# Monuments

## Contre-monuments
## Counter-Monuments

ART ACTUEL    PRATIQUES ET PERSPECTIVES

# espace

# Paul Wong:
# Our Personal Universes
Edwin Janzen

*MULTIVERSE*
**GALERIE JOYCE YAHOUDA**
**MONTREAL**
**SEPTEMBER 10 –**
**OCTOBER 10, 2015**

In the era of art-as-research, it is perhaps a commonplace that if you want to know what happens when you push a technology to its limit, hand it to some artists and watch what happens. In his affinity for the late-model iPhone—its camera and its photo and video apps—Vancouver video artist Paul Wong exemplifies this kind of research. The Apple brand and its Silicon Valley ideologies fade into the background, and we are left instead with a deeply personal examination of a widely used but only dimly understood medium.

Wong's exhibition *Multiverse*, the result of this examination, forms part of Montreal's biennial Mois de la Photo festival, curated this year by Barcelona artist and curator Joan Fontcuberta on the theme of "post-photography." Writes Fontcuberta, "The post-photographic readiness to make use of overwhelming quantities of images is reminiscent of what Umberto Eco refers to as a 'catalogue aesthetic,' as opposed to a 'finished form aesthetic.'" In the catalogue aesthetic context, production and distribution become one and the same. Of the four works in Wong's exhibition, three relate closely to the festival's post-photographic theme. A fourth piece, while also exploring contemporary themes and media, stands a little apart from the others.

In its very scale—some forty videos playing on digital tablet screens—Wong's flagship work, *#LLL, Looking, Listening, Looping*, is an impressive deployment of media and images. People, places, screenshots, abstractions, selfies, what-have-you—all have been shot by Wong and edited on his iPhone 6 into low-fi video loops (GIFs, Vines, etc.), together having a total runtime of seventy-two minutes, as might a feature film.

A second multi-channel work, *Flash Memory*, likewise involves a deployment of diverse images comprising four years of Wong's photographic output presented on four monitors at a rate of fifteen frames per second. Images include friends, acquaintances, travel photos, art gallery interiors, restaurants, selfies—a vast personal archive.

A third project, *Year of GIF* (2013), presents an aggregation of GIF animations shot via smartphone over the course of a year and positioned against shifting pixelated backgrounds. Originally created to be projected onto the wall of the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre in Surrey, B.C., this year's Mois de la Photo also featured an impressive, large-scale projection of *Year of GIF* onto an outdoor brick wall adjacent to Montreal's Saint-Laurent Metro station.

The fourth piece, *Solstice*, strays from the post-photography theme into the realm of socio-political critique. Positioning a camera several stories above a particular street corner in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, *Solstice* presents twenty-four hours of street-corner activity condensed into twenty-four minutes. Rather than use basic time-lapse photography, however, Wong used the "pixel motion filter" tool in After Effects, which digitally extrapolates some of the activity in the time gaps between frames. As a result, the pedestrians "wink" in and out. The street itself becomes the subject, the passers-by its fleeting dreams. Critically, the least ephemeral people in the video are those conducting their business in the street: a panhandler, a couple of possible drug dealers, various police, etc. Their more-consistent presence lends them the sense of animated characters, while everyone else—racing to and from work, out and about on errands—is reduced to traces, wisps. As such, *Solstice* seems to invite us to rethink concepts like "vagrancy" or "transience" as we apply them, usually pejoratively, to people in public space.

It is common to think of media as something that encircles and bombards us. *Multiverse* is a media-intensive exhibition; yet while contemplating *#LLL, Looking, Listening, Looping*, one may feel overwhelmed but it isn't precisely a bombardment. Subtly, Wong overturns these fin de siècle *Adbusters*-ish notions of monolithic media subjectivity: here are no appropriated clips from daytime T.V., no gratuitous footage of 9-11 or tsunamis or ISIS beheadings, no cloying advertisements, no hoping-this-goes-viral campaigns or memes. Instead, Wong's thousands of photos are his own and convey a thoroughly personal relationship to image-making.

In his artist talk, Wong characterized digital photographs as "more tactile" than those of the past. It seems a curious claim at first, given the tendency of the recent past to associate the digital with the ephemeral, the insubstantial. As Fontcuberta explained in his curator's talk, however, today ephemerality and insubstantiality have been flipped on their heads. Consider the current negative correlation between an image's sharpness and its authority; as Fontcuberta has stated, lack of sharpness becomes a "guarantor of truth," as when we presume someone's guilt more easily because they were captured on a security camera. High-res, super-sharp images, in contrast, invite suspicion: corporate advertisements, bad movies with gigantic CGI budgets, etc.

Where might Wong's idea of the tactile digital take us? Even if digital photos aren't "things" in the same way that analog photos are "things," it may be that digital things actually behave in a more "thing-like" way than physical things. After all, digital photos are more easily created than analog ones; more easily flipped through; more easily sorted, stacked and stored; and, finally, more easily distributed and dispersed (but therefore, perhaps, also less easily discarded).

Revisiting Eco's notion of the catalogue aesthetic, we can see that Wong's *Flash Memory* is no mere narcissistic gesture made possible by new technology, but rather, like most of these works, a vast personal catalogue or archive. We may feel tempted to recall the idea of the unlimited self, described in Hindu Puranic literature, where countless universes wander within each of us—a personalized multiverse. Consisting as it does of an enormous repertoire of images, *Flash Memory* reads
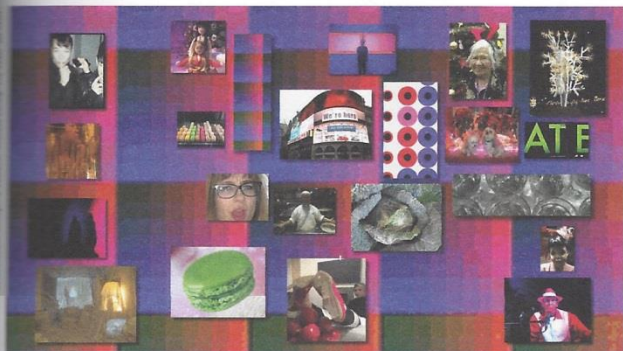
like a personal signature, inviting one to think of other unique signatures: fingerprints, retinas, voices. Enabled by easily accessed high-volume, complex data, might we in the future begin using our personal image archives to mimic such embodied, biological identity representation strategies? And if so, what will be the consequences?

A term like "post-photography" can seem hyperbolic, implicitly assuring us that we're already intellectually and emotionally past a technology that not only remains with us but likely will for many centuries. The situation could not be more different; indeed, it is becoming clear that new smartphone technologies are transforming the function of photography in society, and thus society itself, drawing us down new avenues that we, even as enthusiastic daily users, understand but dimly. To us consumers, therefore, such technologies represent, to borrow from Dick Cheney, little more than a "known unknown." The works being created by artists like Wong illuminate us as we negotiate our commercial technologies' familiar yet barely plumbed depths.

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## Samuel Roy-Bois :
### *La pyramide*
Cynthia Fecteau

**L'ŒIL DE POISSON
QUÉBEC
11 SEPTEMBRE -
11 OCTOBRE 2015**

Pour célébrer ses 30 ans, l'Œil de Poisson ouvrait, en septembre dernier, la saison culturelle 2015-2016 avec *La pyramide*, une exposition de Samuel Roy-Bois. Sensible aux formes de l'architecture, aux espaces construits et aux manières dont ils témoignent de notre relation au monde, Roy-Bois a construit une structure architecturale monumentale à large déploiement, conçue à partir d'une méthode d'invitation pyramidale lancée entre les membres de la communauté artistique. Au départ, deux artistes ont été invités à participer au projet d'exposition : Claude Bélanger et Geneviève Chevalier, et ils devaient à leur tour inviter deux autres artistes, et ainsi de suite. Regroupant au final les œuvres de 175 artistes, l'ambitieux projet explore l'idée synergique d'une communauté en art, basée sur l'engagement participatif et perceptuel. En ce sens, cette récente proposition de Roy-Bois s'apparente à cette question de Félix Guattari : *Y-a-t-il une pratique de la vie, une inventivité possible dans le domaine de la vie sociale immédiate, de la vie collective esthétique ?*[1] Cette réflexion dissimule un affect plus profond qui déplace les idées d'individualité artistique, de processus singuliers de création, vers des questions de nature sociale et éthique.

Dans le passage à l'entrée des galeries, un dessin retrace le parcours pyramidal entre les membres de la communauté artistique. Commencé à Québec, le réseau en arborescence déploie ses ramifications dans les milieux artistiques du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, d'Ottawa, de Montréal et de certaines régions en Europe. Au mur, le schéma ponctué par les 175 noms des artistes participants informe les spectateurs de la force de la mobilisation de la communauté envers le projet, car en s'engageant dans la chaîne pyramidale, chaque artiste confiait son œuvre à Roy-Bois sans même connaître son contexte final de présentation. Au cœur de *La pyramide*, l'artiste dévoile ses observations à l'égard des environnements construits, ses idées, ses désirs. Ce dialogue initié entre les membres de la communauté artistique se poursuit devant les œuvres mises en espace.

À son entrée dans la Grande Galerie, le spectateur est d'abord subjugué par une imposante installation architecturale évoquant tout un pan de l'histoire de l'Œil de Poisson. En outre, l'artiste a consulté les archives du centre à l'époque où il était situé sur le Boulevard Charest, avant la fondation de la Coopérative Méduse. Pour construire cet environnement, Roy-Bois a dû se mesurer physiquement à l'espace et aux matériaux. Misant sur une esthétique rudimentaire issue du domaine de la charpenterie – composée de planches de bois brutes, peintes partiellement en blanc, assemblées avec des clous laissés visibles –, la structure recrée l'ancienne configuration du centre d'artistes en respectant l'emplacement initial de ses portes, de ses murs et de ses fenêtres. Ce rappel en trois