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Qian Cui

Speaking Things and Sentient Worlds

Reading Leung Ping-kwan's Thing-poems in the Global-Local Context

Das zusammengesetzte chinesische Wort 東西 hat die Doppelbedeutung von ‚Ost-West‘ und ‚Ding‘ bzw. ‚Objekt‘. In der Gedichtsammlung des Hongkonger Schriftstellers Leung Ping-kwan mit dem Titel 東西 (*Dong-Xi*, Ost-West-Angelegenheiten) erscheinen der Osten und der Westen jeweils als eine Erweiterung des anderen, wobei ihre anhaltenden Interaktionen eine vitale Welt offenbaren, die unaufhörlich im Entstehen begriffen ist. Umgekehrt erweisen sich das Globale und das Lokale nicht nur als geografische Signifikanten, sondern auch als zeitliche Indikatoren von Sinneswahrnehmungen, Erinnerungen, Erfahrungen, Gefühlen und Vorstellungen, deren dynamisches Zusammenspiel eine poetische Welt fortwährend erschafft und wieder auflöst. Leungs Lyrik, die die traditionelle poetische Form des ‚Dinggedichts‘ aufgreift, versucht durch die Würdigung alltäglicher Objekte, deren Formen, Gerüche und Farben im modernen Leben oft ignoriert werden, zu einer Wiederverzauberung der Welt zu gelangen. Leungs Dinggedichte führen uns in eine Welt, in der Objekte von ihrer Funktionalität gelöst und mit einer eigenen Sensibilität versehen werden. Dabei verändert sich auch die Sensibilität der Leser:innen. Leungs Dinggedichte können als Inbegriff von ‚Sinngemeinschaften‘ gelesen werden, deren Zusammenhalt von der Bereitschaft der Mitglieder zur Offenheit für Andersartigkeit sowie zur eigenen Veränderung abhängt.

Re-imagining the Global-Local Identity

The poetry collection 東西 (*Dong-Xi*, East-West Matters) presents Hong Kong writer Leung Ping-kwan's 梁秉鈞 (1949-2013) dialogues with the world through the perspectives of things situated in the East-West entanglement.¹ The Chinese compound word 東西 *dongxi* consists of two stem words, *dong* meaning east and *xi* meaning west, the combination of which creates a new meaning of ‚objects‘, ‚things‘, or ‚matters‘ for the compound. The compound structurally connotes a traditional Chinese Daoist conceptualization of the world derived from the *yin-yang* doctrine. The seeming opposite terms of ‚east‘ and ‚west‘, akin to *yin* and *yang*, not only inform each

1 Ping-kwan Leung, 東西 [East West Matters]. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2000; translated into French as *De ci de là des choses. Selected Poems*. Ed. and trans. Annie Curien. Paris: You Feng, 2006. Most of the poems in the collection are also published in the English-Chinese bilingual collection *Fly Heads and Bird Claws* 蠅頭與鳥爪. Hong Kong: MCCM, 2012.

other, alter each other, are constitutive of each other, but also give rise to a whole world through their encounters and interactions.

In Chinese cosmology, *yin-yang* are two opposite but complementary energies that make manifest and differentiate the “myriad things” (*wan wu* 萬物) that emerge into existence from the undifferentiated, primordial *Dao*. [...] The dynamic interaction of *yin* and *yang* give rise to cycles of production and destruction, from which the universe and its diverse forms of life [and things] (*wan wu* 萬物) emerge.²

In Leung’s poetry collection, the capitalized “East-West” transposes the Daoist dialectic into post-colonial circumstances, shifting the interest from the conflicting geopolitical power relations demonstrated in colonial and post-colonial studies to the *generative relationship* between the East and the West. Alternatively speaking, the East and the West are treated as reciprocal “intimate others”, whose entanglement engenders a multifaceted world in Leung’s poetry. Following the enterprise of the East-West, the global and the local can also be contemplated as such complementary and generative dialectics in Leung’s works. Instead of adopting the word ‘glocal’, whose reductional form indicates a combination of the sinister aspects of both the global and the local³, I would prefer to use the word ‘global-local’ or ‘local-global’ to describe Leung’s representation of the two elements, which expresses the extensional form of both, generative of new meanings from both sides.⁴ Such a rendition of global-local brings dynamic temporal implications to bear on the spatial concepts, exhibiting the ever-changing situatedness and potentiality of a world mediated by continuous interactions of the global and the local.

Roland Robertson sees globalization as a temporal process unified with modernity that propels “a general homogenization of institutions and basic experiences in a temporal, historical mode”.⁵ He suggests using the term

2 “Daoism (Taoism)” (online: www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/daoism-taoism); see also Robin R. Wang, *Yin-yang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 1-40.

3 By this, I mean that ‘the global’, in its aggressive expansion, erases local specificities, and ‘the local’, in its resistance of such domination and generalization, essentialises local identity in a way that might lead to parochialism.

4 Because I emphasize the two-way extension and supplementation of both the global and the local instead of their directional migration, I use ‘global-local’ and ‘local-global’ interchangeably in what follows.

5 Roland Robertson. “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity”. *Global Modernities*. Ed. Mike Featherstone/Scott Lash/Roland Robertson. London: Sage Publications, 1995. P. 25-44. Here p. 27.

‘glocalization’ to accentuate the spatial denotations of the “global-local problematic” so that the relativity of the global and the local can be exposed, and their complementary aspects are disclosed.⁶ Leung’s depiction of the ‘global-local’ exemplifies another approach to breaking away from the homogenized temporal experience occasioned by modernity, and showcases how the global and the local can be reimagined in literary and artistic works: The global and the local are regarded not only as geographical signifiers but also as temporal denominators of the senses, memories, experiences, emotions, and imaginations, the dynamic interplay of which persistently makes and unmakes a poetic world.

Besides its Daoist underpinnings, Leung’s work also strikes a corresponding chord with Pheng Cheah’s theorization of world literature. Coopting Heidegger’s ‘worlding’ (*das Welten*) as a counter-concept to the spatialization of the world resultant from globalization, Pheng Cheah illuminates a notion of the world as “a temporal process that brings all beings into relation or holds them together as a whole”; Cheah emphasizes literature’s enabling power for this world.⁷ Leung’s poetry deepens Cheah’s phenomenological contemplation of the world and world literature in three aspects. First, things, or beings, are characterized by their situatedness, or ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*) in Heideggerian terms⁸, for which both the global and the local play crucial roles. Second, being in the world always means ‘being-with-others’, the relational connotation of which emphasizes the congeniality of otherness and the connectivity of the world; the global and the local, as an Other to one another, also inform this congeniality and connectivity. Third, poetry is practiced not merely as poetic representation of the world but also as enabling force for the unfolding of the world in which the global and the local cannot be generalized into two simple terms. Global and local rather permeate in particular senses, experiences, imaginations, and thoughts.

Bearing in mind both the Daoist and the phenomenological underpinnings of the global-local in Leung’s poetry, I now offer a close reading of some of his poems to illustrate the undertakings discussed above. In “Hap La Gung (Vietnamese Stuffed Snails in Ginger Leaves) 釀田螺”, Leung observes the world through the perspective of a snail:

6 Ibid. P. 25-44.

7 Pheng Cheah. *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. P. 108-109.

8 Martin Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967. P. 135.

I was picked from a field of water
 plucked out
 minced
 added dried mushrooms, lean meat and onion
 salt
 fish sauce and pepper
 a blade of strange ginger leaf
 stuffed
 back into my shell
 to give me more taste

把我從水田撿起
 把我拿出來
 切碎了
 加上冬菇、瘦肉和洋蔥
 加上鹽
 魚露和胡椒
 加上一片奇怪的薑葉
 爲了再放回去
 我原來的殼中
 令我更加美味

I was plucked out
 removed from
 my geography and history
 given exotic colors
 foreign flavors
 added value
 higher price
 all to place me
 into some future
 unknown⁹

把我拿出來
 使我遠離了
 我的地理和歷史
 加上異鄉的顏色
 加上外來的滋味
 給我增值
 付出了昂貴的代價
 爲了把我放到
 我不知道的
 將來

Hap La Gung is a dish developed in the course of Vietnam's history as a French colony. The first stanza speaks from the perspective of the Vietnamese snail in the (post)colonial setting; the second from the perspective of a global being that has migrated outside of its local embedment. In the second stanza, the narrating "I" acquires a broader spectrum of allusions by relating the snail's particular experience to experiences of other displaced subjects in the global context.

The poem depicts the situatedness or the 'thrownness' of the snail – or "I" – at different levels. On the surface level, the poem ponders 'my' experience of geographical migration, through which a new global identity is acquired. Yet the passive voice throughout the poem betrays a salient sense of thrownness. This thrownness not only describes 'my' status of being in the world and sets the formation of 'my' new identity in motion, but also functions as a common ground sustaining 'my' connectivity with other local-global beings.

One might easily fall into a moral-political reading of the poem as a criticism of globalization that effaces the subject's local identity. Such a reading, however, would put a full stop to our understanding of the poem, thus greatly undermining the aesthetic value of the poem, whose merits rest more in the process of temporalization than of spatial renditions. Indeed, the last three lines indicate a critique of the global mandate from outside – a telos

⁹ Leung. Fly Heads (as note 1). P. 68-69.

of all the above lines: “to place me / into some future / unknown”. The word “unknown” transforms the future into a potentiality, deeming the telos towards the future inefficacious, and thus delegitimizes the teleological temporality through which the mandate from outside is concomitantly nullified. Such a loaded word at the end of the poem prompts the reader to read it again in a revised time consciousness. And it is during this re-reading that ‘magic’ happens. I mentioned that the second stanza transcends the snail’s peculiar local (post)colonial experiences into a more global and universal experience of uprootedness. In a second reading of the first stanza, the broader allusions from the second stanza are added to the first, forming a more lasting reverberance of the present moment experienced by the “I”, which is no longer the snail as an isolated subject but a multilayered subject of displacement. Every step of the preparation for the snail dish becomes a signifier relating the displaced subjects. The poetic prosody slows down each step, leaving room for prolonged moments of resonance. The three words “minced”, “salt”, and “stuffed”, each occupying a single line, forbearingly intimate experiences and memories of a displaced subject, which is in a way violent: the fragmented self is “salted” with open wounds and compressed together again. The understatement of such violence deems the painful process of transformation a condition extended from the thrownness in which a global-local subject dwells. Both the snail and the poetic “I” are *enduring* subjects that *accommodate* their thrownness in the world. The saturation of the poetic moments hinges not merely on the words written, but also on the blank spaces behind the words that sustain the suspensions of the poetic moments: the words unspoken, or maybe even unspeakable.

We are already in the domain of form. The poem was originally written in Chinese, and later translated into English by the poet himself for the bilingual collection, in which the English and Chinese versions are juxtaposed. The bilingual publication not only addresses a broader readership but also exhibits the thrownness of being in a semiotic web woven in both global and local languages.¹⁰ The two languages supplement and reflect on each other; native speakers are defamiliarized from their mother languages so that the poems can be read with renewed sensitivities. For readers familiar with one

10 I am aware of the problematic adoption of the term ‘global language’. Whether or not the widespread prevalence of English could qualify it to be called a ‘global language’ is debatable. However, what I would like to emphasize here is that for a city like Hong Kong, whose post-coloniality accounts for its local identity, the manner or medium through which ‘the global’ penetrates the local is through no choice of its own. Alternatively speaking, English as a medium that transmits the global into Hong Kong has to be taken as given – another example of ‘thrownness’ that a subject like the snail has to bear.

language only, the unrecognizable signs reinforce senses of thrownness more intensively through visual impacts.

“Hap La Gung” is a poem that explores, in a very subtle way, the predicament of the local-global identity. In most of Leung’s other poems, however, this identity is celebrated as a result of encounters and exchanges which are delineated with delightful sensibilities. For example, rice, one of Leung’s favorite signifiers of the global-local, reappears in different poems.

Rice is our common language
 Rice our consoling mother
 Rice encompassing all colours
 Rice soothing a stomach’s old wounds¹¹

As the most commonplace but indispensable element on the Chinese dining table, rice is redefined by Leung from the perspective of how it can become an agent of connectivity. Rice is thus bestowed with cultural and symbolic meanings, the capacity of which transcends its localness into a local-global identity. Such ‘soothing’ and ‘encompassing’ characteristics of rice persist in Leung’s poetry:

Let the beets tell secrets in their hearts
 And dye everybody red
 Each beauty its own hidden woe
 So many vegetables stirred and heated in one stone basin
 Alter the rice into a song of blended colour¹²

or

My dear,
 I also think it’s wonderful
 How a green olive can be marinated into black
 and vegetables diffuse their
 flavors in a bowl of white [rice] porridge
 giving it the flavor of a multifaceted world¹³

Leung portrays rice as remarkably congenial to alterity and open to changes, the outcome of which is constant encounters with other beings and shifting identities that encompass “a multifaceted world”. As Gordon T. Osing rightly notes, “Leung’s poetry is an embodiment of the indeterminable”; the cultural figures in Leung’s poems come “from incorporating all the energy and

11 Leung, *Fly Heads* (as note 1), P. 80.

12 *Ibid.* P. 72.

13 *Ibid.* P. 42.

expressions of change, in a culture that is always in the making and cannot ever be taken for finished".¹⁴ Leung tries to capture moments in the dynamic interplay of things when changes are stimulated and the multiplicity of the world is given fuller rein. The poetic plenitude in Leung's poetry not only *represents* such a multiplicity but also *enables* it through recreating meanings and reactivating feelings for everyday life, the richness of which has been lost in the advancement of modernity. In an interview, Leung comments on his literary endeavors:

In my work I want to 1) write a kind of modern poetry that does not have to turn away from the world we live in, does not have to recede into language in a solipsistic way, but rethinks the relationship between language and objects. 2) I also would like to readjust to read the world from the perspective of simple objects, rather than from the viewpoint of monuments or hero status. 3) I want my poems about things to be a dialogue with the world; not to project upon them a moral statement, but to learn and be inspired by their shapes, smells and colours, and to develop a new vocabulary with which to write.¹⁵

'Thing-poems' or 'Object-poems' (*yong wu shi* 詠物詩) are a long-standing poetic form that thrived for centuries in traditional Chinese literary history, in which objects or things often bear the poets' moral pursuits from heroic perspectives. Leung's explanation of his position in writing 'Thing-poems' incorporates Western renditions of the form in the traditional Chinese legacy.¹⁶

Although Leung declares his creative motive against any top-down moral statement, I would argue that this does not mean there are no ethical vocations in Leung's writing. My question is: Would Leung's tolerant and enduring attitude towards the global-local dissolve the tension between the global and the local, thus leading to a mindless embracement of globalization? In the following part of this article, I will try to explicate the moral and political implications of Leung's poetry by revealing how he endeavors to shift established frames of visibility and intelligibility through illuminating overlooked

14 Gordon T. Osing. Preface to Leung Ping-kwan's *City at the End of Time* 形象香港, coedited and co-translated with Gordon T. Osing, Hong Kong: Department of Comparative Literature, University of Hong Kong & Twilight Books, 1992. P. 2.

15 Leung. Fly Heads (as note 1). P. 14-15.

16 For Western renditions of the form initiated and influenced by poets who write in the German language, like Rainer Maria Rilke and Eduard Friedrich Mörike, among others, see Wolfgang G. Müller. "Dinggedicht". *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*. Ed. Georg Braungart et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010. P. 366-368.

corners of modern life and calling into existence ‘communities of sense’ as theorized by Jacques Rancière.¹⁷

Re-enchanting the World: De-objectification and Subjectivization

In her book, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Jane Bennett introduces, through an illuminating reading of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, her views on how re-enchantment might play an ethical role in modern life. Bennett casts light on one of the beginning scenes in which Joseph K. waits for his trial at home and is later instructed to see the police supervisor. Kafka gives a meticulous description of the onlookers in the window across the street from K.’s room: at the beginning, an old woman peers in at K. “with truly senile inquisitiveness”; later, the old woman drags an older man to join her, “whom she was holding round the waist”; and finally, another man joins them, standing behind the old woman and man, “towering head and shoulders above them”, “with a shirt open at the neck and a reddish, pointed beard, which he kept pinching and twisting with his fingers”.¹⁸ Despite Kafka’s detailed depictions of the three onlookers, they are never mentioned again in the novel; neither are they in any way relevant to the plot or the narrative quest for K.’s trial. Such irrelevancy permeates the novel, as Bennett astutely observes. “*The Trial* is less a photograph of Joseph K.’s trial than its negative”, which picks up the ignored and passed-by experience of everyday life. Hence, Bennett suggests reading Kafka’s stories “as a literary form of garbage-picking”, or “reusing and recycling”.¹⁹ Following Kafka’s enterprise, Bennett adopts the same method in her project to search for and give light to overlooked ‘negatives’ in modern life, to re-enchant the world and weave an “alter-tale” from the tale of disenchantment of modern life. Bennett maintains that moments of enchantment provide affective resources for us to appreciate the world and propel our ethical generosity to other beings in the world.²⁰

Joining Bennett’s and Kafka’s literary endeavor of “garbage-picking”, Leung’s poetry attempts to discover a re-enchanted world through appreciating

17 See Jacques Rancière. “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics”. *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Ed. Beth Hinderliter et al. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. P. 31-50.

18 Franz Kafka. *The Trial*. Trans. Breon Mitchell. New York: Schocken Books, 1974. P 5-10; see also Jane Bennett. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001. P 6.

19 Bennett. *Enchantment of Modern Life* (as note 18). P. 7.

20 See *ibid.* P. 3-16.

quotidian things in everyday life, the shapes, smells, and colors of which are often the overlooked 'negative' of the 'photograph' of modern life. Things and senses both play significant roles in Leung's literary pursuit. The poetic combination of these two elements is deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese Daoist worldview, which sees all beings in the world as sentient and connected by a kind of interflow mediated by senses. The Chinese 'Thing-poems' grow from this worldview. The poetic thing usually affords a mired identity of the poet, the thing-in-representation, and the reader, delivered through sense and sensibilities:

"Artichoke"

It used to hide its feelings
quite unlike the tomatoes
squirting at you with every bite
or durians divulging
the aroma of power.
The artichoke is subtle,
bringing its own history,
testing one's patience,
artichoke, a little at odds with its time,
looking like a lotus lamp
keeping its own secrets
yet empty of mysteries.

[...]

So the artichoke stays put,
a little slow, a little old-fashioned,
its heavy armory unable to join the world's dance.

[...]

It's not easy to glimpse the artichoke's soft heart,
only by accident sometimes,
a bunch of fresh blue flowers
grows out from his head.²¹

Leung's adaptation of the traditional poetic form is less about reviving the Chinese literary legacy than about repurposing it for reflections on the contemporary condition of being in a globalized world. One of the most menacing consequences of globalization and modernity is an objectification that fossilizes the world, leading to its disenchantment. Things or beings, including human beings, are more and more standardized and characterized by their specialized functionality instead of by their capacity to sense, to feel, and to imagine. Leung explores the things' situatedness in the world through treating them as equal subjects with vivid appearances and lively characters. He observes them, tries to understand them, gives voices to them,

21 Leung. *Fly Heads* (as note 1). P. 50-52.

listens to them, and has conversations with them. Leung's poetic renditions "direct sensory, linguistic, and imaginative attention toward a material vitality"²², which, according to Bennett, "gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience."²³ Leung's dialogues with the things are his interactions with the world and with himself concomitantly. In his poetic assemblage of things, "objects [appear] as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics."²⁴ The de-objectification in Leung's 'Thing-poems' represent his radical critique of the objectified world; concurrently, the poems bear his endeavors to re-enchant the world so that voices covered by the noises of modern life can be heard again, images concealed under the frozen 'world picture' can be seen again, and senses numbed in everyday routines can be reactivated.²⁵ In this way, Leung shares the 'ethical task' of Bennett, which is to re-enchant the world by cultivating "the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it."²⁶

Leung's moral-political vocation is bottom-up rather than top-down. His poetic gestures are humble and his voices modest. His things never assertively lecture to the audience from the stage on top but whisper softly like close friends in private everyday settings. The language of Leung's poetry exhibits a plain texture with quotidian delight – a texture of language spoken by common people in daily life yet charismatic with intellectual observation and deep introspection. Ackbar Abbas comments on Leung's language as a "weak" language that takes a political stand:

It is as if Leung were intent in his Thing-poems to let objects themselves speak without the distortions of language, [...] it is a use of language which implies the taking of what we can only call a political stand: this ordinary language does not come on strong, insofar as strong language implies belief that one is speaking for the right and the true; it is a "weak" language in its refusal to categorise [...].²⁷

22 Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. P. 19.

23 Ibid. P. xvi.

24 Ibid. P. 5.

25 On 'world picture', see Martin Heidegger. "The Age of the World Picture". *Off The Beaten Track*. Ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. P. 57-85.

26 Bennett. *Vibrant Matter* (as note 22). P. 14.

27 Ackbar Abbas. "The Last Emporium: Verse and Cultural Space". *City at the End of Time* 形象香港 (as note 14). P. 3-19. Here p. 12.

Leung's political stance expressed through a "weak" language that refuses categorization is also reflected in his selection of senses as the medium of deliverance for his 'subjectified' things. In traditional Chinese Daoist aesthetics, senses are considered a flexible state of consciousness before solidified thoughts and emotions obstruct the free flow of *qi* 氣 and *qing* 情 that connects human and nature.²⁸ Senses give full rein to aesthetic resonances, engendering an enchanted world.

According to Jacques Rancière, the world delimits us with a certain partitioning of the sensible that configures the visibility of the world, through which beings are defined and social roles are assigned; the political undertaking of contemporary aesthetics is to counteract these 'given' schemes so that the sensible can be repartitioned, visibility reconfigured, and beings and their social roles redefined: "It is the introduction of a visible into the field of experience, which then modifies the regime of the visible. [...] It splits reality and reconfigures it as double."²⁹

Leung's Thing-poems guide us into a world where the things are disassociated from their functionality and bestowed with renewed lives and sensitivity, through which an alternative form of visibility and perceptivity is injected. The things are not only de-objectified or subjectified, but also 'subjectivized' in the sense that both the things and the reader are led through a process of 'disidentification'³⁰: the things are disidentified from their status of being as insentient and functional objects, and the reader from a disenchanting being whose senses are modeled, or even desensitized, in the globalized and commodified world. In a convergence of subjective projections of both the poet and the reader, the thing-in-representation comes alive through encounters of the subjective and the objective, the innermost and the appearance, the local experience and the global adventure, monologue and heteroglossia; it transforms dichotomies into collaborated generative elements in such a way

28 *Qi* means the vital force or vital energy in Chinese. *Qing* is a rather complex concept; here, we can simply understand it as the vital force in the form of sentiment.

29 Jacques Rancière. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. P. 99; see also Beth Hinderliter et al. "Introduction: Communities of Sense". Jacques Rancière. *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Ed. Beth Hinderliter et al. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. P. 8-9; Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics* (as note 17). P. 41-48.

30 For more on the concept of 'subjectivization', see Jacques Rancière. "Politics, Identification, Subjectivization". *The Identity in Question*. Ed. John Rajchman. London: Routledge, 1995. P. 63-70; and Hinderliter et al. Introduction (as note 29). P. 3-25.

that ‘worlds’ a poetic world.³¹ ‘Clashes’ are inherent in the subject-object created through Leung’s poetic renditions, making identity a variable instead of a constant.³² To read Leung’s Thing-poetry is to see part of the self traveling away to join the subject-object, and to experience the world from the perspective of an Other. The ceaseless becoming gives rise to a transcended being that is both the self and an Other, while, paradoxically, a safe distance is concurrently maintained, preserving the otherness in the subject-object, who retains the agency of inspiring ‘me’ and dialoguing with ‘me’ as an equally treated being.

On a deeper level, Leung exemplifies how Thing-poems, originally a local form, when traveling outside of the traditional Chinese embedment, not only acquire a new cultural identity that disturbs and destabilizes established certainty but also contribute to the enabling of “the political constitution of nonidentary subjects”, who are endowed with the potential to “[link] together separate worlds and [organize] spaces where new communities can be formed”.³³ We need to be aware that the “communities of sense” formed by the “nonidentary subjects” stop short of being solidified into any communities unified by a common belief or ideology; instead, it is a status of “contingent being-together” whose cohesiveness hinges on the members’ readiness for change and openness to otherness.³⁴ Leung’s Thing-poems can be read as epitomes of “communities of sense” in that the represented thing always bears multi-layered identities of the poet, the reader, and the object in the global-local context; the poetic subject-object never assumes a certain and stable identity but rather dwells in a state of flexibility and mobility created by the combination of the subject and the object as an extended form of both, similar to how the global and the local interact in terms of the global-local.

31 “World never *is*, but *worlds* [Welt *ist* nie, sondern *weltet*].” On Heidegger’s reinscription of ‘world’ as a verb, see Martin Heidegger. “On the Essence of Ground”. *Pathmarks*. Ed. and trans. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. P. 164; emphasis in the original. See also Cheah. *What Is a World* (as note 7). P. 117.

32 In articulating the political aspiration of art, Rancière states: “The main procedure of political or critical art consists in setting out the encounter, and possibly the clash, of heterogeneous elements. The clash of these heterogeneous elements is supposed to provoke a break in our perception, to disclose some secret connection of things hidden behind everyday reality”. Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics* (as note 17). P. 41.

33 Hinderliter et al. Introduction (as note 29). P. 9.

34 *Ibid.* P. 2.