

The Fleeting Border of Hongkongness in Hong Kong's Contemporary Art

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Abstract

This article aims to mediate the fleeting notion of the border of Hong Kong through the lens of contemporary art and the participatory creativity during recent social movements. The subjectivity of Hong Kong and its people often underpins social movements in Hong Kong after 1997, and in the past two decades is negotiated in the forms of confrontation and contention on geopolitical, nationalistic, and ethnic borders between Hong Kong and the Mainland. The social unrests indicate that nationality and ethnicity may not be the prevailing attribution for devising one's attachment to a place. The notion of identity and its boundaries are complex orchestrations that involve confounding subjective and variable aspects of humanity, such as emotion and psychological attachment. In this sense, the notion of border is a transient one, whereby Hongkongness is constantly manifested. The works of three Hong Kong artists—Samson Young (b. 1979), Luke Ching (b. 1972), and Tang Kwok-hin (b. 1983)—illustrate and mediate both the fluidity of multiple assemblages on the boundaries of Hong Kong SAR and the trans-border correlations between Hong Kong and Taiwan. The participatory creativity, namely the Lennon Wall and diverse creativity once spread across the city during the 2014 and 2019 protests, also allegorize the diverse and mutated boundaries of individuals that comprise the subjectivity of Hong Kong.

Entangled Disparities

In the twenty-three years since the Handover of Hong Kong, social movements, disturbances, and anxiety

constantly revisit the city. It has seen quite a number of protests as people took to the streets to demonstrate against the implementation of Article 23 in 2003,¹ the enactment of the national education curriculum in 2012, Beijing's intervention in electoral methods which led to the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and most recently the extradition bill² and the introduction of the National Security Law which ignited scales of protests never seen before. The confrontations manifest the desire of disappointed Hong Kong people for the "high degree of autonomy" promised in the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. The framework is also a metaphorical and ideological border between Hong Kong and the Mainland. What underpins the socio-political disturbances in Hong Kong is the notion of border and its instability and unsettlement. The boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland is always a narrative of entanglements: it is neither as simple as the Chinese proverb "under the same

1 Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23 states that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies." An attempt to implement the article was the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill 2003 which caused a great controversy and a massive demonstration on July 1, 2003.

2 The Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019 was a proposed bill regarding extradition to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (Cap. 503) in relation to special surrender arrangements and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance (Cap. 525) so that arrangements for mutual legal assistance could be made between Hong Kong and any place outside Hong Kong. The bill was proposed by the Hong Kong government in February 2019. The government proposed to establish a mechanism for transfers of fugitives not only for Taiwan, but also for Mainland China and Macau, which were not covered in existing laws at the time.

roof” nor as the saying “a former British colony, now part of China” goes. The situation is by no means reflective merely of a tension between postcolonization and nationalism; the complexity lies in the particularity of the city. As Gordon Mathews argues, “Hong Kong's decolonization is viewed by many in Hong Kong as recolonization, as control over Hong Kong is passed from one empire to another” (3). It is, in fact, an entanglement of socio-political contestation, ideological difference, psychological gap, socio-political discontents, and linguistic and banal disparities.

In *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), Martin Heidegger writes that “a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (152). Heidegger looks into details of building and dwelling, and discusses in linguistic terms what they mean. Building is one of the means of dwelling. Dwelling, however, is not only confined to building in the forms of space, boundary or tangible existence; it is related to the origin and ways of existence of human beings through perspectives of politics, culture, and collective experience. The entangled disparities of Hong Kong reside in the arbitrary implementation and interpretation of the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. Contestations and confrontations particularly on the implementation of “Two Systems” in the past two decades have provoked a re-delineation of the border between the notions of Hongkongness and Chineseness. The multiple complexities regarding the border constitute a site that enables constant reconfiguration of the notion of Hongkongness. This is akin to the *in-between* spaces, in Homi Bhabha’s assertion, that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or

communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2). The notion of in-between spaces for new signs of identity to emerge is significantly evinced in the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the recent anti-extradition protests. The movements enable spaces for a new political and social psyche of Hong Kong people to emerge. What emerges is a political self that is driven less by neoliberal values and notions of nationality, but one that is epitomized through humanistic notions. Pang Laikwan calls this phenomenon the appearing demos, which encompass a capacity for including differences and otherness—from the shared spaces in the occupied areas in 2014 to the operational slogans during the recent protests, such as “We fight on, each in his own way” (兄弟爬山 各自努力), “don’t split up, don’t snitch on anyone” (不割席、不篤灰), and so on. The new signs of Hong Kong identity emerging from the recent social movements attest to the idea that the appearing demos are “a complex orchestration of similarities and differences, community and individual” (Pang 18). Pang argues that identity involves confounding aspects of humanity such as emotions and attachment, which are variables that testify identity is not at all a fixed marker. Identity often suggests boundaries between different sets of conditions; in this sense, the notion of border in Hong Kong is not a settled notion confined to geopolitical, nationalistic, and ethnic relevance; rather, it is a fleeting notion whereby Hongkongness is constantly manifest.

This article aims to contextualize this fleeting notion of border of Hong Kong in the realm of contemporary art and the participatory creativity during the social movements, namely Lennon Wall. The works of three Hong Kong artists—Samson Young (b. 1979), Luke Ching (b. 1972),

and Tang Kwok-hin (b. 1983)—illustrate and mediate the fluidity of multiple assemblages on boundaries of Hong Kong SAR, and trans-border correlations between Hong Kong and Taiwan. In *Liquid Borders* (2012), Young reveals peculiar tension along the regional boundary between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, as well as the rigidity between psychological boundaries of the two regions. Ching's *Liquefied Sunshine* (2014–2015) conceptualizes the natural and artificial weather phenomena in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and comments on the socio-political realities of the two places by blurring their geographical outlooks. Tang's *Everyday Pandiculate* (2018) is a timely reverberation to the latest uproars ignited by the proposed extradition bill: waves of anti-extradition protests re-define the notions of “I” and the “other”; in his work, Tang contemplates the tension between differences and contingency of borders in the daily banalities in his work. The works of these three artists demonstrate the assembled nature of contemporary art which is cardinal in contributing to the notion of fleetingness in their reflections and also in the works themselves. The assembled nature of creativity that counters the exactitude of border can also be located in the course of the evolution of the Lennon Wall:³ the colorful mosaic of post-it notes with spontaneous expressions demanding freedom, democracy, and other liberties. It first appeared on the wall of the Central Government Complex in Admiralty, Hong Kong, during the Umbrella Movement in 2014. The artistic form of spontaneous expressions traversed physical confinement and sprang up all over the city during the anti-extradition protests in 2019. The notion of assemblage in both art and participatory creativity attest to the fluid nature of border, be it national and

³ See the last section for a discussion on the Lennon Wall.

personal, which underscores the concept of Hongkongness.

The Rhetoric of Boundary

“If nobody cares about the integrity of the border's physical structure, why would the border guard care about me in the first place?” (Yung, “Samson”) Samson Young, a Hong Kong artist, speaks of his experience when a border guard tried to stop him from attaching contact microphone to the fence along the Hong Kong and Shenzhen border and recording the surrounding sound for his artwork *Liquid Borders*. The literal Chinese title of the work, “border of violence” (暴力邊界 *Baoli Bianjie*), reveals figuratively the instability and fluidity of the border which can be dissolved violently. Young visited the Frontier Closed Area in the period of July 2012 to May 2014. He set out to collect sounds that form separation of Hong Kong and the Mainland, then assembled the body of recordings that were comprised mainly of vibrating fence wires captured by contact microphones and running water from the Shenzhen River gathered by hydrophones. Young turns the invisible sound of the frontier into visible graphical notations. The artist rearranges the recordings into sound compositions and re-transcribes these sound collages into graphical notations with the sub-title of the works: “I want to see everything.” He wants to see “everything” before everything is demolished.



Figure 1. Samson Young collecting the sounds in restricted zones along the border of Hong Kong and China. (Image credit: Dennis Leung Man-wing)

Hong Kong and mainland China are physically separated by a wall of wired fencing and the Shenzhen River. South to the border on the Hong Kong side is the Frontier Closed Area; official permission is strictly needed when entering the restricted zone; this used to be the physical representation of the opposing ideologies of the two places. A reduction of the Frontier Close Area was proposed by Hong Kong SAR government in 2006. According to government press releases on January 11, 2008, about 400 hectares was reduced from the area in 2008 (“Plan”), and a further 900 hectares was opened up in January 2016 (Hong Kong Police Force, “The New”). The reduction of the Frontier Closed Area is part of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area project, which aims to merge two special administrative zones of China, namely Hong Kong and Shenzhen, with nine other cities to form a metropolis. The thirty-seven-kilometer-frontier between Hong Kong and Shenzhen will

therefore become nothing but a mythic monument. The shrinking of the border area and the strategic amalgamation of Hong Kong with other Chinese cities paradoxically intensify the invisible, psychological barrier between Hong Kong and the Mainland. The paradox finds resonance in Young's encounter with the border guard who tried to stop him from the sound recording. Young reflects on the conversation he had with the guard as "interesting because it reflects how we've no idea why the border is so significant, and as real as our anxiety is, the reason is less perceptible" (Yung, "Samson"). By recording the dissolving sound of the two sides along the border, Young preserves a sonic trace of the diminishing border, which once functioned as a bar of deterrence but now reduced to ideological and political rhetoric in the context of Hong Kong SAR.

The Liquefied Boundary

Young visualizes and audifies the dissolving border in his works. The notion of dissolving border is not only a material one, but also a constitutional one that is relevant not only to Hong Kong but also to Taiwan. The "One Country, Two Systems" framework constitutes a geopolitical, psychological, and unique constitutional boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland. However, the constitutional difference between the two places is as seemingly unsettled as the physical border between them. The framework was conceived in the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed 1984. It was regarded as an imaginative and mythical notion by then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: "the concept had never previously been put into practice, so whether it could be realized or not would need to be verified in the future. [...]" For the PRC, a Marxist–Leninist country, the state's policy

from the top leadership must be perceived as a prior truth” (Wong 1–2). Invented by Deng Xiaoping, the late President of the People's Republic of China, “One Country, Two Systems” was conceived to claim China’s sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macau; and Hong Kong would be the showcase for the same strategy planned for the reclamation of sovereignty over Taiwan as well. Deng suggested that there would only be one China; yet the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) could retain their own capitalist economic and political systems while the rest of China remained under the socialist system. The principle ensured the separation of power in the SARs. Such a fundamental framework is the result of political negotiation between Britain and the Mainland with supplementary principles of “high degree of autonomy” and “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong.” It promised that Hong Kong’s capitalist system, rights, freedom, and way of life would remain intact for fifty years (Chan 37). However, the line between what is permissible in China and what is not has always been a tenuous one. For some, the recent introduction of the National Security Law on Hong Kong casts doubt on the framework’s supposed promise—the implementation “entirely remains contingent on the bounds of Beijing’s tolerance” (Chan 40). The phrase “to remain unchanged for fifty years” is now a contested commitment.

In the first two decades under Beijing’s rule, there were already cases of contention on the delicate line between the affairs of the Mainland and those of Hong Kong,⁴

⁴ For example, veteran British journalist in Hong Kong, Victor Mallet, was denied a work visa by Hong Kong immigration authorities and barred from entering the city for he hosted a talk in August at the Foreign Correspondents Club featuring a pro-independence activist in 2018. Other cases include the abductions of booksellers of Hong Kong in 2015 and six interpretations of the Basic Law by the People’s Congress.

showing how the notion of boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland set by “One Country, Two Systems” is contested. While the geopolitical boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland is blurring, the psychological boundary between native Hongkongers and the Mainlanders—reflected in daily life—is progressing reversely. In *Liquid Borders*, Young attests to the fluidity and obscurity of boundary: the sound is recorded along the tangible border of Hong Kong and the Mainland; the sound, nonetheless, is invisible. The transcription and notation of the sound into graphic representation renders a process of constant delineation of the boundary. In the artist’s statement, Young mentioned the paradoxical natures of geopolitical, ideological and cultural borders: “[o]ftentimes, we think of national and regional borders as definite, clearly defined and stable. At least, it’s the very images represented on maps. When we have boundaries separating Hong Kong and mainland China so clearly delineated by barbed-wire entanglements, I fear ‘the need to build a more important ideological and cultural firewall between the two divides’ has yet to make its way into public consciousness” (“Samson YOUNG”). The statement was written in early 2014 before the Umbrella Movement. Debates and discussions on a local consciousness—insofar as Hongkongness is concerned—have accelerated since then. The recent anti-extradition protests demonstrate Hongkongers’ deep awareness of the issues of identity and, once again, the urgency to confront along the legal and psychological boundaries. The political and cultural boundaries, however, would not simply be erased by confrontations; instead, they reappeared and reflected constantly in the collective emotion of the city during disturbances (Ma 261).

The shared anxiety towards China and the collective emotion that emerged from confronting such anxiety connect Taiwan with Hong Kong. Hong Kong artist Luke Ching turns the water cannon—often used to suppress protestors in Hong Kong and Taiwan—into a signifier of the correlating realities of the two places in his *Liquefied Sunshine* (2014–2015). *Liquefied Sunshine* is an installation of over a hundred postcards with landmarks and icons symbolizing Hong Kong and Taiwan mounted on a wall. The postcards bear slanted white strokes on them, drawn with correction fluid, which make the entire wall of postcards resemble rainfall. The inspiration behind the work lies in the use of water cannons against protestors in Taiwan’s 2014 Sunflower Movement, and an incident in Hong Kong shortly after that when rain fell through the ceiling of the shopping mall Festival Walk during a storm. Thus, the unpleasant weather phenomena evoked in the installation, be it artificial or natural, render a metaphorical connection between Hong Kong and Taiwan—two places that have been struggling over issues of national, cultural, and political identities. Water cannons were also used in Hong Kong in 2019 to banish protesters, this time using water dissolved in a blue solvent, as if to draw a blue curtain on the protest frontline. The artificial rainfall generated from the water cannon in Ching’s maneuver blurs the cityscapes. The diagonal strokes of rainfall that he reconstructs, therefore, interrupt and cover the sunlit cityscapes of Hong Kong and Taiwan. And since the cityscapes are concealed, the two places on the postcards look identical. Ching’s conceptual and artistic interventions chart poetic and metaphoric pathways to connect Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hong Kong was supposedly the poster example of “One Country, Two Systems” to be showcased to Taiwan; yet in Ching’s

postcards, the cityscape of Hong Kong is being dissolved, symbolic of the contested promise of “One Country, Two Systems.”

“Be Water”

The metaphors of water, fluid, and liquefaction resonate with the transience of “One Country, Two Systems”; in fact, its fleeting nature was already revealed early on in its inception. In a speech in 1987, Deng Xiaoping—the inventor of this unprecedented framework—unveiled its fragile nature only three years after the signing of the Sino–British Joint Declaration.⁵ In a meeting with members of the Committee for Drafting the Basic Law, he said, “[t]he Central Government certainly will not intervene in the day-to-day affairs of the special administrative region, nor is that necessary. But isn’t it possible that something could happen in the region that might jeopardize the fundamental interests of the country?” (Deng 46) What are “the fundamental interests of the country?” Definitions vary across regimes of different Chinese leaders. Deng’s successor Jiang Zemin warned Hong Kong people not to interfere with Mainland issues—“well water should not interfere with river water” (井水不犯河水)⁶—if they do not want Beijing to interfere with Hong Kong affairs. The phrase bluntly communicates an inconvenient truth: Beijing’s leniency toward Hong

⁵ The Sino–British Joint Declaration is a treaty signed between the United Kingdom and China on December 19, 1984, in Beijing. The Declaration stipulates the sovereign and administrative arrangements of Hong Kong after July 1, 1997, when the lease of the New Territories was set to expire according to the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory.

⁶ In a meeting with Percy Cradock, Chairman of British Joint Intelligence Committee, in December 1989, Jiang reminded Hong Kong people that they should refrain from challenging Beijing affairs.

Kong cannot be taken for granted (Chan 40), rendering “One Country, Two Systems” a conditional promise. Fluidity and dissolution, then, do not only echo the complex socio-political realities shared by Hong Kong or Taiwan, but also question the “One Country, Two Systems” promise: well water do interfere with—even *have to* mix with—river water.

At the same time, struggles with the fleeting constitutional and physical borders of Hong Kong gave rise to new signs of identity. “Be Water,” the guiding principle of the 2019 protests in Hong Kong—originally a famous line by the martial arts super star Bruce Lee—attests to a guerilla protest tactic that is shapeless, formless, and transformative. This guiding principle becomes cardinal for new signs to emerge. In the essay “Hong Kong’s Re-emerging in the Cross-Border Politics,” Eric Ma asserts that the cross-cultural imagination between Hong Kong and the Mainland never has a fixed and stable border, but is always in the flux of histories, contingency, and exigency. The notion of Hongkongness is, therefore, constantly in the status of transformation in the discourses of integration and disintegration of Hong Kong and the Mainland (Ma 260).

The Borders in Everyday Life

The notion of the fleeting border is not only registered on the level of national or regional politics, but also in the people’s continuous (re)negotiations with the transformations in their banal everyday life. In the past two decades, disturbances in the forms of protests, demonstrations, and civil disobedience have been transforming Hong Kong, more precisely the essence of Hong Kong. Their implications are not only socio-political, but also extend to the quotidian. It is not rarely

heard that confrontations between different generations on the topic of social movements often ignite familial disputes, and such confrontations transform Hong Kong society. Artist Tang Kwok-hin remarks attributes the escalated conflicts to generational difference, magnified by technological advancement which means not only the elite but also the public can access knowledge and information in split seconds. Tang believes that the notions of “I” and “others” contribute to bringing about the disturbances in Hong Kong since the sovereignty Handover. In his recent project *Every Pandiculate* (2018), Tang leaps beyond the interstices and traverses across others’ daily banalities to negotiate the dissentient present and unknown future. The project started with a traditional dish, *pun coi* (*poon choi* 盤菜 or *pencai* in Mandarin; literally big bowl feast), a Cantonese cuisine served in large wooden, porcelain or metal basins in walled villages in the New Territories for communal consumption in festivals. As a walled village descendant, Tang brings the *pun coi* out of its tradition. In 2017, he invited people to share the dish with him in an art space for the first time, and later realized having a meal together was a way to break the boundary between “I” and “others.”

Numerous *pun coi* dinners with friends, strangers, and the public were then organized; daily trivialities, social issues, cultural phenomena, and art were shared and discussed in the dinners. The dinners thus demonstrate crossings between inclusion and exclusion, individual and community, and displacement and replacement. Tang then invited some of the diners to participate in video recordings for his project. Each interview was shot in two parts—morning and evening—in order to reveal each of the participating diner’s intimate as well as distant instances. They talked to the camera on whatever topics

they like, mostly on personal feelings about family, love, work, and study. Some of the participants were just new friends or strangers to Tang. Lamentations of private and public life, here and there, and of the intimate and the distant are thus revealed in the project; instead of divisions, the binaries are transformed into *in-between spaces* as per Homi Bhabha's assertion (2). Although Bhabha's in-between spaces are investigations on postcolonial cultural diversity; they are useful in explaining the crossing between "I" and "others" as a site of transformation in Tang's *Every Pandiculate*. Novelty will only be produced in "the articulation of differences" that go "beyond narratives of originality and initial subjectivities." The overlapping and crossing of domains of differences in his work constitute a site of negotiation between intersubjective and collective experiences of socio-politics, community interest, and cultural value.



Figure 2. Installation view of *Every Pandiculate* in the exhibition *Our Everyday Our Borders* in *Tai Kwun Contemporary* in 2018.

Tang takes the overlapping domains of differences further by placing the components—videos and dinners—

in a museum. In the form of art installation, the artwork was shown as part of the exhibition *Our Everyday Our Borders* in Tai Kwun Contemporary in 2018. With the *in situ* installation of a bed, a wardrobe filled with clothes, shoe racks, and a living room with a bedframe-turned-projection-screen, *Every Pandiculate* is an intrusion to a white cube. The *in situ* installation was set on a platform; visitors were encouraged to take off their shoes, walk onto the installation and do whatever they like, be it watching videos, sleeping, reading or simply spacing out. Various events such as book talks, music performances, and a closing dinner party, were arranged. Whatever they do at the site of the artwork, visitors were in fact probing the limits of museum—they were no longer merely visitors, but participants as well. The process of art making and the final exhibit encompasses numerous juxtapositions, namely between public event and private dinner, individual memory and collective experiences, intimacy and distance, and “you” and “I.” These components of collage form a larger juxtaposition when shown in the museum, enabling multilayered interactions. The concept of border in *Every Pandiculate* is thus troubled since border here does not refer to conventional notions of exclusiveness and sameness; rather, differences are tolerated while notions of “I” and “others,” “here” and “there,” and “placement” and “displacement” remain.

Contingent Assemblage

Hong Kong in its pseudo-postcolonial era is in a peculiar state. Unlike the postcolonial states such as India and Singapore that became independent, Hong Kong’s nationality is hard to define, given it is home to residents of all ethnicities. Independence too is a political impossibility. In the last two decades, disruptions and

protests have put Hong Kong in a constant state of contingency and transformation. The unsettling disruptions call for alliance in heterogeneity in which differences will be respected and hegemonic domination is never an option.

The overlapping domains of differences in the works of Young, Ching, and Tang demonstrate Deleuzian assemblage, a heterogeneous mechanism that enables liaisons and relations to happen across boundaries. Assemblage in Deleuze's assertion is

a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy.' It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind. (Deleuze and Parnet 69)

The notions of fluidity and border are manifest in the works of the three artists, the unsettling nature enabling negotiations of differences and assemblages of multiplicity. In Young's case, the juxtaposition and dissonance of audio and visual materials unveil paradoxes of socio-political and cultural borders between Hong Kong and China, behind which are tensions in the everyday life of Hong Kong such as the Individual Visit Scheme⁷ and

7 The Individual Visit Scheme began on July 28, 2003. It allowed travelers from mainland China to visit Hong Kong and Macau on an individual basis. Prior to the Scheme, Mainland residents could only visit Hong Kong and Macau on business visas or in group tours. The scheme brought an immediate surge in the number of Mainland visitors. In the short period from July 28 to November 4, 2003, more than 600,000 individuals in the Mainland applied for visas, and 450,000 visas were

parallel trading. The ever-changing weather in Ching's work highlights political and social correlations between Taiwan and Hong Kong; social movements that happened in the two places negotiate trans-border resonance; entwining the fates of the two places. This is further seen in the note of support—"a free Taiwan stands up for Hong Kong's freedom" (自由的台灣撐住香港的自由)—written by Tsai Ing-wen when she visited the re-opened Causeway Bay Bookstore in Taipei.⁸ Tang's work transforms the tensions in the notions of "I" and "others" into assemblages of multiplicity that allow interactions across boundaries.

A clear example of assemblages used in artwork can be found in the large-scale Lennon Wall in the recent 2019 protests. The Lennon Wall first came into being during the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and was a mosaic wall located at the Central Government Complex near Harcourt Road. It was a collective creative work of spontaneous free expression in the form of more than ten thousand colorful post-it notes stuck on the façade of the government headquarters, demanding democracy, expressing dissatisfaction with politicians, and encouraging Hong Kong people to fight for universal suffrage of Chief Executive and Legislative Council

issued. The number of visitors under the scheme reached two million in May 2004. The number has reached to forty-five million in 2016, 5.5-time increase since its implementation.

8 Causeway Bay Books (銅鑼灣書店) is an independent bookstore in Taipei which until December 2015 was an upstairs bookstore located in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. The first bookstore in Hong Kong was popular with tourists from mainland China looking for books on Chinese politics and politicians which were not available in mainland China. In late 2015, five people associated with the store disappeared, sparking international concern. The first bookstore closed after the disappearance of its last staff member, Lee Bo, in December 2015. A second version of the bookstore was opened by Lam Wing-kee in Taipei in April 2020.

members. On these notes were epigrams, lyrics, poems, foreign words and hand-drawn graphics. During the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests, the Lennon Wall has evolved into sets of assemblages scattered across the city, typically near transport interchanges. The constellation of Lennon Walls is a manifestation of Manuel DeLanda's idea of binary scales—the micro and the macro, or in Deleuzian terms, the “molecular” and the “molar”—of component parts in assemblage; the binary scales refer to the relations between smaller components in an assemblage, and an assemblage can also be component of an even larger set of assemblages. Each Lennon Wall can therefore be understood as a wall composing of written messages, but also as a component of a constellation of numerous walls scattered in different districts. The Lennon Wall can also be understood in what DeLanda calls “larger assemblages.” In this nested set of assemblages, every level of the assemblage exists

as part of populations: populations of persons, pluralities of communities, multiplicities of organisations, collectives of urban centres, and it is from interactions within these populations that larger assemblages emerge as statistical result, or as a collective unintended consequence of intentional action. (DeLanda 20-21)

Messages on the Lennon Walls were mainly objections to the extradition bill proposal, but there were other socio-political demands such as opposition to the East Lantau reclamation project, anxiety concerning the Social Credit System, call for universal suffrage, complaints against police brutality, and so on, underpinning the struggle over the subjectivity of Hong Kong.

There were attempts to revive the Lennon Wall at the Central Government Complex in Admiralty in 2019 as well, but unlike the Umbrella Movement, plans to occupy the government headquarters in 2019 were thwarted by the riot police soon after the protests started. Various Lennon Walls then started to spring up across the city as observance of the “Be Water” protest principle. The walls appeared in different locations, including subways, footbridges, road signages, shop windows, lamp posts, and even on human bodies. The most spectacular one was in the pedestrian subway near Tai Po Market train station; it extended in all directions to the walls of all the branches of the subway. The colorful assemblages of messages were often torn up by the pro-government supporters, but the tactic of “Be Water” was deployed and colorful paper-note assemblages then appeared all across the city and became more enduring art forms such as paintings, stencils, paper sculptures and many more. Restaurants deemed to be in the “yellow economic circle”⁹ also made room for small-scale Lennon Walls to show support to the protests. After the implementation of the National Security Law, many of the restaurants replaced the written messages with blank post-its. The assemblages of equally colorful but now blank post-its thus transcend their function as message boards to a creative form that symbolizes the spirit of the social movements. Without any text written on it, the material and aesthetic form of the Lennon Wall assemblage itself conveys the spirit and solidarity of the movements.

⁹ The protests in 2014 and 2019 have bred stubborn fissure of opinions in Hong Kong society. The yellow color represents largely the liberal, pro-democracy camp, and the blue color is used by the pro-establishment, police-supporting camp. The “yellow economic circle” refers to a group of shops and restaurants identified by protesters as sharing the same democratic yearning.

The works of Young, Ching, and Tang render the notion of national border in contemporary Hong Kong as always unsettling, complex, entangled, and transformative; they also reflect the tensions between the psychological barrier and the physical border, which ignited the disturbances in Hong Kong after 1997. Paradoxically, the threats brought by the dissolving boundaries between Hong Kong and the Mainland were countered during the Umbrella Movement and the recent anti-extradition bill protests by the notions of fleeting boundaries, but in another sense—assemblages of Lennon Walls signifying the tolerance towards differences in striving for what Pang Laikwan calls “a space of cohabitation” (91).

In *The Appearing Demos*, Pang LaiKwan argues that the Umbrella Movement in 2014 was not a political assembly where the participants shared coherent political ideology, belief, and goals: “rather, it was the protesters’ act of living together for a prolonged period in a public space for public issues. Its duration shows both the level of tolerance expressed by the involved governments and the determination and persistence displayed by the occupiers” (31). The 2014 movement demonstrated the blurring of boundaries between “I” and “others.” Although the Umbrella Movement ended with a feeling of loss and disappointment, the spirit of standing together cascaded to the recent protests and metamorphosed into the “Be Water” tactic which accentuated the notions of adjustment, change, and tolerance. In Pang’s book, she asserts the blurring boundary between “I” and “others” using the example of a female public toilet on Connaught Road Central in 2014; the toilet was maintained by the protesters, and maintained a high standard of sanitation for the public use. The spirit of selfless altruism was also demonstrated when protesters tried to protect not just

their peers amid the chaos and brutality, but also safeguarded the passers-by, children, and senior citizens.

The Lennon Wall epitomizes the spirit of solidarity amid differences; its form re-incarnated as a borderless contingency that echoes the new signs of Hongkongness. Hong Kong is always associated with being an international financial hub, pragmatic, well-off, quick-witted, and calculating in quantifiable, material terms. The movements in 2014 and 2019, however, have opened up in-between spaces for the emergence of new associations about Hong Kong—a fleeting, transformative, and tolerant existence—which is metamorphosing into a more humanistic notion.

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