

Chapter 1

Placing migrant practices

1a. ground zero: a preface

Midnight June 30, 1997: I am standing in Statue Square in Central Hong Kong. Rain is falling as it has for much of the night. Hong Kong has just reverted to Chinese sovereignty. One moment I am in a British colony and the next in the People's Republic of China, surely a form of political magic. Fireworks had lit up the sky earlier in the evening, at about eight P.M. Something like a million people had lined Victoria Harbour to watch the fireworks. Collective oohs and ahs and cries of *ho leng* (very beautiful!) seem to sync together at the most spectacular moments. When this display was over, most of the crowd at vantage points around Victoria Harbour headed for home, rapidly vanishing into the underground railway stations or onto buses. 'Just like another festival' was the most common comment, 'nothing special.' They went home to watch the official events on TV.

After the popular spectacles, a few hundred people had gathered at Statue Square to mark an 'alternative hand-over', organised by a coalition of trade unions, student groups and 'grassroots' organisations. This was one of seven protest meetings authorised by the local authorities. Statue Square had been declared a designated 'protest zone' for the handover evening. These protest zones were all located outside the 'exclusion zone', the high security area surrounding the Hong Kong Convention Centre, where the official ceremonies were taking place (Hong Kong Standard 30.6.97: 2). Several hours of speeches, songs, pieces of political theatre and satire took place before the audience, a motley mixture of Hong Kong Chinese and curious 'expats'. Accompanying the crowd were dozens of journalists and camera operators, perhaps looking for a different angle on the handover story. A crowd, yes, but a small crowd, compared to the million or so who came out earlier for the spectacle of fireworks and general festivities. Small even compared to the thousands of Filipina 'maids' and domestic workers who assemble here regularly on their Sunday day off, transforming the CBD area into a festive zone at the only time when it is closed for

business. I had witnessed a large Christian revival meeting in the square several Sundays before, with an audience of several thousand, mainly Filipinas. The present gathering lacked this revivalist fervour, huddling bedraggledly in the rain, while trying to assume the appropriate mood of solidarity and resistance. This was not the fault of the program of the alternative handover, which included speeches, lively renditions of workers songs and satirical verbal performances on the subject of Hong Kong politics.

Statue Square is one of the few sites in Hong Kong where public protests are regularly staged. On this night other demonstrations were occurring concurrently around the square, organised by the Democratic Party and Frontier, two of the major pro-democracy political parties. One of the rare pieces of open space in the Central CBD, Statue Square is not a large area, although its location lends it considerable symbolic weight. It is bounded by the Legislative Council Building, formerly the Supreme Court, and now the site of Hong Kong's fledgling and somewhat limited parliamentary democracy. The commercial skyscrapers around Statue Square form the nucleus of the financial district and the most exclusive shopping district. Across the road from the square is the imposing Hong Kong Bank Building, with its distinctive external framework. Along with the bank of China Building, it is one of the major architectural symbols of Hong Kong capital. (The banks are the *real* government of Hong Kong, a guide book tells me.) In fact, Statue Square used to have a statue of Queen Victoria which was removed, but the square is now left to the likeness of Thomas Jackson, manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank for 30 years from the late nineteenth century.

As the time moved towards midnight, people at the alternative event in Statue Square began checking their watches more frequently in anticipation of the moment that had been hanging over them. There was disagreement about the exact time. Eventually a collective countdown took place – 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1..., and then a hush – no one knew quite how to react. Perhaps the uncertainty about the precise time detracted from the dramatic effect, which required synchronisation – precise and standardised temporality. Hong Kong had been under a countdown for thirteen years since 1984. Protesters at the 'alternative' handover event could no more resist the logic of the

countdown than anybody else here. Digital clocks in various public places had been cycling down the seconds to go till midnight June 30, 1997 – a blur of numbers counting backwards from the past, time running out. The clocks had finally reached zero. Was time supposed to end now? Or to recommence in an entirely different world. What would people do now? In a few moments, pro-democracy slogans began issuing again from megaphones, and people started singing the ubiquitous *Internationale*.

About a kilometre away, the official handover ceremonies had just been taking place. Being so physically close to the epicentre of these ‘historic’ events seemed to heighten the lack of relation to them. I felt far from the ‘exclusion zone’ where the ‘real’ events were occurring, that is, the scene being transmitted to the outside world in its different versions by mass media. It was several days before I saw the official proceedings on video. Transitional rituals marked the departure of one regime and the arrival of another. The form of these ceremonies had been negotiated down to the tiniest detail by the British and the Chinese. Separate ceremonies were temporally bifurcated around the point of midnight of June 30th. The events prior to midnight were concerned with the departure of the British, and the projection and celebration of colonial achievements in Hong Kong. The events after midnight on July 1 involved the formal establishment of the new administrative order, the appointment of the new administration and the celebration of reunification. Hence there were two fireworks displays, two ‘cocktail receptions’, and so on – ghost images of each other. In the official ceremony before midnight, formal announcements were made first in English then in Chinese. After midnight, this order was reversed, with the announcements in Chinese followed by English. Despite diplomatic attempts to give the appearance of friendly relations, the handover ritual reinforced the absolute structural opposition of the parties. Although called a handover, no symbolic object or document was exchanged. The change of sovereignty was formally represented only by the lowering of the old flags and the raising of new ones. At exactly midnight after the British flags had been lowered, a few seconds of silence ensued, during which time the leader of the British guard of honour saluted the leader of the Chinese guard of honour, who then raised the Chinese flag. That silent pause was the ‘actual’ instance of transition, a liminal point at which state power momentarily

dissolved, like the blink of an eye in an otherwise constant gaze. At the end of this short silence the Chinese President Jiang Zemin walked to the podium and began his first speech as the national leader of Hong Kong:

The national flag of the People's Republic of China and the regional flag of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China have now solemnly risen over this land..... (SCMP 1.7.97: 3)

The short pause in between the symbolic succession of flags reminded me of the momentary hush following the countdown in Statue Square. In Statue Square I had felt a strange distancing from events. I had come to Hong Kong expressly to *be here* for the change of sovereignty in Hong Kong, yet it felt far away. I felt like I was at the centre of a whirlpool, but despite being physically at the centre, I couldn't locate anything, couldn't develop any concrete idea of what I was experiencing. This was no doubt exacerbated by my linguistic limitations – I could speak only minimal Cantonese, and relied on friends to translate and supply much of the context. It also felt as though this massive imagery was being transmitted outwards towards somewhere else, towards China as well as to other countries in the capitalist world. Most of the media messages at that time adopted a relentless positivity that I would paraphrase as: *Hong Kong is a wonderful and prosperous place, and will continue to be so in the future.*¹ However, I soon realised that this sense of distance from events was not solely arising from my own situation and subjectivity. This distance was also felt by many Hong Kong people I spoke to, many of whom gave out a sense of a massive indifference. This inability to place myself in relation to what was happening was curiously mirrored by Hong Kong people themselves.

The handover celebrations and the accompanying representations of Hong Kong produced by state bodies and local media all aimed to project Hong Kong as a concentrated space of capital intensity and opportunity – the pearl or the 'golden place' where wealth is for the taking if you are willing to work for it. This is exemplified by the millions of reproduced images of the Hong Kong island skyline,

¹ This was some months before the 'Asian economic crisis'.

centering on the China Bank and Hong Kong Bank buildings, ² on corporate logos, souvenirs, postage stamps, and almost continually broadcast on television sets (I counted seventeen in a half hour program). Being in Hong Kong at the time of the handover of sovereignty impressed on me the extent to which Hong Kong people live with a heightened ideological pressure that coheres around the production of a particularly intensified 'place'. This is reinforced by the extraordinary physical 'production of space' wrought by both capital and colonial government. The extent of change in the built environment of Hong Kong is so great that people will often refer to a building built five years ago as old. The experience of increased standards of living is common. Vivid memories of moving from squatter camps or tiny one room government flats to forty storey apartment blocks has produced expectations of continued material progress. The intensity of the cultural production of Hong Kong as a space of desire, combined with the end of the British imperial era with no horizon of 'post-colonial' promise, all contributed to the palpable sense of disengagement on the part of many Hong Kong people.

For Hong Kong people, who have lived with the handover since Thatcher and Deng signed the 1984 Sino-British Joint Agreement, the handover as an event was largely an anticlimax. The moment of handover was not a resolution for people in Hong Kong, nor was it the catastrophe that some envisaged. Uncertainty remains, although the common strategy was to postpone this uncertainty. Ambivalence was the feeling I sensed most – perhaps paralleling my own ambivalence about many things, including the research I was doing. Ambivalence isn't *an* emotion as such, but a flow and ebb of contrary impulses and affects. I could detect this in the speech of many people I spoke to. I would encounter similar affective movements in many interviews with people about migration and settlement. I want to present an exemplary 'performance' of ambivalence about the lived experience of the handover.

A few days before the handover I went to a party with some friends in North Point on Hong Kong Island. I saw this as an opportunity to test out my newly acquired minidisc machine, which I did by recording the following interview with a young

² For a reading of the Bank of China Buildings in Hong Kong and Macau, including geomantic interpretations, see Cheng 1997.

woman named Paula. Paula had lived with the background exigency of the handover for most of her life, since she was 10. What follows is not really an interview – it's something between rave and reverie. I include the whole text because it seems to 'say' much more than I could about immersion in the historical predicament.

97? I'm not sensitive to numbers, actually, including money – money is a number...I feel very strange these days, very strange.

It's like Christmas eve, or New Years eve, the same feelings...

I feel a celebrating atmosphere everywhere, including media, other people anyway, but not me, myself. It seems that I'm always trying to drop into the circle of celebration, but actually, maybe I'm not, because...

Today, I go jogging, because I feel too boring and stuck, here in my heart. I don't know why – I want to release some energy, some emotion from myself. So I choose jogging, finally. And I feel...what's the meaning to me – 97? Finally I find that – nothing...

Because I just live as usual as I am...because when I do jogging, every body just walks, just walking on the street, and looking around. It's strange...

97 is a fact, is a history, it's going to happen, but maybe it's not really influential to me. Because I'm not a politician, just a little potato, in the city, a small potato. I try to search for my own dreams. My dream is not here no.

Some foreign friends are telling me it's not possible for two extreme things to come together – two systems...No one knows. Let's see, wait and see, 'don't worry, be happy'.

Something to celebrate? No, no. I have been...not waiting, for 13 years...13 years ago, I have already heard about this title, 1997. So, no more exciting or interesting feelings inside. Just thinking, well OK, coming, coming, and finally, comes.

Its the same feeling as when I'm going to have a holiday, and I really want to get on the plane, to fly to Paris or London. It's just like, how many hours later. The 28th

tonight, right? 29th. And two days later it comes, and everything will be the same. It's just history, it passed by the point, spot.

It is hard to appreciate this piece of speech as a flat text on a page. Text doesn't quite convey the musical 'grain' of Paula's speech, and the intensities and ebbings, stresses and pauses.³ These dynamics convey affective movements arising from an extended experience of waiting, or rather of *not* waiting – shifting between registers of obligation, doubt, boredom, enthusiasm, exhaustion, renewal.

Paula locates her 'self' outside of the celebratory engagement around her. As the artist Kith Tsang remarked to me: 'Everybody is celebrating the handover, but when you ask them exactly what it is they are celebrating, no one can answer you.' The relentless marketing of the handover not just in 1997 but over years presented Hong Kong itself as a place of spectacle – the miracle, the pearl – while at the same time emptying these signifiers through repetition and overexposure. The image of the 'circle of celebration' points to the positivity Paula felt compelled to adopt. Like other people I spoke to, she felt like she was the *only* one who was out of step with the collective feeling. Dropping out of the circle meant dwelling in a 'private' realm of boredom and de-motivation that was not publicly admissible – 'stuck, here in my heart.'

For Paula, the handover was 'just history'. This negation of history's 'aura' seems to be related to a sense of not being able to 'inhabit' history. Hong Kong people could have little sense of being agents in this political transition, this collision of 'two extreme things'. For Paula, 1997 was a number, a title, a point, a spot. I couldn't help relating her words to the hush at the end of the countdown in Statue Square, the empty moment between the reign of flags at the ceremony.

³ The musicality of her speech struck me instantly. I used fragments of this text as the basis for a 'song'. As can be seen from the transcript, a verse-like structure already exists in the original. Samples of Paula's actual speech and sounds of the party were woven around a singer's rendition of the reconstructed handover 'song'. This was part of a radio program called *City In Between* (Iolini and Mar 1997) commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. A recording of this piece is included as an appendix. Paula's song is about six minutes into the piece.

I realise that I have been projecting and conflating my own feelings and perspectives about this time with that of others such as Paula, as if our words were equivalent. My own distance or disinterest from the 1997 *geist*, whether ‘performed’ or not, was clearly not identical to that of Hong Kong people. Ethnographic methodology requires a filtering of personal exchanges, designed to eliminate the effect of ‘counter-transferences’ on the author. Nevertheless, the consideration of the uncertain boundaries between my own viewpoints and dispositions and those of my informants would be of great importance to this study.

1b. 1997 and Hong Kong emigration

I am writing of my own experience of the night of the handover as a preface for this study. What was I doing in Hong Kong? I was there to do field research on Hong Kong emigration to Australia. The handover itself was not the immediate subject of my research, and yet I could not resist timing my field trip in Hong Kong to coincide with this moment. This was no doubt some vicarious interest on my part. I had felt that I somehow couldn’t ‘understand’ Hong Kong and Hong Kong people if I was not present for the handover. Perhaps the handover and its peculiar contingencies were part of the attraction of Hong Kong for me, influencing the choice and direction of my research. Perhaps it also gave me an opportunity to engage in a certain dramatisation, not unlike the *faux* heroism of stock expat characters in such handover fantasies as *Kowloon Tong*, *Last Year in Hong Kong*, and *Chinese Box*.⁴ Why am I playing on my handover reminiscences now?

Oscar Ho, the artist, critic and curator commented on the disturbing nature of international attention on Hong Kong. While Hong Kong had been consistently ignored for so long, except as an exotic location for narratives of disaster and crime,

in 1997 it was momentarily a theatrical event for world-wide consumption. Why the sudden artistic and scholarly interest in Hong Kong? “Will the agony and fear of Hong Kong people help to make their research more profound?” (O. Ho 1997: 64)

I can only plead guilty as charged. There was no doubt a curiosity on my part about the predicament of Hong Kong people. The dispositions of Hong Kong people seemed intimately tied to a singular place and historical situation. (This is not the same as saying they are determined by their historical situation – these people are anything but passive). ‘Agony and fear’ were certainly part of the Hong Kong experience of the handover period, especially in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. But I have also pointed to the co-existence of the obverse, an affective distancing and dis-interest, a screening against a relentless social positivity and an overdetermination of ‘causes’ and representations.

Paula’s phrase ‘my dream is not here’ reverberated with me. The complex emotional registers of Hong Kong people in relation to the handover were germane to various migration ‘strategies’ I would encounter. These strategies – with their practical and rational aspects – always contained a ‘dream’ of Hong Kong, along with a dream of other places in relation to Hong Kong. The migration practices I was studying require an understanding of the handover period, since the end of British sovereignty was a major factor in Hong Kong emigration to Australia and other countries. Key moments in the handover period – from 1984 to 1997 – had strong resonances for migrant subjects. The Sino-British ‘Joint Declaration’ of 1984 set out the terms for return of all of Hong Kong to China and the setting up of the Special Administrative Region for 50 years from 1997. It was from this time – the mid-1980s – that Hong Kong immigration to Australia became significant in magnitude. Hong Kong became a major source of settlers to Australia and one of the larger sources of skilled and entrepreneurial workers only over the past 15 years (Kee & Skeldon 1994: 183-214).

⁴ In these fictions Hong Kong in 1997 is an apocalyptic setting for love interests involving an expat character who displays an heroic but ambivalent empathy for Hong Kong and its people. From *Last Year in Hong Kong*: ‘Suddenly she knew she wanted to stay in Hong Kong..... She wanted to see what would become of the people of Hong Kong under the Communist regime.... Perhaps she could somehow fight for more freedom for the people.’ (Elegant 1997: 11) See also Wayne Wang 1998 and Theroux 1997.

The events at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, more than any other event focused and magnified anxieties about the PRC government and dramatically increased emigration. The actual transfer of sovereignty in 1997 was the temporal point at which many migrant strategies were aimed. '1997' was a symbolic deadline for many, but by the arrival of the real 1997 the intensity of migratory urgency had largely waned.

1c. Conceiving the research project

I started conceiving of this Ph.D. project in 1995. I was casting around for a way of doing an ethnography of multi-culturalism in Australia. I wanted to do something involving migrants and their engagement with urban space in Sydney. Studying cultural otherness had little intrinsic appeal to me. I was initially enthusiastic about the prospect of doing 'homework'⁵ and exploring some of the multicultural complexities of my native city of Sydney. I met some recently arrived Hong Kong immigrants through familial connections – one of my brothers had recently married a woman who had recently emigrated from Hong Kong. She had introduced me to a few of her friends and colleagues. Some exploratory conversations convinced me that working with Hong Kong immigrants could provide a fruitful topic to enable me to brush against the grain of understandings about migration and multicultural exchanges.

A study of contemporary Hong Kong migration would be difficult to contain within the framework of the standard 'community study', within the confines of Australian 'multiculturalism'. For a start, a coherent community was difficult to locate in terms of specific sites and institutions. Most people I spoke to did not recognise a specific community space or organisation as central. What exactly was there to observe? Migrant subjects were somewhat hard to pin down, being generally far too busy to hang out talking to me. The passages of many migrants involved strategic comings

and goings between Hong Kong and Sydney. Just keeping track of people's whereabouts proved to be a formidable task. I could not assume any 'closure' to these migration practices. In temporal and spatial terms, much contemporary migration is very much an unfinished project, subject to uncertainty about 'final' destinations. For most of the people I have been studying 'migration' remains emergent, unfinished and unpredictable in terms of final outcomes, which depend on unknowable political and economic factors.

In order to study modalities of migration I needed to be able to apprehend a sense of locality that is not fixed in one locale, but in motion. It was not just that some people physically returned to Hong Kong for shorter or longer periods – some did and some didn't. So I am not talking purely of physical location of migrant subjects. I found that accounts of migrancy frequently entailed a dialogue, or sometimes something more like a disputation, invoking and connecting urban environments and placing them in a relation to one another. My hunch was that accounts of negotiating lived space in two places would provide the material for an analysis of the singularity of migrant practices and sense of 'being'.

This thesis is based on fieldwork research with recent Hong Kong migrants to Australia between 1993 and 1999. Interviews took place in Sydney throughout this time, while I made three trips to Hong Kong in 1996, 97 and 99. Interview subjects had emigrated during the period of the 1990s. The focus of my research was on the initial years of the migrant process. (It is difficult to tell when migration is ever completed). All my subjects were adults who had engaged with official migration processes. Several had not completed the procedure, having decided not to proceed with an application, having an application refused, or not fulfilling the settlement requirements.⁶ A substantial proportion had returned to Hong Kong if not

⁵ As opposed to fieldwork. The practice of anthropological 'homework' purports to break down the separation between ethnographer and the research subject by dehomogenizing the 'white west' (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 20-21).

⁶ I included them in my study because they spent some time in Sydney and had expectations of completing the migration process.

‘permanently’ then for a considerable period. Some had completed Australian immigration requirements and become Australian citizens and others had not.

My aim was to explore the lived experience of migration of Hong Kong people in (and in-between) two cities, Hong Kong and Sydney, in the course of a range of migration pathways. I wanted to trace migrant movements and settlement practices in both Sydney and Hong Kong. I was interested in these two cities as singular places, and how migration brings them into a relation. This project could be described as a contemporary kind of ‘contact history’, an examination of encounters with places, a bringing of social worlds into juxtaposition. I will discuss these aims in relation to conceptions of the ‘field’ in anthropology.

1d. Subjects in motion: decentring the anthropological field

Doing anthropological research in widely separated field locations has become more common. The undeniable importance of social and cultural phenomena which overlap the boundaries of nation states has necessitated this change. Also it is an extension of ongoing attempts to ‘de-colonize’ anthropological practice by problematising centres and peripheries.

Migration is a paradigm case of movement that disrupts notions of originary spaces and cultures as site specific. Investigation of contemporary migration movements and practices encompass many central issues for anthropology and how we think it. What are the emergent social and cultural formations in a period said to be one of unprecedented ‘globalisation’? What are the relations between nation states (both ‘home’ and ‘host’) and various groups whose everyday practices access more than one national order? How are migrant forms of sociality and social hierarchy transposed across national social fields? To what extent are they autonomous to ‘host’ social orders? What kind of ethnographic investigation is appropriate to mobile social forms? These were all basic questions for my research. If anything they were magnified in the case of Hong Kong, where there were no grounds for a well-founded national belonging.

The above questions are also germane to thinking within anthropology and in the social sciences in recent years about conceptions of spatiality and movement, location and dislocation. This thinking has fed into attempts to reconceive anthropological research practices. As a 'field science', anthropological practice was long assumed to be based in the empirical investigation of social practices within a defined territorial field. Classical anthropological thinking led to an identity of territory and cultural or social structure. In one strand of thought, Durkheim had socialised the Kantian understanding of space and time as *a priori* categories underlying all thought and perception. The forms of local classifications were no longer understood as universal and innate, but as specific (therefore in a sense, arbitrary) to a particular social and cultural order. Society itself is the basis of its own collective representations:

If the world is inside society, the space which this latter occupies becomes confounded with space in general.....Each thing has its assigned place in social space, and the degree to which this space in general differs from the concrete expanses which we perceived is well shown by the fact that this localisation is wholly ideal and in no way resembles what it would have been if it had been dictated to us by sensuous experience alone. (Durkheim 1976: 424)

The naturalness of these 'wholly ideal' localisations hides the fact from its subjects that space *qua* social space is always divided, differentiated, arranged and subjected to meaningful distinctions which are related to the forms and categories of a society itself. The Durkheimian paradigm implied that the existence of homologies between spatial/temporal symbolic and social orders could be used to reveal particular social logics. This provided the basis for a structuralist approach to spatial organisation, which was to prove fertile within its limitations. Total and bounded 'anthropological space' was assumed to contain all symbolic reference within a particular social/spatial order. The limits of this conception of social space have only relatively recently come under question. Cultural entities are 'no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogenous' (Appadurai 1991: 191), if they ever were. This realisation 'overwhelms and relativises' the model of the discrete anthropological field (Augé 1995: 33).

Questioning classical anthropology's construction of the field and its implicit spatiality has led to attempts to reconceive the field in terms of contemporary views of the world produced through migration, global flows of capital, technology, consumer goods, mass media and so on. Appadurai (1991: 191) pronounced the task of anthropology to investigate 'the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world.' There are risks and tensions in taking the figures of 'globalisation' and 'deterritorialisation' at face value, while seeking to re-define the nature of locality. There is a tendency for the specificity of everyday practices to be collapsed into the wide-screened epic sweep of discourses of postmodernity, globalisation or deterritorialisation (Massey 1992: 7-11). Nevertheless, it is salient that in destabilizing bounded 'anthropological space' the way in which spatial territories are constituted should become the subject of renewed problematisation.

An anthropology whose objects are no longer conceived as automatically and naturally anchored in space will need to pay particular attention to the ways spaces and places are made, imagined, contested, and enforced. In this sense, it is no paradox to say that questions of space and place are, in this deterritorialized age, more central to anthropological representations than ever.' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b: 46)

The notion of deterritorialization is presumed to go with a de-centering of the nation state in many theoretical accounts. However, Gupta and Ferguson do recognise that states' restrictive immigration policies somewhat limit the fullness of the metaphor of 'a world always already spatially interconnected.' This would hardly be a revelation for those intricately engaged in bureaucratic immigration processes. The negotiation of these processes and the timing of spatial movements are the objects of a multiplicity of detailed strategies on the part of Hong Kong emigrants. The complicated back and forth movements of my research subjects were timed to maximise competing demands in both Hong Kong and Australia.

If the subjects are moving, the anthropologists have to move too. The ethnographer becomes a stalker. Movement becomes an object of anthropological contemplation.

In an influential paper, James Clifford asserted that travel is itself a vital dimension of fieldwork, although usually absent from finished ethnographic texts.⁷ Clifford was bringing into question two levels of anthropological endeavour. Firstly he questioned the empirical existence and relevance of the field as a site in which ‘culture’ exists (or ever existed) in any pure sense, closed off from movements and exchanges with ‘outside’. Anthropology had privileged the fixity of dwelling over the motion of travelling (Clifford 1992: 99). Secondly, Clifford was concerned to reposition the movement of the anthropologist him/herself as integral to anthropological research. He characterised the field trip – the anthropological rite of passage – as a kind of ‘mini-migration’ (a return migration) in which the anthropologist, usually alone, dwells away from home in order to accumulate the data and experiential capital, which can only be converted into academic writing on return to the university home base. The writing process usually erases all traces of the ‘préterrain’ – “all those places you have to go through and be in relation just to get to your village”, the processes and negotiations that are entered into in order to extract the cultural data from the field (Clifford 1992: 100).

The analogy of the ‘mini-migration’ seemed appropriate to my research. Both migrant subject and researcher sought to acquire ‘ethnographic’ data and a knowledge of ways of doing things, albeit for quite different purposes. This parallelism would sometimes emerge in reflexive remarks of informants who would say, when speaking of something they found strange in Australia, ‘Probably you felt the same when you went there...’ (to Hong Kong). Or in giving an account of returning to Hong Kong, an informant would say, ‘Well, you know what I mean, you’ve been through that.’ In following migrant subjects between Hong Kong and Sydney I was engaging in a mirroring movement that was essential for me to reflect on, in order to gain an understanding of my informants’ movements between places.

Clifford’s notion of ‘dwelling-in-travel’, of being at home in motion or between places is a useful one in allowing us to think of ‘place’ as relatively unmoored, an

⁷ Clifford’s work can be placed in the context of a trans-disciplinary interest in travel – travel literature, exile writing, the culture of diasporic groups. For instance, Clifford draws on Edward

object of continual constitution by mobile subjects (Clifford 1997a: 2).⁸ Clearly there are greatly differing capacities to move between national locations and contexts amongst migrant subjects. For instance, the figure of the ‘astronaut’ as the ‘frequent flyer’ of global capitalism is often associated with business migrants from Hong Kong. I will be analysing the differing capacities for mobility, which provide a basis for distinctions between migrants.

George Marcus, an erstwhile collaborator with Clifford, has developed a more methodologically oriented consideration of fieldwork engaged with the problem of an anthropological object located in more than one ‘field’. While acknowledging the actual interconnectedness of peoples, cultures and things, at the same time it is important to resist reifying increasing global interdependence, as if there were no specificities, unevenness or limits. What is often understood as global in scale is better conceived as ‘an emergent dimension about the connection among sites’ (Marcus 1995: 99) rather than an achieved societal fact – i.e. it is never completed, always in process. ‘Multi-sited fieldwork’ is a conception of working between different sites in order to track or trace groups of people, the circulation of material objects such as commodities and gifts, or metaphors, narratives, modes of thought and practices. Multi-sited fieldwork aims not for a holistic perspective but for a tracing of processes of translation between different cultural idioms.

For Marcus, multi-sited research does not aim at a ‘whole’ understanding, but rather the tracing of particular connections and encounters within the experience of different sites. Comparison becomes more integral to the research process itself, rather than being based in the scholastic comparison between other accounts. “Comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose

Said’s (1984) notion of travelling theory. For a survey of this literature see Kaplan 1996.

⁸ Clifford’s writing on travel and culture can tend towards a sometimes uncritical celebration of travel as an emancipatory trope, pitched against the ‘dwelling’ of the state, or fixed notions of culture. The figure of the ethnographer becomes a cosmopolite *par excellence*, exploring ‘complex histories of dwelling and travelling, cosmopolitan experiences.’ (Clifford 1997a: 2) Clifford, in valorizing cultural movement, tends to conflate different kinds of practices – ethnography, travel, travel writing, diasporic culture, and so on. While Clifford acknowledges that ‘associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents’ are all variables in the ability to move, and furthermore to profit from movement (Clifford 1994: 107),

contours, sites and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves ... making an account that has differently connected real-world sites of investigation” (Marcus 1995: 102). There is a symbiotic relation between the emergent object of the study and the subjects’ accounts of emerging relations between different sites.

In this sense, multi-sited ethnography provides a suitable general description of this study of migration between Hong Kong and Australia. A provisional sense of an ‘emergent object’ seemed to fit both my mode of working and the strategies and accounts of migrant subjects. Migrant accounts of movement, settlement, and dwelling produced a web of comparative material about places themselves, and about the sense of place of subjects negotiating migrant passages between places. Comparing the qualities of places – and the way they are represented and interpreted – was a key preoccupation of my informants. The object of my study became the bringing into relation of places themselves, a task shared with my informants. As an ‘emergent object’ a place or site did not have an intrinsic existence or significance until being brought into relevance by migrant accounts. The ‘sites’ of this study are not Hong Kong or Sydney as a whole, but the elements and specific places within them as they were given meaning by my informants.

In order to study modalities of migrant spatial being I would need to be able to apprehend a sense of location that is not fixed, but in motion between places. (This is particularly the case in the first years of migration, when the flux of early orientation and exploration of unfamiliar social spaces is greatest.) Migration is rarely a simple journey from point *a* to point *b*, with the subsequent social and cultural adjustment. Neither can it be contained within the ‘sojourner’ trajectory, the journey from *a* to *b* and back again, without investment in the host society. Contemporary migration for many Hong Kong people is an unfinished project, subject to uncertainty about ‘final’ destinations. For most of the people I have been studying, ‘migration’ is emergent, unfinished and unpredictable in terms of final outcomes, dependent on unknowable political and economic factors.

these differing capacities to move are only treated very generally in his work.

1e. Subjects in motion: transnational migration

Multi-sited ethnography can be placed beside the growing literature of ‘transnational’ migration studies. This describes more empirically grounded attempts to deal with the questions of globalisation, mobility and social connections extending beyond a single nation state. A ‘school’ of transnational migration anthropology arose around the work of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton-Blanc and others. Their basic claim was that global changes have been accompanied by new modalities of migrant movement and sociality, requiring a rethinking of certain key concepts in migration studies. This work promised to interrogate assumptions about the space and time of migratory trajectories, and to bring nation-states and nationalisms into focus by not assuming their fixity as either beginning points or end points. These authors were concerned to challenge the characterization of the immigrant, which ‘evokes images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture’. (Glick Schiller *et al* 1992: 1) The old image of the immigrant ultimately dissolved both political will and loyalty. ‘Culture’, language, and customs were viewed as anachronisms in the new context. Glick Schiller *et al* substitute the transmigrant, ‘whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relation to more than one nation state’ (Glick Schiller *et al*, 1995: 48). The transmigrant is contrasted with the immigrant who stays and is eventually incorporated into the host nation-state, and the figure of the sojourner, the temporary migrant. Transmigrants differ by maintaining substantial connections and investments simultaneously in more than one national sphere, creating ‘new social fields that cross national boundaries through their daily life activities and social, economic and political relations’ (Basch *et al* 1994: 22).⁹

⁹ There are an impressive number of empirical studies of transmigrant communities anchored in more than one place. For example, see Rouse 1992, 1995a, 1995b, Olwig 1993, Feldman-Bianco 1992, and Lessinger 1992. Much of this literature is centred in the Americas – its main focus has been the U.S. and its Latin American orbit, and the national transformation of identity spaces within the U.S. Its aim was also to investigate contemporary American political space. This is not a criticism – on the

On the face of it, many Hong Kong migration practices would fit this description. The emergence of transnational migration studies (like that of multi-sited ethnography) promises a welcome broadening of the ambit of ethnographic research to encompass the bewildering complexity of emergent social processes operating across borders.

A large proportion of transnational studies in anthropology have dealt with economically dominated groups within the American orbit, and their interactions with the US. On the other hand there is also a significant literature on Chinese transnationalism, which finds its focus in diasporic business networks and Chinese 'strategies of accumulation' in various regions of the Asia-Pacific (Nonini and Ong 1997: 4-5). What links these studies is the primacy of interest in political economy and the emergence of new economic formations anchored in more than one national territory. The transnational field at present appears to be interestingly divided between studies of subaltern national groups and of business networks (especially Chinese). This split in research perspectives is indicated by the titles of two anthologies of transnational studies: *Transnationalism from Below* (Smith & Guarnizo 1998) and *Ungrounded Empires* (Ong & Nonini 1997).¹⁰

Transnational studies continue to proliferate in anthropology and other disciplines, although criticisms have emerged. Rachel Bloul has pointed to transnationalist writers' 'overworked and over-elastic' conceptions of identity that are supposedly at once "both multiple and fluid (clustering around changing master concepts from class to race) and still recognizably ordered around the same transcendental national categories" (Bloul 1996: 20). Transnational approaches have tended to elide intercultural, trans-ethnic exchanges. Transnationalist analyses also tend to conflate

contrary, the study of migration is also a way of interrogating spheres of national influence and power.

¹⁰ From a superficial reading of this material we might assume that the globalising world could be neatly divided into subaltern groups struggling against the dominance of established economic structures, and diasporic capitalists who challenge for entry into the inner circle of the dominators. Of course this is an oversimplification. I am merely pointing to the dangers of constructing good and bad transnationals. Hence this study deals with the skilled and semi-skilled middle class people who make up the bulk of the 'legitimate' migrant intake of wealthy countries like Australia.

individual and collective identity practices, and subjective identifications with public discourses of cultural and political movements. As Bloul puts it, “Analyses of new or emerging discursive representations do not explain the politics of identification from the actors’ perspectives” (Bloul 1996: 2). These analyses often omit the lived dimension, collapsing the way in which multiple social spaces are negotiated in terms of everyday life and engagement with others.

Part of the problem is that it is not certain what ‘transnational’ actually describes. Faist has pointed to the fuzziness of transnational analyses, which often collapse major differences in practice and scale of practices into the category of ‘transnational community.’ He makes the useful point that transnational networks necessarily include people and collectivities which are ‘relatively immobile’, since mobility relies on such anchorages (Faist 2000: 191).

The category of ‘transnational migration’ becomes less than useful if it becomes all encompassing, neither recognising migration practices which do not fit this description, or glossing over other processes, such as intercultural communication. Many authors make little attempt at making finer distinctions that would be necessary in characterizing the many modes of cross-national movement and ties that undoubtedly exist. Are all migrants who maintain connections with countries of origin transmigrants? Are there degrees or different modes of transmigrancy? Does transmigrancy demarcate social divisions within specific migrant groups? What are the conditions which foster transnational capacities?

One approach is to focus more closely on the modes of engagement with nation states. Aihwa Ong has elaborated a theory of citizenship as constituted both by the host state, and the practical strategies of Asian capitalists-cosmopolites. Citizenship is simultaneously ‘an effect of state instrumentality, a productive discursive power, and a social practice.’ (Ong 1993: 747) With the increasing commodification of citizenship acquisition (e.g. investor migration schemes) national governments are themselves constantly readjusting their strategies to maximise benefit from global markets in ‘human capital’. The most wealthy and skilled take most advantage of the market in citizenship. For these people citizenship is ‘flexible’. ‘Citizenship

becomes an issue of handling the diverse rules of “governmentality” of host societies...’ (Ong 1998: 136)

Ong carried out research largely with wealthy ‘business class’ Chinese capitalists. Some of her work (Ong 1992, 1993) has dealt specifically with business migrants from Hong Kong based in San Francisco. As capitalists, they are presumed to be predominantly motivated to accumulate economic capital. In addition to economic capital, Ong also points to the need for accumulations of the cultural and symbolic kind.¹¹ Success in western markets also requires the acquisition of symbolic capital, which must have recognition and value ‘not only in the country of origin and the country of destination, but especially in the transnational spaces in which the paths of emigrants and local residents intersect in daily life.’ (Ong 1992: 127) In an attempt to enhance ‘cultural citizenship’ in the USA, a country where Asian-ness has been historically devalued, and made the base for legal exclusions for the greater part of this century (up until 1965), these wealthy immigrants have engaged in various strategies to reduce their deficit in cultural capital. Older racialised stereotypes of Chinese have been turned to higher symbolic values through their enactment by high status migrants and the production of Asians as ‘model minorities’. These strategies of ‘conversion’ included sponsoring American cultural activities, gaining higher degree qualifications and engaging in ‘high’ cultural and consumer tastes. Integral to this enactment of a specific style of citizenship is an ‘intense self-scrutiny’ and attention to dress styles and grooming, bodily comportment and the exhibition of taste (Ong 1992: 127). These strategies had the (not usually conscious) effect of enhancing a new image of Chinese-ness which combined some elements of old ‘coolie’ stereotypes – loyalty, hard work, family unity, diligence, and frugality – with newer attributes related to high status functionality. These newly cultivated attributes include efficiency, technical competence, studiousness and achievement in tertiary education, and ‘corporate’ style. These embodied performances conform as well as contribute to an image of the Chinese as a disciplined model minority (always implicitly pitched against other more ‘troublesome’ ethnic groups). Self-

¹¹ Ong draws broadly on Bourdieu’s work on the different kinds of accumulated social recognition conceived as forms of ‘capital’. See Bourdieu 1984 and 1986.

presentation and bodily self-discipline are integral to adapting and transforming specific embodied dispositions in response to an American cultural hierarchy that is highly stratified in terms of ethnicity and class. These are elements in an everyday struggle for cultural recognition. Ong draws attention to small details of everyday migrant performance that are attuned to a sense of what is ‘appropriate’ to specific places. This raises questions about migration and settlement that cannot be fully addressed by starting with concepts derived from political economy.

Similarly, this study concentrates on the dispositional ‘work’ required of transmigrants, the performative accommodations of self and body styles which cannot be reduced to a one-way ‘assimilation’. Rather than starting with broad-scale spatial conceptions like transnational fields or diasporas, I have preferred to more closely examine ‘everyday’ migration practices and dispositions of a mobile population as they move between two places – Hong Kong and Sydney. The focus of this study is the specific spatiality of these places as experienced and interpreted by migrant subjects. In the next section I discuss conceptions of spatiality underlying this thesis.

While ‘transnational’ migration usefully recognises the fluidity of contemporary migrant movements, transnational ‘communities’, diasporas, ‘social spaces’ – as they are variously figured – these terms seem to imply substantial and relatively permanent entities, somewhat like transnational corporations. This may or may not be the case. As my research focuses on the early stages of migration processes, and sometimes on less well-connected subjects, transnational migration seemed to be a potentially reifying label. For this reason I use the term ‘cross-national’ throughout. ‘Cross-national’ implies a more limited, localised and fragile sense of practical connection between very specific places.

1f. Conceptual framework: migrant dispositions, practices, spatialities and accommodations.

Appadurai has suggested that ‘local’ social orders are produced and reproduced through ongoing small acts of marking out pathways and territories, building and

maintaining houses, tending gardens and so on. These practices are part of a process of constantly producing a sense of locality – of a local social order, and that this localisation has always been ‘an inherently fragile achievement.’ (Appadurai 1995: 205) We would expect the plural localisations of migrant subjects across national borders to be even more complex and problematic.

The initial ethnographic focus of my research was the minutiae of Hong Kong people’s accounts of forging a locality in Sydney. This material was derived from interview descriptions of small, even banal, acts of adaption, such as walking, locating and finding places, driving, shopping, site seeing and exploring, choosing a site to live, organising lived space and gardening. All these negotiations of urban space can be understood as orienting and dwelling practices, means of location and inhabitation. Dwelling does not only occur in a house – we inhabit different ‘scales’ of our existence in attempting to negotiate a space for our body. Places in the city are brought into play through use, through the tracing of pathways that constitute one’s locality, vicinity, neighborhood, suburb, city, nation. My hunch was that the large movements of migrancy are best traced in small journeys and movements in new and unfamiliar localities. The practical negotiation of a new city is a means of gauging how dispositions acquired in one environment can become attuned to new spaces and the relations they embody. This entails more than a transfer of economic and cultural resources into a new environment.

For instance, I found that at first Hong Kong people typically did not quite know how to deal with what they perceived as a surplus of space in Sydney. Perceptions of density are related to more than physical arrangements of space, but also to specific modalities of urban relations associated with the singular lived space of Hong Kong. Spatial practices delineate spaces, connect them, and endow them with significance. People constantly generate ‘stories’, narrating everyday passages as well as larger scale and longer-term movements and trajectories such as that of migration. Spatial stories are both practical and evaluative enunciations. De Certeau, in his influential analysis of urban spatial practices, shows how ordinary bodily acts such as walking are simultaneously practices of narration. Certeau links practices of walking in the city by an analogy with speech functions, ‘pedestrian

speech acts'. "In the framework of enunciation, the walker constitutes, in relation to his position, both a near and a far, a here and a there." (De Certeau 1984: 99) This echoes Benveniste's work on the way in which pronouns are flexibly utilised to designate the subject/speaker, the interlocutor and the orientation of the subject in relation to her body in any given exchange.

These stories are the central 'data' used in this thesis. Often fragmentary and incomplete, they generate connections between places and scales, ranging from the spatial sense of the individual body to the international orbits traced by migrants. In producing spatial stories about cities, subjects engage in an ongoing practical dialectic of fragmentation and reassemblage. Subjects select and fragment parts of their experience of places on the basis of a multiplicity of perceptions and affects, for instance desires and fears associated with particular spaces.

'The subject detaches and cathects isolated fragments of larger wholes... the city becomes cut into a multiplicity of fragments which operate as invisible, quasi-subliminal poles of attraction and repulsion... these fragments are concatenated to create spatial stories'. (Ahearne 1995: 181-2)

Ahearne's gloss of de Certeau captures the play of desire and abjection that overlays and enlivens the ordinary functions of cities. Lived spaces are always subject to a multiplicity of investments – material, symbolic, ethical and erotic – made by its inhabitants. Spaces are always at once 'real-and-imagined' (Soja 1996: 11).

Migrant spatial stories are not simply individual expressions. They draw on discourses that circulate and contribute to a shared imaginary of a bifurcated migrant world of 'here' and 'there'. A purely interpretive approach to these 'stories' as representations is inadequate to meaningfully interrogate these spatial narratives of difference, because it can give no grounds for the generation of differing orientations and dispositions that produce these different representations.

In the case of migration, subjects are likely to encounter a lack of 'fit' or attunement with an environment, or habitat. A dispositional analysis is required in order to comprehend the ruptures and adaptations entailed in migration practices and

trajectories. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is a useful starting point for thinking about migrancy because it recognises the ongoing interactions between past experiential structures, and generative capacities to deal with exigencies of the present and future, which are always different to what is anticipated. Habitus never quite fits external circumstances, so there is a constant need to generate new strategies in order to strike a balance between the dispositions of the subject and new circumstances. (Bourdieu 1990: 53-56).

Because dispositions are acquired mimetically through bodily experience attuned to specific circumstances and modes of living, a 'gap' or disjunction is created whenever environments or situations change. "(W)hat happens when my habitus does not fit the field, when I am no longer pre-objectively bound with my immediate environment because I have moved out of the world that moulded my habits?" (Wacquant 1992: 896) This question poses the dilemma of migrancy (as well as any kind of change). But capacities to change are also uneven. While Bourdieu's approach to practice has often been condemned as static, addressed only to the reproduction of social orders,¹² his more recent writings have laid greater stress on the generative capacities of habitus which enable improvisation, learning and innovation. Interest (with its connotations of curiosity, attraction and the strategic direction of one's resources and attention), investment in particular social games, and 'libido' are equated. Habitus as an accumulation of dispositions, adapting and orienting practices and practical improvisations, is animated by a libido to pursue strategic investments, curiosities, differences. Recently Bourdieu (again) defined habitus:

...a system of dispositions to be and to do is a *potentiality*, a *desire* to be which, in a certain way, seeks to create the conditions of its fulfillment, and therefore to create the conditions most favourable to what it is. (Bourdieu 2000: 150; my italics)

¹² See, for instance, Connell (1983: 140-5) and Sewell (1992: 15-6).

This suggests a more Spinozan dimension of practice involving affects that can either strengthen or weaken bodily capacity to act in the service of its being.¹³ In this light, migrant striving to fit a new environment can be seen in two aspects. Fit as ‘fitting in’ could be felt as an assimilatory pressure, a dominating of subjects by the powerful norms and demands of the host. Or fit could imply the enhancement of the subject’s capacities to enhance its being, sensing in the gap between knowledge and expectations a possibility for change, learning, and desires. Migrant subjects strive to create conditions for maximisation and extension of being, which may also take the form of the openness to otherness, new networks and horizons. Both aspects compete in migrant experiences of other places.

In starting to examine how two very different cities are experienced by migrant subjects, I need to bring the lived space of the two cities into a relation. I begin by examining what elements of spatial dispositions acquired in Hong Kong might be, through an analysis of the historical ‘production’ of Hong Kong space. This entails exploring the links between the singular and intense urban space of Hong Kong and that of Sydney as refracted through the practices and verbal explications of these subjects.

I wish to discuss my use of those pivotal but fuzzy and polysemous terms, space and place. Their use is difficult because they are so commonplace, and blur into each other’s semantic fields.

Semantically space is not a culturally restricted and defined domain such as colour or class but a ‘natural’, pre-theoretical domain. All languages have spatial terms, and ways of asking and answering ‘where?’ questions, even if the semantic elaborations of ‘space’ as an abstract dimension are very differently developed in given symbolic orders (Levinson 1996: 358). At the very least, space as ‘relative location’ is a basic cognitive and practical dimension. One cannot think about existence, location, action, or comparison in any language, without thinking spatially. I draw broadly on Henri Lefebvre’s notion of space as an active ‘underpinning’ of sociality itself.

¹³ See Spinoza 1992, pp. 103-108.

Lefebvre made a sustained attempt to expand the discredited notion of production to the multiple contexts of lived experience. Production is not restricted to the making of goods and commodities, but includes the whole environment that enables economic production, consumption, exchange and, indeed, all social relations to take place. *The Production of Space* builds an account of history based on a conceptual triad of interconnected aspects of social space, which interact dynamically. Briefly these can be schematised as:

1. Spatial practice: encompassing “production and reproduction, particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation”, with sufficient cohesion to provide subjects with a level of competence in negotiating that space.
2. Representations of space: abstract spatial conceptions, rationalised and rationally communicable, through discourses such as science, administration, planning.
3. Spaces of representation: space as directly lived through images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, the realm of affect, imagination and art.¹⁴ (Lefebvre 1991: 33, 38-41)

While the boundaries between these ‘dimensions’ are somewhat problematic, the main thing I take from Lefebvre is the strong sense of the multivocality of spatial processes, which constantly produce and reproduce different kinds of spaces. But space is not reducible to practices or social relations itself: “space qualifies as a ‘thing/no thing, for it is neither a substantial reality nor a mental reality, it cannot be resolved into abstractions, and it consists neither of a collection of things in space nor an aggregate of occupied spaces.” (Lefebvre 1991:402) What are constantly produced are contexts for further actions. Thus spaces are a precondition for practices as well as an outcome of further production and re-production. A given space is produced in historical time, built upon previous transformations of nature and physical space.

¹⁴ The English translation of *The Production of Space* renders this third aspect of spatiality as ‘representational space’. Both Edward Soja and Rob Shields argue that ‘spaces of representation’ is closer to Lefebvre’s meaning, pointing to the way in which everyday spatial experience is endowed with imaginary content, significance and affective force (Soja 1996: 67-8; Shields 1999: 164-5).

If Lefebvre was more interested empirically in the articulation of historical and epochal spatial forms, in this study I concentrate more on the experiential interlinking of practical space, conceptions of space and especially on ‘spaces of representation’ in migrant movements between Hong Kong and Sydney. This perhaps brings me closer to the domain of ‘place’.

In terms of theory, place is the poor cousin of space. As Geertz (1996: 259) put it: ‘place makes a poor abstraction.’ Place is difficult to articulate theoretically because places cannot be located without examining the specific and singular ways in which people practically engage with and give meaning to them. Places come into being with the generation of specific meanings acquired through experience, familiarity, inhabitation, and investments of meaning and emotion. As this thesis progresses I develop an account of emergent ‘places’ generated in movement between Hong Kong and Sydney, and incorporated into the enlarged sense of place of migrant subjects.

Throughout this study, I use the term ‘accommodation’ as a metaphor for the ongoing relations between places and the changing dispositions of migrant subjects. I draw on various shades of meaning of accommodation. First of all, accommodation has a sense of spatial capacities – the fit of an object in relation to another spatial form or container. This implies a gap between the embodied knowledge of a subject, and an unfamiliar space or situation requiring some strategic adjustment. Accommodation also alludes to the provision of dwelling – a space for the body – even if only a temporary place of habitation. This transience of arrangements also connects to the sense of accommodation as a temporary reconciliation or adaptation to a situation – one that may even entail compromise or duplicity. These interlocking connotations suggest the interrelated dimensions – practical, spatial and ethical – of migrant adjustments between specific places.

Throughout the thesis I elaborate on various (overlapping) modes of accommodation in relation to specific migration practices. This requires the use of certain terms relevant to capacities to change and adjust to new spaces and conditions. These include ‘orientation’, ‘settlement’, ‘dwelling’, ‘attunement’ and ‘fit’.

1g. Chapter outline

This ethnography explores modalities of migrant accommodation to a range of social and spatial trajectories of Hong Kong emigrants through the analysis of accounts of urban space and practices of settling in Sydney. This requires a considerable amount of contextual material to support the argument. Because of the numerous shifts in its narration, I outline the distribution of material throughout the chapters of the thesis.

A basic premise of this thesis is that people from Hong Kong have acquired some common dispositions attuned to living in the specific urban environment of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's dense and challenging space embodies aspects of the singular historical production of space in a colonial entrepôt that has expanded into a global economic power. Chapters 2 and 3 explore different dimensions of Hong Kong spatiality. In order to arrive at some understanding of the 'contents' and properties of Hong Kong's spatiality, I resort to an historical account of the production of Hong Kong's built space.

This more scholastic exercise is augmented by a 'pedestrian' exploration of a small slice of 'lived' space in Tsing Yi, a rapidly changing part of Hong Kong's New Territories (chapter 3). I consider the relation between the historical generation of urban space in Hong Kong and dispositional aspects of everyday practices and perceptions of contemporary Hong Kong dwellers. An analysis of some features of spatial dispositions of people from Hong Kong is combined with ethnographic material on orienting practices, such as ways of navigating urban space. Acquired spatial dispositions do not strictly determine the being and behavior of Hong Kong emigrants, but they do endow them with some common resources and idioms with which to generate practical responses and understandings in various migrant contexts. Migrant memories and narratives of living in different spatial conditions are utilised in ongoing adjustments and strategies.

Understanding migrant practices cannot take place without a sense of the historical and demographic specificities. Chapter 4 outlines some of the features of

contemporary Hong Kong-Australia migration as a ‘whole’, as well as pointing to the particularity of the subjects of my research. I examine relevant migration studies literature for accounts of migrant ‘patterns’ and trajectories and place my research approach in relation to these analyses.

Language and speech are integral to spatial practices and at the same time provide material with which to reference and evaluate ongoing social relations and trajectories. In chapter 5, I discuss the links between language practices and migrancy for Hong Kong emigrants moving to an English speaking country. Drawing on the work of William Hanks, Benveniste, and Edward Casey I discuss the lived relation between discourse space and reference of bodies and physical objects in ordinary speech. Migrant deictic practices broadly bifurcate and relativise the space of migrant experience into a ‘here’ and a ‘there’. Discourses of place in my interviews bring together lived experience of urban life in more than one place, collectively held representations and ‘ideological’ meanings. These can provide a means for migrant subjects to trace and evaluate social fortunes and trajectories between places.

Chapter 6 explores the spatiality of interview material about settling in Sydney, drawing out the links between lived practice and migrant accounts of the negotiation of place. Accounts of settlement in Sydney yield a diverse array of perceptions about the experience of urban life in Sydney. These ‘spatial stories’ can be read as different ways of inhabiting the everyday, drawing on contrasts in lived space in Hong Kong and Sydney. In effect they constitute a structure of urban representations that are themselves elements of strategies of settlement in Sydney. Settlement is taken to include both the physical (and administrative) practices of relocation and the achievement of some sort of affective accommodation to being in another place.

In Chapter 7 accounts of settling and establishing dwellings in Sydney are examined in a more sociological manner in order to decipher how Hong Kong settlers orient and negotiate their position in a city that is interpreted in subtly different ways from its Aussie inhabitants. ‘Ordinary’ suburban spaces such as houses and gardens, and the larger suburban spaces of Sydney are negotiated and interpreted by people

attuned to quite different modes of orientation and dwelling. Dwelling practices are examined in terms of an ongoing project of learning to be ‘at home’ in quite different urban environments.

Chapter 8 examines a film representation of Hong Kong migration to Australia, which supports the more fragmented ethnographic material. Clara Law’s *Floating Life* provides an exemplary ‘spatial story’ about the ontology of Hong Kong migration. *Floating Life* condenses the perceptions and dispositional feelings towards alien spaces and spatial practices in depicting the differential spaces of a single transnationalised family, located in a series of ‘houses’ in Hong Kong, Australia and Germany. The specificity of places and the way they are presented filmically is utilised to explicate the existential difficulties as well as possibilities for expansion faced in migration. *Floating Life* ‘crystallises’ Australian modes of living in images of the Australian suburban landscape. An affective drama is projected onto the ‘empty’ space of suburbia. Displacing engagement with the host society, *Floating Life* is able to detail the dispositional engagement of Hong Kong immigrants with urban Australia.

Chapter 9 shifts the focus to subjects who have returned to Hong Kong. I describe the way in which these returnees reference places in Sydney as a means of evaluating their migrant experience and locating their future trajectories and aspirations in the context of an enlarged sense of place. An extended ‘field’ of place provides an idiom for accessing multiple locations and times, through shared representations as well as through memory and bodily experience. Remembered places in Sydney maintain a presence for subjects in Hong Kong, folded into a larger sense of place that is accessed in different ways by subjects in giving an account of ‘where they are.’

Chapter 10 explores the affective ‘attunement’ of subjects to their migrant trajectories *between* Hong Kong and Sydney. I draw a relation between the sense of ‘fitting’ into local and cross-national contexts, and emergent migrant impulses to belong. This may entail diverse (sometimes ambivalent or conflicting) attachments to objects drawn from the larger place opened up by migrancy. A topography of

belonging (and of not belonging) condenses a diversity of experiences of place, memory and embodied affects, psycho-social depths and surface appropriations.