

MEMORYFRAMES

Silvia Laura Carli

Andrea Wolf Yadlin

www.memoryframes.org

memoryFrames is a visual file of intimate and recent memory created using home videos which are exchanged and adapted to four fictional stories to create the intimate and recent memory of each one.

It is a virtual staging of the memory-forming process built from the audio-visual registers we make in our daily lives. The formation of memory is like making a film: by joining frames, we create a film of our identity. Internet as the convergence space where the information is connected and reorganised enables this to be an open process, converting the user into the editor of the memories of four characters in conflict with one another for different reasons tied to their past.

*“The present and the past coexist,
but the past shouldn’t be in flashback”.*

Alain Resnais

When we say who we are, we create a story of our lives. The construction of this story involves a selection and recounting process. We choose certain milestones from among an endless set of elements (selective memory) and we connect them through nexuses of causality. This operation is called narrating a story and when we narrate a story what we are trying to do is to make sense of the events. The selection is therefore intentional since we choose elements from the past to project them into the future (double movement in the story: retrospection and propection).

By assuming this manner of constructing memory, we enter into the world of narrative knowledge where the story is representative and reconstructive: it represents what has been, reconstructing it with the help of a series of conventions, to bring back what is no longer.

Our approach is based on two assumptions:

- If we understand the construction of intimate memory as a narrative construction, we can recognise in this process the elements inherent to dramatic structure. Hence,

these moments of narrative inflection correspond to stages which, except for the different contexts, are repeated in each one of the stories and are thus common to all of them.

- As a consequence of the long range of images, thanks to the media and particularly to the cinema, the visual representation devices associated with these systems not only influence/determine how we see the world but also how we position ourselves in it. The oral tradition as a vehicle for creating and transmitting memory gives way to an audio-visual code that conditions the construction of our memory.

NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND STORY STRUCTURE

“A story is not, as one might intuitively think, a faithful image of a fragment of reality, but rather a sensory mechanism that our consciousness must manipulate from that slice of the world, enabling us to obtain certain effects of surprise, pleasure, enjoyment, recognition and finally realism. Stories are not things, they are not in the world; rather, they are constructed using narration”¹.

All stories are composed of a series of structural elements that can be found in different types of accounts. We can see the similarities in the different morphological studies conducted by different thinkers and theorists such as Aristotle, Propp, Levi Strauss, Greimas and Joseph Campbell, among others.

The narrative model used by Aristotle divides the plot into acts, where the first one corresponds to an initial exposition with the presentation of characters and contexts and ends with the first node of the plot which represents a twist in the story, the alteration of normality which leads to action. The second act corresponds to the development, to the actions taken by the main character to overcome the conflict announced at the end of the first act, with the appearance of a series of obstacles that must be overcome in order to achieve the objective. This act terminates with the climax which leads into the third act: the resolution of the story, when we find out whether or not the main character achieves his or her objective.

Algirdas Greimas bases his canonical narrative sequence on a general syntagmatic structure in which there are four fundamental stages: contract, competence, performance and sanction. In the centre of each story there is a mission which must be carried out, an action that must be performed and an objective that must be met.

The contract presents a mandate in which someone establishes the task to be performed and the reward for doing so. That someone may be an external entity or the main character.

Competence is the moment when the main character acquires the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the objective. In this stage, secondary stories related to the learning process are developed.

Performance refers to the test. It is the moment of greatest tension in which the main character confronts the conflict which he/she must overcome in order to comply with the provisions of the contract.

Sanction refers to the resolution of the story but is not automatic when the test is successfully completed, but rather when the one that has formulated the contract (the one that “orders” the mission) acknowledges fulfilment.

Joseph Campbell’s proposal is based on the study of myth. In his work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell recognises in mythology and particularly in the mythological hero the underlying model in all of the stories which have been told to date. Christopher Vogler picks up on this idea in his book *The Writer’s Journey*: “The model of the hero’s journey is universal in scope; it occurs in all cultures and all ages. Its variations are as infinite as the human species itself, so in all cases the basic format remains unaltered”².

Beyond its infinite variations, the hero’s story always involves some kind of journey: the hero leaves his home to embark upon a journey that will lead him into a new world full of challenges. The journey can be understood as a metaphor of the main character’s growth.

In his approach to the narrative structure, Vogler draws a parallel with the organisational approach taken by Campbell in which each act is related to one of the stages of the hero’s journey. The first act focuses on the departure, the separation. In this act we are introduced to the hero’s world, the call to adventure, his rejection, the help of a mentor and the crossing of the first threshold. The second act refers to the descent, initiation and penetration. Here the hero faces different tests, meets allies and enemies, reaches the depths of the strange world he has entered and faces the most important challenge that must be overcome in order to earn his reward. The

third act focuses on the hero's return, the journey home and his resurrection as a demonstration of the changes which the hero has undergone on his journey.

All of these analyses share certain elements in the organisation of the dramatic development, incorporating different stages that demonstrate the hero's transformation. Based on the different semiotic theories on narrative structure, one can reach the conclusion that at the deepest level the different accounts share a common base, while they become more divergent at more superficial levels, varying according to the different contexts out of which they emerge. Aware of the variability of the different contexts, we have situated our project in a western culture setting with similar habits, customs and aesthetics which enables us to play with the concept of interchangeable memories.

These studies have also served as a source for organising one of the first selections to enable the interchange of the memories that completed the story lines of the short films (see production process, chapter on materials, memories)

THE FUNCTION OF MEMORY AND AUDIO-VISUAL CODING

*"I wonder how people remember things
who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape".*

Sans Soleil, Chris Marker

An initial definition of memory could be one which describes it as the power that enables human being to retain past experiences. We store information, but to think of memory merely as a container is insufficient. Memory is not only the opposite of forgetting. It would be a simplification to reduce it to a mere method for retaining data, events, people. Memory as text implies creation; it is a means of knowing and situating ourselves in the world. We process these data, connect them and write a story. If we accept the fact that writing conditions our way of thinking, we recognise the method as a way of organising and structuring information (it is important to clarify that when we talk about writing we are not limiting ourselves to a linear narration. We are more interested in the relational activity, the ability to connect the parts in pursuit of a larger construction). These data are obtained through the senses: we listen, smell, touch and see. We then reconstruct the experience based on smells, sounds, sensations and *images*.

History has evolved into the triumph of images. Seeing is believing, seeing is knowing. Visual representation has become an infallible means of owning the world. Hence the image – whether fixed or moving – rises up as the quintessential code for bringing past experiences into the present. Man’s attempt to capture time in an image, from the earliest advances in painting in search of realism, to photography, to cinema as the maximum representation of reality³ has caused the object represented and its representation to fuse, to be confused. So it is that when we are faced with the image of an event, we feel as though we are seeing the event. Absolute trust in the technique is what generates this dissolvence, which overlooks the concept of *aura* described by Walter Benjamin and which refers to the here and now, “a very special intermingling of space and time: the appearance of something far away, despite how close it may be”⁴. This is destroyed by reproduction techniques.

In the age of visibility, we live in a world that has swallowed its double. Plunged into this overpopulated iconic fauna, not only do images determine our present life but also our memories. The notion of the operation of memory as a mechanism that transcends the distance of time added to the value of the image as a fundamental instrument in this process leads us to the idea that the past is accessible through images. Images produce, or at least create the illusion of producing, a situation in which the past and the present co-exist. We then decide to collect the portrait of everything we wish to remember or do not wish to forget. Images are thus converted into our memory.

Consequently, the audio-visual codes are transferred to the construction of our memories: fixed images, moving images, slow motion, jumpcuts, loops, distant audio of the vacuum of the perishability of the here and now – actually the “there” and “then” – displaced, replaced by one or one thousand photograms. The media and the massification of audio-visual recording technologies, from super8 cameras to mobile phone video cameras, enable this language to become increasingly imbedded in our everyday lives in the most natural way.

In conclusion, there are three elements. The event itself, with its ephemeral nature and its death while it happens as something unrepeatable. The image of that event: a photo, a film, an external entity arising out of the event but which becomes independent in a new state of autonomy, converted into a new element with its own value that seeks the non-perishability of the perishable (the event). Memory as a personal text which each one of us writes with certain codes and syntax. Hence,

if memory as writing consists of rebuilding our experiences, it is impossible not to recognise the weight of the images and its codes in this process. We create our own film of our own lives.

NEW CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEELING

*“I will have spent my life trying to
understand the function of remembering,
which is not the opposite of forgetting,
but rather its lining.
We do not remember, we rewrite memory
much as history is rewritten”.*
Sans Soleil, Chris Marker

The idea of constructing memory as a selective, relational and narrative process whose visual code is fundamental leads us to think about the different audio-visual forms that operate in this way and we find that found footage and the cinematic essay are the closest references to our project. The recycling of materials and the collage are two of the basic elements in the conception of our idea. While the former offers an interesting and extensive database, in the latter we find an interesting style of writing as the collage allows the creation of new semantic texts by combining its parts, while at the same time exemplifying its representative nature.

Much of post-modern cinema has been preoccupied with the problem of representation. The Second World War highlight the insufficiency of the image as a historical document and memory appears as a recurring theme. It is within this context that the cinematic essays of Alain Resnais and Chris Marker emerge. In both case, the subject of memory is recurrent: the questioning of the relationship between history and memory and image. Both Goddard and Marker view history as a discourse that can be traced in the history of images.

In a found footage film, we are taught to look dialectically. We are not simply shown a vision of the world but rather the images of it. File footage emblematises images and allows the discourse to be changed. Through editing, new texts are created by joining and juxtaposing images and audio to generate new sensory relations.

Not only do we consider this to be pertinent to the development of our project above and beyond a visual reference, but it is also pertinent to our approach to

understanding the interaction as new creations of feelings and meanings. This consideration involves the following points:

- Recognising the figure of the reader/recipient as an active part of the production process, the part which completes the process. Soviet filmmakers in the twenties created a syntax through visual montage which gave way to reflection and new writing. For example, «Man with a Movie Camera» by Dziga Vertov (1929) operates on diverse discursive levels through a montage which appeals to the viewer to end the work. The view is the one that gives it meaning.
- Investment in the hermeneutic arrow of interpretation: Now it is not only the subject that interprets the image, but the image also interprets the subject and from this point the receiver operates. We are inside the image, inside the speculative world. Man and image are no longer separate; they overlap.
- Recognition of a certain hypocrisy in the interactiveness because the artist continues to be the author and does not really give the rest the chance to become the real co-authors of the work. We believe that this can be inverted when the receptor is recognised as part of the productive process. In our project, this participation consists of the receptor closing the connections between the character in the story and the memories that appear; it is clearly understood that it is the receptor who creates the story from his own experience and context (Barthes' idea of the floating meaning: meaning that can be filled in with different meanings based on the context of the one interpreting it).
- «When we use the concept of «interactive media» exclusively with regard to computer-based media, we run the risk of interpreting «interaction» literally, equating it with the physical interaction between the user and a media object (pressing a button, choosing a links or moving the body) while overlooking the psychological interaction. But the psychological processes of filling in what is missing, of forming hypotheses, of remembering and identifying that we need to understand any type of text or image are erroneously identified with a structure of interactive links with an objective existence».⁵

According to this way of understanding interaction, perhaps we could do without the user's first actions in our project. However, we have included them in order to set the stage, to demonstrate that memories enter into shorts in a semi-hazardous way

without there being any preconceived relationship with the history beforehand. At the same time, and in keeping with this line of thinking, we did not want the user's actions to have a totally explicit relationship to the final results. We also considered the possibility of leaving a second moment of interaction open to enable the user to contribute his own materials to load his own home videos which would become part of the archive of memories. To the extent that the user chooses which videos to upload, he is managing this selection and choosing part of the material for the work. This idea is further reinforced by our view of the project as one big collective memory and therefore we wanted it to be in constant expression.

Internet is the ideal medium for staging the operation of memory thanks to its open and relational nature, which appears like an analogy of the synaptic operator. Furthermore, Internet makes it possible to create a dynamic work, where the final video can only be completed with the participation of the user. The different parts only take on meaning and work synergistically as a result of the user's choices. Moreover, the short film only makes sense when the user gives it meaning. The user is the one who closes the connections between the character in the story and the memories that appear; he is the one who creates the story from his own experience and context. It is here that the idea materialises that our memories or their registers are interchangeable. They are common. By identifying them, having lived through similar experiences and by sharing the same language to build the account, the registers of our lives and the lives of others are similar, recognisable and ultimately interchangeable. It is not only we who interpret the images; rather, the images interpret and question us.

Furthermore, while the spectral nature of the cinematographic image poses problems in terms of its materialness, which resides at least in its photographic encryption in the film, in this case there is no specific finished product. The finished product is generated dynamically as a result of the user's interaction/participation. The final video does not reside anywhere but is potentially present everywhere.

In order to build the virtual set of memory we needed the memories («memories»/ archive material, a device for putting them in context (shorts) and certain elements that would enable us to categorise them (memory clips).

MEMORIES / FILE MATERIAL:

As San Soleil tells us: «I remember that month of January in Tokyo or rather I remember the images that I filmed of the month of January in Tokyo. They've replaced my memory. They are my memory».

We wanted to create a memory file understanding it in this sense: the image converted into memory and we've called it "memories".

This file is composed of a collection of home videos from the fifties up to the present in various formats: 8mm, super8, vhs, high8 and minidv, the image technology corresponding to the age when the image was recorded. We have collected more than twenty hours of material, creating a big collective memory of intimate and recent history. The general contents are situations which are easy for us to relate to: birthdays, weddings, trips, family reunions, day to day happenings ... Moments that are repeated throughout the ages with different faces and fashions. Their function is therefore to represent the visuality of the language of construction and transmission of memory as a code that is recognised and accepted by all as common symbols with which it is possible to construct a new way of writing our identity.

We have built the file using material from different sources, including our own home videos, super8 videos purchases at Los Encants and materials provided by friends and acquaintances, establishing a word-of-mouth network asking for these types of images. The 8mm and super8 films were more difficult to work with due to the different media support. The solution was to project the material and record the projection with a DVcam camera. The other formats were easier to work with. The procedure was to collect the different formats from the computer. The material was classified and organised according to the source.

Above and beyond the technical procedure, we do not view this process as merely an exercise in gathering material but rather as a way for others to participate in the project, a means of including them in part of its visual content, either as actors (in those cases where they appear in the videos) or producers (in those cases where they have filmed the material). In a way, it is as though we were all responsible for part of the aesthetics of the project since the aesthetic of the project is that of the home movie. At the same time, we are recycling material that was not directly intended for this and in doing so we are appropriating it and reinterpreting it while maintaining its evocative meaning and its original function: to remember.

When gathering this material together, we observed the existence of a knowledge of audio-visual resources, an awareness of the different shots, the use of zooms, panning. It is even possible to see the dramatic intent in the use of these resources. This confirms the construction of a common and specific language inherent to the home video, a language that has been constructed unconsciously and that has been established, a language that obviously responds to and arises out of the influence of cinema and the media and that is representative of another phenomenon which is the incorporation of the audio-visual code into daily life, generating a new alphabet: that of the image.

SHORTS:

Four fictional stories, four characters. We witness a moment in their lives. They are simple stories about daily life, routine, but also about memory. A girl who finds a postcard when she gets home from work at the end of the day. We do not know the exact contents but we understand that someone is coming to visit. A boy who receives a telephone call in the morning. All we hear is that he is to go and pick up someone's things. It's an uncomfortable situation and the mobile is ringing constantly, upsetting what would otherwise be a normal workday. A train ride, an older man going to be reunited with part of his history. A radio announcer reading the daily news: the advances in studies on the formation of memory; the transmission runs through the city, among the people, each one of them a memory warehouse within the great database of collective memory simulate the network of neuronal circuits characteristics of synapses.

Each history functions as a unit but also as a part of the whole, since there is a spatial continuity between them at certain times marked by the subtle intersections of the characters. In each short, the main character of another story appears on a second - almost third - level. They are parallel stories or stories that run into one another, revealing themselves like the pieces of a puzzle that can be put together in different ways. Each short is shown separately. In each experience, the user has the option of choosing one of the four so that at first he will not recognise the connection easily. However, if he chooses the others later, he will see the relationships between them and will be able to put the puzzle together the way it makes the most sense to him. The only invariable is that the main unifying element of all of the stories is memory.

MEMORIES:

Before the empire of the image, the empire of the word reigned. The oral tradition has always been the primary means of transmitting knowledge and the vehicle for keeping the memory of past experiences alive.

Perhaps not being quite as aware of this as we should, at one point in the process we decided to collect stories of the memories of different people to include them in our project. With this idea in mind, we began to contact our friends and acquaintances. We asked them to “describe any memory you’d like to share with us”. Listening to the different experiences of the different people, and seeing the way they described them, we observed that each one told stories about their lives. This enabled us to establish a framework within which to begin to contextualise and catalogue the file material we had gathered.

While we were aware of the particularity of each experience, our intention was to remove the ownership of the memory by a specific subject, to a certain extent, going back to the idea that more than the specificity of the anecdote we all share similar episodes in our lives. We chose an aesthetic that did not focus entirely on the individual personality. The intention was rather to denature the faces, converting them into anonymous faces, into a multitude of eyes, mouths and skin. To do so we built a set with a black background and used lighting that created a marked chiaroscuro effect, with part of the faces in semidarkness, with close ups and detail shots.

This experience confirmed the conceptual approaches we had been developing regarding the construction of memory and specifically regarding the influence of narrative structures on the way we create an identity for ourselves in the world. We realised that there were common elements to the different accounts that we could relate to the different stages of the narrative structure, to the hero’s journey.

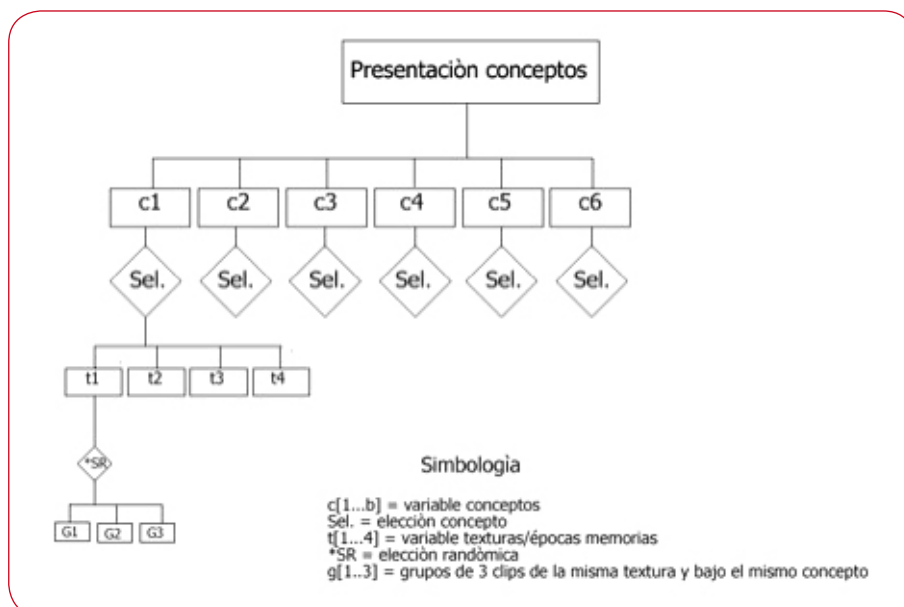
On the basis of these common elements, we established the following classification:

CONCEPT	CORRESPONDENCE WITH ELEMENTS OF THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE	TYPES OF MEMORIES
Me in the world	First act (the ordinary world): presentation of the character is his context; how and where he is situated in the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories that refer to sensorial experiences that act as a reference for his position in the world. - Memories that recount a new or strange situation which reaffirm or question his situation in the world.
Ariadne's thread	This element refers to the existence of close ties to certain people who accompany the main character/hero during his journey, either as effective allies or as the reason why he pushes forward to overcome the test. The principal theme here is love in all of its forms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories of the family, particularly of a particular family member with whom he has a very close relationship. The memories involved unconditional love and protection. - Memories of romantic love.
Innocence	Corresponds to the initial state or starting point of the hero, who experiences a transformation at the end of his journey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories of childhood that reflect an innocent view of the world.
The game	Taking as a reference the theory of Margaret Mead on play as the time when a child begins to create his identity in the world by relating to others, this corresponds to the call to adventure and the crossing of the first threshold. This is the time when the hero leaves his circle and the change begins to take place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories of childhood and playing games with other children; childish pranks. - Memories of adolescence and first important experiences.
Growth/Test	The time when the hero acquires the knowledge and skills he needs to achieve his objectives. Initiation. Here the hero is confronted with different tests, reaching the depths of the strange new world he has entered, facing different obstacles as they arise. The moment of greatest tension in which the hero deals with conflict; passing the test means he is transformed into a hero.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories of difficult situations. Memories of strange experiences that have confirmed the hostilities in the world. - Memories that talk about times when the teller has had to use his skills to overcome a difficult situation.
Loss/disappointment	Difficult moments that sometimes involve a sacrifice or a betrayal and which will affect the hero's actions from then on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memories that talk about the loss of a loved one, either through death or betrayal.

This classification will translate in the concept variable in the programming when structuring the project.

The 25 clips resulting from this stage represent the oral account as a language for constructing and transmitting memory and serve as a means of introducing the user to a context of reflection on memory in the first interface.

FLOW CHART



Presentación conceptos	Presentation of concepts
Simbología	Symbols
Variable conceptos	Concept variable
Elección concepto	Choice of concept
Variable texturas / épocas memorias	Texture/period variable
Elección randómica	Random selection
Grupos de 3 clips de la misma textura y bajo el mismo concepto	Groups of 3 clips with the same texture and same concept

The choice of the concept variable provides access to the texture variable contained in each concept and which has four possibilities. A combination of these choices results in a group. The combination of these choices results in a group of three clips which are the memories that will be included in the shorts (or more, which will therefore be selected randomly).

The final equation is $c+t \Rightarrow (c+t)_{clip1}, (c+t)_{clip2}, (c+t)_{clip3}$

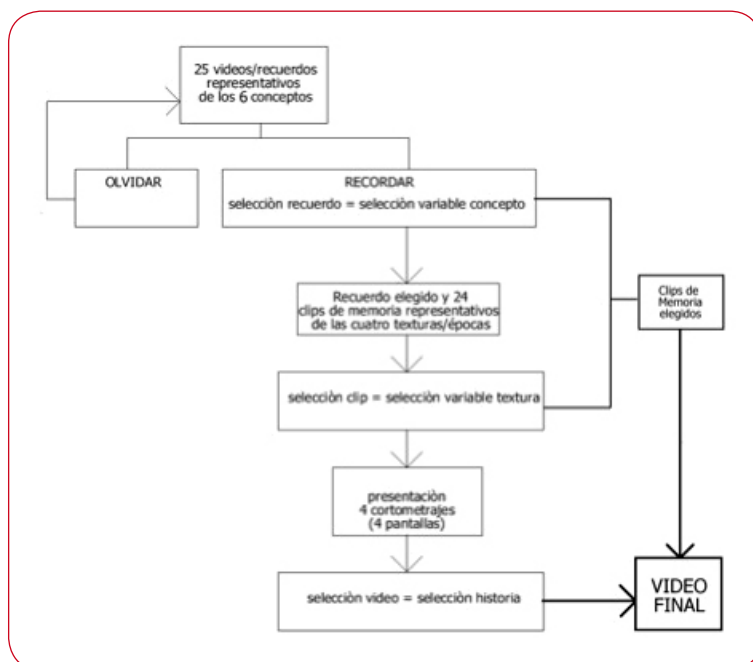
This is interwoven with the chosen history, which is divided into four modules. For example: $h1_1, h1_2, h1_3, h1_4$

The final result would then be:

$h1_1 + (c+t)_{clip1} + h1_2 + (c+t)_{clip2} + h1_3 + (c+t)_{clip3} + h1_4$

There is a function for recording the length of each clip. When that length is exceeded it goes on to the next clip.

INTERACTION DIAGRAM



25 videos/recuerdos representativos de los 6 conceptos	25 videos/memories representing the 6 concepts
Olvidar	Forget
Recordar Selección recuerdo = selección variable concepto	Remember Memory selection = concept variable selection
Recuerdo elegido y 24 clips de memoria representativos de las cuatro texturas/ épocas	Chosen memory and 24 memory clips representing the four textures/periods
Clips de memoria elegidos	Chosen memory clips
Selección clip = selección variable textura	Clip selection = texture variable selection
Presentación 4 cortometrajes (4 pantallas)	Presentation 4 shorts (4 screens)
Selección video = selección historia	Video selection = story selection
Vídeo final	Final video

NOTES

1 Volli, Ugo, *Manuale di semiótica*, Editori Laterza, Roma, 2000, p. 96.

2 Vogler, Christopher, *The writer's journey*, Ediciones Robinbook, Barcelona, 2002, p.42

3 "Compared with imitation, the technical reproduction of the work of art is something new that has been intermittently popular throughout history, at long intervals but with growing intensity". When reviewing this process, Benjamin highlights wood carving, lithography and photography, which ultimately leads to cinema, as the milestones. "With it (photography), the hand was relieved of the principal artistic obligations in the image reproduction process, which then fell exclusively on the eye". Benjamin, Walter, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, Editorial Itaca, México D.F, 2003, p.39-40.

Lev Manovich takes a similar look at the development of the techniques for the creation of images in motion up to the invention of cinema. "...cinema was understood from the time its creation as the art of the moving image, that which finally managed to create a convincing illusion of dynamic reality. If we approach cinema this way (...) we can see how it replaced previous techniques for the creation and presentation of moving images". Manovich, Lev, *Language of the new media*, Editorial Paidós, Barcelona, 2005, p.369

4 Benjamin, Walter, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, Editorial Itaca, México D.F, 2003, p.47

5 Manovich, Lev, *Language of the new media*, Editorial Paidós, Barcelona, 2005, p.369