Beckoning of the Silent Others:
A Visual Experiment Using Projections to Treat Borders as a Heterotopia

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The "border"—be it geographical, political, cultural or psychological—is irreplaceable in the process of constructing an identity: it differentiates "us" from the "Others". Through intertwining legal, capital, institutional, media and social networks, it exercises sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower. In writing the post-colonial Hong Kong identity, various definitions of "border" and "power" have shown remarkable contestations. Ducky Tse Chi-tak's the "Beckoning of the Silent Others", is precisely the kind of provocative experiment that challenges "power" by castings images on "borders" between Hong Kong and mainland China.

This experiment employs border-redefining to counter the gradually disappearing Hong Kong and China border through tactical projections of images of key political figures and events on the China-Hong Kong border that is marked by power and the Hong Kong identity. Such images include the classic scene when Margaret Thatcher fell over in Beijing during the Sino-UK talks to discuss the future of Hong Kong in 1982, the mass gathering in Hong Kong following the June 4th incident in 1989, the anti-national education gathering, the yellow banner on Lion Rock that wrote "I want genuine democracy" during the Umbrella Movement, photos of the artist's childhood, and political slogans and signs of popular culture that have made a lasting impression on Tse.

The decision to keep the border open, or closed, has always been up to Britain or China—the people of Hong Kong are merely passive participants. But the paradox lies in the phenomenon that the more closed-off the Chinese border, the more apparent the Hong Kong identity; and the more relaxed the border, the more serious the identity crisis. As such, the notion of "the other" has always remained. When the border was closed, Hong Kong experienced rapid modernisation as a result an assortment of socio-economic policies as well as population policy implemented by the colonial government. Since then, to "us", people beyond the border became the "others". When the border gradually opened as the result of the changing relationship between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, the "others" poured in, including the likes of pregnant women, tourists, parallel traders, and cross-boundary students. Spurred by cultural differences as they competed with Hongkongers for hospital beds, infant formula, and academic enrolment, the "others" soon became antagonists and started a war of biopower . But it is the political intervention and the "re-colonialisation" policies that posed a greater threat to the China-Hong Kong border, as they eroded the concept of the "Two Systems". To safeguard our living space and political autonomy, resistance of various scales erupted in Hong Kong after the handover.

When images of resistance and others related to Hong Kong identity were projected on the border, Tse tested the limits by turning the paradoxical space into a heterotopia. As Foucault describes, "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." Simply put, a "heterotopia" is like a mirror that reflects and critiques the "real" world, and is an alternative space for imagination.

The nature of border's limiting entry to those with permission already constitutes the space as heterotopia. But when Tse cast a montage of historical images and portraits spanning the colonial and post-colonial eras and culminating in Hong Kong identity onto the border, he broke both the temporality and the spatiality of the site. More importantly, when those significant historical memories that are constitutive of Hong Kong identity face the "violence of time" brought upon by decolonisation and re-nationalisation campaigns, re-representing the past that is under threat of erasure or being forgotten already is indeed a contestation over the politics of memories. That said, resistance is not only about memory: it is also about struggles between ideology, values and beliefs, for example, between the China Dream and the Hong Kong Dream, and between the dream of nation building and that of democratisation. What is more interesting is that apart from using images, Tse introduced text in some of his works. These include "I want genuine democracy", which was printed on the banner that was hung from Lion Rock, the lyrics, "Everything visible is empty" from the song "Queen's Road Central" by Lo Da-yu, and the lyrics "Pearl of the Orient, my lover" from "Pearl of the Orient" etc. In one image, the text "Bring Down the Gang of Four" was superimposed on the anti-national education visuals, while the names of kindergartens, dates, and the text "NO DREAM" were overlaid on Tse's childhood photos. These two sets of visuals and text were juxtaposed with the overlapping portraits of the last three Chief Executives in a barricaded area via projection. The two semiotic systems, text and images, sometimes echo one another, and other times conflict. Placing them together not only enriched the meaning of each work, but also enhanced the ambiguity of each image. Against the location where Hong Kong identity is constantly rewritten, and Hong Kong's discursive power and freedom of speech are incessantly shrinking, the clash of meanings between text and image, and the tension between the content and sentiments in the projections, are much like an alternate version of the movie series *The Departed:* they explore the complexities of identity through the performance of the power of re-presentation and the re-presentation of power.

Tse's performance at the border also included 108 Hongkongers of varying age, job, ethnicity and gender. Tse photographed their portraits, made them into projection slides, and, cast the images onto various borders across Hong Kong with a self-modified carousel slide projector. But Tse did not project each portrait individually: to present the ambiguity of Hongkonger identity post-1997, as well as the artist's belief that the differences between "I", "we" and "you" should be deemphasised, Tse projected multiple portraitures in share spaces. As a result, blurred into faceless "souls" and steeped in red lighting, the 108 portraits embodied characters that are both simultaneously strong and weak, and represented a fleeting moment that would live forever through photography. They presented the set, script and voice that the sovereign state and its people refuse to acknowledge.

As such, whether the "Beckoning of the Silent Others" is a contemplation on the Hong Kong identity, or the practice of photography, it can be considered as Tse's nearly 40-year oeuvre from 1990 to 2018 on Hong Kong identity . The 108 portraits echo "Hong Kong Faces", which shines the spotlight on the underdogs, whose voices have been drowned out by the handover discourse. At the border—a place of power—Tse showcased images and symbols of cultural and political resistance in Hong Kong from the colonial to post-colonial days. Not only did the artist's reflections on the relationship between space and identity through works on the demolition of Queen's Pier, land resumption in Choi Yuen Village and the protests against the development of the Northeast New Territories permeate these images, his approach in using images to challenge, or even subvert the official narrative was consistent with that of his "Posing the Museum" series. Lastly, the dramatic colours, ghostly mood, and sense of absurdity in the "Beckoning of the Silent Others" series, resembles Tse's "The Silence of Disorder"

series developed in response to the Umbrella Movement. However, if "The Silence of Disorder" uses the absence of activists to foreshadow the disbandment of the movement, the projection of absent people and incidents in "Beckoning of the Silent Others" is an outcry against the disappearing and neglected demands in society. Coincidentally, Tse's use of projection to cast images on the border, is what Ackbar Abbas described as "reverse hallucination"— things that are in existence, but are not seen. Those who suffer from "reverse hallucination" are not us who are in search of identity, but the others beyond the border. That's why the silence others have to be beckoned.