

Urban Pedagogies of Resistance in Apocalyptic Hong Kong

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing inequalities and highlighted multiple apocalyptic conditions affecting many different people and other-than-humans. At the same time, the pandemic has made it difficult to mobilise and make visible collective action in public, which has required artist-activists to devise new and diverse strategies to identify, occupy, and refuse spaces of publicness. Hong Kong's unique urban and socio-political conditions continue to coevolve rapidly with the pandemic and intensifying political oppression. Following the Umbrella Movement (2014) and the 'Be Water' Movement (2019-2020), the current COVID-19 era forms the third key turn in the development of public pedagogy at the intersection of art and protest practices in Hong Kong. This paper examines the emerging artistic tactics of creating spaces of publicness as 'the wild place' or 'cracks' in apocalyptic Hong Kong, through two cases of artistic interventions and interruptions—the Hong Kong Way (August 2019) and #Hijack Art Basel HK (May 2021)—which in Biesta's (2012) words can act both as a test of and a reminder of publicness. To contest the notion of publicness and Savage's (2010) multiplicity of publics, we incorporate Harney and Moten's (2013) conceptualisation of 'study' in the *undercommons* as urban public pedagogies.

This special issue calls for a close ‘study’ of public pedagogies in a time of many apocalypses. With a renewed understanding of *exposure*, and in the case of apocalyptic Hong Kong, we explore how public pedagogies can act in the interest of alternate *publics* and what possibility there is to ‘create *publicness* from the ruins’ (Burdick and Sandlin, 2021, this volume).

Many people across the world have felt the varied impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on formal education and psychological wellbeing and have experienced how it is increasing racial and xenophobic violence. The fatally significant impact of the pandemic, especially on those who are already socially, economically, and politically marginalised, urges us to examine how the pandemic and the measures taken in response to it have amplified existing conditions of inequality. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes have weaponised COVID-19 restrictions in the name of ‘the public good’ to effectively surveil and control gatherings in public spaces, which have been central to citizen-led political mobilisation through history. Others have incentivised vaccination for particular citizens who have been deemed legitimate, which exacerbates global vaccine inequality. Vaccine disparities have also highlighted and worsened underlying sociocultural pandemics of racism and xenophobia, as demonstrated by the continuing Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movements in the US, a nation with one of the highest vaccination rates in the world at the time of our writing. As such, framing the current era as apocalyptic is apt for *revealing* and *exposing* its injustices.

For Hong Kong, this apocalyptic era has been particularly transformational since the first mass protest over a million people attended in June 2019 against the proposed bill for allowing extradition to mainland China. However, the peaceful protests rapidly escalated state surveillance and control and involved law enforcement using what may be classified as ‘non-lethal’ but brutal ammunitions such as tear gas, sponge grenades and rubber bullets. The conflict began with the Occupy aka Umbrella Movement in 2014. It aggregated in 2019 with excessive and indiscriminate use of force, which included police shooting live rounds; this use of force resulted in protest-related fatalities, many thousands of injuries, and over 10,000 arrests of citizens and dissidents. These actions led to broader and more explicit exertion of state force to erode civil rights and Hong Kong’s political autonomy. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated this evolving conflict.

This paper examines some of these complications, focusing on the development of public pedagogy at the intersection of art and public protest practices in Hong Kong. We look at the current era shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic measures as the third critical turn for the development of this movement, following the Umbrella Movement (2014) and the ‘Be Water’ Movement (2019–2020). To do this, we apply the concepts of ‘study’ and the *undercommons* developed by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) emerging from Black studies and the radical black traditions of social activism. We attempt to expand academic work on histories of Black and Asian solidarity and activism (Chang 2020) and respond to Moten’s (2018) call for radical inclusivity of his terms. Moten (2018, p. 159) states, in *Stolen Life* that,

Ultimately, the paraontological force that is transmitted in the long chain of life-and-death performances with which black studies is concerned is horribly misunderstood if it is understood as exclusive. Everyone whom blackness claims, which is to say everyone, can claim blackness. [...] In this regard, black studies might best be described as a location habitually lost and found within a moving tendency. It’s where you look back and forth and wonder how utopia came to be submerged in the interstices and on the outskirts of the fierce and urgent *now*. (emphasis added)

Harney and Moten (2013) see ‘study’ as a form of sociality that is always happening. In an interview with Stephen Shukaitis, Moten describes ‘study’ this way:

When I think about the way we use the term ‘study,’ I think we are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It’s talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of a rehearsal [...] The point of calling it ‘study’ is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 110).

These activities are present in ‘a wild place’ as Halberstam writes, the place that continuously produces its unregulated wildness. The place that *we* are already in. *We* who slip through cracks; ‘the “we” who cohabit in the space of the undercommons’ (Halberstam, in Harney & Moten, 2013, pp. 6-7).

In what follows, we extend Harney and Moten’s (2013) attention to the intellectuality of everyday modes of sociality, which can be described as ‘study’ and as ‘activism’. We will discuss two examples in relation to their notions of (urban) study: first, the Hong Kong Way, a 56-kilometre human chain formed across the city on August 23, 2019, and, second, the artistic stunt that ‘hijacked’ the 2021 Art Basel Hong Kong. Furthermore, through a survey of the literature of public pedagogies and the changing concepts of *exposure* (to tear gas, the coronavirus, surveillance and censorship) in the streets of Hong Kong, we want to forward what public pedagogies create to make activist, experimental and demonstrative transformations (Biesta 2013), and to contest especially the notion of *publicness* with and in multiple publics—‘we’s’—now exposed in the time of apocalypses.

Public Pedagogies Beyond Dominant Publics

We build upon this idea of public ‘cracks’ and social ‘study’, thinking with Harney and Moten into the particular kinds of public spaces available and less-available—and to whom—at this particular apocalyptic pandemic moment. By problematising more received notions of ‘public pedagogy’, we urge readers to expand notions of ‘public’ activism and how even micro- or private-sphere activities can now be deployed for activist disruptions to the reifying capitalist logics regarding vaccinations, racism, global im/mobility and care. Expanding on Jose Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) articulation of ‘counterpublics’, we argue that the everyday ‘study’ has become a new form of fluid (Be Water) activism in response to the foreclosure of more traditional public spaces.

First, we articulate an extension of the notion of public pedagogy, one more applicable to this time of global apocalypse. The roots of public pedagogy as beyond formal education, especially when tightly controlled by the state, reflect the current state of geopolitical education in Hong Kong. However, to the extent that public pedagogical scholarship often assumes the existence of public spaces where publicness is conspicuously visible, we suggest that looking beneath accepted notions of ‘public’ may elicit more nuanced understandings of how Hong Kong activists and artists are responding to the political, material and social foreclosure of surveilled public spaces. As Harney and Moten’s critique of contemporary social and institutional capital structures shows, there is still, as always, space in the ‘undercommons’ for those movements, solidarities and knowledge-formations that resist commodification. We apply this lens of the undercommons in our endeavour to expand on public pedagogy literature.

Much scholarship on public pedagogy asserts various links between culture, art, and place-as-embodied-learning (Biesta, 2012, 2013; Burdick and Sandlin, 2013; Burdick, Sandlin, and O’Malley, 2013; Ellsworth, 2005; Harris, 2011, 2014; Sandlin, Burdick, and Rich, 2017). It also argues that teaching and learning, education and miseducation often happen in public venues (O’Malley, Sandlin, and Burdick, 2020). These settings include media and popular culture; public arts such as murals, theatre, and music; and places such as museums and other public spaces (Giroux 2003; Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick, 2011; Burdick and

Sandlin, 2013). Public pedagogy can emulate the dominant culture or challenge it through a critical lens by creating arts that openly turn the status quo or dominant modes of understandings on their head (Springgay and The Torontonians, 2013). For Biesta (2013), public pedagogy (re)connects the educational and the political and locates both firmly in the public sphere. Biesta's notion of public pedagogy that enacts human togetherness is particularly relevant to the situation in Hong Kong. He highlights three notions of public pedagogy: (1) a pedagogy *for* the public, (2) a pedagogy *of* the public, (3) a pedagogy *in the interest of* publicness, that is 'a pedagogy enacting an interest in the public quality of human togetherness' (Biesta, 2013, p. 16).

This paper is situated in the third realm of Biesta's conceptualizations: pedagogies in the interest of publicness, and positions Hong Kong activists and artists as public pedagogues. We examine their current practices as social education to raise awareness of local and international others about urgent social issues and advocate for social change. These artist-activists have been practising outside institutional and formal education contexts to engage the public with the political, even as the public spheres in which they enact these performances continue to shrink. The city, the publics, and the protesters intersect at the site of knowledge-making in activist, experimental, and demonstrative ways. For Biesta (2012), this public pedagogical practice invokes three commitments:

- *Activist*: It aims to create real alternatives, alternative ways of being and doing, in the Arendtian sense of 'acting in concert', that reclaim opportunities for public relationships-in-plurality.
- *Experimental*: It attempts to invent new ways of being and 'doing' economy and new ways of 'doing' schooling to realise public ways of acting together.
- *Demonstrative*: It posits that it is possible to do things differently, that there is always an alternative, that things *should* and *can* be done differently.

Counterpublics

Like Biesta, Muñoz (1999) offers a way to think about the multiplicity of publics and explores how a fluid approach to attaching and disentangling from diverse publics can lead to material and collective change. Muñoz (1999) developed the notion of 'queer counterpublics'. This idea builds on the concept of 'subaltern counterpublics' by feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (1990), who argues that counterpublics are formed in response to a range of exclusions from dominant publics. While Fraser problematises the normative 'bourgeois public sphere', Muñoz (1999) grounds his counterpublics in resistance, relationalities, and community. Counterpublics, for Muñoz, are largely disruptive performances that resist whiteness, racism, heteronormativity, and gender normativity. While he attaches his counterpublic imaginary to the project of racial and queer utopian social relations, we see resonance in its production of 'minoritarian' public spheres, which is currently emerging in the counterculture and counterpublics of Hong Kong arts activism.

Furthermore, Muñoz (1999) links his notion of counterpublics to hope, and the idea of educated hope, which we argue is the primary public pedagogical function of contemporary Hong Kong arts activism. For Muñoz (1999), and for us, activism, art, and resistance are practices of educated hope. 'The enactment of a critique function,' he argues, should be 'not about announcing the way things *ought* to be, but, instead, imagining what things *could* be' (Duggan and Muñoz, 2009, p. 278, emphasis in original). Hong Kong artist-activists, too, wonder and work towards imagining more, and towards helping their communities imagine what things can be going forward.

In the next section, we focus on protest movements in Hong Kong to explore how the city, the protesters, and the publics 'study' in city-scale to devise public pedagogies that enact

activist, experimental, and resistant ways of being and doing. We examine how these pedagogies played out on the streets of Hong Kong throughout the 2019-2020 Be Water Movement and during the pandemic. We discuss how disrupted concepts of *publicness* take shape in the 'new Hong Kong' under the national security law and the changing scale of oppression in the city in 2021.

Hong Kong's Urban Pedagogies of Resistance

Before the onset of the pandemic, Hong Kong was in the midst of a year-long protest movement that is now known as the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement, and also as the Be Water Movement or the Water Revolution, as dubbed by the *Financial Times* (September 2, 2019). In this paper, we use the Be Water Movement. Both water's fluidic nature and the movement's unpredictable and changing states sit well with our conceptualisation of urban pedagogies of resistance enacted in spaces of multiple publics, in 'liquified' public spaces (Hau, 2019) through which citizens continuously 'slip through cracks and re-crack the cracks if they fill up' (Halberstam, in Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 7). We study how citizens 'studied' through improvising ways of acting and being together to enact a concern for publicness (Biesta, 2012, 2013), emerging as a Hong Kong subjectivity in the form of urban *being*.

The Be Water Movement began with citizens protesting against the government's contentious proposal to amend Hong Kong's extradition bill that would have allowed criminal suspects and fugitives in or passing through the city to be transferred to mainland China for trial (Li, 2019). The proposed bill heightened fears of Hong Kong losing its autonomy from mainland China and was ultimately withdrawn. However, protests continued and escalated against what was widely seen as pro-Beijing and non-representational government and police brutality towards protesters, journalists, and citizens. News of the city's unrest appeared across international headlines as people in Hong Kong demonstrated in what became an explosion of distributed organisation, artistic creation, and activist expression. Hong Kong was pioneering a leader-less movement through different forms of multi-centred, multi-sited and physical and mediated protests (Ting, 2020). Artists and non-artists alike have deployed various tactics and creative responses as urban 'study', in Harney and Moten's (2013) words, to make 'a call for and from dis-order'.

How the City 'Studies'

People in Hong Kong have learned from the Umbrella Movement in 2014—in which tens of thousands of protesters occupied public spaces to seek political reforms, and they modified their protest tactics in 2019. The concept of occupation space was central to the Umbrella Movement. For 79 days, occupiers utilised public spaces to 'act in concert' (Arendt 2018, p. 179); they gathered around spaces of power and human flow, such as government buildings and central financial and business areas. They camped in the streets, danced, sang songs, listened to activists and student leaders' speeches. In the occupied sites, people built Harcourt Village (see Figure 1) and shared resources that mainly were public donations (Li and Tong, 2020). The occupiers took turns cleaning washrooms, gardening, recycling waste, and building a common study room for students. Artists also took advantage of the occupied public spaces to perform and materialise their art in the forms of sculptures, posters, paintings, dance, and jam sessions (Pang, 2016, 2019). Opposition to the occupiers also learned to express their discontent; they interrupted activities, destroyed the arts, and eventually, through legal action in the courts, obtained injunctions to reopen the occupied spaces and the blockaded roads (Li and Tong, 2020). However, like in counterpublics existing alongside the wider

public, freedom appeared (mainly) within the occupation sites. Once people stepped outside, the egalitarian sense of being evaporated.



Figure 1. An occupation site in Admiralty known as Harcourt Village, at the Umbrella Movement in 2014 (Image by Kelly Chan)

People and groups with conflicting political views have identified a pedagogy for their respective interests of publicness, through which *publicness* is exercised differently by the occupiers, the citizens in opposition, and the authorities who wanted to ‘call [the city] to order’ (Harney and Moten, 2013). The Umbrella Movement was a stationary movement. Within locations of the occupation, activists’ practice was pedagogical in a *demonstrative* sense—provoking thoughts about public spaces and demonstrating alternative ways of being together and doing things close to egalitarian ideologies. However, the momentum of the Umbrella Movement diminished with time, and the government waited out people’s patience. The police eventually cleared all occupied sites and arrested hundreds of people who refused to leave. Authorities called the city to order, and a 79-day social movement ended. The demand for universal suffrage was rejected. Some of its participants perceived the Umbrella Movement as a ‘failure’ (Chan, 2016).

The Hong Kong Way

Unlike the Umbrella Movement, the latest Be Water Movement was decentralised, mobile and everywhere. Moreover, the nature of water (of different states) has informed the artist-activists to become more *experimental* in their practices. Artists, activists, and the public improvised by re-cracking the cracks. They and their pedagogical practices were evolving with the movement. The entire city was transformed into a site of ‘study’ The city has become a space for an ongoing deformatisation of urban learning environments and infrastructures, including the appropriation of university campuses and resources as components of ‘study’ (Rousell and Chan, 2021). People were ‘acting in concert’ in the interests of ‘cracking’ and opening up spaces of publicness. There were no specific occupation sites; pedagogies were decentralised, and ‘study’ was always happening.

During the early period of the ‘Be Water’ Movement, one of the most visual displays of enactment of human togetherness was the Hong Kong Way, which took place on August 23, 2019, the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way. The Baltic Way was a peaceful political demonstration of two million Balts joined hands to form a human chain that spans 690 kilometres across three Baltic states, stretching from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which were at the time considered to be constituent republics of the Soviet Union (Eglitis and Ardava 2012). Aiming to challenge the Soviet system, the demonstration, organised by Baltic pro-independence movements, was designed to draw global attention by demonstrating solidarity among the three nations and their desires for independence. While inspired by the Baltic action, the Hong Kong Way was grounded in the city’s urban settings. The event saw over 200,000 people coming together from 7 to 9 pm to form a 56-kilometre human chain across different districts in Hong Kong (see Figure 2) (HKFP 2019; Ramzy 2019). People from all ages, all walks of life, able and dis-able bodies held hands and sang popular protest songs, such as *Do you hear the people sing* and its Chinese version, and well-known songs by local rock band *Beyond*. The human chain, bridging three subway lines (Mass Transit Railway), reached the top of the Lion Rock, a 495-metre-high mountain in Kowloon (see Figure 3), across the Victoria Harbour up to the Peak in Hong Kong Island to the New Territories (see Figures 4 and 5). Some participants held banners in multiple languages, saying, ‘Thank you for supporting freedom and democracy!’ (Hui, 2019). People atop the mountain flashed light beams across the harbour, where people relayed beams to the Central side.

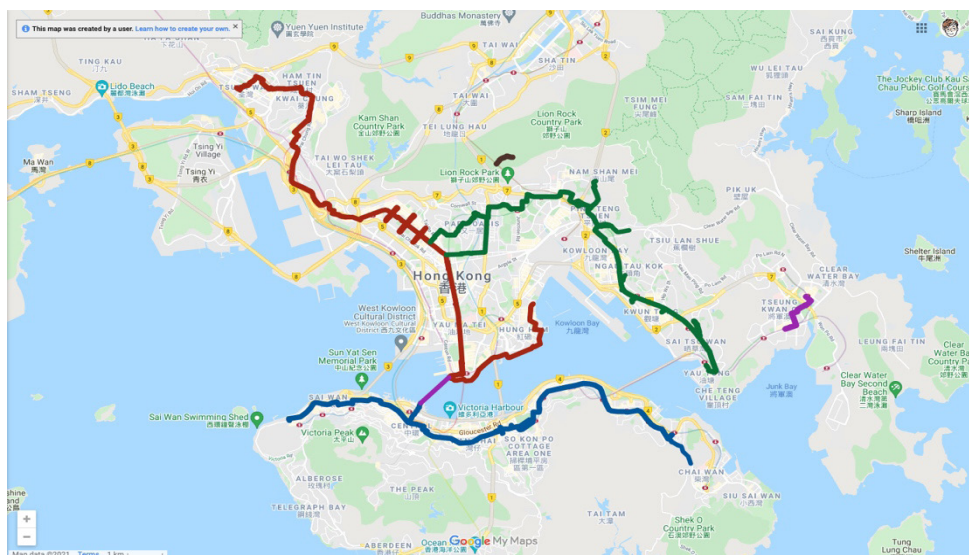


Figure 2. Google map of The Hong Kong Way. Retrieved May 31, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3byWqGS>



Figure 3. The Hong Kong Way at the Lion Rock, August 23, 2019 (Image: Studio Incendo CC BY 4.0)



Figures 4 and 5. The Hong Kong Way in Kowloon, August 23, 2019 (Images: Studio Incendo CC BY 4.0)

That evening, a spectacle act highlighted a pedagogy that literally connected public spaces across the city and metaphorically linked a ‘citizenship of strangers’ (Biesta, 2012, p. 690).

People held hands and together sang songs that were familiar to each other. The event was an embodied experience which, as Harris (2020, p. 14) writes, ‘focused on and enacted through its affect’. A form of activism that travelled from ‘body to body, voice to voice, traveling and materialising as small acts of connection’ (Harris, 2020, p.14). The enactment of the Hong Kong Way and the process leading up to it constructed a public sphere that was continually ‘becoming public’ for a certain quality of human togetherness (Biesta, 2012, p.684). Author Antony Dapiran participated in the Hong Kong way and described the event as ‘a protest of enchantment’ (2020, p. 174). Building on Jane Bennett’s notion of enchantment, Dapiran writes about the event as ‘a sense of wonder’ characterised by a “temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement” that leaves one “transfixed, spellbound” (Bennett 2001, cited in Dapiran 2020, p. 177). While the moment might have appeared temporary, the planning for such a pedagogical moment was done ‘in concert’ (Arendt, 2018, p. 179) across temporal and spatial limits. For Harney and Moten (2013), ‘fugitive planning’ is an antidote to ‘policy’. Planning is, as they describe,

This ongoing experiment with the informal, carried out by and on the means of social reproduction, as the to come of the forms of life, is what we mean by planning; planning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futural presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible. (Harney and Moten, 2013, pp. 74–75)

The planning of the Hong Kong Way was initiated in online forums and spread through social media, chat groups, and word-of-mouth. Maps with instructions and a schedule were circulated online. The ‘state of wonder’, Dapiran claims, ‘lifted the fog of cynicism and disenchantment, encouraging engagement in civic life, and offering rays of hope for the protest movement and the city’ (2020, p. 178). The Hong Kong Way was re-enacted multiple times around universities and secondary school campuses (HKFP 2019), spreading ‘educated hope’ (Duggan and Muñoz, 2009) throughout the city.

Another mode of collective action characterised by ‘citizenships of strangers’ that received broad support from across the community has taken the shape of Lennon Walls Hong Kong (see Figure 6). Layers of colourful post-it notes with solidarity messages and artistic posters of various sizes were posted on walls and surfaces in public spaces throughout the city (Hou, 2020) and widely circulated online. We have written elsewhere about the rhizomatic nature of these colourful walls developed by the multiple publics (Chan, Harris, and Choi, forthcoming). The Be Water Movement was not short of these moments of enchantments in which people act in concert in spaces and places where ‘freedom can appear’ and where plurality could be preserved (Biesta, 2013, p. 19).



Figure 6. The Lennon Wall Hong Kong in Admiralty at the Umbrella Movement in 2014 (Image by Kelly Chan)

Multiple 'Turns' of Exposure in Mid-Apocalyptic Hong Kong

During the Be Water Movement, pepper spray and tear gas were part of everyday life for humans and other-than-humans in Hong Kong for many months. Many public spaces and places indoors and outdoors throughout the city were exposed to toxic gases indiscriminately used by police (Ting, 2020). Residents (adults, babies, children, the elderly, and pets) living in 'private' homes in high-rises were exposed to tear gas. The situation was worse for residents (the homeless, stray animals, birds and wildlife) in 'public' spaces who experienced full exposure to it (Yu, 2019). Protesters at rallies were exposed to toxic gases; at the same time, they were worried about exposing their identity for fear that it might bring repercussions to their careers and families. Many of them had been wearing face masks and gas masks when protesting. With their arms and legs covered with cling wrap, protesters used different unlikely forms of appropriated everyday objects such as umbrellas, kitchenware, toilet seat covers, and suitcases as protective gear in defence of the police's use of militant 'non-lethal' weapons (Victor and Yuhas, 2019).

The COVID-19 cases first recorded in the city in January 2020 brought another dimension of a 'turn' to exposure. In fear of exposure to the contagious virus, people deserted public spaces. This unexpected yet profound change has given new meanings to the notion of publicness; that is, to act in the interest of the publicness is to maintain distance, wear face coverings and avoid public gatherings. People need to 'act in concert' to isolate themselves to create a different human (non)togetherness. State power has extended its control over the personal with contact tracing and movement tracking technologies. Body fluids are tested, movements are tracked and traced, and people's 'private' information is centralised. The boundary of privateness has retreated within the body for the 'public good'. The Be Water Movement's momentum came to an abrupt halt in March 2020 when the pandemic hit. The government has since utilised restrictions and punishments (heavy fines and imprisonment) to restrict public gatherings and conveniently silence dissident voices (Law, 2021). The social

movement slipped through ‘cracks’ into digital spaces, such as online forums and gaming spaces. For example, *Animal Crossing*, a social simulation game where gamers’ avatars build homes on a desert island, has been appropriated as a protest site (Bernhard, 2020).

At the same time, tyranny has also taken advantage of the pandemic to advance control over the public’s way of life in the city. The government has redefined public spaces to all places ‘the public can access from time to time’:

Public places refer to places where members of the public can get access from time to time. If private properties allow access by members of the public from time to time, such as cinemas, shops and restaurants, [...] the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation will also be applicable. (The Government of the HKSAR, 2021)

In the pandemic, the government has the ultimate power to allow and prevent ‘members of the public’ from accessing public, private, and other places and spaces ‘from time to time’. Despite social distancing regulations, law enforcement officers operating in mass numbers have staged public arrests one after another (Hong Kong Watch, 2021); meanwhile, the central government in Beijing tactfully drafted a national security law for Hong Kong. Bypassing the local legislature, the Beijing government announced the imposition of the national security law on Hong Kong on June 30, 2020. The 66 vaguely worded articles criminalising subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign forces and terrorist acts give sweeping power to local authorities to 1) criminalise dissidents with up to life imprisonment, and 2) instil in the public ‘patriotism’ to the Chinese Communist Party. Within one year of the new law’s implementation, the city has seen unprecedented threats to fundamental human rights—dismantling freedom of expression, gathering and the press (Creery, 2020; Reuters, 2021). Commentators considered it ‘the end of Hong Kong’ (Marlow, 2019). People in the city have named the current Hong Kong ‘New Hong Kong’. Referring to the editors of this volume, their conceptualisation of mid-apocalypse is ‘a space that announces the end not as an event, but a process, one that cannot be adequately articulated via such causal language as beginning or end’ (Burdick and Sandlin, 2021); we call this mid-apocalyptic Hong Kong. In mid-apocalyptic Hong Kong, we have seen examples of changing urban pedagogies of resistance. The new law brought about not a turn but a halt in all protest activities, both online and offline. Authorities have redefined public places and spaces. The law has rewritten publicness.

#Hijack Art Basel HK

In mid-apocalyptic Hong Kong, an art collective named ‘The Lady Liberty Hong Kong’ has found a crack to interrupt the annual international art fair, Art Basel Hong Kong. Hong Kong is the Asian site of the world’s largest art market because the city levies zero taxes on imports and exports. After its cancellation in 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Art Basel Hong Kong was a much-anticipated hybrid (onsite and online) sold-out event in 2021. Amidst the pandemic, the five-day event took place in the Convention and Exhibition Centre from May 19 to 23, 2021. Despite the ongoing COVID-19-related restrictions enforced by Hong Kong’s authorities, including a ban on public gatherings of more than four people during that time, Art Basel HK had the authorities’ approval and the government’s funds to cover all venue rental expenses (Tsui, 2021). One hundred and four galleries from 23 countries, half the art fair’s usual scale, showcased thousands of art products to VIPs through private ‘hologram viewing sessions’ and onsite. Potential buyers and virtual visitors worldwide saw live-streamed walkthroughs of the exhibition (Art Basel 2021).

On May 22, 2021, the Lady Liberty HK (LLHK) staged their unsolicited work titled, *There’s No Art Without Freedom*, in the exhibition venue. The team installed four 3D-printed miniature Lady Liberty statues, each 4.5 centimetres tall, in various spots in Art Basel HK.

The LLHK team named their action #Hijack Art Basel HK (Lady Liberty HK 2021a). The statues are a mini version of a 4-metre-tall statue that the team designed and made in 2019 in response to the Be Water Movement (see Figure 7). The design was inspired by the Goddess of Democracy created during the 1989's Tiananmen protests. The Lady Liberty HK was a mediated community project started as a response to an incident in which a volunteer first-aiders right eye was hit by police bean bag rounds fired at eye-level at the crowds (Ho Kilpatrick, 2019). The police have denied responsibility even though several human rights organisations have issued warnings of the police violating international standards (Amnesty International Hong Kong, 2019; Ting, 2020).

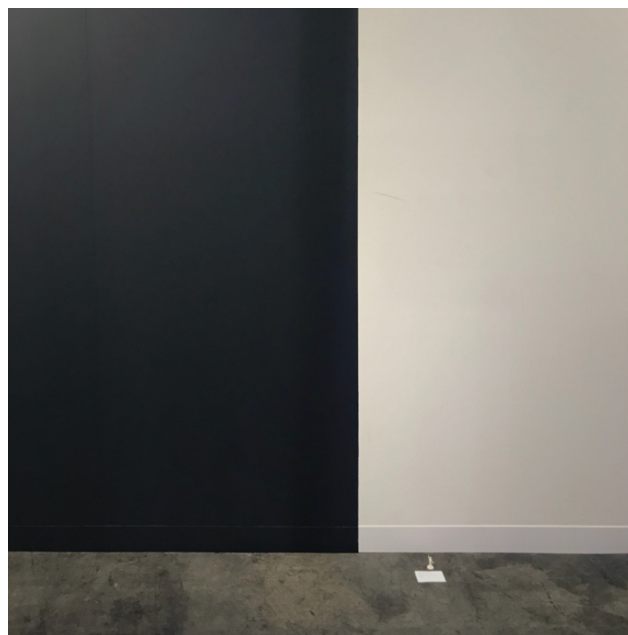
An anonymous design team commenced planning a statue in mid-August 2019 in the LIHKG forum, a Hong Kong equivalent of Reddit. Users of the forum voted for three designs, and the team finalised a version of the statue. The team then launched a crowdfunding campaign to produce the Lady Liberty statue (Global LL, 2019). In six hours, the campaign achieved its fundraising goal (Cheng, 2019). The Lady Liberty HK was first erected at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on August 31, 2019, only seven days after the team had started the project. The statue was transported to different university campuses and protest sites. Weighing over 80kg, the statue was carried, in several pieces, by volunteers and professional mountaineers up the Lion Rock, which was destined to be her 'final resting place' (Ball, 2019). The statue stood atop the mountain overnight on October 13, 2019, only to be found vandalised and destroyed the next day (Grundy, 2021). A rescue team was sent up the Lion Rock on the mission to search for the remains of it (Haakansson, 2019).



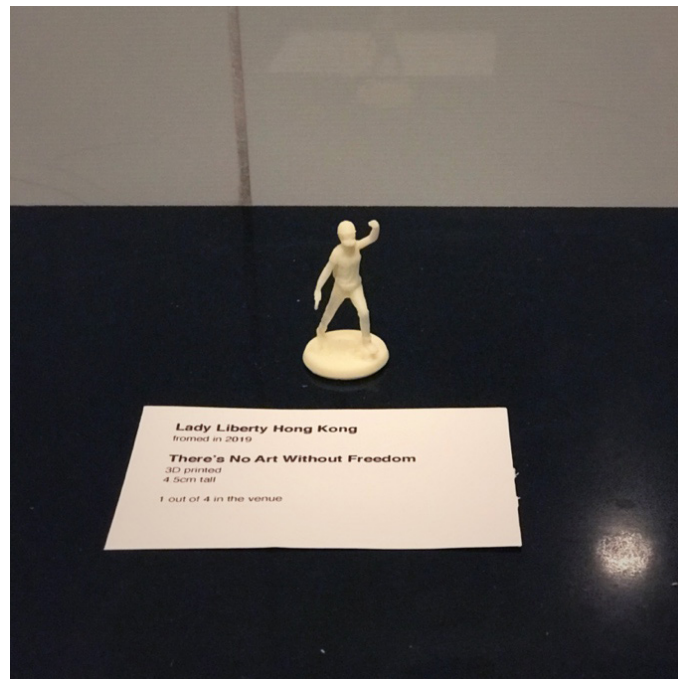
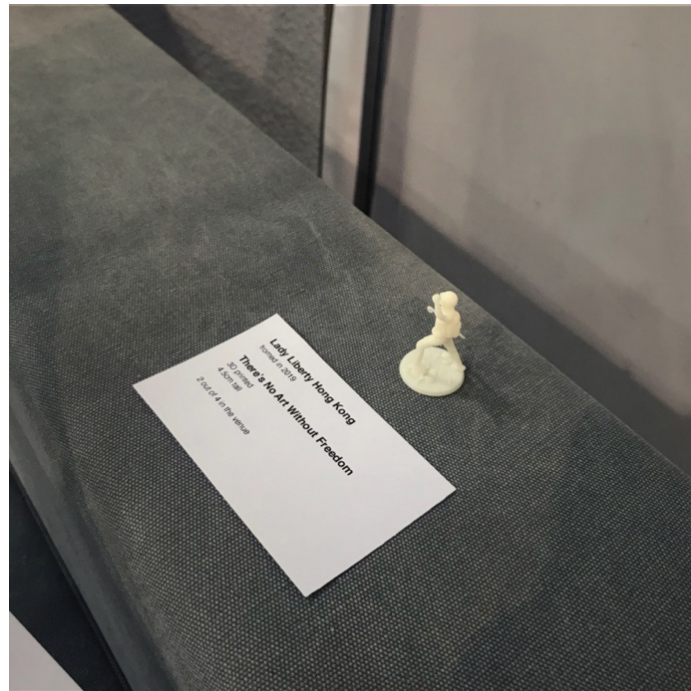
Figure 7. Lady Liberty Hong Kong, Chinese University Hong Kong, August 31, 2019 (Image courtesy of Lady Liberty HK)

The statue is a portrait of a protester wearing a hard hat, an eye mask and a gas mask, holding an umbrella in her right hand and a banner with the slogan in Chinese that reads ‘Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times’, a commonly used slogan in the Be Water Movement. On July 1, 2020, the day following the national security law’s imposition, authorities banned the slogan (Davidson, 2020).

According to LLHK’s website, since October 2019, the team has employed over 210 young people to work on the project, who have produced mini-Lady Liberties of various styles, and managed sales and social media presence. They have organised exhibitions of variations of the statue in Tokyo and Taipei (Lady Liberty HK, 2021b).



Figures 8 & 9. Miniature Lady Liberty HK installed in Art Basel HK, May 22, 2021 (Image courtesy of the Lady Liberty HK)



Figures 10 & 11. *There's No Art Without Freedom* #Hijack Art Basel HK, May 22, 2021 (Image courtesy of the Lady Liberty HK)

At Art Basel HK, the miniature statues planted in the venue showed Lady Liberty holding up a fist instead of a flag (see Figures 8 to 11). On the day of the #Hijack event, the team took photos of their 'act' and posted them on their Facebook page. In their artist statement, they write,

On one hand, the Hong Kong/ Chinese communist regime is more tyrannic than ever, the freedom of the city's residents are narrowing by the day; on the other hand, the rich and famous still linger in art shows, galleries are earning an exorbitant amount of money selling artworks, as if there are 2 parallel worlds in Hong Kong. Therefore, our team created an installation art titled 'There's No Art Without Freedom' with 4 #LadyLibertyHK, smuggled it into #ArtBaselHongKong and displayed the work at 4 different locations within the venue, thereby bringing the voice of Hongkongers to the international art scene. . . . Go see it before it's gone. (Lady Liberty HK, May 22, 2021)

The LLHK team's act can be seen as a form of 'interruption that keep(s) the opportunities for "becoming public" open' (Biesta, 2012, p. 685). In mid-apocalyptic Hong Kong, where the state tightly controls public spheres online and offline, the Lady Liberty as a statue and a spirit of the Be Water Movement managed to artistically 'interrupt' the international art fair. Extending the metaphor of *cracks*, we posit the interruption as an effort in opening up cracks in 'the international art scene'. Art Basel, the world's largest art market, is made for a particular public—the 'rich and famous'—but at the same time supports and is supported by the precarious labour of those doing the ticketing, marketing, advertising, building, cleaning, serving, catering, security, and public relations of Art Basel. The state also sustains the market—the city's government offers its pandemic funds as financial initiatives for galleries and a duty-free trading zone for buyers and businesses. In past years, Hong Kong artists and activists have argued and proven that they know their efforts alone are unlikely to sway the state; therefore, efforts are made to reach out to local and international communities for attention, solidarity, and assistance in pressuring the authoritarian regime on behalf of and with the city (as represented by the mini-Lady Liberty statues).

Also, through social media, the team's message 'slips through cracks', as it urges people to 'Go see it before it's gone.' We extend our interpretation of the 'it' to be Hong Kong; the artists are urging us, many different publics in and out of the city, to see Hong Kong before Hong Kong is gone. Hong Kong here may not simply mean the city as the physical space. While the city itself might not be 'gone', the people who make the city are already 'going'. Hong Kong is experiencing an exodus. Despite the odds against international travel during the pandemic, many people have left Hong Kong between 2019 and 2021. Nearly 90,000 people migrated out of the city between mid-2020 to mid-2021 (AFP, 2021), accelerating the exodus of 30,000 in 2019 (Zhao, 2020). The UK government expects more than a million Hong Kongers to arrive in the coming five years. The exodus will continue; the state is changing the composition of 'the public' of Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Returning to the editors' rethinking of apocalypse as a process, Burdick and Sandlin (2020) remind us that a historical event, like trauma, does not lose its significance. Instead, it is an exemplar in the long history and future of the apocalypse. In the case of Hong Kong, the apocalyptic present is years and generations in the making. Dating back beyond colonial times, Hong Kong was born from the conflicts between two empires: the Qing Dynasty China and Great Britain. Hong Kong's colonial records often began with a narrative like this: a tiny fishing village ceded by the British Empire in 1842 developed into an international financial hub. The city's sovereign power was 'handed over' to China in 1997 after over 150 years of British rule. Hong Kong has undergone development processes from a village into a capitalist machine, with continuous influences from fast-developing China. Incoherent histories and conflicting ideologies are ingrained in the city's colonial legacy. Recent social movements reveal, rather than resolve, some of the many rooted conflicts and injustices within the community and the state.

In this paper, we draw on the radical black traditions of study, as conceptualised by Harney and Moten (2013), to examine the activist activities present in ‘the wild place’. We explore the idea of public cracks and expose the many cohabitation spaces of many different ‘we’s’. Through examples from the Be Water Movement in Hong Kong, we extend Biesta’s (2012, 2013) conceptualisation of publicness from the enactment of public pedagogies to current apocalyptic realities to contest the notion of publicness with and in multiple publics. We have shown some examples of how, in Hong Kong, there are not two ‘parallel worlds’ but rather multiple apocalyptic worlds. Two examples—the Hong Kong Way and the #Hijack Art Basel HK—reveal what is possible in opening up potentialities of ‘becoming public’, which we call urban pedagogies of resistance. These pedagogies enact interruptions to apocalyptic Hong Kong through a human chain in the city and an installation of mini statues in an art fair. These examples yield more questions than answers, demanding new imaginaries that are perhaps not yet see-able but are certainly felt in the hearts, minds, and artworks of the artist-activists who are suggesting ways forward through continuing current crises. Amid the world’s apocalypses, gross injustices are revealed and exposed from which ‘we’ cannot look away. We, too, following Burdick, Sandlin and O’Malley (2013, p. 10), urge Hong Kong to ‘let us pull them [cracks in our knowledge] further open, let them bleed, and begin to consider our next moments’, as a path to liberation. Hong Kong could well be living its most transformative pedagogical moment; teaching and learning ‘beyond the limited vista of the here and now’ (Muñoz, 2009, pp. 21–22). Not only has the city enacted these urban pedagogies to study lessons of freedom, but their pedagogical function continues to expand into living these new commitments to freedom.

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