

Chinese identities: official representations and new ethnicities

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critique of official representations of Chinese identities, with particular reference to the City of Birmingham. The basis of the critique stems from a consideration of Stuart Hall's new ethnicities thesis and follows the trajectory of his thesis to the ideas and methods surrounding deconstruction. Through unfolding this critique, the course of the thesis considers (a) the terms that delimit the emergence of Chinese identity in the local government archive and (b) a number of governmental propositions as well as their constitutive outside. The propositions that are decentred include: the Post World War II claims to the natural order of city life that I counter pose with the elision of immigration, a Chinese presence that is offered to the authenticate Birmingham's Chinese Quarter that I counter pose through showing the regulative role of writing, a notion of community as a cohesive, uniform entity that I counter pose through showing the necessity of a co-existing state and, finally, the centring of a Chinese philanthropic entrepreneur that I counter pose by showing the borders of the City's gift-giving. Despite the apparent fragmented nature of the above arguments, the research repeatedly encounters numerous claims to the sovereignty of Chinese identity. These claims run through and conjoin each chapter. However, the thesis also shows that such claims are partial thus marking a selective appropriation of cultural difference and the lack of a settled relationship between the Chinese population and the City of Birmingham. The thesis concludes with a discussion on the City's hospitality.

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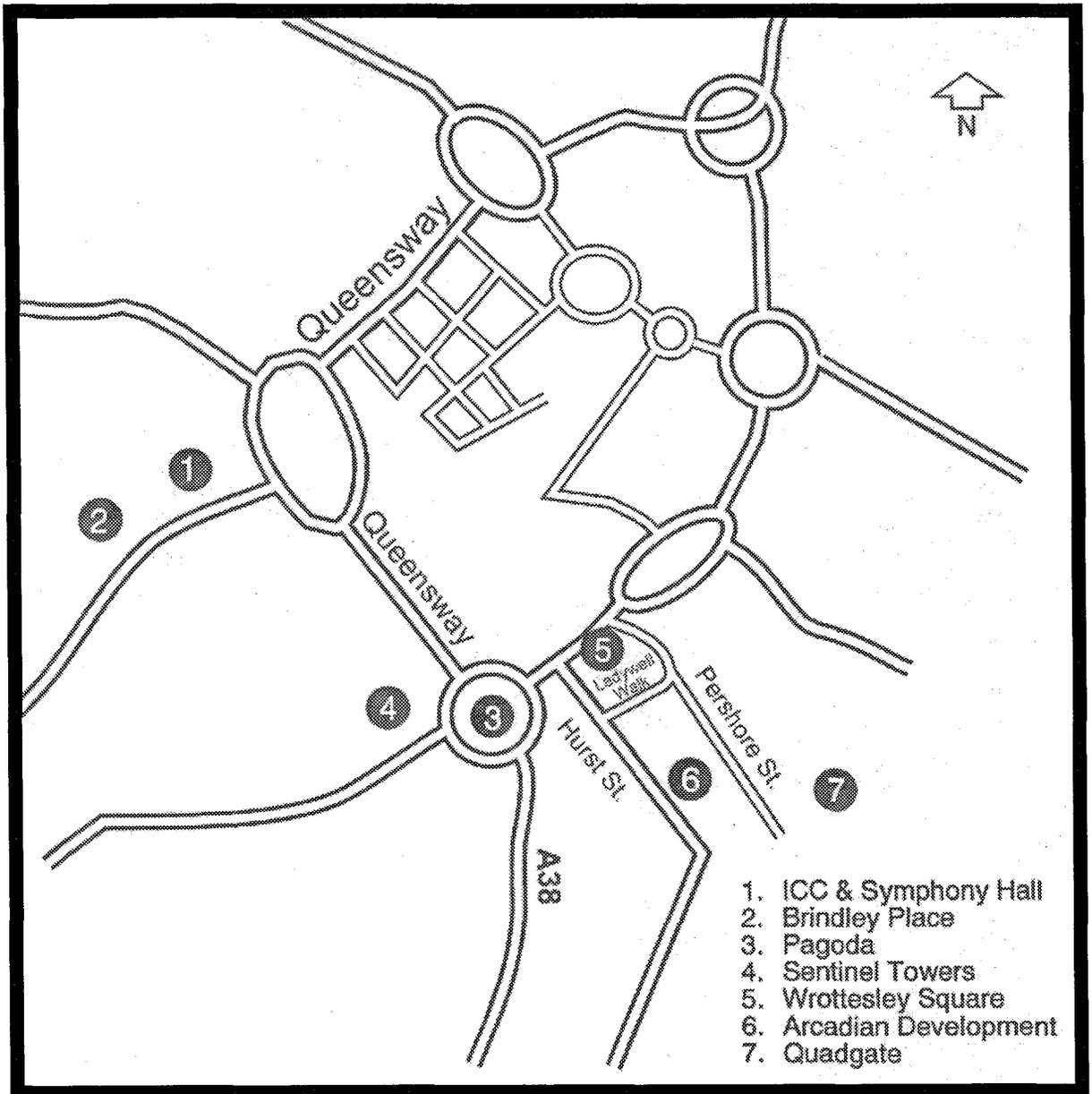
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Map 1.



The Queensway and Hurst Street , Birmingham City Centre.

INTRODUCTION

At the mouth of the A38 underpass between Holloway Head and the Smallbrook Queensway, lie two residential tower blocks called Clydesdale and Cleveland (see Map 1). Both of these towers were built in the early 1970s and during their construction their architect, James Roberts, proudly called them the “Sentinels” as they were “to mount guard like two twentieth century watch towers over the city centre” (Birmingham Evening Mail, January 23rd 1971). However, behind these highly modernist sentiments have always been traces of a chequered multicultural history. For even on the building of their Corbusian styled lines, the towers involved immigrant labour and such was a vision of race in Birmingham that the local press portrayed them as a separate team of Irish labourers and another of Indian workers who competed to build each tower in a race between races to the skies (ibid.). More recently, reports on these towers have shifted from such a celebratory tone. Amongst many other things, planners now call the Sentinels an “ugly graph paper design” and have sought to embellish their exterior with blue neon strips and gleaming glass reception areas. The local and national press have also sensationally labelled them a “Aids colony” or “ghetto for gays” and told stories of residents who were “so scared of touching [the] lift buttons that they don protective gloves” (Daily Star, August 29th 1994) and of others that concern a “pensioner” who “contemplated throwing herself from her 27th floor balcony” in fear of catching HIV (Birmingham Post, August 29th 1994).

Located directly below the Sentinels is the Hollow Circus Redevelopment. This scheme tells something of a contrasting multicultural story. Not least, with its pagoda and feng shui landscaped gardens, it has an aesthetic that supposedly symbolises a distinct ethnic minority community. Indeed, on its opening in 1998 the Mayor of Birmingham even went as

far to suggest that the development acted as their official welcome to the city. It seems, at least on first sight, that Birmingham has a shifting and heterogeneous multicultural history involving a fixation on pluralism, the fear of difference and the emergence of minority groups. In this thesis, I consider the articulation of these very issues and the way that they interweave through urban regeneration, immigration, ethnocentrism, advocacy, community and gift giving. I do so, through examining the particular representations and political formation of one minority group, Birmingham's Chinese population, although it should be noted at the outset that this study has never just been about them. I also explore Stuart Hall's new ethnicities thesis and its trajectory through deconstruction.

Towards some aims and objectives

As an undergraduate at Liverpool, I reluctantly took a module entitled "Community Studies". As a part of the course programme, the lecturer wanted one student per week to give a presentation. As she made clear, each presentation was to be on a voluntary basis as it was not to be assessed. I didn't want to do one and I thought the probability was in my favour: there were around 30-40 other students (most of them white) and only 9 weeks left. However, once the number of volunteers dwindled, the lecturer turned to me and asked me to give a presentation on the Chinese community in Liverpool. I refused. Although I was a British Chinese person living in Liverpool and I also knew that my Dad and his friends used to travel from Manchester to Liverpool's Far East restaurant for dim sum, I felt I didn't know anything about the Chinese community in this city. I remember that at that point, another student stepped in and suggested that she would do the presentation instead, but in the end and at the insistence of the lecturer I did it. I must admit, apart from receiving a question that referred to the secret world of Chinatown, it wasn't that bad. I read Irene Loh Lynn (1982) as well as Mariah Lin Wong (1989) and it gave me a forum to vent my rage by refuting the

notions of community that were implicit in the course. As I understand them now, these notions run close to particularism, equivalence and the insider.

One paper that was instrumental in helping me make sense of the above anecdote and, indeed, many others was Stuart Hall's *New Ethnicities* (1996a). As I understand it, the premise of this paper is with evaluating the black experience and is an attempt by Hall to mark a phase in cultural politics that cannot be reduced to pre-named figures or absolutist designations in the field of the social. More particularly, this essay remarks upon a shift in black cultural politics from what Hall calls "the struggle over the politics of representation to a politics of representation itself" (Hall, 1996a, 442). In short, what this means is that there has effectively been a roughly cut movement from a phase where a black cultural politics sought to gain access to representation through mobilising a unified "black" identity to one where there has been some degree of reflexivity to political closure. Hall adeptly signals this new chapter by calling it "the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject" (ibid. 443) and he marks its demise by noting that the signifier of "black" is a social construction that articulates itself across cultural boundaries and interweaves with dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

In Hall's thesis, the key exemplars used to demonstrate this political shift concern those that document the experiences of diaspora and transnational cultural artefacts, in particular film. Yet as Les Back (1996, 4) points out, irrespective of these empirical pointers, Hall still leaves his thesis in a highly heuristic state and he avoids "the cultural dynamics of new ethnicities at the level of everyday life". Undoubtedly, Back goes some way in addressing this lack by offering a detailed account of the interwoven narratives of racism, community and ethnicity that produce the highly complex and uneven vernacular cultures that exist amongst young people in London. However, for me, whilst I think Hall's thesis carries

specificity and an ethnographic trajectory that Back has followed through (also see Parker, 1998a, 1998b), the new ethnicities thesis covers some wider conceptual issues that can be mobilised with respect to a range of discursive fields. I suggest this as, broadly speaking, his thesis (a) shares a concern with explaining the *formation* of identity and its representations, and (b) offers a *critique* of identity politics, where both aspects can be considered with respect to any body or agent that seek to represent or politicise such a cultural identity. In these two senses, Hall's thesis raises a number of questions such as: How do ethnic minority groups come to presence in forms of representation? What are the types of representational strategies that are mobilised? Who becomes privileged? What are the limits to the representational formation? What are the necessary cultural, political and economic conditions that are required to become acknowledged? How are the historical relations being re-negotiated? What types of representation are promoted? Do these signal an innocent notion of ethnic identity and, if so, what differences have broadened or are drawn upon in producing these new ethnic identities? In short, this thesis endeavours to consider the formation of identity, mobilise the critique offered by the new ethnicities thesis and move towards answering the above questions to assess the political positions of an ethnic minority identity.

The arena where I move towards answering these questions is Birmingham. This city has long been a hotbed for those studying race and ethnicity. In the discipline of geography, such an interest has manifested itself in a number of reports on the demographic changes of "coloured immigrants" in the 1960s (Jones, 1970, 1976) and, more recently, on Birmingham's Black and South Asian population (Slater, 1996). Other geographical accounts on Birmingham's ethnic minorities have sketched out, albeit briefly, the potential economic contribution of cultural difference to the City's regeneration project (Henry &

Passmore, 1999; Henry et al. 2000). However, outside of geography there are a number of more extensive studies that have passed into the realm of the seminal, or at least the frequently referenced, for those interested in British race-relations. In the main, these surround the sociologist John Rex, such as the work on the differential access to housing provision (Rex & Moore, 1967), community organisation (Rex, 1973) and political mobilisation (Rex & Tomlinson, 1979) in 1960s and 1970s Sparkbrook and Handsworth. In a more recent study, John Solomos and Les Back (1995) have also examined the emergence of black politicians in this particular city and charted the restructuring of local government policies that concern racial equality (also see Samad, 1997). In a sense, despite the fact that Solomos and Back express a concern over the political usefulness of the new ethnicities thesis (see Solomos & Back, 1995, 212-213), all of these works mark what might be described as the coming to presence of ethnic minority identities and are therefore not without use in studying the type of representational struggles that are discussed by Stuart Hall. Nevertheless, whilst these studies have investigated the emerging presence or the political position of ethnic minorities in Birmingham, their focus has primarily been upon the relationship between “blackness” (ibid.) and the state and/or focussed upon particular fields of local government administration, such as housing or equal opportunities policy. Subsequently, the scope of these inquiries has underplayed the local celebration of multiculturalism, which as Bhattacharyya (2000) notes has served as another path towards recognition, albeit in the leisure industry. Furthermore, these pieces of research have underplayed the governmental support for other minorities that nevertheless have become represented by Birmingham City Council, whether it is in those areas that are concerned with racial equality or the tourist trade. My interest in this thesis is with one of these minority groups, the Chinese, and how they emerged from, as Jones (1976, 94) puts it, making “no

major impact” in 1960s Birmingham to appearing in contemporary local government discourse.

In effect, the aspiration of the research is not about representing Chinese people in Britain. There are already a number of accounts that do this (see Chan, 1981; Chan & Chan, 1997; Jones, 1979; Parker, 1998c; Watson, 1977). Rather it concerns how they – or at least some of them – are represented by the state. One of the main areas of such governmental representations falls within urban planning and concerns its representation of the Chinese community in Birmingham’s Chinese Quarter. In writing about such a place, I aim to contribute towards the debates on cultural enclaves, but in doing so also seek to unsettle some of the discursive themes that run through both urban planning strategies *and* the academic literature with the particular case study provided by the City of Birmingham. Certainly, some of the themes that I will discuss have passed into the axiomatic, although tellingly they are indicative of how Chinatowns, Chinese culture and, in some cases, multiculturalism have become understood in the West. As a preliminary and as way of focussing the aforementioned literature, one trajectory of these themes might be described as following an anthropological tradition and is tied to the assumptions of the “metaphysics of presence” (Derrida, 1976). These assumptions, despite never finding solid ground, include depicting Chinese culture as idiomatic, immobile and exterior to a Western modernity. For example, take Bernard Wong’s (1982, 87, my emphasis) contradictory claim that “New York’s Chinatown is an *encapsulated* urban American community, influenced by both *traditional* Chinese culture and *modern* American society” or Michelle Guillon’s (1998, 198) statement on “[the] fact that Chinese people tend to form close-knit communities”. Alternatively, consider Ronald Takaki’s (1994, 51) assertion that Chinese American “laundries were

isolated in white neighborhoods, like tiny ethnic islands in a sea of whiteness” and their resonance through Yi-Fu Tuan’s work where he dusts down a traditional China:

“It is not just possible but likely for someone wandering in the streets of a large American Chinatown to believe that he or she is in China. Nevertheless, while China risks looking more and more like the United States, there is no likelihood that the United States will look more and more like the China of history books and tourist guides. The reason is easily stated: the arrow of change – modernization in its many guises – points one way, the way led by the West in the past three centuries and, in recent decades, by the United States.” (Tuan, 1996, 134)

Such a depiction of a lagging or even retrograding China is not new (see Ch’en, 1979; Waller, 1985; Zhang, 1998). It is also not necessarily the concern of other anthropological works on Chinatown. But what many of these others share is a reasoning that the endurance or emergence of these places rests upon the physical presence of immigrant groups. For instance, Loo’s (1991, 249) study on the Chinatown in San Francisco, suggests that it has been sustained by a “flow of low-income immigrants”. Similarly, Fong (1994) in his discussion of the “First Suburban Chinatown” of Monterey Park, California, contends that it only established itself due to the growth in the number of Chinese residents and commercial investors who were attracted by depressed property prices and the marketing of Monterey as the “Chinese Beverly Hills”. Laguerre (2000) in his research on the *Global Ethnopolis* goes further to theorise these claims and he even forwards a suggestion that cultural enclaves are signified by four variables that underscore the importance of an ethnic background:

“In general, cultural enclaves ... reflect four main variables: the residents’ place of origin (continent, country, state, city), their ethnic background, their status in society, and the location of residences. The enclave names serve to identify the residents as “others” and to indicate that they are confined to a specific spatial position in the urban landscape. Customarily, space serves as a marker to locate the place of non-hegemonic groups, to identify their status in society, to delimit their sphere of interaction, and to patrol, control, and contain them in their enclaves.” (Laguerre, 2000, 8)

Table 1.1. Ethnic Groups in Birmingham, 1991

<i>Ethnic Category</i>	<i>Total Persons</i>	<i>%¹</i>
White	754274	78.5
Pakistani	66085	6.9
Indian	51075	5.3
Black Caribbean	44770	4.7
Born in Ireland	38290	4.0
Bangladeshi	12739	1.3
Other ethnic groups	11524	1.2
Other Black	8803	0.9
Other Asian	5653	0.6
Chinese	3315	0.3
Black African	2803	0.3

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Table 1.2. Estimated Numbers of Far Eastern Born Chinese Resident in Birmingham throughout the 20th Century

<i>Year of Census numeration</i>	<i>Number of Far Eastern Born Residents</i>
1911	42
1921	52
1951	182
1961	371
1971	1300
1981	2476
1991	3315

Source: Baxter, 1986; Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Table 1.3. Ethnic Groups in Ladywood, Birmingham, 1991.

<i>Ethnic Category</i>	<i>Total Persons</i>
White	14365
Black Caribbean	3350
Indian	3185
Pakistani	1850
Born in Ireland	1348
Other Black	648
Other ethnic groups	645
Black African	264
Chinese	163
Other Asian	152
Bangladeshi	84

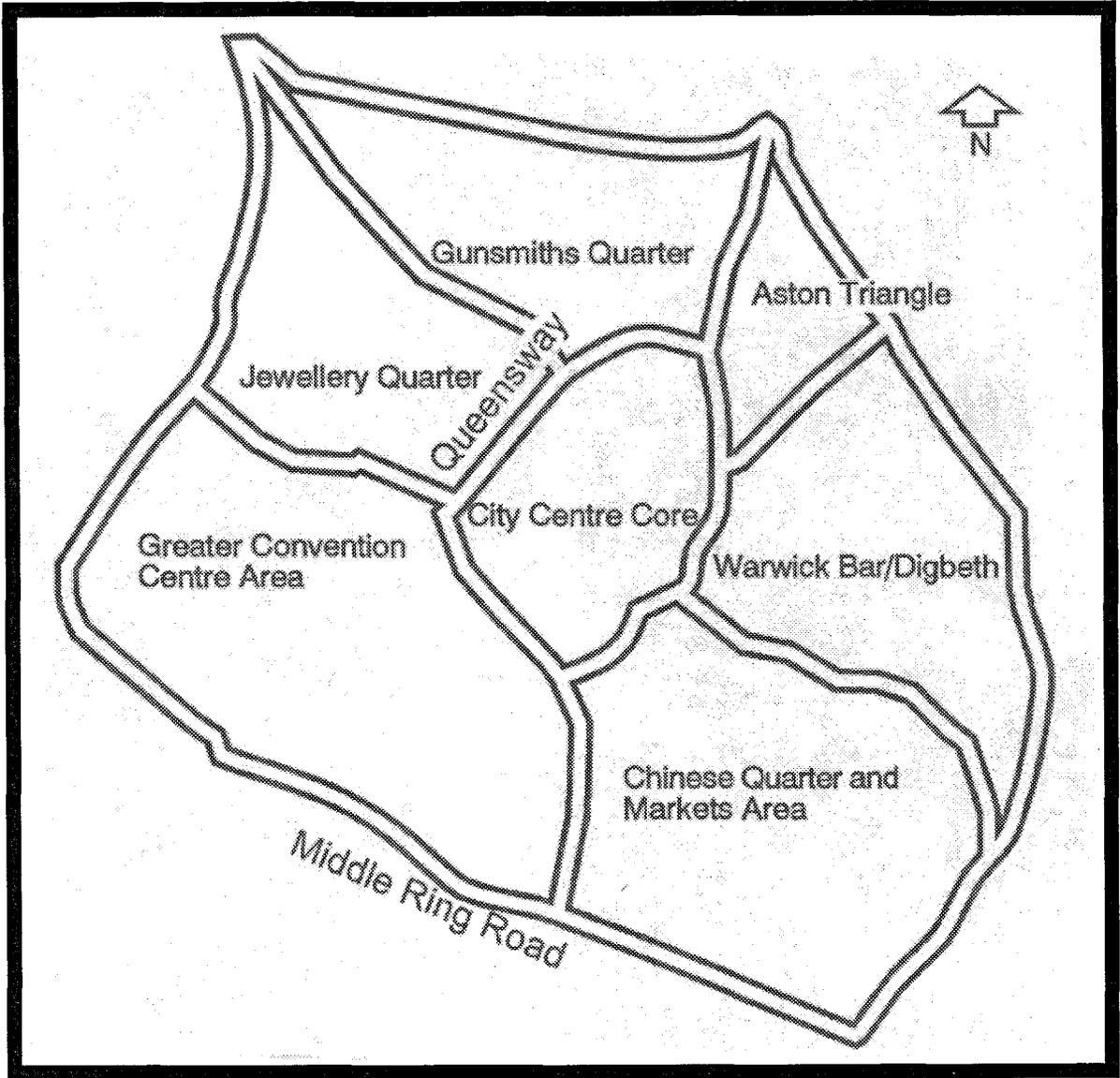
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Table 1.4. Distribution of the Chinese population in Birmingham, 1991.

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Number</i>
Acock's Green	29
Aston	87
Bartley Green	55
Billesley	57
Bournville	55
Brandwood	67
Edgbaston	344
Erdington	36
Fox Hollies	68
Hall Green	62
Handsworth	205
Harborne	123
Hodge Hill	35
Kingsbury	12
King's Norton	12
Kingstanding	116
Ladywood	163
Longbridge	24
Moseley	81
Nechells	69
Northfield	67
Oscott	43
Perry Barr	37
Quinton	90
Sandwell	81
Selly Oak	192
Shard End	17
Sheldon	23
Small Heath	68
Soho	225
Sparkbrook	194
Sparkhill	72
Stockland Green	88
Sutton Four Oaks	43
Sutton New Hall	65
Sutton Vesey	73
Washwood Heath	54
Weoley	111
Yardley	41

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Map 2



Birmingham City Centre Core and its Quarters.

To be clear, Laguerre's logic is far from being incorrect and, in my opinion, the aforementioned writers have produced a number of insightful pieces of work. However, what is interesting about Birmingham's Chinese Quarter is that it has never housed anywhere near the numbers of Chinese people that are boasted by those Chinatowns as discussed by Fong, Laguerre, Loo, Takaki, Tuan or Wong (Table 1.1). Certainly, Birmingham has long had a Chinese population (Table 1.2), yet these are now dispersed throughout the City² and the Ward where the Chinese Quarter sits, Ladywood, is surpassed by those of Edgbaston, Handsworth, Selly Oak, Soho and Sparkbrook in terms of a population that is classified as Chinese (Table 1.4). Moreover, according to the 1991 Census, the 160-hectares space that was named the *Chinese and Markets Quarter* (see Map 2) contains a diverse population where only 0.6% of its population were numerated as falling within this ethnic group (Table 1.3). In this light, it would seem that Birmingham has a different type of cultural enclave that cannot merely be evaluated by the physical numbers of Chinese residents it contains and, moreover, this City offers potential insights into explaining the emergence of a cultural enclave for social scientists that contrast with its North American counterparts. Some clues on how the social scientist might consider these alternative explanations are partially evident in another trajectory of the Chinatown literature. This trajectory, however, is opaque, elusive and not unproblematic.

There is another literature on Chinatowns that runs at a tangent to the anthropological tradition and its analytical foundation upon presence. This strand is certainly varied, for in some places, it encompasses urban restructuring, political economy, foreign capital and local exploitation (Davis, 1987) and in others, this literature remarks upon heavy theory (Gregory, 1994). Yet, irrespective of any irregularities, discontinuities or variations in emphasis, the common denominators in all of this are, perhaps, the footsteps of Jake Gittes and,

undoubtedly, the influence of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, which informs the commentaries, metaphorical content and, not least, the titles of Mike Davis's survey of Los Angeles and Derek Gregory's critique of Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*. For Jane Jacobs (2000), one outcome from such story telling is an uneven racialised account that cannot be easily codified. Jacob's statement could certainly be testified through a careful reading of Davis's account, although I have insufficient space to do such a reading here. Yet, what I do wish to draw out is not simply the uneven analogies of inscrutability, noir or the white detective that are available from such a reading, but rather the very dispersal of these registers, their mobility, their appellations and their ability to conjure memories of such racial connotation. Of course, as is evident in these texts, a discussion of these potential tracks, inter-weavings and their hybrid formulation is not necessarily celebratory itself, but what they do allow the social scientist to explore are the potentialities of writing and the way in which it may decentre notions of self-possession and self-propriety. As I see it, a critique of this "writing" also plays an integral part in Professor Kay Anderson's groundbreaking work on various Chinatowns and in what she calls "the Idea of Chinatown" (Anderson, 1987; also see Anderson, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993). I shall elaborate and build upon Anderson's research in more detail in the course of this thesis, but all I wish to take from her engagement for now is the suggestion that Chinatown is not simply a product of a discrete "Chineseness". Instead, it may be seen as "a social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West" (Anderson, 1987, 581). The manifestations of such a social construction or, as I shall suggest, social constructions is open to debate and, in what follows, I describe some narratives that cannot be reduced to the racial dualisms and Orientalism that Anderson contends with in the Chinatown's of Vancouver, Melbourne and Sydney. Instead, I aim to

consider some different strands of the critique of post-colonialism that pass through deconstruction. This involves the native informant, a split sense of Chinese identity and moments of translation.

Methodology

I have sought to adopt a methodological approach that was suitable to working through my difficulties with the above literature and to studying the above aims and objectives. As these aims and objectives are concerned with the emergence of Chinese identities in forms of governmental representation and the representational strategies that are mobilised, it is perhaps apt that the methodology foreground issues of representation. One analytical framework in which this might be done is with discursive analysis, which provides conceptual tools to study, read and interpret the institutionalisation of codes, languages and symbols. In addition, discursive analysis offers a means to affirm the new ethnicities thesis and its emphasis upon “history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity” (Hall, 1996a, 257).

Forms of discourse analysis have begun to establish themselves as a method in the study of geography. Associated with these methods is the burgeoning use of poststructuralism. Predominately, this has been influenced by writers such as Foucault and de Certeau and resulted in a number of discussions on the regulation, strategies and tactics set upon space and/or body politics (see Anderson, 1987, 1988; Crampton, 2001; Driver, 1985; McDowell & Court, 1994). In comparison, another poststructuralist approach, deconstruction, has been less well detailed. In some places where deconstruction, or at least its terminology, has been used there has been a slipshod tendency to treat it as a byword for “examination” (see Crush, 1999). Alternatively, it has been stitched together with other poststructuralist works to form a theoretical treatise on the unsteady, slippery organisation

and understanding of space and place (Doel, 1999). However, the problem with this work and others of its ilk is not only that it continually turns inward to a philosophical canon, but, moreover, that it fails to grapple with the deconstructive critique of logocentrism and what the logos might entail. To some extent, this is addressed by other geographical writings, which have identified the logos, or at least a version of it, as the type of categorical units used in quantitative geography and cartographic practices. Harley (1992), for example, suggests that there are a body of standards that belie map making including a pretence of a “correct” relational model of the terrain to which he counters by underscoring the rhetorical qualities of cartography. Similarly, through an allegory of *Mary Poppins* Dixon and Jones (1996) suggest that scientific geography might consider the binary understandings that its knowledges and practices rest upon, such as objective/subjective, materiality/discourse and truth/fiction. Yet, whilst Harley’s and Dixon and Jones’s claims might be consistent with the work by Derrida and his suggestions that writing, texts, metaphor and differences are also constitutive of enunciation, for me these works fall short with respect to mobilising deconstruction. For one, Harley does not explicitly elucidate the moments of contradiction or the blind spots in any map, despite telling his reader that deconstruction concerns contradictions and blind spots. Also, if the point of Dixon and Jones’s paper is to show the relations of fiction and discourse at work in scientific geography as is the conjecture of their paper, they could easily choose to read a text of scientific geography as opposed to forming an allegory of *Mary Poppins*. Their reasoning for this metaphorical detour is that their allegorical tale about a white middle class family purportedly breaches the boundaries of academic geography, yet, I would propose that a far more forceful and directed critique could be made if they revealed that scientific geography always and already breaches the very boundaries which set it in place. A careful reading of a work on the quantitative revolution in

geography would provide them with this and, indeed, a paper by Trevor Barnes (1994) goes some way in addressing this lacuna, although as Barnes himself concedes his paper “does not explore the political silencing of the Other ... nor ... the kind of detailed institutional analysis of logocentric closure” (Barnes, 1994, 1037-1038). Nevertheless, it appears apparent that although the labours of Barnes, Doel, Dixon, Harley, Jones and even Crush on deconstruction are testament to the multitude of ways in which deconstruction can contribute to geographical knowledge, what has been underplayed in each case is the intimate textual readings that are associated with this theory. To my knowledge, the exception to this rule in academic geography is the work conducted by Clive Barnett. He has written on the relationship between deconstruction and context (Barnett, 1999), but perhaps his most instructive work concerns his reading of the Royal Geographical Society’s colonial discourse (Barnett, 1998) in which he informs his reader of an alternative history of geography that is constitutive of its centred narrative. The importance of this reading is not that he strictly follows some theoretical lineage from writers such as Derrida and Spivak. Rather, that by marrying a reading of the archives to deconstruction he exposes the role of others, in this case colonized groups, in forming the syncretic qualities of discourses whilst maintaining an eye on the unequal social relations. As Barnett quoting Prakash argues, this dimension shows that there is a call to responsibility in the face of epistemic violence and a continual need to write histories of erased subject positions. Whilst set in a different institutional context from Barnett’s research, my approach to discourse follows a similar path in that it shows an awareness of the details of logocentric structures and elucidates the various elisions through a close reading of a series of archives surrounding the governmental understandings of Chinese identity. In other words, I use deconstruction, not simply as a theory to stitch together with

other theory, but as a theoretical and methodological approach to consider some of the politico-ethical formations that are in play in contemporary multiculturalism.

The empirical resources of this thesis were collated between the autumn of 1998 to the summer of 1999 and principally took the form of archival research. In the main, these archives were collated, held and funded by Birmingham City Council for either its own or for the public' use. I also inspected two other archives that were assembled by two community organisations and visited the Public Records Office at Kew. In total, the archives I visited can be listed as:

- Birmingham Chinese Youth Centre
- Birmingham City Council Planning and Architecture Department
- Birmingham Economic Information Resource Centre
- Birmingham Voice Office
- Local Studies, Birmingham Central Library
- Chinese Community Centre, Birmingham
- City Sound Archive, Social History Department, Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries
- Public Records Office, Kew

As opposed to treating the material as somehow accurate, authentic or representative, I noted the way that it describes or failed to describe Chinatown, the Chinese community, race, ethnicity and multiculturalism. This process of note taking involved looking for assumptions, such as how each archive made foundational claims or assertions on the natural order of city life. The process also involved looking for themes, including organisational routines and repetitions of statements, as well as paradigmatic displacements and contradictions to the above. At a more detailed level, notes were made of aspects of the archive's lexicon, the design of its syntax, the relation between statements in anchoring particular messages and the differential marks amongst each document. These documents covered those that circulated within governmental bodies such as: planning applications, planning strategies, planning guidelines, consultation documents, applications for funding, committee reports, job remits,

letters, minutes and internal memoranda. They also included documents designed for public consumption including: promotional pamphlets by developers and governmental divisions, official histories, annual reports, press releases, newsletters and newspapers. The majority of the documents and/or files that I noted are listed in the Appendix.

In general, I gained access to the research material after contact was made with an archivist or the Heads of Department. However, information on the Urban Development Grant for China Court and the Arcadian was refused on the grounds of confidentiality, as was material on the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre's Grant Aid and Birmingham's Standing Consultative Forum. Some planning documents were missing and others were vetted prior to my inspection. Nevertheless, to try to address these gaps and to clear up my confusions from the archival research, I also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews at a place and time that was convenient for the informant. In each case and with the permission of the interviewee, I made a tape recording from which I transcribed each interview utterance to utterance and word for word. A copy of the transcribed material was sent to the interviewee for confirmation and amendments. Only in one case were any adjustments made. In total, the interviews were held with: the Acting Manager of the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre, the Manager of Birmingham Chinese Youth Centre, the donator of Birmingham's pagoda, the Chinese Community Liaison Officer of the West Midlands Police Force, as well as the Economic Development Department, Leisure & Community Services, the Equalities Division, and the Planning and Architecture Department of Birmingham City Council. I also requested, but was refused an interview with: Anglo-Oriental Properties, Birmingham Chinese Lions Group, Birmingham Chinese Christian Community Group, Birmingham Chinese Society, City Watch and Trident Housing Scheme.

Another reason why I chose a discursive methodology was on the grounds of research ethics. One query that a senior planner and gatekeeper to the planning archive repeatedly made to me was “You’re not going to embarrass me over this are you?” to which I invariably replied “Certainly not”. My explanation for this, although not entirely to his satisfaction, was that the research was concerned with local government practices and its constructions of knowledge, rather than operating on the level of the personal or individual subject. At the time, such reasoning was drawn from a reading of Michel Foucault and his discursive approach, which refutes a steady notion of an autonomous, sovereign subject and instead seeks to affirm the institutional orders and co-authorship of subjectivity. Later, I somewhat supplemented my theoretical position because I felt that it was necessary to affirm not only the heterogeneities and tensions of a Foucauldian approach, but the differences, margins and those silent voices that are nonetheless available to these very institutional constructions. Along with his influence on Hall’s work on new ethnicities, this ethical position has pushed deconstruction and the work by Jacques Derrida to the foreground of my theoretical and methodological interests. I explore a deconstructive framework in chapter 1.

Some of what might be described as the discursive orders of local government undoubtedly had an effect on the positioning of the researcher in the research process. Being of Chinese descent, I often found I was caught up in situations where essentialist understandings of Chinese culture were thrown around and the role of a racial background was over inflated. These occasions ranged from some of the interviews where I was expected to be knowledgeable about Chinese ornaments to assertions that I suffered from ethnocentrism because the research was “just” about one ethnic group (they had failed to note the mediating, governmental body which orientated the research). On other occasions, however, I was questioned about my lack of Chinese culture by representatives of the

Chinese community (see chapter 5), it seemed that sometimes I was Chinese and sometimes not Chinese enough. Still, whatever the case may have been, such preconceptions and assumptions on the make-up of community may have influenced the manner and the type of information that was released to me.

On the other hand, I also used the naturalised (i.e. institutionalised) politics of essentialism to facilitate my research interests. An occasion when I did this occurred when I requested access to the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre's archive. Not incidentally, some of the members of this organisation had already engaged with one of my supervisors and were highly sceptical of what they called "experts on the Chinese community". Their argument, in short, was that they were highly reluctant to give me any information on the grounds that they considered it to be the property of the members of the Chinese Community Centre. My response to their suggestion was that I thought I was a member of the Chinese community. As I saw the situation at the time, this dialogue revealed some of the limitations and an arbitrary closure of the notion of community by the Community Centre, but on later reflection, it also implied on my part some taken for granted connection to the Chinese community that I could not justify. Although these events may seem tangential to the archival material, they have informed much of the readings in the following chapters.

An outline

This thesis was not composed in an altogether sequential manner, but rather in a discontinuous way that involved repetitions and a re-grafting of several themes. To a certain extent, then, the chapters of the thesis can be read in any order and they certainly borrow from each other. In particular, parts of chapter 2 where I discuss immigration and the conditions of hospitality connect to the obligations of settlement that I cover in chapter 5, the aesthetic claims of Birmingham's pagoda that I cover in chapter 5 connect to those in chapter

3, and there are a number of unsteady, but persistent, claims to the sovereignty of the Chinese community throughout. Still, the organisational principal that guides this thesis is one that locates two preliminary chapters – one on my theoretical concerns and another on the historical context - that lay the groundwork for two subsequent chapters, which position and fracture Chinese signification and community. This is followed by a chapter that focuses the practices of signification and claims to community with a case study.

In chapter 1, I compile some notes on deconstruction. Deconstruction is an irreducible theory/method/ethical position and, as it necessarily demands, it can be difficult to pin down. For such reasons, deconstruction is also notoriously difficult to understand. However, the theoretical and textual work by one of its main proponents, Jacques Derrida, is particularly worth outlining in the context of this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, Derrida's work, unlike many of his French poststructuralist contemporaries (see Barthes, 1982; Foucault, 1970), offers ways of conceptualising, rather than distancing, the relationship between the West and China. Indeed, his work contains clear examples of the way some eminent Western thinkers appropriated/disavowed Chinese writing and, moreover, he outlines a sensitivity to the ethnocentrism of these thinkers. This is a line of thinking that can be considered with respect to British urban planning. Secondly, there is a parallel with Hall's new ethnicities thesis and deconstruction and if this parallel is drawn out, then, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into the differentiating structures that constitute the types of identity politics that Hall advocates/criticises and, in particular, its discursive structures. These structures include the metaphysics of presence, *différance* and iteration. Thirdly, deconstruction informs some key theoretical trajectories in the critique of postcolonialism, such as Spivak's critique of the native informant, which I draw upon to trace subaltern

positions and outline the limitations of the advocacy strategies of urban planning and racial equality in Birmingham.

Chapter 2 offers a history of post-war planning in Birmingham. There is already an abundance of accounts on the construction of Western planning and a number of authoritative books on Birmingham's planning history and I do not seek to simply regurgitate this material here. Instead, the aim of this chapter is to unfold some of the concepts of chapter 1 and to deconstruct a series of post-war plans of the City. This deconstruction can be roughly divided into two, but not unconnected, phases. The first phase as represented in the first half of the chapter, will question a number of assumptions of post-war urban planning that include its so-called impartiality and Birmingham's so-called natural population size by revealing that the reconstruction of the city was always constituted in relation to an "outside". Through reading two planning documents, the *City of Birmingham Development Plan* (1960) and *Conurbation* (1948), I identify such an "outside" by noting that planners defined their plans through centring particular geographical scales that trace an awareness of overseas migration. Furthermore, I argue that to visualise urban planning in such a way calls for a revaluation of the relationship between immigration and the city, as these findings underline that the study of the presence of immigrants in the city is not identical to the relationship between immigration and the city as portrayed in the existing geographical literature.

In the second phase of this deconstruction, I mark an ethnocentric history of British planning. With reference to Patrick Abercrombie's *Town and Country Planning* (1943) and Peter Hall's Freeport solution to the inner city (1977), I argue that Birmingham's Chinatown is only one example of a long line of appropriations by planners who have at times of crisis and doubt fostered particular forms of cultural identity to address the lacks and inadequacies of the British planning system. This is discussed through carefully positioning a number of

planning blueprints - which have included a lexicon of Chinatown, Chinese community or Feng Shui - alongside a constitutive syntax of Birmingham's planning strategies. It also involves a consideration of the valorisation of ethnic entrepreneurship in British urban policy and the start of my concern with the fracturing of immigrant identity as sometimes an asset and sometimes a burden to the development of the city. As way of an academic reference point, I shall argue that an outcome of such considerations does not produce a racial dualism that could be framed with Said's critique of Orientalism as is evident in Anderson's analysis of Chinatown. Rather, the Chinese Quarter's narratives and its positioning reveal a much more oblique, contingent and split sense of identity politics that indicates the partial entry of a Chinese community into hegemonic politics and the limitations to Birmingham's multiculturalism.

As well as deconstructing Birmingham's post-war plans, chapter 2 contextualises the construction of the City's Chinese Quarter. In chapter 3, I go onto reflect upon the different types of representational logic stipulated within the contours of governmental planning language with reference to the building of this place. In particular, what I point out is that one preferred means in which urban restructuring has shown its commitment towards representing multiculturalism is through a format of advocacy where different voices are placed in the foreground so that it appears apparent that Birmingham is what it claims to be: multicultural. In the light of the metaphysics of presence, I demonstrate that such a format allows urban planners to suggest that there is uniqueness and authenticity to Chinatown because the Chinese community acts as referent; these people supposedly stand by its signifiers and help provide both planners and Chinatown with a political legitimacy. However, by carefully reading through the planning archive I demonstrate that there are co-existing logics of representation that reveal that such an advocacy is entangled with a number

of historical and geographical detours that mark the syncretic and mimetic qualities of place construction. These detours can be seen in the Chinese Quarter's aesthetic practices and its facades.

As I see it, a purpose of short-circuiting a humanistic logic of representation is to question the axiomatic beliefs that (a) it is possible to provide a subject with a speaking position so that they could be free to express themselves and (b) that the speaking subject is in the possession of a pre-ordained essence that allows them to speak on the behalf of others. In chapter 4 and with reference to various statements on community, I show how these liberal presumptions are problematic to the issue of racial equality. Drawing from the *Chinese Community Profile* (1996), I demonstrate that even though there are attempts to recognise particular identities, the report illustrates that there are cultural differences or subaltern subjects that remain at the margins of the text. As the report further illustrates, these representational difficulties are resolved through a defensive strategy that pushes forward a community as "common-being" (Nancy, 1991), which suggests that the local government should dig up a hidden, transcendental essence that purportedly belies a community. For issues of racial equality, the suggestion here is that the political solution to racial ills is already written just poorly understood. However, by examining an account by Susan Baxter on the Chinese community and a number of Committee reports of the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre, I suggest that an absolutist logic only proves to be a stumbling block, as the construction of a hidden/uncovered identity and community are operations of co-appearance and exposure to the other. The chapter draws heavily from Jean Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* (1991).

Chapter 5 returns the thesis to Birmingham's Chinese Quarter and pays particular attention to the City's Chinese pagoda. The significance of this piece of public art is that its

opening marked the official welcome by the local authority to the Chinese community to the city and, as such, is a major moment in this community's emergence. By elucidating the views of the entrepreneur who donated the pagoda to the city and by marrying these views to the newspaper reporting that surrounded its opening as well as its planning documents, the chapter begins by showing that the social, cultural and material formation of this moment of multicultural enunciation is one of entanglement. The point of this particular demonstration is to displace the entrepreneurial presence that stands central to the pagoda's narrative and, moreover, to confirm the possibility of dissemination. The chapter then goes on to discuss the pagoda as a gift. The importance of discussing this gift is that it discloses a discourse of cultural and economic contribution that is connected to narratives of citizenship and hospitality. I conclude by suggesting that if a gift of hospitality is to be given it is necessary to consider the constitutive outside of multiculturalism, citizenship and its entrepreneurial presence.

¹ The calculation of total persons in the 1991 Census Returns did not include those born in Ireland.

² This is not to imply that there has never been a concentration of Chinese people in the City. Braithwaite Road, Sparkbrook, was "commonly known to the Chinese" as a Chinatown (Chan, 1981; also see Baxter, 1984). The road formerly was comprised of a number of overcrowded residences of which, in the early 1970's, it was estimated that 60% were rented to Chinese tenants. However, neither this quantity nor the concentration of Chinese residing on and around Braithwaite Road exists today. The early work of the Chinese Community Centre with the assistance of Housing Services re-housed many of these families and decentralised the Chinese population (see chapter 4).

CHAPTER 1 – SOME NOTES ON DECONSTRUCTION: ETHNOCENTRISM, ESSENTIALISM, DIFFERENCE AND REPRESENTATION

Deconstruction has frequently been made synonymous with the signifiers of nihilism, anti-essentialism or, worse still, relativism. Too often commentators announce that deconstruction devalues a sign to its disappearance so that it loses any self-identity/historical relationship to a culture or, alternatively, suggest that its followers have espoused a completely nonsensical polysemy. Indeed, it is for these reasons that David Harvey (1996, 8) follows Terry Eagleton to cast Derrida aside for having “the ultimate post-structuralist fantasy” and Jurgen Habermas (1987, cited in Morley, 1996, 343) calls deconstruction an “enemy of reason”. However, in stark contrast, a number of other writers have mined deconstruction for its rich vein of concepts and practices, especially with respect to insurgent movements. For instance, Robert Young (2000, 203) claims that the undecidability of *différance* “perfectly describes the political condition of a minority group” and others have also gone some way to re-theorise difference in their proposals of new ethnic identities (Hall, 1996a) or radical forms of democracy (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). For me and for the sake of outlining my position, deconstruction provides some theoretical lessons in understanding ethnocentrism, difference, translation and the possibility of essentialism. These are ideas that are explored in this thesis. These are also critical concepts in contemporary discussions of cultural politics and a reading of Derrida’s commentary on phonocentrism and deconstruction does not have to move too far to lean towards and elucidate these issues. In what follows, I outline a number of Derridean texts to consider some of the ways in which these issues are structured, articulated and de-centred through practices of representation. I also consider some of their implications. With these two trajectories in sight, my task here is modest and

straightforward. It does not review the work by Derrida in any comprehensive fashion (see Bennington & Derrida, 1991; Norris, 1982, 1987). Nor does it elaborate upon the implications of deconstruction for geographical inquiry at any great length (see Barnes, 1994; Barnett, 1999; Dixon & Jones, 1996, 1998; Doel, 1999; Harley, 1992; Passmore, 1995). But it does foreground some of the ways of thinking that have been applied in the surrounding chapters.

Logocentrism and ethnocentrism

A key text to my understanding of deconstruction derives from the first ninety-five pages of *Of Grammatology* (1976), which are entitled *Writing before the Letter*. This is an obvious place to start this exposition because these pages not only sketch a theoretical matrix for understanding “deconstruction”¹, but they also outline a number of different forms of ethnocentrism that resonate in my research and elsewhere. Indeed, in *Writing before the Letter*, Derrida suggests that we live, especially those in the West, with a logocentrism, which he argues has debased our concept of writing, our ways of knowing and is “nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism” (Derrida, 1976, 3). In this section, I interrogate these ethnocentrism(s) by taking a detour through the contours of the logos. This short journey will involve some leaps of faith and some complex assumptions, yet to reduce the hurdles, one way that the logos might be simply described is by suggesting that there is, or at least a pretence of, a centred reason or rational principle in words and texts. Under the above terms, the logos can be taken as what gives the writer or speaker the authority to posit a definitive truth, or at least a version of it. It acts like, the “structurality of structure” (Derrida, 1978, 278) and provides certain words, concepts, metaphorical categories or even gatekeepers with a transcendental privilege in a given subject matter or discourse. In turn, these figures may become axiomatic; they might be taken for granted, and by doing so, they

may hide other intrinsic elements, which go underground within the text. So, for example, in a number of cases, speech becomes prioritised over writing, presence over absence, nature over culture, and man over woman, where the former term is almost provided with a transparent ability or proximity to universal truths, whilst the latter is subordinated or pushed away. Nevertheless, a task of much deconstruction is to try to reveal that, whilst a centred term may function as a point of orientation and organises the structure with a certain coherent value, any such coherence only takes place through the elision of “other” relational terms that are in fact necessary for comprehending the former.

The logos that Derrida seeks to deconstruct, especially in his earlier work, are those centred on the metaphysics of presence (see Derrida, 1976, 1978, 1981a, 1981b, 1982). Simplifying to the extreme, this can be described as a language/knowledge system where the practices of signification are closed off and assigned to an original source, proper meaning or essence. In this respect, Derrida’s early critique draws a parallel with a number of others on black cultural politics, which tackle fundamentalist, culturally centred understandings of subjectivity (see Gilroy, 1987, 2000). Yet, what differentiates Derrida’s work is that he demonstrates that such fixed, conservative and bounded understandings have often been articulated through the ideals and subtleties of phonocentrism. At one level, what this means is that the signifier is an outgrowth from a given signified and the presumption is that the voice is the most proximate to the signified meaning or presence of a given subject. As Aristotle puts it “spoken words ... are the symbols of mental experience” (Aristotle cited in Derrida, 1976, 11). Now, if Aristotle and the phonocentric tradition are/were correct, then it would follow that an orator literally speaks their mind, there is no mediation in the process of communication and it is actually possible for her/him to present others with clear views that represent their consciousness. Alternatively, it would also seem possible to hear others speak

and gain a true understanding of what is in their minds without too much fuss. Either way, the most important thing with these trajectories is that the subject is actually present when signification occurs as so-called natural signs or proper meanings are produced through the voice, whereas the act of writing, in contrast, is taken as the bastard of language due to its distance from the cogito. Writing is:

“Uprooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone’s disposal, can be picked up by both the competent and the incompetent, by those who understand and know what to do with it ... and by those who are completely unconcerned with it, and who, knowing nothing about it, can inflict all manner of impertinence upon it.”
(Derrida, 1981a, 144)

As phonocentrism denigrates writing as secondary - “written words are the symbols of spoken words” (Aristotle cited in Derrida, 1976, 11) - it frequently prioritises the authority of speech over written words because fundamentally the subject is present, in place, she or he is here to explain fully what they want. Furthermore, it often follows from this logic, that written signifiers have no constitutive meaning as they stand, since they are exterior to the voice, whilst conversely it is purported that a concept signified does not function as a signifier. Saussure puts it this way: “Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first” (cited in Derrida, 1976, 30). Thus, what the reader can perhaps ascertain is, firstly, that phonocentrism presupposes a linearity of the symbol from a signified to a signifier and, secondly, that the signified can exist in and of itself. That is, writing is relegated to the role of supplementing phonetic forms of communication and there is supposed to be a divide between the written signifier from the essential and transcendental signified. In chapter 3, I consider this phonocentric structure with respect to a strategy of advocacy in urban planning.

For the sake of my exposition, the splitting of the signifier from a signified has classically been a point of intervention for those commentators interested in race relations

and also for those who attempt to demystify China and the Chinese. For instance, taking one case amongst many, Jenny Clegg in her neat analysis on representations of Chinese culture “fosters a process of “unlearning” racism by challenging racist stereotypes” (1994, xi). For Clegg, this challenge involves disregarding the false position of signifiers, such as “the myth of the “yellow peril”” for a more truthful signified of “the real lives of the Chinese communities in Britain” (ibid.). More specifically, it involves realising that the “Limehouse Legend” as portrayed by Sax Rohmer along with contemporary films such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are merely fictions in relation to the facts of “The First Chinese in Britain” and the “real lives” in the chip shop. For me, Clegg’s work is a worthwhile, if sometimes exaggerated, endeavour. But as I read it, an underlying assumption that Clegg plays with concerns one in which a de-racialised Chinese community is posed as a pre-discursive entity. That is, it appears that the “real” community is obtained through the elevation of native informants and the dismissal of literatures, the latter of which are treated as something of a troublemaker, intervening in a version of the truth (Attridge, 2000, 107). Subsequently, what escapes Clegg’s account is the possibility that these myths and their evident exoticism may actually mediate the understandings of the “real” life of people in a chip shop and it asks of her reader to consider the interplay between “myths”, signifiers and fictions with the “real”, signifieds and facts. I explore the constitutive role of these differences and underline their importance to an acknowledgement of culture as shifting and mediated below, but for now what can be noted is that although Clegg seems to search for a truthful signified concept to emancipate the Chinese community such a search has also been mobilised to dismiss Chinese culture. Hegel provides one such case in point.

As Derrida (1976, 1982) notes, Hegel supports, privileges and idealises phonocentrism. For, according to Hegel’s conception of the purely ideal World Spirit, the

most intelligent forms of writing are those that are located close to the mind and are those that are most servile to an absolute and infinite subjectivity. In Hegelian semiology this proximity to total knowledge conjures up two forms of imagination. Firstly, there is a “reproductive imagination” (cited in Derrida, 1982, 78) which places a sign as a supplement for the mind; it is a “remembered-interiorized intuition”, which conserves the thought patterns of the subject so that their intelligence can recall itself in the act of becoming objective. Writing, in this sense, is taken as though it is “out of consciousness” (ibid.), and as a regrettable, although sometimes necessary, aid in helping the memory towards the development of the spirit; it forms a reservoir of images that constructs dialectical knowledge. Secondly and supposedly lying outside the former is an imagination that purportedly can do without reproduction and is untainted by the givens and the legacies that are written into signification. Hegel terms this the “productive imagination” (ibid.) and, whereas the reproductive imagination is reconstructed and synthesised from writing, he suggests that the construction of this imagination is completely phonocentric. In other words, it is intuition to itself, self-uttering and sign producing as it brings forth the transcendental mind. As with Aristotle and Saussure, it seems that Hegel assumes that if the subject is close to their inner self, then they are one with signification.

On one level, the relevance of phonocentrism to ethnocentrism is that it implies that signification is centred upon an ethnos, which is supposedly pure and untouched by the hands of others (see below). Yet, for Hegel what was also significant was that, although he had reservations concerning alphabetic (phonetic) writing and its position with regard to the productive imagination, he insisted that the West possessed a system of writing that was most suitable to an infinite culture. An assumption behind this was that “intelligence expresses itself immediately and unconditionally through speech” (Hegel cited in Derrida, 1976, 25)

and that those languages that worked in contradistinction to this (i.e. those languages which were supposedly distant to the mind/spirit) were deemed inferior. Hence, much to Hegel's amusement, he suggested the Chinese model of communication was somewhat cumbersome and sterile². The point was that, unlike Western language, Chinese language is/was supposedly based upon writing and writing supposedly betrayed life, it menaced the spirit, and it privileged relations rather appellations, which purportedly corrupted the possibility of an absolute knowledge and its notions of self-possession and self-propriety. Not incidentally, Hegel also was not that fond of China or the Chinese and he even went as far to suggest that "their main characteristic is that everything belonging to spirit – free propriety, morality, feeling, inner religion, science and true art – is lacking" (Hegel cited in March, 1974, 60). Undoubtedly, he was and is not alone in these views³. Still, as Andrew March (1974) observes, a problem with Hegel's conceptualisation of China was that he never simply wrote about China in and of itself. Rather his concerns were with "an aspect of the European mind, a mode of being of "spirit" which seems possible to Europeans and which has taken shape round the European notions [of] "East, Orient, Asia, China"" (March, 1974, 60). Similarly, in the essay *The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology*, Derrida (1982) also notes Hegel's ethnocentric privileging of spirit, but with respect to Hegel's analogy between hieroglyphics, Chinese writing, mathematics and Western grammars. The observation here is that Hegel persistently incriminates other forms of writing according to the privileges attributed to phonetic writing. So, for example, Hegel denounced hieroglyphics because it was too symbolic and marked by the absence of the voice, and he critiques Chinese writing because it does not come back to, or originate with, the spirit. As Derrida points out, although Hegel's commitment towards phonocentrism leads him to some contradictory statements about China (Hegel sometimes saw Chinese script as a writing system based upon

natural observations (empiricism) and sometimes he reproached it for its formalism (abstraction)) what remains is that he continually demonstrates and returns to a complicity with phonetic writing which he treats like as an “absolute model” to judge all others (ibid. 104). As Marx (1934, 10-11) puts it: “a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue”.

Whereas Hegel dismisses Chinese writing according to a privileged logos, others have appropriated Chinese writing to reassert it. Derrida demonstrates this with respect to a dossier collated by Madeleine V. David in which he locates three “prejudices”. They are the “theological” prejudice, the “Chinese prejudice” and the “hieroglyphist prejudice”. Read together these positions demonstrate an ethnocentric appropriation of the other which, Spivak (1999, 280) suggests, comes “from the appropriate ideological self justification of an imperialist project”. Simplifying somewhat, the theological prejudice takes it for granted that writing had transcended from the hand of God. This prejudice considers writing as a given and, in doing so, relegated a science of language as unnecessary. However, according to Derrida it is with the legibility of non-occidental script that Western philosophers began to accept the possibility of a multiplicity of writings, thus fracturing the theological prejudice as a universal and omnipotent writing system. As we have already seen, Hegel’s response to this multiplicity is dismissive and he treats alphabetic script as the finest form of language due to the proximity of the spirit. Yet, much to Hegel’s dismay, Leibniz praised Chinese script for its ability to piece together the fractures of a so-called universal language. The argument proposed by Leibniz is/was that Chinese writing offered a blueprint – but only a blueprint - for a philosophical writing (or what he called Characteristic) that defined the necessary corrections” and made up for a lack of a “simple absolute” (Derrida, 1976, 78), which Derrida tracks to the logos of a Judaeo-Christian God. In other words, Derrida’s

observations concern the way a de-centring other, in the form of a Chinese writing, is understood by Leibniz as a “domestic representation” and, furthermore, mobilised to re-centre a logocentric and “universal” position. For Derrida, this ethnocentrism reiterates in Father Kircher’s Egyptological research and throughout the 20th century:

“The concept of Chinese writing thus functioned as a sort of European hallucination. This implied nothing fortuitous: this functioning obeyed a rigorous necessity. And the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding. It was not disturbed by the knowledge of Chinese script, limited but real, which was then available...The occultation, far from proceeding, as it would seem, from ethnocentric scorn, takes the form of an hyperbolic admiration. We have not finished verifying the necessity of this pattern. Our century is not free from it; each time that ethnocentrism is precipitately and ostentatiously reversed, some effort silently hides behind all the spectacular effects to consolidate an inside and to draw from it some domestic benefit.” (Derrida, 1976, 80)

A reading of Derrida on ethnocentrism shifts and fractures the focus from the “Other” to note the mutually constitutive role of the co-existences that surround it. So, in the above case, the issue is not necessarily about Chinese writing in and of itself. Instead, through an act of assessing the position of enunciation, deconstruction forces its reader to consider how forms of cultural identity are appropriated by and for the West. This reversal is crucial in deconstructive thinking and, for me, no one has better considered or politicised this lesson than the deconstructivist feminist Marxist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. For in her work on the native informant and the subaltern she draws out a number of ethico-political considerations that are tied to decentring the logos. Abridging her heterogeneous argument somewhat, Spivak (1987) maintains that the subaltern cannot appear without positioning a co-existing elite, as it is in fact the instituted trace at the origin. As she puts it, a subaltern consciousness as such cannot be recovered as it is “in the place of a difference rather than an identity” (Spivak, 1996a, 213). Yet, even though Spivak holds onto an elusive, differentially understood, notion of the subaltern, what she also notes is the fact that short cuts are

constantly drawn to posit a sovereign and determinable subaltern subject. So, for instance, with respect to the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak deems them to be conducting a “strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (ibid. 214) when they propound a narrow sense of “self-consciousness” in the face of an acknowledgment that essentialism is non-viable. On the other hand, she also suggests that when the subaltern subject-position is established as an inalienable and final truth of things (i.e. when the claim is logocentric) then the objective is one of political power because it dominates a heterogeneous and uneven discursive field. Amongst many, she infamously takes Foucault and Deleuze to account for this (see Spivak, 1988) and, elsewhere, repeatedly warns her reader of attempts by “native informants” or an “assimilated-colonial-ethnic-minority” (see Spivak, 1993, 1999) who take themselves as representative, authentic or as subaltern subjects. Her claim is that this conflation is simply an “epistemic violence” that underplays the subject’s entry into hegemony at the expense of silenced others. These logocentric structures and their decentring might be further investigated and elaborated upon by examining the constitutive role of differences to deconstructive thinking. I also put these ideas to work with respect to the position or silences of multicultural citizens and to demonstrate the appropriation of cultural difference by Western planners in the following chapters.

Becoming absent

The marginalized practices of writing and reading are keys to unsettling the logos of phonocentrism. For it is when a subject is seemingly absent from originary speech, when they are being represented through notation or a supplement, such as in a book or by a spokesperson, that a signified concept exceeds rationality and/or becomes loosened from the fixity of a “truth”. As Derrida indicates, writing has meant “not the demolition but the de-

sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos” (Derrida, 1976, 10). By carefully reading Saussure, a number of explanations are proffered for this. For one, Derrida observes that the structure of writing is such that the signified is never contemporary, but may become abstracted and can shift from a given place or time. That is, writing can position the signified concept into a new context so that it can take on a new significance, thus displacing a regional or fixed ontology. For Saussure, as with many other commentators, these slippages are designated as discrepancies to the so-called immediacy of self-presence or the purity of truth, but what Derrida underscores is that they signal a “rupture” with the “voice of being” (ibid. 22). Of course, this does not mean that there is a complete transgression. A meaning may repeat a mediated or dominated form of signification. It might be taken as self-evident. Writing may be policed so that it seemingly becomes a derivative from a naturalised inside with distinct borders. But as Derrida (ibid. 34) argues with respect to Saussurian linguistics, an “internal system” is itself constituted by “the very possibility of phonetic writing and by the exteriority of the “notation” to internal logic”. As I understand it, what this implies is that the phonos does not constitute meaning in and of itself. Rather it is also recognised as a product of a multiplicity of spectres that lie outside of a designated field that reconstitutes the inside. By way of example, one of these others might be a presumed reader who re-articulates a given axiom in a different way. Take Shurety’s definition of “Feng Shui”:

“Feng shui may sound like an obscure Chinese dish but literally translated it means “wind and water”. Feng (pronounced foong) means wind. Shui (pronounced shway) means water, and water is an analogy for wealth” (Shurety, 1997, 8).

For me, Shurety’s literal translation is far from linear. Yet, she certainly privileges phonetic writing, especially in the way she plays upon the sound of the signifiers of Feng and Shui. As they stand, they already can be phonically translated. They even are posed above in

alphabetic writing. Nevertheless, if the text is examined carefully, what seems apparent is that the terms, Feng and Shui, for Shurety are insufficiently phonetic within the written text and as a consequence there may be potential slippages of pronunciation and deviations of meaning that may occur from another reading. That is, there could be a perversion in “Feng Shui” which is not “Feng Shui”, and that this danger can be rectified by making “Feng Shui” more like “Feng Shui” (or more like foong and shway). Still, the possibility of such a slippage is not to mean that Shurety’s pronunciation is incorrect, far from it, as any potential transgression simply demonstrates that there are entanglements of speech/writing where writing may as Saussure fears, “usurp the main role”:

“What is intolerable and fascinating is indeed the intimacy intertwining image and thing, graph, i.e., and phonè, to the point where by a mirroring, inverting, and perverting effect, speech seems in its turn the speculum of writing, which “manages to usurp the main role.” Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin”. (Derrida, 1976, 36)

What Derrida notes via Saussure is that despite the fact he gives primacy to the voice, the use of language is more than one centred upon a phenomenological ideal which renders the grapheme (writing) as merely an arbitrary sign of the voice or designates the voice as the sign of the signified. Rather, the subtle evidence that Shurety, Saussure and others consistently outline alludes to the possibility that a linear writing/reading practice is only a particular signifying model, which is somewhat elevated as a teleology within Saussure’s so-called general system. Looking out for such subtle differences and/or slippages in emphasis is a major feature of deconstruction and is a part of my deconstructive reading technique throughout the thesis.

Signs of hybridity and difference

“[The] phenomena that interest me are precisely those that blur [the] boundaries, cross, them, and make their historical artifice appear, also their violence, meaning the relations of force that are concentrated there and actually capitalize themselves there interminably. Those who are sensitive to all the stake of “creolization”, for example, assess this better than others”. (Derrida, 1998, 9)

Deconstruction leads its reader down a slippery path from linguistics to a grammatology. Along this path it draws attention to some of the mechanisms of the logos. In subsequent chapters, I will demonstrate how these mechanisms are played out with reference to city planning and statements on multiculturalism. For now, the step I am concerned with regards theorising some of the very practices of writing and the differential mark. By making this step it is possible to, firstly, show how a narrow logic of phonocentrism becomes breached and becomes hybrid and, secondly, conceptualise a mode of reading that allows the analyst to affirm the constitutive role of, often silent, differences/deferrals in a given text. However, as I would like to make clear at the outset, thinking through and trying to make this step is located within its own structure and machinery and, as I will try to explain, is therefore somewhat elusive and non-linear in trajectory. Indeed, the following explanations of *différance*, spacing and iteration are, and cannot help but be, located in an inter-linked chain of differences and deferrals and are inevitably presented in this manner. Still, for the sake of demarcating my exposition, I will firstly acknowledge *différance* and then take a look at iteration.

Before I write everything down at once, it is worth bearing in mind that although Derrida argues that we live in an episteme that has prioritised speech as the authentic location of signification, deconstruction does not throw the baby out with the bath water. Eagleton (1983, 127-134) for example suggests that deconstruction is the critical operation to *circumvent* the logocentric tradition. Clearly, this is not the same as a negation. Rather,

deconstruction can neither be viewed as nihilistic nor the negative of a given proposition, but as an affirmative operation. *Of Grammatology*, for example, is not a dismissal of the narratives by Rousseau, Levi-Strauss and Saussure, but it does elucidate denigrations as well as question the role of presence and how these presences are constituted. In this sense, deconstruction concerns the limits of given knowledges, the conditions that make that these knowledges possible and “the critical work that would have to open its field and resolve the epistemological obstacles” (Derrida, 1981b, 13). Moreover, deconstruction seeks to redress these logocentric imbalances through a double register or double gesture, which means that to deconstruct there is both “an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system” (Derrida, 1982, 329, emphasis in original). In some accounts, these overturnings/displacements appear to have led a number of commentators to view deconstruction as an act of reversal and reinscription or even as one of irresponsible abandon. However, as something of a bind, it is this double register that also puts Derrida’s essays in a relationship of critical intimacy to the range of texts he studies, whilst showing their potential openings/limits. As Derrida puts it, deconstruction demonstrates a degree of respect for “classical norms” (Derrida, 1976, lxxxix) by “making them slide – without mistreating them – to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure” (Derrida, 1981b, 6). Hence, deconstruction does not break with a given suggestion nor does it propose a position outside of representation, but instead works with it in a kind of textual bricolage. On this front, deconstruction should not be viewed as a type of god trick existing outside of representation or outside of difference, because without drawing upon an old ground a re-inscription loses all of its pertinence:

“There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the

implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest". (Derrida, 1978, 280-281)

Any pretensions of being outside the episteme whilst persisting to employ the procurable implements and language inside of the house is not only paradoxical, but also substantiates a so-called internal anthropocentric metaphysical meaning (i.e. presence). Therefore, deconstruction does not seek to, and cannot, delineate a complete abandon of the hierarchy of logocentric principles, but instead endeavours to find the blind spot(s), hinge(s) and aporia(s), which unsettle it. In order to do this, deconstruction can be seen as an act of transcription – slowly, inhabiting the structures of language term after term - rather than a reading that skims over it. Deconstruction, perhaps, works not through detachment, like seeing the terrain or the “country road ... when one is flying over it by airplane”, but rather is more like a journey by foot that teaches the reader of “the power it commands” (Benjamin, 1997 orig. 1979, 50).

One benefit of a close reading is that it reveals the de-centred properties of a given text. For one – and this is a feature of much of Derrida’s work - a close reading reveals that a subject matter cannot be deflated to a rationalist, phonocentric pretension of self-knowledge to render signification as a secondary and provisional feature of self-presence. In a number of cases, Derrida affirms this particular de-centring through evoking *différance*. For the sake of exposition, this is like the “formation of form” and is drawn from a number of theories including Saussure’s own conception of semiology. As is well known, for Saussure (1916, cited in Easthope and McGowan, 1992) in any system of signs or *langue* (language), it is the interconnected, synchronic differentiations that permit language to procreate meaning and make possible signification. Dropping the jargon, this can be exemplified with the signifier of “c” which allows the reader to distinguish “cat” from “bat” and from “hat” or, alternatively, the reader might consider the process of traffic lights with its signifiers of “go”, “ready” and “stop”. Seen on their own, one of these very signifiers might seem distinct, it

might seem singular, but what such a system of differences underscores, whatever they might be, is that a signifier does not exist in and of itself. Instead, a sign becomes instituted through heterogeneity and with its relationship to others. So, as opposed to being a figure that has fallen from the sky fully formed, the differential aspect of signification de-substantiates a notion of a pure “expressive substance” as it reveals that: any identity must presuppose difference from something else, there is already a multiplicity in a given discursive field and, moreover, that it is the spaces from this multiplicity that make up its identity. This is a point carefully articulated by Derrida with respect to European culture:

“[What] *is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say “me” or “we”; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself [avec soi]*. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference *with itself*.” (Derrida, 1992a, 9-10 emphasis in original)

The point of identifying these differences is that they demonstrate that with any given text there is something unmentioned, relegated and elided, but absolutely necessary for the text’s formulation. Yet, who, what and where these differences might be cannot be taken for granted; they can only be identified through the specificity of a text.

By tracing through the implications of the *Course of General Linguistics*, Derrida notes that Saussure’s own thesis demonstrates a tension between linguistics (speech) and grammatology (writing). For he argues that “from the moment that one questions the possibility of such a transcendental signified, and that one recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signified and signifier becomes problematical at its root” (Derrida, 1981b, 20). To explain this further, the reader might think of the way that a knowledge of “signified” stems from, as Saussure suggests, the formative difference that the “d” of signified is provided from the “r” of signifier. This constitutive difference would imply that the identity of the “signified” is never in itself of a sensible

plenitude. It would imply that a signified is not known on its own. Furthermore, it would also suggest that it is only possible to identify or think about a “signified” from a structure of differences induced by the unrelenting flickering of others that are adjoined whilst moving toward the differing presence that it aims to re-appropriate (Eagleton, 1983). Or put more succinctly, the appearance of “signified” as a word or concept only becomes illuminated from differences, including that of “signifier”, which it cannot help but carry, reference and trace. Therefore, if Saussure’s thesis is correct, the process of signification can be taken as grasping at other spaces to fabricate its “own” meaning; a representation embodies the effacing of other signs: an arche-writing (Derrida, 1976). It would then seem to follow, at least in a deconstructive understanding, that as the sign sustains other traces in its make-up, it inscribes the untenability of a “unitary presence” or “origin”. It would seem that Saussurian semiology displaces the metaphysics of phonocentrism and, indeed, Saussure’s claim that “speech always comes first” (Derrida, 1981b, 28).

If read differentially, a transcendental signified becomes a simulacrum: a signified collapses short of procuring an essential substance and instead always and already becomes instituted through the weaving together of different traces that lay in-between different signs. However, the possibility of such an interlacing is not just about differences as in a synchrony, it is not just about a Saussurian sense of a constitutive relationship between similar and non-similar identities. For *différance* also conveys deferrals and delays, and it is for this reason that the term *différance*, as opposed to difference, is used so as to compensate for a loss of meaning with respect to a chain of temporal mediations. The importance of this difference is that *différance* affirms diachrony. It affirms that the formation of “the present” or any such time/space becomes stretched between and informed by “a past” and “a future” (which are only in place by other traces). Moreover, it affirms the fact that it is the traces amid these

times that invest meaning into a constantly deferring “present”. Hence, *différance* indicates that if the present is to be acknowledged as such, it must keep within itself the mark of other elements and the intervals between them, thereby dividing the present in and of itself. Thus, with a deconstructive affirmation of time, there is no absolute present, past or future. Instead, ruptures emerge due to the intervals that constitute the written sign: “the spacing which separates it from other elements [and itself] in the internal contextual chain” (Derrida, 1982, 317). This is something like what Derrida coins as “*spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*)” (ibid. 13, emphasis in original), which as Passmore (1995) points out disconcerts the particularity between synchrony and diachrony at the level of thought and language with a pluri-dimensionality of space.

If spacing, margins and differences interlace and divide a sign from itself, then a sign cannot be reduced to definitive boundaries. Nor can it be suggested that there is a static or homogeneous truth hiding behind it. Rather a sign can be adopted as a generative, irreducible hybrid that can never stand still. The process behind these motions has been called “a play of difference” where signs co-exist and enter into new chains of significance:

“The so-called “thing itself” is always already a *representamen* shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The *representamen* functions only by giving rise to an *interpretant* that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity. The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move. The property of the *representamen* is to be itself and another, to be produced as a structure of reference, to be separated from itself. The property of the *representamen* is not to be *proper* [*propre*], that is to say absolutely *proximate* to itself [*prope, proprius*]. The represented is always already a *representamen*”. (Derrida, 1976, 49-50, emphasis in original)

An expression within a single text is always and already surpassed. Signs link in with, and are made up by, other texts and other signs in a tissue of differences, “a network of textual referrals to other texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly “simple term” is marked by the trace of another term” (Derrida, 1981b, 33). Therefore, to acknowledge this

“play”, is to acknowledge a sign’s location amongst an inter-related textual chain. It is to acknowledge that a sign is surrounded by a constitutive syntax, which interpolates it so that it cannot be set back in place to some “internal” lexicon closed in upon itself. Furthermore, as signs exist in a process of iteration they become further linked, displaced and carried with the unacknowledged from the possibility of a sign as a static, original entity. For any iteration operates upon a premise that the sign must carry legibility elsewhere. It suggests that a sign may leave a so-called definitive source and affirms that it must be “structurally legible – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee” (Derrida, 1982, 315). Signs in this iterative sense, if they are to function as signs, therefore can never be completely singular, they will never be completely present in itself as their meaning potentially becomes different and deferred when they re-lift, interlace, inscribe and graft onto other chains and spheres of knowledge. There is what could be described as a dispersal of different lines of meaning resulting in the breaking of a “real” or “linguistic” context. In the words of Derrida:

“Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion” (ibid. 320)

With the displacement of language there is a confirmation that the possibility of language produces. “To write” Derrida (ibid. 316) suggests “is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive”. This act – whether it be simply communicating, duplicating words or citing – places a so-called primitive meaning under erasure. The cited sign still exists but is still different to itself although not *absolutely* exterior to itself. It becomes an “arche-trace”, where a simple origin is de-centred and only seemingly reappears in “moments of discourse, the phenomenological reduction and the ... reference to a transcendental experience” (Derrida, 1976, 61). Put simply, the origin appears where an authority somewhat violently privileges the speaking subject, gathered memory or essence

whilst using the repetitive structures of writing, metaphors and tropes as transparent tools of representation.

To demonstrate the applicability of the above theorisation and to mark a connection with this thesis, a parallel with the above restrictive organisation can be tracked with racial politics. In Derrida's work this is most clearly exemplified in the essay *Racism's Last Word* (1985). For like the decentring of phonocentrism and much of Derrida's work, this article makes problematic notions that pass themselves off as idioms, habitations or natural segregations but in this case with respect to the racisms of Apartheid (see Derrida, 1985, 331). Moreover, perhaps the main, or at least the more engaged, feature of Derrida's analysis in this particular work is the way in which he seeks to displace these ideological axioms through noting an interplay between, and a reworking of, a multitude of spatial and temporal differences. So with respect to South African state racisms, he identifies a number of instituting differences including the economic relations of Europe, the phantasms of what Derrida calls "homo politicus europaeus", and the constitution of its laws as founded in a Christian theology. Yet, as he seeks to make clear to his reader, these instituting differences are always counter-positioned with the possibility of resistance and the fading away of Apartheid as prefigured by the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid for which *Racism's Last Word* was written.

What I think Derrida is trying to get across to his readers is a consideration of the interwoven and dispersed relations that constitute a given identity, in this case Apartheid. With a deconstructive approach, he shows that there is nothing natural, present or given to these familial identities as they "would not appear without the grammè, without difference as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present"

(Derrida, 1976, 71). Différance, in this regard, is alluded to, to allow the investigator/descriptor to affirm what they view as relegated differences/deferrals and to remind the reader that traces remain prevalent, albeit as refolded practices and reassembled entities. As a point on history, différance in these accounts “marks the [work of] dead time within the presence of the living present” (ibid. 68) and as a point on geography, it suggests an inter-related co-existence in the face of absoluteness. Racism in this differing/deferring sense is both essentialising and anti-essential. It disseminates itself in highly flexible and contradictory forms. Nevertheless, although such a reweaving might underscore the fact that a differentially formed identity is not necessarily celebratory per se, what différance persistently keeps alive is a hope for change in the face of violence as it offers a means to affirm the unsteady, non-absolutist position of the logos. These trajectories might be further explored with respect to Derrida’s *White Mythology*.

White Mythology

A critique of logocentrism and ethnocentrism is a point further elaborated by Derrida (1982) in the essay *White Mythology*. The predominate concern of this essay is with the role of metaphor in philosophical thought and, in particular, it tracks some classical motifs, which posit the possibility of a pure, literal and immediate sense of language that is presupposed as the appropriate communicative tool for organising reason. In the exergue, it is suggested that claims to a true meaning are found through privileging diachrony and/or through shaping an analogous relationship between two signs (such as a signifier and signified). These are privileged as such because they seemingly provide metaphor with a semantic depth. Yet, as something of a counter point, what is also flagged up is that any so-called degree of resemblance, diachrony or analogy is only maintained through a rigorous concept of metaphor, in which they are classified according to an internalised organisation, such as an

“indigenous population” or “native region” (ibid. 220). The sense that I gather from the essay is that there is, or at least a pretence of, a degree of proper-ness attributed to particular signs to particular places or people, and that the regulation often proves to be at the expense of metonymic positional combinations and detours that sit silent in the background. In chapter 3, I deliberate upon such regulation with respect to the construction of Chinatown and its aesthetics. In chapter 4, I also draw out the relevance of an internalised organisation for the narrative of community. However, in the final section of this chapter, I simply explore the *White Mythology* essay and point to some of its trajectories. I do so, to round up and reiterate many of the issues discussed above and, moreover, to touch upon some of their implications for issues of ethnicity and identity via some writings that have leant towards deconstruction. In the light of Rattansi’s (1994, 30-31) claim that “it has been left to others to draw out the relevance of deconstruction for understanding racism, ethnicity, Western colonial domination and so on”, this is perhaps a worthwhile academic endeavour.

By taking various Western traditions of rhetoric, Derrida examines the limits that they pose and the margins that they exclude. So, for example, by reading Aristotle’s negative claims against the grain (i.e. differentially), tracing missing terms and elucidating the “less than true” figures which are not taken as a constitutive aspect of a metaphor, Derrida points out that the privilege attributed to the phonos elides conjunctions, the chains of signification and syntax. In short, the observations are that irrespective of any semantic regulation there have been wanderings of meaning and that these displacements of a lexicon always continue. So for example there might be an analogy within language between the signified and signifier, say a Chinese identity and the word “Chinese”, yet the term Chinese might also lie with something other than itself and become unfolded or it might lie with a new guardian. So, if I say “I went for a Chinese last night”, it would probably mean I had a Chinese meal,

but alternatively it could also denote that I picked up my mother from her home the previous evening. Therefore, placing the signifier “Chinese” in other chains of significance demonstrates a potentially intelligible switching from food to my mum and back again. It would seem that the relationship between the reader/writer and a sign may become complex, displaced and travel further than a singular or homogeneous meaning, where the sign “Chinese” may continue to operate on conditions where certain meanings are disavowed whilst others are elevated. Not that the slippage in the above example merely results in an abandonment of meaning or intention as some critics or advocates of deconstruction seem to suggest. Rather, it indicates, firstly, that although the term “Chinese” may be inscribed amongst different sorts of relations, there are durable constraints or a “code of regulated substitutions” (Derrida, 1982, 244-245) of a metaphorical content where a sense of “Chinese” evokes particular sedimented meanings over others. Secondly, that presence – whether as a signified, a designated culture or community - does not constitute the ultimate classificatory criterion (Derrida, 1981b, 130), and, thirdly, that presence may become linked and carried in a process of iteration. Indeed and furthermore, in this final sense, an etymological rooting out of an origin cannot be tracked back in a straight line as its history is one of detours and interrelations rather than one of a determined location. Hence, another outcome that can be drawn from a disseminating structure is that - although metaphor might seem to indicate a primitive, essential meaning - metaphor in itself becomes located amongst a play of substitutions where it undergoes borrowings, replacements and abstractions that never cease to stratify and widen a metaphorical charge away from a literal relationship or proper meaning. This extensive, irruptive and hybrid sense of metaphor is a prerequisite for language construction and has been captured in the term “catachresis”.



That Derrida demonstrates that a so-called signified concept is in itself wrapped with metaphor is a manoeuvre that destabilises the logos. The suggestion is that although the good metaphor calls for nouns that names something properly - it conjures a picture of truth where presence comes back in a form of analogy (at the expense of others) - this too is posed through a catachresis. In other words, although the sign may seemingly denote a signified concept, the trick of a good metaphor actually makes up for the absence of say the author or object in question through underlining, recounting and mimicking certain truths and proper names that hold value or are appropriate to that determination of a discourse. Thus, although there may be a critique of metaphor and its non-true figures on the basis of its distance from the signified concept, what can also be noted is that so-called valid metaphors are evoked through a similar, catachrestic structure. Moreover, what can be underscored is that, whilst metaphor may be regulated in order to conjure a particular image, the play of syntax generates an interweaving where the “same metaphor” is able to operate differently here and there. That is, it is iterable; it effectively encompasses “an incessant recoding of diversified fields of value” (Spivak, 1993, 61). The point that Derrida makes on this is that syntax lies in submission to the privileged role of a lexicon, but there is a continual possibility of “[presence] disappearing in its own radiance”:

“Now, it is because the metaphoric is plural from the outset that it does not escape syntax; and that it gives rise, in philosophy too, to a text which is not exhausted in the history of its meaning ... , in the visible or invisible presence of its theme (meaning and truth of Being). But it is also because the metaphoric does not reduce syntax, and on the contrary organizes its division within syntax, that it gets carried away with itself, cannot be what it is except in erasing itself, indefinitely constructing its destruction”. (Derrida, 1982, 268)

It is this multiplicity and these substitutions that indicates imperfections in the logos: when different terms are layered onto the metaphor, then the supposedly original turns and has movement and further multiplies. The relocation of the metaphor provides the reader with an

addition that lacks and/or exceeds the full presence of the specified knowledge. There is what might be described as a folding implicit in the use of metaphors where a metaphorical definition plays in a different syntax so that it becomes different whilst re-inscribing the same. Classical motifs that denote the etymological purity of language therefore fall away through the substituted semantic loss and gain within the general catachrestic structure.

Towards the end of the essay, Derrida suggests that our reading/writing or management of syntax and metaphors may follow either two pathways. One of these paths may lead the reader to resist the self-destruction of the proper name in the aid of absolutism. Such a resistance treats signifiers as an inevitable evil, as a *pharmakon*, which may be accepted on the condition that there is potential re-appropriation of an essence and the proper meaning. This path leads its followers to the defence of the *logos*. It celebrates a “philosophical concept of metaphor, [which] co-ordinates metaphor with the manifestation of truth, with the production of truth as presence without veil, with the reappropriation of a full language without syntax, with the vocation of a pure nomination” (ibid. 270). Such a path is one where the reader/writer cuts out excess, fills in the lack and regulates meaning. This might be done to conserve, naturalise or make a narrative whole. However, in contrast but not detached from this path is another that strays from the former in that it attempts instead to unfold meaning and challenge the borders of the proper name through rereading “writing according to a different organisation of space” (Derrida, 1976, 86). The task here is not to pretend the reader is outside of the *logo/phono/ethno*-centric tradition, but instead is “a mode of inhabiting the interior” which endeavours to mark the mobility of traces implicit in signification whilst trying to affirm the excess of the *logos*. This is a path where the reader may accept the strange limits of an economy of signs, and the essentialised subjects that feed from it. And then try to “explode the reassuring opposition of the metaphoric and the proper,

the opposition in which the *one and the other* have never done anything but reflect and refer to each other in their radiance” (Derrida, 1982, 270-271, my emphasis).

As Robert Young (1990, 18) identifies in his book *White Mythologies*, much of Derrida’s project has implicitly been preoccupied with “the decentralization and decolonisation of European thought”. If the reader is to follow the trajectory of this thread a little further they might consider the ways in which different users of deconstruction have framed the two aforementioned pathways. For the sake of exposition, it is possible to identify at least two interrelated camps on this front. Firstly, there seems to be a sense where deconstruction is taken as a descriptive/analytical tool to locate, position and situate insurgent groups. For me, the clearest, or at least the most prominent, commentator on this front is Stuart Hall. Hall, as is well documented, has an extensive theoretical trajectory taking in Althusser, Gramsci and Lacan amongst others (see Hall, 1980, 1996b, 1996c), but his work on identity politics also explicitly draws upon *différance*, albeit with certain conditions and with certain detours. For instance, as I have already mentioned, the new ethnicities thesis (Hall, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996a,) calls for a re-theorisation of ethnic identity from those based upon univocal, natural and essentialised claims to incorporate the positional and conjunctural forms of identity construction. In particular, Hall’s posture seeks to decouple those forms of ethnicity proposed by nationalistic, imperialistic and racist discourses with “the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity” (Hall, 1996a, 447), which as he underlines is not difference as in their tradition versus ours, but closer to “Derrida’s notion of *différance*”. So as opposed to discussing difference in terms of some discrete, incommensurable racial groups that lie amongst a plural spectrum of races (see Malik, 1998), what Hall is proposing is a form of difference as one of interrelation, multiplicity and hybridity (also see Hall, 1996b). In other words, difference for Hall means that there is no true hidden self or

common ancestry, as an identity emerges within a play of specific modalities of power and draws upon a “constitutive outside”. That is, it draws from its relationship with differences, with its other, to construct its own position, thus revealing its implicit heterogeneity and its margins.

Somewhat reiterating and further exemplifying these points, albeit in a different context, are a number of other articles that elaborate upon the position of ethnic groups and the afterlife of other spectres. For example, with respect to British multiculturalism, Hall (2000, also see Hall, 1996d) argues that in the face of globalisation there is a proliferation of differences where effectively global cultures and colonial knowledges are constantly inflected, weaved and translated by local identities in producing post-colonial forms of multiculturalism. Similarly, the work by Barnor Hesse (1993, 1997, 2000a) questions the privilege attributed to the post-war period of immigration as the defining period of race in Britain through evoking the constitutive history of slavery and colonialism. Alluding to the metaphysics of presence, Hesse’s argument is that there exists a “whiteness” which has focussed its attention on the physical presence of a racialised other at the expense of cultural memory and its antecedents. Subsequently, he decentres its very formation through suggesting that the “whiteness” does not come about through delineating its own particularism, but through enumerating its limits and frontiers, which point to its constitutive margins, its very incompleteness and its dependence upon its other for its own definition. So as opposed to those that seek to “represent the nation as a closed system of differences”, Hesse is suggesting that nation building emerges, through the excluded relational elements which he identifies as “non-whites” and “multiculturalism” (Hesse, 1997, 97). “In other words the very idea of white Britain is already prefigured both in the Imperial legacy of a split sense of Britishness and in the anatomy of racial antagonism where white identity is

dependent for its expression at all on the very racialised other it sees as blocking its full expression” (ibid. also see Hesse, 1993, 172). Anna Marie Smith (1994) also makes a comparable argument on new right discourses on race and sexuality.

Secondly, there is also a sense where in the light of the unsteady position of the logos deconstruction is mobilised to affirm resistance. One place where this is made explicit is in *Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1998). In this book Derrida discusses the imposition of a sovereign law from elsewhere, with the example of French language in the Algerian education system, and suggests that the outcome is a strange mixture of an autonomous language, that is one that sought to homogenise the population into a “mother tongue”, and a heteronomous language. Tailoring the narrative somewhat, for Derrida these two movements place him both inside and outside French language and leave him without a firm reference or as he puts it in a state of “absolute translation” (Derrida, 1998, 61). Yet, as opposed to lamenting this lack of fixity, he instead uses it to signal the impossibility of mastery and the possibility of an opening in a political closure:

“For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and *naturally*, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate ... this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, thorough the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as “his own”. (ibid. 23, emphasis in original)

Although Homi Bhabha (1994) draws heavily from psychoanalysis, there are parallels to be made with the above formulation of uncertainty together with its location in deconstructive thinking and the structures of his ambivalent, contradictory and repetitive stereotypes. Not least, like Derrida’s work Bhabha points out that the objective of (colonial) discourse is to

form a hierarchical regime of truth. He also suggests that the mode of representation in which this becomes implemented is not through a stereotype as a false representation, but through a fixated mode of representation, which denies the play of difference. In the essay *Sly Civility* (1994), this mode of recordation is said to be speech as writing is taken as something of a dangerous tool that produces a doubling or a splitting of a fixed hierarchy of civil progress. But perhaps the most explicit parallel between Bhabha's thesis and Derrida's *White Mythology* is that they both affirm the places where such fixations and elevations come under threat from the iterable qualities of stereotypes as they enter into relationships with others. For put succinctly, Bhabha's suggestion is that although colonial discourse desires a recognisable subject, he also points out that its repetition (or iteration) is constructed around ambivalence; "in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (ibid. 86). It appears that the perverse outcome is one where mimicry is "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline"; it produces something that is almost the same, but not quite: a partial presence that mocks the very emergence of the "colonial" and at the same time marks its fixation.

Conclusion

I make no apologies here for laying out deconstruction in the above manner. I understand that there is a lack of a critical edge to the exposition and that the preceding pages have been largely descriptive. Yet, this was my intention. "Derrida is hard to read" (Spivak, 1988, 292) and as such it takes some effort to offer an explanation of his work. Nevertheless, as way of conclusion I would like to assert the following points:

- 1) Although deconstruction notes potential movements of meaning, it is not simply about folds and remarks. Derrida's examination of philosophical scripts carefully considers the modes of representation, what dominates a narrative, its regulated substitutions and its

dispersal. For me, that a tradition of these modes also colludes with nationalism, imperialism and ethnocentrism indicates that deconstruction is not some trivial endeavour with little political or social relevance, despite the fact that some commentators have translated it into an esoteric academic narrative. Instead, what I think deconstruction offers is a means to note some of the very structures of epistemic violence, its subtleties, their philosophical and representational underpinnings as well as a means to reconsider them. I consider these logocentric structures with respect to Birmingham City Council's representation of community, multiculturalism, entrepreneurship and immigration throughout the thesis.

2) One of the modes of representation that deconstruction takes to account is that of presence. As I understand it, deconstruction does not and cannot discard this notion solely in favour of floating signifiers because there is no script absolutely exempt from its essentialising, restricting and absolutist narratives. Indeed, as a deconstructive project is only ever differentially understood, it cannot help but trace it and draw from its marks of phonocentrism and the speaking subject. Nevertheless, deconstruction does seek to throw the focus on the other foot and affirms constitutive co-existences, slippages, contradictions and exclusions. Whilst not necessarily so, in this chapter these include syntax under lexicon, writing under speech, subaltern under native informant, inter relation under idiom, and movement under fixity. In the course of the remainder of this thesis, I point to the narrowness of the local authority's politico-ethical formation by repeatedly tracing similar elisions plus the denigration of particular subject positions.

3) With a deconstructive outlook, the above relegations maybe affirmed through locating the importance of *différance*, which goes as far to recognise that signification or presence is not established by a demarcated framework or untainted origin, but rather that any given identity is formed through, within and draws attention to an endless weave of differences and the

detours of deferrals. A short hand for this geographical and historical motion in contemporary social science is hybridity. In the following chapters, I mark out this weaving process to the subject formation of Chinese identity and Birmingham's Chinese Quarter so as to unsettle the proposition that identity or place is dominated by a given agent or representative.

4) Although deconstruction is often thrown forward as a theoretical treatise for narrating and analysing the position of insurgent groups, another means in which it may be conducted and exemplified is through close textual work. Whilst avoided in this chapter, I believe that this is one means in which deconstruction can be empirically driven and has been largely left by writers such as Hall, Hesse, Smith and Young for others to pick up. My suggestion is that by doing this foot work there is a rich, detailed and more sustained account to be made for examining cultural differences, margins and exclusions amongst various discourses without making an empirical leap of faith. Another benefit of such an approach is that it would also map out an avenue where terms such as hybridity, multiculturalism and new ethnic identities maybe re-appraised and the discursive limits of the state can be more accurately illustrated. Having established deconstruction as a theoretical account, I now move onto unfolding deconstruction in relation to Birmingham City Council's representations of Chinese culture to begin such a reappraisal and to outline such limits.

¹ The first use, here or in *Of Grammatology* however, is not necessarily the origin of a term such as deconstruction, as Spivak (1999) points out, deconstruction echoes something like a modification of Heidegger's use of "destruction". And indeed, the word "deconstruction" was substituted for "destruction" in the more recent publications of *Of Grammatology* from its initial appearance in the French journal *Critique*. For Heidegger (cited in Doel, 1999, 142) destruction is "a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed down to the sources from which they were drawn ... Construction in philosophy is necessarily destruction."

² Hegel was not alone in these views. Frank Goodnow, an advisor to President Yuan Shih -k'ai, believed that Chinese language slowed the Chinese mind with its method of classification and the lack of an alphabet (Ch'en, 1979, 40).

³ These views were also shared by many thinkers including Max Weber, who saw China as a "static, unchanging society" (March, 1974; also see chapter 5).

CHAPTER 2 - FINDING THE CHINA OF CHINATOWN: A DECONSTRUCTIVE HISTORY OF POST-WAR PLANNING

“The city’s body *proper* ... reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts, gives back to itself the work that links it with itself within the confines of the agora, by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of the evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it. Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless constituted, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside. These parasites were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense.” (Derrida, 1981a, 133, emphasis in original)

“Each architectural place, each habitation has one precondition: that the building should be located on a path, at a crossroads at which arrival and departure are both possible. ... There is no building without streets leading towards it or away from it; nor is there one without paths inside, without corridors, staircases, passages, doors”. (Derrida, 1997, 319-320)

Finding a way around a multicultural city has never been straightforward. Rather, at each turn there seems to be an immediate and tireless inscription of differences that interrupt the stability of a sense of place and/or a present moment (Derrida, 1982, Donald, 1999, Massey, 1994). In this chapter, I take a historical journey through a city in which I seek to de-centre some of its safe geographies. The journey, in particular, indicates some of the city limits that resonate in a search for a city of refuge. It evokes the brokering of alliances and claims to the natural order of city life. Yet, it also connects to numerous passage ways that reveal that these places, moments and limits already affirm a co-existence that is both absent and present, outside and inside, and constitutive of, yet excluded from the very writings, practices and understanding of contemporary British urbanism. I steer this journey by heading to the narratives of Chinatown in the City of Birmingham from those of the post-war period of reconstruction and by outlining a number of persistent and shifting characters on the way. These include the figures of the post-war immigrant, the integrationist, the ethnic entrepreneur and the refugee as evoked in a series of governmental and non-governmental

texts, which I shall use as my points of departure. In the context of this thesis, the intention of this chapter may be seen as a means to open out the closures of my theoretical concerns and, moreover, lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters by broadly considering *some* of “the traces of historicity and spatiality [as] a constitutive feature of the processes of subject and object formation” (Keith, 1999, 532).

In recent years, a number of commentators have started to review the relationship between immigration and the construction of Western cities (see Kofman, 1998; Rogers, 2000). Most of these accounts have focussed on the metropolitan areas of North America and have frequently explained the resurgence of interest by citing demographic transformations. For illustration take a passage from an account entitled “Immigration and the changing Canadian City” by Daniel Hiebert:

“Over two million immigrants entered Canada in the 1990s and the vast majority have settled in just a few metropolitan areas. As a result, the social geography of large Canadian cities has been transformed, an issue that has attracted considerable attention from Canadian geographers.” (Hiebert, 2000, 25)

What follows in Hiebert’s account is a description of “basic immigration trends” and, in the main, a discussion of the changes in Canadian cities that have been produced through the settlement of immigrants. These cover the places of the city in which immigrants occupy - whether their homes or their places of work - the role of immigrant networks – whether transnational or local - the clustering of immigrant businesses, their type of employment and social polarisation. In a similar fashion, Gober (2000) in a progress report entitled “Immigration and North American Cities” comments:

“At the date of the 1990 Census, 38% of Los Angeles’ population, 28% of New York’s population, and 17% of Chicago’s population were foreign born ... Large Canadian cities have been similarly transformed. In 1996, immigrants comprised 42% of Toronto’s and 35% of Vancouver’s population. It is no wonder that the attention of urban geography increasingly is focused on immigrants – on the social processes that influence where they live and

work, their geographic mobility, their social networks, and the urban cultural landscapes that they have created and that give meaning to their lives.” (Gober, 2000, 83)

To be clear, I think both Hiebert and Gober outline a number of pertinent social issues that confront Western cities and its inhabitants. Still what I find surprising is that when evaluating the relationship between immigration and the metropolis that both of their accounts privilege the presence of immigrants as their objects of study. For King (1995) this is problematic, as a focus upon presence assumes commonality amongst a vast range of people, hiding their variation and differentiation. On reading Hiebert or Gober, I think that they are far from guilty of this. However, I do think that they premise the analysis of the city of immigration upon the subsequent arrival of immigrants. In the first half of the chapter, I supplement, not dismiss, this contemporary work on the city by examining a discourse, which demonstrates that the absence of immigrants or, more precisely prospective immigrants outside of the city, were and continue to be an integral feature of city building. I do so, firstly, to affirm that a study of immigration and the city cannot be conflated with an exposition of the immigrant in the city. Secondly, I do so to re-connect the production of some everyday urban features to international movements of people and, for the sake of my exposition on the emergence of Chinatown, thirdly, to foreground some of the institutional relationships, which are involved in urbanisation.

In the second half of the chapter, I sketch a short governmental history on the official emergence of a Chinatown. Professor Kay Anderson has also compiled a number of historical expositions on the Chinatowns in Vancouver (Anderson, 1987, 1988, 1991) as well as those in Melbourne and Sydney (Anderson, 1990, 1993). Drawing from Said and, to a lesser extent, Gramsci, she brilliantly illustrates a genealogy which has placed a Manichean categorisation between “a hegemonic white European historical bloc” and “a set of racially

defined outsiders known as the ‘Chinese’” (Anderson, 1988, 128). In particular, her concerns are less with assuming that Chinatown is a product of pervasive “Chineseness” that has emanated from Chinese immigrants, but instead proposes “a new conceptualization of Chinatown as a white European idea”:

“It is possible, however, to adopt a different point of departure to the study of Chinatown, one that does not rely upon a discrete “Chineseness” as an implicit explanatory principle. “Chinatown” is not “Chinatown” only because the “Chinese” whether by choice or constraint live there. Rather, one might argue that Chinatown is a social construction with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West”. (Anderson, 1987, 581)

Borrowing from Said’s (1978) critique of Orientalism and its discursive methodology, Anderson’s different histories annotate the way that a “European” idea of Chinatown has persistently denigrated and distanced itself from its other whether on biological, cultural or spatial grounds. Indeed, in a recent “autocritique”, Anderson (1998, 211) concedes that her earlier histories are very much about a cultural politics of racial polarity between “statically authorial (us/them) locations”, which she re-evaluates for underplaying “other historically situated oppressions” such as social class. To support these claims, Anderson points to the heterogeneity of class positions amongst Chinese people in New York’s Chinatown and the building of class alliances in Melbourne’s Chinatown:

“There, the Chinatown upgrading scheme of the mid-1970s saw Councillor David Wang, a Hong Kong-born entrepreneur and Australian citizen, join force with Mayor R. Walker and a Chinese architect to transform Little Bourke Street into central Melbourne’s “Window on the East”. Stage 1 of Chinatown’s redevelopment proceeded, complete with Chinese-style decorative lanterns and pavings dotted with Oriental motifs. The alliance that brought about Chinatown’s revalorization, then, was founded in a correspondence of economic and political interests that cut across the racial divide. Such an alliance ... suggests a few theoretical points. First, it complicates neat stories of unilateral hegemony and appropriation on the part of a putatively undifferentiated European oppressor. Second, it turns our critical eye to the overlapping fields of economic and ideological determination in which Chinatown is inserted. And, finally, by opening out the Chinatown storyfield to take in the district’s location within wider

processes of class formation and capital's restructuring, the district's narrative positioning as eternally (racially) othered is displaced." (Anderson, 1998, 210)

In the main, I am in agreement and engrossed with Anderson's observations; the production of an idea of Chinatown cannot be reduced to a white European bloc, especially when her studies are located in Northern America and Australia. Yet, although my reading is led to reappraise the narratives of Anderson's earlier work, what also interests me here are two inter-related elements of her revaluation. Firstly, that Anderson adopts class formation as a "non-discursive" factor (Anderson, 1998, 204). I feel that this assumption is not unproblematic, because if this is so, then, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to realise an alliance between different subjects, at least, on the level of dialogue. Instead, if I were to assume that communication could be eliminated, then it would appear to me that a class position would be a coagulation of pre-existing features that emanate from a pre-given political economy. In short, it would imply that class formation could be understood in and of itself. Still, whilst I am sympathetic to Anderson's concerns, my opinion is simply that whilst the relations of production or class may have effects outside the sphere of the discursive, it is only with the structures of a discursive field that they become constituted with meaning. An implication that might be drawn from this is that racialised or economic subjects are not the absolute origins of social relations but negotiate, practice and become endowed with "experiences" – whether about race or class - that depend on discursive conditions of possibility (Foucault, 1987). A genealogy of class is as important as one on race.

Secondly, I also find it difficult to understand how Anderson takes it for granted that hegemony is sacrificed when analysing capital and class:

"Of course, by situating racialized sites in wider contexts of, for example, class and capital restructuring, the elegance of the ethnic explanatory frame

implicit in fashionable (if fatally abstract) concepts of “hegemony” and “resistance” is sacrificed”. (Anderson, 1998, 220)

I feel little warmth by putting hegemony on the fire. My numbness perhaps stems from the fact that although Anderson’s earlier accounts are concerned with a “white European hegemonic bloc”, it would seem to me that a consideration of hegemony has never been reducible to a white European identity. Nor has hegemony been a concern that can be conflated to a fixed sense of differences between “them” and “us”. Moreover, my view is that hegemony perhaps could provide an “explanatory frame” to engage with the differences and the alliances that Anderson now appears to be interested in. One of Anderson’s earlier descriptions of hegemony provides a means to consider this:

“Gramsci was absorbed by the problem of the superstructure and, in particular, the manner in which dominant ‘historical blocs’ *articulate* the interests of other social groups to their own. To the extent they are successful, there comes a historical ‘moment’ when the philosophy and practice of a society are fused; when a concept of reality is diffused through a society. The bloc achieves such ‘hegemony’ not through indoctrination, but as more and more people come to interpret their own interests and consciousness of themselves in the ‘unifying discourse’”. (Anderson, 1988, 131, my emphasis)

With Anderson’s conception of hegemony, the joint interests of class and ethnicity are highly possible, as the process of building a hegemonic bloc comes about through *articulation*. That is, hegemony becomes established (and contested) among relational elements, which are modified as a result of exposure to articulatory practices. Simplifying to the extreme, what hegemony indicates, therefore, is not a fixed sense of subjectivity but one that is mutually constructed and subject to flux according to the different relations in which an individual becomes inserted – whether they might be identified as capital, class, disability, gender, race or sexuality. Furthermore, what should be added is that although Anderson finds a “unifying discourse” this can never be absolute. Nor can it be an assumed a priori. Rather a hegemonic bloc persistently encounters subaltern and counter-positions. For in order to embrace “more

and more people”, Anderson’s theorisation presupposes that there is something to hegemonize and somebody else to resist/subject the articulatory practices. One consequence that is possible to take from this reading, then, is that a “constitutive outside” or “unstable balance” persists with each identitarian claim (Hall, 1996c). As Laclau & Mouffe (2001) are keen to point out, these antagonistic differences are not an absolute other, but relational differences, which might be thought of as the unmentioned heterogeneity of and outside a hegemonic formation. What I am affirming, therefore, is that there are traces of others and suppressions in the above formulation that whilst unexplored by Anderson should not be disregarded. These traces can be explored further on returning to Chinatown and taking a closer look at the contingent and contextual make-up of its hegemonic formation.

Chronologically speaking the official appearance of the Chinese Quarter within Birmingham City Council’s planning archive is a relatively recent occurrence. Paradoxically this is not to imply that the emergence of a formal idea for a Chinatown, in its contemporary form, has suddenly materialised out of thin-air. Rather I suggest that a propensity for its arrival and/or its increasing valorisation comes about through a series of overlapping and mutually constitutive governmental phases. The intention of the second half of this chapter is to unravel some of them and, in doing so, demonstrate an aporia that hides behind the China of Chinatown. Furthermore, by sketching my history this way I seek to acknowledge some persistent exclusions, whilst simultaneously recognising that insiders solicit and draw benefit from an outside by offering “disciplinary support” in its proposed sharing of the centre (Spivak, 1993, 57). Or to put it in other words, what I am concerned with here is the emergence of a multicultural present and the grounds in which it becomes domesticated, whilst keeping an eye on the differences and deferrals that lie at its margins.

Partial knowledges and practices of post-war planning

“The abject designates ... those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nonetheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject, but those living under the sign of the “unlivable” are required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which, and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is after all “inside” the subject as the founding repudiation”. (Butler, 1993: 3)

In a history of Twentieth Century British planning, Professor Gordon E. Cherry – former President of the Royal Town Planning Institute - writes of, amongst many things, post-war regeneration. In one paragraph, he sums up some of the aspirations of post-war planners and some of the issues in his discussion. He suggests:

“There would be a veto on sporadic building in rural areas ... and the economic and social base of the countryside would be protected by a revived agriculture. The urban spread of town would be contained; sprawl would be avoided, and the London green belts showed the way. Town and cities would be redeveloped the scars of war would be healed and the squalor of old building replaced by new. Overcrowding would be eased in a process of moving population out to a combination of peripheral estates and new towns. Over time, built-up areas would be reconstructed according to new principles of layout and design; order would replace disorder, amorphous residential areas would be transformed into planned neighbourhoods with social and other facilities, and the various land-use components would be neatly separated. Overall, qualitative improvements in urban living conditions would be effected. The country’s assets of scenic heritage would be protected in National parks. *All these matters became the conventional wisdom of post-war planning, the collectivist state being the steersman to a brighter, nobler future for its citizen*”. (Cherry, 1996, 146, my emphasis)

Set amongst a background of Keynesian economic policies, Cherry also tells his reader of a nationalisation programme and the construction of the welfare state. In some detail, he lists and champions the Family Allowances Act of 1945, the National Health Act of 1946, the National Insurance Act of 1946 and the National Assistance Act of 1948. However, what seems strange is that he misses a piece of policy that defined the legal limits of citizenry that

forms the target of his conventional post-war planning wisdom. The policy that I am referring to here is the British Nationality Act of 1948¹.

Of course, this omission might be excused as an oversight on Cherry's part. He is, after all, an expert of planning and not citizenship. Yet, the biases of his training do not prevent him from discussing the "Commonwealth", which the Act redefined, or some of the immigration that it legislated. In these passages Cherry plays upon a particular understanding of immigration. In short, he associates the presence of immigrant groups with the emergence of certain unhelpful and disruptive features. For example, Cherry informs his students of a "continuing rise in the birth rate, coupled with immigration from overseas" that pointed to a "large population increase" (ibid. 151) and of a housing shortage caused in part, as he argues, "by immigrants from Commonwealth countries" (ibid. 157). In his highly regarded book on Birmingham, Cherry once again uses this descriptive device with respect to the planning apparatus. He writes, "post-war legislation had not bargained for cities where problems stemmed from circumstances very different from those of building and their replacement" (Cherry, 1994, 203). In Cherry's explanation, the particular "circumstances" in question are not a city hit by de-industrialisation and recession, even though this becomes evident. Rather he prefers to list "the newcomers" and the "inner city" as the subsequent "problems" to the post-war glory years of land use planning. In the first half of this chapter, I re-evaluate some of the assumptions of the post-war period of reconstruction and assess the relationship between planning and immigration. Focussing on Birmingham, I suggest that both the presence and the absence of new British citizens were a persistent part of the rebuilding of the city, and furthermore, that they became a definitional, yet sometimes silent limit to the ideal of land use planning. In order to illustrate this I, initially, describe Birmingham's first major post-war plan and locate this document within a broader political movement of

demographic and economic decentralisation. I then go on to look at one of the plan's precursors to disentangle the policy of decentralisation and trace what Judith Butler and others have called a "constitutive outside". As an aside, I paint a brief picture of how immigration was represented in other governmental and popular discourses.

The City of Birmingham Development Plan. Even before the end of the many air strikes of the 1939-1945 War had left their impact on the West Midlands, a number of local authorities had actively set about visualising the conurbation's reconstruction. However, it was not until 1960 when much of the rebuilding was actually underway that Birmingham published its first official post-war planning agenda in the form of the City of Birmingham Development Plan². Penned by the City Engineer and Surveyor, Herbert Manzoni, this plan is described by Cherry (1994, 194) as "essentially a rationalisation of conflicting land uses" and, to a certain extent, these notions are denoted by the plan. The aims and objectives, for example, are clearly and concisely listed as defining the city in terms of "suitable" use:

- (1) To allocate areas for housing...
- (2) To increase the open space in the City...
- (3) To allocate and designate sites for schools and other educational purposes...
- (4) To ensure the proper allocation of land for industry.
- (5) To improve the present road system by works of improvement and construction ...
- (6) Generally to secure the most suitable allocation of land in the City.
(Manzoni, 1960, 7-8)

In addition, one of the main cartographic details of the plan, the Town Map, draws the city as a collage of two-dimensional shaded areas so defined by a set of "main purposes" that reflected the plan's objectives. These are broadly classified as:

“Residential
Shopping
Business Use
Buildings for Civic, Cultural and other Special uses
Open Space (public and private)
Educational
Industrial

Communication and Other Special Uses” (ibid. 15)

Nevertheless, whilst the plan may have signalled a demarcation of the geographical shape of Birmingham along such definitions of physical planning, is Cherry correct to suggest that the CBDP was concerned with “essentially the rationalisation of conflicting land uses”? If so, how was the rationalisation understood and what were the conflicts? And if not, what becomes omitted? To move towards an answer to these questions, I need to unstitch the CBDP and situate its proposals and maps in a context of some post-war planning policy.

Lying alongside the Town Map are 17 “planning problems” that elaborate upon some of the different objectives of the CBDP. Whilst covering a variety of physical planning issues, one discursive theme that links some of them together is a notion of congestion. For instance, the plan discusses “housing congestion”, the removal of industries from “the congested inner [city] areas”, “population overspill”, “traffic congestion” and also the “relief of congestion” with respect to shopping and business areas. The plan then goes on to stress the importance of the zoning policy as illustrated by the Town Map and offers a number of other planning solutions in the form of “proposals” to clear the overcrowding. These include: setting two housing density zones, the provision of open spaces in the form of parks and a green belt, building arterial roads, stipulations on industrial ownership and distributing population growth. In his account of Birmingham’s rebuilding Cherry also discusses much of this urbanisation process at length. He states that “[one] of the main features of Birmingham’s planning has always been its demands for spaciousness” (Cherry, 1994, 192). However, in the context of Birmingham’s post-war planning, spaciousness and its antithesis, congestion, were never simply about land use. Nor was spaciousness thought in and of itself. Rather, the design of the city involved a number of interwoven assumptions made by planners and policy makers of an idealised population size and the size of urban

conglomerations. With respect to the latter, as Sutcliffe and Smith (1974) record, Birmingham underwent a policy shift from expansionism to retrenchment. Broadly speaking, this fitted into a nation-wide de-centralising strategy suggesting that concentric rings of city developments should be reinforced, population should be shed from urban centres and economic growth should be discouraged in the south east and the west Midlands (Taylor, 1998). For instance, the Abercrombie-Jackson Plan proposed that the West Midlands had a finite capacity in terms of population and should redistribute 200,000 people to towns such as Coventry, Stafford and Redditch (cited in Cadbury, 1952). Similarly, the Barlow Report (1940) – also approved by Abercrombie - recommended the decentralisation of industrial population from congested urban areas and this was reinforced by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, which made it a requirement for local authorities to define a target population figure. In the case of Birmingham, the 1952 draft of the CBDP initially proposed such a target to be 1,167,000, although this was eventually reduced to 1,060,000 by 1960. Still, irrespective of any such fluctuation, the importance of these target figures is that they not only made possible a calculation for population overspill, but they also indicate that planners recognised a problematically sized population to the planning ideal. These themes, calculations and problems are evident in the CBDP. On population and industrial development it states:

“The population of the City in 1951 is given in the Preliminary Census Report of the Registrar General as 1,112,340, and the Registrar General’s projected population figure for 1971, based on the 1958 mid-year estimate is 1,178,700. ... [In] estimating the population at the end of the Plan period account has been taken of the City Council’s housing and redevelopment programme, private housing and migration and that part of the City’s overspill problem to be dealt with by 1971 is likely to be 118,700 persons. It is made clear ... that the City Council is aware of the urgent need to make plans, in conjunction with the Ministries and other authorities concerned, for the accommodation of the City’s overspill.” (Manzoni, 1960, 7)

“Areas allocated for industrial use are intended mainly for existing industries in the City and are not regarded as available for industries coming from outside.

It is proposed that such areas should mostly be reserved – (a) as sites for the creation by Birmingham citizens of new industries in their early stages, as has traditionally occurred in the City; (b) as more suitable sites for the relocation of misplaced industry; and (c) as sites for the redevelopment of industries within the City which are cramped and/or outmoded” (ibid. 18)

From the above, it can be recognised that the CBDP concerns itself with some of the key features of Britain’s decentralising strategy: population, housing, an overspill problem, national/regional policy, industrial dispersal and migration. Yet, the point I wish to recover here is that between the time of the writing of the CBDP to its publication, Britain and indeed Birmingham was undergoing other changes that cannot be reduced to demographic/economic movements within the boundaries of the nation. Post-war planners often suggested that they took a comprehensive view point and, whilst this ideal has become contested (see Sandercock, 1998), I suggest here that some alternative scales of visualisation were within the planner’s estimates even though they became barely represented in Birmingham’s official post-war plan. To clarify my claim I want to now turn to another document, *Conurbation*, which offered strategic guidance to the CBDP, and discuss how certain representational practices concerning the disavowal and effacement of post-war immigration became articulated by the state.

Conurbation. *Conurbation* warrants some attention not only because it is considered to be “a classic in planning literature” (Cherry, 1994, 151) and not merely because it offered strategic guidance for the CBDP, but also because it elaborates upon some of the planning attitudes towards retrenchment. Compiled by the West Midland Group on Post War Reconstruction and Planning – a group comprising of a small elite of academics, industrialists and politicians that included the figures of Manzoni and Paul Cadbury³ - *Conurbation* was published in 1948. Along with the other reports produced by this Group⁴, this document was very much a

product of its time: the Group were stimulated by the aforementioned Barlow report (Sutcliffe & Smith, 1974) and, similarly, the report itself discusses a problem of uncontrolled urban sprawl and the need for efficient planning:

“Today the planner is confronted with a gigantic sprawl of factories, houses, cities, towns and villages. Industry is too firmly rooted and widespread to be moved wholesale. The workers who serve it have been housed in dwellings that have sprung up in the shadow of the factories. Recent planning has taken definite steps to improve housing, but there remains an inconvenient heritage from the past, and war has impeded the efforts made to meet current needs. Uncontrolled growth has sent towns stretching along main roads until it is now difficult to see where one ends and another begins. Yet among this new growth lie hundreds of acres of derelict land awaiting the reviving hand of the imaginative planner to restore them to fruitful use”. (The West Midland Group for Post War Reconstruction and Planning, 1948, 16)

In addition, Conurbation perhaps reflects some other desires and pretences of post-war reconstruction: there are claims of a “comprehensive outlook”, a need for “a team of experts”, a belief in empirical fact finding and also hopes for a “good life”. Yet, although the report and its positivistic descriptors are tempered with an acknowledgement of a negative vision comprising of sprawling urban growth, what becomes pertinent to the decentralising project is that its differential narratives become thoroughly contingent upon the positions of post-war migrants. In the conclusion the report states:

“POPULATION

Estimates of the future growth or decrease of the country’s population must, to a large extent, rest on assumptions. The Group has assumed that the tendencies which were apparent over a long period of years up to 1939 will continue to determine population changes, once the abnormal conditions created by the war have disappeared. In the Conurbation, however, population increase between the years 1921 and 1939 was at a higher rate than in the United Kingdom, mainly owing to a higher natural increase, and only in the later years partly to immigration...

To avoid the danger of congestion, the population of the Conurbation should be allowed to continue to grow only to the extent that is equivalent to the natural excess of births over deaths. Policy should, therefore, be directed to effecting an even balance between immigration and emigration.

THE PLANNING PROBLEM

If the above recommendation is made effective, the Conurbation as a whole will not present any serious problems in relation to a national policy for dispersion.” (ibid. 250-251, my emphasis)

As a part of the fact finding and the aspirations towards a “good life”, the West Midland Group advocated restrictions on immigration⁵. Through analysing data from a “long” survey period, the Group surmised that although “natural increase” far exceeded the increases of immigration, it would be the latter which needed to be checked. The West Midlands, they argued, should be without an excessive population; any net immigration would lead to “congestion” – a key problem also for Manzoni’s plan - and this should be controlled by only accommodating “the natural excess of births over deaths” rather than new migrant subjects. To take a brief explanatory detour, the use of ecological tropes was nothing new in urban discourse (see Donald, 1992). For example, somewhat inspired by Western natural sciences, Ernest Burgess mobilised a similar lexicon and syntax in his seminal account on the growth of the city (see Duncan, 1996). He wrote that the “natural rate of increase of population most favorable for assimilation may ... be taken as the excess of birth-rate over the death-rate” and suggested that this measurement could also be used to calculate “the great influx of southern Negroes into northern cities” (Burgess, 1996, 94, orig. 1925). Burgess was, of course, primarily referring to the migratory movements surrounding the United States of America and, in particular, Chicago. However, some questions that might be asked here include: Can Conurbation’s calculations on immigration be reduced to a concern over British post-war demobilisation through the discouragement of immigration as intra-national migration? Did the West Midland Group have an inkling that the West Midlands could resemble Burgess’s Chicago with its “immigrant colonies”? In part, an answer to these questions is made possible with some of the report’s assertions. For, if read against the grain, the above “assumptions” on the “country’s population” mark out a suspension of those outside Britain’s

boundaries from Conurbation's population estimates and/or a demographic uncertainty that does not follow the national trajectories that ran up to 1939. In this latter regard, it is perhaps not incidental that the year of the report's publication was also the year in which Britain re-drew its Nationality legislation, and with it, definitions of citizenship. Nor is it incidental that British employers were actively courting Caribbean and Asian migrants as a potential solution to their labour shortages in the 1940s and 1950s. But in an explicit line of reference, Conurbation also disrupts a suggestion that British planners merely examined migration as one of a localised dispersal in the way it tracks and shows an awareness of population movements that breach the boundaries of the nation:

“... We shall, therefore, continue to see the Conurbation growing relatively to the rest of the country. This consequence of the higher rate of increase can only be offset by relative changes in fertility (which are unlikely to reverse their present relation, or to be big enough to make much difference), or by emigration from the Conurbation, or *by immigration from abroad to the country as a whole but not to the Conurbation*”. (The West Midland Group for Post War Reconstruction and Planning, 1948, 81, my emphasis)

To be clear, my argument here is not that the decentralisation of the domestic industrial population was unimportant to the West Midland Group, but that Birmingham's post-war planners estimated a threat to the decentralising project that cannot be confined to migratory changes within a national scale. If demobilisation is read in such an expansive sense, then, it can be suggested that the CBDP along with Birmingham's entrenchment policy was already managing and sought to manage national differences, albeit with restricted representational practices that barely trace the presence of overseas migrants. The significance of Conurbation in marking such migratory differences is, therefore, at least twofold. Firstly, the report demonstrates that post-war/pre-1960's overseas immigration and its effects were not just viewed in a context of foreign, rather than domestic policy as is often portrayed by certain eminent writers in the field of British racial studies (see Hesse, 1997, 94; Smith,

1989). And, secondly and also pertinent to my discussion here, Conurbation outlines a governmental reception that precedes the arrival of many, but not all, Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth migrants to the planned area (see Gabriel, 1998). The implication here is that the controversies of immigration never simply rested upon the presence of immigrants in the city, more the foreboding of their possible arrival.

Although the report's conclusion appears to be adamant on a degree of immigration restriction, the understanding of post-war immigration throughout Conurbation is uncertain. For not only does the report define immigration on a number of scales, but it also argues that migration is both random and computable. The Group writes:

“Just before the war, immigration accounted for nearly as many additional people as came by natural increase, and this factor may continue, diminish, or increase, quite independently of the birth-rate. Conversely, it may be said that over the period 1940-1970 an average addition of 5 per thousand per annum is a possible contingency. In other words; by 1970 the population of the Conurbation may have increased by 300,000 unless some measure of control over immigration is exercised.” (The West Midland Group for Post War Reconstruction and Planning, 1948, 85)

Whilst such (un)predictability perhaps reaffirms that the report's “assumptions” of population growth lay alongside antagonistic visions of post-war city building, what I think is also important to note here is that the West Midland Group traces the existence of pre-war immigration in Birmingham. The calibrating suggestions of continuation and increasing numbers are exemplary in this respect. For these trajectories mark out not only potential population trends, but they also signal a number of people who arrived to the city from Wales, the east Midlands and Ireland together with the small number of what Sutcliffe and Smith (1974) call “coloured people” who lived in Birmingham pre-1939. Therefore, that the Group called for immigration controls does not mean that there were no immigrants in the area. Nor does it imply that immigrants were unrecognised. Rather, it is that a position for immigrants sometimes becomes found in Conurbation as “a constitutive outside” (Butler,

1993; Hesse, 1997; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). That is, through privileging a social process such as “natural increase”, the West Midland Group locates a relational, yet excluded “other” in such descriptions of an excessive or possible population growth. Reading through the document, this is a reoccurring practice:

“A comprehensive plan for the whole Conurbation could provide accommodation within its present overall area for such population increase as is likely to occur through natural increase, and, at the same time, provide sufficient space for the Green Setting... But any population increase greater than this would imply the relative growth of an area which is already large enough, together with the industrial decay of developed areas in other parts of the country and the subsequent decline of morale, the waste of capital and skill, and all the ills that spring up in a depressed area.

The West Midland Group therefore advocates that the population of the Conurbation should be allowed to grow only to the extent that will arise through the natural balance of births over deaths.” (The West Midland Group for Post War Reconstruction and Planning, 1948, 84-85)

If read as differentially marked, immigration sometimes forms an unmentioned limit in the reconstruction of the locale. It serves as an opposing, yet constitutive, figure of socio-spatial ills that are situated vis-à-vis the ideals of housing a naturalised population and constructing a green setting. In other passages of *Conurbation* this binary understanding of post-war reconstruction gathers a little elaboration. In one section, the reader is told that a green setting - with its “house-gardens, wider roads, and parkways” set amongst the spaciousness of “green, open land” (ibid. 199) – would be dependent on a “balance between immigration and emigration” (ibid. 200). The idea in this case, seemingly, being that the decongestion of urban space, which was highly influential in the construction of Birmingham⁶ (see Whitehand, 1996) and, indeed, the British Empire (Home, 1997), could not take place if more people were allowed to roam town and country. In an earlier section, the Group further discusses such increasing numbers with respect to the housing programme. More particularly, they suggest some allowances, but also a reluctance to house immigrants in the Conurbation:

“In estimating a first post-war housing programme, a small allowance is made for a net immigration which occurred in parts of the Conurbation over the war years ... but the programme is drawn up mainly on estimates of the natural increase of the population and on the average number of persons per family per dwelling. No separate estimate is made of housing needed to relieve overcrowding”. (The West Midland Group for Post War Reconstruction and Planning, 1948, 95)

The point I am making here is not that these dichotomous views are in any way accurate: the projections of immigration are speculative. Nor is it that they are steadfast: there appear to be some concessions to immigrants in the re-housing programme. Rather, it is that if the post-war parameter of the garden city and its connotations of suburbia generated, what Osborne & Rose (1999) call, a “diagrammatic” for how the city was governed, then, this diagram was referenced through a sometimes elided, but mutually dependent other: the post-war migrant. Therefore, it would follow that the ideals that sought to de-intensify urban living through combining “rural charm” with the “modern city”, were not purely a domestic affair (see Borg, 1973). Nor were they a concern that simply dealt with physical planning issues (also see Taylor, 1998) or an idea that can be attributed to a particular planning visionary, such as Ebenezer Howard. Instead, my assertion is that post-war planners were already dealing with different entities – including overseas migrants - within and outside the social body, but as an antagonism to it.

On reading Conurbation, one line of argument that I have been pursuing is that the formal planning of Birmingham – with its celebration of low population density, decongested suburban spaces and isolated gardens - has historically had an engagement with an absent/present “other”, in the form of immigration. The way Conurbation deals with this particular other is undoubtedly highly presumptuous, but the report frequently positions the immigrant as a synonym for social disorder and overcrowding. For me, what this categorical split (i.e. natural increase from immigration) encourages the reader to consider is the way in

which planning persistently composes its ideals through privileging and relegating different identities in a multiple field of uneven social relations. Two implications that might be drawn from this are, firstly, that in this differential marking, identities co-exist and, secondly, that each identity becomes mutually constitutive of its other in a syntactic play between absences and presences. The reason why I am drawing these implications out is because with such a combination the posing, privileging or normalisation of “natural increase”, “spaciousness” or “physical planning” alludes to and must signal the existence of a heterogeneity, which may be silenced in the planning language. To exemplify the persistence of this effacing and the multiplicity in post-war urban discourse, consider a defence of Birmingham’s stock of tunnel back housing in the document *When We Build Again* by the Bournville Village Trust. This particular passage posits a claim to “uniformity” in the light of an awareness of cultural differences:

“Uniformity may be monotonous, but no officer would expect to improve the effect of a parade of soldiers by issuing a variety of headgear ranging from an Indian turban to a busby.” (Bournville Village Trust, 1941, 40)

Apart from the connotations of military precision, discipline and colonialism, if I understand the Trust correctly, there appears to be a differentially posed idea of uniformity that is brought to bear from an original heterogeneity. What I mean by this is that a uniform identity becomes understood in relation to, and defined in the light of, other available identities, which would imply that uniformity is, paradoxically, not uniform and only a preference gathered amongst a play of differences. The evocation of uniformity by these planners, thus, should be read as an attempted closure and/or marks a contextual privilege given to a certain aesthetic and its visualisation. Nevertheless, if it is recognised that post-war planning represents a singularity gathered in a field of differences and is indeed only a privilege, then, on returning to the CBDP it is possible to affirm a series of non-represented others in

Birmingham's first official post-war plan. One instance where this may be done is with respect to the housing programme. As I have flagged above, the West Midland Group had assessed the potential impact of immigration to housing, however on face value these calculations disappear in the CBDP. Instead, the CBDP estimates housing need solely according to a projection of "natural increase" between the years of 1958 to 1971 and presupposes that 118,700 people will leave the city with the New Town programme. Furthermore, in the Appendix, it breaks down these statistics into a number of other relevant calculations. These stipulate the "Number of persons for whom additional accommodation is *to be* provided to reduce congestion", the "Number of persons *to be* re-accommodated in Redevelopment Areas" and the "Number of persons for whom additional accommodation is *to be* provided" (Manzoni, 1960, 28, my emphasis). I would suggest if read as a polarity of differences these very calculations reveal not only those that were eligible for council housing, but also trace an unmentioned location for those who did not qualify. In post-war Birmingham, as Cherry (1994; also see Rex & Moore, 1967) tells his students, those ineligible included new British citizens due to a five-year disqualification rule⁷. On a "housing problem" in the early 1960s he writes:

"The housing problem stemmed from the fact that there was a five-year waiting period before immigrants, from whatever country, or city of origin, could qualify for council accommodation. Birmingham's housing allocation policy, which was centred around this five-year rule, implied that the Council could assist in the housing of only part of its population. The open market was available for the remainder, but for coloured immigrants this posed a major difficulty. The only houses they could buy were the late Victorian and Edwardian terrace houses – which they proceeded to sublet." (Cherry, 1994, 187)

By reading Cherry in the CBDP, it is possible to trace out a blind spot both in Birmingham's official post-war plan and in his suggestion that it was "essentially" concerned with the "rationalisation of conflicting land uses". Given the new scientism and "empty vessel"

conception of space which dominated Western planning in the post-war period with a so-called race neutral planning rationale (see Dear, 2000; Sandercock, 1998), the former omission is perhaps unsurprising. But, in addition, the blind spot signals a more specific contextual register, one where British politicians and, indeed, planners would gradually seek to write out ethnic minorities from urban policy in the fear that they were seen to favour immigrant populations (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). This dream of “impartiality”⁸ (Sutcliffe & Smith, 1974), however, was only one of elision: immigrant identities – whether absent or present - were in fact already a constitutive part of Manzoni’s spatial reality and its fiction.

The Integrated Chinese

Post-war redevelopment occurred at a time when the potential impact of immigration into the United Kingdom was being recorded in the constituencies (see Carter et al. 1987). Intersecting these texts lay an institutional resistance that made equivocal claims that immigrant cultures disrupted the orders of British life (see Harris, 1991). As a number of commentators have pointed out, these claims often sought to undermine a right to the city through a “white amnesia” (see Hall, 1996; Hesse, 1997; Smith, 1994; Schwartz, 1999). That is, despite the fact that the colonies had evident economic and cultural attachments to the metropole (see Driver & Gilbert, 1999; Hall, 1991; King, 1990; Meegan, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 1994), immigration was opposed under a premise that the periphery was a detached referent from a pure, untainted centre. For example, on one hand, C. B. Burgess of the Colonial Office was fearful of “a sizeable Chinese community springing up in the U.K., composed of persons with no real British roots ... and [with] no experience of or any sense of attachment to the British way of life” (CO1030/1319). Yet, on the other, he suggested that Chinese immigration “might lead to a problem similar to that presented by the West Indians”, which potentially could serve as “a means of prejudicing the general public against Hong

Kong and its need for an export market in the UK”. Nevertheless, the narrative of Britain as sometimes with, but mainly without a relation to its colonies became increasingly skewed through a number of protective measures that sought to maintain Britain’s racial and demographic make-up. With respect to the Colonial Office in the early 1960s, such measures tended to oscillate between the interrelated strategies of immigration control and integration. For instance, in a debate with W I J Wallace, the Head of the Far Eastern Department, Burgess sought to establish some form of governmental contact with Hong Kong Chinese migrants in the United Kingdom (CO1030/1278). On this issue, they both agreed that alienation from “Britishness” should be checked. However, whilst Burgess suggested that a Liaison Officer would help prevent the young immigrant Chinese population becoming “vulnerable to exploitation or indoctrination” from the spectre of “positive left wing inclinations”, Wallace argued that any service provision would simply “encourage an even larger influx of Hong Kong citizens to this country”⁹. In other words, service provision was constructed in terms of self-interest.

Along with controls on immigration, integration has historically been adopted as something of a common sense solution to racial problems in Birmingham¹⁰ (Solomos & Back, 1995). What I briefly consider in this section is the inter-relation of this strategy to an epistemic violence. I do so to demonstrate that the silencing of immigration in the post-war planning discourse was given consent by the local media and, moreover, to begin to frame some of the continuities and discontinuities between the post-war period of reconstruction and a more recent incarnation of multiculturalism in the city. The continuities I am particularly concerned with here are those on the signifying practices that mark the presence of an immigrant identity and, what might be termed, the “conditions of hospitality” (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Derrida, 2001). One instance in which these features might be

described is through taking an article entitled “The Integrated Chinese” from a local daily broadsheet, which signals some over-determined and differentiating forms of categorisation.

To quote at length:

“Of all the immigrant minority groups in the Midlands, the Chinese are those about whom it is least easy to generalise.

They blend so unobtrusively and never, except on such hey days as New Year, seem to express them selves as a corporate entity. They eschew politics, and they rarely seem to get into trouble with the police.

Probably there are more than 3,000 of them in the West Midlands; no one can calculate the exact number because so many of them hold British passports and are exempt from the rules of registration governing aliens. Most of them are from Hong Kong, with a generous sprinkling from Singapore. And while they have permeated all walks of life, the majority of them are to be found in the catering trade.

... The early Chinese restaurateurs were individualists. While the basic cuisine was – and for that matter still is – Cantonese, there was a lot of pride in the speciality of the house. As the chefs and waiters dispersed, the individual quality of the cooking in each establishment became diluted. Indeed, the fundamental criticism of Chinese food in the area today is, with some notable exceptions, its sameness.

... The Chinese do not live in closed communities, they do not believe in the ghetto. They are to be found in most professions and trades and in nearly every suburb of the city. They are renowned for their eagerness to help one another. But they have little outward appearance of communal identity.

This has certainly something to do with the language difficulties many of them experience. And it may have something to do also with the fact that their women tend to be excessively sheltered from the social pressures of an alien society. This is Old China asserting itself subconsciously in modern Western life.

Compared with some other immigrants, the Chinese integrate gracefully and willingly, succeeding in retaining their own culture while accepting fully the facts and responsibilities of British citizenship – rather as the Jews have done in many countries throughout the centuries.

They have probably suffered less from colour prejudice than any of the other Asiatics, though they cannot be said to have remained completely untouched by it. But where it has occurred, they have accepted its existence with stoic dignity and have now largely outlived it.

Most of the Chinese are Buddhists but this, being more of a philosophy than a formal religion, does not provide any unifying outward manifestation”. (The Birmingham Post, March 16th 1973)

A number of points can be made here. To start with, by commending the local Chinese community for being unobtrusive and as existing without a unifying outward manifestation

the Birmingham Post suggests that these citizens possess a particular form of subjectivity. To some extent this can be detected in the way that the reporter explains the silence by connecting the Chinese population to Buddhism and the traditional values of China. However, the problem with these explanations is that they simplify the spaces of enunciation, the diasporic experience and excuse gender inequalities by overplaying a centred culturalism and underplaying the social and political relations in which immigrants are exposed. In one sense, the registers I am referring to might be explored with respect to the dissemination of the so-called covert practices of British Chinese people as told by a number of ethnographic studies (see Jones, 1979, Watson, 1977). This is partially examined in chapter 4. But for now, the exposure I am more interested in refers to a synchronic, paradigmatic relationship, which denotes a co-existence in the city. This is partially evident above, especially and explicitly with the claims that the Chinese population has assimilated more than other Asiatics, the signifier of the “ghetto”¹¹, the similar Jewish population and in terms of the unheard female voices. Still, if the narrative of integration is to make sense, the reader must also trace another, somewhat dominant, co-existence in which to calibrate the listed differences. Whilst implicit, such a subject-position is left unnamed and it seems should also be left undisturbed. Indeed, as with many accounts on integration, the premise is with encouraging and expecting the immigrant to adapt to certain rules so that they lie proximate to a familiar body that is taken for granted as the appropriate figure of inhabiting the city (Young, 2000). As with the case of the Birmingham Post, therefore, the report is not celebrating differences. Rather, it is building a hegemonic consent, expecting minorities to measure up and denigrating different identities according to a distance construed from a dominant subject-position. From the above article, although such a body is not made clear, the familial points of assessment and avowal might be identified as political silence,

geographical dispersal, the work ethic, masculinity, obedience to the law and, not least, the possession of a British passport. For me, a question that this simple observation raises is what is “new” about multiculturalism?

Patrick Abercrombie and a Chinese Prejudice

British planning and urban policy making has long had an uneven engagement with Chinese culture, whether in terms of formulating its practices or in its understandings of the environment. This relationship, however, is one that is difficult to pin down as what often arises is a sense where Chinese culture is held as both a source of inspiration and contempt. Yet, perhaps, one way that it is possible to make sense of this unevenness is through reconsidering an essay entitled *Of Grammatology as a Positive Science* by Jacques Derrida (1976), which I outlined in chapter 1. As way of summary, one of the main points of discussion in this essay is Leibniz’s praise for Chinese script and, in particular, the way that Leibniz viewed it as a blueprint for a philosophical writing (or what he called Characteristic) that was able to make up for “a lack” of a “simple absolute”, which Derrida tracks to the logos of a Judaeo-Christian God. In this respect, Chinese writing – one form of non-occidental writing that had fractured the pretence of phonetic script as somehow a universal, omnipotent, system – becomes understood by Leibniz as a “domestic representation” and, furthermore, mobilised to re-centre a logocentric position. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider a number of examples in which this structure of appropriation and ethnocentrism reiterates through the planning discourse. What I demonstrate is that different forms of Chinese culture, although held in great esteem by British planners, have repeatedly been cited to consolidate an inside and that this functioning operates through the elision of other, less desired, but nonetheless, available forms of identity. Professor Patrick Abercrombie’s (1943) seminal planning text, *Town and Country Planning* provides one such example.

In *Town and Country Planning*, Abercrombie famously outlines his criteria for planning practice. As is well known to students of urban planning, these are practices that refuse “laissez-faire” and, as he is keen to stress, they are also practices of inter-relations that complete a harmonious whole:

“The touchstone of what constitutes a planning scheme is this matter of relationship, the accommodation of several units to make a complete but harmonious whole”. (Abercrombie, 1943, 11)

One of the relationships that Abercrombie seeks to discuss is, of course, between town and country. On this he draws from example after example to suggest that they represent “opposite but complementary poles of influence” where each unit becomes formative of the other. For Abercrombie, the implication of these relations is that there is no such thing as “natural growth” but instead a whole history where it is possible to detect the “conscious” intervention of “mankind [sic]” in “[moulding] his [sic] environment” (ibid. 10; also see 1943, Part III). Abercrombie here, like many contemporary thinkers, challenges the orthodox idea that towns are the opposite of nature (Amin et al. 2000, 13-14). Yet, importantly the crux of his argument is that if England is to be planned successfully the connections between town/country and “nature”/“man” must be handled carefully, especially in light of protecting England’s National Parks and when “wild country” comes within reach of a large population. In his case, the solution is both “a code of conduct” (Abercrombie, 1943, 227) and a planning practice drawn from China in the form of Feng Shui.

According to David Matless (1993, 174), by drawing upon Feng Shui, Abercrombie’s work casts a doubt on “the view that attention to nature and spirituality and attention to the modern metropolis are and have been entirely separate concerns”. Rather, following Cosgrove and Pyrs Gruffudd, Matless (ibid. 175) instead suggests that the appropriation of Feng Shui or “a rural environmental philosophy in its most spiritual moments cannot

necessarily be placed in an anti-modern field” as the “modern” lies alongside environmentalism. Quite clearly, Matless reminds his reader of Abercrombie’s point on the formative relationship between different “units”, which blurs a distinction between nature and culture. However, another way that this dialectical process can be read is by recognising that “the Chinese” have become selectively accommodated along a longer trajectory of Abercrombie’s history of English planning and, furthermore, are conjured to address the concerns of population and nationalisation in inter-war Britain. In this respect, like Leibniz’s “Characteristic”, “the Chinese” are located as a domestic representation and reconstructed to fit easily amongst its syntax. The pertinence of this assertion, perhaps, becomes a little clearer on considering the narrow scope in which “The Chinese” appear in Abercrombie’s work:

“The Chinese, faced with the intensive use of the country, have, as already mentioned, evolved a definite system, the practice and aesthetic of Feng Shui, for the purpose. Whether in the present political welter of that country any vestiges of the system remain, is uncertain; but we might well follow their example in attempting to formulate and act up to some definite principles of conduct. The Chinese landscape, evolved under Feng Shui, is probably the most elaborately composed that has ever existed; but it has remained country, for unlike the Greeks whose city policy dominates Europe, the Chinese have always looked to the country as their home.” (Abercrombie, 1943, 229-230)

“The professor of Feng Shui ... is placed in a position of extreme power. We can hardly anticipate a practice based upon such esoteric principles ... But it should be possible to evolve a system of landscape design which will be authoritative enough to prevent brutal outrage on the one hand and a misguided attempt at a bogus naturalism or faked antiquity on the other.” (Abercrombie, 1943, 231-232)

If read against the grain, what becomes evident in Abercrombie’s account is that he draws from “the Chinese” not their revolutionary actions, even though there are spectres of an unsettling Chinese population that is altering the Chinese planning system. Nor does he gather a Chinese urban landscape, even though Abercrombie tells his students that country is constitutive of town and, conversely, that town is constitutive of country. Instead, he praises

and criticises “the Chinese” according to a planning system that can deal with “the density of population per square mile” and in the way Feng Shui provides “Local administrators” with “absolute powers” (Abercrombie, 1943, 21). As I have already pointed out, these planning ideals were also at the foreground of a nation-wide de-centralising strategy that constructed measures to shed industrial population from Britain’s urban centres, especially from those in the southeast and the west Midlands. For example, Abercrombie produced the Greater London Plan of 1944 that sought to produce a new, dispersed urban order with concentric rings of development, fast traffic highways, green belts, green wedges and new towns. Similarly, Abercrombie was a participant in the Barlow Commission and made demands for “a national planning framework, for stringent general powers over industrial location, and for powers to make regional plans stick” (Hall, P., 1996, 168). These concerns for political power perhaps stemmed from the fact that his plan for East Kent was never implemented as 1920’s planning was merely advisory. Yet whatever the case may have been, what remains is a sense where Abercrombie makes available the blueprint of Feng Shui to define the necessary corrections and demonstrate the inadequacies of the British system of planning. In this respect, Abercrombie does not import Chinese culture wholesale, but defines it according to certain domestic conditions. As I now exemplify, Abercrombie’s Feng Shui simply marks a precursor: the limited admiration/appropriation of an idea of China reiterates in more contemporary forms of urban planning, albeit with different domestic registers.

Re-centring Birmingham city centre

“The accumulation of planning knowledge arises through incremental understandings of what would be the “best” configuration of investment ... to facilitate social reproduction. But the most important shifts in understanding come in the course of those crises in which something obviously must be done because social reproduction is in jeopardy.” (Harvey, 1985, 176)

“China” as referent hides the hybrid of Chinatown, hidden in its turn from the culturally unmarked Anglo. (Spivak, 1999, 332)

In the first half of the chapter, I demonstrated that the post-war reconstruction of Birmingham was never premised upon an absolutist representational system. In the second half of the chapter, I further consider a history of ethnocentric consolidation with reference to urban planning. The period upon which I re-focus this exposition coincides with a governmental revaluation/re-articulation of the city’s local and global assets. One of these can be identified as multiculturalism, another a select immigrant. However, before I introduce these characters, it is worth outlining a textual chain that precedes them. This brings to the foreground a syntax that traces some other subject-positions that, whilst seemingly transparent, have a stark influence on the orientation of how multiculturalism materialises and becomes understood. It also allows the reader to note that the introduction of multiculturalism is not a caesarism, that breaches from one governmental epoch to another, but is more like a repetition of established and hegemonic themes that effectively displace onto a moment of multicultural celebration. To untangle these claims a profile of the governmental trajectories gathered from the Central Area District Plan¹² (1980a, 1980b, 1981) is in order.

Birmingham in context. The 1970s marked a transition in Birmingham’s economic and planning strategy. In the first instance, the city was encountering numerous difficulties that Manzoni and his colleagues had never envisaged in their project. For instance, inflation and oil prices were rising and the overlying regional dependence on engineering and metal manufacturing that the CBDP had encouraged was being exposed to a higher level of competition¹³. Subsequently, as is well noted, recession hit Birmingham. Industrial output was reduced by more than a third between the years of 1971-1981 (Spencer et al, 1986), labour shedding became widespread¹⁴ and there were also significant reductions in

reinvestment in the manufacturing sector (Cherry, 1994). Between 1971 and 1987, it was estimated that 29 per cent of total employment had been lost in the city (Beazley et al. 1997) and, certainly, many areas associated with manufacturing had become redundant. Meanwhile, senior members of the local authority were making attempts to offset these job losses through pumping public investment into the service industries¹⁵ and by constructing measures to recycle industrial land¹⁶. Perhaps the clearest example of these political actions was with the building of the National Exhibition Centre (NEC), which opened in 1976 to provide “the launch pad for Birmingham’s shift towards becoming an international business city” (Birmingham Development Department, 1989, 120). But closely attached to the “re-positioning”¹⁷ of the city was a re-modelling of the city centre as typified in the different documents that made up the CADP.

To cash in on the investment in the NEC and to broaden the city’s economic base a different strategic emphasis was placed upon the city centre. In the main, the narratives that describe these changes tend to suggest that a key component of the strategy was with the nurturing of service sector investment - in areas such as office spaces, upmarket retailing and in the leisure industries (see Loftman & Nevin, 1996a, 1996b). They also suggest that these enterprises would be largely encouraged through a combination of government initiatives such as the building of flagship developments and also a marketing of Birmingham’s image through high profile, boosterist initiatives (see Lister, 1991; Smyth, 1994). Indeed, somewhat matching the consumerist line it encouraged, Birmingham placed in its shopping bag¹⁸ a G8 Summit, a Eurovision Song Contest, an International Conference Centre, a Symphony Hall as well as the staples of a Sea Life Centre and an Imax Cinema. However, what the CADP demonstrates is that at the outset there was a number of other, albeit less recognised but equally significant, image-enhancement packages that accompanied these

grandiose projects. One of them included restructuring the material legacies of Manzoni's CBDP, another involved redefining parts of what were acknowledged to be the "inner city" as the city centre.

Environmental Improvements. Because of reductions in public spending, the CADP indicates that developments in the urban infrastructure would be more piecemeal and have to build upon older forms of fixed capital. To some extent then, recent regeneration projects in Birmingham can be taken as something of a bricolage where planners sought to reinscribe city-space and not simply build from scratch. In the early 1980s, the two dominant means to which the reinscription would (re)commence was through the re-launching of Birmingham's "Bright Light District"¹⁹ (see below) and the re-enlisting of a select number of symbolic fragments located amongst the inner city's urban morphology. In the CADP, the latter of these spectacles was concerned with building a heritage industry. This included restoring the canal networks, the "Civic Area" and "the Legal Area", supporting the conservation areas of Colmore Row, Edgbaston, St Paul's Square and the Jewellery Quarter as well as protecting a select number of smaller features, such as cast iron street furniture, statues and free standing clocks. What planners later called "multiculturalism" seemed far from the scene. Still, according to the CADP, the purpose of recovering these architectural forms and city-spaces lay with a functional understanding that "the quality of the environment can have a profound effect upon our appreciation and confidence in the area" (CADP, 1981, 1). In government circles and indeed planning, such "appreciation and confidence" was undoubtedly wrapped up with attracting footloose investment and business tourism (see CADP, 1980a, 1981; Fretter, 1993). The somewhat idealistic, but all too familiar, hope here was that the planning authority's taste in symbolic capital would transform into money capital (also see Bianchini, 1990; Harvey, 1990; Zukin, 1991) or at least a form of competitive advantage. For planners

Figure 2.1.



The view of the Smallbrook Queensway from the Holloway Circus, Birmingham.

and policy makers, however, this optimism became tempered with an acknowledgement that lying in and around the city were some areas that did not carry a heritage of note. In the plans themselves these spaces were regularly associated with the constructions of the post war property boom years, of which the Inner Ring Road or what was characteristically known as “the Concrete Collar” was at the foreground.

Birmingham’s Inner Ring Road and the Areas of Potential Change. There is perhaps no better monument that intersects the fluctuating history of Birmingham’s post-war planning than the Inner Ring Road (Figure 2.1, Map 1). Designed by the architect James Roberts and built of pre-cast in situ concrete, the road conjoined seven major junctions with 4.8 miles of dual carriageway, encompassed four underpasses, two flyovers, five bridges, one twin tunnel and covered 52 pedestrian subways as well as twenty public conveniences and 45 shops (see Cowles & Piggott, 1974). When it was opened in 1971, the road was officially named the Queensway²⁰ and, in a similar vein, it was acknowledged to be the “jewel in the crown” of the region’s public developments (Cherry, 1994, 199). Such grand and monolithic gestures were indicative of Birmingham’s attempt to demonstrate its support for the local, and then flourishing automobile industry. However, even at its conception, support for the road was always far from absolute. For example, despite the fact that the Deputy City Engineer and the Resident Engineer declared that the road had “improved the environmental quality of the area” (Cowles & Piggott, 1975), this Corbusian styled structure was dismissed as lacking “architectural distinction” (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1996; also see Thomas, 1963). In addition, the road itself was said to be a magnet for noise and atmospheric pollution, and its subways were criticised for being a nuisance for the elderly, as well as being prime spots for crime and disorder (Birmingham Development Department, 1989). Indeed, by the time planning entered into the 1980s the dismissal of the

Queensway became common currency in the local urban discourse. For instance, the CADP associated the road with a multitude of uneven, yet mostly depreciative, signifiers such as “drab and inhuman”, “gloomy, dirty and dangerous”, “monotone”, “unfinished”, “unattractive”, “particularly unpleasant” and also one of lack:

“Areas which lack visual interest lie between New Street and the Hurst Street area and New Street and Broad Street and at the northern end of Corporation Street. These not only form barriers between entertainment areas but are also unattractive areas in the City Centre both by day as well as by night.” (CADP, 1980b, 50)

Interwoven into these claims on the road’s aesthetics were others that concerned an alteration to its function. The first Highbury Initiative (1988) - a delegation of academics, architects, planners, management consultants, landowners and government officials²¹ - argued that the city should shift the Queensway’s emphasis to encourage pedestrianisation through building tree lined boulevards and by re-routing the city’s motor traffic to the middle ring road. They hoped that these measures would release commercial expansion into the concentric ring between the Inner Ring Road and Middle Ring Road, and moreover relieve the city of a number of “Left-over spaces” dotted around the inner city (City Centre Symposium, 1988, 10). In the draft of the CADP such leftovers roughly matched what were provisionally called the six major “areas of potential change”²² (later known as “areas of transition”). The argument and intention here, which can be tracked from at least the 1975 Survey of City Centre Land Use, was that the Queensway had effectively opened up “residual land” that needed to be brought back into compatibility with the city centre²³. The “general philosophy” of the CADP states the remit clearly:

“2.14 The general philosophy of the Plan acknowledges that during the 1980s the overall pattern of land use will remain stable and that it is the “areas of potential change” that offer the opportunities for achieving the objectives of the Plan. In them there is room to accommodate those activities which will enhance the City Centre as a regional centre in particular, office uses or cultural activities. However, vacant sites will not be retained indefinitely ...

as it is equally important to the aims of the Plan that sites should not remain unused for unduly long periods, thereby giving the City a run-down look.” (Birmingham City Council & West Midlands County Council, 1980a, 9)

In a liberalisation of the planning process, the areas of potential change were announced as flexible “mixed-use areas” (ibid. 11). Yet, they also signalled an aesthetic revaluation of the relation between the city centre and its margins, as well as a reworking of the connection between upper and lower circuits of capital. The suggestion was that these areas were somewhat “vacant” or “backwaters” of Birmingham (PA: 21892/29-30/1C) and that they now should be given an enhanced value, whether symbolic or of use, to assist the changing mechanisms of accumulation in the regional economy. In other words, these places were open to, but regulated by, the requirements of a city wide regeneration project: they were not that flexible.

As previously noted, one of the requirements as outlined in the CADP involved the enhancement of a consumerist style of urbanisation through an expansion of leisure and entertainment facilities. These particular industries had previously been accorded a lower priority in terms of local authority resources and planners claimed they were somewhat inadequate. For instance, with specific reference to corporate visitors to the NEC, planners argued that there was an “absence of a well defined restaurant or “eating out” area” in the city centre (CADP, 1980b, 45). This view was somewhat reiterated in a business report published in 1990 (Bostock Marketing, 1990). The solution, however, involved finding a suitable site for the establishment of a major entertainment zone and to court joint funding with property owners, occupiers and civic organisations to build “a better environment” (CADP, 1980a, 109). One of four sites that became identified was the Hurst Street’ area of potential change:

“In recent years, the area of Hurst Street/Smallbrook Ringway has naturally developed a role as a major entertainment and specialist service trades zone.

The Hippodrome Theatre, which is now being refurbished, can serve as the focus for general environmental and physical improvements in this vicinity, including limited pedestrianisation, improved car parking and the facelift of frontages.” (CADP, 1980a, 114)

Within the different documents that make up the CADP, it seems that from being labelled as of an area lacking of visual stimulus (see above), Hurst Street was also called a naturally evolving major entertainment zone. Only three years later, planners would also accommodate a Chinese Quarter into its official lexicon. This emergence coincided with, if not acted as the material manifestation for, the valorisation of the ethnic entrepreneur.

Urban policy, economic development and ethnic entrepreneurship

“Some people have felt swamped by immigrants. They’ve seen the whole character of their neighbourhood change. ... Of course people can feel that they are being swamped. Small minorities can be absorbed – *they can be assets to the majority community* – but once a minority in a neighbourhood gets very large, people do feel swamped”. (Margaret Thatcher, February 25th 1979, cited in Solomos, 1993a, 97, my emphasis)

“Hong Kong remains the historical reference for the advocates of unfettered capitalism.” (Castells, 2000, 270)

Throughout the 1960s to early 1970s there were a number of changes to governmental discourse that trace the emergence of ethnic minorities in urban planning. Some of the most significant of these shifts occurred with the introduction of the Urban Programme²⁴ and under Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, which were initially orientated towards social and educational provision, albeit with varying degrees of acknowledgement of race and ethnicity. However, a period between the mid-1970s to mid-1980s marked a more exaggerated, if not more decisive, turning point in terms of the level of governmental recognition afforded to ethnic and racial differences. For instance, these were times where the larger and more left leaning local authorities incorporated elements of equal opportunity thinking into their development plans (Davies, 1996) and a time when racial discrimination

was formally recognised as an urban problem (HMSO, 1977). On another relevant plane, the Royal Town Planning Institute worked with the Commission for Racial Equality to reconsider planning practices and it was agreed that a “colour blind perspective” should be replaced by an acknowledgement of “ethnicity” in urban plans (RTPI/CRE, 1983). Undoubtedly, some of these actions were instigated as a response to social protest and, in particular, to unrest in 1981 (Home, 1982), and some of them were by-products of the Race Relations Act of 1976²⁵. But co-existing with what has been coined “the struggle over the politics of representation” (Hall, S., 1996a) was another macro-political shift that culminated in an increased valuation of entrepreneurial forms of governance (Harvey, 1989). Simplifying somewhat, this shift became underwritten by the hegemonic themes of national duty, self interest, competitive individualism and anti-statism, which promoted the rolling back of the managerial state, contractualisation, the reconstruction of service provision as an entrepreneurial practice and public-private partnerships. With respect to British planning, the turn in the agenda did little for equal opportunities and its attempts to tackle socio-economic disadvantage amongst minority groups (Thomas, 1994a; also see Blair, 1988, 49). Yet, I would also suggest that the dispersal of these regulative trajectories, along with the increased recognition of cultural differences, began to share an affinity, if not valorised, a policy formulation of immigrants, or at least some elected features of them, as a potential node of regeneration. As way of example, Peter Hall’s address to the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1977 marks the influence of, or hijacking by, this interwoven trajectory. In this speech Hall suggested that to reverse urban decline in the inner cities, one strategy that planners could adopt would be the “non plan” (Hall, P., 1977 cited in Hall, P., 1982, 417). More specifically for Hall this meant that they should reduce governmental bureaucracy, eliminate taxation, free the migration of labour and affirm entrepreneurial immigrants to “recreate the

Hong Kong of the 1950s and 1960s inside inner Liverpool or inner Glasgow” (ibid.). Four years later, he re-drew this “model”:

“There is yet a further strategy. It is to recognise that in the period when inner city innovation did flourish, it did so to a remarkable degree with the aide of newly-arrived groups of people who brought with them a strong entrepreneurial tradition. The Huguenots in London in the seventeenth century, the Jews at the end of the nineteenth, the Indians in our day, all provide examples. The same might happen again, if we attracted small businessmen, with capital and expertise, to settle and establish small workshops and trading centres. Thus we might begin to emulate the drive and enthusiasm of emerging centres like Singapore or Hongkong [sic]. Witness, in the second half of the 1970s, the development of London’s Tottenham Court Road as a rival electronics trading centre to Hongkong’s [sic] Nathan Road. True, the immediate result might be some decline in the standards of hygiene and safety in industrial premises. Perhaps, it may be argued, this is a classic case where the best, in the form of central government and local authority regulation, may be the enemy of the good in terms of job creation.” (Hall, 1981, 122)

Although Hall (1982) argued that such a solution was only a “model” to face up to “real economic prospects” and insisted that he was a social democrat, unsurprisingly, these proposals became easily appropriated by neo-liberals who cited Hall’s “non-plan” in their formulations for urban policy. One snag, however, was that with the Conservative Government’s commitment towards immigration controls, it was not so much immigrant entrepreneurs who became celebrated, but ethnic entrepreneurs. Subsequently, the Enterprise Zones in which Hall’s ideas are accredited brought exemption from rates, development land tax and industrial training levies, but dropped the elements that involved the free migration of labour and the encouragement of immigrant entrepreneurs (Hall, 1996). Nevertheless, other schemes were either re-focussed or constructed to enhance the employability and business skills of ethnic minorities. The Urban Programme in the 1980s along with the Ethnic Minorities Business Initiative and the Ethnic Minority Grant are clear examples of this (see Moon & Atkinson, 1997; Munt, 1994). Furthermore, with reference to the West Midlands, the County Council and, in particular, its Economic Development Committee also took a

number of additional steps along these lines. One such step involved the establishment of a Business Advice and Training Scheme²⁶ to “assist ethnic entrepreneurs”. Another involved commissioning the writing of various reports to explore different avenues that ethnic groups offered in broadening the regional space-economy. In the mid-1980s, these reports included: “The West Midlands Food Industries”, which saw the “ethnic food market”²⁷ as a potential means to access overseas markets: “opportunity for food exports (e.g. Halal meat to the Middle East as some West Midland abattoirs are already doing)” (Wiggins & Lang, 1985), and the “Directory on Ethnic Minority Businesses” (Birmingham Enterprise Centre, 1986), which according to Councillor Albert Bore would “assist inter-trading” and “benefit the local economy”.

Van Delft et al (2000) suggest that as policies to provide immigrants with financial assistance are unpopular among European policymakers alternative strategies have been adopted, one of which is ethnic entrepreneurship. For them, this concerns creating “a system of self-reliance, in which new immigrants are held more responsible for their own economic well-being” and involves mechanisms that encourage them “to look after themselves” (van Delft et al. 2000, 430). However, when reading through some policy assertions what also becomes evident is that the focus on encouraging self-capacity and self-sufficiency underplays other benefits and beneficiaries in which these policies are related. As Massey (1982) notes, the main beneficiaries of the Enterprise Zones were not so much small businesses but venture capitalists, property developers and landowners. Indeed, as Hall himself points out, his suggestions were not merely about helping those on the economic margin:

“If we really want to help inner cities, and cities generally, we might have to use highly unorthodox methods. One major source of their ills is that so many of their people ... have been stranded high and dry by the rapid evolution of the advanced industrial (or postindustrial) economy. Their skills (or lack of

skills) were readily useable in an early industrial economy, but are no more. If we try to force them to catch up, we may do them – and us – no good, and perhaps a great deal of harm.” (Hall, 1977 cited in Hall, P., 1982, 417)

What I think is worth underscoring here is that these enterprises were not new to the city: a handful of “Chop Suey Houses”²⁸ had been opened prior to 1960 and in the 1930’s “one big Chinese family produced Christmas decorations in a large house in central Birmingham” (Sutcliffe & Smith, 1974, 363). Rather, it was that they had now become enlisted and rationalised as a node of regional regeneration and, furthermore, served as a means to re-visualise the city’s connection to different international circuits of capital. As the 1997-2000 Economic Strategy for Birmingham suggests, one of the intentions of Birmingham’s Economic Development Partnership (1997, 6) would be to “[build] on the unique advantage that our multi-cultural City gives in international trading arenas”. I think that the case of the hand over of Hong Kong to China in 1997 provides another example of the sort of advantages and connections, which Birmingham was pursuing.

Hong Kong 1984 to Birmingham 1997. The Joint Declaration between Britain and China in 1984 exacerbated expectations of both emigration and capital flight from Hong Kong (see Cuthbert, 1995; Lin, 1998). In 1994, per capita gross domestic product was higher in Hong Kong than in Britain and Australia (Smart & Smart, 1996, 37), and a number of countries, particularly those around the Pacific Rim, re-regulated their immigration and urban policies to cash in (see Mitchell, 1993, 1998). In Britain, the governmental response, although not clear-cut²⁹, was one that promoted a conditional form of settlement that was clouded by self-interest (Parker, 1995). The British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act of 1990, for example, made available 50,000 passports to heads of household and their families according to a points scheme that favoured Hong Kong’s corporate, professional, public service and military elite. Other attempts to solicit the dispersal of this financially affluent polarity of

transnational labour were conducted in the West Midlands, where the Development Agency flagged the presence of an existing British Chinese population to attract prospective investors:

“Centred on the flourishing ethnic food industry, the UK’s Asian enterprises have moved within a generation from the backstreets of inner city Birmingham to the mainstream of international trade. ... [The] growth of the ethnic food industry – as well as the desire to trade with Asian companies – seems to have altered the establishment’s view of the sector. Today the West Midlands Development Agency tries to woo inward investors by highlighting the number of Chinese-speaking professionals in the region. Councils are keen to support ethnic businessmen who can provide new jobs in inner city areas. In particular, the region hopes its links with the Far East will attract Hong Kong businessmen before next year, when the colony reverts to Chinese control.” (Financial Times, May 29th 1996)

Similarly in Birmingham, the local government response played upon a suggestion that 5000 post-1984 Hong Kong migrants would arrive in the region and that they would be a source of investment for the city’s recovery. For this reason a delegation of City Council officers were temporarily located in Hong Kong and a series of conferences were held between senior city councillors and the Birmingham Chinese Society. In one of them, Steven Yau echoed the views of Margaret Thatcher on immigration and its assets. More precisely he stated:

“There will be a lot of confused people arriving here. It could put an enormous strain on existing services.
I would like Birmingham to have a policy to encourage people to come here. They are not poor refugees. They are nearly all professional, well-educated people, many of them with capital to put into starting businesses. They could be an asset to the city.
We are developing a Chinatown in Birmingham as a tourist attraction and it will be a lot more successful if there is a good-sized Chinese community here”. (Steve Yau, Birmingham Chinese Society cited in the Birmingham Post, June 19th 1991).

A number of preliminary points can be made here, which I shall further discuss in chapter 5. Firstly, as Davis (1990), with respect to multiculturalism in Los Angeles, and Lin (1995b), with respect to Houston’s Chinatown, argue the marketing of ethnic diversity provides “elite groups” and “place entrepreneurs” with a forum to negotiate their standing in the city. In

Birmingham, like many Western cities, two contingencies that define a similar speaking position have become the features of capital investment and/or value to the tourist industry. Not incidentally, in return for these investments, these businessmen receive local government support to mobilise their labour and to endorse Chinatown³⁰. This relationship might be called a “regional class alliance” (Harvey, 1985, 140). Secondly, if these agents have become co-opted by local government as players in the city’s regeneration, quite clearly they are not a subaltern. As Spivak (1999, 310) points out, the entry into the “circuits of citizenship” is also an insertion “into the long road to hegemony”. However, it should not be forgotten that such an enculturing and appropriation of multicultural difference does not imply that the eradication of a subaltern subject. For, as with all forms of hegemony the above familial pact, which favours specific regimes of capital accumulation and embraces particular gendered relations, cannot be thought of as an absolute. It is not a “unifying discourse”. Instead, the favouritism acts like a political closure whose syntax cannot help but reveal the repression of an emergent heterogeneity, which is conjured here as the marginal, constitutive figure of the poor refugee. There are undoubtedly other identities amongst them, but one question that this perhaps raises is whether these borderlines are going to be re-figured in the light that the city promotes itself as an international meeting place.

Introducing Chinatown

“The general condition in and around the centre had been reached as a result of a series of phases of varying economic activity and municipal decision.”
(Neville Borg, 1973, 37)

It is by no means clear that ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom successfully obtain planning permission when seeking to open catering establishments (see Riley, 1994; Thomas, 1994b). Yet, the particular planning context of 1980s Birmingham, with its mixture of a relaxation and regulation of land use, rendered Hurst Street increasingly available to a

clustering of food-outlets. For instance, although the Police made objections to the “extensive provision of licensed premises”, Satay House was granted planning permission on account that: “what might be considered over-provision is not an essential planning issue” and because it: “goes well with CADP where restaurants are an acceptable use” (PA: 6634). As previously alluded to, the oscillation of these values, can be read as an attempt to amend an area that the CADP visualised as a space of aesthetic and functional lack, whilst playing out a sense that planning has liberalised land use. Now, on a close reading it is possible to show that these lacks permeate through the governmental understanding of the urban regeneration of Hurst Street, and furthermore, they displace the emergence of Birmingham’s Chinatown as a hermetic enclave, uncontaminated by an outside. In the shadows of all of this, of course, are the figures of the business tourist and ethnic entrepreneur who symbolised investment in a landscape of economic downturn and who, it was suggested, should be accommodated in the city with an appropriate urban infrastructure. Not incidentally, these characters shape another desired and regulative parameter of the governmental discourse. A brief itinerary of what they purportedly had to offer can be elucidated through some visions of Hurst Street. One blueprint comes from a well-cited spokesperson of Chinatown and member of the Conservative Party who describes a place of a sober social order and financial prosperity:

“What was a Chinese restaurant 20 years ago? It was a place you went to after a few pints, for the cheapest meal in town and maybe a punch-up as well. Now it’s a gourmet night out. It’s classy. Chinatown Birmingham is not Chinatown New York, where the prostitutes are, or Chinatown San Francisco, where the drugs and opium dens and the rubbish dumps are.” (Roger Li cited in the Birmingham Post, February 29th 1992).

Another description involves the eating of the authentic other by the all sensory flaneur that walks amongst a working and consuming Chinese population:

“If you want to find Birmingham’s China Town then just follow your nose as the exotic aroma of crispy fried duck, aromatic won ton and ginger pervade your nostrils and lead you to this colourful area.

The roads surrounding Hurst Street are thronged with restaurants offering a culinary treat for the most jaded palate. These Cantonese restaurants, many of which have been featured in the Good Food Guide, can seat as many as 300 diners at once and the menus boast that many dishes and more.

All your usual favourites are there – sweet and sour dishes, beef cooked with ginger, ribs etc but the more adventurous gourmet could venture into the realms of fish lips, deep fried pig’s intestine and eels. The Arcadian Centre houses Birmingham’s only Japanese restaurant and sushi fans will find it a must.

The area is the working environment for Birmingham’s Chinese population who regularly shop at the specialist supermarkets, gift shops bursting with curios and the local doctors, herbalist and acupuncturists”. (Birmingham: The European City, no date, 25).

What is important to add here is that the relationship between the business tourist and the ethnic entrepreneur in the construction of Chinatown is much more than one of a relationship between the consumer and producer. For, the select signifiers mark a differentiating and deferring vision of a cleansed, prosperous Oriental space. Not least, the scent emanating from Chinatown seems removed from the fumes and the threat of the Queensway’s traffic that may confuse the flaneur if they are not careful when following their nose. And the colours together with commodities seem distant to what was on offer in the CADP, let alone in Manzoni’s vision of muted cultural differences where drunken fights broke out in its recession years. Once again, the explanation of difference seeks to be sanitised, if only through being granted a privilege. Yet, here I wish to suggest that the proposition of the paradigmatic ideal landscape cannot help from noting a co-existence some of which it embraces and some of which it seeks to escape, but both of which have become constitutive facets of the Chinatown regeneration project. These features can be elaborated on inspection of the development of an area that surrounds Wrottesley Square (Figure 2.2).

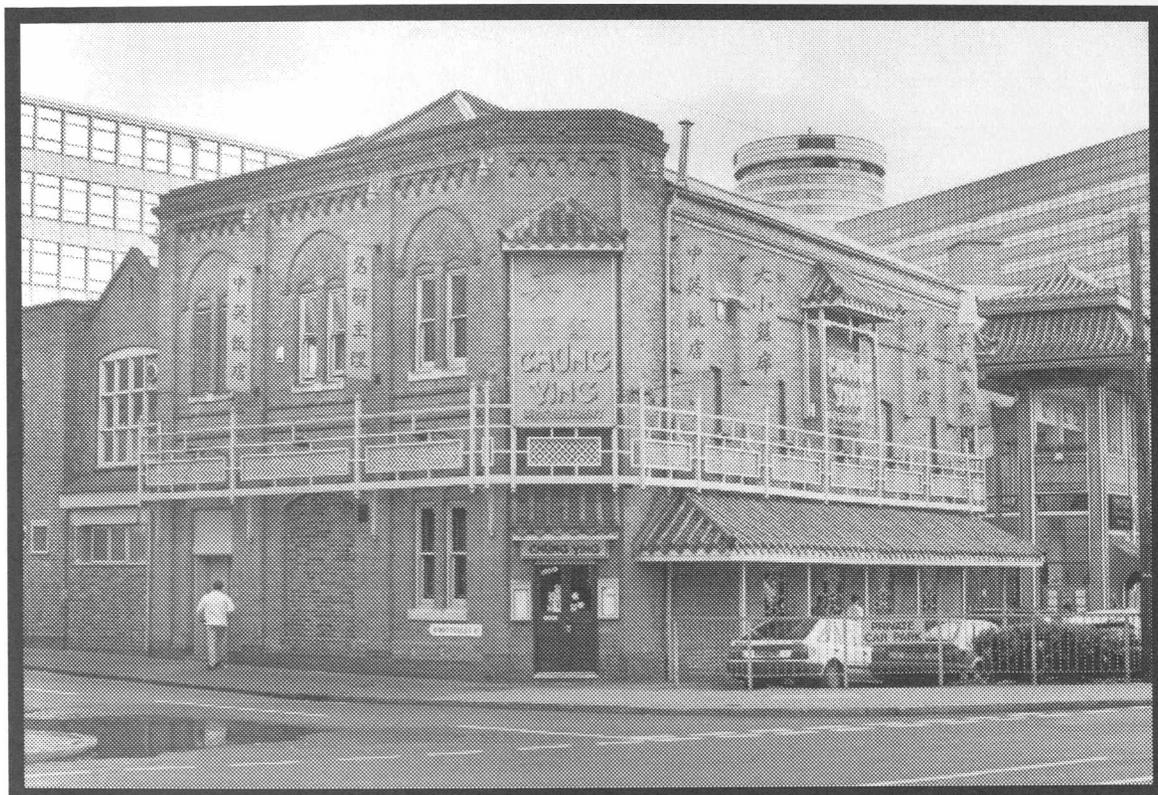
Chung Ying. Although the conditions for the appearance of official multicultural spaces were being arranged in the city, up to 1983 plans in Birmingham had yet to explicitly reference a

Figure 2.2.



Wrottesley Square, Birmingham

Figure 2.3.



The Chung Ying Cantonese Restaurant, Birmingham.

Chinatown. Instead, the agenda of the CADP can be read as an attempt to address the mistakes of the CDBP and the declining income of the city with the descriptive aid of, what the Royal Town Planning Institute (1983) calls, a “colour blind perspective”. Together with the desires and fears of the CADP, these idealistic languages permeated those of individual planning applications. One case in which this might be identified is with the opening of the Chung Ying Restaurant (Figure 2.3). Housed in a warehouse that previously sold footwear³¹, this building was converted by Bultec Development in 1980 into what planners called a “ground floor restaurant and first floor function room”. Yet, despite the fact that this restaurant became the largest Chinese restaurant in Birmingham of its time, the successful planning application became premised on account that it would embellish an area which was both an entertainment area and conspicuous:

“Nature of surroundings

Premises front to Ladywell Walk. Area of wholesale warehouses/cash & carry – to rear of Smallbrook Queensway.

...

Observations

These premises are situated close to the Hurst Street/Hill Street entertainment area.

They are in a conspicuous position and are rather unsightly and unkempt at present.

There is public parking ... There is no residential accommodation in the immediate vicinity.

I, therefore, have no objections, subject to suitable conditions.”

(PA E/C/26342/5)

In 1988, Mohammed Mushtaq proposed to the planning department to change the premises back into a warehouse. However, by this time the area had become demarcated as Chinese. As the Development Department suggested “this proposal would detract from the City Council’s Chinese proposals for Wrottesley Square and would be unsympathetic to the Chinese Quarter generally” (ibid.).

Figure 2.4



China Court Restaurant, Birmingham

China Court and Bayliss House. Vital to the emergence of an official Chinese Quarter in Birmingham was the redevelopment of two wholesale warehouses, one formerly called the Lawrence Brothers premises and the other a former property owned by M. Mapstone named Bayliss House. For the Development Department, the conversion of these properties instigated and provided the “basis for the establishment of Chinese Quarter [sic] in the City Centre” (PA: 920/16) and marked the start of a period when planning began to overtly act upon the economic potential of the Chinese community. Given the outline of the CADP, it was not inevitable that a Chinese Quarter would be focussed around these premises or its immediate surroundings. For example, the CADP had deemed this area as available to a mixture of uses and the Lawrence Brothers building, whilst being considered difficult to let, was exposed to different interests in the early 1980s³², all of which were acceptable to the Development Department. Nevertheless, the proposal that particularly excited planners during the early 1980s was known as China Court (Figure 2.4). Initially proposed by Fullwell Service Limited, this development sought to convert the Lawrence Brothers premises into a complex consisting of a restaurant, casino, night-club, shop units, wine bar, cafeteria, dance studio and offices. Put together, these facilities were described to the local press by the City Planning Officer as a “comprehensive leisure complex with a genuine Chinese flavour” (Birmingham Post, May 10th 1983). However, although the development was, and continues to be, contingent upon Chinese people, the establishment of this flavour became overseen and gathered legitimacy by drawing upon numerous spatial and temporal differences. For instance, the developers and the planning authority reiterated a view of China Court as a unique attraction to conference visitors:

“The concept of the development is to provide an entertainment/leisure complex, with a genuinely Chinese dimension in an area of Birmingham, which has for many years been favoured by the small Chinese community, and which I understand has been identified for some time by your Department,

as being suitable for a “China Town”. A development with the atmosphere which this seeks to create, would be I understand, unique in the United Kingdom, if not in Europe, the only similar development to my knowledge outside China being in San Francisco and Montreal. We would hope therefore that the appeal would be to a wider audience than simply Birmingham and that the development would prove attractive and bring in money from International visitors, particularly to the N.E.C.” (Letter to the City Planning Officer from Alexander Stevens & Company on behalf of Fulwell Service Limited, March 22nd 1983)

“The applicants aim to provide a comprehensive leisure complex with a genuine Chinese flavour. The proposal would accentuate the trend that has naturally occurred in the last few years, that of Chinese restaurants and businesses gravitating towards this part of the City Centre.

The development would not, in my opinion, prejudice the proposed “Hurst Street Plaza” envisaged in the Central Area District Plan but, rather, would enhance the possibility of the success of such a scheme. The proposed development would, I anticipate, create a Chinatown atmosphere which is probably unique in the United Kingdom, although similar developments may be seen in North America, notably in San Francisco and Montreal.

Bearing in mind the attraction of the N.E.C. and possibly in the future, the International Convention Centre, I consider this proposal would add a much welcome diversity to Birmingham’s entertainment facilities, improving the image of a the City as an International Centre.” (PA: 920/19/1C)

I explore the premise of a unique building style in chapter 3. But for now I simply note that the repetition of the above views emphasises the connections between the place of China Court and an international visitor, or at least, a type of international visitor. In particular, it seems that both the estate agent and town planner acknowledge China Court as an integral feature of an urban infrastructure that would service the corporate workforce. This is not an original proposal (see Amin et al. 2000; Sassen 1994; 1999) and, certainly as already noted, the local-international dialectic is well recognised by Birmingham’s place-marketing strategy. Still, what I want to add here is that China Court becomes welcomed as such as it makes the necessary corrections to the features that had been identified as somewhat lacking in the city. To recall, these include a lack of a spectacle in the Hurst Street “area of potential change” and the lack of a well-defined eating out area. In a spatial-temporal sense, China Court’s atmosphere and flavour, therefore, should not be understood as merely a naturally

developing, idiomatic feature. Rather, it is that its identity becomes constituted through a past-present relationship of decaying images of Birmingham and, simultaneously, lies alongside the development of hotels, coffee shops and international airports in an idealised vision of the city's layout. Such differences and deferrals can be further traced in a statement by the Inner Cities Minister³³, where he positions ethnic minorities as a motor for the recovery from inner city depression:

“[China Court] will enhance this area of central Birmingham, already a focus for the city's entertainment and night life and assist in economic regeneration. It is encouraging to see the ethnic minorities, in this case the Chinese, playing such an important role in bringing life back to our inner cities.” (David Trippier, Inner Cities Minister cited in the Birmingham Post, November 23rd 1988)

Wrottesley Square. In 1984, a local Chinatown atmosphere was still in its infancy and, moreover, doubts arose over the level of private sector commitment for China Court. In response, the City Centre Co-ordinating Steering Group and Business Development Officer sought to reassure Fullwell Services Limited by demonstrating public sector support through proposing the redevelopment of an area - located between the Chung Ying, China Court, Bayliss House and the rear of Smallbrook Queensway - called Wrottesley Square:

“Further to our recent meetings and your subsequent telephone conversation, I outline below the kind of scheme Birmingham (through [the] Principal Planning Officer, Landscape) has conceived and is prepared to consider in conjunction with your own most exciting development.

Wrottesley Street

Adjoining “China Court” is Wrottesley Square which serves as an area for car parking and from which rear access is gained to surrounding properties. The enclosure of the Square provides an opportunity to extend the “Chinese” theme and a design scheme has been prepared to illustrate the existing potential that exists.

The scheme proposes the repairing of the Square using a traditional Chinese paving module, and along two elevations at ground level there is a covered walkway protected by an ornate canopy. At the entrance to the Square a decorated gateway sets the scene which is further enhanced by murals of dragons etc.” (Letter from the Principal Business Development Officer, 20th March 1984).

A covering note, which placed this initiative distinctly within Birmingham's international aspirations, accompanied this letter:

"I trust that you will show this letter to your bankers so that they will appreciate the support the City could provide, to this necessary and most welcome scheme to help improve both the amenities and vitality of the Centre of Birmingham, so necessary if Birmingham is to become a true International Convention City." (PA: 920/16)

According to the Principal Business Development Officer this area had "serve[d] as an area for car parking" and for the CADP was considered to be a "vacant site". Still, in 1985 it had a supplementary impetus, which would amend the features deemed without architectural quality by introducing Oriental motifs:

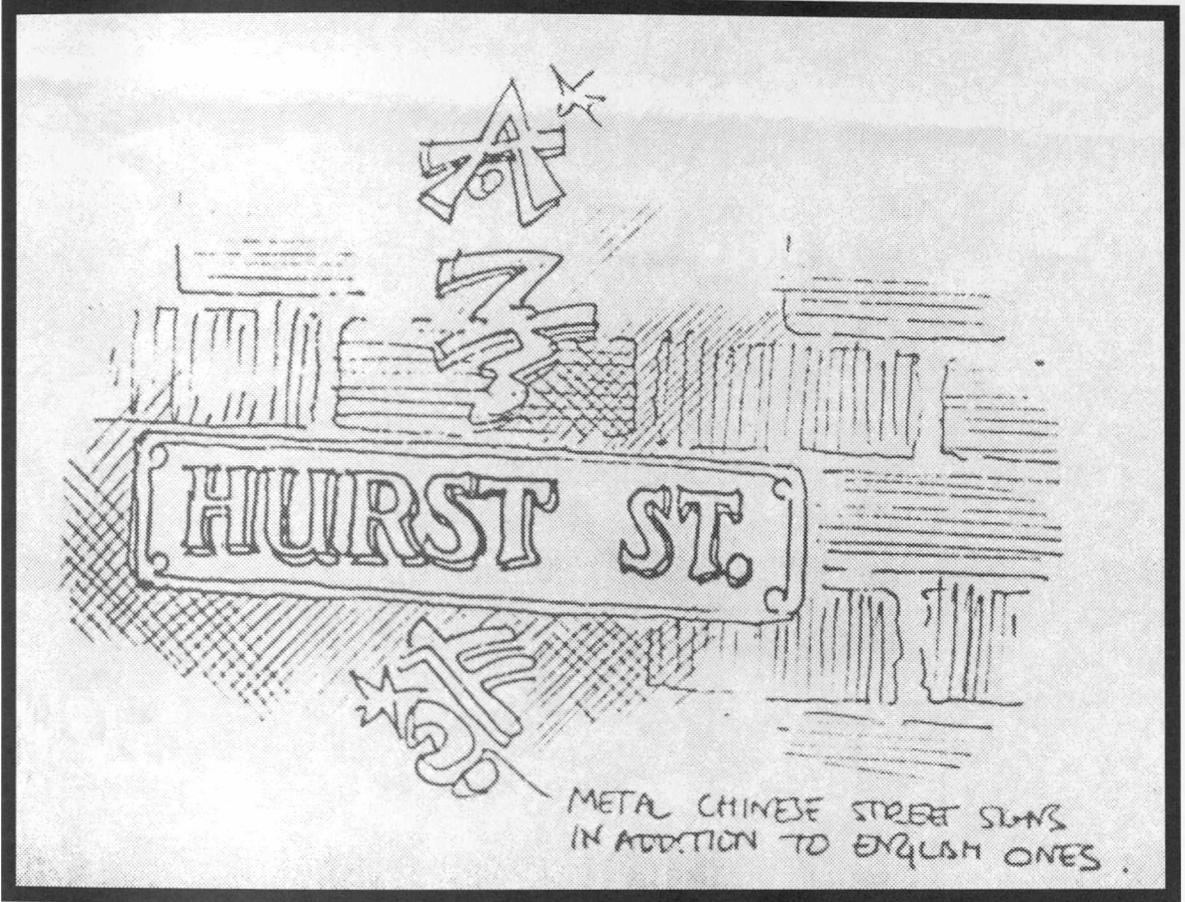
"In order to determine the potential of the establishment of a Chinese Quarter in an area such as this, a design exercise has been carried out ...

The Square would be entered below an archway or "Heaven Gate" and the tarmac would be replaced by a paving pattern of traditional Chinese design. The open paved area would be kept as uncluttered as possible to permit its use for dancing, displays, wrestling etc., and at ground floor level the building would be unified by the use of a continuous canopy. Street nameplates in the areas would carry English names and Chinese equivalents.

Possibly the most difficult design element is the treatment of the elevations of the buildings, which are considerably lacking in architectural quality as they are the backs of buildings. One possible solution would be to introduce appropriate designs, such as "dragon" based features, either painted on to the buildings or on panels standing proud from the buildings. The illumination of these panels would create dramatic effect." (City Centre Co-ordinating Steering Group, 8th November 1985 in PA: 920/16)

At each step, Wrottesley Square's new identity became constructed through, though not outside, difference. What I mean by this is that the planning practice involved putting in place certain signifiers that narrated a Chinese design, but operated with a syntactic play that evoked others. For example, at an estimated cost of £80,000 to the public purse, the paving of a traditional Chinese design would overlay the tarmac, the ornate canopy and dragon based features would adorn backs of buildings, and street nameplates would carry the English name and Chinese equivalents. The new aesthetic, therefore, measured itself as a

Figure 2.5.



The design for the Hurst Street nameplate.

deviation from a lack. It did not occur as an absolute category, but I would suggest it bears the trace of old spaces and/or what might be described as a domestic outline. The design for Hurst Street's street nameplate - as devised by the West Midlands Public Art Collective on behalf of the West Midlands County Council and Birmingham City Council - offers a stark of example of the influence of such a domestic position (Figure 2.5). This process of introducing, what were called "multi-cultural names" had been an issue resisted by local Conservative councillors in the mid-1990s³⁴. Still, what is worth adding here is that in urban planning there was evidence that the non-occidental writing "functioned as a sort of European hallucination" (Derrida, 1976, 80; see chapter 1). For although a rough etymology of Hurst Street would find that the street was previously known as Hurst Hill and named so, according to McKenna (1986), in "old" English because this was a wooded hill, a reading of the Chinese equivalent becomes equally domestic. I suggest this as the middle character can be interpreted in Chinese script as meaning "son" whilst the other two ideograms may be translated as, to paraphrase Jameson (cited in Spivak, 1999), some dead letters or material signifiers, which are not disturbed by the possibility of actual knowledge of Chinese script. To paraphrase Spivak (1999), they are instead produced by an ignorance of Chinese language together with a failure of national identity sharing.

Outlining Chinatown

"[The] limit of the West is ceaselessly in sight: "the West" is precisely what designates itself as limit, as demarcation, even when it ceaselessly pushes back the frontiers of its imperium. By the turn of a singular paradox, the West appears as what has as its planetary, galactic, universal vocation limitlessly to extend its own delimitation. It opens the world to the closure that it is."
(Nancy, 1993, 1).

Like Abercrombie's Feng Shui and Hall's entrepreneurial model, planning in Birmingham has supplemented the CADP by soliciting a "Chinese prejudice". In all these cases, it is not

that the planner brings to the agenda a “new” configuration. Nor is it that the planning discourse has significantly altered its limits. It is that with times of uncertainty a “non-occidental” blue print has been made legible to fit in with the structural objectives and deficits of planning practice. Indeed, with reference to Birmingham, whilst the strategy of introducing Chinatown may appear to be one that plays upon multicultural difference, the planning discourse accommodates it, and understands it, along a chain that appropriates it within an economy of the same. For lying amongst the texts of Chinatown are issues of aesthetics and dereliction, together with the ideals of financial investment, pedestrianisation and the business tourist. These have become the narrow vectors that mark the conditions for Chinatown’s appearance and its fit into the syntax of the city’s development. Take a description of Ladywell Walk, Wrottesley Square, Thorp and Hurst Street:

“Around Ladywell Walk, Wrottesley Square, Thorp and the upper part of Hurst Street together with sections of the Arcadian are many Chinese restaurants and retail premises. This grouping, linked as it is to the financial and cultural activities of the Chinese community in Birmingham represents yet another dimension to the already cosmopolitan mix of the area. Opportunities to develop this theme further through refurbishment and infilling where appropriate will be encouraged along with the use of oriental design features and landmarks in order to build upon the unique character of Birmingham’s very own Chinatown.” (Birmingham City Council, 1998, 36)

The element and de-centring of presence is discussed in the following chapter. For now, I suggest that the development of “this theme further through refurbishment and infilling where appropriate” occur as a contingency within the epistemic limits of government. Put simply, multiculturalism and its relation to infilling has become one of pursuing an entrepreneurial agenda and addressing the lacks that can be tracked back, at least, to the CADP. The textual introduction of Birmingham’s Chinese Quarter in local government discourse, therefore, is not so much a rupture, but a repetition that seeks to displace certain well-worn problems of the cityscape with fillers such as cultural motifs and Chinese finances.

In other plans, these problems include the “urgent need to improve the integration of the City Core” and “the physical barrier created by the Queensway” (Birmingham City Council, 1992), together with fixing the “disjointed” and “insensitive” character of post war development (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1996). In this regard, like the “areas of potential change”, Chinatown becomes entangled with the city centre, or at least, how the city centre is idealised. Its features - such as gateways and pagodas - serve as a point of orientation and, furthermore, they trace the deferral of different times that are now taken as unrefined. Thus, Chinatown is not a pure self-assembled singular entity detached from the spirit of Manzoni and his colleagues, but a place that reinterprets them and a place that is reinscribed by them:

The Entertainment Zone has already begun to emerge as one of Birmingham’s cultural and economic assets. The key to unlocking the full potential of this district lies in the pursuit of a series of objectives and proposals that will provide a fitting setting for one of the City’s brightest and liveliest jewels: - *Welcoming the rich cultural diversity and multi-racial character of the area and encouraging further investment by the Chinese Business Community in order to create a unique building style and character...*

Develop and strengthen the urban design qualities of the locality based upon the creation of a new focal “square” together with the creation of distinct “gateways” and links at the points where Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street join adjacent Quarters and Sub-Area. Gateways into the Zone will not only signpost its existence and improve access but also reflect its character and activities.

A landmark Pagoda feature is already being constructed in an improved Thomas Gardens in the centre of Holloway Circus.

Other possibilities include:

A Chinese Arch framing the portal under the office block at the junction of Smallbrook Queensway and Hurst Street.

The positioning of a “Heaven’s Gate” at the Pershore Street and Ladywell Walk junction.

Columns or pillars marking the entrance into Hurst from Sherlock Street.” (ibid. 58)

“Action Statement: Chinese Quarter/Markets

- To continue to promote the Chinese “Theme” within the area, including signing and the provision of a Chinese Arch, adjacent to the Arcadian.

- To promote enhanced pedestrian accessibility and integration, by the introduction of a normal street junction, with surface pedestrian crossing at Hill Street/Hurst Street
- To establish a pedestrian priority Square, adjoining the Hippodrome Theatre and Arcadian development, in conjunction with a traffic management scheme for Hurst Street.
- To support the redevelopment of the Bull Ring Shopping Centre ...
- To encourage further mixed uses ...
- To provide design advice for the Wholesale Markets site ...” (Birmingham City Council, 1992, 17)

If the planner unlocks the assets or welcomes a “multi-racial character” then Chinatown does not exist in and of itself. Nor does the welcome signify the prior non-existence of cultural diversity. Instead, an implication here is that there are other emergent minorities in this area and a history of being less than welcomed. In this light, the above statement may be seen as a declaration of a changing attitude in the planning discourse; it is an invitation to those that have been excluded and elided. Here, it would seem that the racial dichotomies found in Anderson’s early studies of Chinatown are incompatible. There is no neat act of exclusion between a “white European hegemonic bloc” and its other as the “welcome” marks the nurturing of ethnic minorities (in particular entrepreneurial elites) who have entered into a formal pact with the local authority. Instead, the type of hegemonic bloc that is evident in this Chinese Quarter is not some crystallised, final moment, rather it involves, what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) call, a “regularity in dispersion” consisting of a series of relational positions that are linked by the articulations to form a multicultural entrepreneurial agenda. The Chinese business community, in this sense, have a subject-position within a discursive formation and it is this position that I explore in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In the first half of the chapter, I demonstrated that, even during periods when planners barely represented minorities, different identities were never not a part of the planning proceedings.

I illustrated that the planning of Birmingham has a history that has implicitly involved and constituted itself in its relationship with others. Sometimes these co-existences have been distant, seemingly not present, seemingly not here. Sometimes the relationships between them have been heavy handed and sometimes planners have been welcoming. Yet, what remains evident in the planning text are traces of subject-positions that, although marginal to the plan, act as the defining limit to how planners understand the physical fabric of the city. One antagonist figure who has persistently emerged is the immigrant. For, whether planning has celebrated the natural population or the ethnic entrepreneur or the business tourist, this absent presence has proved to be a constitutive limit even in the face of particular ideas of cultural difference that have been accommodated according to a domestic context.

As Cochrane (1999) makes plain, each attempt to construct an urban utopia has had to rectify a negative vision of urban dystopia. Specifically in post-war Birmingham, this vision partially included sorting out the scenery of demobilisation, which was never simply a domestic affair. As I demonstrated with respect the CBDP, even before any post-1948 immigrants had arrived in the city these people had been inscribed as a disruption by the local authority, they were seen to be out of place and supposedly a malignant potentiality within the metropolis. The governmental response, in short, was to define the reconstruction process through centring “natural increase”. However, in effect, this was somewhat of a representational paradox for local government. For whilst the immigrant had become removed from the text of the CBDP, simultaneously, it was immigration which became a “constitutive outside” that reasserted “natural increase” and formed the borders of its green setting, house gardens and open parkways. If, as Schwartz (1999, 271) suggests, England was “reinvented as a white man’s country” then its internal restructuring always bore the traces of an outside.

Immigrants remain a spectral presence overlooking the city and their exclusion draws attention to the fact that a discussion on immigration cannot be conflated with the presence of ethnic minorities. It seems that the latter of these, in this exposition Chinese businessmen, have become catalysts for the city's revival. Selectively appropriated they follow in a long history of urban planning's self-consolidation in that, like a blueprint, they address the inadequacies of the city. Echoing the views of other prominent voices, they have become assets and it seems that the relationship between the state and minority groups have shifted from one formation of natural increase to another of multiculturalism. But whose assets are they? What development is elevated? My suggestion is that Chinatown cannot merely signal a feature of China and, moreover, the markers of its difference did not necessarily erase ethnocentrism within the planning discourse. Nor did planning move very far in redefining its city centre. Instead, it becomes all too apparent that it is through the identification of planning problems that the lexicon of Chinatown becomes considered. Its position derives, then, not from the denotation of Chinese writing as an absolute category, but from the dispersal of certain regulative trajectories of asceticism and aesthetics, which locates it within a syntax of entrepreneurialism and place marketing. In other words, like Leibniz's Characteristic that I discussed in chapter 1, the Chinese Quarter has a domestic outline where in this case there is a complicit relationship between the ethnic entrepreneur who re-centres the insecurities and doubts articulated by local government. The way Birmingham's Chinese Quarter becomes legitimated, however, is posed in a fashion that runs contrary to this formation and it is the representational modalities that are associated with the claims to legitimacy/authenticity that I now turn to.

¹ In brief, the British Nationality Act of 1948 extended the category of the British subject to incorporate the population that was subject to the authority of the British crown. This included those in the British colonies and self-governing dominions.

² From now on referred to as the CBDP.

³ Others included Dr Raymond Priestley, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, Mr R. H. Kinvig, of the School of Geography, University of Birmingham, three Trustees of Bournville Village Trust: Paul Cadbury, George Cadbury, G.W. Cadbury; Sir Winfred Martineau, Lord Mayor for Birmingham (1940-41).

⁴ See the West Midlands Group (1946, 1947).

⁵ The West Midlands Group conceded that it was in the hands of National Government to deal with immigration. However, they also argued that migration and a decentralisation strategy could be controlled through industrial policy. The basic argument in this case being one where local citizens were to be given priority over industrial land and licenses would be withheld to those outside interests. As Paul Cadbury – a local planner and member of the Bournville Village Trust – argued this “Over a period of years ... will determine where people work and, therefore, inevitably where they live” (Cadbury, 1952, 19).

⁶ One prominently cited garden city project includes the “pioneer industrial village” built by Cadbury Bournville outside Birmingham (Hall, P, 1996). White and (1996) also suggests that the post-war adoption of a green belt policy in Birmingham became especially “successful” in the areas around Moundsley Hall, Wast Hills and Lickey Hills.

⁷ This stipulation had been introduced in 1949 and was primarily directed against English and Irish immigrants to Birmingham. But throughout the 1950s it was recognised as “an effective barrier against a flood of applications for houses from coloured people” (Sutcliffe & Smith, 1974, 377).

⁸ Rex & Tomlinson (1979) argue that the move by the Department of the Environment to redirect aid from the Urban Programme in 1977 from the suburban areas into the inner city was intended as a move in this direction. This aid supported by both major parties was justified in terms that suggested racial tension was the product of “urban blight” and made without direct reference to immigrant communities and instead to geography and social class (also see Ben Tovim et al. 1986).

⁹ With the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which restricted the flow of labour into the Britain and altered the automatic rights of citizenship of Commonwealth citizens, Wallace’s suggestion was redundant and the outcome of the debate fell Burgess’s way. On May the 28th 1962 the Government of Hong Kong funded a Hong Kong Chinese Liaison Office under a diplomatic proviso that it would “establish and maintain contact with the many local people now employed in the United Kingdom”. This claim somewhat covered up the Colonial Office’s desire to provide an organisation that was able to compete with the Chinese Diplomatic Mission whom they, along with the Special Branch, suggested had “penetrated” the social activities of “the Chinese in London” with “Chinese Communism”. A year later this spectre also haunted W. S. Carter, the Colonial Secretariat of Hong Kong:

“In the absence of any more reliable source of assistance there was danger of them falling increasingly under the influence of the Chinese Diplomatic Mission” (CO1030/1653).

As the Liaison Office focussed its work on London, Carter with the support of the Ministry of Labour agreed to send one of his Senior Administration Officers, J T Wakefield, to investigate the activities of Chinese settlers in the remainder of the Country. Wakefield’s itinerary included taking in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Durham, Newcastle, Northumberland, Cumberland, Liverpool, Lancashire, Manchester, Stockport, Crewe, Macclesfield and Yorkshire in the winter of 1963. But by this time, the onus of his report had gained a different impetus. A brawl in a restaurant in St Helens, which resulted in the imprisonment of five Chinese waiters on counts of manslaughter, together with an article in *Private Eye* on a number of Chinese people visiting Soho strip club, shifted the emphasis to one of law and order. The end result was a report containing comments ranging from the financial structure of Chinese restaurants, bigamy, drug use, gambling, a Teddy-boy problem, “Propaganda material” distributed by the Chinese Diplomatic Mission and the “undesirable political leanings” of the Association of Chinese Restaurateurs.

¹⁰ Birmingham had made official provision for liaison with the city’s immigrants before the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants came into existence in 1965. This provision was in the form of Liaison Officer for Coloured People, who was employed by the Town Clerk’s Office to mediate political debates over “race”. He proposed that most racial “problems” in Birmingham could be rectified through marrying integration policies to immigration controls (Rex & Tomlinson, 1979). Rex & Tomlinson (1979, 252) argued that this earlier provision could be “understood as arising from a colonialist mentality on the part of the Council. The Liaison Officer appointed was an ex-colonial policeman and he had neither independence from the Council nor effective responsibility to the immigrant community.”

¹¹ The “ghetto” was used as a racialised reference for Balsall Heath, Handsworth and Sparkbrook in the 1970s (see Hall et al, 1978; Solomos & Back, 1995; Smith, S. J., 1993).

¹² From now on referred to as the CADP.

¹³ Local industry was opened up by a combination of agreements from the GATT talks to Britain's entry into the EEC, and new reductions on tariffs for industrial goods, limited Commonwealth preferences, increased overseas competition in manufacturing (Cherry, 1994)

¹⁴ Between 1971-1984 employment in manufacturing dropped by 57%, compared to a national decline of 31% (Birmingham Inner City Profile, 1985, 9).

¹⁵ In 1971, manufacturing employed just over 300,000 compared with 277,000 in the service sector; by 1987 the service sector engaged 316,000 while the number of employees in manufacturing shrank to 159,000 (Cherry, 1994). The shift in balance, therefore, did not recover the job losses in this period.

¹⁶ See the Ansell's brewery at Aston Cross and the Talbot car works in Small Heath.

¹⁷ A notion of "repositioning" has become a part of the City's rebranding language (Birmingham Post, November 1, 2000).

¹⁸ The shopping bag metaphor is not used lightly. The report of the Chief Executive to the City Centre Steering Group (1989) compiled "The City Centre Shopping List" of "gateways", "corridors", "destination Birmingham" and the "stay".

¹⁹ In Paul Cadbury's post-war vision, he wrote "the opportunity must be taken to plan a theatre precinct where those who wish to spend the evening away from home can find not only entertainment, but also room to park their cars and good restaurants in which to eat their evening meal. Such areas are found in many great cities, notably London, Paris and New York. The area in Birmingham most easily developed for this purpose is the twelve to fifteen acres immediately to the south of New Street Station and here such a precinct is already planned" (Cadbury, 1952, 80-81).

²⁰ Although building began in 1957, Queen Elizabeth II only officially opened the Inner Ring Road on the 7th of April 1971. The Council had intended that only one section of the Ringway, between Holloway Circus and Great Charles Street should be named "Queensway". However, as the Queen was not told this information, she pronounced the entire Inner Ring Road, "Queensway" (McKenna, 1986).

²¹ In March 1988, Birmingham City Council and the Birmingham City Action Team convened the Birmingham City Centre Challenge Symposium, also known as the Highbury Initiative. A second symposium was held in September 1989. Each symposium resulted in the establishment of an organisation – City 2000 and the Birmingham Marketing Partnership – to promote Birmingham as a place of business tourism.

²² The areas of potential change were: Broad Street, Snow Hill/St Pauls, St Chads Circus, Aston University, Masshouse Circus, and Hurst Street. In addition the City Council also recycled other areas of industrial land, such as the Ansell's brewery site at Aston Cross and the Talbot car works in Small Heath (see Duffy, 1995).

²³ The measures advocated by the Highbury Initiative were a reversal of one of the main "benefits" of the road, which had sought to separate the pedestrian from the city's motor traffic under the premise that the road would raise land value and land rent (see Thomas, 1963).

²⁴ Although instigated in part by Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech (Cochrane, 2000, 532), the Urban Programme had been highly reluctant to discuss either ethnicity or race due to the popularly held view that few special measures should be made with respect to the settlement of Commonwealth immigrants. This language was to slightly alter with the Inner Areas Studies of 1972, which sought to gather information on Britain's ethnic minorities in Birmingham, Liverpool and London, and the 1977 White Paper, which identified racial discrimination in the inner city.

²⁵ The Race Relations Act of 1976 "placed a particular duty on local authorities to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different racial groups" (Solomos, 1993b, 150). More specifically, Section 19A of the Race Relations Act made it "unlawful for a planning authority to discriminate against a person in carrying out their planning functions" (cited in Thomas & Krishnarayan, 1994, 6).

²⁶ Later, Birmingham's Employment Resource Centres would supersede the Business Initiative. These formed a part of the Business Link which was managed by the Birmingham Economic Development Partnership (a joint initiative of the TEC, Chamber of Commerce and the City Council) to: "increase the take up of businesses start-up and support services by groups under-represented in business e.g. people from ethnic minority communities, women and people with disabilities".

²⁷ Later, the aforementioned reports would be supplemented by the work of the Birmingham Food Forum. This was established in 1994. It initially included five different ethnic minority communities and was supported by Birmingham TEC and Birmingham City Council's Economic Development Department and the Environment Department to promote the food industry in Birmingham. The main aim of the Forum is to develop Birmingham as a multicultural food sector for tourists and local consumers and to provide training in the catering industry.

²⁸ John Wong, in the City Sound Archive (C367), describes the Chinese restaurants that existed prior to 1968 as selling Chop Suey rather than genuine Cantonese cuisine. Although, for Chan (1981) the first “Chinese” restaurant (Hua gu lou) in Birmingham opened in 1952, Wong argues that it was not until the Happy Gathering opened in 1968 that genuine Cantonese food was available in Birmingham.

²⁹ The most prominent opposition to the Act was not instigated by the Left but by Norman Tebbit. Echoing Powellite themes of a so-called British essence, his argument sought to maintain the Conservative’s 1987 - election pledge to oppose increased immigration. In particular, he sought to demonstrate “a responsibility to the British people” by rejecting a so-called un-assimilable and alien other (see Smith, 1994). In the House of Commons, the Cabinet’s response was that Tebbit’s claim was over blown and that the Act simply would reassure Hong Kong’s “key personnel” against a fear of Chinese Communism, which became heightened with the repression of the student protests in Tiananmen Square and the introduction of the Basic Law. The Cabinet therefore did not directly suggest that Hong Kong Chinese migrants might have a valid place in Britain, they merely suggested that immigrants would not necessarily come.

³⁰ As one of the key agencies that seek to represent the Birmingham’s Chinese community, BCS readily solicits local government money. In the mid -1990s this included a Community Development Officer who was assigned by the Economic Development Department to meet some key targets that endeavoured to mobilise Chinese labour. These included: establishing an Employment Resource Centre, developing business advice, delivering vocational training, the promotion of Chinese catering businesses and the promotion of the local Chinese Quarter as a tourist attraction. The Officer also organised seminars on the possible arrival of Hong Kong immigrants.

³¹ Up to 1973 it was used for the wholesale of boots and shoes, and although attempts were made to erect a nine-storey office block in 1974 on this site, this prospective redevelopment was withdrawn in 1976 due “to the uncertainty of the economic situation” (PA: E/C/26342/4). The building was instead left redundant and was described as a “vacant warehouse” when it was converted.

³² Courtalds Ltd coveted the land in 1981 and weighed up the potential uses of the space. They suggested that the property could be demolished and rebuilt or converted for office purposes or alternatively used as a retail warehouse selling “comparison goods” such as “garden equipment, dustbins, ironing boards etc”.

³³ The implicit lack of the city as defined in texts such as the CADP also played itself out in the construction of the second phase of China Court, which involved an adjacent car park that would be entered through a Heavens Gate and retail outlets:

“The proposed development lies in the Chinese Quarter and Markets area and is wholly consistent with the need to promote its tourist potential. *The development should create additional specialist retailing which is currently lacking in the City Centre* and should complement the adjacent China Court and mixed use Arcadian Scheme which is under construction [sic] beyond Ladywell Walk.” (Development Department Memorandum from Mike Taylor, Planning Division to Mike Murray, City Centre Group, April 9th 1990, my emphasis)

³⁴ See Birmingham Evening Mail, January 19th 1995, January 25th 1995, Express & Star, January 20th 1995.

CHAPTER 3 - WORLDING A MULTICULTURAL CITY: PRESENCE, TRADITION AND THE AUTHORISING OF CHINATOWN

“To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation.” (Fanon, 1986, 17-18)

Lying low within the celebration of multiculturalism are different ways of realising cultural identity. These alternatives already contribute towards a discursive anxiety within the interstices of the text, place or subject under question, and challenge the possibility of a fixed, regimented narrative of difference. In what follows, I move towards an examination of some modes of representation and draw out some of the implications for subjecting these onto a multicultural city. As with chapter 2, the involvement once again considers Birmingham’s Chinatown, but in this chapter I reflect upon the different types of political logic stipulated within the contours of governmental planning language. The representational mode/logic that I primarily discuss and de-centre concerns the “metaphysics of presence”. This humanistic mode of representation carries with it assumptions regarding the subject (Venn, 1999), writing (Derrida, 1976), politics (Spivak, 1988) and the city (Donald, 1999), which are often situated as concrete, absolute, idiomatic and axiomatic. However, by carefully opening up the implementation and practice of these axioms with regard to the Chinatown in Birmingham, I show that there are other co-existing logics of representation, which reveal that the celebration of “presence” only serves to dissimulate Chinatown as a hybrid. I then go onto consider how some of the hybridity is not celebratory per se, but sets in place certain limits to the hospitality given to cultural difference in the city.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, the recent reinvention of Birmingham has coincided with a re-evaluation of ethnic minorities in urban planning. It seems that where once the presence of cultural differences were seen as a threat to post-war reconstruction,

Birmingham has now become “multi-racial”, “cosmopolitan” and “multicultural” (see also Bhattacharyya, 2000; McGuinness, 1996). However, whilst this is perhaps worthy of some celebration, what is important to note about this discursive shift is the way in which certain knowledges of multiculturalism have become structured. As I will argue in this chapter, one preferred angle in which urban restructuring has committed itself to multiculturalism is through supposedly fostering, or more precisely eliciting, the voices of others. This suggests that multiculturalism, or at least a version of it, is solicited through a format where different faces are placed in the foreground so that it appears apparent that Birmingham is what it claims to be: multicultural. However, this positioning is not such a simple or evident logic, as what I (also) demonstrate is that the mobilisation of any such advocacy is already entangled with other histories and geographies that mark the syncretic and mimetic qualities of place construction. An implication that could be gathered from this is that identity prevents itself from reaching a point of absoluteness. But, as I will also suggest, although this may mark a hybrid that enables Chinatown to be appropriated and configured by others, it is one where certain visual and material privileges are offered at the expense of cultural differences. In this regard, advocacy becomes restricted and interceded. To make these claims explicit, I follow a theoretical line that firstly, illustrates the ideality of signification as though it rests upon the evidence of a particular presence. Secondly, I demonstrate that such presences co-exist with other often excluded, yet relational identities that bring into question a foundational claim, and thirdly, show how signification becomes mediated amongst differential relations. To exemplify these theoretical points, I initially read some of the city planner’s grandiose strategic statements on Birmingham’s Chinatown and then take a detailed look at some case studies to examine how these statements are implemented and resisted. The policy statements, from which I draw particularly, chronologically and

thematically, follow from the CADP and the first Highbury Initiative, which I have already discussed. They largely refer to a draft plan entitled the *Chinese/Markets Quarter*¹ (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1996), which was later renamed the *Bull Ring/Markets Quarter*² (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1998).

The traditional presence of Chinatown

“The voice *constitutes* the law, to the extent that it orders; and, to that extent, the law *is* the voice.” (Nancy, 1993, 45 emphasis in original)

On urban regeneration in Birmingham, the Chief Executive of the City Council (cited in Bramwell & Rawding, 1996, 213-14) states that “[the] image was chosen because it is the facts, it is the reality ... We promote the facts, we don’t go in for gimmicks”. However, although the Chief Executive and urban planners may, indeed, promote what they take as “facts”, a question that this quotation perhaps raises is what constitutes a fact, or even a fiction, of urban regeneration? In this section, I discuss an underlying presupposition that secures a factual image. The presupposition that I discuss is the privilege that is attributed to presence. In brief, what I mean by this is the ways in which a representation becomes aligned as standing for, or representing, a distinct referent, and the ways in which this referent, in its presence, can be posed as the authentic origin of a specific image. To elaborate upon the implications and exemplify this taken for granted suggestion I examine three thematic claims in urban planning. The first one operates on a banal and generalised, but taken for granted, level of representation, which is evident in the CMQ’s consultation process. The second and third more specifically addresses the “facts” of multiculturalism, and, in particular, the way that these “facts” are located on the grounds of demographics and/or through calling to the foreground particular communities.

a) On reading the framework for the CMQ, it seems that the plan gathers its name so as to conjure a specific relationship between the signifier and place:

“As its title implies the Chinese/Markets Quarter contains Birmingham’s evolving “Chinatown” and is also the traditional home of it’s Wholesale and Retail Markets” (CMQ, 6).

If the title “implies” place, then, it would not be misplaced to assume that urban planning signifies though representing a perceived thing. That is, urban representation supposedly communicates the specificity of a genus by treating the existences that are in place as the locus of representation and positing the title as proximate to this locus. However, although the title may demonstrate a certain proximity between the title to a “fact”, if planning is to commit to such a representational logic, then the title is unrepresentative. This is because this form of representation works on the premise of *vertreten*, that is proxy or acting for, when those that are represented are a minority located amongst other places/proxies in the planned area. Indeed, it is with this concern that a number of Councillors argued against the use of the term “Chinese” in the title of the plan, not on account of Chinatown’s non-existence, but by pushing more forcibly a suggestion that the title should be more reflective:

“Surprisingly, the issue which aroused the greatest number of comments (including those made by a number of City Council Committees and Ward Sub-Committees) concerned the name of the Quarter. A strong view was expressed that this should be reconsidered. It is therefore proposed that the name should be changed to the *preferred alternative* – the ‘Bull Ring & Markets Quarter’. It was felt that *this title more fully reflects the traditional historical focus of the Quarter.*” (Birmingham City Council, Report of Director of Planning and Architecture, Sparkbrook Ward Sub-Committee 16th July 1997, Planning Committee, 17th July 1997, my emphasis).

If we take the literal understanding of representation that this Committee advocates, it is possible to suggest that for this Committee the entitling of the city should be as a mirror image. Evidently, this is not the case with the “CMQ”, as configuring the Quarter as “Chinese” does not bring forth the preferred image. Rather, it would appear that the signifier

“Chinese”, in this context, is a synecdoche and/or a contortion. Either way, as the Committee goes on to assert, the “existing name”, or more precisely a part of the name, “does not reflect the multi-cultural diversity of the Quarter or its traditional historical focus” (ibid.). However, irrespective of whether the title reflects or not, to once again use the language in the above quotation, this signals what could be described as a “preferred” structure of representation; one that validates the sign of place through mirroring a source or conversely dismisses the signifier by finding another. That, the very “preference” also indicates that there are other, albeit supposedly less accurate and less preferable, ways of representing in the planning discourse is something that shall be explored below. But for now, I would argue that the importance of a preferred structure of representation as a reflection is twofold. Firstly, through revealing the desired position of the sign, this colludes with an idea of writing that belongs to a classical division between the signifier and signified. That is, it would seem that both the title and the re-titling of the plan becomes registered as though they, or at least should, re-appropriate a deferred presence or signified. And secondly, that this very structure has implications for how identity and its relationship with the construction of place and multiculturalism are made exemplary or unique and this is often at the expense of relational differences that are also constitutive of signification. To judge the significance of this narrow, but preferred, mode of representation and to explore the possibility of this signified, it is necessary to elaborate the above points with respect to two foundational claims on multiculturalism.

b) The positioning of the sign in Birmingham’s urban regeneration strategy effectively tries or at least prefers to collapse and legitimate the sign as a reflection. In supposedly mirroring what is there, whether the Bull Ring or Chinatown, the correct multicultural sign becomes removed from an accusation of gimmickry through demonstrating evident and real facts.

Such evidence of multiculturalism in the CMQ's narrative, at its most axiomatic, is taken as (ethnic minority) demographics: "The Quarter's population has a multi-cultural character with around 40% of residents from ethnic backgrounds (especially Black, Asian and Irish communities)" (CMQ, 14). Still, what is notable about this preference are some interrelated, but different writing strategies. These include, the way in which the plan cites foremost the presence of "ethnic ... communities" to demonstrate the multi of multiculturalism. And, also, the way that "multi-cultural character", or what might be read as signification, becomes aligned with the 40% of those from an "ethnic background". Put together, I would suggest that these points are not so much about recognising cultural differences because in moving towards what Brah (1996; also see Julien & Mercer, 1996) calls a "minoritising impulse", the plan evidently fails to acknowledge 60% of cultural differences in the Quarter. Rather, I would propose that they begin to allude to an understanding that centres multiculturalism and the associated character upon the location and proximity of specific people, which would, in turn, render their presence as multiculturalism's literal figures.

c) Although multiculturalism for Bhabha (1998) is seen as something of a "floating signifier", the practice of centring representation as a proxy cannot be ignored within the functioning of the CMQ or, indeed, other representations in the West (Nancy, 1993). For, compatible with the above preferences for reflection, derivation and proxy is a narrow ideal of signification, which offers Chinatown a locatable geography. In short, this can be drawn in the figure of an ethnic circle, where a place "as it is" focuses community and community is linked to place. Take three quotations that each privilege the presence of a particular community:

"The Chinatown area around Wrottesley Square/Hurst Street has continued to develop its important role as a focus of the Chinese Community in the Region. Further developments building on the unique character of Birmingham's

Chinatown continue to be encouraged.” (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1997, 106)

“15.92 The Wrottesley Square/Hurst Street area beyond Smallbrook Queensway contains many Chinese restaurants and retail premises. This grouping linked as it is to the financial and cultural activities of the Chinese community in Birmingham represents an important part of the City’s role as a focus of the Chinese community in the region. Further developments building on the unique character of Birmingham’s Chinatown continue to be encouraged.” (Birmingham City Council Planning & Architecture Department, 1993, 157)

“Around Ladywell Walk, Wrottesley Square, Thorp and the upper part of Hurst Street together with sections of the Arcadian are many Chinese restaurants and retail premises. This grouping, linked as it is to the financial and cultural activities of the Chinese community in Birmingham represents yet another dimension to the already cosmopolitan mix of the area. Opportunities to develop this theme further through refurbishment and infilling where appropriate will be encouraged along with the use of oriental design features and landmarks in order to build upon the unique character of Birmingham’s very own Chinatown.” (CMQ, 36; BRMQ, 36)

Listed above are three quotations that in many ways repeat each other and reassemble a truth through the motion of recounting. Whilst repetition offers a displacement, which I discuss below, the point that I pursue for now revolves around the positioning of presence and, more particularly, phonocentrism as the basis of a *unique* Chinatown.

As a number of commentators have pointed out, presence is not incidental to the spirit of liberalism (Derrida, 1994) and neither is its structure far removed from the “truth” of Occidental thought (Trinh, 1989) or from those denigrating the artifice of the city (Donald, 1999). Indeed, presence has repeatedly been used as a prerequisite for the articulation of a distinct position, whether with claims to authenticity or in explanations that celebrate the uniqueness of an agent or object. Simplifying to the extreme, I would suggest that one of the means to which these disparate claims are mobilised is with a foundational understanding, which foregrounds presence as the transcendental basis for experience and communication. With respect to language, this usually means that presence is the locus of natural knowledge,

and that the signifier is an outgrowth from this locus. As Aristotle (cited in Derrida, 1976, 30) puts it: “Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words”. However, if this is the case, then the presupposition here is that the “mental experience”, which can be translated as presence, can be thought, prior to, and independently of the signifier (Derrida, 1981). That is, if the signified is foundational, then presence becomes the untainted and aura emitting element that defines an authentic, “factual” experience, whilst, conversely, writing becomes relegated as a secondary, less accurate, product on account of its distance from the signified concept. Now, if presence becomes designated on the basis of an ethnicity, I would suggest that this logocentric structure of transcendence also can be thought, and indeed has become proposed, with respect to Birmingham’s Chinatown, albeit in a transformed and uneven sense. I argue this as private investors propose that one of Birmingham’s pagodas is “authentic” on account of “specially glazed green roofing tiles imported from China” (Birmingham Evening Mail, April 8th 2001). This would perhaps imply that authenticity is imparted through a definitive origin. Furthermore, I argue this as the outgrowths of “further refurbishment” and the development of “this theme” are repeatedly preceded, “as it is”, by the “Chinese community in Birmingham” (rather than any other community that might make use of these businesses). This would imply that the presence of the Chinese community in Birmingham is the privileged basis for Chinatown. And, finally, I also argue this on account that another motif of Chinatown is said to be an “expression” by a Chinese citizen (see chapter 5). This would perhaps imply that signification stems from a speaking subject who possesses an aesthetic right over a Chinese sign under a representational system of diegesis.

To be clear, my point with respect to these examples is not to deny that they might be taken as an affirmation of cultural difference. But, what I do want to assert here is that,

despite their irregularity, each of these accounts alludes to a presumption that the signifiers of Chinatown are effected through a narrow and derivative cause. If such derivation is to be the case, then, it would follow that the signifiers of Chinatown are something of an outgrowth from an “inside” – sometimes defined as provincial and sometimes as a subject – where the “inside” is one of the foundational features of a plural arrangement of a multicultural spectrum. As a number of commentators have suggested such exclusivity/particularity often leaves an impression that there exists “concrete agents” (Butler et al. 2000) or “concrete subjects” (Derrida, 1982) or that there are some distinct aura emitting, people (Gilroy, 1993) that have authority over a particular cultural realm (Malik, 1998). However, a problem with privileging these types of understandings and their practises is the way they close off, centre and set in stone a moment of multicultural signification by underplaying its heterogeneity as well as its historical and geographical detours. With respect to Birmingham’s Chinatown, I now affirm these differences and detours to de-centre this aesthetic assumption and to demonstrate the mediation of multiculturalism in this city. In the context of this chapter, this demonstration is important in that it raises questions about the cultural formations that are in play in the management of multicultural space.

Displacing the presence of Chinatown

“When postmodern architectural “historicism” borrows architectural idioms from far-flung periods without any regard for idiomatic coherence or reproduction of appropriate context, this ... can be seen as a foregrounding of radical citationality, of the suggestion that the “aura” of the original cannot be structurally privileged”. (Spivak, 1999, 331)

Throughout the different logics of presence that have been addressed within the planning discourse, I have sought to suggest that urban planning “prefers” a mode of representation that derives evident and procurable features to validate the sign. One of these features is “ethnic backgrounds”, which allows a logocentric understanding to roughly pose

multiculturalism as a product of particular communities. However, if read against the grain, the “preference” in itself indicates that there exists other, although less preferred, modalities of representation that refuse totality. In this section, I elucidate some examples of these alternatives. In doing so, I examine the possibility that signifying the development of Birmingham’s Chinese Quarter through the presence of the Chinese community only ever underplays the constitutive role of differences and the horizon of interpellating relations. The two interwoven relations I particularly focus on are those with urban planning and the writing practices of tradition. However, before I begin to draw these out, I would like to make clear that such an examination is not intended to be one that seeks to erase the labours of “Birmingham’s Chinese community”. Nor is it to dismiss their presence. But, as I take it, it is a means to reconsider the critical tensions that exist around and mediate these labours and presences as well as a movement towards re-locating the subject vis-à-vis other actors, temporalities and spaces. To do this, I initially re-read the planning discourses surrounding the CMQ to reconsider Chinatown as relationally determined and differentially marked, and then go onto exemplify these two processes with a number of case studies.

That the Planning Committee appears to “prefer” a logocentric notion of representation, where the signifier should bring forth, as close as possible, appropriate evidence or a literal meaning to authenticate the sign does not imply that the CMQ simply elucidates a presence in and of itself. Nor, does it necessarily mean that a sign of Chinatown is an exclusive possession by a signified concept that is consigned to an aura-emitting subject. For, ascertaining such an exemplary figure to provide the multicultural imaginary with a semantic depth only appears, as such, with a series of structured relationships drawn between cultural differences. Paradoxically, the CMQ partially alludes to some of these relationships and, in turn, disrupts the mythology of ethnic particularity. One example where

the CMQ makes this explicit is with a reference to “the Chinese theme”, “Irish culture” and “Asian and Afro-Caribbean aspects of life”:

“Proposals are also brought forward which could encourage the cultural diversity and multi-racial character of the Quarter. In particular, a number of possibilities are highlighted for developing the Chinese theme, including the creation of a Chinese Archway at the entrance to Hurst Street, a landmark Pagoda feature at Holloway Circus and a new focal space at the junction of Ladywell Walk and Pershore Street.

In a similar manner projects will be brought forward to build upon the rich and evolving Irish culture of Digbeth and to reflect the Asian and Afro-Caribbean aspects of life in Highgate. (CMQ, 13, my emphasis)

If a “Chinese theme” can be brought forward in a similar manner for other cultures, then the allegedly present and singular “character” in itself becomes “iterative” (Derrida, 1982). That is, if presence can be repeated and placed amongst other chains of significance, so that cultural differences are able to relate and refer to each other, this would confound or, at least, complicate a suggestion that might compress multiculturalism to a definitive, univocal referent. Nevertheless, irrespective of a possible crossing of cultural boundaries or a repetitive/citational structure, any such movement to bring “multi-racial character” “forward” in a “similar manner”, lies alongside an endeavour to mediate or stabilise cultural differences. For, if understood as differentially marked, these movements in themselves trace an implicit, although unmentioned, background of dissimilarity in the moment when they also endeavour to assert an outline of similarity. As I outline below, the dissimilarities of Chinatown are also repetitive and consistently antagonise these similar bonds. But for now my comment here is that although urban “multi-racial” regeneration could be described as something of a hybrid – in the way projects may motion an ability to draw from certain others – this becomes a hybrid that privileges a form of alignment at the expense of an excluded relational heterogeneity. Along with an iteration of Chinatown, these elisions are something of a recurring narrative structure in the planning discourse.

Although the above “manner” may signal a degree of precaution in a celebration of hybridity, it also raises the importance of a formal determination of interrelation (Butler et al. 2000) and the way these formal relations might hierarchically position one, “similar”, polarity in which multiculturalism becomes contextually judged. As I elucidated in the previous chapter, the polarity the CMQ alludes to in the above case is one that refers to business tourism and ethnic entrepreneurship. Whilst the CMQ in other places of its narrative makes these delineations overt, in doing so, it also exposes an understanding of “multi-racial character” to the vagaries of the constitutive practices of urban planning. For example, take two statements that designate the CMQ as something of an economic zone, but premise this upon a process of recognition, “unlocking” and “welcoming” cultural difference to the city:

“Despite the presence of a substantial Irish community in Birmingham and the specific “Gaelic” attractions and uses that are located in and around the Markets, Digbeth and Deritend, there has been little recognition of the potential to develop the Irish character of the locality not only as a strong focus for the City’s Irish Community but also as a potential tourist, leisure and economic asset. This success has been achieved with the “Chinatown” approach in the Entertainment Zone and could be realised here with the realisation of an “Irish District”.” (CMQ, 65)

“The Entertainment Zone has already begun to emerge as one of Birmingham’s cultural and economic assets. The key to unlocking the full potential of this district lies in the pursuit of a series of objectives and proposals that will provide a fitting setting for one of the City’s brightest and liveliest jewels:

...

Welcoming the rich cultural diversity and multi-racial character of the area and *encouraging* further investment by the Chinese Business Community in order to create a unique building style and character” (CMQ, 57).

Although the presence of these communities is taken as though they constitute a kind of signature with a “unique ... character”, these signatures do not exist in a political vacuum. Instead, the signatures of multiculturalism require a “countersignature”, in the way of conventions, institutions and processes of legitimisation (see Smith, 2000). That is, the

announcement of a “multi-racial character”, if it is to exist as such, implies a recognition by something or somebody else - it relies on being received and attested to - which here specifically includes an urban planning that is distanced and differentiated, yet traceable with its welcome. In this way, the construction of Chinatown, an Irish District or “multi-racial character” are irreducible, as any signification becomes positioned amongst, and to, an interpretative register of the state that exists prior to the signature. I would argue that by acknowledging and affirming such a position it is possible to raise, at least, three interwoven points on the construction of multiculturalism, which are to be explored with some case studies. My first point is that if multiculturalism is contingent to, and interconnected with, others, then the signifiers of multiculturalism are necessarily available to other readers. As Keith (1992, 559; also see Ó Tuathail, 1994) argues, “the reader is a necessary presupposition of the text”. My second point is that if both signatures and countersignatures constitute multiculturalism, then, it marks a hybrid. That is, Chinatown or the Irish District has never been one of a transcendental signified that is peculiar to particular communities separating them from us. Rather, the possibility of any such transcendental signified is, paradoxically, always and already constructed through a co-existence that releases and stabilises the particularism of a respective culture. This brings me to a third and final point on multiculturalism and, in particular, the mediation of this hybrid. My suggestion here, is that it is neither hybridity per se or the identitarian claim itself, but rather the way identity becomes reinscribed and subjected that marks the commitment to multiculturalism. This raises the importance of institutional practices together with the way it approaches its antagonisms.

If we take the first official mention of a Chinese Quarter in Birmingham’s planning archive from the pamphlet entitled *Environmental Improvements Birmingham – A Physical*

Enhancement Strategy in the City Centre it is possible to once again resituate some of the signifiers of Birmingham's multiculturalism in relation to others as well as underline the iterative structures of urban planning. Produced in parallel to the City Centre Symposium, this document advertises an "exciting package of schemes" to "concentrate action and transform areas". These include a roof over Union Street to manufacture a retail arcade and "a central column with laser lights" in John Bright Street, alongside a Chinese Quarter in Wrottesley Square. On the latter, it briefly states:

"A Chinese Quarter is to be developed in Wrottesley Square, with tiled pavings, a Heavens Gate, canopies and murals in a traditional style". (City of Birmingham Development Department, 1987)

A number of points may be made on the evocation and development of a traditional style. Firstly, although it appears that a traditional style can be constructed, this does not mean that the Chinese Quarter surfaces in an arbitrary fashion. As Andrew Benjamin (1997, 290) tells us with respect to the architectural metaphor, tradition "involves a repetition in which concepts and categories are handed down". Therefore, if we were to agree with Benjamin, the development of tradition would be one that solicits the labours of others; it houses a durable, recurrent aesthetic as well as a mode of assemblage. With specific reference to Birmingham's Chinese Quarter, such a recurrence can be exemplified in the way that a number of select and sedimented signifiers are summoned to outline the formative possibilities for Hurst Street. For instance, a passage from Birmingham's *City Centre Design Strategy* (Tibbalds et al. 1990, 69) once again picks out the features of the "Chinese gate" and "Chinese pavillion [sic]", but furthermore calls upon different cities and streets to gather a sense of similarity:

"If traffic flows could be rearranged and traffic calming measures introduced, Hurst Street could be turned into a themed Chinese environment and gain similar popularity to Gerrard Street in London. Furthermore, the area lacks a public space. The vacant site at Bromsgrove Street/Hurst Street offers the

opportunity to introduce a square as a focal point for the entire entertainment area.

...

Chinese gates have proved popular and symbolic features in various cities to mark a Chinese area. They could be introduced to mark the entrances to “China Town” in Hurst Street.” (Tibbalds et al. 1990, 69)

Re-packaging cultural difference is a story that is not just specific to Birmingham; other cities have sought the contribution of multiculturalism and have celebrated their Chinatowns (see Anderson, 1990; Laguerre, 2000; Lin, 1998). Still, it would seem that fragments of some of these others have become instructive to the way that Hurst Street becomes understood, thus marking “Birmingham’s very own Chinatown” with a collation of borrowings and redeployments rather than being of an idiomatic specificity. In short, it would seem that Birmingham’s Chinese Quarter is a product of a “radical citationality” (Spivak, 1999, 331). Furthermore, it can also be noted that the repeatability and portability of tradition, not only intersects Birmingham’s Chinatown, but also de-centres tradition itself. For, even if planning may endeavour to go as far to reproduce a “similar popularity” to Gerrard Street, what might be defined as “tradition” continually exceeds any defined parameter through its iterability. That is, the implicit repetition causes a displacement of tradition, through a doubling and in the way the double becomes available to different contexts, forms of visualisation and functionality. Walter Benjamin (1973, 218; also see Chow, 1993) famously sums this process up, when he states that “reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual”.

Secondly, the development of a “traditional style” traces others and becomes framed through privileging gateways, murals and canopies. As I have already noted, for many in the consultation process, the “traditional historical focus” of the Quarter is something not quite Chinese. Whilst this becomes explained on account of the heritage of the Bull Ring, the different deployments of the term would imply that the “traditional” does not come forth as a

singular narrative. Instead, there appears to be an absence of an absolute anchoring of what the “traditional” may mean, rendering the preference for one definition over any other as a desire to close off the “play of differences” so that a particular meaning of the term may be pushed to the foreground. Such a motion also becomes apparent with the CMQ’s proposal for developing and strengthening the “urban design qualities” of the area, which once again evokes certain forms of street furniture, but also re-articulates a notion of “reflection”:

“Develop and strengthen the urban design qualities of the locality based upon the creation of a new focal “square” together with *the creation of distinct “gateways”* and links at the points where Hurst Street and Bromsgrove Street join adjacent Quarters and Sub-Area. *Gateways into the Zone will not only signpost its existence and improve access but also reflect its character and activities.* For example:

- A Chinese Arch framing the portal under the office block at the junction of Smallbrook Queensway and Hurst Street.
- The positioning of a “Heaven’s Gate” at the Pershore Street and Ladywell Walk junction.
- Columns or pillars marking the entrance into Hurst from Sherlock Street.”
- A landmark Pagoda feature is already being constructed in an improved Thomas Gardens in the centre of Holloway Circus.” (CMQ, 58, my emphasis)

In calling forth a traditional style, the CMQ seems to concern itself with signifiers that mark the presence (“signpost its existence”) and offer an equivalence (“reflect its character and activities”). This, however, is only a discursive attempt to constitute the idea of a social totality through closing off the play of difference. I suggest this as it is possible to note how these signs emerge through a chain of differences and deferrals that allow them to be recalled as such. The ideas that the reflective signs are to be “created”, or are in the process of construction, are exemplary in this respect. They indicate in a slippage in the text between “reflect” and “creation” that the sign that reflects is not simply one that evokes the now or is present as a mirror image of an “existence”. Rather, the sign that reflects adds something extra, and is premised upon a projection to a future and an effacing of non-possession. In this

way, the suggestion of “creation” marks a desire, but also traces other apparent existences and other urban forms, which are to be deferred in order to favour a prioritised reflection of the Quarter’s “character and activities”. Or in other words, “creation” indicates that the writing of Chinatown articulates a surmounting of differences that may appear to be less “reflective”, but still remains apparent amongst the surroundings. The all too frequent mentions of “an already cosmopolitan mix” or an “alternative scene in the specialised shops, pubs, clubs and atmosphere” in comparison to the singular mention of “the gay community of the City”, perhaps illustrates some of this repression.

To consider some of these differences and the constitutive role of the outside I wish now to analyse four case studies. They take a different tack to the preceding discussion in that instead of taking the texts of Birmingham’s planning strategy they examine individual planning applications and their architectural articulations. Nevertheless, they once again demonstrate some of the above claims of availability, co-existence, hybridity, iteration and mediation, and moreover show how they are put to practice.

a) *China Court/Lawrence Brothers Premises*. As discussed in chapter 2, the official marketing of Hurst Street as a Chinatown coincided with the development of the China Court complex. Whilst the City Planning Officer and the developers suggested that the China Court was “to provide a comprehensive leisure complex with a genuine Chinese flavour” (see Birmingham Post, May 10th 1983), the cultivation of this flavour traces syncretic qualities, which bring together government agencies and different forms and times. To begin to exemplify this claim, one could examine the financing of the scheme and its construction. For example, with respect to funding, the project was made feasible on account of an Urban Development Grant³ that was given backing by the City Council because of the “proposed environmental improvements in a Chinese theme to Wrottesley Square” (Physical

Regeneration Group Memorandum, 3rd April 1990, PA: No/920/20). Additionally, the proposals for Wrotesley Square were also cited to the China Court's financial backers to demonstrate the level of local government commitment to regeneration (correspondence between the Principal Business Development Officer to Fulwell Services Limited, March 20th 1984). With regard to the material construction of the scheme, this also never marked an absolute creative moment of signification stemming from a particular presence, although it did involve the selective refurbishment of a disused warehouse:

“The aim of this proposal, according to the applicants, is to create a genuine “Chinese dimension” to the development. In order to assist this objective a number of elevational alterations are envisaged. In the main these would involve the provision of canopies at ground and second floor level to be affixed to the Ladywell Walk elevations together with the provision of a new external staircase ... These structures would be of appropriate “ethnic design”. (P.A. No. E/C.920/16)

For the developers, Anglo-Oriental Properties, the building of the China Court was “China-fied” (Sunday Mercury, April 18th, 1990). According to the local press, this predominately referred to the “oriental eaves and signwriting [sic] straight from old Cathay” (ibid.) together with the 60,000 half round glazed tiles which were imported from China to line the canopies. Yet, although these signifiers may have conjured China, China Court was never simply about China or Cathay in and of themselves. Rather, the “ethnic design” of China Court became constituted through selectively altering and adjusting a redbrick warehouse formerly called the Lawrence Brothers premises - which previously housed tea and dresses through the 1950's and 1960's and became “difficult to let” in the 1980s (PA: No/920/15). More specifically, this grafting process included replacing the “Roman type tiles” with “half round glazed tiles from China” and redecorating a “dead frontage” with a “common design” or “ethnic design” of poppy red steelwork and red ceramic floor tiles (PA: No C/02592/96/FUL). Thus, the visual order of the China Court neither came out of a void nor

did it derive “straight from old Cathay” as it involved taking a referential detour through a disused warehouse that had previously stood and still stands today, albeit in an altered state. In this regard, China Court perhaps echoes Lai’s claim that Chinatown’s “blend features of both Chinese and Western architectural styles” (Lai, 1997, 81). However, what is also important to note about China Court’s blending is that, firstly, what was considered “Chinese” was understood with reference to the Lawrence Brothers premises; it is not a pure, untouched notion. And secondly, that China Court’s construction was a highly discerning procedure involving the substitution of certain non-synonymous features in the movement towards producing an “appropriate” ethnic design. This selective action of effacement is somewhat exemplified by the concerns of local planners:

“Given the external decoration of the building the treatment of the new hoist housing is *unimaginative*. It is important to maintain the Chinese Theme and I would suggest pitched roofing and some decoration”. (Memo from Physical Planning Officer, Development Department 2nd May 1989, my emphasis).

The rebuilding of the Lawrence Brothers premises was hierarchically imagined; it privileged certain architectural features over others. But the placement of this imagination was not static as sediments of the imaginative features, such as the pitched roofing, transferred onto other stages of the development. For example, the second phase of the China Court development – involving a car park and a number of retail units – was explained through a structure repeating, blending and matching features of a “Chinese style”:

“Elevations to be constructed in Chinese style to blend with China Court. Construction in facing brickwork with shopping frontages and vehicular openings to have canopies in green glazed Chinese tiles to match China Court with further decorative canopies over each entrance to the shopping arcade and to the car par access fronting Ladywell Walk. Above these entrances brick towers would be constructed surmounted by tiled roofs and faced with panels carrying large scale Chinese characters.

... The applicants also propose to extend the frontage canopies decorative elevational treatment (plaster motifs set on the brickwork to match China Court) to the existing parking levels adjoining the north side of the site, remaining exposed at the end of Wrottesley Street.

In sympathy with the Heavens Gate constructed as part of the China Court development the applicants propose a similar gate in steel framing with infill panels and roofs of green glazed tiles at the entrance to Wrottesley Street.” (PA: C/00920/20)

Although the Planning Committee claimed “the [China Court] development should ... be of particular benefit to the Chinese community” (P.A: No. C/02418/95/FUL), this was nothing but a sweeping judgement as the development was never one that embraced community in its absoluteness. Nor was China Court even to be a project purely for the Chinese community in their presence. One of the partners of Anglo-Oriental properties, for example, conceded that “this expansion [China Court] is now in response to Western demands, rather than serving the Chinese community itself” (Sunday Mercury, April 18th 1990). Elsewhere, Birmingham Chinese Community Centre also questioned how much benefit those working in the area would receive from this feature of the City’s urban regeneration strategy:

“It is clear that the City has a long term vision of how to develop “China town” as part of the overall plan to improve the image of Birmingham. This carefully thought out strategy will surely be highly successful and beneficial to the City in terms of attracting more tourists, employment, investment and adding its authenticity to the city as a whole. As the economic and structural development is advancing rapidly I wonder just how much thought the City Officers have given to the needs of people who will be working in the area and both young and old who will be working and living in the city.” (Chinese Community Centre Annual Report, 1989-1990, 6)

In addition, an adjacent restaurant, the Chung Ying, wrote in 1984 and in 1995 protesting over the two stages of China Court’s development:

“... we wish to lodge our strongest objection to the proposal. Our objection is based upon the fact that the car parking available is greatly used by the clientele of our restaurant and would thus jeopardise our trade. We are aware that the China Court Development, would, hopefully, bring prosperity to the city. In turn our restaurant has already contributed to this prosperity and we, obviously, do not wish to lose the facilities of this car parking area, which could prove detrimental to our business.” (Letter from S.C Wong, Chung Ying Cantonese Restaurant to Planning & Architecture Department, 20th June 1984, in P.A. No/ 920/16).

“We have inspected the plans for the proposed development at your office and whilst we welcome additional car parking and general improvements to this area we feel that the design and proposals will be extremely detrimental to the everyday running of the Chung Ying Cantonese Restaurant.

The proposed development to the Northwest Boundary will cut off rear access ... cut out light to the windows ...

The proposals to the Northeast boundary of the restaurant would obscure both the side elevation and the only window to the first floor restaurant area, resulting in failure to attract trade, together with loss of light.

The Chung Ying Cantonese Restaurant is the oldest established restaurant in Birmingham’s Chinatown and has contributed greatly to the success of the area. We feel that these proposals would be most detrimental to the everyday running of the restaurant and therefore wish to register our strongest objection to the present design.” (Letter from Bultec on behalf of the Chung Ying Cantonese Restaurant to Planning & Architecture Department, 11th August 1995 in PA: C/02418/95/FUL).

That these letters were all rebuked by the local authorities indicates that Chinatown was never simply about the desires of a Chinese presence. At the very least, these complaints – which were also echoed by the Chung Ying’s sister business, the Chung Ying Gardens, together with the Day Inn Import & Export Company – demonstrate that there was never a universal view on how Chinatown should develop (also see Preston & Lo, 2000) and, moreover, that development often met with an antagonistic response. As the next case study illustrates, such antagonism sometimes occurs in everyday situations of non-compliance and ambivalence to the ways in which Chinatown becomes affirmed.

b) *No 73-75 Pershore Street*. Neighbouring the bowling alley and ice rink on Pershore Street lies a small redbrick warehouse⁴ named Quadgate where catering equipment, such as commercial cookers and woks, are manufactured and available for wholesale (Figure 3.1). Set up in 1983, this business has both defied *and* been saluted by the local authority, and by doing so somewhat exposed some of the limits of cultural difference that are championed in the planning language. To exemplify this claim, I take two interconnected events from its planning history. The first one concerns an event in January 1996, which was triggered by a

complaint from Roskel Plc, manufacturers of ceiling tiles and office partitions, over the Quadgate premises and, in particular, what became called the “Erection of Side Extension Raising Height of Roof” (PA: C/05316/91/FUL). The specific comments entail:

“Adjacent to ice rink
Corrugated iron/railway sleeper construction
Very Ugly
Commercial Premises – Chinese owned.”
(ibid.)

As a consequence of this complaint, the local authority ordered the demolition of the side extension, only for the owner of Quadgate to supplement them with four wooden flat roofed sheds on the top of the warehouse. Currently, these are still standing even though another investigation by the Planning and Architecture Department also ordered the demolition of these roof sheds. This investigation states:

“Structures easily visible when looking south along Pershore Street – constructed of non matching materials of a temporary nature. Detriment to architectural integrity of existing building and visual amenity of area.” (PA: C/00894/96)

And recommends:

“That the necessary action be taken, including the institution of legal proceedings, if required, to secure the demolition of the unauthorised extensions constructed at 73-75 Pershore Street, City.” (ibid.)

The second event occurred four years prior to Roskel Plc’s complaint, when the tenant of Quadgate, applied to the City Council for permission to change the use of the first floor into “an Oriental Restaurant specialising in Chinese, Korean and Japanese cuisine” seating 88 people. This application was accepted on account that it “consolidates the oriental uses within the Chinese Quarter” (PA: C/5316/91/FUL) and moreover that it was in Chinatown:

“The proposals to change the use of the first floor warehouse to an oriental restaurant is acceptable in this location. The premises are located within the major entertainment zone and an area of mixed business uses where both uses will be encouraged. There are a number of other oriental restaurants in the immediate area” (ibid.)

Figure 3.1

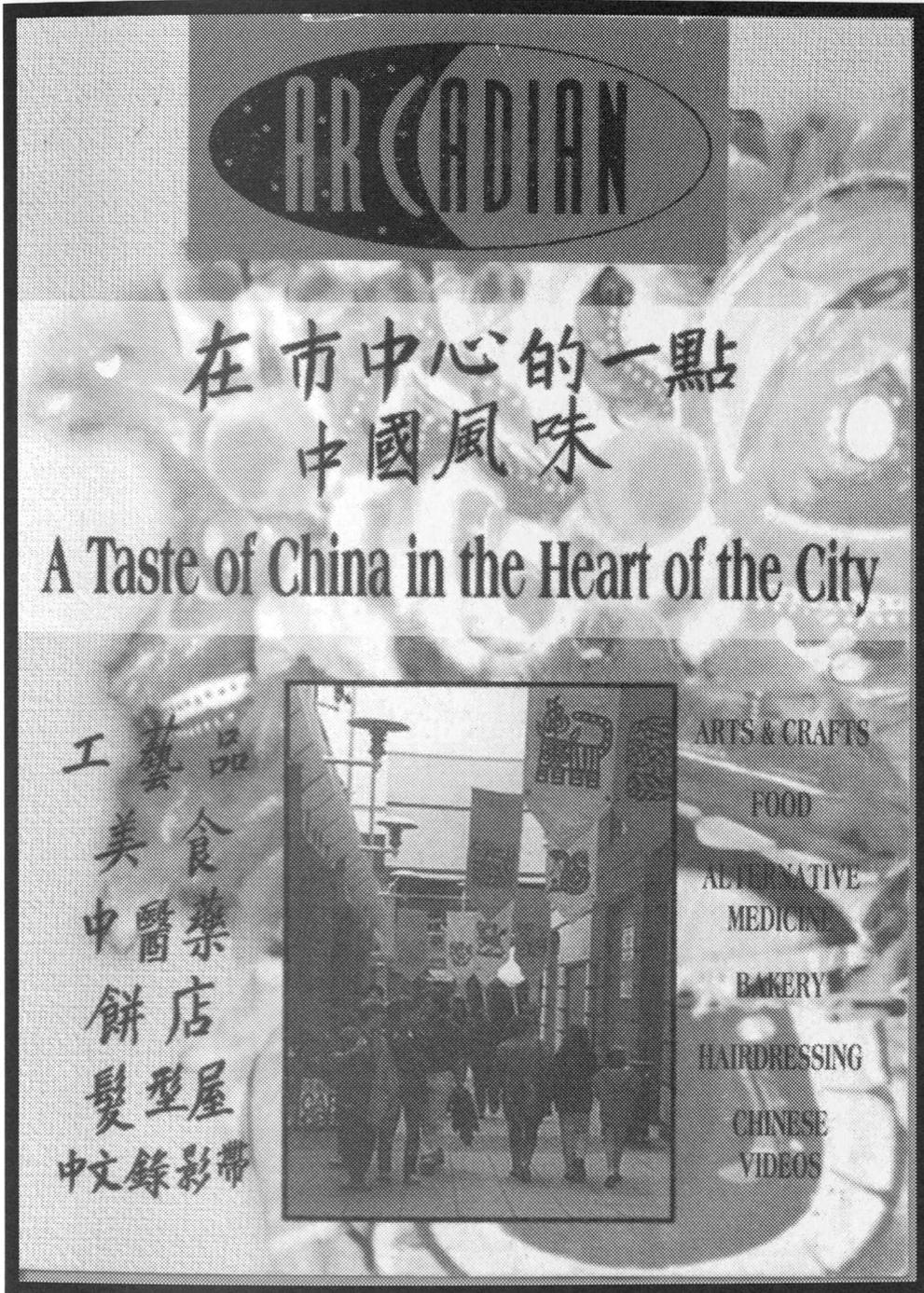


No. 73-75 Pershore Street, Birmingham.

From these two brief events, it would appear that the voice of the owner of Quadgate gathers legitimacy in dialogue. This would partially confirm a point that signification motions not a singular or a linear projection that becomes emitted from the presence of the tenant, but that it becomes attested to and crosscut with the influence of others, whether that of Roskel Plc or the Planning and Architecture Department. In a more micro sense, this perhaps draws a parallel with Kay Anderson's (1987) groundbreaking work on Vancouver's Chinatown, which suggests that Chinatown does not rely upon a discrete "Chineseness" per se, rather, it becomes a figment of a "shared characterization". However, what is important to add here is that, if these two events are read together, it is possible to note that such a "shared characterization" is always differentially marked. For on one hand, although there appears to be a "shared" process of recognition that prioritises certain architectural motifs and an (oriental) land use (i.e. the restaurant), on the other, there is something of an antagonistic, resistant relationship to this process of alignment (i.e. the sheds). That the former relegates what is represented as "detrimental", would appear to render the latter as discontinuous to the construction of the visual amenity of the area and perhaps even "oriental uses". Yet, paradoxically, whilst the latter may block an idea of the area's visual amenity, any such idealisation of Chinatown cannot reach a state of aesthetic absoluteness as it becomes understood as a negation. Or in other words, the very conditions in which Quadgate's more acceptable signifiers become articulated are, in fact, acknowledged through deferring a troublesome, unconsolidated and often-unmentioned visual difference: a "shared characterization" is not necessarily shared and it certainly is not absolute.

c) *The Arcadian/Ladywell Centre*. In chapter 2 and briefly above, I discussed the Wrotesley Square project. This public sector initiative has to date never been finalised. Still, the idea of constructing a Chinatown around this Square is never a planning myth without relation to its

Figure 3.2.



The Arcadian: A Taste of China in the Heart of the City.

surroundings and a planning/development strategy. The development of the Arcadian Centre, located across Ladywell Walk, is such a case in point (Figure 3.2). This particular development - sometimes dubbed “Birmingham’s Covent Garden” (Birmingham Evening Mail, 14th May 1992) and sometimes as “the first truly mixed development which addresses the problems of Inner City Regeneration” (Avatar, 1991) - was finally opened in 1991. However, although construction began in 1988, the development itself had a much longer history of conception as the landowners, the Gooch Estate, had, at least, since 1962 discussed the possibility of regenerating the area with a proposition called the “Ladywell Centre”. Coincidentally or not, this project as with the subsequent Arcadian also was to house a shopping precinct, entertainment centre, cinema and multi-storey car park, yet this precursor was stalled following financial difficulties and a property slump in 1974⁵ (PA: No 21892/40). On its revival, representatives of the Gooch Estate approached the local authority with these difficulties in mind and cited them as a potential stumbling block to the Arcadian’s development. In short, their proposal was for the state to bear the burden of potential costs and cover prospective risks:

“The nub of the problem is that even with the relatively low site values in this central area developers are not prepared to build as the high cost and the risk are not adequately covered by the returns likely to be obtained from the completed buildings. The position, however, could be radically altered if, as in Liverpool and some other places, inner city money could bridge the gap.” (Letter from James & Lister Lea, Chartered Surveyors for the Gooch Estate to City of Birmingham Economic Development Unit, 27th March 1985)

This letter was followed by a series of negotiations between the Gooch Estate and the Economic Development Unit in the mid-1980s:

“He (D. Lea) was looking for ideas, and whilst he mentioned office/hotel uses, he was aware that they would not really be on from a demand point of view. Most of the land concerned is outside the Primary Office Area. The most likely possibility seems to lie in the entertainment field – restaurants, wine bars, clubs, etc.

... We outlined the UDG [Urban Development Grant] idea ... I said that UDG was worth talking about but it depended to a great extent on the existence of demonstratable [sic] demand for a finished product, and private sector commitment, as well as the figures being right.” (Interview Record between James & Lister Lea with the Economic Development Unit, 18th April 1985 from PA: 21892/40/1C)

It seems that concrete ideas for the regeneration, of what were called a collection of “run-down properties” (PA: 21892/25-27/2C) located “in something of a back water” (PA: 21892/29-30/1C), were subject to change. Yet irrespective of any potential alteration in the type of land use, it also would appear that the investors sought an Urban Development Grant⁶ at the rebirth of the “Ladywell Centre”. I suggest here that this interface between the developers and local government became a significant feature in consolidating Birmingham’s Chinatown. To explain why I am making this point, a short commentary around some governmental memorandums and correspondence between the developers, Avatar Ltd⁷, and the City of Birmingham is in order.

Even though the Gooch Estate recognised that “the area has an established reputation for good quality oriental & continental cuisine” (PA: 21892/40 2C), the developers also made it publicly clear that the Arcadian would not be specifically designed to cater for the Chinese community (Benacre Estates Company cited in Express & Star, September 5th 1987). Certainly, it was to include, as suggested by the first round of proposals for the Arcadian, a community centre on Bromsgrove Street, along with a plaza lined with Italian and French restaurants, “German Beer Hall” as well as a “Steak Bar”. However, the failure to explicitly discuss what one planner called a “Chinese style” particularly annoyed some strategists within the public sector. As one Planning Officer noted:

“This scheme takes no account of other proposals for the area. With *our* proposals for Wrotesley Square and the China Court scheme the Ladywell Walk frontage particularly the leisure facility should make some concessions to Chinese *style* and surely many of the restaurants/shops will ultimately be Chinese and *should reflect this in the original design rather than have style*

imposed later by leaseholder.” (Amenity Planning Group Memorandum, Ladywell Area Block Development, 5th November 1987, my emphasis).

The Leader of the Project Development Group reified such concerns:

“The application should take account of *the City Council’s initiative* to create a major focus for the Chinese Quarter in Wrottesley Street. The concept scheme which has been prepared, but does not form part of this application appears to be ignoring the City Councils proposals by concentrating the Chinese elements [a community centre] adjoining Bromsgrove Street, rather than siting them at the Ladywell Walk part of the site, where they would relate to the Council scheme for Wrottesley Street and the proposed China Court scheme.” (Development Department Memorandum, 5th October 1987, my emphasis).

These quotations correlate with a turn in the planning discourse when Chinatown became a key figure in the lexicon of the regeneration of Hurst Street (see chapter 2). Prior to this, Birmingham’s Chinatown is barely traceable in the planning archive⁸. Nevertheless, that the Wrottesley Square development is discussed in terms of a “Chinese style”, “the Council scheme”, “our proposals” and, furthermore, can be accounted for in the Arcadian flags a question over the genus of signification. Here, it would seem that the possibility of a so-called “Chinese style”, or indeed any of the above, becomes available to others and is able to break with a species being. That is, signification appears to be transmittable and decipherable for other parties and is able to function in the absence of an empirically determined subject (Derrida, 1982). Signification, therefore, continues to act and is always and already iterable; it can be repeatable and engender different contexts in its relation to others, whether it be the Council or the Gooch Estate. Indeed, on another level, this ability to re-transfer and appropriate signification (partially) makes feasible a governmental suggestion that “the detailed scheme [of the Arcadian] is fully integrated with the Wrottesley Street/China Court proposals” (PA: No.E/C21892/40). Or in another case, it allows government to disseminate “the Chinese style” where such a “style”, as the Amenity Planning Groups points out, may actually precede the imposition of the leaseholder. Yet,

whilst the very process of consolidating/moving Chinatown de-centres a foundation of presence, the desire for a “Chinese style” is always surrounded by antagonistic differences. The governmental stipulations that a “Chinese style” is ignored and that it should be taken into account by the developers are explicit in this sense. They trace out an uneven and heterogeneous horizon of potentialities, which lies amidst, but according to these planners are discontinuous, to the local authority remit for Hurst Street. However, that Urban Development Grants are obtained through the local authority meant that the Gooch Estate moved towards certain compromises in subsequent rounds of negotiation with the City of Birmingham. For example, consider the way that “the Chinese community” and “Chinese character” become recognised and deployed in a strategy to obtain £3.2 million of government funds⁹:

“I enclose herewith copy letter dated 3rd November 1987 received from J & Lister Lea, which your Committee might think relevant to the matter of Urban Development Grant” (Letter from Peter Hing & Jones to Economic Development Unit, 3rd November 1987)

The enclosed letter read:

“As you know the Gooch Estate has a very big involvement in this area immediately south of the Ringway and is endeavouring to draw together a comprehensive plan for the future development of its land holdings. The Estate recognises the importance of the Chinese community to this area and welcomes the initiative of your clients in creating a scheme with an essentially Chinese character. Whilst we envisage making further provision for their requirements and in our initial outline planning application have included a community centre building, there is clearly room both for the China Court scheme and for the much more extensive and varied redevelopment planned to take place over a period of years south of Ladywell Walk”. (Letter from James & Lester Lea to Peter Hing & Jones, 3rd November 1987).

Consequently, and as something of a turn around, a Chinese street was introduced/reproduced into the plan. This incorporated nearly one-third of the Arcadian’s 32 shop units and formed, according to one press article, “a separate Chinese centre, reflecting the area’s unique

character” (Express & Star, June 21st 1990) and in another, “Europe’s first purpose-built Chinese quarter” (Evening Mail, August 2nd 1991).

d) *The shutters of Wrottesley Street*. Whilst one of the frequently stipulated conditions within planning permissions is a need to “safeguard the visual amenity of the area,” there remains a need for many of the businesses in Birmingham’s Chinatown to safeguard their assets. It is in this tension, between aesthetics and security, where some of the logocentric ideas of the Chinese Quarter as founded upon a transcendental subject become displaced by a formative, yet repetitive, textuality that combines city-policy and a Chinese style. To illustrate these points, I take my examples from the dialogue between the City Council and three businesses located on a small back street that lines Wrottesley Square.

In 1986, “Oriental Art and Craft” began to trade in rosewood and teakwood carved furniture imported from Hong Kong at number 5 Wrottesley Street. Shortly after the opening, the owner, Mr Wang, as instructed by his insurance company, applied to the City Council for permission to install security shutters on the shop front, only to run up against the style of a Chinese square:

“As you are probably aware we are currently pursuing the creation of a Chinese style square in Wrottesley Square during the next financial year and I am therefore concerned that new planning consents will not detract from this scheme. In respect to this particular application I suggest that the grilles should be more open in design, and that it should be in a red, green or blue colour to reflect the existing Chinese canopy rather than in a metallic finish.” (Project Development Group Memorandum to City Centre Policy Group, 25th February 1987)

“The proposed external spindle box does not however, in my opinion, relate satisfactorily in design terms to either the existing Chinese-style structural canopy or to the shop frontage as a whole.

Given the City Council’s commitment to a programme of Chinese-related environmental improvement works within the immediate area of the application site, I consider it particularly important that external works to this frontage are architecturally sympathetic.

In line with your Committee’s policy, I have attempted to secure with the applicant’s agents the inclusion of the spindle box within the structure of the

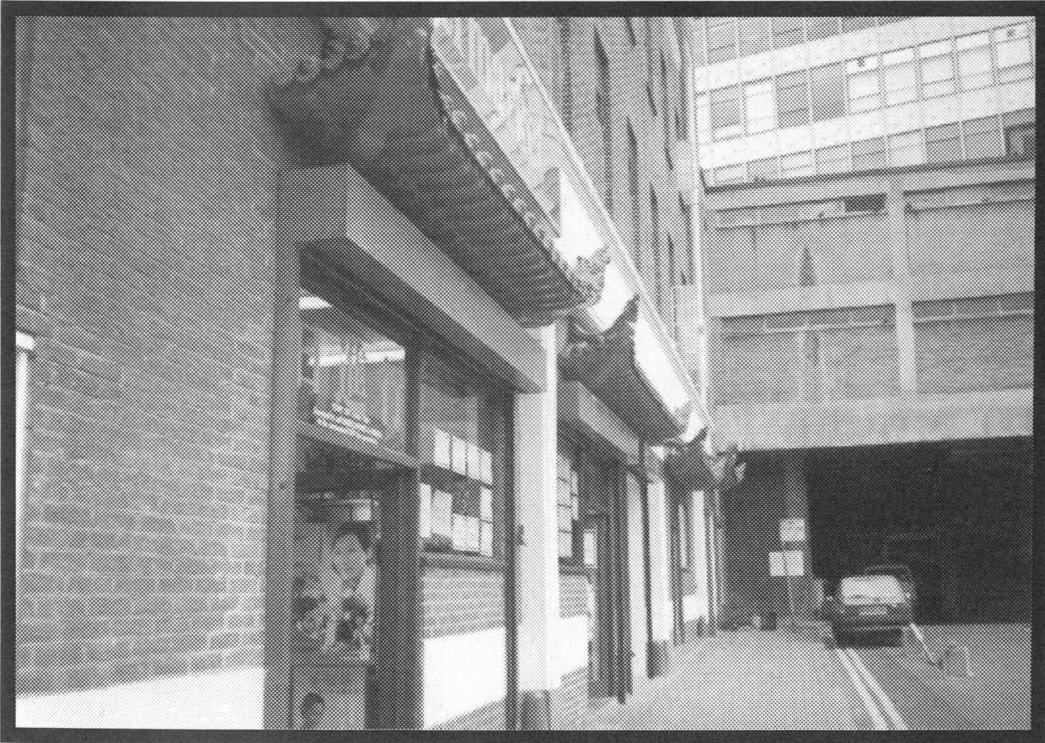
building. In response to this request, the applicant has stated that such provision would be impractical and prohibitively costly and has proposed the shaping of the spindle box in order to improve its present box-like appearance as a compromise. I remain, however, of the view that an external spindle box in this location would be unacceptable and that incorporation of this structure within the building would be possible.

I would consequently recommend refusal of this application to your Committee.” (PA No 13458/9)

Planning permission for the shutter was refused on the 26th March 1987 under the premise that it “would detract from the architectural appearance of the shop front and would adversely affect the visual amenity of the locality” (ibid.). Still, what these quotations perhaps illustrate is that the governmental reference of Wrotesley Square unfolds onto the shop front of Oriental Arts and Crafts with a combination involving the *citation* and *negation* of aesthetic differences. In this respect, signification appears not so much from an aura-emitting ethnic consciousness in its absoluteness. Rather, the signs of the shop front become mediated and entangled with a planning discourse that proposes a code of regulated substitutions that repeat certain signs and suppresses others that are nonetheless available to the construction of the Chinese Quarter. Or to re-phrase this in the planning language, the “Chinese-related environment” becomes situated according to a two-fold and mutual movement that either “relates” different signifiers as “sympathetic” or “refuses” them on account of a so-called “detraction” from such sympathy. As we have seen, this coda is not a one off occurrence.

After several break-ins during late April and early May 1994, an adjacent property, Someway Trading Company, also at the insistence of their insurance brokers and advice of the West Midlands Police Force agreed to invest in the installation of four electronically operated roller shutters (Figure 3.3). Together with the shop fitters, the owner, Mr Mak, came to the decision that the shutters should be erected promptly and painted yellow to “compliment the surroundings”, which, according to the West Midlands Police Force is “a very busy area [with] a great deal of alcohol related crime and damage” (P.A. No:

Figure 3.3.



The yellow shutters of Someway Trading Company and the red shutters of Day Inn Export and Import Company.

C/3513/94/FUL). The Planning & Architecture Department also commented on the surroundings, but with different registers:

“Ground floor retail – canopy above in Chinese style. 2 windows currently damaged.

Nature of surrounding area: Chinese/Markets Quarter. Arcadian opposite.

Proposed Development Appearance - Spindle box would be obvious under canopy. Windows come to underside of canopy.

Whilst there can be some sympathy (windows currently damaged) the spindle boxes as a minimum should be located within the Chinese canopy. Visi-screen in red ok, but must have lights on behind.” (Site inspection, no date),

“Installation of Roller Shutters on Windows.

1. Shutters should not be solid but “see through”.
2. Would like to see them in a “good” colour (red/green).
3. Roller boxes to be located inside canopy

Proposed Colour Yellow” (Returned Memorandum from City Centre Planning to Team Leader, City Centre Planning, 13th October 1994)

In a respect, these comments repeat the planning remit for Oriental Arts and Craft, in the way that they suggest that the spindle box and housing mechanisms should be in accordance with the canopy and that the shutters more “see through”. Indeed, these suggestions also repeat and are largely compatible with the Council’s policy for shop front security (in that this too recommends the use of open grilled shutters and that the shutter box be hidden behind the shop front signs). However, this repetition is partly my point: these shop fronts are acknowledged and defined as such with respect to a wider city policy, as opposed to a culturally specific signified concept. In this manner, it is not that the aesthetics of Chinatown derives from a particular community. Nor is it that the signifiers are closed from adaptation and set in stone with a traditional past. Instead, the signifiers of Chinatown are made legible and subject to other chains of significance. This is particularly clear with respect to the Day Inn Import and Export Company, where the colour of “red” became impressed upon the shop front.

After three successive forced entries in one week (Discussion Record, 19th June 1995), the Day Inn Import and Export Company, another property on Wrottesley Street, installed two electronically operated roller shutters, but in this case, prior to applying for planning permission. Subsequently, the managing agents of the Po On building in which this supermarket is located wrote to the City Council to gain approval. The proposal was that Day Inn might follow Someway Trading Company in erecting yellow shutters:

“You will have on file a recent application for roller shutters made by ... Someway Trading Company ... which is in fact part of the same block of buildings as Day-Inn ... It took many months to obtain permission, but when it was eventually granted the roller shutters installed were of a high quality and painted primary yellow to match the colour scheme of the building and surrounding “China Town” colour theme.

We would like to request that of similar planning approval is granted to Day-Inn Import and Export would it be possible to grant it on condition that the shutters are of similar design and painted the same colour to ensure continuity with neighbouring shop units and the surrounding area.” (Letter from Century Management to the Planning and Architecture Department, 9th May 1995)

However, after a round of negotiations with the City Council, the iterability of “yellow” seemed to be unsatisfactory. Instead, it was agreed that the shutter box would be clad in timber, as it was “not possible to relocate [the] housing boxes for structural reasons” and the shutters would be painted “red to match the existing colour of the underside of the canopy”. This decision was somewhat reinforced by a number of conditions in the planning permission document:

“The roller shutters, housing boxes and guide rails hereby approved shall be painted a colour to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority within 2 months of the date of approval.” (PA: C/00968/95/FUL)

Quite clearly, the importance of selecting red over yellow was not because of an overarching signified concept. Rather what we seem to have in the case of Day Inn’s shutters are two forms of iteration. For the satisfactory “red” is of itself not constructed against citationality, but against other forms of iteration (“it was felt in this instance that as the canopies are red

the shutters should be painted red to match, rather than yellow to match the adjacent building” (ibid.)). Thus urban planning, seems to be concerned with different types of iterable marks, and not with an opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statements on the other, that is with presence. Indeed, presence seems to be far from the issue here. Instead, planning seems to be more concerned with securing the repetition of “red”:

“I would advise you that the planning inspector attended at the above site on 28th November 1995, to inspect the retention of electrically operated roller shutters.

The Planning Inspector noted that the shutter installed is the original. Although there is a vision aspect to it, it is not as approved in the revision ‘C’ plan amendment dated 2nd October 1995, but it is as the refusal plan dated 30 June 1995.

I would advise you that Schedule ‘C’ ... states that the proposal alterations to the roller shutters shown on the drawing ... shall be undertaken and the shutters, housing boxes and guide rails shall be painted to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority within 2 months of the date of approval.

... Accordingly, the purpose of this letter is to remind you of this condition and to inform you that having inspected the rollershutter the planning inspector feels that you have not complied with it” (Letter from the Principal Planning Officer to the Day Inn Supermarket, 19th December 1995).

Producing a mimesis for the Chinese Quarter was then to a certain extent contested; the institutionalised rules that advocate this “style” were never absolute. Instead, they faced potential antagonistic differences. In the forthcoming chapters, I draw out these differences more fully.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that urban planning has mobilised two modalities of representation to unify the origins of place. The first modality plays upon a closure of enunciation and confines specific features of multiculturalism to the exclusivity of presence or, more precisely, a particularised ethnic population/community. Here these people act as the locus of fact and authenticity; they carry an aura of identification. The assumption is

almost as if they offer a short cut to cultural signification, which can be gathered through an underlying essence (Gilroy, 2000). This can be described as representation as proxy, as *vertreten*. However, on examining the signifying practices of Chinatown, I have also sought to demonstrate that the act of positing a transcendental figure serves as a means to dissimulate a second, less preferred, modality of representation that is the constitutive role of a graphematic structure. This second form can be seen as iterative, that is it draws in, borrows from other places, both international and its next door neighbour. This is a modality of representation that concedes that Chinese signs have always been available to other co-existing presences, such as in the case of the Arcadian where property developers represent the name of the Chinese community to gather legitimacy and public funds. That is, this writing opens the boundary lines of ethnic particularity and reveals that different identities touch, are related and can be appropriated under a so-called proper name.

I have also demonstrated that whilst it is possible to suggest that these signs disseminate, their dissemination is stopped short through a binding, mimetic power. Such a bind confers upon the city what signifiers may legitimately appear and what type of practices may occur. It concerns a regulation of familiar figures - such as canopies, colours, land use – that become hierarchically assessed offering a consistency and depth such as with the local government plans to build a Chinese square. Conversely, this bind occurs and is mediated through relegating antagonist differences despite their availability to Chinatown's identity, whether they be the dissenting voices of particular businesses, community organisations, other colours, other forms of iteration or other presences. Nevertheless, that these heterogeneous identities are excluded in planning's multiculturalism does not mean that they can be so easily discarded; they remain constitutive of urban space and are apparent in the margins of its narrative. In the next chapter, I continue this deconstructive process, albeit

with another related figure, that of community. The relation that the next chapter holds with what has so far been discussed is not only that it takes a figure that consistently appears central to the urban regeneration, but moreover that by deconstructing the narratives of community it is possible to underscore the constitutive role of differences to the urban regeneration process.

¹ From now on referred to as the CMQ.

² From now on referred to as the BRMQ.

³ The investment company for the China Court, Anglo Oriental Properties, won an Urban Development Grant of £220,000 in 1990 (Birmingham Post, 23rd of November 1988; Development and Investment service, Economic Development Department Memorandum, 31st July 1995).

⁴ Built in 1956 on ground that was blitzed during the Second World War, number 73 -75 Pershore Street was let by Messrs M Mapstone until 1980 to house periodicals, toys and automated vending machines. It was then taken over by Mr Y K Chan who rented out the property to a licensed private finance company.

⁵ The Bowling Alley and Skating Rink on Pershore Street were the only completed developments of the original Ladywell Centre.

⁶ Urban Development Grant's were a part of the Urban Programme, where loans or grants were made to bridge the investment gap in projects of "special need" (Ben- Tovim et al, 1986). The applications were negotiated primarily through the local authority, although 75% of funds came through Central Government. In contrast to the City Challenge Fund and Single Regeneration Budget, the Urban Programme had in its various incarnations utilised "racialised markers in the distribution of funds" (Sudbury, 1998).

⁷ Avatar Ltd was formed in 1987 as a joint venture between London 7 Edinburgh Trust Plc and Balfour Beatty Ltd to specialise in inner city redevelopment (Birmingham Post, September 14th 1990).

⁸ This is not to mean that Chinese people did not exist in the area. In 1983, a Mr Sham opened a "retail bakers shop" and a Fan Koon Yau hoped to redevelop a property located on the proposed Arcadian site only to be told that it would be "unlikely that the site would be available for your purchase or use". In addition the Planning Sub-Committee refused P Lai permission to convert part of his restaurant business into accommodation in 1972.

⁹ The Inner Cities Minister announced that Avatar Ltd would receive the grant towards the Arcadian scheme on the 13th December 1989 (Birmingham Evening Mail, December 13th, 1989). He claimed "This area of the city is experiencing a transformation. This latest scheme will complement other planned developments nearby – such as China Court, which my department is also helping through grant aid" (David Hunt M.P. cited in Birmingham Post, 15th December 1989).

CHAPTER 4 – SOME COMMUNITIES OF RACIAL EQUALITY: IDENTITY POLITICS AND AN ETHNIC PROFILE

“The problem with such narratives and discussions is their uncritical tendency to associate ‘community’ with some golden age and to define it uncritically as the sole repository of virtue – of meaning social relations, of human scale, of wholesome (non-market) values – vis-à-vis the (oppressive) state or the (rapacious) market. Or, in the case of community as identity group, to seek refuge in the known and the familiar, to draw tight boundaries around it, and pull up the drawbridge. ... “Community”, the apparently unassailable icon of much radical and Utopian thinking, now needs to be examined and deconstructed” (Sandercock, 1998, 190-191)

A concern with community has long been both a source of jubilation and anxiety for those engaged with urban politics. Some suggest there has been a demise of *Gemeinschaft*-like ways of life due to the size, density and heterogeneity of the urban populace (Wirth, 1996, orig. 1938). Others have resisted such claims through their observations on “urban villages” (Gans, 1962; Young & Willmott, 1996, orig. 1957). Some planners have pursued the revival of community identity (see Lee & Newby, 1983). Whilst some conservatives even suggest we should give up with communality, as we have only a society based on individualism. Yet, at least more recently, if not more incisively, some post-structuralists have sought to reconsider community (Corlett, 1989; Nancy, 1991, 1993; Young, I. M, 1990) and others have appropriated these theorisations with respect to films (Brooker, 2000; Donald, 1999), literature (Revill, 1993) and to art projects (Rose, 1997a, 1997b). In this chapter, I draw from these traditions, to discuss the governmental recognition of community and continue to consider how community comes to presence in a Western city. To do this, the chapter initially deals with a local discursive construction of community to illustrate some of the essentialised, although contradictory, limits of identity formation; and, then, it counterpoises these essentialisms by re-locating community as a “co-existence”. As an aside, the chapter will take some other thematic/empirical detours to explicate these points. These

include an examination of the devaluation of difference to the construction of community, the process of making community visible, and finally the insertion of community into a city politic. To exemplify my case I consider the field of racial equality in the City of Birmingham as well as the inauguration of one voluntary organisation to examine a number of references on the Chinese community.

With the on-going privatisation of the state and the conjoined reductions in public spending, there have been some well-noted shifts in the running of local government and also in the ways of practising and assessing racial equality. For instance, two significant trends arising out of the modernisation of the state and its increasingly market orientated approach have involved the transference of former public responsibilities to the private sector and also the opening of new forums for public consultation (Brindley et al, 1996; Solomos & Back, 1997). In addition, at least for the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, these trends lie alongside a belief in the re-marketing of the city centre as a solution to racial ills¹ and also that state provision should be more accountable and streamlined through *recognising* public need, including the needs of minority citizens. Taking a quotation from a document that I shall read in depth, the Chief Executive states:

“By better understanding the culture, history and priorities *within specific communities*, the Local Authority and other service providers can design and deliver services which are more appropriate and more effective in meeting the varied needs of its Black and Minority Ethnic citizens.

... The profiles are an essential part of the City Council’s campaign to improve the quality of the services it provides to all of Birmingham’s citizens.” (Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council, 1996, my emphasis)

From the Home Office’s latest proposals for “Connecting Communities”² to policy claims in local authorities concerning “social exclusion”³, various conceptions of recognition have become somewhat constitutive to recent incarnations of strategies for equality. Central to many of these different accounts is a presumption that recognition would displace inaccurate

representations and provide a step towards rectifying the difficulties experienced by the socially excluded. On another level, this is expressed more elaborately in Charles Taylor's frequently referenced theoretical essay, in which he argues that without affirmation, minority and "subaltern" groups can suffer from "a form of oppression" and exist imprisoned "in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 1994, 75). However, it has not directly been "being" which has engaged British policy makers and Prime Ministers, but rather a different signifier - community (Hoggett, 1997). For example, as Anthias et al. (1992) reveal, both anti-racist and multicultural positions have at least since the 1968 Race Relations Act widely manipulated different versions of community - based on colour, poverty, language and culture - as rallying cries and to target state provision. Indeed, with respect to Birmingham, a City seen at the forefront of British racial politics, the impetus of recognising community in governmental discourse can be further exemplified in reading the eight "community profiles" issued recently by the City's former Race-Relations Unit⁴.

Published in the mid-1990s, partly as a response to the Local Government Review⁵ and partly to represent each "Umbrella Organisation" from Birmingham's diminishing Standing Consultative Forum⁶, the Community Profiles not only identify communities to design service provision and assess need, but also considers a knowledge of a community as crucial to "help dispel many of the *misconceptions* and ... in assisting those committed to equality and in challenging racism and discrimination" (CP, 1996, v, my emphasis). Still, whilst it seems some parts of officialdom are now quite keen to comprehend different forms of identity through community, there remains a lack of discussion on how we might come to terms with these communities (Barnett & Chandler, 1997) or even to conceptualise community to dispel misconceptions. This is not a trivial endeavour, as the political gesture offered by new forms of governance together with the promise of remedying a misconceived

consciousness through recognition falls short without an examination of the epistemic, its limitations and implications (Rattansi, 1992). In part, what I seek to flag in this chapter are some of the different ways and limits that underwrite the Race-Relations Unit's understandings of community and, in doing so, continue to consider how ideas of Chinese identity are narrated and made visible in governmental texts. Whilst addressing the same community, the collection of documents I read take this community in intertwined, but different manners: sometimes as a general body, sometimes as traditional, sometimes as an empirical observation, sometimes as a subject-effect and sometimes as site of communicative action. This chapter endeavours to unravel this complex syntax and gives particular attention to the location of language, communication and difference to community. The first reading takes one of the above mentioned community profiles - entitled "The Chinese Community in Birmingham: A Community Profile"⁷ – authored by a number of Chinese Community leaders in Birmingham, under commission of the Race Relations Unit. The second will review an account written by Susan Baxter on behalf of Race Relations Unit on the Vietnamese and Chinese community which tells its reader of a hidden community within an "ethnically enclosed niche". And, finally, I look at the inauguration of one voluntary sector organisation, the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre – one of the authors of the Community Profile - to offer a means to recognise some of the contingencies of community construction.

Recognising absolutism: singularity and difference in community

"What is missing from the preoccupation with tradition and authentic originariness as such is the experience of modern Chinese people which have had to live their lives with the knowledge that it is precisely the notion of a still-intact tradition to which they cannot cling – the experience precisely of being impure, "Westernized" Chinese and the bearing of *that* experience on their ways of "seeing" China." (Chow, 1991, 14, emphasis in original)

The use of the term “community” by the local state appears to be axiomatic. In no place in the CP is it explained and, subsequently, it appears to be like a natural, pre-given social unit. As Anthias et al. (1992) point out, one of the dangers of adopting community under such a pathological guise is that internal differences are subsumed and a bounded sense of community is posed that emphasises a subject position as somehow absolute. As a way of understanding community, it is perhaps of no surprise to find that in this light, advocates of community pose themselves or are posed as located within the community; they become the spokespeople who understand it due to some presupposed organic guarantee. However, on reading the CP what lingers is a sense where a straightforward, homogeneous being cannot be secured as the narratives of community persistently outline contradictions, points of hesitancy and trace differences that potentially antagonise it. In this first section, I mark both an endeavour to find a definitive community and its impossibility to foreground a suggestion that community is not some common being. I also discuss some of the limits of this thinking for racial equality.

The means to enunciate community in the CP is pronounced through the use of a grid-like taxonomy almost universally applied to the eight profiles. This structure divides into descriptions of the respective histories (focusing on immigration details), “socio-economic characteristics”, “family characteristics”, “religion”, “leisure” and “community activities” followed by another section regarding policy recommendations, all of which are further subdivided. In the introduction, the CP states that the collation of these fragments amounts to “a balanced and representative profile of the community” (CP, 1), and that each profile attempts to “reflect the diversity within each community” (ibid. vi). However, whilst the CP is thoroughly informative on numerous levels, providing instructive indices on deprivation and cultural events, these aforementioned aspirations change on reaching the conclusion:

“The Chinese in Birmingham” expresses generalisations only. It must be emphasised that this community profile should not be used to minimise the diversity within the Chinese community or to nourish racist stereotypes about the Chinese. Service deliverers should ensure that every Chinese service user is afforded individual service and care appropriate to his or her own personal needs.

It is hoped that “The Chinese in Birmingham” will have a major impact on council and statutory service deliverers in terms of increasing their awareness and understanding of the Chinese community in Birmingham. This community profile will hopefully help shape the way in which future services are delivered to the Chinese community in Birmingham and thus, help the local authority and statutory bodies adopt policies which are truly appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of its Chinese residents.

A large number of Hong Kong Chinese are expected to come and settle in Birmingham around 1997 when the sovereignty of Hong Kong is returned to China. These new comers bring with them new resources to the community and new challenges for service deliverers. The profile of the Chinese community in Birmingham will inevitably change radically as the socio-economic characteristics of these new comers are very different from those who came in the 60’s and 70’s. The community profile for the Chinese needs to be updated in about five years time.” (ibid. 58)

The CP is sometimes defined as truly appropriate and sometimes as a generalisation. This is because there are a number of *co-existing* ways of conceiving the limit of the CP. To start with, these include: an empirical endeavour of a “correct” awareness renewed every five years to represent the infiniteness of the field (“inevitable change”) and a generalisation, as in the rooting out of features with application crossing the board of community (besides from having some “individuality” missing). With regard to the latter and also to some degree the former, the CP could be described, albeit with a pragmatic reflexivity to diversity, along the lines to what Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) critically calls community as common being. That is, it can be organised and delineated through those supposedly constitutive substances deemed common to a specific historical geography of identity. As with many other, often critical, accounts on community, this would place its conceptual emphasis upon on mutuality, the suspension of difference and those “characteristics in common that ties it together” (McDowell, 1999, 100; also see Bell & Newby, 1978).

The taxonomical structure of the CP is perhaps well suited to laying out such common characteristics as it allows the report to break down any selected emblems into distinct fields, whether clothing, religion, health, language, etc. Indeed, when read as a fragment each subheading seems to portray community as though it consists of a particular universalised centre, which are proposed as almost general to a specific community and, furthermore, as if they were situated internally and eternally to community (e.g. “within specific communities”). Nevertheless, with a more careful reading of the CP, the possibility of finding such a centre continually takes a contradictory guise. For instance, on one hand, a defining “within” sometimes takes the form of Chinese proverbs and religious values, each one placed almost as if they were an inherited aspect of identity, anchored in traditional China:

“Education

The Chinese have a long history of emphasising the importance of education. Confucianism is the school of philosophy which acknowledges the teaching of Confucius, who was the famous educator of the late Zhou Dynasty. Confucius’s thoughts on education provided the social and political ethics which remained dominant for the major part of the history of imperial China. Recruitment to the administrative service of imperial China had been by means of officially conducted written examinations.

Chinese parents place their children’s education as their first priority and they would sacrifice their material enjoyments to enable their children to achieve their educational aims. They have high expectations on their children’s academic achievement, and generally prefer schools which emphasise discipline and academic achievement, as well as give homework to students. They also pay great attention to the moral training of their children, encouraging them to be polite and law abiding. Those who can afford it would send their children to independent or grammar schools” (CP, 13)

Even though the CP informs the reader in a much later section that “Taoism and Confucianism have declined” (CP, 33), the applicability of these values surface with pertinence to, in particular, the fields of education and the structure of the Chinese family. Still, irrespective of any mentioned inconsistency, it is possible to claim that these values are not incidental to pursuing community under the terms of a commonality. For they mark

through the retreat to traditionalism what could be described as a will for time old emblems; and, somewhat discontinuously, they mark through citing a “long history”, what could be described as the potential for a pedagogical generalisation in what Bhabha (1994) calls “homogeneous time”. In addition, these terms offer an explanatory consistency - somewhat continuous, somewhat habitual - and they re-orientate differences into a racial whole demonstrating at best a stable frame of reference and at worst a return of identity to a rooted essence.

That the CP demonstrates a preference for citing an idealised, traditional historicism of community - or more precisely in the above case, an inaugural moment/presence in education (e.g. Confucius’s thoughts) plays up to the possibility of a centre to community. Indeed, by looping community back to a definitive and distant event located in China as well as recalling a “long history”, the CP accentuates the politics of identity as though they are definitive and radical, rather than conjunctural and relational. Or to put it into the neat words used by Balibar (1991, 22), culture can “function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin”. The point here is that a type of logic, which understands community as shared descent, emphasising an illusion of community as retrospective, and also focussing particularly on the Chinese community itself, as the CP hesitantly does, is dangerously analogous to a homogeneous, self-sufficient and unitary conception of community. For it poses in the foreground a so-called common inheritance that suspends difference in favour of a given gathered identity, it proposes a centred being where “the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible” (Derrida, 1978, 279). This centre and its elision becomes most evident when examining the CP’s take on difference and its relationship with community.

The ideal of community as a mutual subjectivity with general points of reference belies, albeit sometimes reluctantly, the plural arrangement of the community profiles. Nevertheless, intertwined in the concession that the CP may come across as a generalisation, is an instrumental awareness of difference (Nancy, 1993; Wieviorka, 1995). That is, simplifying to the extreme, through grasping at a definition of mutuality, community is constituted by and constitutes those aspects falling outside which have escaped generalisation. In this way, the singularity of community is made up from and makes up alterity. Yet exactly how the CP reconciles any apparent differences, which may appear at odds with its conceptualisation of community, are left tended by at least two identifiable defensive strategies. Firstly, stipulating community identity as original and representing difference as superficial or as a loss, and secondly, an explicit warning against racial stereotyping and forsaking individuality. If these defences are explored one at a time it is possible to make some interconnected points concerning the role of language in shaping the absoluteness of community, the exclusion of the “radically heterogeneous” (Spivak, 1996, 33) and the impossibility of an absolute community. These points will help me to delineate some of the identity politics utilised by Birmingham’s Chinese community organisations and the Local Authority as well as to consider some of its counter-positions.

1) Regarding the former defence, the reader can note that the possibility of a general identity is not lost in the CP’s conception of community despite the availability of difference. For, although the CP may advocate sensitivity to the tangential, it still “arrests and grounds the play of substitutions” (Derrida, 1978, 289) or renders differences silent in the pursuit of a generalisation. One way that we can detect this effacing action is through considering the discussion on “community activities”. In this section of the CP, it is possible to note that the horizon of relations is frequently erased in favour of describing “a metaphysics of presence”

(Derrida, 1976), which underlines what might be described as an immanent being, separated from other influences apart from its own constructions. Take the text's plural arrangement of community festivities, which organises a range of cultural pinnacles relevant to particular presences:

“Chinese New Year means celebration at home, school, as well as in the Chinese Quarter (also known as Chinatown). It is the highest manifestation of Chinese culture and excitement for Chinese children. Its importance to the Chinese is equivalent to (if not higher than) Christmas for the English and New Year for the Scottish.

... On Chinese New Year's Eve, all members of the family enjoy a big and delicious meal by way of a family reunion. No New Year Eve's meal would be complete without fish. The Chinese character for “abundance” sounds the same as “fish”. There is also a vegetarian dish with a special seaweed called fatchoi, which sounds the same as the word meaning prosperity.

... On New Year's Day, all Chinese children have new clothes to wear.” (CP, 1996, 35)

Within the profile, the proximity of a sovereign presence to Chinese New Year repeats the homogenising tone and authorising legitimacy that I outlined in the previous chapter. Presence, in this respect, adds a physical consistency to a mutually impermeable sense of culture, which seems to gather momentum through the citations of kinship, festivities and distant symbolic ties rooted in China. This is further reified by another noteworthy and attached prism, that of language. In the above case, this is displayed with a specific logic where despite the play of meaning, the signifiers of “fish” and “seaweed” are made synonymous with a cultural value. Similarly, the area of family planning also comes under this rubric: “The Chinese used to be very concerned with giving birth to male babies ... This value has now given way to family planning and the virtue of having two babies; preferably one boy and one girl which in Chinese writing forms the character hao (good)” (CP, 25). That language becomes a source of justification and merit, rather than as a communicative act that disseminates meaning, is not incompatible in confirming an absolute community.

For these synonyms offer community a firm ground, where language is handled as though it emanates from and returns to an original source:

“Spoken and Written Languages

Because of the vastness of China and the segregation due to geographical barriers, there are numerous Chinese dialects spoken in different areas in China. The diversities of these dialects mean that most Chinese speaking a certain dialect find it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand other Chinese dialects. The language spoken by the Chinese, therefore depends, to a large extent, on which part of China they, or their parents, originally come from.

As previously noted, most Chinese in Birmingham originally came from Hong Kong and other parts of southern China. Most of them can speak Cantonese. There is also a substantial Hakka speaking minority. Other common dialects among the Chinese in Birmingham included Putonghua (better known in the UK as Mandarin, widely spoken especially among the students from Mainland China), Shanghaiese, Fukienese, Chiao Chow and Toi Shan dialects. However, due to the emergence and dominance of the Hong Kong culture through the mass media, most Chinese speaking other dialects as their mother tongue do understand Cantonese though they may hesitate to speak it.

The situation with the Chinese written language is much simpler. The standard written language for the Chinese is Chinese (and does not differ for various dialects). Ever since the first emperor in Chin Dynasty who united China and imposed the unified written language for all people within the territory more than two thousand years ago, people speaking different Chinese dialects have adopted the same writing script. The same Chinese characters can be pronounced differently for different Chinese dialect speakers whilst maintaining the same meaning. Therefore, different Chinese dialect speakers can understand each other perfectly well through writing.

...

The origin and development of Chinese language is totally different from that of English and other European languages. The pronunciation of Chinese characters is monosyllabic, non-phonetic and tonal, while their formation is non-alphabetic” (ibid. 17-18)

Zhang (1998) and some Sinologists have disputed that Chinese script is non-phonetic and certainly pronunciation, whether Chinese or English, can involve the phonetic transcription of words. Indeed, the aforementioned privilege attributed to the sounds of “fish” and “seaweed” as indicative of “abundance” and “prosperity” perhaps demonstrates that Chinese language is not purely non-phonetic. Nevertheless, these contradictions do not prevent the CP from delineating an absolutist idea of communication (writing) that supposedly circulates

around a uniform practice and lies outside a European history of communication. To be generous, the CP does not directly suggest that there have not been changes to ideographic characters over time, even though these alterations are not made clear⁸. However, it does denote writing as the cohesive, collective, non-differing medium for communication that has brought together the vastness of geography and the limitations of the spoken word into a perfect semantic sameness. Yet, on turning over the page, the absoluteness of such a general feature of language, which offers an opportunity not only to rid any anxieties over non-communication but also to posit a degree of uniformity, is supplemented; it is not total. Rather, the co-existence of different limits of community – for example, the empirical and/or the general – operate in tension and trace out the existence of something more; an excess to an identity as a static, unified being:

“‘Good’ written Chinese is always defined in terms of conformity to Putonghua. However due to the recent influence of Hong Kong culture and popularity of Cantonese, new written Chinese expressions based on Cantonese have been created and become more acceptable. Nowadays, for some people it is the fashion to write ‘Cantonese Chinese’” (CP, 1996, 18).

As the CP ensures its reader understands, what is absolute to written language does not cover the field of community; it is finite. Instead, the play of substitutions that formulate language becomes constrained by a so-called unified practice that takes centre stage due to a constructed value system that reiterates its very centrality through asserting itself ahead of the possibility of alterity. Hence, the supplement - Cantonese Chinese - is implicated as a “fashion” to the somewhat steadfast guarantee of “Chinese is Chinese”. (If we take Cantonese Chinese as a Chinese writing defined by its phonetic difference taking a written form, then the notion that the “origin and development of Chinese language” as “totally different” to European languages according to non-phonetic pronunciation is once again contradicted).

As an appendage, it is possible to point out that the relegation of differences as temporary and poorly established is not an irregularity in the CP and, moreover, adopts an ideological role supportive of the formulation of community as common being. For instance, the privileging of a retrospective illusion of community with its broad nostalgic/traditional strokes sometimes renders alterity as “western” or sometimes leaves marginality unexamined:

“Role of mother and father

For the Birmingham Chinese, the roles of mother and father are still quite clearly defined and segregated. The Chinese saying “The man is responsible for the external and the woman for the internal” is still true for many Chinese. It means that the man’s job is to work to earn money for the family while the woman’s job is to take care of the household so that the man can enjoy a comfortable and trouble-free family life. Even though many Chinese women now work outside the home, they are still the main persons responsible for the care and upbringing of children.

However, some young Chinese couples have adopted the western model of family roles and have accepted the idea that the father should also share the responsibilities of child care. It is no longer uncommon to see Chinese fathers taking care of their babies in public.” (CP, 25)

“Clothing

Since the 1911 Revolution, many Chinese have adopted the western style of clothing. Most Chinese men wear suits, shirts and ties and Chinese women generally wear skirts. Most elderly Chinese women prefer to wear trousers. A traditional Chinese women’s dress is cheung sam – a long dress with split on both sides. Some Chinese women will wear them on wedding occasions or as a wedding dress.” (CP, 44)

A number of points can be made here. Firstly, neither Chinese nor Western models disrupt this patriarchal dichotomy or the sexualised connotation for family life, or in other words, the definition of community as a common being is ill equipped in providing its reader with concepts that evade crosscutting logics of domination. Community as a modality of equality must therefore be rethought against the grain of these roles if a politics of equality is to be taken seriously. I would suggest that such a rethinking should acknowledge, as in the above quotations, that the coherence of such individualised roles appears in the context of a

heterosexual, worldly “model”, which organises around a gendered and geographical binary for narration. It then follows that the position of mother or father or “Chinese saying” or “western model” are not settled according to a singular identity, humanism or simply some young couples. Rather these roles are announced in differential relations set amongst socially constituted subjects (Butler, 1990) and it is the repeated authority of these relations which must be contested as well as the conceived sovereignty of the subject.

Secondly, the CP positions the West as an alteration to the “defined and segregated” parental roles so defined by a Chinese saying and also with reference to traditional clothing. In other words, community is represented as taking a *detour* from one cultural model or moment/present to another, that is, from a traditional centre to a Western tangent. Returning to the particularities of Chinese language, this detour, however, sits uncomfortably with the CP as it is seen less as crosscutting community and more as appropriating community, where on completion “westernisation” becomes a loss:

“The Chinese in Birmingham have a strong commitment to maintaining their mother tongue. Although younger Chinese who are British born or locally brought up may prefer to speak English, their parents (including many professionals) insist on them speaking their mother tongue at home. Chinese parents consider it important to keep their children’s ability with their mother tongue, which is regarded as an essential link with Chinese culture, a crucial medium of communication in the family, as well as an asset for their future career. They think that their children would otherwise be totally westernised and lose their cultural identity.” (CP, 1996, 18-19)

Cultural identity, with the legitimating presence of the Chinese parents in Birmingham, is sometimes thought of as the basis for reconstituting those bonds that allow a filial relationship between the generations in a context of a distorting West. Under these conservative knowledges, what is “Chinese” ideologically leans inward to an internalised circle shared between its members. It concerns the recuperation of an “authentic originariness” (Chow, 1991) in the face of a perceived dissolution and, in doing so, presumes

the possibility of building community as a self-sufficient and stable *Gemeinschaft*. That the quotation also rests upon a binary of children/parents and English/Chinese, draws clear parallels with Ien Ang's (1994, 11) contributive claim that "not speaking Chinese" has become "a sign of loss of 'authenticity'" for those of Chinese descent. And furthermore, it echoes with her suggestion that there is a resistance to the destruction of ethnic absolutism and a suppression of cultural excess and hybridity in favour of a belief in cultural purity (also see Gilroy, 1987). For me, such a view on difference, that is treating it as loss or superficial, limits the confines of community and constructs the general as an absolute, without the general being absolute. It poses a centre to community that dominates the horizon. Yet, importantly, it also calls language and with it the communicative authenticity of community in ethnically fixed terms where community becomes demarcated and possessed only by those who are within this demarcation. In the next two sections I argue that this thinking constitutes a stumbling block to a politics of recognition and the CP's aspiration of racial equality as the very coming to presence of community concerns more than self-possession, internalisation or fixity, and movements which involve relation, lack and exposing identity.

2) If we take the latter defence (see pages 5 & 6), it is possible to note that there appears to be an attentiveness to the intersections between a unitary identity with the violence of racial identity and, furthermore, a sensitivity to the discontinuities between generality and a sense of individualism. Quite clearly, such sensibilities resonate with a debate that fears the subordination of the individual for communal solidarity. As Iris Marion Young (1990) informs her reader, at its most extreme such a debate asserts a separated self (i.e. individual) over a shared self (i.e. community) as the most appropriate figure of immanence, origin and certainty. However, what this liberal retrenchment leaves unelaborated is the possibility of realising these self-standing notions of the individual or, more relevant to this chapter,

community identity differently. For instance regarding the CP, we should highlight how the question of a general position or even an absolute position (whether a separated or shared self) *is always and already situated in a relation to itself and to others*. Or as in the above quotations where individualism/not speaking Chinese/the West is delineated as excessive to, or outside of, the generalisations. With respect to this issue Nancy (1991, 6) writes, “Strictly speaking, it [relation] defines the impossibility ... of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality, in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality”. Simplifying to the extreme, what Nancy is theorising here, is that an acknowledgement of an “areality” (Nancy, 1991, 1993) of a subject’s position means that there is never a precision about “one identity”, there is instead *différance*, contingency and lack. This is not to mean that there is no community or individuality, but that neither proposition can formulate itself without referencing, rejecting or tracing its other and thus it cannot be stipulated as immanent, pure or self-sufficient. Identity, as a number of other commentators have pointed out, far from being fixed in an essentialised or absolute past, is subject to a “play” of history, culture and power (Hall, 1990) with the workplace and the state (Keith & Cross, 1993) and “horizontally” among other communities (Lowe, 1996). However, the point I wish to make here is not just to recover and celebrate an over valorised use of hybridity per se. Rather I suggest that whilst the CP makes few allowances for relational differences, proclaiming them as outside community, it is the play of an outside and the de-centring of community that is necessary for the community profiles and the suggested organisation for racial equality. I shall now turn to another profile of the Chinese community to elaborate upon and exemplify these claims.

Recognising the hidden and the visible

“... the combination of what is similar and what is different defines not only the specificity of the moment, but the specificity of the question, and therefore the strategies of cultural politics with which we attempt to intervene in popular culture, and the form and style of cultural theory and criticizing that has to go along with such an intermatch.” (Hall, 1992, 21)

Under a politics of recognition the rubric of community as common being becomes problematic as the onus of recognition is placed on the possibility of an overarching commonality. The presupposition is that if we understand the elements that belie a community's identity, then we may work towards finding a solution to racial ills. So if, as suggested above, this information lies embedded in a specific origin, then this suggests that racial equality requires a recovery and subsequent understanding of what is supposedly pivotal to identity and, furthermore, that the political is already written, just poorly understood. Or if, as is suggested by the “Directory of Black and Ethnic Minority Organisations in Birmingham” (Race Relations Unit, 1995, 2) that “the authenticity of the information ... lies with the organisations themselves”, then this requires the community organisations to speak their truths, thoughts and ideas. However, although the former flags the recuperation of an impalpable unity and the latter desires a transparent agent to motion an authenticity, both these claims *overlay* the centrality of the sovereign community without taking into account relational differences. These might include a relation to what Hesse (1999) calls the discursive interplay with a Eurocentric and Imperial afterlife (also see Hall, 1996d; Shohat & Stam, 1994; Spivak, 1990; Young, L., 1996) or those differences that are constitutive of community itself (Nancy, 1991). It would also include a dialogical relation that is under hand in a politics of recognition. I now turn to a study on the Vietnamese and Chinese in Birmingham written by Susan Baxter under commission for the Race Relations

Unit to acknowledge two of these under stated relations: the visibility and the constitutive position of community.

Published in 1986, Baxter's document, whilst converging with an idea that seeks to represent a generality, also offers the reader tangential clues on how its reader might rethink community (without Baxter literally discussing community). For on a reading of Baxter's narrative it is possible to de-centre a number of well-worn tropes, which are also repeated on a reading of the CP and in other texts representing the Orient, Chinatowns and the Chinese community. These tropes cover the very politics of recognition, yet they seem to be axiomatically placed. They regard the hidden:

"A HIDDEN MINORITY

At present, little is known about Birmingham's Chinese migrants by comparison to other ethnic groups. This is not necessarily because the Chinese do not constitute a population of considerable size. ... [T]here are roughly 8,000 people of Chinese descent resident in the city. *Rather, the 'invisibility' of the Chinese stems from their occupational concentration in an ethnically enclosed niche within the catering industry.* For not only do the long and irregular working hours demanded of many catering workers severely limit opportunities to learn English and to participate in a variety of social activities but the networks needed to sustain an ethnic catering economy also tend to confine many of the city's Chinese to contacts only with other Chinese." (Baxter, 1986, 15, my emphasis)

"This Profile aims to highlight issues which have service delivery implications for the Local Authority. The Chinese community is generally regarded as an 'invisible' community and, as a result, many council departments lack appropriate information to enable them to develop and deliver more effective services which meet the specific needs of the Chinese community." (CP, 1996, 1)

"The general lack of attention which has been given to the collection of data on the Chinese in the UK, tends to support those concerns expressed in recent years that the Chinese have existed as a largely unassertive and unnoticed group. ... Very little is known about the Chinese in Birmingham by comparison to other ethnic groups and thus, they have been called "a hidden minority." (CP, 1996, 6)

As Lee (1999), with respect to Asian Americans, and Lowe (1991), with respect to China demonstrate, "Orientals" have been represented as silent, faceless and invisible. Indeed, on a

different, domestic register, advocates of integration policy took uneven understandings of unobtrusiveness and silence as commendable attributes of Birmingham's Chinese community in the 1970s (see chapter 2). Other, more ethnographic, propositions on the "Chinese in Britain", whilst telling a different story on assimilation, have also fed into the so-called covert properties of this ethnic identity. For example, Jones (1979, 402, my emphasis; also see Mitchell, 1993; Watson, 1977) writes that: "They [the British Chinese community] retain *their* ability to pass almost unnoticed in the wider community". Still, although it seems that a thematic of silence arises repeatedly in contexts of exploration, scorn and admiration, I do not wish to dismiss this notion as a stereotype and with it the value of empiricism. Rather I wish to work against the grain to claim that community and the non-equivalent tropes of the idiomatic - an innate skill (e.g. their ability) located within an internalised spatiality (e.g. an enclosed niche) – form a hazardous and inappropriate marriage. For it is this conjoined logic of enclosure, whether around the subject or in place, which serves to centre community as a wholly other and forges a self-constructed idea of invisibility. In turn, this may add an ethnocentric mysticism to the "Orient" or "Other", attracting those wishing to dislodge a Western metaphysics (Barthes, 1982; Derrida, 1976; Spivak, 1987), or to justify the heroic charting of a sinological tradition (see Dawson, 1978). But moreover, when considering community, it constitutes a stumbling block as it denies community as a process shared between different beings and it fails to acknowledge that such an identity is seen by this sharing (Nancy, 1991). Or, to put this into different terms, posing community as something anchored within an enclosure withholds community and the aspiration of making a presence visible, as an operation of co-appearance, complicity and communication with regard to a public arena. The necessity of these relations become more explicit if, firstly, we reconsider

the narration of community as a modality of exposure and secondly, position the catering industry within a power geometry that crosscuts and codifies an “ethnically enclosed niche”.

If we take the above quotations, the role of these community profiles can be seen as one of a communicative exposure, where visualising the presence of a multicultural subject is not self-evident. The presumption of the hidden or the invisible does not assume a prior non-location or non-existence. Rather community is less than available to the eye, and in this ocular sense, Baxter and the CP are the pioneers, offering a latent tour of “enclosed” ground and “irregular” time, but only for those who could not or were unwilling to see. Furthermore, as Baxter rightly indicates, to be hidden is to be covered: invisibility marks an erasure of a visual presence from an observing party, and as such, by making the invisible visible these profiles shift the gaze and open out the enclosed to an outside. Nancy (1991, xxxvii) puts it this way: “To be exposed means to be “posed” in exteriority, according to an exteriority, having to do with an outside in the very intimacy of an inside.” That is, for the invisible to be made visible to a non-seeing body the profiles must adjust the relations of representation and alter the position between the observer and the observed. The hidden can no longer occupy a self-sufficient enclosed space if it is to communicate (in this case the profiles make up for a governmental lack of information). Nor can “a balanced and representative profile of the community” (CP, 1) be proffered which only contends with reifying former elements that may have produced an invisible relationship. Instead, it should be recognised that the shift towards revealing an outline of the Chinese community makes the subject legible through breaching lines of silence and transgressing the possibility of an autonomous, confining territory. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that a shift from invisibility to exposure is always already posed as an interpellation and of cultural translation (although not necessarily or explicitly announced this way) and, moreover, that neither Baxter nor the CP can

absolutely determine a community as common being constrained into itself, because the point of enunciating the singular subject must continue to be available outside any inwardness or suggested self-composition of community if local government is to reach a recognition. Or, in brief, a governmental prerequisite of exposing community is one that requires the displacement of any firm anchoring, such as ethnically absolute terms, which may be proposed as definitive of an investigated community.

Evoking the spatiality of community in the contention of a hidden community reveals a blind spot. The one I am referring to here points out that the focus on the catering industry as an ethnically “enclosed” and thus concealing economy is always an inadequate explanation of a hidden community as this, at least, disregards the state’s inconsistent desire/ability to acknowledge the presence of ethnic minorities (see chapter 2). For Baxter, this is a key issue in her policy recommendations where, in particular, she proposes that local authority departments should take a “proactive” role in ensuring “equal access to service provision” and where she suggests that governmental monitoring data should be altered to include Chinese and Vietnamese categories⁹. Paradoxically, in Baxter’s text these alterations are somewhat justified on account of claiming racial inequality within the City Council, without a quantitative assessment to which she advocates:

“Birmingham City Council

Staffing:

At present, the numbers of Chinese and Vietnamese employed by the City Council remain disproportionately low. Since the monitoring system for the recruitment of ethnic minorities does not include a category for Chinese or Vietnamese applicants, their response to job advertisements and selection for employment cannot be assessed. It is strongly recommended that this be rectified by the inclusion of a category for Chinese applicants on all BCC application forms.” (Baxter, 1986, 40)

Access to the formal means of governmental representation is marked by a political intervention that is in discrepancy. I would read this as a will on Baxter’s part to flag the

presence of Chinese and Vietnamese within a context that values quantitative data as an legitimate instrument to measure racism, without having the legitimating tools to achieve her objectives.

Irrespective of the leap here, in other places of her report Baxter holds the place of the Birmingham Chinese as contingent to other actors and spaces, which thereby, can carefully help her reader to re-visualise a sense of community as situated rather than absolute. For instance, in the historical description of the growing “ethnic catering industry” - a feature that “hides” this minority - Baxter cites a number of intersections and a number of communally centred factors for the rise of this economy. She explains that as Chinese people had prior “experience of running a [laundry] business” and had “links with other Chinese in Britain”, they were well placed to capitalise on the “feminisation of the British industrial workforce” and “intensive industrial development” which created a market for “inexpensive, prepared food” (1986, 9). Baxter’s account of the take-away thus moves apart from a racialised “common-being”, or arrangement of internal cultural values to suggest that an “ethnically enclosed niche” operates from contingent relations of capital, labour and gender which may stretch out beyond the immediate reach of a presence. She writes:

“Obviously cultural ethics do play a part in predisposing some Chinese families towards jointly running a business. What is more important, however, are the economic conditions which underpin and promote the prevalence of this kind of economic activity among many Chinese families in Birmingham. For these factors, and the social costs they incur, lie beyond the local control of the migrants themselves but are of central importance for local authority policy.” (Baxter, 1986, 23)

Whether posed inadvertently or not, Baxter contradicts the ideality of “an ethnically enclosed niche” through couching the take-away in a relationship with an outside. This may occur through an axis of capital crosscutting ethnic communities, which would reveal the structured fluidity of positions (also see Pang & Lau, 1998), or with immigration policy, which Baxter

(ibid. 10; see also Baxter & Raw, 1988) states, deepened “the entrenchment of incoming migrants in the Chinese catering trade”. Alternatively, as Baxter partially observes, it could also occur with the often racialised producer/consumer relations that occur in the catering industry (see also Parker, 1994). Yet crucially, Baxter (also) stresses that the construction of the take-away cannot be placed absolutely onto a common substance or an innate racial consciousness or taken as in stasis. Instead, her preference for a structuralist standpoint places the take-away and, therefore, the alienation of community as a part of a subject-effect where different registers including the mediations of market functions and state powers are necessary for the organisation of racial equality. This does not entirely negate the earlier use of the “hidden community” as “hidden”. However, I would take it as rendering Baxter’s earlier, narrow statements on this “ethnically enclosed niche” together with its explanatory tale of “invisibility”, as always already less of a given Chinese network and more of an arbitrary closure of ethnicity to draw the governmental attention to a cohesive presence. That is, it renders the earlier descriptive claims of community as a self-concealed and self-defined entity “as a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 1996, 214).

Recognising the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre

“Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence.” (Nancy, 1991, 35)

In this section I focus on the construction of the Birmingham Chinese Community Centre¹⁰. Through reading a number of their annual reports and minutes, it is possible to exemplify that community is not necessarily obliged to post a self within a projected sameness and that it does not necessitate the domination of an absolute through privileging a nostalgic centre. Rather, what I reaffirm in this section is that the materialisation of community can always be

read as already entangled with others, shaped through fluctuations in the city-politic and as a political aspiration that seeks to reach elsewhere out of a generalisation. We should remind ourselves here that a number of the Centre's senior members were actively involved with authoring the CP and, as such, their involvement underlines the importance of presence and the "native informant" as a political means to recognition and as a key modality of authenticity. It seems that the political discourse is dominated by presences. Nevertheless, whilst the essential moment of presence is thoroughly privileged (Nancy, 1991) and an inescapable logic (Derrida, 1976), it is also possible to suggest that such a moment has nothing essential in itself as the archive offers another means to recognise community and relocate presence in a more extensive articulation than that of a mere social bond. As an aside, I also demonstrate that this community centre has adopted numerous guises, from its inauguration in the late-1970s to the work it conducts in the new millennium, whilst adjusting itself accordingly to suit the political limits of community itself.

According to Rex and Tomlinson (1979), inner-city regeneration in 1970s Birmingham was predominately conducted with reference to geography and social class, and without direct reference to immigrant communities. This lack of representation, however, is not to suggest that the presence of Chinese people were untraceable in other public sectors. For the Sparkbrook Association, later to be renamed the Sparkbrook Advice Centre, already had identified "Chinese Work" as a significant facet in their 1977/78 records. This work, simply described as covering the "same service from the Advice Centre as other parts of the community have", predominately concerned registering "suitable" candidates for council housing. Yet, it also included finding the necessary actions to give a proper status to what was to eventually become the CCC:

"We are now seeking ways of putting this work on a proper footing. Chinese people are coming to Sparkbrook from all over Birmingham and a full-time

worker is needed to meet these needs. We intend to make an application to the Partnership Committee for the funding of this work ... We are also pursuing other possible sources of support” (ibid.15).

Under these conditions a proper footing for the CCC is not gathered through a bond of nostalgia superimposed upon the subject. Community is never a given. Neither is the properness represented in a binary decision between them and us, one where its reader could simply locate the CCC in the “same service” or, alternatively, in a humanistic reckoning of the Chinese subject. Instead, a proper footing and a calling to community emerges from an engagement and adjustment to the *communicative* relations between the Sparkbrook Advice Centre¹¹, the “same” - in this case the state, and in particular the Birmingham Inner City Partnership Programme - together with different Birmingham Chinese people. In this sense, community comes about through an exposure to each other, with exteriority. What could be described as the coming to presence of community can, therefore, be taken as a co-existence in dialogue - or as Nancy (1991) generously puts it as a “sharing” – which is decipherable as a decision amongst agents to act upon the relations which produced “inadequate and unsatisfactory” service provision. In particular, this is recorded as the poor welfare and housing conditions in Sparkbrook, low educational achievement, together with the social isolation of Chinese women.

As reported in the Chinese Community Service Reports, the decision to formulate the CCC departs from a demarcated common-being that may have specificity to a general emblem defining Chinese people to move towards exposing its members to the possibility of different social conditions. However, this formation was shaped through a number of political limits:

“Unemployment among the Chinese Community is rare, as most people believe in working, and are reluctant to claim unemployment benefit, or other state benefits, as they see these as a form of charity. ... At the outset of the project none of the Chinese families had made application for child benefit,

sickness benefit, pensions, or supplementary benefit. Many people, particularly the old and the sick were living in very poor circumstances. As a result of the projects work the majority of families are aware of the existence of state benefit and have been assisted in applying for them when necessary". (Chinese Community Service Report, 1979, 2; also see Chinese Community Service Report, 1980, 3-4)

I read this as a double bind. On one hand, the embrace of community by the CCC undergoes an epistemic violence that is not dissimilar to the CP in the way that it seeks to homogenise community and gain respectability through appealing to an ethnic centre through relegating the marginal. For example, the suggestion that there is a belief in working and a reluctance to claim state benefits by the "most" and the "many", only becomes located through the elision of the social differences of the least and the few. Yet, on the other hand, it is also possible to report that the actions of the CCC attempts to alter the possibility of any generic (i.e. work ethic) and seeks to configure community by calling for the improvement of social conditions. In this sense, community concerns an erasure of the present and looks towards the future. Such an alteration, however, should not be read as one of supersedure or sublation. It is not a movement where there is an abolishing of certain values followed by the inauguration of an entirely new narrative, as the CCC seeks to renegotiate the very state of community for the "many" and "most" that defines its partial community. That this renegotiation in the late 1970's - which was to introduce advice on immigration, playgroups for Chinese, "English and Indian" children, re-housing, and provide a place for dialogue for, in particular, Chinese women – juggles more than an imagined stasis and instead defines community as a contingent entity to alter situated conditions produces a location that differs from the CP's community. Indeed, if the reader were to take the call for a "New Plan" which establishes "THE CHINESE COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTRE", it is possible to note that the awareness of its location together with the visualising of differential relations instigates and inaugurates the CCC:

“This new establishment differed in objectives from the other Chinese organisations in the region and the residents pointed out that the New Plan should place more emphasis on:

- a) promoting the welfare of the Chinese immigrants through its service;
- b) organisation activities suitable for all and in particular for women;
- c) giving service hours compatible with the style of living of the Chinese people”. “

(Enquiry Meeting At The Sparkbrook Advice Centre, 17th June 1979)

The birth of the CCC is of a relationally determined political difference to other Chinese organisations¹², inadequate service hours of the SAC and to conditions of welfare. Yet, on surveying the history of the Centre as a community organisation, this positioning has never been one of abandon that looks randomly in a stray direction, because it appears that the CCC repeatedly focuses upon the linkages between Local Government and the partial community which it represents.

As a reference point, we should flag that the early activities of the CCC treats what Hall (1996b) coins “the struggle over the relations of representation”, that is those activities which put ethnic minorities on the map, somewhat defensively and as a reaction to the confines of the state. I argue this point as the insertion of the CCC into Birmingham’s public sphere occurs as a political mobilisation that seeks to overturn marginality by effectively acting as a broker of “communicative action” (Young, 1998) where such dialogue takes place through certain elevated languages of citizenship. A facet of these languages can be seen more clearly if we read much of the CCC’s early development as situated roughly in an episteme of integration. To expand upon this, consider the use of rhetoric, such as the “Chinese immigrant” within a “host community” and “adjusting to the social and cultural norms” (see CCC, 1982, 1985), together with a fragment from the Centre’s Constitution, which solicits a particular form of conduct:

“The development of the Chinese Community Service Centre
In last year’s report ... we clearly illustrated the problems faced by the Chinese community in Birmingham, which included language difficulties,

housing, finance, education and social isolation ... We also pointed out at the beginning that a specialist service for Chinese residents was developed, because,

1) The Chinese residents, working mainly in the catering trade were living a very isolated life, with little understanding of their rights and duties as citizens.

2) Because of the severe language problems, they often run into difficulties and misunderstandings, and were unable and unwilling to use the existing advice and welfare services.” (CCC, 1980, 2)

In this regard, the coming to presence of the CCC and the act of securing representation is once again of a relation which enunciates not so much the idiomatic purity of community - as separated and ethnically absolute - but emerges with an interpellation to the so-called dutiful workings of citizenry. For exposition, a contrast can be drawn with the CP and its positioning of community as centred on an introverted traditionalism with particularity to China because here the fabrication of community explicitly locates itself at a social intersection with the hegemonic remits of the “host community” (also see chapter 2). The implication here, as Michael Keith (1997, 284, emphasis in original) puts it, is that “[ethnicities] are surely defined neither in essentialist nor in anti-essentialist terms ... they are instead *relational* subjectivities that emerge through the matrices of state-civil society negotiations of the time and the space of the political”. With reference to the CCC’s services on “language”, on the level of the everyday this firstly and literally positions community as a site for translation and secondly renders the Centre as a supplement to governmental service provision. Take, for example, an inaugural report that states: “The Advice Centre is one of the few places which can help them [Chinese residents] deal with routine correspondence from the Tax Office, the schools, etc”. Indeed, to draw on another report (1979/80), the CCC’s main services are listed as covering interpretation and assisting residents complete (English) forms for housing, welfare and medical services together with helping those “with insufficient command of English” through an “English tuition class”. Hence, if taken as a

site of communication and co-appearance of Chinese residents' to/and with various state agencies, the CCC has a reluctance to redress the very Anglo-centric centres of the state (also see Lewis, 2000). Moreover these supplementary tendencies are in some way further represented more specifically on the level of the Centre's Educational Programmes whose initial funding application states:

“I trust you would be aware of the very serious language problems ... which is the main hindrance to the integration of the Chinese community in this country” (Letter from CCC to the Education Committee, 4th September 1980).

This insertion into a governmental syntax is also apparent once it is acknowledged that such classes are “not intended to replace existing provisions at schools, but simply to supplement them and fill the gap” (CCC, 1981-1982, 3).

If the reader accepts that community exists in a relation to the state, then, it is perhaps of little surprise to find that, whilst the CCC was inaugurated to also promote “the awareness of Chinese culture”, such promotions have been inconsistently placed. For instance, in discussing “Recreational and Cultural Activities” the 1981/82 report, favours listing the organisation of Christmas and Easter time activities, whilst omits any mention of Chinese New Year. This diverges quite significantly come the 1990s where one report claims that “Chinese New Year Celebration is our major event” (1993), whilst another discusses its importance as a fundraising opportunity (CCC, 1996, 3). Certainly, these uneven exposures are not to imply the non-existence of Chinese New Year in the 1970s and early 1980s. Merely that the CCC's predicament has inconsistently and only ever partially announced the heterogeneity of its cultural identifications according to an institutionalised location, which has shifted from integration to multicultural celebration (Hesse, 2000b; also see chapter 2). Still, that such public announcements are unsteady and different would perhaps remind the reader that community in the narrow sense, as a common being, is an inadequate means to

retain political efficacy and indeed state funding. And moreover, that a community as co-appearance displaces the possibility of any idiomatic and absolutist impetus, where an essential moment is only ever a discursive construct of inter-cultural dialogue. This becomes more lucid once we note that the expansion of the CCC's work in "Arts and Cultural Activities", coincides with claims by the CCC for governmental funding and the way the select signifier of Chinese kung-fu becomes a strategy for recognition:

"Our current Inner City Partnership grant is due for renewal next year. We shall submit our new application form requesting for increased funding for the extended activities we wish to pursue ... which will include old people's club [sic], career advising and culture classes, etc, as well as the existing services we provide" (CCC, 1984).

"The Centre's staff has been invited to introduce the Chinese community at the meeting of the Birmingham Federation of Townswomen Guilds. Mrs Lan Mui Mac gave an interesting talk on her own personal experience in this country and a demonstration of Chinese kung-fu. This has cultivated an understanding of Chinese women's lives among the members of the Federation". (CCC, 1994, 9)

Conclusion

Through reading the writing on a community and elucidating the location of language, communication and its differential marks, I have noted two interwoven pathways. One of these paths leads to a reassertion of commonality or (ethnic) absolutism and encourages its reader to believe that there is some essence to community life together with some internal and eternal proper meanings. The indicator of language, in this case, is signalled as though it is a static entity with a fixed origin shared by a particularised heritage that is passed down through inter-generations. However, the danger with this figuration of community and language is multiple. Firstly, posing an image of a culture as somehow a unique sameness reifies the borderlines between "their tradition versus ours" (Hall, 1992). Secondly, this type of community can only maintain its pretence of uniformity through continually relegating

differences that appear at its doorstep as contradictions. And thirdly, the posing of community as an origin forgets that the voices that assert a common being are already displaced as the very communicative properties of language (along with the very recognition of community) requires that community move any anchor that may seemingly lie behind it. It would seem that if the search for equality concerns an affirmation of the city's margins and/or is a means to construct a dialogue between city government and its minorities to solve inequalities, then this path reaches a dead end.

The other path towards community that I have been referring to feeds from the former; it is a mutually constitutive moment. Yet, as opposed to promoting a centred community, this path marks the potential detours and directions where community may decouple itself from the limits that are set in place. Community in this case affirms its hybridity; community develops through its relationship with others and by being put into play with co-existing chains of meaning - with the state, with the heterogeneous identities that surround it and with its readers - in a dialogic, displacing relationship. With respect to my example of communication, language becomes rendered as a means of transference, reinterpretation and exposure. It works to broaden horizons and, as such, it is a means to reaching the constitutive moment(s) of community, its detailing, its building. Nevertheless, what the examples I have used also demonstrate is that the process of exposing community, as exemplified with the CCC, is not exempt from pretences of closure in other future incarnations, as exemplified in the CP; it would seem that the very possibility of closure itself is a result of co-existences. It would also seem that if the city is to consider its margins and construct a dialogue with its minorities, then there is a need to re-think the type of inter-relation between the CCC and the state and, moreover, find a way that this inter-relation could open the doors to its other.

¹ Sir Michael Lyons, the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, in his contribution to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry alleged that an economically secure environment would reduce racially motivated attacks, and this, in part, is continually pursued through local government action regarding the physical regeneration of the city (see chapter 2, 3, 5).

² This states: "8.1.1 In working towards race equality it is vital to give due and proper recognition to the positive contribution that ethnic minorities have made and continue to make to the life of this country. The media in particular have an enormous influence in shaping public perceptions. Too often ethnic minorities are victims of crude, negative stereotyping in and by the media, a situation that can contribute to racial harassment and racial discrimination. 8.1.2 The Government has a vision of a diverse, inclusive Britain. In pursuing this vision there is a need to encourage greater respect, understanding, tolerance and appreciation of the different cultures and communities that make up British society in the twenty first century" (from [http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/conncomm.htm#Proposed Funding Programme Areas](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/conncomm.htm#Proposed_Funding_Programme_Areas)).

³ Killeen (1999, no pagination), writing for the Equalities Division concerning Social Exclusion, argues that there is a particular need for recognition especially for Birmingham's Irish community and their "lack of official minority status".

⁴ The series of community profiles cover the African- Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Hindu, Irish, Pakistani, Sikh and Vietnamese minority ethnic groups.

⁵ The mid-1990s Local Government Review, made it an official requirement for authorities to accord community identity, or what the Department of the Environment called "natural communities", a central position in local government service delivery proposals and policy (Ball & Stobart, 1997).

⁶ The Standing Consultative Forum (SCF) arose out of a concern by the Race Relations Unit in the late 1980s that there was an absence of formal communication between black and ethnic minority groups and the Local Authority. This was addressed by the opening of a forum for black and ethnic minority organisations to lobby for their interests and to give voice to their concerns. SCF members would also have direct access to the directors of various council departments and to the Chief Executive Officer (Samad, 1997). However, for many involved it also acted to legitimise or 'rubber stamp' Local Government policy.

Although Solomos & Back (1995, 194) suggest that "all of the diverse interests of Birmingham's black and ethnic minority communities were represented in one form or another", representation (as in proxy) was problematic. The organisation of the SCF was split into 'Umbrella Groups' (Bangladesh Islamic Projects Consultative Committee, Birmingham Hindu Council; Pakistan Forum; Council of Black Led Churches; Irish Forum; Sikh Council of Gurdwaras; Afro- Caribbean Peoples Movement, Chinese/Vietnamese Consultative Committee) and this suffered from divisions regarding leadership and legitimacy over representation. Consequently, it was decided in January 1999 that the SCF should be restructured into "Issue based Community Action Forums" (Report of the Head of Equalities, Equalities Committee, 13th July 1999).

⁷ From now on referred to as CP.

⁸ Throughout the 20th Century there have been numerous attempts to reform Chinese language. The Chinese Language Reform Association announced in 1956, the "Chinese Characters Simplification Scheme", which according to Hodge & Louie (1998, 63) "formed the basis of the 1964 Comprehensive List of Simplified Characters ... which is still current today".

⁹ 'Brumdata' (Race Relation Unit, 1991), a document which collated "key facts about Birmingham's Black and Ethnic Minority Population" from different statutory and voluntary agencies to aid service provision partially supports Baxter's argument. The information within this report covers: housing, health care, economic activity, crime and education figures and categorises the data along various different ethnic/racial axis according to the monitoring figures from each respective department. Brumdata itself concedes that these categorisations have their shortcomings with regard to the time- scale and the coverage of data. Nevertheless what is additionally apparent is that with the notable exceptions of the Economic Development Unit and the Inner City Partnership Programme - sectors involved in the economic regeneration of Birmingham - there is no direct monitoring of a Chinese category in the other Local Authority Departments. This also emphasises that Chinese identity has been foremost represented by government in terms of their economic contribution (see chapter 2).

¹⁰ Now on referred to as CCC.

¹¹ Now on referred to as SAC.

¹² This included the Overseas Chinese Association and the Midlands Chinese Organisation, of which, converged to form the business orientated Birmingham Chinese Society.

CHAPTER 5 – FRACTURES IN A PAGODA: A FETISH OF PRESENCE, A GIFT OF PUBLIC ART AND OTHER SPECTRES

“You must ... confess by ‘individual’ you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle class owner of property. This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way, and made impossible.” (Marx & Engels, 1985, 99)

“Today the old ways, of imperial adjudication and open systemic intervention, cannot sustain unquestioned legitimacy. Neocolonialism is fabricating its allies by proposing a share of the center in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement): disciplinary support for the conviction of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite.” (Spivak, 1993, 57)

“With multi-culture, multi-uses [laughing]” (from an interview with a prominent Chinese citizen¹, June 23rd 1999)

On the rainy morning of the 17th of June 1998, two VIPs² each offered up a speech to mark the official opening of a pagoda on the Holloway Circus, Birmingham. Whilst often drowned out by the background of honking horns and the white noise of speeding and screeching traffic, these voices attempted to deliver a message that this sculpture “truly reflects and represents the Chinese community,” and that “now we can show our welcome to the Chinese community”. They also mentioned the role of multiculturalism, public art, landmarks, urban regeneration and gift giving to the congregation made up of suited people³, building contractors⁴, local and Chinese media⁵ and those small numbers who were curiously passing-by. In this chapter, I unravel some of the discontinuities between the above governmental propositions. In doing so, I record an abbreviated historical geography of the redevelopment and discuss the exemplary moment where a minority identity, or at least a proposed version of it, officially and materially comes to presence in Birmingham’s public space. This process involves a number of ways in which the local media, local government and a prominent citizen conceptually assemble multiculturalism. More generally, it involves a paradoxical narrative that on the one-

hand privileges specific citizens who are located as the unique cultural voice, yet on the other, flags that the pagoda's construction is one of cross-cultural entanglement. In what follows, the unfolding of these issues and their contradictions serve as the main points of discussion, but with them in mind I seek to pose an ethical and political question over a gift of multiculturalism and outline some of the limits to hospitality with reference to a British city. The exposition draws heavily from deconstruction.

The issue of public space seems to be persistently on the agenda in discussions on the Western city. In the field of sociological and geographical inquiry an aspect of the debate has swung from assertions that public space has become pacified, militarised and symbolically monopolised by the private sector (Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1995) to a counter position that has refuted a loss of a more authentic and democratic urbanity. In the main, the latter of these note that the distinction between private/public has long been blurred (Gleeson, 1995; Lees, 1994), and demonstrate that public areas have always been available for use in different ways from those proscribed by dominant urban practices (also see Domosh, 1998). In brief, the observation proposed is that whilst public space may have become increasingly privatized and ordered this does not signal the end of public space as its implementation comes about through ideological struggles with "counter publics", which affirm the presence of more expansive visions of the public realm (Mitchell, 1995; Staeheli & Thompson, 1997). Indeed, amongst many, these forms of resistance have been articulated with different tactics and in different contexts by public artists (Cresswell, 1998), youth cultures (Toon, 2000), street kids (Lees, 1998), migrant female domestic workers (Yeoh & Huang, 1998), disabled people (Gleeson, 1998) and people with mental health problems (Parr, 1997).

In a highly influential article entitled *The ordinary city*, Ash Amin and Stephen Graham (1997) have taken the above debate in an alternative direction. The course of their essay is undoubtedly broad and expansive, but to abridge their argument on public spaces the proposal is that public spaces could be a locus for innovation and encourage a “positive economic contribution” (ibid. 422) if they were opened up as a space for mingling and interaction. In particular, as they continue to suggest this form of boosterism would be achieved by, firstly, ridding the city of its debilitating socio-spatial barriers, secondly, nurturing a sense of belonging to encourage economic possibilities - including those provided by ethnic minority enterprises - and thirdly by taking “creolization ... as an important source of social renewal and economic innovation” (ibid. 423). Certainly, as I see it, Amin and Graham’s argument is adeptly made and beautifully crafted, yet it also makes pertinent those configurations that surround a monopolised and hybrid public space as well as those issues that concern citizenship and economic policy. Not least, it encourages the reader to think about the possibility of an open public space, the relationships between dominated and shared spaces as well as the tensions between belonging and a “positive economic contribution”. In what follows, I will address these issues, tensions and relationships with respect to Birmingham’s pagoda and, moreover, outline some ways in which a gift economy (dis)connects them.

What is a pagoda?

The idea that there is a movement of meaning between the “pedagogical” (a stable, continuist culture) and the “performative” (the unstable signifying process of cultural identification) in Homi Bhabha’s (1994) essay, *Dissemination*, is one that can be lifted with reference to Birmingham’s pagoda to foreground the ethico-political location and/or dissemination of the gift. However, to frame these themes of

resistance and transference as well as their applicability to forms of epistemic violence in a multicultural context, I firstly want to discuss this double movement through considering a comment on Jin Mao, the tallest skyscraper in China by its architect:

“Jin Mao represents the energy and determination of the people of Shanghai ... The design of this gently tapering skyscraper also embodies China’s history and culture. First, Jin Mao’s design is a modern evocation of the first Chinese skyscraper – the ancient pagoda. Second, the building frequently incorporates the number eight, which the Chinese consider a lucky number, throughout the structure” (Smith cited in Lockwood, 1998, 14)

The comparison between skyscraper and pagoda is perhaps not an inaccurate one⁶. Yet, the quotation raises a degree of suspicion on any reductive answer to the question of “what is a pagoda?” For on one take, it could be suggested that signification is never left to abandon; the analogous position of a skyscraper as a modern evocation of a pagoda is not readily evoked with every skyscraper in the world. Nor is it that signification loses sight of the durable constraints of “history and culture”, which provide a sense of familiarity and coherence to a building that is higher than it is wide. However, that Jin Mao becomes inclined towards an identifiable ancient origin and frequented with a *logos* - what we might identify as an anchor of thought (e.g. “the Chinese consider...”) to the form - is not to suggest that there is a single, essential function. For, on another take the link between the signifier and the signified (e.g. “Jin Mao represents ... the people of Shanghai”) and between function and form lie at a “disjuncture” (Tschumi, 1996), are able to flex and slip across a horizon of meaning (Lefebvre, 1996, 1998). We could flag the rewriting of the pagoda as Jin Mao, with its hotel, office and retail space, which supposedly make up a “self-sufficient city” to point to a possible inscription. Or, for exposition I could cite

the authoritative reference of the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the pagoda to demonstrate appropriation and transference:

“The pagoda derives from the stupa of ancient India, which was a dome shaped commemorative monument, usually erected over the remains or relics of a holyman or king. ... This stupa form was adopted by Buddhism as an appropriate form for a monument enshrining sacred relics and became known to Westerners as a pagoda. The Buddhist pagoda was elaborated in Tibet into a bottle-shaped form; it took pyramidal or conical designs in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos; and in China, Korea, and Japan, it evolved into the best-known pagoda form.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 60)

To claim the “monument” as the answer to the question “what is a pagoda?” would be to make an arbitrary suspension on the shifting, indeterminate meanings of the pagoda. Yet, without comprehensively reviewing it, much of the current geographical writing on the monument is of thematic use to approaching this question. These themes include reformation, slippage, heterogeneity, contradiction and a resistance to closure. For example, Harvey (1979) recalls not only a history of class struggle but also points to the multiple attachments to the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur. Heffernan (1995) discusses amongst many things the contested claims to the commemoration of the dead of the Great War, and Charlesworth (1994) tells his reader of a displacement of Jewish identity from Auschwitz. In a paper on the Voortrekker Monument, Crampton (2001) also contributes a conclusion that is particularly worthy of note. Drawing from the work by Young (1992), he argues “for a radicalising of monuments” to open representational forms to participation and reinscription in a context of post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter in many respects draws from these themes, albeit with a different approach and a different setting, by reading the official and popular claims to Birmingham’s pagoda. In doing so, I initially argue that private and public sector agencies offer the City a highly regimented form of multiculturalism that configures or omits a relationship with difference, which

paradoxically are constitutive of the claim to multicultural enunciation. This will lay the grounds for my discussion on gift giving.

Advocacy and authenticity: “truly reflect[ing] and represent[ing] the Chinese community”

On a reading of Birmingham’s urban regeneration strategy we encounter numerous attempts to centre the constructions upon an ethnos. Whilst operating with different registers – sometimes through the individual, sometimes as provincial and sometimes as community – these claims maintain a pivot through soliciting what has been called “a metaphysics of presence” (Derrida, 1976). As discussed in the previous chapters, such a centre can be used to suggest realism and offer legitimacy under the guise of a liberal advocacy politics. Furthermore, with regards to some attempts in the City to recognise minority groups, it can also suggest that there is a common being hidden in the depths of an idiom that requires retrieval in order to deliver racial equality. In many respects, what can be found in the case of the Holloway Circus redevelopment is that these structural tendencies arrive once again and it is these that I seek to de-centre. However for now let us recap some of the assumptions of such a centring to a series of socio-political dimensions that cover social exclusion, community and authenticity. To start with take a City Council report, which outlines the “implications” that this development may hold for equality. More particularly, it states:

“Implications [of the pagoda] for Women, People with Disabilities and Black and Ethnic Minority People and Race Relations:

The artwork would be an expression by a *prominent Chinese citizen* of this aspect of the city’s multi-cultural community.” (Joint report of Acting Director of Leisure and Community Services and Director of Planning and Architecture, 22nd July 1994, my emphasis)

A number of interconnected implications can be raised here concerning the loci of knowledge. To start with it is possible to broadly identify a structure of political

proxy. Taking the quotation with the literality it presupposes; representation appears to be a derivative from a particular identitarian claim. Or in other words, the prominent Chinese citizen (of this aspect of the city's multi-cultural community) expresses the artwork. In this light, it would perhaps not be unreasonable to presuppose that the concern of equality is with allowing the "aspect" to speak and furthermore that the prominent Chinese citizen has, paradoxically, become a member of a marginal group to City politics. However, the danger in constructing such presuppositions is that whilst they may seek to recognise a so-called silenced presence, they also render equality and its representation as a phonocentric inquiry. That is, the presumption co-ordinates the citizen as the source, or a signified, to knowledge, whilst promoting the citizen as representative of such a source. Certainly, as Hall (1997) and Donald (1999) show, phonocentrism underplays the work of representation in a proposal of civil society and, as Spivak (1999) reiterates, it also raises a number of questions over marginality and its specificity. So for example, above the implications to women, disability and race are dropped/blurred in favour of multiculturalism. But in addition, another hazard arises in that it underscores some limitations on the pagoda, its construction and its relation to community. We could perhaps draw out some of these limitations in the suggestion that the artwork represents the idiom of an "aspect" of multi-culturalism, although such singularity is perhaps more apparent in claims on the suitability of the redevelopment's name and the pagoda's authenticity:

"What more suitable name for the Birmingham ring road roundabout chosen as the site of the pagoda so kindly donated by [the prominent Chinese citizen] than Pagoda [the prominent Chinese citizen]-way." (Birmingham Evening Mail, July 29th 1994)

"I would say ... [the pagoda is] authentic because it's been carved in Fujian Province in China which I believe is 500 miles in the interior of China on a hillside with the craftsmen [sic] that actually make those

that are actually used in that country. So I mean having looked at some of the photos of the workmen [sic] carving, it looked pretty authentic.” (Interview with the Contract Administrator, Birmingham City Council, for the Holloway Circus Redevelopment, June 11th 1998)

Whilst operating with different reference points, it is possible to once again note a derivative structure as defining the pagoda. What is derived in these cases appears to be the originality of the subject, place and the specificity of labour⁷. In one case, it is almost as if there are very particular types of hands, which come from a particular place – as opposed to others hands and places - that impart the authentic. And in the other, it is almost as if the suitability of a signifier is proximate to the citizen. Put simply, I would suggest that these disparate claims allude to an understanding where the pagoda becomes considered as an outgrowth from particular presences deemed the authentic/proper origin. In doing so, the presumption here becomes one that assumes that there is a prediscursive, innate element specific to these people. Following Hall (1992) and Venn (1999), I suggest that posing authenticity and suitability in such an idiomatic and innate fashion could lead to an understanding of multicultural difference and its signification as a mutually exclusive arrangement of cultures with their own ethno-centres. In this fashion, ethnocentrism refers to a way of placing and narrowing the signification by ethnic groups as a birthright, in-built consciousness, or an essence (Rattansi, 1992) and not only as a proposition that centres the world according to “one’s own culture” (Jackson, 2000, 238). Indeed, it is possible to suggest that it is this kind of ethnocentrism as a definable, transcendental cogito that offers a means to naturalise the relationship between the particular forms of signification with particular representative(s):

“Meanwhile [the prominent Chinese citizen] is hoping his £90,000 gift to the city will start a trend. He wants entrepreneurs from other ethnic communities to follow his example by *donating works of their own particular style of art* to the city they have made their home.” (Birmingham Evening Mail, July 22nd 1994, my emphasis)

“[The prominent Chinese citizen] is very much looking forward to seeing this scheme completed. ... As you can image [sic] the whole of Birmingham’s Chinese community is right behind the [pagoda] project”. (Letter from Ms Granger, Personal Assistant to the prominent Chinese citizen, to Mr Walker, Birmingham City Council, 4th January 1996).

In one respect, the above claims can be read as an another attempt to draw an immediate relationship between the form of the sculpture with the absoluteness of presence. Under such types of logocentric proclamations, it would seem that Birmingham’s Chinese community is a common being and the pagoda marks out a point of common interest for such a being (Nancy, 1991; see chapter 4). Whilst this is always open to debate, of significance to such declarations is the way that community is not only posed under a homogeneous notion – where there are some essential connections within this populace to the extent that they speak in unison - but also the way that the narrowness and proximity normalises an understanding of the prominent Chinese citizen as an advocate for community. What I mean by this is that under the logos he becomes an exemplary “native informant” (Chow, 1998; Spivak, 1999) identical to and as a figure speaking in the name of a specific group, in this respect Birmingham’s Chinese community. That such dictatorial and reductive understandings also make the most of unequal labour relations⁸ under a guise of an authentic originary should not go unmentioned, yet I would suggest that the logos has to be recast if multiculturalism is to be taken as a shifting, multiple and contesting force. The differences in the above quotations – between the Chinese labourer and the Chinese citizen – together with the looking glass of the “image” perhaps offer a means to move towards this. For they begin to indicate that enunciation becomes formed through a cluster of predicates and it is through their examination that the reader is offered a way to de-centre the privileged position of the prominent Chinese

citizen, and it is these differences that I now affirm. Although to start such an effort, and indeed to show a respect to logocentric ways of knowing that proliferate through the West, my next turn will be to a dialogue with the prominent Chinese citizen himself.

Relocating the artwork: "Now we can show our welcome to the Chinese community"

"[Naming], like a cast of the die, is just one step toward unnamng, a tool to render visible what he has carefully kept invisible in his manipulative blindness." (Trinh, 1989, 48)

Posed at the foreground of the redevelopment of the Holloway Circus and its associated tale of multiculturalism is one particular agent. The take he offers on the pagoda is one of a selective history and absolutist connotation. But quite crucially it is also one of discrepancies where dialogue, adjustments and openings on ethnic belonging can be found. To quote from some interview material:

PCC: It all started, I've got four children ... One day they went to the library ... and I saw the Iron: Man, rusty Iron: Man. So some friend of mine, English, I said, "Where did you get that from?" They said it was donated. So I said that "I didn't know that the Council accepts things from people." He says "Yes, if you want to donate something." So I say "Yeah why not?" So I contacted the Council, we have a decide, what can you decide to give the Council? First thing you rule out politics we can't give them Chairman Mao, that's it. We cannot give them a Buddha, because that's religious. Rule out religion and politics, we say pagoda is neither isn't it?

WFC: But the pagoda has got religious connotations.

PCC: Uhh, yes and no. Yes and no, because you could say any housing has too, because any housing you inside either you got a Buddha or a Christian Christ there. You see the pagoda originally, years ago, there wasn't that, that thing. Because the Buddha, in China up to 300 years ago it wasn't religion it was a theory, philosophy. Very simple in the old days, the pagoda was a temple. Happen to have the money that's all. The pagoda in China there, is built in a rich man's house or kingdom or palace for a, what do you call, a watchtower. People have got to watch their enemies. Like that one you got in Windsor Castle, a round one, it's a watchtower that's all. Later on, the Buddha's of India they cremated the dead body and then put the urn, put it inside. That is very, very minimum, very minimum of it.

...
Generally, ... once you give something to the Council, that is beyond my control. It's not my thing.

...
WFC: On the day that the pagoda opened ... you offered to donate some Cherry Trees to the City is that right? ... Why do you think Cherry Trees are more appropriate than the trees that are there in the gardens?

PCC: The Cherry Tree because they blossom in the Winter time. You see the Chinese, I don't know how much culture you have, Chinese all say one thing when it blossom there is prosperity in hard times, most Chinese believe is good. *Moi fah*, blossoms not in the Summer but in the Winter, Winter when all the trees drop their leafs and everything they are blossom.

WFC: Were you consulted on the design of the gardens then?

PCC: No, no. They send it to us and we offer no opinions. They are nice people, they say this here, well put it this way, if I give you a picture where you going to hang, how you going to hang it, no longer my business. I don't want to interfere, you either hang it in the sitting room, back room, it's impolite. That's right, if I give them a pagoda, where they put it, how they put it is up to them. You see if I start giving you a beautiful picture, even Picasso, I tell you to hang it in a room I become interfering your internal affairs, there is nothing to do.

...
WFC: One other thing, the pagoda was shipped in from China, why did you want it to made in and shipped from China?

PCC: The British couldn't make it. Why ship the raw material here, when you've got the people to make it? It's a Chinese thing. A Chinese thing, each piece of rock, some of them about the size of this room, about that high. It would cost a fortune to do it.

The proposal for the pagoda here is uneven. As the prominent Chinese citizen alludes to, the pagoda is both heterogeneous and (dis)embedded. Amongst many things it shuttles between “a Chinese thing” and “not my thing”. Still, it is such unevenness within the proposal that places the constitutive position of enunciation under question. Let us make two brief points on this. Firstly, if we are to mark an opening in the text it could be flagged that as the Chinese thing is a donation it predicates a displacement from an absolute association with a specific essence and/or the point of enunciation offered by the figure of the prominent citizen. In this manner, the gift of the artwork may retain a mark as “a Chinese thing” but this becomes available through the relationships and the conditions it may have with those that may seem absent, that is

with the other. Or to position this on an explicitly conceptual level, for this “thing” to be communicated it has to be iterable and be able to break with an idiomatic context or species being (Derrida, 1982; Smith, 2000). The point here is that belonging to an ordained community is not central to the “implication” when one considers the communication/gift of the pagoda or that of multiculturalism. Nor is multiculturalism a concern over discovering an absolutist and originary moment, even though this might seem to be the case (see also chapter 4). Rather it is the way the artwork is reinscribed in its relation to others - one of which is the local authority - that marks the cultural commitment to multiculturalism, not the identitarian claim itself (see Spivak, 1990, 1993). We shall come to an inscription later.

Secondly, now I have flagged such conjunctures it is also necessary to consider the attempts in the description to shore-up, straighten out and filter any slippages through the positioning of determinable events. These seemingly prioritise the values of originality and singularity (e.g. a temple located back 300 years in China or “it’s a Chinese thing” or “not my thing”) and are made for or at least capable of a kind of political regulation. I argue this as these events produce an order through pushing away or *struggling over antonyms at particular moments*. For example, the success of finding a so-called political and religious neutrality is delimited by the possibility of failure (e.g. “yes and no”, “you rule out”) where “success” operates through the elision of a backdrop of dissidence that is already available to the very structure of the gift. Reading between the lines, we can then recognise that there is neither a transcendental authority over community nor a neutral position shared by all and further that heterogeneity surrounds the position of the pagoda as selecting the artwork itself works upon a *differential mark*. Therefore, as a claim to communal absoluteness (e.g. “the whole of Birmingham’s Chinese community”) the pagoda falls

short, but pretends to succeed through closing off the play of difference within the narrative structure. For instance, take the detour between two presences (e.g. from “it’s not my thing” to “it’s a Chinese thing”) which require a historical partitioning or temporary amnesia for each suggestion to become wholly viable. In other words, an explanation of absoluteness derives its peculiarity and virtue only “by not taking into account, in the very moment of this description, its past conditions: by omitting to posit the problem of the transition from one structure to another, by putting history between brackets” (Derrida, 1978, 291).

From the above points there is some indication that the embrace of the pagoda occurs amongst a number of representational difficulties. They indicate that the pretence of a univocal ethnos (presence) cannot be proposed to account for the artwork as this, at least, underplays the contextual position of the surrounding cultural politics and its inferences. On another attached axis, presence removes from view an entanglement with the state that underwrites the process of gift giving and it under enumerates an “outside” that is constitutive of the claim to neutrality and absoluteness. I return to elaborate upon these omissions and relations below. However, what the slippage between “it’s not my thing” and “it’s a Chinese thing” perhaps begins to demonstrate is that the *act* of “truly reflect[ing] and represent[ing] the Chinese community” occurs at a selective moment with other legacies and appropriations. Or to put it another way, the process of conjuring a representation is not a simple reflection of a type of person, but can be found between the counter signatures⁹ and inscriptive spaces of the “we” and “community” as suggested in statements such as “now we can show our welcome to the Chinese community”, and moreover that these counter signatures have political and cultural limits.

Figure 5.1.



The Holloway Circus, Birmingham, under redevelopment.

Redeveloping the Holloway Circus: between form and function

Whether proposed inadvertently or not the prominent Chinese citizen shows that the pagoda can be neither reduced to a unity nor simply allocated to the immanence of a definitive ethnos. Instead, what the reader encounters are some irregularities that suggest a play of difference. What I mean by this “play” is that the signification of the pagoda - or indeed any signification – lacks fixity as the moment of articulation is made possible through a relationship with others. Thus, it is not that the artwork or community is simply present in and of itself as a singular, unabridged “aspect” of multiculturalism. Rather the “aspect” co-exists and, moreover, interweaves with something other than itself, whether in the form of deferrals and/or differences, to transform the meaning of the “aspect” into a new synthesis. To exemplify some of this generative and hybrid process I now wish to consider some of the claims placed upon the pagoda and its construction (Figure 5.1). This will allow my investigation to not only affirm and reframe the construction of this redevelopment as one of a cross-cultural engagement, which will signal the possibility of dissemination, but also examine how a degree of hybridity formulates some ideological limits on the understanding of identity and the use of public space. For exposition, I divide these into two broad descriptions on form and function:

A) *Form*. As previously discussed, the selection of a pagoda is accounted for on the grounds of political and religious neutrality. However, the choice of aesthetics is never without political or religious traces. Take the “design of proposals” and its mimicry and reformation of chinoiserie:

“Background research and design of proposals

The pagoda gift from PCC (Harbin, China) has been incorporated into Thomas Garden, Holloway Circus in the style of a Chinese Feng Shui space/garden.

The principles of Feng Shui as given in the text below have been considered and incorporated into the design to ensure the pagoda is placed in a setting appropriate with the correct balance and harmony (Ying and Yang).

Spatial orientation of the various elements have taken into account the recommendations and basic principles including the Chinese compass, geomancy and the fundamental principles of this ancient art/science.

The spatial proportions on the southern side also incorporate the main pedestrian through routes which have supplementary lighting.

Rock samples (Alpendurada) have been specifically chosen to harmonise with the marble of the pagoda and includes elements such as the plinth cladding, dias, steps, edging trim, piers and the natural stone benches.

Benches are provided with mainly southern orientations and are located around the pagoda and existing Hebe fountain which is retained, repaired and incorporated into the design.

The paving has also been chosen to harmonise with the natural granites having particles of white granite incorporated into the matrix of the product [the pagoda] on a dappled surface (shows the micra).

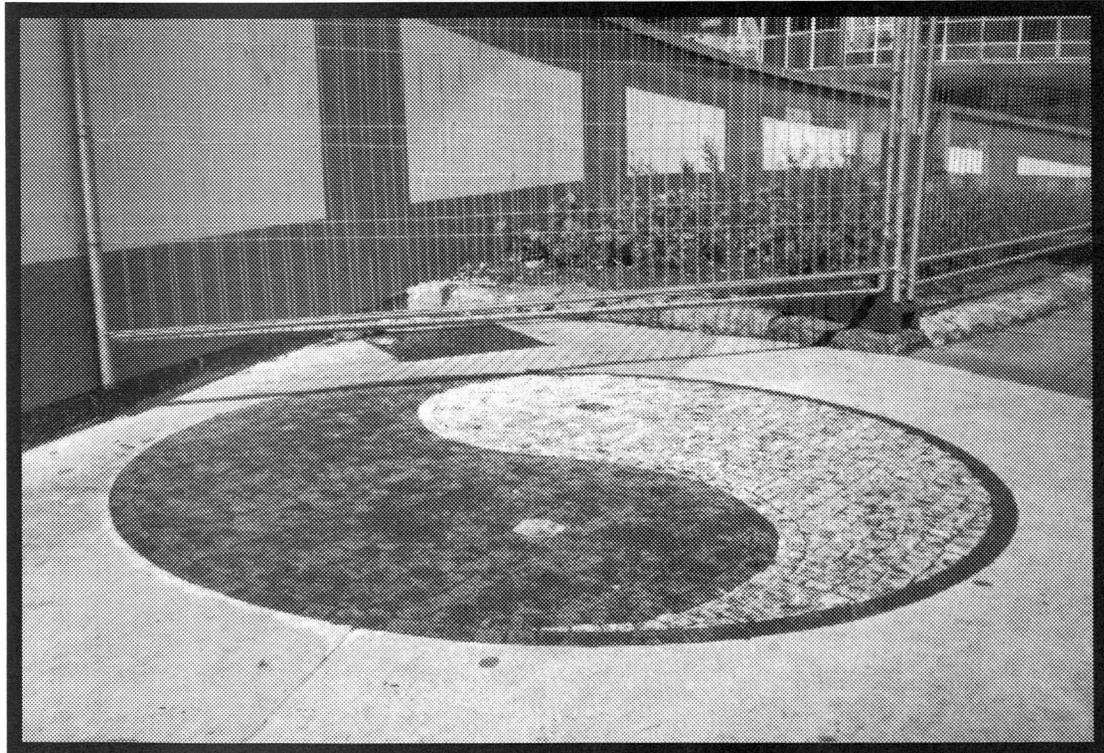
...

The plant species are native of China and largely indigenous to the region where the pagoda is being quarried. The emphasis on the planting has been placed on the introductions of the Victorian plant hunters [sic] (see attached extract), in order to achieve an authentic setting, but with the constraints of viability due to the microclimatic conditions of the site and the species appropriateness to the design.

Finally, PCC has agreed to fund the visit of two craftsmen [sic] from China to advise and oversee the erection of the pagoda under our structural engineer's supervision. The craftsmen will ensure that the pieces are erected and orientated correctly including any finishing works that are necessary to ensure the structure is finished and dressed appropriately and in accordance with the Feng Shui principles." (REF:19/1850)

My reading of this quotation can be broken into a number of points. Firstly, the "appropriate" seems to make up a key facet of the redevelopment. This standard may offer an aura of semantic depth that draws from some select signifiers of Chinese culture, but in themselves they refuse totality (Figure 5.2). For, if read as differentially marked, the movement towards constructing the "appropriate" traces an implicit, although unmentioned, background of "inappropriate" forms and designs that are available, although effaced, in the construction. Moreover, and in relation to this exclusion is the way that the normalising convention of the "appropriate" neither

Figure 5.2



Design elements of the Holloway Circus Redevelopment, Birmingham.

evokes a suddenness of enunciation or a sense of unfamiliarity. Rather, the appropriateness and the authenticity of the design becomes subject to an entanglement where presence becomes mediated amongst a series of identified (and unidentified) references. That these references - including the “Victorian plant hunters”, the “natural” rock types, the fauna and flora of the garden and the (unmentioned) feng shui text books used to plan the development – are evocative of the chinoiserie craze in 18th and 19th Century Europe falls silent here. But as Dawson (1967) and Pagani (1998) suggest, this craze, which ranged from commodities, such as silks, fans, china-ware and furniture, to the monumental, such as Lord Anson’s Chinese house at Shugborough and the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, permeated a British imaginary, and sometimes its households, with an aesthetic legacy of China as a willow patterned world. Indeed, as the travel/architectural writing of William Chamber illustrates, chinoiserie were often based upon a desire for luxurious designs of which were subsequently disseminated as a “correct” version of a Chinese aesthetic throughout Britain (Knox, 1994). Examples of this disseminating aesthetic include the Chinese gardens in Chinese Dairy at Woburn Abbey, the Duke of Cumberland’s Fishing Temple on Virginia Water and Sir George Staunton’s Leigh Park, Devon, as well as the pagoda and House of Confucius at Kew. Therefore, my point here is that in a certain way the redevelopment can be read as drawing upon, unfolding and interpreting a written language that is already there. Or in short, the “now” of the welcome to Birmingham is situated amongst an afterlife of a recurrent and repeatable aesthetic.

Secondly, that such an afterlife lies amidst the violent knowledges and languages of 19th Century British and French Imperialism, or a period which Ch’en (1979, 102; also see Hughes, 1937) calls the “Christian century” of Chinese and

Western relations, is something that goes unmentioned. Yet, this becomes at hand if a brief detour is taken through the writings of Reverend Ernest J. Eitel of the London Missionary Society as well as the work by the various “Victorian plant hunters”¹⁰ (see Fortune, 1979 orig. 1847) which the design uses to choreograph the gardens. For instance, taking the former, Eitel begins his account of Feng Shui (1993, orig. 1873, 1) by asking the question “What is Feng-shui?” to which he locates a preliminary answer that is found absent, obscure and far too confusing:

“What is Feng-shui? Sinologues looked through the Chinese Classics for an answer to this question, searched through their Dictionaries, and found none. Merchants asked their compradores and house-boys, What is Feng-shui? but the replies they got were rather obscure and confused, and at best they were told, that Feng-shui means “wind and water,” and is so called, “because it’s a thing like wind, which you cannot comprehend, and like water, which you cannot grasp.” (ibid. 2)

Eitel then – by somewhat surmounting the elusiveness of these replies – offers them an identifiable basis, which he takes forward as a benchmark to reproach China as suffering from immobilism and exteriority:

“Since my arrival in China I have had a great many practical collisions with Feng-shui, and having for many years collected notes on the subject and studied its literature in all its branches, I now propose to lay the result of my studies before the public. Feng-shui is however, as I take it, but another name for natural science...

Natural science has never been cultivated in China in that technical, dry and matter-of-fact fashion, which seems to us inseparable from true science. Chinese naturalists did not take much pains in studying nature and ferreting out her hidden secrets by minute and practical tests and experiments. They invented no instruments to aid them in the observation of the heavenly bodies, they never took to hunting beetles and stuffing birds, they shrank from the idea of dissecting animal bodies, nor did they chemically analyse inorganic substances, but with very little actual knowledge of nature they evolved a whole system of natural science from their own inner consciousness and expounded it according to the dogmatic formulae of ancient tradition.

...

We may smile at the unscientific, rudimentary character of Chinese physiology; we may point out, that every branch of science in China is but a rudimentary groping after truths with which every school-boy in Europe is familiar; we may conclude, that China as a whole resembles but an over-grown child, on whose intellect has fallen a sudden blight

and who grew up since to manhood [sic], to old age, with no more knowledge than that of a precocious baby; and yet I saw, looking at this same China, the oldest among ancient peoples, the greatest among great empires, or at least the most populous among all the countries of the world, hoary with old age, heavy, dull, childishly ignorant as regards matters of intellect” (ibid. 3-5)

Eitel proposes, at least, two motions on Feng-shui in this condescending passage. Sometimes it is phonocentric, based on an inner consciousness that has advanced little from ancient traditions, and sometimes Eitel exposes Feng-shui as a “natural science”, but finds it insufficiently empirical, reflexive and truthful according to its approximations as a European natural science. That the latter echoes the shifts in theological thought and, in particular, those in the Protestant Church and its Missionaries, due to various Nineteenth Century observations gathered from the Galapagos Islands, is not incidental here (see Dawson, 1967; Mackerras, 1989). Nor is it incidental that the former resonates with a familiar tale of a “retrograding than advancing” China told by a number of other travellers to nineteenth century China (Fortune, 1979 orig. 1847, 9). Yet, what remains is the way that Feng-shui becomes defined through what might be described as a (hybrid) epistemic violence that hierarchically assesses and displaces Chinese “inner consciousness” with a domestic outline of Western thought. We could perhaps elaborate upon this by pointing out that other views of Feng-shui - although poorly explored and/or considered as confusing/obscure replies from childishly ignorant agents or in other passages from money grabbing geomancers (see pages 35 & 44) - are not unavailable to Eitel. But it is that these views, which are simultaneously formative of the understanding of Feng-shui, are substituted in a translation and undergo a racialised evaluation between “rudimentary character”/European masculinity and ancient formulae/objective technology where the West becomes a privileged adjudicator. Therefore, it is not only that the design proposal is already surrounded by political and religious

differences, but also that the genealogy of Feng-shui and its understanding lies *too* with a Eurocentric tradition of European science and Christian expansionism. Exoticism has always been a domestic affair.

Thirdly, the line that is inscribed between the Chinese community and the “we”, or the “aspect” and its other, is far from being unified or continuous as if stretched between two homogeneous areas or groups. The design of the pagoda (and governmental function) is such that there are transgressions, borrowings and imitations that seem to proceed from a context that reinterprets the sculpture in regards to the conditions of the public arena. The suggestion of “harmonising” is one exemplary angle that can be taken here. This is not a static or pure term that can be read in and of itself as a Feng-shui principle fallen from the sky fully formed. Rather it becomes one of extension and proliferation to other relations in which it is calibrated. (Hence, one finds that a Portuguese stone is imported for the stone benches, kerbs and copings on the grounds that it provides a “harmonising” match for the light and dark flecks of the pagoda’s granite). Still, it is not that the pagoda’s sense of harmony offers a definitive final point from which all-else pivots. It is that the sculpture always and already becomes worked upon by different, but not abstracted, geographies and temporalities in its design. For example, on one hand almost as if to recognise specific relations of labour, the small metal plaque attached to the front of the pagoda tells us: “The pagoda ... was quarried and crafted by hand in Fujian province, China using traditional methods”. Yet on the other, as local government planners concede elsewhere, the selection procedure for these very materials involves the precursor of, and revision and alteration with respect to, an urban setting:

“Materials for the pagoda were offered by PCC via his agent in Hong Kong. The most suitable were selected on the basis of colour,

durability, and vitrification. These five sample [sic] were tested to destruction in the former Birmingham Industrial Research Laboratories and the stone chosen was determined to have the best performance characteristics given the ultimate location of the structure (namely, the pollution of exhausts, sulphur and carbon monoxides, etc, and acid rain. The latter is not problematic as to [the] area in China from which the stone originates (Fujian Province) is subject to similar if not worse ranges of temperature).

The material also tied into the existing stone surround and around the Hebe Water Feature (an existing landmark sculpture).

All the other complements were chosen with close matches of texture, colour and natural finishes to further enhance the style of a Chinese styled garden given that the area is pedestrianised and also acts as a collection point in emergencies!

Stone benches and artefacts were included as further finishing touches. Access for emergency vehicles, sweeping vehicles and lighting maintenance etc necessitated the formation of a new vehicular access, and controlled the arrangement to a certain degree as did the point loading requirements over the decking.” (From correspondence with the Contract Administrator, Birmingham City Council, June 1998)

Re-markings, grafts and connections to localised practicalities offer a means to question the boundary lines of a plural arrangement of the multicultural. These features suspend or, at least, complicate the naïve suggestion that compresses the artwork to a definitive referent or to a final signified. They show that the redevelopment is something like a narrative montage that becomes interwoven with an interaction between different traditions, knowledges, places and labours, which in turn renders absolutist and idiomatic overtones as a closure that under privileges the role and possibilities of other historical and geographical contingencies. For example, it could be pointed out that the actual quarrying and crafting with “traditional methods” is preceded by the work in the Birmingham Industrial Research Laboratories together with the requirement of matching the Hebe water feature¹¹ and followed by additional masonry work in the United Kingdom, to demonstrate an overlapping, contingent spatiality of the pagoda’s construction (Figure 5.3). Nevertheless, I would maintain that although an affirmation of these encounters may provide an irreducible notion of multiculturalism, it is important not to label the

Figure 5.3.



Watering the gardens of the Holloway Circus Redevelopment, Birmingham.

pagoda as open to a random availability without considering how it becomes crosscut with resistant comprehensions that mediate its consistency and coherence. As discussed previously, one such resistance to the pagoda's potential openness is shaped by the structural constraint of presence, or at least, how presence is textually received. Another becomes more apparent if the reader sketches out the very location of the redevelopment and marks some of its motifs of functionality and order.

B) *Function*. Even before the PCC encountered the Iron: Man¹², a number of gestures had been made to regenerate the Holloway Circus and its immediate surroundings. If we read through some of these precursors carefully, it is possible to sketch an outline of the contextual arena upon which the construction of the pagoda takes place and further comment on the revaluation of cultural difference in Birmingham. At the outset it is worth noting that whilst these gestures draw upon the architectural form to deliver certain functions – which as Eco (1997) tells us limits and codifies the operational possibilities of architecture according to a syntax - these (too) cannot be compressed into a linear, homogeneous narrative. The differences that I am getting at can be ascertained through elaborating upon some contradictory propositions regarding the purpose of the City's public space. These arise in connection to the package of amendments around the Queensway, which also include the tiling of the road underpass below the Holloway Circus, the lowering of a subway on Smallbrook Queensway, the lining of the adjacent Lower Hurst Street with 70 trees, and the removal of a 10ft high and 40ft long brick wall down Hill Street¹³. For instance, in some places these projects denote a gift. The City Centre Manager along with the City's Planning Committee generously associates the developments with "giving the city centre back to the people" (cited in Sunday Mercury, May 31st 1992; also see The Birmingham Post, April 4th 1992). Although in others, these schemes are wrapped up

with functions that play upon a formulation of attracting property investment with a publicly funded urban infrastructure. The first and unsuccessful bid for £60,000 of European funds to build a Chinese Heavens Gateway¹⁴ calculates:

“This scheme will be a ‘gateway’ into the whole Chinese Quarter and will draw tourists and visitors from the City Centre Core into the Quarter.

...

This scheme will make the City Centre a more attractive place and build upon an improving environmental infrastructure. This will help to retain existing private sector investment and through an improved ‘public realm’ and built environment create the circumstances in which the private sector are likely to bring forward new investment in commercial, retail, leisure and housing schemes.

Project estimated could over the next 5-7 years help to stimulate up to £75million of private sector investment in the locality creating up to 800 full-time equivalent jobs in the local economy.” (Application to the Birmingham Integrated Operational Programme for a Chinese Gate, Smallbrook Queensway, 1994)

The discontinuities between economy and gift are to be discussed subsequently, but for now it would seem that the organisation of the scheme as a “gateway” (also see CMQ, 1996, 26-28) would implicitly require the redevelopment to be considered as located amongst and accessed by others. In one respect, this might include a relationship with the *City Centre Design Strategy*, which identifies the Smallbrook Queensway/Suffolk Street corner as in need of “softening” and “enhancement to create an attractive and memorable townscape” (Tibbalds *et al.* 1990, 19-21). In another, it might include a continuity with the *Birmingham Unitary Development Plan*¹⁵, which claims that “there is a direct relationship between environmental quality and levels of economic activity” and, in addition, goes on to define “attractive” both “in terms of the physical environment” and “in the magnetic sense”, in terms of inducing capital investment” (Birmingham City Council, 1993, 10). However, whilst such a governmental lexicon of business tourism and property investment underlines that the signature of the prominent Chinese citizen co-exists with the entrepreneurial

countersignature of the state, this institutionalised marriage is never simply present in and of itself. What I am alluding to is a constitutive outside of the idealised “intention” (ibid.) of public art as an element supportive of a boosterist agenda (which in itself relates the present features of the aesthetics to the alterity of an idealised future of business capital). This perhaps would appear to involve the uncertainty of private sector commitment to urban regeneration¹⁶ together with the effective re-positioning of the appealing face of post-war reconstruction¹⁷ as “polluted”, “claustrophobic” as well as “visually dull and intimidating” (Birmingham City Council, 1988; Public Art Commissions Agency, 1989). It would certainly include the part-time, low paid, yet rarely mentioned workforce of this “cultural programme” (see Miles, 1997, 118). But difference also conveys the gaps surrounding the institutionalised point of evaluation and a margin to the logic of governmental/private sector orthodoxy. I feel it is necessary to be careful not to announce the position of the marginal other as a definitive entity or being. Marginalia exceeds a narrative as privileged as this. Still, to provide such a claim with some empirical weight and to affirm some unconfirmed presences in the city, one might once again consider the stone benches surrounding the pagoda and the way that these are set to accommodate “the casual sitter” whilst through their hardness and shortness – in comparison to the previous wooden slatted seats – are able to discourage “the long term visitor to the site (i.e. drunks)”¹⁸ (Letter from the Head of Landscape Development to the Chairman of Residents Association of Clydesdale Tower, December 23rd 1997). Alternatively, one might consider the wire mesh cove inserts within the portals of the pagoda to deter “those choosing to climb the structure” (ibid.). Either way it seems that in and around the impetus towards idealising the format of the redevelopment lie some supposedly ‘unruly’ others that depart from and threaten the formality of the artwork

as an apt project that “stimulates” capital. And furthermore that the act of “giving the city back to the people” together with the process of “harmonising” (also) may seek to disengage or at least displace certain margins within the city¹⁹ (also see Loftman & Nevin, 1996a), thus revealing certain limits to multiculturalism as an embracing entity. Although, and in addition, what is worth flagging is that the very figuration of the redevelopment takes its shape (e.g. the mesh coves, anti-graffiti coating) in relation to the very misdemeanours it resists. The governmental claims to the pagoda already mark both the order and potential challenges to them.

In sum, what I have been trying to exemplify is a type of *co-existence* in the design and function of the pagoda and, by doing so, suggest that the redevelopment is situated along resistant and translated lines of inscription. The co-existence I refer to is one that disrupts a suggestion that there is an original moment of enunciation coming from a univocal voice or an “aspect” of multiculturalism in its immanence. It illustrates that such an originary is nothing but a “structural law”, which exorcises and effaces other narratives that are constitutive of the text (Derrida, 1981a). Some of the most general of these (logocentric) laws might be classified as the oppositions between speech/writing, neutrality/dissidence, presence/play and Western modernity/Chinese character. Although I would stress that these dichotomies are not placed in some straightforward distribution between one and the other. Rather they supplement each other in ways where we catch dissidence within a mark of neutrality, writing within speech, past and future elements with a permeated presence, and an intertwined encounter between the “we” and community. Therefore, to recall these woven threads is a reminder that differences touch; they communicate, often violently, and they appropriate each other in and around the emblem of the pagoda in its solidity. But perhaps in addition, if the play of difference involves a crossing of

motifs, traditions and contexts, then the reminder is also one that provokes a reweaving that exceeds an essential impetus for the use of public space (Derrida, 1997; Eco, 1997; Tschumi, 1996). Chance encounters with the pagoda will always offer opportunities for transformation and substitution.

The pagoda as gift

“Gift-giving has the virtue of a surpassing of the subject who gives, but in exchange for the object given, the subject appropriates the surpassing: he regards his virtue, that which he had the capacity for, as an asset, as a *power* that he now possesses. He enriches himself with a contempt for riches, and what he proves to be miserly of is in fact his generosity”. (Bataille, 1997, 203, emphasis in original)

By now I have hoped to make it clear that the pagoda is entangled in a play incorporating past, present and future elements as well as to specific communications that, whilst seeking to render the pagoda reducible to evaluations of capital and presence, demonstrate that it can be available to re-inscriptions. By way of moving towards an exploratory conclusion, one such entanglement that I now wish to return to and reflect upon is the contribution and obligation of the PCC to the urban regeneration process. In particular, my intention is to focus on the offering of a pagoda as a gift and note how such a gift fits into a restricted rationale of giving that delineates some of the conditions of the city’s hospitality. As a sideline, I also examine what, if anything, does a PCC receive from gift giving and how giving is paradoxical under the constraint of presence. This will involve a brief excursion through some understandings of the constitution of the gift with a degree of focus on the respective works by Jacques Derrida (1992b) and Marcel Mauss (1990) on *Given Time* and *The Gift*.

As I have shown above, one of the focuses of the pagoda is to attract property investment and business tourism through making the Holloway Circus aesthetically

engaging and culturally fertile. In this manner the pagoda and its symbolism connotes an economic, utilitarian function that seeks a *return* on a public/private sector investment. Although, as I illustrate below, a notion of return is paradoxical to gift giving, what we find is that the prominent citizen becomes caught in an ambiguity in the response to the pagoda as gift. For on one take, he tell us that there are no conditions to the gift, especially one from a guest, and moreover that the gift does not entail receiving anything back:

WFC: I did read a few newspaper letters which were submitted to the Evening Post, Evening Mail sorry, and they did suggest that they re-name it [Holloway Circus] PCC place or something.

PCC: I wouldn't, you see put it this way, we Oriental people, we are guests in this country, we choose to come. *My generation, your father generation, it's not like you and my children, you were born here. We choose to come. Actually not matter how long we live, we still a guest. All right? So we have to keep our mouths shut, be polite.* I can't give you a gift in your sitting room and rename it, the sitting room.

WFC: But, how would you feel about the City Council renaming it? It wouldn't be up to you say ...

PCC: No, no, no. That would set up a very bad precedent. If somebody want the Bull-Ring to rename, John Smith, he donates some money John Smith. *It means to say my intention was insincere, for publicity. All right? If I got any requests, any thing, it wasn't my intention to give that thing, not sincere. I want to show it's sincere, nothing to do with propaganda, PR, everything as a gift, I'm not asking for anything back.* Why should I? We are guests here, we are happy to be here and to live and make a living that's it. So we not going to request anything otherwise, you know, it's not prospect, otherwise Marks & Spencer have got more money than I have, they probably donate another thing, much bigger and call it Marks and Spencer Square [laughing]. *So we got no conditions.*

If we are to affirm the prominent Chinese citizen's *intention*, we could understand the gift as an object departing from the giver. There is no "insincere" reconstitution from giving as the PCC desires to break the circle of an economic and/or symbolic return along what might be described as a gift event where he silently and politely intends to give the pagoda to some one other. However, to pose such an event is not such a simple logic. The *intention to give* supposes a constituted subject. It denotes a cogito

or a speaking subject that is aware of the sincere or insincere meaning of giving and, indeed, it is this very self-awareness of giving that effaces the gift²⁰. What I am skipping over here is Derrida's (1992b) deconstruction of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* and Charles Baudelaire's *Counterfeit Money*. Simplifying to the extreme, Derrida suggests that the pre-comprehension of what makes the gift possible (i.e. the three structural elements of a "giver" or donor, of "something" to the "receiver") is made an impossibility if it encounters a sense of exchange, reward or debt. So, for example, say the pagoda is a gift from the Chinese community to the City of Birmingham then for it to hold its possibility/sincerity there cannot be any reciprocity, such as "propaganda" or "PR" or any form of merit, from the City to the community who donates. If the reader were to encounter such a compensation - whether conscious or unconscious or in the near or distant future - then this would erase the gift's value and depart from a conception of gift to one of exchange. Or to put this into "everyday" terms, we would be left in a situation akin to drinking rounds in a bar where each time a part of the round is generously completed then the credit/debt/obligation of the initial rounds are nullified. Thus, it would perhaps appear that for the act of giving to uphold the value of a gift it must be as an act that interrupts and exceeds the circle of an economy by disseminating itself without expecting a counter-gift. Or in short, the gift must be aneconomic. However, what Derrida proposes is that the "intention" and/or acknowledgement of the gift by the receiver, which is implicit in the pre-comprehension of the gift, compromises the maintenance of the gift. For, it is a simple intention to give that suffices to efface the gift's qualities by providing an immediate recognition of a symbolic equivalent of giving to the donor even before it is given. Derrida (also see Fox, 1995) puts it this way:

"The symbolic opens and constitutes the order of exchange and of debt, the law or the order of circulation in which the gift gets annulled.

It suffices therefore for the other to *perceive the gift* ... but to perceive its nature of gift, the meaning or intention, the *intentional meaning* of the gift, in order for this simple *recognition* of the gift as gift, as such, to annul the gift as gift even before *recognition* becomes *gratitude*. The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it.” (Derrida, 1992b, 13-14, emphasis in original).

Announcing or recognising the pagoda as a gift becomes a gratification to the giver and transforms the gift into a simulacrum. It is as if the “intention” is enough to annul the gift. It is as if giving is let down even if the donor wants thanks or not; and it is as if the PCC can never quite produce a gift without receiving, at least, some acclaim that publicly celebrates the *presence* of his generosity, “philanthropy” and innovation²¹. Indeed, if I were to continue to mark the PCC’s presence as an absolute presence, I could go as far to argue that a prestation of giving is gathered on the part of the donor himself. For in a self-approving comment he narcissistically claims an economically charged and racially absolutist *difference between giving and taking*, thereby returning a self-recognition to a particular “we” from the gift that is given away:

PCC: ... The Chinese people, we Chinese people come here, we not take more than we give in, we very well balanced. You can say some races take more than they give in. But we Chinese probably some changes, we give more, a little bit more than we take. Got it? So that something, always remember we are self-reliant. We always leave some change behind. We Chinese contribute to society, taking out, we always the bottom line still in black. There are a lot of communities and a lot of races that probably take more than they contribute. Am I right?

WFC: I’m not sure.

...

PCC: So I always tell my children that. In life you always contribute more than you take. Maybe one percent. But you find a lot of people, a lot of races, immigrants, they probably take more than they contribute in. But the Chinese always, anywhere we go, we contribute a little bit more, not a big portion more, than we take out. Then you can assume that one, you can quote it, I said that, anywhere in the world.

Somewhat reiterating the ideals of a “model minority” (see Loo, 1991; Okihiro, 1994) and, in particular, its attachments to stories of financial success and non-dependence, it seems that for the PCC, Chinese people contribute more than other immigrants do. In an earlier passage, the PCC told me of the low numbers of Chinese people in “unemployment queues”, which possibly indicates the sort of things taken as well as an ascetic desire to put minorities to work. Nevertheless what the quotation illustrates with respect to the gift, is that the gift cannot take place by identifying a subject - whether a donor, donee or a model minority - otherwise there is constitutive retention or auto-recognition that nullifies the gift. Or to put it in other words, the identification of a subject is one of circularity where the subject re-appropriates itself from a gift event to confer his own presence, and that this circularity is discontinuous with giving. It would seem, therefore, that in order to successfully give a gift, there is a need to consider it “before any relation to the subject, before any conscious or unconscious relation to self of the subject” (Derrida, 1992b, 24). I shall draw this assertion out below. But, before I do so, what I now wish to show is that, whilst such a (self)celebration of the PCC and the “intention” may nullify the gift, the gift encounters another stumbling block in the way that it becomes situated amongst a discourse of hospitality. One could begin to mark an outline of the formation of such a hospitality from the way the pagoda is to be given politely and with a “shut” mouth. Although I would suggest that a resonance of hospitality, or at least a version of it, reverberates through some passages taken from the local media in which the appearance of the pagoda as gift becomes evoked as a gesture of gratitude:

“The 40ft building was a gesture of thanks to Birmingham from businessman PCC who moved to the city from Hong Kong 39 years ago. He announced his wish to donate a traditional Chinese pagoda to the city of his adoption in 1998.” (Birmingham Evening Mail, April 21st 1998)

“Supermarket tycoon PCC who moved to the city from Hong Kong 35 years ago, wants to make a gesture to the people of Birmingham for having helped him and his family to prosper in Britain.

There is little doubt that the city council will agree to his proposal, which is a gift of the aforementioned pagoda, 40ft high after assembly here from sections made in China.

Unlike *that* statue in Centenary Square, it will cost Birmingham council tax payers no more than the price of its installation ... We should be happy to accept it in the spirit in which it is offered.” (Evening Mail Comment, Birmingham Evening Mail, July 22nd 1994, emphasis in original).

If the gift is a simulacrum, what is at stake in its impossibility is the way the appearance of the gift is repeatedly situated in and amongst other texts and manages to evoke something antithetical. For instance, taking the above reports, I read the “gesture of thanks” that marks the pagoda as a gift as also discontinuous with a donation/gift because the former seeks to offer something in return for a home and help in Britain. In this way, or at least in the way of a gift of no return and obligation, the PCC has never given a gift to the city. Rather, he politely and thankfully repays what we might identify as a reluctantly offered gift of hospitality that is deferred, but not forgotten, from the scene of the pagoda as “gift”. Therefore, if this reader were to borrow from the authoritative Rousseauist language used by Mauss (1990), the pagoda could be described in the “spirit” of a “counter-service” or “counter-gift” caught within a system that eventually exchanges in respect to a right to abode. But what such a structuralist description would seem to imply is that a migrant has some form of debt to settle for their stay. The obligations/debt of settlement are in need of further exploration and could be elicited through examining the contemporary narratives of asylum, and in particular how asylum seekers are inconsistently represented as burdensome economic migrants to the public purse²². Yet, as a preliminary, it is possible to suggest that these very notions of citizenship connect to, and become continuous with, the deployment of a “model minority” and the migrant’s

location in, what Parker (2000) calls, a discourse of “cultural contribution”. For, when placed upon identifiable subjects, a debt of hospitality signals the potential of repayments through the idealisation of a contributive, servile and grateful minority as an antithesis to an indebted, unruly migrant. On one level, the furore in the local and national media surrounding the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act of 1990, perhaps, typifies, or at least traces, both of these mutually dependent polarities. Take, for example, two statements that defend “refugee” status on account of untapped capital (also see Mitchell, 1997):

“While arguments rage over whether 50,000 plus Hong Kong Chinese should be let into Britain before the colony’s 1997 hand-over to Communist China, Mr Sham believes that Birmingham may be missing out on a prime opportunity.

Far from being a burden, the evidence suggests that the Hong Kong refugees would represent a net gain to our economy and to the community, with more businesses and more jobs created.” (Sunday Mercury, April 10th 1996)

“They are not poor refugees. They are nearly all professional, well-educated people, many of them with capital to put into starting businesses. They could be an asset to the city” (The leader of Birmingham Chinese Association cited in the Birmingham Post, June 19th 1991).

Alternatively and on another more recent register, take Robin Cook’s declaration on “chicken tikka multiculturalism”:

“Pessimism is a very British trait, but fears for the future of our national identity are misplaced.

The ethnic diversity of Britain is not a burden. It is an immense asset that contributes to our cultural and economic vitality.

National identity cannot be based on race and ethnicity but must be based on shared ideals and aspirations – some of the most successful countries in the world, like the United States and Canada, are immigrant societies.

Creating an open and inclusive society that welcomes incomers is a condition of economic success in the modern world.

And it isn’t just our economy that has been enriched by the arrival of new communities. Our lifestyles and cultural horizons have also been broadened.” (Robin Cook, April 20th 2001).

Some of the contemporary claims of hospitality not only outline “a condition of economic success”, but they also refer to some prevalent conditions of settlement that connect immigration and multiculturalism. More particularly, these claims inscribe multiculturalism with notions of a diasporic economy and either seek to save these cultural opportunities and assets through governmental provision (see Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2002) or celebrate cultural diversity as such (also see Henry & Passmore, 1999; Henry et al. 2000). These are both well-intended claims. However, whilst I would concede that economic success stories produce some of the most stern defences on immigration, I would also suggest that such conjectures sit too easily amongst a discourse that reduces or equates a right to the country/city with the exchange for capital contributions and cultural investments. To be clear, the above defences of immigration are played out on certain, differentiating terms of class orientated engagement that juxtapose the figment of financial and aesthetic assets (also see Birmingham Post, February 15th 1994) against the figure of a “poor”, burdensome refugee. In this split sense, migrants becomes situated and acknowledged as betwixt potentialities: either fulfilling or not fulfilling the conditions of settlement, whilst the host acts as adjudicator so defining hospitality as a project orientated towards their self-benefit. This is a narrow politico-ethical formation that whilst defining hospitality, also prohibits and perverts hospitality as a gift to the other, who here may be defined as either a subaltern located outside the regime of state/private sector orthodoxy or as an agent with “a well-founded fear of persecution”. For me, there seems to be a danger in losing sight of these differences in the face of multiculturalism, which is posed as a question that continually needs to be satisfied throughout the generations with a particular form of contributory conduct. On this temporality, the PCC is once again informative:

WFC: So what do you think are the successes of the Chinese community in Birmingham?

PCC: Put it this way, I wouldn't say the Chinese here are success, but I can confirm that they are not fail. Between not fail and success, still some difference. Alright, so so what I said earlier, you don't see a lot of Chinese, or Chinese on the dole or on the unemployment queue, maybe one or two occasionally. You don't see Chinese laying about, mugging people or hanging about, that's not fail. We can take care of ourselves. But come to success, I think we still got some distance to go, all depend on the next generation, like you where we go with. We only get to dig the drains and build the foundations, the remaining house, your generation have to do that [laughing]. Is that right?

WFC: So what do you think still needs to be done then? You've built the foundations what needs to be built now?

PCC: For your generation, for my children's generation you should study harder. And more entrepreneurs at a wider angle, look alike, not just saying "I'm okay, I earn 25,000, 50,000, have a car, a family is okay." That only okay for your family, but you have to contribute a bit of you know, on top of that. I make a little bit, always a couple of yards in front of your next guy.

The conditions of settlement do not only concern the immigrant, but also those multicultural identities that are present. For the PCC with reference to the British Chinese population, there appears a lingering sense where neither the pagoda, nor philanthropy, can finally settle the debts or the obligations that are put to them as, instead, there is an intergenerational requirement to show gratitude. In this light, there is perhaps a need to inaugurate a new relationship and sense of belonging if Birmingham is to become multicultural.

Conclusion

In a critique, John O'Neill (1999, 131) conflates Derrida's gift with the "free gift" of "market theorists" – a gift that counters a sociological tradition of the gift that is "voluntary yet obligatory" – and he even goes onto suggest that *Given Time* provides these "ideologists ... with a philosophical/literary pedigree". However, although it is impossible to disagree with O'Neill that Derrida's work is open to appropriations, what O'Neill conveniently omits from his reading is the de-linearity of deconstructive

practices and, in particular, the continual insistence in *Given Time* that the gift must break its unity to enable a gift. What this would suggest for the gift, is that if the gift is to be possible then it “will always be without a border” (Derrida, 1992b, 91) that could constrain it to a calculation or, for example, limit it to an identifiable presence that could profit from the gift. Therefore, like Mauss’s and Bataille’s (1997) conception of gift giving²³, such an anti-humanist proposal is one that looks towards the excessive and the measureless as a means to affirm giving from a more restricted economic rationale. Moreover and as a supplement, the gift that Derrida proposes is one without reciprocation as it insists upon the dissemination of the gift beyond the confines of an accredited donor and addressee preconceived in an “intention to give”. Whilst *Given Time* discusses the motifs of *Counterfeit Money* and how the text engenders a series of others that overrun the right of the author (i.e. Baudelaire or Derrida) as a determinable authority, with respect to Birmingham, I would suggest that if a gift is to be given then there is a need to refigure the contingent relationship between the circle of governmental/private sector orthodoxy and its outside. This would involve a consideration of the margins that co-exist in the city and even include breaching the limits of hospitality so that a gift is given to the other of multicultural prominence and citizenry. Such a gift is both necessary and possible. Indeed, the PCC discusses an aneconomic gift as a difference to the gift of the pagoda:

WFC: I’ve done some research on the pagoda and found some newspaper reports, can I just ask you what you think of these?

PCC: I’ve seen them before. Put it this way, like all these things, is this, this is a democratic society, it’s nice to see people’s opinions. But I think they’re, I wouldn’t say they are silly, I don’t agree with them. Some of the things, so many people live on the street, alright, well, if I didn’t give the pagoda, I give the money on the street only last one week isn’t it? It doesn’t help. And [reading] so that I think that’s okay, I particular disagree with the guy who saying it’s a waste of money, so many people, err, homeless. Homeless it’s up to the government to pay, we pay 30-40% tax.

Of course, and not discontinuous to the above, the PCC also discusses the return of the gift to a particular presence, that is, his own. This marks the impossibility of the gift and it demands a logic that permits the reader to look beyond presence, whether demarcated as a signified of an absolutist community or a homogeneous ethnicity or a privileged citizen. The logic I have been seeking to pursue throughout my thesis is precisely this. On the signifying practices of presence I have, to paraphrase Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 166), sought to suggest that the positioning of any such unity becomes nothing other than the first act of a recognition of the plurality of social relations which undermine the coherence of a claim to absoluteness. In particular, by taking a closer look at a city philanthropist I have suggested that the signifying practices that position him, those that allow him to stake a sizeable claim in the public realm, also mark intersections, differences and conjunctures, which outline the existence of others that are constitutive of the pagoda. Amongst many, these others mark the afterlife of the British colonial project. They demonstrate the contribution of other labours and other dissenting voices that disrupt an essentialised politics. They show that the pagoda is open to competing narratives and that it can be appropriated under the guise of multicultural benevolence or indeed others that may be excluded from its narrative. For me, the gift of multiculturalism has to acknowledge these co-existences if it is to break the circle of re-appropriation. The gift of the pagoda if it is to be a given has to be disseminated.

¹ I use the phrase “prominent Chinese citizen” to offer anonymity. The phrase itself is lifted from a planning application for the pagoda, which is to be discussed in this particular chapter (see page 198).

² The Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Sue Anderson, and the former Chair of the Planning & Architecture Committee, Stewart Stacey.

³ Including the Chinese Ambassador, Ma Zhengang, representatives from the Planning & Architecture Department, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Chinese Society, Chinese Womens Association, the Bank of China, the Bank of East Asia and the Birmingham Chinese School. Also note the absence of representatives from Birmingham Chinese Community Centre and Birmingham Chinese Youth Centre who were not formally invited.

⁴ J Murphy & Sons Ltd.

⁵ Including Sing Tao newspaper, Wen Wei Po newspaper, Chinese Channel Limited, Chinese News & Entertainment, BBC Midlands Today and Live TV.

⁶ Leafing through some definitions in Chinese-English dictionaries, the signifier of *taa*, or *t'a* (the pinyin sound for "pagoda" - depending on which dictionary is used) is equated with a "tower; pagoda; spire" (New Chinese-English Dictionary, 1930, 326). In Lin Yutang's Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage (1972, 199), *taa* signifies "Pagoda: Buddhist pagoda; lighthouse; cobwebs and dirt under ceiling".

⁷ Another 'pagoda' in Birmingham also shares this structural constraint. The three-ton pagoda canopy above the Cathay Street entrance of the Arcadian Shopping Centre according to the Birmingham Evening Mail (April 8th 2001) "has specially glazed green roofing tiles imported from China to add to its authenticity".

⁸ The outlay for the Pagoda to the PCC, is reported to be between £90,000 to £120,000. According to official estimates, for a similar sculpture to be built in the UK it would have cost "at least £1.2million due to the labour cost differentials to those in China" (from an interview with a City planner).

⁹ I once again take a cue from the work of Derrida (cited in Smith, 2000, 129): "[T]he signature is not to be confused either with the name of the author, with the patronym of the author, or with the type of work, for it is nothing other than the event of the work in itself, inasmuch as it attests in a certain way ... the fact that someone did that, and that's what it remains. Nevertheless, and here the entire politicoinstitutional problem is involved, it cannot be countersigned, that is to say, attested to as signature, unless there is an institutional space in which it can be received, legitimized, and so on. There needs to be a social 'community' that says this thing has been done - we don't even know by whom, we don't know what it means - however, we are going to put it in a museum or in some archive; we are going to consider it a work of art".

¹⁰ The Scottish botanist, Robert Fortune of the Royal Horticultural Society who travelled to China a year after the end of the Opium Wars, traces the changing mood of British views of China (see Pagani, 1998). He argues that China is a "half-civilised state" that is "retrograding than advancing" and moreover that the celebration of China and especially its commodities are given too much credit: "We were in the position of little children who gaze with admiration and wonder at a penny peep -show in a fair or market-place at home. We looked with magnifying eyes on everything Chinese' and fancied, for the time at least, that what we saw was certainly real. But the same children who look with wonder upon the scenes of Trafalgar and Waterloo, when the curtain falls, and their penny worth of sights has passed by, find that, instead of being amongst those striking scene which have just passed in review before their eyes, they are only, after all, in the market -place of their native town. So it is with 'children of a larger growth'. This mystery served the purpose of the Chinese so long as it lasted; and although we perhaps did not give them credit for all to which they pretended, at least we gave them much more than they really deserved". (Fortune, 1979 orig. 1847, 4)

¹¹ The Hebe water feature, sculpted by RJ Thomas and modelled on the London dancer K. Williams by the designer L.A Howles, was a 170cm long sculpture erected in 1967 by the Public Works Committee to commemorate the start of the Inner Ring Road scheme (see Noszlopy, 1998). It is named so after a local newspaper poll elected to call it after the daughter of the God Zeus and Hera, and the wife of Hercules (Birmingham Voice, September 27th 2000). Stolen in September 2000, the sculpture is to be remoulded and moved "to a more prominent location on the piazza outside the Birmingham Hippodrome" (Birmingham Evening Mail, March 31st 2001).

¹² Commissioned through the Public Art Commissions Agency in Birmingham by the Trustees Savings Bank, the Iron: Man was sculpted by Antony Gormley to form a part of the landscaping of Victoria Square and to mark the relocation of the TSB from London to Birmingham. It was officially opened in 1993.

¹³ See Birmingham Post, June 21st, 1994.

¹⁴ This bid was a part of the Birmingham Integrated Operational Programme (known as Birmingham Solihull Operational Programme 1994- 1996 and the Birmingham Integrated Development Programme 1988-1992) which solicited both European Social Funds and European Regional Development Funds. It followed two similar and unsuccessful bids to the Urban Programme in 1991 and 1993. The successful bid for the Holloway Circus Redevelopment came as a part of the Birmingham Tourist Project under the West Midlands Objective 2 Programme. This was wrapped up with four street improvement schemes: "Broad Street Approaches, Digbeth Approaches, Oozells Street School Turn and the Holloway Circus Improvements" and was accepted in 1996.

¹⁵ Other reports of note include the "Environmental Improvements Birmingham Strategy" (1987) and "The Current State of the City" (1989).

¹⁶ Despite such claims, the extent of private sector support for the restructuring of the Queensway was uncertain. In 1994, the Council came to the conclusion that “Funding was not available” to build a Chinese Gateway feature at the mouth of Hurst Street (see Birmingham Evening Mail, February 18th 1994; Birmingham Post February 19th 1994) and this was attributed to the unwillingness of “local Chinese businesses” to match public funding. Later, the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts also were said to have adopted a “purist view” and said that they were not willing to invest in the Pagoda scheme. This threw the feasibility of the project into jeopardy. Still, in many respects the redevelopment of the Holloway Circus was to follow this boosterist functionality for the core funding was finally won as an integral part of a City- wide Tourist Project, which levied £1.5million of the European purse to address the state of Birmingham’s roads.

¹⁷ In order to boost the economy in the 1960’s, the city leaders decided to begin the construction of a more “appealing physical face to the world” (Duffy, 1995, 77). Under the influence of Sir Herbert Manzoni, the City Engineer of post- war Birmingham, Birmingham embarked upon a series of modernist projects which reflected the vision of Birmingham as “the first, the biggest and the best” (Fretter, 1993, 166). Following its traditional as a “motor city”, Birmingham constructed two ring roads, the Bull-Ring as well as a series of high rise tower blocks, under the premise that these developments would improve living conditions and encourage inward investment (Cherry, 1994). However from the late 1980’s a significant number of commentators criticised what were called the “graph paper designs of the 1960’s and 1970’s” (see chapter 2). The Queensway was said to be “humiliating for pedestrians” and planners claimed it had restricted the expansion of the City Centre into the inner city (see Highbury Initiative, 1988, 27 and The Birmingham Post, April 19th 1992). They instead proposed that Birmingham should refurbish itself with “spaces ... of occasion”, “grandeur”, “discovery and anonymity” or in more sterile language with “Areas of Character”.

¹⁸ Elsewhere called “tramps” by the Planning Co- ordinator. Despite these security features, which later included CCTV, three of the five concrete “Foo Dogs” statues, which were said to be the “spiritual guard dogs intended to protect the Pagoda from evil”, were stolen (see Birmingham Evening Mail, October 1999). In addition, a granite “gateway symbol” which had been planned for the paved area in front of the vehicular access had also been stolen in 1997 prior to being laid.

¹⁹ Wardhaugh (1996) in her ethnographic research in Manchester’s Chinatown describes another example of the displacement of the homeless. The difference, however, is of a “tacit agreement between street homeless and business people concerning spatial arrangements. The understanding was that food, water and sleeping spaces would willingly be provided if the street homeless presence was confined to marginal back -alleyways, rather than being in evidence at the frontages of the shops and restaurants that constitute the prime space of Chinatown” (Wardhaugh, 1996, 712).

²⁰ The conception of the gift Derrida strategically maintains here is a notion of the gift without obligation. This goes against the grain of a Maussian understandings of the gift, which seeks to demonstrate the existence of fundamentally different modes of societal organisation from a Western model of economic exchange by highlighting societies that offer gifts in a complex system of obligation, mutuality and emotional investment (Mauss, 1990; also see Clarke, forthcoming).

²¹ See for example: the Birmingham Evening Mail July 21st 1994, Birmingham Evening Mail July 22nd 1994, Birmingham Evening Mail July 23rd 1994, Birmingham Evening Mail July 29th 1994, Birmingham Evening Mail June 6th 1998, Birmingham Post July 22nd 1994, Midlands Today June 17th 1998 and Birmingham Live News 17th June 1998.

²² See The Birmingham Post, July 6th 2001; The Birmingham Post, June 19th 2001; icBirmingham, February 14th 2001; icBirmingham, April 16th 2001.

²³ I am referring to Bataille (1997, 189) notion of expenditure without return as exemplified by the sun: “[Solar] energy is the source of life’s exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving.”

CONCLUSION

Recently, Birmingham has sought to re-imagine itself as a cosmopolitan city. For instance, the city's once maligned population has been re-figured as "cosmopolis" (Bhattacharyya, 2000, 171), the city's policy makers have conceded that the "defining characteristic" of Birmingham is its "depth of diversity" (Birmingham City Council, 2001, 12) and the city's politicians have also actively courted and consulted academics seen at the foreground of the cosmopolitan debate. Yet, some questions that this proposed shift and its solicitations perhaps raise include: What sort of cosmopolitan place is being called forward? How deep is the city going to dig to recover the depth of its diversity? Is the introduction of cosmopolitanism in Birmingham's cultural life something new or is it a repetition of certain values? With respect to a discussion on cosmopolitanism, these are questions that cannot be answered in a straightforward manner; cosmopolitanism (paradoxically and purportedly) "escapes positive and definite specification" (Pollock et al. 2000, 577). Still, one way that the plurality of cosmopolitanism might be temporally focused and one way that these questions might be answered is with respect to a consultation document, composed by Jude Bloomfield and Franco Bianchini of Comedia (2002) for the City of Birmingham, entitled *Planning for the Cosmopolitan City*. To tie up some of the ends of this thesis and to point towards some potential extensions of my research, I draw together my conclusions through a reading of the proposals in Bloomfield and Bianchini's article.

The platform for Bloomfield and Bianchini's visualisation of Birmingham as a cosmopolitan city is Leonie Sandercock's *Towards Cosmopolis* (1998). The text summarises the main points of Sandercock's thesis in a succinct manner drawing from it the recognition of "multiple forms of knowledge of marginalized peoples" (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2002,

3). The text also echoes Sandercock's promotion of a "city of memory" and "city of desire". However, Bloomfield and Bianchini's position towards this text is predominately set up as one of critique. In particular, the crux of their argument is aimed at Sandercock's supposed failure to conceptualise "a common public domain with culturally diverse citizens" (ibid. 5) and her privileging of multiple publics. The outcome being, according to Bloomfield and Bianchini, that Sandercock understands multiculturalism as a variety of self-contained cultural worlds and separate publics without intercultural communication or interaction. That Bloomfield and Bianchini's critique is difficult to comprehend, especially once the reader acknowledges that Sandercock's multiple publics repeatedly refers to "new kinds of multi- or cross-cultural literacies" (Sandercock, 1998, 206) and "new hybrid cultures and spaces" (ibid. 219), does not directly concern me here. But what I do want to draw particular attention to for now is that Bloomfield and Bianchini distinguish the way towards cosmopolis through posing two motions. Firstly, they suggest, "[ethnic] segregation can only be overcome with a public sphere which confers equal rights and obligations" (Bloomfield and Bianchini, 2002, 5). Secondly, they reject a notion of community as somehow bounded and untouched. This proposition involves hybridity, dialogue and communication:

"[The interculturalism] approach goes beyond opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences, to the pluralist transformation of public space, civic culture and institutions. So it does not recognise cultural boundaries as fixed but as in state of flux and remaking. An interculturalist approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds. Cities need to develop policies which prioritise funding for projects where different cultures intersect, "contaminate" each other and hybridise. This contrasts with the multiculturalist model, where funding is directed within the well-defined boundaries of recognised cultural communities. In other words, city governments should promote cross-fertilisation across all cultural boundaries, between "majority" and "minorities", "dominant" and "sub" cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, political and economic innovation." (Bloomfield and Bianchini, 2002, 6)

As opposed to adopting “interculturalism” as an “approach” that is in need of promotion or development, I have noted throughout this thesis that an intercultural relationship has long existed between local government and the Chinese community, albeit with different academic registers (see chapters 3 & 4). The connections and their conversations may have been conducted under the strategic pretence that the Chinese community speaks in and of itself as a so-called univocal representative essence. The claim to community may have been based upon an assumption that it has some tight, demarcated boundaries. The assumption may even have been that there is some proper, authentic meaning, but on a closer viewing there have always been unavoidable manifestations of hybridity, contradictions and differences whether advocates of the Chinese community or local government acknowledge them or not. Moreover, I have demonstrated that such forms of inter-relation are a necessary prerequisite for the coming to presence of this community group, or any other, as the recognition of community involves exposure and appellation to an outside. What Hall (1996a, 442) calls in his new ethnicities thesis “the struggle over the politics of representation” is not some univocal moment with respect to Birmingham’s Chinese community. Instead, it actively involves a mutually modifying relationship between an “inside” and an “outside” as well as a crossing of boundaries between “majority” and “minorities”. Furthermore, as I noted in chapter 2, the latter of these relationships equally applies to the construction of the Birmingham Chinese Quarter and has been acknowledged, at least, since 1979 by Margaret Thatcher as a feature of British urbanism. Thatcher’s speech is worth quoting once more to frame Bloomfield and Bianchini’s proposals:

“Some people have felt swamped by immigrants. They’ve seen the whole character of their neighbourhood change. ... Of course people can feel that they are being swamped. Small minorities can be absorbed – *they can be assets to the majority community* – but once a minority in a neighbourhood gets very large, people do feel swamped”. (The Observer, February 25th 1979, cited in Solomos, 1993a, 97, my emphasis)

The points of inter-culturalism that Bloomfield and Bianchini refer to are unavoidable. City governments *do* (not should) work upon and articulate themselves across inter-relationships with different subjects, including community groups and entrepreneurs. For me, there is no moment without such interaction it is just that the structures of these relationships shift between interwoven formations and sometimes they valorise different forms of subjectivity. Perhaps, then, it is less important for policy makers to consider whether there is an existing structure of inter-relationship or not, but instead, as Bloomfield and Bianchini suggest, they should ask if the relationship is of cross-fertilisation and, moreover, ask themselves exactly which subject-positions are being cross-fertilised. The latter of these points become increasingly pertinent once it is recognised that social bodies, such as the Chinese Community Centre and the Chinese Quarter, are hybrids with limits. That is, even though the construction of these bodies might draw upon a multitude of differences and may be appropriated by developers and especially businessmen, their narratives always and already elide subaltern positions that indicate that a hybrid formation finds some difficulty in representing its heterogeneity and fertilising its other. It seems to me, firstly, that “interculturalism” is not sufficient in itself and, secondly, that if local government wishes to adopt “interculturalism” as a way of formulating an urban policy, it must pay attention to the structures of enunciation, the punctuation of the dialogue and the position of the full stops. These are points that are not addressed in *Planning for the Cosmopolitan City* and, as such, are an avenue for further research.

In chapter 2, I noted the dispersal of entrepreneurial understandings of ethnic minorities in the field of urban planning. I demonstrated that at least since the 1980s ethnic minorities have been increasingly seen as a motor for regeneration and discussed as an asset to the city’s development. This is another aspect of Bloomfield and Bianchini’s document

that resonates with Margaret Thatcher notion of ethnic minority groups (also see Blair, 1988; Henry et al. 2002). It is also a feature that has become keenly aligned with the local Chinese identity and is a predominate type of interculturalism that Bloomfield and Bianchini refer to in *Planning for the Cosmopolitan City*. However, unlike Thatcher's claim, Bloomfield and Bianchini accompany the notion of asset with a welcoming to the other. This "welcome", although taken for granted in Bloomfield and Bianchini's text, is in need of exploration:

"How Birmingham responds to demographic and cultural changes will determine whether it becomes a *civitas augescens*. This is a term originally used by Roman jurist Pomponius in the second century AD, and recently revived by philosopher and former Mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari, to refer to a dynamic, adaptive city, in which welcoming "the others" is a source of strength and imagination. Birmingham has begun to see cultural diversity as an asset and opportunity, rather than a problem or threat, and this is a vital shift in mindset". (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2002, 3)

For Bloomfield and Bianchini, there is a need to build upon and tap into these assets. They write that "[the] skills and networks acquired informally by ethnic minority young people need to be linked in Birmingham to more formal training, to turn them to economic advantage in self-employment or micro-businesses" (ibid. 8). They critique another report on "ethnic discrimination" in Birmingham, *Challenges for the Future*, for failing to "engage sufficiently with entrepreneurial ideas, resources and networks in the city, and with the obstacles to capitalising on them fully" (ibid.). They also state that the "Chamber of Commerce and inward investment agencies need to become much more attuned to the opportunities for transnational networking offered by diasporic business communities – particularly links with India and China" (ibid.). In these three cases, it would seem likely that Bloomfield and Bianchini fall in line with Ulf Hannerz's claim that "the cosmopolitan can become a broker, an entrepreneur who makes a profit" (Hannerz, 1990, 248). Nevertheless, what might these profits and assets suggest for Bloomfield and Bianchini's "welcome"? Furthermore, who are the "others" that will be solicited by a cosmopolitan Birmingham?

One feature that the recent theoretical debates on cosmopolitanism make certain is that, although there may be “a willingness to engage with the Other” (ibid. 239), cosmopolitans cannot cover up the highly discerning limits that belie their ideals (Derrida, 2001; Dikeç, 2002; Venn, 2002). For me, it is precisely these limits that must be highlighted if the planning of Birmingham is to recast “a civitas augescens” because these limits signal a tension and a restriction set upon the city’s “welcome”. To do this, it becomes important to move away from suggestions that there has been a shift in mindset from seeing “cultural diversity as an asset and opportunity, rather than a problem or threat” as suggested by Bloomfield and Bianchini (2002, 3). For these type of propositions merely abbreviate the complex ethnocentric history set upon minority groups. Instead, it is worth bearing in mind that there is a much longer trajectory in British planning where particular *differentiated* features of “cultural diversity” have repeatedly been appropriated according to the needs of planners at their points of crisis. So, for example, as I suggested in the second half of chapter 2, like Leibniz’s “Characteristic”, various forms of Chinese identity from Patrick Abercrombie’s Feng shui, Peter Hall’s Nathan Road and Birmingham’s Chinese Quarter have become understood as a “domestic representation” and have been called to the foreground to re-centre the planning tradition. Yet, I have also noted that this accommodation has never been wholesale, as throughout this history planners have simultaneously maintained their distance from other elements of “cultural diversity” – immigrants, dissident voices, the spectre of communism - that have fallen outside of a circle of a private-public sector orthodoxy. In this split sense, my suggestion is that “cultural diversity” can be seen to consolidate an inside and, moreover, that there is a lack of commitment to the “other” by British policy makers who thinly disguise their ethnocentrism behind a mask of multiculturalism. A contemporary analysis of this type of uneven

appropriation of Chinese culture might also be considered in the light of the controversy of the 60 immigrants found in Dover, the allegations which connected a Chinese take-away with the foot and mouth epidemic, and the narratives surrounding the first Chinese state visit to Britain in 1999. Other events, such as the confrontations in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, the renewed debates on asylum and, not least, the racialisation of September 11th, would broaden this analysis.

To address the uneven appropriation of “otherness, what I would call for is not a common public domain with obligations, but a politics of difference. In a sense, my call echoes the work of Leonie Sandercock and her recovery of “multiple publics”. As she forcibly points out, the point of such a politics is to recognise a heterogeneity that would challenge the violence of planning epistemology that occurs under a guise of rationality and universalism. However, there is difference in the type of commitment on my part. For, whereas Sandercock (1998, 185-186) wishes to “revalorize the meaning of difference by asserting the positive qualities of the particular group” and place “oppressed social groups” in “decision-making forums”, I find that these suggestions meet with certain difficulties. To start with, by examining the very articulations of a number of representatives of the Chinese community, I have shown that there is no a priori subject who could speak on behalf of community or this particular group. There is no representative or unified voice. Nor is there a transparency to signification. These auras are only a pretence. Instead, the process of community building appears in this thesis as a complex process involving dialogue, exchange, mediation and, not least, privileges to entrepreneurs and particular forms of signification that have been valorised as essentially representative. To some extent, I think Sandercock is alert to these type of stumbling blocks and is right to tell her reader that the “politics of difference is not based in essentialist notions of identity but in situations [and]

historical contexts” (ibid. 185). Thus, as I see it, what is required to supplement her politics of difference is a commitment to the other. To be clear, this commitment does not necessarily involve the negation of the role of forums, but is an ethical demand that would encourage the forum’s members to continually trace the silent voices that are not represented, yet latent, in their narratives. That is, this commitment to the other requires a persistent recognition of the multiplication of political voices that appear through the numerous exceptions that are put into play. In this light, like Laclau & Mouffe’s (2001, 180) political party, the forum acts as an “organizer for the expansion and deepening of democratic struggles”; it looks at the continual displacements and the foregrounding of subject positions rather than treating some nodal point as covering the variety of political subjects. So, for example, whereas Sandercock configures cosmopolis from its inhabitants (see Sandercock, 1998, 163) and predominately discusses the relationship between immigration and the city from the immigrants presence (see Sandercock, 1998, 165-174), with respect to Birmingham, I would suggest that the politics of difference might find a way to affirm, amongst many, the horizon of absent presences that delimit the city. This commitment would also necessitate further research, especially on the relationship between immigration and citizenship.

In the context of this thesis, one of the absent presences that I have referred to is the immigrant, or more precisely the prospective immigrant that is to come (chapter 2). Their voices are silent in the local authority archive. However, for the city to consider itself cosmopolitan, that is if it is to engage with the other, there is a necessity to find a “welcome” or “hospitality” without being held hostage to the current conditional arrangements centred upon citizenship, the state and nation (Venn, 2002). For, although the conditions of hospitality are what define hospitality and the host’s relationship to the foreigner, the very laying down of conditions also prohibits hospitality. According to Derrida (2000) in his

reading of *The Apology of Socrates*, the logic behind this is that conditions of hospitality signal a type of pact, a limit that is not to be exceeded, which perverts the possibility of a “welcome”. As he explains elsewhere (Derrida, 2002), the distinction here is that the outsider is invited, whereas a “welcome” involves accepting the unexpected visitation. Similarly, if the pact marks a point where the immigrants becomes accepted on the basis of an asset or on conditions of an “obligation” that they should make an economic or cultural contribution that matches the common interests of the city, then, paradoxically, a “welcome” to the “other” is not offered. Instead, under these terms, the city’s “welcome” becomes organised according to self benefit and the familial; the city invites an expected guest who, as I identified in chapter 5, is expected to return a gift of hospitality that is deferred but not forgotten.

In contrast, a “welcome” to the “other” involves something of a different gift, a more radical, absolute hospitality. The formation of this gift is mutually constitutive; it is a form of hospitality that becomes defined by breaking with the thresholds of a pact and, as such, it negotiates with the conditional laws that define a right to the city (see Derrida, 2001, 23). As I see it, this is a politics where the “welcome” to the “other” is about otherness; it is about a politics of difference. For, the “welcome” is not just about re-spinning migrants into those positive terms accepted by the state, such as “asset” or “contribution”. Nor does it concern laying down obligations. Rather my gift is to the foreigner as foreigner, that is, to those subject positions that do not operate with the languages, values or any registers celebrated by the host. In this differentiating sense, the hospitality that I am dreaming of is beyond determination and is a welcome to the city to the absolutely, unknown and anonymous other without asking for reciprocity or contribution. To stretch this far, however, requires new work and this work must begin now.

APPENDIX

Listed below are a number of the documents I consulted in the archives. Although the list is not comprehensive, it covers the bulk of the researched material. For the sake of management, the list is divided into sections on planning (which contains a sub-section on the planning files), economic development, racial equality, leisure services, community groups, newspapers and also a section on the files I consulted at the Public Records Office at Kew. Within the planning files, there are a number of other documents, including committee reports, planning applications, designs, letters and memoranda. These fragments have not been individually listed but have been referenced under the planning application number.

Planning

Birmingham City Council & West Midlands County Council (1980) *Birmingham Central Area District Plan Topic Papers – Employment.*

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Property	Planning File
143 Bromsgrove Street	461/96
143 Bromsgrove Street	1034/97
143 Bromsgrove Street	2209/98
148 Bromsgrove Street	10776
Anglo Oriental Car Park	2418/95
Arcadian Centre	21892
Arcadian Centre	11651
Arena Take-away	4916/93
Bakery	4848/91
Bank of China	44617
Bank of China	2383/2
Bank of East Asia	1836/97
Bank of East Asia	3064/96
Bank of East Asia, rests	541/96
BCYC	3640/93
Betting office	2742/90
Betting office	815/92
Birmingham Chinese Society	1794/93
Bowling Alley	3190/97
Canopy	965/97
Car Park	2602/91
Car Park	1077/98
China Court	5699/90
China Court	2592/96
China Court	920
China Court	2447
China Palace	2430/95
China Palace	355/98
China Palace	4527/97
China Village	10283
Chinese Community Centre	3836/95
Chinese Community Centre	4164/95
Chinese Community Centre	2537/97
Chinese Community Centre	1474/98
Chinese Community Centre	6870
Chinese Junk	5078/97
Chung Ying Extension	2439/98
Chung Ying Gardens	2439/98
Chung Ying Restaurant	26342
Chung Ying Restaurant	4242/90
Chung Ying Restaurant	914/90
Crystal Chinese	3986/98
Day Inn Supermarket	968/95
Doctors Surgery	2668/92
Dynasty	11693

Firm Commerce restaurant	1638/94
Hair Salon	4312/90
Hairdressers, Thorp Street	3520/93
Halcyon Centre	161/97
Heavens Gate	634/92
Herbalist	4847/91
Illuminated Signs for Wing Yip Centre	990/92
Illuminated Signs for Wing Yip Centre	1152/92
Illuminated Signs for Wing Yip Centre	50225
Illuminated Signs for Wing Yip Centre	4933/90
Illuminated Signs for Wing Yip Centre	989/92
IPM phone box	1186/97
Isobar	2430/95
Kotewall basement restaurant	2293/91
Kotewall ground restaurant	1638/98
Kotewall House	74422
Letters for Wing Yip Centre	502/91
Letters for Wing Yip Centre	321/92
MrYeungs	2123/92
New Day Inn	975/92
New Happy Gathering	1919/4
New Loon Fung	9075
New World Payphone	1089/97
Public Convenience	3497/95
Quadgate	894/96
Quadgate	5316/91
Quadgate	13761
Restaurant (unnamed)	2233/91
Satay House	6634
Shutters	968/95
Sing Fat Supermarket	15368
Sing Fat Supermarket	3700/98
Slug & Lettuce	2592/95
Slug & Lettuce	2590/95
Slurping Toad	4803/98
Small restaurant	1372/92
Smallbrook Queensway	15255
Someway Trading Company	3513/94
Someway Trading Company	1978/94
Street Furniture	280/96
Street Furniture	2895/96
Tai Pan Restaurant	2293/91
Telephone	1583/93
Temporary Accommodation	3940/94
Unit 3 Shopfront	994/91
Unit A304, Arcadian restaurant	2504/95
Unit B106 Arcadian Restaurant	295/98
Units A101 Restaurant	1313/98

Units E101-E106 Restaurant	1329/95
West Midlands Taverns	1617/95
Wing Wah Restaurant	3873/96
Wing Wah Restaurant	4342/96
Wing Wah Restaurant	2293/97
Wing Wah Restaurant	2294/97
Wing Yip Centre	11039
Wing Yip Centre	115/94
Wing Yip, Coventry Street	4570

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