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Documenting a Spatial Culture of Disappearance in Hong Kong

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A FLEETING REGISTER:

Documenting a Spatial Culture of Disappearance in Hong Kong

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A FLEETING REGISTER:
Documenting a Spatial Culture of [Disappearance] in Hong Kong
The world is accelerating; the rapid change that transforms entire cities and landscapes, and inevitably their inhabitants and culture, is precipitating a phenomenon of disappearance that renders the city volatile and elusive. Hong Kong is one such place where many factors have collided to create a semi-autonomous political entity that struggles with its social, even spatial, identity. The effects of colonialism, the development of the Eastern Hemisphere’s busiest trade port and economical hub, and more recently the return of sovereignty to the People’s Republic of China contribute to a disappearance of culture that has within a generation’s time metamorphosed into a culture of disappearance.

This thesis attempts to analyse the causes and processes of disappearance in Hong Kong, borrowing from the process of film construction, primarily Wong Kar-Wai’s 2046, in an attempt to develop an approach towards the design of space that at once participates in and documents the progress of the phenomenon of disappearance.
Paul Virilio opens his book *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* with a quote by the Biblical Paul of Tarsus: “The world as we see it is passing.” It was his aim, as well as the objective of this thesis, to illustrate the human world as increasingly unstable, uncertain and ephemeral. This reality is observed through various scenarios and phenomena that in the upcoming discussion are referred to as *disappearance*. Disappearance occurs most apparently in hyper-accelerated urban conditions, complex metropolises that are constructed over systems of transfers.

One such place is the city of Hong Kong, a hilly port city temporarily home to 7.1 million people. The particularity of its prior existence as a British colony acquired through military coercion, and its emergence as a semi-independent territory is engendering this disappearance amidst a struggle towards establishing a graspable identity. Due to the cultural complexity of Hong Kong society, simplified representations have often been adopted over a possibly more encumbering analysis of the city. Infiltrating the social consciousness, these simplified representations accelerate the disappearance of the city by painting over the city’s elaborate network of relationships with easily descriptive generalizations. Space in this city has only contributed to the phenomenon of disappearance whilst other art forms, film in particular, have begun to critically evaluate this event. Films such as Wong Kar-Wai’s *2046* begin to dissect the city’s complex status quo through a fictionalized Hong Kong, triggering ripples of critical conversations on the city’s identity in such ambiguous times. It is the intent of this exploration to borrow tactics from film-making in the construction of space through a series of analyses and applications that culminate in a project. By doing so, one may find a means of critically addressing the phenomenon of disappearance in the spatial context of Hong Kong.
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DISAPPEARANCE -
the phenomenon of the loss of cultural solidarity by the effect of speed (of movement, communication and broadcasted images) in contemporary society.

CULTURE -
umbrella phenomenon of a social contingent that find belonging to certain customs and practices as well as in artifacts both tangible and intangible, the body of elements to which they find belonging separate them from another social contingent.

CINEMA -
the medium of film and the underlying implications that frame society and culture within its limitations and possibilities.
At the southeastern tip of Mainland China lies a sort of legendary city; legendary in its neutrality, in its cultural liberties, in its unrestrained economic market platform, in its density, efficiency, peace. In one respect these mythic qualities seem to be found arbitrarily in this location of all places, and yet its formation as a legendary city, due largely to its colonizer, is entirely hinged upon its location. The geo-political border of Hong Kong includes the main peninsula of Kowloon and the New Territories, and the main island of Hong Kong Island; the territory also includes 235 smaller outlying islands. The famous Victoria Harbor, named during the era of QUEEN VICTORIA, became the port of protection of British merchant and naval vessels. Its development as a major port city is of utmost significance to the city’s cultural advancement and will be expounded upon later with relation to the phenomenon of disappearance.

Many may know that Hong Kong was, though told with the impressionistic sentimentality of a Chinese watercolor, a small fishing village once upon a time, and that its occupation, as John Carroll maintains, extends beyond the HAN dynasty of the late BCE. One must inevitably remark upon the famous assessment of pre-colonial Hong Kong by then British foreign minister, Lord Henry John Temple Palmerston, as “a barren island with hardly a house upon it…” While the correctness of this evaluation is controversial, few today can dispute the immense change brought to Hong Kong since the cession of Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula, as well as the lease of the New Territories, to the British in the 1800’s.
British interest in Hong Kong had little to do with its value as natural land, but rather its function as a node of their maritime trade, namely with Mainland China. While the Portuguese had Macau since the mid-1500’s, the emergent British boat trade began to challenge the Portuguese monopoly of trading in China, finally securing a foothold in the Canton port. Concerns of the ruling QING Dynasty towards the outflow of silver from its citizens due to opium trade, as well as the infection of opium-induced social lethargy, caused strong adverse feelings towards the British, which eventually led to extreme crackdowns, injudicious challenges, and ultimately costly conflicts that led to the treaty of Nanking in 1842, the treaty of Peking in 1860, and the 1898 treaty; Hong Kong was ceded to the British, whose intentions were all too explicit: Hong Kong was to be the eastern entrepot for British merchants. Thenceforth, this intent marked the culture of the city.

The population of Hong Kong grew from 600,000 during WWII to over 5,000,000 by 1971 due to an influx of merchants and refugees from Southeast Asia and China. In addition to sea trade, Hong Kong also became a manufacturing hub, producing goods for foreign countries including Europe and the United States. Chinese economic reforms of the 1980s gave room for Hong Kong to become “a leading financial and service center”, and this title remained unchallenged throughout the 1990s. Meanwhile, social anxiety escalated as MARGARET THATCHER met with ZHAO ZIYANG in 1982 to discuss the sovereignty of Hong Kong, a titular dispute with legal implications. Such implications include the reversal of the “in perpetuity” clause of the earlier treaties, which stipulated that the Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong Island belonged permanently to the Commonwealth. Their two-year long talks culminated with the Joint Declaration of Hong Kong, in which key points included the return of all Hong Kong territory to the People’s Republic of China on July 1st of 1997, and the capacity for the city to remain semi-autonomous, unchanging for fifty years under DENG XIAOPIING’s famous “one country, two systems” plan.

In 1997, Hong Kong was “handed over” to China; now the city awaits the end of fifty years, the termination of its semi-autonomous city-state status, in 2047. Despite the tension of nebulousness, the city marches forward in its developments in many fields, substantiated by the building boom that showered the mere 1075 km² (415 mi²) territory with steel, glass and concrete, not to mention hi-modern building styles and starchitects. These architectural landmarks characterize the Hong Kong skyline, becoming the unofficial symbol of Hong Kong’s success, a real-life heart-warming pauper to prince scenario. Decisions to erect landmarks then are even more thoroughly evaluated by their visibility along the skyline (i.e. would this building alter the silhouette of the skyline?), effectively flattening the implications of spatial characteristics into an image. It is an mélange at best, for there is no unity in any convincing regard to speak of, except perhaps, the propulsion of capitalist competition.

Hong Kong’s intricate history and the impending loss of autonomy in 2047 are turbulently entangled within its quest for identity. The role of built space in the city is the long-neglected element of Hong Kong’s critical culture that stands against the highly polished visual consumerist. Can built spaces comment critically on the socio-cultural complexities that underlie the superimposed and simplified representations that threaten to flatten space, particularly when their emergence is instigated by a newly kindled desire to remain culturally independent? It is the goal of the preceding introduction to present Hong Kong as an intensely irregular urbanscape affected by a complex body of factors.


CHAPTER 1

2 Carroll, A Concise History of Hong Kong, 9-10.
4 Carroll, A Concise History of Hong Kong, 13-15.
5 Shipp, Hong Kong, China, 7-8
6 Ibid, 9-11
7 Ibid, 15
8 Ibid, 14
9 Carroll, A Concise History of Hong Kong, 169
10 Shipp, Hong Kong, China, 31-36
11 Carroll, A Concise History of Hong Kong, 16
Within a study of Virilio’s theory through the lens of the Hong Kong context, the socio-spatial construct of Hong Kong can be discussed in terms of a suspension of temporality, of a disappearance of cultural syndication, and of a reappearance of a reality (through representation). These three aspects are not sequential, but instead, intricately connected in a series of cause and effect relationships. Suspension appears to be both the temporal result of the afore-mentioned ambivalence, the uncertainty in dealing with time as
past/present/future, while at the same time an instigator of the disappearance of cultural identities, since cultural formations are highly dependent on the tangible and intangible remnants of the past which feed into the present and ultimately, the future. Disappearance can in turn trigger a spout of new representations, man-made concepts that are often simplified, which replace / supplant / censor many aspects of actuality in an attempt to fill newly formed voids. These new images, according to VIRILIO, are “a particular selection of what is seen, recording of significant facts that gradually transforms the true objects into a sort of background against which another designation of meaning suddenly emerges, a background which would be already a kind of dissolving view.”

Being so, images set social lives into automation, which, by mere repetition, “[upset] the stimuli of observation, overtaking them automatically…” Representations being suspended in frozen time, also induce a suspension of time by propagandizing the method of seeing and sensing, feeding the same images repeatedly. VIRILIO also believes that not only do images provide for the populace “a siesta of consciousness”, they also trigger “a decline in existence” inadvertently, doubling the effects of disappearance. This cyclic relationship between disappearance and representation within the context of Hong Kong is the phenomenon under scrutiny. The forerunner in this contextual exploration is ACKBAR ABBAS, whose book, “Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance” inspired a community of critical discussions on Hong Kong as a cultural entity within film, space and urbanity.

Disappearance can be said to occur on at least two levels in Hong Kong: the first deals with a struggle occurring outside of but certainly concerning Hong Kong as a political entity: Prime Ministers MARGARET THATCHER and ZHAO ZIYANG signed the Sino-British Joint Treaty in 1982 to settle terms and conditions of the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule on July 1st, 1997. Besides a degree of autonomy and latitude of rights, a specific duration was given for Hong Kong’s final transition into the main body of the PRC, that of fifty years. The policies that will remain “unchanged for fifty years” exist as the last strand of safety rope, after which Hong Kong seemingly will fall into the abysmal darkness of the tyrannous PRC. Hong Kong dangles in limbo, paradoxically treated as unchanging, being nominally unchanged economically and politically, yet poised to surrender all autonomy, thereby ceasing to be. Here arises the fear of identity-loss of Hong Kong, explicitly in the common political practice of altering (if not fundamental transforming or even deleting) cultural practices. This aspect of disappearance finds resemblance in the city-states of pre-modern eras, which in their politically precarious condition, is often consumed by neighboring states, threatening cultural contingents with dissolution and assimilation.

The second level of disappearance deals with the frantic search for cultural identity as a result of foreseeing the impending loss of cultural autonomy. Society responds by default through available means, through capitalist or cultural efforts, resulting for the most part in architecture that is generally categorized here as the “branded” and the “conserved”, respectively. In terms of “branded” architecture, one recalls the building frenzy that occurred during the eighties and nineties amongst various capitalist institutions as a result of Hong Kong’s economic growth. These vertical establishments of glass, steel and concrete are largely found on the waterfronts of Victoria Harbor, bearing in their forms the immutable stamp of its respective institution, sometimes iconic architectural forms, sometimes oppressively
illuminated signage, constituting the epic skyline of Hong Kong without formal order. These impressive buildings, many of which associated with recognizable design names, attempts to freeze the identity of the institution by positing an image both facing the harbor as well as the world through tele-broadcasts and postcards. On this circumstance, ABBAS comments that “[t]he built space of the city not only evokes financial progress and the spatial appropriations of power but also gives us cultural residues, dreams of the future, as well as intimations of resistance. Built space therefore must not be understood only as spatial forms, but also as something that both produces and is produced by cultural practices.”

These rhetorical and phallocentric buildings he labels as “placeless”, which, according to HENRI LEFEBVRE, masks the arbitrariness of the power exertion hidden beneath the image (that is in this case, the architecture), claiming to represent a collective value. In terms of architecture “conserved”, voices of historical preservation have garnered support in hopes of keeping architectural heritages as means to preserve cultural memory. ABBAS calls these heritages the “merely local”, which includes temples and shrines as well as the fishing villages that lie on the margins of Hong Kong society. Buildings from the colonial era or in the colonial style also belong under this category. The treatment of these structures however often only participates in the culture of disappearance.

Firstly, there is the locality of the heritages. Hong Kong witnesses an ironically matter-of-fact scenario where old buildings are placed in such extreme integrated proximity to new developments that what is past becomes quickly homogenized into the present. Secondly, these heritages preserved do not tell Hong Kong’s history in full, but are selected and censored according to the motives by which the preservations were initially instigated, being sometimes the colonizer and even more so the ambivalent hysteria of the status quo. What results is facile nostalgia, “not the return of past memory: it is the return of memory to the past.”

According to ABBAS, this culture of disappearance exhibited both through impending loss of autonomy and misrepresentations directly fosters these spaces of disappearance, a spatial condition that itself promotes a loss of cultural identity. If one argues that the culture of disappearance is responsible for the emergence of such an architectural scenario, that is, a space of disappearance, one is left to question the role of the designer (creator of space) in this perhaps not-so automatic translation from culture to space. The countless anecdotes of office architects, told with inebriated and disinterested acquiescence, attest to the conditions of the prevalent design process of built space in the capitalist city. NEIL LEACH humorously describes this process as “the logic of the rickshaw”, that is, having gone through sufficient iterations to produce a model perfect in efficiency and cost, most competitive in the market driven city. A lack of critical awareness only confirms that the prevailing design process is only the offspring of a culture of disappearance, reinforcing the scenario still without acknowledging its operation on the social consciousness. ABBAS critiques, “[a]s for Hong Kong architecture, it does not concern itself as yet with the question of cultural self-definition and presents to itself only the false image of power.” It should also be noted here that if any critical identity is formed in built space, ABBAS believes that it would emerge “as some form of hyphenation, coming into existence sometime in the future.”
CHAPTER 2

2 Ibid, 56.
3 Ibid, 47.
6 Ibid, 83.
7 Ibid, 83.
9 Abbas, Hong Kong Culture and the Politics of Disappearance, 89.
10 Ibid, 89-90.
The culture of disappearance is intrinsically tied to two projections of the Hong Kong layman, one of the identity of place, the other of time and chronology. Both concepts are tied to a larger social psyche that seems to have been systemically programmed by the city’s own mechanisms, machinations not constructed by a superimposing regime. These concepts are explored here to explain the second stage of the phenomenon of disappearance (the way discussed by Virilio) and the spatial consequences therein.

In terms of an identity of place, Hong Kong has traditionally been a port city. Being advantageously located, the city has continued to be a physical port for commercial goods travelling by sea, possessing one of the most sophisticated and efficient cargo handling centers in the world. And yet maritime trading is certainly giving way to the trade of a new commodity: information. “The nature of the port may have changed, but Hong Kong has not changed as a port”, for now it houses strong international ties in various fields, acting as a relay hub for parts of Mainland China. As suggested etymologically by the Latin (portus) and the Old German (herebeorgian), Hong Kong bears in its image and reputation the ability to protect, to offer safe haven to the displaced. This “inter-national city” originally became “international” by its offer of protection for refugees of social turmoil in other parts of the world, namely China and Southeast Asia. These refugees, most of which arrived during the fifties and sixties, sought not as much for a new home as much as an interim asylum. This sudden influx of manpower however, initiated a system based on transferences, annulling the need for
attachment to place. This is most evident at the exodus of emigrants at the onset of 1997, when sovereignty is returned to the People’s Republic of China, during which those who feared the authority from which they had escaped years earlier found asylum elsewhere. What is exhibited here is the commodification of all things, that all may be purchased, traded, or changed if profitable, with the goal of exchanging (the acquisition and sale) rather than ownership (the acquired). The transactions that characterize this port city run parallel to the physical inter-city and intra-city human movements, facilitated by the networks made available by prospects of capital gain. Hong Kong’s congenital port identity is entrenched within the social perspective, becoming the primary struggle that fuels the phenomenon of disappearance as this particular identity is being threatened by rising competitive powers and the palpably escalating dissolution of political and economic liberties towards the commodity of information.

Another identification of Hong Kong that even locals have come to use as an explanation for the city is the east versus west binarism. The oversimplification may have held true once upon a time, but remains now only as an archaic vestige of identification that is uncritically adopted. To be brief, this identity consists of a belief that the city is a platform where newly inserted western elements “encounter” the eastern indigenous culture. Not only is this identity an oversimplification of the ethnic complexity of the demographic make-up, it also neglects how cultural elements co-exist within a tightly woven urbanity. This adoption again displays how the need for identification can serve paradoxically to reinforce the disappearance of Hong Kong. These static representations cannot claim to be Hong Kong based on a simple logic: “the changing nature of space…inevitably entails a changing idea of place”. 

Time and chronology becomes a significant issue when the change of the city is accelerated, when “our whole life passes by in the prostheses of accelerated voyages.” The age-old binarism of pre-colonial and post-colonial coexistence in the city is one such way the city conceives of chronology. [diagram, junk vs. barge] [rickshaw vs. Mercedes] [old hsbc vs. new hsbc] [hk coastline vs. hk coastline] [fishing vs. banking]. But it is inconceivable that such polarization serve as the dominant system of chronology in terms of the city’s identity within the social consciousness. The poles attempt again to simplify the city’s continuous transformation. Furthermore, the situation becomes increasingly complex when this identification turns into a regularized mode of representation. When it becomes a routine method of depiction, it generates new images that further erases the cultural body of Hong Kong and dissolves criticality of the present. One example is the junk logo for the Hong Kong Tourism Board, who organized a similar looking junk to run the length of the Victoria Harbor for the sake of photographic memorabilia over the picturesque skyline. Another example can be found in the Starbucks interior designed by Goods of Desire. Within, the designers recreated a façade of a traditional urbanscape of Hong Kong from the sixties and reproduced it in jarring and shameless images, rusty window mullions and retro-tiling patterns for the upstairs café. Such a feat only elicits a distorted nostalgia that pares away actuality, reducing the past to a glorified façade, or as WALTER BENJAMIN says, “transforming everything abject about poverty, it’s transformed it also into an object of pleasure.” And this is precisely the risk of the conservation ideology, whose machinations delete the pain of the past, framing it with the values of the present in an attempt to “preserve” the past but in fact making the past a renewed object of the present; as ABBAS argues, “the sense of historical sequentiality and chronology is weakened by the lack of integration of old and new.” He references the Cultural
Center of Hong Kong on the shoreline of Tsim Sha Tsui as the case in point for this homogenization of time. The Center, completed in 1989, is a formally modern building which has become a key element in the Kowloon Peninsula skyline. It embodies all the formal intricacies and expressions of volumes, interlocking to create the spaces of concert and performance halls and exhibition galleries. Placed over the old railway terminal, it represents a new cultural and spatial era. But the lack of reference to existing elements or urbanscapes prompts the extreme effect of the conservation of the old clock tower belonging to the railway terminal, as if in compensation for a loss of cultural memory. The skyline from hence features an old brick clock tower standing in front of a pinkish tiled ski slope in an uncanny harmony.

"Without shock or protest", the visual consumer accepts this repainted image of history; but its repainting indicates an assimilation of history as the present by the uncritical placement of old and new in contiguity. Authors have gone as far as to argue that all remnants of the past have been objectively capitalized, to be cast in a light that would "sell" it (as a sort of experiential commodity) more effectively to the populace.

When THATCHER and ZHAO drafted the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the British imagined the unchanging fifty years to be an allowance for Hong Kong to continue as is, while China imagined it to be a period of transitions, as is in fact the case. The clause of the changeless duration nevertheless continue to bear a representative role in shaping the layman's attitude towards time, so that all of the present is made relative to the approaching day. In a sense the group that identifies itself as "Hong Kongers" live like Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, who at one of many occasional outbursts, imagines for the man sentenced to death such a strong desire to live, even if one had to "remain standing on a square yard of space all his life…". While the reference is extreme, the desire to remain an entity, an independent being is reflected in the growing socio-political awareness amongst Hong Kongers today. The superimposed stasis of fifty years is another attempt at representing Hong Kong in a distorted frame, threatening consciousness.


4 Ibid, 57.

5 Abbas, Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance, 66.

6 Ibid, 75.

7 Ibid, 71.


WHAT IS THE PHENOMENON?

HOW DOES FILM (ATTEMPT TO) CAPTURE DISAPPEARANCE?

(HOW) CAN ONE TRANSLATE THE CINEMATIC ATTEMPT INTO A SPATIAL ATTEMPT?

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HOW DOES FILM (ATTEMPT TO) CAPTURE DISAPPEARANCE?

(HOW) CAN ONE TRANSLATE THE CINEMATIC ATTEMPT INTO A SPATIAL ATTEMPT?
The evanescence of yesterday’s Hong Kong has become today’s scenario. The paradox lies in the attempt at stabilizing Hong Kong while inadvertently participating in the phenomenon of the city’s disappearance. Here one recalls the same quandary of BAUDELLARD’s Filipino anthropologists, who upon discovery of the reclusive native peoples, witnessing how they “disintegrate immediately upon contact”, decide to return them to their “natural habitat” in the jungles, into the shroud that the scientists had longed to dismantle; for to make stable enough for study would cause one to lose grasp on the object of study.1 Similarly, the city’s ephemerality caused by rapidity of change escapes all attempts at solidification, primarily the establishment of how to see the city. As mentioned afore, it is the prescription of the stable, monumental image that is obstructing space from being a critical entity.

“the harder we try to categorize it, the more the city mocks the available categories and remains, in spite of its overwhelming presence, a peculiar kind of ‘invisible city’—it appears in the moment of disappearance (first sense), and it disappears in appearances/representations (second sense).”

“a spatial history of disappearance will attempt to evoke the city rather than claim to represent it, in the sense of giving a definitive account of what it is “really” like.”

-ACKBAR ABRAS, culture and politics of disappearance
The phenomenon of disappearance in Hong Kong, albeit coming into existence within the last three decades, have materialized enough critical artwork to offer a substantial discussion on the phenomenon. In a study of Hong Kong artworks immediately preceding and following the handover to China, DAVID CLARKE describes them "with a past that was on the point of disappearing: a search for identity in the face of its imminent potential loss." These artworks include photographs that capture subjects on the margin of evanescence, producing an index of relationships between the viewer and the subject at the moment of exposure. One powerful example is Lee Ka-Sing's photograph, Hong Kong, Someday in 1997. The monumental image is being destabilized by the prolonged shutter speed, ambiguously causing the image, in the glory of its luminescence, to lose its clarity. At the loss of the horizon, and along with it the delineation between buildings and the sea, traditional representation simply dissolves. The manipulation begins to add a layer of critical commentary towards the viewer in the city that is echoed by the title of the photograph: the Handover is treated as both commonplace (textually) and a threat encroaching upon the city (visually), inducing its subconscious but progressive disappearance.

Amongst all forms of expression, film has been most capable of evoking the disappearing Hong Kong, likely because film carries an advantage in what it is capable of doing. To explain and qualify the competence of cinema, one must discuss two tiers of factors, those related to the inherent possibilities of film as a medium, and those concerning the operation of particular films in strategic executions. Along the first branch, the discussion following will attempt to identify the common ground factors that constitute film as a medium, while along the second branch, the strategies of a specific Hong Kong film in engendering the phenomenon of disappearance will be analysed.
Embedded within film are several implicated concepts that are relevant to the discussion on disappearance: speed, composition and focus, real time, representative time and representative space. A film addresses speed on multiple levels: the speed of images, of the subject within the images, of the camera that is representative of the viewer/audience. Composition and focus pertains to the images themselves, their choice of subjects, contexts and the relationship between them. Real time concerns the film’s relation to the viewer’s own time beyond the screen, conceivably as that controlled by the clock. Finally, representative time and space, usually brought out by the plot and the cinematography, is the internal content of the film that at the same time obliges the film to exist in its own reality.

1 – SPEED
In the oft-quoted words of JEAN-LUC GODARD, “film is truth twenty-four times a second”. This inspiring remark is but a poetic aggrandizement of the scientific explanation of the film mechanism: still images presented so quickly as to achieve the illusion of continuity. It is the critical recognition of this illusion that allows a manipulation of the speed of images. More widely considered is the speed of the subject within the images, which a quick contrast between the genres of superhero action and romantic dramas would quickly portray. This governs the pace of the plot and in turn the disposition of the viewer. Finally, and perhaps more mechanically, is the speed of the camera. While the camera could seem (paradoxically both as) a non-entity and a god-like entity, its role is always subject to critical analysis as it is the window through which the audience also joins in the affairs of the film. A camera’s speed may strive to match that of the subject, forcing the audience to be an invisible companion of the subject. (see Bourne Ultimatum’s window jumping sequence in Tangier) or used to match the speed of the context while the subject remains (see Blueberry Nights, Jude Law in the cafe).

JEAN-LUC GODARD
french-swiss film maker, 1930–____

BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE & FILM
pace of spatial sequence
pace of movement through spaces
pace of others in space
rhythm
transition
2 – COMPOSITION

Implications of how an image composes the relationship between a subject and its context need little justification. What is noteworthy however is the imposition of the frame that is sine qua non of film since its invention. Framing requires a judgment of inclusion and exclusion that is mentioned afore as the artists’ first judgment. Here the authorship of the filmmaker becomes most irrefutably transparent, and is often celebrated in the role of the cinematographer. Another aspect of composition is time-based, which utilizes appearances, disappearances and reappearances of contexts and subjects, cast in specific lights, to portray the relationship between subject and context. This requires even more critically the first judgment of the artist, whose selection on what is to be framed through the duration of the film may have a more lingering effect than a single scene.

BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE & FILM

form
floorplan design (at every scale)
framing views
circulation sequence
3 – REAL TIME

The most external factor of the film relies on the placement of film material in connection to real time, that is, the time beyond the screen. Although a viewer comes into the presence of a film likely with some readiness to (temporarily) relinquish the conventional governances of time, the sensorial experience of the work must still be related to that of real time; inadvertently, the experience of the other reality created by the film is undertaken using the involuntary apparatuses of the audience. For the makers of film, the creation of this experience is likewise based on the chassis of frames, seconds, minutes, hours. An example heavily implicated in this way is the infamously rumored feature film of the TV series, “24”, an American drama that presents each one-hour episode in “real time”, such that after 24 episodes, a full day would have passed within the protagonist’s reality and the crisis would have effectively dissolved. For the feature film however, executive producer Kiefer Sutherland tells his audience “it’s going to be a two-hour representation of a 24 hour day, so we were not going to be restrained by the real time aspect of the TV show”. His uncritical comment implies the significance of his work’s relationship with the “real time” on the viewer’s experience.

BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE & FILM

spatial experience in relation to exterior
temporal experience in relation to exterior
response to context (physical / conceptual)
4 – REPRESENTATIVE TIME / SPACE

When SAMUEL COLERIDGE coined the condition of identifying with fiction as “the suspension of disbelief”, he qualified fiction to embody a certain “human interest and a semblance of truth”. The fabrication of a representative time and space in which the viewer can be a part (even if at a distance) becomes instrumental in meeting COLERIDGE’s qualification. If one can accept the premise that film first creates an internal reality, then opens an aperture for an audience to participate, one realizes that in effect the audience is transported into a fictional world where a new time and space has been prepared. The perception of fictional time from a “real time” situation certainly elicits a comparison and contrast that distorts “real life” in manifold mechanisms. In addition, designing a new method of time evaluation forces film to confront its treatment towards and belief in the effects of time on its subjects. A case in point would include Neo’s transformation from the realm of the matrix into actuality that occurred in a seemingly unending night, which had a profound effect in the subject’s confusion as he struggles to break free from the matrix’s clockwork control of time, visually symbolized by the activities of the day contrasted with those of the night. Representative space deals directly with the perception of the viewer, asking the questions, “how does it look?” “how does it sound?” The construction of a fictive space that compromises “real space” for the sake of looking and sounding a certain way has already become critical of “real space”, for the operation serves to recondition, sharpen, and / or obfuscate it, making it seem real, unreal, or hyperreal. Together, the weaving of the representative space within representative time creates the complexity over which various actions by subjects could marshal meaning.

BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE & FILM

- microcosmic embodiment of “real world”
- threshold delineating an “other world”
- conceptual time-space of “other space”
- interpretation of context
- narrative
It is at this juncture that WONG KAR-WAI's \textit{2046} becomes most germane. It is at once a fictional portrayal of a Hong Kong four decades prior and four decades after the present, and the complete reality of a presently disappearing Hong Kong. \textit{2046} has ignited a ripple of responses, from cinematographic studies by film students to critical constructions of its underlying substance by social theorists, and has been suggested by authors such as ACKBAR ABBAS, that its cinematic fabrication seeks rigorously to convey the paradoxical nuances of post-modern life in the city. While WKW has not on any occasion explicitly deciphered the various cinematic mechanisms to make the film a pedagogical tour of Hong Kong as is, enough shreds of evidence remain to justify such a role for the film; as Stephen Teo writes, it is “a time odyssey”. \textit{2046} richly occupies the four categories listed above, providing ample material for analysis and perhaps for a critical translation into space.

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{WONG KAR-WAI} \\
Hong Kong film auteur \\
1958—\
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{CHAPTER 4}
\end{flushright}

\begin{itemize}
\item 1 Abbas, M. A. 1997. \textit{Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance}. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 73.
\end{itemize}
A quick synopsis of 2046 proves difficult for a few reasons. First, the film is the third part of a trilogy that began with Days of Being Wild (1991), In the Mood for Love (2000), where certain themes and characters (remarkably played by the same actors since 1991) have lingered and taken their turn through both fictional and real time. The entire trilogy is situated in 1960’s Hong Kong, a golden age where contemporary consumerist culture fosters new lifestyles for the characters, which are atypically unyoked by family and others. The fragmented stories of Days and In the Mood become a sort of blurry compressed memory that serve largely as an atmospheric pedestal for 2046, although explicit recollections in 2046 through the voiceover or dialogue immediately summons these memories forward to potent effect. Second, the almost-subconscious influence of the mise-en-scene, both in the frames and in time, is often too elusive to dictate, likely to result in paragraphs of writing for a single scene. This synopsis therefore will only serve to illustrate the fragmentation of the plot sequence, identifying the details of scenes only when they are vital to the establishment of the four categories listed prior.
In the Mood leaves the main character CHOW MO-WAN at the Angkor Wat, where he is taking a business trip after moving to Singapore from Hong Kong in order to escape the pain of silent rejection by a woman disillusioned of her fidelity, SO LAI-CHEN. 2046 however, begins with a fantastical narration in Japanese by TAK, a nomad/passenger journeying on a train coming from the space-time destination of 2046 in a dystopic future city-scape. The train, which weaves through the city’s layers of skyscrapers, is carrying TAK, a train captain who explains in Mandarin to TAK that he was the only passenger who has ever departed from 2046, and “retarded” cyborgs who are degenerating due to the trauma of their voyage’s duration. TAK then explains how he was once in love but that since the love has passed, he had been searching for her. This sci-fi sequence immediately switches to CHOW MO-WAN’s life in Singapore, at the point when he asks a lover clad in black to return to Hong Kong with him, presumably to begin a new life. She refuses indirectly and he returns to Hong Kong amidst the riots of the mid-sixties. Difficult times push CHOW to write pornographic columns for the newspapers, launching himself into the playboy persona that would characterize him throughout the film. On Christmas Eve while CHOW is out at the club, he encounters the MIMI/LULU character from Days, and he reminds her of their acquaintance by describing the tragic loss of love that had occurred to her in Days. When CHOW returns her room key to her landlord (incidentally also the actor for the train captain) he queries about the possibility of living in the room 2046, the room that had earlier been occupied by MIMI/LULU. The room however, is soiled by the stabbing of MIMI/LULU just the day before by a jealous boyfriend and CHOW consequently move into the adjacent room of 2047. From 2047, he watches how 2046 becomes a platform for the murmuring of Japanese phrases by the landlord’s daughter, WONG JIE-WEN, which are delayed acceptances of an unapproved Japanese lover’s offer of elopement, and the stranded but sexy call-girl, BAI LING, in search for a life with one and not many lovers. It is in 2047 that CHOW begins to write a newspaper novel titled 2046, CHOW MO-WAN protagonist of In the Mood for Love and 2046 SO LAI-CHEN CHOW’s lover from In the Mood TAK japanese train passenger in futuristic hong kong MIMI/LULU character from Days of Being Wild with two names BAI LING occupant of 2046, short-term lover of CHOW
a fantastical and erotic portrayal of characters from his life, desperately seeking a way to the imaginary place of 2046. CHOW and BAI become lovers, although he still pays her a nominal sum for their carnal pleasure, at the complacent heartache of BAI. But CHOW’s openness to his other lovers ultimately culminates in their break-up and BAI LING’s provocations of CHOW’s jealousy though to no effect. After CHOW has a night of pleasure with another woman, BAI becomes so broken she departs from 2046. WONG then occupies the space again with her Japanese practice as she writes back and forth to her lover in Japan. At her father’s continual disapproval, CHOW offers to deliver her lover’s letters to her and does so by slipping the letters through the panel between the rooms of 2046 and 2047. Because of a common love for writing, CHOW and WONG begin an ambiguous relationship of lover/friend/confidant although it is apparent to CHOW and the audience that WONG displays a shade of reluctance. At her instigation, CHOW begins the novel 2047 to explain to WONG what her lover is feeling although slowly he finds himself invested in the character of her Japanese lover. The novel 2047 is in fact the train journey shown in the beginning sequence, with the Japanese passenger TAK both as WONG’s lover and CHOW’s attraction for WONG and her reluctance play out in the novel as the impossible love of the passenger and the “retarded” service cyborg. Back to the 60’s, after a Christmas Eve dinner with WONG, CHOW realizes the futility of his pursuit of her, which is then confirmed by the engagement of WONG and her lover. When CHOW meets with BAI for dinner, he begins to recall his desolate time in Singapore years ago, as well as his relationship with the “Black Spider”, a nickname for the female professional gambler clad always in black. When the “Black Spider” offers to help CHOW win back his bets to return to Hong Kong, she reveals her name also to be SU LI-ZHEN, coincidentally the same name as the married woman CHOW had left behind in the first place. Like SO, SU does not leave with CHOW because of an inability to lose grip on her past, which remain a secret for all. The film ends with CHOW alone in a moving taxi.
1 – SPEED

A manifestation of speed as a narrative mechanism for 2046 is in the contrast of the exterior and the interior actions. 2046’s utilization of speed highlights disappearance first by reducing all exterior actions to a choreography of “meaningless” uncontrollable movements, while the interior actions are drawn out, the movements slow and accentuated, the conversations slow but impactfully articulated. Distinguishing between the interior actions that unfold the narrative, most of which are quickly spliced, and those that are meant to convey the emotion that envelops those concurrent actions provide an interesting position towards the possibility of speed manipulation in manifesting disappearance.

Many critics will easily label 2046 as a film drenched in a paradoxically overwhelming coalescence of sorrow and beauty; this is largely the responsibility of the extended scenes, most of which are deployed to demonstrate the anguish of helplessness. The most apropos scene is BAI Ling weeping to the sounds of love making between the protagonist CHOW and one of his other female lovers in the adjacent room of 2047; this scene is paranthesized by a series of quickly clipped scenes typical of the film. Another such scene features TAK of CHOW’s novel 2047, where the character numerates his time spent on the lonely journey whilst weeping. The intensity is clearly magnified by the duration spent watching those emotions unfold.

Here it is noteworthy to mention also the concepts of speed within 2046. An integral struggle of the film is the decision of whether or not to go, that is, to depart from the present space/time. The characters find the space/time to be so rigorously attached that all of them journey to foreign lands in an attempt also to remove themselves from the present time. The excessive amount of travel, which they themselves will discover cannot break them from the past/memory, is constantly the topic of discussion, a nostalgia of places journeyed and of characters encountered, of experiences now faded. This concept being played out
not through scenes of travelling but only recalled in dialogue or the instigation of scenes cutting directly through space/time highlights the effect of speed as it takes a toll on the characters while in fact downplaying the physical qualities of that speed, which in fact has no meaning: one can never leaves one’s memory.

2 – COMPOSITION

While this analysis argues that the film places a much greater emphasis on the interior action, a study of the film’s visual composition finds the interior space still to be fragmented. Like the exterior space, the interior is complex and reflected, the boundaries both definitive and non-existent. Arguably one of the most studied sequences of 2046, where the room of 2046 as occupied by BAI is thoroughly explored, perhaps demonstrates this tactic best of all. This fragmentation makes the space elusive, so that the actions hosted in that space are hardly attributed to the uncharacteristic context but rather the intangible realm referenced by the space. For the room 2046, the allusion is of course “the place where nothing ever changes”.

At times the interior space becomes so undistinguished that the only thing perceivable is the interchange between individuals. Such an interchange has a visual pattern readily apparent. This blurring of the context serves to disclose the parallels between the interactions of the characters from other contexts of 2046.

An unmistakable sequence is repeated multiple times in the film where the female characters are brought to tears because of a loss of happiness. When the male character approaches the female character with a plea to leave with himself, the female, though attracted and to a degree willing, exhibits a reluctance in the form of lack of emotion, leaving the male character dejected and discouraged to a point that he then leaves. It is only when his offer expires that the female weeps, exhibiting the emotion that was once inhibited by an indecision spawned from the failure of past loves, mingled now with the loss of this new opportunity. This deliberate sequence highlights the disappearance of the invisible opportunity of love.
by glorifying the procession of his departure from her followed by the protraction of her tears and concurrent paralysis by sorrow.

3 – REAL TIME

2046 presents the passage of four years and an imagination that jumps forward a hundred years in two hours time. Relative to the audience’s real time, it must therefore have moved faster. But the extended scenes of emotion, mentioned earlier under the discussion of speed, slow down enough to match the audience’s real time, thus creating very abruptly a moment in which the audience transcends the role of a viewer to a participant.

This tactic is not new or surprising, since most films attempt to recreate for the audience a reality which can only be conveyed through an imitation (regardless of how difficult commercially) of the passing of time in the unfolding of events. What 2046 also attempts is to break as far from the real time of the audience as possible, challenging his/her ability to imagine an other reality where time as understood now seems irrelevant. The film begins with the fantasy of the future skyscraper dominated dystopia, a cityscape lit by circuits electrical and vehicular. It becomes more and more unclear whether that city is Hong Kong in the year 2046 or a city called 2046. It is unclear how the city functions and how the train is capable of at once travelling through space (as illustrated visually) and through time (as announced aurally). This journey through space/time detaches entirely from any comparison to the audience’s real time, immediately inducing the confusion both mental and emotional that the audience as well as the protagonist must decipher through his experiences.

4 – REPRESENTATIVE TIME/SPACE

While representative time/space can be viewed as the umbrella creation that encompasses the afore mentioned tactics, it is to be studied here merely in terms of the portrayal of the concepts of the plot in manifesting disappearance. The recreation in particular of both a past Hong Kong (the surreal sixties) and a future
Hong Kong (the fantastic 2046) tears asunder the present Hong Kong (the 2000’s) for the audience, leaving in between those two representations a massive abyss since the film gives no impression as to how the surreal sixties transitions into the fantastic 2046. The potency of this manipulation is at once the exclusion of the audience and a transcendent involvement; the actions of the sixties and those of the future are placed in parallel, leaving the audience to extrapolate also the present parallel for oneself.

The contrast of the exterior and interior actions also are illustrated as dystopic and protective respectively. Intimidating in character, the external world forces the characters to remain within, which though haven-like in appearance, exhibit every reality and nuance of those very cities. This representation of contrast detaches the two by withholding a threshold (creating an abyss) while intricately tying them together.

2046 was originally titled *The Secret*. Since *In the Mood*, the motif of the secret has been brought up in dialogue as a mythical tale, where individuals who wished to hide a secret would tell it to the hole of a tree, then cover the hole with mud, thereby concealing the secret forever. This secret becomes the plea to elope as well as the answers to such pleas in the lives of the characters. *Disappearance* in this case occurs merely by the fact that these secrets exist, inhibiting the channels of communication between possible lovers. The opportunity arises when one of them breaches the invisible boundaries set between the pair by past burdens and projected fears, but the opportunity is always quickly lost. Thus the role of the tale of the tree-hole creates a resting place for the secret that could have precipitated happiness and the constant reminder of opportunities lost.
CHAPTER 5


A decision on where this spatial construct of disappearance can emerge led to an investigation of which urban locations are currently undergoing that process. Deliberation of several sites led to the selection of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), a patch of land reclaimed as a part of the West Kowloon Reclamation and designated as shared public urban space for the development of city culture.

Although the “culture” to be imposed/fostered considers it as a palpably understandable body of actions and beliefs by a contingency, there is a conceptual game to be played when contrasted towards the culture of disappearance. It must be known that when culture is thus enforced, particularly in such a large-scale, politicized public display, something disappears when the status quo yields to this new platform of culture. While building on reclaimed land is akin to designing on tabula rasa, there are several factors that may disqualify this parcel from neutrality.

Firstly, whilst the peninsula is often considered the fringe, the WKCD is in fact situated at the center of urban Hong Kong, which was in fact the main driver of its political designation in the first place. This peninsula at the fringe of the Kowloon peninsula positions the WKCD within the urban fabric even in its fallow glory. The tension of this contrasting scenario holds social and spatial significance since it is so irregular for a space so real-estate prime to be left untouched, leaving the patch of wilderness as a vastly horizontal platform opposed to the verticalities of Hong Kong city center.
Secondly, within the fifteen years since the West Kowloon Reclamation project, events have occurred concerning and within the WKCD that have complexified its role as a cultural hub. The failure of the 2004 competition due to loud public opposition to the poor management and lack of organization on the part of the governmental authorities casts a heavy shadow over the site by implying the possibility of the WKCD project to be a drainer of public funds to yield uncertain ends. In this way, the apprehension of recklessness had deterred any construction work on the site until smaller scale art and cultural exhibition/installation type projects began to claim WKCD as their arena, including a Red Bull Flugtag event, the 2-week Make a Difference artist workshops series, and the 09-10 Hong Kong Shenzhen Biennale, which led then to better funded projects from the government including the Hong Kong International Jazz Festival in the summer of 2011, and the Bamboo Theater of M+ (the new modern art museum to be situated in WKCD). These events begin to speak to the site’s worth as a fallow wilderness, a rare condition of dormancy that under such contexts appear particularly precious. Their selection of the WKCD prior to its full maturation is justifying a certain attractiveness in its untamed juvenescence.

The qualities that triggered relatively spontaneous cultural events to occur are intrinsic to the site both spatially/geographically and socially. Thus it is not difficult to imagine that upon the erection of Foster’s masterplan in the future, what had become intrinsic disappear, bringing along with it opportunities of spontaneity socially speaking. Spatially too, there are several essential attributes that will also be erased. The first is the site void: the lack of vertical domination (i.e. an open sky); second, the wilderness is replaced by a transferred forest, footpaths and perfectly landscaped mounds; third, WKCD’s role as observer of Hong Kong gives way immediately to become the observed of Hong Kong, bulldozing for itself a visual and contextual foothold along Victoria Harbor.

What is upon imminent emergence is the WKCD as a space of disappearance. Its characteristics in relation to city culture, despite arising within the last decade and a half, is threatened by representation and ironically, an explicitly superimposed regime of culture. In order to document the event of this disappearance, a spatial intervention must at once acknowledge and highlight what is disappearing from the site while at the same time (perhaps paradoxically) be instigating the beginning of this disappearance.
A careful and critical evaluation of how the filmic tactics translate into spatial design operations is by far the most essential step in this process. The analysis from the previous chapter serves as a basis upon which the design of space is at once launched beyond the considerations of geometry or program and into a non-form, non-function directed spatial condition or sequence. These conditions should be flexible enough such that the program’s needs can be fulfilled commensurate to the appropriate condition(s). While the translation here from cinematic tactics into spatial conditions do not appear rigorous, since multiple spatial conditions can be argued to stem from one tactic, the advent of this study is to present a new method of spatial design that considers first and foremost the possibilities to engage body and mind in the manner of cinema; the rigor of the process remains in how such conditions are established through proportion and materials as related to the senses, as well as their composition dimensional and sequential when the body becomes engaged with the space(s). Abstraction of the cinematic tactic into an explicit spatial construct led first to a series of concept models made in consideration with the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD).
A comparison between cinema and space demonstrated how each employ a relation of the senses in the making of meaning, which then is associated with a cinematic tactic made apparent in 2046 via the earlier categorization of speed, composition, real time, and representative time/space. The tactics employed by 2046 whilst simplified here as text, is in fact placed into consideration as a complex body of events, questioning constantly the manner in which the tactic was executed. Physical displacements as described in chapter five is performed through both space and time, so that the transference of the body through space simultaneously transfers the being...
into another time. Therefore, programmatically, something transportation-related seemed appropriate, something that would affect a build up of ‘intensity’, which would significantly disrupt the regular passing of time. This may be the same “intensity” that masks the disappearance until a later spatial condition where realization is achieved.

2046’s particular nuance of disappearance hidden until its signification later is that the mask of disappearance is not as much a veil as much as it is a distraction; it is not under the lack of stimuli but from excessive stimuli that disappearance occurs. While these effects are individually simple, they are articulated in the film as a complex network of transitions and relationships.

The danger with this point of extraction from film to space is to facily translate this network into a web of transportation routes for example; any such translation could only be legitimized by the system’s capacity to inspire a sense of overlap: many routes integrated into a single body of overtly systematic relationships, which would yet allow for different manifestations, despite structural similarity.
The simulation of a time broken from real time of the city is first achieved by the urban breach between WKCD and the physically adjoining area of Yau Ma Tei. To capitalise on this condition, the intervention should create an experience where space and time become difficult to evaluate and provide positions or transitions that are rare (abnormal) and challenging (requiring new physical engagements).

Finally, the slowed emergence, both physical and cognitive, of the conditions that are disappearing in an extended surrender to other conditions could at once document and instigate the disappearance as discussed afore. This tactic is reliant upon the architectural intervention’s ability to maintain its solidarity as a systemic entity (the same way the film does) whilst being positioned accurately within its urban scenario (the way the film fits into the culture of genres and body of work in general). System integrity is necessary for the intervention to contain its own fabricated reality, the represented time space that separates the work from its surrounding. While this aspect is much more easily made via film because of the medium’s ability to make explicit the context and passing of time via words or images, space must employ a subtler approach that endeavors to establish a new way of considering space in the city and therefore the cognitive issue of time in relation to the body.
WORLD IS PASSING

Paul Virilio opens his book The Aesthetics of Disappearance with a quote by the Biblical Paul of Tarsus: “The world as we see it is passing.” It was his aim, as well as the objective of this thesis to illustrate the human world as increasingly unstable, uncertain and ephemeral. This reality is observed through various scenarios and phenomena that within this discussion is referred to as disappearance. Disappearance occurs most apparently in hyper-accelerated urban conditions, complex metropolises that are constructed over systems of transferences. One such metropolis is the semi-independent city of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong’s emergence as a powerful economic entity mingled with its political struggles has complexified its search for an identity. Simplified representations slowly take over potentially more encumbering analyses of the city’s nature, painting over the city’s elaborate web of relationships with easily descriptive generalizations. Borrowing from the process of film construction, primarily WONG Kar-Wai’s 2006, this thesis became an attempt to develop an approach towards the design of space within Hong Kong that at once participates in and critically documents the progress of the phenomenon of disappearance.
CAST ADRIFT
CAUGHT IN DRIFT

WORLD IS PASSING

The minute deconstruction and reconstruction of social identity is a process of accumulation, often so slight it can escape attention. Hong Kong is perhaps one of the few places in the present time to have been subject to so many and such varied social forces as to be host to this process. Whilst these processes have often transpired through generations in other contexts, Hong Kong’s complex social scenario has also catalysed the process so that it may be witnessed through the span of a generation and leaving enough evidence for a critical conversation. Cultural disappearance leading to a culture of disappearance cannot and should not be considered at once a negative phenomenon as many may be quick to argue. Critical architectural conversations about the city in particular, should attempt to understand underlying factors in different fields better and to develop a perspective on the proactive role of architecture in response to such factors. Space is inevitably associated with culture; urban spaces at once foster human behavior and are readapted by human behavior in dramatic ways. Thus space in the city must stand in face of culture in its most complex terms rather than facilely adopting a spatial culture based on trends, preferences and transplanted/superimposed ideologies (which may in fact be an ill in the present culture of the instant). While the present form of the world passes at breakneck speed, culture is often cast adrift to fervently follow the novel; what role can architecture play if its goal is at once to maintain firmly embedded into the culture of its context while at the same time act as a chronicle for the chaotic course that the culture has taken? The answer lies perhaps in one’s solution to the paradox of a fleeting register.
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for finding words for the unspeakable and for conversations that in their phase clear and muddy the water.

AK;
for understanding and trust, and for the mass provision of food for thought in substitution for actual food.

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for new opportunities, explorations and trust, expressed through six years of taciturn/gestural communication.

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for revealing in consolation and desolation the nature of the immaterial.

ASY;
for in hardship, taking wardship of my wellbeing.

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for the encouragement that spans a great chasm to be near.
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