

the flame of this inverse consumption. A little further away, in Bayreuth, Brunhilde's pyre is burning again. On the ashes of hope, the Gods resume their ordinary twilight.

## NOTES

1. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Gustav Thibon (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987) 77.
2. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 137.
3. Like Röhmer and Rivette before him, Rancière is alluding to Chateaubriand's *The Genius of Christianity*.—Trans.
4. For a longer discussion of Irene's voyage, please see the third part ("A Child Kills Himself") of my *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, trans. James B. Swenson (California: Stanford University Press, 2003) 107–34.
5. "Interprète" is one of the words for actor in French. Rancière's claim that the idea demands "more from interpretation" plays on both meanings of the term: it demands more from us, the interpreters, and from Anna Magnani, the actor, the interpreter.—Trans.

Jaques Rancière, Film Fables  
 trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg,  
 2006)

## CHAPTER 9

The Red of *La Chinoise*

## Godard's Politics

How should we understand the politics Godard puts into play with his cinematographic practice in *La Chinoise*? The opinions on the matter have more or less followed the fluxes and refluxes of the left. Accused when first released of being just a caricature, and not a serious representation, of real militant Maoists, the film was later praised as a brilliant anticipation of the events of May 1968, and as a lucid look both at the passing infatuation with Maoism by bourgeois youngsters and at the outcomes of that infatuation: the return to order and terrorism. The question of whether or not the film or its characters are actually good Marxists is not only not interesting, but also misguided, since we're bound to get nowhere with such relationships of subordination: it is the coordination that we must look at instead. Godard doesn't film "Marxists" or things whose meaning would be Marxism. He makes cinema with Marxism. "A film in the making," he says, and we must understand this in many ways. *La Chinoise* invites us onto the set, it makes us feel like we're watching the shooting of the film. And it also makes us feel like we're watching Marxism, a certain Marxism anyway, in the process of making itself into cinema, of play-acting. As we watch this play-acting in *La Chinoise*, we see also what *mise-en-scène* means in the cinema. It is the intertwining of these two that we must look at more closely.

We might start with the following formulation: Godard puts "cinema" between two Marxisms—Marxism as the matter of representation, and Marxism as the principle of representation. The Marxism represented is a certain Marxism, Chinese Maoism as it figured in the Western imaginary at the time, which the film represents from the angle that renders the stereotypes of its rhetoric and gestures complicit with Godard's method of the object lesson and classroom exercises.<sup>1</sup> Maoism here is a catalogue of images, a panoply of objects, a repertoire of phrases, a program of

elements brings into play another complicity. The method of the "object lesson" happens to align perfectly with the specific Marxism that serves as the principle of representation, namely Althusserian Marxism, which, in 1967, was essentially a doctrine that held that Marxism for the most part still had to be invented, and that inventing it was like relearning the sense of the most elementary actions. Godard, as is his wont, treats Althusser in bits and pieces that he takes, for the most part, from prefaces and conclusions. He composes with these bits and pieces the speech of the militant Omar and the peroration of the actor Guillaume. And he is likely to have read this sentence, which could well sum up his whole method as a filmmaker, in the preface to *Reading Capital*: "I venture to suggest that our age threatens one day to appear in the history of human culture as marked by the most dramatic and difficult trial of all, the discovery and training in the meaning of the 'simplest' acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading—the acts which relate men to their works, and to those works thrown in their faces, the 'absences of work'."<sup>2</sup>

Althusser's project of knowing what "seeing, listening, speaking, reading" mean is exactly what Godard puts into play in *La Chinoise*. At the center of the film there are two red objects, the *Little Red Book* and the *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes*: linked by their color, these two objects stand in a relationship of solidarity and contradiction. The *Little Red Book* compiles the detached maxims that all those who took part in the Cultural Revolution either learned by heart or simply brandished as rallying calls. The *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes* is the Marxist journal of the students of the École Normale Supérieure, the sophisticated militant journal that lends to the chosen bits and pieces learned by the Red Guard their theoretical foundation as well as their practical acceptability. This journal transforms the Althusserian project of relearning to see, speak, and read into Maoist rhetoric and gestures. Godard's method is to split up the terms of this operation, to break up the evidence, by making Althusserian pedagogy the principle for the *mise-en-scène* of Maoist rhetoric and gestures. The film, then, is about learning to see, hear, speak, or read these phrases from the *Little Red Book* or from the *Pékin Information*. But it is also about learning to read with them, as if these phrases were just another example, and in essence no different from the stories and examples that illustrate the workbooks pupils use when learning to read and write in elementary school. *La Chinoise* is an exercise on Marxism with Marxism as much as it is an exercise on film with film.

"To give vague ideas a clear image." To understand the formula that is like an epigraph for the film, we have to feel that the tension weighing

down on the relationship between word and image is strictly parallel to the tension that fueled—in the China of the time and in the Western Maoist imaginary—the fight between two conceptions of the dialectic. "One is split in two," the formula reclaimed by Maoists: "two are joined in one," the formula stigmatized as "revisionist." The strength of the film is that it brings together cinema and Marxism by treating those two formulas as two different conceptions of art in general, and hence also of Marxist cinema.

What does a Marxist film, a film that proposes Marxism as the meaning of the fiction it puts on the screen, ordinarily do? How do the waves of progressive fictions that flourished on the heels of *La Chinoise* work? Basically through a mixture of beautiful images and painful speeches, of fictional affects and realist references, that when combined compose a symphony on which Marxism imposes itself as the theme or melody necessarily being sought by the mass orchestration. As such, these films remain tied to the everyday functioning of communication. They join two in one in the image of the everyday *chassé croisé* of words and images. Words make images. They make us see. A sentence gives a quasi-visible that never attains the clarity of the image. Images, in their turn, constitute a discourse. We hear in them a quasi-language not subject to the rules of speech. The problem, however, is that when we "see" a word, we no longer hear it. And likewise with the image: when we hear it, we no longer see it. This is the dialectic of the "two in one" instituted by the principle of reality.<sup>3</sup> It is identical in every way to the rhetorical-poetical principle of the metaphor. The metaphor, more than a means of making an abstract idea concrete by linking it to an image, is this *chassé croisé* of words that hide by becoming visible and of images made invisible by becoming audible. One *quasi* entails the other. One refers to the other, lasts only as long as is needed to do the other's work and to link its powers of disappearance to that of the other. The result is this melodic line that is like the music of the world.

We might call this, after one of the episodes of the film, the bowl-and-toast principle. Look at Henri drink his café au lait and butter his toast in front of his water heater as he itemizes all his reasons for going back to the Communist Party. The realistic weight of his words is entirely dependent upon these accessories. Had he delivered it with a blackboard behind him and a professor's desk before him in the apartment of his old comrades, the same speech would lose 80 per cent of the force and conviction it receives from the "popular" *gestes* of this "popular" kitchen, which changes even the connotation of his student cap: here it is the cap of the son of the prole and not the cap of the student who plays at being a prole. The

interview with the maid Yvonne is another demonstration of the same genre. The speech in which this daughter of the people evokes the hardships of growing up in the country immediately generates an image. No need, then, to show us the countryside, we see it in her words. It would be clumsy to show it, even perverse. And Godard's perversity is to insert at this point not the quintessential countryside Yvonne's words make visible, but a silly countryside that he sums up in two images: chickens in front of the wall of a farmhouse, and cows in a field of apple trees. The common work of art and politics is to interrupt this parading, this incessant substitution of words that make us see and of images that speak which imposes belief as the music of the world. The point is to split in two the One of representative magna: to separate words and images, to get words to be heard in their strangeness and images to be seen in their silliness.

There are two possible ways of achieving this dissociation. Jean-Pierre Léaud announces the first one in the film: would that we were blind, he says, then we would really listen to each other, really understand each other. This dream of seizing the radical experience of hearing or seeing at its origins invariably takes us back to the experiences that made these two senses so dear to the eighteenth century. Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* and *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* are never very far from Godard, nor is Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Language*. At its limits, the method of the "object lesson" always tends towards two renowned utopias, the *tabula rasa* and fictional Robinsonades. Godard leaves it to Henri, the "revisionist," to wax ironic about these fictive experiences by recalling the story of Psammetichos, King of Egypt, who tried to discover the original language of humankind by raising two of his children in complete isolation. When he heard them speak, they spoke in the only "language" they were able to learn, that of the sheep whose pen adjoined their retreat. The Robinsonade is how the characters express the experimental situation Godard puts them in. But the principle of the *mise-en-scène* is different. If Godard really wants us to hear the words—and Marxism, like any theory, is first and foremost an assemblage of words—and see the reality they describe and project—and reality is, first and foremost, an assemblage of images—he cannot treat them separately. He must reorganize their liaison, which doesn't mean separating the words of Marxism from every image in order to make us hear them, but the reverse: Godard must really make us see them, he must replace their obscure image-making with a brute image of what they say. He has to put these words in bodies that treat them as the most basic utterances, bodies that try to speak them in various ways as well as to turn them into gestures.

Godard then sets about elaborating an apparatus of separation that makes words audible by making them visible. Here is where Godard gives cinematographic meaning to this representation, at first attacked and then praised for its lucidity, of "petit bourgeois youngsters cut off from the masses and talking non-stop in the isolation of their bourgeois apartment." Godard is fond of the method of enclosing his characters within the four white walls of an apartment where they struggle to put meat on the bones of a few great ideas. The "Althusserianism" of *La Chinoise* is its actualization of Althusser's Diderot-inspired practices. The difference is that in the film the "political" principle of isolation is the condition for the artistic understanding of what a political discourse says. The task of art is to separate, to transform the continuum of image-meaning into a series of fragments, postcards, lessons. The bourgeois apartment is the frame of representation wherein Godard arranges the necessary and sufficient elements for the *mise-en-scène* of the question: what does Marxism, this Marxism, say? How does it speak? How does it turn itself into film? In the pictorial and theatrical frame, words and images can be rearranged in order to undo the metaphorical play that makes sense of reality by transforming images into quasi-words and words into quasi-images.

There are two major forms of representation that work against the metaphor. The first is surrealism, which essentially literalizes the metaphor. Logicians have been pointing out since antiquity that when we utter the word "chariot," no such vehicle issues from our mouths. As a general rule, though, these same logicians have paid less attention to the fact that though the chariot doesn't issue from our mouths, it doesn't for all that fail to dance confusedly before the eyes of our interlocutors. Surrealists then represent the chariot issuing from the mouth. Magritte's paintings are the best illustration of this pictorial method, which, in literature, is at the root of Lewis Carroll's *nonsense*, though it had already served other masters before him, such as Rabelais and Sterne. Godard rarely does without it. He makes his use of it explicit in the scene of Jean-Pierre Léaud throwing rubber-tipped darts at images of the representatives of bourgeois culture as an illustration of the idea that Marxism is the arrow trained on the target of the class enemy. And he uses it directly, as in the scene where Juliet Berto illustrates the idea that the *Little Red Book* is the rampart of the masses against imperialism by standing in front of a wall of red books, or when she visualizes the principle that Mao's thought is the weapon of these same masses by turning the radio that broadcasts Mao's thought through the voice of Radio-Peking into a submachine gun.

The surrealist method is itself subordinate to the dialectical method, which replaces the figure of the metaphor with the figure of comparison. Comparison dissociates what the metaphor joins. Instead of telling us, as the slogans of the period did, that Mao's thought is our red sun, comparison makes us see and hear this thought next to the sun. Comparison foils the metaphor's power to join together: it gets us to hear words and see images in their dissociation, though not via some sort of utopian separation, but by keeping them together in their problematic relationship in one and the same frame. It then becomes a matter of showing this: the revolutionary struggle might resemble such an image; a group "armed with the thought of Mao Tse Tung" might resemble the arrangement of such a sequence of discourses and gestures. To interpret Maoist discourse—to understand what it tells us—we must try to perform [*interpréter*] it—to represent it—this way.<sup>4</sup> We have to help ourselves to the bodies of actors, to a set, and to all the elements of representation in order to figure out how to perform/interpret these words, how to make them audible by making them visible.

Godard structures all of this with his remarkable use of color in the film. He distributes on the white background of a canvas or projection screen three pure colors that he never allows to intermingle: red, blue, and yellow. These three colors are first of all emblematic of the objects represented: the red of Mao's flag and thought, the blue uniforms of Chinese workers, the yellow of the race. And they are also the three primary colors, the three straightforward colors that oppose the gradation, nuances, and confusion of "reality," that is to say, of the metaphor. They function as the table of categories that Deleuze claims Godard is always creating. The "simple things" to be relearned are determined and reflected in the categorical grid formed by these pure colors. This use of color, even though a constant in Godard, is at its most powerful when the issue at hand is one of color, like the red-white-blue Godard had already used to structure the political fable *Made in USA*. *La Chinoise*, a film about red as the color of a line of thought, is entirely structured by this chromatic apparatus, which structures not only what goes on between the white walls of the apartment, but also the relationship between inside and outside. The outside is the real, the referent of their discourses. It is the green countryside inserted into Juliet Bertou's speech. It is the vacant suburban lots and the University of Nanterre barely visible beyond them that Godard uses, once he has them rendered equivalent with a panoramic shot, to illustrate Juliet Bertou's speech, to show what her speech about the three inequalities and about the worker-student link looks like. Finally, the real is the alternating scenery of countryside

landscape and suburban houses that flies by behind the window of the train where Anne Wiazemsky talks to Francis Jeanson, and that strengthens with its discreet evidence Jeanson's words by showing this rural France, grassy and punctuated by homes, so utterly foreign to the discourse of the aspiring terrorist.

Godard was accused of giving the upper hand to the "realist" discourse of Francis Jeanson, the once upon a time assistant to the FLN,<sup>5</sup> over the discourse of the student extremist who fidgets nervously with the handle on the train window. But Godard doesn't take sides. All he does is place the tension of the two discourses in the tension of the visual sets. He puts in question the evidence provided by the rural France that speaks through Jeanson's mouth by accentuating in him, to the point of caricature, the *habitus* of the professor who's having a little fun at the student's expense: "Yes, but", "And then?", "So?", "What do you conclude from that?", "Ah, I see." "And you're the one who'll do all that?" But mainly, it is the pure colors and forms of the closed off apartment that filter the play of reality and keep it from appearing in a good light. Time and time again, these pure colors and forms refer reality to its mixed character, this mixture of mutually dissembling colors and metaphors that ignites, on the other side of the train window, the reality that proves itself in the perennial referral of its mixed tones—a testament to the infinite complexity of the real—to their dominant tonality: green, the color of life in its essential originality, color of the countryside and authenticity. Green is the mixed color that passes itself off for a primary color. It is also, by convention, the anti-red: green for go, red for stop, the color of the market and not the color of communism. "Green prices, since the Reds have seen their day," ran an ad in the 1990s where debunked Red heroes urged everyone not to miss the bargain prices at FNAC.<sup>6</sup> *La Chinoise* is certainly a film from the red epoch, the epoch of straightforward colors and simple ideas. Not simplistic ideas, but the idea of trying to see what simple ideas look like. The green epoch is the epoch of the mixed colors of reality—supposedly recalcitrant to ideas—that ultimately lead to the green monochrome of life, which is, we're told, simple and to be savored in its simplicity.

Inside the frame structured by the three primary colors, Godard organizes the *mise-en-scène* of the different modes of discourse within which the Maoist text can be spoken. There are three such modes: the interview, the lecture, and the theater. Godard's task is to examine and modify the value of truth and illusion normally accorded to each of these three modes. As a general rule, the lecture is thought to portray the situation of authority commanded

by big words divorced from reality. The apparatus of the lecture—table, blackboard, and lecturer standing in front of an audience seated on the floor and answering their questions—seems to accentuate the image of the authority wielded by big words. The interview, on the other hand, is generally thought to sound the voice of the real with the small and slightly awkward words that anyone at all—preferably a woman—uses to describe the personal experiences that have led her to entrust her life to these big words. The image can occasionally lend a supplementary authenticity to all of this. The big eyes and pursed lips of Yvonne, the daughter of the people who seems startled by what she dares to say; the bowl-and-toast of Henri, the realist who knows what he's talking about; the vacant lots that authenticate Véronique's discourse. The authenticity increases when the voice of the interviewer is muted or annulled in order to transform the solicited response into a gush of spontaneity. The *mis-en-scène* calls this truth hierarchy into question. The insertion of a stupid shot, the voice of the interviewer that we hear without being able to make out the words, the performances of the naïve and the canny, these are all ways in which the *mis-en-scène* invites us to see—and hence to hear—that the regime of "authentic" speech is, just like the lecture, the regime of an already-said, of a recited text. It is how the *mis-en-scène* invites us to ask ourselves, instead, if the situation of authenticity isn't actually just like that of the blackboard on which one ventures to write down sentences to be able to look at them and see what they're saying, or like the position of authority held by the amateur professor, who ventures to let these sentences escape his mouth and to hear their echo.

Beyond the professor and the interviewee is a third character, the actor, who takes their two performances back to their common origin, the art of acting. In the confrontation with the student Véronique, it isn't the professor and politician Francis who has the last word, but Guillaume, the actor thus named as a tribute to his ancestor, Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. If Jean-Pierre Léaud's words evoke the *Letter on the Blind*, it is certainly a new version of the *Paradox of the Actor* that he illustrates in the famous demonstration he mimes: a Chinese student covered in bandages has come to show the wounds inflicted upon him by "revisionist" policemen, but what he shows us, as he removes the last bandage, is a face free of any wounds. The political militant and the actor are alike: their work is to show us not visible horrors, but what cannot be seen.

The actor becomes, in the same gesture, the elementary school teacher who returns the speeches and gestures of the naïve interviewee and of the learned professor to their first elements. The actor teaches the militant that

it is possible to understand a text by lending one's voice and body to it, just as he teaches all of them how to spell out words and to vocalize and visualize ideas. That's what Jean-Pierre Léaud's work illustrates when he shouts, as a warrant officer would, the "Why?" that is always falsely inquisitive in the professor, or when he mimes the meaning of what he says by changing tones, "we need sincerity . . . AND VIOLENCE." Spelling out the sentences of the *Little Red Book* and scanning them with physical exercises, this is to study stereotypes with sterotypy. It doesn't make a chariot issue from the mouth, but at least it makes it weigh on the tongue.

When the naïve country girl asks the amateur professor "What is an analysis?," it is the actor who answers, who shows her in the strictest sense what an analysis is. He decomposes the assembly of gestures and images and returns them to their basic elements. The universality of his art is that it establishes the most basic elements, and assembles thereof, that make a discourse and a practice intelligible by making them comparable to other discourses and practices, by, for instance, making a political discourse and union comparable to a declaration of love and a love affair. This is what we see in the opening shots of the film, which show the fragmented speeches and intertwining hands of Jean-Pierre Léaud, who still seems to be acting in *Masculine Feminine*, and Anne Wiazemsky, who's still speaking the Bresson of *Au hasard, Balhazar*. It is what Wiazemsky teaches Léaud when she makes the utterances "Do you love me?" and "No, I don't love you anymore" as problematic as political utterances. If we prefer a visual over a dialectical demonstration, there is one in that superb shot of Yvonne, her posture straight out of a maid in Manet, looking out the window in the scene when Henri is being expelled: the image renders her scansion of the word "re-visionist" identical to the scansion of "I-don't-love-you-anymore."

Godard shows us what the words and gestures of politics looks like by translating them into the attitudes of being in and out of love. His translation isolates the simple elements of a political speech that resurface not only in the lover's discourse, but also in the glib tongue of the street vendor peddling his wares and in the smooth talking of the market vendor. The final episodes of the film are not an illustration of moral relativism, of the equivalence of all things: the militant's speech as he lays out his copies of the *Little Red Book* the same as the street vendor selling his heads of lettuce. We would do better to recall the Brecht who conceived the episodes of *Jungle of Cities* as the rounds of a boxing match. Like Brecht's variations, the film brings to light all those elements in the job of the actor that are also present in every meaningful action and effective speech. Godard

inverts the logic of *Wilhelm Meister*, a book he is always reading and rereading. Goethe's hero starts in love with the theater and ends by finding certainty in collective knowledge. Godard's hero moves in the opposite direction and leads collective knowledge back to the elements of the art of the theater. Politics resembles art in one essential point. Like art, politics also cuts into that great metaphor where words and images are continuously sliding in and out of each other to produce the sensory evidence of a world in order. And, like art, it constructs novel combinations of words and actions, it shows words borne by bodies in movement to make them audible, to produce another articulation of the visible and the sayable.

*Theater Year Zero* is the title Godard gives to the theatrical adventures of Guillaume Meister, and his allusion to Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* is nominal as well as visual. Jean-Pierre Léaud roams the same ruined landscape and ventures into underground spaces similar to those visited by the young Edmund, though not to experience there the law of a world in ruins, but to relearn the meaning of the three blows of the theater. Rossellini wanted his title to evoke a world that had been wiped out and to serve as an epitaph to a child victimized by a murderous ideology. Godard's subtitle, in turn, speaks about what Rossellini's film shows: a kid playing hopscotch against the backdrop of a world in ruins. Ultimately, the moral of the film emerges from the opposition between the actor Guillaume and the terrorist Vêronique: there is no zero situation, no world in ruins or to be ruined. There is only a curtain that rises and a child, an actor who plays with so much lightness the role of a child whose shoulders have to bear the double weight of a devastated world and of a world about to be born. Anyone determined to think the separation between the games of the child actor and the wanderings that end with the death of the child in the fiction, or between theatrical work and revolutionary work, must also think their community. That is what we see in this cinema between two Marxisms that concludes as a meditation on the theater.

## NOTES

1. "Leçons des choses" and "travaux pratiques" are indissociable pedagogical methods that started being used in French schools towards the end of the nineteenth century. The basic idea is to organize exercises

2. where the students learn, literally, from things. I render the first term by "object lesson" and the second by "classroom exercises" or simply by "exercises."—Trans.
3. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970) 15–6.
4. Not Freud's reality principle! The principle of reality is the principle of the metaphor, as Rancière indicates in the next sentence.—Trans.
5. Rancière is playing on the word "interpréter," which means to interpret, and also to act out, perform ("interprète" being one of the words for actor in French).—Trans.
6. The *Front de Libération Nationale*, or National Liberation Front, the ruling party of Algeria through the battle of independence to today.—Trans.
7. FNAC is a French (now European) chain of megastores selling books, CDs, DVDs, cameras, computers, and so on. The closest equivalent in the Anglophone world might be Borders or Barnes & Noble.—Trans.

## CHAPTER 10

### Documentary Fiction

#### Marker and the Fiction of Memory

*The Last Bolshevik* is the title of the film Chris Marker dedicates to the memory of Alexander Medvedkin, the Soviet filmmaker who was born with his century and who died during the Perestroika. To speak of "memory" is to raise the paradox of the film at the outset. Marker's film cannot very well hope to preserve the memory of a filmmaker whose films we have not seen and whose name was, until quite recently, unfamiliar to most of us. Nor is this situation much different with Medvedkin's compatriots, who are as likely to know his films as we are. The point, then, isn't to preserve Medvedkin's memory, but to create it. The enigma buried in the title<sup>1</sup> raises the problem of the nature of a cinematographic genre, the so-called "documentary," and allows us, via a vertiginous shortcut, to link two questions: What is memory? What is the documentary as a genre of fiction?

Let's take as our starting point some self-evident claims that nonetheless still seem paradoxical to some. Memory is not the store of recollections of a particular consciousness, else the very notion of a collective memory would be devoid of sense. Memory is an orderly collection, a certain arrangement of signs, traces, and monuments. The Great Pyramid, the tomb par excellence, doesn't keep Cheop's memory. It is that memory. There are some who will no doubt claim that there are two regimes of memory separated by an ocean: there is that of the powerful sovereigns of long ago whose reality, in some cases, today boils down to the material and the ornamentation of their tombs; and there is that of the contemporary world, diligently keeping the records that attest to the most commonplace lives and the most ordinary events. It would seem a foregone conclusion that an abundance of information equals an overabundance of memory. And yet, everything in our present denies that. Information isn't memory, and it does not accumulate and store for memory's sake. It works exclusively for its own profit, which depends on the prompt forgetfulness of everything clearing the way for the



sole, and abstract, truth of the present to assert itself and for information to cement its claim to being alone adequate to that truth. As the abundance of facts grows, so grows the sense of their indifferent equivalence and the capacity to make of their interminable juxtaposition the impossibility of ever reaching a conclusion, of ever being able to read, in the facts and their juxtaposition, the meaning of *one* story. Negationists have already shown that to deny what has happened, it isn't necessary to deny fact after fact: denying the links that run through them and give them the weight of history is enough. The reign of the informational-present rejects as outside reality everything it cannot assimilate to the homogeneous and indifferent process of its self-presentation. Not satisfied with rejecting out of hand everything as already in the past, it doubts the past itself.

Memory must be created against the overabundance of information as well as against its absence. It has to be constructed as the liaison that connects the account of events and the traces of actions, much like that *σύστημα τῶν περιγυριστῶν*, that "arrangement of incidents," that Aristotle talks about in the *Poetics* and that he calls *muthos*: not, as it were, a "myth," that refers us back to some sort of collective unconscious, but a fable or fiction. Memory is the work [*oeuvre*] of fiction. Good historical conscience can denounce this as paradoxical and pit its patient search for the truth against the fictions of collective memory that underpin power in general and totalitarian power in particular. But, in general, "fiction" is not a pretty story or evil lie, the flipside of reality that people try to pass off for it. Originally, *fingere* doesn't mean "to feign" but "to forge." Fiction means using the means of art to construct a "system" of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs. We cannot think of "documentary" film as the polar opposite of "fiction" film simply because the former works with images from real daily life and archive documents about events that obviously happened, and the latter with actors who act out an invented story. The real difference between them isn't that the documentary sides with the real against the inventions of fiction, it's just that the documentary instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, treats it as a fact to be understood. Documentary film can isolate the artistic work of fiction simply by dissociating that work from its most common use: the imaginary production of verisimilitude, of effects of the real. It can take that artistic work back to its essence, to a way of cutting a story into sequences, of assembling shots into a story, of joining and disjoining voices and bodies, sounds and images, of lengthening and tightening time. "The story starts in the present at Chelmo": Claude Lanzmann's provocative opening sentence

in *Shoah* sums up this idea of fiction quite well. The forgotten, the denied, or the ignored that these fictions of memory want to bear witness to are set in opposition to the "real of fiction" that ensures the mirror recognition between the audience in the theaters and the figures on the screen, and between the figures on the screen and those of the social imaginary. In contrast to this tendentious reduction of the fictional invention to the stereotypes of the social imaginary, the fiction of memory sets its roots in the gap that separates the construction of meaning, the referential real, and the "heterogeneity" of its documents. "Documentary" cinema is a mode of fiction at once more homogeneous and more complex: more homogeneous because the person who conceives the idea is also the person who makes it; more complex because it is much more likely to arrange or interlace a series of heterogeneous images. Marker composes *The Last Bolshevik* with scenes filmed in Russia today, the accounts offered by the people he interviews, yesterday's news items, and with film clips from different time periods and by directors with varying agendas, ranging from *Battleship Potemkin* all the way to Stalinist propaganda films, with incursions, of course, into the films of Alexander Medvedkin himself, all of which Marker reinserts into a different plot and binds together with virtual images.

Marker makes with the real documents he has amassed and treated with an eye to the truth a work whose fictional or poetic tenor is—beyond every value judgment—incomparably superior to that of the most spectacular action movie. Alexander's tomb is not the gravestone laid over the body of Alexander Medvedkin. Nor is it a simple metaphor designating an appraisal of the life of a militant filmmaker that is, simultaneously, an appraisal of the Soviet dream and nightmare. The metonymical value of Alexander's tomb is that it speaks to us about another tomb symbolic of buried hope, Lenin's mausoleum. It is certainly a "fictional" choice on Marker's part not to represent Lenin except through metonymy: this demoralized head that the militants who joined forces against the communist putsch in the summer of 1991 gathered around in celebration, and on which kids can now be seen playing lightheartedly. The colossal, Pharaonic head with enormous inquisitive eyes of Felix Dzierzinski, the man, it was said till recently, whom Lenin had appointed head of the political police because he was a Pole who had so often suffered in his own body the horrors of the Tsarist police that he would never build a police force in that image...

A tomb isn't a gravestone or a metaphor. It is a poem such as those that used to be written in the Renaissance and whose tradition resurfaces in Mallarmé. Or it is a musical piece in honor of another musician, like



the ones written in the era of Couperin and Marin Marais, and more recently by Ravel. *The Last Bolshevik* is a document about the Russia of our century because it is a tomb in this poetical or musical sense, an artistic homage to a fellow artist. It is also a poem aligned to a specific poetics. There are two major traditions in poetics, both of which are susceptible to being further subdivided or entangled. Classical, Aristotelian poetics is a poetics of action and representation that sees the core of the poem as the "representation of men in action," as the performance by one or more actors of the speeches that describe or mime the incidents that befall the characters, and whose arrangement abides by the logic that the progression of the action must coincide with a change in the characters' fortune and knowledge. Romantic poetics abandoned this poetics of action, character, and discourse in favor of a poetics of signs. Here, the backbone of the story is not the causal continuity of the action "according to necessity and verisimilitude" theorized by Aristotle, but the variable signifying power of signs and assembles of signs that forms the tissue of the work. This power is, first of all, the power of expression whereby a sentence, an episode, or an impression can, even in isolation, represent the sense, or nonsense, of the whole; secondly, it is the power of correspondence that puts signs from different regimes in resonant or dissonant relationships; thirdly, it is the power of metamorphoses by which a combination of signs solidifies into an opaque object or deploys itself in a signifying, living form; and, finally, it is the power of reflection that gives a particular combination the power to interpret another combination, or, alternatively, let itself be interpreted by it. Schlegel formulated the ideal union of all these powers in his idea of the "poem of the poem," the poem that claims to raise to a higher power a poetic power already present in the life of language, in the spirit of a community, and even in the folds and ridges of minerals. Romantic poetics deploys itself around two poles: it affirms the power of speech inherent to every silent thing in the same breath that it affirms the infinite power of the poem to multiply itself by multiplying its modes of speech and levels of meaning.

This poetics complicates, in the same gesture, the regime of truth of the work. Classical poetics is based on the construction of a plot whose truth-value depends on a system of affinities and verisimilitudes that presupposes the objectification of the space-time specific to the fiction. The preeminent Romantic hero, Don Quixote, ruins the objectivity of fiction when he smashes to smithereens Master Peter's puppets. Don Quixote rejects the separation of serious activities and leisure activities with his insistence on the coincidence of the Book and the world, an insistence that bespeaks less

the folly of a reader of chivalric romances than the folly of the Christian cross. Romantic poetics replaces the space made objective by fiction with an indeterminate space of writing: this space is, on the one hand, indistinguishable from a "reality" composed of "things" and impressions that are also signs that speak for themselves; and it is also, on the other hand, the opposite of this, a space undergoing an infinite construction that fashions, with its scaffoldings, labyrinths, and slants, an equivalent of this forever mute reality.

Cinema, the preeminently modern art, experiences more than any other art the conflict of these two poetics, though it is, by the same token, the art that most attempts to combine them. Cinema is the combination of the gaze of the artist who decides and the mechanical gaze that records, of constructed images and chance images. Even if it normally uses this double power as a simple instrument of illustration for the service of the succedaneum to classical poetics, cinema is nevertheless the art that can raise to the highest power the double resource of the mute impressions that speak for themselves and the montage that calculates their signifying force and truth-value. Documentary cinema is not bound to the "real" sought after by the classical norms of affinities and verisimilitude that exert so much force on so-called fiction cinema. This gives the documentary much greater leverage to play around with the consonance and dissonance between narrative voices, or with the series of period images with different provenances and signifying power. It can join the power of the impression, the power of speech born from the meeting of the mutism of the machine and the silence of things, to the power of montage, in the broad, non-technical sense of the term, as that which constructs a story and a meaning by its self-proclaimed right to combine meanings freely, to re-view images, to arrange them differently, and to diminish or increase their capacity for expression and for generating meaning. Cinéma-vérité and dialectical cinema—Dziga Vertov's train charging a cameraman lying level with the tracks, and the stroller descending with implacable slowness the famous Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin*—are two faces of the same poetics. Marker, poet of the cinematographic poem, organizes them into a new *mise-en-scène*. He alternates shots from the massacre on the Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin* with shots of pedestrians walking down the same steps today to make us feel the extraordinary artifice of Eisenstein's "slow-motion," his seven-minute dramatization of people running for their lives down these steps that a pedestrian walking at a leisurely pace can walk down in ninety seconds at most. In the same gesture, Marker also shows the infinite gap separating the

artifice by which art punctuates a historical moment from the artifices of propaganda: the film where a lookalike of the friendly Stalin sticks his nose into the broken-down engine of a tractor. The slow-motion Eisenstein uses to film this hurried flight becomes part of a whole series of operations with space and time, large and small, high and low, commonplace and singular; it becomes part of the system of figures that constructs the space-times of the Revolution. Eisenstein's fiction is a history making fiction, whereas Stalin's lookalike is only Stalin's lookalike, nothing more than a fiction of power.

From the midst of the present-day images, the fictions of Soviet art, and the fictions of Stalinist power, there emerges the dialogue of shadows Chris Marker organizes with the six "letters" he writes today to the already dead Alexander Medvedkin. Sometimes Marker inserts yesterday's images into today's prose, as in the re-staging of the emblematic scene of the Revolution's emblematic film; and sometimes he moves in the opposite direction, going from this or that "thing seen" today to the history of a people's imaginary. In a church in Moscow, his camera lingers on images that "speak for themselves": a religious celebration alike in every way to those of long ago, full of ornamental and ceremonial pomp, burning incense, and the devotion of the perennial babushkas. It also lingers awhile on the face of an elderly gentleman who looks just like any other, though he is in fact not your ordinary devout elderly gentleman. In the congregation there is this man who, like Alexander Medvedkin, is as old as his century and whose name, Ivan Kozlovzki, also "says" nothing to the Western viewer. This long take of a face we shall not see again does two things at once: it puts the communist past and the post-communist present into the fabric of an older history, the one performed in the great operas of the national repertory, and it gives Medvedkin a double, it furtively sketches the diptych essential to the elaboration of "Alexander's fiction."

These two figures could not be more opposed. Medvedkin spent his life, his century, working to make the century and the Soviet territory the time and place for the incarnation of the word of Marx. He spent his years making communist films devoted to the regime and its heads, though these heads never allowed the people to see his films. He invented the film-train to be able to go into kolkozhozes, miners' compounds, and so on, in order to film the work, the living conditions of the workers, and the debates of their representatives. He had a lab installed in one of the cars of the train to be able to process the film on the spot and show it to the people he had filmed, to submit to their eyes, posthaste, this document about their successes and shortcomings. He succeeded, too well it seems: his implacable images of

desolate groups of huts, of courtyards full of dead trees, of the meetings of pen-pushers, were all assigned a quiet resting place in the archives where only now researchers are uncovering them. He then went on to put the *compte* and surrealist *verve* of *Happiness* at the service of the policies for agrarian reform, but the fun it pokes at dignitaries, Orthodox priests, and kulaks is by all accounts far in excess of what the depiction of any "line" calls for, so the film got no distribution. This didn't keep Medvedkin from celebrating the official urban planning in *The New Moscow*, but what possessed him to have some fun at the architects' expense by showing, backwards, the new buildings being destroyed and the Savior's Cathedral being reconstructed? The film was immediately shelved along with the others. He was eventually obliged to renounce his own films and to resign himself to making other people's films, films that anybody could have directed illustrating the official line of the moment, celebrating the pageants in honor of Stalin's glory, denouncing Chinese communism, or vaunting Soviet concern for the environment shortly before Chernobyl.

This is not how Ivan Kozlovzki lived his life and century. He sang Tchakovsky, loved by the Tsars and preferred by Stalin to the musicians of the communist avant-garde. He also sang Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky, especially his *Boris Godunov*, an opera based on the work of the foremost Russian poet, who was also much loved under the Soviets, Alexander, family name Pushkin. In this emblematic story of an assassinated tsarevich and of a bloody usurper whose plans are foiled by another impostor, Ivan Kozlovzki played Simpleton, who in the final and prophetic scene cries over the impenetrable night, pain, and hunger awaiting the Russian people. He spent his life and century performing these nineteenth-century fables that portray every revolution as doomed from the outset and singing the suffering of a people eternally condemned to subjection and deceit. And he did so to an audience of communist officials who always preferred these stories and this music to the works of the communist avant-garde. The camera, lingering thus on his silent face, does more than just release the future counter-image of another life lived in the Soviet century. It inscribes that face in a fiction of memory that is the combat between two legacies: one twentieth century inherited from the nineteenth century against another. These two "centuries" of course intersect, they both deploy their own metamorphoses, contradictions, and reversals. And so it is that, between two images of the singer, between the old gentleman praying in the cathedral and Simpleton's lamentation on the stage of the Bolshoi, Marker inserts another story of popes—the ferociously anticlerical scenes of *Happiness*—as well as another

meeting of centuries, men, and "religions": Medvekin's recollections of the Red Cavalry, where he served in the Cossack ranks under Boudienny with the later to be executed Jew Isaac Babel.

The fictional identification of the life of a communist filmmaker and the life of communism's land and century doesn't produce a linear narrative, and that in spite of the fact that Marker's six "letters" to Alexander Medvekin adhere, formally at least, to a chronological order. The first letter is about Tsarist Russia; the second about the first years of the Soviet Union; the third about the agitprop activities Medvekin stirred up with the epic of the film-train; the fourth about the triumph of Stalinism by way of the misadventures of *The New Moscow*; the fifth about Medvekin's death during the Perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union. But this neat chronology is confounded already in the first letter, which piles together all these ages. The first letter, in fact, organizes a different story of life and death, though this will only become explicit in the sixth letter, where we see images of Alexander Medvekin's real death, his living death while filming, in 1939, the enormous pageants in celebration of Stalin for a film entitled *Blossoming Youth*. Marker constructs his film in the interval between two deaths, one real, the other symbolic. Each episode, as Marker intimates with his polysemic title, is really a carefully constructed mixture of times, a pluralization of memory and fiction. There are, in the end, at least four Alexanders grouped under the one of the title. The visit to Medvekin's tomb is sidetracked by the scene of a crowd hurrying in the mud of the late-winter thaw to cover with flowers the tomb of a more illustrious Alexander, Tsar Alexander III. These images, like the images of the religious processions in Moscow and Kiev, are not simply the visual equivalent of Rimbaud's line "Society, and everything, is restored." The kinship between these two tombs is more than simply a synonym for buried hope and for the vindication of the old world. It determines, from the start, the entire narrative structure of the film. Marker doesn't try to show a linear transition from Tsarist Russia to the Revolution, and from its collapse to the restoration of old values. Rather, he throws three Russias into one present: the Russia of Nicholas II, of the Soviets, and of today. These three Russias are likewise three ages of the image: Tsarist Russia the age of photography and of the rich who parade without compunction before the poor; Soviet Russia the age of cinema and of the war of images; contemporary Russia the age of video and television.

Marker has already suggested all of this in one of the first images of the film, that of an officer in St. Petersburg in 1913 ordering the people with his imperious gestures to take off their hats and bow before the passing nobles.

We must make sure we don't misunderstand what Marker means when he says he wants us to remember this "fat man who orders the poor to bow to the rich." It's not that he wants us, metaphorically, to store this image of oppression that yesterday legitimated and today might "excuse" the Soviet Revolution. He wants us, literally, not to forget it; he wants us to pair this image of the great parading before the small with its counter-image: the enormous Soviet pageants that the small now declared great—gymnasts, children, kolkhozniks—put on for their "comrades" in the official gallery. Marker, however, is not just having a little fun by confounding those well-established temporal systems, the simple chronological order or the classical narrative told in flashback. He is working out a narrative structure that creates a memory in the present as the intertwining of two histories of the century. This becomes explicit when we meet, in the image of Ivan Kozlovski singing the part of Simpleton, the third Alexander: Alexander Sergueievitch Pushkin. But Alexander is, first and foremost, the name of the greatest of conquerors, the name of the Macedonian prince who ensured that history wouldn't forget him by subjugating ancient Greece and extending its borders to the furthest reaches of the known world. And it is the name of the illustrious corpse whose tomb explorers have been trying to find for millennia: it is, in other words, one "name of Alexander" that makes this learned history of homonyms incomplete, that refers the tomb-poem to the missing tomb that, perhaps, it always allegorizes.

That is how the "classical" story of fortune and misfortune, of ignorance and knowledge, that ties one man's life to the Soviet epic and catastrophe assumes the "Romantic" form of this narrative that inverts the "black soil of time," just as do those poems Osip Mandelstam wrote on the eve of the Revolution. Mandelstam had wanted to free our "century of clay" from the evil spells of the previous one and to give it a historical skeleton, and this explains the narrative structure of those poems where he interlaces the Soviet present and Greek mythology; the sacking of the Winter Palace and the sacking of Troy.<sup>2</sup> If the structure of Marker's "tomb" has become more complex, it is not because the means of signification of cinema are different from those of poetry, but because of the historicity of cinema itself. Cinema was born as an art out of Romantic poetics, was pre-shaped by it: as an art, it seems almost to have been designed for the metamorphoses of signifying forms that make it possible to construct memory as the interlacing of uneven temporalities and of heterogeneous regimes of the image. Cinema is also, in its artistic, technical, and social nature, a living metaphor of modern times. An inheritance from the nineteenth century

and a relationship between the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries, cinema combines our century's dual relationship to the previous century, the two legacies I alluded to above: Marx's century in Lenin's; Pushkin's and Dostoevsky's century in Stalin's. It is an art form whose principle, the union of conscious thought and unconscious perception, had been worked out in the final chapter of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, a good hundred years before the first public screenings. And it is also the crowning product of a century of scientific and technical research into how to effect the transition from the science of amusing illusions to the ability to use light to record movements hidden to the human eye. In Étienne Marey's day, cinema was still regarded as an instrument useful to the human sciences and to the search for scientific truth, both of which were contemporaneous with the age of scientific socialism. And although it might have seemed, when Alexander Medvedkin was born, that cinema had reached its final destination in the new industry of illusion and public entertainment, by the time he had grown of age, the powers of science and the powers of the image had joined hands once more, much as had the power of the new man, the communist and electric man: communist because electric, and electric because communist. In one fell swoop, writing with light became a practical instrument and the ideal metaphor for the union of the powers of illusion, of science, and of the people.

Cinema was the communist art, the art of the identity of science and utopia. In the 1920s, it wasn't only in the revolutionary Moscow of Vertov and Eisenstein, of Medvedkin and Dovzhenko, that the combinations of light and movement were chasing the attitudes and thoughts of the old-fashioned man; the same was happening in the aestheticized Paris of Canudo, Deltuc, and Epstein. Cinema, the crowning product of the nineteenth century, became the basis for the definitive break between that century and theirs. It was the kingdom of shadows destined to become a kingdom of light, a writing of movement that, like the railway and *with* it, could not but merge into the very movement of the revolution. In *The Last Bolshevik*, Marker tells the cinematographic history of cinema's double relationship to Sovietism. He suggests that it is possible to tell the history of the Soviet century through the fates of Soviet filmmakers, through the films they made, those they didn't make, and those they were obliged to make, because all of these attest to the common destiny of cinema and Sovietism. But there is also a more profound reason: the art of cinema is the metaphor, indeed the very cipher, for an idea of the century and of history that found its political incarnation in Sovietism. Marker's project, in its own way, mirrors Godard's in *Histoire(s)*

*du cinéma*, where Godard proposes to read the history of our century not by looking at its history, but by looking at the *stories*, or some of the *stories*, of the cinema, since cinema is not only contemporaneous with the century, but an integral part of its very "idea." Godard portrays the Soviet and the Hollywood dream factories as mirror images, he sees in Stare Marxism and industrialized cinema the same conflict between the two legacies inherited by the century. Of course, Godard's method and Marker's are quite different. Godard produces another form of the "poem of the poem" by using the resources of videographic writing to render the power of the blackboard and the power of pictorial montage identical on the screen. He sends the machine devoted to information into shock with his method of saturating images or zigzagging through them; he superimposes in the same "audio-visual" unit an image from one film, an image from a second film, the music from a third, a voice from a fourth, and words from a fifth; he complicates this intertwining further by using images from painting and by punctuating the whole thing with a commentary in the present. Each of his images and conjunctions of images is a treasure hunt: they open onto multiple paths and create a virtual space of indefinite connections and resonances. Marker favors a dialectical method instead. He composes a series of images (interviews, archival documents, clips from the classics of Soviet cinema and from propaganda films, scenes from the opera, virtual images, etc.) that he arranges, always in strict adherence to the cinematographic principles of montage, in order to define very specific moments in the relationship between the cinematographic "kingdom of shadows" and the "shadows of the [utopian] kingdom." While Godard gives us a smooth plane, Marker creates a memory we can scan. And yet he falls prey, like Godard but even more so, to an obvious paradox: he feels compelled to punctuate all these "images that speak for themselves," as well as the interlacing of series of images that make cinema into a meta-language and into a "poem of the poem," with an imperious voice-over commentary that tells us what it is that they "say."

Here we have, in a nutshell, the problem of documentary fiction in particular and of cinematographic fiction in general. Cinema's first utopia was that it was a language—syntax, architecture, symphony—better equipped than the language of words to embrace bodies in movement. This utopia has always had to confront, during the silent and talking eras, the limits of its capacity to speak and all the returns of the "old" language. "Documentary" cinema in particular has always been caught between the ambiguities of *cinéma-vérité*, the dialectical turns of montage, and the

imperialism of the voice of the master, usually *off*, that either lines the unfolding of heterogeneous images with its melodic continuity, or gives a step by step explanation of the meaning of the images' silent presence or elegant arabesques. Marker, the dialectical pedagogue, rarely fails to underline for us the evidence that the image "itself" provides of what our memory tends to forget and our thought resists conceptualizing, or to stress the insignificance or ambivalence of the image when left to its own devices and the concomitant need of making all of its possible readings explicit. *The Last Bolshevik* is a fiction of memory, of the interwoven memory of communism and cinema. Marker, however, cannot resist the temptation of making the fiction of memory he constructs with artistic means into a "lesson on memory" and on the duties of memory. That is what this voice is constantly spelling out for the audience: don't forget this image, be sure to connect it to this other image, look at that image a little closer, reread what there is to read in this image. The director's visual demonstration of Eisenstein's artifice, the alternating montage of clips from *Battleship Potemkin* and shots of pedestrians today who descend those steps more slowly and faster at the same time, has been anticipated and made redundant by the professor's explanation. And yet, it would be difficult to read it without the commentary. The "documentary" always plays with how the images and their montage, which should speak all by themselves, have to be referred to the authority of a voice that secures meaning at the price of weakening the images. Undoubtedly, this tension is at its peak in the case of a historical and documentary fiction that is at the same time a cinematographic film about cinema's historical powers. As for the fiction of the "letter" addressed to the dead director, it is the means of ensuring the undivided authority of this voice.

The issues raised here go beyond the already difficult relationship between pedagogy and art and touch the heart of the Romantic poetics that cinema belongs to as the conjunction of the power of speech accorded to mute things and the power of self-reflection accorded to the work. We all know that Hegel radically contested this claim in his lectures on aesthetics. As he sees it, the power of the form, the "thought-outside-itself" of the work, and the power of self-reflection, the "thought-in-itself" of conceptual thought, are mutually opposed. The drive to identify them results either in the work being reduced to the demonstration of a specific virtuosity, an individual signature, or in its being caught in the endless symbolist game between form and meaning where one side is never more than the other's echo. When cinema presents itself as a cinema of cinema and identifies this cinema of cinema

with the reading of a century, it runs the same risk: it finds itself caught between the infinite referral of images and sounds, of forms and meaning, characteristic of Godard's style, and the power of the commentator's voice in Marker. Marker's latest films show his awareness of this aporia and his attempts to break free from it. *Level Five* is a particularly good example in this respect. The film deliberately breaks with the equilibrium characteristic of a documentary in its construction of a fiction of memory around the battle of Okinawa and around the bone-chilling, collective suicide the conquering Japanese officers imposed upon the colonized of Okinawa, forcing them to ape Japanese codes of honor. With a computer, Marker generates the images of the past in the form of a video game; then, using the dialectical principles of montage, he confronts the computer-generated images with present-day images and with the voices of the people interviewed. Marker has made of this computer a fictional character: memory, tomb, and game board that allow Marker to combine the resources of video game with the strategy of Japanese generals and of the game go. As it happens, the game go is the emblem of another film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, by Alan Resnais, who also directed the "documentary" *Night and Fog*, and the "fiction" *Hiroshima, mon amour*. *Level Five* is a sort of computer-age version of *Hiroshima, mon amour* in which the two lovers have been substituted by a singular couple: the computer and the woman who uses it to talk to her beloved who's gone missing. We must not miss the very particular status of this fictional lover. She is, essentially, the fictionalization of a poetic function—that of the voice of the commentator. Marker represents this voice in *Level Five*, where it is not *off*, masculine, and imperious, but fictional and feminine. But he does so under a very specific mode: the "heroine" herself, Laura, has to step out of the cinematographic fiction, much like her namesake, the heroine of Preeninger's film, who steps out of the painting to become a living being. Nor should we forget that *Laura's* fame is closely associated with the opening sentence of the film, "I'll never forget the afternoon Laura died," a sentence that turns out to be spoken by a dead man about a living being.

Thus is the fiction of memory redoubled to infinity and the documentary revealed to be, more than ever, the actualization of the Romantic poetics that rejects every aporia of the "end of art." *Level Five* identifies the memory of one of the most monstrous crimes of the century and of history with a fiction about the fiction of fiction. But the fictional reduction of sense in *Level Five* is matched by the material impoverishment of the image. The aura-less unreality of the computer-generated image rubs off on the images of various origins Marker assembles in the film. The reduction of levels of

fiction and sense complements the plurality of videographic space. The tension between the “images that speak for themselves” and the words that make them speak is, when all is said and done, the tension between the idea of the image and imaged matter. The real issue has nothing to do with the technical apparatus, but is still a matter of poetics. Godard too turns to video, but he achieves the inverse end: he leads the joyous disorder of words and images back to the glory of the icon. By assembling fragments from the fictions of an entire century, Godard eternalizes the spiritual as well as plastic kingdom of cinematographic shadows, the heirs of pictorial figures. With Marker, and here he shows his kinship with installation artists, it is instead the image as an operation of assembling and splitting asunder that affirms itself to the detriment of the material splendor of the kingdom of shadows. At a time when the balance sheets of the century and of the revolutions in image-making technique are being weighed, the “poem of the poem” finds two figures so close together, and yet so radically opposed. One tomb against another, one poem against another.<sup>3</sup>

#### NOTES

1. The French title is *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* [Alexander's Tomb], which explains why Rancière plays throughout the chapter on the word “tomb” and the name “Alexander.”—Trans.
2. Cf. Jacques Rancière, “From Wordsworth to Mandelstam: The Transports of Liberty,” in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (California: Stanford University Press, 2004).
3. I would like to thank Sylvie Astric for drawing my attention to this film and to documentary fiction in general during a program of the BPI (Bibliothèque publique d'information) she organized at the Pompidou Center.

#### CHAPTER II

### A Fable without a Moral

#### Godard, Cinema, (Hi)stories

*Histoire(s) du cinéma*: Godard's title, with its double meaning and variable reach, perfectly sums up the complex artistic apparatus he develops to present the following thesis: the history of cinema is that of a missed date with the history of its century. Cinema missed the date because it misunderstood its own historicity, the history it had already announced in virtual images. This misunderstanding is rooted in the fact that cinema misunderstood the power of its images, its inheritance from the pictorial tradition, which it agreed to subject to scripted “stories,” heirs of the literary tradition of plot and characters. The thesis thus counterposes two types of “(hi)stories”: the stories the film industry illustrated with images with an eye to cashing in on the collective imaginary, and the virtual history told by these same images. The style of montage Godard develops for *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is designed to show the history announced by a century of films, but whose power slipped through the fingers of their filmmakers, who subjected the “life” of images to the immanent “death” of the text. Godard takes the films these filmmakers made and makes with them the films they didn't make. This calls for a two-step process: the first recaptures the images from their subjection to the stories they were used to tell, and the second rearranges them into other stories. The project, simple as its description may sound, requires a set of operations that singularly complicate our notions of image and history, operations that ultimately invert the thesis that cinema betrayed itself and its century and demonstrate, instead, the radical innocence of the art of moving images.

Let's start at the beginning. Not of Godard's series, but of his intervention, which is to say, let's turn directly to the section entitled *The Control of the Universe*, particularly to that part of it offset by the subheading “Introduction to the Method of Alfred Hitchcock,” a homage to Paul Valéry's *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*. This entire episode is devoted to an illustration