

Appendix: Notes accompanying CD of *City in Between*.

I include a recording of the sound piece, *City in Between*, because it represented a parallel project to my fieldwork. This work is not essential to the thesis, but nevertheless complements it. In other words, you can choose to listen to it or not. *City in Between* was commissioned by *The Listening Room*, a radio art program on the Australian Broadcasting Corporations' Radio National. It was composed and assembled by composer Robert Iolini¹ and myself in 1997, Hong Kong's world-historical year. We took advantage of the momentary interest in Hong Kong's fate to secure some funding to do this piece. Here is an excerpt from our original proposal to the ABC:

The piece will deal with what this transition is for the people of Hong Kong on an everyday level.... The work will include such elements as Hong Kong media commentary, environmental sounds such as transport and moving objects, live protests, interviews, Cantopop and Cantonese Opera, Hong Kong musical and theatrical performance. The field recordings will try to capture the kinetic character of Hong Kong life, tracing a trajectory between one order and another.... This will be a collaborative work drawing upon our backgrounds in composition, musical performance and anthropology.

Remarkably, this is quite an accurate description of the final work. It was intended to be at once a musical and an ethnographic work. It also has a cinematic quality to it, in that it invokes images and scenes through aural means, and aspires to a certain dramatic momentum through time. I was inspired by Wim Wenders' *Song of Lisbon*, a movie about a sound recordist who goes to Lisbon to work on a non-existent film about the city, who wanders the city looking for its characteristic sounds. The film offers an inversion of the usually subordinate role of sound in cinema – the complex nature of the soundscape is for once given an equal value with the image. I became that sound recordist, wondering the streets with a mini-disc machine, capturing everything including railway announcements, dripping urinals, the ubiquitous singing of the *Internationale* at demonstrations, and the surprising array of frogs to found in Hong Kong.

I describe this piece as a 'parallel project' because it informed my ideas about the nature of a social space, and its contents. Diverse sound 'objects' of different rhythm and constancy coexist in a three dimensional acoustic environment of immense complexity. Sampling technologies

¹ A recording of this piece is found on the CD titled *Iolini* (ReR Megacorp ReR R11).

allow any sound to be combined and manipulated musically and spatially. Com-position entails isolating and reconstructing sonic elements in a completely new audio space. Nevertheless, these sounds retain a trace of their original contexts and ambiances, their impurities. *City in between* is an active work of memory and projection. We specifically aimed to construct a sense of Hong Kong in 1997 as I felt it. The composer has enormous freedom to play with meaningful and affective ‘resonances’. These were deployed in the combination of elements simulating at different moments expectation, indifference, violence, protest, fear, nostalgia, and uncanny threat.

This work has a clear anthropological component. Fragments of field interviews were used as narrative devices to set up opposing perspectives, for instance the desire to leave Hong Kong and the desire to stay. We developed two ‘songs’, which were more extended and layered constructions conveying more complex information and affective ‘moods’. One of these songs was generated from the interview described in chapter 1, about the ambivalence and distancing from the events of the handover. The recording includes the original voice of the interviewee and background sounds from the party where the interview took place. The harmonic structure for the song was generated from the pitch relations of a particular frog. The music that alternates with the sung verse, was transcribed from the variations of an old erhu player I recorded in Tsim Sha Tsui.

The second song forms the last section of *City*. It was inspired by material from an anthropological paper investigating the series of rumours that spread in the early 1990s about children who appeared in a television commercial (Evans 1997). They were thought to be ghosts, or one child was a ghost causing the death of the others. The rumours and uncanny speculations may have been tied to political anxiety at the time of the arrival of Patten, the last British governor. The singer ² narrates some elements of this scenario in a fairly fragmentary and ‘subliminal’ manner. These words float above dense and bubbling layers of sound derived from Cantonese Opera, treated voices, cello samples and an improvised performance recorded in Hong Kong featuring Ling Li, Chan Wai-fat, Nelson Hui, Lee Man-sang and myself.

There is scope for further ethnographic collaborations with musicians and composers, as well as a need to further thinking about the aesthetic and ethical considerations of such work.

² The singer in both of these songs was Michele Morgan.