FOUR WALLS

Four Walls

(In Cantonese)

Student number 32592570

(In English)

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Light city soundscape – One, two, three, four, the sounds of Hong I'm bound, restrained. Kong. In empty walls, Idle. Drained. Protests. Covid. Even Black Rain. Hong Kong police car siren sound effect "You're safer inside" subtly **fades in** So here we remain. Outside it's dark, Beyond compare. The grey sky gloomy, The streets are bare. Somewhere below Hong Kong rooftops The sirens scream, And then they stop. Hong Kong police car siren sound effect Can you hear them? crescendos Hear as they cry. Hong Kong police car They're trapped inside, siren sound effect **cuts** Waiting to die. out

No more Jasmine,	
No sparkling map,	
No tickling grass,	
No flower sap.	
Far from the hills	
And hope? Not found.	
No pressure to pray	
And God? Not 'round	
And who am I?	
Here, I don't know.	
And what am I?	
Ha. This poem's hero.	
Who is Alice?	
Without a place.	
All alone,	
Just empty space.	
Disease surrounds,	
But so does life.	
Serene nature,	
To blunt deaths knife.	
The sparkling greens,	
And bright blue sky.	
I'm in the Hills,	
On grass, I lie.	

Green bush leaves branching from the old Eucalypt

Shade my face from the flare of the sun.

'Morning bird song in Australia' fades in (Peaceful relaxing soothing) Meditation music fades in

Delicate beams of light illuminate each vein; each leaf; each detail of the trees beauty.

Meditation music and bird song continues

A world glittering with colour,
A sky alive; a crystal blue.

Arms outstretched, eyes clenched shut,
I reach my hands up to the clouds

And inhale my surroundings;

Star of Jasmine,
Sticky agapanthus sap,
The snail and their trail; a sparkling map.

My knees buckle and I'm part of the grass.

Freshly mown, it gently tickles my back.

Nature at its most crisp and sweet.

Its smells, a whisper on the tip of my nose,
filling me with delight.

The suns soft fingers caress my face, the heat of summer warms my skin.

I am like Eve meeting the garden of Eden my eyes newly blessed by Gods creations.

'Morning bird song in Australia' **stops playing**

At least that's the story I'm told; At school, in books, in playgrounds with friends.

(Peaceful relaxing soothing) Meditation "Good Morning Alice! What a beautiful day! music stops playing "Morning Mrs Chilton" Dialogue intrusion "Blessed to be his creations aren't we" "Yeah. Sure." I scratch at my neck. Fidgeting. Fumbling. Digging. My fingernails engraving white lines down the scaly patch of skin on my neck. For a second they remain, then they're gone. 'Morning bird song in As if they never existed. Australia' fades in A kookaburra laughs; my smile returns. Pickerington **Elementary Choir** Kookaburra fades in In the bush around me they cackle and 'Kookaburra call' sing their little songs. sound My ears drift with their harmony. And with the birds, comes happiness. A moment of forever bliss. 'Morning bird song in

"Alice!"

Australia' stops playing

'Kookaburra call' **stops** Daddy calls. playing His voice an echo, soaring above hills. I leap to my feet, the soles of my shoes thumping the ground, propelling against the gravel. The sky and the grass, race me home, from the bottom of my suburban street. I am one with the Hills. I belong to these streets. And the trees between two storey, brick houses. I am at peace with nature. At peace with the trees. And so the trees Common sounds heard in Hong Kong -Exist here too. background But in Hong Kong, Less sky, less blue. No bright light shines On veins of leaves. The beauty hides, Where no one sees. If I could look, Maybe I'd see But from up here It's tops of trees.

Still not outside,	
I watch, above.	
Concrete buildings,	
block sights I love.	
Pollution fills,	
What should be blue.	
Making life dull,	
Depressing too.	
	Hong Kong traffic
On Nathan road	sounds
The shops sells clothes	
None of them fit,	
Too tall I 'spose.	Hong Kong traffic
	sounds stop
Always sweaty	
Always too hot.	
This humid heat	
When will it stop?	
Yet itchy skin,	
Becomes a scar.	
My skin's healing,	
Now that I'm far.	
Far from the Hills	
Surrounded by	
New foreign peaks;	
Hate them, cant lie.	
Visions of home;	

Sydney. Joy. Peace Memories help My joy increase. (Peaceful relaxing soothing) Meditation music fades in **Cuts out** "Ahoy up there!" I hear Dad say; After laying in the gumtree for the rest of the day. I don't want to come down! I call back to him, begging to let me stay. From up there everything sparkles. Streets of hipped roof houses soak up the summer sun. Backyard pools glistening from its reflection. He waves me down and rushes me inside. Mum is sat down, waiting for us to arrive. They take a breath, alight a grin And say the unexpected: Dialogue intrusion "We're moving to Hong Kong." "Imagine how we'll grow." "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity." "We'd be crazy to say no."

"We're moving? To Hong Kong?"

Blessed - Sorrows

7 more days.

7 more days.

I'm left with only 7 more days.

My entire world vanishing,

all I've known, seized from me.

I ride my bike through the woolies carpark;

my pedals churning,

propelling me past cars and lampposts and trees,

the wind beating my face.

Blessed – Sorrows fades out

See The Light (Live) – Hillsong Worship **fades in**

I'm forced to a stop by throngs of church goers.

A Mother and Son pass me in the crowd.

They wear, matching black shirts that read

"God is great"

In bold white font.

Small rainbow pins attached to them.

"I'm voting no."

I read in my head.

I pull on my neck,

Scouring and gauging, my head facing the ground.

See The Light (Live) – Hillsong Worship **crescendos**

Suddenly, I'm forced into them, thrown.

Huffing and puffing, I wrestle them.

Frantically yanking my bike and squirming to escape.

They push me from one person to another,

Moving with them against my will.

I find myself at the front doors of their church.

I make eye contact with a woman, standing under the colossal entrance.

Her hair, white, her face painted with artificial joy.

"Welcome! We're so happy you've joined us today."

See The Light (Live) – Hillsong Worship reaches loudest point

I pull myself away, hauling my bike out from between them.

I jump onto the seat and launch through the foot path, dodging people from all directions.

See The Light (Live) – Hillsong Worship **fades out**

The church goers increase in number, occupying the pathways, blocking me from soaring.

I turn and dip and swerve around the people.

And tumble into the bush. Burning my knees as I skid across the grass.

I lay.

Rasping,
Wheezing,

Heaving for air.

I reach for my neck.

Pinching,

Coursing,

Chafing my skin.

The dry, shrivelled patch starts to bleed, oozing into the crevices between my fingernails and skin.

Running into my clothes, staining my white shirt

Red.

I open my eyes,
I'm next to a pond,
my fingertips gently meld with the water,
I'm drifting, with the ripples.

Breezy gardenia; blossoming jasmine;
A transcendent floral bouquet.
For a moment I'm consumed
And distracted from the throbbing itch
of that flaky patch of skin on my neck.

Here;

So far from the jasmine,

So far from the hills,

I see it all in black and white

The talk of a God, who I could not see.

The need to exist as someone I could not be.

Common sounds heard

in Hong Kong -

background

Is it possible I'm free in this divided land?	
With laws that give you strict command.	
Has Hong Kong made me true and brave? Maybe it's given what Sydney's suburbs never gave.	
iviaybe it's given what syuney's suburbs never gave.	
The wound that once stained my shirt red,	
Is starting to heal the longer I am separate from that place.	
is starting to near the longer rain separate from that place.	
Hong Kong's beauty,	
Is harder to see	
But obvious,	
to those who seek.	
The smell of incense,	
at every turn,	
Adding to the depth,	
of blended cultures.	
Australian,	
German,	
Korean,	
Indian,	
Japanese,	
American,	Common sounds heard
French	in Hong Kong – stops
	playing
	(Peaceful relaxing
	soothing) Meditation
	music fades in
The sun sets over the airport,	

lighting our faces with a pink and orange glow.

Don't know how long. Don't know what for. But to Hong Kong we go.

> We land at night. The weather; stifling.

in Hong Kong -The sky; grey.

Background

Common sounds heard

"And what is that?" I ask my Mum "And why's it red?

Those lanterns too!"

"Does everything here glow?"

And so it's true, this city glows. Signs and buildings all full of light, Night time is as bright as day.

This side of the world spins faster than home. This city never stops.

> So much to see. So much to do.

Smells and scents grip my nose, latch onto my senses. Durian, tofu, fish balls, egg waffles Meld into one stench.

I'm shoved into giant herds of crowds; the people stop for nothing and for a minute I'm drowning in their waves. But haven't I been here before? I'm heaved and rammed through Yau Ma Tei. Was Sydney just a mirage? Common sounds heard Sydney, Sydne..., Syd... (FADE) in Hong Kong – **stops** playing Home – Phillip Phillps The virus calm, I'm now outside. (instrumental) (no In amongst the grit of the city backing) fades in boarding the tram for a ride. It's damp and it's humid but I've stopped noticing the wet blanket of heat. Instead I'm solely focused On the thrum of the tram on the tracks somewhere beneath my feet. Throngs of people line the streets as we chug along Des Voeux; The corners of my mouth creep upwards, Before I really even know.

Once I was a foreigner;
all alone in this crowd.

Maybe the clothes will never fit
but haven't you heard?

"We're all Hong Kongers now"

Home – Phillip Phillps (instrumental) (no backing) **crescendos**

Now I eat Hong Kong food,
Tofu, egg waffles, fish balls.
I probably won't eat durian;
But I guess you can't do it all.

I did not know that it would be this place itself that fit so well. Hong Kong and I are interlaced; Not even crowds stop me from soaring.

The lanterns luminescent red glow,

And bright signs of taxi cars,

Act as our own form of stars.

And you're there with me.

In this moment. On this tram.

Your eyes sparkle. Your hand in my hand.

Outside the four walls of this ding ding, only light.

A world glittering with colour;

A dazzling sky at night.

The patch on my neck,

Now a smooth, milky scar.

¹ A frequent phrase chanted by protesters in the Hong Kong 2019-2020 protests

A tickle, but no flakes.

Just a sign of distance, far.

Out of habit my fingers dance
where rough, puckered skin used to be.
No redness, no blood,
Just a mark of my history.
Now rendered white.
A blank canvas to be filled
And pegged to the stars.

Sparkling Cantonese signs rush past,
Blurring into one united, rainbow smudge.

And the tram's getting smaller, as it hurtles towards the Valley.

Look closely up the top,

And maybe you'll see me.

Basking in the glow; and smiling.

Brightly.

Home – Phillip Phillps (instrumental) (no backing) reaches loudest point

Home – Phillip Phillps (instrumental) (no backing) **fades out**

Four Walls

Reflection Statement

Every individual is a product of their environment; the culture, the politics, the landscape, the energy. But what happens when that environment shifts or changes? And what if it is taken away completely? How does the individual react? Do they shift and change with the environment? What impact does your sociocultural and geopolitical context have on who you are?

These are the questions I explore in my Major Work, Four Walls.

Four Walls is a performance poem that seeks to explore the impact of place and culture on the formation of personal identity. My composition presents the narrative perspective of Alice; a teenager and 'third culture kid' who moves from the Hills district in Sydney to the bustling city of Hong Kong; a place that just like Alice, is striving to shape its own identity. Alice's plight is made all the more difficult due to the Covid-19 pandemic and broader political unrest in Hong Kong. As Alice settles into her new city she nostalgically remembers her 'idyllic' youth but slowly starts to realise that her memories are rose tinted and that it is ironically in Hong Kong that she can truly attain freedom. Four Walls consists of two dominant voices; the voice of Alice's past in Australia, juxtaposed with the voice of her present in Hong Kong allowing for a contrasting depiction of the two cities and Alice shifting sense of self and perspective of world as a result of her surrounding environment.

Ideally, *Four Walls* would be aired on ABC's Radio National 'Earshot' program which offers a selection of stories that explore history, memory, society and creativity. The program explores "Stories that will surprise, delight, compel and challenge you." 2, given the unique socio-political context of Hong Kong at this time; it stands to reason that my major work would be a good fit.

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² ABC Radio National, ABC Australia, Earshot. Miyuki Jokiranta.

The title, *Four Walls*, serves as an introduction to the framework of the poem and the setting of the Hong Kong centric strand. The number four is significant throughout the Major Work as a symbol of the physical/emotional constraints and restrictions imposed upon the persona as a result the Covid-19 pandemic. This title also symbolically reflects the oppression in the character original home but is not realised until later.

Four Walls is based on my own personal experiences as the daughter of expats in Hong Kong. Initially I was interested in the concept of 'blurred lines' in relation to identity and I had hoped to meta-fictively explore my protagonists journey against the backdrop of a politically fractured Hong Kong; a country that struggles to 'draw a line' both literally and metaphorically in terms of its boarders and politics. Recently, it was necessary to shift the focus of my major work as a result of the recent implementation of the National Security Law in Hong Kong. As such, I decided to focus more on the contrast between the two places I have called home: The Hills District of Sydney where the presence of the Hillsong movement looms large and the bustling City of Hong Kong where despite social, cultural and political constraints, I have ironically found a unexpected sense of freedom. While I did not want my composition to hinge on an exploration of sexuality, this is hinted at throughout the poem and is reflective of my own journey; specifically the surprising realisation that I felt more accepted as a lesbian in Hong Kong than I did in my former community in the Hills district.

In order to authentically explore the challenges of my speaker, Alice, I utilised the research of psychologists D. Limberg and G.W Lambie; specifically, their journal article 'Third Culture Kids: Implications for Professional School Counselling (2011). This article acts as a guide for school counsellors at international schools who work with immigrants, multi-cultural students and of course, the children of expats. As such, it shaped the conceptual underpinning of my composition through its provision of insight regarding the impact of the 'third culture' on identity development and connectedness. It enabled me to construct a realistic voice and to explore authentic situations. Specifically, the articles exploration of the fact that "(third culture kids) experience ... a lack of connection to a "home", and don't feel they belong anywhere..." is directly reflected in my performance poem via Alice's battle in establishing her identity, salient in the first strand of poetry when she states:

"And who am I?

Here, I don't know.

And what am I?

Ha. This poem's hero.

Who is Alice?

Without a place.

All alone,

Just empty space."3

These stanzas distinguish the personas struggle to both belong and attain a sense of self in this new and initially foreign environment. The use of rhetorical question demonstrates the extent to which Alice is questioning her sense of self and also invites the audience to engage with her struggle.

Given the performative nature of my poetry, it was imperative not only to entertain but also to sustain audience engagement. During my research I discovered the performance poet Darius Smith who is well known for directly addressing his audience and for his impactful delivery. I was influenced by the stylistic features and delivery of *Proximity* which utilises sound effects to shape tone, enhance meaning and engage the audience. Furthermore, Smith's effective use of modulation, expression and direct address provided me with a blueprint for the style and structure of my own composition. Smith literally invites the audience to join him on the journey:

"So go, with me, the distance..."

In this moment, the volume and intensity of the background music crescendos to emphasise the power of the words and to enhance the impact on the audience. I tried to emulate this throughout my poem, but most notably in the final section where the volume and intensity

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³ My Major Work 'Four Walls'. Page 2.

of the backing track crescendo with the increasingly powerful and hopeful delivery of the poetry.

"Look closely up the top,
And maybe you'll see me.
Basking in the glow; and smiling.
Brightly."4

This crescendo, including the placement of the upbeat instrumental version of Phillip Phillips' *Home*, provides a final sense of triumph and reflects Alice's hope for the future.

My studies of Rosemary Dobson in the Advanced English common module and Eileen Chong's collection *Burning Rice* in the Extension 1: Literary Homelands elective contributed to the shape and form of my composition. While these are not performance poems, they informed the technical construction of my poetry and contributed to the formation of my ideas. Chong's poetry was especially influential as it explores her own experience of feeling torn between two cultures. Throughout Chong's collection there are multiple references to feeling disconnected from both her birthplace and her adopted homeland:

"A continent away, my mother in her kitchen..." 5

"I still dream of Victoria Street,
of the shophouse where four generations
grew up, grew old, died and were born."

I wanted to emulate this same sense of disconnection and longing for the place you called 'home'. This is evident through Alice's initial longing for the things that brought her much comfort in Australia:

⁵ E. Chong. 2010. *Mid Autumn Mooncakes*.

⁴ My Major Work. 'Four Walls'. Page 15.

⁶ E. Chong. 2010. *Shophouse, Victoria Street*.

"No more Jasmine,
No sparkling map,
No tickling grass,
No flower sap."

When she moves to Hong Kong she struggles to adapt to her new surroundings:

"Smells and scents grip my nose, latch onto my senses. Durian, tofu, fish balls, egg waffles Meld into one stench" 8

I purposefully chose to use sensory imagery and listing in both sections to evoke audience response and emphasise the depth of that disconnection.

Throughout my composition I was also conscious of using repeated imagery to demonstrate character progression. This is evident when she finds herself trapped amidst the masses of Hillsong worshippers:

"I'm forced to a stop by throngs of church goers...
Suddenly, I'm forced into them, thrown.
Huffing and puffing, I wrestle them....
The church goers increase in number, occupying the pathways, blocking me from soaring."

This crowd based imagery is then extended in the last section of the poem as Alice realises that her previous environment was more oppressive than she initially realised.

⁷ My Major Work. 'Four Walls'. Page 2.

⁸ My Major Work. 'Four Walls'. Page 12.

⁹ My Major Work. 'Four Walls'. Page 8.

"Hong Kong and I are interlaced;

Not even crowds stop me from soaring"10

I found the performance aspect of *Four Walls* the most challenging part of this process. I was conscious of ensuring that each creative choice allowed me to achieve my overarching purpose, however, I quickly learned there was a disconnect in the way things sounded in my head to the way they sounded in the audio recording. As such, I discovered I really needed to 'perform' the poetry and imagine I was in front of an audience to achieve the desired level of emotive transfer.

The conception, construction and production of *Four Walls* has broadened my understand not only of self but also of the world in which I exist (at this moment). The rerecording and editing of my composition certainly tested my resilience but I have thoroughly enjoyed creatively representing my own journey and experimenting with a unique and dynamic art form.

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¹⁰ My Major Work. 'Four Walls'. Page 14.

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