Hybrid

Revue des arts et médiations humaines

2 | 2015

Réalités de l'illusion

Creation no. 1

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1335>

DOI: 10.4000/hybrid.1335

ISSN: 2276-3538

This article is a translation of:

Création n° 1 - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1332> [fr]

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Vincennes

Electronic reference

Maurice Benayoun, "Creation no. 1", *Hybrid* [Online], 2 | 2015, Online since 23 October 2015, connection on 13 April 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1335> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/hybrid.1335>

This text was automatically generated on 13 April 2022.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 1995, the *Tunnel under the Atlantic* appears as an art experiment of a new kind. Radically performative, the *Tunnel* offers matter to see, to think and to act. The public contributed an average of two hours a day until the emotional climax, five days after when both sides get together. Widely reported by media of the time, this twenty-years-old installation has become a reference among pioneer art works, both innovative and critical, who paved the path of the virtual in the field of contemporary practices. The following text was written before the actual exhibition opening.

- 1 *The Tunnel Under the Atlantic* is a televirtual art installation establishing a link between Montreal and Paris, two towns physically distant by thousands of miles.
- 2 *The Tunnel* enabled hundreds of people from both sides to meet. From each side, a two-meter diameter tube, made us think of a linear crossing of our planet, as if it were dug under the ground, shouting up in the middle of the Contemporary Art Museum in Montreal on one side, and in the lower floor of the Centre Pompidou in Paris.
- 3 The route that lies between the two spots is no simulation of the ocean underground, it is a block of symbolic matter in which the geological strata leave the place to iconographic strata. They are layers of pictures taken in the history of the two cultures that everybody can reveal each time they dig. The collective exploration uncovers fragments of rare or familiar pictures, which are opportunities to wake up the collective memory of the participants. Helping us to loiter and talk to people, these remains transform everybody's digging route into a unique experience, into a personal assemblage made up of sounds and pictures amidst a three-dimensional space created through their moves. While digging, the visitors can talk with their partners across the Atlantic Ocean. The sound of their voices are anchored in space and enable everyone to

find out the directions where to meet the other. It takes almost six days to build and pave the symbolic space before the two continents' diggers meet.

- 4 Free from physics constraints, Space then is a function of Time. There, speed is not the best way to speed up the meeting, but a way of specifying everyone's position within information. *The Tunnel's* architecture created by each visitor determines the editing of the picture in the time of their moves and in the built space.
- 5 Altered and shaped by the newly dug tunnel, the revealed images conjure up the very matter of scenery that redefines itself as the aftermath of each explorer's/visitor's decision. Their sequencing in Time and assemblage in Space are neither merely elements of predetermination nor elements of randomization. Through the things they deal with, and through the selected images, both come from each visitor's own way of digging. If we cannot master what we are going to discover, what we find out depends on our own way of doing things. If we let ourselves enjoy the tantalizing immediate feeling of euphoric capacity of digging at high speed, we do not come across the same iconographic remains as the ones we can see when explore the discovered elements carefully and curiously. Everybody's interest in some details in the documents accounts for the theme and the semantic developments that will come afterwards. The writing process then does not concerns a definitely established building up of sounds and pictures any longer, but does concern the creation of their appearance conditions thanks to the visitors exploratory behavior.
- 6 The combination of chance and determination which defines the result architecture, makes the world-to-explore similar to our current experience of life. The "Gadevu," the agent developed in a basic version for *The Tunnel Under the Atlantic* has become the Z-A Profiler we can use for the dynamic and intuitive exploration of complex databases. Combining the spontaneous actions and dialogues, the music composed by Martin Matalon alters in the course of event and is organized around personal routes, as it is the case with the pictures then revealed.
- 7 The televirtual event—i.e. a remote connection of people in an interactive symbolic space—is filmed with four virtual cameras. What they get is automatically mixed and edited and that takes into account each participant speech. They can discover, in the event of a counter-shot, their own live pictures floating within the space they have just dug up. They will not be able to see each other before the two sides of the tunnel meet. The exchange, essentially made up of sounds so far, then becomes visual. When the meeting is achieved, other persons can at last take the same way or create new ones as if they were in a collective quest of a shared memory.

Screenshots from The Tunnel Under the Atlantic

<http://www.tunnelshots.com>

Video

<http://benayoun.com/projet.php?id=14>

AUTHORS

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Maurice Benayoun, digital artist and theorist, works in Paris and Hong-Kong. Co-founder of the research team CITU in the laboratory Paragraphe at Paris 8 University, he is a professor at the School of Creative Media of the City University of Hong Kong since 2012. He won numerous prizes since the 1990s for his animated films, interactive installations and augmented reality artworks, among which several distinctions at the Festival Ars Electronica (including the “Golden Nica”) and the SCD prize for interactive creation in 2009. Among his recent publications, the bilingual book *The Dump, 207 Hypothèses pour un passage à l’acte/207 Hypotheses for Committing Art* (Fyp Editions, août 2011). About Maurice Benayoun, see Dominique Moulon, Tim Murray, Jean-Baptiste Barrière, Jean-Pierre Balpe, Derrick de Kerckhove, Oliver Grau, *Maurice Benayoun, Open Art* (Nouvelles éditions Scala, 2011). Many of his artworks are available on his personal website: <http://www.benayoun.com/index.php>.