



# Sans Soleil

by Chris Marker (1982)

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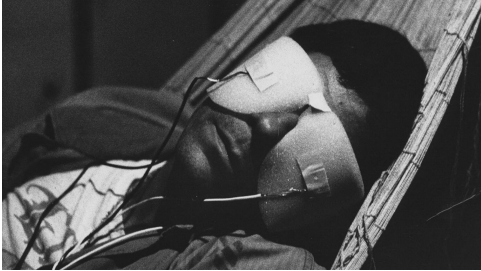
SANS SOLEIL (SUNLESS) (1982), by Chris Marker; 16mm, color, sound, 100 minutes.

Emanating from the same circle of filmmakers that included Alain Resnais, Agnes Varda, and Jean Rouch, a group which started making films immediately preceding the more renown cineastes of the Nouvelle Vague, the French filmmaker Chris Marker has never been easily fitted into a critical niche. To label him an “essayist” would be just as appropriate as labeling him a documentarian or journalist, and just as limiting.

His films harken directly back to cinema’s first “essayist,” Dziga Vertov, whose films release a cornucopia of images which don't synthesize into a whole so much as they attempt to illuminate wholly. Marker's films, like Vertov's, don't have a subject, *per se*. They seem more to be about lack of subject.

In Wim Wenders' *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), Marker makes what seems like an accidental cameo, having a drink in a bar that Wenders' camera

happens into. But the scene is an ironic set-up, for Wenders' document(ary) is as much indebted to Marker as it is to its ostensible subject, the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu. The groundlessness that informs *Tokyo-Ga*, and the somewhat desperate attempt to grab on to an image that conforms to one's memory — for Wenders, the Tokyo of Ozu's films — is a feeling familiar to Marker and familiar to those that have seen Marker's films.



*La Jetée* (1962)



*The Koumiko Mystery* (1965)

In the fictional short *La Jetée* (1962), Marker's best known film and superficially something of an anomaly in his oeuvre, the protagonist is a guinea pig in a time-travel experiment, and finds himself traveling back to an image of his childhood that has obsessed him, only to find that that image was of his own death. The "mystery" in Marker's *The Koumiko Mystery* (1965) is Koumiko herself, who is elusive only because her Tokyo and Marker's Tokyo are not the same, though it is through her that Marker attempts to document that city.

With *Sans Soleil*, Marker returns to Tokyo, but he also "returns" to Africa, Iceland, and San Francisco. These "returns" are made not so much to the actual places as they are to images of those places. Marker's search for a completing image is one likely to be disappointing. More often than not, the image has been tainted, or appropriated, or just not there — in short, without sun.