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A PATH THROUGH THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

ON CHRIS MARKER'S *OUVROIR* AND *PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION*

DRAFT VERSION | WORK IN PROGRESS

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1. INTRODUCTION

FROM THE LINDEN ARCADE TO THE LINDEN LAB

“The *Lindenpassage* (Linden Arcade) has ceased to exist. That is, it remains a means of passage [*Passage*] between Friedrichstrasse and Linden Avenue in terms of its form, but it is no longer an arcade [*Passage*] ...
The time of the arcades has run out.”

Siegfried Kracauer, *Farewell to the Linden Arcade*



LINDENPASSAGE (exterior, 1880)

LINDEN ARCADE (interior, 1881)

Lindenpassage was a Berliner arcade that resembled a magical passage, one that we traversed, writes Kracauer, as if one were underground between this street and the other. (Kracauer 338) Walking through it implied entering a fascinating world, full of sensuous stories, where everything that was excluded from the bourgeois life, that

could not be fit as an adornment for the facade, would find its place. (Kracauer 337) In this sense, the space of the passageway was a space of dwelling, it implied a path that inscribed the subject in its structure. At the same time, with its bazaar, world panorama, anatomical museum, or the bookshop filled with paperbacks whose titles aroused desires, it also required a practice of space that was meant to bring forward the construction of a narrative that could not be contained in that same space, that crossed its physical borders and projected other stories and other places into its dark and porous structure, that turned it into a lived place. "It is precisely as a passage that the passageway is also the place where, more than anywhere else, the voyage which is the journey from the near to the far and the linkage of body and image can manifest itself." (Kracauer 338) By the time Kracauer writes his "Farewell...", the Lindenpassage had been restored, and the dark three-story arcade had been replaced by a one-story structure under a glass roof. However, even after having lost its previous form, the arcade retained something of its earlier function: that magical world remained in the objects it held inside, that functioned like passages in the context of the bourgeois life. To enter the new arcade still meant entering a complex relation between illusion and reality, proximity and distance.

Linden Lab is the name of the corporation that created Second Life, a virtual world that first went online in 2003, and where everything is coined by Linden: we trade real dollars for Linden dollars, or Lindens, that we use to buy from Linden real estate the 1024 sq. feet of virtual terrain where we build our house; and before being able to customize our avatar we are designed by Linden. It was also through Linden that I have faced my first space restrictions on Second Life: as a disoriented newborn who landed

on a welcome island from which I was not able to understand how to get out, and having seen Linden signs everywhere promising its residents quiet and regenerating archipelagos comprised by beaches and dance-clubs, I have decided to teleport myself (this is how you get around on SL) to the Linden headquarters, sure that they would have a welcome desk where an elaborated avatar would be kind enough to answer my questions. However, for the common residents, the Linden World Lobby is a prohibited space. The system told me I did not have access to that teleport destination. First interdiction, others would come.

Chris Marker, a “multimedia-filmmaker” for whom the idea of passage has been a constant throughout his work, not only in what it concerns the passages between images and memory, but also through their different configurations in an array of media, has recently created on Second Life, by joint initiative with the Museum of Zurich and in collaboration with the architect MosMaxHax, the archipelago of the Ouvroir. L’Ouvroir presents itself as a space for wandering: through its islands, its means of transport, its museum, or through its screens. As the space of Second Life in itself, it resembles a magical, ever-expanding world, full of stories and possibilities; a world that is fluid, borderless, unmappable within its multiplicity. However, there is an underlying tension that is put in place in this virtual space, and I will here try to map out the ways in which it is actually very constrained. The virtual space is no longer a passage and not yet an arcade. By rule, there is no path in which the subject can be inscribed, the passage is not meant to be traversed, and the possibility of projection of the *promeneur* is reconfigured when both space and body are displaced from their logic of projection and brought together in an image transmitted through a luminous digital screen. The virtual

museum created by Marker, on the other hand, still seems to inhabit the crossroads between architectural space and filmic time, even if it puts in place new configurations for both by proposing a new relation to the viewer. I propose here establishing a path through these questions of time and space in the virtual worlds, but in the same movement to shift the focus to a relation that brings into account how perception is reshaped when we go from a relation with materiality and indexicality to an immaterial world that we relate to through a screen.

The nomadic spectator that enters the gallery wanders and wonders through the images that he observes sequentially, creating his own personal recollection; in this sense, he follows the same kind of *parcours* that is taken by the film spectator. (Bruno Public Intimacy : Architecture and the Visual Arts) Giuliana Bruno, whose extensive work on these passages will here be taken into account, proposes that we understand cinema as a kind of unstable museum, at the same time that we take the museum as proposing a cinematic, narrative promenade.¹ The figure of the moving body of the *promeneur*, the one who travels through this space, absorbing, inscribing and projecting himself on it, is common, as Giuliana Bruno argues, to both the imaginary path carried by the eye, the mental path followed by the mind of an immobile spectator positioned in front of a film screen, and the *passeur* that moves through a series of carefully disposed phenomena that he observes sequentially. (Bruno Atlas of Emotion : Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film) In this sense, both walking through the exhibitions exhibited in the passages and the mental passages we traverse through film are here drawn through a perceptual interplay between mobility and immobility. They are thus established on a common ground through the promenade, a navigation that creates a narrative for the subject

from his practice of space, through which the body turns these spaces into practiced places, embodying and inscribing in them narratives that derive from those spatial practices, creating a space for wandering and for wondering. The subject, turned into a spectator-*promeneur* that walks through the space of the images, puts in place an architecture of recollection, a construction of our own archive of moving pictures, one that binds both itineraries and that is built at their crossroads: “to sense the texture of this geophysics cultural design, we move on to inhabit this habitat, closing in on that field screen of projections that occurs between the map, the wall and the screen.” (Bruno Atlas of Emotion : Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film 231)

In L'Ouvroir, Chris Marker is inscribing the virtual space at these crossroads, questioning the virtual museum as a new interface between museum and filmic spectatorship, but at the same time as one that reframes its questions. The cyber-space is marked by a cartography of links that do not seem to create a space for wandering, that we are supposed to go through by means of teleporting, or hyper-linking; Marker proposes instead the creation of a different kind of path through the virtual museum, one that takes into account the possibilities of losing oneself, going back and forth, proposing repeated visits, always discovering something different, always arriving at something new. And by engaging with this promenade through a screen, what seems to be in question is the sense of a temporalization of that space, creating a time that does not imply a progression but that is instead the time necessary to open an in-between that may allow to regain past and future in the present of its movement. Instead of adapting an art history or museographic approach, I want here to interrogate how cinematic constructions of space and time are brought back to these configurations, at

the same time that they seem to bring forward new configurations for spectatorship. The *porteur* that traversed the passage and that was mobilized both by the exhibition and the film screen is not displaced in the virtual museum; on the contrary, Marker seems precisely to inscribe him back in the virtual space. However, taking into account that the cyber-space dislocates the relation between the body of the *promeneur* that wanders through the space of the image and a material or indexical relation to that same space, and makes out of the overvisibility of the immaterial body an obsession, it is also questioning our relation to these passages, and to what means to walk through them, when they are placed and reconfigured by a mediation through the digital screen.

2. PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

The Atlas of Digital Memory and its Virtual *Passeur*

“My physiognomy can be seen in the interludes.”

Modest Mussorgsky, Letter to Stasov dated June 1874,
about the progress on his composition “Pictures at an Exhibition”

Among all the exhibitions dedicated to corporeality that the Linden Arcade held inside, and that meant to “satisfy primarily bodily needs and the craving for images of the sort that appear in daydreams,” the place of honor was occupied by the Anatomical Museum. (Kracauer 338) “Both of these [the primarily bodily needs and the craving for images], the very near and the very far, elude the bourgeois public sphere - which does not tolerate them - and like to withdraw into the furtive half-light of the passageway, in which they flourish as in a swamp.” (Kracauer 338) The passage nourished their flames, proposed an underground space that allowed them to attain a right of residence without ever being contained. Also enthroned in the arcade, as well as enthroned in this dynamics between close and distant, was the World Panorama. “Indeed, it is only a tiny leap from the graspable body to the ungraspable distance.” (Kracauer 340) The exhibitions that were inscribed in the arcade functioned as passages on the context of bourgeois life, exhibiting the reckless sensuality of the body and everything that was unfit for the adornment of the facade, and placing them in a relation between proximity and distance. The passerby who entered the passageway, and who started roaming like a vagabond, went through this moving relation between the object and those stories it could not keep closed within itself, between the materiality of what is close, can be

touched, and evokes the distant, and the dynamics of that distance that the image brings into closeness through a relation that implies a relation to the haptic.

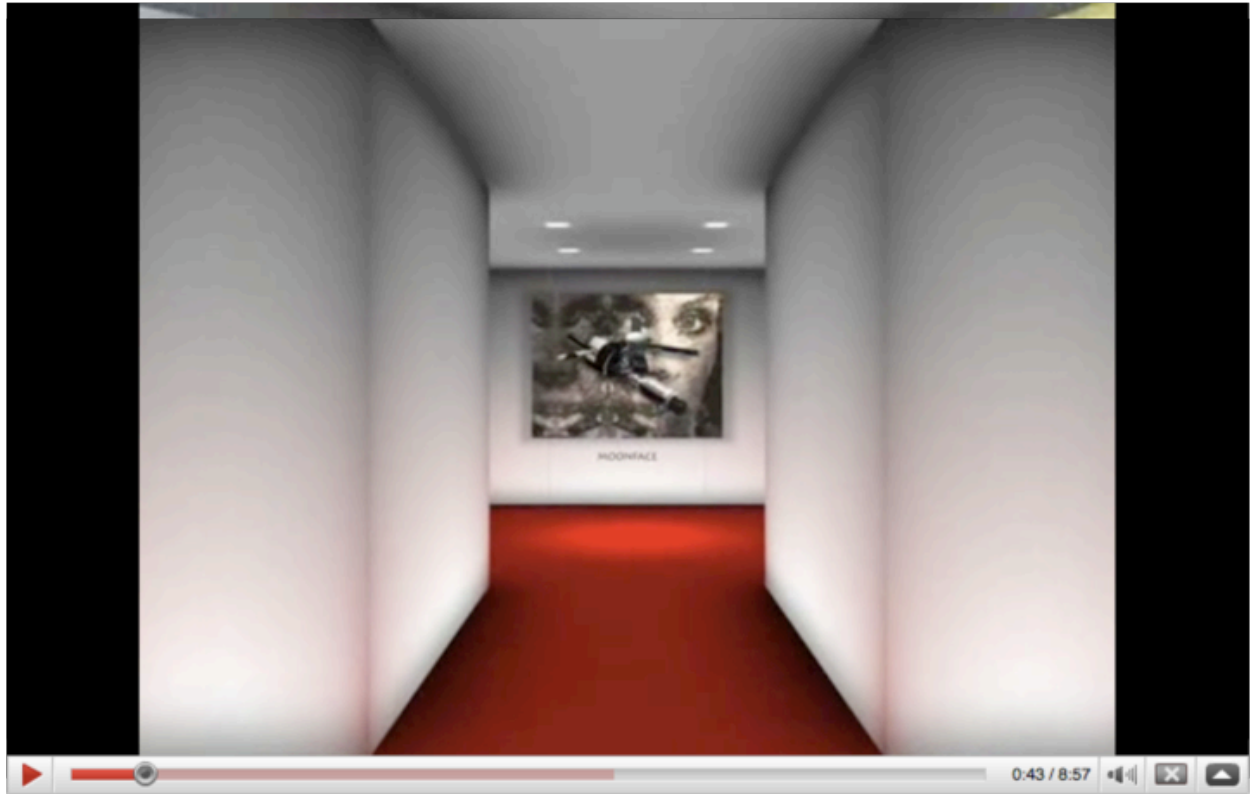
If modernity brought with it an expanding abstraction of time and a replacement of the depth of the city by the flat surface of the image, film can be seen as manifesting the anxiousness of our response to both these constraints, and will be here taken into consideration as a way of mapping how the haptic was put in place not only in relation to the dynamics between proximity and distance, but also in what it allows us to take into account its reference to the relation between materiality and immateriality, or more obviously, to the way in which this dynamics presupposes a link to materiality. Walter Benjamin, drawing on the work by Riegl, has found in the haptic the possibility for elaborating a space for dwelling in relation to the surface of the image. (Benjamin et al.) The haptic implies not only an idea of habit, of the construction of a path through a place that works on the duration of that space, but also relates to an intersection between vision and tact, to an idea that we can apprehend the immaterial space we see on the screen because we have apprehended material space through contact, and we transport to vision that relation with it. This diminishes the sense of distance and creates a dynamics that is embodied in the objects. However, as far as the haptic was related to the tangible materiality of things and our perception of it, it is still profoundly connected to the indexicality of the image, the direct contact with reality and its inscription on the texture of the screen.

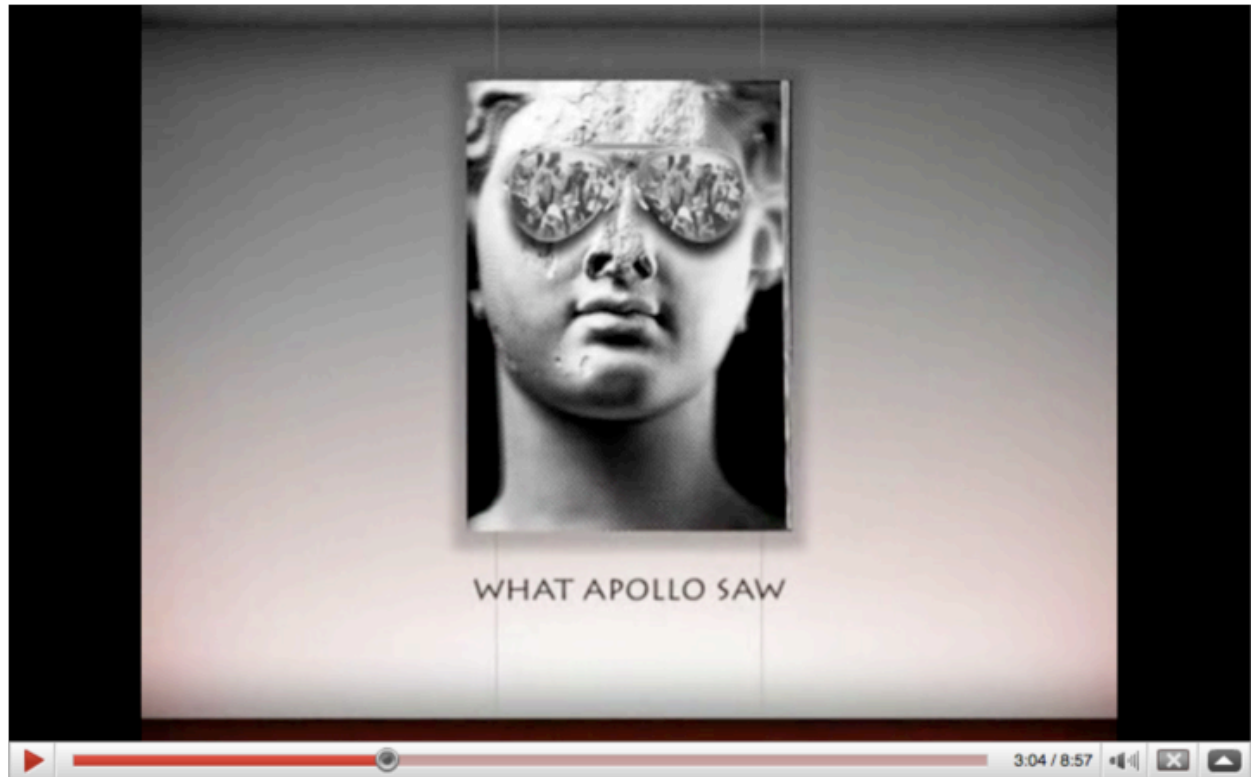
When Kracauer's passageway was transformed into an arcade, "the World Panorama has been superseded by a cinema, and its Anatomical Museum has long ceased to cause a sensation." (Kracauer 342) However, they were still placed in the same ground

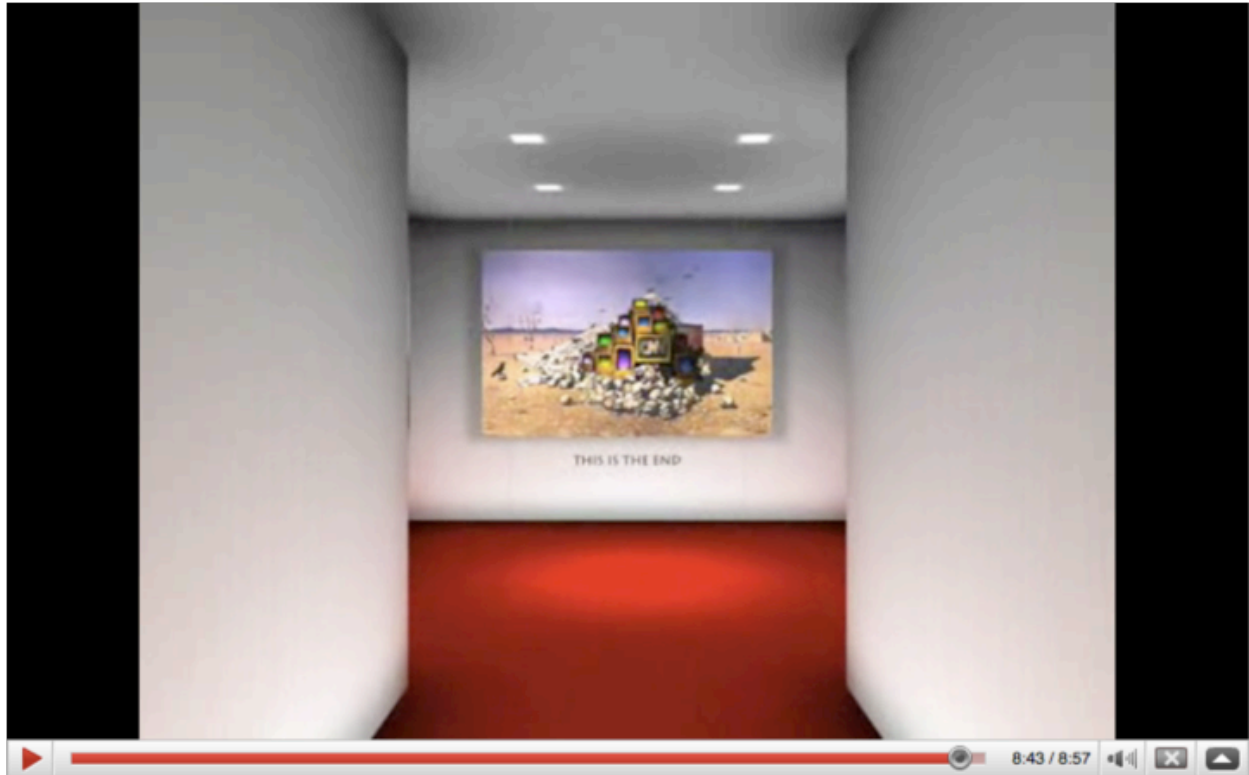
while an idea of inner travel is common to both, as both put in place the construction of a promenade in which physical and psychological spaces are intermingled. Both the panorama and the film theatre are now superseded by the junction and reconfiguration of the two into the electronic screen. We still place body and subject in space (in fact, on *Second Life* we have made out of their over-visibility an obsession), but we have deprived perception from a link to a material connection. Instead of creating a space for getting ourselves lost, we are placed in a cyberspace where one can always find and be found, but that at the same time does not seem to put forward in a first instance a path that can be embodied.

When Marker first approaches the space of the virtual gallery in “Pictures at an Exhibition”, he seems to be bringing forward a first framing of the ways in which the path of the *promeneur* is reconfigured when it is implied through a digital screen. In “Pictures at an Exhibition”, Marker closes us in an unending loop. He controls the path, the narrative exists only within the frame, the loop is proposed as something from which we cannot escape, as a spatialized time that entangles us and that does not create a space for wandering, that does not allow us to inscribe ourselves in its parcours. What the images cannot contain is only given through their frontal views, and we go from one to the other, from link to link.









In this sense, in “Pictures...” Marker seems to exhibit the anxiety of being trapped in an unending loop of images as a first reaction to the kind of temporalization of space that the virtual platform proposes, and the loss of its links to a material connection between body and the surface of the image. “Pictures...” shares its title with a well-known piece written in 1874 by the Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, about which Mussorgsky has written that his physiognomy could be seen in the interludes.² But if Mussorgsky’s “Pictures...” are structured as a path through a series of paintings by Hartmann, in relation to which Mussorgsky is concerned with the inscription of the pace of walking and breathing in the immaterial structure of his composition, Marker, on the other hand, is proposing something different: he places the viewer in a hermetic movement through a series of galleries that resemble one another, in which there is no inscription of the body or of any place for wandering or breathing. The path that Marker proposes through his own “Pictures...” does not seem to open a space for inscribing, in the same way Mussorgsky had intended, our physiognomy in its interludes. Only the framed images change, while the space of this squared gallery remains the same to the end; the movement is a repetitive back and forward that always looks from the same point of view, using always the same camera pan. We cannot move forward or breakthrough, and we always return to the same place. What Marker seems to be bringing into question, taking into consideration how this work also echoes in what he has been developing on SL, is how this virtual space, soon proclaimed open, communitary, interactive and user-controlled, is in fact mapped through an imposition of boundaries, a sense of closeness without enclosure, an excess of gridding that tends to make oneself getting lost without ever losing oneself.³

The images presented in “Pictures...” are the same X-Plugs that are presented in the Museum section of *Immemory*.⁴ Marker works on the remaking of canonical images, reconfigures them by adding layers, reshaping their surfaces, working on their decay, to come to terms with the creation of a history that is not monumentalizing, that proposes simultaneity instead of teleology. In this sense, he is constructing his own Atlas, one that can be inscribed in a tradition common to Warburg and Richter.⁵ What is common to all the three is the fact that neither collage, nor photomontage, nor compositing suffices to describe them: they are bringing into question issues of movement and spatialization, of materiality and its relation to memory, of the boundaries of a place and the creation of a space for wandering (or, in Marker’s case, the critique of its absence). However, if all three Atlas can refer to one another, they are quite different in their structures. In fact, the shifts in the exhibition practices and the spectatorial engagement they propose can be mapped through the path they put in place.

Through their Atlases, both Warburg and Richter recreate the walls as screens, and install them as a space that has to be traversed so that the spectator may recollect and compose his own sequence. Common to both is a topography of viewing, an idea that Giuliana Bruno elaborates in her own Atlas: these installations ask the spectator to sense a place, to be both inside and outside, at the same time that they provide him the coordinates to do so. (Bruno *Atlas of Emotion : Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*)

What is at stake for Warburg is a collision of heterogenous temporalities: the time of the structure and the time of the rendering of the structure. (Didi-Huberman 12) Warburg considered the image as a cinematic structure, inscribed within a problematic of movement, or montage, that implied both the pathos of movement and loss of the self:

in this sense, memory became a symptom in the continuity of events, with symptom being understood as the movement in bodies, as passionate agitation or external prompting, as psychic states that have become fossilized in the images. (Didi-Huberman 15-16) “The installation space becomes a renewed theatre of image recollection”, in relation to which the *promeneur* is the essential collector. (Bruno Public Intimacy : Architecture and the Visual Arts) Following a similar direction, it is through installation that Richter builds a narrative of space, one that connects interior and exterior, the artist and the spectator, through an emotional cartography that is designed by both. Marker, on the other hand, seems to contain the narrative within the frames, and undermine the possibility of a breaking through a defined path. The space seems to spread indefinitely without leaving the same container, the logic of projection is replaced by a screen that is left half-open, but we are now more trapped as we cannot regain the space to lose ourselves. Thus the path that Marker proposes through his Atlas is more constraining than what can be the wandering/wondering of the spectator between the wall of the museum and the film screen. By developing “Pictures...” out of the work he has created both for the CD-Rom *Immemory* and for the *L’Ouvroir*, Marker is investigating precisely the kind of space that these installations of his work propose. If *Immemory* functions in its overlapping of temporalities, proposing a path that is performed by the user, in ‘Pictures...’, Marker conditions temporally our navigation through the images, creates an awareness of a different paradox in terms of our positioning in space. The temporalization of this space entangles us, does not give us time to go through it. “Pictures...” renders evident a critique of the movement through the virtual space that the cyber-space is proposing: a space that is navigable but not

traversable, in which we are not meant to take the time to perform the journey, we just have to click to be able to travel immediately from one location to the other, in which wandering becomes teleporting.

Marker's loop of images, however clearly dealing with a lived space of cultural memory by the images he chooses to show, is presented in a rather detached way, through an equal rhythmic loop through these virtual walls. He is no longer dealing with projection, but showing us screens that mingle among themselves, and that pour into the windows of our own computer screen. In this way, "Pictures at an Exhibition" reflects on the position for the screen, or our position in relation to it, when this folded screen assumes an infinite unfolding. None of the images is framed in a closed frame: either they hang in a flat wall or their frames are left half open.⁶ The loop throughout the images refrains us from the feeling of time passing, it seems that it cannot function anymore as "the wheel of memory" in the sense that the idea of a spatialization of memory is undermined by the same repetitive loop.⁷ In Marker's "Pictures...", if both space and time are devoid from their links to a material experience of space and time, time is spatialized in the unending loop that is performed. Time is suspended, it is an in-between that exists through the rhythm of its spatialization: what is at stake is not the deepness of time - of our whole time, it can be said, as it is that what Marker has in mind, invoking past, present and future, at the same time linked to our memory and freed from their links to the objects – but an aesthetics of surface. And in order to be able to grasp what are these new images, and the kind of spectator they take into account, it is precisely those levels of surfaces that must be taken into consideration.⁸

The path Marker traces through those images implies a deterritorialization and reterritorialization that has to be put in place through a path through multiple surfaces that escape our immediate orientation: it presupposes a subject that can unfold and fold within himself multiple images that lose their links to temporality in favor of a repetition that is linked to time as it is put in place through spatialization; a subject that can go through disparate coordinates and refold multiple surfaces, none of them closed, self-contained, or imposing its own limiting logic nor a relation to a unity. In spite of the apparent detachment with which the images are presented, we inhabit these multiple views and windows with an uncanny familiarity, once in their omnidirectionality we are the ones who reestablish, in our own way, the coordinates. Reading the digital images, and the screens that carry them, through the same light, makes this Deleuzian geophilosophy of nomadic unfolding one of the best ways we seem to have to describe the ways in which the subject is now positioned (or perpetually displaced) in relation to the surfaces he now confronts: surfaces that seem to fold and unfold within the surfaces of the in-betweenness of both subject and screen, repositioning the subject through his relation to both space and time through the screen not at a distance but as modulation, as in-between, as becoming.

This kind of ethics/aesthetics, this questioning of a cartography lived by nomads that circulates within the virtual space, could not come but from the nomadic cineaste *par excellence*. Marker has always been concerned with a path through images, countries, stories, one that also corresponds to a path between media, between different ways of traveling. He has traveled the world with his camera, and has incorporated that same

language of nomadism into his works. His embrace of the new does not jettison the old; on the other hand, it adds new and other layers to it.

From 1953 onwards, Marker has been traveling and collecting geography of memories.⁹ As a *bricoleur*, as Marker calls himself, he is someone that navigates through locations and media and shapes forms and memories in a common space and time, that he wants the spectator to appropriate in the same movement. *Dimanche a Peking*, *Lettre de Sibirie*, *Cuba Sil*, *La Sixieme Face du Pentagone*, or *Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge*, are all concerned with traveling between “zones” at the crossroads between documentary and fiction, personal letter and political manifesto, the mapping and appropriation of memory, and with crossing their borders. Marker writes: “My idea was to immerse myself in this Maelstrom of images to establish its geography,” the affective relation that is also the product of its obtrusive inscription in our own lives.¹⁰ As an even more obvious reference, *Sans Soleil* (1982) deals with the memory bank of a cameraman, Krasna, through his travels around the world. But while *Sans Soleil* is still profoundly embedded in an idea of cinematic temporality, a passing between different times and its inscription on the texture of the film screen, with *Level 5* (1996), this travel becomes immersed in a profound reflection on the electronic media and the shifting nature of its images. “Electronic texture is, as with *Sans Soleil*, the only eternity we have left, but the means of accessing this are broadened out beyond celluloid and its synthesized variations here to the difference that multimedia makes.” (Cooper 161) *Sans Soleil* opens with found-footage of three Icelander children, pictures “affected by the moss of time” and that for Krasna represent the image of happiness; and ends with electronic images, images that, as the voice-over tells us, “are freed of the light, swallowed by the

spiral”, images that extend the zone, that present a language that “finally touches me because it speaks to that part of us that still insists in drawing profiles in prison walls.” Marker goes from a traveling through different places to a traveling through different media, and the ways they pose other questions for memory and its locations. However he extends these passages, makes them travel into one another, with film always staying as the mapping of their in-between.

La Jetee (1962), one of Marker’s most important films, was created as a *cine-roman*, a film made out of still images, so the questioning of the limits between media is hardly new for him. However, as he travels to video, exhibition, museum installation, CD-Rom or videogames, what Marker brings with him is still the concern with the way in which cinematic practices are still alive, and reshape themselves, among this array of media. Marker works on these passages through the way in which space and time are configured in different ways, but always keeping a relation to film, a memory that is not framed as nostalgia but as a way to inhabit the fissures between a collective oblivion and an individual moving forward, between an overlapping past that comes to inhabit what is yet to come. Level 5 presents a revisiting of the past through the computer game, a game conceived as both a reappropriation of Okinawa and as the way Laura finds to deal with her own personal ghosts; in the same direction, the CD-Rom *Immemory* is also engaged with the possibility of replaying of the past, both the impossibility of escaping time and the wish to repeat it, to revisit it. What may be on the basis of this desire if not that what has made, for over one century, our fascination with film?

Marker reframes this in his own terms through the relation he establishes to his reference film, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. In *Immemory*, after a friendly warning that those who do not know *Vertigo* by heart would do better in returning immediately to the contents menu, he writes, over an image of Scottie facing the Golden Bridge: "Scottie will have received the greatest joy a man can imagine, a second life, in exchange for the greatest misfortune, a second death. What else is offered us by video games, which say so much more about our unconscious than the complete works by Lacan? Neither money nor glory: another game. The possibility to start playing again. 'A second chance.' A free replay." A *Second Life*, that is now brought to and remapped through the virtual museum.

3. A PATH THROUGH THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTROM TO FIND MOREL'S ISLAND

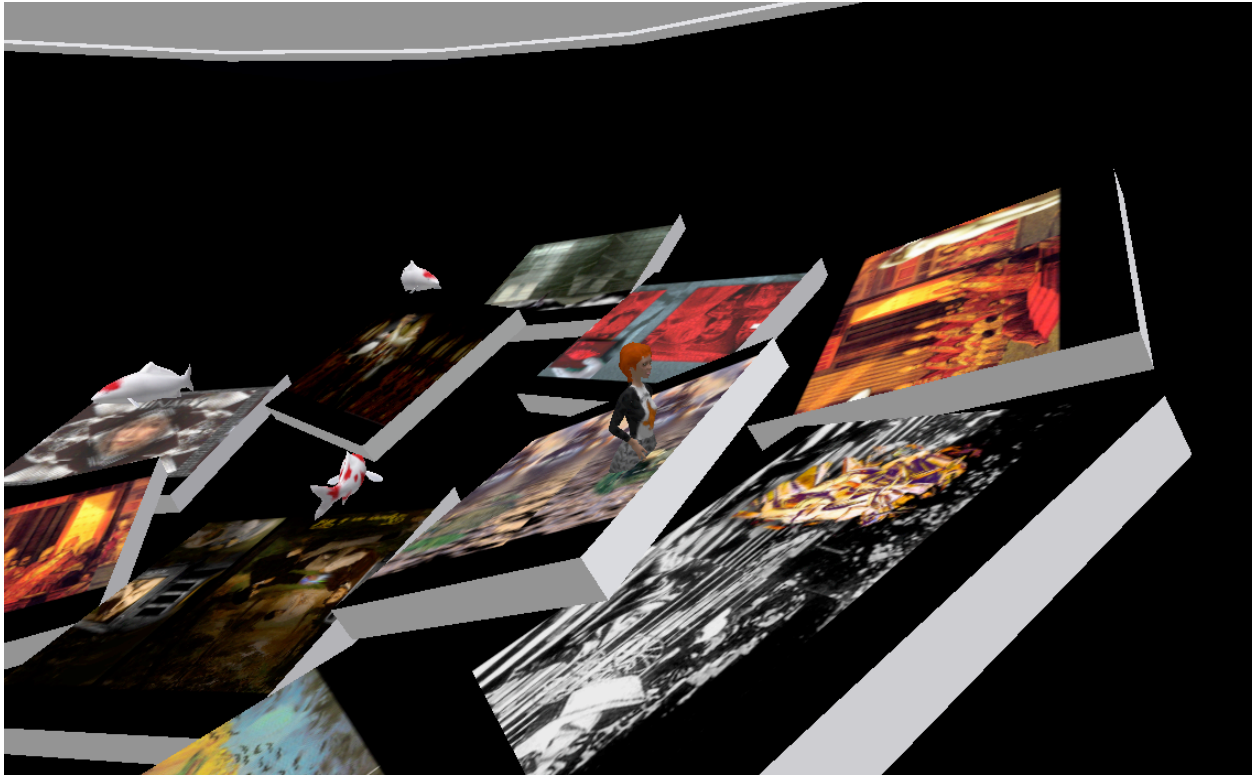
“Looking about me upon the wide waste of liquid ebony on which we were thus borne, I perceived that our boat was not the only object in the embrace of the whirl. ... I now began to watch, with a strange interest, the numerous things that floated in our company. I must have been delirious - for I even sought amusement in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below. ... It was not a new terror that thus affected me, but the dawn of a more exciting hope. This hope arose partly from memory, and partly from present observation. I called to mind the great variety of buoyant matter that strewed the coast of Lofoden, having been absorbed and then thrown forth by the Moskoe-ström.”

Edgar Allen Poe, A Descent into the Maelstrom

The same images that are exhibited through the loop presented in “Pictures at an Exhibition” are placed in the Ouvroir in a different configuration: they are exhibited through screens placed on the floor of the last gallery of the museum, one that resembles an aquarium, where japanese fish live among the images. These are screens that are literally positioned one on the other and that merge into one another; and



as we walk through, we become part of them too, since instead of resisting to the movements of the avatar they allow us to become part of the image.



In this sense, as we travel to Marker's Ouvroir, it is precisely the idea of a path that is brought forward, in a space where it is, by definition, absent. Marker puts it in place a return to cinematic forms that recall an idea of an affective mapping, but at the same time engages in a critique both of the limits of the space, and how it is configured in its duration.

The virtual space seems disorienting, unmappable, an excessive space which we are not supposed to know through a path but by means of teleporting, or hyper-linking. In the same movement, it is a space obsessed with its own mappability, with the creation of a navigation where places can easily be found. There are a number of maps on our Second Life (SL) screen, and even a website dedicated to map SL.¹¹ However, these maps are entropic structures, without a center or a sense of direction, composed by units that are not connected, where the main idea is to discover the coordinates so that

we do not lose a second to get there. This is a fragmentary, non-traversable space, where we are not meant to take the time for traveling, the time for erring; we just have to click. And, by clicking, everything is brought to a sense of proximity, it all seems reachable.

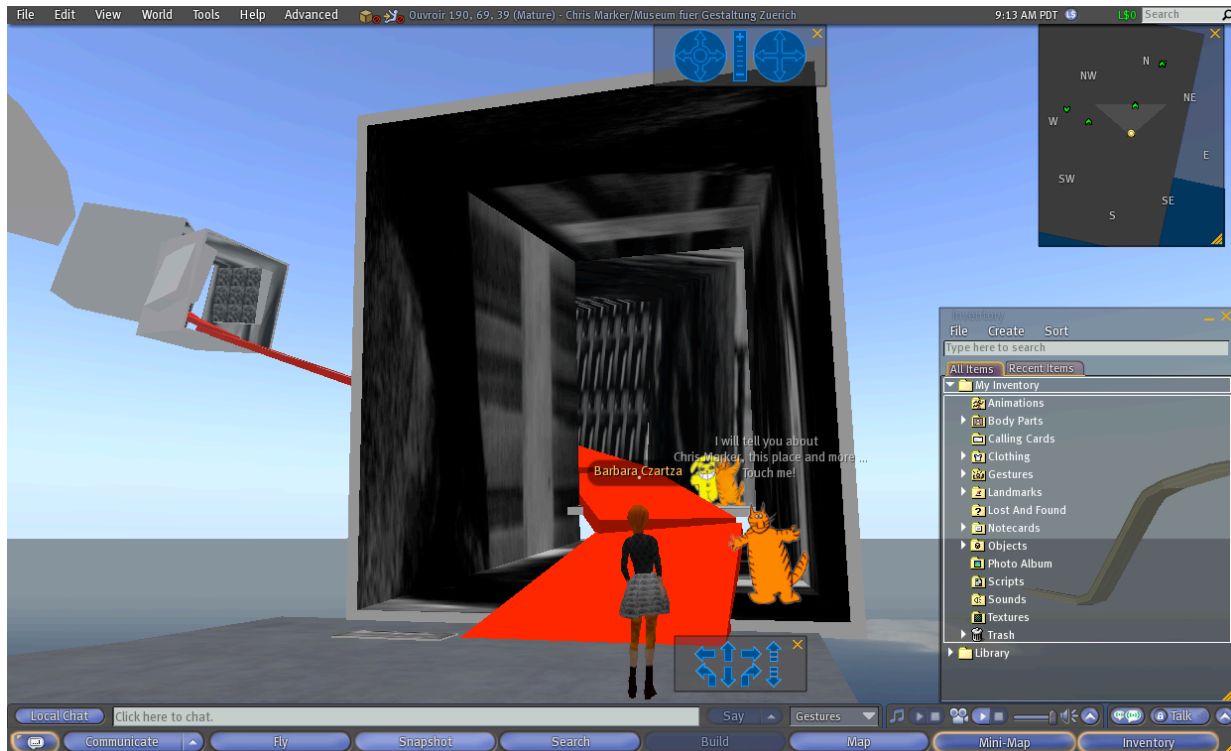
The space of SL is played within a logic of visible/invisible limits. At the same time that it corresponds to a vast, fluid space, an opening up of virtual possibilities for the creation of places, it seems to have encouraged the construction of solid walls. In the representation of its maps, these frontiers are visible in the delineation of parcels that are meant to be taken as individual units, without any connection to their surroundings. And there are also the invisible borders that one confronts while walking through the virtual platform: if we try to go beyond the limits of the space in which we are supposed to stay in, transparent walls appear out of nowhere and limit the spaces we can traverse, even if we can see what is displayed on the other side of this virtual glass. Here lays the paradox of a space that extends itself through an always expanding territory, at the same time that it tries to be contained by the same structures we have been putting in place, as we seem to be responding to our profound disorientation with the obsession for enclosing. Its own mappability is a way of bounding an always-expansive world within defined borders, making it apprehensible even if we cannot fully master its structures (in a sense, what we have been mobilizing in a different way, more open to disturbance and resistance, by framing the world through a film screen). We are caught within systems that propose spatial coordinates and require a form of perception we cannot fully master at this point, and we try to make sense out of them by applying the same old predicaments. We domesticate these environments in order to transform

its fearful spaces into habitable places. As Wigley writes, the modern metropolis and the new technologies are both “wild territories to be domesticated, if not urbanized, with maps”, and we construct mental maps, affective paths, to relate to them. (Wigley 55)



When Marker approaches the virtual space, he brings with him the concern with an idea of travel or circulation between geographic, affective, and political spaces, an interest in the relation between the embodied space and the memory of the *promeneur*, in its relation to an idea of a “cinematographie sans films”, the ways in which film, and filmic perception, are expanding across media.¹² In L’Ouvroir Marker proposes a circulation that goes beyond flying or teleporting, the usual means of mobility of the avatar: in order to go through it there is a balloon, two boats, or a train that runs through the landscape; and inside the museum, what would simply be the means of merely moving from one structure to the other becomes a reflection on the temporalization of that path, by making out of the walk/run displacement a cinematic journey through a series of images

that are placed along the structure, or through the way in which it frames the surrounding landscape. Marker works on the duration of this space, by framing a path that extends temporality, makes us travel and take time to perform the journey, in discovering always something more, something hidden: instead of presenting a cartography of obvious liaisons, always framed by a “back” button, he hides the links and makes us take decisions that are definitive, in which the hypothesis of going back implies arriving at something different.





The idea of repeated visits, and of starting again each time, is in this way clear in Marker's construction. Each time one comes back, we arrive at something unknown: not only we can discover hidden possibilities, but also the islands are in a continuous transformation, since Marker and MosMaxHax are always creating and including new objects and changing their configurations. Another example of the continuous discovery is the fact that the visitors are able to change the images on the wall by clicking on them. This way, not only can we curate our own approach to the exhibition, but also exhibit it to the ones to come, as when we leave the room the images do not return to a

predefined disposition but remain as we have left them. Marker creates out of the archipelago the feeling of unending construction that the virtual space seems to promise, but at the same time works on its desaturation, undermining the idea that empty virtual space is just something infinite that waits to be filled out, either by building labyrinths that seem to lead nowhere, or presenting a place that extends itself horizontally, that opens zones of void that are not meant to be closed. He undermines the unending linkage and substitutes it for an architecture that works on the disruption of the space, on the creation of ruptures in a constrained space. What Marker puts in place is a temporalization of space that implies the possibility of inhabiting its intervals. Creating fissures, openings, inscribe oneself.

In this virtual museum, not only the memory of cinema remains inscribed throughout, but also we are supposed to follow a cinematic path through it, slowing down, stopping, traveling through its walls, inscribing ourselves in its *parcours*. When we “get in touch” with the virtual world we have to learn how to be the nomadic subject Deleuze conceived, to descend into this Maelstrom, the vortex that draws into itself all the objects and reconfigures them, that brings forward a politics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization and proposes a subject that can unfold and fold within himself multiple surfaces, none of them closed, self-contained, or imposing its own limiting logic or a relation to a unity. But in the Ouvroir, we descend into the Maelstrom to find Morel’s Island: not only is Marker mobilizing these cinematic structures, as in the same movement we, the residents, are mobilizing our ways of relation to the world through the film screen, the ways in which we have been learning how to be nomadic through an immaterial world.¹³

Instead of approaching this remapping of cyberspace as an act of nostalgia that implies masking the possibilities of the virtual worlds as proposing a reconfiguration of our perception and our relation to the world through the screen, framing the virtual museum by drawing back to the way in which it interacts with these previous questions seems to bring forward the ways not only how film has a second life in museum space, but also how museum space may extend itself on the virtual space and bring forward a questioning of our perceptive interaction with it. When facing the neurosis and the fear of the vortex, that *horror vacui* that overwhelms us, the superficiality of a fragmented screen that mobilizes a multiplicity of views within the same frame, we respond by putting in place familiar structures. We cannot locate ourselves in a body that is more present than ever, feel a sense of nostalgia for material space and felt time, and respond to it with mapping an immaterial space and putting in place an immaterial path, in which we may find shelter and guidance. If we are never lost nor found, but caught in between (Wigley), the time of the passages is not lost as long as we can still inhabit its fissures, creating breaches in its pouring structures, making use of the fluidity of its screens. It is from this in-between of our perception that we can open lines of resistance, more than drowning in nostalgia, that we can inhabit its possibilities for the rupture of a contained totality, a world that we continue to frame through a different screen.

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¹ Bruno has written extensively on the relation between architecture and film, and the passages between the two in what it concerns the inscription of the body in space, namely in Atlas of Emotion : Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film and, more recently, Public Intimacy : Architecture and the Visual Arts.

² Mussorgsky's quote is taken from a letter to Stasov, dated June 1874

³ In L'Ouvroir, Marker ironizes this idea of griding: in Guillaume's Boat House there are some boxes in which the avatars can hide inside, and which have the following inscription "The box protects you against the effects of the grid." When we come out, there is a warning that we are no longer protected, and that one should be careful.

⁴ Immemory is a CD-Rom designed by Marker and released in 1998 by joint initiative with the Centre Georges Pompidou, re-edited in the United States in 2008 by Exact Change. The X-Plugs I refer to correspond to digital collages and re-montages of images that Marker included in the Museum section of Immemory (in Marker's words: "Pictures, collages, well, call'em XPLUGS").

⁵ Aby Warburg created his Atlas between 1924 and 1929, and it is entitled «Mnemosyne, A Picture Series Examining the Function of Preconditioned Antiquity-Related Expressive Values for the Presentation of Eventful Life in the Art of the European Renaissance». Warburg displayed on wooden boards photographs from images, reproductions from books, images published in newspapers, or collected from daily life materials, that he composed and divided into thematic areas. Richter's Atlas began to be composed in 1964, but its images go back to 1945. Richter works on photographs, illustrations, reproductions, photomontage, found pictures, familiar scenes, or on textures, among almost 4,000 photographs that he organizes into approximately 600 separate panels. It is an ongoing project, that grows parallel to the artist's work.

⁶ As can be seen, for example, in the case of the X-Plug Digital Alexandra, presented above.

⁷ As Giuliana Bruno argues: "Gordon's loop reminds us that the wheel of memory constitutes the very materiality of film.". See Bruno, *Public Intimacy*, 15.

⁸ I am here elaborating on Deleuze's philosophy of *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*.

⁹ 1953 marks the year of release of Marker's first film, co-directed with Alain Resnais, *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*.

¹⁰ The quote from Marker is cited from the essay "Immemory", published on the booklet that accompanies the CD-Rom by the same name.

¹¹ SL-URL: location-based linking on Second Life. SL-URL works by providing immediate teleport to in-world locations. In terms of representation, it is composed by a series of squared parcels of land, which we can zoom in, read the tag, and click. Each resident can build his own slurls. It can be found at <http://slurl.com/>

¹² About his idea of a 'cinematographie sans films', in the essay "A Farewell to Movies", Marker writes: "The original French title, *Cinematographie sans films* (an assonant play of words with *telegraphis sans fil* - aka TSF, the same of radio broadcasting in its pristine youth) was impossible to translate." The title that was finally given to the exhibition created at the Museum of Zurich, A Farewell to Movies, implies a more dramatic idea of *an adieu* to films, when Marker states that what he is interested on things that can be done *outside* movies that still relate to film history.

¹³ Morel's Island refers here to the island pictured in [The Invention of Morel](#), a novel written by Adolfo Bioy Casares and published in 1940. [The Invention of Morel](#) tells the story of a tourist that arrives to an island that seems to be inhabited by a number of characters that repeat the same actions that took place during the period of one week over and over again, but with whom the narrator cannot establish any kind of relation. Eventually, he falls in love with one of them, Faustine, and will try to solve the mystery of their lack of interaction. He discovers that Morel created a mechanism, using kinetic energy, to record and project reality. However, being inscribed on this mechanism, and together with Faustine, will also imply his death.