'ARTS, CULTURE AND MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT IN SINGAPORE'

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DECLARATION

I SIN SONG-CHIEW, JAMES declare that the following thesis ‘Arts, Culture and Museum Developments In Singapore’ has neither in whole or part been submitted for a higher degree to any other institution.
Synopsis:

Museums exhibition designers are servants of the state. They help create public culture, promote a version of history. It is important to demonstrate the design vocabulary and grammar that the exhibition designer works with to create meaning in bridging understanding, with the knowledge of history and the primary ideologies of the state which he/she serves. Singapore’s recent interest in arts and heritage museums as part of a larger desire for regional economic and cultural survival and pre-eminence needs to be identified with the evolution, interconnectedness and ambitions of Singapore’s arts and cultural organisations. In conjunction, some of the implications of Singapore’s Arts and Heritage Policy needs to be unpacked. A brief but concise comparative history of Australia needs to be made for the arts, cultural and museum comparison between the Australia and Singapore. The exhibition designer’s vocabulary and grammar can then be used to evaluate the four exhibitions in Sydney and Singapore eventually.

This dissertation is very art focused. It discusses all display objects as though they were paintings and work of fine art.

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INTRODUCTION:
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This thesis discusses some aspects of the exhibition designer's role in state museums and galleries. It draws on my experiences in Singapore and my observations as a student living in Sydney.

Museum exhibition designers are servants of the state. They help create public culture and also promote a version of history. But if we are to understand the ways in which designers create meaning (and serve their employer's interests) we need to identify the "vocabulary" and "grammar" that they have at their disposal. To this end, I will outline the variables that they work with and argue that they need to understand their employer's ideologies and history. I will also argue that Singapore's recent interest in the arts and heritage has been part of her larger desires for regional economies and cultural pre-eminence and is linked to the ways in which her ambitions arts and cultural organisations have evolved and interconnect. In conjunction, some of the implications of Singapore's Arts and Heritage Policy need to be unpacked. A brief but concise comparative history of Sydney/Australia will be made for the arts, cultural and museum comparison between Australia and Singapore. The exhibition designer's vocabulary and grammar can then be used to evaluate the four exhibitions in Sydney and Singapore eventually.

In recent years, Singapore has been actively promoting its cultural and arts presence, yet few has researched Singapore's museum culture. Added to that, Singapore museums had not provided support and copies of their mission statements to facilitate closer understanding of their cultures and identities. With that, I cannot engage in a standard literature review. Thus this dissertation does not follow the convention of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

In the first chapter, I will demonstrate that the exhibition designer works with a design vocabulary and grammar to create meaning in bridging understanding. In the process of identifying this vocabulary and grammar it will become apparent that the designer is usually working within a modernist idiom and that these modernist display principles have become a mode of
communication which places Singapore and Sydney government museums and galleries (and their intended audiences) within a transnational museum community. Although all of the theorists I draw on to spell out this communication mode have lived and worked in Europe and America, their writings and their design works have informed Australian and East Asian designers’ ideas of how to display their public culture, and, therefore, to represent their institutions as “modern” and part of a transnational modernity. Since this (usually ‘white cube’) vocabulary and grammar is ubiquitous we can use it to evaluate the four exhibitions which I analyse in Chapter Six.

Since the contemporary exhibition designer creates meaning, he/she needs to be more than a technician who realises the curatorial team’s ambitions and deploys a clichéd repertoire of ‘white cube’ semantics. This is because the designer is an agent of the state and is someone who communicates to citizens and tourists on the state’s behalf. The designer needs to know the history and the primary ideologies of the state which he/she serves. In view of this, I sketch a history of Singapore in Chapter Two. This history focuses on Singapore’s colonial period, the origins of Singapore’s multi-racial and multi-cultural citizenry, the role of Goh Chok Tong’s People’s Action Party (PAP) in developing a state ideology of Asian-ness and its relatively recent concern to develop a national museum and galleries culture as part of its vision for future prosperity and security. I will return to these themes in subsequent chapters when I analyse the exhibition’s content and display strategies.

Having identified that Singapore’s recent interest in arts and heritage museums is part of a larger desire for regional economic and cultural survival and pre-eminence; the third chapter identifies the evolution, interconnectedness and ambitions of Singapore’s arts and cultural organisations. Once again, I address the issues of ‘Asian-ness’, modernisation without westernisation and the state’s desire to meet the challenges which the global communication systems place upon Singapore citizen’s welfare.

The above themes resurface in Chapter Four, where I seek to unpack some of the implications of Singapore’s ‘Arts and Heritage Policy’. Recognising that
these sorts of documents are conceptual and rely on administrators and curators to interpret and to realise their broad guidelines, I nevertheless feel that some aspects are ill-considered and unnecessarily vague.

Chapter Five sketches a brief and comparative history of Sydney. This chapter is necessarily brief but concise for three main reasons. Firstly, I cannot assume that my reader is familiar with the broad outlines of this history. Secondly, I think that it is necessary to remind the reader that, for all their differences, Singapore and Sydney share some important features. For example, both cities were founded at about the same time, both have had long histories as British colonies and, hence, of serving her mercantile and security interests; both developed industrial economies; both espouse ‘multicultural’ philosophies; both are sensitive to de-traditionalising and globalising forces. Finally, this chapter anticipates the history which the Museum of Sydney’s (MOS’s) Sydney Vista’s Panoramic Views 1788-1995 sets out to represent in an innovative, but not entirely successful way.

The final chapter compares and contrasts two sets of exhibitions. Demonstrating that Sydney and Singapore are concerned with issues of national identity, multiculturalism and international relationships, I have chosen to discuss two recent art exhibitions and two recent heritage exhibitions. These exhibitions raise questions about artist-museum relationships and about display designer’s power to shape meaning. The heritage exhibitions raise questions about the ways in which museum’s address their imagined audiences through display techniques, labelling etc. and represent the past.

I shall conclude my dissertation with some observations about the ways in which Singapore’s museum designers might develop strategies that would contribute to Singapore’s aspirations to become a regional hub in the developing Pacific Rim culture.
1.0.0

CHAPTER ONE:

Spatial Philosophy And Design Theory
CHAPTER ONE: Spatial Philosophy And Design Theory

All exhibitions designers use lighting, colour, graphics, space and many other variables to enhance exhibitions and to facilitate the curator’s communication with his/her intended audiences. If an exhibition designer works for a government instrumentality, he has the added responsibilities of serving his state’s international standing as a “progressive” and “educated” member of the world economy and legitimating its authority. As we shall see, Singapore’s exhibition designers fall far short of contemporary best practice. But, before we can analyse their strengths and weaknesses, we will need to identify the conceptual tools that we can bring to our task. To this end, this chapter identifies the ways in which exhibition designers address the people who visit museums and galleries.

In this chapter, I will analyse the relationship between a viewer1 and an object2 by the use of lights, colours, perspective, space etc; and evaluate the main (modernist) display principles. These display principles are internal and external theory (see below) of aesthetic display in space, spatial design, size determination3 of display, placement of display, interior and exterior experience of display and transitional space. In effect, this overview constitutes the principles of contemporary spatial display and will provide the vocabulary and conceptual framework for analysing the Sydney (Museum of Contemporary Art and Museum Of Sydney) and Singaporean (Singapore Art

1 The viewer can also be known as the museum-goer, the audience, the observer, the spectator or the eye (the eye is discussed in detail on pp. 21). They are gendered. However, in this discussion, they are termed as ‘the viewer’ or ‘he’. The viewer receives, reads and analyses.


2 Objects include displays, art, artworks and installations. In this discussion, they are termed as ‘objects’ or ‘displays’.

3 Size determination of display refers to the objects in space and the relation to the objects that are supporting them.

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Museum and Singapore History Museum) exhibitions in Chapter Six. It is an amalgam of several designers' vernacular theories and craft knowledge as well as some semiotic approaches to design.

Before designing a public space, it is necessary to understand and remember the characteristics of a viewer. A viewer has at least nine characteristics: a professional one, a national one, a civic one, a class one, a geographical one, a gendered one, a conscious one, an unconscious one and perhaps a personal one too.

This knowledge of viewers will assist the designer\(^4\) in determining the degree of simplicity and complexity of the required design.

Clement Greenberg has explained the essence of internal and external theory of a painting's aesthetic display. He has briefly discussed some influential modernist ideas about art objects and their environments.

He has said that flatness was unique and exclusive to the art (of painting). And that the enclosing shape of the support was a limiting norm or condition, which was shared with the art of the theatre. Colour was a norm or means shared with sculpture as well as the theatre. Therefore, flatness (two-dimensionality) was the only condition painting shared with no other art\(^5\).

However, in orthodox modernist display, the environment in which the object is placed has an effect on the (two dimensional or three dimensional) object itself. Art has to be effectively displayed in a viewer's field of vision for him to apprehend it in different lighting conditions and spatial contexts. In this context, a neutral space of white background and even lighting will assist

\(^4\) Although I acknowledge that 'the designer' is gendered. However, in this discussion, it is termed as 'he'. At the same time, even if more than one designer is involved in the project, I will use 'the designer' to indicate a team, a design function, a museum exhibition designer.

in the display of many objects. The ‘white’ gallery is a neutral colour which will not clash with any other display. However, in the ‘black’ gallery theory, everything is black - the walls, the doors, the ceiling, the sealed windows (or a dark dramatic colour). It gives an illusion of deep space where the objects are hung or placed on black boxes. Objects in black-cube spaces seem to suspend in the air out of time. Such space creates a sense of surrealism. In the event of two-dimensional objects in these spaces, even lighting will bring out an object as a whole. Uneven lighting, not only breaks up an object, it will also give an illusion of distortion. Nevertheless, lighting, in the event of three-dimensional object, will help to “sculpt” the object - the sculpturing effect of lights. In display, the external design of space relates to the internal essence of art (object).

Beatriz Colomnia has said that a thing only makes (made) sense in relation to something else. She has further added that this thing does not even have to be real.

These are modernist theories which are opened to nineteenth century integration. Some museums have used them for their twentieth century displays. Like the New South Wales Art Gallery (NSWAG) which uses the nineteenth century art theory of displaying an assortment of paintings against dark walls; and the MOS which revives the nineteenth century display strategies when it uses big display cabinets to show a montage of artefacts (to create a slice of history) rather than to identify solitary objects or install a realistic diorama.

But it does not really matter if the viewer understands the artist’s concepts when viewing the art. People understand the same thing in different ways. For example, one person may see a can-of-worms as a metaphor for a life form, congested within a limited space, struggling to return to their more comfortable environment (the earth). But to another, it may just be a

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disgusting can full of worms!

In spatial design, space can be thought of as the cubic area occupied by a three dimensional volume. Any volume would occupy space. It is the interval between things that can be measured. If certain distances are important they will be made important to a work of art. Sol Lewitt said that, when the interval is kept regular, whatever is kept irregular gains more importance. It is advisable for displays to be placed far enough to avoid any comparison with adjacent pieces.

Firstly any space is made up of both 'positive' and 'negative' spaces. Positive space is space occupied by the object whilst negative space is space not used by the object. A display requires both of these spaces, a positive space for the object to occupy and a negative space outside or around the object for the viewer to view the display within the spatial context. The relationships between these two spaces are complex. For example, we may describe 'passive works', like a delicate painting, as tame, solitary and needing a smaller negative space. 'Aggressive work', like a large piece of art installation, is participative, it requires a more negative space for the viewer. Therefore, it is up to the curator's or designer's conceptual spatial layout skills to determine the space which an object will need to be shown to best advantage.

Secondly, viewers are always moving, they are not passive and stationary objects. Because of this, Richard Wolliem believes that it is not advisable to provide an overview of a display area. It is probably better to block some pieces off and to "push and block" the viewer around the display area. Any display which has been designed so that viewers can see its entirety at a glance will discourage them from moving about. They will remain stationary, thus not participating within the design space.

Thirdly, sound also occupies space, thus it should be used in a discrete

8 Ibid.
manner so as not to create any adverse effect on other displays (as discussed on pp. 33).

Various elements of display design are the designer's raw materials and the principles of design will help him coordinate these elements. The elements of spatial design are: 'two-dimensional' and 'three-dimensional space', 'observed three-dimensional space', 'live-in space', 'subjective space' and 'designing space for cubism and abstractionism'. The 'two-dimensional space' requires the consideration of positive and negative space, the picture plane, close values and equal flatness, and illusionistic depth in art. The elements of 'three-dimensional space' design are the positive and negative spaces, the space around objects, the space flowing through the objects, open space, congested space, deep space, shallow space and (for representational works) looking into the art work's represented space. 'Observed three-dimensional space', is about the overlapping of shapes and forms, the decrease in size, the linear perspective (one point and two points), the aerial perspective, the distant objects appear higher; the point of view (looking at, looking up at, or looking down on the objects), the effect of light on space, the shadows and space, and the value contrasts and colour which show space. Turning to 'lived-in spaces' of rooms, streets, built environments and wide open spaces, the designer will need to understand spaces that have specific uses as well as the viewer's subjective experiences of engaging with architectural form and sculpture. The 'subjective space', like a camera, is limited in its ability to see. It shows what is there accurately and realistically. Our eyes are similar but if our eyes are linked with emotions or with our imaginations, we can actually surpass the best camera lens in our ability to deal with space. An artist (or a designer) can create his own space and manipulate it at will. In designing 'space for cubism and abstractionism', he creates an ambiguous space that transcends time and space. Today's artists (and designers) squash space, distort it, deepen it and change it to suit their personal feelings. Such treatment of space is contrary to nature and the camera lens but evokes the artist or designer's imagination and creative energy. Surrealist artists attempted to create a deep space in which their illusionary subject matter exists. At first glance, their spaces appear true enough, but after looking at them carefully, they often become extremely subjective and personal - an artistic creation having little relation to reality. Surrealist artists conceive a
twilight zone of space to accommodate their depictions of fantasy\textsuperscript{10}. The sympathetic designer could recreate, or allude to these artist’s subjective interpretations of space (admittedly, this depends on expected audience size and the exhibition’s fabrication budget). An object’s ‘size’ is both its actual physical size and the viewer’s subjective experience of quiet and aggressive space. At times, in my many years of work experience in spatial design, designers are also caught up in deciding the size of a display. Budgetary constraints, limited given space, short designing span and lack of specifications from clients are the main factors that add to the difficulty. If an idea requires a three-dimensional resolution then it would seem any size will do. The question would be what size is best. If the display was gigantic, then the size alone would be impressive and the aesthetic concept of the object might be lost entirely. Objects that are too small become inconsequential. It is advisable that the objects are large enough to give the viewer whatever information he needs to understand the work and are placed in such a way that will facilitate his understanding\textsuperscript{11}.

But we see displays smaller than ourselves differently than larger displays. An object’s “publicness” is directly proportionate to its size. That is, the larger the object, the more it is a part of the public space. A larger sized display includes more ‘neighbourhood space’ than does a smaller one, while large-sized displays exhibit size more specifically as an element. The smaller the object the closer one approaches it, therefore it has correspondingly less spatial field existing between the object and the viewer\textsuperscript{12}. In determining the size of a display, the designer should make a choice of scale in relation to the designer’s concept of the object. The following examples are taken from the Singapore International Airport and ‘Raffles City (Singapore) Photographic Exhibition’. They show the ways in which designers have worked with different scales of display.


\textsuperscript{11} Lewitt, Sol. op cit.

Examples of different sizes of displays:

Fig. 1.1 - Gigantic scale display at 'Singapore International Airport'

Fig. 1.2 - Human scale display at the airport

Fig. 1.3 - Small scale display at a photographic exhibition
Fig. 1.1 shows a gigantic display of Singapore's national flag. It was about three times the height of a human figure. It was designed to be viewed from the expressway to the airport. The viewer was kept away from the display. There was no close interaction with the display. This display, due to its size, took up much of its surrounding space which included the cement flooring and the landscaping of plants. The object and its 'negative space' signify Singapore as a garden city-state. On the other hand, in Fig. 1.2, the human-scaled object was designed for the transitional space at the airport's immigration counters. Being a human-scaled display, the object claimed less of its surrounding walls and the floor. The viewer was able to engage a closer relation with the accessible object. Lastly, Fig. 1.3 shows a small scale photographic display at a photographic exhibition. The photograph measured about forty-five by sixty-seven centimetres in size and was hung on a white exhibition board. The viewer was able to inspect the object closely.

Placement of displays is another important element in the context of space. When discussing the polarity of space, Bachelard Gaston\textsuperscript{13} argues that a space itself produces movements. He uses the scenario of the house - the 'hall', the 'cellar', the 'back' and the 'attic'. The entry hall is an ordered space; the cellar is where chaotic imagination takes place; the back is a "workshop" area and the attic is where ordered imagination happens. By analogy, the hall is the reception area of an exhibition, ordered and organised as a particular type of transitional space (as discussed on pp. 15). The cellar is thought to be where "darkness" and "dirt" occur. Objects which produce confusion and disorder, should be allocated in the cellar. The back can be used to display pieces of mass and "construction" appearance, like sculpture. The attic is a space suitable for fantasy and imaginary display concepts\textsuperscript{14}. However, this metaphorical analogy is given with the author's living environment, that is in the West. In Asia countries as well as in Australia, there are not many houses with a cellar and an attic. This example of the 'house' can only be used as a reference as cultural values differs between countries.

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\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textit{Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore}
Adolf Loos, the influential modernist theorist, claimed that we experience interior and exterior displays differently. On the one hand, the outside is already another other, it speaks the languages of information, civilisation, the public space and masks. It does not understand anything about places. On the other hand, the interior does not tell the exterior anything. It speaks a language of culture and of the experiences of things. The exterior and interior are each other's other. If the exterior represents the viewer's social existence, the interior represents his experiences. And yet, Loos paradoxically claimed that a building's exterior should be designed to harmonise with it's habitants' character\(^{15}\). But many museums are housed in renovated buildings and if a museum like Sydney's MOS is to signify its purpose indexically would have to be a historicist recreation of an early nineteenth century building.

Display designers often work off the inter-relationship between the interior and exterior. It is advisable to design/modify/adapt the building's exterior in order to prepare the viewer for the interior display. Simply because the exterior is public and the interior is private. The designer can prepare the viewer by providing external information which will help him experience the interior's dwelling and displays. Without some essence of similarity in the exterior design to the interior's display, the viewer could suffer from a sudden transformation of experience and become disorientated by his environment. Ideally the viewer has to feel comfortable within the display space. However, in some cases, this is not necessary. If the designer wants to create a theatrical space\(^{16}\) within the display space, the exhibition designer needs to know how to control the back wall space within the building while reconstructing the interior space. The viewer may experience a psychological loss of space if he does not see the back wall. In the meantime, the viewer will have to be informed of the theatrical space within the exhibition space by subtle exposures of the interior's actual architectural structure\(^{17}\).

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\(^{16}\) Theatrical space are space similar to those of a theatre - the space, the coloured lights, and the audio-visuals.

\(^{17}\) Wolliem, Richard. op cit.
A ‘transitional space’ is a place where viewers orientate themselves before the next stage of the display. It is an awareness of space in transition from the building’s exterior to the internal display space. There can be a series of transitional spaces both outside and inside a display space to prepare the viewer for the main space(s). Transitional space is important in preparing the viewer psychologically about the type of space experience which he will be entering into. A minimum of four transitional spaces should be planned prior to a main display space. The first is to be seen away from the display building, which is the approach route(s) to the building; the second is just outside the building; the third is at the reception area where the viewer enters the building and the fourth (level four) is another set of three transitional spaces prior to the actual exhibition. The transition through these four spaces is recommended to proceed in a gradual pace. The designer needs to prepare and transform the (sensitive and knowing) viewer in a subtle way. He can include transitional spaces within the exhibition itself whenever needed. If the designer anticipates that the viewers will be disorientated in front of an object, he can design a transitional space to alleviate the viewer’s anxiety.

The placement of transitional space is important here. The exhibition’s publicity and signage take the visitor out of his home, off the street, into transport and to the museum’s entrance. Even there he will need directional signage to propel him into the unfamiliar world of a particular exhibition’s location. The viewer will be psychologically disorientated if a proper transitional space does not lead and orientate him to the unfamiliar space. There are also practical traffic-flows, marshalling functions, to be considered (which are discussed on pp. 33).

The following examples of transitional spaces are taken from a permanent exhibition, ‘The Warring States’, at Singapore’s Empress Place Museum18 (1993). These are a set of fourth-order transitional spaces at work within the

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18 The Empress Place Museum has been closed for renovation works. The building will be taken over by ACM in its second phase of museum development which is targeted for completion in 1999. The first section of ACM will be housed in the old Tao Nan School building, at Armenian Street, and is scheduled to open in mid-February 1997.
exhibition space. Prior to this exhibition space, there were only two transitional spaces - the first was on the building's external walls and the second at the reception counter within the building.

*Fig. 1.4* shows the first transitional space immediately after the main entrance to the exhibition. It helped to prepare the viewer for his up-and-coming experience with an introduction to the exhibition. The displays, the second transitional space, at *Fig. 1.5* were placed after the exit of the first transitional space. It gave the viewer an overview of the exhibition. The third transitional space at *Fig. 1.6* acted like the genesis of the exhibition. The viewer was then ready to experience the displays.
Examples of fourth order transitional space:

Fig. 1.4 - 1st transitional space at 'The Warring States' exhibition.
This was situated at the entrance to the exhibition. It prepared the viewer for the style of displays within the exhibition.

Fig. 1.5 - 2nd transitional space at 'The Warring States' exhibition.
This was situated immediately after the 1st transitional space. It showed the viewer the various categories of displays.
In designing an exhibition space, the designer could first note the characteristics of his target audiences (for example, esoteric fine art connoisseurs vs school children). Determining the size of the display will have to be discreet because large sized displays could overwhelm the display’s design concept, losing its communication function to its impressive size. Too small and it will become inconsequential. The designer should consider the display’s placement in relation to its internal and external aesthetics. Next is the viewer’s experience of exterior and interior spaces. The designer should design the exhibition’s external and internal spaces so that the viewer has a coherent visual experience and is not disoriented by visual inconsistencies.

When the designer is addressing the international community, his display has to have a challenging installation. At the same time, it has to be stimulating and have universal appeal. In this light, a collection of practical exhibition theories such as exhibition classifications, exhibition planning and production, communication techniques, security, environmental control, lighting, types of showcases, screen types and seats, and information graphics need to be considered. The essential aspects of commercial and museum exhibition’s background, museum spaces and the visual perception of its viewers will also be discussed.

Exhibition design is the most complex design practice. In practical terms, it can involve all types of communication techniques that appeal to the senses. The exhibition designer needs to be well versed in the manipulation of
illustration, typography, graphics, photography and digital-interactives. At the same time, he needs to have a knowledge of interior and exterior space, crowd control, traffic-flow planning, lightings, audio and visual skills, architecture, furnishing, materials, production and installations\(^{10}\). A (evocative, aesthetic and didactic\(^{20}\)) sense of drama, timing and imagination is also essential.

Present-day museum exhibitions owe much to the development of commercial exhibitions, boosted by one hundred and fifty years of world fairs and display designs. Museums in the nineteenth century were built as sacred places in praise of the arts and sciences. Collections in the early days were organised to appeal to connoisseurs, scholars or collectors, and displays were either arranged aesthetically, taxonomically or chronologically. In the nineteenth century, the high and low part of the gallery walls were underprivileged areas. Larger paintings were hung at the top and sometimes tilted out from the wall to maintain the viewer's plane of vision. The best works were displayed in the middle zone while the smaller ones dropped to the bottom of the wall. Each painting was seen as a self contained piece, totally separated from its neighbours by its thick bold frame and its own perspective system\(^{21}\) (Fig 1.7). But why separate the artwork from the wall by a mere heavy frame, if the painting can speak for itself and is a statement by itself? If the painting needed another border of separation from the wall, then the internal and external theory of space is true. That is, the internal relation of an artwork is inter-related to the external space relation. The picture's frame is thus like the artist's psychological container and it encourages the exhibition designer to create a particular neighbourhood space around it.

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\(^{20}\) Ibid.

In parallel, murals tend to project wandering vectors which the viewer attempts to align himself - the viewer's visual perception. The easel picture on the wall quickly indicates to him exactly where he should stand. The easel picture is like a portable window that, once set on the wall, penetrates it with deep space. The frame of the picture is much like the artist's psychological container as a space in which the viewer occupies it for him.

The viewer is also known as the spectator, sometimes the observer and occasionally the perceiver. We can theorise him as having no face because we can only see his back (Fig. 1.8). We can imagine him peering and stooping, and he is slightly clumsy. His attitude is prying, his mystification discreet. He tests, he feels, he notices, he moves, he is sensitive, he is mystified and demystified, and he propels himself through the space\(^\text{22}\).

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

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O'Doherty claims that the ‘disembodied eye’ is very much more intellectually critical than the viewer. The designer can train this eye. The eye is finely tuned and he has less power to direct it than he has to control the viewer’s gaze, who is rather eager to please. The eye discriminates, it resolves, it takes in, it balances, it weighs, it discerns and it perceives. The exhibition designer has to cater to the viewer and the eye. The eye is the connoisseur, the trained art historian, the artist, the curator and the designer; it has an ethnicity and a gender. The designer’s (architect etc) eye experiences the display space

(intellectually and emotionally) as well as, if not more than, the objects on display; or in relation to the objects on display.

The eye and viewer can be two aspects of some visitors’ gallery experiences, but moving as one, as they negotiate the gallery space. The eye is filled with data from its body; yet thinks, feels, notices and moves alone. The viewer is always there in the raw, with the eye’s discriminations. The eye wants the body to provide it with information. There is a dense flow of information between conceptualised and actualised sensations\(^{24}\). The body will distract the eye while the eye will impress upon the body.

Visually all the eye’s perception depends upon the adequate location of objects in the environment. Perception is a platform for action, and actions take place in a three dimensional environment. Specifying the location of an object requires information for the direction and distance\(^{25}\).

The MOS, MCA and SAM display rooms are very much designed for the trained eye’s visual perception. They are for the connoisseur, the trained art historian, the artist, the curator, the designer and the educated. They are not designed for the family, the children and the viewer.

Both curators and designers work within a tradition and they must recognise how hard it is to find completely new forms of display. During the post 1945 era, logic had been added to decoration in the designer’s work. Simple and direct signage and copywriting have been integrated with three-dimensional design. Italian architects dominated museum design in the 1950s and 1960s and they exhibited the displayed objects for sensory enjoyment, rather than for education. They worked with a handful of items and attached a minimum amount of information to them. They expected these objects to speak for themselves\(^{26}\).

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\(^{24}\) O’Doherty. Brian. op cit.


At this point in time, we will first see the initial occupation of space and not the art. An image of a white, ideal space that outlives any single picture comes to mind. This is the image of the twentieth century art gallery, it clarifies itself through the process of historical inevitability which is usually attached to the art it contains. Objects become “art” in the spaces where powerful ideas about art focus on them. Indeed, these objects were used to profess the ideology of new museum spatial design. Today, this is a popular type of late modernist academicism where ideas are more interesting than the art object-conceptual art.

Modernist galleries are constructed with specific parameters which are as rigorously defined as a church’s specifications. That is, the world outside must not be allowed inside the building. Windows were sealed, walls painted white with the ceiling as the only source of light (some modern museums have a mixture of installed side lightings and daylight - eg. MCA). The floor is either carpeted so that the viewer will pad soundlessly along or polished so that the viewer clicks along clinically, with his feet resting while his eyes were focused on the walls. The white, clean, artificial and unshadowed space is devoted to the technology of aesthetics. Works of art are mounted or hung to be appreciated and studied. They exist in a type of eternity in display, in a non-existent time. The gallery is a place where the walls are hung (each artwork isolated from each other by the negative wall space between it and its neighbours) with works of art. The wall, however, has a limit. The wall itself is always recognised as a limiting “depth” (where the “depth” of an artwork stops), just as corners and ceiling will limit size.

Each project must have a starting point. It starts with a thought, a concept; this may start with a mere sketch of ideas to pages of proposals. In the nineteen century, the exhibition team’s theories about their subject were propagated to fellow academics through the learned societies and journals and if the public was admitted to the collections on sufferance (and had to work quite hard to assimilate information from the labels and other

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information which the curators chose to give them). Today's viewer expects to be addressed by the specialists. The viewer expects the specialist to address, excite, amuse and inform him; and to present and explain the material in a simple way. The designer and curators will have to view their subjects from the viewer's point of view. The design team will have to decide on its targeted audiences and the resources which are available for it to address these groups. The responsibilities of the designer in this light is to assist the viewer to understand the language of the exhibition. The successful design will help the viewer to have a memorable (evocative and/or aesthetic and/or didactic) experience.

After all an exhibition is a collection of objects which makes up a commercial display, the duration of which is implicit in the arrangement and style. Exhibitions are the most satisfactory means for selling, educating, or propagandising when they are concerned with actual physical objects or demonstrations and when being able to see something in the round is more impressive than any two-dimensional representation.

An exhibition can either be permanent or temporary. However, there are two other main strategies for classifying an exhibition. The first strategy is termed 'taxonometric' in which materials are displayed according to classification. This exhibition provides the viewer with an opportunity to discriminate between objects, and usually encourages him to draw his own conclusion(s). This strategy assumes an informed audience, and most art gallery displays make this assumption. The second strategy is termed 'thematic'. It sets out to tell a story, guiding the viewer to make connections and to follow the development of the display as it evolves in the exhibition. Some thematic shows are known as 'tunnel' shows because they take simple linear approaches. Another mode of thematic strategy is the 'mosaic' type of presentation which has a broad theme with many individual displays.

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29 Hall, Margaret. op cit.

offering random information. From that the viewer can piece together his own selection of information on the main theme, pursuing his own route and following no particular order (eg in the MOS and SHM).

All exhibitions involve some degree of interaction. Again, there are two further classifications by degree: the ‘interactive’ and the ‘passive’ form. Both can be applied equally to the taxonomic and thematic strategy of exhibition design. An interactive exhibition is one where the viewer needs to have a (hands-on) involvement in order to appreciate the material and information. These forms can be simple or complex. The ‘E-mage’ gallery at SAM is one example of interactive design. The viewer has to interact with a computerised touch-screen to view larger images on a high-definition screen.

To some extent the strategy selected for the exhibition will require the use of one style. But strategy and style are not necessarily tied together. There are basically three styles in exhibition - ‘evocative’, ‘aesthetic’ and ‘didactic’. In an ‘evocative’ exhibition, the atmosphere sets a scene to aid the viewer’s understanding by evocation and association, and not necessarily by the display of informative text, for example some rooms in MOS and SHM. In an ‘aesthetic’ style, the designer expects the object to speak for itself. Supporting texts and display mechanisms complement but are subordinate to the viewer’s aesthetic and visual experience (as in some parts of the MCA and SAM). The ‘didactic’ type of exhibition has often been liken to ‘a book on the wall’. The intention is primarily to impart information (for example, the dioramas display of ‘Visual History of Singapore’ at SHM). In this respect, the exhibition can be a mixture of the three styles. Within each of these three styles, there are six modes of communication, the ‘referential’ mode, the ‘emotive’ mode, the ‘conative’ mode, the ‘poetic’ mode, the ‘phatic’ mode and the ‘metalinguistic’ mode. The ‘referential’ mode attempts to describe or communicate a form or an idea in as objective and dispassionate a manner as possible. The ‘emotive’ mode attempts to communicate certain subjective responses in terms of, for example, the viewer’s excitement, attraction or repulsion for the display object. The ‘conative’ mode persuades or exhorts the

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viewer to respond in a certain way. The ‘poetic’ mode’s principal intention is not to communicate facts or influence behaviour, but to display intrinsically admirable (or exquisite) self-justifying forms. It should be noted that there are two types of poetic form - exquisite objects and exquisite displays, which include the rare materials that are used to enhance the objects; like frames, display cases, lighting, music and sound effect. The ‘phatic’ communication mode is one that does not attempt to record or communicate facts, views, or information, but serves as a means of initiating, maintaining, or concluding the designer’s communication with the viewer (eg. a greeting is not so much so a request for information as a way of maintaining discourse). A transitional space could serve this function. And finally, the ‘metalinguistic’ mode of communication is created for the purpose of clarifying other signs, which may be in the same or other medium (eg. orientation signage)\(^{32}\). Together with the communication modes are the semiotic concepts of ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’. The denotation of a sign is its common sense meaning, what it might be taken to represent in its most fundamental and obvious interpretation. Its connotation is the association and ideas that it may evoke in individual interpretants. For example, the denotation of a museum sign showing the eye as a visual experience for the viewer; and the likelihood that eyes might be watching the viewer within the spot. Its connotation, however, is different to different viewers\(^{33}\).

To begin an exhibition design, the designer needs to identify a simple design and planning sequence in which none of the stages needs to overlap significantly with the others. It could read:

- Suggestion - discussion - briefing - sketch design - approval - final design - costing - authorisation - build.

When the designer expands it, it could read along the following lines:

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\(^{33}\) Ibid

**Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore**
• Inception - preliminary consideration of the project
• Idea, medium, audience, aims, location, resources.
• Feasibility - the team examines proposal's assumptions
• The team analyses the proposal's concepts, objects, storylines, cost, site, schedule, conservation and security.
• First design ideas
• Finalising the design
• Production
• Open to the public
• Recording and dismantling

The exhibition team needs to make some informed assumptions about its target audience in order to mould its communication direction. It needs to clearly specify the direction and it must manipulate expand, condense and highlight its material to that end. On the one hand, the curator edits his objects and text to meet the intended audiences' perceived needs. First, he has to encapsulate the initial idea which is the framework that the whole team is going to work on. Second, he then helps to identify the objects which he has chosen to tell his story, so that it will make sense to the targeted audience. The third stage will begin to involve the language which will tell the exhibition's storyline. He will begin to use the very words which will finally appear on the information panels, labels, catalogue/brochures, and publicity. The text has to be clear and accessible (ie legible and readable). On the other hand, the designer edits his design solution for security, durability, ergonomics, conservation needs, viewer flow, comfort, lighting levels, passage, noise, colour theme etc.

The exhibition plan needs to be designed so that the security guards (or video camera) can monitor the displays easily. The physical arrangement of cases, screens and solid division in an exhibition should be considered in relation to the value and nature of the collection and the supervision of security guards. Barriers are common type of deterrents used in exhibition. A glass sheet held by space bolts can be placed over 'untouchable' objects. Another type of

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Hall, Margaret. op cit.

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deterrent used in open displays is a psychological barrier, designed to be unobstructive, and which should preferably be in keeping with the subject matter. The designer can design these barriers for secondary purposes. They can support the tired viewer; they can hold information panels or carry brochure dispensers. An effective psychological deterrent is to display security devices prominently. But in certain exhibitions where conservation does not present a problem, barriers should be avoided.

Publicly displayed objects are exposed to many dangerous elements which might not be immediately obvious: light, heat and humidity, atmospheric pollutants, insects and bacteria attacks, the chemical effects of adjacent materials, theft, wilful damage and accidental fire and flood damage. The designer needs to protect these objects. He can use UV protection covers, glass casings and display stands to protect them. These may, in turn, adversely or emphatically affect on the aesthetics of the displays.

At the same time, the designer has to be able to control the exhibitions' lighting to meet the conservator's criteria, even though on occasions the lighting appears far darker than the designer or public would readily accept. Light can fade and deteriorate organic materials and the surface colours of any base materials. The designer needs to check the level of illumination with a photo-electric light meter which reveals the strength of the light measured in lux and to liaise with the relevant conservators to take the appropriate measures.

Light emits ultra-violet light which is harmful to light sensitive objects.

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36 Hall, Margaret. op cit.
37 As a general rule, the damage received by an object exposed to light is in proportion to the illumination value multiplied by the exposure time.
38 Hall, Margaret. op cit.

Light sensitive objects includes print material, easel paintings, animal and plants materials where surface colour is important (including undyed leather, wood, bone, ivory), works of art on paper (including water-colours, drawings, prints, stamps, wallpaper, historical document, photographs), textiles (including tapestries, costumes, etc.)
Placing a filter between the light source and the display object can eliminate the damage. The filter is usually a clear plastic film which contains a UV absorbent chemical. If the designer is allowed to work with daylight, he can reduce the glare with blinds, net curtains, with plastic glaze or double glazing.30.

Having taken account of these concerns, the designer can use lighting to set the exhibition's atmosphere. He can control the way things are seen and the viewer's reaction. Light, is the integral part of an exhibition and the form that it is going to mould. Light is not to be added after the arrangement, it is part of the design. Before specifying lights in the design, the designer will need to consider the light's task, the style it is to portray, the availability of the lighting equipment, its constraints, physics of light to be used and its maintenance.

We have already seen that many design solutions tend towards one of two extremes: the 'white' gallery with flat, monotonously bright illumination, or the 'black' gallery where each object or display floats in its own hard-edged pool of incandescent light, separated by gloom from every other part of the exhibition40. In other words, the designer can break exhibition lighting into general or feature lighting, which are either natural or artificial. Fluorescent or incandescent lamps can transmit direct or indirect lights. The number of factors include type, colour, and brightness of light; kinds and positions of luminaries; size and configuration of the space, colour, and the specularity of surfaces within the space. The two primary tasks of lighting an exhibition are to light space and to light objects and planes. Fluorescent lights are linear sources and are used to provide general lighting. Incandescent lights are suitable for feature lighting. They can soften, filter and dim the room space. There are some basic lighting methods like wall washing, downlighting, uplighting, diffused, directional spot, lighting of pale objects and increased

uopholstered furniture, carpets), miniatures and manuscripts, dyed leather and history exhibits etc.

30 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
illumination for dark objects. A general diffused lighting system may be the best compromise for display screens, using rooflights, daylights or velarium. The daylight from windows of the gallery will seldom, if ever, provide an adequate solution. It usually comes from windows on one side of the gallery, and most exhibitions need to use both sides of the display screens. In planning the exhibition lighting, the designer has to meet different concerns. The light should not distort the object's colour or form (for aesthetic/didactic display at least); and the room should not be dangerous (viewer falling down steps because of poor lighting) especially when the viewer is moving from transitional space into the display spaces. The designer's first priority is to serve the 'viewer' and the 'eye'. Second, he has to light the displays to meet the conservation requirement etc. Third, he must provide emergency lights to meet local authority guidelines. Lastly, he should install service lighting for the gallery's staff and security. This may require a separate circuit.

To get an image into the viewer's brain, the designer must reflect light from the objects in the exhibition. A minimum light is required to work the sensory system, but he has to observe a maximum limit. Although the human eye is very adaptable, it can be confused by too great a contrast, and even damaged by excessive light. Furthermore, the viewer can also be easily distracted if areas of the floor and walls are brighter than the exhibits. In general the light source should be diffused.

The temperature in an exhibition area affects the humidity, for with increasing temperature the ability of the air to hold water vapour increases. The designer could therefore be expected to accommodate portable humidifiers or dehumidifiers into his design resolution (possibly not important for some displays).

Since conservators will also be concerned with the danger of sensitive objects being damaged by dust which contains atmospheric pollutants, the designer will have to consider designing appropriate air filtration and building

41 Velarde, Giles. op cit.
42 Klein, Larry. op cit.
protective cases. At the same time, these cases will have to be burglar proof.

The exhibition designer is, thus, to work with the conservator on each exhibition to ensure that:

- the levels of illumination levels are appropriate to the type of objects displayed and the UV radiation is eliminated.
- the correct relative humidity and temperature are achieved and maintained.
- the heat from light sources in showcases is kept to a minimum.
- the showcases are designed to exclude dust.
- the materials selected for the confined and enclosed showcases will not damage the objects.

The designer may need to design or buy off-the-shelf display screens or showcases. These should be stable, adjustable to uneven ground-levels, and should provide firm fixing for brackets and take solid objects or framed materials. They should have provision for floor fixing, but no projections, since these could trip up viewers. They can have vertical concealed channels for wiring, and surfaces which can be renewed, as required, with paint or such covering materials as wall papers, stretched fabric etc. Screens can be single-leaf, joined at right angles, suspended from the ceiling, braced between upright posts, fixed at the floor or at ceiling points or cantilevered.

Seating should be part of the exhibition design and, if it cannot be created specifically for it, seating should be selected with great care. The designer should provide seatings not only to cater for tired viewers but for positive reasons as well. If overall lighting of the exhibition is low, seats in strongly lit areas can enable viewers to consult their catalogues in comfort. If the whole exhibition style is strongly evocative, the seating design can play its part in this and reinforce it\(^\text{43}\) (eg MOS has distinctive seats at different places where the viewer can contemplate evocative designs).

Transmitting communications and instructions is a vital part of exhibition

design, and the designer is often responsible for their form and methods. No one else in the exhibition team is better qualified on matters of legibility and visual acuity, and the designer will therefore make a number of empirical decisions and will implement them. The graphic designer should never underrate the importance of the typefaces selected for his exhibition display as it usually reflects the style of the exhibits or topic. The chosen face may be used in a number of media. It can be in three-dimensional letters in differing finishes, signwritten, silkscreened, printed, and photographically enlarged. The exhibition’s title, in the right typeface and setting, introduces the visitor to the new environment. The title makes him aware that he is stepping into another culture and another time, and he knows that the exhibition has really begun. The design team will have to make the important decision of how to orientate the viewer with the subject matter, as well as the amount and types of information they will need to introduce.

The graphic designer has to consider several aspects of information graphics: the position of the label and its information in relation to the object and to the viewer’s height, the overall appearance of the displayed objects and their accompanying labels, ‘keying’ of labels and ‘keying’ of information. The exhibition team needs to decide at the beginning of the exhibition planning whether to keep the text to a minimum to allow the viewer to concentrate on the objects or to provide a lot of contextual information. He can resolve to design a series of text panels and/or a brochures which identifies exhibition’s highlights. The criteria for this design is that similar graphics and typographical styles should be incorporated to the other information in the exhibition and the contents must be designed to be readable within the gallery space.

44 Typeface for the exhibition’s title has to operate on posters, banners, directional signages, invitation prints, television advertisements and the transitional prints.


46 Icons given or involved in the labels.

47 The more serious viewer (the ‘eye’) would usually appreciate a brochure/catalogue, which testifies to the curator’s intention in putting on the exhibition.

48 Klein, Larry . op cit.
Some exhibition teams provide audiovisual (A/V) devices as a simple method of appearing up-to-date, as a recipe for instant success. However they can impede traffic flow at crucial spots. Audiovisuals also occupy space, both aesthetically and psychologically. Nevertheless, such gadgets are an element to be deployed if and where appropriate; the expense will only be justified, however, if the devices are completely integrated within the overall spatial design. These devices can be extremely attractive to the viewer and the designer alike. But to avoid confusion, they must be deployed according to the exact function that they fulfil in transmitting information or in setting the mood. The length of the A/V presentation is significant. In tight spaces, A/Vs can cause serious bottlenecks. Viewers prefer not to have to stand for more than a minute. Longer than that and the designer should have to include seats in his design. For comfortable viewing, a minimum of one square metre per person or a circle with a radius of approximately thirty centimetres is given within the space. There are two ways of presenting A/V presentations. First, the viewer summons the material from the devices (but operating them will involve interactive-programming). Second, the viewer is passive, the material is transmitted to the A/V “automatically”. When viewers use their A/V units in open spaces, there will be some sound spill. There are speakers that are highly directional, and when placed overhead, the speakers project a cone of sound downward that is contained within a defined space.\(^49\)

The exhibition designer will manipulate the viewer, who is intent on examining the objects in an exhibition or on getting engrossed in the unfolding story, to circulate at a particular speed and in a particular direction. The exhibition designer will set out to control the viewer’s passage in certain directions, quicken his pace, stop and study, encourage him when he tires. The viewer’s movement will not only depend upon his enthusiasm for the exhibited objects, but he will be propelled by the devices and features which the exhibition designer has incorporated into the exhibition’s layout, organisation, lighting and detailing. The designer paces the viewer at all

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\(^{49}\) Hall, Margaret. op cit.
times and this pacing is essential in any exhibition to prevent the viewer from missing parts of the exhibition through fatigue and irritation etc. Pacing should be reasonably consistent throughout the exhibition, avoiding bunching in front of key exhibits. The exhibition designer speaks with, and to, the viewer through the design. He utilises a series of design tools in order to control the situation. These designs are comparable with the 'non-verbal communications' with which we enrich our speech and they can be understood in terms of the six communication modes which I have outlined above.

The designer can use banners to supply the information about the display in a mobile, three-dimensional way. He can brighten a dull building and bring life to a static one. His banners can carry a touch of the fairground, of the parade, and symbolise a happening. He can signal the exhibition's beginning, particularly because, as we have seen, a visit to the exhibition can be disorientating. He can use a familiar logo and colour scheme to provide a link from the start.

To be successful, an exhibition has to transmit a great deal of information, but it cannot do this without also indicating a "feeling" about its subject. The graphic designer needs to consider all sorts of coding devices in order to locate the exhibition within a particular culture, and to place the sections within a chronological framework. The graphic designer can use materials to suggest place of origin and can use illustrations to indicate time.\footnote{\text{50} Velarde, Giles. op cit.}

Exhibition punctuation can be organised to give pause in a number of ways. An introductory section, perhaps in the form of a bay for audio-visuals, may correspond to the introduction to the subject of a book. A significant item at the end of a vista can provide a full stop, a seating area or a text panel may correspond to a chapter heading.

By the way of summary, the exhibition designer, must be therefore be well versed in the manipulation of illustration, typography, graphics, photography
and digital-interactive. He should also have a knowledge of interior and exterior space, crowd control, traffic-flow planning, lightings, audio and visual skills, architecture, furnishings, materials, production and installations\(^5\). He will need to have a sense of drama, timing and imagination to design evocative and aesthetic type of exhibition. These will assist in the smooth development of exhibition spaces.

A case study will be done at the end of this paper, to show how Australian and Singaporean designers have used this vocabulary and grammar to communicate with their intended audiences and be in a better position to assess the quality of their designs as communication media.

The next chapter will have a brief introduction to Singapore’s geography, history, economy, IBH 200, ethnic cultures and the role of museums in the nation-state Singapore. This overview will help us have a greater appreciation of the agenda which lies behind Singaporean’s recent interest in cultural bodies, and museums in particular.

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\(^5\) Klein, Larry. op cit.
CHAPTER TWO:

SINGAPORE
CHAPTER TWO: Singapore

In order to have an arts, cultural and museum discourse in Singapore; it will be viable to discuss and understand Singapore’s geographical location, historical background, economic progress, Singapore’s governmental plan of a ‘International Business Hub 2000’ (IBH 2000), Singapore’s ethnic cultures and the role of museums in the nation-state Singapore. This is particularly necessary because one of my case studies identifies the inadequacies of the curator’s reading of some historical paintings and prints.

2.1 Introducing Singapore:

52 World Wide Web information on Singapore Infomap.
http://sunsite.nus.sg/SEAlinks/singapore-info.html

As part of this research paper consists of a reasonable amount of information from the internet, it is important to identify and explain the origins and credibility of the 'Singapore Infomap'.

'Singapore Infomap' was launched on 8/3/95 by George Yeo, Minister For Information & The Arts And Minister Of Health. As cited in his speech, Minister Yeo said that Internet is an unexpected part of the electronic multi-media revolution:

“A child of the Cold War, it (the Internet) was conceived to be indestructible to nuclear attack. It now has a life of its own. It has today over 30 million subscribers and attracts more than a million new ones every month. The original Internet culture which developed when Internet was principally a network of scientists and academics is now under severe attack. The intimate culture of a small university town is giving way to the urban culture of a big city. Internet can be thought of as a city in rapid organic growth, a city that has completely outgrows its original confines and is spreading outwards chaotically and in all directions. There is no government in charge, only individuals and groups reaching out to each other. News groups are like notice boards accessible to anyone and everyone. But we cannot not visit a city just because there are parts of it we do not like. There will always be bits that we do not like in any city. In any case, even if we want to avoid the city of Internet, we cannot because it will eventually envelop us, like an expanding urban conurbation absorbing small towns in its path. Our response must therefore be to learn how to live in cyberspace and develop the requisite skills. Those who are not adept in information technology will be at a severe competitive disadvantage in the 21st century.”

Minister Yeo mapped out Singapore’s response to cyberspace as:

“Singapore does not only operate as atomised individuals or as fragmented groups. It operates in cyberspace the way it operates in the international political, economic and cultural arenas. Where and when it is advantageous to move collectively under the

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Before Singapore became a city or a nation, it was an island with 193 km of coastline: 633 sq km in area, of which 622.6 sq km is land (the rest are reservoirs and rivers), about 1 degree North of the Equator and 103 degrees East Meridian; located at the bottom tip of the Peninsula of Malaysia, between Malaysia and Indonesia. It was a small tropical island, and particularly an 'Asian' island. These simple realities continue to trigger stereotypical images of warm seas, coconut trees, exotic flora and fauna and oriental people; and of an English colony.

Singapore became a nineteenth century British colony because the English recognised that its lowlands with gently undulating central plateau, abundant fish, deepwater ports and strategic location could ensure their economic and military success in Asia. Although the times have changed, the country has continued to be a focal point for south-east Asian sea routes (Fig. 2.1).

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Singapore banner, it is to do so. The Government is only one part albeit an important part of what Singapore is. The most important part, however, is the cultural sense of belonging to a common Singapore family or tribe. It must transport this same spirit into cyberspace where the role of Government is perforce very limited. To use the metaphor of the city, its collective objective as Singaporeans is to stake out a place for itself in Internet, a Singapore neighbourhood as it were, with both the public and private sectors represented, and developing in co-operation and in competition with others. The entry of all government ministries, departments and statutory boards comes under the rubric of INFOMAP. It is the Singapore Yearbook and other government publications combined - in interactive, electronic multi-media. INFOMAP is coordinated and managed by Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA ) and National Computer Board (NCB).

Singapore only opened its door to the internet world officially in 1994, and the vast subscription to the local servers has increased dramatically. The Singapore government is thus seeking to control and shape its communication cyberspaces by asking its people to be patriotic and responsible with their participation in the internet culture before it becomes uncontrollable like the west.
When Singapore gained its independence from Malaysia, it became a republic within the British Commonwealth. Thus it is officially addressed as the Republic of Singapore and in short, Singapore. The capital is Singapore.

With a population of 2,826,331 (July 1993 est.), nationals in Singapore are known as Singaporean(s). Singapore's population consists primarily of 76.4% Chinese, 14.9% Malay and 6.4% Indians. Besides the variety in races, one can also experience the diversity in religions such as Buddhism, Muslim, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikh, Taoism and Confucianism. To embrace Singapore's unique variety, there are four official languages: Chinese, Malay (also national language), Tamil and English.

In today's Singapore - in its busy streets, between the skyscrapers and in air-conditioned offices, supermarkets, shops and modern homes - most of the colonial images and traces have long disappeared. However, some old buildings have survived and are now used for new museums and for other commercial, educational or administrative purposes. One of the popular
Australian perceptions is that Singapore is a high-rise, soulless and materialistic city which is always a shopping stop-over to or from Europe. These tourists' first impression is that there are hordes of air-conditioned taxis, and rows of 5-star hotels designed by internationally renowned architects and managed by an international chains. In almost every single household, international or Singapore-made television programmes in both Chinese and English languages\(^5\) blast away. Most prestigiously, Singapore houses an ultra-modern Changi airport, which is widely recognised as Asia's busiest and one of the world's best.

Singapore has an open entrepreneurial economy with strong service and manufacturing sectors and excellent international trading links derived from its entrepot history. The economy appeared to have pulled off a soft landing from the 9% growth rate of the late 1980s, registering higher than expected growth in 1992 while stemming inflation. However, economic activity slowed down in early 1992, primarily due to the slackened demand in Singapore's export markets. After bottoming out in the second quarter, the economy again picked up in line with America's economic recovery. Singapore's 1992's best performers were the construction and financial services industries and manufacturers of computer-related components. However, rising labor costs may continue to threaten Singapore's competitiveness, but there are indications that productivity is catching up. Despite all that, government surpluses and the rate of gross national savings remain high. In technology, per capita output, and labor discipline, Singapore is succeeding far ahead of its goal in becoming a developed country.

In the aspect of infrastructure, Singapore has 38 km of railroads and 2,644 km of highways. Singapore holds a number of ports terminals around the island and also being the world's single largest port operator, and supports 6 airports with Changi Airport voted as the world's best airport for many consecutive years. With a record of excellent domestic telecommunication facilities and reliable international service, Singapore prides herself of providing competent radio and television broadcast coverage.

\(^5\) World Wide Web information at:
http://www.ncb.gov.sg/EDM/OSQ/OSQText.html

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There is some substance to these popular myths of Singapore. While Singapore (city) is an urban environment, it is a city of green space with a variety of landscapes. Her master plan includes natural space, beaches, rivers and hills in her urban landscape. For a city to be called a home, Singapore has to be a pleasant place to live and work in, and an environment with character, grace and beauty. With all the above, Singapore further offers her people, a country where Singaporeans can lift their heads high up with national pride.

To further nourish her people's pride in her, the Singapore government embarked on a heritage project which preserved thirty-three old buildings and placed them under the protection of the Preservation of Monument Board. Four of these building have been renovated and used for museum-related purposes⁵⁴. For example, the Asian Civilisation Museum will be housed partially in Tao Nan School building and partially in Empress Place building, the Singapore History Museum will occupy the present National Museum building, and the Singapore Art Museum is now located at the former St Joseph Institution of Bras Basah Road. All these heritage buildings are located within the civic and cultural districts.

2.2 History:
Singapore is a post-colonial nation-state where cultural elites are seeking its identity through the concept of 'Asian-ness'. The island population is made up of predominantly Chinese immigrants. In order to better understand the Singapore multi-cultural background, a short study of its history is required.

The British, who were extending their dominion in India, and whose trade with China in the second half of the 18th century was expanding, saw the need for a port of call in the Straits of Malacca region to refit, revitalise and protect their merchant fleet, as well as to forestall any advance by the Dutch in

the East Indies. As a result, the British established trading posts in Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819), and captured Malacca from the Dutch (1795).

In late 1818, Lord Hastings, Governor-General of India, gave tacit approval to Sir Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen, to establish a trading station at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. On 29 January 1819, Raffles landed on the island of Singapore after having surveyed other nearby islands for deepwater ports. The next day, he concluded a preliminary treaty with Temenggong Abdu’r Rahman to set up a trading post there. On 6 February 1819, he concluded a formal treaty with Sultan Hussein of Johor and the Temenggong Abdu’r Rahman, the de jure and de facto rulers of Singapore respectively. Singapore proved to be a prized settlement. By 1820, it was earning revenue, and three years later, its trade surpassed that of Penang. In 1824, Singapore’s status as a British possession was formalised by two new treaties. The first was the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of March 1824, by which the Dutch withdrew all objections to the British occupation of Singapore. The second treaty was made with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdu’r Rahman in August, by which the two owners ceded the island outright to the British in return for increased cash payments and pensions.

Singapore, together with Malacca and Penang, became the Straits Settlements in 1826, under the control of British India. By 1832, Singapore had become the centre of government for the three areas. On 1 April 1867, the Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office in London.\textsuperscript{55}

When Sir Stamford Raffles sailed up the Singapore River in 1819, he found only a small settlement of some 150 people along the banks. The British turned Singapore into a thriving free port\textsuperscript{56}, it became an important trading route between the west and the east as it is geographically well situated. Immigrant settlers soon came from China, India, the Malay Peninsula and

\textsuperscript{55} World Wide Web information at: \url{http://www.sg/inomap/mita/history.html#founding}

\textsuperscript{56} World Wide Web information at: \url{http://www.nct.gov.sg/EDM/OSOLtext.html}
the Indonesian islands. The first to be attracted by the opportunities in Singapore were the inhabitants, mainly Malays and Chinese, of the older settlement of Malacca, which had been under Dutch rule. They were attracted to the island because the powerful English regime was providing economic opportunities, relative social freedom and easily obtained refugee status. Neither the stringent measures adopted by the Dutch to discourage emigration nor the threat of pirates operating in the Malacca Straits prevented hundreds of Malaccans from finding their way to Singapore.

A second major group of early immigrants were Indonesians from the neighbouring islands, among them were the Javanese, Bugis and Balinese (mainly traders and labourers). Their racial, religious and cultural affinity with the indigenous Malays facilitated inter-marriage. Thus the Malays and Indonesians had contributed substantially to Singapore’s early population growth.

When Raffles landed, he reported that there were only some 30 Chinese in Singapore, engaged in pepper and gambier planting. The establishment of British rule and the consequent new trade opportunities marked the beginning of a long period of continuous Chinese immigration. The first junk arrived from Xiamen (Amoy) in February 1821. By the mid-19th century, Chinese immigration was well-organised. Many indentured immigrants started their ‘new life’ in debt because of the expenses incurred in making their journey. These immigrants were often ill-treated and exploited, until the indentured labour system was abolished in 1910.

The early Chinese immigrants came without their womenfolk, and being in a new environment without their families and relatives, they had no choice but to live under the protection of various clan associations and secret society brotherhoods. As the Chinese community in Singapore became more settled from the 1870s, increasing numbers of women came, encouraged by official government policies. Straits-born and many China-born immigrants settled down to permanent family life in Singapore. Several leading Chinese merchants became British subjects under a naturalisation law passed in 1852. London was then making all the decisions and a governor-general was making all the local decisions representing England’s interests.
The population figures for Singapore were initially derived from a head-count, usually undertaken by the police. In January 1824, the population numbered 10,683, of which 61 per cent were Malays, 32 per cent were Chinese and seven per cent were Indians, suggesting that the English (Anglo-Celtic) component was either very small or outside the surveyor’s controlling gaze (Fig. 2.2).

![Pie chart showing population percentages of Chinese, Malays, and Indians in 1824](image)

**Fig. 2.2 - Singapore’s population in January 1824**

By 1830, the Chinese community had swollen to 65 per cent of the population, numbering 55,000. Their migration to Singapore continued to increase. For example in 1880, 50,000 Chinese people migrated and in 1912 and further 25,000. However, if many Chinese returned to China after a short stay, the Chinese had become the largest single ethnic component of the population, a demographic pattern which has continued to this day (Fig. 2.3)\(^57\).

\(^57\) World Wide Web information at: [http://www.sg/infomap/mita/history.html#founding](http://www.sg/infomap/mita/history.html#founding)

This figure shows the sudden influx of Chinese immigrants which constituted the increase of Chinese population from 32% in 1824 to a 65% in 1830, an increase of 33% in...
The Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese and Hakkas were the four major Chinese dialect groups. From the beginning, Hokkiens dominated Singapore's commercial life, followed closely by Teochews. The Cantonese were generally engaged in agriculture, but some were artisans, carpenters, tailors and goldsmiths. It was not until 1860 that the first proper census was undertaken which indicated that the population had grown to 80,792.

Indian connections with modern Singapore date from the first day of its foundation as a British trading post in 1819. In addition to 120 Indian soldiers and several assistants, Naraina Pillay, an Indian trader from Penang, was also in Raffles' entourage. The liberal policies of the administration and the expanding opportunities for employment drew more Indian immigrants to Singapore from Penang, India and Sri Lanka. They sought work as government clerks, technicians, teachers, and traders.
The decision to make Singapore a penal station in 1823 brought a further few hundred Indian convicts to Singapore. They were put to work, constructing government buildings, bridges and major roads. Among the buildings built by convict labour were the St Andrew’s Cathedral, the Sri Mariamman Temple and the Istana. Both St Andrew’s Cathedral and the Sri Mariamman Temple are presently still serving their primary function as a Christian church and an Indian Temple respectively; with the Istana now housing the office of the President of Singapore. The British also brought in indentured labourers, almost exclusively from southern India, to construct essential public works such as roads, railways, bridges, canals and wharves. Many abuses crept into this labour recruitment system until 1872, when it was controlled by legislation enacted by the Indian Government.

A new form of assisted immigration was introduced in 1908, but with renewed public agitation against the indenture system, the local government eventually banned Indian indentured immigrants in 1910. Indian immigration, however, continued until immigration controls were strictly enforced in the early 1950s so that almost all the major ethno-linguistic groups of the Indian sub-continent are represented in Singapore. But the most numerous are still the southern Indians who have formed about 80 per cent of Singapore’s Indian population since the early days.

With the advent of the steamship in the mid-1860s and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Singapore continued to be a significant port of call for ships plying between Europe and East Asia/Australia. With the development of rubber planting, especially after the 1870s, Singapore also became the main sorting and export centre in the world for rubber. Before the close of the 19th century, Singapore was experiencing unprecedented prosperity and trade expanded eightfold between 1873 and 1913. The prosperity attracted further immigrants from areas around the region58.

Understandably, by the end of the 19th century, Singapore had become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Asia. There was no city in the world quite

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58 World Wide Web information at: http://www.sg/infomap/mita/gov/history.html#intro

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like early twentieth century Singapore. Besides the Chinese, who made up nearly three-quarters of the population, there were sizeable numbers of Peninsular Malays, Sumatrans, Javanese, Bugis, Boyanese, Indians, Ceylonese, Arabs, Jews, Eurasians and Europeans. The population, however, was still predominantly male. In 1911, there were 2,453 men to every thousand women.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the leisurely ways of a steaming, opulent Eastern city was transformed overnight into a life of almost unseemly frenzy. A Europe in turmoil urgently clamoured for raw materials - the desperate race to fill the holds of vessels impatiently lining the quays of Keppel Harbour was on.

The peace and prosperity ended when Japanese aircraft bombed the sleeping city in the early hours of 8 December 1941. Their main targets were the Seletar and Tengah airfields, but they also bombed Raffles Place, the heart of the town. The unsuspecting city was at rest, the streets and the ships in the harbour were set ablaze with fire, the headquarters of the civil air raid precautions organisation were unmanned. For the civilian population these bombs, and the newspaper headlines which greeted them next morning, were the first indications of war that brought along a train of disasters. In a campaign lasting just seventy days, the Japanese 25th Army under General Yamashita advanced 400 miles, often against a numerically superior enemy, and forced the British to surrender Singapore on 15 February 1942. 80,000 British Empire and Commonwealth troops under General Percival


60 Sembawang Airfield (now Sembawang Air Base) and Tengah Airfield were built to support the defences of the Naval Base. Sembawang Airfield was one of the favourite targets of Japanese bombings during the Malaya Campaign. Lt-Gen. Heath defended it as part of the Northern sector under his command. Tengah Airfield had only been recently completed when the Japanese first bombed it on the 8th of December, 1941. Yamashita targeted it as one of the key positions to be captured in his military strategy.

61 Singapore had been known as the ‘Gibraltar of the Orient’. Up till 19 January 1942, the British had been misled by their own metaphor because they assumed that Singapore had defences on all sides, which proved to be false.
surrendered to the Japanese at Singapore in the final humiliation of the greatest defeat in British military history. The Japanese had captured, the 'impenetrable' fortress. They renamed it Syonan (Light of the South)\textsuperscript{62} and it remained under Japanese occupation for three and a half years\textsuperscript{63}.

The British forces returned in September 1945 and Singapore came under the British Military Administration. When the period of this military administration ended in March 1946, the Straits Settlements colony was dissolved.

Postwar Singapore was markedly different from the pre-war country of transient immigrants. The people, especially the merchant class, clamoured for a say in the colony's government. Constitutional powers were initially vested in the London-appointed Governor, who had an advisory council of officials and nominated non-officials. This evolved into the separate Executive and Legislative Councils in July 1947. The Governor retained firm control over the colony, but there was provision for the election of six members to the Legislative Council by popular vote. Hence, Singapore's first election was held on 20 March 1948.

The 1955 election was the first lively political contest in Singapore's history. Automatic registration expanded the register of voters from 75,000 to over 300,000 and, for the first time, it included large numbers of Chinese who had manifested political apathy in previous elections. The Labour Front won 10 of the seats. The People's Action Party (PAP), which fielded four candidates, won three seats. David Marshall became Singapore's first Chief Minister on 6 April in 1955, with a coalition government made up of his own Labour Front, the United Malays National Organisation and the Malayan Chinese Association. This government has, for the past thirty years, been the only

\textsuperscript{62} Singapore was known as Syonan (or Syonan-To, Syonan Island) during the Japanese occupation of 1942-1945. Syo means 'bright' or 'brilliant' and Nan means 'south', so Syonan is 'Brilliant South' or 'Light of the South'. This sounded very close to the Hockkien (one of Chinese dialect groups) words for "birdcage island", an irony that was not lost among the mainly Chinese population of Singapore.

\textsuperscript{63} World Wide Web information at: http://www.nlb.gov.sg/nhb/dec8/war.html
political power moulding and controlling the policies of Singapore. The most important direction for Singapore then was to build a economically strong and socially cohesive country. This policy has resulted in the government’s indifference to cultivating the people’s art and cultural welfare for nearly twenty-four years. Singapore had to wait until 1988 before an Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) was set up to review the arts and culture situation in Singapore (refer to pp 71).

Singapore attained self-government in 1959. In May that year, Singapore’s first general election was held to choose 51 representatives to the first fully elected Legislative Assembly. The PAP won 43 seats, gleaning 53.4 per cent of the total vote. On June 3, the new Constitution, confirming Singapore as a self-governing state, was brought into force by the proclamation of the Governor, Sir William Goode, who became the first Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State). The first Government of the State of Singapore was sworn in on June 5, and Lee Kuan Yew became the new country’s first Prime Minister.

The PAP had came to power in a united front with the pro-communists to fight British colonialism. The pro-communists controlled many student and worker organisations. It was an uneasy alliance between the PAP moderates and the pro-communists, with each side trying to use the other for its own ultimate objective. In the case of the moderates, this meant obtaining full independence for Singapore as part of a non-communist Malaya. In the case of the pro-communists, it meant working towards a communist take-over.

The tension between the two factions worsened from 1960 and led to an open split in 1961, with the pro-communists subsequently forming a new political party, the Barisan Sosialis. The other main players in this drama were the Malayans, who, in 1961, agreed to Singapore’s merger with Malaya as part of a larger federation. This merger was to include British territories in Borneo, with the British controlling the foreign affairs, defence and internal security of Singapore. Malaysia was formed on 16 September 1963, and consisted of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (now Sabah). Brunei opted out. Indonesia and the Philippines opposed the merger. President Sukarno of Indonesia worked actively against it for three years.
The merger proved to be short-lived because of the member states' difference in ideologies, ethnicities and in religions. Singapore separated itself from the rest of Malaysia on 9 August 1965, and became a sovereign, democratic and independent nation. Singapore now has a self-appointed government by the 'one-citizen-one-vote' system without any formal relationship with the United Kingdom. Despite this democratic structure, Singapore has enjoyed a one-party rule with little competition from opposition parties since this time.

Independent Singapore was admitted to the United Nations on 21 September 1965, and became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations on 15 October 1965. On 22 December 1965, it became a republic, with Yusof bin Ishak as the republic's first President.64

From that time the tiny island state has struggle to survive and prosper on its own. It also had to create a sense of national identity and consciousness for its disparate population of immigrants. Singapore's strategy for survival and development was essentially to take advantage of its strategic location, a favourable world economy and its only resource - its own skilled population. Added to that, Singapore has developed a favourable communication structural network to complement the advantage of its natural deep harbour.

2.3 Economy:
Reflecting its refocused economic strategy, the Singaporean government reorganised the Economic Development Board in 1968 and set up the Jurong Town Corporation and the Development Bank of Singapore in the same year.

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64 Singapore continues to be a republic with a parliamentary system of government. The organs of state - the executive, the legislature and the judiciary - are provided for by a written constitution.

The Head of State is the people's elected President. The administration of the Government is vested in the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the other Members of the Cabinet are appointed by the President from among the Members of Parliament. The Cabinet is collectively responsible to Parliament.
In 1970, the Monetary Authority of Singapore was established to formulate and implement Singapore's monetary policies.

Singapore entered the 1970s as a politically stable state with a high rate of economic growth. The one-party Parliament that emerged from the 1968 general election became the pattern, with the PAP winning every seat in 1972, 1976 and 1980. However in the 1984 general election, the PAP lost two seats and in 1991, they lost four seats.

In 1979, after the shock of two international oil crises, the Government started a programme of economic restructuring. It achieved this by modifying its education policies, expanding technology and computer education, offering financial incentives to industrial enterprises and launching a productivity campaign.

On 28 November 1990, a new chapter opened in Singapore's modern history. Goh Chok Tong became the second Prime Minister of Singapore when he took over the office from Lee Kuan Yew. Since stepping down from the Prime Minister position, Lee Kuan Yew now serves as the Senior Minister in the state cabinet. Senior Minister Lee continues to exercise his astute foresightedness and his formidable political experience in the country's policy directions and nation's growth. Over 30 years, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew had built the nation to the second highest standard of living in Asia.\[65\]

Throughout the 1980s, there had been discussions in the private and public sectors to bring about Singapore's long-term national development plans. Many committees were set up to realise the plans and strategies set to achieve these goals. Goh Chok Tong set up a number of committees in 1989, including six Advisory Councils to think about, conceptualise and to develop national strategies regarding family and community life, youth, the aged, the physically challenged, sports and recreation, and culture and the arts.\[66\] In 1991, the government began to promote Shared Values, as the citizens'

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mutual understandings of their multi-racial religious cultures and life-styles. Life-style, according to the Ministry of Community Development, is divided into 'love, care and responsibility', 'mutual respect', 'filial respect', commitment' and 'communication'.

For continuing prosperity and security, Singapore needs continuity and change. It needs to maintain its positive economic performance regionally and internationally with a readiness to adapt and make changes during its development process. A capable government with a industrious Civil Service workforce has already assisted in the expeditious economic and social development. Although recession hit the Western nation-states at this time, Singapore prospered. This has made the nation a middle-income society (Fig. 2.4) with a good foundation for future development.

![GNP at current mkt prices ($M)](image)

**Fig. 2.4** - Singapore's GNP at current market prices ($M)

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67 Ng, Poey Siong (Ed.). op cit.

*Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore*
In 1984, the Singapore Government announced its vision of making Singapore a developed country by 1999. This is also the thrust of Singapore's attempt to realise her vision of a culturally-vibrant society by that time. At one level, the government has been trying to create a sense of national identity and consciousness among a disparate population of immigrants since its independence in 1965. But these 1980s developments indicate that it began to appreciate that the country's state of culture was not as vibrant as its economic growth. And that art and culture were major indices of the modern nation-state's international standing. There was a need to identify a multi-cultural heritage and develop an international centre for the arts. By the mid 1980s, Singapore found itself in an affluent state of economic growth. It recognised the need for developing arts and sports as it is now in a better position to address these dimensions and has begun to see them as vital industries which could enhance her economic development.

Like all nation states, Singapore sees itself as competing in a race of nations and threatened in its national security. With no primary produce, it sees its people as its best security and most precious resource and argues that its population must remain committed to its still growing and widely diversified economy. And, because, Singapore's population has to be large enough to meet its economy's high demands, the Government still encourages marriage and parenthood to off-set the aging population and declining fertility. In order to accelerate the progress of its economy, it is continuously attracting world and especially Asian expertise to supplement its local talents. Simultaneously, the government is also investing in its people by emphasising education as the highest resource. To this end, the Government has pledged $4 million over the next five years (as from August 1995) to two arts institutions, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts. These are private

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68 In 1994, 9,738,324 books were borrowed: 4,956,029 by children and 4,782,295 by adults / young people.

69 Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts is a private institution offering certificate and diploma courses for fine-arts, applied arts, fashion and music. It has linked with overseas universities for degree courses.

70 LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts is a private institution with funding from Singapore International Airlines providing similar courses to those in NAFA. It has now linked
institutions with fee-paying students and it is extra-ordinary for the State to give money to these sorts of institutions. Singapore’s Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) left it to the institutions’ two boards to decide how to use the money. The new grants will help both institutions to meet half of the cost of running their fine arts, drama, music and dance courses. It is worth nothing that design was not mentioned in the newspaper’s statement. If Hong Kong has placed a prominent emphasis on design, Singapore’s educational system should place even more emphasis on design’s value-adding benefits. Perhaps it is not on Singapore agenda to be such, since the government has stressed making Singapore a ‘Hub-City’ of arts and culture both within the region and internationally. At the same time, it has not addressed design’s role in this vision. In fact, as we will see, exhibition designers have been recognised as contributing meaning to influential state exhibitions. Singapore has not placed emphasis on Design education and this reflects in the low status/under valuing of designers’ potential role in creating meanings in museum exhibitions and representing Singapore as a centre for world-class exhibitions.

with RMIT for their degree courses.


72 Does this means that design is not within the S$4 million grant? In contradiction to this, Hong Kong focuses on design and not on visual arts.


At this point, Hong Kong is brought in as both Singapore and Hong Kong are post-colonial city-states with a common relation. They are, in fact, considered as rivals in economic growth and power.

"From a point, Hong Kong has to consider the steps needed to be taken at home so that their design for improved design in Hong Kong becomes also their design for greater prosperity of their people. The main image of modernity in the Sixties in Hong Kong was that of a Western design. This was more an image than a reality, for the powerful agency of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries was less concerned with design in practice, yet it promoted design relentlessly, from foreign trade shows to local education. Indeed, by the end of the decade it was clear that ‘design’ had become a useful metaphor for progress in a Colony - progress without politics." pp. 10.
2.4 International Business Hub 2000 (IBH 2000):
As part of the Government’s plan, the Hub-City concept is based on the International Business Hub 2000 (IBH 2000) vision for Singapore as a ‘vibrant cosmopolitan centre which, because of its strategic geographical location, excellent infrastructure and superior services and capabilities, is able to support and influence markets beyond its natural boundaries’74. The IBH 2000 programme complements the Manufacturing 2000 and Regionalisation 2000 programmes. IBH 2000 also states Singapore’s strategic intention to become the Asia-Pacific business hub, bringing the world to the region and the region to the world. IBH 2000 identified four key services and capabilities for strategic enhancement and grouped these into ‘Regional Headquarters and Business Services’ (RHQs), ‘Communications and Information’, ‘Logistics’ and ‘Lifestyle’75. Activities for the year included:

- sustaining Singapore as a premier location for RHQs and a base for business expansion into the region.
- promoting Singapore as a total capability logistics hub by upgrading its manpower services and regionalisation.
- promoting major broadcasters/programmers to Singaporeans.
- promoting high value-added services in communications such as advanced telecommunication applications, satellite communication, data-hubs and call centres, multimedia content development, products and services to Singaporeans.
- Promoting lifestyle-enhancing activities in areas such as publishing and electronic media, film/television/music, healthcare and education to Singaporeans.

The Economic Development Board% (EDB) will continue to promote these key services and capabilities, as well as to develop new ones including

75 Ibid.
healthcare, education services, TV broadcasting, Internet-based and multimedia services. Singapore promotes 'Lifestyle' as leisure, fine & performing arts, media, medical services and education services. Within the fine & performing arts sector, the key thrusts are to develop an arts-based events industry through Broadway musical seasons, mega-star art fairs and festivals; and to promote new businesses in auctioning, museum ownership and management, show production, theatre ownership and management, ticketing, professional services and support services. In the early 1990s, as part of its fine & performing arts sector, the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) spearheaded the development of a 'Museum Precinct', which is the 'Civic and Cultural' district (Fig. 2.6).

The Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) has taken this Hub-City concept to lobby for a culturally-vibrant society with a multi-cultural heritage as well as an international centre for the arts. It sees a culturally-vibrant society as one whose people are “well-informed, creative, sensitive and gracious”. It also sees Singapore as an international centre for the arts, with a world-class exhibition centre, a market for arts-works and a regular

The Economic Development Board (EDB) has the responsibility of industrial planning, development and promotion of investments in manufacturing and services as well as upgrading local business capabilities. A statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, it transformed Singapore's economic landscape from that of a trading nation to a global manufacturing and business centre for more than 3,000 international companies.

77 World Wide Web information at:
http://www.sedb.com.sg/annual96/review/jbh.html

"In 1995, $1.1 billion in total business spending (TBS) and $1.0 billion in fixed asset investments (FAI) were recorded. Compared to the previous year, TBS and FAI increased by 98% and 134% respectively."

78 World Wide Web information at:

"Located strategically at the crossroads between East and West, Singapore offers companies in the lifestyle services sector a local captive market of 3 million people with a GDP per capita of US$15, 880, the 17th highest in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. Singapore also offers a tourist market of nearly 7 million visitors a year. With the surrounding Asia Pacific population of 3.2 billion and robust growth projections for tourism, business opportunities in the lifestyle services cluster are virtually unlimited."
performing venue for world-class performers. In order to realise this vision of a Hub-City, the government is now encouraging more people to develop an interest in cultural and artistic activities, and to take amateur or professional parts in arts. The government is also stepping up the tempo of cultural activities. It is displaying more works of art in public places; encouraging and promoting more original Singaporean works; building a pool of good artists, arts administrators, art entrepreneurs and other related professionals; as well as developing more modern purpose-built performing, working and exhibition facilities for the arts, libraries and specialised museums/galleries. In order to realise this, a new performing arts centre, 'The Esplanade', is being built at the Marina Bay. A new national library will also be built within the 'Civic and Cultural' district (Fig. 2.6); and three new speciality museums have been planned for the same area. Of these, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) was opened in October 1995. While the Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM) opened in mid-February 1997, and Singapore History Museum (SHM) will gradually take over the premises of the present Singapore National Museum (SNM) with renovation work to be done in phases. According to the Public Relations Officer of SNM, SHM’s renovation process will have the least interruption to the operation of the museum. It will also give the public some time to adapt to the museum’s new name, Singapore History Museum.\footnote{Lim, Sharon (Public Relations Officer of Singapore National Museum).}
Fig. 2.5 - Proposed plan for 'Civic And Cultural Hub Of Singapore'\(^{80}\)

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Fig. 2.6 - Final plan for 'Civic And Cultural Hub Of Singapore'\textsuperscript{81}

Singapore's strategies and visions for the national arts and culture depends on its economic growth, which indicates that the government sees its cultural strength as proportionate to its wealth. Furthermore, with the shift of the world's economy from the Atlantic to the Pacific, its people need to be industrious and work intelligently together. The island's physical constraints should not be the limits of the nation-state's development. The aim of the country is to make Singapore one of the key cities of the world. To achieve the international status as a Hub-City, its infrastructure will have to be

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\textbf{Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore}
upgraded regularly, and its companies will need to venture outside Singapore to enable the country to be Singapore International\(^{82}\).

2.5

Ethnic Cultures:
As stated previously, over the years, Singapore has achieved a comfortable state of affluence. Singapore has the second highest standard of living in Asia\(^{83}\) (after Japan). Singapore’s per capita GNP is US$23,350 for a population of 2.8 million people. Japan’s per capita GNP is US$34,630 for its population of 124.7 million people\(^{84}\). With such outstanding rush of affluence, the Government saw that Singapore should be in a better position to address the other dimensions of arts and sports. Suddenly, Singapore has a need for its art and cultural development. Singapore aspires to be a culturally developed country, and also a prosperous Hub-City for local and regional business, culture and the arts. As we will see, the PAP Government has concluded that arts and cultural activities are vital industries which will enrich the people’s spiritual well-being.\(^{85}\). Or perhaps the city-state now recognises that its people need this type of cultural capital in order to perform on the world stage as ‘civilised’ and ‘domesticated’ citizens. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has said that Singapore’s political and economic institutions are patterned after the West’s and are plugged into the Western grid\(^{86}\).

Indeed Singapore, which has a bare thirty years of political independence, ethnic group could hardly escape an active search for foreign models. Lee Kuan Yew (Senior Minister Lee) and his colleagues have always felt sure they

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82 This is an official concept for Singapore to be culturally active, economically strong and highly and positively regarded.


85 As such, Singapore’s post-colonial culture is heir to those western discourses which has a strong western tradition, which argued that literature and visual art teaches morality, nobility, discrimination and love of truth.


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know what is best for Singapore, and have behaved unrepentantly as social engineers, always looking for ways to reshape the society into their perconceived mould. Like that 'national dress' that is awkwardly stitched together by elements from various ethnic costumes, a new and rational society had to be forged out of bits and pieces from here and there. But increasingly since the mid-1970s, Singapore has also been internationally hailed as a positive example, for its economic growth, its free trade zones, its public housing and town planning, its technological upgrading, its public transport, traffic and general environment management, its "successful" demographic transition, its cleanliness, its absence of corruption, its general atmosphere of efficiently, its bureaucratic openness and freedom from red tape, its magnificent international airport and national airlines, its (relative) capacity to plan its future.

At the same time, looking at Singapore a quarter-century after independence, one cannot fail to notice that it has been one of the most truly imaginative and creative newly independent states. Israel constituted an oasis of competence and development in the middle of backwardness and poverty. In that respect, Israel had something in common with Athens and Venice as hubs of both civilisation and commerce, Senior Minister Lee sometimes compared Singapore to the ways in which these small intense states had cultivated those virtues of modernity, rationality and efficiency that he himself wanted to ingrain in Singapore. Speaking more generally, Singapore is a very strange creation of history, and Senior Minister Lee has played a quasi-godlike role. It is a distinctive history as a strategically-situated island with a majority of overseas Chinese, a long British presence, a strong Communist impact and somebody like Senior Minister Lee. Though Singaporeans may not have thought to claim it, their country is


unquestionably one of the most original in the world - maybe because everything looks so much like a 3-D masterplan all realised in one stroke.\(^{90}\)

The nation does not indeed possess a distinctive and morally superior cultural identity, but the government promotes this as a layered or tiered structure, rather than as a pillar. It comprises component cultural values such that the various community groups are recognised as having values which differ from each other but which are mutually compatible, so that they constitute a nested hierarchy of values which form the building-blocks for the "umbrella" national cultural values and identity. The national community is portrayed as a multi-cellular organism which derives its character, identity, and values from those of its component cells, specifically denoted in ethnic terms. The Singaporean national identity and values are thus seen as developing out of the component Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian cultures.\(^{91}\) Since not all aspects of the original ethnic cultures were perceived by the state elites to be both admirable in themselves and fully compatible with each other, the state has tried to depoliticise the original ethnic cultures and to engineer them in order to demolish the "undesirable elements", while fostering those aspects which could constitute building-blocks for the national identity. The state elites have increasingly sought to instil a new sense of Singaporean-ness which stresses the emergence of a consensual culture at the level of a national community. They see this as a consensus based on 'Asian values' which is their core proposition that the state has largely sanitised ethnic cultures of Singaporeans so as to remove their politically-destabilising connotations. To counteract the divisive and disruptive effects of Western individualism, they portray Singapore as belonging to a set of "nested" identity groups - *family, ethnic community and nation* - each with complementary cultural values. Beginning in 1978 and 1982 respectively, they embarked upon sustained campaigns to promote Confucian values and

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the Mandarin language to Chinese citizens in order to prevent the spread of Western individualism. They have promoted Confucianism as compatible with and conducive to economic development, political stability, national unity, and potentially, democracy. The numerical and socio-economic dominance of the Chinese in Singaporean society, the image of Chinese culture inevitably provides the major building-block for the creation of the consensual national culture.

At the same time, the government also used two main methods to assert the compatibility of Malay identity with a Singaporean national identity based on Asian values. The first method is the Government’s promotion of the acceptance of the ‘Malay-cultural-weakness orthodoxy’, whereby the country’s Malay citizens are asked to see their internal cultural attributes as responsible for their socioeconomic problems, rather than blaming the Chinese or the government, whilst the second method is to influence the development of Islam in Singapore.

The state’s promotion of such distinct but compatible ethnic values, for non-Chinese communities and Chinese communities, has provided the basis for the vocalisation of an overarching Singaporean national culture. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s proposal (October, 1988) hinted at the government’s need to create a national culture by developing a national ideology of “Asian values” out of the existing ethnic culture. The National Ideology specifies the core values of defining the national identity of Singaporeans, and delineates the morally absolute values within which consensual politics could be conducted. The Government identified four of these values as:

- ethnic and religious tolerance embodied in the idea of multi-racialism,
- a commitment to making decisions by consensus rather than by contention,
- putting the needs of society over the needs of individuals, and
- upholding the family as the core unit of society.

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92 For example, the formation of Mendaki 1982 (the Council for the Education of Muslim Children) was established to ‘reform Malay attitudes and values’.

The Government then laid the foundations for the promotion of these Asian values in schools in 1982. The Ministry of Education (Singapore-MOE) proposed the teaching of Religious Knowledge (later renamed Moral Education) as a compulsory subject. Students of each racial category studied their respective religions. In 1989, this teaching of Religious Knowledge was discarded for Civics - aspects of national-building, awareness of shared values and an appreciation of Singapore's major religious values. The focus thus shifted from stressing the distinctiveness of each religious group, to the mutual compatibility of all religious values. This proposal was followed in 1990 by the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, which aimed to promote religion as a unifying cultural anchor for the politician's subversive promotion of the country's diverse religious values.

By the end of the 1980s, the state elites had gone a long way toward asserting a corporatist Singapore identity. In schools and the media, Singaporeans were being deluged with the assertions of the primacy of the national community over the individual, and the associated Asian values over that of Westernisation. All these were done via the reassertion of ethnicity as embodying the core values which provided cultural roots for the individual and communal cohesion for the nation.

As such, Singapore is paradoxical in many ways, not least in the fact that, despite defining itself as a newly-industrialising country (NIC), it is in most respects a mature economy co-existing with a very immature society. Its constant pre-occupation with identity is a very good indication of this latter fact. The Government's constant changes in economic, educational and social policy, combined with the PAP's style of constant slogan-neering, both contribute to perpetuating this immaturity, which is politically functional since it keeps the population in a constant state of dependence.

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94 Appreciation of Singapore's Major Religions. (1989, Oct). The Straits Times (Singapore), pp. 20

95 Brown, David. op cit.

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David Chaney\textsuperscript{96} makes the point that the thing that makes a society modern is the idea that primarily religious beliefs, collective beliefs, become less important and that associated collective celebrations of those beliefs are less widely valued or practised.

If this is the case, then the construction of knowledge which defines that society as a modern society is based not so much on shared values and ideas as on ideologies of Western individualism. Chaney's western-ness become obvious, simply because this is not the case in Singapore. Singapore constructs itself as modern by relying on establishing a set of collective values and ideals. Even more so than in Western democracies, its politicians are its cultural managers\textsuperscript{97}.

2.6
Role Of Museum In The Nation-State Singapore
- The "Imagination" Of A Singapore Identity.

As Singapore is a 'nation-state', it is important to define the meaning of a 'nation-state' and how Singapore is creating museums to "imagine" a "reality" for the nation. Donald Horne has provided a standard definition that a nation-state is a nation of a people with a common religion and ethnicity, a shared creation, a unique language and a history to which most of them can relate\textsuperscript{98}.

In this original form, no nation-state was older than the nineteenth century. As societies became industrial and modern they also became nation-states. The development of what the nation was supposed to be was an essential part of the development of most public cultures. A "reality" had to be created for


these new kinds of states. A nation-state can only exist in the imagination. Once it is imagined, that is what it becomes, it is a basis for thought and action (including dispute). When a nation-state was being created, its nationalist advocates had to invent its icons and rituals, legends and festivals that made this real. Any nation needs a national past, a national character, a national capital, a national flag, a national crest, a national song, national honours, a national currency, a national landscape, a national postage stamp, a national animal, a national dish and a national flower. And these became the central images in its public culture. It was these reality that made up the public faces of the nation. The apologists created a national past, with legends to be taught in schools, of how the nation-state had earned its right to exist. These legends did not evolve. They had to be created. The fauna, flora and landscape of the country were also examined for the revelations of the character of a nation-state. Mountains, rivers and trees were especially favoured for the expression of national character. Thus, Singapore’s national flora icon is the orchid and our tourist industry has used it to promote our country internationally. Singapore’s flag consists of two equal horizontal sections, red above white. In the upper left canton is a white crescent moon besides five white stars within a circle. This red symbolises universal brotherhood and equality of man, while white signifies pervading and everlasting purity and virtue. The crescent moon represents a young nation on the ascendant, illuminated by the five stars of democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality. At the same time, Singapore has set up several museums to guard its civilisation and national spirit. It has erected monuments and scoured the countryside for buildings and sites that it could pronounce “historic”. Along with the most celebrated landscapes, these became the principal stations in the national tourist pilgrimage.

National capitals were created in this way. These usually became a centrepiece in the national showcase, displaying both the history of the nation and in world civilisation. Thus Singapore has appropriated some of its old buildings for the three museums which it will use to create its cultural identity. The Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the Asian Civilisation Museum

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99 Ibid.
(ACM) and the Singapore History Museum (SHM). Significantly, these museums are being housed in renovated historic buildings.

Horne recognises that there are ways of talking about modern-industrial states that go beyond the nationalism of imposing tribal ethnic definitions. Nationalism is the chauvinism of a nation-state. And, because it is chauvinistic, it is concerned with the superiority and/or dominance. But one can distinguish between ‘nation chauvinism’ and ‘state chauvinism’. Nation chauvinism boasts of a nation’s superiority through its ethnic virtue. State chauvinism is a different matter. It is the claim to superiority or dominance not on the basis of ethnic virtue, but on the basis of the virtue of the state. Even in states where ethnicity is also a definer, political concepts can also become part of the identity of a state, even when some are also “ethnic” 100.

The kinds of statistics used in a public culture can also help in the matters on which a state displays its success and failures. Some nations see the test of success in export statistics. In the early stages of state-creating, literacy rates can be important. A nation’s strategic imagination (its habits of policy and style in diplomacy, trade, immigration and military policy) can help define the identity of a state101. Since 1992, the Singapore government has been planning three national museums for the nation to identify its cultural roots and national past.

In this chapter, I have sketched a history of Singapore. This history focuses on Singapore’s colonial period (1819 - 1959), the origins of Singapore’s multi-racial and multi-cultural citizenry, the role of Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party (PAP) in developing a state ideology of Asian-ness and its relatively recent concern to develop a national museum and galleries culture as part of its vision for future prosperity and security.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the arts and cultural organisations in Singapore.

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
3.0

Chapter Three:

Arts and Cultural Organisations In Singapore
Chapter Three: Arts and Cultural Organisations In Singapore

In order to understand and to give a clearer cultural discourse of Singapore, a discussion of its arts and cultural policies and organisations is needed. There are many different arts and cultural organisations in Singapore. The organisation chart in (Fig. 3.1) gives a clear indication of their hierarchical accountability and inter-relationships. A short explanation of the various government and statutory boards will help us to gain better understanding of the role these arts and cultural organisations are expected to play in building and promoting Singapore as a artistic and cultural Hub-City.

In summary, these organisations are mainly the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA), the Ministry of Information & The Arts (MITA), the National Arts Council (NAC), the National Heritage Board (NHB), the Board of Film Censors (BFC), the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB), the National Library (NL), the Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM), the Singapore History Museum (SHM), and the National Museum (NM).
Fig. 3.1 - Organisation Chart Of Cultural Bodies In Singapore
3.1.0
ACCA:

As we have seen, in 1984, the Singapore Government announced its mission statement of making Singapore into a developed country by 1999. It set up the ACCA in February 1988 to accomplish its plan. The ACCA then reviewed the cultural and arts situation in Singapore and made recommendations to assist the Government in realising its vision of transforming Singapore into a culturally vibrant society. More specifically, the Government called on the ACCA to assess Singapore's progress in promoting the growth and appreciation of the arts; identifying, preserving and disseminating Singapore's heritage and engendering the habit of reading among its citizens. The Government also asked the Council to identify factors and propose measures that would create a conducive environment for sustained artistic growth; and encourage Singaporeans to be more widely informed, refined in taste, gracious in lifestyle and appreciate their multi-cultural heritage in the context of their modern city-state.

The ACCA was made up of members from governmental bodies, members from various Singapore media, and a few members from private corporations (industrialists). However, because these bodies and individuals are neither practising artists nor trained as artists, there is a danger that their decisions and recommendations could be inappropriate and inaccurate, for they could not totally represent the artist's interest. Not surprisingly, as most of the Council consisted of governmental officials, the construction of the report was likely to be based more on a national governmental interest than popular and artists’ representatives’ concerns.

As stated in a recent report, ACCA made 56 recommendations of which 50 were accepted for implementation. Four of the major recommendations were:
that a National Arts Council (NAC) be formed to spearhead the development of Singapore's arts;

that a world class performing art centre be built at Marina Centre and that the city's existing cultural facilities be upgraded;

that the Government improve the quality of arts education in the schools; and

that the Government step up the tempo and level of cultural activities through private, corporate, civic and community organisations102.

As a result of the ACCA's recommendations, the NAC was established in September 1991. NAC absorbed the former Arts Division of the Ministry of Information and the Arts, Singapore Cultural Foundation, Festival of Arts Secretariat and National Theatre Trust. The NAC's mission is to help nurture the arts and develop Singapore into a vibrant global city for the arts. After NAC, ACCA established National Heritage Board (NHB) in August 1993. NHB comprises of the National Museum (NM), the National Archives of Singapore (NAS), and the Oral History Centre (OHC). These institutions of the NHB are keepers of our nation's history, collective memory and heritage. Both the NAC and the NHB come under the umbrella of the MITA.

The ACCA has envisaged Singapore as a culturally vibrant society which is pursuing a multi-cultural heritage and to develop Singapore as an international centre for the arts. This review of the arts and culture in Singapore occurred in February 1988 and since then it has become obvious

102 Cheng, Lynette (Public Relations Officer of MITA, plin@technet.sg) E-mail correspondence regarding 'Formulation Of Arts & Heritage Policy', (1995, October 21). She has been the only contact in Ministry of Information and the Arts through which many other related liaisons were made - National Arts Council, National Heritage Board and Singapore Arts Centre.
that the Government is actually serious about the construction of a "new" Singapore identity by the turn of the century.

With the indications that China is positioning itself to be a major role player in Asia; Singapore is emphasising the importance of Asian values - 'Asian-ness'. As we have seen, the Singapore elite sees Asian values as the ideology of Confucian values within the framework of Singaporean Chinese\textsuperscript{103}. Naturally, with the majority of Singapore being of Chinese ancestry, the change of cultural direction appears to be towards the coming age of the Chinese ascendency.

The ACCA soldiered on to draft out six strategies to realise Singapore’s arts and culture vision. It argued that Singapore needs to develop more audiences, to encourage widespread public and artist participation, professionalism, improved cultural facilities, an enriched cultural scene and a developed Singapore repertory\textsuperscript{104}. In this aspect, the Council has identified and provided possible solutions for the problem.

I have already noted that the Council saw a culturally vibrant society as one whose people are well informed, creative, sensitive and gracious\textsuperscript{105}. Such a society must have several distinguishing features: a large sector of the population being well informed about and interested in the arts; a wide and varied range of cultural activities to meet different interests; excellent infrastructure; a sizeable pool of good artists, writers, critics, teachers, arts administrators, directors, producers and support personnel; comprehensive


\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
news coverage and reviews on cultural and artistic events in the mass media; an awareness and appreciation of its heritage and common values; and an artistic ambience enhanced by sculptures, murals and works of arts in public places.

The Council has also argued that in order to cultivate such a culturally vibrant society and international art centre, Singapore must take cognisance of its rich and diverse heritage and encourage excellence in the pursuit of its various multi-lingual and multi-cultural artforms, as it is this collective heritage which makes Singapore unique\(^{106}\). Furthermore, by virtue of its strategic location and its British colonial heritage, Singapore has great potential to be an international market for works of art, an information centre, an international business centre and an art market centre. At the same time, Singapore could become a regular performing venue in the itinerary of world-class performing troupes.

In order to realise ACCA's vision, the liaison among the various arts and cultural organisations in Singapore is vital.

3.2.0
MITA:
Like ACCA, and in line with Singapore's arts and cultural organisation, MITA, a Singapore government organisation, is responsible for the development and promotion of Singapore as a centre of information and the arts.

MITA's scope of responsibility includes five main areas - information, broadcasting, the arts, libraries, and heritage.

\(^{106}\) Ibid.
The departments and statutory boards under MITA’s ministry are the Board of Film Censors, National Art Council, National Heritage Board, Singapore Broadcasting Authority and National Library. MITA formulates the 'Arts & Heritage Policy' to protect the interests of Singapore’s culture and arts as well as to ensure that the guidelines of the policy are being adhered to closely. MITA’s mission is to inform, educate and entertain as part of the national goal to establish Singapore as a Hub-City, and to build the economically dynamic, socially cohesive and culturally vibrant society.

One of this Ministry’s key roles is to assist the Government in its management of relations with the press. The Ministry is also the key link between the Government and the media. It operates as an official information service for Singapore-based news organisations. The Ministry assists journalists in arranging interviews with ministers and senior government officials, facilitates media coverage of ministerial functions and international meetings held in Singapore, and accredits journalists and camera crews. In order to foster closer ties between Singapore and its neighbours, the Ministry organises visitors' programmes for journalists from ASEAN and other neighbouring countries.

The MITA also formulates, implements and reviews policies on censorship and licensing of audio-visual materials. The censorship policy allows for the free-flow of information and creativity while preserving political, social and religious harmony.

MITA also handles National broadcasting and multi-media policy as well as printing and publishing permits. The Ministry ensures adequate provision of broadcasting services in Singapore and facilitates the development of the emerging multi-media industry.

In addition, the MITA mounts annual and biennial national campaigns and publicity programmes like the 'Courtesies Campaign', the 'Speak Mandarin

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Campaign' and the 'Singapore Programme'. These are often organised in conjunction with the private sector.

MITA produces publications like the 'Singapore Yearbook', 'Singapore Facts and Pictures', 'Singapore Brochure', 'Singapore Fact Sheets' and 'The Singapore Bulletin' as sources of information about Singapore for its diverse publics. As part of its international public affairs programme, it provides videos featuring Singapore to interested parties, in particular overseas Singaporeans and foreign television stations. The Information Orientation Programme for visitors on training stints was introduced in 1992 to give them an overview of Singapore. These visitors are also often invited to visit different operations and key organisations in Singapore.

MITA deploys experienced information officers to other ministries to manage their public affairs programmes and also provides advice on public communications matters.

In summary, these are MITA’s five broad areas of responsibility:

- **Information**: - Films, Video Tapes and Publications; Government Campaigns; Government Publications; Government Public Relations; Information Industries; Media Relations; Media Research; Newspaper and Printing Presses; Translation Services.

- **Broadcasting**: - Broadcast Services; Transmitting and Receiving Equipment.

- **The Arts**: - Arts Policies.

- **Library**: - Inter-Library Co-operation; National Bibliographic Services; National Repository of Singapore Publications; Reference, Information and Loan Services.

- **Heritage**: - Heritage Policies, Archival and Records Management Services; Oral History Programme and Museums.

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108 This 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' may link to the notion of Asian-ness by creating a homogenous (Chinese inflected) national identity.
3.3.0
MITA administers and is responsible for five government instrumentalities. These are BFC, NAC, NHB, NL and SBA. I shall discuss each briefly. The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) will also be discussed briefly as this organisation is vital in Singapore’s cultural tourism.

**Board of Film Censors (BFC):**
The first government instrumentality under the umbrella of MITA is the Board of Film Censors (BFC). BFC is responsible for vetting films, videotapes, and videodiscs (laser discs), and approving them for exhibition in Singapore. The board licenses companies to import, distribute, make and exhibit videos. The board also licenses cinemas to screen NC-16 and Restricted (Artistic) films.

In 1993, BFC approved over 3 million entertainment videos (including originals and duplicates), 20,056 industrial, training, promotional, religious and other videos and 2,655 films for viewing in Singapore. It banned 438 entertainment videos and 21 films because the films depicted “excessiveness”, “permissiveness” and “glorified crime” and “gangland culture”\(^{110}\).

It has classified these films into three categories: General (G), Not for Children Under 16 (NC-16) and Restricted (Artistic) (R(A)). The G category is subdivided into films suitable for all ages (G sub-category) and those that require parental guidance (PG sub-category). NC-16 films are restricted to cinema patrons who are at least 16 years old while R(A) films are restricted to patrons 21 years and above. The NC-16 rating was introduced on 1 June 1993. There is no classification for videotapes and videodiscs.

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\(^{109}\) World Wide Web information at:

\(^{110}\) World Wide Web information at:
On 1 April 1993, BFC introduced censorship by exemption. It allows ballet, opera, classical music and jazz videos, documentary videos, sports videos, educational videos and cartoon videos for children to be exempt from censorship if they are for an individual's home use. Training and industrial videos and advertising and promotional videos are also exempt from censorship if a company can show that they are being used in-house. The exemption is granted to video owners who must make a written declaration that their videos fall within the exempted categories, and that they do not have contents which depict sex\textsuperscript{111}, nudity, gratuitous violence, drug abuse; or denigrate any race or religion; or affect Singapore’s national interest; and are otherwise not “obscene” or “lewd”\textsuperscript{112}.

3.4.0

**National Arts Council (NAC):**

The second government instrumentality under MITA is National Arts Council (NAC). NAC was established in September 1991. It absorbed the former Arts Division of the Ministry of Information and the Arts, the Singapore Cultural Foundation, the Festival of Arts Secretariat and the National Theatre Trust. In many ways similar to the Australia Council, its mission is to help nurture the arts and develop Singapore's vision of a vibrant global city for the arts.

In summary, the NAC aims:

- to harness the support and contribution of all Singaporeans and friends
- to promote an artistically vibrant society
- to promote the appreciation and practice of the arts among Singaporeans
- to nurture artistic and creative talent in Singapore
- to provide and manage performing, exhibition and related facilities for the arts

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{111} The BFC interprets this as no penises, breasts, pubic hair, juvenile sex and homosexual activities.


But all these are very subjective and context-specific words. What is 'obscene' to one may be acceptable to another (regardless of nationalities).

\end{footnotesize}
• to promote Singaporean arts and artists overseas
• to attract a wide range of international artistic talents and events to Singapore
• and, finally, to create a partnership between the artistic community, the private sector and the Government in the promotion of the arts.

The NAC has five divisions. (1) Its ‘Arts Programmes’ division organises arts festivals and other arts events; implements and coordinates ASEAN and other cultural exchange programmes. (2) The ‘Grants’ division provides financial assistance and other support services for the arts groups and artists, and it also administers arts awards. (3) The ‘Arts Facilities’ division provides suitable and affordable housing for arts groups. It also plans, develops and manages arts facilities. (4) The NAC’s ‘Community Support and Public Affairs’ division markets the arts, plans promotion and publicity campaigns; encourages and obtains sponsorship for the arts. It also implements the nation’s arts education programmes. (5) Finally, the ‘Corporate Services’ division handles corporate planning, finance, general administration and personnel matters, and coordinates arts statistics and research.\(^{113}\)

3.4.1
The Substation

*The Substation\(^{114}\)* is an example of a venue which operates under NAC’s ‘Arts Facilities’ division. The Substation was developed at a cost of S$1.07 million\(^{115}\). This venue is housed in an old Public Utilities Board’s substation which was built in 1928. Officially opened on September 16, 1990, The Substation organises and stages regular cultural activities. It includes art, photography, drama, dance and mime workshops, as well as collectibles fetes, Sunday crafts, seminars, lectures, art exhibitions, talks and concerts. The Substation is also a regular meeting place for both professional and budding...
dramatists, artists, writers, dancers and photographers. Managed by a board of directors, it is a privately run non-profit organisation.

3.4.2
Singapore Arts Centre Company Ltd (SAC):
Another subsidiary of NAC, the Singapore Arts Centre Company Ltd (SAC), was established on 26th September 1992 to develop and manage 'The Esplanade - Theatre on the Bay', as a non-profit company limited by guarantee from the Government. The building of this world-class theatre was the Singapore Government's response to the ACCA's 1989 recommendation to build an arts centre by Marina Bay. Housing five auditoriums and supported by outdoor performing spaces, the centre is a response to the increasing demand for the quality performing spaces which has been engendered by two decades of dynamic artistic growth in the theatrical arts scene. With Marina Bay as the waterfront of Singapore, with Singapore skyline as a backdrop, it begs comparison with the Sydney Opera House.

The development of the centre gained momentum in 1992 following the appointment of its architect and acoustician. An interactive design process was adopted, involving the Singapore artistic and architectural community. The result is a design which will attempt to combine the philosophical heritage of the East and West. Scheduled to open in the year 2001, the centre will welcome artists and audiences from all over the world and is expected to help establish Singapore as an international arts city.

3.5.0
National Heritage Board (NHB):
The third government instrumentality under MITA is the National Heritage Board (NHB). NHB was formed on 1 August 1993, and is responsible for the National Museum (NM), the National Archives of Singapore (NAS), and the Oral History Centre (OHC). These institutions of the NHB are keepers of our nation's history, collective memory and public heritage. NHB's mission is to explore and present the culture and heritage of Singapore by collecting,
preserving, interpreting and displaying objects and records so as to promote a better understanding of Singapore's roots and instil a sense of national identity among Singaporeans.

To attract visitors from abroad, NHB is mindful of its role in helping to develop Singapore into a regional cultural hub. The Board has promised another three museums; Singapore Art Museum (SAM), Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM), and Singapore History Museum (SHM), between 1993 to 1999, under Singapore National Museum's (SNH) umbrella. When they are fully operational, these museums will seek to enhance Singapore as a (profitable) tourist attraction as well as to enrich its citizen's life-style.116

3.5.1

**Singapore Art Museum (SAM):**

Being first to start, SAM opened its doors in October 1995. This new art museum is devoted to the study and preservation of contemporary art of the Southeast Asian region. SAM is also the realisation of plans to meet expanded spatial and institutional need of National Museum Art Gallery's (NMAG)117 outgrown facilities and increasing art collection. NMAG's collection had increased from some 115 paintings in 1976 to an extensive 2,500 pieces in 1993. SAM's boasts a collection of art works that embraces historical significance and aesthetic value. This collection includes art works by Singapore's and the region's pioneering and established artists as well as works by younger artists. There has been an urgent need to upgrade the gallery's storage and art facilities to house the valuable works. SAM resides in the architectural and historic landmark site of Singapore's Saint Joseph's Institution (which had been a Catholic boys' school until 1987). It lies within the Civic and Cultural District. From the conversion of the former school to an art museum of international standards, a careful balance was struck between the preservation of its architectural and historical character, and the

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117 The NMAG was established in 1976 as an annex of the National Museum and was itself a realisation of long cherished dreams of Singapore artists for a national gallery and repository for the visual arts in Singapore.

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building's new role as a contemporary site for the display of 20th century art. It is therefore deemed as an appropriate choice for the task of refurbishing the building which is close to the other museums. Featuring thirteen galleries over ten thousand metres square of climatically controlled space, the Museum meets international conservation standards. It will stage both permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational programmes and publications on visual arts from the regional and international scenes that aim to stimulate and enrich the visitors' and art lovers' cultural experience. Apart from these areas, SAM also houses climatically controlled storage and collection spaces, conservation laboratories, administrative and curatorial offices, photography studios and a patron's club. Multi-media programmes and computer displays will introduce visitors to artworks which are displayed in other established international museums. The Museum will be the regional pioneer in the collection of 20th century Singapore and Southeast Asian contemporary art.

The SAM will also incorporate an electronic interactive gallery, an auditorium, a library, a multi-purpose hall, a clubhouse, a functional courtyard space, a cafe and a museum shop. A permanently installed state-of-the-art electronic interactive programme, the E-mage Gallery, is the Museum's special educational feature. The interactive programme aims to provide users with an introduction to the art histories and contemporary art practices of the Southeast Asian region. The Museum Cafe and Museum Shop offer refreshments, souvenirs and publications on the visual arts while the Museum's library is open to art researchers by appointment.

Currently SAM is opened to the public, it is also the first phase of the NHB's museums development plan118.

3.5.2
Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM):

118 World Wide Web information at:
Next in line, the Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM) is now scheduled to open in mid-February 1997. The development of this museum's new permanent home would take place in two phases. One section of the ACM will be housed in the old Tao Nan School building, at Armenian Street. The other section is planned for the old Empress Place and it is targeted for completion in 1999. The ACM at Tao Nan building, will feature permanent displays focusing on Chinese civilisation, while the rest of the focus on Asia will be covered in the second phase of the Museum's development. Previously, Tao Nan School was a primary school. Built during the British colonial era, it has a very rich colonial architecture influence and an association with Singapore's history. Thus, Tao Nan School was chosen to be renovated to house ACM because of its heritage value, beauty and age.

The ACM's forte is to focus on the great empires of Southeast Asia, West Asia, East Asia and South Asia because, as we have seen, these civilisations have contributed to Singapore's identity, socio-cultural practices, history and heritage. The ACM exhibitions will trace and unravel the ancestral cultures of Singapore as a multi-racial nation. It will present this history to both present and future generations of the nation (as well as tourists)\(^{119}\). Given the multi-cultural nature of Singapore's population and her geographical position, the main interest areas of ACM encompasses Southeast Asia, China, India and the Islamic world. The Museum's exhibition and collection policies are thus based on these regions. From 1993 to 1996, the ACM organised such major exhibitions as 'Treasures of Asian Art: Selections from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III Collection' jointly organised with The Asia Society, New York; 'Gilding the Phoenix: The Straits Chinese and Their Jewellery'; and 'Alankara: 5000 years of India' jointly organised with the National Museum, New Delhi.

The ACM plans to have a programme of exciting and educational exhibitions, as well as an active programme of talks, workshops and other activities. The ACM strives to be a museum where local and overseas visitors will find their

\(^{119}\) Ibid.
experience informative and memorable, and an institution which Singaporeans value and can identify with.\textsuperscript{120}

3.5.3
Singapore History Museum (SHM):
The third museum on the plan is the Singapore History Museum (SHM). SHM’s mission is to explore and to enhance the national identity of Singapore by preserving, presenting and interpreting the nation’s history and material culture in the context of its multi-cultural origins.

The SHM will be the premier resource centre of Singapore’s history and heritage, beginning with the early centuries of Temasek, when it was part of the Majapahit empire, to the coming of Stamford Raffles and the growth of Singapore as a modern city-state. It has launched an exciting programme of exhibitions and activities tracing the history of Singapore and presenting it from a Singaporean perspective. These highlight trends and developments that have characterised and shaped life and history in Singapore, in the areas of demography, social identity, festivals, trade and commerce, etc. The SHM’s collection is broadly divided into Singapore’s social, economic, constitutional history and community history. Its collection strategy is currently aimed at building up critical gaps in the social, economic and community history of Singapore, as well as in the constitutional history relating to the struggle for national independence.

Recognising Singapore’s historical links with the rest of Asia, this Museum also works with its overseas counterparts to stage exhibitions that trace the roots of immigrant Singaporeans with their homelands. An example of such cooperation and exchange was the recent Fujian Exhibition which the SHM organised jointly with the Xiamen Cultural Bureau.

Physically, SHM has now taken over the present National Museum (NM) building at Stamford Road which has been, for the last one hundred years, the

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
only museum in Singapore. As Singaporeans are still used to the name ‘National Museum’ (NM), but the NHB would like to officially launch the SHM name. Thus, to meet its audiences’ needs, NHB has decided to keep the building as the NM. Major renovations will be done in phases, so as to keep the Museum open all the time. SHM is scheduled to be opened officially it in the year 1999.  

When completed, these museums ACM, SHM and SAM, will be the hub of cultural development in Singapore. Strategically, these three museums are all situated within the civic and cultural district of the country, the district which the Government has planned for the development of Singapore into its Hub-City concept. As the Hub-City plan was established in 1993, the Board is surely showing the government’s emphasis in heritage, art and museum development in Singapore development after all these years. Conveniently, this district is also listed as a tourist and commercial area.

And appropriately, Singapore’s construction of future museums and local identity hints at the symbolic relationship of cultural and identity discovery in museums or galleries. With its multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial background, Singapore presents itself to the world as a law abiding, orderly and systematic country. Its various public holidays and festivals reflect its multi-culturalism philosophies: Chinese Lunar New Year, Christmas, Hari Raya Puasa (Malay New Year) and Deepavali (Indian’s festival of lights, which is equivalent to their New Year) etc. Nevertheless, if Singapore seeks to project, reproduce or create a radical culture, it has to resolve the role of the avant-garde artist in its society.

121 Lim, Sharon (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding ‘Re: Thank You For Your Documents’. (1996, May 25).

questions as: is the Singapore identity going to reconstruct the past or construct a preferred present for the future? Since modern cultural placement is founded on the grounds of roots, an inclusion of the past with an invention of the present will be necessary.

3.5.4
National Archives of Singapore (NAS)
The last institution under NHB is the National Archives of Singapore (NAS). NAS comprises of National Archives and its Oral History Centre, which is the key to Singapore’s past. NAS administers and preserves the corporate memory of the nation. Archives come in the form of official documents, photographs, certificates, letters and others. These materials are of enduring historical value as they record momentous and microcosmically changing landscape and the way of life of the earlier generations. In addition recorded collective memories of wars, social and cultural changes, and even riots, help us to be aware of and understand the experiences of our forefathers. The NAS is an information centre on our history and heritage.

3.6.0
Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA):
The fourth government instrumentality under MITA is the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA). SBA was set up on 1 October 1994 to promote the broadcasting industry and regulates the broadcasting services. It is also the

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The Oral History Centre (OHC), started in 1979, records, documents, preserves and disseminates information on history through the oral history methodology. The centre has completed oral history projects on the Pioneers of Singapore, Vanishing Trades, the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942-45) and Political Developments in Singapore (1945-65 and 1965-75), Civil Servants (1945-85), Development of Education, Chinese Dialect Groups, Regional Entrepreneurs, Special Project and Economic Growth of Singapore. In addition, OHC is implementing three ASEAN-COCI (Committee on Culture and Information) projects, namely ASEAN Senior Statesmen, Nursery Rhymes and Traditional Media. As at December 31, 1994, it had 14,611 half-hour tapes of recorded interviews with 1,577 persons.

World Wide Web information at:
national authority or representative of Singapore on broadcasting matters. SBA's functions includes licensing and regulating broadcasting services; regulating the use of broadcasting apparatus like satellite dishes; establishing guidelines on programme quality and balance in subject matter and censorship, collecting licence fees from households and broadcasters; and liaising with foreign broadcasters and film producers to promote and market Singapore as a regional hub.

On Sunday, 15 September 1996, SBA called on all Internet providers in Singapore to turn off direct Web access to the Internet. This was to meet the licence conditions as set by the SBA's class licence scheme, and as directed by the SBA, all Internet providers in Singapore were required to block access to certain web sites. This requirement applied to all dial-up customers, and to leased line customers reselling or providing Internet access to the public. The requirement however does not apply to corporate leased line subscribers as long as the Internet services are for use solely within the firm or corporation.

Therefore, all Internet users in Singapore have to configure their browsers to use their Internet provider's proxy, so that they are only allowed to access which international sites which the SBA deems appropriate. This change demonstrates SBA's authority in regulating the information influx, especially via the Internet.

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What is a proxy cache?
Proxies are usually servers set up to act as caches for WWW pages and FTP files which are frequently requested. Assuming the internet user does not have proxies set, whenever the user access a page, the user's request goes directly to the overseas site and the reply is sent back to the user. Imagine a hundred people doing this - each request will slow down the original site, and it becomes really time consuming for each individual.

By setting up proxies, the first request goes out to the site and downloads to the user via the proxy. The page is also stored in the proxy's cache and when the rest of the hundred people request the page, the proxy feeds them the information directly from its cache, making it unnecessary to go to the overseas site again. This in effect minimises download times overall and enables the network to run more efficiently.
It also says a lot about Singapore’s attempt to maintain its authority against other power blocs. However, it is not possible for Singapore as a nation-state, to totally regulate all cable and satellite televisions. Or rather, interpretations of Singapore’s culture are often subjected to what foreigners see and understand from their media. In order to promote and safeguard the power elite’s preferred cultural identity, Singapore’s museums have been created to authenticate values which are relevant to Singapore’s public culture. Museums are public educational institutions which help to visualise and educate the Singaporean identity. In this aspect, museums are cultural centres. One of the main vehicles that drives these cultural centres into more recognition and economic added-value is the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB).

3.7.0
Singapore National Library (NL):
In another cultural aspect, the year 1994 was a landmark year for library development. The Library 2000 Review committee headed by Tan Chin Nam, chairman of the National Computer Board, released its report on 5 March 1994. A key recommendation was the concept of a regional library. The Tampines Regional Library, opened on 3 December 1994, was set up to prototype such a concept. The emphasis on information technology (IT) is reflected in its access to online services and CD-ROMs, and such facilities as video-on-demand terminals and an gallery that showcases IT products. Other prototype features are a home delivery service for books, an online Chinese catalogue and a resident theatre company, ‘The Necessary Stage’127.

Similarly in 1994, Singaporeans borrowed 9,738,324 books: 4,956,029 by children and 4,782,295 by adults/young people. There are nine full-time, fully-computerised branches in Ang Mo Kio, Bedok, Bukit Merah, Geylang East, Jurong East, Marine Parade, Queenstown, Toa Payoh and Tampines which is a regional library. Four Community Children’s Libraries (CCLs) were set up to promote the reading habit at an early age.

127 World Wide Web information at:
http://www.livewire.nceb.gov.sg/NL_Line/
The National Library has the dual function of a national research library and a public lending library. At the end of 1994, it had a collection of 2,969,292 books and 317,447 serials, of which 2,146,331 were in English language, 692,611 in Chinese language, 353,747 in Malay language and 94,050 in Tamil language. These figures clearly show that the majority of books available are in the English language which signifies a largely English reading population. The second being Chinese language. There are altogether 1,528,171 books for adults, 275,017 for young people and 1,166,104 for children. In addition, there are collections of barilla books, music scores, maps, talking books, microfilms, microfiches and audio-visual materials, totalling 50,633 items.

The Reference Services Division caters to the information needs of the public and has 148 institutional members. It dealt with 39,923 enquires in 1994. In addition to the provision of online bibliographic searching of overseas and local databases, CD-ROM search stations are also available for public use.

The National Library also serves as the central agency for the Singapore Integrated Library Automation Service (SILAS). Since the official launch of SILAS in April 1987, 52 academic, government and statutory board libraries had online access to 6.2 million bibliographic records in the SILAS database.

These figures above suggest a very literate population. It also suggests the importance of Singaporeans' relationships with education and self-improvement. In order to accelerate the progress of her economy, Singapore is continuously attracting world and especially Asian expertise to supplement her local talents. Simultaneously, the government is also investing in her people by emphasising education as her greatest resource. Singapore is also, like other nation-states, preparing herself for the Information Age. As now, Singapore's authorities are hailing National Library as comparable to France's 'Super-Library' and England's extended British Library etc.

3.8.0
Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB):
Set up in 1964, the STPB is responsible for the development of Singapore as a major tourist destination. The STPB's mission statement is to establish Singapore's position as a leading force in global tourism and a unique and attractive destination, offering an integrated tourism experience linked to regional development. STPB valued partners and pioneers of new frontiers of total tourism business, as they can contribute vastly in promoting economic prosperity and enhancing the quality of life in Singapore.\textsuperscript{128}

In the 1970s and 1980s, the STPB's role to promote Singapore as a tourist destination was broadened to include the promotion of Singapore as a venue for meetings, conventions, exhibitions and incentive travel groups, as well as staging sporting and cultural activities appealing to visitors, tourism product development and cruise development. The result is that Singapore today is a thriving, internationally-renowned destination which draws seven million visitors a year, which is more than double its resident population.

Understandably, tourism has become a significant foreign-exchange earner of Singapore, generating nearly S$11 billion annually and accounting for over 20% of the country's services exports and 5.5% of its total exports of goods and services. Some 70% of visitor arrivals in Singapore are Asians, although visitors come from around the world. Re-visiting visitors comprise more than half of all arrivals and Singapore's top ten visitor-generating markets for 1994, in descending order, were ASEAN, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Hong Kong, Germany and India. At the same time, Singapore has been ranked as Asia's top convention city for twelve consecutive years and was the sixth most popular convention destination in the world in 1994.

Recognising that the contribution of the tourism industry in Singapore can be further enhanced, the STPB has readily expanded its rewarding economic role. In addition to the traditional destination marketing role, STPB is also taking on the function of tourism business development. This will enable Singapore to position itself more effectively as an attractive tourist

\textsuperscript{128} World Wide Web information at:
destination, a tourism business centre as well as a tourism hub. 'Tourism Unlimited' is the strategy behind the work of the STPB. This strategy involves making Singapore more attractive as a destination, linking Singapore's attractions with those of our neighbouring countries to achieve collective attractiveness, and encouraging more tourism-related businesses to set up branch offices in Singapore.

The STPB's role in attracting more tourists to Singapore is significant to the country's museum industry, as part of the industry's target is to introduce local culture via museums to tourists, in addition to influencing these tourists' perceptions that Singapore is more than a commercial and retail centre. The tourist contingent is a vast audience and this audience is helping to boost in boosting the museum industry itself\(^{129}\).

In this chapter, I have identified the evolution, interconnectedness and ambitions of Singapore's arts and cultural organisations. Once again, I have addressed the issues of Asian-ness, modernisation without westernisation and the state's desire to meet the challenges which the global communication systems place upon its citizen's welfare.

Since all these instrumentalities are bound by the recently developed 'Arts and Heritage Policy', we need to analyse this policy in the next chapter.

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\(^{129}\) Ibid.

As such, the museum designer needs to consider English-speaking and diverse Asian tourists in his presentations.
4.0

CHAPTER FOUR:

Analysis Of Singapore’s ‘Arts and Heritage Policy (AHP)’
CHAPTER FOUR: Analysis Of Singapore's 'Arts and Heritage Policy (AHP)'

In order to better understand the arts and cultural development scenes in Singapore, it is necessary to analyse the country's 'Arts and Heritage Policy (AHP)'.

MITA prepared the first draft of the AHP (see appendix 1) in early 1988 and had done the final draft by March 1989. This is the only policy which has not had any amendments attached to it.\(^{130}\)

There are four main sectors - 'Introduction', 'The Vision', 'General Policy Approaches & Tripartite Participation', and 'Open Door'; with another fourteen sub-sectors in this AHP. In order to facilitate analysis, I shall term each subsection as AHP#1 (for the first sub-sector) and AHP#2 (for the second sub-sector) etc, right through AHP#14.

To some degree, this policy statement is successful in providing a clear guideline of its purpose. However, it has some imprecise statements and definitions. Perhaps, it is necessary to provide a leeway for the wide-scope of its nature. This imprecision allows for flexibility. Its definition is therefore dependent upon the authority which has the power to determine and define the document's hidden transcript. Therefore, the argument is always interpretive in providing or not providing specifically clear guidelines. However, it is necessary to analyse the AHP to identify the future possible problems that may arise.

To begin, how does the policy define "culture"? Sociologists or anthropologists often define culture as every aspect of everyday life. It is an inclusive notion of the various elements of everyday life (eg. food, religion, lifestyle).

\(^{130}\) Cheng, Lynette. (Public Relations Officer of MITA, plin@technet.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding 'Formulation Of Arts & Heritage Policy'. (1995, October 21).
sport). The meaning which concerns us now however, is the notion of culture as the arts, though this, too, is often conceptualised as including heritage and the traditions. This is the public culture of museums, art museums and libraries. It is what the nation state wishes to preserve as manifestations of its imaginative and intellectual life\textsuperscript{131}. What then is the relationship of the two meanings of culture to each other and their future relationship to the state? The state itself may be seen to provide a particular type of culture of its own when it displays state power in the spectacle of state rituals. For example, "a kind of lying in state of the national heritage" which occurs, at the opening of Parliament and comprises a consecrated version of culture\textsuperscript{132}.

Perhaps till now, the museums have yet to discuss this so-called consecrated version thus leaving this "version" possibly unresolved or unknown.

Another contemporary development is to be found in the arts as tourism or business entertainment, which can mean that cultural policy becomes intertwined with foreign policy (eg. Rapport exhibition discussed below).

For Singapore (the Government), the meaning of culture can be seen superficially as the notion of arts and heritage in the country's AHP. It also includes its traditions with the emphasis of new and extension of museum programmes within the policy. The AHP was drafted to assist and to give a guideline for the Singapore's cultural development. The first draft of the policy was made in early 1988, while the final draft was published in March 1989\textsuperscript{133}. This has been the only policy since then no other sub-policies have sprung from it\textsuperscript{134}. As in the name of this policy, the Government has defined


\textsuperscript{133} Cheng, Lynette (Public Relations Officer of MITA, plin@technet.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding 'Publish Date Of Arts & Heritage Policy'. (1995, December 1995).

\textsuperscript{134} Advisory Council on culture and the arts. op cit.
the notion of Singapore's culture as fine arts, heritage and traditions. As in the contemporary perspective, the Singapore government views culture, as arts, to be found in tourism. In spite of this, the cultural tourism aspect of the arts was not mentioned in the policy. The importance of cultural tourism's effect on the arts should be included in the policy since, as we have seen, tourism is one of Singapore's main revenue raisers.

However, if tourism was not included in the AHP, the Economic Committee of Singapore has identified the cultural and entertainment sector as a service industry which Singapore can develop. The arts can enhance the country's reputation and generate higher international value for its products and services. Increasingly countries all over the world are recognising the positive impact of art on the economy. Two notable examples are the study on 'The Economic Importance Of The Arts' by the Institute of Policy Studies, UK (Nov 1987) and the report on 'The Arts As An Industry: Their Economic Importance To The New York-New Jersey Metropolitan Region' by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (1983). It is evident that Singapore is affecting a western model from their studies. That is, Singapore is taking on aspects of these strategies for its own purpose. It is also evident that the new S$60-million Singapore Tourist Promotion Board building on Orchard Road (Singapore's prime shopping district), marks the Government's awareness of the service industry's potential to enhance the local cultural, and entertainment scenes (and the economy). The thirteen story building, named Tourism Court, which opened in late 1995, caters not only to tourist but also to the travel business industry and those doing research on tourism. Located at Orchard Spring Lane, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board building brings more life to the beginning of the Orchard tourist District. This

135 Williams, Raymond. op cit.
136 Ng, Poy Siong (Ed.). op cit.

Tourism receipts for 1993 amounted to $9.35 billion, an increase of 9.3 per cent over 1992.

137 The Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) was established in 1964 to develop and promote tourism and its related services. It is also responsible for promoting the Republic as a venue for conventions, exhibitions and incentive travel. The STPB has seven divisions, namely, marketing, convention, events, management, product development, industry services, operations and planning, and administration.
new building appropriates Singapore's colonial past and Asian heritage with its pitched roofs, central courtyard and 'five-foot way'\textsuperscript{138}. The designer's use of batik and the Indian-style wooden doors also lean towards Asian influences. However, the building does not resort to nostalgia for traditional Asia. The building's modernity uses glass as the main construction material. There are also automatic lighting, ventilation and security controls. It is a modern western style building with Asian decorations. The ground level will be used to provide a wide range of information on Singapore and Southeast Asia to tourists, while three storeys of the building will be rented out to companies from the related travel industries.

The importance of its traditions can be seen from AHP\#8 which states the development of museums and performing spaces infrastructure. In developing infrastructures for the various arts and heritage activities, the Singapore government has set up the NHB, a statutory board of MITA, to help Singapore to develop into a regional cultural hub as well as to attract visitors from abroad. The Board has promised another three museums namely; the SAM, the ACM and the SHM, between 1993 to 1998; along with the present NM (which I have already discussed). When fully operational the museums will enhance Singapore as a tourist attraction a place where Singaporeans will be proud of, to live, to work, to establish and to bring up their next generation. With this 1993 plan, the Board is surely showing the Government's emphasis in art and museum development in Singapore development after all these years. A budget of S$4 million was allocated for arts and cultural developments in Singapore in 1995\textsuperscript{139}.

Raymond Williams (1980) also distinguishes between the state as 'patron' and as 'arts promoter'. The patron function involves supporting practising artists (AHP \#8) and gradually moves into the area of improving access to the arts for

\textsuperscript{138} 'Five-foot-way' (translated from Chinese) is the 60's government requirement for a compulsory specific width of covered walkway outside any building. The human foot was taken as a guideline. Five units of the foot was the width of the walkway. Thus, the term 'five-foot-way'.

a greater proportion of the population. This conforms to the ideology that the population should be 'educated' or 'civilised' by being exposed to elite cultural forms such as opera and ballet (AHP#7). As arts promoter, the state has set up separate bodies to govern both broadcasting and film and television. However, this is only one aspect of promotion. Virtual arts museums, arts schools and other arts institution are also avenues in promoting and encouraging the arts.

Two separate statutory boards, the BFC and the SBA, were set up by MITA to govern both the film and broadcasting and television. This idea of setting up independent bodies has been developed further within the AHP by the setting up two more separate bodies for the arts and heritage, the NAC and the NHB (as in AHP #2 and #3). The NAC's role in providing assistance to artists and art organisations has not been clearly defined; they have not given artists any application guidelines; and they have provided ambiguous guidelines about the assistance that they will offer. In other words, the assistance could be in forms of academic, financial, or infrastructural support. Thus the power in dissimilating the assistance rests in the agenda of assistance's endowment. Furthermore, the 'artists' and the 'art-organisations' were not defined. Who are they? Fine-art-photographers are considered to be artists in the Western context. If they were within the parameters of 'artist', then photography associations should be included in the agenda of the policy. This is just one exclusion of the definition of 'artists' and 'art-organisations'. Then again, the role of NHB to collect, preserve and exhibit works of art, artefacts and significant historical documents, concerning Singapore, South-east Asia and Asia was not clearly defined. The collection of documents could both be those that are positive or negative. The discretion here is assumed to be positive since Singapore is now 'inventing' or 'discovering' a Singaporean identity.

140 Williams, Raymond. op cit.


142 But identity can recognise "negative" aspects. It is not necessarily a celebration of national "success".

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Because it is MITA's vision to help make Singapore a culturally and artistically vibrant society, whose citizens are aware and proud of our rich Asian heritage (AHP#4), we need to ask what this 'culturally and artistically vibrant society' refers to? We are told that a culturally-vibrant society is one whose people are well-informed, creative, sensitive and gracious143. A culturally vibrant society (as proposed in AHP #5) can be viewed from many perspectives. It can be viewed from a government's (socially engineered) agenda, a private construction or the public's desires. What the government thought as a seemingly 'vibrant culture' may not be the desires of the people, and the 'good culture' which the people wanted may not suite the politician's agenda. The variety of cultural activities as quoted (in AHP #5), popular, classical, ethnic, cosmopolitan, conservative, avant-garde, amateur and international standards does not cover the AHP's definition of the 'constructed culture'. This 'constructed culture' is moulded in the imagination of the country's government. This is constructed and not evolved from the populace. It is a constructed artificial "vibrant" culture. But as Derek de Cundy has argued, this 'social engineering, by treating people as means, denies that we have the capacity to set our own goals, in short, denies our capacity for thought and feeling. Nor can social engineering produce a genuine sense of national community. Culture involves engaging our thoughts and feelings, our hearts and minds. A lively culture cannot be created by decree. It must depend upon the participation of individuals, who are free to express themselves in their search for the meaning of life144. This is a very western model. And, once again, Singapore's dilemma becomes its need and desire to modernise without westernising.

A statement to specifically include Singapore's local culture will, therefore, avoid following the Western standards during the construction of a Singaporean culture. Singapore needs 'culture' to propel its development, as Singapore is now an economically powerful and affluent country. If 'money' is 'power' and 'power' is 'culture', so the building of a culture is a show of

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143 Advisory Council on culture and the arts, op cit.

power. One would understand Singapore's introduction of Asian arts and civilisation when the policy talks about being a regional centre for the arts; but how can it be an international centre when so much emphasis is given on traditional Asian arts? Perhaps the emphasis was global but focused on Asian arts on a worldwide population. It was not specified in the policy. What is Asian arts? Does "Asian" mean solely the Chinese, the Malays, the Indonesians and the Japanese; or does it include the Vietnamese, the Thais and the Filipinos? Then again, Asian-ness is not well defined in this context. Or is there a hidden transcript of pro-Chinese culture in the country? As we have seen, Singapore has a major population of seventy-seven percent of Chinese with the rest being Malays, Indians and other ethnic groups. With the recent issues of Peoples Republic of China positioning itself to be the major role player in Asia, Singapore is emphasising the importance of Asian values - 'Asian-ness'. And in this context, the Singapore Government sees Asian values as the ideology of Confucian values within the framework of Singaporean Chinese. Naturally, with the majority of Singaporeans being Chinese, the change of cultural direction is alleged to be towards the coming age of the Chinese ascendancy. Despite this, the Government has tried to develop and protect 'Singapore values' which are yet to be clearly defined. Global de-traditionalisation is inducing Singapore's cultural agencies to cultivate re-invented (Chinese) traditions for the nation. However, the dilemma is compounded by China's immediate history that Chinese values includes communism.

In 'making Singapore a regional and international centre for the arts' (AHIP #4), it will have to be a Hub-City. The Hub-City is one which has a culturally-vibrant society with a multicultural heritage as well as an international centre for the arts. However, if 'Multiculturalism' is a perplexing term, all the other terms used to describe demographic diversity have been exhausted. As Singapore marches towards economic and technology development there is a


146 Although Singapore is also Chinese-speaking (one of the official languages), it is not China. Just as Australia, USA and Canada; had to struggle to develop their national identities within Anglophonic heritage.

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renewed urgency about re-defining all its aspects especially its cultural needs. Singapore has always been dealing with a framework of Western values in which those who come from the non-West are placed in a negative relation to the Euro-American standards. One exciting new element in the diasporic experience of multiculturalism is the concept that something new evolves as a result of transplanting to a new context and interacting with other groups. It can generate a new hybridised cross-cultural art. But we can also see multiculturalism and culture as ways in which the state manages differences, in the sense of controlling its divisive aspects.

AHP\#1, states that MITA is responsible for the promotion of the performing arts, the visual arts, the literary arts and an awareness of our Asian heritage. However, it did not specifically identify the broad areas of performing arts, visual arts and literary arts.

Performing arts could include music, as in classical, contemporary, ‘new wave’ or ‘new generation; opera, as in the West, Europe or Asia; with ‘performing arts’ in galleries. Visual could be in fine-art and high-art, as it is in ‘art installation’ and ‘sculpture displays’. It could also include commercial art exhibitions, commercial advertising and graphic design, and the representative display art during Singapore’s festive seasons. Visual art could also be defined as the art that is seen by the eye. It is the two-dimensional, three-dimensional and fourth-dimensional representations. It is also printed and sculptured art. On its own, it could be a conservative representation of fine-art. Literary arts are defined as any art that deals with text. This includes poetry, novels, essays, biographies, letters, and Chinese ink calligraphy. Besides alphabetic typographical art of prints and calligraphic art, those in sculptural forms are also literary arts. The policy does not mention if books and printed-media come under the umbrella of MITA’s responsibility. Asian heritage, Asian art or Asian-ness were not defined, as discussed earlier.

AHP\#1 does not define the parameters and the areas which are covered and does not identify the guidelines’ generality. The ‘generality’ could be referring to adhering to these arts and heritage policies. Nor does it define the committee which will formulate and review these policies. The selection of the committee’s composition has to have a balance of officials, artists and
private organisations. There is a danger that the decisions and recommendations will be inappropriate and inaccurate if the representatives are inappropriate. The committee must not be a majority of government officials, in which the construction of the policy is likely to be based more on a national governmental interest than the art community's representatives. In my opinion, it would be better for the Ministry to avoid becoming the sole agent which dictates the AHP. A specific mention of the percentage of funds allocated to different ethnic groups is needed to assist in the cultural development in Singapore in re-defining a Singaporean identity. Perhaps the allocation was not mentioned as it is to be allocated based on the needs at a particular time. Without a clear specification or definition of what 'art and heritage' is in the Singapore perspective, directions and funding will be subject to the authority's personal (educated) whims at different stages of its history.

The dutiful AHP wants to establish Singapore as a regional and international hub for art and cultural activities (AHP\#6), it has, in 1994, unveiled its development plan for an 'art and cultural centre', 'The Esplanade-Theatre on the Bay', to be built at Marina Bay\textsuperscript{147}. It was developed as an entertainment and recreation area just outside the busy business district area of Shenton Way. It is easily accessible by private and public transport. As noted earlier, the Marina Bay's Esplanade will be equivalent to Circular Quay's Sydney Opera House. The design of the building was highly criticised by the public but it was endorsed and approved by the President of Singapore, Ong Teng Cheong\textsuperscript{148}. In a way the development of the centre is similar to the initial plans of the Opera House too. The Opera House was also criticised for its 'strange' architecture. Despite this, the Opera House has turned out to be the major avenue for art and cultural activities as well as a tourist attraction\textsuperscript{149}. Whatever its architectural merits, Singapore's Esplanade will have a

\textsuperscript{147} Marina Bay is a reclaimed land situated at the south-western part Singapore island.

\textsuperscript{148} The President was an architect himself before he entered politics with the Peoples Action Party (PAP). Although he resigned from the PAP before he ran for the President election, he is quite obviously part of the same power block.

\textsuperscript{149} There is a folk saying that you never see Sydney if you have not been to the Opera House!
permanent place for the cultivation and promotion of art and cultural activities.

Without a clearer guideline of arts and heritage matters, the arts and heritage community (AHP#9) may be subjective rather than objective in identifying and nurturing “talents”. They might regard a “talent” as someone who has been successfully associated with the “famous”, without actually justifying the quality of the “talent”. For example, an overseas “talented” photographer put up a solo photographic exhibition in Singapore in 1994. He was recognised and very well received by the Singapore’s general public, probably because he is the brother of a famous Hollywood star. It seems that, at this stage of Singapore’s history, it may be easier to justify the artistic quality through the artist’s associations and relations. This suggests to me that a lot of traditional “Asian” patronage culture will be in tension with the Western ideologies of “talent”, “avant garde”, “originality”, and “oppositional” art. Singapore might have to adapt to modern ways (as defined by the West) while still preserving Asian values and being cynical or hostile to the de-traditionalising forces of (Western style) modernity. In other words, in order to be an international hub centre - Singapore will have to engage with some Western criteria. If identification was by the former, it will take a quiet, less affluent and more honest artist a lifetime to strike the bell of the community. In such cases, some talented artists will never be able to be identified and nurtured. The art establishment may never accept new ideas as opposed to the traditional ones. Singaporeans still regard change as taboo and as something to be avoided because they think it causes “chaos” and “fear”. It takes much courage to support change. There is some truth in this in Singapore’s context. Photography is still not accepted as a fine-art form in Singapore (by the art bureaucracy and teaching academics), let alone computer generated art practices. Thus, the values which this art community follows will create an impact on the type of art which Singaporeans will see. The values could be conservative Western, Asian, American, domestic or modern values. They can be a single value or ones that oppose each other.

The AHP sees art as being financed and sponsored through Singapore’s corporate citizens. At the same time, it sees Singapore’s individual citizens supporting the arts as audiences, organisers, assistants and members (AHP#10).
This policy could generate the involvement of the public sector in the development of the arts and public culture. Public finance may in a way assist in moulding or creating an awareness of arts and culture. Despite this, it will, to a certain extent, be directed to the MITA's agenda because corporations are usually only prepared to support the arts in as much as their patronage meets their ulterior commercial interests. The corporations may be directing arts towards the corporation's identity or product. Whatever the case, it is unhealthy. A clearer guideline of the type of sponsorship and financing is needed to provide a "cleaner" positive corporate interest in the arts. Without this, the powerful corporations could dictate the nation's art policies. In which, the value of art is directed towards the interests of the individual than the established interest. It will then be within the authority of the corporate sponsors to direct and to identify the value of art. It will no longer be the interest of the public or of Singapore's political agenda.

If the media is the only promotional outlet of the arts (AHP#11), then 'art' becomes that which the media thinks it is. It may not be a total coverage of arts promotion but rather a conservative, commercial or avant-garde selection of the whole. The marginal arts or heritage organisations would not be represented, as in general, most of them still have an amateur status. Despite this, they would choose to promote the arts if there were radical academics and curators. Therefore what the media chooses to represent is an indication of the present agenda which MITA is promoting. Furthermore, the power of association with the powerful and authority is true here again. The more an arts or heritage organisation associates with the media, the more likely it will be promoted. A guideline of the type of arts and heritage organisations to be promoted is needed from MITA for the positive promotion of the arts. All nation states have their public cultures of established artists. However, Singapore is in danger of never developing a hidden/private culture of oppositional artists. Although it claims to be an open society, the earlier internet example shows that it is not prepared to cultivate the alternate/oppositional art practices that have propelled the (Western) avant-garde and modernist traditions.

The policy also states that Singapore is an open society (AHP#12). It argues that Singapore has to be "open" to compete internationally. But to succeed in that
competition, it has to be open without being a “disordered society”\(^{150}\). The cultures which the people are constantly exposed to are those that are not censored by the Film & Censorship Board of Singapore. Therefore, the people are “protected” from many “western” or “unhealthy” influences. The country does not allow works that portray “disorderliness” and liberal sex. This is monitored through anti-discrimination, anti-vilification, affirmation, action policies, internal security act (ISA) and the promotion of racial or religious harmony. The liberal sex, as interpreted in the Singapore context, is public exclamation of sex and homosexuality as alternate lifestyles. However, it is precisely these areas which have been the sites of much recent (and controversial) avant-garde art practices in the West.

Singapore has linked itself with many countries around the world for the arts and heritage (\(\text{AHP}\#13\)). Networking is an important strategy for international recognition. This statement reaffirms its stand.

The same concerns were addressed when Singapore established a 'Singapore International Foundation' (SIF)\(^{151}\) (\(\text{AHP}\#14\)) to assist expatriate Singapore artists. The SIF was formed as a non-profit organisation on 1 August 1991. Its mission is to further Singapore’s efforts to go international. SIF’s five main goals are:

- to encourage Singaporeans to think internationally; and
- to enable Singapore to make global contributions;
- to project Singapore’s image abroad by promoting the country’s culture, expertise, lifestyle, uniqueness and achievements;
- to help Singaporeans who study, work and reside abroad to maintain links with Singapore;
- to develop a worldwide network of friends of Singapore.


\(^{151}\) This is again based on a western model like the British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Francaise, Dante Allegri Society and Australia Council.
One of the SIF's main eight programmes is the Arts and Culture programme which helps Singapore's artists display their talents abroad. It also helps those living abroad to perform and/or exhibit their works in Singapore. Co-sponsorships are offered quarterly\textsuperscript{152}.

We have seen then that, the Arts & Heritage Policy, as formulated by MITA does assist Singapore in the development and promotion of public culture. However, with some modifications and clearer definitions, the policy will be more effective in its purpose.

Following this chapter, I will have a brief introduction to Australia as not all of my audiences are familiar with this country.

\textsuperscript{152} World Wide Web information at :
http://www.sg/informap/mita/gov/ir-rest.html#sif
5.0

CHAPTER FIVE:

Introducing Australia
CHAPTER FIVE: Introducing Australia

As part of my anticipated readership may not be familiar with Australian history, a brief introduction of this country is essential, since it helps to explain the Sydney museum scene and hence to draw comparisons with Singapore’s current cultural aspirations.

Most people harbour a particular image of Australia, such as the Opera House or Ayers Rock, yet these famous icons do scant justice to the richness of Australia’s natural treasures and its cultural diversity. Australia offers a wealth of travel experiences, from the drama of the outback and the spectacle of the Great Barrier Reef to the cosmopolitanism of Sydney and arguably the best beaches in the world. Australia is an enormous country, and visitors expecting to see an opera in Sydney one night and meet Crocodile Dundee the next will have to re-think their grasp of geography. It is this sheer vastness, and the friction between the ancient land steeped in Aboriginal lore and the New World cultural being built upon it, which gives Australia much of its character.153

Australia is known as the Commonwealth of Australia. It has an area of 7,682,300 sq km with a population of 18,090,000 (growth rate 1.4%). 94% of its population are European descent, 4% Asian and 1.5% Aboriginal; of which 75% are Christian, 1% Muslim, 1% Buddhist and 0.5% Jewish. The languages spoken are English, Aboriginal, Italian, Greek and numerous other European and Asian languages.

It is widely known that Australian Aboriginal society has the longest continuous cultural history in the world, with origins dating back to the last Ice Age. Although mystery shrouds many aspects of this Australian prehistory, it seems almost certain that the first humans came here across the sea from South-East Asia at least 50,000 years ago. It is also widely known too

that Europeans began to encroach on Australia in the 16th century: Portuguese navigators were followed by Dutch explorers and the enterprising English pirate William Dampier. Captain James Cook sailed the entire length of the eastern coast in 1770, stopping at Botany Bay on the way. After rounding Cape York, he claimed the continent for the British and named it New South Wales.

The British invaded the East Coast of Australia in 1788 and settled in the Port Jackson area. Free settlers began to be attracted to Australia over the next decades, but it was the discovery of gold in the 1850s that changed the face of these British colonies. The huge influx of migrants and several large finds boosted the economy and irrevocably changed the colonies' social structures. Aborigines were ruthlessly pushed off their tribal lands as new settlers took up land for farming or mining. The Industrial Revolution in England required plenty of raw materials, and Australia's agricultural and mineral resources expanded to meet the demand.

Australia became a nation when federation of the separate colonies took place on 1 January 1901 (although many of the legal and cultural ties with England remained). It is important to recognise that this new country built its identity on a "White Australian" monoculture.

After the Second World War (1939-1945), European immigrants, many of them non-British flooded into the country. These immigrants and their descendants have since made an enormous contribution to the country, enlivening its culture and broadening its vision. In the 1980s, Australia accepted large numbers of Asian refugees, especially from Vietnam. Socially and economically, Australia is still trying to come to terms with its place in Asia, or rather, to create an Asian identity because of its regional and economic ties (which, as we shall see, begins to explain the cultural politics of the Rapport exhibition in SAM).
Economic Profile

GDP : US$299 billion
GDP ranking in the world : 13th
GDP per head : US$17,065
Annual growth : 4.5%
Inflation : 3.9%
Major products/industries : Minerals, oil, coal, gold, wool, cereals, meat.
Major trading partners : USA, Japan, ASEAN, New Zealand, South Korea and the EU.

Like Singapore, present-day Australia is a multi-racial society. Until the post 1945 migrations, Australians were predominantly of British and Irish descent, but that has changed dramatically. Large immigrations from Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Lebanon and Turkey followed the war and have been supplemented by more recent influxes of immigrants from Asia.

Australia has a rich artistic heritage and a vibrant contemporary art scene. While Aboriginal rock carvings and paintings date back at least 100,000 years, European settlers had begun to produce distinctively Australian art forms by the end of the 19th century. Australia's mid-20th century artists were world figures (Arthur Boyd, William Dobell, Russel Drysdale, Sidney Nolan) and its modern practitioners have excelled in painting (Brett Whiteley, Fred Williams), literature (Peter Carey, Thomas Keneally), opera (Joan Sutherland), film (Bruce Beresford, George Miller, Gillian Armstrong, Peter Weir), acting (Mel Gibson, Nicole Kidman, Russel Crowe) comedy (Barry Humphries), dance (Graeme Murphy, Paul Mercurio) and popular music (Nick Cave, INXS, Midnight Oil, Silverchair, Yothu Yindi). Modern Aboriginal art has undergone a revival in the last decade as Aboriginal artists have explored ways to both preserve their ancient values and share them with a wider community.

154 World Wide Web information at:
https://www.lonelyplanet.com/dest/aust/syd.htm

Refer to pp. 51 for Singapore's GNP profile.

Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore
New South Wales (NSW) was the site of the first European settlement in Australia. The state is rich in history - some of it tainted with the brutality of the early penal settlement, but much of it bound up with the gold rush and the westward expansion. As Australia's premier city, Sydney is the oldest settlement in Australia, the economic powerhouse of the nation and the country's capital in everything but name. Sydney is full of the vitality and self-consciousness of a Johnny-come-lately to the international scene, exuding both a devil-may-care urbanity and a slavish obsession with global fads as it strives to bring its social and cultural life on a par with its natural charms. Sydney began life as a penal colony in 1788, and for the next 60 years received the unwanted, persecuted and criminal elements of British society. Despite its brutal beginnings, the city's mixture of pragmatic egalitarianism and plain indifference transformed it into a beacon of pluralism. Sydney now attracts the majority of Australia's immigrants and the city's predominantly Anglo-Irish heritage has been revitalised by large influxes of Italian, Lebanese, Turkish, Greek, Chinese and Vietnamese. The city has a large and vocal gay community, responsible both for the transformation of inner-city Oxford St and the annual 'Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras', which has provided a locus for a series of summer-time "camp" exhibitions.

Like Singapore with her fast growing 2.9 million population; Sydney too, is fast growing with a population of 3.7 million. The inner city areas are an interesting mix of bohemian, gentrified, gay and traditional working-class suburbs. There are three distinct geographic areas outside these inner suburbs: the wealthy eastern suburbs; the middle-class family-oriented southern, inner west and northern; and the less wealthy and much disparaged (outer) western suburbs.

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155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 These have included the importation of such controversial artists as Robert Mapplethorpe, Jeff Koons, Keith Haring and Pierre and Gils. Indeed, the MCA has structured its temporary exhibition program to attract wealthy (gay and lesbian) tourists dollars to these post-modern exhibitions. So that much recent avant-garde Western art is preoccupied with the sexualised bodies which Singapore is reluctant to negotiate.
The harbour is the focal point of the city, and its beaches, coves, bays and waterside parks offer welcome release from the rigours of urban life. Criss-crossed by ferries and carpeted by yachts on weekends, it is both the middle-classes playground and a major port. The string of ocean beaches on the north and south shores offer dramatic cliff scenery, great waves and a close-up of Aussie beach culture at its best.

Working with this overview of Australia and Singapore’s historic, economic, arts and public culture background, I will now analyse the exhibitions in two museums in Australia and Singapore respectively in the next chapter.
6.0

CHAPTER SIX:

Museums In Sydney And Singapore
6.0

CHAPTER SIX: **Museums In Sydney And Singapore**

In order to understand the Museum Of Contemporary Art (MCA), Museum Of Sydney (MOS), Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and Singapore History Museum (SHM), we will need to analyse the museums' policies and analyse each of their individual (representative) exhibitions.

Comparing SAM and SHM with their "equivalent" Sydney institutions, it seems to me that Sydney's MCA and MOS have more specific and developed goals. Both of these Sydney museums have circulated their clearly defined mission statements and collection policies. However, in terms of organisation structures and goals, SAM is similar to MCA whilst SHM is similar to MOS. Briefly, SAM and MCA are the country's/city's contemporary art centres; whilst SHM and MOS have been created to tell the country's/city's history.

The historical and cultural similarities between Sydney and Singapore would prove these comparisons justifiable. Because as I have mentioned, both countries used to be British colonies, they are multi-racial\(^{158}\), each is striving to be a regional hub (global markets) for (especially) information in the world, each is conserving (and refitting) heritage buildings as museums, and both are using museums to create a consecrated "identity" and to attract tourist dollars. Although this cross-cultural comparison could be invidious, it does invite Singaporean and Australian cultural workers to evolve strategies and to learn from each others successes and failures.

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\(^{158}\) Australia's multicultural discourse - restricted to English and power remains in the Anglo-community.

*Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore*
6.1
Exhibition analysis:

‘From Christo & Jeanne-Claude to Jeff Koons : John Kaldor Art Projects & Collection’, MCA.

The first of these Sydney museums is the MCA (Fig. 6.1). MCA is housed in a late 1930s style government office, Maritime Services Board (MSD) Building, which had the misfortune to be completed in the late 1950s. The Museum is situated at 'The Rocks'\(^{159}\) which sits at the edge of the harbour. It has a wonderful view of the Opera House. On the other side is the very popular promenade (The Rocks) which wraps around Circular Quay.

![Fig 6.1 - View of MCA from Circular Quay]

Opening its doors to the public in November 1991, the MCA was established jointly by the University of Sydney and the Government of New South Wales as a company limited by guarantee. MCA is the only Australian public museum or gallery that does not receive any form of Government funding for its ongoing expenses. It relies entirely on private and corporate sponsorship and the contributions of its individual and corporate members\(^{160}\).

\(^{159}\) The Rocks' area of Sydney, is Australia's oldest historic settlement which Captain James Phillip's claimed.

\(^{160}\) World Wide Web information at:

**Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore**
The State Government provided the former Maritime Services Department Building and the University funded the refurbishment of the building and the construction of additions through the J. W. Power Bequest and other resources. While the Power Bequest contributes to the running costs, the Museum is largely self-funding. The J. W. Power Collection of some three thousand works has been acquired over the last twenty years, together with over one thousand works from John Power's original collection. Together, these form the foundation of the Museum's Collection. The Museum has active exhibitions and education programmes. Like the collection, its exhibition focus on international contemporary art, but selectively represents recent Australian art.

MCA's mission is to create on this historic site a centre of energy for the visual arts which stimulates creativity and challenges people with the latest ideas in contemporary art and culture.

Its collection policy is to continue to maintain and to build on its international collection of contemporary art. It also:

- acquires contemporary art produced within the last twenty years, with particular emphasis on the last five years.

- collects art (from Australia and other countries) as it contributes to the most recent ideas and theories and 'the most recent contemporary art of the world'.

- collects the works of a number of Australian artist in depth.

- collects contemporary Australian Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander art in all its forms.


Perhaps this says something about the States' relationship with "modern art" (it still disproportionately subsidises ballet and the opera etc). It could also relate to the time in which MCA was set up: downsizing in government. This is the reason why the NSW government might have been suspicious of the MCA projects (and why it is popular with the arts cognoscenti)
• considers for acquisition whatever forms contemporary artists produce, including: painting, sculptures and other conventional forms, acoustics, luminal, kinetics, computer, video, film, holographic, multi-media, performance, ephemera and other kinds of works.

• enriches existing collections as a whole by acquiring works which expand the range of representation within the collection or strengthen its earlier parts.

The Collection’s current orientation towards exhibiting European, American and British art will in future be selectively complemented by the art of other regions, including Australasia, South East Asia, Japan, China and Latin America (eg. such temporary exhibitions as ‘Taiwan’, ‘Burning The Interface - International Artists CD-ROM’, ‘Real Fiction - Four Canadian Artists’, ‘Asia Pacific Triennial - Artists From China’ etc). In recent years the Collection has grown to include Australian art with a special representation of Aboriginal art. These are examples of ways the “progressive” curators have taken advantage of the national government priorities as art becomes a vital face of international diplomacy.

At the same time, a vigorous program of sound, luminal and performance work, video installations, film, computer-mediated and experimental art forms is helping to lead toward the development of a cinemateque in the near future161 (eg. ‘Burning The Interface - International Artists CD-ROM’).

The Museum presents a stimulating on-going program of changing exhibitions and related events which are exciting, challenging and informative. Major exhibitions (eg. Jeff Koons ‘Puppy’ installation), often exchanged with art museums and galleries throughout the world, are complemented by and contrasted with smaller project (eg. ‘Louise Bourgeois’ art exhibition) and satellite (eg. ‘John Kaldor Art Projects & Collections’) exhibitions.

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161 World Wide Web information at:

Arts, Culture And Museum Development In Singapore
In line with its mission to create an energy centre, the MCA has mounted, for example, one of the most stimulating recent exhibitions: 'From Christo & Jeanne-Claude To Jeff Koons: John Kaldor Art Projects & Collections' (12 December 1995 - 17 March 1996).

Over more than thirty years, John Kaldor had acquired the most significant collection of international contemporary art in private hands in Australia. It was shown publicly for the first time ever at the MCA.

John Kaldor, a Sydney based Hungarian-born textile businessman, has also initiated and sponsored a series of innovative ‘Art Projects’ since 1969, making him the most important independent patron in Australian contemporary art history. These projects began with the now legendary ‘Wrapped Coast, Little Bay, Sydney’ by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and continued with seminal international figures such as Gilbert & George, Nam June Pak and Charlotte Moorman, Sol Lewitt, Richard Long and now, Jeff Koons’ ‘Puppy’.

The ‘John Kaldor Art Projects’ ‘made it possible for major international artists to come to Australia to make important works of art here, something that had never happened before. Documentation of the projects and associated works of art were included in the exhibition, along with an extensive selection from the Kaldor collection. Kaldor’s passionate interest in contemporary art and acute judgement as a collector are borne out in the roll-call of artists, which includes many of the epoch-making figures in avant-garde art since the sixties. Major works in this exhibition included Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers, Donald Judd, Mario Merz, Robert Rauschenberg, Gerhard Richter, and Frank Stella. Among leading Australian artists featured were Aleks Danko, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth. Also included are works by younger generation artists Jeff Koons, Allan McCollum, Richard Prince, Thomas Struth and Meyer Vaisman.

Kaldor has a distinctive style of collecting. He has followed the work of several key (male) artists throughout their career, representing them in depth with a number of important examples that show the development and range of their work. Yet he remains constantly alert to new trends, regularly
visiting galleries in New York and London to look at emerging artists and recent trends. The exhibition reveals John Kaldor to be a truly exceptional patron and collector whose lifelong commitment to contemporary art has given the Australian public access to the work of artists they would not otherwise have seen and, for the first time, an outstanding collection that is unique in Australia. The Kaldor collection is diverse - embracing works that could be variously described as pop, conceptual, minimal, postmodern - yet it also reveals a rigorous aesthetics intelligence and highly developed sensibility that brings these individual powerful artworks the armature of a coherent collection162.

From an exhibition designer’s perspective, Jeff Koon’s ‘Puppy’ installation (Fig. 6.2), outside the MCA building could be seen from distance, especially those who were going to the Museum from Circular Quay. A large graphic banner, of the Puppy, was hung on the exterior wall the MCA building. It complimented the Puppy as a 1st transitional space of the exhibition for the viewer. It also told that Jeff Koons was the man associated with this outside sculpture. Simultaneously, a second banner of another exhibition, the ‘Louise Bourgeois’, could also be seen from a distance. This gave the viewer the impression that the exhibitions within the Museum walls were only about the Puppy and Louise Bourgeois. This 1st transitional space had failed in its purpose in preparing the viewer for the broader exhibition of *From Christo & Jeanne-Claude To Jeff Koons: John Kaldor Art Projects & Collections*. The Puppy was only part of the exhibition in the Museum but the gigantic scale of the Puppy had psychologically dominated the rest of the displayed works within the Museum. The quality of publicness was attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to the viewer. That is, the larger the object, the more it is a part of the public space. The gigantic sized Puppy included more of the space around itself than does a smaller one. It also displayed size more specifically as an element than the concept of the Puppy. I have heard a viewer, who was standing next to me under the Puppy, asking her companion, “Where is the puppy?”. Thus, the size (and perhaps the fuzzy

contours) of the *Puppy* was so huge that it had lost its puppiness when viewed in proximity.

![Fig. 6.2 - Jeff Koon's 'Puppy' outside MCA](image)

The 2nd transitional space of the exhibition was around the *Puppy*. An identity board was erected beside the *Puppy* (Fig. 6.2). The board had identified Jeff Koon as an artist, the creator of the *Puppy*, his art works' history, sponsors and the role of 'Sydney Festival' in relation to Kaldor's exhibition. This space had again emphasised Jeff Koon's work in the Museum. The *Puppy* (positive space), due to its size, had appropriate much of the negative space around. The normally green grounds, which the *Puppy* stood, was transformed to a white-granite filled ground. This had dual purpose in differentiating the *Puppy* from the ground and creating a solid ground for the viewers to stand on. The *Puppy* was fenced off with an aesthetically incompatible white wooden railing.

On moving into the Museum building, the viewer was to proceed vertically to the 3rd level for the *From Christo & Jeanne-Claude To Jeff Koons : John*
Kaldor Art Projects & Collections exhibition. The 3rd transitional space was at the entrance to this exhibition (Fig. 6.3). The viewer was then evoked by a huge wall-sized print, 'Untitled (Cowboy)', by Richard Prince. The purpose was to prepare the viewer for the rest of the exhibition. This exhibition was designed to be taxonometric. It was classified into various sections which the viewer could make their decision to view the exhibition from any direction.

Fig. 6.3 -
Layout plan (not to scale)
of 'From Christo & Jeanne-Claude To Jeff Koons : John Kaldor Art Projects & Collections' exhibition at MCA (3rd Level)

The contents of the objects were meant to be emotive, in that the viewer was to draw their own conclusions. The objects were carefully classified and laid out in this exhibition. And yet, since many of the works were abstract and conceptual, they connoted masculinist rationality and suggested that the viewer was to undergo an essentially cerebral, rather than emotional experience.
The Museum's 'white' space used a combination of spot-lights and daylight, which was carefully diffused by angled walls and white blinds (Fig. 6.4).

Fig. 6.5 - MCA's gallery space for 'Various Artists'
The gallery's fifteen centimetres raised walls from the ground, gave the
gallery a light floating feeling. It also acted as a psychological space for the
viewer's feet. This had encouraged the viewer to have a closer relation with
the displayed objects on the walls. This close relationship between the viewer
and the object prompted better viewer-object interaction. Furthermore, the
security staff on duty were friendly and discreet in their dealings with
viewers. The viewer were encouraged, in a way, look at the displayed objects
at proximity.

Throughout the exhibition, the placement of flat objects caused questions
about the curator's purpose. Carl Andre's work (Fig. 6.5) was placed along the
corridor between 'Jeff Koon's' gallery and 'Various Artists' gallery. The centre
alignment of the object with the corridor makes it appeared like a floor mat. I
witnessed a viewer walking over the object. Although this challenged the
taboo-ness of museum art, I wondered whether conservators would have
wanted the designer to lay this piece off-centre along the corridor.

6.2
Exhibition analysis:
'Sydney Vistas - Panoramic Views 1788 - 1995', MOS.
The second of these museums is the Museum Of Sydney (MOS). MOS is
housed in a modern building on the site of the earliest foundations of the
British colonisation of Australia - 'First Government House Site'. First
Government House Site refers primarily to the immediate site on which the
plaza and museum were built. It also incorporates the continuation of the
physical remains of the original house under Bridge, Phillip and Young
Streets, but does not include the original extent of the Governor's Domain\(^{163}\).
(Fig. 6.6) MOS was opened on 20 May 1995.

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On 15 May 1788, Governor Arthur Philip laid the foundation stone for Australia's First Government House on what is now the corner of Bridge and Philip Streets in the Sydney Central Business District. As the home and offices of the first nine governors of NSW, and as the seat of British colonial authority in the South Pacific, the house was a crucial power base in the colony's turbulent early years. In 1983, an archaeologist unearthed the original footings of the house, which had been fortuitously preserved when the house was demolished in 1846. The NSW government appointed the Historic Houses Trust (HHT) to develop and manage a museum on the site in the Bicentenary Year (1988), and selected architects Denton Corker Marshall to undertake the project in 1989. As construction commenced under the project management of Public Works Department, the HHT formed a project team to develop the museum display.

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HHT of NSW is entrusted with the care of key heritage buildings of NSW. It has empowering legislation of the Historic Houses Act 1980. HHT is governed by a Board of Trustees, appointed by His Excellency The Governor of NSW for three years. Presently, it has ten other properties under its care and management.
MOS's mission is to showcase Australia's history, identity and contemporary culture to the world. Since MOS is the archaeological remains of the First Government House and their historical context and icons of early colonial Australia, its collection policy includes:

- a multi-disciplinary approach to the interpretation of historical evidence.
- a multi-faceted approach to displays and exhibitions.
- archaeological footings
- archaeological collections
- documents
- images
- building elements
- tools and machinery
- decoratives and domestic objects
- reproductions and facsimiles
- audiovisuals
- commissioned artworks and installations
- models
- graphic displays
- computer interactives

Working within this curatorial guidelines, the MOS hosted a historic prints and photographic exhibition, 'Sydney Vistas - Panoramic Views 1788-1995', (1 December 1995 - 7 April 1996). 'Sydney Vistas' (Fig. 6.7) was the third exhibition in the MOS 'Focus Gallery'. Similar to the previous two shows, 'Fleeting Encounters, Pictures and Chronicles of the First Fleet' and 'Wondering Artist, Travels of Augustus Earle', 'Sydney Vistas' demonstrates why it was held in the 'Focus Gallery'. As the one big exhibition of MOS, Sydney Vistas set out to poetically evoke the metaphor of Sydney's geography which like the harbour, seeps into the eyes, ears, thoughts, emotion and

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165 Emmert, Peter. Fitzgerald, Shirley. op cit.

infuses Sydneysiders' sense of place, history, nostalgia, longing, memory and self\textsuperscript{167}.

Curated by the MOS's own staff, the works from 'Sydney Vistas' were meant to intrigue, arouse, and take on a whole new dimension when seen in the context of the whole installation of the museum\textsuperscript{168}.

Fig 6.7
- Layout plan (not to scale)

of 'Sydney Vistas - Panoramic Views 1788 to 1995' exhibition at MOS - 'Focus Gallery' (3rd level)

*Sydney Vistas* was a collection of fifty vistas of Sydney. These vistas, panoramas, views were different ways of representing place, perception, and "progress". The focus in this selections was to hover around Sydney Cove;

\textsuperscript{167} Emmert, Peter. op cit.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
looking from all sides, above, through and around the famous harbour. The catalogue and text panels stated that they were not definitions of ‘Sydney’ but reflections on the conceptual notion of city, progress, place. Since the prints exhibited were from 1788 to 1995, they were supposed to document the growth of the White British colony and trace some of its crucial developments (convict settlement, pastoral, gold, harbour for primary producing hinterland, port for trade, pleasure site, modernist tower blocks etc). All of the prints were reproductions using different technologies to inform different viewers about the site (Sydney). Some were intended as tourist momentos/souvenirs; others were commissioned to inform the British administrators about their colonial possession.

Approaching the MOS, the viewer sees a backlighted panel (Fig. 6.8) about the exhibition, Sydney Vistas, which was visible from a distance (first transitional space). On entering the Museum, there were graphic banners about the exhibition hanging from the ceiling of the reception area (second transitional space). Beside each of the exhibition’s two entrances, there were display showcases of antique cameras and visual panels where the viewer was supposed to make a connection with the exhibition beyond the walls of the entrances (third transitional space). These exhibits connoted nostalgia, obliquely reminded the viewer of the images’ modes of production and psychologically prepare him for the exhibition.
The exhibition's nineteenth century prints retained their original veneered and gilt frames while the more recent photographs were unobtrusively mounted and framed in a light coloured unfinished wood. All the prints were hung at an adult height. This exhibition was therefore not designed for primary school children or excursion groups. The selection was broken down into four different views, such as 'Popular' views, 'Reproducible' views, 'Commissioned' views, and 'Documentary' views. Each exhibit had three main complementary commentaries to signify and present the multiple voices embedded within each view. The three mentioned texts were firstly 'Looking at the image', 'Musing on the time and place', and 'Site sight-seeing'. The three texts elucidate - the collector's voice, the historian's voice and the curator's voice. Looking at the image was a description of the print with a sentence or two in bold typeface by the collector - the collector's voice. Musing on the time and place was printed in a lighter typeface. It was the historian's voice about the print's meaning. It was a subjective and connotative reading from a 1996 perspective. This sometimes fulfilled an editorial function.
(which is subjective) and sometimes it was an authorial one. This was termed around a key word, 'Celebration', followed by a one hundred word text. The curator, Peter Emmert, had proudly stated that there were about eleven hundred words in the captions on this exhibition. This was much too long for the viewer (especially the ESL tourist). The viewer should not be subjected to such verbosity. In the text of Site sight-seeing, the curator gave his views as an observer in a 36 points italic typeface - curator's voice. However, the fifteen degrees inclined text board protruded from the wall (Fig. 6.9) did work successfully as a psychological barrier between the prints and the viewer. It had prevented the viewer from going too near to the prints and reduced the possibility of the viewer touching the prints.

Fig. 6.9 - Overall view of 'Focus Gallery' at MOS

It appeared that the organisation of the exhibition was supposed to be chronological to suggest a narrative history of place. The Museum wanted its viewers to think of chronology as a sequence of manufactured images, which represented place. But the layout of the prints suggested otherwise. The planned narrative nature of the exhibition appeared more to be of 'taxonometic' than the intended 'thematic' traffic-flow. The prints were

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classified under individual clusters in different spatial placements. The contents were ‘conative’ in as much as it wanted the viewer to believe that Sydney *is* (although it had defined earlier on that the exhibition was not a definition of Sydney) Circular Quay. The title of the exhibition, *Sydney Vistas*, suggested that the exhibition was canonical prints of Sydney. But in reality, most of the prints were hovering around Circular Quay. This contradicted the exhibition’s avowed purpose. The viewer was to make his own connections from the objects and once again Sydney’s hinterland was ignored.

Lighting in the exhibition were mainly recessed and indirect fluorescent strip lighting; with a few tungsten halogen spot lights. The gallery (‘Focus Gallery’) was maintained at a low level (thirty lux) luminance throughout the exhibition for conservation reasons. This was also to change the general outlook of the gallery from the various exhibitions which the Museum had hosted (eg. the previous exhibition used yellow lights and the next exhibition would use spot lights). The gallery was evenly lighted and there was no dramatic focus of lighting. Within the gallery, two slide projectors were used. One for the projection of a photograph (Fig. 6.10) and the other was for the exhibition’s graphic poster. Both were placed very discreetly, their images never changed and the usage were weak. One could have screened at least screen slides of the exhibited prints on the wall.
The earliest views were commissioned through government patronage. They constructed the city as a work of art and history as imperial narrative, a site of enclosure invariably symbolised by the centrality of first Government House. The MOS has grown from the ruins of this House (which the MOS curator prefers to see as a turning point rather than as the contested site's beginning).\textsuperscript{170}

The European notion of city is usually founded on a dichotomy between culture and nature, order and chaos, building and landscape. How can this be in a place like Sydney, a cultural landscape of sandstone, water, wood, steel, glass, cloud? The edge of the Trees sculpture in First Government House Place relates nature and culture, and itself to the giant Environment video-

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\textsuperscript{170} This refers to the fact that there was a First Government House Site activists who claimed that the museum should only focus on early nineteenth century Sydney history. They were a group of conservative historians.
wall which slides and dissolves in the modern museum, turning the steel stairs into a theatrical scaffold, a crossing and meeting place\textsuperscript{171}.

I would like to compare and contrast these Sydney exhibitions with comparable contemporary Singaporean exhibitions. My analysis will focus on the curator’s representations of (Sydney and Singapore’s) place in a transnational art scene; cultural diplomacy; nation state identities; ethnic identity, public culture and (official) history as well as the roles which the designers have played in creating meaning about these things.

6.3
Exhibition analysis:
‘Rapport: Eight Artists from Australia and Singapore’, SAM.
The third museum to be discussed is SAM. SAM is the first, amongst the three proposed Singaporean museums, to start operation, in October 1995. SAM has completed the first phase of the NHB’s plans\textsuperscript{172}. This museum (Fig. 6.11) is located in the architectural and historic landmark site of Singapore’s Saint Joseph’s Institution, within the city’s Civic and Cultural District. From the conversion of the former school to an art museum of international standards, a careful balance was struck between the preservation of its architectural and historical character, and the building’s new role as a contemporary site for the display of 20th century art. The Museum boasts a collection of art works that enjoy historical significance and aesthetic value. The collection includes art works by Singaporeans and the region’s pioneering, established and younger artists.

\textsuperscript{171} Emmert, Peter. Fitzgerald, Shirley. op cit.

\textsuperscript{172} World Wide Web information at:
SAM\textsuperscript{173} does not have an official mission statement in print\textsuperscript{174}. It basically uses NHB's mission statement\textsuperscript{175} as a skeleton for its operations. From which, according to internet information, SAM is devoted to the study and preservation of the contemporary art of the Southeast Asian region\textsuperscript{176}. In this context, SAM's main purpose is to "study" and "preserve" the Southeast Asian region's contemporary art. That is, to "preserve" a national identity. In a way, it is "creating" a national identity which Singapore does not have. As compared to MCA, the Museum's (MCA) mission is to stimulate creativity and challenge people with the latest ideas in contemporary art and culture. MCA is also creating culture through art.

\textsuperscript{173} For more information about SAM, refer to the chapter on 'National Heritage Board', pp. 81.

\textsuperscript{174} Lim, Sharon (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding 'Re: SAM's Mission Statement and Collection Policies'. (1996, May 26).

\textsuperscript{175} NHB's mission is to explore and present the culture and heritage of Singapore through the collection, preservation, interpretation and display of objects and records so as to promote a better understanding of Singapore's roots and instil a sense of national identity in Singaporeans.

\textsuperscript{176} World Wide Web information at:
SAM is supported by the Singapore government whereas MCA relies entirely on private and corporate sponsorship and the contributions of its individual and corporate members 177.

SAM’s collection policy is not available to the general public, including academics 178. In this aspect, the Singapore museums administration is not like the Sydney museums who were willing, and probably obliged, to release their policies to the public and academics. The availability of museum information in Australia is, to me, an indication of the Australian museum institutions willingness to be open about their policies. This, in a way, will encourage academics to study, develop and create museums. I supposed this is because Australians are very concerned about government and institutional accountability (even when tax-payers money is not involved, eg. as in the MCA). However, the Singapore museum institution’s “protection” of information will only serve to slow down its art and cultural development plans. On the one hand, this restriction of information does not help in the country’s development of the ‘information age’. And yet on the other hand, it could in fact make them easier. In Australia, the institutions are very concerned about “political correctness”, open-access, freedom of information and a free press (which can be very confrontational). In Singapore, the press supports (and praises) the government policies. Therefore, the field of discourse is much more limited (but assured).

Turning to a specific example, I want to discuss SAM’s collaborative exhibition, ‘Rapport: Eight Artists From Australia and Singapore’ (11 June - 11 August 1996). This project was a collaboration between Australia’s Monash University and SAM. The three participating Australian bodies in this

177 World Wide Web Information at:  

Perhaps this says something about the States’ relationship with “modern art!” (it still subsidises ballet etc). It could also relate to the time in which MCA was set up: downsizing in government. It should be noted however that the NSW government funds the larger Art Gallery of NSW.

178 Lim, Sharon (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding ‘Re: Thank You For Your Documents’. (1996, May 25).

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venture were International Cultural Relations Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australia Council's Visual Arts/Craft Board, and Arts Victoria. These three bodies participated through the Victorian Government's Artists 21 Policy and the Community Support Fund of Monash International and can be taken as a concrete example of Australia's attempt to promote itself as a regional power, trading partner and "Asian" nation state. With that, the Singapore's NAC also participated in the venture through its links with the Asialink Centre, University of Melbourne.

'Rapport' is based on the collaboration and exchange of ideas between young curators and artists from both Australia and Singapore. This exhibition, enthusiastically supported by a number of organisations and individuals in both countries, has been discussed by both countries as a model project of cooperation as it offered and opened up new possibilities for artists to creatively exhibit their works internationally. Rapport marks the fruitful collaborative relationship between the various institutions found within the

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179 The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'Rapport' as the 'close agreement and understanding'. The name of this exhibition sounds like Australia claiming its emotional sympathy and good faith with "Asia" (which it feared and despised for so long).

180 **Eight Artists' Background:**
**Australian artists**
Artists: two male and two female
Race: AngloSaxon
Birth dates: early 1950s - early 1960s
Country of birth/work: Egypt/Sydney (male)
Johannesburg, South Africa/Melbourne, Australia (male)
Bendigo, Australia/Melbourne, Australia (female)
Melbourne/Melbourne, Australia (female)

**Singaporean artists**
Artists: two male and two female
Race: 1 Malay (male) / 3 Chinese
Birth dates: early 1950s - early 1960s
Country of birth/work: Singapore

A content analysis suggests that these artists met the criteria of ethnicity and gender (but not sexuality) which nicely matched the two country's notions of their multiculturalism.

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Asia-Pacific region\textsuperscript{181}. It therefore presents itself as an innovative process of collaborative works through both countries’ goodwill and friendship.

The curating of a cross-cultural artists exhibition begins with rudimentary semantics such as this...

An exhibition can never be a neutral channel for presenting art, but it can be - a rapport. A rapport between artists, artists works, cultures, viewpoints, communities...\textsuperscript{182}

The curators visited the artists’ studios discussed and wrote about the works in an attempt to present an exhibition in which the very process of curating, presenting and discussing is a rapport\textsuperscript{183}. This is art as process, rather than product (or is it?).

It is not surprising, that with the increasingly close cultural ties that someone would conceive of an exhibition of both Australian and Singaporean art. In this case, the exhibition, Rapport, was curated by both Natalie King from Australia and Tay Swee Lin from Singapore. Eight artists’ work were shown in this exhibition, four each from Australia and Singapore respectively.

Rapport set out to exhibit notions of symmetry and exchange, identity and culture, a matter for the artists’ interpretations. By placing artworks from Australia and Singapore side by side, Rapport sought to set up a critical dialogue between practices that emanated from the two different environments. In a way, Rapport was a curatorial collaboration which encouraged shared decision-making, and a synthesis of ideas and thoughts. Exhibited in both Australia and Singapore, Rapport was a cultural project

\textsuperscript{181} Not Applicable. \textit{Rapport}, Melbourne, VIC : Monash University Gallery, Monash University.


\textsuperscript{183} If this happened, it suggests that the curators worked as clients, setting a brief or influencing the artists’ works. This sounds like design to me.
marking a series of partnerships between international institutions and between artists and cultural workers.

The exhibition consisted predominantly of art works by younger artists who are working across media\textsuperscript{184} from photography to found objects, inflatables to sculpture. The resulting installations negotiated such personal issues as childhood, coupling, materiality and spirituality that are pertinent to each artist’s own cultural background. While these eight artists have produced individual works for \emph{Rapport}, three themes emerged as threads binding the various components of the exhibition - synthetic, materials, memory and ephemerality\textsuperscript{185}.

\textit{...the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by “intangible as well as tangible things”, reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacles, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exit above it...}\textsuperscript{186} (synthetic materials).

For instance, with the above principle, Hany Armanious, Christopher Langton and Matthew Ngui utilised synthetic materials such as PVC, vinyl and plastic to express these three themes. Each adopted and employed industrial methods to express how their individual works comment on popular culture, advertising and everyday life. The resulting visual spectacles took their cues from video games (Armanious), information technologies (Langton) and films (Ngui). All these three sources are common aspects of consumer cultures that dominate Eastern and Western people’s lives.

Amanda Heng’s work was about ‘memory,’ it frequently stretches across cultural boundaries which extend her insight into an alternative

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} ie. mixed-media
\end{itemize}
consciousness. Similarly, Carolyn Eske
dale's enclosed muslin room of draped
cushions was like an entombed white tube of memories from the past.

Nicola Loder's haunting grid of black and white photographs of children was
at once powerful and melancholic. Loder's photographs of a group of
children each appeared to be in isolation in the photographs. She cropped
and enlarged the images so that the children were removed from their
familial context. Almost like mug shots or passport photographs, she had
recalled these faces with Roland Barthes' meditation on the impact of
photography and the history of looking.

Breaking the cycle of life into different stages, Salleh Japar presented a world
in a state of crisis thus revealing a sense of life and its development relative to
the "decay" of society. Japar was more purposeful in his works; some of the
other artists in this exhibition seem to be about (the artistic Western
individualism's) loss/past/memory etc. It appeared that most of these
Australian and Singaporean artists were not trained or interested in relating
their individual visions to their state priorities.

In Baet Yeok Kuan's works, the conflict and harmony between modernity and
traditions are apparent. The manner by which individuals recognise and
identify things changes with time as well as with cultural differences. Baet
was especially interested in exploring these differences in viewpoint so that
disparate positions could "meet each other".

At this point, it seems to me, that the curators are making a case that these
eight contemporary artists' works were not conceptualised, in anyway, in
national identity. Their analysis are individualised in a very Western manner.
In the works shown, there was no national identity of the Australian and the
Singaporean. The works were, in fact, very Western-inflected.

Following up on these aesthetic and conceptual aspect of the displays I would
like to analyse SAM's spatial environment. SAM's (Fig. 6.12) exhibition space,
like the MCA's, was based on the popular concept of the white cube. With
walls painted white, windows closed and sealed, controlled downlights from
the white ceiling; it owes much to its parent museum space at the Art Gallery.

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of the National Museum (AGNM). The only source of natural light filtering into the space was by the glass doors of each separate space.

The SAM, is situated within the Civic and Cultural Hub at the end of Orchard Road\(^\text{187}\). Being in the hub, it is placed along the busy traffic roads. Its buffer zone from the main road is just the width of a walkway. As such, it does not symbolise the presumed serenity of an art museum. The transition spaces between the viewer and the Museum is insufficient. I want to argue that, since a series of transition spaces is required for the transformation of viewer’s perception for his Museum space, psychologically, the viewer needs more time to prepare for the Museum visit/experience. The viewer’s sudden confrontation with the Museum’s building will create his uncertainty about its identity (unless, of course, the museum authorities intended to evoke this ambiguity). To the viewer, this building may just be another old building converted into another shopping complex along the Orchard belt! This philosophy supposed that art should be removed from the everyday (commercial) world, it needs to be contemplated in a remote, controlled space. Perhaps that is all it is, if art is only another commodity and/or spectacle.

The receptionist area (Fig. 6.12) is small and not ‘design-friendly’\(^\text{188}\). It does not offer the information which the visitor needs to inform himself about the Museum and its activities. It seems like the viewers are forced to orientate themselves without any aid from visual semiotics. The viewer feels disoriented at the beginning of the museum experience. Without any form of visual assistance at the Museum’s entry, the viewer is left wondering whether to begin negotiating this space (and experience) by moving horizontally or vertically.

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\(^{187}\) Orchard Road is the tourists’ shopping zone in Singapore.

\(^{188}\) ‘Design’, here, is like an entity and it has political, economic, cultural interests and agendas (and consequently enemies).
Fig. 6.12

- Layout plan (not to scale)

of 'Rapport: Eight artists from Australia

and Singapore' exhibition at SAM (grd level)
Amanda Heng’s (Singaporean) installation (D3 - D7) at ‘Gallery 1’ (Fig. 6.13) were supposed to be designed as a stand-alone artwork. However, the objects were placed too close to each other. The exhibition team had the objects placed so close that the cramped objects’ interplay of negative and positive space was inevitable. It was a design decision rather than a lack of space. There was an alternative. This raises important questions about the designer’s role in interpreting the artwork and display pieces. In these, the exhibition designer should play an active agent reading the object and creating meaning. He should not merely be a technician who follows the artist’s and the curator’s direction (and this will impact upon his education). Unless Heng wanted stress and conflict in her work, these five objects caused too much tension with each other. Furthermore, Heng’s work is about memories. To Heng, the past, the present and future are three separate time zones. Her concept, here, of a relationship between a mother and a daughter was universalised. It did not specify its environment - Eastern or Western. Therefore, a local cultural context was absent. The identity of the artist, Heng, need not necessarily be Asian. A Western artist was equally capable of producing a similar kind of installation. The general lighting onto these objects were so even that these individual objects cohered as one. Separate
spot-lightings would have helped to break the objects into different elements of display if insufficient space was the reason for given tight display space. This object, I believe, was to be viewed at a distance, with the presence of security-guard\textsuperscript{189}. The near vicinity of security-guards served as a psychological barrier (perhaps it was the purpose of the Museum) with the objects. If this is the case, then all displayed objects at the Museum were meant to be viewed at a distance, since one guard was designated to cover each of the exhibition halls. The interaction of the objects and the viewer will then be lost. The objects were then meant to be viewed from a distance. The experience of the viewer was then limited and strictly directed by the curator.

After negotiating a narrow passage within the same exhibition hall, the viewer came upon two other installations: Salleh Japar's (Singaporean) hanging cradles and Nicola Loder's (Australian) haunting grid of black and white photographs of children. This exhibition room measured no more than five metres by five metres square with a four metres ceiling height 'white' gallery. The room was dimmed as much as possible for the effect that Japar wanted - dark background. Japar had his eighteen illuminated (from within) white cradles hanging from the ceiling with various heights. His cradles were to depict a three interrelated concepts of revelation, unity and humanity, which constitute the balance of internal and external experience.

Perhaps this was why these two installations were placed within the same exhibition space. Nicola Loder had her works of black and white photography to show the cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.

Japar had a conceptual installation about humanity while Loder was trying to illustrate the "cunning dissociation" of children from society. Loder's sixteen tightly cropped photographs of children's faces were lighted by controlled downlights. These two objects were placed directly opposite each other. They were in direct and constant relation with each other. One (Japar) was about the revelation of life while the other (Loder) is showing the dissociation of consciousness from identity. Despite this, Loder's installation did not hint at

\textsuperscript{189} These security-guards were hired from an independent security company. Each aged between fifty to sixty.
her Australian identity. There were a strong sense of opposition within this space. The use of individual lighting within this space worked well as it was designed to highlight the objects. However, these would have worked better in a truly 'black' space painted black. This would have given the objects a feeling of weightlessness with the objects suspended beyond the scope of time.

Fig. 6.14 - Layout plan (not to scale) of 'Rapport' in 'Gallery 2'

In 'Gallery 2' (Fig. 6.14), the general lighting was also dimmed (almost to darkness except for the spot-lightings for Loder's second installation of photographs) to exclude the white wall (background) from the objects. In this case too, a black background would have provided a more forceful contrast with the artworks' individuality. Matthew Ngui's (Singapore) "multi-media" installation (D15) was inclined at an angle to the walls. It had caused an undue amount of friction for negative space with Hany Armanio s's (Australian) installation (D16) on the walls. The eye was looking for information but there was none. The luminance of the hall was below en lux, too dark for this exhibition space. The only available light in he
exhibition hall was from Ngui's occasional projection of a "multi-media" show on the white wall and the spot-light on Nicole's installation. With the alternative usage of a 'black' space for this gallery, Hany's installation could have been illuminated with a continuous row of spot-lights.

Fig. 6.15 - Layout plan (not to scale) of 'Rapport' in 'Gallery 3'

For a viewer to proceed to 'Gallery 3' (Fig. 6.15), he would have to move from an enclosed space (artificial light) through an open space (daylight, Fig. 6.16) where there was a great difference in luminance. This meant that his eyes had to adapt to changing light conditions for a second time. After the open space, the viewer then entered Gallery 3. The viewer had to adapt his eyes for the objects within this artificially lighted space again. This transition space had failed in preparing the viewer for Gallery 3. The covered walkway could have been further improved with tinted glass along the way. This would have greatly reduced the amount of lighting stress to the eyes. In this way, the viewer could have a choice of viewing the sculptures in the open space or proceed to Gallery 3 for the last part of the exhibition. This suggestion is directed towards this Museum.
Bae Yeok Kuan's (Singaporean) installation of two wall-mounted white shaped clay pieces worked well as a conventional relief. The objects did not symbolise any particular Asian or Singaporean identity. The objects here were shown as art rather than the culture of art. The viewer could visually experience the impact of the objects the moment he walked into the space. The objects were individually lighted with down lights. A 'white' space worked well here. Clearly, this Singaporean designer/exhibition team has not taken advantage of all the variables of the design vocabulary and grammar which I have identified in the first chapter. With more power and/or panache, this could have been a more exciting. This trouble lies, as far as I am concerned, both with the architect designer's renovations and with the exhibition design's understanding of the artists' intentions.
6.4 Exhibition analysis:

'Historical Painting and Prints of Colonial Singapore', SHM.

The fourth, and the last, museum to be discussed is SHM\textsuperscript{190}(Fig. 6.17), which has now taken over the present Singapore National Museum (SNM) building at Stamford Road which has been, for the last one hundred years, the only museum in Singapore. With the take over, SHM’s role is to trace Singapore’s historical development. As Singaporeans are still used to the SNM name, and because NHB would like to officially launch the SHM name, NHB still calls the building SNM. Major renovations will be done in phases, so that they can keep the Museum open at all time. SHM is scheduled to be opened officially in 1999\textsuperscript{191}.

\[\text{Fig. 6.17 - Singapore History Museum}\]

SHM’s mission is to explore and to enhance Singapore’s national identity by preserving, presenting and interpreting the nation’s history and material culture in the context of the multi-cultural\textsuperscript{192} heritage, which I have identified

\textsuperscript{190} For more information on SHM, see the chapter on ‘The Museums Under National Heritage Board’.

\textsuperscript{191} Lim, Sharon (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding ‘Re: Thank You For Your Documents’, (1996, May 25).

\textsuperscript{192} World Wide Web information at
in Chapter Two. It is similar to MOS's showcasing of Australia's history, identity and contemporary culture to the world\(^{193}\). SHM's common goals with MOS has shown both countries have showcased their histories, identities and contemporary cultures.

SHM, like MOS, is managed by a heritage board (NHB) and is state funded\(^{194}\).

The Museum has launched an exciting programme of exhibitions and activities tracing the history of Singapore and presenting it from a Singaporean perspective. These highlight trends and developments that have characterised and shaped life and history in Singapore, in the areas of demographics, social identities, festivals, trade and commerce, etc.

Again, the Museum's collection policies was not available to the general public and to academics\(^{195}\). Therefore, it was not available for study and examination.

However, according to the internet information, the Museum's collection is broadly divided into Singapore's social, economic, constitutional and community histories. Its collection strategy is currently aimed at building up critical gaps in the Singapore's social, economic and community histories, as well as in the constitutional history relating to the struggle for national independence\(^{196}\). As compared to MOS's collection policy, SHM's direction of collection was more specific except that SHM did not specify precisely the media of collection. MOS was the direct opposite.

\(^{193}\) MOS brochure, 1995.

\(^{194}\) NSW government administers and funds Sydney museums (like MOS, Australian Museum etc).

\(^{195}\) Sharon Lim (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg), E-mail correspondence regarding 'Re: SHM's Mission Statement and Collection Policies', (1996, May 25).

One such historical exhibition was 'Historical Painting and Prints of Colonial Singapore'\(^{197}\) (9 May - 1 October 1996).

The 'Early Pioneers Room' of the Art Gallery of the National Museum (Fig. 6.18) was used for this exhibition. Showcasing about fifty prints and paintings of early Singapore, the exhibition aimed at drawing an interest and appreciation of the topography of early Singapore.

As we have seen, the British East India Company established a trading post in Singapore, and the colony grew from a fishing island into an international manufacturing, trading and banking centre. The development of Singapore's trade into its international dimensions has its genesis in the early traders who

developed the entrepot trade, the Western agency houses and the Chinese middlemen.

The SHM attempted to trace the development of the island from its early years to its establishment as a Crown Colony in 1867 by titling this exhibition 'Historical Paintings and Prints of Colonial Singapore'. The paintings and prints, the viewers and the public saw, captured vividly the development of the Colony into a centre for entrepot trade, the administration of colonial governors, the town planning done by Raffles, and the everyday activities of the time. And, as the reader will appreciate, there are obvious chronological parallels between the MOS display and this Singaporean exhibition.

These prints were especially significant as historical records because they predated the advent of photography. Simply put, they were the 'photographs' of the early nineteenth century. So while they might not always be accurate like photographs, they have added value as they conveyed the feelings, thoughts, perceptions and understanding of the artist who drew them.

The oil paintings on display were also extremely valuable historically and in monetary terms. The portrait of Sir Frank Swettenham, on display, was a fine example of John Singer Sargent's work (1856-1925). Sargent was the most eminent portrait painter of Edwardian London. The portrait vividly captured Sir Frank Swettenham's character. The colonial governor's authority was projected through the dramatic stance and the inclusion of accessories such as the ivory baton, Swettenham's badge of office. The portrait, in its original frame, was commanding an awe-inspiring stance in the colonnade in the Early Pioneers Room of the Art Gallery. The designer/curator had included these connotations of British Imperial control in this exhibition. In a way, it had shown that he (designer/curator) had told a particular history through this exhibition, encouraging the viewers to see themselves in a particular way. The designer/curator was being objective in this exhibition.

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198 A print is an image on paper, transferred under pressure from the inked surface of a wood block, metal plate, slab of stone or other suitable substance. Even though it is technically possible to make as many prints as possible, the historical prints that have survived the ravages of time are few.
These paintings and prints served as important historical sources that guided us to a better understanding of our heritage. Rather than appreciating them as aesthetic works alone, this exhibition served as a visual narrative which reconstructed the historical passage through which Singaporeans have travelled. The people, places and experiences could stir a sense of nostalgia. For others, the images are likened to directional signs which take the viewer back in time.

Many of the prints, were sketched by European travelling artists or by artists who travelled on voyages with European travellers. The prints, together with the travellers, accounted their voyages in the Far East, unveil a treasure of information on aspects of trade, administration, culture and beliefs of the early people living in Singapore. In this way the prints serve as important primary sources of history which supplements the historical records. One particular print that was very interesting in composition, according to the exhibition’s home-page on the World Wide Web, was that entitled ‘Barfi dus Dflindien’.

This print portrayed an Indian family from Bombay in India. The striking element of the print was the pose assumed by the woman. She was seated while her husband was standing. This position proved to be misleading because in Indian culture it is considered disrespectful for the wife to be seated in front of her husband. Thus it is obvious that the artist had requested the family to pose for the picture. The pose also reflected the Western notion of chivalry - that women should be seated while men should stand.199

Despite this, this particular information was not highlighted to the viewer of the exhibition. The description and reading of this print was the Museum’s statement. The Museum was assuming that the viewer would discover, draw conclusions and justify the importance of this print for himself in the exhibition. Two types of labelling systems, both printed in English, were used in this exhibition. The first type was printed black (12 point) text, on white

199 World Wide Web information at:
http://www.museum.org.sg/shm/hpp.html
paper, pasted on thin compact polyfoam board. This type of label was used for prints on the exhibition hall’s walls. They were pasted besides the displayed prints, just like conventional displays. Furthermore, the inconsistent height of the labels made it aesthetically unattractive and rather unreadable. The viewer was either looking-down or looking-up at the labels. In comparison, the MOS, was more sensitive in its approach to positioning its labels for the (adult) viewer’s convenience. The labels in *Sydney Vistas* were designed and placed at a common height throughout the exhibition. This labels worked as a textural function and as a psychological barrier between the prints and the viewer, discouraging the viewer from touching the prints. Although MOS was overly wordy, it recognised that different sorts of people had commissioned the different images for the specific reasons (and yet they provided evidence for different sorts of inquiries). However, the Singapore curators did not seem to have considered this post-modern approach to textured analysis. The second type of labels used in the SHM’s exhibition were acrylic desktop labels. They were tiny and placed loosely at below one metre height, on the designed fabricated windows for the prints. These labels appeared to be designed to be picked up by viewer for reading.

On entering the exhibition hall of *Historical Paintings and Prints of Colonial Singapore*, the viewer was immediately faced with a 2.5 metres by 4 metres introduction mural. It was a huge photographic copy of a print, dimly lighted by poorly hidden warm-white fluorescent lights. The lights were obtrusive and would be directed toward the viewer’s eyes if the viewer was standing at an angle. This panel provided a poor transitional space for the exhibition. This was the one and only transitional space for this exhibition. It was insufficient and the curator had assumed that the viewer was informed before entering the exhibition space. In fact, viewers to this Museum are usually “uninformed” tourists rather than locals and school children\(^{200}\) who have come to learn about their cultural and political inheritance. Two more transitional spaces should be added to this exhibition space.

\(^{200}\) Sharon Lim (Public Relations Officer of NHB, sharonlim@nhb.mita.gov.sg). E-mail correspondence regarding *Re: National Museum's Visitors Profile*. (1996, June 15).

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The exhibition was, according to the designer/curator, classified into six sectors - 'Singapore River: Entrepot Trade', 'Agency Houses', 'From River to Harbour', 'Growth of the Landscape', 'Everyday Life Events and Scenes' and 'Political & Civil Administration of Singapore'. However, after a general examination of the exhibition's layout, it could be concluded that the exhibition was designed to be 'didactic', 'thematic' and 'referential'. This exhibition was the display of historic prints of colonial Singapore. It was like a book-shelf (didactic) of objective (referential) information, telling a story, for the viewer to approach in a thematic manner. Despite this, the approach route of the exhibition was divided into two choices. One to the right and the other to the left. In this case, the designed approach route was not clearly planned for the viewer. The viewer then had a choice which suggested the designer/curator took a taxonomic approach to the exhibition designer. Although the thematic and taxonomic approach can work together, the contents of the exhibition had shown that it was meant to be seen thematically.

The display space on the right was installed with a poorly reproduced replicas of a colonial facade, placed at an angle against the walls of the hall. It was not installed with any form of lighting. This facade was dull and not necessary. Some oil paintings and colonial furniture were displayed there. This area were only illuminated with fluorescent lights which seemed to be only ten lux in luminance. There was not any other form of downlightings for the paintings. Perhaps this was the conservation requirement of the objects.

The other approach route was via the left at the entrance. This was where most of the prints were displayed, each within a miniature colonial window. It was the metaphor of looking at these prints through colonial times. Each window was fitted with a halogen downlight for the prints. But they were never used. The viewer had to content himself with the hall's dim fluorescent-lights. The viewer approached the prints with his understanding of the space. He moved along while trying to piece together the purpose of the prints. The eye was collecting information, analysing and reasoning with itself. The prints were placed at a below adult eye-level height which was tedious to the adult viewer. The labels were placed even lower so much so that the adult viewer had to stoop and bend to read the labels. It was, perhaps,
not designed for the adult viewers. But the height placement of prints were too high for school children. Perhaps it was designed for the Japanese tourists!

This exhibition set out to tell a story about colonial Singapore but it had failed in the design of viewer's traffic flow. In fact, the exhibition had become more didactic than evocative, thematic than taxonomic and referential than emotive.
CONCLUSION:
CONCLUSION:

Museums exhibition designers are servants of the state. They help create public culture, promote a version of history. In this thesis, I have demonstrated the design vocabulary and grammar that the exhibition designer works with to create meaning in bridging understanding, with the knowledge of history and the primary ideologies of the state which he/she serves. Singapore’s recent interest in arts and heritage museums is part of a larger desire for regional economic and cultural survival and pre-eminence was identified with the evolution, interconnectedness and ambitions of Singapore’s arts and cultural organisations. In conjunction, some of the implications of Singapore’s ‘Arts and Heritage Policy’ was unpacked. A brief but concise comparative history of Australia/Singapore was made for the arts, cultural and museum comparison between the Australia and Singapore. The exhibition designer’s vocabulary and grammar was used to evaluate the four exhibitions in Sydney and Singapore eventually.

This is an initial attempt to investigate a new phase in Singapore’s political and cultural history and the ways in which the state museums contribute towards that country’s notions of its contemporary identity as a modern, but not necessarily westernised nation state.

I began this dissertation by demonstrating that the exhibition designer works with a design vocabulary and grammar to create a code of communication which places Singapore’s government museums and galleries (and their intended audiences) within a transnational (western-inflected) museum community. Cited two Sydney and two Singaporean examples, I subsequently showed that this ‘white cube’ vocabulary and grammar has been widely used, and we can even assume that regular museum visitors understand and negotiate this semiotic code.

I have also argued that, because the contemporary exhibition designer creates meaning, he needs to be more than a technician who realises the curatorial team’s ambitions and deploys a cliched repertoire of ‘white cube’ semantics. Because the designer is paid by the state, he/she is an agent of the state and someone who communicates to citizens and tourists on the state’s behalf.
have shown that, working as a team member, the designer can still influence the ways in which audiences understand exhibitions. It follows that the designer needs to know the history and the primary ideologies of the state which he/she serves. I have sketched a history of Singapore in Chapter Two. This history focused on Singapore’s colonial period, the origins of Singapore’s multi-racial and multi-cultural citizenry, the role of Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party in developing a national museum and galleries culture as part of its vision for Singapore’s aspirations to be a regional Hub. This historical overview and the complimentary analysis of two Sydney exhibitions, demonstrates that the designer can betray his allegiances to conservative or multicultural interests (I am referring here to the absence of point-of-view texts in the Singapore images exhibition: a naive history that assumes that the images of old Singapore speak for themselves and don’t require interpretation).

I followed this up by showing how Singapore’s recent interest in arts and heritage museums has been part of a larger desire for regional economic and cultural survival and future prosperity. I have also demonstrated the evolution, interconnectedness and ambitions of Singapore’s arts and cultural organisations. From there I located, once again, the ubiquitous roles of Asian-ness, modernisation without westernisation and the state’s desire to meet the challenges which the global communication systems place upon its citizens’ welfare.

These themes resurface in Chapter Four, when I unpacked some of the implications of Singapore’s ‘Arts and Heritage Policy’. Recognising that these sorts of documents are conceptual and reply on administrators and curators to interpret and to realise their broad guidelines, I have argued that some aspects are ill-considered and unnecessarily vague.

Chapter Five sketched a brief comparative history of Sydney/Australia for three main reasons. Firstly, I could not assume that my imagined reader was familiar with the broad outlines of this history. Secondly, Singapore and Sydney/Australia share some important features. Both cities/countries were founded at about the same time. Both have had long histories as British colonies and here, of servicing her imperial interests; both developed

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industrial economies in the mid twentieth century; both espouse ‘multicultural’ philosophies; both compete for the same markets and aspire to be regional centres; both are sensitive to de-traditionalising and globalising forces. This history has also implied the uniqueness of present day Singapore’s economy, politics and culture.

My final chapter compared and contrasted two sets of exhibitions. It demonstrated, that Sydney and Singapore’s cultural and political elites are concerned with issues of identity, multiculturalism and their international relationships. To warrant the above statement, I discussed two recent high art exhibitions and two recent exhibition about each city’s colonial past. I have shown that the art exhibitions raised questions about artist-museum relationships and about display designer’s power to shape meaning. The heritage exhibitions raised questions about the ways in which museum’s address their imagined audiences through display techniques, labelling etc and represent the past.

I shall conclude this dissertation with some observations about the ways in which Singapore’s museum designers might develop strategies that would contribute to Singapore’s aspirations to become a regional Hub in the developing Pacific Rim culture:

- Although museum designers work within the modernist ‘white cube’ idiom etc, Singapore exhibition teams have not used many of the orthodox strategies which international gallery goers expect from a cultural centre: transitional spaces, signage, respect for the art works.

- The museum designer needs to research subject matter as well as to be up to date, if not pioneer museum design as a mode of communication to each exhibition’s intended audiences and to concurrently design for audiences.

- Since the SHM curators had a rather naive notion of history and of the role of the label in facilitating and directing understanding, the educated designer could develop strategies to help citizen’s and tourists to understand this history.
Like his Sydney counterparts, the Singapore designer can align him/herself with ‘progressive’ state ideologies (and must try to appeal to negotiate discriminatory and oppressive state ideologies).

Finally, Singapore institutions, for reasons unknown, have not developed, or at least not circulated, sufficient key documents. This suggests that they are working outside contemporary international museum practices. This might handicap their professional development. Alternatively, it might create spaces for museum professionals to create innovative and exciting new public exhibitions.

It is obvious that more work needs to be done in this field. There should be education on exhibition design and museum studies in Singapore. This course, when set up will be going down an appropriate track.

Singapore has shown a commendable interest in public culture through museum displays but, as I have shown in this research paper, the Singapore museum exhibition designers’ have not played their rightful roles in the aesthetic and spatial design in Singaporean museums. However, the role of a museum exhibition designer, in the aspect of the theory, is constantly evolving and developing with the viewers and cultural environments. Therefore, it is important that more research be done on the exhibition designer’s role in Singaporean museums. The relationship between the viewer and the object, subject and space as a medium of communication within the Singaporean museum needs more research. The Singaporean designers will need to assume more responsibility and power.

This paper had served as the basis for the initial research into the Singaporean context of arts, culture, national identity and museum developments. More research needs to be done on the role of museum exhibition designer; the powers of the museum exhibition designer; the relationship between the viewer and the object, subject and space as a medium of communication; the role of the Government in public culture etc.
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APPENDICES

(1) ARTS AND HERITAGE POLICY
(Quoted from the Ministry Of Information And The Arts. Reference code : MITA H01.002)

Introduction:
1. The Singapore Ministry of Information and The Arts (MITA) is responsible for the promotion of the performing arts, the visual arts, the literary arts and an awareness of our Asian heritage. MITA performs these functions at two levels. At the first level, MITA provides the general direction and formulates, monitors and reviews national policies for the promotion of the arts and heritage. It interfaces with other Ministries and countries, and sets policy on government expenditures on arts and heritage. The Ministry is responsible for the efficient and effective use of public funds and the Minister is answerable to questions on arts and heritage matters in Parliament.

2. At the second level, the actual implementation of National arts and heritage policies is carried out by two Statutory Boards: The National Arts Council (NAC) for the promotion of the arts and the National Heritage Board (NHB) for the promotion or heritage. The operation of each Statutory Board is governed by a Statute. The Board members are appointed by the Minister.

3. NAC is the umbrella body for the promotion of the arts. It organises major activities such as the Singapore Festival of Arts, the Festival of Asian Performing Arts and the Young People's Theatre. It also provides assistance to artists and art organisations. The NHB is the umbrella body for the promotion of Singapore's and Asian cultural and historical heritage among Singaporeans, particularly the younger generations. It collects, preserves and exhibits works of arts, artefacts and significant historical documents concerning Singapore, South-east Asia and Asia. It disseminates its collection through exhibitions and publications.
The Vision:
4. It is MITA's vision to help make Singapore a culturally and artistically vibrant society, whose citizens are aware and proud of our rich Asian heritage. We also aim to make Singapore a regional and international centre for the arts, taking advantage of our strategic location, excellent infrastructure and a stable, efficient and transparent government. We hope to provide a window to introduce Asian arts and civilisations to our visitors from other parts of the world.

5. A cultural vibrancy society should have a large number of arts and cultural activities ranging in variety and quality from the popular to the classical, from ethnic to cosmopolitan, from conservative to Avant-garde and from amateur to international standards. There should also be a wide base of practitioners, audience and supporters and active discussions, previews, and reviews of art and heritage activities among the population.

6. A regional and international art centre should have excellent infrastructures, good promoters a wide range of activities and programmes, a large pool of local, regional and international artists and audience. It should also have an active programme of art exhibitions, art auctions and international art fairs participated by local, regional and international players.

General Policy Approaches

Tripartite Participation:
7. It recognises that the promotion of arts and heritage could not be done by the government alone. To be effective, we should involve also the arts and heritage community and the public.

8. The government's role is to create a conducive environment for the people to participate in various arts and heritage activities. This includes the provision of the necessary infrastructure such as building of museums and performance venues, the provision of assistance to artists and the arts and heritage community such as project grants, training grants, publication grant and housing for art and heritage organisations. It also organises festivals, competitions and exhibitions.
9. The arts and heritage community plays an important role in arousing the interests of the public in arts and heritage matters, in identifying and nurturing talents and in organising various programmes. They are assisted by the government on the one hand and by the general public including the media on the other.

10. The corporate citizens play a vital role in providing financial support to the arts and heritage community as sponsors or donors to their programmes and activities. Individual members of the public can provide moral support as audience to performances, visitors to exhibitions and buyers of art works. They can also help the arts and heritage organisations as members, organisers and helpers. Last but not least, they could help generate discussions among themselves, their families, friends and colleagues on issues related to arts and heritage matters. This would serve to promote and sustain wide-spread interests in these matters.

11. The media plays a significant role in providing news coverage, interviews, feature articles, previews and reviews of performances and exhibitions. As most of the arts and heritage organisations in Singapore are still amateur in status, they could not afford to buy advertisements in the media or engage professional PR agencies to promote their programmes.

Open Door:
12. Singapore is an open society. The people are constantly exposed to cultures from all parts of the world. We welcome this and provide encouragements and incentives to promoters and organisers of such activities. We, however, do not allow works which portray or promote disorderliness, liberal sex or incite racial or religious disharmony.

13. We maintain cordial relationship with all countries in the world.

14. We encourage and help Singapore artists to learn and work in other countries, and welcome talented foreign artists and persons associated with the arts or arts trade to work or reside in Singapore.

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