

## **THE MUSEUM AND THE CHALLENGES OF A TIME-BASED ART PRODUCTION**

### **Reading MAP Office's art practice through the crystal of a temporal drift**

**Valerie Portefaix & Laurent Gutierrez**

**MAP Office, Hong Kong**

*The subject of this fictional essay is a chronological reading of MAP Office's time-based practices and artworks that relate to temporalities. Time as a structure has always shaped our artistic practice, firstly in the specific mapping of the city of Hong Kong, and later through multi-production processes that fluctuate from one medium to another. The question of time is driven through the work of Georges Perec where the categorization of space appears as a structured narrative, running throughout each of his novels. In a similar manner, we have listed the multiple possibilities of reading time:*

	TIME	TIME CAPSULE
ONCE UPON A	TIME	TIME LAPSE
	TIME LESS	TIME LIMIT
	TIME OUT	FULL TIME
SOME	TIME	BED TIME
	TIME BOMB	TIME TO TIME
	TIME CODE	STANDARD TIME
	TIME TABLE	TIME BEING
	TIME LAPSE	ABSOLUTE TIME
NO	TIME	SPACE TIME
ON	TIME	DOWN TIME
	IN TIME	TIME IMAGE
	TIME ON	TIME MOVEMENT
	TIME SHEET	WAR TIME
	TIME TABLE	PERIOD OF TIME
	TIME OFF	PLAY TIME
	TIME MACHINE	AGAINST TIME
MOTION	TIME	AHEAD OF TIME
	TIME SQUARE	TIME IS MONEY
	TIME MAGAZINE	TIME LIFE
	TIME ZONE	PASS TIME
THE	TIME	SHOW TIME
	IN TIME	TIME KEEPER
	LIFE TIME	TIME CODE
GOOD	TIME	TIME SCALE
HARD	TIME	ALL THE TIME

*In French, the words "weather" and "time" are both stated with one simple word: temps. This synonymous association reflects a possible co-evolution between a "chronologic" and an "atmospheric" interpretation of the world, even though the invention of chronological time is very recent event in human history. These two understandings of 'temps' were the subject of the MAP Office's sculptural project entitled Bloody Haze (2010). This work offers a reference to Walter Benjamin's description of the difficulty of seeing through the transformations of the nineteenth century transferred onto the context of Hong Kong to represent a paradigmatic shift in researching on invisible territories, or islands. The haze as the visible, climatic result of human activities materializes an Anthropocene encounter while concealing its materiality with a vaporous veil and whitening atmosphere.*

*This essay explores various notions of 'temps', first through the dynamic trajectories crossing MAP Office's production, then through a series of contingencies encountered among the philosophical references taken up by the artists. My PRD Stories (2005), an early MAP Office retrospective exhibited as part of the 2nd Guangzhou Triennial, is the first of a series of large installations articulating research material, photographs, videos, objects and archive that were collected over the course of a decade.*

*If the object of this fictional essay is time, and the museum, then time has to be understood as a lapse of memory as well as possible future, a duration that can be narrated and therefore curated. Reversing the traditional accumulative process of a museum collection, the intention here is to offer other possibilities of collecting—stories rather than histories, documents rather than artworks, processes rather than results—and for the museum to anticipate today the stories of tomorrow.*

*Based in a region where time fluctuates along with borders, economies, and technologies, the proposition of a retroactive timelog to unfold MAP Office's time-based production allows the multiplication of temporalities and the passage from one time to another time without continuity. The series of strata, co-exist, co-habit, and inform each other in a series of non-linear temporalities, an instant story that can – thanks to the museum – last forever.*

### **Timelog 01: Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2017**

Today we run through the M+ museum in 4 minutes and 32 seconds. Defeating the deafening nature of silence, we set a record for experiencing the new museum. Along the galleries of permanent and temporary exhibitions, our course is defining a new perspective of the museum collection. We swiftly race past artworks, installations images

and transform them into a temporal landscape, immediately reassembled by our rapid motion. The cross-disciplinary approach—the main logic of the M+ current display system—is renegotiated to transfigure not only spatial considerations but also a temporal perspective. The speed of our run interacts with particular transformative artworks - as if we were re-igniting the gunpowder of a Cai Guo-Qiang's drawing and experiencing the TV snow in Nam June Paik's wall of monitors. **M+ Flashrun** is on a smaller scale than the famous run in the Musée Du Louvre, Paris framed by Godard in 9 minutes and 43 seconds. M+ made an early strategic choice to first build a collection and then exhibit it, and the curatorial team worked closely with artists and collectors in order to develop the logic of *spiraling ripples*, where continuity and discontinuity could co-exist, allowing fragments to be integrated within a larger spatial and temporal definition of the collection. Running through the multiple spaces, we re-compose a continuity of the entire collection, from a local perspective to a global dimension - passing rapidly through the challenge of embracing the last 60 years of contemporary Chinese art production.

Crossing various rooms, a familiar perspective comes to our eyes. **My PRD Stories** - a mini-retrospective of MAP Office's early works - opens a series of container-like tunnels where extracts of earlier installations are stitched together. Time here is elastic. The levels of experimentation developed for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guangzhou triennial context are now following the rules set by M+. Yet, the *mise-en-perspective* still works in both directions, visitors embark on a cargo ship named Baudelaire and pass through a set of stories conceived in various areas of the Pearl River Delta region. Even if the urbanization of the region has clearly slowed down, an accelerated time-travel can be experienced through the familiar volumes of container boxes interpreted here as a time machine.

### **Timelog 02: Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2015**

It is already more than 3 months since *Uneven Growth: Hong Kong* (2014) opened at the Architecture and Design Galleries - on the third floor of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The curator's intuition drove our collaboration with Network Architecture Lab from Columbia University to research on a Tactical Urbanism made in Hong Kong. In this museum space, objects, processes and information form a series of fictional narratives inviting visitors to engage with numerous forms of utopia. Challenging the conventional exhibition process, our joint work in Hong Kong extends far beyond the museum's walls, opening new virtual and physical spaces in New York City.

In a nearby art gallery, MoMA's compressed exhibition breaks down into numerous open platforms where visitors are able to interact, debate, play, and construct their own stories. Their visit is complemented by the projection of an **8-channel video** – bridging New York and the territory of Hong Kong. In the film, the future is approached from a land reclaimed with oyster shells, a domesticated jungle, a floating fishing community, a lobby of a bank, a back alley, a recycled environment and a mountaintop. In other words, Hong Kong is turned into an open-set of poetic situations, infiltrated into a solid reality of possible new worlds.

### **Timelog 03: Friday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2010**

Early in the morning of a busy weekday, we are meeting with a RTHK TV crew in Graham Street, Hong Kong's oldest continuously operating street market. The journalists are here to interview MAP Office about their last curatorial project *City-O-Rama*, yet we prefer giving the moment of media attention to the precarious condition of the shops and booth keepers nearby. Our first intention in this exhibition is to shift the perception of the market from commercial to cultural economics, leading us to transform the space of a flower shop, butcher, hairdresser and an electric booth into a museum with multiple galleries.

In Hong Kong, the conditions for a public museum are everywhere. Spaces are waiting to be appropriated, and the public is eager to explore new domains in which the history and the culture of the city can create a new dialogue with objects and artworks. Design events such as Detour, the Mobile M+ exhibitions, and a number of satellite events during ART HK / Art Basel have proven that the concept of a "Museum Without Walls"—a return to the community, free of charge—has great potential in Hong Kong.

*City-O-Rama* extended into *Hong Kong Is Our Museum* (2004), a work that arose from the fact that the city lacks a dedicated contemporary art museum. Yet this first assumption rapidly evolved on two levels: when living space becomes a site for production and exhibition, installations intersect with domestic space; all the while the territory of the personal simultaneously absorbs the external urban environment. Transferring academic research into a real-life context, the city of Hong Kong became MAP Office's primary site of performance and exhibition. *Hong Kong Is Our Museum* (2004) referred to an initiative to turn MAP Office's live-work space in Sheung Wan, an older neighborhood downtown already characterized by radical mixed-use from street level to rooftop into public space. Transformed into a museum for one night, our rooftop became the site for a series of group exhibitions and screenings, including the Hong Kong

premiere of Cao Fei and Ou Ning's *San Yuan Li* (2003); *Trading Space* (2004) with Norman Ford; *Hong Kong is Our Museum* [2008] a satellite event for the First Hong Kong Art Fair; *Mid-nite* [2009] a solo show and performance by Lee Kit; *This is Hong Kong* [2009] a video collection curated by Alvaro Rodriguez Fominaya and produced by Para/Site Art Space. The series ended with *Can't go on like this!* (2010) curated and produced by Hitomi Hasegawa (MIACA).

After ten years of rooftop screening at MAP Office, using the blind walls of surrounding skyscrapers as screening walls for public viewing, *City-O-Rama* extends the initial project in the district of the Central market. Counting on the extreme permeability of traditional commercial spaces, MAP Office is producing a new map of the district to link up a series of video projects as a new alternative route. A selection of 10 video works is set in dialogue with 10 borrowed spaces, forming a temporal exhibition for passers-by to interact with. Together they provide a substitute to the current museum vacuum but also reflect general concerns about the ongoing impoverishment of the cultural and historical environment.

#### **Timelog 04: Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2010**

The sun is high up at a vertical position. It is already a few weeks ago that we began shooting a new film project. This film originated from responding to an impulsive email from the Venice Film Festival asking us about the possibility of submitting an original project for *Premio Orrizonti*, a new section of the festival intending to shift the traditional boundaries of conventional cinema towards a new breed of disciplines including visual arts and performance. Enthused by the invitation, we decided to embark on a new spontaneous film production of *Runscape*. A young boy runs through the various spaces of Hong Kong's public domain, unfolding the logic of appropriating spaces along his course. Locations photographed ten years earlier are becoming a kind of familiar décor for the new project. Placing the individual at the center, *Runscape* opens on a new perspective for the re-mapping of Hong Kong.

During the 24:18 minutes long film, the runner reconstructs few possible trajectories of time and space avoiding urban obstacles such as levels, barriers or any control devises. The simple action of running appears alongside a voice narrating the lengthy history of street fighting and urban political engagement for the new generation of urban dweller. "The runner is the looter of space and time", expresses the idea of marginalization as the necessary counterpoint to composing an urban center. Offering new perspectives of the city, the runner invents new grounds as he appears running across the podium level at

Sha Tin New Town with the statement: "My body is my weapon, a bullet that needs no gun, It carries its own energy" and the soundtrack of "Story of the Fly" by local band A Roller Control is in the background continuously calling for "Change..."

### **Timelog 05: Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2009**

The sky is low and the visibility over Victoria Harbor remains under 100 meters. The cloudy weather makes another day in which a silhouette is barely identifiable. The physical distance between the continent (Kowloon) and Hong Kong Island (China and Hong Kong) is stretched. Located at the furthest point of what will become West Kowloon Cultural district and the location of M+, our given site inspires us in its relation to Hong Kong's amazing skyline – or rather the impossibility of seeing it due to the thick haze. Given this condition of visibility versus the possibility of looking through, we prefer choose to explore the hyper-visibility in reference to Walter Benjamin's telescope.

*"As far as I am concerned, I try to direct my telescope through the bloody haze upon a mirage of the nineteenth century, which I seek to depict according to those features that I will show in a future state of the world liberated from magic".* Walter Benjamin

In a letter to Werner Karft, dated October the 28<sup>th</sup> 1935, Walter Benjamin described his struggle to see as a metaphor for the theory of materialist civilization. He would soon solve the entire puzzle in what would become one of his major texts: the 1935 introductory essay for *The Arcades Project - Paris, The Capital of the Nineteenth Century*. According to Benjamin, the phantasmagoric device of the telescope symbolized the modern spectacle of the nineteenth century capitalist development. The key was that he could not disavow the fog but that instead, to fully understand the logic of nineteenth century development, he needed to identify the haze as the nature and foundation for modern development. The telescope became the optical tool necessary to see through the haze, to look at the past in order to foresee the future.

With *Bloody Haze* (2009) we took on the challenge to construct a giant binocular sculptural device aimed at the Hong Kong skyline. In each of the two cannons, one is able to find a normal pair of binoculars to experience Hong Kong from up close (the normal logic of binoculars) but also from far (inverting the position in which you look through the binocular). The installation comes with the motto: " Hong Kong Island: so close, so far...", as a *clin d'oeil* to Wong Kai-wai's "Happy together, never together..."

It only took few days for the sculpture to be broken and subsequently removed from the exhibition. Visitors did not wanted to see Hong Kong from afar as instead, the constant movement was to force the position of the second binocular in order to see Hong Kong up close.

### **Timelog 06: Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2009**

Today we are launching our first online / virtual / World Wide Web platform. For the time being, it is just a beginning with only one home page, but [www.maskbook.net](http://www.maskbook.net) aims to become a new type of social network - "The Social Network for Avatar"- developed with the logic of experiencing parallel worlds. Beginning from late 2005 we could feel something emerging; notably our close friend Cao Fei who was already exploring Second Life as a platform for an extensive artwork project..

In early 2008, Cao invited us to collaborate with her by constructing a fragment of her legendary *RMB City* in the First New Orleans Biennale (Prospect.1). At the same moment we were reading in newspapers that the Hollywood industry was preparing to abandon Zombie films in order to launch the first large 3D cinema production of "Avatar". Here again our obsession for phantasmagoria and the art bringing ghosts to life was reignited, and the museum appeared as the perfect place for ghostly creatures to life again. Whether it is through filmic tragedy or comedy, avatars, ghosts, zombies and many other creatures are beginning to populate museums. An early example is the character of Madeleine in *Vertigo* who is found contemplating a dead ancestor portrait in San Francisco Art Museum while spiritually possessed.

Maskbook.com looks like a counterpart to Facebook's hegemony of the social world. "*This is not about who you are but who you would like to be*" stated in the home page questions systems of individualization and the development of the "I" or "me" society, as well as the possibility of becoming another "I".

### **Timelog 07: Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2005**

A thousand recycled wooden platforms occupying the floor of the lobby of the Guangdong Museum of Art. As artists, journalists, curators, workers move around them, they seem strangely unobtrusive. Ready to be distributed into the various spaces of the museum, they temporarily create a base for Yang Jiechang's massive flag installation "We Are Good at Everything Except for Speaking Mandarin". And soon, the wooden platforms will flood the brand new marble floor to extend the experience of walking on the unstable ground of the PRD into the space of the museum.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Guangzhou triennial's motto: "Beyond – An Extraordinary space of Experimentation for Modernization", was developed through various discussions with curators and artists. The unstable ground crosses three levels of exhibition space, making visitors pay a special attention to their feet and slowing the time spent in visiting the museum. Some platforms are stable and offer a topographic surface, inviting viewers to sit or lay down. Scattered throughout are a multitude of installations, videos, drawings, and objects, other platforms that can be moved freely and appropriated to establish new routes.

**Timelog 08: Sunday the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2000**

Sunday morning 9 am, thousands of Filipino Domestic helpers have flocked to Hong Kong's Central Business District. A multi pattern piece of fabric on the ground allows groups of 4 to 8 girls to set-up a camp for the day. While exchanging on the misery and happiness of their life, they unite with their culture and families. Shopping on one side, shipping on the other, the multitude gives life to the usually Sunday deserted CBD. The ground floor of the architectural iconic headquarter of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank Corporation (HSBC) is transformed into a giant birdcage whistling with Tagalog idioms.

On the side, a tripod positioned towards the group records the phenomenon. Part of the vector *Appropriated Place*, the HSBC's phenomenon has just been published in Gutierrez + Portefaix's book: *Mapping HK* (2000). First presented as an interactive web platform at the 7<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale, *Mapping HK* set up vector lines to define the unique specifics of Hong Kong and how to create the base to intervene with the density. The temporal density expressed here is transforming the private lobby into a giant living room. This kind of drag or transsexual space is alternatively changing its costume and functionality to be better performed by the multitude. People on Sunday, 9 pm, the curfew... everyone back to his or her respective place...

Monday morning everything will be so different, everything will be so the same.