

MASTER'S THESIS

Illuminating the Trajectories of Hope: A Cultural and Spatial Analysis of Hong Kong's Neon (1980s-present)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the roles and possibilities of neon as a different form of hope for present-day Hong Kong through a cultural and spatial analysis from the 1980s to the current time. At the moment, Hong Kong's neon is facing an almost existential crisis where it risks total disappearance from the city's streetscape within 10 years. This poses a threat to the cultural legacy of Hong Kong's neon, especially when its significance has only been primarily studied in visual communication. By addressing its visual representations from cinema, case studies of conservation in engaged social projects of voluntary concern groups in urban space, examinations of new trends of neon art practice, along interviews with people who are connected to neon in Hong Kong, this thesis suggests there is a dynamic process in which neon plays an evolving role in cultural significance, which can potentially generate three layers of hope on both metaphorical and practical levels. These layers include "false hope", as characterized in cinematic representation, "political hope" in the spatial dimension, and "promising hope" in the practice of Hong Kong's first and only female neon artist to date. For each layer, I apply different frameworks of understanding, which are, respectively: contextualizing neon as a metaphor in textual analysis, as a political process using a Lefebvrian approach, and as a structural breakthrough in subjectivity and a breakdown of boundaries.

Keywords: Hong Kong neon, hope, visual representation, spatial cultural heritage, art practice