PERFORMING THE SINGAPORE STATE
1988-1995

Wm. Ray Langenbach
B-5-6 Menara Pelangi
8 Lorong Ang Seng 2
Brickfields 50470 K.L. Malaysia
Tel/Fax: 603-2274-8231 M: 012-970-1014

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This dissertation is my original work,
extcept for those citings from other works as indicated,
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William Ray Langenbach
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ABSTRACT

The ephemeral and ungraspable moment of performance has ramifications that extend far beyond its immediate time and place. This dissertation explores performances in Singapore as indicators of divergent visions of the nation-state. During 1993-94, 'performance art' and Forum Theatre provided an arena for a convergence and collision of imaginings and desires for civil society, held on the one hand by a small group of ruling Peoples Action Party (PAP) politicians, and on the other, by a small group of progressive artists and other intellectuals. To understand the ways in which the government and artists contested (or, in some cases, agreed to not contest) the cultural ground requires an examination of performance as a semiotic mode in public life, a genre in art, and an instrument of cultural politics.

A study of performance alone cannot sufficiently reveal the subtleties of governmental and artistic agency. The government and artists have mobilized specific figures of speech from a repertoire developed over centuries. These tropes are analysed for their uses, their performative instrumentality, and their discursive power.

Finally, tropes and performances coalesce and disseminate prevailing national, regional, and global ideologies. Through an understanding of their ideological import, we can situate specific tropes and performances in the full complexity of the socio-political moment, and reveal the sensitivities and desires that in 1994 drove the government to stigmatise Forum Theatre and performance art as capable of 'agitating' audiences, 'propagating' deviant social or religious information, and 'subverting' the state.

This dissertation examines the power of aesthetic forms, and the aesthetics of power. Competing notions of performance in Singapore led to a cultural crisis in 1993-94. That historical punctum and its ramifications constitutes the primary object of this study, and is presented as a significant indicator of the state of the Singapore state at that time.
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation opens with a 'Singapore story': the narration of a series of events that took place in Singapore in the first hours of 1994. In the final two chapters, it returns to this same story with critical annotation that complexifies the initial narration provided below. Sandwiched between these two recountings are chapters that introduce the critical theories applied to this analysis, and others that lay out the social, political, cultural and performative frames through which the story is retold.

A SINGAPORE STORY: "a performing body in perishable space"

One might claim in retrospect that the steps were already painted on the floor when Josef Ng Sing Chor and Shannon Tham presented their performance art works early in the morning of 1 January, 1994, at the 5th Passage Contemporary Art Space. A small crowd of about 30-40 people, a press photographer and a reporter from the tabloid press were still in attendance. The extra effort proved to be worth their while. The press reports and photographs of Ng's and Tham's performances, particularly one photograph of Ng with his back turned to the audience, buttocks showing, that were published two days later, resulted in two arrests and the closing of the 5th Passage gallery. Over the succeeding weeks the Artist’s General Assembly (hereafter referred to as the AGA), the weeklong art festival in which Ng and Tham performed, functioned as a strange attractor in a dynamic system. The AGA and its aftermath was the exception that articulated the cultural norm in Singapore of the mid-1990s, parenthetically framing all subsequent art events.

When taking over the office from the first generation Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, on 28 November 1990, the "Second Lap" Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had promised a kinder, gentler, more consultative and participatory approach to the management of civil society and culture, accompanied by a loosening of censorship guidelines (Goh in Chong, 1991:148). The subsequent events over New Years' night 1993/4 revealed a different face of the Goh government, and had an impact on the arts in Singapore seemingly out of reasonable scale to the events themselves.

What is difficult to communicate now, nine years later, was the tone of early 1994. A pallor of bureaucratic dread descended on a small, creative, politically naïve community of artists. The government called in the police, who took statements and brought charges against Ng and Iris Tan, the Manager of 5th Passage. Three weeks later, the government stigmatised an entire art form as having the potential to 'agitate' the public, 'propagate' deviant messages and 'subvert' the government. The arts community simply buckled, mounting no organised resistance against the orchestrated administrative assault.

The most riveting performances of 1994 moved from art schools, galleries, and theatres into the offices of the government bureaucracy, police stations, and the courts. The government appropriated the space created by participatory performance, intervening in the events while excluding others from doing so. Vital civil society forms became the object of renewed government surveillance and scrutiny. Artists became audience to the theatre of the state, sitting in the High Court, witnessing the performances of attorneys, prosecutors and justices, mulling over parliamentary speeches and ministerial pronouncements, undergoing police interrogations, etc. The art scene became the enactment of a film-noir script, and the term 'performance art' took on the aura of a criminal enterprise or a forbidden ideology.

Government officials attended an unpublicized meeting with the artists who were sworn to secrecy concerning the existence of the meeting and the agreements made there. One well-known theatre company began to reject phone calls from friends and colleagues, refusing to discuss its on-going negotiations with government officials. The telephones of artists and academics were reported to be tapped, and they began to look over their shoulders during conversations or lapse into silence when a stranger sat at a neighboring table in a coffee shop. Documentation of sensitive performances was secreted away in fear that it

2 The government declaration, released through Singapore Press Holdings read:

[...] concerned that new art forms, such as "performance art" and "forum theatre" which have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation pose dangers to public order, security and decency, and much greater difficulty to the licensing authority. The performances may be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues, or to propagate the beliefs and messages of deviant social or religious groups, or as a means of subversion (The Straits Times (Staff) 21 January, 1994 (22 Jan.) emphasis added.).
would be taken by the police as court evidence. Some former colleagues were labeled government spies, others as too contentious. Evidence and tactics were daily mulled over.

Public universities and art schools shunned artists and academics associated with the AGA, and a group of students attacked their lecturer for having taught them performance art. Letters appeared in Letters-to-the-Editor columns attacking an art form the writers had never seen, while supportive letters languished unpublished on the editors’ desks. Some artists and theatre practitioners, seeking to distance themselves and their practices from the implicated artists, attacked their colleagues and performance art as a form, arguing that a few of its practitioners had set back the freedoms of all. Some intellectuals claimed that the government was justified in clamping down, and buttressed government positions with academic discourse. Concerned that they would not obtain licenses to perform, performance artists removed the term 'performance art' from their résumés and grant applications. They changed the descriptions of their performance art works to 'dance', 'theatre', 'movement', and 'action'. An entire art form slipped into the shadows.

Like the dominant narratives of the state that will be described here, the preceding three-page counter-narration of these key events offers a broad sweep of a crisis and a sequentialisation of events that is limited by its narrative structure, invoking spectres of causality and continuity. It assumes coherent and unproblematised intentionality among the protagonists, straightening the crooked paths of causality, and untangling the double binds of competing intentions and desires that emerged in the 'real-time' events of 1994. However, this short narration hopefully succeeds in evoking the 'tone' of a collective crisis that characterised a particular historical moment, and teases forth problems and themes to which the following chapters respond.

These events have yet to be critically theorised. Singapore performance art has to date elicited little historicisation or analysis, perhaps because of the suppression of the first such attempt in a 1994 issue of Commentary, a public culture journal, published by the National University of Singapore Society. The issue was censored by the Society's own Management Committee, and the editors resigned, later publishing the contents as a book.
in 1996 (Krishnan, et al. 1996:4-7). The repercussions that followed had a dampening effect on the critical reflection on these events, on 'performance art', and Singapore culture as a whole.

This dissertation offers an alternative narrative of the events of early 1994 to that offered by the Singapore government. It approaches the problem of how and why this sequence of events came about through analyses of the performance of the government and its agencies, and performances in civil society, especially the field of 'performance art' and the theatrical techniques of Forum Theatre. It historicises performance art in Singapore from 1988 through 1995, especially the events during and surrounding the Artist's General Assembly (New Years 1993-94). This historicisation has required:

- elucidating the relationship of state ideology and official history in Singapore to culture and performance;
- identifying the manner that state ideology and official history is disseminated through visual and verbal performative tropes;
- theorising why Forum Theatre and 'performance art', and the performances by Ng and Tham at the AGA over New Year's 1993-4 in particular, were seen by the Singapore government to "agitate" the public, "propagate deviant" ideologies and "subvert" the Singapore state as currently constituted;
- describing the manner in which the events of the AGA (and earlier interventions of the government into civil society cultural initiatives) led to tactical positioning by artists and other intellectuals in their relationship to the government and to other artists;
- speculating as to what the AGA indicates about the tactical positioning of artists and other civil society intellectuals in their relationship to the Singapore state as currently constituted.

This dissertation details and annotates the complex relations between the performance of the administrative state and performance in civil society, with particular attention to the

3 One of the editors, Sharaad Kuttan, a significant young intellectual carrying a Malaysian passport, who had undertaken fourteen years of his secondary, tertiary and graduate education in Singapore, found his visa revoked shortly thereafter.

4 The term, 'administrative state' is used here to distinguish a generalised framework of governmental
avoidance, resistance, alignment and complicity that marks the positioning of artists and other intellectuals in relation to each other and to state policies. To appreciate the manner that linguistic operations generate socio-political conditions, it is important to elucidate the dynamics between syntactics—semantics—pragmatics in aesthetic and social performances. Without an appreciation for the semantic functioning of linguistic *performatives*, for example, it can appear that the relations between government and artists function at the level of social dialectics only. Such an understanding tends to position the government at the *hub* of the state, with artists at the periphery or limen, which—as is argued in Chapter I—supports the government’s imagining of their own power ‘tropography’. Three other problems crystallize around such a mapping:

First, a model of Singapore performance as simply oppositional to the government fits a stereotype of the ‘liminal norm’. Jon McKenzie has argued that performance art, an art form generally holding a critical relationship to artistic canons, has ironically been canonised *by virtue of its alterity* (McKenzie 2000:29ff).

Secondly, as will be argued in Chapter I and Chapter II, artists and the administration more often than not respond to a *shared* national discourse of tropes ideologies, histories, and mythologies, at the same time they are being engaged in various dialectical relations. Government and cultural workers tend to consume and reproduce the same national performance from that in civil society. Chan Heng Chee has used the term to indicate a government with “increased power of the administrative and bureaucratic sector”, the reduction of the role of the elected politician in a de facto “non-competitive” one-party state (Chan 1971:51), the rise of the role of the technocrat over the political “mobilizer”, and the shift from a politics of “conciliation to a politics of expertise” with the capacity to “plan and implement with complete and irreversible power” (Chan 1997/1975:295-6). This dissertation uses the term to refer to the space that has resulted from these adaptations filled by a standing government, in contradistinction to the space of a ‘civil state’. For a more detailed discussion of the term, ‘state’, see Chapter II.

5 ‘Performance’ is a term used in this dissertation for a field of power/knowledge, ideological production and dissemination through individual, group, technological and virtual agency.

6 This dissertation does not accept syntactics, semantics and pragmatics as inviolable distinctions, but will purport to show the slippages of each category into the others; for example, the manner that pragmatics is determined at the level of syntax, while semantics are determined by the ideological frames that inflect pragmatics.

7 The neologism, *tropography*, puns *trope* and *topography*, suggesting a linguistic spatialisation or mapping. See Chapter I for further discussion and examples.
narratives and ideologies, albeit from different positions of access to the instruments of power, force, resources and authentication.

Finally, there is a tendency of writers to either apologise for the authoritarian excesses of the Singapore government, or present an over-determined narrative of the PAP government's betrayal of liberal democracy. The first view is naïve, while the latter ignores the implications of the rise of a bourgeois economy and cultural economy in Asia and in Singapore. It also ignores the long history of bourgeois intellectual ambivalence in Western cultures (Berman 1988; Blum 1996; Petropoulos 2000), in which a progressive intelligentsia represents itself as oppositional to the values and interests of the bourgeoisie, while using its privileged access to information and resources to iterate and expand bourgeois economic hegemony. 'Bourgeois ambivalence' factored in the early consolidation of the People's Action Party, and among independent Singapore intellectuals since.

For its part, the government has instituted means by which to advance the interests of not only the nation as a whole, but also the interests of their own 'class-fragment' (Chua 1995). It has consistently exploited its monopoly over public media to convince the populace (including intellectuals) that the interests of the ruling party are in the interests of the nation. As demonstrated in studies elsewhere, the intelligentsia, by virtue of its massive information consumption, its common class ties with ruling elites, and its desire to maintain its privileges, is often more prone to indoctrination than less educated sectors of society, and tends to display an inordinate capacity for denial. Singapore intellectuals working in state-linked institutions, such as the press, local publication industry, schools and universities, share class, ideological and linguistic affiliations with the ruling party, and thereby have access to wealth, power, and the instruments of information dissemination. The civil service intelligentsia oscillates between concern for its rice-bowl "in a one company town" (Chua 1998, personal communication), and the dreams they share with less-institutionalised intellectuals and artists for a vital and pluralistic civil society. This ambivalence indicates the dangers of intellectual life in Singapore, where the

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8 See the discussion of the place of the Singapore press at the beginning of Chapter V.

government or intellectuals themselves preemptively foreclose arguments that are at odds with those of the ruling party.

To elucidate and complexify the picture of cultural production, circulation and regulation in Singapore, this dissertation will focus on the semiotics of public and official performance and performance art, that is, on the micro-cultural politics of contemporary instrumental bureaucratic and corporate performances on the one hand, and a particular rhizome of civil society performances on the other.

In the formation of a corporative socialist economy in a city-state with few natural resources, but vitally positioned at nexus of shipping routes with a natural harbour, the government and intellectuals viewed the performance of the work force as the essential component to survival and success. For the government of a New Industrialised Economy (NIE), the term 'performance' became equated with performance indicators and productivity assessments. The government's adoption of Taylorist and classical Fayolean management in the workplace found co-travelers in communist, socialist, and liberal concerns with increasing class disparities, union representation, and the exploitation of foreign labourers. In the cultural field, such concerns infused Chinese language theatre during the first two decades of independence. This formative period of national manifestation was followed by the belated introduction in the business sector of theories of Performance Management and Total Quality Management (TQM) (McKenzie 2001), while the art and theatre sector correspondingly saw the arrival of less overtly ideological participatory performance forms, inflected with bourgeois liberalism (for example, performance art, Forum Theatre and some forms of rock music).

In light of government policies through the 1980s designed to proletarianise and Taylorise the island’s industrial work force\(^{10}\), it is perhaps consistent that it would also have concerns over the deleterious effects on the economy of all forms of participatory performance culture. However, it is not particularly surprising that a state committed to an advanced late-capitalist bourgeois economy would also be fertile ground for the development of performance art, an urban-based, middle class art form, that ambivalently embraces and problematises the commodification of the body, its gestures, biological

\(^{10}\) See discussion of these policies in Chapters II-III.
residues, and products. So, the PAP government has found itself in an interesting

dilemma: the very economic globalisation that they have consistently promulgated has led
to the expansion of the very cultural pluralism that stimulates their anxieties.

It follows that, for all its marginalisation and stigmatisation in Singapore, performance art,
represents a core form of cultural experience in Singapore, in line with the overall thrust of
the teleological developmentalism\(^\text{11}\) that has been embraced by the government
(although artists as a group are generally guided by more progressive, liberal humanist
values than are accepted by the government). This may help explain how this ostensibly
marginal cultural form could provoke a social rupture so out of scale with the size of the
actual event, and why this rupture was then rapturously embraced, promulgated and
disseminated as a crisis of 'agitation', 'subversion', 'propagation' by the PAP government\(^\text{12}\)
— the latest in a three decade lineage of such engineered cultural crises. These events
suggest that the AGA may reveal an ideological and performative substratum in some way
indicative of the Singaporean experience of modernity. Performance art at the AGA
condensed larger cultural trends and tendencies, providing a living portrait in real time of
the state of the state in 1994.

Bringing performance theory to bear on cultural politics and political culture in a specific
national milieu articulates linkages with discourses of ideology formation, nation building,
power consolidation, social pragmatism, and social engineering. It also provides

\(^\text{11}\) The term teleological developmentalism is derived from Barr's description of the teleology of "Whiggish
progressivism", but the two have different connotations. While teleological developmentalism connotes nation
building and modernist industrialization, "Whiggish progressivism" (Barr 2000) carries associations with the
liberal tradition of social progress. For this reason, the more general term, teleological developmentalism is
usually more useful for a description of the social and economic goals of the Singapore administrative state,
while the more liberal social goals of civil society intellectuals can be described as 'progressivist', with
liberalist tendencies intact. However, upon close analysis, dualistic distinctions between the progressivist
goals of artists on the one hand and the developmental goals of the administrative state on the other tend to
break down.

\(^\text{12}\) The notion of social 'rupture' and 'crisis' is derived from the work of Victor Turner, who adapted van
Gennep's terms ('preliminal', 'liminal', 'postliminal') to his theory that performance involved first a "breach"
in an accepted norm, leading to a 'crisis', followed by either a redress, a reintegration, or recognition of the
reiterated his theory with developments and extrapolations in his later writings, and at least among
performance art theorists, became synonymous with it. Schechner (1985, 1988, 1993) and others have further
developed and adapted the theory. See further discussion at the end of Chapter VII Section 1, f.n.\#6, where
Zizek's role of 'desire' as cultural surplus (a translation from Marxist economics) is introduced into Turner's
equation, and the concept of rapture/rupture is elaborated.
articulates a complex picture of the relationship between artist-intellectuals and an administrative state. As a one-party corporatist autocracy, Singapore represents a unique blending of socialism and capitalism. The local political culture is influenced by two centuries of colonial rule, and the government's embrace of the Washington nexus of economic globalisation, laced with strong ambivalence toward vibrant civil society and liberal democratic ideals. Correspondingly, the study of Singapore culture and aesthetics can draw productively from both socialist as well as capitalist models of cultural development, and from democracies as well as dictatorships.

The official discourses of politics, sociology and cultural policy fall into the lineage of Western instrumental rationality, their value gauged by criteria of observable and reproducible effect or *effectiveness*. The term, *teleological developmentalism* is thus used here to refer to both a representational complex of instrumental rationality and an official aesthetics infused with Socialist Realism, involving a romantic imagining of an ideal state that is based on a 'realist' or pragmatic representation of the status quo\(^\text{13}\).

Alongside the important role of performance in cultural politics, the deployment of linguistic performatives also play a significant role in political culture. Linguistic performance and developmental discourses are mutually determining by virtue of the transformation of 'constative' or descriptive utterance into 'performative'\(^\text{14}\) utterance, all within the scope of a teleological 'chronotype'\(^\text{15}\). Figures of speech produce the very telos that *directs* public discourse. They also have the effect of dissembling the ideological nature of development by giving prevailing arrangements of power, class and ethnic relations the appearance of a status quo 'factual state,' mystifying the role of 'state desire' in the maintenance of those arrangements.

\(^\text{13}\) Socialist Realism is discussed in Chapter II.

\(^\text{14}\) Austin's notions of 'performative' and 'constative' utterance are discussed in Chapter III.

\(^\text{15}\) Bender and Wellbery describe their coinage of "chronotypes" as "models or patterns" by which we continuously and repeatedly "fabricate" or "improvise" time at "multiple individual, social, and cultural levels" from "an already existing repertoire of cultural forms and natural phenomena". In short, all templates of temporal phenomena are 'chronotypes'. The purpose of the term is to indicate that time is not only an observable phenomenon, but also a convention of representation (Bender and Wellbery 1991: 1-15).
To date there has been little critical literature on either the impact of performance on Singapore political culture\textsuperscript{16}, or on the place of performance art in the larger picture of contemporary Singapore art and cultural production. Virtually all the literature focusing on the field of performance art uses examples from the United States, Europe, Japan and Australia, and most recently, China. Singapore, known primarily over the past fifty years for its globalised, economy-driven politics, and its middle-man marketing of the arts of the region, is often passed over in international studies of performance and visual art. To date it has not been a site of particular interest to international theatre and performance theorists, although there has been some recent attention, limited primarily to the international theatre productions of director, Ong Keng Sen (Bharucha 2000), and the late Kuo Pao Kun (C.J. W.-L. Wee and Lee C.K. 2003).

While not the earliest in the region, in the observations of this writer, the Singapore performance art scene from 1988 and 1994 was one of the most concentrated and energetic outcroppings of the art form in Southeast Asia, and deserves a much closer look. The performance art traditions that predated Singapore's include Japan's, which can be traced back to the 1950s, and the Philippines in the 1970s, if we include the works of David Medalla in England (Brett 1995), and diverse outcroppings of Philippine political performance in the 1980s. For the most part, the mid-late 1980s appear to have been when


Recently, Lucy Davis, Editor of Forum on Contemporary Art and Society (FOCAS) has been holding public panels and publishing articles that focus on various aspects of performance and the state (Davis, L.. 2001, Editor. No. 1 & 2; 2002, No. 3). The many articles on performance and performers that proliferated in The Arts Magazine, the official publicity organ of The Esplanade (Theatres on the Bay), before it ceased publication in 2003, tended to be primarily promotional rather than critical and, because the magazine was an organ of the Ministry of Information and the Arts, avoided discussions of the impact of performance on social or political culture. The Arts Magazine explicitly did not cover performance art. Performance art has to date elicited only scattered articles, collections of newspaper clippings, and one important collection of interviews, compiled in a catalogue for the "openends" documentation exhibition of performance art in Singapore, 7-21 September 2001, organized at The Substation gallery in 2001 (The Substation 2001).

In-depth studies of Singapore visual art have generally focused on object-based traditions, the oeuvre of specific individual painters or groups (Sabapathy, T.K. 1998; Sabapathy, T.K. 2000), or overall histories of the field (Sabapathy, T.K. 1991; Sabapathy, T.K. and Redza Piyadasa 1983; Hsü, M. 1999; Kwok 1996).
performance art gained a foothold in continental Asia, coinciding with the form's arrival in Singapore.\(^{17}\)

Existing political and sociological commentary in Singapore has not included a theoretical model of performance per se in linguistic, sociological, historical, political, economic, and cultural analysis. Only in theatre studies has the nature of performance been theorised, and there only in the narrow bandwidth of what actually happens on stage, in audience reception, and applicable government regulations.\(^{18}\) While stage production and reception is studied, the semiotics of the surrounding milieus of daily social life, the bureaucracy, the government, the press, the courts, the police and the military have not been included in these studies. The aesthetics of bureaucratic and governmental performance have been

\(^{17}\) Japan was the first 'Asian' nation to take to a lineage of actions inspired by Dada and Surrealism, during the period of the American occupation. Various termed 'actions' can be traced in Japan to Gutai artists, Shiraga Kazuo's *Challenging Mud and Please Come in* (1955) and Murakami Saburo's *At One moment Opening Six Holes* (1955). These forms proliferated during the following decade, spawning a number of artist's groups, including Zerokai (Group Zero), Kyucha-ha (Kyushi School), Neo-Dadaism Organizers (or Neo-Dada Organizers), Zerojigen (Zero Dimension), and Taka-Aka-Naka (Hi-Red-Center) (Osaki Shinichiro.1998: 121-157).

The 1970s "events" in England, by the Philippine artist, David Medalla, grew out of his kinetic installations and machine events of the 1960s (Brett. 1995), and his links with Fluxus and Informel. Medalla influenced other artists in the region, including Singaporean, Tang Da Wu, who met him in the early 1980s in England (Tang 1998, personal communication). Perhaps the earliest Southeast Asian outcroppings of performance art were in the Philippines, with its close links with activism, as in the street-dramas and performance-for-video work during the 1970-1980s of the Philippines Educational Theater Association (PETA), first established in 1967 (van Erven, 1992:19ff.). Yuan Mor'O mentions but does not document the occurrence of 'happenings' there in the 1960s, and the "re-surge" of "performance art" in the 1980s (Juan Mor'O 2000:35). Singaporean Vincent Leow points to a performance in 1985 by Philippine artist, Alwin Reamillo, as an important inspiration for his own performances that began in 1988 (Leow 2000, personal communication).


In Thailand, Chumpon Apisuk refers to a 1986 performance for video work by Apinan Poshyananda, "Teaching Art to the Bangkok Cock, which referenced the 1965 performance (26/11/65) at the Galerie Schmela, Dusseldorf by Joseph Bueys, Explaining Paintings To A Dead Hare. Apinan's piece was part of an event organized by installation artist, Kamol Phaosawasdi (Apisuk. 1999:88). Vasan Sitthiket claims 1981 as the start of his public poetry and a short play that led to his political demonstrations in the streets and his performance art works in the late 1980s ("Artist's Statement", in Shimoda 1998:12). Chapter VI offers a general reflection on the arrival of performance art in Southeast Asia.

\(^{18}\) While Ong Keng Sen has referred to government actions as a form of 'performance' in the context of censorship and regulatory activities, he does not take the next step of closely analysing and theorising government or bureaucratic performances (Ong 1994).
considered through their political and economic instrumentality\textsuperscript{19} but not as performances in their own right. In short, researchers have not used performance theory in their attempts to understand Singapore as a polity.

A number of conditions and personal experiences motivated this dissertation. During the years 1993-1997, I worked in Singapore as Lecturer in the Division of Art, School of Humanities, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. I have been personally involved in many of the events described here, curating, documenting, exhibiting, living and simply spending time with the artists included in this study. I was the curator for the AGA Video Screenings in 1993, and presented a performance art work and a paper as part of the programme. I played an active role in the planning and tactics of that and succeeding artistic events and exhibitions until 1998\textsuperscript{20}.

Marked by the overt deployment of propaganda and indoctrination as a conceptual and aesthetic device, my own performance art practice since 1985 — — informs this writing. Coming to maturity in the United States during the period of the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War (and so many other covert and overt American wars), during which the United States 'matured' into the world's premier \textit{propaganda society}, were formative. Also influential were my undergraduate studies in comparative theology, and twelve years of residence in Southeast Asia. All these have influenced my view of performance as a juncture of practice, theory, socio-political context, code, and meta-code.

I have gathered the primary and secondary source materials for this dissertation over a period of ten years. The primary sources include direct observation, video documentation, official documents, recollections of events, and personal communications. I am deeply indebted to many informants over the years for sharing their impressions and analyses of these events, some as they were unfolding in time, and others in retrospect. Because of my participation in the events discussed, formal interviews rapidly devolved into

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  \item Since 1998 I have been limited by the Singapore government to seven-day visits, requiring special processing at immigration checkpoints, soon after the denial of a Public Entertainment License for one of my performance art works that year.
\end{itemize}
conversations. Events and conversations that took place without video documentation or notes have been recalled by the writer or others after the passage of intervening years. In these cases, the writer has sought to obtain corroboration of the citings when possible. I have drawn on many secondary sources: academic studies, national and international newspaper and magazine reports, government releases, email communications, worldwide web downloads, underground articles, letters, and video or audio documentations by other parties.

My direct participation in the events described here raises a problem of objectivity. In my capacity as video curator, together with the 5th Passage organisers, I decided to display the videotape of Marvin Rigg's film *Tongues Untied*, that had been banned and erased by the Censorship Board in its erased condition. The display of this erased tape stimulated sensationalised press coverage that in turn, increased antipathy between the artists and the press. So, by now writing this history, I am, in effect, 'bookending' these events within a discourse that is complicit in the production of the events described. It could be claimed that this study is indicative of my Machiavellian desire to produce a cultural rupture, for which I now provide the hermeneutic 'voice-over'. This dissertation is no less *ouroboric* in its construction of history than are some of the government discourses critically presented and annotated here.

Theoretically, my presence in Singapore during the period of these events, and my writing of this dissertation now, can be seen to be a function of globalisation and post-colonialism. My focus on Singapore as a model of performance theory falls into the orientalist tradition of globalisation that has included the incursion of previous Western performance anthropologists in Southeast Asia. This dissertation is a product of both the modernist Western embrace of Asian performance models, and Singapore's embrace of Western modernism as instrument and ideology for its own purposes. However, as fascinating and challenging as they would be to explore here, my orientalism and authorial complicity in the events described are more fruitfully left to more objective researchers.

21 Derived from the Greek figure of the Ouroborus, a snake eating its own tail, in this coinage an *ouroboric* text is one that reflexes upon itself and consumes itself. See Chapter III for further discussion.
Finally, because the AGA and earlier events discussed in this dissertation elicited government reprobation and legal action, transforming the ‘theatre of the streets’ into a ‘theatre of the courts’, the description of some events remains sensitive or dangerous to some of those involved. For example, laws regulating offences such as 'Contempt of Court' limit what can be related concerning the court cases of Josef Ng and Iris Tan. The Official Secrets Act covers the public display of minutes of meetings within public institutions, including universities and think-tanks. Such regulations limit the scope of this and subsequent studies in Singapore, until those laws and extra-legal regulations controlling information are repealed or rewritten by a government more interested in the inscription of accurate histories. Some historical details and speculations are from sources that wish to remain anonymous, and have not always been possible to corroborate. They are included here because nations, like individuals, suffer from short-term memory-loss. An important part of micro-historical annotation must be the preservation of unverified/unverifiable perceptions and speculations for the later interpretation by other researchers.

OVERVIEW

Part 1: Setting The Scene focuses first on the manner that projections of space and visuality map the nation. It then traces the trajectory of the ideological complex, 'teleological developmentalism', and its relationship to 'instrumental performance'. It introduces three frames of performance studies relevant to this dissertation: 'linguistic performance', 'organisational performance', and 'performance art'.

Part 2: Performance of the Administrative State focuses on bio-determinist and historical performance indicators used to map the body politic. It begins with an analysis of the government's taxonomic mapping of the genetically endowed body as a locus of identity, desire, and productivity. It then proceeds to close readings of historical literature and rhetorical performance aligned to the ideological complex introduced in Part 1.

Part 3: Performance Art turns to the arrival in Singapore of the late-modernist genre, 'performance art', focusing on those works that provide points of convergence and collision between the government and artists. The performance, *Brother Cane*, is depicted
as an ambivalent intervention into the spectacle of administrative state controls on 'feminised' cultural performance (in this case, homosexual acts). The dissertation concludes with an annotated recounting of a government clampdown on participatory performance, and revisits the question of why performance art and Forum Theatre were considered to be methodologies for agitation, ideological propagation, and subversion.
Singapore was the Clapham Junction of empire in the east. It was the regional centre for imperial communications and education, publishing and translation. Yet, all these activities fostered, in spite of the battery of the colonial controls, a political and intellectual life of some breadth and liberality. This was in large part due to the fact that Singapore, in the century or so of its colonial existence, had revitalised much older and indigenous channels of transnational connections. By the early twentieth century, Singapore—more than Batavia, Calcutta, or Shanghai—was at the heart of the intellectual world of Asia. It was, as the kingdoms of the western archipelago declined, a pre-eminent centre of Malay culture and literature. It was the central locus of a host of overlapping migrant worlds: those stretching from China to its Nanyang; those from the old centres of Islam to its eastern world; networks of trade and labour that came from all parts of India and Ceylon. These links were not merely those of homeland and sojourn; Singapore was a centre for intricate, crosscutting through connections. It was a public sphere where information and ideas from outside lay in creative tension with an emerging local experience, and many rich innovations in thought and behaviour arose out of this (Harper, T.N., 2001:7).
CHAPTER I

SCOPOPHILIA: SINGAPORE AS OCULAR TROPOGRAPHY

Unlike most nations, and perhaps this has something to do with size, the writing of Singapore is the writing of immediate and multiple contiguities. When trying to look at Singapore, the observer incessantly finds him/herself slipping across the border to other localities. ‘Gazing at’ immediately becomes ‘glancing off’. The notion of an interior national discourse is difficult to maintain in an intensely international city-state entrépôt with an export driven economy.

Small as the island may be, it takes a little longer to cross from shore to shore each year: in 1967 Singapore was 587 square kilometres in size; by 1999, it had expanded to 647 square kilometres, a net increase of more than 10% (Tan, 1999:31), and another 100 square kilometres of sea is expected to be ‘reclaimed’ in the future with redistributed debris. However, the potential for physical growth is limited. Even essential resources such as water and fresh foodstuffs must be imported daily, mostly from Malaysia.

Singapore stories generally begin elsewhere, whether it is the story of the populace itself, or its cultures and economics, our attention migrates out to Nusantara (the greater Malay archipelago), China, England, the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. If we look beyond typical discourses, we always end up somewhere else. But that ‘somewhere else’ is an uncanny mirror in which we see reflected the reverse image of Singapore looking out from its ‘hub’. And as the object of our gaze from outside, Singapore appears as the imagined modernist 'other' that is so unsettling to Western and Asian theorists alike,

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1 As introduced in the notes of the Introduction, the neologism, *tropography*, puns trope and topography, suggesting a linguistic spatialisation or mapping.

2 Those who attended the 2002 National Day Parade received the first available bottles of reconstituted run-off, paradoxically named “New Water”, intended as a replacement for some of the water piped across the causeway to Singapore from Malaysian reservoirs in Johor.
because it is never quite 'Us' and never quite 'Other'. Rather, it is a site between, a
'passage', infused with a of scopophilic erotics.

One of the many Singapore stories is that of the transformation of the "philosophical city",
and intellectual centre for Southeast Asia, into a "garrison state" of deterrence and
foreclosure. The transformation has been carried out in part through the deployment of
two related performative mappings: one scopophilic/architectonic and the other
rhetorical; that is, one topographical and the other tropographical. Both are performative:
one a performance of engineered architectural spaces, the other is the performance of the
rhetor. Both provide discursive mappings — the overlay of a discourse on a landscape.
This chapter is concerned with the former: scopophilic/architectonic 'mapping', while
rhetorical 'mappings' are the focus of Chapter V.

THE "RED DOT"
In August 1998, three months after taking office, following Soeharto’s forced resignation,
Indonesian President Habibie, irritated by the Singapore government’s less than
enthusiastic embrace of a post-Soeharto Indonesia, referred to Singapore threateningly and
derisively as that "little red dot" (Lee K.Y. 2000:319-320) surrounded by the green seas of
the Malay archipelago. It was a picture that the Singapore government enthusiastically
adopted, as it synchronised with their own narration of the state that has survived by
"overcoming the odds". By embracing the implied interpellation of the 'exceptional' state,
the Singapore government integrated the denigrating tropography of vulnerability into its
policy of 'Total Security' that is comprised of two components: 'Total Defence' and

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3 Michael van Langenberg, 1999, personal communication. Langenberg's characterization derives from
Brown's contention that the Singapore 'corporatist' state has deployed a 'garrison ideology':
to buttress Singaporean national political loyalty, with Singaporeans repeatedly being told
that they must rally behind the nation-state under PAP leadership so as to avoid the danger
of ethnic chaos which constituted the major threat to the survival of their small and fragile

4 The performance of the rhetor is the focus of Chapter V.

5 The trope of Singapore as a risky gamble, surviving by "overcoming the odds", was iterated in Lee Kuan
Yew's The Singapore Story, and the project to disseminate an official national historicisation, based on Lee's
text: the 'National Education' campaign of the mid-1990s. See Chapter V., Figure #16: flier for The Singapore
Story 3D experience: "Overcoming the Odds" (National Heritage Board 1997) and following discussion.
'Internal Stability' (Foo 2001:42)\(^6\). In 1999, Goh Chok Tong pointed out the need for a humble but prepared Singapore, recalling its taxonomic *difference* in the regional 'family'.

[H]owever well governed Singapore is, however strong our economy is, and however united our people are, we will be reminded from time to time that we are a little red dot, or an adik (younger brother), or a predominantly Chinese population, in a Muslim region (Yi Pheng Ho, 2000:42)

In 2001 Goh Chok Tong reiterated the theme, but as a view of a future marked by progressive diminishment:

Some 50 years from now, Singapore will be an even tinier red dot in terms of its population, compared to its bigger neighbours. While Singapore's future is hard to predict, one thing is for sure: future economic growth cannot be taken for granted, said Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.

[...]
Mr. Goh chose to cast his eyes on the unpredictable future. Mr. Goh noted Singapore's physical limits […] (Ng, *The Straits Times*, 29/3/01).

Three oft-repeated anxieties converge in these press reports: fears of an *unpredictable future*, *size anxiety*, and concerns about Singapore's *ethnic exceptionality* in the region. These are expressed through tropes of scale, vision, the gaze, and performance, underscoring a view of the given geographical condition through a frame of security and surveillance. The PAP government translates size anxiety into performance anxiety through the constant exhortations to the populace to work harder, achieve more, and acquiesce to management's exploitation of Singapore's "only resource": skilled, motivated, "cheap and docile labour" (Rodan 1989:86). Tim Huxley points out that

[t]he first 'fundamental principle' of [Singapore's] foreign policy is that as a small state, Singapore has no illusions about the state of our region or the world. The second principle is that Singapore must always maintain a credible and *deterrent military defence* as the fundamental underpinning for an effective foreign policy (Huxley, 2000:xix, emphasis added.).

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\(^6\) This embrace of a denigrating characterisation is done in much the same manner that abject social groups, such as blacks and homosexuals have appropriated the tropes ('nigger', 'faggot') used to stigmatise them (Parker and Segwick, 1995; Butler,1997).
The embrace of the "little red dot" trope serves, then, to produce a permanent state of impending crisis and anxiety, conducive to, and synchronised with, a general acceptance of the five components of "Total Defence":

- "Psychological Defence" (bolstering commitment to the nation),
- "Social Defence" (bolstering social cohesion),
- "Economic Defence" (ensuring survival of the economy),
- "Civil Defence" (protecting civilian lives),
- "Military Defence" (deterrence and aggressive force).

_Total Defence (TD)_ also includes a controversial policy of universal male _National Service (NS)_ (in the Armed Forces)_7_. Total Defence was first mooted in 1984 "to unite all sectors of society —government, business, and the people— in the defence of the country" (_Defence of Singapore 1994-95_, published by the Ministry of Defence, 1994, cited in Huxley, 2000:24). Singapore may be the most densely defended state in the world, spending more per capita on defence than any state except Israel and Qatar (Huxley 2000:xx). Singapore has developed a government-linked defence industry and "defence science organisation unparalleled in southeast Asia", that produces equipment according to national requirements and for export (Huxley, 2000:xx). The requirements of annual National Service tie all businesses and males directly to the government and to the national civil service bureaucracy during their most productive years. Analyses of civil society-state relations and labour relations must be seen within the larger context of corporate structures wedded to governments bureaucracies and a state run by a male citizen army and their female relations. The policy of military _deterrence_ (the presence of a strong defensive and offensive capability (Huxley, 2000)) has also been applied to all aspects of social life, and as we shall see, informs government interventions into civil society._8_

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7 The Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) was set up in February 1966. In 1965 an Israeli team came to Singapore to help set up the training syllabus and to train Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) instructors at SAFTI and remained until 1974 (Huxley, 2000:11). Their advice led to the establishment in 1967 of the first conscription into National Service of 18-year-old males (Huxley, 2000:13). This was expanded in 1970 with the _Enlistment Act of 1970_ under which all male Singapore citizens and sons of permanent residents are liable for National Service (NS) from the age of 16 1/2 through 40 (50 for officers). This requirement includes three months of Basic Military Training (BMT) as part of 2 1/2 years of service in one of the branches of the armed forces, followed by up to 40 days per year of reservist duty (Huxley, 2000:93-4).

8 See the discussion of 'deterrence' in Chapter VI and Chapter VII.
The image of the 'red dot' is linked to Goh’s "cast(ing) his eyes on the unpredictable future". Combined in this text are elements of present vision and future imagining. Both acts are 'foveal', meant to discern, identify, assess, judge, and, when necessary, to deter, or compel. This high-definition, discerning gaze at an object ‘dilates’ into an agonistic drama, producing the real out of lack with available resources. The future is imagined as a theatre of loss that is incessantly called upon to haunt and motivate the body politic in the present.

There is also something sexual and fascinating about this tiny hot, red g-spot visible against a cool green ground, something which makes those green seas recede into the background while the dot persists, fore-grounded, burned into the retina, as the very 'punctum' (Barthes, 1981:27) of South East Asia. Habibie’s image of this focal stain—a macula—was meant to discipline Singapore, but unintentionally reproduced the ‘exceptionality’ of the island nation that the PAP government has consistently promoted.

The trope of the ‘red dot’ is related to two other significant performative tropes deployed by the Singapore government: the regional or global hub and the helicopter view. The trope of the hub is used to refer to a vision of Singapore as a significant centre for the region in economics and culture. On 3 November 2001, Dr. Ow Chin Hock, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, spoke at the University of Bradford Graduation Ceremony of the need to expand on the (by then clichéd) trope of Singapore as an economic and cultural hub to become a 'talent hub', which would draw the best minds of the world to the island.

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9 The theatrical term, dilation, refers to a performer's expansion of physical presence into an exceptional and powerful embodied sign, that serves to entrance or seduce the spectator.

It is continuous mutation, growth taking place before our very eyes. [...] The tensions which secretly govern our normal way of being physically present come to the surface in the performer, become visible, unexpectedly.

The dilated body is a hot body [...] The dilated body is above all a glowing body [...] (Barba, 1991:54).

10 This notion of the 'talent hub' became a ubiquitous—and threatening—government theme, as the economic downturn of the late 1990s became a full recession in 2001, causing increasing numbers of Singaporeans to end up as unemployment statistics. The government’s response was to stimulate the economy by providing
[T]alent is mobile and can congregate in places that offer them the best opportunity for advancement and remuneration. As such, Singapore is facing a brain drain. Knowledge (is) now frequently referred to as the "fifth" factor of production, besides land, labour, capital and technology. We need to develop Singapore into a "talent hub".

 [...] Singapore has always been one of the main crossroads of east and west, being strategically placed on the major shipping routes. Over the years, we have built on this advantage, constructing a world-class air and sea transportation network, as well as a sound financial, physical and legal infrastructure to attract foreign investments[...].

To become a knowledge hub, we need to further build up our intellectual capital (Ow, 2001).

The rhetoric is revealing: Ow bends the ubiquitous trope of 'financial capital' into 'intellectual capital', which is expected, in turn, to reinvigorate the accumulation of 'financial capital'. The characterisation of a ‘commercial’ and 'knowledge hub' is an extension of the colonial period image of Singapore's central position at the crossroads, described by Sir Thomas Raffles in 1824:

Independently of the tribes of the Archipelago, the situation of Singapore was peculiarly favorable for its becoming the entrepôt to which the native traders of Siam, Caboja, Chumpa, Chochin-china and China itself, might annually resort. [T]he advantages of its central position for the purposes of commerce, need no further explanation (Raffles, 1978:55, emphasis added.).

In the frontpiece of this chapter, T.N. Harper has extended the trope of the 'central position' to one of Singapore as a 'junction' for the 'crosscutting' of ideas from the 18th through the early 20th century, a centre for education and publishing, and the circulation of information.

limited assistance to small and medium businesses, investing in infrastructure, and bringing in foreign talent (despite local middle class concerns over the threat to local culture and to their own jobs), to replace those disenchanted or adventurous Singaporeans who had left for foreign jobs.
CHAPTER I: SCOPOPHILIA

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Figure 1. Lim Chin Siong Poster. 1963. Lim's image appeared on posters for the opposition during the snap election called by the PAP, while he was incarcerated under the ISA (National Heritage Board 1998:52).

But Harper’s statement, found at the beginning of his article on the political demise of the politician Lim Chin Siong, indicates a larger demise of pluralistic political discourse in Singapore. A founding member of the PAP in 1954, Lim represented the party and the nation with Lee Kuan Yew at the London Constitutional Talks in 1956. However, he was subsequently expelled from the PAP with other members of the left-wing in 1961, after the PAP won control of the government. Seeking national independence, Lim opposed merger with Malaysia, and was detained without trial as part of the 111 members of political parties, NGO activists, and unionists in a sweep, aptly entitled "Operation Cold Store" in 1963. Harper argues that these arrests were the result of Lee Kuan Yew’s need to maintain parliamentary majority against a rapidly strengthening Barisan Socialis (Socialist Front) party, which had formed out of the split between right and left in the PAP. "Cold Store" was a general operation to eliminate the role of the left in Singapore politics. Lee applied "private pressure on the British and ISC [Internal Security Council\(^{11}\)]"

\(^{11}\) In 1957, Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew had been instrumental in the formation of the ISC, to be chaired by the British Commissioner, but always acting in concert with the Singapore Chief Minister. The ISC allowed the Chief Minister and the elected government to take action against "so-called subversives [...] behind the shield of the ISC" which would take ostensible responsibility for any detentions (Harper 2001:29).
to take responsibility for the arrests" while holding a public position of hostility to the use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) (Harper 2001:37). Lim was released into exile in 1969, returning to Singapore in 1979, but not returning to politics. So, the figure of Lim Chin Siong became a personification for the political ruptures that marked the transition to a new Singapore under the PAP, in which the politics of the left-wing (a productive remainder of the former Asian intellectual centre, referred to by Harper) was effectively reduced from agency to empty trope.

All subsequent intellectual discourse in Singapore holds traces of this purge of the left. Heterogeneous discourses on the left — the vibrant Social Realist movement in painting and woodblock printing (influenced by Lu Xun’s Shanghai publishing house12), activist and street theatre, literature, essays, and public critical social discourse—all but disappeared as the PAP disseminated instrumental ideologies of survivalism, elitism, and Toynbeeian ‘challenge/response’13.

Harper argues that "the inclusive cosmopolitanism of the public sphere of the late colonial era sits in striking contrast to the political discourse of the independence period, although both operated within similar, stringent legal constraints" (Harper 2001:8). In this historical context, Ow’s concept of a "knowledge hub", can be seen to be a latter-day attempt to revive an image of Singapore that the PAP government had actively suppressed since independence, first through censorial assaults on Chinese-educated intellectuals, civil society movements, cultural productions, and, from the mid-70s, on English-educated intellectuals and their productions.

THE HELICOPTER VIEW: CLAPHAM JUNCTION FROM THE AIR

Lee Kuan Yew asserts that effective governance requires a leader with "helicopter qualities" (Lee 1998). In this trope, effective government depends on the genetically


13 For a discussion of PAP ideology and early party politics, see Chapter II, Part 1.
endowed leader\textsuperscript{14} carrying out analyses and making decisions not at ground-level, but from a helicopter point-of-view, allowing for \textit{panoptic} perusal. It is a technocratic trope laced with romanticism, combining instrumentality with a sublime imaginary. In a speech rationalising the controversial pegging of Cabinet salaries to private sector levels in 1994 (1/11/94), Lee listed four qualities of leadership borrowed from Shell’s attributes for an effective CEO:

- power of analysis, logical grasp of the facts, concentration on the basic points, extracting the principles [...]. They must have a sense of reality of what is possible. But if you are just realistic, you become pedestrian, plebian, you will fail. Therefore you must be able to soar above the reality and say, “This is also possible” — a sense of imagination [...]. These qualities are really inborn. You can develop knowledge but if you haven’t got them, you haven’t got them [...] (Lee 1998/1994:331)\textsuperscript{15}.

The ‘helicopter view’ represents the landscape as a map, laid out below, as both abstraction and possession. While the cartographer is imagined as a technocrat or military commander, the idea of the landscape includes a fleeting sense of the sublime: the view of the land by the paradigmatic modernist artist-engineer. It encompasses past, present and future, with the people protected by the party, and the person of the leader, the 'new man', who plans, deters dangers, defends the polity, and embodies the national ethos\textsuperscript{16}. The image is teleological, assuming a procession of similar ocular moments in the future.

One of the most complete articulations of such a view in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was that inculcated by the government of the Soviet Socialist state. At the centre of the state and

\textsuperscript{14} PAP concepts of eugenics, bio-determinism, and the required endowments for leadership are discussed in Chapter IV.

\textsuperscript{15} Lee’s iteration of the Shell attributes significantly melds into his views of genetically determined traits, discussed in Chapter III. Lee has consistently argued that the qualities of leadership are not acquired but are inborn attributes; the implication being that PAP Ministers should be paid higher salaries because of their superior genes.

\textsuperscript{16} Chan Heng Chee introduced \textit{New Man} ideology — a mainstay of Soviet nation-building (Gutkin 1999:113ff.) — into the theoretical fabric of the new Singapore state in 1971.

The most striking feature of PAP thinking after separation is the party’s unshaken belief that the survival of Singapore will depend on the willingness and ability of the Singaporean citizen to adopt a new set of attitudes, a new set of values, a new set of perspectives; in short, on the creation of a new man (Chan 1971:49).
above stood the paragon of the *New Man*: the figure of Stalin. Socialist Realist aesthetics of the Stalinist era defined itself through the leader's privileged view, which included a vision of not only the present everyday reality (*byt*), but also the future possibility—what Maxim Gorki called "the third reality":

> We must know not just two realities—the past one and the present one in the creation of which we are now taking a certain part. We must also know the *third reality*—the reality *of the future* [...]. Without it we will not be able to understand what the method of socialist realism is all about (Gorky cited in Gutkin, 1999:39, emphasis added.).

Founded on the perlocutionary performative trope\textsuperscript{17}, the Socialist Realist present is seen (backwards) from the elevation of the 'third reality'. When Goh is described as 'choosing to cast his eyes on the unpredictable future', it is in this role of the prescient and courageous leader who sees the 'Third Reality', anticipates danger and is there to proactively preserve the nation. Lee and Goh's panoptic helicopter tropography assumes access to a secret and a privileged, position of 'responsibility' for the future. It is ideologically motivated by an ideology of elitism and exceptionalism that has resonances with both the colonial era and other autocratic socialist states. The helicopter view is not a *mass-view*; it is a view *of* the masses — the vision *of* the people, rather than *by* the people. This panoptic view from above leads us to two antithetical models embedded in the topographic/tropographic construction of the 'little red dot and the helicopter view: the *panopticon* and the *secret*, and their conjunction in the *cinematicon*.

**BENTHAM’S PANOPTICON AND DETERRENT VISUALITY**

Jeremy Bentham’s concept for a utopian penitentiary, published posthumously in 1843, described a panoptic architecture in which the administrators and guards, standing in a central cylindrical core without backlighting, invisible to the ‘penitents’, may see them distributed in an outer cylinder of cells. The outer wall of the outer cylinder was to be translucent, thereby framing the inmates against a background of external daylight.

\textsuperscript{17} Perlocutionary utterance and performative tropes are discussed in Chapter III.
In Bentham’s vision, prisoner bodies do not cast shadows upon a screen (as in the Wayang Kulit or in Plato’s cave). Rather, they are backlit, "exemplary" shadows, to be seen by the guards and their fellow inmates. As described in Bentham’s *An Introduction to The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (1789), crime and punishment is part of a larger bourgeois mercantile economy of ratios, analogies, payments, frugality and surpluses of happiness, pleasure and pain. The corrective to crime is the application of Aristotelian proportion structured into an architectonics of visual and statistical distribution, combined with a "felicific calculus" of punishments that fit the crime (Sornorajah 1991:3).

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18 For example: "The value of the punishment must not be less in any case than what is sufficient to outweigh that of the profit of the offense" (Bentham 1948/1789:179). For Bentham’s mercantilist system of proportionate punishment, see his Chapter IV: "Value Of A Lot Of Pleasure Or Pain, How To Be Measured"; Chapter V: "Pleasures And Pains, Their Kinds"; XIV: "Of The Proportion Between Punishments And Offences"; XV: "Of The Properties To Be Given To A Lot Of Punishment".
Singapore's Penal Codes are based on the Benthamite Penal Codes that were re-drafted in India by Lord Macaulay, a supporter of Bentham's reformation of the British Penal Codes. The Codes were subsequently adopted in the colonies of India, Ceylon, Malaysia, and Singapore (Sornorajah 1991). According to Sornorajah, the liberal reformation of the Penal system that failed at the 'core' of the Empire in Britain, took hold in some of the colonies (Sornorajah 1991:4). The panopticon, then, represents a liberal reformation at the Empire's 'periphery' that helped to transform penal philosophy from notions of 'retribution' to 'discipline' and 'deterrence'. In this configuration 'discipline' is 'deterrence' subjectified and put into action by the subject upon him/herself. The goal of both discipline and deterrence is that the conditions of criminal behaviour do not arise because they have been foreseen and foreclosed (Foucault 1979:202-203).

In 1975, Foucault commented on Bentham’s architectural machine for disciplining bodies, and his text moves from Bentham’s vision of the penal engineer who seeks the perfect application of statutory obligations and mechanisms on the body of the prisoner, to the social engineer, applying those same systems to the social body, resulting in a chiasmus between visuality and power where liberal notions of subjectivity and subjection collapse into power/knowledge (Foucault, 1979: 200-205; Butler 1997).

COVERT SPECTACLE
The construction of privileged vision that the helicopter view and the panopticon promise is open to a few, and remains a secret to the many. Correspondingly, the power it provides (and presumes in the first place) is that provided by the discovery or production of the secret scopophilic gaze of a the voyeur through a keyhole, or a guard through the unilateral windows of the tower at the core of Bentham's panopticon. Laura Mulvey, drawing on Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality, considers the scopophilic gaze as one of the erotic pleasures not associated with the erotogenous zones. She applies this to cinematic pleasure in terms that resemble Plato's cave, the panopticon, and the cinematicon discussed below:

[T]he extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patters of light and shade on the
screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen [in contradistinction to a surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling victim], conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. [T]he position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.

The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. (Mulvey, 1994 (1975):160)

Cinema (and to a lesser extent, theatre) is a scopophilic zone that structures a communally shared imaginary as secret visuality, something between spectacle, voyeurism and dream: the individual enrapt(ured) in the safety of the shared anonymity of darkness, secretly voyeurising other humans. Part of the power of cinema is this oscillation between the sense of a secret perusal and wide social acceptance — a privatised experience of public spectacle.

THE SCOPOPHILIAC'S CYLINDRICAL OCCULAR ARRAY
The voyeuristic secret is integral to the notion of a privileged panoptic view, and it is panoptic architecture that structures the three tropes mentioned above — red dot, hub and helicopter view (Figure 3). All three tropes assume a binary relationship between two axes (x,y), such that vertical ascent along the (y) axis allows for a more expansive purview of the ‘ground’ extension of (x). If we extend out from a central point ('small red dot')

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equally in all directions parallel to the ground plane, we form the hub of a larger circle or 'wheel'. Extending vertically from the two concentric circles parallel to the vertical (y) axis we obtain a small cylinder within a larger cylinder (the architecture of Bentham's panopticon), or of an axle bisecting a wheel at the hub.

A surveying helicopter circling around the top of two cylinders, repeats the form of the hub along the vertical ‘y’ axis. The four images — dot, panopticon, hub, helicopter view— all converge in the architectonics of this tropological complex that analogizes centralised optical power. This uncanny convergence of tropes is not obvious in daily parole, as each trope is deployed independently. The trope complex offers a generalised, mythic, structuralist tropography that extends beyond any one of its constituent tropes, synchronically linking adjacent national discourses.

The compelling architectonics of the panoptic complex aside, for Deleuze, Foucault’s reading of Bentham's panopticon concern addresses a heterogeneous and abstracted diagramming or cartography that does not presume the invisibility of the official voyeur. The panopticon is a topographical discourse: a spatial extension of subjectivity/subjection, on a social-scape of an "abstract machine" that functions as a visual performative: producing the landscape it describes. For Deleuze, Foucault’s text, *Discipline and Punish*, falls under the sign of the "spatio-temporal multiplicity" of the diagrammatic, and, indeed, panopticism, as it appears in our metonymies (*red dot, helicopter view, hub*), functions as a diagrammatic projection—a mapping—projected by the government onto the landscape of Singapore.

Deleuze writes:

> So the abstract formula for Panopticism is no longer 'to see without being seen' but to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity. We need only insist that the multiplicity is reduced and confined to a tight space and that the imposition of a form of conduct is done by distributing in space, laying out and serializing in time, composing on space-time, and so-on.

> [...] The diagram is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field. It is an abstract machine (Deleuze, 1988:34).

The performative is described in Chapter III.
Figure 3: Trope Complex

Figure 4. World war II photographic surveillance aircraft circled, in order to overlap information to produce continuous resolution of the landscape. The helicopter fulfills this function in our cylindrical ocular array diagram (Virilio 1989:Plate 31).
This is not to suggest that Singapore is de facto a 'panoptic state', but that panopticism is a complex of administrative state representations. As C.J. Wee W-L suggests (quoting a now iconic article by Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, written in the early 1990s), centralised disciplinarity of the type Foucault describes is still fundamental to the PAP government's policy initiatives. At the heart of those initiatives we find the trope complex—dot-hub/helicopter view/panopticon—either stated or implied, as the reification of (and answer to) conditions of crisis that accompanied national instatement and consolidation.

As the party that oversaw the nation's two formative crises— independence through merger with Malaysia in 1963, and separation from Malaysia and nationhood on 1965—the PAP has used the tropes of 'incessant crisis' to rationalise its own continued relevance to the project of national development, and to justify policies marked by proactive deterrence and 'Total Defence'. This return to the originary crisis requires a post-colonial analysis, such as Rey Chow's notion of the "double gaze" in his discussion.

22 Wee, citing Heng and Devan, has reiterated the theorization of this theme of state crisis, first voiced by Chan Heng Chee (1971).

The region's instability, the city-state's small size and the 'Chinese' identity that continues to be a focus of resentment in the region, are persistent themes in the government's efforts to mobilise the citizenry around an ongoing concern about Singapore's security. According to the PAP, tight national discipline under a centralised bureaucracy must be maintained in the interests of political and economical survival. Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan argue that:

"By repeatedly focusing anxiety on the fragility of the new nation, its ostensible vulnerability to every kind of exigency, the state's originating agency is periodically reinvoked and ratified, its access to wide-ranging instruments of power in the service of national protection continually consolidated. It is a post-Foucauldian truism that they who successfully define and superintend a crisis, furnishing its lexicon and discursive parameters, successfully confirm themselves the owners of power, the administration of crisis operating to revitalize ownership of the instruments of power even as it vindicates the necessity of their use" (CJW-L Wee, 2001:990).

23 Brown refers to the trope of incessant crisis in the more general terms of its deployment as a 'garrison ideology' (Brown 1993:20-21) discussed previously.

24 The issue of Singapore's survival and regional exceptionality was reiterated in 2001-2, following the 9-11 World Trade Center bombing in New York, when the government reportedly uncovered a plot by the radical Indonesian-based Islamic group, Jamaah Islamiyah, to blow up American targets in Singapore. The image surfaced of a Pan-Islamic State (Daulah Islamiah Raya), apparently first mooted in 1949 by "Sekarmaji Marijan Kartosuwiryo, one of Indonesia's founding fathers" (Simon Ellegent, 2002:18), encompassing all of Indonesia, Malaysia (including predominately Christian areas of Borneo), Singapore, Brunei, the southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, southern Cambodia and southern Vietnam. The imaginary of a future pan-Islamic state, fulfilling an Islamic teleology collides with antithetical nationalist agendas, exacerbating nation-state anxieties throughout the region, and thereby strengthening status quo national governments currently in power. (See Figure 4).
of the Chinese state's response to the films of Zhang Yimou. Chow argues that for the post-colonial Asian subject there are always two gazes: that of the state, "and the world's, especially the West's, orientalism" (Chow 1995:170). The state returns to that moment of modernist self-invention, but with an awareness that it is under incessant scrutiny. The gaze of the state is in this manner always doubled; the voyeur always also an object of the voyeurism of another.

Figure 5. "Dream State", Time, 1 April 2002:18 [Singapore circled in black].

THE CINEMATICON

This doubling of the surveilling gaze brings to mind the limitations inherent in the panopticon trope as a metaphor for the Singapore state. First, the model simplistically separates the rulers from the ruled (the guards from the inmates), thereby denying the adherence of power/knowledge. Although the PAP has long deployed an ideology of elitism (Rodan 1989:89-90; Barr 2000:97-136), their elitism must be seen to be part of a larger national ideological framework, linked with teleological developmentalism, under which both the administrative and civil state labour. The trope of the panopticon does not effectively distil the sense of the totalised habitus that exists in Singapore, in which both the ruling elite and the large middle class share in the production and consumption of the same bourgeois ideologies of development and progress, each finding itself locked into
the doubled gaze of the post-colonial condition. The panopticon also ignores the already distributed effects of Singapore’s electronic environment. But what architecture materialises the Singapore spectacle? Consider a plan for a triple-screen monumental cinema by the Spanish architect, Fernandez Shaw:

![Design for monumental cinema by Fernandez Shaw](image)

Figure 6. Design for monumental cinema by Fernandez Shaw (Virilio, 1989:Plate 14)

The plan was conceived in 1930, during the rise of fascism in Europe and just prior to the establishment of the fascist Falange party in Spain (1933). Virilio points out that this imagination of the monumental cinema was conceived five years before Albert Speer’s Nuremberg display and shares the sense of shared mass spectacle, engineered and recorded there by Speer and Riefenstahl. Although imagined by Shaw to include only three screens, we can imagine extending this monumental cinema to include another three screens to make a 360° hexagon. Shaw’s conception was similar to a panoptic cylinder, except inverted, with surveillance removed to an outer encirclement of vehicles.

Let us imagine this structure now with the guards at the centre of the penitentiary replaced by the populace, who view their own gaze reflected back from a wall of inward-facing screens surrounding them, in the manner of the 2003 National Day Parade at the National Stadium. We might call this spectacular architecture the *cinematicon*. Penitence is replaced by self-consumption, and Mulvey’s scopophilic narcissism finds its architectonic corollary in a device that projects commodity fetishism on a spectacular scale. Foucault’s notion of the penitentiary as a machine that anyone can run (Foucault, 1979:202) finds its manifestation not so much in the Benthamite prison, where there is still an imposed
hierarchy of surveillance, but in this monumental *conservaprop*\(^{25}\), where the peoples’ aspirations and gaze (including that of the ‘projectionist’) are reflected back, 'inward', as a common imaginary (doubled as a post-colonial imaginary, described by Chow).

Visuality (visual knowledge/power), even in the panopticon as Bentham and Foucault respectively described it, is both a physical act *and* an imaginary. In the panopticon the spectacle of punishment must be *seen* to be effective, and the prisoner must *know* he is seen for the effects of surveillance to be felt. It is in that circuitry of certainty that the imaginary takes hold: the prisoner (or the post-colonial state apparatus) imagines that surveillance is constant, regardless of whether it is or not. It is in the prisoner's imagination of the absolute continuity of surveillance that the ouroboric circuit of punishment is completed. The subject is displaced by the imagined trope of 'the subject under incessant surveillance'. Rather than a tight collapse of power into knowledge and *vice versa*, we have the unstable triadic complex: power/imagina tion/knowledge.

On the other side of the panoptic equation, we have the surveilling guard who is acutely aware of his lack — the incompleteness of his observations over others. Here imagination takes the form of a compensatory totalisation found in declarations such as: "I have seen enough to know...." or "As long as he believes I am watching, it is enough." It is not the totality that must be known, but a hypostatic\(^{26}\) moment, in which what must be known is uncannily 'revealed' in its incompleteness. What we are left with, then, is the windows or 'skin' of the core cylinder of the panopticon as a hypostatic screen (the virgule or slash \(\{/\}\) that separates knowledge/power, guard/prisoner becomes the sign of the imaginary), upon which the projection of the self (guard and prisoner) and the rear-projection of the other (prisoner and guard) are both seen.

If we see the screen/virgule as the 'fourth wall' of an illusory perspectival space, then the collapse of power/knowledge is shifted to this 'fourth wall' that doubles as both a completion of the projected illusion and as a doorway into the collective imaginary. Albeit still hierarchical as a cultural and gendered artifact, the *cinematicon* suggests (but never

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\(^{25}\) The ideological opposite of the *agitprop*, the cinematicon as it manifests, for example, in the official public rituals of the National Day Parade, national elections, libel 'show trials' of opposition politicians, or the foreign press, offers spectacle with the intent of proactively and aggressively bolstering (or *conserving*) the status quo.

\(^{26}\) ‘Taking form’ or the settling of particles in a fluid (AHD).
delivers) an egalitarian and democratic experience. Aspiration is channeled and displaced by screen culture, namely the projection of a commonly produced and consumed ideological spectacle of subject/subjection. The teleological chronotyping of that spectacle is the subject of the next chapter.

As we shall see, the metaphor of panopticism conflates with residual motifs of the PAP government's imagining of the Confucian-Hobbesian court in which a Sovereign offers civil order in return for the populace's obedience and respect. Essential to this give-and-take arrangement between people and ruler is the spectacle of the coherent and continuous developmental state. Much of the government's symbolic capital is expended in maintaining this projection of a symbiosis of the ruling elite and the citizenry.

The "English-speaking class fragment" (Chua 1995:12), the ruling Peoples' Action Party, obtained its ideological hegemony in part through the tropological manifestation and propagation of that image of symmetry and symbiosis. The state produces its representations through the screened inversion of all panopticism, such that the spectacle of the state—overseen by the post-colonial supervisor-director-inspector-projectionist standing in the dark—is presented for public delectation as an open secret: the covert spectacle, in which a contested object—such as Poe's Purloined Letter—is hidden by virtue of the very obviousness of its placement. The trope-complex <dot-hub/helicopter view> inscribes official spectacle production on Singapore, and it is through the projection of these spatial tropes that the state presents itself to itself, and to the populace. Chapter II will explore some ideological characteristics of this projection.

\textsuperscript{27} The covert spectacle derives from Burrough's notion of a visible "invisibility" and first-seeing (discussed in Chapter VII). It assumes a panoptic view, where the visual agent is invisible to the object of his gaze, recalling Michael Rogin's 1993 musings on the American empire and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter:

The thief hides the purloined letter, by placing it in plain sight. His theft is overlooked because no attempt is made to conceal it. The crimes of the postmodern American empire...are concealed in the same way. Covert operations actually function as spectacle (Rogin, 1993: 499).
CHAPTER II.

IDEOLOGICAL FRAMES:
Instrumentally Imagining Singapore

Substantial theoretical attention has been focused on the periodic changes in PAP ideology (Chua, 1995; Clammer, 1993; Margolin, 1993; Rodan 1993; Cotton, 1993). An emphasis on the periodicity of post-independence history, based on PAP policy initiatives, has developed at the expense of theorising the overall ideological impetus of the state and ruling party. Michael Barr was the first to focus on an overall picture of Lee Kuan Yew's motivating ideology, linking it to an earlier ideological complex he identified as "Whiggish Progressivism", transmitted by the colonial educational system (Barr 2000). There are strong links between Barr's reading of Whiggish Progressivism and the imperialist ideology held by the 19th century colonial agent, Sir Stamford Raffles. Carried forward, these manifestations of colonial ideology form an impetus or trajectory —here termed 'teleological developmentalism'— that includes five other overlapping post-independence ideological projects, notable for their common instrumentalist tendencies:

5. Consolidating State Ideology: 'Shared Core Values' (1991 - present)

Teleological developmentalism is characterised by the 'turning' of historical factoids to the production of an overall teleology that links otherwise disconnected historical events. The past is seen to have been the path to the present order and an ideal future order. The operation of ideology-formation in the present is justified by the very trajectory of history that made the

[...] present appear inevitable—as if the outcome of each battle, each social, religious or constitutional shift, and each imperial conquest were a predetermined and necessary step on
the path to the present. Add to this an assumption that the present is intrinsically better than the past, and it becomes natural to view each political and military encounter in the relevant past as an example of 'progress' fighting in defeating 'reaction' (Barr, 2000:242).

The developmental inevitability of the present state\(^1\) is the central character in the theatre of teleological developmentalism, but it cannot stop there. Essential to the project of nation-building is the imagining of a better future that justifies the current developmental state of the nation. The entire process is instrumental, goal oriented, and an outcropping of an imaginary: specifically the imagining of the present community of the nation (Anderson 1983), inclusive of that community’s imagined common past and future.

THE SINGAPORE POST-COLONIAL STATE
Having been granted self-government in domestic but not international affairs by the British in 1959, Singapore subsequently merged with Malaya and the Borneo Territories in 1963\(^2\), but the merger lasted for only two years. Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965 forming an independent state with a population of just over two million. Official narratives reiterate that the new nation had virtually no natural resources. However, its placement in the midst of international shipping lanes has always been its primary resource, and became the basis for the post-independence globalised economy (Raffles 1978; Syed 1971; Rajaratnam 1987; Goh K.S. 1995, et al.). As Southeast Asia's primary

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\(^1\) In this study, the term 'state' refers to four overlapping entities: 1. The governmental or administrative apparatus of a nation, that is, the ruling government of the day. 2. Civil society plus political society (government apparatus, bureaucracy and political means), as in Gramsci's famous equation "State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (Gramsci 1971:263). 3. The theatre of the state as a function of its mythopoetic presence derived from local traditions of the Confucian court the Devaraja traditions of Thailand and 16\(^{th}\)-12\(^{th}\) century, Java, Angkor and the 19\(^{th}\) century Negara state of Bali (Coedes 1963; Geertz 1980; Poshyananda 1993; Needham 1975; Dien 1987). For all of its regional uniqueness, it is problematic to view the Singapore state as a purely modernist phenomenon in which the signs of a modern economy and bureaucratic power have supplanted all earlier signs of preceding economies, traditional hegemonies and constructions. (This is a complex topic, however, which must be left for future research.) 4. The web of discourses surrounding the verb, to state, which indicate the synchronic production of the state as a product of instatement through the discourses and literatures of legislation, law, regulations and political rhetoric, producing the concepts of nation, history, and power. In order to maintain the productive indeterminacy and fluidity between categories of particular and general political arrangements, notions of civil society and administration built into the term, 'state', all of these deployments are registered by the lower-case 'state'.

\(^2\) Both the Malaysian government and the British approved the merger, in the hope of ameliorating the communist influence on the predominately Chinese population of Singapore (Chan 1971; Harper 2001).
entrepôt, Singapore was the region's first independent state to enthusiastically adopt economic globalisation and the matrix of commerce dominated by Europe and the United States.

The People's Action Party (PAP) was formed in 1954 by a group of English speaking, mostly British educated professionals, recently returned from their 'Oxbridge' educations. They were versed in Fabian Socialism and the tenets of liberal democracy (Barr 2000; Chua 1995), with an acute second-hand understanding of both European fascism, and a first-hand experience of colonial despotism under the British and Japanese. Their desire for independence from all forms of external rule was the raison d'être for their party's formation and consolidation of power in the early years, obtaining state power in 1959 (Lee K. Y. 1998).

The conservative faction of the People's Action Party, led by Lee Kuan Yew, rapidly consolidated its power by "suppressing opposition forces through repressive legislation" (Chua, 1995:10), thereby indicating an ideological divorce from their former communist and social democratic principles, leading eventually to expulsion/withdrawal of the PAP from the Socialist International in 1975 (Chua, 1995:48; Devan Nair, 1976; Dutch Labour Party 1976:250). This consolidation of power was engineered soon after merger with a greater Malaysia with "Operation Cold Store" (1963) (Harper, 2001:41-43). Immediately following the operation, the PAP government called for a snap election. With many of its leaders in prison, the opposition party, Barisan Socialis (Socialist Front) managed to win 33% (thirteen seats) of the vote versus the PAP’s successful but lack-luster showing of 46.9% (thirty-seven seats). Lee ordered further arrests of three opposition Members of Parliament and two others fled the country. The Barisan Socialis called for a boycott against sitting in Parliament by its remaining eight MPs, who resigned in 1965, effectively handing Parliament to the PAP (Chua, 1995:15-17). The PAP thereby consolidated their hold, forming a one-party-dominant state. As of this writing, Singapore is still without a competitive opposition, in large part due to the continued application of institutional force to eliminate a viable opposition.
In 1969, David Marshall, Singapore's first Chief Minister — whose Workers' Party had also been sidelined by the PAP— iterated what he referred to as the PAP's "extra-ordinary absolute powers" at that time:

1. The PAP had engineered a "one-party parliament".
2. They had introduced a law forcing any MP who leaves his party to give up his seat in Parliament.
3. The Prime Minister appointed High-Court justices.
6. The Internal Security Act was used to imprison political opponents indefinitely.
7. The government could deprive citizens of citizenship.
8. Students were required to obtain "suitability certificates" from the government before they could attend tertiary education. (Marshall, cited by Dutch Labour Party 1976:251).

Not only did the PAP not contest these points; they openly rationalized these policies as necessary to fight Communism, and create a stable social and economic environment for globalisation, and the industrial proletarianisation of the workforce. Indeed, the PAP government had considerable economic and social achievements. In 1976, Goh Keng Swee, the architect of Singapore’s industrialization and economic policy from 1959 through 1984, later described the nation's development during the initial period of self-government (1959 -1975): taking inflation into account, the Gross National Product grew 500%, or eleven percent each year. The foreign exchange reserves grew 3000%. The government-linked corporations (GLCs) doubled what had been the industrial employment sector of the entire economy in 1959. The industrial sector (manufacturing, construction and utilities) contribution to the Gross National Product rose from 13% to 35%. Gross Domestic Capital formation increased from 7.6% to 37.6%. Primary and

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3 The media was brought under control through the creation of Government Linked Corporations (GLC), rather than directly by the government. GLC's are described in Chapter V.

4 The Internal Security Act (ISA) (Chapter 143) was amended from the colonial Emergency Regulation Ordinance in 1960 into the Malaysian Internal Security Act 1960 (No. 18/60). This act was then "extended to Singapore on 16/9/63", when it became a "component part of Malaysia". The act reads: "An Act to provide for the internal security of Singapore, preventive detention, the prevention of subversion, the suppression of organized violence against persons and property in specified areas of Singapore, and for matters incidental thereto. (16 September 1963)" (Singapore Government. 1986:4).
secondary education enrollment grew 360%. Over 188,000 government Housing Board apartments were created, while population growth declined from 4.1% to 1.3% per annum. Infant mortality dropped from 36/1000 to 13.9/1000 (Goh K.S. 1976:77-85).

The triumph of the PAP faction aligned with Lee Kuan Yew led to the adoption of a particular narrative of state consolidation, with the PAP and its British educated leadership heroically at the centre. They are portrayed as those who fortuitously saw the coming convergence of national liberation and autonomy with state-capitalist modernity (Wee C.J. W.-L., 2001-1). Wee suggests: "The moderates' choice of anti-communist, capitalist modernity was vindicated by the events of 1989 [the lowering of the Berlin wall and break-up of the Soviet Union], and the apparent triumph of the neo-liberal New World Order of the *Washington consensus*" (Wee C.J. W.-L., 2001-1). This vindication was part of the "Whiggish telos of economic development, progress and modernization since 1819" (Wee C.J. W.-L. 2001-1), termed by Barr a "secular faith [in] human progress" (Barr 2000:5, 49-96), that had arrived with colonialism.

Singapore also inherited from the British an elaborated and ramified civil service and bureaucracy which has been expanded under the post-independence government (Chan 1997/1975), accompanied by consistent regulatory interventions into all aspects of civil society (Chua, 1995; Buchanan 1972; George 1973). This led to the formation of what Gramsci referred to as 'statolatry', a specific stage of the process of conforming civil society to the economy, in which "the bureaucracy becomes commonly understood as the whole state" (Vacca, 1982:53). Chan refers to the phenomenon as the development of an 'administrative state', in which the "meaningful political arena is shifting or has shifted to the bureaucracy", resulting in a "steady and systematic depoliticisation of a politically active and aggressive citizenry" (Chan 1997/1975:294). The independent Singapore state carried forward a colonial bureaucratic infrastructure on the one hand, and democratic socialist ideology on the other, both turned to the service of a concerted thrust into the late-industrial global economy. The "Government of Singapore [became] the most important entrepreneur in the Singapore economy" (Chan 1997/1975:302). Along with the alignment of bureaucracy to the administration came the alignment of civil service intellectuals, in universities, schools and think-tanks, united to the government by class, language and educational background.
While it is certainly problematic (and pervasive in Western and Asian liberal humanist circles), to consider the Singapore administrative state as simplistically monolithic and autocratic; it is equally problematic (and a convenient fantasy of the conservative international business community), to view Singapore as a purified economic zone, with a purely pragmatic discourse of global trade and efficient governance. Government in Singapore lies somewhere between, similar to Gramsci's "interventionist state" or "disciplinary regime", but with a degree of conflation of government, bureaucracy, industry and military, which Gramsci did not foresee. The interventionist state is a political arrangement in which the conscripted military acts as "reserves of [...] order and conservation" (Gramsci 1971:215). In Singapore, the executive management of the Government-Linked Corporations, the civil service, the government, the military, the ruling party, all fall under the same small group of elites and their extended family clans, overarched by the single dominant alpha family of Lee Kuan Yew ("Tan Boon Seng" 2001). Although a 'parliamentary democracy', Singapore governance is still under an updated and adapted taxonomic structure of a Chinese family or clan firm, centred on the Lee family and funneled through the socialist framework of an overarching ruling party.

One of the few writers to confront the manner in which ideology determines consciousness in post-independence Singapore, Chua Beng Huat has made a strong case for viewing Singapore as "not simply an authoritarian state", but a site of polyvalent, negotiated governmentality. In his discussion of the systematic elaboration and articulation of an ideology of pragmatism, Chua notes that "it has also penetrated the consciousness of the population and has come to serve as the conceptual boundaries within which Singaporeans think [...]" (Chua, 1995:68). Chua anchors the appearance of

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5 Gramsci's 'interventionist state' is one "which will take the offensive more openly against oppositionists and organise permanently the "impossibility" of internal disintegration […]" (Gramsci, 1971:239). However, his description of the interventionist state as having an "economic origin [...] connected [...] with tendencies supporting protection and economic nationalism" (Gramsci, 1971:263), which was based on observation of fascist, Bolshevik and mid-century industrial capitalist states, does not fit so well late-modernist Singapore's globalised economic commitments.

6 "Tan Boon Seng" is a pseudonym for an anonymous author of an article published on the web in 2001 exposing presence of the Lee family and PAP cadres on the boards and in executive management positions of Government Linked Corporations.

7 For a discussion of Chinese family and clan firms, see Tong Chee Kiong 1989.
effective ideology in the ability of the party to improve the "material life of the governed" (Chua, 1995:3). This view is based on his Gramscian reading of the hegemonic state as practicing 'consensus' with the people around the ideology of 'economic pragmatism' from the period of independence (Chua, 1995:viii). Chua maintains that the PAP's popularity derives from having crystallize[d] and reflect[ed], relatively accurately, the underdeveloped material condition of the island population at the time of independence (Chua, 1995:10).

This was effected during the period of the ideological manifestation of the independent state, when even the conservatives in the PAP accepted (or appeared to accept) the tenets of democratic socialism, allowing for a productive alliance with the political left (George, 1973; Devan Nair 1976; Lee 1998; Harper 2001, et al.). This alliance allowed for the succession of the PAP to power, and the PAP was able to "provide the leadership which united the population behind its developmental policies, which in turn delivered material returns to the governed" (Chua 1995:10). The next stage, during which the PAP conservatives successfully excised the left in the party, allowed the PAP to consolidate authoritarian rule. Chua maintains that the longevity of PAP authoritarianism is to be explained by being the first party in Singapore to manifest and "achieve […] ideological hegemony or consensus" (Chua 1995:10). Throughout his writings, Chua maintains that there are very real limits to the People's Action Party's (PAP) coercive activities. This follows directly from his contention that the PAP or the 'leadership' is not equivalent to the Singapore State, but is a part of a much larger complex of civil and political society, requiring incessant negotiation and adaptation.

Chua's position raises interesting questions concerning consensus-building and the engineering of public opinion in a de facto one-party state. A one-party system is far more capable of 'stimulating' ostensible acquiescence (Huntington and Moore 1970:516) in the

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8 Chua has proposed Gramsci's 'hegemonic state' as an appropriate 'neo-Marxist framework' (Chua 1995:2) for the Singapore state. First, he justifies this application through a theoretical development from Chan Heng Chee’s earlier notion of the strong or dominant PAP apparatus as heuristic device (Chan 1971). Second, he bases it on his own theorisation of the possible influence of early Communist co-travelers on the PAP, prior to the purges of the left during the 1960s-1970s; and, third, on Fabian socialist influences during the Oxbridge educations of the party founders (Barr 2000:15ff.).

9 The 'consensus' Chua refers to is the political rhetorical correlate to the analytical category of 'consensus' achieved at the level of social process.
populace than a multi-party system, due to the latter's institutionalisation of oppositional views. While this acquiescence could be illusory or tactical, in such a situation it is precisely illusion or appearance that counts. The stimulation of acquiescence (which amounts to an uncritical use of 'consensus') relies on the very characteristics that Chua ambivalently attributes to the PAP: interventionism, disciplinarism, and the "monopolisation of coercion" (Chua, 1995:17). Furthermore, constructing consensus itself requires a previous state of consensus among all involved parties concerning the rules and parameters of consensus.

Gramsci addressed the problem of the one-party state and the construction of consensus in his discussion of 'totalitarian policy'⁷⁰. Gramsci used the term 'totalitarian policy' to refer to party policies that serve to break the bonds of its members to other political parties by 1. enhancing the party's ability to satisfy their wants 2. destroying the other parties or "incorporating them into a system of which the party is the sole regulator" (Gramsci, 1971:265).

Although Gramsci's view cannot be applied to PAP cadres who make up a very select group that offers less space for dissension than Gramsci envisioned, it does quite accurately describe the PAP attempt to order the views of the citizenry in general. In his discussion of the role of Intellectuals as 'deputies' of the dominant group, "exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" in the modern state, Gramsci made a distinction between "spontaneous and coerced consent" (Gramsci 1971:12). For Gramsci, spontaneous consent is based on perceived "historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Gramsci 1971:12). Coerced consent, on the other hand, relies on

\[\text{[t]he apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moment}\]

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⁷⁰ According to Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Gramsci, did not use the word, 'totalitarian', in the unequivocally pejorative sense which it acquired during the Cold War, following his death. It was a quite neutral term for him, meaning approximately "all-embracing and unifying [...] global" (Hoare and Smith 1971:147,fn. 33).
of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed (Gramsci 1971:12).

The distinction here is between the 'variety of agencies' found amongst the populace on the one hand and the 'agency of the state' on the other. Gramsci describes the former as an audience "either actively or passively" receiving the initiatives of the 'State'. Chua's notion must contend with a 'vicious circularity' that has its basis in Singapore history, in that the PAP came to power initially through election in 1959, overseen by a British administration, and from that point on, has strategically used the power that came with the office to stay in office. So, we can say, deploying a limited meaning of the word, 'consensus', that the PAP government originally obtained its legitimacy through what may loosely be called an electoral 'consensus', but since then has displaced even limited consensus with coercive instruments, and has aggressively eliminated potentially competitive political parties and other counter-hegemonic agencies such as NGOs in civil society. The government (and a number of intellectuals), however, continue to refer to the current social order as one based on consensus, thereby reifying a historical moment into a permanent condition.

Chua's construction of consensus also has a taxonomic dimension. There is a tenuous synchronicity between Gramsci's description of the 'dominant fundamental' group and the Confucian notion of the 'virtuous ruler', elaborated by Chua in his discourse on the development of 'communitarian ideology' in Singapore:

[...] Confucianism is a philosophical justification of government by a benevolent bureaucracy under a virtuous ruler; a leader's benevolent rule is reciprocated by the loyalty and obedience of his subjects; in short, benevolence ensures harmony and obedience of his subjects within stratified and unequal social relations [...] and so on with the family based on the same unequal hierarchical but fundamentally benevolent model (Chua, 1995:151.).

While for Gramsci, the basis of spontaneous consent is ideological consensus and the assurance of material sufficiency, the notion of loyalty and obedience and the parameters of consent in dynastic China and modern Europe are substantially different. The Singapore government's conflation of dynastic and late modernist bourgeois signifiers is part of the larger discourse of Asian values, used to mark Singapore identity in contradistinction to the 'West', and to discursively construct an image of PAP rule as
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continuous with historical centres of Chinese power. There is a far better fit between PAP neo-Confucianism and Hobbes' notion of benevolent dictatorship, discussed in Chapter V, than with Gramsci's 'hegemony'. To summarize, while Chua importantly places Singapore government policy in a Gramscian ideological frame of hegemonic relations, he does not fully address the paradox of consensus he has articulated, or the place of propaganda, incultation and spectacle in consensus building.

Because the government refuses to read from a progressive script, liberal intellectuals in Singapore often find themselves 'caught out' by their desire for a reading of PAP governance as part of a pluralist discourse with a multiplicity of state agencies. The PAP government unabashedly presents itself in deed and word as an elitist, centralised apparatus, placing its 'purloined letter' in plain view as it were. This covert spectacle has led to an impasse where the theorists inadvertently either find themselves cast in the role of apologists for an unapologetic PAP government, or increasingly alienated by the government's foreclosure on its promises to liberalise.

This ever hopeful reading of the government by local intellectuals, versus a more cynical view by foreign researchers of the government's autogenic reading of itself, has caused a 'half-full/half-empty' discrepancy. While the foreign intelligentsia tends to view the government as a still strongly centralised "Repressive State Apparatus"11 which attempts to appear kindler and gentler, local liberal intellectuals (hoping to performatively spur the government to adopt more egalitarian patterns of governance) look for signs of multivalent governmentality, and for factionalism arising within the state apparatus. While the former tend to obtain a perverse "I told you so" delight in criticizing an illiberal state, the latter obtain little pleasure from endlessly reproving their own government, and court substantial professional and personal risks by so doing. Meanwhile, a third group, corporate representatives —both local and foreign— generally weigh into the debate with obsequious testaments that the government has 'new clothes,' as they know very well that doing so may help enhance their business prospects.

11 Althusser's "Repressive State Apparatus " (RSA) referring to the forceful and disciplinarian functions of administrative regulations, laws, security, police, military, and intelligence, coexists with the "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA), that refers to the more or less consensual operations of family, education, media, and various cultural forms arising from civil society (DCCT; Althusser 1994).
Applying a polyvalent, pluralistic notion of the state is not an easy matter in Singapore, requiring mental calisthenics of the sort exemplified at times by Michael Hill and Lain Ken Fee in their study, *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* (1995). A proper analysis of their text requires attention not only to the thrust of their arguments, but also to the pragmatics of the text, that is, the manner that their book itself fits into a wider political context. Hill and Lian do not adopt Chua's neo-Gramscian notion of a polyvalent state, with a clear demarcation between the PAP government and the larger state. The authors unequivocally declare,

> Throughout this book the ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP) is treated as being largely synonymous with the state [...]. The PAP and Parliament, which is dominated by PAP members, clearly constitute the demarcated sphere of political activity (Hill and Lian 1995:34-35).

Yet, a few pages earlier they paradoxically portray the sphere of governance as a two-way process of "protracted negotiation" between

> [...] political leaders and a population which is increasingly educated into conceptions of legitimacy and citizenship [...]. Nor should the interaction be seen as one way, since the possibility of missed cues and unintended consequences on the part of the latter may well result in reverses and delays in the process of nation building (Hill and Lian 1995:2).

As an example of this 'protracted negotiation', Hill and Lian suggest that some of these "missed cues and unintended consequences", resulting from unpopular policy initiatives make up a "Return to Sender" dynamic. They suggest,

> Despite its dominance of the discourse on national identity, the PAP has had constantly to regenerate and re-negotiate the process as it was confronted by unanticipated contradictions and by the logic of the Return to Sender process. Nevertheless, the Singapore state, in *penetrating deep into the lives of its citizens, offered them* a stronger sense of security, affiliation and even personal identity [...] (Hill, Lian, 1995:23, emphasis added.).

While the authors clearly want to present the process of governance in Singapore as a reciprocal (if non-symmetrical) give-and-take between the government and the people, they consistently (and perhaps unconsciously) structure the narrative of these relationships with metaphors in which the PAP/leaders/state are the initiators of the relationship and act
upon a passive Singapore citizenry. The population is 'educated' and 'cued'; the PAP 'sends' the letter, which the populace may 'return'\textsuperscript{12}; the PAP 'penetrates' but is never penetrated. Finally, it is the PAP—qua—state that 'offers' the populace a "stronger sense of security, affiliation and even personal identity" —qualities they apparently cannot provide for themselves.

The authors do not address the dilemma of how a "sense of security, affiliation and personal identity" can be measured, other than by gauging the proliferation of independent and robust civil (and uncivil) society initiatives, such as non-government organisations, clubs, societies, based precisely on the 'security' and 'affiliation' of diverse identities? Nor do they problematise the apparent strategy of the PAP government to conflate the images of the ruling party and the state. They are apparently unconcerned that this conflation (which they presume) could be seen to be a representation of PAP desire and pleasure, and they themselves could be the intellectual purveyors of this official desire. They constatively present the conflation of party and state empirically as simply 'the way it is', avoiding any analysis of ideology, propaganda, indoctrination and spectacle. Hill and Lian ignore the performative implications of their own text, which offers us a picture of how description can be performative\textsuperscript{13}, and how academic sociology can effectively propagate the status quo and instrumental teleology. When political or social analysis does not acknowledge and problematise governmental representations of ideology, it becomes a (witting or unwitting) ventriloquial for the government's autogenic panegyric.

Chua, Rodan, Wee, and Davis\textsuperscript{14}, among others, have pointed to the desire and strategies employed by the government, particularly under the second generation leaders, to show "itself to be responsive to pressure and demands from the electorate, in spite of being a single-party dominant government with scant political opposition in parliament" (Chua, 1995: x). The evidence, however, shows an ambivalent government that desires a vibrant national culture, but not at the expense of PAP hegemony. The use of violent

\textsuperscript{12} One of the areas where PAP policies were indeed 'returned to sender' was during the aftermath of the 'Graduate Mothers' Priority Scheme' of 1983-85 where "the PAP has encountered" strong resistance to its intrusion into an area of private concern (Hill, Lian, 1995: 247; Chan 1971).

\textsuperscript{13} The relationship between descriptive ('constative') and 'performative' utterance is a focus of Chapter III.

administrative technologies, such as the Internal Security Act against Communists, trade unionists, drama groups, writers, non-government organisations and opposition politicians has now been redirected toward marginalised and ethnically abject Muslim ideologues and militant operatives. It is one of many side-shows to America's 'post 9-11' global "war against terrorism", in which Singapore has positioned itself as a guarded but strong ally of the United States. The infamous eugenics policies of the 1970s and 1980s have been softened into less discriminatory economic incentives. Censorship guidelines are being reconsidered as of this writing. But none of these changes alter the basic structure of how decisions are made in Singapore. During the "Second Generation" administration under Goh Chok Tong, the government has become more adept at public relations, but the system of decision-making remains unrepentantly unrepresentative. In the words of the writer Catherine Lim, an "affective divide" continues to exist between the PAP government and the people. While many local intellectuals have moved on to new readings of the 'state,' the PAP has dug itself in, remaining committed to a template put in place by the first generation Cabinet thirty years ago.

For some theorists, working out of a Foucauldian panoptic analysis, this template has strong monarchic qualities. For example, in a discussion of the PAP's iconoclastic tendencies in the context of a spectacle society, Lucy Davis, citing Foucault, points out the PAP government's proclivity for structuring power relations on a regal template:

[T]he preoccupation with monarchical power (argued by Foucault to subside in an era of sophisticated administrative technologies) continues to hold sway in the Singapore population. Speculations as to the words, opinions and movements of the PAP leadership in general and Lee Kuan Yew in particular were and continue to be obsessive [...]. The

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15 For the first time, a group of Singapore artists and arts administrators have recently produced a series of recommendations to the Censorship Review Committee that articulate a real break from earlier "pragmatic" negotiations with the government. How the government responds to the document will provide a glimpse of the next generation of cultural policies. As of this writing, the National Arts Council Chairman, Liu Thai Ker chairs the Censorship Review Committee. Acting Minister of Information and the Arts, David Lim has stated that the purpose of the review of censorship guidelines was to "reposition the arts alongside the remaking of Singapore as a global knowledge-based player" (Koh Boon Pin 14/4/2002).

The review of censorship guidelines is part of a new campaign to remake Singapore, in preparation for the handover of power from Goh Chok Tong to the pre-selected next Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong (son of Lee Kuan Yew), in 2002-2004. It must be assumed that Lee Hsien Loong will provide the final approval of the new guidelines.

16 See Chapter VIII.
King in Singapore is still quite firmly on the throne, both inside and outside subjective imaginings (Davis, 2000:36).

C.J.W.-L. Wee, also citing Foucault and writing after Davis, concurs. He suggests that a residue of monarchic rule is detectable in the very inability of the PAP government to recognise that its "centralised interventionist" government must eventually give way to a distributed, "decentralised disciplinary" government:

At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the King. In Singapore, both the 'monarch' and the disciplinary regime exist, but the first refuses to disappear so that governmentality can be ascendant (C.J. W.-L. Wee, 2001:1992).

The residue of monarchy in Singapore has been filtered through a Socialist Realist colander, combining the residual icon of the King with the central image of the corporate embodiment of the state and the 'figure' of the ruling party. The PAP government has adopted an iconoclasm similar to other late-socialist states, such as the post-Stalinist era of the Soviet Republics, the post-Mao governments in China, post-Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Laos, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council/State Peace and Development Council in Myanmar.

The socialist tradition of investing the ultimate authority of the system in the party, found footing in Singapore, where the PAP in 1958 adopted the Bolshevik (and Vatican) cadre system (through which government leadership and ruling party are mutually dependant and mutually determining), and helps to explain the extraordinary conflation of the PAP, the government, judiciary, civil service, military and economic institutions (Mauzy, Milne 2002:40-44). The Singapore government strategically controls and parses out the image of the particular leaders (Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and the Cabinet), reifying them through a Spartan spectacle economy, and regularly deflect attention to the corporate conflation of the ruling party/government. "Creative potential" (Gutkin 1999:113) is invested in the perfect incorporation of the party-state, which cannot be specified in the body and psyche of a single individual, but that of institutional (in)corporation. The doubled agency (government/party) is the PAP government's adaptation of socialist "New Man" ideology, with its new "political physiology" of the "party view" as the "machine-
like model of perfection" (Gutkin 1999:112). Forty years after his party took control of the government, Goh Chok Tong represents the PAP as "not just an ordinary political party. It is the key national institution holding our country together" (Goh 1999:2). He emphasises the singularity, exceptionality and performative agency of the PAP *qua* government.

The political and aesthetic discourse of the PAP and the one-party dominant state in Singapore also consolidates the larger ideological trajectory of teleological developmentalism, which in turn determines historical consciousness and national identity. It is to this larger trajectory that we will now turn, to focus on a division of five historical periods and campaigns, each of which is distinguishable for its concentration on a particular ideological trope. The following chapter focuses in turn on two more. Together, these seven ideological frames (Whiggish Progressivism, National Manifestation, Toynbee’s Challenge/Response, Shared Values, Socialist Realist aesthetics, State-Fatherhood, and Asian Values) provide a socio-political 'footing' for the understanding of performance and performativity in Singapore.


According to Barr, "Whiggish progressivism" was a formative ideology of the British colonial project (Barr, 2000:242), transmitted through the colonial educational system. Until the mid-20th century the ideology was tied on the one hand to liberal notions of social, political and economic progress, and on the other to essentialist notions of biological determinism, underscoring an assertion of genetic and cultural superiority of Anglo-Saxons. Whiggish progressivism was linked with the British history of bourgeois mercantilism, Lockean democracy, *laissez faire* capitalism, and the establishment of parliamentary democracy. Its historical narrative is marked by a strong teleology with

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17 Susan Buck-Morss argues that in its Stalinist configuration, the ruling party becomes "the sovereign body with the legitimacy to wage class warfare, situated in time as the vanguard of history. Its legitimacy lies in holding the interests of the proletariat in trust for the future, and it follows that forsaking the party comes to be synonymous with treason" (Buck-Morss 2000:28). While the PAP divested the rhetoric of class struggle, it has consistently equated loyalty toward the standing government to loyalty toward the Singapore nation; attempts to politically destabilize the power of the ruling party, or question government policies, have been treated as subversion against the nation.
specific attributes: optimism, economic liberalism, a historical uni-directionality from primitive past to civilised present, with the geographic centre of empire and the status quo distributions of power and resources being the inevitable focus of global teleology and historical agency.

Whiggish progressivism is a praxis —practice + theory— involving not only practical policy but also a historical narrativisation that, as Butterfield and Barr argue, abstracts events from their historical context (Barr, 2000:242). While liberal notions influenced Whiggish Progressivism, when applied to the colonial project, the ideology served liberal imperialist ends. Asymmetrical power relations between colonisers and colonial subjects is seen to be historically inevitable and appropriate, anthropomorphised by a biological ages of man analogy, in which a more mature (advanced) and meritorious civilisation paternalistically guides and disciplines its less developed and less productive wards, training them in the ways of liberal democracy. Following colonialism, the pattern continued, with resistance against autocratic governance and urbanization framed by the government as a reactionary impulse against development and the advance of civilisation. Progress was conflated with the advance of bourgeois capitalism and mercantilism displacing rural production on Malayan plantations as the centre of the Singapore economy, followed by the adoption of economic rationalism, and a controlled, graduated progress toward democratic process.

Michael Barr links the PAP’s adoption of 'Whiggish progressivism' with the colonial educational system as disseminated at Raffles Institution (RI), the secondary school Lee Kuan Yew attended. The RI syllabus used text books that emphasised the centrality of Empire, with such titles as, The Cambridge History of the British Empire, The Development of the British Empire and The History of British Civilisation (Barr 2000:51). The syllabus inculcated a view of development from savagery to civilisation with the paradigm of civilisation unequivocally British. It was a view little different from that enunciated by Sir Stamford Raffles (Barr 2000:53; Syed Hussein Alatas 1971:4)\(^\text{18}\). In the RI syllabus, British colonialism was presented as the necessary warding of less developed colonials. The "self-governing dominions" (such as Australia and New Zealand) were

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\(^{18}\) Raffles' views are described in Chapter V.
seen to be "bound to Great Britain by 'the racial bond and the common cultural heritage'", while the Crown Colonies such as Malaya and the Straits Settlements were inhabited, for the most part, by backward populations or have been taken from other empires, and would, therefore, not be considered capable of governing themselves according to British standards.’ (Barr, 2000:53)

Colonial paternalism was seen to be a necessary stage in the inevitable progress of human history, and the great feats of colonialism—whether they involved the engineering of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, or the pedagogical engineering of students at RI—were part of a great telos (Barr 2000). The RI syllabus provided the map of empire, of which the students and their school were a part. They were provided the objectivist view by which peoples and lands may be scientifically categorised by the cartographer, anthropologist, eugenicist, and social engineer. The students were the receivers of a body of knowledge which was confirmed by their own irreifulable presence in a British school, and they thus learned to place a fractal image of themselves into the map of empire spread out before them: a living demonstration of Royce's paradox of the synecdochal map19 that is inclusive of itself. This is precisely the power of teleological developmentalism: the present state of affairs (its irreifiable realism) is used to prove the teleological reading of the past. History was presented at RI as a perlocutionary device, a description meant to performatively instill calibrated effects in the students, who were then 'authorised' to carry within them the 'map of the map' of empire. The ideology, firmly implanted with the 1819 arrival of Stamford Raffles, continued to hold sway until the interregnum of World War II ended assumptions of British invincibility and superiority. The Japanese, Singapore's new colonial masters, brought with them another ideology of essential superiority and the historical inevitability associated with a greater Shōnan (Syonan) (Satō 1998; Lee K.Y. 1998).

19 The "Paradox of the Inclusive Map", posed by Josiah Royce in 1899, imagines a cartographic tracing of a map "on a leveled off portion of England, so that there is no detail of the soil of England, no matter how minute, that is not registered on the map [...] This map, in such a case, would include a map of the map, which should include a map of the map of the map, and so on to infinity" (Hughes and Brecht, 1975:66-67). This dissertation refers to Royce's paradox as a fractal map or synecdochal map, indicating the micro-to-macro correspondence between the part and the whole.
2. NATIONAL MANIFESTATION: National independence and Democratic Socialism (1950s-c.1963)

From the Bandung Conference inaugurating the Non-aligned Movement in 1955, until the early 1960s, the PAP presented itself as the party of the masses, aligned with the nationalist struggles of Third World peoples and newly independent leftist governments: Nasser in Egypt, Sukarno in Indonesia, Nehru in India et al. (Margolin, 1993:88). PAP rhetoric during this period was strongly inflected with egalitarianism, anti-communalism and democratic socialism (Barr 2000:72).

Barr points to the developmentalist notion that underpinned the early ideological formation of the new state (2000:71-73, 76-77ff.). National manifestation provided a vision of a future nation and what this required of the populace in order that this imagined future could be realised, as voiced by the first Prime Minister of the fully independent polity, Lee Kuan Yew:

You have got to believe in something. You are not just building houses in order that people can procreate and fill those houses up because there is no point in that. You do these things because you believe that in the end you create a happy and a healthy nation, a society in which man finds fulfillment and you have got to have the ideological basis. If you treat human beings just like animals you just feed them, keep them sleek, well-exercised, healthy like dogs or cats. I don't think it will work. Nations have gone through tremendous privations and hardships in order to achieve specific goals which have inspired and fired their imagination (Lee, 5 March 1965, TV Singapura Studios, cited in Barr, 2000:77).

The statement is one of Lee's classic amalgamations of liberal social democracy, top-down social engineering, tropes of animal husbandry, and the implied transformation of

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20 The term "manifestation" derives from a performance art work, *Performative Indoctrination Model (PIM)* in which this writer provided a theoretical model of a project of propaganda and indoctrination with five stages:

1. **Manifestation**: the initial dissemination of the ideological foundation of an insurgency, marked by the presence of the manifesto or declaration;
2. **Hybridisation**: the consolidation of the ideological ground through the attachment of propaganda to already ubiquitous articulations of power/knowledge;
3. **Essentialisation/Mythification**: an embrace of new doctrines of history, taxonomy and essence;
4. **Enculturation**: life-style and daily-life ritual becomes the primary means of doctrinal purveyance;
5. **Totalisation**: total infusion of all institutions, commerce, and locally held systems of belief with the doctrines now assumed to be of indigenous origin (Langenbach 1998:146-161).
Whiggish progressivism, all packed into a futurist chronotype. While colonial ideology focused on the inevitability of the status quo colonial occupation of the lands of undeveloped peoples by an inherently superior British civilisation in the present, the ideological swing toward 'national manifestation' necessarily focused on a future improvement in present conditions and the promise of full development of the now independent state among the community of nations. The requisite sacrifice and discipline associated with nation-building was explicitly referred to in a 1966 PAP release: "This means social discipline and self-restraint — denying ourselves of short-term and immediate rewards for long term gains" (Chan 1971:52). It was a short-term discipline that once instantiated, became a permanent fixture.

In Lee’s speeches, the consolidation of the community, the society and the nation\(^{21}\) is tied explicitly to the project of modernity:

> If every year Singapore could turn out men and women who understood the mechanics of a modern society and a modern economy its position would be consolidated (Lee 1966, cited in Chan 1971:52).

In Lee's conception of nationhood the people develop and find fulfillment through the production of the nation and the government, with the ruling party providing the vision of the national future that will be delivered by the labour of the people. The concept implies that the people's labour builds the nation naturally and inevitably, and produces fulfillment as surplus value. "Whereas it may be commonly thought that society and nation are tools that serve people, Lee reversed this order: the purpose of people is to build a healthy nation and society" (Barr, 2000:77), and a strong ruling party. This party imaginary, performatively inaugurated as a state vision, would become a dominant characteristic of PAP ideology.

The period of ideological solidarity with the Socialist International came to an end gradually, beginning in 1961 with the split between the conservative and leftist factions of the PAP, and the formation of the Barisan Socialis. The detention of socialists and unionists by the PAP in the years following 1961 resulted in the expulsion/withdrawal of

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\(^{21}\) Chan points out that PAP rhetoric preferred society and community to the word nation until July 1965, when they discarded any expectation for an eventual reunification with Malaysia. Thereafter, nation became the explicit polemical focus.
the PAP from the Socialist International in 1976 (Devan Nair, 1976). The rhetoric of independence and national manifestation took a turn in 1965, upon separation from Malaysia. From that point on, the rhetoric of 'democratic rights' was replaced by a rhetoric of 'survival' (Chan, 1973; Birch, 1963, Heng and Devan, 1992), a conservative commitment to globalised capitalism (of the West and Japan, rather than through regional cooperation), and the subjugation of labour (1968 Employment Act) to the needs of export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) (Margolin, 1993:89-90). This shift corresponded with a turn toward economic instrumentalism and a rationalisation of the sacrifices of the Singapore people in building the imagined global nation of the future.


Following independence, the PAP government addressed the survival of the independent Singapore nation, applying Toynbee's influential theory of civilisational "challenge and response" (Toynbee 1946:60-79; Barr 2000:63ff.). Toynbee argues that civilisations progress when and if they must, due to internal or external pressures, and each challenge and successful response brings to bear on the next challenge, producing a dialectic of progress (Toynbee 1946:576). Without these conditions, societies sink into a state of arrested development. Toynbee rejected essentialist arguments that explained civilization according to biological (racial) or environmental determinism, replacing these views with a structuralist abstraction. He focused his attention on cultural or civilisational responses to physical conditions: "man achieves civilization as a response to a challenge in a situation of special difficulty that arouses him to make an hitherto unprecedented effort" (Toynbee 1946:570).

Toynbee believed that an analysis of global history reveals the conditions that lead to the success and decline of societies. History cannot be described as a singular progression from a primitive past to a civilisational future, since conditions of challenge can be destructive and progress reversed if the imposition upon a given civilisation is in excess of a certain "golden mean" (Toynbee 1946:141ff.). In Toynbee's writings, history takes the form of an oscillation between "stasis and dynamism", concepts derived from Confucian
and Taoist notions of the oppositional dynamics of *yin/yang*, which were combined with a Hegelian historical dialectic. One can find Toynbee’s views of stasis and dynamism inflecting PAP rhetoric in 1965, during and just after the separation from Malaysia. The PAP position was that the merger failed because under the ruling United Malay National Organization (UMNO), Malaysia was a "conservative static" society, while Singapore, under the PAP was "dynamic" and "innovating", as reflected in a release from the Singapore Ministry of Culture, entitled *Separation*:

One was a conservative static society, wanting to keep what was in the past and to reinforce the forces that kept the society where it was. The other was an innovating society, prepared to reach out for the stars, to experiment and pick the best that suited the country (Chan 1971:10).  

Toynbee's thesis supports a progressivist view, and the PAP conflated Toynbee's thought with a kind of essentialised progressivism and a teleological imaginary, under the aegis of an official Socialist Realist aesthetics, in which the party was the *blazon* of the national plural subjective.

### 4. CONSOLIDATING STATE AESTHETICS: Socialist Realism (1959-present)

Socialist Realism refers not simply to particular art forms, but to a total social programme and an "ideology, that is, a systematic body of concepts about culture" (Gutkin 1999:2), in the service of a unified telos. Socialist Realism is inclusive of life-style, political organisation, bureaucratic functions, social engineering, education, the economies of cultural production, display, reception, regulatory apparatuses, and the deployment of discipline and force. As an ideologically inflected aesthetic, Socialist Realism defines

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22 Chan does not concur with these PAP rationalisations of ideological differences leading to the separation from Malaysia. She argues that it resulted from the attempt of the PAP to impose "the Singapore style of politics on Malaya": a style reflecting PAP qualities as a "calculating, democratic socialist party with a non-communal structure based on a fairly homogenous island. [A]ccustomed to open debate [...] and swift implementation of policy", in contradistinction to the style of the ruling Malay party, UMNO (United Malay National Organisation). Chan characterizes UMNO as a "non-ideological […] communal structure based on a plural society […] accustomed to bargaining and balancing the views of one racial group with the other" (Chan 1971:10).

23 This set of conditions has been described by a number of writers from the former Soviet Union, where the
• A particular kind of lived and performed relationship of artist-citzenry-party-state that includes a strong privileging of state desire;
• The often violent enforcements of that desire, and a correlative degree of complicity and acquiescence among a majority of artists to state desire.
• Alongside this we find various tactics of artistic resistance to state patronage amongst a minority of artists, or the appearance of parallel practices: one state-affiliated and the other resistant to 'official aesthetics'.

Boris Groys argues that Socialist Realism formally, if not ideologically, represents one of the first outcroppings of post-modernist aesthetics, in which the codes of realism and mimesis are thrown into free-float and combined with "ubiquitous use of citation and conscious eclecticism" (Groys, 1992:11). Yet, by virtue of a strong imaginary component, mimetic codes are assigned to serve a thoroughly modernist project: the reification and monumentalisation of official ideology, and the establishment of 'statolatry'. In the words of Stalin, Soviet socialist realism combined realism with a way forward toward socialism, as he stated in his speech to the writers, October 1932:

An artist must above all portray life truthfully. And if he shows our life truthfully, on its way to socialism, that will be socialist realism (Gutkin, 1999:38).

Socialist Realist aesthetics in Singapore, as in other socialist and post-socialist cultures is tied to two poles: mimesis (realism) and an imaginary (romanticism, surrealism)\(^\text{24}\). The aesthetic originated (Miklós Haraszti 1983; Boris Groys 1992; Boris Kagarlitsky 1988; Norman Manea 1992, Gutkin 1999; Clark, K. 2000). In Singapore, the most influential explication of Socialist Realist cultural politics has been Victor Haraszti's *The Velvet Prison*. Haraszti relates the complex contractual arrangements of state and intellectuals that were so essential to the construction of an official state semantics and pragmatics in Hungary. Haraszti's book has found particular resonance in the late 1990s, in the work of the performance artist, Lee Wen, and the critical writings of Sharaad Kuttan, Peter Schoppert, and Ray Langenbach.

\(^{24}\) The writer, Maxim Gorkii, an important theorist of the style, in 1935 elaborated the theme that Socialist Realism consisted of not just the realist depiction of the material culture of the present, but also adhered to a 'plan': a pragmatic projection of the future, and a map of how to get there. It includes necessary representations of the figure of the leader of the ruling party, who embodies the heroic ideology for which the party stands. The party, in turn, concentrates the ethos of the nation. State affiliated artists serve as 'engineers' of the image (and imaginary) of leader, party and state:

It is not enough to show what is, it is necessary to remember what is desirable and possible [...]. We, people of the arts, have been named "engineers of souls." This title is given to us as an advance. We are not engineers yet. Engineers work according to plan. Our whole country works according to plan [...]. I am deeply convinced we are capable of this. We have a plan, we have a goal, and a source of energy which consists in that universal idea which illuminates all phenomena of social life [...] . I repeat once again: for
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former relies on the accurate description (constatiation) of a present state of affairs, corresponding usually to a pragmatic acceptance of some 'challenge' (as in a Toynbeean 'challenge'), whether affecting a particular class, ethnic group, generation, or society as a whole. The necessary response to the challenge is romantically recuperated in signs of heroic struggle. All challenges reinforce the necessity for renewed labour by 'the people'.

Teleological progressivism in Singapore appears to have received its co-traveler Socialist Realist gloss along with the early commitment to democratic socialism by the PAP, Singapore's membership in the Socialist International, and subsequently from the Cultural Revolution in China. Chan Heng Chee cites Goh Keng Swee's comment that the "PAP emphasis on the educative role of the government (and the incessant implementation of campaigns) was inspired by the campaign technique and operational methods of the People’s Republic of China" (Chan1971:52). These have included party and state slogans, public monument explanatory texts, and government behaviour-modification campaigns, with demonstrative PAP performances, such as "Big Cleanup Campaign" (1959); Blood Donation Campaign (1959); "Tree Planting Campaign" to build a modern "Garden City" (1971); "Use Your Hands Campaign" to create a clean environment (1978); "Speak Mandarin Campaign " (1979); "Courtesy Campaign" (1982), and many others. They all had in common strong didactic content, the presentation of party/government performance 'exemplars', overt messages of patriotism, admonitions, exhortations to party/government loyalty, with a canonical and easily accessed (historical) master-narrative. Each of these campaigns was accompanied by photo-opportunities, showing Cabinet officials engaging in the activities of the campaign, strongly reminiscent of Chinese campaigns of the Maoist and post-Mao period (Lianhe Zaobao/Singapore Press Holdings. 1994).

Socialist Realist narratives often adopt a developmentalist notion personified as the phases of life of the proletarian-hero, which, in turn, reiterate Marxist-Leninist stages of historical progress (Clark, T. 2000:10). In Singapore this vision of the Leader and the Party synchronmeshes nicely with Raffles' ‘ages of man’ teleology (See discussions above and in Chapter IV).

25 Katarina Clark identifies all of these elements in her study of the Soviet novel as essential components of Socialist Realist literature under Stalinism and post-Stalinist Soviet governments (Clark, 2000).
The most spectacular of party/state events is the annual National Day Parade, while the most ubiquitous is the mass-pedagogy of National Education, with its component part, *The Singapore Story 3D experience* (1993-5). In the 1990s through the present, government campaigns ('Global City for the Arts', 'Singapore 21', 'Asian Renaissance City', and 'Remaking Singapore') have turned from daily-life behavioural modification to a focus on cultural development, preparing the populace for performance competition in a global economic arena, and for the transition to the 'Third Generation' leadership under the premiership of Lee Kuan Yew's son, Lee Hsien Loong.

The split of the PAP, which resulted in the birth of the short-lived *Barisan Socialis* party (Socialist Front) out of its ranks in 1961, was tangentially linked with the demise of a strong Social Realist26 movement in the arts that had manifested in street-theatre, led by Kuo Pao Kun and others, the Singapore woodblock print movement, influenced by Lu Xun's publishing endeavours27, Mao Zedong's 1942/3 Yan’an talks on the proper role of literature and art in a communist society, and the Cultural Revolution. Early PAP articulations of aesthetics, such as one in 1967 by an unnamed PAP speaker, quoted below, were marked by an odd combination of Yan’an political utilitarianism, pedagogical fervour and Confucian/Protestant prohibition. These attributes mark the shift from Social Realist concern for the social welfare of the masses to a Socialist Realist project to mould citizens into a more effective work-force, often through exhortations concerning their moral welfare.

Plays must be free from crudeness in production, opportunism, monotony, vulgarity, plagiarism and backwardness and they

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26 *Social Realism* refers to a late 19th century and early to mid-20th century modernist artistic commitment in rural and industrial societies to represent the lives of the middle and lower-classes, usually tied to oppositional political movements on the left. *Social Realism* is distinguished as much by its marginality and resistance to the dominant representations of power as by its proletarian focus, and has manifested under capitalist, fascist, socialist and communist governments.

Historically, when a socialist government enlists *Social Realism* to the service of its administrative desires and goals, it becomes *Socialist Realism*. The latter may be considered as an adaptation and usually a fetishisation of the former. The formal distinctions between the two, however, remains fuzzy and their use of metaphor is often identical (*Socialist Realism* often intentionally mimicking *Social Realist* tropes). However, their respective relationships to the real-political context (in particular their respective relationships to the centers of power) are usually antithetical (Groys 1992; Clark 2000).

CHAPTER II: IDEOLOGICAL FRAMES

should provide noble, healthy and proper cultural entertainment for the people (Chan 1971:52).

A similar notion of Puritan didacticism put to the service of the new state, but without its socialist\(^2\) packaging, was iterated by Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's Minister of Defence in his advice to playwrights at a variety concert organized by the Bukit Merah branch of the People's Action Party in 1967 as a kind of "third way" for local art, between Western excesses and the aesthetics of Asian feudalism:

- The themes of the play should be in keeping with the realistic life in Singapore, and its multi-racial, multicultural and multi-religious spirit.
- They must discard the crazy, sensual, ridiculous, boisterous and over materialistic style of the West. In the same way the feudalistic superstitions, ignorant and pessimistic forces of the East are equally repugnant.
- They must emphasise the spirit of patriotism, love for the people and for science, and cultivate diligence, courage, sense of responsibility and a positive philosophy of life.
- They must be free from crudeness in production, opportunism, monotony, vulgarity, plagiarism and backwardness.
- They must provide noble, healthy and proper cultural entertainment. (The Straits Times, 9/4/76 cited in Birch 1998:31)

These requirements are infused with a hard-nosed modernist, secular pragmatism on the one hand and a strong moral Confucian-cum-Puritan didacticism on the other. They indicate a desire of the PAP government to be a cultural player and to mould Singapore culture in its own ideological image. The primary linguistic tool of this enterprise is the performative trope structured as 'pragmatic' or 'realistic' descriptions, in the service of PAP centrality and historical achievements. The purpose of the performing arts in the eyes of the government was to aid in nation-building, to instill a singular secular nationalism, and to ennoble the populace with entertainment that would help to consolidate the nation with its industrial economy.

Socialist Realism merged with Western and Confucian morals and a kind of corporate pocket-protector aesthetics to produce what Peter Schoppert has identified as

\(^2\) As discussed earlier in this chapter, the PAP government had distanced itself at this time from its earlier Democratic socialist ideals and programmes (Dutch Labour Party. 1976; Chan 1971).
'instrumentalist corporatist kitsch'. Schoppert exemplifies his thesis through an analysis of the didactic and developmental narratives intruding into the titles and explanatory plaques adorning public sculptures and monuments (rather than the sculptures themselves) (Schoppert 2001:90-117). These same developmental metaphors are heard in the voice-over narration of the National Day Parade (NDP) that each year reiterates heroic narratives of the founding, present achievements and future promise of the nation and the PAP as the central institution of the Republic. The television narration of the spectacle, in particular, follows the lineage of Socialist Realist exhortations, manifestos and declarations that reaches back through mid-century Maoist China to the late 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union (Gutkin 1999; Clark 2000; Haraszti 1987; Groys 1992, Mao 1972; McDougall 1980:3-41, Holm 1991; Landsberger 1995).

5. CONSOLIDATING STATE IDEOLOGY: Shared Values (1991-present)

In 1991 an ideological rhetoric of Shared Values and Core Values was instituted (Clammer, 1993; Chua, 1995; Barr, 2000). The Shared Values instituted by government decree following Select Committee ruminations were:

- Nation before community and society above self
- Family as the basic unit of society
- Community support and respect for the individual
- Consensus, not conflict
- Racial and religious harmony (Foo 2000:12)

In the initial White Paper on Shared Values of 1991, the wording was different, emphasizing less objectified and consolidated, more performance-based values in the process of articulation:

- placing society above self; upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contentions [sic], stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony (Chua 1995:32, emphasis added.)

The difference between the drafts is instructive. The wording of the White Paper implies a citizenry that actively engages in the 'placing', 'upholding', 'building', 'resolving', 'streaming'. The final draft, strongly influenced by Socialist Realist aesthetics, eliminates
all residue of predicates and pronouns, calling forth an already consolidated and frozen ideology without subjects or agency. The unstable and tentative Toynbeeian progressivist illocutions of the draft were replaced by a perlocutionary stable state already completed, with references to further social progress elided.

Yet(113,897),(999,928) this grammar of arrival is belied by the perceived need for the Shared Values, which were meant to be a government solution to the problems that arose from an earlier government campaign in 1982 to introduce courses on Confucian Ethics into the Religious Knowledge curriculum. Once again the ever-present spectre of ethnic and religious tension arose, this time in the educational system. In 1988 the government accepted "the findings of a government-commissioned social scientific study on religion in Singapore [that] implicated Religious Knowledge courses in intensifying religious fervour and religious differences between students, and possibly in the long term, contributing to inter-religious conflicts" (Chua, 1995:30). The introduction in the school system of Religious Knowledge and Confucian Ethics had merged with always sensitive ethnic identitarian divisions, underscored by meritocratic presumptions that had already exacerbated economic and power divides between the ethnic groups. When attached to ethnic disparities, the introduction of these discourses of indentitarianism, while meant to enhance production by tying economic growth to a historical and ethnic identity, tended to weaken efforts to unite the population across indentitarian lines. The resulting divisiveness ran counter to the overall national development goals that presumed the progressive homogenisation of the populace into a 'national race' (a terminology that conflated eugenics with the rhetoric of national consolidation). In by then predictable top-down fashion, the government addressed the problem by appointing a government committee "to develop a 'national ideology'" with renewed nationalist values that emphasized a common destiny in the nation state (Chua, 1995:32).

Acting on the committee's recommendations in 1991, the government turned off the divisive religious and moral education programmes and struck up the band of a shared Singaporean value system, with obvious links to a larger notion of regional Asian values. Since the mid-1990s, the ideological focus has turned ever more toward inculcating a notion of a 'national race' and a common 'cultural DNA'. This has been done through campaigns focused on ever more elaborate developmental imaginings of Singapore
globalisation — a vision at once consolidating and dismembering: 'Global City', 'Global City for the Arts', 'Singapore 21', 'Asian Renaissance City'. These have been accompanied by motivational rhetoric: 'Globalising the economy', 'innovation', 'competitiveness', and the introduction of 'foreign talent' (C.J. Wee W.-L., 2002:238). When faced with the onslaught of the radical pluralism of globalisation (paradoxically embraced by a 'garrison state' government), cultural homogeneity is continuously shored-up through a recitative of the tropes of Shared Values that presents a utopian imaginary of the present state completely consolidated, and at one with ruling party goals. The Prime Minister's representation of the PAP as "not just an ordinary political party" but as a "key national institution holding our country together" (Goh 1999:2), presents the party as an essential guardian of the national Subject. Through its control of the government, the party consolidates the nation against those forces (many introduced by their own globalising imperatives) that would tear it asunder, while the nation, in turn, serves to preserve and maintain the party.

The consolidation of a modernist state ideology in Singapore in the late 1990s required a teleology, built upon instrumentalist myths of the colonial past, the ‘inevitable present’ (of Whiggish progressivism), on the immanent threats of the regional ‘Other’, on the challenges and hopes inherent in a Toynbeean 'challenge-response' scenario, and on the taxonomies of Asian Values (See Chapter III). All these ideological strands necessitated a romantic utopian future that is attainable, but just out of reach, requiring enormous effort and desire to develop further. The ‘imagined’ entity of the nation (Anderson 1983) finds its mythic consolidation in the trajectory of this developmental telos.

This ideological trajectory will lead us in the later chapters back to the narrative of the Artists' General Assembly as a fulcrum of crisis, jointly constructed by the government and artists, each to advance their separate visions of performance and the civil state in Singapore in 1993-4. On the one side is an instrumental notion of performance, as manifested in teleological developmentalism (Whiggish progressivism, the crisis of national manifestation and survival, Toynbeean challenge and response, Asian Values and Core Values under the rubric of Socialist Realist aesthetics). On the other is a tropological
framing of performance, engendering critical citizenship. Both are seen in this dissertation to be cultural productions of a pluralistic Singapore state. Performance in 1993/4 was an arena for the acting out of a drama of cultural rapture/rupture, crisis, redress and alienation, where the complex relationship between governance and civil society, administrators and intellectuals acutely revealed itself. To understand this collision of performative ideologies it is important to have in mind how *performativity* and *performance* is inflected by language, social behaviour and aesthetic ritual. This is the subject of Chapter III.
Chapter III.
PERFORMATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

The objects of analysis in this chapter—tropes, linguistic performatives, 'organisational performance' and performance art—have been foreshadowed in the Introduction and first two chapters. This chapter will now go into more depth on these key themes, in the course of an analysis of the 1966 book, *Metaphor and Public Communication: Selected Speeches of Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong*, by two Singapore academics, Ong Siow Heng and Nirmala Govindasamy-Ong. This focus on the performative trope (Section 1), organisational performance (Section 2), and performance art (Section 3), provides a background to the analysis of specific Singapore performances found in Chapters IV-VIII.
1. THE PERFORMATIVE TROPE AND OUROBORIC DISCOURSE

THE TROPE

The word *trope* —which itself is a trope— derives from the Classical Greek word for *turn* (*tropikos, tropos*), as well as the Latin word *tropus*: "which in Classical Latin meant 'metaphor' or 'figure of speech'" (White, 1978:2). Tropes may be both linguistic and haptic. Late Latin use for 'melody' and 'mood' in music 'sedimented' into the early English word *trope* that referred to style in literary composition, sitting uneasily between "logical demonstration and pure fiction" (White, 1978:2). The 'performative trope' —which also is a trope— actively produces that which it appears to simply denote, and reflexively holds itself as content, functioning as an autogenic prophetic utterance. Appearing in a progressivist or developmental teleology, the normal relations of the sign become reflexive and self-consuming (*ouroboric*)¹. In such a situation, descriptive signifiers or *constatives* (true-false statements) double as productive or determining signifiers, *performatives*, that correspond not only to given signifieds but pragmatically bring into being the state of affairs to which the signifieds correspond.

There are four framings of 'trope' useful for the following discussions. First, the *cognitive trope* as a deep-metaphorical structure in the brain, by which the world is ordered by the limiting of thought and consciousness, theorised by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987); second, the *cultural trope* as a direct product of specific cultural experience, and a limited set of local cultural and environmental choices (Quinn, 1991; Fish, 1995:204); third, the *(un)conventional trope* as signifier of the norm, or a *turn* from the norm, that is, a convention or a disfigurement of language; and fourth, the *performative trope* as a stereotypical or mythic image, that effectively disseminates ideology or a particular state of affairs, through a speech act that brings into being the very phenomena it appears to describe (Austin, 1975). Unlike *cognitive, cultural* and *(un)conventional* tropes, which generally lie outside intention and largely determine the possible field of consciousness and intentionality, the *performative* trope is engineered to shape utterance so as to intentionally and instrumentally convince.

¹ From Greek *Ouroborus*, refers to a self-consuming and self-canceling discourse. See front-piece and discussion below.
As will be discussed below, such 'performative tropes' are both generative and ouroboric, or self-consuming. They are marked by paradox and vicious circularity for two reasons. First, their transmission necessarily instantiates their own conventional 'turn' or disfigurement. Second, by virtue of existing in a cultural context, they hold both metaphoric and metonymic significance, existing as both discourse and socio-political agency — two jambs of a swinging door that, when it is completely closed, is also fully open. A visual trope that best exemplifies this embedded contradiction is that of Marcel Duchamp's paradoxical installation, Porte, 11 Rue Larrey (Figure #6.).

Figure 8. Marcel Duchamp: Porte, 11 rue Larrey 1927
(Wooden door made by a carpenter following Duchamp's instructions)
86\(\frac{5}{8}\) x 24\(\frac{11}{16}\) inches. Detached from original location;
collection of Fabio Sargentini, Rome (Thierry De Duve, 1991:62) ²

COGNITIVE TROPES
The last fifty years of theoretical inquiry has led to a framing of language that is profoundly unstable. The ‘referential,’ descriptive capability of language, that is, its ability to point at, and accurately map reality has been displaced by an acute awareness of the

² Duchamp posed a visual paradox by building a door in his apartment at 11 Rue Larrey, to swing between two jambs that faced each other across a corner of <90°. When the entrance to one room was open, the other was closed, or, to describe the situation as a paradox: When the door was fully open, it was also fully closed. Emphasizing first its linguistic aspects, and, second, its commodity value, Duchamp made a second version of the door as a freestanding sculpture of the 'idea', divorcing it from all utilitarian purpose (Thierry De Duve, 1991:62).
"figurative devices that lie at the very heart of discourse" (Fernandez, 1991:1 Emphasis added). The notion of a ‘figurative system’ that shapes not only language but culture itself has been strongly theorised in the area of linguistics held in common with cognitive science. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), following on Chomsky's notion of deep structures (Chomsky 1988; Chomsky 1992:393-396), have been instrumental in altering perceptions of the trope (especially metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche), by theorising metahoric usage as fundamental to consciousness and language formation. For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is the manifestation of processes in the brain, or, to put it in other words, the manner in which we speak/think/draw is a reflection of mind-brain structures which can be characterized as 'metaphorical'.

Linguistic expression, they argue, is possible because the brain's methods of conceptualisation are already metaphorical. Because metaphor is necessary to conceptualization it must also produce our conceptions of reality, including society and cultural norms.

Metaphors produce the image of the future and script our future actions that then take on the characteristics of the metaphors that determined them. "This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:156). The trope, then, is both an instrumental drive and an imaginary and performative turn. On the one hand it is rooted in pragmatics and experience, and on the other, it imagines the "real" from which it obtains its instrumentality. Continuity is preserved by virtue of a process of mapping the future with the present and the present with the promised future. So, Lakoff and Johnson's conceptualization of the metaphor is performative in the Austinian sense (see below) and, ouroboric. The border between signifier⇔signified is open, permeable, and reversible.

For Lakoff, tropes carry entailments. That is, by limiting the field of imaginative possibilities, they produce culture and beliefs, govern reason, and produce conventional forms of social behaviour. This reading of the trope is decidedly top-down, or 'brain-out',

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3 Fernandez makes her point with just such a figurative device: the metaphor of a sleeping homunculus (or is it an Edenic snake?), which "lies at the very heart" of her discourse.

4 Lakoff later expanded this theory of metaphor to include a wide variety of other tropes, producing a broad theory of embodied linguistic categorisation, based on a notion of Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM) (Lakoff, 1987), inspired by earlier 'prototype' theories of Eleanor Rosch (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991), and others.
outside the purview of consciousness and intention, moving from cognitive structures to cultural entailments, and elicited a significant critique by Naomi Quinn (Quinn 1991).

CULTURAL TROPES

Quinn argues that Johnson and Lakoff tend to view metaphors and Cognitive Models as productively "structuring meaning de novo", because they leave specific cultural artifacts out of their analysis. Her critique, perhaps indicative of a "territorial squabble between linguists and anthropologists" (Quinn, 1991: 90), points to a limit in Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of entailments, in which "Metaphors [...] govern reasoning by allowing only those inferences that follow from relations between entities in the metaphorical source domain. These metaphorical entailments constitute a grasp of the situation to be reasoned about" (Quinn, 1991: 76). Quinn's position is at once more scripted and more intentional than Lakoff and Johnson's: "particular metaphors are selected by speakers and are favoured by these speakers, just because they provide satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings" (Quinn, 1991: 65). That is, metaphors appear to have limited entailments only if one assumes that the choice of those metaphors to begin with was 'unconstrained' by culture. Tropes appear to structure reality because those that don’t have been eliminated from consideration.

For Quinn, Lakoff's theory of "Idealised Cognitive Models" (Lakoff, 1987) and Johnson's theory of embodiment (Johnson 1987) both tend to rely on "idealized cases, disconnected from the context of actual use in natural discourse" (Quinn, 1991: 91). They cut the cake in such a way that metaphors and other figures of speech appear to be signifiers of strong cognitive agency precedent to the contingencies of local cultural discourse and the social necessities constraining that discourse. While Quinn agrees that "metaphor is the quintessential challenge to the objectivist account, according to which only literal concepts and propositions can describe the world" (Quinn, 1991: 90), she does not accept that "metaphor constitutes (in any of several senses of that term) everyday understanding [...]"(Quinn, 1991: 93). Rather, she claims that cultural models play a much greater role in our understanding of the world, but are not in themselves metaphoric or image-schematics. Her argument throws weight onto local (and ‘glocal’) cultural conventions as

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5 The term 'literal concepts and propositions' more or less corresponds to Austin's 'constatives'.

the site for the formation of understanding, and raises the issue of how those iterable
elocutionary conventions came to be produced in the first place.

Quinn’s work leaves room for potential interventions (‘constraints’) such as those that, as
described below, produce the metonymic dilemma of Ong & Govindasamy-Ong. Without
political or contextual constraints, the trope is reduced to an instrumentalising meta-
dictator that determines the limits of possible discourse, and functions as an instrument of
'implicit censorship' (Butler 1997:130-134). Quinn’s formulation of environmental
constraints leaves room for a less totalised theorisation of explicit interventions
—censorship as well as social and cognitive engineering—such as we find in Singapore.

(UN)CONVENTIONAL TROPES

Another view of the trope, this one seen through the lens of convention versus deviation
(Butler, 1997-2; White, 1978; Friedrich, 1991), is important for this discussion. White
considers "tropes to be deviations from the literal, conventional, or 'proper' language use;
that is, swerves in locution, sanctioned neither by custom nor logic. Tropes generate
figures of speech or thought by their variation from what is 'normally' expected […]"
(White, 1978:2). But, like Calvino's tropography of exceptions, these deviations also
produce the norms from which they deviate. A liminal term, deploying fiction to
demonstrate truths, the trope oscillates between convention and transformation. In her
commentary on White, Butler points to his suggestion that an uncustomary or illogical
connection requires two conditions:

▪ The trope cannot function as a departure from the norm, "unless it is recognised as
a departure".
▪ The exception requires a convention, against which, or outside of which, it can
function ‘contrapuntally’ (Butler,1997-2:202).

While Butler notes that this might imply that the trope is the exception that is produced by
the presence of a rule, White suggests the inverse: the trope is the deviant index of the
rule.

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6 Calvino's apocryphal tale relates a series of conversations between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan. Calvino
draws the paradox of the model city composed of exceptions from the norm, from which Polo deduces the
norm by subtracting the exceptions one by one. Through this 'negative dialectics', the abnorm generates the
norm (Calvino 1978). This text is discussed at the end of Chapter VIII.
Butler points out that any description of the generative capabilities of the trope itself requires the use of tropes, as we saw in Fernandez’s use of a homunculus metaphor to explain the function of metaphor above. The trope proliferates and reproduces through our very attempts to isolate it as a phenomenon. This ever expanding circle of tropes defining tropes leads to a totalising theory, such as Friedrich’s theory of 'polytropy' (Friedrich 1991). Specifically, Butler's trope of the trope is "reflective and generative, mimetic and performative" (Butler, 1997(2):202). It is a proliferating surplus in language, ‘citational’, ‘iterable’, rhizomic, duplicitous, generative, performative: a point of imaginative and productive dis-order.

THE PERFORMATIVE

J.L. Austin theorized the notion of the 'performative' in a series of seminal lectures in 1955. Austin focused on a particular kind of utterance or ‘speech act’ that he called the performative, opposing this term to a 'descriptivist' focus on true-false statements, or 'constatives'.

The term, 'constatiation', is used here to denote the description of, or the drawing attention to, a given condition, naming and representing things as they already are. The 'performative', on the other hand, imposes "linguistic categories, bringing things into being, organizing the world rather than simply representing what is" (Culler, 1997:96).

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7 Austin's critique was leveled at the Descriptivist school of American linguistics, based primarily on methods of synchronic analysis and the work of the anthropologist, Franz Boas. Austin’s lectures were an assault on what he called the "descriptive fallacy of overlooking specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements [...] that indicate [...] the circumstances in which the statement is made or reservations to which it is subject or the way it is to be taken [...]" (Austin 1975:3). Austin sought to establish the performative quality of description.

There was an anthropological precedent for Austin's performative in Malinowski's studies of the language of the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski saw the need for a category of words that could not be reduced to true/false descriptive evaluations of a state of affairs, but which actually did things. Malinowski noted that many words, such as a greeting or a signal of respect, had no implicit meaning other than their effect of creating or maintaining bonds of sentiment between the speakers, which he termed 'phatic' communication (Malinowski 1923 in Sampson, 1980:224).

8 The polarity between 'representing' the real and bringing it into being by "imposing linguistic categories" parallels the rupture between Quinn and Lakoff on the nature of the trope as contextually produced (constative) or productive of context (performative).
Out of the collision of the performative and the constative arises an "undecidable oscillation, aporia" (Culler, 1997:96), or 'chiasmus'. Austin's text is itself aporic. Austin's attempts to distinguish the very qualities of the constative require a performative move of imposing categories. The resulting category of the constative, then, must admit to a constitutive performativity. So, while the act of describing performatives is carried out by the use of constatives, the construction of the constative is performative. Secondly, when we describe the performative, we do so as if it already exists prior to the description. Yet, the performative comes into being reflexively through its function of bringing about that to which it refers. The performative does not exist prior to its function, and cannot be described except through that function. Hence, the performative shares with the trope the quality of a self-fulfilling prophecy that cannot be constatively described, but only suggested. By the sixth of his lectures, Austin, leading his audience by the nose into the turnings of his aporia, admitted that he held no hope for the possibility of clear distinctions between the performative and the constative: "very commonly the same sentence is used on different occasions of utterance in both ways, performative and constative" (Austin, 1975:67).

LOCUTION AND 'TRANSLOCUTION'
Also important to this dissertation, Austin delineated another tracing of the territory of the constative and performative with the terms, 'locution', 'illocution', 'and perlocution'. A 'locution' is roughly any utterance with a certain 'sense' or 'meaning', that is, one that refers to certain things. Phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts all fall within the bounds of 'locution', that is an utterance with a meaning (Austin, 1975:121).

An illocutionary act is one in which a locution is put to use "convincing, informing, ordering, warning, undertaking". Illocutions are utterances with a 'conventional force.' They are classic performatives that require the manifestation of certain 'effects' or 'responses' to be 'felicitous', such as what Austin calls the "securing of uptake"— a sign that the import of the illocution has been recognised. This may be in the form of an appropriate gesture or a sequel in which a response is forthcoming. Yet illocution and response acknowledges a space of indecidability between the illocution and its uptake — a quality not present in 'perlocutionary' utterances. For example, "I ordered him and he
obeyed", describes an illocutionary act, rather than, "I got him to obey", which would fall under 'perlocution'.

A 'perlocutionary' act is an act of "convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading", in which the locution has clear physical effects or consequences, whether intentional or not. Austin clarifies this strong bond between speech act and its effect by stating it inversely, looking back from effect to cause: "the perlocutionary act […] is the achieving of certain effects by saying something" (Austin, 1975:121).

It is revealing to apply the distinctions of illocution, perlocution and translocution to government locutions in Singapore. Since 1990 the Goh government has abjured the most obvious totalitarian methods of violently coalescing power (with some significant exceptions). However, illocutionary space — the negotiated site of governmentality — has been consistently delimited through perlocutionary foreclosures of many specific initiatives arising out of civil society. These include attempts by non-government organisations to protect the rights of labourers and immigrants, or to address class and ethnic disparities. The attempts by opposition politicians to mount electoral challenges and the production of cultural products critical of government policies have been consistently suppressed. Illocution — speech open to possibility — has provided the surface-code, under which the PAP controlled government has coalesced power.

Marcia M. Eaton (1980:287) fills a pragmatic gap in Austin’s triad of "locution, illocution, perlocution" with an additional category, translocution, in which a performer locutes another’s words (or makes another's gestures), whether the apparent 'author' of those words or gestures be the writer, a character in a script, a persona of a performance artist, or the dictates of a government through a spokesperson. Austin would consider this addendum to his theory "unhappy, infelicitous, insincere". The concept has import in

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9 The process of perlocutionary foreclosure is described in Chapter V.

10 Early in the book, Austin claims that the performative utterance does not just say, it does, and although it cannot be said to be either true or false, it nevertheless is open to 'criticism'. That is, it can be successful or not, or as Austin personifies, 'happy' or 'unhappy', 'felicitous' or 'infelicitous'. The performative, like a dangerous liaison, is subject to "misfires, abuses, misapplications, misinvocations, and misexecutions". The performative can also be 'insincere', in which case Austin calls it 'hollow', implying a container with no
that slippery realm of 'infelicitous' and unverifiable speech acts of theatre, advertising slogans produced by ad agencies, sound-bites from the television news team, or political 'spots' ('polispots') (Diamond and Bates 1992), or, as is discussed below, intellectuals, such as Ong and Govindasamy Ong, who translocute the views and policies of those government officials, through an ostensibly 'objective' the analysis of the tropes embedded in their official locutions.

Translocution assumes the conventional and encoded, symbological character of performance (Turner, 1982:10), in which the performed identity is a function of a conventional sign rather than taxonomy. Acts are attributed not to writers or performers "[…] but to the characters whom they create […] thereby avoiding the necessity of making liars and kooks of them" (Eaton, 1980:229).

This notion of 'translocution' is significant to understanding the field of performance art, in which citings from daily life, legal, religious and political rituals may be particularly layered and complex and may or may not reflect the views of the performer-author. For example, performance artists, such as Eric Bogosian or Anne Magnuson, who came out of New York's East Village/Lower East Side scene in the 1980s, regularly took on multiple identities in a single performance. As will be discussed in Chapter VII, Josef Ng, carefully maintaining an mist of indeterminacy concerning his own sexual identity, translocuted the abject voices of gay men in his performances.

contents. Austin arrives at six rules for "the smooth or ‘happy’ functioning of a performative":

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(T.1) Where […] the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves and further

(T.2) actually so conduct themselves subsequently (Austin, J.L., 1975:14-15).

11 The work functioned on the one hand as a space of inter-identitarian and intertextual inquiry, and on the other, as an imposition of appropriational tactics, distilling multiple class identities in a singular, pan-representative bourgeois body.
PERFORMATIVE TROPES AND NATIONAL DISCOURSE

Metaphor and Public Communication: Selected Speeches of Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong, by Ong and Govindasamy-Ong, 1996, is strongly influenced by Lakoff and Johnson’s theory that consciousness and language are structured by and around metaphoric conventions. The authors attempt to bridge two notions of the trope, which we may call, on the one hand, an ambiguous ‘complex layered tropology’, and on the other, a clarified, mythic ‘tropography of national order’. The authors' fundamental presumption is that public discourse is a metaphorical process that ideally revolves around the effective and unambiguous (but ‘colourful’ and ‘imaginative’) utterances of a singular speaker to an anonymous receiving mass public of indeterminate class origins and cultural affiliations.

Their stated intention is that their book should show how the speakers adapted their messages to their social context illustrate what makes metaphors effective, and encourage appreciation for public address in Singapore (Ong & Govindasamy-Ong, 1996: Preface).

Ong and Govindasamy-Ong presume that metaphors result from conscious adaptation of a message to a social context, and that they are effective, that is, they produce predetermined or observable effects. As if to demonstrate their point, the authors strategically deploy metaphors of their own, with calculated effect:

An examination of the metaphors in their (Lee Kuan Yew’s and Goh Chok Tong’s) speeches will illustrate their able leadership in helping the nation sail through difficult storms. […]

Secondly, this book hopes to exhort those engaged in public discourse to craft and invent metaphors with care to persuade their case.

Thirdly, as we look forward to meeting the perpetual challenge of improving the social, cultural and economic aspects of life in Singapore, we need to collectively discover and reinvent metaphors that will inspire and sustain us. Any kind of discourse or rhetorical stylistics is intrinsically tied to the improvement of civic life. Metaphor is to be discovered and reinvented not just for the sake of embellishment, but for persuasion and the inspiration of the populace (Ong & Govindasamy-Ong, 1996: Preface, emphasis added.).
The trope is presented here as the imaginary of nation-building: an instrument of governance to be used self-consciously by the ruling elite. The strategies of persuasion are infused by a developmentalist ethos, with all public discourse, properly leading to a singular national goal, determined and declared by the leaders, regardless of class, sex, gender, ethnicity or political ideology. Associative language, according to the authors, is and should be used to inspire and persuade the people to come on board the implied ship of state, to help the captains (also implied) "sail difficult storms".12

Ong and Govindasamy-Ong describe their notion of persuasion along the lines of a conventional Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as 'the use of language to persuade'. The history of Western rhetoric and the trope have long been co-dependent. Following Aristotle, rhetoric has traditionally been defined as the practice of "using language to persuade or influence" others13, whether through logic or any other area of knowledge, but also the study of the linguistic conventions that result from this practice. Since tropes are one of those conventions, this second sense of 'rhetoric' is like pouring acid on the first. Tropes, as conventional 'turnings', dissuade and undercut persuasion as much as they enhance it. The purpose of the book being to sympathetically elucidate and explain only the manners of persuasion in the speeches of the ruling elite, Ong and Govindasamy-Ong have approached their subject with their 'eyes wide shut'. The mechanics of dissuasion in those speeches and other forms of literature issuing from civil society are ignored in this study, and only the literature of the ruling elite is considered, without comparison. By ignoring the surrounding context of civil society literatures and myths, and emphasising the instrumental and utilitarian aspects of the trope's means of persuasion and motivation, the authors deflect attention from its imaginative and fictive turnings— that is, the manner in which tropes performatively construct history. The authors performatively buttress support for Lee and Goh by using constative descriptions14 of the tropes in their speeches.

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12 The connotation of a ship and captains works off the shared history of immigrant ancestors arriving in Malaya by boat from the Malay Archipelago, China, India, Arabia and Europe.

13 Aristotle was actually more specific and more cognitive than the convention that goes by his name, assigning rhetoric the task of "considering the means of persuasion on any given subject whatsoever". Therefore, the task of the rhetor (public speaker) was not absolute persuasion, but to find in each subject the "means of persuasion […] inherent in it" (Aristotle 1995:9-12).

14 See the following discussion of performative and constative utterances in this section.
Ong & Govindasamy-Ong acknowledge that we ascertain the world through our tropological codes and conventions of figuration and categorisation; that is, through the linguistic structures by which we represent our experience to ourselves and to others. They would likely agree with the notion that "the systems of meaning and value that make figures possible also produce our way of looking at the world" (McLaughlin 1990:87). But they do not appear to accept some ramifications of that acknowledgement, namely, that such a view opens radicles of dissemination that are often far more revelatory of conventions of language and of the speaker’s culture, class, and relations to power than they are persuasive. While their text is ostensibly on metaphor, we must assume that Ong and Govindasamy-Ong are aware that their metaphor of Goh and Lee heroically ‘piloting’ the ship of state is also being read as a metonym of their class alignment with the government leaders whose speeches they are analysing, and perhaps inadvertently 'translocute'. Metonymic complicity seeps into their performance of reading ‘metaphor’, destabilising their attempts to persuade. While not precisely a panegyric, Ong and Govindasamy-Ong's text is ultimately laudatory and synecdochal, finding its place in the landscape described — leaning into the wind at the bow of official culture. Not only the speeches of Goh and Lee are to be put to good and effective use in building the nation and preserving the status quo, but Ong and Govindasamy-Ong's book itself — as a voice-over meant to increase our appreciation of these speeches — becomes an important part of this effort to produce effective national ideology. Their analysis of performative tropes generates a pragmatics that both bears out the import of discourse, but also holds the discourse as constituting member. In Ong and Govindasamy-Ong's writing, the performative effect of their text is to 'translocute' political agency within the frame of their academic and theoretical analysis, recalling the metaphoric/metonymic reading of Duchamp's door.

Building on the foundation of this polyvalent notion of speech-acts, we will now first turn to the manner that performance is mapped, its effectiveness measured in administrative state discourses, and then to the field of performance art, and the means by which the legitimacy of performances is determined in Singapore.
2. MAPPING AND MEASURING PERFORMANCE

In order to understand the Singapore government’s efforts to manage theatre and performance art, we must place seemingly isolated performances in an extended field of performance. The word, ‘performance’ refers not only to aesthetic forms and traditions, but also to measured instrumental performance: evaluative procedures in institutional, bureaucratic, economic and technological arenas. Without a general mapping of an extended field of institutional performance and the management of performance indicators, the particular significance of instrumental performance in Singapore drops below the analytical horizon, and the idiosyncratic technocratic aesthetics of the government’s performative reaction to theatre and performance art remains invisible or misunderstood.

Significant recent work has been done elucidating the place of organisational or institutional performance in the field of 'Performance Studies' by Jon McKenzie. He argues that "At the most concrete level, discursive performatives and embodied performances are forms of knowledge", that bring to bear 'efficacy' (in cultural performance), 'effectiveness' (in the performance of technologies), and 'efficiency' (in organizational performance) (McKenzie, 2001:195). 'Organizational Performance' refers to the lineage of 20th century management theory since Frederick Winslow Taylor. It encompasses the study of the behaviors of complex systems, or systematic environments

15 The field of 'Performance Studies' has developed since the late 1960s, and is composed of any number of fuzzy categories of performance, but for the purposes of this dissertation, these may be reduced to seven: cognitive, linguistic, technological, organizational, cultural, doctrinal, and metadiscursive. The field of Performance Studies combines the knowledge of practitioners, audiences, and researchers in correlative fields in which unique or iterable human 'action' takes place. This recently coalescing field includes those areas of human behaviour such as ritual and rite previously assigned to anthropology, ethnography, sociology, and psychology, speech acts studied in linguistics, political acts, and those behaviours that delineate community and identity.

For the first time, these have all been put ‘under one roof’ by virtue of a new focus on personal, micro-social motivations, local semiotics and local aesthetic/political inscriptions. This initial amalgamation of the field was done through the work of a small group of theorists, perhaps the most influential being the theatre director and academic, Richard Schechner, who drew upon the anthropological work of Victor Turner, especially the latter's theory of 'liminal, and 'liminoid' social phenomena (Schechner 1985, 1988, 1993; Carlson 1996; McKenzie 2001; Goffman 1959; Turner 1974, 1982,1986). In 1973, Schechner listed those "areas where performance theory and the social sciences coincide": "1. Performance in everyday life […]. 2. [S]ports, ritual, play and public political behaviors. 3. [M]odes of communication (other than the written word); semiotics. 4. [A]nimal behavior patterns with an emphasis on play and ritualized behavior. 5. Aspects of psychotherapy […]. 6. Ethnography and prehistory […]" 7. [T]heories of behavior (Carlson,1997:13-14). For more on the development of the field of Performance Studies, see Carlson 1997:13-14; McKenzie 2001:34.
of all sorts, taken as gestalt units, regardless of the sort of information they hold, or the events they structure. These include specifically human, corporate, governmental, administrative, bureaucratic, and military organisations, along with various framing devices, or knowledge disciplines, such as the organization of information categories: sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, art history, philosophy, cybernetics, cognitive science, or the discipline of 'theory' itself. The modern nation state and the modern corporation were both founded on theories of performance, information flow, and management analysis. McKenzie mentions, but does not dwell on social engineering, focusing most of his attention on mid-century performance management, without a critical discussion of the latter's capacity to inculcate, indoctrinate, or engineer societies.

McKenzie opens his narrative of organisational theory with Frederick Winslow Taylor's Scientific Management theory, developed in 1911, and deployed by Henry Ford in his Model-T factories. Taylor continued to theorise labour and management systems into the 1940s with the publication of Scientific Management (1947), a new compilation of earlier writings. Taylorist efficiency studies had global repercussions. Lenin and Stalin adopted Taylorism/Fordism as the management system for the new Soviet industrial state. The mechanised and measured body that we find humorously depicted in Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times (1936) was incorporated into the 'bio-mechanical' movement studies of the Constructivist theatre director, Vsevolod Meyerhold and was celebrated in the early films of the Russian avant-garde, European constructivism and the Bauhaus. This cross-over of Taylorist embodiment into aesthetic forms is significant, as it indicates the parallel developments of theories of embodiment and the aesthetics of the performing body in the arts, of the labouring body in management studies (Taylor 1997/1912), and of the body corporate in organization studies (Fayol 1997/1916).

Taylor focused on micro-studies of the “science” of individual movements and performance of a single worker, as well as for the overall performance of a collective workforce, but most of his attention was directed to the performance of managers, placing upon them a similar demand for efficiency and high-performance that was expected of the labourers. He then framed corporate management in a larger context of ‘national efficiency’ and saw the scientific selection of workers, their methods of training and
standardisation regimes as "the one best method" for improving national efficiency, under the rubric of social engineering (Taylor 1997; McKenzie, 2001:62-3).

Paralleling Taylor’s theories in the United States (but not discussed by McKenzie
d16), were Fayol's analyses in France of the 'body corporate' — the organization. Fayol laid out fourteen principles of management that have a strong resemblance to the social engineering and management of the Singapore state under the administration of the PAP
d17. Fayol’s formula emphasized order, centralization and unity of command, subordination of the interests of the individual or sub-group to the larger corporation or the national state, obedience and displays of respect to the firm, as well as the top-down application of justice and kindliness, meritocratic rewards for quality performance, and the allowance for controlled initiative by workers.

While these early 20th century management theories could be categorised either under 19th century Foucauldian 'disciplinary systems' or 20th century 'organisation performance systems', McKenzie has placed them firmly under the latter, in line with the primary thesis his general theory of performance: that performance is to the 20th and 21st centuries

16 McKenzie does not include Fayol's classical model of organisation in his studies, although he gives a decidedly Fayolean spin to Taylor's theories. For example, he largely ignores Taylor's egalitarian focus on the performance of management, focusing on the performance of the labourer, presuming authoritative distinctions between labour and management that were more acceptable to Fayol. He does touch on systems and organisational performance through G. Bennin's 1969 Organisational Development. McKenzie suggests that Organisational Development theory "emerged in the 1960s" out of behaviourism and systems analysis and in the 1980s became the dominant model of organisational performance (McKenzie 2001:77).

17 Fayol's fourteen principles of effective organization are: 1. 'Division of Work': specialization is based on analysis of the body with its distinct organs and on the "natural order"; 2. 'Authority and Responsibility': "authority […] the right to give orders and to exact obedience, cannot be separated from responsibility or sanction, that is, the application of reward and penalty"; 3. 'Discipline': "obedience, application, energy, behaviour and outward marks of respect observed in line with standing agreements between a firm and its employees, […] whether freely debated or not"; 4. 'Unity of Command': orders move from the top-down only; 5. 'Unity of Direction': one head, one plan, one objective; 6. 'Subordination of Individual Interest to General Interest': the interests of the organization "have pride of place over that of one employees or a group of employees" (in the case of a corporation), "members" (in the case of a family), or "one citizen or group of citizens" (in the case of a State); 7. 'Remuneration': should be fair, temperate and reward "well-directed effort"; 8. 'Centralization': as in the natural order, "sensations converge towards the brain or directive part"; 9. 'Scalar Chain': "the chain of superiors ranging from the ultimate authority to the lowest ranks is the […] route followed by all communications". No link in the chain may be bypassed; 10. 'Order': "a place for everyone and everyone in his place"; 11. 'Equity': "the combination of kindliness and justice", to be instilled "throughout all levels of the scalar chain"; 12. 'Stability of tenure of personnel': "a mediocre manager who stays is infinitely preferable to outstanding managers who merely come and go"; 13. 'Initiative': effective management involves permitting the "exercise of initiative"; 14. 'Esprit de corps': "Harmony and union is strength" (Fayol 1997/1916:253-274)
as Foucauldian discipline was to the 18-19th centuries—the primary means for the shaping of the discourses of knowledge and power\textsuperscript{18}. It is an argument that can be broadly contested if we take into account differences between how performance indicators (or the interpretation of performance indicators) vary under capitalist and socialist, democratic, authoritarian, religious, and military based political systems, in various cultural contexts\textsuperscript{19}. The heterogeneity of governmental systems raises questions about the tidy distinction McKenzie makes between performance and disciplinary regimes. Such distinctions appear to hold their ground much better when applied to the regional corporate sphere and the mid-century development of Performance Management and Total Quality Management (TQM), High Performance\textsuperscript{20} and Peak Performance from the study of sports—all of which largely replaced Taylor’s scientific and Fayol’s classical systems, while retaining elements from them (Herzberg 1997/1966; March 1976; Peters 1997/1994).

In Performance Management the industrial machine or conveyor-belt model gave way to a more ‘organic systems’ oriented model, situated within a new 'information economy', inclusive of interface, feedback, and networks. Performance Management sought to inspire and empower rather than control and order workers. New schools of management sought to challenge Taylorist concepts of efficiency by introducing a "diversity of values

\textsuperscript{18} As will be discussed in Chapter IV, this distinction breaks down if the frame of analysis includes the use of psychometric instruments, such as IQ tests under ‘performance’ intensive meritocratic regimes, such as found in the United States during the first half of the 20th century and in post-colonial Singapore. It also breaks down under racial or cultural hegemonies in which power relations are maintained through the selection of criteria for the evaluation of performance. By also not developing a theory of propaganda, McKenzie opens himself to the criticism that he does not differentiate between performance regimes and those that use performance as a propaganda trope for disciplinary purposes.

\textsuperscript{19} While McKenzie’s work has been significant in the area of bringing to light the problems of the 'liminal norm' (discussed in Chapter VIII), and in placing organisational performance in its proper context, his attempt to construct a ‘general theory’ with global applicability is flawed and politically problematic. McKenzie ignores theory and developments in practice outside the Euro-American nexus in developing nations and on the left, where we find alternative individual and organizational theories and practices that are often oppositional or dialectical to the capital-intensive and technology-intensive corporate structures upon which McKenzie has focused his attention. He does not consider the complex relations of Performance Studies or his own work to globalisation, which relies on broad surveys of economic indicators and global positioning technologies, and ethnographic sound-bites to obtain a 'helicopter view' of the developing world. He does not adequately consider the relevance of his theory to cognitive performance, essentialist doctrines, eugenics and other local socio-political constraints. Finally, he frames performance art under 'cultural performance', largely eliminating from consideration the more conceptual works of performance art that mount reflexivity, citation and metadiscourse as methodology.

\textsuperscript{20} During the Asian economic boom, the notion of High Performance was applied to Asian economies with the Acronym HPAEs or High Performing Asian Economies (White Paper on Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government. Office of the Prime Minister, Singapore Government 21 October 1994 (The Straits Times 23/10/1994).
and organisational cultures” (McKenzie, 2001:63). The "time and motion studies, slide-rules, record-keeping and day-to-day planning" of Taylorism, or the top-down interventionism, centralization, and unidirectionality of Fayol’s classical model had inadvertently increased the alienation of the employees from the management, and led to a syndrome of boredom and loss of personal initiative. Performance Management tried to address these problems, using key strategies of Organisational Development (OD), such as "restructuring, reinvention, pay-for-performance, downsizing, rightsizing, excellence", high performance, 'total satisfaction' and 'Total Quality Management' (McKenzie, 2001:60-61). The purpose of these procedures was the notion that high performance in corporations resulted from "a comparative, contextual, and active evaluation of performance behaviour" (McKenzie 2001:78), with clear goals and clear regimes of excellence (Palan, 2002). Many of the PAP government’s campaigns to increase information flow between government and ground, and the recent top-down exhortations concerning the need for a more bottom-up creative society reflect a latter-day turn toward Performance Management, albeit while attempting to maintain the authoritarian hierarchy of Fayol’s classical model of organization.

Whether under Taylorist or Performance Management regimes, the tight correspondence between corporate systems and the incorporated nation remained important, as companies used 'teamwork, effective communications, and even appeals to patriotism' to improve efficiency and increase profits. The language of electrical engineering, cybernetics, and Cognitive Science, entered management with the discussion of feedback — as in industry 'feedback units', feedback loops and bottlenecks. This has been an important aspect of government doctrine in Singapore, where a management model has been adopted that conflates corporation, nation, military and ruling party. Singapore adopted 'Community Development Councils' (CDCs), Residents' and Neighborhood Committees, 'Citizens' Consultative Committees' (CCCs) announced in 1963, implemented in January 1965, and 'Community Feedback Units'. It was part of a larger drive from the mid-1960s through the 1990s to produce more information flow between 'ground' and government, and to "minimize political dissent […] by favourably presenting government policy to the ground", and by "directing dissent through the PAP–controlled state" (Rodan 1989:74). National needs were conflated with party desires. A rethinking of motivation and indoctrination took place in the 1980s and 1990s, as evidenced in the 'Total Defence'
programme, first mooted in 1984, as a totalised policy engaging with all aspects of national and personal life, designed to "unite all sectors of society —government, business and the people—in the defence of the country" (Huxley 2000:24-27).

Another such motivational device was the strategic inculcation of ' Shared Values' or 'Core Values' (1989/1991) as a formulaic means of social and ideological cohesion for 'charting the course' of the nation (Hill and Lian 1995:214). While such programmes do focus on the development of participatory performance frameworks, and common values, they remain determinist, top-down and corporatist, representing the dilation of classical corporate performance assessment models and instrumentalist performance indicators into national planning and cultural production. It was the collision of this instrumental framework for performance and performance hermeneutics with participatory forms of performance art and Forum Theatre emerging from (un)civil society that created the rapture/rupture of the 5th Passage Affair described in Chapters VII & VIII.

PERFORMANCE ART: A METADIS COURSE OF DAILY LIFE

Performance art and the cross-linguistic European term 'action' (aktion) signify an art genre that was identified qua field in the 1950s in Europe, the United States and Japan (with other scattered sightings), at the same time that Performance Management and Organisational Development’s was being introduced into the corporate sector, and Performance Studies was beginning to coalesce as an academic in the United States and Europe. This simultaneous emergence of three fields may point to an underlying late-capitalist bourgeois service economy that applied commodity fetishisation to the body and the subject. It tends to support McKenzie's thesis of the emergence of a 20th century 'performance ethos' (as opposed to a 'disciplinary ethos'), as a form of power/knowledge, although perhaps limited to the developed economic/information zones of the United States, Europe and Japan.

Performance art draws from, and reflexes on, the field of performance studies, acting out the identitarian embodiments of the global bourgeois economy. An appreciation of
performance art as the emergence of a reflexive agency within the field of the performing arts has been obscured by a romantic conventionalisation of cultural-political resistance at the 'limen' — a notion importantly problematised by McKenzie (2001:29-55). But, to state it again, McKenzie's arguments consistently fall within a First World economic imaginary.

A modernist aesthetic ritual, primarily found in urban, industrial or post-industrial societies, performance art has drawn on visual art, declamation, music, dance, theatre, and social ritual, and various religious and secular technologies of ecstasy, fused together with those spectacle forms that overtly commodify the body and subject, such as fashion and sexual work, other performance genres, and daily life behaviours. Generally, performance art is not directed to the attainment of skills, refinement, or formalisation. Behavioural codes are acquired in order to reengineer the everyday as performance, or to banalise refined skill-based performing arts traditions. This re-engineering exists within the larger re-ordering of capital, urbanization and class through globalisation. Performance art, then, appears as a product of globalisation and the tendency of the now globally distributed information-class to appropriate and commodify local performance forms.

Formally, performance art can be read as the expression of a desire for a 'real' that lies beyond mimesis, as evidenced by its double presentation of the performer as locutor and translocutor, often posing ‘self’ while presenting ‘not-self’. Euro-American performance art developed out of earlier realist movements, such as Romanticism, Social Realism, ethnographic photographic and film representation, documentary, narrative and experimental film, as well as both Stanislavskian and absurdist, non-realist theatre. Its development parallels the development of late-century citation-intensive art movements, such as Socialist Realism in socialist and communist cultures, New York School Trotskyite Gestural Abstraction (Abstract Expressionism), Minimalism, Pop, photo-realism, Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, and the vitalistic tendencies of kinetic and light art.

In the United States, performance art developed as an 'out-of-the-frame' realist interpolation of the Trotskyite migration toward the ‘abstract heroic gesture’ of the New

21 Turner's theorisation of the limen is discussed below.
York School and early Pop. It was informed by Leninist dialectical materialism, regionalist realism, and the Mexican mural tradition (split between Trotskyite and Stalinist factions). It can be argued that performance art in the United States, with its emphasis on a notion of 'performance' inflected by market signifiers and 'economic indicators' (rather than European 'aktion' which had a more concrete cast), was dialectically positioned against the Stalinist canon of Socialist Realism. A heroic struggle of the performance of the commodified middle class body under laissez-faire capitalism versus the collectivist proletarian body under State capitalism reflected the cold war political context.

The convergence of ideology, the material gesture, and transnational migrations that constitute the emergence of performance art were manifestations of the shift in the military, economic, ideological and cultural centre from Europe (especially Paris, Berlin, Munich, Brussels, Zurich) to New York (Guilbaut, 1983) during and following World War II. The shift saw a massive migration from Eastern and Western Europe of intellectuals, scientists, artists, Jews, homosexuals and others at risk from the rise of fascism. This influx of the European avant-garde vitalized the American art scene and produced a new politics of identity that helped spawn performance art and other context-sensitive art forms. Marvin Carlson traces the new movement to the influence of expatriate European visual artists and dancers such as Ann Halprin, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, and the concurrent development of the field of ‘conceptual art’22, in part due to the influence of Marcel Duchamp, who also ended up in New York City during World War II (Carlson 1996:101). So, on the one hand, mid-century performance art can be seen to be a product of the period's movement of bodies, migrations (the flight from war and ethnic cleansing, and fascist genocide23), and on the other, of a concretisation and commodification of the subject-body — a body that is interpellated into subjectification at the very moment it is subjected to force or commodification. A parallel example of this

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22 Conceptual art, which, loosely stated, focuses the epistemological emphasis on a concept, idea, même or discourse, rather than a mode of transmission or style, can be traced through widely varying practices of mid-century Europe, the United States and Japan, including interior and exterior installations, earth art, assemblage, kinetic art, and total systems art, which explored given natural, sociological, or philosophical systems.

23 There is an uncanny echo here of an earlier wave of 'actions' and 'performances' at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich by a group of international artists, many of whom were refugees and pacifists fleeing from World War I to neutral Switzerland in 1916.
complex relationship between performance art and the aftermaths of war can be seen in post-war Japanese performance during the period of American occupation, as mentioned in the Introduction. This period saw many art groups that carried out performances, including Gutai, Zerokai, Kyucha-ha, Neo-Dada Organizers, Zerojigen, Taka-Aka-Naka. In post-war performance art, the problems of subjection, abjection, subjectification and mutational identity were bound together by a newly-globalised migratory urbanity that traveled through the new technologies of transportation and along the supply routes that were developed during World War II.

Pavis (1998:261) iterates the concretion of performance art during the 1960s, associating the field with the intertextual ‘Happenings’ of Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and the Korean Nam June Paik arguing that it did not come "to maturity until the 1980s" (Pavis, 1998:261). Pavis’ frame, like Carlson’s, ignores much of the Fluxus movement and developments in Japan during the 1950s-70s. Like most theorists (e.g., Goldberg, 1979; Carlson, 1996; Battcock and Nickas, 1984), Pavis accepts five trends of performance art:

1. Body art, which puts the performer’s body at risk.
2. Exploration of space and time.
3. Autobiographical presentation of the artist’s life.
4. Ritual and mythical ceremony.

Those works based on modes of communication or contracts, such as happenings and conceptual works, as well as cybernetic, robotic interfaces with the body, and forms of virtual performance24 belong on this list. Five modes of modernist negativity shared with other avant-garde movements are also commonly used to characterise performance art:

- appropriation and plagiarism, especially mimicry and parody of bourgeois or middle class lifestyle and institutions, bureaucracy and bureaucrats;
- the deployment of illocutionary imagination, ‘play’, ecstasy, or the chemical alteration of everyday-consciousness as tools for social transformation;

24 Pavis’ dictionary description necessarily simplifies a complex field. Nevertheless, the absence of all non-western, non-white examples in the 1998 description is extraordinary.
• anarchic deployment of paradox, and the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1965) to undercut and lampoon all conventions and categorical assumptions, particularly those conventions characterized by the accumulation of capital and power;
• Mephistophelian enthusiasm for psychological or charismatic power, combined with Faustian ambivalence and reflexivity, frequently exercised self-destructively, engendering discursive power (Marin 1988), often but not always combined with a correlative refusal of the overt signs of institutional or governmental power;
• peripatetic dalliance with (but rarely long-term commitment to) revolutionary movements and radically alternative political or class orders, except in those cases where political or class struggles conflate with identitarian resistance against privileged ethnic and sexual hegemonies;
• a haptic and agonistic reaction to instrumental rationality, theory, categorization, codes of legitimation, and the hegemony of verbal discourse.

These characteristics have in part provided performance art with a liminoid, counter-hegemonic/counter-cultural and prankish profile that embraces nonsense and absurdity, as importantly detailed by McKenzie in his discussion of the "liminal norm" (McKenzie, 2000:49-53). They also provide the form with a negative dialectics, and aesthetic resistance to the consolidation of official regimes of taste. The very legitimacy of the form, then, is paradoxically based on its dialectical relationship to official culture, and, in some cases, also to academic and theoretical cultures.

'PERFORMANCE & ITS DOUBLE': ASSERTION, AGONY AND LEGITIMACY
Performance art has presented what can be called an assertive response to the conditions of modernity and post-modernity: specifically an assertion for the legitimation of

25 As mentioned earlier, liminality has ironically become a central canon in performance theory (McKenzie 2000), to a large degree due to the work of Victor Turner (Turner, 1974:38-42, 1982:20-59, 1986:99-122). In 1969, Victor Turner wrote The Ritual Process, adapting van Gennep's notion of 'threshold' and 'liminal rites' to his theory that performance involved first a liminal 'breach' in an accepted norm, leading to a crisis resulting from social facture, followed either by a reintegration, a 'redress', or a recognition of the permanence of the schism. In his later writings, Turner recognized that there are problems with the application of this model to complex modernist societies with strong political alienations based on class, capital, and identity. He refined his previous deployment of 'liminality' by distinguishing it from what he called, 'liminoid phenomena' (Turner, 1982:24-55). He distinguishes 'liminal phenomena', found in "tribal and early agrarian societies [and] liminoid phenomena" found in societies with capitalist economies, characterized by "bonded reciprocally and contractual relations, and generated by and following the industrial revolution" (Turner,1982:53).
identities. As mentioned above, while not exclusively focused within one class, concerns with the legitimation of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and culture under a bourgeois economy have predominated. With the exception of those cases where ethnic identity overlaps class divisions (for example, Black, Hispanic and Native American performance in the United States, or performance dealing with class/gender/communitarian discriminations in much of the Third World), most performance art has notably avoided the strong ideological impetus of either Third World agitprop or politically motivated rural and street theatre in Southeast Asia, as described by van Everen (1992). Rather, it tentatively can be described as a 'post-ideological' cultural manifestation, primarily attached to, and a vehicle for, identitarian struggles between middle class constituencies within a bourgeois economy. This assertive identitarian imperative characterises the bulk of this study of the performance art works considered in this dissertation.

On the other hand, performance art has also presented an agonistic response, as exemplified by a lineage of 'victims of surplus': Antonin Artaud, the Viennese Aktionists, Paul McCarthy, Chris Burden, Valie Export, Guy Debord, et al. These artists fit Lu Xun's madman profile of those of the informed ('information rich'), who are forced by the circumstances of their assets —their intelligence, constitutions and their own psychological dispositions— to remain awake at night to read, "what was written between the lines" (Lu Xun, 1990:32). It is not only the straitjacket of tradition that provides the mechanisms of discursive terror and torture (as for Lu Xun's 'madman'), but also the various literatures that articulate the modernist 'bourgeois norm': bureaucratic and official forms, managerial performance, performance assessments, arrest warrants, charge sheets, legal briefs, courtroom testimonies, academic history and theory, that is, all of the discursive remnants of bureaucracy that identify, discriminate, authenticate, engineer, organize and manage the norms of the modern nation-state. The ambivalence inherent in the avant-garde’s demands for exemption from bourgeois norms has inflected manifestos and performances throughout the Twentieth Century. Emblematic of intellectual

26 Although it is problematic to draw a sharp border between ideological versus identitarian cultural production, in those cases where identitarian concerns do not transgress class distinctions, the struggle for identity can serve to consolidate class hegemonies already in place. The struggle for identitarian hegemony in the cultural field can also lead to very complex dynamics, defying a positivist Marxist construct of class, as, for example, in the struggle for the establishment of platforms for secular practices in India, described by Bharucha (1998 and 2001:156ff.), where the cultural particularities of religious struggles transgresses and reflects the very construction of class/caste.
alienation, resistance to the norm as well as of class privilege, performance art is a *blazon* of bourgeois ambivalence.

**PERFORMANCE ART AS METADISCOURSE**

This dissertation also frames performance art as a metadiscursive outcropping of visual and performing arts and a spawn of the miscegenation of formalism and anti-formal impulses. Many (but certainly not all) performance art works appropriate other arts, along with everyday behaviours and rituals and theory, thereby suggesting a shift from Goffman's sociological discourse on *framing, footing* and *keying* in performance and daily life (Goffman, 1959:22; 1981,1986) to a creolised spasmodic metadiscourse of such shifts. Emphasis is placed on the transformations of behavioural codes, rather than on the acquisition or attainment of skills and refinement of a formal canon, as we find in other performing arts. This raises the question of the form's legitimacy when placed in the context of the traditional performing arts (especially in Asia) that have relied for many generations on the transfer of stylistic disciplines. This fundamental uncertainty of how to legitimate and authenticate performance art as a form produces anxiety among bureaucrats committed to the orderly categorization of cultural forms.

For example, following the Singapore government's crackdown on performance art and Forum Theatre in 1994\(^{27}\), new regulations were introduced, requiring the payment of a S$10,000 bond to secure a licence for "unscripted performances", at the discretion of the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU), a regulatory branch of the police.

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\(^{27}\) See Chapters VII-VIII for a recapitulation and discussion of the 1993-94 events.
In 1997, Tang Da Wu *tactically*\textsuperscript{28} bypassed the regulations by embroidering the back of a suit-jacket with the words, *Don’t Give Money To the Arts*, that he then wore to the opening of the government sponsored *Singapore Art ‘97* (29 August - 2 Sept, 1997). Carefully

\textsuperscript{28} The word ‘tactically’ is derived from Michel de Certeau’s distinguishing of ‘tactics’ from ‘strategies’. ‘Strategies’ indicate the access of individuals and groups to instruments of force and power, through their alignment with *sites* (enterprises, nations, institutions, corporations). Positioned against ‘strategies’ are the tools of the weak, ‘tactics’, and the daily resistances, often unnoticed yet effective, which delay, defer, or subtract from accumulations of strategic power.

De Certeau describes a ‘strategy’ as generally representing a movement toward totalisation or hegemony, while a ‘tactic’ is always a detriment or subtraction from the total deployment of institutional knowledge and power: the deployment of *lack*. De Certeau’s ‘tactics’ run parallel to Situationist techniques of ‘détournement’ (the appropriation or ‘turning’ elements of the capitalist spectacle to new creative uses (Blazwick 1989). Whereas ‘strategies’ have the capability of totalisation through localisation, ‘tactics’ are always partial and ephemeral. They do not only function as conscious negation of ‘strategies’; they also represent a creative response within habituated structures in their own right.

There is, however, a need for a third position in de Certeau’s polar configuration: neither entirely *strategic* nor *tactical*, describing a position of class-affiliated or upward-mobile acquiescence to, or pragmatic collaboration with, hegemony. In these cases a relatively powerless individual may *tactically* adhere (collaborate or acquiesce) to the *strategic* performance of institutional power as a deception, out of fear or ambition. Similarities in the dynamics of collaboration or acquiescence among intellectuals in Singapore and in the Soviet Union are discussed below (Haraszti, M. 1987; Groys, B. 1992).
positioning himself for photographers, he shook hands and spoke with Singapore President Ong Teng Cheong. The message could be read as an ironic negation of the government's preferential public funding and promotion of a limited bandwidth of modernist and traditional art forms, to the exclusion of performance art. Tang thereby tactically presented an unscripted performance art work, ambiguously critical of government policy in the presence of a titular head of government, without prior submission or approval from PELU, the Censorship Board or the National Arts Council. The action revealed the impotence of the new government regulations when confronted with a constantly mutating art form, without a clearly demarcated formal schema. He demonstrated that unscripted and unlicensed performances were still possible in Singapore, repossessing the rights of authentication formerly expropriated by the government.

Tang’s 'marginal case' is positioned at the ‘threshold’ or limen between the legitimate and the illegitimate. Legitimacy depends on the maintenance of borders between categories, societies, classes, theories, forms, while the limen is variously characterized as fuzzy in-betweeness, a site of indeterminacy and negotiation (Carlson 1996:20); the "border, a neutral zone, that remains unstable, indeterminate, prone to complexity and contradiction" (Garoian 1999:40). Perhaps never really 'neutral' as Garoian imagines the limen, the threshold inhabited by Tang’s performance was a site of tactical appropriational power, invisible to the authorities precisely because he drew its form from public institutional ritual, positioning it at a point of liminoid ambiguity. Tang metadiscursively appropriated the normative ceremony of the officiated art opening of an exhibition in

29 Austin calls 'marginal cases' those utterances where nothing in the previous history of a conventional procedure will decide conclusively whether such a procedure is or is not correctly or legitimately carried out (Austin 1975:31). He offers the example of the ‘baptism of a dog’ as an act that has a strong intentional illegitimacy intentionally built into it. This marginal case brings to bear mannering, bending or turning, to reveal or subvert a convention. In marginal cases of performance, for example, the performer may repeat ad absurdum a naturalised convention, such as a prayer, until it is revealed to be an arbitrary sign. Marginal cases are particularly difficult for bureaucratic agencies to manage, as the meaning of the work ping-pongs back and forth across the limen between norm and abnorm.

Such performances in a context of political resistance can offer powerful weapons to the weak. For example, Abbie Hoffman, one of the great political pranksters of the American tradition together with other Yippies in 1968, literalised the Chinese astrological assignation for the year ('Year of the Pig'), by running a pig for the office of President of the United States. They thereby lampooned all presidential candidates, as well as the office, and the social ritual of elections (Juno and Vale, 1987:65). Legitimacy, in this case, must be measured by the ability to creatively pilfer the very signs of legitimacy.
which he was not an exhibiting artist, redirecting it to the service of his critique of cultural policies. He mapped the ‘taboo’ onto the norm, conscripting convention as the vehicle by which to deliver his attack on convention. Tang legitimated his own performance by offering a spectacle of its de-legitimation by the government, demonstrating the blindness of the government to the ramifications of its own instruments of legitimation. Tang proved that the government officials, having no theoretical framework by which to distinguish performance art from the ground of social rituals, couldn’t identify a performance art work even if it hit them in the face. Tang’s performance thereby clarified exactly why the government saw performance art to be such a threat to their organs of regulation and control.

The officiating of an art opening by the nation’s President was an officially legitimated Theatre of the State, meant to demonstrate the standing authority for the legitimation and valuation of art works in general. Tang’s intervention into this state theatre transformed the President's instrumental acts into metaphors, and thereby represented an alternative convention of performance that the government (had they recognized it) would have certainly perceived to be competitive with their own. The President's blindness to Tang's 'marginal act' became a sign of the government's cultural impoverishment.

Finally, Tang’s performance clarifies the government’s miscalculation in attempting to suppress an art form that it should instead have been studying. While the Goh government has called for a renewal of Singapore culture with a 'world-class' art scene, and a 'Renaissance Society', infused with the cultural productivity that is seen to be the fruit of development, it seemingly cannot accept the diverse forms that cultural creativity already takes in Singapore. The 'serious play' presented by Tang and theorised by the management theorist, Peter B. Vaill, in his book Managing as a Performing Art (1989:119), has consistently produced phobic responses in the PAP government:

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30 [N]ew art forms, such as “performance art” and “forum theatre” which have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation pose dangers to public order, security and decency, and much greater difficulty to the licensing authority (Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Information and the Arts, 21 January, 1994, published in The Straits Times, 22.1.94).
Themes of play and of personal enjoyment run through all the performing arts. And the arts prove unequivocally that these themes do not detract from getting the job done. Quite the reverse: play and enjoyment are integral to getting the job done (McKenzie 2001:85).

Progressive Singapore artists have been presenting the very ethos of creativity sought by the government in its various productivity campaigns. But, in 'instrumental anxiety' over its own performance indicators, the 'second generation' Goh government (like the first generation) has grown increasingly insecure over its own effectiveness. The very performance indicators of the ruling party's instrumental success double as indicators of their anxiety. The anxiety produced a singular developmental script, obsessively reiterated until the only recognisable framework for participatory performance off the proscenium stage became that of party politics.

To conclude, performance art represents an expression of the late-modernist economy of spectacle society (Debord 1983), in which the body and subjectivity of the producer-circulator-consumer is commodified. It draws on and must be seen against the background of tropological discourses and a tradition-inflected formal lineage from the beginnings of the Twentieth Century in Europe that focuses on a concretization of the body of the hybridized actor-director-writer-visual artist, a concern for the ‘total work’, and the techniques of montage, restoration, citation and pastiche, in which socially or ritually codified gestures, movements and figures of speech are turned to new combinations. This is achieved through a process of re-framing unscripted lived behaviors as art, or by 'reciting' the codes of other aesthetic forms. These very techniques are often 'bared as device' and become signs in the work.

Appropriational techniques are indicators of the urban bourgeois origins of performance art as a form and of most performance artists, in that the very appropriation of heterogeneous cultural elements from all classes, subcultures and social milieus assumes

31 Instrumental anxiety is posited here as a form of performance anxiety, in which the effectiveness of one's performance is thrown into self-question. A perceived lack of potency is compensated for by strategies of dissimulation: either by the application of force or by assuming privileging discourses.

32 Although Singapore performances artists do not fit the privileged university-educated profile of many theatre practitioners, most issue from the middle class, and virtually all of the younger generation artists are now products of the English language primary and secondary school system.
privileged access to those elements, as well as a claim on them as intellectual-property. At the same time, appropriation is generally read by the artists as the subversion of bourgeois fetishisms of originality and authorship. Indeed, the genius of the avant-garde throughout the Twentieth Century has been its ability to expand bourgeois economic hegemony by selling signs of resistance to bourgeois values.

The story of performance art in Singapore is the story of how a core modernist aesthetic ritual found a footing in an urban corporatist city-state, reflecting the polyvalent forces of globalism in the final two decades of the 20th century. With instrumentalist Performance Management and Organisation Development, performance art represents a manifestation of an overarching developmentalist ethos.

The last three chapters have suggested that the means by which teleological developmentalism is performed in society is through the deployment of performative tropes, through instrumental performance, as well as through cultural performance, and performance art. But alongside the government's instrumentalist notions of performance are other decidedly non-instrumental, essentialised and taxonomic performance indicators by which the physical body, its characteristics and endowments are measured and narrativised. It is to this mapping of the body's taxonomic endowments and other performance strategies of the government that we now turn.
PART 2.

PERFORMANCE OF
THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

Singapore is transforming itself into a new kind of city — a Global City. It is a new form of human organization and settlement that has, as the historian, Arnold Toynbee says, no precedent in mankind’s past history. [...] They call it Ecumenopolis — the world embracing city.

[...] Since remote times, however much we may denounce them, the cities have been the creators and sustainers of civilization, culture, technology and wealth. The slogan about the countryside surrounding the cities is no more than the defiant cry of agrarian romantics as they watch the countryside being swallowed up relentlessly by the cities (Rajaratnam, 1987:225-226).
CHAPTER IV.

'STATE FATHERHOOD' & THE BODY POLITIC:
The Taxonomy\(^1\) of Progress

The nexus of this study of administrative state and civil state performance in Singapore is the human body and its performance as an irreducible physical and political trope. It is over the *performance of bodies* that state desire collides with the desire of artists in Singapore. The type of performance that each sector seeks to promote is significantly at odds in its conception of the body's place in society, and has led repeatedly to ruptures and crises in the socio-political field. While artistic performance has emphasised the body as an agent in a broad field of symbolic agency, including play, identity formation, sexual pleasure, class, and participatory social-political rites; the government's focus has been on the limited agency of the body as a resource, and as a component trope of economic instrumentalisation, collective proletarianisation, management, and taxonomic or national affinity. *Meritocracy* provides the ideological and instrumental grid by which the government gauges and evaluates the effectiveness of the performance of the citizen *vis-à-vis* these policies, and against which subjective positions are mapped. *Biometrics* (the measuring of genetically determined biological —especially cognitive— traits) finds its social applications in meritocratic policies, that is, the manner in which meritocratic policies (which, as we shall see, often smudge into biological determinism) have been used to engineer social and industrial performance.

This chapter will first set the ideological frame that Heng and Devan (1992) have termed 'State Fatherhood' ideology (Section 1), and then detail how biometric discourses have been constructed and applied to the performance of the Singapore populace (Section 2). The chapter ends with an analysis of taxonomic Asian Values ideology as it manifests in particular artistic practices (Section 3).

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\(^{1}\) Victor Turner distinguishes *taxonomic* linkages between agents, including kinship ties, structural positions, social class, political status, and the communicative modes they engender, from *symbological* linkages that involve persuasive tropes, verbal and non-verbal signs, strategies, tactics, and various other disseminatory ritual forms (Turner, 1982:10).
Since around 1967, the ideological trend referred to here as 'teleological developmentalism' has been underpinned by naturalised and essentialised policies that directly link civilisational progress to genetic traits. Essentialised\(^2\) developmentalism, on the one hand, concerns itself with the need for expanding gene pools to avoid in-bred characteristics, and on the other, with preserving the purity of gene pools from the introduction of negative traits. In Singapore, essentialisation is tied as well to the evaluation of 'performance' and the assigning of privileges in the meritocratic system.

Chua Beng Huat argues that prevailing power and class relations are legitimised in a society where the ruling elite is naturalised as a manifestation of history (Chua, 1995:118ff.). Stated inversely, if the dominant party is able to achieve the naturalisation of its ideas, it may be said to have achieved ideological hegemony/consensus, which will contribute greatly to its legitimacy (Chua, 1995:43-44).

One of the first enunciations of an essentialised notion of development in the region can be found in letters from Sir Thomas Raffles to Thomas Murdock in 1820 (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1971:4). There are strong correspondences between Raffles' orientalist views described in Chapter V, and the biological determinism of PAP government eugenics and meritocratic policies a century and a half later. PAP eugenics was designed to manage procreation, education, and cultural production, including those cultural products with 'feminised' themes of racial politics, gender and sexuality, particularly homosexuality (Heng and Devan 1992). Biological determinism relies on the functionalist notion that most if not all status and class differentials in society (racial, sexual, economic) are the manifestations of inherited, inborn traits; that society—in itself naturalised as an 'adaptive organism' (CDS)—offers us an accurate reflection of biological differences in nature, and that traits and social hierarchies continue to exist through the supposed Darwinian selection of preferred traits (Gould, 1981).

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\(^2\) Essentialism and essentialisation are used in this dissertation to denote idealist notions of an in-born 'essence' or 'potentiality' within the subject. Naturalisation, on the other hand, refers generally to a realist concept of the impingement of external 'natural laws' or conditions, or a merging of a cultural figure with a natural ground, thereby lending that figure the legitimacy and ineluctability of an act of nature (Barthes 1982; Marcuse 1968).
1. COUNTER-STATEIDEOLOGY: "STATE FATHERHOOD"

The first and most influential theorisation of patriarchal discourses and politics in Singapore has been that of Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, articulated in their 1992 article, "State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore". Heng and Devan offer a counter-hegemonic view of official ideology, articulating essentialised aspects of teleological developmentalism. Before we look at specific biological determinist outcroppings, it is important to simultaneously hold in mind Heng and Devan's critical counter-frame.

Heng and Devan argue that the "dream of a timeless paternal essence [...] splendid, transcendent, immortal" in the psyche of the patriarchal government underpins the PAP's vision of perennial power, economic stability and national integrity. But this utopian vision of a reified phallic state is haunted by the spectre of feminine pollution: Whether represented by actual women [...] or "other" races and cultures whose identifying characteristics are implicitly feminized — whether, that is, it is a sexual, or a social body that haunts and threatens — the figure of threat, auguring economic and social disintegration, dismantling the foundations of culture, undermining, indeed the very possibility of a recognizable future, is always, and unerringly, feminine (Heng & Devan 1992: 356).

The fear of feminine pollution informs "narratives of national crisis", which are deployed by post-colonial governments in order "to reenact periodically the state’s traumatic if also liberating separation from colonial authority" by the state's founding fathers, the first generation leaders (Heng and Devan 1992:343). To an extraordinary degree the discourse of national origins is emptied of feminine agency, and the birth of the nation is narrated as a male parthenogenic ritual crisis of separation and incorporation.

Historically and hysterically bound together, ethnic and feminine pollution form a synergistic threat to the power of the what Slavoj Zizek calls the “‘anal’ father-leader”, the discourse of state subjectivity that musters a totalised response to dynamic and relativistic social phenomena (Zizek, 1995:78). In recent years, the Singapore state has sought to promulgate a normalized set of desires within a narrow band-width of di-morphic heterosexual generativity among the educated, most economically productive middle class
— excluding those who are deemed non-(re)productive, intellectually inferior, genetically damaged, or economically non-productive.

Heng Kim Song’s satirical portrait of “Mr. Singapore 1996” corresponds to these masculinist economic theories. It shows a narcissistic body builder whose synthetically pumped upper torso labeled “ECONOMY” is perched precariously on a tiny pelvis and spindly legs, representing “CULTURE”. A grossly overdeveloped economic pragmatism sits atop an atrophied culture — the site of sexuality, procreation, and locomotion.

For Heng and Devan, the one-sided dynamic that places economy over and above culture should be seen in the context of a masculinist myth in which pragmatic developmentalism maintains its legitimacy by recalling the state’s originary crisis and the historical narrativisation of a "heroic" patriarchy. At times the originary crisis is not only recalled, but is proactively reproduced as a prophylactic reminder of the dangers experienced at the origin of the state, to renew the ruling party’s original mandate:

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3 Aware or not of the Marxist implications in his drawing, Heng has nevertheless managed to invert Marx’s base and superstructure, parody Singapore’s obsessive developmentalism, and comment on issues of class, sexual monoculture and narcissism, all in one drawing.
[By repeatedly focusing anxiety on the fragility of the new nation, its ostensible vulnerability to every kind of exigency, the state's originating agency is periodically re-invoked and ratified, its access to wide-ranging instruments of power in the service of national protection continually consolidated. It is a post-Foucauldian truism that they who successfully define and superintend a crisis, furnishing its lexicon and discursive parameters, successfully confirm themselves the owners of power (Heng & Devan, 1992:343).

Heng and Devan's linking of the patriarchal order to the project of nation-building is compelling, but they do not question the heterosexual norm assumed in the construction of State-Fatherhood, thereby mirroring the very state narratives they set out to critique. To expose state paternalism, they reduce heterogeneous forms of social transgression to the sign of a unitary 'feminine'. It is not the sign of the feminine only that is threatening to the state but 'feminine' as a synecdoche for heterogeneity and pluralism. Labeling all sexualities and other cultural transgressions under the rubric of one member (albeit the most significant) of the set, 'feminine pollution' diverts some important detailing entailed by their analysis.


The measuring of genetic traits falls under statistical sciences known collectively as 'biometrics'. These include the colonial disciplines of phrenology, polygeny, craniometry, and Intelligence Quota (IQ) testing—methods of measuring bodies, intellectual capacity and behavioural normalcy (Gould, 1981). In post-colonial Singapore, phrenology, polygeny, and craniometry were ignored, but the measurement and statistical monitoring

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4 However, it is not difficult to find support for their contention that ethnic and cultural difference—by its association with miscegenation—has been inscribed with femininity. Louis Agassiz in 1893 expounded the doctrine of “multiple Adams” (that different races represent different species) in his overall programme of eugenics:

Conceive for a moment the difference it would make in future ages, [...] if instead of the manly population descended from cognate nations the United States should hereafter be inhabited by the effeminate progeny of mixed races, half Indian, half Negro, sprinkled with white blood,[...], I shudder from the consequences (Agassiz, 10 August 1863 in Gould, 1981:49).

Agassiz’ text assumes a binary of masculine purity versus the plurality of feminine miscegenation (impurity).
of Intelligence Quota has been a policy focus of the PAP government and tightly bound to meritocratic ideology, social-engineering policies in the educational system, and to preferential distribution of housing (The Straits Times 21/5/94; Chan and Chee 1984:7).

Beginning in the mid-1960s, soon after consolidation of PAP political power, social engineering and eugenics entered the rhetoric of the government and was disseminated through the press5. Heng and Devan have described government intervention into the reproductive habits of the citizenry in which the government-linked English press was the primary vehicle for the dissemination of biologically determinist ideology to the white-collar English-educated middle class (Heng and Devan 1993: 347) — the target group for exhortations to increase reproductive rates.

In 1967 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had suggested that 5% of population are " [...] more than ordinarily endowed physically and mentally, and in whom we must expend our limited and slender resources [...]" (Selvan 1990:48, Chua 1995:63). By 1969 this percentage of the population, marked as having leadership potential, had narrowed in government pronouncements to 1-2% (Josey, 1980:535), a figure that coincides with the genius level on the Stanford-Binet scale, adopted by the International Mensa Society as a prerequisite for membership. The public was meant to infer that the leaders were all from the top 2% biologically determined class, and therefore, by virtue of their genetic endowments they deserved to rule. While Lee on the one hand, believed in genetic endowments as determinants for performance, on the other he accepted certain environmental influences, stating on 5 September 1969 that " [...] while IQ was fixed, a good environment, education, discipline, and the inculcation of values and the forming of new habits could raise performance" (Josey, 1980:535). This representation is in line with most eugenicists who tend to argue that IQ is an essentially inherited trait. But Lee did not consistently maintain this position.

On 29 December 1969, during the Parliamentary Debate on the Abortion Bill (passed 32-10) and the Voluntary Sterilization Bill (passed 42-0, without dissent). Lee quoted extracts

5 An earlier version of this chapter on the press spectacle of PAP eugenics releases was published during the period of this doctoral research (Langenbach, 2001(4)).
from an article by Professor Richard Lynn\textsuperscript{6}, published in the New Scientist of 20 March 1969, to rationalise the legislation:

\begin{quote}
[O]ne of the noticeable trends in developed countries is that parents with more education have much smaller families than those with less education. This trend is also discernible in urbanized, though still underdeveloped societies like Singapore. If these trends continue to their logical conclusions, then the quality of the population will go down.

In all societies, there are the more intelligent and the less intelligent. Professor Richard Lynn, a member of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, wrote in the New Scientist of 29\textsuperscript{th} March 1969, that geneticists have come to the conclusion that intelligence is principally determined by heredity (Lee in Chan & Chee, 1984:6).
\end{quote}

In the same speech, Lee indicated which policies these theories would underpin:

\begin{quote}
[Because] the IQ of higher professionals and executive parents had been shown to be considerably higher than that of unskilled workers (150 to 86), Lee warned that there might be a need for comprehensive incentives for graduate mothers to reproduce more and disincentives for less-educated women to reproduce less in future (The Straits Times, 30 December 1969).
\end{quote}

Rather than carry out a nationwide policy of biometrics in the schools, which at least would have been consistent with a thoroughly engineered eugenicist policy, Lee chose to address the issue through the educational level of parents, thereby parsing bio-engineering according to class, language group and ethnicity. Lee assumed that the statistical correlation of IQ to educational level would hold across generations, and that current class position and educational level was an adequate enough index of genetic endowment to underpin social engineering in Singapore. He did not appear to accept that class could be environmentally or historically determined, which, while it may appear antithetical to his own expressed rejection of colonial privilege and discrimination (Barr, 2000:12ff.), is

\textsuperscript{6} Lynn received a $325,000 grant from the Pioneer Fund, which has been linked with neo-nazi and white supremacist causes (Karier, 1972:345; Kevles, 1995:152, Sedgewick, 1995:151). He was Associate Editor of the biometrics and anthropology journal, Mankind Quarterly, and is a principle proponent of the use of psychometric instruments to discriminate populations.
perhaps predictable, in light of his own privileged position in the colonial education system and, later in the Japanese intelligence service.

ESSENTIALISING PERFORMANCE: NATIONAL DAY 1983

National Day, 7 August 1983, saw the climax of an extended indoctrination project through the press concerning ‘inherited performance’. Lee Kuan Yew announced incentives for high-income, graduate women to marry and procreate, and, later, a disincentives programme for low-income, "less-educated" women to procreate less, including payment of a cash grant of $10,000 into their Central Provident Fund account for voluntary sterilization. Graduate women, according to Lee, were being too selective of their mates, reproducing an average of 1.9 children versus less educated women at 3.9. As is apparent in his 1969 speeches, for Lee, less education meant less intelligence.

To support this case, he distorted Thomas Bouchard's hypothesis that performance on psychometric tests was due to 80% nature, 20% nurture (Sedgewick, 1995 (1994):146; Chan and Chee 1984:9-11) into the unequivocal declaration: "Studies have shown that 80 percent of how well you do depends on nature and only 20 percent on nurture" (Lee K.Y. National Day speech. The Straits Times 8 August 1984, emphasis added.) With a leap of faith from I.Q. testing into the milieu of social performance, Lee shuttled between this quotient of inheritable intelligence to a meritocratic notion of ‘performance’ in daily life. He thus linked meritocratic performance to genetic inheritance and ethnic and language

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7 Lee's employment in the Japanese Intelligence service is given a mention at the end of this chapter.

8 The Singapore government received early support for its programmes from some well known eugenicists, such as the Stanford University Professor of Engineering and Mathematical Science, William B. Shockley, Noble Prize winner in physics, and co-inventor of the transistor. In the 1970s, Shockley had proposed to the United States National Academy of Scientists that a Bonus Sterilization Fund be established in the United States. Under this programme the government would offer cash incentives to "intellectually inferior" welfare recipients with below-average IQs who agreed to be sterilized—$1000 for every point below the white mean of 100 (Miller, 1995 (1994): 174; Sedgewick, 1995 (1994): 146; Heng & Devan, 1992: 358).

9 Lee's text read as follows:

There is increasing evidence that nature, or what is inherited, is the greater determinant of a person's performance than nurture (or education and environment). Researches on identical twins who were given away at birth to different social and economic classes show that their performance is very close although their environments are different. One such research, carried out over a decade, is by Professor Thomas Bouchard of the University of Minnesota [...] The conclusion the researchers draw is that 80 percent is nature, or inherited, and 20 percent reflects the differences from different environment and up-bringing (Lee in Chan & Chee 1984:5).
differences in Singapore — differentials that had also provided the naturalised foundations of the class structure during the colonial era.

To understand Lee's position, we must see his citation of "scientific studies" as a rhetorical means to social policy ends. It was clearly his intention to convince educated women to procreate at higher levels and to induce women with lower education to procreate less. Lee focused on comparative ethnic ratios, particularly the educational level and reproduction rates of lower income groups: the Malays (14-15% of total pop.), in 1983 reproduced @20.4/1000; Indians (approx. 7% of pop) reproduced at @ 19.4/1000, and in third place, the Chinese (77% of pop) reproduced @ 14.8/1000. The 1980 Census of Population shows that Malay women, who were marrying earlier and had a higher fertility rate than the other races (Chinese and Indians on a par), had less education, and tended to be less economically active (Khoo Chian Kim, Superintendent of Census 1980:10).

Through Lee's turning of the psychometric testing of genetically inherited traits to the evaluation of performance in daily life, the Singapore meritocratic performance-and-reward system was reframed as a naturalised ideology. Through the language of genetics and psychometrics, the presumed intellectual superiority of the Chinese majority in general, and the ruling elite in particular, was presented as a natural state of affairs and a presumed prerequisite for continued national development. If every citizen plays their part in the scheme, reproducing at no more or less than sustainable levels, the current ethnic profile can be maintained. The Senior Minister's son, Deputy Prime Minister Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong has offered genetic justification for meritocratic disparities as recently as 1998:

Meritocracy underpins the entire Singapore system. But equal opportunities generate unequal outcomes. As our society matures, in the absence of periodic shake-ups, these inequalities will become more marked. No society is homogeneous. There are disparities in achievement both between and within ethnic groups. Because of both nature and nurture, children of successful parents tend also to do well in schools and life.

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10 The PAP under Lee Kuan Yew, has also applied biometric instruments in its own internal processes. Selection of Ministers involves an interview with a psychologist and requires sitting "for psychometric tests that gauge their intellectual ability, leadership qualities and personality" (Chua Mui Hoong 2000).
We must manage these natural differences properly, and not let them be reinforced by social distinctions and barriers. Otherwise, we will accentuate the natural fault lines in our society and generate powerful divergent pulls.

We must continue to give every Singaporean a strong stake in the country’s success. The Government can ensure through its policies a level-playing field, on which winners far exceed losers. But we must accept that some will win more than others. That is the way free markets and human nature work.

To discourage social stratification, we must keep open avenues for talent to move up in society. Every society has its elites. But there should be no financial, social or class hurdles for bright children from poor homes to do well, prove themselves, and join the elite on their merits (Lee, 1998:5).

While Lee Hsien Loong continues to accept the natural and cultural "disparities of achievement" between ethnic groups, due to both nature and nurture, he keeps his signifiers floating, unlike his father, who took inordinate pleasure in fixing his signifieds. Was DPM Lee referring to IQ tests, exam results, school, or job performance? Significantly, he does address the populace's fears of ethnic or racial bias (which had proved unacceptable to voters in 1984). But it is unclear whether he has moderated his father's views or simply is a more subtle propagandist in proclaiming the government's rather ambiguous commitment to "discourage social stratification", an apparent response to sociological critiques along the lines of this one by Chua Beng Huat:

[T]he inequalities of capitalism is already having an effect on the polity. This will only intensify, making it difficult for the single party dominant government to contain all the differences within all its activities. The inequalities will force the regime to focus its attentions towards greater social equity and social justice, that is, towards greater substantive democracy beyond formal procedures (Chua 1995:212).

DPM Lee's statement reveals an interesting conflation of convention and nature. The statement, "[…] we must accept that some will win more than others. That is the way free markets and human nature work", reveals that DPM Lee makes no distinction between the way a culturally determined free market and an essentialised human nature "work". Although he is able to acknowledge the existence of class hurdles that his father ignored, DPM Lee otherwise appears to be at ease with the elder Lee's bio-determinist framework.
Meritocracy has consistently been presented by the state as an ideologically 'neutral' and pragmatic policy of performance evaluation. However, the very representation of 'neutrality' provides a constative frame for effective performative dissemination of a genetically determined hierarchy, with an embedded 'logic' of keeping political succession in the genetic family.\footnote{This dissertation borrows the notion of an 'ideological logic' from Chua, who has devoted considerable effort to "working out [...] the operational logic of pragmatism as an ideological system" (Chua, 1995:5).}

The final product of this particular phase of bio-determinist discourse was the granting of privileges in the form of the Graduate Mothers’ Priority Scheme to those, who in government eyes, were already biologically privileged. On 23 January 1984, The Minister of Education, Dr. Tay Eng Soon implemented the scheme that had been announced earlier by Lee in his National Day address. The scheme encouraged university-educated women to have more children by offering them first choice of primary and secondary schools, while less educated mothers were offered $10,000 to accept sterilisation after one or two children.

The government recognizes that if well-educated mothers, who can provide well for their children, produce three or more children, they are adding to the assets of the country. Their children will hopefully grow up to be good and useful citizens (The Straits Times, 23 January, 1984).

This bill marked the fruition of two decades of campaigning and indoctrination by the government, in which direct correlations were drawn first from race to IQ, and then from IQ to economic standing. But, as mentioned above, either the policies or/and the propaganda proved to be one intrusion too far for the Singapore voters, who handed the government a poor election result in 1984 — down 12%. A post-election survey indicated an apparent venting of deep dissatisfaction not only with specific policies but more significantly with the style of the PAP (The Straits Times, 10 April, 1985), namely "arrogance of power, an inflexible bureaucracy, growing elitism, and the denial of consultation and citizen participation in its decision-making" (Chan, 1989, cited in Chua, 1995:21). This election result appears to have led to the termination of the unpopular and intrusive policies (Hill & Lian 1995:152), and raised questions about the limits of
autocratic government in Singapore (Chua, 1995:21). In 1985 the Graduate Mothers’ Priority Scheme ended, and the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was quietly closed.

However, the *cause célèbre* was back for a re-run in 1993, but this time inverted. The new Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, announced the "Small Families Improvement Scheme", offering twenty-year housing grants, and housing for low-educated mothers who agreed not to have more than two children, as long as the family remained together (Hill & Lian 1995:153-4). If sterilization wasn't acceptable, perhaps the velvet glove of 'helping poor families' to choose to procreate less would be. In line with Asian family-values rhetoric, housing *disincentives* against single mothers were added in 1994 (*The Straits Times*, 21 August 1994).

This series of population policy initiatives over three decades represented the most intrusive of the PAP's attempts to socially engineer the Singapore populace through the deployment of performatives parading as biological constatives. The government promulgated a direct link between signifiers of instrumental social performance and genetic disposition that was further developed in educational and meritocratic policies of the same period.

**THE PLACE OF MERITOCRACY IN A BIO-DETERMINIST REGIME**

Theoretically, *meritocracy* refers to a system in which the social and educational status of the individual (or a class of individuals) must ideally be the result of *performance* and *effectiveness* (continuously demonstrated ability) alone, measured against objective and universal standards. As such, meritocracy ideally would not allow for biological pre-determination, organising the polity along lines of performative competition rather than according to any form of predisposition. That is, meritocratic competition should not allow presumptions of age, gender, race and inherited wealth to interfere with performance results.

However, in real-political culture, the use of performance as the sole criteria for social advancement produces anxiety in dominant groups. It is a far more stable formula to equate merit with a fixed notion of 'ability', quantified through statistical instruments, such
as Intelligence Quota testing, rather than the volatililty and relative indeterminacy of performance in real-time. Determining 'objective' and 'universal' standards is a sticky affair, particularly the criteria used to define and measure intelligence.

The PAP rationalised the disproportionate allocation of resources to the "five percent" or less of "Gifted Students" (i.e. those displaying "natural intelligence") (Chua, 1995:63), as measured by IQ tests and performance in school exams. As mentioned above, these policies were justified by linking them to a 'nation-building' narrative, supported by the trope of Singapore as a 'fragile-new-small-city-state-with-only-human-resources', analogised by Lee Kuan Yew as new beer or rising bread:

> It is on this group that we must expend our limited and slender resources in order that they will provide the yeast, the ferment, that catalyst in our society which alone will ensure that Singapore shall maintain its pre-eminent place in the societies that exist in South East Asia [...] (Cited in Chua, 1995:64).

In post-independence Singapore, meritocracy became a rationale for the stratification of society according to meritorious characteristics or acts. It fell into the development trajectory that had begun with Whiggish progressivism, in that it offered a ready rationalisation for power and privilege differentials (based on power, class, gender, language group), that is, the entailments accompanying the rise of bourgeois mercantilism. A paradigmatic and totalised 'bourgeois ideology' (Blum, 1984, Allen, 1995), meritocracy not surprisingly rationalises the construction of a historically inevitable bourgeois hegemony, based on the meritorious performance of the dominant class. Strongly influenced by Fabian socialism during their tertiary education in England during the 1950s, the Anglo class-fragment in Singapore used Fabian meritocratic justifications to maintain status quo disparities of class, income, and privilege (Blum, 1984; Chua 1995; CDS). The government's anxiety with class displacements engendered by meritocratic performance, then, was countered by the reification of class disparities supposedly also based on meritocratic differentials. In this way, the Singapore government contradicted its own privileging of instrumentalist performance through its attempt to conflate essentialist doctrines with a meritocratic regime through the intervention of biometric instruments. Meritocracy itself became a trope of power based on identitarian and class affiliations
rather than on performance. The covert spectacle of the government's instrumental performance anxieties was evident to those who wished to see it.

We will now turn from essentialist and naturalised doctrines to another ideological complex, 'Asian Values', supported by the taxonomic linkages of kinship, 'traditional' values and prejudices, tying cultural similarities to geopolitical continuities.


Chua Beng Huat traces the beginnings of Asian Values rhetoric to mid-1980s local and global culture. Neo-conservative critiques of Western democracy, on the one hand, merged with leftist critiques of the deleterious effects of globalisation, commodity capitalism, and, on the other, with the spectacular rise of the Asian Tiger economies. A perceived shift of global economic *gravity* from West to East was accompanied by a discursive shift, designed to explain why the region was the latest 'miraculous' site of global capitalism's heroic expansion. Many believed that the region wasn’t just joining the western dominated market, but that the very centre of capitalism was shifting eastward as a sign of a new global teleology during the "Asian Century".12

Westernisation became a convenient holder of all the ills of capitalist developments in Singapore, against which a very loose formulation of 'Asian values' was elevated supposedly to arrest the rot that threatened (Chua, 1995:118).

Asian Values discourse is usually described as a 'taxonomic' corrective to the previous instrumental over-reliance on a 'symbological' meritocracy that accompanied the

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alignment of Singapore's economy to global (Western) capitalism and teleological developmentalism. (But, as argued above, meritocracy in Singapore was not purely meritocratic.) Asian Values added a local gloss to Singapore's globalisation, while maintaining its developmental thrust by dilating communitarian identity to correspond to a geopolitical region.

In contrast to the earlier policies that were aimed at producing an efficient and disciplined work-force necessary to the economic development of a new nation and the material well-being of the new citizenry, the policies and programmes of the mid- and late 1980s have as their motivation the inscription of selectively reinvented 'traditional' attitudes and values as the 'truths of Asians' in general […] (Chua, 1995:119).

Closely associated with the “Asian Economic Miracle” of the 1980s and early 1990s, Asian Values discourse was a product of a consolidation of national and regional identity. It countered nationalist tendencies toward cultural protectionism and economic insularity by deploying local cultural heritage and traditional values as an ideological corrective to the image of profligate and decadent Western societies. Teleological developmentalism was not discarded but was paradoxically renewed by being linked to Asian heritages reaching back thousands of years — long before the 'modern' arrival of Sir Thomas Raffles. In a 1995 National Day speech, the Singapore Minister of State for Community Development, Ch'ng Jit Koon, listed those traditional 'Asian values' that he believed "had helped Singapore […] achieve progress and prosperity over the past 30 years":

- The determination to work hard for the family
- A strong desire to give the best education to children.
- The willingness to live with others to maintain peace and harmony.
- Respect for authority in preserving law and order.
- Readiness to support any efforts to promote social responsibility and enhance social discipline, and
- The collective wisdom to elect a strong and good government successively and support government leaders and policies consistently.

This value system has served us well and should not be allowed to be eroded by the continued onslaught of the Western media, human rights groups or local political opportunists (The Straits Times, 28/8/1995) 13.

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13 Clearly not quite comfortable with the implication that the Singapore people, with their traditional values, could manage on their own without the PAP, Ch'ng added that "Singapore's economic prosperity" had not
The sudden rise of Asian prosperity raised questions about identity, tradition, Asian essence, and the financial benefits of Asian autocracy that had lingered since the period of the Shōnan Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with its highly centralised, coercive system of economic management and essentialist rule (Sōto Takumi 1998; Oral History Department 1986; National Heritage Board 1996). Doubts were rife concerning the post-war American model, linking economic prosperity to cultural pluralism, 'democratisation', and laissez-faire capitalism under the auspices of a US dominated global financial architecture. Autocratic government and controlled government-linked economies were proposed as the new model of economic development at the root of the new Asian prosperity. The proof was perlocutionary and in the pudding: Asia was prosperous; therefore, autocratic systems of governance and traditional Asian values must be the cause (Lee, 6/2/1995; Neville Stack, 8/6/1995; The Straits Times, 31/8/1994, Asad Latiff, 9/10/1993; Kessler, 1999).

In Singapore, a historical lineage reaching back to China before emigration was called forth through the discourse of Confucian Values, emphasising obedience and loyalty to paternal leaders, family values, and community cohesion, in which "the benevolence of the sovereign, in promoting the general social welfare, is exchanged for compliance and obedience of the governed" (Chan H.C. cited in Chua, 1995:28). The PAP government initiated society-wide campaigns for the "revitalisation of Asian Values", including policies that covered housing, a variety of education programmes, including 'gifted education', ‘mother-tongue’ instruction, the 1984 introduction of Religious Knowledge courses, and Confucian Ethics for Chinese students. As mentioned previously, the new courses were scrapped in 1990, as they were found to be ethnically divisive, eroding the discourse of a common heritage and exacerbating a sense of irreconcilable differences among the people. Even among the Cabinet Ministers, the ideological construction of Asian Values proved difficult for some to swallow. Chua points to the skepticism of S. Rajaratnam and Goh Keng Swee, the former Finance Minister. Goh reportedly considered

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come about "naturally", but had resulted from "a far sighted leadership and a patriotic and hardworking people. [...] When the country has become affluent, the Government shares its wealth with the people" (The Straits Times, 28/8/1995). This and the carefully worded invocation of the people's "collective wisdom to elect a strong and good government successively and support government leaders and policies consistently", points to the consistent iteration of the relationship between Asian Values and the desires of the PAP to remain in power, sometimes based on naturalisation, sometimes not.

ASIAN VALUES IN VISUAL ART AND PERFORMANCE
The notion that the West could become a periphery to Asia's centre held enormous power over the imagination of those producing the region's cultural discourses. Asian Values caught the imagination of the populace in part because it was portrayed by the government and intellectuals as causally linked with the "Asian Economic Miracle", that, in turn, appeared to prove the government's contention that autocracy and prosperity indeed made good bedfellows, and that cultural analogues of the past were effective means to re-engineer the present. This resulted in ethical dilemmas for some social scientists and artists, who unexpectedly found themselves integral to government campaigns to establish the global centrality of Asian identity, and correlative constructions of 'Asian Democracy' and 'Asian Human Rights'. Global art markets also began to catch the East wind in their sails as new triennials were established to shift the global focus to new Asian art commodities. The desire of artists to live and work at the global centre rather than the periphery finally appeared to be within reach.

By 1988, Asian Values ideology could be found in the work and rhetoric of the younger generation of 'progressive' artists. It was also used as a polemical weapon in their competition with colleagues for recognition, as exemplified by the struggle for originary recognition by three artists involved in the first *Trimurti* exhibition at the Goethe Institut in 1988 and the second, *Trimurti And Ten Years After*, at the Singapore Art Museum in 1998. The object of their concern was Tang Da Wu and the other members of the 'Artists Village' (AV) group of artists.

The *Trimurti* exhibition and the establishment of Artists Village support the contention that Asian Values was not limited to a top-down project of inculcation by the government. Rather, it found resonance among intellectuals who also desired taxonomic commonality and regional solidarity. Nevertheless, Asian Values discourse manifested differently

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14 For an analysis of the role of intellectuals in the promulgation of Asian Values, see Kessler (1999:295-312).
among different groups of artists. For the Trimurti artists it manifested as signs of a turning back to traditional belief systems, values and icons, while Artists Village turned back to the physical and social site of a rural community: a farm with disused padi fields, out-buildings, paths, irrigation channels, openings —spaces conducive to individual or group work, gatherings, conversations, and encounters with other species. In each case there was a marked surface avoidance of the overt signs of globalised culture, whether Western influences on artistic practice for Trimurti, or the international modernist architecture of the Housing Development Board flats for Artists Village. However, avoidance of these signs of international modernity was anxiously bound to a corresponding reliance on the ethos of globalisation and the international art market.

TANG DA WU AND THE SUSTAINABLE 'VILLAGE'

To appreciate the significance of the early years of the Artists Village group, it is necessary to understand the career and work of Tang Da Wu. In 1988, Tang, at the age of 45, took a position as a lecturer at the Lasalle College of Art in Singapore, upon returning from his sojourn studying and teaching in England from 1970-1987. Before leaving for England, Tang had obtained a Diploma in Youth and Community Work, at the National Youth Leadership Institute, where he learned to organise and motivate young people from 1964—1968. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in Sculpture at Birmingham Polytechnic School of Fine Art (1974), followed by Advanced Studies in Sculpture at St. Martins School of Art (1974-5), and a Masters of Arts in Fine Art degree at Goldsmiths College, University of London (1983-1985).

Having seen the massive mountains of plastic garbage bags during two garbage strikes in Britain, Tang began to work with plastic garbage bags filled with materials. The bags reminded him of gargantuan Chinese dumplings, but more importantly they were a component of a larger unsustainable cycle of production, consumption, accumulation and waste. It was this manufacture of waste that for Tang precisely indexed contemporary British society in the 1970s. At this time, Tang began to develop his techniques for

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15 This is a significant point, because when he returned, Tang used these skills to organise an alternative space for younger artists in Singapore. The Artists Village, then, represents an inadvertent transfer of social engineering and community building technology from the PAP government to the progressive arts community through Tang.
working with found-object *bricolage* of debased commodity refuse —antithetical to the auratic or should we say *heraldic* artifacts of the high-art tradition.

In an interview with T.K. Sabapathy, Tang relates that when he first went to Britain he had wanted to meet Henry Moore, who represented the paradigm of sculpture in Singapore at the time (Sabapathy, 1991:53-57). But when he saw the contemporary work in Britain he cancelled his appointment. During the period between making and canceling that appointment, we may speculate that Tang’s attitude toward material and artistic culture moved from a modernist/colonial to a post-modernist/post-colonial aesthetico-ideological frame. The performance of canceling an appointment with Henry Moore ("the great man", in Tang’s words) represented a shift in Tang’s attitude not only in relation to modernist aesthetics but also to knowledge/power and material culture in a more general sense. This deflection of the modernist European sculpture tradition runs parallel to his later rejection of those ecologically unsustainable patriarchal Chinese customs that value male potency above a sustainable ecological order.

At home in both Chinese-language and English-language milieus, Tang was well placed to deal with these themes. He created works focusing on the medicinal uses of Rhino Horn (*They Poached The Rhino, Dug out its Horn and Made this Drink*, 1989) and Tiger’s penis (*Tiger’s Whip*, 1991), and the use of whale oil in Fuji film emulsion (*Sorry Whale, I Didn’t Know That You Were in My Camera*, 1994).

This concern with issues of sustainable environments and practices also includes Tang’s personal experiences as a child with the Japanese *de facto* imposition of Tapioca as a staple (through the military expropriation of rice reserves) on the people of Singapore during the *Shōnan* period. According to Tang, besides holding little nutritional value, Tapioca is toxic and negatively affects health when taken as a steady (or exclusive) diet (Tang 1995, personal communication). Tang inaugurated the *Tapioca Friendship* project on 15 Feb. 1995, the 53rd anniversary of Singapore’s surrender to the Japanese.

Figure 12. Tang Da Wu "Tapioca" 1994. Photocopy handout.
While the possibility of moving from modernist notions of sculpture into sustainable art production had occurred to Tang before he returned to Singapore, his return offered an opportunity to apply his new vision of environmental degradation to his home environment, and to see his nation through a critical post-modern lens. The dramatic change in the landscape he had known since he was a child became an entry point for an 'extended field' of concerns and processes. Global modernisation and its environmental effects afflicted his homeland as well as the rest of Southeast Asia, and Tang took his inspiration from this chiasmus between modernism and its environmental effects. He first returned to Singapore in 1979 and stayed for an exhibition entitled Earth Works at the National Museum Art Gallery in 1980. During this trip he was struck that “All the villages were gone. As early as the 80’s the villages began to vanish. We lived in Sembawang Road Estate. They began to build up Ang Mo Kio Town and all those familiar places and kampongs disappeared; the land and its vegetation was cleared. So I began to visit those demolished sites and the new building sites and discovered lots of things. There the earthworks began. [W]ithout vegetation the earth would be washed way and the land would deteriorate quickly. In no time gullies formed and then even a river appeared. So I began to record this process. I lay white curtains into shallow gullies and watched them gradually get bigger; and these curtains actually recorded the process […]. The heavy rain during the monsoon season contributed towards the artwork series, and so did strong sunlight. The heat and the light also were important components in the process (Sabapathy, 1991:53-57).

These gully works were dried mud-impregnated square sections of fabric with a single black ink brush circle (Let Nature Destroy Infinity 1980). Tang introduced a visual trope of entropy at the margins of Singapore development into the 'white cube' of the National Art Gallery, along the lines of minimalist and earthwork displacements of the 1960s-1970s by such artists as Robert Smithson, Horikawa Michio, Jannis Kounellis (Secretariat for the 10th Tokyo Biennale 1970; Battcock 1968). In 1982, Tang returned again for Five Days of Performance at the National Museum Art Gallery and gave a lecture on Western art at the Museum in 1986 (Lee, J. 1997:7 n. #10).

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16 This vision brought Tang’s work to the attention of other Asian artists, particularly the Japanese, who have in recent years, proved to be Tang’s strongest supporters.
In June 1988, with a group of younger artists and students, Tang established the Artists Village at the margin of the island, away from the urban environment, at 61-B Lorong Gambas, Sembawang. The location manifested Tang's commitment to build a cultural space at the margin. Tang was joined by a group of mostly younger artists: Goh Teck Hong, Low Eng Teong, Hazel McIntosh (Tang's British wife), Tang Da Hon (Da Wu's brother), Tang Mun Kit and Wong Shih Yaw. In succeeding years many of Singapore's best known young performance and installation artists were associated at one time or another with 'the Village', including Amanda Heng, Jailani Kuning, Koh Nguang How, Lee Wen, and Vincent Leow. The site for “the Village” was a disused farm, with four small houses, a chicken coop, surrounding orchards, ponds of ducks and fish, and vegetable plots, rather than a village per se. The Village was not based on organic cycles, as a farm would be; but neither was it based on an instrumental modernist stacking of bodies, as in the Housing Development Board flats, where the young artists lived with their families. Rather, 61-B Lorong Gambas was a liminal site of cultural labour between local traditions and the global contemporary.

Tang used Lorong Gombas as a site for an extended art pedagogy — a living laboratory for a sustainable artistic practice and lifestyle, and the conduit for the transmission of local/global information. Within a decade many of the AV artists would be carrying out the majority of their work abroad, and we can now look back at the 'restored' kampung (village), paradoxically, as a reflective site for a globalising tendency in contemporary Singapore art\(^\text{17}\). So while Artists Village provided a site for local cultural production, the paradigm of art practice that it represented was not \textit{taxonomical} but \textit{symbolical}, to use Turner's terms. It offered a model for working locally with global culture, and it can be argued that the very creolisation of global-local, urban-rural, sustainable-unsustainable practices was precisely what was so 'Singaporean' and 'Asian' about Artists Village.

\(^{17}\) Since 1988, Tang has shuttled regularly between Singapore and London, where his son and ex-wife live. As of this writing, he resides in Singapore and teaches part-time at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.
TURNING TO TRADITION

Also in 1988, a consortium of three artists, Salleh Japar, Goh Ee Choo, and S. Chandrasekaran turned to a ‘strong definition’ of religious, ethnic and national culture with their collective exhibition and series of performance art works under the title, *Trimurti*, at the Goethe Institute. The three recent graduates of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts had joined another two graduates the previous year in an exhibition entitled *Quintet* at the Arbour Fine Art Gallery, which explored spirituality and cosmic forces though the use of found objects (Lee, 1997:8). The three artists declared in an exhibition manifesto:

*Trimurti* is a Sanskrit word describing three forms usually associated with the Hindu Godhead of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Here, we use it to define a manifestation of three forces, similar to nature – creation, preservation and destruction. (Tay, 1998:47)

Although it was intended as an extended artistic manifesto for the incorporation of regional values, beliefs and icons, *Trimurti* included installations, performance and paintings that would not have been out of place in New York, London, or Tokyo. The introduction of Asian ritual methods of image production and installation into the modernist gallery actually provided a global post-modern counterpoint to a local art market still dominated by modernist painting and sculpture.

During this same period, the Singapore government was exhibiting its own *re-turn* from what was seen to be an overly Westernised ideology of meritocracy and pragmatism associated with the phase of early nation-building. Confucian and *Religious Knowledge* courses were introduced in the schools, and a new focus was placed on distinguishing the unique features of each of the four main Singaporean ethnic groups, with a corresponding emphasis on ‘unity within diversity’ (popularly reduced to the acronym CMIO: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other). In their exhibition manifesto, the *Trimurti* artists explicitly echoed the *unity within diversity* theme (Chandrasekaran, Goh, and Salleh Japar in Sabapathy 1998:11).

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18 *Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA)* was founded in 1937 and was predominately attended by Mandarin and Hokkien speaking artists. The staff (a number of whom immigrated from Shanghai) has included many of the important first and second generation Chinese artists: Chen Chong Swee, Lee Ta Pai, Cheong Soo Pieng, See Hiang Tuo, Chen Wen Hsi, and Georgette Chen Li Ying.
Ten years later in 1998, on the occasion of the remounting of *Trimurti* (*Trimurti And Ten Years Later*) at the new Singapore art Museum, Goh Ee Choo and Chandrasekaran threw down the gauntlet, declaring that their methodology and works were more 'Eastern' than those of Tang Da Wu and the Artist Village group.

Tang Da Wu's performances are based on Western concepts. [...] His performances are not rooted in elements from this region even though the issues are. The body gestures, materials, space understanding, didn't come from this region. They were Western-oriented body language which I thought did not work. Therefore he didn't inspire me; but I got to know what performance was all about. So we shifted this method of making performances. (Chadrasekaran in Sheares, 1998:54, 60)

[Tang] was bringing something from the West, applying a system that was totally alien to Singapore. Whereas in the West we can make a strong statement and yet get away with it, in the East everything you say has a certain responsibility. I was quite worried about the things that he was trying to tell the younger artists [...]. Everything seems to be allowed [...]. (Goh Ee Choo in Sheares, 1998:75).

The apparent ideological division between the two groups offers us a glimpse into the manner that state ideology is reflected in civil society. If we take *Trimurti* in the larger context of the artists’ later work, rather than seeing their later work in terms of their earlier production — the approach of most writers (T.K. Sabapathy 1998; Constance Sheares 1998; Tay Swee Lin 1998; Ahmad Mashadi 1998 in the exhibition catalogue of *Trimurti and Ten Years After*, edited by Sabapathy 1998) — we find a clear ideological impulse running through the manifesto and the interviews. Goh Ee Choo and Chandrasekaran desired an Asian language of embodiment, clear boundaries, limits to freedom, and responsibility — all anxious values explicitly espoused and constantly reiterated by the PAP government.
Two issues are at stake in Chandrasekaran and Goh's critique of Tang's work. First, there appears to have been a misunderstanding by writers over historical influences and originary status in the field of performance art and installation art production, which has caused legitimate sensitivity on the part of the Trimurti artists, and secondly, there are ideological differences between the artists that are relevant to this discussion. But to understand the ideological division between the artists, we must first focus on the dissension over artistic influences.

The dates of the original Trimurti exhibition indicates that the work was produced in the months just before the Artists Village was formally established, so it is necessary to see

19 The antipathy toward Tang appears to result from press misunderstandings combined with some jockeying for originary positioning in the historical narrative of local performance art. This has particularly been the case in the rhetoric of two of the artists, Chandrasekaran (the only Trimurti artist who continued to regularly produce performances) and Goh Ee Choo. The art historian, T.K. Sabapathy has lent support to Trimurti's objections:

All too often Tang Da Wu is cited as the originator of performance art here, or as the sole formative influence in the development of this art medium; in this connection one writer installs Da Wu as the "guru" of Chandra, Ee Choo and Salleh. This is misleading and historically inaccurate. (Sabapathy, 1998:9)
the two groups as parallel developments. This struggle over precedence could have led the Trimurti artists to also want to distinguish their practice ideologically and methodologically from that of Tang and Artists Village, and their anxiety over recognition may in part be caused by the formal similarities between their works and earlier works of the older Tang. There is an obvious formal resemblance between the signs and the surface manipulations in Tang’s *Let Nature Destroy Infinity*, 1980 and some of the works in Trimurti, including the three heraldic installation/performances of the show, *Creation, Preservation, Destruction*; Goh’s later serial work, *Om Padme Hum — Enlightenment Series* (1996), and the images left in the sand during Chadrasekaran’s *Womb* performance (1994).

Because the progressive agents in the Singapore art scene amount to a mere handful of 'usual suspects', the younger artists were certainly aware of Tang’s important 1980 installation, through either direct observation or photographs. In Tang’s work the entropic processes of nature, resulting from human interventions, were displaced into the gallery space. Cracked dried mud from sites of ground erosion caused by extensive clearing for HDB construction were allowed to interfere with icons of perfection, perfectibility, infinity and change, signified by the ‘skilled’ single traditional Chinese ink-brush circle. The brush strokes functioned both metaphorically (for example, as a sign for 'infinity'), metonymically, as a sign of Tang’s links with the taxonomic tradition of Chinese ink-brush painting, and, concretely, in the displacement of already existing un/natural processes contiguous to the white cube of the gallery space.

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20 Etsuko Tsuzuki, the Curator of the Fukuoka Museum in his catalogue essay on Tang, has suggested the correlation of the brush-stroke circles in *Let Nature Destroy Infinity* with the I-Ching sign for infinity. (Etsuko Tsuzuki, 1991:9)
Figure 14(b): Chandrasekaran, Salleh, Goh, 1988 Trimurti, (TK Sabapathy, 1991:81)
In *Trimurti*, the event was composed in and for the symmetries of the white cube, with a sense of the objects being *placed* rather than *displaced*. The emphasis was on conventional and iconic distinctions of creation, preservation and destruction, as 'identity-brandings' for the three individual artists. As in Tang's work, even the forces of destruction (*Siva*/Chadrasekaran) were discreetly contained within the scope of the overall exhibition script and were not out of place in the gallery environment. Balance and symmetry of formal elements appear to have been the primary concern of the three artists: the canonical laws controlling formal interactions. *Destruction* was measured and managed through the predominance of metaphor, the dialectic of irreconcilable elemental forces symbolically reconciled. Metonymy played a part, primarily in the ideological implications of the work, rather than its material manifestation.

The feelings around the issue of Tang's influence on the *Trimurti* group appear to have remained acute over the years and are not fully accounted for by Sabapathy's description of a contestation over influences, as they also appear to derive from ideological differences between the artists that Sabapathy does not address. These were revealed in a series of interviews with Constance Sheares in 1998.

**Sheares:** What is the difference [between your performance and that of Tang Da Wu]?

**Chadrasekaran:** The difference is that, for me, I was able to introduce culture and my own philosophy into it. The material marked a big shift, especially the use of materials from our own cultures, like *kumkum* {red powder for dotting the forehead}, turmeric, twine, banyan tree, circular shapes or *bindus*, all these make differences [sic]. I can claim that I am different because I make the differentiation. I saw performance as part of our culture.

[....]

In Bali I saw this guy who was a cook in the morning and a dancer in the afternoon. His body gets transformed immediately because of the way he was able to express his idea. I think this is not always possible in the Western world. In the Western world a sculptor remains a sculptor; artists in the performance medium will always stay with performance art. I don't think that Da Wu can make that kind of shift in that kind of reference. Oh yes, he does painting and all that, but for me the shift is continual. When I do installations I see
references to my paintings, and when I see paintings I can make references to my sculpture. The sense of continuity is important for me (Sheares, 1998:54, 60).

Chandrasekaran romanticises and orientalises his own processes, while conversely occidentalising Tang's and that of 'Western' artists. His work has 'continuity' with tradition while theirs' does not; he can 'shift' between disciplines but they, who are caught in their specialisations, cannot. This and Goh's interview (Sheares, 1998:70) mark the same territory and are inflected by governmental rhetoric of the 1990s concerning the negative influences from Western society21.

The statements also reveal the dialectics and animosities within the small community of progressive artists in Singapore in the late 1980s, and offer a glimpse of an underlying imaginary: an essentialised bastion of Asian culture and art, clearly distinguishable from Western culture and art. However, these three artists chose to undergo their training in Western institutions following Trimurti22, and their approach to art production, like that of Tang, was influenced by already established global art trends they found in Australia and England. For example, the late 1980s and early 1990s in Singapore included a performance and installation scene. Performance art and installation art could be found in Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia from the 1950s-1980s. These were followed by post-minimalist /post-pop works of the AIDS-infused Neo-Geo (New Geometricism) in Europe and the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. The two-dimensional work of Ryman, Bleckner, Haley, et al. had a strong presence in the London scene of the 1980s and 1990s, during Goh's presence there, and his drawings appear to share some formal concerns with this movement.

21 For example, "Where one should draw the line in art (The Straits Times, 16/3/1994); "BG Yeo: Build defences against outside influence" (The Straits Times 27/7/1994).

22 Having received a Diploma from the Nanyang Academy of the Arts (NAFA) in Singapore before Trimurti, the three artists went abroad for the graduate studies. Chandrasekaran and Salleh both obtained their BA from Curtin University of Technology, Perth in 1990; Chandrasekaran then continued at Perth, obtaining his MA in 1994. Salleh obtained a Masters in Art Education from the University of Central England in 1995. Goh moved directly from his Diploma into a Masters programme at Slade School of Fine Arts, at the University College London, matriculating in 1990. In 2002 Chandrasekaran again returned to Perth to pursue a Creative Doctorate degree.
CHAPTER IV. 'STATE FATHERHOOD' & THE BODY POLITIC


Salleh, in his interview with Sheares described the search for ‘essence’, but not with the same investment in East-West dualisms used by Goh and Chandrasekaran:

Sheares: Was there meant to be any religious overtone to it [Trimurti]?

Salleh: No, we were more or less reflecting on approaches. Ee Choo was really fascinated by Daoism and his works point to other realms than the technical. We drew quite a lot from ancient culture, which affected the way in which we actually see. Part of that is the mystical cultures. Those are things that are most fascinating and not many Singaporean artists draw from that. They could draw from calligraphy, but [...] calligraphy has become quite illustrative [...]. I find they draw surfaces rather than essences. What most of us try to get to is basically essences. So that is why some say, we get quite spiritual or religious (Sheares, 1998:75).

In 1983, Thomas McEvilley wrote an article in *ArtForum* entitled "Art in the Dark" concerning recent Euro-American performance art and conceptual art. The article discussed what he termed 'appropriation performance': and the appropriation of religious rites and cultural motifs, which he divided into either Apollonian or Dionysian tendencies, and pointed to the attraction in the 1960s of performance artists to "sympathetic magic".

The Dionysian subversion of ego in the cause of general fertility has become another persistent theme of appropriation performance. *Barbara Smith has performed what she calls a Tantric ritual that included sexual intercourse in a gallery setting as an artwork.*

In general, performance works involving the appropriation of religious forms [...] may be seen as expressions of the desire, so widespread in the '60s and early '70s to reconstitute within Modern civilization something like an ancient or primitive sensibility of oneness with nature (McEvilley, 1985:294, emphasis added.).

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23 Following *Trimurti*, Salleh turned to an extended critical reflection on the Western logocentric philosophical tradition (and its pedagogical application). In *Mechanised Learning* 1993, Salleh attacked the signs of the pedagogue (or is it the autodidact?) from the position of the modernist bricoleur, for whom objects are valued for their cumulative associations, rather than for any particular intrinsic qualities.

One can read into Salleh’s internationalist focus a counter-state discourse: specifically countering the government's attraction to instrumental rationalism and developmentalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, official representations of the Singaporean Malay as *katak debawah tempurung* (frog under a coconut shell) that is, ‘provincial’, or less inclined to the acquisition of knowledge than the other races. His bricolaged works repeatedly return to signs of intelligence, cognitive-philosophical quandary and reflections on categorization.
McEvilley's critique indicates that Tantric ritual tropes were being appropriated by some Western artists at the end of the 1970s. The use of such tropes by Singaporean artists, living in the most globalised economy of Southeast Asia, correspondingly signified an unresolved chiasmus between local and global, and the destabilising indeterminacy that inflects any search for originary identity in Singapore.

When they gave their interviews in 1998 after studying abroad, the Trimurti artists had apparently not altered their views of Tang's work or of Western art practices that they held in 1988. Inadvertently or not, they invested their work with an imagining of pan-Asian cultural essence at the very time they were following in the footsteps of some Western performance practices of the 1960s-70s. It could be theorised that Chandrasekaran, for example, was appropriating Tantric rituals and motifs for many of the same reasons that Anglo artists in the West had turned to the appropriation of non-institutionalised spiritualism of Tantra or Celtic, Tartar or Native American shamanism. Ancient traditions appeared to deliver the missing core of modern urban cosmopolitan Singapore. They promised a return to pre-industrial cultural economies, grounded in states of belief and hermetic truths, rather than capital extraction, commodity production, and alienated labour. For Goh and Chandrasekaran, the West embodied the very modernist lack that Singapore artists sought to fill with mystical or rural returns. Mystical systems represented a more ‘authentic’ pre-capitalist mode of production, away from the alienated and banal daily rituals of industrial labour that have always been a sign of 'horror' or 'disgust' in modernist bourgeois consciousness.

Supporting this argument that these artists sought authentic essence amongst bourgeois phobias rather than living traditions, Chandrasekaran avoided research into the economics of the ancient social system he was citing. These included the correlations between power relations, caste and class systems to Tantric spiritual systems. There is no reference to economy in the rhetoric of any of these artists who come from a country where national discourse is replete with economic signifiers, and where uninterrupted expansion of the economy is seen to be the sine qua non of national development\(^24\). The tropes of Taoism,

\(^{24}\) Wee succinctly describes the situation as follows:
Of all the post-colonial societies of Southeast Asia, the city-state Singapore is unique as to how the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) government, first elected into power in 1959,
Buddhism, Sufism and Tantra are thrown into economic and cultural free-float, withdrawn from any material context of daily life. Coming out of Singapore's first world economy, Chandrasekaran told Sheares how he tried to convince students at an art college in Madras that his culture was their culture:

I told them that these rituals and performances were not from the Western world, "they are from our part of the culture and are so deeply ingrained in our society. There are so many things to discover and develop, why are you still working on Western methodology?" Most of them were shocked; some disagreed, and some were confused and they left (Sheares, 1998:58-9, emphasis added).

For Chandrasekaran culture is synonymous with ethnicity and binary global positioning: either West or East. But what of class, history, nationality, education, access to information, language, or the close ties between of Tantra to caste structures, to orthodox Hindu codes of behaviour, and Brahmanic subculture? For example, Milner argues that Tantra functions as a means for the entry of unorthodox practices into Brahmanic orthodoxy amongst an elite class of practitioners. This would account for the presence in Tantra of many of the social norms of orthodox Brahmanism: "rigid boundaries, initiation rituals, strong authority, the importance of knowledge, the elaboration of norms and categories, the authority of the guru", while also accounting for how the values of Tantrism that are "antithetical to orthodoxy come to overlap with that orthodoxy" (Milner 1994:123). Milner argues that Tantra is not simply oppositional to, but contingent on orthodox Hinduism, its spiritual oppositionality a function of class as well as doctrinal contiguity. A study of the transgressive sexual rites and beliefs of Tantric tradition entails an awareness of its spiritual, sociological, and economic context. None of these symbological and localised signifiers of lived-culture (outside of taxonomic determinism), or East versus West binaries, figure in Chandrasekaran's idealised description of his citations.

While for Chandrasekaran methodology is the heart of the matter, for Salleh, a concept of essence appears to be the object of the work: "I find they [other Singapore artists] draw surfaces rather than essences. What most of us try to get to is basically essences" (Sheares 1998:65). While the metaphors they deploy are quite different, both artists fit well within has recreated society for the central purpose of economic development (C.J.Wee W-L. 2001-1:1).
an 'Asian' taxonomy. Chandrasekaran's concern is framed in terms of identity and a categorisation of methodology, while Salleh uses a containment metaphor, implying that the essence is 'inside', 'beneath', or at least not on the surface.

In the decade from 1988 through 1998 the same taxonomy was being deployed with rhetoric resonant of Asian exceptionality by the government to advance a globalised capitalist national economy, largely synchronised to the neo-liberal New World Order of the 'Washington consensus' (C. J. Wee W.-L., 2001-1:2). The very tropes of ‘Asian exceptionality’ and return to an essential “Asian” identity provided the ideological impetus for a renewal of teleological developmentalism and a vision of transcendent financial and cultural economies of an "Asian 21st Century".

Singapore artists by no means universally accept the fetishisation of taxonomic culture implied in these statements. The year before Sheare's interviews with the Trimurti artists, Theatreworks presented the stage production, Lear, directed by Ong Keng Sen and written by the Japanese writer, Rio Kishida. Presented in Mandarin, Japanese, Bahasa Indonesia, and English, Lear was a controversial work for its claim of representing a "new Asia" through a commitment to a determinist aesthetic and self-conscious pluralism. Lear included performers from Japan, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia — some delivering their lines in their native tongues.

A complex theatre production that was preceded by interactive workshops attended by the transnational Asian cast, Lear is one of the most analysed works in the history of Singapore theatre25. Critiques have focused on issues of Asian identity, Ong's notion of 'interculturalism', and the imagining of a New Asian culture that Ong performatively constructs with his publicity statements, but also on his methodology. Falling into a lineage of the director/auteur and the actor/über-marionette, reaching back to the British Edward Gordon Craig's spectacle productions in the first decade of the Twentieth Century in Europe and Russia, Lear clearly set out to spectacularise Asian cultural power by subsuming pluralism under a singular dominant directoral imperative. Yet it is instructive

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to place the imaginary of an authentic Asian essence held by the *Trimurti* artists beside Ong’s post-modern spectacular embrace of global pastiche:

> I have consciously avoided a search for the authentic tradition in this production. Lear is from the pastiche which we call Asia. An Asia where the traditional coexists with McDonalds, Andrew Lloyd Weber and rap. [...] Old definitions of traditional and modern no longer seem useful in the new millennium. [...] Tradition has continued to include change, in order to sustain its relevance. It is only societies that have mythicized tradition into a stable phenomenon. Tradition is perhaps best seen as a continuum rather than a monolith. (Ong, 1999:3)

This statement was published in January 1999 while the *Trimurti* catalogue came out a month earlier. The difference in the views is striking. The discourse of interculturalism for Ong abjured the binary distinctions adhered to by Goh, Chandrasekaran and Salleh, acknowledging a Singapore which included layers of global popular culture as an important aspect of its unique construction of ‘Asian authenticity’. For Ong, tradition is not counterpoised in a struggle against global pop, a taxonomic past versus an alien symbolical present. Rather it is incessantly transitional, with ‘Asian tradition’ one important trope of the larger global tropography — an essential trope to be sure, but not a trope of Essence. It can be argued that the aesthetic fetishism that plays such an important part in Ong's staging, runs counter to a pluralistic stance, and his stance as director-auteur supports an inversion of the same cultural imperialist assumptions that infuse Chandrasekaran's arguments with the Indian students: rather than "My culture is your culture", for Ong it is "Your culture is my culture". Nevertheless, the intentions behind *Trimurti* and *Lear* are clearly at odds.

While *Trimurti* itself was a groundbreaking exhibition in 1988, its remounting *ten years after* in the 'official space' of the Singapore Art Museum, indicated the historical limits of the initial exhibition. If it had been remounted twenty years or thirty years later, it would have been viewed as a marker of a particular historical period, but mounted a mere decade later, it was difficult to not view it as an attempt to performatively accelerate the historicisation of the contemporary, in alignment to government efforts to renovate 'Singapore tradition'. The premature mythologisation of the initial exhibition suggested an autogenic reification, synchronous with official ideology and official aesthetics.
For its part, by mounting the re-*Trimurti*, the Singapore Art Museum iconicised three of the four points of the CMIO acronym, the oft-repeated sign of the government's multicultural policies of the late-1980s and 1990s, thereby producing an acronym with an added lack: (Chinese/ Malay/ Indian/ Other). Through a process of elimination we can assume that this *Other* is not only the *Orang Asli* (Indigenous Peoples), Arabs, Eurasians and Jewish elements who make up less than 5% of the population, but is the excised sign of the female in contradistinction to this triad of male artists. This *she/other* does not fit into the taxonomy of the *Trimurti* artists, and is thus bonded to the variety of other immigrants. These untidy, creolised others whose essence is neither-and-both Asian and Western, whose cultural traditions cannot be easily encapsulated in an art commodity based on essentialised 'Asian' identity or a taxonomy of 'Asian' values, are precisely the 'fourth element' that does not fit the ontological triad of either cultural or capital ‘creation-preservation-destruction’.

Asian Values ideology was not concerned with the direct needs of industrialisation or productivity, although it was meant to consolidate and maintain industrial and post-industrial development. The government turned from the direct focus on performance indicators and instrumentalism of what was meant to be seen as the meritocratic ideology that has defined the Singaporean 'advance' to First World status. These policies had stratified the polity along classic lines between the working populace and the managerial ruling party, and between ethnic groups. Through the implementation of environmental redevelopment and social engineering the city-state had lost much of its sense of cultural or regional particularity and identity. It had become the place that no one could quite define, a place between, a *tropic* zone: the 'passage', 'airport transit lounge', 'escalator'. Neither and both an 'ecumenopolis' as imagined by Rajaratnam in the frontpiece to Part 2 of this dissertation, nor/and a 'post-humanist' site of modern alienation, as evoked by Dostoevsky in the frontpiece to Part 3.

The infusion of capital during the late-1980s/early 1990s period of the 'Asian Miracle' allowed regional economies to exert more muscle on the international scene. The sight of ethnic instabilities in the West, such as the Los Angeles riots in 1991, served as a warning
of social fracturing along ethnic lines in developed economies, leading to a renewed urgency for regional and taxonomic unity. So, the government began to focus on aspects of affinity and identity, the production of discourses and representations of a regional and national polity. Teleological developmentalism was not discarded but was paradoxically renewed by being linked to Asian heritages reaching back five thousand years — long before the 'modern' arrival of Sir Thomas Raffles. The Puritan/Confucian work-ethic embedded in Singapore's modernist bureaucratic and meritocratic policies was reconstituted as a purely Confucian work-ethic. Acquiescence to the overwhelming legal and regulatory environment of the state was re-framed by government rhetors as "respect for authority in preserving law and order" and a "readiness to support any efforts to promote social responsibility and enhance social discipline". Election gerrymandering was reframed as "the collective wisdom to elect a strong and good government successively and support government leaders and policies consistently" (The Straits Times, 28/8/1995). The purpose of the exercise remained the revitalisation of the workplace, governance, education and the home. Performance indicators were 'restored' as signifiers of the Asian Values of discipline, hard work and productivity.

The Trimurti exhibition and the establishment of Artists Village indicate that Asian Values was not limited to a top-down project of inculcation by the government. Rather, it also found resonance among intellectuals and artists hungry for taxonomic solidarity. The subject of the latter part of this chapter, then, has been the periodic overlapping of the desires and performances of the state and those of artists and art groups. But as the work of the Trimurti group and Artists Village reveals, even work that consciously celebrated Asian Values and regional consciousness reflected global trends as well.

The following chapter carries this focus on government and civil society cultural production as the site for ideological discourse, into an analysis of the historicisation of two paradigmatic figures: Stamford Raffles and Lee Kuan Yew, one colonial and the other post-colonial. In official accounts, the teleology of Singapore modernity begins with the former and bears fruit through the policies of the latter.
CHAPTER V.
"THE SINGAPORE STORY":
Invention & Foreclosure

Having related in Chapter I the narrative of the visionary voyeur scoping outwards from the panopticon and the hub, and downwards from the helicopter, this chapter returns to the trope of the 'visionary voyeur', now in the role of the autogenic historian. Two charismatic tragedians, Stamford Raffles and Lee Kuan Yew (each ouroborically cast in the mould of the other), embody the autogenic writing of history. In official accounts, Singapore history, is said to "begin" with Raffles and completes a historical cycle with the still living Lee. These two patriarchs frame the history of the ‘Singapore people’ and the island, — a history generally divided into the following periods:

1. All the centuries before the arrival of Raffles;

2. The discovery and establishment of an entrepôt trading post of the East India Company by Raffles, and the colonial development of the island under British rule;

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1 This dissertation uses foreclosure in the sense of "settling or resolving an issue beforehand", as in the deprivation of the right to the redemption of a mortgaged property, or the exclusion from an inheritance. Foreclosure, then, involves a promise or expectation, followed by the premature settlement, resolution or closing off of promise or expectation (AHD).

3. The colonial development of the island under the British Empire;  
4. The Japanese Syonan interlude;  
5. The final period of colonial rule under local transitional administrations;  
6. The beginning of PAP rule and the short agonistic narrative of merger with Malaysia;  
7. Post-independence of the sovereign nation under the PAP and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew;  
8. The PAP “Second Generation” under Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong; with Lee Kuan Yew ensconced as Senior Minister.  
9. The announced transition to the PAP “Third Generation” under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (expected late 2003 or 2004).

This chapter focuses on the trope of the leader and ruling party as embodiments of the Singapore state. Government writings, speeches, and official documents, including Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs, speeches by former Deputy Prime Minister, S. Rajaratnam, and the colonial writings of Sir Stamford Raffles, offer the outlines of the invention and coalescing of the modernist state around a heroic monumentalisation of an amalgamated leadership paradigm. Raffles/Lee has come to personify the continuity of the state from colonialism through the present.

It is a peculiarly modernist notion that states and individuals can be invented (or reinvented) — brought into being through an act of will and solidarity, and, correspondingly, there can be the violent decision to foreclose competing visions of the state, in order for a particular national invention to take root. To this end, the chapter details the foreclosure of the Referendum on Merger that became the paradigm for subsequent government foreclosures of democratic process and the development of autonomous civil society.

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3 In 1971 Chan Heng Chee argued: Politicians and administrators in an administrative state share two fundamental assumptions:  
1. that the masses have a high ceiling of tolerance. It is the outsider, the troublemaker, who stirs up grievances and creates trouble; and  
2. human beings are malleable. People can be taught to accept and adapt to anything (Chan 1997/1975:297).

The 'Referendum on Merger' was the first demonstration of the PAP’s application of these assumptions.
These notions of *invention* and *foreclosure* appear in the three possible inflections of the title of the first volume of Lee's memoirs, *The Singapore Story: THE Singapore Story*, indicating the only or the primary one; *The SINGAPORE Story*, emphasising the emergence of Singapore as subject and protagonist; *The Singapore STORY*: an ambiguous reflexive admission that the work is an invented narrative, a sequential tale and *could be* a fiction.

"THE SINGAPORE STORY" AND SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS

*The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (1998), and the succeeding volume, *From Third World To First* (2000) were issued locally by Times Editions Pte. Ltd., a subsidiary of Times Publishing group, which falls under Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) — a government-linked news and publishing monopoly. For Lee to publish his memoirs under the banner of Singapore Press Holdings indicates the open convergence of a personal and a governmental narrative, and offers an insight into the manner in which Lee and the PAP government perceived their agency, and how they desired the book to be received. To understand this significance, it is essential to understand the history of SPH and the manner that its national monopoly was established. An official history of the SPH states:

> The daily newspaper market in Singapore is a monopoly. All the three English, three Chinese, Malay and Tamil newspapers are published by the listed blue-chip company Singapore Press Holdings. The *evolution* of the Singapore press into a monopoly started in the early 1970s when the government closed down two English dailies—Eastern Sun and Singapore Herald—and merged the two leading Chinese dailies. Until then, the Singapore press was fairly competitive with papers rising and folding in a creative destruction process of the market. (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2000:92, emphasis added.)

The use of the term 'evolution' metaphorises the closure of the independent presses in Singapore as an inevitable and natural process of change and 'Darwinian' natural selection. Three other important elements are not mentioned:

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4 The international edition of *The Singapore Story* was issued by Prentise Hall, while the international edition of *From Third World To First* was published by Harper Collins.
1. The ideological motivations for closing the independent presses and the function of a press monopoly.
2. The legal instruments created and deployed for this purpose.
3. The links between SPH and the PAP government, and how SPH fits into the larger corporate-state structure.

IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVATION

Eight months before the closing of the Singapore Herald, the Eastern Sun and the Chinese language paper, Nanyang Siang Pau, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Inche Mohamed Ghazali Ismail argued in Parliament for deterrent interventions into civil society, which, in retrospect, must be viewed as part of an effort to prepare the ground for subsequent prophylactic actions by the government:

[I]f any enterprise, be it a newspaper or otherwise, works for non-commercial aims and subverts the minds of our people, and interferes with the political and other matters of Singapore's established philosophies, then it is our paramount duty to protect the long term interests of our people and nation (The Singapore Herald, 31/8/1970).

On 15 May 1971, in the midst of the press closures, S. Rajaratnam, then Second Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Minister of Labour, gave an untitled speech on democracy and the press for the Annual Founder's Day Reunion of the Christian Brothers Old Boys' (Singapore) Association. He imputed unnamed papers with "black operations" against the government, and revealed the three issues about which the government was most sensitive to printed criticisms: National Service, the Internal Security Act, and the treatment of ISA detainees (Rajaratnam, 1987:152-159). Rajaratnam's speech provided justification for a dramatic course of government intervention into the sphere of civil society information dissemination. The intervention unfolded as follows:

- 2 May 1971: four journalists of the Chinese press, Nanyang Siang Pau were incarcerated under ISA.
- 16 May 1971: the Eastern Sun ceased publication following government accusations of obtaining loans from Communist officials in Hong Kong.
- 17 May 1971: the Singapore Herald's Editor, Robert Reece, and his wife were ordered to leave the country. The paper closed 11 days later.

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S. George has linked this action to an event two years earlier, in 1969. Reece, then a writer with the Far
Since the 1971 PAP government crackdown on the *Singapore Herald*, *Eastern Sun*, and *Nanyang Siang Pau* for articles, editorials and "letters to the editor" critical of the government, subsequent "letters to the editor" have been carefully screened and monitored by Singapore Press Holdings editors. Views strongly opposed to government policies are generally represented by perhaps one or two mild (and often edited) critiques, while those in favour of government policies are far more frequent.

LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

The *1974 Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA)*, which came into force 1 January, 1975, required that all privately owned newspaper companies be converted into public companies, with shares divided into two classes: 'Ordinary' and 'Management'. Management shares, which constitute 1% of the Ordinary shares, carry 200 times greater voting weight of Ordinary Shares, when dealing with issues such as editorial policy and the appointment or dismissal of directors or editorial staff etc. In the case of financial matters and the daily running of the paper, however, they carry equal voting weight to Ordinary shares. Management Shares can only be issued to citizens of Singapore and representatives of corporations approved by the government, and can be revoked at any time. The intention was to place editorial management under the control of the government and their proxies.

Financial control of the paper would continue to remain in the hands of the owners, but control of editorial policy would be transferred to the majority of management shareholders (Seow, 1998:107-108).

The act was amended in 1977 to the effect that no person could hold over 3% of Ordinary Shares of a newspaper company. In 1982 the two Chinese presses, *Nanyang Siang Pau*...
and the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* were merged under pressure from the government to form *Singapore News and Publications Limited* (SNPL). They ceased publication and were replaced on 16 March 1983 by *Lianhe Zaobao* (*United Morning News*) and *Lianhe Wanbao* (*United Evening News*) (Seow, 1998:119).

**SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDING'S PLACE IN THE CORPORATE CONTEXT**

In 1984, through another forced merger, the SNLP was merged with *The Straits Times* Group to form a 'government linked corporation' (GLC), Singapore Press Holdings, at the time "the largest industrial group and sixth largest listed company on the Singapore Stock Exchange, with a capital base of S$1.4 billion. It was the only monopoly listed [...] Excess shares went to Temasek Holdings and MND Holdings, the two wholly owned government companies" (Seow, 1998:123).

This completed the process of removing the press from private control, placing it under government linked Singapore Press Holdings, and, significantly, directly under the control of Lee Kuan Yew's family (Tan 2002). Government Linked Corporations (GLC) function in the Singapore economy as public corporations, and as investment or assured employment opportunities for the ruling elite following their retirement. They allow for government control of a larger portion of the workforce and the extension of the administrative state into the civil state. Lee Kuan Yew's decision to publish his memoirs under Singapore Press Holdings served to identify the book as 'official literature', meant to be absorbed as such by the people of the nation, and to 'key' subsequent national discourse concerning the history of the first post-independence generation.

This positioning of *The Singapore Story* was reiterated with the production of a 3-D audio-visual spectacle, CD-Rom, books and other paraphernalia. *The Singapore Story* 3-D *son-et-lumiere* was required viewing for all school children and was tied into the *National Education* Programme, launched by Lee Kuan Yew's son, the Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong on 17 May 1997, resulting from the government's perception that

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7 In 2002, Madame Ho Ching, the wife of Lee Kuan Yew's eldest son, Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, and former Chief Executive Officer of Singapore Technologies, became the CEO of Temasek Holdings.
Many Singaporeans, especially pupils and younger Singaporeans, knew little of our recent history. They did not know how we became an independent nation, how we triumphed against long odds, and how today's peaceful and prosperous Singapore came about.

This ignorance will hinder our effort to develop a shared sense of nationhood. We will not acquire the right instincts to bond together as one nation, or maintain the will to survive and prosper in an uncertain world. For Singapore to thrive beyond the founder generation. We must systematically transmit these instincts and attitude to succeeding cohorts. Through National Education, we must make these instincts and attitudes part of the cultural DNA which makes us Singaporeans (Lee H.L., 1997:1, emphasis added.).

The statement is a classic example of the younger Lee's proclivity for producing rhetorical patois, calling up tropes of survival and crisis, shared values, while essentialising it all through a conflation of genetics, culture, and national identity. Determined top-down, the 'instincts and attitudes' of the people are oxymoronically moulded into a 'cultural DNA' — the common defining element that 'makes' a Singaporean Singaporean.

SPH, government websites, and the press have lavishly excerpted portions of Lee’s Memoirs, which could still be perused and purchased at The Straits Times daily press website four years after release. The implication of all these official vehicles carrying the same version of historical events cannot be dismissed as coincidence by the public, academics, or by those in neighboring countries holding very different interpretations of the events covered by the books. In the classic mould of Socialist Realist literature, Lee Kuan Yew’s Memoirs were clearly meant to be received at home and abroad as official history.

AUTOGENIC NARRATIVES

Lee's national paternity is a powerful trope in The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew. He does not speak only for himself. He speaks for the interests of his family,

8 http://www.straitstimes.com.sg/ (12/9/02)

Figure 18. Flier for "The Singapore Story 3D experience: Overcoming the Odds" (National Heritage Board:1997). This image on the cover of the promotional flier significantly emphasises the article 'The', clarifying that this is the only official version of the events. We are to infer that the interpretation presented requires no further interpretation. Indeed the flier eliminates the audience, reducing the experience of three-dimensional viewing to the presence of the technology of the glasses and image production alone. The tools of reception (glasses that translate the two-dimensional projection into a three-dimensional image) are also tools of production, thereby eliminating the problem of contradictory hermeneutics. Through this technology of pro-ception, two-dimensional history becomes three-dimensional 'reality'. 
his clan, for his business partners, the People’s Action Party, the Cabinet and the administrative state. He is both a ventriloquial for a particular imaginary of national coherence and continuity, and the voice behind. The name Lee Kuan Yew indexes both the embodied Lee and a personification of sovereignty, that is, the complex regime of power under which the book was composed, inclusive of its authorship and Lee's protagonism in the book's narrative. The Senior Minister translocutes the iconic 'Lee' who translocutes the subjective singular, "I".

Lee autogenically authors his own protagonism, as if translocuting from outside, slipping and sliding from the historian’s “Vinit, vidit, vicit’ (He came, he saw, he conquered) into “Veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered.). The readers become supporting characters in this historical drama: our performance of reading completes the writing by authenticating it as a “history” rather than private reminiscences or confession. We are meant to feel privileged to be 'present' at the moment history is made. And indeed we are present at that moment, for it is the writing/reading of the book that produces the historical narrative.

Lee has used the technique of inviting the public into his confidence many times before. In a speech entitled, Envoy From The Underground, delivered over Radio Singapore on 22 September 1961, as one of a series of broadcasts from 13 September to 9 October, the Singapore listening public was invited to share Lee’s private experiences. They learned of his secret meeting with “The Plen,” Lee's nickname for the anonymous plenipotentiary of the communist party:

There may be people who say that all this talk of the Communist underground is a fairy tale. I shall have to tell you something which is known to very few people.

In March 1958, before I went with the All-Party Merdeka Mission to the London talks, someone whom I knew to be connected with the Communist organization approached me and arranged for me to see a man who he said would like to see me and discuss some matters [...]. I shall call him the PLEN, short for the plenipotentiary.

In my next talk I shall tell you how after I met the PLEN again in May of this year, the Communists and the nationalists came to a parting of the ways. (Lee in Ong & Govindasamy-Ong, 1996:55-60, emphasis added.)
These are the strategic words of a voice-over in a film-noir script. Lee translocuted his own character in the story as the 'subject' of the tale, parsing out his serialised narrative, bit by salient bit over the course of a month. In these radio addresses on the eve of the Referendum On Merger, Lee solemnly merged his and Singapore’s histories, so that one would be recognised through the other.

The style of the whole speech is (intended) to transport the audience to another place and time. In this sense, the metaphoric pragmatic is to make the audience see the situation in the speech as if it were currently happening, so that the audience will view the situation in a particular light [...] that if they had been in the situation, they would have had to make similar choices (Ong & Govindasamy-Ong, 1996:55-56.).

Lee was the first Singapore politician to effectively use radio and he did so with a flair for verisimilitude that recalls Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre. Lee began with the “battle for merger” —dilating the referendum on merger with Malaysia into a military struggle— and continued to use radio and television in subsequent election campaigns. Story-telling, the primary information technology of non-literate societies for the transmission of history and myths across generations, in industrial societies was enhanced and massified through the introduction of the electronic radio. In 1961 there were radios in at least 30% of the households in Malaya (including Singapore), and probably considerably more. Lee wanted his audience to enter into the historical narrative beside him in their homes and coffee shops, transported through the medium of his recollection, into a progressivist teleology, leading inexorably to that moment at which history is revealed in the real-time present in which the story is being told.

Lee’s account was designed to convince the listening public to enter into a double contract of trust. First, they were called upon to trust Lee (as the authentic participant and trustworthy chronicler), and second, to authorise him and the PAP to lead Singapore into merger with Malaysia—a political stance on which Lee and the PAP had staked their legitimacy. In this sense, the story was meant to propagate a ‘shared history’ forged out of

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10 The figure of an estimated 406,000 radios in Malaya is extrapolated from import minus export data from 1959, including both short-wave and medium-wave. The first reliable "listenership" survey was carried out in 1965 by the University Malaya, which listed 47% households with 1.09 radios per household (Grenfell, N. 1979:23). Because Singapore was an urbanised trading port, at the forefront of Malayan modernisation, it is safe to say that these figures are low.
threat, danger and crisis; a telos leading to this moment of taking stock … and finally to
the safe harbour of merger. Lee constatively described a series of events while also
deploying that description to performatively produce the future of Singapore as he
imagined it. His narration made use of the mythologisation of his own persona, the
dilation and reification of the exceptional first-person-singular, translocuted “I”, and,
through its tenure, he performatively produced a monumentalised subject-economy
mapped onto a nation. Lee continued to perform these translocutions throughout his
career, culminating in his Memoirs.

LEE & RAFFLES: CONSTRUCTING THE TRAGIC LEADER PROTOTYPE
Lee himself has often reiterated his connection with Raffles as historical personage and
contemporary icon in the context of creating a "culturally neutral national historiography"
(Wee, C.J.W.-L. 2001):

[M]y great grandfather came here with nothing [...]. My
tragedy started when he left his son behind (after returning to
China) who was my grandfather; and here I am. I inherited
what you have left me. In a way, it was not all created by you
because my great grandfather did play a subsidiary role and so
did my father and so did I myself. So we have left (the statue
of) Stamford Raffles standing on his pinnacle outside the
Victoria Memorial Hall. But for him, Singapore would still be
a mudflat” (Josey 1968:538, emphasis added.).

In this passage Lee slips into his 'tragic tale' by dramatically and strategically shifting his
footing from addressing the audience to addressing the Raffles through his monument
—like Hamlet on the ramparts speaking to the ghost of his father— and then back again to
the audience. Lee’s own biological paternity is conflated with Raffles, as it is unclear in
the sentence, "I inherited what you have left me,” whether he is addressing his own Hakka

11 In 1972, a copy of the original marble monument depicting Sir Stamford Raffles by T. Woolner (1887) was
erected on the bank of the Singapore River, close to where he had disembarked. T.K. Sabapathy compares the
Raffles Monuments to the F.J. Wilcoxson sculpture of Francis Light, 1939 in Penang:
These images have been composed in accordance with conventions developed for
portraying military and civil heroes during the reign of Victoria in England; gestures and
postures convey authority and power. In demeanor they are aloof and inaccessible; by
their gestures and postures they signal firmness and assertiveness (Sabapathy, 1991:19).

The sculpture of Stamford Raffles replaces the fluidity and classical idealism of the French Eighteenth
Century academy (as exemplified by Houdon) with a stripped down neo-classical British pragmatism and a
touch of conventional romanticism.
grandfather or the British colonist. The arrival of Raffles and the arrival of his father flatten into a singular Oedipal discourse.

Lee's conflation of paternity points to what Mohan Ambikaipaker terms the "rationalisation of the successful immigrant narrative" (Ambikaipaker, 2001), in which class narratives are the product of struggle toward economic arrival in the present. The story of past and future are shaped by the dominant present capitalist value-system, the ideology of developmentalism it entails, and a status quo of power relations.

Teleological narratives provide the means by which all the tensions, discrepancies, ambiguities of historical sequence may be unified into a singular telos, leading inexorably to the present. Historical events are 'flattened' into a discursive reproduction, in the manner that the proscenium stage flattens the deep recesses of life: available space is read as deep space. The product of this moment with Raffles was Lee's perlocutionary dramatic narrative in which the 'present' was ouroborically produced by the historical narrative constructed in the present. For Lee, that telos of displacement and return is built on an orphan fantasy—a mythic disenfranchisement—when his great grandfather returned to China, 'abandoning' his progeny to make his own way in the tropics. This inheritance of a tropical birth is presented as a tragic diasporic alienation from his northern Hakka ancestry, thereafter repositioning the family on a small red dot in the green waters of Nanyang (South China Sea).

Raffles became emblematic of all arrivals to Singapore (even those which preceded him), and marked the arrival of a patriarchal narrative of the ‘successful immigrant’, a theme touched on in an email correspondence between the author of this dissertation and the Singapore-based writer, Lee Weng Choy.
Lee Weng Choy: In July 2000 [22/7/00], the Artists Village, one of Singapore's most significant contemporary arts groups, initiated a series of [three] on-site exhibitions, *Artists Investigating Monuments* (AIM)\(^\text{12}\). The first monument the group investigated was [...] a statue of Stamford Raffles, erected on the supposed site where he first landed along the Singapore River.\(^\text{13}\)

[...] What I found remarkable were these words inscribed in the pedestal in the four official languages, English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil:

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\(^{12}\) AIM (*Artists Investigating Monuments*) was a series of events organized by a group of artists in Artists' Village "with the objective of inviting artists' response(s) to existing monuments and heritage sites" from 22 July through 26 August 2000 (Lingham, 2000:111). The project represented a shift in the tactics of a new generation of AV toward the "strategic conceptualization of events as art", rather than just the production of artworks in exhibitions or shows.

\(^{13}\) Performance artist, Lee Wen constructed scaffolding beside the monumental sculpture on which various artists performed (Langenbach and Lee W.C., 2000:95-97).
ON THIS HISTORIC SITE  
SIR THOMAS STAMFORD RAFFLES  
FIRST LANDED IN SINGAPORE  
ON 28TH JANUARY 1819  
AND WITH GENIUS AND PERCEPTION  
CHANGED THE DESTINY OF SINGAPORE  
FROM AN OBSCURE FISHING VILLAGE  
TO A GREAT SEAPORT AND  
MODERN METROPOLIS  

I found these words genuinely shocking. Not that this expression of continuity with colonialism was a surprise. One is acutely aware of how official Singapore history positions the nation vis-a-vis Raffles. […] What I found shocking was precisely the monumentalising of this ideology.

Langenbach: You mean the manner in which ideology becomes stone, and the equivalency that Lee implies between himself and Raffles through the medium of the monument? The British progenitor followed by the Chinese progenitor, oedipally conflating his great grandfather, who left his son on this mudflat, and Raffles, who stands on a pinnacle above the mudflat. But Lee has clearly climbed to his own pinnacle now. This ‘standing on his pinnacle’ recalls his famous references to the need of leaders to develop a helicopter view, a larger purview, a wider frame of reference. This taking of the pinnacle from the British was the primum mobile of his early career as a politician, to show that he was the “equal of any Englishman” as he put it (Langenbach and Lee, 2001).

The discussion here concerns the monumentalisation of a Singaporean meta-narrative. A particular historical narrative is adopted by the ruling elite, and —should we say metastasised, or should we say collapsed?— into an encompassing ‘meta-narrative’. But it would be an error to assume that the PAP government is alone in focusing Singapore history around the event of Raffles’ landing. In most of the histories of the region, Raffles is depicted as a man who was both "visionary and expansionist" (Steinberg, et al., 1971:136), a man of action for whom performance was the essential indicator, not adverse to taking precipitous and imaginative initiative in the field —actions which he would later be forced to rationalise to his superiors. He saw himself as the gentleman philosopher/historian-cum-man of action, as confident in his ability to analyse and

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14 As argued by Keay:  
There remained Raffles’ most dramatic solution—to seize, occupy, and promote a new British settlement, then argue about the rights of the matter later (Keay, 1991:448).
convince as he was in his ability to implement his designs. He lived his life wrapped in a Napoleonic fantasy of conquest and civilising, as written into the various histories of Singapore including his 'own\(^{15}\) (Keay, 1991:446ff.; SarDesai, 1997:92ff; Turnbull, 1989:92ff.; Steinberg, et al., 1971:136ff; Stearn, 1997; Seow, 1998:2).

DETERRING HISTORY

On April 28, 1984, S. Rajaratnam expanded on Lee’s personalised explanation for maintaining the monument to Sir Stamford Raffles on a pedestal overlooking the landing site on the bank of the Singapore River. It is a revealing passage, necessary to quote at length:

Creating an awareness of the past poses peculiar if unique problems for Singapore. The island of Singapore as such has no long past. When Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, it was the home of a few hundred fishing folk. All we know of its past prior to this are vague hints that it was used as a halting place by mariners, traders and pirates before they moved on to more congenial places. *What happened before 1819 — if anything worthwhile happened at all*— has been irretrievably lost in the mists of time.

_Singapore's knowable past_ began in 1819—exactly 165 years ago. […]

Singapore's genealogical table, alas, ends as abruptly as it begins. However we could have contrived a more lengthy and eye-boggling lineage by tracing our ancestry back to the lands from which our forefathers emigrated—China, India, Sri Lanka, the Middle East and Indonesia.

The price we would have to pay for this more impressive genealogical table would be to turn Singapore into a bloody battlefield for endless racial and communal conflicts and interventionist politics by the more powerful and bigger nations from which Singaporeans had emigrated.

So from our point of view to push a historic awareness beyond 1819 would have been a *misure of history; to plunge Singapore into the kind of genocidal madness* devastating many underdeveloped and even developed countries today. The present government, but much to the dismay of local

\(^{15}\) In his final “Statement of the Services of Sir Stamford Raffles” (1824), written enroute from Asia to England, he described the benefits of Singapore to the East India Company (Raffles, 1878).
racial and cultural chauvinists, has been careful about the kind of awareness of the past it should inculcate in a multi-cultural society.

Towards this end Singapore took a step unprecedented in the history of anti-imperialist nationalism. After attaining independence in 1965 there was a debate as to who should be declared the founding father of Singapore. The debate was brought to an abrupt end when the government fixed responsibility for this on Sir Stamford Raffles and officially declared him the founder of Singapore. Many of our Third-World friends are completely mystified that, contrary to usual practice, a dyed in the wool British imperialist should have been named the founder of modern Singapore. In fact there were some well-meaning patriots in Singapore who were all for casting the Raffles statue in front of Victoria Memorial Hall into what was then the revolting filthy and smelly Singapore River.

To cut a long story short there was a reprieve and Raffles was saved. […]

Our decision to name Raffles the founder of Singapore is an example of the proper use of history; the proper approach to the preservation of historic monuments.

First in nominating Raffles as the founder of modern Singapore, we are accepting a fact of history. To pretend otherwise is to falsify history. […]

Raffles founded Singapore. This is a fact. (Chan & Obaid, 1987:149-151, emphasis added.)

Like a body without organs, Singapore is imagined by Rajaratnam as a modernism without history\(^\text{16}\); an anti-ideological ideological spectacle that erases history as it reifies

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\(^{16}\) Attempts to characterise Singapore's relationship to modernism and modernity are complex and endlessly attempted. For example, Rem Koolhaas' sees Singapore as modernisation sans the cultural complexifications of modernism:

In Singapore — modernization in its pure form — the forces of modernity are enlisted against the demands of modernism. Singapore's modernism is lobotomized: from modernism's full agenda, it has adopted only the mechanistic, rationalistic program and developed it to an unprecedented perfection in a climate of streamlined "smoothness" generated by shedding modernism's artistic, irrational, uncontrollable, subversive ambitions — revolution without agony. (Koolhaas 1995:1041)

Responding to Koolhaas, Kwok Kian-Woon and Low Kee-Hong have presented a counterpoint of Singapore as "modernization without modernity", i.e. a dominant 'managerial state' without the critical and self-reflexive consciousness of modernity, except in the sphere of individually (rather than collectively) produced art and culture, where "the tensions, dilemmas, and costs of modernity are explored and articulated" (Kwok and Low
it. His statement is quintessentially modernist in its rejection of 'primordial identities' and its assumption of a world-transforming moment in which the modern state invents itself out of the debris of the past\(^\text{17}\). And Rajaratnam himself, as embodiment of the ruling PAP party and the Cabinet (and modernity itself), presents us with the very modern problem of self-invention, both of the state, and of the statesman — the personification of the modern state — who engineers the state by rhetorically announcing its 'successful arrival'. While Rajaratnam acknowledges the presence of earlier settlers and visitors, he dismisses their history as a non-history of "vague hints" and inconsequential occurrences, not worth recalling and "irretrievably lost in the mists of time"\(^\text{18}\). In short, they represent the 'pre-modern' and as such are inconsequential. Loy Hui Chieh and Wee Liang Tong suggest that the history Rajaratnam wants to tell is only the economic history, and places it in the context of the struggle of the PAP government to consolidate capitalism (Loy and Wee 1997:12).

Another official source, the 2000 edition of the annual publication, *Facts and Pictures*, by the Ministry of Information and the Arts (which replaced the Ministry of Culture),

\(^{17}\) Rajaratnam was of course not alone in these sentiments. Six years earlier, Devan Nair, then a Member of Parliament in the Anson District, iterated the PAP's claim to being the vanguard of both a constructive and a destructive impulses, cementing modernism:

> For twenty or thirty years, we did not see much around us worth preserving. Colonialism, corruption, racialism, poverty, unemployment and squalor were clearly not worth preserving [...]. A good deal of what we saw around us in the late '40s and early '50s merited destruction. And in order to create the Singapore we know today, my generation set about destroying what had to be destroyed (cited in Hong and Yap 1993:33).

Both constructive and destructive impulses constitute developmental modernism, and the PAP saw itself as the party that cleansed the residues of the pre-modern past as part of building the modern state.

\(^{18}\) In his own writings, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was far more generous than Rajaratnam (although his political position required that he be so). "He declared Singapura as 'classical ground' since it had been a place of some consequence in the fourteenth century Srivijayan empire; a historical pedigree [that] lent dignity and substance to his creation" (Keay, 1993:449).
presents a slightly enhanced picture of Singapore's multicultural origins, beginning in the 3rd century AD it relates struggles between Majapahit and Siam, the tutelage of Iskandar Shah in the late 14th century, and includes the burning of a Malay outpost on the Singapore River by the Portuguese in 1613 (Foo 2001:13). All these events are history cue cards, well known to every school child in Singapore and are precisely the 'what' that "happens before 1819—if anything happens at all", that has not been "irrevocably lost in the mists of time". In contrast to Rajaratnam's cleansed account, Alfian Sa'at, in a short manifesto, "The Racist's Apology" (Alfian bin Sa’at 2002) wrote of the erasure of Malay history:

At the foot of the Raffles statue in Boat Quay there is an inscription that says the man's genius transformed a 'sleepy fishing village' into the modern metropolis it is today, this at the foot of a man who recorded in his journals how he saw the tombs of the Malay kings, and inscriptions on a fortress wall, when he first landed: evidence of an empire, of civilisation. In an interview a doyenne of Singapore theatre laments that all Singaporeans are 'cultural orphans', including the Malays, because they migrated from Malaysia and Indonesia, and that makes them immigrants too, no matter that one can take a sampan from Johor to Singapore (Alfian Sa'at, 18 Mar 2002).

Figure 20. Singapore facts and pictures 2000, showing other official tropes of nationhood: The National Anthem, The Singapore Symbol, The Pledge, Our Shared Values, the Bronze of Stamford Raffles by T. Woolner, unveiled 1887.
The official chronology of Singapore in government publications still today begins where Rajaratnam began his. Following the above short prelude, which uneasily sits on the page next to the image of the Raffles statue, the official Chronology of Singapore begins precisely in 1819.

1819 A trading station established by Sir Stamford Raffles under an agreement between the British East India Company and the Sultan of Johor and the Malay ruler of the island (Foo, 2001:13).

The picture that is presented is 1500 years of history as a prelude to the “Chronology” of Singapore, the majority of which amounts to a recording of the ups and downs of the ruling People’s Action Party since 1959. So, while the rhetoric in this official version is more inclusive of diverse communal pre-histories than Rajaratnam’s, official Singapore history per se is still defined by an ethos of economic instrumentalism and unapologetic teleological developmentalism, leading to the present status quo of power relations. Loy H.C. and Wee L.T. rationalise Rajaratnam’s decisions:

1819 was chosen (by Rajaratnam) as the beginning of our genealogical table because it would provoke the least contestation among her peoples; a history that would not incite the Chinese, the Malays or the Indians to want to possess or appropriate it as their own. It is a history that does not give to any of the races any political capital to pursue chauvinistic policies (Loy Hui Chieh and Wee Liang Tong, 1997:20).

We must assume that Loy and Wee L.T. are consciously not mentioning that Singapore already had a hegemonic ethnic group (their own), and that the elision of Malay history simply enhances the hegemony already in place. This strategic elision—a lapse of critical distancing by these historians—serves to synchronise their text with Rajaratnam’s, and points to the iteration of an official engineering of history issuing from the English-educated class fragment in government and academia.

“The Proper Use of History”

By assigning founder status to a representative of the former imperial regime, the PAP government strategically avoided awarding this privileged status to the minority Malays, as the other ethnic groups were not really in the running. Such a privileged assignation
would run counter to the developmentalist modernism of the PAP government, which has consistently portrayed the Malays as less advanced and less ambitious—in a word, less proletarianised and hence less modernised—than the other ethnic groups. The ‘whiteness’ of Raffles is, one might say, a product of both the erasure of the polychromes of the Malays and other Asians represented by the ubiquitous trope: CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other), and a positive icon of the developmentalist modernism he is said to have initiated. ‘Whiteness’—Raffles' whiteness—is posited as the sign of ethnic neutrality, colonial patriarchy, and modernity, providing a foundation for PAP ideological hegemony.

Rajaratnam, Loy and Wee L.T. call up the spectre of ‘inevitable violence’ that a more accurate historical assignation would supposedly produce. This spectralisation of ethnic conflict is a deterrent trope in common usage in government performances since the racial riots of 1963 and 1969. The image of Raffles as a sign of neutral modernist paternity provided the Government with a plinth for a correspondingly ‘neutral’ and pragmatic developmentalist ethos, based on mostly British institutional antecedents: the Common Law system, and various Parliamentary Acts: the Internal Security Act, the Official Secrets Act, The Societies Act, The Press Act etc., the Cambridge examination system, the Civil Service, the adoption of English as the de facto national language, and meritocracy. All these attributes are presented as 'neutral' signifiers of Singapore’s

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19 Malay remains the ‘official’ national language, while English is termed, the "language of administration". But both Malay and Tamil remain marginalised 'mother-tongues' in the Singapore political and cultural landscape. The struggle for power and linguistic hegemony has been fought between the English-educated and Chinese-educated (Mandarin and primarily Hokkien dialect) speakers. Chua Beng Huat and others (Chua, 1995; George, T.J.S, 1973; Buchanan, 1972, et al) have pointed out that the adoption of English privileged the PAP party and underpinned its predominance in the late days of colonialism and following independence, as it prepared Singapore for globalisation—its dominant economic plan and ideological position. This split between language groups has never completely healed. Buchanan, writing in 1972, observed:

[The gap between the two worlds in Singapore's society has not been bridged: the social, political, and cultural distance between the Chinese-educated and the English educated is still wide [...]. (Buchanan, 1972:281)

As recently as 1997, during the campaign for the 1997 elections, Lee Kuan Yew, along with other PAP ministers labeled Tang Liang Hong, "an anti-English-educated, anti-Christian Chinese chauvinist". When Tang claimed that the label was inaccurate and made a police report to that effect, the PAP politicians responded with a libel suit, claiming he had thereby implied that they were liars. On 30 May 1997, The Straits Times' headlines read, "PAP leaders awarded $8.075m in damages: They were 'justified in calling Tang a chauvinist'." The day before Justice Chao Hick Tin had duly awarded S$8.075 million (over US$5 million) to the Prime Minister Goh, Senior Minister Lee, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan, Trade and Industry Minister Lee Yock Suan, Education Minister Teo, Minister of State for
universal modernism, rather than as signs privileging specific ethnic enclaves. Wee Wan-Ling addresses this deployment of what he calls "cultural neutrality" as a sign of universality and globalism, another indication of "the global inside the national" (Wee, C.J W.-L. 2001-4). However, the trope of administrative and linguistic neutrality—linked to the policy of a 'neutral' meritocracy—served to preempt public discourse of ethnicity and language, thereby justifying the privilege of a small English speaking elite. Raffles was assigned the role of the ghost walking the ramparts, a prophylactic ancestral figure called back to protect the fledgling state from internal division.

Yi Ping Ho points to the privileging of a British colonial past on the part of the PAP government as a political strategy against the Chinese educated, who were invariably denigrated up until 1987 (and less regularly but periodically after) as irrational, ethnically chauvinist, prone to accepting the subversive ideology of the communists, and (Yi, 2001:12), and therefore unreceptive to capitalist development.

Yi points out that Lee saw himself as reasonable, moderate, given to negotiation over conflict while he represented the Chinese educated communists as divisive and given to violent confrontation. Indeed the PAP and Lee saw communism as 'radioactive', irrational, poisonous and deadly, in line with 1950s red-scare propaganda in the United States, rather than simply a competing ideological stance in an egalitarian society. In PAP rhetoric, from the late 1950s on, the Communists did not represent legitimate competition for the hearts and minds of the people, but a deadly and alien enemy to be expunged. The Singapore that the PAP was constructing was strongly aligned with a Washington/New York-centred global capitalist economy with its correlative Cold War stance of the Eisenhower-McCarthy-Disney 1950s. The model for PAP response to opposition parties was formed in the late 1950s, when Singapore was carrying out self-rule while still a British colony; a period during which, as Chan Heng Chee suggested to historian T.N. Harper, allowed "the only real experience in Singapore of political competition". Harper argues:

[I]t was a time of comparatively open and plural political engagement, when, despite bitter ideological divisions on the
future of Singapore, these competing visions were openly contested, if not resolved, within the new colonial-democratic framework (Harper, 2001:23).

But this was also an era of bi-polar global alignments. Indonesia was under an interventionist and increasingly defensive, internally suppressive leftist Soekarno; Thailand was under a rightist military dictatorship, as were South Korea and Taiwan. The interventionist Eisenhower Doctrine began in 1957 and American and British and French intelligence services were increasingly active in Southeast Asian affairs, inaugurating the era of the Vietnam War. Harper argues that Singapore politics and culture at this time was also profoundly influenced by events in China, and there arose at this time a debate concerning the 'naturalisation' of Chinese politics, that is, its localisation in the Nanyang (South China Seas) region. This led the PAP to regard the left in Singapore as the carrier of communist ideology antithetical to the status quo.

But Harper contends that by the late 1950s, the power of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had diminished following the 1,209 detentions between June 1948 and March 1954. Given these constraints, the MCP's influence on the politics of Singapore weakened in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and as the campaign on the peninsula wound down, many intellectuals, formerly sympathetic to the MCP, began to move toward alternative political parties.

Rhetoric on the left during this period was marked as much by nationalism as by communism, but the tag of a unitary communism was useful in the suppression of the left by Lee, with the support of the Lim Yew Hock government, the British, and across the causeway, the Malayan government under Tungku Abdul Rahman. The use of the tag of 'communism' or 'Marxism' to justify draconian measures against intellectuals and opposition continued into the 1990s. Lee's reflections in 1998 on the period of 1958-59 are instructive:

I believe that the experience taught me more than it taught them. Their mental terms of reference were Chinese history, Chinese parables and proverbs, the legendary success of the Chinese communist revolution as against their own frustrating life in Singapore. [...] There were quite a few converted hard-
core communists even in the group I had picked. There was no way to filter them out. They were like radioactive dust (Lee K.Y. 1998:208, emphasis added.).

It is against the rhetorical production of this radioactive Chinese-language educated other, motivated by pre-modern legend, parables and proverbs, that the construction of tropes of neutral English-language speech, a modern and efficient bureaucracy, neutral meritocracy, and rational scientific management of labour should be viewed. A convincing performance of virtuous PAP democratic alignment with a developmentalist and democratic future required the ironical construction of a pre-modern (and predatory) communism to be forcefully put down. Lee repeatedly referred to the 'virtuous' intentions of the English-speaking class, as in the following passage in which he recounts his first speech as Prime Minister to the Assembly after the PAP took power in 1959.

Because of history, the English-educated had an important role to play, I said, adding, “they can help us in bridging the gulf between the colonial past and the egalitarian future” (Lee K.Y. 1998:320).

In an earlier speech during the Legislative Assembly Debates, Sept 21, 1955, Lee presented an often-cited paean to a particularly humanist notion of democracy as part of nation-building:

If we are to survive as a free democracy, then we must be prepared, in principle, to concede to our enemies—even those who do not subscribe to our views—as much [sic] constitutional rights as you concede yourself (Seow, 1994: 243) 20.

As discussed in chapter I, from 1957 through 1962 Lee made public demonstrations in favour of democratic process while urging the British and the Internal Security Council (ISC) to "take responsibility for arrests which he saw as vital to maintaining his position" (Harper 2001:29).

During this period, while Lee and the other moderates within the PAP gradually moved to the right, they deployed public rhetoric as a means by which to dissimulate that policy shift. This period of saying one thing while doing another reached its apotheotic spasm

20 Legislative assembly Debates, Sept 21, 1955, Vol. 1, Col 726

21 For a discussion of this rhetorical strategy, see the section, Kill The Chicken To Frighten The Monkey below.
with *Operation Cold Store* in 1963, capping the job of using the Internal Security Commission to dismantle the opposition, and not sparing those on the left that had helped to give birth to the PAP.

ASSIGNING FACTS

Before the Raffles Monument, Rajaratnam declared that history has *improper* and *proper* uses. The *proper* use is the acknowledgement that the colonial heritage is a part of Singapore history, and that the constructive aspects of colonialism (which he calls the 'liberationist' aspects) should be retained following independence. He holds that this is a necessary liberalisation of the usual post-colonial emphasis on the negative attributes of colonial rule, and, therefore, a "proper use of history". Significant in this passage is the ‘construction of interpretations’ in which Raffles was ‘nominated’ in Parliament as one of a number of possible founders, implying that there was a democratic process of decision-making in place, in which the word ‘nomination’ would make sense. But this image of a field of egalitarian contention is quickly displaced by Rajaratnam’s impatient dictation of ‘historical fact’: "Raffles founded Singapore. This is a fact". It is a fact because it is officially declared to be so, and it is officially declared so because it is a fact.

The dictation of facts is rationalised by Rajaratnam, first, as mentioned, to avoid ethnic conflict resulting from contested paternity, and, presumably, because those who have inherited the mantle of power have the responsibility to legislate history. This responsibility (and right) is reiterated and theoretically rationalised by Loy Hui Chieh and Wee Liang Tong, in the following citation, with a semantics that has become ubiquitous in the circles of Singapore intellectuals who are employed in the civil service. Phrases such as "We should not be too surprised by the claim […]", are carefully constructed to split the difference between a description and mild skepticism:

*We should not be too surprised by the claim* that the government has somehow “fixed” the “responsibility” for the founding of Singapore upon Raffles and not somebody else. Historians have always acknowledged that history can never be a purely and absolutely objective, detached and innocent account of the past. […]

‘[H]istory’ is never simply history, but always ‘history-for’, and in this case, it is “history-for-nation-building” What this
means is that “nation-building”, whichever way it is defined, becomes the underlying paradigm or framework within which the history will be written (Loy and Wee L.T. 1997:19-20).

Loy and Wee T.J. tactically shy away from critical analysis of questionable discourses. They reiterate Rajaratnam's paternal declaration: "We should not be too surprised by the claim that the government has somehow 'fixed' the 'responsibility' for the founding of Singapore upon Raffles and not somebody else". Constructing an imagined 'we', they claim that this 'we' should not be 'surprised' for it is the government itself who both 'fixes' and 'claims', thereby parroting the official view, while giving the appearance reflecting on it. Rajaratnam's claim of relating historical constatives— the description of historical events, in this case reified as facts—serves to performatively establish a national paternity, legitimating those who make that establishment and those who reiterate it.

The "proper use of history" is defined pragmatically and with managerial aplomb, as the establishment and maintenance of a 'state of order' and the avoidance of disorder through a polemical 'declaration' of historical facts. The assignation of the status of historical ‘fact’ is not only a prerogative of the administration, but it is the purpose of the administrative state to manage official history and maintain the representation of social order. But is it ‘real’ social order or an imagined social order that is at stake here? Would declaring Iskandar Shah or some ‘unknown fisherman or fisherwoman’—be s/he Malay or Chinese or Indian or Bugis as the founder of Singapore really "plunge Singapore into [...] genocidal madness" and civil war? This presumption calls forth the ‘spectre’ of violence the PAP has consistently evoked to maintain hegemony.

Crucial to this passage is another quintessentially modernist presumption, that there is such a thing as an "proper use of history". History, like other ideological commodities, has an exchange value determined by its use-value. History performs a function, and that function is proper or improper. Rajaratnam not only proclaims historical facts, but he assigns value to those facts. The disciplinarian trope, ‘proper use of history,’ ouroborically produces history itself by functioning as an Austinian performative in historical time. As in Escher's image in the front piece to this chapter, the hand inscribes itself inscribing. There are two significant performative strategies at play in Rajaratnam's speech that are important to this discussion: first, the presentation of a "covert spectacle", and second, "killing the chicken to frighten the monkeys".
COVERT SPECTACLE

First, Rajaratnam pulls this rabbit out of a hat in full view of the audience or, to borrow a term from Vertov’s theory of montage, “bares his device” (Petric, 1987:103). He tells his audience that he is producing a fact by decree and he shows them how he is doing it—by self-referential comments on his and other governmental performances—and why he is doing it: putting history to ‘proper use’ in the service of nation-building. Like William Burroughs’ act of preemptory description, Rajaratnam pre-empts the collective critical gaze through an act of first seeing, and through the power of that initiative disappears into his reflex—the ‘covert spectacle’.

"KILL THE CHICKEN TO FRIGHTEN THE MONKEYS"

The second strategy, a close cousin to the first, is that of opening a contention in order to produce a cautionary spectacle of foreclosing it, so it will not be opened again by others. This mode of illocution/perlocution, often used by the Singapore government, is described most effectively by the Mandarin analogy; "Kill the chicken to frighten the monkeys" (sha ji xia hou). It may appear in an illocutionary mode: Marking the bounds of acceptable behaviour with penalties, we warned those who might otherwise transgress them; or as a perlocution, such as: Giving him a 'demonstrative punishment' frightened the others.

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22 In his essay, “Ten Years and A Billion Dollars”, William Burroughs describes The Walk Exercise that he gives to his writing students.

   The original version...was taught me by an old Mafia Don in Columbus, Ohio: seeing everyone on the street before he sees you. Do this for a while in any neighborhood, and you will soon meet other players who are doing the same thing. Generally speaking, if you see other people before they see you, they won’t see you. I have even managed to get past a whole block of guides and shoeshine boys in Tangier this way, thus earning the Moroccan moniker: “El Hombre Invisible” (Burroughs, 1982).

This notion of a visible “invisibility” and first-seeing assumes a panoptic view, where the visual agent is invisible to the subjects under his observation.
The Singapore artist, Lee Wen did a series of performances/installations\(^\text{23}\) entitled *Ghost Stories* from 1995-1997 in which he used the phrase "kill the chicken to frighten the monkeys" as a general reference for government repression. It connotes

[...] a typical way of social control. I used this as a visual metaphor for the extreme punishment of political detention without trial [...] social ostracism and [...] extreme repression of freedom.

I sometimes repeated the words in english (in mexico i used the spanish translation) during the performance like an incantation of an unhappy ghost. or sometimes it is suggested in objects i use. eg in the installation in Kwang Ju [Guangju] there were 16 bald chickens floating in formaldehyde in fruit preservation jars surrounding a long table with military blankets as table cloth and sounds of monkeys screams from under the table. or i chop up a chicken during the performance (in poland and mexico) while repeating the saying (Lee Wen, email correspondence 3/3/03, sic.).

*Killing the chicken to frighten the monkey* works on the ambiguity between illocution and perlocution, as it is perlocutionary fear brought back into the present that alters subsequent elocutionary behaviours. The notion of progress is ‘read’ backwards as the forewarned and frightened public avoids the result by altering their behaviour before any successive prosecutions are necessary. The result is self-censorship — a situation in which the antidote is the poison.

**OPENING FORECLOSURE**

During the early post-independence history of Singapore, the promise of constructing a new society, new ideologies, new philosophical and social perspectives based on a unique

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\(^{23}\) *Ghost Stories* was presented at the
- 2nd Nippon International Performance Art Festival, Tokyo and Nagano Feb 1995
- 4th Asian Art Show, Tokyo, April 1995
- 3rd Castle of Imagination, Bytow, Poland, June 1995
- 1st Gwangju Biennale Gwangju, South Korea, 1995 (installation)
- *Hand-Made Tales*, The Black Box, Theatre Works, Singapore, 1996 (installation & performance)
- Simposio Internacional De Escultura Mexico-Japon, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico 1997 (installation and performance)
- Sexta Bienal de La Habana, Havana, Cuba 1997 (installation) (Lee Wen, email correspondence 3/3/03)
local analysis by local intellectuals and activists have repeatedly been opened and then foreclosed. The most historically important example of such deterrent foreclosures was the 'Referendum On Merger', in which the people of Singapore were to determine by ballot whether Singapore should merge with Malaysia. The voters who read the ballot carefully found that all three referendum options on the ballot led to merger, and any destroyed ballots were counted as votes for merger. In 1996, the founder and former President of the PAP, Toh Chin Chye offered a valuable insight into Lee's strategies:

The ballot paper was crafted by Lee Kuan Yew. Whichever way you voted, you voted for merger. There were three choices: A, B, or C. But, frankly, they were all votes for merger. And we moved in the Referendum Bill that spoilt votes will be counted as votes for merger. Few understood the ballot paper [...]. How do you choose? Which way do you vote? But we got away with it [...]. It was a win-win situation for the government Toh Chin Chye in Chew, 1996:92).

The PAP government's vision of the future was never actually in question; rather, it was a perlocutionary declaration in the clothes of an illocution. The manipulation of the vote by the PAP government —still under British oversight—became a model for the engineering of election results since. The effective conflation of a single party with the state apparatus allowed the engineering to take place. Barr has described Lee's deployment of the state apparatus in 1962 "as his personal political vehicle", in an effort to isolate Barisan Socialis under David Marshall, following the split in the PAP.

State radio and television, community centres, the Ministry of Culture and the nightly meetings of assemblymen with their constituents were used unapologetically as arms of the PAP in the merger campaign. As one minister of the time noted, "In many ways, the PAP and the government machinery have become one and the same."[...]. The key feature of the merger campaign was the referendum of September 1962. [....] But the actual vote was almost meaningless (Barr, 2000:27).

The engineering of such 'win-win' situations, learned early, has subsequently become a staple of PAP strategy.

Over the decades, Lee was to perfect the practice of placing the government in 'win-win' situations, usually with the accompanying theatrics of Parliamentary Privileges Committees or courtroom settings (Barr, 2000:27).
'Win-win' can also be seen to be 'lose-lose', as this referendum marked the beginning of the appearance of Lee's and the PAP's *hamartia* (tragic flaw): a consistent lack of confidence in their ability to convince the public of the efficacy of their policies.
Figure 21. Referendum for Merger Mock Ballot (National Heritage Board, 1998:68). Note the synecdoche of the hand marking the Mock Ballot as a stand-in for the voter and the voter’s ‘choice’, reducing choice to an readily consumed instrumental trope.

Figure 22. Lee Kuan Yew arguing in 1962 for merger prior to the referendum. Note in the background a banner with the above image of the mock ballot and the caption concerning the results. The image derives from an official CD Rom, published by a Chinese-language newspaper under Singapore Press Holdings (Lianhe Zaobao (CD ROM) 1995)
The dance of opening-followed-by-immediate-foreclosure is a step that most intellectuals in Singapore know well. It is performed not only within the walls of power, but also within the walls of academia, and in artists' studios. Even today, with the above evidence easily available, academics still extraordinarily write history based on the PAP canon that the people chose merger, rather than citing well known material evidence to the contrary.

For example, Wee Wan-Ling cites the historian Hong Lysa's citing of Rajaratnam's account of the Referendum as "eliciting a 71 per cent majority for the PAP's position", with no reference to vote manipulation (Wee, C.J. W.-L. 2001-1). Even though the thrust of Wee's citing of Hong's arguments rejects 'fixed' histories, the simple reiteration of the Referendum results without a contextual proviso serves to strengthen rather than unpack official PAP accounts.

The aporia of deterrent opening/foreclosure — a door paradoxically both open and closed— is as constitutive of art and cultural politics in civil society as it is of governance. Opening/foreclosure is a tragic and cathartic national spectacle, so often repeated that it may be said to constitute a national culture. The 'tragedy' of the post-colonial nationalist project in Singapore is that the most draconian devices of colonial rule were retained (with some new adaptations the British and Japanese did not consider) in order to insure that power and resources remained in the hands of the first post-independence ruling party. Basing their legitimacy pragmatically on their 'performance', they nevertheless have adamantly refused to test the judgment of their performance at the voting booth25, and have unmeritocratically curtailed the performances of others through various legal and extra-legal schemes.

Before the Raffles Monument, Rajaratnam opened an vein of historical debate and then, immediately clamped off the very vein he had opened. The premise of speaking with

24 As seen in figure #6 above, the official Lee Kuan Yew CD Rom puts the percentage at 73.8% (Lianhe Zaobao (CD ROM) 1995).

25 In a moment of unscripted frankness, Lee Kuan Yew confessed on 5 March 1977: Never have the people of Singapore had a government which they can kick out of office freely, without hindrance, just by crossing them off the ballot. And never have they had a government which had to tend to their needs—every grumble, every bellyache, to make sure that the vote is on the side of the angels every five years (Minchin1990: 278).
devolved into speaking to. Rajaratnam’s foreclosure marks a splitting off of intellec
tion from instrumentalism and power. It is a 'pragmatic' divorce that marks all levels of
Singapore official and civil society discourse since the ascendancy of the PAP. The public
spectacle of foreclosure appears in the party, the electoral system, the courts, the press,
and the arts, and has been profoundly metaphorised in what is arguably the most iconic of
Singapore plays, Kuo Pao Kun's Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral.

The first English version of the play was directed by Ong Keng Sen and Theatreworks in
1995 (3/6/95), followed by the first Mandarin production a month later (10/7/95), directed
by Kuo. The play focuses on the Ming Dynasty Admiral Zheng He, on a mission to the
Nanyang region to find a missing nephew of the Emperor and to display China's military
prowess abroad. Zheng was castrated as a child, and the play shuttles between the dignity
and military prowess of the Admiral, the psycho-social implications of his castration, and
the "culture of castration" (Lin Ke Huan 2003:132), in which humiliation and the
relinquishment of one's rights to propagation are required for advancement in a state
hierarchy. Ming court castration serves as a striking metaphor for the foreclosure upon
biological, taxonomic, emotional and performative promises in the instrumentalist
modernist state. Power relations as a system of assets versus deficits, surplus and
diminution, is literally embodied through the removal of reproductive organs of the mid-
level state official, eliminating any threat to the continuity of genetic, taxonomic and
discursive hegemony 'from below'.

In the bureaucratic arena and civil society, democratic or egalitarian promises are
repeatedly made and then foreclosed, producing an overwhelming sense of paradox, self-
contradiction, and a continuous public ritual of mass self-abnegation. These foreclosures
also take the form of cathartic public dramas, initiated by public officials continually

26 At the end of The Politics (viii.6), Aristotle described catharsis as the emotional release or discharge of
enthusiasm brought on by melody in music (Aristotle, 1962:313). For Aristotle, the function of theatrical
tragedy was to "call forth or excite pity and fear" (Aristotle, 1951:45), which together produce a sense of 'awe'
as the appropriate response to the fate of the aristocratic protagonist. Subsequently theorised to have been
deployed in Greek tragedy as a kind of ritual of purification of excess passion produced by some socially
forbidden tendency in the collective psyche of the society, catharsis has been implicated as a device to
maintain status quo class power relations in the society (Boal 1985). In this interpretation, catharsis is
constituted by a shocking change of fortunes (peripetia) of the tragic hero, resulting from the appearance of a
tragic flaw (hamartia). The flaw leads the protagonist to contravene the law (of nature & of society), followed
by the dawning rational awareness of the nature of the flaw (anagogisis), although not in time to avert
inexorable catastrophe, a state of affairs 'worse than death' (Aristotle, 1962:313; Aristotle, 1951:45; Butcher,
acting and re-enacting the same tragic scripts. The flawed oedipal hero, with awareness of his flaw (anagorissis), pretends —like Burrough's narcissistic construction of the El Hombre Invisible— that others cannot see it. Blinded by his tragic flaw (hamartia), he repeats: They are blind. My flaw is (I am) invisible. In the case of the government, the public spectacle is endlessly reiterated as a cathartic revelation of power, designed to again hide the flaw and to reiterate the modernist teleology that underpins current development and power relations.

STAMFORD'S MODERNISM

What is the nature of the modernism that Raffles is assumed to have brought to Singapore and binds the PAP to Raffles? The knighted Raffles was a product of a Europe that was giving birth to a globalised mercantilism with a corresponding merchant class, with a new paradigm of secularised autocracy, the Leviathan. Their meritocratic competence was pitted against the inherited rights of the aristocracy and royalty. Raffles brought with him technologies of shipping and of war, and he represented a colonial government-linked corporation (GLC), the East India Company, a precursor to the GLC’s that largely control the Singapore economy today (Moore and Lewis 2000:184-201). Raffles also brought British bureaucracy, management, town planning and social engineering—all defining characteristics of Singapore modernism. And all this was ideologically underpinned by the progressivist power-knowledge discourses of orientalism, Darwinian selection, ethnography, biometrics, historical and encyclopaedic knowledge of all kinds, a technology-driven military, and global capitalist objectives. All of these constituted the modernist colonial project and remain as the signs of Raffles and Singapore's modernity.

Raffles was also a disseminator of more obviously imperialism-driven ideologies. "[O]ne of the most outspoken ideologists in this region" (Syed Hussein A., 1977:7), Raffles

1951:45-246; Boal, 1979: 25-49). The result of the drama is that the audience will not forget the terrible consequences of ignorance of one's hamartia, and terrified by this spectacle, is purified and purged by this knowledge (Boal, 1985:xiii-50).

Problematising this view, Elin Diamond acknowledges the involuntary 'shudder' of catharsis as a sign of the radical textuality of the embodied subject responding to unacceptable power arrangements or hegemonic conditions, as in the Vietnam era work of the Living Theater and the Open Theater, or Karen Finley's monologues during the 1980s (Diamond 1995:152-172).

27 Raffles' History of Java was published in 1817 (Collis 2000).
accepted and propagated a bio-determinist ideology that maps human developmental stages of a single individual can be mapped onto the development of civilizations, providing the rationalisation for despotic colonial rule as the charitable protection of those caught at an 'earlier stage' of civilisational development by more 'mature' societies.

1. There appeared to be certain stages and graduations through which society must run its course to civilization, and which can no more be overleaped or omitted, then men can arrive at maturity without passing through the gradations of infancy and youth [...]

2. The most rapid advances have probably been made, when great power has fallen into enlightened and able hands [...]

3. Whether the power to which they bow be the despotism of force, or the despotism of superior intellect, it is a step in their progress which cannot be passed over. —October 9th, 1820 Raffles, letter to Thomas Murdoch from Benkulu (Bencoolen) (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1971:4, emphasis added)

For Raffles, the notion that his colonial subjects were underdeveloped rationalized Britain's necessary despotism. The deployment of despotic power and the application of force by those with the requisite will, intellect and military technology was seen to be a teleological inevitability. Raffles figures as the paradigmatic colonial agent, carrying not only military technology, but also a violent conceptual technology of colonial rationalisation, based on a progressivist teleology of civilisational and ethnic hierarchies.

Independence is the characteristic of the savage state; but while men continue disinterested, and with little mutual dependence on each other men, they can never become civilized.

The acquisition of power is necessary to unite them and to organize society, and it would perhaps be difficult to instance a nation which has risen from barbarism without having been subjected to despotic authority in some shape or other. [...]

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28 One finds this ideology voiced by apologists for American colonialism in the Philippines eighty years later, indicating its general distribution among the Euro-American colonial empires:

> Modern science had shown that races develop in the course of centuries as individuals do in years, and that an undeveloped race, which is capable of self-government, is no more a reflection on the Almighty than is an undeveloped child who is incapable of self-government. The opinions of men who in this enlightened day believe that the Filipinos are capable of self-government because everybody is, are not worth considering. (Strong 1900:310, emphasis added.)

29 The seeds of later bourgeois meritocratic ideology, adopted in Singapore by the PAP, can be found in this contention, although this statement could also be interpreted as supportive of an enlightened and able aristocracy.
order to render an uncivilized people capable of enjoying true liberty, they must first feel the weight of authority, and must become acquainted with the mutual relations of society.

—October 9th, 1820 Raffles, letter to Thomas Murdoch from Benkulu (Bencoolen). (Syed, 1971:4)

Raffles was not alone in his presumption that civilisation 'progresses' from savagery and barbarism through a period of subjection to despotism under those of "superior intellect", to eventual autonomy. He merely put into action a set of beliefs already prevalent in the empire, espoused two centuries earlier by Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), who drew justifications for his own rule from the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679; *Leviathan* published in 1651). A lineage of influences and rationalisations for authoritarian rule can be drawn from Cromwell to the PAP three hundred years later.

In a speech, "How Good Government Should be Judged", then Second Deputy Prime Minister at the National Trades’ Union Congress Political Education Course (10 February, 1982) S. Rajaratnam spoke against the belief that a viable opposition—modeled on the British parliamentary model—is essential to democracy. The speech rationalised the Singapore one-party system, recounting Toynbee's cyclical model of history that accounts for the emergence, progress and then decline of societies and civilisations. Rajaratnam reified Toynbee's theory into an "iron law of history":

> This appears to be an iron law of history, simply because I cannot think of any exception to it. This iron law has been demonstrated in our time. The far flung empires of the West have all but disappeared and with it the West appears to be in decline.
> 
> [...] In many countries governmental authority is open to ridicule and contempt by their intellectuals, street mobs and terrorist mafias.
> 
> [...] But if Singapore is to break free from the iron laws of history, then we Singaporeans must always be conscious of the high probability that the 23 years of more or less uninterrupted progress and prosperity can be even more speedily reversed.

> [W]hen societies decline and collapse some revert to their original sorry state …while others are doomed to disappear for good.

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30 By the time of this speech, the government had subsumed the independent trade unions under the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), the leadership of which was a government appointee.
Singapore comes under the second category. Its collapse will be total, final and absolute. (Rajaratnam, 1987:163-164)

Having ‘established’ that Western democracy has largely failed, and that Singapore is also under constant threat of oblivion, Rajaratnam suggests that Singapore's democracy must "rest on two solid concepts", the first being "government of the people, by the people, for the people", a citation from Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* (1863), and, the second being a strong, autocratic government issuing from a single party such as the PAP:

People should elect a strong government, even if this resulted in a one party government. […]

I know some opposition politicians point to the British Parliament in support of their theory of "Democracy as Opposition". Well, that is one interpretation of democracy in contemporary Britain and they are entitled to their view.

But there is another British definition of democracy which Singaporeans would do well to accept and absorb. It is implicit in the architectural layout of the British Parliament. Immediately before it and facing Westminster Abbey there stands most prominently a statue of Oliver Cromwell, the father of British democracy.

He is a man of stern moral principles and a firm believer in strong governments. I cannot find in his speeches and writings any suggestion that democracy without an opposition is a sham.

The symbolism in the architecture of Westminster is clear and truthful—government of the people, by the people, for the people becomes a runaway democracy without a strong government.

[…]
The people unerringly seek a leadership which, like that of Moses, can lead people through the desert.

Rajaratnam ends his polemic with a paean to the *X-factor*, or human factor, which made possible our ascent to prosperity and progress and without which we must roll back into the swamp out of which we crawled over a century and a half ago. (Rajaratnam, 1987:162-170)

The speech (like most of Rajaratnam's) bursts with performative tropes, ending with a reference to a 'dreaded return' of Singapore to the Singapore River mudflats (a *swamp*)
where Raffles arrived "a century and a half ago". Progressivist ideology was naturalised through the implication of a genetic ascent in 150 years from crawling swamp-dweller to modern man, combined with a Toynbeeian model of civilisational generation and degeneration, and a Rafflesian affinity with Cromwell’s despotism. Cromwell, in Rajaratnam’s 'state-fatherhood' rhetoric, is ‘fixed’ as the singular father of British democracy, in much the same way that he had ‘fixed’ Raffles as the 'Founding Father' of Singapore (and associated him with no-less a mythic patriarch than Moses). While Cromwell’s example can be said to have dialectically produced the conditions necessary for later advances in democracy, to say that he was the 'father of British democracy' is problematic.

There was also a re-evaluation of Oliver Cromwell during Raffles’ lifetime. Following his death, Cromwell had been stigmatised for his contempt for the Parliament (after an initial embrace of the institution), and his assumption of power under the framework of a Protestant military Protectorate. The Memoirs of Sir Philip Warwick (1813:273-5 cited in Gaunt, 1996:211), published seven years prior to Raffles' letter to Murdoch, evidenced a newfound sympathy toward Cromwell. Warwick commented on the pre-Restoration anonymous biography of Cromwell, The Perfect Politician by "L.S." (1659-60), as a book which "clearly retained much admiration for Cromwell's achievements […]The Perfect Politician is by no means unremittingly condemnatory". Raffles' views of the colonial project were a product of a period in which Cromwellian ‘despotism’ was being re-evaluated, a process continued with the publishing of an edition of Cromwell's letters and speeches in 1845.

Behind Cromwell’s figure stood Hobbes’ Leviathan, and notions of government as a necessary authoritarianism, allowing for the security of the citizenry. Hobbes’ published his book, Leviathan Or The Matter, Forme And Power Of A Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall And Civill in 1651. Upon reading it, Cromwell allowed Hobbes to return to London from the continent31. Competing political parties used the book to justify both the monarchy of Charles I, Cromwell's deposition of Charles I, and the establishment of the subsequent Protectorate. Leviathan sought to demonstrate that civilisation is founded on the fear and avoidance of death. In response to this fear, men construct a commonwealth,

31 Hobbes’ enemies maintained that he "worked his passage home by means of it" (Peters, 1962:10).
the *Leviathan*, which is an artificial 'machine' for the enforcement of (and acquiescence to) social rules and the provision of security against sudden death. The book thereby sought to demonstrate the necessity of an absolute sovereign (Peters, 1962:10-11), maintaining that while government must be by consent of the people, once the ruler is selected, the people should by law invest him with absolute and undivided sovereignty (Hobbes, 1962:132-3).

In his explanation of the Commonwealth, Hobbes repeatedly returns to the subjection of the citizen to the leader: "The power and honour of subjects vanisheth in the presence of the power sovereign" (Hobbes, 1962:140). This subjection is seen to be a lesser evil than no leadership at all (Hobbes, 1962:141). The Hobbesian notion of the supreme sovereign not only produced the possibility of a non-monarchic government in Britain itself, but as we can see in Raffles' rhetoric, it also served as an ideological platform for the imperial extension of Britain abroad. However, imperialism and colonialism contradict the basic tenet of *Leviathan*: that the people must willingly consent to allow themselves to be ruled by the absolute sovereign. Without consent, sovereignty is despotic and cannot provide the foundation for the establishment of *Leviathan*. The willing submission of the (vanquished colonial) subject is required for a stable commonwealth.

Dominion acquired by conquest or victory at war, is that which some writers call DESPOTICAL [...] which signifieth a lord or master; and is the dominion of the master over the servant. [...]

It is not therefore the victory, that giveth the right of dominion over the vanquished, but his own covenant (Hobbes, 1962:153-4).

Raffles’ letter to Murdoch shows him decidedly closer to Cromwell’s preemptive military dictatorship, than to Hobbes’ more subtle justifications for sovereignty. Raffles added to Hobbes' thesis an essentialised teleological progression in which an embodied image of development requires the "enlightened and able hands" of a "despotic authority" for the full promise of civilisation to take hold. Despotism is necessary for the eventual fruition of Raffles' progressivism. For Raffles —the colonial agent and 'man of action' par excellence— but not for Hobbes —the reflexive philosopher— "despotism of force" is interchangeable with "despotism of superior intellect", and both forms of elitism represent a necessary 'step' in a progression "which cannot be passed over". The notion is closed, determinist and self-justifying, providing the rationalisation for colonial rule backed up by
military prowess and coercion. Hobbes’ rationalisations for autocracy converge with Raffles' Whiggish progressivism, Toynbee’s concept of the cyclical stages of civilisation, and with PAP eugenics, meritocracy and elitism. It is an ideological trajectory in Singapore that extended over two centuries.

An observer might reasonably assume that Rajaratnam, as a former anti-colonial activist, would evince some discomfort with Cromwell’s violent military operations to bring Scotland and Ireland under the British military boot, his pre-emptive use of the military to close the Rump Parliament, and the Protestant providentialist justifications for all his acts. Although history has shown that the PAP government, like Cromwell, clearly does support a malleable Parliament under the control of the executive and one party, without an effective opposition, the appearance of sustained parliamentary democracy nevertheless remains an important sign. To use Cromwell as a sign of that commitment to democratic appearances is at least an honest gesture.

The adoption of Raffles as the Founding Father of Singapore is also fraught with modernist irony, neutral only to those for whom ‘neutral’ is an ideological signifier. The trope of ‘Raffles’ carries entailments of a developmental ethos based on a continuity of power and dominion, as well as an essentialised symbolic paternity of genetically superior (British) leaders. The patrilineage leads ‘inevitably’ to the current power elite as the first and only post-independence government, and as the only politicians equipped for the "proper use of X-factor". The choice of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles as founding father of Singapore was due not only to his establishment of a British trading post there, as that achievement cannot be divorced from his view that British colonialism was the essential ingredient for the civilisational advance of primitive peoples.

JAPANESE COLONIAL INFLUENCES
Lee’s colonial education (and that of the other English-educated elite of his generation), while begun in earnest at Raffles Institution, as we have seen, had other powerful influences: first, the Japanese Occupation and second, the currents of European thought encountered in the late 1940s at British universities. It was there that they encountered Toynbee’s theories of history and Fabian socialism. Many of the notions of British racial and cultural superiority (and invincibility) propagated through the colonial educational
system were also purveyed by the Japanese propaganda and educational services that accompanied the 1942-1945 occupation of Malaya, which the Japanese renamed Shōnan. This period had a profound impact on Lee’s generation: by bringing to them the shocking conclusion that Britain was no longer the *sine qua non* of historical development. Whiggish progressivism as an ideology of historical progress never recovered its glow, as it was an *Asian* power that had dislodged the world's first global Empire. Following this, the British disappointingly attempted to return to their former colonial position following the war, but teleological developmentalism had outlived its colonial purveyors. In 1963 Lee was to state:

> The (Japanese) made me and a whole generation like me determined to fight for freedom — freedom from servitude and foreign domination. I did not enter politics. They brought politics upon me. From that time onwards, I decided that our lives should be ours to decide. That we should not be pawns and playthings of foreign powers (Barr, 2000:12).

Lee and the PAP learned from the Japanese more than just the need for post-colonial independence. They also saw the positive developmental effects of the kind of despotic rule and a militarised social order that Raffles, Cromwell and the Japanese admired before him. In *The Singapore Story*, Lee returned to this period under the Japanese, openly admiring their use of fear in the ordering of society.

> The three and a half years of Japanese occupation were the most important of my life. They gave me vivid insights into the behaviour of human beings and human societies, their motivations and impulses. *My appreciation of governments, my understanding of power as the vehicle for revolutionary change, would not have been gained without this experience.* […] The Japanese demanded total obedience and got it from nearly all. They were hated by almost everyone but everyone knew their power to do harm and so everyone adjusted. […]

> The Japanese Military Administration governed by spreading fear. […] [I]t was amazing how low the crime rate remained. […] As a result I have never believed those who advocate a soft approach to crime and punishment […] (Lee K.Y. 1998:74, emphasis added.).

The notion that autocratic government could bring about positive social transformations in society would remain, following the accession of the PAP to power in 1959. It was during the Japanese occupation and his time in the Japanese intelligence service that Lee came into his maturity and learned to link economy, discipline, essence, autocratic power, the
broad uses of domestic intelligence, and the application of force — all primary themes of the narrative of PAP power and rule since independence\textsuperscript{32}. A post-independence 'colonial' cultural economy provided the foundations for the proletarianisation of the populace and the industrialisation of the financial system.

The official historical narrative of the ruling People's Action Party, its synchronisation with 'Whiggish Progressivism', and the larger ideological trajectory of teleological developmentalism have been the subject of this chapter. In this narrative, PAP hegemony is presented as an inevitable phase in a historical trajectory, beginning with the inception of the colonial era under Raffles and leading toward a secure and sustainable prosperity in the future. Colonial attitudes toward governance, colonial laws, bureaucratic structures were sustained in the post-independence era by the PAP government.

The following chapters will relate how during the last decade of the century performance art has been introduced into the official narrative as a counter-hegemonic impulse, and has functioned as the most recent canary-in-the-mine-shaft, signaling the collisions between the administrative and (un)civil state over divergent social and cultural ideals, and performance regimes.

\textsuperscript{32} Lee's role as a translator of foreign news wires in the Japanese intelligence unit, with all the privileges such a post entailed (as well as the fear his position must have instilled among his Singaporean acquaintances), has often been referred to, but to date has not been fully investigated. Minchin, quoting David Marshall's "droll description" of Lee, points out how fluidly Lee was able to shift his roles between "Nihongo (Japanese) functionary" to "Kuoyo (Chinese) patriot", the one who relayed to his fellow Malayans news of crumbling Japanese fortunes and bathed in the reflected glory of RAF advances (Minchin 1990:295).
PART 3.

PERFORMANCE ART

You gentlemen perhaps think that I am mad? Allow me to defend myself. I agree that man is preeminently a creative animal, predestined to consciously strive toward a goal, and to engage in engineering, that is, eternally and incessantly, to build new roads, wherever they may lead. Man loves to create roads, that is beyond dispute. But [...] may it not be [...] that he is instinctively afraid of attaining his goal and completing the edifice he is constructing? How do you know, perhaps he only likes that edifice from a distance and not at all at a close range, perhaps he only likes to build it, and does not want to live in it. (Dostoevsky, *The Underground Man*, in Berman, 1988:6)
CHAPTER VI.
"COFFEE TALK"
A METADISCURSE OF DAILY LIFE

This chapter will trace the field of performance art to its appearance in Singapore during the 1980s, riding a tide of late-modernist cosmopolitanism. The arrival of performance art leads to dialectical tensions between the desires of an interventionist government and a younger generation of artists that is increasingly inclined to read between the lines of the social contract between citizenry and government.

SINGAPORE POST-COLONIAL THEATRE
To understand the place of performance art in Singapore, it is important to understand how the form fits within the larger modernist performance tradition in Singapore. As mentioned in the previous chapter, due to its geographical location at the nexus of trading routes during the colonial period, Singapore was an intellectual centre of the region (Harper, 2001:6-13), with a vibrant if small multicultural theatre and arts establishment. Each of the main language groups (English, Tamil, Malay, Mandarin) produced theatre enclaves, looking for their respective ancestries off-island in England, India, Malaysia/Indonesia, and China respectively (Jit, 1988: 48). With the close of the colonial era in 1963, the performing arts were limited to a small number of amateur groups vying for limited resources. Expatriate players continued to present London hits, but Singaporean theatre companies and writers gradually expanded to fill the vacuum (Jit 1988; Birch 1998).

Peninsular Malay theatre, previously centred in Singapore, split into two centres after separation from Malaysia in 1965: Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore it was sustained at a less active level following separation, as the Malays suddenly found themselves an ethnic minority in the city-state. Tamil theatre turned from traditional mythological themes to 'reformist realism' in the 1950s (Jit, 1988:48). Modern Chinese theatre, developed in the 1950s by the Singapore Amateur Players, found itself under intense government surveillance during and after the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-
76), as they adopted the themes and iconic Socialist Realist postures and movements of revolutionary era Beijing Opera. Serving both political and pedagogical functions, these productions were taken out of the theatre to the mines and estates of the peninsula to conscientise immigrant workers.

The diasporic community in Singapore still held close ties with their families in China, and intellectuals of the Nanyang, who had been strongly influenced by the May Fourth Movement, were now caught up in the civil war between the KMT and the Communists, as well as the struggle for self-determination from colonial domination by the Japanese. As discussed in Chapter IV, the discourses of the day were rife with notions of localising mainland Chinese politics in the Nanyang, causing the government security apparatus to concentrate on the appearance of these signs of Chinese 'naturalisation' in Singaporean Chinese language cultural production (Harper 2001).

Playwright-Director Kuo Pao Kun exerted an important influence on this movement before his detention with other ‘leftists’ in 1976 by the PAP government. Kuo had been trained in Australia’s National Academy of Dramatic Arts from 1959-1965 and returned to Singapore at the time of the Cultural Revolution. Together with his wife, ballet dancer, Goh Lay Kuan, they had set up the Singapore Performing Arts School in 1965, subsequently renamed the Practice Theatre School (PTS). Goh served as principal of the school. According to the Malaysian director Krishen Jit,

Kuo […] injected strong doses of professionalism and artistic responsibility into the revolutionary theatre. His epic-type plays, improvised and/or conceived collectively, demystified Mandarin playwriting in Singapore. Staged by farmers, factory workers, and clerks enrolled in his theatre school […], his performances expounded on the social dislocations brought on by foreign investment in an increasingly corporate Singapore (Jit, 1988:48).

The plays included the tropes associated with revolutionary Beijing Opera: "flag waving, clenched fists and other heroic images and gestures celebrating the victory of the common man" (Jit cited in Yu Yuen: 2000:22). Activist theatre was strongly linked with the political movements of the day, particularly during the heyday of the anti-colonial movement, as described by Kuo:

After the war, drama and literature kept up their partnership with politics and social change, such as anti-colonialism, anti-
imperialism, independence movements and eventually party politics, mainly between the PAP and the Barisan Socialis [...]. Drama, literature, painting and fine arts were also part and parcel of the larger political labour student movement. This came to a halt in the early 1970s, partly fueled by the Great Cultural Revolution.

The activist tendencies of artists of that time were quite unimaginable today. Can we imagine Barisan Socialis radicals putting up one of the Eight Model Plays of China: "The Red Lantern" in Riben Yuan at Thomson Road? It's all gone now, replaced by HDB flats. With Mao Zedong's portrait projected on the cyclorama, it was like a little Yan An for the Barisan Socialis. And [...] The Children's Playhouse. They were putting up plays at the National Theatre to an audience about 3400 people. They could run their production through at least 10 times, which meant that a total of more than 35,000 people had watched their play. That was the power these groups held over their members. The political implications of performances of that kind were to the extent that in the 1960s, the Barisan Socialis and other leftist groups were putting up anti-Vietnam War performances [...]. Everything came to an end around 1976, when the leftist movement in Singapore crashed, together with the end of the communist revolution in Southeast Asia, and of course, eventually, the end of the Cold War (Kuo, 2001:94-95).

Kuo's reference to a 'crash' of the leftist movement leaves much unsaid, as it was an Internal Security operation, designed to eliminate manifestations of the left in politics and culture.

1976 ISA DETentions

In January 1976, fifty people were detained under the Internal Security Act Chapter II, Section 81, charged with regrouping two factions of the Communist Party of Malaya

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An Act to provide for the internal security of Singapore, preventive detention, the prevention of subversion, the suppression of organized violence against persons and property in specified areas of Singapore, and for matters of incidental threats {16th September 1963} (Singapore Government 1986)

The ISA is a colonial era act introduced during the period of the "Communist Emergency" in Malaya, allowing renewable two-year preventive detentions without habeas corpus, which can be extended indefinitely. For example, the PAP government detained Barisan Socialis Member of Parliament, Chia Thye Poh under ISA for thirty-two years from 1966 until 1998. He was the world’s longest serving political prisoner on record at that time.
(CPM) "in Singapore for a new phase of subversion and terrorism" (Ministry of Home Affairs Press Statement, 27 May 1976). These arrests, preceded by the passing in Parliament of a series of restrictive acts, represented the final mopping up of the Trade Union movement, Student unions and organizations, and Non-Government Organisations that was begun in 1963 with Operation Cold Store. Among those arrested were Kuo Pao Kun and Goh Lay Kuan. Goh was released following a television confession on 28 May 1976, while Kuo remained under detention until October 1980.

English language theatre found its spark in 1985, a year that David Birch marks as the resurgence of post-independence indigenous English theatre in Singapore. Interestingly, one influence came from across the causeway in Kuala Lumpur, where Malaysian Director, Krishen Jit's Five Arts Company premiered Emily of Emerald Hill by Stella Kon. Max Le Blond picked up the scent, restaging the play in Singapore later that year. Government funding also fueled the formation of a number of new companies, including Act3, which began with children's English theatre, but whose training at the Practice Performing Arts School of Kuo Pao Kun and Goh Lay Kuan, led them to write and present socially engaged adult productions as well. Another new company, TheatreWorks, grew out of the Experimental Theatre Club, originally formed by a group of Singaporeans in 1961 (Birch 1998; Jit 1988). Following the arrests of Kuo and Goh Lay Kuan, some of the critical impetus shifted from Chinese-language theatre to English-language theatre, which was accompanied by a corresponding shift in government surveillance, leading to the next wave of arrests in 1987.

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2 1975 University of Singapore (Amendment) Act

3 Operation Cold Store was followed in 1968 with the passing of the Contract of Employment Act and the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act.

4 The demise of the cultural left had an impact not only on theatre, but on visual art as well, especially political cartooning (Lim C.T. 1997; 1998; 2001), and on the strong social realist woodblock-print movement, inflected by Maoist Yan’an ideology. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the PAP had actively courted the communists. PAP symbols and laudatory images of its gatherings appeared in the local prints, along with the primary subject matter of labour (especially images of digging and planting), as agonistic representations of the hard life of immigrants and the challenges of nation-building. But from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s, as communist, socialist, opposition and union leaders found themselves incarcerated under the Internal Security Act, the Singapore Woodblock prints tradition and critical political cartoons disappeared into artists' closets (Fan & Koh 1998).
1987 ISA DETENTIONS
The next major collision of the government and the cultural establishment occurred eleven years later, but it presented a very different community profile. On 21 May 1987, 16 people were arrested by the Internal Security Department for their alleged "connection with a clandestine communist network" (Seow, 1994:69). In June, six more were arrested. Many were associated with Roman Catholic welfare organizations, and most of the detainees were English educated. The government security apparatus had changed its surveillance focus from Chinese language culture and performance to English language culture and performance.

The alleged 'Marxists' were detained at the Whitley Detention Centre under the Internal Security Act (ISA). The Ministry for Home Affairs issued a statement indicating their discovery of a "Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore through communist united front tactics to establish a communist state" (Seow, 1994:69). At the end of the globalising 1980s, this revival of 1950s-70s communist-phobic rhetoric had the ring of another era about it (Jit, 2000-01, personal communication). Those detained were young, English educated professionals, including 10 church workers and volunteers, agitating not for their own class interests but for migratory transnational Filipino domestic labourers. Since 1985, the Singapore government had expressed concern over the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and the Catholic News Publication, which had criticised the government's dismembering of the trade unions and worker's rights. Also at issue were lobbying efforts by an exiled 1970s student activist cum Oxford University law student, Tan Wah Piow, and the Federation of United Kingdom and Eire Malaysia and Singapore Student Organisations (FUEMSSO) to "save Tan Chay Wa, an alleged ranking Communist Party Cadre, from the gallows". Chew Kheng Chuan was peripherally linked with The Third Stage, which the Internal Security Department (ISD) claimed "was subsequently used to purvey ideas aimed at arousing disaffection against the existing political system in Singapore" (Siow 1994:69). Wong Souk Yee, a dramatist with The Third Stage, had written and produced satirical plays on the plight of Filipina maids (Esperanza) and on Singapore itself (Oh

CHAPTER VI. COFFEE TALK

Singapore!, Cry for a Cactus). The Third Stage had been influenced by workshops presented by the Marxist Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), which in turn had been strongly influenced by the work of two Marxist Brazilian theorists, the educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire (1972, 1968), and the dramatist, Augusto Boal (1985).6

The Singapore internments were followed by Operasi Lalang in Malaysia, under which 107 opposition politicians, trade unionists, NGO workers, volunteers, artists, academics, environmentalists and church workers were arrested in October 1987. Among those arrested in Malaysia was Chee Heng Leng, co-author of an article detailing Singapore eugenics, "Singapore 1984: "Breeding for Big Brother", and a critique of Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad's racial determinism in his book, The Malay Dilemma (Chan and Chee, 1984). Chee's open critique of the bio-determinist and eugenics beliefs of both Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir was a likely cause for her detention.

Although much toned down, the tradition of using theatre to debate local social issues was continued by dramatists such as Stella Kon, Robert Yeo, Max Le Blond, Haresh Sharma, Alvin Tan, Kok Heng Leun, Elangovan, and Alfian Sa'at, working with theatre groups such as The Necessary Stage (TNS), spell#7, Drama Box, Agni Kootthu (Tamil), and Ekamatra (Malay). A second trend with a more formalist and 'intercultural' bent has found expression through productions by the Singapore Repertory Theatre, Action Theatre, Spell #7, TheatreWorks, the Theatre Practice, Theatre Ox, and the Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre, among others. In particular, Ong Keng Sen's Flying Circus Project (TheatreWorks) and, since 2000, the late Kuo Pao Kun's Theatre Training and Research Programme (Practice Performing Arts School) have sponsored a revival of regional traditional performance.

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6 This writer observed that by the late 1980s, Boal's book, Theater of the Oppressed, was well distributed in photocopy form amongst theatre companies in peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

7 Following Kuo's death in 2002, the Theatre Training and Research Programme has been under the direction of T. Sasitharan.
THE ARRIVAL OF PERFORMANCE ART

The exact time of arrival of 'performance art' in Singapore is contested. T.K. Sabapathy points to an action by the sculptor, Tan Teng Kee in 1979 in which the artist held an outdoors picnic to sell paintings and sculptures. At the end of the day he incinerated his three-dimensional constructions. Tan's work, however, was a one-off event. Although it echoed Gutai, Concrete art and 'happenings' of the 1950s-70s, no claims for the introduction of a new form were made by the artist, and it was not followed up by other such actions. The historian, T.K. Sabapathy termed it a singular phenomenon "in Tan's career and unique in the story of art in Singapore" (Sabapathy, 1991:26). The next historical recording of a work which was advertised as a 'performance art' event was Five Performances presented by Tang Da Wu at the National Museum Art Gallery in 1982, which most emphatically marked the arrival of performance art and earth art.

In their transformation from ‘nature’ into ‘cultural commodities’, the raw materials of art require intercontinental transportation. Finished art works and artists are also transported, shipped, or electronically transmitted. Postwar painting, sculpture and performance was marketed using the same flight routes, shipping routes and transmission pathways across the Atlantic and the Pacific that were opened during WWII at enormous human cost. Military technologies were transformed in the post-war era into the information technologies that define global post-modern culture today.

As suggested by Appadurai, we have seen a transformation of the global cultural economy ("ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes") into a new "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centres and peripheries)" (Appadurai, 1997:32), or in terms of "push and pull" (migration), "surpluses and deficits" (balance of trade), or "consumers and producers" (Marxist developmental scenarios) (Appadurai, 1997: 33). Appadurai looks for the signs of 'disorganised capitalism' in the flows, movements, circulation, trajectories, diasporas and resultant deterritorialisation of cultural economies, that is, the transformation of cultural economies into cultural movements. In art, this radical change happened progressively over the
course of modernity, and the technologies of information dissemination followed global military routes.

Performance artists, who travel not with but as their work, made use of the residual technologies of global militarisation to purvey their wares, leading to cultural continuities as well as 'deteriorialised, non-isomorphic', or 'disjunctive paths' (Appadurai, 1996:37). This ‘traveling as the work’ has itself become an important distinguishing feature of the field.

Performance art is a movement of movements, of actions, events, happenings, intervals, circulations, flows, trajectories, and gestures. Richard Schechner characterises the 1960s movements of Fluxus and happenings as “a new move [...] that climaxed in the 1970s and

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8 While the speed of transmission increased exponentially, following the 20th century world wars, routes of transmission were largely already in place at the beginning of the century, as exemplified by an event related by John Clark:

An index of the speed and depth of this contact [between Japanese and the Futurist avant-garde in Europe] even before the First World War was not merely that the Futurist Manifesto [first published by Marinetti in Le Figaro, 20 February, 1909] had been translated into Japanese in 1909, but after the graduation ceremony in March 1912 [at the Tokyo School of Fine Art]...[Professor] Kuroda Seiki, causally mentioned in a dinner speech that he had received copies of a futurist exhibition catalogue the previous day (Clark,1998: 217-218).

9 According to Paul Schimmel, curator of the 1998 exhibition "Out of Actions: between performance and the object 1949-1979" at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles: "The necessity of travel associated with performance work allowed and encouraged an extraordinary degree of interaction that brought the studio into the world arena" (Schimmel 1998:11). There are many variations to this theme. For example, performance artist, Hsieh Tehching remained in New York for over 20 years, although his body of work was based to a large degree on his experience as an illegal Taiwanese migrant in the United States.

It is useful to compare Hsieh’s work with that of Japanese performance artist, Seiji Shimoda, who has traveled extensively as part of his work, presenting a small number of performances many times. Shimoda has also very intentionally disseminated one particular stage-oriented Japanese model of performance art, based on his Nippon Performance Art Festival, first held in 1993 in Tokyo. After NIPAF became an annual event, Shimoda began traveling to other Asian countries, helping them to set up their own performance art events. This has taken place to date in Thailand (Asiatopia, 1999, organised locally by Chumphon Apisuk and Concrete House), PIPAF, the First Philippines International Performance Art Festival in 1999, organised by Juan Mor'O, JIPAF, the Jakarta International Performance Art Festival, organised by Indonesian performance artists and conceptual artists, Arahmaiani, and others.

Shimoda often funds a group of Japanese artists who accompany him. While Shimoda's model has strongly influenced the recent efflorescence of performance art in Southeast Asia, he has also influenced the style and character of performance art away from long duration works toward short, mobile, dramatic presentations, use of non-site specific proscenium stage techniques, usually with a discreet distinction between the performer and the audience (Apisuk, 1999; Arahmaiani 2000; Shimoda 1998; Shimoda 1999). The artist and art organiser, Jay Koh has criticised Shimoda for what he sees as imperialist cultural tourism in the IPAF model, particularly as this model interfaces with desperately poor or politically compromised nations, such as Burma (Jay Koh 2000, personal communication).
1980s” (1977:118). Following currents of the international bourgeois economy, the explosion of Southeast Asian performance art that made of the global transportation infrastructure did not take place until the 1980s, with the trickle-down effects of the Southeast Asian economic boom. One of the first outcroppings of the art form in Southeast Asia in the 1980s was in Singapore, a city placed appropriately at the ‘hub’ of a network of flight connections. The nation has often been reduced to the synecdoche of its airport: a place where people (including citizens) transit, dock, rest, and pause, before the next series of movements. Singapore, then, is a state — a point of stasis, a stationary post within a field of movement, where, in the 1980s, the genre found a footing, however anxious and insecure.

There was virtually no external market for post-modern art in Southeast Asia until the 1990s. Art scenes in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines were still dominated by the first and second generation modernists and traditional artists. The cultural sphere through the 1980s largely remained under the sway of conservative Ministries and National Galleries, whose officials selected artists (often from their own generation) for most international exhibitions

The late century internationalist avant-garde movements of Art Brut, Art Concrete, minimalism, Informel, Fluxus, earth art, conceptual art, and performance art, which dominated the concerns of younger artists in Europe, the United States, Korea and Japan, found little footing in Southeast Asia. National identity there found its expression primarily through international modernism — brought back by local artists who had trained in Paris, Munich, London, New York — and regional traditions purveyed by locally trained masters. Southeast Asia was still viewed in the West as the anthropologist’s laboratory through the 1980s. Following in the footsteps of Mead and Bateson’s filmic study of Balinese trance states, Trance and Dance in Bali (1938), Southeast Asia remained ‘trance-central’, with numerous academic studies focusing on the psychotherapeutic or spiritual aspects of Thai, Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Orang Asli.

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10 Although artists are still selected in this manner for sections of exhibitions such as Documenta, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Madrid ARCO, and the Venice Biennale, among others, it is no longer from the same small pool of modernist or traditional painters and sculptors.

11 See for example the catalogue of the 1970 Tokyo Biennal that brought together Western minimalists and earth artists with Japanese conceptualists (Secretariat…1970).
/Orang Laut (Indigenous) ecstatic experience (Heinze, 1988; Laderman, 1991; et al.). Traditions of performance that were strongly rooted in ritual and trance states, such as Wayang Purwa, Wayang Golek, Menora, Main Puteri and others were also widely studied by both local and Western scholars (Brandon, 1976 & 1993; Ghulam, 1992; Ulbricht, 1970; Schechner, 1993:184-227; Keeler, 1987 et al).

Gradually in the late 1980s and early 1990s, international market focus on contemporary art began to catch hold, but it was generally not until international directors, curators and gallery directors began to by-pass government institutions by making journeys into the ASEAN countries to meet artists on their own that the more progressive (or politically sensitive) contemporary art and performance art cropped up on the international circuits. But even important exhibitions of regional art, curated by Southeast Asians — such as the ground-breaking Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions, curated by the Thai curator, Apinan Poshyananda, at the Asia Society Galleries, New York in 1996— left Malaysia and Singapore (and performance art) off even the contemporary/Asian culture map. Societies with long local histories have been privileged over immigrant societies, even in post-modernity. The ignoring of Singapore and Malaysia in Apinan’s exhibition was particularly ironical in light of the substantial body of work in this exhibition focusing on the experience and politics of displacement in Southeast Asian societies (Asia Society Galleries 1996).

Very little attention by theorists has to date been paid to performance art in Southeast Asia. Virtually no in-depth studies have been produced. Art journal articles in Art Asia Pacific and FOCAS (Forum on Contemporary Art And Society), The Drama Review, event catalogues (which are often not produced for performance art events), chapters or mentions in compendiums and larger histories, and the occasional videotapes and CDs have been the vehicles for the dissemination of the field in the region. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance, to be released in 2003/4 for the first time will include mention of performance art in Asia.

Once it did arrive, performance art grew rapidly into a diverse range of practices, combining with other visual and performance forms to become, in this writer's view, the
single most dynamic area of Singapore culture during the early 1990s\textsuperscript{12}. This rapid and energetic development may have in part been due to its freshness, and, most importantly, its early avoidance of either government approval or approbation—the former leading to soft-control through funding, and the latter leading to hard-control through censorship.

The stage was thusly set for the 1992/93 twelve hour New Year’s event, "Body Fields", presented at 5th Passage, where Vincent Leow presented his \textit{Coffee Talk} performance. "Body Fields" brought the issue of experimental art and performance art into not only public view, but also into view of the government security apparatus, now increasingly focused on English educated culture.

\textbf{5\textsuperscript{th} PASSAGE ARTISTS' CO-OPERATIVE LTD.}
When he decided to perform \textit{Coffee Talk} in a gallery installation-doubling-as-a-cafe-doubling-as-his-studio, Leow was not making a direct reference to antecedents in the twentieth century history of performance art or conceptual art, or the long association between performance art and café culture, beginning with Dada at the \textit{Cabaret Voltaire} in Zurich, 1916. However, performance artists have traditionally been attracted to any sort of space where they are allowed (or specifically \textit{not} allowed) to perform, including the proscenium stage, the street, lofts, schools, raves, rock concerts, empty factories or warehouses—such as the disused Hong Bee Warehouse in Singapore. During his career, Leow has performed in art galleries, museums, on a university dormitory rooftop, a farm, in gardens, on the grounds of a monastery, a disused warehouse, a trashcan, and this designated art space in a passageway.

\textsuperscript{12} The late 1980s and 1990s in Singapore saw a struggle for a language of performance art that manifested as nine general civil society initiatives. For lack of space, this dissertation does not discuss these trends. They are listed below for future consideration, with a few representative artists under each category.

1. Turn To The Kampung: Tang Da Wu, Vincent Leow and the Artists' Village
2. Turn To Tradition: Trimurti and Asian Values discourse
3. Performing Curatorship: 5th Passage and Artists' Village (second generation)
4. Turn to the May Fourth Movement: Cheo Chai Hiang and Koh Nguang How
5. Dialogical or Engaged Practice: Jay Koh, Chu Chu Yuan, Amanda Heng, Lee Wen
6. Hybrid forms of dance/music/installation ("\textit{Not} performance art"): Zai Kuning
7. Performative architectonics: Lim Tzay Chuen
8. Kinetics as Proxy Performance: Suzann Victor and Matthew Ngui
10. Virtual and Internet Performance: Tsunamii.net (Tien Woon, Charles Lim, Tay Hak Peng, Melvin Phua, Tan Kok Yam)
11. Other species: Lucy Davis
On 19 April, 1991, painter, Suzann Victor and ceramicist Han Ling, (soon joined by artist and writer, Susie Lingham, Henry Tang and Iris Tan), established “5th Passage: Access to the Arts” in a fifth floor passageway connecting a seventeen story office building to the Parkway Parade shopping centre and car park in Marine Parade, Prime Minister, Goh Chock Tong’s electoral district. The passageway formed a high bridge across one end of a typical shopping centre in a rectangular concrete shell with skylights. The passageway-cum-gallery was a parasite on corporate space, and it would turn out to be vulnerable to the economic and political priorities of its managers. With public funding, 5th Passage was able to host and sponsor exhibitions of painting, installations, performance art works, cabaret-like performances, poetry readings, lectures and panels and rock concerts. Through a barter arrangement (We bring you culture; you give us space.) with the corporation managing the shopping centre, the gallery had a short and stormy history, its first major controversy brought on by Vincent Leow’s performance on New Year’s night, 1993.

The word, “passage” was both an apt metonym for the local arts scene and its precarious existence at the margins of Singapore society and government policy. Space in Singapore has an eerie quality of the infinite regress of the sign. It is transformable and symbolically malleable. No site remains rooted or historically essential. The landscape over the past four decades has changed far faster than the people living there, recalling Dostoevsky’s description of "disorder that is in actuality the highest degree of bourgeois order" (Berman, 1988:314). Spatial displacement and the state’s strategic expropriation of small land parcels, lie at the heart of Singaporean modernity and have been much described in the historical and sociological literature (Chua, 1997; Hassan, 1977; Koolhaas, 1995:1009-1089; Tan, 1999; S.P.U.R., 1967 &1971). One product of this spatial displacement has been a flood of now clichéd synecdoches, which have been deployed as stand-ins for the whole complexity of national space: the airport, airport lounge, hotel lobby, and the escalator. The doubled trope of the “passage” echoes these others. All of them refer to transitional channels, circuits or border-zones between departure and arrival: those points of excess/access/digress, where the human body is most apparent by being most obviously in transition, disappearance or reappearance. This excess of passage and the residue of displacement have been largely left out of the critical
discourse surrounding Singapore culture. As a space, 5th Passage offered the uncanny reassertion of the body and its representations, and post-modernist concerns with identity and counter-state discourses of youth, pop-culture, gender, and sexuality.

But 5th Passage also inaugurated the notion of a 'performative space' in Singapore, that is, an art space (rather than an 'art gallery') as an active agency in not only hanging, housing and framing art commodities, but a space as a generative site of art production. Artist-run 5th Passage itself engineered a particular concept of artistic pluralism that included globalism while specifically supporting local production. Often conceptualized around a particular issue, 5th Passage exhibitions combined exhibitions of installations, performance art works, forums on various issues, poetry readings, stand-up comedy or cabaret, international video screenings, and rock concerts. These events produced the progressive utopian image of a vital, heterogeneous civil society, in which even its uncivil discontents could find a productive zone in the very passages between corporate zones, shopping malls, and carparks. The space itself structured the communications, and the communications passing through it restructured the space. If it was possible there, the message was that it could be possible anywhere.

In a collaborative book published in 2002, Susie Lingham reflected on the sense of idealism and 'innocence' embedded in 5th Passage, seen in the context of the subsequent installation and kinetic sculptures of her 5th Passage colleague, Suzann Victor, and of their long partnership, as "equations of vulnerability" and "perishable space[s]". She begins the text with a reminiscence from 1999 of walking through "the passage" to "pass seamlessly into the passage of time to 5th Passage in 1992. There she recalls:

Performance. And this is where, a year later, 'performance' would be a target, and it would take close to a decade before it could begin to wrench itself free from all the misinterpretations that it became cast in. Misinterpretation and injustice that resulted in multiple losses — from the passage-space we had shaped into an artspace to the loss of funding, to that infinitely irreplaceable loss of optimistic belief in ideas —loss, yes trite as it may sound, of innocence (Victor, S. & Susie Lingham 2002)13.

13 It is revealing (and perhaps a bit bathetic) that the trope of 'loss of innocence' in Singapore, or the sense of cultural loss in itself, is linked to the trope of 'loss of funding'. As the following two chapters will show, the centralised state economy permeates even the most autonomous expressions of (un)civil society.
'COFFEE TALK'

During the final night of 1992, 5th Passage presented "Body Fields", one such twelve-hour festival of various media, music and writing. During that night Vincent Leow Kong Yam served up Coffee Talk, a performance art work that involved the re-ingestion of the by-products of his own digestion.

Six years later, Leow wrote a short description of the performance and his intentions for it:

*I used my body and an installation set like a cafe — the cafe as a metaphor of my studio. The performance was held at 5th Passage, located in the atrium of a shopping center-cum-office complex in Marine Parade. I began the performance by greeting the 20-30 people in the audience. I then sat down and started addressing them concerning issues of art and other irrelevant stuff. At that time it wasn't important that they understand me. I wanted them to hear sound and noises coming from my vocal chords. I could be speaking,
mumbling, shouting, whispering, slurring, smiling, laughing, chattering or other gestures. The idea was to deliberately blur the boundaries between one form and another. I wanted the audience to experience a piece of nonsense. But after all, is there a significant nonsense?

After my address to the audience, I got up from my chair picked up a coffee cup and pissed into the cup on the stage. With the cup full of urine, I made a toast to the audience and drank. After consuming the urine, I sat down and started cutting locks of my hair and placed them in several envelopes addressing it to several people in the art scene, distributing them to the audience, ending the performance.

The performance was a raw, random event and appeared meaningless. I was concerned with the issue of self-consumption, using the urine as a metaphor for the artist as both producer and the consumer. At the end of the performance the audience applauded. The point was to accept that the audience would have all manner of interpretation: to allow the performance to be what it was (email correspondence, 11/12/98, emphasis added).

Leow’s statement focuses on the appearance of his body while curiously doubling its spatial frame: “I used my body and an installation set like a café — the café as a metaphor of my studio”. The 'body/café/studio' was itself positioned in a passageway that doubled as a gallery. A studio is the space where the body of the artist conventionally positions itself for the act of artist conception. While for some artists, the studio has been replaced by a notebook, or a laptop and a plane seat, Leow’s studios over the years have been central to his work.

Leow’s performance speaks to the excess of the body and its ‘ruminations’: its behaviors, bodily products, physical and cognitive digestion. In this performance the body functions as a passageway for the intake, processing and excretion of fluid, and the "significant nonsense", the "mumbling, shouting, whispering, slurring, smiling, laughing, chattering.

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14 As stated for example by the New York based Taiwanese, artist, Lee Mingwei 1998, personal communication.

15 During the period of this performance, Leow lived with other artists in a house on Cavan Road, near Jalan Besar Stadium. Leow’s studios, subsequently at the Telok Kurau Studios building, have been central to his production for much of the past decade. Leow shifted out of Telok Kurau to his present home/studio in Seletar Camp in 2000.
(and) other gestures" that we all perform every day. Leow’s description of his performance privileges embodiment over semantics, circulation over transmission, the mechanics of vocalisation over ‘making sense’.

The final clause in Leow's statement —"to allow the performance to be what it was"— is highly ironical in light of succeeding events. It is also slyly paradoxical, as it follows the previous implication that the artist accepted "all manner of interpretation". The use of the words, "to be what it was" implies a central core that cannot be touched or changed by the various interpretations imposed upon it. But any attempt to find that central core inevitably leads to the layering of perceptions, memories, associations, and interpretations. The 'isness' or 'being for itself' of the action, the event, the gesture, is paradoxically always also a 'being for the other'; the interpreting subject, carrying out a gesture of 'reading'. This 'reading' is a consuming through which the artist's output is received, taken 'in' (accepted), and thereby receives its 'beingness' legitimacy, and authenticity as a sign. As Eco maintains, signs need not be intentional, nor always involve human agents. But they do require 'interpellants', that is, agents who interpret the signal or sign to produce meaning (or effects). The gesture in this equation is a signal emitted and received, but can only be a 'signal' or 'sign' if reception is at least possible (whether or not it is actualized) (Eco 1979:33).

With this particular performance by Leow, in which the artist's bodily output doubles as its input, the semiotic sequence (emitter: signal⇒receiver) becomes an immediate entanglement, in part because there are two transfers: material ingestion/excretion (which immediately doubles as a metonym for a semiotic sequence), and the expected semiotic emission of the performance, in which information is transmitted from performer to audience. It is not clear whether the urine is a metonym for linguistic utterance or whether the utterance represents the material circuit of ingestion—metabolisation—excretion.

To put this in other terms, speech is also an excretion that is relied upon 'to make sense of' non-verbal acts through a process of metaphoric substitution. In those cases, such as performance art, where the gesture is already intended as both a signifier and a signified, we find a tropological doubling before any verbal interpretation of the actions can be performed. This is the exquisite entanglement of much performance art, where any
attempt to receive or interpret the event simply adds to the event's *a priori* entanglements. The audience is *always* complicit and participatory, whether participation is invited or rejected by the performer (or allowed by the licensing agency). Leow's "what it was" is such an entanglement — an entanglement that is not a random effect but is at the ‘core' of the work.

As if to emphasise the sense of the work as a signal transmitting and circulating in a larger system of exchange, Leow also included cuttings of his hair — another by-product of the body, this one a protein extrusion — placing the strands in envelopes addressed to artists, administrators and government officials who were in some manner connected with the art scene in Singapore.

**CONSUMING THE COMMODITY**

By consuming and sending out his own by-products into the larger economy of production, circulation and consumption of cultural and communication artifacts, Leow montaged (restored) three artistic conventions: the mainstream conventional use of the artist's body in the production of art commodities (‘bodily products’); a sub-frame of this larger convention in which artists *deploy* their bodies as the artwork (body art, performance art, movement, etc.); and a sub-category of that bodily deployment, in which artists physically ingest (or re-ingest) certain ‘bodily products,’ be they artistically or organically produced by their own or others' bodies. This sub-category would include, for example, Stelarc’s ingestion of a micro-video robot that he had designed in collaboration with Japanese engineers, and would also include Leow’s ingestion of his own urine. It would also include other types of ingestions, insertions, and interventions into the body and the exploration of physical attributes, such as the exploration of pain feedback thresholds (Stelarc, Valie Export); fear thresholds (Chris Burden); disgust thresholds through the immersion of the body in its own or others' excrement (Otto Mueller & Viennese *Aktionisme*); surgical 'enhancements' to the body’s surface (Orlan); the ironic insertion/application of foods and the by-products of other species (Carolee Schneeman and Karen Findley), or the ingestion of environmental/industrial products or waste (Shannon Tham, Hermann Holger).
While these productions, secretions, insertions and consumptions in the recent traditions of *performance art* and *body art* may appear to be quite distinct from other types of art production, they converge and become co-equivalent within the commodity market, where the body of the artist has designated market value. They also share an ouroboric semiotics, as in the following chain of signifiers: the artist's body (as a tool) presenting itself (as product), which is then consumed by—or used to intervene into—the body (as effect/tool). The performance opens a private circuit into public discourse, in which the body/tool/producer/consumer/subject consumes its own products, and by so doing also reifies itself as an effect, a public identity—a ‘brand’. In this case, cultural spectacle (the pomp and circumstance and representation of the act) is revealed as both the entire economy of the act, and that effect for which the act is performed.

Leow's performance also falls into the tradition of performances by those artists who consume food with the intention of producing a bodily reaction Angella Elsworth and Tina Takamoto (USA), Shannon Tham (Singapore)\(^\text{16}\), or a bodily excretion, as when Tom Marioni (a.k.a. Allan Fish) produced “Pissing”\(^\text{17}\), or Kamol Phaosavasdi (Thailand), performed *Water Project: Give Me a Glass of Water* \(^\text{18}\); performances for video by Vasan Sitthiket (Thailand)\(^\text{19}\); those artists who ingest their own blood, other bodily fluids or flesh, Ray Langenbach (USA)\(^\text{20}\), and the Padang Lallang Group (Indonesia)\(^\text{21}\).

\(^{16}\) Tham burned a newspaper, consumed the ashes and regurgitated into a barrel. This work fell into a series of such ingestion works, including one he performed at the Sculpture Symposium, Nanyang Academy of fine Arts (NAFA) Gallery in October 1993, in which he ingested sand.

\(^{17}\) Marioni presented the work as part of a *Sound Sculpture As* series in 1970 at his Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco. In this work, he pissed from a standing ladder into a metal tub after drinking beer all day, noting that “the sound pitch went down as the water level went up” (Loeffler & Tong, 1989:12-13).

\(^{18}\) February 1994, Silom Art Space, Bangkok

\(^{19}\) The documentation of the in-studio performances show the artist against back-light, urinating and defecating.


\(^{21}\) *Ubiquitous Bloodbath*, 2000, Jakarta International Performance Art Festival
In July 1993, Leow capped *Coffee Talk* with another performance entitled *IO*, at the National Gallery Theatrette, as part of a Sculpture Symposium, initiated by Tang Da Wu. In this work Leow made an ambling, somewhat confused, periodically impassioned response to the press coverage of *Coffee Talk*. A number of members of the audience were quite critical of his passivity in the face of the distorted and sensationalist media accounts of his work.\(^{22}\) He also presented a limited edition of bottled urine. The bottles were packaged in small cardboard boxes, entitled: *The Artist’s Urine*. Each bottle was labeled, signed and numbered by the artist, and identified as a "Product of Singapore", clearly establishing their *irony value* in a local and global commodity market.

This work has two quite well known antecedents: the bottle of urine in Kurt Schwitter’s *Merzbau* installation\(^{23}\), and another packaged excretion by the Italian conceptualist, Pier Manzoni, who "in May, 1961 produced and packaged ninety cans of "Artist’s Shit" (weighing 30 grams each), naturally preserved and “made in Italy”. They were sold at the current price of gold, and soon became ‘rare’ art specimens" (Goldberg, 1979:149).

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\(^{22}\) The problem of Singapore artists not effectively countering distorted or sensationalised press coverage of their work has been endemic, leading eventually to the disastrous events of 1994, but continuing to the present. As we shall see, during and after his arrest and trial in 1994, the artist Josef Ng never challenged press accounts of his performance, his intentions or his rights as an artist *vis a vis* law and the state apparatus. He, like Leow before him, left practical and theoretical arguments to others. But they are in good company. Neither did the 5th Passage gallery, Artists Village, or the entire progressive community of artists mount an effective public argument for artistic license. This ‘pragmatic’ obsequiousness and lack of oppositional tactics in the face of spectacle power has been a striking mark of the Singapore culture scene as a whole, and is discussed in Chapter VIII.

\(^{23}\) Brian O’Doherty quotes Kate Steinitz," the most perceptive visitor" to Kurt Schwitter’s Merzbau as having "noticed a cave in which a bottle of urine was solemnly displayed so that the rays of light that fell on it turned the liquid to gold" (O’Doherty, 1976: 45).
Figure 24. Vincent Leow, Artist's Urine, Special Edition, 500 ml., 100% Urine 1993 #16/25 (Collection Lee Weng Choy) (Photo: Ray Langenbach)

Figure 25. Piero Manzoni Merde d'Artiste, 1961 (5 x 6.5cm) (Block, René, 1990:246)
Significantly, Leow's performance is linked to another site of ingestion — *koptiam* (coffee shop) culture in Singapore. The Singapore sociologist, Chua Beng Huat, refers to the *koptiam* as a location par excellence for collective idling, usually an open shop front with a minimum of tools of the trade: an open-fire charcoal grill, upon which sat brass or stainless steel conical cylinders, open at the pointed end, in which hung a cloth sock containing locally produced coffee powder (Chua, 1997:158). It is notable for the camaraderie of friends who idle together through long-drawn out cups of coffee. [The clientele are typically old and middle-aged men] in singlets, shorts and sandals or barefooted, served by a proprietor (often a neighbor) with his dampened towel used for wiping tables, slung over his shoulder (Chua, 1997:153).

The *koptiam* described by Chua is a ‘performative’ site, with a radio or television always on, the reading of the daily papers, periodic nodding off, gambling, bouts of fighting fishes, spiders, crickets (although these gambling ‘sports’ with animals have now disappeared), various games with coins, and the swapping of stories notable for their "well embellished, self-aggrandizing narratives of real or imaginary exploits". The *koptiam* is also a place where political views and the issues of the day are endlessly aired and thrashed out, resulting in a site marked by the convergence of government and civil institutions.

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24 Sometimes transliterated as *kopi thiam*

25 Because it is a site of open expression, the coffee shop may not be exempted from state surveillance, a specially totalised picture of which is suggested by James Minchin:

There is an extensive maypole system to bring the people of Singapore within Lee's [Lee Kuan Yew] grasp. He keeps abreast of Parliament by electronic means, he sits on select panels such as the Defence Committee and his office receives countless spoken and written reports from parliamentarians, citizens’ consultative committees, and residents’ committees, the People’s Association, Party cadres, statutory bodies and government departments. Of greater importance is the Special Branch briefing, which monitors not only individuals but coffee shop gossip. So a jigsaw picture of the ‘ground’ is assembled for the Prime Minister (Minchin, 1986/1990: 13).

Chan Heng Chee maintains that Singaporeans do talk politics freely in the coffee shops and "do not really have to look over their shoulders before they spout their political viewpoints " to support her argument that Singapore is not a police state per se (Chan 1997/1975:299). While Singapore does not fit the mould of a typical police state, with plainclothes intelligence agents on hand to spirit citizens away for indiscreet comments, it is my observation that during times of acute dissension between government and civil society groups, those affected definitely do look over their shoulders before voicing remarks critical of the government. While it may not be the police who are listening, the maypole system described by Minchin runs on a more *laissez-faire* surveillance of citizens by citizens or self-surveillance. During the aftermath of the AGA, artists regularly checked who was listening before voicing their criticisms in public places.
society. The performative quality of this space is embedded in the larger performativity of daily life. The *kopitiam* is a ritualised\textsuperscript{26} space for reflecting and rehashing, productive of a variety of ‘discursive games’, that portrays the genre of the community outside (or inside) its walls. We can say that the coffee shop provides a site for the daily repetition of a certain type of relaxed face-to-face interaction, and is a scene for (the) playing out of ritually relevant quite conventionalized utterances, lexicalizations, whose controlling purpose is to give praise, blame, thanks, support, affection, or show gratitude, disapproval, dislike, sympathy, or greet, say farewell, and so forth (Goffman, 1981:20).

One of Leow’s performance methods involves scanning a particular environment—such as the *kopitiam*—for found-objects resonant of a traditional milieu; objects that function as signifiers in a chain of conventional ritual actions, together with their motivating (or motivated) beliefs. Leow then proceeds to ‘restore’ the former triadic relationship of object—ritual action—belief, but by folding the object into an entirely new ‘art’ context. The effect is a rupturing of the assumptions implicit in the triadic complex and the establishment of a new hermeneutic, albeit with traces of the former semiotic order. In this sense, Leow’s artworks manifest both a supportive and subversive relationship to traditional culture in Singapore.

In this case, Leow’s restoration of certain indispensable signifiers of local coffee shop genre offered a portrait of the transformation of *Nanyang* (South China Seas) culture. The traditional leisure rites of the working class shifted to mall leisure zones frequented by the middle class (inclusive of those present at 5th Passage). The performance not only indexed a change of lifestyle in Singapore, it embodied that change—the *kopitiam*, once a site for consumption, became a mere trope of consumption in Leow’s performance. His oeuvre can, then, be productively theorised in a larger frame of the rise of a privileged Singapore middle class culture; his *Coffee Talk* speaks to the surpluses of time and metaphoric gestures, incorporating and redeploying the *kopitiam* as cultural sign, repeating and metadiscursively displacing the non-reflexive daily-life behaviours in the *kopitiam*.

\textsuperscript{26} The use of the words 'ritual' and 'ritualised' here reflects a notion of conventional or normalised and repetitive canonical behaviour, rather than the religious or auratic usage.
Leow’s choice to present his work at 5th Passage in the Parkway Parade shopping center was ironic. Parkway Parade is a large, corporately owned shopping centre that had displaced several of a former community’s coffee shops. Leow’s work functioned in that space as a transposition of economies and economic layers, reintroducing signifiers of an earlier small family-business economy into the space of the highly capitalised, monopolistic economy\textsuperscript{27}, that is discreetly tied to the government. This transposition itself spoke of a larger historical context: a period of Singapore’s development that saw the removal of villages and tangential family enterprises from newly designated corporate zones under a succession of Urban Redevelopment Authority Sales\textsuperscript{28}. Also displaced along with the coffee shop culture was the subtle field of behaviors and “forms of talk” (Goffman 1981) that informed or inaugurated traditional meeting places. With urban redevelopment these performances of “significant nonsense” had to be transposed to other ‘neutral’ locations\textsuperscript{29}. As discussed above, this period of massive infrastructural expansion and cultural displacement spawned a generation of artists, born in kampung or town environments, who were then required to move to HDB flats.

Leow was born in 1961, during a period when his family lived in a small bungalow owned by his Grandfather\textsuperscript{30} on Jalan Sulur, near Serangoon Gardens\textsuperscript{31}. But the family soon


\textsuperscript{28} Parkway Parade was built on land purchased during the Seventh Urban Redevelopment Authority Sale of Sites, in 1978. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) began in 1966 as the Urban Renewal Department of the Housing Development Board (HDB), which had the mandate to provide housing for the populace. A second UN plan in 1963 (the first having been in 1959), under the leadership of German Prof. Otto Koenigsberger, Advisor to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, was produced for a future population estimated at 4 million people, which involved a "Ring City" (based on a Dutch model). This Koenigsberger, Abrams and Kobe Plan, with adaptations, was adopted by the government without public discussion. Again, with the help of the UN, the government initiated the State and City Planning Project in 1967, resulting in the 1971 Concept Plan, which mapped out many of the highways, and a Mass Rapid Transit system linking the satellite ring towns. The next substantial plan was the 1991 Revised concept Plan to develop Singapore into a "tropical city of excellence" in the 21st Century (Tan, 1999:148; Koolhaas 1995).

\textsuperscript{29} For a discussion of this transposition, see Chua Beng Huat, 1997. Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore. London and New York: Routledge.

\textsuperscript{30} Leow’s Great Grandparents moved to Singapore from Fukien province. His Great Grandfather started a transport company with trishaws, developing it into the successful Singapore Bus Company. The government bought out the company when it established its monopoly over transportation in the 1970s. Leow’s Great-Grandfather left a considerable inheritance, most of it lost by his son who did not have the same flair for business (Langenbach 2001 (3)).
moved to a village environment in Sembawang, where they raised poultry. Following the death of his Grandfather, the family bungalow was replaced by a coffee shop (part of a food court) in the midst of new flats at Serangoon North, where Leow and his wife, Yvonne Lee, often go for Sunday breakfast to a coffee shop. Leow’s parents subsequently moved in 1979-80 to one of the new HDB flats in Tampines, where they still reside. Most adult Singaporeans over 35 years old have seen their village house razed and replaced by flats and 'new towns'.

5th Passage engaged with this state discourse of space by redesignating a corporate transit space to cultural use. Such urban redirecting of commercial space subverts the dominant discourse of use-value. However, it can also be argued that the commitment to liminality is a sword that cuts two ways. Such appropriations end by reinforcing the irrelevancy of cultural agency by consigning it to liminal, discontinuous and incoherent spaces. Following this line of argument, a developmentalist telos requires destabilizing initiatives in order to stimulate dynamism and growth at the limen. 5th Passage provided research and development for bourgeois hegemony and teleological developmentalism. This spatial dilemma finds a corollary in Leow’s insistence that the meaning of the speech he presented didn’t really matter, thereby positioning speech and sense in the same discontinuous space that the body experiences in the Singapore environment.

COFFEE TALK AND SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS: TWO PERFORMANCES
Regardless of his intended commitment to a condition of inconsequential utterance, his simple non-verbal act—urinating into a cup and drinking it back down—had the effect of a 'strange attractor' in a dynamic system, setting off a chain of reactions in Singapore cultural politics still felt today.

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31 Leow recalls that the family ran its first TV off a generator, when Leow was about 15 years old (c.1976). The area was called “Bo Sua Tian” — ”No Power Line” — by the residents alluding to the presence of large power pylons but no electricity in the homes. His father constructed an elaborate Buddhist temple environment in the basement of the house.
The press representations of Leow's performance produced a double-image for public consumption that powerfully dilated the significance of the actual event, and led to a media spectacle in which performance artists positioned themselves both as chefs and as the main course. To understand the cultural significance of performance art in Singapore, we must include its spectacle in the press as its cultural *doppelgänger*.

One uncanny premonition of Shannon Tham's controversial regurgitation performance the following year (1/1/1994) was a cartoon by Hou Soon Ming that appeared in *The New Paper* on 12 January 1993, showing Leow drinking his urine on the stage while a member of the audience reacts by vomiting. The vomiting is conflated here with the urine ingestion, thereby accurately (if inadvertently) associating embodied actions to the field of 'performance art'. The indeterminate boundary between performance and spectatorship,

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32 See Ch VII. "Brother Cane in the Garden".
and between performance art and the private bodily behaviours of daily life, are caught in this cartoon. Public representations, like this cartoon, became part of the unconscious public background for Tham's performance 12 months later, and helped form the lineage of public memory which may have affected public or official response, whether or not they were explicitly recalled.

Singapore Press Holdings, through its various vehicles over the succeeding year repeatedly regurgitated Leow's act for re-ingestion by the Singapore public as mass spectacle. *The New Paper*, an afternoon tabloid, led the barrage, closely followed by the Chinese language press (Ang, 9/2/93; Rajaram, 12/1/93). More thoughtful responses were solicited a few weeks later from journalists by *The Straits Times* (Chua, 25/1/93; T. Sasitharan, 25/1/93). Leow suggested that the press need for sensational stories created the demand for performance art-quas-transgressive form. Through these stories, the press determined the attributes of performance art in the public mind, thereby, stimulating their appetite for ever more sensational exposes on the subject (Langenbach, 2001 (2): 39-40).

*Coffee Talk*, as a total event, presents a symbiosis between state organs and civil society initiatives (albeit not one with power parity). The artists court the press for publicity and thereby provide press copy that in turn generates readership. Journalists frame the work of the artists to emphasise the most sensational aspects of their work, thereby satisfying the appetite for scandal among that readership. Each scandal becomes the background for future scandals and produces the expectation of continuous transgression in the eye of the public and, significantly, the government.

The trope upon which all of this swings is that of the scene and the obscene; that which is made visual and those bodily processes that are deemed not fit for visuality or transgress the normal bounds of public visuality. The very characteristic of transgressive behaviour that sells papers brings public awareness to the arts, and both fame and infamy to the artists. Often this is explicitly sought. For example, in a side box entitled, "How far will artists go to grab attention?", Rajaram quotes Leow saying, with intentional irony: "I am an artist, I have to find new ways of getting the attention of people. I don't know what's next. It all depends on what I'm doing and the kind of message I want to send out. Who knows, I may yet eat my own faeces" (Rajaram, 12/1/1993:7). Such ironical intimations of future transgressions —proclaimed in articles that flatten the ironical subtext— serve to
enhance the position of those journalists who get the sensational inside story, and the artists whose story it is (Langenbach, 2001(2)). The stories allow for the already manufactured public disturbances that are essential for the spectacle of official reprobation and the reiteration of paternal discipline by the government, anxious to demonstrate its continued surveillance and prophylactic deterrence. All of these acts, then, are public phenomena that can be constativily described as such, and they are performative gestures that produce the spectacle production described.

Articles issued from the Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil press that variously framed the urine drinking in terms of visceral revulsion, generational or cultural indignation, mixed with medical speculation about the arguable health benefits of drinking one’s own urine — a practice in certain branches of Ayurvedic and Daoist medicine. But, most striking, in view of the ‘crackdown’ on performance art and Forum Theatre that followed in 1994, was the charge in another Singapore Press Holdings article by Chua Mui Hoong, (“Hard to swallow”) on 25 January, 1993, that Coffee Talk was "unacceptable and likely to cause offence to most ordinary citizens" and should perhaps be censored. This was followed a few days later by another article in The New Paper (9 February, 1993) entitled “Revolting,” (Dave Ang, 9/2/1993), neatly conflating themes of visceral disgust and generational rebellion, a theme which would be carried forward into the interpretation of performance art works the following year. Judging from the ripples caused by Leow’s performance in 1993, it would seem that the urine he drank was not his own, but that of the nation itself; and the effect it had on the body-politic was not to invigorate or repair, but to purge. Following the next New Year event at 5th Passage, an editorial in the Malay paper, Berita Harian proclaimed:

Singaporeans have no reason to involve in futile debate over what is art in order to justify the unbecoming acts of certain performers from the Fifth Passage artists and the Artists Village. This was not their first time. To usher in 1993, one of them urinated and drank his own urine. If the performers feel that Singapore is too dry and unfriendly towards their actions please find other venues.

Being a largely Asian society, Singapore must remain Asian. There are limits to an individual's freedom. What happened to the West is a grim reminder to us. We have to set rules and draw the lines. Let art flourish, but in healthy and positive ways (Berita Harian Editorial, January 6, 1994, translated
This text is infused with then ubiquitous Asian Values discourse, in which a ‘decadent West’ is presented as a foil to rally local indignation against those local cultural producers and products that the ruling party linked press considered threatening. Curiously, the artists, Leow, Ng and Tham were pictured as 'less Asian' than those anonymous subjects rounded up under the editorial ‘we’, and were invited to emigrate, presumably for their lack of Asian essence. The reference to Leow's lack of 'Asian-ness' was a prelude to the declaration by the Trimurti artists Goh Ee Choo and Chandrasekaran four years later that their methodology and works were more Asian than those of Tang Da Wu, and by association, the Artists Village group, of which Vincent Leow was an important member.

So, overnight, this performance became a news icon, only to be eclipsed by the infamy of another performance art work, Brother Cane by Josef Ng, precisely 365 days later, on New Year night, 1993-4, also at the 5th Passage gallery. Ng’s performance restored three of the by then heraldic signifiers from Leow’s Coffee Talk:

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33 It is difficult to ignore the stylistic and thematic similarity between this editorial and statements made by George Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts in 1994 and 1995, which may lead to speculation about its authorship. The similarity could also be interpreted as reflective of the distribution of an official discourse into civil society discourses. Yeo stated:

We do not want artistic licence to degenerate into pornography. Of course, there is a fine line to be drawn. It's not easy to draw that line, and it requires courage to draw it well. [...]. Civilization is maintained by lines being drawn (ASIAWEEK, 7 July, 1995:42, emphasis added.).

34 None of the artists of Trimurti appear to have made press comments specifically on either Leow's performance at 5th Passage on New Year's 1993, or those by Ng and Tham at 5th Passage a year later. They expressed neither public support for, nor opposition to, those performances. However, in his capacity as Senior Lecturer at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Goh Ee Choo apparently indicated to Koh Buck Song that the event at 5th Passage caused the Academy administration to not allow student, Eve Tan, a member of Artists Village, to present a performance at the graduation exhibition. He volunteered that the students at the Academy "are specifically taught that art must not speak out on race and religion, or express anti-government views" — a regimen that synchronised the private art college (and himself as lecturer and spokesperson for the institution) with government doctrine (Koh Buck Song 23/2/94).

35 The prelude was another article by Dave Ang —(the author of "Revolting" (Ang 9/2/93)— in the SPH tabloid, The New Paper on 23 December 1993: Weeklong art bash at Parkway. The article was accompanied by a photograph that showed Leow drinking his urine, with the caption:

Remember him? Vincent Leow [...] drank his urine from a cup when he performed at the 5th Passage art gallery at Parkway Parade last year. Along with other artists, he will be performing at the same festival this year-end (Ang, 23/12/1993).
• Turning one’s back to the audience to hide an “obscene” act
• The cutting of body hair
• Sending a message to government officials

By becoming news icons, *Coffee Talk* and *Brother Cane* (and performance art as an art form) were stigmatized as potentially subversive to the overall development of the nation. Performance artists found themselves positioned in the press as a Western-influenced retrograde force against the project of mounting 'Asian' conventions of culture, economy, governance, values and human rights on the world stage (Tan & Sridharan 1999; Perttierra 1999). To the civil service bureaucrats, nervously watching from their offices through the eyes and ears of the press, Ng's performance at a second annual event at 5th Passage must have taken on the profile of a perennial sub-cultural revolt, and Leow’s performance was henceforth necklaced with the infamy of having fathered a degenerate brood.

As discussed in Chapter III, the fundamental question of performance art revolves around the manner that the legitimacy of an action or performance is measured. Cultural contentions surrounding the formation of state ideology and social engineering also erupt through the metadiscourse of daily life that performance art provides. Leow's performance raised these issues of legitimacy embedded in performance art practice, and it set the stage for the events the following year (same time, same place), when the still-living body of socially engaged and critical performance that had been deposited in a shallow grave after the earlier arrests of theatre practitioners in the 1976 and 1987, would rise up again, only to be put down again. As will be seen, this was accomplished at a substantial cost to the Goh government's own performative legitimacy. How this crisis was constructed and played out is the subject of the final two chapters.
CHAPTER VII.

BROTHER CANE:
The Exception That Articulates The Norm

"I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all others," Marco answered. "It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions" (Calvino, 1978:69).

The previous chapter described Vincent Leow's performance over New Year's 1992-1993 as part of the Body Fields event at 5th Passage Gallery. This chapter carries that narrative forward precisely one year to the Artists' General Assembly (AGA) at the 5th Passage from 26 December 1993 through 1 January 1994. Building on Calvino's apocryphal evocation of the exceptional city above, during the following year the abnorm articulated the norm in Singapore. An ‘ab-normal’ work of performance art became the focal point for a concentration of official discourses and ideologies that were meant to reiterate the norm. The Artists' General Assembly (1993-4) thereby provided the site for a collision of contending notions of performance that revealed the 'state of the state' in Singapore. Section 1 sets the scene for the AGA by providing a general picture of the cultural-political context; Section 2 relates those cultural events immediately preceding the AGA that elicited an outcropping of State Fatherhood ideology; Section 3 presents a reading of the performance methodology of Josef Ng; and Section 4 relates the events of the AGA, including Brother Cane.

1: OFFICIAL CULTURE: CONSTRUCTING THE NORM

During the 42 year period under the rule of the PAP, most artists and theatre groups have focused on formalist concerns, identitarian issues, globalisation, and sexuality, thereby avoiding government taboos concerning references to official policy, political commentary, 'race', and religion. The requirements of nation building became the rationale for government intervention into unions, civil society initiatives, private and family enterprises, private and public education, the press, and all aspects of cultural production
from art to theatre to film. As proclaimed in the 1961 *State of Singapore Annual Report*, published by the government in 1963, the programme of the day was unity and the production of the national panegyric:

The cultural policy of the government is based on the belief that for successful nation-building in a multiracial society, it is necessary to evolve a common way of life, a common acceptance of similar ideas and values and norms of social conduct, a common system of emotional response and above all a common idiom of artistic expression reflecting and idealizing these systems. (*State of Singapore Annual Report 1961*, 1963:221, Government Printing Office, cited in Lim Cheng Tju, 1997:134, emphasis added.)

Culture was seen to have a homogenising and prophylactic imperative: "a means of defending oneself from unwanted outside influences and values [...]" (Birch, D. 1998:31), and was folded into the larger development programme. Artistic movements (and their motivating ideologies or identitarian themes) that were seen by the PAP to be antagonistic to their developmental plans and hegemony were discouraged and suppressed. From the early 1960s, the PAP saw the project of nation-building as synonymous with one-party dominance of the government and the elimination of competition.

Political cartooning disappeared from the press in 1961 along with the Social Realist woodblock print and painting tradition. These mid-century works — strongly influenced by Mao's Yan'an talks in 1942, in which he propounded an art that should reflect the lives and aspirations of the 'people (rural peasants and labourers) in line with Social Realist and Socialist Realist aesthetics — reflected the local nation-building efforts of the 1950s and 1960s in Singapore. The government's Socialist Realist inflected phraseology cited above: "a common idiom of artistic expression reflecting and idealizing these systems", implies the 'idealizing' of administrative state institutions and systems, as much as nation-building in a more egalitarian sense.

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1 Eight years earlier than the *State of Singapore Annual Report*, the forward to the catalogue of the Chinese High School Graduates of 1953, exemplifies early Social Realist polemics of the left, voicing the students' commitment to the political struggle for independence and nation building. It states unequivocally, "We are prepared to commit all our efforts to help Malaya gain her independence and her process of nation building" (Hsü 1999:101). A comparison of the tone of the two documents reveals the manner that the nation-building exhortations of the left by 1961 was already being appropriated and tamed by the PAP government in its efforts to build national institutions during the period of self-government under the British. The powerful impetus of Social Realist gestures were gradually institutionalised as an official Socialist Realist aesthetics.
Any art that realistically reflected nation-building alone was in fact fraught with danger. The very effort to accurately reflect the lives and struggles of the people to "evolve a common way of life, a common acceptance of similar (national) ideas and values and norms of social conduct", forced intellectuals and artists to tread the same ideological turf as the politicians. Events would demonstrate that the PAP government consistently interpreted such co-travelers to be a threat to their hegemony. This perceived threat led to the three primary main waves of artistic suppression, discussed in Chapter VI: the 1976 clampdown on Mandarin theatre, the Woodblock Print movement and literature, suppression of the following generation of activist English-language theatre in 1987, and of English-language participatory performance forms (Forum Theatre and performance art) in 1994.

Performance art was accepted and practiced by a number of Singapore's younger progressive artists, beginning in 1987-1988, immediately following the suppression of politicised English-language theatre (Third Stage) as part of the so-called "Marxist Conspiracy". While the dramatists associated with Third Stage openly positioned their practice on the political left, the artists who presented performance art work were far less politically engaged. Nevertheless, as events would demonstrate, the Singapore government linked any form of participatory performances to the tradition of politically conscientised theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. A comparison of government releases from 1987 and 1994 shows that the government viewed the two events through the same lens. In 1987, the Ministry of Home Affairs release had identified the Third Stage as part of:

a Marxist conspiracy to subvert the existing social and political system in Singapore through communist united front tactics to establish a communist state [...] Their subversive activities are prejudicial to the security of Singapore and, if left unchecked, would lead to unmanageable political instability and chaos (Seow, 1994:69, emphasis added.).

On 21 January 1994, The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Information and the Arts issued a joint statement to the public stating they were:

concerned that new art forms, such as "performance art" and "forum theatre" which have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation pose dangers to public

2 See description of these events in Chapter VI.
order, security and decency, and much greater difficulty to the licensing authority. The performances may be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues, or to propagate the beliefs and messages of deviant social or religious groups, or as a means of subversion (Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Information and the Arts, 21 January, 1994, published in The Straits Times, 22.1.94, emphasis added.).

The word, 'subversion', shows up in both texts, but while the performances in 1987 were seen to be actively subversive in intent, those in 1994 were expressions of a form that, less explicitly, "may be exploited [for the purpose of] subversion". The tonal shift in the rhetoric probably reflected the reduction in the overtly violent use of the state's disciplinary instruments under the second generation Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong. The other hinge between the theatre performances of 1987 and theatre in 1993 was a complex of techniques under the name, 'Forum Theatre', developed by Augusto Boal and described in his widely disseminated second book, Games for Actors and Non Actors (1992). The book detailed the practices developed at his Sao Paulo Arena Theater out of the theories presented in his earlier Theater of the Oppressed, (1985). These were underpinned by Paulo Freire's pedagogical theories (Freire 1972 (1968)).

When Lee Kuan Yew moved upstairs to take the position of Senior Minister in the Cabinet, allowing Goh Chok Tong to take over as Prime Minister in 1990, there was a general expectation of a thaw in government policies toward the arts and culture. The period of nation building was seen to be completed and an era of increased regionalisation of the economy had ensued. Public funding increased, as the government spoke of the need to consolidate national culture and educate the people into cosmopolitan citizenship for Singapore to become a "world class city". The Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) in 1997 presented Singapore as an "Asian Renaissance City", followed by the

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3 Following The Third Stage detentions, theatre productions were placed under the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit, requiring the prior submission of the script, names of organizers, promoters and actors, in order to obtain a license (Seow, 1994:77-79). The terms of the license restricts many aspects of the performance, most especially, mixing and participation between performers and audience. The official "Licensing Conditions For Drama Performances/Concerts (with effect from 1 July 1995)" state:

#3 Performers should not step down from the stage. They should not mingle with the audience in any way during their performance or while dressed in costumes.
#4 No audience should be invited onto the stage.

4 Forum Theatre is discussed in Chapter VIII.

The creation of a cultured society had been included as an important component of government rhetoric in 1985 when it announced its intention to transform Singapore into a "culturally vibrant society by 1999". A Report on the Performing Arts was published by the government in November 1988, which has set the tone for development since.

> With a relatively small population, strategizing for a potentially vibrant performing arts environment in Singapore is no different from the strategies successfully applied to Singapore's high-tech economic activities. In many respects, performing arts in Singapore [...] apart from being an enrichment experience for the people, will form an integral part of the Singapore lifestyle no different from its greenness and cleanliness which together will affirm its position as a center of excellence and an attractive place in which to invest (Singapore Government "Report on the Performing Arts" in Peterson, 2001:17).

The repeated phrase, "no different from" in this passage clarifies this positioning of the arts as one of many government strategies to bring in investments and investors. The bracketing of the arts as part of a developmental project to be instrumentally planned and produced top-down led to a syllogism underlying the government's position, identified by William Peterson:

> Developed countries have a vibrant arts scene. We are a developed country. Therefore, we must have a vibrant arts scene (Peterson, 2001:19).

The government sponsored a modicum of 'safe art' at home, while massively showcasing and marketing the artistic creativity of other nations (The Straits Times, 22/1/94). There arose the spectre of Singapore as an emerging foreign art 'commodities exchange' sans local production. The government's conundrum was that artistic communities —and performing artists in particular— are often composed of educated, information-rich middle class, travel-intensive intellectuals, who come into contact with the diverse cultural concepts of their age, many of them implicitly at odds with PAP ideology.

The PAP government appeared to take as a 'given' that the ultimate justification for the production of cultural artifacts in a capitalist system is their commodification and exchange value. They therefore could find no particular benefit to the nation of indigenous
and local-based 'avant-garde' production that would explicitly question and subvert prevailing market trends. Strikingly, even as of this writing in 2003, the government has still not acknowledged that the performing arts (including performance art) could provide alternative models of management in line with 'Performance Management' and 'High Performance Management' theories of the 1970s-1990s. Basically, the PAP government still views the performing arts as ‘circuses for the people’, leaving the Cabinet to continue with the serious work of engineering the future unhindered. It has apparently still not fully registered with the PAP that progressive art production is not antithetical to, but is fundamentally aligned with, the overall teleology of modernist bourgeois developmentalism.

The Artists' General Assembly, held at the end of 1993, provided a 'liminoid' event which proceeded from rapture/rupture - crisis – arbitration - sacrifice, opening a suddenly revealed portal into the nation's cultural economy. Having invested so much of its power into the stable and consistent supply of labour, resource management, and the seamless continuity of controlled cultural representations, the Singapore government responds with extreme prejudice toward disruptions of or interventions into official state spectacle. To strike at spectacle is to strike at the status quo of hegemonic relations through its signs of official pleasure.

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5 Similar sentiments were expressed in a letter signed by artists and directed to Forum page of The Straits Times, concerning the new Censorship Guidelines being drawn up by the Remaking Singapore Committee and the Censorship Review Committee in July 2003: "Let us not forget that art is an ultimate form of "remaking". The Remaking Singapore Committee and the Censorship Review Committee should not forget that, fundamentally, their aspirations are not so different from ours" (Lee Weng Choy 16/7/03, email correspondence.).

6 Zizek's emphasis on the place of desire and enjoyment in socials crisis ("The hatred of the Other is the hatred of our own excess of enjoyment") offers an important corrective to Turner's stages of social "breach - crisis – redress/sacrifice - integration/disintegration" (Turner 1982:69-71; 1974, 1986). The Other's desire and excessive enjoyment threatens existing hegemonic relations because it prefigures the possibility of disruption in proportionate and ratio-nal standards and representations: that is in the ordered spectacle of the hegemonic state. Spectacle is the site of pomp and pleasurable self-consumption, where pleasure is experienced as the 'real' (the ritual or mythic real), and is generalised as the pleasure of the nation that reads its own laudatory monologue (Debord 1983:24) — what Zizek calls 'the national thing' (Zizek 1993:203ff.). Zizek's argument represents an application of Marx's contested theory concerning the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1962:244) to the field of ethnic and cultural production. Marx's economic crisis of surplus production is translated by Zizek into a cultural eruption of 'excessive enjoyment'. So, the use of 'rapture' here refers to inordinate and concentrated (rapt) attention, inflected by scopophilic desire and pleasure, that is doubled as pleasure and trauma. 'Rapture/rupture' signifies the presence of desire in the intentional engineering of crises by the government on the one hand, and of the critical engagement in the social and political sphere by cultural workers on the other.
At the same time, in its media representation of a unified nation in perpetual crisis, the Singapore state has enthusiastically scoped-out and identified unacceptable and unofficial outcroppings of consumption and enjoyment—including the desire to *not* work hard or excel, or the of investing leisure time with the arts and non-reproductive expressions of sexuality—as excesses of cultural capital that, applying Marx's model, must be periodically withdrawn from the system of production and exchange until equilibrium is restored.

The *Artists' General Assembly* (AGA) —its ironic and appropriately 'pompous' name so resonant of official Leninist-Stalinist socialist state aesthetics conventions and assemblies—lived up to its billing. It allowed the symbological and ritual dimensions of state power\(^7\) to be revealed, before the rapt attention of the participants and the public. However, the tragedy of the event was that no one seemed to know what to do with the cultural rapture/rupture that presented itself—neither the artists nor the government—and the transformative, integrative potential of the event simply evaporated over the succeeding months. Scars were left, lives were changed, some damaged. The possibility of a 'liminoidal' renewal appeared for a brief moment in time as a fleeting manifestation of a new developmental ethos. It was then eclipsed, and that, as they say, was that.

### 2. AGA PRELUDE: STATE FATHERHOOD

In November 1993, a month prior to the AGA at 5th Passage, in the capacity of video curator, this writer selected over 30 videotapes from 13 countries for screening. One was *Tongues Untied*, (1989) by the late poet, filmmaker, and University of California journalism professor, Marlon T. Riggs. *Tongues Untied* pointed to the central contribution of black-gay men in the overall struggles for both African-American\(^8\) and gay culture in

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\(^7\) For other analyses of the "symbolic dimensions of state power", see Geertz's study of the Balinese 19\(^{th}\) theatre state, "Negara" (Geertz 1980), and Marin's analysis of the cultural politics at the court of Louis XIV (Marin 1985, 1988).

\(^8\) For two hundred years in the United States, the African-American —doubling as subject and subjunctive— was assigned the role of colonial subject within, controlled through the application of disciplining discourses. Although these assignations could no longer be so easily maintained in post-World War II America, they
the United States. The film was one of thirty selected from thirteen countries for screening at the AGA, because its advancement of the documentary genre and its treatment of sexual and racial alterity.

In the film, Riggs presented himself, in his own words, as “black, gay, gifted and proud”. The uncanny word here was “gifted” (perhaps borrowed from a Nina Simone song). It ran counter to over three hundred years of the stereotyping of the ‘Negro’ in white western discourse, making this film-manifesto so unequivocally powerful in the United States.

The Board of Film Censors—ironically the only people to publicly view the film in Singapore—banned the film for its "Questionable theme of homosexuality. Excessive sequences/dialogue promoting homosexual lifestyle" (Censor's notes, c. 2/12/1993). The film was banned in accordance with two laws: the obscenity law covering material with a "tendency […] to deprave and corrupt […]"(Cheong 1994:106), for its depiction of male nudity and love-making; secondly, in accordance with Sections 377 and 377A of the Singapore Penal Code, it was banned for "promoting (of a) homosexual lifestyle".

remained as traces in the rhetorical struggles over civil rights, welfare, immigration and the local white resistance to the equal application and enforcement of constitutional rights.

9 The tape was in fact highly controversial in the United States, where many local public broadcasting stations banned it for its “glorification of the deviant” (Berger 1990).

10 In 2001 the former Board of Film Censors was renamed the Films and Publications Department of the Ministry of Information and the Arts.

11 Section 377 of the Penal Code was enacted as part of the Straits Settlement Penal Code by Ordinance No. 4 of 1871, derived from the Indian Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860) and came into force in September 1872.

Section 377A of the Penal Code was introduced into [the] Penal Code s7 of the Penal Code (Amendment) Ordinance 1938 (No 12 of 1938) and came into effect on 8 July 1938. It was based on s11 of the UK Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 (48 & 49 Vict c 69), now s13 of the UK Sexual Offences Act 1956. It reads:

377. Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animals, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation. Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offense described in this section.

377A. Any male person who, in public or private, commits or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years. (Leong, 1997)
Such laws and regulations are juridical performatives. First, they have the function of "enforcing the morals of the general public" and second, they must be seen to be doing so. The judiciary itself has a strong interest in underscoring its own legitimacy and being seen to be a peoples' court; a need that became more acute following Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's attacks on the Jury System (1959 & 1969), on the right to Appeal to the Judicial committee of the Privy Council (21/4/1989), on the Law Society (1986) (Seow 1994:58), and the continued use of the courts to prosecute perceived political enemies of the ruling party\textsuperscript{12}. By its own admission, the Judiciary can only carry out its duties if it is seen to be acting on behalf of the mores of the culture as a whole, rather than a single class fragment, or regime of power. In PP v Ng Huat, the High Court maintained:

> What amounts to a grossly indecent act must depend on whether in the circumstances and the customs and morals of our times, it would be considered grossly indecent by any right-thinking member of the public [...]. The court does not sit to impose its own moral standards or precepts, but to enforce the morals of the general public (Leong, 1997, emphasis added.).

The need for convincing appearances aside, this ruling is a red herring, deploying empty legalistic signifiers, such as "right-thinking member of the public and the morals of the general public", which ostensibly denote statistically reproducible demographic entities\textsuperscript{13} to produce an appearance of a homogeneous demography, and of a judicial system that reflects that constructed demographic profile.

\textsuperscript{12} The most recent example was the imposition of a fine of exactly $2000 on 21 February 2003 against the Vice Chairman of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), Ghandi Ambalam for "staging a rally without a permit" on Worker's Day, 1 May 2002, outside the presidential palace. The court fined fellow SDP official, Chee Soon Juan $4000 for the same offence. The amounts are significant, as any fine $2000 or above eliminates the possibility of running for public office under Singapore law. The Chief Justice Yong Pung How rejected the appeal by Ambalam. As of this writing, after 38 years of independence, two of the eighty-four seats in Parliament are held by opposition parties (Associated Press, 27/2/03).

\textsuperscript{13} The logical problem with these denotations are that any "right-thinking member of the public" would presumably have to be recognized by other right-thinking members of the public, who would have to be selected by others, and so forth, producing an infinite regression of self-determined and self-determining entities of members of the same set. Another problem arises with the category, morals of the general public, which logically would have to be inclusive of a cross-section of the citizenry, and would very likely include the morals of some with criminal inclinations, thereby rendering the category nonsensical, as it would include contradictory sets of morals.
RETYING TONGUES

The Board of Film Censors' complete erasure of Tongues Untied (ironically leaving only the copyright attribution at the end), and the heavy cutting of another American film, She Must Be Seeing Things, portraying a lesbian relationship between a white and black woman, demonstrated vigilant protection of local Asian Family Values against the encroachment of a political manifesto for non-procreative, African-American female and 'feminised' sexual pleasure. In 1993, the government was promoting 'Asian values' ideology with the nuclear family as a core component (Chua 1995, Clammer 1993, Wee 1999). The African-American body, this time by virtue of its association with gay culture, found itself yet again in the position of the abject, but this time in a society where citizens of African descent were largely absent. During the 1990s, black culture in Singapore was largely received as a foreign, primarily American, British or African cultural trope, via music and television, through state representations of various debates concerning I.Q. and cross-national scholastic comparisons in the press, or through the presence of black American sailors on shore-leave, cruising the night spots and discos on a Saturday night. 'Gay'\textsuperscript{14} and Lesbian culture in Singapore in the 1990s was far more localised, with increased, if discreet, visibility in civil society, despite punitive laws and regulations (Lim 1994).

Officially, however, homosexuality was not a cultural manifestation of the views or practices of "right-thinking member[s] of the public and the morals of the general public". It remained a matter for the police, and indeed, at least one of the monthly meetings at the Substation of the local male gay society ("People Like Us" aka "PLU") was infiltrated and surveilled by a member of the police in 1994\textsuperscript{15}. Russell Heng and Alex Au, members of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} The word gay, originally a product of specific cultural homosexual lifestyles and social discourses from Europe and the United States in the 1980s, stood for quite diverse cultural manifestations in the 1990s. It is widely accepted and used in Singapore among the population of homosexual persons (accepted by some but perhaps not a majority of Lesbians), as well as by members of the general public, and stands as a trope of the globalisation of culture-specific behaviours and identity signifiers.

\textsuperscript{15} PLU member, Russell Heng commented later on their assessment at the time of the infiltration and the infiltrator:
\begin{itemize}
  \item a) The guy is a real police doing his job. His brief is NOT to tell PLU to stop but to signal to PLU that we were being watched. Meaning the police could live with what we were doing so long as PLU stayed the way it was.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
the PLU Management Committee, met with the man sometime after. They were left with the impression that the government did not necessarily want PLU to stop its present activities, but wanted them to know they were being watched. Gay men who had sex outside their homes were subjected to periodic entrapment and rounded up at bars in spectaculars of national values.

BODY UNDER ASSAULT

The nation as a Puritan and fragile male “body” under imminent pathogenic feminine or homosexual attack is one of the PAP’s most enduring themes of State-Fatherhood (Heng and Devan 1992), continuing Raffles’ personification of societies as bodies requiring husbandry. For the PAP the body politic is beset by degenerative and polluting characteristics infecting the national bloodlines or inf(lecting national consciousness. As early as 1969, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew issued the apocalyptic warning that chaos and social infection were leaking in from the west:

In the interest of all, we cannot and will not allow this permissive, escapist, drug-taking, self-indulgent, promiscuous society (in America and Western Europe) to infect our young. Those who try to introduce these habits do so at their own peril, for we shall take immediate antiseptic measures to prevent and scotch any such infection or affectation. The

b) The guy is a real police doing this kind of job and, given his behaviour, probably a closet case. One of his colleagues played a prank on him by arranging for him to be sent on this assignment. He was miffed and a tad nervous about the whole episode.

c) The guy is a nut pretending to be a police (Heng, R. email correspondence 21/4/03).

16 Chan Heng Chee acknowledges the ‘Puritan’ quality in early PAP moral didacticism of the 1960s. She suggests that Puritanism per se is not a goal in itself but a component of a larger instrumentation of a developmentalist programme.

Puritanism is less the emphasis than is innovation and the obsession with survival. [...] The PAP sees a special constellation of behaviour as crucial to the attainment of the principal Singapore national and political goal which is the creation of a viable modern industrialized state, and to this end the party is determined to induce this behaviour in the island population (Chan 1971:52).

17 Jacques Ellul has pointed out the stigmatisation of communism by its association with the tropes of alcoholism and homosexuality in the literature of those ferreting out un-American activities during the McCarthy era in the United States (Ellul, op cit.: 107). Lee’s metaphors have an uncanny resemblance to those used by witnesses before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1953, documented in the film, Hollywood on Trial, (1976, produced by James Gutman and David Halpern, Jr., directed by David Halper Jr., Cinema Association). For example, the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover (whose own covert transvestism would fit within Lee’s frame of ‘affectation’) gave testimony that:
choice before us is constant vigilance or a complacent *slide to perdition* (Josey 1968, p.527, emphasis added.).

The equivalence of 'infection' and 'affectation' bridges biological and cultural traits, linking both to a language of apocalyptic morality ('perdition'). Chiasmically swinging between genetic degradation and moral perdition, the Singapore polity takes the stage as Everyman, innocent, vulnerable, assaulted by temptations and natural catastrophe, while the government is cast as the vigilant Doctor/Clergy, ready to excise the physical or moral affliction.

Constructing homosexuality as a sign of the global penetrating the local has allowed the government to present itself as 'gatekeeper' to the nation. In 1971, Christopher Hampton's play, *When Did You Last See My Mother?*, was banned by the Ministry of Home Affairs for its use of "gutter language to portray promiscuous and homosexual relationships". This stimulated government funding "to develop local culture as a defence" against outside influences (*The Straits Times* 22 March 1971; 17 November 1971, cited in Birch 1998:35). But it is not always from the outside that the contagion strikes in official narratives. S. Rajaratnam, then Senior Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, made the apocalyptic prognosis that long-dormant microbial agents from within the body of the state could possibly revive:

> Rajaratnam was concerned about the revival of sensitive issues, race, religion and language, which he compared to tuberculosis germs. “We must keep them under control,” he said. “If your constitution is weak, TB will take over and kill you” (Buruma 1988: 54).

The ubiquitous use of *germ* and *infection* metaphors by the government, largely without public objections from the intellectual community, indicated the absence of critical public discourse among intellectuals in the humanities and sciences. They had given up the intellectual ground to an ascendant ersatz biological determinism that reflected current hegemonic relations.

Communism in reality is not a political party. It is a way of life, an evil and malignant way of life. It reveals a condition akin to disease that spreads like an epidemic and like an epidemic a quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting this nation.

Such ideological tropes appear to have been globally distributed through international alliances during the Cold War period.
MICKEY AT THE HUB

While the image of Singapore as an intellectual center for new ideas and discourses in Southeast Asia had been largely erased by 1988, the PAP was assiduously promoting Singapore as a cultural and intellectual hub. The attempts to reestablish its former intellectual bona fides with one hand, while suppressing critical discourse with the other, has led to an inadvertent image of the government as a latter-day Ubu Roi, seemingly oblivious to the humour it generates at its own expense. For example, we have the extraordinary patois of sociology, genetics, molecular biology and recuperated Eisenhower-era American pop-culture to produce the icon of Mickey Mouse as the PAP government's model of the ideal genetic mix for the citizenry. At the opening of the twenty-four hour Disney Channel Satellite Broadcast Centre in Singapore Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo stated:

Whether human society at the molecular level reflects the wholesomeness of Mickey Mouse or the cynicism of Beavis and Butthead is as decisive as the genetic coding of an organism. -Brigadier-General George Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts, (The Straits Times, 27/3/95)

Yeo's embrace of Mickey Mouse culture as "wholesome" America was, on the one hand, a 'flatterer's discourse' (Marin 1988:1988:94) directed at the United States, and on the other, in line with the local official "values of good vanquishing evil, of human friendship, of hope, of the prospect of a better tomorrow" (The Straits Times, 27/3/95). The primary PAP ideologue of his generation, Yeo presents himself—perhaps strategically—as one of the most indoctrinated of citizens. But this did not deter the state press from conferring upon him the title of Singapore's “Renaissance Man” in 1999 (George, C. 25/121999).

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18 Yeo's panegyric for Disney culture led to an equally extraordinary SPH editorial, "Staying lily pure in mud" which reiterated and applied Yeo's comments to the concern with "flies coming in the open windows of the internet and the need to develop a better fly-swatter" (The Straits Times 4/4/95). Continuous media attention to such issues presents the illusion of public intellectual discourse in the form of an in-house soliloquy.

19 See the discussion of Louis Marin's notion of the "discourse of the flatterer" in Chapter VIII.

20 The conferring of the title by the press, which is regulated by Yeo's Ministry, amounted to a self-promotion ritual, in which the PAP ourobically conferred an emblematic entitlement on one of their own. Yeo himself had been the primary proponent of Singapore as an "Asian Renaissance City" through the mid to late 1990s, as, for example, in an ASIAWEEK interview, entitled, “Developing the Arts: How Asia Can Promote the Coming Renaissance” (7/7/95:42-43). Apparently the PAP government concluded that the most appropriate personification of the 'coming' Singaporean renaissance was the person who most consistently iterated the trope.
ELECTRONIC CONTAGION

In 1996, the germ metaphor was again revived to warn of the negative influence of the internet on Singapore society when the government broadened the authority of the Singapore Broadcasting Authority "aimed at safeguarding public morals, political stability and religious harmony" (The Straits Times, 6/3/96), not only in broadcast media but on the World Wide Web as well. Information infections, in the form of HIV-like assaults to the nation's immune system via the net in the 1980s and 1990s, replaced the threat of drugs, long hair and wild clothes (the 'Trojan horses' of the 1960s and 1970s) with images of Singapore as a permeable Puritan body under incessant penetrative digital assault.

We must not delude ourselves into thinking that while we can keep out the mud we can make Singapore a germ-free environment. Singapore cannot be a germ-free environment. What we need is to build up our immune system and have occasional inoculations (The Straits Times, 1994 (27 July): 26, emphasis added.).

The Straits Times reported Yeo again maintaining that:

Every society creates immune systems to defend its own key organs and we must have the immune system in Singapore (sic). Otherwise, by slow increments, we allow these organs to be infected and degraded. And that is not good for us, it is not good for the health of the whole society (The Straits Times, 1994(27 July):3, emphasis added.).

This essentialised narrative of epidemiological assault rationalises the application of administrative force against performances and information that the PAP government deem to be threats to the status quo. It provides a spectacle of first seeing (as described by William Burroughs), in which a collective spectacle of state desire is first disseminated as an evocation of collective paranoia through mass media, and is then ostensibly controlled through the public application of deterrent prophylactic policies. It offers an image of the state enwrapped in a discourse of a repeated constitutive moment of crisis, allowing for continuous vigilance and management by the government of civil society initiatives.

Once 'pollution' becomes the frame through which civil society is interpreted, the potential for democratic governance is replaced by a paranoid chiasmus between fears of unstable pluralism and fears of "material transmogrification — growth, alteration, difference, the transformations wrought by an undislosed, and a never-certain future" (Heng and Devan, 1992: 350). State spectacles of discipline and deterrence become
increasingly focused on the promulgation of reproductive norms (whether biological or semantic), and the control and suppression of alternative sexualities and pleasures (or of their representations), in line with State-Fatherhood ideology. In the late 1980s, for example, efforts to control homosexuality and positive representations of homosexual lifestyles were stepped up. Bugis street and its nightspot, the "Boom-Boom Room", famous for its transsexuals, transvestites and female-impersonators was closed and renovated. A more sanitised version later reopened, complete with video surveillance and the hallucination of females impersonating female-impersonators (Koolhaas 1995:1015). Periodic raids were carried out in gay nightclubs and at cruising spots, but it was a losing battle. Singapore was gradually gaining an international reputation as a very gay and cruisey, but 'closeted' city under the rule of a decidedly homophobic administration. The polyvalence of sexual plurality gradually gained ground over the monovalent desires of the government — but not without sacrifice.

One of several such sacrifices was on 23 November 1993, when The Straits Times announced that twelve men had been arrested for alleged sexual offenses during the course of a weeklong sting operation at the Tanjong Rhu beach park. The twelve men were charged with "outraging modesty, using criminal force to molest, and acts of indecency" (The Straits Times 23/11/93). Their 'victims' were police officers on a sting operation who were reportedly not averse to being approached and touched in the line of duty, if not actually 'keen', as a defendant described the behaviour of one officer. The twelve men had their names and professions listed in the press. The six who plead guilty to the charges were sentenced to two to six months in prison and three strokes of the cane. Those who claimed trial were later found guilty but were not caned. The twelve transgressors of the codes of state fatherhood were disciplined and corrected.

21 Sometimes the PAP forces us to question our most basic assumptions. Are the people that imagine such displacements puritan or perverse?

22 The Singapore government has remained in 'double-bind' mode, even as they attempt to liberalise. In an interview in the 7 July 2003 issue of Time (recorded in February), Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong revealed two things. First, that previously the government actually had a defined 'policy' of not employing gay people in the civil service, and second, that they had decided to lift that policy, but on the condition that gay people disclose their sexual orientation, so they cannot be 'blackmailed'. Goh warned, however, that the laws criminalizing homosexual activities would remain, due to the "conservatism" of the average citizen (Arnold, W. 2003; Nirmala, M. 2003). Homosexuality was shifted from hide in order to be employable in the civil service, to disclose to be employable. Without an ounce of irony, gay people were advised to admit to their criminal tendencies in order to be acceptable to their government employers.
CHAPTER VII. BROTHER CANE

Through this operation, the press exposure, and subsequent canings of six of the men, the fate of the city-state's homosexual community was tangentially tied to that of a small group of progressive artists and, most oddly, to another small group of highly privileged expatriate teens, who also received canings as punishment for their alleged vandalism.

On 18 September 1993, Cars were pelted with eggs and spray painted in the upper class, downtown area of Cairnhill and Belmont Road. The case resulted in the caning of two youths: American Michael Fay and Shiu Chi Ho from Hong Kong. This event and its legal aftermath proved significant for Singapore society, as it would focus a global spotlight on Singapore's use of caning as punishment for certain crimes. The official response to Josef Ng's performance—an eruption of internal criticism of the use of caning on the gay men—must be seen in the context of the government's attempts to demonstrated the nation's solidarity in the face of foreign criticism of the application of corporal punishment as a method of criminal deterrence in the Fay case (The Straits Times 23/4/94).

During a vandalism sting operation on 6 October 1993, Shiu Chi Ho, a Hong Kong student at the American School of Singapore was caught. Following a seven hour interrogation, he passed to the police the names of five other students, two underage Malaysians, one Australian: Damien Kirchhoff (16), and two Americans, Stephen Freehill (16) and Michael Fay (18) (Baratham, 1994:18-19).

The police held Fay in detention with no representation for two days, like Shiu before him. Both he and Shiu claimed that they were beaten until they gave a confession. The Ministry of Home Affairs denied these claims following their own internal investigation and a medical examination by a government doctor. Fay faced 53 charges of vandalism, under the Vandalism Act of 1966, under which three to eight strokes of the cane are mandatory for each count (Baratham, 1994:20). Judge Francis G. Remedios found Fay guilty of vandalism, mischief and keeping stolen items on 4 March 1994. Twenty other charges, most for vandalism, were taken into consideration in the judgment. Remedios sentenced Fay to four months in prison, a fine of $3500 and six strokes of the cane. The Chief Justice, Yong Pung How upheld the appealed sentence on 31 March. Upon an appeal for clemency by the American President, Bill Clinton—who termed the punishment 'excessive'—the Singapore President, Ong Teng Chong reduced the punishment to four strokes (Baratham, 1994:22). The Hong Kong youth, Shiu Chi Ho, arrested on 42 charges, received a much harsher sentence of eight months in prison and an extraordinary 12 strokes of the cane from the same judge. He began his sentence without appeal or reduction on 7 May 1994.
AGA PRELUDE — ENGINEERING THE AUDIENCE

Two months before the AGA, in a performance at the 2nd Sculpture Symposium, "WORK – IN - PROCESS", at the Nanyang School of Fine Arts (NAFA) Gallery, (23 October 1993), Josef Ng presented a performance art work, Don’t Go Swimming, It's Not Safe. This performance and Brother Cane, presented during the AGA two months later were unique in Singapore performance art for their capacity to externalize the artist's personal and sub-cultural tensions as a wider social rupture. Don’t Go Swimming, It's Not Safe placed the audience into an impossible bind by viscerally presenting the social problem of gay bashing. Ng managed, or, more properly, engineered audience response in such a manner as to bring out and demonstrate a co-dependency of victimization and oppression, and the audience members found themselves having to choose between two equally oppressive responses. The work did not address the state or the apparatus of laws, security and convention that marks homosexuals in Singapore as criminals; nor did it express a hope for a future state where homosexuals would not be harassed or persecuted. Rather, the performance metadiscursively demonstrated a set of 'dispositions' or a 'habitus' shared by those present, limiting what was seen to be 'possible' (Bourdieu 1993:64-72).

JOSEF NG: Don’t Go Swimming, It's Not Safe,
2nd Sculpture Symposium seminar, "WORK-IN-PROCESS",
Nanyang School of Fine Arts (NAFA) Gallery, (23 October 1993).

Ng is dressed in a loose completely black Tai Chi suit. He begins by walking amongst the audience who sit in a large semicircle on the floor. A concrete wall is at the open end of the semi-circle. Ng whispers the title of the performance to some members of the audience. The title is in the form of a warning: "Don’t go swimming, it's not safe" (an apparent reference to the well-known phenomenon of gay cruising at the Tanjung Rhu beach). Other audience members strain to hear and pass the 'secret' from one to another, producing a small information circuit, similar to the quiet passing of information about cruising spots, arrests, and other secrets through Singapore’s gay community. The act of sharing secret or private information serves to cohere the audience as participants in the transmission and as 'guests' in the larger community of homosexual males who would be interested in such information. Ng walks rhythmically around the performance space in overlapping circular patterns while pretending to play the violin.
Ng states, "I hate all this fucking gay bashing around the world. When will you fuckers leave us alone? I love to cruise. Just love to cruise." The statement, directed at "you fuckers" serves to split the audience into those who 'bash', those who are 'bashed', and those who fit neither category. Squatting, Ng intones: "I am guilty of acts due to public disturbance, but I am not shameful." (It is not clear whether Ng meant to say: "I am guilty of acts [leading to/seen as] public disturbance, but I am not shameful.") The refrain is repeated.

He hands the violin to members of the audience and asks them to hit him with it. When most refuse, or hit only lightly, he runs across the space and throws his body forcefully against the cement wall, dropping to the floor. He states, "I'll do again. I love to cruise. But if you don't hit me I'll do again." One member of the audience smashes the violin on the floor into many pieces. Ng collects the pieces and continues to present them to audience members, with the words, "If you don't hit me, I'll do again." He repeats this refrain, driving the audience to a critical state of tension. The ambiguity of his 'threat' sets up an aporia, as it is unclear whether "I'll do it again" refers to cruising or to throwing himself against the wall. The audience is forced into a dilemma of having to assault him or restrain him—a reflection of the manner that the government assaults and restrains gay people—in order to stop him from more violently assaulting his own body.

After eight minutes, two young men intervene by violently grabbing Ng—who has dropped, apparently exhausted, at the base of the wall on his hands and knees. They drag him to the side, making a demonstration of restraining him. A third, younger man (late teens, hereafter referred to as 'A'), clearly misreading their cues, runs onto the floor, pushes the two aside, powerfully slugs Ng with his fist, and then kicks him in the torso with great force. A heavy 'thud' resounds throughout the gallery. The audience gasps. The first two interveners push 'A' away from the prone Ng and confront him: "What are you doing? Why did you hit [kick] him?" 'A' responds, "He wanted…. (Inaudible)" It appears he also uses the words, "asked for it", although many people were talking and yelling at this time and the recorded speech is unclear.

Ng, looking disheveled and drained, maintains his kneeling position and continues to repeat, "If you don’t hit me, I'll do again," until performance artist, Shannon Tham, (a close colleague of Ng), uses one last large piece of the violin for a forceful hit. Ng says "Thank you." He gets to his feet and proceeds to distribute pieces of the violin to audience
members, ending the work with a final repetition of "I am guilty of acts due to public disturbance, but I am not shameful." The performance ends. Ng wipes tears from his eyes. Final angry words are exchanged between 'A' and the two other interveners, who, still angry at 'A', are at pains to disassociate their acts from his. Other members of the audience dampen this secondary disturbance (Langenbach video documentation, 23/10/93).

The audience's shocking awareness of unacknowledged violence in its midst was symmetrical to the performer's unacknowledged shame. By placing himself in the position of a passive but recalcitrant gay cruiser, Ng stimulated those in the audience with a desire to punish and eventually to 'bash a faggot'. Even attempts to ostensibly help Ng by restraining him became progressively more violent as the piece progressed. (Only one member of the audience attempted, unsuccessfully, to verbally 'negotiate' with Ng.24) The performance produced a social rupture, which led quickly to a violent crisis and remained unresolved. At no point during the work did Ng attempt to foreclose on the audience's responses to his acts, and at the end, the audience was left to grapple with a paradox and a crisis on its own terms, without the possibility of redress.

By abjuring shame while embracing guilt ("I am guilty, but I am not shameful"), apparently for both cruising and for self-flagellation (resulting from what may have been his —or translocated25— conflicts over a need to cruise), Ng set up a linguistic indeterminacy which led to the group's frustration and violence. For at least 'A', Ng was already infused with self-professed guilt and denial. So 'A' apparently felt that he was simply giving Ng what the performer had asked for, reflecting back on him, externally, the physical and emotional assault he was already visiting upon himself26. This reiterated the

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24 These attempts to negotiate represented a spontaneous emergence of Forum Theatre in the context of the performance, however, without the checks against violent physical interventions that Boal built into the form. A short description of the methodology of Forum Theatre can be found in Chapter VIII.

25 Ng's translocation was left ambiguous. We cannot be certain that Ng's "I" referred to himself, to his body and his body's pleasures, or to that 'body politic' of the abject community of homosexuals. It was never clear whether Ng was speaking of his own subjectivity/subjection or performing a mediation between the gay subculture and the dominant culture.

26 This assumption that Ng was 'asking for it' relates his performance to both a circuit of homophobic prejudice, and to other performances of linguistic 'queering'. Judith Butler (1995; 1997-1), Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick (1995) have focused on the performance of 'queering' in which language performatively interpellates the subject, subjecting at the moment it invests subjectivity. During the 1980s, the derogatory slur 'Queer!' (generally directed by heterosexuals toward homosexuals) was appropriated into identititarian speech
ouroboric circuit that already exists in the minds of straight queer-bashing men, in which the bashing or rape represents a pathological association of sexual abjection and masochism with either feminine sexuality itself or with what is presumed to be an inauthentic homosexual simulation of genuine femininity. In this reading, Ng stimulated in the audience as a whole a struggle for power between performer and audience that 'A' translated into his desire for sexual domination over the abject (performer) Ng. Ng demonstrated that interpellation already existed in the community in the form of gestural and verbal signs that most in the room could discern. He found a way of physically embodying those signs; thereby calling forth a correlative violence from the audience that was subsequently 'policed' by the audience. The community dealt with the rupture produced extemporaneously, and a more dangerous totalised crisis or 'sacrifice' (signified by continued or reproduced and proliferated violence) was averted.

By offering a realistic representation of the community habitus and leaving the audience to confront it, Ng forced into view a community self-awareness and sense of agency or praxis not apparent at the beginning of the performance. While this transformation of the social landscape was not teleological in the narrow sense of temporal goal orientation, in a larger sense it was an example of subtle social engineering, and it was clearly 'progressive' in that it was inflected by bourgeois liberal values and sought to progress the current state of the social contract. It was at odds with the government’s top-down developmentalist ethos, in its reliance on extemporaneous and participatory community building and problem-solving. As the performance sank back into the daily parole from whence it had emerged, the parole was subtly conscientised through a momentary recognition of its own potential for agency.

It should be noted, that, like many other performance artists, Ng's talent does not reside in his training, in the refinement of his gestures or movements, or even in the structuring of his works. Although he had taken Grotowskian performance workshops, his performances showed no particular technical refinement or skill. Nor did he demonstrate skill on the as a term of pride, through a ‘turning’ or resignifying of the speech act. The interpellative force of the word was turned, or we should say, inverted (in light of the Victorian deployment of invert for homosexual) and was deployed emblematically as a signifier of resistance. McKenzie suggests a dramatic method to Butler's own turning of the term, "Queer". He argues that queer theorists "refunctioned" the term, "in the Brechtian sense — to signify a new and affirmative set of meanings […]"(McKenzie, 2001:210).
The politics of identity that underpin Ng's performance are fraught with anxiety and tension, in part due to strongly interventionist policies of the state in the form of regulations and licensing, that guarantees the normalisation of heterosexuality, family and Asian values, while suppressing contentions concerning race, religion and politics. The result, intentional or not, is a de facto promulgation of an official aesthetics. The performance of licensing becomes an emblem of the 'space of the possible', to use Bourdieu's terminology, and many artists gradually come to unconsciously delimit their productivity, in order to fall within the parameters of that space. As for the Queers, so too

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27 The Public Entertainment License for such events presently reads as follows:
LICENSING CONDITIONS FOR DRAMA
PERFORMANCES/CONCERTS
(With Effect from 1 July 95)
1 Performers should not make any vulgar gestures, actions or remarks during their performance.
2 Performers should not be scantily attired.
3 Performers should not step down from the stage. They should not mingle with the audience in any way during their performance or while dressed in costumes.
4 No audience should be invited onto the stage.
5 Female impersonators should not be allowed to participate/perform.
6 Dancing by the audience is not allowed.
7 The organizer/licensee shall stop the show at the instruction of the police.
8 Only performers who are approved by the Licensing Officer are allowed.
9 Only songs that are approved by the Licensing Officers are allowed.
10 The organizer/licensee shall provide sufficient security guards.
11 No pyrotechnics is allowed, unless it is approved by the Licensing Officer.
(Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) 1995)
for the intellectuals and artists: the moment of subjectification—whether it through their identification with family, home, community, class, or nation—becomes the means of their subjection/subjugation. As the artist Lee Wen stated in his translocution of Miklós Haraszti’s Hungarian agony under Stalinism: "The State is able to domesticate the artist because the artist has already made the State his home". Aesthetics and politics is the subject of the subject in Singapore. It was this chiasmus between the poles of subjectivity, subjection, aesthetics, and politics that made the Singapore performance art scene in 1993 so striking and fertile—or should we say febrile?

4. THE ARTISTS' GENERAL ASSEMBLY & BROTHER CANE

Held at 5th Passage Contemporary Art Space, from 26 December 1993 - 1 January 1994, The Artists' General Assembly (A.G.A.) was organized jointly by two art groups. 5th Passage Artists' Limited, which had garnered the funding for the event, invited Artists Village to join as curators of the performances and installations.

One image that remains from the AGA is the line-up of 25 'cupboards', seen above in a photograph of Koh Nguang How. Each <6' x 6' x 2'> cupboard was used as a generic installation site by one or more artists. But, as events spun out of control, the cupboards came to resemble caskets: premonitions of the death of 5th Passage gallery and the small progressive art movement it represented. Besides the installation, the weeklong AGA expanded on the model of the "Body Fields" event of the previous year. It included rock
music, a forum on the state of alternative art in Singapore, performance art, poetry, workshops, stand-up comedy/cabaret, and an international video festival\textsuperscript{28}. The AGA was explicitly designed for those "sensitive to the undercurrent of contemporary culture […]" (Flier notes, 5\textsuperscript{th} Passage, 1993).

Three of the videotapes originally scheduled into the AGA Video Fest were completely banned\textsuperscript{29} (erased) and a number of others received substantial cuts by the Board of Film Censors. The video curator and 5\textsuperscript{th} Passage decided to exhibit any tapes banned by the Censors in their erased condition, so as to not "censor the censors" (Langenbach, quoted in Lim and Gasmier \textit{The New Paper} 20/12/03). This was intended as a curatorial counter-tactic to reveal the covert, behind-the-scenes bureaucratic performances of censorship, of which the audience is often unaware. The censors were, in effect, forced by the organisers to perform in public, as collaborators in the production of the presented work\textsuperscript{30}. In fact, the Board of Film Censors’ contribution to the event proved to be highly stimulating to the audience and artists, which suggests that the collision of administrative state and civil state desires sometimes provides a productive, if volatile, alchemy, demonstrating already existing ruptures.

Some of the performance artists, notably Jailani (Zai) bin Kuning, Lee Wen and Josef Ng chose to perform in front of the television, on which 55 minutes of visual and radio signal noise remained after the erasure of \textit{Tongues Untied}. Zai's performance was one of the most sensational and risky of the AGA. However, it was performed in the early evening before an audience who, though they were apparently shocked by it, did not publicly object to it. As the press was not present at the time, the performance simply disappeared from view. Because of the legal tussle that ensued from Ng's performance two days later, it remained out of view, not spoken of openly. A decision was made by a small group of writers, gallery administrators, artists, and concerned friends, that the video

\textsuperscript{28} Curated by this writer.

\textsuperscript{29} Besides \textit{Tongues Untied} by Marlon Riggs (USA), the other banned tapes were \textit{Game of the Year} by Ellen Pau (Hong Kong), a satirical send-off of a speech by Chinese Premier Li Peng justifying the Tian'anmen Square crackdown, and a short studio performance tape by the Thai performance artist, Vasan Sitthiket, during which the artist defecates and urinates on screen (Langenbach: 1994-3:82-91).

\textsuperscript{30} Intentionally or not, the Board of Film Censors called the organisers' bluff, stating: "It's the gallery's decision. As long as the segment shown is erased, we're satisfied" (Quoted in Ang 24 Dec 1993).
documentation (recorded on the same master-tape as Josef Ng's performance) should be concealed so it could not be used in the prosecution of the artists. This was done by this writer at my place of employment, under the floorboards of an out-building at the National Institute of Education, later retrieved after the trial and conviction of Josef Ng and Iris Tan. Although a few in the art community knew of the existence of this documentation, all who inquired were informed that the tape had been damaged and the footage lost.

On Friday, 31 December at about 7pm, approximately 30-40 people were in attendance at 5th Passage, most of them artists and bands that were scheduled to perform or play that night. Zai Kuning had placed three chairs in a row (one in front of another) in front of the television, which was re-screening the erased tape of Marlon Riggs' film, *Tongues Untied*. The sound of radio interference, a side effect of the erasure process, filled the room, as the screen showed 'snow' and scan-lines. Background noise also filled the space from the 5th Passage balcony area where a Malay heavy-metal/thrash band, *The Pagans*, was tuning up for the first set. The performance began without announcement.

00-5:43 minutes. Zai sits passively in the middle chair. In front of him is a propped-up dead plucked (naked) chicken, with its head slumped over to one side, its neck cut. Behind Zai is a second chicken in the same state. Jailani removes his shoes, and throws them on the floor in front of the television. He repeats the action with his glasses, shirt, pants, undershirt and then his briefs until he is entirely naked. After throwing each article of clothing into the pile before the TV, he sits, impassive.

5:43 min. A video camcorder is handed to Zai by an assistant, and he uses it to videotape the two chickens.

6:57 min. He stands, videotaping the chickens, walks to the TV and records the screen that is showing the erased version of *Tongues Untied*.

7:40 min. He squats in front of the TV, puts the camcorder in his crotch, shooting from that position.

8:30 min. Zai stands, holding the camera against his genitals and records the chickens from a crotch-eye-view.

9:15 min. He reconnoiters the gallery space videotaping the audience from his crotch.
10:11 min. Zai returns to the TV, stands facing the audience, and slowly pans left-right-left-right in ever decreasing intervals, gradually speeding up, and then moves his hand perpendicular to his body as if masturbating the camera, moving the camera in-out from his crotch, while filming the audience.

11:30 min. As if he suddenly realizes his vulnerability, Zai picks up his clothes with his free hand while continuing with the masturbatory/fucking motion of the camera. He sits back down on his chair, puts down the camera on the floor and quickly dresses.

13:20 min. He picks up the chickens by the legs and swinging them by his side as he walks, leaves the space. There is the sound of one audience member's "hooo-hooo". No clapping. (Langenbach, Video documentation, 31/12/93)

To this observer, the performance was a direct assault on the profanity of audience passivity and the ubiquitous interventions of the government's regulatory machine. Audience members found themselves sitting on chairs facing the television in the same space and posture as the chickens. When Zai turned the masturbating camera on the audience, they were literally 'framed' by a lewd act. The image recorded on Zai's camera was a repeated thrust and withdrawal from space: the audience was being fucked by 'the media' while watching the censored screen. It was a restoration of what many would consider a daily experience in the controlled media environment of Singapore. The audience was penetrated in more ways than one; the unseen and absent collaborators in the event being various penetrative government regulatory mechanisms: the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) and the Police, the Board of Film Censors, the National Arts Council (NAC), and the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), who all maintain the censorship regime. The voyeurism of usual performance video documentation was inverted: the clothed passive audience took the role of profane performers before the camera in the hands of a naked documenter. The act of regulatory surveillance and historical memorialisation was turned on its head.

Another court case, potentially more damaging than Ng's, would have ensued had this performance been spectacularised by the press. Many of the elements that marked Ng's work as offensive were present and more: a protest against government censorship
regulations, total nudity\footnote{As a point of history, Josef Ng also presented a nude performance during the AGA, entitled, \textit{Just A dollar Support}. He does not recall which day it was presented and it was not listed in the programme, but the most likely time was 2pm on Sunday 26 December. Arriving with shopping bags, Ng presented a monologue about the financial struggles of being an artist in Singapore and a critique of the local shopping and consumerist culture. He proposed in the performance that a proportion of every sales transaction would be used to fund the arts, particularly in the Marine Parade Shopping Centre where 5th Passage was situated. While speaking, Ng removed all of his clothing and jewelry and placed it in the shopping bags. He tied a blue semi-transparent chiffon cloth around his waist, removed his underpants and threw them at the audience, ending the performance (Ng 13/5/03, email correspondence).}, and an unambiguously “obscene” act: fucking motions with a video camera held against naked genitals. The performance is hardly ever mentioned in artist circles and the video documentation has never been publicly screened\footnote{These precautions may seem extreme, but it should be understood that while in many societies, including Japan, the United States and Europe et al, this performance, might not provoke undo controversy, in Singapore it could carry definite legal entailments. However, this does not fully explain why Singapore performance artists generally avoid forthright demonstrations of alterity, unlike performance artists in other autocratic societies, such as Russia and China, where artists have intentionally transgressed legal boundaries, inviting arrest and legal action. To answer this we must look at the employment, ideological and indoctrinal environment. First, in the words of Chua Beng Huat, Singapore, with a population of between four and five million, is a “one-company town” (Chua 1998, personal communication), in which over eighty percent of the adult populace works in government or government-linked companies. Secondly, the inculcation of the youth in the developmentalist ethos of the corporatist nation-state through the highly competitive educational system is extraordinarily thorough. If we add to this the level of government control over all areas of public life—including the judiciary—we begin to understand that the threat of legal action has an immediately paralyzing effect on civil society production, and efficiently curtails sustained transgression.}, It slipped quietly beneath the threshold of public reprobation. The obverse of showing, exposing, revealing is the co-dependent performance of secreting, hiding, suppressing and repressing. The counter-elision reveals that the censoring of information surrounding the AGA was polyvalent. Both the government and the artists elided information. \textit{Strategic} deterrence through censorship by the government mirrored \textit{tactical} secrecy by the artists.

Tactical elision takes two ubiquitous forms in Singapore. The first is self-censorship for the purpose of career enhancement or to assert affiliation with the elite. The inculcation of \textit{self-censorship or proxy-censorship} is an act that remains a core strategy of the regulatory system. Proxy-censorship by the producers themselves eliminates the need for subsequent state censorship or even overt state surveillance, as the artist himself/herself functions as an extension of the state apparatus, in the manner the Foucault described as the internalization of the panopticon (Foucault, 1979:202)\footnote{He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its}. 

\begin{itemize}
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\end{itemize}
A second form of tactical elision is that of secreting information to preclude government intervention and control. Also a technique of the weak, it takes the form of a 'weapon', that is, a proactive, non-acquiescent performance of resistance. Tactical secrecy in this sense may take place prior to or following the public (or private) presentation of a work, which is evaluated to be offensive to government eyes (or potentially offensive), and is capable of fulfilling the governmental scopophilic desire and pleasure in 'finding' or 'taking offence'. In the case of the AGA, the government threw down the gauntlet by censoring the videos, and the artists responded by producing works which the government would have desired to censor if they had seen them. Documentation of the works was removed by the artists from public, government and legal purview, with the effect of denying the administrative state's pleasures of surveillance and juridical intervention.

Tactical secrecy both mirrors and deflects government intervention in the field of cultural production. The collision of competing desires issuing from civil society and the state bureaucratic apparatus produced the overall spectacle of the AGA. Through its coalescing of the performances and desires of the state apparatus, and civil society performances and desires, the AGA provided the spectacle of a greater state, inclusive of both civil society and the administrative state, in which each found its prodigality in the performance of the Other.

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On the same night that Zai Kuning had presented his performance with dead chickens, Josef Ng and Shannon Tam performed as part of the final 12 hour New Year's night event. Tham's performance protested what he felt to be sensationalized coverage in The New Paper of performances by Josef Ng and Lee Wen that took place a day earlier in front of the blank television, screening the erased Tongues Untied. Among other actions, Tham burned a copy of The New Paper, eating the ashes, and forcing himself to regurgitate into

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physical weight; it tends to the non-corporeal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound, and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance (Foucault 1979:202-203).

As discussed in Chapter I, the relationship of the prisoner or the guard to external visibility is fraught with an indeterminacy that is in part (but never completely) eliminated with internal or what is referred to here as 'proxy' surveillance, which involves a preemption of will through autogenic foreclosure.
a trash barrel. This performance, like Zai's described above, concentrated on the politics of public mediation, but it also fitted well within Tham's *oeuvre*, which included previous forced ingestion of indigestible materials. If one conflates the cynical reflection of corporate and bureaucratic life found in the comic strip, *Dilbert*, with some of Chris Burden's early performance art works focused on his body and its limitations, the result might look like Tham's visceral/comic performances.

JOSEF NG'S *BROTHER CANE*

Brother Cane took place at about 12:30 on 1 January 1994 before an audience of 30-50 people, most of them artists or musicians. The following description is adapted from the trial affidavit:

15 minutes: Ng, dressed in a long black robe and black briefs, carefully lays out tiles on the floor in a semi-circle. He places the news cutting, "12 men nabbed in anti-gay operation at Tanjong Rhu" from *The Straits Times* on each tile. He then carefully places a block of tofu on each tile, along with a small plastic bag of red poster paint.

1 minute: Ng crouches behind one tile and reads random words from the news cutting.
5 minutes: Ng picks up a rotan\(^4\) and striking the floor with it rhythmically, performs a dance-like movement, swaying and leaping from side to side, finally ending in a low crouching posture.

3 minutes: Muttering softly, "Three strokes of cane. I will give them three strokes of cane", Ng approaches the tofu blocks, tapping the rotan rhythmically on the floor. He taps twice next to each block, counting, "One, two, three", striking the bags of paint and tofu forcefully on the third swing.

1 minute: After striking all the tofu blocks, Ng says: "I have heard that clipping hair can be a form of silent protest." He walks to the far end of the gallery space, and, facing the wall with his back to the audience, lowers his briefs [about 2/3 of the way down] his buttocks. He carries out an action not visible to the audience and returns to the performance space, placing a small amount of cut pubic hair on the centre tile.

1 minute: Ng asks for a cigarette from the audience, and has it lit. He smokes a few puffs, and then, saying, "Sometimes silent protest is not enough," stubs out the cigarette on his arm. He says "Thank you," and puts on his robe. He receives enthusiastic applause from the audience, and requests help in cleaning up the tofu. A few members of the audience assist in this process. (POLICE SUMMONS MAC 261/94, DPP V Josef Ng Sing Chor, Report of Ray Langenbach On The Artistic Nature Of The Performance Of Josef Ng Sing Chor On 1 January 1994. Court Affidavit.)\(^5\)

Although it lacked the productive ‘double-bind’ of Don’t Go Swimming, It’s Not Safe, Ng’s Brother Cane extended the logic of the earlier work to include a critique of the legal apparatus that underpins majority prejudice against a sexual minority, with laws against homosexual acts. Ng’s talent for engineering cultural rupture, which resulted in the violent outburst that visited Don’t Go Swimming, It’s Not Safe, was here extended to the legal system and the government. Through the intervention of the government-linked press, the

\(^4\) Ng bound together three thin and short rotan, of the type commonly used for the disciplining of children. The choice of these instruments brought to bear an image of the stern paternalistic state (embodied by Ng) disciplining wayward gay children (objectified by the blocks of tofu).

\(^5\) I submitted the affidavit for the legal record in 1994, at the request of the defense attorneys for Josef Ng (S. Magintharan) and Iris Tan (Philip Jeyaretnam) respectively. This version of the text has been changed from past tense to first tense for consistency with the descriptions of other performances in this dissertation, and includes corrections to the original text by the artist (Ng 13/8/2003, email communication).
National Arts Council, the Ministry for Information and the Arts, the Ministry for Home Affairs and the police, the rupture dilated into a full-blown cultural crisis.

Within a week, few gave a thought about the 'quality' of the performance, or focused their attention on the 25 minutes of its duration. Only the approximately <1/30 second> image of Ng's bare buttocks on the cover of The New Paper (Figure 28) was incessantly recalled and reiterated as emblematic of the AGA as a whole, and of performance art as an art form\(^{36}\). Part of the discursive power of the image, however, lay in an uncanny correlation of images and imaginings of buttocks that filled the press during the first five months of 1994: the imagined caned buttocks of the six men; Ng's 'sacrificial' restoration of their transgressions in his performance; the constantly reiterated caned "white buttocks" of Michael Fay and the buttocks of his schoolmate, Shiu Chi Ho; and the many exemplars of earlier caned buttocks, along with diagrammes and descriptions of the caning process and its deleterious effects on buttocks (Figures 29-30). Suddenly buttocks were on everyone's mind, and the Singapore state had to contend with the unexpected proliferation of a new reification: Singapore = mall, airport, hotel, escalator, and bleeding buttocks.

Figure 29. "How A Prisoner is Caned" (Detail). Accompanying article: "Prisons Department sets the facts straight on caning" (The Straits Times 1/5/94).

\(^{36}\) Responding to the hysterical removal of the art from the artwork in the press and community responses Lee Weng Choy presented a first review of the artistic nature of the performance eight months later in the ill-fated issue of Commentary (Lee, W.C. 1994-2: 65-71). See discussion below of the 'Commentary affair' in Chapter VIII.
A reading of Ng's performance in an 'expanded field' (Krauss 1983) is complex and requires not only the inclusion of Ng’s previous performance works, but also his approach to the trial, the trial itself, and the repercussions in the surrounding community, discussed in the following chapter. There is historical precedence for inclusion of judicial performance as part of the extended interpretation of performance art works, for example, Akasegawa Genpei's *Thousand Yen Note* trial in Japan in 1965, the performance and trial of American conceptual artist, Jay Jaroslav, c. 1970, among many others. There is, however, a significant difference between Ng's work and that of these artists, in that they continued to strategise or ‘compose’ their trials with court appearances in performance drag (Akasegawa), or taking on the role of defense attorney, and calling himself as an expert witness (Jaroslav). While these artists carried their works into social and institutional spaces (fitting this dissertation's argument that performance art can provide a
metadiscourse on the rituals of daily life), family pressures and Ng's fear delimited his view of his work. This resulted in a conventional aesthetic separation of his artwork from his life.

Not surprisingly under the circumstances, Ng's primary concern during the period of the trial was for his personal well being, and for the professional and personal the reputation of his father, who was particularly disturbed over the negative publicity and the associations to homosexuality in the work. At the time, the twenty-two year old Ng found it difficult to consider possibilities for further intervention into the social, political or judicial milieu that the controversy had suddenly made available. He viewed the trial untactically — not as an opportunity for notoriety and civil society spectacle, but as an inconvenience, expense, danger, personal and family oppression. So, while this extended interpretation relates *Brother Cane* to the expanded field of the institutional and social space, it was not a space where Ng himself felt safe or empowered (even though his work had led him there). He could not bring himself to see the trial and punishment as his part of his work, but only as the unfortunate and unintended repercussions of a performance that had ended twenty-five minutes after it began at 5th Passage. As he admitted in an unpublished 1995 interview with Stan Sesser:

"I was very agonized," he said. "I'm so young. I haven't finished my education, if I went to jail what would happen to me? It scared the shit out of me" (Sesser, 1995).

While Ng displayed unambiguous commitment to his performances and their immediate repercussions at the time and place of the events, as evidenced by *Don't Go Swimming, It's Not Safe*, it can be argued that when it came to their legal aftermath, he found it difficult to develop a proactive game-plan, or to see the unfolding events as a kind of game. The fact that his work suggested an embrace of liberal identitarian politics, and implied a correlative rejection of more conventional bourgeois values, did not convince Ng that he should further exploit his work's notoriety as a means to confront the state apparatus of extra-judicial regulations, obscenity laws and judicial authority, or to use the rupture to represent the aspirations of the oppressed homosexual community. Ng's performance and his actions in the extended field were expressions of ambivalence: a simultaneous embrace and deferment of his community’s aspirations for a participatory democratic polity.
CHAPTER VIII.

THE AFTERMATH:

Performance Indicators

At a certain point, the struggles of the dominated were so romanticized [...] that people finally forgot something that everyone who has seen it from close up knows perfectly well: the dominated are dominated in their brains, too.

(Pierre Bourdieu (In Other Words) in Serguei Alex. Oushakine, 2001:191)

The title of this chapter suggests a retrospective mathematics of repercussions, and a calculus of measurement, statistics, and signs of achievement by which to judge the instrumental effectiveness of an economy of performances. It raises the fundamental problem of legitimacy that haunts performance in general and performance art in particular, and points to performance itself as an 'indicator' of the 'state of the state'. The performance of the administrative state and in the (un)civil state is not only to be assessed, it itself is the act 'f assessment: a critical gaze or theōr's — a theatre of the doubled or 'contemplated sight' (Williams 1976:316). Performance art as an indicator of the state emerged gradually over the course of a year following the AGA. All of the various 'writings' of that year — governmental, press, bureaucratic, and judicial — round out the extended field of the AGA performances. All together they represent a 'stating' of the Singapore state.

Two days after Ng's performance at the end of the AGA, the SPH tabloid, The New Paper, carried articles on the performances of Josef Ng and Shannon Tham, sensationalizing a short portion of each performance. Press photos showed Ng as a small figure at the back of the gallery-space, with his briefs partially lowered, back to the audience, in the act of cutting his pubic hair, and Shannon Tham burning a page from The New Paper. But the most memorable image was the cover of the paper which showed a cropped version of the former photo of Ng, his shorts pulled down, exposing the top half of his buttocks superimposed with an obscene “L”, playing off the double entendre, Pub(l)ic.
CHAPTER VIII. THE AFTERMATH

Figure 31. The New Paper, 3 January 1994:1

Figure 32. The New Paper, 3 January 1994:Cover.
In 1999, the 5th Passage Artistic Director, Suzann Victor, reflected back on the manner in which the press spectacle determined the interpretation of the performance:

The press photo of Ng's twenty-minute performance was reproduced as a male with his back turned to a wall and his trunks lowered to expose his buttocks. Aside from its accompanying text, captions and the full colour front page 'coverage' of his buttocks, the press had endowed his image with a sea of signs: Headlined "Public Protest", what appears to have been inscribed with a broad tip texter was a livid red phallic looking letter 'L' sitting atop a red arrow insert, with the former superimposed quite precisely on Ng's anatomy, in the area of his rectum. Obviously intended to be part of the letter "L" in the word PUBLIC, without which it reads PUBIC, it pointedly referred to the site of controversy — the public snipping of Ng's pubic hair. Short of looking literally like SIGN penetrating SIGN penetrating SIGN in its chain of signification, that is red arrow insert thrusting red "L" into the photo image, this mode of graphic appendage is undoubtedly designed to connote the act of sodomy on Ng's image by the newspaper (Victor, 1999:2).

Victor has read the cover sensitively (although she may have assigned more design awareness and intentionality to the paper's layout staff than they actually exercised). She does not mention that on the same page, below the photo, was another sub-headline of a crime: Four Assault Cabby. Ng's act was thereby contextualised as a criminally obscene act, in a field of conventional criminal behaviour: crime and obscenity providing the ‘perfect storm’ to stimulate newspaper sales.

The New Paper presented Ng's work as an assault on the function of the press, falling in line with the skirmishes between The New Paper and the performance art community over accurate depictions of their work during the previous week. This struggle was a sideshow of a larger theatre of hegemonic struggle between civil society and the government for the legitimation and limits of cultural production. These skirmishes served to alert the government to the existence of this sparsely attended late-night sub-cultural aesthetic ritual at 5th Passage, and was instrumental in producing the mass spectacle of disciplinarism that ensued. The PAP government must have interpreted the artists' critique of press reports as a reference to their policies and their press monopoly.
But, if we consider *the explicit versus the implicit* performatives in Ng's performance (Austin, 1975:33), interpretation quickly succumbs to ambiguity. For example, *Br’ther Cane* ended with Ng crouching and smoking a cigarette, which he then stubbed out on his arm while saying, “Sometimes protest is not enough”. The polyvalent performative here is embedded in the declaration camouflaged as a constative truism. It could, for example, be rephrased as an activist polemic, “Sometimes protest, actually, is not enough”, implying that more radical approaches are required in a particular political situation (“Mere protest is never enough”). Or, delivered by a conservative, it could imply that protest outside the "proper channels of feedback"\(^1\) is never enough and that only parliamentary process within the system can be truly effective. But with the self-flagellative stubbing out of the cigarette on his arm, the entire complex of utterance-deed indexes another state altogether: a state of political or personal despair, as in, "The citizen is powerless; protest will never be effective!" The stubbing could also be seen as a reality check for someone who is disorientated, a motivational device for one who is apathetic (an implied criticism of the audience in attendance). The cigarette also signifies pleasure and perhaps addiction turned back as pain upon the body of the subject, referencing the distance between this performance and the actual pain afflicting the tortured bodies and minds of the arrested gay men.

Any doubts whether the performance was a critique of the press and government policy were dispelled by the reporter's focus on the word, 'protest'. The press not only reported on the artists, but also performatively determined the official interpretation of their performances\(^2\). But Ng's own subsequent statements to the press (which should be read as

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1 A phrase often used by the Singapore government to refer to community feedback mechanisms.

2 Unfortunately, the organisers and artists of the AGA did not present a unified front to the onslaught of official hermeneutics. Splits began to form almost immediately among the two collaborating artist groups, following a statement printed in *The New Paper* on 3 January 1994 by the Artists’ Village President, Lee Wen:

> I don't want people to misunderstand that Artists Village supports controversial performances.

> Asked about the screening of the blank movie, Mr. Lee said as an organiser he "cannot set criteria. I cannot, because of my own judgment, stop them from doing certain things" (Ng Li-san 3/1/94).

5\(^{th}\) Passage interpreted Lee Wen's statement as an attempt to distance Artists Village from the press-engendered controversy. Since Artists’ Village had been responsible for curating the performance component of the AGA, 5\(^{th}\) Passage saw the statement as a betrayal of their collaboration (Lingham 16/3/03).
another performance, referring back to *Br’ther Cane*, but by no means a definitive reading of the latter), supported the same narrow bandwidth of interpretation.

One day later, the National Arts Council, a statutory body under the Ministry of Information and the Arts, with a mandate to distribute funds to artists and art groups, released a statement to the press that fixed the parameters of discourse within which Ng and Tham’s performances would henceforth be discussed, foreclosing on the possibility that the performances could be reasonably discussed in the frame of *art pr’ducti’n* or aesthetics.

The National Arts Council (NAC) noted with consternation the report in The New Paper, *Shin Min* and *Lianhe Wanbao* yesterday (3.1.94) of two artists putting on so-called performance art: One snipped off his pubic hair while the other vomited, both publicly in protest against allegedly unfair reports by the press.

N.A.C. finds the acts vulgar and completely distasteful which deserve public condemnation. *By n’ stretch ’f the imaginati’n can such acts be c’nstrued and c’nd ned as art. Such acts, in fact, debase art and lower the public’s esteem for art and artists in general.*

If an artist has any grievances there are many other proper ways to give vent to their feelings. Artists with talent do not have to resort to *antics* in order to draw attention to themselves or to communicate their feelings or ideas.

By staging such tasteless performances, 5th Passage - or any other arts organization for that matter - cannot expect any form of support of assistance from NAC. Asked whether such acts should be allowed, NAC said that this is a matter for the Police to decide (*The New Paper, 5/1/1994*, emphasis added.).

The accuracy of the government representation of Ng and Tham's performances aside, their choice of words was strategic and performative. While these works were not to be viewed as 'art works' they were 'performances' or 'acts', and 'antics'\(^5\). Not the sort of 'performances' the government wanted to see issuing from the civil state, these 'antics'\(^5\)

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\(^3\) The word *antic* is built on the root, *ant-*: front, forehead; its inflected form being *anti-*: against, in fr’nt ’f, indicating ’pp ’siti’n, but is also related to *end* (from the same ancient Indo-European root that produced the Sanskrit *antah*: end), *f’mer*, ancient (as in *antique*), *ante* (bef ’re in time), *advance*, *vanguard*, as in the French *avant-garde*.
were viewed as epidemiological eruptions, which negatively reflected on the credibility of the organs of state power, not from outside the nation, as with the American outcry against the caning of Michael Fay, but from within. As noted above, the government's response to Ng's internal criticism of the use of caning on six Singaporean gay men must be seen in the context of the government's attempts to show a nation in solidarity behind its 'Asian values', exemplified by a strong faith in corporal punishment as criminal deterrence (*The Straits Times*, 23/4/94).

On 6 January 1994, the police charged Josef Ng with committing "an obscene act, to wit, by cutting your pubic hair and exposing your buttocks to the annoyance of the public", a charge which, upon conviction, carries a fine of up to $2,000 or three months jail, or both. Ng posted $3,000 bail. AFP and Reuters carried reports concerning the charges extensively throughout the world. Articles appeared the following day in the *Bangkok Post*, the *Star* (Malaysia), among others. The Criminal Procedure Code Charge sheet is an interesting example of official literature and performative text.

The document presents a formal structure by which the charge is presented, and is designed to interpret the artist's act solely in terms of its alleged legal transgression. One of the contested elements of the charge was the phrase "to the annoyance of the public".

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4 Lee W.C. incorrectly reported the charge to have taken place on 12 January, 1994 in "Chronology of a Controversy" (1996:65). The date of the first court hearing of the charge was 12 January. Ng’s bail bond was insured by artists Lee Wen and Jailani bin Kuning.

5 The charge falls under the following statutes:

Chapter XIV: OFFENCES AFFECTING THE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, CONVENIENCE, DECENTY AND MORALS

Obscene songs.

s.294. Whoever, to the annoyance of others —

(a) does any obscene act in any public place; or

(b) sings, recites or utters any obscene song, ballad or words in or near any public place, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 months, or with fine, or with both. ([http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/](http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/ 2/12/02))

In his discussion of obscenity and art, National University Law Faculty Lecturer, Chan Wing Cheong, points out that the definition of "obscenity" used in Singapore dates back to the English case of R v Hicklin in 1868 where it was defined as the "tendency [...] to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall". Hence, whether something is obscene depends on the nature of the work itself ("deprave and corrupt") and the community to be protected ("those whose minds are open") (Chan 1996:116).
As there were no complaints arising from the audience (a fact later admitted by a prosecution witness in court), the defense was in part based on the fact that there was no evidence that anyone except the government and its various organs—the press, the NAC, MITA, the Home Ministry, etc.—was indeed annoyed by Ng’s act. Second, it was questionable whether the cutting of pubic hair was obscene, since it was visible to no one but the artist. Finally, 'obscenity', or an 'obscene act' is so vaguely defined in the Penal Code, as to remain contestable in court, although this latter issue moved into the complex territory of constitutional law.

Leaving aside its lack of descriptive precision for a moment, this document has an impatient, earnest and utilitarian, emphatically performative aesthetics. It instrumentally maps the defendant with broadly defined and contestable predicates of agency ('commit', 'cutting', 'expressing'), in line with Bentham's 19th century reformation of law, shifting "the attention of the law from the act to the actor" (Sornarajah, M. 1991:3). The document maps out the parameters of the alleged offensive act of the agent and attains closure in a single paragraph, completely ignoring those equally Benthamite features of the psychic
and cultural landscape such as context, tradition, linguistic or categorical ambiguity that might get in the way of a simple charge that will hold up in a court similarly predisposed to efficiency and alacrity.

The purpose of the 'Charge', then, is to performatively initiate proceedings against the defendant, causing the judicial apparatus to come to bear. Not precisely a script, the charge offers a schema for addressing a rupture in the body politic, to be resolved in the subsequent staging of the judicial drama, and the application of rites of punishment, contrition, and reassimilation. The Charge indicates that all actions will be interpreted according to a singular template of legal judgment (rather than aesthetic, ethical, or political). An invisible substitution has taken place quietly behind the scenes, where a course of artist-initiated social engineering through art, aesthetics and critical discourse, has been replaced by a course of state social engineering through the instruments of law.

Also on 6 January 1994, in a perfectly timed article, "S’pore set to become major art auction center", by Leong Weng Kam, in The Straits Times, reported that The National Arts Council, together with Sotheby’s, would present an art auction two weeks later (one of eight that year), designed to "promote Singapore as a global city for the arts". The juxtaposition of these events—legal actions against relatively non-commodified local performance art on the one hand, and state sponsorship of the mainstream art market (regional modernism and traditional ‘objet d’art) on the other—appeared to indicate the government's desire that the term, "a global city for the arts", should refer to a trading center in line with Singapore’s canonical role as regional entrepôt. At stake were two visions of the Singapore state, both developmental, both relying on a future imaginary; however, one was imagined as a progressive, pluralistic civil society and cultural development, while the other was imagined as a homogeneous state, with weak civil society, and cultural development placed at the service of primary industry, trading, and instrumental economics.

TOMMY KOH'S PERFORMANCE OF CONDEMNATION

Speaking for the NAC, Chairman Professor Tommy Koh, on 13 January 1994, responded to a letter from theatre director, Max Le Blond, in which Le Blond decried the NAC’s
suppression of art works they never witnessed, and the bypassing of its art advisory panel. Koh confirmed the suspicion of the artists that no one from the National Arts Council was present at the AGA on New Year’s night:

First, it is true that no one from NAC witnessed Josef Ng’s performance. We have, however, n’ reas’n t’ d’ubt the veracity ’f the newspaper rep’rts. His act, which purp’red t’ be a perf’rmance art, is clearly ’ffensive and there was no need in this case for recourse to a second opinion from the NAC art advisers. It is the collective view of my colleagues and I in the NAC that J’sef Ng’s “perf’rmance” is vulgar, has n’ artistic value, and sh’uld be c’ndemned (Tommy Koh, 13/1/94, Letter to Max Le Blond, emphasis added).

Koh’s response focused on his and the Cabinet’s apparent desire to foreclose public acceptance of performance art as a legitimate art form and to preempt discussion on the form or the interpretation of specific performances. Koh carefully maintained that the difference between the nudity in Ng’s performance and M. Butterfly in which the Singapore actor, Ivan Heng appeared naked "with his back to the audience" was that the latter "was an integral part of the play and artistically done in the context of the play". This was a significant point, for if it could be claimed that Ng's partial nudity was also "an integral part" of his performance "and artistically done in the context" of the performance, then page 48, paragraph 3(b) of the Censorship Review Committee Rep’rt 1992 ‘f the Ministry ‘f Inf’rmati’n and the Arts (the writing of which had been overseen by Koh himself) would apply:

Works of art are meant to be viewed as a whole, and the parts are important to overall understanding. Hence, effort must be

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6 This admission indicates is that the NAC and MITA do not always solicit the views of their ‘art advisors’. B.G. Yeo in his interview with ASIAWEEK referred to a far more potent consultative system than was actually in place.

We do not want artistic licence to degenerate into pornography. Of course, there is a fine line to be drawn. It’s not easy to draw that line, and it requires c’urage t’ draw it well. Being too lax can be as bad as being too strict. S’ what I d’ is empl’ y c’mmittes ’f wise men and w’men fr’ m a wide cr’ ssecti’n ‘f s’ ciety — old and young, different races, different religions — who have the job of drawing these lines. Civilizati’n is maintained by lines being drawn. [ASIAWEEK, 7 July, 1995:42, emphasis added.]

In Yeo’s romantic imaginary, the Minister and his oversight committee are now the agents who must have the c’urage to draw the lines that maintain civilizati’n. The artist is displaced, but the avant-garde romance of the draughtsman-engineer remains, now attached to the performance of the administrative state. Lee Kuan Yew is less romantic in an interview with the revealing title, "Only those elected can set OB markers" (Irene Ng, 3/2/1995), Lee contradicts Yeo’s claim that "committees of wise men are appointed to draw the lines". Lee places that responsibility firmly with the elected Ministers.
made not to violate their integrity, without just cause (Censorship Review Committee, 1992:48, paragraph 3 (b))

For Koh, there was 'just cause' to censor *Bro`ther Cane* but not *M. Butterfly*. The National Arts Council, the Ministry of Information and the Arts, and the Home Ministry based their opinions on the photographs discussed above and on the story of reporter, Ng Li-san. When she arrived at the gallery, the reporter claimed that she was ignorant of the art forms she was assigned to witness. The previous night, the 5th Passage organizers had decided to refuse any reporter from *The New Paper* entry, due to what they felt was sensational reporting, but, they let her in because Ng Li-san appeared to be genuinely asking for their assistance, and appealed to their liberal sensibilities by arguing that 5th Passage should not themselves censor the press. She turned out to be a Trojan horse, writing an article that helped to bring down the gallery. It remains unclear whether she did this intentionally, out of naiveté, or was managed through it by her editors. It is unlikely that the issues of whether the act in question was, or was not, "an integral part" of the performance and "artistically done in the context" of the performance were of any concern to Ng Li-san, and there is no reason to assume that her claim of total ignorance of the art form was a ruse. With only this reporter's reconstruction of the events in hand and a few photographs, it is safe to conclude that the NAC and MITA had very little idea as to just what it was that they were acting against in this matter. What they could glean from the press reports was the existence of a sub-culture of primarily (but not exclusively) English-educated middle class artists, exerting a degree of intellectual autonomy, unafraid to speak and act critically, and willing to assume a role of engaged and responsible citizenship — a faction of civil society no longer willing to be passively 'civil'.

Several months after the events in question, Professor Koh, candidly speaking for himself this time in an interview with E.C. Goh of *MAN*, admitted his own ignorance in understanding performance art:

> I have difficulty grappling with performance art. I’ve been reading about it and trying to understand. It’s like installation

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7 The Censorship Review Committee Report 1992 admonishes:

In assessing the artistic merit of a work, the following considerations could apply: The skill/technique used to create the work of art and the extent of its innovativeness.

Notwithstanding that the content may be shocking or subtle and fine, the form and structure should be aesthetically pleasing and must move and engage. (Censorship Review Committee, 1992:48, paragraph 2)
art — it takes you to a different form of expression. What are the aesthetic criteria by which you judge? I’m also trying to understand the philosophy behind performance art (Goh, 1994:76).

Koh’s retrospective statement indicates that he was apparently trying to understand performance art from books or magazines, since performance art works were suddenly extremely difficult to find in Singapore following his public condemnation. Koh’s resulting imagination of performance art was a floating sign in search of a referent that he had disallowed. Due to their suppression of the form, the government succeeded in also suppressing their own knowledge. A year later, Koh stated in an interview with the American writer, Stan Sesser,

> When Josef Ng exposed himself and cut off his pubic hair, The New Paper splashed it over the front page. It provoked an outcry, Koh said. "It narrowed the parameters for me. Instead of widening the outer boundary markets, it narrowed them. (Sesser, 1995, emphasis added.)

This statement represents an attempt by Koh to shift responsibility for these decisions off his shoulders onto the artists and the press. Since the first 'outcry' in the press against Ng and Tham’s performances was that of the NAC itself, it would appear that Koh felt the need to respond to his own echo. Koh placed the onus for the government's 'OB markers' on the artists themselves when that particular privilege of performing the role of cultural regulator is one the government has always been careful to monopolise. A statement by B.G. Yeo, Minister of Information and the Arts also contradicts Koh’s statement:

> BG Yeo: Yes the pubic hair incident. I remember The New Paper carried it.

> I was sitting with Tommy Koh at some dinner or other. I looked at Tommy, Tommy looked at me and we discussed it. I told Tommy: "Why don't we take a clear position on this matter?" Tommy said, "I agree."

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8 There was broad awareness in the art and theatre community of the irrationality of the government's position. The theatre director, Kuo Pao Kun stated in 1999,

> [W]hile hanging on to de facto bans, the agencies have never explained why art forms can be outlawed. [H]ow could anyone pronounce an entire form of art illegal without risking condemning all potential creations in the form before they were ever attempted? It is at best an unintelligible decision (Kuo, 1999:20).
And so immediately, the Arts Council took a very firm and unambiguous position. After that, people felt at ease. Those who were legitimate artists felt, yes, this is a pretty good fence line beyond which counterfeits would debase the general coinage of legitimate artists (George, C., 30/5/99:43).

If we accept Yeo's recollection, it would indicate that Koh had considerable agency in this affair, and, while he was in part following the orders of the Minister, his employer, he chose to make a simple show of political loyalty, rather than mooting any sustainable argument or intellectual position on the arts. The recalled conversation also reiterates that the government often acted without first consulting the Censorship Review Committee, as Kuo Pao Kun had claimed, as Tommy Koh also admitted in his letter of 13 January 1994 to Max Le Blond (cited above), and as Lee Kuan Yew implied when he asserted that only elected officials should make those decisions (cited above). The purpose of the committee was clearly to present the spectacle of a government open to civil society consultation, rather than engaging in actual consultation.

THE FLATTERER’S DISCOURSE

The National University of Singapore Theatre Studies Programme of the Department of English Language and Literature presented Ben Jonson’s play, *Volpone*, under the direction of American expatriate Lecturer, Dr. William Peterson from 19–22 January 1994. In the production program, K.K. Seet, Coordinator of Theatre Studies, wrote:

> [W]e are right […] to be confounded by what appears to be a disturbing trend in some quarters of the Singapore performance scene today, which has seemingly confused self-indulgence with artistic licence, prodigality with liberality (*particularly seri’us in view ‘f the limited funding f’r the arts*) and stretched the parameters of what can be considered artistic to the extremes. I am referring to the recent brouhaha over such perpetrations as the *snipping ‘f hair fr’m ‘ne’s nether regi’ns, inducing v’mit as a means ‘f silent pr’ test*

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9 Revealingly, Yeo, who soon after left the Ministry of Information and the Arts to become Minister of Finance, uses analogies based on 'legitimate' versus 'counterfeit' currency in discussing the norms of art. The counterfeiting of the coinage of any state is a criminal offence in which the issue of legitimacy has no ambiguity, while legitimacy in the field of art is a complex and far from 'certifiable' matter.

10 Indicating his authority over Koh and the limits of the latter's initiative in the matter, Yeo says in the same interview: "Well, in Josef Ng's case, if the Arts Council at that time had not taken a strong position, I would have" (George, C., 30/5/99:43).
and drinking 'f ne’s urine bef’re a cr’wd ‘f perplexed nl’kers. Just what have these to do with art, even the allegedly elastic principles of performance art? A failure to locate such acts, whether verbal or gestural, within a larger structuring narrative or governing ideology renders them as little more than random displays of misplaced bravado and sensational fodder for the tabloid press. Though there is sometimes a case for knocking convention or buckling [sic] against censorship. Let us exercise more discretion and discrimination lest we jeopardize the whole artistic enterprise and its hard-earned recognition. In this respect, let me applaud y’ur discernment in attending this production of Jonson’s Volpone, which my colleague, William Peterson, has not only contextualised within the very topical issue of materialism in Singapore but has also aligned t’ the dec’r’us precepts ’f classical theatre. Dr. K K Seet. Co-Ordinator, Theatre Studies (Performance playbill, 19-22/1/94, emphasis added.).

This fascinating statement reveals the factionalism that took hold of the artistic community following the AGA, with many artists disassociating themselves from performance art as a form, and from the performances of Ng, Tham, and Leow in particular. The subtext to this disassociation must be read in light of the competition for government funding to which Seet refers. There is a convergence between this statement and a memo to Departmental staff of 6 January 1994 by Dr. Jane Chia, a British expatriate Head of the Division of Art, National Institute of Education. Chia also specifically spoke of the possible loss of NAC funding for faculty research, and indicated that Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham from 5th Passage were to be barred from the University campus, as any association with them might endanger NAC funding11.

The institution’s connection with NAC is a close one because all sorts of people get grants in various art divisions from them. Apparently it is now quite clear that we need to dissociate ourselves from controversy and from 5th Passage in particular, unfortunately, for those grants to continue to be forthcoming. Too many people will be adversely affected in this institution, not just in art but elsewhere in the arts section, and we are reliant on the NAC for grants. So could you not invite the two girls from the Fifth Passage […] anywhere near campus (Jane Chia, 6 January 1994.).

This passage reveals how centralized arts funding through the National Arts Council (a statutory body of the Ministry of Information and the Arts that monitors and dictates

11 Ironically, Chia had previously accepted an invitation from 5th Passage in August 1991 to open "Selves", an exhibition of art by four artists.
appropriate parameters of practice and distributes arts funding)\textsuperscript{12}, effectively controls
dissent in the arts community. Civil service intellectuals, (including expatriates and
permanent residents) become complicit in the system of controls upon which they depend
for project funding. It also indicates how rapidly some members of the intelligentsia sever
relations from their fellows following signals of official reprobation.

In his "Message", Seet distinguishes his department's ilk of performance (that is, those
presumably proscenium-staged plays "aligned to the decorous precepts of classical
drama") from the "indecorous" form of performance art. He does this, like Chia, in order
to protect access to government funding, and, again like Chia (although he was deft
enough to not state so explicitly), to distance himself and his department from the openly
critical performances in the AGA. Seet’s text is a manifesto for a reactionary theatre,
aligned with official patronage and state aesthetics. It reveals the sense of vulnerability
felt by those cultural workers in Singapore that saw the possibility of further crackdowns
or loss of funding resulting from the AGA incident. His paean to Peterson’s alignment "to
[...] classical theatre"\textsuperscript{13}, his flattery of the audience —applauding their 'discernment' in
attending his department’s production— and his call for increased discrimination against
performance art, was clearly meant to eschew any tendencies toward art community
solidarity.

Perhaps the most ironical turn was the placing of this text in the programme of a satire that
emblematically depicts the 'Scavengers': Vulture, Crow and Raven, all vying for the estate
of Fox, who is pretending to be on his deathbed (Jonson 1968/1606). Fox tricks the three
into degrading themselves to give him lavish gifts in the hope of an inheritance upon his

\textsuperscript{12} In a letter to this writer in 1997, the Director of Programme Development, the National Arts Council
clarified the issue of their mandate to monitor and censor theatre at that time:
The National Arts Council is given the authority and responsibility by the Government to
assist the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) in vetting all play scripts meant for
stage production before a licence is issued. NAC recommends whether a licence should be
issued or otherwise [...] (Liew Chin Choy, 11/12/97).

\textsuperscript{13} Either Seet is using the word 'classical' in a general sense of 'conventional' or 'traditional', or he has
inadvertently erased the links between Jonson’s realist "comedy of humours" with the non-classical
Commedia dell’ Arte, the 'flytings' of local carnival plays, popular buffoonery, influences of Aesop and
popular lore, all of which accompanied Jonson’s neo-classical recalling of Aristophanes (Jonson
1968/1606:xxv "Introduction" by Philip Brockbank).
death. Their inability to control their humours, leads each of them to "set the very trap that will finally catch and punish him" (Kernodle et al.1985: 128-129). The play is about envy, greed, self-deception and the uses of flattery.14

As in this case in Singapore, flattery often requires the calculated removal of competing discourses that might contradict or undermine the flatterer's panegyric. Louis Marin argues that both censorship and the 'discursive trap', in which flattery is tactically deployed, are components of a larger system of representational exchange that he calls the 'discourse of flattery'.15

Seet was not alone with these sentiments. Other theatre practitioners 'drew similar lines', carefully paralleling those drawn by George Yeo and Tommy Koh. The well-known stage and television actor Lim Kay Tong was quoted in a New Paper article definitively entitled “Thumbs down for ‘artists’” (Lois Ng, 1994), saying that he did not see performance art "as a form of art" but as a "protest," apparently presuming that the two were mutually exclusive. In the same article, R. Chandran, Director of the Act 3 theatre company made a case for self-censorship:

Our standards say no. I wouldn’t have done it that way. Artists have to decide how far they want to go and practice self-

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14 Dominating the play [...] is the fox’s capacity to deceive the bird[s] of prey; it is related to the skill by which a man imposes himself on another by flattery, and therefore to all modes of deception and false appearance (Jonson: xxvi “Introduction” by Philip Brockbank).

15 There exist strong thematic links between Jonson’s depiction of flattery, derived from Aesop, and Marin’s analysis of the "flatterer’s discourse" in the court of Louis XIV (Marin 1988:89-104). Marin refers to the discursive trap: a cultural work that (whether it is the author’s explicit intention or not) extends metonymically into the surrounding political (and regulatory) environment, setting up a negotiation in the domain of power. Marin models the discursive trap on the fable of The Crow and the Fox by La Fontaine. Seeing Crow with a piece of cheese in its beak, Fox flatters him, until Crow, wanting to also display the beauty of his voice, drops the cheese to give voice. Fox, seizing the cheese says:

“My good sir,
Learn that every flatterer
Lives at the expense of his listeners” (Marin 1988:94).

The King—and, for that matter, all embodiments of power—requires flattery in order to transform force into power, effecting a representation of power that legitimises the further deployments of force, etc. Flattery is the representation of the personage and dominion of the King in such a way that it coincides with the King’s own desired (and approved) image of himself, causing him to drop his cheese. It is precisely the King's need for flattery that leaves him vulnerable to the (covert but obvious) designs of the flatterer. For more on discursive traps, see Marin: “The Discourse of the Flatterer, or the King’s Eulogy”; and, “The Fox’s Tactics” (Marin 1988:89-104).
censorship. If sponsors withdraw their support, they cannot complain (Lois Ng, 1994).

In its tone and style, Seet and Chandran's respective statements fall into a modernist tradition of pragmatic petit-bourgeois indignation toward the cultural products of the (usually equally bourgeois, but less pragmatic) avant-garde. Beneath the tone of the moralist lie concerns that art must conform to the requirements of economic and political pragmatism that have been a strong marker of centralised one-party governments elsewhere (Harasztí, 1987: 82ff.).

PROPAGATING 'SUBVERSION'

The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Information and the Arts issued a joint statement to the public through the press on 22 January 1994:

[...]

The following action will be taken: Police will reject all future applications by the group 5th Passage, for a public entertainment licence to stage any such performance without fixed scripts.

The two men involved in the acts will be barred from future public performances. The police will reject applications for public entertainment licences for any performance or exhibition by 5th Passage or any other group involving artist Josef Ng Sing Chor, 22, and art-student Shannon Tham Kuok Lewong, 20.

The NAC will bar 5th Passage from getting any grant or assistance. It will also not support "performance art" or "forum theatre" staged by other groups, but their other projects will be considered.

Iris Tan Khee Wan, a founder-member of the group and organiser of the event held at Parkway Parade from Dec 31 to Jan 1, will be prosecuted for providing public entertainment
without a licence, as the performances continued past the approved time\textsuperscript{16}.

Organisers of scriptless public performances will have to provide a synopsis when they apply to the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit for a licence. If approved, they will have to put down a security deposit\textsuperscript{17} (\textit{The Straits Times} (Staff) 21 January, 1994 (22 Jan.)).

In a nutshell, the offending common denominator of the two performance forms—performance art and Forum Theatre—was that, in the eyes of the administration, they:

1. Have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation
2. May be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues
3. May be used to propagate deviant social or religious beliefs and messages
4. May be used as a means of subversion.

The government saw the growth of autonomous participatory performance in civil society in the same manner they viewed it in the political field, as antithetical (potentially 'subversive') to the survival of the state \textit{as currently c\textsuperscript{3}nstituted}. Performance was allowable as long as it was within a prescribed bandwidth of appropriate entertainment, and was available in written form to be vetted and licensed by the government. In the succeeding years, they have regularly demanded the removal of spontaneous creativity, the subtle dynamics of participatory communication, and impromptu audience intervention or interference, that is, all means by which a script may be performatively 'subverted'. In the mind of the government, the only model for all performances (either theirs or those in civil society) is the predetermined script and the carefully choreographed strategic plan, returning us to Deleuze's reading of Foucault's writing of the panopticon as "a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field. [...] an abstract machine" (Deleuze, 1988:34). The script, whether for a particular performance or for the

\textsuperscript{16} The charge against Tan went through several permutations. Originally she was charged with allowing "[...] Ng Sing Chor [Josef Ng], a performer, to cut his pubic hear and expose his buttocks", in contravention of the "[...\textsuperscript{16}]licensing condition of : "Entertainers should not make any vulgar gestures, actions, or remarks during their performances." Tan had, therefore, "[...] committed an offence punishable under Section 18(1)(c) of the Public Entertainment Act Chapter 257" (The Criminal Procedure Code (Chapter 68) Sections 158-160 Charge: Iris Tan Khee Wan. Case PS 94/94). However, because the PELU licence for the AGA had expired at 12 midnight, before Ng performed, the charge against Tan was later amended to "providing public entertainment without a licence"; and after appeals, she was eventually found guilty of this charge. See further discussion below.

\textsuperscript{17} The Security Deposit was listed as S$10,000 for unscripted performances and S$1,000 for scripted performances, amounting to a de fact\textsuperscript{17} ban on the former. However, the bonds were discretionary and often not demanded by PELU.
generalised performance of the state, is also part of that *abstract machine* of panoptic surveillance.

Structurally determining metaphors for its own performance, the government's act of censoring performance art and Forum Theatre had the effect of legitimating those 'decorous' and hierarchical theatrical traditions in the cultural sphere in which the script, Director and choreographed staging are privileged as central to production. By treating cultural forms as side-shows of the main event of the *theatre of the state* and the construction of statolatry, theatre and performance art have increasingly functioned as analogues for the structuring of the political field\(^\text{18}\). Other metaphors are evacuated and displaced by the signs of the 'administrative state', in much the same manner (as discussed below) that Catherine Lim has described the evacuation of the signified, *nationalism*, and sentiments of *loyalty*, from the Singapore flag.

As in other countries where variations of socialist realist aesthetics have taken hold, in Singapore the hermeneutic terminus of cultural works and emblems has increasingly become the state itself, its dynamics, its tensions and contentions —always displayed within a narrow bandwidth of the certifiably 'possible' and authorised. Censorial intervention of the government into the cultural field has gradually become the most vital cultural force, sapping the energy of civil society. The government has in effect appropriated many of the generative and creative functions of authors, artists and intellectuals\(^\text{19}\).

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\(^{18}\) The second generation directors of some theatre-groups has begun to resist the ubiquitous privileging of the sign of the 'state' in cultural productions. For example, Jeff Chen (and Chong Tze Chien) openly disdains the application of Marxist analyses that support an oppositional cultural politics (government *versus* civil society). He argues that since the 1990s, a hermeneutics founded in the ideological analysis of the work (a view that "includes the state in the work") simply misses the point of their work (Chen 12/1/03, personal communication). Chen has turned his critique from the institutions of governance to his fellow intellectuals, and their tendency to simply retread old ideological tires with post-Marxist 'strong-state' doctrine. However, as argued elsewhere, Chen's argument and works may function as a discursive trap — his rejection of the discourse of state centrality functioning as a subversive tactic (Langenbach 2003. "Jacked-Off With No Pleasure: Censorship and The Necessary Stage". Unpublished manuscript.).

\(^{19}\) It should not be assumed that administrative state censorship in Singapore approaches anything close to the level of totalisation found in either Stalinist or fascist socialist systems (where the Socialist Realist aesthetic was first developed). There are structural limitations that confront attempts to censor information in late-capitalist information economies, such as Singapore. As Judith Butler (1995, 1997-1) has argued, the act of explicit censorship necessarily reproduces that which it suppresses. It does this in two ways. First, any object of an act of censorship must be represented in order to be suppressed, and any such representation requires reproduction and dissemination. Suppression involves the proliferation of the sign of the thing. Secondly, the
CHAPTER VIII. THE AFTERMATH

ENGINEERING CONSULTATION

The National Arts Council Chairman, Tommy Koh, proposed on 23 January 1994 to meet members of the "arts community" to talk about the new curbs against 5th Passage and Forum Theatre, but members of 5th Passage and Artists' Village were not invited (The Straits Times, 23.1.94; Lee, 1996:66). The successful holding of this meeting in the absence of 5th Passage and Artists Village representatives indicated that the initiative of the moment had clearly passed to the government. By including some artists and not others the government successfully factionalised the artistic community. Those left standing in the light of the bureaucratic apparatus were clearly distinguishable from those who stood in the shadows.

By acquiescing to the arrangements, those who attended thenceforth handed the state greater power over the management of cultural production than they otherwise could have appropriated on their own. We are left to speculate what would have happened if those groups who were invited had demanded the presence of those left off the invitation list, and had refused to cooperate with this government spectacle of 'consultation' in the absence of their abjected colleagues. The arts community never took the possibility of such professional solidarity seriously. Coherence, solidarity, and unity were qualities concentrated in the performance of state bureaucratic management, but were never obtained—or apparently even desired—by many cultural groups. These groups saw themselves as competitors in a dog-eat-dog struggle for "limited funding for the arts", as Seet put it. There were, indeed, some very good reasons to reject solidarity with other artists.

The state aggregation of cultural capital is in part accomplished through rituals of 'consultation', such as this meeting with Koh. Attendance at such a meeting enhances the government’s definition of ‘consensus’ as a top-down state initiative and reiterates state support for those who 'consent'. Miklós Haraszti, writing of the situation facing artists in

censoring of a text is always incomplete, in part because "the text in question takes on new life as part of the very discourse produced by the mechanism of censorship" (Butler 1997:130). Remainders, or pentimenti, stand in for the removed entity, often with a new force the original could not muster. In such a case, censorship brings to bear hermeneutic frames that would not have been called up prior to the censoring, enhancing the trace of the censored object with a newly attached aura of controversy and resistance.
Hungary under a strong centralised socialist state, pointed out that self-censorship and complicity with government desire for visible consensus replaced the more heavy-handed forms of state censorship and banning. His description holds strong parallels to the position of state-linked intellectuals and artists under one-party rule in Singapore, although the generative ideology in 1970s Hungary was clearly different from that in Singapore in the 1990s.

Painful as it is, we must accept that our culture [of "artists in contemporary socialist societies"] is produced voluntarily. Anyone has the right, of course, to label as censorship this process of adjustment by which artists acknowledge their consent […] The representatives of the state would be unable […] to transform our contributions into signs of support if we did not wish the state to do so. We are tied to a society of progress and necessity by bonds that are stronger than fear. […] Instead of daily directives issued from on high, there are guidelines worked out by teams, with the participation of leading artists. Partnership displaces dictatorship. Enfranchisement ameliorates estrangement. […] The new consensus satisfies the needs of the responsible professional: it makes the state’s interventions merely symbolic. Sticks are exchanged for carrots. This also suits the interests of the state since it does not dilute the extent of control and does not isolate the producers of culture (Haraszti, 1987:70-74).

As mentioned above, Haraszti’s book has enjoyed limited recognition among intellectuals in Singapore. In 1997, the artist Lee Wen at the Bangkok ArtConference, built a performance around a phrase from Haraszti’s book:

While intoning Haraszti’s [sentence: *The State is able to domesticate the artist because the artist has already made the State his home.*], I came into [the] space with [a] cardboard box over my head up to waist, moved around, then crawling under it. I came out of it, talked about the "policing" of performance art in Singapore and distributed to [the] audience application forms for police permit [to perform publicly] and chewed lots of gum and offered to audience the "legal" stuff20 […] after that I put the wad of gum on the flattened box and

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20 Chewing gum is illegal to import into Singapore. The "legal" stuff Lee Wen refers to is that gum which is bought and consumed outside Singapore. Because of the absurdity of this particular law, it has become a humorous trope of the government (and nation's) anal-retentive tendencies among both Singaporeans and foreigners.
threw myself on gum/cardboard box (Lee Wen, 15/7/2001, email correspondence).

Lee Wen's description flattens the bathos of seeing him dive off a table onto the collapsing box while ranting, "The State is able to domesticate the artist because the artist has already made the State his home", particularly when coming from an artist most of whose work is now mostly performed outside his country. It is also clear that Lee Wen understands how interpellation works; that is how domestication of one type (subject-formation through an identification with a home) leads to domestication of another type (subjection to the dominant order), and the manner that artists are complicit in the latter by virtue of their participation in the former.

PARTICIPATION: PERFORMANCE ART AND FORUM THEATRE

The open participatory nature of performance art results from an early rejection among the European artistic avant-garde of 19th century Western theatrical conventions, especially the separation of actors from audience implied by the proscenium stage. Beginning with the intentional goading of audiences by the Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists, this agitational and participatory quality has been a mark of the form, although it is by no means universally applicable to all performance art. Participation reached its apogee during the 'happenings' of the 1950s-1960s, in which the distinction between participants and audience was dissolved. It is not uncommon among performance artists today to prepare for the indeterminacy of audience participation, as an unforeseeable but expected challenge to be dealt with extemporaneously, in real-time. But the most fertile participatory performance technique that has appeared in Singapore is that of Forum Theatre, originally developed in 1973 by the Director of the Arena Theater in Sao Paulo (1956-71), Augusto Boal. Forum Theatre is one of a group of theatrical techniques called the Theater of the Oppressed. Although other Arena techniques were already well known in Singapore, Forum Theatre per se did not make its appearance in Singapore until The Necessary Stage (TNS) introduced two Forum works in 1993, MCP

21 Variations of this technique can be found in the works of Singaporean performance artists Amanda Heng, Lee Wen, Tang Da Wu, Vincent Leow and others to varying degrees. These artists use a complex variety of strategies to incorporate audience interventions.
(Male Chauvinist Pig) and Mixed Blessings. In the playbill TNS described Boal's techniques as a participatory problem-solving method, in which:

> An unsolved problem is highlighted in a short play, and the audience is invited to suggest and enact possible solutions. The aim of the forum is not to win, but to discover new ways to confront oppression. This is the first time that such a theatrical technique is used in Singapore.

[...]

As the whole idea of Forum Theatre is for the audience to participate by 'doing' rather than 'saying' [...] the audience becomes the 'SPECT-ACTOR' (The Necessary Stage, 1993, emphasis added.).

In his "Artistic Director's Message", Alvin Tan spoke directly about The Necessary Stage's plans for the technique:

> With Forum Theatre, The Necessary Stage begins its quest to come closer to you. You intervene in the world of the play and decide its end [...].

> The Necessary Stage will be using and developing this methodology with its Theatre-In-Education (TIE) programmes. Thus converting students to be "spect-actors" rather than spectators. In this capacity, they are encouraged to contribute ideas, taking over roles, and using theatre to confront problems. This would encourage a more thinking and creative individual (The Necessary Stage, 1993).

Tan ended his message with a reference to "the masses", a phrase resonant with the more radical history of Mandarin theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, but also with a call to the audience to enjoy themselves, a phrase that would have looked decidedly out of place in that earlier era:

> The technique is highly versatile and is effective in bringing more people to appreciating theatre as well as doing theatre with the masses. Enjoy yourself! (The Necessary Stage, 1993)²².

²² The ideological distance between, "doing theatre with the masses" and "Enjoy yourself!" is indicative of how TNS positioned itself. While their work was meant to confront identitarian oppression in mainstream cultural settings, TNS did not use Forum Theatre as had Boal. They did not intend their performances to conscientise and empower illiterate and oppressed working-class communities. Rather, TNS transformed Boal's techniques into a kind of public family-therapy, introducing open discourse and problem-solving techniques into traditionally intractable relationship problems in middle class families. Inter-class dynamics gave way to intra-class dynamics.

Their first two productions addressed power differentials in a heterosexual Chinese couple, and the cultural and emotional ramifications of a planned intermarriage between a (majority) Chinese Singaporean woman and a (minority) Indian Singaporean man. The addition of "Enjoy yourself!" to a manifesto to bring theatre to the
Perhaps most unnerving to the culture-shy government was Tan's call in the programme notes for expanding theatre into youth education and community work, reminiscent of Third Stage's work with the community of Filipinas in the late 1980s\textsuperscript{23}. It presented the possibility of the development of alternative methodologies for social agency in the city-state. Tan's statement to the audience incorrectly presupposed that not only would Forum Theatre be allowed, but its promulgation throughout civil society would not pose a problem for the ‘kinder and gentler’ Goh administration.

As suggested by Sanjay Krishnan, Forum Theatre was the result of The Necessary Stage taking "seriously the substantive claims made for liberalization" by the Goh Chok Tong government (Krishnan, 1996: 100-107), and its methodologies were not very different from those of highly participatory Performance Management, High Performance, and Organisational Development trainings organized by corporate Personnel Directors during the 1970s-1980s.

BOAL REDUX

*The Straits Times* published an article, "Two pioneers of Forum theatre trained at Marxist workshops" by Editor, Felix Soh on 5 February 1994. According to Soh, the Artistic Director of The Necessary Stage, Alvin Tan, and its resident playwright, Haresh Sharma, had staged Forum Theatre in July 1993 after attending a workshop with Augusto Boal in New York.

[The workshops] were conducted by the Brecht Forum, a Marxist cultural and public education organisation whose founder Augusto Boal has declared that all theatre is necessarily political and that it is a "very efficient weapon for liberation."

\textsuperscript{23}Curiously, and perhaps contradicting the above assessment, this was not the end of Forum Theatre in Singapore. Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of Dramabox Theatre Company, has described the rhizomic resurfacing of the form. Formerly directing with The Necessary Stage since 1993, Kok left TNS in 1997. With Dramabox, he continued to use Boal's techniques in schools, Community Centres, and on call-in radio, where the listening audience becomes part of an electronic Forum Theatre. (Kok Heng Leun 28/7/03, presentation, Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture).
The company's publications, like its programmes and newsletters, explain the forum theatre concept but do not say that Mr. Sharma and Mr. Tan were trained in the art forum at the Marxist Brecht Forum. […]

So is The Necessary Stage, which went professional only in 1992, using theatre for a political end? (Soh, 5/2/94; Lee, 1996:67) 24

Soh quoted Marie-Claire Picher, Executive Director of the Brecht Forum in New York:

Boal's work comes out of the popular movement and was rooted in people challenging the state of oppression that they experience.

There is a political function to what we are doing. We are using art to work for social change.

The theatre of oppressed technique uses the approach of empowering the community to change. It is used to pass on techniques for greater democratisation and social change, understanding oppression and changing it (Soh 5/2/94).

Tommy Koh, Chairman of the National Arts Council, wrote a response to Felix Soh's article in The Straits Times that appeared in the Forum page two days later:

I would like to point out respectfully that your report has a slant which tends to put TNS in a bad light.

TNS has a good track record and is one of the most promising theatre groups in Singapore. […]

The NAC will continue to support TNS as long as it keeps up its good work.

24 According to one anonymous source (hereafter 'S1') the actions against The Necessary Stage (followed by the actions against C’mentary, the journal of the National University of Singapore Society), was part of a larger government "operation".

For example, it was well known in government and cultural circles that Tan and Sharma of The Necessary Stage had attended Boal’s workshop in New York City. Even though TNS sought NAC funding for the workshop upon their return in August (Tan, email 12/2002), according to S1, the poet Edwin Thumboo, was specifically asked to pass this information to Felix Soh of The Straits Times, which subsequently published a story reporting that Tan and Sharma had attended a “Marxist” workshop. The two were thereby implicated, along with Forum Theatre and performance art as potentially subversive.

These events are significant, because it would indicate that the government was more directly (and covertly) involved in the direction of culture than is generally assumed. The suppression of C’mentary (see discussion later in this chapter) may not, then, represent an example of self-censorship by the National University of Singapore Alumni Society, but a covert pr'xy-cens'rship. If this description is accurate, these events could open a larger picture of other acts of elision, made to look like self-censorship, in which intellectuals are called upon by the government "to do the government's bidding" (S1' email correspondence 1999 & 2001).
The only exception is that the NAC will not provide assistance to TNS to stage forum theatre. (Koh, 7/2/94; Lee, 1996: 67)

This letter by Koh indicated government desire to control and dampen the growing hysteria that, through the state-controlled press, they had themselves produced. As in Koh's claim that his hand had been forced by Josef Ng's transgression a month earlier, the government produced another scripted response to their own earlier response to an unscripted civil society initiative. The government treated the populace to a spectacle of its right hand restraining its left. Some of the symbolic capital Koh had lost in the eyes of the art community during the crackdown on the AGA and Forum Theatre, he now regained through a public demonstration of support for TNS-sans-Forum Theatre. For it's part, Alvin Tan and Haresh Sharma, the Artistic Director and Resident Writer of TNS, clearly under pressure, backed off from their stated commitment to "confront oppression" through the use of theatre.

The workshops we attended in New York were two of numerous other workshops we have attended in order to improve our professional skills as theatre practitioners [...]. We have absolutely no political motivation. Thus, we are greatly saddened and disheartened" by Mr. Soh's article and the slant he has taken (Lee 1996:68).

The sentence, "We have absolutely no political motivation", could be read in two ways: first, that they are not using theatre to subvert or compete against the standing ruling party and government; second, that their work and the techniques used are ideologically speaking non-political in motivation. While the first was accurate, the second amounted to an embarrassing retreat. If TNS had attended a Grotowski workshop in Italy, this claim might have been believable, but Boal's work —as Picher accurately portrayed it—from the first was based on intervening into local political conditioning, and was devoted to the conscientisation and democratisation of theatre and of oppressed classes and groups in society. While it was true that TNS’ had adapted Forum Theatre to the needs of the Singapore bourgeoisie, and that class struggle was no longer part of the mix, these could be taken as tactical adaptations and did not erase the ideological force of the technique.

A soft dose of public humiliation was the price of continued survival for TNS — considerably less than the televised confessions and detention without trial that Third Stage had to bear in 1987. The entire event provided the government an opportunity to
publicly reproach an errant cultural group, followed by a magnanimous gesture of qualified support. For their continued survival as a company, TNS was forced into complicity with the dominant spectacle of a press attack, followed by National Arts Council recuperation.

But the suppression of performance art and Forum Theatre in 1994 was also an indication that a significant chasm had opened between the cultural rhetoric of the Goh government and its actions. While holding firm to the former authoritarianism of the first generation PAP government with its emphasis on cultural deterrence, the second-generation leaders had learned to nuance their rhetoric and image. This repeatedly put them into a new pickle, as they were eventually forced to reveal their real intentions following crisis after crisis, to shocked but ever hopeful intellectuals.

INFEFFECTUAL INTELLECTUALS & …

Commentary (the NUS Society journal) held an informal forum with various members of the arts community on 5 February 1994 to discuss the controversy over performance art and Forum Theatre. This discussion marked the final attempt by a small group of concerned artists and writers to coalesce a community response to the government using discussion and petitions. Such actions were not supported by a broad cross-section of artists in attendance, including Kuo Pao Kun, who held enormous status in the arts community as a former ISA detainee during the late 1970s. Many of the younger artists were looking to Kuo at that moment for leadership in this crisis to form a unified response by the arts community toward the government, but found it not forthcoming. His dismissal of the role others were ready to thrust upon him —organiser of cultural workers who sought an intelligible discourse with the state— had a fatalistic and deflating sense about it.25

25 Three months later (11/5/94), in an interview published by The Straits Times, Kuo did make a strong critique of the bypassing of the NAC’s consultative system by Tommy Koh and George Yeo in the AGA affair.

The Government bypassed all the institutional structures set up over the last three years: the NAC, the arts advisors, the review committee and the resource panel […] They were all there to be consulted, but the Government chose to deny the very institutions it created itself. In one stroke, all these were arbitrarily brushed aside at a time when the "consultative spirit" and "due process" were being underlined as fundamental traits of this
Susie Lingham, Co-Founder and Director of 5th Passage, asked for a meeting with Tommy Koh, the Chairman of the National Arts Council. Separately, Lee Wen, the President of Artists Village, on 21 January had also requested such a meeting. Koh agreed "on the condition that it was to be a closed door meeting, and that the public "must not know anything about it" (Susie Lingham 16/3/03; 24/7/03, personal communication and email). Attending the meeting on 22 February 1994 were Koh, representatives of the NAC and the Ministry of Information and the Arts and an older generation artist, Tan Kwank Liang. Representing 5th Passage were Susie Lingham, Suzann Victor, and Arun Mahizman, a member of the 5th Passage Advisory Board. Tang Da Wu and Amanda Heng represented Artists Village. Lingham presented an oral history of 5th Passage and an analysis of the AGA that clarified the sequence of events and queried the imbalanced treatment of 5th Passage vis-à-vis Koh's public support of The Necessary Stage. The artists asked whether the NAC intended to penalise individual artists associated with the AGA in the future. Koh assured them that they would not do so (Susie Lingham, 16/3/03).

During the presentation there was discussion of the recent public support Koh had shown for The Necessary Stage during the Forum Theatre controversy, and a comparison with 5th Passage's situation. An appeal was made to Koh to make a public presentation in support of 5th Passage, as 5th Passage was still barred from receiving all public funds or from being involved in any event with other groups who were receiving public funding. (The NAC had also demanded that 5th Passage repay funding for the AGA.) Koh agreed to make a public statement of support at some unspecified time in the future, but warned the artists not to publicise that the meeting had taken place, or that he had agreed to make such a statement (Victor 22/2/94, personal communication; Lingham 5/5/03, personal communication). Following their meeting, Koh made no such public statement, thereby inflicting serious damage to their own moral credibility (Lee, 1996: 70-71).

If Kuo had released this statement in January or February, it may have had some impact. But in May, there was little to be gained or lost with such criticism.

According to Lingham, this promise was broken two months later in April 1994 when the NAC attempted to engineer her removal from the "Raw Theatre Artists' Project", meant to be the Substation's contribution to the Singapore Arts Fringe Festival. The NAC informed Substation that it would have had to forego both funding and association with the Festival if Lingham remained on the billing. According to Lingham, the Artistic Director of Substation, Kuo Pao Kun, did not acquiesce to the NAC demands and Lingham was able to remain in the project (Lingham 16/3/03, personal communication; email correspondence 5/5/03).
reneging on this verbal agreement. Once again, it appeared that Koh was taking pains to show that he was a "friend of the arts", while further punishing a now almost completely isolated group of artists.

Sometime before the meeting, Suzann Victor, Artistic Director of 5th Passage called the art historian, T.K. Sabapathy, Chairperson of the 5th Passage Board of Directors, and a Lecturer at the National University of Singapore, suggesting that the Board of Directors and the administration of 5th Passage together "should make a reply (to the reports in the press)". The Board subsequently advised against issuing any letter to the press, saying in effect that it was very risky to feed the media, as it would give them a chance to further sensationalise the event. Their pragmatic stance should be seen in the context of the resignation at this time of one of their members, Juliana Lim. She had been recently selected to become the first General Manager of the soon to be constructed Singapore Art Centre at the Esplanade. All the members of the 5th Passage Board of Directors were public servants and found themselves in a sensitive position, as the organisation they represented was being systematically stigmatised by the government — their ultimate employers.

While it may have been pragmatic, the decision to not respond in writing to the press sensationalism represented an acceptance of powerlessness similar to that shown by Josef Ng and Vincent Leow following their performances. At the time the belief was that the situation would eventually blow over, and that it was better to not irritate the government or the press further by making a firm defensive stand, leading to further recriminations. This position strengthened the hold by the government (and its press) over cultural discourse. The circular and self-defeating logic of the time was palpable.

The ante was 'upped' by the government who released through the Parliamentary press reports another statement on the matter on 24 February 1994:

27 Three of the administrators of 5th Passage, Suzann Victor, Susie Lingham and Henry Tang did subsequently meet with an editor of The Straits Times and appealed to the paper to publicise their side of the story of the AGA. This appeal resulted in no discernible effect on coverage (Lingham, 16/3/03).

28 The Board apparently did draft a statement for release to the press that was later 'aborted', in the words of Victor. Attempts by the writer to obtain a copy of this statement from 5th Passage have not been successful.
Responding to a question filed by Nominated Member of Parliament Kanwaljit Soin, Minister for Information and the Arts, Brig-Gen (NS) George Yeo reiterated the Government's position that while art, especially theatre, could not avoid commenting on social and political conditions in society, it should not be used in Singapore to promote particular political causes, and certainly not in a covert way.

*Otherwise, the Government will be forced to treat and regulate such performances as a form of political activity, which will be quite different from the NAC's present approach towards the art [sic], and will surely retard the development of art in Singapore, he said (The Straits Times 24.2.94).(Lee W.C., 1996:68, emphasis added.)*

This comment opened the possibility that the government would claim that those cultural workers whose work was critical of government policies constituted an opposition political party and would be treated as such. In light of the history of violent PAP response to important opposition figures in Singapore, this was no idle threat.29

**...THE REACTIVE GOVERNMENT**

In March 1994, *The Straits Times* reported that in Parliament, B.G. George Yeo stated:

> [T]he recent controversial performance by the arts group Fifth Passage was a good opportunity to define which areas are off-limits to the arts in Singapore. He said he applauded and encouraged the National Arts Council for taking a firm stand against the performance. When we promoted the arts, we said, *look, the old OB [Out of Bounds] markers have to be widened and we will determine the new OB markers when it is clear where they should be.* And when this incident took place, I said, *ah, this is a very good spot to plant a new OB marker.*

> [....]

Noting that it was good to define the boundaries in the long term, BG Yeo added: When the boundaries are clear, then those who act within the boundaries are free.

But when the boundaries are not clear, those who act within the boundaries become unfree.

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29 The same threat was directed toward the writer, Catherine Lim, by Goh Chok Tong on 24 January 1995, in response to her criticism of the PAP government. The common denominator of the two events was the criticism by artists of PAP government policies.
At the end of the day, it is one of balance. We do not want to stifle artistic creativity (*The Straits Times* 16.3.94, emphasis added.).

The statement significantly places the productions of civil society under the purview of the government. The government sees their role as that of laying out the golf course on which Singaporeans play; it is the government's game and their 'boundary maintenance' (Davis 2000) that is at stake. Civil-society performance is consigned to the role of providing the *opportunity* for state performance to establish and maintain OB markers. In an overtly Orwellian passage that Bentham and Foucault would have appreciated, Yeo defines the experience of artistic *freedom* as the benefit of acting within the government rules. On the one hand, he declares that clear boundaries are necessary, but on the other, implies that the placing of markers is an arbitrary act, and that the government itself is not clear what criteria to use in positioning the markers: "We will determine the new OB markets when it is clear where they should be".

Notwithstanding Yeo's claim that the government was then in the process of widening earlier OB markers, and 'defining' new settings, a popular view among artists was that the government was strategically maintaining a state of OB *indeterminacy* as a strategic device to keep cultural workers off-balance. Such a strategy puts the artists and art groups in a position of double-indemnity: the government can blame the artists for 'forcing' their hand, while unilaterally determining the need for OB markers and where they should be placed, based on which civil society productions they desire to suppress at the time.

Significantly contradicting the stereotype of the PAP administration as proactive in its relations with the civil state, Yeo represents government performance as reactive to the initiative of artists, seeking out civil society performatives and foreclosing on their illocutionary potential. Yeo admits that the government finds itself incapable of placing appropriate boundaries in civil society on their own. Wherever a sign of initiative in the form of a political critique appears, or an outcropping of participatory democracy ruptures the surface of civil society determines where the next OB marker should go.

Standing in the shadows of the phallic core of the panopticon, Yeo attempts to convince the populace that their freedom resides in standing against the backlight of its cellular outer cylinder — his subjectivity hollowed out. Yeo paternally suggests that the artists
would find freedom in the manner he found his, by staying within official boundaries. This is ouroboric discourse at its best and Yeo by this time had made it into an art. Nevertheless, it is merely a small wheel within the larger wheel of an ouroboric chiasmus between the government and the artists.

The entire dynamic suggests an transposition of terms in that description of Soviet life, by Bourdieu (cited in Oushakine's study of *Samizdat* culture under Stalinism) in the front-piece to this chapter. Bourdieu was referring to the effects of indoctrination on artists and the populace. But, for a moment, imagine that, in place of Bourdieu's text, the last line was changed to the following:

> At a certain point, the struggles of the dominated were so romanticized [...] that people finally forgot something that everyone who has seen it from close up knows perfectly well: the *dominators* are dominated in *their* brains too.

Our romanticism upon seeing signs of resistance at the margins causes us to not only forget, as Bourdieu warns, that those who resist are also dominated in their minds, but to also forget the dominion of the prevailing economy of power/knowledge over all those within the projection of the state, regardless of power or privilege. Everyone consumes the same state spectacle projected in the cinematicon by virtue of having, in the words of Lee Wen (and Haraszti) "made the state their home".

As discussed above in Chapter V., it is the administrator, Admiral Zhenghe, who is the eunuch in Kuo Pao Kun's *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*. While Kuo's castration metaphor can be interpreted as referring to all levels of Singaporean society particularly the intelligentsia (and Kun's own condition as a 'rehabilitated' but not totally recuperated ISA ex-detainee), the play far more directly addresses those officials in power. It describes exactly which 'pound of flesh' that power has extracted from them, thereby allowing them the privilege of their imaginary of standing in the shadows and looking out from the PAP's phallic core.

**JOSEF NG'S FORECLOSED TRIAL**

On 16 May 1994, the case of Josef Ng was scheduled to be heard before District Judge Ch‘ng Lye Beng on the charge of committing an obscene act, punishable with up to a
$2,000 fine, a jail term of up to three months, or both. As mentioned above, Ng intended to base his defense on three points: first, a fine art defense, situating the alleged "obscene act" (partially lowering his trunks and cutting his pubic hair) in the context of a complete work of fine art, as defined by the "Censorship Review Committee Report 1992". Second, the intention was to question the veracity of The New Paper reports on which the charge was based, and the selective use of obscenity laws in Singapore. Third, the defense intended to raise constitutional issues as to the definition of 'obscenity'.

A constitutional defense could have opened to scrutiny the extra-legal regulations concerning the issuing and enforcement of public Entertainment Licenses and censorship. Not grounded in the constitution, such licenses and regulations are vulnerable to legal contestation precisely because they are extra-legal bureaucratic adaptations. For reasons that cannot be legally revealed here, the defence was withdrawn, following a request by the judge for a conference in his chambers. Ng pleaded guilty in order to avoid possible double prosecution under civil and military courts. On 17 May 1994 the court sentenced Ng to pay a fine of S$1000, and the military subsequently chose not to pursue a case against him:

Based on information from reports in The New Paper, police took action against Ng for performing the obscene act in public.

Defence counsel S. Magintharan said in mitigation that [...] Ng had taken part in stage performances since 1987, and had received several letters of appreciation.

Counsel, who said Ng did not perform for money, added: "He did it for the love of art and in the interest of expanding the general outlook of art in Singapore" (The Straits Times (18/5/94), cited in Lee W.C. 1996:71).

THE TRIALS OF IRIS TAN
Iris Tan's charge had been dismissed on a technicality, but, on the Attorney General's appeal, Chief Justice Yong Pung How decided against Tan, demanding a ruling on an

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30 The court drama (or the sudden lack of it), besides spotlighting jurisprudence in Singapore, demonstrated the manner in which mandatory National Service can be effectively used to control the male populace (Josef Ng, S. Magintharan, Lee Wen, Lee Weng Choy, Suzann Victor and Iris Tan 17/5/94, personal communications).
amended charge from District Judge Hamidah Ibrahim, to be heard in August 1994. At that retrial, District Judge Hamidah Ibrahim convicted Tan of "providing entertainment without a licence", on the grounds that the offence is one of "strict liability" (Lee, 1996:72). Tan was fined $700, but still in fighting spirit, appealed the judgment. The Chief Justice rejected Tan's appeal on 30 March 1995. It was a final anti-climactic drawing of the final curtain on the legal drama of the 5th Passage affair. Extra-legal, Josef Ng and Shannon Tham remain "barred" from performing in public as of 2003, that is, they cannot obtain a license to perform. In the intervening years, the government has exempted Ng twice from the regulations. While the legal basis for the 'barring' remains questionable, neither Ng nor Tham have brought the issue back to court.

**FORECLOSING ON COMMENTARY**

This period following the 5th Passage affair can be described as one of struggle for the cultural initiative between a small group of cultural workers and the government. Because most theatre groups had already acquiesced to (in some cases enthusiastically embraced) government proscriptions of Forum Theatre and performance art, it was left to a small group of visual artists and writers to articulate a response to government regulations. This was not successfully done, in part due to government monopolization of the press and the absence of diverse vehicles of information dissemination. The internet was not yet a vehicle for the dissemination of civil society discourse in Singapore. The onus of producing an intelligible response fell on two publications: the local rock culture zine, *BigO*, which came out with peripatetic supportive comments but no in-depth analysis, and Singapore’s only critical social analysis journal of the time, *Commentary*, published by

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31 According to Ng, there has not been any "official or unofficial" lifting of the barring on him or Tham. "The prohibition still stands [...]" (Email communication 12/3/03). In 1997-98, Ng moved to Bangkok to continue his career as artist, curator and writer there. Ng recently stated that he gave "[...] up [...] middle class status in the bourgeois city-state and struggled [...] to re-examine myself, about my direction in life and art [...]" (Ng 13/8/03, email communication). He continues to practice performance art and other forms of art production. Tham now works as Art Director in a Singaporean advertising agency.

32 It can be speculated that the loss of 5th Passage liberated Victor and Lingham from their concentration on curatorial work. Victor shifted her artistic production from painting into a body of performative kinetic sculptures that have since gained international notoriety, and Lingham has pursued theoretical writing. Both artists began to organise and exhibit again in 1994, at the first of a number of 5th Passage exhibitions in empty shop-lots at the new Australian-owned and managed Pacific Plaza, in the downtown commercial district. The extended collaboration between these two artists has one of the most productive partnerships in the history of Singapore art, leading eventually to the publication of *an equation of vulnerability* (Victor and Lingham 2002). Iris Tan subsequently entered into business with a sibling.
the National University of Singapore Alumni Society (NUSS). *BigO* survived to tell the tale; the editorial regime of *Commentary* did not.

Previously a predictable and staid academic vehicle under the Society, *Commentary* was ‘hijacked’ (as the editors jokingly referred to it) by two young NUS scholars in 1992: Sanjay Krishnan, a Senior Tutor in the Department of English Language and Literature, and Sharaad Kuttan, a Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology. Lee Weng Choy, recently arrived from studies in philosophy and literature in the United States, later joined them. The new editorial slate was committed to fostering and developing public intellectual discourse. They produced three issues of the journal, *The City* (December 1992), *Civil Society* (1993), and *Democracy* (1993), managing to garner articles from a cross-section of intellectuals in Singapore. *Commentary* also held forums on various issues of concern, which then provided content for subsequent issues. The journal was not a juried academic publication, directed only to fellow academics; the editors sought to place the publication in the midst of public debates, and to provide a means for information exchange across professional fields and subcultures.

The editors planned an issue for mid-1994, to be divided into three sections. Two sections were to be eclectic, focusing on various cultural phenomena in Singapore and outside, with notable inclusions being an article profiling Malay rock culture (“The Mat Rockers”) by Shirlene Noordin, and an article by Leon Perera analyzing the Michael Fay controversy. The middle section on "Arts" was to include eight articles focusing on the AGA and Forum theatre. On 28 October 1994, the National University of Singapore Society (NUSS) Management Committee voted 6-4 to stop the issue. *The Straits Times* reported on 29 October,

> The National University of Singapore Society has clamped down on its own journal, *Commentary*, fearing that its latest issue would annoy the government.

[...]

[S]ome committee members said that the whole political climate in Singapore had changed, citing as a signal Mr. Goh's

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33 While these three editors were Malaysian citizens, the editorial slate for the censored issue expanded with the addition of two Singaporeans, Leon Perera and Jimmy Yap.
National Day Rally speech on traditional values, in which he laid down moral markers for the nation.\(^{34}\)

[...] NUSS had been bitten before. In the 1970s, a member was detained under the Internal Security Act for attempting to use Commentary to propagate liberal and progressive views (George, 1994).

The implication was that the Management Committee members took their own initiative in censoring Commentary as a response to the Asian Values rhetoric of the Prime Minister. However, the question remains whether the action may actually have been in response to a ministerial directive.\(^{35}\) At any rate, the editors immediately resigned, followed by the publication sub-committee of the NUSS. Writing in 1996 in their preface to the book, *Looking At Culture*, a reprint of that unpublished issue (with some additions and subtractions), the editors noted that the censoring of the journal was perceived both as an act of *kiasu*\(^{36}\) self-censorship by a timid Management Committee, and yet another sign of a shift in the Goh Chok Tong government:

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\(^{34}\) This comment reveals that 'Asian Values' was either seen by civil service intellectuals to be a disciplining ideology, or, that they assumed it could be reasonably interpreted as such, thereby making it a good camouflage for other intentions and desires.

\(^{35}\) Continuing the discussion found in footnote #24 earlier in this chapter, according to 'S1', the NUSS Management Committee included a person who acted at the behest of the authorities. At issue were the coverage of the AGA, Forum Theatre, and Shirileen Noordin's sociological profiling of Mat Rock, which was seen to be 'promoting racial disharmony'. The refusal a few months later to give Commentary Editor, Sharaad Kuttan (who held a Malaysian passport) a visa to remain in Singapore after 14 years of residence (Kuttan 17/8/03, personal communication), was but just one among a number of steps the government took following *The Straits Times* report by Felix Soh on the “Marxist” connections of The Necessary Stage. And all these steps might be seen as part of a larger initiative to monitor and control English-educated cultural groups in particular, which began in the mid-1980s.

Following the resignation of the editors, Commentary returned to its former incarnation as a typical in-house vehicle, with non-contentious articles on equally non-contentious issues, first edited by J.M. Nathan, Chairperson of the Publications Committee. He was followed by a former editor, Bah Kah Choon, who reportedly had played a background role in the 1994 censorship. While Head of the National University of Singapore English Department during the 1980s, Bah delivered lectures on post-structuralist theory to officials of the Internal Security Division, when (apparently having concluded that what they didn't know about post-structuralism and post-modernism could hurt them) the latter had turned its attention from surveillance of Chinese-language intellectuals to English-language intellectuals, ('S1' email correspondence 1999 & 2001).

\(^{36}\) Kiasu: a fear of loss, as in fear of losing face (from Mandarin, kia: scared + su: lose). Kiasu refers to an identifiable mode of social behaviour among Singaporeans in particular (although the term is used in other Chinese-speaking populations) that is manifested as a response to this fear. In the case of Commentary, kiasu may be used to indicate the desire of the Management Committee to self-censor their own publication in order to preempt government censorship. However, this conventionally accepted reading of the Commentary affair is contradicted by 'S1's' account, which raises the question whether the image of a Management Committee beset by a kiasu mindset may have provided a convenient fiction that dissimulated government intervention into this civil society institution.
[T]he Society’s decision was also seen as a reaction to the perception that the Government, after some years of ‘opening up’, was now becoming less open [...] and that the Society was merely bowing to the exigencies of a new political climate (Krishnan, et al.1996:4).

Whatever the precise agency or double-agency of the Management Committee members, the censorship of *Commentary* by the NUSS Management Committee exemplifies the close links that exist between academia and the ruling government, and the manner that the academic civil service functions as an arm of a larger administrative state apparatus of discipline and control.

THE CATHERINE LIM AFFAIR

It is appropriate to bring this series of interlinked events from 1993-94 to conclusion in November 1994, with what became known as the Catherine Lim Affair. The popular novelist, Catherine Lim, wrote an article for *The Straits Times Sunday Review* entitled, "The PAP and the people — A Great Affective Divide" (Lim, 6/11/94), followed a couple of weeks later by another, "One government, two styles" (Lim, 20/11/94). These became the focus of government reprobation. Citing the "Commentary Affair", Lim wrote that the Goh government had originally portrayed itself providing a "gentler, wiser" style of governance than the previous administration under Lee Kuan Yew, that is, one more attuned to the next generation of Singaporeans. But, Lim argued, the PAP government had gradually reverted to the old 'style' of stern, centralized governance, which, during the nation-building phase of development may have been more appropriate, but was no longer needed. Out of touch with the sentiments of the people, in Lim's view the PAP had become more of an elite class than a government — exemplified by awarding themselves extraordinarily high salaries in 1994.

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37 The popular use of the word, "affair", as in the *Commentary affair*, *Catherine Lim affair*, the *5th Passage affair*, the *Josef Ng affair*, commonly heard in public parole, may be a way of taking the sting out of these traumatic events by bridling them with the touch of slightly surreptitious pleasure, forbidden dalliances or dangerous liaisons.

38 According to a survey carried out in 2002 by the Hong Kong, Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB (2) 1677/01-02(02), Cabinet Ministers in Singapore make 3-4 times their equivalent in the United States and the UK. The Prime Minister receives over 200% of the American President and over 600% the salary of the UK Prime minister (Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(2)1677/01-02(02),
Over the years a pattern of governance has emerged that is not exactly what was envisaged. Goh's style of people orientation is being subsumed under the old style of top-down decisions. [...] It has led to a serious emotive estrangement between the government and the people [...] a "Great Affective Divide" (Lim, 20/11/1994).

Lim argued in the first article that the 'affective divide' made it difficult for the people to view the country as their own; the PAP has blocked the peoples' patriotism through its permanence and stultifying conflation of party and nation.

While in other countries, political parties come and go, but the country remains the rallying point for the peoples' feelings, in Singapore, the Government has become synonymous with the country. Indeed, Singapore is often seen as the creation of the PAP, made to its image and likeness. Hence dislike of the PAP, even though it does not translate into dislike of Singapore, effectively blocks out any spontaneous outpourings of patriotic emotion. The best evidence is the attitude towards the national flag. Singaporeans continue to be reluctant to put it up in their homes on National Day for fear if being thought PAP supporters and sycophants (Lim, 6/11/94).

The blocking of the peoples' loyalty, claimed Lim, results in the materialist stereotype of the *kiasu* Singaporean. The good life and commodity fetishism fills the hiatus where loyalty to nation and community engagement would normally reside.\(^{39}\)

Lim is a well-established middle class writer, always seen around town in one of her seemingly endless wardrobe of elegant *chiongsams*, as if having stepped out of Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood For Love*. Perhaps more than ever before, the government's subsequent response to Lim's thoughtful articles seemed positively hysterical. They looked into the smokey mirror of Lim's prose and found a visage they did not like, and, as if to prove her contentions, proceeded to 'overkill' the messenger through a stream of invective in the state media. Their censure ironically served to disseminate and fix Lim's image of them in the manner that censorship always tends to proliferate the information it is intended to suppress, and affords it a renewed aura of the forbidden.

\(^{39}\) Catherine Lim has speculated that the compensatory psychological effect of 'Kiasuism' (a Singlish adaptation of the word) as "an almost adulatory quality about the attachment of Singaporeans to their affluence [...]"(Lim 6/11/94).
First Goh Chok Tong’s Press Secretary responded on 3 December 1994, followed by numerous third person articles, commentaries and opinion pieces, all proliferating the tropes of Lim's articles, followed over a month later by Goh himself\textsuperscript{40}. If Lim, or any other Singaporean, wished to criticize the government, Goh declared, the government would treat these "writers on the fringe" henceforth as opposition politicians. The comment is instructive for its implicit spatial imaginary of the administrative state at the centre of a 'hub', with opposition politicians and cultural producers on the fringe, and for putting back into play the periodically deployed policy that Kuttan calls “sign-up-or-shut-up”\textsuperscript{41}. In light of the historical array of libel cases against opposition politicians who did 'sign-up', this could be read only as a damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t proposal. In a \textit{Straits Times} front page article, entitled, "PM: Debate welcomed but govt will rebut malicious arguments" (24/1/95), Goh’s reply was nut-shelled in a few paragraphs that repeated the main point several times. He used martial arts analogies, which conveyed the bizarre (and probably unintended) image of a towering male Goh physically striking the effete female writer in the chest with a "very very hard blow", in his words.

The Government would treat those who wanted to set the political agenda here as people who have entered the political arena, even if they have no intentions of joining a political party, said Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong yesterday.

He reiterated the Government's position that it must set the agenda and anybody who wanted to do so must enter the political fray. “You can criticize us and we would treat you as though you had entered the political arena. If you do not wish to do so; you want to hide in sanctuaries, we'd say even though you don't want to join a party, we would treat you as though you had entered the political arena.”

“I think that is fair because you can't just criticise without expecting us to reply to you in the same manner which you have attacked us. If you land a blow on our jaw, you must

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} It can be argued, however, that this proliferation of the signs of resistance, is part of an intentional PAP strategy to spectacularise the drama of control, as a 'covert spectacle'. For more on this see the discussion of "kill the chicken to frighten the monkeys" (\textit{sha ji xia hou}) and covert spectacle in Chapter V.
\item \textsuperscript{41} The comment by Goh precisely mirrored an earlier one by George Yeo in Parliament on 24 February 1994, directed at performance artists (\textit{The Straits Times} 24.2.94; discussed above in this chapter), and demands made to the independent S.P.U.R. (Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group) architects in 1967. S.P.U.R. was informed that if they wished to comment on government urban planning, they would have to first take posts in the Civil Service (Chew, 1967:38).
\end{itemize}
expect a counter-blown your solar-plexus” (*The Straits Times* 24/1/95).

As pointed out by an anonymous informant, ”Michael”, cited by Kuttan,

This thinking is really part of an authoritarian logic. A democratic logic asserts the right of all citizens, both as individuals as well as in groups which includes political parties, to attempt to set the public and national agenda (Kuttan, 1995:5).

For liberal critics to claim that the Goh government is “authoritarian” is to say that it has not changed from the *modus operandi* of its predecessor under the former administration of Lee Kuan Yew, which had always positively embraced that characterization.

Lim had the temerity to confront Goh and the PAP with a discursive representation of their rule. As another of Kuttan’s anonymous informants points out, Lim’s article itself is a conservative critique of a conservative government, in that it affirms the party’s 30 years of authoritarian rule as being appropriate for the time, and it reduces the process of transition from authoritarianism to a question of style (Kuttan, 1995:4-5). In this, Lim’s characterization is not very different from that which Lee Kuan Yew would himself begin to write during the following year, in that both assert that the PAP authoritarianism was a necessary result of the conditions during the period just prior and following independence. With the rise of a new middle class, due in part to the economic policies of the PAP itself, the question is how long will the new constituencies acquiesce to authoritarian rule. One might speculate that Lee was motivated soon after the "Catherine Lim affair" to start writing his own *The Singapore Story*, to be published three years later, in order to preempt the spectacle of multiple Singapore stories, such as Lim's, emerging from civil society.

**POWER AND REPRESENTATION**

In his study of the representations of Louis XIV, Louis Marin suggests, "It is the word of the other that makes the subject emerge" (Marin, 1988:10). Power is the proper subject of the writer, because it is around the performances of power that narratives congeal. However, power also needs representational forms in order to "find its completion, its absolute […] its concrete expression" (Marin, 1988:6). There is no power without
representation of it, and representation finds its *raison d'être* in its power to literalise power. The writer needs the King and the King needs the historian.

In this way operates the chiasmus between political and discursive power.

[...] Power institutes itself as power only through and in the representation of language, just as the representation of language is effectuated only in the power where it is realized (Marin, 1988:95).

Marin suggests that the king obtains power through proliferation of his image as the "absolute monarch he desires to be" (the "Iconic effect"), and this was done consciously and with premeditation in the 18th century court bureaucracy by those who designed the coinage, wrote the histories, stories, plays, proclamations, poems, songs, and laws (Marin, 1988:7). It is in this multiplicity of images where the embodiment of the king is "set free in the infinity of each of his subject's representations" (Marin cited in Conley 1988:xii).

Louis, the man, is iterated as Louis The King through the aura of the proliferation of his representations. However empty these tropes may appear to be, they allow for the coalescing of power and the application of force, which, in turn, allows for the continued proliferation of images. This chiasmatic economy of political domination and auratic representation constitutes the spectacle of kingship.

Today, mass replication and proliferation both produces and annihilates aura. While aura may now have only 15 minutes (or seconds) to its name, its spatial distribution, *via* electronic media, is far more comprehensive; aura is produced everywhere at virtually the same time, and then decays rapidly, also everywhere at the same time. The ubiquitous reappearance and rapid decay of dominant electronic 'images' represents not just the embodiment of the performance of the 'king' (government), but the circulation and the parsing of a ruling economy that is no longer controllable or seizable, in which the 'king' has become merely one of many representational tropes42.

42 The conflicted relationship between power and electronic media in Singapore has been the focus of Seow (1998) and Tan Chong Kee (2002). Relevant background material to this issue is provided by Debord's theory of spectacle society (1983), Baudrillard's theories of the simulacrum and hyper-mediation (1990), the analyses of (Edelman (1988) and Diamond and Bates (1992) who discuss the spectacular construction of the political figure through general discourse and semiosis (Edelman), and the electronic 'polispot' or political commercial (Diamond and Bates).
This change seems not yet appreciated by the PAP government, perhaps because they see their image unfolding from a position they believe to be panoptic, from where they see themselves responding to "critics on the fringe". In much official literature, the government presents themselves as the embodiment of the Confucian concept of "government by honourable men (junzi), who have the trust and respect of the population" (Quah, 1990:113; Chua 1995:193). Their iteration is then reiterated by Government Linked Intellectuals (GLI). Both are apparently unaware that this discourse of the 'centre' has itself moved to the margins and has become largely reactive rather than proactive.

When the PAP power elite read Catherine Lim's column, they read that their elitism had separated them from their constituency. They were in danger of destroying nationalism itself by conflating the interests and spectacle of their party with those of the nation. They read that the people did not love them, as they had substituted an economy of fear for an economy of love and respect. Finally, Lim claimed that they had appropriated the national flag, making it a party flag, the display of which the ruling party rigidly limited to National Day celebrations. The flag had become, she claimed, a sign of fear and acquiescence rather than a celebration of the national 'thing' (Zizek 1993). It was now an unstable sign, oscillating between identity, loyalty and agony. By so stating, in her role as a voice of the people, she sought to performatively reappropriate it as a citizens' flag.

INSTRUMENTAL ANXIETIES
The PAP government has always demonstrated, whether inadvertently or not, insecurity over its legitimacy. As noted in Chapter III, their instrumental anxiety — an anxiety that the effectiveness of one's performance is in question — has required the camouflage of force or privileging discourses that henceforth stand-in for a meritocratic test. Their anxiety has been reflected in their attempts to recapture a sense of performative legitimacy that has been associated with the early 'crisis' fraught days of PAP rule, through the reproduction of that originary crisis in the cultural and political field. It also partially

43 GLI is an ironical interpolation of Government Linked Corporations (GLC).
accounts for the displacement of the dynastic rhetoric of junzi to a late 20\textsuperscript{th} century cosmopolitan city-state.

Since the referendum on merger in 1962, the PAP has never allowed themselves to go into a national election without an assured result. They have never believed in their popularity or in the respect and trust of the people sufficiently to leave their fate in the hands of the populace. Belief in meritocracy terminates at election-time, when they find it prudent to insure the results through gerrymandering, control of the press, and legal suits directed at opposition politicians (George, T.J.S. 1973; Seow 1994, 1998; Dutch Labour Party 1976; Toh Chin Chye in Chew 1996:9-92; et al). Once the PAP democratically obtained power, they used it, tragically, to avoid any further unscripted democratic tests. With Singapore Inc. at stake, participatory democracy is apparently not an option. What Lim wrote must have struck the PAP as precisely the image they themselves recognised. Like Dorian Grey, they saw that their hamartia (tragic flaw) was obvious to all. In Lim's Singapore story, the hegemonic class-fragment had lost the last vestiges of its early "consensus", and, with it, their subject position of a party-among-parties, citizens-among-citizens. Lim was calling on the PAP to meet her on common ground, but it was precisely this notion of a common ground that the PAP government had decided was too risky to acknowledge.

As has happened so often before, the PAP found itself in a discursive-trap (Marin 1988:94ff.). Lim produced a performative description that the government hysterically transformed into a constative, through the very attempt to preempt and curtail her narration. Goh rejected her history of his term in office and her right to tell it and warned her to never tell it thus again, thereby substantiating her description and her justification in telling it. Tactically positioning herself as a voice of the people, Lim invited the PAP to align themselves with her desire for a greater polity of <people + government>. By rejecting her critique and her independent authority as cultural producer, the government reiterated the condition and instantiated in the present the history she had told.

THE AUTHENTIC AND THE COUNTERFEIT
Reflecting on this projection of performance anxiety, how should we understand the PAP’s reading of their own performance methods? The only emergence of what could be
called an exposition of PAP government performance 'theory' has come from the Minister of Information and the Arts, Brigadier General George Yeo, who, in a 1995 interview with ASIAWEEK (a year and a half after the AGA), assigned a set of characteristics to the art form, performance art. When read in obverse, Yeo's description of performance art provides an acute and useful insight into the PAP government's understanding of performance in a more general sense:

Performance art relies on strong psychological interaction between the performers and the audience. It makes for a more intense experience and it's a device which is as old as society. All religions use it. If you attend a charismatic revival, they require you to do things that make the experience a more psychologically involved one. The Communists use it in cells, where they encourage young recruits to narrate their experiences and make certain commitments. Group therapies employ the same techniques, like Alcoholics Anonymous.

So there's nothing new about performance art. But we are mindful that if misused, it can be exploitative and manipulative. But well used, it can make an artistic performance more interesting and more fulfilling. (Yeo, 1995:42-43)

In this earnest and thoughtful declaration, Yeo never attempts to define performance art as a formal system. He focuses instead on a 'technique', upon which the whole art form is supposed to 'rely'. Yeo argues that performance art uses "strong psychological interaction" as its primary ingredient, holding up examples of interrogative and confessional social rituals that all performance art is supposed to share with religion, politics and group therapy. All the social rituals or 'techniques' he describes assume 'deficit relations' between a group and an individual. That is, in order to join a group, an individual must admit or 'confess' to a deficit in his/her constitution or beliefs. For example, the sinner must admit to his sins to be saved through unification with Christ’s Church. The political neophyte must admit to his desire to overcome bourgeois tendencies to be acceptable to a communist cell. The alcoholic must admit chemical dependency in order to gain control over it and join a group in commitment to the Alcoholics' Anonymous “12 step programme”. As we have seen in many of his other comments, for Yeo, determining legitimacy and authenticity is fundamental to his thought.

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Yeo strategically included religion and politics, probably because the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit explicitly lists the presence of these two themes in a performance as grounds for denying a license to publicly perform.
The instrumental application of legalistic and monetary criteria of ‘authenticity versus counterfeit’ to the cultural field erases the productive tropological ambiguity of metaphor and metonymy that constitutes art. Whereas Ng’s performance was unequivocally counterfeit in Yeo’s mind, performance art shares with politics and the military (the two institutions for which the Cabinet Minister and Brigadier-General most particularly stands) standards of belief in and commitment to in a cause, by which the authenticity of the form can be evaluated. More exactly, as he imagines it, performance art actually requires those standards as tests of its participants and their works. In this he would largely be in agreement with those norms by which Austin sought to evaluate the legitimacy of felicitous utterance and the authenticity of the utterers to make the utterance\textsuperscript{45}.

Yeo has left out of his description those ambiguous and fugitive metadiscursive qualities of performance art that have filled the pages of this study: linguistic indeterminacy, translocution, restoration, détournement, the carnivalesque, absurdity, paradox, and parody. He has also ignored all the 'marginal cases' that Austin found to be neither authentic nor inauthentic, as well as all those performances that resist hierarchical reification, producing fluid exchanges of power between performer and audience. The performance art works described in this dissertation generally come without entailments of psychological deficit on the part of the audience. They do not require that the audience accept membership in a group, or in a political programme, or accept a set of beliefs or an ideology. No promises are made; no pacts are formed. While Ng’s Don’t Go Swimming, It’s Not Safe involved an emblematic confession, and a sacrifice of his own bodily well being, the audience was under no equivalent compunction.

The metonymic (synecdochal) body of the performer or translocutor became in all these cases the locus of metaphor. The audience participated out of personal choice; the performer neither removed nor required their agency. Forum Theatre, based on Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal’s notions of 'conscientisation' and empowerment, evolved precisely in order to enhance the circulation of power and problem solving between

\textsuperscript{45} There is nothing, however, in Yeo's rhetoric to indicate that he is aware of Austin's theories.
“spect-actors,” a category that includes the performers *and* the audience. Acceptance of doctrine is never assumed as a condition for participation in Forum Theatre, whereas it is in all of Yeo’s examples.

Yeo’s *deficit assumption* appears to derive from indoctrinal rites, designed to establish or reiterate belief or affiliation, to establish new beliefs, implement new commitments and instill behavioural requirements. It is not easy to find performance art works that fit Yeo’s indoctrinal mold, although we might find it, for example, in some of the more didactic late works of Joseph Bueys. Yet, Bueys presented his chalkboard lectures as complex emblems and metaphors for individual and group consciousness and the shamanic interventions of the artist in conventional realms of consciousness. It is precisely the analogical element that Yeo has removed from his description of the field. As this dissertation has demonstrated, the turning of the trope has the effect of subverting instrumental performance (such as Yeo's indoctrinal forms) through a rampant proliferation of metaphoric *and* metonymic doublings.

Works of performance art that simulate political, religious, corporate or propaganda rituals might indeed use techniques of interrogation and confession to which Yeo is referring. But, whereas religion and politics tend to posit a rubric of the social ‘real’ to be grasped or accepted, or a system of values or beliefs to be exercised; performance art tends to interrogate the very functions of signification, referentiality and representation, resulting in an oscillating and destabilized ‘real’. It is from the fluid and ambiguous relationship of modes of representation to the ‘real’ that performance art obtains its peculiar metadiscursive power. Yeo's description of compensations for deficits and lack makes no allowance for performance art as a metadiscursive form, or as a sign of bourgeois discursive surplus.

Performance artists often find their inspiration in the very absurdities that ‘politics’ and absolutist belief-systems necessarily seek to dissemble. Because its goal, historically speaking, has never been the attainment of a continuous state of power, force, or faith, performance art ‘gives itself away’, usually offering up its infelicities and insincerities in a matter of minutes rather than years, as in the case of most political, corporate, military, and religious rituals. While indoctrinal performance and traditional performing arts abjure
and denigrate dilettantism, much performance art embraces it as a constituting principle. Far from being the habitué of the true believer, performance art tends to attract those whose beliefs are tenuous, riddled with uncertainty, reminding us of Marx and Engels' characterisation of the bourgeoisie as the class marked by "everlasting uncertainty and agitation" (Marx and Engels, 1988:36).

When George Yeo, in his double role of Brigadier General and government Minister, struggled to define performance art, he framed it in terms of those doctrinal fields with which he was familiar, reflecting his own military and Ministerial mandate to convince, indoctrinate, inculcate strategy and policy, direct and lead. In the performance of an address by a leader of the ruling party, such as Yeo, with the instruments of modern state violence behind him, or by a corporate president in a ‘classical’ Fayolean management mould, there is little opportunity for audience real-time deconstruction, interruption, intervention or participation—except through acts of agitation or subversion. In the absence of an audience intervention, the 'speaker-machine', as the sole authorised voice, enters and exits with a power surplus, while the audience enters and leaves with a power deficit.

The PAP ascended to power during the period just before independence through the deployment of 'agitation', ideological 'propagation', and 'subversion' of the status quo. Their ideology of 'teleological developmentalism' has always assumed a deficit or lack to be accepted and then overcome through industry and proactive policy initiatives. Yeo’s embrace of ‘instrumentalist solutions’ to ‘developmental lack’ inflects his view of all aspects of civil society and cultural production. Like the man with a hammer who views the world as a nail, 'agitation', 'propagation' (inclusive of indoctrination), and 'subversion' have been the triadic frame through which Yeo, and his colleagues in the exclusively PAP Cabinet, have come to see all potentially critical civil society cultural initiatives, such as the AGA and Forum Theatre. Through law and polemics, the PAP government

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46 Yeo’s construction of ‘performance art’ in the pages of ASIaweek, a vehicle of univocal dissemination, with an international distribution that performance artists can usually only dream of obtaining, offers an example of the power of political performance to determine the parameters of discourse. This writer’s 'letter to the editor', correcting errors in the recounting of the performances of Shannon Tham and Josef Ng in Yeo's interview, was not published, leaving Yeo’s voice alone to historicise a crisis that he was largely responsible for engineering.
appropriated the emergence of the performances of Ng, Tham and TNS (as they had appropriated earlier performances in 1976 and 1987) to support their own mythic narrative of ‘survival’ and ‘preserving the state’ from deleterious outside influences. As imagined by the government, performance art and Forum Theatre (and the writing performance of Catherine Lim and others) impinged upon the same stage and instrumental footing as PAP performance, and therefore posed a potential danger to their continued hegemony over state discourse.

In the events of 1993-1994, Yeo and the government played out an ‘agony of the norm’, viewing the Singapore cultural landscape in a manner not unlike Kublai Khan viewed his model city of the norm, in Italo Calvino’s apocryphal recounting of a dialogue between the “Great Khan” and Marco Polo:

"[...] I have constructed in my mind a model city from which all possible cities can be deduced," Kublai said. "It contains everything corresponding to the norm. Since the cities that exist diverge in varying degree from the norm, I need only foresee the exceptions to the norm and calculate the most probable combinations."

"I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all others," Marco answered. "It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions. If such a city is the most improbable, by reducing the number of abnormal elements, we increase the probability that the city really exists. So I have only to subtract exceptions from my model, and in whatever direction I proceed, I will arrive at one of the cities which, always as an exception, exist. But I cannot force my operation beyond a certain limit: I would achieve cities far too probable to be real" (Calvino, 1972:69).

While Kublai Khan47, at the seat of administrative power, works from the 'rule of the norm' to the exceptions, the itinerant explorer works from the 'rule of exception' to an abnorm, from the improbable to the not quite probable. When working thusly from the 'rule of exceptions', the most probable itself is the most fantastic to the degree of its probability. The Khan and Polo are both creatures of this paradox.

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47 "The Great Khan" (c.1215-1294) was the first emperor of China's Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1271-1368), and Grandson of Genghis Khan. Marco Polo (1254-1324), Venetian explorer and merchant, served at the court of Da-du (now Beijing) for twenty years, between 1275 and 1292 (Appiah and Gates 1996:387).
Imagine their two model cities represented on two maps, such that when superimposed—the Khan's placed over Polo's or vice versa—the two correspond. Like a glass that is ‘half-full’ or ‘half-empty’, Khan and Polo would then see a single city as both the 'exception' and the 'norm' in their respective hermeneutics. In the same manner, the Singapore government and the AGA artists each doubled their 'Singapore' as both 'norm' and 'exception'.

However, the paradox holds one more turn. The PAP, as the representative party at the moment of the nation's constitution, has always based its performative legitimacy on the perfect match of its own exceptionality as the party of an English educated class-fragment to the exceptionality of the 'tiny red-dot' in the green seas of Nanyang. Exceptionality, improbability, and a quest for legitimacy through exceptional performance, rather than acceptance of given conditions, has always been the flag flown by the Singapore administrative state. Yet, theirs is an exclusive exceptionalism that disallows other exceptional performances.

In its modernist construction of the city of the exceptional norm, the PAP government recalls its own early autogenic performance as a 'marginal case' that required teleological legitimation. Former illocutionary uncertainties and potentialities had to be coalesced into a perlocutionary, doctrinal certainty. In the Italian Calvino's imagining, Kublai Khan, representing the Mongolian colonisation of China, remembers his former position outside the great wall. Now sitting at the centre of power, he recalls himself then, as he listens to the Italian Marco Polo proposing a city "made only of exceptions". The PAP government imagines itself then, at the moment of the trauma of national constitution, as it imagines the performance artist now.
CONCLUSION

I.
This research was begun with the objectives of (1) exploring works of performance in Singapore as moments of contestation in which divergent visions of the nation-state converge and collide; (2) historicising the events of the Artists’ General Assembly (New Years 1993-94), its aftermath, and the presence of performance art in Singapore from 1988 through 1995.

These objectives required an examination of performance as a semiotic mode in public life, as an art genre, and as an instrument of power and resistance. Part I & II elucidated the manner in which state ideology and official history are disseminated through (and constructed by) visual and verbal performative tropes, rituals, rhetoric and other forms of performance. Part III theorised why performance art and Forum Theatre were seen by the Singapore government to “agitate” the public, “propagate” deviant ideologies and “subvert” the Singapore state. It focused on the events surrounding the Artists’ General Assembly and interventions of the administrative state into this and earlier civil society initiatives. It argued that these events led, on the one hand, to tactical positioning by artists and other intellectuals in their relationship to the Singapore state, and to each other; and on the other hand, to the elaboration of the PAP government’s notions of performance (arrived at through a spurious imagining of the attributes of performance art).

The dissertation has described Singapore as a “junction” of crisscrossing cultural economies that extend far beyond the island-state’s boundaries, reflecting global and regional currents. Capital growth and labour efficiency have provided the essential ‘performance indicators’ auguring survival and success. During the first decade following independence Taylorist and classical Fayolean management strategies dominated the factories and the civil service, while the art schools, unions and the streets offered a site for agit-prop as a dialectical counter to government instrumentalism. Both civil service rituals, such as the National Day Parade, and civil society street performances were
informed by Social Realist ideals and Socialist Realist aesthetics. The polemical aesthetics of post-revolutionary Beijing Opera gained a foothold on the left in the work of Chinese theatre practitioners such as Kuo Pao Kun, while official articulations of aesthetics were marked by an odd creolisation of nation-building fervour, Yan’an pedagogical utilitarianism, and Protestant moralism.

This formative period of national manifestion was followed by deterrent crackdowns on the Chinese educated left during the 1970s, including Chinese language theatre. The government’s various draconian measures led to the expulsion of the formerly Democratic Socialist PAP government from the Socialist International in 1976. The administrative state’s disciplining gaze then shifted to the English educated left, leading to the suppression of English activist theatre during the 1980s. Performance art and Forum Theatre emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as core cultural expressions in a nation committed to an increasingly globalised late-capitalist commodity and service economy that emphasised the efficient performance of an industrial/post-industrial workforce. Singapore was fertile ground for the development of an urban-based art form, inflected with liberal bourgeois values that ambivalently embraces and problematises identitarian politics and the commodification of the body.

However, in 1994, the government revealed their anxiety over the deleterious effects on the cultural economy of non-instrumental performance forms, particularly ones emphasising audience participation. This concern was aligned with their consistent reinforcing of instruments of proletarianisation to engineer the island’s industrial workforce, and their anxieties concerning their own performance indicators. It is suggested here that the PAP government’s ‘performance anxiety’ was instrumental in the destruction of their early democratic ideals and became a hindrance to their later developmental goals. Over the decades since independence, the adoption of policies of cultural deterrence and preempton has led the government to perpetuate colonial regimes of force well into the post-independence period.

The PAP government cannot be considered to be naively reactionary. Their strategic dilation of the 5th Passage Affair into a full-blown cultural crisis fell into a twenty year interval of similar constructed cultural crises. Performance art and Forum Theatre were
seen by then to be eruptions of *agitation, propagation* and *subversion* precisely because such representations stimulated and rationalized the agonistic spectacle of the originary national crisis of independence, bringing to bear the continuously renewed mythic crisis of national manifestation and consolidation under a vanguard party. Dialectical to government consolidations, performance art and Forum Theatre represented forms of distributed and participatory social agency, and an alternative vision of the nation: a pluralist city of exceptions, elisions, incongruities, contradictions.

II.

When Josef Ng took the floor at the NAFA gallery on 23 October 1993 to present *Don’t Go Swimming, It’s Not Safe*, he could not have foreseen just how unsafe performance art itself was to become two months later. Ng’s audience at first believed they were supportively participating in a work that focused on the stigmatization and bashing of gay men in Singapore. But in the process of trying to protect the artist’s body from his self-flagellation, they soon found themselves complicit in the violent denigration of that body. Forcing his audience into this double-bind, Ng placed responsibility for identitarian oppression of a minority group (to which few of those present belonged) squarely on the shoulders of the people present; neither the government nor the police were brought into the equation. This moving work indicated that performance art had come into its own as an aesthetic form able to address the impact of social issues on the bodies of the citizenry. Furthermore, it did this in the paradox inflected spaces of daily life that other art forms could not realize. Performance art was clearly a new tool in Singapore for the autonomous exercise of active citizenry. We are left to imagine what may have resulted from the development of performance art and Forum theatre, if the artists had been left to develop a continuous body of works in Singapore over the following decade\(^1\). However, by mid-January 1994 the window of participatory democracy being explored by Ng and The Necessary Stage was closed by government decree. It can be argued that the window of opportunity had not been fully utilised by the artists themselves. For example, Ng had by then turned from works engendering autonomous participation in civil society to more

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\(^1\) The restrictions on the public licensing of these forms were in place for a decade until being formally lifted in December 2003 (although Forum Theatre had been quietly performed in restricted formats for several years by Drama Box under Artistic Director, Kok Heng Leun), and celebrated by a “live art meeting: the future of the imagination” at The Substation (6/12/2003), organized by The Artists’ Village and others.
centralized criticisms of government policies, in particular the enforcement of colonial era sodomy laws. Ng’s earlier concerns with gay rights were certainly part of this decision, and he must have felt pressure to respond to the physical and mental torture faced by the twelve arrested men. It also seems probable (but not certain) that the government, in any case, would have eventually manifested a phobic reaction toward these efforts to independently extend democratic space in civil society. Nevertheless, performance art was drawn centripetally into the vortex of the bureaucratic state. In retrospect, “Don’t Go Swimming, It’s Not Safe” indexed a state of risk that applied not only to gay men but to all artists and intellectuals in Singapore, as they found themselves caught in a dynamic of resistance/complicity with the bureaucratic state. Ng’s engineered double-bind appears to have reflected the words of Kuo Pao Kun’s protagonist, Zhenghe, the Eunuch Admiral: “To keep my head / I must lose my tail”.

Against the backdrop of Singaporean statolatry, we might justifiably assume that the ephemerality, small scale, and sub-cultural specificity of Ng's actions and those of other performance artists, such as Vincent Leow, Amanda Heng, Shannon Tham, or Zai Kuning, would lead to febrile works that were unlikely to have any lasting impact on the national culture. But there are factors that contradict this reductive reading.

Firstly, the power of performance art to memorably transmit through the medium of the artist’s body and mind-to-mind, as well as its ability to get under the skin of official culture should not be underestimated. The meme of performance art—or more exactly, the possibility of performance art—was disseminated by the extreme reactions of the government to the artists’ embodied performances, through the legal rituals of arrest, the pressing of charges, the exemplary trials of Ng and Tan, and most importantly, through the media spectacle of these rituals. Because censorship requires representation—that is, the proliferation of the sign of the thing to be suppressed—performance art and Forum Theatre found their doppelganger in the government’s desire to publicise its exemplary control over cultural production, and in the media’s enthusiastic collaboration in the presentation of this image of ‘the government-in-control’. The press refracted the events in an ecstatic circuitry of communication, projecting the image of the bare buttocks of “Josef Ng, performance artist” (who had “protested” the caning of buttocks) throughout
the republic and into everyone’s home, greatly enhancing public awareness of this “new art form”.

While the censoring of performance art and Forum Theatre preemptively foreclosed on an important initiative toward the development of an autonomous civil society, it also brought hermeneutic frames to bear that very likely would not have been called up without the trauma of the act of censoring. The works under the disciplinary gaze of the government took on a new aura of controversy and resistance (albeit one fatally tied to the figure of the center: the government and ruling party), and provided some of the artists with a deeper awareness of their subjective positioning. The trope of the performance artist, like that of the homosexual, became a figure contested by interests within both the civil service and civil society.

Secondly, by 1988 (well before the government took notice of performance art), the artist’s body in performance art works was already assumed among the intelligentsia to be a significant, if controversial, site for the on-going negotiations of power/knowledge. And as the artists themselves were well aware, performance art was by then a globalised—and in many countries a mainstreamed—art form with a history reaching back one hundred years. So the performance art works in Singapore were being presented on a global stage, and they had a historical significance beyond national concerns, regardless of whether this dynamic was recognized locally.

III.

The power relations between government and artists is by no means the only dynamic at work here. There is, for example, another dynamic within the field of the performance of daily life. The government's harsh response to Josef Ng’s performance must be seen in a context of their much harsher response to the earlier performances of the men arrested and caned for “outraging modesty” —a prejudicial reaction that Ng’s Brother Cane sought to expose.

What micro-performative phenomena in their individual histories, and what unmarked, unrecorded, unrealled events led the twelve men that day to meet face-to-face with the police? What unmarked, unrecorded and unrealled events led the police there that day?
And what of the bureaucrats and government officials who oversaw the writing of the laws that were applied? How did their own very private experiences, fears and covert desires drive them to interpret their political mandate to produce the legislations? And what of those who emptied their waste-baskets, sharpened their pencils, carried their memos, or the foreign maids who cleaned their homes and took care of their children at 1º of separation from the corridors of power? Did their largely invisible performances have any effect on the development and application of those laws and public policies? The larger question is, how other hidden micro-performative behaviours, gestures, or speech-acts impact and alter those few acts that finally manifest in legislation, courtroom dramas, or the day’s news?

The massive distribution of ephemeral acts in a dynamic social system offers a complex mapping of the state that ultimately must be addressed in order to be able to say that I have accurately described and interpreted the “5th Passage Affair”. And it is precisely this complex connectivity of events that I have foreclosed upon in my rush to select, describe and theorise a handful of ‘significant’ performances in this dissertation. Is my academic foreclosure of other possible histories really so different from Rajaratnam's political foreclosures while standing before the statue of Raffles? In these pages I have called forth specters of the past, stripped of their embodiments and “marks of utterance” (Marin) as if they actually ‘were’… actual. The ‘spectrography’ by which these performances in Singapore have been selected, re-constructed and described is now reproduced and reconfigured by your act of reading this inscription. It is a performative writing/reading machine that through the application of academic instruments of exposition, polemics and analysis has performatively fabricated the city it describes — a city of exceptions to the exception, that, in the words of Calvino, may be “too probable to be real”.
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REFERENCE TEXT ABBREVIATIONS


