

**The Spatial Route of Street Dance in
Hong Kong
A Research of Subculture from the
Perspective of Space**

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ABSTRACT

The Spatial Route of Street Dance in Hong Kong A Research of Subculture from the Perspective of Space

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This research will investigate the dynamic relationship between urban space and street dance in Hong Kong. On the one hand, urban space is exploited by the dominant culture to incorporate street dance; while on the other hand, street dance as a form of subculture seeks to resist the dominant culture through place-making practices within the given urban space.

The intensive ethnography includes interviews of more than 60 street dancers across generations with different backgrounds in Hong Kong dancing from 2000 to 2012. Their life histories demonstrate a clear route map of place transformation of street dance among different Hong Kong urban spaces during the last decade.

The privatization of urban space happened simultaneously with the incorporation of street dance in Hong Kong during the last ten years. The two processes interact, influence and perhaps even become synonymous with one another.

After the Asian Financial Crisis and SARS, driven by the eager to recover economy, Hong Kong has experienced the greatest privatization of public space, which rapidly squeeze the space for street activities especially street dance. To survive, street dance has always been in search of a living space within privatized spaces –the street dance studio, youth center and university. Since space is a productive force that could reconstruct and repackage social relations and cultural forms of practice within it, subculture could be alienated by its space.

However, street dancers challenge the incorporation and keep being as transgression against the local government or consumption culture. They actively construct their own space to situate their performance, ritual and subjectivity in spite of the extreme limited and rapid disappearance of public urban space. As a result, the urban space will also be reframed by the challenge and resist of street dance.

摘要

香港街舞的空間路徑：從空間維度出發的亞文化研究

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該論文旨在討論香港城市空間與街舞之間的動態平衡。一方面，城市空間被作為霸權文化和主流文化的工具收編類似街舞的亞文化；另一方面，類似街舞的亞文化也通過重構城市空間來抵制主流文化。對香港從 2000 年到 2012 年之間不同代際不同背景逾 50 位街舞者的民族志研究是本文的主體部份。他們的個體故事恰好可組成香港街舞過去十年的一條空間路線圖。

在過去的十年中，香港城市空間的私有化與香港街舞的被收編是同時發生的，是兩個同步的互相影響的過程。在經歷了亞洲金融風暴以及“非典”疫情之後，香港政府的首要目標是重振城市經濟。

城市規劃上也開始以旅遊購物為首義，造成了香港城市空間的快速私有化。公共空間的快速消失對城市公共文化造成了很大的衝擊，特別是類似街舞的街頭活動。街舞開始在城市逼仄的私有空間中求得生存——街舞開始進入街舞工作室、青年中心和大學。

從新馬克思主義的角度出發，社會空間是一種可以重構社會關係和社會實踐的生產力量。當街舞進入這些私有空間中，亦將不可避免地被這些空間通過重構社會關係、社會實踐和機制從而異化。在市場力量、意識形態和社團文化等多種力量的作用下，街舞被主流收編。本文將要說明的是，在這個過程中，社會空間充當了非常重要的中介和工具的角色。

然而，即使在被收編之後，街舞仍然保有對消費主義和本土政府的反抗性。街舞者們積極地在極端有限的城市空間中重構自己的空間以完成對自身主體性的確認。在這個過程中，被私有化的空間又被街舞重新構建並在社會關係、社會實踐與機制上發生變化。最近一年，更有街舞者利用快閃的方式去香港最繁華的商業中心爭取空間，亦發起旨在奪取空間的誰運動。很有可能繼續畫出一條出人意料的空間路線地圖。

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INTRODUCTION

I came to Hong Kong two years ago as a stranger and outsider, knowing no one, neither nothing about the culture and society here. It is a group of street dancers that became my first friends of Hong Kong occasionally.

They are the youth who dance on the street – you can find their fellows in London, LA, Tokyo and Taipei. They dance something “strange” that is not taught in professional schools but created by African-Americans as an entertainment and resistance, including breaking, popping, locking and hip hop as the most typical styles. I learnt street dance after them, participated in performances with them and constructed a vivid Hong Kong in my mind through their stories and experiences. As a result, the Hong Kong in my understanding is different with its stereotype as an “economic supreme” international financial center. On the contrary, it is thick with the underground vitality and active hormone, as well as the resistance of the dominant power thrown by the marginal groups.

Because of their experiences and sufferings, I started to be interested in the role played by subculture in a metropolis and shifted my research interest into subculture. As the opposition of bourgeois dominant culture,

subculture has been the entry point of the critics on hegemony; from the perspective of deviant, subculture has been the start point of the reflection of urbanization. In a word, subculture is an ideal sample of urban study and hegemony study. From the case of this group of Hong Kong street dancers, the urbanization and hegemony of Hong Kong would be reconsidered. And the stories of my friends may contribute to the theory of power balance between dominant culture and subculture.

Among the stories and complaints of my friends, it is provoking that most of them are suffering and anxiety about the urban space – the spaces they used to dance in are disappearing. During the interview of over 50 street dancers' life histories, “space” is something that was repeated frequently by them – change of the urban space affected their everyday life and street dance practice greatly – mostly negatively. A significant characteristic of street dance in Hong Kong is that different generations of street dancers dance in different spaces – the new generation is in need of new spaces for gathering and practice because the old ones are destroyed and demolished. The individual life histories of the street dancers are dancing experiences in different institutions and places. They would be gathered together to depict a whole picture of the space rout of

street dance in Hong Kong. This research attempts to trace this space route authentically, including the reasons and powers behind the flow among different spaces of street dance, and make a prediction of the possible space route in the future.

However, some street dancers even attribute the decline of street dance in Hong Kong to the lack of space. Recently, the conflict is so sharpened that some of them have to fight for spaces actively. All of these above are sufferings that cannot be imagined by their fellows around the world – distress from space is specifically tied to Hong Kong. Compared with other cities, Hong Kong is a city with extraordinary urban space and metropolitan construction – you can never find another city with such a dense collection of buildings and crowds. Because space in Hong Kong is the extremely popular commodity with whopping price, development of art and culture is limited by space severely. Actually, the “Developer Hegemony”¹ has been consistently blamed for the notoriety “Culture Desert” of Hong Kong. Development of subculture in Hong Kong is suffering from the lack of space too. As an international metropolitan,

¹ Developer Hegemony, 地產霸權, a trendy expression in Hong Kong from the book *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong*, supplying an insider view on how Hong Kong's land system has helped to create unrivalled wealth for the ruling class.

Hong Kong is weak in the development of multiple cultures especially subculture – appearance of street dance in Hong Kong was forty years later than that in Japan and Taiwan. The tension between subculture and urban space is amplified in Hong Kong. A research of street dance in Hong Kong from the perspective of space would contribute to the discussion of relationship between the multi-culture and the real estate development.

Faced with the severe pressure from the “developer hegemony”, the resistance and reconstructed power of street dance is motivated greatly. For instance, the street dancers have started to occupy urban space actively and are continuously devoting efforts in place-making as powerful actors and agents. They use “style” of street dance as a resistance and subversion to reproduce and transform the flux and contested cultural meaning of spaces around us. Where is an incorporation of the dominant culture, there is a resistance from the subculture. The creativity of subculture is amplified through their struggle with the monopolistic bourgeoisies power. Furthermore, subculture has been uprising in Hong Kong over the years as a result of the failing of “unfailing bourgeoisie culture” (Ma, 2002). However, it is found that the

urban planning and development is another trigger point behind the revival of subculture in Hong Kong, playing together with the general cultural politics such as public unrest and consumerist populism. The trigger of the uprising street dance recently in Hong Kong will be also discussed in this research.

In spite “most subcultural studies have either explicitly or implicitly tied space and culture together” (Williams, 2011), the relationship between subculture and space was not explained and analyzed clearly in the literatures before. Instead, the studies could only conclude that “a very subcultural activity happen in specific social space” such as taxi-dance hall and street punk, or focus on the “trans localization” of subculture under the context of globalization. Both Chicago School and Birmingham School regard subculture as a result of urban development, but the relationship between subculture and space is still blurry in their analysis, which will be analyzed in this research in details.

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. The first chapter is a literature review on subculture and street dance. The concept “style” and “incorporation” will be focused as the fundamental ones. The second chapter is a literature review on social space and Hong Kong urban space.

The concept “productive social space” by Lefebvre from the perspective of neo-Marxism is the main theory framework of this thesis. The reproduction of “tourism urbanization” and “high density urban space” will be emphasized when it referred to Hong Kong urban space. The third chapter is a contextualization of the study of subculture from the perspective of space. The “spatial anxiety” and the “spatial reconstruction ability” of subculture are reviewed through literatures. The fourth chapter is the methodology and the research question. From the fifth to the seventh chapter, specific story of street dance in Hong Kong is described and analyzed. In the fifth chapter, it is reviewed how street dance in Hong Kong was originate from the open space around the Cultural Center to discuss the relationship between subculture and public space. In the sixth chapter, through exploring of how street dance was incorporated in different spaces and survived, lots of spatial possibilities of subculture have been created. In the seventh chapter, an introduction of the “retaking” of space by street dance through several ways including social movement is made. The recreation and reconstruction ability of subculture could be examined in details.

In short, from the story of street dance in Hong Kong, this research

argues that the urban space in Hong Kong is means and tool of the capitalism to control and incorporate street dance; On the contrary, street dance could resignify and subvert specific spaces with its resistance style.

CHAPTER 1 SUBCULTURE AND SOCIAL SPACE

Subculture

The emergence of subculture is a social phenomenon that took the form of perpetuated marginalization, appearing in the research on London's working class poor in the 1940s (Gordon, 1947). The definition was elaborated as a group of people who are in some way represented as non-normative or marginal through their particular interest, value, belief and practice.

Later, represented by the BCCC, the conception was developed in the 1970s in the reconceptualization of a series of youth cultures as a specifically post world-war II phenomenon. Limited in their access to dominant culture, young working-class males collectively solve problems through abnormal deviant or delinquent methods, which were treated as subculture. Boundaries of insider and outsider could be found in the subculture since the members consciously identified themselves in contrast to the broader mainstream society (Hall, *et al.*, 1976).

Above stands for two distinct sociological traditions: Chicago school in

America and Birmingham school represented by the BCCC.

Chicago school focuses on the ecological model of urban in equilibrium.

Subculture is treated as a problem of the equilibrium of society, as well as the result of the urbanization (Williams, 2011). It is emphasized as the deviant lifestyles among the marginalized urban poor and connected with the research of criminals (Fischer, 1975).

Subculture is defined in “functional” terms as “solution” of the problems caused by urbanization – the disjuncture between the cultural goals of a society and the ability of its members to achieve those goals caused psychological strain for individuals. It refers to the values and actions that young people develop to cope with shared experiences or shared social problems (Merton, 1938; Brake, 1985; Frith, 1983).

The research of subculture by Chicago school suffers from several critics such as overly deterministic and minimizing other variables except for social economic development. During 1960s and 1970s, a radically different approach to subcultures was emerging in UK led by the Birmingham school.

Distinct with the deviant and functionalism theory by the Chicago school,

the Birmingham school prefers a neo-Marxian approach to class and power. Neo-Marxist theorists argue that lower-class youth participate in subcultures in an attempt to solve structural problems and crisis emanating from their class position, because subcultures could provide symbolic solutions – displayed as “style” – to working-class youth. Subculture was no longer understood as deviant, but as a form of resistance that reflected larger class struggles – struggle between the working-class youth and their parents’ working class as well as the dominant bourgeoisie culture (Clarke *et al.* 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Williams, 2011). BCCC studies were fundamental grounded in semiotic analyses to analyze how taken-for-granted meanings were created, distributed, and consumed and how subculture inverts the hegemony culture meaning (Clarke, 1976; Hebdige, 1979).

The Birmingham School perspective is what will be used in this research based in Hong Kong. Compared with urbanization which has been processed in Hong Kong for more than seventy years, the history of street dance in Hong Kong is less than fifteen years if the short-lived kung fu “dance” is not counted in. Appearing at the later stage of urbanization or even post-urbanization, street dance in Hong Kong is not a deviant or

problem caused by urbanization.

As a developed post-colonial capitalism society, class is the major structure and dynamic factor here. Wealth have only nominally redistributed among middle upper class. A very small minority still own a very large proportion of private wealth. What is more, the industrial militancy has led to a simple “economic instrumentalism” even among working class. Everyone is assimilating rapidly towards middle class patterns, aspirations and values. Even the working class is promoting the rapid “bourgeoisification” to produce the “new type of bourgeois worker” – family minded, home-centered, security-conscious, instrumentally-oriented and acquisitive-celebrated (Hall, et, al. 1976).

“Embourgeoisement” has become a broad consensus among people of all classes, in education, housing, redevelopment and so on, which has been the dominant hegemony culture. Because of the “Developer Hegemony”, the inequality problem has been aggravated virtually as the major urban problem now.

Furthermore, these explanations for the rapid increase of the appearance of subculture emerged out of a much wider social change and new historical feature – the collapse of the firmly believed “bourgeoisie”

ideology, the descend in living standard, and the despair on Beijing – after the handover of Hong Kong. To find the reason behind a sudden uprising of alternative bands in post-1997 Hong Kong, through the ethnographic study of the famous alternative band LMF in Hong Kong, Ma (2002) bridged subculture and general political context with the emotional energy. He argued the emotional energy is triggered by failing capitalism, re-nationalization, downward mobility and weak local governance (Ma, 2002). The decline of middle class ideology of unending capitalism and upward mobility is the chief culprit in a macro political economic context, as a connection between personal psychological drive and negative collective desire (Ma, 2002). These reasons come to be woven together into an all-embracing social myth of subculture and “explanation” of post-handover social change and urban development. Similar with the BCCC, subculture is treated as youth culture in many researches. Most street dancers are youth indeed. However, what will be focused in this research are “margin” and “minority” instead of “youth”. Subculture in this research will be examined from the class status and economic background of the street dancers instead of their ages. Besides, age cannot be the basis of a subculture by itself. The detachment from

other age groups is coupled with other economic, political and social context (Clarke, 1974).

On general, from perspective of sociology, subculture is studied from three scales: micro, meso and macro. Microsociologists understand subculture from how individuals experience social reality, what are their cognitive and emotional processes during they carve meaning out of interaction with others. Subculture research in this scale emphasizes issues related to self/identity, cognition, interaction and emotion (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1990; William, 2011).

Sometimes middle scale analysis draws out attention away from subjective interpretations of subculture or from institutional processes such as government or the market. The meso-scale refers to webs of social networks, value-orientation, and practices which result from sustained interaction among people and which link subculture to broader social processes and structures (Macdonald, 2001; Kahn-Harris, 2007).

Meso-scale perspective will be partly adopted in this research when it refers to discussion of social objects such as norms, values, symbols, artifacts and rituals.

Finally, research tradition of subculture by BCCC discussed above is macro-oriented. A deep analysis was made about the context of a subculture – most ascribed to the change in the political economy. No individual is presented in their researches. Abstract class is the core conception, as the result of urban redevelopment on the working poor. They are national policy and social policy that could be found in the discussion instead of cultural practice of the young people themselves (Cohen, 1972; Hall *et, al.*, 1976; Clarke *et, al.*, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Pilkington, 1994).

Adopting the BCCC tradition, this research will also be macro-oriented. Instead of emphasizing individual experience, a macro political economy context and urban redevelopment pattern of Hong Kong will be described through the connection between street dance and urban space.

Street dance is defined as subculture as one of the elements of hip hop, which was originated as a particular street subculture within African-American communities during the 1970s in New York City. It includes rapping on sidewalk stoops, outdoor block parties with enormous sound systems, graffiti on public trains other than breakdancing (Condry, 2001). From its emergence, hip-hop culture is associated to the

poverty and violence underlying the historical context of African-American communities. It functioned as means of providing the reactionary of the hardship of slumdog as a result of the urbanization. It gave the marginal African-American chances of self-expression and proclamation of dissatisfaction. It was also a substitution of plagued gangs violence (Mitchell, 2002).

Not much literature focus on “street dance” particularly compared with rock and roll, punk or skateboarding. Taiwan is an exception, several surveys and documentaries could be found as a trace of the street dance history in Taiwan, which is similar with its follower Hong Kong.

Resistance

Resistance towards dominant culture and hegemony is the major issue of the BCCC. The resistance of British youth subculture after the WWII pointed at the dominated class instead of old generation. Subculture is a “symbolic solution” of problems in social structure and collective experiences such as poverty, unemployment and house demolition. It is the unique resistance of marginal, abnormal and weak groups as a counter-hegemony form. This “imaginary relationship” is the symbol of

the collapse of the capitalism consensus. Subculture is an actual institution of semantic chaos and temporary block rather than only a potential and imaginary anarchy. It used to express the desecration explicitly through abnormal or forbidden forms.

From the words “abnormal” and “marginal”, it could be concluded that the definition of subculture is connected to refusal or subversive values. Hebdige argued that Subculture is a conception standing on the opposite of bourgeois dominant culture and classical “high art”, as well as the hegemony.

I have interpreted subculture as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style.

(Hebdige, 1979)

It could be concluded that subculture used to emerge from the economic chaos or social migration context which is the tension point between social structure and culture. In the 60s and 70s of last century, the development of productive force and the improvement of life condition did not bring fundamental change to the boring and desperate life of youth – the suffering of working class does not decreased and the polarization between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was still extreme.

The youth still needed to stand the low-paid and dead-end job, with no access to high education. Most subculture members are from working class, they dressed as noble in their imagination to make up their upset caused by the destroyed community culture of working class. Cohen pointed out that the resistance of subculture originated in the consistent social structure conflict and class problem. The resistance represents the social change in an extreme way.

The specific resistant and subversion form of street dance is described by Xia (2003) in his survey on the street dancers of Taiwan. He finds that the social arrangement as the main power that to be against by the street dancers consists of upgrade education structure (exam system and school institution), job opportunity structure (economic formation and labor market) and space structure dominated by the consumption (activities after school and work). Most of the street dancers are “failure” of these social arrangements – they quit school as well as ran away from home (Lin and Zhuang, 2003).

Resistance to above social arrangements is embodied by occupying urban space and holding hip hop parties in pub. Without right to speak, the

youth try to create a “play space” at “Hsi Men Ding”² through their dance steps, within which they could find the self-identification. Pubs scattered across His Men Ding were rented by street dancers for hip hop parties at weekend. Most people took part in the party were members of the “street dance circle”, sharing and battling³ are the main activities of the party. Famous foreign street dancers were invited as guest to the parties sometimes. An independent space had been built within the chaotic pub by the street dancers. However, they could only occupy the “deserted space” by adults such as His Men Ding. The occupation could not threaten the dominant order (Xia, 2003; Lin and Zhuang, 2003).

Style

The self-sufficiency and isolation from the rest of society and culture is the most aspect of what is meant by subculture, which has developed its own corporate culture, own forms of social relationship, own characteristic institutions, values, modes of life. What they shared is interest rather than arbitrary characteristics such as location and hair color.

It is the homological internal structure of a particular subculture.

² His Men Ding, or Xi Men Ding, is an area in the northeastern part of Wanhua District in Taipei and it is also the most important consumer district. His Men Ding is the source of Taiwan's fashion, subculture, and Japanese culture, as well as the pub area and main LGBT area.

³ Battle, a dance form origins from breaking dance - turn-based dance competitions between two individuals or dance crews judged with respect to creativity, skill, and musicality.

Different parts of the structure are organically related to each other through the fit between them that member makes sense of the world (Cohen, 1955; Becker, 1963; Hebdige, 1979). This “self-sufficient meaning system” is the style of a subculture. It is the significant different order by intention. Subculture members make them be read by others through “style”, which is also a communication of a group identity simultaneously. Consist of form and symbols, the “style” represent a fundamental tension between ones in power and ones denounced to subordinate positions. That is to say that style could not be separated from the structure, position, relations, practices and self-consciousness of subculture groups (Hebdige, 1979).

According to the definition of the BCCC, style consists both of the materials available to the group for the construction of subcultural identities such as dress, music, appearance, language and talk, as well as their contexts of symbolic aspects such as their activities, exploits, places, day-trips, evening-out, interactions, ritual occasions and the situation, experience or relations among the group members. Even institutional ritual and ceremony which include specific event, moment or change are also style (Hall, *al. et.*, 1976). For the BCCC, all of them are “symbols”

since BCCC fundamental grounded in semiotic analyses to analyze how taken-for-granted meanings were created, distributed, and consumed and how subculture inverts the hegemony culture meaning. They treat subculture as “massive text” and “quasi language”, in which value, structure and habitat are the key points. Postmodernists call this as “collective production”, which even includes what the groups transcend to their audience and fans by providing them with an affective space to enable them to resist. In result, an outsider could not share the same power and pleasure as a member (Lawrence, 1984).

The conception “style” is connected to “resistance” closely, the direct and radical resistance by the marginal groups could not sustained. Instead, the resistance of subculture is realized through style and ritual. (Clarke, *et, al.*, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Style is the leisure facilities provided by the working class community itself. The unique style and symbol system of subculture is the negotiation about the existent of their class by the working class youth. The cultural crisis of working class is reflected from the style of subculture because a system of habitats and taboos has been constructed to reorder and reorganize materials to form a collective identity. From the point of BCCC, the youth subcultures after the WWII

such as the Bodgie, the Mods and the Skinheads are resistance forms created during the counter-hegemonic struggles.

In a word, style is the most attractive and readable characteristic of subculture, it is the “tattoo” of the subculture groups. It is the represent of the class identity as well as the culture identity, in which the significance and coherence are attached to the group. It is the cultural capital of subculture groups other than the symbol recreation. It plays a role in the internal and external expression of subculture groups through the connection to specific groups.

Incorporation

Can subcultures always be effectively incorporated is a question put forward repeatedly by subculture researchers. Hebdige himself is an absolute pessimist on this issue. He argues that the cycle leading from opposition to defusion, from resistance to incorporation encloses every successive subculture. And he gave two answers of the recuperation process of subculture:

- (1) The conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. The commodity form);
- (2) The “labeling” and re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the

ideological form).

(Hebdige, 1979)

According to him, the authentic of resistance against the mainstream only exists at the moment of the subculture creation. Soon the style will be commodified and resold to the mainstream for profits. The symbol system of subculture is transformed into lucrative commodity as well as fossilized convention by the worldwide commodity economy. On the other hand, the otherness of subculture is diluted by the ideological institutions such as media and entertainment company. The distinctiveness and differentiation of subculture are denied. In the context created by them, subculture is not the result of real historical conflict. Instead, it has been constructed as the achievement of few music or dance geniuses. As its culture capital, “style” is sold out for exchange of economic and social capital for subculture. In the end, the incorporation supplies the possibility of transformation among subculture, mass culture and dominant culture.

The incorporation of street dance in Taiwan has been discussed in details by Lin. Around 1990, the street dance in Taiwan experienced the greatest entertainment industrialization and commoditization. Most entertainment

companies and TV programs that target youth would like to run over street dance performance and competition. The winners would be signed by entertainment company as promising stars. Except for a leisure activity, street dance had evolved into an effective way of “super star”.

Furthermore, the headhunters even hanged out around His Men Ding and square outside of Zhong Zheng Commemorate Hall to find potential street dancers to take over commercial job and performances or even to “be trained to be star” (Lin, 2003a; Lin and Zhuang, 2003).

Street dance became the most convenient popular symbols for propaganda – for advertiser as well as governmental institution. Icons of street dancers were plotted on the huge advertising board of sneakers and sport drinks. They had been used to be the permanent guest of governmental institutions for health-oriented activities target on the youth such as “Say No to Drug” – most are ones opposite of drug, gangs and violence (Lin and Zhuang, 2003).

By the end of 1994, most of the street dance groups in Taiwan transferred into “dance case center”, an institution makes money through taking over dance performances cases managed by a professional “broker”. Some bigger dance groups even registered dance studio under their name,

applying to stockholder institution such as Dance Soul. A great many free street dancers were absorbed into commercial institution to sustain themselves (Lin and Zhuang, 2003).

Ultimately, a huge industrial chain of street dance has been constructed – street dance studio absorbs dancers from street; entertainment company picks up potential stars from studios; advertisers signs street dance stars from entertainment company. The industrial chain is reviewed at length here since it is the same situation for Hong Kong 20 years later.

Social Space

As for such a complex conception “space”, numerous philosophy discussions has been made by Foucault, Grosz, Lefebvre, Nast, Pile and so on from huge cosmos such as geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, and global. However, only one aspect of this conception will be referred in this study – the “social space”.

Relative to time, “space” is always a conception thought of in terms of fixed visible and measurable attributes which is always ignored. It is not until 1970s that writers such as Tuan and Relph, and later Sack and

Malpas, bring the conception “space” into the center of the meaningful component in human life. From then on, Marxism, feminism and culture studies were keen to show how space is socially constructed in contexts of unequal relations. Scholars such as Foucault, Seamon and Pred point out that Space is imbued with meanings, it is not pre-existing, empty or neutral, not merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction, neither just the contexts of everyday lives and sites of events. It is culturally “produced” and manipulates their agency and social relationship. It takes on something of the character and qualities of its inhabitants to make the space dual, multiple and plural (Park, 1925). In a word, space is exhibited in social dimension except for physical and mental ones. “Social space” is space contains more such as social relationship, ideology and habitual practices except for constructed material and mental signals (Lefebvre, 1991). From this perspective, space is a social product of a sequence or series of operations and past actions. And the significance of this complex spatiality is socially constructed based on values, orders and meanings. Through them space could be experienced socially and manipulated symbolically. Furthermore, dialectical interaction between spatial settings and social institutions

should be theorized in terms of its own codes and logic (Shields, 1999).

Four Dimension of Social Space

To conceptualize the unitary “social theory of space” better, Lefebvre proposed a threefold dialectic within spatialization, which consist of spatial practice, representation of space and space of representation.

Based on the dialectic, social space is analyzed in diverse four dimensions in this research to give rise to a discernible peculiarity, contour and form of social space.

Physicality. Similar with the conception of “spatial practice”, the physicality includes the production and reproduction of specific places and spatial “ensembles” appropriate to the social formation. It would include building specific place and spatial characteristic for every particular social formation, such as building typology, urban morphology and creation of zones and regions for specific purpose. Physicality is also the material production activity and the caused outcome. Even the physicality of a space is socially constructed. A social space cannot be adequately accounted solely for geography, climate, anthropology or some other comparable consideration. Social structure, order and

relations could be signified and expressed by the physical characters of a space as well. Most modern buildings carry within themselves implicit ideological assumption which is literally structured into the architecture itself, such as the lecture theater, authority of the lecturer is constructed by the vertical structure between the lecture platform and other seats.

Practices. Similar with the “space of representation”, practice of a space is embodiment and experience of everyday life. It is the practice and habitats of people within the space. The practice of space is imagined as spatialization, as an association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning (Doreen, 2003). Particularly, practice is sometimes a representative of the revolt of the dominant order, which is linked together with the life of the secret grass root on the society. The practice offers complex re-coded and decoded versions of lived spatialisations, veiled criticism of dominant social orders and of the categories of social thought often expressed as symbolic resistance (Lefebvre, 1991). When this research refers to the practices of the street dancers later, it could be found that underground spatial practices used to suggest and prompt alternative restructurings of institutionalized discourses of space. Through the practice, it is possible to create spatial revolution and could

re-function or even capture the hegemonic space. In the space, the alternative groups could fashion and practice outside the norms of the enforced social spatialisation.

Social Relations. Similar with the “representation of space”, social relations within a space are the logic and forms of knowledge, and the ideological codes, theories, as well as the conceptual depictions of space linked to production relations (Shields, 1999). From the perspective of social relations, space is constructed mentally, owning the dominant position. This abstract space represents a power balance of social relations to suppress the “true space”. These social relations are essential to forms of knowledge and claims of truth which grounds the rational power structure advocated by the capitalism. In brief, social space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between objects and products. It could be even treated as part of the social relations of production, because the reproduction of the social formation must obviously be achieved in and through space-time as a medium. As Gottdiener said:

Space has the property of being materialized by a specific social process to act back upon... that process. It is, therefore, simultaneously material object or product, the medium of social relations, and the reproducer of material objects and social relations.

(Gottdiener 1985:129)

Institution. “Whose right here” is the first question needed to be figured out before entering an urban space, which could be classified into an “institution” issue – the institution behind the space decides the “right to space” and reflects decisions about what and who should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and on uses of aesthetic power (Zukin, 1995). It also decides whose representations of whose culture are going to be branded. The state and each of its constituent institutions call for spaces and they would then organize space of them to their requirements. To be exact, through physical settings, social relations and practices within it, the space is shaped by the dominant institution.

On the macro level, Lefebvre developed a radical externalism of space “as a humanistic basis” from which to launch a critique of the denial of individual or community’s “rights to space” under the abstract institution embodied in capitalism and technocratic knowledge structures of the society (Shields, 1999). However, on the micro level, when it refers to the specific spaces in this research, it is found that even the “ideal public space” is operated by some corporations or state as trustee of corporate

and institutional interest. In a word, the power balance could be represented accurately by the institution of space.

In this research, we discuss the four dimensions of social space under the division of ideal public space and regulated space, including private commercial one and governmental administrative one. The former is the space sought by subculture, which is equal to “leisure space” that is free of dominant economic power, social control and cultural forces such as family and school (Williams, 2011). The latter is the real space where subculture is seeking their access and struggle within. Street dance in Hong Kong was originated in an ideal public space but later is suffering in other regulated spaces. Before we tracing the space route of street dance in Hong Kong among these two types of spaces, an analysis of these two in the four dimensions is necessary, which is as following and all of the spaces referred in this research will be identified by this classification.

	Ideal Public Space	Regulated Space
Physicality	Open	Exclusive and Highly Structured

Practice	Diverse	Singular
Social Relation	Equal and Free	Consumer-oriented and “Panopticon”
Institution	State of Trustee of Public	Commercial Corporation or Administrative Institution

Public Space

Generally speaking, there are three ideal types of public space sketched by researchers: (1) the square – representing collective belonging special for political community and expression of citizenship; (2) the café – representing social exchange dominated by the bourgeois; and (3) the street – representing informal encounter as a matter of face and a more mundane space of communal use (Habermas, 1962; Harvey, 2012).

“Ideal Public space” approached in this research implies the third one – street. From the dimension of *physicality*, compared with the previous two, the street is more open to mundane and everyday life – as the best and most obvious example of a shared public space in which individuals

are brought to interact (Harvey, 2012) – subculture could only possible happens in the open and interactive everyday space. Except for that, spaces which share two characteristics as “full of strangers” and “open to public” are also defined as “street” by Jacobs (1961). The places such as the elevators and corridors of public housing projects are street too. They serve the comings and goings of residents who may not know each other. And they are open to the public since anyone can go into buildings and use them.

The *practice* within an ideal public space is diverse – all practices are acceptable. The meaning behind street is equal to “resistance”. From the research of Baron (1989), the subcultural locations that the members gathered were distinguished by the degree of resistance that members adopted. Only members with “severe resistance” would choose hangout on the street. Otherwise, they would choose inside space instead. Most practices within an ideal public space are related to “leisure”. However, according to Lefebvre (1976), leisure of the ideal public space is no authentic escape or freedom but pseudo-enjoyment where the problem of alienation is inherent in the social organization of capitalism which still cannot be overcome. The “ideal public space” in this research is only

some place they escape from of their failing education and cheap boring work under capitalism institution temporarily, instead of place that free from the dominant control permanently.

From the dimension of *social relation*, people objects in an ideal public space are equal and free.

From the dimension of the *institution*, it is the state of trustee of public that owns the ideal public space. The attribute of public prevent the ideal public space from the intervening of other institutions such as family, school or corporation. It is not surprised to find the majority of subcultural activity taking place on the street. In fact, street is often the only autonomous space that young people are able to carve out for themselves to hang out and lark around (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Corrigan, 1979; Baron, 1989).

In a word, the ideal public space is the one sharing closest relationship with subculture – most subcultures grow up from and survive in public space as a basic unit of public life in the city. Jacobs (1961) even described it as the most vital organs of a city. According to Ellis (1978), after the cultural construction over time, public spaces turn into

institutions with “the potential for enriching our individual activities and our collective conception of the urban surroundings we share”.

Represented by street and sidewalks, public spaces are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow (Jacobs, 1961). On the contrary, the distortion and disappearance of public space should be seen as index of the weakening of public life – including subculture – and also a causal factor in its decay.

However, it is a consensus that “the right of public space” is the most struggled, since public space is the product of competing powers that constitute it – order and control or free – and who constitutes “the public”.

The right to public space is intricately decided by negotiations over physical security, cultural identity, and social and geographical community (Mitchell, 1995; Zukin, 1995). However, the result of public space in the contemporary city goes into two ends. The first one is what Sennett (1992) called “dead public space” – the barren plazas and festive spaces that full of consumption, surrounded with countless modern office towers. The second one is “panopticon”, orderly space under surveillance and control – only “open space” but not “public space”, which is privatized public space.

Regulated space

Unfortunately, “public space on decline” has become a common accepted conclusion nowadays and privatization of public space seems an inevitable process of every developed city. The ideal public space is regulated by both commercial force as well as administrative force. It could be told that all of the privatization processes of public sphere in different cities just give out the same plot with exhausted imagination: all of the public spaces turn into a vision of civility, bounded by commercial consumption, evolving into spatial representation of bourgeoisie public culture consumed by mainly white collar workers (Barker, 2000).

Furthermore, more and more museums, galleries, railway stations and airports that we now have are increasingly becoming similar shopping malls. Borden concluded that we are experiencing the process that all public and semi-public spaces are turning into places of consumerism. At last, people today meet, walk and talk in public spheres that situated in private commercial spaces, for instance, the shopping mall, the private theme park (Zukin, 1995; Barker, 2000; Borden, 2005). Combined with the privatization, militarization is another major trend happened on the public space within the city (Davis,1990) because of the increasing use of

security and surveillance to protect “public space” against the incursions of the poor and weak, as well as to defend the property of the rich. The four dimensions of the privatized public space are on the contrary of ones discussed above.

The *Physicality* of the space is exclusive and highly-structured after the privatization. The public space is no longer open and marked by free interaction and absence of coercion by powerful institutions. Consumers with money are the ones with access to the shopping center, which has become the foremost public space in city. Furthermore, the space has become an orderly one for recreation and entertainment, subject to usage by an appropriate public that is allowed in. Public space used to be “neighborhood space” is suppressed into “ordered space” that open for groups of people with specific social and economic status (Kwok, 2011).

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs (1961) criticized this social relation of the regulated space which leads to a very dangerous city – the middle and upper income housing occupying many acres with their own grounds, own streets and private security to keep strangers away, making the city very dangerous. The safety of the urban public space should be kept primarily by the unconscious network of voluntary

controls standards among the people themselves – the eyes of strangers, users of the street and neighborhood in an open physicality – instead of security and police.

Practice within the regulated space is singular. The standard of unacceptable practices on the street becomes susceptible. Anti-social or even simply annoying behavior is taken as disorder or criminals by regulates of the authorities. Practices such as riding bike on sidewalks, graffiti and dancing are subject to “zero tolerance” and needed to be excluded, which reflects the limits of everyday spatial citizenship on the special order. All practices – either entertainment or relaxation – happen within it should be organized in order under the surveillance of the executive (Mitchell, 1995). By comparison, ideal public spaces without private security or clear rules of exclusion are left to the “outlandish” and the intimidating (Jacobs, 1961; Mitchell, 1995; Tonkiss, 2006).

After the privatization of public space, *social relation* within it is consumer-oriented and “panopticon”. With the physical domination of shopping malls in city, the experiential nature of consumption through shopping has fundamentally altered the social relations among the shopping public. In another word, it has been framed by the consumer

ethic. In addition, the “militarization” trend of the public space turns city into a “panopticon” from Foucault. Through the conflict between the singing older and officials happened in Tuen Man Park, Kwok (2011) conclude that the way Hong Kong government use to deal with the public space is “panopticon” because all culture practice in public space is surveilled by the government automatically. The idea about public space hidden behind the “panopticon” management is the social relation should be in order. Two irreconcilable envision of social relations within the space are held by activists/homeless people and the representation of city planners. In fact, city has a need of people with all different tastes and proclivities. The more plentiful the range of all legitimate interests that urban public space can satisfy, the better for the safety and civilization of the city.

Private institutions such as commercial corporates as well as administrative forces such as security and police have replaced the state of trustee of public to be the *institution* behind the public space. A lot of reasons are given for this, for instance, the secure and safety concern as the motivator. The public spaces related activities are even suspected as smacking of the marginal and criminal dysfunction of the homeless.

Activities such as begging, drinking and rough sleeping are forbidden on street (Davis, 1990; Barker, 2000). For corporate and state planners, security desire is more important than possibility of interaction and divisive politics. Police and guards are responsible for getting out of the risk associated with street activities in public spaces – for instance skateboarding and street dancing – on the street, including bodily harm to other pedestrians, the physical damage cause to the built environment, the noises they make, and the general anti-work, anti-consumerism attitude which they often seem to promote (Borden, 2005). Another reason could be the inability and unwillingness of city government to fund and maintain public spaces – it is common that the government hope the estate developers who buy a lot to build on could help to watch out the front street as well. Instead of construction the connection of streets, government prefer to evolve urban spaces into empty land with isolated buildings sitting on it (Siu, 1998; Barker, 2000; Zukin, 1995).

Social Space as Productive Force

Cohen had put forward earlier that unlike other commodities or products, space has both a material reality and formal property that enables it to constrain other commodities and their social relations. It is part of the

social relations of production, because the reproduction of the social formation must obviously be achieved in and through space-time as a medium (Cohen, 1972; Gottdiener 1985). However, Lefebvre has broadened the point by arguing that “social space is a productive force itself”. He argues that space is a productive force where some specific ideologies, social relation and social order are created. In turn, the products such as ideology and social relationship structure the ongoing production of space – this process is substantially a reproduction of social relations of production (Lefebvre, 1991).

Treated as a Marxist thinker, Lefebvre tried to widen relatively the scope of Marxist theory by bringing space into the conception of productive force. He enlarged the core conception “production” from Hegel, Marx and Engels from its industrial meaning such as production and commodities to the wider one which also includes the production of specialized meaning and coding of the social environment. With the capacity of reproducing specialized meaning and coding of the social environment such as *physicality, practice, social relations* and *institution*, space was attributed to means of production under the structure of Neo-Marxism by Lefebvre. Space is the prediction as well as the

consequences of social superstructure, and it could not be separated from the productive forces including technology and knowledge, social division of labor or the state and the superstructure of the society. It produces the network of exchange as well as the flow energy even though it also determined by them. In addition, it could be consumed and used as production itself (Lefebvre, 1991; Shields, 1999).

As Lefebvre pointed out, every society or even every mode of production produces a certain space belonging to its own. That is to say, ideal public space and privatized space are aspiring to be or declaring themselves to be real through producing their own spaces as a peculiar abstraction of their own ideological and cultural sphere. During the production, all the ideologies, knowledge, meanings, images, discourses, signs and symbols are adjusted to play up to the origin and source as a function of specific task. The outcome is that only repetitive space could be reproduced, including the repetitive *physicality, practice, social relation* and *institution* – reproducible instead of unique, repetition instead of difference, dead instead of living. Nothing is created, but everything is produced and reproduced, including ideal public space and privatized space.

Lastly, as a Marxist theorist, Lefebvre argues that the social production of space is controlled by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance (Lukasz, 2011).

(Social) space is a (social) product [...] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.

(Lefebvre, 1991)

Social space is produced and reproduced in connection with the “forces” of production. It is the “force” that gives rise to a particular space with particular *physicality, practice, social relation* and *institution*.

It could be inferred that besides the hegemonic class and dominance power, different classes and powers also sustain separately in their own repetitive space and struggle to occupy as much space as possible for themselves. However, as a tool of hegemony and the reproductive force of the “dominance”, space is not universal and “given” to particular ruling class. Space has to be won, worked for, reproduced and sustained.

As a result, with its material reality and reproductive capacity, space becomes the target of every group and power. Under this logic, it is understandable that a conflict of space is stretching between the dominant culture and subculture. Then the following questions should be “How do

the different powers strive for their right to city? How do ideal public space and privatized space reproduce themselves as well as their *physicality, practice, social relation and institution*? How does the hegemonic class reproduce its dominance through urban space? How does the subculture group struggle for and sustain in their space?” All the questions will be discussed through the case of street dance in Hong Kong later.

Hong Kong Urban Space

With the four dimensions of social space and the productive force theory above, it could be speculated that Hong Kong is a privatization dominated space. The social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of capitalism in Hong Kong. It is commanded by the bourgeoisie as a tool to reproduce its dominance and hegemony, which could be contradictory, conflictual, and ultimately political.

The privatization dominated space of Hong Kong is a result of the tourism urbanization. Urban space planning in Hong Kong is a compromise to “shopping mall culture” and “tourism urbanization”. From the post war period in 1950s, Hong Kong attempted to become a major international business and finance center, as well as a tourism destination.

Triggered by changes in the service sector targeted at overseas tourists, The city is transferring into a “high quality commodity” and a place full of entertainment, having fun, relaxation, festival celebration to boost the tourism and consumption to satisfy the appetites and desires of tourist and keen shopper (Castells, 1983; Lui, 2001; Kwok, 2011).

Process of urbanization in Hong Kong is for the purpose of adjusting to the requirements of the tourism industry. Gigantic shopping malls are literally everywhere especially in tourism districts. Shaped by the development of the tourist industry, shopping mall culture has subsequently become the dominant culture frame of Hong Kong. Because of the great economic reliance on tourism consumption, shopping has been the central part of the Hong Kong way of life, resulting in “tourism urbanization” (Mullins, 1999). As Gershman (1997) said, “shopping in Hong Kong is a serious sport”. This conclusion has even been made as early as the beginning of the 1990s:

Even if you hate shopping, it’s impossible to avoid walking through a shopping centre on any visit to Hong Kong, since half the pedestrian overpasses and walkways in Central and Tsim Sha Tsui East pass straight through one or more of them.

(Brown and Lee 1991: 223)

Except for the tourism urbanization, high density is another characteristic

of urban planning in Hong Kong, which is also a trend of the privatization dominated space. For institute, “New Town”⁴ is the direct result of the high density urban space and complete market-driven development model in Hong Kong. Living quarters in Hong Kong has transferred into “new town” by the combination of government planning and speculative property development. The new houses estates are formed under functional “planned development” instead of natural inhabiting. The diversity of the chaotic organic space has been replaced by the unity of the ordered artificial space. The “new town” planning redefines living quarters towards this more “up-graded”, middle-income pattern of life, reconstructing the real material and social conditions in which people live (Siu, 1998; Poon, 2010; Smith, 2011). After observation of 30 years, Smith (2011) concluded that urban development in Hong Kong has been largely based on reconciling the overwhelming aspirations of a growing population with the often critical shortfall of land and accommodation.

On the other hand, under the urban redevelopment plan, the physical setting and configuration of the urban area have undergone a great change.

⁴ “New Town” is artificial community or city carefully planned by government constructed around the central district of the city or other previously undeveloped area. It is put into practical as a solution of the problem of urbanization such as the crowded and slum at the downtown.

The main reason of the change is the demolition and reconstruction of various properties (The Lands and Works Branch, 1988). Stated in the guideline of the Director of the Planning Department, old buildings and constructions in the urban area needed to be knocked down to provide more space to new constructions. Furthermore, the derelict buildings should be completely replaced (Pun, 1984).

Definitely, Hong Kong urban space is dominated by private ones.

Communal space such as the street, the local pub, and the corner shop are destroyed by the high-density and high-rise scheme. The privatized space of the family unit is the one only remaining, stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation, and lacked any of the informal social controls generated by the neighborhood. Subculture space will disappear in this “standard” and regulated space without doubt.

Without question, capitalism and bourgeoisie culture are produced as dominance and hegemony by a tourism commercialized and privatization dominated city. On history, Hong Kong was famous for its high-rise buildings as a result of the non-intervention policy on economic development and rapid industrial progress. With the tourism and consumerism oriented urban planning as well as the “new town”

redevelopment project, the dominant class take control of Hong Kong urban space based on its own interests and values and reproduce its own structure and order. The present urban planning of Hong Kong is strongly influenced by the expectation of economic returns – the expectation of dominant class – and seldom considering the “loss” of life experience for Hong Kong people (Siu, 1998).

As Poon (2010) exposed in the impactful the *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong*, flexible land-use zoning and lack of development control has long encouraged developers to build rapidly in order to meet short-term market force. In order to obtain the greatest economic growth, the solution put forward to settle the urban land use down is found by mathematical calculation on which kind of land-use brings Hong Kong the biggest economic benefit. Modifications to land use zoning, which act to incentivize private redevelopment and publicly “renewal” program, are facilitated under the prevailing planning system on application to the Town Planning Board, with a premium payment to government if successful. This leads to constant changes in the configuration of urban texture and the dislocation of uses through an almost entirely market-driven urban renewal process based on maximization of

immediate land values, which in turn has ramifications for the way in which the city is used and perceived (Siu, 1998; Poon, 2010; Smith, 2011).

CHEPTER 2 THEORY FRAMEWORK

The theory framework of this research is a combination of theories of subculture and social space. When the two theories are mixed, alternatively constructed by the key conceptions of each other, plenty of questions come out spontaneously – What is the four dimensions of social space of subculture group and what will it reproduce? How is the subculture incorporated by the dominant culture through different social spaces when most ideal public spaces are transformed into privatized space? How does subculture reconstructed space of dominant culture with its resistance and style? – A literature review of the relationship between subculture and social space before answering the questions are necessary.

Both Chicago school and Birmingham school tradition of subculture scholarship emphasized the significance of urban study, including urban space. In the former, studies were most often predicated on an ecological understanding of the urban environment. Changes in the use of urban space during the twentieth century created “interstitial areas” where social cohesion was weak and thus subcultural adaptations to the environment most likely to emerge. Alternatively, urban spaces were seen as seedbeds for subculture because of the concentration of people with non-normative worldviews. And the diversity in the urban environment led to dysfunction as local “ecosystems” were thrown out of balance by urban growth, immigration and other macro-level processes. As Hebdige argued, the research of subculture could not be isolated with the specific context they are produced. Different experiences are encoded to shape subculture in a variety of locales (work, home, school, etc.). Specific locale imposes its own structures, rules, meanings and their own ideology into the experience to reproduce subculture (Hebdige, 1979). From the literature of Birmingham school, most subcultural studies either explicitly or implicitly tie space and culture together. For instance, most researches on subculture have highlighted the significance of bounded geographical

spaces for embodied and situated subculture (Williams, 2011).

But on general, discussion of urban space is not referred too much, not to speak of theorize or systematize. To make up the deficiency, scattered evidences are collected here to construct a dialectic relationship between subculture and urban space.

In fact, space perspective is essential for the subculture researches. Most of the previous researches on subculture are imbedded in abstract concepts such as “incorporation”, “style” and “resistance”. However, as a conception owns material form, “space” is the one that makes abstract conceptions legible. Space has the property of being materialized by a specific social process to act back upon that process (Gottdiener 1985) and the social character of space makes the social relations that it implies, contains and dissimulates visible. As Harvey (2012) clarified: “One of the most visible ways of exercising power is to occupy or to control space” (Harvey, 2012). Subculture research should locate all of the abstract conceptions in specific spaces. In another words, “Space” should be imported to the research of subculture to materialize the abstract conception and the struggle between subculture and dominant culture as legible and visible.

Here, the related discussion in the literature is systematized into “spatial incorporation” (What does space do on subculture) and “spatial reconstruction” (What does subculture do on space) as following.

Spatial Incorporation – Spatial Anxiety and Space as Incorporation

Tool

As mentioned above, ideal public space is what subculture needs and is the only space that subculture could be originated. On the other hand, because ideal public space is being transformed into privatized space inevitably, there is a general anxiety about space among subculture groups who are lack of the accesses towards spaces.

As Gelder (2007) suggested, subculture groups are with little stake in land, or at least no legal stake in property. Instead, they just territorialize their places rather than own them. “And it is in this way that their modes of belonging and their claims on place find expression”. Furthermore, originated as a result of urbanization, subculture is the victim of further urbanization, triggering the decrease of “leisure space” or “ideal public space”. Ruddick (1998) elaborates subculture into “homeless youth subculture”. Through the study of Hollywood punk, he puts the

devolution of spaces available to punks into a larger process of loss of space to homeless and runaway youth in Hollywood. With the predomination of the rise of manor houses, the condemned buildings were demolished and punks were driven out from open public spaces. And they are forced to compete with other groups for marginal spaces. Even as for public space, most public spaces are produced as adult space. Teenager and youth, the main subject of subculture, is excluded from these spaces since teenagers on the street are considered by adults to be the potential threat to public order (Cahill, 1990; Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1998). Thus the youth on the street or other public spaces are subject to various adult regulatory regimes including various forms of surveillance and temporal and spatial curfews (Valentine, 1996). Fu (2003) even concludes that the youth could only use the public space deserted by the adult through the research on street dancers in Hsi Men Ding⁵ in Taipei. Hsi Men Ding is a place without complex control and rules for the weak groups, filled with sales, advertise, hawk, made in Japan, CDs, and film posters. It is an “informal mess yard” for youth. Within His Men

⁵ Hsi Men Ding is an important original place for the street dance in Taiwan, according to the documentary *Back to Those Days*, at the beginning, all of the dancers learnt street dance at several big dance halls of Hsi Men Ding such as the Mickey Star. At night, when the shops on Hsi Men Ding close, the dancers often practice steps or even battle on the streets of Hsi Men Ding.

Ding, the youth could only occupy the street full with the exhausted gases let out by the around buildings, as a deserted space within a “shopping center”.

Even subculture members are adopting many “statics” to struggle for more space, it still leads to a failure ending. Baron (1989) does not agree with the optimistic point of neo-Marxism that subculture is a solution towards the problem of class, since there is “no real solution on the street”. Although the street allows the members to display their resistance to the dominant order, it is not a sphere in which they can solve problems of unemployment, poverty, and prospects of alienated labor. The resistance even create some problems such as food and shelter.

Subcultural youth formed sites of resistance on the street corners, in the dance halls, on the open road, and in the weekend holiday spots. But while these sites offered space and time for youth to do their own thing, the subcultures failed to offer them anything more (Williams, 2011). After the revelry on the weekend, working-class youths likely had only vocational school or their dead-end jobs to which to return.

A reasonable logic is, because of the spatial anxiety caused by the lack of space, subculture has to search for their place in privatized space except

for ideal public space – a possible result is that the form and spirit of subculture will be changed or even incorporated by the privatized space through reproducing specific practice, social relation and institution.

Different spaces will play over the subculture as a tool and mediation of dominance and mainstream culture. The classic incorporation theory did not involve details of the process of incorporation. The details should be checked carefully from space as its material mediation in this research.

From the late 1980s, cultural geography started to understand space through the lens of social and cultural conflict. From this perspective, space is regarded as a tool in the maintenance and transformation of relations of domination, oppression and exploitation (Cresswell, 2004).

However, when we narrow the literature down to subculture from culture, nothing could be found. Few have put the emphasis on the interaction of subculture and space or the production force of space. “Reproduction of space” is reviewed as a philosophic term by Neo-Marxism without dealing with any specific topic. As a “materialized mediation”, space has never been really materialized itself. Compared with literature focuses on the resignify of space by subculture, ones on the inverse relationship, the control and incorporation of subculture by space are rare, which should

be the point and significance of this research.

Spatial Reconstruction – Resignify of Space by Resistance and Style of Subculture

Before 60s of last century, researchers saw culture as determined by the natural environment. However, in *Reading in Cultural Geography* (Wagner and Mikesell, 1962), the importance of culture in transforming the natural environment was first asserted. Culture practice could aggressively, passively, or intentionally take a place and contribute to its meaning and identity. In a word, space comes by their meanings and identities as a result of the complex intersections of culture and context that occur within that specific location (Anderson, 2009).

Except for social construction, “bodily mobility” is another key component to the understanding of space from a micro perspective. The sequence of habits without conscious of people is called as “time-space routine”, which could build a strong sense of space (Seamon, 1980). A feeling of belonging within the rhythm of life in space is created by the combining of the mobility of bodies in space and time. Spaces are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never “finished”

but are constantly being performed. It is performed through these everyday movements in which people get to know a place and feel part of it (Cresswell, 2004).

Occupying space is means for most subcultures to gain self-identity (Giller, 1997). After that, subcultures such as skate boarders, bike messengers, and graffiti artists could also attack architecture and resignify urban environments through their leisure practices and styles (Williams, 2011; Borden, 2005). The researches on teddy boys, skinheads, mods, and rockers by BCCC scholars displays that they created social spaces and stylistic practices that represented resistance to dominant culture on street corners, in dance halls, on the open road and at weekend holiday spots, at the symbolic level (Clarke *et al.* 1976). A number of geographical studies by Breitbart (Breitbart and Worden, 1994; Breitbart, 1995) have drawn attention to young people's ability to subvert and resist the production of public space in late capitalism. Young people's sense of disconnection from the city and their attempts to resist adult oriented urban space through neighborhood environmental activism and public art are highlighted.

The physical separation of subculture space from the outside world, like

the delineation of ‘zones’ inside, are socially produced realities that organize space and the social behaviors and identities that are produced therein (Baker, 2004; Lincoln, 2005). Borden described how the subculture make and create space through the example of skateboarders, whose activity transfers a dull space into stimulating arenas:

Skateboarders focus their activities on city streets, office plazas and myriad semi-public spaces such as staircases, park benches, window ledges and shop forecourts. Disaffected both by the harshness of city streets and by the glossy displays of shopping malls, skateboarders have transformed these territories into their own play space.

(Borden, 2005)

Similarly, with the body movements of street dancers, taxi-dance hall was “a distinct social world, with its own ways of acting, talking and thinking” (Cressey, 1932). It shows people are able to resist the construction of expectations about practice through space by using spaces and their established meanings in subversive ways. In the research of Northern Soul, Wilson (2007) argued that this imported culture was identifiable through a network of local clubs regularly hosted “all-nighters”⁶. “The all-nighters served as a distinct social space where subcultural norms, values and practices related to the consumption of soul

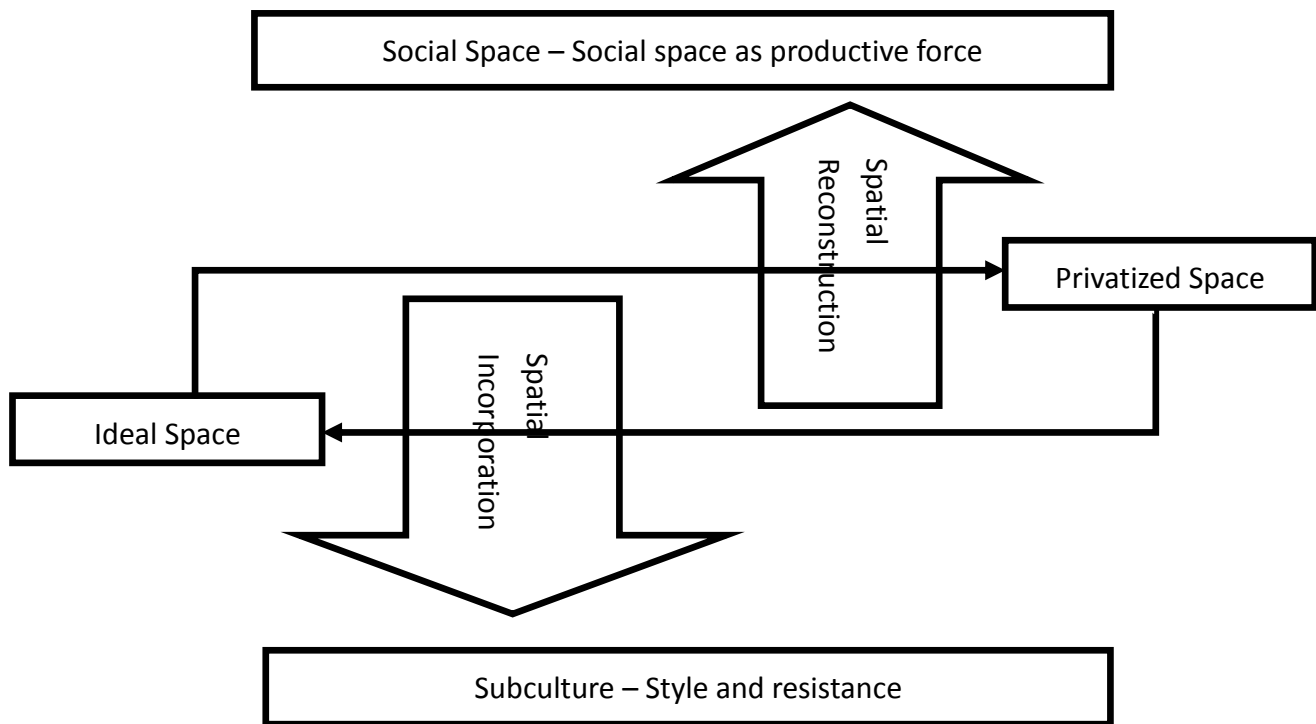
⁶ “All-nighters” are dance parties that began at the end of the regular operating hours and lasted until the next morning.

music and drugs” (Wilson, 2007).

Besides, Ma (2002) concluded this “re-signification” by subculture as an additional dimension of “spatiality” to the subcultural differentiation through the study of alternative band in Hong Kong other than style. He examined the way of place making in which members of a subcultural group construct their own space to situate their performance, ritual and subjectivity. In this local case, the band members creatively reproduce a subversive space *a.room* within the highly capitalized spaces of the over-crowded downtown center of Hong Kong (Ma, 2002). Adopting foreign spatial practices, the members constructed it by themselves with locally available resources. Minor tactic of spatial subversion was resigned to western music culture to re-energize their own life and contemplate their spatial imaginations with symbols as posters and magazines of western bands. Symbols of being against macro spatial strategies of estate developers filled the band room such as DIY decorations (Ma, 2002). Finally, an independent juxtaposed heterotopia was created – the band room has been simultaneously a home, a studio, a playground, a meeting place, a classroom and so on except for a band room.

Ma (2002) explained that the “spatial differentiation” situate subcultural bodies through embodying habitats of discursive formation, which enable and give structure to spatial practices with subversive potential, which is exactly the spatial reconstruction process of street dance in the following discussion.

In a word, the theory framework of this research should be as following if it is presented in graphic.



CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Methodology

Ethnography

To make sense of the street dance subculture, the research adopts a participant observation and in-depth interview approach to gather data.

This method has been used in other youth culture and subculture studies with great success (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977; Corrigan, 1979; Cohen, 1972; Baron, 1989; Rose, 1994; Macdonald, 2001; Ma, 2002). It has also been the method of choice in some of the classic geographic cultural studies (Anderson, 2009).

This approach is optimal in this research for several reasons. First, the subcultural situation is not conducive to normal data-gathering techniques.

Subcultural youth are not likely to provide responses to questionnaires.

Second, much of the data required cannot be gathered through the use of questionnaires. Third, a study such as this is best undertaken in the subjects' natural environment. Lastly, the method tends to provide data

that are more valid and reliable.

Sampling

More than 50 street dancers have taken the in-depth interviews of this research, including the older generation who used to dance at the Culture Center and the younger generation who come into being in the studio and youth culture. Some of them have experienced the thirteen years street dance history in Hong Kong, and at least four or five years for others.

The interviewees also include some related ones such as the owner of street dance studio, social worker of the youth center, staff of public relationship company and researcher on Hong Kong urban space. People like this could supply additional traces of the relationship between street dance and space, as well as other related institutions.

Snow-ball is the method used in this research since “snowball sampling is well-suited to studying social networks, subcultures, or people who have certain attributes in common” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). As marginal group, street dancers have an “insider circle” for themselves, interacted through specific closed activities. They are separated and invisible from the masses, but have close and stable network among their circle.

The snowball sample in this research starts from the famous street dance crew since 70 who are friends of mine. They are willing to serve the dual role of an interview subject and a guide to potential new subjects. After being interviewed, they recruit their teachers, friends or students from their circle as the second group to me. Some of the people in this second group refer me to others who are dancers work for TV station and youth center.

Data Collection

As a street dancer in Hong Kong myself, I have engaged in this local culture for more than one and a half years. That means I was already a participant of this culture and have had an idea about it in details before the start of this research. Every time I go out to take street dance activities, including workshop, practice, party, battle, cypher or competition, I could observe and do the data collection at the same time.

I was considered as a member of the street dance. Therefore I could ask some members one or two questions during the informal chats, and recode the responses at the earliest opportunity, which provides a reliability check of the members' previous responses.

Most of the data were gathered through a combination of unstructured interviews with more than 50 members of the subculture, and field notes are kept on members' activities, interactions, and physical appearance.

Members were questioned concerning various issues relating to the subculture and urban space theories as well as several unanticipated topics that emerged during field work. There is no consistent sequence of questions in the interviews. I often had to adapt to the flow of the conversation by taking the liberty to explore other facets that the subjects seemed to believe were important. All interviews were usable, although some great parts of the interviews are not used because they are not related to the main research questions of this research.

I choose to take interviews in every related space such as the Culture Center, BCDC studio, the University, the youth center, on the street and even in the TV station⁷. By doing this, the first response of their bodies and the related memories could be inspired and collected within the scene.

Most of the interviews were taken during midnights, while they are practicing, training or taking midnight snack after that.

However, interviewing street dancers can be difficult. Subjects usually

⁷ To get admission of the TV station, I acted like the assistant of one of the dancer, entering the Asia TV Station without taking photos.

carried on their daily activities during interviews, resulting in interruptions from other members. Subjects sometimes broke off the interview to pursue more exciting activities with other members.

Research Questions

Based on the discussions above, research questions could be put forward as following:

- What are the history, characteristics and “space route” of street dance in Hong Kong? What are the powers, forces and motivations behind the transition of street dance among the diverse spaces?
- What is the four dimensions of social space of subculture group and what will it reproduce?
- How is the subculture incorporated by the dominant culture through different social spaces when most ideal public spaces are transformed into privatized space?
- How does subculture reconstructed space of dominant culture with its resistance and style?

CHAPTER 4 HONG KONG CULTURE

CENTER – FROM IDEAL PUBLIC SPACE TO REGULATED SPACE

As the first chapter of the whole story, it aims at giving the origination of street dance in Hong Kong, especially the originate space Culture Center. With the descriptive details from the first generation street dancers in Hong Kong, questions such as “why is it the Culture Center as the originate space of street dance” and “how was the Culture Center made as a ‘space of street dance’” will be answered. The discussion of the Culture Center will be put into the dimensions of social space of ideal public space and regulated space. How and why this ideal public space would be transformed into the regulated space will be emphasized. With conceptions of “spatial construction” and “spatial incorporation”, its influence on street dance will also be explored at length.

The first generation of street dancer in Hong Kong appeared around 1999 under the influence of Hip Hop music from the U.S. There were similar dance genres in 80s, but they were succeeded from Chinese Kung Fu and aimed at movie industry. With the decline of Kung Fu movie in Hong

Kong, the genre disappeared completely.

Among the first generation, most of them were from lower middle class who had no access towards high education neither stable job. So they spent much time everyday in hanging around pubs, which was the center of imported Hip Hop music because of the DJs. On account of the curiousness and addiction of the music, they started to learn relevant dance steps from piratical Hip Hop videotapes and practiced them in the pubs. Street dance appeared firstly in Hong Kong as a leisure activity of the lower middle class youths.

According to most street dancers during the interviews, street dance in Hong Kong originates from the “Cultural Center” one decade ago around 1999. Even though something similar with street dance ever appeared in Hong Kong before that, none of them had been inherited and kept like the one from the Culture Center.

For most first generation street dancers in Hong Kong, the Culture Center ten years ago represents the utopia for the “pure and real” street dance.

“Times in the Cultural Center are the happiest one in my life” is the standard answer from them. Through the place making practice related to

street dance ten years ago, Cultural Center has been the “ideal public space” in the collective memory of the first generation street dancers in Hong Kong all the time. As a research of the space route of street dance in Hong Kong, Cultural Center should be described in details as the start point.

In this chapter, following questions will be explored: How did street dance start to grow up in Hong Kong from Cultural Center? Why was the site of Cultural Center selected as the place of origin? How was Cultural Center transferred into “place of street dance”? When, how and why was this “ideal public space” broken down by other powers? How was street dance separated to other spaces from Cultural Center?

Cultural Center (1999-2004) – Ideal Public Space

Broad Sense of the Cultural center – Origin Place of Street Dance in

Hong Kong

The word “Cultural Center”⁸ in this research is not only the main

⁸ According to the opening page of the Cultural Center’s website notes: The Center, covering 5.2 hectares and offering 82,231m² gross floor area, commands a prime waterfront position. Since its grand opening on 8 November 1989, the Center has remained the premier cultural venue offering stimulating environment for arts talents and quality programs to the public, and has since been witnessing the development of the arts in Hong Kong. To cater for performing arts of all variety, the Center is designed to house three major performing halls, namely the Concert Hall, the Grand Theatre and the Studio Theatre. There is also an Exhibition Gallery and four foyer exhibition areas. Other ancillary facilities include eleven rehearsal and practice rooms and two conference rooms. For more details please refer to <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKCC/en/about/intro.html>.

auditoria building. It was used in a broader sense instead. It also includes the “Hong Kong culture complex” around it (Chow, 2004), including Space Museum, a double auditorium block that houses the Concert Hall, the Grand Theatre, the Studio Theater, a restaurant block, the gardens and the open piazzas encompassing the main building, Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Palace Mall, as well as the coast corridor outside the New world Center.



Source: Hong Kong Cultural center



Google Map of the open space around the Cultural Center, the green area is the one that is referred as “Cultural Center” in a broader sense in this research. The two red points stand for the Marble Ground and the open space in front of the Space Museum, which were two most important exact spaces for the development of the street dance in Hong Kong.

However, the meaning I refer to when mentioning the Hong Kong Cultural Center in this thesis is mainly the open space around it as a casual leisure space instead of the main auditoria building as a serious cultural space (Chow, 2004) primarily for “high class and mainstream art”. The open space is a “playground” really for “practice activities of playing” (Chow, 2004), including subculture activities such as bicycle riding, skateboarding and street dancing.

Furthermore, “Cultural center” in this research is a utopia space of street dance and other leisure activities in the collective memory other than an exact geographical area. It includes all the street dance origin related spaces such as the YoYo Club, the Marble Ground, the open space in front of the Space Museum, the McDonald and even the 7-11.

YoYo Club

In 1999, under the influence of breaking⁹ videotapes from the U.S., several youths in Hong Kong started to practice breaking dance. One of them named Chester was the DJ of the YoYo Club. Interested in breaking, Chester always mixed hip hop music and breakbeats in the club, which gathered other breaking fans there to practice and play together.

Since battle¹⁰ is the primary element of breaking dance, several crews were formed in a short period to battle with each other. Chester, with other four regulars Howard, Jimmy, Wallis and Nelson, teamed up the Street Rocker (SR in brief) to battle with others. The name “Street Rocker” was come up randomly during an interview of them about the

⁹ Consisted of toprock, downrock, power moves, and freezes, breaking is a style of street dance that originated among African American and Latino American youths in New York City during the early 1970s. Breaking is typically danced to hip-hop and especially breakbeats.

¹⁰ Tradition in breaking dance: turn-based dance competitions between two individuals or dance crews judged with respect to creativity. It is a peaceable solution to replace violent fight among youth gangs on the history of African American.

youth culture.

As something new in Hong Kong at that time, the appearance of breaking dance in club was hit on newspaper and TV program. As a reporting writes:

Recently the street culture boom has made inroads of Disco...

Groups of youth breaking lovers used to gather in Disco to battle... "Once to Watch" and "Street Rockers" are fierce rivals during the battle... There are so many crowds of onlookers to support the dancers. Some of them even stand on chairs because of the limited space in the Disco. The audience would like to call out the name of dancers loudly to show their support, consistence with the hot air.

No champion is set for the battle, the dancers just treat it as a chance to share and make friends...

(Oriental Daily, 23 March 2001)

Without Youtube and street dance studio, main way for learning breaking in 1999 is watching imported videotape and video sent by friends abroad through ICQ. As Howard, the leader of the SR recalled:

"About seven of us shared one videotape at the same time. We kept playing back the part which we want to learn and imitating that by ourselves. We often practiced for a whole afternoon for learning a simple movement."

Generally speaking, club, where hip hop music was popular ten years ago, was an important origin place for street dance in Hong Kong. Dance,

battle and cypher¹¹ are the primary activities in club ten years ago. Street dance lovers used to gather there without appointment. Most first generation street dancers in Hong Kong said they learnt street dance through the rhythm and shake in club. However, this kind of “old school”¹² club disappeared quickly in Hong Kong and was soon replaced by “Lan Kwai Fong style” club, representing cosmopolitan lifestyles constituted through the feverish consumption of food, drink and entertainment (Cheng, 2001). Rapid rising rent is said to be responsible for the replacement, which will be discussed later in the last chapter. After a while, the door for club was not always open for b-boys¹³, since ground moves of breaking dance take too much space to get enough costumers. The sizable b-boy groups had to hunt for other “right place” of street dance. The Marble Ground is what they found finally as the perfect one.

Marble Ground

The Marble Ground was a circular open space in front of Hong Kong Art

¹¹ Cypher is another tradition of breaking dance. A cypher is a circular shaped dance space formed by spectators that breakers use to perform or battle in.

¹² Old school refers to “old fashioned hip hop music” from an earlier era around 1980s. It is characterized by the simpler rapping techniques of the time and the general focus on party related subject matter.

¹³ B-boy is used as street dancers, who are mostly boys.

Museum and near the Cultural Center, rounded by spiral stairs and covered by marble which is smooth for grounding movements.

Furthermore, it was open air with fresh sea breeze, making dance here more relaxed and comfortable. At latter half of 1999, the Marble Ground had taken the place of club as the first choice for the b-boys to hang out every night. Crews that formed in club transferred their battleground to the Marble Ground. As for the club, “we later only went there for drug taking.” Howard said.

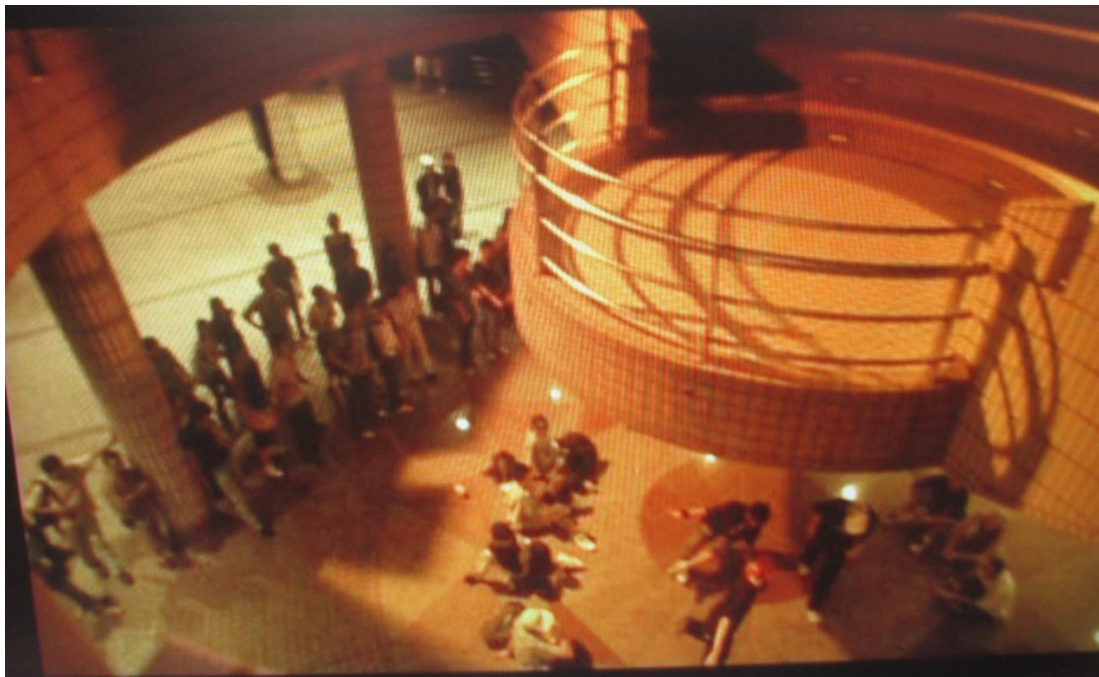
Convenient transportation is another essential reason to explain the important role of the Marble Ground for street dancers, of who most came from Public House Estate nearby. Located at the junction of the Kowloon and the Hong Kong Island, the Marble Ground at Tsim Sha Tsui was a place dancers could get to from any territories within half an hour.

As a popular leisure space and a famous cultural space, Cultural Center was characterized by huge streams of people, who were potential audiences for street dancers. Ah Bun, one of the b-boys talked about how he enjoyed audiences at Cultural Center:

*“The Marble Ground is truly cool with so many audiences!
Almost all the passersby would stop to watch us when we battle.
The number of the audiences would reach to several hundred on*

battle night! It is countless! You can never find another place that could attract so many crowds of lookers-on. Sometimes I could even found beauties among the crowds!”

Several months later, the Marble Ground was famous as a “dancing place” in Hong Kong, as well as the crews such as Freestyle and SR who used to gather and practice there. More and more youths who were interested in street dance came here for watching and joining the crews. About half a year later, the SR even expanded to have more than 40 members as a peak. They broke into two crews soon – SR and DSC¹⁴ - in the next year as rivals. Except for the main three SR, Freestyle and DSC, plenty of crews appeared at the Marble Ground around 2000 for battling in groups. The number of each crew’s members was between 20 and 40.



¹⁴ The full title is the Devil Style Crew.

A shot of street dancers at the Marble Ground in movie *Give Them a Chance*

Gradually, among the crews, a regular “battle night” was established on Saturday. About 70 b-boys would gang up around the Marble Ground at 9:00 pm on Saturday night spontaneously without any appointment, in some baggy sporty sweater as the “uniform”. Street dancers kept coming until the start of battle on 11:00 pm without any organizer. As Ah Bun introduced:

“One music box, two sides, start to battle.”

Different crews would come out one by one. New crews kept jumping out to challenge legendary crews such as SR and Freestyle. Hearing about the amazing street dancers, a number of foreign dancers would also come to battle with them. Certainly the most breathtaking battles always happened among the legendary ones themselves. It was common that battle lasted for a whole night until the next morning since no crew would admit defeat. However, winning is not the target. Sharing among others is more substantial. All street dancers would be excited about a new trick did by someone. As Howard said:

“It felt like “this is our era”! We felt alive through the battle. For us at that time, battle is the only and last thing on this world.”

In addition to this, B-boys claimed their right to space through battle. In the tradition of breaking dance, winner of battle could take the space. To Jimmy, another founder of SR, crew was the same as “tribe”:

“The music box of us is the “flag” of a tribe. When we put it on the ground, it means the ground has been occupied by us. If you want it, battle with and win us.”

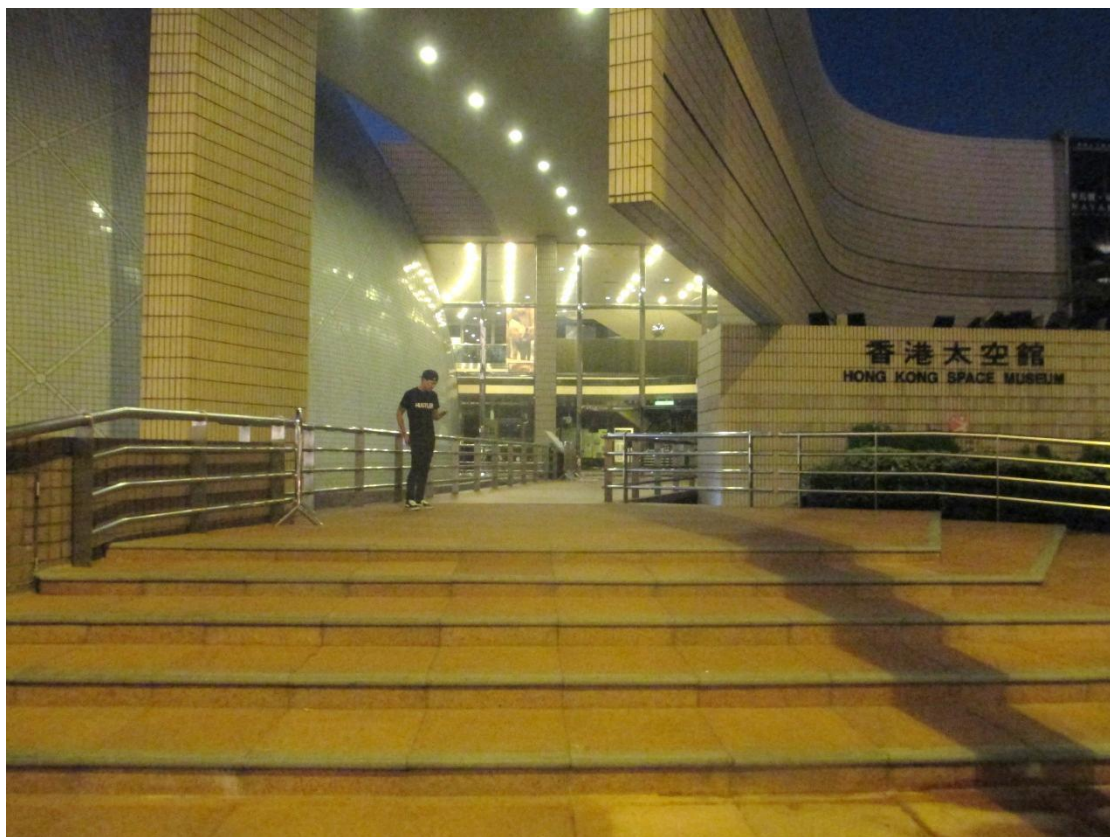
Territory grab happened not only among distinct crews, but also between street dancers and other groups such as bicycle riders, skate boarders and guys who played torch. DSC even once fought with the riders face to face.

To make revenge, the riders took over the Marble Ground with a lot of bicycles later to prevent DSC dancing on it, and kept interfering the music with the bicycle bell ringing. Skateboarders also complained to a magazine that overwhelming street dancers around the Marble Ground had become an obstacle for them (Teens, 2001.July).

However, with the most treasurable memory of the street dancers, the Marble Ground was demolished in 2004. The story will be told in details in the next section.

Space Museum

Located beside Cultural Center, Space Museum has an open space in front of it, as the transition zone between stairs and the entrance. With a roof, it was the gathering place for the street dancers in rainy days. After the demolition of the Marble Ground, it became the daily practice ground for the street dancers.



Open space in front of the Space Museum

At first, dancing here was tacitly permitted by the staff after the close of the Space Museum at 10:00 pm. Street dancers used to gather at the entrance at nearly 8:30pm. Eating take away fast food as dinner while

wait for the close of the Space Museum.

Compared with the Marble Ground, the open space of the Space Museum was used as a playground with all kinds of foolish activities other than dancing practice. They sit on the stairs to chat, drink and flirt; they played cards and climbed trees in the sideward lawn; they sang together and played games of leaping somersault or handstand at the corridor inside. They made fun from playing tricks on homeless who slept at the corridors and stairs nearby. For instance, they consistently threw fireworks at sleeping homeless or even put litten tissue in their month!

As Corrigan pointed out in the study of Sunderland street-corner culture, the most common and intense activity engaged in by the majority of youths on the street is the simple but absorbing activity of “passing the time”. The main action of subculture is “doing nothing” (Corrigan, 1976). “Doing nothing”, treated as endless waste of time and absence of purpose by adult, is mainly talking, joking, fighting and carrying on “weird ideas”. Dancing and battling are also included in “doing nothing” as a way that the boys had of passing the time.

In reality, “passing the time” and “doing nothing” are the major activities

the street dancers engaged at the open space of the Space Museum. They even hanged out there for eight days without going home in a Christmas. They danced there for a whole night, went to the McDonald for breakfast at 6:00 am next morning. They then went to the arcade opposite to kill several hours and even took bus to Saigon to swim until night! In the night, they would still come back to the Space Museum to dance. They just slept at the stairs outside of the Museum when were tired. As explained by Ah Bun and Howard:

“If you ask us were we going there only for dance, the answer is absolutely no. We took more time on other strange and foolish grope and did not practice dancing seriously. Dance alone was not attractive enough to condense us for months and years.”

McDonald

McDonald on the Peking Road opposite of the Cultural Center was another place they used to hang out and stay overnight because of its 24 hours opening. The street dancers were gathering here every night after dancing practice till 3:00 am. They didn't aim at buying or eating, but at sharing and time-passing. They gathered there, sharing experiences, chatting about daily happenings, making practical jokes and smoking under the “no smoking” board. Putting “weird ideas” into practice is what

they indulged in. They “took advantage” of everything in the McDonald: joining tens of straws together to blow through, stringing McNuggets together as a necklace, playing drumbeats with folks and plates, rapping with B-box, or even dance on the chairs. Chatting and bragging with homeless in McDonald was a major fun for them. They also made fun of sleeping homeless sometimes, such as putting ketchup into their shoes and sprinkling pepper in their noses.

Staffs of the McDonald were always busy with the work at hand and left them alone, only the police would come to check and only check their IDs occasionally. The McDonald is a space the street dancers could take control of before the dawn. For the street dancers, the McDonald is not only the brand of international chain stores, but also their inside backyard in the midnight.

Ideal Public Space

It could be concluded that represented by street dancing, activities of grass roots and style of subcultures, the Cultural Center is the stereotype of “ideal public space” in the minds of old generations – a space free from the control of the dominant culture. The four dimensions of the

Cultural Center as an “ideal public space” is given as following:

Physicality – open

Without available entertainment space, grass-root groups gather at limited public space for leisure activities after school and work. Grass-root groups without available entertainment space used to get gratification from the “free” nature and openness of the physical space easily, no matter it is sunshine, freeze or a spacious area to sit, which is rare for people who live in enclosed matchboxes. They have the ability to create some “qualified” space to counter the consumption activity of capitalism society and give the true meaning to life. It is avoided to be the “economic calculation” or “set equal to consumption” for these activities.

Most of the first generation street dancers in Hong Kong learnt dancing freely at the Cultural Center. As Doug, one of locking¹⁵ veterans in Hong Kong, recalled:

“I skipped school and hanged out on the street when I saw some people were dancing in the Marble Ground unexpectedly. I was attracted by this and asked them to teach me rashly. They shared what they had learnt with me zealously. We practiced and performance together after that. Then I became a dancer subsequently.”

¹⁵ Locking is a kind of street dance as a funky style originated in 1960s.

This encounter had almost happened to every first generation street dancers. They came, they watched, they learnt, then they started to dance in the Cultural Center, a place belonged to everyone. Instead of watching passively, audience could participate in the culture practices such as street dance freely. Participating of the street dancers and interaction between them and others turned the Cultural Center into a complex soap opera where individual can work their own distinctive show and enjoy the autonomous pleasure as well as the free entertainment while performing a multiplicity of roles instead of city dwellers that necessarily indulges in calculating rationality (Raban, 1974).

Ten years later, Ray made a comparison between the Culture Center and other spaces for street dance such as studio and youth center which will be discussed in later chapters:

“It is true that we could also dance in the studio or the youth center. But we can only be equal on the street. You can dance even though you do not know how to dance; you can dance even though you cannot afford the tuition fee; you can dance even though you do not know anyone; because street belongs to everyone. Studio and youth center are institution with their autonomy and hierarchy, individuality and equality are something you can only find at the Cultural Center ten years ago.”

Practice – Diverse

The Cultural Center had become the biggest congregation place for lower middle class youths from the Public House Project in the Kowloon district which was narrow and gloomy because every kind of practice is acceptable, even though the exclusive ones out of other urban area such as noisy practices.

Little Yin saw the Cultural Center as the only space that could dance freely:

There was no possibility to dance downstairs of my home since it is too densely packed to annoy others as an old Public House Project. Even though the Cultural Center was not near for me I went there every day to practice since I was 13.

As implied by the words of Little Yin, on some extent, “making noise” was tolerated at the open space around the Cultural Center at that time, which was crucial for street dance practices. Even though noise over a very decibel was still forbidden either at the open space according to the rules, the control of noise at the open space around the Cultural Center was looser than that of densely packed public housing estates, sometimes was even absent because it was open space far away from the residential area.

Furthermore, the practice of the subculture members was a process of

transgression and resistance. Through the interview of Para Para Society in the Cultural Center, Chow elaborated that subordinated groups in the margin are conducted negotiations and resistances to oppose the hegemony of the center in a leisure space embedded with a clear core-periphery or serious culture-casual leisure spatial relation (Chow, 2004). The resistance was even manifested in their body and movements:

The body, at the very heart of space and of the discourse of power, is reducible and subversive. It rejects the reproduction of relations which deprive it and crush it. What is more vulnerable, more easy to torture than the reality of a body? And yet what is more resistant? [The] human body resists the production of oppressive relations – of not frontally, then obliquely.

(Lefebvre, 1976: 89)

These resistant practices find their places in the Culture Center, with other subculture practices such as skateboarding, bicycle, punks. The resistance of subculture is woven seamlessly into this ideal public space to create more possibilities.

Social Relation – Equal and Free

Through the culture practices such as street dance, the space is transferred into a “social space” (Friedman, 2002) to have social contact, entertainment and relaxation. The area and streets around the Cultural

Center had become the exterior room of Hong Kong street dancers both literally and metaphorically, they function as what Ellis said: tend to be places as well as links, incorporating various social and operational activities into an integrated and somewhat unspecific mix (Ellis, 1978).

During the culture practice, it is easy for people to communicate: they talk, learn from each other and exchange information even though they don't know the names of others. The empty open space was in effect like a honey comb with diverse social interactions that orientate to diverse goal. "Public familiarity" of the Cultural Center and "mutual understanding" of people around them were accumulated among the street dancers gradually. The social network, belongingness, and "ambience" are built with their collective practice and battle every day.

Members of most crews, SR, DSC, Dap+, and Since 70' knew each other at the Cultural Center because of dancing on the Marble Ground or in front of the Space Museum. For numerous street dancers during the interviews, friends known in the Cultural Center ten years ago are the best ones during their life times. They have kept the social network at the Cultural Center for more than ten years: Since 70' is still the top crew in Hong Kong and keep dancing together as a crew until now; Ray and

Jimmy from the SR are still business partners even though they rarely dance together now; Howard and Fat J who left Hong Kong to the mainland seven years ago still come back to Hong Kong regularly to meet the old friends in the Cultural Center; some of them married with girls met at the Cultural Center ten years ago.

As a result, a “community” of the street dancers was formed on the foundation of the Cultural Center around 2001. Within this “community”, “individual people having an association with one another – they meet, combine or interact to fulfill some common purpose or share some common interest” (Hiller, 1941). Based on the definition by Davies and Herbert (1993), the Cultural Center was the spatial or territorial context of the street dance community. This spatial context was a common place to reinforce the interactions, provide a psychological union and gain its character. They are of course not dwellings for “settle”, but it is the “settlement” for the typical youth group and grassroots life to ensconce their sense of belonging to Hong Kong.

Institution – Public

An ideal public space should belong to everyone of the public. It should

offer distraction, entertainment, and repose for every individuals from normal prohibitions during work, to escape from routines and to compensate for the difficulties of everyday life. In this independent enclosed space, a great opportunity was provided to the street dancers to make something of their own, staying away from the standard and request of school, employer and home in everyday life, to build their community and feeling of belonging.

Most street dancers were failures of education institution, doing some low-paying work. As a component of the capital production line, they could not find solutions about their boring and dead-end work under other institutions. Life was depressed by educational disadvantage, unemployment, compulsory miseducation and dead-end jobs. The Cultural Center is the only space they won from the capital production institution in their everyday life, where they could be the institution themselves, take a breath, just “standing-about-doing-nothing” and achieve the autonomous pleasure with their bodies. As Jimmy said:

“The backgrounds of us were pretty different: some were waiters, some were students, some were gangsters. But all came to Cultural Center just for playing and fun. We didn’t dance for any world ranking or professional career. We never thought about above targets which are common for street dancers to

pursue nowadays.”

The symbolic activities in the Cultural Center supplied a “distracted solution” to the dominant central class institution concerns and values developed in work. Autonomous pleasure and relative freedom were what they could get from the institution as public.

They once tried to replace the everyday space with this distraction space – making money with street dance and escaping from the dead-end boring school and work forever. Because of the rapid popularity of street dance in Hong Kong, some street dancers got the chance to start their street dancer careers in studio, entertainment company and even movie industry.

They were employed by the first street dance studios in Hong Kong as tutors, they were chosen as dance actors in several movies. They were even introduced by agency to be dancers on concert of Lau Andy¹⁶ in Hong Kong Coliseum, which was the biggest concert of that time. But the contradiction was out in the open soon. They were required to dance under special rules and styles, most of which were opposite toward what they really liked. Simple routine steps with abundant visual effects were much more dominant than freestyle and battle since the capital production

¹⁶ Lau Andy is one of the most popular pop star in Hong Kong during the last 40 years.

efficiency was the golden rule in this commercial institution. In the end, the professional “street dance career” in their imagination at first was finally became some low-paying, boring and dead-end job. Their failure of copying reveals that the autonomous pleasure of the Cultural Center could not be copied under other institutions. The vitality of a subculture could only exist in this public institution, even though the “public” was only a symbol solution to their real dilemmas. As Howard concluded:

“I could never imagined that someday I could dance in the Hong Kong Coliseum felt like a star. I even dreamed of being a successful star at some moment. But finally it was found not a world belonging to us from the very beginning. That was a commercial world with money infighting, in which we were not interested at all and could never figure out.”

Construction and Reproduction of the Ideal Public Space

About ten years ago, with the appearance of the street dancers and other subculture youths at the open space of the Cultural Center, the meaning of this essential geographic space has been changed greatly by these minors. The place making progress was happening simultaneously with the development progress of street dance in Hong Kong.

For many people, the Cultural Center is a world-class venue for performing arts, mostly serious and high-class, instead of a leisure space

at first.

According to the opening page of the Cultural Center's website notes:

The building of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre has signified the beginning of an artistic link to the world. The Centre, covering 5.2 hectares and offering 82,231m² gross floor area, commands a prime waterfront position. Since its grand opening on 8 November 1989, the Centre has remained the premier cultural venue offering stimulating environment for arts talents and quality programs to the public, and has since been witnessing the development of the arts in Hong Kong.¹⁷

“World-class”, “art talent” and “art quality” are emphasized here.

Furthermore, the Cultural Center is subordinated to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), whose target is promoting professionalism and excellence leisure and cultural services commensurate with Hong Kong's development as a world-class city and events capital.¹⁸ Open spaces around the Cultural Center are also responsible for the management of the Cultural Center and the LCSD. As an appendant of the Cultural Center, it shared the same cultural meaning of the Center.

However, space is something could be reconstructed and transformed. As

Chow (2004) analyzed, space does not exist in the projection of an

¹⁷ <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKCC/en/about/intro.html>

¹⁸ http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/about_mission.php

intellectual representation nor arise from the visible-readable realm. It is first of all seen, heard and enacted through physical gestures and movements. Different presentations on what is seen, heard and enacted about a space could resignified it completely. As for the open space around the Cultural Center specifically, the practice of the street dancers and other youths altered it into a “playground” from the “world-class talented art center”.

Objects

According to the definition of the style by the BCCC, the first element to be taken into consideration is material object such as dress. The most outstanding material object in this street dance “bricolage” (Levi-Strauss, 1966) was Adidas sports suit, which was recognized as a sign of hip hop and b-boy because it was the typical dress code of b-boys in the videotapes they watched repeatedly. A good example is that famous street dancer in Taiwan, Allen who came to Hong Kong in 2001 found the Cultural Center for dancing practice through following a group of boys on the train in the Adidas sports suit. He could figure them out as b-boys only from the dress! It even happened that the DSC used to search clothes marketing in Mong Kok for cheaper and fake Adidas sports suit now and

then, which was an important crew activity for them.

The Cultural Center, a place supposed to promote serious and high-class culture, was surrounded by a bunch of b-boys in the same dress code: the Adidas sports suit, raised cuff of pants, a helmet on the back for the grounding movements with head. The Adidas sports suit, commodities produced originally for specific markets (general sports for bourgeois), was generated as object-sign of hip hop to transform the meaning of the open air space as a play and battle ground for b-boys. It helped to figure out the insiders and outsiders, declaring the occupation of this space by b-boys. The mobile fake Adidas sports suits spoke louder than the static elegant environment setting sometimes.

As the material foundation of the place making practice, other objects such as cap, helmet, sport band, music box were also treated as the signs of street dance to occupy and transform the Cultural Center.

Body and Movements

Body and movements are the most substantial elements in the place-making practice of the street dancers because it is body that produce space (Lefebvre, 1991). In the theory treats social space as a

product, actually it is implied that space is a product of body and movements – fresh actions and movements of body could reproduce and transgress the embodied ideologies and existing social relations within a space. Corporal body produces space through exercising and circulating powers of different classes, as well as constituting practices and experiences. In the case of the Cultural Center, Chow (2004) mentioned the corporeal joy and emotional pleasure sprang from autonomous body of the street dancers. She treated it as the fountain that turned the Cultural Center into a leisure space.

Their dancing was characterized with free movements without routine and steps, they tried to represent what they heard in the music - “feel the beat and rhythm to move like what the body want to say” as they said. Since every single movement was required to be consistent with music and beat at that moment, dancers had no time to come up with designed steps but responding with their bodies immediately. Compared with performances in the auditoria, the complex routines which has been designed and rehearsed for several months, freestyle of these street boys is a more direct expression of their inwards.

With the free movements as a response to the music, street dancers could

take control over their body as well as its potential. They could realized autonomous pleasure and release their suffering as well as desires through the practico-sensory body. Their bodies were not passive instrument under the capital production system. Instead, they were sources of social order transgression and community dynamic with its deployment of energy as a lethal weapon of resistance.

Embodied by the free movements and powered body, the open area around the Cultural Center was reproduced as a space full of energetic dynamic, corporeal joy, emotional pleasure, release of suffering, expression of desires and appealing of the grass root youths. The power of the lower middle class was enhanced through the crazy body practices. Finally, the area was turned into the container of the collective experiences and memories of the street dancers. By the way, the status of the Cultural Center as “public” was also created and maintained through the ongoing movements of body.

Noise and Music

Noise is forbidden in a legal society especially one crowded and packed like Hong Kong. But as an open area remote from the downtown, noise

and loud music were more tolerated and acceptable at the open air around the Cultural Center even though at the midnight.

Loud hip hop music with heavy beats gave the street dancers desire to move, wave, shake and jump, and could get in the mood of release and battle. The Cultural Center was re-contextualization by the noise and music. Wherever the deafening music conveyed to, the spaces were scoped as ones belonging to the street dancers temporally. Passerby got to know the existing of the street dancers from the loud music from far away at first. Youth dancing in the music was a stereo view besides the auditorium, conveying the different message that the space was also a perfect one for street art.

Strict institutional rules of the Cultural Center were resolved in the booming music. The music and beats emphasized the focus onto a temporary release instead. Especially for the youths came from the public estate program where the volume control was applied rigidly on account of high-density packed environment. Chow (2004) concluded from her interviews that the youth who had grown up in public housing estate enjoyed not only the “noise” produced by others but also making “noise” themselves. Because loud music meant the absence of control of the

loudness of sound, the high-class art and culture center was turned into an underground platform without control and management.

Rituals

As mentioned in the definition of “style”, ritual is also essential for the construction of subcultural identities (Hall, *et al.*, 1976). From the perspective of the Birmingham School, the subcultures in the post-war Britain are collections of a variety of rituals.

Activities and place making practices of the Cultural Center by the street dancers were also collections of a variety of rituals symbolized by the battle night. “Will you go to the Cultural Center this Saturday” was a common question among street dancers ten years ago. Battle night was formed spontaneously completely to satisfy the desire of showing off in front of others of the b-boys. Every crew would work hard on training and practicing for beating others on Saturday. Volume of the scream and applause of onlookers was the only judgment standard. On Saturday night, with hundreds of people and intense rivals, the Cultural Center would become a paradise of carnival: nothing existed on the world except for the battle, scream, movements and music. The open area around the Cultural

Center had become a space of ritual, a battle ground or an arena with fixed time.

Space of the open area around the Cultural Center would be reordered according to the rules of the battle – winner in battles could occupy areas with advantages such as the Marble Ground. Or the crews could only practice at the corner behind the Space Museum. The space was divided into different parts by the boundaries of a group against another group.

Rituals also exist within the crews, such as the hierarchy among different generations of street dancers and the way of money distribution.

It is through rituals that a subculture could build its “group identity” and enhance its relative exist to the mainstream. It is also through the rituals above that street dance could declare its relative space to the mainstream one, or even transfer it.

Danger and Fear

Within the interview of LMF, Ma (2002) found maybe of them have permanent tattoos or other signs of danger that make them look like gangsters although none of them is a member of a triad gang. He called this as “fear and spatial friction” (Ma, 2002).

Actually, with “style of danger”, the street dancers also transferred the Cultural Center into some “fear and spatial friction” and marked off their boundary and territory there. Tattoos, metallic accessories, long hair and baggy clothes were their style which shared common characteristics with other “trouble maker” subcultures such as Punks. However, the signs were not hints of danger necessarily, it was their frequent involvement in “gangster activities” that was the major place making practice acted on the Cultural Center. For Howard, fights of the street dancers were too common for him to remember how many times he had entered the police to bail the street dancers out.

Most fights happened because of the defiance of other real gangster members according to the street dancers who themselves make a clear distinction with gangsters. Because the street dancers took advantage over the Marble Ground and made loud noise, they were the target of defiance by the gangsters and other subculture members around the Cultural Center. They were mocked as monkey and circus; their female members were assaulted by foul language; they were thrown at with coins by someone during dance battles. Results of these provokes were violent fights without doubt, leading to hospital or police at the end. Sometimes

dance battles were also end up with violent fights because some of them would not like to admit defeat and the battles were too aggressive.

According to Ah Bun, once after a battle over hundreds of B-boys participated in the fight at most, which made the Marble Ground as a “pool of blood”.

Actually, violent fight was an extreme expression of the “evil” and aberrant “bad boy” image deployed by the street dancers, who used to smock, drink, litter, swear and stay late outside. Their “homeless youth” image on media at that time was so negative up to gangsters. This “bad boy” image triggered the cultural imaginations of criminality, violence and aggressiveness (Ma, 2002) that built up the spatial friction around the Marble Ground. The pedestrians were scared and went round of them, while the police officers came to check their IDs frequently, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In brief, it was with the “fear” the street dancers distinguish the open space around the Cultural Center from the general public spaces, as a space contained the unplanned potential; as a space represented rule breaking capacity; as a space full of non-goal directed activities; as a space occupied by dangerous gangsters; as a thesaurus of utopia of bad

boys.

Cultural Center (After 2004) – Regulated Space

To the third generations of street dancers in Hong Kong, the Cultural Center is only a huge theater belonging to the bourgeoisie most of the time, or a famous place of tourism bringing down by mainland tourists. They have never seen the “playground” or “battle ground” since the Marble Ground was disappeared in 2004, and soon street dance practice and gathering were also banned at the open ground of the Space Museum. Around 2004, including street dance, all the public activities were driven away from the open space around the Cultural Center. The ideal public space they once constructed was regulated completely. An ideal public space was finally sacrificed in exchange of the economic benefit. Through the disappearance of the Marble Ground or even “cultural center”, a ripple-effect of the dominant rational city planning on local culture could be proved. To street dancers in Hong Kong, the Cultural Center has equaled to the collective memory, but only memory.

Privatization and Regularization of the Ideal Public Space

Demolish of the Marble Ground

In 2004, the second year after the individual visit scheme¹⁹ was implemented in Hong Kong, the open space around the Cultural Center experienced an ordinary recondition. However, the Marble Ground disappeared after that – the spiral stair was replaced by a straight one which took over the original area in the center, where they used to dance; the marble ground was also replaced by rough concrete floor with many embossed bricks. As Ah Bun said, it is impossible to do power move²⁰ on the floor here anymore after the recondition – the hand would be hurt badly by the rough floor. Even though this is only a regular recondition according to the government record, most of the street dancers believed that the recondition of the Marble Ground aimed at expelling them. Ken, one of the first generation street dancers used to dance at the Cultural Center said:

“The government said the recondition aimed at beauty of the landscape, it does not make sense. Restructure of the stair and the floor made no difference on the image of the Cultural Center. However, all of the modification directed at eliminating the dance advantages of the physical settings. It is the result of a long-term dissatisfaction towards us of the government.”

¹⁹ Individual Visit Scheme: The individual visit scheme began on July 28, 2003 as a liberalization measure under the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement. It allowed travelers from Mainland China to visit Hong Kong and Macau on an in their individual capacity. Prior to the Scheme, Mainland residents could only visit to Hong Kong and Macau on business visas or in group tours. For more details, please refer to the Tourism Commission in Hong Kong: http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/visitors/visitors_ind.html

²⁰ Power Move is prominent movements in breakdancing – moves relying on speed, momentum and acrobatic elements.

The evidence of the “long-term dissatisfaction” for Ken and other street dancers was that the police haunted around the Marble Ground more and more frequently during their dance. At the beginning, the police used to come around three or four times every month, check their IDs and ask them to turn down the music box at most. After several fights, the Marble Ground had become the key haunting area for the police who always came to ask them not to dance around the Cultural Center. As Fat J recalled:

“The police thought us as gangsters after several nasty fights. I think it was our fault actually.”

When the Marble Ground could not afford the gathering space any more, the street dancers moved to the open ground in front of the Space Museum for dance practice and battle. Battle night was kept for a while there. Instead of coming after the close of the Space Museum, the music box always went off at the open ground around 6:00 pm. This disturbed manner was not tolerated by the Space Museum however.

Driven Away from the Space Museum

The street dancers were not approved to gather in front of the Space Museum either. No guard or staff of the Space Museum drove them away

face to face, rather, worker of the Space Museum would sprinkle water onto the whole ground around 6:00 pm every day. The wet floor was not appropriate for ground move any more. The street dancers tried to figure it out but it did not help, as Popping Lok, a famous street dancer in Hong Kong who started to dance at the Cultural Center from middle school years said:

“What drove us mad was they would keep sprinkling when we attempted to go back after it dried out. Needless to say dancing, we hardly could stay or sit there. So absurd!”

Consequently, after withdrawing from the Marble Ground, the street dancers did not stay at this “transition space” for a long time. The battle night returned back to normal quiet Saturday night for the tourists then. Simultaneously, the “cleaning up” happened to other open grounds around the Cultural Center, such as one at the end of the wharf and one outside of the Silvercord Center.

Some street dancers such as Little Yin expected the dancers to transfer to other place together and create another “Cultural Center” at that time. Nevertheless, it never happened. The street dancers dismissed and separated immediately, since demolish of the old marble floor and the area around it was demolish of a “community” at the same time. The

“community”, which could increase neighborliness, was essential for the “settlement” at the Cultural Center for the street dancers. The demolishing of the Marble Ground was the prelude of the dismissal of the street dancers.

Building of the Avenue of Stars

In the *Give Them a Chance*²¹ – a movie based on the true story of the street dancers around the Cultural Center ten years ago – the street dancers are expelled from the area near the Cultural Center because they are annoyed the tourists. One of the police urges the street dancers to leave:

“How could the tourists enjoy the scenery if you dance here? You should know the government is keeping a tight hold of the tourism, which is the main support of Hong Kong’s declined economy now. It is better for you to find another place to dance.”

Most street dancers treat what the police said in the movie as the real motivation behind the recondition of the Marble Ground, because it could be proved by the building of the Avenue of Stars. In 2003, under the

²¹ *Give Them a Chance* is a movie based on the true story of the street dancers around the Cultural Center ten years ago. It was directed by Herman Yau and starring Andy Hui. Howard was also a supporting actor of it. The movie tells a story about a street dance crew developed from the Cultural Center finally gets a chance to make successful career in the mainstream culture after several difficulties. For more details, please refer to http://hkmdb.com/db/movies/view.mhtml?id=10504&display_set=big5

support of Hong Kong Tourism Board, Hong Kong Film Awards Association and Hong Kong government, the New World Group²² announced that it would spend HKD 40 million to rebuild a part of the Tsim Sha Tsui promenade²³ – including the open area near the Cultural Center – into the Avenue of Stars. The Marble Ground was not included in the Avenue of Stars exactly, but it is very near as fifty hundreds miles away. As a part of the embellish planning of the waterfront, the Avenue of Stars is among the ten construction projects aiming at promoting Hong Kong as the world entertainment and tourism center.²⁴ The Avenue of Stars was planned and constructed by the government and private developers jointly to boost the economy through tourism from the very beginning (Fong, 2006), as a result of constant construction of tourism infrastructure in order to compete for a bigger number of visitors. Building of the Avenue was modeled on the Hollywood Walk of Fame exactly. Spread along the 440 meter promenade, nine red pillars demonstrate the story of Hong Kong's one hundred years of movie history with the inscriptions on them. Around 100 plaques containing

²² New World Group is a shopping mall at Tsim Sha Tsui.

²³ This part of the Tsim Sha Tsui Avenue was from the south of the Salisbury Road to the International Mail Centre, including the Cultural Center, Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Tsim Sha Tsui Waterfront.

²⁴ Refer to Tourism Services Department of the HKSAR: <http://www.tourism.gov.hk>.

hand print and autographs of the stars are set into the avenue. Bronze statues of signals of Hong Kong movie industry such as famous star Bruce Lee or popular character McDull stand in order on the Avenue of Stars as the main plot of taking photo. Like other typical destination, three large stores containing manufactured produces and souvenirs could be found. Another tourism program of the Avenue is the Symphony of Lights displays every light, a show presented by decoration and laser lights, orchestration of music and pyrotechnic fireworks last for ten minutes. In addition to the shopping malls New World Center and the Sogo Department Store, space around the Cultural Center has been constructed as a tourism and shopping landmark featured by Hong Kong movie industry and redeveloped as a combined “enchantment” of commodity and celebrities, representing the generally unchallenged forces of the market place.

Four Dimensions of the Regulated Space

As a productive force and a “moving equilibrium”, after the reproduction of ideal public space under the occupation and place-making practices of the street dance, the ideal public space, with the public life and diverse subculture attached to it, turned into a commodity by the political

economy of contemporary capitalism that can be bought, sold, rented, constructed, torn down, used, and reused in much the same way as any other kind of investment (Gottdiener, 2000). An increasingly ubiquitous consumer culture and standard one-off artificial experience is the only reproduced outcome as a result of the exclusive and highly structured physicality, the singular practice, the consumer-oriented and “panopticon” social relation, and the corporation as trustee of corporate or institutional interest.

Physicality – Exclusive and Highly Structured

On physicality, the extents of tourism commercialization are divergent at different areas of the open space around the Cultural Center. Without question, the area of Avenues of Stars (area with red slashes) is the most typical tourism attraction with the pillars, plaques, bronze statues, laser lights, fireworks or even snack bars in Disney cartoon characters. Besides the Avenue of Arts, the open space outside of the Hong Kong Museum of Art is also “tourism commercialized” on some extent, with the recondition of the infrastructure for the convenience of sightseeing tour, such as the demolish of the Marble Ground. It is full of photographers and portrait painters who live on the service of the tourists. Finally, the

open area in front of the Cultural Center and the Salisbury Garden, far away from the Avenue of Stars, are the one with the least extent of tourism commercialization with lowest percentage of tourists, even though all of the annoying activities have been forbidden here to not disturb the tourists.



In addition, area around the Cultural Center in a broader scope, including places around the Salisbury Road and Canton Road, are dominated by great number of newly-built luxury shopping malls and hotels. As for the ones there before, great changes have been displayed on their inward setting – most traditional local stores have been replaced by luxury collections or cosmetic chain stores to satisfy the appetites and desires of the mainland tourists.

Finally the open area around the Cultural Center was sustained artificially as visitor attractions, dominated by huge shopping malls and luxury hotels to satisfy the appetites and desires of tourists. This is doubt as the result of contingency in response to the emergence of new service industries, the exigencies of cross-border tourism and new realms of consumerism, which are boomed after SARS in 2003 to boost the declining economy of Hong Kong as a process of “tourism commercialization”, which was reconstructed as prepared pleasure space systematically that enable people to come. “People” here refer to wealthy of middle class at least, mostly ones from the mainland who could afford for the consumption of the differences that the foreign space offers. Not to mention the street dancers, local people will not come to the open space now. As Howard suggested:

“The open space around the Marble Ground, equal to the Avenue of Stars, is too crowded and too ‘fancy’ for the local people. You can see nothing except for tourists who are taking photo. For me, I cannot get used to the laser light opposite, which is too brightly colorful. It is strange that I cannot feel I am in Hong Kong every time I step there. I will not go there unless I go mad.”

Not only the open space around the Cultural Center, but also the territories nearby were reconstructed by capital investment in hotels,

resorts and shopping malls, offering tourists sumptuous meals and nighttime lounge entertainment.

For the street dancers, the high degree of “openness” and “flexibility” which encourage communication (Siu, 1998) disappeared little by little.

The open area was much cleaner and wider, but the opportunity for users to modify it was limited. By getting out of the risk associated with street activities such as street dance, the open area was not a “ideal public space” any more under the secure and safety concern even though it is still “public property”. As Smith (2011) described with his sketches of urban spaces in Hong Kong:

New and ambiguous urban landscapes provide privatized enclaves of exclusion and surveillance, where large-scale internalized environments seek to simulate the street experience, while being several steps removed from the empirical reality of the urban realm.

Practice – Singular

With high and luxury consumption, the tourism area and shopping malls are actually get avoid of the marginal and “dysfunctional” grass roots as well as practices such as begging, drinking and rough sleeping. The right to this “public property” of the grass roots collapses completely and their practices were singularized seriously. On the contrary, the dominate right

of the space is actually transferred to the tourists who could pay for the service or developers who supply the commodity and service to make profit. Motivated by tourism, the public space around the Cultural Center turned into a vision of civility, bounded by copied scenic spots and similar shopping malls with exhausted imagination. Practices without profit making were denied.

Furthermore, in the media reporting of street dancers in the Cultural center, they were called “Homeless Teenager”. Their practice was labeled as ill-health of the public space. In the related research about public space, it is pointed out that the presence of “homeless teenager” in public space reminds of an irrational and uncontrolled society (Mitchell, 1995). As a “rationalizing” public space, it is necessary for to remove the homeless and their practices – in order to make room for legitimate public activities. In addition, subculture members and their practices are even constructed as folk devils by the mainstream and “dominant” culture. Adults label many subculture young people as gang members based on their choice of clothing (Mair, 1986; Cohen, 1972; Warren and Megan, 1998). These negative biases lead to objective consequences on the street dancers. Their accesses to the open area around the Cultural Center were taken

away by private guards with a bigger number and police who haunted around more and more frequently. Street dance was converged attacked by different dominant institutions and finally driven away from the Culture Center. The situation is the same with other subculture practices. The practice around the Culture Center was singularized to shopping and consuming. It is not surprising to find even other public leisure practice such as Tai Ji, strolling and running are also disappeared there – it is strange to do physical exercise within a commercial center. Activities such as begging, drinking and rough sleeping are forbidden around the Culture Center as smacking of the marginal and criminal dysfunction of the homeless.

Social Relation – Dismiss of the Street Dance Community

The community of street dance was dismissed together with the Marble Ground. Friends and teammates were no longer the major part of the social relation here. It gave way to the consumer-oriented relation between bargainer and consumer, or the “panopticon” relation between police and citizen.

At 2000, in his 22 years old, Howard started to dance at the Cultural Center. Four years later, when the street dancers were cleared from

the open areas around the Cultural Center, he was 26 years old, an age with responsibility as he said. He chose to take over his father's garment factory after he could not dance at the Cultural Center.

Even though he insisted that the time at the Cultural Center was the happiest one in his life, other targets were more urgent for him at that time.

Like Howard, the street dancers, in their 20s, met the same life dilemma – they need to undertake their responsibility as well as start their “real” career, career with enough money and an upward social status. Escape at the Cultural Center was about to end with back to the “reality” – the capitalism society with classes and real problems. However, most of them were not as lucky as Howard who had a family business. They need to step out of the ideal public space and go back to their boring, low-paying and dead end job. At the end of the 2004, most of the youths did not come to the Cultural Center for dancing, except several younger ones such as Little Yin and Double Eight, the crewmate of Little Yin later. Even though the Space Museum stopped sprinkling later, nearly nobody came back any more. Little Yin and Double Eight were so upset at that time. Double Eight remember that they once asked the ones were leaving to

stay:

“But we know they were helpless. They told us that they could not company with us every night here because they were required to sustain their families. That period was the darkest one in my life. But I can totally realize their pressure at that time.”

Just during that period, all of the five founders of the SR moved to other careers: Howard went to the mainland to expand his father’s garment factory; Jimmy started his career of art designing; Chester devoltd into the construction industry; Wallace applied the job in a bank; Nelson became a salesman of the PCCW²⁵. Started from the same Cultural Center, different paths were led by every individual.

Every time when Howard comes back from the mainland now, he will go to the open space around the Cultural Center with old friends who used to dance together here. They will not dance, just stand there and have a cigarette, check in on the Facebook sometimes. One of the comments on the Facebook from an old friend Pong is:

“We grew up here with power moves... Except that the Marble Ground is not there anymore, and I have become an ignorant mid adult... We are jerks who do not know anything.”

Institution – the LCSD and the Shopping Mall/Hotel

²⁵ PCCW is a Hong Kong based Information and Communications Technologies company.

The building of the Avenue of Stars is a signal that the open area around the Cultural Center is not a free domain any more. On the contrary, it is an ordered space and the institution behind it became the corporation or state as trustee of corporate or institutional interest – the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Shopping Mall. As Chow (2004) elaborated, the Culture Center later is supplied by the agencies of institutional power and by their mechanisms of control. From the triggering of the building of Cultural Center, according to Fong (1982), the building of the Cultural Center is a result of the 1966 riot in Hong Kong, as a government strategy to release the surplus energy of young people and tension of urban life.

In 2004, the privately funded avenue was handed over to the Hong Kong SAR government as public property by the New World Group²⁶, under the administration of the LCSD. According to its introduction, the Culture Service department under the LCSD is responsible for the building management, including security, cleanliness and other operation on the open spaces.²⁷ In the *Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance*

²⁶ The New World Group is one of the biggest estate developing companies in Hong Kong. Owning the open area of the Culture Center before 2004, it did nothing to it and make it as a public space.

²⁷ http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/about_org_chart.php

(*Cap 131*)²⁸, the Avenue of Arts is defined as “playground”, where music, singing and other annoying activities are forbidden according to the ordinance. In another word, from 2004, street dance at the open area around the Cultural Center was illegal. “Bad manners” of the youth such as fight, drink, staying out are not encouraged and acceptable by the mechanisms of control and govern officially. And simply annoying behavior is taken as disorder or criminals. Activities such as riding bike on sidewalks and graffiti, including dancing are subject to “zero-tolerance” and needed to be excluded. The control and surveillance of the open area are legalized by government ordinance, which is motivated by secure and safety concern.

On the other hand, the private guards on the Culture Center as main force of preventing the open area from being intervened by subculture activities are mostly employers of the shopping mall and hotels surrounded. The surrounding private shopping malls and hotels become the invisible institution even though they do not take control of the property right of the open area. They play an important role in maintaining order of the open area to create a comfortable environment for their customers. Power

²⁸ Refer to http://www.success.tid.gov.hk/english/lin_sup_org/gov_dep/publication_detail_6357.html

of these institution are entrusted by the government because of the inability and unwillingness of the government to fund and maintain public spaces – the government hope the estate developers to watch out the around area as well. Much open area around the Culture Center is operated by the property management department of the surrounded shopping malls and hotels.

Reproduction and Incorporation of the Regulated Space

The Cultural Center was transformed into a reinvented “enchantment” under the name of the “Avenue of Stars” with more streamlined and commodified model. Separated from everyday life of the local people in Hong Kong, it is not capable to reproduce varied local culture or any public life. Standard “enchantment” experience is the only one that could be created by the reinvented copied and artificial tourism space.

“Enchantment” is defined as “we decide to suspend the disbelief” by Coleridge (1983). When the mainland tourists enter the artificial tourism spectacle – the Avenue of Arts or the shopping mall far from their home, they participate in various attractions in ways that are largely predetermined by the designers and not at all connected to their daily lives. New standard space experience and undifferentiated spatial imagery

are created within this “enchantment”, while the original space embodied by local street dance was displaced. The style of the street dance, with the unique experience as well as informal social space made by it, cannot readily be reproduced by simplistic reinventing and redevelopment approaches. The “style” has been resolved easily by the “reinventing” space.

Most new tourism infrastructure is reinvented on demolished older district separately. In most cases such as the Avenue of Stars, the reinvented space is a transplant and copy of highly praised foreign tourism space, share little organic connection with surrounding areas. As a result, the “reinventing” dominated by tourism has compromised or even eliminated aspects of culturally distinctive heritage and associated uses that might be economically marginal but are socially desirable. For most street dancers, the “street” in the word “street dance” comes up to the Cultural Center which could never be reproduced any more.

Even though the conception “incorporation” will be the emphasis of the next chapter, the real incorporation process has started exactly when street dance appeared around the Culture Center, especially after the decondition in 2004. Taking 2004 as the separatrix, because of the

privatization of the open space around the Cultural Center, the street dance, which used to occupy the space with “symbol style”, was excluded out of the space by the tourism commercialization and security and safety concern. However, the street dance was incorporated by these two dominated powers just around the Culture Center – the former in a commodity form and the later as an ideological form (Hebdige, 1979). The incorporation happened around the Culture Center was a prelude of the smashing incorporation within other spaces later.

First of all, in the commodity form, the street dance in this space was going to be transferred into mass-produced objects: After the Cultural Center was well known as a place of street dance, lots of headhunters from studios, entertainment company and TV stations came in piles to find proper street dancers as the potential tutor, background dancer or even entertainment star. According to the description of the street dancers, from 2001, there were persons in suits sending out business cards to the street dancers on the open space to introduce a “formal job” to the street dancers. Several street dancers get job in studio, entertainment company and TV station like this. After involving into the “chain of mass-produced street dance”, most of them are too busy to come back to the Cultural

Center to dance. Their dance space was replaced completely from then on.

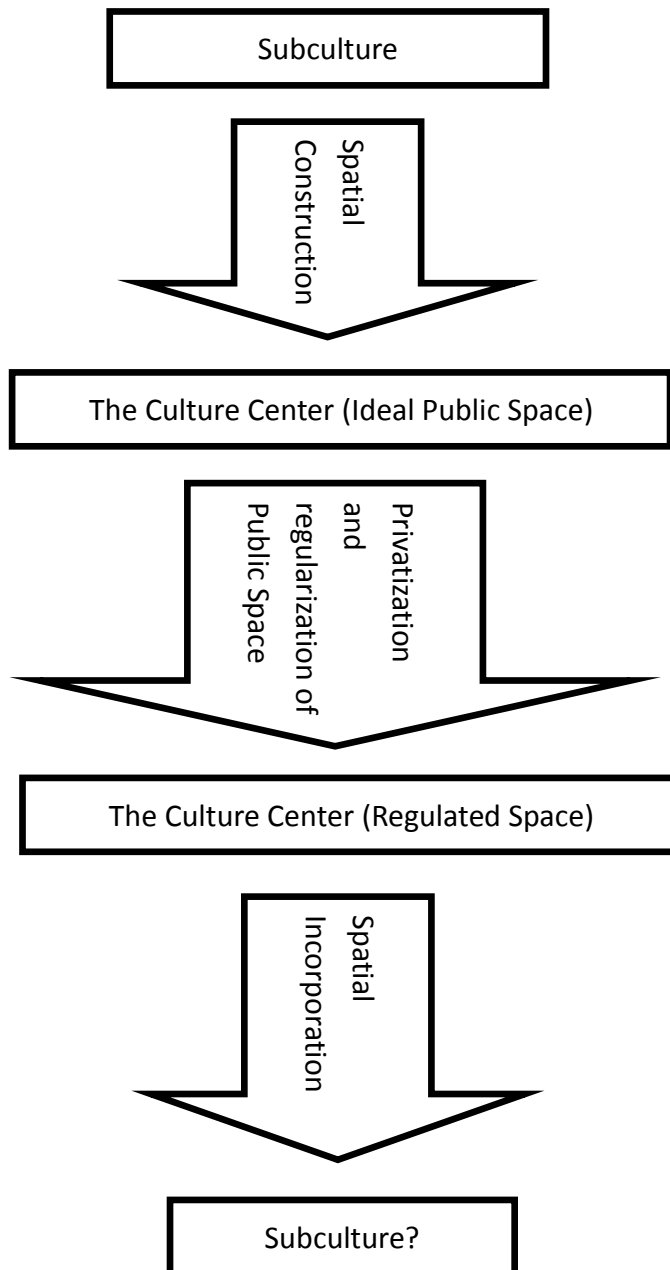
Secondly, in the ideology form, also because of the security and safety concern, the youth center under the government management or with charity support started to deal with these street dancers who were labeled as “homeless youth” and “gangsters” by the mainstream culture. With constructing safer space in which the deviant behaviors of the youth could be redefined, youth center also replaced the dance space of the street dancers.

Finally, represented by dance association of university, a hybridized combination of the commodity form and ideology form also plays an important role in this incorporation. Street dancers from the Cultural Center were invited by different educational institutions to be tutors of the dance association. Under the educational purpose, to satisfy the specific market, street dance experienced an integral commercial operation within campus, in addition to the unique local institutional culture of Hong Kong. This hybridized force must be mentioned in this research as a supplement of the incorporation theory of Hebdige.

Process in details of the incorporation by commodity, ideology and the hybridized combination will be discussed and analyzed in next chapter. Happened at the open space around the Cultural Center as the beginning, with the privatization and clearing of the public space at the same time, the incorporation process brought street dance into diverse spaces. Disappeared from the Cultural Center, street dance kept on its place-making practice about other spaces and was also changed by them simultaneously.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is as following if it is presented in graphics.



According to the standard of Smith (2011), the open area around the Cultural Center used to be an “ideal public space” which facilitated a transition between activities that were necessary and those that are communal in a social and civil sense, giving rise to informal and spontaneous interaction based on a range of potential choices, such as

street dance, skateboarding, bike and other street performances. The “public” of the open area was also constructed by the sets of uses, events and areas of transaction, where activities feed off each other by the subculture groups. At the beginning of street dance history in Hong Kong, the open space just right around the “world center of serious and high-class arts” was occupied by street dance with its unique style such as objects, body, music, rituals and dangers. The style also transferred the open area into a public space as well as a leisure space with free entertainments, distracted solution, resistance and community identity. Open space around the Cultural Center was famous as the place of street dance in Hong Kong and a battle night would be held there every Saturday night spontaneously. It supply the grass root youth a symbolic solution about the real problem in reality and attracted more and more youths come to join the street dance crews. The very diversity of the public realm reinforces aspects of memory and socio-culture continuity which underpin public life. Even if the fights between the street dancers and the gangsters or the chatting between the street dancers and the homeless are organic fabric of adaption and interaction within this ideal public space.

As an intimate part of the capital accumulation process that was increasingly tied to global linkages in the investment and as a result of Hong Kong economy recession in 2003 after the SARS, the real estate around the Culture Center was reconstructed and renovated soon, turning the ideal public space into the artificial visitor attractions. The open area around the Cultural Center lost its traditional character and continuity, and become merely channels of capital, the dimension such as “open physicality” of this space and the “diverse practice” have been compromised. The ideal public space was turned into a landmark of tourism and consumerism, aiming to inscribe diverse daily activities of people into the frame of a “stage” for tourism and shopping. The ideal public space was transformed into a privatized space – the physicality was transformed from open to exclusive and highly structured; the practice was transformed from diversity to singularity; the free community of street dancers was dismissed on the social relation dimension; and finally the public as institution behind the open area was replaced by the LSCD and shopping malls or hotels around. The privatized space could not reproduce the leisure space with free entertainments, distracted solution, resistance and community identity.

Only “enchantment” experience of the tourists and consumers could be copied. Spontaneously, before street dance is incorporated by other spaces, the incorporation process of street dance has begun within this privatized space from commercial, ideological and hybridized forms as a prelude of the smashing incorporation of street dance in next chapter.

The resist on adult oriented urban space through street dance was announced as “failed” temporarily in 2004. Capability of the subculture to resignify space is doubted, especially in Hong Kong with dense capital.

Challenge on the space by the style was fragmentized, followed by the incorporation of the street dance. But what will be the street dance after the incorporation? What will be the space route of street dance later?

These are the questions will be answered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 STUDIO, YOUTH CENTER AND UNIVERSITY – SPATIAL INCORPORATION

On the contrary of the former and latter chapters which discussed the place making practice of urban space by street dancers, this chapter explores how the urban space reproduce or alienate street dance as the tool of the dominated capitalism institution as Lefebvre stated. It is analyzed under the incorporation theory of Hebdige – subculture will be finally incorporated by commercial force and ideology. However, what this research argues is that association culture is also an additional incorporation power. It is tried to prove that the regulated space plays as the mediation of the incorporation and all the incorporated powers work through the space. The analysis is illustrated from the survive and alienation experiences of street dance in three typical spaces – street dance studio, youth center and university Danso – which are classified by the subjectivity of the dancers – rich owner, mainstream good boy and performer. It aims at giving a complete picture of the space route of street dance in Hong Kong after the disappearance of the Cultural Center.

As mentioned in the last chapter, the demolition of the Marble Ground is the beginning of the incorporation of the street dance because it lost its “secret playground” and had to adapt to other spaces to sustain. As productive force, different spaces reproduce different powers, engulfing the subjectivity of street dance and street dancers completely. Street dance was put into the struggle between the subversive spirit and dominated incorporation at the very beginning, long before the street dance has grown into an independent subculture in Hong Kong because the interference of commercial and ideology power in Hong Kong was much earlier than other districts. And the subjectivity of street dancers is differed by the spaces as well.

However, it is doubted that without demolishing the Marble Ground, street dance should also have been incorporated. This doubt is evidenced by fact that no other “playground” with a certain scale appeared after the demolish of the Marble Ground – the subversive style of street dance in Hong Kong had been cleared and removed by dominated power so that they cannot sustain their independent space any more. This chapter will prove repeatedly the predict of Hebdige – subculture can always be effectively incorporated.

Studio, youth center and university dance association are the three notable kinds of spaces during the incorporation process. The incorporated forces are dominated respectively by commodity power, ideology force and association culture, but during the real incorporation process, different incorporated forces always get entangled to work together. So in this research, the three regulated spaces are characterized by the result of the incorporation process – the subjectivity of the street dancers – rich owner of the studio, mainstream good boy in the youth center and performer in the university dance association.

Studio – Rich Owner

The incorporation within studio is dominated by commodity force. After the Cultural Center was well known as a place of street dance, street dance was accepted and known by people in Hong Kong gradually. Later it was packaged as sports good for health and as sign of pop culture to sell to the potential customers. New network and infrastructure of commercial as well as economic institution were built to bring street dance into the capitalism fashion market. Studio, entertainment company and TV Station are the main spaces as well as tools to develop the complete production chain of the street dance industry.

When the Marble Ground was well known as a place for street dance in 2000, Billy, a Chinese dancer over 40 went to the Marble Ground every night. Without greeting with anyone, he just sat beside and watched the youth dancing. After watching for several months, Billy went to ask an outstanding breaking dancer Ray whether he want to get a job in a dance school. The “dance school” referred to BCDC (Billy Chan Dance Company), one of the most famous street dance studios in Hong Kong owned by Billy.

As a Chinese dancer, Billy chose to invest in a street dance studio because he found the huge market of this newly fashioned dance.

According to his working experience in the first dance studio in Hong Kong before, dance similar with hip hop was hit. Youth around him were all enthusiastic about the moves of street dance. Resigned from the Hong Kong dance company with a sum of money, he opened the BCDC for business in 1999, as one of the earliest street dance studio in Hong Kong.

After hearing the street dancers around the Cultural Center, Billy went there and invited them back as tutor. BCDC was officially categorized as a street dance studio from then on. As Billy said:

“I thought street dance would take up a large proportion of the

market in the future. I needed money to sustain the studio and street dance class at that time is what could attract most students even at the tuition as more than 100 HKD per class.”

Same with Ray, other street dancers at the Cultural Center such as Little Yin and Popping Lok got job at BCDC one after another.

In fact, BCDC is not the only one that recruited street dancers from the open area around the Cultural Center, a few street dance studios set about their businesses around the same time after BCDC, including some entertainment company which also supplied street dance classes. Around 2003, after the newly big street dance studios appeared, most of the experienced street dancers around the Cultural Center were tutors or freelancers of different studios. But they still would like to go back to the Cultural Center to dance. As Doug, who was tutor of 5678, a street dance studio at Kowloon, said:

“Even though we start to work outside, we still like to go back to the Cultural Center once per week at least to feel the ‘hot blood’. Teaching at the studio and battling at the Marble Ground were different.”

However, there is no denying that the appearance of street dance studio was based on the absorbing of the dancers around the Cultural Center. Being busy with stuffs of studios, dancers appeared around the Cultural Center less and less. When the Marble Ground was demolished in 2004,

most street dancers went to studio they worked to practice. The street dance space was replaced from Cultural Center to studio. We can say that the beginning of the street dance studio was the ending of the Cultural Center on some extent.

After developing of several years, street dance studio in Hong Kong has become a mature industry with sure-fire returns. As a result, from 2007, the number of street dance studio in Hong Kong kept increasing in an explosive speed. According to Billy, there are dozens of street dance studios on average in every territory now.

Space of Street Dance Studio

Physicality

A physicality of fancy environment is one of the biggest characteristics of the space of street dance studio, reflected from its location and indoor-decoration as well.

Office building is the commonest location for street dance studio. Many studios locate in office buildings near downtown such as Tsim Sha Tsui or Mong Kok even though the rent is extraordinary expensive because convenient location is important for attracting more students. In addition,

fancy environment of office building implies that the studio could supply qualified service with adequate capital. The rent of the 80 square meters room rented by BCDC at the Edward Prince is more than 50000 HKD per month. As a result of the expensive rent, space of most studios is limited, which still need to be divided into several mirror rooms to deal with intensive classes within the same period. As for the small mirror rooms, ten people are too crowded already.

On the other hand, the indoor-decoration within studio is totally different. The biggest difference is the huge mirror in front of the dancer, even four sides sometimes. Dancers said they cannot get used to it at first and feel strange to look at themselves in the mirror. The freedom of body has been lost when it is seen by the mind. Secondly, studio always costs a lot on its wood floor. It is smooth and soft, makes dance on it comfortable and safe. Furthermore, air conditioning is the necessity. Dancers will not be too sweaty when they dance even in summer.

With the “fancy” environment, studio is a highly exclusive and structured space in fact. Both the prosperous location and well-decorated indoor environment are signs of getting close to the bourgeois lifestyle, only people with certain economic capacity could enter and pay for it.

Practice

When street dance is packaged as a commodity, repetitive and singular practices are operated based on the standard schedule. Diverse practices such as battle disappeared within the space of street dance studio.

After the street dancers were absorbed into the studio, they changed to practice in the studios at night. Some studios such as the BCDC and the So Dance open for the dancers overnight. Both owners – Billy and Ching, one of the first hip hop dancers in Hong Kong are worried that the dancers have no place to dance and practice. Space of street dance in Hong Kong is replaced from the street to the studio, part of at least. After several field studies, it is found that what the street dancers do in studio is the same with the things they used to do around the Cultural Center. Their practice used to start from midnight – after all the classes of the day and their night snacks downstairs. The dancers always stay in the mirror room for a whole night. They chat, laugh, practice, freestyle, share, or even sleep on the floor until the next morning. They still “do nothing” in their “playground”, which has been replaced by studio instead of the real street. Dancers also treat this space as street with mirror and wood floor, even though most of them prefer the street with bad physical environment to

inspire more passion.

However, great difference could be found easily between the two spaces.

As Ching said:

“We used to ‘dance’ during battle, and only ‘practice’ now in the studio.”

Compared with their night life on the street, no battle will happen in the this exclusive space, because without a common platform such as the open space around the Cultural Center, street dancers are separated into different territories, different studios and different exclusive spaces.

Approximately, each studio is mainly “occupied” by a specific crew.

Members of the crew is tutor of the studio, they will leave to practice after regular classes and ask some friends to practice there together.

Gradually, the studio will become the base of the crew’s regular gathering.

Because of the small and closed space of studio, other crew will not intrude any more. For example, BCDC is only for the Since 70²⁹, So dance is for Asylum and Pirates³⁰, Studiodanz is the gathering place for the Rhythm Attack³¹ and so on. Most of them knew each other ten years ago at the Cultural Center during the battle and sharing with others. They

²⁹ A Funky style crew in Hong Kong

³⁰ A Hip Hop style crew in Hong Kong

³¹ A Breaking style crew in Hong Kong

keep dancing now, but all are kept in the studio labeled by their crews in different platforms. Without rivals in the exclusive space, battle is not the major for them anymore. Crewmates are the only one they could see and practice with.

Another character of the practice within studio is the conception of “time”. For street dancers at the Cultural Center or ones who practiced for the whole night at the studio, time doesn’t exit. They spend time with “doing nothing”. They do not care about the exact start time or how long the practice takes. Dance is relaxation and rest for them after their boring job. However, the situation is totally different with studio. Except for the overnight, studio is operated by intense schedules. Take summer schedule of BCDC as an example, from 12:00 noon to 10:30 pm, there are seven classes of one and half an hour each. No break between every two classes could be found. Students could not stay in the mirror room as soon as the finish of the class in order to give space to the next class. Every class will be started and finished strictly according to the time table – punctuality is the first principle of business – for not influencing the arrangements before or after the class of the students. This chronological space is like a standard factory to produce specific product in specific timeslot and the

linear time table could be never in trouble.

Ultimately, the practice is repetitive. As mentioned above, running of a studio relies on the same schedule week after week. However, the repetition is characterized mostly by the standard production of classes.

No matter what the style is, classes of studio would be taught in a standard and unified model – usually stretch, fitness and routine, and each for half of an hour. Furthermore, most street dance studios share the similar tutors, class model, tuition, interior design and schedule – the most profitable model of course. They are so homogeneous so that they could be exchanged, bought and sold, with the only difference is the location.

The dozen of studios are repetitious spaces scattering in different locations of Hong Kong. As Lefebvre (1991) said: “With repetitive gestures and duplicatable instruments, studio is repetitious space”.

Social Relation

The free and equal social relations in the Culture Center are replaced by the dualistic relations in studio – tutor and student, bargainer and customer.

Tutor and student is the basic relationship of studio. It is tutor that teaches

students how to dance. Tutor is the one with absolute initiative to decide what to teach and how to teach. Students could only learn that after paying. In some studios that promote tutors as stars, the relationship between tutor and students is what as a star and followers. Students are passively to receive the training and steps. Tutor has the right to judge what is right or wrong, what is good or bad.

You are a customer at the same time when you enter a studio to take street dance classes. Studio is registered as company instead of school – what is supplied here is commodity instead of education. Anyone could enter the mirror room to take the dance class after paying and the price is not cheap with 100 HKD for one class on average. Guys who could get dance classes in the dance studio are rich owners – at least middle class who could give a good price for some leisure activity. If you want to start your dance career in a studio, being rich is one of the preconditions.

Because of the pay, tutor is the creator and seller, students are the customers, who own the final initiative to decide could the class be opened and could the tutor be employed under the marketing driven principle of studios. As discussed above, it is tutor that needs to satisfy students to sustain the class.

In this hierarchical space, tutors own the initiative on technique, and students own the initiative on market. Rich guys, or middle classes mostly who could pay for the class and sustain the studio take the real control of the dance studio instead of street dancers who come from lower middle class.

Institution

Obviously, the private owner of the studio is the institution of studio, making all the rules of the studio. A studio often offers street dance classes every weekday from 2:00 pm to 10:30 pm, and whole day on weekend. The schedule is repeated in unit of week. Classes of different styles are stagger to satisfy diverse requirements. Classes of each style belong to specific or several tutors regularly. Adopting the ways of charging of gym, classes are offered for sale with “package”. Each package includes four, eight or twelve classes with specific price. The more classes it includes, the cheaper will be for the average price of single class. The “package” should be used in certain time period such as two months around. Generally speaking, the price of a package includes eight classes is 640 HKD³².

³² This is the price of BCDC, whose price is on the average level in Hong Kong.

Except for the earning from the street dance class, some studios mainly rely on other commercial job. Most studio would develop a crew consist of the tutors for cooperating with entertainment company to get job such as being the backup dancer or choreograph for pop star in concert, MV and TV program. Besides, without having popular tutor or enough commercial job, some small studio at the marginal district live on renting its mirror room.

Besides, entertainment company and TV stations play their role as institution behind studios too to construct a complete production chain. When the studio owners kept searching for street dancers as their tutors around the Cultural Center, headhunters from TV Station and entertaining company were there too. They were also hunting for right persons of professional dancers or even star. The “lucky guys” who were picked up by them are popular choreographers in the TV station and responsible for grant events. Few of them are even local star who has casted several albums now. Similar with street dance studio, TV Station and entertaining company are also main spaces that received street dancers expelled from the Cultural Center.

And they are also the major tool to transfer street dance into mass

produced commodity with high profits. Through these spaces, huge production link has been built up. At the end, street dance will be cleared as the one in the pop music MTV – simple movements according to repeat rhythm – signs of popular culture instead of subculture. They even play an important role in dazzling advertisements – to be a sales tool to get more capital back. In these spaces, street dance is a convenient stereotype to identify rapid turnover of fashion and novel trendiness. The original street dance style is stripped down and generalized. The symbolic elements lose their first integral relation to a specific life-context. Under these spaces “open to the mass”, style of street dance is re-constructed by other groups, whose activities, self-images and focal concerns are not precisely the same.

Incorporation of Street Dance Studio – Reproduction of Rich Owner

Incorporation

Every subculture has to be faced with the commoditization recuperation, such as mod and punk, both fed back directly into high fashion and mainstream fashion. The diffusion of new subculture styles is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging as mass production. The subversive power of subculture, as well as what was

intended to give meaning and direction are defused and engulfed in these processes. In his analysis of rock and roll, capitalism reduces rock and roll to the lowest common denominator and sell it to the largest audience (Lawrence, 1984). It is deduced that the intended meaning and direction of street dance will be also twisted after it is converted into consumer goods in studio. Movements of the hegemonic culture are the only thing studio space could reproduce.

During the incorporation process, being tutor in studio means making compromises in every way. Street dance community is the first need to be given up. According to Howard, after he entered an entertainment company in Fo Tan, he tried to persuade it to recruit other members of DSC to work here. It failed. As Howard explained:

“Studio or entertainment company could only supply job for the best one or two of a crew who could make most profit.”

After several members entered and worked at studio, DSC has been on show together rarer and rarer since it is too difficult to find time to practice together. They still had gathering sometimes, but it was eating instead of dancing. Entering studio is also a process of standing alone from the original street dancers' community.

Not only that, but they would not be allowed to dance outside at the street by the studio, especially studio lives on taking commercial job of entertainment industry such as pop music concert. Studio is trying to make the tutors as “star” who owns thousands of fans to attract more students to the class. Dancing on the street is not what a star should do. Instead, they would be shot modified salon photo in the studio.

Furthermore, street dancer could not only focus on his own style, especially for breaking, which is not the most popular style among studio. They need to learn other popular styles such as hip hop³³, house³⁴, or “new style” which will be explained in the following section. Hong Boy, a street dancer danced at the Cultural Center from 14 years old, enter a big street dance studio in 2003. As a breaking dancer, he needed to learn other styles. He has been one of the stockholders of another studio now after working for it more than ten years. As one of the most popular tutors, he teaches one breaking class and five hip hop or house classes now. Hong Boy is unwilling to mention the experience in the first studio, he said:

³³ Hip Hop here refers to a style of the old school street dance. It is a party dance comes from breaking, locking and popping, emphasizes body groove.

³⁴ Similar with hip hop, house is also an old school street dance originating from party dance.

“I could not adapt to the institutional life. Making money became the only meaning of life, which made me so unhappy. No regulated space was left for me and I had to obey plenty of institutions. I left right away when the contract expired.”

The wage is paid to the tutor according to the number of the classes they teach and the number of the students of every class, similar with the merit pay. Tutor could get bonus after the number of students achieves specific target one. The average wage for per class is 300 HKD.

More students, more payment is what to be promoted. Under this institution, tutor is motivated to attract more students. As Suki, a street dance tutor of more than five studios introduced, this is why tutor is nicer and nicer to the students – to build up stable followers and make sure of the number of students. This is so important after knowing that in several studios, class with less than five students will be canceled – tutor could get nothing from the cancelled class.

Standard Reproduction

As discussed above, in repetitious studio space, street dance classes are standardly produced with uniform model. Different styles are compressed into one and a half hour of similar stretch, fitness or even routine.

Foundation is not the emphasized point – it is too difficult for the new

faces. Since freshmen show up on every class irregular, the level of class could not be too difficult to be open to as many as new students.

Besides, tutors are given specific label for the convenience of the category of classes – the same function with commodity brand. Every street dancer will be labeled as one style even though he is good at several styles, as the result of the focus marketing – P&G will not claim to produce computer. The first question asked by studio is always “which style do you want to learn”. And specific of that style will be recommended right away after the student gives his answer. The pairing is quick and accurate.

A representative of this standard reproduction is the word blurted out by mot street dancers when they heard about studio – “New Style”.

What is “New Style”? This is a conception on contrary of the “old school” – original hip hop characterized by golden age before 80s, including breaking, funky style and party dance. Generally speaking, “new style” is a category of the new dance styles developed from traditional street dance. In this research, it refers to the “studio style” – a kind of simplified street dance focuses on pause, pose and speed control,

characterized by complex choreography and stage effect more than freestyle. It is taught in many studios under the name of “hip hop”, “lyrical hip hop” or “new style”.

A common phenomenon is that the proportion of “new style” taught in the studio kept rising for years. According to Little Yin, “new style” is almost likely to be the most popular class. As a result, most studios would like to give space to “new style” class on sacrifice of old school class, which has forced Little Yin to lose several studio jobs – he is an old school dancer who clears lines with “new style”. Same with Little Yin, a lot of street dancers do not like or even admit “new style”. They blame the problem and “disappearance” of street dance in Hong Kong onto it privately or publicly.

Actually, the appearance of “new style” is the inevitable result of the commercial logic rather than a real problem. Once street dance is taken over by the studio, the original meaning of street dance as a subculture is removed from the private contexts of street dancers. The subversive style will be cleared to make it easier to understand, which is the requirement of profitable merchandise. Street dance is sold through the “discount package” set by the studios. It is sold to the potential customers – white

collars who keep fit through street dance and university students who catch up with trend through street dance – current and future middle class.

Individual experience is not needed any more by the standardly produced street dance, which will be produced, advertised and packaged. The subject of street dance is not individual dancers any more but performers of a developed industry. This could be treated as the “cost of understanding” – the meaning attached to a subculture need to be distorted to be close to the mass standard when it finds its way in the mass audience out of its inner circle. As Hebdige said:

...As soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen’.

(Hebdige, 1979)

Compared with old school, the new style is something “codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise”. It could be concluded that the “new style” is the result of the clearing and simplification by commercial operation. A new set of conventions is constructed – it could be learnt quicker, its step could be more neatly, it works better with the visual expression of mass media, it

has more advantages on the popularity of star and pop songs.

Several interviewers pointed out that the “new style” is more flooding in Hong Kong compared with other districts such as Japan and Taiwan. The reason could be traced back to the history of street dance in Hong Kong.

As introduced in this chapter, the interference of studio and entertainment company on street dance dates from 2001, almost the same time with the formal appearance of street dance. The subversive meaning was cleared, removed and reconstructed quickly before it is built completely.

Summary

Actively absorbing street dancers from the open area around the Culture Center, street dance studio became the major regulated space for street dance to sustain after the disappearance of the Culture Center. With the booming increase, studio has become the biggest force of street dance in Hong Kong. All the dimensions of studio are greatly different – exclusive and highly structured physicality; singular and repetitive practice; dualistic social relations with student and tutor as well as bargainer and customer; and a complete production chain consisting of studio, entertainment company and TV station as the institution behind.

Within this commercial regulated space, the only thing could be reproduced is the standard commodity – street dance class sold in packages. It is not surprising about the appearance of the “new style” as a result of this standard production. The mass and standard production is also the incorporation process of street dance. As the claim about subculture made by Hebdige, each of them moves through a cycle of resistance and defusion under a larger culture and commercial matrices. “Stripped of its unwholesome connotations, the style becomes fit for public consumption”. Rich owners instead of the street dancers become the subject of street dance in this space.

Youth Center – Mainstream Good Boy

A significant character of subculture in Hong Kong is most of them get huge support from mainstream institution such as youth center, which has been the biggest continuing backer of “youth cultures” (they do not define them as “subculture”) – such as graffiti and alternative band – including street dance of course.

Youth center is not any official category. Instead it is the custom name of Non-Government Organization which committed to youth development,

sponsored by social charity capital. It registered and check in with the government regularly. In several exceptions, government plays as the sponsor of the youth center such as the Youth Square.

In this research, “youth center” refers to NGO which applies to youth development, mainly relying on social capital. The field studies and interviews are organized mainly at the Youth Outreach and the Warehouse – two biggest youth center characterized with street dance development. A small number of interviews are also from social workers of other youth center such as Tuen Mun Integrated Services Center.

Youth center in Hong Kong is a social institution appeared from 70s last century in Hong Kong to solve youth problems. One of its targets is attracting youths as many as possible. Before 2000 there are only several simple entertainments in youth center such as table tennis and jumping checkers. After 2000, with the street dance was more and more popular among youths, it was first brought into the Youth Outreach and the Warehouse. Then it was widely adopted by other youth centers as an important youth development project when it made in the first two youth centers.

Hence after street dance was expelled from the Cultural Center, youth center has also been an important space for the sustentation of street dance – just like street dance studio. During the last ten years, street dance has become one of the vital services of a great many youth centers.

What will be argued in this chapter is that youth center is also a vital incorporated power of street dance, with the commodity form as well as ideology form as Hebdige mentioned. Compared with other regulated spaces, the mainstream ideology plays the leading role in the incorporation process.

In history, all subcultures, including the mod, the punks and glitter rockers were all brought back into line with the ideology and mainstream culture. From what the street dance experiences within the youth center, street dance is incorporated same and ends with the simultaneous diffusion and defusion of the style. As a result, mainstream good boy is the subjectivity of the street dancers in youth center.

Space of Youth Center

Physicality

The close physicality of the Youth Center is a result of the safety concern.

Because of the dangerous imagination about the street, creating a safe space for street dancers is the first consideration of youth center.

According to Yee Wai, the social worker of Tuen Mun Integrated Service Center, most service center or community center cost quite a lot of money on the reconstruction of mirror room. Like street dance studio mentioned before, mirror room in youth center has huge complete mirror, efficient air conditioning and qualified wood floor which could protect dancer from getting hurt with special buffer devices. Other professional equipment such as rubber cushion could also be found there. In the Warehouse, they reconstruct other two offices into mirror room because of the limited space of the older one. The Youth Outreach even spares a whole basketball court for street dancers to practice street dance!

Moreover, it is night that youth center need to rescue youth from the dangerous street. With the sponsorship of Chow Tai Fook, the Youth Outreach extends the opening hours of its basketball court from nine hours to 24 hours and renames it as “twenty four hours activity center”. Except for playing basketball or dancing, the center also supplies other activities such as karaoke, computer online games or reading books. Two social workers are on duty during midnight to take care of the youth in

case of any emergency. After several field studies, it is found that most of the youths stay there during midnights are homeless ones. They are doing the same with what they used to do on the street – hanging out and doing nothing. But for them, it is hard to build some “community” within the space of the youth center. They only come here when they want a rest, few of them will dance. Guys who used to dance here are some groups of middle school students. They get to know here in their school activities held by the Youth Outreach and come almost every day after school and stay there up until 11:00 pm to go back home. In their opinions, the youth center is the only place for street dance – they have no experience with street on the contrary. In a word, the safe space constructed by youth center works most for youths belonging to the mainstream education system.

Similar with the “twenty four hours activity center”, other youth centers also extend their servicing time at night to attract more youths from street during midnight. For instance, Ellen in the Warehouse always delays the close hour of its mirror room from 10:00 pm to 12:00 am or even later. Ellen knows the boys will go to the bus station of Tsuen Wan to go on with dancing if the mirror room is closed too early. She said that she

might as well expand the close time of the Warehouse to preventing the boys from the harassment of dangerous guys on the street. She even eats with the boys after the close of the mirror room, going back after watching the boys go home.

To win over more youths from the street, the Youth Outreach even creates safe space actively on the street with its “Outbreak Truck.” It is a modified truck with lighting, computer, skateboard, music box, karaoke, and electricity generating facilities – all youth entertainment facilities you can imagine and the truck body is covered with eye-catching graffiti. It seems the safe space of the “twenty four hours activity center” is minified into the truck, which could move to everywhere of Hong Kong. The Outbreak Truck goes out once per week, mainly to somewhere far away from the Youth Outreach and marked with serious gangs problem such as Tseung Kwan and Tung Chung. One tutor and several social workers will go out with the truck to supply guidance and service for the youth there. As one of the social worker in responsible of the Outbreak Truck Tung said:

“Only three kinds of people you could find on street during the midnight – homeless youth, social worker and gangs. Gangs are very attractive for the youth. The Outbreak Truck is one of the

ways we figure out to attract more youths.”

Other than creating safe space within the youth center, it also tries to bringing and establishing safe space on the street – the source of their dangerous imagination. The safe space of the youth center is expanded.

In a word, the physicality created by the youth center is a closed indoor site with complete equipment. Even they make use of truck to create an independent space on the street, it is still closed because of the safety concern.

Social Relation

From the interviews, the social workers treat themselves as service staff as well as tutors of the street dancers. The target for their work is helping to create a safe environment for the street dancers and help them to build their confidence as well as life target. It is a dualistic relationship again and the subjectivity of street dancers is respected compared with the one within studio. However, faced with all of the compromises during the incorporation process, street dancers of youth center display hidden dissatisfaction during interviews, especially the Rhythm Attack (RA) – a top breaking crew grew up from the Youth Outreach.

As one of the best breaking crews in Hong Kong, the RA is a positive

example that has been promoted by the Youth Outreach for more than ten years – as “legends” developed and reproduced in youth center. Similar with other “legends”, it focuses on the change under the youth center space – the RA was brought from the street by the Youth Outreach and was changed into “good boy” from gangs. However, it seems that the dancers do not approve the discourses:

Fish Ball: “In short, we hate to be some ‘youth center sale example’ used by them [the Youth Outreach].”

Hong Boy: “It indeed supplies a comfortable space for us to dance, but that is the only favor they do us. We do not represent the Youth Outreach when we performance and participate in competition.”

Bicki: “I do not agree that we were changed by them. We have dream because of the education they gave to us? Bullshit!”

Lil Shing: “Actually during the time we dance at there, we also need to do cleaning and decorating work.”

The RA change their gathering and practice place to Poly University or the studio Hong Boy owns instead of the Youth Outreach, even though some of them are still tutors there. They are avoiding to be labeling as the “sale example” of youth center.

After hardworking of more than ten years, street dance reproduced under the space of youth center is still doubted about its professionalism – as an educational tool, the quality of technique would be ignored. Street

dancers are eager to set boundaries between youth center and themselves. As discussed before, subculture is where the “temporary solution” for grass roots youth to escape from problem of real world. However, in the youth center, a space with the mainstream order, youths still need to adapt themselves to the class – they are taught to be a “good stereotype” of a grass root youth to survive and realize upward mobility in a capitalism society. According to the introduction of Lawrence, the center director of the Youth Outreach, they encourage the street dancers to do labor service at first such as cleaning toilet and dumping to get the “right attitude and experience for their social survive”. The street dancers are also required to take English classes or classes of other basic skill to “get ready for the challenges of the society”.

The youth center attempts to push the street dancers back to face the “real problem and challenge” they would have avoided. But no perfect solution is given instead of adapting to the real world, which is exactly what the street dancer opposes. Street dancers think the youth center make use of them as a tool to realize its own value. They gradually build up strong hidden dissatisfaction and seek to escape of the space of youth center either. The dualistic social relations within the youth center are very

paradoxical.

Practice

Street dance need to adapt to the space of youth center if it is getting surviving in it. Like what happened under the space of street dance studio, after entering the youth center, compromises and clearing out of diverse practice are replayed on street dance. The practice is singularized to the healthy one.

Sustained and supported by mainstream capital, street dance practice is required to be accord to the mainstream value. It has to be cleared out to be mainstream educational tool. A good illustration is the Youth Outreach Disco. With the sponsorship of the Rotary Charity Funding, the disco was established to attract more street dancers. Even though the disco is opened to street dancers free, it closed soon in empty because nobody comes. It banned all “unhealthy practices” such as cigarette, wine, drug or even rough words – all practices to build up the “rough style” of street dance. As a subculture, street dance uses the dangerous practices to construct its style out of the dominant culture.

Registered at government, or even getting financial support from

government, youth center could not distribute the foundation freely.

Before every application of financial support, it needs to hand in proposal to related government department. According to Ellen, financial support is preferred to be distributed to event with a big number of participants.

Luei Mo, a street dancer who used to work in youth center, is worried about the quality of street dance event practice held by youth center, since what they are care about most have to be the attendance. To get more attendance, abundant “stunts” except for street dance are needed, such as invitation of famous international dancer and cooperation with middle schools. As introduced by Wai Yee, the events practice should be also “healthy” so that more parents could allow their children to participate.

Institution

The institutions behind the youth center include government, social institution and corporation, which could be read from the capital source of the youth center.

Generally speaking, only with abundant financial support could the diverse safe spaces mentioned be sustained. This is not a big issue for the youth center anyway since it is space with sufficient reproductive

resource when compared with other street dance related spaces. This is concluded by Dennis, one of the first generation street dancers in Hong Kong. He once took jobs in the Home Affairs Department and several youth centers and opened a public relationship company of his own, dealing with projects of street dance specifically.

According to Dennis, youth center is the one which could get social flowing capital easiest. Compared with street dance studio or individual dancers, youth center could get financial support from government department – mostly the Home Affairs Department, social charity funding – public charity funding or social enterprise, and commercial business communities as well.

Financial support on street dance development from the Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong Arts Development Council and Leisure and Cultural Services Department – the three main official departments in charge of art related funding – is mostly allocated by youth centers. As registered organization, youth center is trusted by government. Compared with individual artists, funding allocated to youth center is easy to track, declare and manage. With stable site and organization, youth center is affordable for consistent event, which is preferred by government.

Certain number of social workers is also upping the ante to support the street dance project held by youth center. In addition, under current institution of art project sponsorship, it is impossible to apply funding from government department directly by individual, and not easy for commercial institution such as street dance studio too.

According to the same reasons, youth center could raise most social capital from charity institution and social enterprise. Educational institution and non-government organizations are favorites of social capital to gain expanding influence and accordant image in social development. For example, the fifteen-floor office block of the Youth Outreach is donated by the Jockey Club Charity Fund of Hong Kong, and daily expenses of the Warehouse are burdened by the Wofoo Foundation Limited – the biggest social enterprise in Hong Kong.

Some scaled youth centers are even the targets of sponsorship from international institution or program – high-profiled NGOs are the first choice for international funding which is not familiar with local cases and processes. One of the prominent examples is the Outbreak Truck of the Youth Outreach is donated by the United Nations Children’s Fund with 50 million dollars.

Moreover, youth center is also the main candidate of sponsorship of commercial business communities because of its great influence.

Relatively speaking, youth center is a space with sufficient reproductive resource and powerful institution. It also supplies street dance classes like studio, but with a much cheaper charging standard. It could sustain big whole-day mirror room. It insists to fund the operation of the Outbreak Truck and so on.

With the abundant resources, street dance culture could be reproduced consistently in the youth center as an educational tool with many compromises.

In a word, all the institutions behind the youth center are mainstream agencies which play important role in the incorporation of street dance under the space of youth center.

Incorporation of Youth Center – Reproduction of Mainstream Good

Boy

The incorporation process of street dance under the youth center includes exotic imagination, labeling with failure and clearing away otherness, which construct the standard “mainstream good boy” as the subjectivity

of the street dancer in the youth center.

Dangerous Imagination of “Street”

“Street equals to dangerous” is the words repeated to me by different social workers. According to the introduction on its website, the purpose behind the construction of the Warehouse is “supplying a safe environment for Hong Kong youth who are addicted to alcohol and drugs more and more”. It could read the same intention in the introduction of the Youth Outreach in its pamphlet:

“...But the streets of Hong Kong are dangerous! The Triads³⁵, the pimps and the drug pushers are always on the lookout for new recruits and this ‘lost generation’ who are in desperate need of support and sense of belonging are a prime target.

...Sleeping during day and hanging out at night has become the preferred life-style for today’s youth. Youth Outreach offers them a safe place to gather and hang out with their friends with leisure activities which encourage positive values.”

It is obvious that youth center is defined as “safe”, “positive” and “healthy”. Precisely the opposite, street is characterized as “dangerous”, “negative” and “criminal”. Street is exposed to the control of mob. The primary focus of the social worker is “seizing” youth from the mob, rescue them from the dangerous space, and bring them back to safe youth

³⁵ Triad refers to the many branches of Chinese transnational organized crime organizations based in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and also other Asian countries.

center.

Youth dance on the street at night is also ones who are “in dangerous”. Ellen, the major social worker of the Warehouse keep telling stories of how the youth get into trouble with sinister cop, gigantic drunker or gangster who make trouble out of nothing when they dance on the street at night. Some youth centers such as the Youth Outreach even organizes “All Night Outreaching Team” to go out in vans from ten at night until six in the morning, scouring the streets for “runaways and throw-aways”, including guys who dance on the streets. Social workers would bring them back to the safe mirror room of the youth center.

Rhythm Attack (RA), one of the most famous Breaking crews in Hong Kong was brought to the Youth Outreach from street in Lam Tin ten years ago. They used to dance outside of the Lam Tin shopping mall after it closed at 10:00 pm, and danced there until next morning. They were accidentally found by the Deputy Director of the Youth Outreach David, who “hoped they could dance in a safer environment” as he said in an interview. He brought them to a new mirror room of the Youth Outreach in Kwun Tong. Gradually, the Rhythm Attack changed their gathering place from the Lam Tin shopping mall to the Youth Outreach. They even

became the tutors and staff there, and delegation of the youth center to Taiwan with their image as mainstream good boy.

Exotic Imagination of Street Dancer

Actually, subculture used to be represented by media as “folk devil” to trigger moral panic (Cohen, 1972). “Hunting for novelty” of media produces an exotic imagination of subculture as something full of “dangerous aliens and boisterous kids, wild animals and wayward pets” (Hebdige, 1979). The result is that subculture is treated as threaten of established institution. One of the extremely example is that the concert of the Sex Pistol – representative of punk music – was enforced to cancel because of the general moral panic. Councilors believed it intend to stir up anti-social actions (New Musical Express, 1977).

The exotic imagination is repeated onto the street dancers in Hong Kong, especially in space of youth center, since the “exotic imagination” is the basis of the institution.

Every youth center I visited would set a media material display corner. It is not hard to find that most reporting – either in newspaper or TV program – is themed with how the youth center changes or even rescues

“evil boys” with street dance.

The premise of the “change” is the “folk evil” image of the street dancers.

This could tell easily from the titles which I only have a glance at in the Youth Outreach – “Hip Hop School Changed Bad Image of Street Dance”;

“Rat Crossing the Street Become Dance Tutor”; “Street Dance Bring

‘Double Loss’³⁶ out of Dilemma”. Street dancers are described as

“double loss” or even “rat crossing the street”! In another TV news clip³⁷

supplied by the Warehouse, the interviewee said she hanged out with

gangsters less and took drug less after she danced at the youth center.

This interview was highlighted because it accords with the exotic

imagination – street dancers are gangsters or drug abuser. The “image” of

street dancer is presented to the audience with wholly negative

connotations.

It is this exotic imagination that gives the youth center right reason to

carry out their work – rescuing the youth and remolding them as good

boy by the definition of mainstream media.

Label as Failure of Educational System

³⁶ Double Loss Youth means youth unemployed and school dropout.

³⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTV78CWGFIQ>

Ling wrote in her paper “Social Work and Hip Hop”: Why has a culture which began life in the black urban ghettos of America become so popular in the Confucian cultures of Asia? However, it is created by unemployment and poverty in its cradle, but it has become a byproduct of failure in the education (Youth Outreach, 2011). It makes sense about the street dancers in Hong Kong. During interviews, when asked the reason of learning street dance, most street dancers gave the answer as “I do not like / am not good at study”. Except for the exotic imagination, label as “failure of education system” is what to characterized street dancers by society.

According to Ling, another primary target for the social worker is erasing this “failure label”. They attempt to rebuild confidence or meaningful goal for youth through street dance. The logic is similar with the observation of Cohen about the gang - working-class adolescents who underachieved at school joined gangs in their leisure time in order to develop alternative sources of self-esteem. The core values of the straight world are replaced by their opposites (Cohen, 1955). In another word, youth center helps street dancers to complete their self-esteem with alternative source – street dance. Accordingly, street dance is attached

with “function” as some “educational tool” – opposite with its original value.

The stereotype story elaborated repeatedly by youth center is the “Hong Kong dream” – some street dancer has been an owner of a dance studio after he kept pursuing his dream in street dance for more than ten years; or some street dancer has been the most famous Hong Kong dancer after he kept being hardworking in dance for more than ten years. Both are classic success stories describing the route from rags to riches.

Street dance or hip hop culture has been another “path to success” other than the education. Street dancers could get impression of energy and expansion. Limitless upward mobility has become something street dancer could expect for, even though the standard of “success” is the same: getting high social status and more money.

What matters here is not the street dance itself anymore, but the result it bring. Fat J still remembered the conflicts between him and other social workers when he was the tutor in the youth center. He would like to focus on the dance techniques of the students. On the contrary, what the social workers cared about is the interaction of the dance class – they hope

students could learn how to communicate and cooperate with others. As

Ellen said:

“The Warehouse is a youth center instead of an art school. Individual development is more important than dance technique for us.”

Social workers in youth center are avoiding labeling street dancers as “failure of education” and avoiding judging them with the mainstream education system. But on the other hand, they would organize street dancers in youth center for some courses in English and social working to get “increased value” with specific certification. However, they still attempt to be good boy and get success through the mainstream education system.

Clearing Away Otherness

Clearing away otherness is the most important step in constructing good boy. As Hebdige forecasted, subculture will be also recuperated among ideology redefinition. Forty years ago in America, all of the articles served to minimize the Otherness so stridently proclaimed in punk style (Hebdige, 1979). Forty years later in Hong Kong, as a space whose support funding comes from government, church, charity institution or other guards of the main value, youth center is doing the same to street

dance in Hong Kong. It minimize the Otherness of the street dance boys, try to wash away the label of “unprincipled person”, youth center serves to define the street dancers as good son, good student or good citizen, which are precisely those terms that it sought most vehemently to resist and deny.

For example, the subculture is tended to be resituated in the family.

Because subculture members are also treated as threaten of family under the exotic imagination context. In the “Dancers in Dark” – a documentary of the street dancers in the Youth Outreach shot by another charity institution, interview of Chacha – a member of the Rhythm Attack – is more than 10 minutes. His parents show up with him together within the 10 minutes at their crude “subdivided flat”³⁸. Chacha is explaining shyly to his old parents what is street dance and how he could live up on it by himself. The messages audience could decode from the interview are that the street dancer is from a grass root family; he has old parents; he tries his best to communicate with his parents; his parents are happy when talk with him and so on. Street dancer is not the sole without origin any more. He is resituated into family and traditional value system again.

³⁸ Subdivided flat is some special kind of rental housing present in Hong Kong. They are flats which are subdivided into two or more individual rooms on the original approved plan of building.

Even the media reporting discussed above, which described street dancers as “folk devil”, later parts of them are always the “positive transition” – they become ones who care about their students, friends and families under the help of youth center. All the reporting serve to minimize the otherness so stridently proclaimed in street dance. The street dancer is not ones who “obscure their origins, refuse the family and willingly played the part of folk devil” (Hebdige, 1979).

Summary

When a subculture is embedded into a mainstream space, it is not a subculture any more. Instead, it becomes an educational tool to reproduce mainstream good boy finally after the incorporation process. Under the space of youth center, street dance is neither an active agent nor a passive object. With support from large mainstream institutions such as government, social enterprise, charity foundation as well as business community, the youth center transfers and incorporates street dance into tool to “rescue” losers of the mainstream educational system into the standard “success” or stereotype “good boy”. However, the series of reinforced images of street dance under the youth center space are originally contradicted with the very presence of the street dance. Under

the imposed ideology and “fairy tale of few street dancer”, street dance is reduced to an educational tool as well as a short cut to success. Street dancers disappear within this process, there is only “mainstream good boy” instead.

University – Performer

Most universities in Hong Kong are free entrance. And plenty of open spaces could be found within them – they are administrative space belonging to the university with looser control – gathering of out-of-school teenagers with small number is also acceptable. Loose control is the result of the low utilization of some spaces within university – they are far away from the teaching building and dormitory, and they do not own any practical application during night and holiday. No special guard or administration would be arranged within these spaces.

After the demolishing of the Cultural Center, universities were taken as a possible choice for dance practice by the street dancers, especially the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Poly) and the City University of Hong Kong (City). Both of them are located at the downtown – the former is at Hung Hom and the latter is at Kowloon Tong – not far from

the Tsim Sha Tsui. Since around 2004, Poly replaced the Cultural Center to be the gathering place for street dancers at night.

However, the free gathering of street dancers within university was prohibited by the authority of university soon. Instead, it is the Dance Association (Danso) of university led the development of street dance within the space of university with mixture of commercial operation as studio, ideology education as youth center and fashion signal of association culture. As a regular institution in university and middle school, Danso is operated by students to advocate dance culture – mostly popular dance aims at performing under the name of street dance nowadays. The word “street dancer of university” refers to Danso members instead of the street dancers practice in the university every night – the number of the former is many times more than the latter. It is not hard to conclude that Danso is the domination of street dance under the university space. Street dance in educational institution also experiences the incorporation. Compared with other two, the incorporation within Danso is a new-style hybridized one – combination of commercial force, ideology and association culture.

Space of University

Physicality

The physicality of space in university is semi-open and semi-closed because of its attribution – administrative space of university with loose control. To be specific, what the street dancers find within the Poly is a stair landing far away from teaching buildings. It is surrounded by several dime stores in service of printing or taking photo in an old edifice. The stores close at 5:30 pm every afternoon, emptying the stair landing.

Around 2004, the stair landing is habitually occupied by street dancers every night. Dancers even chipped in to buy a fixed music box there for practice every night. According to Lil Yin and Double Eight, under introduction of other friends they come to Poly to practice directly after the Marble Ground was demolished. However, it is hard to figure out who was the first one to dance here. Most dancers said the same words during the interviews:

“Thanks for the Poly (City), they are the only place we could go after the demolition of the Marble Ground.”

On some extent, these administrative spaces of university are concerned as public space – it seems everyone could come here for practicing.

Compared with studio where entering is only allowed after paying or

youth center where service is only provided to youth. Also, it is an outdoor space with several passersby – mostly are students of the university. Stopping to watch or even joining them is welcomed by the street dancers, though few students do like this. The stair landing will not be occupied with a very dancer or crew and be excluded to others – it is so big that crews of different styles could take over different zones. Taken in this sense, the stair landing is an open space.

However, from opinion of the dancers, Poly or other universities are places for “practice” instead of “dance” – it is only circulation among “insiders”. Without a good deal of “outsiders” and onlookers, the atmosphere there is “warm” rather than “hot” – everyone is busy with practicing techniques, sharing with other dancers occasionally, but no one would come out to battle with and challenge others since showing off is not necessary without audience. Actually passerby could be found now and then, but they will never stop to have a look at these people who are obviously do not belong to the university and doing things they are not interested in. As Boo, a fresh dancer who comes to the Poly every night explained:

“Dancers are people who are eager for attention. Without the

interaction of audience, we prefer to practice hard by ourselves to get more attention next time when we go out to battle and have audiences.”

Additionally, the land building must be blocked after 11:00 pm according to the university policy, leaving no room for midnight battle which used to be the most exciting part to look forward to.

The free entrance did not last for long. After Poly and City were well known as a place of street dance practice, the university authority took action to forbid the entrance of street dancers from outside. Guards would wait there to check student ID card of every incomer. Soon the street dancers were driven away and Danso occupied these semi-open and semi-closed spaces. Consisting of university students, Danso owns the reasonableness of the space. On the contrary, outside street dancers are excluded.

Practice

The association discipline is the first norm of practice of university associations, including Danso. Actually, practice of Danso has been singularized seriously by the strict disciplines. It is clearly implied from the following CU Danso³⁹ discipline set for team training for current

³⁹ Danso of Chinese University of Hong Kong, in which I have been a member and cabinet council for one year.

team, which is the activity at the last place:

1. 100% attendance of the classes.
 2. Pass the casting.
 3. Join all the annual events of CU Danso including Mass Dance, IVDC and AP no matter what kind of dance style is required.
 4. Absence is only allowed with reasonable reasons such as attending wedding or funeral and serious sick. Reasons such as reviewing and part time job are not acceptable.
 5. If you will be absent, please call XX before 24 hours and give your reason. Absence is only allowed after getting her permission.
 6. Fine for lateness: start from \$30 and \$2 for every minute.
 7. Fine for absence without reason: \$300 once.
 8. Fine for absence with acceptable reason: \$100 once.
 9. Fine for phone ring during training: \$10 each.
 10. Drinking, eating and going to toilet is not allowed without the permission of tutor and team manager
-

It is difficult to imagine that this is only the rules of a small event of a student association – it is so detailed, harsh or even a little unreasonable!

But according to my observation, they are really executed strictly – on local students mostly since international members would leave Danso soon as the result of their impossible obligation. Personal relationship does not work at all during the punishment or I will not be fined for more than \$700 HKD during one year! Another story I heard about from Danso of other university is that a girl was scolded to cry by other members because he wear a render pant in wrong color – it should be

black instead of deep blue. However, this story is widely spread in a positive tone as the perfect exemplar of the “team spirit” of Danso.

Social Relation

Three kinds of social relations dominate this space – social network among the dance association members, association member and tutors like the dualistic social relation within studio, hierarchy relations among different generations of the association members like the dualistic social relation within youth center. Since the latter two have been described in details in the former sessions, the first one is what will be focused in this session.

According to many student dancers of the dance association, making friends and finding belongingness is the first intention for them to join the association. Frequent joint-U activities are to meet the entertaining and social intercourse requirement. Just take the joint u camp as an example. It is a summer camp that all the Danso cabinet councils from different universities will join. At the end of the first day, members of different Dansos will go around exchanging business cards – formal business cards with resume photo and Danso position in stylish design – I received more than 40 business cards in my first participation of the

camp. After the exchange of business cards, a formal or informal self-introduction will be made. Actually I cannot remember when the last social occasion I have experienced in Hong Kong was – thanks for the socialization tradition of Danso. After finish of the camp, cabinet council of different Dansos will gather regularly as the tradition.

As for other joint-U activities, half to one hour will be left specially for taking photo – dancers from different Dansos take photos together and tag each other on Facebook – they take hundreds of photos within the hour, with people they know or do not know.

It is from these social activities that the Danso members feel “belongingness” indeed. From their descriptions about Danso, making friends is another important intention other than learn to dance behind their joining of Danso. Performances or competitions, which are defined as dance activities, are also interpreted by the members as social activities, functioning as the same with cocktail party or banquet. What they are dancing is the social means. The better you dance, the more friends you will get.

Building team spirit and belongingness is indeed the gist underlined

most by Danso. Dansos treat themselves as “school team” as well as representative of the university. Being in advantage in front of other Dansos is what they should do, especially in joint-U activities. As the tradition of Danso in Hong Kong, interaction among different Dansos is frequently. Even the annual performance of its own, other Dansos will also be invited to perform as guest. Good team spirit in front of other Dansos further builds solidarity and a sense of shared identity among the Danso members. Comparison of different Dansos is popular among the members. And to be the best one is the target of every Danso. It is could be speculated that it is the will of winning over other Danso that is the biggest motivation behind their hardworking practice. Yes they are hardworking under the tough disciplines. Practicing for the whole night or for continuous 10 hours before the vast performances is not news. As students without good dance techniques, time is what they could invest to get exchange of neater movements. A dance piece for about 4 minutes will be practiced compulsively for more than one month every night, until late overnight often. However, these overnights are treated as good chances of building team spirit.

Institution

The institution behind this space is the authority of the university, who finally prohibited street dance within this space. However, the dance association of universities takes over street dance to be the institution soon.

From the very beginning, the security appeared now and then to stop the dance activity, but not very often. According to the security, he came to have a look only after getting order from higher authorities during some specific period such as exam week. The pressure from the security was not an impact on the street dancers gathering here as a whole. But the measures were tougher suddenly from last year. In September, a board reads “No Dancing Activities Here” was applied on the wall with the inscription of Facilities Management Office. From now on, dancing is prohibited officially. Additionally, other measures included confiscating the fixed music box and outage to prevent the use of music box.

Street dancers started to hunt for and transfer again to other spaces such as the City University, even though some insist to go to the Poly for practicing – with their own music box. It was surprised that few of them blame the measures of the university. Instead, they appreciated the good attitude of the security and understand the stand position of the university

– they understand that university is unnecessary to supply the dance space for them and is not real public space.

However, another institution within the university, the dance association leads the development of street dance as an association culture within the university soon. It contributes a lot to the institutionalization, disciplinization, commercialization and socialization of street dance later as the major institution.

Danso has sophisticated cabinet council consisting of President, External Vice President, Internal Vice President, Team Manager, Secretary, Finance Treasurer, and Marketing Treasurer. Members of each cabinet council are around 10 people, with specific position and responsibility for everyone. The term of service is one year and voting is held every year for the incoming cabinet council. Hierarchy is instituted among ex-cabinet council, current one and incoming one – obedience is advocated. Other than the cabinet council, current team will also be organized after the team training. Current team is responsible for performance instead of management business. However, cabinet and current team are mostly overlapped.

Moreover, a joint university (joint-U) cabinet council is formed by the External Vice President from Danso of every university with the same construction among the ten universities in Hong Kong. The joint-U cabinet council takes charge of Joint-U activities.

Incorporation of University Space – Reproduction of Performer

Danso is not oriented by single force. It is indicated that three forces are balanced within Danso, which result in the reproduction of performer as the subjectivity of Danso street dancer.

Commercial Force

Few Danso members who are going to perform soon are good at dancing from the very beginning, so they “hire” professional dancers – mostly tutors of street dance studio – to teach and train them. And the most important is to have the tutor choreograph for them for the great number of “compulsory” performances.

Danso focuses much more on performance instead of practice. Around 6 vast performances are waiting in the line within one year – having a new piece every two months. Since most members are freshmen in dancing, the choreographies are outsourced to the tutors at price of 10000 HKD

on average. Sometimes Danso would like to organize technique trainings, which are also outsourced to the tutors with 1000 HKD per class. All of them are paid by Danso members who take part in the performances and trainings.

As a whole, a huge industry chain and market have been constructed.

Professional dancers are engaged to provide products, while Danso members are the stable consumers. Street dancers introduced before such as Lil Yin, Faijai, Suki, and Yip are all popular Danso tutors. Fee from choreography for Danso has been the biggest income for them, which is abundant and stable.

In this market, competition could be found among tutors. In a general way, each university has its own constant tutor as a traditional, which related to its Danso culture closely, and it will be discussed in the following section. The income from Danso is so attractive to street dancers that some of them even complained that no Danso “hire” him.

However, even imported as an educational tool, street dance has become a commodity in Danso, just the same with street dance studio. The enriched school life is paid by students themselves.

Ideology Force

As a student association, Danso is established to enrich school life as a complement of the education. Related activities are arranged to create chances for students to learn communication and organization skills, which are the arguments when they apply sponsorship from university or other institutions.

Street dance is defined as “hobby” under university context – it is only “by-line” when compared with the majors – studying, internship and getting job. It is not any “solution” for the university students – as the winner of mainstream educational system, most of them are or will be middle upper class.

Street dance is regarded as “youth popular culture” instead of “subculture”. During interviews, many students take part in Danso because it is a “popular sign” or it is something one should try during young years. As Fajjai, a professional dancer from Danso and tutors of several Dansos currently, complained:

“Danso members pay much more attention on ‘popular signs’ such as dying hair, outlandish clothing and taking photos. They are only satisfied with imitating Korean MV stars. They do not care about street dance technique at all.”

From the point of university or other authority, exist of street dance association is a manifestation of culture diversity as far as it stay away from drink, drug or violence. Several platforms are supplied by the administration system for Danso under the intention of enrich healthy extracurricular activities. Danso will also be invited as performance guest on official events such as school anniversaries. Even government department or NGOs cooperate with schools to organize street dance performance and competitions. The discourse of street dance has been rewritten as a positive popular youth culture tied to the mainstream educational system.

Association Culture

But neither ideology force nor commercial force is the dominate one in this hybridized incorporation. The strongest alienation power of street dance within Danso is its association culture, which is a stereotype of local culture in Hong Kong. The influence of association culture has been outstanding when we made the analysis of space of university above, including the reasonableness of the physicality, the discipline-oriented singularization of the practice, the emphasizing of team spirit of the social relations, and the complete and complex cabinet

council of Danso of the institution. The blend of association culture makes the incorporation process of street dance within the university space different.

Street dance is first incorporated by the complex institution and arrangements of the cabinet council. During the one year term, cabinet council should be in charge of a series activities as the tradition – team training in June and July, joint-U camp in July, new recruitment in August, orientation camp in September, joint-U mass dance touring performance (Mass Dance) in October and November, count down performance in December, joint-U dance competition (IVDC) in February, annual performance (AP) in April and May. Yes, the schedule is so intensive that they have performance almost every month! The sets of institution and tradition are operated strictly and have been maintained for at least more than ten years. As a result, members of the cabinet council are too busy to deal with management business such as finding sponsorship and contacting with tutors, they complained that they do not have time to dance. On the other hand, other members of Danso are too busy with rehearsing of continuous performances and most of them are ordinary students who have never danced before! They

complained that they are too busy with remembering steps to dance

really. As Suki said:

“The number of performances each year for a Danso even overtakes a professional crew! But they are not dancer, instead they are students with no foundation. When I choreograph for them, I will not feed them with difficult steps and techniques. They cannot make it. I only expect that they could do the steps neat together, that is all.”

Under the institution with too many performances and too little practice and training, students could only have simple choreographies and the quality could not be promised. This is why most professional dancers do not admit the street dance in university. Street dance is incorporated as a convenient and simplified signal.

On the other hand, even the consumerism discussed above is connecting to association culture of Hong Kong closely. Local students have been accustomed to give out money after being cabinet council to sustain the association's operation. The pay expenses of a cabinet council is huge – they would have professional design of banners, posters and booklets; they would have professional resume photo; they would have hundreds of fancy souvenirs as a propagandize means; they would order several sets of uniforms for the council member and current team and so forth. It

is not difficult to find that “packaging” of the professionalism is the primary responsibility of the cabinet council, who cares about exterior details. The expense of Danso cabinet council is nothing when compared with others – it is said director of cabinet council of a hall association would pay 10000 HKD on average just only for an o-camp.

Besides, performance is money-consuming too – not only because of the choreography, but also on account of the extravagant stage props and costumes. The creative usage of props and costumes is fashionable among Dansos. It could help to produce a fantasy stage effect. However, the stage effect is not cheap at all – the most expensive prop during IVDC is 30000HKD. It is a huge one-off mobile brick wall. And finally this Danso got the champion as well as the Best Stage Effect Prize.

Expense on props of tens of thousands of dollars is common in Danso, and the fee is paid by the dancers and cabinet council of course. Besides, costume is another way of spending money. High requirement is set about the details of costumes even including unified shoes. Quick change is popular which leads to several sets of costumes within one dance piece. And the costume will not be reused as usual. According to my experience in CU Danso, the average expense of costume for one

dance piece is 500 HKD one person. As a result, the logic of Danso is “you would better pay for it if you want to take part in the performance of Danso” – a lot of dancers around me take several part time jobs to support their expenses in Danso – on choreography, on props and on costume. Many street dancers have complained about this commercialization trend of Danso. Lil Four, a famous Taiwan dancer who have been in Hong Kong for eight years even express he is too disappointed to teach Danso again openly:

“Danso members used to emphasize the superficial details too much! Much more than what they do on dance techniques! I do not think their performance as dance. It should be called drama or whatever!”

Except for the market constructed between the tutors and Dansos, several other markets are also built maturely – packaging of cabinet council, props and costumes. All of them are supported by money from students themselves. In a word, the “enriching of school life” is not cheap at all. Street dance is incorporated as expensive, superficial and fashionable signal by the association culture.

But then again, reasons behind the divergence between original street dance and that of Danso could not only explained by hybridized

incorporation or even association culture. The imported street dance culture is identifiable through a network of local student associations where performances are regularly held. Therefore this hybridized incorporation process of street dance under the university space is the representative and essential experience of localization of street dance. Moving outward in the specific Danso space, it is clear that the street dance culture in Danso is actually very much linked to broader local networks. Actually, the association culture in university is an exemplar of Hong Kong local culture – focusing on speed, visible form and regulation. Local culture plays the essential role in the alienation of street dance in university Danso. Subculture study was predicated on the ecological understanding of the urban context as well as local culture.

After street dance was imported into Hong Kong as resistance of capitalistic discourse, it is re-channeled by local governmentality, “fast-food culture” and work-and-spend culture (Ma, 2002), as a component of the incorporation process – it is incorporated by ideology and commercial force, as well as association culture and Hong Kong local culture. Both Chicago School and Birmingham School emphasized the meaning of localization of subculture. The localization is constantly

permeated as long as the street dance was imported to Hong Kong.

However, university Danso is the perfect space of the localization with Hong Kong mainstream value and culture. It does not suffer from the economic pressure as street dance studio does, neither it undertake the ideology cultivation responsibility as youth center does. Simultaneously, the subject of Danso is university students, who are the “delicate” mainstream group and have been cultivated by the mainstream local culture. The local savoir-faire such as work-and-spend culture, “fast food” culture and high conformity with regulations are well acquired by the university students, who are trying to find their way out in the mainstream class system. As for the first generation street dancers, most of them are marginal youth who belonging to middle lower class, they share much more limited local mainstream culture and value when compared with the university students anyway.

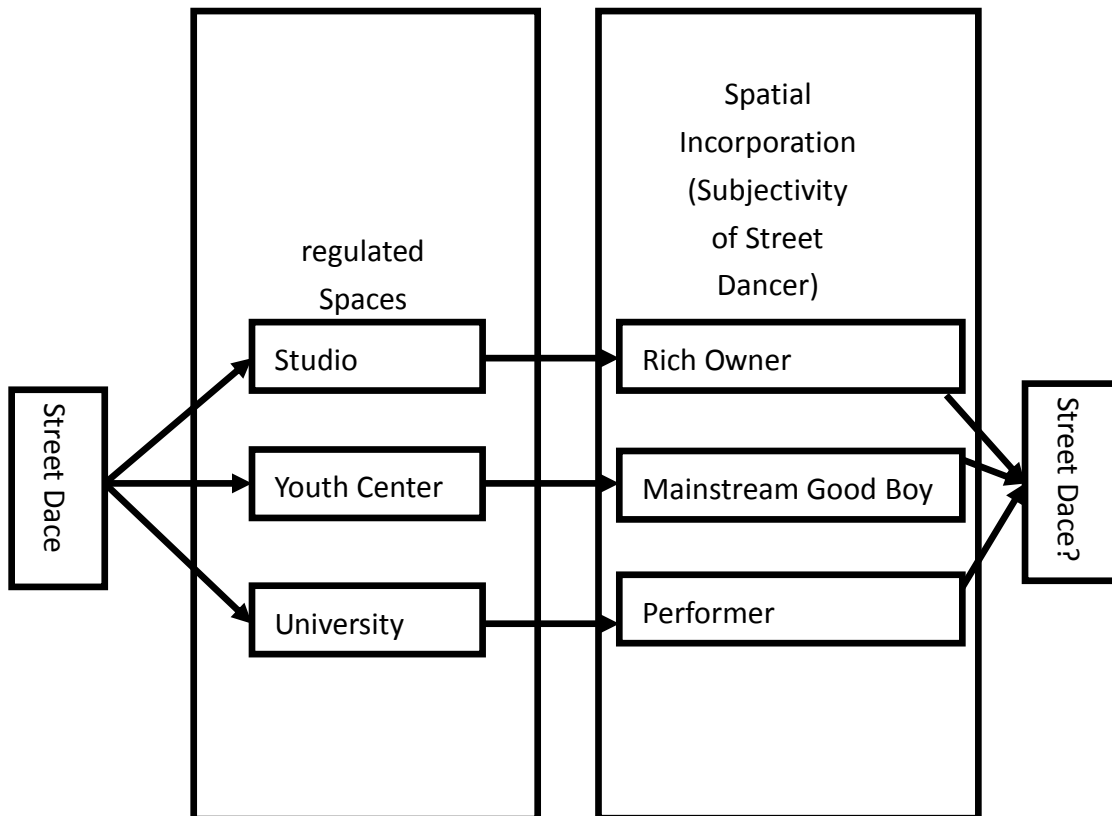
Summary

The administrative space of university with looser control was once pursued by street dancers from the Culture Center as a solution of the lack of ideal public space for street dance in Hong Kong. It is failed since the space is constructed by the association culture with the exclusiveness of

the physicality, the discipline-oriented singularization of the practice, the emphasizing of team spirit of the social relations, and the complete and complex cabinet council of Danso of the institution. Under this space, when street dancers attempt to copy the spatiality of the Culture Center, they finally failed since street dance under this space has been incorporated by ideology force, commercial force and association culture as a hybridized combination and is compressed into Danso as the reflection. The role played by university Danso is a commercial product, an educational tool, as well as a carrier of the association culture as institutionalization, disciplinalization, commercialization and socialization. All of these above aim at developing mature performance instead of pure street dance – street dance is one of the performance form instead of leisure activity. Moreover, the alienation experienced by street dance in university Danso is the essential evidence of the localization of street dance in Hong Kong. It is under the university Danso space that is the most characteristic localization of street dance in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is as following if it is presented in graphics.



After disappearance of the “ideal public space” Culture Center, when it hunts for space to survive, street dance, as well as its subjectivity are alienated within diverted spaces during its incorporation process. As same as the prediction of Hebdige, being a subculture, street dance was incorporated by commodity force, ideology force in street dance studio and youth center. The difference with the prediction is that street dance was incorporated by mainstream local association culture too in university Danso as a typical localization process. Original street dancers are also remolded into rich owner, mainstream good boy and performer within these spaces – the original subjectivity of street dancer is also challenged

within these spaces.

From street dance studio, youth center to university, it seems that street dance has lost its right to the city. Originated from the disappearing public space, it has to struggle to survive in private commercial space and governmental administrative space, which are too difficult to be occupied with their powerful spatial structure and social order. The alienation of subculture subjectivity is the side-effect of the privatization and militarization of urban space of Hong Kong.

As the means and mediation, the productive force of space is noticeable – the inward commercial force, ideology and association culture in the space are reproduced in the alienated street dance in the specific spaces.

Even though the resistance and subversion of the street dance are not denied totally, the social structure and social order within the spaces is too strong. It is nearly impossible for street dance to construct an independent space of “styled” code and rituals. From the discussion in this chapter, it could be concluded that the space is the reproductive force of the “hegemony” as well as the capitalism institution.

On the other hand, the discussion in this chapter provides another possible

definition of “subculture” – are these diverse incorporated “street dances” still subculture? If it is admitted that the incorporation processes are also essential localization experience, as a representative mixture of foreign culture and local context, should be this result of hybridized incorporation entitled as “subculture”? New cultural structures emerge out of interactional contexts. Street dance is invested with significant meanings and place-based identities in different social spaces – street dance studio, youth center and university Danso. Keeping the possible neo definition in mind helps us identify our preferences and biases in subculture research, and thus help to build upon other studies to construct a dynamic and comprehensive understanding of subcultures today.

CHAPTRE 6 BACK TO STREET – SPATIAL RECONSTRUCTION BY STREET DANCE

The former two chapters have examined the first and third research questions. The aim of this chapter is to examine the fourth research question: How does street dance strive for and subvert the urban space in Hong Kong? How is street dance reproduced by Hong Kong urban space? The resistance and style of street dance will be explored in details through their spontaneous “back to street” activities. The spatial reconstruction capability of street dance is ready to play its role through its resistant style. “Ideal public space” is actively created by the street dancers temporarily from the privatized spaces.

From its appearance, street dance keeps losing access, control and representation *in* and *over* space. Spaces used to be occupied by street dancers are taken away or dominated by commodity capital and ideology to drive away street dance or incorporate it. During this process, street dance has to give up the previous space and occupy new one to survive, which forms a “spatial route” as the Culture Center – studio – youth center – university. In any case as a subculture, street dance has never broken out of the “incorporation” prediction by Hebdige (1979). From the previous chapters, it could be concluded that the street dance even have become ordered in line with orthodox ideas about ideology and commercial culture. Street dancers are not “total man” but “transformed body” instead (Lefebvre, 1991). It seems they are weak agency dominated over by the strong power in the space.

However, in this chapter, a possible “strong agency” is come up with. The bodily, individualist subversion of space will be discussed through the collective action of street dancers. It is explored that how the street dancers attempt to reconstruct space within and beyond conventional ordering mechanisms through dancing. In another word, the space route of street dance determined by the incorporation of ideology and

commercial force in Hong Kong could be conversed by the “tactic” of street dancers.

Back to Street – Dog Movement and Street War

Ways of spatial opposition take place through staged encounters, explicit maneuvers and pitched battles, sometimes little incursions in official territory and small acts of resistance are also needed (Harvey, 2012). The struggle to recognized spatial base is realized by street dancers through two ways – participate in social movement and create gathering or “quick flashing” in specific spaces, which are presented by Dog Movement and the Street War respectively.

Dog Movement – Social Movement Participation

Dog Movement is a Facebook group built by Neoi Mo⁴⁰ in 2012, consisting of hip hop lovers, mainly aiming at organizing hip hop activities regularly. Without registration and fixed venue, it is only a loose underground community without institution. During the last year from its foundation, Dog Movement has participated in several social movements,

⁴⁰ “Neoi” means “female” in Cantonese. It is strange to call a female “Neoi” on purpose – to emphasize the gender, maybe because Neoi Mo has many male characteristics and has been confused about her own gender for a while. The acceptance of female identity happened after she engaged into dancing.

acting like the fellows of the subgroups to appeal for specific rights. The biggest one they have ever taken is the Hong Kong July 1 March⁴¹, as an opportunity for them to struggle for “leisure space” for street dance in of Hong Kong.

As the largest arts and cultural project in Hong Kong to date, the WKCD⁴² has no street dance related project. However, the WKCD is public space in the eyes of the Dog Movement members, since it is “open spaces full of strangers” (Jacobs, 1961), which could be a perfect location for the performance and practice of street dance.

⁴¹ The Hong Kong 1 July March is an annual protest since the 1997 handover on the HKSAR establishment day. Attracting 500,000 marchers, the march in 2003 was the largest protest seen in Hong Kong except for the 1989 pro-democracy protest. Since then, the 1 July march is held every year as a channel to demand democracy, universal suffrage, protection of freedom of speech, and a variety of other political concerns. Dog Movement organized the participation in the Hong Kong 1 July last year to strive for street dance space in the WKCD plan.

⁴² WKCD is the abbreviation of the West Kowloon Cultural District. According to the authority’s website, WKCD is a proposed and developing project to boost cultural and entertainment establishments at Hong Kong. The district will feature a new museum of visual culture, numerous theaters, concert halls and other performance venues under the management of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, which is directly financed by the government with an upfront endowment of HK\$ 21.6 billion for construction and operation. For more details, please refer to http://www.wkcdauthority.hk/en/what_s_new/index.html.



The poster of Dog Movement in the 1 July March. It reads: If Cantonese opera Ajie⁴³ could have two centers, we should have at least 200 places to dance! Can't stop, won't stop, this is real Hip Hop!

After witnessing the WKCD adding two Cantonese Opera Centers because of the request towards the government by Cantonese Opera groups, Neoi Mo planned to take actions, aiming at striving for space for street dance in the WKCD.

Neoi Mo called on the Facebook group. More than twenty street dancers responded to take part in the March right away. Simultaneously, to rally

⁴³ Ajie: Nickname of Wang Ming Chuen, a famous Cantonese opera artist.

more support, Neoi Mo made visits to studios and some famous street dance tutors one by one, persuading representatives from studio to march together with the Dog Movement. It let her down that scarcely any studio showed support and response to it. Finally about 20 street dancers' names appeared on the Dog Movement March list on the eve of 1 July.

The official route for the 1 July March is from the Victoria Park to the Central Government Office. Setting out at the 3:00 pm, it used to take about four hours to complete the whole march. Because of the crowded people and road traffic control, the parade moved slowly, with plenty of stops over half an hour. The 20 Dog Movement members started off from the Victoria Park together with the parade, bringing a piece of plastic carpet and a music box with them. Every time there was a stop, they would unfold the carpet to cypher. It is common for them to lose track of time and cypher for one or two hours at every stop. Gradually, most of the parade passed them and moved on, leaving them at the end of the parade, cyphering in the loud hip hop music. Imagine the dramatic scene that a group of teenagers who were dancing in the parade were surrounded and passed by serious people who were chanting slogans!

Around 6:00 pm, the parade had arrived at the Central Government

Office, while the Dog Movement members were lost on the way. Two hours later, when they eventually got to the square in front of the government office, the parade had dismissed, with only trashes littering the ground. At last the twenty youths put the slogans aside, started to cypher again in front of the government office under the lead of Neoi Mo, and sang “Boundless Ocean Vast Skies”⁴⁴ together.

During the march, this group of street dancers also did “regular” protesting such as holding banners and chanting slogans - “Street Power Rocks”, “Please support Hong Kong Hip Hop” and so on, but they took most time in dancing and cypher. This was criticized by other people in the parade. They made a clarification at the Facebook afterwards: “No matter how the others misunderstood us as fool, dumb or trashy, we are sure that we have expressed the appeal of Hip Hop through the body and music!”

However, small as 20, the number of marching Dog Movement members could not catch media exposure, no Dog Movement or street dance related content could be found among the 1 July March news reports.

After that, no further action was taken on the WKCD issue by the Dog

⁴⁴ “Boundless Ocean Vast Skies” is a famous song by a Hong Kong rock band Beyond. This song has been used in many politic social movements as a metaphor to pursue freedom and democracy.

Movement.

The Street War⁴⁵ - Converse Space Route

Ray is a senior b-boy started dancing at the Culture Center. As the first generation of breaking dance in Hong Kong, Ray has danced for more than ten years. People nowadays call him “Master” within the street dance circle. After frustrated in the effort of sustaining SR crew, Ray came up with a new idea as the “Street War” “to rekindle the street spirit of Hong Kong B-boys”.

The so-called “Street War” is a form of flashmob⁴⁶: a group of street dancers assemble suddenly in some busy commercial districts with music box and plastic carpet, circle or battle for three to four hours, and then quickly disperse. However, the purpose of the “Street War” is not only entertainment and artistic expression. According to Ray, the Street War aims at “supplying a platform for b-boys from different territories to battle on the street, to feel the original fire of street dance.”

Through similar way of flash mob, the Street War aims at striving for the

⁴⁵ The name of “Street War” in Chinese is Jietou Shili 街頭勢力. It should have been translated into English as “Street Power” or “Street Force”, but Ray insists to use “Street War” instead since he thought “we need battle and fight spirit”.

⁴⁶ According to the Oxford Dictionary, Flashmob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public space, perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time, then quickly disperse, often for the purposes of entertainment and artistic expression.

use of public space as a platform for street dancers to practice, battle, share and communication. Dreaming of “replaying the situation of golden age in the Culture Center”, the Street War started off to converse the space route of street dance in Hong Kong. Moving from Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Mong Kok, Lan Kwai Fong, Warehouse, the Street War arrive at the Marble Ground in front of the Culture Center finally.

Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan

At first, the Street War chose to go to remote places such as Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan, some unnoticeable open spaces at the back of the Public House Project. Neither police nor private security comes to interfere them there.

Sometimes they need to share space with the night market owners who set tables on the pedestrian at night, or Filipino maids who used to gather in open spaces nearby. But this is not big issue at all, because it is very easy for street dancers to deal with these “lower middle class”. As Neoi Mo said:

“On seeing us, they give enough space to us by themselves every time. They said that they would like to watch us. We appreciate that and respect each other.”

Except for street light, no other lighting could be found at these “remote

places”, which is good for Neoi Mo:

“I prefer to dance in this dim light. It means I need not to rely on the light from shopping mall, advertisements or stores besides the street.”

They will bring light by themselves when there is not enough street lights.

However, limited numbers of audience would appear in these “remote places”, the onlookers of night market owners and Filipino maids are not enough for “showing off”. To acquire a larger number audiences, occupying the downtown is what the Mod Flash will do.

Mong Kok

During specific hours, street performance is legal on the Mong Kok pedestrian after applying according to the Transportation Department.

The Street War set their first step there as a kickoff of the occupying and place making of the downtown district – within a legal framework, even though they never applied.

As one of the most crowded districts within this especially crowded city, Mong Kok is a perfect place for the Street War that targets at attracting audiences as many as they could. Streams of people there are mainly

embodied by tourists from the mainland, who are going to fulfill the lengthy shopping lists in their hands. The Street War and the sweated b-boys are unique scenes for them to catch with cameras.

Still, Mong Kok is a place highly difficult to occupy. Other street performers and company promoters are strong competitors. The Street War has to engage the area with a big plastic carpet at 5:00 pm on Friday even though the battle will only begin two hours later. The competitors are likely to share the occupied space forcibly during the Street War and the Street War is constantly the winner as the one owns advantage on number of people and “manhood” manner.

Frequent check of police is another obstruction for the Street War, on account of the continual complaints from the residents upstairs of Mong Kok. Nonetheless, what the police do is merely checking the ID cards and leaving, as an account for the residents. This gives Ray sufficient confidence to keep on with the occupying of the downtown district with the street dance.

Instead, the biggest problem for them is the time management of the Mong Kok pedestrian. All street performances are only allowed before

10:00 pm, when most B-boys are just go out for dancing practice!

Lan Kwai Fong

To extend the available time, Lan Kwai Fong is the next target of the Street War. It is most famous for night-life and festive atmosphere. Street here does not only function as a link for circulation, but also as a festive place for people's activities such as chat, drink and flirt. During the week, the bars and restaurants continue business until 2:00 a.m., while on Fridays, Saturdays, and some holidays, business goes on until 5:00 or 7:00 a.m. All above are favorable conditions for the Street War to take the occupying action here.

Overall, characterized with fine cuisine, dining elegance, expensive suits and ties, foreign language signboards, arrogant gwaitou, alcohol and drunkards, Lan Kwai Fong is a typical middle class space which used to marginalize the street dancers in the everyday life. It is a stereotype of artificial environment for entertainment and consumption even though it claims to be open to the public (Eu, 1992).

Anyway, this is exactly the reason for the Street War to go to Lan Kwai Fong. They intend to take seizing control of the space "used to belong to

them”. As Neoi Mo said:

“On history, club is the birthland of hip hop, and close relationship could be found between them. However, the situation is totally reversed in Hong Kong. We should enter the space of middle class to promote hip hop – to get the close relationship back.”

The carpet of the Street War was put at the street corner of Lan Kwai

Fong at 10:00 pm of Friday night, surrounded by Folli Folli, Rolex, GAP,

Tudor and Chow Tai Fook. Street dancers danced in this small area, with

the opposite way of wrigglers in bars behind them. Their moving

shadows were reflected on the vitrines, melted in the light from it. They

were drunk without alcohol; they were attention-getting without luxuriant

costume.

The highlight of the story in Lan Kwai Fong is that all the police and

security there thought they are registered activity held by some authority

institutions such as the District Council, because they bring a lot of

professional equipment and came here regularly. Later the Street War had

learnt to pretend to be some formal organizations to get the invisible right

of the space without any registration or application. Even the owner of

the store beside would give the entrance space to the crowded circle after

close of the store. It is often for the Street War to carry through until 5:00

am of the next day.

Warehouse Youth Center

It is surprise that the Street War would break into youth center. The former is eager to lead the youth to rush into and occupy the street, the latter commits it to bring the youth back from the street with great care; the former treats the street as the most joyful amusement park, the latter deal with the street as the most dangerous corner. Actually the idea was come up with by Ellen from the Warehouse Youth Center. Faced with the competition of other youth centers, the Warehouse was on a decline within recent two years. Holding more street dance activities was the solution to attract the youth back for Ellen. As an old friend of Ellen, Ray was invited to conduct the Street War in the Warehouse for once.

On some extent, the youth center was space the Street War was about to occupy as well. For Ray, the youth center is only an “expedient”:

“At present, street that we could dance on is barely to find in Hong Kong. To attract more youth, the youth centers supply classes and mirror rooms for youth to practice in lower price. They create a street dance space for the lower middle class youth who could not afford the expensive tuition fee of studio and Danso in university. It is the only choice for them before the ‘renaissance’ of the street. But finally it will be replaced by real street.”

The Street War in the Warehouse Youth Center is different with ones in other spaces. They could share the stable and well-equipped space here, without taking risk of being checked or arrested by the police. Someone brought a projector to cast street dance videos from Youtube onto the wall. Street dancers danced on the background of the subtle leaping screenshots. Combined with the graffiti carpet and rap music with strong beats, the space within the old red brick house was converted to a cool psychedelic one for the exciting youth, even though not many audiences appeared here.

After that afternoon, two boys who used to dance in the Warehouse joined the Street War and become the core staff later.

Tsim Sha Tsui – Culture Center

The destination of this converted space route of the Street War is the Culture Center at Tsim Sha Tsui, the origin place of street dance in Hong Kong ten years ago. After the Street War had been held for several times in other places, Ray thought it was time for the Culture Center and the Marble Ground. Most of the boys that went to the Culture Center with Ray are new generations that had never danced at the open space of the Culture Center, which was only a legend for them. Ray believed that is

was important to bring the young back there:

“Even if the Marble Ground is not there anymore, the ‘feeling’ is still there. Street dancers must find resonance with the sense of history there!”

As mentioned before, the Culture Center now is within the scope of the “Avenue of Stars”, which is one of the most popular places of tourism in Hong Kong. The control and management there is strict. Any annoying activity would be forbidden right away. To occupy the Marble Ground successfully, Ray prepared a considerate “tactic” – more than thirty of them appear at the Marble Ground in a sudden with some “wild manner”. Ray had found that the individual police or security dares not to embarrass a band of people in a large number. It is a “invisible fighting of savage”.

This “tactic” indeed worked on that day, on the converted marble ground that was truly rough, with the ear-splitting hip hop music, street dancers danced for more than three hours in the hottest place of tourism! The security hanged around them but did not approach.



This is a photo taken on that day. It is a street dancer at the front, dancing on the marble ground ten years ago, wearing a T-shirt with graffiti words “inside the circle”. The background is the celebrated view of Victoria Harbor, with colorful neon as a scenic spot. At the center of the photo, there are several children who passed by by accident. They were entranced by the dancing, a boy even stood on his tiptoes to take a photo. It may not be sure that the children would dance in the future, but for them, the Culture Center is not only an ordinary place on the way back home anymore. Instead, it is also a space for cypher, circle and battle.

However, the cost Ray and the Street War need to pay was that many

critical measures were taken by the security from that day on. The security will come to prevent them even before the music box is put onto the ground and they could tell the members of the Street War. This is the first time the Street War dance on the Marble Ground, but maybe the only one at the same time.

The Street War went to the Tsim Sha Tsui for several times after that, but not the Marble Ground, instead, they went to a deserted open space in front of the Star Ferry. The few one that could come to share space is Fa Lun⁴⁷ promoters and heaps of bird shits.

Tactics of Spatial Reconstruction

The privatization of the public space is not irreversible. The street dancers, who are imagined as suspect, marginal, criminal and dysfunctional and are the main target to drive away from an orderly public space, come back into the street again at some very time-space, break through the rule of access to public space determined by public policing, private security, social aversion and codes of consumption. The street dancers achieved this by the use of “tactic” (de Certeau, 1984), a conception that is relative

⁴⁷ Falun Gong is a spiritual discipline first introduced in China in 1992. It was defined as heresy by the Party in the mid of 1990s. Its supporters flee to Hong Kong to carry on with its promotion for ages, gathering in the Tsim Sha Tsui mainly.

to “strategy”.

Generally speaking, “strategy” belongs to the “powerful” ones such as a business, army or a scientific institution to postulate a space that can be claimed as their own and all of the power relations could be managed. As for the “powerless” ones, including subculture groups, they use “tactic”. Tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus, used in the space of other in the guerrilla way. Through seeking the random empty foreign power to postulates its own space, which could be called as “tactic of the weak” (de Certeau, 1984). The “tactic” is a workable way for subculture groups to strive for space. For example, in the study of the punk in Hollywood (Ruddick, 1998), the youth simply went back to the Hollywood repeatedly and hold out long enough to convert the Hollywood into “Punk Hollywood”. The “tactic” is also workable for the Street War, which is in practice a “guerrilla” among the metropolis forest – the street dancers move around different territories, “attack” the commercial district and architectures, and flee before the “counterattack” of the police and security. The occupying and place making practice, after all, are “semiotic guerilla warfare” (Eco, 1972).

Occupying

According to the thorough urban space management system in Hong Kong, it is supposed to apply to relevant authority institution (Transport Department in most cases) to use any public space. But the Street War never did this. Ray used “occupy” instead of “apply” to describe their action on space:

“As for the space, we must go out and occupy it, so that others could be reminded that the original and habitual use of the space is problematic and unreasonable. We once thought about applying, but the procedure is too complicated and time taking, and that we probably will fail since we never had the priority in the framework of the authority.”

Concluded by Ray and Neoi Mo, the trick of a “successful occupying” is owning “resources” – big number of people, plenty of professional equipment, sponsor – to become the lucky dog under the “selective enforcement” by the police and private security and the surrounding of other competitors. At Mong Kok, they defeated the telephone company promotion staff because of the bigger number of people; At Tsim Sha Tsui, more than thirty of them appeared suddenly with “savage attitude” around the “Marble Ground” to keep the two responding securities away; At Lan Kwai Fong, their setting with plenty of professional equipment tricked the police and security around into thinking that the Street War was activity held by some District Council, instead of driving them away, one

of the security even come to say hello on his own. Compared with the Street War, the victims fined or arrested by the police and security in news tend to be isolated individual without support of any group.

Sometimes checking ID or body frisking was also done by the police because of the receiving of complaint about the street dancers. But rarely real action would be taken. The police would leave them alone after some instruction as “turn down the music box” and “going home earlier”. At Mong Kok, since too many complaints were received, police would come as frequently as three times within two hours, but never really drove the Street War away; At the Olympia MTR station and the Metro Plaza which will be discussed in the following section, the street dancers have gotten used to the check of the security. Every time the security comes, they will stop dancing and take a cigarette outside, but come back and keep dancing ten minutes later. Street dancers in the Metro Plaza even become friends with the security and say hello to each other every day.

Increasing security and surveillance are used in Hong Kong during last decade to protect public space against the incursions of the poor, including the subculture groups. However, it does not work as prediction in the Street War case. The standard of unacceptable activities on the

street is fluctuant depending on the individual security and police. The security and police will avoid taking real punishment on groups with a large number of people, professional equipment, sponsor and private relationship. Simple annoying behavior could still exist under this “selective enforcement”. Authority, enshrined in the major institutional orders of society may be accepted at an abstract level, but much more ambivalently handled at the face-to-face level (Hall *at, el.* 1976).

Instead of enduring, entrenched or mundane, the occupying is still very provisional, highly vulnerable and really risky. It is not hard to find that the Street War is occupying the busy commercial district without application and it is reasonable for the police to arrest the Street War as “unlawful assembly”.

Spatial Reconstruction with Style

In the related discussion of the meaning of youth subculture, Hibdige has pointed out that style is lodged and displayed at the profoundly superficial level of “signs”. Most the “signs” are everyday objects that “stolen” by subordinate groups and made to carry “secret” meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination. All the signs are a presence of

difference and forbidden identity. The objects are materials available to the street dancers. The dancers then construct and appropriate them in the form of a visibly organized cultural response to take up the material space. As a result, the objects which were made meaning by the “style” in subculture, give the “styled” meaning to the space again.

Even during the March – the biggest political gathering with broad “consensus” and a common stake among different classes in Hong Kong, the youth street dancers would like to march in their own special “style”. Instead of holding signs and shouting slogans, they just danced, claiming it as expression of resistance. They refused to take the same pace of rest parade, but to stop anytime anywhere when they felt a need of dancing, and did not mind being “deserted” by the parade. Standing among the parade, the street dancers have their own outstanding style of dress – over T-shirt, baggy trousers, colorful sneakers and eyes-catching ornaments. The march is also a place making practice by the participant street dancers. With the plastic carpet, music from speaker box, as well as their body movement, a temporary, embattled and mundane site of street dance and resistance had been marked out along their route. “Style” of street dance was used by the twenty youths to distinguish themselves from

other paraders around them.

As an “imagined relationship” (Hall *at, el.* 1976), the style is a “collective and symbolic solution” towards the social conflicts. For Baron (1989) and Williams (2011), the resistance should fail in the end – the symbolic style could not solve problems of unemployment, poverty and prospects of alienated labor. After the march, the working class youths likely had only vocational school or their dead-end jobs to return. The scale of twenty people is limited. Absence of the participation of the main street dance studio makes them only a tiny part without any material support and effective bargaining chips. Their appeal of the street dance space in the WKCD is cared and listened to by nobody. However, no further action was taken.

As for the Street War, after occupying the spaces, the street dancers – who have become “active agent” – start to make the space for walking and shopping supposed into “street dance space” – a space includes material preconditions and bodies; a space of music and screaming; a space of movement and masses of air; a space of battle, actions and interactions; a space of latent violent, revolt and transgress; a space of their own identity and feelings of belonging.



Dress is a fundamental element of the “style”. Typical dress of a street dancer includes a cropped top and oversized hoodie, baggy dance trousers or jeans, usually a cap – with the sticker underneath the brim left on, a doo-rag underneath the cap, and sneakers. The T-shirts are covered by “golden words” (often swear words), as a signal of the “confrontation dressing” (Hebdige, 1979). The sudden gathering of dozens of street dancers with the typical dress and other elements borrowed from punk such as exaggerated ear ring is making an “advantage of the signs”. The gathering signs of street dance could temporarily balance the signs of the mainstream culture in this specific area. The advertisement bands hide behind the tattoo of the street dancer at this moment.



The carpet made of plastic and hardboard is the first one on the object list of the Street War. It could make rough cement into a smooth platform that is appropriate for dancing without hurting dancer's body. Above all, with the graffiti logo of the Street War, the carpet is like a label of the Street War that paste on the street to claim the right to the area by the dancers.

One staff of the Street War introduced the use of the carpet as:

“There are so many potential competitors of the space we want in Mong Kok, so on Friday evening, we will put the carpet in the pedestrian street in advance. People will think the area of the carpet has been occupied.”

What is interesting is that after spreading the carpet out on the street, all the pedestrians would make a detour around it. A separate space has been made physically by the carpet.

Music box with logo of the “SR Crew” is another indispensable object of

the Street dancers. With large volume, it is also a strong claim about the right to the space. What more important is that this claim is voiced. The loud hip hop music with heavy beats and wild rap from it could be heard hundreds miles away. It seems air circulation within this area speeds up all of a sudden; feet on the floor could feel the quake following the rhythm. All of other sounds are immersed in the music, and everything in this area becomes exciting. The taking and control of the space is achieved initially by the “blare”. As Fat J once said:

“When we danced on the street, buying a good music box is a dream of a lot dancers. You know, the loudest is the king, others could either obey or leave.”



Compared with the carpet and the music box, a set of equipment of DJ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ DJ, known as Disk Jockey, refers to “Hip Hop DJ” mainly in this research. Hip hop DJs select and play music using multiple turntables to back up one or more MCs/rappers, perform turntable scratching to create percussive sounds, and are also often music producers who use turntables and sampling to

is more professional to outstand the insiders from the outsiders. Consist of complex equipment such as sound recording, multiple sequencers and sound system, the DJ operation desk appeared here as an “intentional communication” only among insiders. The dancers move their body according to the beat, rhythm, rap and track, which mean nothing except for loud sound to ones who are not members of this subculture. This professional equipment created a closed space. Outsider could not get the message and share the feelings of this space even though they could still be spectator. The space is separated from context around by professional underground code.

Sometimes the professional equipment also includes the floodlighting, which could fix a spotlight on the street dancer in the circle. The light enhance this specific area even more “blazing” on the background of a brightly lit shopping mall and bar street. The signs of street dance are magnified by the lighting, which is a sign by its own. Furthermore, the area becomes a stage under the lighting. The street dancer and his moving shadow are the main actors of this “performance”.

The resistance of subculture is practiced under ritual, rather part of the

style. From the perspective of the Birmingham School, the subcultures in the post-war Britain are collections of a variety of rituals (Hall, *et, al.* 1976). Style consists not only of the materials available to the group for the construction of subcultural identities such as dress and music, but also of their contexts such as activities and ritual (Hall *et, al.* 1976).



With a set of systematic movements, general classify of different styles, clear standard of dancing techniques, street dance itself is a sort of “ritual”. The space is felt and measured by the body of street dancers in a sequence of movements. It is not “the dancer move in the space”, instead, it is “the space is moved by the dancer”. From the eyes of the dancer, the space is also turned, jumped and rolled speed with him.

It is through the dance ritual of movement and argot that the street dancers form and shape a coherent and distinctive way of “being in the world”, as well as a “symbolic system” to refine and make the space. The capital flow within this space is stopped by the dance as a ritual – the capital of the style and street dance.

Except for the dancer, other actors play their roles in this ritual too, including DJ, MC, and the judge. As for the DJ and MC, they are different elements of hip hop culture, but all of them are organically related to street dance, as a “style as homology” (Hebdige, 1979). The members of this subculture make sense of the world through the fit between them. Actually, the space is not made and refined by any single element or any lawless form as the popular myth declares. On the contrary, it is a consistent unity of reassemble appropriate objects and ritual.

Some iconic behaviors would be repeated to strengthen the ritual in the space, such as chest-bumpig, hug before the battle, and lifting hand up of the winner. These “random” movements are read and decoded by the street dancers in specific way, an agreement of the meaning has been achieved within the space, to rewrite the original meaning there. The

“natural” codes and order of the space, which attribute to the commodities and are arranged by the dominant culture, are expropriated by the unity of the subculture group through their ritual occasions, as a response of the group’s relations, situation, and experiences.

Subculture Politics

The power of their tactic is improved greatly after connecting to subculture politics and social movements. Compared with images of street dancers in previous chapters, the most prominent distinct of ones in this chapter is that they start finding their political expressions. The emergency of subculture politics is responsible for a wilder aspect of social change and structure. The rise of the political participation by subculture groups such as the Dog Movement is a product of the macro social change after handover and new historical features of the social structure.

The reason given by MA (2002) to explain the sudden uprising of alternative bands in post-1997 Hong Kong could also be applied to the appearance of the Dog Movement. Through the ethnographic study of the famous alternative band LMF in Hong Kong, MA (2002) bridged subculture and general political context with the emotional energy. He

argued the emotional energy, which could distinguish the subculture other than dressing style and esoteric ritual, is triggered by failing capitalism, re-nationalization, downward mobility and weak local governance after the handover (Ma, 2002). The middle class ideology of unfailing capitalism and upward mobility is not the absolute dominant after 1997. The reason of uprising subculture after 1997 is found in a Macro political economic context in Hong Kong, as a connection between personal psychological drive and negative collective desire (Ma, 2002).

As the subculture of the same time period, Dog Movement is stimulated with the same elicitors of the LMF, even more compelling. After 15 years of handover, the prestige of the SAR⁴⁹ government hit the bottom after several failed voting and scandals; Firmly believed “bourgeoisie” ideology even collapse for the first time in Hong Kong caused by the descension of living standard among the working class; Distrust of Beijing is spread broadly and is cast on the conflict between local people and the mainlanders; The large scale rebuilt of the urban space designing for mainland tourists benefit instead of local community culture ... All of these post-handover problems come to be woven together into an

⁴⁹ Abbreviation of the “Special Administrative Region”

all-embracing strongest “emotional energy” towards the present situation and government among Hong Kong people, including the youth of the lower middle class, who are the biggest victim of this social change as discussed below. The Dog Movement is just a focal point on the huge net woven by the “emotional energy”.

“Social movement” was used to be a strange word to these working class youth. However, witnessing or even participating in several working-class oriented social movements, they have gradually accumulated related experience and would like to apply to it instead of contradicting the security or police face to face.

In the Dog Movement, the street dancers have learnt how to express their requirement with social movement language – they declared that access to public space is substantially focusing on politics of equality and distributive justice; they have mastered social network as the basic tool for contacting and sharing – the Dog Movement is a group based on the Facebook; they have had basic knowledge of politics operations such as requiring one representative at the panel of Hong Kong Art Development Council to speak on their behalf.

The most important is that they also started to keep an eye on other

“weak” except for street dance group. They take chances to support other social movements on issues of homosexual, national education, demolish of industrial areas and so on. They dance and cypher in parade oriented by other social groups to speak out for other groups. For the Dog Movement, dancing is a means instead of a target.

Dimensions of the Reconstructed Space

Physicality – Temporary Openness

Both the Social Movement and the Street War are trying to create a “reconstructed space” in the busy commercial center or tourism district, aiming at reconstructing an “ideal public space” on the street which is open and everyone gets access. As Ray said:

“Simply speaking, I hope the original situation of the Culture Center ten years ago could replay now. Among the new generations of street dancers, little of them have ever experienced the golden age of street dance – dancing on the street and having fun together. The separated indoor dance spaces lead to a lot of trust problems among dancers or even disappearance of the real street dance culture. This culture could only exist in a public space that everyone has access to.”

Another example is that for some of the members of the Dog Movement, cyphering on the street is the main reason for them to be a part of the march. During the 1 July March, most of the driveways will be blocked to

give way to the crowd. In another words, this is one of the rare opportunities that the street is open to everyone and a person could occupy the street used to be taken by cars to do anything – including dancing – reasonably. As Neoi Mo said:

“Only in the protesting and march people can really enjoy a whole street and learn about the real feature of a street. It is the one and only moment that all the infusion of capital will be stopped.”

However, this “ideal public space” seems an interlude would be quickly forgotten after the leave of the Street War three or four hours later. Staff of the Street War would pack all the carpet, music box and other equipment up and take them away. All the street dancers would leave without back again as a dancer. Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui and Lan Kwai Fong would be space of shopping, party and date with girlfriend for them later. All kinds of commercial and entertainment activities would go on with nobody remembering what happened here on Friday night. On next Friday, the Street War has gone to another place.

In a word, the ideal public space they occupied and reconstructed were “reveling space” instead of “everyday space”. The place making practice was taken temporarily instead of with a consistent process. The

occupying of the Street War could be described by the word of Hakim Bey (1991) – “temporary autonomous zone”. They make a space where they could be in charge for a short period of time. Their practices thus did not resist the marginal position given to street dance by the mainstream, but rather reveled in it. Finally, the street dancers would not be “too much of threat”. As Hebdige concluded, this place making by “style” is just a symbolic violation of the social order. Moreover, the occupying was a result of the “selective enforcement” of the police and security, which means the initiative was seized by the authority. They could take back the right to the space anytime since the occupying now is illegal, relying on bravado and disguise.

Anyway, the meaning of this openness on the phicality could not be ignored and played down. First of all, it is sort of “test” and “experiment”. The street dancers directly test their own and the mainstream’s orders by attempting to take and make adults’ space. Now, Neoi Mo has gotten different habits and characteristics of every space:

“I could forecast the exact time of the appearance of the police and security now. It is like that I am doing the same experiment about the risk within every space.”

In addition, the Street War defiantly issues a challenge to the question

“whose space is this”. In the words of Bhabha, the making space practice by the street dancers offers the potential to “give rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 1990). The spaces are “filled not only with authoritarian peril but also with possibilities for community, resistance and emancipatory change” (Soja, 1996).

Practice – Play

After the practice of place making by the street dancers, these spaces, even if limited area and temporarily, become what Lefebvre called “counter space” in the city.

We know what counter-projects consist or what counter-space consists in – because practice demonstrates it. When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing developments, when it demands “amenities” or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter space can insert itself into spatial reality.

(Lefebvre, 1991: 381-2)

The spaces that are used to practice and perform street dance are sites that question the dominant organization of space and which refuse a predatory logic of capital; they are places valorized in terms of use value rather than exchange value. By intention, most of the spaces chosen by the Street

War are space of commerce and alienated leisure in bustling downtown. Every time the Street War occupied the space, many super tourists and customers would stop their feet on shopping and consumption activities to have a look at the dancers in the circle, in front of the stores most of the time. At Mong Kok, the promotion activity of telephone companies were so obstructed by the street dancers that they kept complaining to the police; At Tsuen Wan, the restaurant dealings needed give way to the street dancers; At Tsim Sha Tsui, even the shop owner gave his support to the street dancers by saying that “people need to have a rest by giving a glance to some interesting staffs”; At Lan Kwai Fong, exchange activities in the luxury shops on the street are almost suspended because the entrance is blocked by the Street War. At the very time-space point, infusion of capital is stopped. A small hole is burned by the street dancers on a stunning silk woven by capital. The hole appeared so abruptly that it is independent absolutely on time, space and capital. The normal spatial arrangements in the hole have been remade in contrary way, running from the everyday to the experimental.



A small hole is burned by the street dancers on a dunning silk woven by capital. The infusion of capital is stopped in the hole.

The shopping center and commercial district are also transformed into a space of play rather than of work for the street dancers by their practices.

The plaza and pedestrian street used to be gathering place for intensive commercial exchange are transformed into gathering place for a scene of dancing.

Standing quite consciously outside of ordinary life, connecting with no material interest and profit, proceeding within its own proper boundaries of time and space, making what has been hidden visible, consisting of “fight and battle” sometimes, the practice of Street War could be seen as

“play” (Huizinga, 1995; Turner, 1987). Having a look at the Street War gathering message on the Facebook, the street dancers come into the street on Friday night spontaneously only for fun. They circle, cypher or battle with other street dancers meeting by chance under a set of “inside order”, which makes all the strangers on the street audience. Dancing is not the only activity practiced on the street of Friday night, the communication among street dancers also include casual chat, drink, flirting, fighting etc. For the street dancers, “play” is as important as “survive”. Neoi Mo talked about importance of “play” within the interview:

“The others [promotion staff of telephone company] would think they take this space [Mong kok pedestrianisation] for survive and life, but we [take it] only for play and for fun. But my opinion is this kind of play is also our life, we could only survive with the play.”

Play has the power to transform space into counter space. According to Turner (1987), play could not only “having fun” but also “making fun” of people, things, ideas, ideologies, institutions and structures. It allows the society “to move from structure to anti-structure and back again to transformed structure; from hierarchy to equality; from indicative mood to subjunctive mood; from unity to multiplicity; from system to

community”. The ownership, access, uses and meanings of the street space were all subverted and challenged. The geography of political of the capitalist state and economic privilege of the bourgeoisie control were totally ignored by the street dancer in the circle. There is nothing more important than the movement and play of the dancer in the center. The strict social hierarchy is resolved as the single relation of player and audience. The ordinary setting of the street was modified as a circle centered by the dancer by the dynamics produced by his play. During his turning, handstand, grounding and jumping, the “play spaces” were “anti-structure”, “subjunctive”, “multiple”, “communal” and “equal”, which should be highlighted in this research as a result of the class mobilization within the Street War.

Social Relation – Free and Equal

The conflict relation between street dancers and police/guards is eased during this reconstructed space. Increasing security and surveillance does not work as prediction in the Street War case. The standard of unacceptable activities on the street is fluctuant depending on the individual security and police. The security and police will avoid taking real punishment on groups with a large number of people, professional

equipment, sponsor and private relationship. Simple annoying behavior could still exist under this “selective enforcement”. Authority, enshrined in the major institutional orders of society may be accepted at an abstract level, but much more ambivalently handled at the face-to-face level (Hall *at, el.* 1976).

During marches of the Dog Movement and the flash-mobs of the Street War, passerby is invited to participate into them too. Everyone is welcomed to share this reconstructed space with them. Most staffs of the Street War were passers who did not know each other. No entrance or other qualification is required – you can come to march, dance, and battle with others if you want. The champion of one of the Street War battles is an American who met into it occasionally.

The classes and boundaries among people disappear in the “Carnavalesque” (Bakhtin, 1940) atmosphere of the reconstructed space. In the battle, everyone would like to laugh and scream like on a festival and celebration. At some point, a group of people would do some funny steps together, jump high together, call out loudly together or take off the T-shirts together. Under the carnival atmosphere, the original weak class identity was disguised or symbolically disfigured by the scream,

movements and music, which were as ploys “to escape the principle of identity” (Hebdige, 1979). Completely taken by the carnival atmosphere, the reconstructed space is a space without class, order and moral principle, a space “filled with authoritarian perils” (Soja, 1996).

The class mobilization is realized in the play spaces, best represented by Lan Kwai Fong. Armed with expensive entrance fee, high-priced drink and elegant dress code, Lan Kwai Fong is a typical middle class space which used to marginalize the street dancers in the everyday life.

However, the situation switched in this “counter space”, capital was not important any more, the excellent dancing skill armed the street dancers as the dominated actor. Even a middle aged man in a suit would stop and gave applause to the street dancers or have a look at them at least. By virtue of the Street War, the street dancers are not the weak group who need to be driven away any more, instead, they are the focus who own the “symbolic power” in the play space. As Neoi Mo said:

“The boys who do not drink also go to the 7-11 to buy Bailey to drink as lord it over since they feel they are powerful now.”

As the organizer of the Street War, Neoi Mo had some amazing words about the freedom after broken of the ordinary class:

“Every time when I am on the site of the Street War, I feel free as I have broken through the limit of a street dancer, to challenge the institution. It feels like that when you are standing at a beautiful sandy beach at night, suddenly u take off your clothes and naked swim in the sea. I mean, you are scare of being found but you could enjoy the freedom concurrently.”

Institution – sub-autonomous class

The institution behind these reconstructed spaces is not only the Dog Movements or the Street War. Instead it is a representative of a wild working class and lower middle class – collectively known as sub-autonomous class in this research. As an essential element for sustaining of subculture, access to space is an issue of class under the context of Hong Kong. Subculture is ultimately a “class issue” (Hall *at, el.* 1976).

Currently, poverty and continual, great inequalities of wealth is still quite typical in this post-colonial capitalism city. The wealth is redistributed to the middle class nominally. A very small minority is the main beneficiaries of the “opportunity structure” society. The “equal life chances” of lower middle class has been shown as an empty promise.

This inequality is also manifested on the right of space of different classes, especially public space. The lower middle class are the most vulnerable to the redistribution of the urban space during the rebuilt and privatization

of the urban space.

The privatization of the urban space is harmful to the lower middle class youth, who heavily rely on poky Public House Project and “play” mainly in public space nearby such as street market to build local community life and subculture space. The privatization of the public space is the disappearing of their “leisure space” for playing. The widening of lower middle class’s horizons and demands on space, as a source of unrest, is manifested first by the youth, which is the direct victim of the vanishing of public space. Of course, the “youth” here means “sub-autonomous class youth” with poorly paid and uncreative occupation, who account for the majority of the Dog Movement. In the march, subculture members participate in social movements as potential agents of collective social transformation through alliances with broader lower-middle class. Their appeal of the public space is at the same time an appeal towards the disappearing and vulnerable local community life in the “rebuilding” trend of Hong Kong.

However, this is not the appeal for their middle peers. As one member of the Street War, Potato said:

“All of us who gather on the street corner at night are guys from

poor family. No rich guys would appear here. They have enough space to play in their fantasy rooms. No possibility for them to hang out with us on the street at all!”

Actually, ideal public space is not necessary for their middle class peers, who are either still at school and college or else only just beginning on their career in standardized office buildings (Abrams, 1961). Moreover, the privatization of public space wins over more priority right on space for middle class through transferring open space into “public space” with special access such as shopping mall, theme park and even the WKCD as the Dog Movement required for.

Moreover, represented by the Dog Movement, access to public space is substantially focusing on politics of equality and distributive justice by subculture groups (Harvey, 2012). Public space is what struggled by different powers to claim its own right and reproduce its own power. The look and feel of public space in a city reflect decisions about what- and who should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and on uses of aesthetic power (Zukin, 1995). In Hong Kong, the answer will be tourism (or the hotel and tourist industry, including restaurants), which is the biggest employer of this city now (Siu, 1998).

Even so, a great length of *Production of Space* is devoted to developing a

radical externalism of space “as a humanistic basis” from which to launch a critique of the denial of individual or community’s “rights to space” under the abstract spatialisation embodied in capitalism and technocratic knowledge structures of the society (Shields, 1999). It means that subculture has consistently “won” from and “negotiation” with the dominant culture about the space. With occupation of material space, street dancers would remain visible and represent themselves to larger audience. By taking public space, street dance could reproduce the representation and right of itself in administrative leading space such as the WKCD. By being a diversified part of the WKCD, the Dog Movement tends to construct a multiple public space and society instead of a uni-model which is functionalism and dominated with high class and middle class.

For the Dog Movement, striving for space is a means instead of a target.

As Neoi Mo wrote on her Facebook page:

“Why do we insist about ‘street’? Because we believe that Hip Hop is effective medicine to change the society.

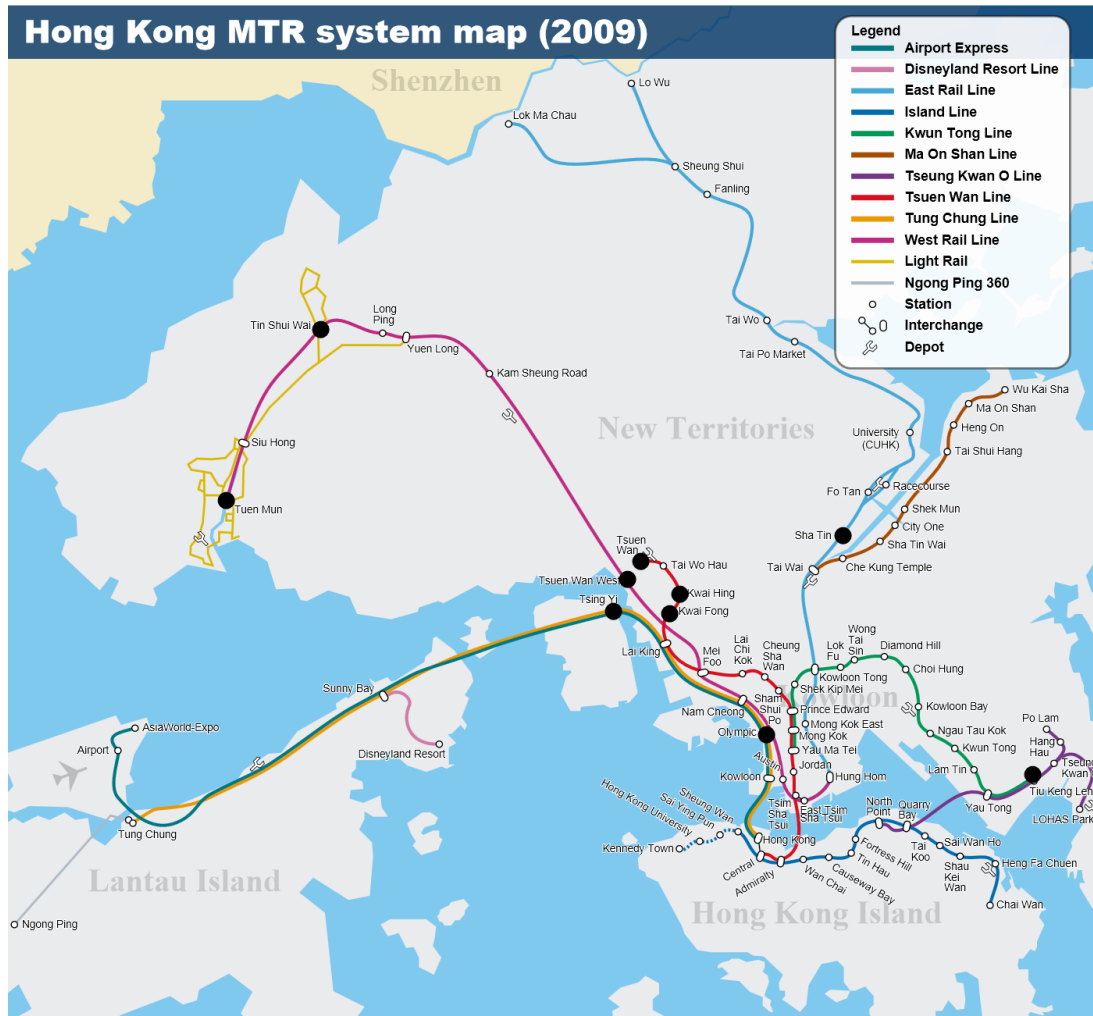
We respect knowledge and technology in the past, and we also look forward to the development and creative in the future. But at the same time, we do not, and dare not forget every individual that is struggling on the ‘street’ now.

'Street' is the vessel of the city. Only well circulated vessel could support a healthy body. Only going back to the start point of our culture – street, could we have a more forward conception of culture and a broader vision of art.

Only when the culture has been a part of the everyday life of a city, only when the culture has been matter for most citizens, could be it really promoted."

Other "Ideal Public Space" – Marginal Tolerate Space

While other street dancers are struggling to reconstruct space at the busy commercial center, some "ideal public space" could still be found on the margins. After several interviews and field study, the spaces that still tolerate street dance in Hong Kong are collected as: the Metro Plaza at Kwai Fong, the Shek Lei Mall at Kwai Hing, the Olympia MTR station, the Tsuen Wan West MTR, the Tsuen Wan bus stop, the Cheung Fat Plaza at Tsing Yi, the Sha Tin Town Hall, the Kingswood Ginza at Tin Shui Wai, the Swimming Pool of Tiu Keng Leng (labeling in the MTR map).



Source: MTR Corporation Limited

As showing in the map, most of the “ideal public spaces” locate at the remote New Territory, far away from the down town such as Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui, none exists on the Hong Kong Island, which is thought as the more developed part of Hong Kong. These are spaces on the margins of mainstream culture and geography. To an extent, the orders are more loosely defined in these margin spaces, which thus have been relatively easy to temporarily take and make for street dance. They

are not necessarily policed or regulated in a strict, authoritarian way.

Intrinsically, they are open to transgressed uses.

Two Examples

From the collection above, we can tell that most of the tolerate spaces are shopping mall and MTR at the marginal part of Hong Kong. The question would be discussed in the following examples (shopping mall and MTR each) are “Is this street dance tolerated because it is in the margins of the city?” or “does its marginal presence just go unnoticed and invisible to the dominant authority?”

The Metro Plaza

The “owner” of the Metro Plaza is a crew called “Metro Gangs” consisting of about 20 youths. Most of the crew members are youths from under and lower class nearby, they knew each other when they come to the Metro Plaza for dance practice regularly. They don’t even know the exact meaning of the word “Metro” and made a mistake when they spell it to me, but they name their crew with this word because the significant position of the Metro Plaza in their mind:

“Most of us have practiced dancing every week here for more than four years. Compared with other places, this area is where

belongs to ourselves.”

The area for dance practice is an open space no larger than 10 square meters outside of the Metro Plaza, opposite of the Kwai Hing MTR.

They can only occupy this open space after the close time of the Metro Plaza – about 10:30 pm at night. They tried to come after school at 7:00 or 8:00 pm. However, the security of the Plaza consulted with them, ask them to not come until the 10:30 pm on the condition that the security will not drive them away.

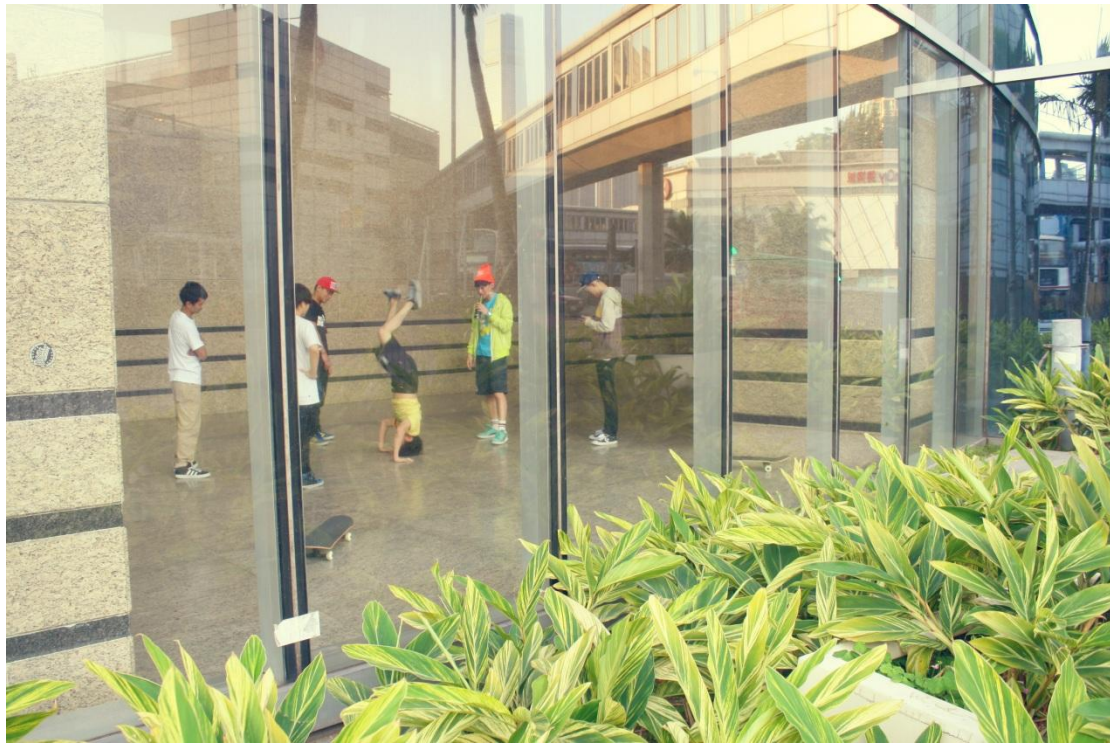
As one of the westernmost MTR station, Kwai Hing is deserted in the night. Few pedestrians could be seen on the street, except for some shuttle bus passing by, full of people who rush home after the extra worked hours. Therefore, no one cares about the loud hip hop music from the music box of the dancers. Sometimes residents in the Public Housing Estates complain about them to the police, then the police will come to check their IDs and ask them to go home earlier without any other punishment. Police is the only authority here since there is no private security of the Publish Housing Estate. The Metro Gangs will come again the other day, like nothing has happened.



The area for dance practice is an open space no larger than 10 square meters outside of the Metro Plaza, opposite of the Kwai Hing MTR.

The Olympia MTR station

On the Tung Chung Line, belonging to a new residential area built within these ten years, it is really a rare situation that a large number of passengers squeeze at the Olympia MTR station. The MTR station hall is quiet except for the sound of the escalator. With polished floor and French window as mirror, it is a perfect place of dancing practice for nearby youths. A dozen of middle school students come here every day after school, and they even come here right after waking up on weekends.



With polished floor and French window as mirror, the Olympia MTR station is the perfect place for the nearby youths to practice dancing after school

Their activities here are not only limited to dancing, they do all kinds of things for fun here such as skateboarding, playing video games, singing, or even graffiti⁵⁰. One of them shared this “secret space” with his classmates so they even had class meeting here! Surrounded by the Public House Project and high-class neighborhood, this MTR hall has been made as a playground for the youths. The time they spend here is longer than that spent home.

Sometimes, after receiving complaints, the staff of the MTR will come to

⁵⁰ It is only “graffiti” on some extent: they like to draw the logo of their crews on the walls outside of the MTR station hall.

“drive away” them, but this is not a big deal for the dancers. In fact, a “secret agreement” has been reached between the staff and the dancers: this is not a real driving away, only because of the complaint. Every time when the staff comes, the youths could get the point and go out without gathering up the music box or their bags. They will come back simply after taking a cigarette outside and keep practicing.

Ideal Public Space?

Although it is “marginal space” that is discussed here, all of the spaces made by youths as space for street dance are the “center” of the remote territory nearby – mainly the medium-sized shopping mall and the MTR station, because even if the practice of “everyday life” also needs audiences. To get more audience, the Metro Gangs arrive at the Metro Plaza at 10:00pm punctually – right before the close of the plaza, then most of the customers who are reluctant to go will become audience of them. One of the boys who practice every week at the Olympia MTR station feels good in front of the audience:

“Compared with the youth center two streets away, we like this station more. When a child passes by, he will look at us with all his eyes, it makes me feel so good.”

Compared with the Street War – making “ideal public space” in the down

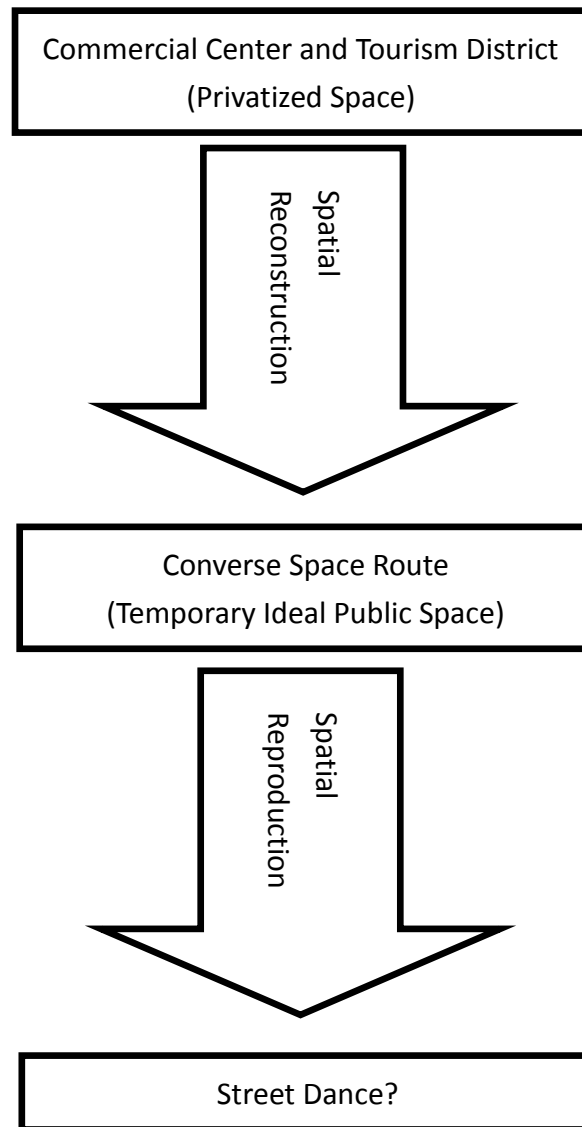
town and commercial district, these spaces are “everyday spaces” made by youths who live in the Public House Project of the marginal territories. Dancing there is a part of their lives instead of a performance of good preparation. There is no need to “occupy” the space since it belongs to them naturally, and a strong feeling of belongingness could be found in these spaces. For the Street War, the place making practice need to be finished within the three or four hours of the “temporary occupation”. The same practice could take its time, accumulated by every night after school.

For the police and security, the annoying activity is not an issue of importance in these remote spaces, which is the most essential reason behind the leaving over of the “tolerant spaces”. As marginal residential area, the control on street – with low use ratio at night – by the authority and commercial power is weak. It releases extra autonomy to the youths to refine the loosely primary structure of the spaces. It is the “unnoticed” and “invisible” that make the spaces “tolerate”.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is as following if it is presented in

graphics.



By the time writing this chapter, the Dog Movement and the Street War have struggled for space in crowded Hong Kong for more than one year, as a support of the argument “Street dancers always actively construct their own space to situate their performance, ritual and subjectivity in spite of the extreme limited and rapid disappearance of public urban

space in Hong Kong”. As the other side of the subculture story, what is written in this one is a counter-example of the conclusion by Hebdige as “Subculture will be incorporated by commodity and ideology definitely”. The “escape route” of street dance that is determined by the incorporation of ideology and commercial force in Hong Kong is converted as an “attack route” by the “tactic” of street dancers in this chapter. “Counter space” are created even at the most prosperous commercial district and most popular places of tourism through the flash mob. A hard resistance appeared during the place making practice with signs, ritual and carnival as the style of street dance.

Triggering by post-handover problem and growing inequality space distribution among different classes, street dancers even attempted to participate in political activities to claim their own right to public space, as well as the requirement of the equal access towards everyday politic urban life. Expressed through their dancing and style, a wider sub-autonomous class was represented by them.

In addition, street dance could still be found at some remote public spaces of marginal territories around downtown. The street has not disappeared completely in the history of street dance. “Everyday spaces” like the

Culture Center ten years ago are still exist!

From above all, a positive expectation is almost made: Street dance in Hong Kong challenges the incorporation and keeps being as transgression against the local government or consumption culture. As a result, the urban space will also be reframed by the challenge and resist of street dance rather than the incorporated tool. More power of the subculture group and lower middle class could be reproduced by the space occupied by street dancers.

However, this research could not promise the “happy ending” because of too many limitations: the intention of street dancers is not to edit or revolutionize the mainstream, but simply to take and make space for their own culture; the occupying of the downtown districts are temporary – they are “reveled space” instead of “everyday space”; the practice of occupying and place making is only a result of the “selective enforcement” of the authority and still under the control of it; the incorporation is on its way such as the join of sponsor and youth center; the political participation is symbolic, no real solution was ever taken; all of the existed “everyday space” for street dance are in marginal territory, which will also disappear after related estate developing, the existence is

passive resistance instead of active one.

The biggest limitation lies in the street dance circle itself. In Hong Kong, commercial studio, youth center, Danso in university, entertainment company – all of the forms described in previous chapters – are absolutely the mainstream of sustaining and developing of street dance.

The total number of members of the Dog Movement and the Street War is not more than 100, which is too small when compared with the whole street dance circle, even though the number of affected dancer will be much larger.

Faced with the question “How long will u take to occupy the street completely”, Neoi Mo answered like this, which is a good summary of this chapter:

“I do not know how long will we take. Three years? Four years? Actually we may not occupy the street completely finally since so many powers are struggling about the space with us. But we did ‘sow seeds’ every time we enter different spaces, which could develop the habitat of space using of people in Hong Kong. I hope one day the street dance circle in Hong Kong could become a big Street War. And our final target is broadening the possibility of the usage of public space in Hong Kong.”

“Occupying” is too radical for lots of street dancers. But they have learnt the active attitude of resistance and the way to reconstruct the commercial

and ideology space to get out of control in Hong Kong.

Even though the resistance of subculture is vulnerable, it is still meaningful in the eyes of Hebdige:

“I would like to think that this Refusal is worth making, that these gestures have a meaning, that the smiles and the sneers have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are, like Genet’s gangster pin-ups, just the darker side of sets of regulations, just so much graffiti on a prison wall.

...

[The subculture is] a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation [of the capitalism].”

...

None the less style does have its moment, its brief outrageous spectacle.”

(Hebdige, 1979: 3; 90; 112)

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE

POSSIBILITY

Conclusion

Inspired by my own experiences about the street dance in Hong Kong, this thesis comes to its final chapter of the first systematic research about street dance in Hong Kong, which is out of my expectation. The struggle between street dance and Hong Kong social space is still on its way to an uncertain future, and more related researches are in need to sketch a convinced economic political structure behind it. From the perspective of space, the classic subculture theory is verified and broadened under the updated environment. Power balance between subculture and other parties is visualized by material space as a presentation of the transformation of the social structure on the whole. In this chapter, first of all, a brief present of street dance development in Hong Kong and the transition of the urban spaces is needed to create more rooms for further questions and discussions.

According to the first generation street dancers, street dance in Hong Kong was originated from the Marble Ground outside of the Culture Center in 1999. Influenced by imported hip hop music, a group of youths started to practice Breaking during the gathering outside of the Culture Center. Several dance crews are established and the Culture Center was famous for the battle night gradually. It had been the “ideal public space” for the subculture members for the tolerance of leisure practices without the interference from adult. Not only the dance practices, but also the everyday life and community of the street dancers were at the Culture Center. Around 2000, several similar “ideal public spaces” appeared within Hong Kong, where the street dance was born as a tool to resist the mainstream commercial culture and ideology by lower middle class youths.

However, this “utopia” did not sustain long enough. After the financial crisis and SARS, “ideal public space” was exchanged for economic profit by the government – a great number of them were transformed into shopping mall, theme parks and attractions aiming at tourists from the mainland. The most extreme example is that the Marble Ground was demolished and taken over by the Star Avenue as a top tourism attraction.

Furthermore, known as controlled by the Developer Hegemony, Hong Kong experienced the greatest privatization of public space. Most ideal public spaces became into regulated space with singular practice, social relation and institution. As a result, street dance in Hong Kong disappeared from the street.

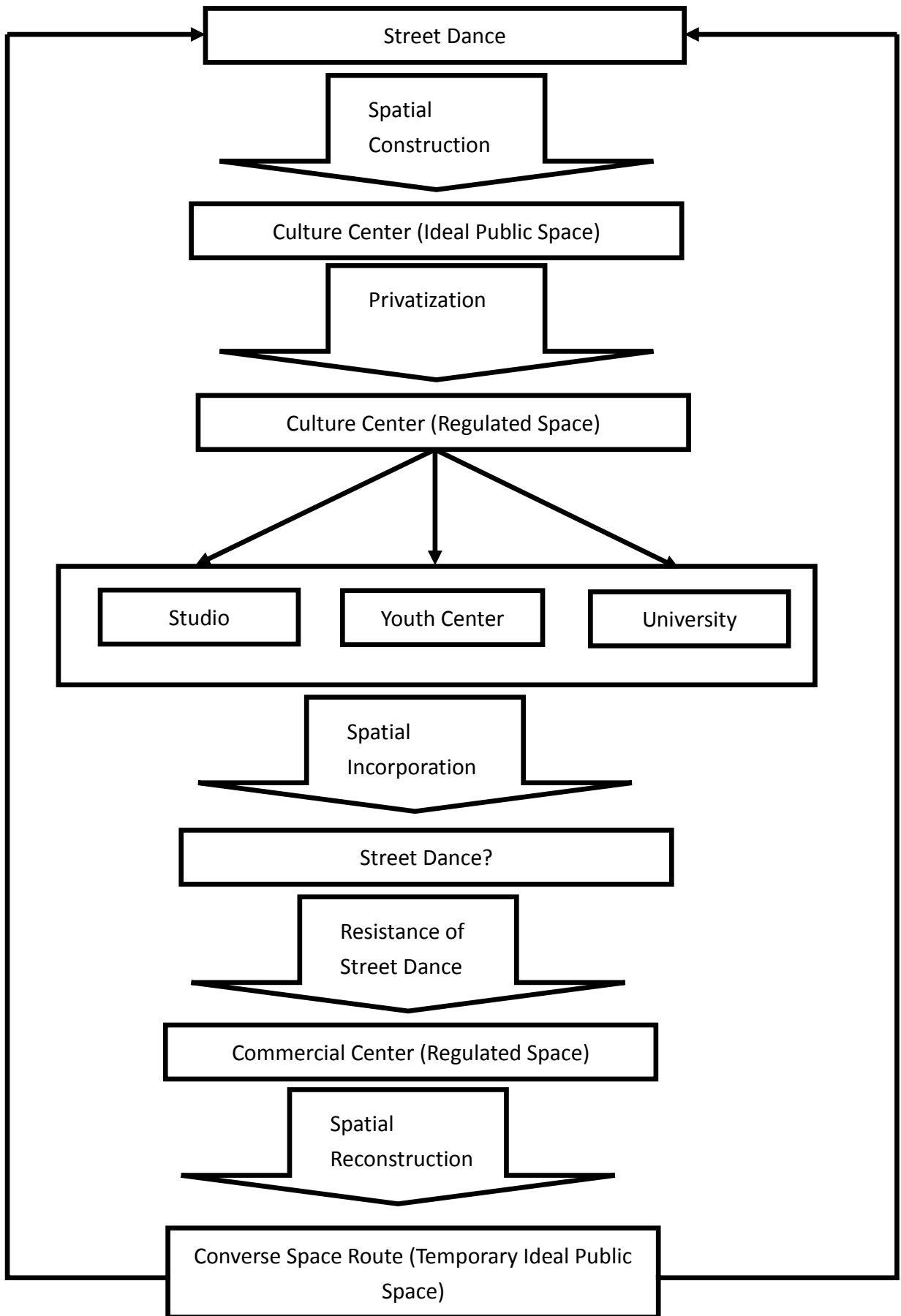
To sustain, street dance sought spaces within other regulated spaces such as studio, youth center and university. However, the spaces they supplied also cleared up the original characteristics of street dance with the commodity force and ideology force, which was a repeat of the “incorporation” prediction of Hebdige. The regulated spaces were tools and mediations of the dominated and bourgeois culture to incorporate subculture. In studio, the street dance is simplified as fitness, stretch up and step – standard mass produced to attract more potential customers, the dance subjective becomes into rich guy who could pay for it. In youth center, the otherness of street dance is cleared up carefully and street dance is repacked as an educational tool for the young offenders. The dance subjective is mainstream good boy instead of the homeless youth in the Culture Center. In university, street dance is evolved into big campus activity and performances with neat steps and complex patterns.

Performer is emphasized as the subjective of street dance. The “sub” of subculture is dispelled during the reproduction process of regulated spaces.

Fortunately, this is not the end of the story, after constant failures of entering public spaces, some extreme “place making” such as flash mob was come out – a group of street dancers gather spontaneously every Friday night to rush into crowded commercial center and tourism place and dance in a sudden with their own music box on. The flash mob lasts three to four hours every time and the target public space is different every time. Without any application of the right to use, the street dancers claim their right to the city through their dance steps. They moved within the urban space like a guerrilla, occupying every vulnerable spaces from the authority. This “temporary occupation” is what defined as “tactic” by de Certeau as the trick of the weak. Within the limited time, the space structure regulated by the developers and government is reconstructed by the bodies of the street dancers, even though it is not an everyday space like the Culture Center. Above all, a converse space route of street dance has been created by the spatial reconstruction of street dance after it was driven out of the downtown to marginal spaces.

What is more exciting is the active participation into social movements by the street dancers. They dance among march people of major social movements recently to express their requirements of space, as a reflection of the triggered conflicts between the dominant class and the sub-autonomous class under the new environment of Hong Kong. The political participation realized by the street dancers indicates a coming reconstruction of the public spaces in Hong Kong. The power balance between subculture and urban space may be changed again.

The description above is as following if it is presented in graphics, as a sum total of the thesis.



According to this graphic, the research questions of this thesis could be answered first. *What are the history, characteristics and “space route” of street dance in Hong Kong? What are the powers, forces and motivations behind the transition of street dance among the diverse spaces?*

The space route of street dance in Hong Kong is as following:

Ideal public space (the Culture Center) – privatized space (studio, youth center, university) – converse route (Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan – Mong Kok – Lan Kwai Fong – the Culture Center). Starting from the Culture Center, the space route is also ended at the Culture Center. However, the back is temporary, and a real ideal public space is still in need. As for the powers, forces and motivations behind the transition of street dance among the diverse spaces, a macro political economy context should be involved, including the serious privatization of urban space led by tourism during last ten years, the development of entertainment industry, the unfailing belief in capitalism system and bourgeoisie life style, the urban planning of the authority as well as the sharpened conflict among different classes. Besides, these macro powers, forces and motivations are woven together to incorporate the street dance through the mediation privatized space.

What are the four dimensions of social space of subculture group and what will it reproduce?

Real street dance could only be reproduced within ideal public space with open physicality, diverse practice, free and equal social relation and institution as public. The Culture Center before 2004 was a perfect example and it was temporarily copied in the Street War later. The ideal public space is constructed by street dance with its style at the same time, as a space free of the dominant culture and hegemony.

How is the subculture incorporated by the dominant culture through different social spaces when most ideal public spaces were transformed into privatized space?

After most ideal public spaces were transformed into privatized space, street dance has to find space to sustain in privatized spaces. As a result, street dance is inevitably incorporated by privatized spaces, including studio, youth center and university in Hong Kong. The incorporation process is led by different powers in different spaces – commercial force in studio, ideology force in youth center and hybridized force mixed with commercial force, ideology force and association culture in university.

Different street dances are reproduced within these different spaces – profitable commodity with “new style” in studio, popular educational tool without “otherness” in youth center, and convenient fashion signal emphasizing “team spirit” in university.

How does subculture reconstructed space of dominant culture with its resistance and style?

With a lot of “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984), seeking the random empty foreign power to postulates its own space. They practice flash-mob as a “guerrilla” among the metropolis forest – the street dancers move around different territories, occupy and “attack” the commercial district and architectures, and flee before the “counterattack” of the police and security. With play practice, street dancers resignify the physicality of the space into temporary openness and reconstruct the free and equal social relation by stopping the capital flow. With participation of social movement and referring of subculture politics, street dance started to construct an institution relying on a wild working class. Even though the reconstructed space is not permanent, it is still an exciting trial for the street dancers who are planning the next actions.

Further Discussion

During the findings above, several issues need further discussions.

What does decide the appearance of street dance / subculture?

From the research of this thesis, there were two periods during which the street dance was flourished to reconstruct the urban space greatly – around 1999 when the street dance first appeared in Hong Kong and around 2012 when the street dancer choose to claim their right to urban spaces through flash mob actively. The common characteristics on the social context of these two periods should be the determinants of the appearance of the subculture. And they are the elaboration of mainstream culture and the collapse of it in this research.

First of all, subculture could only appear after the elaboration of a strong mainstream culture. The conception “subculture” was constructed as a resistance of the mainstream culture. The opposite side of the mainstream culture could not boom if it is weak. This is why there is no subculture in the 60s and 70s in Hong Kong, since a great number of people just fled out of China here and led a poor life. Most people are working class at that time and there was no mainstream culture or high culture either. The situation was different during the 80s and 90s when a strong middle class

and market ideology was built. But there was still no subculture since it was invisible under the unfailing myth of capitalism. Everyone believes in the market and capitalism, setting making money through hardworking as the biggest target.

However, subculture was built invisibly under the strong mainstream capitalism system. When this strong system collapses, the invisible subculture would come out and become visible. As we know, this collapse happened in 1998 when Hong Kong was hit seriously by the financial crisis. The street dance appeared in the following year, which is not a coincident. As Ma (2002) concluded, the decline of middle class ideology of unfailing capitalism and upward mobility is the chief culprit in a macro political economic context, as a connection between personal psychological drive and negative collective desire. Subculture plays as the arm of the disappointed people to resist the dominant system which has been abandoned by the major.

Ten years later, the counterattack of street dance appeared under the similar situation – the collapse of the mainstream culture. If the financial crisis in 1998 was a failing on economic system of Hong Kong, the collapse of this time is the failing of political system of Hong Kong. In

the post handover period of Hong Kong, more and more conflicts are accumulated within the political ecology – people do not trust the government which has been believed as losing its independency and confirmed as corrupted, the conflicts between the mainlanders and Hong Kong locals often breaks because of a tiny excuse, the contradictions between the pro-establishment camp and pro-democracy camp is bigger and bigger, the polarization of the rich and poor has arrived its peak of the history, the tension about the general election in 2017 is about to explore... These conflicts come to be woven together into an all-embracing social myth of subculture. According to the poll of the SCMP, the number of demonstration and protests last year is 70 times of the one of five years before! In a tearing society, subculture – with its style of resistance – will be booming among the sub-autonomous groups. The flash mob of street dancers is just one of the thousands protests. After a spatial incorporation process of street dance that lasted for ten years, a strong spatial reconstruction has started as a additional support of the resistance towards the coming collapse of political institution.

What is the new trend of street dance in Hong Kong?

Street dance in Hong Kong has experienced the separate and polarized

period as what has been discussed in this research – originated from the Cultural Center independently and were incorporated completely with the rapid disappearance of public spaces. However, newly hybrid form of street dance has led the trend of street dance in Hong Kong.

This July, several remarkable events of street dance will be held.

The Youth Outreach will organize its first outdoor street dance competition under the Tsim Sha Tsui Clock Tower – as a result of learning from the Street War. The youth center does not insist with their “blind faith” in the safe indoor space any more. Without doubt that they still commit themselves to create a safe space so they applied to related department about the space using right and set a well equipped stage. Even though it is a performance other than everyday practice, it is a good attempt for the youth center to be connected street dance with street again.

The first “University – Battle” will be held among university Dansos – spaces where freestyle and battle were never advocated and “popular style” such as dying hair is the more important issue. To revive street dance in the newer generation, several ambitious street dancers

experimented to developing original “self-consciousness” of street dance while they being tutors in Danso. A few of the students have been affected by them even though they failed on the whole. However, Danso has made a breach for the “street spirit” and original street dance.

The first “Hip Hop City Festival” will be combined held by the Warehouse and the Dog Movement. This is the first street dance festival that emphasizes the urban spaces. Except for battle and performance, other activities such as DIY of hip hop style, screening of hip hop documentary, city tour of hip hop culture space and experiment of hip hop workshop. Hip hop culture is operated in a more sophisticated and multilayered. It has been conjoined with other arts to explore the bigger potential for the striving of space. In addition, this festival is sponsored by the government institution.

From these new practices, it could be guessed that street dance is not limited in different spaces statically. Instead, variety of interactions happen among street dances under distinct spaces. This could be explained by the “dynamic of subculture” put forward by Clarke (1974):

“Where they [subcultures] are violently repressed their impact is likely to be frustrated by bitter antagonisms. They may be re-emerge in other forms. Where they are even half tolerated

they are likely to change, not necessarily in the direction of incorporation but at least in that of growing self-awareness. That is, the culture which was generated in response to pressing circumstances, once it is accepted as genuine and not anathema can go on to become less essentially separate and polarized and more sophisticated and complex.”

(Clarke, 1973)

Street dance in Hong Kong used to be broken into separate traditions and styles within different spaces which is isolated and probably deviant variants. The visible hybrid orientation of the interaction and dynamics among street dances under different spaces leads to a re-conception of subculture. It should be thought in terms of pluralism and competing cultures rather than “sub-culture”. Because of the “dynamics”, street dance, and other particular subcultures should be analyzed with “processes” – significance should be found from the consistent “change” in contrast of what was defined before.

According to the experience in this research, embodying the inherent resistance to the dominant culture, subculture also negotiates its relations with the dominant culture as the “negotiated” aspect, such as what happened in spaces of studio, university and youth center. In practical, the line between subculture and mainstream culture, though never disappears, is often blurred and overlaid by intermediary structure. A hardening or a

softening of specificity could take place on this issue. We have to be more careful now to draw boundaries around what is the subculture and what is the dominant culture and how we identify the central features of the subculture.

The conflict between subculture and dominate culture cannot “disappear” – until the productive relations which produce and sustain it disappear.

But it can be more or less open, more or less formal, more or less institutionalized, and more or less autonomous.

Is subculture born to die?

“Subculture is born to die” is the general conclusion of the classic subculture theories. However, the findings of this research throw doubt to this universal accepted conclusion.

At first, when the ideal public spaces disappeared and street dance entered regulated spaces such as studio, youth center and university, this conclusion is confirmed again. Original street dance seems only exist at the moment of its creation – around 2000 at the Culture Center. Soon the street dance as well as the dancers were commodified and resold to the mainstream for profits such as studio and Entertainment Company. The symbol system of subculture is transformed into lucrative commodity as

well as fossilized convention by the worldwide commodity economy. On the other hand, the otherness of subculture is diluted by the ideological institutions such as youth center and university. Many people said that the street dance in Hong Kong has died in the regulated spaces. The changes of the urban social spaces under the guidance of urban planning play an important role in the death of street dance. As an essential public space, street of “street dance” disappeared. The remaining regulated spaces are tools and mediation of the dominant institution to transfer the street dance into mainstream as well as popular culture.

But from the experiences of Hong Kong, the vitality of subculture is much more dogged than expected. Subculture itself is not passively waiting for the incorporation. On the contrary, it would like to take every chance to retrieve its style and resistant attribute. Faced with the crash on the political environment, street dancers are triggered to fight for their own public spaces to reconstruct their utopia with open physicality, diverse practice, equal and free social relation, as well as a public institution. The flash mob and political participation are some signals of a following spatial reconstruction with larger scale by the street dancers. Both of the appearance and disappearance of street dance are closely

connected to the macro political economic structure. As we discussed above, subculture such as the street dance is an outcome of unstable social structure, especially when the dominant structure is going to collapse. It is true that the subculture will die during the following stable period – the dominant structure is strong enough to incorporate the subculture during the stable period. But as long as the social structure is not stable any more, the resistant style will be reflected by the subculture soon and the originate subculture will appear again.

In a word, subculture is not born to die. It may be invisible in some stable periods, but it always gets ready for its next vitality and boom again during the unstable transition.

Possibility in the Future

Dynamic Subculture – Subculture and Media/New Media Space

As some kind of virtual space, media plays an important role in the triggering and incorporation of subculture. Mass media such as TV station is also a significant tool to transfer the subculture into mass and popular culture. Having closed relationship with street dance studio and entertainment company, a complete productive chain is set up by the TV station. However, instead of widening to the virtual space, this research

emphasizes on the relationship between subculture and real spaces. But media should be a possible issue in the following related researches.

Furthermore, because of the booming of new media, the definition of new media needs to be reconsidered. The classic definition may be not accommodated to the present context. Because of the social media, millions of life style other than the mainstream one could be found on the internet. Or you even do not know which one is the mainstream under a opener world in the new media. The dynamics of subculture are absorbed into different value systems. Subculture under the new media contexture is also a trend in the related researches.

Reversed Subculture- Subculture and Social Movement

In this research, street dance has displayed tremendous resistance to assimilation in certain respects. The refusal or subversive values are fully embodied in their striving of space, especially at the initial stage at the Cultural Center and the recent phase of the occupation and reconstruction led by the Street War. The conflict between subculture and dominate culture is materialized on the tenacious deadlock of “valuable” spaces – use value for street dancers and change value for estate developer.

After the Street War was well known, street dancers in Hong Kong even

tried to construct “everyday space” and “practice space” instead of just “performance space” in over-populated downtown districts. The occupation and reconstruction of counter space are not just occasional flash mob any more, rather it has become a consistent leisure activity of everyday life. From April of this year, with support of other street dancers such as Yip and Howard, Ray appealed for practice in front of one of the biggest commercial skyscrapers Langham Place⁵¹ in Hong Kong. Their target is the transition space outside the gate with luxurious marble ground no more than 15 square meters. Ray emphasized that it is “practice” instead of “flash mob” this time. As he said:

“After running the Street War for about one year, I start to expect some placid and quiet place without dramatic rivals and wild virtuosity – everybody comes here just for practicing rather than showing off. Compared with occupation a space temporarily, it is time for us now to reconstruct an independent space of ourselves in a long term.”

Without surprise, a great response was obtained among the street dancers who have been tired of dancing in studio and youth center. Langham Place as a new gathering space for street dancers was spread quickly as a big news – this conceiving was realized at the first month because of the

⁵¹ Langham Place is a commercial skyscraper complex and shopping mall completed in 2004 at the Mong Kok area of Kowloon, as result of an urban renewal project under Land Development Corporation, aiming at upgrading and modernising a dilapidated area of Kowloon by providing a nucleus for renewal for the surrounding area, including the red light district along Portland Street. However, the building of Langham Place is controversial because of the criticize of destroying the community local culture of around area, which is one of the stereotype of Hong Kong local culture.

nice guards of Langham Place who has never driven the dancers away.

However, this flagrant occupation and reconstruction would not be tolerated by the administrators, who were worrying about these disturbing street dancers at the gate. One month later, in the middle of May, the transition space was suddenly full of steel bars – obviously to defend the gate from the street dancers. Because the transition space is private property of Langham Place, street dancers could do nothing except for stopping the nascent regular practice.

Among their disappointed complaints about the reaction of Langham Place, it is surprised that several street dancers even attempt to organize the activity “Occupy Langham Place” just like “Occupy Central”⁵² which is the most heated social movement issue in Hong Kong currently. They even started to discuss and put forward detailed planning on the Facebook group – this is a sign that street dancers in Hong Kong are learning how to implement their spatial appealing through political participation. With the “political awakening” of the street dancers which has been discussed in the “Subculture Politics” in the last chapter, the “symbolic solution” of

⁵² Occupy Central is a proposed nonviolent occupation protest for universal suffrage that would take place in Central, Hong Kong in July 2014. The campaign was initiated by Benny Tai Yiu-ting, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong, in January 2013. He predicted that at least 10,000 citizens would join the protest to take over Central in July 2014 if promises made by the Central People's Government for universal suffrage were not realized in the 2017 Chief Executive Election and 2020 Legislative Council Elections

grassroots youth is finally connected with social movement inevitably. Is it possible for subculture to become “real solution” after the combination of social movement?

As what has argued in the last chapter, put in a wider political economy background, the sudden uprising of subculture such as street dance in Hong Kong is the result of the sharpening of social conflicts such as the soaring housing price, the growing wealth gap and the acute contradiction between Hong Kong and Mainland. Subculture has become the substituted way out within the society of class immovability, as well as a method to pursue an independent collective “Hong Kong” identity during the post handover period – subculture has its new role under current social context.

Faced with a desperate government, series of massive social movements emerged intensively during the last year such as the Scholarism⁵³. Within the diversified protest methods, cultural and art guest were invited to take part in social movement as an appealing force, especially subculture with resistance quality such as rock and roll band and street dancer.

Furthermore, political sense and experience has been popularized among

⁵³ Scholarism is a group formed by couple of secondary school students and was the leading group in the alliance against Moral and National Education successfully after protesting, marching and hunger-striking outside the Central Government Liaison Office.

the grass roots youth by the intensive massive social movement. The marginal group attempts to take charge of the initiative of space instead of “doing nothing”. For future researcher, it will be a valuable trial to combine subculture and social movement outside of the classic conception such as deviant and class.

Hebdige has predicted the death and end pint of subculture when their content is weakened by the incorporation and normalization process – they are no more than a fad, to die out when no longer fashionable and be extinguished by the arrival of a successor. However, this is not the case of street dance in Hong Kong. When conjoined with political participation and social movement, it is even solidified from within as a “solution” for the grass root and generates strong vitality.

Hong Kong – Multicultural Urban Space Coexisting with Subculture and New Spatial Possibilities

This research has demonstrated that the genesis, sustain and transform of subculture are influenced by the direction of the macro urban development.

The question “how the subculture came to arise and what its dynamics are” reminds us about the exogenous effect of public space, which has

been proved in this research with the arising of street dance at the open space round the Cultural Center – of course we cannot ignore other elements such as the contact with western culture and so on, but they are not the focus here. Had street dance still originated in Hong Kong if there is no public space like that? The fact is, street dance kept searching for fresh spatial possibilities after public space rapidly disappeared in Hong Kong.

Historically, because of high crime rate or the government deficiency, the privatization of public space is an inevitable process for every city. The great public spaces of modern cities – streets, parks, museums, department stores – are transformed to their successors – theme parks, restaurants, ghetto shopping centers, and indoor flea markets. Besides, the urban planning of tourism urbanization, and the high residential density between overwhelming population and shortfall land supply are both the other motivators of the privatization, commercialization and disappearing of public space in Hong Kong. Faced with the inevitable decline of public space, other spatial possibilities should be taken into consideration by the street dancers for sustaining.

Several spatial possibilities have been discussed in this research – studio,

youth center, university or even TV station. However, as a result of processes and mobility of people, objects and ideas, space is not static. Interacted with people's interpretation and everyday life, space reveals different meanings and values. Furthermore, it is also the representations of social and cultural value as well as our identification within particular time-space. All of them keep imposing their own structure and order onto street dance to create the neo practice, symbolism and experience of street dance.

To our surprise, the resistance and style of street dance did not disappear completely. They are even brewing a greater fight back towards the commercial privatized space through hybrid subculture and social movements. Spatial reconstruction ability of street dance or even other subcultures is confirmed in this research. This kind of ability should be taken into consideration during the urban planning later. Like the example of the industry building mentioned in chapter 5, street dance and subculture is positive power to reuse the deserted urban spaces. Instead of pulling down the old area completely, importing of subculture to create new spatial possibilities is more anticipated. From the demolishing of the Culture Center, it could be learnt that the destruction of physical

constructions and architecture is also the destruction of existing culture, neighborhoods, communities and relations. Acceptance of subculture on space is fundamental to a fruitful life as well as a creative society, as our living space is not made up merely of land (empty ground) and isolated objects, but also relationships and memories. As an important part of the relationship and memories of the marginal people around this city, subculture could never be abandoned, especially on space.

Because of the reproductive capability of space, urban planning takes great effect on the culture life of the public. It is expected eagerly to make more attempts to shift the design of living environment in Hong Kong into multidisciplinary dimensions to shift the paradigm of the practice within it. More “ideal public spaces” are needed as the direct index of the culture life of the public. As Raban (1974) argued in the *Soft City*, the city dweller is not some necessarily given over individual can work their own distinctive magic while performing a multiplicity of roles, or a labyrinth honey-combed with diverse networks of social interaction which are orientated to diverse goals. What sought through this research are the concrete implications of “space”, defined as the “existential foothold” of the human beings in the world by the phenomenologists. “Urban” should

be rediscovered as one full of human existence and everyday meaning.

With their new possibilities, street dance and other subculture will be the important role in this rediscovered process as the negotiated adaptation of a shared urban meaning.

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