Hong Kong and Insect Rhetoric: The Spatial Politics of Pokémon GO

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ABSTRACT
During Hong Kong's 2019 street protests, images of *Pokémon* became a recurring motif. What accounts for the presence of this videogame franchise figure among the anti-extradition demonstrators? Establishing *Pokémon* as a lens through which spatial politics can be viewed, this paper examines the sociocultural, economic and geographic tensions in Hong Kong through this popular Nintendo franchise. Charting the emergence of insect rhetoric as an invective in that city, the contours of the anti-extradition crisis are charted at the intersections of language, identity, space and nostalgia. Drawing extensively on reportage of protest movement, this paper concerns itself with how digital platforms enact, elaborate and represent spatial politics and activism in both virtual and embodied worlds.

Keywords
Spatial Politics, Urban Play, *Pokémon GO*, Insect Rhetoric, Hong Kong, Sinophobia

INTRODUCTION
Within a week of the launch of *Pokémon GO*, public space had been radically transformed. Throughout July 2016, and in the months followed, players amassed in unprecedented numbers in streets and parks of world cities, seeking to capture small animated creatures attached to physical landmarks, yet visible only through the AR interfaces of mobile phones. The sudden infestation of billions of virtual Pokémon abruptly upended a wide range of spatial norms, altering how space was experienced, used and understood. While the regulation of urban space tends to be highly controlled and contested, the arrival of *Pokémon GO* constituted a unilateral re-zoning at a global scale (Harle 2016). The densely populated city of Hong Kong presented no exception. Vast swarms of phone-wielding players descended upon parks and open areas, often fluttering about until late in the night. Their presence attracted the attention of onlookers, reporters and the police. Player activities were not restricted to city streets; construction sites erected posters warning gamers not to enter, while retailers and shopping malls quickly cashed-in on the foot traffic (Cheung 2016). In a city with so little public space, *Pokémon GO's* impact was acutely felt.

The Politics of *Pokémon GO*
Since the 2016 launch of *Pokémon GO*, much has been said about the politics of space its popularity has incited. Numerous accidents and incidents have arisen of unintentional trespassing, hazardous participant behavior, and players swarming at Pokéstops in otherwise quiet streets and sensitive locations (including cemeteries, memorial centers, churches and Holocaust museums (Peterson, 2016). An unending parade of quantitative and anecdotal evidence all underscore the inevitable transgressions and discrepancies that unfold around the game's ubiquitous spatial play. Moreover, *Pokémon GO* play has revealed undeniable hierarchies in the use and experience of urban spaces indexed by the societal privilege of participants.

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Previous scholarship has connected *Pokémon GO* to the way-finding activities of the nineteenth century *flaneur*, to the playful *dérives* of the twentieth century Situationists and to contemporary racial and gender inequities highlighted by pervasive games. Each of these perspectives evokes a politics of the city in the process. For Salen (2017), *Pokémon GO*'s colonization of public space inadvertently incorporates the same politics that makes moving in the physical world easier for some than others. The result amounts to what Salen (2016) has elegantly articulated as "the unlevel playing field of *Pokémon GO"*. Keogh (2016) has contrasted the urban adventures of predominantly young white men in relation to *Pokémon GO*, "of having to awkwardly explain to police why they were hanging around in a park at 2 am to catch a Pikachu", experiences that are "vividly juxtaposed" with "police shootings of black men in America" for engaging in equally innocent urban activities. Davies and Innocent (2017) trace the inequities of spatial play in *Pokémon GO* to the *derive* of the Parisian Situationists of the nineteen-sixties, whose wayfinding activities, when replicated by a Tunisian colleague of colour, saw him quickly arrested and imprisoned. As plainly observed by Akil (2016) "*Pokémon GO* is a death sentence if you are a Black man".

Mans (2017) has cast suspicion on Niantic's shrugging of responsibility for player actions, injuries and impact upon public space noting that the experience of public spaces "is actually already guided" by Niantic's economic interests. While *Pokémon GO* purports to offer participants freedom of play, Mans demonstrates that "the agency of *Pokémon GO* users is limited". Along similar lines, artist Josh Harle (2016) offers a short video essay in which he co-opts the avatar of *Pickachu* to critique *Pokémon's* spatial politics asserting: "in a way *Pokémon GO* continues the active hostility to government regulation and externalization of risk and operational cost of disruptive technologies such as strident neoliberalist Uber and Airbnb." Taken together, *Pokémon GO* presents a critical lens through which to examine, assess, and critique a politics of urbanization given its conceptual trespass into this territory.

To comprehend the connections between the *Pokémon* phenomenon and the complexities of urban space, it is helpful to trace the history and spatial origins of the franchise. *Pokémon* was conceived in 1996 when Satoshi Tajiri sought to create a videogame that recaptured his own childhood experience of play. Tajiri was raised in outer Tokyo, at the edge of suburban limits in a verdant playground of wildlife in miniature. Like many Japanese youth, Tajiri would spend the warmer months collecting insects found abundantly in the local swamplands and waterways. But the suburb would undergo dramatic urbanization during the 1980's as the ponds, swamps and rice fields were replaced with apartment buildings, convenience stores and shopping malls. Videogame arcades supplanted Tajiri's former locations of play. In a 1999 interview discussing his motivations for creating the game, Tajiri cites a desire to provide new generations of children the same exhilarating interaction with insects he had once enjoyed (Tajiri in The ultimate game freak, 1999). Conceived as a nostalgic response to the loss of natural surrounds near the developer's home, the original *Pokémon* game can be understood as a critique of urban development. The politics of shrinking space and urban transformation are etched into Pokémon earliest code. With *Pokémon GO* offering a catalyst to provoke queries around what public space is, and who has the right to it, through the lens of *Pokémon GO*, this paper argues, we might examine the contours and tensions of what the French Marxist and social theorist Henri Lefebvre infamously termed "the right to the city" (1968). Taking up the lens of *Pokémon GO*, this paper examines the politics of shrinking space in relation to the city of Hong Kong.

SHRINKING CITY SPACE

Both public and private spaces in Hong Kong are scarce. As a principal destination for people fleeing China over the past 150 years, the region's relatively small land mass now boasts one of the highest population densities on the earth. Established as laissez-faire capitalist experiment under British rule in the 1830's, the cities spatial tightening is intensified by a political authority that remains economically driven favoring the development of commercial buildings over public spaces (Au 2015; Kammerer 2016; Cheung 2017). Despite repeated calls for new public spaces designed to fulfill local civic needs, shopping malls and banks flourish instead. (Skavicus et al. 2018). Although the city transitioned from British to Chinese Communist rule in 1997 under the 'One Country, Two Systems' arrangement, the city's uniquely capitalist structure remains fully intact. Power once wielded by the British colonial authority is today taken-up a small number of local tycoons and proxies of Beijing. (Carroll 2019; Cheung 2017; Studwell 2014).

Inequities of access to physical, social and political space have significantly worsened in recent years. A stagnation of per-capita income, increasing job insecurity, and encroaching mainland control have given rise to social polarization (Zhao and Li 2005). The shrinking of space is physically palpable. To detail a picture, in the late nineties, each Hong Kong resident had only 1.5 square meters of public space (each Singaporean had 4.5 square meters for comparison). In some of the more densely populated areas like Mongkok, Hong Kongers enjoyed only 0.5 meter of public space. In its '2030 Planning Vision and Strategy', the government has vowed to raise the open space per person standard from 2 to 2.5 square meters. However, as Lai (2016) notes, these spatial standards are routinely circumnavigated. Although planning standards require two square meters of open space per person, not only are shopping mall piazzas counted as open space, but so are private gardens in large residential developments reserved for resident use only. In practice, Lai observes, the government calculates private conveniences of the rich as public amenities for all.

In his ground-breaking opus *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Ackbar Abbas, examined the city's social and spatial politics, offering a then timely assessment of the Hong Kong psyche. His observations concerning the anxieties of a disappearing city and the pain of nostalgia resonate into the present. Although Hong Kong's way of life is theoretically safeguarded until 2047, its democratic independence has progressively eroded as affinities grow between communist authoritarianism and capitalist rule. Hong Kongers find themselves losing economic stability, public space, and the freedoms of expression beneath the looming shadow of the mainland (Lee 2015). This so-called 'mainlandization' is increasingly viewed through a xenophobic lens. Negatively perceived mainland cultural habits are reported and viewed as violations of Hong Kong urban space. Infractions range from Government controlled land development to mainlander's que-jumping, talking loudly, and allowing their children to eat and defecate in Hong Kong public spaces (So 2015; Szeto 2014; Szeto and Chen 2011, 2015). Complicating matters further, while in the 1980's, rich Hong Kongers visited the then impoverished mainland to take advantage of cheaper products and services, a reversal of fortunes now sees middleclass mainland Chinese visit Hong Kong en-mass for shopping, health care, and education. Outrage in Hong Kong regarding the increasing permeability of the border sparked unprecedented protests through 2019. Against this complex backdrop of increasingly constrained reality and the geospatial imaginary, the political lens of *Pokémon GO* opens up an aperture through which the tensions behind the protests can be observed. As previously noted by Davies (2020) Shea (2019) and Yang (2018), Hong Kong's protest movements have reached the sphere of videogames on multiple occasions in the past five years, offering new perspectives as to how these tensions might be understood.

POKÉMON AS A CULTURAL LENS

Pokémon first emerged as a protest symbol in Hong Kong in 2016, when Japanese videogame producer Nintendo changed Pikachu's name transliterated from the Cantonese 比卡超 pronounced (bei-kaa-chiu), to the Mandarin 皮卡丘 pronounced (pei-kaa-yau) (see Figure.1). The name change occurred following the lifting of a 14-year game console ban in mainland China that saw the opening of its videogame market in 2014. China almost immediately became the largest videogame market in the world boasting over 600 million users and generating more than $35 billion in revenue in 2018. With game earnings projected to double to $75 billion by 2024 (Gonzales 2019), China quickly emerged as a vital market for global game distributors to appease. Recognizing the vast economic potential of appealing to China's player base, Nintendo localized their game for Chinese audiences accordingly (Wang 2016).

But the renaming of Pikachu by Nintendo struck a raw nerve with Hong Kong locals, who saw it as both an affront to the city's dialect as well as evidence of a broader replacement Hong Kong's Cantonese language and culture with that of the Chinese mainland. In response, on May 31, 2016, members of the radical localist political group "Civic Passion" (熱血公民) organized dozens of demonstrators to protest outside the Japanese consulate in Central, Hong Kong. (Wang 2016). "This is not only a commercial decision, but relates to cultural exchanges," one protester decried at the rally. "We want to let the Japanese consulate know that a company from their country is disrespecting Hong Kongers" (anonymous protester in Huang 2019). Another protestor told *The Telegraph*. "Pikachu has been in Hong Kong for more than 20 years", "It is not simply a game or comic book, it is the collective memory of a generation" (Leung in Thomson 2016). Within these sentiments, a poetics of nostalgia takes shape, a resonance connecting the spatial politics of Hong Kong with that of *Pokémon*, each mournful of a place that is either shrinking, disappearing, or lost in time altogether.

In games scholarship, the nostalgia politics surrounding the *Pokémon* phenomenon are well mapped. Surman (2009), Keogh (2017) and McCrea (2017) have each explored the collective nostalgia toward *Pokémon* and the crucial role it plays in the games' dissemination. Each new iteration of *Pokémon* recalls the franchises' rich past, while as already examined, nostalgia for a pre-urbanized natural setting is a central inspiration in the games' creation. Moreover, socio-cartographic fieldwork has revealed that playing *Pokémon GO* produces a sense of belonging, linked to an appreciation of place among many of its players. The work of Vella et al. (2019) underscores the "nostalgic connection" and "shared passion" that is extended toward the *Pokémon* and, in-turn, to fellow players. Casual conversations blossom into friendships with strangers strengthening social and community ties. Studying *Pokémon* fandom specifically in the Hong Kong context, Lovric (2020) reveals how the franchise nurtures meaning making and a sense of connection with imaginary beings and likeminded fans while granting Hong Kongers an escape from urban alienation. *Pokémon GO* appreciation has solidified as a global family of fandom.

This cultural kinship is not shared in the Chinese Mainland. The country has thus far resisted what game theorist Ian Bogost has termed the 'Pokémonisation' of the globe (2016). Since 2017, China's governing Communist Party has blocked Google Maps and by extension *Pokémon GO*, declaring the game a danger to consumers and national security alike (Lau 2017). Although high-profile *Pokémon GO* clones proliferate in China, the most successful being Tencent's *Let's Hunt Monsters* 城市精靈 (2018), Niantic's *Pokémon* have yet to infiltrate the compound of China's Great Fire Walled garden.

Figure 1: Pikachu's name change from Cantonese to Mandarin.

Insect Rhetoric

In Hong Kong, the politics of the *Pokémon* name-change that sparked protests in 2016 again resurfaced in the protests of 2019. It arose not only as an expression of localist sentiment, but in recognition that Pikachu's Cantonese pronunciation resembles to the actual Chinese name of one of the extradition bill's supporters (Huang 2019). *Pikachu* appeared in subsequent protests as an icon of extradition bill defiance. In late July, Hong Kong protesters returning from a demonstration in Yuen Long were attacked by a group of masked men wearing white shirts. It was the first in a series of violent escalations against the anti-extradition protestors. Although the white shirted attackers were widely suspected to be triad gangsters, video footage surfaced of pro-Beijing lawmaker Junius Ho shaking hands with men in white and giving them the thumbs-up signal, thereby raising serious suspicions of government involvement (New Straits Times 2019). His office was later ransacked, and the gravestones of his deceased parents were desecrated.

Police response to the grave vandalization further escalated tensions when the Chair of the Junior Police Officers' Association 香港警察隊員佐級協會 stated that those who damaged the graves could not be called human. Chi-wai declared, "Such low lives can only be called by the name of the insect which is most afraid of light – 'cockroaches'" (Chi-wai in Cheng 2019a). Although the insect slur was widely and strongly condemned, it nonetheless gave rise to repeated instances of Hong Kong police name-calling protesters "cockroaches" (as well as journalists and by-standers). China's state-run news media agency *Xinhua* has also used the term and imagery to refer to the protesters, publishing a cartoon on its Facebook page (Hui 2019b) (see Figure 2).

Attempting to neutralize the offence, a police community relations officer later claimed that the term "cockroach" as used by police to describe protesters could be interpreted as a compliment. Another high-ranking police public relations officer conceded that for Hong Kong's police force to use such terms was "not ideal" (Cheng 2019b).

Figure 2: Left: Hong Kong Facebook page of Xinhua news agency on 17.08.2019 depicting protesters as cockroaches.

Several observers have noted that such invectives should not be dismissed as merely verbal abuse but understood as part of a radical othering process (Hui 2019b). This dehumanization, indeed, verminization, has not occurred in isolation but arises from growing ethnic divisions between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong residents that has seen insect rhetoric fly both ways. The 'cockroach' insult summoned by Hong Kong's increasingly pro-Beijing police recalls a full-page advertisement that appeared in Hong Kong Apple Daily newspaper in 2012 labeling Mainland Chinese tourists as 'locusts' (蝗蟲) (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Left: Full page Advertisement in the Hong Kong Apple Daily newspaper in 2012 labeling mainland Chinese tourists as 'locusts'. The text asks, "Are you willing for Hong Kong to spend one million Hong Kong dollars every 20 minutes to raise the children born to mainland parents?"

Figure 4: Right: "Watch out for Locusts" cover of the February 2012 issue of the Hong Kong Lifestyle Magazine New Monday.

The accompanying image presented a swarm of locusts descending upon the city. The slur took hold and within a year, 'anti-locust' images were common in Hong Kong. Locust iconography accompanying anti-Mainland sentiments brought lines of t-shirts, stickers, badges and tote bags while posters featuring pregnant locusts appeared on university campuses (Where Bitterness Reigns 2012). Hong Kong entertainment magazine *新Monday* (New Monday) twice published the locust image on its cover. (see Figure 5). Throughout 2013, locust imagery as an expression of anti-mainland sentiment continued to gain momentum. In 2014, an 'anti-locust' demonstration was held to target and disrupt mainland visitors perceived as infesting Hong Kong streets (So 2015). Organized by localist group "Indigenous Democratic Front" the event saw protesters shouting, "Go back to China" and "Locusts, go back to your mainland" in the busy Tsim Sha Tsui shopping district with banners reading "locusts, die going home". One of the most disturbing features of the demonstration was the symbolic "exterminating" of mainlanders by spraying people with bottles labeled "locust insecticide" (Young 2014; Lo 2014).

Some clarification is crucially required. The implication being made here is not that both sides of the political tensions in Hong Kong have deployed invectives and should therefore be equally dismissed. Nor is it to imply that there is an equal power relation between Hong Kong nativists and the Chinese Communist Party and its proxy rulers in Hong Kong. Instead, through the contrivance of the *Pokémon* franchise with its insect genealogy, this paper aims to trace the insect rhetoric in Hong Kong and to connect it with spatial tensions in the city more broadly.

In their 2015 publication, *Localists and Locusts in Hong Kong*, Sautman and Yan investigate Hong Kong's insect rhetoric scrutinizing its deployed in Sinophobic invectives against Chinese mainlanders. They note that use of the term 'locusts' conjures a particularly insidious image. These creatures begin as harmless and solitary grasshoppers yet when deprived of food, they physically mutate and swarm destructively. Their very evocation stirs ancient and transcultural currents of famine and Armageddon (Dobbs 2013). It is notable that in the pantheon of over eight hundred Pokémon, all of which are almost entirely based on actual insects and other small creatures, none are related to a locust. Even the maligned cockroach finds form in generation VII's *Pheromosa* (フェロ－チェ) (see Figure 6).

Reporters have distinguished the insect rhetoric in Hong Kong as explicitly dehumanizing in a manner that recalls the historical perpetrators of genocide (Cheng 2019a; Hui 2019a). In the 19th Century, identical taunts were deployed against Native Americans in the U.S, while in neighboring Canada, Chinese immigrants were characterized as "a swarm of locusts' (Roy 2008). At the turn of the 20th century in Australia, Chinese people were commonly depicted in as insects arriving in swarms (Ferrall 2005). Yet the most despotic use of this vernacular is reserved for the Rwandan military's *Operation Insecticide* that in 1995 led to the murder of 800,000 Tutsi's (labeled as 'cockroaches'), and the WWII holocaust that saw a million Jews killed with poisonous gas. Both insect language and insecticide, Sautman and Yan note, are historically connected with genocide. While summoning historical genocides risks lunging toward extremes, it is noteworthy that through the second half of 2019, a lethal and unprecedented 10,000 rounds of tear gas were fired within the high-density city of Hong Kong, constituting a mode of fumigation that has killed masses of birds and insects, as well as inflicting a range of illness upon residents (Leung 2019) (see figure 5). Questions persist about the make-up of the gas and its concentration of toxic dioxins.

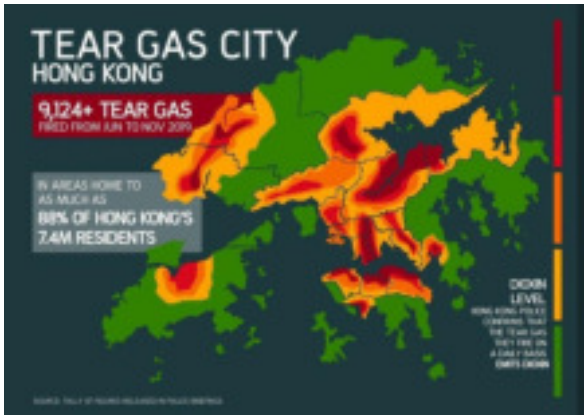

Figure 5: Left: Tear gas concentration levels in Hong Kong.

Figure 6: Right: Generation VII Pokémon Pheromosa (フェローチェ) based on a cockroach.

For outsiders to the city, pockets of nativist xenophobia in Hong Kong can appear astonishing. Given the enormous majority of Hong Kong people have their roots in the mainland, a physically, genetically and culturally proximate people, how is it that such venomous Sinophobic invectives arise? — not simply against the government in Beijing — but against immigrants and tourists from mainland China? If the vehement rejection is of Communist authoritarianism, why so little compassion for those already suffering beneath its reign? How, Sautman and Yan ask, is Hong Kong "nativism" constructed? Such questions have provoked sustained scholarship within Hong Kong. Sociologist Alvin So 蘇耀昌 (2015) traces the post war metamorphosis of Hong Kong identity from Chinese refugees to city-state nationalism. For So, strains of Hong Kong xenophobic hostility have grown alongside social inequity and in response to extensive tourism from mainland people. Ip (2015) argues that nativist Hong Kong identity with strong racist overtones emerges out of anxiety over the cities collective ideals. He cites a Hong Kong inability to distinguish either with or from the "intimate other" of mainlanders combined the anguish about the "disappearance" of the city, as bringing about a distinctly biopolitical turn toward a nativist ethnocracy. Mirana Szeto (2014) excavates deeper roots to the anti-mainland sentiment. She contextualizes the tensions within colonial histories, suggesting that:

> Like the Yellow Peril imaginary of the United States, this nativist, Cantonese-centric Hong Kong, of which the anti-Chinese- anti-immigrant coalition called Hong Kong Native Power is a key example assumes cosmopolitan, "advanced" capitalist superiority against the barbaric, ruthless, "primitive" capitalism of China and therefore characterizes people from China as "locusts" and products from China as toxic "weapons of mass deception." Its similarity to the imperial imaginary of racial superiority is too obvious to miss.

Elsewhere, Szeto has observed that identity politics in contemporary Hong Kong, in which postcolonial cultural politics criticize the marginalization of Hong Kong people by Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism, has ironically allowed newly empowered Hong Kong constituencies to use the same cultural politics as a strategy to assert dominance in ethnocentric and racist terms against mainlanders. (Szeto 2006) For Szeto, this paradox emerges out of Hong Kong status as a marginalized entity caught between two colonizers in Britain and China.

Becoming Pokémon

A week after the 2019 Yuen Long attacks in which masked assailants attacked civilians; anonymous adverts appeared online calling for a mass *Pokémon GO* hunt in the same location. The advertisements were a tactical ruse. *Pokémon GO* was being used to obscure intentions of a tactical group of activists to seek out an exact revenge on the white shirt triad members suspected to be in government cohort.

Elsewhere, *Pokémon GO* has emerged as a congregation tactic allowing protesters to claim to police they were simply gamers gathering to play *Pokémon GO* in order to circumvent denial of permission for assembly ordinances (Vincent 2019). According to one office worker and protester: "If we said that we were going to an unauthorised protest it would have provided good evidence for the police to charge us," (protester in Vincent 2019). *Pokémon GO* maps have also surfaced promoting "play" gatherings as a means for the leaderless and decentralized protesters to collectively communicate and organise where forthcoming protests may take place. (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Left, Maps promoting *Pokémon GO* events serve as a way to flag where protests will be held. (Vincent BBC 2019)

Figure 7: Right, a "quick guide to Hong Kong protest Symbols that remixes *Pokémon* characters as Hong Kong anti extradition protesters".

The media has documented the pioneering organisational tactics of Hong Kong protesters noting their decentralized structure and ability swarm in various locations through appropriation of tools such as *Pokémon GO*, Uber, Tinder, and others (Joshi 2019). Such media commentary has given rise to a new technically driven insect rhetoric in which terms such as swarms, webs, and hive minds have been rallied to describe the organization of protesters. Jussi Parikka has comprehensively explored the emergence of insect rhetoric as a central reference point in jutaposing architectures of communication and social organization within contemporary network culture. Parikka's book *Insect Media* (2010) analyzes how notions of social organization and distributed networks, are increasingly described as colonies, webs, and distributed intelligence—shaped the discourse modern media and the network society. This slippage of associations of insect rhetoric from dehumanised to technologized plays out in the reportage of Hong Kong protests. Some protesters have embraced the insect slurs with cockroaches being cited as one of the most resilient species within anthropocenic conditions.

In a poem that appeared in a Hong Kong lifestyle magazine, the author tacitly encourages identification with insect slurs. The stanza reads:

> *They say we are like cockroaches, and in a way we are.*
> *We're resilient, just like them, the strongest tribe by far.* (Love 2019).

Likewise, in an article calling on Hong Konger's to abandon prejudices and to communicate openly, respectfully and truthfully, the author recommends: "Instead of seeing cockroaches as pests, let us think of them as survivors who can weather all manner of obstacles" (Tam 2019). In a final underscoring the trend of insect identification throughout the 2019 protests, an outpouring support for Hong Kong protesters appeared from *Pokémon* fans around the world via Twitter, with artists redesigning *Pokémon* in protest gear under the hashtag #PokemonForHK (see figures 8 and 9). Via the *Pokémon franchise,* Hong Kong protesters had both identified and become identified within a metamorphosized insect rhetoric.

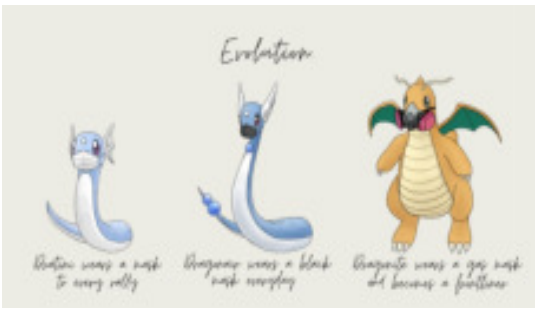

Figure 8**:** Left, Evolution of *Pokémon* characsters into Hong Kong Protester. #PokemonForHK Sourced from @berenster on Twitter

Figure 9**:** Evolution of *Pokémon* characters into Hong Kong Protester. #PokemonForHK Sourced from @jess612831 on Twitter

Beyond the gestures solidarity these images arouse*,* they also provoke fascinating allegorical ambiguities in their transformation of Pokemon into Hong Kong protesters. What other insectoid identity transformations are occurring in the Hong Kong imagination? Can anyone or anything metamorphosis into a Hong Konger? How does one unbecome a Hong Konger? or a Mainland Chinese for that matter? What are the contours of Hong Kong identity? Unlike the transformation from a caterpillar to a butterfly, the shift from a Mainland Chinese to Hong Konger (otherwise put, a locust to a cockroach) is outwardly invisible — occurring only at a subjective and psychological level. Yet the shift in identity is profound and complete.

CONCLUSION

Pokémon GO is the most recent in a long list of computer games featuring insectoid aliens that invade our spaces of home. Titles include Nameco's *Galaxian* 1979, Atari's *Centipede* 1981 and of course Taito 's 1978 hit *Space Invaders*. The spatial politics of insects are firmly established in the video arcade game genre. *Pokémon* Go extends and remediates these spatial politics into the physical world through the medium of pervasive games (Davies 2007), all the while provoking new relations and rhetoric's. By embracing insect rhetoric, albeit within the benign and playful guise of *Pokémon*, this paper has sought to explore the spatial and identity politics in Hong Kong and during its painful states of metamorphosis.

What will Hong Kong change into? It is noteworthy that both Chinese Communist Party (CCP) loyalists and Hong Kong localists champion a return to former state. For localists, the return is to a democracy, albeit one that never existed under British rule. For the CCP loyalists, the return is to a Communism as yet unfounded at the time of Hong Kong's separation from the Qing Dynasty. Each of these ultimately nostalgic apparitions confirms Chow's (1995) observation of Hong Kong nostalgia - it does not seek a precise past moment but is more accurately a subjective longing for notions of an imagined pastness.

As Hong Kong searches for its own identity amid the debris of British colonialism and beneath the ominous presence of the mainland, nostalgia plays a key role. It's curious to find such resonant reference to the *Pokémon* franchise in its struggle. Perhaps the only current point of agreement between the two sides is that the "One Country Two Systems" formula has failed, albeit a failure inversely understood from each position. For China's Communist Party, the focus was always on the collectivist unity of "One Country" in which Hong Kong's special Administrative Region would gradually transition into the mainland. For the Hong Kong locals, the "Two Systems" statement always held foremost importance, ideally bringing to bear an arrangement allowing indefinite political independence from the mainland.

What might the nostalgia embedded into *Pokémon* offer this impasse? Can a shared Lefebvrian "right to the city" be found? With each side steeped in historical imaginaries, can a mutually agreeable past be evoked? In response to protests calls to "liberate", "reclaim" or "restore" Hong Kong, a provocation by the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs spokesperson might be directed to both sides of the Hong Kong conflict: "What exactly do you want to reclaim? Where do you want to restore Hong Kong to?" (Hui 2019a).

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