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think of the two of us as trying to escape a fire, one lame and one blind. We help each other out of the fire, each of us stepping up to lend a hand to accommodate our different abilities. To do so, music became our medium of communication." Kuo discovered June's musical ability, which he described as having a healing quality, by accident. Encouraging June to sing reignited his motivation to make a new album. "This is the spirit of mutual aid I am talking about. It moves us forward. It works as a 'method.'" He invited June to sing in *The Big Hug*. During the performance, Kuo would ask the tuner to turn up June's voice instead of blending it with his own vocals. "Think duo, like Tai Chi (□□□□). I want people to hear both of our voices; it is solidarity and equality. They may be differences in our voices' strength and tenor, but they should have equal exposure. These are the values I want to shine through."

Friends who like Blackbird's body of work may not be used to the Kuo we hear in *The Big Hug*. But if the past Blackbird was about demonstrating how different people could form a collective, *The Big Hug* might just be a continuation of such an attempt. Kuo would laugh like a child every time he talked about this album, "I'm hoping to be an example for how we can all hug! A big hug that encompasses all civilizations and cultures."

Looking back, I still remember how Lenny and I almost got into an argument when we first started the interview. Now, we have become good friends—it was a process of overcoming invisible barriers and reconstructing broken unities. At a time when everything in the world seems immense and insurmountable, our dialogue brought some light into my life. It reminded me that the other side of the shore is not something that we can see in the current status quo—but a belief in its possibilities is an act of faith. Eventually, we will be able to find our way there.

This is dedicated to Lenny Kuo, and to June.

Beyond fragmentation: *The Big Hug*

On the cover of his new album *The Big Hug* (□□□) is a solitary Kuo, walking along a coastal road, guitar in hand. It features "I Ain't Got No Home / Which Side Are You On," a crossover between Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, a cover of "Free the People Now!" by John Lennon, and "Bella Ciao," an Italian anti-fascist folk song: simple orchestration, plain sound, a touch of the heroic, accompanied by June's erratic voice. The spirit of folk is alive and well.

Kuo now lives in a small suite in the hills with June. They boycott social media to resist virtual communication; they refuse to get bank accounts to boycott the financial system; they avoid eating in restaurants so they don't have the whet the appetite of real estate hegemony. One way or other, they are living out a simple life and keeping the system at arm's length. The two of them still make small zines, write articles, make music, on top of enjoying everyday life. When I stayed with them, I often heard singing at eight or nine in the morning. June likes to cook and make things from scratch and by hand; she's one of those soulful and handy types. The kitchen, needlework, and music are her domains. June told me that Kuo is actually a low-key foodie. Though not picky, he was particular. June's cooking is simple and casual and nevertheless really delicious; it's quintessential home cooking. Kuo apparently also liked to cook, but would often let her take the reins. At lunch, I often saw Kuo peek into the kitchen without speaking, just smiling. After dinner, the two liked to go for a walk. This was exactly the energy of simplicity and quietude on the cover of *The Big Hug*, the only difference being that Kuo is not actually alone. He has June and he needs June, and vice versa.

This is what he recalled of their first encounter: he was a shell of his former self, depressed due to the loss of his home. She, on the other hand, could not return to her home because of the CCP's persecution of Falun Gong. Both crushed by the system, they supported each other and put their lives back on track together. "I

Interviewer's note

Upon hearing that I was going to interview Lenny Kuo, a senior labor activist—a mentor of mine—brightened up instantly. "Oh! Lenny Kuo! Lenny Kuo! He was our idol back then: the Cui Jian of Hong Kong."

They say that Lenny Kuo is a legend in Hong Kong's indie music scene: avant-garde, radical, angry, confrontational, romantic, libertarian, hardcore, antagonistic, anarchist—these are just some of the labels that others have conferred on him. The story one could call "The Legend of Lenny Kuo" usually begins like this: Once upon a time, in the 70s, there emerged a legendary magazine made up of anarchists and later Trotskyists, *The 70's Biweekly*. Serendipitously, a band called Blackbird was formed soon thereafter, and in this band was a vocalist named Lenny Kuo, Hong Kong's greatest punk rocker and an enigma unto himself. A subplot of this legend includes the 1983 Guitar Players Festival organized by Kuo's *Guitar Magazine*; among the honorees were Beyond, Tats Lau (□□□), and Eugene Pao (□□□)—veritable icons in their own right. Of course, the most memorable thing about Kuo is the music of Blackbird that, even when I play it to my friends today, elicits incredulity: "Is this really from more than 20 years ago?"

Kuo is a forefather of sorts in the social movement scene—a seasoned elder. I have been frequenting autonomous 8a (a.k.a. the social movement resource center of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, which recently disbanded due to political disagreements with the federation) since my university days, where Kuo used to serve as a staff member. Although Kuo had already left when I arrived at autonomous 8a, I now realize that the concept of "cultural intervention in social movements" and the figure of the "artivist" that I kept hearing about from older members, are a part of Kuo's legacy from his brief stint in the group. On the iron shelves of 8a I found the complete works of Blackbird; the album *Singing in the Dead of the Night* even had an anti-WTO bookmark in it! My mind

immediately conjured up the Beatles' lyric, "Blackbird singing in the dead of night," as I began to grapple with the intricate genealogical relationships between myself and 8a, 8a and Lenny Kuo, and Kuo and the 60s.

I had a burning curiosity to uncover more about these geneaologies, so I invited Kuo for an interview. I did not expect my very first question to lead to a quarrel: "How do you see the 60s?" He replied, "Methodology is destructive. So when you ask 'how,' it is an attempt to do damage." At first I thought he was trying to "out-radical" me by throwing me off with the most irreverent and smart sounding answer. But as I changed my approach and the conversation proceeded, I realized that he was not against sharing per se, but rejected being idolized as an "icon of resistance." He resisted being seen as a legend, whether it was in regards to his musical oeuvre or his anarchist path: he refused to be pigeonholed into either, understood according to a set formula or moulded into a cliché.

Marching into the 60s: A revolution right under your nose

The ignorant and sensitive Mr. Jones

Born in the 50s, growing up in the 60s, coming of age in the 70s—this is the sort of *bildungsroman* that would predestine Lenny Kuo to have a trajectory resembling a "cinematic" backstory. At the time, the world had just experienced the chaos and desolation of World War II; the Western empires were greatly weakened by the war, which presented an opening for their colonies to resist and revolt. Around the late 1950s and 1960s, the spirit of resistance returned to the First World by way of the Third World, producing collisions of radical thought whose impact would reverberate across the globe. Scholars who study the 1960s (especially in the West)

Breaking down and coming home

It is no secret that Kuo preferred nature to people. "Look at the nature outside. If you really try, you will feel the nature inside of you. You can see yourself with another set of eyes."

"In 2002, a doctor announced that I had become a cancer patient. In 2003, I experienced the disintegration of my family. At the time, I was driven out of my home on the hills when real estate developers swooped in to acquire the valuable land underneath. Given my physical condition then, I never thought I would still be alive today." Kuo became even more convinced that the body and mind were connected, that depression of the mind and the body influenced one another, and to get rid of them both, the two must be treated together. "I lived through a very dangerous stage where I was very close to death, and I realized that it is very easy to die of illness. I know now that I must cherish this body and take good care of it, so that it can do more things." He admitted that the way his mind and body were entangled and balanced with one another had changed: "I cannot rush headlong into things like young people do, and as I used to do in the past. Some younger folks tend to burn out that way. I guess my physical deterioration may have been connected to the fact that I have children and have to take care of my family, on top of trying to make interventions in society. The corruption of the body also signals a general decline at this age."

Having a family, dealing with a changing body, keeping up with the politics of our times, and grappling with personal misfortunes also meant a change in Kuo's sound. "Earlier on, I leaned towards old-timey stuff: softer, earthier aesthetics. That's a sound I really liked. Later, I departed from the type of work I did in *Nuclear Ashes*. It was time for me to leave that behind." Kuo often emphasized earnestness in communication and in music. Now, folk and blues have become closest to his heart. "Blackbird is a band, a collective world… *The Big Hug* is a 'personal world.'"

A large part of Kuo's memories revolved around his family. "I like to be at home rather than out socializing. It's not that I stay home all the time, but I don't really like drinking and talking. I like to spend time with my family, so I often stay home or take them to the countryside. I remember one year when my kids were still in school, I took them to a youth hostel tour during the summer, staying in a different youth hostel every day. We toured all the youth hostels in Hong Kong, where we cooked and chatted."

This introversion was also political. "When I was in Europe, I met some metal and punk friends. I saw beyond the facade and it was pretty unreal. As punks, some people just wanted to get drunk, have fun, pass time. There was no substance to it. I had no desire for any of those things." But what about the parties and salons that were equal parts drinking and a meeting of the minds? "Sometimes these so-called exchanges made more room for shooting the shit rather than fruitful discussion per se. It was the atmosphere that everybody enjoyed, to be relaxed and unburdened. But it was like dessert to me, the mere satiating of a sweet tooth. I didn't think it did me any substantial good." As for the serious discussions, Kuo still had his reservations. He knew of groups who spent all their time meeting, debating, and writing, and in the end, many of these groups disintegrated due to infighting over trivial matters and conflicts between -isms.

"We want to direct the goings-on of the outside world too much, when in fact we can only direct our own inner worlds." For Kuo, -isms were illusory tools of manipulation. So I asked, "What do you think is not 'superficial', then, if not -isms?" Slowly and cautiously, he replied, "All politics demand a fight, a struggle. But are our hearts aligned to a shared, if abstract, kindness? Without this empathy, no -ism would lead us to somewhere better."

have called it "the Long Sixties": beginning in the Third World, there first arrived the independence struggles in Ghana and Algeria, followed by the Cultural Revolution in China, which subsequently brought forth the Paris Riots of May 1968, movements in opposition to the US' involvement in the Vietnam War, the culture wars, the Free Speech Movement, the civil rights movement, the 1960 protests against the US-Japan Security Treaty, and many more such watershed moments. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, it seemed like revolution was unfolding right before our very eyes.

"Bob Dylan had it spot-on when he said, 'Something is happening here but you don't know what it is," Kuo quoted from Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man," in which the titular Mr. Jones falls into an endless loop where he asks question after question in pursuit of life's answers, but everything is too overwhelming, too fleeting, too immense, and too complicated, so that in the end, he can't figure anything out.

You walk into a room
With your pencil in your hand
You see somebody naked
And you say, "Who is that man?"
You try so hard
But you don't understand
Just what you'll say
When you get home
Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mr. Jones?

Like Mr. Jones, the young Kuo was ignorant, troubled, and sensitive. The turmoil of the global 60s gave him an inkling of what was to come—the imminent arrival of a new world order. Even during Kuo's recent live shows, he would still perform songs by folk or blues singers who were very influential in the 60s. Our conversation about the 60s, then, revolved around this general question,

"How did you *feel* under those material circumstances?" He compared it to a collective "pregnancy" experienced by an entire generation. "People showed up, listened to some music, and became culturally and politically 'pregnant'; everyone took something from the 60s—a shared 'embryo,' so to speak—and went off to develop their own thing." At the time, however, nobody could definitively articulate the precise nature of that "embryo."

Mapping a path to radicalism

To see what this embryo would eventually grow into, we have to know what transpired in the 70s. This was the decade where 15-year-old Kuo met Shum Quanan (□□), who took a liking to him. Under Quanan's mentorship, Kuo began writing for *Hong Kong Teens Weekly* (□□□□□). "The teachers at school were impressed to hear that I was writing for Shum's weekly publication. He showed me a lot of new things—that was really a special relationship, one I still cherish. Although he was a little older than me, we were still able to talk a lot, and he helped connect me to a lot of resources."

This was not a typical relationship between a senior and a junior, one defined by education, the passing down of knowledge and wisdom, and hierarchy. In fact, the elders in this circle all treated young Kuo as part of the group. "They would say they were going to 'Brazil' for coffee, and would ask me if I wanted to go. I would say, 'Yes yes yes!'" These people did not belong to any immediately apparent political tradition or institution. Generally speaking, they were a group of "hipsters" (□□□□) from Baptist University (BU), who would gather to talk about things like poetry, literature, experimental films, and the Situationist International. According to Kuo, these people may not have resembled each other in personality, but they all shared a certain zeal. "You might say it is diligence—a conviction that things must be done in a certain way." He noted that this may have had something to do with the stature of BU at the time. "Back then, BU ranked below the University of

especially when they see me on stage, because on the stage it is all about performing resistance and showing anger at the world. Some say, Lenny, you seem like a very serious and harsh person. Some have trembled when they approached me. Every time this happens, I think to myself, 'Oh! This is my fault. I'm not angry at you—I'm angry about the issues.' I always remind myself to relax." Kuo's idea of himself is in fact the opposite—soft-spoken and tranquil.

A soft-spoken and tranquil Lenny Kuo? Although it has long been known that he is a Pisces, doesn't everyone know Lenny Kuo is a punk through and through? Kuo interjected, "You see, as early as *Manifesto*, there has been a lot of gently deployed classical guitar." But weren't there also a lot of roaring in the mix? "*Manifesto* was a collective world." Kuo's idea of his own role within that collective had always been that of the classical guitar.

> Blackbird was a *collective* in the truest sense of the word: there was no leader, no core figure. In short, everybody contributed, with whatever we had to bring to the table.

"When my father and my mother fled from China to Hong Kong in order to raise us here, they had no social life. My father had no siblings and was adopted. So we were very much a nuclear family. In the beginning, there was only me and my brother: there was no big family, no grandparents, just a very small, lonely family. Social ties were not a reality nor a relevant concept; growing up I had nothing. I left home very early on to make a life for myself and I didn't have many friends. I think this philosophy of simplicity is probably in my DNA. It was healthy and I was not dissatisfied. I am grateful for that." No social life? What about hanging out with the comrades at *The 70's Biweekly*? "They like to drink. When overseas friends came to visit and exchange experiences, we'd talk about all sorts of ideas and situations. But I am no party animal."

eration may wish to witness these legends at work, while Chu's critical response, for instance, may call attention to their limitations instead. Kuo would echo this critique in turn: "People want to subjectively judge, control, and search for rhythms and patterns that they deem worthy of recognition. But they will inevitably be disappointed."

A *Big Hug* in the Valley

The classical guitar in a collective world

It was the spring of 2019. The crimson seats and dim lighting in the anthropology classroom on the hillside of CUHK created a dark, cinema-like atmosphere. But from the small window of the classroom door, one could still see the blossoming mountains.

Lenny Kuo was wearing a thin black and white striped jacket, loose ethnic style pants, and a grey top with a draped collar, the opening of which revealed two thick, well-worn silver necklaces. He took off his yellow Converse sneakers, placed them neatly under the front row seats, and walked barefoot to the podium with his guitar. He was invited by Dr. Chen Ju-chen from the Department of Anthropology to give a lecture titled: "Invisible barricades and the fragmentation of solidarity." This was his introduction: "Although I have spoken in many different colleges and universities, I hate going to class. So I've been thinking about how I can undermine or disrupt this class right now. But as per traditional Confucian values, I want to be polite… How I wish we could imagine this, will this into being: we walk onto a plateau with our friends, where we smoke, drink, sing, debate about China, talk about life and love… to imagine this scenario would be to enact it as well."

Smoking, drinking, plotting the revolution… Hearing this, some people might think that Kuo is some sort of hardened party animal. Kuo dismissed this with a laugh, "Many people who listen to my songs have told me about this perception they have of me,

Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), and was routinely looked down upon. But that gave BU a 'gangster' character: it was anti-establishment, DIY, always going a different way."

Operating on the margins of the establishment, these young people were active thinkers with a penchant for experimentation. "For example, they might suggest, out of the blue: 'Let us write poetry via the lens.' Then one of the poets would buy a camera and say, 'I am not actually going to take photographs. I am only offering an idea.' I was young and of course said 'OK!' and took the camera to try taking photographs that resonated with the imagery the poet invoked." Kuo laughed as these memories resurfaced, "It was a lot of fun back then. These experiences gave me lots of opportunities to try different things out. I think if I had read the camera manual beforehand, for instance, the project would have become a technical exercise—I would have just been a mechanic, not an artist."

Kuo's family was poor; he had little money for books and would read whatever the seniors happened to be reading. "I tried to absorb everything second-hand; there was no criteria for what I would choose to read. Whomever I met and whatever they finished reading, they would pass the material on to me." I asked, "And you understood what you read?" "Of course not! I had no idea what Quanan was showing me."

Although Kuo did not study the material in any systematic (or academic) manner, it gave him the freedom to reflect on the texts and examine in earnest how he felt about each one, and it dawned on him that this was the type of learning experience he wanted to pursue—one that was totally unencumbered. "This is similar to music for me. Some musicians who have gone through academic training are brilliant at musical theory and understand the logics of musicality, but their music is dead. On the contrary, those who rely on their feelings and instincts and their ears make very good music. More people should operate on this intuition and spirit of improvisation!" Kuo might not have been "properly" trained, but

he was not uninformed either. He might not have been able to articulate what made something of high quality or even what he liked and disliked, but he could feel it in his bones.

Kuo also liked to go to the "American Library"—the library of the United States Information Agency. A product of the Cold War, the library was originally part of the US' anti-communist infrastructure aimed toward the promotion of American values. Because of its significant holdings of American newspapers and magazines, however, it served as a systematic introduction to Western literature for Kuo and became one of his go-to haunts.

"Back then, Taiwanese literature was mainstream within the hip young art circles. Some people read Western stuff, though it was not popular. I had no money, and regular libraries had really conventional holdings." At the time, whether this library had been an embodiment of anti-communist strategy or not was not Kuo's biggest concern; he found the collection interesting because it was largely made up of things he had not been exposed to before. He liked reading magazines, and to access a complete collection of Western periodicals in Hong Kong, one had to go to the American Library. "I applied for a library card to read my favorite magazines, such as *Rolling Stone* and *The New Yorker*." This turned out to be a precursor to Kuo's later involvement in publications. "Reading those magazines back then influenced my interest in zine making. I liked that nothing was written by a single person. It was refreshing to see so many graphics as well. I found this medium very fun. When I joined *The 70's Biweekly*, a lot of my ideas as to the format and my interest in the graphic element of the magazine were sensibilities that I first cultivated from being able to read in the American Library. It's the same with the Blackbird fanzine, *Communiqué*."

day—"the reunion was supposed to re-immerse us in an alternative line of thinking, to make space for everyone to present their current critiques, to greet the now with history… As long as everyone is still keen to connect, what we actually do or the substance of the reunion is perhaps less important."

Yet both the performers and the audience seemed to have doubts about this "reunion." Virginia Chu said, "From a critical standpoint, I asked: what are we going to show together? A state of discord? Are we to expect some new stimulation? Or are we satisfied with showing the status quo within the current dynamic?" She worried that the audience and performers might get too used to this echo chamber, no longer looking for profundity and progress beyond what has become a closed system. By appearance alone, it seemed that Chu and Kuo held opposite attitudes towards the reunion: one was critical, the other indifferent; one hot, the other cold. But they were both intently reflecting on the "legends of resistance" of Blackbird and the People's Theater, coming to terms with the fact that they did not have the ability to respond to current challenges in the form of a reunion.

Can the decline of these supposed "legends of resistance," the embarrassment of the free jam, and the friction and disillusionment of the reunion be blamed on anyone? On one hand, people have clearly found separate paths and practices, and though they have lost the close rapport they once enjoyed, they were still working hard in their respective fields and circles. Can anyone really be faulted here? Should the audience—drawn to the occasion of the reunion and enamored by the "legends" of *The 70's Biweekly*, Blackbird, and the People's Theater—have taken the opportunity to reflect upon their own anxieties instead? For instance, who is creating such legends in the first place? Is it the gods or the god-makers themselves?

That preconceived notions and assumptions surrounding these "legends" would come crashing down through disillusionment or confrontation doesn't really come as a surprise. The younger gen-

capitalist music industry and envision a possibility of radical coexistence.

After the performance, many students' questions during the Q&A made it obvious that they were all aware of the historical importance of *The 70's Biweekly*. Yet their praise for *The 70's Biweekly*, on top of the basic etiquette of respect for social movement elders, might also have been a desperate attempt to redeem these seniors from the failure of the free jam session. A student asked, "What do you think is the impact of *The 70's Biweekly*?" Kuo's response was not appreciative, grumbling that such questions "only appear on funding applications submitted by NGOs" and that he refused to prove his worth as such. Kuo said afterwards that "young people should be the most adventurous of us," and to ask such a "quantitative" question showed a decline of the spirit of the times. To premise one's question on "effectiveness" was wrongheaded in Kuo's view. But was that the original intention of that question? It might have expressed a desire for evaluation, but it was not necessarily a quantitative, instrumentalizing one either. The post-Umbrella Movement generation's desire to learn about the history of social movements, to evaluate the experience of their predecessors in order to chart a plan for the future, and the aspiration to connect with their seniors, thus came to a premature end in the Q&A.

Kuo did not seem worried about the free jam, likely because it simply reflected the reality of the group dynamic; the reunion never meant that the group was getting back together. "Everybody is very busy with their own work. Doing a performance ad hoc was the only real way to come together again." So if everybody was busy, why get together? What was the meaning of the reunion? Kuo replied earnestly, "Existential crises around the world are rapidly escalating. We all have to respond." When there is less and less space for free expression in society—the political ecology within universities, for instance, is changing from day to

Deserting the system

Looking back on his youth, Kuo characterized it as being in "a very poetic state. It was very fresh for me. Nobody had necessarily described nor recorded anything like it that I knew of, but there it was." Kuo likes poetry—he is a fan of the Beat Generation. Poetry was his "easy rider" (□□□□): the metaphor itself comes from a 1960s road movie of the same name. This indie classic tells the story of two men riding a motorcycle; there was no destination, but there was an undeniable romanticism. That was more or less Kuo's outlook then: unfettered and free.

He also attributed his dislike for academic studies "within the system" to this outlook. When it was time to go to university, Kuo heeded Timothy Leary's call to "turn on, tune in, drop out." He paced back and forth on the train platform and watched train after train rush by; in the end, he did not board the train to CUHK and gave up his interview with the Department of Music. He admitted that he may not have thought things through carefully back then, but the way he talked about dropping out had a retrospective certainty. "I had read a lot, and then without really knowing how it happened, those books became a party in themselves!" This "party" was an escape route that led him away from the formal system of the university, one that relied on the same improvisational and experimental spirit that had brought him to those books in the first place.

Kuo hoped to pass on the things he took from the 60s to the next generation, because that was a gift he had received from that era and one that should be shared. But by telling these stories from the 60s, he was not hoping to become some spiritual and intellectual guide for the next generation of anarchists, let alone be remembered as such. "The prefix 'an' in 'anarchism' means 'without': to be without methodology in method, without mechanisms of control, without masters." To Kuo, the best method is no methodology at all, and the healthiest order is one without any dominant stric-

tures. "I am very fortunate; my family never interferes with my life. They would never tell me what to do. Let things play out on their own! Let nature take its course—and what is this nature really but the most unmediated, organic state of being? If you lived on a boat, you'd eventually learn how to swim and get a sense of what's safe and what's dangerous. This is an intrinsic, self-sufficient process. The best education is self-education."

This gift, then, would never have taken the form of a single, revolutionary theory or speculation over and analysis of the many -isms endemic to the 60s. It would not have taken shape as contributions to the unique cultural space created by the Cold War and the so-called "Long Sixties" in Hong Kong, nor even the contemporary trajectory of knowledge production between the East and West. "You asked me how I came out of the 60s and what I took away from it. I can only tell you: there was no methodology, no single, essential outcome. Just as music back then was not manufactured and commercialized to make money, nor was it mechanical or overly technical; it was not supposed to be understood in terms of established styles or any readymade method of categorization, but rather total free association."

Most people have seen the "Circle-A" anarchy symbol in which the A represents "anarchy," but fewer people know that the circle originally referred to "order." What the "Circle-A" denotes then is the idea that only by dismantling authoritative power can people build a new, truly humanist order. Kuo's "gift" from the 60s is precisely this: naming the driving force of true liberation and the practice of "methodology-less" method, towards a political order uninhibited by any structure of control.

Kuo's respective reflections on their organizing work as an example. Since the 80s, Mok has more or less dedicated his efforts to applying a more democratic organizational model to theater work on a broader scale to build power and to empower. On the contrary, Kuo disliked this approach and thought it doctrinaire; he did not believe in the large-scale, systematic promotion of any given idea, something he thought could be dangerous and anti-humanist. He was also dismissive of Mok's acceptance of government funding, contending that this source of funding is a real issue: "It's a shame." These tensions were relatively insignificant compared to the broader beliefs they shared in terms of their critique of capitalism and the state, but the accumulation of these trivial differences made any long-term collaboration difficult in reality. Nevertheless, they managed to get together for a free jam session sans rehearsal at the end of the performance, and it seemed that they were both at least still interested in putting their rapport to the test of politics and time.

But the free jam session was also awkward. The session did not really come together in form or content. Their rapport was only palpable insofar as the session drew to a natural and unanimous end. With authentic expression as the original intention came the authentic result of inconsistency that each participant had to grudgingly accept. After all, everybody had accumulated different experiences over the years, coming out of the other end with different personalities and temperaments. Intentionally or not, the free jam betrayed the extent to which they had drifted apart as a result of no longer spending time together. The richness of the individual performances had created a sharp and uncomfortable contrast against the enervation of the free jam. After the show, the audience either avoided mentioning it or euphemized its lukewarm quality as "exhaustion."

> 'Magazine style' as a musical practice was meant to penetrate the rigid stylistic frames formulated by the

conditions that had enabled this assemblage of voices were precisely the ethos of open-ended communication, which called for respect, heterogeneity, and a certain earnestness.

Almost everybody now thinks of Kuo as synonymous with the band itself—a routine misunderstanding. "Don't think of the past as mine. Blackbird was a collective. Yet the formation of this collective was not the result of any single deliberation, nor was I supposed to be its spiritual leader or representative figure. It was a *collective* in the truest sense of the word: there was no leader, no core figure. In short, everybody contributed, with whatever we had to bring to the table. If one listens carefully, Mok Chiu-yu can be heard doing the agitated monologue in 'The Planetary Work-Machine' in *Living Our Lives*. The celebrated energetic roaring in 'Nuclear Ashes' in *Manifesto* was Tom Tong's doing. So, who is punk? What is punk? *Manifesto* was not a solo record, but a collective world. Mok would tell stories, Uncle Hung would read poetry, Tom would howl; it was an integration of many personalities, a whole more than the sum of its parts."

Going our separate ways together

From the milieu of *The 70's Biweekly* to the early collaborations of Blackbird, different experiences, like so many seeds, later grew into distinct anarchist practices for each member. At the performance at CUHK, Kuo and June sang gentle and sentimental folk songs, Tong and Chu made high-energy noise/experimental music/performance art, Uncle Hung told warm and humorous tales, and Mok performed penetrating interactive theater. Each prepared for their own unique segment. Kuo explained, "This arrangement also allowed us to avoid confronting our differences."

"Avoidance" was Kuo's candid way of explaining differences and tensions between members. No one harbored any illusions about the state of estrangement and dispersal that had developed since the group last collaborated on *The 70's Biweekly*. Take Mok and

The People's Theater and Blackbird—A reunion

The afterlives of *The 70's Biweekly*

It was 7pm on 21 February 2019 at the CUHK New Asia Amphitheater. The event that night had been advertised as the following: "No one is illegal: Reunion of the People's Theater and Blackbird under the water tower." Those already familiar with these "legends of resistance" started pouring in at around 6pm.

The convergence of Blackbird and the People's Theater began around 1979. Not even the parties involved remember exactly when it happened. But the seeds of the encounter were planted in *The 70's Biweekly*, where Lenny Kuo, together with the members of Blackbird, and Mok Chiu-yu of the People's Theater, became radicalized by the social movements of the 60s. They organized street protests while intervening in social movements via the written word: publishing a magazine, writing articles, translating books, running a bookshop.

Before *The 70's Biweekly* had time to consider changing its name from "The 70's" to "The 80's," financial difficulties forced printing to come to a grinding halt. Kuo summarized, "That was the economic reality. Newspapers and books were not selling." They pirated many books on anarchism, theater, and film theory, but sometimes they would not even be able to sell one out of the 50 copies they would print. "In the beginning, we all did it idealistically, and we did a good job. When we had to disband in the end, it came down to the rent rather than any fault on our part—we had to pay rent, but nobody was buying any books. We ran our own bookshop, but when the rent cost much more than what we made in book sales, we were working virtually unpaid. It was disheartening, and as time passed, we had to disband."

After the shuttering of *The 70's Biweekly*, members increasingly believed that the performing arts was a more flexible medium,

whose energy and broad resonance seemed more directly relevant and attractive to young people. And so they began experimenting in this area. Mok founded the People's Theater, hoping to use theater to intervene in social movements, to engender a more thorough and in-depth transformation of the political subject. They began performing in theaters, on the streets, in universities, and within local communities. The New Asia Amphitheater was one of their venues. In parallel, Blackbird toured the university circuit in the late 70s, covering songs by the likes of John Lennon, Bob Dylan, The Clash, and Tom Robinson, a repertoire that put them at the cutting edge of the avant-garde at the time. In 1979, the two groups collaborated "as a matter of course": Blackbird would frequently do the music for the People's Theater, while members of the People's Theater also joined Blackbird in its performances. *The 70's Biweekly* crew developed video projects like "Blackbird: A Living Song" too—a nod to their origins in the written word as a form of political intervention.

The performance was due to start at 7pm, though Kuo et al had been rehearsing since the afternoon. Perhaps "rehearsing" would be too formal a description; it was really more of a reunion amongst old friends and comrades. Yuen Che-hung (Uncle Hung) brought blueberries, cherries, bread, and cheese. It was not even 4pm, but Mok had shown up with wine while Tom Tong Sze-hong and Virginia Chu shared homemade cookies with everyone. Small yellow flowers Tong and Chu had brought from Mui Wo adorned everybody's pockets. Meanwhile, Kuo and June practiced the ballads for the evening as Tong adjusted the lights.

This picture reminded people of the 1986 Blackbird poster for the album *Manifesto* that featured Lenny Kuo, Cassi, Peter Lee, Mok Chiu-yu, Tom Tong, and Lau Ming-pui. Kuo remembered that Uncle Hung was also part of the crew. This collective probably comprised the lineup for four other albums too, from *East Is Red/Generation 1997* to *People Have The Power*. As it turned out, the reunion that year was not merely a diplomatic exchange nor a one-off collaboration between the two collectives. People's Theater and Blackbird were almost inextricable from each other in their early days. Not only were they close-knit in their thinking and politics, but their memberships also overlapped. This may have had to do with the genuine camaraderie they nurtured during the years of *The 70's Biweekly*.

'Magazine style'

There was no editor-in-chief at *The 70's Biweekly*. Instead, it operated as a horizontal organization between multiple affinity groups. With such a flat structure in addition to complete transparency and the absence of management, divisions of labor were decided through constant negotiation: the roles played by each person were flexible and responsibilities were shared collectively. "There were no checks and balances nor any set mechanism or position of power, but rather a general underlying ethos of friendship and empathy. We contributed according to each of our capacities. Take rent as an example. It wasn't like ten people paid a thousand dollars each at all, but rather that we all paid according our abilities. This was very important."

Perhaps it was this flexibility that enabled different personalities to find their own strengths within *The 70's Biweekly*. For example, Kuo would contribute to the music columns and occasionally design the layout. In the early days of Blackbird, the organizational model inherited this cooperative spirit—"everybody is an editor"—from *The 70's Biweekly*. Even the musical form was "magazine style": you can hear different elements in the same album or even the same song: folk, punk, blues, noise, roots rock. This kind of pastiche was not to show off stylistic mastery or range, nor to ignore the historical contexts and even the contradictions behind these genres. Rather, magazine style as a musical practice was meant to penetrate the rigid stylistic frames formulated by the capitalist music industry and envision a possibility of radical coexistence. The