



*Sans Soleil / Sunless Part II* - Chris Marker

He wrote me that the Japanese secret—what Lévi-Strauss had called the poignancy of things—implied the faculty of communion with things, of entering into them, of being them for a moment. It was normal that in their turn they should be like us: perishable and immortal.

He wrote me: animism is a familiar notion in Africa, it is less often applied in Japan. What then shall we call this diffuse belief, according to which every fragment of creation has its invisible counterpart? When they build a factory or a skyscraper, they begin with a ceremony to appease the god who owns the land. There is a ceremony for brushes, for abacuses, and even for rusty needles. There's one on the 25th of September for the repose of the soul of broken dolls. The dolls are piled up in the temple of Kiyomitsu consecrated to Kannon—the goddess of compassion—and are burned in public.

I look to the participants. I think the people who saw off the kamikaze pilots had the same look on their faces.

He wrote me that the pictures of Guinea-Bissau ought to be accompanied by music from the Cape Verde islands. That would be our contribution to the unity dreamed of by Amílcar Cabral.

Why should so small a country—and one so poor—interest the world? They did what they could, they freed themselves, they chased out the Portuguese. They traumatized the Portuguese army to such an extent that it gave rise to a movement that overthrew the dictatorship, and led one for a moment to believe in a new revolution in Europe.

Who remembers all that? History throws its empty bottles out the window.

This morning I was on the dock at Pidjiguity, where everything began in 1959, when the first victims of the struggle were killed. It may be as difficult to recognize Africa in this leaden fog as it is to recognize struggle in the rather dull activity of tropical longshoremen.

Rumor has it that every third world leader coined the same phrase the morning after independence: "Now the real problems start."

Cabral never got a chance to say it: he was assassinated first. But the problems started, and went on, and are still going on. Rather unexciting problems for revolutionary romanticism: to work, to produce, to distribute, to overcome postwar exhaustion, temptations of power and privilege.

Ah well... after all, history only tastes bitter to those who expected it to be sugar coated.

My personal problem is more specific: how to film the ladies of Bissau? Apparently, the magical function of the eye was working against me there. It was in the marketplaces of Bissau and Cape Verde that I could stare at them again with equality: I see her, she saw me, she knows that I see her, she drops me her glance, but just at an angle where it is still possible to act as though it was not addressed to me, and at the end the real glance, straightforward, that lasted a twenty-fourth of a second, the length of a film frame.

All women have a built-in grain of indestructibility. And men's task has always been to make them realize it as late as possible. African men are just as good at this task as others. But after a close look at African women I wouldn't necessarily bet on the men.

He told me the story of the dog Hachiko. A dog waited every day for his master at the station. The master died, and the dog didn't know it, and he continued to wait all his life. People were moved and brought him food. After his death a statue was erected in his honor, in front of which sushi and rice cakes are still placed so that the faithful soul of Hachiko will never go hungry.

Tokyo is full of these tiny legends, and of mediating animals. The Mitsukoshi lion stands guard on the frontiers of what was once the empire of Mr. Okada—a great collector of French paintings, the man who hired the Château of Versailles to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of his department stores.

In the computer section I've seen young Japanese exercising their brain muscles like the young Athenians at the Palaistra. They have a war to win. The history books of the future will perhaps place the battle of integrated circuits at the same level as Salamis and Agincourt, but willing to honor the unfortunate adversary by leaving other fields to him: men's fashions this season are placed under the sign of John Kennedy.

Like an old votive turtle stationed in the corner of a field, every day he saw Mr. Akao—the president of the Japanese Patriotic Party—trumpeting from the heights of his rolling balcony against the international communist plot. He wrote me: the automobiles of the extreme right with their flags and megaphones are part of Tokyo's landscape—Mr. Akao is their focal point. I think he'll have his statue like the dog Hachiko, at this crossroads from which he departs only to go and prophesy on the battlefields. He was at Narita in the sixties. Peasants fighting against the building of an airport on their land, and Mr. Akao denouncing the hand of Moscow behind everything that moved.

Yurakucho is the political space of Tokyo. Once upon a time I saw bonzes pray for peace in Vietnam there. Today young right-wing activists protest against the annexation of the Northern Islands by the Russians. Sometimes they are answered that the commercial relations of Japan with the abominable occupier of the North are a thousand times better than with the American ally who is always whining about economic aggression. Ah, nothing is simple.

On the other sidewalk the Left has the floor. The Korean Catholic opposition leader Kim Dae Jung—kidnapped in Tokyo in '73 by the South Korean gestapo—is threatened with the death sentence. A group has begun a hunger strike. Some very young militants are trying to gather signatures in his support.

I went back to Narita for the birthday of one of the victims of the struggle. The demo was unreal. I had the impression of acting in Brigadoon, of waking up ten years later in the midst of the same players, with the same blue lobsters of police, the same helmeted adolescents, the same banners and the same slogan: “Down with the airport.” Only one thing has been added: the airport precisely. But with its single runway and the barbed wire that chokes it, it looks more besieged than victorious.

My pal Hayao Yamaneko has found a solution: if the images of the present don't change, then change the images of the past.

He showed me the clashes of the sixties treated by his synthesizer: pictures that are less deceptive he says—with the conviction of a fanatic—than those you see on television. At least they proclaim themselves to be what they are: images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality. Hayao calls his machine's world the 'zone,' an homage to Tarkovsky.

What Narita brought back to me, like a shattered hologram, was an intact fragment of the generation of the sixties. If to love without illusions is still to love, I can say that I loved it. It was a generation that often exasperated

me, for I didn't share its utopia of uniting in a common struggle those who revolt against poverty and those who revolt against wealth. But it screamed out that gut reaction that better adjusted voices no longer knew how, or no longer dared to utter.

I met peasants there who had come to know themselves through the struggle. Concretely it had failed. At the same time, all they had won in their understanding of the world could have been won only through the struggle.

As for the students, some massacred each other in the mountains in the name of revolutionary purity, while others had studied capitalism so thoroughly to fight it that they now provide it with its best executives. Like everywhere else the movement had its postures and its careerists, including, and there are some, those who made a career of martyrdom. But it carried with it all those who said, like Ché Guevara, that they “trembled with indignation every time an injustice is committed in the world.” They wanted to give a political meaning to their generosity, and their generosity has outlasted their politics. That's why I will never allow it to be said that youth is wasted on the young.

The youth who get together every weekend at Shinjuku obviously know that they are not on a launching pad toward real life; but they are life, to be eaten on the spot like fresh doughnuts.

It's a very simple secret. The old try to hide it, and not all the young know it. The ten-year-old girl who threw her friend from the thirteenth floor of a building after having tied her hands, because she'd spoken badly of their class team, hadn't discovered it yet. Parents who demand an increase in the number of special telephone lines devoted to the prevention of children's suicides find out a little late that they have kept it all too well. Rock is an international language for spreading the secret. Another is peculiar to Tokyo.

For the takenoko, twenty is the age of retirement. They are baby Martians. I go to see them dance every Sunday in the park at Yoyogi. They want people to look at them, but they don't seem to notice that people do. They live in a parallel time sphere: a kind of invisible aquarium wall separates them from the crowd they attract, and I can spend a whole afternoon contemplating the little takenoko girl who is learning—no doubt for the first time—the customs of her planet.

Beyond that, they wear dog tags, they obey a whistle, the Mafia rackets them, and with the exception of a single group made up of girls, it's always a boy who commands.

One day he writes to me: description of a dream. More and more my dreams find their settings in the department stores of Tokyo, the subterranean tunnels that extend them and run parallel to the city. A face appears, disappears... a trace is found, is lost. All the folklore of dreams is so much in its place that the next day when I am awake I realize that I continue to seek in the basement labyrinth the presence concealed the night before. 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. It might suffice to pick up any one of the telephones that are lying around to hear a familiar voice, or the beating of a heart, Sei Shonagon's for example.

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.

He told me about the January light on the station stairways. He told me that this city ought to be deciphered like a musical score; one could get lost in the great orchestral masses and the accumulation of details. And that created the cheapest image of Tokyo: overcrowded, megalomaniac, inhuman. He thought he saw more subtle cycles there: rhythms, clusters of faces caught sight of in passing—as different and precise as groups of instruments. Sometimes the musical comparison coincided with plain reality; the Sony stairway in the Ginza was itself an instrument, each step a note. All of it fit together like the voices of a somewhat complicated fugue, but it was enough to take hold of one of them and hang on to it.

The television screens for example; all by themselves they created an itinerary that sometimes wound up in unexpected curves. It was sumo season, and the fans who came to watch the fights in the very chic showrooms on the Ginza were the poorest of the Tokyo poors. So poor that they didn't even have a TV set. He saw them come, the dead souls of Namida-bashi he had drunk saké with one sunny dawn—how many seasons ago was that now?

He wrote me: even in the stalls where they sell electronic spare parts—that some hipsters use for jewelry—there is in the score that is Tokyo a particular staff, whose rarity in Europe condemns me to a real acoustic exile. I mean the music of video games. They are fitted into tables. You can drink, you can lunch, and go on playing. They open onto the street. By listening to them you can play from memory.

I saw these games born in Japan. I later met up with them again all over the world, but one detail was different. At the beginning the game was

familiar: a kind of anti-ecological beating where the idea was to kill off—as soon as they showed the white of their eyes—creatures that were either prairie dogs or baby seals, I can't be sure which. Now here's the Japanese variation. Instead of the critters, there's some vaguely human heads identified by a label: at the top the chairman of the board, in front of him the vice president and the directors, in the front row the section heads and the personnel manager. The guy I filmed—who was smashing up the hierarchy with an enviable energy—confided in me that for him the game was not at all allegorical, that he was thinking very precisely of his superiors. No doubt that's why the puppet representing the personnel manager has been clubbed so often and so hard that it's out of commission, and why it had to be replaced again by a baby seal.

Hayao Yamaneko invents video games with his machine. To please me he puts in my best beloved animals: the cat and the owl. He claims that electronic texture is the only one that can deal with sentiment, memory, and imagination. Mizoguchi's Arsène Lupin for example, or the no less imaginary burakumin. How one claim to show a category of Japanese who do not exist? Yes they're there; I saw them in Osaka hiring themselves out by the day, sleeping on the ground. Ever since the middle ages they've been doomed to grubby and back-breaking jobs. But since the Meiji era, officially nothing sets them apart, and their real name—eta—is a taboo word, not to be pronounced. They are non-persons. How can they be shown, except as non-images?

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. For the moment, the inseparable philosophy of our time is contained in the Pac-Man. I didn't know when I was sacrificing all my hundred yen coins to him that he was going to conquer the world. Perhaps because he is the most perfect graphic metaphor of man's fate. He puts into true perspective the balance of power between the individual and the environment. And he tells us soberly that though there may be honor in carrying out the greatest number of victorious attacks, it always comes a cropper.