
Altro Oltre

The Memory as Interface: Narrative Logic, Digital Memory and the Object as Storyteller

Valerio Arsenio Raise Your Voice Fellowship, Baltan Laboratories, 2026

Introduction

Altro Oltre is a design research project developed during the Raise Your Voice Fellowship at Baltan Laboratories in 2026. The project examines how digital environments shape memory, perception and interpersonal relationships, and how these transformations can be translated into spatial and visual forms.

The research started from questions around non-verbal narration and symbolic communication. Early references to fable structures helped frame the idea that collective experiences can be transmitted through patterns, gestures and visual systems. As the project developed, this reference shifted — moving away from the fable as narrative content toward narrative logic as perceptual structure. The work evolved toward image sequencing, montage and sculptural interface, drawing from cinematic approaches such as *Koyaanisqatsi*, where meaning emerges through rhythm, accumulation and sequencing rather than linear storytelling.

The final installation uses sculpture, 3D scanning, projection and moving image to explore how personal digital memories can become shared perceptual experiences. Visitors encounter sculptural objects activated through chroma-key projection and image overlays, where narrative appears through the relationship between fragments.

I. The Digital Shift as a Transformation of Perception

The first encounter with a digital device rarely appears extraordinary in memory. It often arrives disguised as banality: a family computer in a living room, a first mobile phone, an online game shared with friends, an account created on a social media platform. Yet these ordinary moments marked the beginning of profound perceptual transformations.

The digital did not simply introduce new tools into pre-existing social structures. It gradually reorganised the structures themselves.

One of the most significant aspects of this transformation is that it occurred without clear ritualisation. Previous historical shifts often produced immediate symbolic responses. Industrialisation generated new political myths, visual iconographies and collective narratives. Religious transformations produced rituals and cosmologies. Wars generated monuments and commemorative structures.

The digital transformation unfolded differently. It spread through convenience, entertainment and communication. It entered homes as utility before revealing itself as environment. By the time critical awareness emerged, the transformation was already embedded within everyday life.

This produced a peculiar condition: millions of people underwent a massive collective shift in perception without possessing collective symbolic frameworks capable of narrating that shift.

Identity increasingly became performative and platform-based. The self became something continuously produced through images, interactions and metrics. Memory itself changed —

instead of recollection functioning primarily through internal processes, it became externalised into archives of images, messages and platforms. Experiences increasingly occurred alongside their documentation. Space also transformed: the smartphone dissolved the stable separation between public and private environments, making simultaneity across physical and digital spaces normal.

These shifts profoundly altered emotional and social structures. Yet unlike traditional historical transformations, they lacked symbolic condensation. There was no contemporary mythology capable of translating these experiences into transmissible forms.

This absence became the conceptual opening for Altro Oltre.

The project begins from the idea that contemporary digital life produces emotional and cognitive residues that resist direct explanation. These residues persist in habits, anxieties, desires and patterns of perception. They remain partially unnamed. Artistic practice, in this context, becomes not a representation of technological change but an attempt to construct symbolic forms capable of holding these experiences collectively.

The question becomes: what kind of structure could carry the complexity of contemporary digital existence without reducing it to illustration or critique?

The answer proposed by Altro Oltre comes from the ancient logic of the fable.

II. Narrative Structures and Symbolic Systems

Folk tales, myths and fables compress collective experience into recognisable structures that circulate socially over time. Their function was never purely literary. They operated as knowledge systems — technologies preceding formal science and institutional frameworks — capable of encoding warnings, transmitting ecological awareness, creating cognitive shortcuts and stabilising meaning within communities.

As the project developed, the interest moved away from producing a contemporary fable directly and toward narrative structures themselves: repetition, fragmentation, sequencing, tension and symbolic association. This shift led to a more visual and spatial approach. Meaning in Altro Oltre does not rely on plot or characters. It emerges through relationships between objects, projected footage, surfaces and gestures — through montage as a narrative system, where image sequences and personal archives create connections through rhythm and proximity, and visitors construct meaning progressively while moving through the space.

III. Non-Verbal Narrative and the Language of Images

Can images function as language?

This question has occupied philosophy, semiotics and media theory for decades. Thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Vilém Flusser and Aby Warburg explored how images produce meaning through symbolic systems rather than direct representation. Unlike written language, images resist stable interpretation — their meaning shifts according to context, sequencing, framing and cultural association. Yet images undeniably communicate.

Contemporary digital environments intensify this. Social media platforms operate through compressed visual communication. Emojis, memes, image fragments, reaction formats and short videos function as symbolic shorthand. Meaning increasingly emerges through juxtaposition, rhythm and repetition rather than through coherent linear narrative. Contemporary perception may already operate according to forms of non-verbal narrative logic.

Altro Oltre investigates this possibility. Rather than creating linear stories, the project constructs symbolic environments where meaning emerges through relationships between elements. Sculptures, projections, colours and gestures become components within a narrative system — moving away from representation toward activation.

The use of chroma-key blue is central to this approach. In film and digital production, chroma-key surfaces function as placeholders, designed to disappear so that another image can occupy their place. Their role is transitional: they mark a threshold between visibility and substitution.

Within Altro Oltre, chroma-key blue becomes symbolic. The painted sculptures appear incomplete until viewed through technological mediation. The surface signals potentiality rather than closure, reflecting the condition of contemporary digital environments themselves — interfaces that appear neutral while actively shaping visibility and interaction. The sculpture becomes an interface waiting for activation. Visitors encounter it physically, but its full narrative dimension emerges only through mediated viewing. The act of looking through a device becomes necessary to reveal the hidden image.

This mechanism reproduces the logic of digital perception itself. The contemporary subject increasingly experiences reality through interfaces. Cameras, screens and platforms mediate access to memory, sociality and representation. Altro Oltre materialises this condition spatially — not opposing digital mediation, but examining how mediation reorganises experience and whether artistic structures can render that reorganisation perceptible.

IV. Workshop as Methodology

The workshops organised during the Raise Your Voice Fellowship were not secondary educational activities attached to an artwork. They constituted the core research methodology.

Nine participants from different ages, backgrounds and personal histories were invited to reflect on formative digital experiences. The prompt remained intentionally open: When did technology change something in your perception of yourself or the world? Rather than producing predefined narratives, the workshop sought recurring emotional and symbolic structures emerging organically from personal memory.

Participants were asked to model forms in clay while speaking. This simultaneous process of talking and making was conceptually important. Manual gestures often access forms of knowledge not immediately available through conscious verbalisation. The hand produces structures intuitively, carrying emotional and symbolic information beyond direct explanation.

The resulting sculptures became physical traces of digital memory. Participants were not instructed to create representational objects. The forms remained abstract, ambiguous and often difficult to categorise — some appeared protective and closed, others dissolved outwardly, some expanded aggressively into surrounding space while others contracted inward. These formal tendencies became meaningful without needing explicit symbolic interpretation.

After the modelling process, the objects were scanned and translated into digital files. This step carried strong conceptual significance. The transition from handmade object to digital scan mirrored the broader transformation explored throughout the project: embodied experience became data, physical traces became portable information. The scan preserved geometry while erasing material warmth. Fingerprints, softness and tactile hesitations disappeared. The resulting 3D print possessed precision but lacked intimacy.

This tension became central to the work. The sculptures exist between physical presence and digital abstraction — neither fully handmade nor fully technological. They occupy a threshold

condition that the workshop process itself enacts. The process becomes inseparable from the conceptual argument

V. Connection, Overlap and Disconnection

As the workshop conversations developed, three recurring structures emerged from participants' memories: connection, overlap and disconnection.

These categories arose organically through collective discussion. Connection referred to moments when technology functioned as genuine extension of human presence — online relationships that became emotionally significant, devices that facilitated intimacy across distance, digital tools that expanded perception rather than replacing it. These memories resisted simplistic technological pessimism, acknowledging that digital systems genuinely transformed possibilities for communication and creativity.

Overlap described the collapse between physical and digital realities. Participants spoke about identity construction through social media, the blurring between documentation and experience, and the difficulty of separating performed selfhood from lived selfhood. In this structure, the digital no longer appeared external — it became interwoven with everyday consciousness.

Disconnection emerged through absence, rupture or withdrawal. Broken devices, deleted archives, abandoned platforms and intentional disengagement revealed the emotional depth of digital attachment. Participants described both relief and grief associated with becoming unreachable.

These three structures became the organisational logic of the installation, and they resemble the architecture of traditional fables: a stable relationship, a complication or transformation, a threshold crossed.

During the development of Altro Oltre, it became increasingly clear that the project was not producing a fable in the traditional sense. There was no singular tale, no stable allegory and no resolved moral structure. The work evolved toward a cinematic and associative form of narration closer to Koyaanisqatsi, where meaning emerges through accumulation, rhythm, juxtaposition and temporal progression. The visitor does not follow a tale but enters a field of relations where repetition, interruption, silence, distortion and resonance gradually produce emotional and conceptual continuity. Narrative appears retrospectively, assembled through the encounter between images, objects and memory rather than delivered through a predefined storyline.

What remained from the fable was not the story itself but its operative function: the capacity to orient experience, to condense collective anxieties and to create symbolic pathways through unfamiliar conditions.

VI. The Object as Storyteller

One of the central propositions of Altro Oltre is that objects themselves can function as storytellers.

Objects have always carried narrative dimensions. Religious relics preserve histories of faith and devotion. Family heirlooms transmit memory across generations. Archaeological artifacts become testimonies of vanished worlds. Contemporary digital culture introduces new possibilities: objects can now function simultaneously as material entities and as interfaces.

The sculptures within Altro Oltre occupy precisely this position. They are handmade forms carrying traces of specific individuals and memories. They are also digital reproductions generated through scanning technologies. They operate as interfaces activated through mediated

viewing. This multiplicity reflects the contemporary condition of memory itself — no longer purely internal or external, but distributed across bodies, archives, platforms and devices.

When visitors activate projections through their cameras, they participate directly in the narrative mechanism. The sculpture does not reveal itself passively. It requires engagement, paralleling the operation of the fable: a fable becomes meaningful only through participation, requiring the listener to interpret symbols, recognise structures and emotionally enter the narrative.

The object becomes less an artwork to observe than an encounter to navigate. Rather than presenting fixed meaning, Altro Oltre creates relational meaning — suggesting that contemporary storytelling may increasingly depend on environments and interfaces rather than linear textual narratives.

VII. Thresholds and Contemporary Ritual

The concept of the threshold appears throughout Altro Oltre at every level. The digital shift itself is understood as a threshold crossed collectively without preparation. The chroma-key surface functions as threshold between visibility and invisibility. The workshop stages a threshold between personal memory and collective symbolic form. The scan marks a threshold between embodied matter and digital abstraction. The installation positions visitors between physical and mediated perception.

Historically, thresholds occupy central roles within myth and ritual. They mark transitions between known and unknown states. Ritual structures exist precisely to guide individuals through moments of transformation.

One of the crises of contemporary digital culture is that many profound transformations occurred without ritual frameworks. The transition into networked life lacked symbolic preparation. Children and adolescents entered systems of permanent visibility, algorithmic attention and platform identity formation without collective rites capable of contextualising these experiences. As a result, digital transformation often remains psychologically unresolved.

Altro Oltre can therefore be understood partly as an attempt to construct contemporary ritual forms — not ritual in a religious sense, but in a symbolic and collective one. The workshops created temporary spaces where participants collectively reflected on their relationship to technology. The installation creates a spatial encounter where visitors navigate fragments of shared digital memory.

These processes slow perception. They interrupt the speed and invisibility of everyday digital experience by making mediation itself visible. Digital infrastructures function through immediacy, acceleration and distraction. Altro Oltre asks visitors to pause, observe and assemble meaning patiently — operating not only aesthetically but also temporally, creating a different rhythm of engagement.

VIII. Artistic Research and Contemporary Relevance

Altro Oltre exists within the broader field of artistic research, at the intersection of media theory, digital culture and participatory practice. Its contribution lies less in technological innovation than in symbolic methodology.

Much contemporary discourse about technology oscillates between celebration and critique — digital systems presented either as emancipatory tools or as mechanisms of surveillance and control. While these analyses remain valuable, they often fail to address the emotional and

symbolic dimensions of technological transformation. People do not only inhabit systems intellectually. They inhabit them affectively.

The memories shared during the workshops revealed precisely this complexity. Participants described intimacy, shame, dependency, discovery, loneliness, connection and transformation. The digital appeared not as abstraction but as lived environment. This is why the logic of the fable remains productive: it historically addressed lived complexity through symbolic condensation rather than analytical explanation.

The project suggests that contemporary artistic practice can operate as a form of symbolic research. Rather than illustrating pre-existing theories, the artwork becomes a site where new conceptual structures emerge. The pace of digital change frequently exceeds the speed at which societies generate meaningful symbolic responses. Artistic practices can intervene within this gap, creating temporary structures through which collective experiences become perceptible.

IX. Conclusion

Altro Oltre explores how digital experiences can be translated into spatial, visual and material forms. Through workshops, sculpture, 3D scanning, projection and moving image, the project creates an environment where personal digital memories become part of a collective visual structure.

The workshops were central to this process. Participants reflected on how digital tools transformed their relationships, habits and self-perception. Their memories became material for a shared visual language developed through modelling, scanning and projection. The resulting objects carry traces of this collective process — existing between the handmade and the technological, between the intimate and the distributed.

The final installation does not present a fixed story. It creates a perceptual structure where visitors navigate connections between physical and digital space, intimacy and mediation, presence and absence. Narrative emerges through accumulation and encounter rather than through plot.

Altro Oltre proposes a design methodology grounded in participation, symbolic association and spatial narration — one that uses objects, interfaces and moving images to examine how contemporary digital culture shapes the way experiences are remembered, shared and transmitted. The project does not resolve the questions it raises. It renders them perceptible, which may be the more useful contribution.



Altro Oltre 2026, Installation view, Van Abbehuis, Eindhoven.



Altro Oltre 2026, Still, Van Abbehuis, Eindhoven.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barthes, Roland. *Image Music Text*. Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, pp. 83–109. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Essay originally published 1936.

Flusser, Vilém. *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Translated by Anthony Mathews. London: Reaktion Books, 2000. Originally published as *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*. Göttingen: European Photography, 1983.

Flusser, Vilém. *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Translated by Nancy Ann Roth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Originally published as *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*. Göttingen: European Photography, 1985.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Translated by Laurence Scott. Revised and edited by Louis A. Wagner. 2nd ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. Originally published in Russian as *Morfologiya skazki*. Leningrad, 1928.

Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Originally published as *La technique et le temps, 1: La faute d'Épiméthée*. Paris: Galilée, 1994.

Warburg, Aby. *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*. Translated by David Britt. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999.

FILMOGRAPHY

Reggio, Godfrey, dir. *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance*. Institute for Regional Education / Island Alive, 1982.

SITOGRAPHY

Baltan Laboratories. *Raise Your Voice Fellowship*. Eindhoven, 2025–2026. <https://baltanlaboratories.org>

Reaktion Books. *Vilém Flusser: Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Accessed 2026. <https://reaktionbooks.co.uk/work/towards-a-philosophy-of-photography>

Stanford University Press. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Accessed 2026. <https://www.sup.org/books/theory-and-philosophy/technics-and-time-1>

The Warburg Institute, University of London. *Aby Warburg: The Mnemosyne Atlas*. Accessed 2026. <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk>

University of Texas Press. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Accessed 2026. <https://utpress.utexas.edu/9780292783768>