Aaina Bhargava on
Phoebe Hui 許方華
at Duplex Studio, Tai Kwun
Lee Kit 李傑, Rodel Tapaya 羅德爾·塔帕亞, Maurice Benayoun 莫里斯·貝納永, Hans-Peter Feldmann 漢斯—彼得·費爾德曼, Wu Chi-Tsung 吳季璁, Zheng Bo 鄭波, Lalan 謝景蘭, Siu Wai Hang 蕭偉恒
and more...
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A pioneer of new media art, French artist and theorist **Maurice Benayoun**

began experimenting with 3D animations in 1987 and interactive VR

installations in the early 1990s. Since then, he has developed a complex

multimedia practice that combines digital technologies with a conceptual

approach. Benayoun, also known as MoBen (莫奔), arrived in Hong Kong nine

years ago to teach at City University of Hong Kong’s School of Creative

Media. There he established the Neuro Design Lab, a studio where he and his

team develop and produce his art projects.
莫里斯·貝納永又名莫奔，是法國的先驅新媒體藝術家及理論家，早於1987年開始以3D動畫進行實驗，並於90年代初試驗互動式VR裝置。他在那時開發了一種複雜的多媒體實踐，將數碼技術與概念方式結合。莫奔於9年前來港，在香港城市大學創意媒體學院任教。他在城大創立了「神經設計實驗室」，和團隊開發和製作他的藝術作品。

CHT：自2018年起，你埋首極具野心的《價值的價值》計劃，評估人類對自由、愛和奴役這些價值觀的相對價值，是什麼令你有這個想法？

莫奔：這個計劃源起一系列的問題。最近我們可以看各政府在制訂疫情相關決策時有多少取決於價值觀：教訓是保障老人還是經濟？側重於同理心或金錢？而這些對人而言又代表什麼？我在《情緒力學》系列中創作大型城市屏幕藝術作品，觀眾可以根據互聯網搜索數據即時觀看世界情緒。而在《價值的價值》中，我與尼可拉斯·曼多薩和簡漢傑一起創建一個可以將人類價值交換和轉化為貨幣的股票市場，同時將這些價值以有形藝術品的形式呈現。

計劃至少有三個構思。第一部份是你在不同的展覽中透過互動形式邀請人們在所謂的「大腦工廠」中塑造這些價值觀。

我與研究人員合作，開發出一種可以將人的思想轉為具體形式的演算法。觀眾要將注意力集中在一個特定的價值觀，然後我們會將腦電圖傳感器放在他們的頭部周圍聆聽腦電波，讓他們根據對價值的看法來評估動態3D形狀的變化。這個過程講求集體的力量，因為所有具有相同價值的前人都會不斷重新設計你開始時的形狀。在8分鐘的過程中，每位觀眾都會產生10個根據價值觀和序列命名和編號的項目或VoVo，如「自由0160」和「自由0161」等。這些模型會在一個數據庫的網頁上登記，以分散方式儲存資料，比有形的物件更有效。出盡力的參加者會獲得第二個概念性效果和3D模型的代幣，以抽選幾何圖形數碼呈現新設計的價值。其後，參加者可以在價值觀市場上交換或購買該代幣。

數碼化是作品的第二部分。在你的網上平台中人們可以買賣代幣，意味著價值觀可以通過貨幣和商品的方式呈現，這好像有點諷刺？

我喜歡這種含糊。當然，談價值觀可以成為交易對象是有爭議性，但這個平台是開放的。到目前為止，「性」排名第一，而令人驚訝的是「金錢」（通常）竟不是最高需求的價值觀，不過這因應地點而異，正直亦是作品的挑戰和有趣之處。

觀眾可以跟隨世界各地的即時價值觀排名的市場波動，「愛情」在韓國比在香港更受到重視嗎？我必需重申我只是負責提出問題，然後觀察事情的發展。人們可能會出於政治等原因操縱市場並兜售某些價值觀，但最終在投機與情感的動機之間找出平衡。

要獲得真正的集體價值觀階級，你需要大量的觀眾參加，你認為這目標可以實現嗎？

希望如此。我們正繼續開發計劃，覆蓋不同的地區。世界各地許多展覽都延期或取消，2022年初《價值的價值》計劃在奧沙拉爾的協助下於香港一個大型空間策辦個展，屆時會有一個可以讓觀眾立即買賣價值觀的交易室。

數碼藝術家Beepie在佳士得3月份的拍賣會上以超過8,900萬美元售出一件非同質化代幣（NFT）形式的藝術品，引起藝術界的討論。你對這種新的數碼藝術經濟模式有什麼看法？

目前為止NFT只是一種新的藝術品分銷模式，我認為它的潛力遠遠不止於此。數碼藝術家現在只是透過網上平台展示和出售他們的藝術品，這些平台只是代替了以前的美術館和拍賣，並沒有掀起藝術界預期的革命。令人欣慰的是這場瘋狂的拍賣的確提高了數碼藝術品的曝光，令它們的價值得到認可。新冠疫情和區塊鏈的興起促成了這轉
CHT: Since 2018, you have been working on a very ambitious project, Value of Values, which aims to evaluate the relative value of human values such as freedom, love and power. What triggered this idea?
MB: This project arose from a series of questions. We have seen recently how much various governments based their pandemic-related decisions on values: protect the elderly or the economy? Compassion or money? But what does that mean today for individuals? With the Mechanics of Emotions series, I created large urban screen artworks where viewers could watch in real time the World Emotion Forecast, based on internet search data. With Value of Values, together with Nicolas Mendoza and Tobias Klein, we propose a stock market where human values could be exchanged and monetised, but also an apparatus that allows these values to take tangible artforms.

The project has been conceived on at least three levels. The first part happened in different shows and was interactive: you invited people to give shape to these values, in what you call the Brain Factory. I worked with researchers to develop algorithms helping to translate people’s thoughts into a tangible form. Viewers are asked to concentrate on one particular value, and electroencephalogram sensors are placed around their head. We can then listen to their brainwaves, giving them the possibility to assess the evolution of a dynamic 3D shape according to their conception of the value. It is a collective endeavour because the shape from which you start has been continuously redesigned by all the predecessors working on the same value. During the eight-minute process, each viewer produces 10 items or VoVs, all named and numbered according to their value and series: for example, FREEDOM 0160, FREEDOM 0161 etc. Better than a tangible item, these models are registered on the blockchain, a specific type of database in which information is stored in a decentralised way. Participants, brain workers, are given the first token that includes a visualisation and the 3D model, which is a geometric abstraction in digital form of the freshly designed value. They will be able, later, to exchange or trade this token on the market of values.

This is the second stage of the work, when it becomes digitised. In your online platform, people can trade their tokens, which means that values become monetised and commodified. This seems rather cynical?
I like this ambiguity. Of course, saying that values can become objects of transaction is debatable, yet this platform is open. So far, SEX is ranked at the top position, and surprisingly MONEY is not (usually) the most demanded value, depending on the location. This is exactly the challenge and the interest of the work. Viewers can follow the fluctuations of the market, the real-time ranking of the values according to different places in the world. Is LOVE more valorised in South Korea than in Taiwan? Again, I am only asking questions and watching how things evolve. People might manipulate the market and speculate on some values, for instance for political reasons, but in the end there
變。我嘗試透過《價值的價值》進一步推動模式，區塊鏈不只是藝術品直接交易的平台，更可以成為藝術家解決財政、道德和政治問題的合理媒介。VoV代幣的擁有人不單單是收藏者，還是藝術家和商人。

這點帶我們來到第三部分：擁有人可以交換或出售他們的代幣，但亦可透過打印形狀甚至修改原有模型等實體化購買的價值觀。與此同時，你將代幣生成自己的模型，重新帶我們回到了創作和有形的藝術形式。

VoV代幣並不是實質的物件，它只是由純數據構成，可以視為一種「藝術種子」。由基於EEG的DNA編碼生成。舉例來說，擁有「美麗0678」之後，你就可以根據其序列建立任何藝術品。我建議保留它在「大腦工廠」中集體建立的原有形狀，但可以改變它的展示或表現。出盡「腦力」的參加者或收藏者在策展人的角色評估出有形價值的演變後，他們亦會成為創作者之一。如何令觀眾看起來可能很抽象的形狀變得有意義？這種意義不僅僅是價值觀，還表達了與價值觀有關的陳述。擁有者有完全表達、詮釋和修改的自由。我從自己的VoV代幣收藏中建立了一系列獨特的2D自主作品「twodees」，希望展示可以生成的形式的力量。

形狀非常抽象，如果不按名稱劃分，你會如何區分「名利」與「同理」？這是一種後象徵主義的形式。我們過去一直在尋找能夠體現意義的形式。在作品中，我順便了道過程，讓我們以既定的形式尋找意義。我亦很喜歡研究質感、顏色和光線。有了現今的軟件，你甚至還可以生成像肉的質感，在實現價值方面存在無限的可能，實際上這是一個非常有用的過程。「友誼522」凝集了下落的形式，乍看起來或會令人驚訝。但它的形狀像友情一樣柔軟，蜜糖般的色彩喚起甜美的味道。有時候也像朋友一樣扭轉，至於「力量473」則以金色的動態形式呈現，它的陰影比模型更大，你可以詮釋為對力量的諷刺，明顯地重要的不是你是誰，而是人們如何看待你。
might be a balance between speculative and emotional motivations.

In order to obtain a real collective hierarchy of values, you would need a large population of people involved. Is this possible? I hope so. We keep developing the project in order to reach different sets of audiences. Many exhibitions planned around the world have been postponed or cancelled. In early 2022, VoV should have a solo exhibition in a large space in Hong Kong as an Osage Gallery initiative. There will be a trading room for the visitors to engage right away in the trading of values.

In the art world, people have just started talking about non-fungible tokens (NFTs) because one digital artist, Beeple, sold a piece for more than US$69 million at Christie’s in March. What do you think about this new economic model for digital art?

So far, NFTs represent only one new mode of distributing artworks. I think this new model does not go far enough: instead of the expected revolution in the art world, digital artists are now paying online platforms to display and sell their artworks, and these platforms merely replace what art galleries and auctions used to do. What is positive is that this crazy sale gave visibility to digital artworks and helped legitimise their value. Covid-19 and the popular rise of the blockchain contributed to this shift. For VoV, I try to push further the model: blockchain is not only a platform for direct trading of art, but can also be a medium that artists appropriate in order to address financial, ethical and political issues. The owners of VoV tokens are not only collectors, they are also artists and traders.

This is the third part: these owners can exchange or sell their tokens, but they can also reify the value they bought, for example by printing their shapes or even by modifying their original model. In parallel, you are producing your own models derived from the tokens. We come back to creative and tangible artforms. Being immaterial, made of pure data, VoV tokens can be considered as “seeds of art”.

They are grown out of an EEG-based DNA code: once you own BEAUTY 0678, for instance, you can create whatever artwork you wish from its genetic code. I recommend not to alter its original shape, created collectively in the Brain Factory, but to play with its display or its staging. After playing the curator in assessing the evolution of the shaped value, the brain worker or collector becomes also a creator. How to make sense out of a shape that may look abstract to the public? This sense is not only illustrating the value, but also expressing statements related to the value. The owner has total freedom of expression, interpretation and reification. Personally, I created a series of “twodees”, unique 2D autonomous works originating in my collection of VoV tokens. I wished to show the power of the forms that can be generated.

The shapes are very abstract. How do you differentiate FAME from COMPASSION, if not by their title? This is a form of post-symbolism. We used to search for forms that would embody meaning. Here, I reverse the
Paysage Kofy after Marcel Duchamp's Paysage Foutj, sperm on satin, signed R. Mutt. Courtesy Miben (Maurice Benayoun).
Studio

process: we search for meaning in given forms. I also play a lot with texture, colour and light. With today’s software, you can even produce meat-like textures, so there is an unlimited field of possibility when it comes to reifying a value. In fact, it is a very rewarding exercise. FRIENDSHIP 522 might seem at first glance surprising: an agglutination of falling forms. However, the shape is soft, like friendship, and its honey-like colour evokes a sweet taste. It is also sticky, just as, sometimes, friends can be. As for STRENGTH 473, it is a golden, dynamic form, whose shadow is bigger than its model. You can interpret this as an ironic representation of STRENGTH: apparently, it is not who you are that matters, but how people perceive who you are.

Collectors become artists, curators and traders, while economic and financial models invade the art world: you are indeed blurring all the usual benchmarks by which art is judged. Is this a way to push back the boundaries of art, or a kind of provocation? This is a reality that people need to acknowledge. Art as an object has already become an autonomous subject, able to perceive, adapt, react and express. Today, with the digital world, art is everywhere, deeply pervasive: it reaches all fields of human activity, all levels of human society. I wish to contribute to this mutation by conceiving artforms that are ubiquitous, catalytic and revealing. I also think that the categories that define today’s actors in the art world are not relevant any more. Curators have become artists; artists have become art critics and curators; critics are now art market designers; and spectators, through social networks, are now trendsetters. In the exhibition that we are preparing with Osage Art Foundation, I will add more virtual agents, often what we call artificial intelligence, who will also engage with the works: after the Virtual Poet converting effective trading into transactional poetry, The Reader will try to associate the shapes of the values with Chinese characters, an Interpreter will use these words to write philosophical or ethical statements, and, finally, a Scientist will generate in real time a Periodic Table of Values, reflecting the relative distribution of the values in private collections. In a next step, I would like collectors of VoVs to display their Face Values, a selection of their favourite values, as a new way to represent themselves. It might add some complexity to the market’s activities: buying and exchanging values anonymously is different: from doing it openly, as if, beyond focusing on what you invest in, you wished to show what you stand for.

You are mimicking the stock exchange and models of today’s cryptocurrency market. Does this mean you acknowledge the way they lead the world?

For me, the process that I call sublimation, which consists of converting the world into discrete units like shells, numbers, coins, words, letters, atoms and bits, contributes to a better understanding of the world. At the same time, it allows transactions and dialogue, analysis and measurement, abstraction and representation. The sublimation process converts everything into data, from the universe to its living beings, including their actions and their
收藏家變為藝術家、策展人和商人，而經濟和財政模式則入侵藝術世界，你確實在模糊所有判斷藝術的常規標準，這是一種推翻藝術界邊界的方式還是挑釁？

這是人們需要承認的現實。一貫為客體的藝術已成為一種自發的主體，能夠感知、適應、反應和表達，在現今數碼世界中藝術無處不在，它涉及人類各個活動領域和社會層面，我希望透過設計具滲透性、具有催化和啟發作用的藝術作來為這種突變作出貢獻。我亦認為現時人們對藝術界不同角色類別的定義已不再合時；策展人已變為藝術家，藝術家變為策展人和策展人，策展人變為藝術市場設計師，而觀眾亦透過社交網絡成為了帶領潮流的人。在我們與奧沙藝術基金一起籌備的展覽中，我會讓更多智能助理參與作品。在「虛擬詩人」將有效的買賣轉化成交易詩後，「讀者」會嘗試將價值的形狀與中文字體結合起來，然後「口譯員」會使用這些詞來寫出哲學或倫理字句，最後「科學家」會即時生成一個「價值觀週期表」，反映不同價值觀在私人收藏中的相對分佈。下一步我希望VoV的收藏家顯示他們的「面值」，即選擇他們最喜歡的價值觀作為表現自己的新方式，這過程可能將市場活動更加複雜，因為匿名購買和交換價值觀與公開交易不同，除了專注投資外，你還要向別人展示自己的理念。

你正在模仿現今加密貨幣市場的證券交易所和模型，這是否意味著你認同它們領導世界的方式？

對我而言，我認為「昇華」的過程可以令人更了解這個世界，包括將世界轉換成離散的單位，如黃金、數字、硬幣、單詞、字母、原子和位元等，同時亦允許交易和對話、分析和量化，以及抽象和表示。「昇華」過程可以將宇宙以至生命等的行為和思想等一切轉換為數據，這是其中一面，而另一方面則是具體化，其中思想和數據可以轉換成現實中的物件。「大腦工廠」就是專注於人類活動的這一方面。具體化的情念非常強大，由馬克思開發，盧卡奇和居伊·德波詮釋，可以解釋為將
thoughts. This is one side of the coin. The other is the reification, where thoughts and data can be converted into objects constituting our physical reality. The Brain Factory was focusing on this aspect of human activity. Developed by Karl Marx, and interpreted by György Lukács and Guy Debord, the concept of reification is very powerful. We could translate it as the commodification or even thingification of thought. If LOVE and SEX become something you can buy and sell, if COMPASSION and PEACE become commodities, you are not only addressing the power of money over any kind of other value, but you are also creating the possibility of observing finance making sense.

Transactions between POWER and PEACE, SEX and MONEY are measured in the same way as other stocks. When in June 2019 we launched Value of Values in Seoul, at Art Center Nabi, as an IVO, or Initial Value Offering, VoV tokens were produced and converted on the blockchain and traded right away. We never presented VoVs as cryptocurrency: they were born as NFTs. It is not a coin, as they are all different, and owning it means concretely owning a 3D model that you can use to duplicate, interpret, enlarge or print to make physical artworks. Banknotes are not officially convertible into gold any more; only the symbolic value remains. VoV are not the NFTs you’ve heard about recently. Demonstrating that you can use the blockchain as a certification of ownership detached from the good, allowing pure speculation, is not satisfying if this happens without considering the process as part of the sense of the work. Value of Values integrates the blockchain as a medium, and not only as a virtual white cube, a virtual art shop. The whole process interrogates the subjective stakes that lay between values, and the public-artist-curator-dealer production chain, in their relation to many other human activities coming straight from a human’s brain, like poetry, ethics, science, philosophy or fashion.

Marcel Duchamp is an important source of inspiration for you. Is that because he escaped all preconceived frameworks? Duchamp exemplifies the transitions that happened in the art field in the 20th century. He was an art dealer and a curator, but he is well known as an artist. As a kind of joke, I recently created a post on my website entitled www. elsavonfreytagloringhoven.com. This baroness [Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven] was the avant-garde artist working with recycled material, mostly plumbing, who probably created Duchamp’s famous Fountain – Duchamp mentioned it in a letter to his sister. However, historians seldom remember her. To me, this story shows how the artist Duchamp has become a curator-artist, a shift which is still operational today. In my post, I propose a reinterpretation of all Duchamp’s artworks signed by Richard Mutt, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven’s masculine pseudonym, a post-mortem appropriation closing the loop of the original appropriation by Duchamp.
思想轉換成商品或物件。如果「愛」和「性」變成可以買賣的物件，「同理」和「和平」成為了商品，那麼你不單提出了貨幣比任何其他價值觀強大，還令觀察財政變得更有意義。「權力」和「和平」、「性」和「金錢」之間的交易與其他股票相同。2019年6月我們在首爾納比藝術中心推出《價值的價值》作為初始價值產品時，VoV代幣已在區塊鏈上生產和轉讓並立即賣出。我們從沒有將VoV展示為加密貨幣，它們是NFT。它們不是硬幣，因為它們各不相同，有它表示你擁有一個可以複製、詮釋、放大或列印製作實體藝術品的3D模型，它們不再可以正式轉換為黃金，只有它的象徵價值仍然保留。但VoV不是你最近經常聽到的那種NFT，如果你沒有將整個過程視為作品意義的一部分，而只是單純炒作，那麼你的區塊鏈擁有權證明是沒有意義的。《價值的價值》將區塊鏈整合成一種媒介，不僅是個虛擬的白色立方體，還是間虛擬的藝術商店。整個過程會質疑價值觀與公共藝術家/策展人/商人的生產鏈之間的主觀利益，因為它們與大腦直接產生的許多其他人類活動（如詩歌、倫理、科學、哲學或時裝）有關。

杜象是你要重要的靈感來源，是否因為他脫離了所有先入為主的框架？

杜象代表了20世紀藝術領域的變化，他曾是個藝術品商人和策展人，但最為人所知是他的藝術家身份。話說回來我想起一件趣事，我最近在個人網站上張貼了一篇名為www.elsavon-freytagloringhoven.com的論文。這位男爵夫人Else von Freytag-Loringhoven是名前线藝術家，主要使用水管等可回收物料創作。參考杜象寫給姐姐的信中內容，他的名作《泉》或許是男爵夫人所創作，但歷史學家很少提及她。對我而言這個故事顯示了藝術家杜象成為策展人/藝術家的過程，這轉變至今仍然常見。在我的論文中，我重新詮釋了杜象所有署名為Richard Mutt（Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven的男性筆名）的作品，以擅自進行的事後調查結論因杜象而起的無能循環。