

**Co-creating Agency, Remaking Worlds:**

**Socially Engaged Participatory Art in Hong Kong and Taiwan**

Cheung Wai-ting Stephanie

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## Abstract

Focusing on socially engaged co-creative participatory art, this thesis expands international scholarship by chronicling exemplary cases from East Asia. In addition to offering contextualised exegeses of contemporary projects from Hong Kong and Taiwan between 2000 and 2018, the thesis responds to questions about the efficacy and democratic potential of participatory art by anchoring the study in the concepts of agency and world-making.

*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* (2009-2011) and *Woofers Ten* (2009-2014) demonstrated how co-creative participatory art can be a lens for understanding the city's multifaceted democratic movement in a critical period bracketed by the eventful years of 2009 and 2014, when a growing civil society exercised agency to tactically remake everyday worlds for transcending *realpolitik* to live in truth. In democratic Taiwan, *Textile Playing Workshop* (2000-2004) and *Papercut Field: Soulaugh Project* (2016-2017) furthered the democratic quest at personal and communal levels by engaging women to reclaim their subjectivity vis-à-vis repressive patriarchy and, against the grain of pervasive urbanisation/modernisation, assert the value of their rural habitat respectively. Methodologically, the surveyed examples provide an empirical ground for considering the “æffects”—a concept bridging the affect of art with the effect of activism—in socially engaged co-creative participatory art.

Besides examining the making of social engaged co-creative participatory art, the thesis also ruminates on its curating in a self-reflective account of three curatorial undertakings. A trilogy at the destined site of Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District (2011-2013) experimented with cultural democracy. *Tin Shui Collaborative* (2014) empowered grassroots resistance against disenfranchisement. *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* (2018) engaged locals to delve into pertinent issues of home and custodianship. Curatorial agency crafted spaces for reciprocally enriching creativity and “caring with,” a collective practice put forth in care ethics for redefining democracy.

Written in a context whose recent developments are not insular amidst rising authoritarianism in different parts of the world, this socially engaged art history encapsulates the potential of individual agency and world-making co-creativity in a reservoir of hope.

**Keywords:**

Socially engaged art, participatory art, co-creation, art activism, civil society, citizenship, democracy, Hong Kong, Taiwan

## Acknowledgements

When writing this thesis, sometimes Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's *Angelous Novus* came to mind, not so much for his comment on historicism, but as an evocative image. Eyes staring at a distancing past, his mouth wide open and wings spread, the angel of history "sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of its feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward."<sup>1</sup>

What this thesis historicises is not a catastrophe. Indeed, what it contemplates is much closer to a utopia. However, written at a time when a large part of this utopia has been apparently smashed, like the *Angelous Novus*, I felt the storm that drives us irresistibly to the future. The personae in the storm of this study, however, are not singular like the solitary angel. I am extremely grateful to the protagonists of this thesis for making near-utopian worlds and standing witness to these important chapters of history as they generously shared with me their memories, thoughts and archived mementos.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392-393.

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## Author's Note

As this thesis attempts to bridge knowledge from East Asia with an English language readership, its treatment of language is conscious of questions about identity and regionalised epistemologies.

Most obviously, with regard to local practices, Chinese names are translated with Cantonese (following a system of romanisation commonly used for names; not exactly Jyutping), Mandarin (Wade Gilles) and Putonghua (Pinyin) for Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China respectively. Following the Chinese convention, family names are placed before given names, which are hyphenated for easier identification. When a person is identified with an English name, typically in post-colonial Hong Kong, it is put before the family name. In the case of Japanese names, dovetailing their common translations in English, given names precede family names. This general principle gives way to personal preferences when the person involved habitually prints his/her name in another way.

To facilitate identification of names in their original languages, Chinese characters are supplemented when a name is introduced for the first time. This reader service is also performed for special terms, works of art/art projects, exhibitions, publications, names of places, colloquial words, etc. A glossary overviews these words in alphabetical order in Appendix III.

Traditional Chinese characters are used consistently, except for materials that are originally in simplified Chinese. The text is in British spelling, but American spelling is kept in quotations. Diacritics are preserved for words from foreign origins.

The thesis is informed by sources from a range of localities and disciplines. To give readers a sense of where each perspective comes from, when an author is first cited, his/her geographical base and discipline are mentioned as long as the qualification does not undesirably convolute the flow.

To avoid excessive repetitions, abbreviations such as *ibid* and *op. cit.* are used when sources are referred to for multiple times.

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## Introduction



Fig. i. Hongkongers illuminating the iconic Lion Rock with flashlights on 1 October, 2020  
(Photo source: *Apple Daily* 《蘋果日報》<sup>2</sup>)

### I. A Contextual Point of Departure

On three midsummer and autumn nights in 2019, an evocative image found its way to mass and social media around the world: daring hikers, unafraid of darkness and rugged relief, crowned a majestic mountain ridge with flash lights.<sup>3</sup> It took place at the primary context of this thesis, Hong Kong, whose recent developments pose as a backdrop. The galvanising trek first took place in August, 2019 when an estimate of 210,000 Hongkongers, following the precedent of the anti-Soviet “Baltic Way,” literally joined hands in a 60-km “human chain” all around the territory at the height of the months-long, city-wide Anti-Extradition Law

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<sup>2</sup> *Apple Daily*, a pro-democracy, tabloid-style newspaper in Hong Kong, ceased operation on 24 June, 2021 after multiple arrests of its staff for alleged infringement of the National Security Law. Both its website and online app were suspended overnight. Before archived contents turned irretrievable, there were voluntary efforts to back up these testimonies of a time. Materials cited in this thesis, gathered on earlier dates, inadvertently become part of this preservation.

<sup>3</sup> Compelling images and news about this loaded hike were circulated widely in mass and social media. Besides attracting local interests, it also made headlines in international news. See for example, *BBC News*, “Hong Kong’s Human Chain Protest,” 23 August, 2019, accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-china-49452988>; Jessie Yeung and Ivana Kottasova, “Hong Kong Protesters Form Human Chain,” *CNN*, 23 September, 2019, accessed 27 October, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/asia/live-news/hong-kong-chain-dle-intl-hnk/index.html>.

Amendment Bill Movement 逃犯條例修訂草案運動.<sup>4</sup> Atop the iconic Lion Rock, a symbol of the port city's unwavering spirit, shoulder-to-shoulder demonstrators embodied a pledged world where light—a central metaphor in the protests—shines over the city of 7.4 million. Less than a month later, the nocturnal hike was repeated at the Moon Festival when protestors reiterated their demands with mooncakes and lanterns held by young children.<sup>5</sup> The celebrative vibe took a drastic turn after hard-handed suppression. When fearless citizens attempted the rendezvous for the third time on a severely policed National Day, the climb was precluded by police officers who deemed it as an “unlawful assembly.”<sup>6</sup>

This inquiry to socially engaged co-creative participatory art situates itself in this immediate milieu. My research fermented in 2013, a year before steaming civil energies burst onto the scene in the spectacular 97-day Hong Kong Occupy in 2014. The gathered materials began to come together in 2019, when the aforementioned protest was in a deadlock, with an antagonistic strife tearing society irrecoverably apart. In 2020, days before I completed a first draft, a National Security Law was enforced overnight. Supporters welcomed it as a trump card to restore order; critics loathed it as a death knell: exercises of freedoms previously guaranteed by the Joint Declaration between Britain and China upon the former colony's return can now be criminalised as acts of treason, secession, sedition and subversion.<sup>7</sup> By the time when this study wrapped up in 2021, as the Hong Kong government celebrated “A Bright

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<sup>4</sup> Michelle Wong, Tony Cheung, Sum Lok-kei, and Victor Ting, “Demonstrators Offer Sparkling Visions of Unity as an Estimated 210,000 People Form 60km of Human Chains to Encircle City in ‘Hong Kong Way,’” *South China Morning Post*, 23 August, 2019, accessed 22 June, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024169/demonstrators-offer-sparkling-visions-unity-human-chains>. The Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, originally starting as protests against a proposed law amendment that made possible extradition from Hong Kong to Mainland China, eventually accelerated to citywide confrontations between protestors and the government over a range of issues, including the demand for universal suffrage.

<sup>5</sup> *Hong Kong Free Press*, “Hongkongers Light up City's Mountaintops with Protest Demands During Lantern Festival,” 14 September, 2019, accessed 22 September, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/09/14/hongkongers-light-citys-mountaintops-protest-demands-lantern-festival/>.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Wong, “Hong Kong Police Deploy to Mountaintop as Officer Claims Lion Rock Gathering Is ‘Unauthorised Assembly,’” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 2 October, 2019, accessed 22 September, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/10/02/hong-kong-police-deploy-to-mountaintop-as-officer-claims-lion-rock-gathering-is-unauthorised-assembly/>.

<sup>7</sup> For a concise summary of the Hong Kong National Security Law, see Grace Tsoi and Lam Chowi, “China's New Law: Why Is Hong Kong Worried?,” *BBC News*, 30 June, 2020, accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>.



future for Hong Kong’s Democratic Development,” news stories with titles such as “How Democracy Was Dismantled in Hong Kong” reflect an utterly different view.<sup>8</sup>

The image described at the beginning of this introduction is a synecdoche of this turbulent time. Against fatal ruggedness and perilous invisibility, its peaceful, imaginative and potent form transcends specific political events. Contemplating it at a fundamental and perhaps universal level, I saw it as a persistent visualisation of the subject of this inquiry: the co-creative agency and world-making capability of participation. Vis-à-vis oppressive circumstances, can socially engaged co-creative participatory art, like this co-created beacon, bring about agency for liberation and empowerment? In parallel to other forms of struggles, can these generative processes remake worlds—in imagination and in deeds? When *realpolitik* is disappointing, can art still inspire hope?

## II. Development of the Research

This research ends up responding to my home city’s current crisis. When it began, however, without foreseeing this state of emergency, my intent was to expand international scholarship on participatory art and survey a plurality of contemporary Chinese contexts, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> As I tried to gather materials from all four localities, I reckoned that the scope could never be covered in reasonable depth in one PhD study, and a narrower focus was necessary. Hong Kong, where I am based for most part of this study, is chosen for its immediacy. My professional capacity as a curator offers an insider’s grasp of my home city’s context and the endeavours of local artists and cultural workers. This

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<sup>8</sup> See Paul Chan Mo-po 陳茂波, “A Bright Future for Hong Kong’s Democratic Development,” News.gov.hk, Hong Kong SAR Government, 22 December, 2021, accessed 28 January, 2022, [https://www.news.gov.hk/chi/2021/12/20211222/20211222\\_141936\\_160.html](https://www.news.gov.hk/chi/2021/12/20211222/20211222_141936_160.html); Zen Soo and Huizhong Wu, “How Democracy Was Dismantled in Hong Kong in 2021,” *ABC News*, 30 December, 2021, accessed 28 January, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/democracy-dismantled-hong-kong-2021-81983491>.

<sup>9</sup> These “four cross-strait regions,” 兩岸四地 in Chinese, are often brought together in a vast range of comparative studies. They are also considered as part of “Greater China,” a more complicated concept which will be elaborated on in footnote 53. These four places, in addition to their geographical proximity, are also inextricably intertwined culturally and politically, despite having taken diverse historical paths.

positionality also underlines the inquiry with an urgency as I find myself among fellow practitioners interrogating critical issues on the public agenda, particularly those pertaining to democracy. While Hong Kong was my primary base, a detour was taken to Taiwan. During sojourns of residencies and field investigations, I managed to delve into exceptional cases revolving around the same set of fundamental questions, albeit in different manifestations. The two localities are joined together in an examination of participatory art as an emancipatory and empowering medium.

This line of argument has been a topic of debate among “international” scholars. “International” is put in parentheses for the obvious reason that the word does not necessarily encompass fair representations of all nations. Current scholarship on the subject, as elaborated on in the following sections, is largely dominated by Western Europe and North America, and materials from other regions are relatively scarce. Along the line of a general aim of regionalising knowledge, the objective of this research is to offer grounded perspectives from East Asia on the co-creative agency and world-making potential of socially engaged participatory art. Besides being specific with the socio-cultural sites of knowledge production, this study is also critically conscious of the need of greater specificity with the term “participatory art.” Participation in art can take multiple forms. My focus is on socially engaged co-creative projects in which participants play an active role in shaping the works. This generative process, as the thesis argues, is central to meaning-making and transformation.

The inquiry is not meant to be a comprehensive survey, but rather an interrogation of this strand of participatory practice through in-depth case studies. During my field work from 2013 to 2019, seven substantial undertakings from Hong Kong and Taiwan were chosen. They span from 2000 to 2018—roughly the first two decades of the twenty-first century. 2000 marks the year when socially engaged co-creative participatory art was first methodologically employed as a means of community empowerment in Taiwan, a forerunner of such practices in this region. The lingering presence of this classic project demonstrates its longitudinal reverberations. Examples in Hong Kong dated from 2009 to 2018—critical years for the city when “artivism” emerged as the civil society gained steam through continual struggles for

preserving the local on various fronts, before things took an irrecoverable turn in 2019. These examples offer an empirical ground for considering a series of questions: how does socially engaged co-creative participatory art catalyse transformations? How do people gain agency through co-creation? How do artists and participants revisit and reinvent the worlds around them? How do the creative processes interact with their contexts? How do local or regional social and cultural factors play a part?

When thinking about these questions, my epistemological angles shift between those of an art historian and a practitioner, and both perspectives will be included in the following chapters. Reflecting on socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a tactical medium against hegemonic oppression, the thesis gives a contextualised account of the subject as a people-centred form of democracy, beyond the institutional system of polls. Although it is not an emphasis of this study and is thus not addressed in detail, at the background of this history is a postcolonial impulse of people, once subjugated, rediscovering their autonomy and manifesting their will to define their worlds. In dialogue with a global discourse, writing history from the perspective of the very sites of these struggles serves the same cause.

### **III. Literature Review**

#### **III.i. Socially Engaged Participatory Art: Paradigm Change in an Age of Participation**

The existing Western Europe/North America-centric discourse on participatory art, despite its arguable validity for other contexts, is a point of departure for this study. To begin with, the very notion of “participatory art 參與式藝術” in Hong Kong and Taiwan owes its conception to an imported genealogy. A review of what “participatory art” signifies in this discourse is ground zero of this inquiry.

Like many other emergent practices, participatory art finds itself in a matrix of categories: interaction, dialogue, collaboration, cooperation, collectivity, etc.—sometimes referred to interchangeably. New York-based art historian and critic Claire Bishop, one of the most frequently cited writers on the subject, uses the term “participatory art” to refer to “post-studio

practices” emerging since the early 1990s, which she lists as “socially engaged art, community-based art, collaborative art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice.”<sup>10</sup> Bishop has chosen “participatory art” as a critical demarcator in rejection of the ambiguities of “social engagement,” and also to specify the involvement of people who “constitute the central artistic medium and material.”<sup>11</sup> Participatory art, as she defines it, transforms the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience:

[T]he artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable and commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*.<sup>12</sup>

These fundamental changes of what artists do, what makes a work and how beholders become participants are concurred upon by Stockholm-based critic and curator Maria Lind in her discussion of “The Collaborative Turn.” “Participation,” writes Lind, is “more widely associated with the creation of a context in which participants can take part in something that someone else has created but where there are, nonetheless, opportunities to have an impact.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of completing works of art for passive audiences, makers of participatory art craft generative situations for participants to have a share in meaning-making. By making tangible the sensory, emotional and ethical effects of artistic encounters and displaying outcomes of participants’ actions, participatory artworks can, according to British art historian Kathryn Brown, amplify the effect of individuals’ self-placement in constructed worlds of imagination.<sup>14</sup> This move from passive contemplation to active participation ushers in a

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<sup>10</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Maria Lind, “The Collaborative Turn,” in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, ed. Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog, 2007), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Brown, ed., *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 7.

paradigm shift, argues curator Rudolf Frieling as he surveys participation as a burgeoning trend: it “question[s] and transform[s] the fundamental condition of how modern art functions—namely, the radical separation of artists and their public.”<sup>15</sup>

This paradigm shift and its recognition of the creative potential of viewers’ or audiences’ participation is reminiscent of *The Open Work* (first published in Italian in 1962), a proto-theory of participatory art by the polymath Umberto Eco. Considering art, literature and musical pieces that are composed with a deliberate openness for completion by actively interpreting performers or audiences, Eco conceives the open work as a genre that replaces authorial determinacy with “perceptive ambiguities,” a concept he borrows from modern psychology and phenomenology:

[The audience] is no longer to see the work as an object which draws on given links and experience and which demands to be enjoyed; now he sees it as a potential mystery to be solved, a role to fulfil, a stimulus to quicken his imagination.<sup>16</sup>

Eco further argues that, as the open work gives room to “fresh dynamics of potentiality before the fixation process of habit and familiarity comes into play,” it “seek[s] to establish the new man’s inventive role.”<sup>17</sup> This inventive role of interpreters, echoed by “The Death of the Author” by Roland Barthes, is perhaps not exactly a privilege of “the new man.”<sup>18</sup> From the fantastic beasts that animated awe or fear in the caves of Lascaux to the unpainted voids in traditional Chinese landscapes for imaginative viewers to roam within, art could always have been “open” to mentally active interpreters. The inventive role of participants—not only as perceivers but also as creators—is however a contemporary phenomenon.

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<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Frieling, ed., *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Conconi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1977), 142-8.

In *Notes on Participatory Art*, Swedish artist Gustaf Almenberg (who claims that he is the first person to name this mode of practice at a solo exhibition in 1982), capitalises “Participatory Art” as an art movement “emblematic” of our “Age of Participation.”<sup>19</sup> Almenberg quotes catchy newspaper headlines—“Welcome to the Participation Age,” when “Participation is the latest watchword”—to contextualise our milieu with a transformed market structure in which consumers have become prosumers, as in the case of Firefox’s open-source development, not to mention user-driven Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other Web 2.0 media.<sup>20</sup> A shift to a “participatory culture” is also recognised by Belgian design researcher Liesbeth Huybrechts, who characterises this new paradigm with networks and wikis, novel frameworks for cultural production with lowered barriers for artistic production and civil engagement, stronger support for creating and sharing one’s creations, greater confidence in the value of one’s contributions and the feeling of a higher degree of social connection.<sup>21</sup>

There is reasonable consensus on participation as a new social dynamic in the contemporary world and a definitive quality of socially engaged art. When these attributes come together, participatory art is often socially engaged. However, participatory art and socially engaged art are not identical. While social engaged art revolves around artistic interrogations of social issues, participation is a method that can be employed to serve different causes. For instance, a number of historical participatory works, including Robert Morris’s classic *Bodyspacemotionthings* (1971), are discussed in a critical essay by curator Hilary Floe as explorations of play and participation, but hardly any of these examples can be considered socially engaged.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, socially engaged art also comes in various forms and

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<sup>19</sup> Gustaf Almenberg, *Notes on Participatory Art* (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2010), xi. Although the term “participatory art” is not exactly used, art emphasising participation were made and discussed at an earlier date. For example, *Popa at Moma: Pioneers of Part-Art—with “Part-Art” standing as a short for of participatory art—was presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in 1971*. See Hilary Floe, “Everything Was Getting Smashed’: Three Case Studies of Play and Participation, 1965–71,” *Tate Papers* No. 22 (Autumn 2014), accessed 28 January, 2022, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/everything-was-getting-smashed-three-case-studies-of-play-and-participation-1965-71>. In 1975, *Art, Action and Participation* (New York: New York University Press) was published by Frank Popper.

<sup>20</sup> Almenberg, 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Liesbeth Huybrechts et al., *Participation Is Risky: Approaches to Join Creative Processes* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Floe, *op. cit.*

does not necessarily need to be participatory. Many surveys of socially engaged art, such as veteran practitioner Pablo Helguera's general primer, include meaningful examples that are not participatory at all.<sup>23</sup> In this thesis, the subject of study is socially engaged participatory art, but the distinction between socially engaged art and participatory art is still essential for specifying the inquiry: it is not about socially engaged art or participatory art in general, but participatory art as a particular mode of practice in art's engagement with the social realm.<sup>24</sup>

### III.ii. Socially Engaged Participatory Art and Democratic Participation

A plethora of literature has addressed the democratic potential of participation, participatory art and citizens' engagement in public art. American urbanist Sherry Arnstein celebrates participation as a political process in her classic essay "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969): it redistributes power and enables "have-not" citizens, originally excluded from political and economic processes, to gain access to decision-making in the public sphere.<sup>25</sup> In the field of art, Marseille-based art historian Anna Dezeuze argues that "do-it-yourself artworks," her moniker for participatory art, "encourage individuals and groups to take control of their own social and political existence [...] by offering alternative models for social or political interaction, and by acting as means to empower participants."<sup>26</sup>

When artists and the public partner in socially engaged participatory art to challenge oppressive effects of the dominant ideological order, American art educator Charles R. Garoian pairs citizenship with public art in their situational commitment to affecting social, political and economic welfare.<sup>27</sup> In an essay titled "Performing Civic Cultures: Participatory

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<sup>23</sup> Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York, NY: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> "Social practice" is actually a preferred descriptor for the examples surveyed in this thesis for a reason explained on p. 15 of this introduction. The term "socially engaged art" is however used when referring to discussions on the subject by other writers, as an umbrella category for socially engaged artistic practices in general (described with a plurality of terms), and for "socially engaged participatory art" as particular field examined in this research.

<sup>25</sup> Sherry Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, 216-24.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Dezeuze, *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Charles R. Garoian, "Socially Engaged Art and Its Pedagogy of Citizenship," *Studies in Art Education* 60, no. 3 (2019): 168–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2019.1632601>.

Public Art and Its Publics,” cross-disciplinary researchers Laura Iannelli and Carolina M. Marelli reckon that, at the same time when the logic of participation democratises public art, artistic practices can also influence policy-makers by either denouncing them or supporting their improvement.<sup>28</sup> Civil engagement through participatory art is highly regarded by Australian art historian Holly Arden, who finds in these processes a game-changing possibility for alternative democratic participation—particularly at a time when common forms of democracy are critically scrutinised.<sup>29</sup>

French political philosopher Jacques Rancière disapproves of the ineffectuality of representative democracy and decries instrumental neoliberal politics for its debasement of the “public” into an “impossible” construct, “order[ed] into compliant non-existence.”<sup>30</sup> In *The Return of the Political*, Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe argues that liberal democracy is increasingly overshadowed by liberal democratic capitalism and limited to the rule of law, and risks driving the excluded to antiliberal populism.<sup>31</sup> In more specific terms, urbanists Jeffrey Hou and Sabine Knierbein attribute the dampening of democracy to vested interests of nation-states and colossal multinationals, which influence decisions affecting local communities behind closed doors.<sup>32</sup> A system of networked economic and political hegemony is constituted by this conjunct operation of the state and capital, and is dubbed “new authoritarianism” by human geographer Erik Swyngedouw and “Empire” by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.<sup>33</sup> As the two post-Marxist philosophers call for political rebuttal by a rising multitude, Mouffe sees the potential of “critical artistic practices” to foster “participation

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<sup>28</sup> Laura Iannelli and Carolina M. Marelli, “Performing Civic Cultures: Participatory Public Art and Its Publics,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (September 2019): 630–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877919849964>.

<sup>29</sup> Holly Arden, “Participatory Art and the Impossible Public,” *Art & the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (2014): 103–17.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 102; cited in Holly Arden, “Participatory Art and the Impossible Public,” *Art & the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (2014): 103–17.

<sup>31</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Hou and Sabine Knierbein, ed., *City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Shrinking Democracy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2008); Swyngedouw Erik, “Reconstructing Citizenship, the Re-Scaling of the State and the New Authoritarianism: Closing the Belgian Mines,” *Urban Studies* 33, no. 8 (1996): 1499–1521, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098966772>.



of a multiplicity of voices in the democratic agon, thereby helping to mobilize passions towards democratic objectives.”<sup>34</sup>

Along these lines, champions of the democratic potential of participatory art approach it as a medium for fostering active subjects, socio-political engagement and community empowerment. This tendency is exemplified by an interdisciplinary gathering exploring participatory, community-based and collaborative arts practices held at Concordia University in Montreal, with sponsorship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in 2012. The resultant compilation of papers demonstrates a common impulse to apply a medley of participatory, community-based and collaborative methods for social goals.<sup>35</sup> In the foreword, art educator Rita L. Irwin cites Bishop:

According to Clare Bishop (2006), contemporary artists (since the 1960s) who have embraced collaborative creativity have focused on three concerns: activation, authorship, and community. Activation is the “desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation.” Authorship is concerned with egalitarian or democratic authorial engagement that emerges from or creates a non-hierarchical model of socialisation. Community responds to a human need for collective responsibility and when the arts are involved calls for “a restoration of the social bond through collective elaboration of meaning.”<sup>36</sup>

As much as Bishop is frequently cited, her discussion on participatory art, as referenced in a later part of this literature review, is known to be critical. The above citation is, however, unreservedly affirmative of collaborative creativity as a means of egalitarian empowerment,

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<sup>34</sup> Mouffe, “Right-Wing Populism: The Mistakes of the Moralistic Response,” in *Populism: The Reader*, ed. Lars Bang Larsen, Atelien van Lieshout, and Šiuolaikinio Meno Centras (New York, NY: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 68.

<sup>35</sup> Diane Conrad and Anita Sinner, ed., *Creating Together: Participatory, Community-Based, and Collaborative Arts Practices and Scholarship Across Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Rita L. Irwin, “Foreword, Middle, and Lingering Afterword,” in *Creating Together: Participatory, Community-Based, and Collaborative Arts Practices and Scholarship across Canada*, ed. Diane Conrad and Anita Sinner (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), viii. The citation is a paraphrase from Bishop, ed., *Participation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 12.

restoration and social bonding. This partiality is in sync with the generally positive attitude shared in the book's other essays, which unanimously celebrate such practices as conducive to serving community agenda.

The efficacy of participatory art is not uncontested. Back in 1969, critic and curator British Guy Brett alerted readers of the use of participation as a fashionable gimmick: "participants" were actually spectators, and their mechanical contribution through enactment of pre-conceived effects were entirely arbitrary and incapable of generating relationships.<sup>37</sup> In "Forms of Participation in Art," German philosopher and art historian Juliane Rebentisch cites writer Diedrich Diederichsen who discusses a "terror of surrogate-democratic participation" overshadowing active consumers and forced networkers in today's world of leisure, service and cultural work. "A new term is long overdue: participation is the new spectacle".<sup>38</sup>

Dezeuze, despite her enthusiasm, is also aware of historical antecedents when participation was used to serve exactly what it was supposed to subvert. For instance, a line of conjugations on a poster during the May 1968 uprisings—"*Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent*" (I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate, they profit)—critiques the abuse of participation in the aggressive expansion of consumerism. Ironically, this very poster was subsequently used for mobilising city planning in America. Using Arnstein's vocabulary, Dezeuze deems this as merely an "exercise of manipulation" and "tokenism," instead of a manifestation of true "citizen power" with real partnerships, delegated power and genuine citizen control.<sup>39</sup> In a similar line of thought, critic and theorist Boris Groys points out a fundamental problem: even though participatory art puts viewers in a more active position, they are indeed controlled in another way. As the audience forgoes an autonomous, external position, they are absorbed by the work. In a way, the opening of the work is nonetheless an extension of authorial power.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Guy Brett, *Helio Oiticica* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1969), n.p.

<sup>38</sup> Diedrich Diederichsen cited in Juliane Rebentisch, "Forms of Participation in Art," trans. Daniel Hendrickson, *Qui Parle* 23, no. 2 (2015): 34.

<sup>39</sup> Dezeuze, 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Boris Groys, "A Genealogy of Participatory Art"; Rudolf Frieling, ed., *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 23.

Bishop, one of the sternest critics of participatory art, concludes an anthology with a questioning endnote by Hal Foster, who expresses his mistrust towards a “shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society,” and sees the promiscuity of sociability as a “pale, part-time substitute” for its lack in other spheres of life. His suspicion is that relational works as such “might be ‘sucked up’ in a ‘post-critical’ culture.”<sup>41</sup> Bishop shares Foster’s misgivings in her own critique of Nicolas Bourriaud’s theory of relational aesthetics. “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” raises incisive questions about relational and participatory works. Reviewing Bourriaud’s examples, she queries the rhetoric of democracy in microtopic harmony and argues that in a truly democratic society, conflicts are sustained but not erased.<sup>42</sup> Later, in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, she goes on to critique the tendency of governing participatory practice with ethical criteria, compassionate identification with the people and consensual collaboration, and is wary that the well-intended conviviality in many participatory works risks becoming “a new kind of repressive norm.”<sup>43</sup>

Bishop’s scepticism is countered by those who are more positive about such practices, most notably California-based art historian Grant H. Kester.<sup>44</sup> With reference to an emergent eagerness to interact with participants among a younger generation of artists in the 1990s, Kester finds in participatory, dialogical, collaborative and socially engaged art an openness that departs significantly from earlier avant-gardism. As a “context provider” instead of a “content provider” (similar to Lind’s formulation), the artist catalyses collaborative encounters and conversations.<sup>45</sup> Kester argues that such processes are not necessarily “a new kind of repressive norm.” Rather, artists and participants all have the autonomy to negotiate and the results of their collaboration can be no less radical than antagonistic art.

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<sup>41</sup> Hal Foster, “Arty Party,” *London Review of Books*, 4 December, 2004, 21-2; reprinted as “Chat Rooms” in *Participation*, 190-195.

<sup>42</sup> Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October*, No. 111, Fall 2004, 51-79.

<sup>43</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Kester, xvi, 1, 12.

### III.iii. In Specific Terms: Co-creation in Situated Projects

The debate revolving around participation, relational art, dialogical practices and social engagement, epitomised by the disagreement between Bishop and Kester, is insightfully deconstructed by Finnish art historian Kaija Kaitavuori in her book *The Participator in Contemporary Art*. Kaitavuori observes that, to begin with, the contenders are standing at different positions that favour particular forms of practice and ideologies. On top of that, the kinds of “participatory art” they are referring to are actually not quite the same. “Participatory art” is not an analytical term but a descriptive label that covers art practices with diverse aims and methods.

Kaitavuori demarcates various forms of participatory art in a distinct typology regarding the roles of people who take part: passive “targets”, reactive “users”, embodying “materials” and decisive “co-creators”. In Kaitavuori’s categorisation, what Kester champions is engagement of “co-creators”, while Bishop examines the involvement of people as “materials”. The antagonism preferred by the latter and the collaboration celebrated by the former are not necessarily contradictory, for they operate on different planes. Moreover, Bishop’s interest lies largely on how critical works are to be perceived by a discerning audience. Kester, however, is concerned about the making of these works as affective experiences for those who take part.<sup>46</sup>

Regardless of its forms, participation per se does not bring about any definite outcomes. Berlin-based architect/writer Markus Miessen sees the hype of presumptuous participation as a “nightmare.” In *The Nightmare of Participation*, he comments that participation has become a “radical chic” and is made use of by politicians who capitalise on it as a self-sufficient tool of criticality, regardless of the actual content that is to be generated.<sup>47</sup> He clears up the matter: “On the meta-level of the tool or modus operandi itself, participation is not a particular quality;

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<sup>46</sup> Kaija Kaitavuori, *The Participator in Contemporary Art: Art and Social Relationships* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 15-70.

<sup>47</sup> Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2010), 44.

nor does it mean anything.”<sup>48</sup> To achieve substantial impact with this neutral tool, he stresses that one must confront underlying motives through contextualised practice, and move towards direct and personal engagement and stimulation of specific future realities.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, Free Art Collective, sometimes employing DIY and participatory methods in their socially engaged art practice, also make it clear that “[w]e understand that participation is not a value in itself, but something that depends on the value and content of the project in which the participation takes place.”<sup>50</sup> The collective came up with the notion of “actants”—active participants as drivers of a transformed apparatus for an emergent form of participatory practice.<sup>51</sup>

This study examines the efficacy of socially engaged co-creative participatory art by buttressing analyses in situated practices, in which artists and “actants” joined hands to negotiate present and possible worlds. Reference is made to specific empirical examples, understood not as “works” but rather “projects”. Bishop historicises the notion of “projects”. Connoting an “open-ended, post-studio, research-based social process, extending over time and mutable in form,” the category has emerged in the 1990s as opposed to finite “works of art.”<sup>52</sup> Socially engaged art projects, often not fixated with conventional notions and methods, are more aptly described as “social practice,” a term emphasising socially engaged artistic *practice* instead of the institution of art.<sup>53</sup> Through creation of situations and activation of actants, socially engaged co-creative participatory art projects surveyed in this study inspire imagination and action for realities beyond existing confines.

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<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. cit.*, 242, 251.

<sup>50</sup> Free Art Collective, “Impossible Participation,” in *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice*, ed. Kathryn Brown (London and New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 258. Free Art Collective (2005-2018, now disbanded) was made up of British artists/scholars Andy Hewitt, Mel Jordan and Dave Beech. Their works interrogated public culture with an expanded approach to publishing.

<sup>51</sup> *Op. cit.*, 260.

<sup>52</sup> Bishop, “Performative Exhibitions: The Problem of Open-Endedness,” in *Cultures of the Curatorial: Timing—On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (Berlin: Sternberg, 2014), 240.

<sup>53</sup> The term “social practice” was first institutionalised by the Social Practice MFA programme at the California College of Arts in 2005. It has thus been adopted by practitioners and writers to stress a conscious distancing from the ideological constructs of art. See Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 3.

### III.iv. Regionalising Knowledge: Perspectives from East Asia<sup>54</sup>

As noted previously, the current discourse on participatory art is heavily influenced by Western European and North American perspectives. In *Artificial Hells*, Bishop attempts to redress this regional domination of by surveying Eastern Europe and South America. Efforts to expand the geographical and cultural scopes of the discourse have become visible over the past decade. For instance, in her proposition of participatory art as a “gesture” linked to broader issues of citizenship and collective action, Dutch performance scholar Sruti Bala buttresses her theory in practices across Europe, Central America, the Middle East, Africa as well as Asia (in particular, India).<sup>55</sup> *Forces of Art: Perspectives from a Changing World* is an ambitious research on thirty-nine “majority world countries” (a term to replace “third world countries”) where collaborative social practice advanced civil society.<sup>56</sup> Noting the importance of understanding in context, *Art in Context: Learning from the Field*, edited by cross-cultural art researchers Susanne Bosch and Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio, covers diverse practices in a wide range of localities—Myanmar, Japan, Germany, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong and China—through conversations with local practitioners.<sup>57</sup> Probing into Hong Kong and Taiwan as specific East Asian contexts, this research finds itself among these emergent endeavours to push the regional and cultural frontier of the global discourse of participatory art.

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<sup>54</sup> Naming of localities related to this research is a difficult matter. Specifically, this study focuses on Hong Kong and Taiwan. These two Chinese-speaking places supposedly fall within what is called “Greater China,” whose scope of reference ranges from a narrow demarcation of the “four cross-strait regions” to a broad identity of Chinese people, including diasporic communities having taken roots in places all around the world. See Harry Harding, “The Concept of ‘Greater China’: Themes, Variations and Reservations,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 136, 1993: 223-50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S030574100003229X>.

In most instances in this thesis, Hong Kong and Taiwan are mostly referred to as singular localities, whereas “East Asia” is used as a regional umbrella covering the two places. For references to literature “in the region,” Chinese and English materials from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China are included. While a handful of translated texts of Japanese origin inform the thesis theoretically, untranslated literature in other East Asian languages (such as Japanese and Korean) are beyond the scope of this survey.

<sup>55</sup> Sruti Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Carin Kuoni et al., ed., *Forces of Art: Perspectives from a Changing World* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Susanne Bosch and Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio, ed., *Art in Context: Learning from the Field—Conversations with and Between Art and Cultural Practitioners* (Berlin: Goethe-Institut, 2017).

In East Asia, the imminent need to localise knowledge is acknowledged by scholars in cultural studies. Knowledge production, according to Taiwanese cultural theorist Chen Kuan-hsing 陳光興, is a major site where imperialism operates and exercises its power. The automatic reference to European antecedents in scholarship in non-European localities, and the lack of reciprocal knowledge, are symptomatic of an imperial discursive structure which positions Europe as the “home of the modern.” Chen thinks that this inequality must be rectified and puts forth a deimperialising proposition of “Asia as method.” Asia societies are to be used as one another’s point of reference: through examining their diverse historical experiences and rich social practices, societies previously subject to imperialism may be able to arrive at transformed understanding of the self.<sup>58</sup> In a less elaborate thesis, Hong Kong cultural critic Ma Kwok-ming 馬國明 also makes a point about new epistemological approaches as a “local discourse” fermented in the postcolonial city. As Chen calls for comparative studies, Ma argues that untranslated, colloquial “primary perception” is essential in authentic manifestation of the local.<sup>59</sup>

Put together, the “local” of Hong Kong and Taiwan also carries another layer of significance. In *The Art of Modern China*, American art historians Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen 沈揆一, reputed specialists in modern Chinese art, approached Hong Kong and Taiwan as “Alternative Chinas.”<sup>60</sup> Paying attention to the two localities’ colonial histories, their independent developments from Mainland China in the 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their close relationship to Europe and America, Andrews and Shen argue that the art of Hong Kong and Taiwan manifests unique psychologies and identities that pose as a counterpoint to a modern Chinese art history focusing only on the Mainland. There are however nuanced ties

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<sup>58</sup> Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 211, 212, 219.

<sup>59</sup> Ma Kwok-ming, “Hong Kong’s ‘Local’ and ‘Local Discourse’” 〈香港的「本土性」和「本土論述」〉, *Inmedia Hong Kong* 《香港獨立媒體》, 10 July, 2013, accessed 27 August, 2022, <http://www.inmediahk.net/node/1017271>.

<sup>60</sup> Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 225-255.

amidst distinctions: the two localities have played important roles in the modernisation of China's art world as the country gradually reopened in the 1980s, and as artists from diverse Chinese communities turned towards the global after the 1990s, they began to share the same space.<sup>61</sup>

While Andrews and Shen's survey focuses on modern art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their observation on the distinction and connection between Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China is particularly interesting for considering socially engaged participatory art, even though this emergent practice is not covered in their study. In the context of this inquiry, this pertains to the socio-political conditions, cultural identities and civil psyches of these places. Vis-à-vis a clearly undemocratic People's Republic of China, borderline Hong Kong and democratic Taiwan are in a position where civil participation stands a different chance. Like what Andrews and Shen suggest for Chinese modern art, socially engaged participatory art in Hong Kong and Taiwan is also a bridge to approach "Alternative Chinas" and two localities can cast light on broader developments in various Chinese contexts.

To begin this discussion on how socially engaged participatory art is understood in a Chinese context, an important point to note is a commonplace conflation of terms in Chinese, across the strait in both Mainland China and Taiwan. Because the term "參與式藝術" is at the same time used as a translation of the imported notions of "participatory art" and "engaged art," oftentimes it is used for both participatory art and socially engaged art 社會參與式藝術 without clear differentiation, especially when the qualifier "socially 社會" is omitted.<sup>62</sup> (In

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<sup>62</sup> See for example Zhou Yanhua, "Keywords of Social Engagement Art" 〈參與式藝術的關鍵詞〉, *Yishu Dangdai* 《藝術當代》, no. 1 (2017): 24-27; Li Zhu, "Practice of Engaged Arts in Contemporary China: The Reality Scene Can't Be Defined" 〈當代藝術的參與式實踐：無法定義的現實圖景〉, *Yishu Dangdai* 《藝術當代》, no. 2 (2017): 28-31; Lu Pei-yi, "'Social Engagement' in the Context of Taiwan" 〈「社會參與」藝術在中國台灣地區的發展脈絡〉, *Journal of Arts Management* 《藝術管理》, no. 3 (2019): 86-99; Hsieh Pei-jun 謝佩君, "Five Keywords of Engaged Art 〈五個關鍵詞 解碼「參與式藝術」〉," *PAR* 《表演藝術雜誌》, no. 308 (August 2018): 53-55.

There is however critical awareness to meaningfully differentiate the terms. For instance, Taiwanese veteran socially engaged artist Wu Mali, whose projects will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, coined the term "art as social interaction 與社會交往的藝術" to cover a range of



Hong Kong, where a mix of Chinese and English is used because of the city's colonial history, the confusion is less common.) The conceptual distinction between the two terms was explained earlier, so even though the same Chinese term is used in the reviewed literature, a differentiation is maintained in the following discussion. However, this linguistic jumble of participatory art and socially engaged art underlines that in this part of the world, participation is seen as an integral feature of socially engaged art, and social engagement an expected motive of participation.

Participatory art, with its ambivalent meanings, has emerged as a subject of interest in contemporary Chinese art. In 2014, the 8<sup>th</sup> Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, curated by Taipei-based art historian and critic Lu Pei-yi 吕佩怡 and then Tate Modern's convenor of public programmes Marko Daniel (whose specialties include contemporary Chinese art), was titled *We Have Never Participated* 《我們從未參與》. Not really focusing on local works, the exhibition nonetheless exemplifies ruminations on the problematics of participation in the area. The negation of "We Have Never Participated" is noted in a review by contemporary art historian Lu Mingjun 魯明軍 as a response to "the crises encountered by participatory art of the present."<sup>63</sup> The exhibition's highlight on works that deal with personal-public relations in forms that are not outwardly participatory is seen by Lu as a reaction to the systematisation and capitalisation of participation.

Somehow ringing a note of disagreement, the Art Museum of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts featured a selection of socially engaged and participatory projects in the exhibition *Capillaries of the Field: 2016 Exhibition of Art Institutions from the Pearl River Delta* 《場域的毛細管——珠三角藝術單位觀察展》. While acknowledging the marginal and contested position of such practices, curator Hu Bin 胡斌 argues that they are like capillaries, capable

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possible relations when art approaches society. See Wu, *Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong\Taiwan Exchange* (Taipei: Association of the Visual Arts in Taiwan, 2015), 18.

<sup>63</sup> Lu Mingjun, "We Have Never Participated: The 8<sup>th</sup> Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale" 〈我們從未參與：第八屆深圳雕塑雙年展〉, *Leap*, 5 September, 2014, accessed 15 April, 2017, <http://www.leapleap.com/2014/09/we-have-never-participated-the-8th-shenzhen-sculpture-biennale/>.

of generating unexpected in-situ effects and casting new light on our understanding of the region.<sup>64</sup> In an unreservedly affirmative tone, Zhou Yanhua 周彥華, a Chinese exponent of socially engaged participatory art, credits it for making possible democratic expression despite constraints in the authoritarian state.<sup>65</sup>

Concluding *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art*, Taiwanese art historian Tung Wei-hsiu 董維秀 highlights the significance of the “participatory turn”: in co-authorship, the audience assumes the role of civil-minded art activists; in a bottom-up way, they make their voices heard through art, express ideas and reconstruct society. In an East Asian context, Tung argues that, as the Confucian legacy of socially responsible literati-artists morphs into the criticality of citizen-artists, such forms of practice demonstrate a culturally specific impetus.<sup>66</sup>

Attention to socially engaged participatory art, as an emergent form of practice, is on the rise in the area. Researchers such as Lu, Zhou, Tung, Li Zhu 李竹, Ren Hai 任海, Chen Xiaoyang 陳曉陽, Meiqin Wang 王美欽, Minna Valjakka, Mai Corlin, Phoebe Wong 黃小燕, etc., as well as artist/scholars Wu Mali 吳瑪俐, Kao Jun-honn 高俊宏, Zheng Bo 鄭波, among others, have published on specific cases (with various degrees of detail) of socially engaged art in the region, offering, in Chen’s words, new understanding of the self and reciprocal knowledge to international scholarship.<sup>67</sup> Participation as a particular mode of practice, however, is not

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<sup>64</sup> Hu Bin, Curatorial Note on *Capillaries of the Field: 2016 Exhibition of Art Institutions from the Pearl River Delta* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Zhou, “Keywords of Social Engagement Art.”

<sup>66</sup> Tung Wei-hsiu, *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art* 《美學逆襲：當代藝術的社會實踐》 (Taipei: Artist Publishing Co., 2019), 161-162. Tung’s opinion on the Confucian legacy, as a culturally specific counterpoint to “Western social artists and critical pedagogy,” is reiterated in a more recent publication, “Environmental Aesthetics in Taiwan: Revival Through Socially Engaged Public Art Practice and Creative Placemaking,” in *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, ed. Meiqin Wang (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2022), 143.

<sup>67</sup> For discussion on socially engaged art in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, see for example Lu, “Towards ‘Art/Society’: Study on Socially Engaged Art Practices,” A Research for the National Culture and Arts Foundation, 2015; Tung, “When Social Practice Art Overcomes Globalisation: Attending to Environment and Locality in Taiwan,” *Culture and Dialogue* 6, no. 2, 2018: 223–50, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683949-12340052>; *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art*; “Truth and the Power of Change: Socially Engaged Art in Taiwan” 〈真實與改變的力量：社會參與性藝術創作在台灣〉, *Bishan* 《碧山》 11 (2019): 189-200;

always considered critically and the specific subject of socially engaged participatory art is yet to be sufficiently covered by focused studies in the region.

Incipient literature is notably indebted to Euro-American histories and theories. For instance, an article discussing participatory art as a turn from disinterested practice to social engagement was published by Tung in *Journal of Performing and Visual Arts Studies* 《藝術研究學報》 in 2013. The article heavily references the Western European trajectory—from the self-reflexivity of modernism to Beuys’s social sculpture, Lacy’s new genre public art, Kester’s conversational art, Bourriaud’s relation aesthetics, etc. A concise overview of Taiwanese artists’ involvements in communities, as promoted by cultural policy in the 1990s, is supplemented with an elaboration on developments in the United Kingdom in the 1970s.<sup>68</sup>

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Li Zhu, “Practice of Engaged Arts in Contemporary China: The Reality Scene Can’t Be Defined” 《當代藝術的參與式實踐：無法定義的現實圖景》, *Yishu Dangdai* 《藝術當代》, 2 (2017): 28–31; Ren Hai 任海, “Generative Aesthetics in Contemporary Art: Socially Engaged Art as a Mode of Cognition in Everyday Life 〈當代藝術的生成式審美——作為認識日常生活世界模式的社會參與式藝術〉”, *Xuexi yu Tansuo* 《學習與探索》, no. 7 (2017): 159–67, 176; Chen Xiaoyang 陳曉陽, “A New Realism: The Entry and Exit of Socially Engaged Art 〈一種新現實主義：社會參與式藝術的進路與出路〉”, *Meishu GuanCha* 《美術觀察》, no. 12 (2017): 23–25; Zhou, “Socially Engaged Art and the Affects of Chinese Rural Community: A Case Study of ‘Someone Nearby,’” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 5, no. 2–3 (2018): 215–31, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca.5.2-3.215\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca.5.2-3.215_1); Wang, “Place-Making for the People: Socially Engaged Art in Rural China,” *China Information* 32, no. 2 (July 2018): 244–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X17749433>; Minna Valjakka and Wang, ed., *Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); *Socially Engaged Art in Contemporary China: Voices from Below* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); Mai Corlin, *The Bishan Commune and the Practice of Socially Engaged Art in Rural China* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020); Phoebe Wong, “Community Turn: Social Practice in Hong Kong Art,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2015* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2015), 86–103; Wu, *Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong/Taiwan Exchange*; Kao Jun-Honn, *The Multitude: Occupy Movements of East Asian Art* 《諸眾：東亞藝術佔領行動》 (Taipei: Walkers Cultural Enterprises, 2015); Zheng Bo, “Creating Publicness: From the Stars Event to Recent Socially Engaged Art.” *Yishu* 9, no. 5 (October 2010): 71–85; “An Interview with Wu Mali (2016),” *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 151–64, <http://field-journal.com/issue-3/an-interview-with-wu-mali>, accessed 10 April, 2020; “Playing Cool Under the Iron Ceiling: The Current State of Socially Engaged Art in Mainland China,” *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 12 (2019), <http://field-journal.com/issue-12/far-east-and-australia/playing-cool-under-the-iron-ceiling-the-current-state-of-socially-engaged-art-in-mainland-china>, accessed 22 October, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Tung, “Art Intervention into the Community: A Socially Engaged Aesthetics and Art Practice” 《藝術介入社群：社會參與式的美學與藝術實踐》, *Journal of Performing and Visual Arts Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 27–38. The aforementioned conflation of “socially engaged art” and “participatory art” is also visible in this article. As its translated title refers to “socially engaged aesthetics,” audience/communities’ participation is rather central to the discussion. In the body text, “engagement” is put as an English reference for both the concepts of “參與 participation” and “社會介入 social intervention,” and “參與性的藝術創作 (participatory art)” is followed by “Engaged Art; Participatory Art” in parentheses.

While informatively summarising historical developments, it also demonstrates an initial lack of developed regional studies, not to mention reciprocal knowledge as Chen prescribed.

A similar tendency is also observed in a dedicated issue of *Modern Art* 《現代美術》, a quarterly published by the National Taipei Fine Arts Museum on the occasion of a large retrospective of the diasporic artist Lee Ming-wei 李明維. For instance, when discussing the paradigm shift from art for art's sake to the generation of inter-subjective relations, Cheng Lin-chia's 鄭林佳 refers to Western European and North American antecedents such as Dada, new genre public art, social sculpture and connective aesthetics. Her illustrations are primarily the works of Lacy. For domestic examples, only the works of Lee Ming-wei and Wu Mali are sketchily mentioned.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, an article addressing the “current state” of participatory art by Cheng Hui-wen 鄭惠文 is also indebted to overseas references. Relational aesthetics, new genre public art, dialogical art, social sculpture, the Situationists, etc. are once again brought up in her argument on participatory art as a form of creative network. After discussions on the work of art collectives in Bangladesh and Indonesia, the example for Taiwan is g0v.tw 零時政府, a group of coders who intervene with computer programming.<sup>70</sup>

Over the past few years, however, more focused local case studies have appeared. For instance, although not exactly addressing participatory art, a 2020 publication by Tung examines how local communities in a marginalised Taiwanese locale were empowered through involvement in a transformative art project.<sup>71</sup> Also based on local examples, a few recent Master's theses

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<sup>69</sup> Cheng Lin-chia, “When Audience Participation Becomes an Artistic Practice: On the Development of Participatory Art” 〈當「觀眾參與」成為藝術實踐：淺析「參與式藝術創作」的發展與流變〉, *Modern Art*, no. 177, 2015, 42-51.

<sup>70</sup> Cheng Hui-wen, “Sharing as Participation: The Current State of Spontaneous Participatory Art in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Taiwan” 〈分享即參與：孟加拉、印尼、台灣自發性參與式藝術的現在進行式〉, *Modern Art*, no. 177, 2015, 52-61.

<sup>71</sup> Tung, “From Social Art Practice to Environmental Aesthetic Awakening and Civil Engagement: The Case Study of *Cijin Kitchen*,” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 7, no. 2-3 (2020): 307-24, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca\\_00031\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca_00031_1).

from Taiwan pinpoint “participatory art” as their subject of inquiry.<sup>72</sup> These emerging efforts suggest growing academic interests in filling this relative paucity of situated analyses.

Although Mainland China is not within the scope of this research, a number of in-depth case studies are worth noting here for the writers’ comments on the unique potential of socially engaged participatory art in the context of a repressive society. Shanghai-based American art historian Julie Chun reckons that, in China where expressions and contestations in the streets are strictly restrained, socially engaged participatory art opens a conduit to bring art to the public and reconfigure space as sites of exchange and participation.<sup>73</sup>

Another relatively elaborate discussion on participation is the case of Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society 定海橋互助社, appraised by Zhou who argues that the project’s “mass line” approach can be associated with a Communist legacy. In post-socialist China, Zhou argues that reviving a socialist understanding of participation “reterritorializes the conventional thinking of participation in the public” and probes into new social orders.<sup>74</sup> In a further investigation of Yangdeng Art Cooperatives 羊燈藝術合作社, started by a group of young artists in a rural village in southwest China, Zhou notes how the visibly depoliticised generation reinvented the historical socialist mobilisation of artists to rural areas and explored identity with villagers

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<sup>72</sup> See for example Chu Hsiao-chi 朱筱琪, “The Practice and Reflection of a Participatory Art Project” 〈參與式藝術行動計畫之實踐與反思—以新屋藝家人為例〉 (MA Thesis, Taipei: Taipei National University of the Arts, 2015); Huang Ke-hsuan 黃可萱, “A Study of Exploring Lee Mingwei’s Zen Experience from His Participatory Art” 〈從李明維的參與式藝術創作探索其禪學經驗之研究〉 (MA Thesis, Taipei: Tunghai University, 2016); Chang Ken-hsuan 張耕瑄, “A Case Study of Participatory Art Curating: Cheng-Long Wetlands International Environmental Art Project” 〈參與式藝術策展個案研究—成龍溼地國際環境藝術計畫〉 (MA Thesis, Taipei: National Taipei University of the Arts, 2019); Hsieh Mei-ling 謝美鈴, “Social Practice in Participatory Art—Art as Environment: A Cultural Action of Beimen Community College at Qigu Coastal (2007-2017)” 〈參與式藝術的社會實踐：北門社區大學七股海岸環境藝術行動 (2007-2017)〉 (MA Thesis, Kaohsiung: National Kaohsiung Normal University, 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Julie Chun, “Independent Spaces to the Street: Participatory Art in Shanghai,” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 5, no. 2 (2018): 269–94, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca.5.2-3.269\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca.5.2-3.269_1).

<sup>74</sup> Zhou, “When Public Art Becomes the ‘Mass Line,’” in *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, ed. Wang (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2022), 149–180. Although Zhou’s discussion is included in a compilation on public art, she notes that there is however a distance between Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society and art—its founders are from non-art backgrounds and do not identify themselves as artists, and their methods are more akin to sociology. Zhou counts it as an art project because it “blurs the nuanced boundary between art and life by blending art into its ethical dimension.”

through quotidian and light-touched interventions, as opposed to earlier fanfares of grand narratives.<sup>75</sup>

Negotiating with a very different political circumstance, Hong Kong's political scientist Laikwan Pang 彭麗君 also wrote about socially engaged participatory art.<sup>76</sup> Written in 2016, the specific objects examined in her paper are what she calls "participatory arts" at the Umbrella Movement 雨傘運動 in 2014. With a range of "Occupy arts"—including iconic paper umbrellas, the Lennon Wall, an exceptionally well maintained women's washroom, makeshift staircases and other utility structures, as well as photoshopped imagery, shrines of the Chinese deity Guan Gong 關公, figurines and posters of Jesus Christ—as her empirical examples, Pang suggests that "[protestors] participated so actively in the political arts because of their strong political judgment about the current political reality."<sup>77</sup>

Pang argues that the Occupy arts demonstrates a plethora of autonomous expression of political judgment and uncompromised actions. Her alignment of politics and aesthetics taps into the dialectics of Hannah Arendt:

[a] most unexpected and productive reflection of Arendt's that resulted from this is the connection she made between political and aesthetic judgment. Neither political nor aesthetic judgment could be planted, but it genuinely belongs to the individuals who, by being aware of how others judge, also actively bring a community into being.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Zhou, "Art Intervention in a Rural Village—The Road Map of Ruralism by Post-80 Sculptors" 〈藝術介入鄉村——80後雕塑家的鄉村主義路線圖〉, *Bishan* 《碧山》 11 (2019): 175–88.

<sup>76</sup> Laikwan Pang, "Arendt in Hong Kong: Occupy, Participatory Art, and Place-Making," *Cultural Politics*, 12, no. 2 (2016): 155–172, <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-3592064>. Besides Pang, writers in Hong Kong sporadically use the word "participatory art," but focused discussions on the subject and scholarly analyses are largely missing. This citation is particularly relevant to this study for approaching socially engaged participatory art from the perspective of cultural politics.

<sup>77</sup> Pang, 170.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

The protestors' participation in the making and viewing of the Occupy arts is interpreted as significant events that "prompt us to rethink the possibilities of contemporary art for reengaging with its political power."<sup>79</sup>

In 2020, an expansion of this essay was published in *The Appearing Demos: Hong Kong During and After the Umbrella Movement*.<sup>80</sup> Referring to similar examples, Pang however switches her focus from participatory art to Arendt's idea of a thinking and judging spectatorship. Indeed the term "participatory art" ceases to be a keyword in the essay compiled in the book. Pang's change of emphasis might be related to the book's principle objective to read the Hong Kong Occupy alongside theories of Arendt, but it also leaves an inquiry into the close ties between participatory art and civil agency an incomplete project.

This research aims to expand international scholarship on socially engaged participatory art by investigating under-examined practices in Hong Kong and Taiwan. A selection of substantial projects—more consciously crafted as a generative form than the spontaneous outbursts of mass creativity in Pang's examples—are studied from the epistemological angles of both an observer and practitioner to evaluate how they make their marks. The inquiry is rooted in local contexts, but is also in dialogue with relevant ideas from other sources. Contemporary Chinese art specialist Paul Gladston makes a point about a typical dichotomy in scholarship in contemporary Chinese art: while downplaying Chineseness risks overlooking the persistence of tradition in modern Chinese identity, "Chinese exceptionalism" over-emphasises essentialism and cultural separateness. His suggested way out is a plurality of trans-cultural, intertextual and multivocal discourses.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Pang, 155.

<sup>80</sup> Pang, *The Appearing Demos: Hong Kong During and After the Umbrella Movement* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

<sup>81</sup> Paul Gladston, *Deconstructing Contemporary Chinese Art: Selected Critical Writings and Conversations, 2007-2014* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 30.

## IV. Co-creating Agency, Remaking Worlds:

### Socially Engaged Participatory Art in Hong Kong and Taiwan

#### IV.i. Agency and World-making

In this thesis, “agency” is a key concept for considering socially engaged participatory art. Citing Arendt, Pang’s argument for *The Appearing Demos* is that “the act of entering the public space of appearance is one’s own choice and a reflection of one’s political agency.”<sup>82</sup> Like the hikers illuminating Lion Rock, the participants appearing in this thesis have demonstrated their choice and agency through co-creative art. The participatory projects they took part in were springboards of action. Creative agency was exercised to give a spin to various forms of hegemonic domination, but unlike forthright protests, these projects did not serve definite political goals. So what sort of agency had they enabled? Why did it matter?

Doris Sommers, Director of the Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard University, passionately defines agency as “an optimism of the will, beyond the despair of reason, [that] drives life toward social commitments and creative contributions”.<sup>83</sup>

“Agent” is a term that acknowledges the small shifts in perspective and practice that Antonio Gramsci described as a war of position in which organic intellectuals—including artists and interpreters—lead moves toward collective change... It won’t do to indulge in romantic dreams about art remaking the world. Nor does it make sense to stop dreaming altogether and stay stuck in cynicism. Between frustrated fantasies and paralysing despair, agency is a modest but relentless call to creative action, one small step at a time.<sup>84</sup>

“[S]mall shifts in perspective and practice,” as Sommers pinpoints, are perhaps what these projects can all confidently take credit for. In a similar line of thought, American human rights advocate Suzanne Nossel pronounces her belief in “art’s utility in activism”: “Art has the ability to change our minds—inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine

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<sup>82</sup> Pang, *The Appearing Demos*, 40.

<sup>83</sup> Doris Sommers, *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>84</sup> *Op. cit.*, 4.



our worlds.”<sup>85</sup> Inspired by new perspectives brought about by art, with little shifts in thoughts and action, participants of the surveyed projects exercised agency and conjured up different worlds.

“World-making” is another focal point of this inquiry. A related concept—“worlding”—has roots in postcolonial studies and theoretical propositions of social transformation. It stresses the immediacy of contexts as the worlds of cultural productions and opens up possibilities for confronting hegemonic worlds with visions and practices of resistance.<sup>86</sup> The trans-Atlantic initiative *Worlding Public Cultures* takes “worlding” as an analytical tool to decolonise “universal” Western narratives. Through inter-disciplinary interrogations of pluriversality, situatedness and power relations, the scholarly project approaches “worlding” as an “activating” concept for reshaping understanding of contemporary culture.<sup>87</sup>

Drawing reference to Martin Heidegger’s “*the worlding of the world*” as a critical construction of horizon, transnational and postcolonial literatures scholar Rob Wilson postulates that:

As such a *gerundive* process of situated articulation and world-making, “worlding” [...] can become a historical process of taking care, and setting limits, entering into, and making the world-horizon come near and become local and informed, situated, instantiated as an uneven/incomplete material process of *world-becoming*.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Suzanne Nossel, “Introduction: On ‘Artivism’, or Art’s Utility in Activism,” *Social Research* 83, no. 1 (2016): 103–5.

<sup>86</sup> The notion of “worlding” is expanded upon by postcolonial cultural theorists such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. See summaries by Christopher Leigh Connery in Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery, ed., *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization* (Santa Cruz, CA: New Pacific Press, 2007), 5, 7. The concept is also related to Hardt and Negri’s “multitude”, Michel Foucault’s “social field,” Delueze and Guttari’s “rhizome”, Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, etc. in Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, ed., *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 11–12.

<sup>87</sup> Worlding Public Cultures, “Chapbooks and Publications,” access 6 September, 2022, <https://www.worldingcultures.org/chapbooks-publications>.

<sup>88</sup> Wilson, “Afterword: Worlding as Future Tactic,” in *The Worlding Project*, 212.

Alongside its function as a decolonising apparatus, “worlding”, according to Wilson, can become a “critical tactic of reverence-cum-resistance”—an active part of “*world-becoming process of renewal* [original italics] and transformation.”<sup>89</sup>

The promise of this “gerundive” process of setting static worlds into transformative motion finds resonance in political theory and activism. In an essay titled “Worlds in Motion” published in the inaugural issue of *Turbulence*, a magazine dedicated to ideas of social movements, Leeds-based collective The Free Association puts forth an activist understanding of “worlding”:

This is what we mean by “worlding”: by envisaging a different world, by acting in a different world we actually call forth that world. It is only because we have, at least partially, moved out of what makes “sense” in the old that another world can start to make its own sense.<sup>90</sup>

It is worth noting that the subject repeatedly used in this exegesis is “we”. This kind of “worlding” is not about solitary worlds in individual fantasies. Rather, through collective inventions and negotiations, new shared realities are constructed while old, dominant worlds are shaken up.

In *Experimental Politics and the Making of Worlds*, Australia-based human geographer Anja Kanngieser argues that the “unhealthy division of labour” between social and artistic actions has to be dissolved so that transversal, border-crossing momentums can be used to discover “new modalities and forms for critical political and social intervention and reflection; creative forms of producing ourselves, our relations to each other, and to the worlds we inhabit.”<sup>91</sup> Her view echoes what French philosopher Félix Guattari puts forth in *Chaosmosis*:

New collective assemblages of enunciation are beginning to form an identity out of fragmentary ventures, at times risky initiatives, trial and error experiments:

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<sup>89</sup> *Op. cit.*, 222.

<sup>90</sup> The Free Association, “Worlds in Motion,” *Turbulence*, no. 1 (2007), accessed 26 December, 2020, <http://www.turbulence.org.uk/index.html?p=44.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Anja Kanngieser et al., *Experimental Politics and the Making of Worlds* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), xii-xiii.

different ways of seeing and *of making the world* [author's italic], different ways of being and of bringing to light modalities of being will open up, be irrigated and enrich one another.<sup>92</sup>

In this light, this thesis examines concrete cases when different ways of seeing and being were opened up as alternative worlds were envisioned and enacted in socially engaged co-creative participatory art. When attempts to remake worlds appear (in a political sense as Pang references Arendt) in the public realm, individuals' actions are also acts of citizenship and pertain to democracy.

For Arendt, democracy is more than voting in a system of polls. In its fullest manifestation, it requires direct participation.<sup>93</sup> When treks of democracy follow a winding course, like the contour of light on Lion Rock, socially engaged co-creative participatory art can give form to visionary worlds and embody both the will and action—even one small step at a time—to realise them. Agency and world-making, perhaps relevant to all art, are not exclusive to socially engaged participatory art, nor is such art a privileged medium in this regard. Nonetheless, in the context of this thesis, when people desiring to rule themselves fight battles of democracy in narrow and expanded senses, the two concepts offer a helpful framework for comprehending participatory co-creation as processes of significance—for those taking part, and for the worlds they inhabit and aspire to remake.

#### IV.ii. Overview of Chapters

Charting a momentous period from 2009 (after waves of struggles in the late 2000s) to 2014 (the year of the Umbrella Movement), Chapter One records how civil-minded actants, to borrow Freer Art Collective's terminology, constructed alternative realities beyond regimental

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<sup>92</sup> Félix Guttari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Sydney: Power, 1995), 120.

<sup>93</sup> Arendt cited in Kieran Bonner, "Arendt's Citizenship and Citizen Participation in Disappearing Dublin," in *Acts of Citizenship. London*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen (London: Zed Books, 2008), 141; Shmuel Lederman, *Hannah Arendt and Participatory Democracy: A People's Utopia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

control, the inertia of neoliberalism and hegemonised subservience through co-creative participatory art in Hong Kong. Founded by fresh art graduates who later became key members of the local art community, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* 《香港投訴合唱團》 (2009-2011) is an illustrative case of self-organisation for the freedoms of expression and dissent. Through a quintessentially participatory process, participants from all walks of life co-created songs of shared woes. Enthusiastic response from the public and phenomenal media coverage testify to the project's resonance with a widespread craving to vocalise discontents, especially when concordance was promoted by the establishment for social order. Many of the repressive forces complained about by the choir—the dehumanising logic of Capitalism, short-sighted policies, silencing of speech and thought, etc.—were resisted against by Woofers Ten 活化廳 (2009-2014), coming up next in same the chapter. Literally meaning a “revitalising living room,” the community-based initiative is widely known in East Asia for its radical interventions in a gentrifying neighbourhood, engaging communities in participatory reclamations of authentic needs and desires.

The two cases are specific to their time and place, but they also strike a chord with a global reality. “It seems to me that we were all entangled in the Nation-Nation State-Capital mesh that Kojin Karatani 柄谷行人 put forward to describe the structure of modern political history,” writes Lee Chun-fung 李俊峰, a participant of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and a core member of Woofers Ten. “Art, as a critical and dialogical practice, offered the possibility of constructing subterranean points of escape from this triadic structure.”<sup>94</sup> Contextualising the two projects in their escape, or more actively, rebuke against hegemonic circumstances, the chapter discusses how socially engaged co-creative participatory art can be understood as a force in Hong Kong's democratic struggles during these intense years. Co-creators formed a multitude and tactically resisted with lively forms of art, remaking worlds vis-a-vis the status quo. Charging political art with palpable efficacy, socially engaged co-creative participatory

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<sup>94</sup> Lee Chun-fung, “Preface: On the Origins of the Woofers Ten AAIR—A Trans-territorial Art/Activist Network?,” *Woofers Ten, Art/Activist in Residence 2011-21* (Hong Kong: Woofers Ten, 2014), 11.

art was a form of participatory democracy and played a part in this consequential chapter of the city's quest of democracy on all fronts.

Chapter Two considers how socially engaged co-creative participatory art cultivates creative agency and world-making capability in individuals, thereby fostering a people-centred form of democracy—as power (*-cracy*) of the people (*demo*) vis-à-vis an institutional system of polls. A detour is taken to Taiwan, where two projects with longitudinal impact provide substantial reference for this inquiry. *Textile Playing Workshop* 《玩布工作坊》(1999-2004), a trilogy of workshop-based processes hosted by veteran artist Wu Mali for a group of housewives in Taipei, opened up spaces for women subjugated in a patriarchal society to re-examine their lives and give form to reimagined selves. *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* 《剪紙合作社——蕭壠計畫》(2016-2017), launched by Jam Wu 吳耿禎 with residents in rural Tainan, inspired rediscovery of the everyday and endowed participants with a creative language to have their say as inhabitants of a place, thereby raising a lucid counterargument against hegemonic urban/rural development.

Seemingly worlds apart from the politically charged Hong Kong cases, these two projects nonetheless also involve resistance against hegemonies. In the sphere of personal and cultural politics, the people harnessed creative agency to remake worlds. Considered in junction with the previously discussed Hong Kong examples, these Taiwan examples inform the chapter's methodological interrogation: What principles and methods are conducive to fostering creative agency among confident actants? What bring them together to become a multitude to remake personal and collective worlds? In the specific context of East Asia, is local culture a factor to consider for the seemingly universal process of co-creative participation? Returning to this research's ruminations about democracy, what is the significance of individual empowerment?

Chapter Three continues the research from another epistemological angle. While the two previous chapters examine the making of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, this chapter looks into the curating of such art by leveraging my personal experience. In parallel to this research, I have been practising as a curator at the Make A Difference Institute 創不同協

作, a Hong Kong-based non-profit that strives to remake worlds—in imagination and in deeds—through co-creation. Three extensive projects, co-produced by my colleagues, numerous collaborating artists and active participants who will be named in the respective sections, are selected for a reflective account on the curating of socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a form of democratic agency, while offering close-ups of how art practitioners and communities cared for their immediate circumstances in co-creative undertakings.

Beginning the chapter is a series revolving around the then unbuilt site of the city's overdue cultural district. Responsive to general misgivings that the multi-billion project might be dominated by colonial, elitist and commerce-driven ideologies, a trilogy of bottom-up cultural co-production, namely *MaD@West Kowloon* 《MaD@西九》 (2011-2012), *Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest* 《自由野共創項目》 (2012) and *Construction in Progress* 《工程進行中》 (2013), testifies to a time when a critical mass explored methods of self-organisation for alternative worlds. The second example in the chapter contended a similar aspiration with the harsh reality of a grassroots community in a satellite town, known for its inhuman town planning and corporate monopolisation. *Tin Shui Collaborative* 《天水營造社》 (2014) worked with vendors in a struggling market to replace encumbering feelings of deprivation with autonomous agency and convivial solidarity. Finally, the last example *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* 《邂逅！山川人——在地藝術》 (2018) contemplates local identity, custodianship and the meaning of home in a 600-year-old village, at a time when these issues were pertinent to society at large. Utilising my first-hand experiences through these winding processes, this final chapter offers an intimate view of what co-creative participatory art meant to the people who went through them. Like a curatorial post-script, the chapter also reflects on curating as a form of agency in the city's multipronged quest for democracy as it attended to collective perception and imagination, action and negotiation, and ultimately, care.

During this research, a series of fundamental questions has been constantly on my mind. Observing the recent ebb and flow of social struggles in East Asia, Hong Kong cultural theorist

Yuk Hui 許煜 asks, “These parties will all be over. Afterwards, what will be left? What is the role of art?” Further to oppression itself, Hui sees an aggravating problem: repression has led to disabling conformism, acceptance and perpetuation of pseudo-realities. “We constantly accustom to our repressed environment and take pride in thriving in such an environment, but rarely question the logic of such an environment.”<sup>95</sup> Opposing such widespread numbness, he raises another question that might be read as an imperative: “How does art direct us to a system of care, in other words, how do we regain our perception of the world and our sense of the self?”<sup>96</sup> Alongside explosive struggles in heated confrontations, the less high profiled but no less committed projects chronicled in this thesis negotiated a creative space where people could re-examine and re-imagine the sensible, and give form to alternative realities with their very own hands. None of them was capable of overthrowing repression, but through palpable practices of care, those who took part held onto their subjectivity and reclaimed worlds.

#### IV.iii. Methodology

This research addresses the relative scarcity of East Asian materials in the international discourse of socially engaged participatory art. While what can be achieved by one study is far from comprehensive, my aim is to begin writing a history from a particular perspective: the transformative agency and world-remaking potential of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. This angle is chosen because of the socio-political situation I find myself in, and hopefully offers context-specific references for considering broader issues of resistance and democracy.

There is an intent to write a chapter in socially engaged art history. In *Socially Engaged Art History and Beyond: Alternative Approaches to the Theory and Practice of Art History*, American art historian Cindy Persinger asks a series of critical questions for the discipline:

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<sup>95</sup> Yuk Hui, *Creative Space: Art and Spatial Resistance in East Asia* (Hong Kong: Roundtable Synergy Books Limited, 2014), 13. Original essay in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Is art history being produced for an elite? Have art historians been cut off from others due to what is perceived as the non-practical nature of their work? Have they been encouraged to write and produce in ways that are perceived as elitist and largely inaccessible to anyone but an initiated few? Does the general public view art history as unrelated to their everyday lived experience?<sup>97</sup>

In response, Vendela Grundell Gachoud, a contributor to Persinger's book, raises a suggestion in the form of a rhetorical question: "How can art historians engage in the social dimension of making art, where images gain their agency to not only mirror the world but also to generate and shape it?"<sup>98</sup> While testifying to how artists and co-creators exercised agency and remade worlds by documenting their dynamic involvement in social movements, engagement of communities, reception and continual developments, this thesis aims to generate knowledge of what was, and hopefully still is or will be, possible in pluralistic quests of democracy. It resists effacement of memory—vis-à-vis rapid erasure, amnesia or oversight of true stories of strength and resilience.

This study stands witness to instances when art activated people to change their worlds. A recurrent question for activism is how its impact can be gauged. Stephen Duncombe, American political activist and scholar in media, culture and communications, points out a fundamental divergence between art and activism: the former values open-endedness and generates affect; the latter has definite goals and demands effect. Duncombe, however, thinks this disparity can be bridged with the concept of "æffect": "before we act in the world, we must be moved to act."<sup>99</sup> How participants were moved by art's indefinite affect and took concrete action to create effect is at the heart of this inquiry. Bishop reckons that visual analysis and photo

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<sup>97</sup> Cindy Persinger and Azar Rajaie, ed., *Socially Engaged Art History and Beyond: Alternative Approaches to the Theory and Practice of Art History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 297.

<sup>98</sup> Vendela Grundell Gachoud, "Making Worlds: Normative and Other Art Histories of Visually Impaired Photographers," in *Socially Engaged Art History and Beyond: Alternative Approaches to the Theory and Practice of Art History*, 181.

<sup>99</sup> Stephen Duncombe, "Does it Work?: The Æffect of Activist Art," *Social Research* 83, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 117-119, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2016.0005>. Not exactly addressing activism, Adair Rounthwaite also considers affect as a way of understanding participatory art as a dynamic transpersonal practice. See Adair Rounthwaite, *Asking the Audience: Participatory Art in 1980s New York* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 26-27.



documentations, typical source of information for art historical studies, fall short to convey the “affective dynamic” that motivates artists and participants in participatory projects.<sup>100</sup> Group dynamics, social situations, changes of energy and heightening of consciousness—invisible but vital values of socially engaged participatory art—are best understood through first-person experience. This research, however, is largely retrospective. In lieu of direct observation, memories of the participants provide testimonies of æffect.

In Kaitavuori’s structural analysis of the “participator function,” she opts to refer to people taking part in participatory art as “participators”—a categorical position instead of “participants” with unique personal experiences.<sup>101</sup> To understand how people went through co-creative processes as world-remaking agents, this study looks into singular experiences of individuals. While art history typically emphasises the perspectives of artists, participants—who might also be considered “artists” in co-creation—are of utmost importance to this inquiry. My informants are not general “participators” but identifiable “participants”, alongside artists and others who had a share in the projects. Mentions of names in the subsequent chapters, and the listing of artist initiators/facilitators and co-creative participants for every project in Appendix I, do not only provide factual information, but also credit the vital involvement of these people.

When I tapped into their first-hand experiences through face-to-face interviews, my approach was deliberately open-ended. Instead of asking interviewees specifically formulated questions, I invited them to recall how they experienced, perceived and reflected on the projects, and let them drift in recollections, so that what is worth-noting in the projects’ meaning-making processes naturally emerged. I am extremely cautious about the danger of subjecting my generous informants to an academic discourse or intellectual underpinnings that might be irrelevant to their lived experiences. Understanding what these projects meant *to them*, in their own perceptions and expressions, was of foremost importance in my field work. This is also the principle when their materials are represented in the write-up. All citations and discussions

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<sup>100</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Kaitavuori, 11.

of personal experiences were checked with the respective persons, with Chinese translations provided for those who do not read English. This was done with extra care with informants in Hong Kong, whose volatile political situation now demands vigilant review of the materials to avoid risky consequences. On a few occasions my interviewees helpfully suggested changing a word or two, corrected facts and provided further information. Through such a process, besides observing the ethics required for this kind of research, I also wish that the thesis can embody the spirit of its inquiry by respecting people's subjectivity to the fullest.

Besides inputs from people involved in the projects, archived documentations (in text, photographic and video formats) also informed this study. In lived albeit edited vignettes of the past, I managed to get a glimpse into what actually happened. To contextualise these moments and evaluate their social significance, this playback of memory is paired with contemporary journalistic and scholarly materials from a range of disciplines including art, cultural studies, social sciences, political theory, etc. Learning across disciplines is indispensable for this research, because the examined projects took place in worlds whose complexity is to be unpacked with a medley of knowledge that constituted them. Many of these references, especially those penned by committed public intellectuals who have inspired social consciousness, do not only relate to this study in a dialectical way. They have impacted social actors and were a potent force behind societal developments. To buttress the examination in its regional context, the study also pays special attention to vernacular resources—from philosophical traditions to cultural practices, local stories, colloquial expressions and situated theory.

Anecdotal storytelling, personal reflections and contextual references are woven in a narrative that aims to reconstruct these projects before subjecting them to analysis. The commonly overlooked importance of description in scholarship on socially engaged art is raised by Grant Kester in an editorial essay in *FIELD Journal*:

Too often we find description treated as the merely incidental process of enumerating the discrete stages or features of a given project, often with the goal of presenting those features as illustrations of a particular theoretical paradigm.

It might be useful here to recall the distinction between the hermeneutic process of exegesis, the extraction of meaning “out of” a given text, and eisegesis, or reading “into” a given text. In eisegesis we refer the text back to our own a priori assumptions, rather than allowing the text, in all its complexity, to call those assumptions into question...

All too often we impose onto practice an epistemological unity, coherence and self-evidence that it does not in fact possess. And, as a result, we neglect the unresolved and contingent processes of meaning production and self-transformation that are at the root of socially engaged art.<sup>102</sup>

Kester’s opinion is particularly valid with participatory co-creations, when the most significant meanings often emerge in prolonged, processual developments. Therefore, before subjecting life to patterns of logical coherence, this thesis portrays how participants experienced these projects through microscopic descriptions of their meandering courses. Nonetheless, I have to acknowledge that these descriptions are not fully objective and the exegeses are admittedly coloured by my lens. I am also conscious that, despite my attempt to reconstruct the picture through interviews with a range of participants, those who responded had mostly favourable opinions about the projects. Noting that their views do not necessarily reflect all perspectives, my take on this partiality is a delimitation of interpretation of all art: it is not about certainty, but potentiality.

One of my favourite art historical texts is *Remaking Beijing* by Wu Hung 巫鴻.<sup>103</sup> In 2008, when the historical capital was undergoing transformation for the exhilaratingly anticipated Olympics, the émigré scholar unearthed deep political, social and cultural strata, much of which was, already or soon to be, cemented into oblivion by a massive physical and ideological makeover. As Wu takes readers through time with scholarly accounts of art, he supplements academic discourse with parcels of asides, written in a varied tone and printed in a different

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<sup>102</sup> Kester, Editorial, *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 3 (Winter 2016), accessed 13 May, 2020, <http://field-journal.com/editorial/kester-3>.

<sup>103</sup> Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

font, about his personal memories.<sup>104</sup> His treatment reminds me: history is lived, felt and participated; its writing is a testimony to presence, care and resistance to amnesia. In a modest way, this thesis pays tribute to this approach to historiography. Rather than assuming an objective distance typically held in art historical literature, my angle is from up-close. The accounts in the following chapters, alongside historical materials, are overlaid with personal observations and intimate conversations. Like Wu, my position is simultaneously a historian and a participant in this history, who witnessed these projects, felt the passions of their protagonists, and understands, as a fellow practitioner, what it takes to tread these paths.

A last note on methodology is on writing. British critic/painter/writer John Berger once wrote:

There are two categories of storytelling. Those that treat of the invisible and the hidden, and those that expose and offer the revealed. What I call—in my own special and physical sense of the terms—the introverted category and the extroverted one. Which of the two is likely to be more adapted to, more trenchant about what is happening in the world today? I believe the first.

Because its stories remain unfinished. Because they involve sharing. Because in their telling a body refers as much to a body of people as to an individual. Because for them mystery is not something to be solved but to be carried. Because. Although they may deal with sudden violence or loss or anger, they are long-sighted. And above all, because their protagonists are not performers but survivors.<sup>105</sup>

This text informs and also evokes. In a montage of the *Complaints Choir* brimming with convivial conviction, down-to-earth exchanges between Woofer Ten and its *kaifong* 街坊

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<sup>104</sup> Detailing the anecdotes would be too much of a digression in the main text. To give interested readers a sense of how these poignant asides enliven *Remaking Beijing*, I would like to cite a few telling examples in this note: Wu eloquently supplements history with his own memories of waking up before dawn to attend Mao's fanatic parade, helping make a space shuttle-like float for National Day, hitting his fist against the wall when the agony of witnessing tortures was beyond words, recalling the impossibility of owning luxuries when quartz watches first appeared in the newly open market, observing the collapse of the Goddess of Democracy on television after leaving his turbulent home country for America, etc.

<sup>105</sup> John Berger, *Bento's Sketchbook* (London: Verso, 2011), 86.

(people in the neighbourhood), chatters of the aging *Textile Playing* sisters under a rain-struck roof, a warm treat of oyster fritters by a Tainan shopkeeper who received a papercut, a swaying dragon held up by “stick-holders” in Hong Kong’s cultural miasma, a handwritten proposal by a septuagenarian who energised *Tin Shui Collaborative* with his optimism, a teenager who fancied growing a tree after *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, I invite readers to meet these protagonists in stories of survival, where worlds were remade with co-created agency.

## Chapter One:

### Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art as Civil Participation

#### in Hong Kong's Quest of Democracy from 2009 to 2014<sup>106</sup>

##### 1.1 Introduction

2009 and 2014 bracket a critical period in Hong Kong's civil participation. These eventful five years were illustrative of the accelerating energies of the city's democratic struggle, whose manifestations were multipronged and took a wide range of forms. This chapter encapsulates the history of these heated years through the lens of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. In particular, two contemporary projects, namely *The Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten*, beginning in 2009 and ending in 2014 respectively, would be examined in detail. These substantial examples demonstrate how socially engaged co-creative participatory art played a part in Hong Kong's quest of democracy by activating citizens to become "actants"—recalling Freer Art Collective's portmanteau for "active participants"—to respond to emergent socio-political developments, rebuke against what was deemed unacceptable, and exercised creative agency to usher in change with visions of better worlds.

##### 1.1.1 2009 to 2014, a Critical Period of Hong Kong's Civil Participation

The civil fervour between 2009 and 2014 can be vividly evoked by a sketchy summary of socio-political struggles. Marking the end of a decade when Hongkongers repeatedly took to the street for democratic expressions over a series of socio-political incidents, 2009 saw the Anti-Express Rail Link Movement 反高鐵運動. This particular instance was an extremely important moment in Hong Kong's recent history of activism, for it epitomises what was at stake and demonstrates the growing scale and forms of civil participation. Early that year,

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<sup>106</sup> A less elaborate discussion on *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten* was previously published by the author. Stephanie Cheung, "Taking Part: Participatory Art and the Emerging Civil Society in Hong Kong," *World Art*, 5:1 (2015): 143-166, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2015.1016584>. The content is significantly expanded in this chapter.

construction of the Hong Kong section of a high-speed railway connecting the city to Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Beijing was confirmed. Various interest groups protested against the plan for a range of reasons, including the hefty costs to be covered with public money, environmental impact, border implications, “black-box” operations, collusion between the government and businesses, etc. That construction of the railway would uproot Choi Yuen Village 菜園村, which lied in the middle of the planned tracks, aroused a huge controversy. Villagers, unwilling to give up their homes and original way of life, were backed by activists who saw the forced relocation as a sacrifice of common people for the gains of the rich and powerful, and also an alarming threat to local agriculture (whose stakes are ecological as well as political) and the space to live beyond mainstream values.<sup>107</sup>

The movement was a wake-up call to many. In the subsequent years, a critical mass grew to defend what they thought was truly important for Hong Kong: universal suffrage as promised by the Basic Law, the city’s mini constitution (annual rallies on 1 July, the anniversary of Hong Kong’s return to China), freedom of expression (423 Art Citizens March 423 藝術公民大聲行, 2011), an education system unaffected by brainwashing in the name of “national education” (Anti-Moral and National Education Protest 反國教運動, 2011-2012), streets reclaimed for citizens’ livelihood as opposed to excessive parallel import goods for Mainland

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<sup>107</sup> For journalistic accounts of the protests against the high-speed railway, see for example James Pomfret, “Hundreds Protest Costly Railway Project in Hong Kong,” *Reuters*, 8 January, 2010, accessed 9 May, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-train-idUSTRE6071S120100108>; Tom Mitchell and Andy Ho, “Hong Kong Anti-Rail Protest Gathers Steam,” *Financial Times*, 15 January, 2010, accessed 9 May, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/cee57b52-01aa-11df-b8cb-00144feabdc0>.

The movement has been discussed as a notable chapter in Hong Kong’s recent politics in scholarly publications, such as Cheung Chor-yung, “Hon Kong’s Systemic Crisis of Governance and the Revolt of the ‘Post-80s’ Youths: The Anti-Express Rail Campaign,” in *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*, ed. Joseph Y.S. Cheng (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong, 2014), 417–47. It was also the subject of a number of postgraduate dissertations completed shortly afterwards, suggesting how it was recognised as momentous and worthy of examination: Ying Xia, “Citizenship in Practice: ‘Post-80’ Activists in Hong Kong” (PhD Thesis, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011); Wang Jiejing, “An Identity Formation Through Collective Action in a New Social Movement in Hong Kong: A Case Study of the Post-80s Anti-Express Rail Link Youth” (MPhil Thesis, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, 2011).

shoppers (Reclaim Sheung Shui Station 光復上水站, 2012), licensing of an independent television network, whose stakes included the freedom to choose non-state-backed media, procedural justice and the rule of law (protest in support of HKTV, 2013), etc. This brief list of protests, attended by hundreds of thousands, evidences the city's sizzling civil energy. In 2014, it burst onto scene as the Umbrella Movement, the first-ever city-wide occupy.<sup>108</sup>

Political scientist Laikwan Pang's analysis of the Umbrella Movement as a process of democratic appearance is cited previously in this thesis's introduction.<sup>109</sup> Demonstrations, as political appearance, have been pivotal to Hong Kong's recent quest of democracy and is pertinent to this study for various reasons. First, as respected local scholars in journalism Francis Lee Lap-fung 李立峯 and Joseph Man Chan 陳韜文 observe, mass demonstrations, a "prominent feature of Hong Kong's political landscape," have challenged the former colony purported political apathy and conservatism and invigorated the pro-democracy movement.<sup>110</sup> Secondly, the very fact that protesting in the streets made up a repertoire in the democratic movement underlines how this quest was hard fought.

In a shrinking or diminishing democracy, according to urbanists Jeffrey Hou and Sabine Knierbein, taking to the street is citizens' last resort to reinstate democracy through urban resistance.<sup>111</sup> In a more positive tone, political scientist Margit Mayer references Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" and argues that when citizens claims their rights to the streets, they create rights through social and political action.<sup>112</sup> Protests, as Hong Kong-based lawyer and writer Anthony Dapiran elucidates *In City of Protest: A Recent History of Dissent in Hong Kong*, can be understood as inseparable from the identity of Hongkongers.<sup>113</sup> The city's

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<sup>108</sup> For a concise summary of this series of protests, see Antony Dapiran, *City of Protest: A Recent History of Dissent in Hong Kong* (Hawthorn: Penguin Books Australia, 2017).

<sup>109</sup> Pang, *The Appearing Demos*.

<sup>110</sup> Francis Lee Lap-fung and Joseph Man Chan, "Making Sense of Participation: The Political Culture of Pro-Democracy Demonstrators in Hong Kong," *The China Quarterly* 193 (2008): 84–101, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0305741008000052>.

<sup>111</sup> Hou and Knierbein, ed., 10.

<sup>112</sup> Margit Mayer, "The 'Right to the City' in the Context of Shifting Mottos of Urban Social Movements," *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 13, no. 2–3 (2009): 362–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902982755>.

<sup>113</sup> Dapiran, *op cit*.



trajectory of demonstrations transcends individual incidents and stands for the protestors' defence of what they believed as the core values of their home city.

### 1.1.2 The Democratic Quest to “Live in Truth”

What exactly did dissident Hongkongers—and the two case studies in this Chapter—protest against? What was the world that they sought to remake? The aforementioned list of protests addresses concerns over unjust and unsustainable development, encroaching influence from Mainland China, erosion of the city's freedoms and the rule of law, restrictions on people's autonomous way of life and political expressions, etc. Overshadowing all these are specific local problems that also strike a chord with a global phenomenon: the state-capital-conjunct empire. In Hong Kong, the reign of neoliberal pragmatism is termed “the value of Central District 中環價值” by former Taiwanese Minister of Culture Lung Ying-tai 龍應台 when she resided temporarily in the city.<sup>114</sup> Behind glitzy facades, toiling neoliberalism colludes with a bureaucracy that has little regard for common people in its service to economic and political agenda. It deprives citizens of their legitimate rights and bulldozes memories, thoughts and deeds inadvertently in the way of single-minded development.

Despite its dehumanising operations, business had long been taken as usual. Cultural critic Yuk Hui illustrates with a vivid example:

Humanity's ability to adapt is awe-inspiring, but it is also the source of countless tragedies and sufferings. When rent is too expensive, people share a flat, then they share a room, and when even a shared room is too expensive, they rent a bed and live like astronauts in narrow space cabins.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ying-tai Lung, “Hong Kong, Where Are You Going? Some Partial Observations on Hong Kong Cultural Policy and Civil Society” 〈香港，你往哪裏去？對香港文化政策與公民社會一點偏頗的觀察〉, *Epoch Times*, 18 November, 2004, accessed 2 May, 2020, <https://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/11/18/n721216.htm>. Central District refers to the central business district in Hong Kong, an epitome of the city's neoliberalism.

<sup>115</sup> Hui, 11.

Hui considers these adaptations disabling. They conform to and perpetuate neoliberal pseudo-realities.<sup>116</sup> In this numbing miasma, “progress” comes at a cost and those who pay for it often earn little in return. Sacrifices were rationalised in an expansionist logic that is well reflected in this idiom used by Former Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands John Tsang Chun-wah 曾俊華 as he legitimised the city’s grand plans: “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.”<sup>117</sup>

However, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth-first century, as demonstrated in the aforementioned protests, a critical mass has emerged to question this status quo. Anthropologist Helen F. Siu cites a *South China Morning Post* survey in 2007: a need to rethink established boundaries was emergent in debates about core values, collective memories and historical preservation.<sup>118</sup> This observation is expanded upon by Yun-chung Chen 陳允中 and Mirana M. Szeto 司徒薇, two scholars in cultural studies who took an active part in the social struggles, in their discussion on the “New Preservation Movement 新保育運動.” Drawing reference to frontline observation of contemporary mass movements, Chen and Szeto argue that a new urban movement has sparked off in Hong Kong to serve a number of deeply political causes: preserve history, rebuild social capital, reclaim public space, promote ecological sustainability, revive organic agriculture, assert autonomy in lifestyle and emphasise cultural identities.<sup>119</sup>

Emergent forms of social movements, such as Chen and Szeto’s proposition of the New Preservation Movement, are noted by Stephen Chan Ching-kiu 陳清僑 as cultural actions that address the issues of subjectivity and citizenship. Citing fellow public intellectuals Hui Po-

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<sup>116</sup> *Op cit.*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> The quote was cited in Chen Kim-ching 陳劍青, “Discussion on the Issues of Urban Renewal in Hong Kong,” in exhibition catalogue of *Reverse Niche—Dialogue and Rebuilding at the City’s Edge: An Exhibition in Hong Kong, Osaka and Taiwan*, ed. Alice Ko Nieu-po 高念璞 (Taipei: 2013), 190.

<sup>118</sup> Helen F. Siu, “A Provincialized Middle Class in Hong Kong,” in *Worlding Cities*, 139.

<sup>119</sup> Yun-chung Chen and Mirana M. Szeto, “The Forgotten Road of Progressive Localism: New Preservation Movement in Hong Kong,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 436–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2015.1071694>; “Reclaiming Public Space Movement in Hong Kong: From Occupy Queen’s Pier to the Umbrella Movement,” in *City Unsilenced*, 71–85.

keung 許寶強 and Lau Kin-chi 劉健芝, Chan comments on the undermining, if not elimination, of people's agency, autonomy and right to non-conformity by the (post)colonial regime.<sup>120</sup> Questions of democracy are at the core of these struggles, but what they are after is more than straightforward political results. Hui and Lau argue that the Umbrella Movement, epitomising this long chain of struggles, is beyond *realpolitik*, which fails to get to the root cause of the contemporary crisis and reduces people's livelihood to the baseline of material survival. Rather, the struggle is more profound. It is about autonomy and freedom, the right to non-conformity and dignity, as well as regaining control over one's own fate. It is about, to cite dissident-turned-Czech president Václav Havel, the desire to "live in truth."<sup>121</sup> The political crisis in Hong Kong is also a moral crisis. As bottom-up exercises of participatory democracy, these struggles went hand-in-hand with decolonisation and asserted subjective agency to what Chen and Szeto call "progressive localism," where "transformations of a better society lie."<sup>122</sup>

### 1.1.3 The Rise of "Artivism" in Hong Kong's Democratic Struggles

Art and popular cultures are crucial sites of contesting power formations and enacting empowerment in the pursuit of justice, states Emily Merson, a Canadian scholar in politics and international studies.<sup>123</sup> In Hong Kong, art and cultural practitioners have played a notable part in struggles over the last two decades. "Artivism"—the commingling of art and activism—made a mark in the historic episodes that inspired Chen and Szeto's formulation of the New Preservation Movement.

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<sup>120</sup> Chan Ching-kiu, "Delay No More: Struggles to Re-Imagine Hong Kong (for the Next 30 Years)," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (July 20215): 327–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2015.1070447>.

<sup>121</sup> Hui Po-keung and Lau Kin-chi, "'Living in Truth' Versus Realpolitik: Limitations and Potentials of the Umbrella Movement," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 348–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2015.1069051>.

<sup>122</sup> Chen and Szeto, "The Forgotten Road of Progressive Localism: New Preservation Movement in Hong Kong," 450.

<sup>123</sup> Emily Merson, *The Art of Global Power: Artwork and Popular Cultures as World-Making Practices* (London: Routledge, 2020).

The rise of “artivism” and a growing local consciousness can be contextualised with broader art history in Hong Kong. In the 1990s when the former colony’s return to China was imminent, interrogations of “what is Hong Kong” emerged in contemporary art.<sup>124</sup> This continued at the turn of the century, when the government launched its first official public art commissioning scheme amidst erections of several controversial handover monuments. Alongside average municipal commissions, a few most active artists in the local art scene ventured independently, exploring public space as a threshold for contesting public meanings. Artists such as Kith Tsang Tak-ping 曾德平, Kacey Wong 黃國才, Luke Ching Chin-wai 程展緯, among others, hijacked public space for temporary installations about the identity of a place, what haunted the cityscape and alternative urban imagination.<sup>125</sup> Over the years, as these more mature artists continued their practice, they were joined by a younger generation who reacted to an increasingly intense political climate with art as a form of activism.

With shared concerns about preservation of history and collective memories, art and cultural practitioners went shoulder to shoulder with activists in demonstrations and sit-ins. The former’s involvement expanded the protests’ expressive spectrum. Besides conventional placards and banners, visual displays, evocative performances, poetry reading, music, etc. fleshed out ideologies behind the struggles while illustrating an emergent civil sentiment in the local art community. A particularly noteworthy occasion was the Anti-Express Rail Link Movement which, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, was a watershed in the city’s recent history of civil participation. Amidst prolonged demonstrations, a Woodstock-style art festival was mounted by artists as a high point of the struggle (2009-2010). Artivism came conspicuously into view and was commented upon by both art writers and scholars in social and political studies. For instance, a reflective essay was written by critic and curator Valerie

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<sup>124</sup> For an overview of this period of art and cultural production, see David Clarke, *Hong Kong Art: Culture and Decolonization* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001).

<sup>125</sup> This history was the topic of the author’s MPhil research. See Stephanie Cheung, “Public Art in Hong Kong (MPhil Thesis, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, 2011). The three artists are mentioned in particular because, further to having their works covered in my earlier dissertation, they continued to have a share in the examples discussed in this thesis. Projects by Ching and Wong will be examined in this chapter and Chapter Three. Tsang, whose art was not cited, was nonetheless an avid participant in many of the listed struggles.

C. Doran. She observed a phenomenon of “artists in Hong Kong responding to a sense of urgency, engaging in collective social action, opening up alternative rooms for the imagination.”<sup>126</sup> To cite an insider’s perspective, she quotes artist Luke Ching Chin-wai:

“Artists have an alternative way of engaging in the role of citizen,” he said.

“Because we don’t have democracy [in Hong Kong], we make use of the power of our imaginations to overcome power.”<sup>127</sup>

In 2011, when the international art community responded to the “disappearance” of dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未 with vocal demands for his release, Hong Kong artists organised a parade with the identity of “Art Citizens.” Artist-scholar wen yau 魂遊 discusses how the 2000-strong march performed “bigger-than-you” civil duties in a range of artistic forms:

From the anxiety over the loss of free speech, to the empathy for civil rights activists deprived of their freedom, people are elevated to a higher level of “bigger than you” through demonstrations and rallies – these are social politics and moral values founded on the belief of freedom and equal rights for all. [...] Out in the streets, artists and art practitioners have developed a consciousness of being “a part of history,” so there is probably more action to come. How will these actions align themselves with the development of Hong Kong’s civil society and (collective) identity? Will art be a means of action, or will actions evolve into art and something more?<sup>128</sup>

wen yau’s questions found their answers in art’s continual appearance in civil struggles in the subsequent years—most spectacularly, when art’s power to activate imagination teamed up

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<sup>126</sup> Valerie C. Doran, “Viewed from a Train: Glimpses of the Artist as Hong Kong Citizen,” *Asian Art Archive*, March 1, 2011, accessed 1 February, 2020, <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/viewed-from-a-train-glimpses-of-the-artist-as-hong-kong-citizen>.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> wen yau, “Artists Taking to the Streets!—423 Art Citizens March and Its Revelations,” *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2011* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012), 16–49; reposted at the official website of International Association of Art Critics Hong Kong, accessed 13 February, 2022, <http://www.aicahk.org/eng/issuesdetail.asp?id=646&pg=1>.

with direct democratic actions during the Umbrella Movement in 2014. “Creativity Blossoming Citywide” is a descriptive title given to a survey on Umbrella “art” by critic and curator Oscar Ho 何慶基.<sup>129</sup> In disciplines beyond the arts, besides Pang whose essay was previously cited, historian-turned-social scientist Lim Tai-wei 林大偉 also remarks on the importance of protest art from the perspective of social and political sciences. Focusing on the first ten days of the Occupy, he reckons that performances and visual art representations have a special edge in protests because they essentialise complex ideologies into appealing symbols for eliciting popular responses. Lim considers interpretative, rather than literal, content more “attractive”. It entices, yet at the same time hedges and allows a “face-saving escape route for negotiations and compromise between both protestors and the state in East Asian cultures.”<sup>130</sup> This view is echoed by Francis Lee Lap-fung and Joseph Man Chan, who see “soft power” in aesthetic forms. Capable of influencing the senses and resonating with local, regional and/or international audiences, such forms can serve as mobilisation tools for encouraging participation.<sup>131</sup> Along similar lines, urban scholar Liza Kam Wing-man 甘詠雯 finds in activism a special appeal that speaks to “situational and relational audiences,” making corporeal actions more acceptable and the enunciation of a “Hong Kong identity” possible for disintegrating internalised discipline of obedience and post-neo-colonial apoliticism.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Oscar Ho, “Creativity Blossoming Citywide 全城創意·遍地開花,” in *Art as Social Interaction 《與社會交往的藝術》*, 92-99. Visual and performative displays were a key part in the Umbrella Movement in 2014. Some were created to give form to political expressions. Some others, such as the frequently cited “installation” at a female public lavatory, were put together for practical reasons. While many writers refer to all such creations as “art”, I prefer to put “art” in parentheses, not because of their merging with everyday forms, but because of the questionable presence of intentional artistic formulation.

<sup>130</sup> Lim Tai-wei, “The Aesthetics of Hong Kong’s ‘Umbrella Revolution’ in the First Ten Days: A Historical Anatomy of the First Phase (27 September, 2014 to 6 October, 2014) of Hong Kong’s Umbrella Revolution.” *East Asia* 32, no. 1 (2015): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-014-9223-1>.

<sup>131</sup> Francis Lee Lap-fung and Joseph Chan Man, *Media, Social Mobilization and Mass Protests in Postcolonial Hong Kong: The Power of a Critical Event*. (London: Routledge, 2012), 93-97.

<sup>132</sup> Lisa Kam Wing-man, “Artistic Activism as Essential Threshold from the ‘Peaceful, Rational, Non-Violence’ Demonstrations Towards Revolution,” in *Art and the City: Worlding the Discussion Through a Critical Artspace*, ed. Jason Luger and Julie Ren (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 124-125.

The “soft power” of art—which influences the senses, resonates with people, constructs identity, challenges inert order, mobilises participation and inspires agency to remake worlds—is reflected upon in this chapter through detailed examination of the two selected cases of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* (2009-11) enlisted Hongkongers from all walks of life to share, sing and reflect on their collective woes. *Woofers Ten* (2009-2014) was a community-based initiative that intervened with real-life circumstances in a grassroots neighbourhood. Concurrent to the democratic struggles to “live in truth,” the two projects demonstrate how socially engaged co-creative participatory art played a part in this history of resistance against hegemonic pseudo-realities, championing autonomous perception and expression, and activating actants to remake a more just, equitable and sustainable society. Following the thesis’s methodological imperative of placing exegesis ahead of analysis, detailed descriptions will first re-tread the projects’ winding courses, before a concluding discussion examines how they tactically remade worlds in these momentous years when the civil society strived for democracy.

## **1.2 Responding, Intervening and Reimagining Through Collective Voices of Discontents:**

### ***Complaints Choir of Hong Kong (2009-2011)***

#### 1.2.1 Context: A City of Complaints

On new year’s eve in 2003, Betty Tung 董趙洪娉, wife of then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa 董建華, slipped over another public relations disaster. Already ridiculed for her epizeuxis when she admonished citizens to “wash hands, wash hands, wash hands” during the SARS epidemic, the first lady of the unpopular government made another repetitive remark: “Hongkongers are the best at complain, complain, complain [sic].”<sup>133</sup> As the blunder brought her one more wave of derision, it conveys a certain truth about society at that time. A series of mishaps—an economic downturn induced by the Asian financial crisis, serial government

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<sup>133</sup> The ungrammatical translation of the sentence preserves Tung’s mix of languages in the original statement: “香港人最叻就係 complain, complain, complain.”

failures, aggravating social problems, political unrests and a deadly plague—overshadowed post-handover Hong Kong. Alongside massive protests, a “complaint culture” was symptomatic of widespread discontents.

Complaints were so pervasive that *Sunday Report* 《星期日檔案》, an Emmy-nominated, long-running current affairs programme of the city’s then prime television station, dedicated an episode to the issue in 2010. “Every year, the government, public organisations, councillors and the media receive over 100,000 complaints,” states the anchor. To investigate the social phenomenon, the episode lines up interviews with people who dealt with complaints on different fronts. Scholar-writer Chin Wan 陳雲, author of *On the Hong Kong City-State* 《香港城邦論》, attributes the trend to a sense of powerlessness. He argues that in democratic countries, protests can possibly lead to policy or legislation reform. However, given that matters of importance, such as universal suffrage, land policy, social vices that go hand in hand with unbridled neoliberal development, etc., are apparently beyond the control of ordinary citizens, many Hongkongers vent their frustrations through petty complaints. “Complainers seem unruly. In fact they are forced to do so. If they are not difficult, they can only get very little.”<sup>134</sup>

Chin’s opinions are presented in the programme as an intellectual analysis of the context. To exemplify citizens’ passion for complaints, two other representative cases are featured. One of them is a middle-aged man who believed that constantly lodging complaints was an effective way to call for problem-solving attention. The other is Vangi Fong 方韻芝, who initiated and followed through *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*. From 2009 onwards, Fong has been one of the city’s most committed socially engaged art practitioners, and *Complaints Choir* was an important starting point. Brimming with vitality, the then twenty-four-year-old was filmed during a choir performance in the street. “A man passed by. I handed him a leaflet. He immediately reacted, ‘What are you complaining about? Don’t you know that this city is

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<sup>134</sup> *Sunday Report* 《星期日檔案》, “City of Complaints” 〈投訴之都〉, aired 3 October, 2010 on TVB.



already very good. Young lady, do you really know what you are complaining about?” recalled Fong in the interview. “Compared to Mainland China, Hong Kong enjoys a higher degree of the freedom of speech. As citizens in this city, we have to cherish this.”<sup>135</sup>

### 1.2.2 Imported Model, Local (Dis)contents

*Complaints Choir* is a concept put forth by Finnish artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen. “We just realised that people complain a lot, no matter what their life circumstances are. Whether they live(d) under socialism or capitalism, whether they are rich or poor, young or old,” explain the artists in the project’s “sharing website.”<sup>136</sup> “We wanted to tap into this unending source of energy, we wanted to transform this complaints energy into something else, something surprising.” Taking the Finnish word for mass complaints, “Valituskuoro”, literally “complaints choir”, as the project’s title, the two artists formulated a methodology for people to come together and sing their grievances.

The process starts with an assembly of choir members, who democratically decide on the content of their song. Politics only make up a “small margin of the wonderful world of complaints.” Personal woes, such as “broken underpants, boring dreams or spying neighbours,” are considered equally important and potentially symptomatic of broader socio-political issues. The lyrics are then put together with a tune composed by a local musician, and choir members would practise for a few times before public performances. Musical virtuosity is not a criterion. “The only important thing is that you sing loud and proud.”

This methodological framework to transform complaints into a participatory art project was offered to various events by Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen. In 2005, it was realised for the first time by a choir of eighteen in Birmingham. Since then the artists have been invited to run workshops in different parts of the worlds. In 2006, they launched an open-source website to make a “nine easy steps method” accessible to anybody who wants to organise a choir. By

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> The concept, history and methodology of *Complaints Choir* are listed in detail in the project’s website, accessed 6 May, 2020: <http://www.complaintschoir.org/faq.html>. All citations of Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen in this section are taken from the same source.

February 2014, as far as the artists managed to keep track on, there have been 140 *Complaints Choirs*, including the biggest ensemble with 150 members in Cologne, a solo in a Canadian forest, a self-proclaimed “World Champion of Complaining” in Budapest, and one that was banned by the Singaporean government and triggered a parliamentary debate.

Fong, who imported the model to Hong Kong, came across *Complaint Choir* during a trip to New York City. She remembered discovering the project in a documentation exhibition at MoMA PS1. “It was the best contemporary art work I have ever seen. It is so real. The complaints convey a lot of truth about society.”<sup>137</sup> At that time, the young graduate had just finished art school with many doubts about artistic practice. “I am not particularly skilled in making physical works. I always wonder, why should I make artworks?”<sup>138</sup> Seeing how *Complaints Choir* captures the reality of different places and many dimensions of humanity, she found in the work a convincing relevance. Deeply moved, she decided to start a choir in her home city together with a few likeminded friends. Following the nine easy steps shared by Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* eventually got into limelight as it merged visual forms, choir performance and urban intervention.

*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* made its first public appearance at the annual Fotan 火炭 (a cluster of artists’ studios in industrial lofts) Open Day in 2009. Pep!, a group identity donned by the organisers, launched the project by introducing the idea of *Complaints Choir* in a prelude exhibition. Among documentation videos of other choirs around the world, text and visual statements on the aspirations of the local version, small pieces of paper, stamped “MY COMPLAINTS,” were available for visitors to pin up their complaints on a wall. With visitors’ voluntary participation, the slips of woes amassed.

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with Vangi Fong by the author on 19 July, 2014. All interviews in this chapter were conducted in Cantonese. Quotations translated by the author.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Fong by the author on 26 February, 2019.



Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*, Prelude Exhibition, 2009  
(Courtesy of Vangi Fong)

After a further exhibition held during Hong Kong Art Walk 2009 (another annual open house event drawing public visitors to the gallery district), Pep! decided to take the project to the street. Part of the prelude exhibits were condensed into a mobile set, with videos of earlier *Complaints Choirs* played on a carted monitor. Their first roadshow took place in Sai Yeung Choi South Street 西洋菜南街. Located in one of the busiest parts of town, a section of the street was pedestrianised from 2000 to 2018. In the early days of the pedestrianisation, local street performers were among the first to seize the opportunity for public expression. Subsequently, the area was overtaken by singers (notably Mainlanders passing the hat) using high-volume amplifiers. Noise, access rights, use of public space and ownership of the place became highly contentious. In 2008 and 2009, for unknown reasons, corrosive liquids were hurled from buildings flanking the road, injuring close to 100 people. The place was a symbolic space of contradictions.

Siting events in such loaded locations became a consistent tactic of Pep!. Later, the group also ventured to Causeway Bay, where everyday consumerism converged with political fervour (the shopping district is at a stone's throw to Victoria Park, a frequent starting point of street

rallies and an iconic venue for public assemblies). “We did not know what to expect,” recalled Fong, “It was the first time we left an art environment and tried it out in an everyday space.”<sup>139</sup> The project seemed to resonate with citizens in random encounters. Fong remembered meeting a pregnant woman and her husband. When they chatted, the expecting mother burst into tears. “She thought, giving birth at such a time is horrible for the child. She was worried about the education system, the social environment, and everything about her child’s upbringing.” At the end of the crowdsourcing process, over 700 complaints were collected. In the handwritten scribbles, varied tones and manners, and a mix of languages typical of the postcolonial city, each complaint represents a unique individual. As a whole, they reflect a general impression of Hong Kong as a distressed society. The complaints touch upon many aspects. Some address societal issues. Some are personal. Individual grumbles underline systemic problems: “Why is housing so expensive? Why are wages so low? Why are fathers men?” Questioning with “why” is common: “Why existentialism—being radically free is just a dream.” Frustration and agitation are explicit in strong language and exclamation marks: “The rich are heartless. The officials are detestable. The people are sleepless. Annoying! Annoying! Annoying!” In these heated expressions, a highly charged energy conjures up a commotion of rancour and discontents. Once in a while, a different spirit breaks the tension: “(Can I start not with why) Let’s be happy. Go to nature!”<sup>140</sup>

In addition to collecting complaints, the members of Pep! also recruited choir members. Around fifty people, coming from all walks of life, eventually got on board after visiting the exhibitions, running into the roadshows or learning about the project via social media. Among them was Thickest Choi 蔡至厚, then a budding cultural practitioner who was eager to try something new. He was drawn to the project because it was “interesting”: while complaints in different cities sounded universal, there were unique laments that inspired curiosity about their

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Fong, 19 July, 2014. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

<sup>140</sup> These examples are selected from a database archiving the collected complaints. The materials were generously provided by Fong. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

respective places.<sup>141</sup> He later became a core member and helped on communications. In the project website (built and managed by him), he spelt out what he thought was the meaning of the choir in the local context:

Perhaps let us redefine Tau Sou 投訴 (complain) in a Chinese context: “Tau” 投 (*tou* in Mandarin) originally means ‘throwing’, and later it also relates to a subject’s active actions, e.g. “Tau Piu” 投票 (voting); “Tau Gei” 投寄 (mail something to somebody). And it also means linking up of different people or parties, e.g. “Ching Tau Yee Hap” 情投意合 (congenial in feelings and thoughts). “Sou” 訴 literally means “speaking”, and this verbal expression is usually associated with pessimistic personal feelings, and even social critiques. In the light of these explanations, complains would be something more than it used to be: It would be a joined action, and active participation of the general public; it would be free, public expression through various art forms, e.g. literature, music, visual arts, etc.

Confucius once said, “*The Odes* serve to stimulate the mind. They may be used for purposes of self-contemplation. They teach the art of sociability. They can be the ways to complain.” Similar to *The Odes*, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* is a project to encourage singing, or any kind of artistic expressions of the people, by the people, and for the people. And it is also an experiment to rebuild a binding force in a diversified but divided society.<sup>142</sup>

Choi’s statement is a testimony to three definitive characters of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*: its collective ownership by the members, a heightened sense of local relevance and an urge to transform the pessimism of complaints into a form of congenial energy through artistic co-creation.

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Thickest Choi by the author on 26 February, 2019.

<sup>142</sup> The statement was posted on the project website as a blog entry in July 2009, around the time the choir made its public debut. The website, which was an online archive of the project, is no longer publicly accessible. Back-up files were kindly provided by Fong.

### 1.2.3 A Colloquial Choir, Identity of a Place and Ethos of a Time

*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* created its repertoire collectively with choir members and music practitioners. Following the suggestion Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen, a local songwriter was invited to compose the melody. Ho Shan 何山, a member of the popular indie band PixelToy, gave the choir a uniquely Hong Kong touch with a composition that sounds like Cantopop. Such songs are highly memorable (and thus marketable) for their easy-to-sing melodies, usually featuring catchy refrains that might as well become earworms. The tune of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* parodies this popular format, but unlike typical Cantopop that builds towards a crescendo, this choral music is thoroughly light-hearted. With crisp piano beats and guitar chords, it is in stark contrast to the negative energy vented in the collected complaints.

The lyrics were then written with the help of veteran lyricist Chow Yiu-fai 周耀輝, one of the city's most prolific Cantopop writers known for his authentic treatment of non-mainstream subject matter. Active in the Hong Kong music scene, Chow had nonetheless moved to Amsterdam for almost twenty years. It happens that he was back in Hong Kong briefly when the prelude exhibition was mounted. He visited the show upon a friend's recommendation. Soon afterwards, members of Pep! reached out to him and asked if he could help on the lyrics. Lyrics-writing is usually solitary work. The invitation to take part in co-creation sounded interesting to Chow, and he thought he could use his expertise to facilitate a bottom-up creative process.

In a workshop, participants wrote the lyrics together with reference to the collected complaints. Categorisation of the grumbles reflects how areas of concerns were demarcated: work, urban development and injustice, ineffective government and politicians, education, the media, gender and love, health, etc. When participants processed the materials, Chow noted that there were a lot of inhibitions. Many considered complaints about serious public issues, such as universal suffrage, more important than personal laments like “why someone else always gets

a better haircut.” Chow’s response was to assure everyone of the equal significance of all complaints, especially those about daily, intimate, personal politics.

In an ardent attempt to embolden amateurs in the creative process, Chow engaged the groups in active conversations and kept saying “This is okay!” and “Why not?” to make sure that everybody felt confident in their contributions. To cite complaints verbatim was a priority. Some participants were reluctant to include Cantonese expressions in the verse, thinking that the lyrics had to be properly “written”.<sup>143</sup> The maestro however encouraged the use of colloquial and mixed languages to encapsulate the city’s identity. Humour was embraced. “It was playful and jocular. We treated the complaints with black humour,” recalled Choi of the enjoyable experience. He made a special point about the collaborative process, “It was okay even sometimes the lyrics were off-tuned. The composer was willing to adjust.”<sup>144</sup>

“With only a few weeks between the collection of complaints and the performance,” remembered participant Tempo Yeung, “it was like an immediate response to the government’s policies and the social reality.”<sup>145</sup> Similar to what Fong felt when she first saw the exhibits of *Complaints Choir* at PS1, this Hong Kong song captures the city’s reality at that moment.<sup>146</sup> It voices out citizens’ daily grievances such as excessively long working hours and the fatigue of an overloading urban environment. (“No end to my round-the-clock working”; “Roadshow would you keep silent?”) It registers current affairs that clouded over the city—from mundane matters of food safety (“Piggy Piggy do you have a flu? A cup of milk a day, take my kidney away”) to symptomatic incidents that overshadowed future development: the erasure of collective memories (“The ring of Star Ferry Bell is out of my memory”), the lack of bureaucratic transparency and the impossibility of democratic

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with Chow Yiu-fai by the author on 13 December, 2019. Cantonese is mostly regarded as a spoken dialect, whose vocabulary is sometimes different from the formal written Chinese language.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Choi.

<sup>145</sup> Email correspondence between Tempo Yeung and the author on 29 July, 2014.

<sup>146</sup> The choir’s music video is available at YouTube, accessed 9 May, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQVZMMqg7\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQVZMMqg7_0). For readers’ easy reference, full lyrics of the song are included in Appendix II.

intervention. (“West Kowloon Cultural District public consultation is a scam,” “Universal suffrage always delays,” etc.)

Economic pressure in an apex of neoliberalism is a recurrent theme. (“Expensive meals and transport. I got no money left by the end of month,” “If I have no job interviews, I have to beg on the street,” “Why Macau has a tax rebate? Hong Kong has no minimal pay?”, “The greatest thing here is to make money. What else can I do?”) Discontents with specific facets of the city as a social system, such as education (“Why the education of Hong Kong is so poor?”) and the media (“Exaggerated and unfair reporting”), are pinpointed. As a propagated grand narrative (“Motherland is our backbone to face the world”) is mockingly repeated in the Putonghua refrain, politicians and government officials appear in cameos of unscrupulousness and ineffectiveness. (“Political parties sweet talk only,” “Why the Chief Executive keeps bullshitting?”) A two-part chorus sounds sexist. (“Flat-breasted and ugly, I’m a spoiled pork-chop,” “Ugly and no money, can I find someone lovely?”) Seemingly personal, these self-pitying laments nonetheless reflect a ruthless obsession with wealth and appearance.

“This is Asia’s grey city,” an ironic reference to the rhetorical branding of Hong Kong as “Asia’s world city,” aptly summarises the lyrics. This tirade of complaints paints a bleak portrayal in all regards. However, instead of sounding gloomy, the song is intriguingly uplifting. Part of this contradictory effect owes to the cheerful music. Sung to the brisk beats, frustrations find an outlet, and the joining of voices in venting the city’s collective woes is almost convivial. The wits to make fun of depressing situations are notable in the language of the lyrics. In the midst of the loaded content, a string of “囧囧囧囧囧囧囧 / gwing gwing gwing...” repeats four times in one of the stanzas. The character originally means “brightness”. Because of its hieroglyphic quality (like a face with raised eyebrows and an opened mouth), it is appropriated by Chinese internet users as an emoticon meaning dumbness.<sup>147</sup> Its repetition

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<sup>147</sup> See entry of the character in Uncyclopedia, an online database of subculture in Hong Kong, accessed 9 May, 2022: <http://uncyclopedia.hk/wiki/囧>.



might have been a general remark on the pervasive ridiculousness in the problematic society, but it also sounds gibberish, as if it is a slangy vocable to fill out the tune.

Colloquial expressions animate the original Cantonese version. Expressions such as “so poor that there is a hole 窮到穿窿,” “holding a bowl 揸兜” (a dead metaphor for begging), “explosion of a plague 發瘟” (also meaning “going mad”), “porkchop 豬扒” (a rude argot referring to unattractive women), “which *mouse* (an accented pronunciation of ‘place’) 邊「鼠」,” etc. convey many layers of untranslatable homegrown meanings and reinforce a local identity. The Cantonese lyrics also touch on specific incidents that strike a chord among those who witnessed them together. For example, the Cantonese original of “Cheating grandpa, granny’s money” is literally “tell grandpa and grandma to plant gold.” “Planting gold” was once a massive scam targeting old people. “\$4,800, enough for daily necessities” alludes to an eyebrow-raising policy to alleviate unemployment. Around that time, the government made provisions for 4,000 internships to university graduates. The monthly remuneration was HK\$4,800, shockingly low for anyone living in the expensive city. The Cantonese lyrics mocks this with tongue in cheek.

Embarrassing slips of politicians are picked on as telling instances of their ineptitude. To non-locals, “Hak Kan has to ‘try your breast!’” might sound nonsensically obscene. For insiders, it makes sport of an unnecessary “r” in the councillor’s commitment to “try our best” during a televised interview after winning the election. The impulse to grumble in a stressed environment is also delivered with a sneer: “You have pressure. I’ve pressure!” is a reference to a notorious sound bite from a brawl on a bus, which was filmed by a bystander and became viral on YouTube. Mockery goes hand-in-hand with a quirky sense of black humour, and the absurdity of these complaints is almost hilarious. The anger-fuelled complaints transformed into upbeat and original jingles. In the concluding chorus, the lyrics state clearly: “I love therefore I scold. I love therefore I blame. We wanna make a change.”



Fig. 1.4. Visual identity of *Complaint Choirs of Hong Kong*  
(Courtesy of Good Morning Design)

As the song got into shape, Pep! also tried to establish the choir's identity with visual forms. At that time, the young artists were sharing a studio with graphic designers Jim Wong 黃嘉遜 and Karman Leung 梁家文 of Good Morning Design and invited the two neighbours to develop the project's visuals. In many ways, the choir's visual identity shares the character of its song. Emphasising the local was a foremost design concept and the team collectively weaved together a medley of context-specific motifs. An emblem like a coat of arms parodies an European institution. The typical bear and dragon, however, is replaced by a rooster and a duck. "A rooster talks with a duck 雞同鴨講" is a colloquial expression meaning miscommunication. The duck, standing on the right in a position of power, wears a bow tie. This is not only a sign of formality, but also an insignia of the then Chief Executive, nicknamed "Bow Tie Tsang" for his signature attire. The chattering poultry makes a point about the eagerness, albeit to no avail, to enter into dialogue with political power. In the middle of the crest, under a crown reminiscent of the bygone colonial era, is a castle with no door. It alludes to Kafka's *The Castle*, whose protagonist K tries in vain to gain access to mysterious authority behind high walls.

The fervour to transgress is coded in a banana underneath. Along the lines of the lyrics' inside jokes, the fruit reminds local viewers of a farce in the city's Legislative Council. To express

his disapproval of the Chief Executive’s policy report, councillor Wong Yuk-man 黃毓民 furiously threw three bananas at the chairman’s podium. The incident sparked off a huge controversy and a few subsequent banana-themed public confrontations. Wrapping up, a sixteenth note and a trio of ribbons marked with the aforementioned “Complain, Complain, Complain” sit at the bottom. On the top is an ironic slogan: “Believe in Public Order.” Recounting his design concepts ten years later, Jim Wong remembered every detail fondly. “It is playful, and for people who have experienced that moment, it tells stories, and inspires thoughts, memories and imagination.”<sup>148</sup>



Fig. 1.5. Debut of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* at the 1 July demonstration in 2009 (Screncap from the project’s music video)

#### 1.2.4 Going Live in Real Life

*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* debuted at the 1 July demonstration (an annual large-scale rally on the anniversary of the former colony’s return to China) in 2009. Equipped with a full set of paraphernalia, including choir folders, uniforms, metal pins, banners and flyers, choir members marched together with other demonstrators in the rally and sang their song. The openly recruited choir was unabashedly amateurish, but performances such as this premiere were artistically orchestrated with complementary musical, visual and performative elements,

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Jim Wong by the author on 19 March, 2019.

and their conceptual engagement with real-world contexts. A spontaneous, dialogical relationship with the environment and serendipitous audiences was central to these performances. At the 1 July demonstration, after a pre-arranged performance on the main stage, the group found resonance with fellow demonstrators and passers-by who sang along upon receipt of handed-out lyrics. Political parties and concern groups staging roadshows along the rally route also invited the choir to stop by and perform by their booths. Yeung recalled the audience's reactions:

At the beginning, they did not have a clue about what we were doing. Then they saw that we were there to sing, nodded to our lyrics and finally gave us a big applause... The gap between us and the passers-by was dissolved in the time of a song.<sup>149</sup>

Positive reception is also exemplified by appreciative media reviews. The choir was covered by almost all major local newspapers and popular magazines, including *South China Morning Post*, *The Standard*, *Hong Kong Economic Times* 《經濟日報》, *Hong Kong Economic Journal* 《信報》, *Ming Pao Daily* 《明報》, *Sing Tao Daily* 《星島日報》, *Oriental Daily* 《東方日報》, *Apple Daily*, *Ming Pao Weekly* 《明報周刊》, *Next Magazine* 《壹周刊》, among others. *Apple Daily*, known for its pro-democracy stance, ran a story of the project shortly after its public appearance at the 1 July demonstration. After questioning the meaning of annual rally, crammed with “overly dressed demonstrators, excessively fancy banners, clamorous organisations and empty slogans,” the reporter changes his tone, “Fortunately, there was a group of passionate youth who turned nursery-rhyme-like music into voices of complaints. It is a bit carnivalesque, but at least they take a clear stance and succinctly sing their pledges.”<sup>150</sup> As if helping the group to dismiss criticisms, he includes an explanatory quote from Fong:

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<sup>149</sup> Email correspondence between Yeung and the author.

<sup>150</sup> Mong Wai-leung 蒙為亮, “Singing to Complain, No Need for Swearing” 〈唱歌投訴 唔使爆粗〉, *Apple Daily*, 15 July 2009, accessed 14 March, 2020, <https://hk.lifestyle.appledaily.com/lifestyle/culture/daily/article/20090715/12988242>.

Our lyrics are not cynical. All we wish is to resonate with Hongkongers. [...] Many journalists asked, “Why did you take to the street in such a high-profile way on 1 July?” First, we do not think that it was high-profile. People found it strange because they are not used to this. Secondly, we chose 1 July because it was a popular gathering, and a platform for mutual respect. Everyone represents himself or herself when he or she marches.<sup>151</sup>

The choir’s purposefulness is acknowledged by columnist Cally Yu 余若玫, who cites specific verses as evidence of youthful agency.<sup>152</sup> Public intellectual Ma Ka-fai 馬家輝 discusses the choir in a Mainland newspaper, comparing the choir to classic social mockery by well-known entertainers decades ago.<sup>153</sup> As if mischievously hacking the media from within, a news commentary programme produced by the public broadcasting service Radio Television Hong Kong features the choir’s rehearsal of a segment about “CCTVB”—a neologism ridiculing TVB (Television Broadcasting Company, Hong Kong’s most watched television channel) for siding with the authority like the state media CCTV (China Central Television). The programme was aired on TVB at prime time.<sup>154</sup>



Figs. 1.6 & 1.7. *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*, Lyrics ridiculing CCTVB (in parentheses) under the logo of TVB (right top corner) when the programme was aired at prime time (Courtesy of Vangi Fong)

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Cally Yu, “Keeping the Green Hills” 〈留得青山在〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, 9 August, 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Ma Ka-fai 馬家輝, “King of Complaints Song” 〈投訴歌王〉, *Shenzhen Economic Daily*, 28 August, 2009.

<sup>154</sup> *LegCo Review* 《議事論事》, “1<sup>st</sup> July Carnival” 〈七一嘉年華〉, Radio Television Hong Kong, aired 2 July, 2009 on TVB. Radio Television Hong Kong is primarily a radio broadcaster. While it also produces television programmes, it does not have its own television channel and uses airtime of other broadcasters.

After the debut, the choir embarked on a series of guerrilla performances in different parts of town, including places mentioned in the lyrics (eg. the yet-to-built West Kowloon Cultural District 西九文化區, still barren after years of vain public consultation; the clock tower in Tsim Sha Tsui 尖沙咀, the only remaining structure of the demolished Kowloon-Canton Railway Terminal 九廣鐵路總站, overlooking the former Star Ferry Pier at the other side of the harbour, etc.), fetishised landmarks (eg. The Golden Bauhinia 金紫荊, a gift from the Chinese Central Government, installed at the piazza where the handover ceremony took place, subsequently becoming an attraction of Mainland tourists and an object against which protests were staged), sites symptomatic of social problems (eg. privatised public space at Times Square 時代廣場, controversial urban redevelopment at Lei Tung Street 利東街, the satellite town Tin Shui Wai 天水圍, stigmatised as a “city of sadness,” etc.), the city’s busiest districts with maximum exposure (eg. Sai Yeung Choi South Street), as well as means of public transport (tram, bus, ferry and subway). Some of these locations were selected by the choir members. Some were chosen by public voting at Facebook. Popping up as a flash mob, each in-situ performance was an intervention.



Figs. 1.8, 1.9, 1.10 & 1.11. Guerrilla performances of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* at Golden Bauhinia Square (left) and Sai Yeung Choi South Street (right)



Figs. 1.10 & 1.11. Guerrilla performances of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* in front of Old Wan Chai Market 舊灣仔街市 (left) and walled housing in Tung Chung 東涌 (right) (Courtesy of Vangi Fong)

For instance, one guerrilla performance was sited at a refuge island in the middle of a pedestrian crossing in front of the Old Wan Chai Market. At that time, the historical market, a rare piece of Bauhaus-style architecture filled with collective memories, was soon to be repurposed into a shopping facility in a gentrifying scheme of urban renewal. When the choir sang in the midst of the incessant traffic, what was fleeting and what persisted became a physical juxtaposition. Another performance took place in front of walled housing. There was no visible exit from the towering buildings and what they represent. The choir was dwarfed, but at the same time stood tall as human beings resisting against what appeared to be invincible. “When we sang ‘we wanna make a change’,” recalled Fong, “I felt that our voices are bouncing back to us, as if telling us that the change we want to see has to come from ourselves.”<sup>155</sup>

These guerrilla performances were documented with photography and video. Selected footages were edited to become a music video, with bilingual lyrics in the subtitles. This video, documentation of the choir’s performances, all collected complaint forms and again exhibits of *Complaints Choirs* around the world were put together in an exhibition at 1aspace (an independent art space in Hong Kong’s Cattle Depot Artists Village 牛棚藝術村). The show also featured a number of derivative artworks. For example, Choi made a karaoke version of the song; the televised moment with “CCTVB” under a TVB logo was immortalised in a painting by Wong Ka-wing 黃嘉榮.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Fong, 26 February, 2019.



Figs. 1.12 & 1.13. Exhibition of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* at 1space, 2009



Fig. 1.14.  
Thickest Choi, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong—YouTube Karaoke*, 2009  
DV PAL, stereo, 5'10"  
(Courtesy of Vangi Fong)

Fig. 1.15.  
Wong Ka-wing, *CCTVB—Fast and the Best*, 2009  
Acrylic on canvas

This exhibition was intended to be a coda, but unexpectedly, the choir began to receive invitations to perform in various situations. It then moved on to a next stage: the real-life-derived participatory art project became an artistic participant in real life. A good number of protest organisers invited the choir to take part in their events. Often, their performance was included as a warm-up programme because it was an effective way to gather a crowd. Coinciding with the emergence of activism, the choir crossed paths with the repeatedly mentioned Anti-Express Rail Link Movement. By the end of 2009, the protest reached a boiling point. On the day when the public funding proposal was debated at the Legislative Council, a demonstration took place outside the council building and the choir took part. Dressed in black, the choir members joined many other artists and cultural practitioners who used creative forms to express their support of the movement. “We witnessed one performance after another,” testified both Fong and Choi, “There were many familiar faces, many



companions. It was deeply touching to see that so many people cared.”<sup>156</sup> In the charged context, the choir found itself a player in an emergent trend of activism.

Shortly after the anti-Express Rail Link demonstration, the choir staged another performance in a satellite town called Tuen Mun 屯門. This time, the event was not outwardly political and was not even a self-initiated intervention. It started out as a municipally commissioned “leisure and culture” programme of art in the park. The date of the show was 23 December, and the choir dedicated the performance to Christmas. This *Black Christmas Street Carol* is a multi-part, classical choir-like song. The lyrics cover a range of daily grumbles gathered through Facebook. The concluding chorus fires complaints at the particular occasion:

Oh Jingle Jingle 又到聖誕節	Oh Jingle Jingle, it's Christmas again
煲咗好屎 求耶穌救命	Bow-tie is shitty, Jesus please save us
Oh Twinkle Twinkle 又到新一年	Oh Twinkle Twinkle, it's new year again
What do we celebrate for?	What do we celebrate for?

With a creative intent to question what was worth celebrating at Christmas, this performance resulted in a surprise. Tuen Mun Park was itself a complaint-loaded venue. Like what was happening at Sai Yeung Choi South Street, noise from high-volume amplifiers used by self-entertainers/street performers was a nuisance to the neighbourhood. Many of these performers appeared to be Mainlanders, so there were also territorial complications. An officially approved performance in the contested park was an intriguing situation to begin with. The choir's approach was to interrogate public space. During site visits, choir members learnt that the performances disliked by some were nonetheless the only entertainment for others who found their small homes constricting and the costs of commuting to the eventful city centre prohibitively high. Thus besides singing their own song, the choir opened up the stage. At the end, they were joined by all sorts of performers and the audience rounded the evening up with a convivial group dance. Through these sited performances, from purposeful involvement in

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Fong and Choi, 26 February, 2019.

political struggles to serendipitous intervention in public space, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* evolved from a song to an active participant in societal situations.

### 1.2.5 The Ups and Downs of Participation

Originally formulated as a defined art project, the choir grew in unexpected directions. At the end of the year, the members considered whether this unexpected growth should continue. In the spirit of democracy, they opened the decision to a poll. Through an online form hosted at the project website, around one hundred people voted. The collective decision was that the choir should go on.



Fig. 1.16. Online voting for the continuation of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* (Documented in the project's archival website, retrieved with assistance from Vangi Fong)

The choir then carried on for another year, responding to one invitation after another. In a government funded programme called “Travel to Learn in the City 城市遊學,” *Complaints Choir* took part as an artist-in-residence in three local secondary schools. They encouraged students to express their dissatisfactions in lyrics—an opportunity rarely given in their mostly regulated environments. The teenagers blasted out what bothered them: overloading schoolwork, crammed classes, a chronic lack of sleep, “dictatorship” over hairstyles, etc. “Regulation on hairstyle is too dictating: eyebrows must be visible and cannot be covered.”

The complaints of the students were somehow amusing, but it was also sad to hear how young people were frustrated by a controlling system.

The choir provided a platform for the students to make themselves heard and for the school authorities to listen to their voices. A teacher in one of the participating schools, when interviewed by a news reporter, suggested that the principal was fine with the critical lyrics and approved of the students' bold expressions.<sup>157</sup> However, not everyone was positive. Within days after the news story, an anonymous post in a pro-establishment blog reacted dramatically with stern criticisms. The students' lyrics were scornfully accused as “illogical, low-level rebellion and blaming.”<sup>158</sup> This comment might be singular, but it also indicates that the choir's audaciousness was not unanimously supported.

On new year's eve in 2010, a performance was commissioned by K11, a then newly completed “art mall.” Again with inputs gathered through Facebook and contributions from the choir members, the choir wrote a “countdown song.” This song, obviously representing mostly a young generation, complains about the city's examination-driven education, the pressure of employment, materialistic values and over-consumption, obscenities in popular culture, etc.



(Female): Studying for good grades,  
I dare not relax  
(Male): Working hard in full steam



Indeed everyone in Hong Kong  
labours for promotion,  
and then gives everything for  
credit card repayments

<sup>157</sup> Siu Fai-ho 蕭輝浩, “Students Learn to Write Lyrics and Sing Bitter Songs About School. *Complaints Choir on Campus*” 〈學生學填詞 唱盡讀書苦 投訴合唱團走進校園〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, 1 April, 2011.

<sup>158</sup> *Hong Kong First* 香港最前線, “Extra: Attention! *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong Hits Schools*” 〈號外: 注意香港投訴合唱團「殺入學校」!〉, 3 April, 2011, accessed 20 August, 2019, [http://hongkongfirst.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post\\_9794.html](http://hongkongfirst.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_9794.html).



The 10,000 sq. ft. Coliseum and Stadium  
are not big enough  
So much efforts for the Asian Games



Donald you did a good job

Figs. 1.17, 1.18, 1.19 & 1.20. *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*, “Countdown Song,” 2010 (extracts), performed at K11 Art Mall (Screenshots from the performance’s documentation video)

As an annual review, the song also touched on contentious issues of the year, such as the government’s intended bid to host the next Asian Games despite widespread public disapproval, and pro-democracy Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波’s empty chair at the Nobel Prize presentation, etc. Irony is used as a trope throughout the song. Criticisms are worded as matter-of-fact descriptions or even compliments. The song ended with a sarcastic salute: “Donald [Tsang, the Chief Executive formerly introduced as “Bow-tie”] you did a good job.” Probably not too sensitive to the choir’s content, the mall’s public relations team lined up a media interview. When the reporter published an exegesis of the satirical content, the mall’s management was alarmed. On the day of the show, the performance was relocated to a quiet corner.

This performance also signalled a dwindling of the choir’s energy. As the choir roved from one situation to another, a good number of members eventually faded out for various reasons. Some wanted to keep a distance from politics. Some simply chose to spend time otherwise. Even Choi stopped participating, thinking that the choir had grown into a format that kept repeating itself. He was demoralised. The passion that fuelled the Anti-Express Rail struggles did not succeed in deterring legislation—singing “we wanna make a change” was not enough.<sup>159</sup> Fong was also frustrated, albeit for a different reason. Despite the loaded content

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Choi.

in their songs and participation in numerous activist campaigns, some choir members were still indifferent to social developments and were there only because they wanted to sing. “Were we simply providing weekly entertainment?” questioned the devoted organiser.<sup>160</sup> Meanwhile, group dynamics got fractious. Small circles of existing members were unwelcoming to newcomers. The quality of delivery was also affected by low attendance. When the repeated woes grew wearisome, the choir’s impact was seriously doubted. Sensing that all aspects were in decline, the choir deliberated again on its future. This time, members opted for an end. The final song of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* was a “graduation song.” It juxtaposes two parts. Sounding like a school song, the beginning slowly reiterates clichéd grand narratives:

傳說地狹港闊	The legend goes that land is lacking but the harbour is wide
人才薈萃	Full of talented people
漁村可變大城市	A fishing village can turn into a big city
人說互勉相愛	People say that everyone is encouraging and loving
勤力上進	Hardworking and progressive
願望總會達到	Dreams will all come true
異見亦能共處	Different opinions can coexist
期望人人包容厚道	Everyone is expected to be tolerant and generous
前進就算都市	Moving forward, even the city
猶如坐困	is constrained
美夢總會漸近	Dreams will finally come true

A change of tune immediately follows. Sung to a nursery rhyme-like melody, critical content, spelt out ironically in positive statements as illustrated below.

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with Fong, 26 February, 2019.



We come together in millions  
to be a slave to money



We come together in millions  
to lose everything with margins and warrants



Housing estates totally changed  
The market was torn down



Working till sick  
to earn \$20 an hour



Kind proposals are rejected  
Malicious laws are always approved



Interpretation of the Basic Law by the  
Standing Committee of the National People's  
Congress becomes a habit.  
There is nothing citizens can do.



Bow-tie is shamelessly thick-skinned



Act Now  
(Donald Tsang's election slogan)

Figs. 1.21, 1.22, 1.23, 1.24, 1.25, 1.26, 1.27, 1.28.  
*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong, "Graduation Song," 2011* (extracts)  
(Screenscups from the song's music video)

The song concludes the whole project. As always, the lyrics address social problems at various levels, but the treatment has become more sophisticated with the structural juxtaposition and the ambivalent superimposition of grave content on a merry and childlike tune. Timely responses to current affairs, to no avail as critical interventions, remain as records of the city's discontents. An acute sense of contradiction prevails throughout the song: is the choir's cheerfulness a positive celebration of "happy struggle 快樂抗爭," then believed to be a promising alternative to radical confrontations? Or is it utterly black humour, to an extent that it assumes farcical cynicism? For a ceremonious closure, a special shooting was held at GAIA School 自然學校. This particular school is itself a statement: vis-a-vis result-oriented mainstream education, GAIA is an alternative school that gives room to individual exploration and self-determination. With the outlier's campus as their makeshift alma mater, wearing uniforms printed with "Fresh Grad," the choir sang their last song.

#### 1.2.6 An Expression of Imagination, the Agency to Take Part in Society Meaningfully and an Emergent Collaborative Spirit

Although the choir eventually disbanded, its co-creative process made a mark. Together, the choir members transformed a widespread sense of helplessness into collective expressions. "Instead of suffering in solitude, many people faced their discontents together," said Fong, "It was not exactly a struggle. While being vocal about the reality in our city, we went with the flow. The willingness to sing the complaints was a form of release and relief. It was an expression of imagination: something like this was possible. This is especially important for a society in despair."<sup>161</sup> Besides songs, performances, interventions, installations and videos, relation also made up the choir's art. In the extended course, choir members went abreast through intense moments of civil participation. Collective deliberation was the choir's modus operandi. Ownership and agency were critical resistance to the monolithic power against which many complaints were lodged.

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Fong, 26 February, 2019.

“It offered me a channel to take part meaningfully in society,” endorsed choir member Louis Hung 孔憲基.<sup>162</sup> When the choir was recruiting through social media, the then thirty-year-old was unemployed. “I was very *jak* 宅.<sup>163</sup> I had nothing to do. One day, a Facebook post of the choir got my attention. I was in the choir when I was in primary school. I thought there would be an audition, but I was accepted automatically.”<sup>164</sup> Singing with the group was a transformative experience for him, who previously found his routine life uninspiring. “If I did not take part in *Complaints Choir*, my only interface with society would be going to work or singing karaoke. But those songs are not as interesting, meaningful and socially relevant as the choir’s.” He sees the choir as a stimulating “window” of empowerment:

Most citizens do not care about the lives of others and social problems. The choir provides a window for those who are indifferent to think about social issues. Even though they are powerless in the face of all kinds of injustice, at least there is a modest way to do something.<sup>165</sup>

As a member of the choir, he took part in its many in-situ performances, observed how these youthful struggles were doubted by an older generation, witnessed how politicians feigned attention, and reflected critically on whether social movements were “consumed”. He also befriended fellow members who introduced him to the world of art and culture. After joining the choir, he found it impossible to return to his old life. “Working nine to six is too eroding.”<sup>166</sup> He has traded the stability of regular employment with the space to explore what he finds more meaningful. For a while, he has been teaching people to make upcycled ukuleles, a craft he learnt from friends in the choir. Whenever he runs a workshop, he talks about trash separation. “We wanna make a change.” The refrain stays with him.

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<sup>162</sup> Interview with Louis Hung by the author on 6 April, 2019.

<sup>163</sup> *Jak* is the Cantonese adaptation of the Japanese notion of *otaku* 御宅族. In Hong Kong the word has more to do with unsociability and seclusion than the obsession with computer games and anime.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Hung.

<sup>165</sup> Email correspondence between Hung and the author on 24 July, 2014.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*



Many alumni of the choir eventually became active organisers in the community, providing alternatives to what they used to complain about and ushering in the change they wanted to see. For instance, Yeung, who fondly remembered the group's creative response to immediate social situations, came up with the idea of Summer Slow Life Festival 夏漫漫生活節. Rejecting the city's oppressive obsession with speed and efficiency, the festival contemplates the possibility of slowness through the arts. Choi subsequently founded Lawn Map 草原地圖, a project which mapped out lawns and all that they represented in the concretised city. The initiative eventually evolved into a popular independent music and lifestyle programme (more on this evolution will be discussed in Chapter Three). The model of Lawn Map, which brought together people with shared interests through open calls, was largely derived from *Complaints Choir*. The choir's co-creative approach was an inspiration. "There is always something surprising and deeply touching. It is essentially trust-based."<sup>167</sup> Like the choir, most of his projects had virtually no financial support and resources were frequently mustered through crowdsourcing. "If the idea is good, and if it is part of you, it can be realised even without resources," said Choi with conviction.

The choir also made an impression on a much more seasoned person like Chow. "It was bizarre—why would so many strangers contribute their time to something like this?"<sup>168</sup> Having worked in the music industry for decades, he was astonished by the man hours invested in this totally pro bono project. It was exceptional in this pragmatic city fixated with making money, and the encounter with these "bizarrely" committed people in Hong Kong was exhilarating to him. Soon after taking part in the project, he was pondering on his own future and eventually decided to move back. "The beautiful image" of his experience with the choir was a factor behind his decision. "It's important that people can come together to make things happen." He later co-founded Every Life Is a Song, an ambitious project to engage people from all walks of life to write songs for people around them in this city of 7.4 million.

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Choi. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Chow.

*Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* responded to the social reality of Hong Kong and intervened artistically with collective voices. By singing loud and proud that business as usual was bothering, choir called for reimagination. Although these songs of complaints did not immediately lead to any change the group “wanna make,” it resounded with society during those charged years and its co-creative agency stayed on with former participants. Ching, whose comment on artists’ social engagement amidst Hong Kong’s lack of democracy was previously quoted, compares the choir to the mythical Sisyphus. His comment is sympathetic: in the choir’s insistence on pursuing something that was inevitably futile, he sees a demonstration of an emergent collaborative spirit.<sup>169</sup> Such a spirit became pivotal in numerous social movements in the next decade. It also drove *Woofers Ten*, which Ching later co-founded with ten others.

### 1.3 Participation as Resistance: *Woofers Ten* (2009-2014)

“*Woofers Ten* is the most active *kaifong* (meaning ‘local community’ in Hong Kong) art collective, not only in Hong Kong, but also in East Asia,” writes Taiwanese artist/activist/scholar Kao Jun-Honn as he introduces *Woofers Ten* in his survey on art occupations in the region.<sup>170</sup> Kao’s statement, illustrative of the recognition this art collective has received for its roughly five-year existence, pinpoints communal participation as its definitive quality. Kao’s view is echoed locally. Hong Kong activist/urbanist/scholar Sampson Wong Yu-hin 黃宇軒 commended: “*Woofers Ten* not only represents a local cultural space that existed from 2009 to 2013, it also deeply impacted the consciousness of the Hong Kong people by telling the crowds, ‘This is the potential of community arts.’”<sup>171</sup> Among the many

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<sup>169</sup> Luke Ching Chin-wai, “Songs of Sisyphus” 〈西西弗斯的歌聲〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, 17 October, 2010, accessed 10 August, 2014, <http://www.01.mingpao.com/cfm/style5.cfm?File=20101017/sta13/vzfl.txt>.

<sup>170</sup> Kao Jun-honn, *The Multitude: Occupy Movements of East Asian Art* 諸眾：東亞藝術佔領行動 (Taipei: Walkers Cultural Enterprises, 2015), 169. The translation of *kaifong* as “local community” is Kao’s interpretation for his Taiwanese readership. In Hong, the word *kaifong* is a colloquial expression for “neighbours” or “people in the neighbourhood.”

<sup>171</sup> Sampson Wong Yu-hin, “From the *Woofers Ten* Debate to the Coming of the Community Art Era,” *LEAP*, 10 March, 2014, accessed 4 March, 2020, <http://www.leapleap.com/2014/03/from-the-woofers-ten-debate-to-the-coming-of-the->

projects examined in this thesis, Woofers Ten is a relatively well-known example in local and regional literature. While its political position, social engagement and connection with the community have been widely discussed by the members themselves and other writers, this discussion focuses on its treatment of participation as one of its key tactic of resistance against hegemonic encroachments.

Like *Complaints Choir*, Woofers Ten came into being in a milieu when the belief in art as a form of social agency, together with a “collaborative spirit” in Ching’s words, motivated many art and cultural practitioners to expand their forms, fields and methods. It was the brainchild of Ching and art critic Jasper Lau Kin-wah 劉建華, who were joined by eight other partners including C&G Artpartment C&G 藝術單位 (a collective formed by artist-couple Cheng Yee-man (Ah Gum) 鄭宜敏 (阿金) and Clara Cheung 張嘉莉), artists Lee Chun-fung, Law Man-lok 羅文樂, Kwan Sheung-chi 關尚智, Doris Wong 黃慧妍 and wen yau, photographer and critic Edwin Lai Kin-keung 黎健強 and writer Cally Yu. The “ten” (with C&G as a duo) jointly proposed Woofers Ten as a durational project for Shanghai Street Artspace 上海街視覺藝術空間, an intriguing venue whose background will be elaborated on later. In the late 2000s, Ching and many of these artists were involved in numerous renditions of “hijack” art, addressing issues such as people’s right to public space and urban redevelopment, as well as the aforementioned struggles for the preservation of Star Ferry Pier and Queen’s Pier. Their proposal for the art space was an interesting step forward. It attempted to hijack an institutional opening and subvert it into a base for socially engaged art experiments.

Woofers Ten’s explorations were driven by motivations beyond aesthetic interests. In a video made for the tri-city exhibition *Reverse Niche: Dialogue and Rebuilding at the City’s Edge* 《逆棲－都市邊緣中的對話與重建》, a number of Woofers Ten members account for their

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community-art-era/. As discussed later, Woofers Ten was in operation at Shanghai Street Artspace from 2009 to 2013. When its tenancy officially ended, a “Continuing Working Group” occupied the space for roughly one year until 2014.

vision. At the onset, Clara Cheung of C&G Artpartment states that the artists' shared dream was that art "can bring some changes to society." Lee, who later became a principal when Woofers Ten renewed its tenancy for a second term, pinpoints the marginalisation of "lives, relationships and trust among people" by single-minded materialistic development. Lau, playfully nicknamed "general in-chief" of the inaugural term, conceived the initiative as a reaction to a regretful situation overshadowing many struggles at the time: "We always [go] too late to the site to resist the development." To gain a foothold in a neighbourhood was a tactic to address critical issues before a point of no return.<sup>172</sup>

### 1.3.1 Context: Resistance in-Situ and Redefining Revitalisation

Shanghai Street Artspace was a venue owned by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council 香港藝術發展局 in a historical neighbourhood called Yau Ma Tei 油麻地. Literally meaning "the land of oil and hemp," it was once a coastal stretch of land where fishermen dried their ropes and vendors sold tung oil for boat maintenance. Over time, the harbour was reclaimed and Yau Ma Tei developed into a commercial-residential area. A Taoist temple, a night market, brothels, coffin shops, etc., are long-term neighbours with clusters of hardware and specialised appliances stores, wholesalers and street vendors, and numerous affordable eateries and shops. Atop street-level businesses, the buildings house grassroots homes. Hardly anything can be more out of place than a white cube gallery exhibiting contemporary art. That, however, had been basically the case of the Artspace, whose heavily subsidised tenancy was granted through selections of open-called proposals, since its opening in 1999.

When the Arts Development Council called for a new tenant in 2009, Ching and Lau, together with the other signed-up artists, tried to hack the system. Following the council's requirements,

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<sup>172</sup> Featuring the works of Woofers Ten, Coco Room of Osaka and Taiwan Studio, Exhibition and Arts Labour Union of Kaohsiung, *Reverse Niche: Dialogue and Rebuilding at the City's Edge* was curated by Alice Ko Nieu-po and was presented at Taipei's Hong-gah Museum 鳳甲美術館 in 2013, Kaohsiung's Pier 2 Art Center in 2014, and the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism \ Architecture in 2014. Videos were made by the curator during her field work in these locations. The one on Woofers Ten can be viewed online, accessed 9 May, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a13w2FYIhkc>.

they submitted a proposal specifying a series of ten exhibitions to be mounted during the two-year tenancy. While such vetting processes typically require specifications of rigid deliverables, the artists made room for transgression and included “side projects” as an integral part of their proposal. Besides loosening up the space for spontaneous creations, they were also critical of earlier airdropping of elitist art into the grassroots neighbourhood and intended to deal with a precarious local condition. In 2005, a mega-size shopping mall and a five-star hotel opened in the area. Gentrification kicked in. Rising rent and new regulations to keep the streets “in good shape” made it harder and harder for small businesses to survive. A bird market, fondly visited by locals for decades, had to relocate.

The situation was not exclusive to Yau Ma Tei. It was a growing symptom among many old districts in Hong Kong, increasingly monopolised by chain stores and commercial outlets that served either tourists or those who can afford. Such redevelopment, whose outcomes were frequently criticised for their erosion of humble lives, are euphemistically named “revitalisation 活化” by the authorities. *Woo-fer*, the word pronounced in Cantonese, is therefore the point of departure of this “Ten”:

Many *kai-fong* shake their heads when they hear the word “revitalisation”, because when the government says “revitalisation”, it means big shopping malls like Langham Place and hotels, plus famous works of contemporary art. Then the birds have to leave. Many small shops closed down because of rising rent. Our groups of artists think that art should not be airdropped to a community to revitalise it. Rather we wish to try out a kind of community art that is based on intimate dialogues between artists and *kai-fong*.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The quotation is taken from the first issue of *Woofers Post*, a monthly community newspaper *Woofers Ten* started during its second tenancy. The newspaper will be discussed in a later part of this chapter. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

### 1.3.2 Co-creating Grounded Meaning

To begin its dialogue with the community in its newly made home, Woofer Ten's first project was *Prize! Prize! Prize!* 《多多獎小小賞》, curated by Ching and Lee. Ching was clear about the positioning of Woofer Ten: "Woofer Ten was like a community centre—it was a centre of interflows. The most worth-seeing thing was the community."<sup>174</sup> In this particular instance, attention was directed to shops in the vicinity. As previously outlined, Yau Ma Tei is a historical neighbourhood and celebration of old shops was not uncommon in media stories and tourism promotion. This project, however, was not fixated in conventional ideas of historical significance. "Luke put it as 'recognising the everyday,'" recounted Chung Wai-ian 鍾惠恩, who got a job at Woofer Ten as its only full-time staff soon after graduating from art school. "At the beginning, I thought the title sounded vulgar and horrible," recalled Chung who was then used to institutional decorum, "but later I changed my mind."<sup>175</sup> Rediscovering values in the quotidian, *Prize! Prize! Prize!* looked for unassuming small shops whose honest-to-goodness qualities were worthy of exceptional commendation.

*Prize! Prize! Prize!* awarded small shops with trophies. The parody is clear: commemorative sculptures and award presentations are archetypes of public recognition. Without exception, these official spectacles assert authoritative ideologies and domination in public space. As if countering such imposing power, *Prize! Prize! Prize!* celebrates a different kind of value from bottom up. The selection of awardees was made through spontaneous street-level encounters. Alongside contributions by a group of around thirty young artists who scouted around and interacted with shopkeepers, an open system crowdsourced ideas for applauding shops with praiseworthy merits.

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with Luke Ching Chin-wai by the author on 28 February, 2020.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Chung Wai-ian by the author on 3 February, 2020. The Chinese title, literally "many many prizes, small small rewards," is a parody of tacky taglines common in supermarkets' promotions.



Figs. 1.29 & 1.30. “Delicious Egg Tarts Award”



Fig. 1.31 & 1.32. “Humanistic Boss Grand Award”



Fig. 1.33 & 1.34. “Malade Savior”



Fig. 1.35 & 1.36. “Quietly Reminding You Not to Overlook Grand Award”  
(Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

Appreciative nominations culminated in a series of whimsical awards. The ordinary was recognised in a “Delicious Egg Tarts Award 好味蛋撻獎” and a “Photogenic Uniform Award 最上鏡制服獎”, presented to a bakery and a tailor respectively. An egalitarian take on cultural significance manifested in a “Humanistic Boss Grand Award 人文老闆大獎” (seemingly a twist of the Hugo Boss Prize) to an antique store and an “Art Education Grand Award 藝術教育大獎” to a coppersmith. To acknowledge unsung heroes, a helpful grocer who remedied the unhealthy diets of single young men was crowned with “Malade Savior 麻甩仔救星,”<sup>176</sup> and a “Quietly Reminding You Not to Overlook Grand Award 靜雞雞提提你不可忽視大獎” applauded an acrylic sign maker for “silently alerting people through signs such as ‘mind your head.’” These titles are heart-warming in their sense of humour and recognition of what these humble shops meant to the real lives around them.

To emblematised these authentic recognitions of the everyday, DIY trophies, refabricated with old ones gathered from a closed-down school, contradict the formality and permanence of official monuments. After the physical trophies were given to the awardees, an exhibition at Woofier Ten posed as a further gesture of anti-monumentalism. Complementary to exhibits of project documentation and derivative contents, a map showing the locations of the awardees guided visitors through a tour in the neighbourhood. As they walked from one shop to another, spotting trophies in the shop windows and possibly interacting with gregarious shopkeepers, the audience took part in a process similar to the project’s creation. Unlike static and stultifying monuments, *Prize! Prize! Prize!* activated curiosity, exchange and relations.

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<sup>176</sup> Many Cantonese words have interesting cross-cultural origins. “*Ma-lut* 麻甩”, a slangy description of scruffy and coarse, typically middle-aged men, is thought to be related to a misunderstanding of the French word “*malade*” in Guangzhou. The urban legend goes that the Cantonese mistook the word, which referred to patients in a hospital, for unkempt men in general.



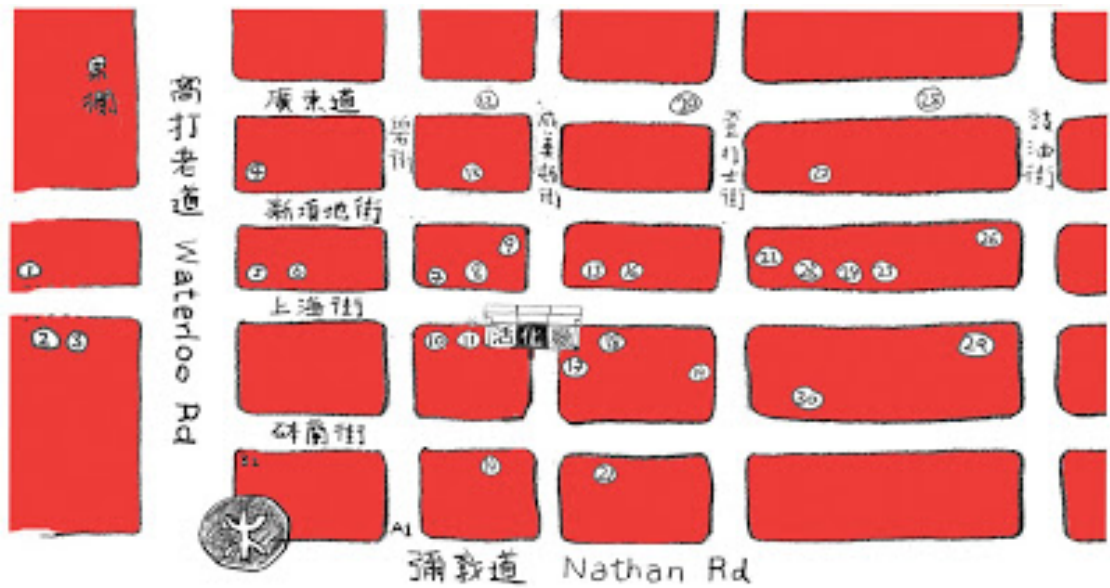


Fig. 1.37. Map directing visitors to discover the awardees in the streets



Figs. 1.38, 1.39, & 1.40.  
Old painter “Master Fung” cherished his “Most Shanghai Street Gallery” trophy in his shop  
(Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

*Prize! Prize! Prize!* was not formulated schematically as participatory art, but participation was an indispensable attribute. There are many tiers of participation—the artists’ locally inspired creations, the audience’s journey of discovery and the involvement of the shopkeepers. The latter is the least straightforward, but perhaps mattered the most. Apparently, these shopkeepers did not exactly have a share in the making of the physical pieces, but a significant part of the project’s meaning was grounded in their interactions with the artists and reception. The trophies, made with a low budget and never intended to be long-lasting, were very well received by their recipients. Examples of how the awardees cherish these objects are illustrative of this meaning-making process, which gave tactile form to mutual regard. A

framed drawing given to a reticent old draughtsman as “The Most Shanghai Street Gallery 最上海街畫廊” was hung on his wall until the very last days of his business. “Another *kaifong* took a broken trophy back to Woofers Ten a few years later, hoping for repairs,” reminisced Chung.<sup>177</sup>

Time was taken for the *kaifong* to become more actively engaged. As a prompter, a part of the exhibition was a call for “*kaifong* glorious histories.” It began with a simple poster asking people in the neighbourhood to drop by and share proud stories about their neighbours or themselves. The accessible space of Woofers Ten and the locals’ readiness to chat were conducive to neighbourly conversations. Some of them grew organically into new projects. Within the timeframe of *Prize! Prize! Prize!*, an exemplary anecdote was the replay of a movie scene at an embroidery shop. As the shopkeeper recounted her memories, the artists learnt that the shop was once used as a set in a popular romantic comedy. They then filmed a re-enactment of the scene in-situ. The exact content of the soap opera was inconsequential. What was important was that the shopkeeper, instead of being only an observer of someone else’s screen presence, took centre stage and became a protagonist in her own environment. The footage, included as a derivative piece in the exhibition, was an early example of how Woofers Ten created a platform for the community to co-create content.

This redistribution of cultural rights is a critical issue raised by advocates of local culture. Among them was activist Chan King-fai 陳景輝, who took part in *Prize! Prize! Prize!* as a nominator:

Hong Kong culture is not the five thousand years of traditional Chinese culture...

Those who created the history of Hong Kong were not the big bosses, but the middle and lower classes... Understanding the “little people” in the multitude is

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<sup>177</sup> Interview with Chung.

important. It is only through their stories that we can understand our own culture and identity.<sup>178</sup>

If Woofers Ten is essentially about recognition of “the ‘little people’ in the multitude,” the meaning it projected through the mass media is particularly worth noting. In September 2009, when the group first settled in Shanghai Street Artspace, a full-page story in *Ming Pao Daily*'s Sunday supplement, known for its regular subscription by readers interested in art and culture, ushered in a series of sporadic but extensive coverage over the coming two years. After introductory paragraphs on “What is Woofers Ten?” and a vignette illustrating lively interaction with *kaifong*, both written in a colloquial language, there is a forecast of the then upcoming *Prize! Prize! Prize!*. The project's intent of fostering community network, subversion of monuments and its model of engagement are clearly spelt out. Calls for nominations and glorious stories are included at the bottom of the paper, laid out in a style reminiscent of street flyers.<sup>179</sup> About two months later, after the project materialised, the next full-page feature comments on the result:

It did not bring art to the community in a high-profile or arrogant way. The young people did “airdrop”. They did not necessarily know much about Shanghai Street, but the process was interesting and reciprocal. Nomination and awards produced dialogues. The subjects were old shops that have been running for three, four decades, and not artists.<sup>180</sup>

These contents in *Ming Pao Daily* were editorials, but to begin with, the media campaign was lined up by Ching. The subject was not only Woofers Ten's projects, but also the social issues they addressed. Through such contextualisation, these publications served as a medium to raise awareness and stimulate discussions in the discursive public sphere.

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<sup>178</sup> Chan King-fai, “The Origin of the Local Movement” 〈本土運動的緣起〉, in *Journal of Local Discourse* 《香港本土論述》, ed. Journal of Local Discourse Editorial Committee (Hong Kong: UP Publications, 2008), 31. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>179</sup> Full-page coverage on Woofers Ten in *Ming Pao Daily*, Sunday Supplement, 27 September, 2009, 6. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>180</sup> *Ming Pao Daily*, “Woofers Ten: Inaugural Issue” 〈活化廳：創刊號〉, 8 November, 2009, C6. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

Returning to the case of *Prize! Prize! Prize!*, other media also contributed to its discourse building. A half-page story in the news section of bestselling *Apple Daily* starts with an upfront comparison with government “revitalisation”:

Government officials always talk about “revitalisation”, but what they do are basically expelling residents in old districts, tearing down old houses and allotting land to developers for profitable buildings and shopping malls. This is not revitalisation. A young group of artists went to Shanghai Street and invited *kaifong* to “nominate, present awards and host guided tours,” and promoted old shops that have been silently endeavouring in Hong Kong. This is revitalisation.<sup>181</sup>

Another extensive story in *Sing Tao Daily* makes a special point about the project’s encapsulation of micro histories and highlights the embroidery shop as an old trade that might see its last days if there was no succession.<sup>182</sup> The title of a full-page feature in *Hong Kong Economic Journal* sounds like an imperative: “Memory, Start Building Now.”<sup>183</sup> As if giving a hand to promote this dialogue with the local community, a three-page story in *Weekend Weekly* 《新假期》, a local leisure magazine, presents the unusual trophies, cameos of the shops and a section of the community map as a recommended itinerary.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Leung Pui-fan 梁佩芬, “Revitalising Shanghai Street” 〈活化上海街〉, *Apple Daily*, 19 November, 2009, E12. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>182</sup> Yeung Yiu-tang 楊耀登, “Artists Commending Shops and *Kaifong* Glorious Histories—Shanghai Street “Oscar”, the Past Is Worthy of Reminiscence” 〈藝術家表揚店舖術坊威水史——上海街「奧斯卡」往事堪回味〉, *Singtao Daily*, 18 October 2009, A12.

<sup>183</sup> Tin Kwong-an 田江雁, “Memory, Start Building Now—On Shanghai Street Woofers Ten” 〈回憶，從現在開始建立——記上海街活化廳〉, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 7 November, 2009, 27.

<sup>184</sup> *Weekend Weekly*, “Prizes for Everyone in Shanghai Street” 〈人人有獎上海街〉, 9 November, 2009, 74-76.



*Prize! Prize! Prize!* is a telling debut of the creative direction of Woofer Ten. Its work was not programmatically crafted as participatory art, but multiple stakeholders—artists, *kaifong* and the audience—co-created meaning. Not only did it transgress conventional art institutions, it also broke into actual operations of everyday life and makes sense as both quotidian experiences and artistic actions. To achieve this, it requires methods that would be locally called “grounded 貼地.” The expression, in binary opposition to “off the ground 離地,” epitomises common perception of the irrelevance of some lofty forms of art and a contrary orientation towards the reality of commoners. *Prize! Prize! Prize!* was grounded in values that might not be given any regard in grand history and high culture, but were held dearly, albeit unnoticeably, by dwellers in grassroots streets. To engage people who might not automatically respond to Art with a big A, Woofer Ten used humour to break the ice and opened up space for layers of meanings. From idiosyncratic trophies to playful collaborations and media campaign, its methods permeated the capillaries of existing social fabrics.

### 1.3.3 Creation of a Common

Around the time when Woofer Ten opened, a series of promotional videos were released to articulate its purpose. Among them was a quirky one that shows an old-fashioned television, captured by a shaky, obviously hand-held camera. After a brief scene with “Woofer Ten is possibly?” superimposed on an unspeaking, bespectacled man (Lau, Woofer Ten’s “general in-chief”), extracts from an episode of Korean period drama *Hwang Jini* plays on the filmed screen. The edited sequence features a debate between two Joseon-era entertainers:



[artists who can touch] commoners and even untouchables are true talents



talents that can only touch a certain group



are only shallow artistes



no, not even artistes



When would you give up  
your pride and delusion?



Don't be silly. Face the reality!

Figs. 1.42, 1.43, 1.44, 1.45, 1.46 & 1.47. Screenscapes from YouTube video titled “wooferten,” 2009<sup>185</sup>

This argument between the aspiring outlier and her authoritative adversary seems to be a comment on Woofer Ten’s approach to art. The latter’s admonition professes how touching “commoners and untouchables” was against the grain. The former’s obstinance speaks for its resolution. Eleven years after making the video, Ching still cites *Hwang Jini* in his art school classes. He said, “You only need to watch the last episode.” There, the champion of accessibility performs tirelessly for the crowds, until a point her audience starts fanning for her. “It’s about the creation of a common,” concluded Ching.<sup>186</sup> Like Hwang Jini who made her art a medium for connecting real individuals in real relations, Woofer Ten practised art in the same spirit. The parody video ends with a conclusive statement: “Woofer Ten is possibly a place to watch television in Shanghai Street!” The down-to-earth message is equivocal: without naming “art” at all, it raises the potentiality of a form of practice that unreservedly

<sup>185</sup> “wooferten,” accessed 27 September, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMISoRN7vps>.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Ching.

merges with real-life for an alternative common, and invites relaxed, unpretentious and lively participation.



Fig. 1.48. Concluding statement in YouTube video titled “wooferten,” 2009

Like “Woofert”, “Ten” is also loaded homophone. Besides referring to the ten founders, in Cantonese *ten* shares the same sound with the word meaning the main room in a house. Its usage ranges from government offices (for instance in the old days, police stations were called “*ging-caat-ten* 警察廳”) to places where people gather for a particular purpose. (Eg. *chan-ten* 餐廳, restaurants; *jam-ngok-ten* 音樂廳, music halls; *gaau-ji-ten* 交誼廳, social parlours, etc.) In domestic environments, a living room is called *haak-ten* 客廳, literally “guest-ten.” Among these many possible *ten*’s, Woofert Ten’s definition of itself is clear in its logo. As seen at the top right corner of the video screen, it is a plan-view sofa. This revitalising space is a hospitable living room.

The space actually had a sofa in a homely setting, furnished with second-hand furniture, carefreely unkempt. Everybody, especially *kaifong*, was welcome to drop by and casually lounge about. Visitors could freely use the space’s water dispenser, fridge, computer and other gadgets, and there were special initiatives to encourage interactions. Besides the aforementioned “*kaifong* glorious histories,” there was “ping pong diplomacy” which parodied the historical move China took to reconnect with the non-Communist world at the end of the Cold War. Over ping pong, artists interacted with walk-in visitors, who were given toilet rolls



(“stolen” from other art spaces) as an extra incentive to join the game. The members, especially General Lau and full-timer Chung, also spent a good deal of time chitchatting with visitors. Gradually, people in the neighbourhood, particularly retirees and those without regular employment, began to frequent the space.

As they slowly built relationship with the artists, who were there not to only talk about art but also chat about life, “the *kaifong* felt that Woofers Ten was not just run by a few of us,” noted Lee. “They volunteered to help. Say when we were busy, they would host other *kaifong*, help water the plants, clean up the place... *Kaifong* who were close to us naturally did all these, just like tidying up their own home when it got messy.”<sup>187</sup> “A year later,” Lau wrote in an introduction to Woofers Ten in the anthology *Creating Spaces: Post Alternative Spaces in Asia*

《搞空間：亞洲後替代空間》：

Woofers Ten has gradually attracted momentum with visits from nearby residents through mutual interaction and assistance. And with each event, it makes every effort to involve appropriate neighbourhood participation, strengthening the natural creativity from these types of exchanges. Through affecting the people of the community, it provides daily participation in culture and art for the community, as well as links the perspective of culture and art. This enhances the appreciation and care that the residents have for their living style and space, letting them feel as if they were stakeholders with a sense of civic rights and belonging. This becomes a cultural participant’s feeling of self-worth—this is the key measure of Woofers Ten.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ko, “Community/Art Merging Hosts and Guests—Interview with Woofers Ten Core Member Lee Chun-Fung” 〈邁向主客互融的社區/藝術—訪「活化廳」核心成員李俊峰〉, *Art Critique of Taiwan* 《藝術觀點》, no. 57 (January 2014): 18.

<sup>188</sup> Lau, “Introduction to Woofers Ten,” in *Creating Spaces: Post Alternative Spaces in Asia*, ed. Lu Pei-yi, (Taipei: Garden City, 2011), 330.

#### 1.3.4 The Kaifong Took Centrestage

After two years, some Woofer Ten members thought it was about time to round up the project, but some saw the potential to go on. Among them were first-term member Lee and a number of post-80 artists, including Fong who started *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*, Roland Yip 葉浩麟, Sushan Chan 陳素珊 and Au Wah-yan 區華欣.<sup>189</sup> They reapplied to the Arts Development Council and had the tenancy renewed for two more years. A refocus was clear at the onset, as announced in the new monthly community newspaper *Woofer Post* 《活化報》:

Over the past two years, we observed that Shanghai Street was full of interesting characters and human warmth, but it was facing drastic changes. Therefore, even more so we hope to activate the community's meridians with art and foster sharing and discoveries through different methods, so as to strengthen *kaifong's* sense of recognition and participation in the community, and make Woofer Ten an approachable and avant-garde art community centre.<sup>190</sup>

The will to engage people in the neighbourhood in this “living room” already prevailed in the first term. In the second term, this became the emphasis. Fuller *kaifong* participation was exemplary in a number of *kaifong*-driven projects.

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<sup>189</sup> “Post-80” is a descriptor of a generation born after 1980. Unlike previous generations, they grew up when discussions of Hong Kong’s identity emerged as a critical issue in the final days of the colony, and came of age after the handover. Their social involvement was notably active in instances such as “P-at-riot” 八十後六四文化祭, a cultural project clearly identified with a post-80 perspective, as well as many of the aforementioned struggles. For an elaborate discussion of the context of the term, see To Chun-ho 杜振豪, “Post-80 八十後,” Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University: Keywords, accessed 11 March, 2020, [https://www.ln.edu.hk/mcsln/23th\\_issue/key\\_concept\\_01.shtml](https://www.ln.edu.hk/mcsln/23th_issue/key_concept_01.shtml).

The applicants for Woofer Ten’s second term were endorsed by first-term member Lau Kin-wah and Cheng, together with Wong Nai-chung 黃乃忠 (referred to Mr. Wong in later parts of this chapter as he is usually called), a traditional flower plaque craftsman who settled in Woofer Ten after being evicted from his old shop in another “revitalised” district. The new group was later joined by more artists, include Ng Ka-chun 吳家俊, Cheung King-wai 張景威, Pak Sheung-chuen 白雙全, Wong Chun-kwok 王津鈺, among others.

<sup>190</sup> Lee, “Message from Host Junior: What Does ‘Woofer Ten’ Do? 〈小廳長的話：「活化廳」攪咩東東㗎?!〉,” *Woofer Post*, January 2012, accessed 9 May, 2022, <http://wooferpost.blogspot.com/search/label/issue1>. Original text in Cantonese with colloquial expressions. Translation by the author.

A most notable example was an exhibition featuring *kaijong* Mr. Cheng 鄭生. Through “*kaijong* glorious stories,” members of Woofers Ten met the retiree who took pride in his extensive vinyl collection. He later became a frequent visitor and always shared his passion for popular music. His enthusiasm was already publicly presented during *Prize! Prize! Prize!* as a side programme, in the form of a worksheet about local music and in Woofers Ten’s appearance in the aforementioned *Ming Pao Daily* coverage. When the first-ever Art Basel Hong Kong was launched amidst fanfares in May 2013, *Where Art Thou, My Love—Cheng Kaijong Albums Collection* 《知音何處——街坊鄭生唱碟收藏展》, a showcase of Mr. Cheng’s cherished collection, was Woofers Ten’s critical response to that frantically eventful month for the local art scene.

When discussing the exhibition’s curatorial direction, Lee refers to Harald Szeemann’s 1974 exhibition of his grandfather’s belongings.<sup>191</sup> In Mr. Cheng’s exhibition, attitude became form in the show’s celebration of the colloquial, both in terms of the exhibits and the way they were shown. The exhibits, selected by Mr. Cheng himself, were telling of the ardour of a *kaijong* next door. As popular music registered what resonated with the mass, the contents and styles of these vintage records were physical testimonies to developments in Hong Kong through the years. Making use of the space’s ground-level shop window, Mr. Cheng’s collection was displayed in an unembellished manner. Faded covers were framed within a painted background with bright green strips and cut-outs of handwritten words, posing a vivid contrast with the refined aesthetics of high art. Inside Woofers Ten, another part of the selected collection was displayed on simple shelves for visitors to get hands-on.

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with Lee by the author on 2 August, 2014.



Figs. 1.49 & 1.50. *Where Art Thou, My Love—Cheng Kaifong Albums Collection*, 2013  
(Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

The exhibition was in oblique conversation with an institutional approach to collection, curation and exhibition. As it amplified the cultural significance of a *kaifong*'s passion, Mr. Cheng was a “subject”—not in the sense that he was subject to this curatorial framework, but an active participant whose subjectivity ran the show. He was present as a DJ during the exhibition period and shared with visitors his favourite tunes and knowledge, from physical conditions of the records to stories of the music industry.

Another telling example is *You Help Me Help Her* 《你幫我我幫佢》 (2013), a project initiated by Fred Ma (Fred's mom in Cantonese). The elder visited Woofers Ten almost on a daily basis because she could freely use its DVD player for watching health-related videos. She eventually befriended the artists and became a key member of the place. In Christmas 2012, Woofers Ten held a “rice balls for the homeless” event. Fred Ma took part and was reminded that her late mother did the same for beggars when she was a child. Soon afterwards, she showed up with two thousand Hong Kong dollars and expressed the wish for another rice ball giving event at Chinese New Year. As much as the artists wanted to support Fred Ma, at that moment they did not have the capacity to realise her dream. Instead of letting her down, they came up with crowdsourcing as a solution.

Through a Facebook call, ten odd volunteers were recruited. With funds raised by Fred Ma herself, over one hundred rice balls were prepared and given to homeless people in the

neighbourhood.<sup>192</sup> The non-monetary exchange and the social relations wrapped in these rice balls are comparable to Rikrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Free/Still)* (1992), a classic example of relational aesthetics.<sup>193</sup> However, the rice balls gifting was not a simulated event in a classy white cube, but a genuinely grounded exercise of care and citizens' self-organisation. Woofers Ten has inspired an individual to take the lead in filling a social interstice. By leveraging its network, resources in the community were mobilised to empower civil action.

### 1.3.5 Artistic Strategies, But Not Art

The erasure of living space by gentrification and neoliberalism was a critical issue tackled by Woofers Ten. Their resistance was site-specific to Yau Ma Tei and also had wider relevance. That art, after setting foot in a local neighbourhood, accelerates gentrification is frequently critiqued in many parts of the world. Wary of this situation, local music practitioner Wong Chun-kwok discusses the social and political ethics involved in art's entry to urban spaces:

Annette Baldauf rebukes against Richard Florida, who celebrates the “creative class,” for granting special rights to capitalists on public issues and leaving the cityscape to corporate consumption; the creative class actually has nothing to do with art and creativity. To respond to the economic impasse with the creative class undermines the original creative communities who have been experiencing the rise and fall of a city together. Baudauf argues that if artists are to resist gentrification, they have to occupy (Florida says gentrify, we say occupy). Artist must take an active part in the global occupy movement. [...] Now art

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<sup>192</sup> The author very much hoped to interview Fred Ma in person. Unfortunately, during the research period, her health deteriorated and an interview would be too much of a burden to the ailing old woman. Fred Ma passed away in 2020. Her story was told by Lee in his interview by the author.

<sup>193</sup> First presented in 1992, Tiravanija's *Untitled (Free/Still)* transformed the back room of a SoHo gallery into a temporary kitchen in which the artist cooked and served vegetable curry freely to anyone who wanted it. A comparable work was included in *Traffic* (1996), curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, who coined the term “relational aesthetics.” See Bourriaud's discussion on Tiravanija's approach to participation and interactivity in *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2009), 25.

practitioners around the world can no longer justify themselves with false claims. From now on, we need more critical dialogues. Do not become a cultural bulldozer. Do not serve the devil while paying lip service to community. The truth might be in what Holub says: this city needs more artistic strategies, but not art.<sup>194</sup>

Citing Viennese urbanist Barbara Holub, Wong argues that to avoid being an accomplice of gentrification, “artistic strategies” must be involved in long-term urban planning and policy-making, such as measures to stabilise property prices, controls over rent, etc. These were beyond Woofers Ten, but Wong is still appreciative of its “interrogation of the relationship between art and *kaiifong*.”<sup>195</sup> As Woofers Ten engaged *kaiifong* in recognition of their cultural significance, neighbourly interactions and civil agency, second-term host Lee compares their work to Japanese activist Hajime Matsumoto 松本哉’s “Amateur Revolt 素人の乱”: it is a mobilisation of likeminded “poor people”—*kaiifong*, artists as well as other “have-nots” in the wider society—in the forming of a sustainable community network that realises social change in everyday life.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> The essay was written in the final days of Woofers Ten. Wong Chun-kwok, “Farewell Woofers Ten, Welcoming More Critical Discussion on Public Art 〈道別活化廳，迎來更尖銳的公共藝術討論〉,” *CultMon* 《文望》, no. 6 (September 2014); re-posted on *Inmedia Hong Kong* 香港獨立媒體, 18 January, 2016, accessed 13 March, 2020, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/1040108>. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Lee, “From ‘Starting from One Year, Ending at Two’ to ‘Leaving the Living Room to *Kaiifong*’—Woofers Ten” 〈從「一年起，兩年散」到「交個廳俾街坊」——活化廳〉, +Lee Chun Fung, accessed 13 March, 2020, <http://leechunfung.blogspot.com/2015/06/blog-post.html>. Founded by Hajime Matsumoto in 2005, The “Amateur Revolt” is a second-hand store in Tokyo that is also conceived as a base for political action. Identifying themselves as “the poor,” Matsumoto and his peers organised party-style street parades as actions to reclaim the people’s right to a neoliberal and bureaucratically policed city. It has multiplied in Tokyo with numbered stores opened by others championing the movement and has influenced many activists in other parts of East Asia, including Woofers Ten. See Hajime Matsumoto, *Amateur Revolt: A Survival Guide Written by Japan’s King of Protest for the 22K Punk Generation!* 《素人之亂：日本抗議天王寫給 22K 崩世代的生存祕笈！》, trans. Ken Chen 陳炯霖 (Taipei: Pushing Hanz, 2012; Takurou Higuchi 樋口拓朋, “Amateur Revolt—Abandoned Space, or Base of Revolt” 〈廢棄空間，或者是叛亂據點——論素人之亂〉, in *Creative Space*, 132-161. Comparison between the “Amateur Revolt” and Woofers Ten as well as *Complaints Choir* will be elaborated on later in this chapter on p. 123.

To connect this sustainable community network, a number of artistic strategies were devised. One of them was *Woofers Post*. As the monthly community newspaper drew attention to the stakes of urban redevelopment, problems were not presented as abstract headlines, but were humanised in caricatures of people whose livelihood was irrecoverably affected. The paper did not only criticise. It also put forth what could be done in resistance. For instance, to counter the diminishing of space for small businesses, there was a call for “*kaifong* advertisements.” In a chatty language, the paper covered neighbourhood anecdotes. Seemingly trivial, these however attended to real lives of recognisable people, as opposed to the erasure of individuals and their connections in massive developments. The paper also publicised what Woofers Ten did to build relations and raise awareness in the community. Thematic events, such as the aforementioned “White Christmas: rice balls giving” and a Chinese New Year red banner-writing project (which invited participants to write their authentic wishes instead of standard lucky messages), rebuke against oppressive social situations and fostered human ties in a community of resistance.

「白色聖誕：派飯糰」

今年的平安夜是三十年來最凍，最適合食野暖吓身。由活化廳成員主理，自家親手製作熱騰騰飯糰數百個，並在平安夜送到區內街坊和有需要的人手中，讓他們過一個溫暖的白色聖誕。排檔街坊肥姐食完豎高手指大讚：好好味呀！



“White Christmas: Rice balls giving”:  
 “This year’s Christmas Eve was the coldest in 30 years.... Hundreds of hot rice balls were prepared and given to *kaifong* and the needy so they all had a warm white Christmas....”

Fig. 1.51.  
*Woofers Post*, Issue 1, January, 2012



“Wishing the pai-dong (street vendors):  
 Free of worries and conflicts,  
 good business and strength;  
 continual operation,  
 the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
 (which then announced that it would no longer grant new licenses to street vendors) turns back!”

Fig. 1.52.  
*Woofers Post*, Issue 2, February, 2012

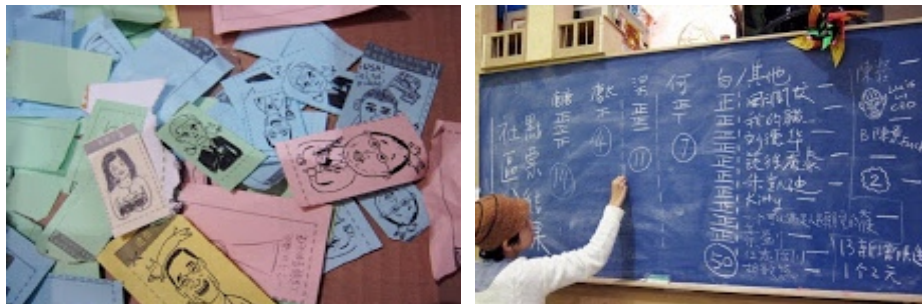
*Woofers Post* was also a channel to call for participation. Its community circulation enabled it to reach out directly to its readers. The format of a small newspaper, as opposed to a poster, gives more space to elucidation of contexts and rationales. In March 2012, a large-scale mock

voting was carried out by the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong 香港大學民意研究計劃. The background was that even though universal suffrage is promised for Hong Kong in the Basic Law, the city's Chief Executive, whose nomination has to be approved by the Central Chinese Government, was chosen by an exclusive committee whose members are not elected by average citizens. To replace this system with genuine universal suffrage had been a pledge in major struggles including the Umbrella Movement, and was one of the five demands arising from the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement. In 2012, three unpopular candidates ran for the highest office. A day before the small-circle election, a mock poll was held for citizens to have their say through hypothetical ballot. On the anticipated day, Woofers Ten was one of the community voting stations. Supporting the event, that issue of *Woofers Post* published a call to join this civil referendum. At the same time, there was a complementary activity using another set ballot tickets. For those who did not want to vote for any of the three candidates, there was a blank ticket. Voters could leave it blank or suggest a name. The results turned out to be an interesting parallel to the mock referendum. Most cast blank votes, demonstrating their mistrust of all candidates. Some proposed other names, such as activist Eddie Chu Hoi-dick 朱凱迪 (who played a key role in many of the civil struggles in late 2000s and early 2010s), movie star Chow Yun-fat 周潤發 (an icon of the heyday of Hong Kong cinema), pop singer and actor Andy Lau 劉德華 (who had a generally good reputation until he took part in a promotional video for a controversial reclamation project in 2018) and "my cat." It was unclear how serious these nominations were, but like *Prize! Prize! Prize!*, this whimsical intervention cast light on the rights due to the people and what they had to say.





Fig. 1.53. A long queue for the mock voting outside Woofers Ten on 24 March, 2012



Figs. 1.54 & 1.55. Woofers Ten's version of the mock voting  
(Photos printed in *Woofers Post*, Issue 4, April, 2012)

### 1.3.6 The Agency to Self-Rescue

That “little people” mattered in mammoth socio-political situations is a recurrent assertion of Woofers Ten’s “Amateur Revolt.” Running through the fifteen issues of *Woofers Post* was a struggle against gentrifying urban redevelopment. In April 2012, a thematic project was mounted to convene critical discussion. Titled *Yau Ma Tei Self-Rescue Project and Demonstrative Exhibition* 《殺到油麻地！地區自救計劃暨展覽示範》, it interrogated what residents could do to resist the pressure of redevelopment.



Fig. 1.56. Shopfront of Woofen Ten during *Yau Ma Tei Self-Rescue Project and Demonstrative Exhibition* with sprayed red words and signage parodying visual forms common in forced relocations amidst gentrifying urban redevelopment (Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

Among the exhibits, *Who Forced Master Fung Away?* 《誰逼走了馮畫師》 was a reconstruction of a commercial artist's street-corner stall. Old draughtsman "Master Fung", awarded "The Most Shanghai Street Gallery 最上海街畫廊" in *Prize! Prize! Prize!*, exemplified an old trade that has waned in the course of development. Once upon a time, when photography was a rare luxury, Master Fung drew charcoal portraits for his clients. Shortly before the exhibition, the canopy of his idle stall was forcibly removed. This final strike was almost symbolic of the destruction of old businesses by ruthless redevelopment. With assistance from Master Fung's son, the old painter's works and tools were presented in an installation. The set invited visitors to share memories and thoughts on what this case represented.

While this work prompted discursive reactions, *Vertical Planting System* 《垂直種植系統》 tested out what could be done practically to expand possibilities in the urban environment. The Anti-Express Rail Link Movement has awakened critical awareness for agriculture, self-sufficiency and sustainable development. Some activists continued the struggle by farming in rural fields; some looked for spaces to practise in accessible urban locations. In this instance, Yau Ma Tei Gardener 油麻地花王 teamed up with *kaifong* Uncle Mui 妹叔 and exhibited a set of hanging pots made with repurposed plastic bottles. The device was designed by Uncle

Mui who used it for planting in his office. Complementing the display, an explanatory booklet mapped out spaces for guerrilla planting in the neighbourhood. Yau Ma Tei Gardener and Uncle Mui continued with various planting experiments in the following years. Because of Wofer Ten's connections, other urban farmers also settled in Yau Ma Tei. These were small-scaled and personal undertakings. Nonetheless, they demonstrated tactical actions taken by powerless "little people" for tangible change.

An extension of the *Self-Rescue* project was a salon-like "chat-meeting 傾偈會" which brought together *kaijong*, artists and other concerned parties to address common concerns and discuss tactics of resistance. The conversation touched upon a range of critical issues including local economy (as opposed to corporate monopoly), community network in the face of change, as well as urban planting as a form of social and environmental intervention. In the subsequently publicised minutes, the discussion seems lively and constructive. For example, when addressing the last topic, attendees shared experiences on rooftop farming, discussed hurdles and came up with ideas for raising interest. These included self-organisation for community gardening, playbacks of documentations and promotional activities such as "vegetables salon photography exhibition," "vegetable sculpture," "veggies for Valentine," etc.<sup>197</sup> Apparently, Wofer Ten's approach of tackling social issues with ingenuity, humour and artistic acts was contagious. The chat-meeting, however, also revealed that the presumed resistance was not deemed necessary by everyone. "Some older *kaijong* actually welcomed redevelopment because it would practically improve their living conditions," reflected Fong, "Sometimes, our imagination of community was based on certain presumptions. However, when we really got in touch with the *kaijong*, we learnt that some did not think in the same way. We might have imposed our ideas on them."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Minutes of "Community Self-Rescue Chat-Meeting," Project Website of *Yau Ma Tei Self-Rescue*, May 18, 2013, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://ymtselfrescue.blogspot.com/2012/08/205-20-5-1.html>.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Fong by the author on 23 March, 2020.

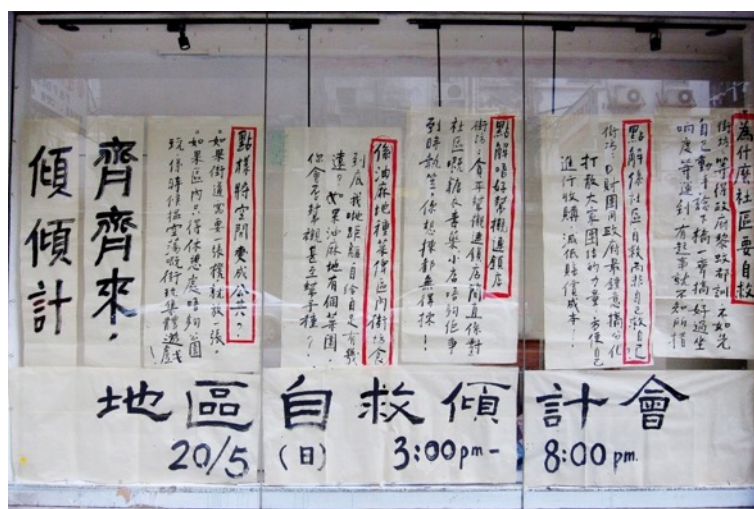


Fig. 1.57. Agenda of “Community Self-Rescue Chat-Meeting” posted on the shop window of Woofier Ten (Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

Projects like *Yau Ma Tei Self-Rescue* make a vocal statement about civil participation. Current affairs are not abstract public agenda, but inseparable with people’s intimate experience. Even though influential decisions were not up to the people, the “poor” could still assert their agency through individual actions. This multitude is not necessarily in unison, rather, it encompasses a plurality of diverse and sometimes conflicting voices.

### 1.3.7 The People Will Not Forget

Regard for individuals’ views was at the heart of Woofier Ten’s handling of grand matters, from the previously discussed issues of cultural equity and urban development to the grave subject of history. Ever since the founding of Woofier Ten, June Fourth, the local epithet for the Tiananmen Massacre, had been an unforgotten question. To Hong Kong, June Fourth was not only a historical incident. Across all territories in the People’s Republic of China, the Special Administrative Region was the only place where public commemoration and discussion of the incident was permitted.<sup>199</sup> The freedom to touch on a fatal taboo in the

<sup>199</sup> Circumstances changed drastically during the course of this research. After hard-handed crackdown on dissent in 2019, the annual vigil was banned in 2020 on the premise of pandemic prevention. In 2021, public commemoration was again forbidden and different parts of the city were policed by thousands of officers. In 2022, Victoria Park, where the annual vigil took place, and its vicinity were cordoned off.

Mainland was an indicator of Hong Kong’s relative autonomy. “The people will not forget 人民不會忘記,” a slogan in June Fourth commemorations, suggests the people’s defiance against repressive erasure of history and political amnesia. As the city’s freedom of expression was increasingly threatened, to talk about June Fourth openly was in itself a political statement. Since its early days, Woofers Ten had been literally highlighting “64” when it printed its telephone number (3485 6499) in public releases:



Fig. 1.58. “64” highlighted in Woofers Ten’s telephone number  
*Ming Pao Daily*, Sunday supplement, 27 September, 2009

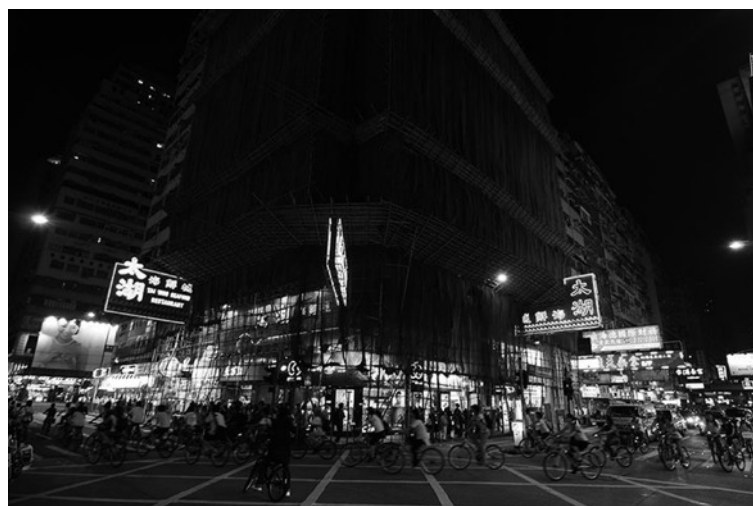


Fig. 1.59. *Cycling to the Square*, 2010  
(Courtesy of Lee Chun-fung)

In 2010, *Cycling to the Square* 《來往廣場的單車》 was organised on the twenty-first anniversary of June Fourth. It was a re-enactment of the memorable scene of students ferrying resources to Tiananmen Square during the pro-democracy movement. Wearing white shirts like students in iconic photos, with black ribbons to symbolise mourning, artists, *kaifong* and other participants cycled all the way from Woofers Ten to Victoria Park (where a large-scaled memorial vigil was held annually), embodying remembrance and identification with the

student protestors while presenting along the busiest roads a symbolic public performance. A stop was made at a sculpture known as *The Flying Frenchman*. Allegedly, the work by French sculptor César Baldaccini was originally a comment on the Tiananmen Massacre and was titled *Freedom Fighter*. However, when it was installed in a municipal plaza, its name was changed to evade that reference. An annual flower presentation had been organised by artists to “rectify” the meaning of the work.<sup>200</sup> This event was embraced as part of the cycling itinerary, which became an annual participatory ritual to accompany Woofers Ten’s thematic exhibitions on June Fourth.

The cycling event was usually participated by a few dozen, but as the gathering took place outside Woofers Ten, attention rippled out. Lee recalled:

One year, I went to a nearby florist. I didn’t know the owner. When he learnt that I wanted to buy white flowers, he asked whether they were for Woofers Ten. Then he gave me a big, nicely wrapped bouquet. When I paid, he said, “It’s free. Take it as a gift. Place it for me. I have to take care of the shop and cannot go myself. Thank you, young man, for going on my behalf.”<sup>201</sup>

This anecdote exemplifies Hongkongers’ emotional connection with June Fourth. Its commemoration, however, had become a contentious matter as the critical mass deliberated on the city’s identity and relationship with Mainland China. Since the first anniversary of the crackdown, an annual candlelight vigil had been hosted by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China 香港市民支援愛國民主運動聯合會, which had organised rallies in solidarity with protestors in Beijing during the Tiananmen Movement and subsequently helped many flee China with donations raised in Hong Kong and overseas. Attendance of the memorial vigil ranged from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands according to the organiser (the police’s figures were typically lower). In 2012, the turnout

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<sup>200</sup> Edwin Lai Kin-keung, “Some Questions About a Few Public Sculpture 〈對於幾尊公共雕塑的一些疑問〉,” in *From the Handover to the Millennium—Seven-Person Self-Selected Anthology of Visual Arts Criticisms* 《從過渡跨越千禧——七人視藝評論自選文集》, ed. Lai and Anthony Po-shan Leung 梁寶山 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2002), 219.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Lee.

broke records, but there was also an outburst of vocal criticisms. Most notably, a young man shockingly seized the mic and denounced the vigil's tokenism. In the following year, the Alliance's slogan for the vigil was "Love the Country and Love the People, Hong Kong Spirit 愛國愛民，香港精神." This provoked many, especially localists swore to differentiate Hong Kong from Mainland China. Alongside censure against the Alliance, some questioned the validity and meaning of the commemoration itself.<sup>202</sup>

By 2014, June Fourth was a complicated matter. In the same year, Woofers Ten entered a difficult situation. Its application for a third tenancy was declined by the Arts Development Council. In a struggle for its continuation, a few members began an unauthorised occupation at the Shanghai Street Artspace. During this period, core member Lee teamed up with artist Lo Lok-him 盧樂謙 and curated *Pitt Street Riot* 《碧街事變》, a site-specific action theatre project that engaged participants to interrogate what June Fourth meant to individuals in Hong Kong. Lo is founder of an initiative called "June Fourth for This Generation" 這一代的六四, which had previously organised street performances to reflect on the meaning of June Fourth for those who were still very young and mostly relied on secondary sources to reconstruct the historic incident.

In *Pitt Street Riots*, collective memories brought to life a largely forgotten episode in local history. After the crackdown at Tiananmen, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China originally called for a general strike and a large-scale parade on 7 June, 1989. Attendance was expected to reach a resolute 1.5 million. However, before that day, a riot took place overnight around Pitt Street, one block away from Woofers Ten. Reportedly, up to seven thousand rioters disrupted the quiet night by setting fire to vehicles

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<sup>202</sup> For an overview on the contestations concerning June Fourth commemoration in the early 2010s, see Ho Kam-yuen 何錦源, "Commemorating June Fourth in Hong Kong: What Are Localist Youth Dissatisfied About? What Have They Missed?" 〈香港悼念六四：本土派青年不滿什麼？錯看什麼？〉, *The Initium* 《端傳媒》, 16 June, 2016, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://theinitium.com/article/20160606-opinion-ky-64/>. An updated discussion on what June Fourth means to Hong Kong over the years until 2019: Edmund W. Cheng et al., "1989-2019: Perspective on June 4th from Hong Kong," *China Perspectives* 2 (2019): 81-86.

and looting, and attacked the police by throwing bricks, stones and glass bottles. After fierce confrontations, the riot was suppressed and the streets returned to order. For safety considerations, Szeto Wah 司徒華, Chairman of the Alliance, called off all planned actions. At the same time, he averred that the riot was a scheme to jeopardise a massive display of Hongkongers' dissidence.<sup>203</sup>

“After 2014,” observed Lo, “People’s feelings towards June Fourth changed significantly. Previously, June Fourth was almost a ‘functional’ subject, a very symptomatic topic that epitomised the contradictions between Hong Kong and the Mainland. It was an occasion for expressing your relationship with the Communist Party, and a question of identity. Later, when people argued that June Fourth was no longer relevant, it was also about identity.”<sup>204</sup> He and Lee were very conscious of this switch in mentality and pondered over timely treatment of June Fourth. “Pitt Street Riot was a public incident. How important was it, to an extent that I needed to talk about it publicly?” Their answer to this question was to bring in more voices, so that “different people can talk about June Fourth from different perspectives,” and that “the public can be engaged in different ways to continue narrating this story.”

Pitt Street Riot was a pretext for examining the relationship between the repression of June Fourth and the people in Hong Kong. A foundation of the project was oral history. Lee and Lo conversed with *kai fong* who witnessed the riot in first person. Recapturing memory was more difficult than expected, because many old shops had relocated. Among those who had been around for such a long time, some said they remembered, but the incident was mixed up with another major riot in 1967. However, some revealing fragments did surface.<sup>205</sup> Wah Gor 華

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<sup>203</sup> Background of the Pitt Street Riot, including news clippings, was documented in the project’s website, accessed 16 May, 2020, <http://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/search/label/Materials%20%E5%89%AA%E5%A0%B1>.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Lo Lok-him by the author on 6 February, 2020. The following quotations of Lo are also taken from the same interview.

<sup>205</sup> The following summary of recollections is paraphrased from verbatim records of interviews in the project’s website, accessed 16 May, 2020, <http://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/search/label/Fragments%20%E8%A1%97%E5%9D%8A%E5%8F%A3%E8%BF%B0>. Extracts of the cited materials are included in Appendix II.



哥, who worked at a mahjong house, attributed the riot to the people's troubled emotions as they thought a vindication was needed.

Even though Lo and Lee asked specifically about the riot on 7 June, many drifted automatically to their own experiences during the Tiananmen Movement. Trophy shop owner Mr. Luk 陸生 recalled a sleepless night, with flickering lights from televisions all round. Fruit seller Wing Gor 榮哥 took part in a parade for the first time in his life, "because [he] thought the Chinese government was wrong, and we needed to tell them they were wrong." Antique shop owner Mr. Chan 陳生 has been keeping newspapers as historical records, thinking that "as Chinese people, we must keep denouncing to do history justice." *Kaifong* Henry remembered going to a rally with his family members, who slowly became apathetic because "some might be too sad at that time and turned cold eventually." Miss Choi 蔡小姐, a cultural practitioner, missed the cancelled demonstration on 7 June. "I was so disappointed. This has been weighing down my heart for years."

Lo and Lee found in these oral accounts a "face of Hong Kong," once upon a time:

Everywhere, there were self-initiated actions to assert freedom, democracy and equality. People contributed to a kind of value that was difficult to put in words.

There were shock and promise. Over time, the sentiments faded. But through *Pitt Street Riot*, these faded histories are reconnected with us.<sup>206</sup>

Materials from the interviews informed the project's further development. Through a Facebook open call, *kaifong*, frequent visitors of Woofers Ten, people interested in art and culture and other creative practitioners clustering in Yau Ma Tei got on board to reconstruct the riot at its very location. The process was open. Sometimes visitors dropped by and chipped in a word or two. Veteran storyteller Uncle Hung 雄仔叔叔, who has been hosting a guerrilla

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<sup>206</sup> Quote of Lee in Lin Hsin-i 林欣怡, "Script: Screen Memory" 〈劇本：銀幕記憶〉, *Art Critique of Taiwan* 《藝術觀點》, no. 67 (September 23, 2016): 27. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

project called *Tales We Tell* 《四圍講故》 to reinvigorate the vernacular tradition of storytelling at street corners, was invited to prompt participants to share their own stories about June Fourth.

“Regret” emerged as a keyword. The cancellation of the 7 June strike and protest, an irrecoverable omission of what Hong Kong could have done for the pro-democracy movement, was overlaid with a loose plot with multiple storylines, each about someone missing the chance to do something. Co-creating this part-real, part-fiction drama, some participants wrote the script while others made the props. Most of them, including Lee and Lo, did not have any theatre training. Their amateurish co-creation was never intended to be a finely crafted performance. Rather, they saw it as “action theatre” that turned the streets into a set for collective action.

Two street performances took place in late May and early June 2014, around the time of the twentieth-fifth anniversary of June Fourth. The active participants were joined by a walk-in and walk-past audience. Amidst the hustle and bustle in the streets, the action began with three soliloquys by three men. In the roles of a high school student, an old former journalist and a middle-aged *kaifong*, they recounted their own regrets revolving around 7 June, 1989: an unfinished love story, a resignation from idealism, and a four-storey black banner which never flew in the demonstration for which it was made. After these monologues, others in the group re-enacted the riot by blowing whistles, chanting slogans, making sounds with a range of daily objects and waving a gigantic piece of black cloth to represent the commotion. Someone repeated shouted, “Here is 7 June, 1989.” Members of neighbouring collective Tak Cheong Lane 德昌里, formed after the first Occupy Central in 2010 to 2012, jammed with live music.

As the procession moved through the congested streets, the audience followed and naturally became part of the act. Some were given banners or a corner of the black cloth. Passers-by stopped and observed the unexpected action. Some looked confused. Some took photographs. Finally, the last scene took place in a public garden. Surrounded by a growing crowd of

around one hundred, the three lead actors appeared again to close their stories, personal yet also symbolic of what Hongkongers have gone through collectively. The young student talked about a missed opportunity and the persistence of memories. The resigned journalist figured out the mysterious disappearance of his idealistic Communist father. The *kaifong* who desperately hang the banner from his flat gathered the black cloth over a tale of disbelief.



Fig. 1.60. Re-enactment of Pitt Street Riot began with amateur soliloquys in the street



Fig. 1.61. Actors and the audience re-enacted protests in 1989 as they walked through the streets with banners.



Fig. 1.62. At a climactic moment, a huge piece of black cloth fluttered in the streets to symbolise commotion.



Fig. 1.63. The action closed with a recounting of a *kaifong*'s true story.  
(Screenscaps from documentation video of *Pitt Street Riot*, 2015)

*Pitt Street Riot* was simultaneously a public spectacle and participatory theatre. Its meaning is constructed by both spectatorship and different levels of participation. For its first-tier participants—those whose personal memories informed the story—the project was a conduit for individuals to vent their reactions to a collective trauma and validated them as micro histories, buttressing grand history in people's actions, thoughts and emotions. Lo cited the case of an interviewee, who found a relieving outlet for feelings trapped in her heart for decades.

Second-tier participants were those who co-created the performance together and experienced “first-hand” the interplay between historical incidents and personal experiences. Among them was Fato Leung 飛圖, who was born in 1993 and only learnt about June Fourth when curiosity drove him to search online after hearing repeated mentions every year. In *Pitt Street Riot*, he played the role of the young student whose teenage romance was thwarted because of happenings in society at large. He admitted that, even though an acute sense of social awareness was in the air after numerous recent struggles, what struck him most was not the political events, but the regretfully fruitless puppy love. At the time when he was re-enacting the past, to say that the story gave him a perspective to history was an exaggeration—for it was a history not personally known to him. However, going through the following period between the Umbrella Movement and the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Protest shed new light on that memory. “Some people wonder why young people would risk and sacrifice

so much for what they considered justice,” Leung reflected, “But if we look back at June Fourth, high school students in Hong Kong also reacted strongly in response to the movement in Beijing.”<sup>207</sup> The regret of the riot strikes a different chord. “After 1989, the next occasion of mass mobilisation for a social movement was 2014. If the 7 June rally had happened, people’s civil participation might have been very different.”

A further tier of participants was the audience, who did not just look on as spectators, but also embodied the act as they followed through. Grace Lai 黎家怡 (吉暝水), who later became an art editor, was among the meandering audience. She reflected on what the action meant to the city across time. “I was struck by how free Hong Kong once was. They freely put up posters on the subway exit, and marched through the cross streets without any interruptions. This is not possible now.”<sup>208</sup> Revisiting the project’s documentation, she recalled that her experience in the performance added a new dimension to what she knew about June Fourth. Lai was born in 1989 and had only learnt about the incident from her family, history teachers and film footages. *Pitt Street Riot* exposed her to an unknown part of history. She did a bit of research afterwards and reckoned that “besides rallies, Hongkongers responded to the incident in many different ways.” Lai now only has sketchy memories of the performance, but her immediate reactions were captured vividly in a review:

The audience inevitably participated. The set was not a fictional space, but streets in real time and real space. *Pitt Street Riot* was not re-appearance but re-enactment. It led a group of people to re-enact what happened back then.

“Today is 7 June, 1989,” stressed the protagonists throughout the action. But it was actually 31 May, 2014. I followed the group and could not quite tell whether Was I watching a drama, sharing a role in a drama or taking part in a social movement? Time crisscrossed with space. I was confused. When theatre roved in the streets, we made an impression on the passers-by. The impact far exceeded

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<sup>207</sup> Interview with Fato Leung by the author on 25 March, 2020. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Grace Lai by the author on 29 March, 2020. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

any so-called theatrical effects. Perhaps we don't need to make distinctions. Theatre, as a medium responding to society, is action. When it happens in the streets, is it a street movement?<sup>209</sup>

Lai's view is echoed by critic Damian Cheng Wai-pang 小西:

*Pitt Street Riot* did not only let participants connect the past and the present. It also presented an opportunity to return to the community, prefiguring a lively future and creating possibility for an alternative form of life and political practice.<sup>210</sup>

*Pitt Street Riot* was chosen as the final example for this discussion because it epitomises Woofer Ten's take on participation. "Participatory art" was not made in a clearly structured way. Rather, it evolved organically as the living room opened its doors to people with diverse takes on common concerns. The co-creation of a common, as Ching set out, went hand in hand with a belief that roots creative agency in the confluence of sociability. "It provided an entry point to a platform, where people encounter one another, take part and explore their share."<sup>211</sup> Ching is however cautious about overstatement. When the *kaifong* dropped by, their participation was not always substantial. Nonetheless, these moments cultivated a certain vibe and social imagination. "A community is never built by one single unit. It was rather like the spatial relationship among multiple CCTV screens."

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<sup>209</sup> Lai, "Experience of Roving Street Theatre" 〈街頭劇場的滾動經驗〉, *The House News*, 1 June, 2014, accessed 16 May, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140604095320/http://thehousenews.com/art/%E8%A1%97%E9%A0%AD%E5%8A%87%E5%A0%B4%E7%9A%84%E6%BB%BE%E5%8B%95%E7%B6%93%E9%A9%97/>. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>210</sup> Damian Cheng Wai-pang, "Revisiting the Past, Prefiguring the Future: On Pitt Street Riot—Roving Theatre of Tiananmen Massacre 〈重演過去，預演未來——關於《碧術事變》〉," *Art Critique of Taiwan* 《藝術觀點》, no. 67 (September 2016): 36; reposted at *Pitt Street Riot* website, accessed 23 May, 2022, <https://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/2018/08/damian-cheng.html>. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Ching. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

### 1.3.8 Aesthetic Experiences of Collective Life

What role does art play in this matrix of social interactions? Summing up the “art” of Woofers Ten, Lee described his fellow artists as “producers of aesthetic experiences and dialogue.”<sup>212</sup> By democratising cultural production, appropriating mass appeal, negotiating with signs/sites of power, experimenting with self-organisation and acknowledging individual voices, members of Woofers Ten invited others to take part in the shaping of these aesthetic experiences. Aesthetics here shall not be understood in a strictly disciplinary sense. Rebentisch makes a lucid point about an anti-formalist understanding of aesthetics: “Having an aesthetic experience means experiencing experience, that is, encountering the world of experience familiar from the real world anew in the mode of reflexive distance.”<sup>213</sup> Woofers Ten’s aesthetic experiences, however, are not distanced but intimate. They are moments when what made sense authentically to individuals, community and society, vis-à-vis numbing inertias and repressions, were felt acutely as palpable experiences. “Can we think of a form of resistance that attempts to infuse principles of participation into everyday life, that builds a sustainable form of collective life upon the basis of needs and desires?” asks Lee in a curatorial text for *Can We Live (Together)* 《假如（在一起）》, an exhibition surveying similar emergent initiatives in fall 2014, when Woofers Ten’s continual occupation approached its final days.<sup>214</sup> A witness to Woofers Ten’s building of collective life was Michael Leung 梁志剛, a *kaifong* who fondly remembered the “wonder years of Yau Ma Tei.”<sup>215</sup> Leung, a designer who had just settled in the neighbourhood, was initially attracted to Woofers Ten when one of its engaging artists invited him to take part physically in an exhibition (by holding a towel, as a lively piece of art, in the shop window). He subsequently became an active participant, taking part in its residency and helping to take care of the space once a week. “It was really like a living room.

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with Lee.

<sup>213</sup> Julianne Rebentisch, “Forms of Participation in Art,” trans. Daniel Hendrickson, *Qui Parle* 23, no. 2 (n.d.): 29–54.

<sup>214</sup> Lee, “Can We Live (Together): Curatorial Project of Self-Organised Practice in Hong Kong” 〈假如（在一起）：本地自發組織實踐的策展計劃〉, in *Hair, Together* 《一起毛》 (Hong Kong, 2014), 003.

<sup>215</sup> Email correspondence between Michael Leung and the author on 12 March, 2022.

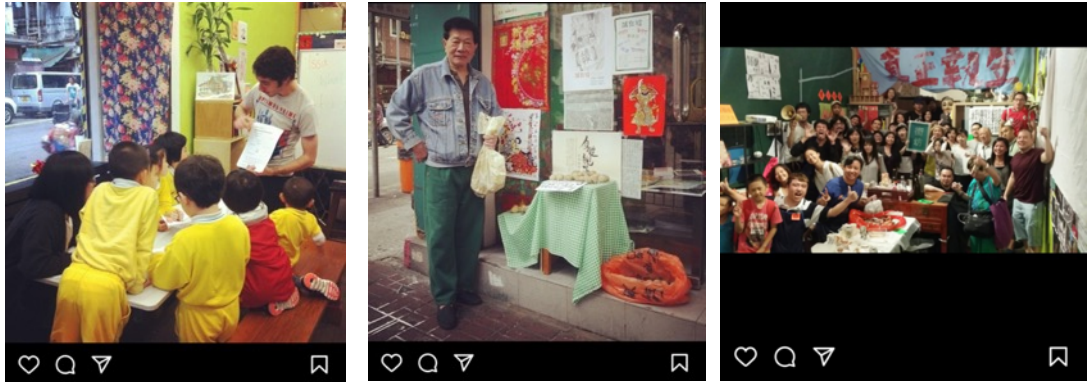
If you sat there for a while, you'd meet *kai fong* hanging out there. They discussed their problems with one another.”<sup>216</sup> His memory was anchored with moving moments of mutual support. When Mr. Wong, a traditional flower plaque master evicted from another gentrifying district, was temporarily housed in Woofers Ten, Leung once helped him set up a three-storey high plaque in the midst of a fever. When Leung himself moved his rooftop farm to the opposite block, helping hands came out automatically from Woofers Ten to unload soil from a five-tonne truck.

Besides weaving daily networks, Woofers Ten also mediated contingent occasions. During the first-ever city-wide occupy, many humble businesses were inadvertently affected. Woofers Ten thus mounted “Occupy in Support of Small Shops 佔領撐小店.” By simply being in the occupy site (at a stone’s throw from Woofers Ten) with a folder containing menus from eateries nearby, members unfolded a map of shared values and concerns. When passers-by stopped by and checked out the restaurants, and when shop owners came to add themselves to the list, politics became a down-to-earth subject of sustenance over spontaneous conversations. Chat-meetings were also held for participants to better understand one another when society was strained in an ideological strife. Leung remembered a mother talking about a trip to the occupy site with her sons and husband. The youngsters had in their backpack school uniforms for the next day. In Leung’s recount of the “living room next door,” there were also wonder moments of a homeless person giving out potatoes (grown by himself) to *kai fong*, friends pushing Fred Ma (then wheelchair-bound but elated) to an event, a visiting friend becoming an ad hoc English tutor for grassroots children, etc. These mundane but telling anecdotes vividly conjure up what Leung considered as the most important legacy of Woofers Ten—a “street spirit” which had enlivened the streets as a space of living together.

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Michael Leung by the author on 17 March, 2022. The following quotations in these two paragraphs are taken from the same interview.





Figs. 1.64, 1.65 & 1.66. Memories of Woofers Ten encapsulated in Michael Leung's Instagram posts (Courtesy of Michael Leung)

Leung's testimony, together with the examples discussed in this section, illustrates how Woofers Ten explored authentic needs and desires and a more sustainable form of collective life through participatory aesthetic experiences. As a highly recognised project in the region, Woofers Ten was not without its critics, but those who were closely involved testified to the meaning it has created through earnest engagement. *Kaifong* Irene Hui explained what drew her to Woofers Ten. "Unlike other organisations that treat people as random beneficiaries, they take the time to see to people as individuals."<sup>217</sup> Hui, who started out as a helper in Fred Ma's rice ball-giving event, later became a regular volunteer. With almost no previous exposure to art, she now thinks that "art is important." Her ideas about art include learning calligraphy from Mr. Wong (the flower plaque master whom Leung talked about), choosing better-looking bowls when the *kaifong* cooked together, and getting to know artists from home and afar. As Woofers Ten championed a lively take on aesthetics, its modus operandi also made an impression. Fato Leung, who acted in *Pitt Street Riot* and spent a gap year at Woofers Ten, later pursued a career in community art. "Work requires me to follow procedures. My experience in Yau Ma Tei was more relaxed. If I have not taken part in Woofers Ten, I would be more compliant." To him, the spontaneity of the carefree living room was a lesson of "courage".<sup>218</sup> The valiance of Woofers Ten is also lauded by the space's successor, Centre for Community

<sup>217</sup> Interview with Irene Hui by the author on 7 August, 2014. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Fato Leung.

Cultural Development 社區文化發展中心 (CCCD), whose support was pivotal to the member's occupation before they finally decided to bring Woofers Ten to a close. In an article intimately titled "Woofers Ten and Me," CCCD director Mok Chiu-yu 莫昭如 writes:

It is at the forefront of the movement, full of innovation, subversion, youthfulness, passion and participation (by *kaifong* from all walks of life). If I describe Woofers Ten with two words, it is "always fighting." If I use four words, it is "trying to revolutionise again!"<sup>219</sup>

#### **1.4 Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art as Civil Participation:**

##### **We Wanna Make a Change**

Like Grace Lai and Fato Leung who found new meanings in their participation when they looked back with memories of what happened subsequently, when I reviewed these two long-running projects, which I have witnessed in person in a continuum of recent history, I read in Mok's eulogy a poignant dialogue with the city's latest development. When "trying to revolutionise" is now potentially a crime, this choir of complaints and the living room that kept "fighting" at the "forefront of the movement" register a history that is all the more worth documenting. Sprouting from a growing critical mass who became increasingly critical of what went unquestioned for a long time, the two projects engaged communities to collectively give form to democratic imagination and demonstrate how socially engaged co-creative participatory art played a part in civil struggles in Hong Kong over these charged years. Further to filling out this history, the case studies also cast light on the agency to remake worlds, providing a perspective to understand the nuances of the democratic movement in this particular locality and comparable civil undertakings in wider contexts.

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<sup>219</sup> Mok Chiu-yu, "Woofers Ten and Me" 〈活化廳與我〉, *Inmedia Hong Kong*, 31 December, 2013, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.inmediahk.net/13123101>. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

#### 1.4.1 Co-creative Participants as “Art Citizens”

The identity of “Art Citizens,” emerging in the social milieu of this period, was previously discussed in this chapter’s introduction. In *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten*, this identity was clearly performed by the artists, who also extended it to the project’s co-creative participants. Positioning participants not only as targets, users or medium but creative collaborators, co-creation is the most active form of participation in Kaitavuori’s categorisation and recognises the participants’ subjective share. Indian art critic Nancy Adajania describes this approach to creative practice with the notion of “devolution.” While overhauling a dated, “fetishized ways of ‘being-artist’ that merely sustain and reproduce the self-perception of being a member of a class with a special status,” devolutionary practice opens up possibilities for creating “future publics.”<sup>220</sup>

Amidst debates on whether participatory art is an empowering or tokenistic medium, as outlined in the literature review, the case studies in this chapter provide an empirical ground for considering co-creation as a particular form of civil participation and its socio-political efficacy. The artists obviously did not see themselves as privileged professionals in the trade of art, but artist-citizens with a “bigger-than-you” (to cite a previously quoted expression of *wen yau*) cause. At the onset, they served a democratising cause by roping in others in co-creative responses to societal situations. *Complaints Choir* crowdsourced contents from those who might not be usually heard. Choir members decided the choir’s development through collective deliberation. *Woofers Ten* provided a platform for *kai fong* to publicly negotiate what was important for a society. When Mr. Cheng proudly shared his musical passion and when Fred Ma rewardingly found allies for her initiative of kindness, “little people” took centre stage and had a say.

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<sup>220</sup> Nancy Adajania, “The Thirteenth Place and the Eleventh Question: The Artist-Citizen and Her Strategies of Devolution,” in *Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Ranjit Hoskote (Utrecht: BAK, 2015), 29-30.

Such a committed practice to dissolve “artistic privilege” is more than a pledge to egalitarianism. It also tackles a crisis concerning contemporary political art, pointedly scrutinised by art historian Daniel Herwitz:

Political art is a way of converting demoralization by those who, because they can't change the world, place all their aspirations instead in the currency of symbols, into illusions of agency. The market thrives on this fetish, turning political art into a branded commodity of edgy and important value, all of which is about inflation in price.<sup>221</sup>

As opposed to this fetishised play of symbols, which might as well serve to reinforce the power structures it claims to subvert, Herwitz sees true potency in a more engaged form of practice. “Art (like all other cultural items) gains political agency or force not in and of itself, as if it were a magic potion or bullet, but instead, only in virtue of a larger context that catalyzes it.”<sup>222</sup> By “devolutionising,” *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* set out co-creative participatory art as a field of citizenship. This field, echoing what Deuze finds in “do-it-yourself artworks,” offered alternative models for social and political participation.<sup>223</sup> The co-creative “Art Citizens,” even though not managing to influence policy-makers as Iannelli and Marelli hopefully promise, were “actants” as Free Art Collective posited.<sup>224</sup> They performed citizenship by expanding social imagination.

#### 1.4.2 Tactical Resistance and World-Remaking Agency

*Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* merged art with social intervention. Their work was not limited to infinite physical works. Rather, they were generative processes that doubled the symbolic and the real. This doubling is significant, for what was at stake was never art per se but life—real, political and everyday life. The projects contradicted oppression by taking

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<sup>221</sup> Daniel Herwitz, *The Political Power of Visual Art Liberty, Solidarity, and Rights* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 4.

<sup>222</sup> *Op cit.*, 20.

<sup>223</sup> Deuze's idea was previously cited in the introduction on p. 9.

<sup>224</sup> Iannelli and Marelli, and Free Art Collective were discussed in the literature review on p. 10 and p. 15 respectively.

action in its very site—everyday environments where domination is administered by monolithic powers and perpetuated by the numbed.<sup>225</sup>

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French philosopher Michel de Certeau argues that the everyday is a potent site for resistance and subversion, particularly for the powerless. He makes a distinction between strategies and tactics. A strategy, in his formulation, is “the calculus of force-relationships” between a subject of will and power and its exterior environment. A “tactic,” however, does not have a defined space of its own and “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.”<sup>226</sup> Thus when strategising with mammoth structures is a monopoly of the powerful, everyday practices such as talking, moving about, shopping, etc., tactically introduces “a Brownian movement into the system.”<sup>227</sup> Like a detour defies orderly streets and *la perruque* (a French expression for disguising work for one’s own as work for one’s employer) unscrews a person’s fixation as a factor of production, tactical actions in the everyday reinvent repressive systems.<sup>228</sup>

Comparably, *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* tactically took over everyday spaces as fields of resistance. In places where life went on despite social discontents, *Complaints Choir* staged guerrilla performances and *Woofers Ten* used quotidian contradictions as contexts for critical actions. For instance, when *Complaints Choir* sang on a refuge island in front of a vanishing heritage site, the incessant traffic became sirens of the danger of oblivion. When *Woofers Ten* gave out trophies to humble shops, eroding gentrification framed the urgency of reconsidering redevelopment. Both projects were in no position to overhaul colossal systems. However, as they insinuated repressive circumstances and tactically flipped them over, they subverted oppression from within and lucidly said “no” to hegemonic subjugation.

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<sup>225</sup> Free Art Collective’s notion of “actants” is previously discussed on p. 15 in the thesis’s introduction.

<sup>226</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), xix.

<sup>227</sup> *Op cit.*, xx

<sup>228</sup> *Op cit.*, xix-xx.

This “no” resonates with a “scream” sociologist-philosopher John Holloway spells out In *Change the World Without Taking Power*:

Our scream is a refusal to accept... A refusal to accept the inevitability of increasing inequality, misery, exploitation and violence. A refusal to accept the truth of the untrue, a refusal to accept closure.<sup>229</sup>

“Our scream,” continues Holloway, is “two-dimension: the scream of rage that arises from present experience carries within itself a hope, a projection of possible otherness.”<sup>230</sup> The tactical resistance of *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* was not only subversive. “Contrary to the superficial meanings of the word, resistance is not merely a reaction to domination,” explains Kanngieser in her treatise on world-making. “As anti-dialectical concepts resistance and insurrection are productive, affirmative, creative.”<sup>231</sup> When activism redefines its territory as such, political worlds are lived out in spaces where, citing geographer Jenny Pickerill and urban researcher Paul Chatterlon, “a questioning of the laws and social norms of a society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity and citizenship” stand strong.<sup>232</sup> These ideas of world-making are helpful for appreciating the projects’ tactical resistance as constructive social actions. Aesthetic experiences, even when doubling with life, were hardly the most practical steps to effect change. However, they could create instances of alternative ways of being. As those who conjure up these scenarios act faithfully in them, recalling the words of Free Art Association, they “call forth” reimagined worlds.

*Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* envisaged, lived out, acted in and called forth a different world. Members of *Complaints Choir* turned their back to the helplessness of a lamentable “Asia’s grey city” and sang “we wanna make a change”. Against regimental rhetoric of harmony, songs of dissonance asserted the freedoms of thought and expression. Vis-à-vis increasing influence from Mainland China, Cantopop and colloquial lyrics straightforwardly

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<sup>229</sup> *Op cit.*, 6.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Kanngieser et al., 1.

<sup>232</sup> Cited in Kanngieser et al., xiii.

identified with the local. In lieu of effective democracy, flash mobs corporeally intervened with heated struggles and routine social operations. When official “revitalisation” trampled over grassroots lives, Woofer Ten countered proposed “a sustainable form of collective life” by savouring the familiar taste of egg tarts, attending to what was close to heart for a neighbour and making time for genuine interactions in a communal living room. The resistance of *Complaints Choir* and Woofer Ten was affirmative and productive. They remade what life threw at them into an utopian world—uninhibitedly honest, fair, respectful and connected, unafraid of singularities and disagreements. This utopian world was not imaginary. It was inhabited.

Remaking this world was a manifestation of civil agency. Before Hongkongers’ political agency burst onto the scene during the Umbrella Movement, the world-making actants of *Complaints Choir* and Woofer Ten showed a less eruptive but no less powerful kind of agency. In their “small shifts in perspectives and practice,” recalling Sommers’ definition, they demonstrated that, against inflaming discontents, there was an optimism that drove socially committed citizens towards constructive actions. The worlds remade by *Complaints Choir* and Woofer Ten were intimate, yet their agency had wider significance. It registered how “little people” took control over their own senses and imagination, and had their say in a world that belonged to them. Taking ownership of this world, these actants exercised agency to remake it through co-creation, modestly but relentlessly, one small step at a time.

#### 1.4.3 Amidst the Quest of Democracy

As *Complaints Choir* and Woofer Ten tactically resisted repressive circumstances with world-remaking agency, against the grain that undermines utility in art, aesthetics translated into efficacy. Cuban artist/activist Tania Bruguera, who engages substantially with real social problems, reflects on the notion of “useful art”:

*Useful Art* is a way of working with aesthetic experiences that focus on the implementation of art in society where art's function is no longer to be a space for "signaling" problems, but the place from which to create the proposal and

implementation of possible solutions. We should go back to the times when art was not something to look at in awe, but something to generate from. If it is political art, it deals with the consequences, if it deals with the consequences, I think it has to be useful art.<sup>233</sup>

Resonating with this statement, *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* were not meant for awe. In their unpretentiously down-to-earth manner, further to signalling problems, they posited and, albeit temporarily, generated possible solutions to tackle disenfranchisement. Unlike tokenistic political art, these world-remaking co-creations are not fetishised futilities but a two-dimensional scream for change. To cite an eloquent inference by cross-disciplinary scholars Sander Bax, Pascal Gielen and Bram Ieven: “amidst all of the chaos, crisis and injustice in front of us, the desire for alternative filters that produce the sense—if not the scene—of a more liveable and intimate sociality is another name for the desire for the political.”<sup>234</sup>

This desire for an alternative, more liveable form of society was beyond *realpolitik*. Echoing local scholars Hui and Lau, the politics of *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten*, like many contemporary struggles, were about living in truth.<sup>235</sup> These civil undertakings sprung from a postcolonial sense of identity, with which committed citizens seriously took ownership of a place they regarded as home. Committedly, in petty complaints they heard systematic flaws, in daily trivialities they found priceless values to be preserved. In the ethos of the New Preservation Movement (as cited at the beginning of this chapter), the tactical resistance and world-remaking agency of the two cases were illustrative of a pervasive “self-help mentality” that propelled Hong Kong’s recent democratic movement. Amidst aggravated socio-political problems and the hope for change, as Chen and Szeto observed, “‘Our Hong Kong, We Save’ became not only the slogan, but also the motivation for many people to take part.”<sup>236</sup> The

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<sup>233</sup> Tania Bruguera, “Introduction on Useful Art: A Conversation on Useful Art, Immigrant Movement International” (Corona, Queens, New York, NY, 23 April, 2011), accessed 16 February, 2022, <https://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm>.

<sup>234</sup> Sander Bax, Pascal Gielen, and Bram Ieven, ed., *Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitution of the Public Space* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 18.

<sup>235</sup> See p. 45.

<sup>236</sup> Chen and Szeto, “Reclaiming Public Space Movement in Hong Kong: From Occupy Queen’s Pier to the Umbrella Movement,” 77.



eagerness to “save” Hong Kong—owned by the plural pronoun “our”—manifested in a “do-it-together culture.” Co-creative participatory art was part of this socio-political and moral quest. Abreast more visible instances of concurrent struggles, the “soft power” of socially engaged co-creative participatory art was telling of the multifaceted growth of Hong Kong’s civil society and multiple forms of civil participation in those momentous years.

Besides providing an angle to understand the nuanced democratic movement in Hong Kong, these examples of socially engaged co-creative participatory art can also be situated in global and regional contexts of anti-hegemonic resistance. The communities of actants of *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* reverberated with Hardt and Negri’s proposition of the multitude who, as disruptive agents, are capable of countering the conjunct Empire of capital and the state and capital.<sup>237</sup> This transnational multitude is regionalised in East Asia by Kao Jun-honn, who references Spinoza’s emphatic insistence on individual freedom and coins the term *chu chung* 諸眾.<sup>238</sup> Comparatively, Matsumoto’s “Amateur Revolt,” mentioned earlier in the discussion on *Woofers Ten*, is another regional example of an insurrection by Empire-defying and freedom-insisting *chu chung*. Seen from a wider perspective, the world-remaking agency of co-creative actants was not only pertinent to societal developments in a single locality. It was, and is, a relevant force in a connected world where uncompromising people reject what is regimentally dictated and take responsibility to make their shared worlds more liveable.

Neither *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten* concretely changed the game, nor were they free of contradictions and disappointments. The disbanded choir let down its own helmsmen when its goal got disoriented. Critics of *Woofers Ten* doubt the extent of its community engagement. Nonetheless, the world and agency they co-created were palpable. This different world might have been limited and transient, but its agency continues to live on in history and the imprints of those who took part in them. Persistence of these memories and participants’ subsequent undertakings, inspired and informed by these earlier experiences, are

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<sup>237</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>238</sup> Kao, 15.

testimonies to the enduring impact of the two initiatives as human processes. Participatory art, as noted in the introduction, is not a necessarily privileged medium, but some particular ways of making art through co-creative, participatory processes are arguably conducive to æffect, recalling a previously introduced concept by Duncombe. How co-creative participatory art creates æffect that in turn inspires world-remaking agency, and why such activations of actants matter in long quests of democracy, is the subject of the next chapter which zooms into these methodological questions by venturing to a wider geographic terrain.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Co-creating People-Centred Democracy**

#### **Through Socially Engaged Participatory Art in Democratic Taiwan**

#### **and a Methodological Analysis**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Moving on from Chapter One's examination of socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a form of civil participation in Hong Kong during the charged years from 2009 to 2014, this chapter examines how the agency to remake worlds is cultivated among individuals through co-creation, thereby fostering democracy as the people's (*demo*) power (*-cracy*). In addition to buttressing this inquiry in the previously discussed Hong Kong examples, this chapter looks into two longitudinal cases in Taiwan. Taking place in a democratic state, these two Taiwanese projects are not outwardly political as the Hong Kong cases. Nonetheless, in the spheres of personal and cultural politics, active participants took on the role of transformative actants and exercised co-creative agency over the worlds they inhabited. Most remarkably, their momentum outlasts the projects' timeframes and keeps remaking personal and communal worlds. While the work of art in participatory art comprises both physical artefacts made through participation and crafted processes of participation, the latter, which entails impact on participants and activation of world-remaking agents, is of utmost importance to this study.

#### **2.1.1 A Detour to Taiwan**

The first part of this chapter follows the courses of the two select Taiwanese examples. *Textile Playing Workshop* (2000-2004), led by veteran social practitioner Wu Mali, is a workshop-based trilogy that engaged housewives to reconsider gender roles and personal identity in a traditional patriarchal society, alongside wider struggles of the Taiwanese autonomous women's movement. Under the guidance of Jam Wu, a more liberated generation of women exercised co-creative agency continually in *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* (2016-2017), reaffirming local values vis-à-vis an urban-centric outlook of modern progress. To inform a

global discourse of participatory art, their histories are worth documenting on their own rights. In the context of this study, these substantial cases are illustrative instances of emancipation and empowerment. Socially engaged co-creative participatory art catalysed individuals' transformation into actants, capable of resisting existing orders of domination and taking actions for alternative realities. As noted in the introduction, my methodological imperative is to retrace these noteworthy projects through description before thematic analysis. In the following recount of the Taiwanese projects, how participants acquired creative agency and how they remade worlds will be retold in their own voices. Perspectives of those whose experiences define such a practice, rarely traced to such an extent in existing literature, offer vital materials for appraising socially engaged co-creative participatory art and its democratising potential.

### 2.1.2 Effect, Agency and Democracy

In the second part of the chapter, these impactful Taiwanese projects are considered in junction with the Hong Kong examples in a methodological analysis of æffect. Recapping an aforementioned notion—Duncombe's portmanteau of æffect—is helpful for setting out the conceptual framework of this discussion on socially engaged co-creative participatory art as an empowering process. Coined to reconcile the seeming contradiction between art's openness to affect and activism's demand of effect, æffect posits that the basis of all actions is that "we must be moved to act."<sup>239</sup> According to Duncombe, understanding how art's affective properties result in activist effects is crucial for evaluating activist art. A few elements can be pinpointed for schematising æfficacy: intention, which varies from case to case; method, also variable; finally, a general pattern which he describes with the metaphor of a rainbow.

The pluralistic æffects of activist art "can add up to nothing, diverging into scattered points in empty space, each brilliant in its own way but isolated from each other, and therefore doing little to dispel the darkness. Or these different æffects can complement one another,

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<sup>239</sup> Duncombe, 117-119.

converging into a new quality, a new force, a new light that has the potential to change everything.”<sup>240</sup> Duncombe’s theory addresses art activism, but it also casts light on socially engaged participatory art that activates people to pursue personal and social change. As seen in the last chapter, singular events in the extended courses of co-creative participatory art—chance encounters with a choir of complaints, flash mob appearances in the hustle and bustle, casual conversations in an open living room, sporadic coverage in the news, etc.—might be inconsequential on their own, but added together in a continuum, these scattered points changed perceptions, made coherent sense, constructed memory, galvanised individuals and built communities.

In this chapter’s methodological analysis of æffect, both the Hong Kong and Taiwan cases inform an examination of the principles and methods that are potentially conducive to cultivating creative agency and bringing singular individuals together to become a multitude for remaking personal and collective worlds. By anchoring the analysis in culturally specific examples and referencing regional resources, this discussion also aims to provide an East Asian perspective for considering the æfficacy of socially engaged co-creative participatory art in fostering people’s power over their worlds—democracy in a quintessential form.

## **2.2 Personal Worlds Remade: *Textile Playing Workshop* (2000-2004)**

On a rainy day in 2018, I met with a dozen of senior women in a café in Taipei, eighteen years after they first participated in *Textile Playing Workshop*. The roof was probably corrugated iron, and the sound of the incessant rain was overwhelming. That however did not stop the women from enthusiastically sharing with me their creations over the past two decades. One by one, they showed me textile pieces and talked passionately about their latest “works”, as if they were all active practising artists. In terms of form, their works could not be more remote from the contemporary iterations of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten*, but they resonated in spirit. The creativity of amateurs was unreservedly recognised. In visible

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<sup>240</sup> *Op cit.*, 121-123, 129.

assertion of cultural egalitarianism, people are loyal to their authentic perception and confident in their expressions and actions. Their works probably would not catch the attention of a conventional aesthetician, but if one understands where they come from, these are heartfelt embodiment of agency and remade worlds.

### 2.2.1 Context: “Awakening” Women from Subjugation

While the stakes of *Complaints Choir* and *Woofers Ten* were a vast array of societal discontents in post-handover Hong Kong, those of *Textile Playing Workshop* were more specific: the circumstances of women and their subjectivity in both private and public spheres. Ever since Taiwan was sinicised by immigrants from Mainland China in the late Ming Dynasty (early 17<sup>th</sup> century), women’s status on the island was primarily governed by Confucian values. Women were expected to be managers of household affairs and educators of children. For practical and ideological reasons, they were mostly secluded in domestic environments and free access to the outside was inhibited by decorum—or most symptomatically, foot-binding for well-off ladies who did not need physical mobility for the family’s chores. Unlike boys who were prepared for activities in the public realm, girls were home-schooled (if they had the opportunity to receive an education at all) to acquire skills that would enhance their value in the marriage market. “Women with no talents were virtuous” was a Confucian dictum.

During the Japanese occupation, the situation began to change. The Meiji notion of a “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母) was introduced and women were assigned an additional role in the intellectual growth of children for the modern society. To cultivate “wise mothers” as well as a larger literate workforce, girls were enrolled into public schools for the first time. Paralleling these developments, reformist elites educated in progressive urban centres such as Tokyo and Shanghai brought back liberal ideas. When the Taiwan Cultural Association 台灣文化協會 was founded in 1921 to petition for a parliament within the legal framework of the colonial constitution, feminist advocacies were also ushered in by Taiwan’s first wave of autonomous women’s movement. Western ideals of liberal feminism spread

through publications, lecture tours and activist campaigns, calling for the liberation of women—socially, politically and economically. Besides confronting deep-rooted patriarchy as prescribed by Confucianism, the early feminists were also critical of colonial domination and exploitation.

However, with Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, political dissent was increasingly suppressed by the militarists. The autonomous women's movement eventually lost momentum, and government-affiliated women's organisations, such as the Patriotic Women's Association (*Aikoku fujinkai* 愛國婦人會), the Taiwan Women's Philanthropic Association (Taiwan *fujin jizenkai* 台灣婦人慈善會), the Greater Japan National Defense Women's Association (*Dai Nihon kokubō fujinkai* 大日本國防婦人會), took over as predominant women's groups. These organisations were led by elites closely connected to the colonial regime and their agenda was not women's emancipation, but rather their mobilisation in support of Japan's military aggression.<sup>241</sup>

At the same time, across the strait in Mainland China, the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang 國民黨) was also developing its version of women's movement. Ideological currents such as the New Life Movement 新生活運動 sought to synthesise western liberal ideas with Confucian values and reformed society's expectation for women. Participation in the public domain, typically as contributors to the national economy, was valued, but to fulfil the domestic roles of a wife and a mother was always a priority. Even the first lady Madam Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石夫人, who was instrumental to her husband political campaigns, was criticised by conservatives for her public presence that was deemed too high-profile. During the Sino-Japanese War, Kuomintang subordinated familial interests to national salvation and mobilised women for backend support to the resistance. After the Nationalists fled Mainland China and took over Taiwan in 1949, similar expectations were imposed on the island's

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<sup>241</sup> For a historical study of women's status in Taiwan, see Doris Chang, *Women's Movements in Twentieth-Century Taiwan* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

women. In the Cold War period, only a small portion of the annual budget was allocated to social welfare. Families—with women as the primary caregivers—were expected to be a socioeconomic unit responsible for the old and the young. Before marriage, women provided inexpensive labour to the emerging industrial economy. Government-affiliated elite groups organised women to back up state policies on various fronts.

Throughout the imperial, colonial and Kuomintang periods, Taiwanese women had been subjugated to utilitarian roles. Despite their contributions to both private and public realms, they were socially marginalised and enjoyed limited rights. In the 1970s, Annette Lu Hsiu-lien 呂秀蓮, who later became the Vice President of the Republic of China from 2000 to 2008 and ran for presidency in 2007 and 2012, emerged as a pioneer of the post-war autonomous women's movement. Motivated by personal experiences and the American women's liberation which she witnessed as an overseas student, she started advocating gender equality in Taiwan through lectures and publication. Besides critical rebukes against symptomatic instances of gender injustice, she compiled a translated anthology of Anglo-American feminist essays and titled it *From Being a Woman to Becoming a Human Being* 《從女人到人》.

The autonomous women's movement was not a stand-alone struggle for women's rights. It was also connected to wider struggles for democracy vis-a-vis the Nationalists' one-party authoritarian rule. In 1979, pro-democratic demonstrations were violently suppressed by the government. Many oppositional leaders, including Lu, was arrested and imprisoned. The crackdown, known as the Kaohsiung Incident 美麗島事件, was a critical moment in Taiwan's democratisation as it galvanised both local and overseas communities into political actions. As for the autonomous women's movement, in 1982, Lee Yuan-chen 李元貞, an associate of Lu, and other feminists started the monthly *Awakening Magazine* 《婦女新知雜誌》. When formation of societies was severely regulated under martial law, the magazine was a platform to disseminate ideas and foster dialogues on gender egalitarianism. Rejecting social seclusion, the magazine championed women's civil participation, arguing that this would improve their



quality of life, instil in them greater self-confidence and allow them to contribute autonomously to society.

When martial law was lifted in 1987, the group that started *Awakening Magazine* founded an eponymous foundation to advocate gender conscious policy change. On the public agenda, the foundation lobbied for legalising abortion, legislation against sexual harassment, banning human trafficking of underage prostitutes, equal opportunities in the workplace, constitutional revisions for gender equality and other critical motions. In the private sphere, it empowered women through legal consultation, operated a support hotline and organised educational activities. The organisers were aware that, while the earlier women's movement was elite-led, there was an imminent need to promote awareness among women of all classes and education levels. To encourage non-elite women to be more active in their communities, the foundation ran workshops and usually employed forms that appealed to them. For instance, needlework, especially Japanese-style patchwork, was a popular activity in the 1990s. Such workshops were more than hobby classes. They provided the occasion for women to leave their homes and domestic duties, and make time for what interested them as individuals, so that they could, like the title of Lu's anthology, take a leap "from being a woman to becoming a human being."

### 2.2.2 A Familiar Craft for a New Sense of Self

This leap was an uneasy—and extremely precious—step for a majority of women confined by their domestic duties. Among the participants of *Textile Playing Workshop*, Peng Tseui-feng 彭翠鳳, a mother of three, recalled how "blessed" she felt when she was able to take part. After giving birth to her second child, like most married Taiwanese women, she resigned from work and felt trapped in the largely isolated life of a housewife. In 1997, she learnt from the newspaper that the Awakening Foundation ran workshops and telephoned to ask if she could bring along her children. The foundation was supportive. Ever since then she has been an avid

participant—“never absent and never late.”<sup>242</sup> Her situation was shared by many other women. Kao Pi-shia 高碧霞 also needed to negotiate with her husband for joining the weekly workshops. “The men were afraid that outside exposure would turn women into feminists, and they would not do housework anymore.”<sup>243</sup> She managed to come to an agreement with her husband: as long as she could be back at 5 o’clock, she could make time for her own interests. “It actually motivated me to finish the chores more quickly. Going out was a reinvigorating weekly shot.”

In 1999, Shiao Heng-shu 蕭姮姝, a cloth merchant’s wife, came up with the idea of asking fellow merchants to donate their overstock for a community event. The foundation made use of the opportunity to bring women together through a “textile crafts carnival.” Making use of the donated fabrics, a few women completed a gigantic patchwork banner with the traditional expression *pai na ch’i fu* 百納祈福 (meaning “a hundred come together for good fortune”) surrounded by auspicious symbols. The banner was unveiled publicly during a Chinese New Year parade and the women were tremendously energised. A few of them wanted to keep working together, and *Textile Playing Workshop* became a regular programme of the foundation. “These classes were skill-based. Most of the time, the women simply did what they were told to. The foundation is a feminist organisation and wishes to encourage women to be more socially active and change their traditional mindset. These workshops did not serve those purposes,” recalled Wu Mali, who got on board in 2000 to change the game.<sup>244</sup>

Wu was invited by the foundation because of her track record in exploring social issues from a gendered perspective. The engagement of an artist for a social aim by a non-profit organisation was then unprecedented in Taiwan.<sup>245</sup> For the artist, it was also a new experience.

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<sup>242</sup> Interview with Peng Tsuei-feng by the author on 17 August, 2018. All interviews in this chapter were conducted in Mandarin. Quotations are translated by the author.

<sup>243</sup> Interview with Kao Pi-shia by the author on 17 August, 2018. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Wu Mali by the author on 20 August, 2017.

<sup>245</sup> In their interviews with the author, both Wu and Chine suggested that *Textile Playing Workshop* was an unprecedented case of socially engaged art in Taiwan. Without specifying the project, Lu Pei-yi also notes that new genre public art, with a focus on relations, was introduced by Wu to

Although Wu has built a reputation for her socially oriented works, previously her point of departure was always personal. *Textile Playing Workshop* was the first time for her to see to a creative process not only on her own, but also with other participants. Through the foundation's correspondences and newspaper advertisements, around a dozen women were recruited. Most of them were housewives. Some were participants in the earlier textile crafts carnival. Some were attracted to the programme because they were interested in needlework. The artist's objective was clear: to inspire these women to relate creativity to their lives. When the group met for the first time, instead of giving the women instructions for another sewing exercise, Wu showed them how feminist artists reflected on their lives through art. After seeing these examples, the participants were asked to organise their previous works into portfolios. Wu's idea was to create a situation for the women to re-examine what they had made and discover their personal motives and concerns. The processes of the project were documented in a video by Wei-ssu Chien 簡偉斯, a veteran filmmaker specialising in social, identity and gender issues. In an interview, participant Chen Shiou-shia 陳秀霞 described her reaction when Wu told them to inspect their life experiences and express their "vitality 生命力":

Many of us were anxious. Where could I find my vitality? Everybody thought she lived a very ordinary life. What possibly could I share as something special, something vital?<sup>246</sup>

She moved on to discuss a textile piece she made for the assignment. It was an embroidery with two docile-looking birds in the middle, caged under a cluster of wire. The wire extends

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Taiwan in 2000. See Lu, "'Socially Engagement' in the Context of Taiwan '社會參與' 藝術在中國台灣地區的發展脈絡," *Journal of Arts Management* 《藝術管理》, no. 3 (2019): 94.

<sup>246</sup> See *The Stitching Sisterhood*, directed by Wei-ssu Chien (Taipei: Awakening Association, 2004). The documentary was featured in the Women Make Waves International Film Festival 2004. A trailer of the video is available at the online archive of the festival: <http://www.wmw.org.tw/tw/film/1191>. Chen's statement is originally in Mandarin. Translation by the author. The following quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same source.

beyond the piece; at the end there is a clown-shape doll. Every component was made with sewing skills commonly known to homely housewives. She elucidated her story:

After getting married, my husband has been keeping me well. I don't have to go to work. Even since I was little, my life has been all the same. Nothing has changed. Like this little bird, even when it gets old, it is still trapped. Life is comfortable. Nothing is particularly bad. But you live inside a frame. If you wish to break away, you could do so like this clown, but you would still be chained by the wire, because you could not courageously open up. This clown is like me. She entertains and puts on funny faces for people. She does not really express herself, because people don't really care.



Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 & 2.4.  
Chen Shiou-shia talking about her confinement through a patchwork piece  
(Screenscaps from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

Then the camera zooms into a patchwork quilt lying underneath, where a medley of yarns spring from a flowery heart. Chen continued:

When few people care about who you are, you forget what you are. Then the heart becomes a caterpillar, or indeed, an amoeba. The heart is not as pure as

it was born. It is changed by experiences. Many of us are ordinary. But we want more. We want breakthroughs.

The struggle between entrapment and an eagerness to break free was common among the participants. Peng Tsuei-feng, who sees the opportunity to take part as a blessing, talked about her works in retrospect. Like many young people in rural Taiwan, she left home for Taipei at the age of sixteen for employment. After getting married, she settled in the city far away from home. “Women are like linseeds,” she cited a well-known metaphor from Liu Fai-ying 廖輝英’s novella *Youma Caizi* 《油麻菜籽》, which compares the fate of women to airborne seeds. “We are carried to different places by our circumstances. No matter where we are, we stay strong and survive.”<sup>247</sup> While dutifully raising her family in her urban home, Peng missed her hometown in Huatung 花東 dearly. Her feelings are expressed vividly in a meticulously sewn patchwork. Fields, roads and mountains of her hometown are reconstructed with patches of greens, yellows and ochres, as if the landscape is glowing under the warmth of the sun. With curvilinear lines flowing across the pictorial planes, the approachable scenery looks spacious but also distanced. She calls the work *The Home That I Cannot Return to* 《我回不去的家鄉》. Like Chen’s embroidered quilt, Peng’s figurative work gives form to deep-seated feelings in her heart.



Fig. 2.5. Peng Tsuei-feng, *The Home That I Cannot Return to*, n.d.  
(Courtesy of Peng Tsuei-feng)

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<sup>247</sup> Interview with Peng Tsuei-feng by the author on 17 August, 2018.

Such forthright expressions of feelings were new to the women. Besides patriarchal repression, the women's restraint also involved a social and political dimension. "A child should have ears but no mouth," Kao Yin-yue 高櫻月 recalled what her generation was taught when they grew up.<sup>248</sup> Reticence was expected not only for women, but also for people in general under martial law. "You get into trouble if you speak too much." Throughout Taiwan's long colonial history, its people had always been discouraged from expressing or thinking about their opinions. "Peace is good enough."

In such a social climate, aggravated by the lack of opportunity to talk in their solitary domestic confinement, housewives were not at all used to self-expression. Encouraging the women to open up and express themselves was thus fundamental to the workshop. The leap from an anxiety about their "ordinariness", an uncertain sense of self and the feeling of incapability was not automatic. Transformative moments emboldened gradual loosen-up. In one session, a therapist was present to lead a discussion on "love", a notion shyly avoided in everyday Chinese conversations. At one point, a participant boldly acknowledged her craving for love, and perhaps for embraces. The group first reacted with embarrassed giggles, but when her serious confession continued, a few women stepped out and gave her a reassuring hug. The therapist responded to the emotionally charged moment and invited everybody to stand up and hug one another. Bonding at a deep level was built through such moments when normally repressed feelings were shared openly in a non-judgmental sanctuary.



Figs. 2.6 & 2.7. Participants of *Textile Playing Workshop* encouraged by a therapist to embrace one another (Screenshots from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Kao Yin-yue by the author on 17 August, 2018. The following quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same interview.

To bring out what was dearest to the women, conversations began with evocative prompts. From their own textile works to wedding pictures and underwear, conversation starters probed into their concerns, frustrations and desires. Wu commented on the process:

They were sometimes shocked in this dialogical process. They have known one another for a long time and thought they knew one another really well. But when everyone told her story, you suddenly realised, you have got to know her better. So they became really good friends, because they knew everyone's story, and could learn from one another. Everyone has gone through some unpleasant experiences. Most of the time, we don't really know how to handle such moments. Through conversations, they seemed to have found solutions to the difficulties in life. When we talk about the feminist movement, it is exactly about this awareness—the empathy to understand and help one another.<sup>249</sup>

“Sisterhood” aptly describes the women’s relationship. By listening to one another and sharing thoughts, know-how and materials for their craft, these individuals built a community. The documentary video captures moments when participants got emotional. Hugging, once hesitant, becomes a responsive language when the compassionate friends joined in sisterly embraces.



Figs. 2.8 & 2.9. Participants naturally hugging one another in later parts of the process (Screenscaps from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

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<sup>249</sup> Interview with Wu Mali.

### 2.2.3 Revisiting Worlds Through Dialogical Co-creation

Wu facilitated conversations and guided the participants to express themselves in textile pieces. As a coda to each module, an exhibition provided an occasion for the women to share their thoughts with public visitors. Sometimes, Wu made use of her own exhibitions as co-creative opportunities for the participating women. For instance, at the end of 2000, Wu was commissioned by the then new Taipei Museum of Contemporary Art to present an opening exhibition. Instead of showing her personal works, Wu initiated *Quilts of the Heart* 《心靈被單》. Quilt-making was nothing new to the participants. When they previously made quilts, they usually referenced beautiful patterns, but rarely saw it as a means of self-expression. Subtitled the project “awakening from your skin 從妳的皮膚甦醒,” Wu’s overarching idea was that beddings were extremely personal, so this quilt-making exercise was a process for the women to intimately examine what was really close to their hearts. “The image on the quilt has to be related to their own lives. At the onset, everyone has to think about the story she wants to share.”<sup>250</sup>

Through conversation-based workshops, the women eventually came up with their own storied quilts. Each story deals with a moment of emotional significance. For instance, Kao Yin-yue put colourful fabrics together in a figurative patchwork of a little girl holding a pineapple bun, a treat given by her father when she was young. “We walked past a bakery. The bun cost five cents. I cherished it so much that I restrained from eating it.”<sup>251</sup> To her, the uncomplicated work was a straightforward commemoration of her late father’s gentle care, memorable especially at a time when a sweet bun was a luxury. Wu however spotted some undercurrents in the endearing work, and asked her to re-examine her relationship with her mother. Kao’s mother was a tough women who managed the family’s livelihood in a difficult time. As a child, Kao had to work hard in her family’s grocery store and had frequent conflicts with her mother. Unlike typically subservient housewives, Kao’s mother was always in a commanding role and

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with Wu Mali.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Kao Yin-yue.



her father was relatively quiet. Reflecting on her growing up experience, Kao realised that her close relationship with her father was probably conditioned by some suppressed feelings they shared.



Fig. 2.10. Kao Yin-yue's *Quilt of the Heart*  
(Screencap from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

Another participant Chen Chiung-gu 陳瓊姑 also took quilt-making as a way to process what she was going through. The introverted graduate in fashion design had been working in the industry for a while, but she never had a chance to create for herself. “I didn’t really know what I wanted to make.”<sup>252</sup> She was single at that time, and when she confronted herself through making this quilt, she realised her craving for a family as she stitched together a pair of protective wings on a wintry mountain. A similar process of self-awakening happened to Lin Yen-ling 林彥伶, a former art major who had to put aside her passion because of family duties. Her work is a mixed-media piece. Between furry checkers, dry leaves are sealed under transparent plastic sheets. Except for the leaves, the whole blanket is white as snow. The documentary video captures her poignant statement. Holding her little son, she talked about death:

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<sup>252</sup> Interview with Chen Chiung-gu by the author on 17 August, 2018.

I look forward to a kind of death. I want nothing. I want to quickly escape from all these. I can't stand this anymore... It's been almost three years. It's been tumultuous. The kid is young. I feel like I have disappeared. My self is totally absent. I can't even have a quiet second.<sup>253</sup>

Then she crawled into the blanket together with her son, and the death blanket transformed into a cocoon. Eventually, she sought her own rebirth. Bringing her son along, she went to Tainan 台南 to attend graduate school. "It was a precious experience to witness the sisters' difficulties and joy when they looked for ways out in their lives."<sup>254</sup> Observing these processes of self-discovery and transformation, Wu said, "In *Quilts of the Heart*, I saw a kind of power: art is a medium to help you face yourself. When you are aware of your situation, there is an opportunity for change."<sup>255</sup>



I don't have a self at all.



But she wishes to have a new start.

Figs. 2.11 & 2.12. Lin Yen-ling discussing her *Quilt of the Heart* (Screenshots from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

As the workshop series progressed, Wu challenged the women to overcome taboos. The next module was *The Theatre Under the Skirt* 《裙子底下的劇場》 (2001), named after an eponymous book on sexuality by Japanese feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子. The provocative direction was triggered by earlier conversations. Most of the women were middle-aged and marriage seemed to be a central part of their lives. Domestic responsibilities and pressure were oppressive, and the women were generally repressed. Wu thus wanted to

<sup>253</sup> *The Stitching Sisterhood*, directed by Chien.

<sup>254</sup> Email correspondence between Lin Yen-ling and the author on August 4, 2019.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with Wu Mali.

push them out of their comfort zone and openly talk about desire and intimacy through reinventing underwear.

The process began with having Ueno's book as required reading. This was a mischievous assignment, as reading a book with such explicit content was transgressive enough for housewives in a traditional Chinese society. In the documentary video, a participant talked about the experience with a smirk, "The first few pages look like pornography. I have to hide it from my daughter."<sup>256</sup> Besides the book, other prompts included conversations over underwear. In one meeting, each of the women was asked to bring along her regular underpants and a pair that she would never wear "even if beaten to death." With their personal choices displayed on a laundry line, the group talked about topics that were totally beyond their imaginable decorum. Kao, recalling the experience almost two decades later, still remembered the excitement of the conversation. "We talked about what we never dared to say. There was so much fun."<sup>257</sup>



Figs. 2.13 & 2.14. Wu Mali used provocative experiences to prompt women to openly discuss sexuality.

A climactic moment was a visit to a sex shop. It was the most adventurous experience for the women, who used to shy away from such places despite their curiosity. As the women amused themselves over the shop's products, some long-term inhibitions vanished. The liberating effect of these breakthroughs can be seen in the works presented at the final exhibition. Personal stories, thoughts about gender and sexuality from a social perspective and even

<sup>256</sup> *The Stitching Sisterhood*, directed by Chien.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Kao Yin-yue.

political commentary were overlaid on a daring and playful collection of inventive lingerie. The participants also moved away from traditional patchwork and experimented with a wide range of forms including fabric sculpture, wearable and performance.<sup>258</sup>



Figs. 2.15 & 2.16. Participants boldly related sexuality to politics and everyday chores in their textile pieces.  
(Screenscaps from *The Stitching Sisterhood*, 2004)

#### 2.2.4 Refashioning the Self with Creative Agency

The third project in the series was *The Empress's New Clothes* 《皇后的新衣》 (2004), which concretised the abstract notion of identity by engaging the women to reflect on their past and current lives, and fashion what was yet to come. As in the earlier modules, the issue was first explored through facilitated conversations. The participants were asked to bring along news clippings and photographs and talked about their ideas about attire, self-image, ideological constructs of femininity and the reality they faced as women. After conversing on what they had experienced, the women were invited to imagine themselves as empresses ruling their own worlds and present their imagination in garments. Wu spelled out the conceptual frame:

Clothes symbolise a person's identity. [...] You could imagine what you could possibly be. Most of them were housewives staying at home, but this might not be what they have wanted for their lives. However, they must stay at home

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<sup>258</sup> The visit to the sex shop and this bold exhibition are both captured in *The Stitching Sisterhood*, directed by Chien.

after getting married and having children. So I thought, through making dresses for themselves, how would they reimagine what they could possibly be?<sup>259</sup>

The creative process and outcomes were captured in another short documentary produced by Chien.<sup>260</sup> A number of the women were filmed sewing at home. They talked about feelings of confinement, and regretted that they had to quickly finish their creative work before their husbands returned. Their action, however, showed a modest resistance. As they contentedly gave form to imagination, their autonomous pursuits have taken over a corner, no matter how small, of their domestic environments. Stitch-by-stitch, they reclaimed their subjectivity. Ouyang Hsiu-chi 歐陽秀姬's description of her dress gives a lucid account of such transformation:

The former part of my life [and the upper part of her dress] was rather plain, so I expect more in my future life. I'll add something sparkling.

A butterfly is just a lowly caterpillar who must go through a cocoon to metamorphose into a beautiful creature. Pretty much like my life. After years of toil, I hope that I can live the best out of my future life, and decorate it with [dignity 尊嚴] and [bliss 福氣].<sup>261</sup>



Figs. 2.17 & 2.18. Ouyang Hsiu-chi discussing her *Empress's New Clothes* (Screenscaps from *The Empress's New Clothes*, 2004)

<sup>259</sup> Interview with Wu Mali.

<sup>260</sup> *The Empress's New Clothes*, directed by Chien (Taipei: Awakening Association, 2004).

<sup>261</sup> The quotation is taken from the subtitles in the project's documentary. Words in square brackets are amended by the author for greater precision.

The outcomes of this project evidenced how the series of workshops have activated the women to reclaim their sense of self. The dresses represent genuine reflections on personal situations in original forms. Some made statements on broader issues such as social expectations for women, women's right in sex, etc. Accumulative impact of the earlier projects was visible in the women's ease in communicating their ideas through textile and speech, and their bold treatments of topics and materials. As the empresses put on their new clothes, they all looked confident in their eccentric expressions of authentic thoughts and individual aesthetics. Through their self-fashioned gowns, these women exercised creative agency and had their say on their worlds.



Figs. 2.19 & 2.20. Participants parading through the streets in their *Empress's New Clothes*



Figs. 2.21 & 2.22. Lin Shih-ling's "Condom Queen" and Hsu Li-kan's "Queen of Happiness"  
(Screenscaps from *The Empress's New Clothes*, 2004)

For instance, reminiscent of the sex shop visit in *The Theatre Under the Skirt*, a toy penis and colourful condoms adorned Lin Shih-ling 林詩齡's silky kimono. The explicit contents were a critical comment on the statistical fact that a high percentage of HIV positive patients in Taiwan

were married women who got infected by their unfaithful husbands. Her dress was intended to be a costume for advocacy, reminding women to be more conscious of the need to protect themselves.

Not all dresses were so assertive. A number of them honestly exposed the women's feeling of vulnerability. Hsu Li-kan 徐麗柑's apparel, covered with colourful balloons from head to toe, was cheerful-looking, but the design was conceived out of frustration. Troubles in her marriage made her feel that her earlier fantasy was like a bubble. She was saddened by disillusion and wanted to convey her grief with fragile inflatables. When she made the dress, she was joined by her children. A supposedly solitary process of emotional release turned out to be quality parent-child time. The joyful experience gave her new perspectives and strength. At the final presentation, she declared herself a "Queen of Happiness": "Life is like a dream having its up[s] and down[s]. Seize the moment." As she gave out balloons to strangers, she said, "Pass on the happiness to everyone around you."<sup>262</sup>

Some difficulties were not reconciled. Unaware that the dresses were meant to be displayed on the makers themselves, Daby Liu 劉瑋馨 constructed a gown with an array of lacy brassieres. She was attracted to the allure of undergarments, but because of modesty, they must be concealed. The idea behind her dress was a liberating one, "If I were a queen, people would appreciate whatever I wear."<sup>263</sup> Her statement was not only about underwear but also her feelings about taboos and social pressure. When she finally realised that she herself had to publicly wear the piece, she did not dare. During the final parade, the dress was mounted on a mannequin and wheeled around by other costumed queens. Liu did not overcome her inhibition, but through the process, she gained new insight to her fear.

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<sup>262</sup> *The Empress's New Clothes*, directed by Chien.

<sup>263</sup> Interview with Daby Liu by the author on 17 August, 2018.



Figs. 2.23 & 2.24. Daby Liu's gown in *The Empress's New Clothes*; not daring to wear her dress, she had her piece paraded on a mannequin. (Screenscaps from *The Empress's New Clothes*, 2004)

Reflecting on the course of *Textile Playing Workshop*, Wu talks about the many levels the project touched upon. “At a personal level, the women tackled difficulties or problems in their lives through creative works.”<sup>264</sup> The above examples illustrate how the women confronted, processed, expressed, reimagined and moved on with their circumstances through self-directed art projects within open-ended frameworks. To the artist, this way of working was methodologically stimulating:

When we are in the field of art for a long time, our ideas about art become fixed. We might have a certain take on aesthetics, or we are concerned about technique, expression and forms. But when I work with lay people who have no idea about modern art, art history and aesthetics, in their authentic expressions, even a few simply lines can be deeply touching. They help me rethink what art is.

*Textile Playing Workshop* was Wu Mali's initiation to participatory practice. Back then, her references included the women's art movement and earlier examples of socially engaged art. Through research, she found that such a mode of working, compared to traditional artist-centred practices, was capable of generating multiple layers of meanings.

The experiences of *Textile Playing Workshop* were not only influential to Wu's future practice as an artist, but also inspired feminists:

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<sup>264</sup> Interview with Wu Mali. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.



Most of the participants were conservative housewives. “Feminism” sounded scary to them. Yet the spirit of feminism was realised in their subtle reflections and change. *Textile Playing Workshop* demonstrated a new possibility for the feminist movement in Taiwan. In the past, the movement was elitist and distant from grassroots women. Textile was a soft medium to spread the message of gender equality among grassroots women.<sup>265</sup>

The impact was concurred on by the participants. Kao Yin-yue acknowledges:

The feminist movement does not necessarily take place in the streets, in protests or through revolution. A soft movement can be even more long-lasting. Housewives live in tiny circles. After joining the workshop, my world is bigger. We made friends in the name of “textile playing.” When we chat together, we feel at ease and safe. The exchange with other people is important. Women understand one another, and can help one another. This is truly helpful to women.<sup>266</sup>

The outcomes of the series impressed many feminists and leaders of the movement. It happens that at that time, a new policy in Taipei required a women’s centre to be set up in every district. These new centres needed programming. Seeing the impact of *Textile Playing Workshop*, more and more organisations started to collaborate with artists.<sup>267</sup>

When I met with participants of *Textile Playing Workshop*, I asked them to recall that part of their memory. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, almost all of them talked fervently about their creative works. For instance, Peng (whose expression of homesickness was previously discussed) made a new piece called *Lost in Technology*. She was again dealing with relocation—to an epoch when new technologies are daunting to the older generation. Yet instead of feeling nostalgic and clinging onto a past that she could not return to, the piece was meant to inspire empathy among young people who got impatient when their parents could

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<sup>265</sup> Wu Mali, “Revelations from Textile Playing” 〈玩布啟示錄〉, IT Park, accessed 24 August, 2019, [http://www.itpark.com.tw/artist/essays\\_data/13/237/42](http://www.itpark.com.tw/artist/essays_data/13/237/42).

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Kao Yin-yue.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Wei-ssu Chien by the author on 14 December, 2018. In addition to filming *The Stitching Sisterhood* and *The Empress’s New Clothes*, Chien later became the director of the Awakening Association and witnessed the series’ inspiration to the Taiwanese feminist movement.

not handle the latest gadgets. As she continues to process her life through art making, she also enables others to do so. She now teaches textile crafts at a community college. “At the beginning, my hands sweated!” Now, the seasoned instructor sees teaching as sharing. Remembering how grateful she was when herself was able to join *Textile Playing Workshop*, she concluded, “Many mothers came out. We all grew.”<sup>268</sup>

Most women showed their works in pictures; Kao Yin-yue brought along a portfolio. An extensive body of work, each accompanied by a handwritten artist’s statement, held her fond memories of her late parents, loving refabrications for her daughter when she was little, creative responses to personal and social situations, etc. The portfolio demonstrates how “textile playing” has been a methodology for her to reflect on her life, ponder on issues and express opinions. In “bits and pieces of time,” she found an outlet and stitched together what was important to her as a person. When her once agile body was suffering from osteoporosis and she had to move about in a wheelchair, she gave her empress’s gown a retouch. To make up for her loss in height and what aging and illness have brought, she added a paper hat to the queen’s apparel, still regal though slightly discoloured by time.



Figs. 2.25 & 2.26. Kao Yin-yue showing her portfolio and the new hat for her empress’s apparel (Photos taken by the author during a home visit, 2018)

### 2.2.5 The Sisterhood Reunited

I was able to meet all these women because of Tseng Yun-chieh 曾韻潔, Kao Yin-yue’s daughter. Tseng is now a mother herself. When *Textile Playing Workshop* took place, she was an undergraduate art student. At that time, engaging communities through artistic practice was

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with Peng.

new to Taiwan. Tseng's own practice back then was rather "traditional, expressive and abstract," and she did not register *Textile Playing Workshop* as a participatory art project.<sup>269</sup> It was only after she gained exposure to the practices of international artists while working in an artist village after graduation that she realised what *Textile Playing Workshop* was really about. She later undertook master's studies in trans-disciplinary arts and rethought her own creative directions. Working as both an artist and a curator, she now frequently engages others as she cares for individuals and broader social issues.

In 2015, the Soulangh Cultural Park 蕭壠文化園區 in Tainan had plans for a multifaceted programme on women. At the recommendation of Wu, who is a consultant to the institution, Tseng teamed up with her mother and co-curated an exhibition. *Cloth Play, the Way to Weave in Their Self-Narratives* 《玩布，從她們敘說的日常開始》 was a creative reunion of the women who met more than a decade ago in *Textile Playing Workshop*. Kao was instrumental as co-curator. She took Tseng to visit her long-time friends and figured out the exhibits through conversations on textile playing, memories and creative work. The women were in a different stage of life. Despite physical ailments that came with age, most of them were enjoying a much higher degree of freedom. In addition to taking time to create works, some of them travelled all the way to Tainan for the installation.

At the exhibition, the women presented both old and new works that expressed their views on feminine experiences. Still working primarily with textile, the women however experimented with new forms. For instance, Kao's own contribution was an installation featuring an old sewing machine and the aforementioned portfolio. It was an updated version of her first ever portfolio, put together when Wu asked the women to reflect on what they had made almost twenty years ago. This new version, intended to be a keepsake to pass on to her daughter, summarises decades of life experiences woven together by the aged appliance, a dowry item which has been accompanying her all these years. A few women also gave talks and ran

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<sup>269</sup> Email correspondence between Tseng Yun-chieh and the author on 16 October, 2019. Tseng originally wrote in Chinese. Translation by the author.

workshops to interact with visitors. “The fathers came,” noted Tseng, contrasting the men’s supportive attitude to the days when many of them were reluctant to let their wives pursue what they wished to do away from home.<sup>270</sup>



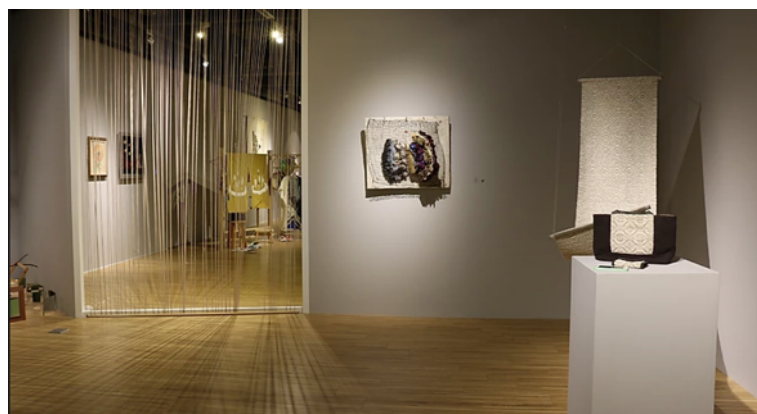
Fig. 2.27. Kao Yin-yue’s installation at the exhibition of *Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth—A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project*, 2016 (Courtesy of Tseng Yun-chieh)

A year later in 2016, the group was invited by Hong-gah Museum 鳳甲美術館 to present another exhibition. The museum is located in Beitou 北投, Taipei, where Tseng and Kao lived. Tseng aspired to weave together the Beitou community with the women’s energy and came up with *Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth—A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project* 《共享的溫度：玩布姐妹的參與式藝術計劃》. As the project’s curator, Tseng structured the participatory experience for the women and others. Beitou Storyteller 北投說書人, a local group which used storytelling as a methodology to connect people with the place, was invited to take the women on a tour to learn about local history. Art practitioners specialising in community art and media installations were roped in to share their creative experiences. These exposures expanded the women’s imagination and the result of this exhibition was obviously a step further—in terms of the work’s formal experimentation and also their engagement with the community.

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with Tseng by the author on 17 August, 2018.

For instance, the women expanded their circle by inviting their sisters and students (some of them were teaching in community colleges) to join the “stitching sisterhood,” then clearly a collective identity. Kao Yin-yue got her younger sister Kao Pi-yue 高碧月 on board. The latter created an interactive “bathrobe” installation, site-specific to the area known for its hot springs. “There is a dialogical relationship in their works,” remarked Tseng on the participatory nature of the project. “They expanded the connections of this network.”<sup>271</sup> To share their enjoyment of textile playing with others, the women set up an area for visitors to get hands on with fabrics. With complementary programmes such as community potlucks, the exhibition was not only a display of creative outcomes, but also, like *Textile Playing Workshop*, a process of engagement. It also, decades later, fulfilled the original workshop series’ intent of expanding women’s participation in public life.



Figs. 2.28 & 2.29. *Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth—A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project*:  
 (top) Kao Pi-yue’s site-specific, onsen-themed piece;  
 (below) installation by Peng Tsuei-feng

<sup>271</sup> Email correspondence between Tseng and the author on 16 October, 2019.



Fig. 2.30. Interactive area at the exhibition of *Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth—A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project*, 2016 (Courtesy of Tseng Yun-chieh)

On the day when we met under that rain-struck roof, the old friends were overjoyed to see one another. They exchanged gifts—confectionery, health drinks, hand-sewn charms, etc. The noise of the rain was nothing to them. Their chatter was like waves peaked regularly with convivial laughter. Someone would always be showing the others her recent textile works. I could not follow every word in their conversations, but observing this meeting gave me a palpable sense of what *Textile Playing Workshop* has endowed them with. Almost twenty years ago, the aim of the project was to “awaken”. Now all the women are wide awake. Textile playing has become a way for them to process and express their feelings and thoughts, and a medium to connect with others and participate in the world beyond their homes.<sup>272</sup> It was transformative for them as individuals and as a group. The empathy and rapport among them are enduring. Many spoke fondly about the bond they have built. Daby Liu, whose fear was escorted by her assuring “sisters” in *The Empress’s New Clothes*, put it this way: “It was company for all these years.”<sup>273</sup>

From shyly uncovering their repressed feelings in *Quilts of the Heart* to boldly exploring the tabooed subject of desire in *The Theatre Under the Skirt*, the participating women gained self-knowledge and confidence to fashion *The Empress’s New Clothes* for themselves. Co-creating

<sup>272</sup> In 2022, a workshop titled “Mood-recording Fabrics” 心情紀錄布 was conducted by two of the “stitching sisters,” Su Ju-i 蘇如意 and Daby Liu, at Hong-gah Museum in Taipei. The information was shared by Tseng in an email to the author on 25 May, 2022.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Liu.

this trilogy with their active participation, these actants made textile playing a generative medium, with which they autonomously processed, articulated and reinvented subjective experiences. As they kept creating over the past twenty years, their creative outputs were not only textile pieces, but also an ever stronger sense of liberation and agency. In private, through playing with textiles, these women constructed a room of one's own. In public, the medium empowered them to contribute to their communities through sharing works and knowledge. As they morphed from a confined second sex into socially active humans, they realised the aspiration of the Taiwanese autonomous women's movement and tactilely remade their worlds.

### **2.3 Placemaking as World-making: *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project (2016-2017)***

Similar to *Textile Playing Workshop*, *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* was also a socially engaged co-creative participatory art project that inspired participants to exert their creative agency in their immediate world. In this instance, participatory art was conducive not only to personal expressions, but also to placemaking efforts that defined a desired world. The project started as an initiative of the Soulangh Cultural Park in Tainan, whose interest in social engagement was exemplified by its commissioning of the previously mentioned *Cloth Play, the Way to Weave in Their Self-Narratives* exhibition. Originally, the Cultural Park intended to engage an artist to lead a series of workshops that would cumulate in a final showcase in its children museum. On Wu Mali's recommendation, Jam Wu was invited.

Alongside process-based, frequently performative interventions that address a range of social issues, Jam Wu is known for his exquisite papercutting pieces typically shown in more conventional art institutions. Blending the two sides of his practice, *Papercut Field* was an attempt to reinvent the vernacular craft of papercutting into an engaging social medium. The Chinese title of the project is literally "Papercutting Cooperative." When discussing his choice of the title, Wu referred to the cooperatives known to him in primary school: at a time when resources were not abundant, these small vendors operated in a system of reciprocity. *Papercut*

*Field* was as a field of confluence, where participants rediscovered their world and reinforced what they valued through co-creative actions.

### 2.3.1 Context: An Artist's Passion, Homecoming and Rural Identity in an Urbanising World

A discussion on Wu's background is helpful for understanding the point of departure of Papercut Field. Wu had undergraduate training in architecture, which exposed him to both the theory and practice of participatory design. Through field studies, he had surveyed participatory architectural projects in various parts of Taiwan and familiarised himself with community-based methods. At the same time, he developed a passion for papercutting. The craft, common in festive decorations, posed to him a question about Taiwanese identity. "During Chinese New Year, papercutting is everywhere. It's part of our culture. But if we look for the roots, papercutting did not originate from this island. So where did it come from?"<sup>274</sup> His curiosity inspired an inquiry into the origin of Taiwanese papercutting and he realised that it was closely related to the island's and his personal histories. A great deal of vernacular culture from Mainland China was brought to Taiwan by Kuomintang's military officers and their families after 1949. Later in the 1970s, despite the generally repressive social climate, the publishing industry thrived. When Mainland China reopened after the Cultural Revolution, many scholars endeavoured to stock take the country's vernacular crafts and culture, much of which was irrecoverably destroyed during the tumultuous years. Scholarly outputs were published across the strait. Among Taiwanese disseminators of Mainland knowledge, a key exponent was Echo Publishing Company 漢聲出版社. "When I was little, I had a set of books by Echo Publishing. We grew up with it. These publications were part of our childhood memory." In these books, his encounter with papercutting left a lasting impression.

While figuring out the historical roots of his preoccupation, in one of his college field trips, he discovered a unique style of papercutting on the Matsu Islands 馬祖. He reckoned that it

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<sup>274</sup> Interview with Jam Wu by the author on 25 August, 2017. The following quotations in this section are taken from the same interview.



should be a style influenced by the Mainland, for the islands are very close to the east coast of China. After graduation, instead of pursuing a career in architecture, he signed up for the Cloudgate Theatre's 雲門舞集 "Wanderer Project" 流浪者計畫 and embarked on a journey of discovery in Shaanbei 陝北, Mainland China. Finally setting foot in places where papercutting passed on from generation to generation, he witnessed the intricate relationships between vernacular culture and a variety of folk crafts. Eager to deepen his knowledge in these areas, he undertook graduate studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. There he learned that in the 1970s, there was a vernacular arts department at the Academy. Faculty members and students did extensive fieldwork in rural China and regional materials were systematically analysed. The department, however, did not exist anymore. Papercutting was nonetheless "preserved"—albeit only as a kind of cultural commodity. "Young people were trained by the official cultural bureau. Their works were all for sale. To cater to customers' demands, they eventually change the style. Papercutting, once raw and unaffected, became extremely fine. The vernacular vitality is lost."

The project in Soulangh presented to Wu an opportunity to recover the vitality of papercutting, back in his hometown. The Taipei-based artist was a native of Tainan. His father had a fish farm near Soulangh and he remembered the area as "the most charming place in Tainan." "Soulangh", also spelt as "Soulang", was originally a settlement of the indigenous Siraya tribe 西拉雅族. Located at the lower course of the Zengwen River 曾文溪, the area is rich in fish crop, fertile for vegetation and well-conditioned for mining salt. Its natural endowments had attracted the Dutch colonisers to build Fort Zeelandia (now known as Anping Old Fort 安平古堡) in present-day Tainan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Imperial Qing dynasty renamed the area "Chiali 佳里" after an ancient town in close proximity. At the outbreak of the Japanese occupation, a large-scale massacre took place in 1895, resulting in an urban

legend that associates the name “Soulang” to *hsiao jen* 消人, “disappearance [of] people.”<sup>275</sup>

In 1906, the first modern sugar factory was set up by the Japanese Meiji Sugar Manufacturing Company, en route to the railway network that transported produce from Tainan to the ports. A rich history, abundant natural resources, inhabitants who defended their land and took care of it diligently, and a representative literary movement known as “Salty Zone” 鹽分地帶 made up the area’s anthropological strata.<sup>276</sup>

The lure of the local has a particular legacy in Taiwan’s self-construction as a state. In an essay discussing off-site art as a manifestation of Taiwanisation, Lu Pei-yi looks into renewed interests in local identity as a phenomenon after the lifting of martial law. In the 1990s, a cultural policy of “Community Comprehensive Construction 社區總體營造” was put into effect to encourage attention to local environments, somehow as a rebuke against the repressive ideology of “Great China Idealism.” As Taiwan opened its doors to globalisation, local introspection was also an exigent reaction at the crossroad of localism and internationalism.<sup>277</sup>

Since the 1990s, a good number of localised art projects have taken place in this trajectory. Among them, those sited in rural areas involved an extra socio-political dimension. During Taiwan’s modernisation, there has been a disproportionate emphasis on urban centres. An official policy differentiates “urban lands” from “non-urban lands.” Concentrated attention to the former is clearly indicated by statistics around the time of *Papercut Field*. As of 2014,

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<sup>275</sup> The urban legend about *xiaoren* was recounted by Hsieh Mei-ling 謝美鈴 (who will be introduced later on in this chapter) and other participants of *Papercut Field* when they took the author on a visit to the area on 19 August, 2018.

<sup>276</sup> This overview of the history of Soulang is informed by Jam Wu, *Papercut Field: An Experimental Project in Taiwan* (Taipei, 2019), 80-82, 113-14. Soulang Cultural Park, previously a sugar factory, is a monument to the historical sugar production and regional rail network. Besides physical traces of the trade, the cultural park also presents this history in its regular exhibitions. For more details of the “Salt Zone” literary movement, see Yang Tzu-chiao 羊子喬, “Salty Zone Literature” 《鹽分地帶文學》, in *Encyclopedia of Taiwan* 《臺灣大百科全書》, Taiwanese Ministry of Culture, last update 28 October, 1998, accessed 17 May, 2020, <http://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=4574>.

<sup>277</sup> Lu, “Off-Site Art Exhibitions as a Practice of ‘Taiwanization’ in the 1990s,” *Yishu* 9, no. 5 (September/October 2010): 13–24.

almost 80% of Taiwan's population clustered in the island's 13% of urban lands. Amidst unequal economic, social and cultural development, "remote rural areas" frequently suffer from fewer employment opportunities and social resources.<sup>278</sup> The story of Peng (cited in the above discussion on *Textile Playing Workshop*), who had to leave behind her hometown for better prospect in a big city, continues to reincarnate in younger generations (such as Jam Wu and many others).<sup>279</sup>

In the late 2000s, there have been state-level efforts to rectify the urban-rural disparity. The need to reaffirm rural values, preserve intangible heritage and establish local identity was explicitly stated in a report to the President in 2007.<sup>280</sup> However, the aforementioned statistics underline that there was still a long way to go for redressing the drain to urban places. To tackle this urban-rural gap was not an intent of Wu when he set out to weave together the many threads that were of interest to him. Nonetheless, this became emergent when *Papercut Field* reinforced the close ties between Soulange and its inhabitants.

Although it was not a straightforward intent of *Papercut Field*, the project can be contextualised with a recent trend of rural placemaking and revitalisation amidst ever widening urban-rural disparity in East Asia. The most notable examples are the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 越後妻有大地藝術祭 and Setouchi Triennale 瀬戸内国際芸術祭 in Japan, pioneers of art festivals aiming to celebrate local identity and attract attention to remote and depopulating rural areas.<sup>281</sup> In Taiwan, projects such as *Art as Environment: A Cultural Action in Tropic of Cancer* 北回歸線環境藝術行動 in Chiayi 嘉義 and the more recent *Madou*

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<sup>278</sup> NPOst editors, "How Wide Is the Gap Between Urban and Rural Development? Eight Cruel Truths About Taiwanese Rural Towns" 〈城鄉差距究竟有多大？臺灣鄉鎮的 8 大殘酷現實〉, NPOst 公益交流站, 5 May, 2016, accessed 21 February, 2021, <https://npost.tw/archives/24816>.

<sup>279</sup> See Li Wo-chiang 李沃牆, "'North-drift' and the Urban-rural Disparity in Taiwan" 〈從「北漂」看台灣城鄉發展差距〉, *ET Today*, 16 November, 2018, accessed 11 September, 2020, <https://forum.ettoday.net/news/1307598>.

<sup>280</sup> Chiu Kun-liang 邱坤良, "Narrowing the Distance Between Urban and Rural Cultures—Talents Development and Community Building 「縮小城鄉文化差距」—人才培育與社區營造" (Taipei: President Office of the Republic of China, April 16, 2007), accessed 21 February, 2021, <https://www.president.gov.tw/Portals/0/Bulletins/paper/pdf/6741-1.pdf>.

<sup>281</sup> See websites of the two widely covered projects: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, <https://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/en/>; Setouchi Triennale, <https://setouchi-artfest.jp/en/>.

*Sugar Industry Art Triennial* 麻豆糖業大地藝術祭 cared for local identities and land ethics by interrogating their respective localities' environments, histories, ways of life and social connections.<sup>282</sup> While these primarily artist-driven projects eagerly involved local people, the extent, depth and sustainability of communities' participation remain a question. *Papercut Field* did not set out with a programmatic agenda for rural revitalisation, but as its co-creators cut out one intimate vignette of home after another, rural life was reinvigorated by the very members of the Soulangh community.

The organic growth of *Papercut Field* was joined by twenty residents in Soulangh, presently more commonly known as Chiali. Among them was Hsieh Mei-ling, an art educator from the area whom Wu acquainted on an earlier occasion. When *Papercut Field* made its way home, Hsieh was extremely instrumental. In addition to taking part as an avid participant, she enlisted nineteen other women through her strong local connections. Unlike the earlier generation who took part in *Textile Playing Workshop*, these women were no longer homebound. Many of them were actively balancing their own careers while taking care of their families and had also proactively initiated communal activities for their growing up children. From drama to reading clubs, these "wise mothers" were aware that cultural activities were conducive to their children's growth as well as their own personal development. At the time when they took part in *Papercut Field*, some attended with their children; some found it an interesting pursuit of their own.

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<sup>282</sup> For reference, see Chen Ming-wen 陳明文 et. al., *Art as Environment: A Cultural Action in Tropic of Cancer 2008* 《嘉義縣 2008 北回歸線環境藝術行動》 (Chaiyi: Chaiyi Provincial Government, 2009); Madou Sugar Industry Art Triennial project website, <https://madou-sugarindustry-triennial.tnc.gov.tw/>. Contextualised discussions on these Taiwanese cases can be found in Tung Wei-hsiu, *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art*, (Taipei: Artist Publishing Co., 2019), 59-60; "Environmental Aesthetics in Taiwan: Revival Through Socially Engaged Public Art Practice and Creative Placemaking," in *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, ed. Meiqin Wang (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2022), 119-47.

### 2.3.2 Rediscovering the Everyday

In a metaphorical language, Wu asked, “Can I use participatory forms to *plant* papercutting in a place?”<sup>283</sup> Before relating the project to Soulangh, Wu’s approach was to first heighten the connection between creative work and everyone’s experience of daily life:

I let them cut what was real to them. They did not need to learn from anybody. They could look around, but they had to return to themselves. What I wanted to tell them was that art was not only something creative. Their relationships with others in everyday life could also be a form of art. Their recipes were also a form of art. Their movements, when closely observed, were also a form of artistic expression. I wanted to tell them art was unrestricted.

Governed by this rationale, the project progressed through workshops revolving around rediscoveries of the everyday. In an induction session, participants were prompted to lie on a big piece of paper and listened to an edited recording of soundscapes in the area: the chugging of a train mingles with broadcast announcements, passengers’ conversations, the sounds of waves by the coast and other ambient sounds. Afterwards, the listeners were asked to represent what they heard in abstract lines on the big white sheet. The paper, marked with expressive brushstrokes, was then used as the foundation for a process of self-discovery. Wu asked participants to lie on the paper again, trace the outlines of their bodies and cut out their silhouettes. With these “big figures” as reference, each participant cut out a corresponding “little figure” of herself.

After class, the group was given an assignment to carry these “little figures” around, place them in their daily environments, take pictures and see what would happen. Lin Mei-yin 林玫吟, who worked at a dental clinic, took her “little figure” to work. The oddity piqued her colleagues’ curiosity. “What are you doing?” Unusual conversations were thus sparked off

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with Jam Wu. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.

between people who had known one another for quite a while. Lin really imagined her “little figure” as an animated companion. She shared a memorable anecdote:

One day, the dentist had an operation. So I invited him to bring her along (in his pocket). The dentist was totally confused and said, “Is it necessary?” Of course, she is a member of the clinic! During that time when I was accompanied by the “little figure,” I recorded all the details of my everyday life. What was usually overlooked got magnified, may it be the scenery on the way to work, the colourful clouds in the sky, shopkeepers... I savoured all these with my “little figure.”<sup>284</sup>

The “little figure” was like a double of each person. As it physically drew attention to what their owner experienced everyday, the small sheet of paper made conspicuous what might have been absent-mindedly neglected.



Fig. 2.31. A workshop of *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project*, 2016 (Courtesy of Jam Wu)

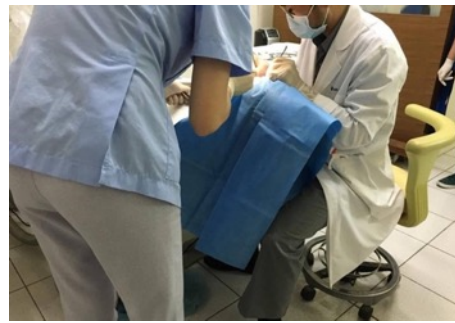


Fig. 2.32. Lin Mei-Yin's “little figure” sharing her daily life by “peeping out” from the dentist's pocket during an operation, 2016 (Courtesy of Lin Mei-Yin)

Inspiring participants to make new discoveries in the seemingly ordinary was a strategy used by Wu throughout the process. In another exercise, participants were invited to invent dishes with local produce. The selected ingredients had to be not only native to the area, but also loaded with special emotional significance. For instance, Hsieh Mei-ling's dish was “karasumi boat,” made with watermelon and karasumi, a Japan-influenced Taiwanese treat made with sundried, salted mullet roe. Hsieh chose the ingredient in memory of her mother who worked in a karasumi factory. Making karasumi was a strenuous job, and Hsieh credited her mother

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<sup>284</sup> Correspondence between Lin Mei-yin and the author on 17 June, 2020.

for her hard labour to raise the family. The women’s recipes reflected their high regard to the environment and the humble lives dwelling within. Kuo Mei-chih 郭美枝’s “fish soup with pickled gourd” is a tribute to a native dish in the area, commonly made by thrifty housewives who combine preserved vegetables and a fresh catch in a flavourful soup, fondly savoured by locals as the quintessential taste of home. Also celebrating the place and its people, Huang Shu-fen 黃淑芬’s “silky tofu with oysters” is made of oysters farmed by women who, as described by the Taiwanese folk song “Oyster Seller’s Wife 青蚶仔嫂,” were down-to-earth and affectionate, uncomplainingly accepting their fate while industriously striving for a better life. Finished with a sweet and sour dressing made of local vegetables, the dish is meant to be a token of gratitude to “every pair of hands that works laboriously for these wholesome ingredients.”<sup>285</sup>



Fig. 2.33. Hsieh Mei-ling, “karasumi boat”



<sup>285</sup> Postscript to the recipe by Huang Shu-fen. These recipes and postscripts were featured in the project’s concluding exhibition at Soulange Cultural Park and are included in the project compilation. See Wu, 286-87, 292-93, 298-99. Original texts in Chinese. Translation by the author.

Fig. 2.34. Kuo Mei-chih, “fish soup with pickled gourd”



Fig. 2.35. Huang Shu-fen, “silky tofu with oysters”  
(Exhibition views, 2017; photos taken by the author)

Each dish from this inventive cooking exercise was recorded with a recipe, a postscript and a drawing. These drawings are illustrative of the project’s artistic vision. Except for a few that were more skilfully drawn, most are visibly attempted by someone who had little or no technical training. Wu discussed the significance of this amateurish quality:

Three of them were more skilled. Most didn’t know how to draw. They felt a sense of inferiority: “I could never be as good as the others.” They thought they could not make it, “I cannot draw.” They had a standard idea of aesthetics. I must tell them, this is not what I want. I want what is originally yours. You don’t have to change yourself. This is the hardest.<sup>286</sup>

Participants were encouraged to accept and appreciate the value of their authentic creations, and the amateurish doodles show an eagerness to try. At the end of the project, all drawings were shown as equals in the concluding exhibition. Wu described them as “different styles.”

### 2.3.3 In-situ Interventions

From daily interventions to cooking, photography, sketching, papier mâché, printmaking, etc., a range of creative methods were used to heighten participants’ sensitivity to their

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with Jam Wu. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same interview.



environments and record daily experiences in visual forms that are not dictated by conventional aesthetic standards. A part that really took participants out of their comfort zone was a progressive module on performance. Participants warmed up in a few studio sessions and were exposed to contact improvisation. As in the earlier exercises, the focus was on self-expression and interaction with other moving bodies. Representative locations were subsequently chosen for in-situ performances. For instance, together with her son and daughter, Wu Chen-yun 吳臻昀 developed a sequence of everyday activities. The movements were inspired by the family's habit of exercising after a weekend nap: swimming, skipping, diabolo (a popular game in Taiwan), basketball, etc. When Jam Wu observed their movement, he thought there was so much sweetness in the seemingly ordinary and suggested the family to stage their performance in a sugarcane field, comparing the quality of their piece to the crop.



Fig. 2.36. Performance by Wu Chen-yun and her children Huang Pin-chia 黃品嘉 and Huang Pin-hsin 黃品馨 at a sugarcane field (Courtesy of Jam Wu)

Each of these performances took place in front of a white backdrop. Like their “little figures,” participants all dressed in white. Under the sun, their shadows remind viewers of silhouettes in papercuts. These performances were filmed and photographed, and the materials became ingredients for later creations. In a subsequent part of the workshop series, the mother of two turned this image into a print. She also wrote a short poem about the sugarcane field:

五分軌猶在	The <i>wu fen</i> tracks are still here <sup>287</sup>
汽笛聲已遠	The whistle blew, far away
火車勾甘蔗	Trains hauled sugarcane
甜蜜藏心頭	Sweetness hides in the heart

Her verse about the historical sugarcane trade in the region highlights another key aspect of the project. Besides personal everyday experiences, local trades in the area were another area of interest. A collaborative piece by Huang Shu-fen, Lin Mei-yin and Yu Su-mei 游淑媚 was developed along this line. In an in-situ performance at the Cigu Salt Mountain 七股鹽山, once the largest salt farm in Taiwan, the three women mimicked the gestures of local artisans. Accentuated with light projections, the piece was an ode to the labour that defined the place.



Fig. 2.37. Performance by Huang Shu-fen, Lin Mei-yin and Yu Su-mei at Cigu Salt Mountain (Courtesy of Jam Wu)

A climactic moment of the performance module was a concerto involving all participants at the area's spectacular fan-shaped salt farm. To reach the location, the white-clad group had to walk by a highway and passers-by looked on with incomprehension. It is worth noting that

<sup>287</sup> “*Wu-fen*” (meaning “five *fen*,” with “*fen*” as a unit of measurement) is a kind of train tracks unique to the area. Wu’s verse refers to a time when sugar cane production and its distribution by rail were a prime local trade in the region.

dressing in white was a lot more complicated than formal minimalism. In that rural part of Tainan, particularly strong in traditions, white is a funerary colour. Thus the all-white attire was actually a great challenge to taboos in the region. One participant remembered that she could not take part in this particular activity because her mother-in-law was strictly against the dress code. Some others took the ideological plunge, but left home wearing something else.<sup>288</sup>



Fig. 2.38. Performance by participants of *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* at Chiali's iconic fan-shaped salt farm (Courtesy of Jam Wu)

“They had no idea that I would lead them to all sorts of activities. Not only papercutting, but also doing many things in their surroundings,” says Jam Wu.<sup>289</sup> These seemingly irrelevant activities were perceptual and conceptual stimuli. When the participants eventually picked up papercutting techniques, they were able to go beyond conventional motifs and employ the craft as an expressive medium. Their works were like a diary of what they experienced on a day-to-day basis. A telling example took place after the memorable shooting at the seaside salt farm. Exhausted by the long day, the group went to refresh themselves at a nearby eatery famed for their oyster fritters. Seeing the white-clad group, even though it was already late, the sympathetic shop owner served them her last two pieces and substituted the rest of the order with cuttlefish. The women were very touched by this nourishing act of kindness and wanted to offer something in return. Hsieh later portrayed in a papercut a woman cooking on the shore,

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<sup>288</sup> Sharing by participants of *Papercut Field* in a group interview on 19 August, 2018.

<sup>289</sup> Interview with Jam Wu.

with lively fish bouncing in a river when hungry egrets hover above—a figurative depiction of the dusk-time scene and also a playful representation of themselves as the starving white birds. The framed papercut, together with a statement explaining the story, was presented as a memento to the shop owner, who then adorned her wall with it.<sup>290</sup>



Fig. 2.39. Papercut by Hsieh Mei-ling, hung as a memento at a local eatery  
(Photo taken by the author)

This self-initiated act was very much in line with another part of the workshop series. “Poetic Links – Street Papercutting Action 詩意的鏈結——剪紙街頭行動” situated papercuts in everyday, site-specific locations. Some pieces, reminiscent of the heightened awareness of the “little figures,” show intimate scenes of quotidian encounters. For instance, a motorcyclist steers his wheel to return to a parked scooter in a sited papercut by Lee Che-yuan, while Kuo Mei-chih’s concentrating pianist turns her back to a painted sign for second-hand pianos.



Fig. 2.40. Sited papercut by Lee Che-yuan



Fig. 2.41. Sited papercut by Kuo Mei-chih  
(Courtesy of Jam Wu)

<sup>290</sup> Hsieh and her peers kindly took me to the eatery after our group interview. The framed papercut was hung at a most visible location near the entrance.

Some others, representing the landscape, way of life, customs and other unique features of the Chiali community, illustrate a strong sense of local identity. Huang Shu-fen combined a number of characteristic motifs—a local farmer, black-faced spoonbills and egrets—on a roadside barrier near a major conduit. Her in-situ piece is like a footnote to the close relationship between agriculture, wildlife and urban infrastructure in her hometown. Its presence in public space inspires others to see their surroundings differently. “When my colleagues and friends learnt that a group of mothers were pasting papercuts here and there, they carefully paused and looked for the pieces. When they saw one, they would proactively tell us,” said Huang.<sup>291</sup>



Fig. 2.42. Sited papercut by Huang Shu-fen      Fig. 2.43. Sited papercut by Huang Wei-fen  
(Courtesy of Jam Wu)

Social interactions also animated Huang Wei-fan 黃薇芬’s papercut buffalo, whose real-life counterparts are now rarely seen in modernising Chiali. When agriculture, once close to life, has become more and more remote, years ago the school where she worked took part in a rice-farming project. She was very touched to see how the schoolchildren observed the hard-working buffaloes and learnt to cherish resources. “Through papercutting, I hope to recover the long lost agrarian life.”<sup>292</sup> Her papercut was mounted on a DIY bicycle cart made by a colleague, who has then been setting the work on the move to remind passers-by of old

<sup>291</sup> Correspondence between Huang Shu-fen and the author on 17 April, 2020. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>292</sup> Correspondence between Huang Wei-fen and the author on 17 April, 2020. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

memories. Amidst gradual disappearance of rustic culture and what it encompassed, Huang's piece and its communal circulation meant more than nostalgia. Even though extremely gentle, it resisted modernisation's erasure of what was once important and definitive of a place.

#### 2.3.4 Local Identity and Co-creative Agency in a Place Called Home

A vast body of work—papercuts, prints, sculptural works, as well as documentations of the recipes and street interventions, videos of the in-situ performances, the participants' visual diaries, etc.—encapsulated the year-long process in a concluding exhibition at Soulangh Cultural Park. The sheer quantity of the exhibits evidenced how acts of creativity had become almost an everyday habit, and the content visibly emphasised the tight connections between art-making, daily experiences and the identity of Chiali. While each of the works conveyed an intimate story about its maker, as a co-created corpus, the exhibition embodied a multifaceted, nonetheless coherent way of life. In this *Papercut Field*, placemaking materialised as palpable form-giving to what made this place home.



Figs. 2.44, 2.45, 2.46 & 2.47.  
Exhibition of *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* at Soulangh Cultural Park, 2017  
(Photos taken by the author)

At the entrance of the exhibition was an archway of white papercuts in symmetrical formats. Unlike traditional papercuts following conventional motifs, each design is original and conveys genuine feelings towards something dear to its maker. Hung Pei-ling 洪培玲's still-life depicts milkfish and conches, harvested with both hands and cooked on a hot stove. An extremely ordinary scene in the coastal town, the work conjures up the aroma of a comforting treat after a day of hard work and emblematises rewards of the mundane. Lin Mei-yin's *Papaya Trees* grow in abundance amidst cats tiptoeing onto brick walls. The lively cats are fondly portrayed by Lin, who remembered them as her "childhood playmates."<sup>293</sup>



Fig. 2.48. Hung Pei-ling, *Gifts from the Sea*

Fig. 2.49. Lin Mei-yin, *A Corner at Grandpa's Home*

(Courtesy of Jam Wu)

Some vignettes are loaded with broader local references. Discussing her intricate *Tungshan Longan* 《東山龍眼》, Chen Pei-yu 陳佩瑜 began with her childhood memories of picking the fruit on trees in her home's backyard and moved on to the backbreaking work of longan farmers. "To harvest as much as possible, farmers would bring along their lunchboxes and spent the whole day on the trees. These lunchboxes were usually packed with pickles so they stay good for a long time."<sup>294</sup> In the papercut, the hardworking farmers never leave the tree. Tirelessly, they are always picking longan, except for a short meal break on a sturdy branch.

<sup>293</sup> Lin Mei-Yin's notes about her piece on *Papercut Field's* Facebook page, posted on 7 December, 2017. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>294</sup> Chen Pei-Yu's notes about her piece on *Papercut Field's* Facebook page, posted on 13 December, 2017. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

An abstraction of the tree is at the centre of attention, bringing to mind canopies when viewed from below. All these examples convey a strong sense of belonging to the place where these women call home. On white paper, each rectangular piece resembles a flake of salt, as if giving visual form to the regional characters crystallised in the Salty Zone literary movement.



Fig. 2.50. Chen Pei-yu, *Tungshan Longan*, posted on *Papercut Field*'s Facebook page, 13 December, 2017

During the exhibition, a series of education programmes were conducted for schoolchildren from remote areas in rural Tainan. The participants took the lead to guide these young visitors to appreciate the exhibits and ran workshops for them to experience this *Papercut Field* first-hand. “Through these activities, we hope students could learn about local life in Tainan,” suggested Hsieh, who again played a pivotal role.<sup>295</sup> From the workshops’ documentation, it is clear that the group’s vision was to bring to life the area’s vernacular culture, highlighting creativity in the everyday and fastening connections. For instance, local motifs were magnified in an environmental exercise with teachers, while schoolchildren composed with plants found in the environment and invented their own masks—an archetype of the area’s indigenous culture. As much as the activities aimed to cultivate participants’ interest in art and

<sup>295</sup> Correspondence with Hsieh and the author through Facebook, 17 April 2020. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author. The following quotation in this paragraph is cited from the same message.



papercutting, “understanding that the beautiful is everywhere in everyday life, if one has the eyes to discover and explore” was stated by Hsieh as another key goal.



Fig. 2.51. A workshop for teachers run by participants of *Papercut Field* during the project’s exhibition



Figs. 2.52 & 2.53. Children’s workshops run by participants of *Papercut Field* during the project’s exhibition  
(Courtesy of Jam Wu)

Was papercutting *planted* in Chiali, as Jam Wu pondered at the beginning of the project? These lively works, so carefully carved out of life and affection of a place, suggest a “yes”. The concluding exhibition was a summation of the Soulangh project. It was also a threshold for considering what was yet to come. For one-off projects that deal not with abstract subject matter but real life, sustainability is always a tough challenge. This is a particularly difficult question when the artist steering the project is not based in the site on a long-term basis. Wu contemplated the road ahead:

Then I thought, what should I do afterwards? Shall I continue working with them?

What will be their goals to move forward? Some of them were not artists. If they have to do this in their very busy lives, they need to have dreams and passion.

This is the toughest, and the biggest question facing us now.<sup>296</sup>

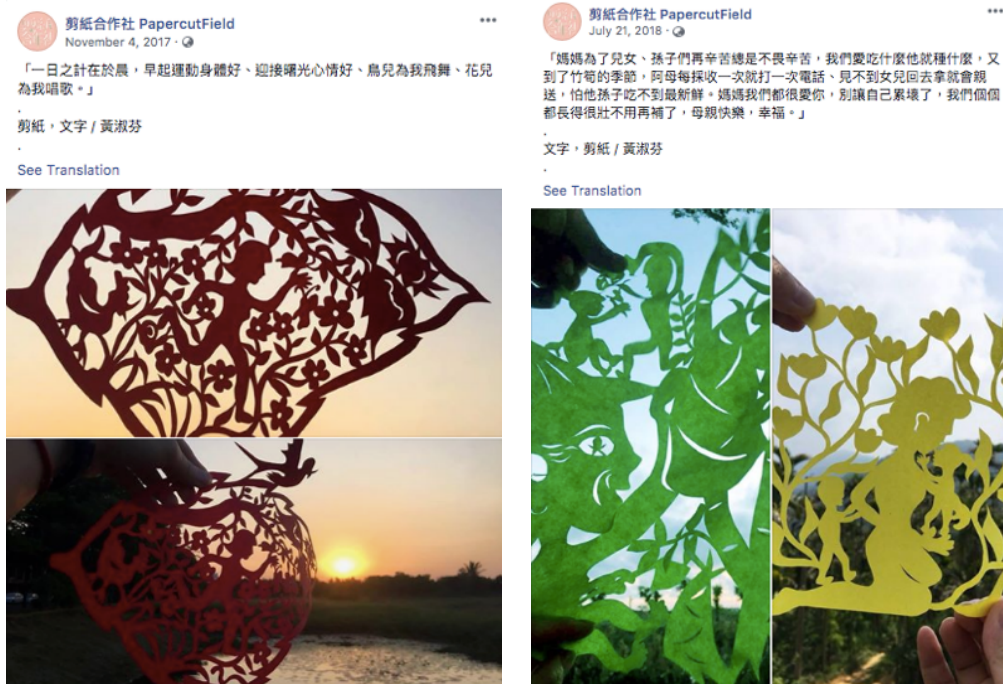
It turns out that these women do have the dream and passion. Like the participants of *Textile Playing Workshop*, after the artist-initiator faded out, these “Chiali mothers” kept the creative energy flowing. In 2018, a year after the exhibition at Soulangh Cultural Park, I had the privilege to meet ten of the participants in their hometown. Unlike the aging “stitching sisters,” most of these women are in their prime years and are busily juggling domestic duties, work and other pursuits. Unlike the leisurely retirees, not everyone was in creative mode, but some were still keeping up with papercutting—not only as a craft, but as a means to capture and express their existence.

On the group’s Facebook page, besides activities updates, once in a while, participants share their personal works. The craft has become a language for spontaneous responses to everyday life, as illustrated in Huang Shu-fen’s serial postings. Her feelings of vitality during morning exercises, gratitude to her mother when she eagerly telephoned her to pick up seasonal harvest, etc. are represented in contextual photographs of papercuts. Some participants use the craft as an expression of love and what they consider important. When Huang Hui-ling 黄惠玲’s son went abroad as an exchange student, she gave him a papercut with a black-faced spoonbill and

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<sup>296</sup> Interview with Jam Wu.

Taoist symbols. It was meant to be a lucky charm and a reminder of home. The bird was native to the area, and Huang's family members were Taoist devotees. When the young man was required to design a badge for the delegation, he incorporated the papercut. These souvenirs from home accompanied him as an emblem of his cultural as well as personal identity.



Figs. 2.54 & 2.55. Posts by Huang Shu-fen on *Papercut Field's* Facebook page, 4 November, 2017 and 21 July, 2018.



Fig. 2.56. Souvenir badges featuring a papercut by Huang Hui-ling, n.d. (Courtesy of Huang Hui-ling)

During the Soulangh project, many of Huang's papercuts expressed her identification with traditions. For instance, in a piece depicting musical instruments in what looks like a bamboo

grove, there is a story to be unpacked. In the small village where Huang was originally from, there is a ritualistic parade known as *t'ien tzu men sheng* 天子門生 (literally the “emperor’s disciples,” a term referring to those who came first in the imperial examinations). The area was aging, and very few young people were interested in such customs anymore. The parade, though named as an intangible heritage in Tainan, could fall into oblivion if there was no succession. Huang’s family had been preserving this tradition for generations. She insists on bringing her children back to her hometown to take part in the procession and reiterated its importance in papercuts, taking personal responsibility for cultural preservation.



Fig. 2.57. Facebook post about Huang Hui-ling and *t'ien tzu men sheng*, posted on 2 June, 2017

Using papercutting as a conducive medium to reinforce local culture and identity, participants of *Papercut Field* have expanded the project to other geographical fields. A thriving example

is Tainan's Lane 365, Section 2, Ximen Road, which was later branded as "Papercut Lane 剪紙巷." The place is a non-descript alley with a long history. When Taiwan's municipal government was seated in Tainan in the Qing Dynasty, a historical temple, known as Puji Temple 普濟殿, was rebuilt. The temple was both a religious and communal centre. As markets and businesses clustered in close proximity, the nearby area was exceptionally vibrant. In particular, Lane 365, known as Shengjun Xiang 聖君巷 (holy monarch lane), was an important access in the city thought to be protected by the temple's patron deity. The area is no longer a prime location in contemporary time, but many hundred-year-old houses still remain and locals take pride in their legacy.

In 2017, the Puji Culture and History Research Association 普濟文史研究協會, an organisation committed to preserving historical heritage, invited Hsieh to create an in-situ papercut for the temple. It was a very serious matter and divine advice was ceremoniously sought before the work was put up at the temple's entrance. After this auspicious beginning, Hsieh and other members of *Papercut Field* contributed more papercuts to the alley. Hsieh herself also collaborated with local schools on workshops and employed the craft as a medium for placemaking and community building. Some of these works became part of large-scale festive events. Some stayed on the walls of the alley to celebrate vernacular culture everyday.



Figs. 2.58 & 2.59. Participants of *Papercut Field* showing papercuts by locals on the walls of "Papercut Lane" in Tainan



Figs. 2.60 & 2.61. A poster promoting papercutting workshops and papercuts by small children in “Papercut Lane”



Figs. 2.62 & 2.63. Papercuts in everyday settings (as toilet signs and decorations on a food truck) in “Papercut Lane”  
(Photos taken by the author, 2018)

When Wu himself faded out from the project, he reflected “After I planted it, it started to grow, in different ways.”<sup>297</sup> With heightened sensitivity to their surroundings and exploration of permeable forms, participants of *Papercut Field* have taken on papercutting as an autonomous drive. Connections between art and their habitat have grown into co-creative agency in both private and public spheres. What could have been a solitary pursuit has taken roots as a transmissible methodology to connect with others. Papercutting became a form of agency that fostered interflows between people and publicly asserted what they valued. Their hometown’s environment, the people who labour humbly in this salty zone, its history and customs, a leisurely pace of life and the ideologies embodied in all these are the quintessence of a world they took pride in, to be preserved and celebrated vis-à-vis changes ushered in by modernisation. The social interactions catalysed by these works contend that these rustic vignettes are not at all stereotypes of some provincial backwaters, but real experiences that make up a local identity. In the process, the placemaking locals of *Papercut Field* are also world-making actants, bolstering their desired world while rekindling papercutting’s vitality as a vernacular practice.

#### **2.4 Effect of Co-creative Participatory Art: A Methodological Analysis**

In an essay collected in the concluding compilation of *Papercut Field*, Taiwanese curator/critic Hsu Fong-ray 許峰瑞 made a curious comment:

To simplify *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* as an endeavour of “community empowerment” under the logic of [the] social turn is rather a pitiful way to consider the project, because art is not used in this project as a “tool” to catalyze social change, and the artists are not simply just “mediators” or the participants “stakeholders” of

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<sup>297</sup> Interview with Jam Wu.

authorship. Rather, the action undertaken has allowed the creation of art to be realised.<sup>298</sup>

As Hsu defends the artistic merit of the Soulangh project, the criticism he counters—that socially engaged participatory art is “just” an “endeavour of ‘community empowerment’” and pitifully not “creation of art”—confronts all other cases surveyed in this thesis. At the core, it calls for attention to a critical question about the merit of such art.

While many of the physical artworks made in these projects are not conceptually or technically refined, these projects are sometimes “simplified” as “community empowerment” rather than serious art. In *The Nightmare of Participation*, Miessen scornfully criticises the participation of laypeople in art, arguing that it is in danger of uncritical, unquestioned and consensus-oriented mediocrity and compromised quality.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, as cited in the thesis’s introduction, critics such as Foster and Bishop are wary that an emphasis on the “ethical criteria” risks jeopardising the criticality of contemporary art.<sup>300</sup> These criticisms however miss the fact that the artistic intent of such a post-studio, project-based and human-oriented practice is to stretch the notion of art.

In the last chapter, there is a discussion on Rebentisch’s theorisation of aesthetic experience as refreshing encounters of the familiar world, and Woofen Ten’s embrace of this idea in intimate overlays of mundane and reflective experiences.<sup>301</sup> In this chapter, both Wu Mali and Jam Wu approached art as heightened sensitivity of lived experiences. To go one step forward, this anti-formalist, experience-driven take on art ventures to the field of individual and communal transformation. “Co-creation,” further to being a facet of participation in Kaitavuori’s ramification, is actually a form of praxiological expansion that treats the process of making art together with participants as the very substance of artistic creation. In this expanded concept of art, the shaping of these transformative processes, not inseparable from

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<sup>298</sup> Hsu Fong-ray, “Beyond Community Empowerment: Jam Wu’s PapercutField--Soulangh Project” 〈不止於社區營造：談吳耿禎「剪紙合作社——蕭壠計畫」〉. *Tainan Meishu* 台南美術, no. 6 (2007); reprinted in *Papercut Field: An Experimental Project in Taiwan*, 324-333.

<sup>299</sup> Miessen, 51.

<sup>300</sup> Foster, 190-195; Bishop, 51-79. Previously cited on p. 13.

<sup>301</sup> Refer to p. 113.



“community empowerment”, is an emergent art form. The production of artefacts through these generative processes can be appreciated in a different light that is more sensitive to their human significance. Deconstructing the presumed dichotomy between “community empowerment” and “creation of art,” this thesis appraises socially engaged co-creative participatory art *as* an art that catalyses and registers powerful transformations for both individuals and society. As noted in the thesis’s introduction, participation per se does not necessarily entail meaningful outcomes. The impact of the examined projects can be measured only by reviewing the very substance of their art—their generative processes of co-creation. Responsive to very different circumstances, the two Taiwanese projects discussed in this chapter are comparable to the Hong Kong examples from the last chapter as they all empowered participants to remake worlds with co-creative agency. The more explicitly social and political *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten* opened up spaces for citizens to explore alternatives to monolithic hegemonies, through which participants gained a potent identity: non-compliant, imaginative and action-taking, capable of re-examining, confronting and constructing their collective lives together with reclaimed needs and desires. In seemingly personal spheres, *Textile Playing Workshop* demonstrates how co-creative art enabled an older generation of women to free themselves from repressive patriarchy and evolve into autonomous human beings, no longer barred from public life. Working with a more liberated generation of women, *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* endowed home-loving habitants with a vernacular craft to give form to what they value in the everyday and make an immediate statement about identity and choice of life.

These East Asian cases offer solid reference for appreciating socially engaged co-creative participatory art as an emergent form of contemporary artistic practice and cultural production, especially with regard to the critical debate revolving around participation and democracy. Across these diverse projects, an examination of their methodology offers insights to their workings as artistic processes. The exegeses of the four projects in these two chapters provide an empirical ground for considering a series of methodological questions concerning the efficacy of co-creation, particularly in the context of this research’s rumination on

participation and democracy. As projects develop processually, what principles and methods are æffective for fostering creative agency among confident actants? What bring them together to become a multitude to remake personal and collective worlds? What cultural factors need special consideration, even co-creative participation can be a universal practice? Why do individual empowerment and activation matter in wider democratic struggles? To begin the analysis, the following section returns to the concept of “æffect” which, according to its theorist Duncombe, is a useful measure for art aiming to inspire action.

#### 2.4.1 Principles and Methods of Æfficacy

“Before we act in the world, we must be moved to act.”<sup>302</sup> Duncombe’s theorisation of æffect begins with affect that moves one into action. Along the lines of agency activation and world-remaking, a pattern of moving-into-action is observed in the four surveyed examples. Artists initiated the co-creative processes with moving stimulations. When participants were “moved to act,” they exercised creative agency in open frameworks and imaginatively remade their worlds. These frameworks to move participants into action took various forms. *Complaints Choir* generated contents through democratic processes of crowd-sourcing and collective decision making. *Woofers Ten* engaged *kaifong* organically in down-to-earth reactions to concurrent social situations. *Textile Playing Workshop* set out as workshops to prompt self-discovery and expression through conversations and shared experiences. Combining workshops and interventions in everyday spaces, *Papercut Field* inspired participants to relate their own sensibilities to their surroundings with an acquired craft. As participants take centrestage in the creative process, artists, in the role of facilitators, continue with guidance. Creativity targets specific circumstances, and the tangible works made either by the participants themselves or jointly with the artists emblematised their agency and world-remaking capability. More importantly, the process itself, the vision inspired, the agency acquired and the change created define socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a

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<sup>302</sup> Duncombe, 119.

generative practice. This logic is easy to follow. The critical question is how these can be affected.

A helpful point of reference is Rancière's "redistribution of the sensible." The wider context of Rancière's theory is the deprivation of autonomous agency in a policed society, where the "sensible"—what can be sensed and what makes sense—is under regimental control.<sup>303</sup> To repudiate, Rancière calls for emancipation through "dissensus" which allows reconfigurations of perceptions and significations. Aesthetic experiences, in Rancière's formulation, are particularly emancipatory as their reframing of relations between bodies and the world can "change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible." When spectatorship bars passive viewers from full knowledge and permits no influence on the plot, participation rectifies this disenfranchisement by inviting people to assume a more subjective role. The engagement of amateurs is a political rebuke against the exclusiveness of cultural production and consumption, and through art—or the aesthetic regime in Rancière's terminology—perceptions, thoughts and feasibilities are remapped.<sup>304</sup>

However, how can one be sure that this opening up is democratic to begin with? To say that artists are granting participants new access is problematic, for it subjugates participants to the positions of passive recipients. Also, as cited in the introduction, participation can also be tokenistic and serves nothing more than extending an seemingly open but actually manipulative author's control.<sup>305</sup> An autonomous will is indispensable if socially engaged co-creative participatory art is truly emancipatory, and this will cannot be taken for granted. In the four discussed examples, invitations to participate necessarily revolved around relevance. Members of *Complaints Choir* enlisted themselves because they found resonance in their city's common woes. *Kaifong* were attracted to *Woofers Ten* because it attended to their real lives. With a straightforward, popular hobby as its appeal, *Textile Playing Workshop* addressed deeper psychological and social needs. *Papercut Field* encouraged participants to channel their

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<sup>303</sup> Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011), 42.

<sup>304</sup> *Op cit.*, 48-49, 72.

<sup>305</sup> Dezeuze, 16-17; Boris Groys, 23. For details of Dezeuze's and Groys's argument, refer to pp. 12 of the thesis's introduction.

creative energies to what they genuinely cared about. The artist-initiators did set the project's agenda, but they were all centred on the participants' palpable concerns. Thus the active participants were not at all mechanically enacting others' preconceptions as critics fear. The co-creative participants were at the epicentre of the redrawn cartography of perception, thought and feasibility. In a subjective position, they embraced immediate fields of experiences as intimate contexts for art-making.

As the discussed projects strived to create relevance, a common thread among them is the blending of art and life. With reference to de Certeau, the last chapter made a point about the everyday as a potent site of transgression. As this study aims to regionalise knowledge, it should be noted that popular forms, commonly employed in such quotidian revolts, carry political connotations in an East Asian context. In 1967, Japanese philosopher/historian/sociologist Shunsuke Tsurumi 鶴見俊輔 published a treatise on “marginal art 限界芸術.” Tsurumi posits that, besides the dichotomy of “pure art” (made by professional artists for an elitist audience, in traditionally established disciplines) and “popular art” (also made by professional artists to entice the mass for the interests of business, state or media patrons, etc.), “marginal art”—whose forms comprise gestures of daily interactions—is another category that recognises laypeople's creativity at the intersection of everyday life and creative expression.<sup>306</sup> Tsurumi's theory sees a revival in recent years. Contextualising it with the social climate of the 1960s, a historical point of reference for today's social movements, sociologist Masaya Terada 寺田征也 interprets the attention to gestures of daily interactions as “[acquisition of] a private field of mind and freedom of spirit, by enjoying art and resisting the authorities.”<sup>307</sup> Taiwanese scholar Gong Jow-jiun 龔卓軍 argues for the contemporary relevance of “marginal

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<sup>306</sup> The author cannot locate a full English translation of Tsurumi's book on “marginal art.” My understanding of the theory is based on secondary sources. See for example Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 267; Masaya Terada, “Reconsideration of Shunsuke Tsurumi's ‘Marginal Art’,” *The Annual Reports of the Tohoku Sociological Society*, Vol. 45 (2016): 63-73 (in Japanese with an English abstract).

<sup>307</sup> Terada, 63.

art,” especially when a place aspires to “settle the debts from a colonial art history.”<sup>308</sup> Gong’s particular locale is Taiwan, but the same argument about decolonialisation also speaks to Hong Kong. Read along these lines, the employment of “marginal” forms in the discussed examples can be seen as a probe into a liminal space where creative individuals are unbound by the elitism of pure art and the interested motives of popular art, and transcend imposed boundaries of established definitions.

“Marginal” forms are methodologically instrumental to participatory co-creations. Rather than conventional, typically specialist genres, these closer-to-life forms make participants feel at home and at ease. They provide amateurs with an approachable blank canvas on which they could negotiate meanings confidently and personalise with authentic content. The unadornedly colloquial refrains of *Complaints Choir* are more than hook lines. They were also direct utterances of shared experience and opinions. Daily interactions at Woofers Ten—from lounging about on a communal sofa to conversations on glorious histories, Mr. Cheng’s sharing of his album collection, Fred Ma’s rice balls, Uncle Mui’s DIY planters, etc.—naturally conveyed *kai-fong*’s ardour for what mattered to them despite uncontrollable changes in their environment. The “stitching sisters” reclaimed their sense of self by sewing together feelings, circumstances and identities with their skilled needlework. Papercuts, widely adaptable in a range of daily contexts, became a language for participants of *Papercut Field* to make spontaneous remarks and paramount statements. These appropriated vessels of meanings were so user-friendly that participants could command them as an almost native creative language. In the liminal space between everyday life and creative expressions, and a “private”—nonetheless shared—“field of mind and freedom of spirit,” they served as honest-to-goodness embodiment of individuals’ feelings, thoughts and imagination.

While an emphasis on relevance respects participants’ autonomous will and the use of “marginal” forms provide an accessible language, they do not necessarily promise meaningful

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<sup>308</sup> Gong Jow-jiun, “Marginal Art: Land Art Festival and Art’s Contemporaneity” 〈限界藝術：大地藝術祭與藝術的當代性〉, *Artist Magazine*, no. 485 (October 2015); reposted at the writer’s personal website, accessed 25 October, 2021, [http://gongjowjiun.blogspot.com/2015/10/blog-post\\_1.html](http://gongjowjiun.blogspot.com/2015/10/blog-post_1.html).

outcomes. As the agenda and fields of creativity, even though relevant and approachable, are set by the artist-initiators, the above features might as well be employed to expedite authorial manipulation. The results of the studied projects, however, speak for themselves: what manifested most prominently was clearly the co-creative participants' authentic visions, rather than any outlook imposed by the artist-initiators. This was carefully fostered through a truly open participatory process. In their roles as facilitators, the artists seeing to the four discussed projects all ensured that participants genuinely have their say. This is made possible with open-ended frameworks that gave individuals room to personalise contents, and thorough respect for creative autonomy. A foremost principle was, in line with Rancièrian thought, a wholehearted "redistribution of the sensible." What was typically policed as "sensible" is no longer unquestionable. Emancipated subjects can freely navigate what makes sense to them. Rejecting the primacy of monolithic ideologies and conventional standard of aesthetics, the artist-facilitators constantly assured participants of the value of their perspectives and expressions in the durational process. Every complaints, no matter how seemingly tedious, counted in *Complaints Choir*, and the authenticity of unpolished daily language was celebrated. Woofers Ten recognised the glorious tales in small alleys, and teamed up with *kaifong* to make their marks in unembellished styles to counter the poshness of encroaching gentrification. In *Textile Playing Workshop*, a fondly remembered pineapple bun, the honest craving to break out from a cocoon, the need for a hug, the anxiety about wearing one's daring invention, etc. received serious attention. In *Papercut Field*, participants were encouraged to "just be themselves" and tell their tales in "different styles."

Hong Kong community art researcher Samson Wong Kei-shun 黃基信 makes a special point about total respect for participants' inputs, content and aesthetics. Wong argues that "polishing of final products" is an act of tokenism that can undermine the collaboration between artists and communities.<sup>309</sup> Such respect was the *modus operandi* of the surveyed projects. In their

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<sup>309</sup> Samson Wong Kei-shun, "Applying an Ethological Perspective of Art to the Community Arts and Socially Engaged Arts," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 18, no. 3 (July 2019): 205–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702029.2019.1613614>.

processual activation of creative agency, there was always a methodological emphasis on the aesthetics of emancipation and empowerment over that of formal artwork productions. This is particularly important, considering that the participants did not stand in commanding position of discursive hierarchies. In normal circumstances, their voices are rarely heard in societal contestations and identity politics, even though these affect them immediately. The high regard given to their perspectives was thus more than authorial freedom. It assured these usually “have-not” persons of what is due to them, and that they actually had it within themselves. This promotes confidence in perception, interpretation and creation. In this thesis’s introduction, Hui’s critique of numbed conformism was cited as a disabling habit engineered by systemic repression. As if echoing his call for resistance, the four projects all directed participants to regain their authentic perceptions and sense of self. To feel and be aware of one’s feelings rebuke against coerced inertias, and the repeated emphases on participants’ genuine thoughts and imagination ascertain their autonomy—not only in art-making, but also in dealing with actual circumstances.

Participants’ re-examination and reinvention of their immediate circumstances are not only fostered by affirmation of their perspectives, but also but switches in perspectives. Unusual experiences, sometimes heartfelt, sometimes amusing and sometimes transgressive, inspire participants to rediscover the familiar with new sensitivities. These stimuli can be integral to the co-creative frameworks, as in the case of the *Complaints Choir*, whose members found transformative concordance when their frustrations were heard as critical responses to current affairs. On other occasions, the projects simply directed attention to the overlooked, like how *Woofers Ten* challenged mainstream values by casting light on non-descript small shops, the passion of *kaifong*, resistance of the poor and memories of the forgotten. At times, transgressive experiences, such as the unsettling assignment of an introspective portfolio and the taboo-challenging expedition to a sex shop in *Textile Playing Workshop*, drove participants out from their comfort zones and made them confront desires unspeakable in regular decorum. Extraordinary experiences left lasting impressions and stretched imagination: the uncanny small white figures that followed participants around in *Papercut Field* and the tradition-

defying white-clad march made conspicuous their close ties with their environments, and surreal memories backed them up as proud custodians of the place they called home. Pivotal to the co-creative processes, these refreshing stimuli further redistributed the sensible. Against repressive norms, what could possibly be felt, imagined and enacted was expanded. Critical art, according to Rancière, operates in a schema beginning with sensory “strangeness.” Awareness of the reason for that strangeness is the beginning of critical reflection. A perception of the world therefore creates a commitment to its transformation.<sup>310</sup>

Relevance, accessibility of media, regard for individual perspectives and stimuli to expand imagination are a few observed methodological commonalities in the surveyed Hong Kong and Taiwanese examples. Even though these projects were initiated by artists, participants took part autonomously because the stakes mattered to them. With genuine regard for cultural egalitarianism and an earnestness to redistribute the sensible, these projects placed all co-creators on equal ground and enabled participants to have faith in their authentic perceptions. Unimposing everyday media, akin to marginal art, provided a malleable blank canvas for confident negotiations of meanings, especially when there was no diktat of ideological or aesthetic standards. Occasional extraordinary experiences, questioning normative habits, opened up new awareness and stretched imagination. Each of these scattered points of affect moved participants to act. All added up in a continuum, they complemented one another and converged into an affective rainbow that “has the potential to change everything.”<sup>311</sup> In the surveyed examples, this potential manifested in the co-creative agency of the world-remaking actants.

#### 2.4.2 The Convivial Multitude: Collective Agency in an East Asian Context

A further point in this affective rainbow is collectivism—a critical concept whose place in socially engaged artistic practice might be re-evaluated with a mix of perspectives from East

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<sup>310</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 142.

<sup>311</sup> Duncombe, 129.



Asia and contemporary politics of solidarity. “Collectivism” has historical roots in Chinese art. Traditionally, artistic exchange and collective creativity were common in literati circles.<sup>312</sup> The practice of co-writing poetry in drinking parties is a household-known cultural legend. Successive owners of a painting would add on to its meaning with colophons and seals. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, “collective work” 集體創作 was *a la mode* in Mao’s China, and is identified by art historian Christine I. Ho, as “a process-oriented *discovery* of the nature of socialist art as well as performing the experience of collectivity.”<sup>313</sup> Like these historical antecedents, the agency exercised by the project’s actants multiplied in co-creation. *Complaint Choirs* called for the change they wanted to make by singing in unison. Woofer Ten resisted monolithic development by convening a common. The “stitching sisterhood” refashioned femininity with one another as companions. Soulangh’s custodians worked as a team in *Papercut Field*. However, the ideological outlook of these collectives was drastically different from those of the classical coteries and the socialist system of mass mobilisation. The ethos of this contemporary collectivism is more akin to the radical notion of commons and Hardt and Negri’s idea of the multitude.<sup>314</sup>

The empire-confronting multitude, as conceptualised by Hardt and Negri, is not an undifferentiated mass, but a unified yet diverse *multitude*. In each of the surveyed examples, the collective was not unanimous. Their participatory frameworks were coherent but also porous. Participants’ personal histories, feelings and thoughts filled out these ad hoc multitudes with singularities of human substance. Regard for individuality was paramount in all these projects. This regard, further to preserving individuality, also functioned as a cohesive for community building. When Suzi Gablik put forth the idea of “connective aesthetics” in the early 1990s, she related listening and dialogue to intersubjective interconnectedness:

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<sup>312</sup> This point is also noted by Julie Chun when discussing the historical trajectory of Chinese participatory art. Chun, “Independent Spaces to the Street: Participatory Art in Shanghai,” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 5, no. 2 (2018): 271.

<sup>313</sup> Christine I. Ho, “‘The People Eat for Free’ and the Art of Collective Production in Maoist China,” *The Art Bulletin* 98, no. 3 (September 2016): 352, <http://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2016.1150755>.

<sup>314</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, *op cit*.

Art that is grounded in the realization of our interconnectedness and intersubjectivity—the intertwining of self and others—has a quality of relatedness that cannot be fully realized through monologue: it can only come into its own in dialogue, as open conversation.<sup>315</sup>

In the surveyed projects, space was consciously carved out for individuals to be heard and listen to one another. To begin with, the city-wide complaints collection of *Complaints Choir* was an extensive listening exercise. Subsequently, both the project’s contents and development were determined through peer-to-peer dialogues. *Woofers Ten*, as shown in the stories of Mr. Cheng, Fred Ma, Uncle Mui, etc. and the testimonies of *kaifong* Leung and Hui, treated its co-creators as individuals and fostered mutual understanding among the folks next door. The “stitching sisterhood” was built through deep conversations, and empathy bound the group together as each of them dealt with personal circumstances. Each member of *Papercut Field* told her own tale in singular works, but when everything came together, they became a cooperative with shared experiences.

When monolithic powers efface and alienate, these multitudes resisted with recognisable faces and relations. “The politics of connective aesthetics is very different: it is oriented toward the achievement of shared understanding and the essential intertwining of self and other, self and society.”<sup>316</sup> As much as the surveyed projects empowered individuals to become autonomous actants, they also fostered an essential intertwining of self, others and society. Although the participants did not always co-created artefacts together, they contributed to collective creativity—an even more consequential output of this generative practice. This collective creativity resonates with what Kester describes in *The One and the Many*: provisional forms of solidarity and collective action are catalysed as artistic subjectivity unfolds with insights

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<sup>315</sup> Suzi Gablik, “Connective Aesthetics,” *American Art* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1086/42414>

<sup>316</sup> *Op cit.*, 6.

generated by the coming-together of individual and collective identities, actions, and histories.<sup>317</sup>

This relational approach recalls the critical debate about conviviality as outlined in the thesis's introduction. Bishop makes a distinction between two approaches to artist-participant relations: "an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants; and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative."<sup>318</sup> Believing that art should challenge instead of pacify, she prefers the former and is wary of the latter's consensual tokenism. Her misgivings have been countered by champions of collaborative practice such as Kester, who have written extensively on collaborative projects that are no less radical than authored interventions.<sup>319</sup> Observing this debate, Nancy Proctor, American art historian specialising in feminism and postcolonialism, raises the possibility of a middle ground: when marginalised voices are involved, the two approaches are not in opposition. Alternative, convivial, relational-building projects are not necessarily opposed to conflictual and subversive practices. A merger of the two is potentially a way to both empower disenfranchised communities and dismantle the structures that produce the marginalisation.<sup>320</sup>

As the surveyed projects spanned over significant periods of time, conviviality was a lot more than pleasant moments of acquaintance. Conflicts were not avoided. For instance, despite their respective set-up as a harmonised choir and a shared living room, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten* went through dynamics of disagreement. Bringing people together is not all roses, but in a society overshadowed by political repression of dissent, these instances of disharmony were candid exercises of democratic contentions. In the Taiwanese cases, even though there were no explicit antagonism, the "stitching sisters" had to negotiate with their restricting husbands; the relatively liberated Soulangh participants still had to confront their

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<sup>317</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 139-140.

<sup>318</sup> Bishop, *Participation*, 11.

<sup>319</sup> Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 10.

<sup>320</sup> Nancy Proctor cited by Kaitavuori, 166.

own cultural inhibitions. As participants dealt with these contradictions, as a joint force, they also tackled the repressive ideological and power structures that gave rise to these very contradictions.

Indeed, conviviality as a potent form of sociability is expounded upon in recent literature, particularly as an attribute of post-growth ethos. Most notably, *The Convivialist Manifesto—A Declaration of Interdependence*, published by the University of Duisburg-Essen’s Centre for Global Cooperation Research in 2014, is a thesis on conviviality as a political theory of peaceful co-existence in a world of conflicts. By looking into the Latin root of the word—*convīvi(um)* feast / *convīvi(ere)* to live together, the manifesto sees conviviality as a form of togetherness “that would allow humans to take care of each other and of nature, without denying the legitimacy of conflict, yet using it as a dynamizing and creativity-sparking force.”<sup>321</sup>

There is a culturally specific dimension when considering the significance of relations, conviviality and sociability in East Asia. As previously mentioned, there was a historical tradition of harnessing collective creativity in convivial occasions among literati circles in ancient China.<sup>322</sup> In contemporary theory, “*kau-puê* 交陪,” a concept in vernacular culture, is re-examined by Gong as a context-specific variation of relational aesthetics. Literally meaning “crossing” and “companionship”, *kau-puê* is a Taiwanese expression for sociability. In particular, it refers to a traditional practice of recurrent exchange among temples and involves a number of dimensions: “aspiring towards kindness together 共同向善”, “benefitting together 共同取利,” “enjoying and having fun together 共同享樂.” Making up the social psyche of the ritualistic “*kau-puê* realm 交陪境,” these morals of *kau-puê* are forms of spiritual life. Gong argues that they can also be recontextualised in a post-religious schema which deals with a range of socio-political matters: change of political powers, cultural metaphors and

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<sup>321</sup> Centre for Global Cooperation Research, *Convivialist Manifesto—A Declaration of Interdependence* (Duisburg: University of Duisburg-Essen, 2014).

<sup>322</sup> Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch’i-Ch’ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge Mass.; London: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1978), 7.

symbols, transition of urban fabric, etc.<sup>323</sup> By extending the notion of *kau-puê* to “a form of artistic practice from the perspective of fluid sociology,” he highlights the cultural significance of sociability in Taiwan and East Asia, where interflows between individuals and communities are vital social formations.<sup>324</sup>

Applying an ethological perspective in his study of community arts and socially engaged arts, Samson Wong notes the primal relation between human bonding and survival. He stresses the vitality of collective worldview and group identity in these strands of art.<sup>325</sup> When lives, worldviews and aspirations come together, they become what political economist Massimo de Angelis calls as “life-worlds”:

Our life-worlds define communities we belong to immediately, and these are nothing other than networks of real individuals, living real conditions, having real needs and aspirations and enjoying real relations among them. Seizing power over our lives implies therefore not only being able to access resources and means of existence that enable us to organize social production, but also getting on with defending, building and transforming our communities.<sup>326</sup>

The close affinity among communities, networks and seizing power over our lives highlights the potency of conviviality, *kau-puê*, and human bonding in shaping life-worlds. In a resisting multitude, agency is multiplied in relational networks, belonging to a group and the will to defend, build and transform not only personal but also shared circumstances. Kanngieser’s treatise on world-making makes a similar point:

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<sup>323</sup> Gong, “*Kau-Puê* Realm” 〈交陪境〉, *Kau-Puê, Mutual Companionship in Near Future* 《近未來的交陪》, 2017, accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://soulangh.tnc.gov.tw/KP/about.htm>.

<sup>324</sup> Gong, “Spirit-containing Pulima: The Expansion and Limits of *Kau-puê* aesthetics” 〈盛裝魂魄的 Pulima : 交陪美學的開展與限制〉, *Artist Magazine* 《藝術家雜誌》, no. 551 (December 2017): 188-91; reposted at the writer’s personal website, accessed 25 October, 2021, [http://gongjowjiun.blogspot.com/2015/10/blog-post\\_1.html](http://gongjowjiun.blogspot.com/2015/10/blog-post_1.html).

<sup>325</sup> Wong, 208.

<sup>326</sup> Massimo de Angelis, “Reflections on Alternatives, Commons and Communities or Building a New World from the Bottom Up,” *The Commoner* 6 (2003): 10, accessed 6 March, 2022, <https://thecommoner.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Massimo-de-Angelis-Reflections-on-Alternatives-Commons-and-Communities.pdf>.

Participation [...] engenders the self-valorization and performance of self-determined and heterogeneous collective enunciations of subjectivity and space. It is precisely this self-valorization and performance of collective articulation that has the potential to make worlds.<sup>327</sup>

This was empirically illustrated by the surveyed projects. The fostering of relations in co-creative processes, from making time and space for understanding and rapport, to catalysing collective memories through group ventures and orchestrating climactic moments of collaboration, can be comprehended as leverage of conviviality for artistic and social goals. As the choir sang in unison, the living room expands into the community, the sisterhood marched out from their homes and the papercutting cooperative decorated neighbourhoods with insignias of a place, like social movements, the joint actions of individuals proclaimed collective statements. The feeling of solidarity and a collaborative spirit, very much at the heart of these projects, had both personal and political significance. Testimonies of the “stitching sisters” and participants of *Papercut Field* confirm how much they valued shared experiences. The former cherished the companionship that supported them through the ups and downs in their similar circumstances; the latter looked back at what they did together in good vibes of comradeship. These “self-valorization and performance of self-determined and heterogeneous collective enunciations of subjectivity and space,” using Kanngieser’s words, bind individuals together in their collective pursuit of a more desirable form of survival. Convivial relations were also an effect, assuring actants that they could gain strength from one another in a multitude to remake shared worlds.

#### 2.4.3 Activation of Actants and Democratic Agency

A range of emancipating and empowering effects—the autonomous will to participate, accessibility of media, regard for individual perspectives, stimuli to expand imagination and a

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<sup>327</sup> Kanngieser et. al., 57.

conducive form of conviviality—come together in socially engaged co-creative participatory art that moves people to action. In the surveyed examples, participants were activated to re-examine their circumstances and become multitudes of actants who exercised creative agency to remake personal and shared worlds. This remaking of worlds was hardly drastic. Through co-creation, participants demonstrated “small shifts in perspective and practice.”<sup>328</sup> To sing “no” to business as usual so fellow citizens hear “we wanna make a change,” to resist erasure by monolithic development by shedding light on humble lives, to break away from the dictates of an assigned role and refashion oneself stitch by stitch, to proudly defend rustic values with sprawling papercuts, etc. are all tactical acts to call upon alternative worlds. One small step at a time, in solidarity, these co-creative multitudes realised different ways of being. These differences, albeit small, remake the repressive worlds they resist.

What is the significance of these singular instances of emancipation and empowerment? Why does activation of actants, as individuals and in groups, matter? The quest of democracy is more than securing an institution of political representation, whose limits have been severely scrutinised. Miessen’s nightmare of participation is not only about aesthetics but also politics, and he derides representative democracy for “outsourcing” responsibility.<sup>329</sup> In *Hatred of Democracy*, Rancière lambasts the polls’ debasement to disguised domination and subservience to neoliberalism. He makes it clear that democracy is “neither a form of government that enables oligarchies to rule in the name of the people, nor is it a form of society that governs the power of commodities.” Rather, “it is the power that, today more than ever, has to struggle against the confusion of these powers.”<sup>330</sup> Likewise, Arendt also sees democracy as more than voting for someone else to govern on one’s behalf. To the political philosopher, citizenship at its fullest requires “the full experience of acting and speaking,” and true democracy needs direct participation.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Sommers, 4. See previous discussion on Sommers in the thesis’s introduction on p. 26.

<sup>329</sup> Miessen, 51.

<sup>330</sup> Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2009), 96.

<sup>331</sup> For Arendt’s idea of participatory democracy, particularly as resistance against the violence of totalitarianism, see *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1969). The quotation is from Kieran

Expanding on Chapter One's concluding discussion on co-creative world-remaking as an alternative form of democracy, these instances of transformative empowerment essentialise the democratic agency cultivated by socially engaged co-creative participatory art. This agency, constituted by the ability to stay true to authentic perceptions, the openness to explore the unfamiliar and the imagination to envision something better than what is hegemonically given, finds leverage in conviviality and galvanises people to act and speak as citizens. As they exercise autonomous power over their circumstances, what they do might be modest, but it is immediate and does not rely on an external system. These artistic actions contribute to a more potent form of participatory democracy beyond representation.

When an undertaking has a time frame, when what it strives to overcome is overpowering, what it is capable of doing is inevitably limited. None of the discussed cases managed to overthrow repressive systems, but they left a mark—as small chapters in long histories of resistance, and more importantly, on the people who co-created them. The democratic agency cultivated among participants can potentially extend to longer-term democratic participation. As an internal resource, this agency is particularly potent when conditions of democratic participation are precarious if not non-existent. Democracy is a long-term project. Further to catalysing momentary instances of participatory democracy, the most consequential effect of socially engaged co-creative participatory art is endowing people with the outlook and competency for practising democracy in this enduringly people-centred form. Democracy, if practised as a more active form of civil participation, is quintessentially rooted in this power of the people.

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Bonner, "Arendt's Citizenship and Citizen Participation in Disappearing Dublin," in *Acts of Citizenship*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen (London: Zed Books, 2008), 141.



## Chapter Three:

### Curating as Democratic Agency—

#### A Reflective Chapter on Curatorial Practice

##### 3.1. Introduction

Through contextualised study of empirical examples from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the previous chapters examine how socially engaged co-creative participatory art cultivates agency and remakes worlds. Further to catalysing momentary instances of participatory democracy, if the inspired civil agency stays on, this generative form of art can potentially foster a people-centred kind of democracy in the long run. In this final chapter, I switch from the perspective of an observer to the position of a practitioner. As noted in the introduction, in parallel to this research, I have been curating socially engaged co-creative participatory art projects in public and communities together with my colleagues at the Make A Difference Institute (MaD), a Hong Kong-based non-profit cultural organisation with a mandate to build a creative civil society.<sup>332</sup> While co-creative participatory art played a part in a society's catalysation of agency and remaking of worlds, my engaged practice allows me to reflect on the agency of curating in this milieu, and offers a first-hand, praxiological perspective to expand this research's overarching inquiry of art and democracy.

##### 3.1.1. Curating as Value-Driven and Critical Cultural Production

When David Balzer introduces *How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* in his intentionally non-specialist book *Curationism*, he cites a dictionary definition as a basic point of departure: “to *curate*...an act of selecting, organizing and presenting items in the vein of an arbiter-editor.”<sup>333</sup> Simple and straightforward, this definition stipulates two forms of

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<sup>332</sup> For background of the Make A Difference Institute, see the organisation's website: <http://www.mad.asia/about?lang=en>. Unless otherwise specified, the pronouns “we” and “us” in this chapter refer to the teams of MaD colleagues and collaborating independent practitioners who saw to the respective projects.

<sup>333</sup> David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, Toronto: Coach Books (Toronto: Coach Books, 2014), 8.

agency that are quintessential to the acts of curating: value judgement (arbiter) and judgement-based processing (editor). Curators across time, from those who look after collections in museums to “exhibition makers” in the legacy of Harald Szeemann, have been practising in this vein.

As curators put forth their value judgement by presenting art, the very notion of exhibition has been stretched. Contemporary curators have expanded their work as arbiter-editors to worlds beyond conventional art institutions. Curatorial selection, organisation and presentation of art now involve not only objects and space but also time and relations. “The exhibition assumes the character of a relational, dynamic field of interacting,” writes German curator and art historian Beatrice von Bismarck and her co-editors of *Cultures of the Curatorial: Timing—On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*. Processuality and performativity of different actors emerge as key features.<sup>334</sup> The curatorial interest in performative processes, rather than only in the presentation of the final products, observes curator, dramaturg and writer Florian Malzacher, could become a powerful means to construct a temporarily porous reality that is inseparable from its artistic, social, political and theoretical contexts.<sup>335</sup>

In *The Cultures of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Paul O’Neil notes the emergence of a new generation of curators who ground their practice in a view that sees curating as creative authorship and discursive co-production.<sup>336</sup> *What* forms of culture and discourse are authored and co-produced remain open. Discussing the curator as a cultural producer, Polish performing arts curator Marta Keil acknowledges that to a considerable degree, curatorial practice is the product of late capitalism: “it embodies its core values and mechanisms, eventually becoming its (often objectified) partner in crime—a tool legitimating and justifying late capitalist rules.”<sup>337</sup> Her view is echoed by American art and cultural critic David Levi

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<sup>334</sup> Beatrice von Bismarck et al., ed., *Cultures of the Curatorial: Timing—On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2014), 8-9.

<sup>335</sup> Florian Malzacher, “Bethinking One’s Own Strength: The Performative Potential of Curating,” in *Curating Live Arts: Critical Perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice*, ed. Dena Davida et al. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2018), xvi–xxi.

<sup>336</sup> Paul O’Neil, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 127.

<sup>337</sup> Marta Keil, “The Curator as a Cultural Producer,” in *Curating Live Arts*, 325.

Strauss, who thinks that curators of contemporary art have become “the principal representative of some of our most persistent questions and confusions about the social role of art”:

Is art a force for change and renewal, or is it a commodity for advantage or convenience? Is art a radical activity, undermining social conventions, or is it a diverting entertainment for the wealthy? Are artists the antennae of the human race, or are they spoiled children with delusions of grandeur (in Roman law, a curator could also be the appointed caretaker or guardian of a minor or lunatic)? Are art exhibitions “spiritual undertakings with the power to conjure alternative ways of organizing society,” or vehicles for cultural tourism and nationalistic propaganda?<sup>338</sup>

Strauss’s questions are obviously rhetorical and critiques art that serves the latter halves of this chain of options. His misgivings, together with those of Keil, are not singular. Writing on an observed “curator fever” in the early 2000s in Mainland China, California-based contemporary Chinese art historian Meiqin Wang historicises how the “prestige” of Chinese *cezharen* 策展人 (a translation by Taiwanese curator/scholar Victoria Lu 陸蓉之), once at the forefront of ushering in critical art appreciation, got “tarnished” as some became subservient in the “official and market turn.”<sup>339</sup> Keil, Strauss and Wang address different contexts, but the point they make speaks to contemporary curating in general. The praxiological question for curators who see their work as value-driven contemporary cultural production is how they process curating accordingly so that their visions for contemporary culture potently manifest.

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<sup>338</sup> David Levi Strauss, “The Bias of the World: Curating After Szeemann & Hopps,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 2006, accessed 14 March, 2022, <https://brooklynrail.org/2006/12/art/the-bias-of-the-world>.

<sup>339</sup> Wang, “Everyone Curates: From Global Avant-garde to Local Reality,” *Yishu* 8, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 23-30.

### 3.1.2. Curating and Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art

Incidentally, the earliest exponents of emergent practices of socially engaged art were mostly curators. Reviewing socially engaged art in the 1990s and beyond, Michael G. Birchall names canonising figures such as Nicolas Bourriaud (relational aesthetics), Maria Lind (collaborative practice) and Mary Jane Jacob (an exemplary demonstration of new genre public art, as theorised by Suzanne Lacy, in her classic rendition of *Culture in Action*), who all put forth visions for culture through curating as an expanded and discursive practice.<sup>340</sup> Considering the examples in this thesis, interestingly the work of the artist-initiators was also very much akin to that of curators. *Pep! of Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* saw to the project as a curatorial collective. Woofers Ten's projects were largely curatorial. Wu Mali is both an artist and a curator; the way she worked with the "stitching sisters" was not unlike a curator working with a group of artists. Jam Wu is an artist, but in *Papercut Field*, the way he "made art" was to create a framework and facilitate his co-creators—a mode of operation comparable to that of a curator.

This blurring of the roles of the artist/author and the curator in co-creative participatory art is intriguing. To conflate the two modes of creative productions is a rash over-simplification, but there does seem to be a strong connection between the making of co-creative participatory art and curatorial practice. A pivotal point in this connection is the redefined roles and relationships in co-creative art-making. Audiences, who might be passive in spectacle-centred artistic encounters, are activated to become active participants and have a share in the creative process. The artist is no longer a singular conveyer of meaning. He or she assumes the role of a dialogical facilitator, placing into limelight not his or her own, but others' creativity. With

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<sup>340</sup> Michael G. Birchall, "Socially Engaged Art in the 1990s and Beyond," *On Curating*, no. 25 (May 2015): 6, accessed 14 March, 2022, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-25-reader/socially-engaged-art-in-the-1990s-and-beyond.html#.YcA9zxNBzGI>.

*Culture in Action*, curated by Mary Jane Jacob in 1995, is a canonical example of new genre public art. See Michael Brenson et al., ed., *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Chicago, IL: Bay, 1995). A theory of new genre public art, whose praxiological directions inspire many art projects that would later be labelled socially engaged, is spelt out in Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Chicago, IL: Bay, 1994).

the ethos of participation as a core value, the artist, also selecting, organising and presenting co-production, somehow undertakes the work of a curator. Artistic processes and curatorial processes are not congruent, but in co-creative participatory art, there is a symmetry when authorship goes through a democratising transformation and art-making evolves from self-expression to collective enabling.

The process in which artists care for co-creative participatory art is similar to a curatorial process. The latter, however, involves a few more dimensions. When interdisciplinary scholar Vicky Moufawad-Paul examines “intersectional curating” as a form of world-making, she makes a point on the internal dialogue created through juxtaposition and re-contextualisation of works.<sup>341</sup> Orchestration of a multiplicity of artistic voices and intents, creation of internal dialogues through such orchestration, and articulation of meanings in contextual presentations, not necessarily performed by all artists, are elemental to curating. Curators of exhibition perform these tasks through assembling artefacts. Curators of socially engaged co-creative participatory art do so by putting together multiple stakeholders (artists, participants and others involved in processes of co-production), crafting time-space for generative interactions, and making sense of these actions and relations in contextual frameworks. Unlike artists, curators do not exactly make forms. As arbiter-editors, they make room for forms of meaning to lucidly make their points.

### 3.1.3. A Self-reflective Review on Curating, Civil Agency and Remaking Worlds in Hong Kong

To expand the earlier discussion on the making of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, this chapter focuses on its curating as a relational, generative and discursive practice in instances when civil agency was strengthened and worlds were remade. Three of MaD’s previous projects provide an empirical ground for considering how the curating of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, as value-driven and critical cultural co-production,

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<sup>341</sup> Vicky Moufawad-Paul, “Intersectional Curating: The World, the Street, the Hand,” in *The Art of Global Power: Artwork and Popular Cultures as World-Making Practices*, 142.

played a part in Hong Kong's rapidly growing civil society over the years (2011-2018) when it harnessed energy on all fronts.<sup>342</sup>

"Can participatory art be conducive to a democratic culture?" was a principle question explored in the first example, a curatorial trilogy titled *MaD@West Kowloon* (2011-2012), *Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest* (2012) and *Construction in Progress* (2013). These projects targeted the then unbuilt West Kowloon Cultural District, a much anticipated and controversial cultural hub destined for Hong Kong.<sup>343</sup> "Let's Own It!" was an inaugural slogan of the series, which tried to turn the rhetoric of "cultural democracy" into action. The second example, *Tin Shui Collaborative* (2014), took place in a small, struggling local market whose vendors were classified as "underprivileged" in a condescending welfare system.<sup>344</sup> Through a transformative summer, the project rewrote the story by activating the vendors to become active co-creators who, in their small but palpable ways, demonstrated resistance against monopolising deprivation. Amidst accelerated contestations over what is local, the last example, *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* (2018) was a public art project presented in collaboration with residents of a 600-year-old village. It addressed issues such as identity, lineage and preservation as co-creative art probed into the notion of home and the choices of its custodians.<sup>345</sup>

All of these projects were not exhibitions presenting finite works of art. Rather, borrowing the words of von Bismarck, they were "relational, dynamic field[s] of interacting." Indeed, as argued in the previous chapters, the art in these projects lies in the generation of collective

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<sup>342</sup> Materials included this chapter were previously published in two articles by the author: "Taking Part: Participatory Art and the Emerging Civil Society in Hong Kong," *World Art*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2015.1016584>; "At the Threshold: *Hi! Hill—Art In-Situ*, a Case Study of Community-Based Public Art," in *Socially Engaged Public Art in East Asia: Space, Place, and Community in Action*, 57–84. Contents are expanded and rewritten to correspond to the argument on curatorial agency in this chapter.

<sup>343</sup> Factual details of the three projects and documentation videos are listed in Appendix I.

<sup>344</sup> Factual details of the project, a documentation video and a published compilation are listed in Appendix I.

<sup>345</sup> *Hi! Hill* was a public art programme presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) of the Hong Kong SAR Government. The overall organiser was LCSD's Art Promotion Office 藝術推廣辦事處, which steered an exhibition in the former Chuen Lung Koon Man School. MaD took part as curatorial partner of *Art in-Situ* and saw to site-specific art projects inside the village. Factual details of the project, a documentation video and a published compilation of *Art in-Situ* are listed in Appendix I.

agency through transformative processes. As public appearances, they made visible co-creative participation of diverse stakeholders in grounded contexts for democratic cultural co-production. Not limited to exhibition making but encompassing the processual engineering of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, this chapter is a praxiological inquiry into curating as a form of agency in actualising and articulating democratic participation.<sup>346</sup>

Montreal-based curator Yves Sheriff uses the term “soft curating” to describe a curatorial process that determines the content and contextualisation of a work, its resonance with the public, as well as the sharing of resources through constant dialogue between the curator and his or her collaborators.<sup>347</sup> It was very much MaD’s *modus operandi*. Dialogues among the curatorial team, collaborating artists and active participants drove the developments of the projects and were often the basis of decisions. Methods such as open calls, open-ended frameworks for autonomous contribution and collective deliberation were typically employed to foster a democratic culture.

The selected curatorial undertakings responded to and intervened with socio-political situations by creating platforms for multitudes of actants to reconsider, reimagine and remake worlds. As co-creative participation was cared for so that individual subjectivity, internal dialogues and agency were effectively fostered in meaningful processes of people-centred democracy, these instances of cultural co-production also contributed to Hong Kong’s democratic quest at large. In line with the thesis’s consistent methodology, thematic analysis is preceded by detailed descriptions. Written from the perspective of someone finding the way through all three projects, the following recounts convey from up close what socially engaged co-creative participatory art meant to its stakeholders, in a precarious society whose critical mass resisted against monolithic hegemony as they took ownership of what belonged to them.

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<sup>346</sup> Indeed, the author’s preferred Chinese word for describing such work is not *cezhan* 策展 (exhibition making) but *cehua* 策劃, which encompasses a more extensive process.

<sup>347</sup> Yves Sheriff, “‘Soft-Curation,’ Pollination, and Rhizomes,” in *Curating Live Arts*, 147–48.

## 3.2. *Let's Own It!*—A Curatorial Experiment on Cultural Democracy (2011-2013)

### 3.2.1. Context: A Controversial Cultural District

In 1998, the Hong Kong Government announced plans for the construction of “a new, state-of-the-art performance venue” to boost Hong Kong’s “image as Asia’s entertainment capital.”<sup>348</sup> The proposition turned out to be an unprecedented opportunity for art and culture: after a long history of marginalisation, a multi-billion, first and only cultural hub was to be built in West Kowloon, a reclaimed area by the waterfront. This seemingly promising project was nonetheless not met with forthright enthusiasm. Sceptics worried that it might just become another commercial development and local culture could not really benefit from a blueprint fixated on world-class hardware, invested to stage international superstars instead of cultivating homegrown talents.

Extensive analyses of the West Kowloon Cultural District development have been published by scholars from different disciplines. Social scientist Agnes S. Ku and journalist Clarence Tsui Hon-chee contextualise the case with the government’s utilitarian approach to art and culture since the colonial days. They argue that the West Kowloon Cultural District project was a product of colonial state-paternalism, institutional fragmentation and neo-liberal globalism.<sup>349</sup> Human geographer Carolyn Cartier considers the project “emblematic of the Hong Kong economy under British rule and the first decade of the SAR government.” She finds its emphasis representative of “the value of Central District” (as previously mentioned in Chapter One), or the operational logic of capitalism prizing high-profile property development and so-called world-class venues.<sup>350</sup> Public misgivings about the project, as those

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<sup>348</sup> Hong Kong SAR Government, “The 1998 Policy Address,” 1998, accessed 11 May, 2020, <https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa98/english/high.htm#:~:text=Position%20Hong%20Kong%20as%20an,within%20the%20region%20and%20beyond>.

<sup>349</sup> Agnes S. Ku and Clarence Tsui Hon-chee, “The ‘Global City’ as a Cultural Project: The Case of the West Kowloon Cultural District,” in *Mobile Hong Kong: Making a Global Population*, ed. Helen F. Siu and Agnes S. Ku (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 343-364.

<sup>350</sup> Carolyn Cartier, “Culture and the City: Hong Kong, 1997-2007,” *China Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 64.



mentioned above, are summed up by all three scholars. In particular, Cartier notes criticisms against the “state-property development alliance.”<sup>351</sup>

Despite the fact that a mandate to “reflect the ideals of equality and public participation in its physical, emotional and intellectual accessibility for both locals and visitors to the city” was prescribed in the government’s Concept Plan Competition Document in 2001, a lack of public consultation is pinpointed by Ku and Tsui. There were however interventions by civil think tanks such as The People’s Panel on West Kowloon 西九龍民間評審聯席會議 which advocated a paradigm shift to greater participation.<sup>352</sup> In their 2008 publication, Ku and Tsui’s conclusion was:

In Hong Kong, the government has opted for a path of globalisation from the above that leaves no place for the local. In response, a civil society is in action seeking to create spaces for cultural participation in alternative ways.<sup>353</sup>

Observing the same phenomenon, Cartier sees in the case of the West Kowloon Cultural District “a new era of public debate and citizen participation.”<sup>354</sup>

The curatorial trilogy discussed in the following section can be seen as an example “to create spaces for cultural participation in alternative ways” in “a new era of public debate and citizen participation.” Unlike predecessors who advocated with speech, these projects acted with curating. The beginning of this curatorial intervention was similar to Woofer Ten’s hacking of an official opening. In 2006, legislators passed a motion demanding the government to radically rethink the West Kowloon Cultural District project. The development was then back to square zero. Consultative committees were formed and a series of public engagement exercises (many of them criticised as “vain” in the lyrics of *Complaints Choir*) were to be conducted between 2009 and 2011. For a good number of years, the prime site by the harbourfront remained idle before a new plan was confirmed. In 2011, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority invited MaD to try out the site. For the Authority, the non-profit’s

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<sup>351</sup> *Op cit.*, 65.

<sup>352</sup> Ku and Tsui, 359-61.

<sup>353</sup> *Op. cit.*, 364.

<sup>354</sup> Cartier, *op. cit.*

autonomous status was favourable for testing out spatial possibilities without the pressure of public scrutiny. For MaD, then a young initiative, saw it as a golden opportunity to contribute its share to the city's most contested cultural agenda and eagerly accepted the commission.

### 3.2.2. Making a Difference to West Kowloon

In his prologue to Miessen's *The Nightmare of Participation*, Israeli architect Eyal Weizman writes about a "paradox of collaboration." Accordingly to him, this paradox affects most independent non-governmental organisations that "make up the ecology of the contemporary crisis": "It operates by creating a common ground where activists must cooperate with the very states, armies, or militias they originally sought to confront."<sup>355</sup> When MaD worked on the West Kowloon commission, we collaborated but not were not co-opted. Curatorial autonomy was respected by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority which treated the project largely as an independent undertaking, and we took the liberty to be subversive rather than subservient. *MaD@West Kowloon* was conceived as a heterotopia to address what made people mad at the controversial development, what could possibly make a difference to the site and why this mattered to citizens of Hong Kong.



Fig. 3.1. *MaD@West Kowloon* at West Kowloon Waterfront Promenade, 2011-2012  
(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

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<sup>355</sup> Eyal Weizman, "The Paradox of Collaboration," in *The Nightmare of Participation*, 10.

With “Let’s Own It!” as its slogan, *MaD@West Kowloon* championed bottom-up agency and asserted that the people should have their say on the culture presented in this symbolic location. A curatorial concept was derived by the curatorial team, which comprised Vangi Fong (of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*), Sumyi Li 李心怡, Meipo Yuen 阮美寶 and the author, with inputs also from theatre practitioner Janice Poon 潘詩韻. The overall idea was to engage a multitude to co-create, even though temporally, a visionary West Kowloon Cultural District. To present a multiplicity of voices was a foremost curatorial principle. Around one hundred local art practitioners and thousands of public visitors were roped in to “own” the space, constructing an imaginary cultural hub through co-creative participatory activities.

As opposed to the widely criticised fixation on hardware, the project was all about the vital software for cultural development. An articulate project structure qualified hypothetical venues with intrinsic values. “Wall-less Art Complex” featured “Live Art Festival” (an opportunity for emerging local artists to exhibit works that were down to earth and close to life) and “Cross the Line Theatre” (a collaborative scheme for cross-disciplinary practitioners to derive boundary-crossing works). “Free Art School” (in the legacy of Beuys’s Free International University) offered free art classes that were not governed by capitalistic logic and explored freedom. “Open Space” maintained that public space should be made available for unrestricted use. “Public-in-Residence Programme” put the public rather than artists in the spotlight. The embodied argument was direct and vocal: the West Kowloon Cultural District should not be a top-down glamorous stage for “world-class” spectacles, but a space for local art development and cultural democracy.

One of the most illustrative demonstrations of this curatorial vision was *Instant Skyline* 《瞬間天際線》, a collaboration with local artist Kacey Wong (whose earlier urban interventions were mentioned in the thesis’s introduction) under the umbrella of the “Public-in-Residence programme.” Wong was invited to create a project for public visitors to take centre stage. He came up with a process-based, co-creative platform for participants to collectively reinvent the

iconic skyline of Victoria Harbour. With a background in architecture, Wong is known for an oeuvre that critiques spatial and ideological hegemonies in the city's built environment:

People in Hong Kong think about real estate, homes and buildings in utilitarian and economic terms. They rarely think about these concepts in relation to history, integrity and freedom... Citizens have no say in the city's hardware... Only property developers and the government have the power to decide and build.<sup>356</sup>

Fully visible from the West Kowloon site, the skyline of Hong Kong's central business district is a beacon of "the value of Central District" erected by the rich and powerful. Taking this as a point of departure for this co-creative participatory art project, Wong and his assistant invited public visitors to build their own mini-skyscrapers with scrap wood at a carefully designed workbench. During the project period, hundreds of walk-in participants crafted their own wood-block skyscrapers. In all sizes and shapes, they celebrated a wealth of personal characters hardly accommodated in the dominated cityscape. After finishing their personalised architecture, participants lined them along the fence by the harbourfront. In a perspectival superimposition, this "instant skyline," full of human touch and democratic, posed a stark contrast with the glass-cladded high-rises on the opposite shore. "Participants never took part in the construction of the background," stated the artist, "There is a reversal of what is real. The buildings in the foreground are actually more real than those in the background."



Figs. 3.2 & 3.3. Kacey Wong and public participants, *Instant Skyline*, 2011-12:  
Workbench for participants to craft their own skyscrapers

<sup>356</sup> Interview with Kacey Wong by the author on 18 July, 2014. The following quotations of Wong in this section is also taken from the same interview. All interviews in this chapter were conducted in Cantonese. Translation by the author.



Figs. 3.4 & 3.5. Co-created installation by Victoria Harbour, full view and detail  
(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

The project was a symbolic reclaiming of citizens’ “right to the city.” Asserting that this right is more than a simple visiting right but a “renewed *right to urban life*,” French philosopher Henri Lefebvre argues that the people, individually or in teams, can “propose, try out and prepare forms” for social relations in our urban existence.<sup>357</sup> In the final night, *A Symphony of Lights (Citizens’ Version)* 《幻彩詠香江（人民版）》 was staged. Launched in 2004, the official version of *A Symphony of Lights* is a large-scale light and sound show at the spectacular Victoria Harbour. Starting with eighteen participating buildings, by 2017 the spectacle was partaken by forty-two waterfront skyscrapers, which emit laser beams into the night sky in a synchronised sequence at eight o’clock every night. The tourist attraction was accredited as the world’s “Largest Permanent Light and Sound Show” in Guinness World Records, but is not equally well received among locals. Environmental groups criticised it for excessive light pollution that endangers nocturnal species. Its airdropped approach and primary appeal to Mainland tourists are lamented upon as a blatant sign of how the city does not belong to its people.<sup>358</sup> Two lines in a poem titled “Dreams of Mountains and Clouds” 《山雲我夢》 by local poet Chan Chi-tak 陳滅 express the sentiment succinctly:

<sup>357</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 151, 158.

<sup>358</sup> For criticisms against *A Symphony of Lights*, see for example “Anti-nuclear Rainbow Warrior at *A Symphony of Lights*” 《反核電彩虹勇士「詠香江」》, *Apple Daily*, A12, 15 February, 2011; “Billion-dollar Revamp of *A Symphony of Lights* Lambasted” 《億元更新幻彩詠香江捱轟》, *Apple Daily*, A07, 19 January, 2017; Poon Kwok-ling 潘國靈, “Symphonic Lights and Light Out” 《幻彩與燈滅》, *Headline Daily* 《頭條日報》, 22 December, 2008, accessed 29 June, 2021, <https://hd.stheadline.com/news/columns/28/20081222/66679/專欄-靈感國度-幻彩與燈滅>.

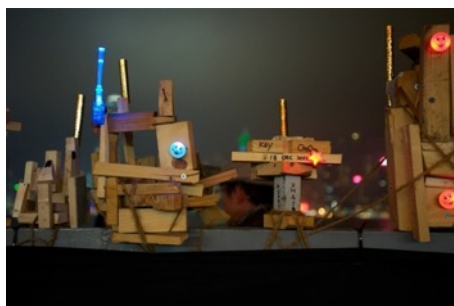
不怕變幻只怕那幻彩詠香江

以幻彩泯滅香江的色彩，不自主

The symphonic fades Hong Kong's colour, no autonomy

Unafraid of fluctuation, but afraid of a *Symphony of Lights*<sup>359</sup>

The *Citizens' Version* was a parody of the official production and subverted its hegemonic connotations with people's power. It was deliberately wonky and teased the actual show with black humour. Laser effects were cheaply simulated with torches and LED lights, put onto the miniature skyline by public participants. A climactic moment was created with two "flying" dragons. These tacky paper creatures were a mockery of a widely criticised logo of "Brand Hong Kong," which morphs the Chinese characters of Hong Kong with an oddly proportioned dragon.<sup>360</sup> Accompanied with fireworks, conspicuous spectacles taking place at Victoria Harbour annually on celebratory occasions such as the Chinese New Year and the anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China, the show was a travesty of power displays in the city. All the tricks were manually performed by crew members in black, hiding with everyone's perfect knowing behind creased masking. The artist played the role of a visible controller, prompting his crew on a mobile phone. This farce was watched by an audience of around three hundred whom, although not exactly involved in the making of the work, completed it as the crowd in every orchestrated ritual.



<sup>359</sup> Chan Chi-tak, "Dreams of Mountains and Clouds", in *Hong Kong Lights* 《香港韶光》 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2017), 10-11.

<sup>360</sup> For details about the branding of Hong Kong, see for example "Branding Hong Kong: Charting the City's History," *South China Morning Post*, January 26, 2016, accessed 29 June, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/hk-magazine/article/2029386/branding-hong-kong-charting-city-history>.



Figs. 3.6, 3.7 & 3.8.  
Kacey Wong and public participants, *A Symphony of Lights (Citizens' Version)*, 2012  
(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

“This is way better than the actual version!” I overheard an exclamation when I was watching the show among the crowd. As much as this comment suggested how the work was positively received by the audience, the very fact that I could not verify it with the anonymous stranger calls for frank acknowledgement of the limit of engaging a faceless public. *Instant Skyline* is a framework for public visitors to come together in the creation of an imaginary cityscape. Its symbolic subversion of monolithic control with autonomous people’s power is unambiguously articulated in highly readable forms. However, to the participants, mostly families having a day out at the waterfront, these critical comments might have been different to what was on their mind. The process might as well be taken as an occasion for parents and children to make things together, to try hammering a nail for the first time, and to have a creative work of their own on public display.

The artist was open to the participants’ own versions of the story. Indeed, the room for open-ended creation of meaning is integral to the work. Instructions were minimal and participants could shape their buildings freely with the versatile blocks. Organic growth, both as a model and as a metaphor, was reinforced by the provision of soil and seeds. Participants were invited to put soil on their buildings and sow seeds, and grass would grow naturally within weeks. Even though the work and concepts were thoroughly developed by the artist at the onset, *Instant Skyline* was also an open structure by default and accommodated pluralistic sense-

making and transformation. The participants' autonomous interpretations can be an argument against authorial control. However, individual subjectivity of the participants, whose thoughts could not be traced through their quick creations, was hardly as pronounced as what was cogently enunciated by the whole set.

In *MaD@West Kowloon's* exploration of cultural democracy, besides artist-driven works, another curatorial imperative was to invite wider participation in free use of space. As part of the component "Open Space," "\$0 Sq. Ft." put forth a hypothetical question: if land is free despite the city's ever rocketing property prices, what greater freedoms could the people enjoy? As mentioned in Chapter One, land was a heated issue after the contestations over the uprooting of Choi Yuen Village and gentrifying urban renewal in the early 2010s. Land in Hong Kong was (and is) always identified with a price tag. The basic right to dwell in space, as cited previously in a critique by Hui, is sadly burdened by a high price that subjects many to capitalistic hegemony. "\$0 Sq. Ft." was thus conceived for people to sign up for a small plot of land along the harbourfront promenade and could use it freely—free of charge and in whatever way they wish, providing that it was legal and did not endanger others.

The initiative was a critique against neoliberal spatial repression and enabled participants to realise their imaginative yearnings for how they wanted to inhabit space. The format of an open call, instead of selection or invitation, was a purposeful curatorial decision to make maximum room for practising participatory democracy in public space. What participants did was like a fleshed out version of *Instant Skyline*. Given carte blanche to present whatever they wished, many used the opportunity for what they considered important for themselves and this city, regrettably not given enough space by society at large: alternative economies, pursuing one's passion and convivial social interactions. For instance, an advocacy group known as Go Beyond the Mall 唔幫襯大地產商的聖誕, whose Chinese name is literally "Not giving business to big real estate developers during Christmas" (the event was held at the end of the year in the holiday season), mounted a stall to promote small local producers in resistance against what is locally called the "hegemony of real estate 地產霸權." Some participants,



whose name could not be retrieved, made use of their lots for exhibiting personal interests, sharing second-hand items and exchanging with others. A group of university students simply booked the space for hanging out. At dusk, they played the guitar. One of them told me casually, “We just want to lounge about—in a spot even closer to the harbour than the luxury apartments nearby.”<sup>361</sup>



Fig. 3.9. “\$0 Sq. Ft.” at *MaD@West Kowloon*, 2011-2012



Fig. 3.10.  
Go Beyond the Mall promoting  
small local producers



Fig. 3.11.  
A participant sharing second-hand items

<sup>361</sup> Sharing by an anonymous “\$0 Sq. Ft.” participant with the author at *MaD@West Kowloon*.



Fig. 3.12  
An artist exhibiting her works



Fig. 3.13.  
Two young people sharing their passion for film



Fig. 3.14.  
A participant hosting an interactive game



Fig. 3.15.  
A group of young people lounging about

(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

On temporarily owned land, hundreds of citizens presented authentic local culture along the promenade of the promised cultural district. In order to make room for more people, the area reserved for each “\$0 Sq. Ft.” participant was only around the size of a parking bay. To stretch spatial possibilities on another scale, another dimension of “Open Space” was “Free Time,” which welcomed community organisers to demonstrate their vision of public space through presenting activities for larger crowds in bigger venues. Among the open-called entries was *Lawn Fest* 《草民音樂節》, a band show on the lawn proposed by Lawn Map 草原地圖, co-founded by Thickest Choi after joining *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*. A concert on the lawn does not sound particularly special. However, *Lawn Fest* was a potent statement to those who understand the city’s human geography. Green patches are a rarity in the concretised environment. When there is one, it is typically cordoned off with a “step off the grass” sign.

Lawn Map was founded to map out lawns—and what they represent—in the suffocating city so that people could regain their right to space out in urban nature.

The lawn at West Kowloon, an exceptional piece of greenery in the heart of the city, was their proposed stage and auditorium for a day-long band show—another precarious matter. Against all odds, independent bands have a strong culture in Hong Kong. While rent is oppressing high, many bands set up their studios in more affordable factory lofts. Since 2010, industrial building revitalisation measures have been implemented by the government. Through these “revitalisation” processes, many bands lost their footholds because of rising rent and persecutions against “illegal” use of factory spaces. Most notably, a few months before *MaD@West Kowloon*, Hidden Agenda, a popular live house in a factory building, was ordered by the government’s Lands Department to cease operation. The incident was an epitome of unsupportive policy, which led to a pitiable lack of space for local band sound.

Such was the milieu when *Lawn Fest* brought together a vast lawn and local bands in its proposal to open up space for what was so spatially marginalised. In line with the *raison d’être* of “Free Time,” Lawn Map also made an open call and tried its best to give all applicants the opportunity to show on the prime spot. As a result, eight hours of continuous music was played by one band after another, drawing to the site an audience of over one thousand. It happens that around that time, a popular television drama titled *When Heaven Burns* 《天與地》 was the talk of the town. The series, which was banned in Mainland China, dives into issues such as the city’s homogenising culture, political collusion, the sensitive topic of cannibalism, etc. “This city is dying” is among the many aphorisms in the script. An episode featuring a climactic band show was aired shortly before the event. The similarity of circumstances in popular culture and real life made this heterotopic space-making project all the more surreal.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> The coincidence between *Lawn Fest* and the band show in the TV drama was noted in media coverage: “Real-live version of the Rock Fest in When Heaven Burns: A ‘Young and Naïve’ Music Festival Rocks West Kowloon” 〈《天與地》Rock Fest 現實版：《年少無知》搞熱西九音樂節〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, A17, 3 January, 2012.



Figs. 3.16, 3.17 & 3.18. *Lawn Fest at MaD@West Kowloon, 2012*  
(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

As these self-initiated projects addressed contemporary situations, they were authentic embodiments of local culture from bottom up. In the event's documentation video, a telling anecdote was recounted by theatre practitioner William Yip 葉遜謙, who led a public workshop with one table and two chairs. The furniture was used as a basic setting for all kinds of narratives. During an intermission, the set was unexpectedly appropriated:

There was a kid, about seven. He used the chairs to build his "home." Although this was not part of my workshop, he used the chairs for his own creation. When the kid turns seventeen, I am sure he will still remember he had a great afternoon at West Kowloon.<sup>363</sup>

That kid might have turned eighteen by the time this thesis was completed in 2022. I have no way to check whether he still remembers that afternoon, but Yip's story suggests how freedom and creativity flourished in unrestricted space. The kid described by Yip reminds me of another child I met during the event. In another activity, a performance artist scattered bank notes on the promenade to see how visitors would react. A man, accompanied by his little son, wanted to pick up one. Stopping his father, the boy said, "No Dad, this is art." I saw it as another surreal moment when a bank note, usually so prosaic, was comprehended with a different imagination. In happenings that overturned inert practices and perceptions, senses were constantly redistributed in a temporary heterotopia. Extraordinary scenes questioned whether the usual was reasonable and whether space can be inhabited differently.

Another illustrative example is captured in the project's photographic documentation. In Hong Kong, kite-flying is typically not allowed in public parks, but in a workshop led by theatre practitioner Leung Wai-man 梁惠敏, participants made kites and flew them. The reason for banning kites at the promenade was that it was below flight routes. Tactically, the kites flown at Leung's workshop transgressed rigid prohibitions with their short lines. Because it was unlikely that these low kites would interfere with aeroplanes thousands of feet above, the venue management could not reasonably forbid the activity. Although this was not exactly kite-flying

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<sup>363</sup> Documentation video of *MaD@West Kowloon*, *op. cit.*

in the proper sense, the activity was an acutely critical action against risk-adverse managerialism, so widespread in Hong Kong's public environment. People-centred freedom was given form by the symbolic kites, flown by bare-foot participants, all visibly grinning from ear to ear.



Fig. 3.19. Kite-flying performance by Leung Wai-man and public participants at *MaD@West Kowloon*, 2011 (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

*MaD@West Kowloon* was a simultaneously modest and bold attempt to activate democratic imagination at the destined site of Hong Kong's cultural hub. The experiment drew unprecedented crowds to the then mostly unpopulated promenade and tested out how space could be used to give room to local creations. To evaluate reception, the curatorial team conducted random interviews with visitors on site. Two anonymous responses were cited in a subsequently printed pamphlet for lobbying municipal bodies to develop public space and culture with greater freedom and trust:

Free, interactive and energetic! A public creative platform.

Everyone's creativity thrived! It was a historical moment in Hong Kong!<sup>364</sup>

The pamphlet was meant to be an advocacy paper so the selection of quotations served a clear purpose. Nonetheless, similar observations were also made by journalists and critics. *Ming Pao Daily* expatiated on the project's values: "diversity, openness, people-orientedness and

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<sup>364</sup> This concluding pamphlet, published by the Make A Difference Institute in 2012, was sent to various government departments as an advocacy paper based on the experiences of *MaD@West Kowloon*.

public participation are MaD's vision for West Kowloon."<sup>365</sup> In a commentary contextualising the project with space for art in the city, cultural critic Chan Ka-ming 陳嘉銘 made an affirmative point about the spatial politics behind "Let's Own It!": "Autonomous interventions by citizens and independent artists add colour to this government/corporate-managed place from bottom-up."<sup>366</sup>

### 3.2.3. Reimagining Public Culture

Shortly after an ad hoc multitude co-created this heterotopic world at *MaD@West Kowloon*, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority embarked on a comparable event: *Freespace Fest* 《自由野》—a pilot programme of Freespace 自由空間, a multi-functional performance venue to be built as part of the cultural district's infrastructure. The ideology of *Freespace Fest* was significantly different from *MaD@West Kowloon*. The latter was about fundamentals: what the West Kowloon Cultural District stands for, what makes public culture and what cultural democracy promises. *Freespace Fest* was a more straightforward weekend event. Its objective was practically to prepare for the future venue by presenting art programmes to an expanded audience. The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority steered the project and lined up a number of curators to present music, dance and aerial performances. MaD was invited to curate "public programmes." Persistent on opening up that emblematic space for co-producing public culture, the curatorial team designated this new edition as *Collaborative Programmes* 《共創項目》.

The difference in mindset between MaD and the Authority was obvious. As an authority managing the future cultural district, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority was orderly in all regards. MaD however preferred less control, so that authentic contents from the

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<sup>365</sup> Poon Kin-man 潘健文, "West Kowloon Defined by You and Me" 〈西九由你我定義〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, S07, 18 December, 2011. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

<sup>366</sup> Chan Ka-ming, "If Factory Lofts Are Replaced by West Kowloon" 〈如果西九取代工廈〉, *Ming Pao Daily*, D04, 5 January, 2012. Original text in Chinese. Translation by the author.

people could naturally emerge. This variance is reflected in the project’s official visual identity and our parody of it. In the former, icons of the programme components and standard features of an outdoor festival (marquees, food and beverages) are placed within rectangular compartments. In a subversive adaptation, we opened up the boxes. Figures are not bound within frames. They are not performers but people inhabiting spaces. As two chat with each other while another walks a dog, a game of football—typically forbidden in public parks—takes place outside the box. Two defy gravity and float in midair, ambiguously flying up to or down from an UFO. In vernacular language, mavericks who do not conform to the common way of life are called “aliens 外星人.”

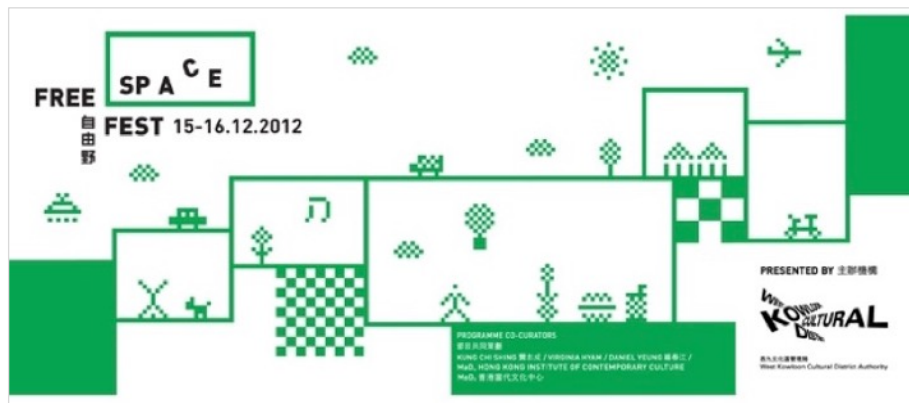


Fig. 3.20. Official visual identity of *Freespace Fest* 2012



Fig. 3.21. Visual identity of MaD’s *Collaborative Programmes* at *Freespace Fest* 2012



Behind this graphical contravention is a struggle between managerialism and a more liberal approach to public culture. For instance, as principal organiser of the project, the Authority required visitors to pre-register for the event. Upon entrance, each of them was given a wristband for identification. This system might seem commonsensical, but we disagreed, contending that people’s access to public space should not be conditional—especially in an event called *Freespace*. After rounds of discussions, the Authority insisted on regulated admission. Our response was a participatory intervention: participants were invited to tear off their wristbands, write down what they thought was a truly “free space,” and display them on a raw structure mounted by the waterfront so these thoughts about freedom fluttered in the harbour breeze.



Fig. 3.22. Installation for participants to express ideas about “free space” at *Freespace Fest* 2012  
(Photo by the author)

As MaD continued to collaborate but refused to be co-opted, we were aware that in the context of this programmed occasion, spatial politics needed more pronounced deliberation. In *Interrupting the City: Artistic Constitution of Public Space*, Gielen critiques the “creative-repressive city”: a well marketed and orchestrated image of neoliberal, orderly creativity glosses over inequality, conflicts and repression. Echoing de Certeau, Gielen believes that there is room for “just about everyone” to try tactically appropriate space, so that the creative-

repressive city becomes “the common city.”<sup>367</sup> In *Collaborative Programmes*, tactical annexation of West Kowloon for alternatives beyond neoliberal and regimental control was realised through participatory co-creation.

A number of programme drives were scaled up to accommodate a greater number and diversity of participants, and sharpened to make more pointed statements. Besides an expansion of “\$0 Sq. Ft.,” “Free Time” evolved into a methodological “Open Call” for spatial experiments addressing critical topics on the public agenda. This participatory discursive space was vocalised by members of the public, whose opinions about public space were encapsulated in the project’s documentation video. It starts with a dozen of interviewees discussing what they thought about the notion of “free space.” Accessibility to all, the freedom to do whatever one likes, an absence of control and definitive planning, etc. exemplify their preference for a more egalitarian and liberal environment. A participant of “\$0 Sq. Ft.,” identified as Daniel, however remarked on the lack of a critical mass:

It needs greater awareness. Many people think when they don’t stay at home, they can “walk in the streets 行街” [typically understood as shopping or window shopping in the consumeristic city], watch movies, have dinners. They don’t really think they need space.<sup>368</sup>

Daniel elaborated on what he considered as the reason of people’s indifference:

There are actually many vacant spaces, but they are not open. Naturally, Hongkongers think, “Some places cannot be entered.” For instance, in places such as the metro whose properties are supposedly private, there is still lot of space that can possibly be used by the people. However, because of problems of resources, mindset and management, space is almost non-existent.

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<sup>367</sup> Gielen, “Performing the Common City: On the Crossroads of Art, Politics and Public Life,” in *Interrupting the City*, 287-286.

<sup>368</sup> Documentation video of *Collaborative Programmes* at *Freespace Fest*. The following quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same source.

He was echoed by others who vented their discontents about the unwillingness of venue managers to open up public space, their restrictiveness and inhuman managerialism. Another participant of “\$0 Sq. Ft.,” Suet-yi 雪兒, described a symptomatic example:

Along the coast of many outlying islands, fences are built in a way that when people sit down, they cannot see the sea. I think this is merely for satisfying some requirements. They are built because they have to be built, without considerations of the residents’ feelings and needs.

Suet-yi’s comment is reminiscent of Hui’s critique of the numbing bureaucratic conformism that undermines people’s authentic perceptions and desires. That a critical mass was nonetheless more than ready to overthrow such inertias is illustrated by the subsequent footages, which show a great variety of activities initiated by participants, such as people speaking publicly on issues they cared about, freely enjoying the lawn, gathering convivially for karaoke, creating situations for interpersonal interactions, etc. A public visitor named Hody commented:

I think Hongkongers do not lack awareness of public space, nor are they inept at using public space. Say if you organise an event like this, everything comes out.

In this collective display of what free space could be, a contribution to “Open Call” was particularly representative. *Let’s Play Football!* 《嚟!!!踢波!!!》 was initiated by artist Lo Lok-him (who later co-curated *Pitt Street Riot* in 2014; see discussion in Chapter One). Before studying art, Lo was a professional footballer. His call for others to join him in a game of football at *Collaborative Programmes* was however more nuanced than an expression of a personal interest. As repeatedly critiqued by the previously cited participants, public space in Hong Kong is extremely regulated. Many normal leisure activities, from stepping on the lawn to flying kites, walking dogs, playing with remote-controlled cars,

skateboarding, cycling and even lying on benches are prohibited.<sup>369</sup> Among the many prohibitions, ball games are typically not allowed.



Fig. 3.23. Signs prohibiting a range of activities in a public park in Hong Kong; photo taken in 2012 (Courtesy of Mary Ann King)



Fig. 3.24. *Let's Play Football!*, initiated by Him Lo as an "Open Call" programme at *Freespace Fest 2012* (Photo by the author)

*Let's Play Football!* transgressively turned a piece of lawn into a football pitch simply with two makeshift goal posts and hand-drawn boundary lines. This rebuke against managerial control, as in many other self-initiated activities, was particularly interesting because of its

<sup>369</sup> Excessive regulation in public parks is frequently commented upon. See for example, Mandy Chung, "Park Rules," *Varsity*, no. 110 (2009): 4–7.

demonstration of an alternative form of public space ownership. MaD's curatorial principle was to share and trust. Thus unlike venue managers who avoid liabilities and cover all risks with disclaimers and insurance, we did not require contributors to follow rigid rules. Instead, they were only reminded to exercise their own judgement and be conscientious to others. Following this principle, the football match went very well until an out-of-bounds ball accidentally hit a coincidentally passing-by car. The vehicle was slightly dented and the driver asked for compensation. Without insurance coverage, the curatorial team explained the situation on a microphone and crowdsourced for the mishap. Many players and onlookers chipped in their shares and the affected driver accepted the raised amount. This "crisis" was resolved with an alternative approach to public space management: as opposed to liability-avoiding regulations, collective ownership and shared responsibility are possibly more conducive to a civil culture.

This incident, besides illustrating trust-based co-ownership as a possible alternative to risk-averse managerialism, is also telling of MaD's curatorial approach to participatory democracy. Recalling the aforementioned concept of dialogical "soft curating," the resolution of the football accident was an example of how the people were brought together to collectively take care of a common matter, and such democratic participation was promoted in all aspects of curation. For instance, besides getting access to space, "Open Space" co-creators also received subsidies for presenting their activities. When each of them budgeted an amount, not surprisingly, the total exceeded the available funds. Instead of making selections or budget cuts, the curatorial team transparently told everyone about the shared pool of resources and invited budget-makers to review their plans. It turned out that the voluntarily revised total was much reduced, to the extent that additional participants could be accommodated. In stereotypically money-minded Hong Kong, this manner of resource allocation was a world remade. Alternative ways of being and working together, catalysed by the curating of interactions and relations, emerged as processual performativity in a dynamic field of cultural co-production, where the commitment to common good among civil-minded agents demonstrated how participatory democracy could make a real difference.

### 3.2.4. A Microcosm of the Civil Society

In 2013, the selected concept design for M+, a much anticipated new museum of visual culture, was unveiled and a ground-breaking ceremony for the Xiqu Centre 戲曲中心, a facility for Chinese operas controversial because of the use of Putonghua pinyin (instead of the local dialect Cantonese) in its name, was conducted. The long overdue cultural district was finally taking shape—in terms of hardware at least. The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority held a second edition of *Freespace Fest*, a more elaborate one with ten co-curators, festive fringe arrangements such as a gourmet street, overwhelming publicity including a web app, event management by a public relations company, and the goal of attracting one hundred and twenty thousand visitors.

MaD was again invited to be a co-curator. Responsive to developments of the West Kowloon Cultural District and questioning the notions of construction and progress, *Construction in Progress* 《工程進行中》 was conceived as a curatorial theme by Vangi Fong, Meipo Yuen and the author, this time joined by new members Helen Fan 樊樂怡 and Lee Suet-ying 李雪盈. In the previous renditions, to reserve space for pluralistic interpretations, MaD had deliberately restrained from publishing definitive curatorial statements. At this point, the curatorial team however thought it was time to explicitly spell out what was at stake. For the first time a curatorial statement was printed on a programme brochure and published in a pre-event essay in popular online media *House News* 《主場新聞》, setting agenda for collective deliberation, loud and clear:

Over the years, a path is getting into shape on barren land. Along this way, we are still heading towards the same direction. Circumstances, however, have changed. The path underneath our feet has become wider. But is it still a grassy trail, or has it been cemented?

At *Freespace Fest* this year, we are happy to see an even more diverse line-up of co-curators, whose programmes cater to a wide range of audiences. Efforts on reducing waste and accessibility also deserve big thumbs-up. At the same time, we

have our doubts: with a targeted attendance of over one hundred thousand and spectacular promotion, has culture become another industry, succumbing to the logic of capitalistic consumption? Amidst state-of-the-art event management, how much room is left for organic growth? Are our relationships based on interests and contracts, or respect and trust? What kind of culture is cultivated in “cultural events”? Perhaps we are simply facing the real world. When faced with diverse values and habits, how do we see our roles and responsibilities, as practitioners who care about the long run?<sup>370</sup>

Vis-à-vis a spectacular, consumeristic and orderly model of cultural production, *Construction in Progress* was a counterpoint that manifested a civil outlook on “progress”—from bottom-up, organic and critical of monolithic repression.

The project was an expansion of *MaD@West Kowloon* and *Collaborative Programmes*. Along the lines of “Free Time” and “Open Call,” “Open Space” was a platform for self-initiated projects to demonstrate their endeavours to construct a critically progressive local culture. Agricultural communities resisting eviction brought along soil and plants for visitors to learn about the rural side of Hong Kong. Environmental activists set up an exchange station for second-hand resources. A group of vegetarians donned animal costumes to promote animal welfare. Artivists concerned about public space got people together to hack the event. *Let’s Play Football!* came back as *People’s Cup 2.0* 《西九人民杯》. So Boring 蘇波榮 (a neighbour of Woofers Ten, known for its subversive use of public space and practice of alternative economies) shared free food. Advocates for a different pace of life organised a “slow tribe.” A local art journal launched an open media platform. Sound artists ran workshops to invite visitors to re-experience the surroundings with their ears. An exceptionally proactive high school teacher teamed up with students on a project called *I Wanna Free Hong Kong!*

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<sup>370</sup> Curatorial statement of *Construction in Progress*, 2013. The extract was included in an essay discussing the project’s rationale. See Stephanie Cheung, “Before *Freespace Fest*” 〈寫於自由野之前〉, *The House News*, 13 December, 2013. The online platform has dissolved.

This plethora of activities, celebrating non-mainstream, pluralistic values, were not shows put on to impress the crowds. Rather, they were an extension of what the initiators had been doing all the while and came together as a microcosm of Hong Kong’s civil society at that time. The grounded and real-life nature of these committed practices was particularly obvious during a big hiccup in the festival. On the second day of the weekend event, there was a heavy rainstorm and all other performances were cancelled. Understanding that *Construction in Progress* involved hundreds of stakeholders, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority left it to us to decide whether this part would go on. Keeping the practice of soft curating, the curatorial team consulted the “Open Space” co-creators and made it a collective decision. The take was almost unanimous: we do what we do, rain or shine. The winter morning was biting cold in the rain. Mapopo Community Farm 馬寶寶社區農場 warmed the collegial community with freshly made vegetable soup.



Fig. 3.25. Contingent signage suggesting that *Construction in Progress* was still in progress despite the pouring rain



Fig. 3.26. Hot soup served by Mapopo Community Farm to persisting co-creators of *Construction in Progress*

(Photos by the author)

As the co-creators filled *Construction in Progress* with real-life content, our curatorial contribution to the kind of culture cultivated in this “cultural event” was praxiological. As in the previous editions, cultural democratisation was fostered through egalitarian distribution of rights and responsibility among the people, whose choices and actions defined a place’s culture. In an unreserved rejection against regulated use of space, “\$0 Sq. Ft.” morphed into “Flying Carpets.” Instead of lining up along the promenade, “pilots” could “fly” all over the place as long as they respect the needs of others. The prime opportunity to freely present



materials in the popular festival attracted almost three hundred “pilots.” There was naturally a mix of people with different expectations, and the result was a realistic reminder of what it takes for an ideal civil environment to materialise. In a post-event essay, I recorded what we experienced on the frontline:

Before the event was affected by the heavy rain, most “Flying Carpets” clustered at central locations. It was extremely congested. Our team thought, perhaps we could invite some of them to relocate to a less crowded area to ease the congestion and channel the crowds—we didn’t need a lot, only twenty “carpets” would do! We thought it would be easy, but after asking many, all of them turned us down with their own reasons. It turns out that to many, one’s own convenience and interests were more important and immediate than the possibility to change the larger environment for the better.<sup>371</sup>

“Flying Carpets” was a risky experiment on people’s ability to self-regulate, collaborate and freely inhabit a public environment. Discussing the “risk society” and the possibility of a world beyond, British sociologist Scott Lash makes a distinction between “security cultures” and “risk cultures.” While the former is consequence-conscious, the latter are willing to deal with risks beyond rational calculation and normative subsumption.<sup>372</sup> Huybrechts calls the uncontrollable consequences of uncontrolled instances of participation “risky trade-offs.”<sup>373</sup> The unconditional opening up of space at *Construction in Progress* was a curatorial risk taken to realise a norm-defying culture, even though it might come at a cost. It was a trade-off for embracing a form of public culture requiring no regulation other than the people’s own judgement, or at least, a test of the city’s readiness for radical co-ownership of public space. A first step is always taken with risk-taking courage:

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<sup>371</sup> Stephanie Cheung, “After *Freespace Fest*” 〈寫於自由野之後〉, *The House News*, 25 December, 2013. As previously noted, the online platform is now closed.

<sup>372</sup> Scott Lash, “Risk Culture,” in *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, ed. Barbara Adam, Ulrich Beck, and Joost van Loon (London: Sage, 2012), 47–62.

<sup>373</sup> Huybrechts et al., 13.

But then, one pilot overheard our request and volunteered, “I can move.” We thank this participant, who walked away with a small luggage. Your move did not change anything, but if more people were like you, the situation would be very different. As you walked on, I saw that the civil society in this city has moved a tiny step forward.<sup>374</sup>

In a milieu when a critical mass in Hong Kong was taking one step after another towards an aspired democratic society, MaD’s curatorial trilogy was a parallel stride taken together with co-creators whose pace might or might not be totally in sync. In our crafting of time-space and orchestration of interactions and relations, we propounded that culture, to cite curator Barnaby Drabble, “is not something the state offers to us: quite the opposite, culture is inherently ‘ours’, emerging as it does through a creative process of interaction and collaboration between citizens, in relation to their environment.”<sup>375</sup>

The long-term philosophy of the curatorial series was somehow embodied in a co-creative participatory work of art. Among the many “Open Space” programmes, *West 9 Dragon* 《西九民·化骨龍》 was presented by artwalker 創藝同行, whose co-founder Meipo Yuen was a member of the curatorial team. Her artist’s hat on, Yuen sees the work as a translation of the curatorial rationale in artistic form. The work was a co-creative participatory process for festival attendees to collectively shape *West 9 Dragon*, a pun on the Chinese of West Kowloon. Walk-in participants were invited to draw or write their thoughts about the future of this place on sculptural parts prepared by the artists, and then assembled their pieces into a dragon. artwalker’s idea was to create a space for basically anyone to have a share in the symbolic construction of West Kowloon. After four hours of intense participation, around one hundred participants co-created a thirty-foot dragon and paraded it through the site. As they held the dragon up, they wore badges identifying them as “stickholders” (stakeholders).

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<sup>374</sup> Cheung, “After *Freespace Fest*.”

<sup>375</sup> Barnaby Drabble, “On De-Organisation,” in *Self-Organised*, ed. Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions, 2013), 20.



Fig. 3.27. artwalker and public participants, *West 9 Dragon*, 2013  
(Photo by the author)

From what the participants wrote on the dragon parts, the artists' intent to democratise West Kowloon was not always registered. But if culture is fundamentally a way of acting, doing and living, the work did realise its aspiration. "When participants picked up the markers, they drew automatically," Yuen observed.<sup>376</sup> To recognise creativity as a common impulse was at the heart of *West 9 Dragon*. This was warranted by a design with simple but versatile parts that welcomed intuitive and adaptive uses. In addition to reassuring everyone's right to create, the process, especially during the parade, also fostered a kind of interpersonal connection that went beyond momentary conviviality. The parade took place in the busiest moment of the day, around the time when the curatorial team was urging "pilots" to fly away their overcrowded carpets. Mobility in the jam packed promenade was further hindered by a sudden drizzle and the procession of the dragon took much longer than expected. Holding up the sticks for almost an hour was extremely tiring, but no one gave up. A kind of natural solidarity emerged. Families and friends took turns to hold the poles. When the stickholders had to stop and wait in the middle of impossible congestion, they were exceptionally patient and started to sway the dragon rhythmically among themselves. "I have always wanted to create a mirage," said Yuen, "In this work one is created for, with and by the people."

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<sup>376</sup> Interview with Meipo Yuen by the author on 31 July, 2014. The following quotation in this paragraph is taken from the same source.

This mirage of bottom-up co-ownership and co-creation, vis-à-vis a top-down approach to culture at this symbolic site, epitomises a world MaD strived to make through this trilogy. In a city where civil energies were rapidly gaining steam, this world of democratic participation, pluralism, autonomy and freedom was made collectively by tens of thousands of citizens, whose agency thrived in value-driven curatorial frameworks. As what the people considered valuable for the city's culture visibly emerged, the ultimate question for this series of curatorial undertakings is how this mirage could possibly become lasting and real.

The project was a testing ground for a good number of long-running projects. For instance, *Lawn Fest* became an annual programme dedicated not only to local music but also alternative ways of life. Lo developed *People's Pitch* 人民足球 into a sustained undertaking and continued to engage different communities to address issues of public space and urban development. The collective statement on bottom-up culture was lucid and those who took part defied regiments of bureaucracy, capital and regulated convenience. However, as the participant base grew bigger and bigger over the years, the ownership and shared responsibility that refuted top-down control in *Let's Play Football!* was not a baseline for everyone. Without a common ground, the creation of a common could not be taken for granted. It was extremely difficult to convene an enormous, faceless public, but meaningful interactions did take place on more intimate scales. Thus when the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority stopped inviting MaD to take part in a further edition of *Freespace Fest*, we thought it was time to refresh our approach to democratic engagement.

### **3.3. Co-creating Tactical Resistance: *Tin Shui Collaborative* (2014)**

#### **3.3.1. Context: Disenfranchisement in a "City of Sadness"**

Soon after co-creators of *Construction in Progress* demonstrated a desire for alternative ways of life, in spring 2014, some grassroots vendors protested against eviction from where they strived to making a living. The locale was Tin Sau Bazaar 天秀墟, a struggling market in a remote area called Tin Shui Wai 天水圍. Developed by the government as a new town in the

1980s, the area was home to a high concentration of low-income households and immigrants. Unemployment (or inaccessibility to employment in other parts of Hong Kong because of burdensome commuting costs), tension among the heterogeneous community, inadequate infrastructure and repeated media coverage of suicides and family tragedies stigmatised the place as a “City of Sadness.”<sup>377</sup>

The problematic urban planning in Tin Shui Wai is another example of the collusion between the government and business in Hong Kong. A 2010 news story revealed that when plans for the new town was made in 1982, the colonial government had an agreement with the developer on limiting commercial activities so that its interest would not be affected.<sup>378</sup> The deal resulted in long-term monopolisation by the developer, which does not only build real estate but also owns the city’s biggest chain stores, from groceries to telecommunications. Unless residents travelled to satisfy their daily needs in other districts at the expense of hefty transport and time costs, their lives were dictated by the monopoly of the developer’s conglomerate on a day-to-day basis. To create options for themselves, the grassroots community had their own tactic. Cheap goods were traded in a pop-up dawn market 天光墟 near a nullah. However, trading allegedly caused noise and nuisance to nearby residents, and the hawkers were frequently dispersed and arrested by authorities responsible for public hygiene and social order.

In 2012, the government announced an incentive to “alleviate poverty” in Tin Shui Wai. A low-rent market was to be built to provide employment opportunities and redirect hawkers from the dawn market to a regulated venue. It was to accommodate around two hundred tenants who had to be vetted by a non-profit operator. In 2013, Tin Sau Bazaar began operation but fell short of expectation. “Stall owners are unhappy with many of the arrangements,” notes

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<sup>377</sup> For common perception of Tin Shui Wai, see for example Liu Kongwei 劉孔維, “How was a ‘City of Sadness’ ‘constructed’? Spatial Politics of Tin Shui Wai” 〈「悲情城市」是怎樣「打造」的？天水圍的空間政治〉, paper presented at the annual symposium of the Lingnan University’s Master of Cultural Studies Programme, 2012; Tina L. Rochelle, “Diversity and Trust in Hong Kong: An Examination of Tin Shui Wai, Hong Kong’s ‘City of Sadness,’” *Social Indicators Research, Dordrecht*, Vol. 120, Issue 2, (January, 2015): 437-454.

<sup>378</sup> “Colonial Deal Built ‘City of Sadness,’” *South China Morning Post*, December 6, 2020, accessed 30 July, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/article/732536/colonial-deal-built-city-sadness>.

*The Pulse*, a news programme of Radio Television Hong Kong, in an episode on the newly opened bazaar.<sup>379</sup> “There are no shoppers here,” lamented a stall keeper. “There’re problems with the directional signs,” complained another. The inaccessibility of the location and a lack of promotion were identified as unwelcoming factors. A visitor pointed out other weaknesses:

*Visitor:* The first feeling is failure. There are no special features. I thought this place would be special and came down to have a look.

*Reporter:* Like the dawn bazaar?

*Visitor:* Yes, people feel freer there. Here, it is crammed.

Besides these shortcomings, top-down planning was diagnosed as a fundamental flaw. A trader discussed her disenfranchisement:

First, the government decided on the site. Secondly, it decided on the stall design... The whole design is singlehandedly decided by the government. The contract and rent are decided by Tung Wah [the designated operator]. The government and the managing organisation decide things on their own and expect us to accept them.

Similar views are reflected in another feature news programme a month later. Vendors found the regulated bazaar hardly comparable to the lively dawn market. One bitterly criticised, “It only wants to sweep away [the hawkers] and never really listen to the hawkers’ needs.”<sup>380</sup>

The relocation of street vendors to regulated space was not singular to Tin Shui Wai. Around that time, in many districts (including Yau Ma Tei, where Woofar Ten was located) this was part of urban redevelopment, accepted as progressive by some but resisted as repressive by others. The streets in Hong Kong had been a vibrant trading place since the 1940s, when employment opportunities were insufficient especially after an influx of war refugees from

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<sup>379</sup> *The Pulse*, “Universal Suffrage; Occupy Central; Tin Land Use Controversies; Tin Sau Bazaar,” aired 15 March, 2013 on Radio Television Hong Kong, accessed 18 September, 2022, <https://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item.php?pid=205&eid=29095&year=2013&display=all&lang=en-US>. The following quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same source. Original statements in Cantonese. Translation by the author.

<sup>380</sup> *News Magazine* 《新聞透視》, “Hawkers in the City” 〈大城小販〉, aired 6 April, 2013 on TVB.

Mainland China. Street markets formed organically. To somewhat manage them while permitting people to make a living, the colonial government issued licenses to hawkers. In the 1970s, to limit street trading, individual licenses were not granted any more and hawker areas were demarcated.<sup>381</sup>

Social scientist Leung Chi-yuen 梁志遠 saw in these hawker zones a historical significance: they were a form of social welfare and met the needs of citizens with limited means. Leung is a specialist on hawkers in Hong Kong. He observes that, as the number of licensed hawkers reduced drastically after the 1990s, consumers gradually switched to chain stores and shopping malls. Hawker markets seem to be outdated and less progressive, but this view can actually be deconstructed as a repression of unregulated economy by the dominant system and bureaucracy. Leung argues that hawker markets have never become obsolete. Indeed, as wealth discrepancy becomes wider and wider, this alternative is all the more vital, particularly for less privileged communities (such as women from low-income families, ethnic minorities, etc.) whose employment opportunities are minimal in their socially marginalised circumstances.<sup>382</sup>

Such was the milieu of Tin Sau Bazaar. On the one hand, it embodies bureaucratic regulation. On the other, it is an opportunity for residents in Tin Shui Wai to find an alternative in the largely monopolised town. The protest of the vendors, whose eviction was caused by their failure to comply with the operator's attendance requirement, caught the attention of the team behind MaD's West Kowloon projects. Seeing that *Construct in Progress* was hard to proceed with a faceless public, we thought perhaps we could try out the aspiration of collective ownership and collaborative co-creation with the hundred-odd vendors at the challenged market. Joined by other members of the MaD team, including Crystal Chan 陳慧君, Winki Cheng 鄭穎茵 and Rachel Yan 甄卉露, we cold-called the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals 東

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<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> Leung Chi-yuen, "What Makes a Hawkers Market?" 〈小販墟市可以是怎樣煉成的?〉, *Inmedia Hong Kong*, 13 April, 2015, accessed 5 June, 2020, <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/1033314>,

華三院 (operator of the bazaar) and presented *Tin Shui Collaborative* as a series of workshop-based activities. Despite the two organisations' differences in ideologies and approaches, Tung Wah accepted our proposal and the summer-long project commenced.



Fig. 3.28. Aerial view of Tin Sau Bazaar  
(Screencap from the documentary video of *Tin Shui Collaborative*)

### 3.3.2. When Civil Aspiration Faced a Tough Reality

*Tin Shui Collaborative* was originally conceived a series of co-creative interventions that engaged vendors and public participants to re-examine, re-imagine and reinvent Tin Sau Bazaar. Likeminded collaborators were lined up to address a range of pertinent issues through socially engaged co-creative participatory projects. Hong Kong Urban Laboratory 香港城市創作實驗室's *Tin Shui Wai Topology* 《天水圍拓樸學》 was a topological inquiry into the notoriously poor town planning and residents' tactical adaptations. Artist collectives MUDWORK and artwalker (which hosted *West 9 Dragon* at *Freespace Fest* 2013) looked into public furniture as physical structures for public interactions. Vangi Fong (working on the project as a collaborating artist) and Fato Leung (one of the actors in *Pitt Street Riot*) explored issues of local consumption and community building through *Community Kitchen Project* 《天水圍的煮與食》. Filmmaker Lam Sam 林森 launched *Kaifong MTV Channel* 《街坊MTV台》, a critical response to the arrest of some residents because they sang by the nullah. Urban farmers from Good Family Farm 好家庭菜園 and O-farm fostered community



interaction in a communal farming project titled *Growing Neighbourhood* 《家家種植》. Engaging participants in field investigations and co-creative work, each workshop was set out to last for around two months. However, the time was proven to be too short when the groups found themselves still struggling with the tough place's complexity two-thirds down the road.<sup>383</sup>

An anecdote was particularly telling of the frustrations overshadowing Tin Sau Bazaar. *Growing Neighbourhood* was extremely popular among the vendors and there was an overflow of interest. One day, the planters were suddenly surrounded by prohibitive barriers. The venue staff explained that there was vandalism, allegedly by someone who was upset about not being admitted. Sensitive to the defensive aggression coded in the iron barriers, we tried to soften the guard by replacing some of them with colourful party banners. As we attempted to convey a different message with form, we were nonetheless alarmed that the intent to cultivate a sense of community could potentially exacerbate tense relations.



Fig. 3.29. A colourful party banner placed by the curatorial team to soften the prohibitive barriers around the vandalised planters (Photo by the author)

Competitiveness among traders in a market with scant business is understandable. A perturbing lack of trust was also partly triggered by paternalising management. The

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<sup>383</sup> *Tin Shui Collaborative* was originally scheduled for June to July 2014. Subsequently, it extended for two more months and ended in September.

aforementioned eviction of some earlier tenants was triggered by absenteeism, which was deemed unacceptable as the bazaar was supposedly a welfare programme. To tackle this, the operator took attendance a few times a day. Stall keepers had to stay in their shops throughout the bazaar's opening hours if they wanted to secure their tenancy, but it was gruelling when there was no business and opportunity costs involved necessities such as childcare and time for other domestic duties.

Feeling the vendors' discontent and entrapment, we seriously questioned whether our civil aspiration to co-create a co-owned space for autonomous living was really valid in their difficult circumstances. The elements were also unpropitious. Heat was unbearable on the site and was off-putting for everyone. As visitors turned away from the scorching bazaar, many of the public participants dropped out. Frequent rainstorms also made open-air work impossible. When the scheduled finale was doomed to be hit by an approaching typhoon, the curatorial team consulted the collaborating artists. Everyone agreed that more time was needed and unanimously decided to extend the project for another two months.

### 3.3.3. From Intervention to Co-creation

The additional time was a restart. While the first batch of workshops was largely conceptualised by the collaborating artists, the second part of the project was reactive. Artistic responses were derived according to observations and experiences in the bazaar. Interventions were revamped to become co-creative co-productions to invite the vendors to take on a more active role.

A game-changer was *Signboard Making Workshop* 《招牌工作坊》, a contingent collaboration with Leo Wong Chun-yam 黃振欽. An exceptionally sociable artist with a track record in relational work, Wong got on board when the curatorial team reckoned that relations building was pivotal to this restart. Trained in sculpture, Wong's first reaction to Tin Sau Bazaar was its physical form: the standardised modular structure of the shops looked unfittingly uniform for the variety of people housed within them. While changing the shop

structures was difficult for a short-term project, Wong focused on the signboards which were all printed in an identical manner. His idea was that if a sign represented a shop, it should reflect the character of the business and its owner.

Together with a team of helpers, he set up a simple carpentry workshop near a vacant store and invited stall keepers to create new signboards for their shops. Nothing can be more irrelevant than installing sculptures in the struggling market but making nice business signs had a strong appeal. Vendors started to gather around the benches. Wong gave them an extremely open brief: represent your shop in whatever way you see fit. Most vendors never made art before. As they amateurishly crafted their own signboards, the coarsely shaped wooden pieces conveyed a lot about what their small businesses meant to them. For instance, grocer Shing Kee 成記 tried his very best to carve poultry and eggs to represent his fresh produce. Ping 萍姐, who sold natural remedies, composed a couplet on wellbeing and shaped the text with different kinds of beans. Rag and bone shop owner Uncle Lam 林伯 self-invented assemblage by fitting a favourite buddha figurine in his sign.



Figs. 3.30, 3.31 & 3.32. Signs made by vendors Shing Kee, Ping and Uncle Lam respectively at *Signboard Making Workshop* (Photos by the author)

Initially, some stall keepers were hesitant about participation. Some thought that the craft was beyond them. Others were worried that if they took part in “leisure” activities, they might be seen as wasting their tenancy under the welfare scheme. However, when they saw others completing their new signs, many changed their mind. Some took materials from the workshop and made their signs while keeping their shops. For those who worked next to one another at the workbenches, it was a natural opportunity to spend time together, not as business competitors but neighbours. Many conversed for the first time. Wong deliberately offered minimal technical guidance, and the vendors helped one another out. The atmosphere was exceptionally convivial. Bonding slowly formed among the participants and the artists.



Figs. 3.33 & 3.34. Vendors of Tin Sau Bazaar crafting their own signboards together with Leo Wong Chun-yam and his team of helpers during *Signboard Making Workshop* (Photos by the author)

The signboards gave form to labour of love. They also earned vendors unexpected recognition. Even though the works were unabashedly unskilled, the artist and the curatorial team were generous in their praises for everyone’s efforts and creativity. In an appreciative environment, the vendors also complimented one another. Previously, recognition was largely absent in the stigmatised bazaar, so these kudos inspired an unprecedentedly positive vibe and a genuine sense of pride. What this meant to the vendors is best illustrated by an amusing anecdote. During the time when *Signboard Making Workshop* was held, Tin Sau Bazaar was featured in another news programme. Reporting again on the place’s failures, the randomly panning camera captured Uncle Lam’s sign with the inlaid buddha. A relative of the old man saw it on television and rang him up. For an older generation in Hong Kong, appearing on television was an equivalent to public significance, and Uncle Lam was overjoyed. The next day, he went

to the workshop again and said he wanted to make another sign—this time, an even bigger one.



Fig. 3.35. Uncle Lam proudly showing his signs at his rag and bone shop  
(Photo by the author)

By inviting vendors to take part in a creative act that they could easily find relevance, *Signboard Making Workshop* changed both the physical and psycho-social environment in Tin Sau Bazaar. As the vendors hang up their lovingly handcrafted pieces, their colours and uniqueness made a stark contrast to the homogenous signs imposed on them by the venue management. Each of the new signboard embodied how its owner saw, felt about and valued his or her small business. The handmade quality conveys a warm feeling of humanity, and the care given to these crude pieces is like a metaphor of the bazaar itself: despite its apparent roughness, the place is after all a haven for the vendors' modest dreams. Against all odds, vendors deserved to be commended for striving for themselves and their families, and for providing alternatives in a community overshadowed by hegemonic monopolisation.

Indeed, contrary to its unpopular perception, Tin Sau Bazaar could have been an affordable shopping option especially for low-income earners in the district. The shops offered a range of goods and prices were frequently lower than other places in Tin Shui Wai. This prosaic fact carries social significance. At a personal level, even though vendors were not earning much from their businesses, they demonstrated the will to be independent and autonomous. "Tin Sau Bazaar is not a place for you to make a fortune," said Mr. Long 朗先生, a vendor in his sixties,

in the project's documentation video, "but a place for you to pursue what you wish to do."<sup>384</sup> Such a will to and practice of autonomy can be appreciated as a rejection of the logics of enslaving capitalism and paternalising social welfare. At a social level, trading in the small market, even though difficult, stood for the possibility of people-based local economy as opposed to the domination by mammoth corporations. Tin Sau Bazaar is a delicate space of personal, social and economic resistance. To celebrate its meanings and support those who strived eventually became refocused objectives of *Tin Shui Collaborative*.



Fig. 3.36. Affordable prices at Tin Sau Bazaar (prices in Hong Kong dollars)  
(Photo by the author)

#### 3.3.4. Agency Harnessed to Remake a World

When the project was making staggering progress, we questioned whether civil aspirations were too lofty for vendors burdened by their daily troubles. Seeing the vendors' challenges in a broader socio-economic landscape, improving their business was actually not only pragmatic but also ideologically and politically important for what these small shops represented—to Tin Shui Wai as well as to Hong Kong. As the curatorial team and the collaborating artists brainstormed on ideas to make visible the values of Tin Sau Bazaar, *Pui Pui Sales Brochure* 《貝貝雜貨圖》 emerged as a discursive tactic to overturn the common misconception that the market was not worth a visit.

<sup>384</sup> Documentation video of *Tin Shui Collaborative*.

Parodying direct marketing leaflets of supermarkets and department stores, the idea was to invite vendors to identify their best products, photograph them and show the diverse shopping options in a colourful collage. Roy Lam Lui-kong 林磊剛, originally engaged as the project’s documentation photographer, took up the task. He visited one shop after another, chatted with the shopkeepers and took pictures of what they chose as the pride of their shops. It was a relational process of both recognition and collaboration. A total of one hundred and seven shops participated. Through Lam’s photography, their contributions filled up an A2 sheet with cherry-picked contents from the overlooked bazaar.



Fig. 3.37. Roy Lam Lui-kong photographing a vendor’s selected products for *Pui Pui Sales Brochure*



Fig. 3.38. *Pui Pui Sales Brochure*

(Photos by the author)

This sales brochure was named after Pui Pui 貝貝, a saltwater crocodile in a well-known local saga. In 2003, a strayed reptile, probably deserted by a former pet owner, was spotted in a river. Crocodiles are not an expected species in densely populated Hong Kong, so the animal’s eight month-long hide-and-seek with the government’s Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department and overseas crocodile hunters earned it celebrity status. When it was finally captured in 2004, after a few transfers it was homed in a newly built wetland park next to Tin Sau Bazaar. A territory-wide naming contest was held and “Pui Pui”—referring the name of the river where it was first discovered and also meaning “preciousness”—was selected from 1,600 public entries.<sup>385</sup> Pui Pui, a symbol of rekindled concern after desertion,

<sup>385</sup> Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, “Pui Pui’s Home,” Hong Kong Wetland Park, accessed 7 June, 2020, <https://www.wetlandpark.gov.hk/en/exhibition/reserve-puihui>.

became a proximate inspiration when we were figuring out an approachable “mascot” for promoting Tin Sau Bazaar. Overlaying recognition of the participating shops with the appeal of Pui Pui, thirty-eight thousand copies of the sales brochure were distributed to households in six nearby housing estates, hopefully to attract residents to check out what this place had to offer.

Both *Signboard Making Workshop* and *Pui Pui Sales Brochure* are double-coded. The practical signboards and promotional leaflets are at the same time functional items and symbolic affidavits. While messages were conveyed in artistic form, we were nonetheless mindful about imposing a socio-political discourse on the vendors and did not explicitly discuss such thoughts. To the vendors, the signboards and leaflets were literally signboards and leaflets, but there was a certain tacit understanding on their deeper meaning. When we distributed copies of the *Sales Brochure* to the vendors, one of them pinned it up on her shopfront with utmost care: all sides of the folded leaflet were visibly shown, and the vendor even aligned the sheets with the grid of the roller shutter. Mutual regard was tangibly articulated.



Fig. 3.39. Different sides of *Pui Pui Sales Brochure* shown on a shop's roller shutter  
(Photo by the author)



On the other side of the *Sales Brochure* was information about the postponed project finale. As autumn arrived, a first-ever night fair was to be held at Tin Sau Bazaar. Titled “An Autumn’s Night Fair” to bid farewell to searing summer, the event speculated that extending business hours and enriching the bazaar with festive attractions might be a way to arouse visitors’ interest. Flexing art as a tactical approach to practical problems, this night fair echoes Wong Chun-kwok’s comment on art in the face of neoliberal repression: “this city needs more artistic strategies, but not art.”<sup>386</sup>

To run a night fair, vendors’ participation was essential. This however could not be taken for granted. For many of the grassroots vendors, taking care of their families is an evening routine. If business did not improve in the experiment, it would cost them more than a few wasted hours. Some vendors thought that a presentable night market required everyone’s participation, but they did not trust their neighbours’ commitment. The curatorial team convened vendors’ meetings to engage everyone in collective deliberation. Some trusting and optimistic vendors stepped up to convince others and suggested that they should take a proactive role in this attempt to change the game. Some came up with the idea of crowdsourcing goodies for a lucky draw. Goodie bags were thus packed with small items donated by the vendors. The goods were of little monetary value, but they were precious tokens of the vendors’ agency: instead of humbling themselves as deprived welfare recipients, they volunteered to give.

When “An Autumn’s Night Fair” was finally held, the vendors ran the show. Almost all shops remained open. In addition to contributing to the goodie bags, many offered discounts or other attractions. In these small but significant ways, the vendors joined force as collaborative actants, took ownership of Tin Sau Bazaar and co-created their first-ever night fair. To complement the vendors’ ardour, we teamed up with a dozen of socially minded collectives and mounted a food street with a promotional drive to boost business. Purchases at the small shops could earn visitors “Pui Pui stamps,” which can be used to redeem a free bite or a throw of dice at the lucky draw.

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<sup>386</sup> Wong’s comment, citing Holub, was previously noted in the section on Woofer Ten in Chapter Two, pp. 95-96.



Fig. 3.40. “An Autumn Night’s Fair,” finale of *Tin Shui Collaborative*



Fig. 3.41. A vendor stamping a redemption card that awarded local consumption with free food and drinks during “An Autumn Night’s Fair” (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

Down-to-earth art activities were also presented as additional features to boost attendance and flesh out ideas behind this collective undertaking. Participants of *Tin Shui Wai Topology* hosted *Tin Shui Travel* to guide visitors to rediscover the market and its vicinity with fresh eyes. *Kaifong MTV Channel* screened site-specific music videos, dubbing popular karaoke songs with footages taken in the bazaar and its neighbourhood. The vibrant fair effectively attracted a continuous stream of visitors. For the first time, Tin Sau Bazaar felt like a lively market. While keeping their shops, vendors also took their time to enjoy the activities and chitchat with one another. A climactic moment of the convivial evening was the screening of

“Everyone Has a Dream” 〈一人有一個夢想〉, a Cantopop classic paired with a montage of vendors at their shops, each showing a handwritten message about what motivated him or her to run a shop in Tin Sau Bazaar. Seeing their own faces on the big screen, the vendors rushed to the stage and sang their song.



Fig. 3.42. Vendors singing together at *Kaifong MTV Channel* (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

“‘An Autumn Night’s fair’ was one of the rare occasions over the past five years when I clearly felt the power of art,” commented Sampson Wong Yu-hin, who took part as a member of Hong Kong Urban Laboratory, in a post-event discussion. “I have never seen Tin Sau Bazaar like that all the while when we were there. Many thought it was impossible. I think what is artistic about this is that some potential was unleashed.”<sup>387</sup> That evening was transformative for Tin Sau Bazaar. Together with a drastic increase in visitors, the vendors strived not only for their own small businesses but also for the market as a whole. There was enormous energy in teamwork and the bazaar became a convivial community. A world was remade through co-labouring for a shared mission, a shift from alienated rivalry to collaborative camaraderie, and recognition and support earned for autonomous livelihoods. The vendors’ belief in one another and what this small market could be was the most vital agency.

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<sup>387</sup> Wong’s comment was recorded in the project published compilation. See Crystal Chan, et al., ed., *Tin Shui Collaborative* (Hong Kong: Make A Difference Institute, 2017), 142-143.

As for curatorial agency, the experience of *Tin Shui Collaborative* was essentially about humility. It was a contingent process of stepping back, humbly navigating a challenged world and harnessing its internal energies for change—both symbolic and real. Reviewing the project, artist/scholar Leung Mee-ping 梁美萍 makes a special point about the genuine care for livelihood:

The greatest creative contribution of *Tin Shui Collaborative* is that, instead of imposing meanings, it explored the true colour of a free space through the notion of “livelihood.” At the same time, it empowered the community to build itself and addressed the issue of sustainability by deliberating on the context. The saying goes: art comes from life; the question is then, what kind of art goes back to life? It is always more easily said than done—how many people can humbly work in grounded practice? Today, I can still find the hand-painted signboards at Tin Sau Bazaar, side by side with characteristic products. This community building project delights me with its gentle, humanistic touch. [...] There, what was built was not only community, but also justice—for each and every one of us.<sup>388</sup>

Leung’s view is concurred upon by Chow Sung-ming 鄒崇銘, an avid exponent of land justice, glocal development and sharing economy:

Compared to irrelevant, fanciful cultural practices, such an approach to progressively improve a market is notably more solid and grounded. It is rooted in the community and the vendors’ network; it respects the place’s history and culture; it is built on citizens’ everyday experiences and actual circumstances facing communities in Tin Shui Wai. This is something that cannot be simulated, even by the most creative cultural practitioners.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Leung Mee-ping, “From Community Livelihood to Community Building,” in *Tin Shui Collaborative*, 12.

<sup>389</sup> Chow Sung-ming, “An Autumn Night’s Fair: Endowing the Everyday with Special Meaning,” in *Tin Shui Collaborative*, 16. The following quotation of Chow is also taken from the same source.

Chow is admittedly sceptical about presumptuous airdropping of art and culture in communities. As he approved of the approach of “An Autumn Night’s Fair,” he reckons that “MaD found a way to ‘break in’ and fill the gaps. Broadly speaking, this can be taken as a kind of ‘occupy’.” The comparison to occupy is not random. The night fair took place on 27 September, 2014. In the previous night, student protestors demonstrating for universal suffrage broke into Civic Square 公民廣場 at the Government Headquarters. Tens of thousands rushed to the site to support the students on the following day. Amidst confrontations between protestors and the police, at midnight on 28 September, Occupy Central was officially launched and subsequent occupiers in different parts of town ushered in the Umbrella Movement. In terms of atmosphere, the convivial “An Autumn Night’s Fair” was an extreme opposite to the tense protests, but as it asserted people’s agency and autonomy at a community level, its quest of democracy was in parallel to the citywide struggle.<sup>390</sup>

### 3.3.5. The Ethics of Working with Real Life

As seen in the aforementioned scholarly writings, *Tin Shui Collaborative* was credited as an impactful socially engaged art project in critical reception. However, a great danger was that, to vendors who do not speak or think in such terms, their participation was subject to a discourse that do not belong to them. We found it difficult to discuss our concepts behind this undertaking with the vendors and, worrying about intellectual patronisation, opted not to do so. To the vendors, what happened in *Tin Shui Collaborative* was real life, just that it was overlaid with an unusual sensibility as unspoken messages were conveyed with colourful materials and trust-based, relational processes. Although an artistic discourse was foreign to

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<sup>390</sup> This parallel between resistance in everyday contexts and struggles in the political arena, already demonstrated in the case of Woofers Ten, would become even more pronounced in the post-Umbrella years. Writing in 2019, Minna Valjakka notes that “while political resistance continues to be one form of civil activism, the overall emphasis is shifting onto cultural and social resilience through civic engagement brought about by insurgent and propositional advocacy for societal change in Hong Kong through varied, and also apolitical, discursive sites and activities.” See Valjakka, “Urban Hacking: The Versatile Forms of Cultural Resilience in Hong Kong,” *Urban Design International* 25, no. 2 (February 2019): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-019-00079-5>.

them, as illustrated by the example of the carefully displayed *Pui Pui Sales Brochure* and some other instances portrayed in the following section, the vendors did comprehend and recognise the project's meaning in their own way. Mindful of the genuine engagement, how to manage perceptions and relations ethically, especially after the project ended, was a critical question for the curatorial team.

*Tin Shui Collaborative* was subsequently selected as a featured project in *Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong/Taiwan Exchange*, a bi-city survey exhibition curated by Leung Mee-ping and Wu Mali (who has established herself as a leading figure in socially engaged art in East Asia with decades of practice after pioneering with *Textile Playing Workshop*). The curatorial team considered the vendors' autonomous striving and their creative subjectivity as the most important part of the project. Thus while the gist of the process was delivered in a documentation video, the vendors' indispensable share was tangibly represented by their signboards, which were borrowed from their owners and put together to become a centrepiece.<sup>391</sup>

Like how *kaifong* Mr. Cheng took centrestage in his exhibition at Woofers Ten, this presentation of the signboards stressed the vendors' ownership. On the day when the curatorial team arranged a coach to shuttle them all the way from Tin Shui Wai to the exhibition venue, the vendors responded to the recognition in their own language. A good number of them made special arrangements with Tung Wah to take leave from business. When they appeared delightfully, most of them dressed up. In a non-verbal way, the vendors made it clear that it was a special occasion and this exhibition of their works meant a great deal to them.

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<sup>391</sup> In order not to disrupt the "real life" of the signboards in the bazaar, copies of the vendors' creations (printed on foamboards) were given to them as substitutes during the months-long bi-city exhibition. The vendors did not mind the make-shift quality and contentedly hung the duplicates at their shopfronts.

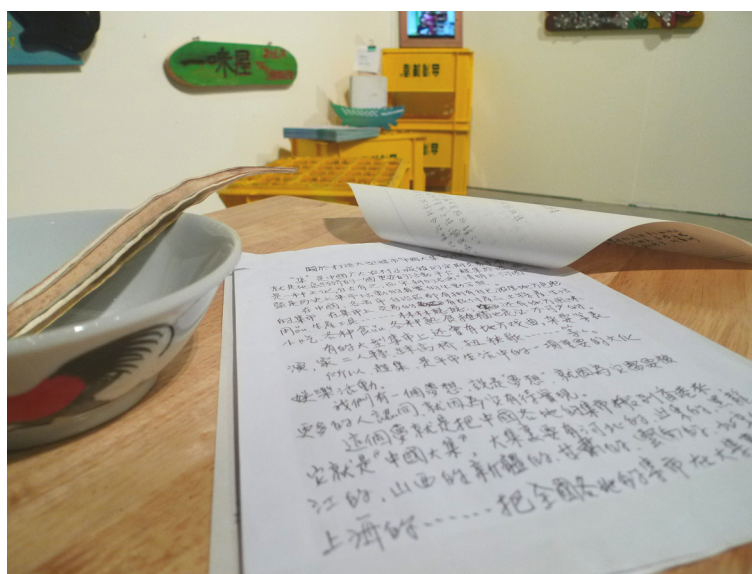


Fig. 3.43. Vendors of Tin Sau Bazaar visiting the Hong Kong exhibition of *Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong/Taiwan Exchange*, 2014 (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

*Tin Shui Collaborative* has given vendors a new perspective of their agency. The proudly made signboards, their co-created night fair, etc., stimulated them to rethink what they could do in spite of the challenging reality of Tin Sau Bazaar. On the day when the vendors visited the Hong Kong exhibition, Mr. Long, the elder gentleman who said “Tin Sau Bazaar is not a place for you to make a fortune, but a place to pursue what you wish to do,” took out a four-page, hand-written document. It was a concept proposal for a new market: the vendors learnt that a piece of government land was available for development in Yuen Long, an area in close proximity to Tin Shui Wai. In the name of “Tin Sau Bazaar Vendors’ Alliance 天秀墟租戶聯盟,” they came up with the idea to bid for the land and set up a bazaar with diverse regional characters (the vendors were from different hometowns). The proposal was drafted by Mr. Long in confident penmanship and was co-signed by dozens of vendors. It was a far-fetched dream and did not materialise at the end. However, the very fact that the vendors had such a dream is a movingly strong testimony to the agency they rediscovered for themselves.

Some dreams growing out from *Tin Shui Collaborative* were more accomplishable. For instance, participants of *Growing Neighbourhood* gathered seeds from their harvest and kept them for the next growing season, trusting that the communal garden would continue. A symbolic okra pod, together with the original proposal for the Yuen Long market, were added

to the set when the exhibition travelled to Kaohsiung in Taiwan a few months later. Originally, fearing that the irreplaceable original might be damaged or lost in the overseas exhibition, we proposed exhibiting only a copy of the proposal. Mr. Long however insisted, “If we exhibit it, we have to show the original.” The vendors never put the significance of these acts in words, but by bestowing these objects to us, their tacit understanding was palpable.



Figs. 3.44 & 3.45. The vendors’ signboards, Mr. Long’s proposal and an okra pod in a presentation of *Tin Shui Collaborative* at the Kaohsiung exhibition of *Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong/Taiwan Exchange*, 2015 (Photos by the author)

Besides inspiring a sense of agency and anticipation for another round of harvest, *Tin Shui Collaborative* cultivated relationship among the vendors and their will to self-organise. The grand market in their joint proposal was a pipe dream. In reality, the vendors initiated a first-



ever year-end gathering among themselves. A potluck get-together is hardly extraordinary, but a bonding event cooked up by the vendors themselves was unprecedented. Previously, Tung Wah had organised many social events and vendors would join as passive beneficiaries. This time, they took the initiative to host the party. It was like a mini version of their dream market. Hometown specialties shared by the vendors celebrated cultural diversity and coexistence. An extremely shy South East Asian woman courageously took part in the communal event. Over naans and curries, she quietly introduced herself to her neighbours and they conversed for the first time. The collaborating artists and the curatorial team of *Tin Shui Collaborative* were invited to join as guests. Touchingly, we found the vendors identifying their contributions with “Pui Pui stamps.” Attachment and relationships grew through the project and the vendors were very eager to see the art practitioners around. As they kept asking “Will you be back to do something again?”, the question of sustainability became a big question.



Figs. 3.36 & 3.47. Multicultural food shared by vendors and a dish labelled with a “Pui Pui stamp” in a self-organised year-end party at Tin Sau Bazaar in 2014  
(Photos by the author)

In her classic essay “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” California-based art historian and curator Miwon Kwon concludes with a note on lasting impact:

Only those cultural practices that have this relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks—so that the sequence of sites that we inhabit in our life’s traversal does not become genericized into an undifferentiated serialization, one place after another.<sup>392</sup>

Written in the 1990s, the essay’s subject of inquiry is not exactly participatory and collaborative works, but artist-driven site-specific interventions. By “relational sensibility,” Kwon means “addressing the difference of adjacencies and distances between one thing, one person, one thought, one fragment next to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing after another.”<sup>393</sup> A critical dimension in relational practice, however, is not addressed by Kwon. Her focus is on sites as conceptually loaded spaces instead of places inhabited by people. The relations in her discussions are site-oriented rather than people-bound. In *Tin Shui Collaborative*, the site was the layered physical, psychological and social space of Tin Sau Bazaar. Artistic processes of the project were essentially built on people’s perceptions and relations. When the project ended and stopped taking place in the physical site, ties between people nonetheless remain. “One place after another” is not only a conceptual question, but also an ethical one inseparable with the premise of this form of art.

Together with the collaborating artists, we deliberated seriously on whether this short-lived encounter should become a sustained commitment. Notwithstanding the vendors’ expectations, the decision was that continual work would not be pursued. Aware that long-term change had to depend on those who lived and worked in the bazaar on a daily basis, we reckoned that there was a limit to what we could and should do as outsiders. By engaging the small market’s community to take part in relevant and lively forms of art, the unusual summer redistributed

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<sup>392</sup> Miwon Kwon, “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” October 80 (1997): 110.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

senses and temporarily remade its world. Vendors were assured of the significance of their autonomy and creative agency. Convivial relations were fostered. Even the patronising operator was stimulated to reposition the tenants as collaborators.<sup>394</sup> The co-creative process of *Tin Shui Collaborative* left its marks, but sustainable impact in a complex community was beyond a one-off art project launched by sojourners. As MaD traversed from the faceless terrain of West Kowloon to a recognisable community in Tin Sau Bazaar, this step towards grounded relations left behind a praxiological reminder.



Figs. 3.48 & 3.49.

MaD encapsulates its regard for the people in *Tin Shui Collaborative* with a publication. On the day when the team revisited Tin Sau Bazaar with gratis copies, vendors delightfully looked for themselves in the book.



Fig. 3.50.

Vendor Shing Kee pointed to his faded but still proud sign, three years after making it at *Signboard Making Workshop*.  
(Photos by the author)

<sup>394</sup> The operator of Tin Sau Bazaar began a series of thematic night markets after “An Autumn Night’s Fair,” and roped in vendors and some of the collaborating artists of *Tin Shui Collaborative* to present activities. In an interview included in the project compilation, the operator’s representative made a point about a change in their approach and relationship with the tenants. See Chan et al., ed., 136.

### 3.4. Custodians of Home: *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*

In 2018, a commission by the Art Promotion Office brought MaD to another memorable co-production. *Hi! Hill* was a public art project in Chuen Lung 川龍, halfway up in Tai Mo Shan 大帽山, Hong Kong's tallest mountain. The place is home to an almost six hundred years old Hakka 客家 village and other residents, who live in close proximity to a running river, a rare species of butterflies and picturesque watercress fields. As the municipal office planned for an exhibition in a vacated village school at the periphery of the village, it was aware that hundreds of households inhabit the area and reckoned that a community component was needed. MaD was invited to be a curatorial partner to “do something in the village.” Unlike our earlier projects at West Kowloon and Tin Sau Bazaar, this commission for Chuen Lung did not begin with clearly defined agenda. It was, like the title of the project, a terrain to explored after saying Hi!. Indeed, in the village's native language, “*Hi! Hill*” is a homophone of “encounter.”<sup>395</sup>

This encounter was seen to by a new group of colleagues. Besides the author, there were Taylor Cheng 鄭銘柔, Jessie Coo 郭藹儀, Ada Li 李詠茵, Nicky Liang 梁榮豪 and Liv Tsim 詹煦嵐. When we first set foot in Chuen Lung, anecdotal encounters inspire the curatorial direction. On the façade of a one-story house, brightly painted in yellow, we spotted a printout of a life-size, friendly looking mongrel. Canine security is common in Hong Kong's villages and guard dogs are defensive for good reasons. But this mongrel grins from ear to ear. Soon after, we met the dog in the flesh and her keepers. They were as warm and approachable as their amiable yellow house. Villages in Hong Kong, though seemingly more relaxed than the tense urban

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<sup>395</sup> In Hakka, the native language of Chuen Lung Village, “Hi! Hill” is the pronunciation of the word meaning “chance encounter.” It echoes the Chinese title of the project *Haai Hau! Saan Cyun Jan* 邂逅！山川人, literally “chance encounter with mountain, river and people.” The perfect match of the project's titles in English, Cantonese and Hakka was serendipitous. The “Hi!” series was a recurrent undertaking of the Art Promotion Office to transform special sites into venues for public art. *Haai Hau! Saan Cyun Jan* was a title proposed by Chu Yiu-kwong 朱耀光, a collaborating historian in *Art in-Situ*. Chu found in the three simple Chinese characters all essential elements of this chance meeting with Chuen Lung. When we asked the village chiefs how *haai hau* was pronounced in their mother tongue, to everyone's amazement, it was actually “hi hill.”

environment, are typically traditional, hierarchical and closed communities. But Chuen Lung is different. Besides friendly canines, another even more striking sign of the village's openness is its ancestral hall. Such halls are usually formal and guarded in other villages. The one in Chuen Lung, despite the village's long history, is modest and welcomes visitors. We later learnt that the village's geniality might be attributed to its history. Early in our encounter, our impression was that Chuen Lung, as a site for the planned public art project, was exceptionally willing to open its doors. A series of questions emerged: in front of a gracious local host, how can art play guest? How can we create meaning at other people's homes? And remembering the lesson from *Tin Shui Collaborative*, how can a temporal project leave its footprints in the continuum of a place's existence?

#### 3.4.1. Context: Tales of a Village, a Story of Hong Kong

Arcadian Chuen Lung seems remote from common perceptions of contemporary Hong Kong. However, the village's tale is intricately connected to the city's development. Ancestors of the Tsang clan, who eventually populated Chuen Lung, migrated from Longchuan 龍川 (whose Chinese name is "Chuen Lung 川龍" in reverse) in northeastern Guangdong 廣東 and settled in the nearby coastal area in 1403 during the Ming Dynasty. To protect themselves from pirates, they eventually moved uphill and named their newly found abode somewhat after their hometown. There they broke the hilly ground into paddy fields, used stream water for irrigation and took roots as they raised one generation after another. In the early twentieth century, Italian missionaries aided the village through a plague. Since then a large portion of villagers converted to Catholicism, and the conversion opened the village to cultural practices other than their sixcentenary traditions.

During the Japanese occupation in the 1940s, young men in the village were forced into slave labour for the construction of a military road. This road, a painful memory of hardship and exploitation, nonetheless gave villagers convenient access to trading and employment opportunities in the adjacent Tsuen Wan new town in the post-war years. Thus while many

other villages in industrialised Hong Kong were deserted as villagers moved away for better livelihoods, Chuen Lung remained home to the Tsang clan who could commute to win their bread. The civil war in China led to an influx of immigrants. Many settled in Chuen Lung and made their living by growing vegetables and rearing livestock. Because of policies prohibiting semiaquatic farming in urbanising parts of town, Chuen Lung, with its clear running river, moderate climate and the perseverance of toiling farmers, became a stronghold for watercress. The crop, as described in the introduction, later made a name for itself and for Chuen Lung.<sup>396</sup> Retold by villagers whose blood ties wrap around these lived experiences, this history of migration, inter-cultural encounters, ravages of war, modernisation and sustenance carries a great deal of substance beyond stereotypical grand narratives of a fishing-village-turned-world-class-city where East meets West. This anecdotal history is a true story of Hong Kong, but its traces are not always preserved in the city whose roots are constantly erased by hyper-development. In this sense, Chuen Lung is uniquely valuable in its encapsulation of history in its living heritage. Besides scholarly work by the project's oral historians, our understanding of Chuen Lung was also based on interactions with its people. We once asked village chief Fai 輝村長 where their hometown was.<sup>397</sup> He said, "My father's father's father's father lived here." We were stunned by this assertive statement on home and the preciousness of this unsevered connection between people and a place.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> This summary is informed by a number of historical accounts: Tsang Wing-san 曾榮生, "A brief history of Chuen Lung Village 川龍村之史略", in *Commemorative Publication on the Occasion of the Inauguration of Chuen Lung Village Office* 《川龍村公所落成啟用紀念特刊》(Hong Kong, 1980), 12; Li Ho-fai 李浩暉, "River of Time: Chuen Lung in History" 〈川流不息：歷史中的川龍〉; Chu Yiu-kwong, "Leaving Home, Coming Back: Oral History Recounted by Mr. Tsang To-sang" 〈遊人離開，遊子歸來：曾道生先生口述歷史〉, "Oral History: Mr. Law Hoi-tung" 〈羅海東先生口述歷史〉(Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2018). The essays by Li and Chu were published as a result of the project's historical research and were distributed in print to public visitors during the exhibition period. Subsequently, the latter was reprinted as "Oral History by Mr. Law Hoi-tung: Watercress in Hong Kong" 〈羅海東先生口述歷史：香港西洋菜〉, *Qing Yaer* 青芽兒, Issue 93 (2020): 42-48.

<sup>397</sup> Village chief is a traditional office in Hong Kong villages. Over the past few decades, an electoral system has evolved for electing village representatives by rural constituencies. Elected village representatives are equivalent to village chiefs on a four-year term. The moniker of "village chief" remains in daily usage. Besides their duties in the electoral system, village chiefs also see to communal matters.

<sup>398</sup> Village chief Fai's quote is cited in a curatorial essay titled "Notes in-Situ" by the author in the exhibition catalogue of *Hi! Hill*, edited by the Art Promotion Office, in 2018. The quotation is

This connection, however, is also precarious. Although communal life still feels vibrant in the village, the most active generations are old or middle-aged. The closure of the village school is a sign that upbringing of the young generation was no longer centred in the village. “Youngsters nowadays are preoccupied with their schoolwork and do not roam about like we did,” said village chief Keung 強村長, who observed that young people were less attached to the community, did not even know their kin and had little interest in taking up official responsibilities in the village.<sup>399</sup> Will Chuen Lung’s living legacy be preserved by its next generation? Will they be as closely connected to this piece of land as their father’s father’s father’s father? When today’s children grew up, will they remain to be their hometown’s custodians? These are critical questions for Chuen Lung—and perhaps, in a broader sense, for this city in its current state of flux.

#### 3.4.2. Co-creating Meaning with a Village

With *Art in-Situ* as a curatorial direction, we approached Chuen Lung as a social, cultural and ecological space. Nine groups of artists were engaged to embark on artistic processes that would be meaningful to the locals, while also addressing pertinent issues for visitors coming to see “public art.”<sup>400</sup> Carrying on the humility from the experience of *Tin Shui Collaborative*, the curatorial team encouraged the artists to begin with no presumptions and take their time to immerse themselves in the village before developing ideas. Occasions to get to know villagers and build relationship were arranged, both for the artists to understand the context and also for the villagers to acquaint with the project. Through interactions, the artists learnt about what the seemingly halcyon village was facing, and responsive projects eventually got into shape. All of them attended to different aspects of this precariously precious social, cultural and ecological space. A good number of them went down a co-creative path.

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originally in Cantonese. Translation by the author. In this section, villagers are referred to by the names they are called in the village.

<sup>399</sup> Interview with village chief Keung by the author on 10 July, 2020.

<sup>400</sup> A list of participating artists is included in Appendix I. Artists’ preparations and villager engagement began in October 2017. The exhibition officially opened in March 2018 and lasted until August.

As in our earlier undertakings, crafting artsy objects for display was not the aim. Our emphasis was on aesthetic experiences that bring together a network of actors—artists, villagers and public visitors—in rediscovering, reconsidering and even reshaping aspects of life, at the specific location of Chuen Lung, revolving around issues that are relevant to both this place and society at large. Conscious that public displays were to be dismantled after the durational project and cautious about consuming one place after another, the curatorial team made sustainability an integral part of the plan: the artworks would remain in ingenious ways even after the public exhibition, and an emphasis would be placed on transformative experiences and lasting relations.

#### 3.4.3. Recuperating a Language, Reclaiming an Identity

Symptomatic of the uncertain future of Chuen Lung is the waning of its indigenous language. The Tsangs are of Hakka descent. Hakka, whose Chinese characters mean “guest families,” is the identity of a diasporic community thought to have originated from northern China and eventually moved to the south in a massive exodus. Unlike other subgroups of the Han Chinese, the Hakkas are not named after a specific geographical origin but their language. Once considered a dialect in Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangxi, Hakka is now on the list of Hong Kong’s intangible heritage inventory as an indigenous language that signifies a culture.

Besides Weitou 圍頭 (the language of its eponymous ethnic group, which settled in Hong Kong in the twelfth century during the Northern Song Dynasty), Hakka was once a dominant language among natives in Hong Kong. In 1911, it was spoken by around 15% of the territory’s population. In the mid-twentieth century, alongside an inrush of Cantonese-speaking refugees, the British colonial government promoted Cantonese as the official Chinese language. Indigenous tongues such as Hakka were marginalised in schools and workplaces. Together with factors such as marriages with other ethnic subgroups and relocation, Hakka children lost the language environment. There is a Hakka saying, “Rather selling our ancestral lands than losing our ancestral tongue.” However, statistically, Hakka-speakers have dropped to merely



1% of the population in 2006.<sup>401</sup> In Chuen Lung, Hakka is only spoken by more mature villagers and is not inherited by the young generation.

Among the participating artists of *Art in-Situ*, media artist Yip Kai-chun is also of Hakka descent. Like young people in Chuen Lung, he does not speak his native language. Feeling a need to confront this rupture of identity, the artist began to learn Hakka from his father in 2013. Documentation of the process culminated in a multimedia installation titled *voice from the root, reclaiming* (2015). An interrogation into identity is clear the bilingual titles. While the English unambiguously asseverates root-searching, the linguistically nuanced Chinese title “崖 hea 響 槓 言” is “I am a Hongkonger” in Hakka when the characters are pronounced in Chinglish, a mix of Cantonese and English commonly spoken by people in the former colony. Yip’s artist’s statement on this earlier work casts light on a conceptual point of departure for his later undertaking in Chuen Lung:

Learning Hakka is a process of “(Hakka) identity restoration” [...] It is a way to start a dialogue and reflect on the possibilities of language and identity. The installation uses learning Hakka as an entry point to examine Hong Kong’s culture on the identity of Hong Kong (people): what makes me (not) a Hakka? What are the criteria of being a Hongkonger? Are they ancestry, place of birth, place of residence, language and culture, or simply identification? Talking about Hakka, this is essentially a Hong Kong story.<sup>402</sup>

At Chuen Lung, Yip found resonance in a communal field. Preparations for *Hi! Hill* coincided with the Tsang clan’s annual autumn rite. On this traditional Hakka occasion, besides ancestral

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<sup>401</sup> For surveys on the history of Hakka as both an ethnic subgroup and a language, see for example Tiger Huang, “Hakka Revivalism: A Story of Language Conservation in the 21st Century,” *Sigma Iota Rho Journal of International Relations*, 30 January, 2018, accessed 7 February, 2020, <http://www.sirjournal.org/op-ed/2018/1/30/hakka-revivalism-a-story-of-language-conservation-in-the-21st-century>; *Hong Kong Heritage*, “More Than Dialects: Hakka and Wai Tau,” aired 7 February, 2019 on Radio Television Hong Kong, accessed 20 September, 2022, <https://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item.php?pid=1485&eid=126816&year=2019&lang=en-US>; *Tuesday Report* 《星期二檔案》, “Preserving Indigenous Languages” 〈留住本土語〉, aired 12 August, 2014 on TVB.

<sup>402</sup> Yip Kai-chun, artist’s statement on *voice from the root, reclaiming*, 2015, accessed 7 February, 2020, <http://yipkaichuns.com/ngai2he4hiong1gong3ngin3/>.

worship and “distribution of pork,” there was a *punchoi* 盆菜 (basin food) feast for villagers and families who have moved away. The village chiefs graciously invited the project team to join the convivial gathering, and Yip took part together with other artists. While Hakka hill songs were an indispensable part of ethnic heritage, villagers in Chuen Lung seemed to have carried that gene with them in their passion for karaoke. As Yip revelled with the jovial villagers, he was intrigued by the total absence of Hakka songs in the evening. *Hakkaoke* 《山昏見 OK》 was thus conceived as a whimsical project to address and redress the loss of the language by engaging villagers to co-create Hakka karaoke.<sup>403</sup>

Yip immersed himself in the village to befriend villagers, whom he invited to revisit the language through recalling or inventing Hakka songs. In the process, the language manifested itself as a register of lively meanings. For instance, village chief Fai and village secretary Kwok-wai 國威司理 retrieved from memory their playful adaptation of a popular song in the early 1980s. “Childhood” 〈童年〉 is originally a Mandarin track composed by Taiwanese musician Lo Ta-yu 羅大佑. In their Hakka rendition, Fai and Kwok-wai encapsulated their adolescent adventures around Chuen Lung at a time when a *pat jai shu* (guava tree) stood by the ancestral hall, when the mischievous youths were constantly chased by adults for snatching crops, and when old friends and relatives were called by names now unknown to most people in the village.

As this childhood from thirty years ago resurfaced in the voices of grown-up men, Yip also wished children in present-day Chuen Lung could recount their childhood in their indigenous language. With their parents’ consent, eight-year-old Aiden and six-year-old Khloey took part. Yip thought perhaps they could start with the basics and asked their father to teach them how to count over the household-known Chinese “Number Song.” In a recording of this Hakka

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<sup>403</sup> When pronounced in Cantonese, the Chinese title of *Hakkaoke* is *Saan-kala OK*, with *kala*, punning on “*kara-oke*.” *Saan-kala*, meaning “remote and rural,” is a colloquial expression in many Chinese dialects.

lesson for the two children, they hesitantly repeated the numbers after their father. By the end of the song, they could count one to ten in a newly acquired native tongue.<sup>404</sup>

When the exhibition opened in March 2018, old and young villagers have contributed eight songs, including some medleys of shorter verses. From traditional hill songs to authentic creations, these songs convey in the village's indigenous language its Hakka heritage, quotidian experiences in Chuen Lung as well as expressions of feelings. For instance, villager Elsa shared a refrain from a folk song, passed on in oral tradition. She could only remember a few lines: "Granny sells pickles / do you want some? / he doesn't want mushrooms / come quickly if you want to buy." The seemingly trivial content conjures up a past when hardworking Hakka women, even in old age, tirelessly supported their families by vending farm produce, and crops of labour were frugally preserved. Uncle Tat 達叔, a septuagenarian waiter at the village's half-century-old Duen Kee Restaurant 端記茶樓, took part ardently and wrote a titular song to describe the everyday at this representative place: tea brewed with stream water, freshly made dim-sum, restaurant-goers spending their mornings leisurely together with a community of songbirds. Uncle Tat kept creating and became an avid contributor to *Hakkaoke*. In May, he delightfully released a song for Mother's Day, in the style of a Hakka hill song.



Fig. 3.51. "Granny Sells Pickles," performed by villager Elsa, in *Hakkaoke* (Courtesy of Yip Kai-chun)

<sup>404</sup> Documentation of the project, including MTVs of "123321" by Aiden and Khloey and "Granny Sells Pickles" by Elsa (mentioned in the next paragraph), is accessible at the artist's website: <http://yipkaichuns.com/hakkaoke/>.

Post-production of the recorded songs was handled by the artist, who paired them with footages filmed in Chuen Lung. Edited in a home-made style to parody low-budget karaoke videos from the 1990s, the videos show the lyrics prominently in Karaoke-style subtitles, superimposed on the centre of the screen. While Hakka is essentially a spoken language and does not have a written form, like how he rendered *voice from the root, reclaiming*, Yip notated the sounds with Cantonese, English and Putonghua, three languages generally spoken by most Hongkongers after Hong Kong's return to China. These karaoke videos were presented as a playlist at an interactive installation. The set, a television encased in a lockable, double-door wooden cabinet, is reminiscent of an "education TV cupboard," a piece of old-school classroom furniture. Matching the quirky videos, the installation was deliberately garish, with laser stickers, a traditional shrine garland, blinking lights and plastic figurines as decorations. Placed outside the village office, whose lower floor is basically a mahjong parlour for elders in the village, the work welcomed visitors to freely play a song, pick up a microphone and sing along.



Fig. 3.52. Yip Kai-chun showing *Hakkaoke* to visitors during a public gathering of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, 2018 (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

*Hakkaoke* turned out to be phenomenally popular among visitors and villagers. The former appreciated its treatment of a serious matter with a good sense of humour. The latter embraced it as part of life. Children played with the set after school and naturally picked up a Hakka

word or two. “[The work] makes us rethink the loss of our native language,” said Chun 浚經, manager of Duen Kee Restaurant, in an interview for the project’s documentation video. “Everyone sings the songs,” echoed his sister and co-worker Fanny, and the two of them laughingly demonstrated a chucklesome couplet from “Granny Sells Pickles.”<sup>405</sup> Through the songs, villagers also got to know their neighbours better. For instance, retiree Uncle Sing 星叔 became a fan of Uncle Tat. “I got to know Uncle Tat after listening to his songs. I go to Duen Kee every morning, but I didn’t know who he was. He works upstairs. I always sit downstairs. I never had a chance to learn his name,” said Uncle Sing. The two men finally acquainted through Hakka songs.

As *Hakkaoke* addresses the grave loss of heritage, instead of simply critiquing it as a lamentable case of cultural disenfranchisement, it gives the real-life situation a creative spin by rekindling interest in the Hakka language and connecting people with humour and human touch. A most telling example of the project’s impact was the change of Adi, village chief Fai’s youngest son who was then fourteen years old. The bubbly teenager was a star of the karaoke night at the autumn rite and brought everybody to their feet when he performed “Gangnam Style.” Spotting his talent, Yip invited him to take part in *Hakkaoke*. Adi turned him down, saying that he did not speak Hakka and was not interested in an “old-fashioned” language. However, when *Hakkaoke* became a phenomenon in the village, he joined the other youngsters and quickly learnt the songs.

In one public sharing, organised for visitors to gain insight to the project directly from the artists and their co-creators, Fai gave an exegesis of his “Childhood.” Adi appeared and sang a duo with his father. Later on, when Yip continued to work with villagers to expand the repertoire, Adi finally accepted his invitation and sang a Hakka rendition of one of his favourite Cantopop songs. Initially, they thought the Hakka version could be made through translation. Yet when they started translating, they realised that Hakka was so incomparably

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<sup>405</sup> Documentation video of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*. The following quotation of Uncle Sing in this paragraph is taken from the same source.

different from Cantonese in its syntax, vocabulary and manner of expressions. The irrecoverability of a lost language was all the more pronounced. Seeing the urgency and the potential of engagement, after *Art in-Situ*, the artist took the initiative to apply for further funding to scale up *Hakkaoke*. A new album, with more villagers chanting Hakka in twenty-one songs, came into fruition in summer 2020. Among them is a “twenty-first-century youth version” of “Childhood,” starring Adi who might have felt a little different towards his ancestral tongue.



Fig. 3.53. Village chief Fai and his son Adi singing a duo at *Hakkaoke* (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

#### 3.4.4. Touching on Lineage

When *Hakkaoke* cared for cultural identity with a focus on language, other co-creative projects in *Art in-Situ* responded to various precarities observed in apparently halcyon Chuen Lung. Participating artist Ray Chan See-kwong was particularly concerned about lineage as villagers moved away. This was an extremely delicate topic and Chan handled it subtly with his craft as a ceramicist. Keen on experimenting with clay properties, the artist began his creative journey in Chuen Lung by examining local clay. The process was an engaging exercise that probed into the bond between people and their land. To find suitable clay in the village, Chan was assisted by villagers who hospitably showed him around while reminiscing about clay balls fight at their childhood playgrounds.

After testing the gathered materials, the artist discovered an almost symbolic character. The volcanic clay at Tai Mo Shan has a high concentration of sand and loosens up easily, but it is an extraordinary material for slip casting and moulded wares can be massively reproduced. He then came up with the idea of mass producing local ceramics that could be passed on among villagers, especially from those still residing in the village to those who left. A series of simple, conical cups, glazed on the inside for containing liquids, were made in multiples. On the terracotta exterior, each was engraved with three handwritten words—Chuen Lung *nai* 川龍泥 (Chuen Lung clay)—to mark their origin.



Fig. 3.54. “Chuen Lung cups” in a roadside installation of Ray Chan See-kwong’s *New Re New* (Courtesy of Art Promotion Office)

The project was formally titled *New Re New* 《新新相續》, referring to classical literature about succession, but among villagers the wares were rather called by the nickname “Chuen Lung Cups 川龍杯.” Chan wanted the cups to blend into the daily environment. A selection of cups, together with jars of clay samples and tools used in the making process, was displayed on a pushcart parked on a sidewalk by a main vehicle access. Viewers were encouraged to pick up a cup and feel the tactility of local soil. “Enjoy tea in a cup made of local clay”—a multi-dimensional sensation fusing a place’s soil, water and people—was the project’s invitation to its audience.

Taking advantage of Chuen Lung’s reputation for tea, the artist collaborated with local restaurants on daily use of these cups. The restaurants were later joined by a juice bar, which used specially designed “Chuen Lung Tumblers” for hot beverages. Circulation at these eateries enabled villagers and visitors to experience an intimate relationship with the very land under their feet. The coarse-grained clay heats up quickly when filled with hot liquids, giving a palpable sense of earth formed by molten rocks. With their mineral contents, the clay displays a range of unexpected colours after firing, and the spectrum shines vibrantly under clear tea.



Fig. 3.55. Ray Chan See-kwong bringing “Chuen Lung Tumblers” to a local juice bar for real-life circulation



Fig. 3.56. “Chuen Lung Cups” workshop for villagers (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)



As the project's objective was not to make art objects for exhibition but to care for life with artistic processes, Chan proceeded to a next stage after attracting villagers' interest. Workshops were arranged for villagers to learn to make the cups. As these workshops brought together relatives and neighbours in a collective act, they also opened up an aesthetic-social space. Distanced kinsfolk got to know one another in the village office-turned-studio. "We started by collecting clay and dissolving it into slip. Then we painted our own patterns to personalise the cups..." recalled Shirley, an active participant who later teamed up with the artist for a competition held by the tea ware museum.<sup>406</sup> Joining this exhibition, which habitually favours finely crafted sets of pots and cups, was another process-based experiment. The artist's intent was to give participating villagers a shared goal and mission. A hundred cups, some imprinted with plants to characterise Chuen Lung, was completed. "The clay is from Chuen Lung. The makers are people from Chuen Lung," said Shirley as she relished the "strong local flavour." The mother of two thinks it is important to learn about one's own history. "[Making the cups] enables us to feel this in another dimension. There are so many treasures in Chuen Lung. When we take part personally, we feel it all the more deeply." The roadside exhibit, the use of the cups at the eateries and the workshops were all favourably received. Seeing the popularity, a restaurant owner made an entrepreneurial suggestion for sale, so that the revenue could support continual operation of the ceramic workshops. Chan welcomed the idea and imagined that perhaps one day, besides the famed watercress, "Chuen Lung Wares," made of Chuen Lung clay and by Chuen Lung villagers, might become a local speciality and a material embodiment of this place. Over the exhibition period, almost one thousand cups were made and pay-as-you-wish sales raised sufficient funds for setting up a basic ceramic studio. However, even though the villagers took pride in the "Cheun Lung Wares," none of them was committed to running a studio on a long-term basis. The sustainable plan did not materialise, but the tactility of earth tangibly reminded villagers of their close connection with their heirloom land.

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<sup>406</sup> Interview with Shirley by the author on 17 July, 2020. The following quotations in this paragraph are taken from the same interview.

“Chuen Lung Cups” became an emblem of identity among the villagers. In another interview for the documentation video, Auntie Bo 波嫂, who was once a village chief, referred to them when observing how elders restrained from overburdening youngsters with history. She appreciated the project for filling a gap. “Our soil can indeed be used to make cups?” she raised the rhetorical question in affirmation of the tactile reminder of their endowment. Elder Uncle Mong 檬伯 conveyed what these cups meant to him through his endearing acts, “I locked up my cups in a safe. Sometimes, I show them to my granddaughter and friends.”<sup>407</sup> Shirley’s family still use the cups, especially when they brew the finest tea.

Sometimes when villagers discover new colours in their soil, they ask Chan to gather samples for new variations. “The clay is always there. We have also prepared the set-up fund. As long as we can find a suitable venue for setting up a studio with local villagers undertaking the project, we can always restart.”<sup>408</sup> The artist is not disappointed and patiently understands that sustainability can only be set into motion by a place’s custodians. *New Re New* contemplates the positionality of a guest. Similar to MaD’s reflections on the experience of *Tin Shui Collaborative*, long-term change is never up to visitors and one-off projects. Art can catalyse internal reactions and build capabilities, but sustained actions count on those who stay.

#### 3.4.5. Sowing Seeds for Preservation

Sowing seeds is perhaps an apt metaphor for what a visitor could do during a brief sojourn, and this was exactly what *Ramie Garden* 《苧麻公園》, a project combining the cultivation of plants and communal space. The co-creative project was started by Monti Lai Wai-yi, who is an environmental artist involved in the revitalisation of abandoned fields in another Hakka village. In Chuen Lung, the nature-loving artist attended to its eco-social sphere: Yellow Coster butterflies are indigenous to the area; their larvae feed on ramie leaves, so the latter’s presence is vital for the species’ existence. Ramie is a fibre crop widely utilised in many

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<sup>407</sup> Documentation video of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*.

<sup>408</sup> Email correspondence between the Ray Chan See-kwong and the author on 9 May, 2020.

cultures. The Hakkas used it for textiles and as a natural dye. Its leaves are an ingredient for traditional Hakka rice dumplings. Resourceful usage of the protean plant bespeaks a time when materials were scant and people cherished nature for what it could offer. As society prospers and manufacturing makes daily necessities more conveniently available, the inseparability between people and their natural environment falls into oblivion.

Like the loss of indigenous languages and people's alienation from their roots, this disconnect with the land is a downside of modern progress and calls for attention at both Chuen Lung and beyond. Contestations over land issues, as noted in the previous chapters, have alerted many of the alarmingly low rate of local agricultural production and its latent ecological and political threats. Eventually, a good number of activists and many others continued the struggle by getting their hands dirty in the fields. Farming posits itself as a form of labour with socio-political significance. Although *Ramie Garden* did not have any specific political aims, it is related to this wider context. From an eco-social perspective, Lai's concept was to reignite interest in vernacular species and replant a forgotten, traditional form of coexistence. "Art is a bridge," said the artist, "It lets people rediscover their connection with nature."<sup>409</sup>

When she put forth her idea, villagers accompanied her to scout for a suitable location. On idle fields now reclaimed by nature, they remarked on how their ancestors manoeuvred the land. At the end, *Ramie Garden* took roots on a small plot on a slope. These hilly grounds are known in Hakka as *che* 輦. A long time ago, they were ploughed laboriously by "guest families" farmers, who only had access to rugged terrains while land with better conditions was taken by earlier settlers. The site for *Ramie Garden* has been idle for decades and was covered by hay. A most common and efficient way to clear up the field was burning. Lai however did not want to disturb the surrounding households and opted for an artistic solution. With the help of a team of helpers, she sorted out the heaps by transforming them into seating and planters. The planters were to become a nursery for plants widely used by the Hakkas in the old days.

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<sup>409</sup> Email correspondence between Monti Lai Wai-yi and the author on 30 July, 2020.

Besides ramie, there were also mugwort and Chinese fevervine. Both were traditionally valued for their versatile uses. Mugwort is an insect repellent; as an herb, it is thought to be good for purging dampness and removing toxins. Chinese fevervine has similar medicinal properties. Colloquially nicknamed “chicken poop vine 雞屎藤,” its pungent aroma is a familiar taste for the Hakkas who used it to infuse rice dumplings with a distinctive flavour. To most present-day people whose daily needs are met by market-place options, the value of these plants is largely unknown. Among those who could recognise them, they were mostly considered wild species. When Lai carefully looked after seedlings on the hay planters, villagers were curious. “Why would you bother to care for weeds?” To answer these queries, the artist and her partners from Farm Side Art Research Lab 田邊藝術研究所 ran workshops to illustrate the plants’ lively usage. From writing with ramie ink to making mugwort incenses and “chicken poop cakes,” participants relearnt indigenous wisdom while spending time together in a communal space.



Fig. 3.57. Monti Lai Wai-yi and Yat-yat sharing a sunset on a hay couch during preparation for *Ramie Garden* (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

When Lai and her team were preparing for the garden, they acquainted their neighbours. The affable family next door took an active part. Ten-year-old Yat-yat 一一 drew a blueprint: blocks of hay are to be laid out in a circle for growing plants; at the corner, there is a star-shape structure for climbers; on the west-facing edge, a row of hay seating makes room for

villagers and visitors to enjoy sunsets over the open vista. His plan was realised by the artists. “At sunset, you could sit on this throne,” said the young master planner who adopted the garden as his own and played there every day.<sup>410</sup>



Fig. 3.58. A child and a dog playing in *Ramie Garden*  
(Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

During the public exhibition, the garden was open to all. When visitors dropped by from time to time, Yat-yat and his mother Ceci showed people around as docents-in-residence. The young boy demonstrated ways to reorganise the hay stacks and how he made spinning toys with clover. “Previously, the site of *Ramie Garden* belonged to our neighbour. I didn’t dare to trespass. But when it transformed into a ‘garden’, I could go there anytime,” said Ceci, “It didn’t really change our lives, but I got to know more people. It felt good to see them chilling out in the garden.” She recalled an instance when a child accidentally fell into the manure tank (which was fortunately only filled with moss and water). The helpful family offered a change of clothes. When the child returned the clothes, he became a new friend and played at their home.<sup>411</sup> Through the growth of plants and human interactions, *Ramie Garden* created an eco-social space. Bosco, Yat-yat’s sixteen-year-old brother, once voiced a wish: “I want to plant a tree in Ramie Garden, so that villagers can sit under its shade.”<sup>412</sup> The plot of land was restored after the end of the project, but a seed was sown in people’s heart. Ceci’s family remained

<sup>410</sup> Documentation video of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*.

<sup>411</sup> Whatsapp message from Ceci on 30 July, 2020.

<sup>412</sup> Documentation video of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*.

close with Lai, who relayed that “because of the project’s connections, they started planting coffee, imagining that ten years later, the harvest might enable them to transit to another way of life.”<sup>413</sup>

#### 3.4.6. Extending a World of Home

As *Hakkaoke*, *New Re New* and *Ramie Garden* revigorated a language and an identity, close ties to the land and one another, and sustainable co-existence with nature, worlds where people find themselves rooted, somehow forgotten as all these waned in the course of development, re-merged through co-creation by the village’s custodians. To paint a vivid portrait of the processes, the above exegesis focuses on these three projects as examples, but other co-creative undertakings in *Art in-Situ* also attended to various aspects of this home. In each of their own ways, the projects attempted to answer the praxiological questions raised at the onset: art invited the gracious local host to play an active role in rediscovering, reconsidering and renewing meanings that were dear to them. It paid tribute to definitive values of this place, and gently reminded its habitants of their agency as custodians.

Put together in a curatorial portfolio, these socially engaged co-creative participatory art projects made up a multivocal dialogue about different facets of a habitat and its custodianship. In parallel to co-creating meaning together with villagers, questionings and utterances about how a place was inhabited were also presented to public visitors. Caring for this “exhibition” is an essential part of the curatorial process. As suggested in this chapter’s introduction, this exhibition was not about showcasing finite artefacts. Rather it was a “relational, dynamic field of interacting” that extended processual co-creation while sharing with inhabitants of a wider “home”. Keeping the homely co-creations truly in-situ was a foremost principle. The unassuming works co-created by the participating artists and villagers did not stand out as art on pedestals. They blended seamlessly with everyday life, like hidden gems to be discovered. When crowds were drawn in, tours and activities engaging the villagers were organised to let

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<sup>413</sup> Email correspondence between Lai and the author.

visitors hear and feel about the project’s evolution first-hand. To make visible the most vital parts of *Art in-Situ*, a “story window” was installed on the wall of the village office. Inside this window, a growing body of photographic and video documentation, as well as mementos from the co-creative process, gave visitors an intimate view to the project’s organic growth.



Fig. 3.59. A guided tour stopping by the “Story window” of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)

In the project’s documentation video, villagers made a point about how the process reconnected the extended family and reignited a sense of togetherness.<sup>414</sup> This, essentially co-created by the villagers, was perhaps the most important thing *Art in-Situ* made for Chuen Lung. When the project was approaching its official end, a closing was held to pass what the project had harnessed back to the very hands of the village’s custodians. Under a huge, house-shaped marquee set up as a shelter from an approaching typhoon, hundreds of villagers gathered and revisited *Art in-Situ* over an extended family feast. The artists formally handed over the artworks to their perpetual owners, and a special montage of photos in Chuen Lung across time concluded the convivial evening. Ending *Hi! Hill*, this closing party was conceived as “Ciao! Hill” instead of “Bye! Hill.”

The promise of reunion was kept in the aforementioned expansions of *Hakkaoke* and *New Re New*, lasting relations between villagers, the artists and the curatorial team, and a compilation. Titled *Ciao! Hill: Review and Return of Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, this publication brought

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<sup>414</sup> Documentation video of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*.

stakeholders together in a review of the project, and also created opportunities for the artists to return to Chuen Lung and extend their works through further co-creation with villagers. When the book was published in 2021, hundreds of gratis copies were shared among villagers as mementos, together with an award MaD received from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council for curating *Art in-Situ*. Like the trophies Woofer Ten bestowed on the *kaifong* of Yau Ma Tei, this trophy finds its home in the very world it celebrates.



Figs. 3.60 & 3.61. Closing party of *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*: The villagers took centrestage again as Uncle Tat sang newly created songs; hundreds of villagers joined the convivial evening under a house-shaped tent. (Courtesy of Make A Difference Institute)



Figs. 3.62 & 3.63. Distribution of *Ciao! Hill: Review and Return of Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*; a Hong Kong Arts Development Council Art Promotion Award at the village office in Chuen Lung, next to a photo of villagers at the official award presentation ceremony (Photos by the author)

### 3.5. Curating Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art,

#### Caring for Co-production of a Democratic Culture

From reclaiming public space from bottom up to countering monopolisation through grassroots collaboration and probing into the local with a place's custodians, the three projects discussed in this chapter exemplify how co-production of a democratic culture is fostered in



curatorial undertakings of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. As actants exercised agency to shape their worlds, these co-creative participatory projects had immediate effects on intimate circumstances. At the same time, they projected their perspectives onto society at large. This social presence, recalling Pang's *The Appearing Demos*, is political: "the act of entering the public space of appearance is one's own choice and a reflection of one's political agency."<sup>415</sup> Although most of the projects' participants did not have the intent to make vocal public statements, the fact that their work was open to the public space of appearance enlisted them among a society's democratic agents. The worlds they remade or revisited for themselves were also remade and revisited for this city. Alongside Hong Kong's civil society's struggle for electoral democracy, resistance against government-corporate collusion, defence against the erasure of alternatives by monolithic development and preservation of what makes this city home, every cheer for the transgressive soccer match, every cent chipped in by the observing crowd, unpolished contours of handmade signs, proud promotion of humble products on a double-coded sales brochure, the vibrant colours of local clay under clear tea brewed with stream water, a ten-year-old's tour to his temporary garden for random visitors, etc. are vignettes in a long montage of the city's multipronged democratic pursuits.

### 3.5.1. From Making to Curating

How socially engaged co-creative participatory art can be conducive to activating actants in the realisation of this form people-centred of democracy has been reflected upon in the previous chapter, and the curatorial undertakings recounted in this chapter shared a great deal of methodological commonality. Relevance, noted as a key effect in Chapter Two, is obvious in these examples as all of them dealt with contexts participants cared about: the city's contested public space, a place for making a living and a village generations called home. By inviting participants to take up active roles in co-creations for these intimate contexts, the projects went one step further to elevate relevance to ownership. The West Kowloon projects

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<sup>415</sup> Pang, *The Appearing Demos*, 40.

positioned participants as active contributors, whose ideas and actions filled out open-ended explorations of public space and public culture. *Tin Shui Collaborative* processually expanded the vendors' sphere of autonomous decision—from designing their own business signs to co-creating a night market and coming up with new ways of togetherness. With the artists' positionality as guests from the outside, *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* highlighted the villagers' roles as rooted hosts and prompted them to reconsider aspects of home which might have been neglected in everyday oblivion. All projects placed participants in a quintessentially subjective position. The projects made sense only because they cared, and they ran the show.

Similar to the projects discussed in the previous chapters, situations were created to catalyse a redistribution of the sensible and foster authentic perceptions. Artistic imagination invited participants to try out what was possible beyond everyday confines and inertias. When a usually prohibited soccer match took place in the name of art, and when the accidentally affected driver accepted crowdsourced compensation, citizens' co-ownership replaced top-down bureaucratic control and risk-adverse managerialism. When the handcrafted signboards celebrated individuality and a first-ever night market drew in unprecedented crowds, vendors in Tin Sau Bazaar stepped away from a patronising welfare system and gained recognition for what they were capable of. When distanced clansmen came together to make homely vessels and when a ten-year-old drew a blueprint for a garden of vernacular plants, the stickiness of local clay and a haystack “throne” reminded them of hereditary connections. Art opened up spaces to re-examine pertinent issues in the worlds people inhabit.

Authentic expressions, like the examples in the previous chapter, was not subjected to imposed definitions or standards. Participants confidently gave form to what mattered to them. The “\$0 Sq. Ft.” party took the liberty of lounging about at a spot closer to the harbour than luxury apartments. Vendors proudly chose their own representative products for *Pui Pui Sales Brochure*. Uncle Tat sang his own songs about a beloved place. In authentic ways, they remade, or at least, revisited worlds in their respective contexts. These worlds, sometimes tangible, sometimes symbolic, were all self-directed instead of being dictated by regimental power,

neoliberal inertias and numbing conformism. Authenticity translated to autonomous agency: these are worlds where people have a say and are capable of shaping.

As noted in this chapter's introduction, there is a symmetry between making and curating co-creative participatory art. The above reiterates that when fostering co-creative participation, curators and artists adopt similar conducive methods. In curatorial undertakings, an extra dimension of internal dialogue is constructed by a medley of art projects involved. For instance, in *MaD at West Kowloon*, individual co-creative projects did not stand alone. They stood with one another as an aggregate display of a creative civil society, making a collective and pluralistic statement on public culture. When topological studies, public furniture, communal farming, sharing of food, humanised signboards, a double-coded brochure and a co-created night fair came together in *Tin Shui Collaborative*, a remaking of this world happened in multiple dimensions. Likewise, in *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, the range of issues touched upon by the co-creative projects and their variety of approaches filled plural interstices in the village's temporal, spatial and relational continuum.

Co-creative participatory art, to recall Guttari, can be seen as “collective assemblages of enunciation” which irrigate and enrich another.<sup>416</sup> A curatorial collection of co-creative participatory projects is an assemblage of assemblages. Curating this assemblage calls for the creation of a generative environment—for both participants and artists—with the aforementioned conducive methods, and also the care to foster “participation of a multiplicity of voices,” as Mouffe asks for critical artistic practices in the democratic agon.<sup>417</sup> Structurally, all of the projects discussed in this chapter were crafted as spaces for diverse stakeholders to voice their perspectives. Methods such as open calls, unregulated and supportive space for expression, and negotiation of meanings through dialogues gave high regard to singularities and praxiologically rebuked against monolithic repression. By casting light on a multiplicity of voices, the projects contended the importance of pluralism for a democratic culture. As

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<sup>416</sup> Guttari, 120. Previously cited on pp. 28-29.

<sup>417</sup> Mouffe, 68. Previously cited on pp. 10-11.

participants made themselves heard and listened to one another, different ways of seeing and being defined communities as *multitudes* in which lives, in plural, came together.

Post-growth theory of conviviality, as a political form of togetherness in a world of conflicts, and Gong's interpretation of *kau-puê* as a culturally specific form of sustained sociability for common good, have been cited in the last chapter. To create a convivial, "*kau-puê* realm" for multitudes of actants to co-create meanings and remake worlds was key to the curatorial agency exercised in the three projects discussed in this chapter. Similar to the previously discussed cases, the projects' nuanced togetherness empirically refutes Bishop's critique against superficial harmony of microtopic conviviality. Instead of cloned consensus, these convivial microtopias were built on respect and negotiation of differences. The critical mass gathering in West Kowloon was never treated as singular. Despite a shared belief in citizens' ownership of public space, space was given for diverse performances of this ownership. Conflicting needs and preferences were tackled with ingenuity, as in the tactical subversion of conditional access and collective shouldering of shared liability. Sometimes, as in the case of the reluctant "Flying Carpets," they remained unresolved. The "*kau-puê* realm" curated for lives to come together was not at all superficially harmonious. Rather, it is a dynamic, open field where individual singularities negotiate with reciprocal relations.

The acceptance or even appreciation of irreconcilable differences is elemental to Rancière's idea of dissensus as a non-consensual condition of democracy.<sup>418</sup> Similarly, Mouffe also argues that the contention of incongruent feelings and passions is indispensable for agonistic democracy, which recognises the legitimacy of diverse opinions.<sup>419</sup> In her discussion on Hong Kong's social movements, Pang cited critical theorist Sara Ahmed's differentiation of "willingness" and "wilfulness". While willing subjects concur with and go by the collective, wilful ones disagree. Ahmed believes that both willingness and wilfulness are vital for political action, and attending to "not witness" is a crucial part of social experience.<sup>420</sup> Thus when

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<sup>418</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 58-61.

<sup>419</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 6-8.

<sup>420</sup> Pang, *The Appearing Demos*, 41.

space was carved out for the vendors of Tin Sau Bazaar to contend their wishes and misgivings concerning the proposed night market, a realistic process of democracy was in practice. Likewise, *Art in-Situ* offered villagers a range of options for various degrees of participation (as well as non-participation), with due respect for their genuine feeling or lack of feeling towards their home and traditions. Participation was cared for as a neutral ground for autonomous decisions. It was not coercively consensual, but pluralistically willing or wilful.

### 3.5.2. Curating as Care

The etymological root of the word “curate” is *cura*, “care” in Latin. As noted in the thesis’s introduction, a redirection to “a system of care” is exactly what Hui considers as the endgame radical resistance.<sup>421</sup> Care ethics, emerging in critical discourse in the 1990s, have attracted notable attention in the post-2019 world when, symptomatised by the globally disruptive pandemic, prolonged problems of neoliberal exploitation and regimental rule demand fundamental reconsideration of the way human beings handle our civilisation.

American political philosopher Joan Tronto, a key exponent of care ethics, argues that a deficit in care is another side of the same coin of a deficit in democracy. To repair this deficit, Tronto calls for a redefinition of democracy as “caring with” by all citizens. Echoing Arendt’s call for participatory democracy through speaking and acting in the public, Tronto emphasises care as a collective responsibility:

What it means to be a citizen in a democracy is to care for citizens and to care for democracy itself. I call this practice “caring with.” [...]

“Caring with” is not the same as judging one’s self-interest, though it is about our collective and self interests in the long run. To do so requires a change in the values of citizens. It requires that citizens care enough about caring—both in their own lives and in the lives of their fellow citizens—to accept that they bear the political burden of caring for the future. That future is not only about

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<sup>421</sup> Hui, 13.

economic production but also about caring for the values of freedom, equality, and justice.<sup>422</sup>

The idea of collective responsibility for collective good is reminiscent of the moral dimensions of *kau-puê*, as discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>423</sup> Considering these ethnical criteria in context, they are also reminiscent of Tung's observation of the morphing of the Confucian legacy of socially responsible literati to today's critical citizen-artists.<sup>424</sup> As MaD cared about a range of social issues by caring for projects of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, our curatorial agency ultimately served to construct civil spaces of "caring with." When a place's custodians took part in co-creative participatory art, open-ended situations were constructed to reassure them of their ownership, and invite them to re-examine or even reinvent what was dear to them. In convivial moments where lives came together, they saw one another, and cared about both their own lives and the lives of others through co-creative actions. As these activated actants exercised agency to remake common worlds, they bore the political responsibility of caring for a shared future.

Soft curating, which derives curatorial outcomes through dialogues with collaborators, resonates with the ethos of "caring with." In the examples of this chapter, a recurrent curatorial imperative was to engage participants in decision-making—as exercises of care for the shaping of future collective worlds. For instance, the decision to continue *Construction in Progress* regardless of rain or shine manifested an insistence to carry on with all these self-initiated, civil undertakings. Tin Sau Bazaar's vendors' final agreement to co-present *An Autumn's Night Fair* and their proactive contribution to the goodies bags transformed themselves from beneficiaries of a welfare scheme into hosts of a place they cared about. Yat-yat's masterplan of *Ramie's Garden* and his family's welcoming orientations turned an untrespassed piece of no man's land into a friendly space for virtually anyone. Recalling Kanngieser's comment on

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<sup>422</sup> Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), x-xi.

<sup>423</sup> Refer to previous discussion on p. 190.

<sup>424</sup> Tung, *The Challenge of Aesthetics: Social Practice in Contemporary Art*, 161-162. Previously cited on p. 20.

world-making as forms for critical political and social intervention and reflection, this curated co-creative space is a field of citizenship where individuals collectively care for themselves, their relations to one another, and ultimately, the worlds they inhabit.<sup>425</sup>

Exhibitions were approached as occasions to project the relevance of these localised undertakings to the wider society. Instead of being showcases of fine and finite artefacts, these exhibitions were relational fields of dynamic interactions. They were conceived as living processes which continued to generate in-situ effects of capillary-like actions, to borrow Hu Bin's metaphor when he discusses permeable practices, often fused with real life. Capillaries are delicate and barely visible, so curatorial efforts were made to magnify and at the same time strengthen these vital actions. When presenting socially engaged co-creations, MaD strived to convey the essence by setting up direct encounters, so that the audience had the most immediate experience of the creative energies of the participants, and the former's responses provided feedback to the latter. At times when an interpretative lens was needed to articulate meanings, we were vigilant about subjecting the participants to imposed discourses and used forms that spoke in a fitting language, always keeping the participants' subjectivity at centrestage (such as *Pui Pui Sales Brochure* and the story window at Chuen Lung). Like what Berger writes about storytelling, these exhibitions were not performances. Displays were public appearances of "caring with" in action.

As mentioned in the recounts in this chapter, many of the projects did not end completely after the project period. The West Kowloon projects' commitment to civil culture went on through advocacy and more grounded endeavours at Tin Sau Bazaar.<sup>426</sup> In the two subsequent undertakings, where relations with recognised participants were built through co-creative processes, the ethics of closure was handled with utmost care to avoid consuming one place

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<sup>425</sup> Kanngieser, xii-xiii. Previously cited on p. 28.

<sup>426</sup> Besides the pamphlet mentioned on p. 217, MaD convened an advocacy group called "People People Park" in 2014 when the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority announced its plan to draft by-laws for the future West Kowloon Art Park. Calling for a more open and trust-based approach to park management, People People Park began with a petition signed by over 300 art practitioners and art groups, lobbied directly with the Authority's management, organised think-and-do events and shared imaginative references on social media: <https://www.facebook.com/peoplepeoplepark/>.

after another. While acknowledging the limits of what sojourners could do, *Tin Shui Collaborative* and *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* strived to cultivate agency among the places' custodians. Some physical works of art stayed on as everyday objects, reminding participants of the energising experiences. The intangible but most valuable processes of co-creation were encapsulated in published compilations. Lavishly illustrated with convivial photographs, with layers of meaning gently written in a down-to-earth language, these books were mementos to convey the project teams' regard for the people who took part. Gratis copies thanked participants for their kind co-writing of these memorable chapters of "caring with." These treatments of closure also demonstrated care. Recalling de Angelis, they respected the project sites as "life-worlds" where networks of real individuals were not severed even after a project officially ended.<sup>427</sup>

Curating spaces of "caring with," MaD gives a praxiological answer to the series of critical questions about curatorial practice raised in the beginning of this chapter. Through dialogical co-production of culture with a non-exclusive multitude, this approach rejects to be an accomplice of late capitalism or vehicles for cultural tourism and nationalistic propaganda. Rather, as illustrated by the democratising and world-remaking instances recounted in this chapter, it cares for art as a force for radical change and renewal, undermining social conventions and conjuring up alternative ways of organising society. To highlight the value of a democratic public culture and foster it with co-creative participation was the organisation's response to this milieu as a socio-cultural arbiter-editor, and the political action it took as a civil body.

Curating socially engaged co-creative participatory art was MaD's tactical agency in the city's civil struggle to reimagine postcolonial Hong Kong. "To de-colonise our mind, the formation of our cultures, and the socially instituted imagination in which we live [...] is a process co-extensive with the full and radical democratisation in this place the people (whoever they may be) call *home* (not 'status quo')," writes Chan when he argues that reimagining Hong Kong

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<sup>427</sup> de Angelis, 10. Previously cited on p. 191.



should be “delay[ed] no more.”<sup>428</sup> He reiterates a point made by Chen and Szeto in their proposition of the New Conservation Movement, “This HK is mine, so I am here to save it!” When the monolithic authoritatively dictates the identity of a place, deprives people of choices and erases existences in the way of single-minded progress, remaking worlds with ownership, responsibility and care is an endeavour of living in truth. Through curating, MaD contributed to this cause by caring with the seven-year-old who constructed his “home” with one table and two chairs, the “Flying Carpet” pilot who took the initiative to help ease congestion, the seventy-year old vendor who still had dreams, the newly befriended neighbours who looked forward to the next harvest, the small children who learnt to count in their native tongue and the teenager who thought about planting a tree for all.

### 3.5.3. A Final Note on This Form of Art

Finally—returning to art itself: notwithstanding what this form of art can possibly do for society, a critical question is whether art has become a social apparatus and risks losing its critical autonomy. The misgivings of critics such as Foster and Bishop, though not fully applicable to all instances of socially engaged co-creative participatory art, are nonetheless worth considering for their admonitions against a loss of artistic integrity for the sake of social service.

Art can be instrumental in social situations, but it is not and perhaps should not be an instrument. As an insider witnessing these projects from up close, I want to make a point about the positionality of art in co-creative processes. Reiterating an argument of Frieling as cited in the thesis’s introduction, participatory practices from 1950 to the present share a recurrent attempt to question and transform “the fundamental condition of how modern art functions—namely, the radical separation of artists and their public.”<sup>429</sup> In the examples surveyed in this thesis, participatory art does not only overthrow this divide and what it represents. It also

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<sup>428</sup> Chan, 345.

<sup>429</sup> Frieling, 19. Previously cited on p. 7.

demonstrates how co-creation can enrich and expand art. As much as the artistic experiences made a difference to the participants, the latter did the same to art.

The West Kowloon experiments on cultural democratisation were empirically tested by the responses to the open calls, the enactment of shared responsibility and the reality check of self-interest. How vendors in Tin Sau Bazaar persevered against the odds geared the development of *Tin Shui Collaborative*. The colours they put on their signboards, the goodie bags they contributed to the night fair, the dream they dared in that far-fetched proposal and the seeds they kept for another growing season gave the project potent forms. In *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, *Hakkaoke*'s interrogation into identity was substantiated with the lively content of Fai and Kwok-wai's childhood, Uncle Tat's endearing expressions, Elsa's demonstration of cultural inheritance, Aiden and Khloey's acquisitive of a native tongue, Adi's initial reluctance and eventual change of mind, etc. "Chuen Lung Cups" were validated by users who held them in their hands, and in everyday circulation driven by supportive villagers who also took part in the cups' creation, preservation and dissemination. *Ramie Garden* thrived when villagers and visitors were there to lounge about. Our carefully curated finale made its point only through the Chuen Lung family's enthusiastic participation.

Socially engaged co-creative participatory art—either made or curated—begins with artistic formulations, but it is always the co-creators' responses and actions that fill it with substance. As much as it potentially empowers participants and remakes worlds, this form of art is essentially an art of humility. It lets go of authorial control and takes risks to open up space for others in co-production. To welcome participation is to reposition oneself from a lone actor to a participant in a field of sociability. In the context of this thesis, the willingness to negotiate perspectives and the wilfulness to withdraw from single-mindedness are perhaps foremost embodiments of the spirit of democracy.

## **Conclusion**

By writing socially engaged art history on co-creative participatory art in Hong Kong and Taiwan, this thesis contributes to international scholarship from an East Asian perspective. Amidst emerging endeavours to regionalise knowledge, chronicles of exemplary cases in the two localities provide substantial references for readers interested in socially engaged participatory art in this region. Contextual analyses relating these notable cases to agency and world-making engage with the global critical debate on the efficacy of participatory art, particularly with regard to its contested affinity with democracy. With reference to local practice and theory, the case studies highlight the vital importance of co-production as lives come together, offering a culturally specific angle to the disputes over conviviality in Western European and North American scholarship. The study demonstrates that worlded examination can provide grounded perspectives to some recurring questions concerning this form of practice and cast new light on a discourse that needs to be expanded to acknowledge different socio-cultural considerations. Responding to the situation facing Hong Kong as a point of departure, this thesis is also a testimony of how socially engaged participatory art can be an alternative form of resistance, a conclusion with wider relevance when authoritarianism looms over various places in our time.

### **I. Contingent Processes of Meaning Production and Self-transformation**

This thesis methodologically places description before thematic analyses. By recording lived and heartfelt experiences, observed in close range from my position as both a researcher and practitioner, these extensive exegeses zoom into how empirically artists and participants found their way through the “contingent processes of meaning production and self-transformation that are at the root of socially engaged art.”<sup>430</sup> In récits that situate human stories in contexts,

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<sup>430</sup> Kester, Editorial to *FIELD Journal*, Issue 3. This methodological direction, as laid out in the introduction on pp. 36-37, is adopted throughout the chapters.

readers can see how these practices of co-creative participatory art made sense to and made a mark on their protagonists and respective milieus.

In Chapter One, how co-creative participatory art played a part in the city's multifaceted democratic movement was illustrated with the histories of *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and *Woofers Ten*. The former, a localisation of a globally circulated model by young art practitioners, demonstrated a game-changing co-creative spirit at a time of widespread social discontents. Crowdsourcing of complaints from all walks of life, conducted both physically and virtually, kickstarted the project as a citywide exercise of release and listening. Shared but also diverse sentiments reflected a range of social problems. They were woven together by self-enlisted choir members who were encouraged to write their song with due regard to all sorts of grievances, and with the liberty to unfasten themselves from dominant ideas about significance and artistic merit. Capturing a social reality from the people's unfiltered perspectives, with colloquial expressions sung to a Cantopop tune, this co-created piece struck a chord with many citizens going through the same circumstances.

What was intended to be a one-off project grew into a force of intervention in one societal incident after another, until the choir's energy eventually waned because of the participants' varied expectations. Even though the choir has disbanded after its last song, its alumni testified to the impact the experience had on them: it provided an opportunity to meaningfully participate in society, transformed a sense of helplessness into co-creative agency, and demonstrated a collaborative spirit that was burgeoning in the democratic movement at large. In the choir's legacy, a good number of participants founded their own civil undertakings, walking of walk of the refrain "we wanna make a change."

Also founded in that impassioned moment was *Woofers Ten*, a community-based art project which convened a common to resist against monolithic development. In a neighbourhood imminently affected by gentrifying urban renewal, this "revitalising living room" celebrated values beyond encroaching neoliberalism. The importance of small businesses for humble lives, the pride of "small people," the poor's tactical preservation of spaces of living, recovery of memory against historical amnesia and communal rapport manifested in an organic

approach to participation. Engaging forms insinuated the everyday in the most down-to-earth way, at the very site where domination was administered by mammoth powers, perpetuated by the numbed, but possibly subverted by unyielding nonconformists.

The creation of a common and a sustainable form of collective life were at the core of the project. With earnest regard for people as both singular individuals and a relational community, a multitude was brought together in street-level encounters to have conversations, address common concerns, explore alternatives and enact what was true to their authentic desires. Like *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong*, Woofers Ten is history now but it also left a mark. Active participants remembered it for fostering a “street spirit” that enlivened a space of living together and showing that “art is important.”<sup>431</sup> Art and cultural practitioners complimented it for a legacy of revolutionary artistic strategies that proved the potential of community art.<sup>432</sup> In addition to fond memories, the vibe co-created by the participating artists and *kaifong* has attracted likeminded collectives to settle in the area.<sup>433</sup> They continued the struggle after Woofers Ten was gone.

In the heated years between 2009 and 2014, a critical period for the civil society in Hong Kong bracketed by the momentous Anti-Express Rail Link Movement and the Umbrella Movement, *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* and Woofers Ten exemplify how the city’s democratic struggles can be understood through the lens of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. Rejecting the inertia to live with a problematic status quo, this form of art activated participants to become multitudes of actants to resist against hegemonic pseudo-realities. Echoing local scholars’ analysis of the nature of civil struggles in that period, the projects brought together co-creative participants to envision and pursued a more just, equitable and sustainable society that transcends *realpolitik* with the faith to “live in truth.” Artists, instead of making fetishised political art, assumed the role of “artist-citizens” to catalyse real political actions. Charging

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<sup>431</sup> See interviews with Leung and Hui, as previously cited on pp. 113-115.

<sup>432</sup> These comments were previously cited on pp. 115-116.

<sup>433</sup> Participation in co-creative civil actions by the neighbours of Woofers Ten, such as Tak Cheong Lane in *Pitt Street Riot* and So Boring in “\$0 Sq. Ft.”, are documented on p. 108 and p. 226 respectively.

political art with palpable efficacy, socially engaged co-creative participatory art was a medium of direct democracy and played a part in this consequential chapter of the city's quest of democracy on all fronts.

Taking a detour to Taiwan, Chapter Two examines different registers of anti-hegemonic resistance with the telling tales of *Textile Playing Workshop* and *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project*. Contextualised with the Taiwanese autonomous women's movement, whose roots were entwined with Taiwan's democratisation, *Textile Playing Workshop* demonstrates how socially engaged co-creative participatory art enabled an older generation of women to free themselves from repressive patriarchy. Through a dialogical process that transformed needlework from a domestic skill to an expression of feminine experience, these women delved into their repressed vitality by making *Quilts of the Heart*, overcame taboo and boldly acknowledged desire in *The Theatre Under the Skirt*, and refashioned their subjectivity in *The Empress's New Clothes*. They bonded in a sisterhood that supported one another through ups and downs, and such companionship was recognised by both the participants and lead artist as pivotal to the feminist goal of liberation. The lasting impact of this transformative experience was cogent in the participants' continual use of "textile playing" as a means of self-expression, as well as a medium to process their lives and participate in society. Most remarkably, the two sequel projects that took place more than a decade later stood witness to how socially engaged co-creative participatory art has endowed the women with an abiding agency, empowering them to free themselves from a subjugated second sex to become fulfilled persons.

Co-created with a more liberated generation of women, *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* can be appreciated as a collective statement about identity and choice of life, vis-à-vis single-minded equation of progress with urbanisation and modernisation. In the rural town of Chiali in Tainan, project participants went through a stimulating process that inspired them to reconsider the quotidian with a heightened sensitivity and instilled in them the confidence to interact creatively with their immediate surroundings. With the vernacular craft of papercutting and a range of other forms as their media of expression, these habitants of this ecologically and culturally rich locale came up with a vast body of work. The co-creative opus

defined the space by lucidly conveying what their makers found valuable in the place they called home. Their hometown's environment, the people who labour with dignity, its history and customs, a leisurely pace of life and the ideologies embodied in all these were the quintessence of a world they took pride in, to be safeguarded despite of changes ushered in by modernisation. The social interactions catalysed by these works contend that these rustic vignettes are not at all stereotypes of some provincial backwaters, but real experiences that make up a local identity. Proud and equipped with a versatile craft, these avid participants proactively expanded such affirmative placemaking to other localities, thereby enabling more home-carers to celebrate the local in endearing ways.

Considered in junction with the Hong Kong examples, these far-reaching Taiwanese cases offer methodological insight to how socially engaged co-creative participatory art activates participants to acquire agency and become world-changing agents, particularly with regard to cultural preferences and intellectual perspectives in East Asia. Following this thesis's methodological imperative of putting exegeses before eisegeses, this analysis will be reiterated in the next section. Without essentialising their significance with the aforementioned inquiry, *Textile Playing Workshop* and *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* are noteworthy for capacitating self-determined constructions of identities that overcame orthodox ideologies and prevalent trends. They affirmed that individuals rightfully had their say over their immediate circumstances. As joint displays of autonomous singularities, socially engaged co-creative participatory art was a form democratic cultural co-production. It asserted that culture was not to be dictated but could be collectively shaped from bottom up.

Bottom-up co-production of culture is the gist of Chapter Three, which returned to Hong Kong while switching to another epistemological angle. Making use of my insider's knowledge as curator of the chapter's examples, this curatorial postscript tracked three attempts of democratic cultural co-production in Hong Kong during the 2010s when civil energies continued to gain steam. The trilogy of *MaD@West Kowloon*, *Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest* and *Construction in Progress* cared for co-creation of a democratic public culture at the contested site of West Kowloon, destined for the then long overdue cultural hub.

With an explicit positioning and programme structures that emphasised collaborative construction of cultural software, the series engaged a critical mass to publicly present their ideas of local culture. Curatorial methods such as open calls and dialogical, trust-based and risk-taking soft-curating were used to bring out diverse perspectives on a pluralistic society. In a plethora of self-initiated activities, inert practices such as top-down diktat of city space, equation of land with a dollar sign, excessive regulation, risk-adverse managerialism, etc. were questioned with subversive interventions. Contingent situations, as in the collective sharing of responsibility for the football accident, tested out possibilities of civil forms of being together in a public environment. Sometimes, as in the failure in persuading overcrowded “flying carpets” to ease a bottle-neck congestion, they revealed current limitations.<sup>434</sup> As a co-created portfolio, the series was a microcosm of emergent ideas, practices and conditions of Hong Kong’s rapidly evolving democratic movement.

Aspiring to foster democratic participation in a more specific context, *Tin Shui Collaborative* ventured to a struggling market in a monopolised satellite town clouded by inhuman planning, employment difficulties, ethnic tension and media stigmatisation. Through a summer of trial and error, the project rediscovered the exceptional significance of the vendors’ persistence in this delicate space of personal, social and economic resistance. The vendors gradually took part in making double-coded forms that fused symbolic meanings with practical functions. They replaced disenfranchisement and alienated rivalry with a sense of agency and collaborative camaraderie, and organised themselves as a community with a new daringness to have big dreams. Scholars credit the transformative power of this grounded project and its pursuit of “justice—for each and everyone of us.”<sup>435</sup> Coincidentally, the project concluded in the night just before the first-ever citywide Occupy which eventually became the Umbrella Movement. This convivial finale could not be more different from the charged demonstration.

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<sup>434</sup> These two specific examples are discussed on p. 224 and pp. 227-228 respectively.

<sup>435</sup> Leung, 12. Previously cited on p. 247.



Nonetheless, as the grounded undertaking actualised people's agency and autonomy at a community level, its quest of democracy was in parallel to the struggle at large.

Local identity, the notion of home and custodianship were critical issues for Hong Kong in the post-Umbrella years. This set of questions was interrogated in *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, a community-based public art project in the 600-year-old Chuen Lung Village, whose history was essentially a tale of Hong Kong. Responding to precarities in this seemingly halcyon settlement, the project set out with two objectives: to co-create transformative experiences and lasting relations with the villagers, and extend the meaning of this encounter to the wider community. Through generative processes, socially engaged co-creative participatory art probed into local situations that also rang a bell for Hong Kong in general. The villagers played a key role as art, essentially based on life in their habitat, was made collaboratively at their doorsteps. Their participation was indispensable for the exhibition which made public questionings and utterances about how a place was inhabited. The many parts of *Art in-Situ* made up a multivocal dialogue about different facets of Chuen Lung and the aforementioned issues. Ultimately, the curatorial undertaking ruminated on the urgent question about care for a place called home.

These recounts of self-reflective shaping of shared environments demonstrate how socially engaged co-creative participatory art made sense to and made a mark on their protagonists and respective milieus. Telling anecdotes, voices of the people who went through them and supplementary information on the social and cultural contexts reconstruct these ephemeral projects, whose art was vested more in evolving processes rather than in finite artefacts. By narrating these winding courses before subjecting the cases to thematic analysis, the text traces “contingent processes of meaning production and self-transformation” which, even without any imposed epistemological unity, speak for the value of socially engaged art in its own right. As admitted in the introduction, these descriptions are not totally objective and are sifted through questions that propel this study. Nonetheless, without binding these recounts rigidly to the thesis's argument, I hope the materials can provide substantial empirical references for further examination of these practices, regardless of the researchers' points of departure and

epistemological interests. In intentionally detailed exegeses, I also hope to demonstrate that such records are not merely descriptive. They are loaded encapsulations of an essentially situated practice and is worth attention as a research method to consider processual meaning-making.

## **II. Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art and Democracy,**

### **Agency and World-making**

In addition to expanding international scholarship by offering grounded references from East Asia, this research looks particularly into the efficacy of participatory art in relation to democracy, with agency and world-making as key concepts. Agency and world-making are relevant to a vast range of artistic practice and participatory art is not a privileged medium. Nonetheless, as this thesis examines how people desiring to rule themselves fight battles of democracy in narrow and expanded senses, the two concepts offer a helpful framework for comprehending socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a means of emancipation and empowerment.

Drawing reference to Arendt's political theory and Sommer's practical iteration, "agency" is recognised in this thesis as a wilful act of entering the public space of appearance, and an optimism of the will that drives life towards social commitments and creative actions, one small step at a time.<sup>436</sup> "World-making," whose conceptual kin "worlding" has roots in postcolonial discourse and theoretical propositions of social transformation, entails envisioning of a different world.<sup>437</sup> Transversing artistic and social actions, as propounded by Kanngieser, new modalities and forms can be made for critical political and social interaction, and for producing ourselves, our relations to each other and the worlds we inhabit.<sup>438</sup> These worlds are utopian, but they are not non-existent. World-remakers live out prefigurative politics. They call upon different worlds by acting in it.

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<sup>436</sup> See previous citations of Arendt and Sommers on p. 26.

<sup>437</sup> See previous discussion on the concept of world-making on pp. 27-29.

<sup>438</sup> Kanngieser et. al., xii-xiii. Previously cited on p. 28.

As participants of the surveyed projects negotiated with various hegemonic circumstances through co-creation, they demonstrated agency and remade their respective worlds as actants—a portmanteau of “active participant” coined by the Free Art Collective.<sup>439</sup> *Complaints Choir of Hong Kong* transformed pervasive discontents and pessimism into a common ground of social critique. “I love therefore I scold, I love therefore I blame”—their resounding songs were affirmative of belonging and vocally called out “we wanna make a change.” Convening citizens to contend on the city’s public agenda, MaD’s curatorial trilogy at West Kowloon were heterotopias where people’s will to have a say on public culture potently appeared in co-productions of subversive interventions, acting out visions of a more liberal, human-centred, sustainable and democratic world that was under construction in the budding civil society.

In community-based settings, *Woofers Ten* and *Tin Shui Collaborative* similarly merged artistic and social actions as they galvanised the joint force of the poor. Small businesses threatened by gentrifying redevelopment received trophies and persisting vendors crowned their own shops with colourful signs. *Kaifong* boldly shared glorious histories and humble shopkeepers promoted products of their pride. Fred Ma’s generous wish came true with help from newly-met volunteers. Trusting neighbours in Tin Sau Bazaar took the plunge for an uncertain experiment. A re-enacted riot reminded passers-by history should not be forgotten. A co-created night fair celebrated the significance of an overlooked space of personal, social and economic resistance. In these equivocal merging of aesthetic and social experiences, new forms of being together happened organically. The welcoming living room and the persevering market provided an alternative to neoliberal alienation and regimental disenfranchisement. Enacting these, actants lived out and called upon a very different world.

Less overtly political when compared to these examples, *Textile Playing Workshop*, *Papercut Field: Soulangh Project* and *Hi! Hill—Art in Situ* saw actants harnessing agency and remaking immediate worlds in seemingly personal and communal spheres. Stitch-by-stitch, participants

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<sup>439</sup> Free Art Collective, 260. Previously cited on p. 15.

of the *Textile Playing Workshop* reclaimed their sense of self and emancipated themselves from the suffocating world of patriarchal confinement, gradually becoming their own self-fashioned “empresses”. With papercutting as a tactile form of creative agency, participants of *Papercut Field* upheld their strong sense of rural identity and rejected unquestioned modernisation and urban-centric development. In *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ*, succession of a village’s identity, lineage and succession became precarious. Villagers revisited custodianship by breathing new life to their ancestral tongue, moulding vessels with inherited soil, showing visitors around in a garden of vernacular wisdom, and reuniting as a big family when the sojourners said “ciao”.

In these examples, the actants’ exercises of agency to remake worlds answer Arendt’s call for citizenship at its fullest: more than casting ballots in a system of poll, it requires direct participation. Dynamically engaged in their respective contexts, these world-making projects were instances of participatory democracy, resisting monolithic hegemonies or ideologies on multiple fronts. Reflective of aspirations in the wider democratic movement, the Hong Kong cases are part of a history of the postcolonial city’s pursuit to make its own vital choices. As for the projects in Taiwan, whose institutional democracy was hard-earned after an era of terror, they show that the quest of self-determination involves numerous dimensions. Learning from these substantial examples, I argue that socially engaged co-creative participatory art can be conducive to a people-centred form of democracy. Alongside political institutions, heightened subjectivity and the capability to take control of one’s immediate circumstances make up an agency that can potentially drive democratic participation in the long run.

### **III. Affect and Socially Engaged Co-creative Participatory Art as a Method**

With activation of actants as a measure of impact, the efficacy of co-creative participatory art can be gauged by considering how artistic affect inspires action. Positing that “before we act in the world, we must be moved to act,” Duncombe bridges the affect of art and effect of

activism in the neologism “æffect”.<sup>440</sup> The notion was employed in Chapter Two’s analysis of socially engaged co-creative participatory art as a method. Among the surveyed examples, a few common traits appear to be conducive to æffect.

In Rancière’s critique of the policed society where the “sensible” is under regimental control, a “redistribution of the sensible” in the aesthetic regime remaps perceptions, thoughts and feasibilities.<sup>441</sup> Co-creative participatory art emancipates passively disenfranchised spectators and repositions them as actants who could impact subjectively on a project’s remapping of the sensible. For this remapping to be truly emancipatory, the actants’ autonomous will is indispensable. This will manifested in the studied cases as participants found relevance in projects centred on their palpable concerns. The cartography of perception, thought and feasibility was redrawn in immediate fields where heartfelt experiences were embraced as intimate contexts for co-creation.

The blending of art and life is also a shared trait. With reference to de Certeau’s theory of tactical everyday practices and Tsurumi’s idea of “marginal art,” liminal spaces, unbound by established boundaries of art, make room for individuals to explore authentic perceptions and negotiate meanings confidently with accessible forms.<sup>442</sup> Rejecting the primacy of monolithic ideologies, participants are assured of the value of their perspectives and expressions, with no need to conform to conventional standard of aesthetics, so that participation does not risk becoming manipulation, tokenism and an extension of authorial power.

Besides creating conditions for participants to confidently perceive, interpret and create, inspiring switches of perspectives was also a transformative æffect. Unusual experiences, sometimes integral to the project’s framework, sometimes directing attention to the overlooked, sometimes popping up as extraordinary or even transgressive surprises, stimulated participants to reconsider the familiar with new sensitivities. Pivotal to the co-creative processes, these refreshing stimuli defied repressive norms and further redistributed the sensible. The feeling

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<sup>440</sup> Duncombe, 117-119. Previously cited on pp. 34, 126-127.

<sup>441</sup> Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 42. Previously cited on p. 181.

<sup>442</sup> See discussions on de Certeau’s theory of practice of the everyday and Tsurumi’s “marginal art” on p. 119 and p. 182 respectively.

of strangeness, according to Rancière, is not only perceptual. Reflection on that strangeness mobilises action. Renewed perception of the world can possibly lead to its transformation.<sup>443</sup>

A further common thread is collective experience. In the choir of complaints, the communal living room, the stitching sisterhood, the papercut cooperative, the multitude joining the collaborative experiments at West Kowloon, the market co-created by artists and vendors who sweated together in Tin Sau Bazaar and *Art in-Situ* made by kin and kith in Chuen Lung, the agency of individual actants multiplied in co-creation. These co-creative participatory art projects saw formations of collectives that have historical roots in classical literati culture and the socialist system of mass mobilisation. Their ethos, however, is more aligned with the contemporary notion of commons and Hardt and Negri's empire-confronting multitude.<sup>444</sup>

In solidarity, these multitudes nonetheless maintain singularities as space was consciously carved out for individuals to be heard and converse with one another. Intersubjective interconnectedness, as emphasised in Gablik's theory of "connective aesthetics," made a case for the classic debate on conviviality versus antagonism.<sup>445</sup> The sternest critique of conviviality is that it superficially pacifies and masks deeper conflicts. This is not really the case in the surveyed examples, whose ample regard to individuals gave room to disagreements. Different expectations, unreconciled disagreements, and even the reluctance to participate were respected in the course of participation. As the projects dealt with these contradictions, they also confronted the repressive ideological and power structures that gave rise to them. But these instances are not straightforwardly antagonistic. They cast light on a different way of understanding conviviality—not as momentary merry-making, but as coexistence when lives, with different perspectives and desires, come together.

Post-growth theories have expounded on conviviality by looking into its nuanced Latin root *convīvi(ere)*. As commingling of lives, it is a form of togetherness "that would allow humans to take care of each other and of nature, without denying the legitimacy of conflict, yet using

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<sup>443</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 142.

<sup>444</sup> See previous discussions on the multitude on p. 123.

<sup>445</sup> Gablik, 4. Previously discussed on pp. 188-189.

it as a dynamizing and creativity-sparking force.”<sup>446</sup> In an East Asian context, Gong’s adaptation of the vernacular concept of “*kau-puê*” highlights the cultural significance of confluence.<sup>447</sup> When lives and worldviews come together, they become what de Angelis calls as “life-worlds” which define our communities as networks of real individuals, living real conditions, having real needs and aspirations and enjoying real relations.<sup>448</sup>

Conviviality was a conducive quality in all the studied cases. The lasting friendship of the stitching sisters and participants of *Soulangh Project* fuelled their continual personal pursuits and active involvement in communities. As *Complaints Choir* championed a collaborative spirit, Woofer Ten convened a common and MaD’s collaborative programmes enlisted a critical mass in cultural co-production, they were initiations for many to undertake civil actions and meeting points for likeminded allies to join forces. In Tin Sau Bazaar, the vendors’ grand dream to build a characteristic market and their eagerness to keep the okra seeds for the next growing season were galvanised by fond memories of synergy. At Chuen Lung, as young Bosco fancied planting a tree for his neighbours, the village has committed to another in-situ art project with the vision to strengthen ties among villagers while furthering urban-rural exchange.<sup>449</sup> Conviviality is also an æffect. It cultivates a sense of solidarity and collective imaginaries, assuring actants that they could gain strength from one another to take sustained actions for remaking shared worlds.

The will to participate, accessibility of media, regard of individual perspectives, stimuli to expand perception and a conducive form of conviviality are recurring principles of æffect in the making of socially engaged co-creative participatory art. In the final chapter, the curating of co-creative participatory art is methodologically reflected upon as a relational, generative

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<sup>446</sup> Centre for Global Cooperation Research, *op. cit.* Previously cited on p. 191.

<sup>447</sup> Gong, “*Kau-Puê* Realm”; “Spirit-containing Pulima: The Expansion and Limits of *Kau-puê* aesthetics”, previously cited on pp. 190-191.

<sup>448</sup> de Angelis, 10. Previously cited on p. 191.

<sup>449</sup> In 2020, Chuen Lung Village began a partnership with the Hong Kong International Photography Festival as a key site. Village chief Keung suggested that this collaboration was envisioned to be a way to foster more exchange with urban dwellers and promote a stronger sense of identity and community in the village in an interview by the author and members of the MaD team on 10 July, 2020. The collaboration, however, was affected by the pandemic in the subsequent years.

and discursive practice that can also contribute to strengthening civil agency and remaking worlds. When authorship is democratised in socially engaged co-creative participatory art, art-making evolves from self-expression to collective enabling. There is thus a symmetry between artistic practice and curatorial practice. The latter however requires attention to a number of additional dimensions: orchestration of a multiplicity of voices and intents, creation of internal dialogues, and articulation of meanings in contextual presentations. In Chapter Three's self-reflective account, conscious treatments for bringing together multiple stakeholders in processes of co-production, crafting time-space for generative interactions and contextualisation of emergent meaning qualify curating as a form of agency in convening affective processes of democracy. Ultimately, when caring for socially engaged co-creating participatory art, these curatorial undertakings catalysed "caring with," a term care ethics theorist Tronto uses to redefine democracy—as caring for citizens, caring for democracy itself and caring for the values of freedom, equality, and justice.<sup>450</sup>

In the surveyed examples, socially engaged co-creative participatory art was instrumental in fostering a people-centred form of democracy, but it was not an instrument per se. Through participatory processes, artists take risk and let go of total authorial control. In return, the participants' share expanded the co-created art. It was the mass of citizens' woes, the choir members' collective creativity, their enthusiasms as well as scepticisms that brought *Complaint Choir of Hong Kong* to life. Without the *kaifong* and others who dropped by and lounged about, Woofers Ten might as well have been another airdropped entity in Shanghai Street Artspace. MaD's West Kowloon experiments were blank spaces whose hypotheses were tested out by the open call respondents. The vendors' reactions geared *Tin Shui Collaborative* and animated the project with their resilience, generosity and willingness to experiment. *Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ* evolved through interactions between artists and villagers. Feminist art hit home in *Textile Playing Workshop* with the "stitching sisters'" devoted participation. The avid cooperative of *Papercut Field* rekindled a vernacular vitality in the craft of papercutting.

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<sup>450</sup> Tronto, x-xi. Previously cited on pp. 280-281.



Participation creates new meanings for art. Co-creative participation gives rise to a form of art that is not dictated by a single vision, responsive to reciprocity and porous. In the context of this study, this embrace of multiple voices can be seen as a realisation of democracy in itself.

#### IV. Responding to a World

While I examine how socially engaged co-creative participatory art gives form to agency and remake worlds, the most intimate world behind this study has been remade drastically. The image starting this thesis was sourced from *Apple Daily*, a yardstick of the city's freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In 2021, it ceased operation.<sup>451</sup> While the paper's top management was prosecuted for alleged violation of the National Security Law, over 10,000 people were arrested for charges related to the 2019 protest.<sup>452</sup> At least fifty civil society organisations disbanded.<sup>453</sup> After amendments by the Beijing Government to "improve" the electoral system, "democratic" procedures were revamped to "ensure patriots administering Hong Kong."<sup>454</sup> Amidst celebratory fanfares for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, citizens' assemblies were strictly prohibited on 1 July, supposedly a date

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<sup>451</sup> The closure of *Apple Daily*, mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis, was widely covered in international media. See for example Yvette Tan, "Apple Daily: The Hong Kong Newspaper That Pushed the Boundary," *BBC News*, 24 June, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53734887>; Austin Ramzy and Tiffany May, "'Forbidden Fruit': Apple Daily, Pro-Democracy Newspaper in Hong Kong, Is Forced to Close," *New York Times*, 24 June, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/23/world/asia/apple-daily-hong-kong.html>. Weeks after the paper's demise, twenty-one countries issued a joint statement to condemn the crackdown on media freedom: Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, "Media Freedom Coalition Statement on Hong Kong's Apple Daily," 10 July, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/media-freedom-coalition-statement-on-hong-kongs-apple-daily/>.

<sup>452</sup> See Candice Chau, "10,250 Arrests and 2,500 Prosecutions Linked to 2019 Hong Kong Protests, as Security Chief Hails Dip in Crime Rate," *Hong Kong Free Press*, 17 May, 2021, accessed 4 September, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/05/17/10250-arrests-and-2500-prosecutions-since-2019-hong-kong-protests-as-security-chief-hails-fall-in-crime-rate/>.

<sup>453</sup> See Rhoda Kwan, "Explainer: Over 50 Groups Disband—How Hong Kong's Pro-Democracy Forces Crumbled," *Hong Kong Free Press*, 3 January, 2022, accessed 16 February, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/11/28/explainer-over-50-groups-gone-in-11-months-how-hong-kongs-pro-democracy-forces-crumbled/>.

<sup>454</sup> See Hong Kong SAR Government, "Improve Electoral System," 6 July, 2021, accessed 11 May, 2022, <https://www.cmab.gov.hk/improvement/en/home/>; "Hong Kong: Why the Legco Elections Are So Controversial," *BBC News*, 19 December, 2021, accessed 28 January, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59632733>.

for an annual rally in this former “City of Protest.”<sup>455</sup> Victoria Park, where the candlelit vigil for commemorating the Tiananmen Massacre was held yearly, was empty on June Fourth for the first time in thirty-two years.<sup>456</sup> Amnesty International closed its office in the city, regretting that the national security law has made it “effectively impossible” to “work freely and without fear of serious reprisal.”<sup>457</sup>

When promised freedoms are disappearing and suppressive signs ring a loud alarm, tens of thousands are fleeing the city.<sup>458</sup> In a looming white terror, sensitive books were removed from libraries. Social media pages were closed. Digital materials were deleted and a good number of sources that have informed this thesis cannot be retrieved anymore. There is an imminent urgency to write this history. This history is context-bound, but at a time when authoritarianism is on the rise across continents and peoples fought myriad battles of resistance, this history has wider relevance.

From the vantage point of this challenged city and also those going through comparable struggles, this study responds to a fundamental question cited in the introduction: “These parties will all be over. Afterwards, what will be left? What is the role of art?”<sup>459</sup> When Hal Foster critiques the simulacra of sociability in relational aesthetics, he lambasts it as “a pale, part-time substitute” for what is missing in other spheres of life. Vigilantly, I also ask myself whether these magnified moments are also substitutes for a lack of genuine democracy in society at large.

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<sup>455</sup> “Security Tight in Hong Kong on China Anniversary, Official Says City Stable,” *Reuters*, 2 July, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kongs-no-2-official-says-city-has-retained-stability-chaos-2021-07-01/>.

<sup>456</sup> “Hong Kong Park Empty for the First Time in 32 Years as Police Surround Venue to Prevent Banned Tiananmen Massacre Vigil,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 4 June, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/06/04/breaking-hong-kong-park-empty-for-the-first-time-in-32-years-as-police-surround-venue-for-tiananmen-massacre-vigil/>.

<sup>457</sup> Primrose Riordan and Chan Ho-him, “Amnesty International to Leave Hong Kong amid Fears for Staff Safety,” *Financial Times*, 25 October, 2021, accessed 28 January, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/7f1b8dc9-b756-469f-a099-a32e021b9e82>.

<sup>458</sup> For sketchy summaries of changes happening in Hong Kong and citizens’ reactions, see “Hong Kong: How Life Has Changed Under China’s National Security Law,” *BBC News*, 30 June, 2021, accessed 13 July, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57649442>; Richard Lloyd Parry and Yoyo Chan, “Hong Kong Worn Down by the Slow Death of Freedom,” *The Times*, 30 July, 2021, accessed 9 April, 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-beijing-killed-democracy-in-hong-kong-rlcwpddm0>.

<sup>459</sup> Hui, 13. Previously cited on p. 33.

In its evocative storytelling, this thesis begins with an anecdote of people joining hands on Hong Kong’s iconic Lion Rock. Closing it, I take the liberty to evoke a recent incident of people joining hands again—this time, for some rodents. In early 2022, when Hong Kong was still having strict restrictions under a “zero-Covid” policy, after eleven hamsters were tested positive, over 2,500 small animals in pet shops around town were culled. Despite public outcry against this mass killing, the government “strongly advise[d]” citizens to surrender their pet hamsters for “humane dispatch.”<sup>460</sup> Hamsters, apart from being a favourite pet species among households living in the city’s typically tiny apartments, also carry special emotional value to younger generations who grew up with a hamster-themed cartoon.<sup>461</sup> So when the “advice” to surrender hamsters was repeated by the government and backed by pro-establishment experts, animal-lovers, especially those who were aware that some research actually proved that the chance of animal-to-human transmission was minimal, were outraged. Tens of thousands signed petitions and volunteers self-organised a citywide hamster rescue.<sup>462</sup> “A hamster life is still a life and that’s what a lot of volunteers are thinking.”<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Helen Davidson, “Hong Kong to Kill Thousands of Hamsters After Covid Found on 11,” *The Guardian*, 18 January, 2022, accessed 19 May, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/18/hong-kong-cull-thousands-hamsters-covid-pet-shop-virus-animals>. The government’s position on the cull is stated in this press release: Hong Kong SAR Government, “Hamster Surrendered by Citizen Tested Positive for Covid-19 Virus,” January 23, 2022, accessed 19 May, 2022, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/23/P2022012400634.htm>.

<sup>461</sup> *Hamtaro*, a story about a hamster and his friends, is a Japanese manga, anime and computer game series enjoyed by generations of Hongkongers. During the hamster controversy, the unfortunate animals were frequently represented by the beloved cartoon hamsters in mass and social media. See for example, thewayeasy, “Hamtaro: Last Episode” 〈哈姆太郎最終回〉, *Matters*, 24 January, 2022, accessed 19 May, 2022, <https://matters.news/@a725809723/233325-%E5%93%88%E5%A7%86%E5%A4%AA%E9%83%8E%E6%9C%80%E7%B5%82%E5%9B%9E-bafyreicfhpbguplenn6ymdhvnuqfam2bixzqro2hni3s6hat4ud5mja4a>.

<sup>462</sup> A number of petitions were started by compassionate citizens. One of them, titled “Stop the Government from Wrongfully Euthanising Little Boss’ Small Pets,” was signed by 47,048 people. See <https://www.change.org/p/hong-kong-sPCA-stop-the-government-from-wrongfully-euthanising-little-boss-small-pets>, accessed 19 May, 2022. Alongside individual efforts, the hamster rescue was organised via a Facebook group whose Chinese name can be translated as “Rescue Hamster Concern Group”: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3183000451932013/?ref=share>. The group has roughly 14,000 members.

<sup>463</sup> The quotation, of a volunteer identified as Jessica, is included in a news story about the rescue. See Helen Davidson, “Hongkongers Launch Hamster Rescue Mission After Covid Cull Declared,” *The Guardian*, 21 January, 2022, accessed 19 May, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/hongkongers-launch-hamster-rescue-mission-after-covid-cull-declared>.

These hamster-protectors are reminiscent of the protagonists in the socially engaged co-creative participatory art projects discussed in this thesis, and many others in wider struggles of democracy. Hanging on to their beliefs, defying what they deem unreasonable even though it was regimentally mandated, they care with one another, exercise agency and collectively change the game—for a fairer and more just world, and for living in truth. The story of these hamster-saving actants is more than an analogy. Happening at a time that was tougher than ever, it is a story of tenacity and resilience. These protagonists, like those sketched by Berger when he writes about storytelling, were not performers, but survivors.

To those persisting in their pursuit of democratic ideals, this history of socially engaged co-creative participatory art testifies to how individuals, as nuclei of democracy, hung onto their autonomous senses, gained agency and creatively remade worlds for what they cared about. Like the hamster saga, these instances were indeed “part-time” and their impact cannot be overstated, but there are not pale. As Vangi Fong noted when she looked back on *Complaints Choir*, “It was an expression of imagination: something like this was possible. This is especially important for a society in despair.”<sup>464</sup>

Looking forward with history in mind, Sampson Wong Yu-hin cherishes the magical night fair of *Tin Shui Collaborative* when Hong Kong took a tumultuous turn in a parallel universe: “These moments are reservoirs of hope.”<sup>465</sup> Commenting on perhaps even tougher circumstances, addressing doubts about socially engaged art in authoritarian China, Meiqin Wang concludes with this opinion:

The pessimistic view ignores the fact that social progress often starts with small-scale changes, either in consciousness or action, among a few concerned individuals first. These changes might then lead to major social changes when more people are motivated to follow suit, and the impact multiplies and expands to reach the tipping point for making a big difference.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Interview with Fong by the author on 26 February, 2019. Previously cited on p. 73.

<sup>465</sup> Wong, “From ‘And Then?’ to ‘And Then...’”, in *Tin Shui Collaborative*, 20.

<sup>466</sup> Wang, ed., *Socially Engaged Art in Contemporary China: Voices from Below*, 215.

When the quest of democracy cannot be achieved overnight, when its prospect does not seem particularly bright and when *realpolitik* is disappointing, co-creating agency and persevering with the ability to re-imagine and remake worlds are expressions of tenacity and resilience. In consciousness and action, when “caring with” multiples and expands, this enduring agency and world-making co-creativity are possibly not only our last—but also lasting—resort.

## **V. Way Forward**

Imagination, hope and optimism granted, a realistic question is: how could agency and world-making co-creativity fostered through temporal socially engaged co-creative participatory art projects last in the long run? This thesis has recorded how these capacities stayed on with the participants of Textile Playing Workshop and Papercut Field: Soulangh Project, and evolved among participants of the Hong Kong projects who came up with new initiatives. In Chapter Three, a stated observation was that sustained endeavours depend on the communities themselves. Without becoming dogmatic, art needs to embrace the openness of potentiality rather than definitive outcomes. However, if lasting capacities are pivotal to the propounded people-centred form of democracy, whether there are ways to extend these capacities—for the individuals involved or for setting-up conducive systems or environments—can be a subject for further praxiological and evaluative research.

As examples in the thesis transversed boundaries and dissolved the divide between artistic and social actions, an expanding field of interest for subsequent studies is how such a practice and other disciplines—activism, social work, placemaking, etc.—can complement one another. Indeed, like how socially engaged art was embraced by Taiwanese social organisations after *Textile Playing Workshop*, more and more crossovers have been inspired by the impact of such art. Critical analysis of the synergy and comparisons among the disciplines can effectively advance practice, and at the same time shed light on what is uniquely valuable, and what is possibly transferrable among these reciprocally irrigating practices.

Returning to the essence of intersubjectivity in socially engaged co-creative participatory art, an area that is worth more examination is the dynamics among artists and fellow participants. This thesis points out how positive dynamics create a convivial æffect. However, there is little discussion on negative or difficult instances. This is admittedly an incomprehensive treatment and is left so for two reasons. The first one is ethical, especially with regard to social propriety in the Chinese culture. Considering the trust behind my informants' frank sharing, I am mindful of how I probe into delicate territories and how I represent people in this thesis. Another reason is intellectual: fair comments on these situations require up-close examination of multiple perspectives. Since such an inquiry was not the focus of this study, I restrained from making statements that are not sufficiently grounded. This untouched area is like a Pandora's box. Considering the importance of interpersonal interactions in this form of practice, unlocking it in future studies will surely offer insights on the complexity of the convivial æffect.

A further point to take on from this research is how this chapter on socially engaged art history will unfold in the course of history—not a history in retrospect, but a history in which we live. Amidst accelerating authoritarianism, raging rightism, state violence, disillusioned liberalism and divisive partisanship in many parts of the world, earlier forms of expressions and interventions have become more and more difficult if not impossible. Could socially engaged co-creative participatory art usher in alternative forms of civil participation in various contexts? What can be learnt from other regions with different socio-political and cultural conditions? What can be deduced from their comparisons for imagining new roles of art? The possibilities held in these questions, like how this thesis answers its contextual challenge, are promising for they would mean game-changing art vis-à-vis an exigent global reality.

In addition to the above directions which can be explored on the foundation of this research, a number of other paths are also yet to be trodden. In the limited scope of the thesis, areas beyond the focus of its inquiry are unexamined. For instance, antagonistic practices that involve participants in different ways, art activism confronting institutions more directly, etc. sit at another end of the spectrum, but they are equally significant for an impartial grasp of a nuanced

practice that should not be polarised into one thing or another. Also, as the primary objective of this thesis is to account for democratising processes, studies from Hong Kong and Taiwan are joined together in thematic analysis. Comparative studies, which have not been undertaken in this research, can possibly lead to greater understanding of these two localities and the projects' varied approaches to practice. These unaddressed aspects are definitely worth looking into amidst emerging efforts by scholars to world and expand knowledge in this complex and dynamic field in different continents.

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## Appendix I:

### List of Surveyed Projects

Reflecting their co-creative nature, the following list attributes the surveyed projects to both their artist initiators/facilitators and co-creative participants. While the latter comprises a good number of individuals whose levels of engagement varied, without exhaustively listing everyone involved, this list only names participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited in the thesis, and those who have informed this study through interviews and provided reference materials. The others are represented by collective identities in the contexts of the respective projects. Names are listed in alphabetical order by last name (or first name for participants who are identified not with last names) in English.

### Chapter One

Project title	<i>Complaints Choir of Hong Kong</i> 香港投訴合唱團
Location	Hong Kong (various locations in the city)
Year	2009-2011
Artist	Pep!
initiators/facilitators	Chow Yiu-fai 周耀輝 (facilitator of lyrics workshop) Vangi Fong 方韻芝 (as member of Pep!)
Co-creative participants	Around 50 citizens from all walks of life recruited through roadshows and social media open calls
Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	Thickest Choi 蔡志厚 Louis Hung 孔憲基 Karman Leung 梁家文 Jim Wong 黃嘉遜 Tempo Yeung

Project documentation	<p>Music video of <i>Complaints Choir of Hong Kong</i>, 2009:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQVZMMqg7_0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQVZMMqg7_0</a></p> <p>Documentation video of “Countdown Song,” 2010:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNrkicGeSjE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNrkicGeSjE</a></p> <p>Music video of “Graduation Song,” 2011:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRXDgVUnNAc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRXDgVUnNAc</a></p>
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Project title	Woofers Ten 活化廳
Location	Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong
Year	<p>2009-2014</p> <p>Woofers Ten was in operation at Shanghai Street Artspace from 2009 to 2013. When its tenancy officially ended, a “Continuing Working Group” occupied the space for roughly one year until 2014.</p>
Artist initiators/facilitators	<p><u>First term (2009-2011)</u></p> <p>C&amp;G Artpartment      C&amp;G 藝術單位</p> <p>Luke Ching Chin-wai      程展緯</p> <p>Kwan Sheng-chi      關尚智</p> <p>Edwin Lai Kin-keung      黎健強</p> <p>Jasper Lau Kin-wah      劉建華</p> <p>Law Man-lok      羅文樂</p> <p>Lee Chun-fung      李俊峰</p> <p>wen yau      魂游</p> <p>Doris Wong      黃慧妍</p> <p>Cally Yu      余若玫</p>

<p>Artist initiators/facilitators</p>	<p><u>Second term (2011-2013/14)</u></p> <p>Au Wah-yan            區華欣</p> <p>Sushan Chan            陳素珊</p> <p>Cheung King-wai       張景威</p> <p>Chung Wai-ian         鍾惠恩</p> <p>Vangi Fong              方韻芝</p> <p>Uncle Hung             雄仔叔叔</p> <p>Lee Chun-fung         李俊峰</p> <p>Lo Lok-him             盧樂謙</p> <p>Ng Ka-chun             吳家俊</p> <p>Pak Sheung-chuen     白雙全</p> <p>Wong Chun-kwok      王津鈺</p> <p>Yau Ma Tei Gardener   油麻地花王</p> <p>Roland Yip             葉浩麟</p> <p>Among others (membership in the second term was fluid and other artists also took part sporadically)</p>
<p>Co-creative participants</p>	<p><i>Kaifong</i> of the Yau Ma Tei neighbourhood and others joining its activities</p>
<p>Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited</p>	<p>Mr. Chan                陳生</p> <p>Mr. Cheng              鄭生</p> <p>Miss Choi              蔡小姐</p> <p>Fred Ma                Fred 媽</p> <p>Henry</p> <p>Irene Hui</p>

Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	Grace Lai	黎家怡 (吉暝水)
	Fato Leung	飛圖
	Micheal Leung	梁志剛
	Mr. Luk	陸生
	Uncle Mui	妹叔
	Wah Gor	華哥
	Wing Gor	榮哥
Project documentation	Website: <a href="http://wooferten.blogspot.com/">http://wooferten.blogspot.com/</a> YouTube channel: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/wooferten">https://www.youtube.com/user/wooferten</a> <i>Woofers Post</i> 《活化報》: <a href="https://wooferpost.blogspot.com/">https://wooferpost.blogspot.com/</a> Project website of <i>Pitt Street Riot</i> : <a href="http://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/">http://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/</a>	

## Chapter Two

Project title	<i>Textile Playing Workshop</i> 玩布工作坊 Part 1: <i>Quilts of the Heart</i> 心靈被單 Part 2: <i>The Theatre Under the Skirt</i> 裙子底下的劇場 Part 3: <i>The Empress's New Clothes</i> 皇后的新衣
Location	Taipei, Taiwan
Year	2000-2004
Organiser	Awakening Foundation 婦女新知協會
Artist initiator/facilitator	Wu Mali 吳瑪俐
Co-creative participants	Around 20 women joining the workshops



<p>Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited</p>	<p>Chen Chiung-gu 陳瓊姑</p> <p>Chen Shiou-shia 陳秀霞</p> <p>Chuang Yang Luan 莊楊鑾</p> <p>Hsu Li-kan 徐麗柑</p> <p>Kao Pi-shia 高碧霞</p> <p>Kao Pi-yue 高碧月 (in a sequel of the series)</p> <p>Kao Yin-yue 高櫻月</p> <p>Lin Shih-ling 林詩齡</p> <p>Lin Yen-ling 林彥伶</p> <p>Daby Liu 劉瑋馨</p> <p>Ouyang Hsiu-chi 歐陽秀姬</p> <p>Peng Tsuei-feng 彭翠鳳</p> <p>Su Ju-i 蘇如意</p>
<p>Other informants</p>	<p>Wei-ssu Chien 簡偉斯 (director of documentary videos)</p> <p>Tseng Yun-chieh 曾韻潔 (curator of the subsequent <i>Cloth Play, the Way to Weave in Their Self-Narratives</i> 玩布，從她們敘說的日常開始 and <i>Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth—A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project</i> 共享的溫度：玩布姐妹的參與式藝術計劃 exhibitions in 2015 and 2016 respectively)</p>
<p>Project documentation</p>	<p>Chien, Wei-ssu 簡偉斯, director. <i>The Empress's New Clothes</i> 《皇后的新衣》. Taipei: Awakening Association, 2004</p> <p>———, dir. <i>The Stitching Sisterhood</i> 《玩布的姊妹》. Taipei: Awakening Association, 2004.</p>

Project title	<i>Papercut Field: Soulangh Project</i> 剪紙合作社 – 蕭壠計劃	
Location	Chiali, Tainan, Taiwan	
Year	2000-2004	
Organiser	Soulaugh Cultural Park (Tainan, Taiwan)	
Artist initiator/facilitator	Jam Wu 吳耿禎	
Co-creative participants	Around 20 residents in Chiali	
Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	Chen Pei-yu	陳佩瑜
	Hsieh Mei-ling	謝美鈴
	Hung Pei-ling	洪培玲
	Huang Hui-ling	黃惠玲
	Huang, Pin-chia	黃品嘉
	Huang, Pin-hsin	黃品嘉
	Huang Shu-fen	黃淑芬
	Huang Wei-fen	黃薇芬
	Kuo Mei-chih	郭美枝
	Lee Che-yuan	李哲媛
	Lin Mei-yin	林玫吟
	Wu Chen-yun	吳臻昀
	Yu Su-mei	游淑媚
Other informants	Hsu Pei-chen	許珮甄
	Liu Hsiu-wen	劉秀紋

Project documentation	Wu, Jam 吳耿禎. <i>Papercut Field: An Experimental Project in Taiwan</i> 《剪紙合作社：台灣剪紙的實驗田野》. Taipei, 2019. [Self-published]
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### Chapter Three

Project title	<i>MaD@West Kowloon</i> MaD@西九 (2011-12) <i>Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest</i> 自由野共創項目 (2012) <i>Construction in Progress</i> 工程進行中 (2013)
Location	Site of the yet to be built West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong
Commission by	West Kowloon Cultural District Authority 西九文化區管理局
Organiser	Make A Difference Institute 創不同協作
Curatorial team	Stephanie Cheung 張慧婷 (2011-13) Helen Fan 樊樂怡 (2013) Vangi Fong 方韻芝 (2011-13) Lee Suet-ying 李雪盈 (2013) Sumyi Li 李心怡 (2011-12) Meipo Yuen 阮美寶 (2011-13)
Artist facilitators	Over one hundred participating artists are listed in the credits of the project documentation. Below are those whose works are cited in the thesis: artwalker 創藝同行 Lawn Map 草原地圖 Lo Lok-him 盧樂謙

	<p>Leung Wai-man      梁惠敏</p> <p>Kacey Wong        黃國才</p> <p>William Yip         葉遜謙</p>
Co-creative participants	Citizens joining as presenters of open-called activities
Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	<p>An anonymous participant of “\$0 Sq. Ft.” who lounged about with friends</p> <p>An anonymous child who “built his home” with chairs used in a workshop</p> <p>An anonymous child who stopped his father from picking up a banknote left as a prop to create a situation</p> <p>An anonymous participant of <i>Instant Skyline</i> who commented on <i>Symphony of Lights (Citizens’ Version)</i></p> <p>An anonymous participant of <i>Flying Carpets</i> who volunteered to help ease congestion</p> <p>Daniel (participant of open-call programme “\$0 Sq. Ft.”)</p> <p>Hody (interviewee in documentation video of <i>Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest</i>)</p> <p>Suet-yi (participant of open-call programme “\$0 Sq. Ft.”)</p> <p>Mapopo Community Farm 馬寶寶社區農場</p>
Project documentation	<p>Documentation videos:</p> <p><i>MaD@West Kowloon:</i></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b23yqTOpKXo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b23yqTOpKXo</a>.</p> <p><i>Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest:</i></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-B2CMk19EA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-B2CMk19EA</a>.</p> <p><i>Construction in Progress:</i></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5C8JY79aFw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5C8JY79aFw</a>.</p>

Project title	<i>Tin Shui Collaborative</i> 天水營造社
Location	Tin Sau Bazaar, Tin Shui Wai, Hong Kong
Year	2014
Organiser	Make A Difference Institute 創不同協作
Curatorial team	Crystal Chan 陳慧君 Winki Cheng 鄭穎茵 Stephanie Cheung 張慧婷 Helen Fan 樊樂怡 Rachel Yan 甄卉露
Artist facilitators	artwalker 創藝同行 Good Family Farm 好家庭菜園 O-Farm Hong Kong Urban Laboratory 香港城市創作實驗室 MUDwork Vangi Fong 方韻芝 Roy Lam Lui-kwong 林磊剛 Lam Sam 林森 Fato Leung 飛圖 Leo Wong Chun-yam 黃振欽
Co-creative participants	107 vendors and around 40 workshop participants
Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	Uncle Lam 林伯 Mr. Long 朗先生 Ping 萍姐 Shing Kee 成記

Project documentation	Chan, Crystal 陳慧君 et al., ed. <i>Tin Shui Collaborative</i> . 《天水營造記》 Hong Kong: Make A Difference Institute, 2017.  Documentation video:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVq8yffzNnM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVq8yffzNnM</a> .
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Project title	<i>Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ</i>
Location	Chuen Lung Village, Tai Mo Shan, Hong Kong
Year	2018
Commission by	Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Hong Kong SAR Government
Organiser	Make A Difference Institute 創不同協作  in collaboration with Art Promotion Office 藝術推廣辦事處
Curatorial team	Taylor Cheng 鄭銘柔  Stephanie Cheung 張慧婷  Jessie Coo 郭藹儀  Ada Li 李詠茵  Nicky Liang 梁榮豪  Liv Tsim 詹煦嵐
Artist facilitators	Chak Wai-leung 翟偉良  Ray Chan See-kwong 陳思光  Chung Wai-ian and Ng Ka-chun 鍾惠恩、吳家俊  Monti Lai Wai-yi 黎慧儀  Agnes Lee 李淑雅  Rainbow Leung 李香蘭

Artist facilitators	Leo Wong Chun-yam      黃振欽 Ricky Yeung Sau-churk      楊秀卓 Yip Kai-chun      葉啟俊
Co-creative participants	Villagers in Chuen Lung
Participants whose creative contributions or personal experiences are cited	Adi Auntie Bo      波嫂 Bosco Ceci Chun      浚經理 Fanny Shirley Uncle Mong      檬伯 Uncle Sing      星叔 Uncle Tat      達叔 Village chief Fai      輝村長 Village chief Keung      強村長 Village secretary Kwok-wai      國威司理 Yat-yat      一一
Project documentation	Cheung, Stephanie et al., ed. <i>Ciao! Hill: Review and Return of Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ</i> 《再會！山川人：〈邂逅！山川人—在地藝術〉紀錄及延續》. Hong Kong: Make A Difference Institute, 2021. Documentation video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APqIXQ2R3A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APqIXQ2R3A</a> .

## Appendix II:

### Supplementary Information on the Surveyed Projects

#### Complaints Choir of Hong Kong: Lyrics of the Inaugural Song<sup>467</sup>

點解點解永冇放工	No end to my round-the-clock working
點解點解老細冇用	Why my boss is so stupid!
午飯晚飯搭車貴	Expensive meals and transport
到糧尾窮到穿窿	I got no money left by the end of month
要納稅冇得免	I have no tax allowance
天星鐘聲冇晒記憶	The ring of Star Ferry Bell is out of my memory
西九諮詢冇晒意義	West Kowloon Cultural District consultation is a scam
喂冇晒平價樓買	Hey, cheap housing is history
叫呀伯呀婆種金	Cheating grandpa, granny's money
發達咪賣良心	Millionaires sold their souls
點解香港教育咁差	Why the education of Hong Kong is so poor?
Fresh grad 出身佢當你笨	Fresh graduates aren't stupid!
夠食夠住四千八	\$4,800 is a basic salary?
我又要狂做 Part-time	But why I have to be occupied with part-time jobs
我仲有一身債	And I am still liable to school loans
煲吹亂噏智慧冇乜	Why the Chief Executive keeps bullshitting?
官商掛勾普選再擇日	Universal suffrage always delays
要是我沒有工見	If I have no job interviews

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<sup>467</sup> The song is primarily in Cantonese, with a symbolic mix of Putonghua and English. English translations of the lyrics are taken from the subtitles in the music video. At certain points, the meaning is not exactly the same as the Chinese version, but the original translation is copied verbatim here to preserve the choir's intent.



以後我就要搵兜

I have to beg on the street

克勤要 Try your breast!

Hak-kan (Legislative Councillor) has to 'try your

背靠祖國 面向世界

Motherland is our backbone to face the world

We wanna make a change

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌

What are we here for? Let's sing

我要話你 我要話你

I have a say I have a say

We wanna make a change

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩

What are we doing for?

(In English)

Hong Kong Chinese loves to complain

(In English)

Why can't we just leave it like that?

個城市成個灰晒

This is Asia's grey city

發達發達最偉大

The greatest thing here is to make money

你話我點樣算?

What else can I do?

背靠祖國 面向世界

Motherland is our backbone to face the world

We wanna make a change

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌

What are we here for? Let's sing

我要話你 我要話你

I have a say I have a say

We wanna make a change

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩

What are we doing for?

(In English)

Hong Kong Chinese loves to complain

(In English)

Why can't we just leave it like that?

個城市成個灰晒

This is Asia's grey city

發達發達最偉大

The greatest thing here is to make money

你話我點樣算?

What else can I do?

豬仔豬仔有無發瘟

Piggy Piggy do you have a flu?

沖杯奶飲冇左個腎

A cup of milk a day, take my kidney away

我忙到頹晒想瞓

I'm totally exhausted

Roadshow 請你 Keep silent

Roadshow (onboard bus TV) would you keep silent?

太太無法靜心

Housewives can't have a moment of peace

CCTVB 最快最新

CCTVB, fast and the best

事事旦旦無法過問

Perfunctory without accountability

報導缺實欠公理

Exaggerated and unfair reporting

當我係傻要我睇

They think we are stupid audiences

連篇大話嚇死你

Unreliable coverage shocks you!

點解高官猛咁廢 Up

High rank officials talk in empty words

政黨呢票 冇句老實

Political parties sweet talk only

點解澳門有錢派

Why Macau has a tax rebate?

香港冇最低工資  
強積金去晒邊？

Hong Kong has no minimal pay  
Where is all my MPF gone?

背靠祖國 面向世界  
We wanna make a change  
其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n  
我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌

Motherland is our backbone to face the world  
We wanna make a change  
I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n  
What are we here for? Let's sing

我要話你 我有我道理  
We wanna make a change  
其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n  
我哋嚟做啲咩唉...

I have a say It's a reasonable way  
We wanna make a change  
I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n  
What are we doing for? Sigh...

成日冇伴樣衰胸細  
豬扒等發毛  
頭髮勁 Set  
不想一個人  
無奈冇銀樣都輸晒  
邊「鼠」追女仔

Flat-breasted and ugly  
I'm a spoiled pork-chop  
Hairdressing is a must  
If you want to be in love  
Ugly and no money  
Can I find someone lovely?

I'm a poor guy!  
只好不結婚  
人哋話我睇戲點解得嗰一個人  
其實我都不想當光棍  
無奈情歌通街洗腦偏偏戀上咗  
難道幸福只有劇情播？

I am a poor guy!  
How can I get married?  
People asked why I have to watch movies alone  
Bachelor is not something I want to be  
Cantopop brainwashed me but I love to be brainwashed  
Love and happiness only exist in soap operas?

囧囧囧囧囧囧囧

We wanna make a change

其實我 囧囧囧囧囧囧囧

我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌

Gwing gwing gwing...

We wanna make a change

I'm singing gwing gwing gwing...

What are we here for? Let sing

你有壓力 我有壓力

囧囧囧囧囧囧囧

其實我 囧囧囧囧囧囧囧

我哋嚟做啲咩 呀～

You have pressure, I've pressure!

Gwing gwing gwing...

I'm singing gwing gwing gwing...

What are we doing for? Ah...

背靠祖國 面向世界

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌

Motherland is our backbone to face the world

We wanna make a change

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

What are we here for? Let's sing

愛你至鬧你 愛你至話你

We wanna make a change

其實我 c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

我哋嚟做啲咩 嚟唱歌哦～

I love therefore I scold, I love therefore I blame

We wanna make a change

I'm singing c-o-m-p-l-a-i-n

What are we here for? Let's sing together!

Extracts informing the summary of recollections cited on pp. 106-107 of the thesis:

Mr. Luk, trophy shop owner:

I don't remember much about the incident on Nathan Road. Too many things happened at that time. It only lasted for a night and was not really important, so it didn't make too much of an impression. But I remember the night on June Fourth that year. I rushed to my workshop in Shanghai Street from home. It should be midnight already, but the lights were on in all the households along Shanghai Street. I saw flickering light from televisions. It was already late night. Everyone didn't sleep. They were watching the news. Also, I remembered that the sex workers in Mong Kok joined the march as a team. Society was not as open back then. But they were still willing to come out.

Wing Gor, fruit seller:

It was the first time in my life I took part in a parade. Because I thought the Chinese government was wrong, and we needed to tell them they were wrong. That was the one with one million people, in Peterson Street in Causeway bay, a lot of people... The riot on Nathan Road? I saw people throwing water bottles. Probably they displaced their discontent with the Mainland police and the People's Liberation Army to the policemen... Who organised that? I think likely the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China.

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<sup>468</sup> Gathered from a section titled "fragments" in the project website of *Pitt Street Riot*, accessed 16 May, 2020, <http://pittstreetriot.blogspot.com/search/label/Fragments%20%E8%A1%97%E5%9D%8A%E5%8F%A3%E8%BF%B0>. Original text in Cantonese. Translation by the author.

Mr. Chan, antique shop owner:

June Fourth, I collected a whole lot of newspaper: *Tai Kung, Wen Hui, Sing Tao, Oriental...* Someone offered me thirty thousand dollars but I am still unwilling to sell them. These are evidence for accusing the Communist Party. You say nobody died? I show you these newspapers! I collected these newspapers because a university schoolmate of mine worked at the Xinhua News Agency. He's high-ranking and told me things might go wrong in Beijing. He asked me to be careful, because if that happened, nobody knew how society would change. So I started buying newspapers. I insist on denouncing it for all these years, because as Chinese people, we must keep denouncing to do history justice. Whether this is effective is another issue, but I must tell the world how cruel the Communist Party was.

Henry, *kaifong*:

Back then I donated a lot of money to the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China. A lot of people supported the cause. I went to the Hong Kong Stadium. There were a lot of people. Everywhere was full. I brought along my wife and children, but slowly they became apathetic. Why? Sometimes people stand by you today and reproach you tomorrow. That's mass psychology. Some might be too sad at that time and turned cold eventually. Like dating, after ten odd years, the feeling becomes less intense... I still go to Victoria Park every year. I cycle there with you.

Miss Choi, cultural practitioner:

At that time I was a high school student. I planned to go marching with my classmates on 7 June and prepared a banner. But I received a call from my classmate in the morning saying that the march was cancelled... I was so disappointed. This has been weighing down my heart for years.

### Appendix III:

#### Glossary

Notes:

- \* In the listing of persons, last names precede first names. Commas are put after last names.
- \* Italicised Cantonese (Jyutping), Mandarin (Wade Giles), Putonghua (Pinyin) and Japanese (Hepburn) romanisations are printed in parentheses for names and terms from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China and Japan respectively. For words that are used across different places, multiple romanisations are provided.
- \* Intonation marks, omitted in the main text for smoother reading and easier name searches, are included in this list to aid pronunciation.

Ai, Weiwei	艾未未 (ài wèi wèi)
Alien	外星人 ( <i>ngoi6 sing1 yan4</i> )
Amateur Revolt	素人の乱 ( <i>shirouto no ran</i> )
Anping Old Fort / Fort Zeelandia	安平古堡 ( <i>an p'ing ku pao</i> )
Anti-Express Rail Link Movement	反高鐵運動 ( <i>faan2 gou1 tit3 wan6 dung6</i> )
Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement	反逃犯條例修訂草案運動 ( <i>faan2 tou4 faan2 tiu4 lai6 sau1 ding3 chou2 on3 wan6 dung6</i> )
Anti-Moral and National Education Protest	反國教運動 ( <i>faan2 gwok3 gaau3 wan6 dung6</i> )
<i>Apple Daily</i>	蘋果日報 ( <i>ping4 gwo2 yat6 bou3</i> )
<i>Art as Environment: A Cultural Action in Tropic of Cancer</i>	北回歸線環境藝術行動 ( <i>pei hui kwei hsien huan ching i shu hsing tung</i> )
<i>Art as Social Interaction: Hong Kong/Taiwan Exchange</i>	與社會交往的藝術：香港台灣交流展 ( <i>yu5 se5 wui5 gaau1 wong5 dik1 ngai6 seut6: heung1 gong2 toi4 waan1 gaau1 lau4 jin2 / yü she hui chiao wang te i shu: hsiang kang t'ai wan chiao liu chan</i> )

Art Promotion Office	藝術推廣辦事處 ( <i>ngai6 seut6 teui1 gwong2 baan6 si6 chyu3</i> )
Art Citizens	藝術公民 ( <i>ngai6 seut6 gung1 man4</i> )
Au, Wah-yan	區華欣 ( <i>keui1 wa4 yan1</i> )
Awakening Foundation	婦女新知協會 ( <i>fu nü hsin chih hsieh hui</i> )
<i>Awakening Magazine</i>	婦女新知雜誌 ( <i>fu nü hsin chih tsa chih</i> )
Beitou	北投 ( <i>pei t'ou</i> )
Beitou Storyteller	北投說書人 ( <i>pei t'ou shuo shu jen</i> )
Bishan	碧山 ( <i>bi shān</i> )
C&G Artpartment	C&G 藝術單位 ( <i>ngai6 seut6 daan1 wai2</i> )
Cattle Depot Artists Village	牛棚藝術村 ( <i>ngau4 paang4 ngai6 seut6 chyun1</i> )
<i>Cehua</i>	策劃 (also <i>chaak3 waak6, ts'e hua</i> )
Centre for Community Cultural Development	社區文化發展中心 ( <i>se5 keui1 man4 fa3 faat3 jin2 jung1 sam1</i> )
<i>Cezhan</i>	策展 (also <i>chaak3 jin2, ts'e chan</i> )
<i>Cezhanren</i>	策展人 (also <i>chaak3 jin2 yan4, ts'e chan jen</i> )
Chak, Wai-leung	翟偉良 ( <i>jaak6 wai5 leung4</i> )
Chan, Chi-tak	陳滅 ( <i>chan4 mit6</i> )
Chan, Crystal	陳慧君 ( <i>chan4 wai6 gwan1</i> )
Chan, Joseph Man	陳韜文 ( <i>chan4 tou1 man1</i> )
Chan, Ka-ming	陳嘉銘 ( <i>chan4 ga1 ming4</i> )
Chan, Kim-ching	陳劍青 ( <i>chan4 gim3 ching1</i> )
Chan, King-fai	陳景輝 ( <i>chan4 ging2 fai1</i> )
Chan, Ray See-kwong	陳思光 ( <i>chan4 si1 gwong1</i> )
Chan, Stephen Ching-kiu	陳清僑 ( <i>chan4 ching1 kiu4</i> )
Chan, Sushan	陳素珊 ( <i>chan4 sou3 saan1</i> )



<i>Che</i>	輦 ( <i>che4</i> )
Chen, Kuang-hsin	陳光興 ( <i>ch'en kuang hsing</i> )
Chen, Chiung-gu	陳瓊姑 ( <i>ch'en ch'iung ku</i> )
Chen, Pei-yu	陳佩瑜 ( <i>ch'en p'ei yü</i> )
Chen, Shiou-shia	陳秀霞 ( <i>ch'en hsiu hsia</i> )
Chen, Xiaoyang	陳曉陽 ( <i>chén xiǎo yang</i> )
Chen, Yun-chung	陳允中 ( <i>chan4 wan5 jung1</i> )
Cheng, Damian Wai-ping	小西 ( <i>siu2 sai1</i> )
Cheng, Hui-wen	鄭惠文 ( <i>cheng hui wen</i> )
Cheng, Lin-chia	鄭林佳 ( <i>cheng lin chia</i> )
Cheng, Taylor	鄭銘柔 ( <i>jeng6 ming4 yau4</i> )
Cheng, Winki	鄭穎茵 ( <i>jeng6 wing6 yan1</i> )
Cheng, Yee-man (Ah Gum)	鄭宜敏 (阿金) ( <i>jeng6 yi4 man5, a3 gam1</i> )
Cheung King-wai	張景威 ( <i>jeung1 ging2 wai1</i> )
Cheung, Clara	張嘉莉 ( <i>jeung1 ga2 lei1</i> )
Cheung, King-wai	張景威 ( <i>jeung1 ging2 wai1</i> )
Cheung, Stephanie	張慧婷 ( <i>jeung1 wai6 ting4</i> )
Chiali	佳里 ( <i>chia li</i> )
Chiayi	嘉義 ( <i>chia i</i> )
Chicken poop vine	雞屎藤 ( <i>gai1 si2 tang4</i> )
Chin, Wan	陳雲 ( <i>chan4 wan4</i> )
Chine, Wei-ssu	簡偉斯 ( <i>chien wei ssu</i> )
Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang)	國民黨 ( <i>kuo min tang</i> )
Ching, Luke Chin-wai	程展緯 ( <i>ching4 jin2 wai5</i> )
Choi Yuen Village	菜園村 ( <i>choi3 yun4/yun2 chyun1</i> )

Choi, Thickest	蔡至厚 ( <i>choi3 ji3 hau5</i> )
Chow, Chun-fat	周潤發 ( <i>jau1 yeun6 faat3</i> )
Chow, Sung-ming	鄒崇銘 ( <i>jau1 sung4 mings4</i> )
Chow, Yiu-fai	周耀輝 ( <i>jau1 yiu6 fai1</i> )
<i>Chu chung</i>	諸眾 ( <i>chu chung</i> )
Chu, Eddie Hoi-dick	朱凱迪 ( <i>jyu1 hoi2 dik6</i> )
Chu, Yiu-kwong	朱耀光 ( <i>jyu1 yiu6 gwong1</i> )
Chuen Lung	川龍 ( <i>chyun1 lung4</i> )
Chung, Wai-ian	鍾惠恩 ( <i>jung1 wai6 yan1</i> )
Cigu Salt Mountain	七股鹽山 ( <i>ch'i ku yen shan</i> )
Civic Square	公民廣場 ( <i>gung1 man4 gwong2 cheung4</i> )
<i>Cloth Play, the Way to Weave in Their Self-Narratives</i>	玩布，從她們敘說的日常開始 ( <i>wan pu, ts'ung t'a men hsü shuo te jih ch'ang k'ai shih</i> )
Cloudgate Theatre	雲門舞集 ( <i>yün men wu chi</i> )
<i>Collaborative Programmes at Freespace Fest</i>	自由野共創項目 ( <i>ji6 yau4 ye5 gung6 chong3 hong6 muk6</i> )
Collective work	集體創作 ( <i>jaap6 tai2 chong3 jok3</i> )
<i>Complaints Choir of Hong Kong</i>	香港投訴合唱團 ( <i>heung1 gong2 tau4 sou3 hap6 cheung3 tyun4</i> )
Community Comprehensive Construction	社區總體營造 ( <i>she ch'ü tsung t'i ying tsao</i> )
<i>Construction in Progress</i>	工程進行中 ( <i>gung1 ching4 jeun3 hang4 jung1</i> )
Coo, Jessie	郭藹儀 ( <i>gwok3 oi2 yi4</i> )
Dawn market	天光墟 ( <i>tin1 gwong1 heoi1</i> )
Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society	定海橋互助社 ( <i>dìng hǎi qiáo hù zhù shè</i> )
Duen Kee Restaurant	端記茶樓 ( <i>dyun1 gei3 caa4 lau4</i> )

Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale	越後妻有大地藝術祭 ( <i>echigo tsumari daichi geijutsu sai</i> )
Echo Publishing Company	漢聲出版社 ( <i>han sheng ch'u pan she</i> )
Edwin Lai Kin-keung	黎健強 ( <i>lai4 gin6 koeng4</i> )
Eric Chen	陳宣誠 ( <i>ch'en hsüan ch'eng</i> )
Fan, Helen	樊樂怡 ( <i>faan4 lok6 ji4</i> )
Farm Side Art Research Lab	田邊藝術研究所 ( <i>tin4 bin1 ngai6 seot6 jin4 gau3 so2</i> )
Fato Leung	飛圖 ( <i>fei1 tou4</i> )
Fong, Vangi	方韻芝 ( <i>fong1 wan5 zi1</i> )
Fotan	火炭 ( <i>fo2 taan3</i> )
Four cross-strait regions	兩岸四地 ( <i>loeng5 ngon6 sei3 dei6 / liang an ssu ti / liǎng àn sì dì</i> )
Freespace	自由空間 ( <i>zi6 jau4 hung1 gaan1</i> )
<i>Freespace Fest</i>	自由野 ( <i>zi6 jau4 je5</i> )
<i>From Being a Woman to Becoming a Human Being</i>	從女人到人 ( <i>ts'ung nü jen tao jen</i> )
g0v.tw	零時政府 ( <i>ling shih cheng fu</i> )
GAIA School	自然學校 ( <i>zi6 jin4 hok6 haau6</i> )
Go Beyond the Mall	唔幫襯大地產商的聖誕 ( <i>m4 bong1 can3 daai6 dei6 caan2 soeng1 dik1 sing3 daan3</i> )
Good wife, wise mother	良妻賢母 ( <i>ryōsai kenbo</i> )
Gong, Jow-jiun	龔卓軍 ( <i>kung zhuó chün</i> )
Good Family Farm	好家庭菜園 ( <i>hou2 gaa1 ting4 coi3 jyun4</i> )
Greater Japan National Defense Women's Association	大日本國防婦人會 ( <i>dai nihon kokubō fujinkai</i> )
Guan Gong	關公 ( <i>gwaan1 gung1</i> )
Guangdong	廣東 ( <i>guǎng dōng</i> )

Hakka	客家 ( <i>haak3 gaa1</i> )
hegemony of real estate	地產霸權 ( <i>dei6 caan2 baa3 kyun4</i> )
<i>Hi! Hill—Art in-Situ</i>	邂逅！山川人——在地藝術 ( <i>haai5 hau6! saan1 cyun1 jan4 — zoi6 dei6 ngai6 seot6</i> )
Ho, Oscar	何慶基 ( <i>ho4 hing3 gei1</i> )
Ho, Shan	何山 ( <i>ho4 saan1</i> )
Hong-gah Museum	鳳甲美術館 ( <i>feng chia mei shu kuan</i> )
Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China	香港市民支援愛國民主運動聯合會 ( <i>hoeng1 gong2 si5 man4 zil wun4 ngoi3 gwok3 man4 zyu2 wan6 dung6 lyun4 hap6 wui2</i> )
Hong Kong Arts Development Council	香港藝術發展局 ( <i>hoeng1 gong2 ngai6 seot6 faat3 zin2 guk6</i> )
<i>Hong Kong Economic Journal</i>	信報 ( <i>seon3 bou3</i> )
<i>Hong Kong Economic Times</i>	經濟日報 ( <i>ging1 zai3 jat6 bou3</i> )
Hong Kong Urban Laboratory	香港城市創作實驗室 ( <i>hoeng1 gong2 sing4 si5 cong3 zok3 sat6 jim6 sat1</i> )
<i>House News</i>	主場新聞 ( <i>zyu2 coeng4 san1 man4</i> )
Hsiao, Heng-shu	蕭姮姝 ( <i>hsiao heng shu</i> )
Hsieh, Mei-ling	謝美鈴 ( <i>hsieh mei ling</i> )
Hsieh, Pei-jun	謝佩君 ( <i>hsieh p'ei chün</i> )
Hsu, Fong-ray	許峰瑞 ( <i>hsü feng jui</i> )
Hsu, Li-kan	徐麗柑 ( <i>hsü li kan</i> )
Hu, Bin	胡斌 ( <i>hü bīn</i> )
Huang, Hui-ling	黃惠玲 ( <i>huang hui ling</i> )
Huang, Pin-chia	黃品嘉 ( <i>huang p'in chia</i> )
Huang, Pin-hsin	黃品馨 ( <i>huang p'in hsin</i> )
Huang, Shu-fan	黃淑芬 ( <i>huang shu fen</i> )

Huang, Wei-fan	黃薇芬 ( <i>huang wei fen</i> )
Huatung	花東 ( <i>hua tung</i> )
Hui, Po-keung	許寶強 ( <i>heoi2 bou2 koeng4</i> )
Hui, Yuk	許焜 ( <i>heoi2 juk1</i> )
Hung, Louis	孔憲基 ( <i>hung2 hin3 gei1</i> )
Hung, Pei-ling	洪培玲 ( <i>hung p'ei ling</i> )
<i>Jak</i>	宅 ( <i>zaak6</i> )
<i>Journal of Arts Management</i>	藝術管理 ( <i>i shu kuan li</i> )
<i>Journal of Performing and Visual Arts Studies</i>	藝術研究學報 ( <i>i shu yen chiu hsüeh pao</i> )
June Fourth for This Generation	這一代的六四 ( <i>ze5 jat1 doi6 dik1 luk6 sei3</i> )
<i>Kaifong</i>	街坊 ( <i>gaai1 fong1</i> )
Kam, Lisa Wing-man	甘詠雯 ( <i>gam1 wing6 man4</i> )
Kao, Jun-honn	高俊宏 ( <i>kao chiün hung</i> )
Kao, Pi-shia	高碧霞 ( <i>kao pi hsia</i> )
Kao, Pi-yue	高碧月 ( <i>kao pi yüeh</i> )
Kao, Yin-yue	高櫻月 ( <i>kao ying yüeh</i> )
Kaohsiung Incident	美麗島事件 ( <i>mei li tao shih chien</i> )
Karatani, Kojin	柄谷行人 ( <i>karatani kojim</i> )
Ko, Alice Nieu-po	高念璞 ( <i>kao nien p'u</i> )
Kowloon-Canton Railway Terminal	九廣鐵路總站 ( <i>gau2 gwong2 tit3 lou6 zung2 zaam6</i> )
Kuo, Mei-chih	郭美枝 ( <i>kuo mei chih</i> )
Kwan, Sheung-chi	關尚智 ( <i>gwaan1 soeng6 zi3</i> )
Lai, Edwin Kin-keung	黎健強 ( <i>lai4 gin6 koeng4</i> )
Lai, Grace	黎家怡 (吉暝水) ( <i>lai4 gaa1 ji4</i> )

Lai, Monti Wai-yi	黎慧儀 ( <i>lai4 wai6 ji4</i> )
Lam, Roy Lui-kong	林磊剛 ( <i>lam4 leoi5 gong1</i> )
Lam, Sam	林森 ( <i>lam4 sam1</i> )
Lau, Andy	劉德華 ( <i>lau4 dak1 waa4</i> )
Lau, Jasper Kin-wah	劉建華 ( <i>lau4 gin3 waa4</i> )
Lau, Kin-chi	劉健芝 ( <i>lau4 gin6 zi1</i> )
Law, Man-lok	羅文樂 ( <i>lo4 man4 lok6</i> )
<i>Lawn Fest</i>	草民音樂節 ( <i>cou2 man4 jam1 lok6 zit3</i> )
Lawn Map	草原地圖 ( <i>cou2 jyun4 dei6 tou4</i> )
Lee, Agnes	李淑雅 ( <i>lei5 suk6 ngaa5</i> )
Lee, Che-yuan	李哲媛 ( <i>li che yüan</i> )
Lee, Chun-fung	李俊峰 ( <i>lei5 zeon3 fung1</i> )
Lee, Francis Lap-fung	李立峯 ( <i>lei5 lap6 fung1</i> )
Lee, Ming-wei	李明維 ( <i>li ming wei</i> )
Lee, Suet-ying	李雪盈 ( <i>lei5 syut3 jing4</i> )
Lee, Yuan-chen	李元貞 ( <i>li yüan chen</i> )
Lei Tung Street	利東街 ( <i>lei6 dung1 gaai1</i> )
Leung, Chi-yuen	梁志遠 ( <i>loeng4 zi3 jyun5</i> )
Leung, Karman	梁家文 ( <i>loeng4 gaal man4</i> )
Leung, Mee-ping	梁美萍 ( <i>loeng4 mei5 ping4</i> )
Leung, Michael	梁志剛 ( <i>loeng4 zi3 gong1</i> )
Leung, Rainbow	李香蘭 ( <i>lei5 hoeng1 laan4</i> )
Leung, Wai-man	梁惠敏 ( <i>loeng4 wai6 man5</i> )
Li, Ada	李詠茵 ( <i>lei5 wing6 jan1</i> )
Li, Sumyi	李心怡 ( <i>lei5 sam1 ji4</i> )
Li, Zhu	李竹 ( <i>li zhu</i> )

Li, Ho-fai	李浩暉 ( <i>lei5 hou6 fai1</i> )
Liang, Nicky	梁榮豪 ( <i>loeng4 kai2 hou4</i> )
Lim, Tai-wei	林大偉 ( <i>lam4 daai6 wai5</i> )
Lin Mei-yin	林玫吟 ( <i>lin mei yin</i> )
Lin, Shih-ling	林詩齡 ( <i>lin shih ling</i> )
Lin, Yen-ling	林彥伶 ( <i>lin yen ling</i> )
Liu, Daby	劉瑋馨 ( <i>liu wei hsin</i> )
Liu, Fai-ying	廖輝英 ( <i>liao hui ying</i> )
Liu, Xiaobo	劉曉波 ( <i>liú xiǎo bō</i> )
Lo, Lok-him	盧樂謙 ( <i>lou4 lok6 him1</i> )
Lo, Ta-yu	羅大佑 ( <i>lo ta yu</i> )
Lu, Annette Hsiu-lien	呂秀蓮 ( <i>lu hsiu lien</i> )
Lu, Mingjun	魯明軍 ( <i>lǔ míng jūn</i> )
Lu, Pei-yi	呂佩怡 ( <i>lu p'ei i</i> )
Lu, Victoria	陸蓉之 ( <i>lu jung chih</i> )
Lung, Ying-tai	龍應台 ( <i>lung ying t'ai</i> )
Ma, Kwok-ming	馬國明 ( <i>maa5 gwok3 ming4</i> )
Ma, Ka-fai	馬家輝 ( <i>maa5 gaa1 fai1</i> )
<i>MaD@West Kowloon</i>	MaD@西九 ( <i>MaD@ sai1 gau2</i> )
Madam Chiang Kai-shek	蔣介石夫人 ( <i>chiang chieh shih fu jen</i> )
<i>Madou Sugar Industry Art Triennial</i>	麻豆糖業大地藝術祭 ( <i>ma tou t'ang yeh ta ti i shu chi</i> )
Make A Difference Institute	創不同協作 ( <i>ong3 bat1 tung4 hip3 zok3</i> )
Mapopo Community Farm	馬寶寶社區農場 ( <i>maa5 bou2 bou2 se5 keoi1 nung4 coeng4</i> )
Marginal art	限界藝術 ( <i>genkai geijutsu</i> )
Matsu Islands	馬祖 ( <i>ma tsu</i> )

Matsumoto, Hajime	松本哉 ( <i>matsumoto hajime</i> )
<i>Meishu Guancha</i>	美術觀察 ( <i>měi shù guān chá</i> )
<i>Ming Pao Daily</i>	明報 ( <i>ming4 bou3</i> )
<i>Ming Pao Weekly</i>	明報周刊 ( <i>ming4 bou3 zau1 hon1</i> )
<i>Modern Art</i>	現代美術 ( <i>hsien tai mei shu</i> )
Mok, Chiu-yu	莫昭如 ( <i>mok6 ciu1 jyu4</i> )
New Life Movement	新生活運動 ( <i>hsin sheng huo yün tung</i> )
New Preservation Movement	新保育運動 ( <i>san1 bou2 juk6 wan6 dung6</i> )
<i>News Magazine</i>	新聞透視 ( <i>san1 man4 tau3 si6</i> )
<i>Next Magazine</i>	壹周刊 ( <i>jat1 zau1 hon1</i> )
Ng, Ka-chun	吳家俊 ( <i>ng4 gaal zeon3</i> )
Old Wan Chai Market	舊灣仔街市 ( <i>gau6 waan1 zai2 gaai1 si5</i> )
<i>Oriental Daily</i>	東方日報 ( <i>dung1 fong1 jat6 bou3</i> )
Otaku	御宅族 ( <i>jyu6 zaak6 zuk6</i> )
Ouyang, Hsiu-chi	歐陽秀姬 ( <i>ou yang hsiu chi</i> )
Oyster Seller's Wife	青蚶仔嫂 ( <i>ch'ing k'ei tzu sao</i> )
<i>Pai na ch'i fu</i>	百納祈福 ( <i>pai na ch'i fu</i> )
Pak Sheung-chuen	白雙全 ( <i>baak6 soeng1 cyun4</i> )
Pang, Laikwan	彭麗君 ( <i>paang4 lai6 gwan1</i> )
<i>Papercut Field: Soulangh Project</i>	剪紙合作社——蕭壠計劃 ( <i>chien chih ho zuò she — hsiao lung chi hua</i> )
Papercut Lane	剪紙巷 ( <i>chien chih hsiang</i> )
<i>PAR</i>	表演藝術雜誌 ( <i>piao yen i shu tsa chih</i> )
Participatory art	參與式藝術 ( <i>sam1 jyu5 sik1 ngai6 seot6 / ts'an yü shih i shu / cān yǔ shì yì shù</i> )
Patriotic Women's Association	愛國婦人會 ( <i>aikoku fujinkai</i> )



Peng, Tsuei-feng	彭翠鳳 ( <i>p'eng ts'ui feng</i> )
<i>People's Pitch</i>	人民足球 ( <i>jan4 man4 zuk1 kau4</i> )
<i>Pitt Street Riot</i>	碧街事變 ( <i>bik1 gaai1 si6 bin3</i> )
Poon, Janice	潘詩韻 ( <i>pun1 si1 wan5</i> )
Poetic Links – Street Papercutting Action	詩意的鏈結 – 剪紙街頭行動 ( <i>shih i te lien chieh – chien chih chieh t'ou hsing tung</i> )
Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong	香港大學民意研究計劃 ( <i>hoeng1 gong2 daai6 hok6 man4 ji3 jin4 gau3 gai3 waak6</i> )
Pui Pui	貝貝 ( <i>bui3 bui3</i> )
Puji Culture and History Research Association	普濟文史研究協會 ( <i>p'u chi wen shih yen chiu hsieh hui</i> )
Puji Temple	普濟殿 ( <i>p'u chi tien</i> )
Queen's Pier	皇后碼頭 ( <i>wong4 hau6 maa5 tau4</i> )
<i>Quilts of the Heart</i>	心靈被單 ( <i>hsin ling pei tan</i> )
Reclaim Sheung Shui Station	光復上水站 ( <i>gwong1 fuk6 soeng5 sei2 zaam6</i> )
Ren, Hai	任海 ( <i>ren hai</i> )
Revitalisation	活化 ( <i>wut6 faa3</i> )
Sai Yeung Choi South Street	西洋菜南街 ( <i>sai1 joeng4 coi3 naam4 gaai1</i> )
Salty Zone	鹽分地帶 ( <i>yen fen ti tai</i> )
Setouchi Triennale	瀨戶內國際藝術祭 ( <i>setouchi kokusai geijutsu sai</i> )
Shaanbei	陝北 ( <i>shan bei</i> )
Shanghai Street Artspace	上海街視覺藝術空間 ( <i>soeng5 hoi2 gaai1 si6 gok3 ngai6 seot6 hung1 gaan1</i> )
Shen, Kuiyi	沈揆一 ( <i>shen kui yi</i> )
Shengjun Xiang	聖君巷 ( <i>sheng chün hsiang</i> )

<i>Sing Tao Daily</i>	星島日報 ( <i>sing1 dou2 jat6 bou3</i> )
Siraya tribe	西拉雅族 ( <i>hsi la ya tsu</i> )
So Boring	蘇波榮 ( <i>sou1 bo1 wing4</i> )
Socially engaged art	社會參與式藝術 ( <i>se5 wui2 sam1 jyu5 sik1 ngai6 seot6 / she hui ts'an yü shih i shu / shè huì cān yǔ shì yì shù</i> )
Soulangh Cultural Park	蕭壠文化園區 ( <i>hsiao lung wen hua yüan ch'ü</i> )
Star Ferry Pier	天星碼頭 ( <i>tin1 sing1 maa5 tau4</i> )
<i>Stitching Stories, Weaving Warmth— A Fabric Play Participatory Art Project</i>	共享的溫度：玩布姐妹的參與式藝術計劃 ( <i>kung hsiang te wen tu: wan pu chieh mei te ts'an yü shih i shu chi hua</i> )
Su, Ju-i	蘇如意 ( <i>su ju i</i> )
Summer Slow Life Festival	夏漫漫生活節 ( <i>haa6 maan6 maan6 saang1 wut6 zit3</i> )
<i>Sunday Report</i>	星期日檔案 ( <i>sing1 kei4 jat6 dong3 ngon3</i> )
Szeto, Mirana M.	司徒薇 ( <i>si1 tou4 mei4</i> )
Szeto, Wah	司徒華 ( <i>si1 tou4 waa4</i> )
<i>Tai Kung Pao</i>	大公報 ( <i>daai6 gung1 bou3</i> )
Tai Mo Shan	大帽山 ( <i>daai6 mou6 saan1</i> )
Tainan	台南 ( <i>t'ai nan</i> )
Taiwan Cultural Association	台灣文化協會 ( <i>t'ai wan wen hua hsieh hui</i> )
Taiwan Women's Philanthropic Association	台灣婦人慈善會 ( <i>taiwan fujin jizenkai</i> )
Tak Cheong Lane	德昌里 ( <i>dak1 coeng1 lei5</i> )
<i>Tales We Tell</i>	四圍講故 ( <i>sei3 wai4 gong2 gu3</i> )
Terada, Masaya	寺田征也 ( <i>terada masaya</i> )
<i>Textile Playing Workshop</i>	玩布工作坊 ( <i>wan pu kung zuò fang</i> )
<i>The Empress's New Clothes</i>	皇后的新衣 ( <i>huang hou te hsin i</i> )

The Golden Bauhinia	金紫荊 ( <i>gam1 zi2 ging1</i> )
<i>The Initium</i>	端傳媒 ( <i>dyun1 cyun4 mui4</i> )
The people will not forget	人民不會忘記 ( <i>jan4 man4 bat1 wui2 mong4 gei3</i> )
The People's Panel on West Kowloon	西九龍民間評審聯席會議 ( <i>sai1 gau2 lung4 man4 gaan1 ping4 sam2 lyun4 zik6 wui2 ji5</i> )
The value of Central District	中環價值 ( <i>zung1 waan4 gaa3 zik6</i> )
<i>The Theatre Under the Skirt</i>	裙子底下的劇場 ( <i>ch'ün tzu ti hsia te chü ch'ang</i> )
Times Square	時代廣場 ( <i>si4 doi6 gwong2 coeng4</i> )
<i>T'ien tzu men sheng</i>	天子門生 ( <i>t'ien tzu men sheng</i> )
Tin Sau Bazaar	天秀墟 ( <i>tin1 sau3 heoi1</i> )
Tin Sau Bazaar Vendors' Alliance	天秀墟租戶聯盟 ( <i>tin1 sau3 heoi1 zou1 wu6 lyun4 mang4</i> )
<i>Tin Shui Collaborative</i>	天水營造社 ( <i>tin1 sei2 jing4 zou6 se5</i> )
Tin Shui Wai	天水圍 ( <i>tin1 sei2 wai4</i> )
Travel to Learn in the City	城市遊學 ( <i>sing4 si5 jau4 hok6</i> )
Tsang, John Chun-wah	曾俊華 ( <i>cang4 zeon3 waa4</i> )
Tsang, Jonathan Wai-keung	曾偉強 ( <i>cang4 wai5 koeng4</i> )
Tsang, Kith Tak-ping	曾德平 ( <i>cang4 dak1 ping4</i> )
Tseng, Yun-chieh	曾韻潔 ( <i>tseng yün chieh</i> )
Tsim, Liv	詹煦嵐 ( <i>zim1 heoi2 laam4</i> )
Tsim Sha Tsui	尖沙咀 ( <i>zim1 saa1 zeoi2</i> )
Tsurumi, Shunsuke	鶴見俊輔 ( <i>tsurumi shunsuke</i> )
Tuen Mun	屯門 ( <i>tyun4 mun4</i> )
Tung Chung	東涌 ( <i>dung1 jung2</i> )
Tung, Betty	董趙洪娉 ( <i>dung2 ziu6 hung4 ping1</i> )

Tung, Chee-hwa	董建華 ( <i>dung2 gin3 waa4</i> )
Tung Wah Group of Hospitals	東華三院 ( <i>dung1 waa4 saam1 jyun2</i> )
Tung, Wei-hsiu	董維秀 ( <i>tung wei hsiu</i> )
Ueno, Chizuko	上野千鶴子 ( <i>ueno chizuko</i> )
Umbrella Movement	雨傘運動 ( <i>jyu5 saan3 wan6 dung6</i> )
Uncle Hung	雄仔叔叔 ( <i>hung4 zai2 suk1 suk1</i> )
Value of Central District	中環價值 ( <i>zung1 waan4 gaa3 zik6</i> )
Village chief	村長 ( <i>cyun1 coeng4</i> )
Wanderer Project	流浪者計畫 ( <i>lau4 long6 ze2 gai3 waa2</i> )
Wang, Meiqin	王美欽 ( <i>wáng měi qīn</i> )
<i>Weekend Weekly</i>	新假期 ( <i>san1 gaa3 kei4</i> )
Weitou	圍頭 ( <i>wai4 tau4</i> )
<i>Wen Hui Pao</i>	文匯報 ( <i>man4 wui6 bou3</i> )
wen yau	魂游 ( <i>wan4 jau4</i> )
West Kowloon Cultural District	西九文化區 ( <i>sai1 gau2 man4 faa3 keoi1</i> )
West Kowloon Cultural District Authority	西九文化區管理局 ( <i>sai1 gau2 man4 faa3 keoi1 gun2 lei5 guk6</i> )
<i>When Heaven Burns</i>	天與地 ( <i>tin1 jyu5 dei6</i> )
Wong, Chun-kwok	王津鈺 ( <i>wong4 zeon1 yuk6</i> )
Wong, Doris	黃慧妍 ( <i>wong4 wai6 jin4</i> )
Wong, Jim	黃嘉遜 ( <i>wong4 gaa1 seon3</i> )
Wong, Kacey	黃國才 ( <i>wong4 gwok3 coi4</i> )
Wong, Ka-wing	黃嘉榮 ( <i>wong4 gaa1 wing4</i> )
Wong, Leo Chun-yam	黃振欽 ( <i>wong4 zan3 jam1</i> )
Wong, Nai-chung	黃乃忠 ( <i>wong4 naai5 zung1</i> )
Wong, Phoebe	黃小燕 ( <i>wong4 siu2 jin3</i> )

Wong, Sampson Yu-hin	黃宇軒 ( <i>wong4 jyu5 hin1</i> )
Wong, Yuk-man	黃毓民 ( <i>wong4 yuk1 man4</i> )
<i>Woofer Post</i>	活化報 ( <i>wut6 faa3 bou3</i> )
Woofer Ten	活化廳 ( <i>wut6 faa3 teng1</i> )
Walk in the streets	行街 ( <i>hang4 gaai1</i> )
Wu, Chen-yun	吳臻昀 ( <i>wu chen yün</i> )
Wu, Hung	巫鴻 ( <i>wū hóng</i> )
Wu, Jam	吳耿禎 ( <i>wu keng chen</i> )
Wu, Mali	吳瑪俐 ( <i>wu ma li</i> )
Xinhua News Agency	新華社 ( <i>xīn huá shè</i> )
Xiqu Centre	戲曲中心 ( <i>hei3 kuk1 zung1 sam1</i> )
<i>Xuexi yu Tansuo</i>	學習與探索 ( <i>xué xí yǔ tàn suǒ</i> )
Yan, Rachel	甄卉露 ( <i>jan1 wai2 lou6</i> )
Yangdeng Art Cooperatives	羊磴藝術合作社 ( <i>yáng dòng yì shù hé zuò shè</i> )
Yau Ma Tei	油麻地 ( <i>jau4 maa4 dei6</i> )
Yau Ma Tei Gardener	油麻地花王 ( <i>jau4 maa4 dei6 faa1 wong4</i> )
Yeung, Ricky Sau-churk	楊秀卓 ( <i>joeng4 sau3 coek3</i> )
Yip, Kai-chun	葉啟俊 ( <i>jip6 kai2 zeon3</i> )
Yip, Roland	葉浩麟 ( <i>jip6 hou6 leon4</i> )
Yip, William	葉遜謙 ( <i>jip6 seon3 him1</i> )
<i>Yishu Dangdai</i>	藝術當代 ( <i>i shu tang tai</i> )
<i>Youma Caizi</i>	油麻菜籽 ( <i>yu ma ts'ai tzu</i> )
Yu, Cally	余若玫 ( <i>jyu4 joek6 mui4</i> )
Yu, Su-mei	游淑媚 ( <i>yu shu mei</i> )
Yuen, Meipo	阮美寶 ( <i>jyun2 mei5 bou2</i> )

Zengwen River

曾文溪 (*tseng wen hsi*)

Zheng, Bo

鄭波 (*zhèng bō*)

Zhou, Yanhua

周彥華 (*zhōu yàn huá*)