

Wai Kit Lam - Press

The Wall: Reunion or Divide - A Dialog between Hong Kong & Germany

- Carol Pui Ha Chow, 7.2022

Walls protect and divide. They act as frontiers of power with various control mechanisms, especially when built as political and ideological borders. However, does the fall of a wall really signify freedom? Perhaps different forms of invisible walls are always present, hindering unity within and beyond nations? What constitutes real freedom? How can togetherness that embraces differences be realized when power is always at play with its insidious disguises?

The political reunion of Hong Kong and China, as well as that of West and East Germany, provides a fantastic backdrop for us to examine these questions. Despite the political reunification and removal of “walls” of various kinds, the people of both countries do not come together as “we.” Us/Others still prevail within the “united” nation-state. The Wall features 14 artistic positions from mainly German and Hong Kong artists that respond directly or indirectly to the issue.

Both featuring an overwhelming presence of bricks, Yim Sui Fong’s video Quotation explores how people remain imprisoned in the mental wall constructed by Maoism even forty years after Mao’s death, while South Ho Siu Nam’s Defense and Resistance performance-photography uses bricks “made in Hong Kong” to retain its autonomy and agency from the escalating forces of oppression. Such “will” finally took the street as its stage. The haunting, panoramic images of Vincent Yu Wai Kin’s (In)visible Wall show a vivid picture of the contesting forces from the past to the present that shape Hong Kong, while the gloomy black and white images of Jimmi Ho Wing Ka’s So Close and Yet portray a very similar picture via the border between Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Resistance involves strong will but also emotions such as loss, despair, and even hatred. Tobias Kruse’s Deponie and Eric Meier’s THOR invariably involve the idea of “abjection” to explore the frustrations and the right-wing sentiment amongst Eastern Germans and its linkage to the Nazi past in post-reunification Germany. Meier’s melted beer mugs glass installation Goodbye Deutschland further explores the sense of loss and vulnerability of the life of the precarious and those who migrate for a better alternative, often in vain. Such sentiment is echoed by Lam Chun Tung’s Goodbye Hong Kong, the image of an iconic floating restaurant forced to leave the once glamorous city and its flamboyant past, just like the new wave of Hong Kong emigrants or even the values carried within the place and the people.

Does history repeat itself? Herbert W.H. Hundrich’s A Thin Red Line neon-strip installation and Lam Wai Kit’s Which Things Were (Are) Allowed And Which Were (Are) Not self-spying image-text vividly manifest the co-operation of “discipline blockage” and “discipline mechanism” in a totalitarian regime. -When the red lines are ubiquitous, and nothing is right, subtle coercion is an inevitable outcome. As a result, humans submerge into the abyss of distrust, and people are never truly “people.”

Hartmut Jahn's experimental video *Double Germany Fantasy* and the cinemascope film *Berliner Blau*, co-directed with Peter Wensierski, while depicting rather drastic differences in life on both sides of the Wall, nevertheless suggest a Utopian vision of unity. One not so much constructed by a homogenized, collective body but through creative and social democracy in which individuality, heterogeneity, and diversity constitute society. In fact, as the divide after post-German reunification evinces, history should not end with the transition from communism to the often linked pairs of democratic-capitalist systems. A binary thinking and simplistic assemblage of communism/authoritarianism on the one hand and capitalism/democracy on the other may obscure the problems underlying societies and social conflicts. Lee Chun Fung's mockumentary *Boundaries*, which interweaves the Wall element and the division of East and West Germany in both pre and post-unification eras with the political negotiation between Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and the colonial forces, suggests how history and societies are always shaped by complicated and intersecting political-economic and socio-cultural forces at local, national, and transnational levels.

Globalization marked by intensive flows of people, commodities, capital, and technology definitely does not flatten the earth, though time and space are undoubtedly compressed. Disjunctures still exist. An investigation of the metaphor of the Wall in the globalization era necessitates the unfolding of dissonances and multifarious voices masked by the veil of increasing connectivity and cultural convergence. Interviewing native and migrant islanders of different nationalities and religious and political beliefs, Lo Yin Shan and Anthony McHugh's *Driving Lantau – Whisper of an Island*, a video diary 1998-2003/2011 reveals the untold, contradictory, and suppressed Hong Kong stories through the lens of an allegorical outlying island. More importantly, the story is perhaps also a reiteration of the eternal truth that no man is an island. Ethnicities, gender, religious, and even political differences are not necessarily conflictual when working in tandem.

Dialog, or more specifically, communication, is integral to the fostering of communities within and across cultures. The photography and audio work *What time is it now* by Dorothy Wong Ka Chun and Benjamin Ryser (O!land) and their accompanying artist-guided tour link Hong Kong and German histories through the intertwining of personal and social memories in public spaces, such as memorials and parks. Public spaces are sites where public life can come into place, parks are spaces where boundaries can easily be transcended through play, minds and bodies can be liberated, and hopes and dreams can be fostered.

The dialog will end with the screening of Hartmut Jahn's video *Counterpart Hong Kong* and Choi Bin Chuen's work *Every time I am back in Hong Kong, I gain 9 kilos* shot in 1989 and 1997, respectively, -two significant years in both Germany and Hong Kong's histories. More than three decades have passed, and it is time to ask not only what time it is now in terms of history writing, but also where we are now on the path of the revolution of social democracy.