



Dreams That Are Not Your Own

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ADRIAN FACED A WINDOW larger than his apartment floorplan. Legs too sore to move, he strained his arms into the elliptical's handles, his eyes pinned to the fog that draped over Hong Kong's skyscrapers. A pallid fog that did not really exist until art invented it. Adrian knew this quotation well, had pegged it to grant reports and whispered it into the ears of aspiring artists tucked into his underarm. When he was hired to curate the Mei Gwok Mung Art Space in Quarry Bay, he found it on the institution's website:

There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we know nothing about them. They did not exist until art had invented them.

—Oscar Wilde

Enthralled by the words, Adrian's first act as curator was to order a total revamping of the gallery's website, excising the quote from public record, privatizing the insight for himself. He saw himself planting that seed of inspiration into the head of every potential patron who visited the Mei Gwok Mung Art Space. "Imagine, if you will, that for millennia, mankind had fog around them, enveloping them, in their lungs, blurring the world. But had no way to sense it."

Muscles tightened, slowing his strides to a heavy pace. He heard his breath—breathe, breathe. Air tickled his body. Day five of the Chinese New Year break, and not once had Adrian left his 72-story housing complex. Enclos-

ing himself indoors, he had pursued a rigorous regimen of self-health and self-cleanse: three-hour-long workouts, green smoothies, yoga classes, and countless cups of espresso to stymie the hunger pains.

He wasn't starving himself to lure Miguel back, Adrian told himself. After four years living together, their relationship had turned platonic, collegial. Neither had designs for a family, or marriage, or staying in love forever. With detachment came peace, and Adrian welcomed it. With distance, he was free to focus on himself, on body-taming. Here in the clubhouse was a café, a view, saunas, swimming pools, karaoke rooms, arcade machines, wine bars. Out there were the causes of his sickness—stress, pollution, racism, whispers. Six years in Hong Kong and he could approach the city only from a dim awareness, through jabs of pain, through his worn, cursed, depleted, atrophying muscles.

The day was February 16th, 2018, New Year's Eve. Would she visit again? Build strength, he told himself. Like fog, she is something you breathe, a love-sickness made tangible through art.



Meanwhile, across the harbour in East Tsim Sha Tsui, Miguel sat beneath Café de Fontaine's candy red umbrellas, gulping happy-hour Pale Ale and waiting for the caffeine to kick in. The patio was empty besides one customer lurking near the corner umbrella pole, an old man hunched over a blue luggage case, perhaps, ashamed to be alone during the new year.

The sky was steel gray backdrop. Canvas for Takashi Murakami's black-toothed mutations, for Francis Bacon's sickly face-smears. Just a week before, the square was a busy thoroughfare for bankers, tourists, and workers. Now, all that remained was a small crowd lined up for the opening of a chocolate store.

The crowd smiled to seduce luck, even if inside they all felt cabin fever.

Miguel felt the familiar lapping of waves pulling him into the city's drift. He mashed his cigarette into the pebbles of a bamboo pot and zipped his red leather jacket. He paid, walked, then obeyed the glowing red man above a set of yellow parallel lines. All the things that said, "don't walk." Grant reports, bills, elections, due dates, mass shootings. There was so little to do over the new year—no e-mail, no discounts, no deadlines. No customers, no clients, no students. The holiday halted a super-sonic engine that had spun wildly just a

week before.

Miguel kept moving, though he had nowhere to go. A thought retreated and another stepped in line. He hadn't created art in over a year. His last installation in 2017 was inspired from the eunuch slaves in China and Vietnam. They were prisoners of war, Cham Muslims whose genitals were sterilized in pepper water then cleaved from their bodies. Miguel didn't know how else to become them than to cut himself, first his hair and then his genitals, scraped with a lemon zester he had sneaked out of the Foreign Correspondents Club. Zested skin, hair and blood mixed in a cocktail served to the onlooker. "Miguel Pohl's piece alludes to the fetish of white colonials for brown boy skin," said one reviewer. Another: "The acidity of the scent of Pohl's blood triggers the vulnerability of the refugee. Like these desperate migrants, we the viewer feel the microbes wafting around, contaminating our body."

The itinerant artist jumbled along the promenade near Salisbury Road, empty except for the gray clouds shining off the bay. He could spot his 72-story apartment complex on Hong Kong Island, bunched behind blue and tan towers like a plastic fruit display. The flat he shared with Adrian; a rectangular room split equidistance by large oceanic photographs recycled from Miguel's 2016 art installation, *Crossing Straights*. The eight-foot tall panels made a convenient transit from gallery to home, demarcating space after their collective agony had too run out of storage.

Jackhammers jolted him as he crossed the skybridge over the ice cream vendors of Tsim Sha Tsui. He listened to the jackhammers' tremble, the hum of car engines, the whistle of a ferry boat, the melody of Hindi from construction workers below him, life's worth in the crescendo.



The *Crossing Straights* opening took place two years after Miguel and Adrian first met her. Together, they introduced her to the art world's scrutinizing glares. Miguel believed he could rouse her ineffable presence in layers of printed screens—photographs of the ocean, of underwater haze, of oil mixtures in the South Pacific, of the great garbage patch—screens marred by water damage and translucent in places from the six months they spent hanging from their apartment balcony, left to the elements of tropical Hong Kong—the hu-

midity, the sunlight, the rain, the tropical storms, the smoke billowing from Tai Po temple, Miguel's hourly tobacco breaks. Projected onto these faded screens was the artist's recollection of first seeing her: a stumpish figure in the shape of a parking barricade, with bare traces of blue-black hair.

Crossing Straights was that feeling the first night she visited their apartment, Chinese New Year, 2015. He and Adrian had just returned from their first international tryst in Da Nang. Roused from sleep, Miguel heard someone say in a muggy voice, "Who are you?"

The voice had come through the patchy water stains of their fourth story window. "Stop dreaming," Adrian barked, body curved in a hook. "Wake up, wake up." She materialized in front of them sitting on the edge of the bed and showering the floor with rainwater.

At first Miguel believed she was a hitchhiker from Vietnam, and he left to serve their wayward guest Trung Nguyen coffee. Adrian entertained her, babbling on about the New Year decorations, the crowded promenade, only now and then recalling that she had drifted in from the storm.

"Do we shake hands?" Adrian joked. "Or will you drag me back to Hell with you?"

Watching her speak to Adrian, unable to suppress a smile that formed on her face as beads of water dripped from her long long hair, brought Miguel a feeling that filled him beyond capacity. Perhaps longing, perhaps submission.

This was the essence Miguel sought to capture in Crossing Straights—an experience that could congest one's cognition. The six photographs were printed in eight-foot strips, wavering in the white box of the Mei Gwok Mung Art Space. The projection shaped the screens, gave feeling to that immemorial essence of the past, the sprites that spasmed out of time.

Standing next to his installation, Miguel cast still-unsatisfied glances at his creation, watching it slowly flap from the sporadic gusts of air-conditioning. He said sparse words to the patrons and critics who twisted from art to artist with their rotating wine glasses: "I'm clearly riffing off some more famous artists." "Creepy shit happens." "I was somewhere and it wasn't on any map on Google."

On Adrian's advice, he hadn't taken questions about the installation: With all the shit going on in the world, they won't even see what you made; if you went on about your fascination with poo, they'd still ask what this had to do with politics.

Poo, Miguel replied, was always political, always too about love: Poo shows you who sticks around, who is willing to be challenged and who needs to de-odor.

"I'm just saying. Every art piece gets read as PRC propaganda or Hong Kong resistance. And every day we see the U.K. and the U.S. tear itself apart from afar. If you get political with your poo, they'll all step right in. But this piece is about her."

So Miguel took no questions at his own opening. He stood a good five paces from his installation, his eyes upon his own art piece to direct all gazes in the same direction. A tall white man in a blue blazer approached him, one of the donors Adrian had seduced with that phrase from Oscar Wilde about fog.

"Good," the donor said, wrist rotating a glass of red wine. "I think I get it. Creepy."

In that two-year period of his youth when Miguel was homeless living under Kowloon's lantern streetlights, cruising from man to man, inventing his own name, he would have jumped at a guy like this. A white man who liked to take foul-smelling paths, who felt no shame in writing checks.

"So," the donor said. "This symbolizes something from your past, right? Did I get it?"

"Narrowly." Miguel stumbled over his words. "Nearly. Kind of. It depends."

"Well I can see it in the photos," the man said with a nod. "Boat people. Arrival. But the video? How'd you do it?"

Miguel heard himself speak through a constricted throat. "Well. It was. I put a phone in a bathtub—in a plastic bag, turned down the lights, and placed an object on the surface. A char siew bao." Once he released the words into the air, he couldn't unsee it—the white ethereal figure projecting onto his photographs was just a steamed pork bun floating in a bathtub.

Near the wine counter, Adrian, in his element, spoke in canned phrases: "refuses the gaze," "develops a nuanced critique." Words dabbled from his mouth in vivid streaks of color.

"It's not about me, or my past," Miguel said bluntly. Ears paddled toward his words. "I'm trying to capture something that happened two years ago, on Chinese New Year. We were visited by a ghost. Her name was Claire."

The crowd's eyes scanned Miguel's photographs, updating their thoughts. Adrian looked at Miguel with those dark frightened eyes.

"A Chinese ghost?" someone asked, without asking, a loud whisper.

Then came an assault of words: “boat people,” “mourning,” “school shooting,” “suicide rate,” “umbrella movement,” “Brexit,” “Trump.”

Miguel remembered Adrian’s advice. If they insist, insist upon nothing. The aura of the artist. Everything they need to know is in your bio: Vietnamese refugee, incarcerated, homeless, queer.

“It’s not about mourning,” Miguel told the small crowd. “It’s not about me. Someone died.”

“Who?”

“Your mother?”

Days later, neither Miguel nor Adrian could bring themselves to read the first review. They knew from the stray eyes around them what reading it could do.

“Creepy shit,” as described by the artist himself. Creepy in that stolen ghost stories are of no surprise in colonial Hong Kong, but from an Asian artist it’s double disappointing. Pohl’s blurry incantation feels more like a Hollywood-made CGI of Casper the friendly pork-bun than an apparition from Chinese folklore. With Trump and Brexit upon us and the history of The Umbrella Movement now fading into memory, can we afford to be hampered by the old China-hand belief that we locals are just supernatural conduits for a foreigner’s vaguely mythical fantasy? Perhaps if Pohl (a German name) were to turn the kaleidoscope, he’d give humanity to his subject. Who is she? What is she? Freud would say it plain: a fetish.



Sunshine. Adrian blinked awake from his post-work-out nap, tossing hair from his eyes. Sunshine, yet the sky was still gray.

With the windows closed, and the air conditioning and humidifier turned off, the apartment felt eerily quiet. He remembered bringing Miguel here for the first time, when he was just another struggling artist following Adrian home. But wherever Miguel went, he created silence. He had a habit of unplugging every appliance—the refrigerator, the air purifier, the de-humidifier, the bathroom fan. Those were the days when Miguel’s quirks were strange and enticing rather than daily irritations. Silence let the heat and humidity creep

in. Silence made the cheese and milk rot. Even the large photographs hanging from the ceiling, easing back and forth, felt damp to the touch.

Adrian made himself an espresso in the kitchen, closing the window above the stove to keep out the roaches. Overlooking the split apartment, it occurred to him that the living room had become an art installation. On Miguel's side, the bluish photographs gave an underwater feel, making the throw pillows appear like red seaweed growing upon a coral reef. And like a reef it was disgusting—with scented candles left out like crumbs leading to the cracked-open window, visible only by a yellow lamp covered in twine. Adrian's side was nothing to speak of, a white triangle with a single twin bed against the wall above a stack of plastic containers. The white underside of Miguel's photographs provided a glossy sheen that reflected the city's fog, bathing the room in natural light. It relieved the brain to look at it, to be on his side.

The apartment, Adrian wrote in his mind, an effective way to creatively express one's agency within a city widely scrutinized for its lack of space. The hackneyed sentence could fit easily on a grant application. It was perfect "dumb-speak," as Miguel would call it. But the idea began to wane. Miguel would never agree to use their own home for art; the splitting of the room wasn't made on the best terms. After that dreadful gallery opening, after they spent weeks bickering with each other, after all the accusations that they were appropriators, thieves, colonials, Miguel still believed that *Crossing Straights* was his best work. "They're wrong," he affirmed, a smirk so wide Adrian had to restrain himself from bitch-slapping it away.

Miguel, who spent his days orbiting through the city like a satellite, couldn't understand what it was like to be trapped in that art exhibition for three months, watching visitors peek at those blue panels, their phones out to look up the reviews. A foreigner's vaguely mythical fantasy. The installation was a blight on the whole gallery. And then, after three painful months when it all came mercifully to an end, Miguel wanted to keep the photographs in the flat. No. Yes. No. Yes. Where? How about the balcony? You're kidding. People will see it. How about the bathroom, as a shower curtain? Are you kidding? I don't want to see it. I do. Don't you remember what the critics said? They're wrong.

Fetish, they had called it. Miguel, swallower of fantasies, living in an eternal present, was susceptible to fetish. Fine, Adrian thought. Give him his fantasy. So he imagined the photographs splitting the room in half. Miguel wanted

those blue ethereal waves. Adrian wanted the blankness, the clean white.

The taste of caffeine brought clarity to his brain, driving away the panic of hunger. He swallowed the last of the espresso and felt a timid pressure in his lungs.



The second time Claire visited, on New Year's Day 2016, the flat was not yet halved into sea and cloud, but was merely a chaotic mess of paper-stacks and candle wax. Hoping to escape the room, Miguel suggested taking their guest to the mall just three floors below them. Claire agreed, excited to see if her ghost-form could travel in an elevator.

Hand-in-hand they swooped through the mall's festive red tunnels, sizing up the large New Year monkey who sat atop a pile of flashy gold coins. When they paused at an ice cream kiosk and Miguel asked Claire why she had come to see them again, Adrian felt hurt. One doesn't ask a family member why they bother to visit.

"I'm angry," Claire responded in that deep, muggy voice. "I've been angry and I need to snap. But I have no reason to snap anymore."

"We'll find something for you to get angry at," Miguel said. "Life is so great after a good snapping."

The devil of mischief rose in Miguel as he led them both into a restaurant bordered by red velvet ropes. Heads ducked, they sneaked into the open patio and huddled around a recently vacated corner table. Claire plucked at a mango cheesecake dessert while Miguel topped it with ice cream. A waiter came, her hair crimped in long braids. No doubt, she was in a ticklish situation—two men and a local girl enjoying another customer's white wine.

Within seconds the altercations began, growing in volume as another waiter appeared, then another. The other guests pointed their noses to the hanging space heaters.

Miguel and Claire scolded the crowd in Cantonese, and Adrian caught only bits and pieces of it. "Imagination was being mean to me," it sounded like. Then Claire shouted something like "I'm not feeling it!" Someone yelled back only one phrase Adrian could recognize: "It's your fault! Your fault!"

Adrian once aspired to speak like a local, to live in their enclosed worlds.

After two years and thousands of dollars spent on Cantonese classes, he had nothing to show but a grudge, and a small group of friendly expats who gathered at weekend brunches. Like them, Adrian preferred living in the language's rhythmic white noise.

One of the waiters seized Claire's left wrist. Claire rightfully pushed back, her plump body appearing monstrous. Adrian caught her fist as rage sparked out of her, "We were here first!" in English. Miguel goaded on, shouting the same phrase, while Adrian tugged them both past the velvet ropes.

Once beyond the eyes of the restaurant, the three dashed to the third floor coffeeshop and purchased ice cream covered in sugary mango slices. They haunched down on metal stools nearby a glass pane overlooking Kowloon's skyscrapers. As she ate, Claire's expression changed from a shift-eyed paranoia to a mischievous giggle, remembering what just transpired, then to the calm reflection of having beaten the system, of being here, in a new space.

"That was fun," Claire voiced.

Kowloon's skyline was a gaudy mess of advertisements, the worst among them a gigantic digital screen reading in red and gold "Zhong guo ren de meng," "Chinese People's dream." Adrian imagined what would happen were he back in Los Angeles, and some company had bought out the largest screen in the city to read "White People's Dream."

"I almost forgot," Claire said. "I have a report from the underworld." Her round eyes met Adrian's. "I met your grandmother. I sought her out after you mentioned her. I told her you were living with a wonderful man. That you were both happy and so so nice to me even though—" she lapsed into silence. Adrian felt air draw out of his lungs. Claire could not have known that his family was so religious. That he had fled to Hong Kong to get away from them. That his grandma, his apo baket, never needed to know. That his all cousins working minimum wage in Honolulu's malls, or joined up in the U.S. Army, or serving tourists on a beach, never needed to know. He saw the face of his apo baket, weathered by years of working on cane fields, then in markets, then at church potlucks.

"I'm sorry," Claire said, glossy-eyed.

As she vanished, her spirit tossed the chandelier above them into a crescendo of tinkles.

Miguel moved into her spot and held Adrian's hand. They watched the sky-

scrapers bunched together like incense sticks.



Even devoid of customers, the Ancient Chais coffeeshop in Sheung Wan's mid-levels still had that same air of pretension (its sole customer wore sunglasses, her legs supporting a book of Shakespeare plays). Miguel took his fourth coffee of the day to the patio and lit up a cigar, watching the few pedestrians still coming home for the workday.

Miguel first touched Adrian here, on Tai Ping Shan street, firm on his stomach. After a night of bar-hopping together, Miguel had said he didn't believe Adrian worked out (though he had mentioned it several times), that he had no abs to speak of (though he could see them through his tight blue shirt).

"Feel here."

"Ok—!"

The grab was the first of many tugs into alleyways, doorways, and skybridges. In each alcove they tongued, habituating to each other's bodies. Their last stop was a patio where they somehow saw the stars despite Hong Kong's light pollution. In the four years since that night, Miguel had never been able to find that patio.

Though Miguel had done all the seducing, in the end, the joke was on him. Adrian was not the type for a fling. There was to be no moving on, no late-night booty call, no hitting and quitting, no parting gift appropriate for the level of risk and discretion.

After six good drags, Miguel put out his cigar and continued his long trot through the city, breezing through all the places he and Adrian had occupied together; the wine bars, the happy hours, the overpriced dance halls, the art galleries serving up predictably palatable abstract art.

He stopped at Man Mo temple and prayed to Man Tai, the god of literature, feeling himself drawn to an ethereal power. Perhaps she was already on her way to their flat. He ran his fingers over the trinkets at the temple's registry. Would she like incense? Herbal concoctions? Candles?

Candlelight had guided her visit the year before, New Year's Day 2017. That night, neither of them had the brain-space to entertain a sixteen year old tourist. Miguel had just admitted to fucking a pretty tomboy who worked in the Hong Kong film archives. Adrian was on three sets of medication, one for anxiety, one for cholesterol, one for weight loss. Oh yes, and Miguel had just pulled out of Adrian's next exhibition, refusing to even commission older work.

"You can't just remove yourself from circulation!" Adrian shouted from the kitchen.

"Remove me from circulation," Miguel repeated, pondering, crossed-legged on his red throw pillow. "That puts it beautifully."

"So what will you do instead?"

"Something else?" Miguel replied, his fingers rubbing the surface of his underwater panel, its layers ready to peel. "Just do something in one way, because I can't do it differently. The way I used to. Before someone comes in, calling it art."

"So, performance art? Outsider art?"

Miguel lit a hibiscus-scented candle at the windowsill. "Non-performance. Non-outsider. Non-art. It will just happen. Anywhere, anytime."

"So no one will see it?"

The candlelight flickered Claire into existence. Miguel saw her hunched on their couch, water dripping from her nose. Their aired disagreements, now free-floating, soured the evening fast. Miguel went through a list of possible activities—arcade, movie theater, coffee shop, bar, shopping. In the end they settled on watching Netflix on Adrian's iPad. Unsure what Claire liked, and getting nothing out of her sullen cheeks and weebegone eyes, Adrian selected a Korean horror film about a haunted monastery, dismissing fast the irony of watching a ghost movie with a ghost. An hour in, covered in blankets, legs crossed over each other's, they felt the comfort of each other's bodies. Even Claire's was warm, with the power still to twitch. Then their legs fell over each other, in the place where she once was.

Adrian, weary-eyed, stood to retire to his side of the demarcation. "So when this spontaneous non-art thing happens," he said. "How will I see it?"

"I'll text you," Miguel said with a shrug.

At the Admiralty Station skybridge, Miguel knew his journey had come to an end. Overlooking Hong Kong's two major arteries, where Connaught expressway and Harcourt Road highway merged into one, he felt a roguish courage build up within him. He saw toys all around: yellow police tape, white iron barricades, directional signs, light poles, trees, bus stop shelters made of steel and glass. He took a picture of the road with his smartphone and sent it to Adrian accompanied by a text message:

spontaneous non-performance non-art happening now

The music of honking horns and swerving cars provided an overture as Miguel walked into the center of the expressway, a thick roll of police tape tucked into his jacket pocket. He placed the Man Mo concoction of herbs at his feet and planted inside a lit cigarette facing upward. He stood and faced the herd of vehicles stampeding toward him. "Fog," he announced, and pursed his lips to whistle.



Once, the Connaught expressway flowered with color. Once, its pavement speckled with students in candy cane uniforms, some in makeshift tent-halls crunching down on homework, others in drum and crafting circles. Miguel was there, sitting beneath an arc of rainbow umbrellas, putting oil paints to cardboard and handing out his creations to the youth, using art to show them what their cameras could not.

For thirty-six days Miguel had hung around the encampment, working in a blaze of brush strokes, snatching the fragile nakedness of the Umbrella Movement before it would be brought to heel by green-suited policemen wearing gas masks, before the Post-it Notes of written verse would be shaken from the walls by the rumble of boots pummeling pavement. Until then, Miguel would paint those kids, the ones who had never camped but learned to set up tents, the ones who tore apart their sneakers and used the salvage to make sculptures. The old timers taught them. The city's craftsmen and artists taught them. Liberation, the youth discovered, was having some control over your own environment.

But this discovery gave no room to rejoice. It only brought the terror that they would be shaken awake from this dream of theirs.

Searching for his next painting subject, Miguel spotted a man in a sunset pink suit jacket, aiming his camera's stabbing gaze at Miguel's cardboard paintings. Miguel posed with his artworks, hoping to paint the newcomer (he was always a sucker for long hair padded thick with humidity). When the camera lowered, Miguel saw the man's deep brown eyes. This man was not like the others. Like Miguel, they both stuck out in monochrome crowds.

His name was Adrian. He curated for a gallery in Quarry Bay. "Though we prefer to call it an art space," Adrian said, his eyes on the cardboard. "Your work is interesting. Mesmeric." Miguel wondered who Mesmer was, imagined he was a great artist. "We're hoping to be the first in Hong Kong to exhibit artwork from protestors."

Miguel faced his own work. He'd been busking on the sidewalk for years, and never called it artwork, nor was he a protestor. "So you're just picking art off from the streets?"

"It's in my wheelhouse."

Miguel imagined a warehouse full of tires. Why would someone put art there?

"So," Adrian said, hands in suit-pockets. "Tell me about your vehicle."

"I don't have one," Miguel said.

"Amazing," Adrian nodded. "No topic, no theme, no object of inspiration." He took a moment to drink in the sunlight, tapping his fingers to his horn-rimmed glasses. "That's it. Exactly. So that's why your work is so—encorcelling."

This guy's coconuts, Miguel thought. And, I'd really like to devour his asshole.

Three months later, after the zip-tied barricades of the encampment were stored back into government warehouses, Miguel had his first installation as a professional artist at the Mei Gwok Mung Art Space. His piece was a cheap 7-Eleven umbrella turned upside down, hung below a drainage pipe leading from a nearby open window. During a storm, rainwater flowed into the umbrella and spilled onto the white concrete of the gallery, forcing visitors to mop up the overflow. Days later, viewers could still smell the bacteria and feel the dampness in the air. By the end of the exhibition, the umbrella had turned dark and worn. But somehow, its thin fabric still supported the deluge pouring in.



“Fuuuuck. You’re kidding.” Adrian muttered the words from his clubhouse rock-garden. The voice of an audiobook still rambled in his headphones as he stared at an image of the Connaught expressway. “Fucking asshole,” he repeated. It had to be the Occupy site, didn’t it? The most heavily protected thoroughfare in the entire city. “Fuck you,” he said to those pretentious, arrogant fucking words:

spontaneous non-performance non-art happening now

He yanked the headphones from his ears and shot for the estate elevators, moving at a wide pace so he wouldn’t have to run, his heart pounding in his ears. “Asshole,” he whispered to the empty elevator. He hadn’t felt relaxed since Miguel came into his life. Everything was either a crisis, a close call, or a shit-show like this. The past four years had been a zigzag from one manic state to another. Finally, a week of peace, and he pulls this.

Adrian jittered down the dark steps of the metro escalator and shouldered through the tunnel of standing bodies. “That fucker’s going to give me a heart attack,” he spat.

Inside the subway station, Adrian’s head swarmed. The lines, the clocks, the machines, the bodies. For five blissful days he had forgotten he lived here, in this city of intensely-lit advertisements, solar decoys without daylight.

Leaning on a pole covered in white tiles, Miguel realized he’d eaten nothing that day but a slice of raisin toast. That explained the dizziness, the nausea. Two women watched him, asked themselves if he was Filipino, like them. Speak English, his apo baket would say. He moved out of earshot.

Inside the subway car, his heart raced. He stood beneath a vent, yet the air around him thickened. A family decked in New Year red crowded him into a corner. He felt his upper back weaken and moisture pad his thighs. Breathe, breathe. With each exhale, his mind siphoned away. He brandished a pen from his pocket and the room started to crinkle. His knees strained with a blinding pain and he grabbed a boy’s shoulder, holding on for his life. The boy moved and he fell.

With an exhale his vision sank from the stiffening crowd into the dark and toiling tide.



A pedestrian on the Admiralty Station skybridge said that the crazed man whistled an anthem, a superhero's theme music.

The pedestrian's girlfriend said the man in the red leather jacket took a good thirty seconds to really find his beat, but once he caught it he didn't let go, holding tight to a rhythm and letting it seal his fate.

The woman in the first stopped car was on an errand to pick up more tissue paper after baby Winnie had flushed six rolls down the toilet. She said she screamed when the young man climbed aboard the hood of her BMW and threaded a roll of police tape through her windshield wipers. Turning them on only made scratch marks across her windshield (and wouldn't she be compensated for that?).

A buzzed Finnish tourist, led to the expressway by the sounds of honking horns, said he felt a rush of giddiness hit him when he scooped up a traffic cone and joined the man in his inebriated movements. "What a trip!" the tourist said, laughing.

A Filipino truck driver said the man moved beautifully. It was like he was levitating. Twirling atop concrete blocks like he was ascending to heaven. It was obvious the man was a gay.

We gave him three warnings, said the police officer who body-slammed him. The man had no permit to protest and was endangering lives.

Aye ya. Think he try to kill himself? said a voice on the Youtube video that showed a jammed freeway with cars threaded together in a gigantic net snatching up the city's New Year traffic. Netizens could see the shocked look on the drivers' faces when it took three policemen to restrain the idiot.

It seems the disheveled foreigner was attempting to memorialize the Umbrella Movement from four years ago, said a newscaster that night, after police reported the man was Miguel Pohl, a professional artist. But is it art or is it merely propaganda?

Not a memorial, a summoning, said an art patron who had spent an hour selecting which blazer would look best in a television studio (he had gone with

Sharkskin gray). The kid was obsessed with ghosts. Much to the detriment of his art.

Pohl's gratuitous grab for attention, blogged an art critic, reinvokes the Whitehead camp facility where he grew up. Barred behind police tape, squeezed in by traffic, assaulted by a hailfire of honks and screams, and wrestled to the ground mid-pirouette, the artist's vision culminates within a single phrase strewn from the ecstasy of movement: Hong Kong, you are all condemned!

He had no grand designs, said a man interviewed from a hospital bed by a local Cantonese paper, the curator for a gallery he insisted on calling an art space. Miguel just wanted to do something in a particular way, and there was no way to do it differently than the way he did it. We're the ones calling it art.

The artist himself, after being granted interview permission from the Tung Hau Correctional Institution, declined to comment.



The Man Mo temple's stonemasonry looked ancient and intimidating, as if the building once housed a titan. We were always so grand, Claire thought, as her spirit crossed.

The street sparked memories. A screaming pain that looped in her mind. The year before she had tried to visit them, the ones who were supposed to be her family. But then...all again...and for no reason. No, she would not go back.

The thought of visiting her boys excited her. She would have to apologize for last time. She had let the old drama affect her again. This time it would be all fun and play.

She liked seeing the old world through their eyes, liked that she was foreign to them. She could be this girl, "Claire," and they never asked for her Chinese name, never even asked where she was from, whether mainland or local, whether educated or a peasant. It didn't concern them that she spoke Cantonese with an accent, or that her English was terrible.

Her spirit lifted above the first stack of rooftops. If only she could have flown when she was alive, perhaps, she would have had more confidence. Reaching up, floating past windows, she wouldn't have slept in the same position every night, dreaming of her and seeing her dance, believing that only she

could teach her how to be herself, how to wear a dress, how to drink coffee. If she could have flown...

Claire's manifestation spattered rainwater all over Miguel's red throw pillow. The split room hadn't changed since the year before. Miguel's madness was written upon the wax bubbles and freakishly large photo-prints. Claire peeked to the other side, still with its white sheets, sharp angles and plastic containers, a testament to Adrian's type-A hysteria. She let out a laugh, though no one was around to hear it.

She waited for them atop Adrian's folded duvet, reliving the time she first saw them inside the encampment. She had been busy tying yellow ribbons, her mouth covered by a white facemask.

"What's your vehicle?" Adrian had said, wiping confetti from his pink blazer.

"I don't have one," Miguel responded, his frowzy hair like the crown of an idiot prince.

"Amazing."

Wild with laughter, Claire had to buckle her knees to settle her stomach muscles. She felt giddy, inspired, encorcelled, as the man had put it. Then, when Adrian delivered that line about art inventing fog, she felt a spark like a blazing sunset appreciated only by those who happened to glance at the horizon. The men were both endangered species, but both were also on safari. In each other they saw the big game, ready to be taken down. If we weren't stuck in this impossible place, Claire had thought then.

Time passed. Claire played with their furniture, darting through the hanging photographs until one snapped from its plastic hanger and fell to the floor. Could they have split up? Were they out on a date?

She used one of Miguel's charcoal chalks to draw a shape onto the fallen photograph's backside, letting her hand move with the memories of all the things she would miss. The scent of temple incense. The kids in drum circles pounding louder to drown out the police megaphones. She wasn't quite finished when she heard her friends call her away.