

*Singapore Songlines revisited: the world class complex and the
multiple deaths of context*

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Abstract

A part-biographical, part-historical and part-polemical essay, this study revisits Rem Koolhaas's classic meditation on Singapore's natural and built environment in the post-independence era. Building on Koolhaas's provocative depiction of Singapore as an architectural and environmental *tabula rasa*, it delves deeper into the twentieth-century modernist conditions which produced the post-independence city state's decontextualized urban landscape. In doing so, this essay argues that Singapore city-making state policies have resulted from more than an official ideology of pragmatism. Rather, they contain within them an official poetics with which independent creatives in this city must contend with and negotiate. An analysis of these poetics, embodied in the way the government has projected Singapore's official image of itself, reveals its pervasive preoccupation with 'the global' and its wilful desire to liberate Singapore from the constraints of history through creative urban destruction.

I turned eight in the harbour of Singapore. We did not go ashore, but I remember the smell – sweetness and rot, both overwhelming.

Last year I went again. The smell was gone. In fact, Singapore was gone, scraped, rebuilt. There was a completely new town there.¹

So begins Rem Koolhaas's classic mediation on Singapore as a *tabula rasa* – an architectural blank slate, wiped clean and inscribed upon by new buildings, and then wiped clean again. It is a depiction of the city that resonates with me. In 1982, at the age of nine, I spent a delirious week with my family in that Singapore of 'sweetness and rot'. My siblings and I ate croissants for the first time at the luxury Oberoi Imperial Hotel on Jalan Rumbia near River Valley Road. We watched our parents haggle in the markets of Chinatown, where I first tasted *cha kuay teow* and found the cockles more unsettling than

the rat that ran past our table out onto the street. We wandered wide-eyed through old Bugis Street. The whole trip was a reverie – a slice of pure and other exotica. For the next decade and more, I yearned to get back.

When I did return, to conduct field research for my PhD in late-1999, I experienced that same feeling of punctured nostalgia and sensory grief that Koolhaas **expertly** captures. The ‘smell was gone’; my childhood love was unrecognizable. To limit **this** sense of loss, I kept to a narrow circuit made up a few appealing waypoints, all of which have now been **erased** or **scraped clean and repurposed**: the cheap and slightly cockroach-infested Chinese hotel on Armenian Street where I stayed; the old National Library where I did much of my research; the Hock Hiap Leong *kopitiam* (opposite the old Tao Nan school) where I ate lunch; and the S11 food court near the library where, late at night, I watched Chinese girls and Indian guys hang together, and so came to the false assumption that the whole of **the island** heaved with a similar boundary-crossing flirtation. On a few occasions, I ventured into The Substation, today the lone survivor from this earlier period, to listen to a battle of the bands being fought out in the garden. It was eventually won by **Hokkien-singing rockers**.



(Fig. 1: Above, Armenian Street, with the Hock Hiap Leong *kopitiam* to the far right, in the early 1980s. Below, in 2010, having been scraped clean by the Nakano Corporation)

Koolhaas seeks to explain why Singapore became ‘*uncontaminated by surviving contextual remnants*’. He sees the city –almost of all of which he claims, at the time of his return there in 1990, to be ‘less than 30 years old’– as representing ‘the ideological production of the past three decades in its pure form’:

It is managed by a regime that has excluded accident and randomness: even its nature is entirely remade. It is pure intention: if there is chaos, it is *authored* chaos; if it is ugly, it is *designed* ugliness; if it is absurd, it is *willed* absurdity. Singapore represents a unique *ecology of the contemporary*.²

To explain this state of being, Koolhaas engages in what he calls ‘reverse alchemy’. Via the travel writer Bruce Chatwin, he borrows the notion of ‘songlines’, the dreaming tracks that Australia’s aboriginal peoples believe ‘creator-beings’ long ago wove across the landscape, conjuring it into existence. The Singapore songlines that Koolhaas explores combine to form a powerful narrative of urban transformation dating back to the United Nations urban renewal report for the city of 1963. In particular, Koolhaas places the erasure of the old city of Singapore in the context of worldwide fears about urban decay and population explosions during the 1960s. Drawing heavily on the Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat, he also presents it as a product of the developmentalist-survivalist discourse of the island’s political elite. Ostensibly, his account is non-judgemental. Yet it becomes clear he deems the changes he has witnessed perturbing. Occasionally, his lens moves beyond Singapore’s ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) to examine other players in the city’s urban transformation: the Metabolist school of Asian architecture, for example, or the local architects and planners from SPUR (the Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group). For the most part, however, this is a tale of a very hard state willing, **largely uncontested**, a new urban formation into being.³

The **narrative** is powerful and visceral, and even if Koolhaas’s conclusions are sometimes questionable I find it hard not to sympathize with the sentiments behind them. Yet, as a historian interested in Singapore, I feel some further exploration of the ideological production of the modern city as realized in its physical space is necessary, as well as some further explanation of the government’s erasure of contextual remnants. The aim of this essay is **therefore** to pull back, to bring forward and to expand on Koolhaas’s original Singapore songlines, to examine **other** historical antecedents that set the stage for the new Singapore dreaming that commenced from the early-1960s, to widen our

understanding of the ideological forces which shaped this official dreaming, and, finally, to further our appreciation of the creative voices that have come to contest it.

In doing so, I hope the following discussion underlines a number of points. The first is the extent to which the ideological production of Singapore has been the consequence of a struggle between powerful and influential figures in the city and their immediate local contexts, by which I mean those particular and idiosyncratic characteristics (be they historical, cultural, ecological or topographical) which have defined the spaces through which **these elites** move and given meaning to their thoughts and actions. Secondly, in their struggle with their immediate contexts, in their effort to build what Koolhaas would refer to as new and ‘uncontaminated’ alternatives, these powerful and influential figures have been propelled forward, while seeking validation from, their imaginative conceptions of the global. Indeed, one theme that runs right through this essay is the haunting of Singapore’s urban imaginative field by these elite constructions of the global, **whether through official arts policy or officially-guided urban development.**

Following Koolhaas, this essay also strives to reinstate the official imagination as a creative as well as destructive force in Singapore’s post-war history. It argues that Singapore’s national government, far from acting as a philistine state concerned only with technocratic pragmatism, has long been imbued with a clear aesthetic vision. The technocracy, in other words, has long indulged in its own poetics. **Such** official poetics are critical elements that have to be taken into consideration in any discussion of the island’s urban imaginative field because they have often been so hegemonic. Whether through its vision of Singapore as a concrete civilization or a garden city or a global city, the state has shaped and continues to shape the island’s urban aesthetics. As we shall see, official visions of the city remain a challenge to arts practitioners in Singapore who seek to impress their individual **artistic** sensibilities upon it.

Colonial dreaming: the global imaginings of Dr Lim Boon Keng

During my return to Singapore as a doctoral student, the figure I spent most of my time researching at the old National Library was the Straits Chinese doctor Lim Boon Keng (1868-1957). The simplistic portrayal I was trying to contest (now shifting thanks to the efforts of several scholars) was of Lim and his reformist circle of fellow *Baba* as simply 'King's Chinese'; that is to say, as deracinated British Empire loyalists. China and being authentically Chinese clearly mattered to the local-born, English-educated, Lim – which explains one of the pivotal moments in his early life-story. As a student of medicine in Edinburgh in his early twenties, Lim had been approached by a professor to translate a Chinese scroll and proved unable. In addition, China-born students who attended the same institution has spurned him, on account of his inability to speak Mandarin.⁴

Lim's desire to overcome his personal sense of inauthenticity, exposed internationally while he was a young man far away from home, appears to have inspired the reform movement which he led on his return to Singapore in 1893. Its purpose was to transform and modernize the identities of his fellow Straits Chinese, and then those of the wider Chinese population in general. Lim dreamt of a future generation of *Baba* who spoke English and Mandarin fluently, who journeyed to China, as he himself did, and who took their fair share as 'Sons of Han' by acting as intermediaries for European and Straits-based commercial enterprises. For Lim, the Straits Chinese were to form a class of global middlemen between the Middle Kingdom and the West, tasked with the work of reconciling these two great civilizations.



(Fig. 2. Lim Boon Keng in the 1890s)

Crucial to the articulation of this vision was Lim's discovery of the works of the exiled late-Qing Confucian reformer Kang Youwei, who arrived in Singapore in 1900. Kang inspired Lim to present Confucianism as a modern, rational and scientific religion that did not meddle in primitive supernaturalism, and that, in contrast to Christianity, was well equipped to deal with the theories of Darwin.⁵ At the same time, however, Lim's radical neo-Confucianism was a product of his effort to keep pace with developments in the wider regional-cum-global context through which he moved and which he expected to influence. Western missionaries he debated with in Singapore dismissed his movement as an imitation of the Indian Hindu-reformist Brahma Samaj that had arisen in Calcutta, and of the reformist Buddhist modernism then spreading from Ceylon across Asia from its base in Colombo. Lim, in reply, admitted his knowledge of these other port-city movements and that he had, indeed, studied them. He was, in effect, in competition with them.

Already, Lim's close ally in his Confucian revival activities, the journalist and educationalist Tan Teck Soon, had interviewed Anagarika Dharmapala, the leader of Ceylon's Buddhist modernist revival, at the offices of Singapore's *Daily Advertiser* newspaper. Their meeting occurred early in 1894 as Dharmapala made his way back to his homeland from the Chicago Parliament of Religions. At this international gathering the Sinhalese leader had presented Buddhism to the world as a modern scientific religion in harmony with the theory of evolution, in much the same way Lim would later do in the case of Confucianism. Lim's subsequent neo-Confucian endeavours, which included a failed attempt to build a Confucian temple-academy in Singapore, were intended for consumption by a similarly pan-Asian and international audience, one Lim reached out to via the same port-city literati networks that kept him in touch with the rest of the world. As well as Singapore journals, Lim wrote for the periodicals of India's Western-educated literati. Later, he would become a literary associate and friend of the famous Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore.⁶ In the early-1900s, he intended his radical neo-Confucianism to put Singapore on these Asian progressives' global map.⁷

His efforts in this regard were constructive: they produced new journals (Chinese and Anglophone) and new associations, and eventually new schools which taught Mandarin. They were also destructive, though perhaps not as much as Lim would have liked **them** to have been. His reform movement took aim at many of the local cultural contexts –and the rites of belonging enacted through them– which Lim had been born into as a *Baba*, and which he had probably not, until his international exposure in Edinburgh, questioned. He and his self-styled 'progressive' young *Baba* party denounced ancestral worship, *feng shui*, food offerings and prayers to the gods, as well as Buddhist-Daoist wedding and funeral customs. They succeeded in getting the management of the Thian Hock Keng, Singapore's principal Chinese temple, to end its involvement in the Chingay and Hungry Ghosts' festivals – annual commemorations they claimed embarrassed local Chinese in the eyes of the world's nations. At the temple meeting where Lim and his supporters pushed for this reform, they expressed their belief that Chinese temples should no longer be places of prayer and petitioning, but of rational remembrance and reflection upon the deeds of past heroes. Henceforth, the Chinese temple was to be what we might today think of as merely a meditative heritage site.

Yet it was local Malay-influenced *Peranakan* Chinese customs that most consumed Lim and his circle's initial reformist energies. The hairstyles and dress of *Nonya* were attacked, as was the speaking of *Baba* Malay. In 1899, Lim and his associate Song Ong Siang established the Straits Chinese Girls School. Its purpose was to educate future *Nonya* out of their *Nonya*-ness by teaching them domestic science, English and, initially, while Lim's first wife was alive, Mandarin. The idea was that once cleansed of their Malay-influenced habits these girls would as mothers commence the education from home of Lim's future generation of globe-trotting Anglo-Chinese, *Baba*.⁸

Two years before the school opened, Lim published a lecture entitled 'Our Enemies' in which he described the Malayan Peninsula as home to 'wild and restless tribes antagonistic at once to the routine work of civilized society and to the nobler demands of literature'. His pioneering Chinese ancestors, he claimed, had managed to cultivate Chinese literature 'in spite of their Malay surroundings'.⁹ However, the darkest side of Lim's quest for cultural ethnic cleansing was revealed a decade later, in an article he contributed to a fund-raising publication in aid of the Straits Chinese Girl School. In this essay, entitled 'Race deterioration in the tropics', Lim placed the blame for the 'decay' of local-born Indians and Arabs in the Straits Settlements and Malaya on the 'constant influx of Malay blood', an influx which rendered both races 'indistinguishable from the Malays, except in certain anthropological characters'. In a similar vein, he attributed the decline of the local Eurasian community on 'Malay wives', who 'often returned to the barbarous ways of their people' so that 'the children imbibed with their milk the instincts of the Malay rather than those of their European fathers.' To arrest what Lim perceived to be the *Baba*'s own racial deterioration, he recommended their 'removal from the Tropics': 'The social atmosphere must be purified. A proper system of moral education for the home must be instituted, and every one must be instilled with the highest ideals of the race.'¹⁰

Thus, the unease of influential and self-styled 'progressive' Singaporean elites with their immediate local contexts appears to have a long history. Does Singapore therefore owe something of its later urban transformation to this earlier colonial songline? How far did Lim's battle to reform local Chinese identities and avert tropical race 'deterioration' leave remnants of ideas that were later resuscitated in the independent city-state ruled by the PAP? Lee Kuan Yew was, after all, born into the

Peranakan Chinese community which Lim Boon Keng, intellectually at least, once lorded it over in Singapore. In the 1950s, most of Lee's 'Oxley Rise set', he later admitted, were colonial bourgeoisie, educated in Western universities abroad, as Lim and many of his circle had been. Lee and his government later promoted speak Mandarin campaigns and English education, in their effort to position Singapore as a whole in the same role as Lim had dreamt of for the *Baba*: as the ultimate Europe-Asia intermediary. **At various times, the PAP legitimized its** urban engineering through what Koolhaas refers to as the 'ideological umbrella' of Neo-Confucianism.¹¹ Lee, like Lim, appears to have also viewed Singapore's natural tropical environs as an enervating obstacle to civilization and progress. Asked in a 2009-10 interview to what the island owed its success (apart from its racial tolerance), he replied:

Air conditioning. Air conditioning was a most important invention for us, perhaps one of the signal inventions of history. It changed the nature of civilization by making development possible in the tropics.¹²

There thus appear to be many examples of ideological continuity. But the way this songline mutated is as important to recognize as its origins. Lee Kuan Yew and his PAP colleagues were hardly susceptible to the same Victorian racial discourse as was Lim. For another thing, they were more at home in a Singapore's everyday cosmopolitan local context than Lim, with his concerns about racial and cultural purity, ever seems to have been. Indeed, as we shall shortly discuss further, Lee and his Oxley Rise set were much more committed to a vision of Singapore as a harmonious, multi-ethnic utopia.

In any case, Lim's influence over the way Chinese elites imagined the city of Singapore and its inhabitants waned after World War One. Frustrated at his failure to gain equal rights as a British imperial citizen, he departed Singapore in 1921 to work in China for the next two decades, whereupon new voices emerged in the city that challenged his earlier vision. One of the ironies of the generation of China-born literati who arrived in Singapore after 1918 to transform its Chinese-language intellectual

scene was their eventual embrace of their tropical surroundings. Filled with the ideals and patriotism of the New Culture and May Fourth movements these newcomers may have been. Nevertheless, their editors insisted that they acclimatize themselves to local reading tastes, which meant embracing the *Nanyang* [the Southern Ocean] and its distinct ecology (in particular, its palm trees).¹³ Subsequently, from 1937, the loose collection of China-born artists that became known as Singapore's Nanyang School did likewise. As, relatively speaking, new-arrivals, these writers and painters were hardly less globally-savvy than the local-born Lim and his reformist circle. In hindsight, however, they appear far more appreciative of the immediate tropical context to which Singapore belonged.

Arts and Singapore's post-war cosmopolitan vision: the PAP as creator-destroyers

The post-war era in which these China-born artists emerged was a period not only of political turbulence, but of great creative excitement and optimism. From 1945 up until the early 1960s, Singapore's arts scene flourished. Along with the Nanyang School of painters, a group of leftist Chinese social realist artists established the Equator Art Society in 1956, their stark, black and white woodcut prints of everyday political and social struggles contrasting with the Bali-inspired Tropicana of Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng and co. Literary life in Singapore was energized by the cosmopolitan Anglophone poets who studied at the University of Malaya (founded in 1949), and by ASAS 50 (founded in 1950), a gathering of Malay and Indonesian leftist writers that included the renowned Singapore-born poet S. N. Masuri. In addition, Singapore's architectural arose from the wartime mess reinvigorated and its burgeoning film industry would in the 1950s bring together audiences of Chinese, Malays, Indians and others through the pan-Malayan appeal of P. Ramlee. Ramlee's portrayals of local ethnic archetypes, and his scenic representations of the rural and urban essences of Singapore and Malaya, became the imprint on celluloid of a nation-in-waiting. Meanwhile, at Singapore's 'world' amusement parks, a mixed audience of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Europeans, shopped, danced and watched performances of *bangsawan* [Malay language musical theatre] and *gewutuan* [Chinese cabaret].¹⁴

The key point here is that Singapore developed into a regional cultural hub minus state intervention – that is to say, without officially trying. The city drew writers, film directors and artists to it from China, India, the Philippines and Indonesia, not because it possessed a world-class creative infrastructure and the promise of government subsidies, but because it allowed for a relatively open trade in ideas. In spite of colonial restrictions, this trade remained free enough to allow for artistic experimentation, emulation and competition. To those who believed they shared in a common struggle against colonialism and inequality –and, of course, for those who believed their role as artists was to capture and document the essence of this struggle– Singapore also became a magnet because it contained that essential duality: both the ‘sweetness and the rot’.

The PAP’s early cosmopolitan dreaming very much belonged to this wider cultural efflorescence. Not only did the party’s leaders look to create a cosmopolitan civic identity in Singapore, they began to imagine a cosmopolitan Malaya which belonged to all ‘Malayans’ – be they Malay, Chinese, Indian or Eurasian. Having attained self-government from the British in 1959, the PAP, led by its Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam, campaigned to see Malay (not English) emerge as the common language of Singapore’s diverse populace. Rajaratnam dreamt of a ‘Malayan’ culture that encompassed elements from each of the island’s different ethnic groups. Initially, this official dream manifest itself through state-sponsored Aneka Ragam Rakyat (People’s Cultural Concerts), the PAP’s politically-correct version of what was already on offer at Singapore’s ‘worlds’ amusement parks.¹⁵

Most significantly, Singapore’s ideological production as a profoundly modernist material space –the architectural songline whose origins Koolhaas locates in both the global and local urban anxieties of the mid-to-late 1960s– commenced at the start of the same decade, when the PAP began to imagine the city as the gleaming progressive metropolis of a young Malayan nation. The party’s social revolution in housing, health, education and industry, which it launched so quickly after it swept Singapore’s first general elections in 1959, was intended to be the blueprint for a second stage: the export of this revolution to the rest of the Malayan Peninsula with which Singapore merged in 1963 to form the new Federation of Malaysia. Urban renewal in Singapore, which in Koolhaas’s essay becomes a euphemism for the razing of the old city by bulldozer, in fact began with this utopian Malaysian dream

in mind. As an oft-quoted official booklet on Singapore's housing revolution put it in 1965 (a work composed before Singapore's departure from the Federation of Malaysia that year):

What is urban renewal? Urban renewal means no less than the gradual demolition of virtually the whole 1,500 acres of the old city and its replacement by an integrated modern city centre worthy of Singapore's future role as the New York of Malaysia.¹⁶

Lee Kuan Yew, in the same publication, expressed his view that Singapore's Housing Development Board (HDB) flats, more than 50,000 of which had by this time sprung up in various parts of the island, were more than merely a social necessity. They were, as importantly, a political and cultural symbol; the beginning, even, of a new social contract:

All great civilizations have this hallmark in common – imposing public buildings and good private dwellings ... Singapore has always had imposing public buildings – thanks to the British – intended to awe the people into obedience BUT not the private dwellings, which its elected government has erected...Singapore is a proud city. It is acquiring the one hallmark of a great civilized community, magnificent buildings plus comparable workers housing.¹⁷

In Lee's vision, Singapore would achieve the hallmarks of 'a great civilized community' through steel girders and concrete. Presumably, its imposing concretized civilization would stand as an example to the rest of the Malayan Peninsula of the 'winds of change' the PAP would bring if voted for in Malaysia's 1964 general elections.



(Fig. 3. Lee Kuan Yew in 1965, at the Commonwealth Close HDB flats)

To help realize this official dream, three United Nations inspectors –a German, an American and a Japanese– had earlier visited the Singapore to produce for its government their infamous ‘Growth and Urban Renewal’ report of 1963. Over time, this document has attained a folkloric status for having provided the original sanction for the thirty years of demolition that followed. As early as 1964, Lee Kuan Yew referred to it in this way when justifying the demolition of Malay homes in the neighbourhoods of Crawford, Rochor and Kampong Glam.¹⁸ Koolhaas reads this document in much the same fashion, as an international warrant for future mass urban destruction. He notes the report’s breakdown of urban renewal into three key elements: ‘1) conservation 2) rehabilitation and 3) rebuilding’. Nevertheless, he sees its recommendation that ‘*a commitment be made to identify the values of some of Singapore’s existing areas as well as their shortcomings and build and strengthen these values while planning to remove some of their shortcomings*’ as no more than a ‘pondering of preservation’, one that in retrospect can be taken either as merely as ‘lip service’ or as a belated self-realization by these experts that the their overall recommendations ‘will seal the island’s fate with the transformations they are about to set in motion.’¹⁹

Koolhaas might not be the only person guilty of a having misread this critical document, but he remains one of the more influential. In terms of our overall discussion, what the UN experts actually

say in their report is illuminating. At this critical juncture in Singapore history, urban renewal is not to be, as the island's authorities later define it, 'no less than the gradual demolition of virtually the whole 1,500 acres of the old city' – on this point the inspectors are explicit. Rather in 'framing objectives', they write, 'it is important to know the purpose of urban renewal. It is more than simply tearing down sections and rebuilding them'. In reality, the full quotation which Koolhaas selectively pillages reads:

With all its confrontations, the question that an urban renewal program must face and resolve is whether to make a commitment to the retention of its areas or to raze them and create something different in their place. We recommend that a commitment be made to identify the values of some of Singapore's existing areas as well as their shortcomings and build and strengthen these values while planning to remove some of their shortcomings. A city of predominantly Chinese people for example, without a Chinatown would be an anachronism. The Chinatowns of cities are among their most attractive features and they have evolved out of their own travail rather than out of planned models. Too many people derive their livelihood from such areas to be uprooted en masse. Many prefer to continue living in them rather than in the housing projects... Chinatown can also become a main focus of tourism and a locus of better restaurants and shops as well as provide *a contrast in a big city that needs divergencies between old and new, between the superimposed and the spontaneous. Every big city needs escape hatches from sameness and order and areas like Chinatown can emerge into important examples – if they are treated with something more subtle than the steam-shovel.*²⁰

In 1963, the UN experts hired to advise the PAP government wanted key urban contextual remnants in Singapore to be preserved. In the case of the first city in Asia to undergo major urban renewal, they were acutely aware of the need to maintain internal 'divergencies', those 'spontaneous' architectural

elements which allowed for an escape from the ‘sameness and order’ of the abstract and rationalized urban space they proposed elsewhere. More than merely ‘pondering’ preservation, they were explicit in their recommendations as to how it was to be achieved. Areas of the city would first be publicly declared as designated for urban renewal through ‘rehabilitation and selective not wholesale demolition.’ Rehabilitation would consist of five stages which included: a survey of every block to determine which areas were to be conserved, which rehabilitated and which demolished and rebuilt; the re-planning and rebuilding of blocks where better parking and traffic flows was required – in line with a regard for their composition and flavour’; and a ‘code enforcement programme to compel the repair and preservation of buildings’ which were ‘sound and salvageable’. The inspectors fully understood Singapore’s CBD would pose a challenge. Nonetheless, they concluded that, ‘Here too, conservations coupled with selective improvements are the keys’.²¹

Yet the government of Singapore, keen to transform the city into a modern ‘New York of Malaysia’, was at that time working to a different timetable and with a different set of priorities, and it only took from the report those recommendations which suited it. The authorities eventually declared patches of the city as conservation districts in the 1980s: namely Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India, Emerald Hill, the Singapore River and key parts of the old colonial town. In the mid-1960s, however, they glorified in the old town of Singapore’s ‘gradual demolition’, which was then justified over the next three decades as a pragmatic necessity and inevitability.

A liberating Separation? Building, flattening and greening

During his announcement of the death of the Federation of Malaysia dream in August 1965, did Lee Kuan Yew cry on television tears of relief as well as regret? Did Separation mark the death of a wider context that had been eating away at Lee’s official dream of Singapore as a clean and modern utopia? Had Merger, in fact, been turning Singapore more Malaysian rather than, as Lee had hoped, Malaysia more Singaporean? Was the failure of Merger, the cutting of those bonds of kin and geography that Lee

wept over, a liberation for the PAP leadership from previous constraints – the ties and obligations of historical and geographical belonging?²²

According to Koolhaas, Lee was an admirer of the works of the futurologists Herman Kahn and Alvin Toffler. In the aftermath of Separation, a certain futurologist streak became a feature of PAP discourse. In an address to a gathering of local teachers, Lee implied made clear his view that Singapore did not possess any common historical context from which a modern national identity could be formed. The Singaporean, he argued, was not someone like the American – who could tell you ‘all about George Washington or Abraham Lincoln...For he has history, and he can say, “These are the great events in the life of my people”... We are not in the same position’. Rajaratnam, in a speech in 1968, went further:

We do not lay undue stress on the past. We do not see nation-building and modernisation as primarily an exercise in reuniting present generations with a past generation and its values and glories...A generation encouraged to bask in the values of the past and hold on to a static future will never be equipped to meet a future predicated on jet travel, atomic power, satellite communication, electronics and computers. For us the task is not one of linking past generations with the present generation, but the present generation with future generations.²³

Nor was this official attack on history simply an elite one. As the historian Mary Turnbull has noted, a popular slogan for young PAP supporters at the time of Separation was ‘SINGAPORE HAS NO HISTORY. SINGAPORE’S HISTORY BEGINS NOW’.²⁴

The post-Separation myth of Singapore as a ‘sleepy fishing village’ before 1819, possessing little of significance in the wider world or state of things, might similarly be construed as part of this official effort to escape historical context. In an interview with a British journalist just two days after independence, Lee described Singapore as just such a space back in the days before Sir Stamford Raffles landed: ‘I am here because over 100 years ago the British came to Singapore, a little fishing village,

and decided to develop the place'.²⁵ Interestingly, Raffles' vision of Singapore was never to render the island historically context-less. Rather, he dreamt of a Singapore rooted in the region and its past, an island's whose colonial development would restore it to its ancient role as a centre of Malay (in its broadest sense) civilization.²⁶

This official concern to present Singapore as history-less following independence adds a new dimension to our understanding of the intensified urban destruction that followed. Over the next three decades, the government demolished buildings and removed and relocated whole villages, thus ending for some the rituals and rites they had periodically inscribed onto the island. In their place, it built new edifices of its own, or permitted the construction of those, once sales of land were open up to private investors from the 1970s, which reflected the capitalist prosperity it had orchestrated. Across the island, it created an imposing concrete 'heartland' of HDB blocks, the solid walls of which served to remind the people to whom they ought to feel gratitude. The state relocated temples and in so doing completely reordered Singapore's sacred geography – as did its ban, imposed from 1964 following the Chinese-Malay riots of that year, on all religious foot processions for these two communities, whether their members be Christian, Daoist, Buddhist or Muslim. The state built multi-ethnic community centres which drew people away from clan and other communal associations. It flattened hills, filled in swamps and added land to the island where once there had been sea.

As Koolhaas observes, the state also 'remade' nature. Driving Lee Kuan Yew's 'greening' of Singapore policy (which commenced in 1963, was renewed in 1967, and then took off as a public movement in the 1970s with the inauguration of officially-led tree planting drives) was the desire to cover up the bare concrete structures of his exemplar modern Asian capital. In addition, Lee hoped that Singapore, as a comfortable garden city, would become more attractive to international visitors and investors. Yet the green 'oasis' in Southeast Asia he set about making was hardly a throwback to the ecological context celebrated by an earlier generation of local China-born writers and artists. The greening of Singapore, at least during its first twenty years, was in its own way largely context-less. Tree and plant species were chosen because of their ability to grow fast and provide shade rather than because they were indigenous. Singapore's tree-growing technicians were forced to resort to species

imported from drier climates, owing to the fact that varieties native to tropical Southeast Asia could not survive in the newly concretized metropolis.²⁷

Politicians in Singapore have reminisced about this era of transformation as one in which the young Singaporean nation overcame the odds. It might equally be understood as a period in which the state made subservient or killed off numerous other contexts that gave meaning to the physical space Singaporeans inhabited: sacred, ecological, topographical and historical. Nation-building was at the same time *other-context erasing*. After 1965, the rites of Singaporean belonging increasingly belonged to the state. Singaporeans became united by the sameness and order of officially regulated and defined experiences – in their HDBs, at their schools, during (for men) National Service, and even through government-led tree planting drives. For some years, the only foot procession that gave ritual meaning and a sense of temporal continuity in the modernized metropolis was the August 9th National Day Parade – until, in 1973, the Singapore Tourism Board realized that more was needed in a city that aspired to be ‘Instant Asia’ and reinstated, after a 67 year absence, the city’s annual Chingay parade.





(Fig. 4. Three images of a temple in Toa Payoh, as HDB flats go up in 1968, as seen in 1971, and then as demolished in 1977.)

It has to be noted that there are today signs Singapore has come through this period of creative urban destruction. A new generation of politicians, planners, curators and architects, not to mention heritage and environmental activists, have imbued the city-state with a reawakened sense of history, sacred geography and place. The struggle to preserve a sense of local context is ongoing, yet striking gains have been made. For Tony Tan Keng Joo, the former Chief Architect of HDB responsible for Singapore's entire public housing programme from 1983 to 2003, a watershed moment in urban planning came in the late-1990s, during the early stages of the Punggol New Town development. Tan recently recalled that up until this development the pressure to build housing as fast and as cheaply as possible in Singapore had meant the destruction of existing landscapes had become 'engrained in the psyche of our planners, architects and engineers. In the initial stages of Punggol New Town, they just followed the same approach, putting down a grid and sending in the bulldozers to flatten everything.' Nevertheless, as the 'buildings started to rise in Punggol', Tan and his team 'began to rethink the design strategy' in order 'to preserve what was left of the existing natural landscape':

Yes, Punggol New Town was the starting point for a change in mindset. As professionals, designing and building for others, planners must understand that the idiosyncrasies of a site are in fact its main asset. Only by preserving the memories of that location, and creating an identity, can a new town then have a character of its own, connecting residents with where they live.²⁸

Bye-bye hinterland: the birth and legacy of Rajaratnam's global dreaming

Though it might not represent an unbroken continuity with the past, one post-independence Singapore songline which at least harked back to an earlier period was the official vision which replaced the dream of Singapore as the 'New York of Malaysia'. In 1972, and a good two decades before academics picked up on the idea, Rajaratnam, acting as Foreign Minister, informed a gathering of international journalists that Singapore had recently acquired a new status as a 'global city'. For Rajaratnam, this metamorphosis, into what he described as 'a new kind of city... a new form of human organization and settlement that has... no precedent', made explicable Singapore's 'inexplicable' success following Separation, and its avoidance of the 'gradual relapse into economic decay' that had been predicted for it. Before 1965, he admitted, the PAP assumed Singapore needed a natural hinterland to provide it with its raw materials and domestic market. The years of progress that followed Separation had disabused the party of their former mistaken belief.²⁹

The 'Global City, now in its infancy', Rajaratnam claimed, was 'the child of modern technology'—namely, electronic communications, giant tankers and supersonic planes— and of 'industrial organization'. It was also the future. 'Agrarian romantics' who waxed lyrical about 'the countryside surrounding the cities' were simply expressing the 'defiant cry' of those who looked on while the countryside was 'swallowed up relentlessly by the cities'. Thanks to the population boom across Asia, the old context they were desperately trying to hold onto was fast disappearing. Rajaratnam, in addition, argued that global cities such as Singapore were unprecedented because 'unlike earlier cities' they were:

linked intimately with one another. Because they are more alike they reach out to one another through the tentacles of technology. Linked together they form a chain of cities which today shape and direct, in varying degrees of importance, a world-wide system of economics.

Singapore had evolved into global 'more than a regional city', he continued, because the economic benefits of being merely the latter, as the city's entrepôt trade declined, were not sufficient to sustain it. Instead, Singapore's future now lay with the worldwide club of other global cities and 'the international economic system that this club shared in common'.³⁰



(Fig. 5. S. Rajaratnam's image was the first to appear on television in Singapore in 1963)

In a diatribe against the field of urban history and its obsession with generic types, Raj Chandavarkar, the social historian of India, proclaimed the city as a 'relational category constituted by and dependent upon its wider political economy'.³¹ In essence, Chandavarkar argued, cities are made by their hinterlands, just as they in turn make their hinterlands. One cannot therefore be thought of independently of the other. Such a perspective is clearly applicable to Chandavarkar's home town of Bombay, with its deep connections to the Indian countryside which fed it and provided it with labour. It would also appear applicable to Renaissance Italian city-republics and their *contados*. However, Rajaratnam's vision of Singapore in the early-1970s flies in the face of any such presumption that a rural hinterland alone constitutes a city's wider political economy. As he told his journalist audience, 'once you see Singapore as a Global City, the problem of hinterland becomes unimportant because for a global city the world is its hinterland'.³²

He does not appear to have included the arts in his imagining of Singapore as a global city. At the time, he was more obsessed about the electronic communications and supersonic air travel that made her contract with other cities in the global cities club so regular and rapid. However, by the start of the new millennium, a new generation of PAP planners recognized that though Singapore's First World status had been achieved economically, it lagged behind in its cultural life. In the year 2000, the 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'.³³

For these planners, the global city club now provided a new context when making their assessments of Singapore's arts scene and when recommending policies to 'improve' it. What this comparative data consisted of, and exactly where Singapore stood in the global city club in artistic terms, was evident a decade later in the Report of the Economic Strategies Committee of 2010. In a sense, this

document indicates a maturation of the official urban vision: ‘Singapore’s future must rest on being a global city. New York and London are what they are, not because of their specific economic activities, but because people want to be there’. In what was possibly a tacit acknowledgement that decades of urban destruction had robbed Singapore of its distinctiveness, the report emphasised the need to add ‘character’ to the city in order to make it a ‘distinctive global city’. To this end, arts and artists ought to be given considerable state support as they strove to give Singapore a unique flavour.³⁴

Nonetheless, when it came to the how and the why of such state creativity-making, it was clear indicated the ghost of Rajaratnam’s global city vision still haunted Singapore’s planners:

To be a leading global city is to be part of an elite community of world cultural capitals. Singapore ranks highly in various business and liveability indices for our first world business and city infrastructure and networks. While we have obtained first-world standards in business and liveability, we are still lagging global city standards for culture. [The footnote reads: ‘In a recent Global Cities report, Singapore ranked seventh overall and within the top ten in terms of business activity and human capital but it ranked 37th in cultural experience’]. Our cultural sector falls behind that of global cities like London, Paris, New York and Tokyo in terms of scale, diversity and demand. On the other hand there has been a major shift in focus in the global cultural landscape towards Asia, as evidenced by the booming Asian contemporary art market and massive investment in cultural infrastructure by competing Asian cities. [The footnote then lists Hong Kong, Seoul and Abu Dhabi as major global city competitors in this regard]. To be a player in the league of top global cities, we need to make significant investments in our cultural capital and landscape...’³⁵

The report went on to list, through the efforts of its subcommittee, where such investment should be directed in order to make Singapore a ‘hub for the arts’ and ‘an influential innovator of distinctive cultural experiences with global appeal’:

We must develop thriving creative and arts clusters – distinguished for both their development of Asian content and appeal to an international audience. We should also aim to host more pinnacle global events, building on the new vibrancy of the city and Marina Bay.³⁶

How was the ranking that had so bothered these planners – 37th in the global cities club for ‘cultural experience’ – been arrived at? The league table of global cities in question was produced by the international consultancy A. T. Kearney. According to its website, A. T. Kearney’s specialist expertise includes: aerospace and defence, automotive, chemicals, communications media and technology, consumer products and retail, financial institutions, healthcare, metals and mining, oil and gas, private equity, public sector, transportation, and infrastructure and utilities. It does not, it appears, include the arts or cultural resource management. What importance did these international consultants assign ‘cultural experience’ in the making of leading global cities? The answer was ‘15%’. How did they assign this grade in their assessments? By awarding cities points based on the access they provided ‘to major sporting events, museums and other expos’. The global arts complex that Singapore’s planners imagined in 2010 was one in which cultural excellence was achieved through international exhibitions, mega-museums, Formula One and 50,000 seater stadia.³⁷

Art as resistance to the state’s global dreaming?

The focus of this essay has been on the elite and official dreams that have dominated the urban imaginative field in which Singaporean creatives work. Obviously our emphasis, when discussing a

society in which freedom of expression is permitted only so far as what is expressed falls within quite limited officially-defined parameters, has been on the 'hard state' rather than the 'soft city'. I am still unable to relate to the image of Singapore as a soft city which invites you, so Jonathan Raban claims, 'to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in' as it bends to the individual imagination.³⁸ Past and more recent history indicates that individual imaginations in Singapore have repeatedly had to compete against the urban visions that the city's official dreamers have created. That these imaginative constructs –the 'Renaissance city', the 'global city league', and before that the 'garden city' and 'New York of Malaysia' – need to be dissected goes without saying, especially as more local arts practitioners are drafted into to assist with their propagation.

It likewise goes without saying that the continuing hardness of the Singapore state in its attitude to censorship means that the relationship between local arts practitioners and the government will probably continue to be antagonistic. At the same time, this relationship has already become, as a result of the new funding and infrastructure the state now offers artists, an increasingly interdependent one, a development that raises a whole set of new questions regarding Singapore's urban imaginative field. For one thing, what sort of creativity does the state in Singapore, now intent on making the city more globally distinctive, conjure into existence? What sort of aesthetic expression does an officialdom that yearns to create a global arts hub organize and configure? As importantly, will artists working within this new configuration become influential enough to change the way the government imagines the city it continues to govern?

Some months before the Renaissance City report of the year 2000 appeared in Singapore, I wandered off my daily circuit between Armenian Street and the old National Library to explore the recently opened Singapore Art Museum. Here, I caught the cultural medallion winner Lee Wen's satirical mixed-media installation *World Class Society*. In it, the visitor 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... a world class airport, a world class government, world class artists and a world class museum'.



(Fig.6. Lee Wen and his World Class Society installation at the Singapore Art Museum, 1999)

I found this work consoling. It was not just myself, an outsider, who reacted in this way to Singapore's 'world class' complex. Somewhere in the hard state someone had permitted this artistic act

of subversion its place within a national arts institution. Having later worked with government heritage agencies across Singapore, I came to realize that the city's hard state is nevertheless, like all states, an assemblage. The planners who dream up futurist urban visions form one part of this assemblage. They might, and they do, find their visions mediated, remoulded, subtly un-dreamt or even subverted by other parts of the assemblage.³⁹ In spite of dipping, for the purposes of the present discussion, into the roots and iterations of Singapore's global city benchmarking fixation, I am aware of the striking contrast presented by the city's newly-opened National Art Gallery. Although this institution was established to cement Singapore's status as a global cultural hub, it has opted to do so through a curatorial focus on Southeast Asia. In this case, an older Singapore songline, dating back to city's post-1945 cultural efflorescence and even before, has now been re-established.

Of course Singapore's *tabula rasa* syndrome, which its official planners have until recently accepted as inevitable –and which, as the video artist has Ho Tzu Nyen has noted, at some point in the 1990s transitioned from the 'bull-dozing stage' to the 'perpetual makeover' in which 'nothing can be left alone', whereby the 'lifespans of things and buildings are abridged' and 'everything comes with an expiry date' – this syndrome certainly remains a challenge for those individuals seeking to imprint their creative identities on the city. Juan Foo, quoted in a 2008 study by the political scientist Kenneth Paul Tan, speaks of it being 'increasingly difficult to have a continuity and consistency of the cinematic landscapes that are depicted in Singapore film' – the recognizable locales, 'the elusive essence of the city' that are the key to narrative in film-making.⁴⁰ Royston Tan, another Singaporean film maker quoted in the same study, admits to feeling 'a great sense of loss in Singapore because it's constantly changing'.

However, in the words of the study's author, Tan's sense of loss propels him through his work to try 'to immortalize as many things as [he] can in film'. The director's 'earlier works are set in pockets of "old world" Singapore, in places that seem to represent for him an intimate but temporary refuge from the relentless and inflexible logic of modernization, and in particular the indiscriminate forces of urbanization':

Tan's mission is to preserve through art those places in Singapore that have deep meaning for him. As Singapore transforms into a global city clone, indiscriminate urbanization threatens to demolish these places and replace them with context-less buildings that lack character and historical depth.⁴¹

Hock Hiap Leong, Tan's short film about the *kopitiam* on Armenian Street (the one which, in 1999, I myself fell in love with) is one such example. Works by Ho Tzu Nyen, by playwrights such as Huzir Sulaiman, Paul Rae and Kaylene Tan, and most recently by the graphic novelist Sonny Liew, provide further examples of the way the imprint of individual creators can be superimposed on Singapore's seemingly ever-changing context-less present. These artists reject the myth that Singapore has no history. They mine the island's past for all its creative worth, restoring formerly lost songlines to a city seemingly long bent on the erasure of all its contextual remnants.

How Singaporean creatives respond to the latest urban dreams of the state, while staying true to their individual artistic sensibilities, remains to be seen. Some practitioners (including those from outside the city who have now made it their home) have greeted the global arts hub policies of the government as good medicine for a local scene that has been for too long inward-looking and parochial.⁴² Others have been more circumspect. The thoughts of the abstract painter Ian Woo are instructive. Woo, in a recent interview, accepts the vital importance of visual artists from Singapore exhibiting abroad and being seen 'in the context of the world'. Nevertheless, he concludes:

I never thought of the arts hub. I don't understand what it's all about. I don't want to make work to service a system that is positioned by the government. I fear I may end up making work that caters to a certain assumption. So, to Singapore artists, you make the best work you can make. The most original, the most individualistic that's unique to you; you just have to be excited about your work. If you make good work, the hub is going to happen anyway.⁴³

In a city that has for so long been afflicted by its global benchmarking fixations and its world class ‘complex’, often to the detriment of what makes it distinctive and unique, Woo’s strategy appears the best solution. But perhaps, too, local artists, by turning away from Singapore’s pursuit of the global and the lure of an often rootless cosmopolitanism, will continue to recover their island’s own lost contexts – contexts which are more than merely traditions, contexts which lend themselves to being borrowed and bent, and reinvented, contexts which are never truly killed off while there is still someone with the imagination to conjure them back into existence.

¹ Rem Koolhaas, ‘Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis... or Thirty years of Tabula Rasa’ in *S M L X L* (Cologne: Taschen, 1997), pp. 1008-1089.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1011

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1017-19, 1035-6, 1051-9; Chua Beng Huat, ‘Pragmatism of the People’s Action Party Government in Singapore: a Critical assessment’, *Southeast Asia Journal of Social Science* 13, 2, pp. 29-46; Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, new edition (London: Vintage, 1998).

⁴ Jurgem Rudolph, *Reconstructing Identities: A Social History of the Babas* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 381-2.

⁵ See Mark R Frost, ‘Transcultural Diaspora: the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1918’, ARI Working Paper 10 (2003); and ‘Emporium in Imperio: Nanyang Networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1914,’ *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 36, 1 (2005): 29-66.

⁶ In 1902, for example, Lim penned an article on the Anglo-Japanese agreement for the Madras-published *Indian Review*. See the editorial note in the *Straits Times*, 9 May 1902, p. 4.

⁷ See the debate in the *Straits Times* between ‘Amicus’ and Lim, writing as ‘Historicus’; ‘The Advancement of the Straits Chinese’, 7 July 1899, p. 3; ‘The Moral Advancement of the Chinese’, 13 July 1899, p. 3; ‘The Attempt to Rejuvenate Confucianism’, 15 July 1899 p. 3; ‘A Confucian Revival’, 18 July 1899, p. 3. On Dharmapala’s interview with Tan Teck Soon see, ‘The Mission of Buddhism’, *The Daily Advertiser*, 13 Jan 1894, p.2.

⁸ Frost, ‘Transcultural Diaspora’, pp. 23-7.

⁹ Lim Boon Keng, ‘Our Enemies’, *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, 1, 2 (June 1897): 52-58

¹⁰ Lim, Boon Keng, ‘Race Deterioration in the Tropics’, in *The Straits Chinese Annual*, ed. Song Ong Siang (Singapore: Strait Times Press, 1909), pp. 2-5.

¹¹ Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines*, p. 1019.

¹² Quoted in Chang Jiat-Hwee and Tim Winter, ‘Thermal Modernity and Architecture’, *The Journal of Architecture*, 20:1 (2015): 92-121.

¹³ Yeo Song Nian, ‘Chinese Language Literature in Malaya and Singapore (1919-1942), *Chinese Adaptations and Diversity: Essays on Society and Literature in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Singapore Univ. Press, 1993), pp.169-80.

¹⁴ Mark R. Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 340-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 389-91

¹⁶ *50,000 Up: Homes For the People* (Singapore: HDB, 1965), p. 84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Frost and Balasingamchow, *Singapore*, pp. 417-18.

¹⁹ Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines*, pp. 1025-6

²⁰ Charles Abrams, Susume Jobe and Otto Koenigsberger, ‘Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore: Report Prepared for the Government of Singapore, November 1963’, pp. 121-2. My italics.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.120-3.

²² On Lee Kuan Yew’s uneasiness regarding the changes in Singapore during the Merger period see his *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 2000), pp. 512, 579.

²³ Quoted in Frost and Balasingamchow, *Singapore*, pp. 430-31

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- ²⁴ Koolhaas, *Singapore Songlines*, pp. 1019; Constance Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore: 1819-2005* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), p. 1.
- ²⁵ National Archives of Singapore, 'Transcript of an interview given by the Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, to Mr Gerry Seymour, resident correspondent of Independent Television News (ITN) on August 11, 1965', p. 3. Available at <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19650811b.pdf> [accessed 28 Aug 2016].
- ²⁶ Frost and Balasingamchow, *Singapore*, pp. 49-58.
- ²⁷ Koolhaas, 'Singapore Songlines', pp. 1011; Tim Auger, *Living in a Garden: the Greening of Singapore* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2013) pp. 29-30; Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story 1965-2000* (Singapore: Time Editions, 2000), pp. 188-90.
- ²⁸ Claire Fleetwood and Viviana Meijia, *Housing People: Affordable Housing Solutions for the 21st Century* (Singapore: Surbana International Consultants, 2012), p.150.
- ²⁹ National Archives of Singapore, 'Singapore: Global City, text of an address by Minister for Foreign Affairs S. Rajaratnam to the Singapore Press Club on February 6, 1972', also reprinted in *Southeast Asia in the Twentieth century: A Reader*, ed. Clive Christie (London: I.B. Taurus, 1998), pp. 286-91
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-91.
- ³¹ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 218-19.
- ³² Quoted in Christie, *Southeast Asia*, p. 289.
- ³³ Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore (2000), pp.23-24, 26-7, 41. Available at <https://www.nac.gov.sg/dam/jcr:defaf681-9bbb-424d-8c77-879093140750>. [accessed 26 Aug 2016].
- ³⁴ Report of the Economic Strategies Committee (2010), pp. 9, 12. Available at <http://www.mof.gov.sg/Portals/0/MOF%20For/Businesses/ESC%20Recommendations/ESC%20Full%20Report.pdf> [accessed on 26 Aug 2016].
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71
- ³⁷ See A. T. Kearney's 'Global cities 2015: The race accelerates' report, p. 7. The company's most recent global cities index is available at <http://www.atkearney.co.uk/research-studies/global-cities-index/2015> [accessed 26 Aug 2016].
- ³⁸ Jonathon Raban, *Soft City* (London: Random House, 1974), p. 2.
- ³⁹ On the state as assemblage see, Mark R. Frost, 'Pandora's Post Box: Empire and Information in India, 1854-1914', *English Historical Review*, forthcoming; see also Manuel Delanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2006).
- ⁴⁰ Kenneth Paul Tan, *Cinema and Television in Singapore: Resistance in One Dimension* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 222
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xxiii, 221-27.
- ⁴² See Wyn Lyn-Tan, 'Global Hopes – Is Singapore an arts hub yet?', *The Peak*, 22 Jan 2015, available at <http://thepeakmagazine.com.sg/2015/01/is-singapore-an-arts-hub-yet-2/> [accessed 26 Aug 2016]; Greg Oates, 'Singapore repositions image as a cultural hub with local artists', *Skift*, 15 Sep 2015, available at <https://skift.com/2015/09/15/singapore-repositions-image-as-a-cultural-hub-with-local-artists/> [accessed 26 Aug 2016]
- ⁴³ Wyn, 'Global Hopes'.