



## Chris Marker

Birth Name: Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve  
Director, Screenwriter, Cinematographer, Editor

Birth Jul 29, 1921 (Neuilly-sur-Seine, France)  
Death Dec 24, 1997 (Tokyo, Japan)  
Genres Avant-Garde/ Experimental Films

A cinematic essayist and audio-visual poet, Chris Marker was one of the most innovative filmmakers to emerge during the postwar era. Working primarily in the arena of nonfiction, Marker rejected conventional narrative techniques, instead staking out a deeply political terrain defined by the use of still images, atmospheric soundtracks, and literate commentary. Adopting a perspective akin to that of a stranger in a strange land, his films — haunting meditations on the paradox of memory and the manipulation of time — investigated the philosophical implications of understanding the world through media and, by extension, explored the very definition of cinema itself.

Born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve on July 29, 1921, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, the intensely private and enigmatic Marker shrouded the personal details of his life in mystery. He rarely agreed to interviews, and during his rare tête-à-têtes with the media he was known to provide deliberate misinformation (as a result, some biographies even list him as a native of Outer Mongolia). It is known that during World War II, Marker joined the French Resistance forces (and also, according to myth, the U.S. Army). He later mounted a career as a writer and critic, publishing the novel *Veillée de l'homme et de sa liberté* in 1949. He also wrote 1952's *Giraudoux par Lui-Même* — an acclaimed study of the existential dramatist Jean Giraudoux, whose use of abstract narrative tools proved highly influential on Marker's subsequent film work — and appeared in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinema*.

At the outset of the 1950s, Marker's radical politics found a forum in documentary filmmaking, and by 1952 he had completed his first short feature, the 16 mm *Olympia 52*, a study of the Helsinki Winter Olympics. His first widely acclaimed effort was 1953's *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*, filmed with the assistance of frequent collaborator Alain Resnais. Banned by the French government for over a decade, the film explored the rapid demise of African culture by taking aim at the exploitation of artisans by Western colonialists who encouraged the manufacture and sale of sacred folk art. After serving as an assistant director on Resnais' 1955 Holocaust landmark *Nuit et Brouillard*, Marker further established his reputation as a fiercely polemical talent with such provocative fare as 1956's *Dimanche à Pékin*, the next year's *Lettre de Sibérie*, 1959's *Les Astronautes* (co-directed by Walerian Borowczyk), and 1961's inflammatory *Cuba Si!* He also provided scripts for projects including Jean-Jacques Languepin's *Des Hommes dans le Ciel* and Raymond Vogel's *Le Siècle a soif*.

Ironically, Marker's most famed film was not a documentary, but a work of science fiction: the 1962 masterpiece *La Jetee*. A time-travel parable consisting almost completely of still images and voice-over narration, the 30-minute work later served as the inspiration behind Terry Gilliam's 1995 feature *12 Monkeys*. The next year, Marker returned with *Le Joli Mai*, an essay on Parisian political turmoil in the wake of conflict with Algeria. Upon completing 1965's *Le Mystère Koumiko*, his dedication to activism continued with the formation of SLON ("Société de Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles"), a Marxist arts collective initially established to produce 1967's *Loin du Vietnam*, a pro-North Vietnamese Army documentary anthology also featuring work from Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, Claude Lelouch, and Agnes Varda. Revived in the aftermath of the 1968 student and worker strikes, SLON continued issuing numerous agitprop films well into the next decade.

In addition to remaining active with SLON, Marker continued his own work throughout the 1970s with efforts including 1971's *Le Train en Marche*, 1974's *La Solitude du Chanteur du Fond*, 1977's *Le Fond de L'air est Rouge*, and 1978's multimedia video project *Quand le Siècle a Pris Formes*; he also worked on a variety of other projects with other directors, most famously as a co-producer of Patricio Guzman's powerful 1976 documentary *La Batalla de Chile*. After a three-year absence, Marker returned to filmmaking in 1981 with the short subject *Junkopia*. Its follow-up, 1982's superb *Sans Soleil* — a wry and complex global travelogue inspired by a series of letters — was acclaimed as his best work in years. Revitalized, he continued the next year with *All by Myself*, followed in 1985 by *A.K.*, a portrait of Akira Kurosawa shot on the set of the Japanese master's epic *Ran*. Two more biographical essays, *Tarkovsky* and *Hommage à Simone Signoret*, appeared in 1986.

As the 1980s progressed, Marker's work became more and more dominated by developing technology. Instead of film, he worked increasingly on video, also experimenting with television, computers, and other multimedia outlets. For the latter half of the decade, his output consisted primarily of brief video work like 1988's *Bestiaire*, *Spectre*, and *Tokyo Days*, all later collected as part of the 1990 collection *Zapping Zone*. In 1989, he also released the mammoth *L'Héritage de la Chouette*, a nearly six-hour compilation of TV material. The small screen remained his central venue during the 1990s, with 1993's *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* — a tribute to Alexander Medvedkin, the Soviet filmmaker who created the "film train" (a mobile film studio of the 1930s) — among his most highly visible projects. Always the innovator, in 1995 Marker created the multimedia installation *Silent Movie* — a construction featuring five video monitors, each randomly sequenced to show different films in a random loop — and he continued work on the autobiographical CD-ROM *Immemory*. In 1997, he returned to feature filmmaking with *Level Five*. — **Jason Ankeny**

1. [Le Souvenir d'un avenir](#) (2001) (V)  
... aka Remembrance of Things to Come (USA)
2. [Cinéma de notre temps: une journée d'Andrei Arsenevitch](#) (2000)  
... aka One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich (International: English title)
3. [Level Five](#) (1997)

4. [Le Facteur sonne toujours cheval](#) (1992) (TV)
5. [Le Tombeau d'Alexandre](#) (1992)  
... aka The Last Bolshevik
6. [Berliner Ballade](#) (1990) (TV)
7. [Mémoires pour Simone](#) (1986)
8. [A.K.](#) (1985)  
... aka Kurosawa Akira (Japan: alternative title)
9. [From Chris to Christo](#) (1985)
10. [2084](#) (1984)  
... aka 2084: Video clip pour une réflexion syndicale et pour le plaisir
11. [Sans soleil](#) (1983)  
... aka Sunless
12. [Junkopia](#) (1981)
13. [Le Fond de l'air est rouge](#) (1977)  
... aka The Base of the Air Is Red (International: English title)
14. [La Solitude du chanteur de fond](#) (1974)  
... aka The Loneliness of the Long Distance Singer
15. [L'Ambassade](#) (1973)  
... aka Film 8mm trouvé dans une ambassade (France)
16. [Vive la baleine](#) (1972)
17. [On vous parle de Prague: le deuxième procès d'Artur London](#) (1971)
18. [Le Train en marche](#) (1971)  
... aka The Train Rolls On
19. [La Bataille des dix millions](#) (1971)  
... aka The Battle of the Ten Million
20. [Carlos Marighela](#) (1970)
21. [Les Mots ont un sens](#) (1970)
22. [Cinétracts](#) (1968)
23. [La Sixième face du pentagone](#) (1968)  
... aka The Sixth Face of the Pentagon
24. [Loin du Vietnam](#) (1967)  
... aka Far from Vietnam (USA)
25. [La Jetée](#) (1962)  
... aka The Pier
26. [¡Cuba Sí!](#) (1961)
27. [Description d'un combat](#) (1960)  
... aka Description of a Struggle
28. [Dimanche à Peking](#) (1956)  
... aka Sunday in Peking
29. [Les Statues meurent aussi](#) (1953)  
... aka Statues Also Die
30. [Olympia 52](#) (1952)

