

Cities and Nature(s) — Thinking Beyond

Nature in and around urban centres has become an added value for life quality. Today, the term habitat has evolved into something that human beings strive for: a protected biotope of urban life with comfortable access to exciting experiences in nature. But isn't this an inherently contradictory idea of nature? On the one hand, nature should be wild and unspoilt, and on the other hand, controlled, accessible and efficient to maintain. But is nature in and around cities not part of a natural environment subjected to social influences? And are cities not both, a social and an environmental construct? Even so, in recent times, urban and design studies have frequently ignored the essential qualities of nature as a physical and material element of cities, where nature is shaped and controlled by and in the city, as well as by its citizens.¹

Cities — as ecological, social, economic and political systems — and our daily lives are both undeniably shaped by environmental issues and urban concerns. In most of the developed countries, nature is no longer the same as it used to be in settlement times. Nature is an integral part of our cities; it is controlled and has to correspond to the various requirements of urban life and planning. However, at a time when food

¹ Benton-Short Lisa, Short John Rennie, *Cities and Nature*, Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City, Routledge Publishers, 2008

is available in a nearby supermarket instead of in the fields, and when one can easily turn up the heating to keep out the cold or turn on the air-conditioning to avoid the heat, one tends to see nature — that is the natural environment — somewhat disconnected from human life, and the city becomes an independent overall concept. Through the power and the collaboration with individuals and groups, we believe that design can make people aware of this phenomenon, and positively shape and transform our future by creating fundamental negotiations through practical and participatory actions.

In the epoch of the Anthropocene, design must assume responsibility for its impact on the planet, point out non-material aspects of the discipline, and promote less consumerist approaches. But above all, design must think beyond the idea of being the problem-solver to become the facilitator of basic changes, and truly contribute to more sustainable forms of living.

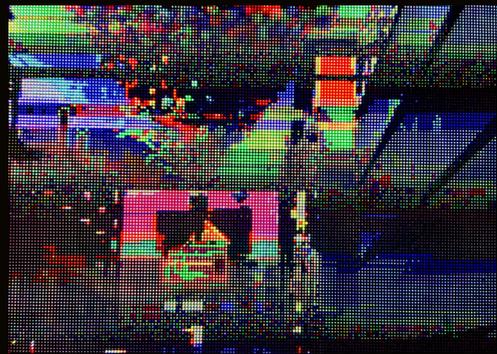








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International Design Workshop

The Master of Arts in Design has been running an International Design Workshop since 2010. The workshop is based on a intercultural and experimental investigation around a predefined topic. The aim is to offer students the opportunity of participating in an interdisciplinary programme, and explore a particular topic with experts from different cultural and professional backgrounds. This setting allows students to experience new challenges and develop new strategies related to design practice, design research and the arts. The workshop should inspire the students to use the knowledge they have gained to come up with innovative approaches for their own practices, unfold novel perspectives for their professional careers, and open their minds to new methods and environments.

To strengthen this experience, the Master of Arts in Design collaborated over the last three years with the ZHdK Hong Kong Hub Connecting Space and Hong Kong based faculties, and proposed in 2017 a two-week workshop to scrutinize and compare the natural and urban environments in Hong Kong and Zurich from three different positions. This confrontation should permit a better understanding of the differences and challenges of both cities from a designer's point of view, and provide a fruitful ground for speculative explorations.

The International Design Workshop took place in Hong Kong from September 11 – 22, 2017. The workshop was in collaboration with design students of the Master of Arts in Design at Zurich University of the Arts, landscape architecture students of Birmingham City University, and residents of Hong Kong. This publication presents the project and the results developed in Hong Kong.

International Design Workshop 2017:
Cities and Nature(s) — Thinking Beyond

Concept and realisation:
Prof. Michael Krohn
Karin Zindel

Tutors from Hong Kong:
Dr Yanki Lee
Michael Leung
Albert Tsang
Sara Wong

Workshop 1

The Hong Kong Botanical Commons — Ecological Communities Reclaiming Public Space

Michael Leung is designer, urban farmer and activist. His work ranges from collective urban agriculture projects such as The HK FARMers' Almanac 2014–2015 to Pangkerchief, a collection of objects produced by Pang Jai fabric market in Sham Shui Po. Leung is a visiting lecturer at Hong Kong Baptist University, where he teaches socially engaged art.

www.studioleung.com
Instagram: [studio_leung](#)

In collaboration with:
Wong Tsing-Kong and Léonard Lin

The Hong Kong Botanical Commons
Ecological communities reclaiming public space
Michael Leung, June 2017, Hong Kong

Proposal



*Kai Fong Pai Dong
community garden,
Yau Ma Tei*

Imagine for a moment a rejuvenated metropolis, consisting of independent but federated suburban communities, separated from one another by small groves of trees. All but the most necessary roads and fences have been removed and replaced by gardens, parks, fish ponds, and small-scale recycling plants [...] This city does not try to isolate itself from nature by covering everything in asphalt; rather, it integrates itself as closely as possible into the ecology of the surrounding region.¹

In Hong Kong, a city populated with over seven million people, and with a sunset lost to towering buildings, it can be difficult to imagine the city becoming reacquainted with nature ever again. Fortunately, a short roller coaster minibus ride can take you to the countryside, coastal villages and to ports with boats going to outlying islands. But for those who live and are rooted in the urban environment, where can encounters with nature happen on a daily basis?

In the past few years I have spent less time on the rooftop, and have become more focused on urban farming and guerrilla gardening on the ground level. I believe that such efforts in public and urban spaces repair communities and bring biodiversity back into the city.² This workshop brings us to such spaces: security-gardeners who turn building entrances into small but thriving gardens; people growing medicinal herbs on small mountains next to elevated highways; mobile gardens on metal carts brought out during the day; planters that are elevated and attached to metal street signs; a 39-year fabric market hidden in, and surrounded by trees; a convenience shop grounded by a large tree; Chinese banyan trees growing in the crevices of a 1960's building rooftop;

¹ Purchase, Graham, *Anarchism & Environmental Survival* (Canada: See Sharp Press, 2011), 13. Online version: www.libcom.org/files/Purchase%20G.%20Anarchism%20and%20Environmentalism.pdf

² www.paidong.tumblr.com/search/communityfarmingproject

grandma gardeners who share knowledge when they buy their daily groceries; and Mango King, a homeless guerrilla farmer who practices permaculture on an unused 6'000-square foot (560-square metre) public space in Kowloon.³

The coexistence of nature and the built environment in Hong Kong is also supported by neighbourhood concern groups, community spaces, environmental activists and even bird feeders, such as a lady dressed only in black who unboxes a nutritious dinner for urban birds at precisely 5pm every day, and the middle-aged man who carries a ladder and feeds around 70 cats at 7pm every night.

How do such practices and environments relate back to a creative, multi-disciplinary and explorative workshop? Such green heterotopias and sensitivity towards nature offer new encounters and knowledge exchange in a hostile neo-liberal capitalist era. In increasingly controlled and regulated public spaces, what approaches exist in Hong Kong, and can be developed further, using design as a tool, to inspire new opportunities for open and shared green spaces – our ecological commons?

Visiting places in Hong Kong that organise from the bottom-up and building on examples in Zurich such as Stadion Brache Hardturm and cooperative neighbourhoods like Das Dreieck and 5im5i, workshop participants will create multidisciplinary works that envision what an ecological commons platform would look like, under the project title “The Hong Kong Botanical Commons”. How can we document and participate in bottom-up practices (“legal” and “illegal”)? What tools and strategies are people using when gardening/farming in public and hostile environments? How can insights into one person’s life inspire others? How do cultures, textures and interactions inform design processes? How and where do we share our experiences so that they become part of the commons?

Field work, intercultural encounters, participatory action research and creative collaborations will introduce new opportunities to the Hong Kong urban landscape, and turn them into case studies, projects, (new) objects and exhibits for a Hong Kong Botanical Commons – an open and expansive platform that grows out of the institution, roots itself in the community and supports a balanced urban environment in Hong Kong.

Transcultural Solidarity Workshops Michael Leung, January 2018, Hong Kong

Reflection

Since moving to Hong Kong in 2009 I have been a visiting lecturer at the School of Design (2010–2015), Intercommon Institute (2016) and Academy of a Visual Arts (2014–present day). Switching between under- and postgraduate programmes, I have taught product design, design strategy, experience design, social design, interdisciplinary art, and socially engaged art. Traversing across different disciplines has positively influenced my own practice and has built a strong platform and network, which I am pleased to have shared with this year’s Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) design master’s students.

Prior to the workshop I wrote and shared the text entitled *The Hong Kong Botanical Commons* to explain the approach and intentions of my workshop. Given the preparatory Zurich research trip in June 2017 and the extended length of the workshop (two weeks instead of one) in September 2017, it seems fitting to approach this text in chronological order.

June 2017 was my first visit to Zurich and I was fortunate to be introduced to Verein Zitrone, a creative community who negotiate contracts with landowners to temporarily use their buildings for free in return for the basic upkeep of the building and squat prevention.¹ For the first half of my stay, I stayed in the affluent neighbourhood of Seefeld and for the second half, in the caretaker’s home of a soon-to-be-demolished office building in Feldeggstrasse.

Meeting the Zitrone community and learning how they liaise with landowners and *amicably* with the anarchist community made me reflect on a building in Hong Kong that I have been frequenting with friends and Zurich students in past workshops. This abandoned tenement walk-up building was the site for Anders Nikita’s rooftop intervention in the 2016 workshop and featured as the cover image for this Cities and Natures 2017 workshop (Rooftop tree, photo by Michael Leung). In a similar spirit to Zitrone, I hope that some progress can be made with the building owner, perhaps in time for the 2018 workshop.

My inspiring trip to Zurich led me to visit Notschlafstelle, Koch-Areal, Autonome Schule Zürich, Fermento Anarchistische Bibliothek, the area around Sihlquai 55, Genossenschaft Dreieck, Kalkbreite, Quartiergarten Hard, Stadion Brache Hardturm and ZHdK and its remarkable campus and library. I also had the pleasure of meeting philosopher, art theorist and ZHdK staff member Gerald Raunig, and Thomas Raoseta, who introduced me to six cooperative housing projects in Zurich.

At Toni-Areal, the ZHdK campus, I learnt that this year’s workshop in Hong Kong would be more ambitious and public than the previous two workshops, with an emphasis to “design things” that would be twice exhibitable (at the end of the workshop in

³ www.facebook.com/pg/communityfarmingproject/photos/?tab=album&album_id=539877076141587

¹ www.zitrusfrucht.ch

September and as part of *Zurich Meets Hong Kong* a month later). Unable to imagine how the students would respond to my workshop description, I remember thinking that designers today should take responsibility for what they create and bring into the world, especially those who prolong the era of superfluous design objects, and contribute to landfill and the devastating proposed era of the Anthropocene. I confront this approach to design in my teaching, at our market stall that also functions as a second-hand shop, and even share a potent quote from Metahaven on my website.²

Prior to the 2017 workshop, I compiled the two-week schedule and shared it with the 15 students.³ The schedule involved rural and urban field trips that would introduce the students to Hong Kong's social, political and ecological context. Similar to my own practice, especially as someone from abroad, I stressed the importance of visiting places and speaking directly in person to different members of the community, from workers to villagers, neighbours to market sellers; and to displace oneself, observe the environment and hear other people's stories. Slightly overwhelmed by the size of this year's group, I decided to invite two friends and translators, Kong Tsai and Leo, to join us on a few days and support the students with their fieldwork and share their perspectives. Our visits included a guerrilla garden in Tsim Sha Tsui, a rooftop tree, Kai Fong Pai Dong, the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens, Spring Workshop, the Herbarium, Pang Jai fabric market, Wang Chau, Living Bookspace, Flow Bookshop, Mango King's Farm and a bitter leaf forest grown by my friend's father.⁴ All of these places relate to the theme of our workshop, *The Hong Kong Botanical Commons*. Unfortunately, a few months later, a couple of those places no longer exist and some now have a precarious year ahead such as Wang Chau, a rural village planned for demolition by the government this year.⁵

Writing this text makes me think of an essay by Jens Kastner, who writes about the Vienna student protests against the neoliberalisation of higher education in 2009.⁶ In the entrance of the academy, the students hung a banner that said, 'What do you represent?' Passing through a foreign place for two weeks and speaking to different marginalised communities will likely raise such an ontological response, which reflects one's experiences and personal values.

During the last three days of the workshop, the students discussed what they could do as a group; create to add awareness and new relationships to the places that they visited; and how to share those locations with the public in a responsible way.

On the presentation day, the students shared their project entitled Sprout and distributed seedlings and organic seeds in the front area of Connecting Space Hong Kong. Sprout is a platform that contributes to our ecological commons and can be used by gardeners and farmers to share knowledge and challenges collectively.

The Sprout project and map can be seen at www.sproutcommunity.xyz. The website also functions as an invitation and prototype that illustrates a possible path for a transcultural workshop that builds on a meaningful platform, in the form of a creative and expandable act of solidarity, spanning from Zurich to Hong Kong — and pausing in Mrs. Tong's home in Wang Chau Village, where she kindly shared her probiotic enzyme drink with all the students that day.

² The designer who wakes up on an early morning in the 21st century knows that his human capital, creativity and labor are the last reserve of the western economies – Metahaven, *Ideology of Design*, p.277

³ www.tinyurl.com/HKBotanicalCommonsSchedule

⁴ www.instagram.com/explore/tags/HKBotanicalCommons

⁵ www.tinyurl.com/WangChauFlowers

⁶ *Art and Activism (Against Groys)* – www.transversal.at/blog/Art-and-Activism

Workshop 2

Co-design Politics of Nature in Hong Kong — To Bring Nature Back to our Cities

Dr Yanki Lee is design researcher, educator and activist. She is founder of Enable Foundation and programme director of its Social Innovation Design Lab, a social design agency in Hong Kong and London focused on design research for social inclusion and innovation.

www.yankilee.com
www.enable.org.hk

Albert Tsang Siu Yin is sociologist, performer and lecturer with focus on social design, particularly concentrating on participation through design, co-design, and action research as a way of gaining knowledge.

**Co-design Politics of Nature in Hong Kong:
To Bring Nature Back to our Cities
Yanki Lee and Albert Tsang, June 2017, Hong Kong**

Proposal

It was a real tour de force how *western* civilization understand *nature*. In the Middle Ages, religious influence meant that, nature was viewed as evil. Incrementally, the criteria of judging shifted from morality to aesthetics. Right before renaissance, unproductive land was seen as ugly, and domesticated land as beautiful. It wasn't until romanticism that it was considered that the most beautiful nature was that without human intervention. In contemporary times, a new shift towards a mix of pragmatism and surviving ethics— environmentalism related to climate change— has taken place. The fact is that humans have never seen nature as it IS. Nature, no matter its meanings, or even its physical presence, has always been culturally or politically produced.

Compared to many European cities, Hong Kong is a very young city, where earliest massive human infrastructures were only implemented less than 100 years ago. Since then, the elements of the city have rapidly *invaded* nature. As a super-dense city, Hong Kong is also a city of possibilities, where different things happen in co-existing contexts. While urban elements appear in the middle of nature, the elements of nature fight back subtly in different ways:¹

- Commodity for our basic needs
- Beauty for our desire for delight
- Language for our communication with one another
- Discipline for our understanding of the world

Based on these propositions, we invite ZHdK students to investigate their own politics of nature, from Zurich to Hong Kong and from personal encounters to three specific questions/steps/levels that Latour² provoked us to think about with regard to nature and our urban lives:

1. How to modify public life to take nature into account?
2. How to adapt our systems of production to nature's demand?
3. How to preserve nature from human degradation through sustainable politics?

Participants will experience the three steps through four visits, with the goal of co-designing tools/situations/systems for new politics of nature in the city.

¹ Emerson R W (2009), *Nature*, Penguin Books: Great Ideas

² Latour B (2004), *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*

Visits: From Zurich to Hong Kong

Participants will first experiment the interweaving urban/nature landscape of Hong Kong in four visits, following Yanki Lee's paths in Zurich, in order to define different forms of nature:

1. Species in the City: exploring the species from Elephants' House in Zurich Zoo to Birdcage at Hong Kong Park, Giant Panda Adventure at Ocean Park, the Bird Street and Flower Market
2. Nature in the City: visiting citizens' interpretations from Zurich's Freitag Tower to Hong Kong's Flower Granny and extremely small "pocket parks"
3. Nature in Nature: using our bodies to come across different forms of nature, from residential areas in Zurich suburban area to Hong Kong's new town
4. City in Nature: immersing ourselves in the urban oasis of Zurich's Unterer Letten to Hong Kong's Tai O Village or other outskirts

Step 1: Immersing into Other Species

Participants will immerse themselves into one natural species in Hong Kong, and define purposes of nature through their immersive experience.

We, as a group of design researchers, are interested in experimenting with new design research methods. Immersion is a method we are extending from traditional empathic methods. Instead of "putting themselves in other people's shoes", participants will be requested to observe and become other natural species" and design from their perspective. They need to articulate one purpose on which they will focus. Our goal is to develop new design tactics to enable citizens to bring nature back into our urban areas.

Step 2: Investigating Politics of Nature

From private to public domains, designers are inspired by many citizen-driven innovation initiatives such as the 100in1Day and Guerrilla Gardening Movement, and increasingly exploring societal challenges through engagements with issues that call forward new publics and new modes of democratic citizenship. Binder et al³ refer to such engagements as "democratic design experiments" of re-presentation and emergent civic actions.

On Day 5 of the workshop, participants will share their immersion stories and their investigations of politics of nature. Together, we will co-design and create prototypes of a series of collective democratic design experiments, as an action research project with designers from Zurich and Hong Kong citizens.

Step 3: Intervening Designs for Nature in Cities

Participants will develop their proposals of "democratic design experiments" to bring nature back to the city, through design. They will prototype their proposals at the Lee Garden Area to invite citizens to negotiate how to bring nature back into to urban life.

On the last day of the workshop, participants will present their prototypes in the form of a festival, which will allow them to articulate and share their experiences. What we are seeking is disruptive: instead of looking for a harmonious scenario, we want the experiment to challenge some deep-rooted cultural presuppositions built on some fundamental binary opposition such as right/wrong, beauty/ugly, temporary/permanent etc. We will ask participants to explore with us the cultural meanings of city/nature through co-design processes of urban interventions between designers and citizens.

Immersive Design Experiments

Yanki Lee in collaboration with Albert Tsang, January 2018, Hong Kong

Reflection

Cities and Nature(s) — Thinking Beyond is an urgent topic, especially in light of the current ecological debates. As design researchers, our first reaction to this subject is a methodological one: how can designers design on behalf of other species or elements in the nature? However, the underlying question is how design can play an active and provocative role to bring nature back to our cities.

Immersing into Others

Over two decades of conducting design research in social inclusion with special focus on ageing population, I have practiced design with empathy. However, being a design researcher as well as an activist, I found that empathy, which is about "putting ourselves into other people's shoes" is not enough as a creative practice. This is why I started to experiment with immersive methods, especially designing activities to engage students and citizens to use their bodies in order to immerse themselves into situations as part of investigation and as a performance of their findings.

Starting in Zurich, I immersed myself into the nature in order to understand the lives of different species in the city. From Elephants' House in Zurich Zoo to Freitag's urban farm tower and Unterer Letten, I experienced different interchangeable forms between city and nature.

Designing as Another Species

This experience was brought back to Hong Kong and I shared with ZHK students how I unfold my immersive experience into design elements. In collaboration with design researcher and theatrical per-

³ Binder T., Brandt E., Ehn, P. & Halse J. (2015), Democratic design experiments: between parliament and laboratory. In: CoDesign, 11 (3-4), 152-165

former, Albert Tsang, we asked our students to pick one nature species/element in Hong Kong and observe their tactics to cope with the presence of human beings in a dense city like Hong Kong.

Immersion is a method that extends traditional empathic methods. Instead of “putting themselves into other people’s shoes”, our students were asked to observe and literally “become another species”. Unlike the immersive experiences popular in various disciplines that are usually sensual experiences, our meaning of immersing is an active engagement of one’s identity into others’ situations by means of the imagination. Our students presented their findings through physical performance of the moment of encounter. Through the selection of the species and their interpretation of them, we found that performance is a way of thinking that returns the human body and materiality into the imaginative design process, which is now very much mediated by all sorts of HCI/digital interfaces.

So, our design students from Zurich became different species in Hong Kong and investigated the politics of nature through their new identities: How do SPARROWS see the city? Where does the AIR go? How do the TREE roots grow? How could we translate the cultural relation to HERBS? How could we map the traces of COCKROACHES? How could we bring fortune through planting FLOWER seeds? How could we reconstruct PALM TREES in the city? How could we avoid LIGHT pollution?

Designing as a Collective

Using Binder et al (2015) as a primary reference, our ZHdK students developed their proposals of “democratic design experiments” and investigated how these negotiations can happen putting up design installations with different design disciplines and Hong Kong citizens, using the form of a street festival. They installed their proposals at the Lee Garden Area (<http://www.leegardens.hk>), which is the densest urban area in Hong Kong, and invited citizens to negotiate how to bring back nature to urban life.

There were three narratives to challenge some deep-rooted cultural presuppositions. First of all, Nina Hodel’s *Where Does the Air Go?* and Loraine Olalia’s *Roots below the pavement* are two projects investigating how to visualise the invisible nature through design actions. On the other hand, Mia Kang’s *Roach No. 1* worked on how to trace the unknown nature while Sabrina Haefeli’s booklet of *The sparrow’s view of the city* shares an unusual sightseeing tour from the world of the sparrows. Jenny Kantsjö’s *Herbs in Town* explored the different mental mappings of cultures through mis/re-placing handling of herbs; and finally, three groups of ZHdK students were taking a more provocative approach: Narin

Elmas and Michikko Onozawa’s *Fortune Seeds*, Roman Ernst’s *Dialogue in Two Languages* and David Lüthi’s and Jonas Shriqui’s *Hong Kong Light Force (HKLf)* aimed to provoke thought about the artificiality of our interaction with nature by their design interventions.

The projects resulted in a co-investigation of designers-to-be and design researchers that explored the cultural meanings of city/nature through creating urban interventions in which designers and citizens took part. The students also reflected upon the role of “designers” in design actions and democratic experiments.

Additionally, we, the workshop leaders, also assumed a different role, since in following the Action Research Model we created the situation to invite ZHdK students to join us in a collective investigating the policy of dealing with nature in Hong Kong, as well as developing tactics to bring nature back to our city. It was a real experiment as we could not foresee the results and therefore a completely open process. The learning experience was based on negotiation, and we were glad that in the end, our students were willing to adopt the process and turn it into their project. Finally, we became a team co-creating the showcase to share our proposals for the future.

Workshop 3

The City, the Nature and the Space in Between — Re-introducing the Potential of the Urban Fringe

Sara Wong is visual artist and landscape designer. She is co-founder of Para Site, a leading independent contemporary arts organization in Hong Kong. Her work has been exhibited in international exhibitions and biennales. Wong teaches landscape design at Hong Kong Design Institute and School for Higher and Professional Education.

**The City, the Nature and the Space in Between:
Re-introducing the Potentials of the Urban Fringe
Sara Wong, January 2018, Hong Kong**

Proposal & Reflection

Hong Kong as a metropolis is known to be a city of extremely high density. However, despite the intensive urban environment, three-quarters of the land in Hong Kong are countryside. Here, the country parks cover a total area of 44'300 hectares, which comprise distinctive and characteristic landscapes including scenic hills, woodlands, reservoirs and coastline. It is commonly considered “the nature” in Hong Kong.

Nature, in today’s perception, is usually described as the land beyond the fabric of the city, where human intervention is less invasive. For an extremely dense city like Hong Kong, new city developments aggressively push the perimeter of the built environment, while nature shrinks in response to urban expansion. In some situations, the natural systems would subtly grow back to take over the built environment. This spatial negotiation between the man-made system and the natural system constantly occurs within this transitional zone, known as the urban fringe. Some might think that it is an area with unidentified spatial characters and commonly underused. However, from a different perspective, this less extensively managed environment at the urban fringe, where diverse and vibrant vegetation as well as wildlife can be found, also provides opportunities for imagination and inspiration.

Studying the relationship between human activity and the natural environment in the urban fringe area is crucial to inspire innovative solutions to environmental, social and cultural issues and more.

- What is the boundary of our city, and what is the boundary of the nature?
- How can this frontier zone, which lies between the two systems, inspire us, as designers?

The workshop gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and rethink the definition of the boundary between city and nature. It encouraged participants to observe, explore, respond, and using creative media and innovative methods of their choice, *to connect our citizens back to nature.*

**From Zurich to Hong Kong:
in Search of Intimate and Poetic Experiences at Home**

“...the body-organism is linked to the world through a network of primal significations, which arise from the perception of things.” — Michel Foucault

Participants of this workshop, before taking off to Hong Kong, went for a walk into the urban fringe areas in Zurich and in the woods. They were asked to make stops and be conscious about the pace of their

steps; to be aware of the sensorial and emotional stimulus from their surroundings; to document their walking experience by collecting tangible and intangible materials during their walk, which reflected their perception of the place. This could be objects, drawings, photographs, written notes, video/sound recordings, or any form of material of their choice.

Tangible items: stone, seeds, plant samples, insects and found objects...

Intangible items: weather, temperature, light, colour, texture, smell, sound, stories, views, time, and motion...

Hong Kong Experience:

Reach Out for a Sense of Place as a Visitor

In order to increase the essential geographical, social and cultural contexts that served as sources of inspiration to the participants, the workshop included field trips to various geographical boundaries/urban fringe sites that define the city–nature border in Hong Kong.

Participants explored places from the top of Lion Rock to the monkey kingdom in a nature reserve, from abandoned villages well hidden in the nature to an abandoned iron mine. (*Geographical and environmental context*)

The visits also included case studies on community-initiated programmes that contribute to revitalize the urban fringe, from a hiker's self-built community along the hiking trails to a communal project that employs intervention tactics to revitalize dying village. (*Social and cultural context*)

Participants were encouraged to observe patterns of use, conduct prototype studies and explore the various tactics and strategies that people employ to introduce activities and new life to these urban fringe sites, while maintaining the unique character of the place.

Interventions to Bring Citizens

Back to the Nature

Starting by documenting sensorial/emotional experiences and mapping findings from their visits, the participants investigated the various possibilities of how to raise the public's interest in and appreciation of urban fringes in the city. Furthermore, they brainstormed on new tactics and design ideas, or low-impact interventions that can transform these unique zones and bring new values to them. Experiments as well as programmes, tactics, and prototypes were developed to promote new visiting experiences of the urban fringe. Participants were asked to consider questions such as:

- How can the urban fringe enrich our everyday life?
- How can we unlock the environmental and social potentials of the urban fringe and promote the great value of these sites?
- How can nature be transformed into a place where people feel they belong to?

- How can environments built by frequent visitors of these areas transform the experience of the place?
- How does the urban fringe relate to our interdisciplinary and research-driven practice?

In the course of the workshop, research materials collected at the sites and documentation of the project development were displayed in the Action Lab, which was set up temporarily in the Oil Street Art Centre for public review. The Action Lab served as a co-working base for public engagement, to share experiences, generate ideas, and develop the projects.

Student Projects

Workshop 1 p.71

SPROUT – Spread the seeds p.71
A platform to share botanical information (locations), seeds and seedlings in the city

Workshop 2 p.72

Where does the air go? p.72
video

The roots below the pavement p.72
intervention & slideshow

Hong Kong Light Force. The Phenomenon of Artificial Light p.73
glasses with LED-panels and infrared filter, website with documentation

Fortune Seeds—Bringing Fortune through Planting Flowers in the City p.73
seed packets

Palms — Dialogue in Two Languages p.74
10 drawings (5 representing nature and 5 the city)

Herbs in Town — Cultural Differences p.74
slideshow, fresh and dehydrated herbs

Cockroach — Design Research about Traces of Cockroaches in the City p.75
visualisation, process images and traps

The Sparrow’s View of the City p.75
booklet

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5 glasses showing the course of water pollution in particular areas in Hong Kong

Nature as A Family p.76
installation

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pop-up event and installation

Exhibition

Exhibition during the Festival Zurich meets Hong Kong p.79

Student Projects

Workshop 1

The Hong Kong Botanical Commons — Ecological Communities Reclaiming Public Space

Tutor: Michael Leung

How can design create encounters with nature on a daily basis for those who live and are rooted in the urban environment?

SPROUT – Spread the seeds

A platform to share botanical information (locations), seeds and seedlings in the city

SPROUT is a platform that contributes to our ecological commons and can be used by gardeners, farmers and city dwellers to share knowledge and challenges collectively. The platform was designed by a group of Swiss designers in collaboration with Hong Kong citizens. In two weeks, the designers visited a wide range of sites, from public parks to guerrilla farms, from street markets to independent bookshops, and from community spaces to rural villages scheduled for demolition. On the last day, they presented SPROUT.

For more details see:

www.sproutcommunity.xyz



Concept	Michal Bzdziuch, Annamaria Kozma, Sandra Staub, Christoph Untersander
Website	Tunay Bora
Illustration	Irina Huwiler
Graphic Design	Priscille Jotzu, Nadine Wüthrich
Seeds & seedlings	Sonja Böckler, Jonathan Erne, Estela Gless, Kevin Perlinger
Installation	Eveline Moser, Angel Rose Schmocker, Diana Wotruba

Workshop 2 Co-design Politics of Nature in Hong Kong To Bring Nature Back to our Cities

Tutors: Dr Yanki Lee and Albert Tsang

How can we design with other species or natural phenomena to (re)gain consciousness of their existence?

Where does the air go?

Nina Hodel, *video*

“Where does the air go?” is a reflection about air and airflow in a city like Hong Kong. When in Hong Kong as an outsider, you quickly notice that breathing feels different. The air is not just hot, it is humid, in some places heavily polluted, and in others almost absent. Local residents appear to be used to this seemingly thicker air. To me, as a Swiss, this immediately struck me.

Through an immersive process, I researched the airflow within the city of Hong Kong. How and where does the air move? How does it feel to interact with it? How can it be made visible? How to raise people’s awareness of air and airflow—omnipresent, but so often hermetically sealed. And how, in this way, to even raise people’s awareness for air pollution? With this work, I want to make a very implicit topic explicit again. The area of Causeway Bay was the perfect place to show my final installation. A very busy neighbourhood, where people seem to have forgotten the air, although it is everywhere.

The roots below the pavement

Lorraine Olalia, *intervention & slideshow*

Urban trees in Hong Kong are set in unnatural habitat conditions due to the city’s density. Despite the government’s efforts in maintaining individual trees, I wonder how the city landscape affects the natural growth of urban trees and what consequences that brings with it.

Through immersion into an urban tree, I set my focus on the tree’s roots and what it might experience below the pavement. What if the soil mainly consists of concrete? Can the roots still grow freely or do they, like the human habitants of Hong Kong, also suffer from the dense living space? To raise awareness about the natural growth of tree roots, I visualised on the city’s pavement what might be below the concrete. Using simple white chalk allows people to easily participate freely and playfully visualizing, and therefore revealing the roots under the urban surface.



Where does the air go?

Hong Kong Light Force The Phenomenon of Artificial Light

David Lüthi & Jonas Shriqui, *glasses with LED-panels and infrared filter, website with documentation*

While walking through Hong Kong, we realized that artificial light is everywhere. Widely used in advertising, screens jump into your eyes at every corner. Hong Kong is known to be a 24 hours city that never sleeps. To get to this point, the city interrupts the natural cycle of night and day by overpowering the night with artificial light.

This project investigates the phenomenon of natural and artificial light in Hong Kong. What seems to be normal for Hong Kong residents, was totally overwhelming for us. To share our experience and to raise awareness for this reality, we designed two glasses. One allows the user to experience an overdose of artificial light by using LED-panels. With these glasses, we want to address the absurdity of the overuse of artificial light that screams for attention and ends up in an illegible blur. The other glasses absorb a certain spectrum of light by using an infrared filter. This prototype is an attempt to bring back the rhythm of natural light. Here one perceives the natural cycle of the day at sunset. Due to the lack of visibility at night the user is forced to rest. Even though the glasses are prototypes made of simple found objects, we assembled them in a way that it represents their original appearance with the intention to raise questions, and not to be functional. For more details see: hk1f.shrijo.ch

Fortune Seeds—Bringing Fortune through Planting Flowers in the City

Narin Elmas & Michiko Onozawa, *seed packets*

This project is based on storytelling and belief systems. To carry it out, we created an appropriate context. Inspired by fortune cookies and Asian culture, we produced little packets containing flower seeds that should motivate people to plant and grow their wishes in the city. Inside the packet, one will find a map with references to planting locations. The packet can also be used as a tool to plant the wish it contains. Our intention with Fortune Seeds is to encourage Hong Kong citizens to grow green and colourful wishes, and bring nature back to the city.

Palms — Dialogue in Two Languages

Roman Ernst, *10 drawings (5 representing nature and 5 the city)*

Palms is a speculative visual statement from a graphic design perspective. It emphasises the different formal languages of cities and nature, and opens a dialogue between them. One language is built on lines and organic forms, inspired by nature, in particular palms growing within the city. Whereas the other language is defined through human-made and technical forms, inspired by Hong Kong's very specific architecture.

Ten drawings, five represent nature and five the city, that are layered over each other alternately. Each layer is made of sixteen A3 sheets, which can be pulled off by the viewer in any way desired. Parts of Palms, such as a fragment of the city or of the nature, can be kept by the viewer and be used as images that stand by themselves. Through this participative process, city and nature formally grow together, new appearances emerge, the density of the image increases and the viewer finds him- or herself an architect of cities or nature, realising that neither can take up space without taking it from the other.

Herbs in Town — Cultural Differences

Jenny Kantsjö, *slideshow, fresh and dehydrated herbs*

In Hong Kong — a city of innovation, digitalisation and urbanisation —, nature, even if not immediately remarkable, plays a particular part. For this project, I concentrated on a specific kind of nature: herbs. To understand and represent these plants from “their perspective”, I immersed myself into an herb. I thought about the relationship between herbs and the people living in Hong Kong. How do they interact with the herbs? What are they used for? This finally led me to visit a Chinese doctor, who prescribed me herbs for my individual needs. A service of which many Hong Kong citizens make use.

This is, when I noticed that there is an artificial connection between the users and the herbs, with respect to nature. Herbs are used as medicine, instead of pills. They are thus detached from their origin. Where do they come from? This question is often raised in Switzerland, when natural products are concerned. Herbs that one can buy in Zurich have a direct connection to nature. We know where they come from, sometimes who picked them. But the treatment of herbs in Hong Kong is different. In Zurich, you choose the herbs you want to consume.

They either come in tea bags, already mixed, or fresh. My project shows these practices by reversing them. I prepared the Chinese medicine in tea bags, suitable for everyone. In addition, I looked for herbs used in Europe for the same problem and prepared them in the Chinese way: ground and mixed into a broth. In placing them next to each other, I wanted to make a comparison and reveal the invisible connection between Hong Kong and the nature amidst it. I also wanted to show the cultural difference between Hong Kong and Zurich, concerning the interaction with — and treatment of — herbs.

Cockroach — Design Research about Traces of Cockroaches in the City

Mia Kang, *visualisation, process images and traps*

Cockroaches are one of the most common insects found in the streets of Hong Kong. The primary connection between human beings and cockroaches is a negative feeling. Unlike most other living things in the city, like birds or flowers, cockroaches are perceived as unpleasant creatures. However, their prosperity is closely related to their dependence on the natural environment. Somehow, cockroaches make us think about what nature is, and what it is not. I asked myself how to create a different point of connection between human beings and this unwelcomed species. For this project, I designed a platform for cockroaches to represent themselves in a unique way. The idea of revealing cockroaches' traces to city dwellers enables me to expose curious aspects of cockroaches. For the cockroaches, this becomes a method to express themselves.



*Cockroach;
immersion.*

The Sparrow's View of the City

Sabrina Haefeli, *booklet*

Hong Kong through the eyes of birds. This booklet is all about the question: How do sparrows see the city? To get to know that I walked through the metropolis. Whenever I saw one of these little species, I took a photograph from the landing place, to approximate a sparrow point-of-view. I also studied their behaviour. The result is a collection of images which show other perspectives than you might find in a guide for humans. It is an unusual sightseeing tour with objects you may not normally notice, including diverse terms and issues from the world of the sparrows.

Workshop 3

The City, the Nature and the Space in Between — Re-introducing the Potential of the Urban Fringe

Tutor: Sara Wong

How can design explore and visualise the space in between the city and the nature?

Water Flow —The Conditions in Between

Luca Holzer, Yanick Lukic, Suzanna Sun, Vicki Tong, Chloe Tsang, Pamela Wan, *5 glasses showing the course of water pollution in particular areas in Hong Kong*

The relation between cities and nature is imbalanced. Humankind takes from nature, but does not return in the same proportion. This project visualizes how different places in Hong Kong impact nature. The environment is portrayed in photographs and found material taken on site from a variety of locations. The impact of the city on nature is represented through the purity of water samples collected in glasses, corresponding to each location. The arrangement of the glasses traces the path from pure nature to polluted locations with nearly no nature left, and continues to parts of the city where nature is visible again. Each place we visited evoked different feelings. Although we were an interdisciplinary and intercultural group, the feelings were the same. The imbalance between cities and nature is everywhere.

Nature as A Family

Tatiana Liljenfeldt, Stefan Ruefer, Miles Chiu, Kathy Chung, Alice Lee, REXXAR Lee, Emma Tai, Cora Wong, Yeva Yeung, *installation*

How should we relate to Nature in a world of growing complexity, what is our place in it, and how can we embrace its importance? Under the guidance of landscape architect and installation artist Sara Wong, together with Hong Kong landscape architects, we explored various sites, where nature meets the city of Hong Kong — the border lines and fringes. We asked ourselves how we could describe the bond between people and nature in order to show its complexity, fragility and vital importance. To answer this question, we created an installation consisting of a tree with hanging lanterns and a photo album, where captions reflect the concept: Treat Nature as Your Family.



POP-UP-FONDUE

POP-UP-FONDUE

Noemi Chow, Lucia Sidler, Sandra Tschanz, Bill Chan, Aldo Cheng, Anais Wong, Jeney Wong, *pop-up event and installation*

The Urban Fringe represents strong contrasts of urban and wild, as do the cultures of Hong Kong and Switzerland. Beyond these contrasts there are moments of intersection and collaboration. Over a period of two weeks, we explored this space of tension in collaboration with Hong Kong students. By bringing the contrast together in the form of an event, we shared food, which acted as a symbol, where everything comes together in moments of geographical and cultural contrast. We also shared stories, discussed cultural differences and similarities. To celebrate our transcultural experience, we organised a Pop-Up Fondue in the so-called urban fringe, where all our thoughts came together in one melting pot. The installation in the final presentation and exhibition should not recreate this unique moment, it should rather reflect on it and accelerate the conversation of two contrasts. We encourage to try it yourself!



Nature as A Family.

Exhibition during the Festival

Zurich meets Hong Kong

“Cities and Nature(s)–Thinking Beyond”

was a Master of Arts in Design research and teaching project that investigated the relationship between cities and nature from a designer’s perspective. The project explored the way cities and nature are defined today, how designers and citizens can collaborate to shape and transform them. It questioned the supposedly existing, it revealed the natural and artificial environment, and proposed both practical and speculative concepts.

Based on a two-week long exploration of Hong Kong by an interdisciplinary group of design students from Zurich and Hong Kong, the final exhibition presented on the occasion of “Zurich meets Hong Kong” showed a selection of the outcome of this expedition. It introduced concepts of design research, co-design, and collaborative work.

The work was developed by the students of the Master of Arts in Design in collaboration with Hong Kong residents. The exhibition took place at the Connecting Space Hong Kong from 22 – 29 October 2017, and was a group exhibition with works of the Z-Lab project “Mapping Transformation. Art and Design in the context of urban change processes”.

洗衣

End 終止

18號B

美潔洗衣



End 終止



Zürich meets
 Hong Kong
 蘇黎世與香港的約會

10-2017

A FESTIVAL OF
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Smart Cities and Healthy Ageing
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CONNECTING SPACE
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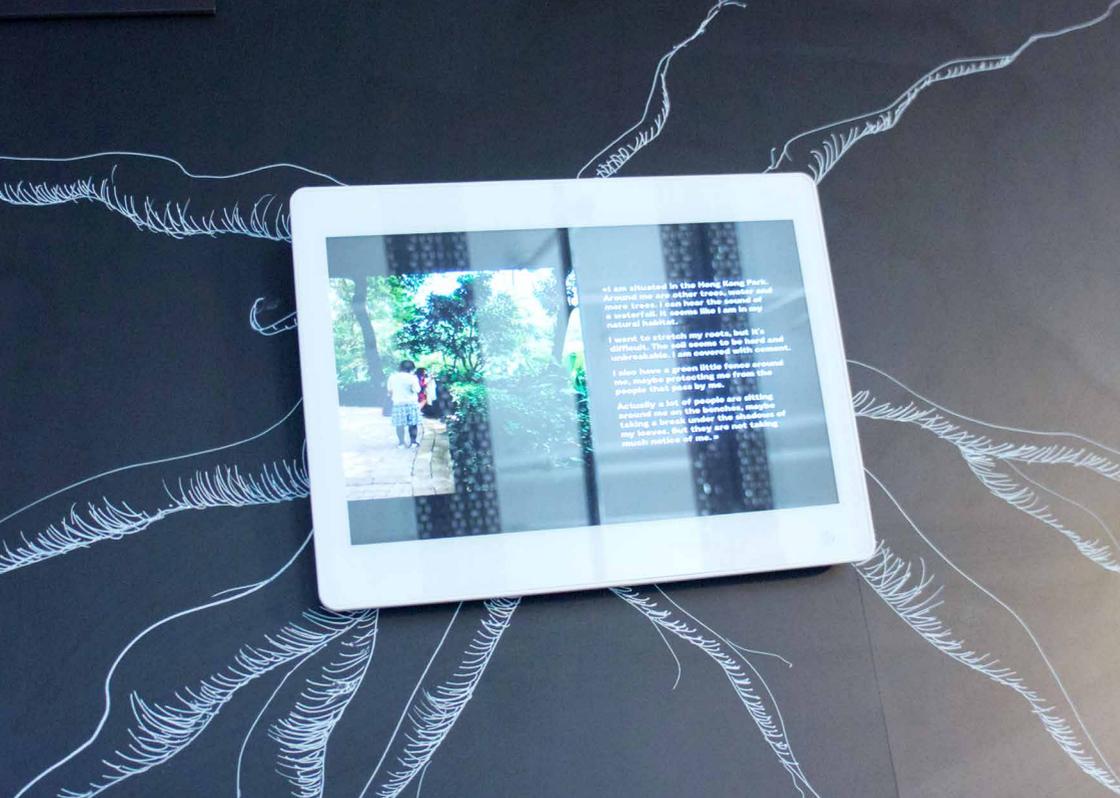
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Imprint

This book was published on the occasion of the International Design Workshop in Hong Kong in 2017, realised by the Master of Arts in Design at Zurich University of the Arts, on the topic “Cities and Nature(s) — Thinking Beyond”. Besides the book, there is also a video interview with the Hong Kong tutors at <https://vimeo.com/255183267>.

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casado.ch
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Zurich University of the Arts

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Master of Arts in Design
Cities and Nature(s) — Thinking Beyond

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