

# **HARD** *STATE,* *SOFT* **CITY**

THE URBAN IMAGINATIVE FIELD IN SINGAPORE

17 MARCH 2016 | CELADON ROOM, NUS MUSEUM  
18 MARCH 2016 | ARI SEMINAR ROOM



**This symposium is organised by Asia Research Institute, in collaboration with NUS Museum, at the National University of Singapore.**

Alongside the physical structures and associated practices that make up our lived environment, and the conceptualized space to be engineered into material form by bureaucrats and scientists, a perceptual layer of space also exists that is produced through people's everyday life experiences. Termed by Henri Lefebvre (1974) as "representational space", it is space which is "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some of artists and perhaps a few of those, which as writers and philosophers..." While such imaginative projections onto space oftentimes might not be as tangible as its functional designations, they are nonetheless equally vital and palpable. In the words of Jonathan Raban (1974), "The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps."

With Singapore serving as the subject of exploration, we seek to promote discussions on the purview of imaginative representations of the city. As we grasp the richness of representational space, we also begin to contest the (in)famous claim made by architect and urban theorist Rem Koolhaas (1995) about Singapore's qualification as a Generic City, one whose urban landscape exists in a perpetual state of tabula rasa, subject to abrupt erasure or extreme alterations under the rubric of national progress. The cyclical topographical remoulding for the greater good of the nation, compounded by the hegemonic disciplining of its population, inevitably promotes the construction of mental reproductions of the quotidian by its inhabitants – to affix a genius loci in order to make sense of the dislocating changes surrounding them. In the process, memories, aspirations and meanings are ignited that fill the interstitial realm of imagination projected onto urban spaces. It needs to be remembered that a city's *raison d'être* is more crucially defined by its users than by the functional ensembles orchestrated by government or commercial enterprises. For this reason, the noun 'state' carries a double meaning: one is to foreground and acknowledge the various forms and modes of intellectual and creative articulations of Singapore's urban condition; the other is to invite us to address the challenges to nurturing (or even preserving the autonomy of) the domain of *terra imagina* vis-à-vis state authority.

This symposium aims to bring practitioners and academic researchers together to uncover insights into the imaginative representations of Singapore in two ways: the particularized approach looks at the creative practices and contributions of individuals, as well as the impact of specific projects; a macro-level approach is orientated towards identifying broader trends and institutional structures that have played a role in shaping the conditions of creative production within Singapore. By taking the urban imaginative field as the point of departure, we will probe the resilience of cities through the images they convey or evoke.

**REGISTRATION**

Admission is free. Kindly register early as seats are available on a first come, first served basis. Due to the limited number of seats, please indicate whether you will be attending Day 1 (17 March 2016), Day 2 (18 March 2016) or both days of the symposium. We would gratefully request that you RSVP to Valerie at [valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg) indicating your name, organization, and email address.

**CONVENORS**

**Dr Simone Chung**

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*SECRETARIAT*

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<b>17 MARCH 2016 (THURSDAY)   CELADON ROOM, NUS MUSEUM</b>	
<b>09:00 – 9:30</b>	<b>REGISTRATION</b>
<b>09:30 – 10:00</b>	<b>WELCOME &amp; INTRODUCTORY REMARKS</b>
09:30	<b>Ahmad bin Mashadi</b> Head, NUS Museum
09:40	<b>Simone Chung</b> Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore <b>Mike Douglass</b> Asia Research Institute & Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
<b>10:00 – 11:55</b>	<b>PANEL 1 – STATE OF THE ARTS IN SINGAPORE</b>
10:00	On the Contemporary and Contemporary Art: Culture and the 1980s in Singapore <b>CJ Wee Wan-ling</b>   Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
10:25	Singapore as Cultural Hub and Global City: The Free Port and Singapore’s Art Scene <b>Robin Lynch and Kathleen Ditzig</b>   OFFSHOREART.CO
10:50	The Address of Art and the Scale of Other Places <b>Lee Weng Choy</b>   International Association of Art Critics (Singapore Section)
11:15	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>11:55 – 13:30</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>
<b>13:00 – 13:30</b>	<b>ARTIST TOUR (SESSION 1)</b>
	Walk-through of exhibition <i>Five Trees Make a Forest</i> by Donna Ong in the Archaeology Library, NUS Museum
<b>13:30 – 14:45</b>	<b>PANEL 2 – RESURRECTIONS</b>
13:30	An “Un-forgetting” Machine: Resurrecting Archaeological Ambiguities from Pulau Saigon <b>Debbie Ding</b>   Visual artist and writer
13:55	Remaining Haunted <b>Shawn Chua</b>   The Necessary Stage
14:20	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>14:45 – 15:00</b>	<b>BREAK</b>

<b>15:00 – 16:15</b>	<b>PANEL 3 – SINGAPORE THROUGH THE LENS</b>
15:00	On the Streets Where They Lived: Peripatetic Singapore 1965-1995 <b>Lai Chee Kien</b>   Singapore University of Technology and Design
15:25	Forming Cityscapes: An Ongoing Photographic Project <b>Kong Wen Da and Jamie Yeo</b>   Designers
15:50	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>16:15 – 16:45</b>	<b>TEA BREAK</b>
<b>16:45 – 18:00</b>	<b>PANEL 4 – ART AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT</b>
16:45	Chain of Creativities: For 'the Era of Creative Citizens' <b>Motohiro Koizumi</b>   Tottori University, Japan
17:10	Floating Projects, Survival Re-envisioned: Spatial Occupation, Re-producing Social Relations and the Economy of Contribution <b>Linda Lai Chiu-han</b>   Floating Projects (Hong Kong) & City University of Hong Kong
17:35	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>18:00 – 19:00</b>	<b>RECEPTION</b>
<b>18:00 – 18:30</b>	<b>ARTIST TOUR (SESSION 2)</b>
	Walk-through of exhibition <i>Five Trees Make a Forest</i> by Donna Ong in the Archaeology Library, NUS Museum
<b>19:10</b>	<b>BUS TRANSFER TO SYMPOSIUM DINNER</b>
<b>19:30 – 21:30</b>	<b>SYMPOSIUM DINNER</b> (For Speakers, Chairpersons & Invited Guests)

**18 MARCH 2016 (FRIDAY) | ARI SEMINAR ROOM**

09:00 – 9:30	REGISTRATION & TEA
09:30 – 11:25	<b>PANEL 5 – MODERNITY IN QUESTION</b>
9:30	The ‘World Class’ City Complex: Colonial Singapore and the Birth of Competitive Modernity <b>Mark R. Frost</b>   University of Essex, UK
9:55	The Sinophone as Lyrical Aesthetics Redefined: the Case of Contemporary Singapore Chinese-language Poetics <b>Chow Teck Seng</b>   University of Cambridge, UK
10:20	Re-Imagining Migrant Histories and Mapping Narratives of Transnational Culture in Singapore <b>Kristy Kang</b>   Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
10:45	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
11:25 – 11:40	TEA BREAK
11:40 – 12:55	<b>PANEL 6 – SCREEN SENSIBILITIES</b>
11:40	Sense and Censorship: The Banning of Tan Pin Pin’s <i>To Singapore, with Love</i> <b>Olivia Khoo</b>   Monash University, Australia
12:05	<i>Title to be advised</i> <b>Kenneth Paul Tan</b>   National University of Singapore
12:30	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
12:55 – 13:45	LUNCH
13:45 – 15:40	<b>PANEL 7 – THE CITY AS ECOLOGY</b>
13:45	‘Garden City’ Memes, Dreams and Schemes for Singapore: Comparing Gardens by the Bay to the Ground Up Initiative <b>David Sadoway</b>   Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
14:10	<i>Pujangga: Bodies of Water, Bodies of Longing (The Expressiveness of Waterfronts in an Island Nation)</i> <b>Rachel Koh</b>   Independent researcher
14:35	Collaborative Imaginaries: Social Experiments, Free Schools and Counterpublics in Singapore <b>Ng Huiying</b>   National University of Singapore
15:00	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
15:40 – 16:10	TEA BREAK

<b>16:10 – 18:05</b>	<b>PANEL 8 – PLACEMAKING, PLACE-BREAKING</b>
16:10	Routes to Roots: The Art of Placemaking in Singapore <b>Tan Tarn How &amp; Ho Su Fern</b>   Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore
16:35	Is There Space for the Urban Imaginative Field in Singapore? <b>Rodolphe De Koninck</b>   Université de Montréal, Canada
17:00	The Invisible Electorate: Political Campaign Participation as the Production of an Alternative National Space <b>Emily Chua Hui Ching</b>   National University of Singapore
17:25	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>18:05 – 18:30</b>	<b>CLOSING REMARKS</b>
	<b>Simone Chung</b>   National University of Singapore <b>Mike Douglass</b>   National University of Singapore
<b>18:30</b>	<b>END OF SYMPOSIUM</b>

## On the Contemporary and Contemporary Art: Culture and the 1980s in Singapore

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The first quarter of the twenty-first century seems one in which the contemporary arts, new museums and art biennales have become linked to what is called 'commodity reification' and a near-frenzied consumerism that are part of the free-market capitalism that, for those in East and Southeast Asia, has gained pace since the 1980s Asian 'Miracle' years. In the city-state of Singapore, *culture* once used to mean *race* and the *ethnic cultures* linked to the so-called CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other) model of ethnic-cultural management in the city-state. Since the 1980s, though, *cultural policy* has expanded to include the more recognisable *arts policy*. This 'moment' of culture has led, with increasing speed from the 1990s onwards, to the seemingly overnight establishment of institutionalised art markets, museums (mainly the Singapore Art Museum, opened in 1996 and focussed on contemporary Southeast Asian art, and the National Gallery Singapore, opening officially in October 2015 and focussed on modern Southeast Asian art) and performing arts centres, notably The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, opened on 12 October 2002. Such developments have helped transform the puritanical and (that long-favoured People's Action Party [PAP] adjective) pragmatic city-state from a purported cultural desert into ... what exactly? A Global City for the Arts (the title of a 1992 policy paper)? A cultural hub through in which expression can be a problem, and where 'hip' capitalism is celebrated? Singapore wants to be contemporary urban chic now, ostensibly replacing the older philistine and stentorian urban modern of the late 1960s and 1970s – and, indeed, the changes in the city-state's cultural life are substantial.

This presentation attempts a preliminary examination of how the Singapore state in the 1980s started to develop cultural policy to mean arts policy, rather than the cultures of ethnic groups, or culture to be managed mainly in the interest of creating a more unified society. However, the state's dream was for *both* the arts to try to make more cultivated a parvenu society and for the arts as economically viable enterprise for a now-modernised economy. The presentation also looks at how artists, too, started to dream – and their efforts crucially broadened the context and horizons for artistic creation that present artists function within. The arts controversy from the end of 1993 was a setback to the previous decade's critical arts dynamism, and simultaneously, also represented a vital pause before the full force of state-led arts infrastructure and policy developments proceeded to try to facilitate and also to contain (or co-opt, some people put it) what philosopher Paolo Virno would call 'communicative performance' and 'improvisation' in the arts so as to further Singapore's ambition to be a global city. This exercise is also an attempt to periodise the 1980s and the 1990s, and to comprehend cogently the critical values and full significance of our immediate past. It can be but tentative as I do not think we have had the time to sift through our recent past and to reflect upon the achievements (or otherwise) of both state policy and artistic development from the 1980s in the present.

**C. J. W.-L. Wee** is a Professor of English at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He was previously a Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, and has held Visiting Fellowships at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India, and the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, among other institutions. Wee is the author of *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern* (2003) and *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (2007), a co-editor of *Contesting Performance: Global Genealogies of Research* (2010) and the editor of *The Complete Works of Kuo Pao Kun, vol. 4: Plays in English* (2012). He is a board member of the journal *Modern Asian Studies*. His present research interest is in the formation of curatorial practices in showcasing modern and contemporary Asian art and the circulation of pop culture in the larger East Asia region, and how the question of how the link connecting the "high" and "low" in culture might be rethought in the wake of increased opportunities for cultural consumption in a wealthier, more "globalised" East and Southeast Asia.

**Singapore as Cultural Hub and Global City:  
The Relationship of Singapore's FreePort to Singapore's art scene (TBC)**

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In thinking of Singapore as an arts city, what often gets left out of the conversation despite being integral to it is Singapore's FreePort. Established in 2010, the Singapore FreePort is a 270,000 square foot facility at the Changi airport logistics park. An art and private wealth logistics hub, strategically located within Singapore's Free Trade Zone, the Singapore Freeport benefits from being part of a free zone and is largely independent of the political jurisdiction of the country it sits in.

For example, works of art stored at the Freeport can be displayed in Singapore's museums without import duties, indirect tax or security deposits. Assets (artwork, gold, wines and other valuables) traded at the Freeport similarly are exempt from tax.

While, it benefits from exemptions from Singapore's taxes, the Freeport is a project deeply ingrained within the Singapore state. The Freeport's website alone declares that "Singapore rapidly enacted regulations necessary to optimally operate a Freeport". The Freeport's day-to-day operations are made possible because of the support of the Singapore customs, the Singapore police, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Economic Development Board. Furthermore, at the time of its establishment the National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board each held a 5% stake in the corporation. Thus, despite being outside of the jurisdictions of Singapore, it is inherently a project of the Singapore state.

In this regard, the FreePort addresses two parts of Singapore's development and sustainability strategy a) to become a regional arts hub and b) to be a global center for wealth management. The FreePort was exemplary of the goals of the Renaissance City Plans and benefited from Singapore's 2002 raft of laws that bolstered banking secrecy and strengthening of trusts. At the Singapore FreePort's official opening in 2010, the then Senior Minister of State for Trade & Industry and Education Mr. S. Iswaran noted that more investors were choosing to put their money in high-value "investments of passion", such as fine art. With Singapore's strategic location, infrastructure and ties to markets in Asia, he further said that "Singapore is an ideal location for companies seeking to tap into the arts and collectibles trade in the region." The Freeport in this vein would help fuel the development of creative industries in Singapore, and strengthen its role as a global arts hub.

To date, it has been shown to be successful in such endeavours. Designed by Swiss architects, engineers and security experts, the FreePort building has captured an international imaginary of Singapore as an art city and conduit to Southeast Asia. It has been dubbed by artist-theorists such as Hito Steyerl, the future of private art museums and is often the lens by which the internationalism of Singapore art scene is framed. For example, in Deloitte's 2014 survey of art markets, Singapore's infrastructure was denoted as a definitive frame for Southeast Asia as an emergent art market. Furthermore, the FreePort has lent to the internationalisation of Singapore's cultural scene, with the establishment of the Pinacothèque at Fort Canning, which was also achieved through generous state subsidy. The founder of the Freeport, Yves Bouvier is directly tied to the development of the museum at Fort Canning, as part the company Art Heritage Singapore, which looks over the museum and of which he is a founding partner. This speaks to the creation of a value chain for the circulation and presentation of art in Singapore that stems from the FreePort.

This paper will focus on the Singapore's Freeport and its associated development of Singapore's cultural scene, particularly the definition of Singapore as an international or regional art depot. Presenting the research of the

curatorial collective offshoreart.co, the paper will present the practical outcomes of the representation of Singapore vis-a-vis the FreePort in terms of creative production within Singapore and the development of a value chain for the flow of art/capital assets through the island-city. The paper will attempt to ask if Singapore's working art scene benefits from a trickle down of wealth and opportunity from this state enabled infrastructure, The paper will also discuss the international case of fraud placed against Yves Bouvier on accounts of overpricing artworks, the representation of Singapore as a city-state in how it legally addressed the international case and what it tells us about Singapore as an international art scene.

Organised by curator **Robin Lynch**, curator **Kathleen Ditzig** and artist Debbie Ding, OFFSHOREART.CO is a platform that thinks through offshore economies as a way of understanding global infrastructures and the narratives that support them. Often used with respect to foreign banks, corporations, investments and deposits, offshore is a concept that underpins the institutional life of exchange in our current era of globalism. Frequently a privileged structure of 'otherness', it can speak to an independent legal, political zone or outlying subsidiary of the state that addresses deficiencies in centers of power. Defined by movement, relocation and concealment, the offshore is an articulated pattern in contemporary economic, social and political life.

## The Address of Art and the Scale of Other Places

Lee Weng Choy

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In an essay called, “A Country of Last Whales” — the subtitle of which goes on to ask, “can we ever really understand how big the world is?” — I suggested that the sublime interrupts “our” world profoundly — it is of an *other* scale. I suppose, of all things, the opposite of what I am is the whale. Of course, the whale and I have things in common. At the least, we are both mammals. But one is typically very large, while the other can only wish to be larger. One lives expansively, all over the waters of world. The other is trying very hard, without much success, to feel located in a small island city-state. One could say the whale is like nature incarnate. Because nature is in some sense always too large. Too large for us to apprehend. In contrast, the art critic has a small, modest job — he or she is a person who, well, I was not going to say, makes a living writing about art. Not all of us do. Instead, shall we say, this person tries to make a *life* out of writing on art and culture.

As an art critic, I am first of all a being in the world. And these days, to be in the world is to travel it, sometimes widely, and, typically, to compare one place with another. But wherever we are or roam, often our fates as humans means being regularly crushed with disappointment, whether on an intimate and private register or on a larger and collective scale. From romantic heartbreak to family tragedy, from wars to impending ecological catastrophe. We each have our own tool boxes with which we try to deal with this all, and I suppose the reason I am an art critic is that I happen like to write essays on art, but, really, it’s my own way of trying to speak to a world at large that is too large.

In titling this paper, “The Address of Art”, I seek to raise questions on how critics can address or speak to art and the world at large. But also: what is art’s address? How does it speak to us? What can it tell us? And how? And how does art locates us within our world? — not just a world of public culture, which we apprehend readily and naturally, but a world that is always also somehow beyond our reach of understanding, a world that is made not just of our own place, but of other places.

An individual artist or group of individuals speaks through their art in public: they address the public, and in doing so also help create a sense of *local address, of local place*. But at the same time, one of the things that the best art does rather well is remind us of *profound otherness*. And art’s publics are constituted by simple acts of individuals reaching out to an *other*.

**Lee Weng Choy** is president of the Singapore Section of the International Association of Art Critics. He has taught art theory, cultural studies and policy at various institutions, including the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Sotheby’s Institute of Art, Singapore, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. From 2000 to 2009, Lee was the Artistic Co-Director of The Substation arts centre. More recently, he has been involved in a number of projects with Nanyang Technological University’s Centre of Contemporary Art Singapore. His essays have appeared in such publications as: *Afterall*; *After the Event: New Perspectives on Art History* (Manchester); *Art & Intimate Publics: Art in the Asia-Pacific* (Routledge); *Broadsheet*; *Contemporary Art in Asia* (MIT); *Forum On Contemporary Art & Society*; *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art* (Cornell); *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture* (MIT); *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (Blackwell) and *Third Text*.

## An “Un-forgetting” Machine: Resurrecting Archaeological Ambiguities from Pulau Saigon

**Debbie Ding**

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How can art and technology be used to investigate gaps in our understanding of the history of Singapore? Pulau Saigon is a former island in the Singapore River, which vanished around the 1980s. As an artist I was intrigued by the apparent lack of information about Pulau Saigon, as there are scant few public records about Pulau Saigon in Singapore’s National Archives, although it was the former site of a railway station, an abattoir, and several warehouses. In 1988, a rescue dig was conducted at this post-eighteenth century archaeological site. By that point the site had been disturbed so many times that the oldest items were on top rather than the bottom. The artefacts recovered from this site also contain a list of mass-produced, everyday objects – speculated to have been litter from passersby.

I wanted to attempt to “resurrect” these archaeological ambiguities, so I began building a prototype for an “un-forgetting” machine, which produces objects from their names. Parametric models are generated using deep learning, shape recognition, 3D shape interpolation, and generative CAD modelling. Each object is designed to be the perfect sum average of all other objects with the same name.

The machine attempts to perform the creative and cognitive role of cultural craftsmanship on our behalf, producing a library of mutating cultural objects, exploring infinite sets of variations within a fixed set of rules. With rapid prototyping, they do not have to be just thought experiments, but can be translated into material experiments, allowing us to explore theories through prototypes.

If we could teach machines to understand our world and to extrapolate philosophical and visual ideas for us, they could be used to bring contradictions to our attention, creating new connections and provoking new debates about Singapore’s pasts, present, and potential futures.

**Debbie Ding** is a Singaporean visual artist and writer based in London. She facilitates the Singapore Psychogeographical Society, which explores alternative archives of urban experience through public exchanges, thought experiments, and documentation of ludic adventures. As a writer and designer of fictions, she is also interested in developing prototypes for philosophical machines or objects which translate theory or phenomena into language or other experiential forms. She graduated with a BA (Hons) in English Literature from National University of Singapore, and an MA in Design Interactions from Royal College of Art, London. Recently, she curated a show about the archives of The Substation, Singapore’s oldest independent art space. Her exhibition, The Library of Pulau Saigon, is on at the National University of Singapore until February 2016.

## Remaining Haunted

**Shawn Chua**

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This paper channels the trilogy recently staged by Drama Box "It Won't Be Too Long" to dwell in the haunted spaces of land-scarce Singapore, asking which spaces are allowed to survive, how spaces are repressed and what remains as a place is disinterred.

The first part (The Lesson) is a free interactive performance held outside the Toa Payoh Library. A new MRT station is to be built for a housing estate and members of the public enter the scenario assuming the roles of property agents, policy-makers and power-brokers, ultimately deciding what must go to make space for the community. The Cemetery unfolds as a two-part performance (Dawn and Dusk) that explores Bukit Brown Cemetery, a site that is slated for redevelopment to make way for a 4-lane expressway. Dawn is a site-specific performance at the cemetery while Dusk is a piece of Verbatim Theatre that documents the struggle between the various stakeholders of Bukit Brown, including the Heritage Society, civil society representatives, institutions and the families of those interred.

By conjuring the uncanny figure of 'haunting', this paper evokes the spectral notions of a place that connotes persistent lingering, recalcitrant remains, and posits other modes of phantom dwelling that disturbs the claims of a generic space that is 'tabula rasa'. This paper casts the performative intervention of "It Won't Be Too Long" as a haunting that remains even in the afterlife of the cemetery. The haunted space of the performance represents a site of contestation that renders uncanny the hegemonic articulations of space in state narratives. What is 'un-homed' in the exhumation of a place? Perhaps the only thing more terrifying than ghosts then is the very absence of their haunting.

**Shawn Chua** is a performance researcher based at The Necessary Stage. He has previously presented at the Performance Studies international conference in Shanghai, China, and in Aomori, Japan, and at the ASEAN conference for traditional puppetry. He is a recipient of the NAC Arts (Postgraduate) Scholarship and holds an MA in Performance Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU, and a BA in Cultural Anthropology at Waseda University, in Tokyo.

## On the Streets Where They Lived: Peripatetic Singapore from 1965-1995

Lai Chee Kien

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Most urban scholars of Singapore's planning deem the large scale physical changes that altered Singapore's landscapes commenced in the late 1960s with the setting up of the Urban Renewal Department, later as the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Through this institution and others under the Ministry of National Development, concerted programmes to clear swamps, eradicate slums, remove hawkers and polluting trades, construct housing estates as well as other infrastructural projects, transformed both Singapore's urban fate and economies along with the lives of resident Singaporeans.

The linking of social progress with urban renewal had been central to the presented narrative in Singapore's known histories enacted and told through text and figures, and cursorily with maps and photographs. Such visual evidence of the erasure of elements within landscapes, and entire landscapes themselves, had been scarce compared to the portrayal of the new, and of the transformation. Of late, the internet had enabled researchers to glimpse those worlds from posted photographs and family movies on heritage and interest group sites, but the visioning of space remains fragmented.

From 1965 to 1995, the late architectural historian Lee Kip Lin took over 15,000 photographs of Singapore's streets, landscapes and residential homes. As a member of the Preservation of Monuments Board in the 1970s, Lee captured at-risk areas to demolition, and building types deemed everyday but which had value to the study of architectural history. At a time when drones were not available, Lee's photographs of entire areas, ironically taken from skyscrapers built over old establishments, present much material for the study of conservation and transformation of the city in general.

In this paper, I would like to argue for a quotidian urban Singapore as deduced from an examination of Lee's photographs. I argue that the lost typologies of the city: such as shophouse and apartment blocks, along with post-war buildings, considered the scale, connectivity and progressive nature of the city in development, compared to the city of the present day. The uses of the streets were also multi-layered with lived-in populations and pedestrianization as main concerns, at a time when car sales were burgeoning. The ubiquitous five-foot way along the block edges eventually gave way to bare walkways due to the construction within agglomerated building plots.

**Lai Chee Kien** is Adjunct Associate Professor at the Architecture and Sustainable Design pillar at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. He graduated from the National University of Singapore with an M Arch. by research [1996], and a PhD in History of Architecture & Urban Design from the University of California, Berkeley [2005]. His publications include *A Brief History of Malayan Art* (1999), *Building Merdeka: Independence Architecture in Kuala Lumpur, 1957-1966* (2007), *Cords to Histories* (2013) and *Through the Lens of Lee Kip Lin* (2015). He is also a registered architect in Singapore. He researches on histories of art, architecture, settlements, urbanism and landscapes in Southeast Asia.

## Forming Cityscapes: An Ongoing Photographic Project

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Looking specifically at *Forming Cityscapes*—a photographic publishing project from the authors’ personal design research practice—this paper is an exegetic writing on the project against the wider disciplines of architecture (subject), design (subject and material), and photography (method), and its relevance to Singapore’s urban condition.

With almost every city dweller equipped with a cellphone camera, one of the most common way we attempt to familiarise ourselves with a city or neighbourhood is through casual snapshots of the city environment. Unsurprisingly, this behaviour is also one of the ways we inhabit and ‘consume’ a city, and can be described as the city users’ lived experiences. The beginning of *Forming Cityscapes* was a result of this behaviour, it is the attempt to make sense of countless photographic observations the authors captured on an everyday basis in Singapore. Mostly taken without an intention of use in any particular context, these images are free from a controlled narrative, therefore associating itself as images of the authors’ direct experiences with a city—many times being influenced by interests in communication and behaviours occurring in local urban environments.

Through a process of organising and tagging these images into overlapping categories, a series of three books—each containing images of a particular theme—were produced and published independently in 2014. In contrast to the claims of Singapore being a city which excludes accidents and randomness, with Rem Koolhaas going further to say that all chaos in this city are authored, photographic documentations in *Forming Cityscapes* reveal many of the accidental misuse and appropriation of objects and spaces in the city. It documents the evidences of city spaces being defined by its users rather than the authority of the state. Although mostly minor and unnoticeable, these small interventions when added up and placed alongside each other shows how a city’s *raison d’être* can never exclude itself from the actual urban activities that occur over time.

This paper borrows ideas from theories in architecture, design and photography, specifically: 1. Gaston Bachelard’s writings on oneiric inhabitations; 2. acts of repurposing design described in the recent term ‘Non-Intentional Design’; and 3. John Berger’s writings on how still photography brings attention to what is not shown (placing emphasis on the imaginative interconnections and patterns when reading photographs from *Forming Cityscapes*). Through these ideas, the paper aims to demonstrate how *Forming Cityscapes* could potentially become a tool for both research and communication, the former for pragmatic applications in writing or design, and the latter as a response to the general lack of interest in the everyday occurrences inside a city generally labeled as generic and boring.

The significance of this project, and hence this paper, would be the actual photographic documentations that reveal insights into Singapore’s urban condition. Placed in context alongside other similar initiatives around the world—for example Jane Fulton Suri and IDEO’s ‘Thoughtless Acts’, and Droog’s ‘Urban Play’ experiment—we begin to see how these photographic fragments might form its own distinct visual appearance of the Singapore city.

**Kong Wen Da** and **Jamie Yeo** are practicing designers based in Singapore, working on design and research across disciplines in mainly industrial design and graphic design. Their interests often lie in the intersections of practice and research, without any strict categorisation of disciplines. They are also involved in teaching occasionally at a range of platforms—a series of one-off experimental workshops, technical training in secondary education, and providing assistance in tertiary design education. They are currently working on designing a system of objects and printed matter that allows for open-ended play, in the contexts of early childhood art education. Wen Da received his BA (Hons) in Communication Design from Glasgow School of Art, Singapore, and Jamie received her BA (Hons) in Industrial Design from National University of Singapore. Recent achievements includes: having exhibited in the 26th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno in Czech Republic, and being invited to a workshop by Formafantasma in Boisbuchet after winning a competition ‘Space Nurtures’ held by Space.

## Chain of Creativities: For 'the Era of Creative Citizens'

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There is currently a significant change arising in the relationship between art and people. The structure of the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the observer is being shaken, and art created with the people's participation and cooperation is prospering. Naturally, art is fundamentally open to the perception of the people. Just as with what Umberto Eco (1962) called 'The Open Work', there are many works of art, which do not simply have symbols that should be interpreted with one meaning like road signs, but rather that can be interpreted by the individual's own way of thinking. In recent years, however, people's participation has gone beyond their observation and individual perception to a close participation in the production process of art. The curator Nicolas Bourriaud has observed that the concerns of artists are directed towards the re-stitching of society through the participation and cooperation of the people in the face of the trend towards individualisation, which is caused by progressive urbanisation and the ever greater electronification of life through technology. He indicated: 'It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows' (Bourriaud 1998:45). However, there is also a deep-seated criticism of these actions, which regards them as forming an exclusive community that attracts a homogenous group of people. The criticism maintains that the political aspect (which should be included in art along with the goals of participation and cooperation) has been attenuated, due to the festive attitude of the communities. (e.g. Bishop 2004, Boomgaard 2006).

This study, however, turns our attention to cooperative citizens, not only artists, as producers of collaborative art, through its accumulation of sociological qualitative and quantitative research on cooperative arts (such as participant observations, interviews, and surveys). Firstly, the research observes that in art projects, there are extremely varied politics that are accompanied by the participation of the people (especially art which is developing in actual communities) - those people participating in a project are never uniform. They decode the project in their own style both consciously and unconsciously, and enjoy each process; as a platform in an unfamiliar area, as an anchor for interacting with the young, or as a window of opportunity for meeting with new cultures and histories. More importantly, situations frequently appear which give the opportunity for group activity between artists and strangers, where people make fresh reforms in the cultural activity in their own area, and begin to tackle new cooperative cultural movements. In these situations, we can see the link where creativity, supported by the knowledge of the crowds and by versatility links to new and different creativities. Through these arguments, this paper indicates the importance of coordinated networks of artists and citizens, which bring about 'Creative Citizens', expanding on previous observations of the creation of Creative Cities that employ and give privilege to established creative talents only.

**Motohiro Koizumi** (Sociology of the Arts, Cultural Policy, Cultural Studies) received his B.A. from International Christian University and his M.A. in music and Ph.D. in sociology from Tokyo University of the Arts in 2009. He was a Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS, 2008-2011), a Research fellow at University of the Arts London (2009-2010), a Post Doctoral Researcher at Osaka University (2011), and a Researcher at the Birkbeck, University of London (2011). Koizumi is now an Associate Professor in Cultural Policy at Tottori University (2011-2016), an Associate Professor in Sociology of Art at Rikkyo (St. Paul's) University (2016-present), and also actively engaging in teaching courses for Arts Management and Cultural Industries at International Christian University (2012-present).

## Floating Projects, Survival Re-envisioned: Spatial Occupation, Re-producing Social Relations and the Economy of Contribution

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Beginning as a project to protect and advance personal dreams in artistic pursuits, the Floating Projects Collective (FPC, 「句點」, 2010) has evolved from a group of 4 into a collective with 20 additional members in 2015, and its activities renamed Floating Projects (FP 「據點。句點」, literally “occupation point”). FP takes on a spatial turn by occupying an 1800-square-foot industrial unit in a fading industrial district, Wong Chuk Hang (WCH黃竹坑), on the southern part of Hong Kong Island, where the increase of disused and vacant flats forces their owners to open up to atypical manufacturing usage. The spatial turn has fueled our imagination and soon evolves into a series of experiments around a central question: what can we artists do with an empty unit in an industrial building with institutionally and physically defined constraints? How does what we do connect to the premise that art is by definition a form of radical thinking, thus an indispensable force in nourishing our humanness? At the point when FP inserted itself into WCH, the district was already the home for several commercial galleries in addition to two new boutique hotels on top of various independent art spaces and artist’s studios. The rent FP is now paying could have been 30% less a year earlier. The question of art is the question of space in a milieu when art and design are heavily appropriated to be the supporting pillars of what is known as “creative economy,” an aggressive agent for gentrification, the flip side of which reads the problematic transformation of urban surfaces.

FP is not only an experiment, but it seeks to be experimental, in the sense that it strives to re-open up many known normal artistic practices to assert questions of art must be understood also as those of non-artistic nature. Issues of how to keep making art, and of how to scramble for resources to sustain survival, become a new series of questions. Can artists working with different artistic media work together, and how about artists of different generations and expertise training? Who is the artist – only those who received formal studio art education in an art school? Are there modes to publish and share art other than the white cube model? How does a collective accommodate individual aspirations and desires? What possible modes of survival and sustainability are there beyond the commercial versus charity support binary structure?

Rooted in Critical Theory concerns, FP’s production of space (Lefebvre) is considered the impetus for the reproduction of social relations. FP asks: how do we sustain the progressive posture of art, preserve art’s non-conforming and implicitly anti-establishment character in the age of gentrification, when art increasingly becomes a decoration, or a kind of added value? These questions all point to the need to re-imagine and re-invent a different sort of creative economy, called “the space of creativity.” (Hui Yuk, DOXA) At this point, FP is answering to the demand of a relevant model – one that (re-)generates singularity (of the individuals) and promotes new collectivity, or the enactment of co-individuation. (Simondon, Stiegler) What does it mean to be an artist in a hyper-capitalist digital age in which our feelings and temporal being are the main targets of moderation and control through broad-scale commodification of art and design (Lukács, Stiegler) in the name of urban progress through gentrification (Hui)? As many government-initiated local projects highlight heritage re-enlivening and/or are implicitly imbued with a social work concern or rhetoric, what does FP as a collective conceive to be the new relations between the politics of art, de-proletarianization (the regaining of one’s place in knowing and in producing new knowledge), and the practice of love and care?

In the short period of seven months, a few signature event series have emerged to be place-holders of individual desires and the practice of care for others. The conference presentation (and the full essay) will elaborate on how our purposes are realized in the following programs – WCH Assemblage (on re-purposing dumped material into art installation and object performance), Work-in-progress Inspection, Spatial Pressure Calibration (improvised sound-making), Floating Teatime (an on-line writing platform), and other free contribution from FPC members specific to their talents -- all occurring on an open-to-all indoor space furnished with a charity café with a free wi-fi reading environment to encourage person-to-person conversations, and a growing library and digital archive to promote the culture of documentation as many of us are media artists.

FP is not just an organization, but itself an art project that interrogates questions of space and being. Re-orientation of art is central to the re-orientation of everyday life, which must begin with spatial re-orientation.

<http://floatingprojectscollective.net>

**Linda Lai Chui-han** is Associate Professor in Intermedia Arts at the City University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media (SCM) and a research-based interdisciplinary artist. After completing her Ph.D. in Cinema Studies at New York University, she has sought meaningful connective extension to other relevant artistic and theoretical endeavours. A critical researcher on the History of Everyday Life, her works focus on historiography, visual and auto-ethnography, urbanity and popular culture. She founded HK-based new media art group the Writing Machine Collective (2004) and has completed 5 major group exhibitions on questions of computational thinking and contemporary art. Her own digital and non-digital works have been shown in key venues in many cities in Europe, Asia and the US. Floating Projects is her recent experiment on modes of sustainability in art-making and artists' associations.

## The 'World Class' City Complex: Colonial Singapore and the Birth of Competitive Modernity

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In the year 2000, Singapore's then Ministry of Information and the Arts produced its 'Renaissance City Report' which articulated 'a vision of Singapore as a world-class city supported by a vibrant cultural scene...one of the top cities in the world to live, work and play in.' The report employed comparative data from what it labelled 'benchmarking cities' to 'obtain a clearer picture of where Singapore stands in terms of cultural development' and set down a five to ten year plan whereby Singapore could 'reach a level of development that would be comparable to cities like Hong Kong, Glasgow and Melbourne'. In the longer term, the objective was 'to join London and New York in the top rung of cultural cities'.

Meanwhile, from September of the previous year, and running into February of 2000, visitors to the recently established Singapore Art Museum might have encountered Lee Wen's satirical mixed media installation *World Class Society*, in which the viewer looks down a long cloth funnel at the artist on a video screen intoning, ad infinitum, lines such as: 'We have world-class food in world-class restaurants and world-class hotels. Because we are world-class'.

Singapore's 'world-class' fixation has influenced its arts and intellectual scene as much as its urban infrastructure, but its roots date back much further than the city's post-independence ascent, as another famous Lee put it, 'from Third World to First'. A century earlier, the city's intelligentsia, then mostly made up of Western-educated and multilingual Asian literati, had become enveloped in a transnational dynamic we shall refer to as *competitive modernity*. In their cultural, religious, political and even philanthropic activities, they strove to 'keep in step' with other benchmarking colonial, and non-colonial, cities. As they did so, the public stage on which they believed themselves to perform, and the audience they addressed, transformed into an ever more regional and global one.

This paper seeks to explain how this self-conscious effort to match the modernity being expressed in other Asian and world cities came to influence cultural, religious, intellectual and political life in late-colonial Singapore. It assesses the role of colonial communications, capital and policies in this dynamic. It especially focuses on the powerful and sometimes destructive legacy of this heightened transnational awareness as it impacted on local ideas and practices.

**Mark Ravinder Frost** is Senior Lecturer in Transnational and Asian History at the University of Essex, having previously worked at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore and the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of *Singapore: A Biography* (2009; 2012) which in 2010 won the Asia Pacific Publishers Association Gold Medal and was selected as a CHOICE 'Outstanding Academic Title'. Between 2005 and 2007 he was Content Director and Senior Scriptwriter for the National Museum of Singapore's award-winning Singapore History Gallery (2006-2014). He is currently completing a manuscript on the port city 'enlightenment' in late-colonial British Asia, and is also Principal Investigator for the Leverhulme-funded international research network WARMAP - the War Memoryscapes in Asia Partnership.

## The Sinophone as Lyrical Aesthetics Redefined: In the Case of Contemporary Singapore Chinese-language Poetics

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The creation of literature and poetry may be considered as higher-order constructs of identities for a community. This is especially true in a city-state nation like the post-independent Singapore, when the nation and her language/literature(s) are constantly re-imagined in the confrontation of history and modernity. In the case of Chinese-language Singaporean contemporary poetry, the texts, also part of the wider Sinophone articulations, has in my view reconstructed and renewed "Chineseness", "modernity" and the traditional "lyrical aesthetics" in a multilingual context. In our presentness to confront modernity and perhaps post-modernity, alongside increased global connectedness and multilingualism, this interpretation will be intertextual and negotiating.

In my presentation, I wish to update the audience with regard to how "lyrical aesthetics" and the emerging field of Sinophone articulations can be useful in understanding the present-day Chinese poetry in Singapore. The concepts of literary criticism linked to "lyrical aesthetics" will be briefly discussed. The researches of Shi Shu-mei, David Wang Der-wei and Jing Tsu on the Sinophone articulations will be highlighted, with my inputs on this theoretical structure in relation to its application to Singapore Chinese poetry.

Through geopolitical, literary/poetic and linguistic perspectives, I attempt to illustrate that poetics is an amalgamation of imagined spaces and overlapping of narratives. Poetry and poetics can also be boxed in different mediums and discourses, or are themselves mediums. With paradigm shifts, I claim that the different combinations of national, aesthetic, cultural and linguistic identities in poetry account for the existence of contesting poetic paradigms. While paradigm shifts usually occur as a succession of power when one paradigm dominates over other marginalized ones, this process, often in conjunction with the canonisation of new poetry texts or emergence of poetic sub-genres, is positioned under an evolution narration that suggests innovation triumphs traditions.

Case studies of poetry and lyrics (including TV lyrics and *Xinyao*) by Liang Yue, Wang Runhua, Han Chuan, Huang Guangqing, Cai Shengjiang, Xi ni'er, Liang Wenfu, Chen Weibiao, Fei Xin and mine, including texts of translation (from Chinese and into Chinese) will be analysed via close-readings. Some of the following pivotal themes will be addressed:

- 1) The complex dilemma of "diasporic" identities and literary taste present in different groups of Singaporean Chinese poetry art practitioners, in terms of age, gender, backgrounds, linguistic preference and aesthetic ideologies;
- 2) Institutions, publications, the press and platforms of new digital social media;
- 3) Poetics of high-brow literature, popular culture (comprising movies, television songs & Xin-yao lyrics) and other art and multimedia representations;
- 4) Poetry in different languages and poets working in cross or multiple genres

Together with close-reading in and intertextual comparisons between actual poetry texts, we would like to demonstrate that poetics are actualised in the "afterlives" of the poems reread, when they are revisited by the creator, or circulated via linguistic translations and cross-genre interpretations. Beyond individual poetic texts, poetic spaces exist in a network of aesthetics created by previous literature, the innovation of the writers, the reading and re-reading of the text(s) and a plurality of identities.

Singapore-born **Chow Teck Seng (周德成)** won awards including the 2014 Singapore Literature Prize & 1<sup>st</sup> prize (Chinese Poetry) in 2009 NAC Golden Point Award. His poetry and fiction appeared in the Chinese press, as well as various local and overseas anthologies and journals. A former college lecturer and university teaching fellow, he is currently a PHD student at the University of Cambridge. His research interests include Sinophone literature, literary criticism, Chinese classical poetry and fiction (especially in "Dreams of the Red Chamber"), language acquisition etc. His poem, *When Inspiration Arrests the Poet*, was translated into French and English, reinterpreted into artworks, music and a short video by artists in Europe for the 2012 Festival Franco-Anglais de Poésie. In 2012, he published his debut poetry collection *'The Story of You and Me' (你和我的故事)*, and in 2015, his 5 poems "*The 5 shades of Solitude*" (五种孤独与静默) are adapted as an animation short. A featured writer at the 2015 Singapore Poet Festival, 2015 New Delhi/ 2014 London Book Fair, and Singapore Writer's festivals, he edited anthologies on Singaporean urban literature, travel literature and literary works by Y-generation Singaporean writers. He is also a member of the South East Asia Sino-Poet Association, Singapore May Poet Society and Singapore Writers Association.

## Re-Imagining Migrant Histories and Mapping Narratives of Transnational Culture in Singapore

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This project looks at how ethnic communities are changing in cities. How is migration and movement changing our experience of cities and its peoples today? How is our sense of identity and place affected as a result? Examining the rich and complex cultural history of Singapore and its multi-ethnic communities both past and present, this project aims to tell the story of how overlapping stories of migration transform the way we understand ethnic communities in cities. It explores how these communities have become hybrid in unexpected ways and have developed strategies for sharing a sense of place. Situated in the emerging field of the digital and urban humanities, this project serves as a digital platform for community storytelling. It aims to reveal overlooked histories embedded in the geographies of place in order to help disturb histories of forgetting, to help disturb the negation of unrepresented narratives in order to empower individuals to gain a voice and perspective in the transnational metropolis of Singapore.

The story of movement and migration is as much about the histories of loss as it is about the promise of new possibilities. Immigrants participate (consciously or not) in the loss of culture and identity. When we move, we often painfully negotiate between what is culturally left behind with the new culture in which we try to assimilate. But what is lost in the struggle to assimilate? Moreover, should assimilation be an end in itself or are there other strategies of belonging? This work is about revealing the histories of loss among immigrant communities in the city, and making visible the negotiation in struggling to make sense of being in a new place. Cultural geographer Doreen Massey states that our sense of place is in a constant state of becoming. Singapore, like other rapidly developing urban cities, is in a constant state of becoming while being keenly aware that developing towards its future requires a simultaneous negotiation of loss with its past. Though the city is distinct in that it deliberately built its national identity on a foundation of ethnic diversity and the cultural heritage of multiple immigrant histories, it, like other global cities, is being challenged to adapt and articulate its identity in part, due to the unprecedented migration of newer peoples that are part of its sociocultural and economic landscape. What emerges from this collision of histories?

These stories of cultural heritage, everyday histories and documentation collected will be developed into an interactive mapping project exploring the spatial ethnography of Singapore. Selected narratives will be exhibited as popup installations in the city using a variety of urban screen technologies including projection mapping. This transmedia network comprising online, mobile and urban screens uses new media to create a greater awareness of our built environment and the peoples who populate it. It asks what kind of urban interfaces could be designed to communicate with the spaces we move through and what overlooked stories could be uncovered in order to enrich our understanding of our everyday spaces.

**Kristy H.A. Kang** is a media artist and scholar whose work explores narratives of place and geographies of cultural memory. She is Assistant Professor at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and Associate Director of the Spatial Analysis Lab (SLAB) at the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy in Los Angeles. Here she collaborates with urban planners and policy specialists on ways to visualize overlooked spaces and peoples. Kang is a founding member of the Labyrinth Project research initiative on interactive narrative and digital scholarship at USC where she has served as researcher, creative director, and designer on a range of interdisciplinary projects. These works have been presented at venues including the Getty Center, The ZKM Center for Art and Media, Museum of Art at Seoul National University, and received several awards including the Jury Award for New Forms at the Sundance Online Film Festival. She received her Ph.D. in Media Arts and Practice at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts.

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**Sense and Censorship:  
The Banning of Tan Pin Pin's *To Singapore, With Love***

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This paper details the circumstances surrounding, and the effects flowing from, the banning of Tan Pin Pin's latest documentary, *To Singapore, with Love*. Shot in Thailand, Malaysia and the United Kingdom, the film is an intimate portrait of nine political exiles who left Singapore during the 1960s and 70s for their involvement in alleged Communist struggles. In a statement released on *To Singapore, with Love's* Facebook page, Tan says, "Like my other films ... this film is a portrait of Singapore; unlike the others, it is shot entirely outside the country, in the belief that we can learn something about ourselves by adopting, both literally and figuratively, an external view." The film was issued with a Not Allowed for All Ratings (NAR) classification by the Media Development Authority, effectively banning it from its home country.

The paper outlines what is at stake in this specific act of censorship; asking how can we interpret the action by the government to ban *To Singapore, with Love* beyond the display of a blunt instrument by a repressive state. Singapore's system of censorship is unique, sophisticated, and discursively produced out of a combination of historical need and political pragmatism, which in the case of Tan's film employs a discourse of "national security" as a means of diverting attention from a perceived threat to political legitimacy. It is the construction of an "external" view presented by the documentary – a perspective of Singapore's history in opposition to the narrative established by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) – that seems to be the basis of the film's perceived threat to national security, because it falls outside the PAP's vision of Singapore as a highly developed urban metropolis and a first world democracy founded on an early opposition to Communism.

Beyond the banning of this particular film, the paper will also touch on the broader issue of censorship in relation to Singapore's promotion of itself as a global creative city. Singapore's "creative city" discourse is predicated on its openness; in order to attract foreign capital, encourage international companies to set up offices in Singapore, and entice professionals to work in the city, the state has invested heavily in its articulation of Singapore as a global city. Yet paradoxically, while the island state promotes and encourages creative freedom, particularly when it involves international collaboration, it also seeks to considerably restrict freedom, especially among its own citizens. What the film *To Singapore, with Love* embodies is precisely *not* a pragmatic response to the PAP's narrativisation of the nation's past, but rather a set of *affective* and individual responses to its history in the form of its interviewees' personal stories of exile. It is the voicing of historical silences and the capturing of affective intensities that ultimately prove so unsettling to a political pragmatism founded on ambivalence.

**Olivia Khoo** is a Senior Lecturer in Film and Screen Studies at Monash University, Australia. She is the author of *The Chinese Exotic: Modern Diasporic Femininity* (Hong Kong University Press, 2007) and co-author (with Belinda Smaill and Audrey Yue) of *Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas* (Lexington, 2013). Olivia is also co-editor of three volumes, *The Routledge Handbook of New Media in Asia* (with Larissa Hjorth, Routledge 2016), *Sinophone Cinemas* (with Audrey Yue, 2014), and *Futures of Chinese Cinema: Technologies and Temporalities in Chinese Screen Cultures* (with Sean Metzger, 2009). From January-April 2015, Olivia was a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

**Title to be advised**

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## **‘Garden City’ Memes, Dreams and Schemes for Singapore: Comparing Gardens by the Bay to the Ground Up Initiative**

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The notion of ‘Garden City’ has long been valorized within Singapore state discourses and spatial praxis — from the embrace of specific landscaping practices; to contemporary eco-modernization initiatives that feature everything from green walls to large-scale ‘green’ urban development projects. At the same time as Singapore has sought to showcase eco-initiatives and technologies as both a mode of urban placemaking and economic development, there has also been a persistent undercurrent that has questioned the rhetoric behind these so-called green ‘urban growth machine’ developments — highlighting forms of business as usual and ‘greenwash’. Longstanding civil environmental groups like the Nature Society (Singapore), as well as newer non-government organizations and movements have, for example, questioned the inherent consumerist, energy intensive, hygienic or developmentalist logics driving the ‘clean and green’ rhetoric that at times accompanies Singaporean environmental statecraft and placemaking.

This paper seeks, by means of a comparative study, to examine the distinctions and similarities in the spatial imaginaries of two particular urban development schemes in Singapore. One, the now completed development project, ‘Gardens By the Bay’ (GBB) — undertaken partially under the auspices of *NParks Singapore* — and the other a project vision in the (potential) making, deemed ‘Kampung Kampus’ (KK), and spearheaded by the local civic environmental group, *The Ground Up Initiative* (GUI). Both projects, it is suggested, are illustrative of green city visions and placemaking; and both provide important insights about contrasting dreams for urban livability and spatial sustainability in Singapore. Drawing upon digital discourse analysis and spatial visual studies of the GBB and KK projects, this paper seeks to highlight the underpinnings of each project’s memes, dreams and schemes or plans (and actualization in the case of GBB).

These studies will compare and contrast the articulation of plan and decision-making and the manner in which Singapore urban spaces are expected to be (re)assembled; as well as the manner in which a host of technologies or infrastructures are expected to intersect and interact with local ecologies and ‘community’ cultures. In the process two distinct imaginaries of green placemaking, one an orchestrated, logistically efficient and economically productive mode of eco-developmentalism; and another an arguably localist, civic-participatory and nominally appropriate techno-ecology space in the making. The contrasts and parallels between these two placemaking memes, dreams and schemes, it is suggested, can provide valuable insights into the terrain and tensions underpinning Singaporean spatial imaginaries.

**David Sadoway** has been a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with HSS-Sociology at Nanyang Technological University since February 2015. His current research explores “underground urbanism”. He has a PhD in Urban Planning and Design from the University of Hong Kong (2013) and served as a Postdoctoral fellow at Concordia University, Montréal (2012-14), where he examined the politics of Indian urban infrastructure. Dr Sadoway has been a Visiting Scholar at: The Technical University of Darmstadt’s Topology of Technology Faculty (2013); The National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi (2013); and Academia Sinica’s Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, Taipei (2008). His research interests include: Asian urbanism; civic environmentalism; urban infrastructure and technologies; community informatics; and enclave urbanism. Dr Sadoway has worked in the U.N. system, government, the non-profit sector; and with urban planning consultants.

## “PUJANGGA<sup>1</sup>: Bodies of Water, Bodies of Longing”: The Expressiveness of Waterfronts in an Island Nation

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Singapore is the only country in the world with a 100-percent urban population. Encounters with natural landscapes, specifically waterfronts, are heavily mediated by (but not limited to) carefully planned and designed waterways, lakes, reservoirs, barrages, kelongs and other constructed water catchments. Beyond the institutional demarcations and functions of these state-issued recreational spaces, inherent are also the forms of their habitation and usage which inscribe a city ethos that extends beyond the dominant rhetoric of nation building and the material economy.

Ranging from the use Bedok Reservoir as music venue for 100 local bands and fishing at non-designated park canals, to the allure of an obscure kelong off Lorong Halus, these ‘loose spaces’ challenge and ultimately ‘loosen’ the social fabric weave of a space whether through spatial programming from emergent communities of practice or artistic-cultural activities; they serve as prototyping reiterations conscious self-organisation in a context of perpetual urban transformation and adaptation.

By observing the various assertions, co-negotiations and praxis inherent in the dwelling of these waterfronts, the inquiry will unravel the socio-cultural drivers of change and surfacing narratives in the realm of the imaginative, the poetic and the artistic - carving out from the public sphere pockets of mental spaces that offer vastness in the midst of urban density. In its mediation and/or replication of waterside eventscaapes, waterfronts provide a retreat and a private sphere, where positionalities are reaggregated and rearticulated within the community and from community sphere to community sphere.

In addition, these bodies of water are not only territories for reclaiming agency or borrowed power, they also act as metaphors from which to explore undulating projections and ideas about the city. These representations--the melancholic imagery of the sea and its expressiveness--set an anthropological inquiry into the urban environment’s possible determinants and reworkings of transcultural identities, identities that are embedded in local-regional maritime histories and intercepting cultural values that persist and transcend polity as well as the material conditions of the economy.

<sup>1</sup> *Pujangga Etymology: A Bahasa Indonesia term that loosely translates as ‘poet’, ‘author’ or ‘philosopher’. In Central Java it was an established term denoting an official court poet. Known for exceptional boat-making and sailing skills, a powerful family among the Riau Islands and archipelago who were nomadic people of the sea were known to have named their ship Pujangga. Another group, sea gypsies for centuries have been known for sailing across straits and settling on new islands around the region which today consists of Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia.*

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## Collaborative Imaginaries: Social Experiments, Free Schools and Counterpublics in Singapore

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As “artistic concepts begin to be used against a backdrop of potentially massive appropriation...a territory of art appears within widening “underground” circles” (Holmes, 2007). The last two decades has witnessed a transformation of artistic practice in such “underground” artistic practice to broader social movements, with radical, tactical media gaining readership and visibility. The growth of this global informed public, or “counterpublic” (Warner, 2014), in part due to the development of peer-to-peer networks and new platforms for collaboration, has been constitutive of social movements’ increased ability to spread, organize, and sustain their message. These changing technological processes can be understood in Marxist fashion, in an autopoietic constellation of changing social relations, routines in daily life, and mental conceptions of the possible. Only by changing these points of reference simultaneously, Marx believed, would it be possible to change the totality of the capitalist economy.

These elements are changing in Singapore amidst undercurrents of global ideological and culture shifts. As interest in urban planning for resilient, liveable cities took off within academic and governing circles, this translated to funding for individuals engaged in work on the ground. Simultaneously, there is a rise of autonomous precarious labour, with an emerging subculture of workers choosing to take on temp, part-time, and contract jobs, and whose lives are no longer arranged around the typical “working day”. Finally, the rise of the eco-consumer, or the figure of the “eco-Young Girl” (Tiqqun, 2015), suggests a growing ecological and social consciousness still obdurately entwined with consumerism.

In this climate, spaces to imagine a different city are emerging against an entrenched culture of competition, materialism and concomitant forms of alienation—alienation in daily life and social relations, from one’s intrinsic motivation, and from history and nature. In addition to living amidst the spectacular constructions and “frictionless passageways” (Buchanan, 2005) of an alienating “city without qualities” (Koolhaas, 1995), residents of Singapore are also said to have no stories on which to centre themselves—in theory.

By studying three separate phenomena that the author was/is involved in as participant and curator, this paper seeks to illuminate counter-narratives to Singapore’s image as an ahistorical, politically apathetic city. It examines the role of capital and consumer culture in energizing these detours from the mainstream, and how the ideals of autonomy and third space are/were realized. In so doing, it looks at alternatives to capitalist alienation, and at the commons—including resource commons, information commons and collaborative practices—as both practice and imaginary, and as a deliberately produced entity with the power to equalize class relations and liberate living labour (Edu-Factory, 2009).

These phenomena include 3 spaces that function as imaginariums of the possible: 1) *Babel*, a series of sessions exploring labour, craft and knowledge production through different storytelling mediums, and which includes the imaginary world of table-top role-play games; 2) the development of a citizen-science initiative, *Foodscape Collective*, an infrastructural experiment (Schulz, 2014) and site of collective knowledge production, and finally, 3) the effects of the *Growell Pop-Up*, for its transient impact on creative networks and longer-term impact on civil society and new creative forms of production.

Through interviews with key participants and observers in these phenomena, participant observation, and discourse analysis of specific texts and events, also paying attention to the time of different activities, venues, participant demographic and types of transactions between participants, this paper will take a reflexive approach to the sociopolitical impact that these projects have (had) on the imaginaries of Singapore—an analysis that the projects themselves have not yet critically undertaken. This will also serve to bring the vision and aspirations of some of these projects—particularly the completed Growell Pop-Up—full circle.

**Huiying Ng** is a recent graduate of the National University of Singapore's Department of Psychology and University Scholars Programme and is currently working in a research capacity at the NUS. Her Honours thesis in psychology (in preparation for publication) focused on self-determination, autonomy and supportive social environments. She has presented her undergraduate work extensively at humanistic and health psychology conferences. Outside psychology, she employs ethnographic methods and participatory action research picked up from research in rural Thailand and Laos, part of which has been published in the student journal *Subjectivities* and *New Mandala*, an academic blog on Southeast Asia. Her work experiences after graduation have led her to new considerations of labour, volunteerism and commerce. She is currently pursuing these interests, along with a longstanding interest in agricultural production and livelihoods, collaborative knowledge production and participatory processes, through initiatives such as *The Photo Thing* and *Foodscape Collective*.

## Routes to Roots: The Art of Placemaking in Singapore

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Of late, placemaking has emerged as a popular urban (re)development strategy to inject “heart and soul” into the public spaces of Singapore. From the refurbished town hubs of neighbourhoods such as Tampines and Punggol, to the gentrified hipster districts of Kampong Glam and Tiong Bahru, public spaces have been mobilised as a means to cultivate Singapore into a vibrant and liveable city.

This paper critically examines the nature, extent and implications of the use of placemaking to manage public spaces in Singapore. In particular, this paper will look at the creation and evolution of public spaces over the last 30 years, to highlight how placemaking is not just a means to inject vitality; more importantly it is a governmental technique to shape human behavior and manage social relations.

Ultimately, this paper aims to deconstruct the coherence and stability of the urban built environment in Singapore, where every building, street and neighbourhood is part of a matrix of power.

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## Is There Space for the Urban Imaginative Field in Singapore?

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Can “the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare” (Raban 1974) prosper in Singapore, where the functional city, the hard city, is constantly being redefined, imposed and superimposed by the state. Can representational space (Lefebvre 1974) or territoriality, i.e. the emotional appropriation of space into which labour has been invested (Raffestin and Bresso 1979), be entertained in Singapore? Can *topophilia* (Tuan 1974) be even envisaged by residents of a city in “a perpetual state of tabula rasa” (Koolhaas 1995)? How can Singaporeans even consider “nurturing the domain of *terra imagina*”, when the hard ground on which they stand is constantly remoulded from above them by the state, and laid out around them by foreign workers, unlikely to share either the resulting provisional living space or even less alternative and imagined ones?

While definite answers to all these interrelated questions must be sought through the actual examination of creative practices, ideally at several territorial scales, it remains indispensable to investigate and document the magnitude of the challenges that the hard map is unceasingly posing to the soft one. These challenges are themselves constantly redefined along with permanently shifting spatial components, including at the neighbourhood scale. Whether ancient, middle-aged or young, few landmarks are sacred and likely to last for long, much less to be permanent. This applies at all scales, particularly at the neighbourhood one, whether those of so-called natural landscape, such as hills, green spaces, water bodies and coastline or of the built environment, such as various forms of transport infrastructure, schools, shopping malls and high rise buildings.

The purpose of this paper is to: first, further document the permanent and pervasive character of runaway development, upgrading and landscape transformation in Singapore (De Koninck et al. 2008); second, emphasize and explicate the hypothetical interpretation according to which the relentless overhaul of Singaporean living space – nearly always considered as a *fait accompli*, yet always susceptible of being revised by the state ... – can lead to territorial alienation among the City-State’s citizens and permanent residents; third, suggest that this alienation may lead to political resignation. This in turn leads to the dual proposal that, first, permanent and unquestionable remoulding of individual and communal territorial markers is a tool of political control, whether used consciously or not; second, in Singapore, the soft city has a long way to go before it can challenge the hard one.

**Rodolphe De Koninck** is a geographer who has since 2002 held the Canada Chair of Asian Research at the Université de Montréal. Ever since he completed his PhD thesis at the University of Singapore in 1970, he has been involved in Southeast Asian Studies. Most of his teaching, research, research supervision and publications, which include 21 authored or co-authored books and nearly 200 articles, have since dealt with agrarian and environmental issues in the region, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. But his interest in Singapore’s experiment with City-State building has never abated and he has devoted several books to it. These include *Singapour ou la révolution du territoire/Singapore or the Revolution of Territory* (Montpellier 1992); *Singapour, la cité-état ambitieuse* (Paris 2006); and *Singapore. An Atlas of Perpetual Territorial Transformation* (Singapore 2008, co-authored with J. Drolet and M. Girard). He is currently working on a new edition of that book.

## The Invisible Electorate: Political Campaign Participation as the Production of an Alternative National Space

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On 11<sup>th</sup> September 2015, Singapore citizens voted the ruling People's Action Party back into Parliament by a striking 69.9% majority. Candidates on both the incumbent and opposition sides expressed surprise at this result, many saying that their experiences 'on the ground' had led them to anticipate a significantly stronger show of support for political opposition.

This paper takes the 'unexpectedness' of the election results as an opening through which to explore political campaign participation as a practice of imagining and producing an alternative space of nationhood in Singapore. Using ethnographic methods to study the rallies, ground-walking activities and print and online media engagements that took place over the month of September, I develop the argument that electoral politics in Singapore is being practiced on two distinct terrains, characterized by two disparate regimes of visibility.

One is constituted by the map of electoral administration, which divides the island and segments its residents into 29 different 'constituencies,' each contested by a different team of party representatives. The other, which I call 'campaign terrain', reaches across the country as it is lived in and reflected upon by its citizens – whose activities, experiences and opinions are not confined to their voting wards. Instantiated at election rallies and walkabouts, in print and online media, and in informal discussions among individuals, campaign terrain is animated by popular perspectives on national issues and ideological principles.

The map of electoral administration makes visible the votes that residents cast for parties running in their constituencies. However, it renders politically *invisible* their opinions on the national policy proposals and ideological principles of parties which are not contesting their constituencies. Campaign terrain, on the other hand, creates spaces where citizen's views on national issues and policies can be aired; but it elides the electoral map's divisions – making it impossible to see which constituency citizens are registered in, and hence, what their actual voting options are.

I trace the various ways in which these two national terrains shifted in and out of view, from the 'pre'- to 'post'-election period. My findings suggest that where the map of electoral administration was foregrounded, Singapore politics was constituted as an array of local infrastructure challenges, best solved by technocratic experts and predictably dominated by the PAP. Where campaign terrain predominated, however, Singapore politics was narrated and lived as part of a more universal struggle for intellectual dignity and social justice – generating a palpably different national space.

Focusing particularly on the performative and affective dimensions of this second space, I argue that the 'unexpectedness' of the election results arose from the unmarked disjuncture between the two political terrains. In this interstitial gap that has opened up between state-enforced electoral boundaries and resident-citizens who will not stay in place, a new practice of popular political engagement is taking root. This practice is uniquely sculpted by the administration of democracy in Singapore, and – whether officially acknowledged or not – is certain to play a part in the island-city's future.

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