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Jean-Louis's *Moments* of Jean-Jacques

ABSTRACT

In the global, international context of interactive cinema, French new media artworks, such as Jean-Louis Boissier's Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau *(2000), demonstrate the persistence of national heritage as an aesthetic frame of reference. This article examines Boissier's work in relationship to the concepts of the document and of adaptation, showing the privileged relationship to the historical real that figures in the contemporary virtual.*

KEYWORDS

Digital cinema and new media art constitute a matrix of art and entertainment practices that range from the most popular of big-budget, high-concept special effects films, to the most cutting edge of contemporary avant-garde practices, from gallery installation to Internet-based and locative media. No matter which distinctions one makes, however, this is an undeniably globalized, international phenomenon. Cinema histories would suggest that the film industry has always been more international than national, and the artistic avant-garde has similarly shared a mobility across national boundaries and identities. The technologies of the contemporary moment, however, allow for the distribution and dissemination of works to a potential international audience that can be reached with speeds hitherto unknown. This internationalism has not negated the digital divide, and the film industry continues a discourse of polarization between big-budget Hollywood and 'the rest'. The French film industry has long been recognized as an 'art cinema', distinguished
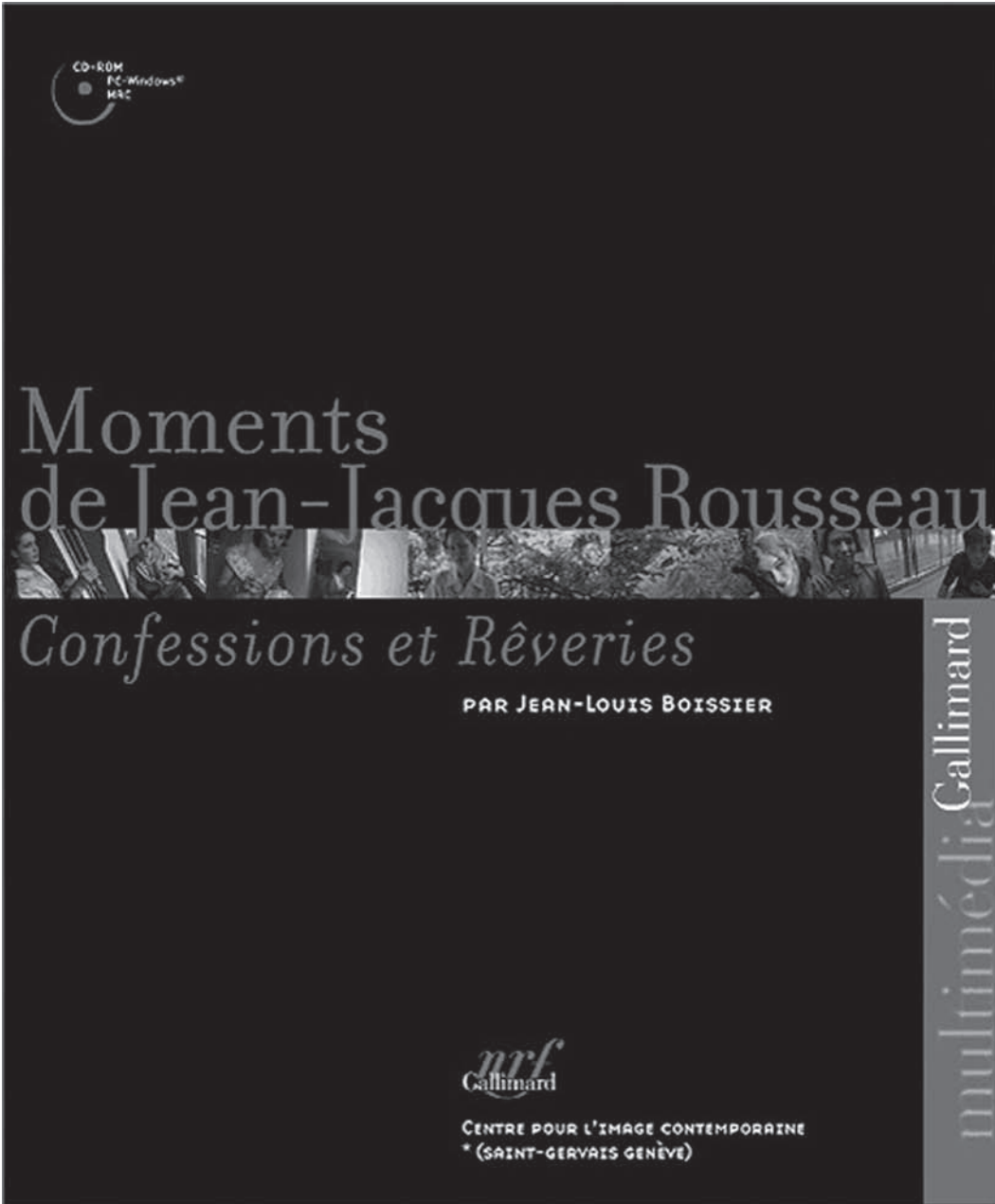
Figure 1: Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau *(courtesy of www.hyperbate.com).*

by protectionist legislation designed to promote the French cultural exception. French national cinema has thus joined with other segments of cultural production to propagate a national mythology wherein French culture is unique, but also universal. In the face of the European Union as a political reality and globalization as a source of anxiety, French film and new media art provide

striking examples of the persistence of cultural mythologies and their rede-
ployment in the service of new art forms.

In this article, I use Jean-Louis Boissier's CD-ROM (or, interactive cinema
work) *Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (2000) as a means to consider the
relationship between cinema and digital arts in France, suggesting that together
they privilege French heritage and identity. In the work of Boissier, as with that
of Chris Marker (most notably his CD-ROM *Immemory*, 1997), arguably the two
highest-profile and most internationally established new media artists working
in France today, this particular relationship to the past as a cultural phenom-
enon of the eminently present, the technological 'new' finds itself set in counter-
point to a singularly subjective exploration of memory and autobiography. Thus,
while participating in and mobilizing a national mythology of the literary canon,
Boissier touches the ineffable and immaterial of culture. Moving to a reading
of *Moments* itself, I show that Boissier's situation of the material conditions of
interactivity and the interface at the heart of his project is tied to the practice of
documentary and documentation, wherein the real is granted a privileged posi-
tion – a paradoxical move in that the real is so often considered to be absent from
the digital realm. To read and understand *Moments* it is thus crucial to explicate
the role of the document in this work.

Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau was published by Gallimard along with
the Centre pour l'Image Contemporaine (Saint-Gervais Genève) in 2000.[1]
The CD-ROM is a stand-alone work, but was also the culmination of a series
of installations based on the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau entitled *Flora
petrinsularis* and the *Second promenade*, installed in multiple museums (with some
variation) from 1993–1999. *Flora petrinsularis* had its own CD-ROM version,
released in 1993 by ZKM Karlsruhe. Boissier has continued his Rousseau-inspired
installations since *Moments* with *La Morale sensitive* (2001, 2003).

While usually grouped under the heading 'new media', Boissier cautiously
uses the term interactive cinema for the work. *Moments* is a type of adap-
tation of Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782–1789) and *Rêveries du promeneur soli-
taire* (*Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, 1782), as it both incorporates the complete
text of the *Confessions* and *Rêveries* and is inspired by certain Rousseau-esque
philosophical concepts and practices. Made up two sections, which I will
call 'textual' and 'figural', this CD-ROM is, in the textual portion, a reposi-
tory of information or scholarly tool, and in the figural portion, an interactive
cinema adaptation of Rousseau's texts. I will use the term 'reader–spectator'
as a means of negotiating the medial ambiguity posed by *Moments*. Boissier
himself has vacillated between terms such as 'user', 'lecteur–manipulateur'
(reader–user), 'spectateur–interprète' (spectator–actor/interpretor), 'lecteur–
spectateur' (reader–spectator) and 'spectacteur' (spect–actor).

David Rodowick has suggested that the 'new media' will not realize their
full integrity until they have freed themselves from cinema as a structuring
metaphor (Rodowick 2007: 98–9). Such cautionary observations have not,
however, prevented numerous artists from calling their works interactive
cinema. Such a moniker has appeal in that it situates the heterogeneous works
to which it refers as the cinematographic avant-garde, an avant-garde that
bears more promise of radical artistic innovation than mega-budget, spectacle-
driven works of undisputed technological innovation. When the Internet is the
location for interactive cinema – as opposed to the gallery, for instance – such
a conception of the avant-garde holds to the promise of the early twentieth-
century avant-gardes, for whom the cinema mattered in political terms
precisely because it could be an art of the masses. In many cases – such as the

Net art piece *Le Partage du sensible* (*Sharing the Uncertainty*), by the collective anonymes.net – the work's video stylistic characteristics can be quite 'classical'. This is thus an avant-garde whose defining images come in the remediation of images through alternative interfaces. Such an avant-garde poses a more radical challenge to mainstream theatrical distribution than gallery-based film and video, situating its aesthetic challenge in formal abstractions (data capture, looping, reader–spectator manipulation, etc.) rather than simply in changing 'the look' of the image.

Boissier has been somewhat cautious in his embrace of interactive cinema, as is evidenced by the qualifying phrase ('for lack of a better term') he put on the designation at the time of *Moments de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, when he wrote of the relationship between computer-based arts and the cinema:

> A computer program [*logiciel*] is that which inscribes logic. In the cinema, the principal axis of logic is that which governs the recording of appearances in temporal flux. The power of cinema is the logic of its relationship to the real. […] Interactive cinema – we'll call it that for lack of a better term – frees the potential variability from cinematographic parameters but in so doing, pays homage to the cinema.
>
> (Boissier 2000a: 8)[2]

I will return below to the consequences of the use of 'interactive cinema' for the interface, and the 'relationship to the real' in documentary. It is worth noting already, though, that this insistence upon the relationship to the real highlights not just an aspect of creative practice (which would be the case in connecting Boissier's process to that of documentary), but also as an aspect of the CD-ROM's relationship with its users. That is to say, if the art object (in this case 'interactive cinema') is to be of relevance in the experience of the reader–spectator, then it also has the potential to act upon the real. Furthermore, one of the points of interface that all digital arts have with the real is found in the way in which their eventual publics are introduced to them, how they are pitched and marketed. Here, we can see another configuration of the parallel relationship between digital cinema and new media art.

French discussions about digital cinema have neatly fit the pattern of the French film industry's positioning relative to Hollywood ever since World War I: on the one hand, the attempt to 'beat the Americans at their own game', and on the other hand, to construct the idea of something that is a distinctive national product. The notion of exceptionalism is of double import within the context of French audio-visual media, as two superposed ideas are at play. In a legal sense the cultural exception refers to the status of cultural products under the GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services). The French have maintained that film and other cultural products or services should be exempt from the rules of free trade, because of their special artistic or intellectual status. A bone of contention between France and the United States, as well as the cause for international divisions within the European Union, the cultural exception as a product of twentieth-century economic and legal contexts is superimposed upon a much longer-standing notion of *l'exception française* (the French exception). This ensemble of ideas posits France as different from other countries, but in that very exceptionalism, possessing a history of universal import (Remond 2006: 212). It naturally follows that a nation whose identity – rightly or wrongly – has been based in a sense of being exceptional

would argue that the products (or, one might say constitutive elements) of that culture merit attentive state husbandry through protection clauses such as article IV of the GATT.

What can be a nearly explicit deployment of the 'French cultural exception' in the context of cinema seems also to be operating implicitly within the realm of new media art, where it is immediately striking that two of the most internationally well-known new media artists coming out of France, Chris Marker and Jean-Louis Boissier, have major works that directly engage sacred cows of the French literary canon: Proust for Marker, and Rousseau for Boissier. Scholarship on Marker's *Immemory* focuses on Marker's relationship with Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu/In Search of Lost Time*, whose central preoccupation is memory, the substantive that Marker ambiguously modifies with the 'im-' of his title. Patrick ffrench, for instance, argues that the first page of the Memory Zone of the CD-ROM, which has side-by-side portraits of Marcel Proust and Alfred Hitchcock, is the key to understanding the structure and function of the entire work. For ffrench, the resurgence of memory unleashed upon the *Search*'s narrator Marcel by a madeleine is to be situated not only as the keystone to Proust's œuvre, but that of Hitchcock and Marker as well. In considering *Immemory* alongside other French digital audio-visual works, I would shift the focus somewhat to point out that the memory in question is cultural and even national. While no one would debate the appropriateness of Proust's place in the Memory Zone, the fact remains that the use of such an iconic writer serves to influence the reception of *Immemory*.

My claim here is not that the repackaging of heritage has been the only route to success for new media artists in France: another version of exceptionalism, as it were. However, the privileged intertextual figures of Proust and Rousseau certainly have a significant role in the critical marketability of Marker and Boissier's new media art, particularly the CD-ROM pieces. As is not unusual for CD-ROM art, both of these pieces came as the result of a series of gallery installations extending over many years, and they involve an interface that is necessarily simplified from that of the installations to accommodate the hardware of the home computer. This translation and transformation to home computer platforms should not suggest that the CD-ROM art objects are necessarily easy to come by or by any means mass media items. Still, they carry a potential audience that one can imagine as being different from traditional gallery goers. I should note that both do have translated versions (*Immemory* to English and Japanese, *Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* to Japanese), and *Immemory* has multiple French and English editions (to catch up with software requirements). *Moments* has two co-publishers: Gallimard and the Center for the Contemporary Image (Saint-Gervais Genève, Switzerland), the latter having published a collection of Boissier's theoretical essays (Boissier 2004). Moreover, the whole of Boissier's work on Rousseau was funded by the Centre pour l'image contemporaine and the Haute école d'arts appliqués in Geneva; clearly for the Swiss, Rousseau's Helvetian origins were crucial and would not be occluded for the purposes of French national literary canonization.

At the time that the CD-ROM of *Moments* was crystallizing, Boissier worked with the Gallimard editor who was spearheading the house's expansion into multimedia editions. The work as it exists today is thus a hybrid between a reformatted extension of Boissier's previous installation work on Rousseau and a Gallimard commission. The decision to work with Gallimard might at first seem unusual given the fact that Boissier has an extensive relationship (as artist, curator and editor) with the Centre Georges Pompidou,

whose publishing house has released a significant number of CD-ROM works, included the Boissier-edited *Revue virtuelle: Actualité du virtuel* (Boissier 2007). However, the fit was good in that Gallimard is the editor of the Pléiade edition of the complete works of Rousseau (Rousseau 1959–1995). Moreover, publishing with Gallimard allowed the possibility of exposure to a much broader audience.

In fact, the Gallimard multimedia catalogue is made up primarily of pedagogical CD-ROMs aimed at children or young people, with a sprinkling of fantasy-adventure games and reference works. In this happy world of digital colouring books and the twenty-first century's equivalents of Hooked on Phonics, *Moments* sounds a dissonant note. It is the only CD-ROM categorized as 'art et essai' (art and experimental) as opposed to 'ludo-éducative' (educational games), 'littérature' (literature), etc. In marketing the CD-ROM, Gallimard emphasizes the pedagogical and indeed scholarly aspects of the work, touting the inclusion of a digital version of the complete text of Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Rêveries*, as well as the 'complete bibliography' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the rather pompously redundant 'clarifications, citations and numerous explanatory notes'. While there is a scholarly apparatus embedded in the CD-ROM, the terms 'reference' or 'pedagogy' are difficult to apply, and in print, Boissier himself has not discussed the work in either of these ways. Even though somewhat truncated, the immense Pléiade 'documentation' that is thus embedded in the CD-ROM becomes the first variant of 'document' that comes into play in *Moments.*

I suggest 'se documenter' or 'to inform one's self' (literally: 'to look up') as a crucial component of the play of 'document' in *Moments*, because the textual section includes the complete text of the *Confessions* and *Rêveries*. Although the scholarly apparatus is abbreviated, the pagination of the Pléiade print edition is respected. Therefore, a motivated reader could easily go to the bookshelf to supplement her reading with even more notes and variants if she found she really did not have enough to occupy herself with the approximately one thousand pages of material included in the CD-ROM! The interface here is made up of a white background with black, blue and red text in a no-nonsense sans-serif font called Base, designed by the California-based typography company Emigre. Blue text allows linking to different areas within the text-only section, red text links to the figural section, and black text does nothing but let itself be read (see Figures 2–5). Movement is strictly in straight lines and right angles. While this leads to a rough, homemade look, one quickly comes to appreciate this section of the CD-ROM when attempting to deliberately navigate through it (while researching an article, for instance), because the interface of the main section can be quite difficult to control. A completely aleatory reading of the figural section is a much more pleasurable haptic experience, but this section of the work would be nearly useless for the hypothetical researcher in pursuit of a particular passage.

The minimal graphic virtues of the full *Confessions* and *Rêveries* can be read as a somewhat ironic gesture towards serious scholarly activity, or at least bibliophilia, as represented by the inclusion of the Pléiade text, made possible by having Gallimard as the editor. Pléiades are the scholarly edition gold standard of the French literary canon: coveted, fetish objects whose distinctive bindings with gold trim and gold-edged onion-skin pages sell for about 70 euros per volume. In a humorously self-referential moment, one of the clips of the other, figural, section of the CD-ROM shows a young man approaching an IKEA-style bookshelf, caressing the spines of several Pléaides, eventually

Figures 2–5: Screens from the CD-ROM (courtesy of www.hyperbate.com).

taking down one volume. With a glance towards the camera as the image pans left, he opens the book to a marked page, displaying it to the reader–spectator, who can, when the camera then zooms in on the page, clearly make out '[…] M. de Conzié gentilhomme Savoyard […]' ('M. de Conzié, Savoyard gentleman') – that is to say, the very same passage readable in text below or above the frame of the video.

The blocky austerity of the textual section comprises a double nostalgia: on the one hand, for the materiality of the book, and on the other for the early years of computers (the 'Base' typeface being visually evocative both of teletype machines and nominally recalling Basic programming language). In contrast to the red, blue and black lettering on the white page of the textual section, the figural section features a black background and white lettering. This typeface was also designed by Emigre and is the equally aptly named and slightly baroque (certainly antiquated) Philosophia (see Figure 5).

Appearing in Philosophia and providing the sliding structure of the figural section are passages taken primarily from Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, but also *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762), *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and a few other texts by Rousseau. If document, documentation and documentary are helpful terms for understanding the textual section of *Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, adaptation is a helpful starting point for the figural section. Linda Hutcheon has argued that adaptation should no longer be limited to the crossover of narrative from literature to film, but rather should be expanded to include multidirectional narrative transportations between media as diverse as video games, pop songs and roller coasters (Hutcheon 2006). She insists that adaptations must be experienced by their audience as adaptations, which is certainly the case in *Moments*, given the Gallimard-suggested subtitle *Confessions et Rêveries* and the inclusion of the entirety of the Rousseau texts. Similarly, it would certainly be possible to engage in the analysis of *Moments* primarily as a critical reading or analysis of the *Confessions* and *Rêveries*, much as scholars have historically proposed case studies of individual film adaptations of specific literary works.

In *Moments*, each excerpted passage of Rousseau is associated with a moving image clip that may occur on the top or the bottom half of the screen; every clip has a soundtrack of landscape or cityscape noises, and has a slightly jerky movement due to the reduction of frames to approximately one of every ten, an alternation that justifies the lineage Boissier claims with chronophotography (Boissier 2003). The palette is natural, but bright and saturated to the point that it 'pops' from the black background, emphasizing the internal frame that slides in a panorama when the reader–spectator rolls over it with the mouse. Besides provoking changes in the image, moving the mouse also causes the words in the passage to advance, and enables navigation through the CD-ROM by way of 'mots embrayeurs' (shifter words) that appear when the mouse is placed on the text. The shifters are made apparent because the rest of the words disappear. When the mouse rolls over one of them, it alone remains on the black screen, and slides diagonally to the position it will have in another passage (changing form en route, if necessary, from the imperfect verb 'songeait' to the noun 'songe', from 'pierres' [stones] to 'cailloux' [pebbles], or singular 'jour' [day] to plural 'jours' [days], for example). Finally, the new passage and its associated clip appear, and the process of either zoom or pan, advancing through the passage or following a shifter to yet another passage begins again.

The constant flux of interaction between text and image, driven by the actions of the reader–spectator, makes the term figural particularly apt for this section of the CD-ROM. David Rodowick calls the figural 'a semiotic regime where the ontological distinction between linguistic and plastic representations breaks down […] a transformation of discourse by recent technologies of the visible' (Rodowick 2001: 2). In *Moments*, both representational and graphic elements within each image interact with the graphic elements exterior to it (passages, places and dates in Philosophia), and both the representational and the graphic elements exhibit motion. 'Figural' is thus the most adequate term to account for both the play of text and image on the screen and their non-identity but equivalent make-up (both can be reduced to code).

As mentioned above, navigation of the figural section can be difficult to control, something that Raymond Bellour notes in his essay accompanying the work (Bellour 2000: 28). Timothy Murray has also noted the difficulty of manipulation in another of Boissier's Rousseau-inspired works, writing of the 1993 *Flora Petrinsularis* installation: 'His creative use [of software] also permits Boissier to display what he calls the haptic ambiguity of digital designation (that to point the mouse or to move the trackball gives renewed entrance to an image but not necessarily its confident possession)' (Murray 1997: 67). In other words, the reader–spectator frequently displaces the cursor with unintended results, such as catching a shifter and changing passages when he or she only intended to return the mouse to the image area of the screen. For Boissier, this frustration is an aesthetic *parti pris*. He writes:

> In the CD-ROM version, the reader's gaze is monopolized by his delegation in the indicating arrow. The image changes when one departs from it. The reader finds himself frustrated, deprived of the effect of direct connection. While other factors are there to seduce him, to attract him and to make him penetrate the image, I wanted thus to keep him at a distance and invite him to return repeatedly over these same transitions – and, if he does not see them directly, then to reconstruct them in his own memory.
>
> (Boissier 2004: 200)

Distancing the reader–spectator thus becomes a fundamental part of the interface. Just as Barthes insisted in *S/Z* that forgetting was essential for proper reading (Barthes 1970), because it incited re-reading, Boissier's obstacles incite the return over and through varying shifters, driving continued navigation.

Chosen for a combination of frequency and signification, there are 84 shifters in *Moments*, which along with all of their variants (for instance, 'present' may transform midshift to 'presence') total around 300 individual shift words (Boissier 2000a: 7). Text and image connect in clear ways if one takes the time to read the entire passage; often the image plays out some small scene whose meaning would be opaque without recourse to the text. The 37 models were cast from people met by Boissier while at the location where he was filming: neighbours, people approached in the street, word of mouth in the village café (Boissier 2000a: 14). Two of them play more than one role, while several characters are played by more than one model: there are two Mme de Warens, three Julies, and four Saint-Preux. All are quite young (in their teens) and their race is varied. The multiplication of roles causes even more dissociation between the images and the texts; the

viewer is thereby discouraged from trying to reconstitute a narrative based around matching the images to each other (or to memories of the context of Rousseau's broader narrative). Instead, the shifters provide the dominant sense of interrelationship from one image to the next, and in this sense, *Moments* can be used to push the boundaries of any discussion of adaptation that remains overly reliant upon narrative as a defining characteristic. Simultaneously, the casting reinforces the documentary nature of the project: the models are *of* the place depicted – just like natural features or landmarks – rather than being inserted into the landscape for the purposes of constructing a fiction.

Boissier's preference for the Bressonian 'modelling' as opposed to 'acting' entails 'the avoidance of any mannerism […] in fact avoiding acting at all' (cited by Bellour 2000: 27). Indeed the models often have a rather uncanny, blank distance, an alienating effect that is only heightened by the continual looping and bifurcation of the image. The dropped frames have a particularly disconcerting effect on eye movement, while the awkward poses convey much less sense of motion than eighteenth-century illustrations of Rousseau's works that, when shown alongside frame captures from *Moments* (as in the catalogue for the ZKM exhibition, *Future Cinema*) can appear almost as single-image storyboards for Boissier's images.

One quickly becomes aware that the images all either zoom or pan, with certain images imposing a longer wait on the reader–spectator before the occurrence of movement or other changes in the image (the appearance of another character, for example). Generally (but not always) images of place names zoom, while images of people, plants and landscape pan. Several images in the piece suggestively combine the two movements. For instance, the words 'Médiathèque Jean-Jacques Rousseau' appear on an automatic sliding glass door, so that the words themselves 'pan' while the camera zooms. It is eminently appropriate that the juncture of the two possibilities for movement within the work converge at the Médiathèque: the word refers to a library dedicated to audio-visual objects, and thereby enacts within its collections a similar combination of text and image as in *Moments* (of course *cinémathèque*, *vidéothèque* and *médiathèque* all derive from *bibliothèque*: library).

The significance of the Médiathèque is that all of the '-thèques' are repositories of documents on various supports. *Moments* thus insists again upon its internal documentation. However, the sign 'Médiathèque Jean-Jacques Rousseau' is another kind of documentation: that of the traces left by Rousseau in European space by commemorative naming. A major category of clip shown in *Moments* is that made up of street and place signs: the Chemin Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Social Contract bus stop, the Jean-Jacques Rousseau TGV (high-speed train), commemorative plaques ('In this house Mme de Warens lodged Jean-Jacques Rousseau from 1732 to 1740'), and so on. The documenting of Rousseau's life and effects on French (and Swiss) social space done within the image is reinforced by the addition of a place name and date next to the clip, while the accompanying booklet, *À propos de Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* includes a map of all the locations Boissier and his team visited in order to shoot the video for the CD-ROM. The trajectories of Boissier and Rousseau thus criss-cross, particularly as each written passage is accompanied not only by the title of the work from which it was drawn, but also the date and location of its writing.

The dates of the images therefore chronicle the production of the work, implying a necessary connection to the real. Boissier explains how this

process of documentation of Rousseau's traces is in effect itself a Rousseau-esque practice of space and memory:

> We will make […] 'monuments'; documentary views/shots, showing Rousseau's name all over, literally inscribed in our contemporary space. Because the *monument* for Rousseau refers to the witnessing of what remains with us of past actions, that which keeps memories, that upon which one can rely to guide one's memory, to bear witness to the truth, that's to say, the archive, the document.
>
> (Boissier 2000a: 5; Boissier's emphasis)

We can thus argue that Boissier is both adapting and documenting Rousseau. The loops and bifurcations within the image refute a vérité style; it is rather, as Bellour notes, through the reality effects of localization that the sense of documentary is retained (Bellour 2000: 24). Furthermore, the inscription of dates causes a shift from the 'documentary about Rousseau' aspect provided by the map of Rousseau's travels, towards a reification of the notion that each film documents its own making. That is, while Rousseau is documented, Boissier is documented as well.

Indexicality is of course fundamental to the power of the analogue film image. It is also precisely what Boissier insists is *not* lost in the passage to digital imaging, or data capture. He pairs the idea of refusing that relationship to an absence of critical understanding:

> The fascination for 'new technologies' goes hand in hand with the refusal to grant them informed and critical study. For example, saying of computer-generated images that they are free from any attachment to the real, that they cannot constitute a trace, prevents understanding the degree to which they can be fed by the real and participate in its investigation without giving up their purely constructed dimension.
>
> (Boissier 2004: 11)

In the *Flora petrinsularis* installations (1993) that preceded *Moments*, Boissier had found yet another Rousseau-inspired means of insisting and exploring the relationship with the real. For the installations, the interface involved a book or binder in which Boissier included pressed, dried plants, just like Rousseau collected and pressed plants between pages of his own books to create a herbarium. The CD-ROM version preserves these traces; each electronic page of the herbarium ends its montage sequences of live plants, *in situ*, with an image of the pressed, dried plant on the white screen. The Apple monitor of the installation had images with places and dates very similar to *Moments*, and interactivity was activated both by a camera that tracked the flipping of the pages of the book and by the trackball mounted in front of the book. Boissier explains that 'in my project, the digital was not to erase the analogue power of the optical recording of appearances and its ability to designate an exterior real' (Boissier 2000a: 4). The dates in both the installations and CD-ROM then are a crucial element, calling attention to Boissier's own trajectory in the footsteps of Rousseau. Boissier's use of 'historical' traces, the 'old-fashioned' pressed flowers and textual notation of date and time, as a visual and figurative means of arguing against the belief in a radical difference between analogue and digital photography, indicates that the physics of

digital data capture can be interpreted as a trace, just as much as the chemical processes of analogue photography have been.

In *Flora petrinsularis* and again in *Moments*, the verb 'herboriser' (to collect plants in nature in order to study them) thus becomes a metaphor for the collection of images: the work of the artist. Through this segment of the *Confessions*, Boissier's work seems to be a deliberate juxtaposition of the organic and the mechanical, all the less surprising coming from someone whose writing is influenced by the work of Gilles Deleuze. In using a horticultural metaphor as a self-referential gesture, Boissier is very close to Agnès Varda in her digital documentary cine-essay *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse/ The Gleaners and I*, also from 2000. This film examines the historical origins of gleaning in France, along with its more and less famous art historical representations. Varda then puts the historical practice of gleaning in relation to its contemporary cousins: agricultural industries and regions that are more or less friendly to contemporary gleaners, artists whose primary materials are found objects, the homeless who pick their food from the trash, the not-so-poor who dumpster-dive on the principle that it is not good to waste anything, and of course herself, whose work as a film-maker, particularly as a documentarian, involves collecting images when and where she can.

Turning the camera on herself, Varda performs self-portraiture in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*. In contrast, Boissier has tended to efface himself from *Moments*; while they call attention to and document practice and production, the inscriptions of date and place do not strongly suggest a subjective artistic presence. However, in a notably humorous turn, the camera's zoom provides an ironic twist of authorial signature. At St. Cergue, a minor spot on the Rousseau itinerary, the reader–spectator sees the sign 'Il y est passé le 29 juin 1733' (He passed here 29 July 1733). Rousseau walked by only one day, and yet by virtue of the zoom that eliminates the eighteenth-century date and a playful view of grammar, the truncated 'il y est' can be read as 'he is there'. The zoom thus suggests the presence of Rousseau, but also allows a reading of a 'he' in the present tense as Jean-Louis Boissier.

In spite of this authorial wink, Boissier tends to prefer placing the reader–spectator in the place of Rousseau, as befits the autobiographical pact. Looking at the credits of *Moments*, one might notice that no one plays Rousseau himself; indeed this leading role is always played by the camera, and it is thereby, arguably, given over to the reader–spectator. Thus the text maintains the autobiographical collapse of narrator and reader as the reader–spectator enunciates the 'I', while the image furnishes an 'I' as an 'eye', positioned by the camera's subjective point of view.

Nowhere is this positioning more evident than in the images that accompany the awakening scene in the Second Promenade. Before and after the pan, three young men stare intently into the camera. In the second walk Rousseau is knocked unconscious by a Great Dane, and as a result the autobiographical project of the *Rêveries* is born. Significantly, this promenade is also a re-writing of Montaigne's like-death experience from a fall after being knocked over by a horse while out for a walk: 'De l'exercitation' ('Of Practice') in Book 2, Volume 6 of the *Essais*. Boissier's staging of Rousseau's rewriting of Montaigne (both of whom refer to St. Augustine as father of self-writing) thus becomes an evocation of an already metatextual and intertextual moment, while the visual interpellation of the reader–spectator by the three young men dramatically calls attention to the camera's point-of-view positioning as Rousseau awakens to strangers.

The challenge posed to the reader–spectator by the autobiographical transposition of the 'I' in *Moments* raises the question of what it actually means to 'get it' when one is confronted with such an object. Through his essays, Boissier returns again and again to the importance of 'data capture' or 'la saisie'. 'Saisie' and 'saisir' are extremely versatile words in French, meaning capture, arrest, confiscation, seizure, but also to have understood. So for Boissier 'saisie' must be extended not only to mean the capture and recording of information by the machine, but a certain understanding of the reader–spectator. Communication or information exchange is not the issue, but rather prehension. Therefore, interpellation through the interface and through figural representation is in Boissier's art the necessary precondition to such prehension. Deploying the autobiographical 'I' within the context of a work of interactive cinema sets up a double position for the reader–spectator, who is, as Boissier put it, 'instigator of the enunciation. He is at once the interlocutor and enunciator. While it is he who designates the signs, the images are simultaneously addressed to him, to his subjectivity' (Boissier 2004: 211). The act of interactive manipulation works to strengthen the identification between the subject of the text, the point of view of the camera and the subjectivity of the reader–spectator, although the physical resistance of the interface reestablishes a distancing effect through the frustration of writerly intent on the part of the reader. Thus, whether considered from the point of view of documentary or adaptation, *Moments* turns upon the project of autobiography and construction of subjectivity.

As I have shown, the cultural trajectory of *Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* parallels that of recent French cinema, where content and marketing collude in the mobilization of national tradition, anchoring themselves deeply in cultural mythologies. But Boissier brings more than the mythological into the cybernetic realm. His work plays with the notion of the documentary trace, allowing the real thus to be worked upon and through in various ways. Through interactivity, the work in turn affects the user, actualizing a new relationship with the real. Thus, *Moments de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* produces meaning by inscribing the documentary real into the triangulated interactivity between Rousseau (the literary past), Boissier (the 'new media') and the reader–spectator.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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