



TIFFANY SIA
SLIPPERY WHEN WET
ARTISTS SPACE

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The works on view usurp freight channels to make the shortest distance between two places: Between New York and Hong Kong. Between Artists Space and Speculative Place. An obsessive material accumulation of intimacy between geographies emerges about wormholes; about cunts; observing the affective space between antipodes. How can I dig your way to Hong Kong?

This is a show that proposes a wet ontology of Hong Kong—a city in ongoing transfiguration shifting into an uncanny vision of itself. Hong Kong secretes, leaving a trail of ink, tears, humidity, logistic flows and leaks. "Social theory has failed also to account for time as lived," Achille Mbembe challenges, "not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change beloved of so many historians.¹ Illuminating the durations of lived time versus what we know and understand to be History: How is the passing of time in crisis felt? A wet finger in the air trying to grasp the cusp of change is unable to locate its dimensions. The air is as immaterial and unseeable as this moment.

Inspired by Hamid Naficy's The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles, the show picks up from Naficy's proposition that television and media are vehicles through which exilic communities construct themselves and find belonging in a new place. Spectatorship becomes a potent site for exiles at large, drawing such relations to the Hong Kong community now (and between other diasporic communities for whom return to the birthplace is impossible). Television and print media afford a tantalizing touch with the old place, as individuals in exile approximate, at best, a connection. Still, one is left with an uncanny pastiche of mirrors and nostalgic simulations. From Salty Wet: "Every Chinatown is a simulacra of Hong Kong."² The crux of these works, as threads, wrestle with the slipperiness of the original place as it recedes into the imaginary, yet with a nearness that cannot be easily grasped or surmounted.

These various new works move across screens and paper surfaces to activate wormholes that draw the shortest distance between two places. The central piece, The Bastard Scroll, presents as a dare to read in its entirety. An image of the Hong Kong skyline flickers as a projection in a lounge space. The projected image shifts into a weeklong, episodic live-streamed landscape film, marking the changeover to daylight savings when New York and Hong Kong are in exact antipodes in timezone. A row of the newly published book, Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕, serves as the show's vertebrae, and sits as a mirrored barrier on a shelf, slowly disappearing over time. On stacked cube monitors, a three-channel video cycles through archival weather reports.

Humidity accumulates on the windows. A blank scroll precariously blows in the vestibule. One falls headlong into a page that unfurls as a scroll.

The haptics of moving images and paper precipitate, threading a slippery outline of relations, timelines and placehood. 小心地滑。³

THREAD I [THE BASTARD SCROLL]

On dot matrix paper, upon which receipts are printed, The Bastard Scroll is a provocation against the official or so-called legitimate receipts of history. Printed continuously, the scroll form is spread over a long table and spills onto a chair. The text is also leaked in full online. This complete, consensual leak of Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕 takes inspiration from media studies scholar and former Speculative Place resident, Alysse Kushinski, who poses, "The escape of a fluid, the leak also embodies more poetic tendencies: rupture, release, and disclosure."⁴

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Campaigns of suppression and assault through lawfare conversely present in the exhaustive, meticulous and intentionally oblique legal dealings of fine print. Critical information is smuggled as a dense and unrelenting stack of lyric and prose in fine print. What is occluded—and sometimes redacted—demands the reader the duty to infer.

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Calligraphy by Jonathan Yu for Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕

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Discontinued in 2013, IBM System I was a midrange computer platform, generally referred to as "AS/400" or "AS400." These systems print onto continuous paper through dot matrix printers, receiving transnational transmissions, for example, from North America to Hong Kong, or committing production orders onto physical receipts. Dot matrix printers spit ink onto paper of various designs, from green and white lined paper, to three-layered, tricolor paper reels, to plain white sheets. This printed form

served as a legally binding document,⁵ whereby disputes over production orders, for example, would be settled by citing dot matrix receipts as evidence.

The software interface of AS/400 was threadbare: black screen and green text functioned only through commands by punching F keys. Any amendments to orders, however small, would necessitate reprinting. This system was so ubiquitous and dominant that it was still used by companies such as Ralph Lauren until the early 2010s. Shrill from the sound of the ink jet oscillating back and forth in the motion of a weaving loom, these printers soundtracked offices in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s. Dot matrix scrolls are also seen in the Hong Kong stock exchange, with a printer sitting atop each trader's desk.

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A PDF is divided into pages, each of a specific size. It is electronic paper.

Like Translate Report

Reply

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On the table, the continuous paper scroll is staged to show the section in the text about mourning cities, "Mourning cities has existed throughout history, and observing loss and the irrevocable change in Hong Kong reckoned essentially with an abstraction. What does it really mean for a city to die? Mourning a person has comparisons."⁶, leading into an extended passage about history "as a series of receipts":

History unfurls as a series of receipts that show an assemblage of primary and secondary accounts. In a story that focused so much on macro-transactions—geopolitical lobbying, blockbuster IPOs that moved capital from one stock exchange to another, luxury real estate speculation in overdrive, and the dizzying lawfare—what are the artifacts in this event for the history of tears? In the digital age, what will primary sources resemble? Will bibliographers be sorting through DMs, WhatsApp and Telegram messages, Twitter accounts, e-mails, et cetera? What will the rooms of all this data they have on us amount to when we are dead?⁷

In official accounts, whether in news or school textbooks, what is belied by censor or shame? Where are the frontlines of resistance today? How must we bear witness to these disappearing receipts of history?

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On your computer screen or phone, the scroll unfurls by the flick of a finger. Although behind glass or via reproductions, viewing ancient scrolls is similarly a self-led experience. Walking alongside scrolls as they are presented in museums, some several meters long, you, the viewer, are driving the pace at which information is received. If you are lucky enough to have access and touch a

scroll, you unfurl it, shoulder-width, panel by panel. This paper form, as an unfurling medium, is the quintessential mode through which Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕 is read, mirroring the digital timeline. The Bastard Scroll enters the visual vernacular of an ancient form that pivots into a contemporary action.

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The holes that border the continuous paper catch on sprockets to feed through the printer, echoing the design of celluloid film. Is celluloid film not also a type of scroll? What is a scroll but a curly piece of paper? Our devices present "infinite scroll."

An entire ink ribbon cartridge is needed to print Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕, so as The Bastard Scroll prints, it exhausts the ink, getting lighter page after page. The sounds of the machine are particularly shrill and rhythmic when it prints images. It takes up to a minute to print a full page, and the paper, unspooling in an ungainly pile, easily jams the printer. This is a receipt.

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Unknown Internet Source

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The table and chair, as domestic elements, make known the presence of both the author and the reader as specters. One imagines a body seated at the end of this long table with a scroll on her lap. The body must be foregrounded in relation to this text, since its core thinking is about the place of affect in history. The initial idea was a vitrine, which in contrast feels inappropriately disembodied, as a display vernacular representative of retail spaces, museums and institutional archives, contrary to the text's objectives as a bastard scroll that belongs to a so-called illegitimate archive.

The table and the chair root this piece in Speculative Place, an artist-led non-institution, project space and residency in Hong Kong. Located on Lamma Island, the space is first and foremost a home and domestic space.

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By noticing the objects that appear in Husserl's writing, we get a sense of how being directed toward some objects and not others involves a more general orientation toward the world. The philosopher is oriented toward the writing table, as the object on which writing happens, which means keeping other things and rooms relegated to the background. After all, it is not surprising that philosophy is full of tables. As Ann Banfield observes in her wonderful book *The Phantom Table*: "Tables and chairs, things nearest to hand for the sedentary philosopher, who comes to occupy chairs of philosophy, are the furniture of that 'room of one's own' from which the real world is observed." Tables are "near to hand" along with chairs as the furniture that secures the very "place" of philosophy. The use of tables shows us the very orientation of philosophy in part by showing us what is proximate to the body of the philosopher or what the philosopher comes into contact with.

Given this, the sameness of the object involves the specter of absence and nonpresence. I do not see it as itself. I cannot view the table from all points of view at once. Given that the table's sameness can only be intended, Husserl makes what is an extraordinary claim: *Only the table remains the same*. The table is the only thing that keeps its place in the flow of perception. The sameness of the table is hence spectral. If the table is the same, it is only because we have conjured its missing sides. Or, we can even say that we have conjured its behind. I want to relate what is "missed" when we "miss" the table to the spectrality of history, what we miss may be behind the table in another sense: what is behind the table is what must have already taken place for the table to arrive.

Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations Matter." In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. Duke University Press. 2010. 237-239.

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"If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places - the activities that are intimately associated with boredom - are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeated stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unraveled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship."

Walter Benjamin⁹

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THREAD II [BASTARD TONGUE]

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I want other bastard accounts. I want you to write bastard accounts.

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A suspended blank dot matrix continuous scroll hangs from the ceiling, landing in

a stack onto the floor in the vestibule below. The gesture holds space for the unaccounted receipts of our timelines opening up to invite multiple authors towards the history of receipts. Taking up this line in Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕, "The task of grasping the history of occupation and the fact of ongoing occupation in your hands lies in the urgency and necessity to shed light on its gaping absence in our oral histories, where perhaps shame has belied it."⁹ This silent void—where disappearance, censorship or shame have rendered pages blank—is the first and last piece introducing itself to a viewer in Artists Space. On windy days, the door opening and letting air in from Cortlandt Alley might cause the paper to sway. Its thin white surface may pick up debris and dust over the several weeks it dangles in the space. The Bastard Tongue licks in the wind. Its vertical descent is meant to suggest a timeline, tumbling downwards between floors and sets of staircases—hellward.

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"The contemporary secret does not inhabit one of two registers exclusively: known or unknown, illuminated or obscure. It functions, rather, as an ideological toy and performative gesture both: its visible withholding is as critical to its power as whatever content we might imagine the secret contains. As we draw down this reading of think tank aesthetics, I argue that ours is a peculiar visual economy twinning concealment and hypervisibility as strategically continuous, two sides of the same coin, serving notice to the stockpiling of information as power. The open secret, as I'll call it, announces its clandestine bona fides by virtue of its appearance while propelling the fantasy of a media trafficking in the free exchange of information. It's a dynamic fundamentally troubled by a public sphere compromised by both the quantity and quality of its revelations, and no less by the systems of control that govern such revelations."

Pamela M. Lee¹⁰

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"Pro-democracy lawmakers raise white papers to protest during a meeting to discuss the new national security law at the Legislative Council in Hong Kong."¹¹

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In a time of ongoing lawfare, a piece of paper, devoid of content, marks simultaneous erasure, threat, resistance and evasion. White paper refers to policy papers, whether a report or guide, issued by a government or any issuing body on the analysis of a specific event or issue. White paper is an official form that originates from the British government, an integral part of the paper trail of colonial history. Examples include the White Paper of 1939 issued by the British government on the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt in Palestine, to the 1969 White Paper issued by the Canadian government on the elimination of Indian Status of Indigenous peoples, to The Practice of the 'One Country, Two Systems' Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region published in June of 2014, months shy of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. White papers in these contexts are not at all void, but are a collection of letters marking a critical point in each historical timeline. An accumulation. Precipitation. A precursor.

THREAD III [A WET FINGER IN THE AIR]



Inspired by the ambient forms of eight hour repeating audio or ASMR videos available on YouTube, a three-channel

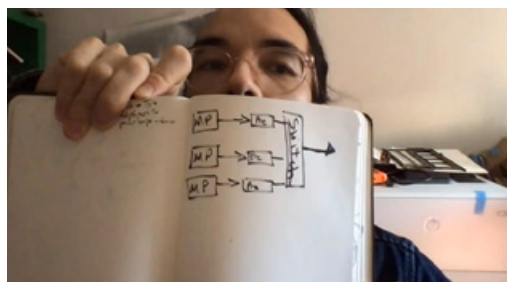
installation on stacked cube monitors is arranged with the top monitor at eye-level for a viewer of approximately 5'6" in height. An audio switcher directs the audio to play from one monitor at a time for approximately 30-seconds before alternating to the next. In total, there are 9 videos in cycle. Each weather woman delivers the forecast, reporting on the time, degrees in Celsius, chance of precipitation and relative humidity of Hong Kong. Some reports are given in English and others in Cantonese, where subtitles are withheld. The format across these reports is roughly the same: A weather jingle introduces each; the weather women speak with a greenscreen background of the city skyline; a map is shown, and an animated character, Freddy, appears in each weather report to emote disappointment or elation about the weather ("Ooh" or "Aah"). All footage is collected from the 1980s and 1990s and assembled into an ambient weave across time.

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One has to wonder about the narratives that pass in the clandestine or in the unseen. A wet finger in the air, feeling for change and trying to penetrate its dimensions. The air is as immaterial and unseeable as this moment.

There was another narrative at play among Hong Kong people that drove at the invisible discourse of the spirit, telling of how our bodies, like this city, endured through the cloudy, tenuous ineffability of this historical event. We were to emerge, transfigured, at an epochal shift we had yet to meet.¹²

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Joshua Gen Solondz, filmmaker, artist and former Speculative Place resident, holds up a hand-drawn flowchart for the three-channel installation's path into an automated switcher via Skype

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THREAD I/ (HONG KONG IS A FICTIVE PROCESS)



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The above still is from an altered image taken of the Hong Kong skyline from 1988, showing the construction of the Bank of China building in the foreground,

along with a view of the harbor and the opposite Kowloon peninsula. Designed by the renowned architect I.M. Pei, the Bank of China building had features that were believed by Feng Shui experts to be inauspicious and threatening to the buildings surrounding it—and to Hong Kong itself. A series of triangular shapes and angular lines, appearing knife-like, were believed to be sowing threat and bad energy. The design was highly criticized for disregarding Feng Shui principles, which many in the city take seriously. Various architectural features in the surrounding area were subsequently constructed, including a cannon-like structure on the top of the HSBC building, to retaliate, ward off or diffuse the bad energy emanating from the I.M. Pei building. Feng Shui as a form of occult, architectural practice. "Salting the earth" is the idiom for desecrating a conquered city and rendering its land arid and uninhabitable.¹³ But ruled by superstition, bad luck or unfortunate and tragic events are speculated, whether explicable or predictable, by the occult belief of Feng Shui.

The shimmering effect over the image takes inspiration from a neurological hallucination—as if your brain is creating a glitch in your vision—called a scintillating scotoma. If one sees this in their vision, it is likely a harbinger of a migraine to soon come. And if it persists, it can indicate more serious neurological complications.

A screenshot of a Google search for "what is a scintillating scotoma". The search results show about 45,900 results in 0.65 seconds. There are four image thumbnails at the top. Below them is a text snippet defining a scotoma as an aura or blind spot that obstructs part of your vision. There is also a link to a healthline article titled "Scintillating Scotoma: Causes, Treatment, Risk Factors". At the bottom, there are three animated depiction thumbnails.

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In America, the Hong Kong skyline often appears in Chinese takeout restaurants, as seen in large sun-bleached photographs alongside food items. Images of Hong Kong in the popular Western imagination are ubiquitous, enigmatic and often mundane. Travel booking websites regularly feature the Hong Kong skyline, a testament to a city that exists as a kind of visual shorthand for globalism: a non-place¹⁴ that is familiar but exotic. In the global imaginary, Hong Kong emerges through the image trail of Blade Runner, flight simulations, Wong Kar-wai films, gangster movies, banking ads and video games.

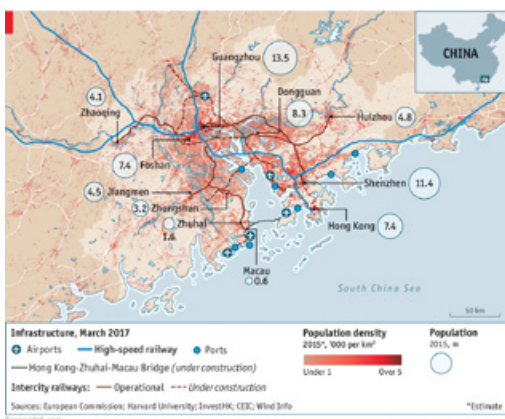


Sun-bleached photograph under a lightbox of the Hong Kong skyline. Over 20 years old, the photograph hangs at John Garden on Nostrand Avenue in Crown Heights in Brooklyn, New York. Taken in 2017.



A lounge area in Island Spa, a Korean spa in New Jersey, projecting a slow computer-generated pan of the Hong Kong skyline as ambient footage. Taken in 2017.

"The Pearl River Delta is the material birthplace of globalism, and on a map, it even looks like a cunt. A dirty joke lies in this map: look at it one way and you see the Pearl River Delta, look at it another way and you see a cunt. Look at it another way and you see the Greater Bay Area. Hong Kong was always built for extraction."¹⁵



THREAD U [A ROAD MOVIE IS IMPOSSIBLE IN HONG KONG]

A Road Movie is Impossible in Hong Kong attempts to live-stream a landscape film of weeklong, episodic duration. Each 30 to 40-minute short film begins exactly at the moment of official sunrise in Hong Kong, broadcasting each day's sunrise moment at a time when the sun has fully set in New York. The schedule reflects as follows:

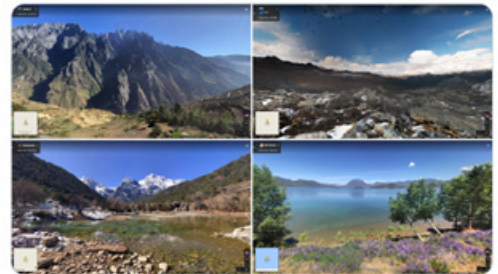
- Sunday, March 14 @ 6:32 PM EST /
- Monday, March 15 @ 6:32 AM HKT Sunrise
- Monday, March 15 @ 6:31 PM EST /

- Tuesday, March 16 @ 6:31AM HKT Sunrise
- Tuesday, March 16 @ 6:30 PM EST /
- Wednesday, March 17 @ 6:30 AM HKT Sunrise
- Wednesday, March 17 @ 6:29 PM EST /
- Thursday, March 18 @ 6:29 AM HKT Sunrise
- Thursday, March 18 @ 6:29 PM EST /
- Friday, March 19 @ 6:29 AM HKT Sunrise
- Friday, March 19 @ 6:28 PM EST /
- Saturday, March 20 @ 6:28 AM HKT Sunrise
- Saturday, March 20 @ 6:27 PM EST /
- Sunday, March 21 @ 6:27 AM HKT Sunrise

Inspired by a series of personal correspondences from 2016 and a lecture by Hong Kong film critic and programmer Clarence Tsui at Hong Kong Baptist University, the work takes up the provocation that a road movie is impossible in Hong Kong. Tsui's lecture on the sociopolitical circumstances upon filmmaking began with a challenge that the "road movie," an American cinema trope, is not translatable to Hong Kong due to specific factors in the city. Namely, that the longest distance to drive between two points takes no more than two hours, and that few have cars in a city where public transportation is dominant, affordable and efficient.



Imagining a Kerouac-figure in China has been a persistent fantasy of mine, so I speculate digitally via Googlemap photo spheres

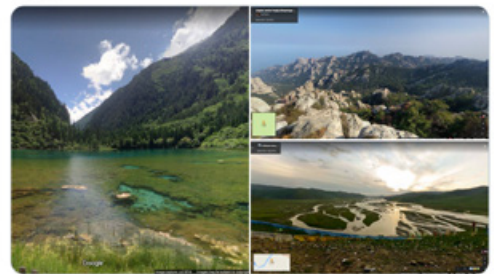


10:26 PM · Nov 1, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



Replying to @tiffany4scale

More!



10:33 PM · Nov 1, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

I read Kerouac's On The Road during the Bush era when gas prices were at their all-time high. The notion of the unfurling road as liberating already felt outdated and impossible. Who feels safe on the expanding road alone? Who gets pulled over? For whom is this site one of possibility and recreation, and for whom is it not? And further still, if not in America, what does a road movie elsewhere look like? The road movie is fenced in by a tacit premise of sociopolitical circumstances. For a filmmaker or writer to envision the possibility of such narratives, the lack of freedom to traverse open space and landscape itself complicates this vision; that land must be romantic, open for recreation and infinitely permeable. In Hong Kong, indeed a road movie is

impossible. The city is not vast, but broken up by the sea into several different islands. Yet still, how can a Hong Konger imagine a road movie on the Mainland? What of those vast spaces?

Wanting a road movie is fraught. But, there is still something romantic about the desire to see it realized. Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami described driving as the quintessentially cinematic experience of life:

My car's my best friend. My office. My home. My location. I have a very intimate sense when I am in a car with someone next to me. We're in the most comfortable seats because we're not facing each other, but sitting side by side. We don't look at each other, but instead do so only when we want to. We're allowed to look around without appearing rude. We have a big screen in front of us and side views. Silence doesn't seem heavy or difficult. Nobody serves anybody. And many other aspects. One most important thing is that it transports us from one place to another.¹⁶

Galcher Lustwerk, Cleveland native and New York-based musician who raps and produces deep-house instrumentals, describes driving as a meditative:

I miss driving. I grew up in Cleveland, you drive everywhere; living in New York, you don't drive. I get anxiety from not driving. Driving was my form of meditation. And I also miss listening to music and driving—that's the best way to listen to music. You just kind of zone out. Driving's so futuristic—you're barely putting in any effort, and this huge machine is pummeling down a strip of concrete.¹⁷

In A Road Movie is Impossible in Hong Kong, we begin with a hike. Overlook points across Lamma Island provide various views, from the south of Hong Kong Island, the South China Sea, to the harbor and shipping channel through which commercial cargo ships enter the port of Hong Kong. On some days Lantau Island can be seen vividly, and on other days it is enshrouded by smog or mist.

On Lamma Island, there are WWII-era Kamikaze Caves left over from Japanese occupation, connecting mountaintop lookouts surveying the South China Sea to the shores through a circuit of dynamite-blown and manually-dug tunnels. These caves were used to conceal speedboats that were launched by the Imperial Japanese Navy on suicide missions against enemy ships.¹⁸ Shortly before the surrender of Hong Kong, Japanese ships prepared a Kamikaze attack from the caves on Lamma Island.¹⁹ When the Imperial Japanese Navy lost to Allied Forces, the negotiation of their surrender took place on Lamma Island. The island is also the place of the earliest signs of human life in the region, dating back 4,000 years to the Yue people.²⁰ There is a power plant on the island, which supplies Hong Kong Island with electricity, and the first

commercial-scale wind turbine in the city. The dissident poet Ma Jian, when he lived in Hong Kong, resided on Lamma Island.²¹ As a Permanent Resident in Hong Kong, if you live on Lamma for seven years, an older resident told me, you have the right to be buried there when you die (unlike other areas in Hong Kong where burial is scarce and extremely expensive).²² There are no cars on the island.

The hike begins at various points across the island. Each walk will afford you a new view, and some repeating views, observing the regularity and repetition of sea traffic. There is a voice behind the camera as it broadcasts, breathing. From Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕: "A live-stream moves with a body: the feed shakes synchronically to each step, recording at times the breathlessness of the person holding the device as they run to capture the critical moment."²³

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Kathy Acker: The Language of The Body²⁴

Every day, in the gym, I repeat the same controlled gestures with the same weights, the same reps,... The same breath patterns. But now and then, wandering within the labyrinths of my body, I come upon something. Something I can know because knowledge depends on difference. An unexpected event. For though I am only repeating certain gestures during certain time spans, my body, being material, is never the same; my body is controlled by change and by chance.

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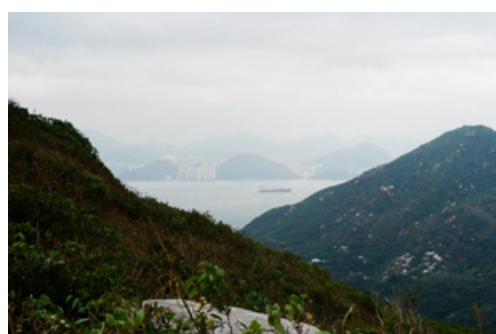
Untitled, 2018.

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Untitled #2, 2018.

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Untitled #3, 2018.

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THREAD VI [BARRIERS BUY TIME]

An installation of Too Salty Too Wet 更咸更濕 books are arranged in a long row, appearing as a kind of mylar barrier. Stacked with their spines facing out, the reflective foil jacket will pick up dust from the space, oil from hands and indentations from edges it encounters. These accumulated imperfections are part of its design. The markings make known its production process, and the path the book then takes. Over time, this row of books is depleted by each copy that's taken.



A picture of the finished books sent from the printer in Hong Kong

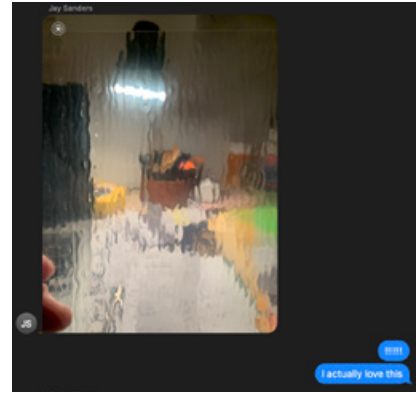
Laying out a text that is a dare to read in its entirety buys me time for an audience to catch up, if one ever makes it to this line. Many parts hide in plain sight. A resistant text is also an exhaustive and relentless one. An homage to Evan Calder Williams' critical writing on barricades and resistance architecture, the work references, as well, Williams' lecture "Flexible Cages: Securitization and Revolt Within and Beyond Educational Architectures." Williams asserts, "Provisional materials that are suddenly made modular or torn up stand little chance. If anything, what stops that full advance of aggression is not a built structure but the mutable contract of bracketed or limited aggression."²⁵ In Cantonese, there's this saying: 撞住支筆搵食, which means "to make a living through writing." It translates literally as, "to hold a pen to find food," as if mocking writers with the implicit paradox: Could your pen, or word processor, indeed feed you? Indeed, what does poetic response in various forms get me? These are mere provisional materials, which stand little chance. Instead, this work buys me time, and is a site of bracketed and ongoing processing. Building a barrier of facts, an unfuckable text.

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THREAD VII [TOO WET]

Artists Space's Cortlandt Alley address is an inherently humid space. The entrance windows seen from Cortlandt are made to appear as if they are opaque with condensation.

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When looking at photographs of the Hong Kong protests from the summer of 2019 splashed on front pages and across social media timelines, these images miss the fact of intense humidity and the beating heat of the subtropical sun. They don't convey how hot it is underneath surgical masks and gas masks, and that in black clothes and in subtropical heat, you feel as though you are being broiled. Or how condensation builds and fogs up the visor, making it hard to see, especially if you're wearing one of those full-face gas masks. In the mask, you can hear yourself breathing, laboriously, with the sounds around you muffled. A thick layer of wetness forms along the top of your lip, without any space to ventilate, and it bakes under the hot sun with no respite. I bought an anti-fog spray, but I always forgot to use it when I was out there. It got lost in my huge pack, filled with saline, snacks, a light jacket, gas mask filters, wet wipes and battery packs for my phone. Even in the intensity of subtropical heat, it was the hottest summer on record, and that fact remained unexceptional relative to other headlines. The immense wetness under the hot sun added weight and lethargy to push against when you're running. But understanding the humidity as not only a feature of Hong Kong's climate, but a fluctuating narrative alongside events is to observe the relentlessness of wetness.

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can only produce a sentimental politics. What we need to do, rather, is break out of the psychological poverty which forms part of today's crisis culture, in which everyone conspires in condemning pessimism as immoral. In fact, this immorality is our last chance. But, deep down, why should this situation be resolved?

Perhaps it is better that the political sphere should rot away altogether. We are no longer in a primitive society where the rotting of the body was consciously hastened in order to help it achieve the dignity of death more quickly. We, by contrast, savour the decay, enervation and disgrace of our energies, the fact that they are beyond recall.

The abjection of our political situation is the only true challenge today. Only facing up to this situation in all its desperation can help us get out of it. We should use the energy of catastrophe as we should use tidal or solar energy or that produced by earthquakes. When fossil fuel deposits, stable energies are exhausted, we should turn to the energies of breakdown, to the seismic and the fractal. Perhaps one day, we shall even draw some energy from the night itself? It is the same for mental energies: when the positive energies run out, one must seek an outcome to an event from its taking a diabolic twist, from its maximum disequilibrium, its precipitation. A fatal strategy, but one that is of our time. Isn't energy itself a form of catastrophe?

Baudrillard, Jean. Cool Memories. Galilée, 1990. 190-191.

THREAD VIII [IN PLAIN SIGHT]

Coin-sized, LED stage markers are used to mark where one is standing when in the center frame of surveillance cameras across the space. This notes where you are in plain sight.

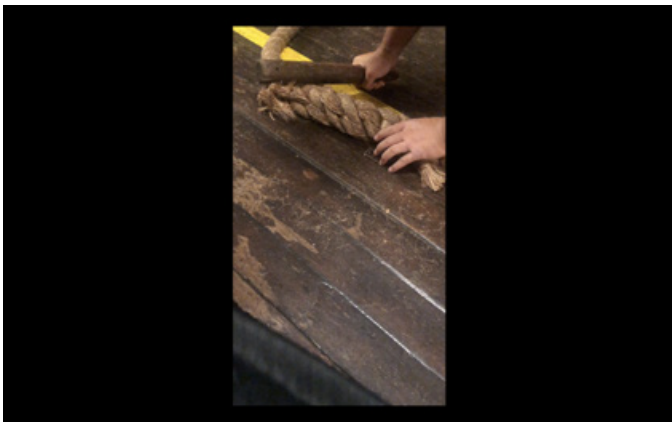


A stage marker for a politician's speech 26

Message boards were flooded with phoneticized Cantonese to thwart bots; tweets in obtuse language mitigated replies; hot or trending words were redacted by changing a letter to a number; face recognition and fingerprint unlock turned off on phones; suspicious accounts with 0 followers were blocked; accounts with a joined date of June 2019 were blocked and muted; laser pointers were used to disrupt filming. Frontliners would call out in coded meaning, "It's raining! Everyone should put their umbrellas up," prompting umbrellas to open to shield against surveillance from helicopters overhead or cops filming from higher ground. What could be described as folk infrastructure of thwarting, or crowd-sourced innovative tactics around security always lead back for me to this line from Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer's prescient science-fiction thriller, Empty Metal: "Privacy is not a right. It is not even an instinct. It has to be learned and taught by people."²⁷



THREAD IX [NEVER REST/UNREST]



Never Rest/Unrest (2020), 28 mins

Never Rest/Unrest is a hand-held short film by Tiffany Sia about the relentless political actions in Hong Kong, spanning early summer to late 2019. The experimental short is an adaptation of the artist's practice of scaling oral history, of showing political crisis

in Hong Kong as ephemeral stories on Instagram for the past year. Never Rest/Unrest takes up the provocation of Julio Garcia Espinosa's "Imperfect Cinema" on the potential for anti-colonial filmmaking, aiming towards an urgent, process-driven cinema while resisting dominant narratives of crisis pushed by news journalism. Instead, crisis poses ambiguous, anachronistic and often banal time. Subtitles are intentionally omitted as a means of interrogating the cultural proximity or distance of the viewer from Hong Kong.

THREAD X [TL;DR]

The tenth and final thread is this text. This text was written on a Google Doc in the course of planning the show.

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Tiffany Sia: *Slippery When Wet* is on view at Artists Space from February 17 – May 1, 2021.

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