

The Bulkeley Market

Peter Hasdell (text)
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Olivia Chen has conducted research into the transient dawn markets of Hong Kong in which hawkers secretly operate second-hand markets, forming a liminal space in which objects of inconsequential value are sold and exchanged. Through this Chen has built an understanding of the web of the social relations and hierarchies that underpin poorer areas in Hong Kong, exposing the socio-economic disparities in Bulkeley Street, Hung Hom and giving the lie to the prosperous facade of Hong Kong. The reality that she captures is a vanishing one, with street markets giving way to shopping malls. Through protracted observation, Chen has found that such markets contribute to the recycling and exchange mechanisms of a material economy of the city, and that such spaces of production build social cohesion through weaving webs of social connections. As a wish to manifest these social webs, Chen's work *The Bulkeley Market* explores storytelling as a spatial practice in ways that highlight the importance of such issues in the production of social space.



#local authority

#production of space

#critical practice

#spatial narrative

For Chen's *The Bulkeley Market*, the project deliberately discarded conventional design in lieu of developing a spatial narrative. This was a way for her to interpolate her fieldwork observations on the dawn markets and their casual engagement with the local into the presentation of her ever-changing work, which comes to us in the form of a series of narrative vignettes of everyday life. This market is conceived to be endlessly transforming according to the vicissitudes of the social needs in the street, drawing from the ways the former Hong Kong street markets operated. In Chen's narrative the new market is a theatrical spectacle on a community scale- vendors move in at night-time and set up their stalls in new configurations, every time in different ways, parts shift and modify according to social practices, the times of day and the needs of daily ritual and renewal. Chen's proposal is developed using three local industries: a piece of meat, a piece of metal and a piece of paper – all three items and their processes so anodyne as to be beyond consideration – are choreographed and employed to weave narratives into an array of possible configurations of the market. In Chen's view this permits the continuance of the web of social relations. Observed fragments of life from the area are given roles and characters that integrate into the new market to increase social engagement and cohesion.

The Bulkeley Market project consciously employs a scenographic means of representation over the planometric form which is often favoured by architects and urban planners alike due to its more territorial, dominion-like properties. Similarly, the choice of the three starting points – a piece of meat, a piece of metal and a piece of paper – questions the privileging of design towards practices of consumption and commodification, opting instead for the everyday (de Certeau 1984). The tactical practices deployed in Chen's project- the various ways of gathering knowledge, the ways of seeing, valuing, and the

means by which these are synthesised into narrative form- each play an equal part in defining the values and possible meanings of the project. The use of informal practices of everyday life and intangible factors have often been the focus of tactical design approaches that seek to activate space through the "lived spaces of representation." If place can articulate collective memories and have significant local meanings for residents of that place that may well be invisible to passers-by, then parts of Chen's project may touch upon what Michel de Certeau terms a "crack" – a 'local authority' that is opposed to the imposition of official narratives from above. It can therefore be suggested that the accumulation of a web of minute details and stories and events constitute alternative forms of knowledge, meaning and signification for design that may have an equally important role to play in the production of space.

Figure 1 (page 44): Meat worker (butcher: scene 6) stall in Bulkeley Street scene with underground abattoir (collective memory) beneath the street. Early morning, pork store rising. A beam of light appears in the darkness, butchers prepare for the opening, when the butcher hangs the last piece of meat on the hook, part of the shop starts to move, rotate, and rises up. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 2 (page 45): People gather to buy a piece of meat. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 3 (page 46): Walking down the gap, she finds a factory which transforms prints into digital archives. The left-over prints are kept in a giant library. She's fascinated by the enormous collection room for books. She forgets about time. *Source: Olivia Chen.*

Figure 4 (page 47): At the end of the day steam cleaners clean the market. *Source: Olivia Chen.*











Figure 5: Getting lively, in the morning, chopping sound and the street, sounds of metal crafting. After the market is operating for a certain time, sitting devices emerge. Elderly sit, relax and wait for friends. Kids stand on it for fun.
Source: Olivia Chen.



Figure 6: While the restaurant completes preparation of food, a desk and cooking device appear and extend on street. They transform into a private *cha chaan teng*, an independent barbecue stall or an open tea house. Walk down a narrow alley, there is an obscure and quiet courtyard. People come here with small amount of food which can be to-be-expired food from market or from home to exchange for a meal with variety of nutrition. (a meal with strangers on a big circular table).
 Source: Olivia Chen.



Figure 7: A girl gets lost on the crowded street. She finds a thing in between a narrow slit, something old and raw. Smells woody and display letters without screen and light, a book.
 Source: Olivia Chen.

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Bio

Peter Hasdell is an academic at the School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He has taught architecture and design in the Bartlett School, KTH Arkitektur, University of Manitoba, Hong Kong University and others. He was formerly a researcher at Chora Institute of Architecture and Urbanism and the Centre for Architecture Structures and Technology and is the founder and director of Architecture and Urban Research Lab (A+URL) and In-Situ Project. His research focuses on metabolic architecture on the scales of the city (city as a life form, urban ecology), and as architecture (interactive and responsive architectures).

Chen Shuning, Olivia graduated from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design in 2019. She has designed and researched the living spaces of many marginalised communities including Tai-O and Hong Kong's dawn markets. Her graduation project has been recognised by the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers, which awarded her the 2020 Design Distinction Award and has been exhibited widely. Four years engaging in spatial design projects has strengthened her intention to offer support to neglected people and to engage with social issues through spatial innovation. Aided by her collection of local information, she probes the possibility of spaces for adaptation and change, all in the pursuit of an improvement of life.



#space

#production of space

#market

