

*“If we always focus on being an activist, being on the left, or whatever, then we miss the fact that we could do something otherwise than what we are doing. Instead of always thinking “what should I do?” or “what could we do differently?”, what is that little aporia, or pause, or interstice, that interrupts our customary ways of thinking and behaving? In that suspension or intermission, maybe there’s a chance for the political machine to be interrupted.”*

A group of people are gathered around a table outdoors at night. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, yellowish light source in the background creating a glow. The people are mostly seen from the back or side, engaged in conversation. The background consists of a wall with horizontal slats, possibly a window blind or a screen. The overall atmosphere is intimate and focused.

## **BUILDING THE BASES FOR A DIFFERENT LIFE**

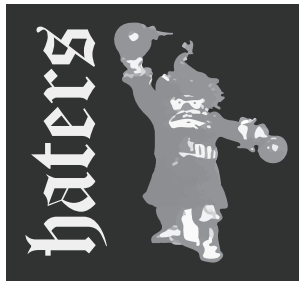
*An interview with Hong Kong anarchists, Black Window*

Images from Lausan website courtesy  
of Black Window

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So Boring's kitchen. Photo courtesy of Black Window.

Cover Photo: The collective congregating outside So Boring. Photo courtesy of Black Window.



Film screening on the street outside So Boring, Black Window's former infoshop-restaurant. Photo courtesy of Black Window.

# **BUILDING THE BASES FOR A DIFFERENT LIFE**

*An interview with Hong Kong anarchists, Black Window*

by Lausan Collective and Black Window



So Boring's infoshop. Photo courtesy of Black Window.

**Editor's note:** In the wake of 2011-2012's [Occupy Central](#), a group of participants decided to establish an infoshop and operate a free pricing restaurant called So Boring in Tak Cheong Lane, Yau Ma Tei. The space not only provided the collective a means of sustenance in the years since, but also sheltered it from the regimented space-time of state and capital. Its members were therefore able to sustain their experiments with non-statist forms of association and community that were initiated during the year-long occupation of the plaza beneath the HSBC headquarters. As the interview below with several of their members makes clear, their commitment to lived anarchy entails a rejection of the paradigm of sovereignty, which the left and right uphold in their political struggles to seize the reins of government and monopolize legitimate violence to effect social transformation. If constituting a new hegemony produces new forms of domination, then it is imperative to imagine a life without hegemony. Thus, the collective aims to—in its infoshop and in mass struggles—open up spaces of contingency and free play that profane the established coordinates of politics and germinate subjectivities, relations, and practices that prefigure desertion from the social logics of the sovereign political order. The collective is currently holding a fundraiser to help reopen their space, now called Black Window, in Sham Shui Po. It will be an important community and resource hub in a city that is in need of a robust infrastructure of resistance. For information on how to contribute to the fundraiser, as well as updates on their activities, visit their [Facebook](#) page and [Instagram](#) account. This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

*Note from Haters:* Text in red (or grey, depending on printing) indicates a hyperlink from the original webpage. Go to [lausancollective.com](http://lausancollective.com) if you're interested in seeing where they lead to.

for. If you talk about infoshops, they're about disseminating this kind of information. If the [George Floyd uprising](#) in Hong Kong was coded in such a way where Hong Kongers are like, "Black proletarians—they're against Trump. They're going to hurt our cause!" or something, that's totally moronic. But if Hong Kongers had some way of understanding their activities resonate with those in the US, then it would be much easier for Hong Kongers to resist this chauvinistic impulse of, "are they going to hurt Hong Kong's chances or damage Hong Kong's chances?" It wouldn't be like that. We're all proletarians [fighting](#) in the street.

**Y:** From 2019 up till now, maybe there are a lot of things in the movement that we don't agree with, such as its xenophobic orientation and the widespread toleration thereof for the sake of unity. But we could see there were some things that made people revise their thinking. I sense something different especially with regards to the discussions around the case of the twelve escapees, as well as this year's June 4th. There was a [mainlander lawyer](#) who helped the twelve people who'd wanted to escape to Taiwan but were arrested and brought to the mainland. While some among the twelve were nativists, they still accepted the lawyer's help and worked with him. Some Hong Kongers started to [realize](#) that some people in the mainland would actually stand on their side.

As for this year's June 4th, the political situation has gotten to the point where it's horrible, and those who had despised the [支聯會](#) (Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China) would not shit on it too much—not that they'd agree with it. Many people who came out of 2019 had not thought about politics or participated in any social movement. Now that they've acquired some experience, maybe their thinking would shift a bit. These changes are quite formative... I don't know. If there's a hub, a place where people can come into contact with one another, then I think it would lead to the exchange of different kinds of thought. I'm not so confident to say what this would result in. The infoshop in our new space would be much more accessible than the one in So Boring. People who will come just to eat might not know what we do, but we'll maintain a social media presence and hope that people will know more about this space before they visit.

**D:** We will also organize events that will take place in the infoshop upstairs, and we imagine that those who come just to eat will become curious and go upstairs to check out the infoshop! But yes, like Y said, prior to 2019, many people were more or less blank slates and had no knowledge of political matters. Perhaps they're now more open to listening to different things and making their judgments about them. Since there was no big platform, people had to take the initiative to make their own judgments, which occurred more so than in 2014. If you're talking about a positive identity for Hong Kongers, perhaps there is more of this talk—as in, [struggling and fighting together](#) for something.

Trump stuff came from too, because people were like, “oh wow, Trump is taking a strong stance against China”, like on a superficial level.

So, on one hand, people were acting for themselves on the street, but on the other hand, at the back of it, people had the sense that ultimately it’s not us who can create...as Walter Benjamin **says**, ultimately it’s not us who can create a real state of emergency; we need the intervention of some greater power—and that’s not a perspective we share, obviously. Let’s say there’s some apocalyptic war between the US and China, and the US wins, and the Communist Party is dissolved. It doesn’t have anything to do with us. What would constitute a victory for us? What we’re concerned about is, as you quoted us in our Indiegogo fundraiser, building our own capacities and being able to control the lives that have been confiscated from us—learning how to secure our own food, and build our own spaces. We gain all these capacities that have been commodified and taken from us. We want to invent and elaborate a different form-of-life. That would be what constitutes a victory for us. Sometimes in Hong Kong, and I’m not saying this accounts for the vast majority, it almost seems as though the objective is “we have to stop the menace of the Communist Party by any means necessary, and anything that can interfere with and depose the Communist Party is something that we have to champion.”

**Y:** We thought some aspects of 2019’s movement were really great. Many people would self-organize—from organizing **schoolbus teams**, resource distribution networks, to **writing letters** to jailed activists these days. We could see this orientation of coming together and doing something happening on a vaster scale in the past two years. When there’s a need under those circumstances, everybody thought they could work to fulfill that need. We want to open a space, and would like to think about how we can sustain this ethos of coming together. I’d say there are many different people trying different sorts of things, so I suppose our group is just one node among this constellation of autonomous networks.

**N:** It’s really amazing that these autonomous activities have been germinating and continue to blossom today. But I feel very **ambivalent** about how they’ve been framed and celebrated. The capacities of 香港人 (Hong Kongers) that have been on exhibition over the last two years are not something always latent in people, as if “the spirit of Hong Kong people is to help each other.” It’s not some kind of national characteristic. At the same time, we have to be proud of these activities, but not proud of them in a patriotic way, especially when it’s defined negatively by saying “Hong Kong is not China”, because that’s not a positive characteristic. It’s like saying, “I’m not those idiots or brainwashed drones on the other side of the border.” That can’t be how we define ourselves.

We have to find some other way to valorize our heroic activities and be proud of it without it being absorbed into a nationalist framework—that is quite tricky to do. The only way we can do that is to be able to see how parallel or apposite kinds of activities are also proliferating everywhere in the world. People like us are doing this kind of stuff everywhere, and I think this is a very instrumental thing that our space is

**Lausan Collective:** When and how did your collective come into being? Anarchism is more or less non-existent in Hong Kong’s political landscape. How did your members become familiar with and committed to anarchism?

**D:** We met each other at Occupy Central under the HSBC headquarters in 2011. Back then, we knew a bunch of people who called themselves anarchists and embraced anarchist values. I knew nothing back then, and I wouldn’t say I know too much right now. It’s really through the way in which we carried out discussions and made decisions by consensus that I became familiar with the values behind anarchism. Not every one of our members reads about anarchism and its traditions—perhaps most of us don’t—we just think it’s an appropriate set of principles by which to live and work together.

**N:** I echo D. Some of us are more interested in these questions than others. Also, sometimes I wonder about this anarchist label. I grew up in anarchist milieu in North America, and the meaning of anarchism in America has shifted a lot, you know? It’s associated with anti-globalization movements and the black bloc there, whereas in Greece, for example, it’d assume a very different meaning from anarchism in Spain. A while back, the CNT from Spain came to Hong Kong to hold a conference, and they invited us with the intention of bringing us into their syndicalist umbrella. We were sitting in that conference and we fell asleep every single day listening to what they had to say. So, there’s this heritage of anarchism and all the baggage associated with it and all the different, polyvalent contexts to which that term belongs. I would say ninety percent of us aren’t very interested in those kinds of things. But if someone was to say “Tak Cheong Lane...that anarchist group!”, I don’t think anyone in our group would be like, “no, that’s wrong!”

**D:** We actually had a discussion about whether we are anti-capitalist.

**N:** Yeah, a long time ago. The thing is, with our collective, different people would have different answers if you asked us a question about anarchism. But as far as being anti-capitalist, everybody identifies with it.

**D:** Broadly speaking, there are two other anarchist groups in Hong Kong—**Autonomous 8a** and **older anarchists** who grouped together in the ‘70s. We work with them from time to time, but we have differences as to how we go about doing things. We do benefit from them because they’ve established a network for grassroots struggles, and through them, we get to know a lot of different people and communities, such as migrant workers and immigrants from the mainland fighting for the right of abode.

**Y:** During Occupy Central, we were there along with many others—several Autonomous 8a members, as well as the people behind a citizens’ channel called **FM101**. There were meetings, and some friends who had tried consensus decision-making suggested adopting it for the meetings. And so, everyone tried it and agreed to adopt it from then on. I guess some decisions made back then are still in effect.

**LC:** What's the history of anarchism in Hong Kong?

**Y:** We actually don't know too much about it.

**N:** I think Hong Kong has no clear, continuous lineage when it comes to anarchism. When we came into contact with 8a, they wouldn't talk about these things either. For me, that's what I grew up with, and for some of us, they read some books about Kropotkin talking about mutual aid. I think for a lot of kids in Hong Kong these days, anarchism is some sort of exotic spectacle they observe happening in black blocs.

**D:** Maybe some of us were like that back then. We'd browse social media pages of people in black throwing molotov cocktails. Then came the translated versions of, say, The Invisible Committee's *Coming Insurrection*, and it's through reading these books—even though they don't call themselves anarchists—in the reading groups we organized that we feel like our orientation is similar to that of the Invisible Committee.

**N:** Part of our development has to do with the friends we've made over the years as well. Just by virtue of us having the space in Yau Ma Tei, and before that, in Occupy Central. All these friends we made along the way—from La ZAD, Kamagasaki, and Wuhan—telling us what they're doing where they were, and showing us what they made and the books they wrote, influenced us a lot.

**LC:** In the *description* for your Indiegogo fundraiser, you state that you do not aspire towards national sovereignty or political independence, but towards the power to produce your capacities and potentiality, which is materialized in the “collective skills, knowledges and practices that [you're] able to...build, multiply, and circulate”, so as to “[build] the bases for a different life, and the means to defend it.” What notion of freedom, and what kind of political horizon, if there is one, underpin your political aspirations? How do your commitments affect the way in which you participate in Hong Kong's political struggles?

**N:** This question has a few loaded concepts. The first has to do with freedom. Independence and national sovereignty is one variation of freedom. As for what kind of political horizon underpins our political aspirations, do we have aspirations that can be properly qualified as being political? Because the political sphere is this sphere of will and the conquest of power, as well as the struggle for recognition and representation. I was thinking about the *phenomenon of 躺平* (lying flat). It's so widely discussed in Chinese social media and in the West. I read so much lefty commentary on the phenomenon, especially in China, where commentators were like, “these 躺平 youth...this totally apolitical, apathetic generation. It doesn't form any kind of political subjectivity, and without political subjectivity, you can't make a revolution.” Totally old-school, left-wing recipe for political activity. I'm sitting there thinking that they totally missed the point of what 躺平 is. I think it's interesting because it doesn't form a subjectivity, because a political subject is an agent that has

we put out and smoke cigarettes. We'd talk to each other and offer them soup, and in exchange they'd give us some cigarettes. The people who live on our lane would come down to eat and talk to us about food and other things as well. There's also a woman who collects paper boxes around the corner, and she'd give us so many fruits. She would collect fruits that are nearly rotten from the fruit wholesale market, so she'll select the good ones and give us, say, a box of baby cherry tomatoes and grapes.

**N:** In the new space, there's an old man who repairs shoes in a very small space next to us. Some of our friends did a *graffiti* outside our new space on the wooden boards raised in front of the entrance of our new space, which is still being renovated. The graffiti said, 心靜自然涼 (a calm heart keeps you cool). The other day, the old dude came by and was like, “心靜自然涼?! 我人生咁痛苦, 點可以心靜㗎?” (“A calm heart keeps you cool? My life is so hard, how could my heart be calm?”) I was painting the whole day and was really tired, but I just had to ask him, “your life is that hard?” He's like, “yeah!”, and went on to tell me about his life history. I still had to finish painting the wall. It seems like there's going to be many more of these experiences with him over the next few weeks (everyone laughs).

**D:** We can't really plan to control how we build relationships with other people because everyone has different vibes, rhythms, and personalities, which determine how we communicate with them, as well as the kind of relationship we have with them.

**Y:** As much as we are *aware* of Sham Shui Po's *gentrification*, and wonder what we could do about it, not that we could counter the phenomenon in any significant way, we're not moving to Sham Shui Po with the mindset of diving straight into community work. We haven't really learned much about what the 文青 (hipster) shops, which have been criticized for furthering gentrification, have done for the neighborhood, or what their relationship with the people there has been like. As we did in Yau Ma Tei, we'll settle into Sham Shui Po casually and see how our relationships with the people there develop organically.

**LC:** How have you been processing the 2019-2020 Hong Kong protests?

**N:** This is what we were talking about at dinner. Going all the way back to the first question, when we were in Occupy Central, we would watch all these struggles unfold around the world. For example, in Exarcheia, in Greece, the nationwide riots in Greece after Alexis was killed—we'd be watching the developments there and wonder, “when's that going to happen in Hong Kong?” And then there's this huge eruption in 2019. I feel like, oftentimes, people didn't treat struggle—the combat that took place in the streets—as an end in itself. People would be sensitive as to whether there were cameras to document what's happening, so that it could be refracted through the media, and transmitted to an overseas audience—it's framed in a sense where if something catastrophic happens, the whole world's going to know. Maybe a human rights crisis is going to transpire in Hong Kong, and then foreign governments would be forced to act against the Communist Party. That's how all the

period and is suddenly feeling tired and sick. Once you understand their situation and express everything to get your frustrations out of you, you try to understand what happened that night and how everybody was feeling that night. It's totally fine. In a way, that's how we manifest what we believe in, but it's easy for us because we're also close to each other, and we care about what each of us is going through, and what holds us together is more important than inefficient dinner service.

**Y:** Another thing is, we have a roster every week, and there should be at least three people signed up every day. Oftentimes, everyone should fill in the roster by Monday night, and if no one has signed up for Tuesday's spots, somebody would get pissed off and argue with those who don't want to work tomorrow. The other thing is, because we don't receive a big salary for our other jobs, we divide the money we earn from So Boring every month after we pay the rent and utilities. Anyone can speak out if they need more, but it's very hard to discuss what everyone needs.

**N:** For example, after you pay the rent and cover the costs of electricity and water, let's say we have \$14000 left to be shared among fourteen people. Each person can technically take \$1000, but...

**D:** Some people work more days than the others. But then, somebody needs more money that month for special reasons. Say, his mom gets injured, and he needs money for the medical treatment. But he doesn't communicate that. He just says, "I need much more for this month."

**N:** Yeah, maybe that person would be like, "I want two thousand dollars but I worked one day the whole month." The natural impulse of some people in the group would be like, "you worked one day and want twice as much money as everybody else?" But, based on what we believe in, it shouldn't be a problem. If everybody else doesn't have a problem with him taking more, then he should just take it.

**D:** It'd be easier if we knew why he demanded so much, and that person would also feel the pressure of working so little and demanding so much. If he communicated better, things would be easier and more comfortable for everyone.

**N:** Then at the opposite side of the scale, we'd have some people who work a lot but have another source of income. They'd be like, "I won't take any money. Somebody wants to take my share of the money? You can take it." I spend so much of my time cooking, so I'd usually take more than most people. So, money creates all these kinds of very stupid situations. Money's value is so tied to...I mean, it's labor time, you know? So, we'll always be bound by that conception to some degree.

**LC:** What was your relationship like with Yau Ma Tei's residents, as well as the restaurant's customers, when your restaurant-infoshop was operating there?

**D:** I'd say it could be pretty random with different people in the neighborhood. Some people from the elderly home upstairs would come down everyday in the afternoon when we're still preparing food, and they'd just sit outside of our kitchen on the chairs

will, and then many agents with their wills form a collective will, and that collective will goes on to conquer power. 躺平 is just something that can't be captured by that **paradigm**; it's like Agamben's **concept of inoperativity**—a line of flight from the machine of will.

Obviously, I'm not saying "doing nothing is better than doing something", nor am I saying we're caught between forming a will or surrendering it. I think what the gesture of 躺平 signifies is that something about the political model has exhausted itself. Maybe there's something significant in the gesture's refusal to form a will or act in ways that are customary or codified in order to qualify as being political action, and that there's some possibility in people's activity being opaque and unreadable. Maybe we shouldn't get into the knee-jerk habit of coding the gesture in familiar terms in order to unequivocally condemn it and then offer our prescriptions. That's how I think **tankies** react too, in that **tankie-ism** is like an algorithm scanning everything and being like, "this doesn't correspond to what I believe in, so this is imperialist", which is just careless and stupid. Maybe we should suspend this habit to always say, "well, what should we do?", and focus sometimes on the aspect of **not doing** what we customarily do. When Agamben talks about inoperativity, he's suggesting that potentiality is always the potential to do, but also the potential to not do something. If we always focus on being an activist, being on the left, or whatever, then we miss the fact that we could do something otherwise than what we are doing. Instead of always thinking "what should I do?" or "what could we do differently?", what is that little aporia, or pause, or interstice, that interrupts our customary ways of thinking and behaving? In that suspension or intermission, maybe there's a chance for the political machine to be interrupted. That possibility and that potential represent a line of flight, as Deleuze and Guattari say. So, in a way, our collective is interested in withdrawing and **creating something else** that can't be captured by the political machine.

**Y:** As for how we participate in struggles, we would usually go and observe what the situation is like during political actions before considering what else we could do afterwards. Fundamentally, we wouldn't want to understand the participants in a flattening manner.

**N:** If you characterize Hong Kong's struggles as being "political struggles", while they're political struggles on the surface, it leads people to relate to actors and subjects inside that struggle in a certain way. Like, in the **dockworkers' strike**, a stereotypical left-wing way of relating to the dockworkers would be to treat them as abstractions—the rank-and-file workers, bodies representing a mass to be directed and represented by union representatives. For our collective, we would think that the demands they put forward are absolutely legitimate, and that they should be able to accomplish those demands. Then that raises the question of how such ends are to be met? Should they be represented by union heads? For the most part, should they just sit around and be filmed by cameras just as a spectacle to signify that they're fighting for something? As for people in support of the strike, how do we relate to those workers? Do we just simply show up with some slogans and banners and say, "we're some

university students in support of you”, and then parade your slogans around them to show solidarity? How else can solidarity manifest itself? These are the questions we ask when we participate in these kinds of struggles. What does solidarity mean? Is it some kind of divorce between us as supporters and them as people presenting a set of demands? That’s not how we relate to the struggles we participate in. I think that categorizing something as being a political struggle and then using very reified terms like solidarity reinforces this kind of relation. One thing we can say for certain is that we will be wherever mass struggle appears. For us, the demands that a struggle clamors for is secondary to the relations that form between partisans in the struggle. Our participation in such struggles go beyond merely marching alongside them to secure demands, so while achieving such goals are crucial if they are to have the bare minimum conditions for a halfway dignified life, these demands do not define the horizon of our relationship with them.

**D:** We’ve shown up many times to support the demonstrations organized by migrant domestic workers, and so we’ve gotten close to some of the migrant workers in order to really know the needs that they have. Perhaps they’d like to attend or organize some workshops because they’d like to learn, for instance, English. We’d host some classes, and after teaching them, maybe we’d like to do some more things with them. Things apart from what they’d like to achieve in terms of political demands, such as creating some zines with them so they have a space to tell their personal stories. For us, apart from the demands they’d like to secure, which are important, we’d like them to feel they’re valued, that people would like to listen to their stories.

**LC:** With the activities you’ll be running in your new space—“coordinating screenings, curating our library, organizing discussions and workshops”—do you intend to radicalize more people?

**N:** No, I wouldn’t think of it that way. Of course, part of it is us having a belief that what we do is novel and meaningful—us being together for the last ten years has allowed us to survive. We want to share experiences and communicate, but it’s not as though we have something to communicate either, because Black Window is, in a way, us exposing ourselves to the outside, and having a place in which we can encounter other people. I feel like the space of encounter is the medium for, I don’t know, radicalization. I don’t really want to use that word though, because I often don’t know what radicalization means. Does it mean we form a Das Kapital reading group and read all three volumes? Then what? The number of people who read left-wing literature doesn’t account for anything because, for example, our Japanese friends are always complaining that Japan has a very scholastic, academic culture. They have a long tradition of studying Marxism. Lots of kids read cultural theory to do with the far-left, and then they make that into a career, analyzing and critiquing things. That doesn’t account for anything at all. Also, radicalization is often a codeword for left-wing organizations to recruit more members. It establishes a circuit that moves in one direction—there’s the radical who radicalizes the non-radical, and this unilateral transmission **isn’t something** that I identify with.

transferable in large-scale struggles such as the defense of farmland in the Northeast New Territories, and so on. It makes a massive difference when everybody involved is able to get together and sit down to have a hot and substantial meal filled with nutrients before having a standoff against bailiffs, security guards and cops in the sun. The meal is obviously also a pretext for conviviality and conversation, for people who might not know one another too well to relate to one another on a personal and informal level.

In the restaurant, we have always treated food as a form of media, but one with its own material specificity. That’s why when I cook dishes from the Middle East or India or Africa it’s not simply about exposing others to cooking cultures that are foreign from our own, but also about estranging myself from my own customary culinary habits, learning in a very material and tangible way about how other cultures relate to the preparation of food and the philosophy behind their handling of ingredients. I want to be respectful of that and ask that others are too, which is why I tend not to tone the food down and “translate” the dishes to suit local palates. There’s also the fact that the food functions as a media in quite another way—to alert people to what’s going on around the world. If there’s an upheaval in Lebanon or in Palestine or in Belarus, we might try our hand at learning to prepare something from the region, accompanied with a post about what we think about this or that uprising. The music that is played loudly in the kitchen is also a means by which we effect this sort of link, we like playing street music, urban music from different places. It’s a very palpable way for people to connect to cultures and peoples and histories that they are far removed from, but at the same time this connection is also forged through aspirations and desires for transformation that we share in common.

**LC:** How was So Boring run according to your principles?

**D:** We do have different roles, but they aren’t too fixed. For example, there is no dish-washing position; that task is shared by everyone who works in the kitchen that night. The lack of strict division of labor sometimes leads to tensions among ourselves. If someone’s not proactive enough, they may be called out for taking too many breaks.

**N:** Yeah, it’s just that different people have different rhythms of work. For example, I don’t like being out in the front, because I don’t like interacting with people (laughs), so I cook for the most part, but it’d be very distracting for me if I see all the dishes piling up and nobody’s taking care of it. So when I finish cooking a round of entrées for people, I’d go to the sink and wash all the dishes. All the while, somebody could be sitting outside taking a break and hanging out, and this could generate some animosity between whoever’s working the shifts. We’re not going to be passive-aggressive and not talk to them for a while. We don’t have workplace politics—you get pissed off, but these are your best friends. At the end of the night, after we wash the dishes and clean up the place and go upstairs to sit in the infoshop, we just argue it out. Like, “what the fuck were you doing? I don’t wanna wash all these dishes while you’re on your shift, like what’s your problem?” But then maybe that person is on their



local farmer friends when it was harvest season. It was difficult to use more expensive ingredients because we were doing free pricing. We do have some principles, however. We don't use white sugar, for example, and when we buy soy sauce, we'd go for the ones with fewer harmful chemicals in it.

**N:** One of us is a full-time farmer now. He became one after So Boring closed, because we all had to find a way to make a living to prepare for the opening of the new space. He'll remain a farmer once the space opens, because he'll contribute to our space with what he grows. But **his farm** doesn't grow at a very large scale, so the amount of vegetables they'll be able to give us will be limited.

**D:** There's another farmer in New Choi Yuen Village that we know, and they'll also collaborate with us. Maybe we'll explore making food from scratch as well, such as homemade bread.

**LC:** What is the political significance of food? How does it figure in political struggles?

**N:** I think that in the West this connection is a lot more patent than it is here, because of longstanding projects across the States like Food Not Bombs and whatnot, whereas in Hong Kong there has always been this cleavage between what is "political" and what isn't—that is, the way we live our lives, the activities that we engage in together or separately and how these relate to our subjectivity or indeed our subjection. For example, when me and D brought food that we had made in our kitchen out to the occupied area of Mong Kok in the Umbrella Movement, some people told us that food is an individual matter for each consumer to decide for themselves, that we shouldn't be concerned with how people feed themselves in the struggle. After all, they told us, there is a 7-11 and a McDonald's on every street corner in Hong Kong—such are the advantages of being a denizen of a hyper-capitalized metropolis. This is also why every time a mass mobilization appears in Hong Kong what you immediately see is an abundance of prepackaged foods and corporate bottled water—donated by well-meaning people no doubt, and certainly a bun or an onigiri is deeply welcome when you've been on the street for hours on end—though with the most recent movement people have been much more aware of how waste is managed than they were previously, and this is also why there were huge debacles in the Umbrella Movement surrounding the "carnavalesque" nature of people barbecuing and organizing public hotpot gatherings in the encampment sites. People thought there was some essential discordance between the affective climate of a "political" struggle, supposedly austere and indignant, and mundane stuff that had nothing to do with this. This is the extent of what is permitted to us; even when we are in revolt, the only subjectivity we have access to is that of the citizen-consumer.

For us, being poor and/or vegetarian, you don't exactly have a surfeit of choices when it comes to eating out, so the basis of So Boring was us having to learn to cook nutritious food for ourselves principally, so that we would have something satisfying to sustain us through long meetings, gatherings and actions. Then we discovered, over the course of cooking for large crowds in the restaurant, that these skills were

I feel more comfortable with saying that our space is a space of encounter, and an encounter is something that's new and unknown to both me and the person that I encounter, from which some kind of discovery can be made from our exchange. That's why we established our restaurant and infoshop in the first place. It's to encounter different people, or different fragments of reality, which also consists of us going to the countryside in the New Territories to defend farmland, or going inside the docks to meet dockworkers. We want to encounter real life. We want to encounter reality, and reality is beyond our understanding. So that's what we want—transformation, metamorphosis, encounter. That's what we think we can find in struggles, encountering people who are very different from us and outside of our experience and understanding. If we're going to talk about anybody who's radicalized, I would say that it's us. Of course, through our space, we want to circulate materials and things we've been exposed to because those things just aren't accessible or visible in Hong Kong, and we think it's important to put that stuff out there. But it's not to radicalize anybody. It's to offer different kinds of perspectives and solutions to problems that we all face, and how we can use these materials to deal with these concrete problems and use them as a basis to experiment with creating different kinds of solutions.

**Y:** The things we have and will put out are things our collective thinks are great. The gigs and exhibitions we've organized feature music and artworks we think are great. It's unlikely you'll be "radicalized" after you've gone to the events we organized. We just want to put out things we like more often so that more people can be exposed to them.

**D:** Yeah, the things we like and put out, aesthetically speaking, aren't exactly the most upfront, with some clear-cut political statement that forces you to be for or against a matter. I suppose we want our space to allow for different modes of expression. One thing that comes to mind is, there's a tree that was originally from Choi Yuen Village. When the village was demolished following the **Anti-Express Rail protests**, the Choi Yuen villagers gave the tree to **Ma Shi Po**. Now that Ma Shi Po is **facing demolition** to pave way for Henderson Land's luxury flats, a friend asked if anyone wanted to adopt a branch of the tree. Many people ended up taking a part of it to grow in their own space. In doing so, the journey of the tree serves as a remembrance for an agricultural way of living in Hong Kong that is **increasingly threatened**, as well as for invisibilized struggles that are just as important as the struggle against the Chinese regime and all nation-states.

**Y:** We had an alternative space before. With the reopening of Black Window, we could make connections between ordinary people, experiences, different struggles, and everyday practices—how we plant a tree, how we consume—come together.

**LC:** I asked the previous question about radicalization because in the **Mingpao Weekly interview**, one of you was saying you'd like more high school students to be exposed to your space and what you stand for.

**D:** Oh, that was me! We haven't really come into contact with high schoolers in the past. After 2019, perhaps younger people would like to reach out and learn more about politics. I'd like to know and talk to them, not because I think they are a blank slate and are so new to social movements that I'd like to teach them and pass down my wisdom, but because, during the protests, my feeling was that there were big differences when it came to how I and other people were processing things. There are many things that I need to learn. Perhaps through encounters with people in our space, they could absorb some of the principles we stand for. But, just as N said, these encounters are two-way. We learn from other people as well. High schoolers are one crowd; we're still not exposed to many other kinds of people.

**N:** Encounters are like having a conversation. You're not shying away from offering a perspective that you believe in, and in a way, you owe it to people to be able to communicate perspectives that they might not be able to access. So, I feel like talking to students is not a one-way belt of transmission. It's not that they know nothing and you know everything, because, from experience talking to them, I would also be able to see things from a perspective that I ordinarily would not.

**LC:** What informs your decision to generate publicity for the reopening of your restaurant-infoshop, having appeared on [Mingpao](#), [MP Weekly](#) and [HK Feature](#)? Aren't you afraid that the government would monitor the activities that Black Window will organize?

**Y:** I don't think the government would have time to do these things...

**N:** We're more scared of being broke than being surveilled by the government (everyone laughs).

**D:** It's a dilemma. We want to be more exposed to raise enough money, as well as to connect to people we're not exposed to before, yet we also have to be aware that the government could censor us or cause disturbances. But this is the general condition we're all in now. It doesn't matter if you have an actual space or not, you'd still have to worry when you do things that are politically sensitive.

**Y:** So far, when we conduct interviews, we definitely think about what we can say and cannot say. Of course we hope we can talk about what we believe in, but we really have to consider how best to proceed before we're interviewed.

**N:** Ever since Occupy Central, we decided not to talk to any kind of media outlet. But every time we needed to raise funds, we abandon most of our principles and anyone can ask us questions (everyone laughs).

**D:** No, it's also because we know some people who work in the media, and we know them well enough to be assured that they won't distort what we have to say. There's still some kind of principle in there (laughs).

**N:** What we say isn't so easily coded and interpreted as being "yellow". We don't keep talking about 香港人 (Hong Kongers), and so it's very hard to decrypt what we say into binaristic terms. The interviews we've been conducting are not as dangerous, as far as the authorities go.

**LC:** In light of your concerns of being broke, how did you settle on adopting a pay-as-you-want model for So Boring, and how sustainable was it?

**D:** Two or three months into running So Boring, after we got into the flow of things, we wondered what more we could do to let people know who we are and what we stand for. A friend suggested that we adopt a free pricing system. If you're a customer and would like to pay, you may want to ask us some questions to learn more about us. Also, in Yau Ma Tei, there are a lot of elderly, prostitutes, and homeless people—it's an old neighborhood and people aren't very rich. We wanted these people to be able to eat in our place, and be exposed to cuisines from different parts of the world.

**N:** Also, we're poor ourselves. I think that has to be part of it (laughs). We can't afford to eat expensive food. The free pricing system is sustainable as long as we don't get much income from it ourselves. If that's how we qualify sustainability, then yes. Thing is, we'd only be open for dinner for a few hours every night. I imagine if we had opened seven days a week with longer hours, it would have been sustainable in the sense of being able to generate an income for people who worked there. We weren't able to open during lunchtime at So Boring because the street is used for different purposes. There's a mechanic next to us, and a lot of trucks unloading stuff...it's just not a good environment for lunch service. We never had to incur any huge financial losses. Sometimes we ran into financial trouble. We sometimes didn't open for a few days because we went to participate in the dockworkers' strike, or to protect villages in the Northeast. We'd post something online, "hey, we're kinda fucked...we have five or six days left and we can't pay the rent", and people would help us out. So I'd say our previous kitchen was very much a success in a lot of ways. Black Window, however, won't be using a free pricing system for the entire menu. We will have one entrée that's freely priced, and two entrées that are not. We still have very long discussions in our meetings about how the food should be priced. It's a pain because all the prices are going up in Hong Kong. It just gets more and more expensive to eat out, even with the cheapest meals you can get. We don't think the prices being paid outside are reasonable, especially considering a lot of the food you get outside isn't even good in the first place. We also don't think we're pricing our food reasonably, even though we think our food is going to be a lot better than what you can get elsewhere. We're all poor too. It's a very tricky situation. It just proves that being poor in Hong Kong sucks.

**D:** We'll try things out for a month or two and see how we can balance our costs. We'd like to gradually expand our free pricing system if our operating costs work out. Also, we'd like to gradually use more and more locally-grown produce. During the So Boring years, we mostly purchased ingredients from the wet market, and I think the vegetables we got were mainly from the mainland. We'd also buy from our