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Les Immatériaux: a tour of the exhibition with headphones

Marie Vicet

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- 1 Sound has today become an essential component in the work of certain artists but it is also important for many curators in the exhibitions they organise. It occupies a very specific place around which an exhibition can be built or even defined. Pascale Cassagnau explains that “Exhibitions can be “voiced”, with a “soundtrack” that constitutes a principle of reflection and a piece of art itself that produces an interpretation.”¹ But well before sound art became as common as it has in recent shows, one exhibition, considered by many art historians as a milestone in the history of museums and exhibitions², had already used sound in a most original way, offering an unprecedented viewing experience to visitors, where listening was an integral part. The curators of the exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, for the Centre de Création Industrielle du Centre Pompidou in 1985³ [Fig. 1] were the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and the curator Thierry Chaput. The use of a sound system raised the question of how the public would react and understand it, as we will see later on. To tour the exhibition, and its sixty-one sites, visitors were given a pair of wireless headphones that transmitted the soundtrack. This unexpected approach on the part of the exhibition’s curators, to our knowledge the first, drew the public in droves.⁴ In this article, we will review this unusual experiment. We will put the exhibition team’s original intentions into perspective with regard to the soundtrack and the way it was transmitted, with the public’s actual experience. While the visitors initially showed enthusiasm for the visit with headphones, they were also, for the most part, quite thrown by the experience, even bewildered, as they went through the exhibition with the headphones on.

Fig. 1

Jean-François Lyotard at the opening night of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* on 26 March, 1985 (L to R: Claude Pompidou, Thierry Chaput, Jean-François Lyotard and Jack Lang)

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An exhibition that considered itself a work of art

- 2 The subject of the exhibition was “postmodernity”⁵, and it was intended as a reflection on the times based on questions of intangibility that were coming to the fore with the development of new technologies.⁶ It was to go down in exhibition history for a number of reasons: firstly, it was the only exhibition that Jean-François Lyotard ever curated, and the first ever organised by a philosopher.⁷ The subject of the exhibition was also a reason for its notoriety, as were the design and scenography involved. The “dramaturgy”, aimed at “provoking a feeling of the end of an era and the sense of anxious curiosity that emerges at the dawn of postmodernity”⁸ made an impact, as did the variety and mix of the objects on show. The exhibition included some very recently designed industrial robots, computers, holograms, interactive sound installations, 3D films, paintings, photographs and sculptures (including a *bas-relief* from ancient Egypt) but also pieces by contemporary artists such as Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth and Giovanni Anselmo. The wide range of domains the objects on show covered, (painting, biology, architecture, astrophysics, music, food, clothing, etc.) that were at times gathered together in one site as they illustrated a given theme within the exhibition, made the *Les Immatériaux* exhibition a ground-breaking event.
- 3 The other main characteristic of *Les Immatériaux* was the genre of exhibition it was, as its curators devised it as an exhibition that was not artistic, documentary, encyclopaedic, or performative, but in fact, all these things at once. It was a hybrid genre, a mix, but not a synthesis, of many genres. The exhibition created its own object by blurring the lines between traditional categories. “This hybridisation led to a sense of blurring, an illegibility that raise many questions.”⁹ As the press release stated, *Les*

Immatériaux was built as “a non-exhibition”¹⁰ that was meant to “question the traditional presentation of exhibitions handed down from the salons of the 18th century and galleries.”¹¹ Furthermore, Lyotard, Chaput and the team at the CCI wanted the exhibition to be an entity in and of itself, like a piece of art. In 1985, Lyotard declared that “The team is not attempting to create an educational exhibition, for example to explain new technologies..., but an exhibition that is itself a work of art.”¹² The press release continued, “It is not about explaining, it is about making the public aware of the issues in the forms in which they appear in the arts, in literature, in technoscience and in lifestyles. This show only really clearly presents some of its effects, as a piece of art would do.”¹³ The idea of “making a piece of art” was at the very core of the project. As Chantal Noël, a member of the exhibition team, explained “The presentation, installation and organisation of the space were not subject to the objects on show. There was an artistic approach to the relationships between the volumes, the colours and the sounds.”¹⁴ In fact, the intention of the team was to redefine the exhibition “medium” with a show that combined an artistic, philosophical and scientific approach to the 20th century.

- 4 The soundtrack¹⁵ was one of the tools used as part of this approach. Visitors listened to it on wireless headphones handed out at the entrance to the exhibition, and it was designed as an extra experience for the public, turning the visit into an audio-visual experience. The idea for the soundtrack¹⁶ came from Lyotard himself who initially intended to write the texts for the different sites with the addition of well-chosen writings by famous authors. In the end, he ran out of time and the task fell to his colleague Dolorès Rogozinski who chose and collected various texts by philosophers and writers¹⁷, and in some cases wrote texts that resonated with the theme of the sites.¹⁸ Instead of the voice-overs reading texts, some sites had recordings, such as pieces of music recorded at the IRCAM, or sounds that came from the sites themselves. The wireless headphones were supplied by Phillips and were prototypes being used for the very first time [Fig. 2]. The exhibition space was equipped with around thirty infrared transmitters that broadcast one or more of the texts to the headphones during the visit according to the zone they were in. There were thirty-one zones in all.¹⁹ As Lyotard explained to the press “The visitor walks around with the headphones on [...] and the broadcasts change according to each zone. The sections are two to three minutes long and they are constantly repeated. They are transmitted by infrared onto mirrors that means that on the ground, the sound is very clear.”²⁰

Fig. 2

The Philips WH200 wireless headphones used for *Les Immatériaux*, 1985

© Gérard Chiron

The soundtrack and misunderstandings

- 5 Visitors to the exhibition put on their headphones and walked into the exhibition space through an entrance hall where they found themselves in front of an Egyptian *bas-relief*, a fragment from the outside of a temple in Karnak, on which a goddess gives the Pharaoh Nectanebo II the breath of life. The soundtrack transmitted the sound of breathing. The exhibition *Inventaire* wrote, of this site: “Humans received life and meaning: the soul. They had to return them, intact and perfected. Do they have a destiny today? This is one of the main questions of this exhibition.”²¹ In an essay written as part of a study led by the Expo-Media observatory²² on *Les Immatériaux*, Charles Perraton, a communications professor at the University of Québec in Montreal, wrote a phenomenological account of the visit, describing it as follows:

“The adventure begins as I am handed a pair of headphones that will accompany me throughout my visit, “If you so wish”, they say at the entrance. I take it to be proof of the exhibition curators’ didactic and educational intentions. As I listen to the first part of the information transmitted by the headphones, I conclude that it will help me to understand the content of the exhibition, and to experience the intimate nature of the communicative relationship it creates. I start to think it might be a chance for the visitor to personalise the exchange by introducing the possibility of a discussion to the enunciation. So, initially I see the headphones as a means to speak to me and help me to understand. But very early on I understand that it is not really there to make me **listen** (to an explanation) but to make me **hear** (words and sounds).”²³

- 6 Indeed, instead of providing information or explanations about the works of art, objects and scientific inventions presented, that the visitor will have expected to hear in the headphones, they transmit readings, music and various noises according on the zone they were in [Fig. 3]; [Fig. 4]. The different elements were “chosen for their emotional and/or associative value, and were not intended to help with the visit.”²⁴ The exhibition had no didactic or educational intention, but instead wished to appeal to the visitors’ emotions and feelings. The intention was “to aim not for the public’s ability to absorb information but to appeal to its senses, its sense of aesthetics. For what we have to say, we propose to awaken a response in visitors on the level of their emotions, not their understanding.”²⁵ The texts were never legends explaining what was shown at each site. Neither was there any correspondence between the sound transmission zones and what was shown at the different sites as a text could just as easily work for four sites as one.²⁶ Lyotard explained to the journalist François Dumont: “So the relationship between the sound and the visualisation is a question of tension, it is about the imagination rather than the concept, which corresponds to our project in that we want to remove resistance.”²⁷
- 7 Consequently, the sound was an addition to the visual elements of the exhibition and created an extra layer of meaning. However, visitors who were not warned in advance of the conceptual nature of the texts were taken aback, to say the least, by what they heard in their headphones. As Nathalie Heinich explained as part of an inquiry she led during the exhibition. Some visitors thought they were being give a traditional museum tour:

“There was [...] a misunderstanding as to [...] the status of the texts that were transmitted, that visitors were used to taped exhibition tours that were common at the time for some big exhibitions at the Grand-Palais for example or in some museums, which tended to constitute an “explanatory commentary”, while this was more of a companion piece, a counterpoint, a creation of actual conditions, a work of association, but above all it was not an “explanation”. This led to a certain amount of perplexity as to the commentary that wasn’t one, and that added literary, philosophical and other texts to images that were already quite obscure (or, more to the point, images and objects, the point of which was not always crystal clear), that could have provided, for some visitors, an explanation as to the meaning. So, we understand the regrets expressed by a visitor in a post-exhibition session when they said that it needed a permanent commentary from someone who was qualified, and that the current one was not enough.”²⁸

Fig. 3

A visitor at the « Arômes simulés » exhibit at *Les Immatériaux*

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Jean-Claude Planchet.

Fig. 4

Les Immatériaux, a view of the « Labyrinthe du langage » site

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Jean-Claude Planchet.

- 8 The discrepancy between what the visitors expected to hear in the headphones and what they actually heard led to much misunderstanding. Instead of enlightening them about what they were seeing, the soundtrack pushed them even further away. Wearing the headphones and listening to the texts transmitted tended to confuse and destabilise the visitors, which was tacitly the intention of the team behind the exhibition: “We wanted to avoid identification: we wanted to create a feeling of destabilisation about

identity today.”²⁹ The exhibition had been designed, in different ways, to create disorientation. The curators built it so that the visitor chose their own path through, with five possible options that fanned out from the *Théâtre du non-corps*³⁰ which was made up of five dioramas created by Jean-Claude Fall and presented at the entrance to the exhibition. These five paths corresponded to one of the themes developed in the exhibition which were: *Matériau* (material), *Matrice* (matrix), *Matériel* (material), *Matière* (matter) and *Maternité* (maternity), each of which brought up a question: “where do the messages we receive come from (what is their maternity)? what do they refer to (to what matter do they refer)? what code can be used to decode them (what is their matrix)? on what are they written (what is their material)?, how are they transmitted to their recipients (what is the material of this dynamic)?”³¹ The labyrinth-like design of the exhibition, in fact, participated in the creation of a new exhibition format that corresponded to the post-modern era we had entered. Lyotard summed it up as follows: “The exhibition is a postmodern dramaturgy. There is no hero, no narrative. It is a warren of situations organised according to questions: our sites. A fabric of voices transmitted by portable headphones: our soundtrack. The visitors, in their solitude, are summoned to choose their path at the crossroads of track that holds them back and voices that call to them.”³² The tour took place in semi-darkness over a layout of metal track. The exhibition’s press release explained: “Here, picture rails have been replaced by tracks of varying transparency and opaqueness that call on different types of perspectives. The light is completely controlled, giving them intensity, warmth, colour and limits. The layout of the hanging half-screens allows the visitor to choose their path, to a certain extent. They are not forced, they are led.”³³ Visitors were free to choose their own paths through the exhibition; all avenues were open to them.³⁴ This did not help the public’s understanding. The intentional lack of explanation in the exhibition compounded the issue: “No chronological or thematic points of reference, just a sense of ‘drifting’ where the visitor appears to have total freedom of movement, but zero control of the space.”³⁵ Visitors did not let it lie, they were already quite disoriented by the different blurring effects inside the *Immatériaux*, so they nevertheless looked for explanations. As Nathalie Heinich explained in her study: “Very often people would ask for explanations at the entrance, worried about the actual contents of the exhibition. This would also happen inside, or even as they were leaving, where some French visitors would try to get their hands on the English-language brochures intended for foreign visitors in the absence of any other explanatory documents (most of the visitors questioned as they left did not realise that the exhibition did have a small “journal”, most probably because they didn’t notice the bookshop).”³⁶

- 9 While the exhibition did indeed have a *Petit Journal* available in the bookshop, this was not really the same as an exhibition brochure distributed to visitors at the entrance, as it was not free of charge, even though it only cost 6 francs. However, even if all of the visitors had the exhibition’s *Petit Journal* in their possession, they would most certainly have had problems reading it as the space was very dimly lit, and this was most certainly the case for those who bought it. Nevertheless, it would have been a great help in terms of understanding what was on show in the different sites and what was transmitted through the headphones. In fact, the *Petit Journal* was filled with information, describing what the visitor was looking at, explaining what it meant and also explaining what was being transmitted in the headphones. The journalist Jean Launay described it as follows: “About fifteen pages that cover the events that we can expect throughout the visit with the addition of informational (how it works) and

editorial (what it inspires) comments. The concision and clarity of the writing is absolutely remarkable.”³⁷ In fact, the *Petit Journal* was an important source of information for visitors, much more than the catalogue, in particular, *Album et Inventaire* that was not really a traditional catalogue but included on one side various copies of work documents and on the other a technical sheet that went through the exhibitions’ structure and various sites without ever really going into what was actually on show.

A blurring effect

- 10 While the content of the soundtrack was not always understood, this was compounded by technical issues with the infrared headphone system that the public was unfamiliar with and did not know how to use properly, further adding to the feelings of disruption provoked by the exhibition: “This led to recurring “breakdowns”, some real (due to cutting edge technology), but many – as the guards at the entrance noticed – purely fictional: the visitor, faced with an abrupt ending in a voiceover they were listening to as they walked, would conclude that the headphones were broken as they were used to obeying the text rather than the other way round, not understanding that it stopped and started because they, themselves were walking.”³⁸
- 11 These blurring effects and interruption of the soundtrack were, of course, due to the infrared transmission system. But they were also designed and even planned by the exhibition team in the design phase. As Francesca Gallo pointed out: “any malfunction in the transmission of a message was, paradoxically, part of the project³⁹.” The losses of signal between two zones, the breaks in listening were the transposition to a museum of the experience one could have in a car while driving, as the radio moves out of a transmission zone. This is how the experience is illustrated in a document from the preparatory stages that is reproduced in the *Album des Immatériaux* to explain how the team envisaged these breaks: “When travelling hundreds of kilometres from San Diego to Santa Barbara by car, you drive through a conurbation zone. It is neither country nor city, nor is it the desert. [...] The radio has to be readjusted a number of times as you travel through different radio transmission zones. It is quite nebulous, where the materials (buildings, roads) are states of energy in metastasis. The streets and boulevards have no facades, information circulates by invisible radiation and interfaces.”⁴⁰
- 12 Consequently, this exhibition with equipment participated in the construction of a “postmodern” space-time where time took over from space, fencing it in or sketching it. “The time it takes to move around marks the surface of the space, the space/surface relationship is now a sort of itinerary.”⁴¹ In this new space-time, the visitor-spectator experimented with the exhibition by walking, by becoming a wandering spectator.⁴² The augmented visitor found themselves, thanks to the headphones, “in the position of a reader, or as a reader, like the sign on the head of a tape recorder,”⁴³ was the correct analysis made by Jean-Louis Boissier. In a postmodern world, as the team behind the exhibition saw it, man had become a post-human and the new realities of the world replaced the *Man/Nature* interface with the *Man/Technique* interface. In his editorial, Élie Théofilakis mused that: “Technological devices are already an integral part of our own knowledge toolbox and our nervous system. Consequently, man is sharing what is human, and will perhaps be *humanised* (outside the very constraints of natural

order).”⁴⁴ But this visit with headphones was a way of expressing the world’s passage into the postmodern era, by causing the public to lose their frame of reference, and increasing its isolation. The press release announced that “Silence reigns over the exhibition.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the headphones closed visitors off from one another, preventing them from communicating and exchanging views as one visitor remarked: “I went with two or three friends but we couldn’t speak to one another. I saw people I knew and had to remove the headphones, etc... and so we were obliged, in a way, to leave the exhibition, to step out, at least for the sound part, in order to connect with someone else, to talk or even make a comment on what we were seeing.”⁴⁶ Taking off the headphones was the same as leaving the exhibition and the experience it offered.

- 13 In fact, this exhibition was above all, an event to be experienced, and the headphones were an integral part of the experience. However, there was a huge gap between the exhibition’s cross disciplinary approach where lines were crossed between categories and the various literary and philosophical texts transmitted through the headphones and what the public actually experienced. As Heinich noted in her study: “The first conclusion we can come to is [...] that the instances where the actual experience of the visitors coincides with the potential of the product on offer are extremely rare⁴⁷.” The reason being that Lyotard and his team proposed “an exhibition that was intended to trigger critical reflection on the part of the visitor but, at the same time, omitted to provide any form of explanation. So how could it succeed?”⁴⁸, as Jérôme Glicenstein so rightfully pointed out. However, in the end, the intention was not that the visitor understand what they were seeing or hearing. No one had shown them the rules of the game: “The postmodern individual is someone who has been invited to play a game without being told the rules. They don’t know what they can win or lose, but they have to figure it out. It is up to “The man without qualities” to work out the rules alone.”⁴⁹ They were suddenly equipped but alone to face the onslaught of messages. The exhibition asked more questions than it answered. In addition, the curators had no intention of answering. Visitors left with more questions than they had when they arrived.⁵⁰

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NOTES

1. Pascale Cassagnau, *Une idée du Nord : des excursions dans la création sonore contemporaine*, Paris, Beaux-arts de Paris éditions, 2015, p. 96.
2. On this subject, see various articles in the 12th edition of the online magazine *Tate Papers*, special "Landmark Exhibitions Issue", [Online] <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12> [consulted July 20 2018]. It is also referred to as "one of the exhibitions that made art history" in Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond - Exhibitions That Made Art History: 1962-2002*, London, Phaidon, 2013.
3. The exhibition took place from March 28 to July 15 1985 on the fifth floor of the Centre Georges Pompidou.
4. Some visitors went to the exhibition just to try the headphones. See Nathalie Heinich, "Un événement culturel", in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 37.
5. Concept theorised by the philosopher. See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1979.
6. See the presse release for *Les Immatériaux*, 1985. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf> [consulted July 18 2018].
7. After Lyotard, other philosophers and intellectuals became curators, often for one-off events. They include Bernard Stiegler (*Mémoires du futur*, Paris : Bibliothèque publique d'information, 1987), Jacques Derrida (*Mémoires d'aveugle*, Paris : Musée du Louvre, 1990), Jean Starobinski (*Largesse*, Paris : Musée du Louvre, 1994), Julia Kristeva (*Vision capitales*, Paris : Musée du Louvre, 1998), Paul Virilio (*Ce qui arrive*, Paris : Fondation Cartier, 2002), Bruno Latour (*Iconoclasm and Making Things Public*, Karlsruhe : ZKM, 2002, 2005) and Jean-Luc Nancy (*Le Plaisir au dessin*, Lyon : Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2007). This information comes from Antony Hudek, "From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of Les Immatériaux", *Tate Papers*, 12 (Landmark Exhibitions Issue), Autumn 2009. [Online] <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/from-over-to-sub-exposure-the-anamnesis-of-les-immateriaux> [consulted July 18 2018].
8. Exhibition press release, p. 4, 1985. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf> [consulted July 18 2018].
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10. Lyotard preferred the term manifestation to the term exhibition to refer to *Les Immatériaux*.

11. Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
12. A quote from Jean-François Lyotard in Élie Théofilakis, "Les petits récits de chrysalide, entretien Jean-François Lyotard - Élie Théofilakis", in Elie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 7.
13. Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
14. A quote from Chantal Noël in Philippe Merlant, "La règle du jeu : matérialiser Les Immatériaux, entretien avec l'équipe du C.C.I.", in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 19.
15. It is unfortunately impossible to listen to the soundtrack and its content. A copy exists in the Jacques Doucet library and it will be digitalised soon.
16. See Jean-Louis Boissier, "La question des nouveaux médias numériques", in Bernadette Dufrêne (dir.), *Centre Pompidou, trente ans d'histoire : 1977-2007*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 2007, p. 380.
17. The texts on the soundtrack include writings by Hans Christian Andersen, Antonin Artaud, Gaston Bachelard, Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Lewis Carroll, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Jean-Joseph Goux, Marcel Hénaff, Yves Klein, Henrich von Kleist, Gilbert Lascault, Lao-Tseu, Jean-François Lyotard, Stéphane Mallarmé, Henri Michaux, Octavio Paz, Marcel Proust, François Rabelais, Jacques Roubaud, Eugène Savitzkaya, Paul Virilio, Émile Zola, accompanied by texts written specially for the exhibition by Dolorès Rogozinski.
18. On the subject of writing for the soundtrack, see Dolorès Lyotard (Rogozinski), "On the Development of the Texts for the Les Immatériaux Soundtrack (Sur le développement du texte pour la bande-son des *Immatériaux*)", Working Paper n° 2, published by Andreas Broeckmann, July 2019. [Online] http://les-immateriaux.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/LIR-WP2_Dolores-Lyotard_Soundtrack_2019.pdf [Consulted July 2 2019].
19. The soundtrack and sound system were designed by the Centre Pompidou's sound engineer, Gérard Chiron.
20. A quote from Jean-François Lyotard speaking to François Dumont, « Le train fantôme du Docteur Lyotard », *Le Matin de Paris*, Thursday March 28 1985, p. 24
21. Wall panel from the « Entrance hall » in Thierry Chaput et Jean-François Lyotard (dir.), *Les Immatériaux : Inventaire*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985, no page numbers.
22. Expo-Media was a think-tank that was tasked with observing the changes in « exhibitions » in all their forms since 1983.
23. Charles Perraton, "L'œuvre des petits récits autonomes", in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 14.
24. Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
25. A quote from Jean-François Lyotard in Élie Théofilakis, « Les petits récits de chrysalide, entretien Jean-François Lyotard - Élie Théofilakis », in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 7.
26. This lack of coincidence between sound and vision within the *Immatériaux* exhibition is, according to Francesca Gallo, the continuation of Lyotard's audio-visual experiments in the seventies, in particular the *Tribune sans tribune* video made for *Tribune libre* for FR3 in 1978. See Francesca Gallo, « Ce n'est pas une exposition, mais une œuvre d'art. L'exemple des Immatériaux de Jean-François Lyotard », *Appareil*, n° 10 (Lyotard et la surface d'inscription numérique), 2012. [Online] <https://journals.openedition.org/appareil/860> [consulted November 08 2018].
27. A quote from Jean-François Lyotard to François Dumont, « Le train fantôme du Docteur Lyotard », *Le Matin de Paris*, Thursday, March 28 1985, p. 24.

28. Nathalie Heinich, « Un événement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 37-38.
29. A quote from Jean-François Lyotard in Élie Théofilakis, « Les petits récits de chrysalide, entretien Jean-François Lyotard - Élie Théofilakis », in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 7.
30. Inspired by *Pour en finir encore* (For to end yet again and other fizzles) by Samuel Beckett. An extract from *L'innommable* (The Unnameable) was broadcast through the headphones.
31. Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
32. Jean-François Lyotard, « Le partage des conséquences », in *Les Immatériaux : Album*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985, p. 5.
33. See the Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
34. But this freedom led to a lot of confusion for visitors: “many visitors left by the entrance, which means they hadn’t found the actual exit, and possibly had missed a number of sites.” See what the guards had to say in Nathalie Heinich, « Un événement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 39.
35. Nathalie Heinich, « Un événement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 36.
36. Nathalie Heinich, « Un événement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 39.
37. Jean Launay, « Les Immatériaux », *Le Monde*, March 28 1985. [Online] https://lemonde.fr/archives/article/1985/03/28/les-immateriaux_2742266_1819218.html?xtmc=les_immateriaux&xtcr=1 [consulted September 10 2018].
38. Nathalie Heinich, « Un événement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 38.
39. Francesca Gallo, « Ce n’est pas une exposition, mais une œuvre d’art. L’exemple des Immatériaux de Jean-François Lyotard », *Appareil*, n° 10 (Lyotard et la surface d’inscription numérique), 2012. [Online] <https://journals.openedition.org/appareil/860> [consulted November 08 2018].
40. See the copy of a work document from 1984 (the second phase of reflecting on and designing the exhibition) reproduced in Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput (dir.), *Les Immatériaux : Album*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985, p. 19.
41. Philippe Délis, « Architecture : l’espace-temps autrement... », in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 24.
42. At one point the idea of each visitor having a magnetic card to keep that would record their movements was mooted until it was abandoned for technical and financial reasons. See Jean-Louis Boissier, « La question des nouveaux médias numériques », in Bernadette Dufrêne (dir.), *Centre Pompidou, trente ans d’histoire : 1977-2007*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 2007, p. 377.
43. Jean-Louis Boissier, « La question des nouveaux médias numériques », in Bernadette Dufrêne (dir.), *Centre Pompidou, trente ans d’histoire : 1977-2007*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 2007, p. 380.
44. Élie Théofilakis, « Condition humaine, l’interface ou la transmodernité », in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. X.

45. Exhibition press release, p. 4. [Online] <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/document/de/0d/de0d76bbe203394435216a975bea8618/normal.pdf>, [consulted July 18 2018].
46. The opinion of a thirty-year-old teacher and academic in philosophy and epistemology visitor to the exhibition, in Nathalie Heinich, « Un évènement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'évènement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 105.
47. Nathalie Heinich, « Un évènement culturel », in Christian Carrier (dir.), *Les Immatériaux* (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), *Étude de l'évènement exposition et de son public*, Paris, Expo Media, 1986, p. 117.
48. Jérôme Glicenstein, « « Les Immatériaux » : exposition, œuvre, événement », in Françoise Coblence et Michel Enaudeau (dir.), *Lyotard et les arts*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2014, p. 205.
49. A quote from Thierry Chaput in Philippe Merlant, « La règle du jeu : matérialiser Les Immatériaux, entretien avec l'équipe du C.C.I. », in Élie Théofilakis (dir.), *Modernes et après : Les Immatériaux*, Paris, Autrement, 1985, p. 19.
50. While the exhibition may have wrong-footed many visitors who failed to grasp the issues at stake, it left a lasting mark on everyone who saw it, and on exhibition history. It had various follow-ons. For example, exhibitions curated by Thierry Chaput at the Cité des Sciences, in particular the *Image calculée* in 1988, but also the establishment of the *Revue virtuelle* from 1992 to 1996 at the Centre Pompidou. It also influenced numerous artists like Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno and Loris Gréaud in the design of their own exhibitions. A more in-depth study of the influence of the *Immatériaux* exhibition in the field of contemporary art still needs to be carried out.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* curated by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput at the Centre Pompidou in 1985, and more particularly on its soundtrack. The exhibition was devised around the question of “postmodernity”, and aimed to reflect an era where the question of intangibility was becoming more and more present with the development of new technologies. Visitors were given wireless headphones to wear as they wandered around the exhibit, so that they could listen to a specially recorded soundtrack. However, the soundtrack, which broadcast texts of writers and philosophers but also recorded sounds – music and various noises – that had been chosen to resonate with the developed themes in the exhibition, led to much confusion among visitors. In this article, we will examine the initial intentions of the exhibition team concerning the soundtrack and its broadcasting system by comparing them with the visitors’ experience.

INDEX

Keywords: Les Immatériaux, Jean-François Lyotard, Thierry Chaput, exhibition, soundtrack, headphones, postmodernity, new technologies

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In 2017, Marie Vicet completed a Ph.D. in contemporary art history at University Paris Nanterre on the links between contemporary visual artists and the music video since the early 1980s. Her current research focuses on the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* which took place in 1985 at the Centre Georges Pompidou and was curated by Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, concentrating on the place of new media in the event. Along with Andreas Broeckmann, she recently published a chronology of the exhibition (see <http://les-immateriaux.net/working-papers/>). For the year 2019-2020, she is a postdoctoral fellow at the German Centre for Art History - DFK Paris as part of the “Arts and New Media (XX-XXI Century)” annual themed programme.