# Zoomer's Gateway

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The Zoomers Gateway explores how cultural memory and nostalgia surface through soundscapes—testing our subjective sense of the past via sound, the acoustic manifestation of place.

Presented as a performance, The Zoomers Gateway adapted the structure of a pure tone audiometry test, the project shifts focus from hearing thresholds to when familiarity arrives, documenting relationships between listeners, sounds, and memory.

The work asks a simple question: Can one person's memory of a space be shared with another through sound?

InspirationInspiration
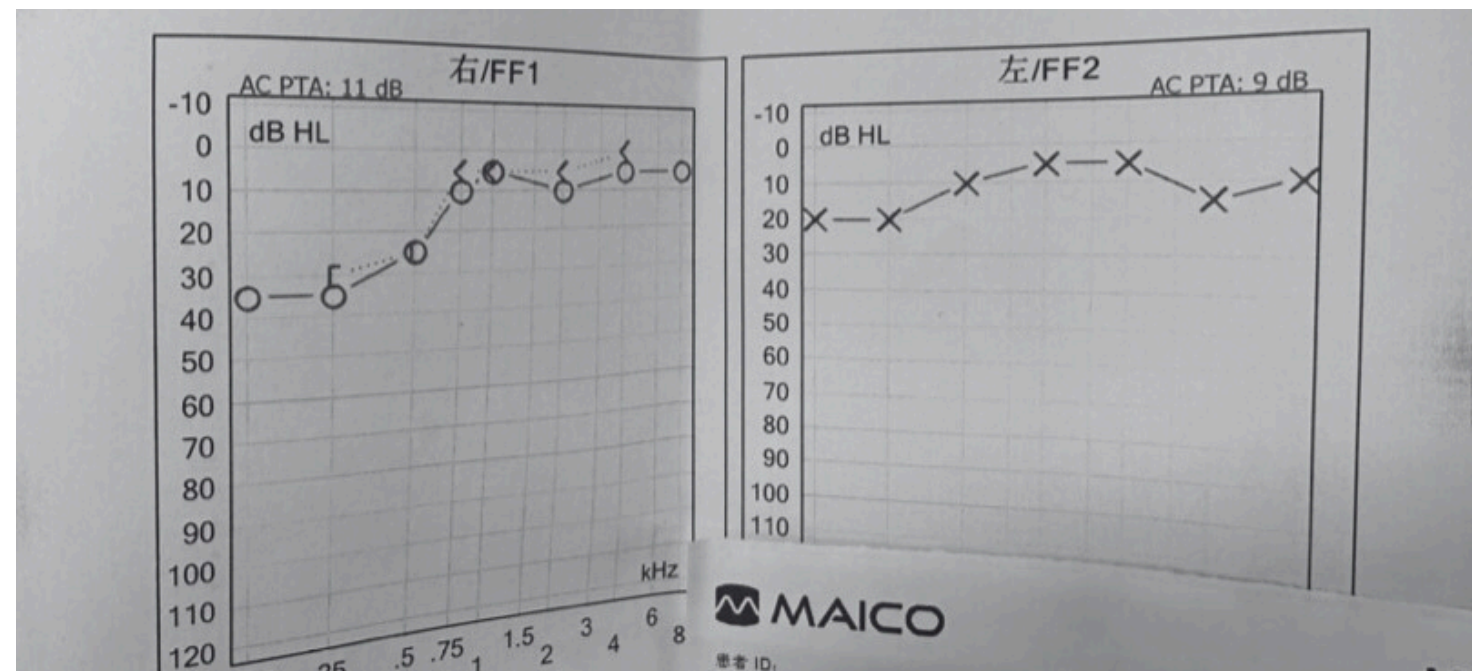
In 2024, my right ear experienced sensorineural hearing loss. In the hospital, I was told to proceed with a pure tone audiometry test, a common hearing test that measures your ability to hear different sounds at various frequencies and intensities. In the sealed box, I sat and listened to the tiny frequencies to respond at the threshold of perception.

Nostalgia to me, is most vivid as sound. A small sonic cue opens a corridor back to a street, a room, a year. The everyday soundscape, more than image or text, is where I notice memory catching. Memory, often linked to nostalgia, can feel vague or indistinct. But just like hearing, it can be lost. When my experience in the hospital and feelings of nostalgia clashed, a question came to my mind:

Can nostalgia Be tested through Sound?

ResearchResearchResearch

In exploring nostalgia and memory, I adopted Jan Assmann's definition of cultural memory: cultural memory consists of reusable texts, images, and rituals that stabilize a society's self-image, making the past visible in the present through forms cultivated and repeated." With his definition, I narrowed down my question: can sound operate as such a form of cultural memory not by narrating history but by activating it through recognition?

FROM PLACE TO SOUNDSCAPE

Finally, I bring in hauntology: the presence of unrealized past futures that still color the now. Some clips evokes nostalgia in me not because I directly lived them, but because they echo shared atmospheres and missed ideals that hover within a generation's culture. This gives me a vocabulary for overlaps in the remembrance graph that exceed private biography.
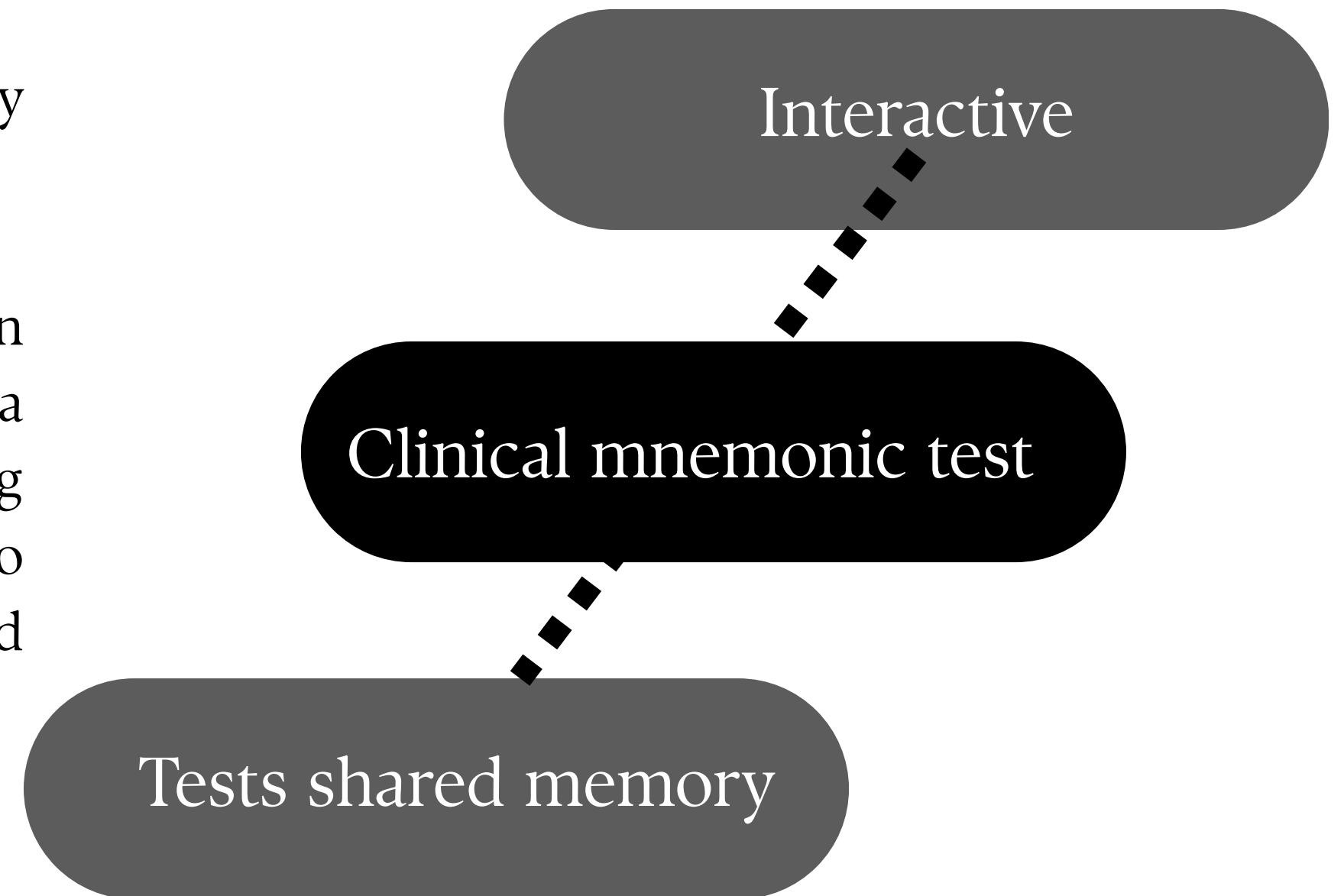
CULTURAL MEMORY

To pursue that inquiry with sound, I aligned with Barry Truax on the idea that "the soundscape is the acoustic manifestation of place; it reveals how a place is understood by those living in it, and it is, in turn, shaped by their activities." If place is audible, then place-anchored memory is also audible. It is not contained in the file itself, but in the encounter between listener and environment. This frames my test as a way to enter memory spaces rather than extract content.

HAUNTOLOGY

MANIFESTING THE IDEA

Research shows that soundscapes create memory spaces that make up our understanding of the past.

Tying this understanding to my original inspiration from the clinical hearing test, I wanted to create a test that quantifies memory, juxtaposing inexplicable sentiment and hard data to explore to what extent these memory spaces can be shared between individuals.

Interactive

Clinical mnemonic test

Tests shared memory

PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

Collecting Stimuli: collecting six short environmental soundscapes (2000–2025), each tied to my memory of a time/place yet chosen for possible cultural legibility.


2000

2000 is characterized by a rise of electronic use, especially with games. Based on early-2000s gaming (e.g., Street Fighter-era cues), I constructed a compact soundscape from coin chimes, menu stingers, button taps, and soft CRT hum, placed within a light room/arcade ambience.
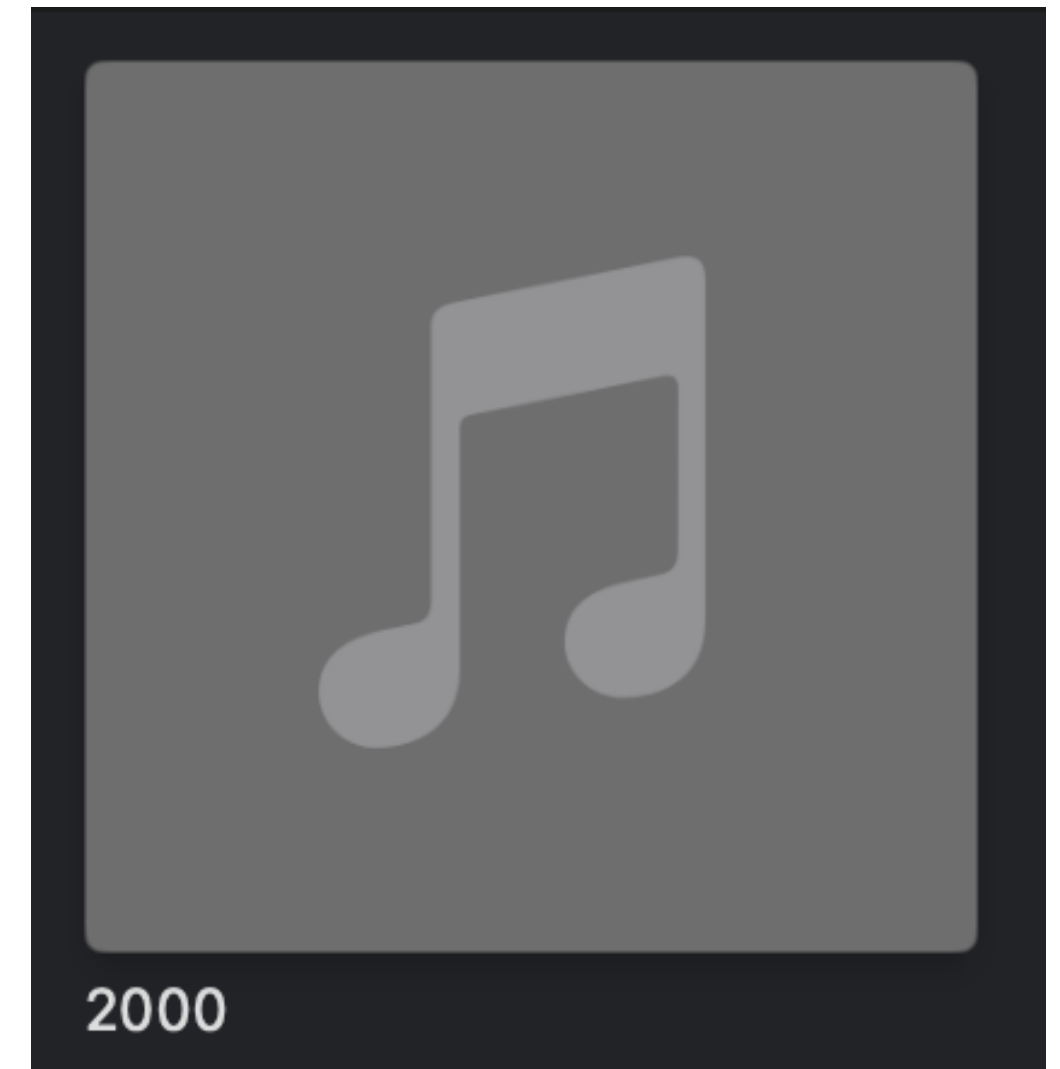
PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

Shenzhen in 2005 has SEG electronics market at its peak. To recreate the sound of Huaqiangbei at that time, I layered vendor chatter, feature-phone ringtone demos, keypad clicks, mixed as fast micro-events over a dense market bed.
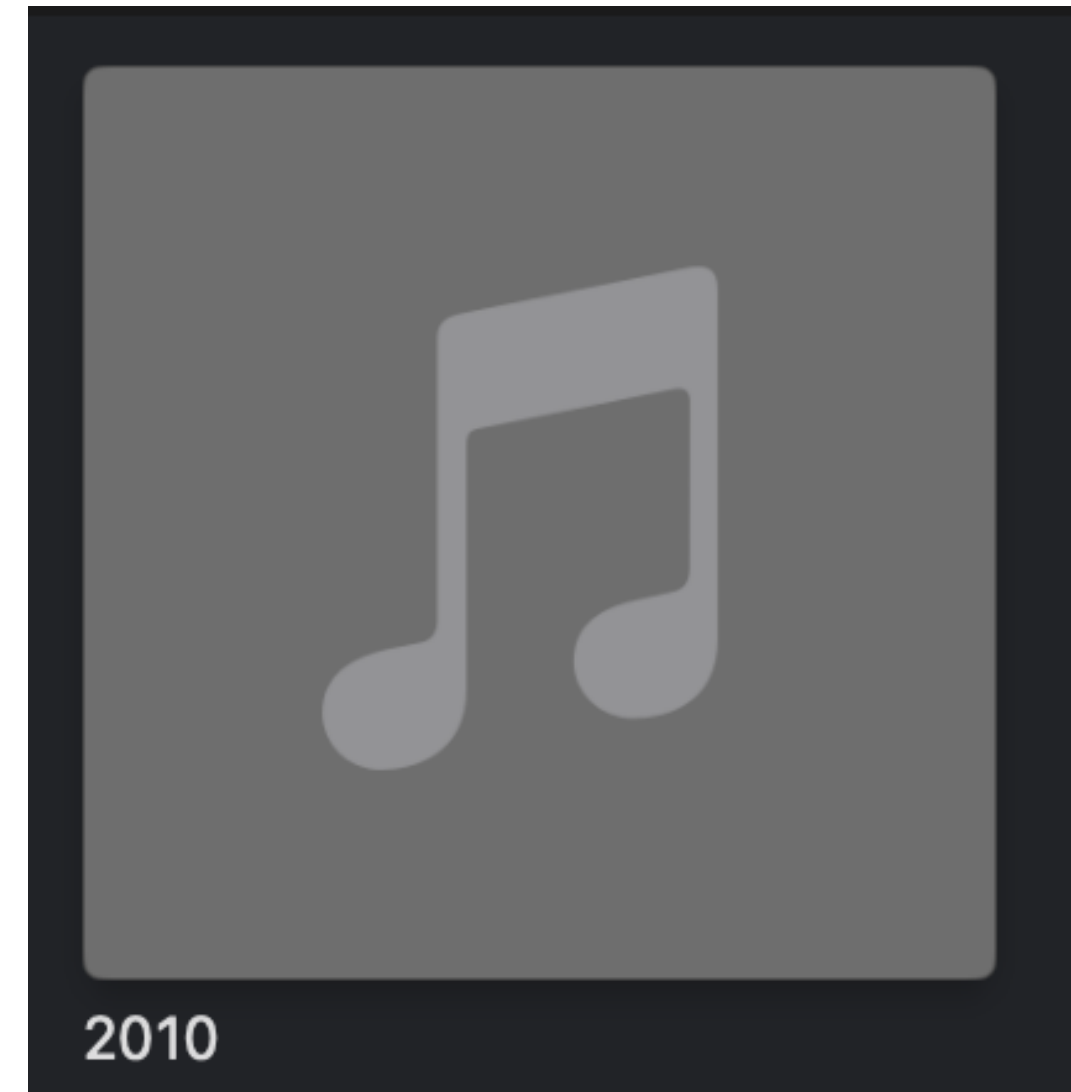

2005 ☆
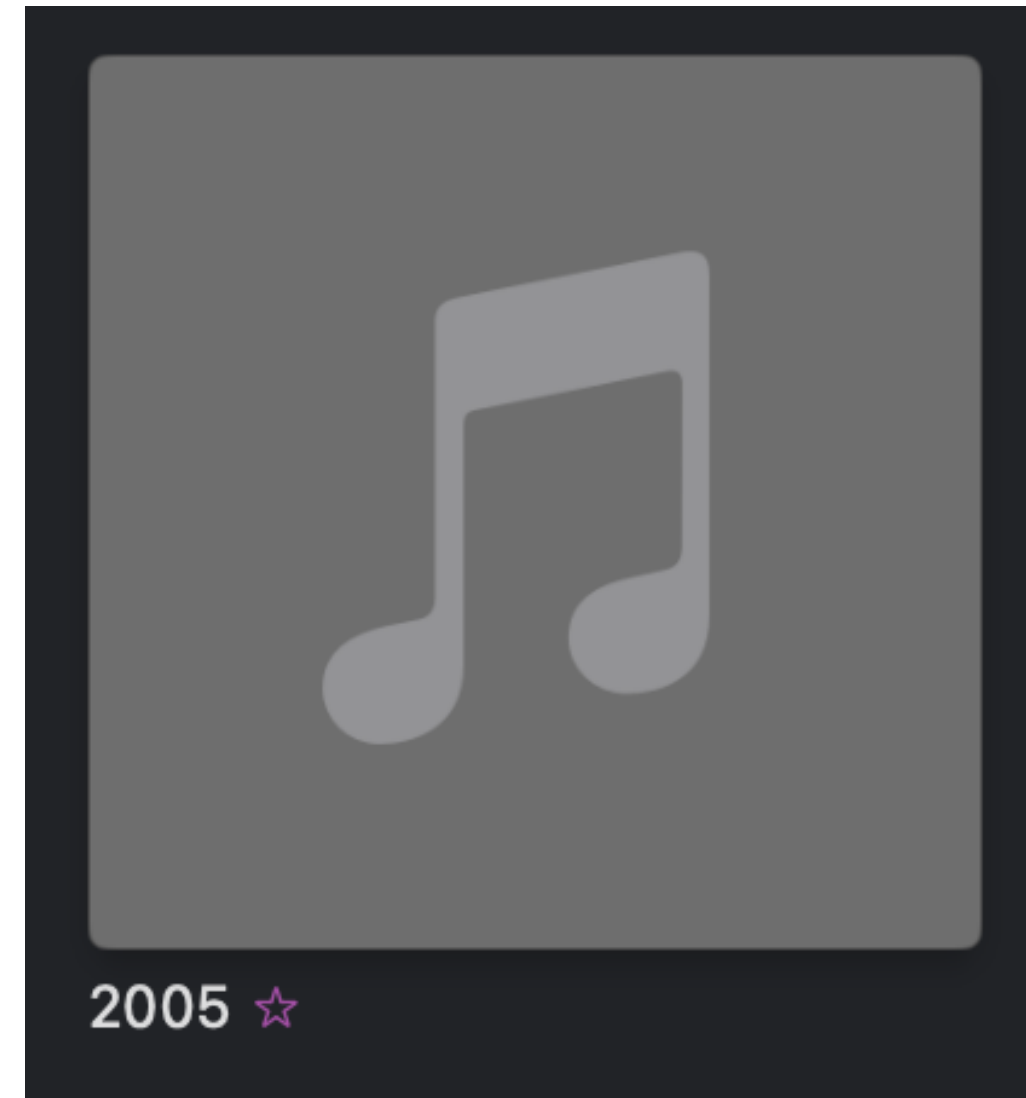
PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

Born in 2007, my memory before turning 5 if full of kiddie rides. Therefore, for 2010, I captured the coin-insert clink, greeting jingle, motor rumble, and looping tune of kiddie rides.
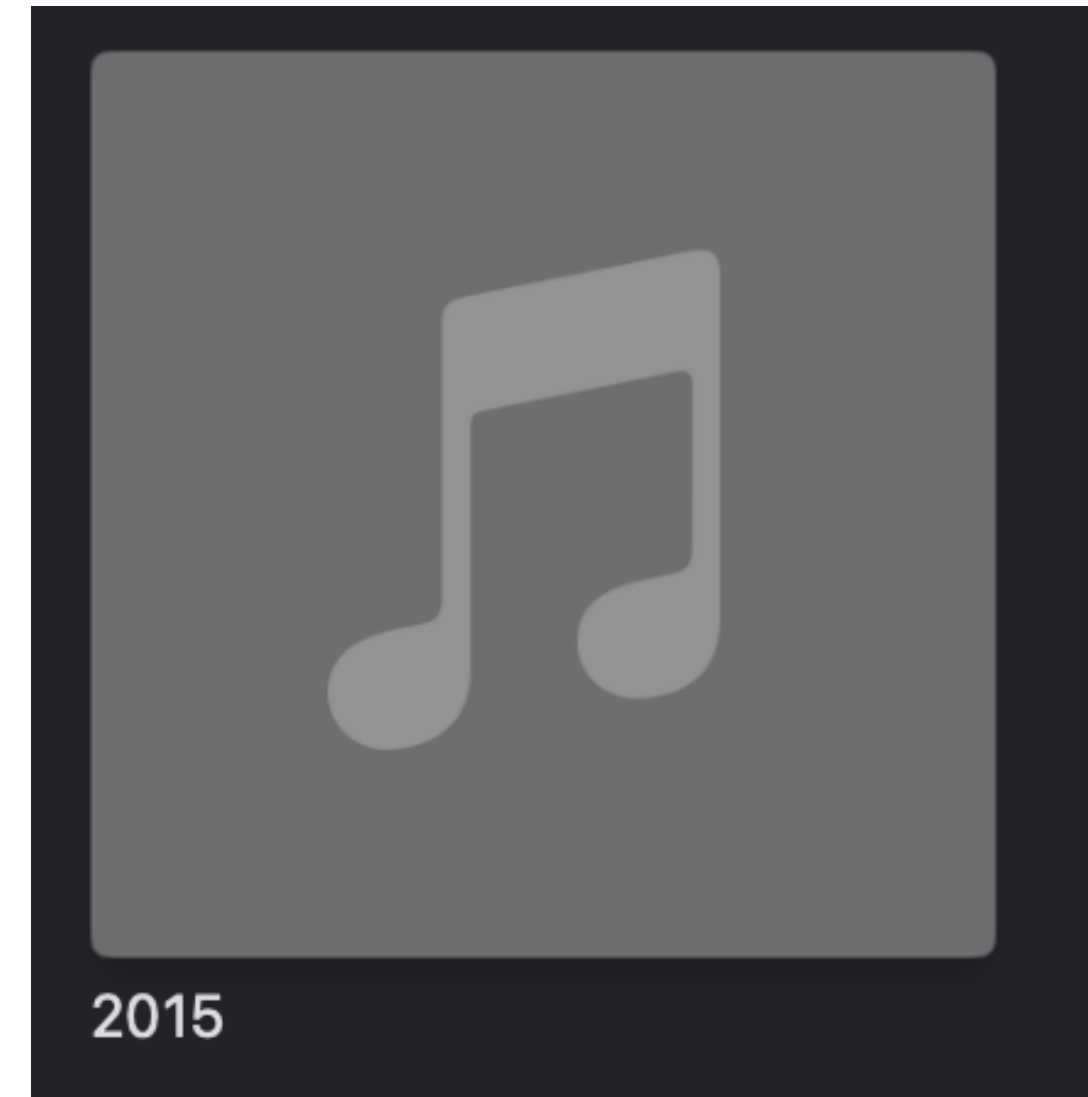

2010

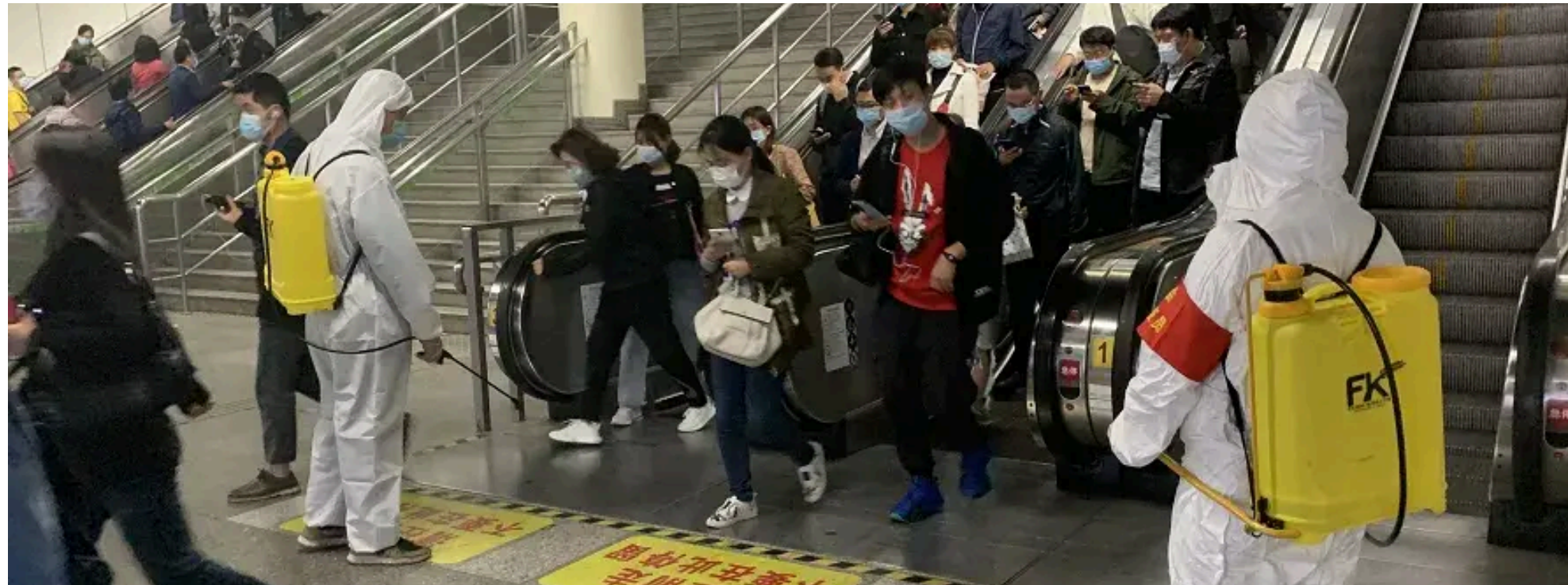# PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

In primary school, my family often shopped at Walmart, which gets extremely festive during Chinese New Year. I composed a short soundwalk of metal carts on tile, staff PA announcements, and seasonal promo lines under steady crowd murmur to trace pre-CNY shopping rhythm.
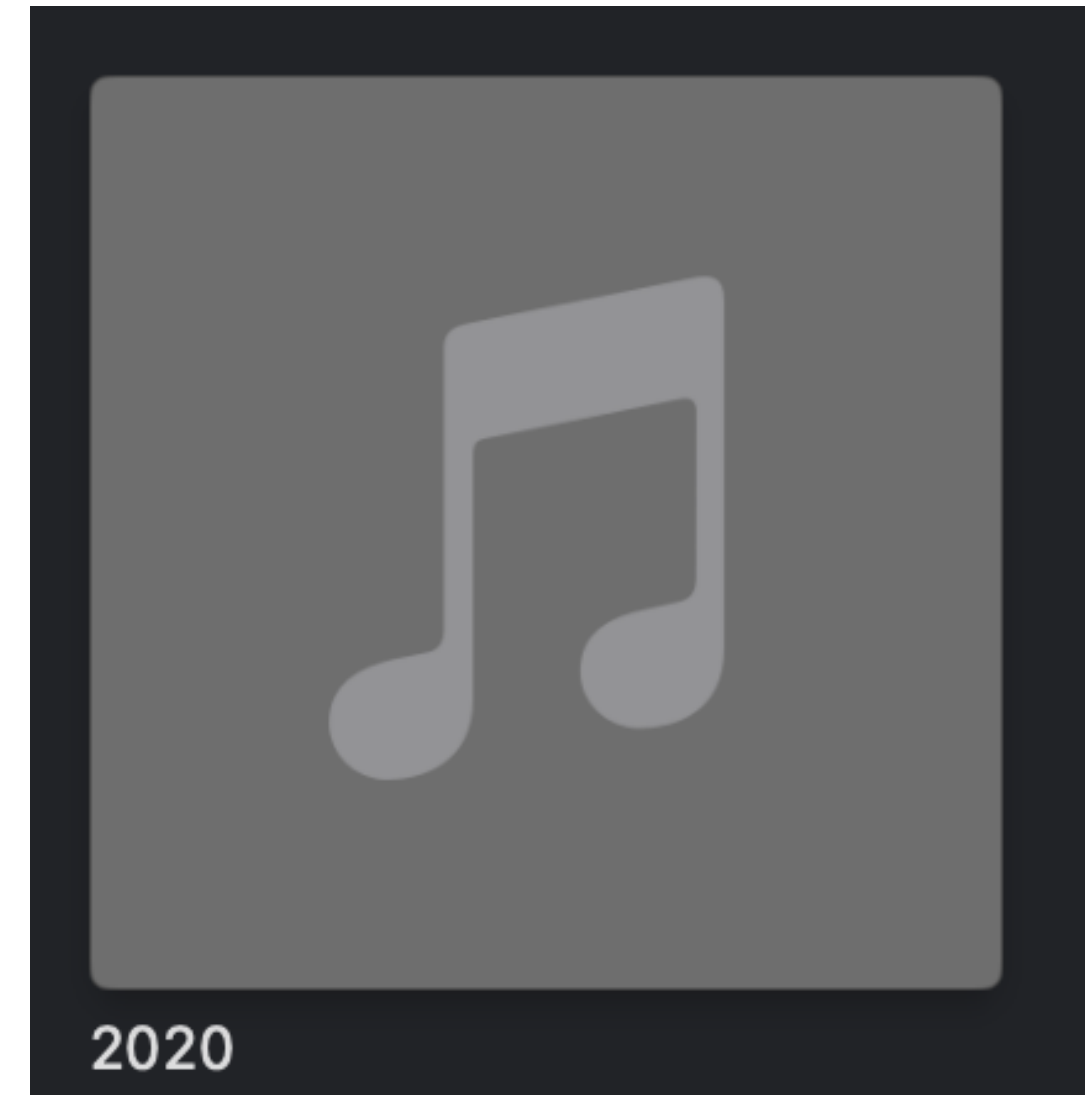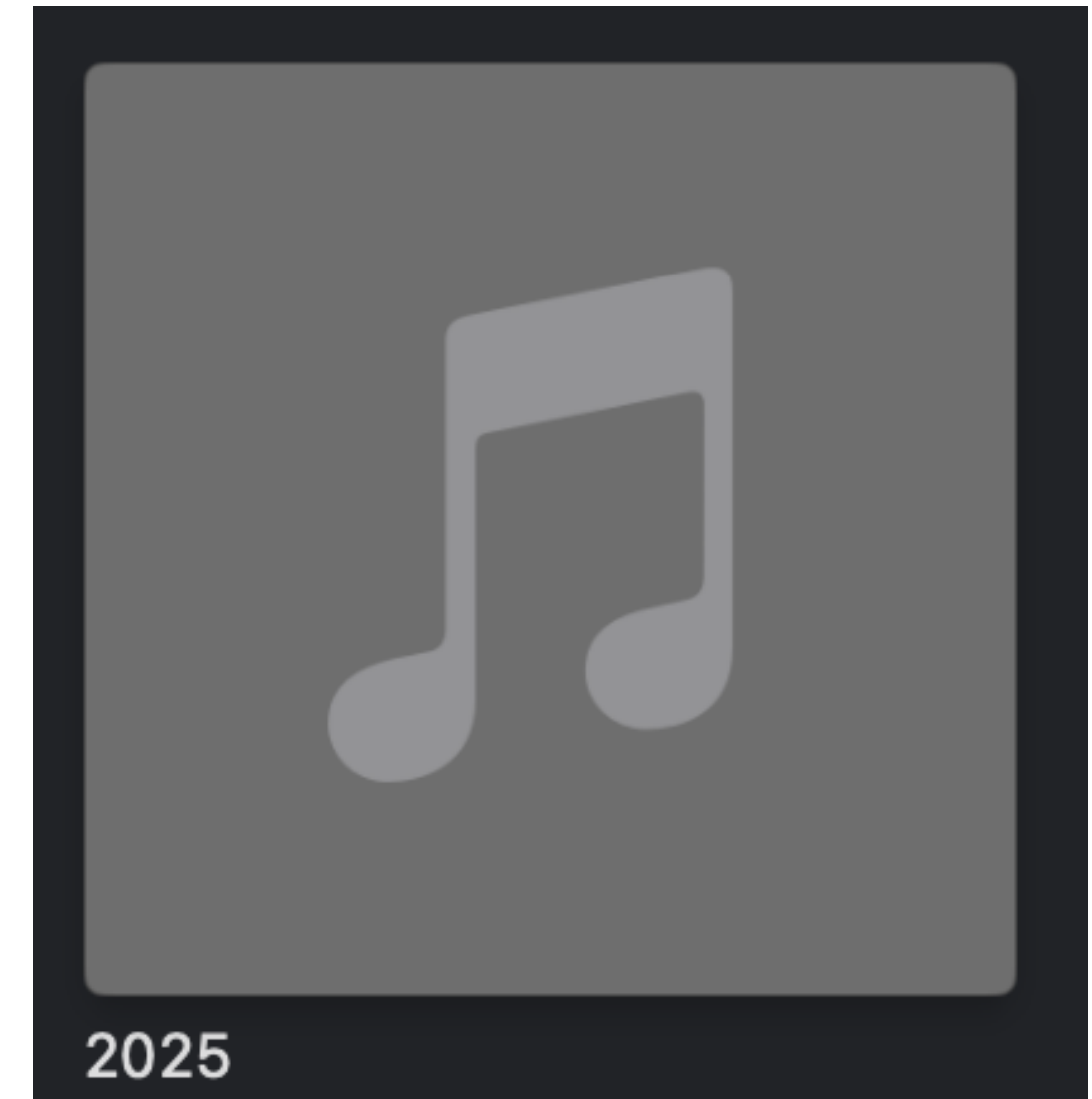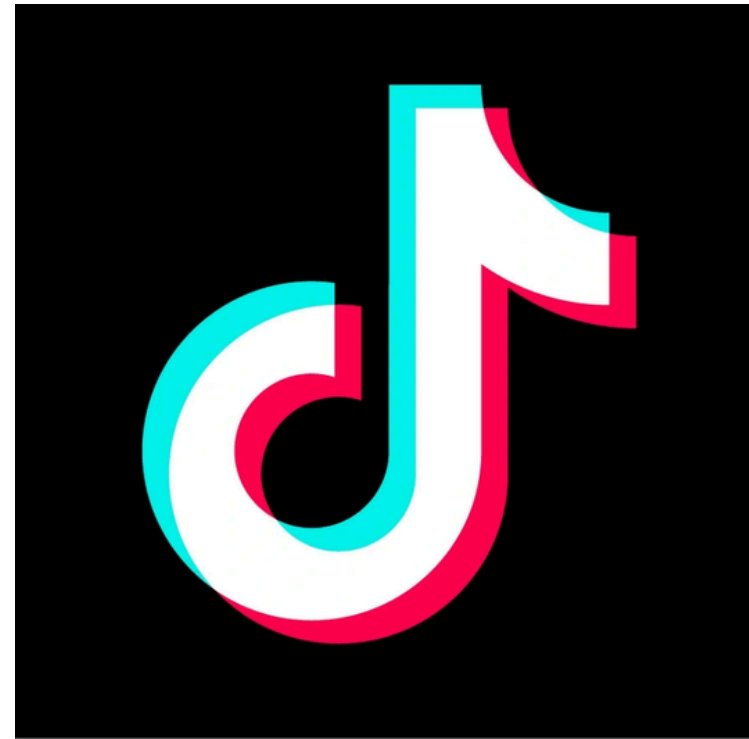
PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

2020 was THE pandemic year. I centered the audio on a metro mask-reminder announcement against train idling hum and platform reverberation, with thinned crowd presence.


2020

PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

2025 marks a shift of soundscapes from actual places to mediated spaces, with technology merging into everyday life and environment. I collaged "brain-rot" audios, including sped-up hooks, meme stingers, chaotic song remix to compose the audio.

PROCESS: BUILDING THE TEST

Using TRAE AI and basic coding knowledge, I coded my own test webpage to run the test program.
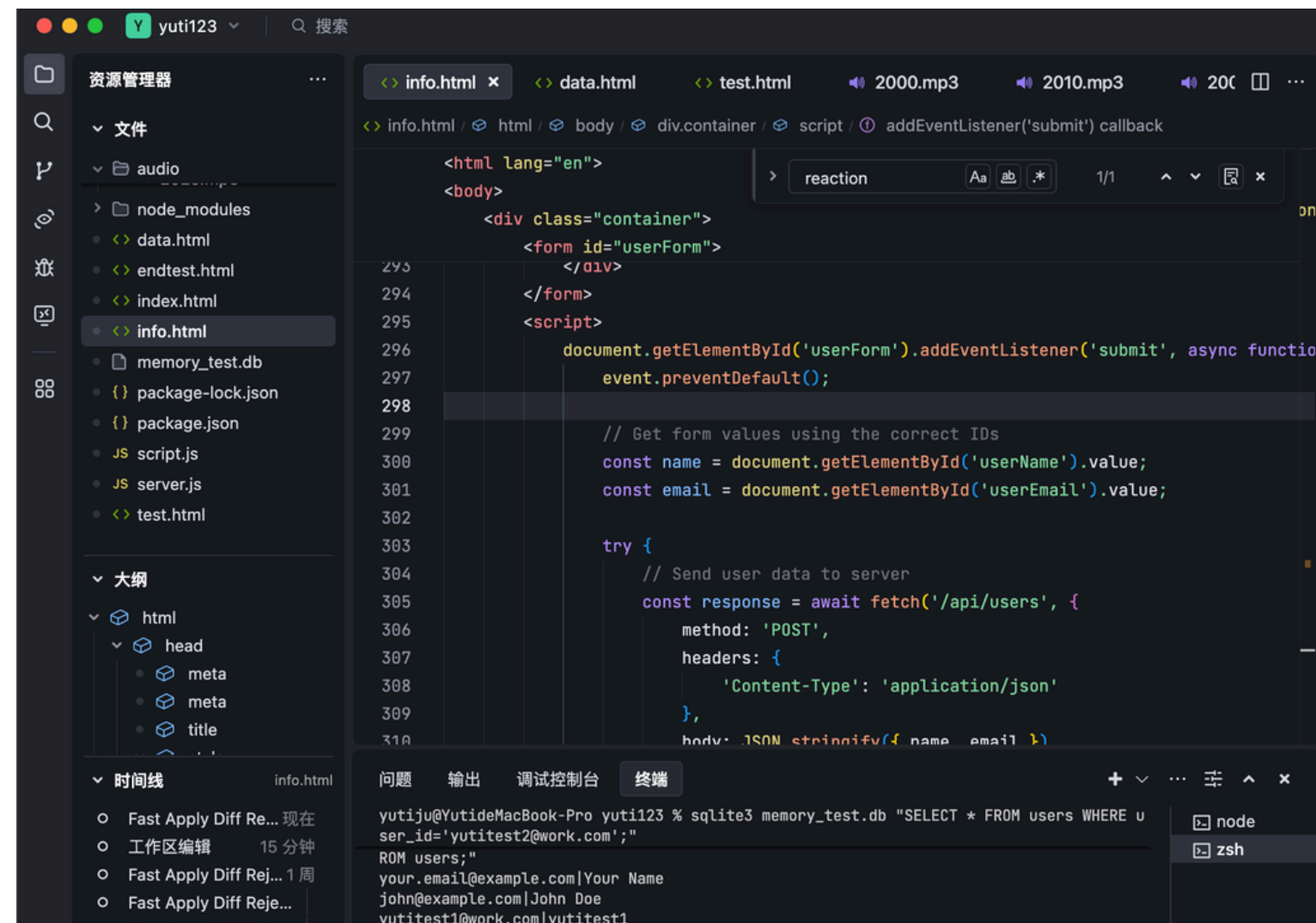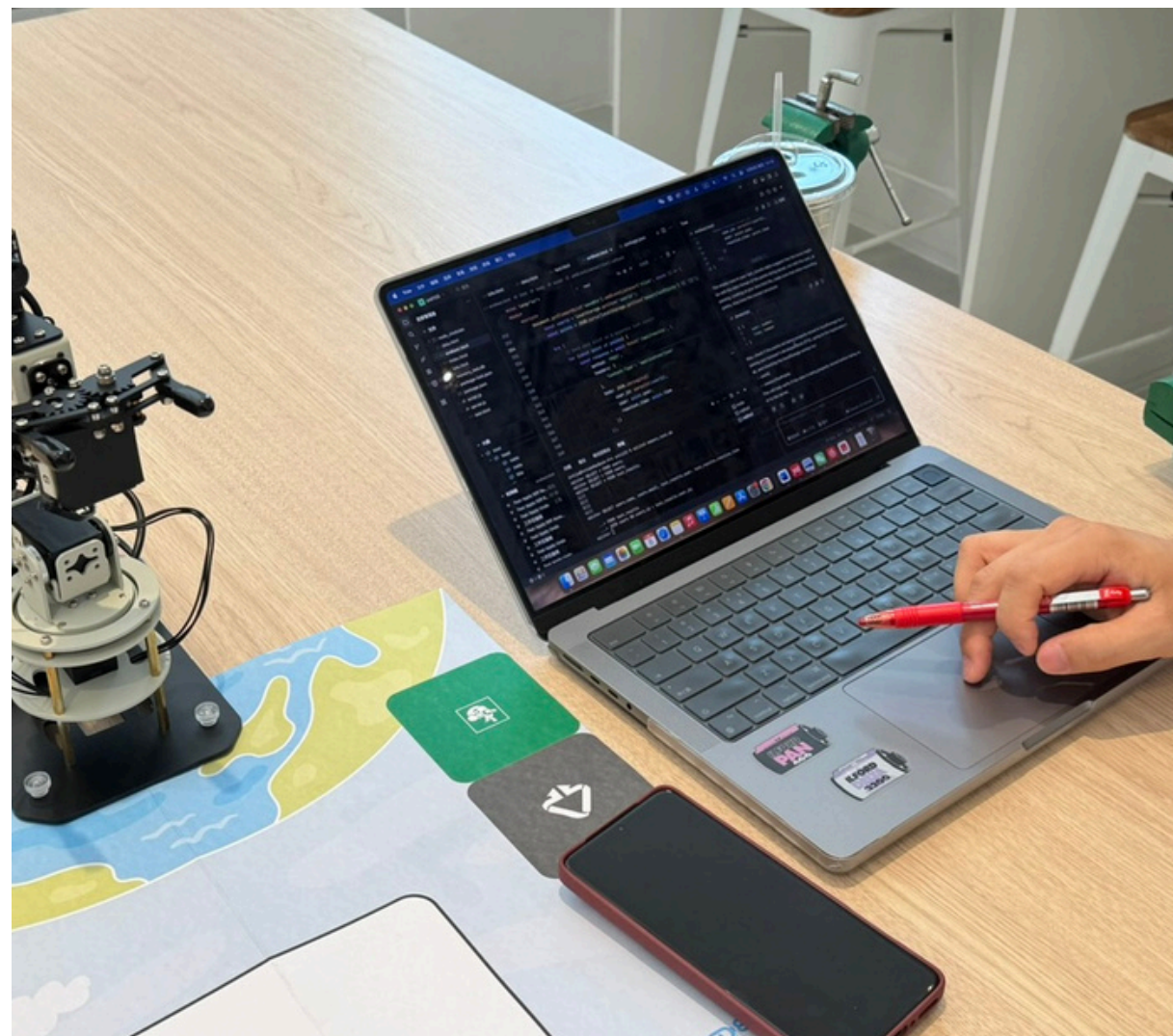
TEST RUN-THROUGH

Degrees of Remembrance Test

Welcome to the Degrees of Remembrance Test

Instructions for participants:

- This test is designed to measure your subjective response to auditory prompts associated with memory. You will be presented with five audio recordings of environmental soundscapes from the years 2000 to 2025. Each audio will be played individually.

- During each playback, you are asked to press the button on the controller **once** if and when you experience a sense of familiarity with the sound being played. **Please respond as soon as you feel familiar to the audio.** Your reaction time will be recorded.

- You will have up to 40 seconds to respond to each sound. If no familiarity is detected within the 40-second window, the test will automatically proceed to the next audio.

- You will receive specific guidance from me at each stage of the test.

[Next] [View Data Set]

1. Starting and instruction page

At the heart of The Zoomers Gateway lies the Degree of Remembrance Test, which consists of the six audio recordings of environmental soundscapes from the year 2000 to year 2025 that represents my memory of space and time from those periods.

Audience members are instructed to react to each audio by pressing a button when they feel a sense of familiarity towards a sound. After all six audio clips have been played, a graph representing the participant's "degree of remembrance" appears on the screen. The points of greatest overlap among participants reveal the shared cultural memory of the test group.
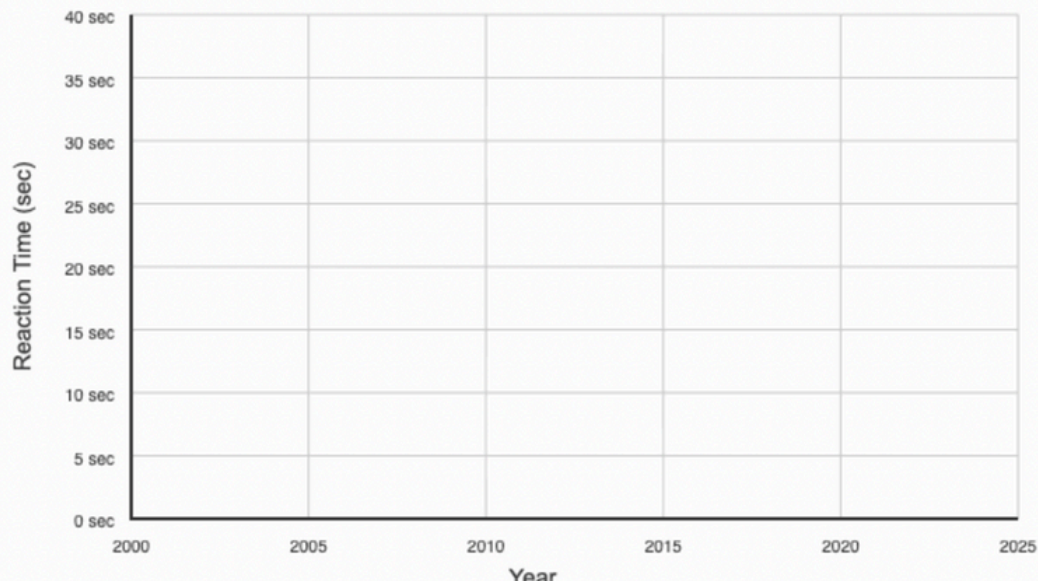
TEST RUN-THROUGH

2. Information Page to store user data; displays test graph
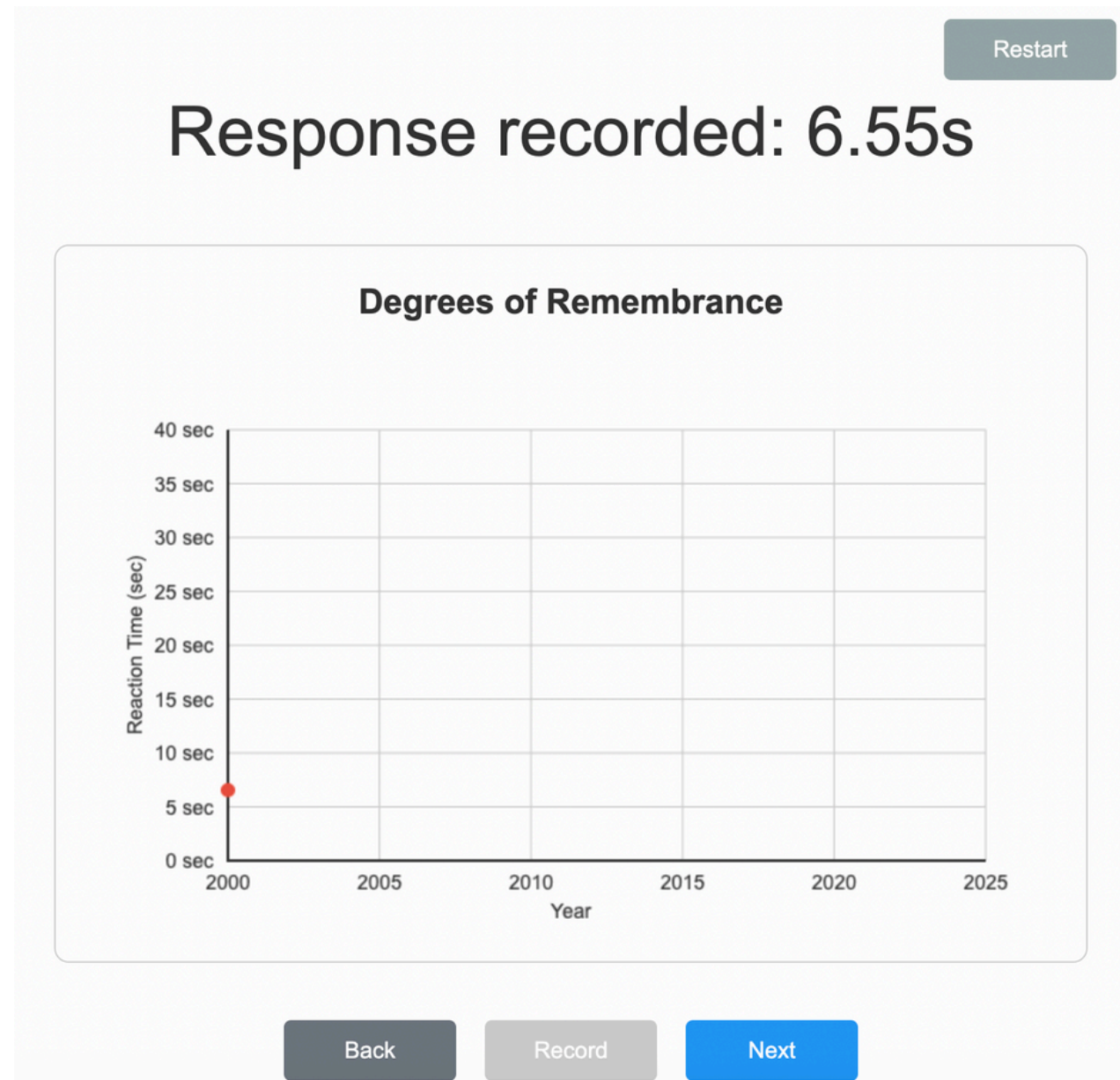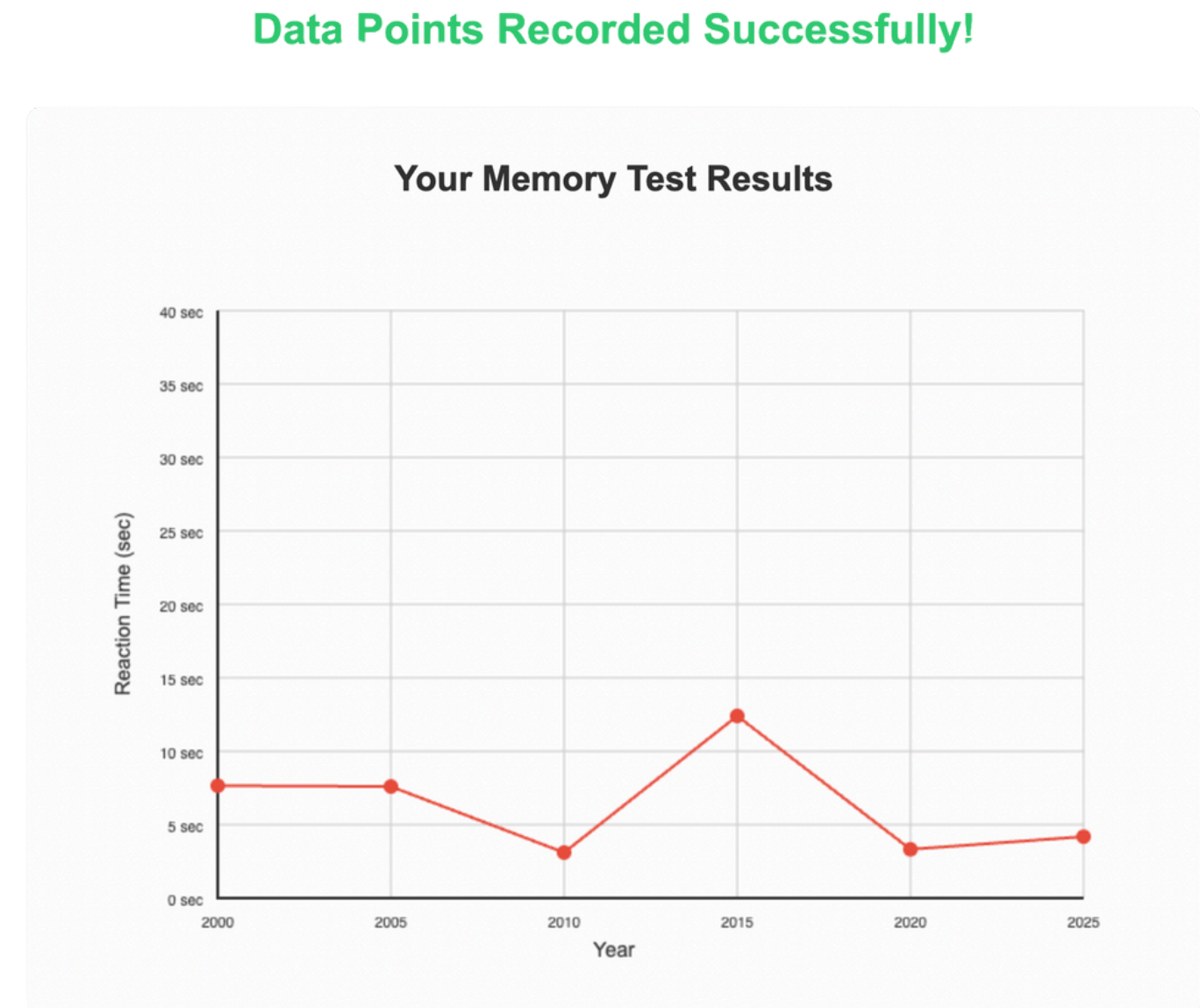
3. Testing page; program plays audio following order 2000-2025
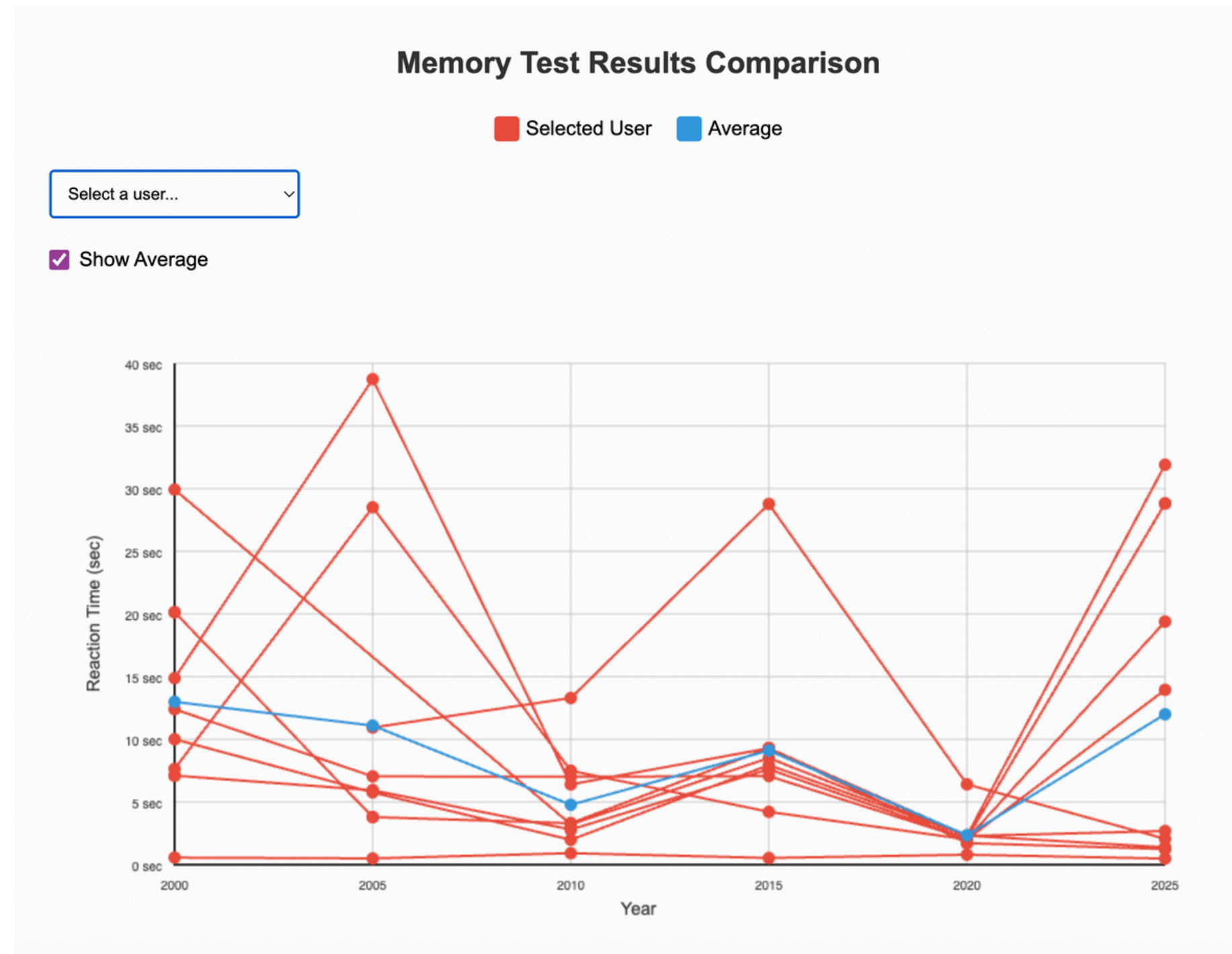
TEST RUN-THROUGH

4. Response documentation display

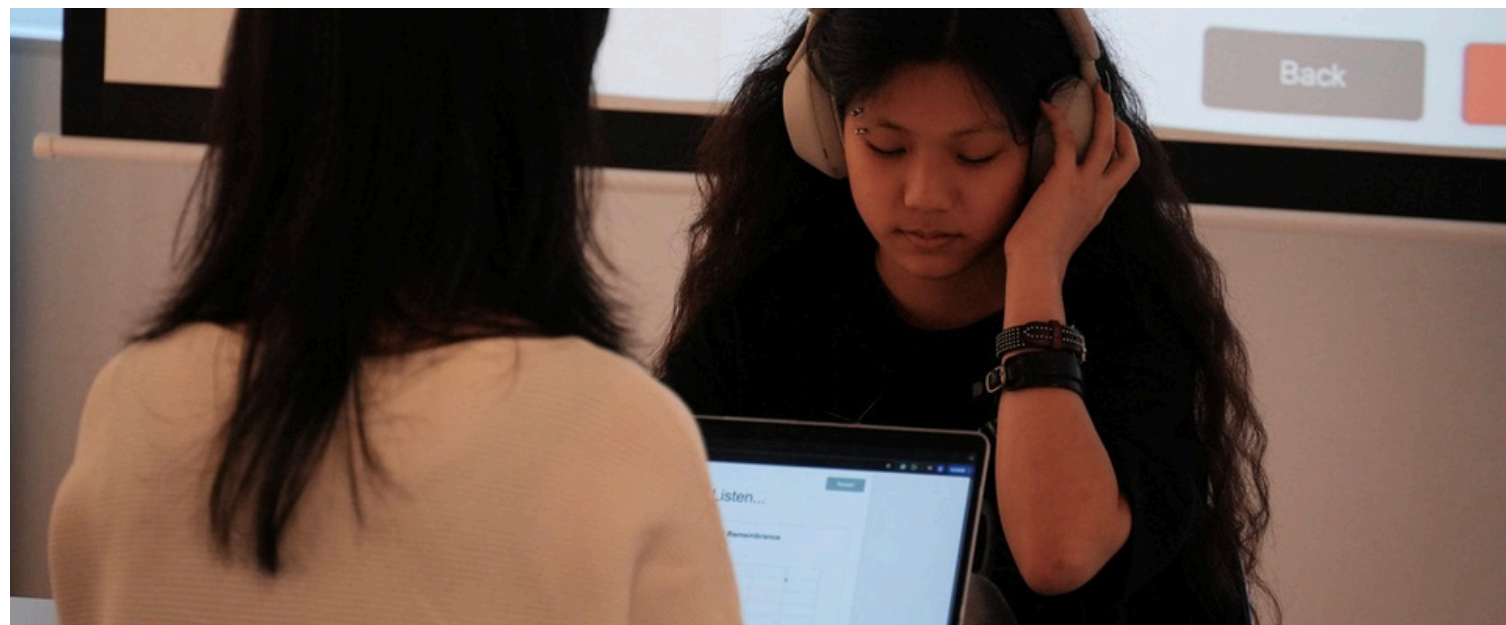5. Testing completion page display; user data stored

TEST RUN-THROUGH

6. Memory Test Results Comparison Display. After clicking on "Data Set",
program shows the list of stored user data and average reaction time.

ZOOMER'S GATEWAY PERFORMANCE

FILMING ALLOWED
可以拍照

VOLUME DOWN
请保持安静

← **WAITING AREA**
等候区

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TEST,
PLEASE LINE UP AND WAIT IN THESE CHAIRS
如您想参与测试
请在此区域的椅子上排队等候

PERFORMANCE MATERIAL

文化记忆测试专家—琚榆婷
YOU ARE INVITED TO:
热烈邀请您来：

TEST YOUR MEMORY
测试
您的记忆

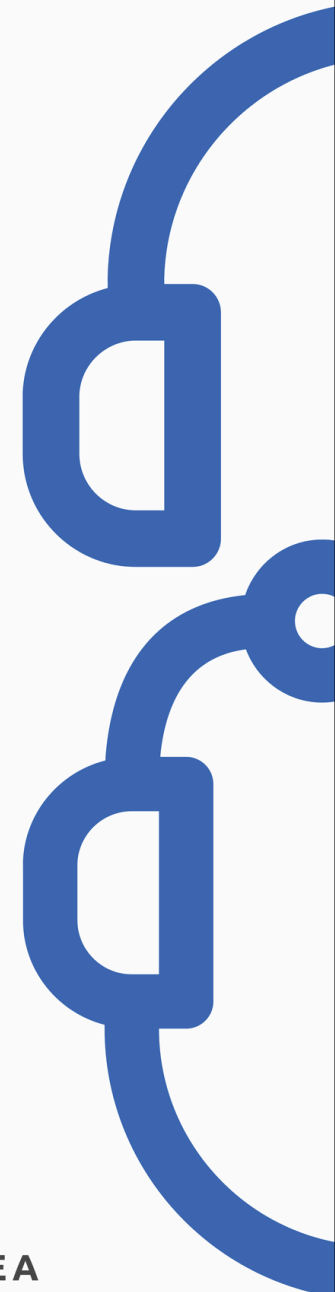*A test that tests your memory through sounds*
一项通过声音揭示你记忆的测试

MAY 28, 2025
A8 FIFTH FLOOR COMMON AREA
A8教学楼五楼公共空间
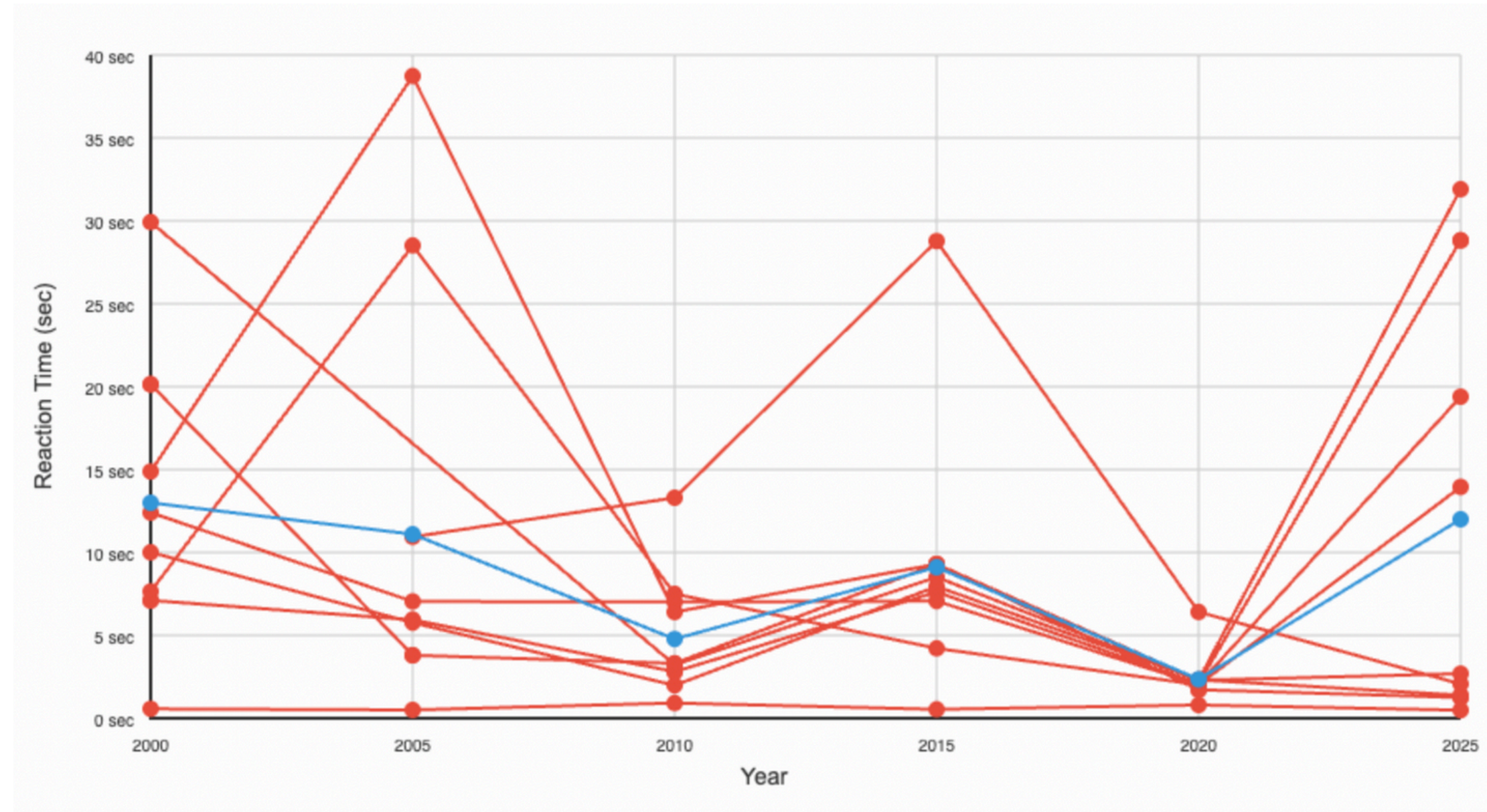**FROM 2:15PM ONWARDS**
下午2点15分开始

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED
无需预约，直接测试

DATA & ANALYSIS

Axes & read-out

Y-axis — intensity of memory: proxied by reaction time (shorter = more intense; longer = less intense).

X-axis — time: the collection period of the audio (2000–2025), spanning actual and "mental" spaces.

DATA & ANALYSIS

How I interpret overlaps.

Clip-level incidence and median reaction time separate salient soundmarks from idiosyncratic ones. Where curves intersect most, I infer cultural memory—patterns that exceed the private and edge toward the shared.

From the graph, it is obvious from the blue line that year 2010 and 2020 has shared quick reaction time, with average of 2010 at 5 seconds and average of 2020 at 3 seconds. The quick reaction time in 2020 qualifies as a shared memory as the tested community's understanding of its identity and memory shares the knowledge to year 2020's situations.
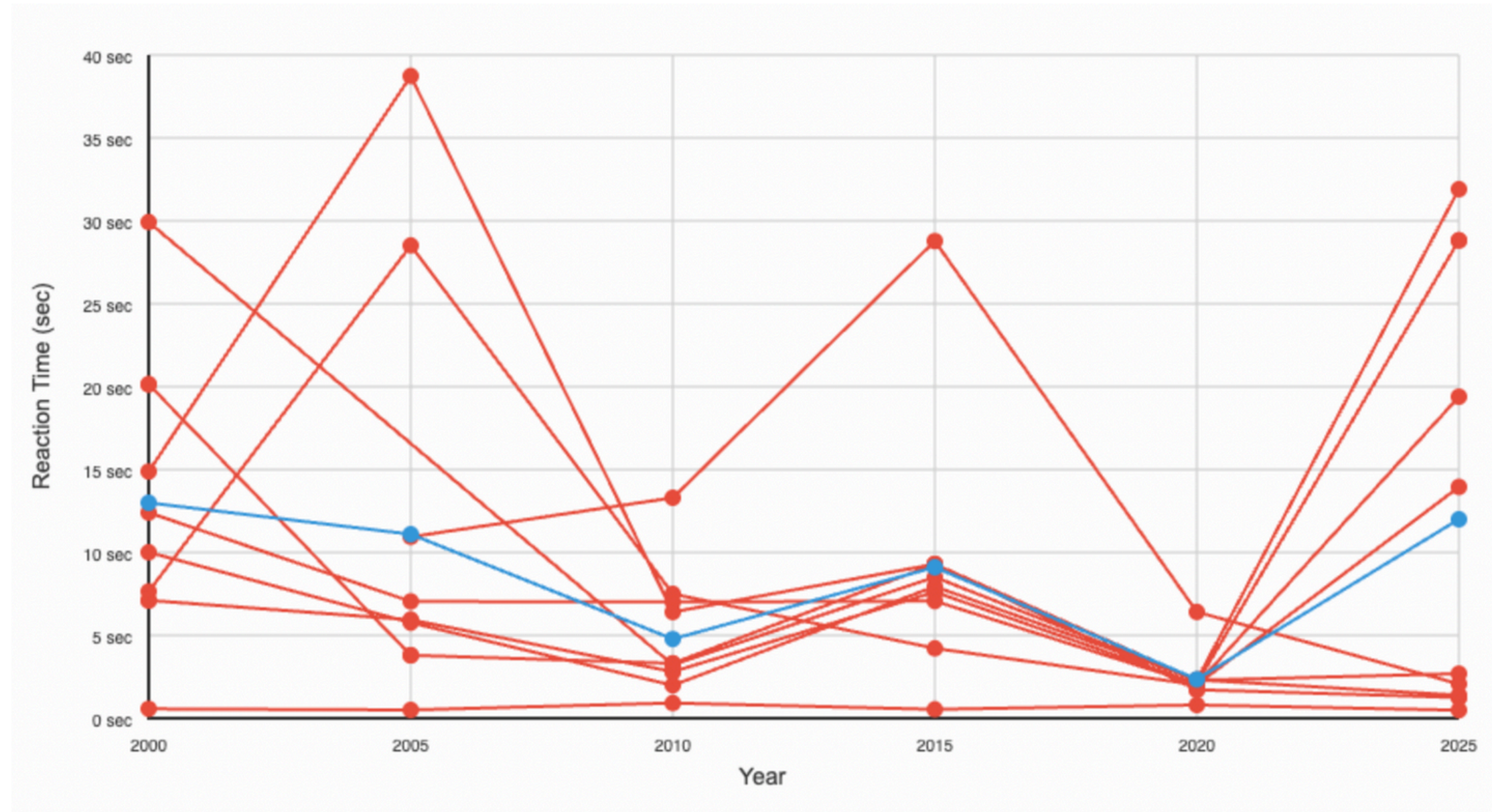
What this can and can't say.

This test quantifies when familiarity is felt, not what is recognized or why; perception remains subjective. I treat overlaps as indicators, not proofs, of shared cultural memory, and I pair them with theory to make meaning responsibly.

This juxtaposition of inexplicable sentiment and hard data created the scene in which I attempt to obtain tangible, even scientific, connection while also acknowledging the impossibility of fully achieving it, since the perception of sound is inherently subjective.

Ultimately, The Zoomers Gateway offers me a channel to testify if my individual memory is, in fact, a fraction of collective culture.

ReflectionReflection
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