

Hall of Half-Life

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STEIRISCHER HERBST, GRAZ

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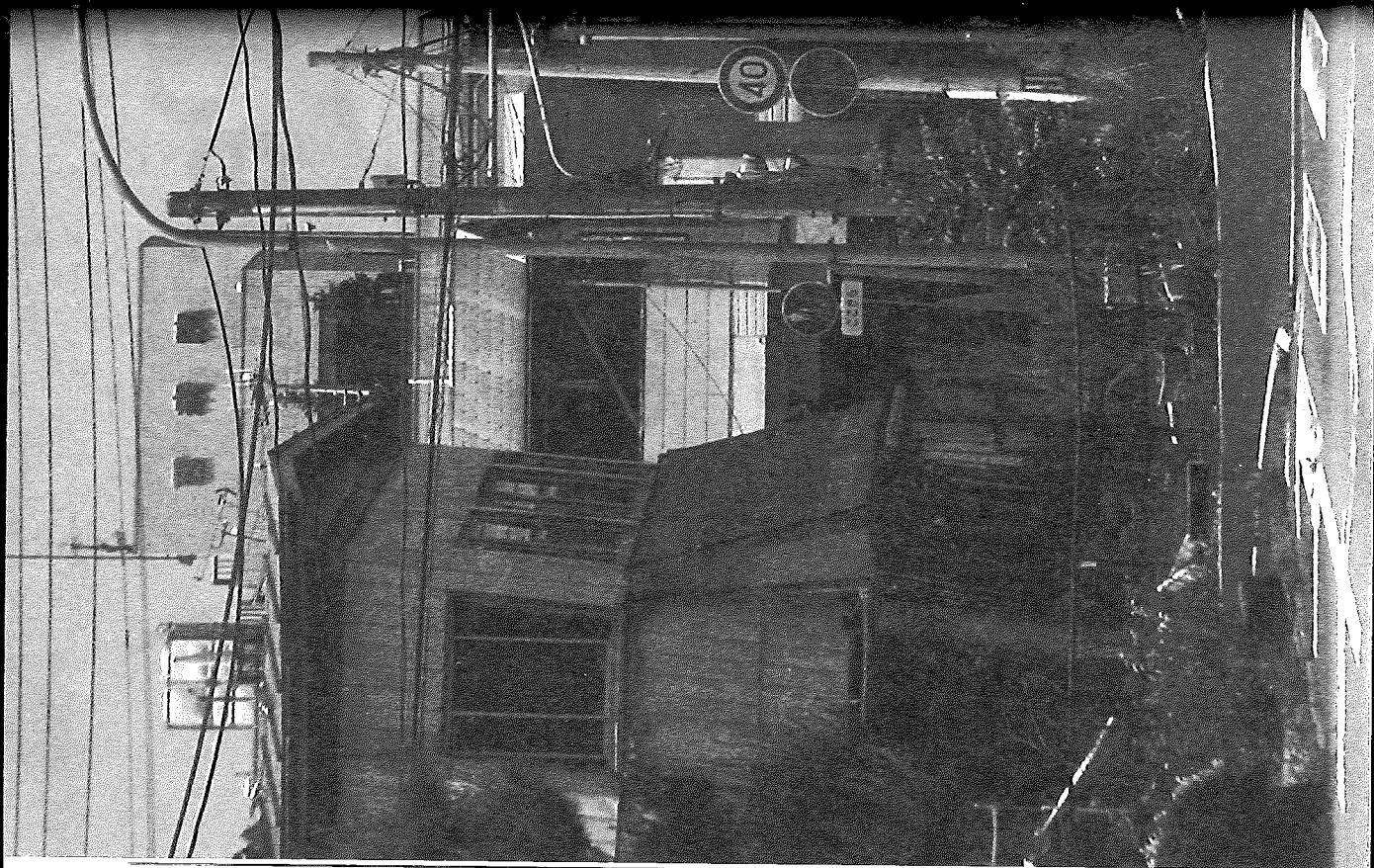
# Peter Galison & Robb Moss

Landscapes of Stopped Time, 2015  
Film installation  
GrazMuseum  
Commissioned by steirischer  
herbst 2015  
(film still detail over)

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The ancient Tsunami Stones of Japan are a haunting reminder of the way in which fundamental messages from humankind drift into obscurity over time, and with the evolution of language. In the wake of Japan's devastating 2011 earthquake, an enormous sea-borne wave crashed against shores and over high-water lines with terrifying speed and power. Many thousands of people were lost in that catastrophe, many more displaced. Encircling the island of Japan, the tsunami stones were set in place by ancient ancestors to warn future generations of the peril of building beneath the level of these markers. In some areas of the country the warning was heeded, the meaning of the now largely indecipherable markings passed on by the elders down through generations. In other areas their meaning was forgotten, grown over in the wild or disappeared entirely. The second catastrophe to hit Japan after the 2011 earthquake was the quake's impact on the water cooling towers of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. Without the fresh water to cool the reactor towers, the plant went into meltdown, releasing radioactive material into the atmosphere and environment, an action of still immeasurable consequence to the local, national and global communities and ecologies. The Fukushima meltdown and its immediate evacuation took place while Peter Galison and Robb Moss were researching and filming two other nuclear sites: the Savannah River nuclear weapons plant in South Carolina (USA) and the weapons waste burial site in Carlsbad, New Mexico. These three locations are together represented in the three monumental slabs that form the screens of their video installation for *Hall of Half-Life*.

*Landscapes of Stopped Time* takes us into one of humanity's most hypocritical relationships with time. It charts these three sites: the first of radioactive disaster; the second a clean-up zone of radioactive pollution; and the third, a long-term containment facility, a site called the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. The radioactive waste created as a result of nuclear weapons production, and later in enormous quantities by nuclear power plants, has never had a long-term strategy in place to contain it safely from the population and the environment. Time, in addressing this problem, takes on a whole new dimension. "The half-life of plutonium is 24,000 years. We consider something gone after 10 half-lives, so, 240,000 years," says Allison MacFarlane, Chair of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission 2012-14, in Galison & Moss' *Containment*, 2015. The WIPP site in Carlsbad, New Mexico, was selected as the destination for America's nuclear waste, in the hope that its natural properties of large salt deposits would help to isolate the waste from water and erosion.

The questions then arise: when conceiving of the safety of this planet into the vast future, what kinds of warning systems and markers might be needed to communicate the peril of what lies beneath? What kind of material could possibly endure across this depth of time? How can memory be enshrined in each generation? How can we protect the future inhabitants of the planet from a catastrophic exploration dig that could end life in their environment? These questions also strike at the core of contemporary art — how do objects,

gestures, monuments and ideas communicate?  
And how can we act with respect to a period of  
time we can barely conceive of?

(Peter Galison's text *The Half-Life of Story* in this  
book gives a detailed account of the historical and  
conceptual implications of this research).

# Mikhail Karikis

Children of Unquiet (2013 – 15)  
Sound installation  
Schloßberg (until 18 October) and  
GrazMuseum  
Commissioned by steirischer  
herbst 2015  
(site image over)