Does Public Art Have to Be Bad Art?

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Public Art in the Private City: Control, Complicity and Criticality in Hong Kong

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Abstract: Responding to Open Philosophy's call 'Does public art have to be bad art?', in this paper we argue that this discussion should pay attention to the consequences of structural transformations that guide the production and presentation of public art in today's increasingly private city. While entrepreneurial governance and corporate branding strategies generate new opportunities, they might also result in increased risk averseness and control over the content of public art, thus putting its critical potential at risk. That observation ushers in urgent questions about control, complicity and criticality. We aim to reflect on those questions through two public art projects in Hong Kong: Antony Gormley's *Event Horizon* (2015) and *Our 60-second friendship begins now* (2016) by Sampson Wong Yu-hin and Jason Lam Chi-fai. After drawing conclusions on the justification of public funding for co-productions, the legitimacy for artists to sometimes not 'follow the rules', and the problematic nature of a narrow definition of professionalism as a means to discredit artists, our analysis underlines the urgent need to develop a framework that can guide discussions on the consequences of control and complicity for the critical potential of public art.

Keywords: Public art, private city, control, complicity, criticality, Event Horizon, Antony Gormley, Countdown machine, Add Oil team, Hong Kong

1 Introduction

What are the possibilities for critical public art in an increasingly private city? In response to Open Philosophy's call for papers, in this contribution we argue that this should be one of the central questions in the discussion about public art today. This suggestion builds on the observation that "the art world is not what it used to be", as the socio-economic space within which contemporary art circulates has changed dramatically.[1] In our early twenty-first century neoliberal constellation of rising inequalities, a dramatic growth of the art market, public-private co-productions, increased expediency, and a new authoritarianism with related attacks on institutions of science, democracy and deliberation, it is an open question if contemporary art will be one more social practice to be overwhelmed by the rationales of ulterior motives, or that it can somehow play another, more critical role.

Of course, discussions about the autonomy of art are not new at all. Chin-tao Wu for instance critically discussed the effects of corporate sponsorship of art in the 1980s; George Yúdice and Peter Marcuse criticised the effects of growing expediency for the content of art in the mid-2000s; and with a healthy

1 Zolghadr and Teixeira Pinto, "Conversations".

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dose of realism, Sven Lütticken and Pascal Gielen discussed the demise of art's autonomy more recently.[2] Here we argue that these discussions have special relevance for public art. Admittedly, the term 'public art' refers to diverse practices. In her influential 1996 book *Mapping the Terrain*, Suzanne Lacy for instance discerned three forms of public art.[3] Using Judith Baca's expression 'cannon in the park', she describes the oldest of these as "the display of sculptures glorifying a version of national history that excluded large segments of the population."[4] Secondly, she argues that the term public art also refers to outdoor sculptures and installations, produced since the 1960s in the wake of government funding programs or corporate commissions. These programs were a result of the conviction that art can be a means to humanise urban environments. However, as the resulting artworks had to be inserted in the political settings of actual public spaces, they required consent of a wide variety of stakeholders. Resulting in complicated bureaucratic procedures, this often compromised the quality of this public art. The question that guides this special issue especially refers to this second, bureaucratised practice of public art production. Suzanne Lacy contrasts this with a third 'activist' public art, which is based on social engagement. This 'new genre public art' uses "traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives."[5] It does not focus on the production of objects, but instead aims to employ art to reinvigorate the public sphere by attacking existing social boundaries, thereby affecting specific audiences.

While distinct in their approaches, these three practices have in common that they result in art that is visible in public space, where it engages a diverse, and often unexpecting audience. That characteristic is at the core of our claim that questions regarding the autonomy of art are especially relevant for public art. For, as we will argue, the modes of production and presentation of works of art that are visible in public space have transformed over the last decades. As a large urban studies literature testifies, in the contemporary city the idea of public space as generally accessible for all, publicly governed, and diverse in itself is under threat.[6] As a result, the diversity of publics engaging with public art might be increasingly limited. On top of this, in the private city corporate interests mesh with the interests of a growing super-rich elite and the entrepreneurial 'real estate state'.[7] In this setting, many decisions regarding the production and presentation of public art are made either by entrepreneurial governments, aiming to appropriate art for other – economic or state and identity building – ends, or by corporations that mainly aim to 'enrich' their products. At stake, therefore, is the question who controls the content of public art: the state, corporations, or the art world? Furthermore, who exactly is complicit to emerging forms of control? And what are the consequences of these developments for the critical potential of art?

Through these questions, we aim to raise awareness of issues of control, complicity and criticality in discussions about public art today. We do so from the vantage point of Hong Kong, an authoritarian postcolony with a highly problematic relationship to its new sovereign, the Peoples Republic of China, and where freedom of expression increasingly comes under pressure. The territory has a relatively recent art infrastructure in which ideas about the autonomy of art are not deeply rooted, an oversized art market that emerged very recently, and a government happy to employ art in its strategy for global city making. In short, Hong Kong is no stranger to the tendency of appropriation that is now sweeping the global art world. On top of this, public space is limited in Hong Kong, and real estate companies dominate both city development and decision making in general,[8] while various government agencies have very strict ideas about what is permissible in public space. Against that background, in the following we will first highlight some of the structural transformations influencing the production and presentation of public art in the private city. Next, we will introduce public art in Hong Kong, before discussing two specific public art projects: Antony

2 Wu, "Privatising Culture"; Yúdice, "The Expediency of Culture"; Marcuse, "The Production of Regime Culture"; Lütticken, "Neither Autocracy nor Automatism"; Gielen, "Autonomy via Heteronomy".

3 Lacy, "Cultural Pilgrimages", 21-30.

4 Ibid., 21.

5 Ibid., 19.

6 See for instance Mitchell, "The End of Public Space?"

7 Stein, "Capital City"; Forrest, Koh and Wissink, "Cities and the Super-Rich".

8 Wissink, Koh and Forrest, "Tycoon City".

Gormley's *Event Horizon* (2015) and *Our 60-second friendship begins now* (2016) by Sampson Wong Yu-hin and Jason Lam Chi-fai.[9] Our conclusion will underline the urgent need for a framework that can guide discussions on the consequences of control and complicity for the critical potential of public art in the private city.

2 Art and the enrichment economy

As is by now well-documented, one of the core structural transformations of our time has been what David Harvey has described as an "attack on labour" by a revanchist capitalist class that has managed to "restore class power" since the 1970s.[10] In this process, neoliberal policies that included a rollback of state intervention and a return to the market as the prime mechanism of resource allocation have resulted in a stark increase of corporate power as well as a dramatic growth of income inequality.[11] Attention to the growing wealth of the 'super-rich' or the '1%', for instance in Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, have triggered comparisons with pre-First World War economic realities and the proclamation of a 'second gilded age'.[12]

These structural transformations in the political economy have had enormous repercussions for cities. Dramatically increasing the importance of urban real estate for capital accumulation, it has driven up prices in the process,[13] confirming David Harvey's belief that real estate functions as a secondary circuit to store capital that cannot be made productive.[14] Leilani Farha shows that with a current total worth of $217 trillion, global real estate now represents an astonishing sixty percent of the world's assets – roughly three-quarters of which is in housing.[15] According to Samuel Stein, this has coincided with the emergence of a 'real estate state': "a political formation in which real estate capital has inordinate influence over the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics and the lives we lead. (..) As real estate values have risen to absurd heights, so has the political force of real estate capital."[16]

These transformations also have consequences for the physical structure of the city. Real estate capital results in a variety of new state and business-led regeneration projects, which in conjunction with new premium infrastructures are super-imposed on existing – already segregated – cities.[17] Meanwhile, concurrent with dramatic budget cuts for public urban amenities,[18] public spaces as freely accessible and publicly governed open spaces for all are increasingly transformed into privatised collective spaces.[19] Of course, these developments are not new; what is new however, is the current speed of transformations and the unapologetic focus on high-end real estate, at the cost of almost everything else. The resulting 'private' city is characterised by a radicalisation of socio-spatial fragmentation, as low-income groups are pushed out of collective spaces, neighbourhoods, and the city as a whole.

Art is linked to these transformations in two ways. On the one hand, in the wake of a transition from managerial to entrepreneurial planning strategies since the 1980s there has been a growing attention of city governments for art as a means to reinvigorate cities; a development that is well recognised.[20] The realisation that in an increasingly mobile world, capital, professionals and consumers need to be actively lured to the city refocused urban planning on city branding exercises in combination with the development of iconic places, preferably designed by starchitects. Museums and art events like biennials soon emerged

9 The presentation of these cases draws on Van Meeteren, "Views on a Former Periphery".
10 Harvey, "A Brief History", 17 and 25.
11 Streeck, "Buying Time".
12 Piketty, "Capital"; Dorling, "Inequality and the 1%"; Hay, "On Plutonomy".
13 Forrest, Koh and Wissink, "Cities and the Super-Rich".
14 Harvey, "The Urban Process under Capitalism".
15 Farha, "Report of the Special Rapporteur", referenced in Stein "Capital City", 2.
16 Stein, "Capital City", 5-6.
17 Graham and Marvin, "Splintering Urbanism"; Wissink, Schwanen en Van Kempen, "Beyond Residential Segregation".
18 Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism".
19 Sorkin, "Variations on a Theme Park"; Mitchell, "The End of Public Space".
20 Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism".

as go-to policy solutions for cities, aspiring to recreate what has come to be known as the Bilbao effect. This easily legitimised high-cost investments in large-scale art institutions and events, and the simultaneous disinvestment in various urban amenities for all to finance such investments, including smaller art spaces with a local orientation.

Secondly, art institutions and art events are also starting to play an important role in the strategies of real estate developers. Of course, corporate contributions to art are not new. Chin-tao Wu suggests that in the 1980s such contributions were meant to generate access to decision-making networks, while they also offered cheap advertising and social capital. As a result, "business [became] well advanced in every phase of contemporary art."[21] New, however, is that with the increased importance of the market for luxury goods under influence of super-rich private capital, art is starting to play an increasingly important role in production and branding strategies of real estate companies. For Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre this transformation relates to the growth of what they call the 'enrichment economy'.[22] They argue that the value of luxury goods for top-end consumers is not determined by production costs (as is the case for 'standard' mass products), nor by expectations about future returns (as is the case for the 'asset' form of products), but instead by narrative, often with reference to the past, or to special events or persons (the 'collection' form of products).[23]

Writing about the fashion industry, Chin-tao Wu suggests that with the growth of the enrichment economy the role of art has changed: "[i]n contrast to corporate-art interventions in the 1980s, when the general aim was to bring art into the office space, this new fashion-branded landscape of contemporary art is intended to bring avant-garde works into contact with luxury shopping spaces – exploiting art so as to mediate the experience of conspicuous consumption."[24] Similar processes are now taking place at the top-end of the real estate market. In this market, there is no longer a relationship between scarcity and price, because the super-rich can pay whatever they want for exclusive properties. The resulting dramatic price hikes cannot be explained with reference to production costs or expected returns on investment alone. Instead, value in this market is increasingly justified by Boltanski and Esquerre's collection form. While real estate branding already played an important role for quite some time, in the collection form it becomes a crucial strategy. Art is one of the means in this strategy to generate narratives that 'enrich' properties and justify the exorbitant rents and prices of units. The introduction of new technologies that transform the façades of buildings into giant screens – a development that as we will see is at the core of one of the projects that we will discuss – has helped to dramatically increase this potential.[25]

One example of the appropriation of art to enrich real estate can be found in Hong Kong, where Adrian Cheng, the executive vice chairman of the $9.4 billion New World Development real estate and retail empire with enormous interests in the Chinese market, is also a well-known collector and patron of the arts.[26] His K11 Art Foundation has been sponsoring a host of collaborations with big-name Western art institutions like Palais de Tokyo and MoMA PS1. Adrian Cheng is also a board member of many such institutions. However, his engagement with art has an economic rationale as well, as his company is planning to invest about $2 billion in retail and real estate in mainland China under the K11 brand.[27] Obviously, the cultural standing of the K11 brand is meant to add value to these investments.

Another example of the appropriation of art to enrich real estate is the recently opened Shed, one of the centre pieces of Manhattan's much maligned Hudson Yards project. As the "largest mixed-use private real estate development in American history", this project received an estimated $6 billion in tax breaks and other government assistance.[28] Hudson Yards itself is the epitome of the private city, and it "glorifies a kind of surface spectacle — as if the peak ambitions of city life were consuming luxury goods and enjoying a

21 Wu, "Embracing the Enterprise Culture", 29.
22 Boltanski and Esquerre, "The Economic Life"; Boltanski and Esquerre, "Enrichissement".
23 For a critical discussion see Fraser, "A New Form" and Boltanski and Esquerre, "Enrichment, Profit, Critique".
24 Wu, "Fashion Seduces Art", 124.
25 Pop, Toft, Calvillo and Wright, "What Urban Media Art can do".
26 Pollack, "How a Nonprofit Cut a Global Path".
27 Ibid.
28 Paybarah, "Hudson Yards".

smooth, seductive, mindless materialism."[29] Illustrating the importance of enrichment, Ben Davis observes an "unspeakable gap between what [Hudson Yards] actually is and how it wants and needs people to think of it."[30] The Shed plays a crucial role in this strategy. Located next to the Vessel, a $200 million art cum architecture cum experience object, the Shed is a similarly outrageously priced $500 million-plus extra-large hybrid visual arts and performance space. It is funded through contributions by New York city government, as well as a host of super-rich 'patrons', many of which have direct interests in the real estate project. Designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and supported by various big-name art professionals, for Dorothea van Hantelmann, this space is meant to function as a new 'ritual space' that stimulates meetings with others and togetherness.[31]

However, as Claire Bishop scathingly observes, "the total impression [is] less of a new ritual space than of quality decoration for an area where a cozy pied-à-terre will set you back $12 million."[32] For her, "[t]he construction of yet another enormous venue for culture feels like the harbinger of a horrible new world in which all public services are drained of resources but every High Net Worth Individual can evade taxes by pouring a fraction of their profits into a cultural project that enhances their social status."[33] She continues that it "isn't going to yield the kind of social gathering described by von Hantelmann. (..) The space might ostensibly be open to all, but participation is invitation-only. One can only imagine the security response if a group of street dancers descended on the Shed's plaza unannounced and a crowd of spectators grew around them."[34] Bishop concludes that "New York doesn't need another curated cultural venue. We need to reclaim public assembly."[35]

In the private city, corporations join governments in appropriating art to enrich buildings, projects, neighbourhoods, and cities. As a result, as artist Hito Steyerl notes, "[c]ontemporary art is [now] a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything for a quick face-lift touting the new creative imperative for places in need of an extreme makeover."[36] On the positive side, this increases opportunities – money, space, support – for art projects, public or not. But potentially, this comes at a price. As new supporters aim to create 'positive' narratives, they are likely to try to 'curate the city' by controlling which art is produced or presented; especially in the case of public art projects that potentially are visible for everyone. Meanwhile, in view of the money and possibilities involved, art professionals seem all too happy to collaborate. This context of control and complicity can have huge consequences for the public imagination of urban life and the city itself, for art threatens to be reduced to an affirmative supporter of a higher unity, like nation, religion, culture, or capitalism.[37] In other words, these new possibilities might indirectly affect the critical potential of public art.

One interjection to this dystopian view might be that the art professionals involved in these new co-productions would safeguard the critical potential of art, and that recent art events with substantial funding from entrepreneurial governments or corporations certainly also display critical art. Take for instance the 2018 Bangkok Art Biennale, which had the Thai Tourism Authority and Thai Bev, a drinks-company with enormous real estate interests, as its main sponsors. The international press was well-briefed by the curatorial team, and picked up the message that this biennale displayed critical works of art.[38] However, strikingly, these were mainly presented in the less public locations of the show, and issues that are really contentious in Thailand, like monarchy, nation and army, were blatantly absent. This underlines the risk that, while critical art will continue to exist – and might even be crucial for enrichment as a marker

29 Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community".
30 Davis, "Hudson Yards has Thrown Everything".
31 Von Hantelmann, "What is the New Ritual Space".
32 Bishop, "Palace in Plunderland".
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Steyerl, "Politics of Art".
37 Bishop, "Palace in Plunderland".
38 For example, see: Ellis-Petersen, "Risk-Taking Artists".

of cultural capital – at the same time it will only be allowed to take forms that do not threaten the core assumptions on which the city in question is built.

In the private city, the orchestration of the public sphere threatens to become normalised, putting the potential of art to support 'new subjectivities'[39] and alternative publics, instead of depictions of publics as sanctioned by nation-states, city-governments or corporations, at risk.[40] If we agree with David Harvey that "[t]he right to the city is (..) far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies" but that it is also "a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire", then this should certainly include the right to *imagine* the city in a variety of ways.[41] Next to other practices, art has always played an important role in such imaginations. The concern that this might not be possible in the private city brings us back to the questions regarding control, complicity and criticality that we formulated in the introduction.

3 Public art in Hong Kong

It would be an understatement to say that public art in Hong Kong has a bad reputation. As Christopher DeWolf stresses, in itself there is plenty of public art. However, he quotes art critic John Batten as saying that most of it is bland, boring, safe and unprovocative: "It's seen by people as decoration rather than art. (..) If it was seen as art, the pieces would be braver."[42] Writing about public sculpture in Hong Kong, David Clarke is similarly unimpressed, arguing that "where it exists, [it] is mostly characterized by a desire to avoid controversy."[43] Meanwhile, in an op-ed for the *South China Morning Post*, another Hong Kong art veteran, Oscar Ho, writes that "the city is hardly brimming with fantastic examples of public art." In his opinion, public art commissions in the city are loud and showy, have a Chinatown aesthetic, and might not be very relevant to the lives of Hong Kong people. "Can we stop building these grand, ugly objects that are polluting our environment?", he wonders.[44] Clearly, the question 'if public art has to be bad art' is highly relevant in the Hong Kong context. A short overview of public art in Hong Kong in terms of Suzanne Lacy's distinction between three types helps to illustrate this situation, and to understand the potential benefits of the new opportunities arising from support by corporations and entrepreneurial governments for public art in this city.

As for the 'cannon in the park' type of public art, remarkably there are only a handful of monuments and statues in Hong Kong. Obviously, in this postcolony, statues and monuments can be highly sensitive. It is probably not surprising, therefore, that one of the most visible monuments, the Cenotaph on Memorial Square in the city's administrative heart, commemorates the victims from the First and Second World Wars; something that is hardly contentious. Originally, the colonial government had erected several statues of British royals and dignitaries on close-by Royal Square (now Statue Square). However, during the Second World War, bronze statues and their fixtures situated here were looted by the Japanese.[45] After the liberation only the severely damaged statue of Queen Victoria and the statue of HSBC chief manager Sir Thomas Jackson were recovered from a Japanese Armory and brought back to Hong Kong.[46] After restoration, they were placed in public space again. However, possibly connected to shifting attitudes towards colonial power, no new commissions for this type of public art followed since the end of the war. So far, things have only slightly changed since the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, with the new sovereign adding two monuments to the cityscape: the *Golden Bauhinia* and the *Monument in Commemoration of the Return of Hong Kong to China*.

39 Mouffe, "Artistic Activism".
40 Roberts and Crossley, "Introduction", 3; Valjakka, "Urban Hacking".
41 Harvey, "The Right to the City".
42 John Batten, quoted by DeWolf, "Waste of Space?"
43 Clarke, "Between East and West", 83.
44 Ho, "Hong Kong Deserves".
45 "Statues of Royalty".
46 "Queen Victoria Found".

In Hong Kong, objects in public space resulting from commissions by government or private parties – Suzanne Lacy's second type of public art – emerged quite late. Remarkably, here the corporate parties, and most notably real estate developers Hongkong Land and Swire Properties, led the way in the 1980s,[47] which might reflect the private nature of urban development in this city. The decision to include works of art in their commercial and residential developments could be seen as forward-looking. However, the commissions where quite conservative, and the resulting works mainly consisted of sculpture, often by well-known local and international artists, such as Van Lau and Henry Moore.[48] This public art befitted the then common corporate art patronage, a quite passive engagement focusing mainly on collection building.[49]

In Hong Kong government circles, before the 1990s there had been little programmatic interest in public art as a category, and initiatives had been incidental.[50] This changed when the government commissioned several research reports on the potential of public art, eventually setting up a 'Public Art Team' in 1998, followed by a 'Public Art Scheme' one year later. In addition, in 2001 the Art Promotion Office was created as an overarching government body, focusing on the "promotion and implementation of public art in Hong Kong."[51] The Public Art Team has regularly published open calls for works of art, to be displayed at public venues around the city.[52] However, reflecting the negative assessments with which we started this section, overall the results of these initiatives have been disappointing. While administrators increasingly accommodated concepts from international discussions on public art, like site-specificity, these were usually translated in a very literal sense. Stephanie Cheung for instance concludes that "references to the sites, and quite frequently, styles or contents (..) suggest certain clichés of Chineseness."[53] Meanwhile, in a 2003 report on the state of public art in Hong Kong, Desmond Hui was remarkably critical, stressing that the "majority of artwork developed in the last twenty years seem to be predominantly sculptures and murals in the conventionally permanent sense. Examples from other cities point to more diverse options – in particular temporary installations and events in specific sites chosen by the artists, which allows a more proactive artistic response to the environment by the public."[54]

While the government was commissioning conceptually safe, unchallenging and non-offensive works of public art, as well as reports diagnosing causes of the bad state of public art, artists seemed more in tune with global developments. Since the mid-1990s, their initiatives often resulted in Suzanne Lacy's third form of 'new genre public art'. Some artists also explicitly professed kinship with her ideas. Kith Tsang for instance referenced Lacy, before arguing that his own practice of art in public space was a form of social participation: "as a citizen wanting to join in an interested affair, through the means of his own expertise."[55] As one example, in 2008 a loose collection of artists and others staged various interventions to take back the public space in front of Times Square mall by demonstrating the un-publicness of the site.[56] In a similar vein, thematising the highly problematic relationship with mainland China, artists such as Amy Cheung, Kacey Wong, and wen yau have been walking a fine line between art and activism with their projects and performances in public space. Through their practice, these artists have engaged with the thorny subjects that undermine 'the stories that Hong Kong tells about itself'.[57] However, while their work was highly relevant for Hong Kong, and certainly delivered on the critical potential of art, they worked from project to project in precarious, self-organised settings, generally either through self-funding or with short-term financing via the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC).

47 Hui, "Public Art Research", 9.
48 Cheung, "Public Art in Hong Kong", 3.
49 Wu, "Embracing the Enterprise Culture".
50 Cheung, "Public Art in Hong Kong", 91.
51 Hui, "Public Art Research", 10.
52 Art Promotion Office, "Public Art Scheme".
53 Cheung, "Public Art in Hong Kong", 101-103.
54 Hui, "Public Art Research", 11.
55 Kith Tsang, quoted by Cheung, "Public Art in Hong Kong", 190-191.
56 Leung and Denizen, "Privatising Public Space".
57 Gregory, "The Colonial Present", 4.

The setting for public art in Hong Kong has thus never been very fertile. While funding has been limited, Hong Kong government has had the propensity to avoid risks. In recent years, this has become increasingly problematic for artistic expression, as the relationship with mainland China, and especially the related threats to human rights and freedom of expression, have become increasingly sensitive subjects. Meanwhile, artists have been conceiving many exciting critical art projects, but they have had to do so in precarious circumstances. In Hong Kong private ownership also easily takes precedence over public expression. Thus, when Altermodernists organised *Dusk Rat Run*, "a one-night flash mob art happening, transforming the maze-liked back alley network in Kwun Tong industrial area into an experimental art platform" in November 2017, building managers were quick to step in and prevent some of the projects from taking place.[58] On top of this, the overly bureaucratised government agencies generally take a negative stance towards public art as well, and its production is mired by the necessity to apply for endless permits. And the communication between government departments leaves much to be wished. Thus, when the government for instance finally decided that the graffiti-like work of Tsang Chou-choi, known as the King of Kowloon, was to be conserved as heritage in 2000, different departments had a hard time deciding in which category to place it, and due to lack of communication between departments many of his works were still removed.[59]

Against this background, possibilities for public art arising from corporate actors and entrepreneurial governments aiming to enrich products and cities are certainly interesting. After all, while additional funding might help to fix the precarious nature of the practice of many artists, at the same time the concurrent professionalisation might help to bring government commissions more in line with international practices. Co-productions involving corporations, governments and artists might also open up physical spaces for public expressions. However, initial forays into similar collaborations in the early 2000s have not been very positive. The collaboration between Para Site and the MTR corporation in 2000 through the exhibition "Private Lives" in Sheung Wan station, for instance, turned out to be problematic, when according to Kith Tsang "[t]he corporate management (..) adopt[ed] a policy of censorship (...) to screen away anything that might provoke users' dissatisfaction. Public art in the stations remain[ed] on a decoration level, and misse[d] the important function of influencing the citizens' 'public life' in a mass transit system."[60] Despite the advantage of additional funding and physical space for public art, the negative consequences of these collaborations for its critical potential to which we alluded in the previous section might therefore be real as well. How do these positives and negatives stack up in two recent co-produced public art projects in Hong Kong?

4 Antony Gormley's *Event Horizon* (2015)

In November 2015 a group of life-size sculptures reached their destinations on the edges of 27 rooftops and on four street level locations in Central and Admiralty. It had been a long journey: realisation had taken three years. The Hong Kong iteration of this art installation had been initiated in 2012 by real estate branding consultant Cassius Taylor-Smith, whose non-profit 'Very Hong Kong' engaged with issues pertaining to the use of public space. Antony Gormley, the British artist responsible for the work, had made a preparatory visit in the same year and was excited to add Hong Kong to the list of cities that had already hosted his *Event Horizon*: London, Rotterdam, New York, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The installation sought to make people pause and look at their surroundings anew. It seemed a natural fit for Hong Kong, a densely packed high-rise city, where throngs of people travel narrow pavements with eyes often glued to smartphone screens. The work was supposed to headline a cultural festival at the end of 2013, but that proved too optimistic.[61] However, with help of facilitator British Council, lead sponsor K11 Art Foundation

58 Altermodernists, "Dusk Rat Run".
59 Wooters Yip, "Conservation of 'Graffiti'".
60 Cheung, "Public Art in Hong Kong", 115-116.
61 Very Hong Kong, "Very Hong Kong Announces".

and a host of other corporate partners, the small army of replicas of Gormley's own body finally took up their posts two years later. *Event Horizon* in Hong Kong was a fact.

Event Horizon had acquired an air of notoriety. 'Making Space', Gormley's artist talk in honour of the project, easily filled the Grand Hall at the University of Hong Kong. For an hour, Gormley candidly spoke about the role of art in society. He suggested that art can show the unknown, that it should take up a social role, and that it thereby becomes a platform for discussion. Accustomed to a certain amount of controversy, he politely dismissed concerns from the audience that his work would not be 'acceptable' in Hong Kong. Such concerns might not be surprising in view of the contentious nature of both nudity and suicide in this territory. However, according to Gormley, "it's not art's job to be acceptable. In fact, its job is to question (..) everything, (..) the last thing that art has to do is please people. I think it should disturb, undermine and question."[62] Gormley suggested that nowadays 'reflexivity' has replaced 'representation' in art. *Event Horizon* for instance reflects on the place of the human project in the scheme of things. In an interview with the South China Morning Post, Gormley stressed the importance of critical, reflexive art for Hong Kong: "This art is about Hong Kong's growing awareness of its own unique identity that is neither its colonial past or [derived from] its new masters in Beijing."[63] He made an explicit link to the Occupy Central protests that had taken place the year before in the area where the sculptures were installed: "This project (..) is very much about the place of individuals against forces that are faceless determiners of our lives, such as forces of government and corporate power."

The realisation of *Event Horizon* had proven a tall order. Delays mainly stemmed from two sources. On the one hand, the city's administration was at its risk-averse best, and obtaining the necessary permits was a herculean task. Problems were exacerbated due to corporate sponsorship, the second problem.

Image 1: Antony Gormley: Event Horizon | presented in Hong Kong by the British Council | Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith, 2015.

62 Gormley, "Making Space".
63 Tsui, "Art as Acupuncture".

Image 2: Antony Gormley: Event Horizon | presented in Hong Kong by the British Council | Photography by Oak Taylor-Smith, 2015.

Corporate support for the project turned out to be fickle when the project's initial lead sponsor, Hongkong Land, suddenly withdrew its support in 2014. The direct cause was a request to do so by one of its tenants, investment bank JPMorgan, after one of their employees had committed suicide by jumping off Chater House, coincidentally also one of the intended sites for a sculpture. This decision robbed *Event Horizon* of its lead sponsor and of the locations for the sculptures. It also meant that the project organisers needed to engage in a fresh round of permit requests, which compounded the first source of delays.

Eventually, the project was saved. The sponsorship problem was solved when New World Development's Adrian Cheng and his K11 Art Foundation stepped in as new lead-sponsor. Asked about the risks of sponsoring the controversial project, Adrian Cheng responded: "What's the point of saying you support the arts, that it's part of your corporate social responsibility, when you don't support anything with an impact?"[64] With this jibe at Hongkong Land, Cheng also seemed to explicitly embrace Gormley's ideas about critical, reflexive art. With newfound sponsorship, the project still needed to scale the city's administrative apparatus. It reportedly took personal interference by Carrie Lam, the current embattled chief executive and second in command at the time, to give the project the all systems go.[65] Not surprisingly, her support had less to do with her love for critical, reflexive art and more with the fierce intercity competition in Asia and the perceived risk that *Event Horizon* might end up elsewhere, for instance in Singapore.[66] This was illustrated by Lam's statement in the event's press release: "I am pleased that this Asian premiere of *Event Horizon* in Hong Kong has demonstrated to the world our city's progressive and promising development into a regional hub of arts and culture, as well as reinforced our position as an economy where creative industries are set to prosper."[67]

64 Tsui, "Hong Kong Companies Split".
65 Ross, "Gallery Without Walls".
66 Ness, "Foreword", 4.
67 British Council Hong Kong, "Event Horizon Changed the Future of Public Art".

In Hong Kong's underfunded setting that is hardly conducive to critical art, with *Event Horizon*, a collaboration of government, NGO and commercial parties managed to create a public art event that is just that. The issue of control and risk averseness certainly played a role in this project when the original lead sponsor, Hongkong Land, withdrew from the project as it proved to touch on issues that were too sensitive for this corporate partner. However, the willingness of another corporate sponsor, Adrian Cheng, to take over this role through his K11 Art Foundation, and the explicit support for critical art projects by New World Development's executive vice chairman seems to suggest that corporate sponsorship does not have to be opposed to critical art projects. At the same time, Carrie Lam's support for the project with reference to the competitive position of Hong Kong indicates that entrepreneurial governments can support critical art projects as well. And while the project – at least indirectly – made Antony Gormley complicit to the real estate agenda of the project's main sponsor, at the same time his artistic autonomy was never in danger, while his staunch defence of critical public art, his recurrent presence in the territory, and the public engagement program that was part of *Event Horizon* certainly aimed to contribute to a positive climate for critical public art in Hong Kong. In all, *Event Horizon* thereby illustrates the possibilities that co-productions with new supporters of public art can bring to cities.

Would this success be reproducible in other projects? The British Council certainly seemed to think so, stating that "Event Horizon changed the future of public art in Hong Kong."[68] Gormley himself apparently agreed, arguing that the project constituted a "profound change of mentality" in this risk averse city.[69] But during a panel discussion in Hong Kong's Fringe Club the tone was less boisterous. According to Hong Kong art world veteran Benny Chia, "[u]nless you have access to the top, [nowadays] it is very difficult for individuals and small organizations to do anything."[70] Meanwhile, as Enid Tsui observed, "(..) there [were] fears that the controversy (..) may further discourage local companies from backing contemporary art projects. After all, sponsoring a classical music concert is a much safer way of adding an aura of sophistication to their brands."[71] On top of this, *Event Horizon's* success strongly hinged on the participation of an established and internationally recognised artist who is capable of withstanding pressure, as well as a corporate sponsor that saw an easy win, and a city government seeking to employ the international allure, and resulting spectacular images, of *Event Horizon* for city branding purposes. It is questionable if this model of organising critical, reflexive art could also work for projects of lesser-known artists, or projects that engage with issues that hit closer to home; a fear that is reinforced by the controversy regarding *Our 60-second friendship begins now*.

5 Sampson Wong and Jason Lam's *Our 60-second friendship begins now* (2016)

Sampson Wong Yu-hin and Jason Lam Chi-fai are two of the founders of the Add Oil team, which derives its name from a distinct Chinese rallying cry, meant to invigorate and express encouragement. During the pro-democracy Occupy Central protests that resulted from the so-called Umbrella movement, their interactive installation *Add Oil Machine* (2014) projected almost 40.000 messages of support from all over the world on the wall of the Central Government Complex in the middle of the occupied area. Earlier, Wong also co-organised Affordable Art Basel, an initiative addressing the elitist nature of this international art fair, and Hacking Freespace Fest, a critique of the increasingly non-inclusive character of an event under the same name in West Kowloon Cultural District. In view of this history of critical interventions, Sampson Wong and Jason Lam were invited to contribute to the "Fifth Large-Scale Public Media Art Exhibition: Human Vibrations." Initiated by the government, the exhibition was commissioned by the HKADC and curated by Hong Kong-based independent French curator Caroline Ha Thuc. Consisting of works by both international

68 Ibid.
69 Gormley, "Making Space."
70 British Council Hong Kong, "Beyond Event Horizon".
71 Tsui, "Hong Kong Companies Split".

and local artists, it was complemented with talks, an educational program, and artist-led workshops, all aimed at engaging a wide audience. The exhibition took place at a variety of public and semi-public venues: busy Pier 9 next to the Star Ferry Pier on Hong Kong Island, government spaces, and commercial venues such as the K11 Art Mall and the International Commerce Centre (ICC).

Wong and Lam's contribution to the exhibition consisted of a nine-and-a-half-minute video entitled *Our 60-second friendship begins now*. Together with the animated works of several other artists, it was displayed on the enormous 77.000 m^2 LED façade of the ICC, where it was visible to everyone. With almost 500 metres, at night this tallest building of Hong Kong stands in stark contrast to its relatively dark West Kowloon surroundings, making it an inescapable beacon of the territory's successful capitalism, and possibly also the largest public art installation in the city. For most of the year, the ICC displays cutesy animations, but the building has a history of hosting media art by local and international artists as well, for instance in collaboration with Art Basel Hong Kong, or in the context of the 'Open Sky Gallery', organised with City University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media.[72] As a precondition for art works on ICC's façade, its owner Sun Hung Kai Properties (SHKP) has set guidelines that "do not accept lighting works designed for personal and commercial events (..) themes that may be interpreted as derogatory as to race, religion, sexual orientation, natural origin, or physical or mental disability (..) or works containing any political elements."[73] It might be common practice for commercial organisations in Hong Kong to set such restrictions.[74] However, for Wong and Lam restrictions regarding political content were highly problematic, and it was clear from the start that they would submit a work with political relevance.

The title and concept of *Our 60-second friendship begins now* is derived from Wong Kar-wai's movie *Days of Being Wild* (1990). In one of the movie's iconic scenes, two darlings of Cantonese pop culture,

Image 3: Sampson Wong and Jason Lam: Our 60-second friendship begins now | Photography by Sampson Wong and Jason Lam, 2016.

72 Park and Benayoun, "A Cautionary Tale".
73 SHKP guidelines, according to Park and Benayoun, "A Cautionary Tale", 5.
74 Man, "Only Numbers".

Maggie Cheung and Leslie Cheung, watch a minute go by together – a shared moment of friendship that binds them forever. The scene is an example of Wong Kar-wai's recurring references to ambiguous perceptions of time, which had been a crucial element in the city's imagination in the years leading up to the handover of the territory from the UK to China in 1997. Taking inspiration, Wong and Lam divided their work into six segments, each tracking the passing of one minute, alternated by a textual reference to the movie scene in both English and Cantonese. The artist statement presented the work as an invitation "to celebrate this memorable cinematic moment" and encouraged "people to have impromptu interactions with each other."[75] However, a day after the first showing, together with other members of the Add Oil team, they released a press statement, explaining the meaning of the final segment of the work to local and international media outlets. Branding this segment *Countdown Machine*, they stated that the nine digits covering the full length of the ICC are counting down to 1 July 2047, the expiration date of the current 50-year 'One Country, Two Systems' agreement that guarantees a special status to Hong Kong. The segment echoed a similar countdown clock at Tiananmen Square in the run-up to the 1997 handover.[76] Wong and Lam wanted to attract attention to this deadline, and confront the citizens of Hong Kong's with one of the most uncertain aspects of their lives.

The timing of Add Oil's press statement was not accidental; it coincided with the first visit of a high-ranking mainland Chinese official since the pro-democracy protests almost two years earlier. During this three-day visit of Zhang Dejiang, whose tasks included overseeing Hong Kong affairs, the stakes for the Hong Kong government were high. As a result, the city was on lockdown to ensure that there would be no 'embarrassment', and 8000 police officers were deployed to prevent people from 'causing trouble'. Bricks were glued to pavements and protests were not allowed.[77] Despite guarantees in the Basic Law, freedom of expression was thereby de facto suspended. However, by 'hacking' the ICC, the Add Oil Team effectively broke this blockade and broadcasted their concerns about the future of Hong Kong loud and clear across the harbour. As various news outlets pointed out, it was definitely visible from Zhang's hotel room.[78]

Wong and Lam's statement resulted in significant media coverage but other than that, at first surprisingly little happened, and night after night the work was shown on the ICC.[79] After five days the HKADC finally broke silence, stating that the work would be removed from the exhibition. In a mutual statement, Ellen Pau, chairman of the HKADC Film and Media Art group, and curator Ha Thuc justified this decision with reference to a perceived breach of contract by the artists. In their view, the artists had changed the title and statement of the work and published these changes without consulting the curator. Thus, the artists had shown "disrespect (..) against the original agreement", thereby "jeopardising our profession and put[ing] at risk any future possibility to work further in the public space."[80] They stressed that the decision to cancel the work was not an act of censorship, but a professional sanction. The following day, the artists published an official response, contesting that they made changes to their work – after all this was technically impossible after submitting the animation to the organisation. They asserted that the curator knew the meaning of the last minute of the animation from the start, and also claimed the right to discuss various interpretations of their work. They therefore challenged the legitimacy of the removal of their work, branding it an attack on their freedom of expression.[81]

The facts of the actual conversations between curator, artists and HKADC will probably never be clear. They might not even be very important compared to the more fundamental difference of opinion about the function of art in society that was revealed in the aftermath of the conflict. Some commentators condemned the Add Oil Team, shaming Wong and Lam as 'attention seekers' and 'careerist'. Others stressed their 'outsider' position, saying that Wong was a 'geologist' by trade and that Lam had never been that

75 Cheung, "Ungrounded, Unjustified and Arbitrary".
76 Wu, "Remaking Beijing", 131-164.
77 Siu, Lam, and Leung, "We're Now on a Counterterrorism Operation".
78 For instance, see: Man, "Only Numbers".
79 Sanchez-Kozyreva, '"It's All Fear Circulating"'.
80 Cheung, "ICC Building Protest Art Suspended".
81 Wong and Lam, "Artists' Response".

deeply involved in the Hong Kong art world.[82] While some of these responses reflect a certain pettiness, behind such accusations is a deeper conviction in Hong Kong society that people like Wong and Lam are 'troublemakers'. Disregarding the unwritten rule to operate within predetermined boundaries and not upset hierarchies, they make life harder for everyone in the already underfunded setting of Hong Kong's art world, endangering future projects, both in public space and elsewhere.

However, opposing such non-confrontational pragmatism, others stressed the need for a more antagonistic role of art. For instance, they argued that "all public art in Hong Kong has to go through an approval process that involves agencies aligned with the powerful real estate industry, which in turn is involved with promoting the mainland's agenda. Only by doing something subversive artists [can] get their message across."[83] This clearly has direct relevance for the ICC building, whose owners, the billionaire Kwok brothers, have enormous development interests in mainland China. In an interview Wong himself said: "I am just trying to do what artists do, challenge and provoke. (..) But what is art if all you do is expecting money? And what does it mean that if the ICC says there should not be political work and the HKADC and the curator fully accept that condition?"[84] Phoebe Man summarised the underlying problem, wondering "whether the [HKADC] should invest its resources in venues that restrict artists from expressing themselves freely."[85] Yang Yeung concluded that artists should not just aim for professional survival, but that they are obliged to contribute to society by questioning reality. She criticised the 'art institutions' – the curator and the HKADC – as they did not stand up for art's potential to do so.[86] Illustrating that Hong Kong art institutions might not be willing to safeguard such a critical role of art, the HKADC eventually even erased all evidence of Wong and Lam's participation from the exhibition website. Clearly, it is questionable if in Hong Kong co-produced public art events will be able to safeguard the critical potential of art beyond the rare 'pet projects' by internationally renowned artists on relatively 'safe' subjects, or without artists that choose to 'hack' such events.

6 Critical public art in the private city

In a setting that is far from ideal, the enrichment strategies of corporations and entrepreneurial governments might create welcome opportunities for public art in Hong Kong. However, we have posed questions regarding the possible consequences of the resulting co-productions for the critical potential of public art as well. Two projects of course do not provide a solid basis for conclusions. However, the histories of *Event Horizon* and *Our 60-second friendship begins now* do illustrate the urgency of our questions regarding control, complicity and criticality. On the one hand, Antony Gormley's *Event Horizon* shows that co-productions can present a welcome addition to the underfunded and risk averse setting of public art in Hong Kong. In this case, evident challenges for public art, like the need to seek permits and support of government agencies, the need to find physical spaces for public art projects, and the need to find funding were overcome with the support of corporate sponsors and entrepreneurial government strategies. The importance of this type of support for public art in Hong Kong was also referenced by Lisa Park and Maurice Benayoun, who argue that Sampson Wong and Jason Lam unthinkingly jeopardised the "opportunity to turn the iconic ICC into an exhibition venue."[87]

However, the history of *Our 60-second friendship begins now* illustrates that these new forms of support come at a cost, suggesting that the positive experiences of *Event Horizon* – real as they are – might also be exceptional. After all, that project involved an established artist with the standing to advocate critical art, a corporate sponsor that could make an easy point, and an entrepreneurial government that aims to benefit from the international allure of *Event Horizon*. However, when artists are not as established, when their

82 Siu, "Artists Behind 2047 Countdown"'; Pearlman, "1,588-Foot-Tall Artwork".
83 Pearlman, "1,588-Foot-Tall Artwork".
84 Sanchez-Kozyreva, '"It's All Fear Circulating"'.
85 Man, "Only Numbers."
86 Yeung, "We May Never Know".
87 Park and Benayoun, "A Cautionary Tale".

projects are not as well-known, and when the subject of their criticality touches a raw nerve, things might turn out a bit different. *Our 60-second friendship begins now* suggests that control over artistic expression was enacted through a combination of restrictive rules of corporate parties and self-censorship by art professionals that all too easily chose positions that, at least indirectly, made them complicit to the execution of control. Ultimately, this underlines that co-productions might seriously impact the critical potential of public art. In this context, there are three issues in the history of *Our 60-second friendship begins now* that we want to especially highlight: financial public contributions to collaborative projects; the necessity of alternative artist strategies; and the problematic nature of a narrow definition of professionalism in the criticism of Sampson Wong and Jason Lam.

6.1 The public funding of co-productions

While *Human Vibrations* was financially supported by the HKADC, the restrictive guidelines that proved to be the core of this controversy were determined by SHKP, the corporate 'partner'. From the start, both the HKADC and the curator knew about these guidelines, but they never seem to have questioned them as a pre-condition for the project. As Park and Benayoun rightly observe, in itself the HKADC has a good track record in defending artistic freedom.[88] However, against that background it is all the more questionable if the HKADC should commit its limited financial resources to collaborations that bind artistic expressions to restrictive rules. Shouldn't the Council make sure that its limited funding is reserved for projects that do not work through guidelines that restrict artistic expression? As again Park and Benayoun suggest, maybe we have to be realistic and accept the new reality of public-private collaborations and its consequences.[89] But while Pascal Gielen certainly agrees, he also stresses the importance of the mixed funding of these collaborative projects, arguing that hopefully at least one of the parties in these projects would be willing to safeguard the critical potential of art.[90] While the HKADC could have taken up exactly that role by linking its funding to requirements regarding restrictions to artistic expression, unfortunately it didn't. Meanwhile, its financial contributions at the same time indirectly did support the corporate interests of SHKP. Claire Bishop's criticism of the public sponsorship for the Shed in a context of limited resources for general urban amenities illustrates that in this, unfortunately, Hong Kong is certainly not alone. Critical contributions that discuss the problematic nature of public funding for projects that restrict artistic expression – for instance by Phoebe Man[91] – notwithstanding, in general the responses to *Our 60-second friendship begins now* suggest that the awareness about this positionality of the HKADC is rather limited; unfortunately, in the aftermath of this project this discussion hasn't really progressed very far either.

6.2 The legitimacy for artists to sometimes not 'follow the rules'

Corporate and government control over artistic expression often works through public order and other guidelines stipulating what is acceptable and under which circumstances. It is not surprising therefore, that private guidelines were at the heart of the controversy regarding *Our 60 seconds begins now*, and that government permits played a crucial role in the run-up to *Event Horizon*. Similarly, Claire Bishop reminds us of the restrictive nature of private regulations in Hudson Yards' 'public space'.[92] The arbitrariness of such regulations is illustrated by the fact that, guidelines prohibiting political messages notwithstanding, the ICC façade did broadcast a message welcoming Chinese president Xi Jinping to the city about a year after

88 Ibid., 6-7.
89 Ibid.
90 Gielen, "Autonomy Through Heteronomy".
91 Man, "Only Numbers".
92 Bishop, "Palace in Plunderland".

the *Our 60 second friendship begins now* controversy.[93] Apparently, political expressions are only prohibited for dissenting voices. In the wake of a growing ambition of governments and corporations to curate the image of cities, following 'the rules' might imply that certain expressions – especially those regarding the most controversial issues in cities – will become de facto impossible, especially when international art professionals are becoming complicit to the related control over artistic expression.[94]

In such a setting, should we really expect artists to follow rules and regulations, or is it acceptable that they follow strategies of civil disobedience that create a space for the expression of new or suppressed subjectivities? After all, as Vivienne Chow suggests in her discussion of *Our 60 second friendship begins now*, "[w]hat if Hong Kong's rules about public exhibitions are wrong in the first place? (..) Whatever the answer is, one thing Hong Kong doesn't want is another generation of people kowtowing to the authorities and money. We've had enough of them already."[95] Meanwhile, Minna Valjakka argues that "varied forms of urban hacking have a growing power to raise awareness of sociopolitical issues, enhance solidarity, and renegotiate space for new strategies and subjectivities aiming for more versatile co-authorship of the city."[96] Maybe, the fact that Wong and Lam did not follow SHKP's guidelines is in itself insufficient for criticism. The one-sided discussions that followed *Our 60-second friendship begins now* suggest that the discussion on acceptable choices between rules and expression still has a long way to go.

6.3 The problematic nature of a narrow definition of professionalism

The argument for the necessity to sometimes not 'follow the rules' in settings of highly unequal power relations has consequences for references to the 'unprofessional conduct' of Sampson Wong and Jason Lam in the mutual press statement by the curator of *Human Vibrations* and the HKADC.[97] This discourse on professionalism aims to bind artists to pre-made contractual obligations, thus generating 'mutual trust'. Of course, contracts do not only serve corporate parties and funders but also the curator and the artists, as it creates a setting in which responsibilities and expectations can be clear. However, Yang Yeung reminds us that the statement of the curator and the HKADC follows a narrow definition of professionalism.[98] Echoing Antony Gormley's view that art should disturb, undermine and question, she argues that it is part of the 'profession' of art to take risks, explore boundaries and express new subjectivities. The contract under which *Our 60 second friendship begins now* was produced significantly restricted the possibilities for professionalism, thus interpreted. Following this broader view of professionalism, Sampson Wong and Jason Lam actually acted 'professional'. At the same time, Yang Yeung criticises the curator and the HKADC: "On what principles have they negotiated for the project? How have they prioritized and wrestled with a hierarchy of values in the negotiation, including the short-term opportunity for showing, or a longer-range view of contributing to a public culture that is truly open to and willing to recognize the value of art?" A narrow definition of professionalism as the need to follow rules easily becomes a framework of complicity that unjustly legitimises limits to artistic expression, while making the organisers complicit to this control. This also obscures the responsibility of institutions and art professionals to actively question those limits, for instance – as we argued above – by making freedom of expression a precondition for public financial support. The conflicting positions in the controversy on *Our 60 second friendship begins now* illustrate the urgent need for a framework to guide a discussion about control, complicity and criticality.

93 Valjakka, "Urban Hacking".

94 For a similar example of the detrimental consequences of complicit art professionals, see wen yau's experience with a European curator at an event in mainland China, available at https://www.comingsoonbkk.com/cedrics-room.

95 Chow, "Hong Kong Wants to Remain".

96 Valjakka, "Urban Hacking".

97 See Ha Thuc, "Art Should Remain Free"; Park and Benayoun, "A Cautionary Tale".

98 Yeung, "We May Never Know".

6.4 The urgent need for a framework to discuss control, complicity and criticality

In the restrictive setting of Hong Kong, corporate sponsors and entrepreneurial government could potentially be positive facilitators of public art, but their support can also come at a high price. Our analysis suggests that until now, in Hong Kong there has not been a balanced debate that is open to both the potential benefits but also the risks of this new support. So far, in the discussion in Hong Kong, those who support new co-productions do not seem willing to discuss potential negative consequences; and as yet there is no framework that can help to reach a balanced view on issues of control, complicity and criticality. However, is it not possible to include a concern for consequences for the critical potential of art in this discussion? What, for instance, should be the minimum requirement for government parties like the HKADC or art professionals – international or not – to participate in collaborations with corporate parties? Under which conditions is it acceptable to not follow rules? Under which conditions is it acceptable for artists to be complicit to the enrichment strategies of corporations that might have other negative social impacts? Admittedly, these are difficult questions that do not have easy answers. The one-sided responses to *Our 60-seconds friendship begins now* suggest that such a discussion nonetheless is urgently needed in Hong Kong. It is rather likely that it would be beneficial in other geographical settings as well.

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