

***Immémorial* (1996 - 2011) An immersive memory mechanism**

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Abstract

Immémorial is an immersive artistic work. Owing to the technical process of spatialization via eight points and sound trajectories and the four-sided presentation of the images, *Immémorial* projects the viewer into the heart of an environment, which is divided into 26 ambiances based on poignant experiences, in order to awaken long-term memory. The discovery of our senses, our earliest emotions, our frustrations and our desire is treated as evidence through audio-video case-studies; reconstituting them like a nature study: analyzed, identified, and quantified... a typology of the shared places of our memory, defining their "natural" or "cultural" characteristics, the extension by fiction. *Immémorial* deals with the functioning dynamics of our memory and its anticipatory prolongation through our imagination and the network of meaning that these functions continuously weave. Conversely, the structure of the computer language used for distributing the video image and sound spatialization guide the construction of the narrative and the return of the memorial experience in the device. Immersive experiences pull us out of a reality too complex to grasp, and evoking the real they invite us to focus on a detail, a micro feature. This is the world narrowed in the heart of an enclosed space, a metaphor for a major societal issue: Can we finally see the world as a plurality? Can we think outside of one's body, from other bodies, from a common body? Can we escape the limits of our physical body in the body-friendly device, as a network, extended by the machine, become system...

Keywords: Memory, Multimedia, Perception moods, Semiology, Neurosciences

Introduction

In the multimedia project *Immémorial*, undertaken fifteen years ago, we find sequences of animated images (photos, 8mm film, video...) and sound sequences which deal with memory, constituting a taxonomy that establishes the sensory conditions that result in the viewer experiencing resurfacing memories.

One summer, I filmed my grandmother who was losing her memory because of Alzheimer's disease. I have always been obsessed by my difficulty to remember numbers, names and titles... I have very few memories of my childhood. I began to work with this material, to take pictures of the places where I have lived. I tried to expand out of the frame... some of my memories reappeared. Simultaneously I asked elderly people to tell me stories from their lives. Memory is a curious material; it is like a reconstituted space, a reinvented time. Concerning childhood, others are the ones who tell us who we were, and we have no choice but to believe them because we don't have anything else. (From the interview with Pascale Weber by Gabriel Soucheyre for Vidéoformes)

Immémorial is a work in progress that doesn't really deal with the autobiographic story, even fictionalized, but with the process of creation of our memories or obsessive images, and with the way we imagine. Why does this image stick in our memory but not another? Why do we forget or suddenly remember an event, a number a detail? How can a parent forget his own children because of Alzheimer's disease?

The pictures of the film have been worked and reworked, reorganized, re-filmed, and re-edited. The audio recordings have been reworked as well, especially with the considerable help of Euphonia (a studio of sound creation) and of the GMEM (a National Studio of musical creation), both of them based in Marseille. It was firstly a series of short videos I presented in a few festivals; then it became a compilation within a 2^{1/2} hour film that was structured in 4 parts. Its duration was compressed and “densified” to 30 minutes with repeated overlaying and a multiscreen composition. After that it transformed into a series of 4 mechanisms that were projected in enclosed space, with a more and more complex system of unpredictable and/or interactive treatment of part of the data. The technical supports used for these works act as a metaphor, a mirror for our cognitive memory, our imaginative processes.

Immémorial, because operating in the social field, calls into question the language, the elaboration of a multimedia figurative language and its relations with other significant systems. This “language” assures precise forms of social cohesion, bound to myth as Lévi-Strauss has been analyzed, or to self-consciousness. Julia Kristeva took an interest in the “dynamic process in which signs incorporate or change meaning”¹. To do so, the writer examined the Poetic language because according to her, Poetry “breaks the inertia of language habits”². Poetry complicates things...

1- Memory and identity functions

Immémorial is principally a project for exploring and reconstructing memory. It deals with the relation between Memory and Imagination in the construction of our identities. When I created my first videos, I noticed I couldn’t help but consciously mixing some elements of fiction with my real memories. I wondered if it was a way to protect my intimacy or if it was not another way to reach a secret part of what constitutes my identity. It seemed to me at this moment that only a Work in progress and unrelenting vigilance could nourish this quest of identity and memory process. Montaigne qualifies his *Essays* as a “book consubstantial with its author”. He wonders “Did I waste my time when reporting about myself so continually, with such curiosity?” he answers “I do not paint being: I paint passing”³. In the first two versions of *Immémorial*, it seemed to me I couldn’t spare a Practice in self-portrait and fictionalization of individual history when dealing with the phenomenon of memory. Moreover, it appeared that collective and individual fates were inextricably connected, that it was maybe the only way to go beyond the simple autobiographic narrative.

In 2010, then again in 2011, I met with Prof. Dr. Alain Berthoz, specialist in cognitive physiology at the Collège de France in order to understand why and to what degree our functions of imagination and memory were interrelated in our brain.

Today, what is extraordinary is that we are discovering in neurosciences, by brain imaging techniques for example, that it is the same structures of the brain which are involved when we try to remember a past event—a memory of an adventure, a dramatic or happy situation—and the structures which are involved when we ask for example a person to imagine a future scenario.

¹ KRISTEVA, Júlia (1969), “For a semiology of paragrammes”: *Semeiotike : Research for a Semanalysis*, USA, Seuil, p.117 (Translated by P.W.)

² KRISTEVA, Júlia (1969), “For a semiology of paragrammes”: *Semeiotike : Research for a Semanalysis*, USA, Seuil, p.117 (Translated by P.W.)

³ MONTAIGNE Michel de, “Regret “: *The Essays*, Volume III, Chapter II. (Translated by P.W.)

scientific, technical, technological developments. Therefore it may be criticized for neglecting the presuppositions and the context in which the structure is formalized.

The object of *Immémorial* cannot be limited to bringing out the structure or to reconstituting memory narratives by a work of representation and collection of visual or sound elements which would have a strong significant, emotional impact; I cannot talk about the past without forgetting that I speak about past days from my short-lived present viewpoint. My inclusion in the present forces me to conform the system of signs—multimedia but also technical and technological—which I have elaborated. If this connection to the mainstream gives my project coherence, I should never lose sight of the fact that nothing is less definitive than a multimedia object dealing mainly with the updating of our memory and with our identity process.

According to Roland Barthes, the “sign”⁵ must ceaselessly divide, split, transform itself, be invented and overflow its meaning. All the more so because it is the tool and the material of every restitution and every interpretation. As well, it seemed to me with the third version of *Immémorial*, that the truth of the memory was not content-related but could be found in the manner of reorganizing, assembling the elements: an interactive narrative composed of “narrative segments”. The spectator has to assemble these “signs”. He perceives and interprets them differently depending on their order. Sequences can be cut short or stopped if the spectator chooses to: our memory is not a “hard disk”, but a dynamic function, like a meaningful network.

Indeed, Julia Kristeva considers “language as a dynamic system of relations”⁶. “To describe the meaningful functioning of poetic language is to describe potentially infinitely the mechanism of the junctions”⁷. For Julia Kristeva, any literary writing arises from a correlation of texts, words, and images that the writer appropriates by transforming them; she describes here exactly what took place in the construction of *Immémorial* when reworking movies such as family movies, and amassing images, sounds, testimonies, sometimes radio reports to confront this corpus with present, widely used representations, until something emerges evoking my own memory.

Computer time is out of biological time, irrelevant to present, past or future. It is something happening, however if a source of energy is available (if the computer is on and connected), it is digital image time, subject to the computer clock, to an organized protocol. The patches (little programs generated by Max MSP Jitter) created for the versions 3 to 6 are only inscribed in continuance because I present them in such an order. But they are Independent programs, which could work simultaneously on different computers, without us noticing the third version as previous to the sixth. Patches have no memory or history. Events are not involved with a Timeline. When I start the program, I activate the video, audio and text, which are always set off in random order. Edmond Couchot calls this time u-chronic. I imagine memory’s time is also u-chronic.

Immémorial, ever since the version #3, uses a more and more complex mechanism of random and interactive treatment of data. Therefore I have to separate the audio from the video to construct databases. To be able to mix them in different ways, I also have to split different assembly plans. For that reason, I have to re-edit a large part of my video and audio that the standard-process of the software obliged me to overwrite. The technical resources of this

⁵ BARTHES, Roland, *Empire of signs*, originally published in 1970, Albert Skira ed., US edition in 1982, Hill and Wang ed. (Translated by P.W.)

⁶ KRISTEVA, Júlia (1969), “For a semiology of paragrammes”: *Semeiotike : Research for a Semanalysis*, USA, Seuil, p. 113. (Translated by P.W.)

⁷ KRISTEVA, Júlia (1969), “For a semiology of paragrammes”: *Semeiotike : Research for a Semanalysis*, USA, Seuil, p. 119. (Translated by P.W.)

artwork shouldn't be yet considered as a means of turning away the usual cinema process but as a metaphor, a mirror of the memorial and imaginative cognitive process. This had already been discovered and described by Montaigne:

I have to adapt my history to the situation. I might change, not only of destiny, but also of intention. This is operated by different and changing accidents and indecisive imagination, and when it devolves just the opposite; that either I am another my-self, or that I refer to subjects by other circumstances and views; So much that I unfortunately contradict myself, but as Demade said, I do not contradict the truth. (Michel de Montaigne, "Regret": *The Essays*, Volume III, Chapter II, beginning).



Figure 2 – “Non-historical places of the memory” (*Immemorial* #3): memories or memory-models lists (©Immemorial, PascaleWeber)

2- Different time scales within the same narrative structure: Sequencing experiments with UST⁸ research at the MIM⁹

⁸ UST: Temporal Semiotic Units

⁹ MIM: Music and Computer Laboratory of Marseille. The musician-researchers of the Music and Computer Laboratory of Marseille, founded by Marcel Frémiot, have developed an original listening practice, consisting of identifying a succession of USTs in a piece of music.

I understood that some time scales that help me to structure the filming of my artwork were foreign, even incompatible:

- Speech time scale (saying a word, a sentence, a secret, an anecdote; to express, to tell, to describe, to think aloud);
- Picture time scale (fixed image, computer animation, video screenshots: slow or fast actions, furtively filmed or staged);
- Mechanism time scale (media organization and broadcasting programs: Whether it is subdued to a continuous and linear, even simultaneous time-line, like in the first two versions, or whether it results from autonomous patch connections and relays, like in the further versions);
- Iconographic arrangement time scale (continuous all-over the surface, with overlapping and inlay effects or picture-division with breaks and split-screen, “discrete” spatial distribution and zoning).

The MIM has established a UST typology (a relatively stable list of 19 USTs). The USTs are a kind of building block of musical meaning that the musician-researchers locate and clarify during sessions of collective acousmatic¹⁰ listening. A complete piece of music can be analyzed by this UST approach, which is interesting because it is based on the understanding and the collective analysis of a musical work. The MIM has been hoping for some time to apply this technique of collective perception and analysis to video films.

As a resident artist at the MIM in 2010-2011, I joined the group of researchers, expecting that this practice—when it was applied to video—would give me the opportunity to distinguish a synchronic approach (collective, considering the context, emotions, many experiments) and a diachronic approach (more personal and continuous, in relation with personal history.) Moreover the principles of segmentation and articulation of short semiotic units bring us back to language and narrative: to cut, to record and to compile video time-spaces obliges us to think about the place and the role of narration in the practice of experimental video. What kind of relations do semantic and semiotic have in an audiovisual production? What minimum audio-visual semantic and semiotic units shall we use to organize a pre-editing, to structure a narrative clip?

We analyzed the role of language in video duration perception in an experiment we carried out through several sessions of segmenting “the Cellar”, (4mn 45) a video clip from *Immémorial*. Ever since my first work session at the MIM, I thought intuitively that the *Immémorial* film material would resist segmentation. I thought it would be difficult to segment the film because of the sporadic voice-over intervention, which gives the film a particular rhythm and which guides the film flow most of the time: the voice-over orders in a certain way the film segmentation. This is the reason why, I created for one of the 26 video clips, a second version with the same pictures and the same audio mood but without voice-over. We analysed and segmented “The Cellar” several times during the year: with no voice-over, with the voice and listening attentively to it, with the voice-over but focusing on image and audio mood, trying as much as possible, to perceive the voice as one element among others.

¹⁰ Acousmatic refers to a sound that one hears without seeing the causes behind it (Schaeffer 1966). Schaeffer defined the acousmatic listening experience as everything within the field of hearing.

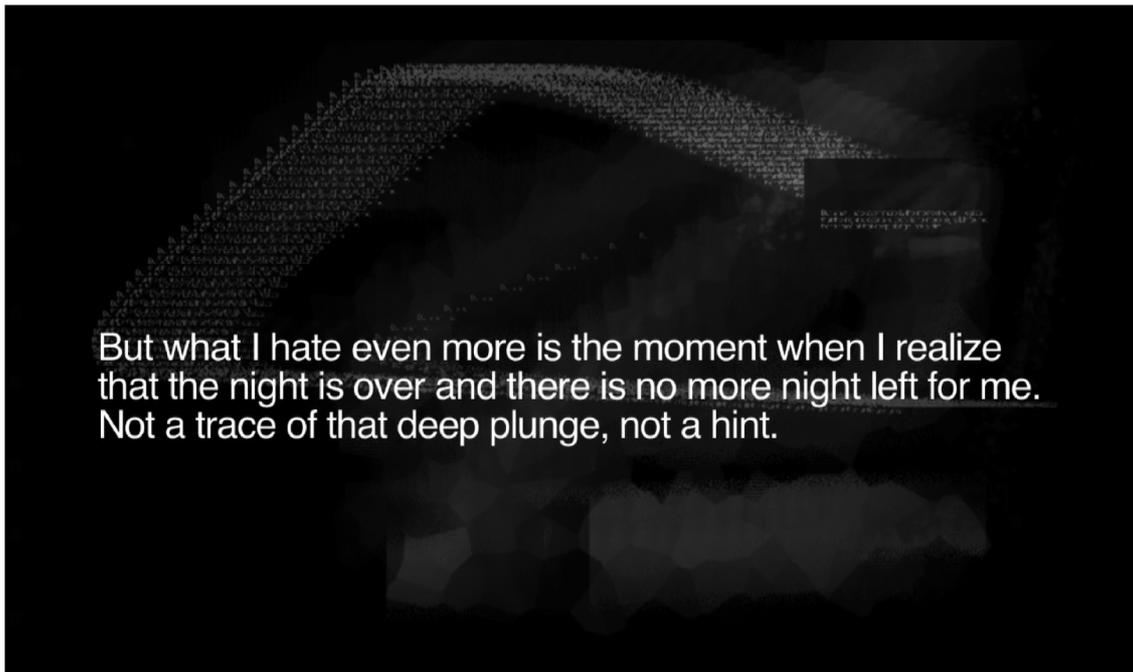


Figure 3 – *Immémorial* (#5): screenshot of “speech time” (©Immémorial, PascaleWeber)

Exercise 1

During the segmentation of “The Cellar” with no voice, next to the time indications we noted signs referring to the progression and the duration of time in a given segment. We could qualify the time progression as an event (or series of events), statement or process (increasing or decreasing). Going back to the video, we had to verify the similarities of the different individual segmentations. A collective analysis of the film with the voice-over took place a few weeks later, in the same conditions.

Observation 1:

When listening the voice-over, I can’t consider my own temporal perception. Caught up in the narrative, I’m in the progression of the text, which is different from the duration of the image, the music or their multimedia association. I can’t be in these two different times simultaneously, the image and sound progression on one hand and the language progression on the other hand. The voice has a tone, a musicality, but if I take an active interest in what it means to me, I’m no longer able to discern the visual, audio and temporal characteristics of the film. The researchers don’t notice any increased or contradictory meaning, but input is overshadowed by other input which covers, contaminates and devours. We evoke a phenomenon of attention pumping. There is no information increase even if there is media increase.

What is the relationship between perception, understanding, and the meaning we give to what we perceive? Maybe these functions (perception, understanding, meaning, interpretation) do not evolve simultaneously but in succession. Does a cognitive function, bound with understanding, analysis, and interpretation, systematically influence perception, imagination and memory functions? Do two different approaches exist (one connected to the power of speech the other connected to perception) which take turns and inform us at different and complementary levels? How do these different functions register in our memory creating our consciousness and general understanding at different levels? My role as an artist is not to answer such questions but to explore this phenomenon (and to invite spectators to do so).

Observation 2:

The members of the MIM noticed at the end of the viewing without voice that even though the story wasn't as clear, they had decoded something in the film, which turns them inward, focused on their own sensations. J-P.M. wondered if his perception was bound with the sensory, perceptible, cognitive experience he imagined sharing with the muted narrator. After viewing the second version with the voice-over, we made the decision to make two successive segmentations for this version: one focusing the attention on the sound, the music (except speech-times) and the image; another focusing on the voice and what it is saying.

Observation 3:

N.B. noticed that the film reception is largely inferred—more influenced by its title "The Cellar" than even the voice-over. Even before the first pictures of the film, as soon as the title appears, images of his own grand-parents' cellar overlap and overshadow the frame. The title influences temporal perception because of the viewer's involuntary search for indications within the image that reassure him in his own representation of a cellar.

An old brochure appears on the screen, on which N.B. read the word "Calorstat"; it nevertheless caught his attention. It seems our mind gives priority to recognizing elements before it discovers new ones. We look at what we know, our attention is snatched by what we have already perceived. J-P.M. emphasized noticing "it is impossible not to hear such words as 'Mother', 'Sequestration'... or 'Sticky'". Can we perceive without being captured by the meaning, without being ensnared. Doesn't our perception always operate in exactly this way: continuously alert to traces of meaning?

Exercise 2

We decided to analyze the film, focusing our attention on the speech, then focusing our attention on times without the voice.

Observation 4:

According to E.H.: "it seems that we don't consider the same details and images when we listen carefully to what the character says as when we don't listen". More precisely, when we do really listen to the voice, E.H. spotted far fewer images than when she abandoned herself to the film, not paying any particular attention to what the woman was saying. In general the voice leaves us in suspense or saturates the general attention, decreasing the visual concentration.

The voice seems to build a sort of space-time continuum. When paying no particular attention to the voice-over, I segmented the film by noticing principally progressions and statements, whereas when attentive to the voice I was able to notice events only. Curiously, the time indications are the same. That is, in the first showing, a time indication would be considered as the beginning of a progression or a statement before evolving into another type of procession (lead by a perceptive change: visual, colored, iconic, sound, mood, rhythm, or the nature of the information...). In the second showing, these same time clues would be interpreted as events or breaks. Globally in the second approach, the elements of perception and of meaning look like "discrete objects" and do not vary smoothly, but have distinct, separate values, and as P. F. insisted on, it doesn't register in the continuance. Time speech is in the best case rhythmical, index-linked, carried by salient visual and audio objects which succeed in leading the voice-over.

We all admit that the voice accentuates the narrative elements found in the image and the sound; that it's supported by these elements and their illustrative ability, to the detriment of the rest of the visual and the soundtrack. This happens especially to the detriment of both a global

perception of information, and maybe even of a globally raised awareness of perception/emotion. For example we cannot identify long time-spans anymore. The sensory data is becoming discrete. According to J-P. M., pictures and sounds congregate around what is told. Words emerging from the sentence are making sense by themselves in isolation by meaning crystallizing and monopolizing. The word goes on; it acts as a gravitational center. The system of *Immémorial* is also immersive in various ways and at multiple levels (visual, sound, spoken and spatial).

3- Passage from a logic of saturation by accumulation to a logic of models

In *Immémorial #4*, I took an interest in the progression of time in the process of making a video film. Designed to be presented on a mono-screen, this version makes possible the simultaneous display of the film in the background (25 images per second on the same surface and using the persistence of vision) and the inset display of the same images overlapping throughout the background, a succession of labels, building a kind of tunnel of images. I wanted everyone to be able to enter into the duration of the film and to be faced with the duality of the narrative time and the time of the audio-visual object.



Figure 4- At the bottom of the screen, the buttons allow us to: I- start the program and the interactive play of the video /II- pause by freezing the image on the screen /III- temporarily erase the tunnel of pictures and make it reappear /IV- read the title of the clip being viewed. At the top we find the titles of the last video films, they squeeze and crush together on the left of the screen. (©Immémorial#4, PascaleWeber)

When the spectator clicks on a compartment (on a point or a title), a video clip starts. The clip stops if he clicks on another compartment to begin another film. These titles and points are semi-visible. The video is displayed simultaneously in the background and image by image on superimposed frames of the film. This second display, which I call the “tunnel” of images, draws unpredictable forms and is erased when advancing, leaving the only last minute of video on the screen. When the spectator chooses another clip, the “tunnel” of the precedent clip remains visible for one minute. The “tunnel” starts from the compartment where the clip was chosen.

Immémorial transformed from a compilation (an open filing system) to a project of taxonomy which brings to light the relations between the construction of identity, the permanent

contextualized update of our memories, the pleasure of classification, and the need to order and reorder. Our identity is a result of what we remember (keep in mind) of our personal history and mythology. Our memory is also moving because the relation we have with reality is unsteady as well. Memories appear within the framework of a context, of relations between events with other events. A reminiscence is a kind of interpretation, a narrative construction of a series of events, of images, sensations, memorial impressions, which succeed, call or reject each other at a precise moment.



Figure 5- One minute of video is made of 1500 (60 X 25) frames. The images are superimposed and the indication of transparency decreases with time. Little by little background is overlaid. When clicking on the button in the lower menu of the interface of the computer of the system, it is possible to remove the tunnel. (©Immémorial#4, screenshots, PascaleWeber)

Because I wanted to give up the linearity of the narrative, I had to analyze and reedit the film material: by going back to the original film (*Immémorial #1*) and the four simultaneous projections of *Immémorial #2*, 32 clips were compiled. Their title appears on a data entry form on the screen of the computer interface. Two pairs of pre-associated sequences are simultaneously displayed on the screens, whereas only one soundtrack is randomly broadcasted. By choosing words on the interface-screen, the spectator activates the association of pairs of modules. He can write his own words, which will then be inlayed within the image. All the words come back randomly at irregular and longer and longer intervals, as reminding thoughts, like memory tracks of the previous sequences. This version helped me to bring to light

the un-linear operation of memory and the semantic, narrative, and continuous reorganization of the same clues.

The words appearing on the screens were acting more like a kind of poetic metaphor than release mechanisms (because real memory processes remain mysterious). It reveals, however, the secret links that weave together our different sensory experiences, our fears and our desires. Moreover, this version needed reediting for continuity—cutting and clipping video, sometimes a new shooting—to make the theme clear. Eventually this constraint liberated me from the literary continuity in film editing, which requires a meaning and a narrative construction. The sequences needed to deal with simple and immediately understandable topics, so that a meaning is perceptible in the clip. Otherwise the succession and the articulation of the different sequences would appear like a continuous metamorphosis, a jumbled audiovisual object. Composing a taxonomy of sequences also obliged me to define more precisely what constitutes a memory sequence, what defines its unity. I made the first version of a memory directory which looks like a list of fictionalized recollections and evocations of the past.

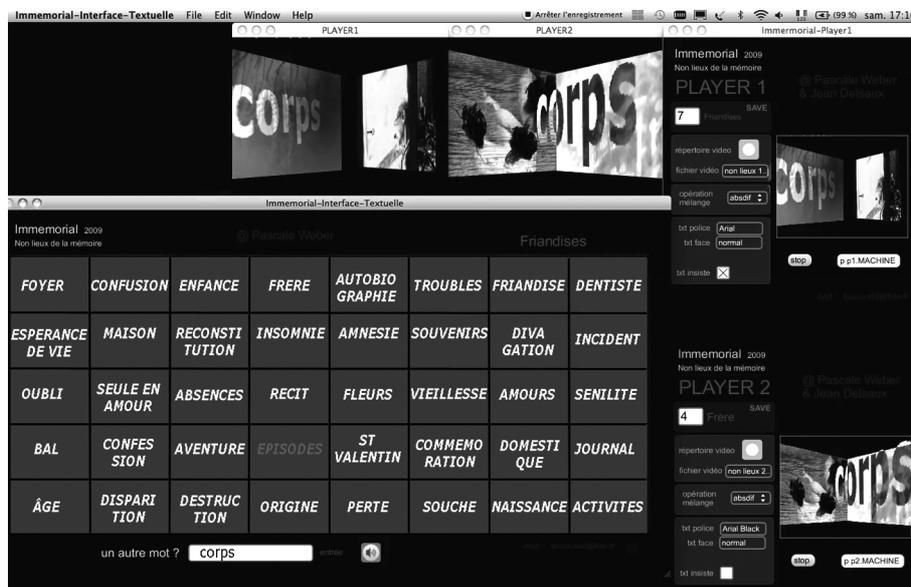


Figure 6- The spectator can also: I- start the program and the interactive play of the video //II- pause by freezing the image on the screen //III- read the title of the clip being viewed //IV- insert other words (@Immemorial#3, screenshot, PascaleWeber).

But what is a memory made of? Is it necessarily about events we have experienced? Can we remember by proxy? What about memories our close relatives relate and which date back to a time we don't remember ourselves. After *Immemorial* #3, I made two suppositions:

I- The description of spaces we have known is generally more suggestive, more reminiscent of the past than both the voice-over's reminiscing and the text inlayed into the picture. We need to represent places where we lived (or where we could live) in order to travel in time (past, present or future). In every meaningful place, our body has unreservedly felt desires, senses of frustration and stretched its own limits. I make the hypothesis that the body has to be involved in a particular space to activate the memory. This is clearly shown through sequences that depict childhood spaces and meeting places. I did an experiment working with photographs, trying for example to draw what is just outside the frame, off-camera, to recollect the places suggested by the picture. Through this exercise some memories reemerged in my mind. Curiously, a more precisely structured film with a complete coherent narrative, with characters and plots, would place me in the situation of a spectator of my own childhood: What would be my role in the depths of the story? The narration, especially very precise, leads me away from the truth and hinders me from reawakening hidden memories.

II- My second hypothesis is that memories told by third parties may evoke in me as much emotion as my own memories, and the most upsetting may lodge in my memory as if I have experienced them myself. I recall at that time what the Professor Alain Berthoz said to me about memory and experience:

[...] My body holds the memory of these extraordinary moments during space flights: while being on the ground and conversing with astronauts we were in their situation, to a certain extent we were discovering weightlessness with them, we were experiencing it in our own body, not only with the mirror neurons of our frontal cortex, but simply by the imagination of what our colleagues must be feeling. (*From the interview with Alain Berthoz by Jean Delsaux and Pascale Weber, 2010*)

We appropriate stories told by others, that we remember and refer, which are slowly incorporated in the construction of our identity. Considering a narrative as autobiographical shows the will of being involved in the story. It means we want to be recognized as an actor, a character of the story... but never the sole owner of that recollection. If it is possible to appropriate the experiences of others, why not insert other people's recollections into the database of *Immémorial*. I also decided to conduct interviews on specific points, in order to constitute a sort of generic memory bank, familiar to the majority of us. I expected to build both a common and a very personal memory.

I made a series of audio interviews, in order to highlight certain aspects of memory processing: a musician confided his first sound recollection, which is more a memory of vibration than melody; a young man related a scooter accident and his painful return to consciousness at the hospital; a man remembered the teddy bear he got when he was a child and recalled the role of this object during a period of separation from his parents; a woman reconstructed the emergence of a strong loving emotion; another woman, confined in a cellar in her childhood, remembered odors; a man explained how the recollection of a bee sting erased the other childhood memories of the same period... The global organization of the project with audio and video databases (and later trajectory databases) highlights the heterogeneous nature of the perceptive experience and of identity construction. *Immémorial* expresses a disparity of the identity, the overflowing of the personalities of the author, the characters, and the narrator. The multiplication of inner selves in the video and narrative progressions cross-references the multiscreen aesthetic: I'm simultaneously one and ten thousand different "I"s.

In the fourth version, I added family films, which introduce a new division in the type of compiled media: there are pictures I recorded behind the camera, and pictures of a little girl when I was on the other side of the lens. There is a third type of image: those I have made, adult, inspired by the stories of other people, adults or young children who remind me of my own childhood or that of my peers. Also we must add to the multiplication of the subject, the multiplication of views and roles: the one who is present, the one who looks, the other who knows someone is looking at him and who looks at the cameraman looking at him looking at the lens... If truth is irremediably linked to a point of view, this multiplication of roles testifies to a multiplication of the truth as well.

But what of Immersion in *Immémorial* at this stage of our presentation? It challenges our certainty of being present inside a system of immersion which deals with memory, takes us into our oldest memories. I investigate a representation always more tangible and a body always less present, even due to imagination and memory, before these functions finally bring the body back to the present. Our presence is unsteady: we are emerging, submerged. We try unsuccessfully to distance ourselves from what we are experiencing, feeling, and how we understand it.

4- Real and symbolic spaces of the system

In the fifth version of *Immémorial*, titled “Dreams and Reminiscences”, interactive as were the two previous versions, I pay particular attention to the spatial placement of the sounds and images in the immersion setup. Following another work session with Charles Bascou at the GMEM Studio in Marseille, and following three successive presentations of *Immémorial* over 2011¹¹, I feel I can make a few assertions about techniques of image and sound placement and movement, and the use of space in this kind of immersion system

The immersion setup defines a real space, but also a symbolic space: a zone of exclusion. The experience of immersion, because it depends on a deep empathy, is able to plunge one into “The Wild”, promising that one will finally become whole.

The immersion mechanism makes it necessary to construct a nearly empty, sealed, and obscured space. Everything seems to play out between this attempt to cut off the viewer's experience by focusing his attention—by delving into his own presence—and on the other hand his desire to enlarge his visual field, to expand his experience. This contradictory characteristic of immersion probably points to another depth in space, unknown to perspective, but which we can only speak about by referring to perspective, for it is the only way our minds have of representing a space which recedes as it goes through a succession of planes. In the immersion environment of *Immémorial*, the space and time of the film unfold in space (on the faces of a cube) receding although we aren't advancing.

The sound and the images slide by like the countryside through a train window, which moves not through the action of one's own body, but because the vehicle is mobile. In the immersion cell, the viewer is transported while remaining immobile. Space twists back on itself: first waning, then stretching out. It is an expanding space which keeps imploding.

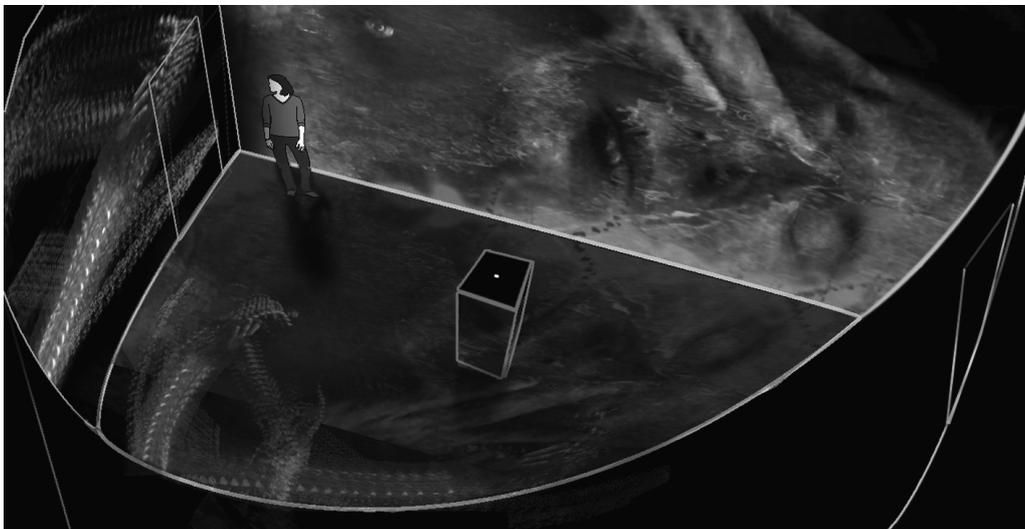


Figure 7- Simulation previsualizing (©Immémorial#5, “Dreams and Reminiscences”, PascaleWeber).

In the structure “Dreams and Reminiscences”, the sound elements are drawn from the corpus of 26 video films (lasting from 1 to 6 minutes). There are 3 specific sounds per film, and 3

¹¹ At the Mamac in Nice (Extramuros conference I3M), at the Cité de la Musique in Marseille (Laboratory-concert) and at the GMEM (Workshop-conference on the project)

associated sounds- sounds specific to one of the other 26 films. Each of these sounds is emitted in three different trajectories (particular modalities of spatial transmission.)

Categories :	Films :	Specific Sounds :	Associate Sounds :	Trajectories :
C1 places	F1 places of my childhood	S1_ S2_ S3	S4_ S33_ S10	T
	F2 the attic	S4_ S5_ S6	S54_ S14/	T4_
	F3 the cellar	S7_ S8_ S9	S5_ S6_ S37	T7_ T8_ T9
	F4 back to Paris	S10_ S12_	S51_	T
C2 persons	F5 my father's eyes	S13_ S14_ S15	S	T
	F6 my mother's age	S19	S	T
	F7 the forgetting	S20_ S21/	S76/	T20/
	F8 children's memory	S	S	T
	F9 valentine	S	S	T
C3 dreams	F10 dreams	S28_ S29_ S30	S43_ S50_ S55	T28_ T29_ T30
	F11 a dreamed life	S31_ S32_ S33	S64_	T
	F12 the blackouts	S34_ S35_ S36	S6_	T
	F13 childhood music	S37_ S38_ S39	S12_ S28_ S43	T37_ T38_ T39
C4 sensations	F14 water	S 40_ S41_ S42	S1_ S4_ S58	T70_ T71_ T72
	F15 childhood vibrations	S43_ S44_ S45	S49_ S12_ S38	T37_ T38_ T39
	F16 a little girl's body	S47_ S48	S	T
	F17 under the cover	S49_ S50_ S51	S12_ S35_ S44	T49_ T50_ T51
	F18 hairstyle	S52_ S54_ S55	S9_ S61_ S78	T
	F19 to do nothing	S57_ S58_ S59	S14_ S76_	T
	F20 boredom	S60_ S56_ S53	S13_ S77_ S55	T
C5 events	F21 feelings	S61_ S62_ S63	S59_ S56_ S47	T61
	F22 break up	S64_ S65_ S66	S5_ S20_ S10	T
	F23 the accident	S	S	T
	F24 the Teddy-bear	S70_ S71_ S72	S28_ S58_ S65	T4_ T71_ T72
	F25 the anger	S	S	T
	F26 the wasp	S76_ S77_ S78	S	T

Figure 8- Organisation diagram of video, visual and sound datas, so as spatial broadcasting of sound, nov 2011 (Immémorial#5).

The films are named by the visitors, and the images are linked to key moments which set off the sound events (a kind of audio ambiance) in an unpredictable manner. The sound events are either sustained from the very beginning, or begin at a particular moment on the time-line (such that we don't necessarily hear the beginning of a sound clip, and never hear the end.) The manner of sound transmission (spacialization) alters the perception of the sound. Here, too, the mechanism proves to be two-fold: a closed system using a database; and because it is possible to add to the database, an open system. The project shows and invokes by its very

way of functioning the system of complex relationships between sensory information (visual and audio), which organize memory function: the updating of perceptions and memories, sensory contamination, overflow or overlapping of information.

5- The immersion setup summons a new representation of space and time

The display tries to separate the representation from traditional figurative representation conceived by the rules of perspective. The knowledge of nearly a century ago, in physics at least, can finally be modernized.

In this fifth version, sound and image move and even turn as if acted upon by a centripetal force, sketching out dynamic visual and audio trajectories that tend to approach the center, animating the space by making visible the physical forces at work: the force of tension, the viewer's effort of attention.

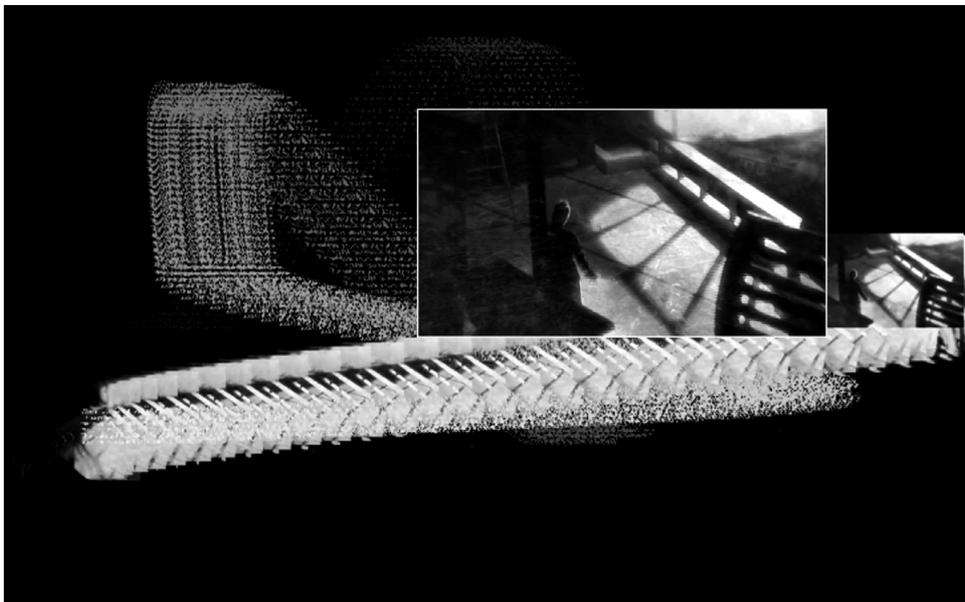


Figure 9- Screenshot from a mono-screen demo wheel simultaneously presenting "frame" and "tunnel of images". Image of the memorial video clip "Dreams". (©Immémorial#5, PascaleWeber)

The setup is therefore not only one which encompasses. It inserts, encloses, all while proposing a sort of continuum of sonorous images in motion. In the middle of it all, the viewer perceives the sounds circling around him: Immémorial has speakers at 8 points: the 4 corners of the room, as well as in the middle of each wall. The sounds vary in frequency and in volume. Their characteristics (spatial behavior or audio reconfiguration of texture, brightness or timbre...) are continuously changing, always luring the visitors' senses. The visitors unfailingly begin by going around once to get oriented and to try to understand the technical origins of the diffused sounds, then find a spot and stay there, as if too engrossed to move, or stuck by the centripetal force that generates the animation of the entire environment. The transmission of video format films in this immersion setup does not encourage the spectator to move, other than to move from one film to another, to embrace with their eyes the various walls, to follow with their eyes and head the tunnel of images or the audio trajectories. It is wholly unlike a video game or a Wii activity, for these require quick and repeated reactions involving learning and practice.

The immersion room, nevertheless, functions based on the possibility for viewers to move about, even if they don't use the space at their disposition in a dynamic way. Concerning the

movement of images, I must note the co-presence of two kinds of images and two kinds of movement. These complete one another and function in concert.

Firstly, there are film projections in a little window (like a control screen). The viewer sees the action of the film unfurling in an absolute and limited time frame: the length of the film. The internal movement of the film, which illustrates a Galilean relativity, is dependent on the viewpoint, and therefore depends on the viewer. Facing the wall, he sees characters and landscapes sliding by as if he were looking out a car window—the window is immobile, just as the car is immobile to its occupant but moving to those outside.

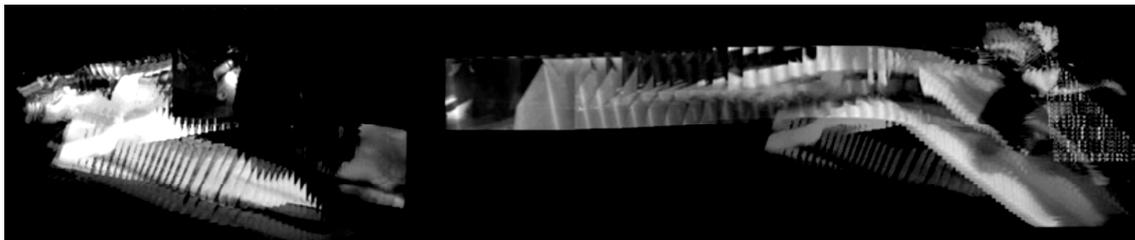


Figure 10- Screenshot presenting the “tunnel of images”. (©Immémorial#5, PascaleWeber)

In the second type, a “tunnel” of images is projected, presenting individual frames of the film exposed off-center, allowing the individual images making up the continuum of the film to become perceptible. The very idea of a viewpoint is neutralized by the off-center nature of the projections, and this results in a line of viewpoints, coiling back on itself.

The length of the film is not presented as an absolute, but as a relative fact: the viewers understand it according to their position in space and depending on if they are moving or have stopped; also according to the sounds they hear- sounds in motion or relatively still, for example.

The sound trajectories developed with Charles Bascou at the GMEM are actually behaviors linked to the sound and its possible modifications,¹² or transmission of sound with different “behaviors” depending on the parameters of the sound¹³ with spatial diffusion profiles (the spatial behavior of the sound) accentuating the parameters¹⁴.

What we call “trajectory” is therefore not a literal movement through space, but a property of the sound's behavior, a reconfiguration of the sound, which leaves the viewers feeling that sound-objects are actually moving through the space around them. The trajectory, then, follows a sort of path with a beginning and an end. We fashion the sound's behavioral properties in order to provoke the sensation of a movement or a certain dynamic of sound. Furthermore, the trajectory doesn't come within a duration as a video or audio clip dominated by a time-line. This is really a matter of performance; it is an event (a behavior) one can apply to all sound data, even to its duration, to a series of actions presented as differentials, predefined variations. This is definitely not a synopsis.

¹² For example T9: oscil-blur / low-pass filter / diffuse progression with continuous amplification of the low frequencies, removal of the high frequencies, and progressive raising of the volume.

¹³ For example: brightness, accentuating the attacks, acceleration of the movement of the sound according to the variations in amplitude of the sound.

¹⁴ For example T28: progression according to the brightness (clarity) of the sound and a snakelike trajectory or T30: swinging to and fro (pendulum effect with an inward arching trajectory) + a slight reverberation.

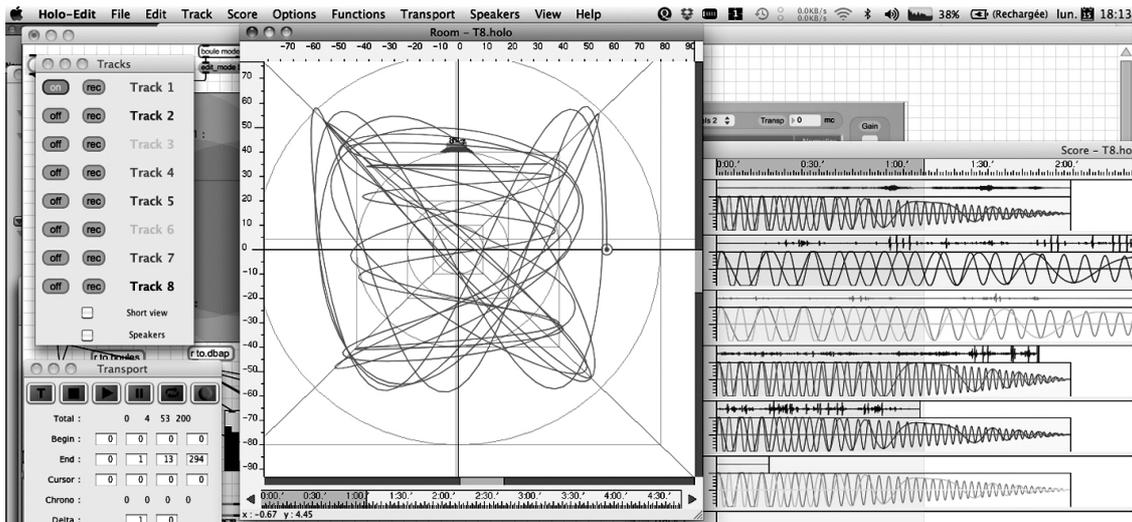


Figure 11- T8: Scheme of spacial diffusion following the double Lissajous curve and trajectory for the 6 sounds of F3. (©Immémorial#5, PascaleWeber/GMEM)

Take, for example the T7 trajectory: progression by an attack, transitory jumps (alternating speakers at each attack) in a small zone (front left, trajectory drawn by mouse.)

The sound emitted is not that of a continuous sound trajectory which crosses the room, for example, but a dynamic progression, shattered, very segmented with multiple ruptures. T7 synchronizes the attack with the jump from one point of the transmission zone to another.

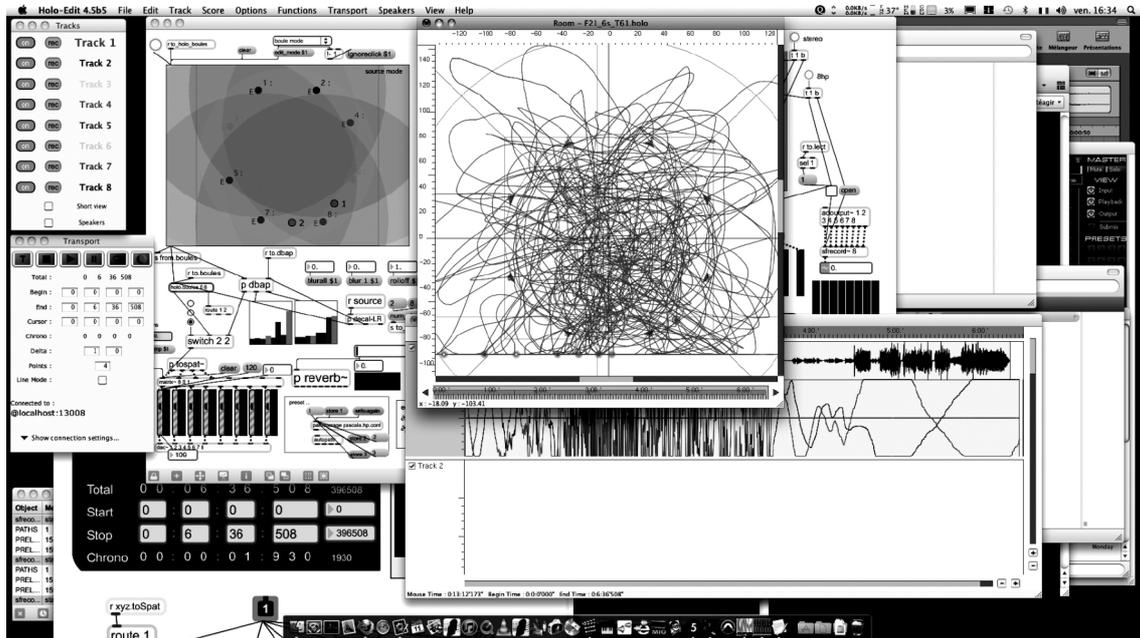


Figure 12- T61: A trajectory which applies the complete film and not independently to such or such a sound following indications bound to the time-code: 00:02 → 01:08 (soft and which slowly beats up) /01:08 → 02:44 (more bumped sequence, Lissajous curve, acceleration, loss of marks) /02:44 → 03:35 (which reorganizes itself gradually) /03:35 → 04:03 (which cools down suddenly) /04:03 → 04:38 (very soft and smoother and smoother) /04:38 → 06:21 (always very soft and smooth but that expands itself, and crawls along). (©Immémorial#5, PascaleWeber/GMEM)

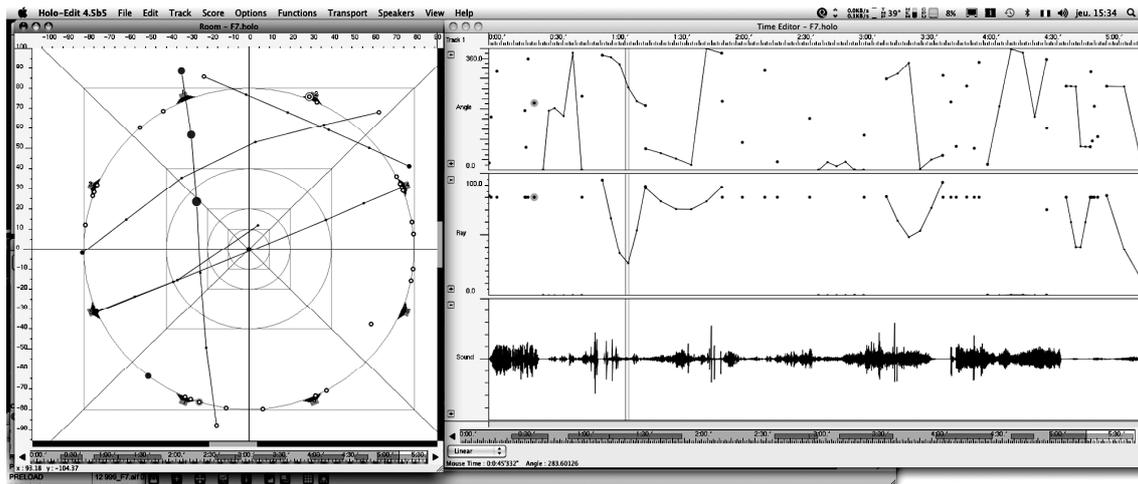


Figure 13- T20: A trajectory which applies the complete film: I want to make the spectator feel disoriented by the sounds trajectories and blunt changes of sound outputs (jumping from one speaker to another, located on opposite sides) (©Immémorial#5, PascaleWeber/GMEM)

I use the word “trajectory” for practical reasons and in order to designate the behavioral patterns, which determine the demarcation of the sounds and determine which portions of sound are assigned to a given point in space or to a given sound event. There has never been an optimum point for listening nor a fixed representation of the sound dynamic.

6- The interrupted movements of luminous elements, of color, of sound, generate a hypnotic fascination, as if the body is suspended by a centripetal force.

All the trajectories and the bright, impulsive audiovisual data form a network. Even if it were possible to list the clips’ sounds, behavior and applied effects by category and number in a table, the system is not linear and has no defined progression: every clip, every element constituting an atmosphere is an outcome and a beginning of a significant, emotional, and dynamic process.

The clips shown are the result of the association of the units (sound, semantic, audio, visual) which constitute them. In this way, they establish elements “overdetermined” and “multidetermined” by the global project; they are inevitably intertwined with the other clips (correlative report: the same soundclips, the same images sometimes, the same visual or sound trajectories), which makes it a dialogical system. Therefore, the whole project is unstable, what Julia Kristeva names a “paragramme”: a “system of multiple connections which we could describe as a structure of paragrammatic networks”¹⁵

Once inside, the viewer flows into the surroundings as into a warm bath, and in doing so, he lets the space carry him. The immersion chamber is a place of regression. In this way, memories and emotions are able to come forth or come back. It is not an action-reaction zone, but a presence felt by the body placed at the crossroads of a space which simultaneously stretches in many directions, a presence which requires a transitional abandon of the body.

The world is no longer in front, but all around. It is in a frenzy, a constant state of movement. Such a profusion of movement results in a neutralization of the visitor’s feeling of movement, not

¹⁵ KRISTEVA, Júlia (1969), “For a semiology of paragrammes”: *Semiotike : Research for a Semanalysis*, USA, Seuil, p.123 (Translated by P.W.).

having the attention capacity to grasp the origin of each event. The audio-visual trajectories do not appear as such because their arrangement generates audio and visual environments swarming with stimuli. The immersion setup is exactly what is necessary to help the viewer take in this kinetic energy, setting it into resonance with his own breath, his heartbeats, the visual and audio perception of his entire body.

In *Immemorial* #5, I observed only calm visitors, floating about; a few would confide to me that they fell entirely under the spell of the images flowing along the walls and the sounds, which moved around and through the space. The immersion factor also allows us to feel the instability of the world to a greater degree, like a reality that comes to us and tests us, over which we have no power. The immersion setup allows us to escape both the mindset of a point of view and of the necessity of a globally coherent structure, absolute and obligated to have a viewpoint. On 4 facets, the field of view and everything peripheral to it advance together, no other horizon approaches or recedes.

It seems to me that the body of the visitor initially behaves the way it would in any new space: surveying the site, figuring out the possible ways of circulating, attempting to understand the way the setup functions—including how to find the most comfortable position. The possibility of moving is not a source of pleasure, nor is it especially comfortable, and it doesn't seem to respond to the rejection of more traditional setups in which the viewer is immobile, stuck in space. In reality, the possibility for the viewer to move about is mostly related to the end of an era of linear development that took the spectator captive. These new audiovisual productions create a sort of substance filled with continuous images where we come to immerse ourselves and, I hope in the present case, to renew ourselves, to renew the ties with our own memories, even our sensory emotional memory.

As a final note, it is useful to differentiate the closed space of the setup from real space (you cannot walk along a film the way you walk along a country road, for example), or from a constructed space (a living space, structuring and structured by the way of living; the setup is not a simple cube or hollow space, but animated by images which spread over and conceal the architecture) or even from a symbolic space (the space of narration and projection). The immersion setup is above all a realm of intersections, moving and indefinite, constantly in a state of redefinition: it is a space-event.

Conclusion

Rew is the title of the project for the sixth version of *Immemorial*, which will be created in 2012 in collaboration with the GEMM.

Rew focuses on audio and sound recording. As an abbreviation of Rewind, it raises the specter of traveling back in the past, of accessing our childhood secrets, of revisiting, maybe rewriting our identity.

If *Immemorial* originally dealt with the question of memory failure of an old and ill person, little by little it allowed me to report my painful experience of the ephemeral nature of visual and audio digital recordings. The subject of *Rew* concerns as much the individual memory as the memory of a civilization that is short of breath, of a changing world, the memory failure of Technology, the video images, the unstable fragility of audio and pictures. *Rew* allowed me to express the difficulty of preserving my data, of accessing my own files. Continuously accelerating, the lifespan of the creation never ceases to diminish.

I also wonder what to save, what to archive, when I don't know what I will need in the future. Do I have to file my rushes as a priority, or my sequences, or my compiled film? What format as a

priority? How many film units will also be erased and lost? How much media-data will become illegible, unusable due to saving and successive transfers? Do I have to favor the backup of the final product, of the different steps of the compilation, of the editing I could rework, or the raw recording?

How can I make experimental cinema today if I have to think to every future editing, narrating, film making? I tell myself that the immersion attempt of *Immémorial* is a kind of real-time creation that means something alive, impossible to experience twice in exactly the same conditions. The role of *Rew* is to express just this impossibility.

Lastly, *Rew* presents the taxonomy of memorial moods processed during the last versions. The development of the project obliged me to clarify the role of the images and sounds in the mechanism, but also the ambitions and the expectations of such a quest. What is the place of experimental video art within scientific research, neuroscience, medicine, visual art, philosophy, introspective fiction? The next important step is to defend such multimedia installations as able to participate in a form of heritage and renewal of the association system of our sensory impressions.

Immémorial was written, conceived and created by Pascale Weber; audio engineers: Charles Bascou at GMEM and Lucien Bertolina at Euphonia; multimedia engineer: Luccio Stiz; multimedia interactivity technician: Sylvain Delbard; technical support, conception of the setup: Jean Delsaux.

Immémorial#1 was presented at the MAMAC (Nice, 2006); *Immémorial#2* was modeled in 3D with O.K. Appadoo in 2007; *Immémorial#3* was presented and realized for the conference "About virtual space and body in presence" (University of Auvergne, Le Puy-en-Velay, 2009); *Immémorial#4* was presented at the MAMAC (Nice, 2010); *Immémorial#5* was presented several times during the residencies in Marseille (2011): at the GMEM, at the MAMAC, at the *Videoformes Festival*, at the *Cité de la Musique de Marseille*. *Immémorial#6* is a creation planned for the festival of the GMEM in May 2012: it will be the realization and the conclusion of fifteen years of work.

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