

The child who still breathes

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An immersive expérience from Fabienne Giezendanner



In brief

The child who Still Breathes is an immersive and interactive animated experience. At this stage of development two versions are envisaged: one for metaverses, Alexandria, new VRROOM platform and VRChat and another the Oculus Quest 2 and Pico Neon 3 headset.

The two versions will be identical from a storytelling point of view, but the experiences will be different, the metaverse versions being simple from an interactive point of view. The sound and graphic rendering will be improved in the Quest 2 and Pico neon 3 versions. The VRchat and VRROOM version are multiplayer and will make it possible to have a tokenization of the univers. It impacts reality by proposing, through collaboration with Inuit associations, to give voice to this population directly affected by global warming and to act in the real world.

Format: 25/30 minutes - 3D animation real time

Genre: Fantasy / dreamlike

Production: Nadasdy films (Switzerland) and Zéro de Conduite Productions (France)

Authors: Fabienne Giezendanner and Mathieu Morais de Araujo

Director: Fabienne Giezendanner

Target: from 12 years

Without dialogue

The child who still breathes is already: obtaining funding for writing from the CNC and a selection to the XR market of New Images and a selection to the VR-Arles - Fisheye writing residence supported by the French Institute and the South Region



Synopsis

Concept

With its dreamlike tone, *The child who still breathes* is an immersive experience for the Oculus Quest and Metaverse headsets. At the intersection of visual art, fiction, and gaming, this experience offers a voyage in the Great North. The narrative and the graphic and sound design are inspired by the Inuit culture.

The experience is like an **absurdist road movie** on a weathered ice floe. In the heart of the Arctic, in a dreamlike, sometimes surrealistic landscape, you incarnate *He Who Still Breathes*, the spirit of a child who, having become an animal, learns to survive in an ecosystem disrupted by global warming and the modern world. In the frozen, white vastness, you encounter transmission towers and electric wires turned into monsters, wild whirlwinds, oil tankers with slicing propellers, vociferous drilling stations, drunken trees, and frenzied, biting mosquitos. Each time you fall down from exhaustion you choose a different animal, changing bodies in order to continue living. You will turn into a snowy owl, a caribou, a bear, a whale, and a seal. Run, fly, and swim until you are out of breath! Then you will be reborn as a human. Enriched by your past lives, will your outlook on the world around you be transformed?

Synopsis

A weeping Inuit mother lays her stillborn child on the ice floe and covers it with a fur boot. The small body, which has become transparent, gives a glimpse of a frozen and pale heart. Suddenly, it glows with an orange light and starts to pulse slowly. The child's umbilical cord comes toward the viewer and attaches to their abdomen. A snowy owl intrigued by the fetus approaches. The fetus's heart, attracted to the snowy owl, rises out of its body and settles into the bird. The boot transforms to fit one of its claws.

The viewer's avatar undergoes the same transformation: hands become wings, one foot becomes a claw and the other a fur boot.

The sun rises and the scenery switches to daylight. The snowy owl flies away, the viewer follows, linked by the thin umbilical cord. And so they will live the life of the snowy owl, and after its death, they will be reborn as a caribou, then a wolf, then a whale, then a seal. In each life the viewer discovers obstacles caused by global warming or human activity... they die each time, but choose to be reborn in a different body until they become human for good. Having grown up before the spectacle of a dying world, their outlook has changed and they still dream that one day the ice floe will be able to be reborn.

Interactive Setup

The viewer experiences a **real story** thanks an immersive and interactive narrative which adapts to their behavior and advances through their gestures.

The **graphic and sound design are very distinctive** with paper, gouache, and watercolor materials and drumbeats and throat songs (Inuite tradition). They are **brought to life** thanks to procedural animation that is used to endow protagonists with behaviors and amplify the magic of the story.

The **experience is multiplayer** in order to show than the viewer is not alone in living through the damage of global warming; we decided to integrate the possibility of perceiving the other viewers as ghosts in the adventure.



Statement of Intent

By Fabienne Giezendanner, literary author

During a trip to the Inuit community of Kangiqsuallujuaq (Nunavik, Canada), I met the elder Tivi ETOOK, wood engraver and storyteller (some of his prints are part of the permanent collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts). I was particularly touched by the book which he wrote and illustrated: *Whispering in My Ears and Mingling With my Dreams*. While talking to him, I came to understand that the border between reality and the world of dreams was very porous. The life of the Inuit that he had experienced, during the time of nomadism and shamanism, seemed surreal.



Tivi Etook, illustration from "*Whispering in My Ears and Mingling With My Dreams*".

With *The child who still breathes* project, I continue in a direction already present in *Yi and the curse of the Celestial Emperor* (adventure game in animation on Chinese culture), *Nain Géant* (traditional animated short film on Inuit culture), *Dreamin'Zone* (immersive experience in animation which takes place in Korea), that is: **creating emotion with the codes of another culture**. With *He Who Still Breathes*, I wish to transport the viewer to this surrealistic and poetic world where the notion of survival is very important, and thus show them other ways of thinking of the world, ways that are different from Western culture.

Inuit culture, because of its very strong relationship with nature, allows an original perspective of ecology; *The child who still breathes* also naturally leads to thinking about the life of humans and animals in the Arctic in an ecosystem threatened by global warming, oceanic pollution, and human activity.

During my research, I was fascinated by *Anatarturk*, an Inuit story, the main points of which are as follows:

Following a miscarriage or an abortion (different versions exist), a mother gives birth to a stillborn child, which she places on the ice floe, but a dog eats it. The child's spirit changes bodies and becomes a dog. They learn to live with the pack but die, beaten by their master because they are too undisciplined. They are eaten by a wolf and choose to become a wolf, learn to sustain themselves and to hunt the

caribou by attacking their Achilles heels. One day, still green in their learning, he is kicked by a caribou hoof and dies. He decides then to become a caribou, experiences the community and learns to feed on lichen and moss... then becomes a walrus, but the life of a walrus is so boring that he decides to change bodies once again to become a crow... then he becomes a seal. He is then caught by a hunter whose wife could not have children. As the woman eats a bite of seal, the spirit of the child settles comfortably in her womb, she gives birth to a boy who she names Anatarturk. He will become the most celebrated hunter of the Arctic because having lived the lives of his prey, he knew all their secrets. The legend even says that he knew how to speak their language.

This story was traditionally told to children for its educational aspect on the life of animals and hunting and fishing techniques.

It also highlights the idea of changing bodies, specific to Inuit culture, that I wish to depict in *He Who Still Breathes*.

The child who still breathes is therefore inspired by the story of Anatarturk, but imagined in a contemporary Arctic threatened by climate change and upheavals due to human activity.

Wandering on a weathered ice floe, the viewer is the soul of a stillborn child who incarnates five animals, living their lives full of misadventure. He dies during each life, but he always finds the strength to get back up and to continue living until he becomes human. At the end, the character is reborn as a woman or a man according to the viewer's choice.

The challenge for me is to develop an immersive work with a strong story at the intersection of **storytelling**, **graphic arts** and **music** with a distinctive aesthetic and **gaming** elements. The game, here, shouldn't be understood as something to win or lose, since the story remains the same for all viewers, but instead with the meaning of engaging the viewer to advance the narrative through their gestures.

To reach a wide audience, the experience is designed to be released on Oculus Quest and Metaverse headsets, (I am thinking of VRchat, for which I am currently producing an experience, and whose technical and narrative possibilities I know well: media size, teleportation, changing avatars, etc.).

It is also for this reason that I approached a graphic designer and a game designer who are accustomed to producing works with Metaverse and Oculus Quest.

Lastly, we expect that the experience will be without dialogue, which will facilitate its international release.

Statement of Intent

By Mathieu Moraïs de Araujo, graphic designer

There is nothing on the all-white ice floe, except for the horizon, made out only by a bluish veil of snow that rises...
Suddenly a shadow appears.

The graphic treatment of *The child who still breathes* is influenced by my discovery of Inuit prints, from which I decided to take certain codes. Inuit prints from the 1950s and 1960s, primarily from Cape Dorset and Nunavik, will inspire the character design. Made with stencils or printed on stone (lithography) with seal fat soot from oil lamps, they will represent monochrome characters in movement, all in curves with lightly textured flat areas of color.

The entirety of the scenery will, also, be partially influenced by these prints. By playing, among other things, with the lines of curves, empty space, and also the absence of a clear perspective and the interweaving of spaces like nested universes. I want to give the impression that the space is always larger and to promote immersion.

Additionally, this kind of graphic design, with simple forms and lightly textured flat areas of color, is ideal for making media with small file sizes. Such assets will be perfectly adapted to the technical limits of the Oculus Quest and VRchat, (for the later universes must not exceed 100 MB).

Finally, *He Who Still Breathes* a real graphic adventure where white, blue or black cover the colors and vice versa, where large monochrome and almost empty spaces, conducive to the emergence of a character, will guide the viewer's gaze.



Statement of Intent

By Anthony Cabas, technical consultant for writing and design

So that the experience could reach a wide audience, Fabienne Giezendanner asked me to take part in the writing and the design from the writing phase to natively adapt the project to hardware such as the Oculus Quest and metaverse headsets.

The challenge of *The child who still breathes* resides in the balance between visual art and music, between storytelling and gaming.

The first challenge is to determine the difficulty level, neither too easy, nor too hard. We will create an experience adapted for a casual gaming audience, but also and importantly, a non-gaming audience. The Oculus Quest headset and its "hand tracking" functionalities allow us to offer an intuitive and fluid experience, within everyone's reach. We will script, from the writing phase, a tutorial based on animated symbols, to naturally lead the viewer into learning the gestures naturally. Regarding the narrative, if it is possible to achieve everything for the Quest version, we will work on finding ways to make the scenery and avatar changes and teleportation fluid for the Metaverse version.

The other challenge will consist of finding a graphic design that is less demanding, using fewer polygons, but is nevertheless distinctive: curves and lightly textured with paper, gouache, and watercolor materials. The VFX will lend a warm atmosphere and will support the link between the viewer and the character that they incarnate.

The traditional sounds of drumming and throat singing will give rhythm to the adventure throughout, promoting immersion.

Production will start with the Metaverse version which will then be enriched by the Oculus Quest Version.

Inuit Print – Moodboard



Literary and graphic file

Treatment

Black screen. We see a fetus whose heart beats slower and slower until it stops. It is inside a uterus resembling the shape of an igloo. Then a real igloo appears on top. We hear the crying of a woman. The lifeless body of a fetus with its umbilical cord is pushed headfirst from the small tunnel entrance of the igloo, toward the outside (as in childbirth). We see the motionless heart of the fetus through its body. It is followed by the weeping mother. She takes the body of the child and places it the ice floe, not far away, covering it with a fur boot. The scene fades out.

INTRODUCTION ET NAISSANCE DE "CELUI QUI RESPIRE ENCORE"

DISPARITION DU FOETUS LAISSANT PLACE AU IGLOO



ÉCRAN



ÉCRAN

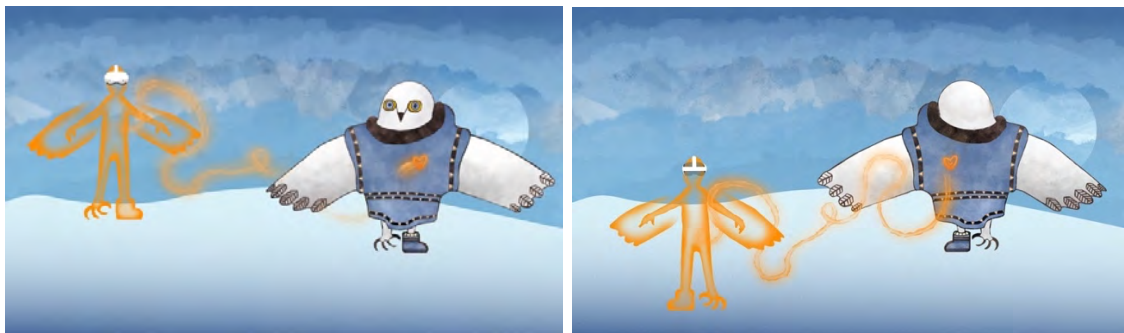


In the dark, the heart and the umbilical cord start glowing with an orange-tinted light. The heart starts slowly beating again. The umbilical cord comes toward the viewer and attaches to their abdomen. The viewer's hands turn orange. *Note that to simplify readability in the rest of the treatment, the heart and the umbilical cord will be referred to as the child's soul.*

We hear the flapping of wings. A snowy owl, intrigued by the fetus, approaches it. The heart, attracted by the snowy owl, leaves the body of the fetus, abandoning it like an old garment, and settles in the bird. The boot transforms to fit one of its claws.

The viewer's avatar undergoes the same transformation: hands become wings, one foot becomes a claw and the other a fur boot.

The sun rises and the scenery switches to daylight. The snowy owl flies off, we follow it, connected by the thin umbilical cord.



Life as a Snowy Owl



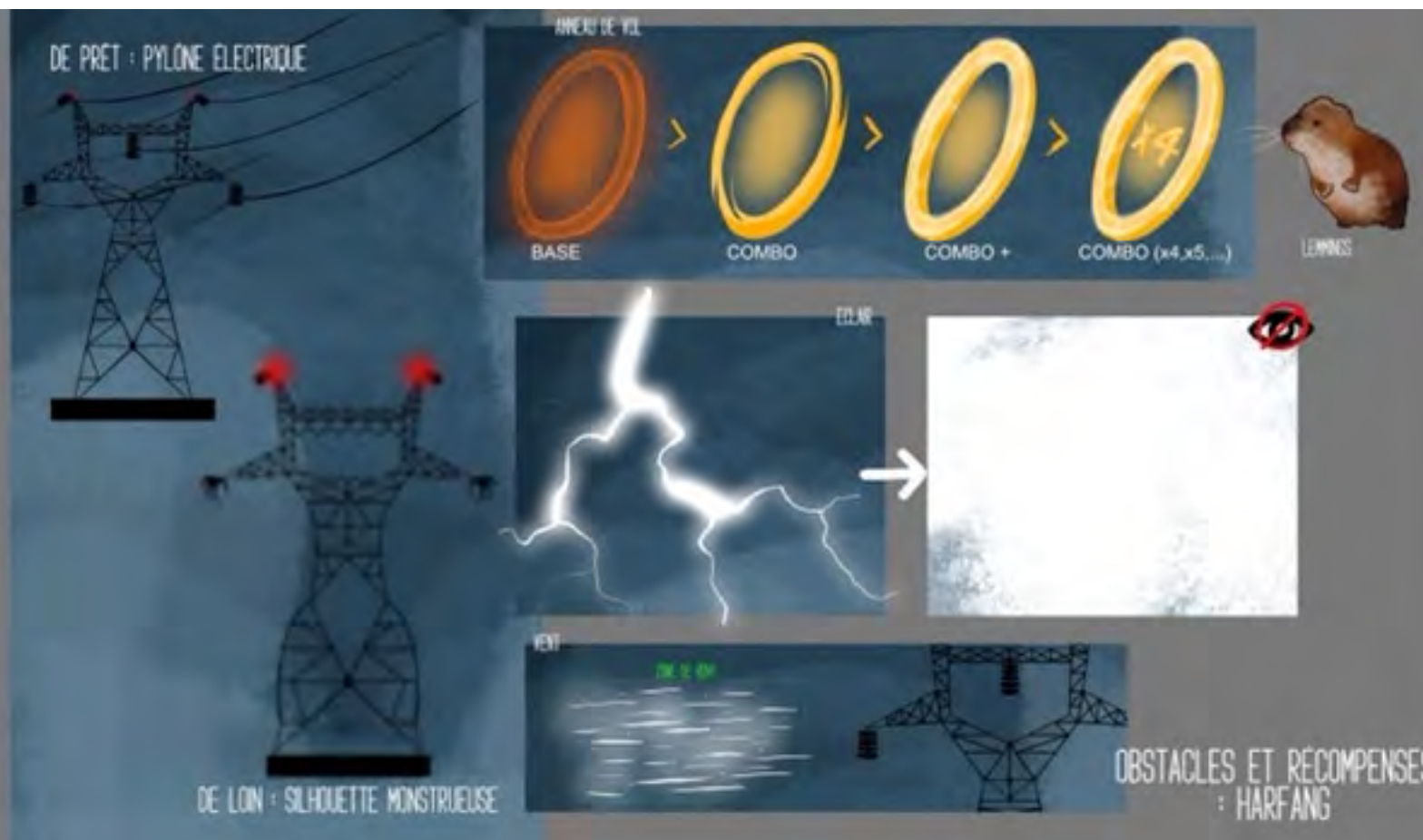
AVATAR



The viewer controls the direction of movement by spreading their arms, as if to simulate the flight of an owl. It is not easy to learn to move through the sky, but the landscape below is beautiful. The viewer flies over the seasonal ice floe that covers the sea, with strange bumps like waves, then the permanent ice and its hills as well as the jungle of electrical wires.

The more the viewer flies, the more the soul loses its color. The soul is now very clear, the viewer must find something to eat.

On the ground, the viewer makes out lemmings emerging from their tunnels and going from one tunnel to another. The viewer they can hunt lemmings, but they must avoid the electrical wires. Each time they run into an electrical wire the child's soul loses even more color. Inversely, when they catch a lemming, color is restored. Difficulty increases as the viewer advances and new obstacles appear. Whirlwinds block the way forward and twirl electrical wires in all directions. The scenery becomes surrealistic, the electrical towers with their big arms turn into living monsters.



Inevitably, the owl viewer becomes exhausted and falls.

Soul Transfer:

While the snowy owl is falling, the umbilical cord splits in two and changes to world into deep blue scenery with material effects that recall the texture of seal fat, and the outline of 3D elements becomes white.

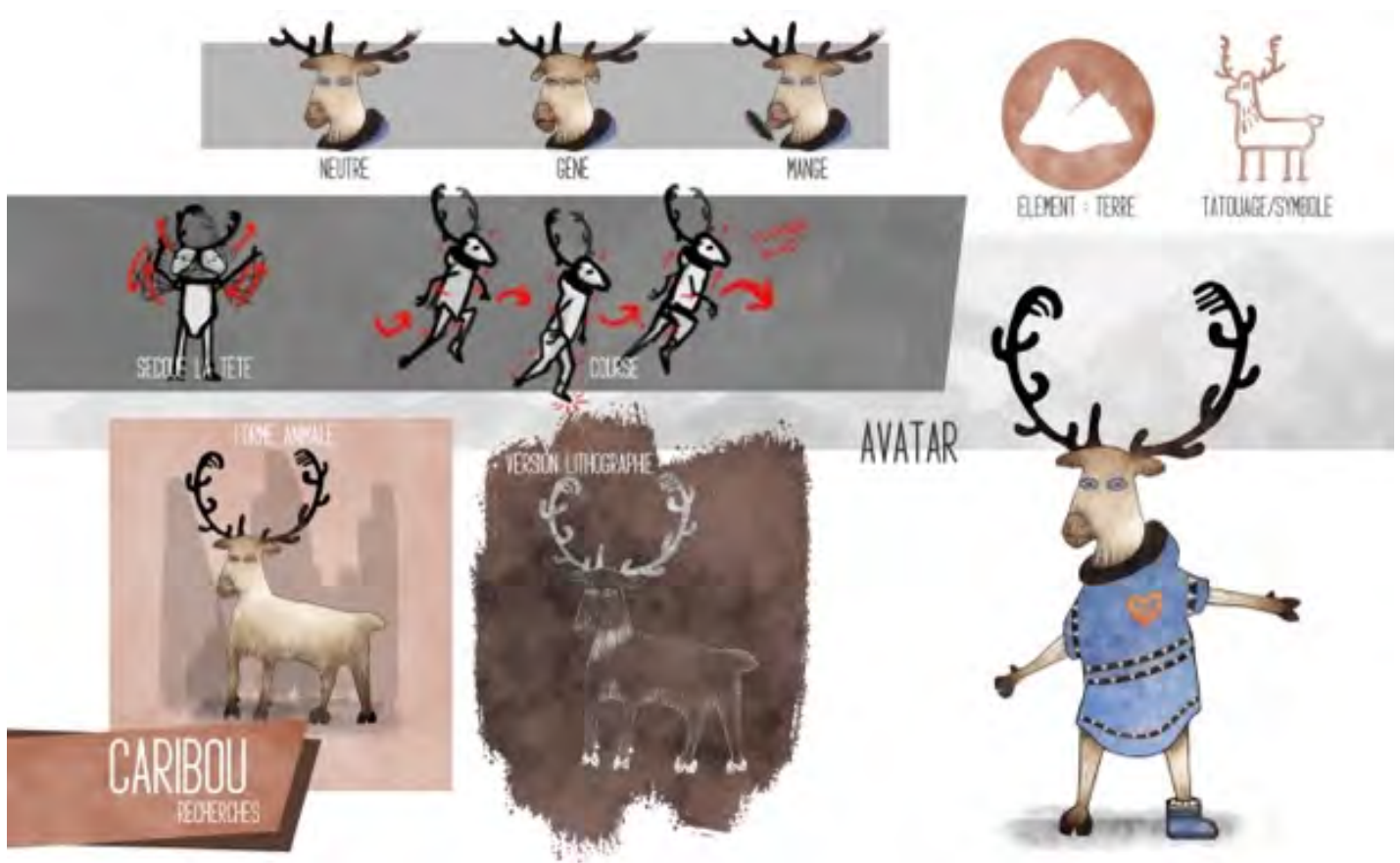
Once on solid ground the monochrome texture has completely covered the scenery. The viewer becomes the soul in the first person. The goal is to find a new body.

The viewer must listen and look to see if there is a living being in the scenery. They make out the shape of a caribou and go near it. If they touch it, then the heart goes to rest in the caribou's chest, the cord connects to it, and the boot slips onto one of its hooves.



The viewer's avatar undergoes the same transformation: hands become caribou hooves, one foot becomes a hoof and the other a fur boot. They are now attached to the caribou by the umbilical cord. The scenery switches to daylight. The caribou moves forward and we follow it, connected by the thin umbilical cord. The adventure continues.

Life as a Caribou:



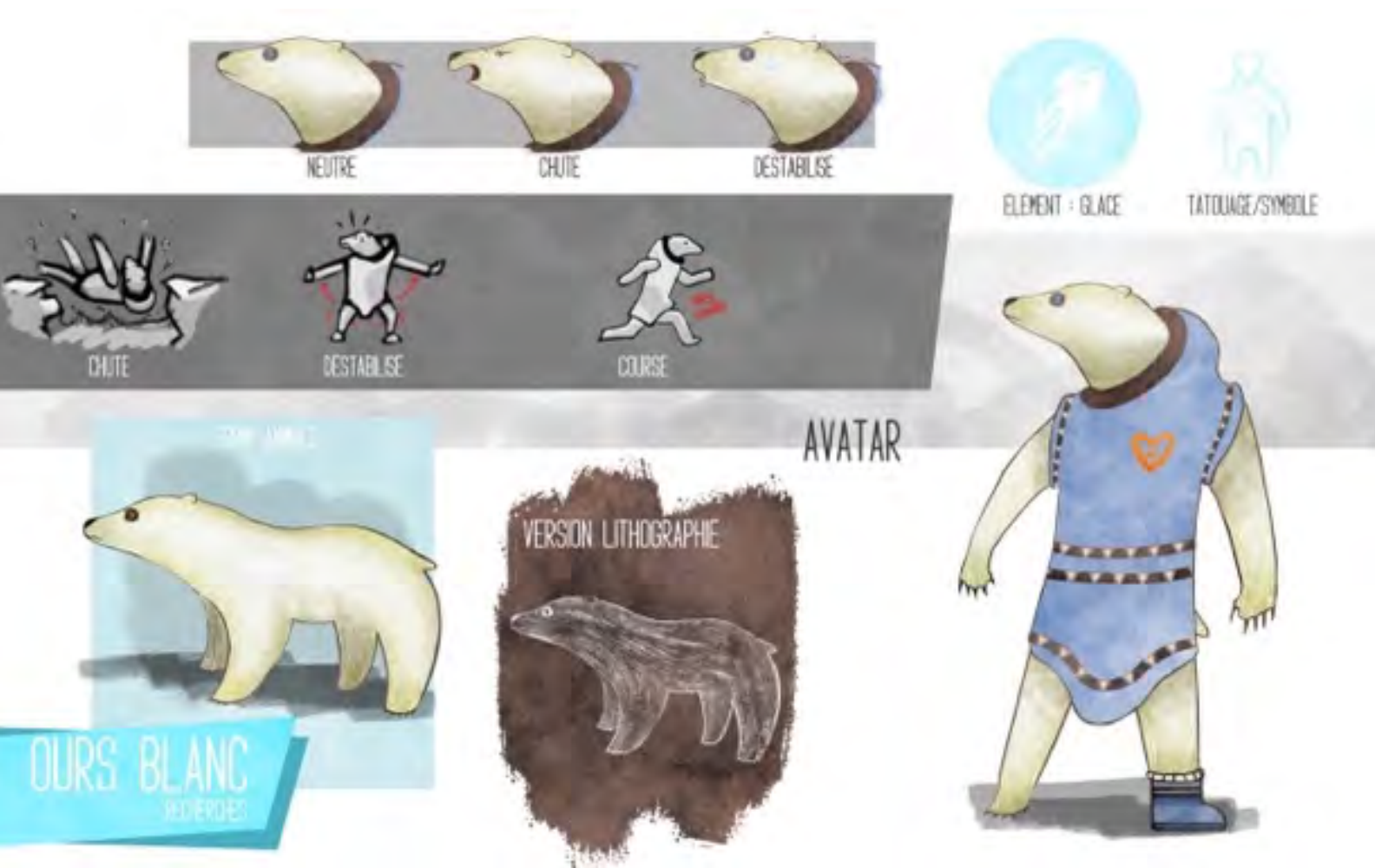
The child who still breathes caribou learns to survive by locating moss and lichens in a forest where mosquitos swarm. The forest grows and becomes abnormally green (realtime animation). The trees are unstable because their roots, caught in the permafrost, are becoming loose with the ground being so melted and soft (the Inuits call this phenomenon: drunken trees). The viewer must avoid both the biting mosquitoes and the falling trees. It is not easy to avoid hitting the trees with their antlers (wood). The trees wobble more and more, some are blown away in the whirlwinds. The viewer is equipped with a power unlocked through previous experience and he has the power of the wind (confront in his life before), which allows him to launch a current of air by executing an arm movement. It eliminates a large quantity of mosquitoes but beware the draft also blows away the trees. The caribou inevitably collapses from exhaustion. A tree falls on *The child who still breathes* and ends their life.



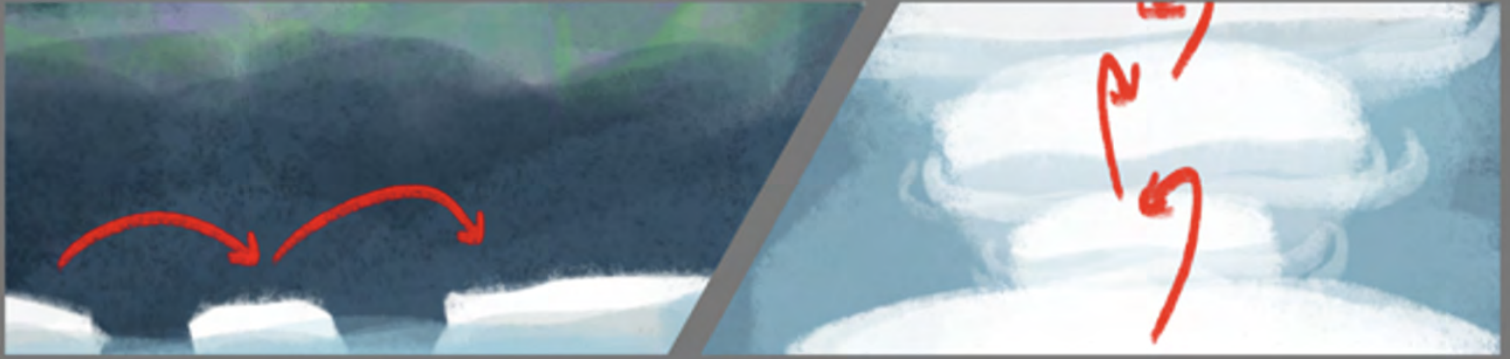
Soul Transfer:

The umbilical cord splits in two and changes the world to monochrome scenery: *The child who still breathes* becomes a bear.

Life as a bear:



Fragile, the ice floe is breaking up. The viewer is about to fall into the water. In loss of balance, the viewer must stabilize. Using hand tracking, he must, to stay in balance, adopt the position of the tightrope walker by spreading his arms. The viewer must then swing from right to left to stabilize the pack ice. He will then be able to move on the ice by jumping from piece to piece by jumping for real to try to regain a thicker piece of pack ice where there is sleeping seals, his favorite food. The viewer is equipped with a power unlocked through previous experience, which allows him to freeze the ground. Plates of ice come to settle and create a platform on which he can walk or an iceberg begins to grow and can serve as a bridge between two pieces of ice. But the viewer sinks into the depths of the water without reacting, his heart and soul are pale and no longer beating.



Soul Transfer:

The umbilical cord splits in two and changes the world to monochrome scenery. While roaming the seabed in search of a new animal body they encounter a whale and transform into a whale.



Life as a Whale:

The child who still breathes whale must learn to move under the ice by listening to the whale song of those up ahead. In fact, they show him/her how to open passages where they can go to the surface to breathe. But *The child who still breathes* whale can no longer hear the songs, drowned out by oil drilling stations which are turning into vociferous monsters. The viewer is equipped with a power unlocked thanks to the previous experience, which allows him to break ice thanks to a stream of icy water. It destroys obstacles in front of it. But Completely disoriented, the viewer suffocate.

OBSTACLES ET RECOMPENSES : BALEINE ET PHOQUE



Soul Transfer:

The umbilical cord splits in two and changes the world to monochrome scenery. Still in the depths of the sea, searching for a new body, *The child who still breathes* decides to continue living by becoming a seal.

Life as Seal:



The child who still breathes seal learns to twirl and spin in the frozen water and to catch fish to survive. They must pay attention to choose non-polluted fish and avoid the sharp propellers of the oil tankers that traverse the surface, but they are used to obstacles by now, so it's actually quite easy to live as a seal. After a while, *The child who still breathes* seal, full of fish, decides to go up to the surface by a hole in the ice. In the daylight, the shadow of a man and his harpoon appear through the ice and everything becomes dark.

Cinematic Scenes (without interactivity)

The hunter carries the caught seal to the igloo seen in the beginning of the experience. On the seal we see the still heart and the orange umbilical cord through its body, and the boot on one of its fins.

The fisherman's wife is none other than the mother of *He Who Breathes (fetus)* encountered in the beginning. She comes to meet him. The fisherman places the seal in front of the igloo and she begins to carve it up.

In the evening, the couple is gathered around the dish and they eat morsels of seal meat.

The mother's body becomes transparent, the spirit of *He Who Still Breathes*, present in a piece of seal meat, slides inside the woman's body. They settle gently and comfortably in her womb, the cord connects to her, and the heart starts to beat again. *The child who still breathes* becomes a fetus again.

An igloo-shaped uterus appears over the scene. To the sound of the drum, a baby is pushed headfirst out of the igloo's small entrance tunnel uterus to the outside. The baby cries loudly and takes its first breath.

Return to Human Life

The child has become a young girl or a young man (depending on the choice made by the viewer at the beginning of the experience), we see on their chest the pulsing heart and we recognize their boots. They are wearing the orange cord on their wrist, all the symbols of the animals they have incarnated are arranged there, like pearls. With an angry expression, they sweep their eyes over the ice floes ravaged by human activity: collapsing icebergs, oil tankers and cargo ships going by, undersea drilling, trees that grow, sway, and are blown away, mosquitoes appearing....

They breathe deeply, then the animal symbols on their wrist grow until they become huge and come to life. The animals, also, start to breathe very loudly, (sound of throat singing).

Their breath turns into the wind, then a blizzard.

The blizzard kicks up the snow and covers the scenery, making the chunks of ice, boats, drilling platforms, trees, and mosquitoes all disappear....

The ice floe returns to its original whiteness.

End

Metaverse version

Unlike the Oculus Quest and Pico version, the metaverse version is played in the 1st person and the interactivity is simplified (by technical necessity). The avatars of other viewers are visible in transparency and disappear when they are far away.

To give a social dimension to the project, we will create a social room. The Social Room The social room is accessible before and after the experience. It takes the form of a hub with several doors that give access to the worlds of animals: whale, caribou, bear, seal, snowy owl and their obstacle. Each universe allows us to wander and interact with sounds and trigger animations that characterize the animal. Documentary elements punctuate the route: sound recordings of animal cries, real ethnological and animal films on these endangered species. Link of these animals with the Inuit culture.



Graphic Environment

Curves, textures and a slanted world

The graphic treatment of the characters is inspired by the Inuit monographs of the 1960s. First stenciled with seal fat soot from oil lamps, then with gouache, they represent characters in movement, all in curves.



Example of prints made with seal fat soot and gouache - mood board

Characters, in my research I will focus on:

- Material, we will apply a material to the darker characters that evokes the seal fat traditionally used, all while adding some colors.
- Stencil patterns, present on the scenery and the costumes of the characters.
- Roundness of the characters and the settings.
- Physically unrealistic characters and animals.

mother and father of *the child who Still Breathes*



Scenery, in my research I will focus on:

- Scenery with a watercolor rendering for the day and lithography for the darker passages.
- A world with slanted lines that recalls the instability of the ground which is in the grip of global warming.
- Immense landscapes with horizon lines blurred by mist or sea currents.
- FX of snow blowing around, sun glinting off the ice, and fire on the heart and umbilical cord of *He Who Still Breathes*.

Monochrome vastness: the white of the ice floes or blue of the water, black (while changing bodies and during childbirth), will make it possible to identify the characters and guide the viewer's gaze while increasing immersion.

Scenario elements illustrating immersive and interactive storytelling

A story that adapts to the viewer's behavior

Through the story of *He Who Still Breathes*, discover a version of the Arctic by embodying the soul of *He Who Still Breathes*. You are not just a viewer, your behavior transforms the experience. By holding your gaze or touching certain details, you naturally trigger interactive sequences that enhance the experience and advance the common narrative for each viewer.

These interactive sequences sometimes use sound, each sound has a duration longer than its hover time, so the viewer is also in position of musician, this element is at its peak during body changes.

A story that progresses with the viewers movements

The experience takes place in the first person. The viewer plays the role of the soul of the child. They are attached to the animal that embodies them by an umbilical cord. The gestures they make with their arms are reproduced in real time by the animal. This helps minimize the risks of *motion sickness* and to keep the experience's gameplay intact.

We have imagined three natural and intuitive types of movement:

- **Walking:** (life as a caribou and bear): using a walking movement with their hands, the viewer moves forward. If the place both hands in front, they go straight ahead. If they put their hands toward the left, then they go left, and inversely. By making hand movements that are more rapid, like running movements, the viewer can go faster.
- **Flying:** if the viewer spreads their arms, they fly straight ahead. If they tilt their left arm, they go left, and inversely (almost as if they were really flying). If they flap their spread arms, they fly faster.
- **Swimming** (life as a whale and seal): if the viewer uses both arms, as if paddling, they go forward, their left arm takes them to the left and vice versa.

Transferring the soul from one body to another

Each time the body changes, the umbilical cord breaks and the scenery changes. The environment then becomes monochrome, a dark blue background with a textured effect (seal fat) and 3D scenery elements outlined in white appear. The viewer begins searching for a new body in the 1st person, only their hands glowing orange.

Vitality and exhaustion indicators

During each animal life, all the spectator's actions modify the color of the heart and the umbilical cord: the brighter the color, the more alive it is and vice versa. After a while, if the color is too pale, the controllers vibrate, and the viewer must go in search of food or oxygen (different according to the lives) to regain their strength.

Multiplayer:

To show that the spectator is not alone in experiencing the damage of global warming, we decided to integrate the possibility of perceiving other viewers, like ghosts in the adventure. Therefore the spectator has the feeling of not being alone but will not be disturbed by the actions of the other players. The further away the spectators are in the scene, the more transparent they are and vice versa. In the VRchat version, the experience can be enjoyed by more than one person and the viewers can talk to each other via their microphones.

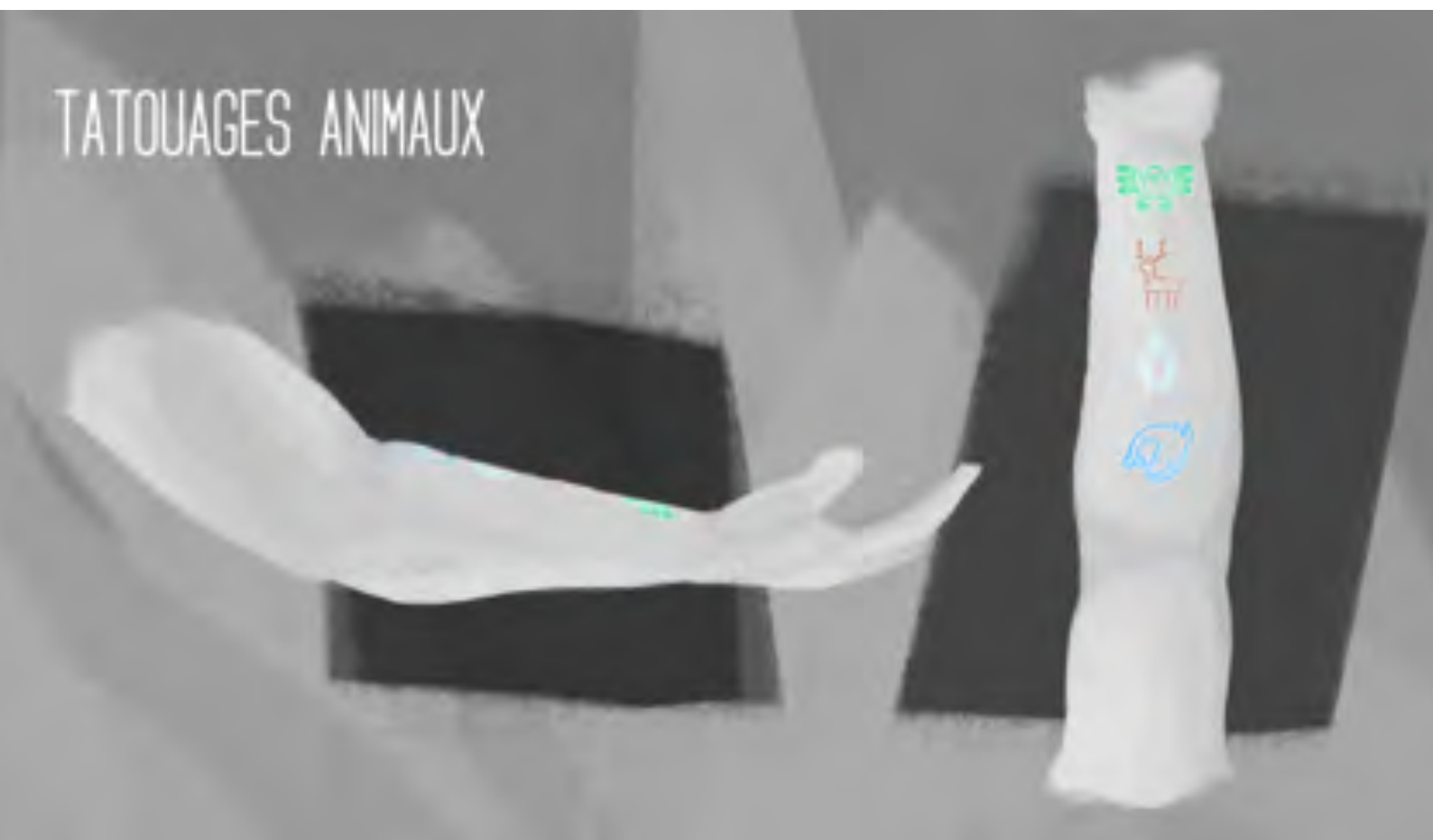
Tutorials

The mini tutorials from the beginning to learn the gestures and the tutorial during the course are given by the Spirits, they will have a graphic representation from the Inuit culture (graphic research working progress).

The powers / tattoo

After each past life, the viewer gets a power from their before life that they can use in their after life. A tattoo appears on his forearm and by clicking on it he triggers the power:

- After a snowy life: make the wind
- After a life of caribou: freezing and consolidating the ground
- After a bear life: break the ice with icy streams of water
- After a whale's life: making protective air bubbles.
- These powers remain usable in human life.



Sound Environment

The sound design of *The child who still breathes* is as exciting as its visual design. We will create a kind of interactive and immersive music, with a very textured approach based on Inuit drumming, throat singing and concrete sounds from the elements: ice, wind, water, wood, whale songs.

One of the goals of the sound design is to awaken the senses of the viewer. It is a sensory experience, so we have to be in a situation of listening and paying attention to the elements all around us; also the sonic writing will be directly linked to the narrative and its aims to increase or ease tension.

To give you an idea of planned sound elements, here are recordings of Inuit throat songs and drums made by Fabienne Giezendanner.

Throat Song 1 <https://www.dropbox.com/s/eaywicccb88if36/CHANT1.WAV?dl=0>

Throat Song 2 <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5fsqhy7yu7f35e4/CHANT2.WAV?dl=0>

Drum <https://www.dropbox.com/s/q3dsbct9nqw8bsd/tambour.WAV?dl=0>

