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Each year through the student societies, students from Cultural Studies (CULS) and Professional Communication and English Studies (PENG) form a team to vet and edit student essays and creative work submitted to *This and That*. The Journal celebrates the College of International Education's writing talent. It is headed and produced by lecturers at CIE.

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Contribution from our HKBU alumnae

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The Spectacle The Spectacle

Creative Work

The visual dialogue of the film A Separation (2011)

Yiu Yuk Kwun, Julianna

The author's bio:

I am an alumna of Hong Kong Baptist University, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Creative Writing for Film, Television, and New Media, as well as a Master of Arts (MA) in Producing for Film, Television, and New Media.

I am an enthusiast of film and television animation. Throughout my career, I have gained experience in various fields and roles, including film and new media production, executive administration, public relations, marketing, and Cantonese subtitle translation. At present, I am independently studying videos related to films, television series, and advertisements. I occasionally share my analysis videos of films or TV series on my YouTube channel: "Moving Island" (YT/FB/IG: movingisland.yj).



Asghar Farhadi's *A Separation* is about an Iranian middle-class couple's conflicts due to divorce. Nader hired a lower-class caregiver to take care of his elderly father suffering from dementia. The protagonist's stubbornness drives everyone to disappointment and desperation. The cinematography shapes their turbulent atmosphere. The story structure, characterization, framing, and camera position establish a meaningful audio-visual dialogue with the audience and elevate the film to a work of art.



Fig. 1. The preamble: scanning passport



Fig. 2. The beginning: the couple's divorce in progress

At the beginning, the preamble is the scanning of a passport and some documents, showing the preparation of a case of “separation” between the characters. It is the beginning of a storm connotatively. Such representation of separation also accentuates the distance between the documents and their physical selves in flesh and blood.

The use of the camera's POV invites the audience to make a judgement of the separation. The female character Simin is shown to be complaining to the judge that there is a problem with her marriage, as her husband Nader does not want to emigrate and abandon his father. She wants to leave Iran to give her daughter a better education.

The film is dominated by gray tones. The director adopts an eye-level camera angle to create a sense of reality, as if the audience were sitting with the characters.

The director is good at using distance to express the relationship between characters. A medium-long shot is used to portray Simin being home alone, representing a sense of alienation from this home.



Fig. 3. Simin staying at home alone

The camera distance of the conflict scene between Nader, Simin and their daughter is medium, highlighting the tense triangular opposition, the three angles of different values.



Fig 4. The conflict scene of Nader, Simin and their daughter

When the father and daughter are in a good mood playing, they are shown to be sharing the same frame, close to each other.



Fig. 5. The image of Nader and his daughter playing up the stairs

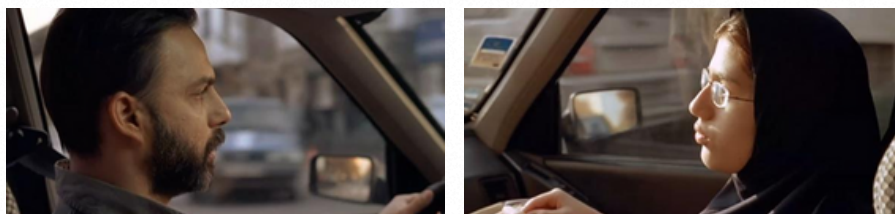


Fig. 6. At the beginning, his daughter sitting in the car beside him

Car-seating strategy also reveals the father and daughter relationship. At first, they sit next to each other. As things fall apart, the daughter is shown to be taking a back seat, as if the father is just a driver, with little eye contact.

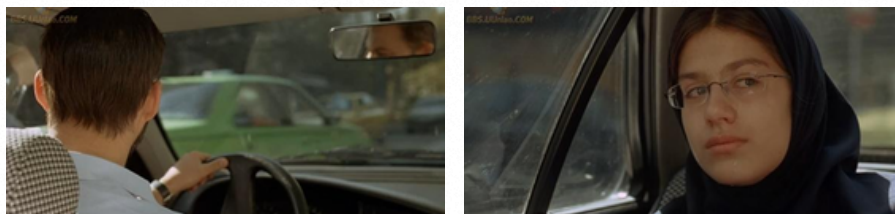


Fig. 7. His daughter sitting in the car behind Nader

Regarding the social distance between Nader and his daughter's schoolmate, the car is the main instrument to be a cover to obstruct him from contacting others when he picks up his daughter. The driver's seat is his comfort zone. He wants to keep a distance from his daughter's school as he tackles his personal problems at home. The windshield is a mirror for him to block out the social world.



Fig. 8. The sequence of Nader waiting for his daughter in the car outside the school

The walls, doors and windows are important elements that show the separation of the characters according to different classes, standpoints, beliefs, or identities. Wherever they are - home, car, or hospital, characters are shown to be trapping themselves in their “safety distance”.

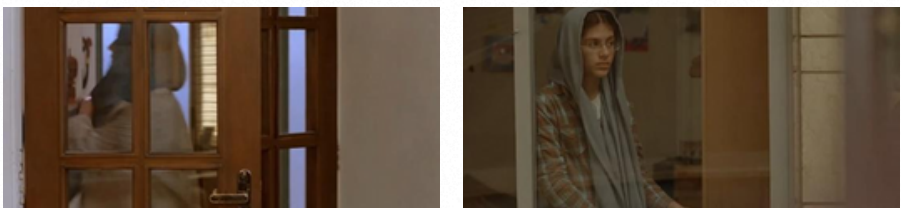


Fig. 9. The walls, doors and windows have significant functions

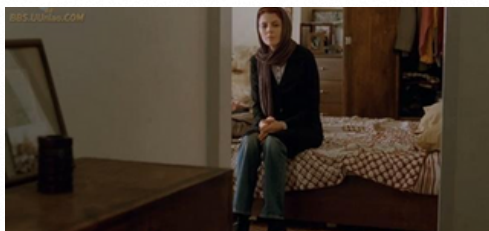


Fig. 10. Simin staying at home alone

When Simin watches her daughter from inside her room, the wall reduces her to a mere voyeur of her daughter's distant life.



Fig. 11. Nader and Hodjat meeting for the first time in the bank

When Nader meets Razieh's husband, Hodjat, he stays in the bank behind the window cover, a significant divide between the middle class and the lower class. The director uses a low angle of Hodiats's sight to look at Nader; whereas Nader's sight uses a high angle to look at Hodiats. Such difference instantly convey the difference in class.



Fig. 12. Hodjat argues with Nader about whether his wife's miscarriage was caused by him

In this scene, the glass door is prominently portrayed, expressing opposition. Nader and Simin stay inside the room, and Hodjat is pushed outside. This shows that the dominant power is in Nader's hands, connotatively.

In conclusion, the director effectively uses different elements to express emotions. The theme of "separation" is expressed in marriage, family, class, and identity. The film does not use any non-diegetic background music. Instead, it relies on diegetic, environmental sounds to create a visual dialogue and tell a story. This approach brings the film closer to reality, a mirror held up to society. The excellent cinematography and mise-en-scène take the audience closer to Iran's reality.

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In the Mood for Love: capturing the disappearance

Wong Po Ying, Camille

When discussing Hong Kong movies, Wong Kar-wai is a name that cannot be left out. Some opinions suggest that his movies are representative of Hong Kong. Paradoxically, they cannot be seen as crowd-pleasers and are not considered mainstream (Sek, 1994). Step printing, a classic soundtrack and a specific date with meaningless monologue have become iconic in the public eye. However, these elements do not encapsulate his stories about the 1960s. The slow motion and elegant waltz compose the stagnation of time in *In the Mood for Love*. This essay will investigate the recurring theme of Wong's movies - time, through narrative structure and repetition techniques of *In the Mood for Love*, and discuss how the movie setting and Hong Kong history create *deja disparu*, as well as the literariness among his movies.

The process of Su Li-zhen and Chow Mo-wan brewing their affection mostly happens at night. The two scenes of Su and Chow meeting each other at night are very similar, but the use of weather, smoke, and fog, causes different effects. They do not have much interaction when the first time they meet, Su wiping the sweat among the cooking fumes from food stalls conveying the stuffy and muggy atmosphere, while Chow is pensive and preoccupied while eating (Heychillhk, 2022). Both actions show their anxiety about their own partners' affairs. When they met for the second time in the stairwell, the water pipe on the wall was vibrating (Qiepianjihua, 2021), which suggests their turbulent feelings, also as the beginning of their complicated relationship. Later, the rain caused Chow to return to the stairwell and smoke.

When Su looks back into the stairwell, the scene transfers to the rain dropping on the floor, then they go back to the apartment together. Wong creates suspense by omitting the scene where they might chat downstairs, making the interactions between them ambiguous (Heychillhk, 2022). Except for the repetition of the venue and movie setting with tiny differences, the lapse of time is also shown in costumes. After they know the truth of their partners' affairs, they fling themselves into the "role-playing game". The continuity of the scene is presented by the same restaurant, music, and food. But Su's cheongsam keeps changing to show they already have rendezvous multiple times (Pan, 2000). The feelings between characters are constructed through these tiny details.

Moreover, the literariness and special narrative structure in Wong's movies, mostly are affected by Latin American literature. The non-linear, circular narrative structure is inspired by Julio Cortázar. His novels always problematize the linear structure of time by literary structure, which is integrated into Wong's movie. Chow and Su having affairs while investigating their partners' affairs, the conversion of their identities contains a tragic and fatalistic connotation (Qiu, 2007). Erasing Mrs. Chow and Mr. Chan not only allows audiences to focus on the feelings between Su and Chow, but in the process of exploration they also need to play as each others' partners (Mao, 2017), which also can be seen as a circular structure from this role replacement. Yumeji's theme is used throughout the movie. The feature of the waltz is the rotating movement and eventually getting back into the original position. The rotation in the waltz is similar to their relationship, restored to its original condition. Their romance turns to deadlock at last, forming a circular structure. In *Days of Being Wild* (which can be seen as a prequel to *In the Mood for Love*), after the death of Yuddy, a nameless man shows up

at the end, which is also portrayed by Tony Leung. This scene implies that another rootless “bird without legs” is ready for his tour, the death of Yuddy is “another Yuddy’s” rebirth (Qiepianjihua, 2021). Its spirit seems to be inherited by countless legless birds forever, and Chow can be interpreted as that nameless man, becoming the “living legacy” of Yuddy. The circular structure appears again which shows the endless and infinite sentiment and ascension through this process of repetition.

A clip from a documentary of French President Charles de Gaulle visiting Cambodia in 1966 is added at the end of the movie. Cambodia used to be one of the colonies of France, and the visit of the French president symbolized the end of Cambodia's colonial history. Also as a colonial city, Hong Kong was in an uncertain political situation (Heychillhk, 2022). In the same year, the Cultural Revolution started in Mainland China. Later, in 1967 leftist riots erupted under its influence. The local social unrest and the shockwave from the Mainland cause great impacts to Hongkongers. Britain also changed its way of managing this colony and soon proposed different policies, which created a sense of belonging among Hongkongers, turning Hong Kong into a buffer against northern chaos. After the 1984 Joint Declaration, the handover was confirmed. The concept of *deja disparu* came up and Hong Kong has become a “hyper-anticipatory and predictive” society since that time (Abbas, 1997). Due to the terminal date in the future, the “ever-present irritant” urges people to change (Abbas, 1997), but the exact things that need to be changed are unknown. The slow rhythm of the film represents the stagnation of time, showing the nostalgia of the good old days.

In conclusion, room 2046 symbolizes the end year of the promise — “50 years unchanged”. The sweetness and

memories of Su and Chow that happened in room 2046 cannot stay forever. They need to face the reality of separation, the same as the Hongkongers need to face the reality of handover. Chow hopes that the memories can stay frozen in the past, which is represented through his action of peeping at female characters in room 2046 from room 2047. However, the past cannot be changed, and the future must be faced. In the end, Chow in *In the Mood for Love* sealed his secret in Angkor Wat, another “him” in 2046 leaving the Oriental Hotel without looking back. Even though Chow and Hongkongers used to be lost in the sorrow of inevitable change, it is just temporary. The passing of time can soothe this pain. After the confession in Angkor Wat and the consolation brought by every “Su Li-zhens”, Chow and Hongkongers will eventually recover from this period of throes.

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Happy Together: the fragile bonds of love in the shadow of Hong Kong's uncertain future

Wong Ning Lo, Theo

Wong Kar-Wai is known for filming nostalgic ambiance and trivial daily lives. He often incorporates imagery and dialogue that reflect the fettle of Hong Kong. In *Happy Together* (1997), Wong depicts a complex relationship between two men, using impactful visuals and music to convey a sense of melancholy and the bittersweet nature of human connections. This essay will examine the uncertain fate of Hong Kong, the characters as alienated and the complexities of love will be discussed by applying the concept *deja disparu*.

As Ackbar Abbas (1997) articulates, *deja disparu* is “the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of cliches, or a cluster of memories of what has never been.” This notion serves as a critique of the rapid transformations occurring in urban environments, particularly in Hong Kong, which has experienced significant socio-political changes since the 1990s. In his film, Wong Kar-Wai effectively captures how the recollection of happiness is overshadowed by the stark reality of the couple's toxic relationship. Additionally, Wong selected Argentina as the filming location to facilitate the audience's connection with themes of migration and the experience of alienation, as homosexuals and as temporary immigrants. As the relationship developed, they could not face each other as they argued and felt unsure if they were perfect together. It aligns with *deja disparu*, representing the inability and refusal to establish roots in any place, leading to human connections that begin to fall out of sync. It also expresses the feelings towards Hong Kong, serving as a significant catalyst for

potential change, reflecting the uncertainty surrounding its future. Lai Yiu Fai and Ho Po Wing illustrate two fundamentally opposing perspectives on the identity and experience of Hong Kong. Po Wing resides in Buenos Aires without a passport, serving as a symbol for the Hong Kong Chinese who do not possess genuine British passports. This circumstance embodies a deep sense of “eternal exile and diaspora”, highlighting the feelings of dislocation and yearning experienced by many individuals who identify with Hong Kong but are physically separated from their homeland. Conversely, Fai possesses the opportunity to visit a breathtaking waterfall and travel to Taiwan, implying a degree of mobility and connection to his cultural roots. The contrast between Po Wing and Fai not only articulates the individual struggles faced by people from Hong Kong but also reflects the intricate dynamics of identity, belonging, and personal history within a rapidly evolving global context.

The kitchen dancing scene is known as one of the most iconic scenes in *Happy Together*. Po Wing teaches Fai to dance back when he is injured. During that time, Fai and Po Wing share a tender dance in a dimly lit kitchen, holding each other tight with no personal space. As they tango, their chemistry is palpable, showcasing their love amidst the chaos of their surroundings. This scene symbolizes their fleeting happiness and connection to a foreign land, emphasizing that their moments of joy are found only in each other, where they are comfortable and feeling alienated (Kotzathanasis, 2016). The moment in the film lasts only a few minutes, but it encapsulates the love between Po Wing and Fai. They care for each other deeply, yet their differing personalities hinder their relationship. Fai despises how Po Wing seems aimless, spending time with foreigners while Fai is working hard. In contrast, Po Wing believes he is simply trying to enjoy life in Buenos Aires. Despite their arguments and eventual

separation, they continue to harbour feelings for each other. The dance brings back memories of the good old days when they were madly in love and happily together, giving *deja disparu* as their passions towards each other start to ignite again, with complex feelings and different ambiance. Their brief reconciliation also symbolizes the reunion of Hong Kong with the motherland. The future of the couple remains uncertain at this moment, reflecting the unpredictable future of Hong Kong amidst rapid changes.

The Iguazu Falls plays a significant role in *Happy Together*, as it motivates the protagonists to travel to Buenos Aires - the antipode of Hong Kong. This journey symbolizes their recklessness and deep desire to find a new place to settle and start afresh. They dare to venture into unfamiliar territory, far from their homeland, highlighting their struggle with identity and a sense of belonging, symbolizing the worry about the uncertain future of Hong Kong's handover to China. The Iguazu Falls is a powerful metaphor for the relationship between Fai and Po Wing. When Fai decides to visit the falls alone, he realizes their bond is as fragile as the tchotchke he once admired, inspired by an animated lamp depicting the falls (Alves, 2022). It shows that this connection, once vibrant, now feels like a beautified illusion, thereby evoking the cherished memories that once held them together. The falls epitomize breathtaking beauty and an unattainable ideal, mirroring their persistent struggles to forge a sustainable connection. However, as Fai contemplates this, he gains clarity, recognizing that he is ready to reclaim his life, belonging, and identity within the "hyper-anticipatory and predictive" fabric of Hong Kong society. This journey of self-discovery emphasizes the importance of embracing one's true self amidst the complexities of relationships.

In conclusion, Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together* intricately weaves themes of alienation, nostalgia, and the complexities of love against the backdrop of Hong Kong's uncertain future. Through the lens of Po Wing and Fai's tumultuous relationship, the film highlights the profound longing for connection amidst the harsh realities of life as expatriates. The iconic kitchen dance scene and the symbolic journey to Iguazu Falls illuminate the fragility of their bond, reflecting broader existential questions about identity and belonging. Ultimately, the narrative encapsulates the bittersweet essence of human connections in a rapid transformation, echoing the sentiments of those grappling with their own ties to Hong Kong and the changes it faces.

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The evolution of Hong Kong English: a linguistic perspective

Lee Yin Ting, Charmaine

Hong Kong English (HKE), also commonly known as a variety of the English language that has evolved in Hong Kong, emerged from British colonial history and is shaped by the region's unique historical, social, and linguistic contexts (Chan, 2013; Bolton, 2000). Over time, the rise of HKE has become an integral part of Hong Kong's multilingual identity and symbolizes the blending of linguistic traditions (Sung, 2015). This evolution creates a common ingroup identity that differentiates Hong Kong from Mainland China by emphasizing the bilingualism of English and Cantonese (Luo, 2014). Additionally, it reflects the city's socio-cultural transformations and the predominant language among its population (Wolf, 2008). Linguistically, HKE is distinct for its phonological features, such as the influence of Cantonese tonality on intonation, and its lexical innovations, often incorporating Cantonese expressions and syntactic structures (Hung, 2002). This essay will explore the unique characteristics and features of HKE, its evolution, and its sociolinguistic implication, while also addressing the challenges it has encountered and proposing potential solutions.

HKE has undergone significant evolution since the mid-19th century during British colonial rule, reflecting complex sociolinguistic influences on the language. HKE was originally shaped by British colonial rule and subsequent globalization, and through time it has undergone a wealth of evolution, developing into a distinct variety of English. During the late 20th century, Hong Kong transitioned into a global city

through globalization and the perception of HKE shifted, leading to its recognition as a legitimate variety of English (Wong, 2015). In addition, regional variations of HKE are evident, referring to distinct linguistic features such as phonetics and syntax that have emerged in specific areas, reinforcing the local identity of Hong Kong. However, the differences of social dialects within Hong Kong have been illustrated due to the two different social classes. Members of the lower working class often use HKE, which is significantly influenced by Cantonese phonology and code-switching. Conversely, the upper working class tends to have a more polished accent due to increased interaction with native speakers (Lai, 2010). Thus, their social markers refer to the dialects they use to identify themselves with either the upper or lower working group, serving as a tool for understanding the complex multicultural city.

Several authors have expressed doubts about HKE on the grounds of perceptions in professional domains. Code-mixing and simplified syntactic structures are prominent characteristics of HKE discourse (Ho & Woon, 2007). Synoptically, the most idealized and original variety of English, such as British or American English, are typically associated with education and broadcasting in formal contexts. However, HKE's divergence from standard English could potentially lead to ineffective communications and misunderstandings. As evident from research conducted by Edwards (2015), workers may have a mix of BrE and HKE, undermining HKE's legitimacy. To address this challenge, it is necessary to enhance the recognition of HKE as a creditable valuable tool for industries. Although HKE is not considered a standard form of English, it can serve as a valuable asset for businesses, allowing them to leverage this language as a theme for their projects. By improving its status and promoting its utility, stakeholders can enhance their marketing efforts,

leading to more effective communication within the market while preserving the cultural identity and fostering globalization.

In conclusion, the evolution of HKE features several unique characteristics that reinforce the city's history and cultural context while making a significant contribution to society. As HKE continues to develop, ongoing challenges related to its stereotypes and status will arise. It is essential to create an environment where HKE is recognized as a legitimate form of English. Hong Kong, as a financial and trading hub (FSDC, 2022), promotes global connections and relationships. The study of its linguistic evolution not only enriches our understanding of human interaction but also highlights the profound interconnectedness of language and culture.

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Portrait of a Lady on Fire: a new feminist cinematic language

Yong Ziyi, Hazel

Laura Mulvey first introduced the concept of the male gaze in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, which provided a unique perspective on feminist film studies. She pointed out that traditional cinema's perspectives and narrative structures tend to revolve around the viewing needs of cisgendered male viewers, and that the female characters are often objectified. The story of the film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, created by French female director Céline Sciamma, revolves around an aristocratic bride to be married and the female painter who paints her portrait, which gradually develops into a romantic relationship from the beginning of a dishonest relationship. This paper will analyze how this film subverts the common narrative structure of films, in which men are the initiators and have unequal power relations, through Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire unfolds from a purely female perspective. Through the expression of reciprocal gaze, the film gives women equal visual rights, deconstructing and rebuffing the traditional male gaze, whilst reconstructing the relationship between female characters, making them equal subjects rather than remaining in one-sided relationships of observing and being observed. The film theory of the male gaze argues that the traditional cinematic language, usually from a male perspective, constructs a *power structure of the gaze* in which women become the objects of the gaze. Mulvey divides the gaze in cinema into the camera's gaze, the male character's gaze and the audience's gaze. They each correspond to women filmed from a male perspective; how

male characters view women in film is usually motivated by desire or control; and films usually assume the audience to be male, and therefore, through the language of the camera and the structure of the narrative, the audience is led to view and evaluate female characters from a male perspective. She also suggests that in works created by women, the *mutual gaze* breaks down the traditional structure of the gendered gaze, in which women are subjects, allowing the power of the gaze to be equal. (Sassatelli, 2011). In the film, the director completely eliminates the presence of male characters, thus creating a separate utopian world for women, which not only frees the female characters from the male gaze but also allows the audience to directly participate in the mutual gaze between women, deepening the expression of women's subjective perspectives. Marianne and Héloïse establish a deep emotional connection through their mutual gaze. They are not only each other's *observers* but also become each other's *comprehenders* in their gazes. This mutual gaze gives both of them subjectivity and further undermines the traditional power structure. Marianne's profession as a portrait painter, hired by Héloïse's mother to paint her daughter's portrait before she gets married, provides her with a valid reason for observing Héloïse. As a painter, Marianne believes that she has more power in the game she plays with her subjects until midway through the film, when Héloïse says, "When you look at me, who do you think I'm looking at?" This statement breaks down this imbalance of power that Marianne pretends to have, and the two are on the same side of the room, turning her towards the camera, with Marianne vaguely breaking the fourth wall and looking directly at the viewer. This one spot is designed to break the fourth wall, where the director not only rethinks the concept of the gaze but also wants to maintain an equal relationship between the creator, the character, and the audience.

Cinema empowers female characters to express themselves and explore female subjectivity, allowing them to defy sexualized and objectified perspectives, with emotional and spiritual connections dominating the representation of the female body. The expression of desire for emotions rather than visual consumption is constructed through the female perspective, thus building an aesthetic experience and identity construction that transcends the male gaze. Mulvey proposes the “anti-male gaze” as a possibility for feminist cinema, emphasizing the need to allow female characters to be independent, to express female experiences and emotions, to make female characters active participants in the narrative, and to construct equal gender relations (Sassatelli, 2011). The director has practiced this basis in the film. In terms of character design, Héloïse is not only an object of painting, but also a female character with self-consciousness and rebellion against traditional identity. Her struggle against fate and her exploration of emotions are all constructs of her own identity, subverting the construction of female identity from a male perspective. During Marianne's painting of Héloïse, Héloïse faces the painting process independently and autonomously; she takes the initiative to ask Marianne to show her body realistically, rather than being idealized or reduced to the “ideal woman” in art; the female characters have independence in the story and express female experiences and emotions, making the female characters active participants in the narrative. The film allows the viewer to experience the physical attractiveness of the characters in a way that is consistent with female subjectivity, by focusing on details such as hand movements or shared smiles, rather than reducing the characters to mere objects of desire. Contrary to the typical male gaze approach, in which the pornography usually involves reducing women to fragmented body parts or programmed visuals, the film does not display eroticism. Instead, it portrays the relationship between the two through subtle emotional build-ups, and the emotional connection between the protagonists

gradually heats up in an atmosphere of romantic equality.

The film focuses on the multi-dimensionality and complexity of minority groups and women's emotions, breaking the traditional male perspective of women's roles, giving a new symbolic image and deconstructing the traditional male-dominated narrative, and contributing to the creation of a new feminist cinematic language. Genovese mentions the concept of post-feminist society in her thesis, and she argues that the post-feminist era is characterized by the fact that women are bound by patriarchy, but there is still a willingness to resist (Genovese, 2024). The final farewell between the two in the film combines and animates the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus. They do not succumb to the illusion that they could be together in a world dominated by patriarchal expectations. Also, at the end of the film, Marianne lets it be known that the painting is hers even though she has been asked to submit it in her father's name, another example of resistance within a patriarchal society.

Director Sciamma said in an interview, “the story of minorities is a threat to the patriarchal society because then they can control the discourse.” Being a sexual minority, the director has given feminist films a new perspective and served the female characters in the audio-visual language, creating an unconventional feminist cinema.

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The untouchable "Taiwan daughter"

Lin Yu Ting

Law Sau Ling, Liana

In the 2024 Summer Olympics, the gender controversy surrounding Taiwanese boxer Lin Yu Ting was a hot topic in the media. J.K. Rowling challenged her gender by retweeting a news article from *The Guardian*, using it as evidence to accuse Lin of not being a woman but participating in women's boxing and being dangerous to other boxers. It drew the public's attention and raised questions about her qualification for the Olympics. As diverse information appeared in the media, the public cared less about her gender but instead consumed her image to construct their own "reality" and promote their ideologies. This essay will illustrate the production and public consumption of the image of Taiwanese boxer Lin Yu Ting, which is a simulacrum that leads to the crisis of the audiences' "realities" and identities collapsing in the postmodern era.

Lin is a sports star who has a positive image, which has expanded after the gender controversy. Sports stars are a mixture of the sports hero and celebrity. A sports hero is a mythic and an inspirational character that symbolises the model of sport and the prevailing social values. Through media intermediaries, the hero becomes a celebrity (Chiu, 2011). Lin becomes a sports hero as she is a distinctive figure in sports, constructing the myth of striving to reach her goals. She has won many awards in international boxing events since 2013, including two gold medals in the *International Boxing Association (IBA) World Boxing Championships*. This conveys the message and creates the myth of getting what you want, defeating the enemy, and becoming the winner

(Chiu, 2011). Lin as a sports hero is first recognised by her great achievement and as a champion. As she receives more awards, she receives more attention and has been extensively covered by the Taiwanese media. She is gradually known by the public for her fame rather than her talent, so she becomes a celebrity. Therefore, Lin is a sports star. The image of Lin has extended after gender controversy. In the postmodern era, our society is dominated by media, including TV, news media, and the internet. They float abundant images and signs that create diverse representations and encompass us. Hence, the media is a world of representation. Lin presents her performative self in the public setting. Through media reports and her posts on Instagram, she shapes her image in the media. Before the Olympic Games, Lin built a hard-working and persevering image in the media to gain public support. In the Taiwanese documentary *Road to Champions*, she shows her weakness as she feels lost in the endless and repetitive training for the Olympic games (Taiwan Mobile, 2024). This demonstrates the difficulties of the training to create a diligent image. Also, Lin describes in the documentary that she feels uneasy in the Olympic qualifiers because of the rival's European Youth champion title. Nevertheless she gave it her all regardless of the outcome. This establishes a persistent and unwavering "never-giving-up" image. Furthermore, the Olympic gossip brings a new image upon her original one. After winning the championship, Lin claims that she has proved with a gold medal in response to her gender controversy and online discriminatory statements (Lee, 2024). This creates an image that a brave and determined woman endures pressures and fights against bullies and inequality. It also deepens her heroine image as the champion title proves her boxing capacity, honours Taiwan, and uses it to protect her female identity. Lin's positive image before and after the Olympics has gained public support as they comment on her post to cheer her on.

Its change shows that the image is artificially constructed by words and performance, so its authenticity is doubted.

Lin's image is a simulacrum that she conducts a careful staging of, and different institutions intervene to modify it, leading to her undefinable identity. Chiu states that the sport clubs, media, corporations, and the nations participate in the production of the sports star (Chiu, 2011). As Lin draws public attention, these parties collaborate with Lin for their own interests and indirectly shape her image. Also, she starts to commodify herself to sell the new image, maintain it, and earn money through joining events. For example, Lin becomes the guest in the *International Day of the Girl Child* and takes on the role of an anti-bullying ambassador in the non-profit organisation promoting menstrual equity, *With Red*. These parties use her fame to promote their organisation and ideologies like gender equality and anti-bullying. Lin's connection with them consolidates her brave woman image. Besides, Lin became a member of the sports development team of the Sports Administration, Ministry of Education. The government uses her to gain public support for sport-developing policy while Lin strengthens her Taiwan heroine image as she serves the nation. It is noticeable that these types of events have appeared or increased after her gender controversy, showing the cultural and political value of her new image.

Lin's image is a simulacrum, and her identity is mediated. It is hard to decide whether Lin's personal self on Instagram is real or a tactic to keep her image. For instance, she gives her gratitude towards the Taiwanese after the celebrating events of the Olympics. She promises to work hard and fight more glory for Taiwan. Lin also speaks of her hard work and insistence in training for the Olympic journey. Compared to other media, her words on Instagram are more personal and emotional,

however, they are not significantly different from her public image. There is no apparent difference between her private self and public self. As Lin's "real self" is hard to identify from her image in the media, this image no longer represents any real-life referent and becomes a simulacrum. Furthermore, it is hard for Lin to develop her own characteristics. Since Lin is subject to the public gaze in every public appearance, she needs to act even when she expresses her personal feelings. Besides, the aforementioned events demonstrate that Lin's image is an illusion constructed by herself and different institutions. For their own interest, her characteristics need to keep changing to cater to the taste of the public so as to create the illusion for commercial, cultural, and political use. Lin's own personality is hard to perceive and even lost, replaced by the created characteristics. Personal identity means the characteristics that a person views as unchangeable and wants to be distinguished by (Fearon, 1999). Lin's uncertain characteristics lead to her identity being undefined, discontinued, and even disappeared. Her identity remains a set of ideas like being a brave woman and a Taiwanese heroine, which becomes the surface meaning of her simulacrum for the public fantasy and consumption.

The audiences consume Lin's image to build identity or promote their own ideology. As aforementioned, Lin's image is a simulacrum that has the surface meaning of a sturdy fighter for gender inequality and a Taiwanese heroine. The public consumes it to internalise the provided ideologies or promote their own values. For instance, Lin has the endorsement of a sanitary pad brand, which uses the slogan of "If I am not a girl, what is a girl?". She shows the products in her lockers and says the slogan. She also pins this post on her Instagram. Sanitary pads are used in menstruation, so it implies the fertility of women that symbolises femininity. This conveys the message of encouraging people to assert and embrace their female

identity like Lin. Women do not live for others' imagination or need to be proved. It urges women to be the best of themselves, not needing to care about others' opinions. Besides, Lin posts photos of herself in neutral and feminine dressing. She shows her muscles, which implies strength and power. This delivers the idea that women can dress however they like and have masculine features. Lin's supporters comment, "Only buy this (sanitary pad) brand". They also praise her masculine physique and androgynous image in the dressing photos. The comments show that Lin's supporters agree with these ideologies. Furthermore, Lin talks about her happiness and feeling a sense of honour for representing Taiwan after winning the Olympic championship, which shows her patriotism. Taiwanese netizens cheer her on, congratulate her, and name her as "Taiwan Daughter" and "The light of Taiwan". They feel proud of her and are encouraged by her. This implies that they embrace their Taiwanese identity. Lin's supporters learn from her simulacrum as knowing what a woman and a Taiwanese should be. Through showing their support to Lin, like commenting and buying the products she endorses, they advocate and assert the ideas that Lin represents to build their female or Taiwanese identity.

Lin's critics use her image to perpetuate their ideology and as a form of social control. J.K. Rowling calls for stopping this insanity of boxers who fail gender tests at world championships from joining the Olympics. She later implies that Lin may suffer from disorders of sex development (DSD). Donald Trump says there are two transgender athletes in boxing competitions and urges the exclusion of men from women's sports in campaign rallies (Chuk, 2024). Both of them perpetuate the ideology that biological sex is equal to gender. As Lin fails the gender test, she is perceived as not a biological female, so they think she is not a woman and should not

participate in women's boxing. This reinforces the dichotomy of gender and defines femininity in patriarchy as excluding the transgender and biological male from the women category. Trump's speech further implies that transgender women are men. Rowling and Trump comment on gender controversy to promote their idea of women and gain public support, so as to consolidate the existing gender binary in patriarchy. Also, Rowling can reinforce her feminist image, and Trump tries to get the female voters' support as the presidential election is near at that time. Lin's supporters and critics consume her simulacrum to generate meanings that are useful for themselves. They build identity or promote their own ideology.

The audiences pick and choose information on media to construct their "realities", which triggers the crisis of collapse of their "realities" and identities. Lin's supporters insist "Lin is a woman"; they find and spread a video in which a young Lin is wearing a yukata with her family on the internet. Taiwanese media plays this episode after Lin's Olympics finals (Lee, 2024). As the video shows Lin dressing girlishly, emanating gentleness and modesty, which is consistent with femininity in patriarchy, the supporters use it as evidence to prove Lin's gender. However, the critics assert that "Lin is not a woman". Rowling and Trump post Lin's photos. Rowling cites the news from *The Guardian* that Lin failed the gender test from IBA last year (SET News Channel, 2024). They claim that Lin has a Y chromosome, so she is disqualified for their competition (Hui, 2024). Rowling also cites writer Suzanne Moore's article from *The Telegraph* to argue that Lin may suffer from DSD (Chuang, 2024). She uses a test result, which IBA cannot provide substantial evidence for (Hui, 2024). Trump's opinion does not even have any reference. Both parties base on different criteria to make judgements: the Taiwanese basis is on Lin's identity, but Rowling and Trump base their judgements on Lin's

masculine appearance. Then, they select information that is beneficial to them as “evidence”. However, they cannot provide convincing proof like medical evidence. Even the medical field cannot assert that having a Y chromosome means that someone is not a woman (Bettiza, 2024). This demonstrates that the audiences do not care about the accuracy of the sources and the authenticity of Lin’s image. The media generates massive images and signs without real-life referents. These simulacra saturate and replace the pure reality that creates the simulation of reality. The simulation deconstructs the boundary between true and false and dominates how we experience and understand the world. The audiences are only concerned if they can use the selected signs and images to build their own reality regarding Lin’s identity as a woman, thereby perpetuating their ideologies and building their identity. As Lin’s simulacrum and other signs are more real than real, the audiences perceive them as real and no longer question their authenticity. Simulacra replace pure reality, and the audiences are trapped in their own realities, which unconsciously affect their behaviours. Lin’s supporters attack J.K. Rowling, by blaming her and boycotting *Harry Potter* products and films (SET News Channel, 2024). J.K. Rowling does not withdraw her words and refers to the netizens as “bonkers” (Choi, 2024). Lin is either perceived as a woman or not, which makes the definition of “woman” ambiguous. Abundant “evidence” appears, leading to the “truth” of Lin’s gender loss. It also becomes irrelevant to the audiences, because, as aforementioned, they believe that the simulacra are real. The audiences’ identities are fragile, as their understanding of the world is built on uncertain signs and simulacra. Once new evidence appears and these things are proved to be wrong, their identities will collapse and even disappear.

To conclude, Lin is a sports star whose image is produced by herself and different institutions for their own benefit, catering to the public's illusion. Lin's image is a simulacrum, and the public consumes it to build their own identity and promote their own ideology. Lin's incident shows postmodern characteristics. The narratives of Lin's supporters and critics are metanarratives. All they have are self-constructed realities and the truth is lost. The appearance of new signs and simulacra may overthrow the old ones, leading to the collapse of their realities and identities. Lin, as a celebrity, also lost her identity in the construction of her image. Postmodern identity is fragile and evanescent.

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The conflicts in Blade Runner (1982)

Feng Yuebo, Serena

Blade Runner (1982) is a dystopian science fiction film based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The premise of the film is that humans have created bionic humans through bioengineering and used them as slaves in colonies beyond Earth. These bionic humans are called replicants, which are basically identical to humans. *Blade Runner* delves deeply into issues related to human identity, including the conflict between cybernetics and punk culture. This paper will analyze the concepts of “me” and “the other” and explore how the film reflects the conflicts of cyberpunk through the enslavement and confrontation between humans and replicants.

Blade Runner embodies a cyberpunk theme, highlighting the conflict and interaction between the “cyber” and “punk” elements. According to Andrew Butler (2000), cyberpunk relates to science fiction, in which computer power to simulate environments is central. The use of computers is not limited to the Internet; they are also used to strengthen personal abilities, such as replacing body tissue with machinery, effectively monitoring and controlling the human body and mind. Punk usually refers to a low-life subculture, featuring the working-class or the lower middle-class as the main characters. It embodies the spirit of resistance and a dystopian worldview, involving drug dealers, drug users, and hackers. cyberpunk is a sincere attempt at egalitarianism, practicing an “anti-humanist belief” that humans are not destined to triumph over the Great Machine (Butler, 2000). This shows a conflict between “cyber” and “punk” in

cyberpunk. Cyber refers to the growing power of computersized surveillance. Punk represents the low-life human resistance.

Blade Runner reflects the conflict of cyberpunk. First, it is reflected through the conflict between humans and replicants. Humans use replicants as slaves for dangerous work in the outer colonies and set a lifespan of four years to maintain their rule. The replicants desire life and freedom, so they choose to defect and get more for themselves. In the cyber aspect, humans master high technologies. Thus, they create replicants through bioengineering and use the replicants as laborers. In the punk aspect, some of the replicants fight against human domination. The replicants' defection represented by Roy and his five companions is the rebellion of the enslaved class against the ruling class of humans. Second, there are also conflicts among humans. Street anarchy is portrayed in stark contrast to the tall, spacious, and luxurious complexes of Tyrell Corporation. This reflects the fact that although humans have the technology to benefit themselves, these benefits are ultimately only applied to a very small number of people at the top. Those at the top have a lot of resources, those at the bottom have very limited resources, and as the population grows, the competition among those at the bottom becomes more and more fierce. As Butler (2000) mentioned, the punk aspect of cyberpunk refers to the low life subculture, taking the working-classes like the poor, drug dealers, and addicts as main characters. Such imbalance in resources shows the conflict of cyberpunk within the human race.

Blade Runner also reflects the issue of "me" and "the other", demonstrating how the line between them is blurred and raising questions about the inner contradictions of human identity. "Me" refers to humans, and "the other" refers to replicants. This limit is set by humans because replicants are

created through genetic engineering. They are not real humans, yet problems are emerging as replicants become more similar to humans. For example, the seventh generation possesses feelings like humans and has the memories of a human upbringing. The difference between humans and replicants gradually decreases. Thus, there comes the problem of how humans define the replicants as replicants rather than humans. If the standard for defining replicants is whether they threaten the survival of the human race, then the actions of humans in *Blade Runner* are still contradictory. The seventh-generation replicant Rachael does not hurt humans at all; she is targeted for elimination simply because she is aware of her identity as a replicant. This shows that there is a contradiction in humans' recognition of the identity distinction between the two. Shanahan and Smart (2020) suggest that when memories can be implanted in the brain, memories can no longer serve as proof of identity. In this case, humans also experience identity issues as they also cannot prove that they are humans rather than replicants. Thus, the line between "me" and "the other" is blurred. In the end, Deckard falls in love with the replicant Rachel and escapes with her. This shows that in the process of chasing and killing replicants, Deckard gradually begins to doubt his mission, while also developing new appreciation for the lives and freedom of replicants, and begins to sympathize with and respect them.

In conclusion, *Blade Runner* reflects the conflict in cyberpunk and the issues related to human identity. At the end of the film, the replicant Roy states that he "had seen things that people wouldn't believe", and all those unbelievable moments would be "lost in time like tears in rain". This poignant scene elevates the film's conclusion, prompting the audience to think about the future fate of mankind within the cyberpunk theme.

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The hyperreality of VTuber

Yau Yan Ting, Yumi

The existence of a virtual YouTuber (VTuber), who has a virtual appearance but uses a real human-voice acting, brings a hyperreal interactive experience for the audience, leading people to gradually believe that VTubers “exist”. Every VTuber usually has a unique debut ceremony before entering the audience’s field of vision, such as having a short video to describe their personalities and their character settings. Having distinctive virtual images and streaming content will greatly enhance the audience’s expectations for their livestreams, making audiences willing to consume this kind of unique streaming because they crave constant stimulations. VTubers not only break the limitations of time and space, but also blur the boundaries between the real and the virtual worlds. This essay will examine how VTubers stimulate and satisfy people’s needs for real interaction by using Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality.

The virtual identities of VTubers will create a hyperreal world to the audience. According to Baudrillard (1981, p3), “pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false”, the “real”, and the “imaginary”. VTuber’s virtual image not only simulates the personalities and appearances of real people, but also creates certain unique character settings to fit the current aesthetic trends and market demands. It enables their virtual image to be independent from the real world, since the image of virtual characters is original, which does not have actual reference

prototypes in reality. In this case, it brings a strong difference between their virtual image and reality. Without a doubt, the existence of VTubers is threatening the audience's perception of the real, since VTuber will be regarded as a hyperreal existence, which makes the audience believe that VTubers are real. The process is that VTuber's virtual image is played by a real person, who covers up their real appearance and personality behind the screen, making them better at role-playing, even constantly enriching the image of their virtual characters during their livestream. VTubers become "more real than real" people.

Live2D provides excellent technical support for VTubers. Lehtovirta (2023) explains that Live2D technology is composed of multiple layers of drawn parts in a 2D model, which are combined together, including characters' clothes, their body structure, and animated by using Live2D function. For example, Ren Zotto's virtual character is a man with a dragon horn, who can speak alien languages but actually he speaks English for live streaming. He combines the nature of reality and fantasy, creating a sense of mystery for him by using his alien identity, which makes the audience immersed in his livestream content, in order to better understand and explore his mysteries. The audience's perception of reality will be replaced by the hyperreal feeling provided by VTuber. His true personality will not be identified, nor would it be relevant.

According to Li (2023), the VTuber's authenticity increases if the audience can participate in chat. The interaction between VTuber and fans simulates that of the real world. The interaction with VTuber conforms to their definition and perception of reality, since the hyperreal interaction mode provides them with real evidence. Under this condition, even though fans know that the VTuber's image is virtual, the

hyperreal interactive experience provided by VTuber will also shape the authenticity of their virtual image, making the VTuber's existence more real than real. For instance, VTuber will share their daily lives on Twitter and communicate with other VTubers. In this case, the interaction mode in reality has long been replaced by VTuber's hyperreal interaction, making it hard for fans to distinguish between virtual character and VTuber (a real person who plays the role of virtual character). Fans lack actual evidence to distinguish between reality and virtuality, since their experience of reality has long been replaced by the hyperreality, which does not reference their reality. Their experience of "reality" is permanently disconnected from "real" reality, which does not even involve existence at all.

Our consumption behavior is gradually dominated by signs and images, making it impossible for us to escape this hyperreal consumption experience. Based on Baudrillard's concept, "the current social order has been based on the rationality of hedonism based on the satisfaction of need and pleasure through consumption" (Silviana & Mustain, 2019). To satisfy their desires for the VTubers in reality, they will shift their emotional demands to purchasing derivative products related to VTubers (dolls, badges) and participating in offline activities, such as cosplayer. It fulfills the need to meet their real demands in projecting their emotions about VTuber to customised cosplayers in the real world. Desire is a root of consumption - the derivative products of VTuber are a tool to stoke the fans' desires. Indeed, fans prove their love and loyalty through such consumption.

All in all, live-streaming has become mainstream entertainment, permitting VTubers to dominate our experience of reality. The hyperreal entertainment provided by VTuber constantly invades our lives, blurring our

perception of reality. Our real lives are being replaced by hyperreality irreversibly. The “real” reality does not exist anymore.

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ENGLISH

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The Spectacle

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The Story of an Hour

Lee Yin Ting, Charmaine

“Encore! Encore!”

The screams crashed over and over like a wave, voices blending into a loud roar. I stood frozen, my ears ringing, as thousands of fans stamped their feet and clapped until the stadium shook. The stage was a world unto itself— a pulsing, living heart illuminated in blinding lights. Sweat dripped down my neck, mixing with the glitter floating in the sticky air. This, of course, was all Ruby’s idea. My best friend since middle school — loud, wild, and always dragging me into adventures.

Five years ago, she talked me into dancing at a party — while I was hiding in the bathroom; two years ago, she took me to karaoke — where I sat stiffly in the corner, with a lip clamped shut; three days ago, a concert ticket was handed to me by her neon-pink nails, *“You need to get out more,”* she grumbled, as if my quiet nights at home were a crime. *“You’ll feel alive — trust me!”*, she affirmed. I didn’t know whether to be impressed or shocked that, after all, she still never gave up on me.

Now here I was, squashing between strangers. *“Wave this!”* Ruby’s voice barely came through the waves of noise, she shoved a glowing purple stick into my hand. The stadium was a sea of flashing lights and neon signs, the air smelled like candy and overpriced perfume. Suddenly, a single spotlight hit the stage, and the crowd exploded with a frenzy of cracked screams. The singer stood in the centre, breathing hard, sweat shiny on his face. He roared into the first song – a fast, angry

tune about “breaking the rules”. The band’s guitars screeched; drums pounded like thunder. To my left, Ruby was crying, smudging her silver eyeshadow and golden eyeliners.

“He’s not just a singer — he’s magic!”

She sang along to every word with her smeared makeup, completely engrossed from beginning to end. Around us, people buzzed with excitement — teenagers screaming, couples hugging, a group of friends belting lyrics off-key. But clearly, everyone was spellbound completely. A teenage girl nearby was sobbing into her friend’s bright green jacket. A few rows ahead, a man in a wrinkled work shirt looked exhausted; his hair, barely combed. Yet, his girlfriend was dancing beside him with her hands in the air. He stared blankly at the exit sign, like he was counting the minutes until he could leave.

A middle-aged woman — who seemed oddly out of place — stood stiffly near the passage-way, clutching her handbag like someone might steal it. She frowned at every high-pitched shout with a disgusted face but stayed put. Next to her, a young girl — maybe her daughter — jumped and screamed the lyrics while waving a light stick. *“This is vulgar!”* the woman hissed, but she didn’t leave. Maybe she feared losing the girl in this crowd of magnetic force. Or maybe, like me, she was tired of fighting. Security guards patrolled in the crowd, looking annoyed. One guard, a woman with short hair in stark black uniform, barked at a fan who tried to rush the stage: *“Sit. Down. Now!”* The fan unwillingly slumped back into her seat, still mouthing the lyrics.

As the lights dimmed, the singer started a slow, sad tune on the piano, and the crowd quieted down.

“This song is for anyone who feels lost,”

His fingers brushed through the keys, and the first note hung in the air like smoke. The lyrics told a heart-wrenching tale of loneliness, of feeling like a forgotten doll left in a cruel, mismatched world. His voice trembled like he was about to cry. Ruby grabbed my arm. “This part always breaks my heart,” she whispered, sniffing, clutching her chest like the sorrow in his voice physically wounded her. People held up their phones, recording the moment like it was something holy.

I tried to understand what it felt like to care this much. To spend money, time, and energy just to scream for someone you’d never meet. The middle-aged woman reached to her handbag, pulling out a tissue to dab on the young girl’s damp forehead. The tired office worker massaged his neck and checked his watch. The security guard muttered under her breath, like she’d rather be anywhere else.

Then the music exploded again — drums, keyboards, guitars, the singer shouting into the microphone. Fireworks shot into air from the stage, and the crowd went wild, jumping and singing together. For a second, I felt it — the magic — the way thousands of strangers held their breath together, the thrill of being part of something bigger than ourselves. I surprised myself by cheering too — not for the singer, but for all of us, packed together, sharing this loud, sweaty moment.

And then, it ended. The lights flicked on, harsh and sudden, revealing tear-streaked faces one after another. The stadium looked messy — trash and spilled drinks everywhere. Ruby drifted toward the exit, looking dazed and empty. Outside, cars honked and fans chattered, still buzzing with energy. I

didn't follow Ruby. Instead, I caught a bus that was nearly empty.

Through the foggy window, I watched the stadium shrink in the distance, its lights glowing like a fading star. I leaned my head against the window, watching the city pass by, a collage of strangers and stories unfolding in moments I'd never know. The quiet felt heavy but peaceful. At a red light, the bus stopped, and I couldn't help but wonder about the people I'd seen: the singer probably was gulping water at backstage; Maybe the middle-aged woman was scolding her daughter for wasting money; Or perhaps the tired office worker was checking his phone and schedule. Ruby would be texting me tomorrow, I was sure — messages packed with emojis, long exclamations, and promises to drag me to another concert soon.

But here, now, there was only the hum of the bus engine and the cool glass against my cheek. I closed my eyes, smiling a little. For one hour, I'd been part of a storm — a mess of love, tolerance, duty, chaos. For one hour, I'd held it in my hands, like a firework sparkling before fizzling out. Messy but real.

Good Hong Konger

Li Rachel Chie Hang

Follow me. Take my hand. The trees bow in symmetry. Watch their shadows dance. Don't lose your balance; the pavement is knitted with thick roots. You hop over them like a stone skipping on quiet water. You hate waiting. The world is your oyster. Be careful now, I warn you. The concrete splits beneath your feet and the mighty ant crawls along its fissures. See how they march— crawling in obedience. I hear the metro rumbling now. Wait. It will pass soon. Dawn descends, kissing your skin. Cattle whip the air with ropey tails, wading through morning haze. You count as they pass, one after another. Huffing and sauntering over the deserted road, following ancient hoofprints etched in the grass. A young calf bleats for its mother. A car key twists in the distance. It must cross now. The one who strays is left behind. Step over the boundary of white-painted symbols. Join the pilgrimage home.

Your laugh is a firecracker. I see gaps where teeth once were. You strum the air, shout love songs from the radio, and leave pudgy handprints on the furniture. You daydream. You sit in the shallow bathtub. You try to hopscotch with the others but you fall. You bite your fingers when no one's watching. You sit alone at lunch but you keep yourself company. Your mind wanders too much. You live in your own imagination. You draw mother and father, sister and brother on beige wallpaper. You wanted to carve a home from a rotten husk of a family. Tears soak the carpet when they don't feel the same. You painted your nails in lacquers unearthed from dusty drawers, under mother's bed. None of the colours match;

they spilled over borders. It never bothers you. In fact, you couldn't hide your delight.

You pick your favourite leaf from the ground, smooth and lime green with yellowed spots, edges crinkled like tissue. You peek through an opening: beyond the gray ruffles of tide, are the blue-tinted imprints of Tsim Sha Tsui skyscrapers. Look — that is the dream of the good Hong Konger. The virtuous builder who sweats and bleeds and inches skyward with rolled sleeves and a furrowed brow. Aren't you a lucky one to be born here? Welcomed by the industrial waves of a great city built on the backs of our great ancestors, still reeling from the afterglow of a Golden Age. You must not forget what you are. You must not forget your duty. Children like you are fodder for their success. Grow up, grow up, they warn. We must go forth and fulfill our birthright.

I turn the bathroom lock, stare at my reflection. Teenage anguish has not been kind. Unruly strands of hair jut outwards like branches beneath the scrutiny of fluorescent lights. I grip dulled shears and prune. Each snip curbs the gnawing discomfort inside. How is it now? Step back. Critique. Rebellious tufts battered into a straight line across my eyebrows. My teacher compliments it the next day. I accept, return to my seat. I pass rows of smiling little girls. Shiny black hair in taut ponytails. Bangs fall in satisfying order over porcelain faces. Neatly, all in line.

Now I walk the gravel path, jaw clenched. I barely think over the hum of steel cranes. New buildings peer on from either side. I feel their gaze press me into freshly-poured concrete. Summer heat is unbearable. A heavy backpack strains my shoulders. I long for the comforting silence of home. I am suffocated by a rush hour crowd. Disdainful glares, seething whispers cast as a naive tourist tries to find the front. "Didn't

your parents teach you to line up?”, someone spits. I stare at the barricades; cold, slick metal staring back. Built only a few months ago. I used to admire rungs on the smooth track, even imagined myself running over each one to catch the train ahead. Barricades open. We walk one after another, single file, proud ants basking in the solace of order. The light blinks. Hurry— no time to waste. Hurry, and go forth. The city won’t wait for you. Not for those who wander. It was always this way. The only way. In line.

Encounter

Sridika Rai

There was a strange sense of familiarity across the room
as they exchanged innocent glances at each other.
Like a silent connection; a gentle force
that stretched for the longest since
the night of the winter solstice.

First encounter, they believed but
what's the word from the streets
that directed the constant silent question
— *Have I seen you before?*

Perhaps they've passed each other by a million times now
where distance closed in for them in this city's
fragrant harbour,
tampering with coincidence, a sheer blind luck,
or even fate
where grace touched chance and encounter.

Perhaps they'd been in the same platform of the
city's major interchange station,
just headed in different directions
a week ago.

Perhaps they'd been in the same gondola of the
harbour's City'super,
just standing on the other end of the aisle
a month ago.

Perhaps they were on the same sixteen hours Cathay flight
back home,
just sitting across from one another
one year ago.

Or, perhaps the closest distance ever measured was
a “*sorry*” muttered
when their shoulders brushed against each other in the
roaring crowds of this city’s fragrant harbour on
New Year's Eve
three years ago.

Maybe somewhere in the corner of the universe,
enounced the wonders of their silent manifestation
like how Day and Night meet during twilight,
and how the Sun and the Moon meet at eclipse
—perhaps that was it.

In the road of the city's nocturnal embrace
bound by the same time-continuum,
all they could hear were their hearts beating
out of their chests, and voices in their heads,
its secrets, its stories,
of the epoch.

Their eyes — catching each other's
for the first time on opposite sides
ten years ago,
marked an encounter
that had been whispering for
across lifetimes.