

關於群島「感覺」的一些暫時想法

Provisional Thoughts on Archipelagic "Feeling"

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林東鵬進駐香港灣仔區的新都酒店，在生活多年的城市裏將自己塑造成各種各樣的遊客，是為 2015 年個展《好奇匣·香港——作客家鄉》的一部份。他的目的是激發一種對從未踏足的城市的好奇心，在香港主權移交將近二十年後開展這個項目。林氏所認知的城市正在變化，這變化隨著 2047 年的臨近會一直持續，屆時香港的高度自治將會結束。也許這些變化對於居住在這座城市的人來說並不會太過明顯，因此有需要讓自己變成一個異鄉人。為了製造從香港的生活抽離的感覺，他搬離家人，住進酒店五個星期。期間他在酒店現場製作一個裝置作品，佔了酒店的其中一翼。由 2015 年 6 月 1 日至 7 月 12 日，人們可以預約參觀。同時，林氏把自己「遊歷」香港的紀念品和信件寄給了一個位於蘇黎世的虛構家庭，並同期於 Counter Space 展出（2015 年 5 月 5 日至 7 月 8 日），這裏也是他進行虛擬駐場的地點。林氏又邀請了香港作家韓麗珠來訪這家酒店，並把經歷撰寫成遊記；也邀請了在英國生活的香港詩人 Jennifer Wong 以《好奇匣·香港》為靈感寫詩。

《作客家鄉》源於林氏在紐約市駐留的日子，2013 年他曾在紐約生活和工作了幾個月。在那裏，傳統意義上他是一名旅客，但他將自己的公寓轉化成臨時的展覽空間——在「一個非公共的，但同時也非私人的空間」建造了一個裝置，放了樂高積木、參觀博物館時收集的小冊子等各種鎖碎雜物，以及遊覽公園時拍下的錄像投影。他

在牆上安裝了一系列不起眼的棕色紙袋，並在紙袋上寫了一些精妙的陳述，例如「我寧願想家也不願在家。」^① 紐約公寓中的部份《好奇匣》於同年 6 月 13 日至 12 月 21 日在舊金山中國文化中心展出。該次展覽除了展示他在紐約市公寓的部份裝置外，他還加入了一些新作品，例如洛磯山脈的素描以及他來往紐約、芝加哥和三藩市之間五十八小時火車旅行的所得以及回應。林氏不喜歡乘坐飛機，所以他盡可能都會選乘火車。

總的來說，《好奇匣》系列迫使觀眾想像一種互相關聯的不同城市群像而不是獨立的個體城市，從而重新定義了「家」本身的規範。進一步說，根據林氏上述說法，對他而言，正正是「想家」這行為，讓「家」得以被重新想像並由此擴闊。在三藩市展覽圖錄裏刊登的筆記中他如此寫道：「我發現自己實際上既不是遊客，也不是本地人，我不知道在這個城市裏我是甚麼，我們應該要有另一個術語來定義這種旅遊。」^② 我提議可引用哲學家 and 詩人愛德華·格里桑（Édouard Glissant）的「克里奧爾化」（Creolization）概念來形容林氏這種非遊客亦非本地人的狀態。^③ 克里奧爾化是指由奴隸制度、種植園文化和殖民主義在加勒比地區的文化融合過程。但是格里桑認為克里奧爾化不僅指加勒比地區，更可以泛指世界各地廣泛的社會文化進程。^④ 的確，格里桑堅決相信他的概念源自但並不侷限於加勒比地區，本文亦是本著這種精神撰寫的。

① 陳暢，《好奇匣：林東鵬》（*The Curiosity Box: Lam Tung-pang*），三藩市：舊金山中國文化基金會，2013 年，第 51 頁。

② 陳暢，《好奇匣：林東鵬》（*The Curiosity Box: Lam Tung-pang*），第 89 頁。

③ 愛德華·格里桑著，Betsy Wing 譯，《關係詩學》（*Poetics of Relation*），安娜堡：密芝根大學出版社，1997 年。

④ 愛德華·格里桑，《完全世界條約》（*Traité du Tout-Monde*），巴黎：Gallimard，1997 年。

▲《好奇匣·香港——作家家鄉》·新都酒店·香港·二〇一三
The Curiosity Box (Hong Kong): The Hometown Tourist, New Capital Hotel, Hong Kong, 2013



在這裏，特別引人注目的是格里桑的「群島思想」概念。^⑤群島意指分散在海域中一連串或一系列島嶼，沒有一個明確的主軸核心島。毫不意外的，格里桑許多想法都與加勒比群島的自然地理息息相關。讓他感興趣的是，加勒比地區每個島嶼在保持自治的同時仍與整個區域保持聯繫。^⑥對於格里桑來說，「關係」也是一個重要的概念。由此引申，我認為跟各版本的《好奇匣》相關的城市——蘇黎世、三藩市、香港、紐約等——可以看成是一個群島的一部份。每個城市都不是分開的，而是彼此關連的。林氏在他詩意的筆記中明確地建立了這些聯繫，其中有一些給刊登在三藩市展覽的圖錄裏。例如，在條目「畢加索，你不是藝術」底下，林氏挪用了一名香港政客「政治藝術」不是藝術的輕浮發言，放在諸如他在紐約看到的畢加索著名畫作〈格爾尼卡〉(Guernica, 1937)之上。帶著嘲諷的口吻，林氏暗示了若是遵循這位香港政客的邏輯，就意味著挑戰像畢加索這種經典藝術品的重要性。

《好奇匣》為他的展覽《山洞記》奠定了基礎。但是它並不是藝術家作為遊客的留痕，因此我們再見不到博物館的小冊子和收據。《山洞記》的作品也並沒有要把不同的城市聯繫起來。相較於《好奇匣》貼近現實的作品，《山洞記》的作品是

^⑤ 愛德華·格里桑，《關係詩學》(Poetics of Relation)，第34頁。

^⑥ 香港也是一個由二百多個島嶼組成的群島，然而與加勒比地區相反，這些島嶼擁有一個主要的軸心島。

魔幻現實的。最重要的是，我想指出這些作品創造了一種多層次的情感體驗，以詩意的方式表達了香港與中國大陸之間不平衡的關係。的確，《山洞記》的出發點正是林氏在乘坐當時新開通來往香港和北京的高鐵期間，穿越一條為時二十分鐘的黑暗隧道時所感到的焦慮。展覽標題《山洞記》就引述了林氏該趟令人不安的火車旅程。^⑦ 高鐵的建造和實施並非沒有爭議：九龍站裏旅客登車的樓層，交給中國的入境和海關部門管轄。這樣一來，林氏所感到的不安情緒可能是對後者的隱性反應，即是說香港放棄部份領土的管治權予中國。此外，選擇使用粵語的羅馬拼音作為展覽標題也是有啟發性的，是對於使用普通話為「官方」語言的中國政府日益增加的壓力的一種抵抗。^⑧ 加勒比地區的語言發展（其譜系無法追溯到明確的來源）經常被認為是克里奧爾化的一個經典例子。這在香港的情況，或可類比為英語和廣東話的混合。

當然，我無法預料，甚至無法想像，展覽開幕僅僅數個月後，就發生了針對香港逃犯條例修訂草案的大型抗爭行動。雖然我不會說林氏的展覽反映了香港的政治局勢，但回想起來，那無疑是一個耐人尋味的預兆。^⑨ 在回到格里桑的論述前，讓我先介紹展覽中的一些作品，以便更全面地闡明展覽所引發的不同情感。首先，林氏的三聯畫，〈景物手術〉（2018）描繪了放大的外科醫生在為山脈動手術。林氏沒有運用太多炭筆，藉此顯露了作品使用的材料（木夾

板）。中央畫面的上方描繪了人造燈，深色線條代表其光線。生與死同時在畫中出現，但視覺上色彩的消去更傾向於後者。蒼白無生氣的色彩讓人想起裝置作品〈一日兩天〉（2019）裏的煙火，這作品包含林氏在香港的遊歷摘錄，剪輯成一分鐘的錄像並循環播放——裏面有他遇過的鳥兒、海邊的岩石、一個碼頭、一艘船和一個站在購物商場的男子——投影在六張大幅的透明紙上。共使用了四台投影機，屏幕兩側各放置兩台。地板上佈置了太陽能供電的跳舞花兒以及塑膠魚——的確整個展覽都充滿了幽默和玩味。

此外，作品〈山洞記轉〉（2019）由兩輛玩具火車組成，各自走在自己的軌道上，環繞在牆上無休止地轉圈。不過，這種輕佻被作品中穩現的陰鬱事實平衡了——其中一輛玩具火車仿製自中港之間第一輛通行的直通車。另一個例子，〈地理形制〉（2018）乍看是另一幅外科醫生為山脈進行手術的繪畫，但仔細一看，林氏在畫中加了小人像，跟放大比例的外科醫生形成強烈對比。這些小人像也出現在其他作品中，例如〈封面——山洞記〉系列。這些興高采烈的小人像彷彿對他們所身處的陰鬱環境不屑一顧。

錄像作品〈希望一〉（2006 – 2019）和一系列繪畫作品〈希望二〇〇六——二〇一八〉（2019）同時展示了淒涼和樂觀，該錄像循環顯示一支火柴由燃點到熄滅的過程。藝術家早在 2006 年就開始拍攝

⑦ 任何認識林氏的人都會知道他為人快樂和樂觀，他似乎不會為任何事所動搖。展覽也許是讓他開始理解他的非凡經歷的一種方式。

⑧ 與此同時，如下文所述，廣東話被邊緣化的原因不能完全歸因於來自中國政府的壓

力。參考：〈Meet the Cantonese activist fighting to keep the language alive in its southern Chinese heartland〉（為了讓廣東話在華南地區中心存活而奮戰的文化運動份子），2018 年 10 月 21 日，*Today*，<https://cutt.ly/hyqnFeQ>

⑨ 展覽策展人陳暢曾說過，由於這些抗爭行動，這時代最偉大的藝術正在香港發生。林東鵬的展覽是一個先驅。參見 Vivienne Chow，〈‘The Greatest Art Is Going to Be Produced in Hong Kong’: Amid Raging Protests, Some See an Opportunity for the

City’s Art Scene〉（〈香港將創作出最偉大的藝術：在熱烈的抗爭中，有人看到香港藝術界的機遇〉），*Artnet*，2019 年 7 月 15 日，<https://cutt.ly/6yqnLZj>

▲《山洞記》半繪
Sketch of Sean Dung Gai



了這些錄像，當時高清仍未普及，因此這看似重複的動作也略有參差：這導致了彷彿燃盡的火柴不斷擦出明亮火焰的效果。如果說希望在這錄像裏得以保存，它在〈希望二〇〇六——二〇一八〉的十三幅作品裏則被撲滅了。這十三幅作品各自對應了2006年至2018年期間的每一年，藝術家將燃盡的火柴嵌入每張畫布的顏料中。又一個例子，大小適度的夾板雙聯畫作品〈幽幽洞裏見星光〉（2018）從沉鬱裏浮出，並帶有一股樂觀感。作品右下角有一個蹲跪著的、正在寫作的小人物。確實林氏在登上高鐵之前曾計劃寫一本書。畫面大部份被大筆大筆的炭筆和墨所覆蓋，一系列重複的白點象徵了標題裏的星光。這樣一來，作品具有活力之餘，亦令人黯然。

《山洞記》的展覽佈置，通過建立非線性的參展路線將我所提及的「群島感覺」實例化，令觀眾能通過親身體驗和感受來呈現作品（如上所述）及其主題——兩者往往互有關聯。群島感覺與格里桑的群島思維概念完全一致，而以「感覺」代替「思維」的理由是要強調思維不必是抽象的而可以是具體化的。展覽佈置在人們進入畫廊之前就建立了這條件。當踏出電梯準備進入畫廊時，人們面對著兩個入口，每個入口都被一塊深色的布幔覆蓋著，從而隔絕了內部空間的視野。到底該從哪個入口進入，頃刻間並不清楚。也就是說，展覽沒有明確的起點或終點。這樣，作品之間的關係變得比任何單一作品及其主題都重要。有趣的是，無論選擇哪個入口，首先和最後

遇到的作品都是「希望」。從右邊入口進去，可以見到〈希望一〉錄像；而從左邊入口進去，則會見到〈希望二〇〇六——二〇一八〉繪畫。^⑩ 展覽佈置裏線性的破壞也見於一些作品中。例如前述的〈山洞記轉〉，由於火車沒有明確的起點或終點，旅程本身就顯得比目的地重要。此外還有一組作品，藝術家把書中內容以UV印刷到木夾板上，然後直接在板上作畫。人們甚至可以看到書中其他頁面的輪廓，但是最終，由於觀眾只能看到書的一頁，敘述因而變成非線性。總括而言，透過線性的破壞，無數種關係得以建立，從而拒絕靜態單向的表象而偏重於局部相對性，當中身體被有意識地置於能主動產生身份的情感關係中。更具體地說，展覽喚起的群島感覺帶予人沮喪和希望，而兩者並不能完全達致和解。的確，這裝置說明了對於「希望」來說，「焦慮」其實並不陌生。

關於香港與中國大陸岌岌可危的當代關係，格里桑以下所書值得我們進一步反思：「距離是關係的必要條件：就像海橄欖和毒番石榴之並存。」^⑪ 毒番石榴是一種在馬提尼克的海灘上與海橄欖並排生長的植物。觸摸時，它會造成痛苦的灼傷，只有海橄欖才能治癒。重要的是，在這裏「距離」是接近的，跟僅用於施行控制的距離相反。撰寫本文時，香港與中國大陸之間的關係處於一種可悲的單向狀態。如果關係取決於近距離，那麼林氏的展覽佈置就隱喻地實現了這一點。例如，展覽的牆壁之間的縫隙，讓人只可以部份瞥見其

他房間。此外，作品〈一刻〉（2019）的旋轉投影所發出的光線從這些縫隙漏出，從而干擾了人們在其他空間的觀展體驗。重點是，無法對展覽有一個全面的視覺：透明度是不可能的。格里桑寫道，不透明的權利將是自由的開端。保留的權利與邦國對透明度的要求形成了鮮明對比。不透明並不一定意味著混淆，而是克里奧爾化世界的出現，不間斷的關係所產生的糾纏必然是不完全為人所知的。林氏展覽的部份可見性，為觀眾提供了不透明的條件。正如格里桑所寫：「因此，保護多樣性的東西，我們稱之為不透明性。」^⑫

從最樂觀的角度，我認為林氏探索的中心是一種對希望的堅持（目前尚不清楚那將採取甚麼形式）。值得注意的是，格里桑提出的克里奧爾化理論，雖然源自後殖民及殖民背景，也是非一般的樂觀。這就是克里奧爾化和林氏作品吸引我興趣的部份原因，也應該吸引所有關心一個更道德的世界或跨越地緣政治邊界建立連結的人的興趣。

^⑩ 林氏對寫作和語言有著濃厚的興趣。其他參考書籍的方式包括藝術家將兩幅畫板並排裝置在牆上的作法，見《山洞記》，頁五十五及五十六（2018）：畫組的左側和右側稍微推離牆壁，而中央兩幅畫板相接的部份則緊貼牆身，製造出翻開了的畫頁的效果。

^⑪ 愛德華·格里森，《關係詩學》（*Poetics of Relation*），第157頁。

^⑫ 愛德華·格里森，《關係詩學》（*Poetics of Relation*），第62頁。

As part of his 2015 solo exhibition *The Curiosity Box (Hong Kong): The Hometown Tourist*, Lam Tung Pang stationed himself at the New Capital Hotel in Hong Kong's Wan Chai District, where he fashioned himself as a tourist of sorts in the city where he has lived most of his life. His aim was to engender the curiosity one feels for a city one is only just visiting. Lam embarked on this project almost two decades after Hong Kong's handover from Britain in 1997 to China. The city with which Lam self-identifies was changing - and will continue to do so as it approaches 2047, the year Hong Kong's semi-autonomy expires - but perhaps in ways less perceptible for someone living in the city, hence, the need to make oneself into a stranger. To create a sense of estrangement from his life in Hong Kong, he lived in a hotel apart from his family for five weeks and during this period he would create an *in-situ* installation that would eventually take up one wing of the hotel. One could visit the installation by appointment from June 1 to July 12, 2015. In a further twist, Lam sent souvenirs and letters from his Hong Kong "visit" to a fictional family in Zurich that would be contemporaneously exhibited at Counter Space (May 30 – July 8 2015) where Lam held a virtual residency. Adding other layers of complexity, Lam invited Hong Kong-based writer Hon Lai Chu to write a travelogue (as a tourist herself) based upon her visit to the hotel and UK-based Jennifer Wong, originally from Hong Kong, to create poetry inspired by *The Curiosity Box*.

The Hometown Tourist grew out of an Asian Art Council fellowship and residency in New York City, where he lived and worked for several months in 2013. Here, where he was a tourist in the conventional sense,

he turned his apartment into a makeshift exhibition space – “a non-public, but at the same time non-private space” – in which he created an installation out of everything including Legos, receipts of various kinds, brochures of floor plans of museums he had visited, and other ephemera. He also incorporated projections of footage of parks he had visited and installed onto the wall a series of otherwise unremarkable brown paper bags. On these bags, he had written pithy statements, such as “I’d rather be homesick than be at home.” ① Parts of his New York City apartment would eventually become integral to another iteration of *The Curiosity Box*, an exhibition which took place at the Chinese Culture Center in San Francisco later that same year from June 13 to December 21. In addition to presenting a version of his installation in his New York City apartment, he included new works, such as a group of sketches of the Rocky Mountains with found objects, created during or in response to the 58-hour train ride he took between New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco. Lam prefers not to fly, so he often takes trains whenever possible.

Overall, *The Curiosity Box* series nudges the viewer to consider a constellation of disparate cities in relation to each other rather than as distinct entities, thereby redefining the parameters of “home” itself. For him, it is being homesick that re-imagines and expands “home”. In one of his notes reproduced in the catalog for the San Francisco exhibition, he writes that “I found myself actually not tourist not local, I have no idea what I am in this city, there should be one more term to define this kind of journey.” ② In this essay, I will suggest that philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant’s conceptualization of “creolization” might be

① Chen, Abby, *The Curiosity Box: Lam Tung-pang* (San Francisco: Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, 2013), 51.

② Chen, Abby, *The Curiosity Box: Lam Tung-pang*, 89.

the term Lam needs to further elucidate the condition he describes as nether being a tourist nor a local. ③ Creolization technically refers to the process of cultural mixings in the Caribbean that comes as a result of slavery, plantation culture, and colonialism. However, Glissant believed that creolization could refer to a broader set of sociocultural processes not only in the Caribbean but also across “all the world” (*Tout-monde*). ④ Indeed, Glissant believed quite strongly that his concepts, while emerging from the Caribbean context, need not to be tied to the region, and this essay is written in this spirit.

Of specific interest is Glissant’s notion of “archipelagic thinking.” ⑤ An archipelago refers to a specific geological formation of a chain or series of islands scattered in a body of water with no clear center. Not surprisingly, much of Glissant’s thinking is linked to the physical geography of the Caribbean archipelago, focusing on the idea that each island of the Caribbean maintains its autonomy while still being in relation to the whole. ⑥ “Relation,” too, is an important concept for Glissant. In this way, I would argue that the cities connected to the various iterations of *The Curiosity Box* – Zurich, San Francisco, Hong Kong, New York City, etc. – can be seen as part of an archipelago. Each city is not distinct but in relation to each other. Lam explicitly makes these connections in his poetic notes. For instance, under the entry “Picasso, you are not Art” Lam takes a flippant statement by a Hong Kong politician that “political art” is not art to bear on artworks such as Picasso’s well-known painting *Guernica* (1937) that he came across in New York City. In a tongue-in-cheek matter, Lam implies that following the logic of this Hong Kong politician would mean

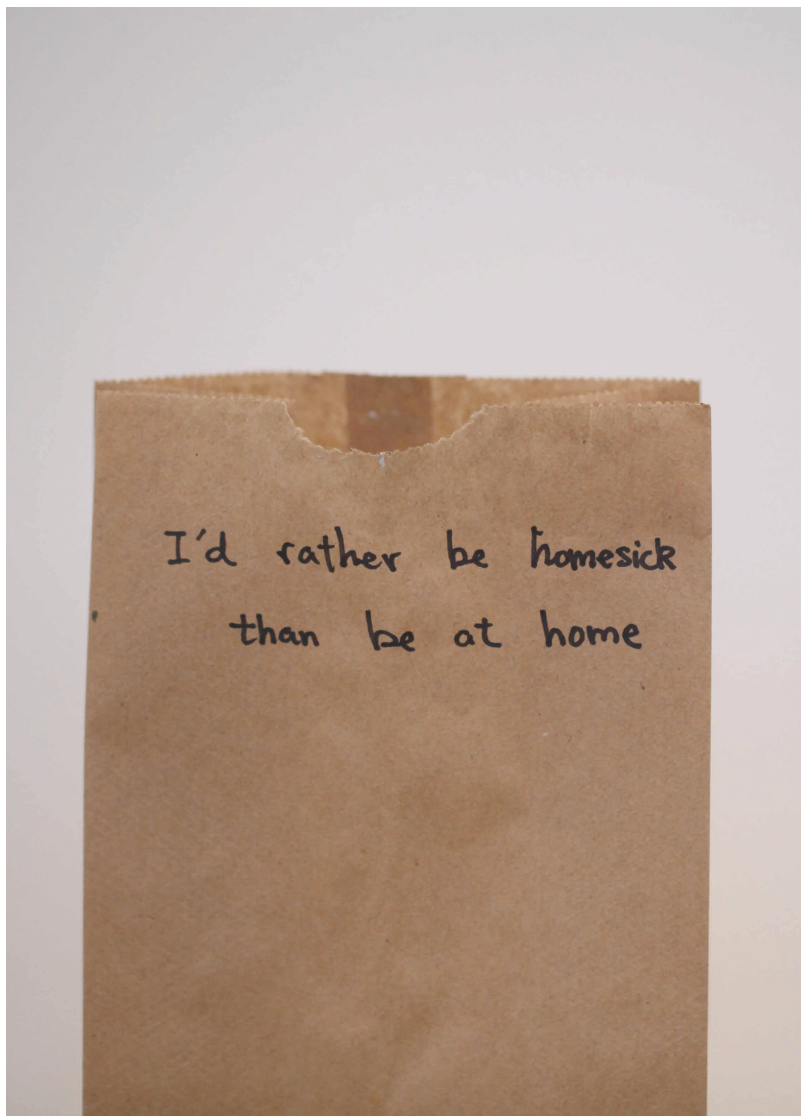
③ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

④ Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

⑤ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

⑥ Hong Kong, too, is an archipelago of 200+ islands. In contradistinction to the Caribbean, though, the islands do have a center.

▼《好奇心》·中華文化中心·三藩市·美國·二〇一三
The Curiosity Box, Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, U.S.A., 2013





challenging the importance of canonical artworks like that of Picasso.

The Curiosity Box laid the foundation for his exhibition *Saan Dung Gei*. It is not, though, one of ephemera of the artist-as-tourist: the museum maps and receipts are gone, for instance. The works in the exhibition are magic realist in contradistinction to those of *The Curiosity Box*, which are more grounded in reality. Most importantly, the works create a multi-layered affective experience that poetically gestures towards the uneven relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China. Indeed, the event which is the point of departure of *Saan Dung Gei* is the anxiety Lam felt during part of the 20-minute period he was travelling through a dark tunnel on the then-newly inaugurated high-speed railway between Hong Kong and Beijing. The exhibition title loosely translates into “mountain cave notes” and is a reference to Lam’s unsettling train ride. ⑦ The construction and implementation of the high-speed train was not without controversy: one floor of the West Kowloon station, where one boards the train, was given over to Chinese immigration and customs. In this way, the undercurrent of anxiety Lam felt was perhaps an implicit reaction to the latter that effectively amounts to Hong Kong’s cessation of territory to China. Moreover, the choice to use Romanized Cantonese for the exhibition title signage is instructive in that it is a form of resistance to the increasing pressures by the Chinese government to use only Mandarin, the “official” language. ⑧

⑦ Anyone who has met Lam, will know that he is jovial and upbeat. He seems unflappable. His exhibition was perhaps a way for him to begin to make sense of his exceptional experience.

⑧ At the same time, the reasons for why Cantonese is being marginalized cannot be completely ascribed to pressure from the Chinese government as outlined in the following article. See: “Meet the Cantonese activist fighting to keep the language

alive in its southern Chinese heartland,” *Today*, October 21, 2018, <https://cutt.ly/hyqnFeQ>

The development of language in the Caribbean, the genealogy of which cannot be traced to clear sources, is often cited as an example of creolization par excellence. An analogy in the context of Hong Kong might be the mixing of English and Cantonese.

Of course, I could not have forecasted or even imagined that just a few months after the exhibition opened, there would be massive protests against the Hong Kong government triggered by the proposed extradition bill to mainland China. While I would not argue that Lam's exhibition is a mirror of Hong Kong's political situation, in retrospect it is certainly eerily portentous of it. ⑨ Before weaving back Glissant's writing into this essay, I will describe just a few of the works in the exhibition to articulate the different affects evoked by the exhibition more generally. Firstly, Lam's triptych painting *Landscape in operation* (2018) depicts larger-than-life surgeons operating on a mountain. Charcoal is sparingly used here; in so doing, Lam reveals the material (plywood) on which he worked. There are artificial lights, the illumination of which is marked by dark lines, depicted at the top of the central panel. Life and death are both evoked but his visualization of muted colors veers more towards the latter. The pale and lifeless colors are reminiscent of the fireworks in the installation *A day of two Suns* (2019), comprised of a looping 1-minute extract of Lam's peregrinations in Hong Kong – including birds, rocks by the seaside, a pier, a boat, and a man standing in a shopping center he came across – projected onto six large hanging sheets of diaphanous paper. Four projectors were used: two on either side of the screen.

Arranged on the floor of *A day of two Suns* is a solar-powered, dancing flower as well as a plastic fish. Indeed, humor and playfulness are present throughout the exhibition. The work *Saan Dung Gei Turns* (2019) is comprised of two toy trains, each on its own track, looping endlessly around a freestanding wall. The frivolity, though, is balanced with the somberness of the fact that one of the model trains is a replica of the first direct train between Hong Kong and China. In another example, *Forming the landscape* (2018) is at first glance another painting of a surgeon in scrubs operating on a mountain, but on closer inspection, Lam has attached Lilliputian figures that contrast with the over-sized surgeons. These figures appear in other works, too, such as in the series *Cover – Saan Dung Gei* (2018). These figures seem to be gleefully oblivious of their melancholic surroundings.

The video work *Hope #1* (2006 – 2019) and a series of paintings titled *Hope 2006 – 2018* (2019) collectively offer up both bleakness and optimism. The video depicts a loop of a match being lit until it burns out. The artist shot some of the videos as early as 2006 when HD was not the common resolution so there is a slight variation in the seemingly repetitive act: this has the effect of making it appear as if a bright flame incessantly emerges from an otherwise burnt match. If hope is kept alive in the video it is extinguished in the thirteen paintings comprising *Hope 2006 – 2018*. Each painting references a year between 2006 and 2018. The artist has embedded burnt out matches into the paint in each canvas. In another example, the modestly sized diptych painting on plywood *Shining Stars in Cave* (2018) surfaces dreariness coupled with a sense of optimism. On the lower right-hand

⑨ The curator of the exhibition Abby Chen has said the greatest art of the era is coming out of Hong Kong because of the protests. Lam Tung Pang's exhibition is a precursor to that. See Vivienne Chow, "The Greatest Art Is Going to Be Produced in

Hong Kong: Amid Raging Protests, Some See an Opportunity for the City's Art Scene," *Artnet*, July 15, 2019, <https://cutt.ly/6yqnLZj>



side of the work is a small kneeling figure who is writing. Indeed, Lam had planned to write a book prior to boarding the train. Most of the painting has been covered over with broad washes of charcoal and ink, while a series of repetitive white marks is meant to evoke the shining stars in the title. In this way, the work not only is vibrant but also gloomy.

The exhibition layout of *Saan Dung Gei* instantiates what I will describe as “archipelagic feeling” by creating a condition of non-linearity that in turn allows the works (such as those aforementioned) and their themes to be experienced and felt by viewer’s bodies – always in relation to each other. Archipelagic feeling is completely in line with Glissant’s notion of archipelagic thinking, but the rationale for replacing “thinking” with “feeling” is to underscore that thinking need not be abstract but embodied. The layout brings this condition in being even before one enters the gallery. That is, upon leaving the elevator to enter the gallery, one comes upon two entrances, each one covered by a dark cloth so the view into the space is obstructed. It is not immediately clear through which entrance one should enter. That is, there is no clear beginning or end point to the exhibition. In this way, relationships between and among artworks become more important than any singular artwork and its theme. Interestingly, whatever door one decides to go through, the first and last works to be encountered are the *Hope* works. Entering through the right-hand door, one would encounter the video, while entering through the other, one encounters the paintings.^⑩ The disruption of linearity in the layout is reinforced in several of the works, too. For example,

given there is no clear beginning or end point for the trains of the aforementioned *Saan Dung Gei Turns* (2019), destinations seem less important than the journey. Also, there is a group of works based on the artist directly painting onto plywood whereon the scanned pages of a book has been UV printed. One can even see the outline of other pages in the book but ultimately the narrative becomes non-linear since a viewer only has access to one spread of book. In summary, an infinite number of relationships can be created through the disruptions in linearity, and thereby a static image of the world is rejected in favor of localized relativity, where one’s body is consciously placed in the affective relations that actively produce identity. More specifically, the archipelagic feeling engendered by the exhibition leaves one with feelings of bleakness coupled with hopefulness which are not entirely reconcilable. Indeed, the installation suggests that anxiety is not a strange bedfellow of hope.

The following written by Glissant is worth further reflection in relation to the precariousness of the contemporary relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China: “Distancings are necessary to Relation and depend on it: like the coexistence of sea olive and manchineel.”^⑪ The manchineel is a plant which grows side by side the sea olives on the beaches of Martinique. When touched, the plant can inflict painful burns which is healed only by the sea olive. Importantly, “distancings” here are proximate in contrast to distances which only serve to engender control. At the writing of this essay, the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China is one in which power is woefully one-sided. If relation depends upon proximate distancing, then Lam’s

⑩ Lam has a strong interest in writing and language. For interest, other ways in which books are referenced include the artist’s strategy of placing two panels on the wall so each abuts the other as in *Saan Dung Gei*, pp 55-56 (2018): the left and right-hand sides of

the resulting unit are slightly pushed away from the wall while the center, where the two canvases meet, remains flush with the wall, effectively creating a spread of pages.

⑪ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 157.

exhibition actualizes this metaphorically in its layout. For instance, there are gaps between the walls in the exhibition that allow one only a partial glimpse of other rooms. Moreover, the light from the rotating projection of the work *The Moment* (2019) spills through these gaps and thereby disturbs one's experience of works in other spaces. More to the point, it is impossible to get a totalizing view of the exhibition: transparency is not possible. Glissant writes that the right to opacity will be the birth of freedoms. The right to withhold is in sharp contrast to the state's need to be transparent. Opacity does not necessarily mean obfuscation, but that the entanglements that incessant Relations produce must be partially unknowable for a creolized world to emerge. Lam's exhibition with its partial visibilities instantiate the condition of opacity for viewers. As Glissant writes, "Thus, that which protects the Diverse we call opacity."¹²

At its most optimistic, I would posit that the core of Lam's investigation is an insistence of hope (what form this might take is unclear). It is worth noting that creolization as theorized by Glissant is unusually optimistic too, given the birth of the idea emerges from post-colonial contexts. This is in part why creolization and Lam's works should interest all of us interested in a more ethical world or connecting across geo-political borders.

¹² Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 62.



Saan Dung Gei by Lam Tung Pang

*is published for Lam Tung Pang's solo exhibition
Saan Dung Gei at Blindspot Gallery, 26 March – 11 May 2019*

<i>Published by</i>	Blindspot Gallery (HK) Limited
<i>Art Director</i>	Mak Kai-hang
<i>Design</i>	Mak Kai-hang, Yeung Yan Shek (Makkaihang Design)
<i>Editor</i>	Chong Ying Nei, Nick Yu, Mimi Chun
<i>Contributor</i>	Lam Tung Pang, Mimi Chun, Abby Chen, Prof. Kurt Chan, Dr. Alpesh Kantilal Patel, Chitralkha Basu, Louise Law, Jennifer Wong, Tang Siu Wa
<i>English Translation</i>	Jennifer Wong, Nicolette Wong
<i>Chinese Translation</i>	Mary Lee, Lin On Yeung
<i>Images</i>	Leung Wing Yee, Jan Lau
<i>Limited Edition</i>	350 copies, May 2020
<i>ISBN</i>	978-988-12802-8-2



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