

URBAN SPACE OF HONG KONG AS THE IMAGINARY: A VISUAL STORY IN 5
EPISODES / a visual lecture by Linda Lai
16m55s / color + b/w / 4:3 / sound / 2005.04

Urban City of Hong Kong as the Imaginary: a visual story in 5 episodes (2005), a visual ethnographic exercise in the form of a video lecture surveying the notion of Hong Kong as an urban dwelling in her local cinema and independent works in the postwar period to present

The +16-minute video lecture was prepared and delivered at the symposium “A Matter of Ownership: dialogues on art and cultural space of Singapore & Hong Kong,” for the Bilateral Cultural Exchange Project “Metropolis Strip(p)ed,” co-funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the LCSD, and the National Arts Council of Singapore, organized by Para/Site Art Space (Hong Kong) and The Substation (Singapore).

The 5 episodes:

I. Production of Space: Top-down? Bottom-up?

Tenement buildings – “the house of 72 tenants” – the “typical” urban signifier of post-war Hong Kong

— In the Face of Demolition 危樓春曉 (1953)

A microcosm... of class discrimination?

HK = Guangzhou / A social-realist signifier...

-- The House of 72 Tenants 七十二家房客 (1973)

An icon of lost pastoral ideal of communal ethics / “one for all, all for one”

— Kungfu Rhapsody 功夫 (2004)

Roots... A tale of three cities: HK-Guangzhou – Shanghai

The “house of 72 tenants” was a popular comic trick-theatre piece in 1930s’ Shanghai, now an enduring sign of localism.

But not only...

— He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Father 新難兄難弟 (1992)

Space of nostalgia – 1950 & ‘60s’ Hong Kong / an obsolete value: “ong for all, all for one”

Tenement housing: an updated version

-- Hong Kong’73 香港 73 (1974)

From tenement buildings to squatter areas... to public housing...

— Father & Son 父子情 (1981)

Residential housing...

...For the first time... a real space / serious social realism

Public housing

— Cops and Robbers 點指兵兵 (1979)

The bustling city of HK is a jungle of crime: cops are robbers, robbers are cops...

— Made in Hong Kong 香港製造 (1997)

Marginal space... Lonely hearts... Alien sentiments... Marginal Space... And...

And shady business

- Dumplings 餃子 (2004)

II. Emergence of local urban legends: for whom are the stories told?

District by district

Lion Rock: Diamond Hill, Shek Kip Mei, Wang Tou Hom

— Hollywood Hong Kong 香港有個荷里活 (2002)

Diamond Hill, Wang Tou Hom; “under the Lion Rock,” the forgotten nobody, the banal and the ugly, the marginal...

District by district:

Causeway Bay / Wanchai

—Young and Dangerous 古惑仔再戰江湖 (1998)

District by district: Western District

—Story of Kennedy Town 西環的故事 (1990)

—Visible Secret 幽靈人間 (2001)

District by district: Tsimshatsui

- PTU (2004)

District by district: Mongkok

- Once Upon a Time in Triad Society II 去吧！渣fit人兵團 (1996)

- Love Will Tear Us Apart 天上人間 (1999)

—A Night in Mongkok 旺角黑夜 (2004)

District by district: Yaumatei

—Metado Fumaça 半枝煙 (1999)

—C'est la vie, mon cheri 新不了情 (1992)

- New Emigrant [A Story per Flat] 一樓一故事 (1988)

III. The Haunting/Haunted City

- The Imp 凶榜 (1981)

—The Eye 見鬼 (2002)

- Visible Secret 幽靈人間 (2001)

IV. The Count-down Anticipating 1997

UFO's design cities... [UFO = United Film Organization]

The world has gone mad...

- Dr. Mack, (aka Mack the Knife) 流氓醫生 (1994)

- Heaven Can't Wait 救世神棍 (1995)

- Anna Magdalena 安娜瑪德蓮娜 (1997)

In the mean time, they were also counting...

V. Independent Visions

- Ah Ming 阿明 (Rita Hui, 1996)

- In the Dumps 垃圾年頭 (Kwok Wai-lun, 1997)

- Happy Valley (Waiting at T-Zero) 沒有人在跑馬地等沒有人 (Mark Chan, 1996)

- The Daily Mood of Final Certainty, OR, The House of August ('97 story) 八月的房子 (Howard Chang, 1997)

-17-1/2 十七歲半 (Monica Lee, 1999)

-[Little Fatty's] video diary I 小肥 (的錄像日記) (Siu Fei, 2001)

EPILOGUE: Re-appropriation / Return of the Repressed...

In spring 2003, Financial Secretary Anthony Leung invoked the theme song of Below The Lion Rock (RTHK social-realist drama series)

-Below the Lion Rock (RTHK)

The discourse of 1970s as a period of forward-looking, independent spirit was officially engraved into HK people's shared consciousness.

The END

Researched and scripted by Linda Lai / Edited by Kedy Fan / April 2005, v.1

- The Tickled Faces of Big Mansions 房子的變臉 (Linda Lai 2004)

The 33 moving image works cited in this visual lecture:

[commercial production with commercial release]

Blossom in Rainy May 五月雨中花 (1960)
In the Face of Demolition 危樓春曉 (1953)
The House of 72 Tenants 七十二家房客 (1973)
Kungfu Rhapsody 功夫 (2004)
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father 新難兄難弟 (1992)
Father & Son 父子情 (1981)
Cops and Robbers 點指兵兵 (1979)
Hong Kong'73 香港 73 (1974)
Father & Son 父子情 (1981)
Cops and Robbers 點指兵兵 (1979)
Made in Hong Kong 香港製造 (1997)
Dumplings 餃子 (2004)
Hollywood Hong Kong 香港有個荷里活 (2002)
Young and Dangerous 古惑仔再戰江湖 (1998)
Story of Kennedy Town 西環的故事 (1990)
Visible Secret 幽靈人間 (2001)
PTU (2004)
Once Upon a Time in Triad Society II 去吧！渣 fit 人兵團 (1996)
Love Will Tear Us Apart 天上人間 (1999)
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Metado Fumaça 半枝煙 (1999)
C'est la vie, mon cheri 新不了情 (1992)
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Heaven Can't Wait 救世神棍 (1995)
Anna Magdalena 安娜瑪德蓮娜 (1997)

Below the Lion Rock 獅子山下

[Independent productions / experimental video works]

Ah Ming 阿明 (Rita Hui, 1996)
In the Dumps 垃圾年頭 (Kwok Wai-lun, 1997)
Happy Valley (Waiting at T-Zero) 沒有人在跑馬地等沒有人 (Mark Chan, 1996)
The Daily Mood of Final Certainty, OR, The House of August ('97 story) 八月的房子 (Howard Chang, 1997)
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