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FROM THE CAMERA OBSCURA TO (DIGITAL) CAMERA: HISTORY, MEMORY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CHRIS MARKER'S SUNLESS AND DAVID ALBAHARI'S BAIT

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Abstract

This thesis examines formal aesthetic elements and political premises and implications in works by the Serbian-Canadian author David Albahari and French writer, photographer and filmmaker Chris Marker by establishing the visual metaphor of the camera as an instrument and theory of history, memory and subjectivity. I argue that the position of self-imposed exile and the travelling cinematography of the narrative point of view invite both camera obscura contemplation and a photographic/filmic mode of spectatorship. Albeit in different art forms, Marker's experimental documentary film *Sunless* and Albahari's novel *Bait* both function as meditations on personal and global experiences and history. Their aim is to filter traumatic memories, trying to (re)constitute a new subjectivity and a new historical horizon.

Keywords

Camera obscura; digital media; photography; perception; recording media; subjectivity; documentary film; Crary, Jonathan; Barthes, Roland; Descartes; historical trauma; war

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Introduction

Why is the camera obscura frequently used as an analogy, metaphor, philosophical tool or literary figure? How is it possible, to begin with, to view a technical device as a figure that represents a set of beliefs, a kind of knowledge, a social disposition or a worldview? In *Techniques of the Observer*, the eminent art historian Jonathan Crary sees the camera obscura as both "a technological and discursive object, about which something is said and at the same time an object that is a complex social amalgam in which its existence as a textual figure was never separable from its machinic uses."[1] Although Crary's post-structuralist rhetoric rarely reveals those "complex social amalgams" and underlying processes of which such uses are effects, his goal is to relate the camera to subjectivity, or to study the way the observer, his visual field and function, which he posits as a critical figure of subjectivity of the investigation, had been historically constructed, thoroughly explained, and modelled on the technical device. The primary point of departure for my thesis project is Crary's insight that

> [V]ision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification [...] Though obviously one who sees, an observer is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.[2]

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[1] Jonathan Crary. *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 5-6.
[2] Ibid. 6.

The necessity of connecting the subject/observer to a particular visual technology is thus posited in Crary's view that "Perhaps the most important obstacle to an understanding of the camera obscura or of any optical apparatus, is the idea that the optical device and observer are two distinct entities, that the identity of observer exists independently from the optical device that is a physical piece of technical equipment.'[3] Yet as Anne Friedberg also argues in her critique of Jonathan Crary's thesis on proto-cinematic media, not only the camera obscura, but also photography (or the output of the photographic camera), projection devices and the computer (screen) could be seen here as figures of an historically constructed identity of the observer. Crary's introductory remark in *Techniques of the Observer* that digital technology created new effects or meanings of the terms like observer or representation, but that "older and more familiar modes of 'seeing' will persist and coexist uneasily alongside these new forms"[4] seems to provide a more fluid and less restrictive genealogy of media devices, which I plan to use to capture essential moments of the works that are compared in this thesis.

In this thesis, I am interested in tracing the use of recording media and the camera in a variety of literary and filmic contexts as "filtering and editing" devices for historical memory and as tools for contemplation and distraction. The editors or narrators in this thesis seem to base their works on the premise of a camera obscura "metaphysics of interiority" that looks inward and reflects, but simultaneously they also reach outward to try to grasp and comprehend world history or what Heidegger calls the "world picture". In the process, they seem to leave the confines of their camera interiority; the integrity of camera, its focused contemplation changes into the mobile, polymorphous, disorienting,

[3] Ibid. 30.
[4] Ibid. 2.

and synthetic distraction of a megalopolis like Tokyo (in *Sunless*) or language/text itself (in *Bait* and *Snow Man*). The fact that the protagonists are engaged in editing or writing through continual comments and dialogues (interior or open) points to a tradition of philosophical reflection starting with Plato. But the fact that they are travellers, invisible, anonymous, at the same time traumatised and bland city dwellers points to a different subjectivity; distracted, multiple, assembled and transformative. That the war, memories of war, political struggles, violence and death are the immediate object of their gaze seems, therefore, only appropriate for the explanation and illustration of the agon between the two.

In Chapter 1, I examine the thesis of Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*, his argument that something as natural and self evident as vision has its history. Its (re)configurations, Crary argues, reflect the structure and changes of the organization of knowledge and social practices of subjectification. The subject of vision is therefore a historical and social construct which Crary tries to understand through the investigation of knowledge concerning human perception and optical devices. Particularly interesting for me is that Crary's work reveals, or makes, connections and relations between specific technical instruments and historical subjective formations. The camera obscura is such an instrument; it was used as a drawing tool and for light entertainment, but also as an explanatory model for human perception and as a philosophical metaphor of individual subjectivity. The post-structural theorist Sarah Kofman also examined the camera obscura metaphor as used in philosophical texts by major modern philosophers like Descartes, Marx and Nietzsche. In this chapter I discuss Crary's arguments and examples for the positing of camera obscura as the model for an

early modern (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) observer and "metaphysics of interiority" – an individualized, disembodied, isolated and contemplative observer, to mention only a few of the most important traits. I also briefly analyse the photographic camera system of vision inaugurated with the nineteenth century's discoveries in the physiology of the human eye (and body in general) and the developments of optical apparatuses based on that knowledge. The model of spectatorship certainly changed, as we approached our digital age. One of Crary's goals is to trace the genesis of this shift, as vision became embodied, empirical and material, which mirrored the transition of older societies into an industrialized and modernized world of commodities. Paradoxically or not, this modern development of optical knowledge and visual devices led to the digital abstraction of the visual, to the disappearance of reference (to the empirical world and of subject of perception).

From Crary's point of view, these are two radically different paradigms of vision, which means that there is no coexistence of different scopic modes or continuous use of optical devices, either technically improved or not. In the final chapters on Chris Marker's *Sunless* and David Albahari's *Bait* I try to show, however, that the camera does not break down as a philosophical or literary (visual) metaphor in the twentieth century, but works properly as an interpretative machine. Although their works belong to different genres and media, the film and the novel(s) are based on the common goal – the understanding of time through the examination of the possibilities of its forms of memory, filmed image and recorded language.

In Chapter 2, I introduce Marker's beginnings as a writer, art activist and documentary filmmaker concerned with themes of war, traumatic memories and social

and political projects in the new post/cold-war era. The experience of engaged writing and cinematography during the period between 1950 and 1980 is reflected upon in his unorthodox documentary *Sunless*, which combines personal, confession-like contemplation and non-fictional cinematic material. *Sunless* is a melancholy revisiting of distant places memorized as video and audio fragments ("I've been round the world several times and now only banality still interests me" says the voice over) which now exist as pieces ready to be assembled in the editor's dark room, in the film marked as the *Zone*. The film is also a self-reflexive recapitulation of the process of editing the film, which draws our attention to its creative and playful side and even the ability of images to change, associate, communicate, return the gaze and inhabit a space of their own.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of David Albahari's novel *Bait*, and partly of his other Canadian novel *Snow Man*, which repeat the theme of a camera-like meditation on the madness and memory of war (the Second World War and the armed crisis in the Balkans in 1990s), narrated by a nameless Serbian Jewish academic in Canada. Like Marker's travelling cameraman, Albahari's narrators try to understand and create, so to speak, a map of their personal and their family's experience of a life of loss and fragmentation. They contemplate the audio recordings and historical atlases in order to piece together meaningful stories that would keep their human ability to use language and their mental frames of viewing the world from deterioration.

Chapter 1: Meditations: The Camera Obscura and a New Model of Vision, Subjectivity and Interiority

There is a long tradition of using the camera obscura as a model of visual perception in the context of philosophical research into knowledge – concerning the way we receive and organize the sensual data of the external world, the structure of the sensory apparatus, the forming of belief, and its relation to knowledge and truth. In *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, Sarah Kofman identifies such places in the writings of Descartes, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud[5] and analyzes the different moments in which these authors used the camera obscura as an analogy, explanatory model or metaphor. For example, the fact that in the camera obscura images appear inverted seemed fitting for Marx to set it as a metaphor which captures the nature of ideology: "...in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura..."[6] Religion and metaphysics are ideological constructs, qua Marx, products of the human mind which, once elevated to a level of autonomy, attain a life of their own and although illusory, exert a real influence on people's lives.

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[5] Sarah Kofman finds that Freud uses the camera obscura metaphor "explicitly and repeatedly" to refer to the unconscious. Although there is a slight change – it is now upgraded to the photographic camera because of its capacity to retain an impression (negative) coming from outside, she argues "the usage and principle remain identical." She states that there are two different meanings of this metaphor in Freud's writings – one concerning the passage of psychic episodes from the unconscious to consciousness, which works like development of a negative into a positive image, and another related to retention of an impression and its subsequent repetition where a selected negative is repeated, duplicated without necessarily being developed to a positive. See Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), 21-28.

[6] Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), 1.

As Kofman writes, for Nietzsche this metaphor of the camera obscura, in a variety of contexts, has slightly different meanings or different purposes. As in Marx, it is an ideological device, but unlike Marx's version, it is not to be done away with by theoretical and practical work. Its upkeep is necessary for a decent and healthy life: It is, in short, as Kofman argues, a "metaphor for forgetting, for a forgetting necessary to life." Kofman argues that "Nietzsche employs this metaphor by playing on its mythical connotations and reining it in as close as possible. The chamber of consciousness has a key, and it would be dangerous to want to look through the keyhole – dangerous and impertinent."[7] Still, a philosopher is attracted to the truth, he wants to know and see through the apparatus, even if it is unbearable and harmful. He is a being, Nietzsche postulates, torn between fear of and curiosity for truth. "A born psychologist," Nietzsche argues, "instinctively guards against seeing for the sake of seeing; the same applies to the born painter. He never works "from nature"—he leaves it to his instinct, his camera obscura, to sift and express the "case," "nature," the object of the "experience" ... He is conscious only of the general, the conclusion, the outcome: he knows nothing of the arbitrary abstraction from the individual case."[8] For Nietzsche, the camera obscura thus appears as part of a sifting, filtering and editing process, whereby individuals forget, but also remember and determine the object of experience. Also taking my cue from Nietzsche in this thesis I am interesting in tracing the use of recording media and the camera in a variety of literary and filmic contexts as "filtering and editing" devices for historical memory and as tools for contemplation and distraction.

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[7] Ibid. 45.
[8] Ibid. 42.

Let us recall that Crary reads the camera obscura through the lenses of its "multiple uses" as a "philosophical metaphor", a model for visual perception, and a technical apparatus and social construct:

> That the camera obscura was social as well as technical means that during the 17th and 18th centuries it was a 'widely used model for explaining human vision, and for representing the relation of the perceiver and the position of a knowing subject to an external world. [...] It was used as a philosophical metaphor, an optical model and also a technical apparatus for a large range of cultural activities.[9]

In other words, the camera obscura as an Enlightenment concept stood as a model of "how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world, and at the same time, as a physical instrument, it was used as a means of observing the world, for popular entertainment, for scientific enquiry and artistic practice."[10] Its multiple uses imply "its multiple identity, its 'mixed' status as an epistemological figure within a discursive order and an object within an arrangement of cultural practices."[11]

Yet what are the defining features of a camera obscura and how does Jonathan Crary describe it as a model of vision? It could be broadly defined as "[...] any dark place, in which outward objects exposed to Broad-Day-light, are represented upon paper, or on any white body."[12] For Jonathan Crary and his understanding of the camera obscura as an Enlightenment tool for cogito or reason, central is "its relation of the observer to the

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[9] Jonathan Crary. *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 27-29.
[10] Ibid. 29.
[11] Ibid. 30.
[12] Kofman, 75.

undemarcated, undifferentiated expanse of the world outside."[13] The camera obscura creates a certain kind of subjectivity by individualising and defining

> an observer as isolated, enclosed and autonomous within its dark confines. It impels a kind of *askesis* or withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate and purify one's relation to the manifold contents of the now 'exterior' world. [...] [i]t is a figure for both the observer who is nominally a free sovereign individual and a privatized subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world. At the same time, and what is the most important, the *camera obscura* signifies that the act of seeing is separated from the physical body of the observer and that the vision is disembodied.[...] The spectator is a free floating inhabitant of the darkness, a marginal supplementary presence independent of the machinery of representation.[...] The *camera obscura* a priori prevents the observer from seeing his or her position as part of the representation. The body then is a problem the camera could never solve except by marginalizing it into a phantom in order to establish a space of reason.[14]

Key terms that mark the essence of Crary's speculation on the camera obscura are disembodiment, abstraction, individualization and rationalization. The "dark confines" refers to the privacy of a particular observer's bodily frame within which the person's mind quietly, undisturbed and concentrated on the images from the outside, discerns, categorises, orders and evaluates. This observing mind does not depend on the body it inhabits, or, at least, it is not certain where and how they relate. This solitary, immaterial spirit is an immobile but free presence that fixes the always threatening flow of the physical world of uncertainty. Martin Jay, in "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", also writes about the so-called Cartesian perspectivalism as the dominant modern visual mode using

[13] Crary, 1992, 34.
[14] Ibid. 39.

the following adjectives to describe the eye of the spectator-researcher – static, unblinking, fixated, eternalized, dismembered, disincarnated, absolute, de-eroticized, and dispassionate.[15] It is presupposed that there is an external, material world that exists independently of the observer who is interested in truthful representation and knowledge.[16]

Obviously, the passage quoted above (Crary) speaks of an instrument, machinery for acquiring valid information, and sensations concerning objective reality. Since it was constructed, the camera obscura has been used as a copying or tracing device by painters and those interested in drawing. Early photographic processes in the mid nineteenth century were seen to enhance the tracing potential of the camera obscura, thus serving as an enhanced "mirror with a memory". The inventor of photographic recording, Nicephore Niepce, defined the process (he named it "heliography") as "the automatic reproduction, [...] of the images obtained in the camera obscura"[17]. Fox Talbot, one of the forefathers of photography, left a record of his research in which camera obscura was a necessary, starting point: "I made new attempts to obtain pictures of buildings with the Camera

[15] Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", in *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 114.
[16] This presumption about the doubtless existence of the world outside, as implied in the quoted passage, is highly questionable from the point of view of epistemological studies. Neither Jonathan Crary, Martin Jay nor Sarah Kofman see Descartes' work as an effort to find the right criteria for truthful knowledge and, by implication, a proof for the existence of the external reality against the classic sceptical objections and arguments (the infinite regression of justification, with the distinction between true perception and dreaming, the evil Demon scenario etc.).
[17] Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, "Memoire on the Heliograph", in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 5.

Obscura... I succeeded in reducing the time necessary for obtaining an image with the Camera Obscura on a bright day to ten minutes"[18].

William–James Gravesande in *An Essay on Perspective* (1724) gives a detailed description of the camera obscura structure and usage in a form much like Spinoza's *Ethics*—the definition is followed by the theorems, demonstrations, problems and remarks. His analysis contains the illustrations of its design ["This machine is something in figure of a chair (such as people are carried in), the back part of the top is rounded..."], its construction elements ["There are two tin tubes bent at each end... On top of the machine there is a board about 15 inches long..."] and its usage for the representation of objects ["in their natural disposition," of "pictures or prints and of persons' faces"]. The geometrical manner of exposition is particularly conspicuous in the "quod erat demonstrandum" phrase of the Theorem 1 – "...therefore the rays which fall upon the paper in the Camera Obscura, likewise give the true representation of the objects theron. *Which was to be demonstrated.*"[19]

[18] William Henry Fox Talbot. "A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art", in Ibid., 33.
[19] Kofman,76.

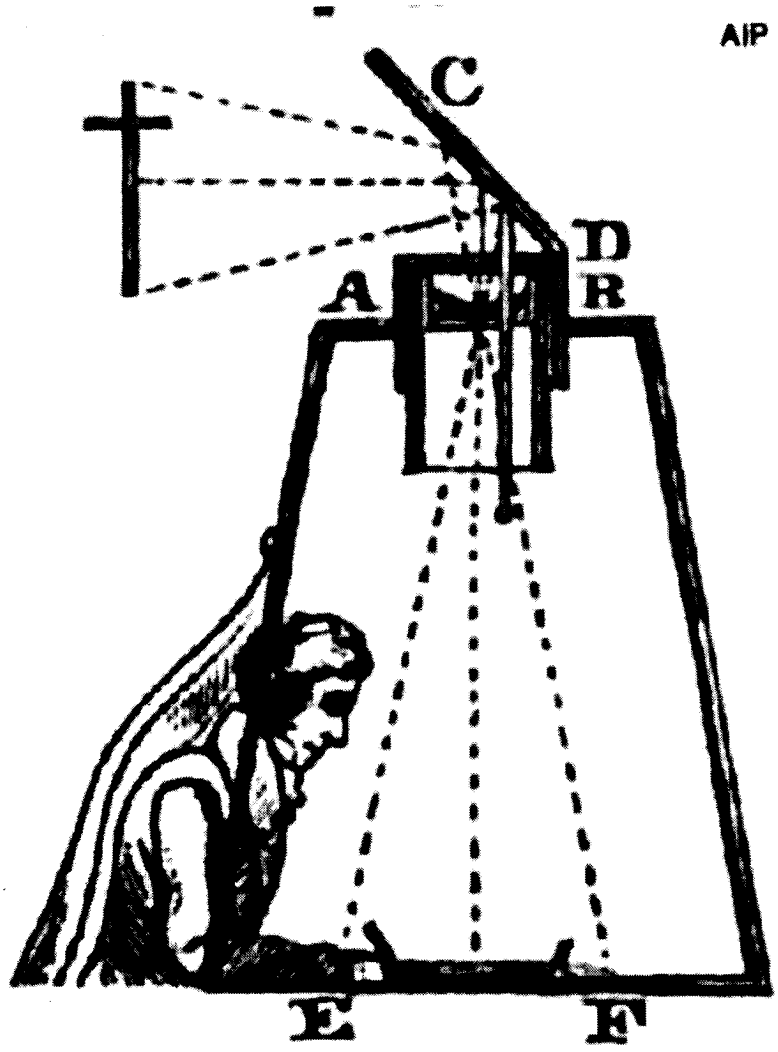

Figure 1. *A drawing of a portable camera obscura* (David Brewster, *A Treatise on Optics* 1838)

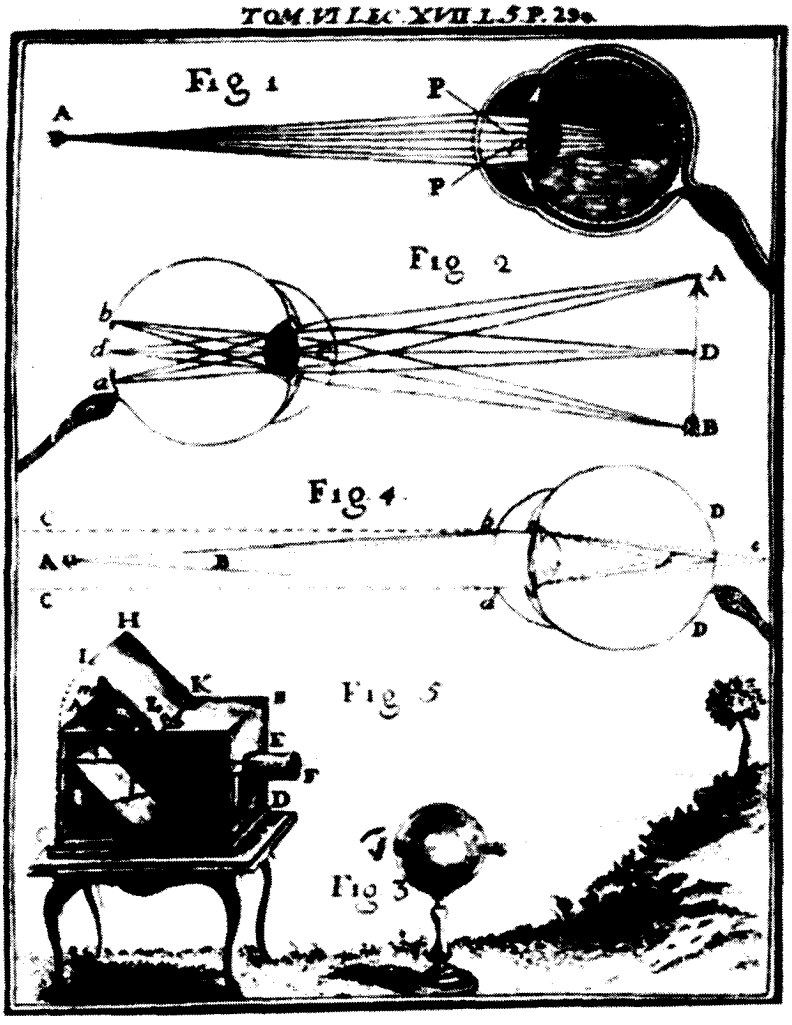

Figure 2. *Anon. Comparative depiction of the human eye and the camera obscura* (Early eighteenth-century book illustration)

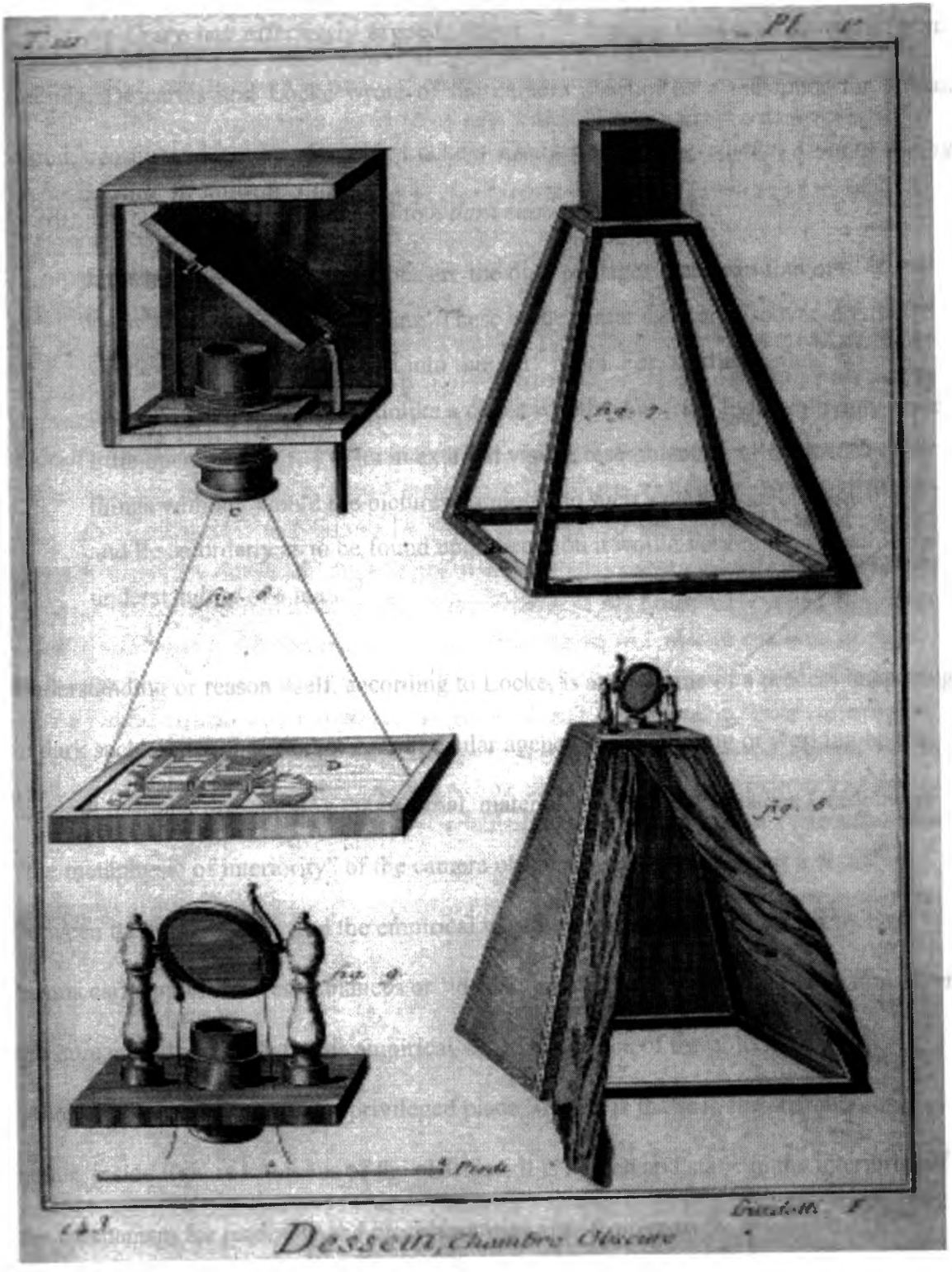

Figure 3. *Chambre Obscure 18th Century* (*Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire, des arts et des métiers,* 1772)

As Crary has effectively argued, major 17th century thinkers Kepler, Newton, Leibniz, Descartes and Locke wrote of the camera obscura as a metaphor for human vision, reason and cogito. In John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), the human mind is compared to a *dark chamber or room*:

> External and internal sensations are the only passages that I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left [...] to let in external visible resemblances, or some idea of things without; would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion it would very much resemble the understanding of a man.[20]

Understanding or reason itself, according to Locke, is an outcome of a process happening in dark seclusion with a kind of central ocular agency contemplating or working on the material of images resembling the external, material world. What Jonathan Crary terms "the metaphysic of interiority" of the camera obscura implies that there is a divide between the human being and the empirical world which can only be crossed by light beams carrying visible resemblances or 'ideas' through the 'window' of perception. Even the human body belongs to this empirical world and is one of the objects of contemplation. The body has a privileged place, since it is the seat, the chamber, or better, inside it there is a locus of the observer. It is hidden and static in the interiority of the mechanism for receiving and projecting messages from outside.

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[20] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.1996), 65.

Locke's analysis of the nature of perception is an occasion to introduce the idea of "distraction" as an inevitable threat posed by the new knowledge and instruments of expanded vision. The 17th century invention of the microscope greatly improved perspectives of empirical investigation, but it was also used as popular entertainment. As Janelle Blankenship writes in her doctoral thesis: "Philosophers such as John Locke expressed their fear that that magnification inherent in the [microscope] lens would lead to a superhuman perception that would distort and distract, not edify and enlighten."[21] It was recognized early on that the edutainment tools of the microscope and the camera obscura, coupled with a magic lantern for projection, could be utilized for visual entertainment and popular diversion, although this did not prevent Crary from positing the camera obscura as an exclusively contemplative optical paradigm.[22]

In *The Virtual Window*, Anne Friedberg complicates the traditional view of the camera obscura as contemplation vs. cinematic media as distraction. She probes this "edutainment" function of the camera obscura and other optical devices and traces the metaphorical uses of the architectural window in narratives of perception and vision. She maintains that the camera obscura functions like a window but also "exchanges places with the window."[23] The wall of the camera obscura is a projecting screen for the light coming from the outside reality. "The darkness and opacity of the wall becomes the receptacle for the light and transparency of the window aperture."[24] This projection side

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[21] Janelle Blankenship, *Time and the Cinematic Trick: Contemplating an 'Optical Unconscious'* (PhD Thesis: Duke University, 2004), 107-108.
[22] Crary dismisses this "counter deployment" of the device: "However, this counter deployment of the camera obscura never occupied an effective discursive or social position from which to challenge the dominant model I have been outlining here," 33.
[23] Ane Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 61.
[24] Ibid.

of the camera obscura, according to Friedberg, prepares the ground for its use as an entertainment medium, complicating its epistemological status. An explanatory model and a scientific instrument, it can also be used as device for illusion and distraction along with a related ocular contrivance developed at the roughly same age – the microscope.[25] Historically speaking, although the camera obscura device was frequently used for entertainment and distraction, as early manuals and catalogues attest, it should come as no surprise that the Enlightenment philosophers shunned its distraction potential and instead emphasized the darkness as a return to reason.

The philosopher Rene Descartes also returns to the camera obscura as a metaphorical dark chamber for cogito, explaining human perception using the camera obscura analogy in his *Optics* (1637):

> Thus you can clearly see that in order to perceive, the mind need not contemplate any images resembling the things that it senses. But it makes it no less true that the objects we look at do imprint very perfect images on the back of our eyes. Some people have very ingeniously explained this already, by comparison with the images that appear in a chamber, when having it completely closed except for a single hole, and having put in front of this hole a glass in the form of a lens, we stretch behind, at a specific distance, a white cloth on which the light that comes from the objects outside forms these images. For they say that this chamber represents the eye; this hole, the pupil; this lens, the crystalline humour, or rather, all those parts of the eye which cause some refraction; and this cloth, the interior membrane, which is composed of the extremities of the optic nerve."[26]

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[25] The microscope was seen by early modern philosopher Locke as part of a threatening epistemology of 'distraction': For Locke "enhanced sensory perception that was attached to the new invention of the microscope [...] upset the equilibrium of understanding. It threatened the solid equation between subject and object, the disembodied contemplative viewing" housed in the metaphor of the camera obscura (Blankenship, 107).

[26] Rene Descartes, "Optics, Fifth Discourse", in *Discourse on Method: Optics, Geometry and Meteorology,* trans Paul J. Olscamp (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 91.

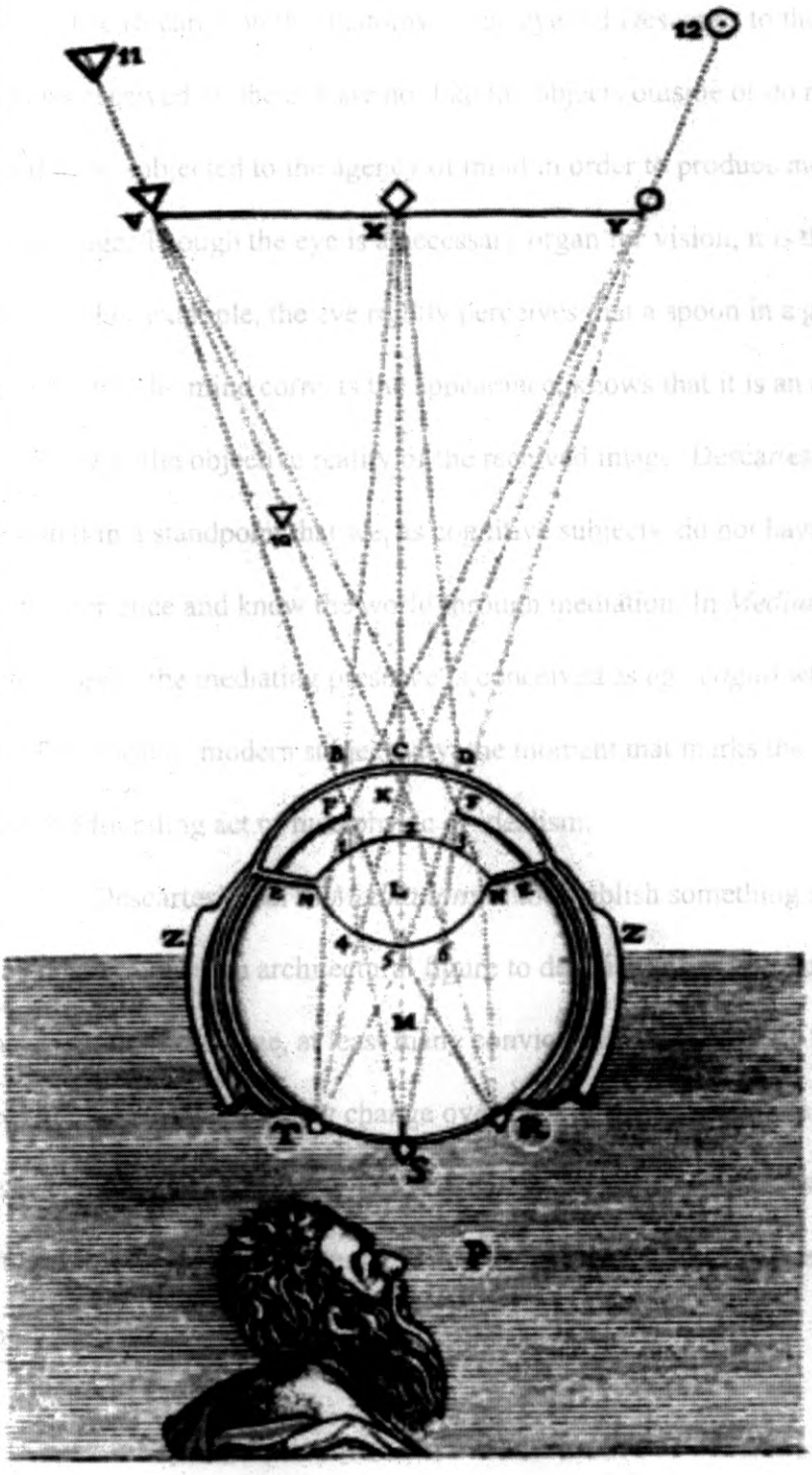

Figure 4. *Images received by the eye* (Descartes' *Optics,* 1637*)*

The research on the anatomy of the eye led Descartes to the conclusion that the images received by the eye are not like the objects outside or do not resemble them, but need to be subjected to the agency of mind in order to produce meaningful ideas and knowledge. Though the eye is a necessary organ for vision, it is the mind that sees, not the eye. For example, the eye rightly perceives that a spoon in a glass of water appears broken, but the mind corrects the appearance, knows that it is an optical effect, in other words, sees the objective reality of the received image. Descartes' practical investigations resulted in a standpoint that we, as cognitive subjects, do not have direct access to reality, but experience and know the world through mediation. In *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, the mediating presence is conceived as *ego cogito* which is usually seen as the first form of modern subjectivity, the moment that marks the beginning of modernity and the founding act of metaphysic of idealism.

Descartes' goal in *Meditations* is to establish something solid and lasting in the sciences. He uses an architectural figure to describe his epistemic project. He says that we have, if not knowledge, at least many convictions about the way the world is. But these convictions are faulty: they change over time, many of them turn out to be false, and none is properly grounded or fully understood. The only way to achieve secure, certain, and fully intelligible knowledge, Descartes says, is to tear down the existing "structure" and build a new one.

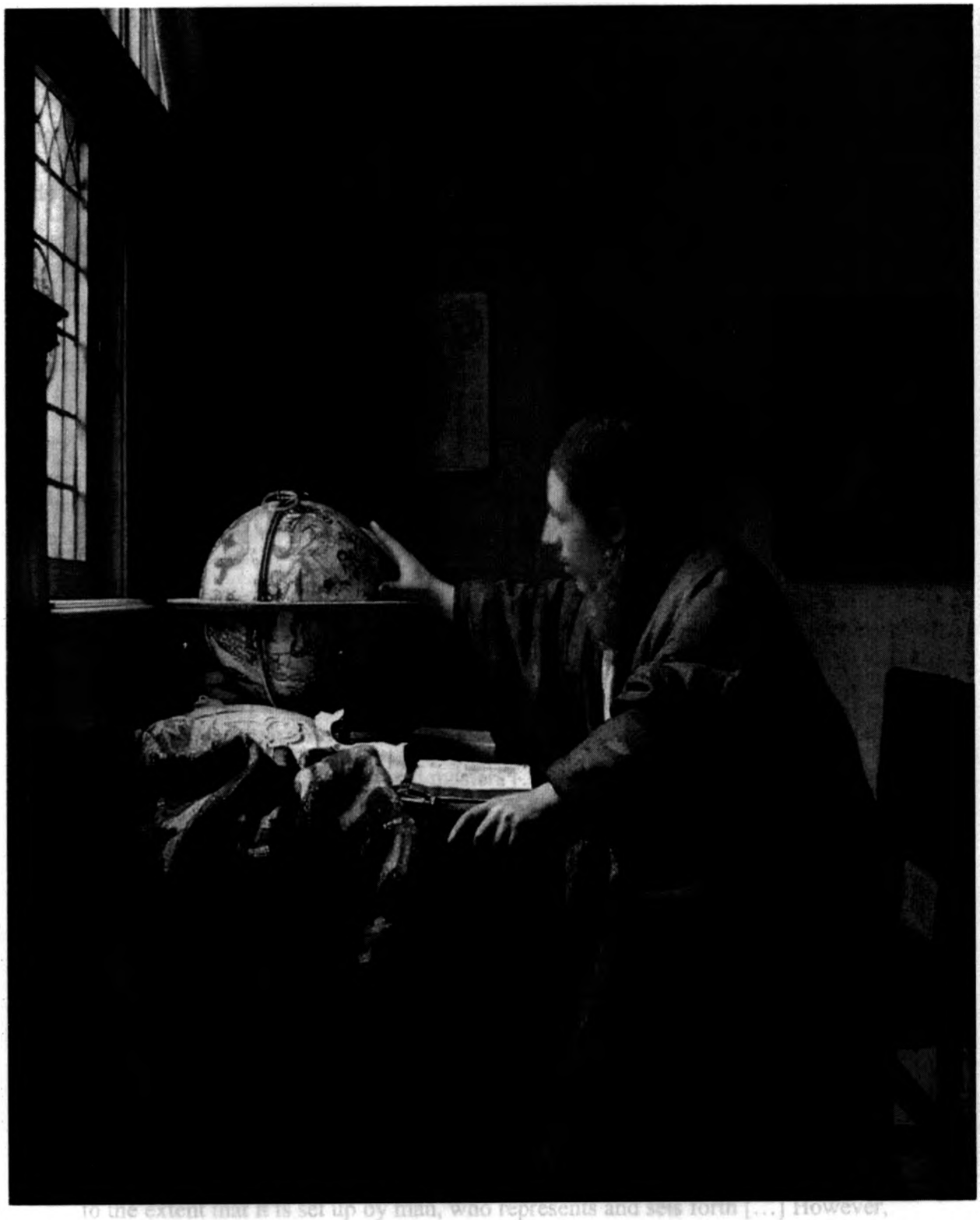

Figure 5. *Jan Vermeer. The Astronomer* (oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1688)

To reach something absolutely certain, beyond even the most unreasonable doubt, Descartes dismisses the evidences of his senses. He finds that he is certain about one thing: that he thinks, that is, doubts, imagines, understands, wants, sees, hears etc. He finds his subjectivity as the only certainty on which other phenomena can be founded. The certainty that he thinks becomes the permanent foundation of his knowledge. And any other thought that is as clear and distinct as the idea that thinking implies the existence of one that thinks, qualifies as knowledge.

A passage from Heidegger's *The Age of World Picture* explains that the relation between man and the world mediated through the image is constitutive of both man's subjectivity and the objectivity of the world. They, in a sense, do not exist before entering that mediating relation:

> Thinking is representing, setting before, [...] it is rather that which, in representing, is first set over against, that which stands fixedly over against, which has the character of object. Representing is making-stand-over-against, an objectifying that goes forward and masters [...] Every relation to something – willing, taking a point of view, being sensible of something – is already representing.[...] To be subject now becomes the distinction of man as the thinking – representing being [....] Where the world becomes picture, what is, in its entirety, is juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself. Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth [...] However,

> everywhere that whatever is, is *not* interpreted in this way, the world also cannot enter into a picture; there can be no world picture.[27]

The understanding of perception which dominated the Ancient Greek and Medieval times, which stated that objects by nature emanate their tiny replicas into the air and so come into contact with the eye, is now changed into a theory which recognises representation (instead of similarity) as the principal term.

Crary's analysis of Vermeer's paintings exemplify his reading that relies on the metaphor of the Cartesian camera obscura as cogito, as a "metaphysics of interiority" and a device that takes stock of the "world picture." The solitary male figures in *The Geographer* and *The Astronomer* are 'in camera' in an interior surveying or examining (even inspecting) the outside world, determining its laws and its circumference. Crary depicts the solitary male figures in both paintings as

> absorbed in learned pursuits within the rectangular confines of a shadowy interior, an interior punctured apparently by only a single window. The astronomer studies a celestial globe mapped out with the constellations; the geographer has before him a nautical map. Each has his eyes averted from the aperture that opens onto the outside. The exterior world is known not by direct sensory examination but through a mental survey of its 'clear and distinct' representation within the room. The sombre isolation of these meditative scholars within their walled interiors is not in the least an obstacle to apprehending the world outside... The paintings then are a consummate demonstration of the reconciling function of the camera obscura: its interior is the interface between Descartes's absolutely dissimilar res cogitans and res extensa, between observer and the world. The camera, or room is the site within which an orderly projection of the world, of extended substance, is made available for inspection by the mind. The production of the camera is

[27] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of World Picture", in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 158.

always a projection onto a two dimensional surface—here maps, globes, charts and images... Rather than opposed by the objects of their study, the earth and the heavens, the geographer and the astronomer engage in a common enterprise of observing aspects of a single indivisible exterior."[28]

The "interface" is "a plane outside of nature"[29], a viewpoint onto the world that is positioned outside the world like the divine eye. It is "a plane independent of the viewer"[30] on which perceptions are accumulated and cross-referenced to build up knowledge[31]. The physical eye is in the service of "a nonsensory faculty of understanding", or metaphysical, transcendent eye capable of "overriding of the immediate subjective evidence of the body"[32]. A proto-materialist, like Diderot, says Crary, considers the senses as subordinate to mind which directs them "according to an immutable semantic logic that transcends its mere physical mode of functioning"[33]. Thus the importance of the concept of image, of the idea of the world as a picture for the modern understanding of knowledge, science, truth, being, world, as Heidegger explains in *The Age of the World Picture*. In the lecture entitled "The Thing", Heidegger illustrates the modern concepts of time and space using the example of time-lapse cinema: "The germination and growth of plants, which remained hidden throughout the seasons, is now exhibited publicly in a minute, on film. Distant sites of the most ancient cultures are shown on film as if they stood this very moment amidst today's street traffic"[34]. With a

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[28] Crary. *Techniques of the Observer*, 46.
[29] Ibid., 59.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 60.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Martin Heidegger. "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 165.

nod to Martin Heidegger's lecture about the eminently modern impulse to expand our objective knowledge and the use of technology in the modern age of science, it would not be unreasonable to accept the idea that the camera obscura is an ancestor of photography and modern digital optical devices, which aim to filter and edit the "world picture."

In the primary narratives examined in this thesis, Chris Marker's *Sunless* and David Albahari's *Bait* and *Snow Man*, what is real and important for the 'protagonists' are the recorded video and audio tapes, maps and charts they reflect on and inspect for traces and signs of the past. In *Sunless*, the cine traveler says that he does not understand how people who do not take pictures remember, and that his memory, his awareness of transpired experience is identical, co-substantial with the world seen and saved by the camera eye:

> [w]here the world becomes picture, what is, in its entirety, is juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself. Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth... However, everywhere that whatever is, is *not* interpreted in this way, the world also cannot enter into a picture; there can be no world picture.[35]

[35] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. and intro. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 160.

Marker's cine-narrator meditates on and filters the "world picture" for the spectator. Another important aspect of thinking of the world as a world picture, according to Heidegger, is the systematic aspect of world as picture or world pictured as a system. The "Panopticon," according to Foucault's lecture on the disciplinary technology of surveillance, is another architectural image (this time) of a systematic nature of modern understanding of man and the world. It is an optical mechanism for fixing, immobilizing, segmenting, recording and registration. It is automatic, increases efficiency, dis-individualizes power, provides knowledge, finds and invents new objects of knowledge/observation and can be generalized as a model of functioning. It is a technology that can be detached from any specific use. All of the above-mentioned characteristics of the panopticon are also the properties related to photography, that is, they are unavoidably present in any discourse on photography as a visual medium. As Susan Sontag argues, photography is also a means of systematization, classification and storage indispensable in today's science and practical knowledge:

> [t]hrough being photographed, something becomes part of a system of information, fitted into schemes of classification and storage which range from the crudely chronological order of snapshots sequences pasted in family albums to the dogged accumulations and meticulous filing needed for photography's uses in weather forecasting, astronomy, microbiology, geology, police work, medical training and diagnosis, military reconnaissance, and art history.[36]

[36] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1990), 156.

Photographs also reveal what Benjamin calls the finer layers of the "optical unconscious"[37] and by doing so transform everyday experience and its expectations. As Sontag writes, expanding on the media theory of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin:

> Photographs do more than redefine the stuff of ordinary experience (people, things, events, whatever we see – albeit differently, often inattentively – with natural vision) and add vast amounts of material that we never see at all. Reality as such is redefined – as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance....The technology that has already minimized the extent to which the distance separating photographer from subject affects the precision and magnitude of the image; provided ways to photograph things that are unimaginably small as well as those, like stars, which are unimaginably far; rendered picture taking independent of light itself (infrared photography) and freed the picture-object from its confinement to two dimensions (holography); shrunk the interval between sighting the picture and holding it in one's hands... ...the process itself remains an optical-chemical (or electronic) one, the workings of which are automatic, the machinery for which will inevitably be modified to provide still more detailed and, therefore, more useful maps of the real.[38]

It is often said that the age of photography is the age of modernization which means that photography provides a new map of the "world picture" and the modern time of "deterritorialization,"[39] making bodies and objects abstract and interchangeable and integrating them into new institutions and hierarchies ("reterritorialization"). If industrialization is one word usually used in the narratives of modernization, war as

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[37] Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), 24.
[38] Sontag, Susan. *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1990), 158.
[39] Crary's use of the term "deterritorialization" is indebted to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 10.

Sontag and Virilio suggest is synonymous with the processes and effects of modernization – war "makes mobile that what is grounded, clears away or obliterates that which impedes circulation, and makes exchangeable what is singular. This applies as much to bodies, signs, images, languages, kinship relations, religious practices, and nationalities as it does to commodities, wealth and labour power."[40]

> Over the course of the 19th century, an observer increasingly had to function within disjunct and defamiliarized urban spaces, the perceptual and temporal dislocations of railroad travel, telegraphy, industrial production, and flows of typographic and visual information. Concurrently, the discursive identity of the observer as an object of philosophical reflection and empirical study underwent an equally drastic renovation.[41]

The observer is now embodied, or better, vision/perception is embodied. It "became located in the empirical immediacy of the observer's body"[42]. On the other hand, the body has become the object of analytical study of perception, the study which produced many abstract models and theories of perception and cognition (computer, information, digital etc).

It seems that in modern investigations of the nature of perception, the camera obscura metaphor has been retained and modified in the form of a newer, improved recording device. The eye – camera obscura analogy as an explanation of the function of the eye has been improved with the photographic camera model of vision. In a well known textbook for medical studies, *Medical Physiology* by Guyton, in a chapter entitled 'Eye as the Photographic Camera', the parts of the eye are presented in such a way as to

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[40] Crary, 10.
[41] Ibid., 10-11.
[42] Ibid., 24.

resemble the elements of the photographic apparatus. Both the organ and the camera have optical systems, systems for the regulation of light (pupil/shutter) and retaining the image (retina/film). Although the camera obscura models of perception, vision and cogito have already been discarded as dated and unproductive[43], historically such models had great repute and in this thesis they serve as a philosophical point of departure for rethinking media and storage devices, subjectivity and history in David Albahari's autobiographical works and Chris Marker's essay film, *Sans Soleil.*

Although the camera obscura isn't a direct reference in either *Sans Soleil* or the works of Albahari, I argue that the position of self-imposed exile of the narrators in *Snow Man* and *Bait* and the position of the travelling photographer/cinematographer in *Sunless* is analogous to camera obscura observation. Second, the narrators are concerned with trying to come to terms with the instability of history, memory, and knowledge. They are forced to draw the line and reflect on their past experience and work in order to find a possibility of living a meaningful future. In that sense, these narrators embody the Cartesian *Meditationes* project. What is also similar is the results these narrators arrive at – Descartes's res cogitans/abstract, transcendental thinking thing is similar to the obscure, spiritual space Albahari's protagonists eventually inhabit and Marker's virtual space of the digital Synthesizer or the entrance to the Zone. Finally, I seek to draw upon Chris Marker and David Albahari to trouble Jonathan's Crary's shift in the "Techniques of the Observer" and sketch out a more fluid genealogy between the observer and effects of early modern and digital optical devices/practices.

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[43] Zarco Korac, *Razvoj psihologije opazanja* (Beograd: Nolit, 1985), 36.

In his classic text *Techniques of the Observer,* Crary stresses a shift from the camera obscura metaphysics of interiority of the 17th and 18th centuries to the embodied spectator of the photographic 19th century and many scholars have recently critiqued this shift, such as Friedberg, arguing that the two poles of media "distraction" and "contemplation" are perhaps closer than one might think.

In this same vein, Kofman asks provocatively whether the "magical apparatus" of the camera obscura in modernity doesn't bring clarity, but rather a fetishistic function, also reminding us of how Nietzsche and Marx read the camera obscura as "false consciousness" or forgetting. Crary's Enlightenment reading of the camera obscura as cogito perhaps over-invests it with the reason, truth and clarity that it received in the early modern philosophical tradition, yet the cine-narrators of my thesis return to the cogito mapping of modern media to create a new corporeality and embodied subject that uses the power of media as a filtering and observing device to map the new contours of a constantly shifting "world picture."

Chapter 2: Chris Marker – Inverted Utopia and Solarized History in *Sunless*

Chris Marker is one of the most popular experimental film auteurs of the second half of the 20th century. *Sunless,* his 1983 documentary film, is a celluloid reverie about the political world, his past work(s) and a possible future that was ahead of him at the time. The film seems to broadly fit into the documentary category, because it does not have the standard elements of a fiction film—here are no imaginary characters involved in a dramatic action, it was not shot in a film studio and it is viewed without the prerequisite of the willing suspension of disbelief. Its aim is not to entertain by actors' performances, eloquent dialogues, a selection of attractive/beautiful/captivating locations, a suspenseful conflict and an unexpected resolution, or references from the history of film culture. Needless to say, it aims to capture the objective, real world, the world as it is, its true existence at a particular time and place. It abounds with footage taken from real/regular TV like entertainment shows, coverage of political and war events, news broadcasts and sport events. There are frames from personal video diaries, popular feature films, computer games and advertisement screens. This objective/realist agenda unmistakeably puts it in the tradition of the documentary genre. Moreover, the clear ethnographic character of the film confirms its debt to documentary.

Yet, this film has a hypnotic voice over narration, is shot at stunning locations across the world, points to various moments in the memory of not only film culture, but also poetry and music, and contains a science fiction micro-story about a time traveller from the future. There is the epistolary narrative frame, a fiction about letters sent by an elusive photographer to his lover or friend who receives, reads and occasionally comments on them. He even has a name, as we discover close to the end—Sandor

Krasna. We know that the voice does not belong to the one who wrote the words we hear, who experienced the things we hear and see filmed. It is a proxy, a ghost presence like the author himself, who never took a picture of himself or posed in front of the objective of his camera. Still (s)he is omnipresent. He sees and films miles of footage, is curious about what he sees and remembers, about the way he sees and remembers the traces of life, preserved on celluloid. This frame, the "telescopic" presence of the author-traveler, works like a prologue which announces and introduces the events we are about to see by putting them in a perspective. It brings out the element of story-telling in the non-fiction genre of film.

Sunless is a kind of 'writerly'[44] film with a premise similar to the organizing principle and starting point of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* – his excitement and attraction to certain photographs is the point of departure for his research into the nature of photography as a medium for conveying images. A subjective bond to certain, particular items is the first step in an "objective" phenomenological study of photography. Barthes is overcome by ontological desire, but also feels uneasiness and discomfort on being undecided between the analytical and expressive powers of language. He knows that they are both reductive and insufficient for reaching the knowledge he desires, so he devises his own science of taste and memory related to several photographs. Interestingly, the most valuable one for him, the Wintergarten photo of his mother as a child, is not reproduced in the book. The omission ensures the

[44] Roland Barthes introduced a distinction between *writerly* and *readerly* texts in his *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1975), 5. In contrast to the 'Readerly Text', the 'Writerly Text' aims "to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (Barthes, *S/Z*, 4).

centrality and indelible trace of the particular referent in his remembering and present state.

Markers and Barthes' writing in *Sunless* and *Camera Lucida,* respectively, is not a simple ekphrastic supplementation to the images. In one of the letters, Sandor Krasna writes that Tokyo can be perceived/grasped as a musical symphony. The way a symphony is composed and 'read', as a development through the variation of theme and motifs, is the way Tokyo is composed, developed and framed as the central motif in *Sunless*. So, the musical score is not there just to highlight an emotion, mime a movement, suggest a sentiment on the screen etc. but is an element for itself, constantly present and unavoidable to the point of being crystallized into the images of musical instruments, SONY stairs at Ginza, and video games effects, to name just a few.

Catherine Lupton and Nora M. Alter, in their research on Chris Marker, document Marker's literary 'origins' in the 1940s and 50s. As a member of *Peuple et Culture* and later *Travail et Culture*, left-wing NGOs/cultural agencies, and a writer for the journals *Esprit* and *Cahiers du Cinema* and the publishing house *Editions du Seuil*, Marker wrote poetry, essays, film and book reviews, radio broadcasts, short stories and a novel. This variety of literary forms reflects the wide range of phenomena he was interested in – (jazz) music, (C.S. Lewis' and Jean Giraudoux') novels, (Cocteau's and Dreyer's) films, theatre (Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*), political matters (the Tito government in Yugoslavia), anthropology, animals, animation, photography and cinema. His four poems, the short story "Till the End of Time," and the novel *The Forthright Spirit* (*Le Coeur net*), reveal, as Catherine Lupton summarizes, the trauma and burden of remembering, dreaming or hallucinating about the dead. They are all set in more or less

unspecified locations, after World War Two (there are a couple of lines from one of the poems: 'I live in the house of the dead/For a time we are chained together/Only you have lost all the hours/And me, I remember'[45]).

Of course, the opening lines of *Sunless*, from T.S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* point to Marker's modernist taste and echo the thematic concern of his early poetry and prose which reappear later, in *La Jetée* and works of the "late period"[46] oeuvre like *Level 5*. The line 'Because I know that time is always time/ and place is always and only place" is a tautology, the claim of pure identity, something obvious, like A is A, which in the film, as in the poem, is thematized and questioned. In the poem, it is the divine mercy as an (un)expected, (im)possible miracle that can change the world of predictable corruption, and in the film, it is the machine that can interrupt the endless variations in the historical repetition of horror and misery.

In the same vein, the symphonic composition of *Sunless* is not only explicitly mentioned in the one of the letters which explains the title of the film as the name of the song cycle by the Russian 19th century composer Modest Mussorgsky ("Of course I'll never make that film. Nonetheless I'm collecting the sets, inventing the twists, putting in my favorite creatures. I've even given it a title, indeed the title of those Mussorgsky songs: 'Sunless'"), but is also thematically visible in two ways. First, again confirming Marker's respect for the modernist avant-garde heritage, the film inevitably calls to mind the cityscape imagery from Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* from 1929, and

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[45] Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 28.

[46] Joshua Clover divides Chris Marker's oeuvre into "Early Style, Late Style and the missing years" in "Chris Marker: The Return to Work at the Wonder Factory" in *Exile Cinema: Filmmakers at Work Beyond Hollywood*, ed. Michael Atkinson (Albany: State University of New York, 2008), 170.

Walter Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*, 1927. Their cinematic formalism, especially Dziga Vertov's, points to the second aspect, that the shots in *Sunless* are methodically edited by theme—motifs are, so to speak, syntagmatically and paradigmatically, repeated in different scenes/contexts, which is a strategy of weaving them together into distinctive thematic lines—political/historical, technological, memorial, ethnological.

For example, (as in *Man With a Movie Camera* where a shot of the window blind is followed by a shot of a camera shutter), a frame with a group of street outcasts who desperately need a morning fix is put together with the shot of a large bottle changing hands at a cemetery ("Luxury for them would be one of those large bottles of sake that are poured over tombs on the day of the dead"). The scenes at the street and the cemetery are then associated with a bar scene in which 'bums' and 'lumpen' drink and are equal ("It's the kind of place that allows people to stare at each other with equality; the threshold below which every man is as good as any other—and knows it.") This bar in Namidabashi is like a sacred place, a shrine or a cemetery, where people are united in their awareness of the sameness of their essence and destiny. Then comes the shot of people at a jetty in the Cape Verde islands, whom Krasna calls people of nothing, of emptiness, of wanderers and of world travelers. They, like the frequenters of the bar, share a kind of audacity that excites them to look one another in the (camera) eye ("Frankly, have you ever heard of anything stupider than to say to people as they teach in film schools, not to look at the camera?").

Another example of this city symphony editing is a kind of putting together shots that are structured around a playful repetition of gestures. We see a black and white video

bit of Amilcar Cabral waving toward a shore followed by the same gesture of Luis Cabral in a colour film clip. We see black and white images of soldiers greeting Luis and hugging one another paired with the shot of a promotion ceremony with Luis again congratulating the soldiers. ("In an old film clip Amilcar Cabral waves a gesture of good-bye to the shore; he's right, he'll never see it again. Luis Cabral made the same gesture fifteen years later on the canoe that was bringing us back.")

The story behind the pictures is the struggle of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde against the Portuguese oppression and its aftermath. Amilcar and Luis Cabral are half-brothers and founders of the PAIGC party which united the two African peoples and started a guerrilla war against the colonisers. Their goal was to constitute a federal state, once freedom was won. To grasp the meaning of the sequence of the shots, Marker suggests that we need a different point of view – "But to understand it properly one must move forward in time". In 1981, the party will fall apart, the Guineans and the Cape Verdeans will separate, Luis Cabral, the president, will be in prison, and a man he decorated at the ceremony will assume power.

> And so predictably that one has to believe in a kind of amnesia of the future that history distributes through mercy or calculation to those whom it recruits: Amilcar murdered by members of his own party, the liberated areas fallen under the yoke of bloody petty tyrants liquidated in their turn by a central power to whose stability everyone paid homage until the military coup. That's how history advances, plugging its memory as one plugs one's ears. Luis exiled to Cuba, Nino discovering in his turn plots woven against him, can be cited reciprocally to appear before the bar of history. She doesn't care, she understands nothing, she has only one friend, the one Brando spoke of in Apocalypse: horror. That has a name and a face. (*Sunless*)

The island of Okinawa during the American invasion in May 1945 is one more motif of the apocalyptic horror of history placed in *Sunless*. But there is a crucial difference in that it is treated, put through, remade by the editing machine. The Okinawa part of the film is preceded by the shot of a mixing board in an empty editing studio (empty except for a figurine of a cat overseeing the equipment), a visual announcement that we are entering "a world of appearances": "I'm writing you all this from another world, a world of appearances. In a way the two worlds communicate with each other. Memory is to one what history is to the other: an impossibility." One "pole of existence", the third world, of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde for instance, is predictably amnesiac, with "plugged memories" and the return of "careless and ignorant history". The other "pole of existence" is the screen of images created by Sandor Krasna, Marker's Japanese friend, Hayao Yamaneko and his computer.

> In *Apocalypse Now*, Brando said a few definitive and incommunicable sentences: 'Horror has a face and a name... you must make a friend of horror.' To cast out the horror that has a name and a face you must give it another name and another face. Japanese horror movies have the cunning beauty of certain corpses. Sometimes one is stunned by so much cruelty. One seeks its sources in the Asian peoples' long familiarity with suffering that requires that even pain be ornate. (*Sunless*)

The historical account of the invasion of Okinawa is not as publicly known as other large-scale battles of World War II, like the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and is perhaps not as extensively researched and documented, even though it involved massive numbers of soldiers and large amount of airborne and naval power. What makes this war

episode particularly interesting for Marker, apart from its marginal significance for official historiography, is the dogged fox-hole entrenched resistance of the Japanese soldiers and astonishing numbers of casualties, both military and civilian. More than 100 000 Imperial army soldiers were killed and between 100 000 and 150 000 civilians were executed or committed suicide. In *Level 5*, fifteen years after *Sunless,* Marker revisits this event by turning it into a hybrid of documentary (archival newsreel and combat videos, interviews with witnesses, quotations from different visual and written historical evidence), a fictional love story (the character Laura keeps a video diary of her dead lover) and an interactive piece on video design.

In *Sunless*, the footage of 'present day' Okinawa shows the rite of purification presided by the Noro priestess who communicates with the gods of elements. It is followed by the sequence of synthetically washed clips of army processions, kamikaze pilots drinking sake, airplanes taking off and attacking the ships. An example of Marker's wit/ticism in dealing with what for many people still is very traumatic and emotionally difficult to bear is a remark that the code name for the Pearl Harbour attack was 'Tora, Tora, Tora!', the name of the cat an elderly couple is praying for at the beginning of the film. He says: "So all of this will have begun with the name of a cat pronounced three times." After over a month of fighting, when the Americans soldiers gained control of Okinawa, the island, says Marker, "toppled into the modern world." This means that only a short distance away from the purification site there are bowling alleys, gas stations, and grenade-shape lighters are sold as souvenirs. People take pictures near the place where two hundred girls had committed suicide by grenades so they would not be captured alive by the enemy. When recording the ceremony he says he knew he was witnessing the end

of a magical culture that was disappearing without a trace because "the break in history has been too violent" (*Sunless*).

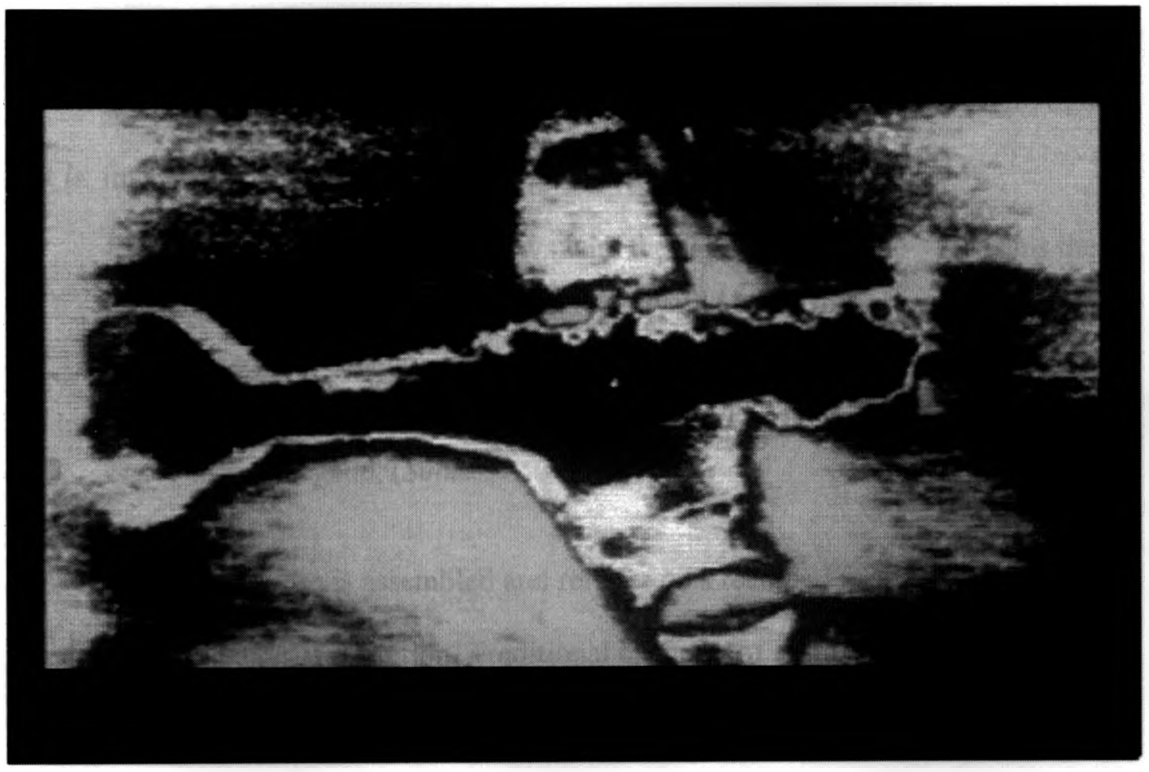

Figure 6. *A "solarized" image of a kamikaze plane* (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

At the same time, history itself becomes broken and unrecognisable. The images of the procession, pilots and planes as well as any other pictures that come out of the Hayao's synthesizer are bland, neutral stains of colour and shapeless contours constantly in change and motion – "On Hayao's machine war resembles letters being burned, shredded in a frame of fire." The machine (EMS Spectre Synthesizer) and the world it creates, the Zone, is a place of aesthetization and anesthetisation of the horror of history. It is transformed into digital memories, visible flows of data which can be modified, amplified, stretched, retarded or sped up, arranged, and edited by an ever increasing

number of tools. In that way, memories and history acquire new meaning. Instead of a nightmarish trauma of war and death/existence, they become benign, intelligible, plastic pieces of artifice. "We see what is happening electronically on a machine that separates the darks into lights: we see the process."[47] It is compared to the re-exposition to light, that is, image solarisation:[48]

> I envy Hayao in his 'zone,' he plays with the signs of his memory. He pins them down and decorates them like insects that would have flown beyond time, and which he could contemplate from a point outside of time: the only eternity we have left. I look at his machines. I think of a world where each memory could create its own legend. (*Sunless*)

The way the film is assembled and reflects on a recorded past reveals Marker's camera obscura mode of operation. Traditional elements of seclusion or imprisonment, meditation, mimesis or "mirror with a memory," memorized or accumulated experience and knowledge earmark Marker's optical machine:

> What Marker means to communicate to us is the solitude of the film editor at his machinery, his reverie over the footage he's shot (or that has been sent to him by friends), the scenes he watches over and over again.... In his 1982 book *Le Depays*, a photo-and- text record of the same trip to Japan which provided the material for *Sans Soleil,* Marker writes his impressions, not in the first person but in the second – because, he finally admits, he wants to establish a distance between the one who, from September 1979 to January 1981, took these photos of Japan, and the one who is writing in Paris in February 1982...[49]

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[47] Susan Howe, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker", in *Beyond Document, Essays on Nonfiction Film*, ed. Charles Warren (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 335.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Terrence Rafferty, "Marker Changes Trains", *Sight and Sound*, 53:4, 285.

Another moment which links Marker to the Cartesian camera is the (hi)story of the essay film as a genre. It starts with Hans Richter's essay[50] about a new cinematic form which goes beyond the limitations of a traditional documentary into experimental and imaginative creativity. Andre Bazin also wrote of the genre when reviewing Marker's "Letter From Siberia" – he said it was "an essay in the form of a filmic reportage on the past and present reality of Siberia.... An essay documented by film."[51]

Groupe des Trente was a film association in the 1950s particularly interested in short films structured as written essays. Marker and the above mentioned director Resnais were, among others, members of the group and their work represented the new cinematographic essay genre. As Alter describes, there is an affinity between Descartes' *Discourses* and the essay film epistemology or philosophical strategy:

> Richter's concept of the essay film was further developed by French filmmaker and theorist Astruc, a close associate of Marker, who was also involved in Peuple et Culture and in the Groupe des Trente. Astruc stressed the new genre's literary and philosophical antecedents. Already in 1948, he speculated in "Naissance d'une avant-garde: la camera stylo (Birth of an Avant-garde: The Camera-Pen)" that if Descartes were to write his *Discourses* today, it would be 'written' in the form of a 16 mm essay film. Astruc described the new subgenre as 'filmed philosophy'...[52]

The process of recording and digitalisation (with camera obscura at its starting and the computer software at the ending point) was already a familiar topos in the western world and Japan at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties,

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[50] Nora M. Alter mentions Richter's essay "The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film" in *Chris Marker* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 17.
[51] Alter, 17.
[52] Ibid. 18.

when *Sunless* was made. Many studies of photography at that time revealed how the camera obscura became the first instrument to enhance vision and make drawing precise and accurate. Indeed, the camera obscura was used as a memory aid just as the photographic camera in the mid 19th century had earned the status of 'the mirror with a memory.'[53] Early writers on photography either celebrated (Oliver Wendell Holmes) the prospect of creating "an enormous collection of forms...classified and arranged in vast libraries, as books are now"[54], or reluctantly concurred with its role as "[t]he secretary and record keeper...Let it save crumbling ruins from oblivion, books, engravings, and manuscripts, the prey of time, all those precious things vowed to dissolution, which crave a place in the archives of our memories."[55] Besides being an editing device, the computer, the Zone is also an advanced memorizing, storage tool with ever-increasing archival capacities. In Marker's media genealogy, the digital tools and dark leader of celluloid provide resolution and a "conclusion" to the photographic process.

In one of the letters, Marker describes the well known phenomenon of replacing filmed images for organic memory, and remembering pictures, instead of the objects taken picture of: "They have substituted themselves for my memory. They are my memory. I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape." In this respect, he resembles the narrator of David Albahari's *Bait*, who says that "the tapes [with his mother's voice] are the only proof of my existence in time."[56]

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[53] Oliver Wendell Holmes. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph", in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg, New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980, 74.
[54] Ibid. 81.
[55] Charles Baudelaire. "The Modern Public and Photography", in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 88.
[56] David Albahari. *Mamac* (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2005), 172.

The fictional part of *Sunless* is the SF story which contains an implicit prediction of the outcome of this process. It is about a time traveller from year 4001 who, coming from the world of total recall, a world which does not forget anything, wants to feel the meaning of the memories. It is the world of the Zone, a utopic future when humans realised their potential and perfected society. But instead of feeling the joy of the wealth of remembering, the time traveller feels disconnected – "In the world he comes from, to call forth a vision, to be moved by a portrait, to tremble at the sound of music, can only be signs of a long and painful pre-history. He wants to understand." Marker writes that the future man feels indignation at the injustice of not being able to sense the unhappiness experienced in the past. In a kind of reversed symmetry, the youth of the 1960s felt indignation at the injustice of not being able to forget unhappiness. This 'Third Worlder of time' has a part in a chiasmus which goes that "[T]he unhappiness he discovers is as inaccessible to him as the poverty of a poor country is unimaginable to the children of a rich one". The only conclusion of his quest can be going back to the song cycle by Mussorgsky which moved him in the first place. "They are still sung in the fortieth century. Their meaning has been lost. But it was then that for the first time he perceived the presence of that thing he didn't understand which had something to do with unhappiness and memory [...]." According to Paul Coates, "The themes of SF time-travel and utopia, linked at the beginning of the 20th century" with the beginning of cinema, mark a point when the pre-modern world view "finally exploded... transforming time into a vast field to be mapped and colonized, creating—in a sense—a domain for colonial enterprise once all the available space in the world had been taken up."[57] We enter a new

[57] Paul Coates, *Film at the Intersection of High and Mass Culture* (Cambridge, New

world picture. Marker's time travel privileges a utopic vantage point (memories of the future), but it also works as a figure of an endless divide between the poles of existence and the source of political crises: "Travel in time is in a sense travel between the unevenly developed countries of the world mapped onto the space of the universe."[58]

Marker pictures it as no win video game, a solution to a problem which becomes problematic and returns as the problem of the solution itself. Trying to escape the horrific dead ends of history, the future built the Zone of perfect tranquility only to find out that the resolution of all conflicts is another kind of dead end, a horror repeated. There are two scenes which convey this experience. One is the video game parlour where we see people playing Pac-Man, "the most perfect graphic metaphor of man's fate" and the image of "the inseparable philosophy of our time". This can be a seen as an updated drawing game conceit from Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). It is a contest in which the one who ends up drawing last loses, and there is a character who always wins, no matter the opponent. "Video games are the first stage in a plan for machines to help the human race, the only plan that offers a future for intelligence. [...] And he tells us soberly that though there may be honour in carrying out the greatest number of victorious attacks, it always comes a cropper" (*Sunless*).

York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43.
[58] Ibid. 44.

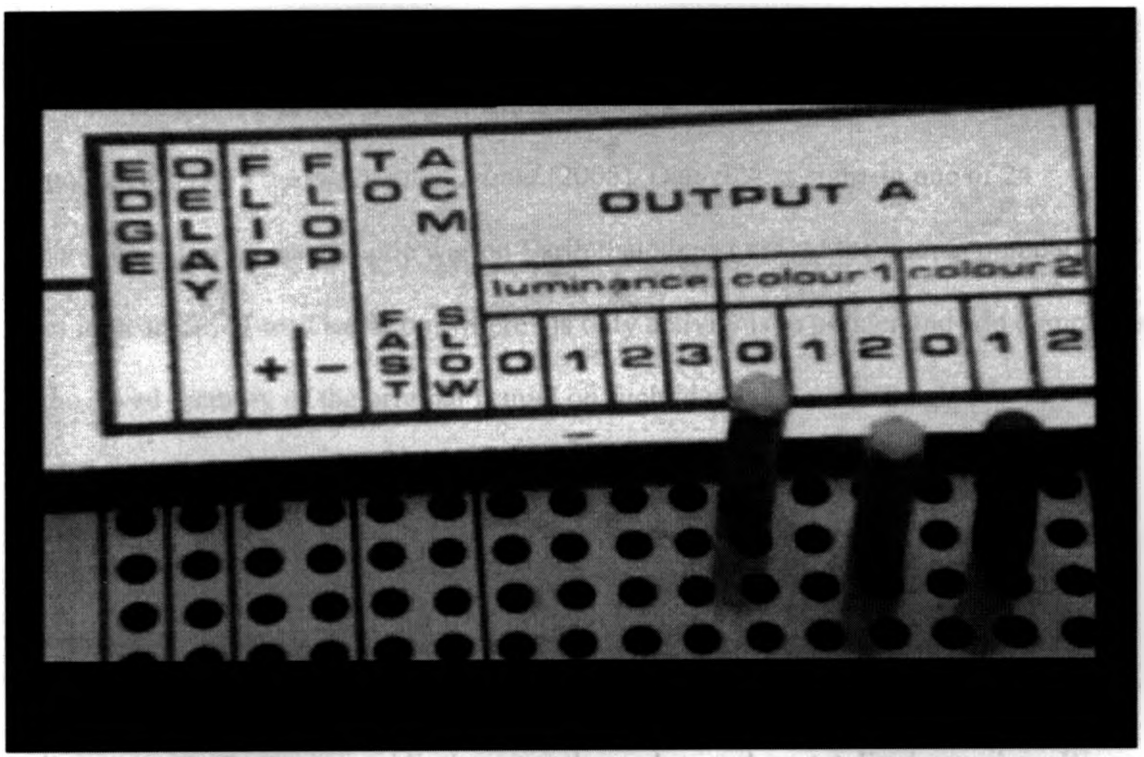

Figure 7. *Hayao's Spectre or Editing Board* (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

The other scene is the final sequence of the film. Following the principle of shot repetition, we see randomly chosen images doubled in the Zone. The narrator's own cine-travel is now an object of Hayao's editing board and he sees his "images already affected by the moss of time."

> Then I went down into the basement where my friend—the maniac—busies himself with his electronic graffiti. Finally his language touches me, because he talks to that part of us which insists on drawing profiles on prison walls. A piece of chalk to follow the contours of what is not, or is no longer, or is not yet; the handwriting each one of us will use to compose his own list of 'things that quicken the heart,' to offer, or to erase. In that moment poetry will be made by everyone… (*Sunless*)

Themes of utopic aporias and poetry[59] collate in a number of other art works that may seem to quote *Sunless* (or other Chris Marker's films like *La Jetée*). In Michel Houellbecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2005), Daniel24, a clone in one of 24 generations after an apocalyptic war on Earth that almost erased the human population, lives in peaceful hi-tech isolation, where his only activity is to ponder and add comments to the saved memory of the original Daniel on such ideas as 'love', 'laughter', 'regret' etc. Their comments are verses which express both acceptance and despair, facing the unfathomable remnants of past and future.

Like Yeats' Airman ("An Irish Airman Foresees His Death"), a Japanese kamikaze pilot writes in a note: "I have always thought that Japan must live free in order to live eternally. It may seem idiotic to say that today, under a totalitarian regime. We kamikaze pilots are machines, we have nothing to say, except to beg our compatriots to make Japan the great country of our dreams." (*Sunless*)

Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* also combines themes of personal memory and collective catastrophe. Again, as in the earlier mentioned films, the city, Hiroshima, plays a central role. Its destruction during the war, that is, the traumatic memory of it, is an object of contemplation and the troubled subject the main character tries to communicate to his lover. Like *La Jetée* or *The Koumiko Mystery*, *Hiroshima Mon*

[59] That "poetry will be made by everyone" is the exact title and a line from a poem by Serbian poet Branko Miljkovic (1934-1961) which, as early as 1950, expressed doubts about the future (socialist project of Yugoslavia) – "would freedom sing as the slaves did" (da li ce sloboda umeti da peva kao sto su suznji pevali o njoj). In *Savremena poezija jugoslovenskih naroda i narodnosti* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1984), 32.

Figure 8. *Hotel Utopia in Tokyo* (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

Amour is a love story which is historically determined within an inescapable historical context and a social study, a story of an intimate relationship. Resnais' third feature film *Muriel,* is also concerned with the main characters' consciousness of past historical events (the Algerian war, the OAS) and the ways they rework their memories in the present.

There is more than an accidental thematic connection between the films. Chris Marker and Alain Resnais worked together or co-directed such films as *Les Statues meurent aussi, Toute la mémoire du monde, Le Mystère de l'atelier quinze.* Their most renowned collaboration is *Nuit et brouillard* (1955), the short documentary about the infamous concentration camp in Auschwitz ten years after the War. Resnais' comment on

the film echoes the SF story from *Sunless*: "If one does not forget, one can neither live nor function. The problem arose for me when I made *Nuit et brouillard.* It was not a question of making yet another war memorial, but of thinking of the present and the future. Forgetting ought to be constructive."[60]

Auschwitz is thus another name in a cinematic geography of places which weaves together themes of spatial and temporal dimensions of remembering/forgetting the past. The impossibility of translating this geography into an aesthetic experience and poetry of witnessing is the subject of Resnais' film medium, just as the freedom of travelling and filming into the traumatic past and utopic future is the trademark of Marker's career. *Sunless*, in a sense, repeats/mirrors the dizzying experience of covering long distances, but with the added intention to discern, learn, find out, make sense, explain, soberly reflect on recorded memories. Some of the secondary literature and critical analyses of the film[61] draw attention to the viewing experience of *Sunless* – its effect of disorientation, excitement and a suspicion that what has been seen is never fully grasped or remembered. "It washes over and readily slips the grasp of its spectators who, on first viewing at least, are hard pressed to take in everything that is seen and heard."[62] "Where are we now? Is this a film about Japan? About Guinea-Bissau? Why does he bring up the children in Iceland, here? Was there a project? Or several? Why *Vertigo*? Why the

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[60] Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Documenting the Ineffable: Terror and Memory in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*", eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski, in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 204.
[61] Terence Rafferty, "Marker Changes Trains," *Sight and Sound,* 53:4, 1993, 286.
[62] Sarah Cooper, 'Time and the City' in *Cities in Transition, the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* ed. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 114.

emu?"[63] The way it is edited makes it "an exercise in art of editing"[64] an "editor's film worthy of the Russian masters,"[65] a "highly conscious miming of the involuntary processes of memory"[66] which as a side effect, or its real subject, has "the creation of need, and the desire to see things again..."[67]

Yet, the motif of imprisonment—even within this enigmatic memory editing—is constantly present. Though travelling is the material of *Sunless* (and of most of Marker's other films), the travelogue of *Sunless* is full of failed revolutionary stories and rites commemorating loss. Even loss itself is commemorated, one might argue, through the *Vertigo* passage, when Krasna goes to San Francisco and follows the route of Scotty's fantasy. It is the film Krasna saw nineteen times, a fascination similar to the fascination of its main character who manages to reconstitute his shattered fantasy of Madeline in the end. Unlike the Hollywood ending of Hitchcock's movie, it is not certain whether and how the author of *Sunless* would find hope for the future.

Similar to Stalker, the figure in the eponymous film by Andrei Tarkovsky, it is not clear whether the narrator will continue to be a high priest of the Zone or join the ranks of the non-believers, the Writers and the Scientists. It is from *Stalker* that Chris Marker took the name for Hayao Yamaneko's editing room. In Tarkovsky's film, the Zone (and the room in it) is a miracle, a military guarded area in which an unexplained catastrophe happened and left a room/space where the innermost wishes are reportedly realised. After

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[63] Terrence Rafferty, "Marker Changes Trains," *Sight and Sound*, 53:4, 1993, 286.
[64] Ibid., 285
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 284.

the Stalker, a social pariah whose only purpose is to guide those desperately in need of a miracle past the real and imaginary obstacles, brings two nameless passengers to the

Figure 9. *Kaleidoscopic Distraction: Fascination with the Magical Function of the Eye* (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

threshold of the room, the journey turns out to be a failure because they cannot even utter their wishes, being afraid of humiliation. In the scene at the threshold of the room a kind of exchange takes place in which Stalker instructs the Writer and the Scientist to have faith and think about their pasts because it makes people more kind. The Writer says that if he starts recalling his life he would not get any kinder.

It may seem appropriate to view Marker's work as oscillating between these two "extreme poles" of existence. Until the 1980s, his documentary catalogue consisted of filmed revolutions, social upheavals, resistance, and utopian projects. Titles like

Description d'un combat, *Cuba si*, *Le Joli mai*, *Loin de Viet-nam*, *On vous parle du Chili: Ce que disait Allende*, *The Train Rolls On* and numerous others, and his membership in the SLON collective (Societé pour la Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles) in which he produced many of them, confirm the constructive side of this devoted radical.

On the other hand, the melancholic voice of *Sunless* clearly speaks of doubt and the illusions of the past engagement. The film title, its meaning and the manner in which it is placed in the opening shots invite the viewer to read it as a melancholy confessional narration with more sombre and ominous tones and threnodies. The film opens with the lines from T.S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* which fade out to a black screen. Then we hear the voice over talking about an image we do not see: "The first image he told me about was of three children on a road in Iceland in 1965." Cut to a soundless shot of three young girls holding hands and walking away while watching the hand-held camera tracking after them. Cut to black screen again and the voice continues to tell about the same image which we do not see: "He said that for him it was the image of happiness and also that he tried several times to link it to other images". Then we see a shot of airplane being lowered silently onto the aircraft carrier and hear words: "But it never worked". Again cut to black screen and the voice which tells about a filming plan of an unknown correspondent: "One day I'll have to put it all alone at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader. If they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black". The information we hear from the voice seems to contradict what we see on screen; the auditory voice points to the image, stating that it means happiness, but we see black leader instead. When the image is shown and we hear about the failure to connect it with other images, we see that it is, paradoxically, linked to the warplane carrier shot.

Finally, we hear about the future (in the past) idea to put the image at the beginning of a film and realize that we are actually watching the beginning of that, once imagined, film. What at first seems a contradiction takes shape as a designed or scripted sequence of shots. Perhaps not more than a casual association, this inversion reminds us of the inverted image of the camera obscura and the agency of the spectator to actually see, that is, to understand perception. If so, Marker invites the viewer to engage in postmodern speculation as a creative activity, investigation or even game (as in *Level 5* or the *Immemory* CD-ROM).

In an essay that is at the same time a film analysis and historiography, and a poetic commemorative piece of writing, Susan Howe sees the black leader as Marker's way to surround and shelter the pastoral Icelandic shot or model of happiness.[68] Her stream of consciousness response to the film, "Sorting Facts", seems to return to this black leader as a haunted ground that signifies both the safe zone of protected memory and the dark obscurity of death:

> A woman's voiceover tells us the film's editor surrounded or sheltered this particular sequence with black leader. She speaks from inside the black until the next sequence of shots, when the jet plane sinks into the hold of a destroyer or aircraft carrier.

[68] Susan Howe, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker", in *Beyond Document, Essays on Nonfiction Film*, ed. Charles Warren (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 201.

From a similar point of view, the black leader creates 'a *visual* framing effect'[69] just as the voice commentary '*verbally* frames the image.'[70] What is inside the frame has more than just an informative value of factual representation, but "testifies to the act of seeing and to the involvement of two parties in its recording."[71] The testimonial power of a recording related to two subjective parties is also unmistakeably apparent in David Albahari's *Bait* where his records not only speak of real historical events, but also provide entrances to private micro-universes of his and his mother's past life. Marker, too, is interested in the power of the stored, retrievable document, in video, audio or text form, and seeks to provide a portal, a subjective connection to it.

His introductory note to the *Immemory* CD-ROM, (1997), explaining the idea of the project, can be applied to *Sunless* as well:

> I think that a collection of photographs, taken apparently at random, or postcards, chosen on the spur of the moment, reaching a certain size, will start to draw a route, a map of the imaginary country inside us. By systematically looking through all these images, I am sure to discover behind the apparent disorder a secret map [...][72]

Looking ahead, as in Albahari's novels, Marker's films display two sides – one is concerned with the motif of archival collecting and organising, and the other with the problem of editing, linking, arranging or writing about the stored records. They are both, that is, their protagonists are writers, collectors and travelers obsessed with maps and re mapping and haunted by the spectres of past and future wars. But as Urlow states,

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[69] Uriel Orlow, "Chris Marker: The Archival Power of the Image", in *Alphabet City, No. 8*, ed. Rebecca Comay (Toronto: Alphabet City Media, 2002), 439.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Howe, 201.
[72] Urlow, 438.

"instead of representing the authority over images, Marker's oeuvre and archive tap into authorial function of the images themselves. Marker's work and position as author and archivist is dialectical: *systematically looking through the images in order to discover a hidden map, drawn by the images themselves.*"[73]

Krasna writes that "Tokyo is a city crisscrossed with trains" and his film clips show trains, boats, airplanes, cars as well as railways and stations, highways, streets, piers, even an airplane carrier. There are masses of people traveling or waiting to travel. We see hands on a railing, on a wheel, or showing tickets, and faces, yawning faces, faces with their eyes closed or reading comic books, papers, watching TV/video game screen(s), people at a museum exhibition or street dance. One shot shows people coming out of the underground, seemingly refreshed and energized, after a ride during which, behind their closed eyes or fixed stares, horror, erotic or dramatic dream sequences are played

> ...in a situation where reality itself reproduces the magic cinematic experience. She approaches the rail, the train is passing and it is as if what in reality is just a person standing near a slowly passing train turns into a viewer observing the magic of the screen. We get a very real ordinary scene onto which the heroine's inner space, her fantasy space is projected so that although all reality is simply there, the train, the girl, part of reality in her perception and in our, viewer's perception is, as it were, elevated to the magic level, becomes the screen of her dreams. This is cinematic art at its purest.[74]

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Slavoj Zizek, *Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (Amoeba Films, 2006)

The only difference between Zizek's comment on *Possessed* and the fantasy space of *Sunless* is that the heroine is the city, that is, the multitude of people moving about it. They inhabit the space of their collective spectatorship:

> All the galleries lead to stations; the same companies own the stores and the railroads that bear their name. Keio, Odakyu—all those names of ports. The train inhabited by sleeping people puts together all the fragments of dreams, makes a single film of them—the ultimate film. The tickets from the automatic dispenser grant admission to the show... I begin to wonder if those dreams are really mine, or if they are part of a totality, of a gigantic collective dream of which the entire city may be the projection.

But this does not mean that the observers existed before the city they create. Krasna's videos show the silent presence of innumerable faces and figures observing Tokyo commuters from all possible angles and perspectives. There are animate and inanimate, mechanical and digital, pairs of eyes watching from the rooftops, balconies, posters, shop windows, walls, ads, signs, buses, video screens etc. A film theoretician, Sarah Cooper interprets the ubiquity of face in *Sunless* as an instance of the Levinasian interface – a plane of encounter with what is beyond one's perception and understanding. This "beyond" is not, she says, a transcendent space of essences or a divine realm accessible through the face as through a window. It is an asymmetrical relation between the spectator and what inevitably lies outside, the relation realised in the film as "an immanent approach to transcendence through the image, distance accessed through proximity'[75]. This immanence is the materiality of the film with which Marker, according

[75] Sarah Cooper, 'Time and the City', in *Cities in Transition, the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* ed. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson. (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 115.

to Cooper, experimented to reach the moment when filming "becomes the fabrication of a second skin, through which the spreading of a fine enveloping and impressionable membrane over the city lends it a surface akin to that of a living being."[76] *Sunless* is, from this point of view, a tactile exploration of a dream land from which its images and videos emerge and return in the end.[77] It is, in other words, "alterity as inscribed in the very form of the film itself"[78]. Again, the subjective viewing experience of the film, as related by many reviewers, is often described in terms of disorientation, puzzlement, and simultaneous effect of stupefaction and inspiration. There are so many things integrated in its texture; beside the voiceover reading the letters there are, as mentioned before, passages from other feature films and short videos, diegetic and non-diegetic sound pieces from radio and television shows, music and voices filtered through Marker's software or left unaltered. The cine-narrator writes:

> The entire city is a comic strip; it's Planet Manga. How can one fail to recognize the statuary that goes from plasticized baroque to Stalin central? And the giant faces with eyes that weigh down on the comic book readers, pictures bigger than people, voyeurizing the voyeurs... The television screens for example; all by themselves they created an itinerary that sometimes wound up in unexpected curves. (*Sunless*)

[76] Ibid. 113-114.
[77] The peculiar theory of the dream and the notion of the skin ego by Didier Anzieu are referenced here by S. Cooper. 'Time and the City', in *Cities in Transition, the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* ed. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 114.
[78] Ibid. 116.

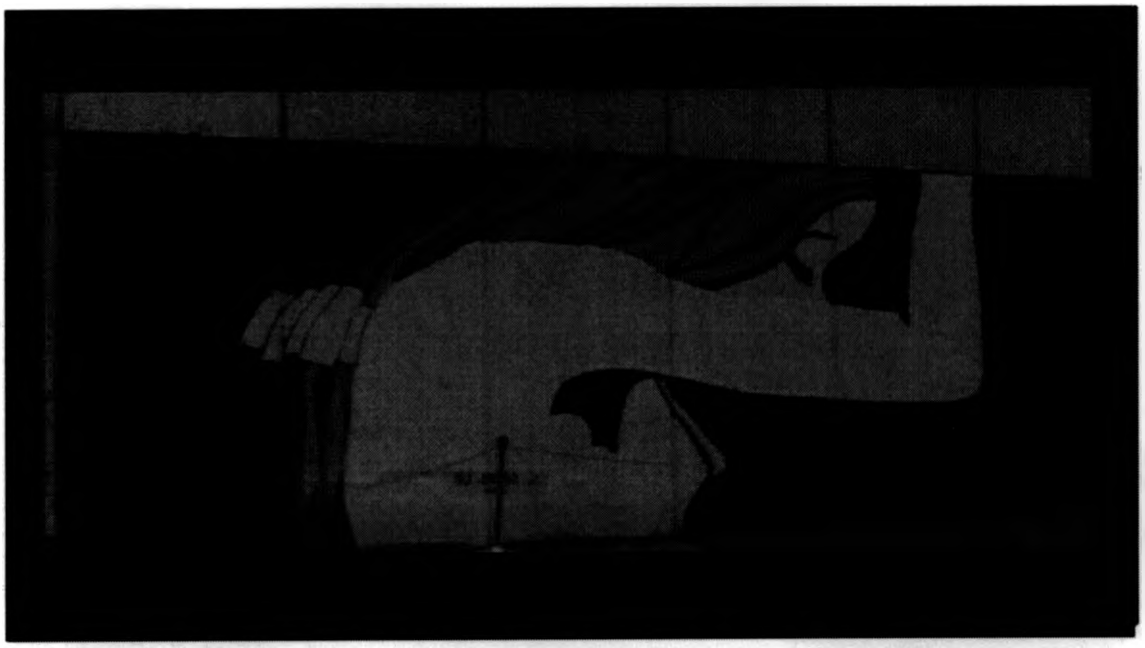

Figure 10. '*The entire city is a comic strip*' (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

Here Marker seems to animate by inversion or invert by animating that which is ordinarily (in a tradition beginning with Plato) viewed as an image/fantasy world of a lesser ontological rang/repute. The supporting technology of this phantasmatic world, its infrastructure, is, in a way, co-substantial with the masses of "real" people that build it. Objectified as a diffused, digital, machine technology effects a diffused, mobile, artificial, modernized, public, traffic-like, network subjectivity – there is no single main character of *Sunless*. Tokyo streets and public spaces are teeming with spectators and passengers, and the third world jetties are crowded with people waiting for ships to escape to a Tokyo-like future.

In the sequence of shots announced with the words "I've spent the day in front of my TV set – that memory box", the inversed, composite spectatorship is, perhaps, even more obvious. We see a fast succession of hundreds of freeze TV frame shots interrupted

sporadically by a news broadcast clip, an entertainment or educational TV show fragments, or a film action sequence. Speed of the succession varies; slowly, it sets off with the TV images of a deer, the Nara, a "real and painted sacred animal", and an image of a heron, a small white shape on a green backdrop of a Japanese wood. The heron shot dissolves into a shot of a reversed river reflection, with the voice over: "The willow sees the heron's image…upside down." These are lines from Basho's haiku from the 15th century, which may serve as a motto for the impression Sandor Krasna will get watching it all: "But the more you watch Japanese television… the more you feel it's watching you" (*Sunless*). Close-ups of faces, mostly women's, from TV commercials, follow one after another with rapid cuts, which is the procedure that copies the commercials, the voice tells us, "the haiku to the eye". The tempo slows down with a video passage about the burial ground of J. J. Rousseau, with the monumental, long and close up shots of trees reflected in the water and the inscription on his tomb. It speeds up with the TV frame shots of drawings (or crude paintings) illustrating, the voice says, the Khmer Rouge atrocities. Again, we see heads and faces bleeding, without eyes or bodies and the scenes of execution. "…coincidence or the sense of history?" the voice over poses the rhetorical question, which may imply a corruption, a kind of inversion of revolutionary and Enlightenment ideals of the ideologue of French Revolution into the 20th century's paranoid bigotry.

Figure 11. *'I've spent my day in from of my TV set – that memory box'* (Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

The series of horrifying images extends to close-up of faces with bulging eyes, reflecting agony, fear, anger, attention and drama. There are black and white stills from Japanese horror movies, bodiless hovering women's heads and cartoon monster heads. More faces and eyes expressing different emotions appear inside TV frame shots coming for the left, right, up and down. They are facing the camera or looking outside the frame, as if facing and reacting to one another in the series of reaction shots. The cacophony of asynchronous and non diegetic sounds, pieces of synthetic and organic noises, voices and

melodies suggest an infernal ambience of exchange. As if images reached a plane of existence of their own and started to communicate between themselves, not being content to just return the gaze of a human voyeur.

Sunless, as media theorist Uriel Orlow has argued, is an archive or thesaurus of images capable of interaction, networking and producing new meanings and associations. By attracting or reaching out to other images they escape the limits of representation or mimesis. The "sunless" images may exceed the "mirror with a memory", but in Marker's manifesto they also reflect back to the spectator, the dreams, dystopias, unrest and fantasies of 20th century history, creating a new historical subjectivity and identity for the spectator. At times the polar opposite of the camera obscura images or sun-writing of early photography, the shadowy representations of the digital Zone and the world of the "black leader" serve as the first layer of non-mimetic and subjective "creative reproductions" of external reality or history. The second layer of subjective images, however, is the documentary footage itself, supplemented by the lyrical epistolary writing that enshrouds the images in "essay" form. Marker edits this documentary footage into a solarized history, empowering the spectator to rethink the political "faces" of the 20th century. While engaging a new aesthetics of cinematic "distraction,"[79] the Zone, with its

[79] I seek to create a more complicated dialectic between the terms "distraction" and "contemplation" in this thesis. On the term "distraction" and its relationship to spectatorship, see Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction" *boundary 2* - Vol 30, Number 1 (Spring 2003), 51-66; Siegfried Kracauer "The Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces" [1926], trans. Thomas Y. Levin in *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987), 94-6; and Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproducibility." Critics have described "distraction" as one of the more elusive of Benjaminian topoi.

black leader, haiku and other techniques also marks a return to the dark meditative chamber of the camera obscura.[80]

The inverted images of the Zone, the haunted inverted gaze of horror and the return of the gaze foregrounded in an ethnographic sequence early in the film disrupt the familiar representational and stereotypical portrayal of the ethnographic archive and shock the spectator into a new awareness of the political power of images. Marker's new inventory inverts what Deleuze has described as the dictatorship of "faciality." Like August Sander's Weimar portrait gallery of class consciousness (praised by Walter Benjamin), this poetry of the close up opens up the twentieth-century archive to new meaning production, interrupting and destabilizing the ethnographic gaze. As Orlow suggests: "[T]he extraordinary inventory of 'face-images' and the eyes aggregate into a gaze that is no longer intentional ('no longer looking at this or that, over- here, over-there or away'[81]) but directed '*elsewhere*'. Their gestalt is a radically different "gaze which doesn't quite exist in this world but rather belongs to, looks for, or onto, another world, a dreamed up world, a world of future, a different or better world, a world whose very utopian nature is both poetic and political; a world and its future that exists in the gaps between images, between documents hidden in the archive."[82]

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[80] In the memory box of Marker, the haiku of nature precedes the swarm of images created for distraction, short pleasure and the excitement of a city dweller, illustrating the dual nature of the TV box and modern media—its use for contemplation and distraction. As Anne Friedberg has argued, the same "dual nature" is repeated in the optical machines preceding it – the camera obscura and its Doppelgaenger projector of illusionism and science, the magic lantern, or photography's realism and cinematic illusion. This dual nature again manifests itself in digital form in Marker's meditation, in the Zone of ever-expanding possibilities for capturing and (re)producing reality.

[81] Uriel Orlow, "Chris Marker: The Archival Power of the Image", in *Alphabet City,* No.8, ed. Rebecca Comay (Toronto: Alphabet City Media, 2002), 450.

[82] Ibid.

The motif of inverted spectatorship and the reflected, returned gaze that critically examines the spectator and the future again draws attention to the camera obscura and its contemplative dimension. As I have tried to suggest in this chapter, Marker's TV can be viewed as "a memory box", as a descendant of a "mirror with a memory" and its archive or "world picture" is certainly vast – from Rousseau's nature[83] to Tokyo's underground, from the haiku to horror cinema and TV commercials, from the solarized pilots of WWII to the "lines of flight" that leave the third world jetties for a new future.

[83] Rousseau in *Sunless* represents the return to a "metaphysics of interiority" or contemplation. His "Confessions" is the work planed from inside the camera obscura, so to speak, or according to his words: "I shall be working, as it were, in a camera obscura. No art is needed beyond that of tracing exactly the features that I observe there" (37). His goal was to focus on his inner life and achieve objectivity, transparency and truth. Rousseau viewed nature as the proper setting and environment for the concentration needed for his project. When Marker's epistolary narration returns to nature and its inverted images -- the willow sees the heron's image upside down -- it accidentally invites the spectator to consider the idea of Rousseau's camera.

Chapter 3: The Narrative Subjectivity of David Albahari: Revisiting the Horror of War and Memory

In the beginning there was the acoustic archive -- and the word was with God (theo en ho logos) and the word was God. David Albahari's 1996 novel *Bait* begins with "From where do I begin", a narrative questioning that belies the biblical teleology and epistemology of false starts. The first words of the novel are already enshrined in darkness, a shadowy spectre, vibrations that belong to the unnamed protagonist's mother, whose voice now exists only in the form of magnetic tape. Her voice was actually recorded on several tapes fourteen years before the moment of the novel's beginning, and this questioning voice that will speak of historical trauma clearly echoes Albahari's concern about the (im)possibilities of writing and narrating. The protagonist or first person narrator is also a writer and the phrase announces his own anxiety and uncertainty concerning inscribing the story of his mother, translating her acoustic archive into a written text.

The words are repeated subsequently in the novel, this time to start a dialogue about family history, writing, and writing about history. These themes are continually visible in all of the Serbian writer's work to date – from the early collection of short stories *Family Time* (1973) and numerous volumes of stories to eleven novels and two books of essays. It is not a surprise that one of the key moments in the modern history of the Balkan peninsula (the disintegration and following war in former Yugoslavia) which is also one of the important moments in David Albahari's personal life – he left Belgrade for Calgary in 1994 – is also mirrored in his prolific work. Though it has been pointed out that the disintegration (or collapse) of Yugoslavia and the displacement left a strong mark

on his later prose ("abandoning the indeterminate subject position common in experimental fiction and embracing a self that is grounded firmly in a historical moment, however incoherent and violent it may be"[84]), the fundamental elements of his poetics have not changed. He says that 'some new themes have appeared in my prose, but all of them are still within the dilemma about the power or impotence of language to actually register our experience....about the inability of language to express the horror of history and memory.'[85]

Bait was published in 1996, a year after *Snowman* and two years before *Goetz and Meyer.* All of the novels, his so-called "Canadian novels," are built around a solitary character who tries to make sense of the personal or his family's memories by watching them through the lens/perspective of storytelling. *Bait*, particularly, follows the strategy of putting every "real" (hi)story or material experience into the perspective of writing, text and the possibilities of language.

The nameless narrator is trying to write the story of his mother and discusses the story with Donald, his Canadian friend, also a writer. He needs help because he is "not a writer" (although he used to write poetry), which is signalled by the repetition of the "If I could write" phrase. The words are deployed, with slight variation, more than a dozen times throughout the text to remind himself and the reader that he is aware of his ignorance and incapability of realizing the project he is undertaking, and that the reader should always be aware that what they are contemplating is nothing other than this flawed writing itself. The nameless narrator says "If I could write, if I knew how to use

[84] Mraovic-O'Hare Damjana. "Interview with David Albahari," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (Mar-Jun 2008), Vol 50, 170-190; 177.
[85] Ibid. 182.

literary allusions..."[86], "If I could properly write, I would describe the anger I felt at the moment..."[87] , "If I were able, I would work on that image, but I lack words..."[88], 'and finally "If I could write, I would definitely describe the gaze..."[89]

There are ten more phrases that echo throughout the text, repeated once or more times with or without any variation. When asked about them David Albahari explained:

> [...] their purpose is primarily rhythmical and cohesive, which is actually very important for the whole text. I see those sentences as special kernel sentences. They are the core of the story that constitutes the novel. Repeating them, I remind myself, and of course, readers of the whole story.[90]

One of these phrases is the answer to the question posed at the beginning of the novel "From where do I begin?"—"I did not know what to say to her." The narrator explains in the novel that he recorded his mother's life story over a short, indefinite period of time, back in a suburb of Belgrade, Zemun, after his father had died. He tells his mother that the loss of his father also signified the "loss" of his life story and thus he wanted to record her voice to fill the emptiness that was left behind. Sixteen years after, in a place near the Canadian Rocky Mountains, he listens to her taped voice for the first time and tries to translate it into text.

It is a journey back to the time of his mother's life during and after World War II, but also a journey back to the time of the recording sessions. The memories of recording, incited by listening and the present reflections of her monologue are woven into the

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[86] David Albahari, *Mamac* (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2005), 32. All subsequent translations from Albahari's novels, fiction and interviews are my own.
[87] Ibid. 40.
[88] Ibid. 36.
[89] Ibid. 27.
[90] Mraovic-O'Hare Damjana. "Interview with David Albahari," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (Mar-Jun 2008), Vol 50, 170-190; 186.

novel's narrative frame, a self-reflexive dialogue between the main narrator and Donald about writing style, genres, geography and ethnography. Recording and listening—the auditory archive—are also put into perspective in another way: the recording device is unavoidably and audibly present through the repeated descriptions of the recording procedure. The reader is always aware that there are cables, tapes, a microphone and other moving and rolling particles of the mechanism that stand between mother and son. They are an essential part of the recording/memory process; they have their place in a box on top of a shelf, it takes time to set them up, the time usually filled with unpleasant silence while the mother waited, or posed (as one would in front of an old camera), waiting to begin. The reader is made aware of this almost tangible silence as the narrative perpetually interrupts itself to remind the reader of the squealing sound of the old machine. Also, the novel starts with the search for a tape recorder that can play the tapes, a search that was futile until the writer's friend Donald locates an ancient record somewhere in his deceased father's garage. "The tape recorder is old. For days I went to different shops and inquired where I can find such an apparatus, the brand was not important. The salesmen were polite, smiled, shrugged their shoulders..."[91]

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes speaks of the sound of an old camera, the clicking sound of an apparatus he liked to hear, which newer generation of cameras do not make. He says: "I love these mechanical sounds in an almost voluptuous way, as if, in the Photograph, they were the very thing – and the only thing to which my desire clings, their abrupt click breaking through the mortiferous layer of the Pose" (10). Like Chris Marker in *Sunless* and Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, Albahari in *Bait* seems to execute his

[91] David Albahari. *Mamac* (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2005), 5.

desire to investigate personal memories and consciousness through contemplating media, their essence and potential for meaningful expression. In both Barthes and Albahari's works, the central figures are their mothers, that is, their mothers' lives as perceived through the photograph and audio tape.

The audio tapes in *Bait* preserve the mother's voice which tells a testimony of her life, starting with the early days of World War II and ending with the onset of the armed conflicts in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The two points in time mark the limit of what is now a memory, an object, and raw language material for making a story. The narrator's mother was born in a village in Zagreb, Croatia, and lived there for a short period of time after marrying her first husband and converting to Judaism. Her husband was a member of the communist party and was arrested by the Ustase government (the Croatian Nazis), soon after the Second World War started and sent to a death camp. She moved with her two children to a village in Serbia where they waited until the end of the war. But the "bare life" or raw material of the archive that is used to narrate the traumatic story of the narrator's family is also bound to the visual and tactile materiality of writing and again involves an epistolary frame, which was also used in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil.* In the letters sent from the camp from which he did not return, her husband disapproved of the idea to raise the children as Jews, and this sentiment, the narrator tells us after inspecting the writing of the letter, is expressed emphatically by underscoring the hand-written words. It seems that the narrator wants to direct our attention in a self-reflexive manner to the materiality and ephemerality of words, he even points to the thinness, colour and fragility of the paper on which it was written.

We learn through the audio tape recordings that after the war the narrator's mother met and married a Jewish concentration camp survivor, a man who also lost his family (she lost her children in a train accident on their way to Belgrade). They first lived in a town in Kosovo where they had two children, the narrator and his sister, and where her second husband worked in a hospital, but they soon migrated to Zemun, near Belgrade to settle. In the novel the narrator's mother explains—on tape—why she insisted that her children be brought up as Jews:

> [W]e joined the Belgrade Jewish community, not in order that I make you, you and your sister, into real Jews, because almost everyone there was only a little piece of a Jew, a shard of broken pottery, but in order to develop in you, and in myself, a sense of real belonging, in order to find some solid ground, there where everything was sliding or turning into agitated voices.[92]

Although her original intention to "develop a sense of belonging" and "find some solid ground" for herself and her son failed, her wish is posthumously revived with the narrator's renewed effort to recreate and re-narrate the personal story from the horrific inheritance of the past. Like his parents years ago, the narrator explains in the novel that he was also forced to flee or move away from the new war that was happening in Yugoslavia and find a place where he could live peacefully. With his mother's sentence echoing in his mind—"When Germans broke into Zagreb they marched over flowers and chocolate"—he thinks about his present situation as if it were a "replay," an opportunity to revise the acting on a dusty reel pulled from the shelf in a film archive: "where I came from, a new war is waging, that is, an old war is coming to an end, unrealised designs are being fulfilled, as if someone pulled out the past from a film archive and prompted the

[92] Ibid. 22.

actors to continue the scene they started before."[93] With the generational shift, we move from the auditory to the visual archive. It seems that a simple change of place, a different geographical location (Canada) is not enough, and that a historical shift necessitates a new media dialogue with the spectres of past. Albahari writes: "It is a necessary effort on the part of the narrator to recreate as much as possible of the history that belongs to him personally, to make it recognizable to and acknowledged by the present, and to be able to safely deposit it, if he is ever to proceed into the future."[94] For the war-torn narrator, safely depositing the archive and observing the past and the shifting ground of the "world picture" (Heidegger) necessitates a confrontation with the traumatic visual archive of the war, a return to the haunted ground of tele-visuality (which flashed war-torn images on the screen).

The scene in which the narrator decides to leave his country plays on the difference between historical change and repetition. The nameless narrator worked with an international humanitarian organisation as a translator and data administrator in war-stricken Bosnia. He helped the refugees and people who lost their homes and family members, assembled lists of missing persons and lost or destroyed property, collected, translated and interpreted their statements and signatures. He was there until the moment he could not feel anything and until "other people's fear of change and losing the world effaced my fear of the world repeating."[95] This is a thought, a sentence that comes to him years later in Canada while waiting for and having an imaginary dialogue with his friend Donald. As soon as the narrator discovers anything important about his past experience or

[93] Ibid, 44.
[94] Mraovic-O'Hare Damjana. "Interview with David Albahari," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (Mar-Jun 2008), Vol 50, 170-190; 179.
[95] Albahari, *Bait*, 68.

reveals a psychological insight about himself or other people, he distances himself from that insight by consciously trying to find adequate words and sentences. They are then used in the exchange between the narrator and Donald and become the central part of a conversation that takes place in a restaurant on a river island.

If we were free to assume that the conversations with Donald are fictive or a part of the narrator's imagination, the restaurant on the river, their public meeting place, could be seen as a contemplative dialogue with his self, the bustling flow of his consciousness. All the reader knows about Donald is his name and profession—a writer—and that he is a second generation immigrant form Eastern Europe, which makes him a kind of "future" double of the narrator.

Inside a restaurant on a river island, with glasses of beer, cups of coffee and maps on their table, the two spiritedly discuss literature, cultural and ethnological themes, debates which sometimes border on exchange of punches:

> You, Europeans, he said, are real bunglers, and imagine always that one's life is in collecting, like people who put stamps in albums. Who collects stamps here? Old people. I revelled in his anger. [...] When I spoke him, looking down at the map, about the Ustase massacres, he just shrugged his shoulders. Sometimes, it really crossed my mind to beat him up.[96]

The transformation of the mediating, self-reflexive perspective of writing into introspective maps may be a symptom of what Fredric Jameson sees as a feature of postmodernism – the transformation of reality into images.[97] Vladimir Tasic (another

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[96] Ibid. 70.

[97] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New York Press, 2004), 127.

Serbian writer living in Canada) in an essay on David Albahari compares the cartographic motif in postmodern art, its value and widespread appeal/attraction for the artists at the end of the 1980s and its treatment in Serbian literature at the beginning of the 90s, particularly in *Bait* and *Snow Man*. Albahari's books from the beginning and middle of the decade. Whereas the thesis of "cognitive mapping" of the modern world for a director of 'George Pompidou', on the occasion of opening a gallery exhibition, meant that "the proliferation of images of the Earth [is] a symptom of multiplication of communications and relations, mediated and personal, between the people on the planet"[98], in the two Canadian novels, in the context of the war in Yugoslavia, it meant the opposite – fragmentation.

Let us now turn to the second Albahari novel on the war, written in Canada: *Snow Man*. In *Snow Man*, another autobiographical narrator appears, an unnamed writer from an Eastern European country who moves to a Canadian University to lecture on creative writing. His mind registers various impressions and encounters with the environment – a new house, conversations with the students, professors, neighbours and random stream of consciousness thoughts – and his physical and mental state progressively deteriorates, ending with his death and a chase after a magical rabbit.[99] In the novel *Snow Man*, the first-person narrator, a nameless writer-in-residence at a Canadian university, goes through a *Historical Atlas of Central and Eastern Europe* and sees a process of fragmentation of this part of Europe throughout its modern history as well as the fragmentation of his self – his body and his emotional and perceptual/intellectual life:

[98] Vladimir Tasic, "Snezni covek i paralaksa", in *Gradac* No.156 (Cacak: Umetnicko drustvo Gradac, 2005), 88.
[99] Perhaps Albahari's narrative of distorted space and time can be deciphered as a postmodern play on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.*

> Not one map inside it could be understood without wars, not one was drawn without discontinuous lines which signified the change of the borders, not one was permanent, not one could take a time period longer than forty years, because the lines became too convoluted, the realities too mixed up, that no one could make sense of it all.[100]

One sleepless night, his paces turn into a desperate (slow-motion) run through the rooms of his house, where the walls are covered with maps, loosely hanging and falling down. "... maps fluttered on the walls, carried by the air whirls I made running by. A large photo of Jerusalem first slid down the wall; South America crumpled like a rag; Asia fell over the table; Australia tilted, Near East turned upside down..."[101] The image of disorder and upheaval represented by the maps' literal inversion and the confusion of the cartographic "world picture" is the mirror reflection of the inner turmoil the autobiographical narrator is trying to pin down and transform into words. Just as the war in Yugoslavia redrew the contours of the European map, the narrator says that history is a reflection of geography and geography is a reflection of the human spirit. The new spatial coordinates and territorial remapping which had been traumatically flashed into the brain and memory of the spectator and televised and recorded for all to see on news broadcasting is one of the reasons the narrator gives for fleeing his country and coming to Canada and activating the audio tape in order to "replay" and reinvent his own family narrative. Albahari in an interview explained where the obsession with maps comes from. This memory takes us back to tele-visuality as an inverted haunted ground, what we saw fore-grounded in Chris Marker's horror meditation on reflected "nature" and

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[100] David Albahari, *Snezni covek* (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2007) 134.
[101] Ibid. 138.

spectatorship. For Albahari it is not flashing images of B horror and inverted gazes – who is watching whom – but the flashing images and TV screens narrating the clashes of the former Yugoslavia that are inescapably etched into the viewer's mind:

> The protagonist of *Snow Man* reflects what the main concern was just before the beginning of clashes in the former Yugoslavia – definition of territories. From day to day, we were bombarded by new versions of borders, new maps, and new interpretations of historical heritage and the importance of forming borders. Maps were flashing TV screens long into the night. Therefore it was normal that my narrator is confronted with that world of maps, with the fact that, in spite of his beliefs, there are still unsolved problems regarding borders and definitions of certain territories.[102]

Whereas in Marker, there is still a possibility to re-edit the images in the camera obscura chamber of the Zone, Albahari's narrators are never able to completely replay and reedit the traumatic moves and memories of the Balkan past. Yet the theme of maps is more than a literary response to an ephemeral TV phenomenon from the years of the Balkan conflict; it supplements the transformation of the narrator's experience of the world and self. As in *Bait*, there are many places in the novel when the narrator explains why he had to move out to North America. These are the moments when Albahari's autobiographical narrator reiterates that he could no longer understand what he perceived and observed; he, so to speak, lacks the "techniques of the observer" which would render his environment sensible, indeed sketchable. With the shifting ground of representation, the subject or narrator also shifts and loses his ability to observe and contemplate external reality. Instead of using the interiority of the mind—or cogito—to reassume control over

[102] Damjana. "Interview with David Albahari," 186.

cacophony, here the narrator slips into camera obscurity, retreats into narrative inversion and perversion – the final scene of *Snow Man* is of an apparently insane narrator chasing a rabbit and presumably collapsing and dying in the snow. The narrator seeks a new technological apparatus and another chart that could be used to orient in an increasingly confusing, "inverted" and distorted environment, yet unlike Marker's Zone where a certain zen effect equalizes history, in Albahari it is as if the narrator is trapped in a camera obscura chamber. The walls cave in, space shrinks and the subject is suffocated, enshrined in darkness, trapped in interiority: "I left because, I thought, space started to shrink, because the wall threatened to suffocate me, because I no longer recognized myself walking in the street, reading newspaper headlines, buying bread, throwing stones into the river. 'You are someone else', I told to myself."[103] The subject splits in a schizophrenic, uneasy and uncanny mapping. In another passage, the narrator describes his mental confusion and the need to help himself, by observation and reflection, which is here very close to the meaning of scientific term of parallax – "the apparent displacement of an observed object due to a change in the position of the observer." Albahari writes;

> 'I came', I said, 'because I ceased to continue, because I believed that life could again be a continuity, not just a succession of broken sequences, always a new beginning, never ending, and I found myself in a net of new beginnings, in an endless repetition, in an impossibility that anything can be any different from that which, once before, was.' I could not remember when I pronounced such a long sentence last time. 'I came', I tried again, though I did not any longer address myself to my toes only, 'because I believed that, *when I looked back from a different place, I would see the first place that way I could have never seen it*

[103] Albahari, *Snezni covek*, 2007; 124.

while I was there, that I would, free from being partial and wanting to possess things, realize that everything could have happened in a different way...'[104]

This passage reveals the fantasy of what we might call a perfected "camera consciousness" of history in which space and time are related as inseparable and intertwined in a new narrative language. The narrator longs for a complete "world picture," a new beginning, "not just a succession of broken sequences," what Bergson laments in his criticism of "cinematographical consciousness" as a stifled "series of snapshots" that fail to communicate true experience.[105] Historical distance or telescoping in the fantasy of the narrator would allow for a continuity, would restore wholeness to the series of Balkan fragments and would free the narrator, giving the possibility for a "replay," where everything could have happened in a "different way." The fantasy of a new observing perspective for this troubled, psychically almost destroyed individual, the new perspective of parallax, and the rules of syntax may be the only hope for integration into any meaningful present. Describing this kind of post-traumatic form of subjectivity (victims of war or people who suffered great losses in natural disasters, or were subjected to torture) Slavoj Zizek uses such qualifications which appear to precisely to speak to the narrator's character *Snow Man* and *Bait*; he says that they are no longer engaged with the world, they are "living dead," "deprived of libidinal substance of their being" and vegetating "Cartesian subjectivities."[106]

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[104] Albahari, *Snezni covek* (2007), 125; my emphasis.
[105] See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Henry Holt and Company, 1911 {1907}).
[106] Slavoj Zizek, *Roda Viva – Slavoj Zizek - Exibido em* 02/02/09, available online at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8610224796251814184&ei=lTOQSoSOEKbmqQKgytjNAg&q=slavoj+zizek&hl=en

In *Bait*, one could argue that the narrator is slightly more successful in using a camera obscura approach to reflecting on and filtering information about his family's past existence, whereas the narrator of *Snowman* is literally trapped and deprived, marooned in a *camera obscura* interiority. The nameless narrator first appears alone, enclosed in his apartment, with the old tape recorder on the table. He sometimes goes to the window and looks outside, which he translates as his "attempt to define her essence" and attempts to find a stable observing lens onto history:

> ...it is merely my attempt to define her essence...When my father died, I realized that we know least about those who are closest to us, and for that reason I tried to get Mother to speak about her life, though when she died, twelve years later, I had to admit to myself that nothing, at least when it's a question of our knowledge of those closest to us, had changed (31).

As previously mentioned, on another narrative level there is a dialogue between the narrator and Donald, a friend whom he first met in a library. Donald is a writer too, and their dialogue about storytelling, history, geography, culture and language takes place in a "restaurant on the wide island in the river, transformed into a city park..." (11). Again, the park-like setting or ambience—as seen in Chris Marker's Cartesian camera obscura inversion – the "nature" of the metropolis –points to *askesis*, or withdrawal from the world. And the narrator and Donald intend to regulate and purify their relation to the "manifold contents of the now 'exterior' world" (55). Like the interior subjects of Vermeer's *Geographer*, these narrators inspect, discuss and debate the contours of a geographical map within the safe Cartesian retreat of a park-like setting.

The dialogue in the restaurant resembles Krasna's journey to the "two extreme poles of survival." With Albahari, the poles are geographical, ethnographical (North

America and the Balkans), linguistic, poetic, political, temporal and epistemological. The camera obscura mapping moment is resolved in a violent way in both of Albahari's novels. In *Snowman*, wind scatters the old maps and charts around the room and in *Bait* Donald crumples the map of Yugoslavia:

> I felt like screaming, because as he kneaded the map of my former country, it seemed to me as if he were squashing my own heart.... he still sat there at the table in the restaurant on the island in the river and transformed the map into a paper bill, as I, on the chair opposite him, attempted to bring some order into the confusion that streamed about my body.... Except for the folds, the splits, and two or three tears, nothing on it could be any longer recognized....That's your story, said Donald (150).

It is as if by ripping the map Donald places his friend's story into Hayao's digital synthesizer 'zone'. After that, the narrator drinks up his beer, collects the map, shakes hands with Donald, goes home, puts the rice on to cook... He becomes anesthetized, does not feel the loss any more, at least for a while, and starts writing his story. The nagging doubts he had about his ability to write suddenly disappear. He resembles Marker's time passenger from 4001 who lost the ability to forget and with it the sense of unhappiness. In Marker, this passenger now tries to understand and recover the lost sense:

> His only recourse is precisely that which threw him into this absurd quest, a song cycle by Mussorgsky. They are still sung in 40th century. Their meaning has been lost, but it was then for the first time he perceived the presence of that thing he didn't understand. Which is something to do with unhappiness and memory, and towards which slowly, heavily, he began to walk (*Sunless*).

Jonathan Crary's new observer and the experience of subjectivity as outlined in *Techniques of the Observer* provide us with powerful metaphorical tools that we can use to explore the nebulous travelogue in Chris Marker's Japan of the 1980s in *Sunless* and David Albahari's fragmented Serbian-Canada landscape. If memories are mediated, transformed into interchangeable and replaceable visual or acoustical images or archives, then the concepts that previously defined and organized our perception and understanding become such images and clichés as well. Gilles Deleuze speaks of concepts as clichés and images of thought, intensities; as sounds or colours which either work or not, suit you or not.[107] Albahari's and Marker's view on the mode of spectatorship they find themselves in seems deliberately melancholy[108], undecided and ambiguous, but both observers are invested in the contours of a new media experience and a lyrical portrait that could make sense of a constantly shifting "world picture."

Albahari and Marker, writing and filming in the age of the virtual storyteller, not only give us technology itself as an historical object of reflection (TV, film, black leader, audio cassettes, camera obscura). Like Crary, they also formulate a new historical

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[107] Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 1*: *The Movement-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlison and Barbara Habberjam. London: Athlone Press, 1986.

[108] Albahari also describes the melancholy moment of disappearing as a utopia, one that liberates text: "I guess that is why I am obsessed, all these months, with the thought of disappearing, with the same thought which is – now I realize – consequently present in all my books. I am not talking, of course, about the disappearance of my physical being, or about fading and expiring of my spiritual being, but about the demand that the being of writer disappear and free the space for text itself" (121). David Albahari, "Iščezavanje" in *Dijaspora i druge stvari* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2008). The conclusions of Albahari's novels speak of the protagonist's failure to come to terms with the burden of horrifying memory and history and to convert it into an organized narrative. Still, this failure is accepted calmly, even peacefully embraced. The narrator of *Snow Man*, for example, gradually disappears at the end of the novel, but the narration, the text, continues as if on its own, from its own perspective.

discourse on mediated history, as projected past and future, reversing the biblical narrative... not beginning with the "word," not narrating the frozen past, but shaking up the teleology by asking where and how one begins or narrates. Theirs is, one could say, an anti-eschatology or archaeology of the future:

> I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape? How has mankind managed to remember? I know -- the Bible. The new Bible will be the eternal magnetic tape of a time that will have to re-read itself constantly just to know it existed. (*Sunless*)

Conclusion

At the beginning of *Sunless*, we hear the cine-traveller's thought that "in the 19th century mankind had come to terms with space," that is, explored and colonized every unknown region of the Earth and produced maps of the planet and the skies. After the geographical inventory had been accomplished, the narrator says that "the great question of the 20th was the coexistence of different concepts of time." He then goes through his (and other people's) video library and masses of accumulated fragments of mediated perception and memory, trying to establish a personal relation with what has passed before his senses. Similar to the narrator of Albahari's novel, for whom the tapes are the proof of his past, Krasna's memories are not organic, biological traces in consciousness but various formats of media containing ordinary or shocking events. They can be translated, transcribed or edited, like a film.

Geography acquires a time dimension; there are different concepts of time in Africa, Japan and Europe, writes the traveller from *Sunless* ("He contrasted African time to European time, and also to Asian time.") The writer-narrators from Albahari's novels travel from Europe to the American continent, which is also a kind of time-travel – they try to remember and write about their pasts. "Geography is history" says one of them. Different speeds of historical development/modernization are geographically marked.

What their projects seem to point to is that the processes of transition – travelling/geographical mobility, the convergence of different media forms to a digital 'Zone', and the transcribing of recorded memory into a narrative – have a great impact on the spectators involved. Albahari and Marker paint out the contemplation of an isolated

and discrete viewer who at times tries to escape the distracted subjectivity of the dispersed city and the inverted "world picture" they both take part in. Images and signs take over, become 'alive' and real while the processes of editing/filmmaking and writing a narrative become the procedures that mark the transformation.

In an *X Files* episode, a boy whose power of imagination was so strong that it materialized his fantasies in real life is put in front of a wall with dozens of TV screens as a treatment against such a forceful (and often harmful) ability to concentrate. This therapy, of course, hinges on the prevailing belief that the distraction of a screen (or screens, to multiply the effect) destroys or at least decreases the observer's capacity for attention, concentration and by implication creativity and understanding. The artistic practices of Chris Marker and David Albahari may seem to suggest something different. Catherine Lupton, in *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*, writes about her visit to his Paris apartment and living-editing room:

> The windows are covered to block out the daylight, and inside seven or eight television screens are perpetually switched on. One receives satellite broadcasts from Korea, another from China, while a third is hooked up to French cable. Above the sounds of the television, ambient jungle noises are playing. The room is immaculately tidy, crammed with books, tapes and the mementos of a lifetime of travel and friendship.[109]

Inside this dark chamber, TV screens serve as optical lenses, bringing light from all over the world. Marker, says Lupton, "spends much of his time taping the television

[109] Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 217.

broadcast, writing the audio visual archives of the future"[110] and lives a solitary life of devotion to collecting and animating images. This image reminds us of Vermeer's paintings and the interpretation that in his paintings "[T]he question of body has been reduced to the question of its sharpness relative to the objects and images which surround it and its disappearance, that is, the disappearance of its privileged place in the register of representation."[111] It may seem that the distracting presence of numerous screens is a necessary condition of the highest level of attentiveness and sensibility (Lupton's parenthetical remark goes that although Marker is friendly, polite, fast talker and thinker "there is no point trying to continue the conversation if a programme about parrots happens to start on the Animal Channel"[112]) or that, inversely, the highest level of contemplative focus and integrity turns into distraction, dissolution and disappearance into the world (of) picture(s).

[110] Ibid.
[111] Čekić Jovan. "Disappearance of the Body: Vermeer and Blade Runner" in *Spectre of Nation*, ed. Obrad Savić (Belgrade: Belgrade Circle, 1996), 734.
[112] Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 217.

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