

Chapter 10

Belonging between: accommodating places

10a. Chapter introduction

This final chapter will look more closely at the way elements of place are employed in emerging attachments and identifications. This will take us beyond the analysis of specific spaces in either Hong Kong or Sydney. I bring the previous analyses of particular spaces to a head by focusing on emergent 'belonging' across the larger place constituted by migrant movements. This chapter also points to future subjectivities and to a sense of place beyond the initial 'contact' period that has so far been the focus of my analysis.

In this chapter I will further loosen oppositions between the place of origin and the place of migrant destination by examining ways in which migrants (in both Sydney and Hong Kong) negotiate some kind of accommodation between the places that initially seem so opposed. The contrasts between the migrant 'here' and 'there' are not dissolved, but are brought into an ongoing practical and existential relation.

In considering modes of accommodating different places within migrant orbits, we enter the difficult conceptual terrain of affective attachments to place and identity. With the emergence of interest in dispersed, cross-national social terrains, anthropologists have had to re-evaluate notions of the ethnographic field as a single discrete site, and with it the processes which connect subjects to places and to political and cultural orders. For Nadia Lovell (1998: 5), 'locality...becomes multivocal, and belonging itself can be viewed as a multifaceted, multilayered process which mobilises loyalty to different communities simultaneously.' Lovell is pointing to the many ways in which places, localities are incorporated into a sense of collective belonging, which may not have a single object. This is particularly salient for highly mobile groups such as contemporary

emigrants from Hong Kong who cannot claim a clearly defined national orientation and traditions.

The use of the word 'belonging' seems strange when its objects are plural and dispersed. Belonging seems to suggest an exclusive linkage or membership of a single place or culture. The common usage seems too restrictive to convey the slippery and often transitional nature of migrant engagements with more than one place. It seems counter-intuitive to think in terms of loyalties or a sense of belonging to more than one object. It might be useful to think of belonging as something more momentary, as neither fixed nor stable. Elspeth Probyn usefully defines belonging as an impulse for 'some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state.' (Probyn 1996: 19) An emphasis on impulses rather than states seems more appropriate to the tracing of emergent, often fleeting attachments of mobile subjects. It will allow me to further investigate the jostling of places within the larger place-world of this group of recent migrants.

Throughout this study I have maintained that migrant impulses to form attachments to other people, places, and ways of being cannot be detached from an analysis of dispositions acquired elsewhere and undergoing alteration throughout migrant trajectories. Continuing along the lines of this study, these impulses are strategically linked to the dispositional insertion or 'fit' with a place (or with a pattern of movements between places). Attunement to a place, the embodied sense of its limits and possibilities, is linked to the capacities of subjects to relate new habitats and dispositions acquired in other times and places.¹ Attunement to everyday living in a new place is a starting point for the development of affective attachments to the larger topography opened up by migrancy. So attunement to a place (or a number of places) is closely tied to 'affective resonances' or moods (Nagatomo 1992: 208) arising from specific

¹ Attunement was originally a musical notion, suggesting bringing a voice or instrument into harmony or a common register.

migration trajectories. My earlier discussion of the deployment of comparisons between Hong Kong and Sydney has already suggested a play of preferences, affects and affinities between places. I will further examine this play of affinities and loyalties to one place or other. These quasi-national feelings do not so much represent solidified identities as emergent attachments towards a multitude of objects – places, cultures, languages, styles and ways of being.

So far this study has been largely concerned with spatial dispositions arising from specific experiences of urban life. The objects of the following analysis – such as language, Chinese or Australian culture, or national feelings – are not strictly ‘spatial’. But as I have argued, migrant accounts of place tend to incorporate a multitude of cultural and social comparisons and distinctions. Hence, attention is paid to the way in which cultural or national qualities are spatially indexed, and to ways in which these conceptions refer back to spatial practices of everyday migrant experience.²

10b. Migrant attunements: the fit between place and subject

So far we have been examining how migrant subjects draw on experiential resources and dispositions acquired and associated with another place (Hong Kong) in negotiating new situations and relations. In this section I detail three subjects’ attunement to their particular migrant trajectories. ‘Attunement’ implies a more general sense of engagement with place and with their migrant trajectories as a whole. Attunement, as the ongoing ‘somatic modality of engagement’ (Nagatomo 1992: 195) encompasses the sense of bodily and affective engagement with the subject’s situation as a migrant. Here, the focus is on the ways that informants used the language of adjustment, adaptation, and fit to describe their sense of insertion into places and ways of living. A dispositional analysis of migrancy suggests – in fact demands – an account of differential capacities as well as inclinations to ‘adjust’, ‘adapt’, to ‘fit in’, to ‘belong’,

² Analysis of ‘imaginary’ structures such as the nation in terms of their spatial and territorial elements shows how these are translated into various practices of governance of lived space through the means of an imaginary spatial architecture. See Hage 1996.

and to 'feel at home' in new situations and places. Dispositions are by no means restricted to maintaining habits and tastes acquired in the past: they also encompass ways of 'being disposed to' unfamiliar and surprising people, places and pleasures. Fitting in a cross-national context entails a sense of fit not just to a current habitat (here), but also to the wider place-world brought into play through migrancy.

Informants sometimes reflected on their flexibility and capacity to improvise in new circumstances. Josie related her migrant experience in Australia to her years growing up with her family in a cramped public housing estate, with minimal cooking, washing and toilet facilities. She considered that this experience gave her a capacity to deal with change that was transferable to situations in Sydney:

I'm very confident in my adaptation. I can adapt to any environment. I know I can adjust to people's different needs so we can survive, yeah – survival technique... I can adapt to whatever the situation.

'Adaptation' was a common usage amongst my informants, whatever its source. (It may stem from medical or psychological discourses, or technological or management discourses.) Many interviewees used the language of adaptation to describe the attempt to refashion themselves in Australian contexts. Josie could see the need to objectify herself, to stand outside and to monitor her own self-presentation and its effects in the less familiar context. However, functional competency, practical professional and linguistic performance is never enough. Her uncertainty is not just about her practical capacities, but also about her whole sense of being in the social space, in this case her place within the social relations of her workplace in a hospital ward. Josie uses the metaphor of 'fit' – negatively as 'not fitting in' – to describe her efforts to deal with different practical contexts and workplace interactions.

You try to find the cause of you not fitting in, so sometimes it's a simple situation like, the people don't know what you're saying, so they will say 'pardon' or sorry, what do you mean?' So you have three thoughts, or maybe more than three thoughts. The first one is, "Am I speaking in the right language, speaking my thoughts?" Or the situation is too

busy, so the person couldn't perceive accurately what I'm saying. Or, is this just ill...ill will (she has difficulty pronouncing this), that person asking just don't give a shit, or whatever. And then lots of other questions. So, you will still try to repeat in different ways, and try to speak it clearly, um, what you are trying to say, but you already have at least three thoughts in your head. That makes you, makes myself, a lot of people as well, not feeling secure in a place.

What does fitting in entail? Josie has the sense she is trying too hard to just 'be' at her work, to have a sense of social ease in doing her job – the paradox of any struggle to 'be' something you think you are not. She must monitor and evaluate her own communicative performance, the context of the reception of others, and the attitude of others towards her. The effort of constant self monitoring and translation precludes the sense of 'being in the moment', of a flow of time as 'natural' and transparent, which relies on a relatively unreflexive engagement, a 'natural attitude' to people and things around the person, where one takes it for granted that there is an external world of things independent of one's perceptions of them (Hammond et al 1991: 41). This lack of ease also affects the relations with other Aussies in the workplace, who may not be disposed to make the effort to assist her with her difficulties. It takes its toll on her sense of 'feeling secure in a place'. This is not only an individual psychological response. The frequent shifts of person between 'I', 'you', and other immigrants – 'a lot of people as well' – refer to a shared account of the difficulties of social adaptation in Australia. Josie is all too aware of 'trying too hard'. Trying hard to fit in is paradoxical: one cannot be fitting in so well if one is trying too hard. But there seems to be little choice – you have to struggle in order to gain the social foothold that will make it easier in future. 'Not feeling secure in a place' expresses the explicitly spatial feeling of insecurity and marginalisation in milieux characterised by uneven linguistic exchanges.

You often need it... that security feeling...but it's not natural that you can fit in an environment, you need to try harder, four times harder. And maybe, the people don't know that you are trying that hard, they just think that you are acting normally.

At stake is the ontological security that is underpinned by the naturalness of Josie's insertion into a particular communicative milieu. Fitting in implies an ease with everyday negotiations – for Josie this is primarily felt as a linguistic difficulty. At the same time other things are being negotiated, including the will (or ill will), on the part of other speakers to communicate equally, to translate. It is not Josie's linguistic performance alone, but frequently the lack of communicative reciprocity accorded to her as a non-native speaker. Social integration is a relation, not merely an individual achievement. The struggle to fit is not the accomplishment of a migrant individual, although it is frequently felt to be so, but also a reciprocal relation with the Aussies. The communicative deficit also comes from the 'hosts'.

Interviewees usually felt they could easily satisfy the requirements of professional competence in work contexts. The difficulties usually concerned social interactions in the workplace or in other public milieux.³ These can produce (or reinforce) a sense of a split ego, of radically divided modalities of engagement. The private and domestic sphere may become a haven from the effort of engaging with Aussies, and the basis for the production of a private 'cultural' self (although this cultural 'self' will differ from prior to migration.) People from Hong Kong, particularly those with professional or para-professional training are often strongly immersed in occupational identities, having made heavy investments in workplace and collegial relations. This is no doubt a product of necessity, given the high pressure of study and long working hours required in Hong Kong.⁴ This privatisation of the cultural self could be isolating, in combination with domestic habitats in Sydney which place greater social emphasis on home spaces rather than public spaces.

³ In fact, it was common for informants to complain of their professional under-engagement, since they were frequently employed at levels of experience, competence and responsibility below that of their experience in Hong Kong. This seemed to apply across nearly all the professional areas in which my informants were involved (nursing, health management, financial management, accounting, engineering, social work).

⁴ I want to avoid essentialist typifications of Hong Kong Chinese as intrinsically hard working, possessing an ethic of labour and self-sublimation. This ethic is ascribed to a general 'psycho-social' legacy of the Chinese in general as a 'Confucian' trait (Redding 1990: 69-70) or more particularly as a product of the 'self-selection' of migrants who came to Hong Kong (Lau 1982: 174).

'Fitting in' involves more than linguistic competencies and local knowledge of the host country. Wanda, a social worker in her thirties has excellent English skills. She came to Australia for the latter years of high school and for her university education, before later emigrating after returning to Hong Kong for some years. She married an Aussie man and has raised a family in Sydney's northern suburbs. Despite her self-acknowledged cultural and English language competence she still strongly feels a lack of what she called a sense of belonging:

I feel I'm functioning like any Australian. The only thing that is hard, you still don't have that sense of belonging. I think I understand their culture very well. I think I function quite well among them. Like, I've got my job under control. I don't have problems in terms of meeting with them, or even having a lot of friendships with the local people. I guess there is always a sense of whether other people feel that you are part of the country. I still have that feeling – do they feel that I belong? You don't have that sense of belonging that you have if you brought up in the country. Like...when I go to Hong Kong, no matter how long I've been away from it, you have that sense that ... that's where you came from. I mean that no matter how I try here, it's not going to replace it. I'm never going to get that feeling, that sense of belonging. It's like, where your root is. And I think it's because I come from a very close family network as well, so I'll always feel that that bit is missing.

Wanda has attempted to replace 'it' – a sense of originary belonging and fullness of being associated with Hong Kong – with a 'functioning' Australian-ness. Wanda was at pains to assert her cultural command and competency. She distinguished herself from other migrants in terms of her ability to negotiate Australian society.

So I guess on the functioning level I think I can, I mean, I think I *know* more than, maybe, most of the new migrants because I do listen to the news and because I'm a social worker. I know what issues are around. I need to know, and I'm interested in news, documentaries, current affairs, and I know all the Aussie sports, because my husband likes sport, and I know all these things that people talk about. I *know*, although I might not be interested, I *know* what they are talking about. I know the politicians and the political parties, what the issues are, so, on that level I think I'm quite, I feel I *know* quite a bit. (Italicised words stressed in speech).

Note the verbal repetition and emphasis on knowing. Wanda has achieved an objective knowledge but not a transfer of interest to allow her to feel fully engaged or immersed in her life in Australia. Knowing itself isn't enough to 'belong' to Australia – it requires an affective investment and immersion in Australian-ness. But where does that come from? Wanda has no inherent interest in sport, for instance, other than as a form of cultural currency that circulates amongst Aussies, and 'because my husband likes sport'. She acquires sporting knowledge as an exercise in 'anthropological' mastery, because she knows it is important to others.

So when I talk to my colleague, I mean it's not like I don't *know* what they are talking about. I'm happy to know and I'm willing to learn about everything. But you always miss that sense of, um, perhaps it's my own feeling, belonging, that sense of belonging. And I guess, perhaps, further than that, it's my own cultural identity. You don't get a lot of the Chinese culture here, I'm gradually forgetting, although I sometimes read Chinese books. It's not like if you're with a group of people like in Hong Kong, you can talk between ourselves, we know all about our culture, we just know it.

The lack of Hong Kong or Chinese 'culture' is keenly felt. By culture Wanda was not referring to a 'whole way of life' which integrates institutions and generalises values and hierarchies, but rather to a familiar and encompassing communicative milieu. Her yearning is not for any particular contents or values of 'Chinese culture', but for a shared cultural naturalness that doesn't have to be reflected on – 'we just know it.' However, attempts at cultural maintenance in Sydney such as celebrating festivals like lunar New Year or the mid-autumn festival only evince a disappointment that 'it's not the same.' Although Wanda can take part in various 'Australian' festivals through her family:

W: I can participate in it but I still feel like... I don't own it, as they do... It's not something I was brought up with. I guess, if we have children I think they will feel different from me, and there always is, I guess, a sort of dilemma – how much of what you can pick up can you truly own?

P: When you say to 'own' a culture, what do you mean by that?

W: It's something that you...it's something that's natural. I mean, it's you, it's part of you, it's part of how you identify, of whom you identify with and what you identify. It's just natural, it's not learned, like, it's maybe the way I was brought up. Say for example, if I know that my husband, when they were kids they always talk about the tooth fairy and stuff like this – it's not something I own...

P: Tooth fairy!?

W: Like, the Easter Bunny and that sort of thing, it's not something I own, like we had different things. So I can appreciate how to them it's automatic, spontaneous, even though we know it's something that is not true, whatever it is. You can own those things, and it's part of you.

What does this 'ownership' of culture depend on? For Wanda, adaptation to an acquired 'cultural' world can never be entirely achieved, as she cannot attain the innocence and naturalness of primary belief. She had converted to Christianity in Sydney, and attends the local church (not a 'Chinese' church) but did not feel quite as much a part of it – 'I didn't grow up with the people at the church as a lot of them did.' Wanda does not feel 'ownership' of Aussie culture because she does not possess the means to develop a multicultural or cosmopolitan 'gaze' which can appropriate and relativise cultural knowledge to her own advantage. For Wanda, Chinese culture can only belong in Hong Kong and Australian culture in Australia. Pluralism does not offer her a solution because of the lack of recognition of her cultural capital. She does not operate in a sphere, such as art or writing or even running a restaurant, in which her 'Chinese-ness' could be turned into a distinction in a multicultural context. A claim to 'ownership'⁵ would entail either: 1) a means of productively deploying one's cultural status, as a 'capital'; or 2) making a lesser investment in the host culture (which she cannot afford because of the form of her insertion into Aussie social and family life.)

⁵ In Bourdieu's terms symbolic capital is composed of all forms of recognition that generate a sense of significance and social importance (Bourdieu 2000: 241). In migrant contexts the constitution of symbolic capital frequently operates in the interstices of gendered power and cultural status. Wanda's sense of cultural recognition was doubly marginalised by patrilocal marriage to an Aussie man, who could not consider living in Hong Kong or even learning some Chinese. All of the inter-cultural sexual relationships I encountered in my sample (only four – three straight marriages and one gay relationship) fitted this pattern.

Bloul (1996) insists on the importance of everyday cross-ethnic or intercommunal interactions and solidarities that go beyond ethnic and cultural categories.⁶ Indeed, Wanda's account provides evidence of a partial realisation of such possibilities, while pointing to the asymmetrical nature of the experience of intercultural exchanges in Australia. Her adaptive struggles to practically master the cultural milieu she encounters tends to magnify the sense of discontinuity between her past life in Hong Kong and her present one in Sydney. Wanda has a persistent sense of the incompleteness of her 'fit' with her life in Sydney. Paradoxically, too successful a strategy of 'fitting in' may engender a certain detachment from the adopted place despite the investment put into it. It may direct attention to the gap between dispositions and experiences that cannot be addressed solely through assimilatory labours. The subject feels a yearning for a remembered place in which the subject and her aspirations seemed to fit.

Not all migrants exhibit this yearning for an originary place. The next case demonstrates a very different sense of belonging between places. Melba, a computer technician, came to Sydney in the 1993. She applied to emigrate 'just to see if I can go', and because some of her friends were migrating to Australia at the time.⁷

Well actually, I'm not worrying about this '97, you know. I do not have much idea. Actually, I did not plan for migration, you know, the intention is not that much. I just try and see, you know, whether I can go or not.

She was accepted and decided to come to Sydney, to try out living and working in another place. Early on she decided she would stay only for two years, just long enough to secure 'the insurance.'

⁶ Bloul (1996: 6-7) argues that intercommunal relations and solidarities are often elided in analyses of 'transnational' migration because of inelastic conceptual understandings of 'ethnic identity'. Most analytical approaches retain the centrality and primacy of exclusive and essentialist ethnic/cultural categories at the same time as they attempt to develop accounts of transnational sphere of sociality crossing national boundaries.

I'm thinking that, when I first go there, I ask myself whether I will stay there for the rest of my life. Since I prefer not to stay there for the rest of my life, I'm thinking that I only have two years in this place, so I try to know this place well, and try to experience as much as possible. Yeah, so everything will be nice and exciting if you think in that way.⁸

'Nice and exciting' sums up Melba's approach to settlement in Sydney. She chose a job on the 'people side' of her industry, insisting to her employer that she wanted 'a lot of contact with the Australians.' By inviting and maximising intercultural communication she developed personally and gained confidence through working with non-Chinese, which she employed when she returned to Hong Kong. She now works for a multi-national firm in Hong Kong on the strength of her enhanced cosmopolitanism.

Before I went to Australia, I found myself shy when I work with foreigners, maybe I will not voice my opinions very much, you know. But since the two years in Australia, you get used to just express yourself very easily. Because I think in Australia it's quite open, you know.... Now I can see that we are equal, you know. I can see sometimes people at work, you know, they will treat the foreigners, even on the same grade, as superior to themselves, you know.

Melba could now better identify and negotiate the culturalised relations that operate within corporate spheres in Hong Kong. Melba also travelled extensively in Australia, and learned to drive, to swim and to ski. 'For myself, it's an expansion, rather than, you know, for others, maybe they were not expanding themselves.' Her approach to migration was one of taking opportunities to engage in new experiences for herself, rather than 'fitting in' to the place or the customs of the natives. Comparing herself to other Hong Kong people she knew who did not share her adventurous disposition, she ventured:

⁷ Engagement in migration as a contingent possibility – 'because I can' – is neglected by commentators looking for structural reasons, whether economic 'push-pull' factors or demographic trends.

⁸ This came from an interview in Hong Kong. Notice how the reference to Sydney momentarily moves from 'there' to 'here', as Melba shifts the perspective into another frame, locating herself in 'this place' (i.e. Sydney).

I think they are not happy to stay in the place, they just want to escape from Hong Kong and stay in there, then they will find themselves not happy with anything. They expect too much to just happen, expect the environment will give them so many things rather than they will create the things for themselves. I think if they are not resisting the place, or they are not resisting their own idea of staying, they can create many other opportunities – because two places can never be the same.

It would be easy to characterise Melba simply as a ‘positive’ individual enabled by the temporary nature of her stay and lack of responsibilities (no spouse or children) that weigh on many migrants. What is of interest is how she negotiated the difference of place and culture by fully recognising this difference as potentiality, by ‘not resisting the place...because two places can never be the same.’⁹

Melba returned to Hong Kong, but not due to any disappointment with Australia. She saw both places as complementary. In general, I found that returnees (or at least the ‘willing returnees’ and insurance migrants) more positively ‘appreciated’ Sydney as a place. Those who did not expect to stay permanently often allowed more space and time in which to expand horizons and enjoy new experiences. Those for whom migration was intended to be permanent were more subject to assimilatory pressures, often serving to suppress desires for enjoyment. (“You’re here as migrants, not to enjoy yourself”, Bing says in *Floating Life*.)

These contrasting stories help us to understand different modes of ‘fitting’ places. In the first two accounts the desire to ‘fit in’ takes an assimilatory form, the adoption of a new cultural superego. Subjects felt an external pressure to acquire Australian ways of thinking and being. Linguistic difficulties in particular affect the quality of insertion into public spaces. We can compare the above accounts of cultural fit. Josie felt the strain of having to engage in a labour of constant translation of everyday experience,

⁹ This differs from the rationale encountered earlier that ‘everywhere is the same’, where the space of migrancy was imagined as an abstract and homogenous (Cartesian) space without social attributes or limitations.

which was rarely equally reciprocated. Her effort and the lack of recognition of this effort left her with a sense of 'not feeling secure in a place'. Feeling a lack of 'fit' in public situations, she invested in a rediscovered Chineseness in her domestic life. Wanda, having achieved some mastery of local cultural knowledge and everyday functional competencies still felt a deficit, a sense of not being 'part of the country'. She maintained a yearning for the Chinese culture she felt she was losing. Despite her attempts to 'know' Australian culture, she felt a lack of 'ownership' of her cultural being. Wanda experienced multicultural Australia as a highly asymmetrical field of cultural recognition and symbolic exchange. Melba, by contrast, found a fit with her own sense of being through the augmenting and expansion of experiences, capacities and possibilities. She was not so concerned to fit *into* Sydney, but to find ways in which places and situations could match her dispositions and enlarge her experience and enjoyments.

We can distinguish two 'poles' in a continuum of migrant attunement to new social spaces. The first two accounts emphasised subjects' fit with the host social order and ways of being which we could call 'assimilatory adjustment'. The attempted fit was directed to an external scheme of being and doing, experienced as an assimilatory requirement of the host cultural space. A struggle for assimilatory adjustment might suggest a strong desire to embrace new ways of being. Paradoxically it often resulted in an inhibiting of belonging and ownership, perhaps because it always implied a subordinate relationship to established ways of being. Where subjects felt an intense assimilatory pressure to fit a sense of deficit and lack often resulted. This was measured against memories of Hong Kong which come to be viewed nostalgically as a 'mnemonic desire' (Lovell 1998: 15).

A sense of mis-fit or mismatch with habits and dispositions formed elsewhere generates suffering due to difficulties in dealing with rapid change and in 'holding together the dispositions associated with different states or stages'. (Bourdieu 2000: 161) On the other hand, the 'holding together' of dispositions implies an enlargement of capacities and orientations, a learning process. Melba's story epitomises the incorporation of new

tastes, desires, accomplishments, networks and social styles to produce a sense of 'dispositional expansion' beyond a single locality. The subject was able to generate new dispositions to operate between different places and circumstances, expanding her capacities and horizons of possibility across an enlarged sense of place.

There seems to be an inverted logic of investment to these different trajectories. Greater assimilatory adjustment was associated with a stronger investment with the host place. The very struggle to fit into Sydney could produce a compensatory yearning for and attachment to the place and conditions of origin, whether for the liveliness and condensation of urban life in Hong Kong or the familiarity of Cantonese language and customs. The less the investment, the 'lighter' the commitment to permanency of settlement, there was less need to fit into a place, to sublimate oneself to an 'other' way of being. Migrants like Mabel were more able to augment capacities and tastes to take advantage of new cross-national spaces of potentiality presented by migrancy. Rather than having to 'fit' into a place, her account gives a sense of new places 'fitting' the subject by opening up room for self-expansion and 'proliferation of being.' An ease of attunement to the specificities of a place and its ways of being enabled a greater appropriation of it, a sense of profit and opportunity which is transferable to other places and contexts.

In practice most migrant subjects undergo both assimilatory adjustment to the norms of the host environment and a more general augmentation of dispositions – these are not necessarily independent processes. Both are improvisational responses to particular trajectories and circumstances, ways of confronting gaps between dispositions and the new spaces encountered in migrancy. Out of these interplays emerge various desires, whether oriented nostalgically to past experience and places or to new prospects and horizons. Emerging identifications and attachments are closely linked to specific dispositional accommodations between places and styles of attunement

10c. Depths and surfaces: topographies of belonging

Theoretical understandings of belonging, identity, nationalism, object relations and so on generally contain some kind of implicit ‘topography’ of subjectivity – a ‘space of the subject’ relating spaces of the body and of the world (Kirby 1996: 148). In *Outside Belongings*, Elspeth Probyn explicitly writes against the fixity of identity categories, and against a hermeneutics of ‘depth’. Her strategic employment of terms such as ‘outside’, ‘surface’, and ‘skin’ attempts to move beyond an internal/external or a centre/periphery model, to a horizontal network of proximities configured and interconnected by desire.¹⁰ Probyn (1996: 11, 13) writes of living ‘within a grid or network of different points’, while living through a ‘desire to make them connect differently.’ We can see the relevance to the cross-national and cross-cultural existences I have been describing. Hong Kong subjects seem to be ideal candidates for ‘outside belonging’, lacking the grounds for fully ‘national’ attachments, speaking an ‘in-between’ language, and inheriting a highly ambivalent attachment to both China and ‘the west’ as cultural and political points of reference.

This externality and horizontality might accord with Melba’s sense of expansion rather than the more enclosing sense of personal space experienced by those struggling to fit into a strange place. However, on the evidence of my interviews, subjects experience various ‘levels’ of attachment – from ‘deep’ attachments to apparently fleeting desires and affects. It is necessary for this analysis to encompass both transitional, surface modalities of (‘outside’) belonging and ‘inside’ belonging attached to an apparently interiorised subjectivity, both of which subjects undoubtedly experience.

Recall for instance the interviewee in Sydney who described her embodied sense of cultural location: ‘this (Chinese-ness) is the thing inside, but outside, I still have to get along with the English-speaking people, to deal with them.’¹¹ For this woman skin was both a marker of cultural and biological difference and a boundary that informed her

¹⁰ Probyn makes use of Elizabeth Grosz’s Spinozan take on desire: “Desire does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it requires; rather it aims at nothing above its own proliferation or self-expansion. It assembles things out of singularities and breaks things, assemblages, down into their singularities. It moves; it does.” (Grosz in Probyn: 49)

¹¹ See chapter 6 section e.

wider sense of place. Migrant belonging and desire for attachment cannot be considered separately from subjects' social insertion or fit with the places of migrancy, which is in turn related to different histories and contexts. Migrant impulses and desires to belong typically combine diverse discursive and affective elements: attachments to essentialised categories and to 'inessential' objects; deep and 'surface' desires; longings for the known and familiar and for the unfamiliar and novel; tastes tied to social limitation and material necessity and desires for a degree of freedom from these limitations.

Pursuing one side of an opposition between interior and exterior, depth and surface is not adequate for the analysis of cross-national migrant belonging. Interview accounts of migrants' sense of place are more suggestive of what Winnicott (1971:47-8) termed a 'potential space' – neither wholly an 'internal' subjective space nor an 'external' material environment shared with others. The potential space of migrant spatial stories draws simultaneously on lived physical space and imagined dimensions of memory and affect. It is at once 'outside' and 'inside'. Potential space as a 'space of play' was for Winnicott the zone of object seeking and exploration that allows the child to separate from its mother, or perhaps in our case from its motherland. Play is a means of building up confidence through the creation of other sources of trust and regularity. For migrant subjects 'feeling secure in a place' is enabled by exploratory practices which at once connect and separate places and ways of being.¹²

Impulses to belong are active means of 'moving' affectively, of bringing places into a liveable relation. In the next section I specifically investigate emergent 'national' feelings and tentative expressions of belonging, affinity or loyalty cast in different directions across the space of migrancy. These emergent affinities to one or other place are not nationalist, i.e. manifestations of an enduring sense of belonging to a nation state. They are forays into a mode of belonging not yet regularised or normalised. The

¹² While the concept of potential space might strictly apply only to the context of children's 'transitional objects' (thumbs, blankets, toys etc.), Winnicott also suggests an analogy with the space of play in a wider sense, that of 'cultural experience' in general. See Winnicott 1971: 112-24.

following section presents and analyses some instances of emergent national feelings of subjects in both Hong Kong and Sydney.

10d. Emergent national feelings

The limited feeling of national belonging to Australia amongst my informants is hardly surprising since they had lived in Australia for a relatively short time, and many had in fact returned to Hong Kong. Nevertheless expressions of some affinity to the host country were not uncommon, even amongst returnees.¹³ Josie was discussing her sense of being Australian, comparing the moment of her citizenship ceremony and hearing of Sydney's success in the bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games:

P: Getting your Australian citizenship, did it mean much to you?

J: Actually, I didn't get much sense of being Australian then, but when Australia got the Olympics, I'm just watching that when John ... Fahey, is that right?, and he's jumping with another person,¹⁴ and I'm jumping too (she makes a high pitched whooping sound). . . Sometimes watching cricket, with the West Indies, I listen to that and I watch the television, and if they win I will jump (she makes an excited sound again, like hmhohohohurray).

'Oh what a feeling', as the jumping Toyota ads say. Josie's elation at Sydney's Olympic selection might have validated her settlement choice, the feeling of having picked a winner. (Other Hong Kong people I spoke to felt it was an honour to have won the Olympic selection.) Josie's exuberant bodily response to sporting spectacles also signalled a transfer of national loyalty (although she hadn't cultivated any interest in sport in Hong Kong). But changing loyalty may be a slippery proposition hinting at

¹³ There are a number of organisations in Hong Kong reflecting strong Australian connections. These include Austcham (Australian chamber of commerce), the Australian Chinese Association of Hong Kong with around a thousand members, and various Australian university alumni groups with branches in Hong Kong.

¹⁴ She is referring to an iconic Australian media moment in 1993 when the New South Wales politician John Fahey was captured leaping into the air after the IOC chief Samaranch announced 'the winner is ... Sydney'.

more than other possibilities. Josie's thinking pursued the logic of her new national feeling to arrive at an ambivalent juncture:

That kind of behaviour, following the sports, usually a person do it like they feel they belong. I belong to Australia, so I will support them, I will feel really proud of them. But what if China came, like at war, like *clashing* – the question would be too hard to answer. Who would you turn to? The same as like, if my husband and my mother is drowning, which one would you want to get?

This sudden shift from sport to war and other matters of life and death suggests the potential gravity of making new alignments. Josie sensed in her shifting of loyalties that other loyalties and obligations could be compromised or betrayed. It was China, not Hong Kong that Josie counterposed to Australia as the alternative object of loyalty (the interview took place before 1997). Variable identifications with China and Hong Kong are part of the complex histories of Hong Kong people. Histories of belonging are both collective and individual, and include complex generational dynamics.

To illustrate I will use an account of Janey, a nurse in her thirties, who emigrated some five years ago and married an Australian. Her relations with her parents are important in this account. Janey's parents were now quite elderly. Both came from rural Guangdong, in the aftermath of the Second World War and Communist revolution. They have remained in Hong Kong, where their other children are still living. They have no intention of emigrating but have spent considerable amounts of time visiting their daughter and young grandchildren in Sydney. I offer this little 'window' onto the interpenetration of the perspectives of a mother and daughter: it provides a glimpse of the different generational affinities with Hong Kong and China, and with places beyond.

When I first interviewed her, Janey had not been living in Sydney for long and was feeling homesick. Janey complained by telephone of missing Hong Kong to her mother in Hong Kong. Her mother surprised her by berating her, 'Why do you feel homesick? Hong Kong is not your home.' For Janey's parents, Hong Kong had never represented a

stable entity, a place identifiable as a home. For Janey it was a palpable place of origin where she had an 'at home feeling'. Sociological studies have pointed to the relatively recent emergence of a national (or quasi-national) sense of being a Heunggong yan, a Hong Kong person (Lau & Kuan 1988: 2). Janey would often say that Hong Kong people do this or think that in a way that suggests a well-formed 'national' category that her parents do not possess.

However Janey's knowledge of China was filtered largely through her parents' memories. Her 'China' was a misty construction grounded in the affective world of her mother's stories and songs. When her mother visited Janey in Sydney they would go for a drive and her mother would sing songs from her village, including ones about the Japanese invasion of China:

In the car we sing old Chinese songs. She grew up in a peasant family, they have like a bamboo shelter, with a lot of plants growing on top, and the people sit there after a whole day of work, waiting for their husband or the son. So she's singing in the car and sometimes she's crying. Like they sing, oh the Japanese are coming, everything is peaceful until the Japanese come, lost everything, and then she will start crying. And definitely, when I hear the traditional songs that have a lot to do with the Chinese village, not Hong Kong, and when they sing they will just relate to the water, the fish, the farm, and things like that. But I never experienced that, but I feel like, that's China. So when I sing I just feel like, I belong there.

The imaginary of a peaceful rural China before the Japanese may be a fantasy of older refugees, yet Janey has inherited it.¹⁵ Janey had never been on a farm herself, or under a bamboo shelter. Her version of China was largely transmitted through her mother, with whom she paradoxically forged a much stronger bond since coming to live in Sydney.

¹⁵ Attitudes to the Japanese in Hong Kong are highly complicated and largely generational. They range from a deep hate and mistrust stemming from the Japanese invasion of China and the occupation of Hong Kong to an admiration and even fetishisation of Japan and Japanese culture as an alternative (Asian) source of modernity. Hong Kong interest in Japanese fashion, pop culture (manga, music, Hello Kitty)

They (the Chinese) never go and they never need to. They never need to settle anywhere. They never need to settle because they're always in one place with the same people all the time.

Janey, from her Hong Kong perspective, understands China and the Chinese as an homogenous and eternal presence, (notwithstanding the upheaval of its modern history and the resultant migrations of her parents). 'China' is the inverse of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Chinese – the Chinese are static while the Hong Kong Chinese are in motion:

J: This group of Chinese of Hong Kong, they need to settle all the time, to find comfort all the time. Adjust to the environment all the time. They're mobile. I remember like my mum usually said 'you are in a... *fáu tauh*, meaning like in Cantonese my mum said that you are in a *fáu tauh déi fóng*, meaning like parking...a ship will stay somewhere, a ship will come around in a....a....(she is searching for the right word) harbour, or a...

G: port...(her husband chimes in)

J: A port, yeah. You are living in a port, Hong Kong is a port, you got to learn a skill, otherwise you can't have a firm place to stand on.

P: A skill?

J: Yeah, yeah, something to settle, to stand firm, to stand on your feet or to just keep the status, or ...So my mum means like, this is not a stable environment, so you got to try your very best to catch up whatever that place wants you. So, I said that because that means from my very young age I need, I know that you've got to have a skill all the time to catch up.

Hong Kong is viewed as a transitional place against the stable verity of China and the Chinese. An imaginary of centrality and peripherality as well as relative size is operating here. China is the originary land and Hong Kong a ship or 'port', a place existing only as temporary mooring.

and technology (the latest electronic and communications products) is an important source of Hong

It is important to remember that this is Janey's mother's perspective 'translated' through Janey's tale, although it can be difficult to discern the boundaries between their accounts and opinions. Interestingly it is Janey's mother, with her 'primary' roots in rural Chinese culture who has the stronger disposition to mobility and the need to find the 'place of opportunity'. From Janey's perspective, China literally is a mother-land, since it is affectively transferred through her mother.

I do not mean to reinforce the 'Chinese sojourner' paradigm based on this view of China as eternal root of culture – this case suggests something more complicated. Janey's parents are stolidly anti-Communist and have never gone back across the border even for a short trip, even though their home-village is less than 100 kilometres away. Janey has a complex perspective, a mixture of a 'romantic' view of China filtered through her mother's representations and affective performances, combined with a more experientially grounded sense of herself as a Heunggongyan. She draws on all of these at various times, as well as this image of the 'floating motherland', that mobile pursuit of opportunity. Like other Hong Kong migrant subjects she may at times feel 'deep' attachments to Hong Kong or to China. She expresses these layered impulses to belong as being oriented to three 'homes':

Hong Kong is my home, where I grow up, where I learned everything. Yeah, Hong Kong is my home, and from a very young age I see China is my country. And now my husband and kids are here, I will naturally feel that this is my home. Like this is my home but my heart is still there I suppose. Sort of hard, I can't figure it out but this is true.

Multiple homes: Hong Kong as birthplace and place of formation; China as cultural reference point and mother-land; Sydney as the place of the father, the home that must be made. Janie's strategy in Sydney seems to have been to deepen practices of Chineseness, to bring the Chinese home into the Australian home.

Kong's cultural modernism.

When she arrived in Sydney, Janey became preoccupied with learning to cook Chinese food. She had never cooked at all while living with her parents in Hong Kong. Her mother had always maintained control of all domestic work, and never even encouraged her daughters to assist her, although she would watch her mother preparing food. (As with some other informants, the mother's domination of the small household space in Hong Kong was felt to be almost total.) When Janey first came to Sydney, her mother's home cooking was one of the things she missed most. When she no longer had access to motherly provision, she had to reproduce it for herself and for her family. Janey learned to cook superbly, largely by reconstructing memories of what her mother did in her tiny kitchen, and matching the results to remembered tastes and smells, adjusting techniques to match the remembered flavours, colours and smells. Janey would sometimes ring her mother in Hong Kong to check the ingredients of a sauce, but only if she could not work it out herself.¹⁶ This reproduction of motherly provision was also extended to the adoption of 'traditional' techniques of birthing and post-partum care. After she gave birth to her first child she mainly ate *geung cho*, a concoction of pigs feet and eggs stewed in vinegar, ginger and medicinal herbs.¹⁷ For about forty days after the birth she would do little but remain in bed. This period is one of the few times when motherhood is explicitly privileged. 'Maybe I would not have bothered with the Chinese way of looking after myself and the baby – in Hong Kong most people think it's a bit old fashioned.' Her strategy seems to be less about maintaining traditions, than a means of claiming from a cultural background certain comforting ways of caring and being cared for in an environment that seemed indifferent to her motherhood. But it also involved a connection of 'substance' to Hong Kong and to her mother. I was enlisted to bring back large bags of 'special' ginger and herbs from Hong Kong, even though they could be bought in Sydney. Migration may prompt the generation or intensification of 'traditional' practices as a way of filling a certain feeling of 'lack'.

¹⁶ When her mother came to stay in Sydney, she promptly took over all aspects of the domestic life of Janey's family home, including cooking, cleaning and childcare, to the extent that the family felt 'evicted' from the house. Janey was not allowed to demonstrate her cooking prowess.

¹⁷ Yao Souchou (2000: 67-68) has written of the fusion of culinary, medicinal and symbolic values in specific dishes meant to restore and recharge the body. The rich taste and gelatinous texture of the pork skin and meat, and the sweetness of the sauce offset by the medicinal 'bitterness' of the ginger and herbs, provides a complex sensory and cultural experience fused with the experience of birth and mothering.

Another cultural dimension that may come into play is the complex and varied relations of Hong Kong people to the English and English-ness. We should not assume that Hong Kong migrants are necessarily ‘interpolated’ only or even primarily as Asian or Chinese subjects. Migrant subjects I have observed are just as likely to exhibit tensions between belonging and autonomy, between individuation and integration with a social collectivity. We cannot assume a straightforward desire to gravitate to ‘migrant communities’ in Australia. Amongst my informants I often noticed an explicit disavowal of attachments based on a similarity of background. There was sometimes an explicit avoidance of concentration and propinquity when people chose to live in areas away from other Asians or Chinese (see chapter 7). More likely there is an oscillation between desires to maintain contact with people who share a point of origin and desires for autonomous engagements with multiple contacts to be found in everyday urban life.¹⁸ Hong Kong subjects were already located in such a cosmopolitan urban milieu with plenty of urban ‘attitude’. The characterisations of Sydney as non-urban or backwards attest to this.

The next story concerns a relationship formed with Aussies, and the impulse to forge attachments with the most culturally legitimate people. Stanley is a computer technician in his forties who settled with his family in a northern suburb of Sydney. He tells of developing a close friendship with an older Aussie man in his neighbourhood:

My neighbour actually treats me as his son. I just moved in and he invites me to take tea. His wife makes some of the very good cake and some dessert. I really enjoy. He’s an Australian, from the third or the fourth generation. They own that land. They own half of the suburb in the past, according to what they told me. Just a big piece of farm. I prefer to live in an area with the old traditional Australian than the new migrant. The new migrant, they still have to find a way to settle. Everything, every sliding movement will

¹⁸ This was a major problematic in Simmel’s pioneering studies of metropolitan life. Modern cities bring together multiple different forms of life and sensation. Metropolitan life is apt to be characterised by both heightened intimacy and engagement with different forms of life, as well as with embodied strategies of inattention and disengagement, what Simmel termed the ‘blasé attitude’ (Simmel 1997: 178-85).

make them to think whether it's against them or for them.¹⁹ But the old one, it doesn't matter. The old Australian, they have seen things change. For example, now they try to accept the Asian, I mean the Asian migrant, whereas some 15 years ago they accept the Greek and Italian. The same thing.

Stanley exhibits a capacity to take on an overview of the social contents of the nation from the viewpoint of this 'old traditional Australian.' Migrants who 'still have to find a way to settle' are not fully Australian in this view, which is (in a way) remarkably perceptive of the relations of national belonging, in which belonging is not an either/or relation, but a matter of differential accumulations of 'national capital.'²⁰ I am not suggesting that Stanley adopted such an intellectualist attitude to the social relations of migrant insertion into the country. He does, however seem to have the assurance to arbitrate about the position of others in relation to the nation. He can do this by aligning with his neighbour's 'pioneer' narrative of suburban squattocracy.

P: You're saying you'd rather not live with the people who are still settling?

S: I prefer to live with the old Australians. I mean old ones who have been here more than two or three generations. The new ones they have to fend for their family, they have to fend for their kids, get a secure job.

P: You feel more at ease with them [the old Australians]?

S: And they are not that mean. Some of the new migrants, they are very mean.

P: Which migrants?

S: I mean the (other) neighbours. At a certain stage my fence was damaged, and I don't know how to fix it. And I have no time to do it. My neighbour, who is going to be eighty, he went to buy the wood, and then he nailed it, and he fixed the fence. That is a common experience. But I am much younger than him, he is eighty and I am only forty at that time. He fixed it for me, and he said, 'you don't have to pay.' He paid everything. And later on, when I find some of the fence is damaged, then I say, 'this is my part.' And he gave me the whole bucket of nails, and said 'This is useless to

¹⁹ These two sentences were also quoted in the previous chapter.

²⁰ Hage refers to practical nationality as an accumulation of recognised and valued cultural styles as well as embodied characteristics – 'looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour etc.' (Hage 1998: 53).

me. Can you take it? If you need it, you just put it (?)’ So it makes a big difference. Little things that make you feel it’s totally different.

The largesse and noblesse of the ‘old Australian’ is contrasted with the meanness of migrant neighbours. ‘Little things’ rendered are taken as a sign of a more expansive nature. These little things confer Stanley a place on the side of the ‘established’ Australians.²¹ Stanley is able to view ‘the migrants’, the Greeks, the Italians, and the Asians as other to himself, as ‘strata’ of settlers legitimated by the longevity of occupation (indigenous Australians are entirely absent from this scheme). This viewpoint on Australian society relies on a substantial objectification and distancing from an identity with migrancy. Stanley shows a capacity to transcend migrant status through complicity with the ‘old traditional Australian’, and the naturalness of this myth of settler domination.

The next example shows how forms of ‘national’ loyalty can be generated out of quite ‘impersonal’ qualities and standards. When Eartha was in Sydney (she had returned to Hong Kong) she was constantly struck by the inefficiency of Australian businesses and services. This made her feel that things ‘fitted together’, worked better in Hong Kong.

When I was in Australia I found that, especially when I worked at the bank, I found the people were just too slow. They don’t know how to hurry, to accommodate your needs. That made me think about the bank in Hong Kong – the queue is always *sooo* long, and the teller have to work *very very* fast (the words are *very* stressed – she is getting excited and speaking more loudly). Otherwise people will yell at them, and complain. Well, one thing, I’m proud of Hong Kong when I was in Australia. They are very very efficient. That’s why I was proud of Hong Kong there.

²¹ This study is guilty of the rhetorical violence of classifying ‘migrants’ separately from ‘Australians’.

The efficiency of banking practices seems like odd material for ‘national’ pride. However, this is related to qualities that we have seen ascribed as attributes of Hong Kong – speed, pressure, competition, convenience, economic success. Technological artefacts in Hong Kong – buildings, bridges, tunnels, airports, public transport, and many elements of ‘infrastructure’ – are often promoted to instil a sense of pride in Hong Kong. Developmental ‘success’ is an overlooked dimension of national feeling. Discourses and hierarchies of technical development produce a kind of ‘evolutionary’ chain in comparisons of Hong Kong and Sydney. Kevin, an electrical engineer, was concerned with electrical infrastructure in Sydney:

My first impressions...Australia is not a very advanced country. Most of the families they own old fashioned electrical appliances. And also telecommunication technology is not so advanced as Hong Kong. And also you can see the overhead lines for electricity are everywhere in the suburbs, as far as Central (Station), not as good as in Hong Kong. But the people – it’s very friendly compared with Hong Kong people. You can talk with them anywhere, for example, if you are travel in a coach, you can talk with them, you can talk about anything. In Hong Kong you can never do that – if you do that, they think you are crazy (laughs).

Electrical engineers tend to view the world in terms of its electrical engineering. Kevin’s technical judgements may well be related to the fact that he was unable to find a suitable job in his field and was forced to return to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the thrust of his account fits with the general structure of comparisons that positions Hong Kong on the side of economy and technology and Australia on the side of nature and leisure. Australia is a backward but friendly place, possessing certain ‘down-home’ values, a simpler world without the demands and constraints of Hong Kong. This structure of values is echoed in Kevin’s view of driving and drivers in Sydney and Hong Kong. In Sydney:

They are gentle; they always give way to other driver, not the case in Hong Kong (I laugh). I think the main reason is because people in Hong Kong are always in a hurry, you know, they want to save every second. But here (the interview was in Hong Kong)

everything is in a rush. For example, they never signal their car. When they want to turn left or turn right, they never signal.²²

Gentleness versus aggressiveness: it is as if subjects have allocated different sides of their 'natures' to the places that constitute the migrant place-world. As I suggested earlier, the space of migrancy tends to be divided up into economic potentiality (Hong Kong) and social potentiality (Australia). Andrea's account provides a typical reading of this division. She had returned to Hong Kong for economic reasons, but plans to go back to Australia in future. She argued that Australia had a 'better lifestyle':

A: ... in all aspects. The living environment, all the other things like, the education for the kids, the relationship with friends, everything.

P: Did you get to know a lot of people there?

A: I think Hong Kong is a very strange place. Everybody in Hong Kong is in a hurry.

If you got friends, you won't be able to, um, to go deeper with your friends. But in Australia it's quite different. But they are not in a hurry, in a rush at all. In Australia they emphasise the family life, something like that. I mean, when you have friends in Sydney, you can go very deep with them, but in Hong Kong you have no time to do it.

Migration supplies a critical distance that allows subjects to see a strangeness in Hong Kong life. Again we encounter the mixing of native 'sociological' interpretations of environment, lifestyle, standard of living etc. with dispositional perceptions of places – of spatial densities, speed, urgency, intensity and social depth. Again speed is a key quality, an embodied ethical style which encompasses the social imperatives that are felt to be inherent in Hong Kong as a place. Speed – which implies a sense of different bodily engagements – is associated with Hong Kong's economic pressure, competitiveness and discipline. Lack of speed is associated with Australian space, with

²² This accords with my observations of driving styles in Hong Kong. Drivers in Hong Kong are imperious, since they are much more of an elite – a large proportion owning luxury cars. But from what I have observed, Hong Kong drivers in Sydney are generally very cautious, perhaps over-cautious and conscious of rules, as if they no longer possess the assurance of their place. Also many Hong Kong people first learn to drive in Sydney. Ownership of a car is more necessary to get around, and car ownership and associated costs such as parking are relatively inexpensive compared to Hong Kong. So driving is a new

family life, leisure, friendship, nature. It is as if discrete social spheres were allocated to Hong Kong and Australia, holus-bolus, as though no one worked in Australia or relaxed in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was often presented as a place where family solidarity is valued, but cannot be effectively realised. Australia was identified with *social* potential associated with more time and opportunity for family life, a greater autonomy from economic exigencies and from the social fields of work. Andrea extended this logic to the realm of friendship:

When you have Australian friends, you can't go deep. Like when I was in Sydney I had Australian friends, but still, although we are not very close, I always felt, like, I can go and see them and talk to each other. The thing is, we can't go very deep because our cultural background is different. But in here, we've got the same cultural background, but we haven't got time to go deeper.

Personal dilemmas and social critiques are played out in these comparisons of places. In Sydney Andrea could have Aussie friends but cultural differences limited the 'depth' of friendship. In Hong Kong, she has close friends, but is alienated from them by demands of Hong Kong life. With her return to Hong Kong, the greater space of the suburban home in Australia and the possibility of centring social life more in the home has become an object of yearning for Andrea.

The place-worlds mutually constituted by these migrant movements contain complementary elements of an imagined fullness of being. But in these cases, the elements cannot be easily brought together: the places, Hong Kong and Sydney, cannot effectively be integrated. Nevertheless a hope remains that these aspects can be brought together in the future. In the meantime, a dualism is maintained between these places and their potentialities. This perception of place effects an allocation of temporal

experience for many, including Kevin: his perspective on Hong Kong drivers is basically that of a pedestrian.

aspects to spatial referents. Where Australia is located as a place to retire, social potentiality is something to be deferred. Or where Australia is imagined as ‘just like a resort’, a kind of ludic territory, the subject understands ‘Australia’ as a commodity space dedicated to enjoyment and a separation from necessity. Such strategies (Australia as pleasure principle) may be a way of maintaining a distance from Australia’s specific civic and political realms. Australia was not often recognised as a social sphere in which migrants could interact and participate as subjects.

As I suggested earlier national investments and affinities are related inversely to a specific economy of social possibilities. Only a couple of subjects were able to aspire to a ‘global’ fullness of existence – assisted either by their economic or professional capacity which confers international mobility, or by cultural capacities to ‘profitably’ negotiate differences between cultures. One example, a willing astronaut called Raymond, has a house in Sydney where his wife and son live, while he spends most of the time in Hong Kong tending to his business interests. His family commutes to Hong Kong for maybe three months a year. As he described it:

R: I have two homes. I’m living across the ocean (laughs).

P: You can be equally comfortable in both places?

R: Yeah. I like Australia. When I first visited I just loved it. I still feel it’s a country I’ll go and stay one day. The people are more friendly. (...) But I think I would find it difficult to get a job in Australia that can offer this satisfaction. In terms of financial rewards, I can probably earn seven to ten times as much (as in Australia). If I work here for two years, I can stay in Australia for twenty years.

This astronaut account exhibits a familiar structure – social potential is separated out from labour and economic actions and associated with Australia. Autonomous social enjoyment is deferred until after certain economic goals are achieved. But Raymond does not feel any imperative to develop a strong attachment to Australia, since as an economically and professionally valuable migrant, he could be located anywhere. As he said, ‘I don’t have a very strong and narrow nationalistic thing – in a way I’m a citizen

of the world'. This is almost literally true. He explains how his employer, a multinational company:

To keep me in Hong Kong, they offered me a round-the-world migration plan. I can be in Australia, and if the visa expires I can go to Canada, wait for awhile, then when Canada's visa expires, I can go to the States. Once the (United) States expires, then it will be ten to fifteen years down the road.

A differential economy of 'global' migrant belonging is apparent. As one of the two fully 'transnational' subjects in this study, Raymond displays the easy mobile sense of belonging that goes with the freedom from needing a specific place of belonging. (Both were men who articulated an identification with world citizenry.) We can counterpose this global viewpoint with the experience of the mostly middling migrants engaged in a quotidian struggle to make a place and belonging somewhere in the more restricted spaces between Hong Kong and Sydney.

10e. Chapter conclusion

Pursuing the line of this study, this chapter on 'belonging between' emerged from an analysis of migrant dispositions towards lived spaces, and of differing accounts of mobility and possibility in relation to these spaces. The exploration of diverse ways of making attachments and affiliations across the spatial and social networks of migrancy is a way of thinking beyond fixed territories or assumed cultural frameworks. Lovell's emphasis on the multivocality of belonging and Probyn's interest in the surface play of impulses to belong were useful in dispensing with the need to specify fixed identity categories attached to a single place or cultural category.

Nonetheless I do not suggest that these emergent attachments are arbitrary. They are related to subjects' capacities to translate dispositions and social and cultural capital into new contexts. However, there is rarely a smooth translation. It is necessary to consider the 'fit' of dispositions to a new place along with subjects' impulses to belong and pursue specific identifications. My examination of subjects' attunement to unfamiliar

spaces and social styles in Sydney suggests a continuum – between demands of assimilatory adjustment to the ‘host’ order and the expanded dispositions which generate new pleasures and capacities drawn from the specificity of engagements with very different places. The inhabitation of new spaces and contexts necessitates an expansion of ways of being to incorporate new knowledge and intuitive capacities to act. Migrant trajectories could be experienced as ‘dislocation’, a rupture of places and modes of being attuned to those places. Or they could be experienced as ‘expansion’, the enhancement of possibilities and orientations to new spaces and contexts. The highly mobile styles of migrancy I have been describing require making ongoing accommodations between places and sharply differing ways of being. These accommodations entail a play of desires, tastes and impulses to belong across the larger place constituted by migration.

Interviewees’ stories detailed different modes of belonging between Hong Kong and Sydney. Subjects demonstrated different ways of bringing these places into a relation, and of drawing together practical experience, representations of place and affective nuances. They expressed shifting inclinations, loyalties and attachments to one place or other. Accounts of belonging between Hong Kong and Australia showed diverse and divergent ‘national’ orientations. Various objects could emerge as quasi-‘national’ referents within a play of preferences, loyalties, attachments and desires. However, there was no *single* narrative or representation on which nascent identifications were based. ‘National’ identifications and attachments emerge as contingent objects in a ‘space of play’ that could encompass elements from either Hong Kong or Australia.²³

Subjects in Sydney sometimes felt an interpolation as Australian subjects, beginning to feel a closer relation to Australian interests. The emotional slipperiness inherent in all

²³ This accords with Kapferer’s account of national ideologies being grounded in ‘mutable’ ontologies of practice, ‘in the actions and interpretations made by actors in the course of lived experience’ where ‘commonsense and everyday understandings take form’ (B. Kapferer 1993: 29, 35). For Kapferer, the analytical comparison of contrasting cultural logics – such as Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka and ‘egalitarian’ Australian nationalism – can reveal the different grounding of national ideologies. In this study migrant accounts themselves offer up comparisons of differing modes of national attachment or identity, however enduring or momentary.

belonging was most apparent in early stages of migrancy, when the balance between strategies of adjustment to the ways of the host and the continuity of cultural being is most precarious. New attachments could collide with old, such as entangled intra-familial loyalties to China, Hong Kong and to Australia.

National feeling for Australia could also be diminished or undermined on encountering the lesser status and recognition often accorded to migrants. Some subjects could not even conceive that Australian belonging could even apply to them, that whiteness and Anglo culture defined the category of 'Australian'. Bodily features could be taken as the basis of national belonging, enforcing an internalisation of culture or Chinese-ness in the migrant body.²⁴ On the other hand, others could easily connect to Aussie myths and values. We saw how one subject made a mythic identification with the 'old traditional Australian', an alignment with the most legitimate and established settlers. This fantasy also involved the construction of a hierarchical positioning of migrant others structured by degrees of legitimate 'settlement' in a suburban neighbourhood. This is only a more clearly articulated example of the way in which subjects 'place' themselves within a multicultural space such as Sydney. I have already showed how emergent distinctions between localities within Sydney frequently coalesced around hierarchies of class and ethnic/national qualities.

Retraditionalizing strategies cohering around Chineseness could be intensified with settlement in Australia, as a compensation for a perceived lack of recognition of a cultural way of being previously taken for granted. Patriotic songs or comforting tastes and smells could help to fill a perceived loss of continuity with the ease of belonging associated with the past. But most subjects had little interest in systematically cultivating reminders of Hong Kong. They were more likely to pursue new enjoyments and modes of belonging. These could range from tastes for small pleasures like 'coffee on the road' or barbecues, to a more a basic reorganisation of sociality, such as the pursuit of a gay desire and lifestyle perceived (by one subject) to be untenable in Hong Kong.

Migrant experiences could also reaffirm attachments to Hong Kong as a viable space of development. Feelings of attachment to Hong Kong often cohered around a sense of economic and infrastructural viability. This was usually linked to the array of perceptual associations linked with Hong Kong's style of living and the sense of a different bodily engagement. Specific contrasts of lived space from electrical wiring to the speed of bank queues could recall the developmental viability of Hong Kong as a source of belonging.

By contrast, Sydney was often associated with a folkish *gemeinschaft*, with friendly 'rural' characteristics apparently lost in hyper-urban Hong Kong. This mapping of Hong Kong-Sydney was largely modelled on the projected dispositions of migrant subjects. The imagining of Sydney/Australia as a place of nature, of potential for enhanced social being supplies 'another side' to the Hong Kong sense of place. As spaces of representation both 'Sydney' and 'Hong Kong' might appear to be lacking in dimension, as two halves of a psychologised geography.

These typifications are not simply 'representations' unconnected to empirical experience. They are artefacts of a specific 'common sense', drawing on people's everyday practical experience of place as well as on their shared talk of a more or less banal kind. I made the point that this structure of common-sense comparisons initially assists migrant subjects in 'settling', in placing themselves in relation to the practical exigencies of being in an unfamiliar place without succumbing to oceanic longings to be elsewhere.

A common 'class' structure of dispositions, values and spaces of representation, around the polarities of economic/social, necessity/freedom, urban/rural, culture/nature, fast/slow, Chinese-ness/whiteness and so on – was generated out of a specific contrast of places enacted by a migrant group. The analysis of the perceived qualities attributed to Hong Kong and Sydney has been useful in pointing to ways that places embody dualised

²⁴ See chapter 6, section 6e.

values which mark out points of tension and contestation, as well as directions and possibilities for dispositional change.

However, the migrant 'spaces of representation' I have been describing are not at all fixed, but still emergent and transitional. We have seen how multiple ways of belonging (and not belonging) between Sydney and Hong Kong were manifested in a range of affective states, from traumatic dislocation to pleasurable expansion. Forms of suffering accompanied a sense of being in the wrong place, or of being poorly disposed to a place. But subjects were also able (in varying degrees) to accommodate and integrate migrant experience into a larger sense of place, to find contrasting qualities enjoyable and profitable, 'nice and exciting' in their distinctiveness.

Migration must after all offer some possibility of going beyond, of stretching the boundaries of potentiality and opening up the unexpected. Studies of migrant practices should not preclude the sense of surprise and change that can be found in the most quotidian guise. I would like to close out this chapter with a final story illustrating the ordinariness of belonging between Sydney and Hong Kong.

You might recall Fay's account of settlement in Sydney.²⁵ Fay was resistant to Sydney's perceived slowness and 'backwardness'. She seemed to embody a reluctant exile suffering in kind of a suburban Siberia. With the passing of time Fay came to see Sydney's slowness more positively as 'more relaxed' or 'more lenient'. She was pleasantly surprised to receive a reminder notice for an unpaid bill, 'instead of just cutting off the phone, like they do in Hong Kong'. This is the other side of her concern with 'efficiency'. Hong Kong still embodied speed and productive energy as opposed to Sydney's more relaxed pace, but Fay now saw some value in taking it easier:

Yeah, keep going, going. For young people definitely, Hong Kong is the place to be. Where you're getting older, sort of mellow, (said laughingly) getting mellow in Australia, I think that's it. Learning that shopping isn't everything, and other things like gardening.

²⁵ See chapter 6, section 6d.

You know, my friend, she got big garden at home, and she find satisfaction in doing gardening. The flowers coming up, very satisfying. So I can learn from her, see things from a different point of view. I even got to like ironing shirts.

This well-to-do cosmopolitan *taai-taai* who always had domestic help in Hong Kong was bemused by finding some pleasure in everyday domestic duties. Fay made an accommodation with Sydney's more relaxed pace, a flip side of Hong Kong's urban intensity. She could be resigned to Sydney, accepting 'retirement' and domestication, while her husband was largely away working in China or Hong Kong. Was this a happy assimilation? Or resignation to the marginalisation of a gendered division of labour on a international scale? Fay had decided to remain in Sydney for several years for the sake of her daughter's schooling, but was still unsure of the future. She was thinking of returning to the 'hustle-bustle' of Hong Kong for a while, or going to Toronto where she had many friends, or even to Shanghai perhaps, things might be better there now.... This is not the end of the story.