

# **The Visual and Material Culture of Hong Kong Protests**

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SD PolyU – UoA 38

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SIU, King Chung co-directs an art collective, the [Community Museum Project](#), through which he conducts artistic and curatorial research on visual culture, indigenous design and community heritage in Hong Kong and elsewhere. He pioneers in local socially engaged art & design practices where he explores methodologies and tactics to initiate collaborations among students, teachers, designers, artists, activists and community partners. The approaches have allowed him to experiment and develop viable collaborative strategies and forms for exhibition design, installation display, information and publication design as well as alternative museum practices. Since 2017, his approach has been translated into the first formal BA curriculum on Social Design in Hong Kong.

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# Title: The Visual and Material Culture of Hong Kong Protests

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## Descriptor

- The deliverables constitutes a series of photographic and panoramic documentation of the Hong Kong "Umbrella / Occupy Movement" in 2014. It constitutes a sequel of work, relating to the "material culture of protests" the author has been studying since the 2000s.
- It employs visual research methods, such as "photo-stocktaking" (an approach developed by the author's art collective, the Community Museum Project), "visual anatomizing" and information design to make detailed documentation of the makeshift facilities and barricades constructed by the protestors during the Umbrella Movement;
- The extensive and detailed images collection of the occupy-facilities is developed into a series of visual anatomy of the place-making features in-situ. This series of work also attempted to archive the "manifestations of political expressions" or banners and handbills posted on the public arenas during the Umbrella Movement;
- The series of work is exhibited in the *Objection! Protest by Design* Exhibition at the Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany (26 Feb.- 29 May 2016)
- The panoramic videos were subsequently loaned to the German Institute for international and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) for further research use.
- A visual essay of the exhibit-details is to be published in Jilly Traganou (Ed.) (in press) *Design and Political Dissent: Space, Objects, Materiality*. Routledge.
- This body of work constitutes part of the author's long-term research endeavour in documenting and analysing the visual and material cultures of political protests in Hong Kong. [\(see early exhibition brochure on the same theme\)](#)

# What constitutes the research output / body of work

Keywords: **Forms of demonstration; Illegal place-making; Protests archive; Hong Kong occupy movement;**

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- **A series of visual artefacts exhibited in the *Objection! Protest by Design* exhibition, including:**
  - a) A series of visual anatomy of the place-making features at the occupied site in Admiralty;
  - b) A series of panoramic documentation of:
    - 1) the "poster walls" at different stages of the occupied period (e.g. in front of the Legislative Council and at the HSBC shopfront at the Mongkok occupied site);
    - 2) the makeshift "study room" in the Admiralty site.

These panoramas were adapted into video format as a scrolling projection (approx. 20 mins) in the exhibition; (see next slide)

A 300 pages book, *Objects of Demonstration: A Visual Dictionary of Hong Kong Indigenous Cultures and Political Expressions* is underway. (expected publication date late-2019)

A visual essay of the exhibit-details is to be published in Jilly Traganou (Ed.) (in press) *Design and Political Dissent: Space, Objects, Materiality*. Routledge.

A “political poster wall” developed at the shop front of the HSBC building at the Mongkok occupy site on 2 Oct 2014 ([see video](#))



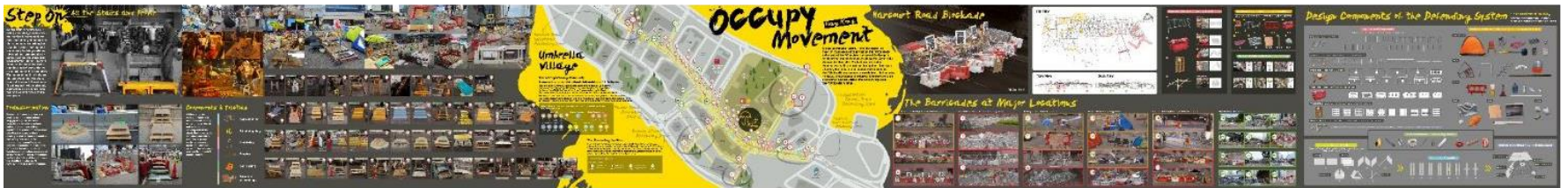
A “political poster wall” developed at the shop front of the HSBC building at the Mongkok occupy site on 19 Oct 2014 ([see video](#))



A “political poster wall” developed at the shop front of the HSBC building at the Mongkok occupy site on 29 Oct 2014 ([see video](#))



A visual explanation of the place-making activities at Admiralty during the occupy movement ([see exhibition panel](#))



A “political poster wall” developed at the façade of the Legislative Council Building at Admiralty ([see video](#))



The self-formed “Study Room” constructed during the occupy movement ([see video](#), [left](#) or [right](#))





## Research Questions

### The research sets out to:

1. find out the forms of protest activities and related artifacts that were produced during the 2014 Occupy Movement in Hong Kong;
2. understand how the design of place-making features and activities played a role in Hong Kong's Occupy Movement;
3. identify the political implications and significances manifested in such "grassroots" or vernacular design activism.

Challenging the regime of written forms of communication, the above approach follows what Stafford advocates in her book, *Good Looking* (1996); as she believes (and the author agrees and puts into practices) that "we possess artistic models and visual methods of analysis – many deriving from the eighteenth century - for not receiving pictures passively but entering and reassembling them actively." (p.40)



Photo-stocktaking the panoramic "poster wall" outside the Legislative Council Building at Admiralty

## Research Methods

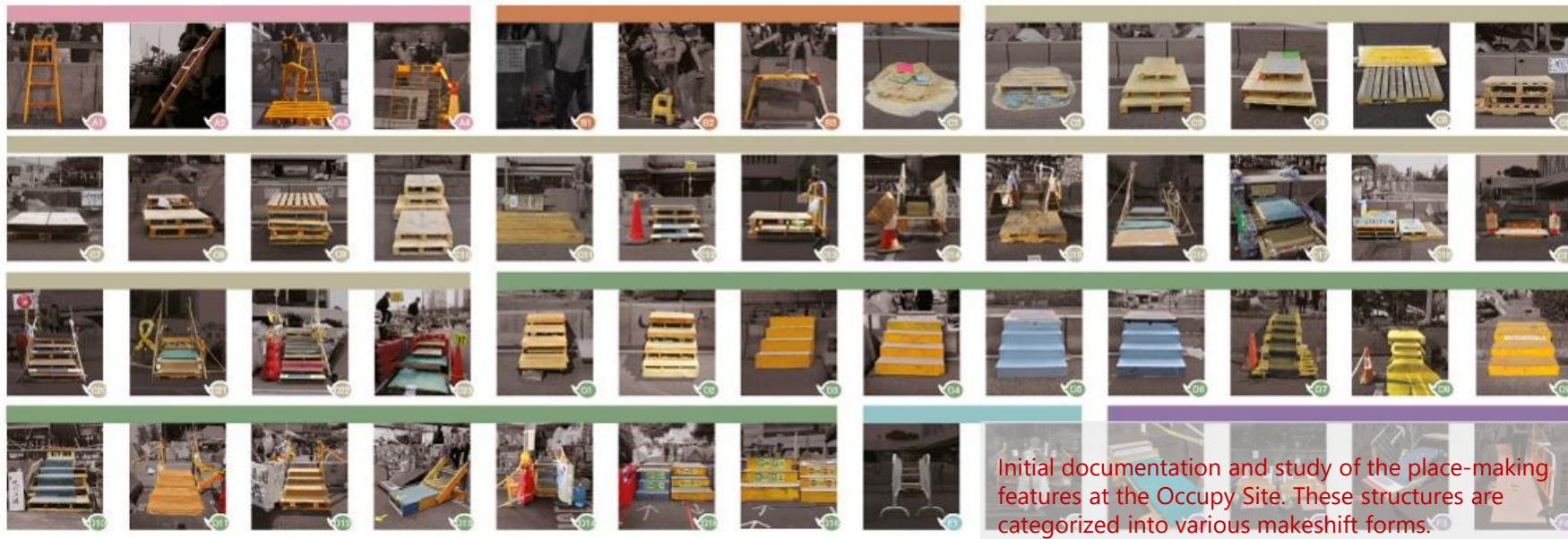
### Organizing and analyzing the collected images for visual design

- Photographic research and visual analysis employing information design principles for visual explanation.
- The photographic works were produced with a group of student researchers in a class called "Design for Social Concern and Urban Pedagogy" which studied the vernacular designs and place-making activities in the occupied sites.
- Employing methods of visual explanation as a means for designing visual pedagogy during the Occupy Movement

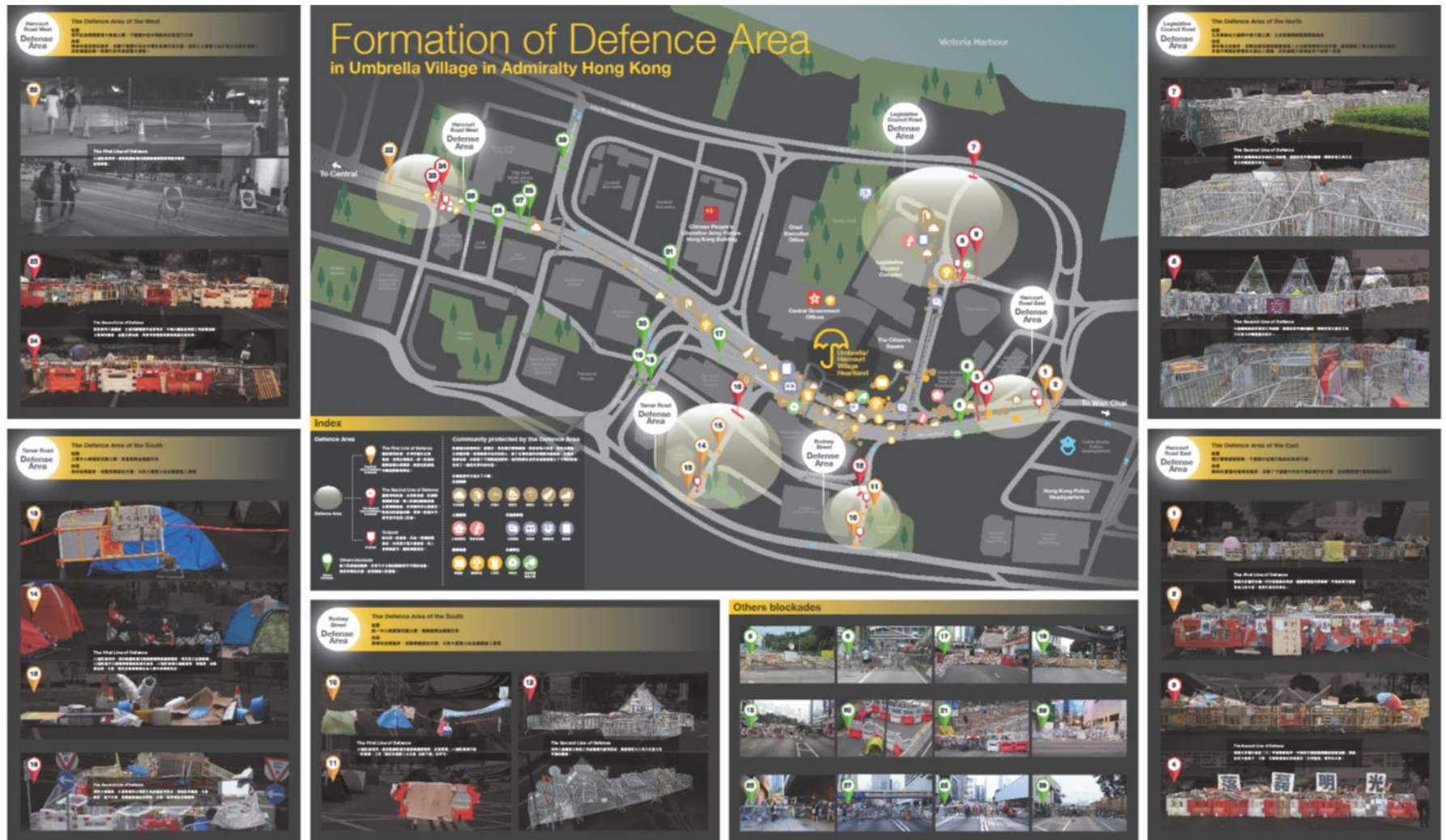




## Categories





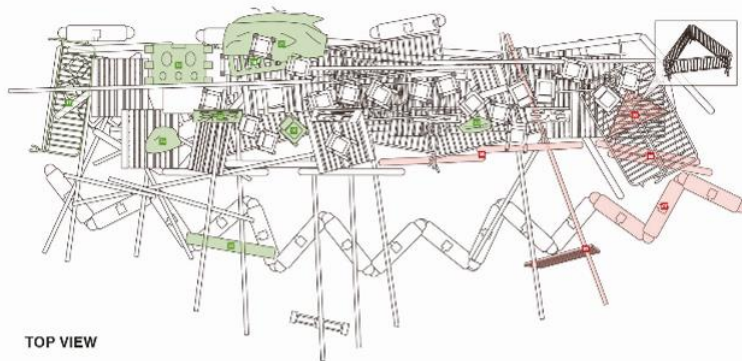


The collection of barricades and their geographic layout at the occupy site at Admiralty

### Case Study

Harcourt Road  
blockade

在武吉的兩旁路障中，雖然各有特色，不過要數最富防守意義的，非東區邊防路障莫屬。因此，我們選擇了此路障作個案研究，原因有二：一是該路障利用了最多前線所提及的建築技巧；二是該路障最近經警方監察總部、佔領者在木板上印上「光明義渡」四字，用以制裁警方早前在國和道邊角處劃打示眾土層建築一事，亦為此路障增添不少政治意味以外的一個新穎特色。



TOP VIEW



26 OCT 2014  
Harcourt Road

FRONT VIEW



**BACK VIEW**



骨干物料

骨干物料

[illegible]

## 11

## II 骨幹的結構方式

馬六甲和麻坡的港口在當時極其重要，使它們成為商埠，令它們的船隻前往歐洲和亞洲各埠。『之』字船隻的航行時間極其短，加上船隻的建造成為歐洲太平洋航線的重要一環。



## III

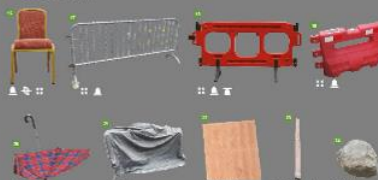
### III<sub>IV</sub> 接駁物料和方式

[illegible]

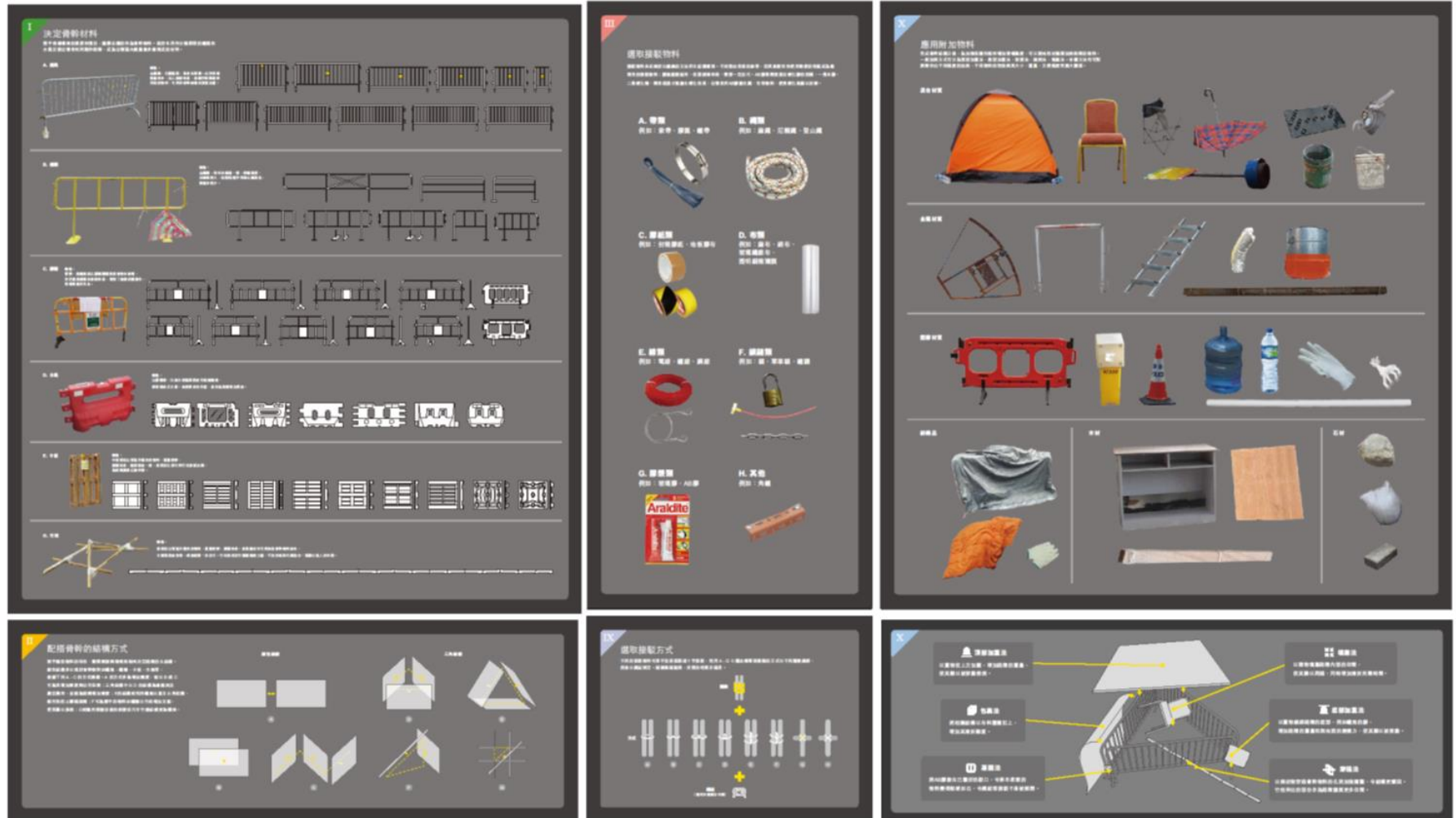
## v

**V 附加物料**

為要點。根據李登輝在過去兩天上台前的對內對外、及國際間的種種「政策」與「講話」，大致可歸納成三點，其中最重要者即為民主政治與法治。前者，即所謂「三民主義」，包括「國權」與「人權」，後者則多指人類的物質與精神生活而言。







Visual anatomy of a selected barricade at Admiralty



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## Research Conclusions

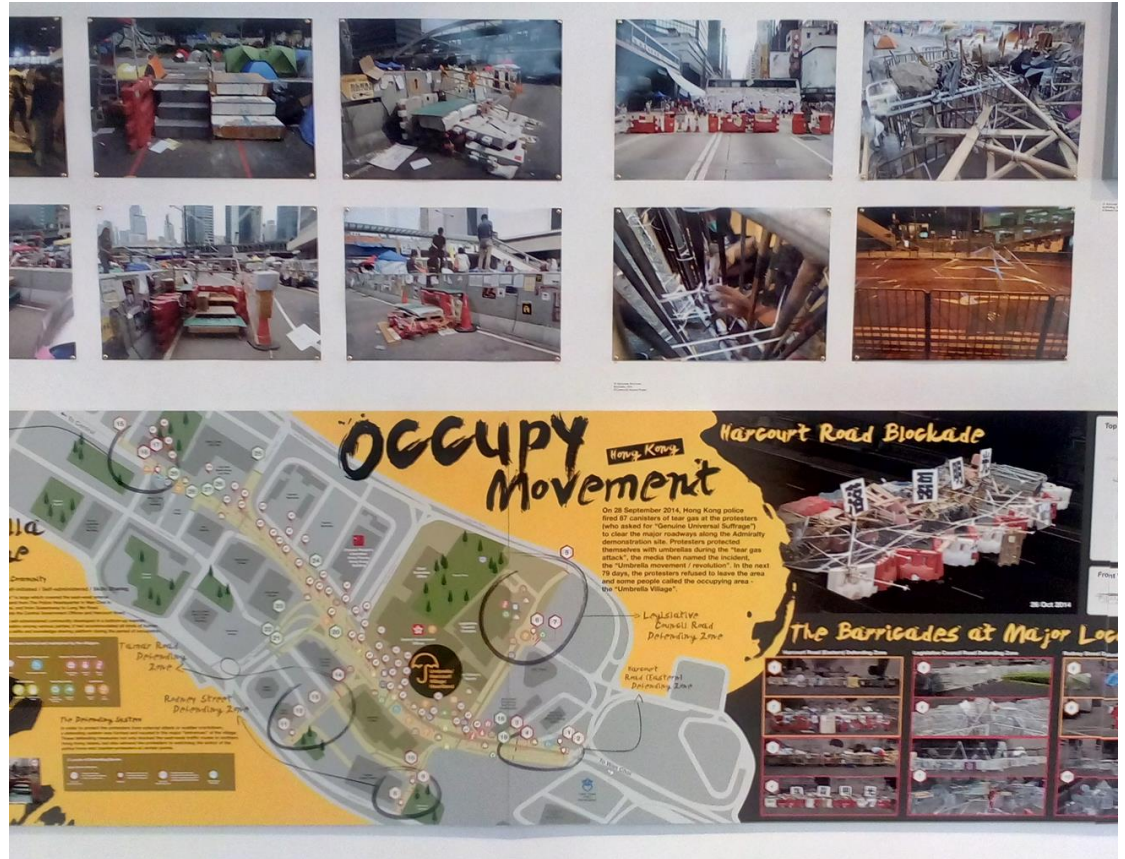
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- **The forms of demonstration are constantly evolving vis-à-vis the tension generated under specific political situations, the material or resource availability as well as the level of engagement of the (techno and creative) community.**
- **Activists negotiate with the police and authorities by employing different political-cum-visual strategies to mobilize the public, and by taking advantage of the visual nature of the mass media and social media.**
- **Different strategies or “forms of demonstration” and that of de-demonstration have been identified, with a rich collection of visual examples, namely: a) Ready-made, b) DIY object, c) Pictorial, d) Text, e) Media Pun, f) Souvenir, g) Monument, h) Body Performance, i) Place-making. (These strategies are codified in our upcoming book: *Objects of Demonstration: A Visual Dictionary of Hong Kong Indigenous Cultures and Political Expressions*.) ([see chapter draft](#))**
- **Illegal place-making strategies were identified particularly in this body of work. They are visually presented in the various outputs enclosed here.**

## Dissemination and distribution of outcomes

- Artworks showcased at the said exhibition, included, **A**) a series of Video Projection pieces entitled, "Panorama from the Umbrella Movement, 2014"; **B**) a series of A3 photographs, namely, "Barricade Structures - Staircases, 2014"; "Barricade Structures - Blockades, 2014"; "The Barricade Altar, 2014"; and **C**) a visual analysis panel, entitled, "Illegal Place-making as Forms of Design, 2014" (841mm x 7134mm).
- Lecture delivered at the Vitra Design Museum: "Protest by Design" on 31 March 2016.
- Lecture delivered at the Koln International School of Design on "Illegal Place-making as Forms of Design" on 9 June 2015.

All of the above attempted to explore different strategies and forms of place-making in community activism during local protests, and the Umbrella Movement in particular.



Close-up of the A3 photographs of Staircase Structures and Blockade Structures (exhibit B) and the visual panel, "Illegal Place-making as Forms of Design" (exhibit C. Size: 841mm x 7134mm)





Final work displayed in the Objection! Protest by Design exhibition at the Vitra Design Museum, Germany, from 26 Feb. to 29 May 2016



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*-Please contact author for more information*

## Official synopsis of the public talk at the Vitra Design Museum

31 March 2016

The exhibition »Objection – Protest by Design« at the Vitra Design Museum Gallery illustrates the central role informal design played in the student protests that erupted in Hong Kong in the autumn of 2014. King Siu, an independent curator of the Community Museum Project, Associate Professor and Programme Leader of the BA (Hons) Art and Design in Education Programme at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, documented the protests in a series of photographs and analysed this phenomenon together with his students. He will present his visual research on the “pre-histories” of the Hong Kong’s Occupy Movement and explain how design processes can steer self-organisation in public spaces, why objects like umbrellas, public places of work, and walls of Post-its® were important in the protests, and how design has become an instrument of civil disobedience in Hong Kong.



Audience attending the opening ceremony on 26 Feb. 2016

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## Research field and key works referenced

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