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From Caméra-Stylo to Photobook: On Chris Marker's *Staring Back*
De la caméra-stylo au livre de photographies. À propos de *Staring Back* de Chris Marker

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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, l'auteur propose une analyse des travaux photographiques de Chris Marker, plus particulièrement de son projet *Staring Back* (qui est à la fois une exposition et un livre publié en 2007). Cette oeuvre peut se lire comme une synthèse en images fixes de la carrière cinématographique d'un auteur qui s'est toujours efforcé d'explorer les limites instables entre image fixe et image mobile, comme dans son film-culte *La jetée* (1962) ou dans des productions telles que *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (1966) ou *Le souvenir d'un avenir* (avec Yannick Bellon, 2001). L'auteur appuie son analyse sur trois éléments : 1) le concept markérien de « superluminal », qui renvoie à une technique consistant à détacher certaines images fixes du flot d'images mobiles, 2) les débats plus ou moins récents sur l'intermédialité, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur des études du cinéma, et 3) la notion de cinéphilie, entendue ici comme une certaine façon de combiner écriture verbale et écriture filmique. Ces trois éléments l'aident à soutenir une lecture rapprochée de *Staring Back*, qui met fortement l'accent sur les enjeux politiques du regard, d'une part, et sur les rapports entre artiste et modèle, d'autre part.

From Caméra-Stylo to Photobook: On Chris Marker's *Staring Back*

Jan Baetens

ABSTRACT

In this article, the author analyzes Chris Marker's photography, in particular the project *Staring Back* (an exhibition and a book, published in 2007), which offers a synthesis in fixed images of the film career of this author who has always explored the blurred boundaries between the still and the moving image (for example in his 1962 cult movie *La jetée*, or in later photo-films such as *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires*, 1966, and *Le souvenir d'un avenir*, with Yannick Bellon, 2001). The author relies on Marker's notion of the "superluminal" (which refers to a special way of selecting still images out of the flow of moving images) as well as on contemporary and historical discussions on intermediality (inside and outside the domain of film studies alone) and cinephilia (as a specific way of combining writing and filming), to propose a close reading of *Staring Back*. In this reading, the author places strong emphasis on the political issues around looking and the relationship between artist and model.

Marker as photographer

Chris Marker, as is well known, had at least nine lives like the cats he loved so much, and as an artist he was active in a wide range of visual and textual media. In addition, all these media have a high degree of intermediality (text and image, sound and vision, tactility and visuality occur in dazzling combinations) and more than once Marker's media tactics challenged the limits of our vision or definitions of media and genre. Forty-five years after its release, a film/photo-novel like *La jetée* (1962) is still puzzling new audiences and continues to question what the word "movie" really means—both as an object and as an experience. Marker's fascination with memory and remembrance, another thread that runs through all his work, can then be seen as the temporal or diachronic double of the *mediological* or synchronic blurring of boundaries that characterizes his work and

is, for many good reasons, systematically foregrounded in the literature on the director.[1]

Nevertheless, other readings of Marker are possible. First of all, there is in Marker's work an incredibly strong feeling of the spirit and the signs of the times. This extreme awareness of what one has to do at a specific moment in a specific place cannot be separated from the fact that Marker is not only an artist but also a witness, a journalist, a critical presence. Marker does not behave as artist on some occasions and as journalist on other ones, he is always both artist and journalist. Accordingly, the documentary aspect is there in every project. It is also clearly inspired by the neo-realist zeitgeist of his early years.

Yet it would be reductive to stress time and again the authority of neo-realism's post-war documentary mood in Marker's work. Marker is often ahead of his time, and that is why he is an artist and not a mere witness. He was also always a man of a specific time and a specific place, and that is why neo-realism or neo-documentary should not be the only key to understanding his work. Rather than reading Marker's project as an idiosyncratic experiment with genres and media structures, it may therefore be useful to emphasize the way it was always rooted in a peculiar context and how it interacted with the visual culture of its time. Context is of course a slippery notion and for this reason I shall stress here the material and cultural context of the photobook (Parr and Badger, 2004 and 2006). Such a reading should be possible as well in the case of *Staring Back* (Marker, 2007), one of the author's last attempts to reflect upon his own film work in book form.[2] This reflection is, as always, a very active one, for as Viva Paci (2011, p. 125) argues:

> Marker n'a jamais aimé les rétrospectives portant sur son œuvre, lui-même n'hésite pas à revenir… sur les traces de son œuvre, à en reprendre des fragments et à les remettre en lumière.

Staring Back dramatically reshapes the past, not only by the decision to juxtapose and combine images from very different periods, but also by a series of technical interventions that further blurs the boundaries between the images' origins. As André Habib (2008, p. 53) summarizes:

Pareillement… les diverses sections de *Staring Back* font se jouxter des images de 1952 jusqu'à 2006… en opérant un même refaçonnage : passage au noir et blanc, texture soyeuse et ondulante, découpage des figures par rapport au fond rendu flou, bref, une opération « technique » — réalisée sur Photoshop — qui atténue les discontinuités entre les époques, en montrant que ces images sont bel et bien ressaisies dans le présent de celui qui les reparcourt…

Yet each time the artist "stares back," the reflection on the medium of photography, already present in many of his films, which often explore the uncertain boundaries between the fixed and the moving image, is dramatically highlighted.[3] In an illuminating article on Marker's photography, which goes beyond the specific photobooks that he has been making since the very beginning of his career,[4] Jan-Christopher Horak (1996, p. 62) observes that

[w]hile photographs may be chronologically or thematically organized, explanatory captions and the reader's cognitive capabilities must still create the temporal connections between these photographic moments frozen in time. This principle is clearly demonstrated in *Commentaires 1 et 2* [Marker 1961 and 1967, J.B.], the two volumes of Chris Marker's collected screenplays (1953-1966). Since Marker's films are not just dependent on his narratives, but rather consist of juxtapositions between words and images, he has attempted to visualize his films' scripts through film stills. The photographs are integrated into the text in various sizes, sometimes taking up a whole page, sometimes only half a page, sometimes only as a small image at the edge of the text. The reader assumes that Marker has included all the most important shots in the film, yet the photographs remain strangely abstract. In two-dimensional form they can only function as indices of film scenes, giving the reader a visual taste while he or she reads the verbal narration to the film.

Staring Back is at first sight an overview in still pictures of Marker's moving pictures since the 1950s. In this sense, it is noticeably different from the works mentioned by Horak, which could be loosely paraphrased as reinterpretations in book form of specific films. The first meaning of "staring back" is "looking back," for instance at one's own career, but it is well

known that as far as his own work is concerned, Marker looked only forward: he disliked the idea of retrospectives, and when he returned to previous works, it was never in a gesture of self-celebration, but in a reflexive stance of rewriting. The collection of images gathered in *Staring Back* thus has a completely different meaning, as we will see.

Second, Marker's attraction to mixed media, multimedia, intermedia, etc. should not be all that strikes us. No less conspicuous—and as paradoxical as this may appear—is his serious commitment to medium-specificity, a concept that has long been discarded as part of modernism's suspect essentialism but whose critical potential has recently been put forward once again by critics such as Rosalind Krauss (2000), who in her study of Marcel Broodthaers underlines the political use-value of the apparent anachronistic maintenance of—or return to—medium-specificity.

This critical voice reminds us that medium-specific readings are still necessary, and this lesson of course applies to *Staring Back* as well, despite the fact that this book appears to be a blatant example of medium-hybridity: its pictures are not photographs, but film stills, digitally remastered and then reshuffled and reorganized as a kind of a mainly non-narrative photo sequence (it is precisely the questioning of linear storytelling that enables Marker also to exceed the genre boundaries between the *poetic* and the *essayistic*; on this point see Foster 2009). In this case, the medium-specificity concerns both the shift from film still to printed picture, which is not a mechanical shift, for the pictures are digitally remastered in order to deepen the aesthetic possibilities offered by single prints; and the visual presentation of these images, which is not mechanical either: the prints in *Staring Back* are ordered differently in the book and in each of the places where the touring exhibition is displayed. It is certainly not by chance that Marker himself coined a new concept to circumscribe the specificity of the images and of their selection process, namely the superluminal. In an e-mail to Bill Horrigan, the curator of the exhibit at the Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, Ohio) that was at the origin of the photobook *Staring Back*, Marker (2007, p. 139) wrote:

These are not bona fide photographs. They're stills from my video footage, somewhat manipulated thru the jujucraft of Photoshop and painter. It's an experiment I conducted for years, in order to extract meaningful images from the inordinate flow of video and television. I developed the concept of "superluminal," which is a sort of counterpoint to Subliminal. Instead of one frame lost in the stream of other, different frames, Superluminal is one frame lost in the stream of almost IDENTICAL frames, or so it seems, for when you take 'em one by one, one happens to be THE real photogram, something nobody then has perceived, not even the guy who shot it (me, in most cases). (April 1, 2006)

This twofold possibility of rereading against the grain—and it is easy to guess that there must be many others—will be at the heart of my own analysis of *Staring Back*. Yet what I will try in the very first place to do will be to intertwine these two ideas of historicity and medium-specificity. For medium-specificity is not something that is ahistorical: it is always a commitment to a reflection on media at a given point of time, whereas historicity is never something that is without the medial component. The history in case is always already a medium history.

From photographs to photobooks

In 1948, Alexandre Astruc became the first to introduce, albeit in a quite general and programmatic sense, the notion of "caméra-stylo" or camera-pen, an appeal to directors to free themselves from traditional forms of filmic storytelling and to use their camera as unreservedly as writers use their pen. It has been understood too easily that caméra-stylo, a notion that would become increasingly popular during the years of the French New Wave cinema, was a new and perhaps the last step in the long term cultural shift from literature to film as the dominant medium for storytelling. In the well-known Bolter and Grusin (1999) "remediation" terms, i.e. the refashioning of earlier media into newer forms of mimetically and emotionally more powerful media, this is a classic story indeed: an old medium is remediated by a newer one, which starts copying the older medium (for example: the first narrative films imitate the melodrama from popular serial literature) before discovering its own

language (for example: narrative cinema will develop new forms of storytelling less indebted to literary models). In the former mechanism, one hears here a strong echo of McLuhan's "rear mirror" effect[5] (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, pp. 74-75). The contested medium, on the other hand, replies with the help of self-defensive mechanisms of repurposing (books try to reappropriate filmic techniques) but finally it has to abandon the fight with the stronger competitor (narrative literature in book form disappears, or specializes in niches untouched by film narrative). This remediation story is often oversimplifying, however, and caméra-stylo filming can be reread today in the same light. If one manages to see it not as a technical but as a cultural phenomenon, i.e. as part of the larger whole of cinephilia, then the relationship between the textual and the visual does not remain unaffected—not in the sense that caméra-stylo filming appears to be an anachronism (as a way of staring back at literature in the filmic era), but in the sense that it helps to question oversimplifying views on the relations between film and writing.

What does cinephilia mean? Let us follow here the analysis of Antoine de Baecque (2003), one of the finest specialists in the field. Contrary to the first wave of French cinephilia, at the time of "French impressionism"—the usual denomination of French modernist cinema in the late 1910s and early 1920s—post-war "New Wave" cinephilia did not focus on the incompatibility of text and image. Instead of emphasizing the specific visual features that make cinema an irreducibly new and autonomous medium—mainly "light" and "rhythm," in short what was called "photogénie"—New Wave cinephilia and its focus on the "vision" of the director as the complete "author" of the film established an osmosis between the visual and the verbal. Films, which could perfectly well be adaptations of existing literary material, had to be completed by an accompanying literary or critical discourse, which in turn had to exceed its own status and evolve towards the proper way of making movies. Marker's multimediality *avant la lettre* must be understood that way. Going back and forth between text and image, he illustrates in a highly personal manner the cinephilic ambitions of the caméra-stylo, and he will remain faithful to this spirit in all his works.

The photobook, then, is as much "caméra-stylo" as filmmaking itself. It is neither an anachronism—in remediation theory terms—nor an art gallery side-step in institutional terms. It is, exactly like all other Marker productions, an attempt to write *with* images as well as to write *on* images, for these are the two inextricably linked dimensions of New Wave cinephilia. When one says photobook today, one almost automatically thinks of Martin Parr and Gerry Badger's *The Photobook: A History* (2004 and 2006). In this impressive publication, the name of Chris Marker is however missing, as is the name of Bruce Mau, the typographer who designed for Marker the book version of *La jetée*. The reason for this enigmatic absence may be twofold—but of course I can only guess here.

On the one hand, Chris Marker is not a photographer, at least not in the first place, and this may have excluded him from the outset from the photobook project. On the other hand, Marker's own books do not indulge in what seems to be characteristic of the modern photobook: first, the play with narratively oriented sequences; second, the craving for fictionalization; and third, spectacular lay-out and design. As has become clear from Marker's comments on the "superluminal," *Staring Back* lacks all these elements. Although most of the images are definitely posed, it would be an exaggeration to speak of staged photography. Similarly, there is no attempt to single out the decisive moment or story-telling picture. Finally, the visual composition of the page remains quite simple: it serves the images, rather than the other way round.

Nevertheless, Chris Marker's absence in the Parr and Badger anthology does not signify that *Staring Back* is outside the history of the photobook, on the contrary. The most important feature in this regard is Marker's resistance to what has come to dominate the contemporary niche of the "cheap chic" coffee table film book: the recycling of film stills by the Taschen company, the publisher that has flooded the market with photobooks on directors, actors, genres, themes or periods. In contrast with these publications, *Staring Back* avoids the two all-pervading characteristics of such publications: at the level of the represented subject, the glamour or, if one prefers, the "poster"

quality of each image; and at the level of the representational techniques, a great internal coherence, but one that is dependent on thematic matters, not on matters of order in one sequence, since one can enter these books anywhere and flip through them in any possible direction. At the same time, *Staring Back* is also quite different from the books that photo reporters have started publishing in order to escape from the stereotypes and working conditions of the mass media. There is a gap between *Staring Back* and the work of Raymond Depardon, the most famous of this kind of reporter. In Marker's book, the I-narrator, so strongly present in Depardon, is of course self-consciously present, but never dominant, while the input of narrative and storytelling, although always at hand, never steers the organization of the work. Similarly, *Staring Back* is light years from the sombre and sometimes gruesome photography that is now the doxa of high art photobooks—the Nan Goldin example comes easily to mind. Marker's book has something that makes it so unique that its uniqueness is not routinely recognized. Its mix of directness and sophistication places it at equal distance from the available models of the contemporary photobook.

The collective eye

The very idea of *Staring Back* is a statement. It signifies the absolute refusal of one of the basic mechanisms of traditional cinema. Characters in a narrative movie are not supposed to look directly at the camera, i.e. as the spectator, for such direct eye contact would ruin the double identification that grounds our position as spectators: identification with the character, which would be ruined by the character looking at us (we can only identify with a character if that character does not identify us as a different person); and identification with the camera, which would be ruined if the camera is denaturalized as a technical device (we can only identify with the camera if we tend to consider it a look, a gaze, not a machine). In most of his filmic work, Chris Marker has always strongly criticized this ideology, not only by "breaking the rule," but also by emphasizing this rule-breaking in very explicit ways. In his 1983 film *Sans*

soleil (*Sunless*), one finds a strong and explicit intervention in the narrator's voice-over stating the absurdity of the convention of looking away from the camera and the traditional refusal of looking at people and characters straight in the eyes. In a quite similar vein, the same applies to photojournalism, where the absence of direct eye contact helps to maintain the myth of transparency and objectivity—as if these images were not "made." Here as well, not staring back guarantees the mythical function of identification: if the person photographed stares back, he or she necessarily looks back at the photographer, not at the viewer of the image, and this situation of course blocks the double identification with the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the person appearing in the image. Nevertheless, Chris Marker's use of the return of the photographer's gaze, in both *Staring Back* and his work in general, cannot be reduced to this general, anti-naturalizing stance, since the images under analysis do not appear in a movie or in a photo-reportage. They are seen in a photobook, where eye contact with the photographer is much less exceptional (it may even be considered the rule). Once again, we have to go beyond the stereotypical reading of the technique in order to scrutinize how it is used in the specific context of Marker's book. Of course, by showing pictures of people looking back at the camera, Marker criticizes a certain kind of photojournalism, yet the real importance of this feature must be found elsewhere.

Who is pictured in *Staring Back*? At first sight, this question may seem irrelevant. Most of the images show people that Marker has met during his travels, while shooting his films, and through their faces and looks, Marker—who, exceptionally, is seen in one of the pictures—enables us to imagine his own portrait, as one who takes people seriously and who is capable of winning their confidence. But *Staring Back* is not a book on individuals, anonymous or not, recognizable or not, representative or not; it is a book on the relationship between the individual and the crowd. In its ideal form, this relationship is double: the person pictured is part of the crowd—and I am using the word "crowd" on purpose, for the context of many images is that of the political demonstration), but at the same time the

person pictured remains a real individual—capable of looking back, which is, in the context of a visual relationship, a real speech act. In other words, the individual is never "representative" of the crowd, while the crowd is not a mere sum of individuals (Schnapp and Tiews 2006). There is something collective in the representation of the individual, while there is also something individual in the representation of the crowd. This mutual intertwining of individual and crowd does not mean, however, that there is a one to one relationship between both, as is the case in projects such as *The Family of Man* (Edward Steichen, 1955), where the individual is a shortcut for humankind and vice versa. By the way, in *The Family of Man*, the epitome of classic photojournalism, both on a formal and on an ideological level, few individuals are looking back. In Marker's vision, the coming together of individuals is much closer to what Negri and Hardt (quoted in Hale and Slaughter 2005) in their post-Empire (2005) work call the "multitude":

> which is not "*the* people," but rather many peoples acting in networked contexts. Because of its plurality, its "innumerable internal differences," the multitude contains the genus of true democracy. At the same time, the multitude's ability to communicate and collaborate—often through the very capitalist networks that oppress it—allows it to produce a common body of knowledge and ideas ("the common") that can serve as a platform for democratic resistance to the Empire.

But this is the optimistic version. In practice, Marker sometimes stresses the sadness of the individuals as well as the problematic relationship between the members of a crowd who seem unable, despite their common interests, their common feelings, their common goals, to find each other. This rupture is called loneliness[6] and I don't think it is absurd to analyze the staring back technique as a way of healing this loneliness, as a way of establishing new relationships between the individual and the crowd (in this case not the crowd that surrounds them, but the virtual, globalized crowd of readers of the photobook).

I will come back to these issues of the individual and the crowd, but first I would like to call attention to another difference with *The Family of Man*, namely the serial—rather than

narrative—organization of the book. Even though *Staring Back* follows a quite strict chronology in at least one of its five clearly distinguished parts ("I Stare 1," "The Case of the Grinning Cat," "They Stare," "I Stare 2," "Beast of . . ."), its primary endeavour is not to tell a visual story, be it a small narrative or a grand narrative. The central issue of the book is paradigmatic, not syntagmatic—and if stories are told, they are less rooted in the images than in the texts that accompany them (and these texts, establishing the context as well as the chronology of the pictures, may appear to some as rather un-Markerian for their very straightforwardness).

Here our reading of the book, which can be considered paradigmatic of Marker's overall approach to visual dialogue with the people he films or photographs, must become comparative. Within the important photo projects of the twentieth century, one can make a distinction between two great types, seen from the perspective of staring or not staring back. In the first category, the people pictured are looking at the camera: August Sander's *Faces of Our Time* (1929), Johan van der Keuken's *Wij zijn zeventien* (*We Are Seventeen*, 1955) and Marc Trivier's *Portraits* (widely circulated, yet never completely published in book form)[7] emphasize eye contact. Walker Evans's *Many Are Called* (first released in 1966, but photographed between 1938 and 1941) and Luc Delahaye's *L'autre* (1999) avoid it—for very comprehensible reasons: these works are candid camera shots in the metro, and the models' unawareness of being photographed is part of the artist's project. It will of course not come as a surprise that, as I shall later analyze in more detail, Marker likes to question the differences between these two groups—not just in *Staring Back* but in his films in general, where one can find examples of both types (in the above-mentioned *Sans soleil* and the 1977 *A Grin Without a Cat*, the shortened English version of *Le fond de l'air est rouge*, there are examples of people being filmed unawares in the metro). Yet once again, the difference between staring or not staring back is not just a matter of photographic technique (posed photography versus candid camera photography). It entails on the contrary a very different idea of photography and its social relevance. The use of looking back at

the camera individualizes the models, and attenuates the symbolic and sociological layers of the image: even if Mr. or Ms. X or Y appear as the representative of a social class or a group, they are—or rather: they *become* thanks to the art of photography—individuals who exceed the social class or group they are supposed to illustrate. The use of not looking back at the camera seems to insist instead on what is common to all people: not only do Evans's or Delahaye's city dwellers remain anonymous, they are also homogenized by the very repetition of the identical framing of people not looking at the camera. In other words: if looking back is a way of individualizing even the most anonymous character, not looking back tends to de-individualize even the most familiar face. Or, even more generally: from the moment one pictures a person looking back, the link is cut between that person and his or her group, whereas from the moment one avoids that looking back, one tends to suggest the exemplary value of the individual face and the possible link between a person and a group. In the former case, the model is in the first place an individual, regardless of his or her social context. In the latter case, the model is seen primarily as a representative of something else.

This very general distinction, which obviously all concrete works question, criticize and blur to a certain extent, can be reinforced by a similar distinction in the use of the portraits' backdrop. People looking back often appear in settings that are either individualized (this is dramatically clear in Trivier's portraits) or empty (which is of course a way to heighten the importance of the individuality of the person pictured). People not looking back are often photographed against common, neutral, anonymous, exchangeable backgrounds (such as for instance the subway seats in the case of Evans and Delahaye),[8] as if there exists a kind of communication between the individuality or lack of individuality of the person and that of the background, which then acquires a more sociological—i.e. less individualizing—dimension. The fact of looking back on the one hand and the selection of a banal, anonymous background on the other hand do not make a perfect match: the more the pictured person looks back, the more there is a tendency to

increase the importance of the background (or to completely bracket it). The same goes for the opposite elements: the fact that one doesn't look back does not seem to foster the selection of highly personalized backgrounds—and of course one is allowed to infer from this observation, general and oversimplifying as it may be, that it will be more difficult here to construct certain relationships between person and context (in this case a spatial environment, a certain kind of prop, and a special way of occupying that place, of living with these props).

In *Staring Back*, however, Chris Marker blurs the general boundaries: between looking and not looking, between individual and crowd, between backdrop and the neutralization of backdrop. The most transparent example of this blurring is the pairing of portraits with and portraits without eye contact.[9] Yet the way in which this crossing is carried out is not the same throughout the whole book. The blurring is not complete, but obeys a deeper structure, which it brings to the fore. In the central section of *Staring Back*, entitled "They Stare," the criterion of eye contact is used as a selection constraint: almost every picture of this series exemplifies the structure of looking back at the camera. Similarly, the emphasis on the faces is such that even when a recognizable background is present, it manifestly bears only little importance. In the other sections, the people generally do not stare back, which inevitably gives more weight to the background, and even if they do, the general structure of the series in which they appear tends to neutralize the exceptional status of their looking back.

But how can one represent the overall structure of the book? Rather than repeating that the book has five sections, one might argue that it actually has only three sections, which are called "I Stare 1," "They Stare" and "I Stare 2." Since "I Stare 2" can be read as "I stare too, I stare as well," it ought to be seen as a repetition—with a difference of course—of the first section. In a more visual manner: A + B + A'. The two remaining sections, "The Case of the Grinning Cat" and "Beast of . . .," are a coda or complement of each of the A sections, to which they give a non-human or animal twist ("The Case of the Grinning Cat" rephrases the material of A as seen through the lens of a particular graffiti

theme: the cat; "Beast of . . ." enlarges the non-human mirroring of A' by adding the representation of other animals to that of the sole cat). It is one thing to describe this structure, however, and another thing to interpret it. Hence one has to think of what can be inferred from the global A/B/A' structure.

A first analysis of this structure could focus on the linguistic elements of the titles. They combine two types of markers. On the one hand, they shatter the impersonal form of the title: "staring back," which has no determinable implied subject, is replaced by the subject-verb sentences "I stare" and "they stare." On the other hand, while in the syntagm "staring back" a subject was missing, what is lacking here is an object or complement: I/they stare at whom or at what? A quick answer to this question might be the following: I am staring at them and they are staring at me. But this is clearly too simple an answer, and from the very beginning of the book, Marker (2007, p. 1) warns us that there is more to see than people or faces:

> Straight in the middle of the frame, on the balcony, among those tense faces, a young tree recently planted. Forget the faces for a moment, just watch the tree.

In a very violent move, *Staring Back* thus opens with a virtual erasure of the face. This deletion anticipates the final replacement of humanity by the animal reign, but its immediate effect, for the insistence on the tree will be literally repeated at the end of the first section, is a suspicion cast on the "me" that seemed so loudly implied in the title of the second section: "They stare" . . . at me. Yet if the first section questions the "logical" structure "I stare at them," which actually becomes: "I stare at . . . something else," then the second section is no longer the innocent elliptical form of "They stare at me." The erasing move here is even more violent, as this is the section where eye contact is systematically applied. Nevertheless, careful reading of the first section must have some impact on the way we read the second section: the "I" of the photographer is virtually, i.e. not literally but structurally put under erasure. What the people pictured are looking at is thus no longer "me" but, say, the world. For it is "the world" that the photographer is expecting from them:

> There is something of that megalomaniac melancholy in the browsing of past images. Perhaps, if I could catch up with that absolute beauty in Cape Verde, the violinist in Stockholm lost in her thoughts, the grandmother in Corsica kissing the sacred stone . . . perhaps I could conquer a world. Or rather, they would conquer a world for me (Marker 2007, p. 80).

In conclusion, one could say that the worlds of "I" and "they" do not automatically intertwine, or that they do so much less easily than one might have expected. This difficulty is, one might argue, not unrelated to the above-mentioned deficient harmony between the individual and the crowd. The explicit absence and even deletion of a direct relationship between "I" and "they" is compensated by an "iconic" manoeuvre at the level of the book's design. Given the A+B+A' structure, it can be said that "I" *embrace* "them"—and, conversely, that "they" *make* "me." This embracing can be found at other strategic places in *Staring Back*: there is also an A/B/A' structure in part 1, which opens and closes with the image of the tree, while in part 3 the final image is that of a mummy, which mirrors a comparable image of a woman on the opposite page, which can be a human figure as well as the picture of a wax doll: the drift into the vegetal and the mineral exemplified by the mummy is thus an echo of the initial image of the three, so that the whole portrait book is taken between the brackets of two non-human elements.

But the linguistic analysis is not exhausted by the reflection on the missing object of the verb "to stare." No less important is the durative aspect of the -ing form "staring back," which is by definition problematic in the context of a photobook. A picture is indeed a slice of time, certainly when that picture is a fragment of a celluloid strip or video film. "Staring back" thus becomes something very instantaneous and ephemeral, and the eye contact is then reduced to a very brief encounter.[10] Nevertheless, just as the absence of a subject/object relationship and vice versa was compensated by the iconicity of the overall composition of the book, here the extreme shortness of the shot is balanced by a whole range of visual mechanisms which all tend to dissolve the single moment in a larger time frame: the systematic recourse to blurring, the contrasts in focus, the

suggestion of implied movement, all of which may also be heightened by the digital remastering of the original images. The impact of these visual auxiliaries at the micro level is increased by more general shifts in time span between the sections: Part 1 covers a period of forty years, but the thematic reverberations within this section devoted to protest demonstrations are such that one has the impression that time simultaneously stands still and is always capable of starting anew; Part 2 has no strong chronology and the homogenizing effect of the staring back mechanism is very strong; Part 3, on the contrary, has more indices of symptoms of time passing by: the aging of the people pictured is more manifest, as is the presence of death and destruction. The temporal layering and complexity of the book is, once again, not only dependent on the quality of the images themselves, whatever their formal and thematic richness may be, but on the slow unfolding of a structure that deepens the temporal dimension of what we see. The -ing form of "staring back" and the temporal yet undefined extension it allows for is both the permanent horizon of the 1/50th of a second shutter click, of the inevitable location of all moments and faces in time and place, and of the anchorage of the action of looking in the sentences subjected to the experience of a concrete "I" and a concrete "they."

Staring, writing, photographing . . .

But what, finally, about the cat? Is this animal, both the author's favourite pet and a figure he uses to illustrate some of his work, Marker's "signature"? Certainly, but in the very first place the cat—or rather, the specific cat called "M. Chat" (Mr. Cat)—appears in Marker's environment—and then, inevitably—in his work, as graffiti.[11] Or to put it in a different way: the cat is not just a symbol, it is a sign (and contrary to symbols, which have significations that are conventional, i.e. socially agreed upon, signs are structures that open questions: "signs of what?" is always the first question that comes to mind). This peculiar type of writing obeys four major rules, all of them inextricably linked: it is anonymous, it is collective, it merges the categories of art and non-art, and it illustrates that real

meaning is always use: nobody knows what the graffiti "means," but city-dwellers incorporate it into their daily life, they appropriate an empty signifier as a springboard for political action. What I would like to suggest here is that such graffiti, independently of its content, is a model for Marker's photographical practice. A book like *Staring Back* acts analogously to the cats appearing on the walls, courtyards and sidewalks of Paris. It invites readers to join the dreams and struggles it brings to the fore. It is definitely beyond discussions on the differences between art and life. It is collective to the extent that the exchange between the one who is looking and the one who is looked at no longer holds. And, finally, paradoxical and absurd as this may seem, it is also anonymous, the author of the pictures being as much the models as the photographer. This is probably the most radical shift of all, taking into account that *Staring Back* has been conceived and realized as a kind of autobiography in pictures. Given Marker's basic interest in the interrelatedness of individual and group, person and crowd, man as entity and man as citizen, the rhetorical figures of enunciative "enallage"[12] are however a logical step in the artistic reconstruction of the position of the visual storyteller. Rather than following the current fashion in "self-fiction," *Staring Back* is an attempt to reinvent the new encounter of the antique singer of the city and the unhappy crowd.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1. See Dubois (2002), Lupton (2004), Paci (2005), Alter (2006), Habib and Paci (2008) and Kravanja (2009 and 2010).

2. Although it should be stressed that the book in question is also the catalogue of an exhibition, and that the various spaces and galleries in which the work has been shown do add a special layer, i.e. a spatial and rhythmic organization different from that of the book, one that will however not be taken into account in this article.

3. See Dubois (2002a) and Habib and Paci (2010).

4. See Marker (1956, 1959 and 1982), Marker and Horrigan (1995) and Susini (1981).

5. The latter remembers the "second birth" theory by Gaudreault and Marion (2000), who defend the idea of a dynamic genealogy of media, based on the distinction between a "first birth" (i.e. the moment in which a certain technology appears)

and the "second birth" of a medium (i.e. the moment in which an institution has emerged that helps to insert, after various adaptations and changes, the new technology into an existing mediascape).

6. Chris Marker says, in *Staring Back*: "Yet four years later, that jubilant mood hardly shows up in my images . . . . As my lens slips inside the crowd like an inquisitive snake, what it frames is, despite the apparent cohesiveness of the groups, the everlasting face of solitude."

7. For a selection, see his book *Le paradis perdu/Paradise Lost* (Trivier 2002).

8. There is at least one (recognizable) Parisian metro portrait in *Staring Back* (Marker 2007, p. 70), which is very different from the pictures by Evans and Delahaye: on the one hand the person is definitely looking back (but with her eyes apparently closed, and how can one not remember here a famous scene of *La jetée*); on the other hand because the whole picture is strongly individualized, by the setting (the picture frame includes a Dior ad) as well as by the viewpoint (the woman pictured is sitting, and nevertheless the point of view is a very strong low angle shot).

9. I take this term in the broad sense of the word: a person pictured with his or her eyes closed can of course be an example of such signifying eye contact.

10. On one occasion, Marker (2007, p. 64) makes this brevity very explicit: "In this 1/50th of a second the Chilean worker under Allende knew that the nationalized factory now was his property. . . . In this malignant, undefinable world, the speed of the shutter stopped the rarest moment, a moment of certainty."

11. Chris Marker also uses the figure of a cat, "Guillaume en Égypte," as a kind of logo or alternative signature.

12. "Enallage" is, in general, the substitution, as of one part of speech for another, one gender, number, case, person, tense, mode or voice, of the same word, for another. It is used also in narratology to qualify the use of the third-person narrator in autobiographical narratives.

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RÉSUMÉ

De la caméra-stylo au livre de photographies. À propos de *Staring Back* de Chris Marker
Jan Baetens

Dans cet article, l'auteur propose une analyse des travaux photographiques de Chris Marker, plus particulièrement de son projet *Staring Back* (qui est à la fois une exposition et un livre publié en 2007). Cette œuvre peut se lire comme une synthèse en images fixes de la carrière cinématographique d'un auteur qui s'est toujours efforcé d'explorer les limites instables entre image fixe et image mobile, comme dans son film-culte *La jetée* (1962) ou dans des productions telles que *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (1966) ou *Le souvenir d'un avenir* (avec Yannick Bellon, 2001). L'auteur appuie son analyse sur trois éléments : 1) le concept markérien de « superluminal », qui renvoie à une technique consistant à détacher certaines images fixes du flot d'images mobiles, 2) les débats plus ou moins récents sur l'intermédialité, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur des études du cinéma, et 3) la notion de cinéphilie, entendue ici comme une certaine façon de combiner écriture verbale et écriture filmique. Ces trois éléments l'aident à soutenir une lecture rapprochée de *Staring Back*, qui met fortement l'accent sur les enjeux politiques du regard, d'une part, et sur les rapports entre artiste et modèle, d'autre part.