

## Translocal spatiality

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**ABSTRACT** ● Instead of exploring the global/local logic of globalization, this case study specifically concentrates on a form of local-to-local spatial dynamics. The spatial history of Hong Kong underground bandrooms is exploited to illustrate the translocal reproduction of spatiality. While the construction of this space was translocally inspired by music subculture from abroad, local spatiality absorbs transborder subcultural energies and re-channels them to become discursive resources for resisting local governmentality and the work-and-spend culture of transnational capitalistic discourse. Translocally inspired and locally accomplished, this underground site becomes a heterotopia in which very different spatial functions are set in juxtaposition. Beside inward heterotopian compression, it also connects outwardly to other translocal spaces of clubs, discos, hip-hop fashion shops and other localized spaces. This web of interconnected spaces provides and organizes the lifeworlds of a community of local graffiti artists, DJs and musicians, who mobilize transborder hip-hop and rock culture to construct and maintain a radically translocalized spatiality. ●

**KEYWORDS** ● spatial friction ● spatiality ● subculture ● translocal connectivity

Edward Soja, quoting Foucault, reminds us that, in the past century, space was somehow treated as the dead, the fixed and the immobile in critical discourse (Soja, 1989). Theorists now see space quite differently. Space can be highly mobile, as indicated in the space of flow in shifting ethnoscapes. Space is a social construct that anchors and fosters solidarity, oppression,

liberation or disintegration. Space is a container of power through which people's biographies are constrained and enabled in life projects of becoming (for example, Bird et al., 1993; Hetherington, 1998; Massey, 1993). In this article, by a detailed description of an underground space, I try to examine the mobility, sociality and productivity of a specific form of spatial practice – a transborder yet localized spatiality that may be called translocal spatiality.

There are various forms of transborder spatial practices. The most obvious and widely discussed is the global-to-local spatial flow such as transnational McDonalidization (Ritzer, 2000), a process in which a stable set of spatial practices (symbolism, management, routine and spatial design) travels across borders and reproduces spaces transnationally. Another form is a local/global spatial flow, which is exhibited in migration and cultural tourism. Migrants bring with them their localized practices and negotiate their way through the trails of global migration, forming diasporic networks across nations (for example, Chambers, 1994). In cultural tourism, exoticized local cultures are reproduced for global consumption in theme parks and tourist sites (for example, Tan et al., 2001). This article is not a case study of these global/local logics of transborder flow, but a study of the translocal spatiality of *local/local dynamics*. It can be considered as the local absorption of spatial practices from faraway sites. My basic question is, How do subculture groups incorporate foreign spatial practices to construct their own localized spaces? Translocal spatiality is applicable to transborder youth subcultures, cult religions, special interest groups and other niche affiliations, which cut across nations to form a spatial network based on subcultural affinity. In this article, I shall concentrate on the translocal spatial practices of music subculture groups.

Subcultural researchers have taken the analytic tracks along the elite/popular and domination/resistance binaries (for example, Fiske, 1989; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). I try to experiment with an ethnographic approach by focusing on the spatiality of subcultural politics. The focus of analysis is not on semiotics or ideologies that have dominated subcultural studies. Instead, I shall examine the way in which members of a subcultural group construct their own space to situate their performance, ritual and subjectivity. Many subcultural studies examine subcultural differentiation by dressing styles and esoteric rituals (see Gelder and Thornton, 1997; Hebdige, 1979; Lull, 1992). I would like to add a dimension of spatiality to these studies. For instance, Grossberg (1992) uses the term 'affective alliance' to relate social reality and emotionality of popular music. An affective alliance is the organization of concrete material practices, cultural forms and social experience, which both opens up and structures the space of affective investments of the youth. In this case study, I will add a spatial dimension to subculture studies by showing how affective alliance can be fostered by investing emotional energies into spatial configurations of localized sites.

The local subcultural space in question is a band room of an alternative Hong Kong band called LazyMuthaFucka (LMF). LMF and friends have localized and combined heavy metal and hip-hop music since the early 1990s. LMF has recently surfaced in the popular media in Hong Kong as an alternative band that generates critical noises against mainstream middle-class ideologies. In this case study, my primary analytic site is the translocal space of LMF's band room, which they call '*a.room*'. Life histories are collected to trace the intertwining lines of spatial actors' biographical trajectories and *a.room*'s spatial history. My informants are the 12 members of LMF. Most of them are from lower-income families. From LMF I have created a network and interviewed their friends<sup>1</sup> and five other independent bands. I have also befriended some of the audience at mini-concerts. Later in the research I was able to participate in the band's daily activities and attend recording sessions and stage performances. Thus my target community includes LMF members, fans, concertgoers and independent bands and their friends. In the following sections, various aspects of translocal spatial practices of LMF and its affiliates will be analysed. In this article I try to present my ethnographic account by both analytic and visual means. Images are produced by photographer Ducky Tse, who has participated in most of the fieldwork for this study. It should be noted that the visuals and analyses are not presented here as representations or documentaries. They are expressive treatments of our experience in the fieldwork. Ducky treats the images independently. Instead of giving me visual 'records', he dramatizes and retouches the images to express his own visual interpretations.

### Translocal utopias and local accomplishment

Translocality refers to the dynamic between localized lifeworlds in faraway sites. The emotional energies of local alternative bands are partly drawn from transnational symbolic resources. Translocal alternative music culture from afar has been used frequently as discursive linkage to energize the local music scene. Emotional energies travel across cultural boundaries through the mediation of translocal music subculture. In the band rooms of Hong Kong groups, there are CDs, posters and images of foreign bands. Most of my informants recalled that when they first started out, they acquired their knowledge of band music mostly by reading music magazines and listening to western groups. These non-local inputs are usually taken out of their original socio-political contexts and treated as generalized alternative cultural resources.

LMF members and many of their friends had trouble fitting into the establishment. Unable or unwilling to follow the mainstream, they looked for alternative survival options to deal with their own problems of growing



**Figure 1** Guitarist Jimmy stands in front of a collage of western images. His hairstyle, sunglasses and T-shirt are both compatible with and comparable to those images behind him. (Personal photo)

up. Life history interviews of informants indicate that most of them were 'failures' by elitist standards. They dropped out of school, some had problems with their parents, and others took up freelance jobs in CD shops, on construction sites and for delivery companies. Of course, a few obtained university degrees, but, as a whole, most can hardly be considered academic achievers. Some members of the group were restricted to a lower social stratum and were deprived by the education and social systems. Davy, one of the leaders of the group, recalled:

I didn't like going to school at all. One day, my mother asked me whether I wanted to attend school or not. I was sitting on a sofa and my relatives were all standing around me. My mother hit me on the face and demanded an answer. I didn't know what to say. She hit me again, and again.

Davy left school in form 2 (year 8) and worked as a salesman at a music album shop at Temple Street in the inner city of Hong Kong. There he gained access to a large pool of foreign alternative music. He also met some of his music friends, who were regular customers at the shop. These friends met together and shared information they acquired from music magazines and other personal networks. In the early 1990s, five of them formed a band called Anodize.

In very localized sites, such as music shops, band shows and band rooms, Anodize and friends fostered a loosely organized community and redirected their creative energy to develop their music talent. Finally they contemplated the idea of building their own band room. In 1993, they rented a small and worn-out apartment at Mongkok and started to produce their own music. Anodize produced four CDs in the mid-1990s. In 1999, Anodize and friends regrouped into LMF and produced their independent debut album *LazyMuthaFucka*. They call their band room *a.room*. How the space of *a.room* was mapped out and produced is an illustrative instance of translocal spatial practices.

Adapting Lefebvre (1991), spatial practices can be analysed along three different planes. First, representations of space, which refer to spatial plans, maps and knowledge of spatial practices. Second, material spatial practices, which refer to the experiences and rituals generated within or across spaces; they are the material and physical forms of spatial interactions. Third, representational spaces, which refer to symbolisms, imaginings and inter-textual web of signs saturated within and extended beyond the space in question. In short, Lefebvre's three analytic planes are: the master plans, the experiences and the symbolism of spatial practices.

For the early *a.room* members, the alternative music culture of the generalized West was a readily available resource for them to construct their own spatial maps and plans. Seeds of spatial construction were acquired from afar. Foreign representations of space and representational spaces were selectively mediated and inflated by transnational distribution of music subculture. These plans and symbols are highly charged with emotional energies combined with legendary tales of famous bands and musicians. Local youths re-energize their own life projects by tapping into these foreign emotional energies. Davy recalled, 'I was so excited when I listened to those band sounds for the first time. They were so different! I bought piles of them [albums] every time when I got my monthly pay check'. Other members related similar experiences. From translocal symbols they contemplate their own spatial imaginations. Imported stories of foreign bands, removed from their immediate contexts, can easily be inflated and injected with a utopian aura. Determined spatial actors, like *a.room* members, put these plans into spatial practice and actually build for themselves a translocal utopia in which new spatial experiences and rituals can be produced.

Indeed, their spatial maps are translocal, yet the actual spatial construction is decidedly a local accomplishment. It has to be constructed from the resources available to them locally. *a.room* was designed and furnished by Anodize members and has been continuously renovated and upgraded. Ah Wah told me that he did most of the renovation when they first rented the band room in 1993. The wires, pipes and sockets were all installed on the spot. However, everything was mixed up. A friend who was a technician visited the place and told Ah Wah that he had installed it incorrectly. Since



**Figure 2** The band room is saturated with DIY decorations. Against macro-spatial strategies of property developers, advertisers and city planners, the production of translocal space such as *a.room* can be considered to be the minor tactics of spatial subversion, translocally inspired and locally improvised. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

then posters, wallpaper and sound-absorbing materials have covered up all those technical mistakes.

### Invisibility and visibility

Lefebvre's three spatial planes are master spatial plans, spatial experiences and spatial symbolism. At the initial stage, translocal spatial plans are most significant to *a.room*. However, when the dream space is realized, it can breed a set of translocalized symbols and localized spatial experiences. I will discuss spatial symbolism and spatial experience respectively in the following sections.

The interior of *a.room* is filled with excessive translocal signs of western bands, plastic toy figures, CDs and imported musical instruments. Yet this



**Figure 3** On the streets outside *a.room* there are roadside stores and food stalls selling meat, fish, vegetables and other groceries. It is an old district with worn-out buildings and networks of long-time inhabitants. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

space is situated within a very localized city space at the heart of a densely populated downtown area.

Within this community is the parasitic space of *a.room*. It is parasitic in a double sense. First, it is an alien spatial habitat nested in a secretive corner of a stabilized exterior; *a.room* is invisible from the outside, it is harmonically and invisibly embedded in its immediate spatial context. Second,

*a.room* is also a para-site where a translocal space is dramatically inflated from within. The inside and the outside are marked with conspicuous differences. This space is saturated with translocal symbols highly charged with emotive energies of rebellion and the desire for autonomy. These symbols can be seen as semiotic embodiments of the desire to negotiate a life project different from those offered by mainstream discursive institutions such as schools and the media. Projected on to the space are these dramatized symbols, and, in return, these symbols empower the ritual and interaction taking place in this space.

As I become more involved with my informants, grand discourses of cultural imperialism, globalization and homogenization pale when applied to this translocal space. Fairley (2001) points out that it is not easy to generalize about the complex exchanges between the local and global in popular music in the discourse of imperialism and post-colonialism. The irony is that the lifeworld of my informants is saturated with foreign cultural elements and yet they are producing very localized spaces and styles with 'alien' resources. In the midst of a Hong Kong-style old building in Mongkok, LMF have built their own band room and peppered it with Japanese and American plastic figures, imported instruments and piles of western albums. Although these non-local cultural practices may be rather popular, hybridized, and even very mainstream in their original contexts, they are perceived by local Hong Kong groups as alternative cultural resources and are used as such. This private den is definitely local. It is a big weird nest with non-local and local leaves and branches. This translocal space is carved out in a very localized city space, from which domestic life histories have been structured in a DIY fashion. Those translocal elements are used by local bands to empower themselves and their fans and to overcome a localized problem they face in Hong Kong.

Similar to other underground spaces,<sup>2</sup> *a.room* has a firm boundary marked by the duality of invisibility and visibility. As Hebdige argues (1979), subculture forms at the interface between surveillance and evasion of surveillance. Hebdige focuses more on stylistic and tactical interfaces, while here I want to talk more about spatial interface. In order to maintain an alternative pool of identity energy and to prevent it from being dissipated into the exterior, underground space sets up hard spatial and emotive barriers between the inside and the outside. Dissipation will defeat the very first utopian and transgressive impulse of producing a distinctly different underground space. Thus we have an interior saturated with symbols of differences. However, because of the need for parasitic harmony and elusive camouflage from the exterior, its presence is also marked by its invisibility if viewed from the outside. Sonic constructions are parallel to the visuals; by using noise-absorbing materials, the loud music inside cannot be easily discerned from the outside. Walking past the entrance of this translocal underground space, there are very few subtle but clear terrestrial marks. Yet

'walking in' this space is a passage of sudden change of spatial semiotics and sonic indicators. It is a representational space, which simultaneously triggers closing and opening, invisibility and visibility, rendering access difficult for outsiders but easy penetration for insiders.

## Heterotopias

The earlier section on *translocal utopia* focuses on the maps and plans of spatial configuration, and the previous section on *visibility and invisibility* focuses on the symbolic aspects of translocal space. This and the following sections will focus more on the ritual and experiential aspects of spatial practices.

Heterotopias is a term used by Foucault (1986), referring to complex sites that form the very foundations of society by enacting utopias and simultaneously representing, contesting and inverting real sites. Here I am selectively adapting this concept to describe the spatial multiplicity of *a.room*. As argued above, translocal spatial plans and practices have to be actualized through local improvisation. The space has to be carved out from



**Figure 4** The dense and tense interior decor plays up the emotions of fear and anxiety, installing a spatial friction (Harvey, 1989) that reduces physical and psychological accessibility. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

existing social spaces. This parasitic nature renders *a.room* a site of conscious and active spatial precipitation, compression, remodelling and flexible hybridization.

Before the group moved in, the apartment had been a den for gambling and selling heroin. In Cantonese, it had been a 'dou dong' (賭檔 private gambling room) and a 'fen gak' (粉格 place for hiding and selling drugs);



**Figure 5** In the early *a.room* days, guitarist Jimmy, without enough money to rent a home for himself, used the innermost room as his bedroom. His girlfriend (now his wife) sometimes stayed with him. He lived there for three years, after which his bedroom was remodelled to become a recording studio. (Personal photo)

both words strongly suggest an underground, illegal, partitioned and secretive spatiality. When the group renovated the site, they discovered small packs of heroin hidden inside cracks in the walls. A sense of secrecy seeps into the spatial imagination every time this piece of *a.room* history is retold to newcomers.

The frontal space, where most of the musical instruments are placed, has been used for jamming music. The central platform, slightly elevated, somehow resembles an altar for musical ritual. However, when band members are not playing their instruments, all available spaces of *a.room* have served as a second home to most members. They stay inside the band room for long hours, playing video games, smoking marijuana, shooting high-power CO<sub>2</sub> guns, socializing, meeting new friends and experimenting with their music.

As *a.room* produced more music and the group grew bigger, the opposite apartment, which was a hairdressing salon, was appropriated. The corridor connecting these two apartments, which was an exterior space before, has now been absorbed and internalized to become a mini-meeting room, while the front salon has been remodelled to become the living room for band members.

*a.room* is simultaneously a space of work and play, a space of home and outside home. Spatial growth has been the result of flexible appropriation and compression. It is a heterotopia capable of juxtaposing in one real place several different spaces. Remade from an underground drug den and a low-market salon, *a.room* has become a multiplex of home, studio, playground, meeting place, classroom and band room. Heterogeneous spaces are juxtaposed in one, becoming a heterotopia charged with dense local rituals and translocal energies.

### Translocal connectivity

Hillier and Hanson (1988) creatively reformulate Durkheimian solidarity in spatial terms. In their simplified reinterpretation, organic solidarity is based on interdependence and thus requires an integrated and relatively dense space, while mechanic solidarity is based on common similarities of belief and thus allows integration of groups in dispersed spaces. Applying this spatial formulation, subcultural spaces, connected by compatible beliefs and practices, can be considered as space capable of translocal solidarity. These spaces, with distinct subcultural boundaries and internal cohesiveness, can be integrated translocally and trans-spatially within and beyond national boundaries. This dispersed nature of translocal spaces renders spatial reproduction possible across geographically separated and distanced territories. Thus this type of translocal spatiality is quite different from the interlocking and interdependent spatial arrangements in complex urban settings.



**Figure 6** During the daytime, when band members are less active, the band room can also be used as a classroom for music lessons. Members can make some money by taking students who are attracted by the music of LMF. They teach students basic musical skills that are rather mainstream and also talk about their own musical styles. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

In the case of *a.room*, it is symbolically connected to a wide range of sites such as hip-hop fashion shops, affiliated band rooms, private clubs, concert halls, rave parties and tattoo shops. I visited these sites and found similarities in the inside/outside boundary marking and the visual displays of the interiors. Various *a.room*-related signs, icons, posters and stickers are

scattered within these trans-spatially connected sites. Ah Phat, a junior LMF member, has opened a hip-hop fashion shop at Causeway Bay. There you can find LMF posters, plastic figures and tattoo signs. Many of my informants share the hobby of collecting toys and guns. In a remote industrial district, LMF manager Kenny has rented a private apartment storing piles of toy figures. The interior resembles the atmosphere of *a.room*, where you can also find these plastic figures covering the ceiling and walls.

Graffiti, a hip-hop element, connects hip-hop spaces translocally and trans-spatially (Phillips, 1999). Graffiti artists have black sketch-books in which their friends can draw their unique diagrams and tags when they meet each other. MC Yan, the graffiti artist of LMF, told me that he keeps in touch with overseas graffiti artists by email and infrequent visits. From time to time a foreign friend will visit Hong Kong and stay at his place. Together they will draw graffiti at night.

Disc-scratching, a DIY musical element of hip-hop culture, can serve as another example of translocal connectivity. Disc-scratcher DJ Tommy learned this form of music in the early 1990s from black American hip-hop. He then introduced his craft to LMF and now disc-scratching has been



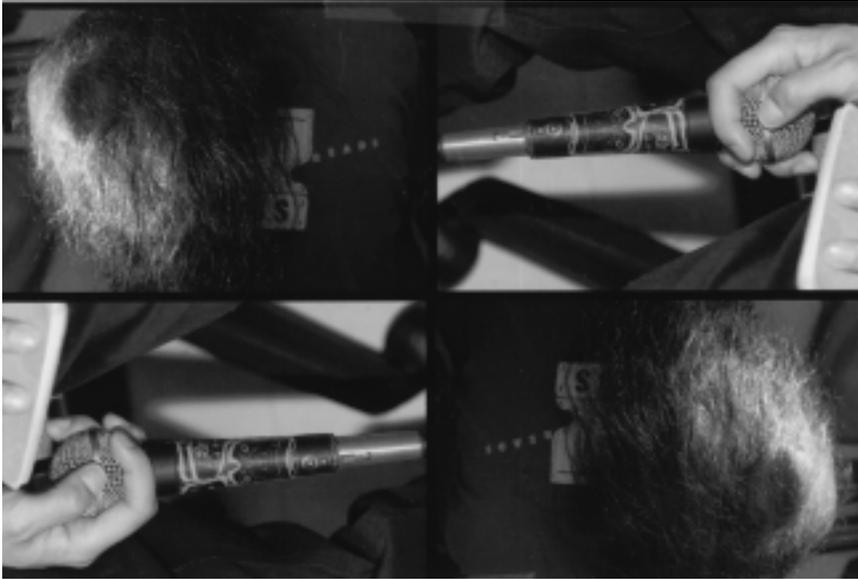
**Figure 7** These sites are peppered across a great distance, but all display compatible sets of spatial symbolism. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)



**Figure 8** Graffiti can be seen as an illustrative symbolism of translocal connectivity. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

incorporated into the band as an important musical element of the group. Disc-scratching refers to the manipulation of discs on one or more turntables to produce 'scratchy' sounds; it also involves the mixing and blending of these scratchy sounds from tracks from existing albums. Its originality and creativity are exhibited in 'stealing' and 'copying', a postmodern favour of creating over creation (George, 1998; Potter, 2001). Hip-hop is now global, yet local scratchers like Tommy can always localize their particular brand of music scratching by injecting domestic musical elements. In fact, translocal spatiality can be understood as a spatial form of 'scratching', mixing spatial practices and symbolisms of local and non-local origins.<sup>3</sup>

Connectivity is also maintained and recharged by translocal tours and mediated encounters. Some LMF members frequently travel to mainland China and other Asian countries such as Japan and Thailand. They are affiliated to different hip-hop and heavy metal groups, specialized radio stations and concert organizers. A field visit is relevant here. When I visited *a.room* one evening, band members were sitting beside the TV set, watching a home video of members DJ Tommy and MC Yan touring in Japan. On screen, DJ Tommy was performing his disc-scratching craft in various specialized radio stations. He was enthusiastically received and hailed by Japanese presenters as the best hip-hop DJ from Hong Kong. In another



**Figure 9** Ah Yan has a very personal liking of Native American crafts. He has a collection of Indian artefacts and inscribed on to his own private microphone is a pattern resembling Native American totems. Ah Yan likes to relate how Native American culture was ripped out by the Americans. This small piece of the history of oppression, and many other stories he has learned from abroad, have been used to energize and fuel his own desire to resist what he is facing locally. They have reminded him of the need to defend marginalized groups like his in the oppressing and homogenizing culture of Hong Kong. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

clip, through Tommy's eyes (he was holding the video camera at that moment), we could see gigantic hip-hop graffiti painted on the walls in the urban spaces of Tokyo. We could hear on tape Tommy swearing in front of these amazing colours and symbols. 'This is fucking big!' exclaimed Tommy. Inside *a.room*, LMF members were joking with Tommy while watching the clips from Japan; a sense of local pride and translocal connectivity was clearly in the air. Interactive rituals are performed in translocal spaces, where symbolism, accreditation and mutual reorganization reinforce a translocal identity connecting these subculture groups of faraway sites.

### Subverting time

The previous sections are more concerned with translocally connected spatial representations and symbolism. In this section, I shall explore the way in



**Figure 10** Tommy disc-scratches into his music some very old-fashioned Cantonese songs, which he has collected from second-hand shops at Temple Street in the inner city of Hong Kong. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

which spatial configurations can situate subcultural bodies and biographies. These spaces are embodied habitats of discursive formation (Bourdieu, 1984), which enable and give structure to spatial practices with subversive potential. In another article (Ma, forthcoming) I have written a lengthy account of LMF and the affiliated community. I conceptualize subculture as emotional energies (Collins, 1990) and try to map out the band's rituals of energy production and maintenance. Here I will summarize one aspect of the band's daily rituals that is directly embodied in the space of band rooms.

Most alternative band groups prefer to jam at night. Some have routine daytime jobs, but most LMF members and their affiliates have long been practising a lifestyle that subverts normal routine. They stay up very late at

night and sleep during the day. They make a living by working in freelance jobs serving as stage crews, musicians, technicians and private music tutors. Besides music, most indulge in different kinds of games. They like war games and cycling; some are fanatical collectors of guns, tank models and plastic figures. One told me that, for the past 10 years, he had been very lazy and would stop working if he had earned enough for the day. Now he does not work at all because he can earn a small amount of money by being a member of LMF.

If capitalistic modernity is about the precision management of time and turning it into effective and measurable units, then LMF members are somehow resisting this by prioritizing space over time. Time seems to be frozen within the closed space inside the band room. Band room activities are more spatial than temporal. Most band groups prefer to have their own band room instead of hiring commercial band rooms on an hourly basis. Inside a band room, time gives way to space. Band rooms are saturated with excessive spatial markers such as windowless walls, overcrowded musical instruments, dim lighting, DIY partitions and so on. These privileged spaces allow members to engage in activities that they cannot usually do at home and at the workplace. Members bring to the band rooms items that they personally love but which may not be acceptable to family members at home. Graffiti, unfamiliar decor and chaotic set-ups render these spaces emotionally charged and confer identity on them.

In these underground spaces, play comes before work. My personal adjustment during a field visit is illustrative here. One night Jim told me to start cycling at midnight. We gathered in a private den. I had 6 hours of lectures starting early the next day. So, I was quite eager to be on time and to finish by 2 am. However, we did not start until 3 am. I was very anxious and constantly checking the time. Yet, they were hanging around in their base camp, 'doing nothing'.

Gradually, as I adjusted myself and tried to enter their time scheme, I started to realize how disciplined I am with time. However, play is most essential to them. It does not matter whether it is cycling or playing darts. I wanted to ride on those big bicycles for a very specific purpose; I wanted to collect data, take exotic photos for my book and return to work on time the next morning. They have a different set of ethno-methods, which depart from the work value and 'productive time' of the mainstream, and they have been doing this for many years.

Young (1971/1997) distinguishes between formal work values and subterranean values of play. In the adult workaday world, 'normal' people affirm the values of deferred gratification, future planning, predictability and hard productive work. However, some subculture groups, such as some LMF members and their friends, accentuate the values of short-term hedonism, spontaneity and autonomy. In modernity, the socialization of a child involves a transition from the pleasure principle to the reality



**Figure 11** The base camp is actually a rented apartment that resembles a private clubhouse, a few blocks away from the LMF band room. It is in a worn-out building at the heart of an over-populated downtown area. On the night this photo was taken, while I was waiting anxiously, band members spent their time in front of their PlayStation, smoking marijuana and throwing darts. (Photographer: Ducky Tse)

principle, from the world of play to the world of productivity. In this process, subterranean values are restricted and framed within the discourse of reward, recreation, relaxation, catharsis and consumerist leisure. Play cannot be an end in itself. Yet, in the lifeworld of my informants, subterranean

values are prime values. Most are reliable in time management when it comes to concert performances and studio recording sessions; some of them have full-time jobs, which require precise timing. Besides, they are engaged in all sorts of normal social and economic activities that most people do every day. Nevertheless, although fulfilling routine duties is sometimes necessary, they are inclined to transgress the disciplinary time machine of the workaday world. Playing is not a relaxation after which productivity can be increased. For some of them, play is an end in itself. In the case of band groups, their spatial habitats have served as sites of discursive formation in which resistive biographical trajectories are constructed and reworked in spatial practices of the everyday.

### Brand naming *a.room*

If the spatial story ended here without talking about commercial absorption, the above analysis would become a romanticized account of subversion. Here I want to add a brief discussion on spatial commodification. In recent years, LMF and its music have surfaced from the underground and subsequently signed up under the wing of the major music company Warner. *a.room*, a translocal site attached to a real place, has gradually been developed into a brand name for alternative music production. In fact, the Warner contract is under the name of *a.room* instead of LMF. *a.room* now exhibits the features of a spatial commodity. It has become an exotic place for commercial exploitation. The brand name of *a.room* now suggests personality, quality and originality. It is a shooting location for TV commercials, MTV and movies, and a prestigious studio where popular singers want to have part of their album produced by the crew of *a.room*. The cumulative effect of translocal spatial practices has charged up this underground space to an energy level that can re-enchant the mainstream music industry.

Market developers constantly need to tap into all forms of emotional energies to recharge cultural products and material goods. Market-driven dynamics have led to what Ritzer (1999) calls product disenchantment: the Fordist mode of production erases whatever is fresh and special along the assembly line, and the post-Fordist mode seeks to re-enchant products by constantly adding in exotic elements. The translocal underground space of *a.room*, with its excessive signs and overflowing emotional energies, has become an ideal spatial product for re-enchanting the disenchanted music industry. Since subcultures have highly inflated markers of differences, they are easy targets of stigmatization. The stronger the stigmatization, the more emotional energies are pumped into these forms of subculture. These emotional energies can be deployed by subculture groups to foster solidarity; they can fuel the moral panic of the mainstream society; they can

also be absorbed and appropriated by the market to recreate fashionable commodities. Emotional energy is a wild card for many situations. It can serve as resistive energy and at the same time be absorbed by the market and the elite to re-energize dominant economic and cultural formation. The irony is that the brand naming of *a.room* is inversely related to its ability to capture and maintain exotic imagination.

### Concluding note: translocal spatiality

When cultural imaginations travel across borders, they are rearticulated into the internal meaning circuit of local lifeworlds. Instead of seeing this process merely as representational, this article has focused more on the materiality and spatiality of transborder imaginations. There has been much discussion on the global-to-local and local-to-global logic of glocalization; this case study is specifically about translocal spatiality, which is a form of local-to-local spatial dynamics. The spatial history of the LMF band room is used as an empirical case to illustrate the translocal reproduction of spatiality. The construction of this space was translocally inspired by music subculture from abroad. *a.room* creates a subversive space within the highly capitalized property spaces of the over-populated city centre of Mongkok. The boundary of this translocal space is marked by the duality of parasitic invisibility and dramatized visibility. The internal space of *a.room* is saturated with the semiotic excess of western icons. However, it absorbs transborder subcultural energies and rechannels them to become discursive resources for resisting local governmentality and the work-and-spend culture of transnational capitalistic discourse. Translocally inspired and locally accomplished, *a.room* becomes a heterotopia in which very different spatial functions are juxtaposed. Beside inward heterotopian compression, *a.room* also connects outwardly to other translocal spaces of clubs, discos, hip-hop fashion shops and other localized spaces in Asian countries outside Hong Kong. This web of interconnected spaces provides and organizes the lifeworlds of a community of local graffitians, DJs and musicians, who mobilize transborder hip-hop and rock culture to construct and maintain the radically translocalized spatiality of *a.room*. It has been simultaneously a home, a studio, a playground, a meeting place, a classroom, a band room, a subversive base camp and a spatial commodity.

### Notes

- 1 Some of the members hang around another private 'clubhouse' regularly. It is not another band but a loosely organized group of long-time friends.
- 2 Here, underground spaces loosely refers to restrictive spaces where private

groups engage in practices that may be considered to be deviant or unacceptable by mainstream society.

3 I would like to thank the reviewer for suggesting this precise framing of translocal spatiality.

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