Zapping Zone and *Level Five.* Between the visitor's experience of the video installation and the filmmaker's reflection of the essay film[1]

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Abstract. The displacement from the essay film to the video installation has in Chris Marker one of its first and most relevant figures. The comparative study of *Zapping Zone. Proposal for an imaginary television* (1990) and *Level Five* (1996) allows for the analysis of the construction and complexification, and the deconstruction and saturation processes that take place between the most complex expression of the Markerian essay film and its transformation into the video installation. *Zapping Zone* responds to the embodiment of both the magmatic stage of the postmodern audiovisual era and the starting point of the filmmaker's work (documentaries, essay films, video installations, etc.), which would be the opposite of the writer's blank page: a saturated world of images that needs to be selected, analyzed and worked on in order to build meaning. *Level Five* offers the filmmaker's reflection on that same reality, applied to the Battle of Okinawa, through a complex audiovisual thinking process that hybridizes different types of images—documentary and fictional; analogue and electronic—devices—epistolary video diary, video game and cyberspace—and their authorial subjectivities—Laura, Laura's lover and Chris—in order to reflect on the relationship between these audiovisual forms and spaces and the thematic axis memory pain oblivion.
Keywords: essay-film, video installation, Chris Marker, audiovisual thinking, postmodernity.

[es] *Zapping Zone* y *Level Five*. Entre la experiencia del visitante de la video instalación y la reflexión del cineasta del film-ensayo

Resumen. El desplazamiento del film-ensayo a la videoinstalación tiene en Chris Marker una de sus primeras y más relevantes figuras. El estudio comparado de *Zapping Zone. Proposal for an imaginary television* (1990) y *Level Five* (1996) permite analizar los procesos de construcción y complejización, deconstrucción y saturación que se dan entre la expresión más compleja del film-ensayo markeriano y su transformación en videoinstalación. *Zapping Zone* responde a la materialización tanto del estadio magmático de la era audiovisual posmoderna como del punto de partida del trabajo del cineasta (documentales, film-ensayos, videoinstalaciones, etc.), que sería lo contrario de la página en blanco del escritor: un mundo saturado de imágenes que necesitan ser seleccionadas. analizadas, y trabajadas para construir significado. *Level Five* ofrece la reflexión del cineasta sobre esa misma realidad, aplicada a la batalla de Okinawa, a través de un complejo proceso de pensamiento audiovisual que hibrida diferentes tipos de imágenes –documentales y ficcionales; analógicas y electrónicas–, dispositivos –video diario epistolar, videojuego y ciberespacio– y sus subjetividades autorales –Laura, la pareja de Laura y

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Chris– para reflexionar sobre la relación entre estas formas y espacios audiovisuales y el eje temático memoria-dolor-olvido.
Palabras clave: film-ensayo, video instalación, Chris Marker, pensamiento audiovisual, posmodernidad.

Summary: 1. Introduction, 2. *Zapping Zone*. The video installation as experience of postmodern reality. 3. *Level Five*. The essay film as reflection on audiovisual postmodernity. 4. Between the visitor's experience and the filmmaker's reflection. References

1. Introduction

¡The displacement from the essay film to the video installation has in Chris Marker one of its first and most relevant figures. The comparative study of *Zapping Zone. Proposal for an imaginary television* (1990) and *Level Five* (1996) allows for the analysis of the construction and complexification, and deconstruction and saturation processes that take place between the most complex expression of the Markerian essay film and its transformation into the experience of video installation. It is essential to point out that the museum work precedes the cinematic one, which also implies the contribution of the creation of the former in the evolution and complexification of the latter. If we compare his essay films with his video installations, I argue that, while the former generates an itinerary of increasing complexification that culminates in *Level Five*, the latter offers the opposite evolution, towards essentialization, being his most complex creation, *Zapping Zone*, the second of these works (Table 1).

Table 1. Table elaborated by the author.

Essay films		*Video installations*
Lettre de Sibérie	1957	
Si j'avais quatre dromadaires	1966	
	1978	*Quand le siècle a pris formes (Guerre et révolution)*
Sans soleil	1982	
	1990	***Zapping Zone. Proposals for an Imaginary Television***
	1995	*Silent Movie*
Level Five	**1996**	
	1997	*Immemory One*
	1998	*Immemory One*
	2005	*Owl Art Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men*

I consider the four selected works as his essential essay films, defining this filmic form as an audiovisual thinking process generated by the filmmaker's subjectivity. Thus, the essay film develops a reflection from the relationship of different materials, containing two complementary sides: the "parataxic thinking" defined by Josep Ma-

ria Català (2014, p. 206) and the "interstitial thinking" theorized by Laura Rascaroli (2017, p. 51). Hence, the essay film embodies "a thinking in act" (Moure, 2004, p. 37) that I define using Jacques Rancière's concept of sentence-image, which combines this dual nature of the audiovisual thinking process:

> The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined esthetically—that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. (2009, p. 46)

Thus, the sentence-image oscillates "between two poles, dialectical and symbolic […] between the image that separates and the sentence which strives for continuous phrasing" (p. 58).

Starting from this definition, *Lettre de Sibérie* (1957) became a foundational work of this filmic form by enabling the expression of the filmmaker's imagination, and the thinking process that generates it, using the epistolary device to create a letter-film addressed to an unknown recipient (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018, pp. 56-82). *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (1966) instrumentalized the conversation around the spectatorship of photographic images, making the shifts among subjectivities possible. *Sans soleil* (1982) complexifies the possibilities of the epistolary device, as well as the displacement among subjectivities, to offer a reflection on postmodernity and its images (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2021). The frozen cinematic image served as a starting point for reflection on memory and the equality of the gaze to later go through the evolution of the television, electronic and virtual images. Finally, *Level Five* reaches the maximum complexity of the Markerian audiovisual thinking process, as I will analyze below.

Regarding the video installations, *Quand le siècle a pris formes (Guerre et révolution)* (1978) consisted of two monitors on which the same fifteen-minute sequence was shown, with a three-second lag. The sequence offered a montage of archival images from the First World War and the October Revolution, electronically altered through a synthesizer. That is to say, Marker had started experimenting with *the Zone* from *Sans soleil* a few years earlier in the video installation. *Zapping Zone*, Marker's second video installation, became the most complex, with 19 monitors, 13 video sequences, six computer programs, of which two were interactive, four luminous displays containing 80 slides, and finally, ten photomontages displayed on the adjacent walls. It is necessary to point out here that I am analyzing the first exhibition of this video installation at the Centre Pompidou in 1990, as part of the exhibition *Passages de l'image*. After *Zapping Zone*, the video installation is simplified as it progresses through the interaction that will lead to the CD-ROM version of *Immemory One* (1997). *Silent Movie* (1995) exposed five monitors placed vertically where five sequences of 23 minutes are shown, all of them accompanied by a unique soundtrack consisting of piano compositions (Figure 1). Again, the moving image was accompanied by 18 slides and ten posters. *Immemory One* installation consisted of three monitors, two speakers, three tables, six seats, a Guillaume painted on the wall, and the *Immemory* application programed on HyperStudio. *Roseware* (1998), co-created with Laurence Rassel, delved into this interactive workspace idea with two monitors, a scanner, a camera, a projector and a screen. Finally, *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* (2005) showed the wasteland between the two world wars visualized 80

years later through digital images in a loop, simultaneous and interspersed with T.S. Eliot's poem (Figure 2).

Figure 1. *Silent Movie* (1995)
Source: Peer's archive: https://www.peeruk.org/chris-marker

Figure 2. *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* (Chris Marker, 2005)
Source: MoMA's archive: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/115

Therefore, while *Level Five* becomes Marker's last essay film, reaching its maximum complexity, *Zapping Zone* also responds to this characteristic, but it is nevertheless located at the beginning of Marker's video installation activity. While the essay film responds to a progressive complexification, the Markerian video installa-

tion generates the reverse itinerary, a progressive essentialization. I aim to analyze both works to later compare how *Level Five*'s thinking process turns into the visitor's experience in *Zapping Zone*, and how *Zapping Zone* fuels the creation of *Level Five*; the different elements that embody the transformation from the essay film to the video installation and the formal dialogue that is established between both audiovisual forms.

2. *Zapping Zone.* The video installation as experience of postmodern reality

This video installation is disposed as a disorderly accumulation of materials—19 monitors consisting of 13 video sequences and six computer programs—that prevent any sense of coherence. The visitor is not assigned a position as spectator because the installation is not designed for a comprehensive, guided visit (Figure 3). Instead, they visitor must create their own experience through it that will provoke a subsequent reflection. This disorderly accumulation is generated through different elements: the simultaneity of the zones, the sequences in loops, the monitor's disposition, the lack of a spectator position, fragmentation and distraction.

Chris Marker *Zapping Zone (Proposals for an imaginary television)* 1990-1994 © Chris Marker. Photo : Centre Pompidou

Figure 3. *Zapping Zone. Proposal for an imaginary television* (Chris Marker, 1990-1994) Source: Centre Pompidou's archive: https://twitter.com/CentrePompidou/status/1480947728423260160/photo/1

The format of the installation allowed for the coexistence of multiple registries of information and ideas. The complex installation is indicative of a change in Marker's thinking that was initiated by digital systems. Unlike the linearity of his earlier work in television and film, the new piece is based on constellations that allow multiple times and spaces to coexist. Advances in digital technology permitted Marker to propel the essay film into a new register, one that is not bound by the older linear forms of representation available through writing or film. (Alter, 2018, p. 315)

The 19 zones, using the concept from *Sans soleil*, show the different materials that would later make up *Level Five*. In the 13 video sequences,[3] we find a complete spectrum of the audiovisual forms created by Marker (Table 2).

Table 2. Table elaborated by the author.

1. Zone TV: *Détour Ceausescu* (1990, 8 min.)	Essay film
2. Zone (Spectre. 1990, 27 min.)	Animation
3. Zone Tarkovski (1985, 26 min.)	Documentary
4. Zone Clip: *Getting Away with It* (1990, 4 min.)	Music video
5. Zone Éclats (1990, 22 min)	Video
Cocteau; 2084; KFX; Frames; Statues2; Taps; S tatues2; Kat Klip; Fractals; Alexandra; Vertov; Arielle; Chouettes; Zeroing; Moonfeet; Flying Fractals	
6. Zone Berlin: *Berliner Ballade* (1990, 20 min.)	TV documentary report
7. Zone Séquences (20 min.)	Marker's films
Le Fond de l'air est rouge; Sans soleil; La Solitude du chateur de fond; Le Joli Mai; Le Sixième Face du Pentagone; L'Héritage de la chouette	
8. Zone Tokyo: *Tokyo Days* (1986, 20 min.)	Travelogue
9. Zone Bestiaire (1990, 9 min.)	Marker's videos
Chant écoutant *la musique; An Owl is an Owl is an Owl; Zoo piece*	
10. Zone Christo: *From Chris to Christo* (1985, 24 min.)	Exhibition diary
11. Zone Photo: *Photos.Browse* (1990, 17 min.)	Photos
12. Zone Frisco: *Junkopia* (1981, 6 min.)	Short film
13. Zone Matta (1985, 14 min.)	Interview

In the 6 computer programs, two of them interactive, we also find the different versions of Marker's new computer creation, among them the HyperStudio program, which already prefigures the CD-ROM device used in *Immemory* (1998) (Table 3).

Table 3. Table elaborated by the author.

1. Zone Graphs: graphic composition consisting of images of faces – Basic Applesoft language.
2. Zone Slide show: a succession of 67 still images – digital collages – PaintWorks Gold.
3. Zone Constructor / Lulucat / Owlkey: generative program composed of fractal figures.
4. Zone Elephant Bank: a succession of 29 captioned images linked by horizontal sweep transitions and programed by the artist for a display time of a few seconds each.
5. Zone Hyperstudio: interactive composition consisting of 12 interactive pictures combining texts and sounds – Hyperstudio
6. Zone Cycles: interactive program consisting of 12 graphic animations to choose, made from digital collages.

The visitor's experience is based "on the near-impossible task of focusing on a precise target in the middle of the cyber-noise" (Marker, 2003, p. 49). In addition, it is essential to point out the relevance of the installation sound, which is often forgotten in its analysis. The sound image of the 19 zones is reproduced simultaneously, making the individual viewing of them totally impossible. By trying, the spectator perceives the image as detached from its sound; the latter converted into ambient

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3   Information extracted from the exhibition brochure at the Centre Pompidou (2022).

noise. Besides, it is also essential to point out the darkness in which the installation is located, making the external references disappear.

If we analyze the evolution of the video installation, we find two relevant aspects: the modification of the different elements and the alteration of the distribution[4]. Concerning the first, the modifications of the elements that make up the installation are minimal. Marker adds two zones: *Azulmoon* in 1992 and *Zone Bosniaque* in 1994, which included the medium-length film *Le 20 heures dans les camps* (1993). Besides, he modifies another three, adding footage:

- Zone Bestiaire: addition of *Coin fenêtre* in 1992 and *Slon Tango* (1993) and *Bullfight in Okinawa* (also included in *Level Five*) in 1994.
- Zone Séquences: addition of fragments from: *2084* (1984)*, Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (1992) and images from the future *Level Five,* in 1994.
- Zone TV: addition of *Montand répète, Belkhodja s'expose,* and *Fragments d'une télévision imaginaire* in 1994.

It is necessary then to reflect on the relevance of these modifications**.** The spectators cannot detect them since it is not possible to differentiate these details. Therefore, these modifications are conceived to embody the filmmaker's creative process. That is, to show the process by which the new creations become part of this indiscernible audiovisual magma that both the creator and the spectator must go through.

Regarding the modifications of the distribution, the 14 exhibitions in 20 years, during Marker's life (Table 4), reveal another essential issue: a process of essentialization. It is crucial to point out that the installation exhibited in Barcelona that same year presents a radically different distribution in fundamental aspects (Figure 4). The circular distribution becomes panoramic, and the spectator's position is fixed now. Thus, Marker modifies the two defining aspects of the first exhibition, generating its total transformation. It is necessary then to ask ourselves if the new scenography offers a different experience and reflection from the original one. I argue that the accumulation idea of an audiovisual magma evolves to an organized version of it, in which the inapprehensible audiovisual flow becomes manageable thanks to the idea of order. If we observe the distribution of the rest of the installation exhibitions, we can observe how the disorderly accumulation of the first exhibition almost completely disappears. The initial distribution and accumulation of *Zapping Zone* needs to be simplified in order to access a *concept-idea* as a result of a previous thinking process.

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[4]   The installation was the object of the research project "Propositions pour une restauration et migration de Zapping Zone de Chris Marker" thanks to which the space *Pensée technique et pensée formelle / Technical thinking and formal thinking* was exhibited in the Centre Pompidou in 2022, showing the creation process of the video installation and its different versions over the years. https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/offer-to-professionals/scientific-research/zapping-zone-chris-marker

Table 4. Table elaborated by the author.

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1. 1990 Centre Pompidou, Paris	11. 1999 Centro Andaluz Arte Cont., Sevilla
2. 1991 Caixa Forum, Barcelona	12. 1999 Montevideo, Amsterdam
3. 1991 Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio	13. 2007 Centre Pompidou, Paris
4. 1991 San Francisco Museum	14. 2010 Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona
5. 1993 Louisiana Museum, Humlebaeck	15. 2013 Istanbul modern
6. 1994 Centre Pompidou, Paris	16. 2013 Centre Pompidou, Paris
7. 1997 Museum of Contemp. Art Tokyo	17. 2014 Whitechapel Gallery, London
8. 1998 Palais des Beaux-Arts Bruxelles	18. 2014 Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo
9.1998 Steirischer Herbst, Graz	19. 2015 Lunds Konsthall, Lund
10. 1998 Fund. Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona	20. 2020 Centre Pompidou, Paris
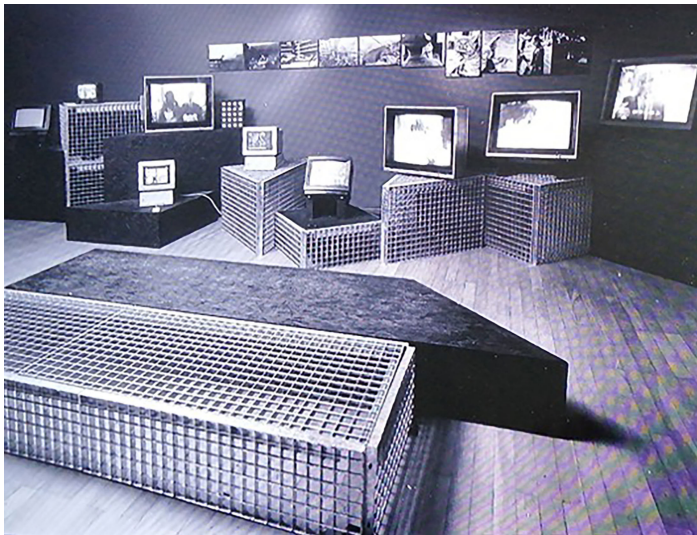
Figure 4. *Zapping Zone. Proposal for an imaginary television*
(Chris Marker, 1991) Caixa Forum, Barcelona.
Source: Exhibition *Pensée technique et pensée formelle*. Centre Pompidou 2022.
Photograph by the author.

Therefore, I argue that the first exhibition of *Zapping Zone* responds to the embodiment of both the magmatic stage of the postmodern audiovisual era and the starting point of the filmmaker's work (essay films, video installations, etc.), which would be the opposite of the writer's blank page: a saturated world of images that needs to be analyzed, studied, selected and worked on in order to build meaning. Thus, the first version of the installation is the most valuable because it is transitory; it does not respond to the specific objective of a video installation but to the general aim of audiovisual creation, conveying a strong sense of fleeting performance.

3. *Level Five*. The essay film as reflection on audiovisual postmodernity

The audiovisual thinking process in *Level Five* is generated from the subjectivity of the essayist Chris, using Marker's own voice for the second time after *Le Mystère*

Koumiko (1965). It implies the total identification between the character and the filmmaker. Laura's character asks him to order all the material she has around the video game *The Battle of Okinawa* on which her partner was working before he died. The essay film we contemplate is the materialization of that request: "One day I'll give Chris all this material for him to try to do something: a game that won't work, a woman going in circles… We'll see what he can do, the ace of montage" (Marker, 1996, min. 9). Chris's voice-over appears for the first time to explain the reasons that led him to accept it: "That's where I came into the story. At that point in my life, other people's images interested me more than my own. I took Laura's commission as a fun challenge" (min. 9). Thus, the essay film generates a reflection on the battle of Okinawa and the collective suicide of more than a third of its population (150,000 people) to avoid surrendering to the American army. It offers a reflection on the axis of memory – pain – oblivion in the historical and also intimate space and on the role that different technologies and devices have in it: "[H]ow one might use electronic memory to relate to the suffering of others" (Cooper, 2008, p. 161). The essayistic reflection is made up of the following:

- Laura's epistolary video diary addressed to her dead lover.
- Chris's voice-over narration on images of Okinawa from Laura and his lover's journey.
- Laura's lover's video game *The Battle of Okinawa*, about the battle of WWII.
- The Optional World Link as a fictional representation of cyberspace.
- Other materials: interviews, archival images, documentary films, fiction films, and literary elements.

Therefore, we find three subjectivities and three authorships, and these materials are ordered as a kind of figurative dialogue between Chris and Laura as users of both the video game and cyberspace, as evidenced by the first images of the film, where both hands manipulate the computer mouse (Figures 5 and 6). The essay film will reflect on how these three concepts—memory, pain and oblivion—materialize and interrelate in the different spaces and devices—documentary, fiction, video game and cyberspace. Once again, as in Marker's previous essay films, the reflection is about rethinking images and their devices.

Figures 5 and 6. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996) Source: Screenshots.

Laura produces an epistolary video diary since she joins both devices in an indiscernible way. The video diary, which recounts her daily experience both in her work with the video game and in the experience of mourning the death of her lover, is filmed by herself with a camera that she manipulates using a remote control. It becomes epistolary when confirming that all its content is addressed to an unequivocal "you": the deceased lover. Chris underlines its diaristic nature by including the dating of its entries on the black screen on different occasions. The 19 entries of this epistolary video diary account for the psychological and emotional evolution of the character. As Catherine Lupton indicates, Laura is "the first fictional character to appear and speak directly" in one of Marker's films; a character who becomes a "point of identification for the audience" (2005, p. 204) thanks to the epistolary device, as Rascaroli points out: "His form of interpellation, the confessional or love letter, is warm, passionate, intense and in the present tense; we stare into her eyes and we are asked to share her pain with her" (2009, p. 80). Laura's intimate epistolary expression through her gaze at the camera establishes the most direct relationship possible between the film work and the spectator.

The film then develops from Laura's personal experience of two intrinsically linked episodes for her: the historical events which occurred in Okinawa in 1945 and the recent death of her lover: "Rather than focusing on what happened, such an approach favors a multiplicity of perspectives which understand historical truth as inevitably mediated by their own personal experiences" (Montero, 2012, p. 102). Historical and personal mourning are linked by the video game of the battle of Okinawa, which Laura tries to conclude:

> I can recognize myself on this small island, because my suffering, alone, the most intimate, is also the most banal, the easiest to name. So, better give it a name that sounds like a song, like a movie, *Okinawa, mon amour*. (min. 36–37)

Once again, the cinematic intertext serves to generate the perfect metaphor for the intimate emotion of the character: that of the film *Laura* (1944) by Otto Preminger in the sphere of love—Laura is the affectionate nickname that her partner gave the protagonist—; that of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) regarding that intimacy–history bond. As Christa Blümlinger observes: "With this reference to Alain Resnais's film on Hiroshima, Marker indicates the constructive principle behind *Level Five*: the linkage of a fictional, subjective history (Laura) with the real yet finally indescribable history of a collective annihilation (Okinawa)" (2010, p. 8). For Rancière, "*Level five* is, in a way, the remake of *Hiroshima mon amour* in the days of computers" (2001, p. 215).

In the eleventh entry of the epistolary diary, we observe how Laura adjusts the frame of her own image through the remote control of the camera, a symbolic sentence-image of audiovisual writing in the first person since it shows the specificities of its realization. This manipulation of her own image will gain all its meaning in the last diary–epistolary entry. The reflection on the image provoked by this action is developed in the following segment: "I have the impression that you left me inside a huge puzzle, and the discouraging idea that, in the end, there is no image" (min. 52), in which Laura turns her gaze away from the camera as she loses herself in the digression, distancing herself to a certain extent from her addressee. The seventeenth entry once again becomes a materialization of the specificities and possibilities of the

first-person audiovisual device, showing us its author looking at the images of Kinjo's tragic testimony, recounting the mass suicide in Okinawa. In her epistolary video diary, Laura portrays herself viewing the images, thus directly offering her own experience as spectator, which the viewer observes on the monitor located behind her (Figure 7): "[A]nd others began to kill the people they loved most […] So husbands killed wives, parents killed children, brothers killed sisters. They killed them because they loved them. Such was the tragedy of those mass suicides" (min. 85). Laura's crisis is already an evident reality in the following fragment, dated almost three months after the first one. The last entry offers a letter addressed to the deceased loved one. Laura then uses the remote control of the camera to close the shot on her face and blur it, a new symbolic sentence-image of the intimate suffering that she experiences (Figure 8).

Figures 7 and 8. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996) Source: Screenshots

Besides, Chris manipulates the epistolary video diary progressively throughout the film: inserting shots from the video game; adding representations of the cyberspace; introducing documentary images. It is through Laura's speech that Marker introduces a reflection on the possibilities of the documentary image to manipulate reality. First, the suicide of the woman from Saipan shows the consequences of being filmed, therefore, publicly exposed. Marker then manipulates the image: he repeats the fall, enlarges the image to focus on its protagonist, slows it down and finally stops it when the woman detects the camera filming her: "In slow motion, you can see this woman turn back and spot the camera. Do we know she would have jumped if, at the last minute, she hadn't known she was being watched?" (min. 41) Laura then relates the woman from Saipan to the man who jumped from the Eiffel Tower in 1900 with the intention of flying. Marker links both moments by means of a superimposition between the freeze-frame of the former and the moving image of the latter, until it is also frozen to unify both moments of awareness of death, which coincides with the glances at the cameras that capture them (Figure 9). The second image takes on movement again to show us the fall of the man, and then that of the woman is repeated:

> The woman from Saipan saw the camera. She understood that this foreign demon not only stalked her but was able to show everyone that she had not had the courage to jump. She jumped. And whoever held the camera, and who aimed at her like a hunter, through the rifle scope, shot her, like a hunter. (min. 42)

Thus, the manipulation of the image becomes a search for the proof image of the responsibility of filming. The freeze-frame that in *Sans soleil* captured the equality of the gaze registers here the awareness of death and the responsibility of the person filming. Superimposition and cross-fade become a symbolic sentence-image that identifies the historical pattern of this responsibility, which is repeated from 1900 to 1945. Second, the manipulation of the images of the man from Borneo serves as a reflection on war propaganda. Marker first shows the electronically processed image and stops it when the burning man falls to the ground. Laura explains how the image has been located in different war conflicts throughout history. Marker then shows the continuation of the shot, now in its original version, where we see the man getting up and continuing walking, and then he stops the image again (Figure 10):

> The interesting thing is that, at the end of the original shot, you can tell he doesn't die. He gets up again. You feel he'll get over it, like the napalm girl in Saigon. The ending has always been cut in all documentaries. A born symbol doesn't get out of it so easily! […] Truth? What is truth? The truth is most didn't get up. (min. 78–79)

The electronic processing of the image then becomes a mark of the manipulation of the image, and the freeze-frame becomes again a proof image that now demonstrates the manipulation. Finally, the fake flag-raising on Iwo Jima insists on the battle of images. The moving image of the false hoist is frozen again to be compared with the photographic image of the real one: "It wasn't much. Just a little setup. There'd be more like it. The original was uninspiring anyway […]. The picture has become an icon. It was used in Sarajevo in 1994, but not to hail the US Marines" (min. 79–80). Once again, the still image offers the proof image of the manipulation of documentary images throughout history.

Figures 9 and 10. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996). Source: Screenshots

The enunciation of Chris's voice-over is associated with the current images of Japan coming from Laura and her partner's journey to the country. His 16 enunciations move from the recent story of the couple to the historical events that took place in the different spaces shown. This passage materializes in his fifth enunciation, in which the images of present-day Okinawa are superimposed with archival images of the embarkation of thousands of children in 1944 to save them from the conflict, on a ship that sank: "More than 1000 deaths. Even before the battle had started" (min.

31). The superimposition of the current image of a dancer and the archival images of the embarkation now embodies the temporal gap of the 50 years that separate us from those events (Figure 11). This superimposition gives way to the images of *Les morts sont toujours jeunes* [*The Dead Remain Young*] (1977) by Nagisa Oshima, according to the credits of the film, in which, ten years later, the relatives of those children can pay tribute to their disappeared. These documentary images are shown without manipulation, as is the case with the interviews, as a materialization of the actual memory to be preserved. The same happens with his next enunciation, in which Chris shows the documentary image of a girl who survived the collective suicide, waving a white flag to protect the remaining Japanese army, as exhibited in the local museum (Figure 12). The journey by different historical sites is interrupted by the ninth enunciation, which begins with a documentary film from the time that was censored for 35 years for offering a critical look at the war and its consequences: *Let There be Light* (1946) by John Huston. After it, a fiction of the time is shown, that one surrendered to the propaganda purposes of the North American government: *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) by Allan Dwan (min. 75–77). The conflict around the veracity of the discourse is thus transferred to the fictional space. While the spectator sees an original scene from the former, the latter is only referred to through a short, frozen close-up of John Wayne's face that is blurred.

Figures 11 and 12. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996). Source: Screenshots.

Chris's account of the history of Okinawa concludes with Nagisa Oshima's images from *Cimetières marins* [Marine Cemeteries] (1970), again according to the film's credits, on which Chris states:

> Without Okinawa's resistance, Hiroshima would not have occurred, and all the history of the century would have been different; which means that even in the minor detail, our lives were fashioned by the events that took place on that little island. (min. 96)

In his penultimate enunciation, Chris offers his opinion on Laura's condition. To do this, Marker shows a black-and-with portrait of the character, her naked face, now without any mask, another materialization of a documentary non-manipulated image: "She talked now of it with detachment, as if she had reached a limit beyond it the game no longer belonged to her, nor history" (min. 97). Therefore, Chris's

enunciation is associated with the current documentary image of Japan to move from the couple's journey in the present to the history of Okinawa 50 years earlier. The different registered spaces serve as a trigger for the narration of what happened there. Thus, Chris's voice is instrumentalized to generate the historical account of Okinawa as one more element of the audiovisual thinking process of the essay film of which it is a part.

Created with the Hyperstudio program, like "Zone Hyperstudio" in *Zapping Zone*, the video game offers two different experiences: the strategy game and the ordering of historical information at different levels. The strategy game (Figure 13) offers to play on "historical reconstruction and deconstruction" (Kear, 2007, p 139) and embodies the impossibility of changing history through the system errors, the denial of access, and the failure of any attempt at modification:

> Strategy games are made to win back lost battles, aren't they? Did you really believe a player would be able to spend his nights watching history repeating itself? […] I tried the Marienbad game. After a few moves, the computer said: "I won already, but we may go on if you like". Death could say that. (min. 53)

The orderly storage of information (Figure 14)—US Command, Witnesses, Media Coverage, Bibliography, etc.—is interpreted by Chris as another defeat to history: "Now Laura had understood the game could never change history. It would just repeat it, in a loop, with meritorious and probably useless obstinacy. Memorize the past in order not to relive it was an illusion of the 20th century" (min. 96–97). Although not explicit, the conclusion is drawn. The storage of information in itself is of no use. It is necessary to ask, to question, to reflect on it. The failure of both possibilities is synthesized in the "Level Five", which gives title to the essay film, as an unattainable aspiration: the impossibility of changing the past and giving "meaning" to history. However, the documentary material stored allows us to learn from it. The testimonies from Kinjo and Nagisa Oshima evidence the unique value of the non-manipulated expressions.

Figures 13 and 14. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996). Source: Screenshots.

Finally, cyberspace, the network, is presented as the hegemonic space of "knowledge", information that, however, is defined by saturation and concealment to become a kind of emotional and psychological black hole in which to disappear.

Marker creates an electronic voice for the OWL that embodies the depersonalization process it provokes:

> Welcome to OWL, Optional World Link. This terminal will give you access to all available networks; radio, television, news networks, whether they exist or not, present or future. Bits have replaced savings. Gold and dollar belong in the past. Right here, feel the beating of the heart of the future. The Knowledge-standard! (min. 14)

The filmmaker represents saturation through the superimposition between Laura's face and the faces of the anonymous crowd, devoid of identity (Figure 15). In the same way, the psychological and emotional abyss that it represents materializes into the figure of the spiral in virtual images; the evolution of the one that appears in *Sans soleil* concerning electronic images as a symbolic sentence-image of oblivion, now transformed into a symbolic sentence-image of identity loss (Figure 16). The Zone from *Sans soleil* has become *Level Five's* cyberspace. Access to it requires the configuration of a mask that prefigures a kind of splitting of the personality, of the first identity fracture: "Pick up your mask" (min. 15). Marker instrumentalizes the electronic voice assigned to the network to expose its failure as a project of the 20th century:

> The Knowledge-standard. When you saw the kind of knowledge that was circulating on the net you could smile. But that was still their game: make information circulate even further and further, faster and faster. In other times, to lend weight to money, they sought dense, rare material to act as a pledge inside coffers. They chose gold. Now money has become invisible and volatile, so the new power needed a pledge that was invisible and volatile too. They found Knowledge. Atoms of knowledge came through our screen. It was into Knowledge's black holes that this century's dreams of power fell, this unending century. Sometimes the screen tore into black shapes reminiscent of others forms, those where the century had made the draft for its own suicide, engraving images in our minds. Images of ruins: The ruins of Coventry and Berlin, of Dresden and Stalingrad, the ruins of Okinawa. (min. 50–51)

Figures 15 and 16. *Level Five* (Chris Marker, 1996). Source: Screenshots.

Not only are the enunciation devices multiplying, hybridizing, and fragmenting—diary, letter, video game, and cyberspace—but also they show a point of saturation—black holes—in which the thinking process seems no longer possible. The further and faster nature of cyberspace, and digital technology in general, provokes a condition that prevents reflection. It is the network that is responsible for Laura's disappearance. The abyss of this cyberspace causes the splitting of the personality through the mask, to become the loss of self-recognition. Laura comes to speak with her own mask so as to finally not be recognized by the network itself, which denies her access. Following Laura's final entry of her epistolary diary, Chris's enunciation concludes the film by recounting her disappearance, without prior notice, leaving her home and workplace without a trace of her departure while the computers remain on. His hands write her name on the computer's keyboard to get a new error message: "I don't know how to Laura" (min.103).

In the triple axis that the essay film presents: the thematic—memory, pain and oblivion—and the formal ones around the different types of images—documentary and fictional; analogue and electronic—and their devices—epistolary video diary, video game and cyberspace—Marker's reflection advocates personal experience as the only fertile link to analyze historical facts and draw conclusions. Laura's personal suffering, expressed in a very intimate first person—the self-filming addressed to her loved one—is what allows her to empathize with the pain suffered in Okinawa, and the personal and individualized testimonies and documentary materials of what happened there allow for understanding the magnitude of the catastrophe. By leaving the sphere of the personal and concrete, the link with history gradually fades. The video game offers two stages of this disconnection. First, the information storage generates a first distance from the event. Second, the strategy game converts personal experience into data devoid of emotion and reflection. From the beginning of the film, the constant error produced by the video game evidences the failure of merely quantitative and strategic description. Finally, cyberspace offers the disorganized saturation of information that the individual cannot assimilate, and in which identity can only get lost. The documentary–fiction axis shows the danger of manipulating the documentary image. As opposed to the freeze-frame as a search for the proof image that ratifies the veracity of what happened, the manipulation of the image—its electronic conversion—shows the altered accounts of history. The cross-fade and the superimposition become a materialization of critical thinking since they are capable of linking events far apart in time: the woman from Saipan and the man from Paris, the present and the past from Okinawa. Its use in the cyberspace represents how information saturation nullifies such critical thinking. Thus, the essay film implies the selection of images and their reflective relationship in order to create an audiovisual thinking process. The video game (and the CD-ROM after) implies their accumulation and organization first and its conversion into strategic data after, thus establishing two different levels of distancing. Finally, the cyberspace offers an information saturation that prevents the production of meaning.

4. Between the visitor's experience and the filmmaker's reflection

Considering both analyses, I present below the comparison of the different characteristics and elements of both works (Table 5). We can conclude that while the thinking

process of the essay film needs to make its discourse more complex in order to generate parataxic and interstitial thinking among its different elements, until reaching its maximum complexification in *Level Five*, the initial accumulation and distribution of *Zapping Zone* need to be simplified, in a process of essentialization, in order to access the *concept-idea* as a result of a previous thinking process. While the essay film produces the filmmaker's essayistic reflection on images in our postmodern era, the video installation offers the visitor the physical-spatial experience of this reality. The visitor of *Zapping Zone* would experience the same impossibility that Laura's character faces in *Level Five*. In *Zapping Zone* the filmmaker deconstructs the audio-visual thinking process inherent in the essay film to turn it into a multifaceted offer in which the visitor must choose their own itinerary and generate their own reflection on the proposed installation. While the essay film allows for the shifts among subjectivities and the spectator's identification with them, the video installation provides the distancing between the authorial filmmaker's subjectivity and that of the visitor. While *Level Five* uses different elements—superimposition, freeze-frame, electronic images, the spiral and the mask—to produce reflection, *Zapping Zone* instrumentalizes its elements—distribution, sound, light—to offer the visitor an experience in the first person. Thus, the sound of *Zapping Zone* offers the same *perceptual saturation* that *Level Five* reflects on regarding cyberspace. The darkness of the video installation provides the same disorientation that the essay film represents with the spiral. The loop of the video game that embodies in the essay film the endless impossibility of approaching history becomes the loop in the zones of the video installation that prevents to experience the works as linear narratives. *Zapping Zone*'s video game offers a ludic experience, while *Level Five*'s one provides a distancing experience from history that always fails.

Table 5. Table elaborated by the author.

Level Five	*Zapping Zone*
Audiovisual thinking process of the author	Physical-spatial experience of the visitor
Shifts among fictional subjectivities	Distance between the author's subjectivity and the spectator's subjectivity.
Identification between spectator and characters	
Complexification	Indiscernible saturation
Reflective elements:	Accumulation and distribution:
superimposition	simultaneous sound
freeze-frame	
electronic image	
spiral	darkness
mask	
loop as an endless impossibility	loop as endless indiscernibility
Video game as a distancing experience	Video game as a ludic experience

Considering this comparison, I locate *Zapping Zone* as a postmodern space offered to the visitor's experience, consisting of saturated and indiscernible audiovisual magma, from which different expressions emerge. The essay film—*Level Five*—reflects on it through an audiovisual thinking process. The video installation—*Silent Movie*—pursues and generates a concept-idea as a result of a previous reflection. And finally, the CD-ROM—*Immemory*—which, although it would be the subject of another analysis, I argue that it becomes a utopian space where it is possible to

reconcile the infinity of cyberspace with individual subjectivity to create the combination between digression and memory. The evolution of the zone from *Sans Soleil* is experienced by the visitor in *Zapping Zone*, reflected on by the essayist in *Level Five* and idealized in *Immemory*.

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