
CONVERGENCE OF THE PRACTICES OF DOCUMENTARY AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN HONG KONG: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC WORKS OF TANG KWOK HIN AND LAW YUK MUI

Hoi Shan Anson Mak, *Hong Kong Baptist University*

ABSTRACT

This article is part of a research project funded by the University Grants Committee, Hong Kong. The project title is 'Convergence of Documentary Practices in Contemporary Arts in Hong Kong'. We collected 230 artworks from 31 artists/artist groups for textual analysis. Twelve artists were selected for a focus study and interviews. Eleven short edited interviews with English subtitles, together with information on the artworks and artists, are freely available online to anyone, especially researchers and teachers, interested in using the materials for their own projects. There are also artworks (with artists' permission) that go with artists interview, hence audience can better comprehend when artists referring to their artworks. URL: <https://docuarthk.wixsite.com/research/artists-n-z> Among many findings, autoethnography is shown to anchor an interesting point of intersection across disciplines. This article explores autoethnography, originally applied as a qualitative research method, echoes with the practices in reflexive documentary and the ways being used by contemporary visual artists in Hong Kong. This writing examines autoethnographic artworks by Tang Kwok Hin and Law Yuk Mui regarding notion of homes and relational autoethnographic subjectivities.

KEYWORDS

Autoethnography, Home, Hong Kong Contemporary Arts, Experimental Ethnography

BIO

Anson Mak is a researcher-artists, specialized in moving image and sound. She currently works as Associate Professor in Academy of Visual Arts in Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong. She is especially interested in experimental ethnography and manipulation of super 8 film in the digital era. In the last 10 years, she has been doing research-creative works, bridging conventional researches methods and creative art works in the field of visual ethnography. Her works are shown in many international film festivals and exhibitions.

www.aahsun.com

Introduction: Auto-ethnography at the Junction of Various Disciplines

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With Documenta creating waves every 5 years and more and more contemporary artists working on documentary-based works, studying the ways in which Hong Kong artists work has become inevitable and necessary. In the last two decades, debates, publications and conferences² across disciplines have paid increasing attention to the core issues of documentary and art, especially with regard to objectivity vs subjectivity, factual vs emotional and expressive representations (Pearce and McLaughlin 2007, Lind and Steyerl 2008, Balson and Peleg 2016). A collection of essays by contemporary artists on their own practices and perspectives has also been published (NAi Publishers 2005). Autoethnography is a vital

¹ <https://docuarthk.wixsite.com/research/artists-n-z>

² The book, *Truth or Dare, Art and Documentary*, edited by Pearce McLaughlin and published by Intellect, Bristol, UK, is a collection of conference presentations held at Whitechapel Art Galley and Tate Modern in 2006.

anchor point of interests. It appears in documentary studies and as a qualitative research method in the field of anthropology and sociology. Autoethnography in documentary studies has proliferated under various names: personal cinema, personal documentary, domestic ethnography, video diaries, electronic essays, experimental ethnography, avant doc, etc. (Russell 1999, Renov 2004, Austin and de Jong 2008, MacDonald 2014).

At the academic debate on autoethnography as a qualitative research method, there are two diverging paradigms, as explained by Anderson (2006) in a journal article entitled 'Analytic Autoethnography'. One paradigm focuses on conventional methods of data collection (the research subject has to be visible and actively engage in the text and the research has to include informants other than the researcher/subject herself/himself) and data analysis (the researcher must analyse data on herself/himself and other informants, and s/he must submit to theoretical analysis). The other paradigm stresses contexts of engagement and experiential levels: evocative, emotionally expressive, subjective, etc. There are so many interpretations of autoethnography that pages of Chang's book *Autoethnography as Method* are dedicated to clarify the author's argument that autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details originating from anthropological and social scientific inquiry (Chang 2008: 43-51).

The following definition of autoethnography is a balanced regarding the two paradigms above, 'autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation' (Bochner and Ellis 2000: 742). In this article, I am interested more on the subjective and emotional aspects of autoethnography, issues as follows:

1. The perspectives of artists/researchers regarding research methods and fieldwork practices, reflexivity in data collection and analysis, relational subjectivities and the expression of cultural and social knowledge via emotional and artistic means. As noted by Sparkes, 'Autoethnographies can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding in ways that, among others, are self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, and self-luminous' (Bochner and Ellis 2002: 222).

2. The reading and interpretation of autoethnographic texts and artworks; that is, whether an audience can proactively engage in exploring self/cultural experience together with the artists/ethnographers. This is related not only to the perspective of audience's reading but also as a result of the artistic means and representation tactics. We need an active audience, not passive spectators. 'I wanted readers to feel that in describing my experience I had penetrated their heads and hearts. I hoped they would grapple with the ways they were different from and similar to me' (Ellis 1997: 131).

Decentralisation

The emerging artists Tang Kwok Hin and Law Yuk Mui were both born in the 1980s in Hong Kong. Some of their major works use method and practices of autoethnography to geographically, historically, culturally and emotionally explore and re-inscribe the notion of home(s).

The term 'central value' describes the prioritisation of Hong Kong's development as a global financial and commercial centre. The term originates from the name 'Central District', a district in the middle of Hong Kong Island that is home to most of Hong Kong's financial corporations. Central District is located at the heart of Victoria City in the colonial times. The term 'central value' also refers to the top-down centralised political control exerted by communist China. Tang is an indigenous inhabitant³ of Yuen Long (in the far northwest of Hong Kong), and Law resides in Tseung Kwan O (eastern Hong Kong), the new town developed out of Junk Bay in the 1980s. The homes of the two artists are in very different cultural and geographical settings. Tang's ancestors were residents long before the British came, whereas Tseung Kwan O, Law's current home, was a new town built by the British colonial government. Despite the differences historically and culturally, both artists focus on the edges of Hong Kong, rather

³ 'Indigenous inhabitants of the New Territories (Hong Kong)' refers solely to men (and their sons and grandsons) who were resident in Hong Kong's New Territories before 1898. They have special rights to preserve their customs and free land on which to build houses. These rights were preserved under the Hong Kong Basic Law after the handover of Hong Kong from the British to the People's Republic of China in 1997.

than its “central” areas. This is an essential and meaningful strategy for decentralisation and decolonisation, although delivered via personal trajectories.

Law held a solo show entitled *Victoria East*⁴ in Videotage, Hong Kong in 2017. She has lived in Tseung Kwan O, the former Junk Bay, since childhood. The area was named ‘Tung Hau’ (picture 1), referring to the eastern end of Victoria Harbour, in the *Convention between Great Britain and China Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory* signed between the Qing dynasty and the British government. The British colonial government used the landfill for dumping trash until the 1980s, when Hong Kong needed space to develop new towns other than the central Kowloon area. The place was then renamed Tseung Kwan O, and is today a town with a population of 400,000. Naming the exhibition *Victoria East* rather than using the town’s name was a tactic that ironically locates the exhibition in a de-colonialised setting, reinscribing the idea of Victoria city/Victoria Harbour as anchor/centre. Through fieldwork research and the use of materials from the town’s landscape and seashore for the production of the artworks, Tseung Kwan O could then be reclaimed as a powerful subject or (re)-centre of Hong Kong, not the ‘other side’ east of Central. I shall explain Law’s work in details in later sections. Geographically, Tang’s exploration of an area in the far northwest of Hong Kong, Yuen Long, which covers history, traditions and the notion of home, is based on a similar strategy of decentralisation to search for and inquire into identity. However, I should emphasise that decolonisation as a discourse is not a defining quality or aim of Tang’s or Law’s artworks, but a by-product. Both their artworks and this article focus on auto-ethnographic experience, the production of cultural knowledge and the depth and subtlety of emotional connection between the artists and their subjects.

In an interview conducted for this research, Tang said, ‘I did not pay attention at all to politics when I was young. Not until I went to university did I start to notice the news and social issues. I repeatedly tell this very story that I went to the city for the first time only when I was 18 years old. Being an indigenous inhabitant is a very special identity that made me rethink a lot of issues, including power structures and the right to own land... It also made me think about issues of inter-generations, as I live so very differently from my parents. There are certain kinds of contradictions – regarding inter-generations, regarding my own life in the village and in the city. Then I wanted to start exploring myself, my home and my family.’

This long reflective process of gradual realisation of the ways political and cultural identity mutually shape one and other resulting in changing inter-subjectivities, is exactly the decolonisation process. Studying and reflecting upon self and familial relations for cultural and political implications is actually also, the method of autoethnography.

Tang then developed an interest in re-observing the customs of his village and the ways of life of his parents and other relatives living there, with which he seems to be very familiar of. He used a video camera as a tool for his re-exploration of various special customs, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and Linear New Year. As a visual artist with a fine art background, he is also interested in materiality, objects and his (grand-)grandfather’s belongings. These objects and their cultural materiality carry great significance and traces of history of the village and its community.

Grandpa Tang is an exhibition/installation⁵ accompanied by a single channel video⁶ and objects. In the exhibition space (photographs 2-7), Tang uses everyday objects owned by his grandfather and ancestors from 1800 to the 2000s. These objects include family photographs, letters and pieces of writing, records, drawings by Tang’s grandfather’s father, boxes, cabinets and medicinal oil. The objects are either hanging on the wall or put in cabinets. They are rare and important items that should be preserved as part of local community history, which have been neglected in Hong Kong’s grand narrative history. The raw concrete space of the exhibition is in sharp contrast with the homely objects. This alienating effect mirrors the contradiction of Tang’s own identity as a villager yet in this big cosmopolitan Hong Kong. Due to the delicate texture of papers, the private handwriting, the fading colours of the drawings and Tang’s decision to install these small objects on the walls, viewers must get really close in order to see them. This setting and the resulting act of close-seeing, all contribute to the reflection of the sense of distance with our families/ancestors and history in an intense emotional dimension. Hence, it goes far

⁴ *Victoria East*, exhibition documentation <http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/victoriaeast/>.

⁵ There are several versions of the exhibition; this is the most recent one (2017) at the time of writing: <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2019/03/grandpa-tang-2017.html>.

⁶ Grandpa Tang, video URL: <http://vimeo.com/240440282> 14 min.

beyond mere presentation of fieldwork materials, but demonstrating ethnographic knowledge in a deep emotive realm. The exhibition also turns, both Tang and the audience into witnesses to all of these fading materials that can be easily destroyed. Ellis writes about the interaction between autoethnographic texts and their receivers. 'My open text consciously permitted readers to move back and for the between being in my story and being in theirs, where they could fill in or compare their experiences and provide their own sensitivities about what was going on' (Ellis 1997: 131). We as audience witness the objects of histories together with Tang, flowing back and forth within Hong Kong's historical time and back and forth between Tang's and our own family stories, emotions and conflicts with ancestors and history.

Re-exploring the notion of home through the lack of memory

Autobiography, often discussed alongside autoethnography, works through memories. In the last 40 years, people have become increasingly interested in self-narratives, as demonstrated in the shift from novels to memoirs (Chang 2008: 32) and from expensive ethnographic films to low-budget (or even zero-cost) video diaries (Renno 2004: 171-180). Memoirs and video diaries all work through memories, unfolding personal experiences into a public representation. Benjamin's *Berlin Chronicle* may be one of the most frequently cited texts on how autobiography places memories front and centre. What I found interesting about the autoethnographic works of Tang and Law, however, is that they work the other way around. The artists conducted their research due to a *lack* of memory, a *lack* of archival materials and historical documents, and thus a lack of ways to review and understand the past that actually shapes the present, and also the future.

Russell writes about the conventional ethnographic film, which is based in social observation and seeks to present a form of cultural knowledge; yet the colonial context makes this knowledge bound to produce otherness. However, in her view, this otherness should not be 'vanished.' Instead, it 'can be transformed, expanded and modified as otherness is still very much with us as new hierarchies and forms of differences are constantly being produced in postcolonial culture' (Russell 1999: 10-11). Such a transformation should not diminish otherness but rather liberate from within, from artists' own subjectivities and identities. In post-colonial Hong Kong, people have long lacked memories of their own community/homes and local history. Both Tang and Law respond to the *lack*, as a reason to set off their autoethnographic journeys: for Law, missing information on the original landscape before the artificial rendering of the coastline by the reclamation of land for Tseung Kwan O; and for Tang, missing information of the origins of the everyday-life customs of his family's (and his very own) village. These are the 'outer' subjects the artists want to observe, participate in, re-explore, re-inscribe and eventually liberate from. This "lack" is essential cultural knowledge due to the colonial political conditioning. Hence, the self and the other are placed and aligned on the same plane, transformed from within, culturally and politically.

The single channel video in *Grandpa Tang* exhibition/installation starts with several close-ups on objects. The first is an old black and white wedding photograph of Tang's grandfather and grandmother (pic 8). It is staged not as a photograph but as a framed photograph (an object) hanging on the wall, as is customary among elder generations in Hong Kong. Family photographs are part of the spatial arrangement of homes. Thus, regarding representation of the artwork, the photograph is not merely an photograph in itself but as an cultural object placed at home that makes specific notion of home. The cultural context and ways of life of Tang's parents' generation, handed down from their ancestors, are then further emphasised. Only until Tang's generation does this spatial practice – hanging family photographs on the wall ceases, which metaphorically points to the changing notion of homes.

Major festivals, in particular, amplify unique cultural patterns. The beginning shot of the *Grandpa Tang*, on the photograph on the wall is followed by a close-up of Tang's father's hand as he tidies up in preparation for the Mid-Autumn Festival, which is one of the most important traditional festivals. It stresses family unions/gatherings. The full moon symbolically suggests a full union of family members. In Tang's village, most people are relatives, forming a big "Tang family". The festival itself demonstrates the unique clustering of big single-surname families of Hong Kong indigenous inhabitants in villages. Festivals traditionally pay tribute to ancestors with ceremonial practices that have been passed on from generation to generation. Lunar New Year is another major festival. The video shows Tang himself getting rid of the old and redoing a new couplet in red on both sides of the door. This is an important

tradition to indicate a new beginning and a new year with good fortune to come. We hear the voice of his father teaching him how to align the couplet correctly. We see the artist doing an everyday task, a traditional act that is what his father and his grandfather's fathers repeatedly did for years. In a way, traditions, as cultural patterns, are repeated performances from which later generations can learn and uphold. I saw the artist's posting of red couplets as a performance of his own identity, the expectations of his parents and his self-reflections, which differ from and yet still relate to tradition and the complex thoughts regarding the idea of home. For Tang, a camera is like an attentive inner and outer eye, searching for people, stories and objects that generally remain unnoticed, and placing reflections and thus representations of the self and others on an equal plane as a kind of exploration of inter-subjectivities.

This is how domestic ethnography plays out in the inner and outer spaces of the lives of the subjects under study, who are also the art-makers themselves. Domestic ethnography refers to 'work engages in the documentation of family members or, less literally, of people with whom the maker has maintained long-standing everyday relations and has thus achieved a level of casual intimacy. Because the lives of artist and subject are interlaced through communal or blood ties, the documentation of the one tends to implicate the other in complicated ways; indeed, consanguinity and *co(i)mplication* are domestic ethnography's defining features. By *co(i)mplication* I mean both complexity and the interpenetration of subject/object identities. To pursue the point yet further, one could say that domestic ethnography is a kind of supplementary autobiographical practice; it functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial order' (Renov 2004: 218).

Psychological truths

To extend further the discussion of domestic ethnography related to a lack of memory, Tang has another very interesting work, entitled *Nancy*,⁷ which is about his unborn sister. The video is a top down fixed frame shoot overlooking a photo album that his mother's hands flipping through page by page. As she looks through the photographs, so does the audience at the same (limited and fixed) speed (picture 9). Tang collected photographs from the Internet of girls named Nancy, composing his imaginary sister. As he only knew about bits and pieces of his mother's experience, he wanted to connect with his mother via a fictional narrative of his unborn sister. He stages a viewing of the photographs at the same time as his mother, interrogating family histories, questioning family relationships and supplement the lack of memory of a family member through this fictional intervention. Interestingly though, the photographs are real (from the Internet of girls called Nancy), depicting Nancy(s)' studies, birthday parties, picnics, travelling and gathering with friends. The mother's experience of her unborn child, her hands and her experience of reading the photo album are also real yet on a ironized fictional photo album. '(D)omestic ethnography offers up the maker and her subject locked in a family embraced; indeed, as we have seen, subject/object positions are at times reversed' (Renov 2004: 229). In this case, subject/object positions are beyond reversed; they are blended. The absent subject, Nancy, points to the psychological truth of Tang's mother, and Tang's own lack of memory all become subjects of the artwork, and the expressive dimension of the emotional touch.

The structure of the video includes inter-titles that create punctuated moments of pause for thoughts while looking at the photographs. The inter-titles are in the first person voice of Tang, as if a brother were talking to his fictional sister, the 'I' and 'you'. The voices are real, explaining that Tang's father still talks about his unknown daughter, and expressing how Tang misses Nancy and tries to find her traces in various places. These are all real emotions of Tang. In the process of searching, the artist fills in the 'lack', and the missing affection, to sketch a hidden family history and story that aims not as outer facts but inner reflections and perhaps innermost emotions.

The expressive quality of the visual work lies in the images themselves. The formation of the ethnographic experience involves looking at past photographs as a form of fictional narration, bouncing back and forth between Nancy's (and Tang's) family stories and the audience's own experience. The

⁷ *Nancy* 2017 exhibition documentation <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2017/06/nancy.html>.

Video URL: <http://vimeo.com/220284314>, 8 min.

Installation view URL: <http://vimeo.com/220340542>, 4 min.

experience of looking at the album, with the speed of Tang's mother's hands flipping through the photograph album and the pauses created by Tang's "voice" in the form of inter-titles, along with the experience of looking at the content of the photographs, which echoes people's common expectations of reviewing photographs from everyday life to 'remember' important moments in life (in this case, the absence of life), work together with the audience's own experience of the relationship between siblings. Truth in auto-ethnography is often internal; psychological rather than external. Watching the dry-skinned aging hands of Tang's mother flipping through photographs of her unborn fictional daughter is the most touching moment of the video.

'Self-representation likewise shifts into something much more fluid and open, discursive and intersexual, even fictional and fantastic' (Russell 1999: 314).

Expressive formal experimentation

The expressive formal experimentation in *Grandpa Tang* is executed through the aesthetic of fixed frame close-up shoots. The video comprises a series of close-up shoots from the beginning until the middle of the work. A journey into family memories is set off by an old wedding photograph of Tang's grandfather hanging on the wall, followed by close-ups of the hands of Tang's father and other objects and food for the Mid-Autumn Festival, such as cups, fruits (grapefruit and taro), joss paper, paper money and incense, which are burned as a tribute to ancestors. Close-ups shots are normally used to amplify the impact of objects and are often used as giving details out of an overall environment in conventional cinematic language. Close-ups tend to serve as supplementary detailed information in general situations. However, Tang uses close-ups without wide shots to deliver information of general conditions. Hence, the close-ups shots defamiliarise everyday life, stripping away its usual connotations by amplifying textuality and materiality of objects, not the event-orientated information. This alienated and segmented presentation suggests a different perspective to both Tang and the audience to re-observe and re-examine the activities and relationships of families (traditional villagers) in this cultural festival and setting. He focuses on objects and investigates ways in which the materiality of objects conveys his observations and feelings. The work is developed further in abstractions through images of burning paper and incense, fireworks in the sky, smoke rising from fire against the night sky and a blurry full moon, alongside mundane chat between Tang and her mother. Hearing these voices, cultural context fades away, becoming secondary and serving as mere background. There is no information on where, what or why. This type of work is quite commonly being criticised as a lack of useful 'information' and 'ethnographic knowledge'. Yet, I take it as a form of autoethnography, which is often 'opaque, circuitous, in pieces' (Austin and Jong 2008: 46). It is 'opaque' in the genuine expression of affection and emotion of the artist (who is also the subject being studied); circuitous in its subtle and poetic aesthetics, which require active interpretation from the audience on the cultural objects and events; and in pieces in terms of its complex and barely conveyable internal inquiry of inter-subjectivities.

In the video work, not until the part on Lunar New Year do images turn into wide shots delivering relatively more informative situations, presenting the traditional activities for instance, sharing roast pork, greetings and 'poon Choi' gatherings.⁸ The video work moves between defamiliarised close-ups of everyday objects and contextualised depictions of the unique cultural traditions and activities of the village, caught by Tang's reflective eyes for participant observation, re-observing people and events with which he has been familiar for many years. '(D)omestic ethnography of the sort I am outlining is exclusively an exercise in self-inscription. Put another way, these works could be said to enact a kind of participant observation that illumines the familial other while simultaneously refracting a self-image' (Renov 2004: 219).

Law's formal experimentation also heavily relies on abstraction and defamiliarisation. Similar to Tang, as an artist with a fine art background, she is interested in materiality, yet lies in natural landscape, for instance trees, hills and sea. In a work entitled *On Junk Bay, The Plant: 1990 – present*, a video installation,⁹ Law re-explores the landscape of a hill that she passes every day. One must pass through

⁸ A tradition of families gathering for dinner, eating outdoors in large groups and putting many dishes in a big bowl shared by everyone seated at a round table. This tradition is common among Hong Kong's indigenous inhabitants.

⁹ *On Junk Bay, The Plant: 1990 – present*:

<http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/on-junk-bay-the-plant-1990/>.

hills to enter the town of Tseung Kwan O, which was created by reclaimed land. The landscape of the hill has become a routine visual experience for residents of Tseung Kwan O. It is an everyday, mundane landscape seen repeatedly from the bus window. Buildings in the public housing estate in which Law lives are named after plants¹⁰. For Law, plants, trees and hills have become personalized iconic symbols denoting the idea of home. In the installation work (picture 10), various types of plants are placed in low light interacting with the projection, casting shadows on the walls. Among these shadows is a video work.

This video work¹¹ is composed of a one-take shot along the road to Tseung Kwan O, an everyday visual experience for Law. She substantially slows down both the sound and the images to extend the momentary experience of a repetitive dull routine. The visuals are accompanied by text on screen, with no voices. We hear the artist's voice in our minds by reading the text, offering us something resembling a personal chat. Due to the extremely slow speed of the video, we can see trees which originally is fast moving view of landscape from cars, in details. The images work with the actual sound distorted by slow speed. The processes of looking and listening dramatically extend over time. In the text on screen, Law explains where she lives, the names of the plants/buildings we see and her curiosity about the trees in the hill, which had been there long before the town was built by reclamation. The trees and hill are the object and landscape of the pre-town history, which is exactly the lack in Law's memories and records of this history. It also renders an analogy of rich varieties of and good survival of plants on the hill to ways of life of people living in Tseung Kwan O.

Hong Kong is an immigrant city. In the 1940s-50s (when the Communist Party took over China) and the 1960s and 1970s (during China's Cultural Revolution), numerous people immigrated illegally to Hong Kong, including Law's mother. In addition, the British built new towns in Hong Kong and brought people in through public housing projects. Law and her family were moved to Tseung Kwan O as part of this trajectory. Their migration was a path to rebuild home, yet this was an unstable notion of home, creating unique memories for temporary homes that is a shared experience to many Hong Kong people. This in fact is a strong contrast to the idea of homes of indigenous villagers with fixed geographical and familial ties for Tang. In the book *Documentary Now*, which gathers the notes of contemporary artists doing documentary-based works, Marjoleine Boonstra writes, 'Documentary for me means a story where there's a clear concept, where image, sound and narrative line represent different layers and emotions. It is a construction in which you can discover things, create a new reality. With a line of approach that condenses and orders things in such a way that the film's intention become clear. The poetry of reality.' (NAi Publishers 2005: 119-120) 'The poetry of reality' is an appropriate description of the formal strategy and aesthetic of Law's works.

Research Methods and Fieldwork

Curiosity about the pre-town history of Tseung Kwan O led Law to work further on the area -- her solo show entitled *Victoria East*¹² (2017). Before describing and analysing the exhibition, Law's research methods should be discussed. Her fieldwork practice is not merely a tool for collecting materials. Rather, bodily and emotional experience during fieldwork is also accounted for the aesthetic decisions of the artworks and the setting of the installation in the exhibition. Fieldwork is not neutral, and contemporary artists conducting research do not produce mere ethnographic data. It is their experience **as** the artworks themselves.

The following description of detailed fieldwork is from an interview I conducted with Law. Originally, she wanted to find a particular hill in Tseung Kwan O, which can match the shape of a hill in an archival photograph. She hiked up a hill in Sau Kei Wan (east of Hong Kong Island) and realised that high-rise buildings in Tseung Kwan O town blocked the view of the hills. Hence, she decided to travel by boat to a small island in Sai Kung (on the eastern tip of the New Territories) and hiked up the small hill there. At that point, she could finally see the hill she had been looking for but at the back. As the view of one side of the hill was blocked, she had to move around to the other side to see and photograph it. She

¹⁰ King Lam Estate. In Chinese: 景林 means landscape and trees. It is a public housing estate began in 1990 in Tseung Kwan O.

¹¹ Video URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaE9rvnoS2Y>

¹² *Victoria East* URL: <http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/victoriaeast/>

found this fieldwork experience very interesting because it was like a bodily performance -- using her body to interact with the hill. This fieldwork experience guided her to include slide images (photographs) of the hill (present and past), a map of her sea trip and the locations of the hills, and a video of the sea (above and beneath the surface of the water) in the final presentation of the exhibition.

For Law, the most important issue is the discovery of her physical and psychological reflections during her fieldwork experience in which bodily experience is essential. The fact that she could not see the hill on one side motivated her to travel by boat across the sea to a small island. As a result, she discovered the shape of the coastline, which was not the original aim of her fieldwork. On approaching the Tseung Kwan O cemetery, she realised that the coastline was artificially straightened due to reclamation, that was very different from the natural coastline. The contrast between the visually straight and naturally curved lines made Law decide to produce a sculpture. The only remaining original natural coastline in the town, was cast on a metal plate as a sculpture, with a video documentation of the casting and welding, as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition comprises three video projections. The biggest one, at the centre, is displayed on a transparent screen (picture 11). It shows the seascape (above and beneath the surface of the water), accompanied by sound obtained by underwater hydrophone. As the screen is transparent, the underwater images fall on the screen, walls and floors (as if the floor were the sea). The audience is overwhelmed and surrounded by a seascape that represents the pre-town history of Tseung Kwan O, in which the land we walk on today was originally the sea. It is a highly poetic and emotional representation of the history of a town, geographically and spatially. The second video documents a technician casting and welding the shape of the natural coastline on a metal plate, and the metal plate is also part of the exhibition (picture 12-13), set behind the main video projection.

The third video is an abstract image of a flapping flag (picture 14) that is another set of work in the solo exhibition. Tseung Kwan O has a special political history. Tiu Keng Leng which located in the area of Tseung Kwan O, was once a village housing former Kuomintang officials and their followers who had escaped to Hong Kong from China after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). National flags of Taiwan were put up everywhere in the village, and the British allowed them. In the 1990s, and approaching the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, the Hong Kong government decided to clear the area, along with the new town planning of Tseung Kwan O. This is not a hidden history, but was planned to be forgotten. She sets up a desk with a small lamp, with photographs of the landscape, people and objects of Tiu Keng Leng on the desk, similar to a domestic environment at home. The abstract seascape images reflected all over the exhibition space, contrasting with the domestic homely setting of the desk, photographs on desk and small lamp. Via this artistic and cultural ethnographic fieldwork presentation, it recomposes and questions both Law's and our own understanding of homes and history -- Tseung Kwan O history and Hong Kong history, Tseung Kwan O as home and Hong Kong as home. The exhibition has created an unique and reflexive spatial and cultural experience for the audience about Tseung Kwan O. 'Subjectivity subsists within image culture as an "other reality" – a utopian space where parallel universe is linear neither in time nor in space, moving across histories and geographies to produce a dialectics of cultural representation' (Russell 199: 313).

Conclusion: Autoethnographic Text

I wish to render this conclusion in autoethnographic form, as my very own autoethnographic text. As a researcher-artist with a background in film/cinema who does experimental ethnography and currently teaches at a contemporary visual art school, I have been pulled and pushed by various forces – academic, artistic, familial, activism. I have been asked the question 'Why do I have to watch your story?' innumerable times since the late 1990s. On learning about autoethnography, I was better able to articulate my answer. I still remember how shocked I was on reading a book on autoethnography (2003) by Carolyn Ellis that describes the author teaching a class on autoethnography as the book itself. It is constituted by descriptions of context, people, emotions, relationships and events that are as detailed as field notes, as touching as a novel. 'Oh, this echoes the reflexive nature of modernist cinema and personal essay film, and the notion of form as content and the process as the artwork in contemporary art!' I exclaimed to myself.

I shall also never forget Susanne Gannon's *Sketching Subjectivities* (Jones, Adams and Ellis 2013: 228-243), which comprises an academic debate in the first half and a personal letter to Ellis in the second half about their shared experience of losing family members. Scholars like Renov and Ellis have written about autoethnography for more than three decades and are still facing challenges. I was astonished to find that Tang and Law, visual artists from a fine art background, make autoethnographic works so very well, and yet without stressing this purpose or even being aware of it. Their genuine intention to explore life and the expressive, poetic qualities of their artworks along with cultural ethnographic knowledge have touched my heart. And yes, I consider this to be an academic finding, a personal finding and an essential insight.

FIGURES

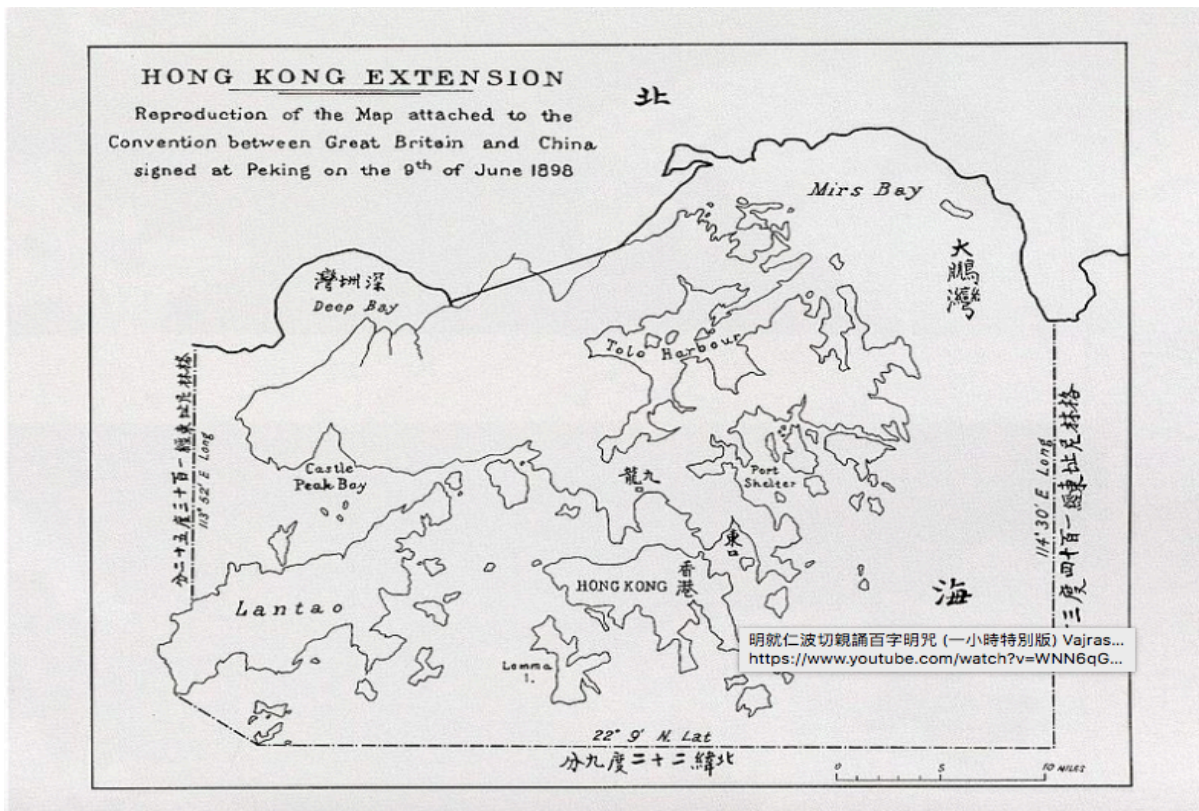


FIGURE 1: Tung Hau” which refers to the eastern end of Victoria Harbour, at *Convention between Great Britain and China Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory*







FIGURE 2-7: from <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2019/03/grandpa-tang-2017.html> Grandpa Tang Installation view



FIGURE 8: *Grandpa Tang* (video screen shot)



FIGURE 9: *Nancy*

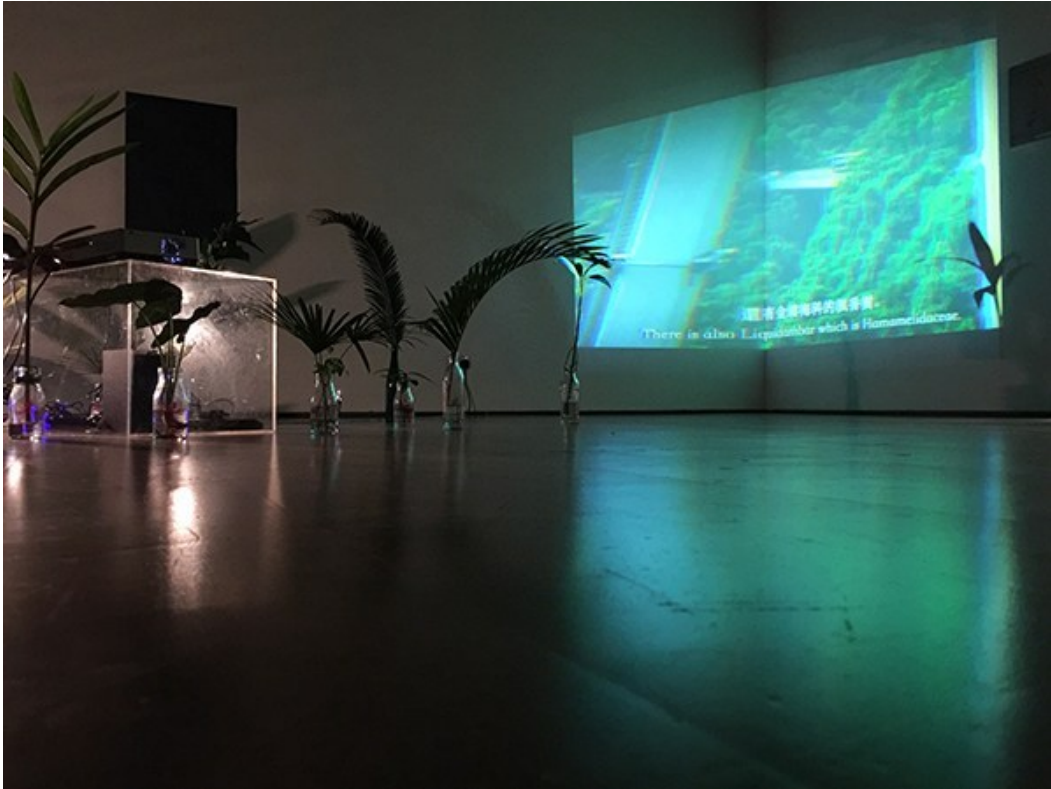


FIGURE 10: Installation view of *On Junk Bay, The Plant : 1990 – present*



FIGURE 11: Transparent screen and the video falling on screen, floor and walls, at installation, *Victoria East*.



FIGURE 12-13: The second video is the documentation of a technician welding the natural coastline on a metal plate, and the metal plate is also part of the exhibition, set behind the main video projection, at installation, *Victoria East*.

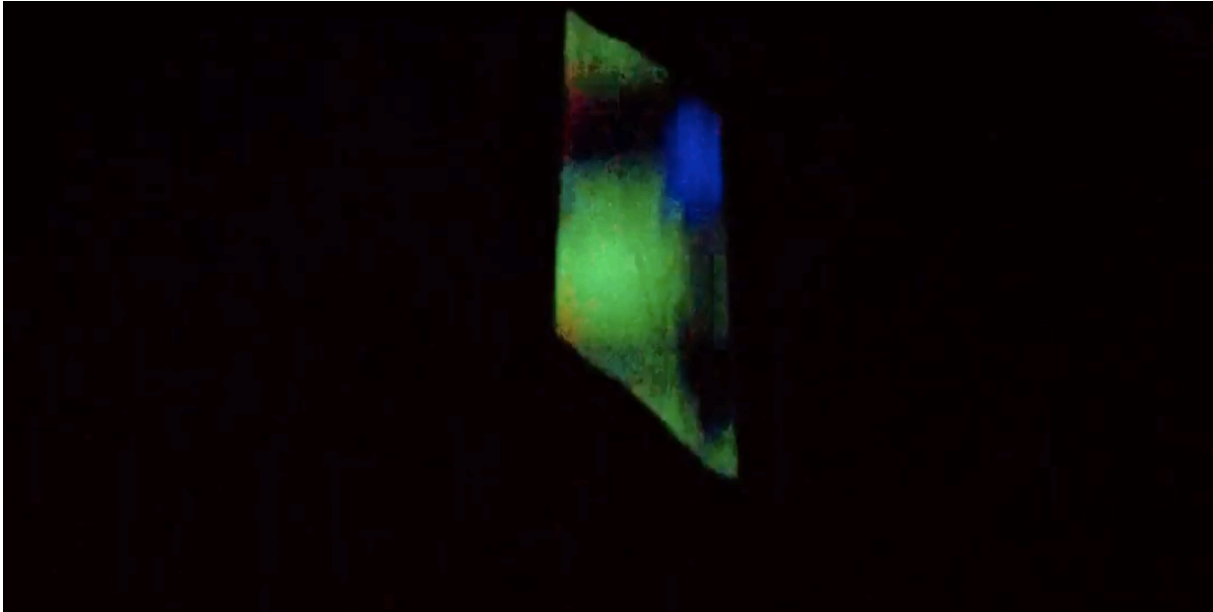


FIGURE 14: An abstract video of a flapping flat about Tiu Keng Leng. at installation, *Victoria East*.

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