

Lyricism of revolution: A choreographic analysis of the 2003 and 2014 protests in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This paper uses choreographic analysis to examine the 2003 and 2014 protests in Hong Kong and contends that the political potential of a social movement is located not in its immediate result, but in the new structure and organization of reality it inspires. Informed by dance studies scholarship, choreographic analysis looks at social movements with a focus on the form of bodily movements and seeks to identify the choreographing force that it calls 'lyricism', which emerges from the new collective desire shaped by the event. Through choreographic analysis, and by drawing on popular music studies, this paper proposes that the site of radical politics in Hong Kong can be located in the persisting colonial alienation that separates the people from the authority. The trajectory of Hong Kong recent protests also shows that these events, though seemingly ephemeral, are moments of revolutionary thoughts that have universal implications and lasting effects.

KEYWORDS: Hong Kong, protest, Umbrella Movement, lyricism, psychoanalysis

Introduction: Epiphany, popular aesthetics and lyricism

The million-strong rallies in the early stages of the 2019 protest in Hong Kong filled the air with indiscernible roaring of countless slogans. Marching slowly in the crowd that packed the streets, in my mind a few lines from the late Taiwanese writer Lee Wei-Jing's (2019) novel about Latin dancing, *The Mermaid's Tale*, surfaced. It is the dance coach's response to the protagonist's complaint about the difficulty of basic rumba walk: "Walking, it's just walking. You have to forget the concept of

“dancing”. Dancing is walking, dancing is walking effortlessly, chin-up and head-high. All we got to do in our life is to walk beautifully, nothing else” (W. Lee 2019: 266).

In seven months, the democratic movement was suppressed first by continuous government crackdown and then by the global pandemic in early 2020. None of the citizens’ demands were answered; the city witnessed rapid escalation of censorship and oppression in every aspect of life. Despite my total lack of vision of possibilities in the present political reality, these lines of daring gracefulness and unstoppable momentum stubbornly linger in my mind like songs that cannot be unheard. The epiphany inhabiting these lines, and the moment it arose forcefully, keeps my perspective of the future open while refusing any easy thought of the event as a sheer failure. In her study of protest songs as “soundtracks of revolution”, Tiina Rosenberg (2013: 186) regards these involuntary voices from within as “my forgotten self singing to me”, pressing for acknowledgement and reflection.

Feelings evoked by happenings reciprocally establish the perception of the latter as events, which would otherwise be dismissed as random and irrelevant incidents. To study epiphany is therefore to examine these moments when feelings arise in which the subject establishes a relationship with, and a perspective of, the perceived situation. This concern for the reality as lived instead of an objective existence is in line with Simon Frith’s (1996) profound conceptualization of popular aesthetics from popular music experiences. Frith contends that the critical issue “is not meaning or interpretation” of an individual musical work but the “experience and collusion” of music that combines “the sensual, the emotional, and the social as performance” (1996: 272). Indeed, despite the fact that all songs and performances come to an end, they are never considered futile for their ephemerality. Extending such thinking to the topic of protest, to study a protest as a performance therefore focuses on the participants’ experience, and the changes and impacts as a result. Existing studies of popular music and protests have primarily examined how musical works operate as texts that exert different functions in social movements. The scholarship largely studies the experiences, processes and significance of performances/events that seem ephemeral. Jonathan C. Friedman suggests in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* that “[a] song’s poetry and music can change reality, maybe not by immediately resulting in changes in law, but by having a deeper impact on the society that makes law” (2013: xv). In other words, popular aesthetics illuminate not only the “human condition” (ibid.) but also a dimension of reality and its possibilities imperceptible from other perspectives. Similarly, Graham St. John’s (2008) study of carnivalized methods of protest, apart from giving insight into the historical development of this form of protest in relation to global politics, demonstrates how to identify and articulate the “other world” manifested through protest as performance (2008: 184). Each “other world” is immediately specific to its own context and universal for its emancipatory potential. Such conclusions can also be found in George McKay’s (2019) study of the British band Crass’ anti-nuclearism, viewing it as simultaneously an illustration of a local case of unique aesthetics and politics, a global case part and parcel of the world’s cultural responses to nuclear power in the late seventies and early eighties, as well as a manifestation of the universal endeavour against the state’s ideology.

Popular music studies has therefore provided a unique tool for the study of what psychoanalyst and poet Dana Amir (2016) calls “lyricism”, which is the psychical force that enables the subject to relate him-/herself to the external reality. This force produces recurring reverberations of sensation and emotion when triggered and keeps the subject’s reality in perspective. For example, when the lyric of a song suddenly remembered sheds light on the chaos one is going through. Lyricism also holds the form and structure of a sequence of social and corporeal movement and the style of appearance. This paper proposes that lyricism of revolution locates in the new forms of social organization and structure that emerge out of and extend beyond the event into the post-protest everyday life of the mass. The concept of choreography from dance studies can help yield insight into how the seemingly contingent and spontaneous mass corporeal movements invent new forms of dynamic collective existence, like choreographies of dance, and produce new space and temporality in the post-event everyday life. This method takes corporeality as the foundation of social reality and thus advocates a kind of politics that is not only bottom-up but also inside-out. It is premised on the ideal of a unified and inseparable existence of the corporeal and social reality, city dwellers and their city, the people and the authority. For (post)colonial Hong Kong whose persisting colonial condition has inhibited the consensus of dwellers from constituting the social-political reality, the politics of lyricism is radical not only for being anti-alienation but also decolonial. In the light of choreographic analysis, the Anti-Article 23 protest in 2003 (“2003 Protest” hereafter), which has long been considered a victory of Hong Kong civil society for the immediate achievement of political change, actually perpetuated the colonial condition of the city that has separated the authority from the people. The Umbrella Movement (UM) in 2014 on the contrary, and despite its failure in altering the authority’s political decisions, marked a revolutionary moment. This is because individuals as well as the civil society demonstrated the desire to abolish not only the colonial alienation of people from the place they live, but also the society from the authority.

Current scholarship on Hong Kong protests has yielded invaluable insight into the events as political struggles with cultural implications mostly local to the city. Existing studies on UM, for example, mainly focus on the event’s finitude such as ideological limitations (Hui and Lau 2015; Tang 2019), factual (Flowerdew 2017), ethnographic (Hui 2015) and textual features (Veg 2016), the use of alternative media in relation to political views (Chan and Lee 2018) or the changing political awareness (Chan 2016) and political climate in the shadow of Chinese influences (Chan and Ng 2017). This paper aims to add to the scholarship by developing lyricism as a focus of analysis for understanding collective human agency. Agency in making social and political changes rather than determined by their immediate and material success or failure. As much as how global revolutionary experiences and academic discussions of these experiences have inspired Hong Kong protests and its scholarship, a local case study should also enrich and inform the understanding of global political struggle as human experiences.

In the following section, this paper sets out to explain choreographic analysis as a method and the insight it would yield into the permanence of coloniality of the city that has been hindering the development of progressive and democratic politics. It contends that undemocratic stability and neoliberal prosperity have been

sustaining the colonial condition that alienates inhabitants from their collective social-political reality and prohibits the rise of lyricism among inhabitants that would transform them into self-conscious political subjects. The second part of the paper moves on to reading choreographically the successful 2003 Protest and illustrates how a repertoire of civil disobedience developed out of this protest that eventually became an annual performance of grievances that left the colonial structure of politics unchallenged. The third part of this paper explores new choreographies that emerged in UM in 2014, and suggests that they indicate a lyrical dimension awakened in the event that resulted in the creation of its own form of appearance. This paper concludes by reading a lyrical moment in the 2019 protest to demonstrate the effectiveness of choreographic analysis in identifying the revolutionary potential of events (despite their immediate failure).

Colonial alienation and choreographic unity

Ceded to Britain from China in 1841, Hong Kong did not have a pre-colonial past to return to or the option to decide its postcolonial status like other former colonies. Situated on the southern margin of China which had been in political turmoil for over a century since the mid-1800s, colonial Hong Kong has long been considered a haven and the gateway to overseas abodes for many Chinese refugees. On top of the relative social and political stability, the obvious economic prosperity, material abundance and diversity of lifestyle that Hong Kong enjoyed as a capitalist city have made the critique of colonialism challenging. Except for the riot in 1967, influenced by the anti-capitalist and anti-imperial discourses from the Cultural Revolution in China, there was no major decolonization movement or decay of colonialism in Hong Kong history. The (British) colonial alienation that estranged people from the governance of the city did not appear problematic for most in the city.

The lack of awareness of the city's coloniality largely led to the subsequent development – or the lack – of local politics. In 1986, and without the consensus of Hong Kong people, the British and Chinese governments released the Joint Declaration that decided the handover of the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997. The document promised Hong Kong a fifty-year status quo and a high degree of autonomy after the handover. Yet the status quo and stability desired by many Hong Kong people then were the forces sustaining the economy of colonial politics for both the authority and the people. As Yiu-Wai Chu contends in his discussion of postcolonial Hong Kong culture and politics, the “myth of the status quo” has “significantly limited its [Hong Kong's] political, social and cultural imaginaries” (2013: 16). Mass political actions without the intention to abolish the colonial structure of power, when they succeed, bring about conformist changes that in return justify the colonial mentality, hierarchy, and infrastructure.

Dana Amir's (2016) concept of the lyrical dimension in the human psyche can illuminate this limitation of imagination set by the desire for the status quo in Hong Kong which this paper argues sustains the mental colonial alienation. In her conceptual framework, Amir explains how the formation of the self consists of two dynamic operations: carving and enveloping. Carving “unveils the world in all its singularity” and enveloping “embraces that singularity in the context of continuous being” (Amir 2016: 91). This interactive process takes place “between what is

transferred from within and what is transferred from without – between the consciousness that reads the external and the consciousness that writes this same external as if it were created from within” (Amir 2016: xii). The lyrical dimension in the psyche is “tantamount to the sense of selfhood” (Amir 2016: xiv) as “[a]ll areas of creativity, work and love are grounded on this dialectic between knowing the reality outside us and feeling that we have the ability to create this reality, according to our wishes, each and every moment” (Amir 2016: 7). Alienation of the individual and the society, the self and the world, the personal and the political, is overcome in the lyrical operation. In this sense, mass protests in Hong Kong in recent years are not mere expressions of political defiance but much deferred and necessary lyrical responses for the maturation of the selfhood of the society. Choreographic analysis therefore becomes an effective tool for the elucidation of the lyricism of these events and their revolutionary potential.

The term choreography refers to the composition of movements following certain principles that gives form to the sequence of actions. Rather than dismissing seemingly random bodily actions as sporadic, choreography as a concern puts them in perspective. In choreography, the internally conceived content of movements and the externally presented form are unified. The subject’s lyricism, instead of the ideology of the state, governs the choreographic unity. Choreography as a method can then arrest the fleeting movements in its form of appearance in which possibilities of radical change reside.

Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster (1986) develops the idea of choreography into an analytical tool with a body-centered focus from her study of American concert dance. Choreography as a dance term denotes the organization of bodily movements for a work of dance in terms of the frame (that organizes the dance as a singular event), the mode of representation (which indicates the work’s relation to the world), the style (that serves as the apparent statement of identity of the work in its genre), the vocabulary (which are fundamental elements constituting the work) and the syntax (that works as the grammar that puts elements together) (Foster 1986: 59). Dancers embody pre-existing codes and conventions, coalesced by choreographers that can be others or themselves, and fashion these corporeal vocabularies and norms in their styles and colours in performances. At moments when new forms and styles triumph and enable the manifestation of novel corporeal aesthetics, new vocabularies and concepts will enrich the convention.

Choreographic analysis thus enables the perception and articulation of a reality that conditions and is constantly altered by the people as a collective subject. Foster takes on dancing as a prism to see how “relations between body, self, and society through its choreographic decisions” (1998a: xv) are being configured. Everyday life can thus be seen as a choreographic process that perpetuates, resists, and renews the norms and discourses in social and cultural fields such as gender and history (Foster 1995, 1998b). Recognizing the agency of the body – universal for all individuals but with a multitude of nuances – in archiving, mediating and creating reality, choreographic analysis compels the perception of a multiple and heterogenous subject whose bodies “continually conspire together and are conspired against” and “transit to a mutually constructed semiosis” (Foster 1995: 10-11). The shared affect binding individuals as a collective subject, the reason and rationality emerged out of the choreography justifying decisions of action, and the

persistent pulsation that maintains the continuity of action, are manifestations of the lyricism propelling the sequence of moments. Choreographic analysis can therefore also identify whether an incident is a genuine event of revolutionary potential or a pseudo-event that produces no new thought but an illusion of change that veils the operation of ideology. The 2003 Protest, with its glaring success, can thus be seen as a pseudo-event that further consolidated the lasting colonial alienation. In contrast, the immediate failure of UM marks an epiphany that has changed forever local people's perception of themselves in relation to the city.

The 2003 Protest: The lyricism and repertoire of civil disobedience

The 2003 Protest has long been hailed a victory of Hong Kong civil society (Chan 2011: 26; Cheng 2005: 1; Cheng 2016: 389) by successfully calling off a widely unpopular anti-subversion legislation. The largest rally since the handover, half a million citizens took to the street on 1 July 2003, which was also the anniversary of the reversion of Hong Kong's sovereignty. Demonstrators marched slowly and in an orderly way from Victoria Park to the government headquarters, taking over six hours for the rally to finish. It was also the first protest over local politics (Lau 2003; Leung 2003) with an opposition (Cheng 2005: 2). The immense sense of empowerment felt by many Hong Kong people came from both the immediate realization of a political goal and local and global compliments for the orderliness and peacefulness of the protest (ibid.). *Wall Street Journal* praised the orderly marching crowd as a "river of humanity" (Buckman 2003), indeed the peacefulness of the event made it a spectacle for the world's media (Bradsher 2003; Lakshmanan 2003; Pottinger 2003; Wall Street Journal 2003). In the Legislative Council Meeting three days after the protest, legislators against the bill repeatedly emphasized the orderliness and peacefulness of the protest march as evidence of a quality citizenship of reason and self-restraint who deserved the government's respect (Legislative Council of Hong Kong 2003).

The choreography of the 2003 Protest suggested that the demonstration was more an exhibition of disciplined and ideal citizenship – thus worthy of the freedom and rights they asked for – than forceful demands for progressive and structural changes in the authority. A lyricism of civil disobedience created a new political subject that was collective and participatory, with its size a decisive and defining feature. Taking the (colonial) status quo as the ideal of the society, the political subject had no utopic fantasy to condition a desire for fundamental change, consequently resulting in a lyricism that broke the boundary between individuals and constituted a new collective political subject that saw itself as external to the political reality in which they were situated.

Joseph Bosco's study of the religious qualities of political protests in Hong Kong as processions (2016: 379) rightly points out how the 2003 Protest has set a new pattern for political demonstration that became the standard repertoire for the following decade. July First March became an annual procession performed in the same choreographed routine for general grievances and concerns until 2019. Its choreography became the standard choreography for rallies, which were more like routine performances of grievances than determined actions for change. Each year,

pro-democracy politicians and campaigners would call for public support for the event around a month before the date. Civil Human Rights Front, a network of pan-democratic organizations existing mainly to organize the annual ritual, would take care of the logistics, including applying to the police for permission for the rally. Victoria Park, situated in the middle of the island, was made the starting point of each rally. Demonstrators marched along the main roads, going through major business districts and buildings, and stopping at the government headquarters, covering a route just under four kilometers. Marchers chanted slogans mainly targeting the government but also general discontent on a variety of social issues.

The 2003 Protest as a choreography generated a collective but also personal temporality and rhythm of political life that citizens found participatory and meaningful: the date of the transfer of sovereignty, as much as the transfer itself, was not decided by and therefore irrelevant to many Hong Kong citizens. The rally marked the beginning of large-scale public participation in politics, making many citizens aware that they could engage with political reality and make a difference. As the decisive factor for the effectiveness of the protest was the number of participants, the size of the rally became the central concern. In line with Cheng and Yuen's (2018: 20) suggestion that mass protests have become "inseparable" from the development of local politics since 2003, the "mass" as the subject and its massive quality can be understood as the defining choreographic feature of the event. Choreographically speaking, the mass, as the assemblage of individuals without constituting a specific subjectivity that can be named, does not concern the creation of a new form of existence. Also, as individuals amassed for a recurring event which was an end in itself, the assemblage did not produce its own concerns that could bring individuals together or inspire individuals to connect with each other. As participants did not even create new relations among themselves, their relation to the reality was also left untouched and no new representation of a collective movement was invented.

The choreography, in every repetition, exhibited obedience as a style and deployed political vocabularies and gestures palatable for the global audience. The actual deprivation of criticality for the self and the persisting colonial condition and the self-deceiving sense of success were the corollary of the lyricism of *disobedience*. Pro-Beijing political commentator Lau Nai-keung's (2003) compliment of the 2003 Protest for its adherence to "our proud tradition of non-violence" and his observation of a sense of prevailing pessimism among protestors, who did not expect their outcry would change anything, together spell out the inconvenient truth of the lyricism of *disobedience*: The success of the event was real in the ideologically intact political reality, that is, in retaining the colonial order. The celebration of keeping the status quo as a victory signified the failure of imagining a utopic alternative of or a decolonized reality. The collective psyche, split by the colonial alienation, was unable to desire. The excessive excitement that arose from this accidental and unexpected achievement thus conjured a hysterical illusion of power and agency exercisable only in the colonial condition.

The inherent conformist quality of the 2003 Protest was revealed in the subsequent failure of its repertoire to let demonstrators engage with the political reality in more profound ways. Law Wing-sang (2013) acutely criticizes the annual procession of July First March for eventually becoming a "spectacle of the mass"

that reduced civil society to a homogenous mass. His accusation of the romanticization of the “democratic lifestyle” of Hong Kong finds testimony in the prevalence of popular comments on each march such as “New Year’s March: Stay Rational and Tolerant” (Yahoo News 2013). Such views can also be found in academic discourse, such as Victoria Hui’s (2015) high regard for UM for winning “the world’s admiration” with the scale “of the people power” and “their discipline, politeness, and orderliness” (2015: 112). Even after the outbreak of the 2019 protest, comments such as “Hong Kongers are the Best Citizens” (LF 2019) were still widely popular. For Law (2013), the more detrimental impact was that the July First March made-believe that civil society consists of “many spontaneous, organic small groups” without the need of organization and promotion. In terms of choreographic analysis, the political subject that created and was created by 2003 Protest lacked the collective intention to create new forms to unite different bodies’ movements according to their own lyricism or ideals. As analyzed above, July First March was essentially conformist, with the self of the collective subject enveloping the status quo as it was without the desire to carve into the external reality. The success of the protest convinced people that they could ask for permission to be free and their wish would be granted if they behave.

Lyricism of the quotidian and re-forming everyday life in UM

In her account of the emergence of UM, Ching Kwan Lee says the movement “literally exploded into existence amid the eighty-seven canisters of tear gas shot by the Hong Kong police (to disperse protestors)” (2019: 1). Indeed, regardless of the complexity of the historical and political situation, the police’s use of then unforeseen violence was the major factor determining the unprecedented choreographies of the event. The mental and physical shock experienced by the mass shattered the emotional economy of colonial alienation that had long impeded the impulse and dynamics of the collective lyrical dimension. To borrow Amir’s words, the politically inexperienced mass for the first time could “experience feelings as their own” (2016: 2) and became conscious of their own desires, like infants’ first perceptions of their objects of desire that are external to but orient their existence. UM marked the coming of age of the Hong Kong subject who came to realize that the relation between them and the place was not natural and required active construction.

While UM also had its specific political demands to the government, the three prominent choreographies that emerged in the movement, namely Occupy, Lennon Wall and Vertical Banner, underscore a lyricism of the quotidian, contrasting its splendid and “eventful” (C. K. Lee 2019) appearance. In his study of British everyday life, Joe Moran regards quotidian culture as the site of “forms of lay knowledge that (...) conceal resilient power relationships” (2005: 12). Collective and shared social everyday life, lived by ordinary people before being ascribed any meaning of significance, “makes sense of, but also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference” (Moran 2005: 13). UM choreographies orchestrated new forms of collective (bodily) movements that enabled the communal production of new knowledge about the self and imaginations of possibilities of public everyday life. One of the slogans defining UM, “mastering our own destiny” (命運

自主) (Chow 2014), underlines an anticolonial awareness in its extremity: it is not about expelling the colonizer, who is not even in the picture of this existentialist endeavor. Occupy, being the prominent choreography of the protest, represented the main strategy of the collective subject which carved their corporeality into the material fabric of the city, rupturing the spatial and ideological order previously governing the place that was never defined by its inhabitants. The UM choreographies provide new repertoires of dissensus that are repeatedly performed with variations in later protests until today. But more importantly, a new corporeal understanding of civil society that is participatory and democratic surfaced out of the practices of these choreographies, which continued to exert its force into the post-protest everyday life of the mass. What defines a revolution is, therefore, not the achievement of immediate political changes but the new ways to organize collective life, create new forms of dynamic collective existence of the people, new thoughts embedded in these forms, and utopic imagination of a possible reality.

The choreographic decisions for UM were also greatly influenced by the larger social and political situation apart from the immediate sensorial and emotional triggers. Notwithstanding the promise of universal suffrage stated in Hong Kong's constitutional document, on 31 August 2014, China's legislature in Beijing stipulated a screening mechanism for the election of the head office in Hong Kong. The spatial and institutional inaccessibility of the external authority compelled protestors to improvise new forms of intervention. On 28 September 2014, the police fired teargas to disperse the rally around the government headquarters despite there being no sign of violence. A large number of unprepared protestors retreated in chaos and spilled over onto the nearby highway. Instead of fleeing and ending the chaos, protestors were galvanized to stay in the middle of the roads, interrupting the traffic. As some protestors used umbrellas as shields against the police's tear gas and pepper spray, the protest was coined "umbrella movement" (Wener-Fligner 2014). The occupation lasted seventy-nine days, ending on 15 December 2014 when the police evicted occupants by force and cleared the occupation sites.

Encampment as a strategy of protest action is not new, with the global Occupy Movement manifesting the many potentials of the form by making the underrepresented mass visible. Occupy in UM, mobilized by quotidianism as a lyrical force, manifested in the form of improvised village-building. Occupants affectionately called their camp sites 'village'. Technicolour camping tents brought by citizens were aligned tightly against each other along and across multi-laned motorways, its unintended visual exuberance marking an unapologetic existence that ruptured the spatial logic and the functional order of the city landscape. The three villages, namely Admiralty, Causeway Bay and Mongkok, had their respective style, manner and signature facility fashioned by the political beliefs and background of the occupants. From the massive open-air study area in Admiralty for students, the "pantheon of deities" in Mongkok (Wu 2014) with statues of gods from different religions put side-by-side, the meticulous waste recycling station, communal leisure facilities such as the full-size ping-pong table to hotpot dinners in the street, UM's Occupy became a spectacle resisting voyeurism: Everyday life is lived before it is rationalized or becomes fully conscious; There was not much to

see in everyday life and ordinary people but its compelling presence was impossible to avoid.

The Occupy of UM was not only a mass demonstration for democracy but also of utopian aspirations of life. The specificity of this form of protest was primarily people's response to the authority's persistent refusal to implement a genuinely democratic electoral system that people had asked for, but the desire to fashion an outlook of collective existence was no less pressing in the process. Its choreography – unstable, improvisational, dispersed and decentralized – did not produce an image or a narrative that concretized a stable and totalized definition of the event. Rather, what remained were the formula and dynamics of the choreography that give form and method of practice of freestyle public exchange of genuine opinions, the organization of organic communities around common concerns instead of pragmatic interests.

From the perspective of political science, Ching Kwan Lee points out that UM ironically pressed for reformist demands that were “legalistic, and constitutional in nature” with “extraordinary scale and radical form as an event” (2019: 1). This “irony” suggests that radical politics is always situated and can only be explained within the structure of the condition. The fact that the legal, constitutional systems and other social infrastructure and institutions that kept the city running were never decided by the consensus of the people makes the reclamation of constitutional power radical and emancipatory. In the lyricism of the quotidian, the staging of everyday life for an indefinite duration was an exercise of the creation of a new norm. As the active everyday community-building and networking in the aftermath of the event reveals, the UM Occupy was a laboratory for citizens to practice and experiment with methods of getting connected first and foremost on a human and everyday level.

The second major choreography produced in UM was Lennon Wall. Many discussions of the Lennon Wall in UM attribute its origin literally to the Lennon Wall created by the people in 1980s Prague in Soviet Czechoslovakia and John Lennon's anti-war spirit (But and Lau 2020; Chiu 2019; Leung 2019). However, given its now unique and highly stylized presentation in the popular impression and the predominance of visuality over physicality in the concept, Lennon Wall from UM must be comprehended as a local choreography of action and movement for the rendering of its iconic rainbowy appearance. Minna Valjakka's (2020) study of the “initial Lennon Wall Hong Kong” suggests that its creation was entirely accidental. As soon as the occupation of the space around the government headquarters began, a few protestors who happened to have some multicolour post-it notes felt the need “to facilitate communication” among occupiers (Valjakka 2020: 980). As recorded in a photo shown in Valjakka's study, the first creators successfully spatialized a wall into a canvas for self-expression by putting the question “Why are we here?” as a header (ibid.). As a choreographic device, the question beckoned for people to come close to the space to respond to the question, read others' responses, and interact with one other. The original street-level mural of sticky notes quickly expanded and covered the nearby half-covered and wide-open spiral staircase of the government building with colourful scales of sticky notes, which became the archetypal image of Lennon Wall. This image of a colourful mosaic denotes the reality as a singular multiplicity that the lyricism of the quotidian can constitute. If the individual's experiences in Occupy were

immersive without the realization of the totality of reality that he/she was part of, Lennon Wall on the contrary choreographed individuals into movements to create a phantasmagoric image.

In active embodiment, the choreography of Lennon Wall produced an open, organic, participatory and constantly evolving “physical spatiality” (Valjakka 2020: 982). Participants wrote or drew on their sticky notes and put them on the wall, carefully avoiding using the same colour notes or covering existing writings in order to create the overwhelming multicoloured image. The visual effect of the vividness of colour, and the actual movement of the notes in the air, made the impression of Lennon Wall as a moving image in stillness. Though all participants intended their contributions to this aspired picture to be seen from a distance, they would still faithfully write on the notes before putting them on. This design of the sequence of movements required participants to physically engage with the wall, leaving traces of their existence that produced more a material than textual effect. This obligation for individual input prevented the reduction of Lennon Wall to a mere ornamental and formal existence. On top of this designated action for individuals, the structure of the final image, of sticky notes neatly and tightly aligned one by one, also demanded mass collaboration, and refused the domination of a single effort or voice, however eloquent or powerful. Lennon Wall thus also suggests a framework of movement and experience for the collective creation of an outcome that makes every individual seen but larger than any individual in terms of effect and imagination. The kaleidoscopic image of Lennon Wall has also immortalized a mental impression of the affects of participatory democracy.

The third choreography produced by UM, Vertical Banner, took on the iconic Lion Rock in the city as the stage of performance. On 22 October 2014, the city witnessed a twenty-eight-meter long (equivalent to the height of ten floors) banner hung vertically on Lion Rock, a mountain in the heart of Kowloon. In the combination of black words on a yellow background, at that time already representative of the visual aesthetics of the movement, the five enormous Chinese characters that translated to “I Want Real Universal Suffrage” (我要真普選) impressed into the mind of many pro-democracy Hong Kongers with the magnificence of its visual minimalism. Apart from the visual-textual impact of the banner, the refashioning of Lion Rock for political outcry also created a semiotic short-circuit in many people’s minds. Lion Rock has been a cultural symbol, coined by both popular culture and the government to signify the spirit of resilience, flexibility, cooperativeness and endurance of the mass that contributed to social upward mobility and the capitalist city’s economic miracle (Lai 2017; Wu 2020). The group of hikers who hung the banner, Hong Kong Spidie, named after the superhero Spider Man, produced a video recording of the whole operation with an explanation of their action. The banner was soon taken down (Tharoor 2014). Like the dance moves in a pop music video that have gone viral, reenactments of the choreography quickly flourished across the city. Gigantic vertical banners were seen hanging from university buildings as well as from several footbridges above highways (RFA 2014). The imitation was not a sign of a lack of creativity, but rather a manifestation of the enchantment felt and the wish to localize the spectacle through restaging.

Unlike Occupy and Lennon Wall, Vertical Banner as a choreography produced a statement in the form of a spectacle unifying all protestors. The spectacle aroused awe by simultaneously summoning attention with its overwhelming visual appearance and textual eloquence and denying easy access or embodiment. Vertical Banner required a discreetly designed and executed procedure to impress the mass in the singularity of its appearance. The physical height, the enormity of the banner and the enticing sense of danger emanating from the rocky and steep cliff all contributed to the psychical distance required to achieve the stunning effect. Like a magician's tricks, the bodily actions and movements were deliberately hidden from spectators, as the process of making and technical virtuosity (which is actually accessible) would disenchant the miraculous quality of the spectacle. In his discussion of the theatricality of Lion Rock, in its materiality imbued by this performance, David R. Gruber comments that this act "dramatized their [protestors'] dissent" (2020: 461). Such dramatization, through the choreography that concealed the process of movements, was essential in creating the visual statement and exerting the subliminal effect, without which the social and bodily movement(s) would only be an empty gesture.

Hong Kong Spidie's behind-the-scenes video (Lion Rock 2014a) fuses footage of rock climbers dangling in mid-air fixing the banner on the mountain against the backdrop of the city below their feet, with local legendary rock band Beyond's song "Under a Vast Sky" as the musical background. The strikingly serene atmosphere of the video is also found in another video of one member's solo statement (Lion Rock 2014b) that begins with "We are just some most ordinary Hong Kong people." The chillness of the speaker's tone hints at a humble pleasure of achievement. The personal becomes political here: a social movement is first and foremost an event of self-transformation and realization, in which the separation between the self and society is overcome. This explains the mass resonance of the slogan "I Want Real Universal Suffrage", spoken in the name of "I" and unifying all individuals in a collective subject. The brutal simplicity of the slogan, an outcry from the repressed desire instead of any grand and sophisticated political idea or ideal, became a drastic contrast to the spectacularity of the performance, and consequently intensified the force of the demand: people were demanding something fundamental, not exceptional. This choreography also exerted a significant organizing effect in this decentralized movement and provided a spectacular image that cannot be monopolized by a single subject as a focal point that kept protest thinking and action in perspective.

In the seventy-nine days of occupation, ideological, strategical, and aspirational differences among protesters grew. Confrontations among protestors – on-site, online and in different textual public platforms – deepened the social and political discrepancy among individuals, and the often emotionally-charged debates wounded many as protestors and humans. Mistrust and disagreement prevailed and fractured the civil society into a wide array of factions between the poles of peaceful and rational non-violent group emphasizing universal values and pressuring the authority, and the more militant group that prioritized the livelihood and interests of the local grassroot communities and did not fear to use force. The government's use of force in crackdowns escalated during the movement, making resistance increasingly challenging. The relatively restrained action in the clearance of the sites concluded UM in a quiet manner, denying the finale of the event a much-

needed catharsis. An overwhelming sense of futility and hopelessness imploded among protestors after UM. The lyrical dimension of the civic society had been fully awakened in and through the movement on the individual and collective level. The frustration, as a lyrical response, was the result of the failure of carving the existence of the self into the reality to materialize the envisioned utopic possibilities.

However, choreographically speaking, the post-UM period until 2019 clearly witnessed the extension of the lyricism and the adoption of choreographies in everyday life. A revolution is only a real radical event when it fundamentally changes the reality by creating new norms, and inescapably reshapes the everyday for all, organized around the reverberating lyricism that emerges from the event. Siu Man Yee's (2016) discussion of the transformation of the organization of civic activism aptly points out how the legacy of UM exerted its effect in the everyday life of the ordinary citizen. During UM, protesters' refusal of a single and centralized leadership led to their spontaneous participation through creating new positions, roles, and duties for themselves and setting up three occupation sites, consequently giving the event its form of appearance that was unpredictable for everyone. This aspiration for participatory democracy, as well as the practices and habits invented during UM, were transformed into a wide range of community-building experiments after the end of the movement (Siu 2016: 1-7). This transformation can be seen in better detail through the lens of the three choreographies identified above.

Coda: a lyrical moment in the 2019 protest

A month into waves of vigorous protests against the government's proposal of an extradition law, the July First March in 2019 was destined to be different. After the rally, thousands of protestors gathered outside the government headquarters and a hundred broke into the empty Legislative Council building. The police eventually warned of a clearance of the building by midnight. The occupiers could not come to a consensus on whether to stay or go and decided to act separately, with four occupiers determined to remain. A few minutes past midnight, some of the departed protestors returned to the building chanting "let's go together", lifted all four of the occupiers against their will and carried them out of the building by force. The moment presented a paradox encapsulating a new and provocative understanding of democracy: if the people sharing power are heterogenous, the fight to include differences becomes an essential task, which in extreme circumstances entails violating the spirit of democracy by going against others' will and dictating the situation. This moment of intensified emotions and unresolved contradictions, however, illuminates an understudied revolutionary ideal – fraternity – and suggests the need to examine the idea in relation to democracy. Recalling such moments, like listening to the same song again and again, brings a pulsing sense of existence: it is impossible to consider the event a failure for the infinite possibilities and new thoughts it has revealed.

This paper uses choreographic analysis to examine the lyricism that emerged in the 2003 Protest and UM to trace a trajectory of protest in recent years in Hong Kong. It also, through the case of Hong Kong, proposes a way of examining and comprehending protests by identifying and articulating the infinite possibility,

realized and not, that marks the events' singular moments of lyricism that produce new thoughts and are a location of hope.

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