Outside-Singapore

: A practice of writing :

Making subjects and spaces yet to come

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program, and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my grandparents who have passed on.
Abstract

This thesis highlights the practice of writing as a way to engage with this amorphous thing-space-State-city-nation-citizens term that is “Singapore”. However, the thesis is not about Singapore or Singaporeans; it is not a reflection on or representation of what was Singapore and Singaporeans or what these two terms should be. Its concern is how the practice of writing contributes to, rather than defines, the incessant process of making subjects and spaces, peoples and nations, citizens and cities. Hence, the kinds of subjects and spaces this thesis is concerned with are yet to come.

What this thesis offers is not a negative critique of what Singapore is, based on its government’s current neo-conservative policies, its stress on neo-Confucian values and global-capitalist attitude to urban development and nationhood. Concerned with subjects and spaces yet-to-come, this thesis writes of the potentialities beyond measure that governmental, social, political, cultural, subjectival and spatial bodies can have in the process of their continuous differential relation with each other. The notion of potentialities beyond measure, as used in this thesis, draws primarily from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and his notion of difference as difference from itself, or differentiation; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and their notion of the new empire as an empire of change offering up non-dualistic resistances, and is not predicated upon the hierarchy of an imperial centre and outposts. The thesis also draws on Homi Bhabha, Jean-Luc Nancy, Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot and their respective concerns with how theory is itself a practice of writing that is not just reiterative but experimental, capable of expressing novel meanings, subject positions and even spaces. Additionally I will weave the thoughts and writings of Benedict de Spinoza and Friedrich Nietzsche through the thesis. Many of the aforementioned writers, too, draw from Spinoza and Nietzsche to develop their own notions of unquantifiable potentiality. Particularly I am interested in how Nietzsche, via his “Overman”, and Spinoza, via his notion of the ever-changing body, overcome dualism, and conceive of life and the ethics of living as never strictly predicated upon high moral principles and opposition. Rather the ethical life becomes one that attends to life’s own maximal capabilities for transformation.

The implications this notion of potentialities beyond measure has for Singapore’s continuous post-colonial project allows us to negotiate a way of doing post-colonial theoretical writing (as well as art-making and creative writing) that goes beyond identitarian politics, reiteration, relativism, insistence on telos and essentialism. Additionally such a writing moves beyond the theorist’s voice as representative of Singapore’s territory and people: the spaces and subjects spoken of are never there yet. A post-colonial project may indeed attend to the production of a Singapore yet-to-come, a Singapore outside oppositional imaginations of Singapore, an ‘Outside-Singapore’. There is nothing ‘inside’ this Outside-Singapore; rather, this Outside-Singapore is inside the practice of writing from which emerges the potentiality of new subjects and spaces.

What sort of practice, thus, follows? How is this practice of writing practised? This thesis will draw the conceptual, material, spatial, textual and philosophical forces from three artworks and one theoretical text that focus primarily on Singapore city. I will then combine the forces offered up by the aforementioned writers and artists with other conceptual, textual and philosophical forces to produce a practice of writing that may incite the production of subjects and spaces yet to come, and ultimately those potentialities beyond measure.
Preamble: Lessons from making Rojak

When this project, this practice of writing, started some years ago it began as a collection of useful concepts, notes and photocopied pages from my favourite theorists and philosophers. Now, the project is still a collection of things. In local Singaporean parlance this thesis like Singapore’s urban and cultural scapes may be called a “Rojak”. Rojak is a street dish consisting of chunks of vegetables, fried meats, spices, tomato ketchup, kecap manis (sticky sweet soy sauce) shrimp roe and sambal belachan. The dish is a combination of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian ingredients. It is prepared by mixing the ingredients towards the centre of a big wooden bowl until the sauce permeates all the vegetables and meats. In recent years Rojak began appearing in hotel restaurants where chefs have incorporated non-local ingredients such as olive oil instead of the usual peanut oil, and even attempted to include smoked salmon into the dish. For Singaporeans as well as the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board Rojak is celebrated as a representation of Singapore’s “melting pot of cultures.”

However, it is not what Rojak represents that I am interested in here. I am more interested in what the process of making Rojak can impart in terms of experimentation and hence producing potentialities. And to this end I am interested in expanding what the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘mixed-up’ have for Singapore. Is diversity simply a relativized and contradictory difference among Singapore’s races, or can diversity be a process of diversifying, or differentiating from oneself? Thus, when we speak of Rojak as being diverse it is not just because it incorporates different ethnic ingredients but also because there is a will to experimentation and a will to make Rojak become something different from what is was. Perhaps, we can learn from those chefs who are willing to add unfamiliar ingredients to Rojak’s usual mix of ingredients, to hence propel Rojak toward new gastronomic compositions.

Food, for Singaporean sociologists Chua Beng-Huat and Ananda Rajah, “constitute in long-term human history a cultural field in which cross-fertilization, appropriation, re-appropriation, infusion, diffusion, absorption, degorging, invention, bricolage as well as doctrinaire, essentialized gastronomic ideas and practices all proliferate with hybrid rigour.” More importantly Chua and Rajah suggest that the hybrid must be thought of as more than a simple mix of “pure types.” Following Homi Bhabha and Robert Young’s

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2 In this thesis, difference is understood as not just relative or comparative difference but a difference-from-itself, which is a process of differentiation. Gilles Deleuze explains that difference-from-itself or differentiation involves a process of variation which are constituted by internal variations or “individuating modalities.” It is a difference where one thing, person, subject, place or concept varies by becoming different modalities. Differentiation in this instance is a difference in kind rather than a difference by degree or comparison. Differentiation causes a thing, person or event to become something else, causing a change in kind. As such when considering the process of making Rojak through the duration of time and history, one may understand the Rojak as an ever-changing dish rather than simply a dish that can be neatly divided up into periods and types. There is a process of indivisible change and non-telicity that underlies the ‘life’ of the Rojak and the making of the Rojak. It is this notion of difference that is central to this thesis. In fact the notion of absolute potentiality as discussed in Chapter One is predicated upon this difference-from-itself, which is non-telic, a becoming-something or someone else that cannot be predicted beforehand. See: Deleuze, Gilles (1994) Difference and Repetition (Trans. P. Patton), London & New York: Continuum Books. p.39
formulation of the hybrid Chua and Rajah suggest the hybrid cannot be just a “third term” that is a synthesis of opposing pure types but rather “a miscreated perversion of its progenitors” that can exhaust the simple comparative differences between these progenitors. Young himself writes that hybridity is always “interstitial” or in-between. To speak of hybridity is never a matter of tracing fixed originary identities but to acknowledge the process of becoming taking place, and to acknowledge the possibility of being caught up in this process of hybridization and become a hybrid oneself. A subject or a place, or even a dish, may become a hybrid of what it was and what it may be becoming – a hybrid constituted by continuous change rather than a composition of easily recognizable parts. Hybridization for Young is a process of “creating new spaces, structures [and] scenes.”

The space of the hybrid is no longer simply straddled across two existing worlds or a harmonious integration of one into another. Its space is one that is in the process of making and transformation. Amidst a process of making the hybrid’s space has no fixed identity. The spatio-temporality of the hybrid is in this sense that which is yet to be known. The hybrid is like a process of making Rojak that involves constant experimentation, the adding of unfamiliar meats and sauces as well as the ways the dish can be arranged or displayed on a plate or bowl. Its identity is congruous with the process whereby forces, or ingredients, are continually added and/or subtracted. Its identity is in fact expressible as this continuous, intensive and extensive process of experimentation.

The hybrid like the Rojak is a collection that is constantly growing and shrinking. Making Rojak, considered from the perspective of experimentation, goes beyond marking out the various ingredients as being equivocal to the various essentialized races. The ongoing experimental practice of making Rojak expresses potential tastes, colours and textures that are yet to be known in advance. One may say an experimental practice of making Rojak can be one that defies the “age-old study/process split” where theory and practice are inseparable. What Rojak can be, the tastes to be produced and the ingredients to be incorporated is something that cannot be predicted. The constant remixing of this brown coloured mixture of meats, vegetables and sauces can be said to be not “an end in itself but as a sign of the irreducible heterogeneity of social relations” taking place. It is not just the Rojak being a marker of Singapore’s rich and complex cultural and urban scapes, but how this varying composition of gastronomic and olfactory forces, colours and textures can contribute to Singapore’s diversifying and differentiating social, cultural and urban spheres.

Like making Rojak, this thesis is a process of collecting and fusing different words, concepts and sentences together. However, just like the process of making Rojak goes beyond demarcating an essentialized Singapore, the thesis’ aim is not to locate what Singapore is definitively about. The thesis does not present a view as to what Singapore or Singaporeans should be. Rather, it is an experiment of putting together words, sentences, quotes and concepts so that inspirations for continual experimental engagement with Singapore may take place for the readers of this thesis. Here, one takes into account how textual and poetic forces in writing can shape the concepts and ideas

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5 Young (1995), p.25
one gets from reading a text. Following Michel Foucault one may suggest that language is not merely representative. Through experimentation, Foucault elaborates, “language is then freed from all the old myths by which our awareness of words, discourse, and literature has been shaped.”

If the Rojak as a composition of gastronomic and olfactory forces can be interpolated into Singapore’s social sphere to add to and transform the island-state’s complexity, then this thesis becomes a collection of words, concepts, phrases and quotes that a reader may pick up to interpolate into his/her own work – artwork, buildings, novels, plays or theoretical texts – to hopefully enable transformation. In turn, the reader may insert his/her work into Singapore’s urban, cultural, literary scapes to effect actual transformation as well. This is the thesis’ social and political dimension. The thesis is not outside of this amorphous entity called Singapore. What is presented in this thesis are collections of words, sentences, artworks, concepts and figures that together or separately may inspire the production of nations, cities, people and even perspectives yet to come. In this sense one may say that the thesis’ ‘form’ grows extensively and intensively along with the variety of uses the readers may have for this thesis. In time, this thesis’ form like the Rojak’s form grows and changes. In time, the thesis’ form changes as new forces, words, sentences, uses and concepts may be added to it. Insofar as this thesis may be variedly used by other artists, writers and theorists its form becomes as expansive and intensive as time immemorial.

Perhaps working like a Rojak chef, here in this thesis I gather groups of words, forces, concepts and sentences that I hope other Rojak chefs may pick up and use variedly. Thus, the question of this thesis’ use is directed toward how artists, architects, theorists and writers interested in engaging with a changing Singapore may pick up the thesis’ particular collections of concepts, forces and words. And, how they may incorporate these collections to their own projects, which, in turn, may be interpolated into Singapore’s social-urban realm, hence further generating new gatherings or collections of forces in the form of new texts, buildings, artworks, parks and even policies. These tasks happen beyond the ‘time’ of this thesis.

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8 Nietzsche, Friedrich (1976) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Book 3, ‘Before Sunrise’)” in *The Portable Nietzsche* (Ed. & Trans. W. Kaufmann), London & New York: Penguin Books. p.278. Time for Nietzsche, as for many philosophers writing before and after him, is what drives the world in change. The essence of the world, insofar as it changes, is owed to the fact that time is the world’s most interior form. Time is non-telic and what it offers are potentialities that cannot be quantified or predicted. Thus, chance or more precisely pure chance is for Nietzsche what time offers. As Nietzsche writes, “Lord Chance”, or the utmost non-representable potentiality is the very “form” of time. And chance is the “most ancient nobility of the world,” this in turn signals time being the world’s most ancient nobility insofar as time and chance are one and the same for Nietzsche; chance’s form is time itself insofar time expresses the unquantifiable. In this world of pure chance and non-telic time, there are no more heavens or Gods who govern the passage of Men. What is left as the utmost divinity is “a dance floor for divine accidents.” The world becomes for Nietzsche “a divine table for divine dice and dice players.” Thus spoke Nietzsche on the great immense un-speakable moment that is the dice throw, a moment expressing pure chance and in essence all potential futures.
...Things, concepts, practices gathered so far:

**Abstract**

**Preamble: Lessons from making *Rojak***

...Things, concepts, practices gathered so far

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**other beginnings…in lieu of a conclusion**

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The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside… If thought comes from outside, and remains attached to the outside, how come the outside does not flood into the inside, as the element that thought does not and cannot think of? The unthought is therefore not external to thought but lies at its very heart, as the impossibility of thinking which doubles or hollows out the outside.

[...]
Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal.

- Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*

Of bodies changed to other forms I tell;
You Gods, who have yourselves wrought every change,
Inspire my enterprise and lead my lay
In one continuous song from nature’s first
Remote beginnings to our modern times

- Ovid, Book I, *Metamorphoses*
Beginning over…

Beginnings often conceal the desire of other beginnings.¹

- Paul Carter, Material Thinking

Let us first say something about beginnings to segue to an ‘Outside-Singapore’: It is not uncommon for writers to write the introduction of the text they are working on last. It is when the various chapters are written that arise the potential for the text as a whole to become inexhaustible and to be beginning over again. At the end of writing those chapters, excursuses, sections, paragraphs and appendixes there emerge introductions other than the one we as writers had initially drafted as a ‘guide’. In fact each word, sentence or paragraph constructed in the process of writing those various chapters already harbours the potentiality for those other introductions. This is simply the practice of writing, always implicating or expelling different forces, hence, always forming innumerable ways to begin again. Even when the proper introduction is written this process of implicating and expelling different forces continues. The introduction is never merely a summary of what is to follow.

In writing the introduction there is the act of re-organizing concepts, conceptual personae, imageries, and textual, visual and poetical forces. The introduction in this sense introduces two inseparable things: first, the chapters, themes and concepts to follow, and second, a harbouring of other beginnings, introductions, chapters and sentences yet to be written, yet imaginable and yet representable. It is this second kind of introduction, immanent in the first, which expresses the possibility of re-gathering the groups or compositions of forces that had expressed the various subjectivities and spatialities marked out in the later chapters. The introduction has within itself textual, poetical and conceptual forces that may cut through and combine with those of the later chapters to transform what may be expressed in those chapters. The introduction does more than merely introduce. If we bear in mind the conceptual forces of the opening quote to this introductory chapter whilst engaging with the later chapters, the quotation hints at the potential for each chapter, too, to begin over.

It is this theme of beginning over again, or precisely the potentiality to begin over again without first stating what these potentialities should be (in terms of outcomes) that is this thesis’ primary concern. And, when concerns for this indefinable potentiality are plugged into the socio-historico-politico-textual-material-conceptual-corporeal sphere/entity that is called ‘Singapore’, there emerges a concern for potential-Singapores to come; or, a Singapore outside expectations of the existing (binarized) socio-political imaginations. An ‘Outside-Singapore’ is perhaps what these potential-Singapores are collectively. Yet, in that each potential-Singapore is yet-defined, the ‘collective’ of all of them which together makes the ‘Outside-Singapore’ remains beyond measure. The term ‘collective’ here expresses as an innumerable quantity.

What can this notion of an ‘Outside-Singapore’ do for Singapore’s post-colonial, post-independence project? One of the more obvious functions is that such a concern for potentiality offers the notion that things can be beginning over again and again. Specifically this can mean the subjectivities and spaces conceived within Singapore’s post-colonial project need not be definitional. They are, like artworks, always remade insofar as the post-colonial project remains dynamic, constantly implicating and expelling various different forces, constantly remaking the functions and trajectories of such a post-colonial project, constantly remaking the post-colonial. Out of this notion that subjectivities and spatialities are constantly changing the question as to whether ‘difference’ in Singapore has to be posited as relative and oppositional emerges. Or, can difference be differentiation – difference from itself? Difference from itself, as philosopher Gilles Deleuze elaborates, subsists within every actual comparative and relative difference. It is a difference more profound than the oppositional difference between “the high and the low, the right and the left, the figure and the ground.” Differentiation is a non-measurable ‘intensity’; it is every finitude’s differentiation from itself, a finitude’s infinitization, as well as the differential relations between finitudes. Deleuze continues to say differentiation expresses “not an extension but a pure implex” that is beyond any “possible length or size.” And, this intensity does not indicate quantifiable difference but a process of differentiation which form is in potentie.²

² Deleuze, Gilles (1994) Difference and Repetition (Trans. P. Patton), London & New York: Continuum Press. p.229. Deleuze goes on to suggest that this intensity or potentiality for difference is the “deeper ground [profond]” that subsists within a “ground [fond]” that qualifies extensive or measurable difference.
Considering difference in terms of intensity and potentiality with regards to a post-colonial City-State like Singapore offers a way to think beyond the clear demarcations between colonial/neo-colonial and post-colonial, West and East, Singaporean and non-Singaporean and even oppression and freedom. Each of the binary terms mentioned here are not essential subjectivities or positions, but are always changing. The notion that Singapore is a fixed post-colonial locality invested with immutable values and cultures becomes ungrounded. The piece of land, the formal treaties defining Singapore’s geographical, national, socio-political, economical and cultural boundaries are themselves particular constellations of forces capable of being recomposed. As philosopher John Rajchman notes, “the spaces we inhabit are always events,” they are the events of de/re-composition of forces “that cannot be ever quite exhausted by the meanings with which we invest them.”

What defines a nation’s space, a citizen’s space or even a subjectival space are spaced-out in the event of forces swirling, attracting, expelling, cutting through and combining with each other.

The space of a subject and the subject of a space are changing. However, the change can be slowed down to almost undetectable speeds that make subject and space seem static. The Singapore government’s compulsory mother-tongue language program for state schools dictates that Chinese-descent students will have to learn Mandarin, Malay-descent students to learn Malay and Indian-descent (regardless of India’s geographical and linguistic diversity) to learn Tamil, demonstrates an attempt to bind contemporary Singaporean subjectivity to China, Malaysia and India as the origins where these subjectivities come from. It is not that the government denies there being change in contemporary Singaporean subjectivity. But, by deflecting away some conceptual, socio-political, ideological and historical forces that may expedite the rate the Singaporean subject may change, the government maintains some semblance of subjectival and spatial stasis – the Chinese-, Malay-, Indian-Singaporean, and China, Malaya and India remains


4 Patton, Paul (2000) *Deleuze and the Political*, London & New York: Routledge. p.71. Paul Patton notes that the whole notion of the stable subject, the “I”, as prior and the origin of the social realm needs to be reversed. As he elaborates, “It is the subject which is inseparable from the constitution of a machine assemblage,” those gatherings or compositions of forces we here speak of: “Subjectivity is an effect of this [ongoing] process rather than its origin.” The “I” is in the event of these assembling machines, the messy masses of gathering forces which boundaries and “form” persists with all eternity – past and future.
linked together unfazed by two centuries of cultural mixing and globalization that is still taking place in Singapore.\(^5\)

Resisting the essentialism that arises from tying subjectivity to a specific place and time has been a concern for some post-colonial theorists interested in Singapore. The Australian media theorist David Birch, for instance, questions how the often one-sided controlling and managing of culture, and ultimately subjects and spaces, in Singapore via channels of mass communication can be countered.\(^6\) However, countering controlled or managed Singaporean culture need not be a proposal or reliance on existing models of subjectivity derived directly from the West, such as the American Libertarian. Rather, the question for post-colonial theorists concerned with the formation of subjectivity and spatiality in Singapore may be how the speed of the changing subjects and spaces can be maximized so the seeming socio-political-subjectival-spatial impasses can recompose as something else. Moreover, the Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng-Huat notes that the “terms, Singapore and Singaporean… [are] the results of discursive practices,” and are as such “temporally changing characters.”\(^7\) Hence, neither ‘Singapore’ nor ‘Singaporean’ are immutable. Singapore may generally be seen as an oppressive place but it is not a necessary Evil if the speed of which the movement of the forces re/de-making up this slow-moving stultified Singapore can be quickened, thus reconstituting the composition of forces involved to produce Singapore’s other spatialities.

In not proposing the adoption of alternative but already-existing spatial and subjectival models, but attending to decomposition and recomposition, we may follow Deleuze and

\(^5\) This fixing of subjectivity and spatiality is not just contained within government policies but carries over to the fine arts; many of Singapore’s arts group are state-sponsored. For instance, the 2005 theatrical-musical production of The Admiral’s Odyssey by Singapore’s corporate- and state-sponsored Action Theatre functions similarly to the government’s compulsory mother-tongue program. The Admiral’s Odyssey tells the story of a young boy finding the footprint of the legendary Ming dynasty Chinese admiral Cheng Ho who supposedly landed in Singapore in the 15th century. Upon finding Cheng’s footprints the boy embarks on his own brave journey to discover the world. However, the musical-play was far from advocating its viewers to leave home and embark on unknown voyages as per Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. Rather, the young boy’s journey was a journey to discover his innate Asian-ness, his Chinese roots which has been hidden by Singapore’s many Western influences. In this sense The Admiral’s Odyssey fixes the contemporary Singaporean subject to a mythical past subject such as Admiral Cheng and a mythical past place such as Ming dynasty China.


say, “Difference is not negation.”

Difference can be negotiation, finding ways to make true differences – differentiations. It is attending to the intensity or potentiality of life. Every subject or space is a field of forces, and as Deleuze writes, “every field of forces refers back to a potential energy, every opposition refers to a deeper ‘disparateness’.”

The question is how the practice of writing can attend to the maximization of these changings’ speed.

Again, the question is how other ‘beginning-overs’ of an oppressive regime, subjectivity or spatiality can be fostered? How can we be “tracing hardly recognizable intensive paths” to a world beyond relative oppositional differences, a world of swirling forces, only to gather new gatherings of forces? To gather new forces is not to replace this regime with a better regime, but simply to bombard existing compositions of forces expressing stale subjectivities and spatialities in order to spur them toward something beyond measures.

How can we embark or make a path that goes beyond both the Singaporean government and its detractors’ imagination of Singapore? The writing engages with these questions, they are questions which do not necessarily demand answers. These are questions that may find within the practice of writing the emergence of more questions, other subjectivities and spatialities yet-imagined. These are questions that do not solve what the outcome of Singapore’s post-colonial project should be, but simply intensify it, make it begin over and over again. There are other beginnings in practices of making artworks, novels, theoretical texts (of course, including this thesis), conversations, cities, museums, photographs and installations pertaining to the entity that is Singapore.

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8 Deleuze (1994), p.235
9 Ibid, p.236
10 Ibid.
11 Philosopher Gregg Lambert, following a point on “war-machines” made earlier by psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari in the journal *Actuel*, notes, “The revolution clearly needs a war-machine.” However what Lambert and Guattari understand as a war-machine is not a tank or bombs, or even the war between two parties each holding onto its own sense of moral principles. To be warring is to fight an internal war, to will to change and chance, of not just relations between parties but *within* a party (or body). This is why to fight a war is not to achieve final “synthesis,” but to continue fighting, to continue beginning over again. “It is not about adapting desire, socializing and disciplining it, but hooking it up in such a way that its process is uninterrupted in the [ever changing] social body.” It is to “escape the impasse of individual private fantasy.” See also: Lambert, Gregg (2005) “What the Earth Thinks” in *Deleuze and Space* (Eds. I. Buchanan & G. Lambert), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp.220-39, p.222
Why, what and how
But here, we go back to more basic questions momentarily before engaging with those questions that beget more questions.

a) Why?
There are several ‘whys’ here, each implicated within the other. But let us start with the most obvious ‘why’. I asked myself: Why Singapore and not Canada, Australia or India, which history and development of post-colonial studies are generally considered to be richer, hence offering more to write about?

The above question is one I am often asked. What do my well-meaning friends mean by ‘more to write about’? Do they mean in countries like Canada, Australia or India there are more histories, longer histories, more interesting artworks, cities, architecture, more diverse people, cultures and places, and even more theoretical texts that can serve as source for me, as such to make a thesis that is an encyclopaedia-like documentation of a country?

Seeing that I was not going to write a thesis on Canada, Australia or India, and have insisted on Singapore, concerned friends and family who are also academics then became puzzled as to why I am not taking lots of pictures of Singapore, interviewing people on the street, visiting nooks and crannies, side-alleys, abandoned warehouses, old Chinese and Hindu temples, colonial churches and administrative buildings, looking at the latest art exhibitions in order to find enough diverse information to make my thesis richer. And, when I told a fellow academic that my maternal grandfather was from Malacca, Malaysia, he suggested that I should do a thesis documenting and comparing the shop-houses in Malacca and Singapore, which are curious mixes of Victorian townhouse and Chinese architecture. As such the ‘heritage’ of the local-born Singapore-or-Malaccan-Chinese\(^\text{12}\) with their “unique blend” of culture would be ‘preserved’ despite global-capitalism.

\(^\text{12}\) The English-speaking local-born Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia were, during the colonial era, called the ‘King’s Chinese’ for their perceived loyalty to the British Crown and their readiness to more openly embrace Western culture and religion as compared to the more recent China-born Chinese immigrants. Besides embracing Western culture, these local-born Chinese, having lived in British Malaya for several generations, have also adopted many Malay customs and ways of dressing. This group of Chinese because of their ease with the English language were more employable by the colonial government than their China-born counterparts.
Then, the question as to whether I am interested in ‘adding more’ to a comparatively scant collection of post-colonial theoretical writings on Singapore was asked by a Singaporean architectural theorist who lamented the reallocation of funding from Singapore-focus projects to China-focus projects, presumably because China offered more university-industry ties. He asked whether it was because Singapore has very little theoretical writings on it, compared to other Commonwealth countries like India, which have produced scores of famous post-colonial theorists that spurred my interest? I suspect there is something I want to add to Singapore’s current collection of post-colonial theoretical writings. But my addition is not a discovery of some ‘hidden’ aspect of Singapore, like a little documented popular practice of dating via mobile phones among teenagers, or how young executives flock to *ulu* places instead of the city for adventures, or how jet-set businessmen represent the postmodern global citizen.

All my friends and family have been concerned that I was not getting *enough* ‘Singaporean-ny things’, or, to say there is an assumption ‘more’ Singaporean-ny things will produce a richer thesis. It is assumed that theoretical writing, especially concerning post-colonial worlds, must have ‘real world’/‘Singaporean issues’ to represent, or else it becomes less engaging.

What we may see from my family and friends’ concerns is that theory is a representational tool; it is a practice of reconciling real world, real Singaporean issues with pre-established post-colonial identities like the master, slave and/or East-West hybrid. But I suspect theoretical writing can do more than document and represent existing phenomena according to ‘types’. I am interesting in knowing more of Singapore, but the ‘more’ I wanted was not the quantifiable or imageable – images of forgotten alley-ways, disappearing rickshaw-pullers, angry young graffiti artists, smoky temples or proposals for better governance models. The ‘more’ I am interested in is the *more potentialities* when beginning over and over again. I am interested in more intensity, more subjectivities and spatialities yet to come, rather than defining for my readers what rich diversity Singapore has despite global-capitalism’s homogenous face, or how these diverse peoples and places constitute fixed positions of resistance.

13 “Ulu” is a colloquial/Malay term for rural. In recent years, more young Singaporeans are beginning to explore Singapore’s surrounding islands to engage with ‘Western’ sports like rock-climbing and kayaking.
But, still, why Singapore the country?

Singapore – with its kitschy shopping districts, benevolent paternalistic government and angry young arts scene wanting more ‘freedom’, or at least the freedom to represent diversity – is in a sense a ‘perfect’ case to engage with for embarking on a practice of writing that attends to innumerable potentialities. It is a chance to produce potentialities within representations. The overt concern for representation allows for the question, how else subjectivities and spatialities may be produced without reliance on conventional modes of representation?

Hence from the response to why Singapore the country we derive an address to the question, why is the thesis a contribution to the field of post-colonial Singaporean studies? I would argue that this thesis offers, though it does not denote, something beyond representational and identitarian politics. For instance, it is no longer a question of whether the kitschy shopping district represents global-capitalism, but what the forces composing it can do/be – what other compositions can these forces, maybe along with other forces, become that may express a difference outside the identities conventional schools of sociology and cultural studies assign to global-capitalist cities. It is no longer whether the Singaporean government represents neo-colonialism by subscribing to American imperialism and neo-Confucianism. It is a matter of asking how the expansive field of Singapore’s composition of forces, which includes places like museums, may be differently engaged and composed. How can the material, spatial, visual, textual, socio-historical, corporeal and architectural forces existing within certain parts of the government’s expansive realm be de/re-composed, so places like museums need not necessarily represent the government’s oppressive regime? More importantly how can the transformation of the compositions of forces avoid representing the inverse of the existing regime, for such inverse regimes are often based on alternative but nonetheless already-established political models of governance and identities.
Here, we arrive at another ‘why’: why write a theoretical text that does not seek to represent the plight and fortunes of Singaporeans in their ‘daily life’?14

As implied earlier, a theoretical text is itself a gathering of forces that can be added into existing compositions of forces expressing current identities and meanings of places, and transforming these current expressions. The theoretical text, too, draws from its object of study various forces to form its composition. Thus, by default of its relation with its object of study and its own dynamicity the theoretical text – be it an art-critique, an essay, a thesis or review – cannot just be a representation of its object of study. A nation

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14 The term ‘daily life’ used in this thesis needs to be qualified. The term is commonly used to indicate the lives of the people who are not special or in rarefied fields like architecture, academia and the fine arts. I will like to argue that such a use of the term is limiting as it makes the presumption that architecture, academia and fine arts are somehow not part of a nation’s life and growth. The question as to why activities like street-art, roadside food-and-goods stalls and the misadventures of street urchins are necessarily more important in the construction of a nation, such as Singapore, needs to be asked; and, the notion of those more ‘daily life’ activities as more important also needs to be challenged. Singapore, like any modern and transforming city, is no longer a third world nation which only mode of production and consumption are predicated upon the more ‘daily’ mundane ways of life like selling wares on the streets. International trading of information, money and people do take place. Even the trading, exchange and production of territories take place as is the case with how Singapore has consulates in most foreign countries (and vice versa), how the Singapore military have semi-permanent bases in the United States, Northern Australia and other places, and how Singaporean corporations do own buildings across the globe. These exchanges and trades take place between Singapore and other countries, as well as within Singapore itself. As such, how can we deny that such international exchanges are somehow not part of Singapore’s ‘daily life’? Additionally, these exchanges and trades also partly contributed to the growth and development of Singapore’s intelligentsia, as such are architecture, academia and fine arts not part of the nation’s daily life?

If one is to practice the daily life, one must include all activities that can be implicated in the process of producing this entity call Singapore. The practices of architecture, academic writing and fine arts are not merely rarefied activities that remain within ivory towers. They are not practices that only draw up pictures of Singapore’s ‘daily life’. The architect, the academic writer and the artist may not sell wares on the streets, but their work, their produce, do impact and transform the life of this thing call Singapore on a daily (even ‘minute-ly’ and ‘second-ly’) basis. For instance, the writer can produce a text that may transform the design of an architect, and this in turn may impact on the way pedestrians subsequently encounter the city state’s space. The architect, writer and artist’s work is ‘daily’ in this sense. They are affected by the wares sold on the streets, the playfulness of street urchins and graffiti artists; at the same instance they affect ‘life’ on the streets. Following philosopher Michel de Certeau, one may suggest that the “everyday life” or ‘daily life’ “has a strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible.” The daily or everyday is thus not something one can easily represent; rather, it is constituted by practices or “ways of operating” rather than a territory demarcated into the university, the studio or the street. As de Certeau suggests, it is a “migrational” city that is of “another spatiality” rather than a “planned and readable city.”

It is in this sense that one may suggest that the ‘people’ of Singapore cannot be simply reduced to the council housing dwellers, the street hawkers, and the “mom-and-dad” and “aunty-and-uncle” characters that can easily be romanticized. The ‘people’ encompasses not just individuals or collectives. The ‘people’ can also be understood as the exchanges and shifting relations amidst bodies, subjects, minds, concepts, places and of course buildings, artworks and texts. The ‘people’ is potentially changing all the time; the story of the ‘people’ changes likewise, it is as de Certeau suggests a “manifold story” that folds and unfolds producing new dimensions and angles incessantly. The story of the Singaporean subject and space changes insofar as the Singaporean subject and space themselves change. See: de Certeau, Michel (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Trans. S.F. Rendall), Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press. p.93
or people’s daily life – its artworks, endeavours, habitats, novels and habits – cannot be reflected unproblematically in a theoretical text. In this symbiotic relation the theoretical text spurs the change of its object of study and vice versa; each working as one body to sustain what philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls “the potentiality of a potentiality.” To write is, as Agamben notes, to undertake “a writing of potentiality.” It is a practice celebrating life’s dynamicity rather than defining it in terms of ‘types’.

Singapore’s daily life necessarily includes theoretical writing. In this sense this daily life necessarily harbours potentialities yet written or actualized in many other ways. In turn, these potentialities of potentialities become more than the more that my family and friends equate with a diverse Singapore. Once again, this is also why this thesis, a practice of writing that attends to potentialities, can contribute to Singapore’s post-colonial project. The post-colonial project need not just be a matter of matching peoples and places in Singapore with established identities and meanings founded in sociology, psychology or cultural studies. The project, activating the textual, poetical and conceptual forces of writing can represent and do more; a representation can be crafted so that it can begin again.

b) What?... a box of tools

To ask ‘why Singapore’ in many ways is to begin to address what this thesis is. In asking why we have raised the notion that to write of Singapore is not to make a representation of the nation-state. But to gather forces that can be interpolated within the existing Singaporean post-colonial project. The thesis’ composing forces can then cut across, mingle with and transform the compositions of forces expressing established Singaporean identity to express something/one/place else yet actualized.

As a gathering of forces this thesis is not unlike a box of tools. As Deleuze in a conversation with Michel Foucault says, “a theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself.” And a thesis is but a bunch of theories assembled together, and each theory is itself a

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16 Ibid.
particular gathering of textual, conceptual, philosophical, poetical forces. This thesis, as a bunch of theories, is to be used within this amorphous Singaporean post-colonial project, and perhaps other projects. It is never for itself, or an end of itself. As post-colonial theorist Peter Hallward citing Homi Bhabha suggests, to post-colonial theory texts can “move from the given or articulated to Creative articulation itself, from a derivative, signified stasis to the ‘vicissitudes of the movement of the signifier’.”\textsuperscript{18} As Bhabha further elaborates on the power and form of a dynamicity-inspiring post-colonial text:

A critical discourse does not yield a new political object, or aim, or knowledge, which is simply a mimetic reflection of an a priori political principle or theoretical commitment. We should not demand of it a pure teleology of analysis whereby the prior principle is simply augmented, its rationality smoothly developed, its identity as social or materialist (as opposed to neo-imperialist or humanist) consistently confirmed in each oppositional stage of the argument. Such identikit political idealism may be the gesture of great individual fervour, but it lacks the deeper, if dangerous, sense of what is entailed by the passage of history in theoretical discourse. The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates out political expectations, and changes, as it must be, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. The challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction. This is a sign that history is happening – within the pages of theory, within the systems and structures we construct to figure the passage of the historical.\textsuperscript{19}

As a box of tools the thesis can always be used differently to express ever new subjectivities and spatialities. The thesis itself does not prescribe what these new subjectivities and spatialities should be. In being used differently the thesis begins over again, it expresses something else. It expresses the dynamicity of history without telos. Thus, what is ‘central’ or what makes for the thesis’ ‘interiority’ is really what sorts of usage takes it on, what sorts of relations are being formed with it, and what sorts of other different forces are conjoined with it producing new gatherings of forces. A box of tools does not belong to a specific spatio-temporality. It may very well extract various textual,

\textsuperscript{19} Bhabha (1994), p.25
spatial, philosophical, poetical, socio-historical, political and cultural forces from specific places, other books written in or referencing a specific time and place, but insofar as a box of tools is continually engaged differently it belongs to a *Spatium-tempo potentie*. The thesis’ form, as well as its location and significance, becomes ONE with its potentiality.

c) How?... a practice of writing and a concern for potentiality

Earlier on we discussed how a thesis is but a bunch of theories assembled together, and each theory is itself a particular gathering of textual, conceptual, philosophical, poetical forces. So what are some of the particular sources that offer up these forces for the construction of theories present here and ultimately this thesis? Particularly what sources, which philosopher, theorist, body of text, what are some of the methodologies that offer the conceptual forces of this potentiality and non-representationality we are evoking as pertinent to the possibility of a Singapore outside the measures of the existing socio-political spectrum?

In an essay addressing space in post-colonial texts, literary theorist Alexander Moore remarked that the question is not how a text can represent post-colonial space. He continues, if post-colonial space is dynamic and always going further than what representation can pinpoint, the question shifts to “how language thus confers reality on the possible world as such.”20 To write is a practice of “wrenching the literal out of a system that would have it be the passive designator of an already pre-formed reality.”21 Writing intensifies and not reiterates reality. Working from Michel de Certeau’s notion of dynamic space Moore poses the question of how post-colonial writing can become “a performance of space”, that is how can writing become “a spatial practice”?22

Writing, as Moore, following Deleuze, elaborates is “an experimental machine.”23 The critic becomes like an artist concerned with producing new perspectives, experiences, spatialities and even a new sense of self:

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21 Ibid, p.19
23 Ibid.
The critic, in other words, is not in thrall to the text’s depths from which another more fundamental spatial meaning must be studiously dredged, since this hermeneutics is dependent on the fiction of conditions supposedly entirely independent of the text [the critic, the theorist or philosopher writes]. Instead, the critic reads the text as a chart or a map, a collation of representational devices which depict the very same spatial relations which are produced in the act of representation.

We write of worlds coming. The entire “transcendental opposition [and hierarchy] between presentation and representation” falters. Scribed within representational devices – rhetorics, even propositions and criticisms – is a potential for potentialities, the untimely emergence of a beginning-over-again.

The text no longer refers to a space, but adds to the space, it intensifies the spatial dynamicity of post-colonial peoples, nations and cities. The space of a text goes beyond mere textual space to a space-in-making, a space of possible worlds to come without in any instance prescribing what should be. The theoretical text becomes plugged into what Bhabha calls “the event of theory,” the continual practice of writing that remakes “those negative polarities between knowledge and objects, and between theory and practical-political reason.” A theoretical text’s power is its capacity to inspire the emergence of subjects and spaces outside of the predictable, outside the oppositional, hence, outside neo-colonialism’s dualistic, progressive-developmental worldview.

As philosopher Cesare Casarino suggests a theoretical text’s capacity to inspire the emergence of subjects and spaces outside the predictable is enabled when the “materiality of language,” the textual, conceptual, philosophical and poetical forces constructing the enunciative, receptive, representative and even socio-historical positions/subjects in a text are attended to. A theoretical text is never just a text about something else. To research about something is to extract forces from it, to gather those forces into the textual, conceptual and poetical forces at the event of writing in order for writing to become space-making. As Roland Barthes notes:

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Bhabha (1994), p.25
The research itself becomes text… ‘Research’ is then the name which we give to the activity of writing: research here moves on the side of writing, is an adventure of the signifier, an excess of exchange – impossible to maintain the equation of a ‘result’ for a ‘piece of research’… Whatever it searches for, it must not forget its nature as language.28

The question goes further than what these forces in the form of subjects or spaces mean, or what/where are their origins. The question at stake is what can they do, how can writing attend to their possible recomposition?29 Research or theoretical writing is never just re-searching or re-discovering what was there; it attends to peoples, futures and places yet to come.30

The written book, a thesis, a critical review among others, begins over again. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggests:

In order – but the gesture of writing is never satisfied with a teleology – to dissolve – but in a dissolution itself dissociated from the values of solution always conferred on it by metaphysics – not only the ideal identity inscribed in the blindness scattered throughout… but to dissolve even the privation, which also forms the privatization, of this identity, to dissolve even the Book itself, and even the privation, the privatization, of the Book. The Book is there – in each book occurs the virgin refolding of the book (Mallarmé) – and we must write on it, make it a palimpsest, overload it, muddy its pages with added lines to the point of the utter confusion of signs and of writings: we must, in short, fulfil its original unreadability, crumpling it into the shapeless exhaustion of cramp.31

[...]


29 The issue of what writing can do, writing’s potentialities beyond measures, beyond the bounds of representational modalities, as opposed to what writing should or must do, will be further elaborated in the section “So, what can a local writer do?” in chapter one.

30 Deleuze in his essay “Literature and Life” notes that writing’s task is “the fabulating function to invent a people.” Writing is not to relive memories as they were. “We do not write with memories, unless it is to make them the origin and collective destination of a people to come still ensconced in its betrayals and repudiations.” To evoke memories is merely to extract from the pages of history, story books, annals and the sounds and voices of people those mnemonic, verbal, auditory, visual, textual forces and experiment with making new memories, memories that evoke a future yet present. Writing of memories is to hold on to a future that will perhaps never be actualized as such, a future that remains in potential. See: Deleuze, Gilles (1998) “Literature and Life” in Essays Critical and Clinical (Trans. D.W. Smith & M.A. Greco), London & New York: Verso Books. p.4

What for? We certainly must take risk: we must write on the book for the sake of deliverance.³²

A book, a critical text, a thesis or essay, may open up to become itself once again, but in this (re)-opening it also opens up or become univocal with the changing world, an empire of change where spatio-temporal boundaries are at-outside their limits.

This thesis is shaped by taking in these conceptual forces, much like Moore, de Certeau, Deleuze, Barthes and Bhabha, along with other philosophers who attend to writing as a spatial practice. This is the method implied and practiced throughout.

It is not enough to ask where or what is Singapore or who is the Singaporean. ‘Singapore’ and ‘Singaporean’ are particular gatherings of forces, particular bodies that are contracting and expelling other bodies and forces. There is a great potentiality of ‘Singapore’ and ‘Singaporean’ (as de/re-composing) bodies that one cannot gauge in full.

It is medieval philosopher Benedict de Spinoza’s notion of a body’s potentialities beyond measure (which was also taken up by Deleuze³³) that inspires this thesis’ usage and understanding of the term ‘potential’. As Spinoza writes, “for indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone,” for Nature is never with telos or definitive form. The body that takes its laws to be one and the same as the laws of Nature will change in such ways, and “can do many things which its mind wonders at.”³⁴ Such is a body’s potentiality outside established systems for quantifying knowledge. And, the body of a theoretical text, if we consider it to express Bhabha’s event of theory, may also express potentialities beyond measure.

The will to experiment, to write books and texts that begin over again, is to will a text’s longevity by its own difference from itself, insofar as the text will always be engaged

³² Ibid.
³³ When contemplating “what can a body do” Deleuze suggested that insofar “a body’s structure is the composition of its relation” and that relations are never fixed, what a body can do is preserved in a potentiality beyond measures. See: Deleuze, Gilles (1992) Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza (Trans. M. Joughin), New York: Zone Books. p.218
differently and different forces composing its body will be extracted and other different
forces are brought within its body.\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps this is a call for the will to read texts as
openings to other kinds of subjects and spaces rather than narrations of existing ones. In
this event of theory that is constituted by forces breaking through, repelling and
combining with each other – all within the practice of writing – I hope that ‘Singapore’
and ‘Singaporeans’ may live many times over.

Amidst the will to experiment, to make texts begin over again, ‘Singapore’ and
‘Singaporean’ are not just constellations, they also harbour a potentiality for coming-
constellations.

\textbf{Chapter outline:}

The following pages will detail particular gatherings of forces that have congealed into
chapters.

\textbf{Chapter One, “A Gathering of Forces”}, can be read as a literature review in that it
introduces the key concepts: absolute potentiality, the practice of writing, the question of
the ‘I’/author in a text as well as the relevance and urgency of non-representation (for
both writing and art-making) in enabling the emergence of subjects and spaces
(‘Singaporeans’ and ‘Singapores’) yet to come. The chapter gathers the conceptual,
textual and philosophical forces that make these key concepts. Here, we will also detail
the relevance of Spinozist potentiality in creating peoples, nations and cities that may
resist regulated, oppositional and pre-formed socio-political positions. We will end this
chapter by considering the question, “What can a local writer do”, asked by Singaporean
literary theorist John Phillips to further attend to this Spinozist potentiality.

\textsuperscript{35} The Spinozist body as perpetually differentiating is echoed a few centuries later in Friedrich Nietzsche’s
writings. Nietzsche’s “Overman” is such an event-character that expresses Spinozist corporeality. The
Overman is not a higher man but the overcoming of the mere man, the Cartesian man. It is man who
differentiates \textit{from} itself. Thus the Overman is not another category of Man; difference here is not between
Man and Overman. The Overman is Man’s potentiality beyond bounds of speculation and predictions.
Thus Nietzsche writes, “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in
man is that he is an \textit{overture} and a \textit{going under}.” And “I love him whose soul is overfull so that he forgets
himself, and all things are in him: thus all things spell his going under.” See: Nietzsche, Friedrich (1976)
“Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Book I, ‘Zarathustra’s Prologue’, §4)” in \textit{The Portable Nietzsche} (Ed. & Trans.
Through engaging with two Singaporean artists’ works Chapter Two, titled “Empire” & “Still Waters”: Art and the coming Singapore City”, explores how Singapore city as well as specific architectural sites can be more than what they are supposed to be as per the government or its opposition’s imaginations. However, in this chapter I do not suggest that the artworks represent another kind of Singapore city and subjectivity. The cities and subjectivities emerging are in the event of engaging them, writing/reading of them and amidst the event of theory discussed earlier in this introductory chapter. The chapter consists of two halves: The first half works through photographer-sculptor Lisa-Anne Chong’s installation “Empire” to find ways to elaborate a globalizing Singapore city that can be more than the hegemony of global-capitalism. Here, the text, Empire, suggesting an empire of change and non-oppositional resistances, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri serves as a guiding conceptual force. The second half, treating Suzann Victor’s installation/performance at the Singapore Art Museum, deals with how the citizen’s body can be cut through by Spinozist corporeal forces, hence, the citizen is no longer a private individual oppressed by the State’s (and museum’s) dogmatic regime. What is suggested here is that the citizen’s body, composed of relations of forces, is always capable of combining with the forces and relations of the State and Museum in order to produce new kinds of bodies expressing different subjects and spaces beyond the limits of the harsh dichotomy of internal/external or self/other. All in all, this chapter, besides addressing non-dichotomy, also attends to an artworks’ capacity to inspire the production of subjects and spaces to come.

Chapter Three, “Mapping a Singapore yet to come”, extends the notions of space-making highlighted in chapter two. It concerns how the practice of writing of artworks, in this case another photograph by Lisa-Anne Chong of a Singaporean-bourgeois apartment block, can become a practice of mapping of a Singapore yet to come. This chapter also addresses how in attending to a nation and a people yet to come, through affirming potentiality and a difference-from-itself, there is a Nietzschean production of life, a life that actively forgets what perspectives should be and what a nation’s land should look like. With regards to post-colonial issues this chapter hints at how the general divide in Singapore between the elite ruling class’ plush suburbs and the council flats of the ‘heartlanders’ (the local term for the working class) can be re-evaluated if any genuine love for a Singapore yet to come is present.
Chapter Four, “In the middle of writing, writing in the middle”, returns to the notion of theory and knowledge as gatherings of forces previously addressed in chapter one. This is done in order to further elaborate how the theorist, his/her sense of self changes with these amorphous gatherings of forces. In as such the spatio-temporality of the theorist preserves a potentiality that may resist representation. I end with a discussion on how the thoughts and knowledge generated in the practice of writing, insofar as they are always stretched across the event of a perpetual gathering of forces, can never be judgment based on higher morals. Here, I reiterate the theme from Chapter One that what amounts to theories and knowledge in the practice of writing are themselves gatherings of forces to be (re)-interpolated into a written text’s object of study. Knowledge and theory do not just represent but contribute to the continuous production and variation of its object of study, and of itself.

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[...]  
Just like beginnings, endings often conceal the desire for other endings in order to begin again and again.

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Footnotes in this thesis are not so much secondary points or afterthoughts as they are considered to be part of the conceptual frame that gives the thesis its shape. The footnotes indicate the theoretical, socio-historical, political, textual and even personal forces that in part guide the direction of the thesis. In this sense the footnotes can be read in conjunction with the main body of text; they are at times there to strengthen arguments rather than simply provide divergent interests.
Chapter 1
A gathering of forces

This chapter can be treated, in part, as a literature review. It lists many of the key concepts – for instance, potentiality, practice of writing, the question of the ‘I’ in a text, and non-representation – used throughout the thesis. Yet, I will argue this chapter is more like a gathering of forces, of useful, enabling concepts. Each section, sometimes each paragraph, gathers its particular forces. In some ways this chapter is also un-literature review-like. Being not so concerned with stating what needs to be corrected in order for Singapore’s schedule of progress to be adequate, concepts are presented not to be proven through case studies to reiterate a hypothesis-proof sequence. The concepts gathered here are not exhaustive; throughout the thesis various other forces will still be implicated to produce other gatherings of forces and thus concepts.

In many ways the way this chapter functions more like a guide showing how to engage with the following chapters: How gatherings of forces may be used, and importantly, how these gatherings are always susceptible to being decomposed and recomposed, expressing a dynamicity and potentiality beyond measure. This chapter familiarizes the reader with the particular gatherings of philosophical, conceptual, textual, socio-historical, political, and, as we will see, even theological forces that appear in following chapters. It familiarizes the reader with the forces that make up this amorphous nation-people-entity-gathering called ‘Singapore’.

And, how, particularly through the practice of writing, “Singapore” can be transformatively engaged, and move toward a potential spatio-temporality outside the conventional measures of the nation’s dichotomized socio-political spectrum.

We will address this potentiality beyond measures, or absolute potentiality, via Spinoza’s explication of the term, specifically in relation to his understanding of God as an event of change expressing unquantifiable potentialities rather than a divine planner. For Spinoza, God was immanent in all things, insofar as God is the change that necessarily exists within and between all things in differential relations. Following this I will discuss how the practice of writing encourages and enables continual differential relations, and thus is expressive of this Spinozist absolute potentiality or divinity. And, because writing expresses this absolute potentiality it becomes capable of gathering the conditions that can produce subjects and spaces yet to come. Finally I will treat the question Singapore literary theorist John Phillips asks, “What can a local writer do today?”, in relation to this Spinozist potentiality, and how writing produces a “minority” not predicated upon the minority/majority binary.
How to use gatherings of forces

Theorists working in varied fields – art, architecture, design, cultural studies, sociology, media studies, literary studies and philosophy – when touching on this nation, people, city and/or State, called Singapore have more or less agreed that it is for the most part constructed. For instance media theorists Ien Ang and John Stratton argue:

Singapore has no pre-colonial past, which could give it meaning and justification to its post-colonial and newly achieved nationhood. It is impossible for Singapore to erase its derivative and artificial existence as a Western colonial construct – more than any other nation in the region, Western colonialism is inscribed in Singapore’s very ontology, and in the very composition of its predominantly immigrant population.36

This thesis does not deny Singapore is a construct, but how a construct is engaged differs greatly. The most obvious is to lament the loss of authenticity, and make colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism and globalism the cause of this loss. The alternative subjectivity and spatiality imagined is posited as an authentic pre-constructed Singapore. This championing of authenticity manifests variably across the political-ideological spectrum: The government’s more conservative imagination of the true Singaporean subject is packaged as a neo-Confucianism driven ‘New Asian’ that stresses uniformity. On the other hand there is the postmodern relativist stance on authenticity that views the government’s stress on uniformity as an oppressive socio-political regime threatening the individual. What is at stake here is that both neo-Confucianism and postmodern relativism make claims for its own authenticity, and in a sense insist upon a form of innate immutable subjectivity – interiority.

However, there are other ways in which Singapore as a construct can be engaged, ways that do not have to resort to a dismissal of individuality and authenticity or blind hedonistic celebration of these ideals. One way, which this thesis adopts as a method, is to find out what sorts of forces – including colonial and neo-colonial ones – constitutes Singapore as a construct. More importantly this thesis attempts to find out how these forces can be regrouped, re-gathered, to form new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities that can resist dichotomous representations. The concern is no longer whether these forces – theoretical, socio-political, philosophical, conceptual, textual, material,
architectural, post-colonial, colonial or global – belong to the ‘Left’ or the ‘Right’, ‘East’ or ‘West’, ‘heartlander’\textsuperscript{37} or ‘bourgeois’, but how these forces can also be used to help produce new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities. It is to find out how these forces can be used, what relations or compositions – subjects and spaces – can these forces be \textit{brought within} in order to effect subjectival and spatial emergence and transformation. The focus moves from an analysis of what has already been constructed (attributing to causes) to the process of constructing (making potentialities). This manipulation of forces to produce conditions for the potential emergence of new subjects and spaces will be elaborated in the following chapters.

To write ‘theory’ is but a practice of gathering forces, a practice of writing that never stops. As this practice grows more and more forces can be added to this thing called Singapore, thus sustaining its amorphosity.

What does this chapter do? It offers a sampling of the variety of forces that are gathered in the following chapters, while constituting a gathering of forces itself.

Let us slow down, and, see what some of the constitutive forces frequently cutting across this thing call Singapore are. What are some of the current compositions of forces expressing current Singaporean subjectivities and spatialities that one may begin to cut through and combine with other forces that swirl in Singapore, currently, with less frequency?

As mentioned earlier, many writers, artists and theorists conceive of Singapore as a construct – a pastiche of high-capitalist fakeries and Baudrillardean simulacra. Architect Rem Koolhaas’ 1995 essay \textit{Singapore: portrait of a Potemkin metropolis; Songlines... or thirty years of tabula rasa} has served as a bible for many Singaporean writers, artists and

\textsuperscript{37} In Singapore the term “heartlander” refers to the non English-speaking working-class people living in the public housing projects. The “heartlanders” are often in popular imagination regarded as true-blue Singaporeans who, as are portrayed in films, artworks and music, are oppressed and alienated by globalization and urban renewal projects initiated by the English-educated-speaking bourgeois class who also make up the majority of the government. The English-educated-speaking bourgeois class including many of Singapore’s ministers and society leaders are commonly perceived to inhabit the wealthy lush leafy districts – “Districts 9, 10 and 11” – while the “heartlanders” are perceived to be crammed into the “other” suburbs. The very term “heartlander” thus evokes subjectival and spatial divisions in Singaporean popular imagination.
designers in their subsequent critiques and perspective of the nation-state. Koolhaas
writes that “Singapore is clearly not free,” and ponders what freedom means for
Singaporeans whose harmonious multiculturalism existence seems, to him, to be
suspicious. “Singapore seems a melting pot that produces blandness and sterility from
the most promising ingredients.”

Everything that happens in Singapore is accorded to an aim for tabula rasa and complete rebuilding, “which turns the entire island into a
modernistic, dismantled Chinatown.” Ultimately, for Koolhaas:

The global consumer frenzy perverted Singapore’s image to one of
repulsive caricature: an entire city perceived as shopping centre, on orgy of
Eurasian vulgarity, a city stripped of the last vestiges of authenticity and dignity.

The tropical island-nation-state is, for Koolhaas, “a kind of accelerated decay, a
Conradian rot.” The relentless construction of shopping centres and well-manicured
parklands and gardens signify the country’s “deep primordial fear of being swallowed up
by the jungle, a fate that can only be avoided by being ever more perfect, ever more
disciplined, always the best.”

The influence of Koolhaas’ general notion of Singapore as a façade with nothing
substantial behind and effectively a tabula rasa cannot be understated. Here I quote
extensively from theatre theorist Robin Loon’s rhetorically titled essay Are you there,
Singapore? to tell a story of the force of Koolhaas’ notion of tabula rasa:

It is now that we turn to Singapore – that unique hybridity of memory
lessness that insists on memory. A nation that was constructed tabula rasa
and a country that was created as fait accompli – Singapore has always
struggled with the fact that it has no history. Make no mistake, Singapore
has many historical events. Indeed, the historical events are potent and
extremely important but the sum of the parts does not always make a
coherent whole. Compounded by its multi-ethnic and multi-lingual

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38 The Singaporean architect Tan Kok-Meng, for instance, opens his essay “The Artifice Park” with a
quote by Koolhaas on how Singapore is a tabula rasa city. For Tan, Singapore suffers from “collective
historical amnesia” and as a result the nation has to turn to a pastiche of artificial trees, plastic colonnades
and façades in order to construct national identity. See: Tan, Kok-Meng (1999) “The Artifice Park” in
Interior Cities (Ed. R. McLeod), Melbourne: RMIT University Press, pp.200-202
Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, p.1015
40 Ibid, p.1017
41 Ibid, p.1033
42 Ibid, p.1079
43 Ibid, p.1083
circumstances, Singapore has always had the potential to be the jousting
ground for cultural clashes but these clashes are safely averted in favour of
a collective economic prosperity which ultimately binds the various classes,
races and religions. Is it any wonder that any threat to the economic order
in Singapore is perceived as a greater threat than any possible disruptions in
the class, race or religion sectors? We have little to discuss amongst
ourselves – and the common topics of discussion are almost always
economic commodities: restoration of the CPF cut, property prices, retail
prices, stock market prices, COE prices, taxi prices, ERP prices etc. The
idée du jour now is a Knowledge Based Economy (KBE) – a means of
forwarding the economic rhetoric and now represents the future of
Singapore culture. I am in no way criticising the economic and materialist
hegemony in Singapore – in fact, I applaud it for this is what marks
Singapore as a nation. This is the identifying trademark of the Singaporean
and Singapore – whether we like it or not. It may not be the ‘cultured’
marker but very few of us would disavow it readily. But the high-density
economically-driven rhetoric of our common discourses also produces one
very curious thing. And this I put before you as food for thought – is it
conceivable that Singapore and indeed Singaporeans do not know how to
discuss anything apart from the economically-driven rhetoric and the
discourse will always be a utilitarian one? Not what is it but how much is it
worth?44

For Loon the question of representation in Singapore is self-defeatist: “Is there anything
there to represent in the first place?”45 He seems to suggest that global-capitalism has
hindered Singaporeans’ ability to represent what is essential to them, their Being (l’être),
and so they erect a Potemkin-City as substitute, where everything is “an even more
blurred Xeroxed copy.” A copy of Chinese gardens, Japanese Tatami rooms, and
German Beer-Halls “becomes more removed, and thus loses its connection with its
supposed origination and becomes something else.”46

It is interesting to note that while Loon says that all the representations in Singapore
amount to nothing, because they are all in one way or other Platonic simulacra, he does
not question his own judgment-representation of Singapore. As art critic Lee Weng-Choy
writes in response to Loon’s essay (within the same volume Loon’s essay appeared),
“whereas [Loon’s] theory of representation had no way of guaranteeing fixity, his
representation of Singapore is entirely fixed, practically foreclosing the possibility of any

45 Ibid, p.17
46 Ibid, p.16
other speech.” For Lee, Loon’s representation of Singapore divides the city-state-nation relatively into ‘constructed’ and ‘authentic’ while at the same time admitting “everything is subjective and imperfect,” hence the answer to the rhetorical question that is also the title of his essay is a resounding ‘No’.47

While Loon is not incorrect to say Singapore cannot be wholly represented, his ‘No’ is derived more from the notion that the true Singapore has receded into an unattainable but nonetheless authentic past, and less from understanding Singapore itself as transforming and is without a fixed, graspable form. Although Loon do not name what an authentic Singapore should be, a longing for authenticity can still be detected in his engagement with Singapore. For instance Loon writes, “The rest of Singapore is sadly monolingual in that they can only speak the econ-speak. The econ-speak is vital and essential but also closes options to other kinds of languages out there.”48 What Loon do not take into account, as Lee argues, is that “language should not be theorized in the abstract.”49 In this sense even the economically-driven rhetoric and the utilitarian discourse Loon laments as Singapore’s mono-lingua franca can be transforming and transformative, for is this economically-driven utilitarian language not a particular gathering of forces that can be transformed? Is it not already subtly changing?

47 Lee, Weng-Choy (2000) “Representation and Relativism” in FOCAS: Forum on Contemporary Art & Society (Ed. L. Davis), Singapore: The Necessary Stage. pp.53-62, p.62. What Lee sees in Loon’s argument is that Loon laments the loss of the original, and thus validates the Platonic hierarchy of the Original or Model over the Copy and ultimately the simulacrum. In many ways various writers on Singapore do equate the kitsch objects in Singapore’s shopping malls, the theme parks, etc, to a Platonic simulacrum, a copy of a copy, a representation of a representation, twice removed from the original and thus having lost all powers to truly express anything other than superficial econ-speak (as Loon surmises). Lee’s critique of Loon’s take on representation can be further substantiated if we consider Deleuze’s reversal of the Platonic order. For Deleuze, the simulacrum “without doubt… still produces an effect of resemblance, but this is an effect of the whole, completely external and produced totally different means than those at work within the model.” What Deleuze suggests here is that the simulacrum’s depreciation comes from a valuing system based on necessary Good and Evil (a Platonic hierarchy reinvented as Christian-Judeo morality stating the further a thing is away from the vengeful God the more sin it acquires) rather than attending to what the simulacrum’s composing forces can do or be. When considering the simulacrum as a composition of force capable of “internal differentiation” and thus “built upon a disparity or upon a pure difference… we can no longer define it in relation to a model imposed on the copies of a model of the Same from which the copies’ resemblance derives. If the simulacrum still has a model, it is another model, a model of the Others (L’Autre) from which there flows an internalized dissemblance.” As Deleuze further elaborates, “the simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbours a positive [productive] power which denies the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction.” See: Deleuze, Gilles (1990) Logic of Sense (Trans. M. Lester & C/ Stivale), New York & London: Athlone Press. pp.257, 262
48 Loon (2000), p.17
49 Lee (2000), p.57
The production and transformation of Singaporean identity

This longing for authenticity – a past people and place to serve as models for contemporary Singapore – goes beyond Loon’s laments within academia’s hallowed halls. It is the longing for authenticity outside academia – within governmental and populous circles – that provides the materials for academics like Loon and Lee to begin their appraisals and/or laments.

As per Ang and Stratton’s comments on Singapore as a construct at the beginning of this chapter, Singapore unlike many of its neighbours has little documented indigenous culture that can serve as a ‘past’ for the basis of building national identity. The Singaporean past straddles between a quasi personality-cult of its British founder Sir Stamford Raffles to a fictitious animal-mascot name the ‘Merlion’. Raffles’ name, appearing on airlines, yacht clubs, marinas, private schools, hotels and beers, is synonymous with anything luxurious and good. So good is Raffles’ name that Singapore’s first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew since independence often sees himself to be continuing Raffles’ task in building modern Singapore; both men, though separated by more than a century, could see into the future and chart Singapore’s schedule of progress.

The Merlion is a chimera with a lion’s head and a fish’s body, and was supposedly first sighted by Sang Nila Utama, a mythic thirteenth century hero. As a national icon it first took the form of twenty-something feet tall water-spouting statue at Clifford Piers. But has since then appeared on coins, ornamental cups, and as soft toys around souvenir shops. Since 1995 it also manifested as a twelve storey high viewing tower on Singapore’s resort island, Sentosa, and also at a park on Mount Faber. However, despite its widely believed mythical origins, it in fact surfaced in 1964 when Fraser Brunner,

50 For instance, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei can claim the Sultanate, Islam and tribal filiations as a base for their national identity; Thailand still has its King and is still steeply rooted in Buddhism; the Philippines has Catholicism; Vietnam has the ancient city of Hue from which its kings reigned; and Hongkong, being predominantly Cantonese, has no problem identifying itself as “Chinese”. All these are compared with Singapore which, as illustrated in the main text, has a British lieutenant and a half-fish, half-lion creature as “guides” toward unity and progress. However, it can be argued that Singapore’s neighbouring countries’ “past” are no less produced than Singapore’s. Islam, for example, was not “indigenous” to Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, but introduced in the fifteenth century by Arab traders, and over time developed to become synonymous with Malayan culture. One might say it is the particular gathering of historical, socio-political, religious, material, and racial forces that constructed the synonymy between the Malay people and Islam.

then curator of the Singapore Aquarium submitted his design to the Singapore Tourist Board\textsuperscript{52}, which added this fantastical myth to Fraser’s simple design to partly enchant tourists and locals, and partly to instil into Singaporeans the notion that Singapore has a history longer and richer than British colonialism. Again, this is an attempt to secure spatial and subjectival origins, even if they are mythical, that can serve as models for the construction of contemporary Singaporean subjectivity and spatiality.

All these investments in ‘Raffles’ and the ‘Merlion’ were made to secure a Singaporean identity to appear as long-lasting and authentic as its surrounding neighbours. And through this representation of authenticity, Singapore also positions itself as having been freed from being a copy of British (and/or American) imperialism.

Since the early eighties this imagination and production of Singaporean identity has shifted from inventing non-racial specific icons to the production and formalization of ‘Asian values’, which eventually led to the appearance of the (state-approved) term ‘New Asian’. As cultural theorist C.J. Wee observes, the plan for the Singaporean government was to develop a set of Asian values that not only unified Singapore’s varied racial groups, but also as a form of “politto-cultural contestations or resistances against Western universalism.”\textsuperscript{53} Asian values denotes “a discourse on ‘East Asian Modernity’ – a ‘regional’ universalism – in which ‘traditional’ Asian values of family-centredness, self-control, frugality, and corporate identity were seen as the foundations for Asian success.”\textsuperscript{54} Leaders like PM Lee Kuan-Yew (and his Malaysian counterpart Dr. Mahathir) argued that it is by holding firm to these values that Asian countries can achieve modernity without the “cultural deracination thought to be taking place in the West.”\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merlion, viewed on September 12 2006.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. As part of this promotion of Asian values, the Singapore government from the early eighties on introduced the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” targeting English-educated/speaking Singaporeans as a mean to cultivate their cultural roots. The “Speak Mandarin Campaign” manifested as pamphlets, road-shows with puppets teaching children Mandarin idioms, and, in January 2005 even took the form of a syndicated television program launched by Lee Kuan-Yew. Around the same time, the government-owned television station began producing Mandarin language soap-operas where a somewhat fictitious/idealized Singapore where everyone speaks Mandarin is portrayed. However, the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” also divided Singaporeans who are not all of Chinese descend despite the Chinese-descents making up 75% of the
The promotion of Asian values in Singapore, as political scientist Neil Englehart argues, is an attempt by the government to instil “Confucian Ethics” as the common or “Shared Value” of all Singaporeans. The government postulates that “democracy and human rights… at least as understood in the West, are alien to Asian cultures and inappropriate for [Singaporeans].” The notion that one is free to choose must be sacrificed for the good of the nation. A Singaporean must live by “obedience to authority, intense allegiance to groups, and a submergence of individual identity in collective identity.”

Without explicitly stressing Chinese ideological, social and cultural influences such as notions of filial piety and servitude to one’s master, the Singaporean’s loyalty and obedience to the State is further tested in the wake of the fall of New York’s World Trade Centre. In response to this event punishment for refusing compulsory military service for male citizens was increased from a basic fine to up to three years imprisonment. This change in punitive law is to reinforce the need to protect the ‘homeland’, and the duty to give back to a country that has provided the citizen with security, racial and religious harmony and opportunities for monetary advancement. Singapore’s tough stance on military service reiterates the Confucian position of filial piety towards one’s parents and king. Englehart further remarks, this exemplifies the need for the Singaporean to obey and repay the State – the “virtuous rulers” – as one would one’s parents.

Singaporeans, as sociologist Chua Beng-Huat notes, are expected to “abide by the ‘wise’ counsel of the father” who has the foresight of what and how Singapore should develop. To disobey the father’s counsel is to allow oneself to fail and descend into chaos as did the Westerners who “opposed” their government. In this sense, “Orientalist conceptions of ‘Asia’” which lay excessive stress on family values, filial piety, blind loyalty and trust in one’s leaders “were reversed and married to the modern.” To live by Confucianism-inspired Asian values became the only way to succeed. In Singapore “a non-retrograde population. Moreover, the four official languages of Singapore are English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, thus many non-Chinese in Singapore felt the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” exhibited closeted racism.

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57 Ibid, p.559
ethnically Asian capitalist mode was [made] conceivable."⁶⁰ One can see, here, how Singaporean identity is produced by various military, economical, political and ideological disciplinary machines and forces. Thus, following Foucault, Chua calls this process of producing Singaporean identity, “a disciplined citizenry.”⁶¹

This disciplining of citizenry implicates pseudo-biological-conceptual forces to stress the importance of Confucianism in Singapore’s development. The government had to convince the people that to be born Asian is to be born Confucian, and that Western liberal values are incompatible with not just Singaporean’s social but racial and biological make-up.⁶² Englehart notes, the government “had to claim that Singaporeans were actually implicit Confucians who practiced Confucian principles without explicitly recognizing them as such.” And if one was already ‘Confucian’ at heart, there was no reason to question the stress on the necessity for Confucian and Asian values.⁶³ A circular argument is being presented: being Asian is being Confucian, and vice versa; no other forces can be implicated to transform such an identity. The purpose of this disciplinary act was the government’s attempt to “shape the identity of [its] overseas Chinese [population] in ways that are favourable to the [political] regime. It is an attempt to convince them that their own tradition is one of obedience to authority and submission to the community.”⁶⁴

In this shaping of identity there was a conscious decision to essentialize the “oriental” and the “occidental” to the extent that what is produced is an “auto-orientalism”. Only by convincing Singaporeans of their innate essence can the government exercise control over them and warrant obedience.⁶⁵

The Singapore government, however, did realize that this stress on Confucianism could lead the island’s non-Chinese inhabitants to think the government of fostering Chinese chauvinism. But, Englehart notes, the Singapore government was in fact aware that “cultures do not have a single essence,” and that to make Confucianism work in Singapore certain aspects of Confucian value-system needed to be reconfigured;

⁶⁰ Ibid.
⁶¹ Chua (1995), p.66
⁶² There are a couple of old Chinese sayings, “In your veins flows the Dragon’s blood” or “Remember that you are a descendent of the legendary Yellow Emperor”; that I remembered being reiterated by Chinese characters on a few of Singapore’s countless Mandarin-language soap-operas. Such scenes usually involves an elderly Chinese man telling his wayward (read Westernized) grandchild to mend his/her ways.
⁶³ Englehart (2000), pp.554-555
⁶⁴ Ibid, p.559
⁶⁵ Ibid.
specifically the inward looking, closed-door policy aspect of Confucianism needed to be replaced by an openness to foreign economies and politics “in response to changing historical circumstances.” Likewise, what constitutes Asian values needed reformulation. For the government the ‘New Asian’ became a figure that “entailed culturally resisting” Western decadence while “being politically and economically involved with globalization.” It incorporates the best of the East and West. The “New Asian” becomes embodied in a person who studies hard, has a well-paying job in the global-corporate sector, a caring family, partakes in consumption but still has time (every weekend) to spend with his/her parents and in-laws. In terms of media promotions of this New Asian, certain visual icons such as the traditionally dressed Confucian characters and Chinese calligraphy had to give way to a more ‘updated’ imagery. A reconstitution of the visual forces was needed to help reformulate the New Asian. As Wee surmises, the Confucian identity needed to be ‘reinvented’ so that it can attend both to ‘progress’ and to the preservation and restoration of Asian values and cultures.

This updating of Confucian values to the ‘New Asian’ is also present in Singapore’s built environment. For instance, an upscale bar/restaurant, the New Asia Bar, complete with Chinese-inspired paper-screened lattice dividers opened on the 72nd floor of the Stamford Swissôtel. A coffee-table book, *New Asian Style: Contemporary Tropical Living in Singapore*, with examples of architectural interiors done in Japanese/Ming Dynasty-inspired ‘simplicity’ by various up-and-coming young designers was published in 2002 by Jane Marsden.

Reconstituting Asian values to produce this updated New Asian requires what geographer T.C. Chang describes as a common practice in Singapore – “selective remembering.” To evoke Confucianism and Asia’s histories does not mean to incorporate them in their entirety. The government extracts from these schools of thought and histories certain forces, and joins them up with certain socio-politico-ideological forces to produce a particular identity. The New Asia Bar and the various architectural

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66 Englehart, p.565  
67 Wee, p.112  
68 ibid.  
interiors in Marsden’s *New Asian Style* needed to implicate certain economical, social, cultural, and even Western, forces to produce the New Asian’s habitat. Thus, in spite of the rhetoric being an unconditional trust and faith in the old ways, it is necessary that “spatial identities and place meanings are always created anew.” As will be elaborated in the second half of chapter two, even colonial buildings like the St. Joseph’s Institute, a former boys’ school, can be brought into contact with other forces to make it execute the Singapore government’s myopic approach to art.

Hence, what constitutes the ‘Confucian’ in Singapore is a changing set of relations, and transforming compositions of forces. As Chua argues, what passes for Singaporean identity and culture are produced out of “negotiations and mixtures.” He elaborates:

[The] terms, Singapore and Singaporean refer not to the ontological geographical feature of the island nor to the biological being-as-such. They are unavoidably the results of discursive practices that formulate them as objects with specific but temporally changing characters, which are ‘called into existence’ by statements that circulate in different discourses, in different spheres of social practices.

Working from Foucault’s problematization of the inside or subjectival interiority, we may say what constitutes Singapore and Singaporeans is “a complex relation of exteriority and interiority.” There is never an identity or culture that can belong unconditionally inside Singapore. What is considered inside Singapore is potentiality also outside of it. And, as will be discussed throughout the thesis, it can potentially be outside of all predictable imaginations of Singapore. Identity and culture are always changing, always at an amorphous middle between what was and what is yet to come, although what is yet to come cannot be determined in advance.

From what has been discussed above, it becomes more apparent that the New Asian is not truly an essential figure that is at the core of every Singaporean. The practice of

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71 Ibid.
72 Chua (1995), p.102
73 Ibid.
making new relations between a variety of different forces produced the New Asian. As Chua suggests, one must not be too quick to oppose Singapore’s “communitarianism” against “individualism”. Following Foucault, Chua argues that disciplinary machines are not just tools for subjugating people, but in fact contribute to the production of diverse identities, peoples, meanings and nationhood.\textsuperscript{75} The entity we call the “individual” is produced by a particular assemblage of disciplinary machines and their constitutive forces. The self is never a unified entity that stands in eternal opposition to the State or community. The self, like the State, is an artifice. The self is never guaranteed. As Foucault argues, “the practice of the self,” a practice of producing selfhood is a process of negotiations and making relations. Such a practice “is conceived as a permanent battle. It is not simply a matter of shaping a man of valour for the future. The individual must be given the weapons and the courage that will enable him to fight all his life.”\textsuperscript{76}

However, when speaking of a practice of the self, it is also note that the ‘self’ is not there to begin with. The process of making a self does not begin with an internalized innate entity extending toward the outside world. Rather, the practice of the self is a process of forces, bodies, thoughts and spaces cutting through each other to constitute a temporary being-milieu-territory – a gathering of forces. One can utilize some of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s notions of the complex self as a conceptual force to aid in the elaboration of what a self – a New Asian or otherwise – may become. As Nancy writes in his consideration of ‘Being’s’ complexity:

\begin{quote}
‘Self’ is not the relation of a ‘me’ to ‘itself.’ ‘Self’ is more originary than ‘me’ and ‘you.’ ‘Self’ is primary nothing other than the ‘as such’ of Being in general. Being is only its own ‘as Being.’ The ‘as’ does not happen to Being; it does not add itself to Being; it does not intensify Being; it is Being, constitutively. Therefore, Being is directly and immediately mediated by itself; it is itself mediation; it is mediation without any instrument [without transcendental cause], and it is nondialectic: dialectic without dialectic. It is negatively without use, the nothing of the with and the nothing as the with. The with as with is nothing but the exposition of Being-as-such, each time singularly such and, therefore, always plurally such.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Chua (1995), p.187
\textsuperscript{76} Foucault (1997), p.97.
The ‘self’ is not an ‘I’ that stands for an ‘I-me’ or a ‘You-I’ as if each ‘I’ was itself the same. Nancy explicates, the ‘self’ is a singularity capable of expressing potentialities outside measure; this is its unquantifiable plurality. The ‘self’ is already a gathering of the various forces that constitute those amorphous ‘mes’ and ‘yous’. Thus:

Prior to ‘me’ and ‘you’, the ‘self’ is like a ‘we’ that is neither a collective subject nor ‘intersubjectivity,’ but rather the immediate mediation of Being in ‘(it)self,’ the plural fold of the origin.78

The ‘self’ is an ‘origin’ that begins again and again. This is the eternal return as differentiation from itself, the power of perpetual genesis. The ‘self’ attains a Nietzschean power of forgetting where, “Returning is being, but only the being of becoming.” “Eternal return cannot mean the return of the Identical because it presupposes a world (that of the will to power) in which all previous identities have been abolished and dissolved” that is deterritorialized.79

It [‘self’] is prior to any ‘ego,’ prior to any presentable ‘property’… [The ‘self’ is] rather an event, the coming of something: of its coming into the world, where the ‘world’ itself is the plane (la géométral) or the exposing of every coming.80

The ‘self’ as a New Asian is already a complex shifting composition, a body that is coextensive, affected by and affecting, and a gathering, of other bodies of identities, thoughts, institutions, cities, words and flesh. In the New Asian’s eternal returns, it is becoming someone/thing other than the New Asian.

78 Ibid.
79 Deleuze, Gilles (1994) Difference and Repetition (Trans. P. Patton), London & New York: Continuum Books. p.41. However, when a “self” is said to have the power of forgetting this does not mean the past is eradicated, but that what constitutes the “past” – the texts, bodies and concepts that are composed by particular historical, socio-political, textual and even corporeal forces – are deterritorialized and reterritorialized, recomposed into something else. This mode of forgetting is for Deleuze, following Nietzsche, an active nihilism, or “active destruction” concerned with transformation and “transmutation” rather than simply installing another set of values or worse, “the will to nothingness” as par the defeatist trajectory of postmodernism. The eternal return is thus not the insistence of the Same and thus a will to nothing-is-changeable but rather the coming of something so immense that the mindset set on history as cycle of reactive epochs cannot comprehend. Active destruction thus affirms life’s dynamism; it “destroys reactive forces” that insists on history as cyclical and identical. This is the power of forgetting or else active transformation that renounces the reactive models of betterment and higher morals. In forgetting “the negative [and reactive] becomes the thunderbolt and lightning of a power of affirming.” See also: Deleuze, Gilles (1986) Nietzsche and Philosophy (Trans. H. Tomlinson), London & New York: Continuum Books. pp.174-75
80 Nancy (2000), p.95
To resist the particular disciplining or production of identities like the New Asian, is not necessarily to posit an anti-New Asian figure that is rooted in even more archaic Asian archetypes, or else the Western ‘liberalist’. If the practice of the self is, as Foucault notes, a matter of reassembling and recomposing certain compositions of forces, then it is possible that to resist the established popular imagination of the New Asian becomes a matter of evaluating how the New Asian’s constitutive forces can be differently composed. More importantly it is not just a matter of recomposing these forces, but of knowing how to recompose them in relations and compositions that resist capture by the Singapore government’s categorizing machine. It is not just recomposition, but attending to constant recomposition.

Resistance is no longer focused on relative or oppositional differences, but on differentiation itself – that is how something/one can be continually recomposed to be other than itself: to escape oneself. It is a concern for producing potentialities without necessarily actualizing them; to have the urgency to be something/one else without any predictions. This concern for unmappable potentialities tends to a future without designating what Singapore or Singaporeans should be. It is never to reiterate the predictive mode of history-writing that prevails in the Singapore government’s doctrine as well as many post-colonialists’ determinist conception of Singapore’s socio-historico-politico-ideological future. The Other of the New Asian becomes an outside, an exteriority that cannot be imaged.

To be done with Koolhaasian tabula rasa. To produce petit récits

If ‘Singapore’, ‘Singaporeans’, ‘New Asian’ and Asian values are produced by various different forces coming together, then it becomes possible to understand and engage with Singapore not as the gone-wrong-tabula-rasa-postmodern city conceived by Rem Koolhaas and his proponents. Tabula rasa and Koolhaasian postmodernism are not the only identities one can extract from engaging with Singapore, if Singapore is engaged less as a ‘type’ and more as a composition of forces capable for de-re-composition, and if its potentialities are attended to. To engage with a complex Singapore is to see what other forces an act of writing can implicate to enrich Singapore’s ‘life’, instead of simply categorizing it as being an example of a certain life. We do not yet know what Singapore’s life is and what it can do.
In his essay *A few good men and their phallic jet-stream* architectural theorist Bobby Wong asked if there was a postmodern Singapore other than the one articulated by Koolhaas and to a certain extent Frederic Jameson (or specifically the Jamesonian treatment of post-modern cities evident in many current texts on Singapore).81 What Jameson theorized as happening in the postmodern globe is a “multinational world system,” specifically the “third moment of capitalism, after those of classical market capitalism and of imperialism and monopoly.”82 But according to Wong, “Jameson’s argument is a totalizing desire to see all developments, at least after World War Two, as... the penetration of Late Capitalism or multinational capitalism into previously non-colonized areas or areas that have existed with pre-capitalist regimes,” and “Singapore, from a mere Third World nation in the 1960s to its success today with multinationals and the commodity culture, is one of the best candidates in fulfilling Jameson’s hypothesis.”83

The term *tabula rasa* used to describe Singapore is valid only if stemming from a Koolhaasian-Jamesonian analysis of Singapore where all things old and existing ideologies are cleared and replaced by global-capitalism’s “façadism”. And only through a *tabula rasa* approach to urban planning and nation building can the “potemkin metropolis” that relies on pastiche to articulate differences be realized.84 In the case of Singapore this pastiche is constructed from patch-working together a myriad of “essentialisms” based on race and East-West dichotomies. And according to Koolhaas this pastiche persists because every Singaporean partakes in late capitalism’s favourite pastime of shopping. It is the activity of shopping that for Koolhaas brought about the construction of “a Shopping Eden” with a “synthetic ‘plantation of tropical emblems, palms and shrubs.’”85 Shopping takes the blame for how differences in Singapore become simultaneously superficial and unproblematically binarized.

One can go on playing the blame-game and lament the sorry state of affairs. But as Wong asks, is there a way out of the *tabula rasa* and Potemkin metropolis status that

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83 Wong (2002), pp.166-67
84 Ibid, p.164
Jameson, Koolhaas and their proponents have assigned to Singapore? In other words, how can Singapore be more than a “fabricated copy of the yet unknown tropical city of excellence”\textsuperscript{86} but without reviving bygone eras and racial essentialisms? Is there a difference that can resist Jameson and Koolhaas’ totalization of Singapore into a “flat or depthless” city “into the celebration and consumption of difference and flattened images”?\textsuperscript{87}

For Wong it is a matter of finding ways to engage with and articulate a perpetually changing Singapore so that the government’s efforts to turn the nation-state into an effective economy machine can be resisted. But equally as important, it is to resist what he sees as an “overarching idealism” in Jameson and Koolhaas’ laments, which unwittingly reiterate metanarratives of an Enlightenment-inspired progress. Particularly, Wong sees Jameson and Koolhaas’ imaginations of Singapore to “reduce and homogenize difference” under the guise of mending the inequality brought on by the spread of global-capitalism.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{In place of} these metanarratives Wong proposes Jean-François Lyotard’s “\textit{petit récit} or little narratives.”\textsuperscript{89} While Wong, following Lyotard, understands the \textit{petit récit} as a narrative that has its “origins from seemingly splintered groups”\textsuperscript{90} we must be careful not to treat the \textit{petit récit} as a relative difference. A little narrative is not an alternative narrative – for example, one detailing the cause, rise and success of the New Asian – that some Singaporeans (albeit following their leaders) agree upon. As Wong further remarks, Lyotard is even “sceptical of metanarratives he finds embedded in… a consensus forming process,” or “consensus as a process of validation,” because “the process assumes an agreement that is obtained among individuals through dialogue; all who have superior intellect and act in free will.”\textsuperscript{91} The whole notion that consensus, specifically popular consensus, stands for a nation’s true ‘self’ just because there is an

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, p.167
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, pp.167-68. See also: Lyotard, Jean-François (1984) \textit{The Postmodern Condition} (Trans. G. Bennington & B. Massumi), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.37
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, p.168
‘agreement’ on what is ‘common’ is for Wong and Lyotard “motivated and made valid by a humanist belief in emancipation; itself driven by a meta-spirit.”

That which is expressed within a *petit récit* derives not from a splintered, or relativist, group. A *petit récit* is in fact the event of splintering. The event of splintering is the process of differentiation within a group; and, not just a collection of different perspectives but the incessant non-telic transformation of any perspective that tend toward potentialities outside measure. *Petit récits* are narratives that fall apart themselves, but not to become non-decomposable parts; to fall apart is to be becoming something else.

As Wong citing Lyotard writes, the “*petit récit* holds a promise” in which the promise is not denoted. It promises a spatio-temporality and people yet to come. The Singapore within such a *petit récit*’s promise is neither a *tabula rasa* shopping mall wasteland nor a tropical homeland desired by the most well-meaning post-colonial architects and writers.

Lyotard’s *petit récit* offers a conceptual force that Singaporean studies and its concomitant post-colonial project can implicate to begin to produce subjectivities and spaces that do not necessarily rely on models of betterment and progress, nor relativism. It is not a question of how the *petit récit* explains Singaporean subjectivity and spatiality, but what other kinds of subjectivities and spatialities may emerge from the actual implication of this conceptual force.

The *petit récit* goes beyond the will to nothingness, a resignation to a state of affairs. To produce small narratives that are heterogenetic and capable of beginning over anew is not equivalent to “merely postmodern writing” that “tends toward a certain placenessness, a disembodied abstraction uncomfortably close to an ideological reflection of prevailing modes of production in the capitalist West.” The potentiality of a space beyond measure is not the same as placelessness; the former affirms presence whilst the latter affirms absence. The *petit récit* is concerned with reinvention and not an attempt to represent the world as categorically placeless. This is why “the liberation of

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid, p.169
difference of local elements” must be engaged not merely as the due arrival/revenge of the post-colonial, but the already-happening process of differentiation within subjects and spaces tending toward absolute potentiality. Tending to the dynamism and potentials of forces, bodies and thoughts, is to cultivate opportunities for the emergence of the petit récit. The petit récit is not a literary or theoretical formula that emerged only in the post-colonial era; for a will to an experimental gathering of forces has no fixed sequential steps that can be followed. In any case to produce a petit récit is only to tend to the dynamism of a people and a nation; there is no divine purpose.

At no instance does a theorist step aside and proclaim his/her own position as spectator to a world that is re-telling itself over anew, or to proclaim this or that person captures the spirit of the petit récit, as if the petit récit is mankind’s finale. As Homi Bhabha suggests, if we are to emphasize “indeterminacy in cultural and political judgment” then “our sense of the ‘subject’ of culture and the agent of historical change” must also be transformed. The self and the Other must move beyond their own localized and essentialized positions. There is a “need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the ethics of social affiliation.” It is never enough “to speak of and judge others” by claiming “ethical relativism” or to “place ourselves in their position.” The theorist, the narrator, must narrate not only the complex changing world reflectively and detachedly, his/her narration must add to this intensifying complex world. As literary theorist Peter Hallward writes, “The postcolonial critic moves from the given or articulated to Creative articulation itself.”

The radical hybrid moment, the gathering of forces, bodies and thoughts in which origins and ancestries have truly passed, is outside what can be represented. The hybrid moment, as Bhabha further elaborates, is “not quite [subjective] experience, [and] not yet [objective] concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified.” Thus, the theorist who writes of artworks no longer does theory in isolation; theoretical texts emit forces to sustain (itself as) this hybrid moment. Bhabha surmises, “This intermediate space between theory and practice disrupts the disciplinary semiological demand to

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid, p.36
99 Hallward, p.25
enumerate all the languages within earshot.’’ All those people and places that seem to be emerging in a theoretical text are falling apart, or else yet to come.

To create rather than to reiterate is to resist essentialism; rely neither on models of subjectivity and spatiality from the past nor borrowed from existing some already-appraised models of alterity. It is to resist calling the Singaporean a *tabula rasa* character, wiped clean of all histories, and constructed as a mix of the East and the West, and who wears Tommy Hilfiger while eating Hokkien noodles. It is necessary to resist turning the hybrid into a specifiable type that one can easily identify. The easily identifiable hybrid is validated because its ‘halves’, its cultural, racial or geographical ‘ancestries’ can be recognized. Moreover, to identify these ‘halves’ and ‘ancestries’ is in fact to stay with the notion that there are irrefutable, immutable origins that can be traced back. For surely there is more to Singapore than the easily identifiable hybrid who wears Tommy Hilfiger and eats Hokkien noodles. There has to be more than a Singaporean identity derived from a comfortable mix of established Western fashion and Asian cuisine.

Hybridity goes beyond an East-plus-West façade behind which there is a *tabula rasa*-like placelessness. Hallward speaks of a “créolité” that may go beyond the familiar-and-celebrated East-plus-West model of a hybrid being. “Créolité extols a purely fluid difference beyond relations-with-others;” it undergoes “constant self-transformation, it creates the dynamic medium of its own existence.” The créolité is not a being that is predicated upon an opposition to another being. It does away with references and filiations. It “re-invents itself at every instant.” Rather than a derivative essential self-being or a social type, the créolité’s existence is its transformation, its refusal to be predicated upon any established identities, and this includes hybrids which identifiable constitutive parts are imagined to be immutable. Through constant transformation the

100 Bhabha (1994), p.181
101 The gourmet dishes blending Eastern and Western flavours and the music compositions featuring the sonorous flavours of South-East Asia to be catered to the IMF/World Bank meeting in Singapore in September 2006 are examples of this familiar-and-celebrated East-plus-West model of hybridity that considers both the East and the West not in terms of their dynamicity but their most obvious static features.
102 Hallward, p.23
103 Ibid.
créolite maintains potentialities beyond measure. It expresses a narrative, like the petit récit, that “escapes epistemological representation and objectification.”

Difference is not just a juxtaposition of opposite pairs. Difference is what is happening when bodies and forces cut across each other, contaminating each other to the point of indistinction, and when something/one new is emerging and re-emerging again – eternally different. Difference is differing from itself. As Deleuze suggests, anything that can claim the status of being different “must see its own identity swallowed up in difference, each being no more than a difference between differences. Difference must be shown differing.” What constitutes “qualitative diversity,” Deleuze notes, is “potential difference and difference in intensity.”

There is no specific space or subjectivity that can be defined as the perfect middle ground between Tommy Hilfiger and Hokkien noodles. Difference is always the amorphous event-space between positions, itself never occupying its own territory or temporality. Its spatio-temporality is stretched across the varying relations and compositions of socio-political, historical, material, architectural, textual, ideological, cultural, conceptual, philosophical and even fashion and gastronomic forces. Its subject, space and time is coextensive with its unpredictable potentiality beyond the East/West division. It is no longer a specifiable identifiable type of hybrid we can pick walking down Singapore’s busy shopping avenue, Orchard Road. There is a truly hybrid people in Singapore, but their identity and subjectivity are yet to come. Thus Bhabha, following Frantz Fanon, writes, “the time of liberation is… a time of cultural uncertainty, and most crucially, of significatory or representational undecidability.” It is to “introduce a split in the performative present of cultural identification,” it places “the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference” into question. It is to pay attention and even perpetuate what Fanon describes as “the zone of occult instability where the people dwell,” and, one may add where people are born again the very moment they are born.

104 Wong (2002), p.169
105 Deleuze (1994), p.56
106 Ibid, p.57
107 Bhabha (1994), p.35
To write a post-colonial history and future is not to be writing from a position outside of the actual happening history-future, the contiguous event of time which affirms life itself. The writer, and the theorist, changes with the event of time as s/he implicates various forces to produce his/her body-mind. Writers are already part of, not just spectators of, “a theatre where nothing is fixed, a labyrinth without thread.”\(^{109}\) We are in a play that has a plot without beginning and end, a script that is being written. It is “a veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations” where all ‘Is’ or claims of self have been “transcended” but never to an overarching God’s (or a conventional theorist’s) perspective.\(^{110}\) This theatre is a “world without identity,” where everyone is oscillating between the finitude of being and specific times and places, and the infinitude of Being’s becoming. In this world without identity there is no longer a clear division between finite and infinite; what is seemingly finite and completed is also unlimited.\(^{111}\) This is why what appears to be an immutable metanarrative can always be engaged in such a way that its constitutive forces are de/recomposed, so that it is expressed as a petit récit. And, it is here that histories and futures no longer speak of this or that past or future, but simply a past or future without spatio-temporal specifications.

Faced with a past or a future without spatio-temporal specifications one can no longer pass a judgment as to whether it was or will be a better epoch. There are only pasts yet to come and futures yet to come. And, where is one’s (the writer’s) precise location in relation to the yet to come spatio-temporalities? Singapore’s post-colonial project can pick up the conceptual and philosophical forces of Lyotard’s notion that the radicality of history/future writing is not the ability to chart a course of development. Rather, when one writes, yet is no longer speaking of a definable and judgeable epoch, there is the moment “when the reflective faculty of judgment feels its impotence, but at the same time [this faculty] ‘discovers’ its calling.”\(^{112}\) The words written are no longer descriptive as par the chronological laying out of dynasties, kings, thinkers and concepts. There is now true thinking, the absolute condition of thinking, the active (de/re)-forming of concepts, rather than simply reconciling epochs, people and places to pre-established

\(^{109}\) Deleuze (1994), p.56
\(^{110}\) Ibid.
\(^{111}\) Ibid, p.57
concepts. Here “all possible finalizations are rejected.” There is no longer the need to state this is what history was and what the future should be. Yet, for Lyotard, when epochs are no longer of primary concern, and, instead the form of time and transformation are attended to, is when the truly radical and revolutionary “moment” emerges. Following Lyotard’s consideration of history here, one may say the radical moment in a nation’s post-colonial project is when the course of telic historical development is forgotten, and instead when there is a concern with experimenting – in art-making and writing – in which each step within this process of experimentation can simultaneously re-evaluate the past and open up to new futures.

Writing histories and futures that are not strung from an originary point to an end is to produce what Lyotard calls “an energetical sign,” which is always potentially something/one/time else, expressing nothing but potentialities beyond the schedules of progress and dualistic revolutions. Such a practice of writing is one attending to writing histories and futures that remain yet to be written, not because they are not discovered yet, but because what is to be discovered cannot be written representationally.

Histories and futures beyond measure is a liberation from telos. And, it is perhaps also a liberation from the sorry state of affairs that is the tabula rasa-ed placeless shopping world at Singapore’s fin de siècle.

The practice of writing without ‘they’, ‘you’ or ‘I’
There is “the indignity of speaking for others,” Deleuze exclaims in a conversation with Foucault. A theorist should be cautious that the voice in his/her text is not that of the people, culture or nation s/he writes of. In other words, theoretical writing should be wary of assuming another’s position. Deleuze continues to say we should recognize “the

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113 Ibid, p.174
114 Ibid, p.173. The “imagery” that Lyotard gives the energetical sign is “tension”. It is a “transition” that “does not take place,” or rather is yet to take place, but has an immobile “shaking” – “a sort of agitation on the spot, in the blind alley of incommensurability” – because of the immensity of its own absolute potentiality beyond measure and predictability. A history and future is coming but what they are remains incommensurable, yet it is this incommensurability that makes anything written as expressing histories and futures yet to come so energetical.
115 The energetical sign exists insofar life as dynamic is affirmed, and not because there is a will to nothingness, tabula rasa, as par Koolhaas and Jameson’s ironic celebration of “flatness or the waning effect.” See: Wong (2002), p.171
consequences of this ‘theoretical’ conversion.” The “I” in the text is not the ‘I’ of the people, culture or nation written about. However, this is not to assume the theorist’s ‘I’ and the people, culture or nation’s ‘I’ are immutable; in the performance of the text these ‘Is’ change. Theoretical writing does not represent its object of study; it picks up various forces from and around its object of study to build something – subjects and spaces – altogether new.

As if echoing Deleuze and Foucault’s notion of the indignity of speaking for others, literary and post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak suggests that theory cannot be applied, or, those objects of study – cultures, artworks, peoples and places – cannot be made to fit an established value or concept. As Spivak points out, there is no general post-colonial theory that can be applied across the board. Post-colonial theory is not like theories developed in the hard sciences in which a theory is a hypothesis that has to be ultimately proven. With post-colonial theory nothing has to be proven; what is “theoretical” is the way various conceptual, textual, material, corporeal, spatial, historical, social, philosophical and architectural forces can come together to produce particular compositions, conjunctions and gatherings. For Spivak it is through the negotiation of these forces that “a cosmopolitanism that is global, gendered and dynamic” can emerge. It is as much a way of doing (without necessarily being “done”) as it is a way of seeing. This is why, for Spivak, to write post-colonial theory is to treat the “sphere of production,” “an inexhaustible field of connections” where objects of study and writer mingle, to be “peopled by [dynamic] historical agents” rather than social types. The theorist does not speak for these dynamic people, and his/her writing does not represent them, but rather the writing is a particular condensation-constellation of forces that can be interpolated into the sphere of production to sustain the sphere and people’s dynamism.

117 Ibid.
118 The “performance” of a text, as used here, follows art theorist John Bock’s understanding of the term to suggest how words “do something rather than describe something.” Hence, we take into account the mixing of poetic, textual, visual, literary forces that can, together, produce something more than a proper name or signified. See: Bock, John (2005) “On Performance (and other complications)” in Art Works: Perform (Eds. J. Hoffmann & J. Jonas), New York & London: Thames and Hudson. pp.11-32, p.12
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
Writing can be more than a mode of representation. It is a practice of making subjects and spaces, citizens and nations; the act of writing has potential peoples and places that are yet to come. This is why the attention to historical agents must go beyond essentialization of people and places. An attention to historical agency is an attention to the forces at play in the formation of identities and histories. It is also attending to a practice of how these particular formations of forces can be reconstituted. More importantly, it is not to merely represent or observe this process of de/re-composition from a bird’s eye point of view; the theorist is recomposing at each turn within the sphere of production. The theorist him/herself is a transforming historical agent, a being-event stretched across the infinite ends of time. In writing, the theorist also attends to how his/her voice-as-authority returns to the sphere of production, thus sustaining his/her own dynamism.

To write and to be concerned with producing (but not necessarily actualizing) potentialities, and is, at the same time, to be engaged in a practice that does not posit theory as prior to practice. Deleuze reminds us “theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice;” theory itself “is practice.”\(^{122}\) To write a theoretical text is to extract the powers of certain forces and to construct other potentialities that may express nations, peoples and cities yet to come. This act of engaging with current constructions of subjectivity and spatialities differently is what provokes Deleuze to say that “a theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself.” It does not totalize or categorize the world. “It is not to ‘awaken consciousness,’” but “to sap power, to take power.” To sap or take power is not to posit an alternative empire of thought and being, but to be involved in “a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious.”\(^{123}\) This is a struggle not between opposing sides but a process of differentiation through different engagements.

Following Deleuze’s notion that theory is a process of sapping power and willing different (and experimental) modes of engagement, and Spivak’s notion that there is no one post-colonial theory that solves all post-independence nations’ problems, one may say a theoretical post-colonial text is not entirely effective unless it can sustain dynamism. Can a theoretical text sustain what Bhabha calls “the event of theory,” the

\(^{122}\) Foucault (1977), p.208
\(^{123}\) Ibid.
The continual practice of writing that remakes “those negative polarities between knowledge and is objects, and between theory and practical-political reason?” A theoretical text’s power is its capacity to inspire the emergence of subjects and spaces outside of the predictable, outside the oppositional, hence, outside neo-colonialism’s dualistic, progressive-developmental worldview. The indignity of speaking for others teaches us the importance of maintaining an ambiguity as to who is being addressed, who is spoken of, and what the designated future identity of a text’s ‘people’ is. However, the indignity of speaking for others must be complemented by what philosopher Cesare Casarino understands as “the indignity of speaking for ourselves.” For Casarino, it is not that we entirely disregard the force of representation. “This is to say, rather, that to the extent to which representation does take place, it needs to be understood and studied as the by-product of a forever incomplete and forever renewed process of exploitation of the unrepresentable: We do need to cut through representation but we cannot stop there. Ultimately, the unrepresentable beckons, for this is the black sun that puts the heliotropical task of any materialist reading to the test.” The materiality of history already sucks in and transforms the ‘I’ of the writer. Casarino notes, the “materiality of language,” the textual, conceptual, philosophical and poetical forces constructing the enunciative, receptive, representative and even socio-historical positions/subjects in a text cannot be ignored. The ‘I’ of a text is in many ways capable of joining with other forces to become someone else, insofar as the ‘I’ is always a growing, shrinking, contracting, expelling body of forces, and insofar as the text, from which the ‘I’ emerges is already nothing but a particular gathering of forces ready to be something else.

124 Bhabha (1994), p.25
125 As Deleuze writes, “as soon as theory is enmeshed in a particular point, we realize that it will never possess the slightest practical importance unless it can erupt in a totally different area. This is why the notion of reform [based on oppositions and paths to betterment] is so stupid and hypocritical… Reforms are designed by people who claim to be representative, who make a profession of speaking for others, and they lead to a division of power, to a distribution of this new power which is consequently increased by a double repression.” Foucault (1977), pp.25-26
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid, p.87
129 Foucault in one of his seminal essays “What is an Author?” notes that “an author’s name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. It has no legal status,
The writer needs to question the representations that appear in his/her own texts, but not just from the position of a judge who points out the errors of representation; the writer needs to question his/her own role as giver of representations (of the shortcomings of representation). In a discussion with Ann Smock on Maurice Blanchot’s problematization of the ‘I’-position Nancy writes, “The voice of the written text is not that of ‘Monsieur Blanchot.’ It is a voice asking to be recognized,” yet “impossible to recognize. One has only to let it be.” The question is no longer where the ‘I’, ‘you’ or ‘they’ are within a text, but what these positions can be or are becoming. These ‘Is’, ‘yous’ and ‘theys’ become events. “There is no subjectivity here; in this sense there is no self-recognizing of the utterance. It always speaks before becoming self-present.”

The ‘I’, ‘yous’ and ‘theys’ in a practice of writing (and reading, and re-writing and re-reading) becomes “a formless outside radically distinct from any form of exteriority or interiority.” Even what Spivak calls the “indigenous elite” can no longer say because s/he is racially, nationally or geographically same with the people and places s/he writes of, she can unproblematically represent them. At the same time, the indigenous elite cannot simply retreat to saying his/her views are merely subjective. What is written goes beyond the dualism between the merely representative and the merely subjective. As Spivak continues to note, the “problematic of decolonized space” changes everything. The whole notion of being able to identify this or that place, or this or that people, as decolonized; and, the term ‘decolonized’ as betterment or progress, is between what it was and what it is becoming (without future designations). In fact, Singaporean art critic Lee Weng-Choy has argued that critical writing in a country like Singapore, with its small arts community, cannot simply be reflective and representative. Art critics, theatre

nor is it located in the fiction of the work; it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being.” The author’s name, the author/narrative “I” voice in the text, is but a gathering of textual, poetical, conceptual, historical and sometimes even visual (of the photographs and diagrams presented) forces; the author is in-between these forces, in a shifting middle that is more event than solid ground. Insofar the text can be always engaged differently the author is capable of becoming someone else. See: Foucault, Michel (1992) “What is an Author?” in Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas (Ed. C. Harrison & P. Wood), Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers. pp.923-28, p.924

131 Ibid, p.314
132 Casarino, p.71
133 Spivak (1993), p.277. For Spivak it is the writer resistance to say this is “I” representing “they” and speaking to “you”, and this specific spatio-temporality defines “us” that becomes the “method” to subvert the “new orientalism” taking place in many post-colonial nations.
reviewers and even academics at the local university and various art colleges are themselves playwrights, artists and novelists. One writes a review or critique of one’s friend or one’s colleague’s work as often as one would write of one’s own work. The development of Singapore’s art never proceeds just from theory (or theorist); there are no visual quotations or equivalents of theory. As sociologist Stephan Fuchs suggests with regards to a critic’s implication in his/her object of study, “the cultural work of the critic is an integral part of the work that is art.” Not only does criticism influence art, criticism defines and interprets art and shapes the cultural territory it functions within. It is only from defining this territory that criticism and even the critic can begin to “make sense of itself to itself.” What amounts to knowledge in critical or theoretical writing is what actualizes following this practical nexus of writing and art. And, it is not improper to ask where/when/who is the ‘voice’ of an artwork.

There is something the espoused concepts in the critical and/or theoretical texts cannot capture – this is precisely the event of theory which Bhabha has described: A process of theoretical writing, reading, re-writing and re-reading that remakes those negative polarities between knowledge and is objects, and between theory and practical-political reason. To write theory – including art criticism – in this sense is not just to partake in but to contribute to a Singapore and Singaporeans that are always changing and tending towards an unpredictable potentiality. It is also attending to how a theorist may be becoming part of this changing people and nation.

The ‘I’, ‘yous’ and ‘theys’, if we follow the arguments above, belong to an ‘Outside’ that is a space of “emergence, intensity and potentiality.” In his book *Foucault*, Deleuze calls this Outside a “non-place,” however this non-place is not nothingness or the opposite of ‘place’. It is a place of “composing forces” rather than “composed forms;” it is a place to come in which the “where” that is coming will never be defined. It is a place where the exact relation between subject and space, subject and subject are yet to

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136 Casarino, p.72
be formed. It is a place that the practice of writing expresses but does not, or cannot, represent.\(^{138}\)

To write of a liberation beyond measure is to love potentiality – “amor potentiae”\(^{139}\).

“A making of words… is above all the love of that which remains unmade in such a making, the love of words as unspent potentials.”\(^{140}\) And, this may be a love for the ‘I’s’ unspent potentials, a love for what Singaporean subjectivity can be becoming.

**Absolute potentiality**

When speaking of ‘potentiality’ in this thesis I mean more than potentials that can be fulfilled. This is a potentiality beyond “Johnny has the potentiality to become either a doctor or a lawyer”. It is a potentiality in which the outcomes cannot be predicted. Outcomes predicated upon speculations are of little help when understanding such a potentiality. It is an “absolute potentiality” that is expressing itself as potentiality beyond measures, a potentiality that is potentially ALL but reserves itself as non-actualized. It is this sense of potentiality that this thesis is concerned with. It is this sense of potentiality that may offer up conceptual forces enabling the emergence of subjects and spaces...

\(^{138}\) In his recent essay “Spaces in the Age of Non-Place” philosopher Ian Buchanan remarked that the “postmodern traveller” such as writer Marc Augé when “complaining that new spaces [those global world cities that are in Augé’s terminology ‘non-places’] are not as meaningful as they used to be is essentially complaining that these spaces are not coded” sufficiently as they used to be. Buchanan suggests that Augé’s wanting for these world cities to properly coded amounts to a form of “postmodern Orientalism” or the need to “bring the Orient to life” by reconciling these cities with “codes”. Buchanan notes that while Augé’s reading of world cities make us aware of contemporary space, it only goes as far as to code these world cities as “non-place”, an opposite of “place”. What Augé and others who rejoice and lament the non-place simultaneously have not done is to make aware of space’s “mobility” or else space-in time. For Buchanan this dichotomization and privileging of place over non-place is a fear for the process of differentiation, and even a fear that relativism would be lost in such a process. Here one may say the “not coded enough” non-place is for the reactive postmodern traveller who longs for stability just another code within his/her book of social-typology. See: Buchanan, Ian (2005) “Space in the Age of Non-Place” in *Delence and Space* (Eds. I. Buchanan & G. Lambert), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp.25, 23 & 26.

\(^{139}\) Casarino, p.79

\(^{140}\) Ibid. For Casarino truly radical philosophy – and one may include theoretical writing – expresses a process of “philopoiesis”, which is “the love of potentiality that cuts across philosophy and literature,” that takes into account the indispensability of poetical and textual forces in the process of conceptualization. This is a form of non-dialectical, non-representative writing that wills experimentation. Following Foucault, Casarino calls for the invention of “new philosophical objects” that can garner the “possibility of a nondialectical language.” This is not “the end of philosophy, but a philosophy which regains its speech and finds itself again only in the marginal region which borders its limits.” This is transgressive philosophy, not just a philosophy of transgression. Writing “stripped of dialectics” allows “the existence of another language” to emerge. This is a language which the theorist “is unable to dominate.” Such an outside-language expresses words, subjects, sentences, and spaces yet to come. See also: Foucault (1977), pp.41-42
beyond the duality of Singapore’s socio-political spectrum. However it is not to privilege potentiality over actuality. Rather, as will be elaborated shortly, it is to understand how actuality – actual subjects and spaces – can have the potential to become more than what they are.

a) *Deus sive Natura* and absolute potentiality

We turn to an unlikely ally – religion/God – to begin our engagement with an explication of absolute potentiality.

In *The Ethics*, Spinoza conceives of God as “a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes [or ways/modes which God *can* become], of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.”\(^\text{141}\) What Spinoza is suggesting here is that God insofar as ‘he’ has an infinity of attributes, or can become an infinity of things, is thus a potentiality for an infinity of potentialities. God’s potentiality is absolute, not conditional or partial. Spinoza further explains that what is “absolutely infinite” is “not infinite in its own kind.”\(^\text{142}\) Absolute infinite is not the infinitely unchanged, but the infinitely changing. In being always different from itself the absolutely infinite “involves no negation;”\(^\text{143}\) it is not expressed as discrete moments or stages, or a contradiction of identities. What is absolutely infinite is infinitely changing – God expresses change immediately by perpetually changing. God, thus, expresses potentialities beyond measure. God, as an absolute potentiality, encompasses (or *is*) ALL the universe’s creatures in ALL spatio-temporalities. Insofar as all creatures partake in the infinite event of change they are ONE with this absolute potentiality that is God.

It is because God insofar *s/he/it* is absolutely infinite and thus preserves an absolute potentiality that Spinoza also says that God is that which is a “cause of itself.”\(^\text{144}\) This means there is no higher cause that causes God – or else to say there is no higher cause that determines in advance what the potentialities God can become should be.

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\(^{142}\) Ibid, Nook 1, Def 6, Explanation

\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Ibid, Book 1, Def 1
What exactly is a God that is absolutely infinite and is, potentially, ALL creatures in ALL space and time? How can we define God’s absolutity? Deleuze notes that for Spinoza the absolutity of God cannot be a property, as par a property of a finite being. The order of events implicated in the phrase “God’s absolutity” is reversed; it is rather absolutity – the absolute infinity and potentiality – that constitutes God. It is not God as Supreme-Being that produces absolute infinity and potentiality but rather an absolutely infinite and potensive condition that produces this term ‘God’. But what is this absolutely infinite and potensive condition that constitutes God, what ‘form’ does it take? Deleuze notes that in Spinozist theology there is a move beyond “the infinitely perfect as a property towards the absolutely infinite as Nature.”¹⁴⁵ In this statement what is founded is that God is no longer distinguished as a ruler over Nature and his creatures, their relations and constitutive forces. Once again, the order is reversed. God is, instead, univocal with Nature; God and Nature are one substance. This is why Spinoza says, “∗Deus sive Natura”: “That eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists…. The reason, therefore, or cause, why God, or Nature, acts, and the reason why he exists, are one and the same. As he exists for the sake of no end, he also acts for the sake of no end. Rather, as he has no principle or end of existing, so he also has none of acting.”¹⁴⁶ Spinoza’s God is not just a naturalistic God, but, God exists insofar s/he/it is Nature, is changing infinitely like Nature, and is nontelic like Nature. Deleuze further elaborates, God “as substance and cause” or “Natura naturans” and “Natura naturata,” or Nature as “an effect and mode[s]” are interconnected through “mutual immanence: on one hand, the cause remains in itself in order to produce [and return as pure difference]; on the other hand, the effect or product remains in the cause. This dual condition enables us to speak of Nature in general, without any other specification [without any need to specify actual actualizations and to preserve Nature as having a potentiality beyond measures].”¹⁴⁷

When God is said to express himself “by in himself constituting Natura Naturans” before “expressing himself through producing within himself Natura Naturata,” we must understand the relation between God and Nature as not positing God temporally prior to

¹⁴⁶ Spinoza (1996), Book IV, Preface
Nature if God is truly an absolutely infinite or changing being. To situate Natura Naturans (God) as temporally prior before Natura Naturata (Nature) is to deny God his absolutity; it is to admit that God’s Being and Nature is finite, and just one of his ‘belongings’. God as the absolutely infinite is preserved only if we consider the world or Nature to be in turn expressing him/her/it, expressing him/her/it as changing, as the change of the changing world. “God as Natura Naturans” is always “involved in [or in-between] the nature of things or Natura Naturata.” Or as philosopher Robert Piercey notes of Deleuze’s Spinozist God, “Natura Naturans expresses itself in Natura Naturata,” in which the operative word is ‘in’. As such “Natura Naturans and Natura Naturata are not different things… The former is expressed immanently in the latter.” It is in this sense that Piercey as well as Deleuze understands the Spinozist God as expressing absolute power, infinitude and potentiality – it expresses/is the capacity to be becoming.

In that Nature exists, God exists. Natura Naturans/God and Natura Naturata/Nature, which expresses God’s essence or his existence and being, are ONE: “God’s existence and his essence are one and the same.” God and his infinitely differentiating essence, that is nothing other than Nature, are one and the same. All the finite things in the world insofar as they are in differential relations, decomposing and recomposing as something else, express (God’s) absolute infinity. The contiguous differentiation that constitutes the ‘form’ of Nature affirms difference beyond relativism, contradiction and identity.

And, because of the univocity or ONEness of God and Nature, nothing in this world can be truly contingent. All things in Nature and Nature itself necessarily exist because “God cannot be called a contingent thing” and nothing in Nature is contingent. God, or Nature, as Spinoza explains is “an absolutely infinite power of existence (infinitam absolute potentiam existendi).” Existence is not merely a matter of taste, whim or delight of societal, cultural, humanistic or political laws. The right to exist, or rather this

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149 Ibid, p.49
151 Spinoza (1996), Book 1, Prop 20
152 Ibid, Book 1, Prop 29, Demonstration
153 Ibid, Book 1, Prop 11, Scholium
necessary existence that Spinoza speaks of, is guaranteed not by higher moral principles but by the very existence of Nature itself. But to exist as such is not to exist within divine plan where destinies are mapped out. It is not a matter of saying one thing is better than another, or one must exists rather than another. It is a matter of how these things can be engaged, albeit differently and sometimes experimentally, that proves their necessary existence. Existence is guaranteed in change. Hence, the form of the world and a dynamic humanity, the necessity of existence, the absolute infinite and potentiality of the world, and the guarantee for humanity’s longevity as expressed in perpetual change is founded in the existence of “Deus sive Natura.”

In this sense God as Nature is no longer a divine Being that commands the fate of humans. In fact, what amounts to “a final cause,” for Spinoza, “is nothing but a human appetite,” or else the absolute non-telic event that is the truly collective desire of humans. God’s absolute potentiality is expressed not as a will to telos, but only in humanity’s collective will to change. To be ONE with God is thus not to submit to a higher moral principle, but to be ONE with the event of change that is already the world and Nature.

Life, the whole practice of living, is not dictated by the usual Judeo-Christian Lord Almighty. It is not just to say “The Word is made Flesh” (John 1:14), but that it is the flesh, the movement of flesh, bodies, concepts and spaces that constitutes the amorphous and absolutely infinite word of the universe. God is not prior or anterior to the changing world, again, the reverse becomes the case: God subsists as the pure immanence of the world; God is the ‘change’ of the changing world. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben, following Deleuze, elaborates God as pure immanence by observing that “the principle of immanence” is antithetical to ground. God is no longer the source, beginning or

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154 Deleuze (1994), p.40. Spinoza writes that the “eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists.” Here Spinoza suggests that because Nature necessarily exists, and exists through differentiation, God thus necessarily exists. (See: Book 4, Preface) God and Nature are necessarily one substance. This is “a substance which is absolutely infinite,” or else always changing, but equally as important it is also a substance that is “indivisible.” This is to suggest God and Nature cannot be broken into moments or aspects, but must be conceived as a being that perseveres in time, changing in time. (See: Book 1, Prop 13) “The nature of substance,” or God or Nature, “cannot be conceived unless as infinite.” (See: Book 1, Prop 13, Scholium)

155 Spinoza (1996), Book IV, Preface

ground of life; he no longer gives life to Nature and the creatures. Nothing is made in his image. If humans are ‘God-like’ it is because humans, too, change non-telically. What amounts to life or living is “everywhere, in all the moments that traverse this or that living subject.” Life as such is “undefined,” it “does not itself have moments” or segments that clearly distinguish your life or mine, or even this or that period of one’s life.\textsuperscript{157}

There is no higher God that gives or defines life; God is in the practice of living, which is governed by nothing but the experimental hubris of life itself, the will to chance and change that is dynamism. The practice of living expresses its absolute potentiality or else God. There is no divine plan that will deliver post-colonial Singapore to a well-calculated telos; there is only a practice of living, engaging and experimenting with things, bodies, texts, art and minds that will continually re-chart the nation’s trajectory and destiny.

b) Writing of potentiality

Writing is one of many activities in the practice of life that may express God or absolute potentiality. However, the question is not whether writing represents such a Spinozist God, but how this Spinozist God – absolute potentiality expressed in the event of change – can be immanent in writing? How can writing activate and sustain this absolute potentiality?

To begin to engage with these questions Agamben’s study of “potentia absoluta” and “potentia ordinata” as distinguished in medieval theology can be a useful ally. Agamben explains that the term potentia absoluta or ‘absolute potentiality’ indicates God’s power to “do anything (according to some even evil, even acting such that the world never existed, or restoring a girl’s virginity),” and “potentia ordinata [is] an ordered potentiality, by which God can only do what is in accord with his will,” or what God or rather Christian-Judeo theologians see as morally correct to do.\textsuperscript{158} He goes on to suggest that for these theologians potentia ordinata is privileged over potentia absoluta because there they wanted every potentiality to be realized or else passed into actuality. For these theologians, with every potentiality must have only one corresponding actuality, for how

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, p.254
else would God have given his only son and not an animal or woman to save the world. God giving Jesus is understood as Jesus being the irrefutable actualization of God’s infinite powers.\textsuperscript{159} These theologians posit potentiality as prior to actuality, or, potentiality as beginning and actuality as end, rather than potentiality as \textit{that which is yet to happen}. In terms of writing, if one follows the doctrines of these theologians, then the written text becomes the finality or end-product derived from a pre-determined potentiality. In this case potentiality becomes ‘potential-that-should-be-actualized-as-this’ instead of the Spinozist potentiality that is open.

However, Agamben argues that this linear sequence passing from potentiality to actuality need not be the only understanding of potentiality. He even argued that when actualities are realized this does not mean potentiality is exhausted; actualization can still harbour innumerable potentialities yet to be determined – Spinozist potentialities. There is for Agamben potentiality that need not pass into actuality. Following Aristotle Agamben suggests that potentiality is both “potential to do” and “potential to not-do” or “potential not to pass into actuality.”\textsuperscript{160}

Potentiality, maintains itself in relation to its own privation, its own \textit{sterēsis}, its own non-Being. This relation constitutes the essence of potentiality… to be in elation to one’s own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own impotentiality; and only in this way do they become potential.\textsuperscript{161}

Thus, it is important to note that for whatever that is actualized there remains that which is unactualized. But, what is unactualized is not the opposite for what has actualized. Unactuality goes beyond the mapped out unactualized-but-shall-be-actualized possibilities. Unactuality expresses a potentiality that cannot be possibilized. It goes beyond asking estimated probable answers. What remains unactualized is always outside of what can be represented within identity, analogy, resemblance and opposition. It is the condition of outside-ness that makes what is un-actualized an absolute potentiality. It is a potentiality that cannot be caused by a higher cause that grants its stable identity. In this sense, absolute potentiality is preserved only by means of these radical unactualities, which are as the unspent potentialities of each actuality that happened. Indeed, Agamben suggests, if everything is actualized all potentialities will be exhausted. Potentiality is not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid, p.180
\item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid, p.182
\end{itemize}
a being-that-must-eventually-exist. Rather, potentiality is, for Agamben, a form of “non-Being”; the “welcoming of non-being is potentiality.”\footnote{162} Potentiality, or non-Being, is not the diametric opposition of Being, but a Being’s absolute potentialities beyond measure.

A potentiality in expressing its unactuality, for Agamben, demonstrates “the cardinal secret of the Aristotelian doctrine of potentiality.” Following this we may suggest that every thought also “exists as a potential not to think,” and every word or sentence written is also the potentiality not to write.\footnote{163} What is written, put down on a page, is inclusive of what is not written. However what is not written does not designate the opposite of what is written. What has actualized in fact preserves potentiality. Or as Agamben puts it, “pure actuality, that is, the actuality of an act, is pure potentiality, that is, the potentiality of a potentiality.” To write then is to be engaged in the act of “writing of potentiality,” or to sustain potentiality rather than end it.\footnote{164} And, insofar as each text as a composition of forces, upon being engaged, can be recomposed, used differently, and draws up new concepts, subjectivities and spatialities, we can say that each text already inscribes its own potentiality yet to come. That which is not written remains outside the obvious dualisms captured/represented by what is written. That which is not written expresses “the pure potential to write.”\footnote{165} There are texts yet to be written here! This is what a written text can do outside the representative functions of writing. Actuality is not opposed to potentiality. It is acting and making actualities – a practice of writing – that sustains potentiality in its absolute form.\footnote{166}

Agamben’s reformulation of the relation between actuality and potentiality enables us to say that to preserve potentiality we need not forsake actuality or actions. To write is a matter of doing, a practice of life that forms new territories, subjectivities, thoughts, and

\footnote{162} Ibid.
\footnote{163} Ibid, p.215
\footnote{164} Ibid, p.216
\footnote{165} Ibid, p.217
\footnote{166} Making a connection back to earlier discussions on the univocity of God and Nature, one may say that Nature is not the actuality of which God is its potentiality, as if God must precede Nature. Nature insofar as it changes non-telically sustains its absolute potentiality. What actualizes as creatures, bodies and thoughts by virtue of their differential relations express Nature’s potentiality or otherwise God itself. God as potentiality itself is always there in and as Nature, never an anterior higher being. Nature being constituted by actualities expresses that which is also unactualized, an absolute potentiality that is the Spinozist God.
relations among forces that need not obey “the traditional scheme of signification.”\textsuperscript{167} To write is to experiment, just like life which often requires leaps of faith, and a will to chance in order to garner novel knowledge and even modes of being. To celebrate dynamism we may begin to write in ways in which words and sentences express an un-actuality that eludes representation through the capture by established identities and oppositions.

Agamben’s writing of potentiality can be further understood through Nancy’s formulation: “Writing [is] that which does not respond to any model whatsoever of the appropriation of significations, that which opens at once relation and, along with relation, significance itself.” The “message” of this kind of writing is not a “signified”; it is not even a plurality of relativized signifieds, but is what Nancy calls “the toward.”\textsuperscript{168} What writing offers is the intensive move towards something or otherwise an absolute potentiality that cannot be mapped out in advance. This “toward” that writing offers is not a move towards one world that is seen as better than the existing; it expresses a world yet to come. As Nancy continues, writing that offers this “toward” tend toward all the “dimensions of the world,” it must speak of a “community” that resists its own “hypostasis”, it must go beyond that which can be communicated unproblematically.\textsuperscript{169}

It is writing’s resistance to hypostases or mapped out futures that Nancy suggests can interfere with political situations. Writing is able to resist established relations and the political grounds from which these established relations are produced from.\textsuperscript{170} As such, following Nancy, I suggest such a mode of writing can be used to resist representing syntheses and simple conceptions of hybridity which still retains its clearly recognizable constitutive parts. To write is to perpetually found new grounds and unground one’s own ground. This ungrounding and re-grounding is for Nancy to be actively forging new political practices, rather than adhering to pre-established political-ideological grounds.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{167} Agamben (1999), p.208
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, p.119; The notion of a world, which dimensions are supra-dimensional or else beyond the Cartesian perspective, as a resistance to Singapore’s postcolonial identitarian politics will be further elaborated, again with aid from the textual, poetical, philosophical and conceptual forces within Nancy’s writing, in chapter three, “Outside-Singapore”.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, p.120
The writer of the “writing of potentiality” must break the political territories of the Left and Right into their constitutive forces and garner new, sometimes unstable, relations amidst these forces. As Nancy suggests, the writer’s task is to undo those finite relations within and between words and sentences and bring them towards a “proper infinity.”

This is to find ways to let words and sentences and their relations become integrated into the absolute potentiality of the changing world – the Spinozist “Deus sive Natura” itself. This move from the finite and fixed to the truly infinite is not unlike Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke’s suggestion that in order for post-colonial projects to move beyond reactive identity politics and to foster the production of newness there can be a move from “localisms” to a “generality” that complicates rather than simplifies the structure of these localisms. One can understand Patke’s plea to be directed toward writers and theorists to resist essentializing Singapore and Singaporeans, as well as to question the author’s relation to these peoples and places.

Perhaps the written text itself may go beyond the representational format; it is not just the use of established methods of production that enables the invention of new methods of writing. And we speak not just of the genre of ‘creative-writing’ but even theoretical writing, research writing. As already discussed earlier, Roland Barthes argues the practice of research is never separate from its object of study; the research on the production of subjectivity and spatiality itself becomes implicated and contributive to this production process: “The research itself becomes text… ‘Research’ is then the name which… we give to the activity of writing: research here moves on the side of writing, is an adventure of the signifier, an excess of exchange – impossible to maintain the equation of a ‘result’ for a ‘piece of research’… Whatever it searches for, it must not forget its nature as language.”

Research that attends to the gathering of forces, especially the powers of textual and poetical forces “becomes the place of a genuine experimentum linguae.” What is learnt and known from research is never independent

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172 Ibid, p.121
173 Ibid.
176 Agamben (1999), p.208
from the process. *From* the event of research, the event of writing/reading there emerges knowledge and subjects and spaces beyond measure.\textsuperscript{177}

**Engaging artworks: founding places and a people yet-to-come**

Artworks, when engaged, offer up visual, material, architectural and even textual and conceptual forces that the practice of writing can take up to produce new bodies of texts. To write of artworks is not to make the written text a substitution for the artwork. To make the text a substitution for the artwork is to commit two Cardinal sins in Spinozism: First, the most obvious, it is to assume the potentiality of the artwork needs the text to be realized; hence the text completes the artwork’s passing from pre-established potentiality to actuality. The second is to reiterate the fact that a pre-established potentiality has passed into actuality in the form of the artwork, and that the process is complete, and the text merely represents the actual-form of this potentiality. In both cases the openness of potentiality is foreclosed. Art as well as text become ‘ends’ rather than capable of producing something else and spurring the emergence of subjects and spaces yet to come. In contrast to this view on the relation between art and text, I propose, and this notion persists through the thesis, that there is an ‘in-between’ between the artwork and the text that goes beyond the linear sequentiality of potential-actual and the limits of representation. Indeed, for what else is research – inclusive of the writing of artworks – but an *experimentum linguae* that is a gathering of forces, including the material, visual, corporeal, spatial and socio-historical forces of the artwork written of.

What artworks offer to writing is more than what identitarian politics represents, but why? Why are artworks granted such importance in the practice of writing in this thesis? It is obvious this thesis is a “text-only-thesis”; it is not an exegesis to artworks that I have produced. At the same time this thesis neither seeks to present a treatise of what post-colonial art in Singapore should be, nor attempts to explain what the artworks treated in this thesis are about. And, if this thesis is not *about* Singaporean artworks, but Singapore as an amorphous ‘entity’ why not go straight to the ‘source’? Why not engage directly with the actual Singapore city, talk to people on the street. For surely within some

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, p.209. As Agamben suggested, what is truly philosophical in writing that which “no longer wants to refer to something.” It is “a *terminus interminus*,” an interminable term, a name that is only ever becoming proper name without ever being one. Becoming-proper name is a proper name’s deterritorialization; it is a proper name’s becoming-something/one/place else. It is the proper name partaking in its own absolute potentiality, a movement without *telos*; a movement that enables this proper name to join up with any number of other forces in order to truly express its longevity.
academic circles ‘street-level’ engagement is privileged as the better method to get to the ‘truth’? There are two reasons: First, (one may recall earlier discussions) this thesis is not an explanation of what Singapore is, was or should be. It is a gathering of forces, which can be interpolated into this amorphous entity-event-space call Singapore in order to sustain its dynamism. Artworks can offer certain visual, conceptual, material, architectural and textual forces that can aid the formation of these useful ‘gatherings’. The second reason is that the thesis is a practice of undoing representation, not to dismiss representation, but to evaluate the forces that constitute a particular representation, and re-assemble them into something else. Thus, the thesis becomes, in part, a practice to turn these representations back into their dislodged composing forces in order to form new gatherings. These are the reasons why artworks may offer to writing something more than what identitarian politics that relies on artworks as signifiers of immutable concepts, subjectivity, spatiality and values can offer.

And if it need be artwork, why artworks produced by artists who are working within academia such as the artworks treated in this thesis – installations like Lisa-Anne Chong’s “Empire”, performances-installations like Suzann Victor’s “Still Waters”, photographs with somewhat abstract compositions like Chong’s “Balmoral Park” and Rajeev Patke’s Walter Benjamin-inspired montage text-essay on post-colonial cities such as Singapore? Why art which concerns are mainly philosophical, textual and art-historical rather than representing the voice of the oppressed? In other words, why art that is not explicitly representational, not an explicit announcement of the artist’s race, sexuality or nationality? Why not art about the ‘people’?

To begin to address the aforementioned questions I will first turn to Jean-Paul Sartre’s dismissal of art that forgoes the ‘people’ and then begin to construct an argument in support for the powers of artworks that is not explicitly representative of the people. Sartre notes in What is Literature?: “We know very well that pure art and empty art are the same thing and that aesthetic purism was only a brilliant defensive manoeuvre of certain bourgeois of the last century who preferred to see themselves denounced as philistines rather than as exploiters.”178 And if one takes Sartre’s comments on pure or high art seriously in a post-colonial context is it not to suggest that within a global-

capitalist art market art would lose its revolutionary power and become merely collectables because it offers no harsh and direct antagonisms toward the establishment? For Sartre and many after him, to not antagonize the establishment through oppositional techniques is to “attempt to flee or do away with history.”\textsuperscript{179} Thus if it is Singapore’s people we are addressing then why not ‘street-art’ like graffiti that are ‘tagged’ onto walls with more frequency in Singapore, for surely these artworks show diversity, individuality and alterity, and even progressive freedom in the nation-state? Why not write about filmmaker Eric Khoo’s now-famous-at-the-Cannes-Film-Awards films, like “Mee Pok Man” or “Twelve Storeys” that show a grimy side of Singapore with alienated-but-sympathesizable working-class people who the government does not like to admit exist. For surely these poor souls need to be represented? The list of questions detailing the honourable tasks writing should or must do for the people of Singapore goes on.

But I want to address another kind of people in this thesis, a people yet to come, and thus cannot represented. Another kind of art, another approach to both art-criticism and art-making is needed for the emergence of a people yet to come. Additionally, the way “Empire”, “Still Waters”, “Balmoral Park” and Patke’s montage-essays refuse to describe what Singapore or Singaporeans should be makes them apt artworks to treat in this thesis’ elaboration on how artworks, which conventionally function to represent, can resist representation. In this sense these artworks may aid in the elaboration and production of an Outside-Singapore, outside of predictable peoples and places, dreams and localities.

The answer to the above questions stemming from “why art that is not explicitly representative?” is to be found in a concern with recomposing the forces that may constitute certain representations, certain subjects and spaces, certain citizens, nationhood and their assumed opposites. It is not a valorization of high art and a silencing of art’s revolutionary powers. It is a valorization of how something – an artwork, a text, an event – that does not offer explicit models of identity can aid in the

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid. As critical theorist David Carroll elaborates, sociologists keen to understand what makes “society click” have thus very “little patience when dealing with movements or theories that could be classified under the rubrics ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘experimental or avant-garde art’ – perhaps because these movements seem to play with and even reject the most fundamental premises underlying the entire historical or sociological project: that there is one social or historical reality which all discourse and art represent either negatively or positively.”
emergence of potentialities beyond measures. Writing can do more than rescue and celebrate the weak, and help grant back to them their sought after identities. Besides rescuing and restoring a past, writing can attend to a future yet to come. Writing on art without models of identity forces writing not to reiterate the ‘given’ but to attend to the forces, the cracks, the surfaces, the curves, the bodies, the air, the processes of conceptualization, the words in the engagement with an artwork that stretches to both a past without origin and a future without destiny; it enables a writing-in-the-middle to be taking form.

Critical theorist David Carroll, responding to the aversion some revolutionaries show toward high-art (and non-messianic writing), suggests that writing like art-making must be more than “mere reflections of [the artists’] socio-historical context.” The usefulness of writing and artworks alike can afford to go beyond their ability to truthfully present “historical ‘facts’;” they can attend to their own “aesthetic dimension.” The aesthetic dimension is the affective dimension of the artworks and the texts. This dimension is less a space and more an event. It is an event where the constitutive forces of artworks combine with those of the viewer or reader and transform him/her.

When one’s composing forces are caught up and intertwined with those of the artworks and texts, as well as the spatial and material forces of a gallery it may be exhibited at, the ‘subject’ enters what Deleuze and Guattari calls “a zone of imperceptibility, indiscernibility and impersonality” where Self and Other are (or become) indistinguishable. Yet far from lamenting the loss of the ‘I’, Deleuze and Guattari call imperceptibility, indiscernibility and impersonality the “three virtues” of life. They elaborate, living dynamically is “to reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait [a shifting mass or gathering of forces expressing tendencies rather than formed forms], in order to find one’s zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator.” To be the impersonality of the creator for Deleuze and Guattari is to become “‘everything’ (le ‘tout’): the indefinite article, the infinitive-becoming.” As discussed earlier, this is to be ONE with the Spinozist God, or the absolute potentiality and infinity of the changing world that is a cause of itself. This is

180 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
when a citizen – like a Singaporean subject – deterritorializes and flees from itself in order to be “becoming everybody/everything,” for “becoming everybody/everything (tout le monde) is to world (faire monde), to make a world (faire un monde).” The finite subject infinitizes to become not just reflective but constitutive of a world yet to come. Outside the reach of representation the aesthetic dimension becomes a world beyond the values and valuing-systems of existing political spectrums.

In a similar vein to Carroll, Deleuze makes a case for the importance of his aesthetic and affective dimension. He suggests that to neglect this dimension is to produce “a reactive conception of art,” negating art and text’s capabilities for composition and re-composition. Carroll argued that Sartre’s “political purism” in fact “prohibits the questions raised by art from being treated seriously, not only in the aesthetic but in the theoretical-political realm as well.” Political purism prohibits questions such as “how the material, spatial, visual forces of an artwork can affect a viewer”, or “how engaging with such forces differently produces subjectivity” to be asked. Political purism is reactive in the sense it does not question its own valuation system; it posits one value against another while each value is assumed to be fixed. It does not question how these values and valuing-systems are composed and how they may be recomposed.

So let us affirm not just existing differences by means of naïve tolerance. Let us affirm differences yet to come, subjects and spaces without proper names. Let us affirm ways of making art and writing that affirm these differences belonging to the greatest potentiality.

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183 Ibid, p.308
184 Deleuze (1986), p.102
185 Carroll, p.26
186 Carroll’s position and critique of Sartre’s valorization of socialist-realism and representationality follows philosopher Theodore Adorno’s stance on representation. Adorno writes that art cannot be understood by a “set of invariants” which sociologists and historians can always rely on for interpretation. If anything, it is when artworks, including writing, express a “tensional” quality that makes them not easily resolvable that, in turn, establishes for their “authenticity”. This is an authenticity expressed as that which resists dependency and identity on given categories, and which embodies a self-difference. (See: Adorno, Theodor (1997) *Aesthetic Theory* (trans. R. Hullot-Kantor), London & New York: Athlone Press. p.3) Artworks for Adorno are “non-conceptual objects,” they cannot be reduced to represent an established concept or value. (See: Adorno, Theodor (1978) “Commitment” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Eds. A. Arato & E. Gehardt), Oxford: Blackwell Basil. p.317)
187 Brian Massumi writes that to affirm true difference is to adopt a “productionist approach” to not just art but academic writing. It is to invent a way of doing theory that goes beyond mere challenges and critiques based on inversions and opposites. As he further elaborates, “If you want to adopt a productionist approach, the techniques of critical thinking prized by the humanities are of limited value … Critical thinking disavows its own inventiveness as much as possible. Because it sees itself as uncovering
a) The usefulness of non-representational works

Art (one may include writing), as Deleuze-Nietzsche suggest, can be “a ‘stimulant of the will to power’, ‘something that excites willing’.” It is not a matter of art imitating life, or life imitating art. Art-making as well as interpreting, evaluating and writing of art, is but something that occurs in life, enriching life; such practices are not extraneous to or reflective of life. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation.”

However, Carroll has also argued that attending to art and writing’s aesthetic dimension – its non-representational dimension - is “not meant to replace political ideals.” Rather, without the focus on representation as being “primary” in an engagement with an artwork or text, there is the possibility to engage with those sidelined forces that in turn evoke “a way of undoing all ideals and all ends imposed on the critical process.” Thus, “art has a critical and self-critical function.” First, it interpolates certain unfamiliar gatherings of forces into the socialized meanings ascribed to a people and a nation to reconstitute the compositions that make a people and a nation. The politics of nationhood and citizenship are, here, no longer reiterations of socio-moral types. For Carroll “What glows in the depths of society is not some ideal of society or essence of the social but the possibility of critical alternatives to the concepts and practices of the existing social order [including existing opposites]. What has not yet happened in society and may in fact never occur as such ‘happens’ in the arts.” Second, art also brings forth forces that remake the relations a writer, critic, reader or theorist, may have with it. It is in this sense – art’s critical and self-critical functions – that art (and writing of art) can be something it claims was hidden or as debunking something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificatory modus operandi. … The balance has to shift to affirmative methods: techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagrely) to reality. There is a certain hubris to the notion that a mere academic writer is actually inventing.” See: Massumi, Brian (2002) Parables For The Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation, Durham & London: Duke University Press. pp.12–13.

Deleuze (1986), p.102
Carroll, p.27
Ibid, p.28
simultaneously “apolitical and radically and profoundly political.” This can be why there is something useful, even political, in art and texts that resist mere representation.

Art-making and writing of art is never merely to recount memories, but, as Deleuze suggests, “to invent a people.” Even if memories and histories are evoked they are there not to reiterate what was or what should be. This is why histories and memories are only ever implicated in terms of their constitutive forces, only to be broken down into something else. There are only “a people to come” amidst these deterritorializing and recomposing histories and memories. As artists/writers Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham note, amidst the growing, intensifying space between the materiality of the artworks and the textuality of the texts there is a “hypothetical ontology” that constantly eludes actualization and even what it is supposed to hypothesize. Here, a hypothesis is no longer a position in the near future to be met. It is a position that is immanent to the entire span of art-making, art-criticism, writing and reading. And, such a position stretched across the event of time founds the emergence of new politics for this people yet to come and a polis yet to come.

To found places and a people yet to come is never to discover a lost city or tribe, or be caught up in the utopian future. The ‘yet-to-come’ is not something that can be named as the diametric opposite subject or space of an existing regime. It is not a potential waiting to be actualized. Neither is it divorced from the actual practice of art-making and writing among other facets of life. The ‘yet-to-come’ is not a power (puissance) against another power (puissance); it is not a contest or contradiction of identities, or a contrast of a terrible present against a better future. It is, rather, as philosopher Antonio Negri suggests, a more Spinozist engagement-deployment of power: “power against Power (potenza contro potere).” Power against Power is potentiality (pouvoir) against fixed

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192 Ibid, p.27
195 Negri, Antonio (2004) Subversive Spinoza: (un)contemporary variations (Ed. T.S. Murphy), Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press. p.97. Here, we recall earlier discussions involving Agamben’s notion that writing (and similarly art-making) is the writing of potentiality, for each word preserves its own potentiality to be not written as well as its potentiality to be written otherwise in an infinity of ways. There are countless yet-to-come words within each word written or actualized, there are countless ways of to be beginning over.
representations of racial, economical, geographical or ideological might (puissance).\textsuperscript{196} The term ‘against’ or ‘contro’ does not indicate opposition but rather a way of undoing and redoing; it pertains to invention rather than annihilation or conquest. In this sense we can begin to understand Negri’s formulation, power against Power, against finding ways to cut across what is mighty in order to decompose the particular composition of forces that constitutes it, and gather these forces otherly, and perhaps continually re-gather and recompose these forces, thus expressing potentialities or power (pouvoir) beyond measure. The continual re-gathering of forces to make for new compositions expressing subjects and spaces, the forms of which are boundless takes place in the realm of practice and is never pre-determined based on higher morals. The emergence of the yet-to-come occurs when those subjects and spaces cherished in chronic memories and histories are “open to the exterior,”\textsuperscript{197} open to the flux of forces that will bombard them and set them on a line of flight somewhere outside the scope of Descartes-intoxicated eyes.

These yet-to-come peoples, places, citizens, cities and nations exist in a time without proper beginning or end; they are gatherings of forces from a past immemorial that did press into an indefinite future. As Spinoza remarks, “the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being involves no finite time, but an infinite time.”\textsuperscript{198}

What can a local writer do?

What can be written so that these yet-to-come people and places emerge? What can someone writing of Singapore do to attend to these ‘yet-to-comes’? These two questions may be (re)-framed into literary theorist John Phillips’ question, “What can a local writer do today?” This is, as Phillips suggests, a very simple question that can be fulfilled by “a straightforward answer.”\textsuperscript{199} The answer many committed post-colonial writers want to say may suggests that the local writer must write words and sentences that are avowedly

\textsuperscript{196} In French as with other Latinate languages there is a distinction between power – pouvoir – meaning capability or potentiality and power – puissance – meaning might, or power as it is commonly understood in English. Writers like Negri, Deleuze, Agamben, Nancy and Foucault conceive of there being pouvoir within puissance, or to say within a dominative might there is a potential for change, but a potential that cannot be represented in advance. The single usage of the English word “power” for both pouvoir and puissance has caused confusion in early translations of French post-structuralist texts.

\textsuperscript{197} Deleuze (1988b), p.100. As Deleuze following Spinoza argued “the interior is only a selected exterior.” What is taken to be an individual or place is but a particular grouping or gathering of the forces that swirl in the exterior which has no proper form other than its formlessness and groundlessness. See also: Deleuze (1988), p.125

\textsuperscript{198} Spinoza (1996), Book 3, Prop 8

anti neo-colonial and sceptical of Singapore’s global-capitalist way of life. However, Phillips suggests something else. For him, “it might be more pertinent to suspend the ought or the should or the must implicit in such a demand [for a straightforward answer]… when we are considering a can… The can is what enables.” For Phillips “the can enables the what.”²⁰⁰ It has the power to make the ‘what’ into something more than an answer or a designation for the right kind of subjectivity or spatiality for Singapore. The ‘what’ in this case becomes “something like an act or event” that is not necessarily “controlled by a conscious intention.”²⁰¹

One may draw from Phillips’ reformulation of the ‘what’ into an act or event as a prompt for local writers to experiment, even experiment with ways of writing, of reassembling the conventional compositions of forces which relations express popular Singaporean subjectivity. It is even experimenting so that the writer no longer expresses his/her own subjectivity as a Singaporean but becomes willing to partake in and contribute to an active post-colonial world-making. As Phillips suggests it is only in “the act of writing” that the ‘what’ is produced; the ‘what’ is not a pre-established subjectivity or spatiality that the writer must represent.²⁰² Experimentation in writing would never “indicate what writers are supposed to do. Nor would it indicate what writers actually do. It might conceivably turn out that writers who undoubtedly write feverishly… nonetheless do not do what they can [or are expected to do]. The what indicates, solely in the provisional register, what a writer can do.”²⁰³ (Phillips’ stressing on the ‘can’ in his question as that which can liberate the ‘what’ is not dissimilar to what we have discussed earlier with regards to Agamben’s notion that writers in actualizing words also preserve absolute potentiality. As Agamben suggests every word written is also its potentiality not to be written, or else the word’s non-being, its unquantifiable unrepresentable potentiality. Words have not only a provisional but also a potential register.)

The local writer may indeed be constrained by the ideological and political forces in Singapore that dictates s/he should not write about the government and its policies. However, s/he does not have to move to another country to mount assaults on the government and write of better ways of governing Singapore. The writer becomes more

²⁰⁰ Ibid.
²⁰¹ Ibid.
²⁰² Ibid.
²⁰³ Ibid.
attuned to his/her medium by being attuned to the text’s composing forces. S/he finds ways to experiment with words to maximize the production of new textual relations that can, in turn, construct conditions for subjectivities and spatialities yet-to-come to emerge.

Experimenting with new ways of producing textual relations is never itself a method framed within the framework of hypothesis and proofs; it entails another kind of experiment, one concerned with un/re/doing existing relations to subject and spatialities that are without proper names. A local writer in experimenting is not concerned to prove his/her ‘local-ness’. As Phillips notes, the ‘can’ in enabling subjectivities and spatialities outside of the imaginable will always be “at war” with the ‘local’.204 It will always be a power (pouvoir) against the local that has settled into Power (puissance). Words and sentences express an outside, an absolute potentiality. As philosopher and post-colonial theorist Peter Hallward suggests, what is powerful about writing is not that it reiterates existing political ideologies and agendas. The power of writing “is its capacity to invent new ways of using words (new in either form or practice, or both), at a disruptive distance from inherited norms and expectations – in other words, its capacity to provoke people to think, rather than merely recognize, represent or consume.”205 Writing is revolutionary in that it revolts against itself; it gathers a tension between what it was and what it is becoming in terms of its absolute potentiality.

The writer no longer posits one local position against another; it is not a competition for which local political agenda is better. S/he also does not posit one historical moment against another; history not necessarily progressive. However, this does not mean the writer would like the postmodern beings in Koolhaas and Jameson’s laments retreat into doing nothing. The writer does work! However, his/her responsibility is to be “responsible to this openness” that the ‘can’ enables in the ‘what’.206 This responsibility to sustain openness is the reason why Phillips says that the ‘today’ in his question is no longer pertaining to a ‘now’: “what a writer can do today is inevitably related to the not yet, which splits today into un-reconcilable temporal disjunctions.” The writer is attuned to what makes the ‘local’ and ‘today’; s/he is always ‘close’ to the local ‘idioms’ and situations. But s/he does not reiterate them; s/he does not turn the local into a position pit

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204 Ibid, p.31
against the government and the global. S/he takes the ‘local’ and ‘today’, recomposes them bringing forth new relations expressing the “not-yet”, and immanently express the ‘can’. In transforming the “local” and the “today” the writer partakes in and adds-to this “Outside” that is outside of all local/global binaries; this is what a local writer can do.

a) The multitude in minoritization

In a sense what Phillips is proposing is a minoritization of both the writer and what s/he writes of. However, this does not produce a minority pitted against a majority. We find no suffering artist facing the enormity and anonymity of the Singapore government. The minority suggested here involves making oneself a minority of oneself; one is already another, eluding the ‘I’ of the ‘today’. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate:

What defines a minority, then, is not the number but the relations internal to the number. A minority can be numerous, or even infinite; so can a majority. What distinguishes them is that in the case of the majority the relation internal to the number constitutes a set that may be finite or infinite, but is always denumerable. Whereas the minority is defined as a non-denumerable set, however many elements it may have. What characterizes the non-denumerable is neither the set nor its elements; rather, it is the connection and the ‘and’ produced betweens elements, between sets, and which belongs to neither, which eludes them.

A minority takes place when an identity, subject or even meaning is in-between what it was and what it is becoming. It is at an in-between that cannot be pinned down as a happy middle position. Its space and subjectivity is, as Deleuze and Guattari note, that which “constitutes a line of flight,” always already somewhere else, always an event more than formed form or formed matter.

The minority in this sense is not the local agent who wages war against global capitalism or government from a stable position. The minority constantly recomposes him/herself to avoid capture by the State. Its revolt against the State is precisely it being “incapable of constituting viable States from the point of view of the axiomatic and the market, since in the long run they promote compositions that do not pass by way of the capitalist

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207 Ibid.
208 Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (2004), pp.518-19
209 Ibid, p.519
Non-denumerability is their weapon against the State. As Deleuze and Guattari continue, “the power of the minorities is not measured by their capacity to enter and make themselves felt within the majority system, nor even to reverse the necessarily tautological criterion of the majority, but to bring to bear the force of the nondenumerable sets.” The minoritizing minority engages in a practice of undoing itself, tending toward its absolute potentialities without even letting itself know what is to come in advance.

Insofar as what a minority is becoming is non-denumerable, it expresses a multiplicity beyond sets, stages and series. The potentiality it preserves within itself, in its ceaseless practice of living, is what Negri calls a “multitudo” or “multitude”. As Negri’s contemporary Paolo Virno contemplating on the multitude in relation to the political sphere observes, “the multitude obstructs and dismantles the mechanisms of political representation. It expresses itself as an ensemble of ‘acting minorities’, [active minoritizing minorities], none of which, however, aspires to transform itself into a majority. It develops a power that refuses to become the government.” The minority becomes multiplicitous not by gaining more denumerable support from the community, but by becoming-someone/thing/place else; it resists capture by un/redoing existing relations of forces that composed it. A forgetting of self-identity becomes its very becoming (devenir) and power.

Attaining multiplicity in the process of minoritization is, for Negri, to partake in “an open anthropology” where an anthropologist and his/her object of study are something/one else, becoming imperceptible not just with each other but with the scores of material, visual, spatial, textual, conceptual forces that make the event of research/writing. Or to say to live a life that is “structurally open, continually re-opened by the numerous freedoms of the subjects who are always constructing anew.” This is a life where “‘absolute’ is the absolute opening.” This is a life that minoritizes those

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210 Ibid.
211 Ibid, p.520
212 Negri (2004), p.98
existing economical, ideological or racial machines that provides the comfort of self and Other.\textsuperscript{215}

To write in order to emerge as a minority is to tell stories that have yet to be told, and which \textit{upon being told} spur the coming of ever more stories of people, nations, citizens and cities yet to come. As Deleuze notes, the power of art, which can include even theoretical writing should it be \textit{artful}, only offering up the “possibility of fact” without stating what \textit{should be}.\textsuperscript{216} A text’s longevity and multiplicity is preserved when it functions like a diagram that is suggestive yet elusive, political yet apolitical, and when its ‘voice’ no longer dictates.

What can be written so that a future beyond the schedule of progress may emerge? Maybe it is, as Singaporean artists Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham remark, to “leave your history behind” and “go on a quest for a myth yet told” for “we are always in the wake of an event’s passing;”\textsuperscript{217} an event passing \textit{into} itself and becoming the entire event of change. Where is the story or myth? When is the ‘telling’ done? What can we write today in a today extended \textit{further} than its ‘now’? We \textit{are} life’s story. \textit{We are what can be done and/or written today when today passes into the infinite time of the greatest potentiality. This is the centre, interior, interiority (where) we are (at).}

\textsuperscript{216} Deleuze, Gilles (2003) \textit{Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation} (Trans. D. Smith), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.110
\textsuperscript{217} Victor & Lingham, p.61
Chapter 2
“Empire” & “Still Waters”: Art and the coming Singapore City

The chapter engages with two installations by two Singaporean artists working in both Singapore and Sydney, Australia. The first half of this chapter mainly focuses on Lisa-Anne Chong’s ongoing project, “Empire” (2005 – present), a collection of cast concrete blocks that are assembled into various site models and shown at different galleries. The second half focuses on Suzann Victor’s “Still Waters” (1998), an installation/performance involving a plexiglass enclosure installed the Singapore Art Museum (SAM).

The notion of Singapore city is a focus in both works. “Empire” concerns the whole city, specifically the architectural-typological hegemony taking place in Singapore. “Still Waters” concerns are more specific, it engages specifically with one of the balconies at the SAM that is encased by a glass seal separating the museum from the elements. By moving from “Empire” to “Still Waters” this chapter makes a move from the macro to the micro; or, from the city as a form of architectural exteriority to the museum’s architectural interior. However, this chapter neither reviews the city’s different architectural typologies, nor posits the individual as an autonomous interiority against the city as a destructive exteriority. Rather the chapter seeks to develop non-reactive, non-dualistic relations between interiority and exteriority, subjectivity and spatiality. Evoking Hardt and Negri’s notion of the changing global-capitalist Empire the first half of the chapter, in treating Chong’s “Empire”, discusses how a subject when mixed with various forces of global-capitalism and urbanism can become transformative and positive instead of merely being damaged by these same forces. Then, evoking Spinoza’s understanding of the complex body-mind, the second half, through treating “Still Waters”, elaborates on how this transformative subject and space can resist oppositional identity politics still occuring in post-colonial and post-modern studies.

This chapter is, thus, concerned with what artworks can do – their capacity for change. Additionally, it explores how the practice of writing of artworks can contribute to intensifying artworks’ capacity for change, and in the production of subjects and spaces outside specific localized milieus. And, from this engagement with the practice of writing, this chapter will also problematize the writer’s centrality, and re-evaluate the theorist-critic as a judge who represents the subjects and spaces around him/her, in order to suggest s/he is no longer an interior-self of which an artwork is an exterior-object.
Lisa-Anne Chong, "Empire" (Installation, Phat Space Gallery, Sydney, Australia, January 2005)
Writing: a questioning of the centre

What can writing about artworks do? There are things a text should do in order to communicate. These ‘should dos’, such as representation, are a text’s ‘duties’. But there are things that happen in the practice of communication that really express the text’s absolute capacities. A text’s absolute capacities or potentialities are what a text can do beyond duty and even semiotic and representational requirements. What is expressed in this ‘can do’ are the productive powers of the text, its capacity to take thinking and being to the limits, beyond the conventions of representational thought.

Let us write on. Ideas, subjects and spaces will not precede words and worlds; let us write to found these ideas, subjects and spaces.\(^{218}\)

A text written on Singapore is never just a textual equivalent to the Singapore one degree north of the equator. The text is not a textual substitute for a Singapore represented through its government and people’s pursuit of national identity. A text may communicate to us Singapore’s commitments to producing a world-class city as well as artworks reflecting the struggles of producing national identification. But what the text expresses is something else. The text is produced by and operates through particular compositions of textual, poetical and theoretical forces. These compositions are composed differently from those constituting Singapore’s pursuits and commitments. This, however, is not to say the text and the Singapore exemplified through those pursuits and commitments are not two separate exclusive centres unable to affect each other. A nation’s centrality and the centrality of a text on a nation have such complex relations that these two separate centres are better expressed as territories that are always opened to each other as well as to other territories. Their boundaries and space are

\(^{218}\) Blanchot, Maurice (1982) *The Space of Literature* (Trans. A. Smock), Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press. p.33. It is interesting to note that for Blanchot the idea, the subject and worlds are never there in which the written text’s function is to represent. As Blanchot writes, “To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image [created in the written text], instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more [known and representable] world, when there is no world yet.” For Blanchot, writing is not just capable of representation, but through an attention to its textual and poetic capacities and forces, can produce that “opening” from which worlds that are yet terminable emerge. One must write to occasion such an opening.
mutable. Amidst their complex relations the whole nature of boundary and territory is problematized.

It is this complexity between Singapore, the artworks regarding it, and texts on Singapore that this chapter explores. When a text on Singapore and Singapore itself are mutually inclusive, it not only represents, but contributes to the pursuits, problems and complications in Singapore’s process of identity formation. Writing contributes and sustains the act of pursuance and commitment. To pursue and be committed to something is to be in the process of creating anew that which is pursued and which one is committed to. The inseparability of the practice of writing and the complex process of pursuing and creating nation identity can be further elaborated by Agamben’s notion that the practice of living cannot be defined by fulfilling telic moral duties. For Agamben the practice of living is a poetical act (”poieisis”), when living is concerned with creation or bringing into “presence” something that is yet to exist.219

Working from Agamben’s notions on the poetic practice of living one may say that writing, insofar as it is capable of producing unfamiliar and unstable perspectives, spatialities and subjectivities, has the capacity to bring into presence that which is yet to exist. Writing forges life. The unfamiliar and unstable perspectives, spatialities and subjectivities emerging from a text are not just representative of unstable and unfamiliar but established people and places. Unfamiliarity and instability are produced by the constantly shifting viewpoints and voices immediately present in a text. This immediacy is what Agamben means by ‘presence’. The poetic practice of writing trespasses the ‘limits’ of familiar and stable subjectivities, viewpoints and voices, and relations a reader might have with the text’s narrator. The unstable and unfamiliar is actively produced and changed in the process of writing and reading.220 The outside of these limits is an outside that exceeds the duality of inside and outside, subject and other; what is trespassed does not pass into another inside. The centrality of voice and subjectivity is perpetually peripheralized.

220 Ibid, pp.73-74
Although the concerns with defamiliarizing subjectivity, voices and viewpoints in writing are more commonly found in creative writing, there is no reason why this mode of writing is incompatible with theoretical writing.221 This mode of writing is in fact useful in the production of post-colonial theory if post-colonial theory seriously challenges the imperialist gaze. The post-colonial theorist does not just defamiliarize and shake up the subjectivities and voices of the nations and peoples s/he writes of, but unsettles his/her own position. In his/her text s/he produces him/herself as that which has ‘presence’ but yet has a proper name. In creating this yet-to-exist person s/he contributes to and intensifies the nation’s complex identity formation process, and also resists a pre-defined post-colonial Singaporean life. The text s/he writes does not represent, it only offers what Deleuze calls a “possibility of fact.”222 This possibility of fact is a possibility for change, a change which in turn is capable of undoing any centres of subjecthood, identity and meaning.

What is meant by a possibility of fact in writings on Singapore? Writing, like making art, especially the montage, may extract bits and pieces from the world it engages with to create a composition.223 For example, statements made about Singaporean national identity are extracted from their ‘original’ context in government publications, academic journals, exhibition catalogues and even kitschy, sentimental and reactive TV programs. These statements are then interwoven into each other and even into theoretical, philosophical statements, concepts and texts. The composition the writer creates no longer reiterates what was said ‘originally’. As was discussed in chapter one literary theorist John Phillips remarked that post-colonial writing has a voice distinct from the colonial in the sense that it is a collective voice, or rather a collection of voices that are not synthesized as one.224 These voices, mutually affecting and transforming, present a

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221 One may think of the writings of the Situationists, the Russian Constructivists and the Dadaists, which incorporated collage and montage techniques as well as satire and parody that challenged the centrality of an author’s voice, or for that matter the authority of dominant productions of meaning. In terms of theoretical writing, Walter Benjamin, whom I will be discussing in Chapter Four, is someone who borrows from the Dadaists and Constructivists, and may have influenced the Situationists. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke borrows these techniques from Benjamin in order to produce texts on the post-colonial Singapore City that resist the theorist’s all-seeing eye and thus the theorist as ultimate authority and judge.


223 The montage mode of writing will be further elaborated in Chapter Four when Patke’s Walter Benjamin-inspired montage essay, “Benjamin’s Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City” is treated.

voice that has a presence without having a proper name. This is the text’s voice; this is the voice which offers to the reader an array of conceptual, textual, poetical and philosophical forces for the actualization of new subjects, concepts and spatialities.

Those unresolved voices, although originally sentimental, reactive, “kitsch, camp, banal and trashy material,” and in many ways illustrative of the conventional cosmopolitan city, are, through their in-synthesizability, expressive of the “reworking and transfiguration of cultural forms” of Singapore. The writer’s task is not to lament the loss of truth but to work at transforming the relations to and between the kitschy, camp and banal materials. For Phillips this is how the capitalist Singapore’s trash can be developed into a “new aesthetics of trash,” which make trash more than capital’s by-products.225

A voice in-between all the trashy, camp and banal material, all the publications, journals and artist catalogues, begins to emerge. This voice is not the voice of the written text, nor reflective of the writer’s intentions. The voice of the in-between is always in between positions, never just expressing one particular identity, but always expressing an identity that is becoming-something/one else. It emerges as if it is from a narrator who is not yet there, who has yet been positioned. This voice is, for Maurice Blanchot, one “that is not simply the organ of subjective interiority, but, on the contrary, the reverberation of a space opening onto the outside,” outside of the dualities of self/other, nature/culture and centre/periphery. This is a voice “prior to all saying, and even the possibility of saying,” and which “situates itself nowhere.” It “manifests itself in a space of redoubling, of echo and resonance where it is not someone but rather this unknown space,” simply a “discordant accord” and “vibration” that “speaks without speaking.” It is a voice that is capable of breaking with the linear narrative’s “perpetuity” and “proud stability.” This is

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Cesare Casarino writes that a writer is like the Benjaminian “collector”. The subjectivity of the collector is not prior to his/her collection; it is not the variety of texts, concepts, words, sentences and visual images that represent the collector’s innate subjectivity. Rather it is the collector who comes alive in the collection. Quoting Walter Benjamin Casarino writes, “‘it is he who lives in them’. The collection, thus, expresses “the secret life of objects,” in which “a space of potentiality in which one may become other than what one already is” takes place. As the collection expands or contracts there no longer belong to specific epochs. The collection becomes, as Casarino states, “heterochronic enclosures animated by past and future time.” Hence what defines “the collector and his/her possessions” are “never fully realized in the present… Both live in a state of potentiality.” See: Casarino, Cesare (2002) “Philopoeisis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto” in Boundary (2 29:1, Spring 2002). pp.65-96. pp.80-81. cf. Benjamin, Walter (1969) Illuminations (Ed. H. Arendt & Trans. H. Zohn), New York: Schocken Books. pp.59-60, 67

225 Ibid.
a voice that eludes itself and “commits itself” and “[the world] it animates to… disappearance,” or transformation.226

A mode of writing concerned with producing this voice ceases to represent the world. As Blanchot notes, “writing ceases to be a mirror.” It only offers possibilities, people and nations that cannot be predicted or articulated by the voice of authorial linear narration. This voice of an author who is yet to come in “affirming nothing but its own outside” demonstrates writing’s absolute condition.227

A voice affirming nothing but its own outside is produced by a mode of writing concerned with experimentation in style, form and composition. To experiment is to attend to the ‘can’ of Phillips’ question “what can a local Singaporean writer do?”. It treats the ‘can’ as the capacity-to rather than as definitions of the ‘what’. By treating the ‘can’ as primary in the process of writing Phillips argues that the “what” is transformed into “unfulfilled possibilities.” The ‘can’ enables the ‘what’ to open up to futures that are yet to come.228 Writing can make what is factual – the people and nation’s pursuits and commitments – into something infactual, something that refuses to be designated as a proper historical and spatial territory.

This mode of writing resists establishing a centre from which writer or reader can stand and proclaim what the unfulfilled possibilities are supposed to be. At each step of the process of writing violence is waged against the characters, concepts, figures and perspectives developed thus far within the text.229 Blanchot notes what writing can do at its utmost capacity is revealed when it is “turned back upon itself.” Here, writing executes “a break with thought… a break with all empirical experiences of the world. In this sense, writing also entails a rupture with all present consciousness.”230

For Blanchot, and for Phillips, breaking with empirical experiences marks the emergence of creativity. Only in freeing the text from the position and intentions of the writer, and readers, can the text be suggestive of possibilities while resisting denoting what these

227 Ibid, p.259
228 Phillips (2002), p.31
229 Ibid, p.36
possibilities should be. Only then can the unfulfilled possibilities that Phillips spoke of emerge. Only then can the ideological, aesthetical, socio-historical and cultural conventions of Singaporean identity go beyond their permanency. Unfulfilled possibilities remain unfulfilled because of writing’s capacity to constantly exercise violence upon itself. Each word transforms the identities of the words and sentences before and after it. It is from this violence that Phillips locates writing’s capability to break “the powerful myth of post-colonial belatedness.” The post-colonial world is no longer a promised world that comes too late, or is slow in achieving national identity. With this mode of writing imperialism and colonialism and post-colonialism’s developmental-teleological history is resisted. As long as this practice of creative violence persists the future will always remain unimaginable and unpredictable, but filled with an intensive richness.

It is this mode of writing that attains liberation through violence which this (and subsequent) chapter(s) will attend to in its engagement with Lisa-Anne Chong’s “Empire” and Suzann Victor’s “Still Waters”. Specifically I will attend to the violence to two kinds of centres: First, I will attend to the violence that takes apart the theorist-critic’s authorial voice to project meaning into an artwork. Second, the assumption the artwork necessarily represents Singapore city and its hegemonic condition. When both the theorist and an artwork lose the ability to speak from a central position of control and fail to maintain a definitive relationship with their object of study, their ability to define Singaporean identity and life becomes challenged. The theorist can no longer definitively say Singapore and artworks about the nation-state exemplify any particular urban, cultural, political contexts, especially if these contexts are derived from the social types and patterns of conventional sociology. As Phillips along with Ryan Bishop and Wei-Wei Yeo note, an engagement with Singapore cannot be wholly expressed by “any epistemological frame whatever.” They continue, to engage with it, to write and make art on it is not to develop “another epistemological frame. It is an alternative to epistemological frames.” To engage with Singapore outside of categorized knowledge is to go “beyond description.”

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231 Phillips (2002), p.36
233 Ibid.
the current epistemological frameworks of current urban, cultural, socio-political and art theories.

If post-colonial theoretical writing is to express to an alternative to epistemological frames and resist essentialized Orientalist readings, it must be ready to bear violence against its own inherited linear and definitional mode of narration. The epistemological clarity of the theorist as ‘speaker’ for artworks and his/her countrymen is to be challenged.

The theorist cannot demand that post-colonial art enact a resistance to colonial ethnography and neo-Orientalism, while s/he remains the dutiful colonial administrator who has an explanation for everything. Working from art theorist Jonathan Crary’s observation that an artwork changes the way it is presented along with the changing “history of perception” we can say the theorist must also change his/her perspective and subjectivity in this increasingly complex history of perception.\(^{234}\) His/her writing must express this complexity with immediacy. Only in doing so can s/he actively contribute to the making of a complex history of perception without mediation and detachment, without treating art and society from a Cartesian standpoint. His/her work must actively add visual, textual, conceptual, philosophical and even poetical forces, in new and experimental compositions, that can actually transform and remake the history of perception, and the history and process of knowing. Writing, like a transformative and affective artwork, situates immediately in the social realm instead of merely being reflective of society.

Hence, the philosopher Julian Young notes, with reference to Nietzsche’s notion of interpreting art, that writing of art is first of all “imitating… the techniques of artist in the literal sense.” One acquires a distance from oneself, however this is not to reflect upon oneself as a unified being, rather it is “to see ourselves ‘simplified and transfigured’.”\(^{235}\)

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A simplified and transfigured self, for Nietzsche, indicates a self that is in constant modification. One is no longer a unique being but ‘simplified’ into the forces that constitute one’s sense of self, and, in turn, these constitutive forces’ relationship are ‘transfigured’. A theorist’s selfhood undergoes such simplification and transfiguration. S/he does not merely ‘discover’ his/her self. The ‘self’ for Nietzsche is “something one ‘becomes’,” that which is created and born anew in the process of engaging with the artwork.236

A distinct subject and artwork no longer populate the “space” in which a theorist engages with an artwork. There are no defined subject and object there. Each ‘I’, ‘you’ or ‘it’ are, therein, simplified and transfigured. Furthermore this space is not hermetically sealed-off from other spaces, other forces and relations. The space is potentially integrated into the whole changing world. Thus, to engage with an artwork is to already engage with all these forces and their differential relations of this changing world. The theorist’s centrality in this space of change is now coextensive with a future that is unmappable. The theorist’s ‘I’ is doubled; forces from spatio-temporalities that are yet to be determined or have proper names are folded into the particular composition expressing his/her ‘I’, thus complicating this ‘I’. Or, as Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham suggest, “the ‘realities’ in which we [as theorists] are embedded” go through constant inversion and subversion. These complex realities embed in and become coextensive with us. One’s thoughts are no longer one’s own, but are racing “around the haptic space of the site of collision” made of a myriad of forces cutting through each other.237 In his/her doubling the theorist is what s/he is becoming that which is yet to be articulated. And, by virtue of his/her eternal state of change there will never be one moment representative of the theorist’s entire subjectivity.

Each word and sentence the theorist writes does not explain his/her subjectivity which is becoming something else, losing its centrality and reforming somewhere else. Words and sentences add complexity and energy to his/her transformation. Every word and sentence remakes the form and essence of this space s/he is ONE with but nonetheless does violence to him/her. The theorist writes to remake the world and to remake him/herself.

As Nietzsche notes, to “‘want to become… who we are’” is to “‘create’ ourselves as beings who are ‘new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws.’” The self is no longer based on a pre-established identity. The theorist no longer assumes the definitive central position of the judge equipped with given laws to which the interpretation of the artwork, and him/herself, is accorded. Engaging with or interpreting artworks is to create new laws, new ways of evaluation, new ways of knowing, and more importantly to break apart and make anew these new laws, modes of evaluation and knowledge at every turn. Nietzsche in The Will to Power notes that to break things apart is creative destruction. He exclaims: “To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a divine way of thinking.” One thinks as God who makes things truly anew without being in servitude to some higher moral values. In becoming a God of post-colonial Singapore, one harnesses the power to re-invent the boundaries, folds and voices of this territory, not to just wish for a better world but to incite genesis.

Engaging a multitudinal “Empire”: a practice of peripheralization

In this thesis, to engage with Chong’s “Empire” is to overcome those familiar ways of talking about the city and also to overcome the authorial voice of the art theorist. In fact we might think of this mode of engagement as a response to the question outlined in Chapter One that Bobby Wong asked regarding whether Singapore can be more than the tabular rasa city Rem Koolhaas have branded it to be. What can the material, visual, conceptual, urban and architectural forces of “Empire”, basically a set of concrete blocks assembled together to form a site model of a generic city offer for the production of theoretical texts? How can these forces aid a rethinking of what defines Singapore City’s territory?

Here, I will briefly outline philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s notion of the Empire as a theoretical framework to aid the elaboration of how Singapore can be thought of otherwise. The Empire, for Hardt and Negri, is at the first instance a form of multitude that has “played a role in putting an end to colonialism and imperialism,” and

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thus may be said to be “good in itself.” The Empire in this sense is produced as “a response to the various struggles against the modern machines of power,” and expresses a “desire for liberation” from class-based societies. However, they point out that Empire though “good in itself, however, does not mean that it is good for itself.” Although it dissolved the hierarchical structures of colonialism and imperialism “it nonetheless constructs its own relations of power based on exploitation that are in many respects more brutal than those it destroyed.” In this second instance Empire can be seen as limiting as it halts the struggles and potentialities of the spaces and subjects that are within it.

In many ways Chong’s “Empire” can be read as reflective of this second instance of Hardt and Negri’s Empire, and in agreement with Koolhaas’ view of Singapore as an extremely homogenized and bland city-state. As art critic Gillian Fuller suggests in a review of “Empire” in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Empire” represents the city as a “reproducible node in global networks,” the stress being reproducibility and thus suggestive of sameness.

In this thesis’ engagement of “Empire” I do not deny that “Empire”, an assemblage of grey concrete blocks does reflect this general view of global cities, especially Singapore which has since its independence in 1965 been relentless about land-reclamation and deforestation in order to create more urban spaces. However, within a seemingly restrictive empire like Singapore, even one as concern with orderliness and cleanliness, there can be strategies for change and opportunities for the emergence of yet to be determined potentialities. The artworks that Chong and Victor produce, the relations they come into allow for this liberative sense of Empire to take place. As Chong suggests in her Master of Fine Arts exegesis that accompanies her first installation of “Empire”, “Empire” must be understood as “fictional rather than representational of an existing or specific place.” This is not to suggest “Empire” disregards all ties with Singapore or

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242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
disregards the nation-state’s histories. Rather, we may consider fictionalization as a creative process that creates the condition for the emergence of new kinds of subjects and Singaporean outside measure. It is this creative process that enables Hardt and Negri’s liberative Empire to emerge.

Hardt and Negri suggest there can be alternatives within the limiting aspect of Empire, if attention is given less to the “distinction between the global and the local,” and more to the “different networks of flows” contributing to a process of “heterogenization.” As they continue, the “Leftist strategy of resistance to globalization and defense of locality is also damaging because in many cases what appear as local identities are not autonomous and self-determining but actually feed into and support the development of capitalist imperial machine.” However, the capitalist imperial machine is not all pervasive and controlling. The task for the politically minded artist and writer is to find ways to harness those “mobile and modulating circuits” that promotes differentiation or peripheralization and, in turn, generate the potential for new kinds of subjects and spaces. To treat Empire positively, as Hardt and Negri stress, one must take into account “the power of the multitude,” a term they borrow from Spinoza. The multitude expresses a world in constant change, and one must know how to use its powers so as to remake history and reconfigure Empire’s limiting aspects. Here, there is Empire contra Empire in the same order there is potentiality contra stultified might (pouvoir contre puissance).

How, specifically, Singapore as well as Chong’s “Empire” can be considered to be within, produced by and attributes to Hardt and Negri’s liberative Empire, an empire of potentialities and change, will be elaborated in the following few pages. I will address instances where and when a resistance to colonialism and imperialism succeeds with regards to Chong’s works. I will attend to how difference within this second instance of Empire can be expressed as differentiation rather than relative or oppositional difference based on fixed identities. I will also discuss how to narrate or write of “Empire” or Empire in order to attend to the ways a voice in a text may differentiate from itself.

247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
249 Ibid, p.47
Through this concern with differentiation I aim to articulate how we may, first, produce a Singapore that is not a Koolhaasian tabula rasa city, and second, disrupt the role of the theorist as one who makes definitional and limiting statements, and inevitably reduces the post-colonial city into nothing but a signifier for consumerist fluff.

The capacity for differentiation is another kind of revolution: a revolt against what one was without stating the other end. But having said this it is not to suggest “Empire” is revolutionary by itself, or as a theorist I will instil the status of being-revolutionary on it. The theorist must not assume there is a definitive mode of being that is revolutionary. As literary theorist Mieke Bal argues, to write history or to create knowledge within a post-colonial project is a “methodological” and not an “analogical” practice. What is revolutionary cannot be accorded to models and analogies. To be methodological, for Bal, is to overcome familiarity, to discern and surpass the limits of dogmatic thinking. It is to devise a radical method – guerilla in form – to revolt even against one’s own position and assumptions. In the case of “Empire”, it is to find ways to engage with it, write on it, which may incite this ‘internal’ revolution that makes it radical. But, what actual activities incite “Empire’s” ‘internal’ revolution? “Empire” becomes revolutionary not by reiterating the tiresome condemnations of Singapore the bland concrete jungle. Its revolutionary aspect comes from there being a revolt against what it, and even the theorist who reads it, is supposed to be. Revolution is an artwork’s, a theorist’s, a text’s and most importantly these three terms’ mutual relations’ capacity to elude fixed meanings. Such is a revolution without end; it is constituted by forces that exist before the revolution ‘officially’ begins, and when it ‘officially’ ends it is still able to continue offering forces that affect and transform minds, bodies, relations, texts, artworks and concepts. These minds, bodies, texts, relations, artworks and concepts, in turn, affect yet other minds, bodies, texts, concepts and artworks, and may enable other revolutions to emerge. In this process we no longer can say there is a spatio-temporality that belongs to a revolution. In this eternal revolution identities, meanings, subjects and spaces may revolt against themselves, this is the internal revolution mentioned earlier.

To enable a revolution to emerge we, as theorists concerned with creation and re-invention, must learn to extract bits and pieces, elements and forces from an artwork in

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order to reconstitute their relationships, in order to allow new kinds of subjects and spaces from the duration of our engagement with the artwork to emerge. So what are some of the bits and pieces, elements and forces of “Empire” that are offered to us?

“Empire” is a collection of cast concrete blocks (varying from 1” x 1” x 1” to 3” x 3” x 9”) assembled together to form an architectural site model (~ 10’ x 6’) of a generic city. “Empire” is, however, not a one-off exhibition. The official first variation of “Empire” was shown in January 2005 along with some of Chong’s photographic works as a solo exhibition at Phatspace Gallery, Sydney. The exhibition was for partial fulfilment of Chong’s Master of Fine Arts degree at Sydney’s College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. Phatspace Gallery is located in downtown Sydney in a restored Art Deco office building along Oxford Street. The gallery still retains an office layout, in that instead of being sealed by four white walls the triangle-shaped gallery has its entire west-facing side lined with 4.5” x 3.5” wood framed double hung windows. Being the height of the Australian summer when shown, “Empire” was lit by the afternoon sun. In the late afternoon the low sun would cause shadows to form across the gallery floor and in this sense the visual-form of “Empire” changes. And because there is no air-conditioning in the gallery the windows are left open allowing the traffic noise unfettered entry. Here, the actual aural, climatic, spatial and visual forces emitting from Sydney city contributes to the event of “Empire”, adding and changing its essence and form, giving it momentary specificity.

However, “Empire”, according to Chong, is an ongoing project. The concrete blocks are differently reconfigured each time they are exhibited. Each time different assemblages form in response to the different galleries’ different spatial configuration. And sometimes photographic prints of the blocks instead of the blocks are shown. For example, since January 2005 “Empire” in photographic form has been shown in various galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore and Hong Kong. These photographs are not documentations of “Empire” but complementary to it. The photographs and the blocks together make this shifting form that is “Empire”. “Empire”, because of its responsiveness to the various galleries’ different spatialities, may be said to be site specific. However, because of its variations and its retainment of the potential to be installed ever differently, the specific “site” of “Empire” becomes elusive.
It is “Empire’s” elusive site that partly attributes to its revolutionariness. Its mobility around the globe, its ability to be shown simultaneously in different cities, revolts against its preciousness as an autonomous art-object; its form is more movement-like than object-like. This mobility is also what makes it non-site specific; the site where it is installed no longer is held as the primary or privileged ground where “Empire” stands. The galleries and sites offer up spatial, material, socio-historical, textual and urban forces that together with the blocks’ material and spatial force constitute “Empire’s” changing, event-like form.

“Empire” is always reconstituted and reconstitutable. When ‘Singapore’ was referred to in Chong’s (and my) writings and conversations, it becomes no longer a nation-state that dictates what “Empire” should be. ‘Singapore’ is implicated – in the form of the socio-historical, architectural, textual, theoretical, political and spatial forces constituting it – only to contribute to furthering “Empire’s” ongoing change.

“Empire” is not a portrait of Singapore. Only the most conventional reading of “Empire” makes it a representation of Singapore the nation-state. Instead, there is an “Empire” that is constantly implicating and expelling forces from Singapore the nation-state, not so to represent the nation-state but to add to the complex changing form of the nation-state by throwing back those forces in transfigured compositions. This aspect of “Empire” is concerned with production. Seen from the point of view of production “Empire” exists not to show the international public what a lifeless city Singapore is. The work is not to be a conventional critique of Singapore’s urban existence, but rather allows for an attention to site-specificity, to how “Empire’s” materiality and scale relates to the galleries’ spaces, and on “Empire’s” ongoing changing form and essence.251

“Empire” does not embody definitive statements about what Singapore is or should be. What one knows from engaging with “Empire” is always in-between the site model, the galleries in Sydney and Singapore, the catalogue essays and artist statements written. Moreover, because Singapore and Sydney will always be changing, these cities will always be adding different kinds of forces to “Empire’s” persisting existence. And

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251 Chan, Patrick F. (2005) Singapore, an Empire to come (Paper delivered at the Singapore Symposium, September 2005, School of Applied Communications, RMIT University, Victoria, Melbourne)
because “Empire” is an ongoing project there will always be different essays and statements produced about “Empire”, hence adding different textual, conceptual, poetical and philosophical forces over time. With (the potential of) the addition of all these forces what comprises the centre, the in-between position, that is otherwise read as the identity and meaning of “Empire” will always shift. What is known of “Empire” is inseparable from the varying fluxes of artistic, textual, ideological, informational, material and spatial forces in their differential relations and compositions that together constitute this in-between without specific spatio-temporality.

I will here devote the next few pages to elucidate what Hardt and Negri mean by a liberative Empire of change in order to better understand the dynamic form and composing forces of Chong’s “Empire”:

As Hardt and Negri suggest, Empire in its liberative form changes and transforms meaning, subjects and spaces within it. It is “in contrast to imperialism.” They continue:

Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command.\(^{252}\)

Empire, although expansive and can subsume different nations, nonetheless offers the opportunities for new kinds of differences – differentiations and becomings. Here, we must take into account what drives Empire, especially if Empire is to be liberative, transformative and positive. In their sequel to Empire, Multitude, Hardt and Negri use the Spinozist term “multitude” to describe the liberative form of Empire. The multitude expresses not just change but potentialities beyond measure, or what they call “singular differences,” singularities that are at the verge of becoming things, subjects, spaces and meanings that we have yet to know.\(^{253}\) The multitude is neither indicative of a Cartesian individual nor a form of the people that is “reduced to a unity or an identity.”\(^{254}\) They further elaborate:

\(^{252}\) Hardt & Negri (2000), p.xii
\(^{254}\) Ibid.
The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labour; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences.255

Again, the multitude is not just difference between two or more persons, places or meanings, but the entire process of differentiating from itself. “The multitude is thus composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production.”256 As such when considering the Empire from the perspective of the multitude it is not just a matter of reviving oppressed identities, peoples and places, but to be concerned with producing new ones, even ones that are yet to come. Subjectivity as Hardt and Negri stress is “produced through cooperation and communication” among different subjects, objects, concepts and bodies. And in turn, “the produced subjectivity itself produces new forms of cooperation and communication, which in turn produce new subjectivity, and so forth.”257 The subject in this sense is never given but produced. Paolo Virno, a contemporary of Hardt and Negri, suggests that within the multitude “the distinction between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ is in no way validated.” In line with Spinozan thought Virno stressed that the multitude “occupies a middle region between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’.” It is not a collection of discrete individuals that together make a people or collective; “one can no longer speak of a people converging into the unity of the state.”258 Within the multitude, Virno suggests, the collective is redefined. Neither the state nor the people constitute the collective that promises a definitive future or identity. The collective is “no longer a promise, it is a premise,” a necessary condition of a nation, a city and a people The collective “is no longer something towards which things converge,” rather it is the way unquantifiable, unqualifiable processes of differentiation happen.259 The collective is the ceaseless process of multiplication; it is this process that the multitude redefines the collective as we conventionally understand it. Again following Spinoza, Virno states that the multitude indicates a “plurality”260 in which through the ways bodies, thoughts, texts, subjects, spaces and concepts, and ultimately

255 Ibid.
256 Ibid, p.xv
257 Ibid, p.189
259 Ibid.
260 Ibid, p.21
forces affect and transform each other there is expressed a potentiality for a future we are yet to know.

The will to change without telos, as Hardt and Negri suggest, is the first step for any subject to become one with “a richer reality,” which form is nothing other than “this process of metamorphosis.” The will to non-telic change is to enable the subject to be one with “the [amorphous] body of the multitude.”

Following Spinoza, Hardt and Negri argue that, insofar as we are one with the multitude we produce for ourselves a life which expresses the “capacity of transformation.” Citing Spinoza, Hardt and Negri remind us that the monstrous transformation without telos one undergoes when one with multitude is not necessarily a bad thing, for only in transformation can “the possibility to create an alternative society” not already demarcated by capital’s quantification machine emerge. They continue, “the multitude forces us to enter a new world,” in which we stride “across the revolutionary terrain,” and embark on “the gigantic endeavour of becoming free.”

“The multitude needs a political project to bring it into existence,” but this political project goes “beyond private and public,” beyond a politics that demands the return of the identically same. The political project, for Hardt and Negri, emerges from a non-telic struggle that resists “any hub or centre of intelligence.” Each of these struggles “remains singular” that while attending to local situations is nonetheless capable of expressing potentialities beyond measures. The political project or struggle no longer identifies with known identities and value-systems. As Hardt and Negri suggest:

Today we need new giants and new monsters to put together nature and history, labour and politics, art and invention in order to demonstrate the new power that is being born in the multitude.

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262 Ibid, p.194
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid, p.212
265 Ibid, p.202
266 Ibid, p.217
267 Ibid, p.194
The multitude is what allows for the emergence of potentialities beyond measure.

Within the multitude there are no more centres: each instance of a specific subjectivity or spatiality can be transforming into something else. What is taken as the centre of Chong’s “Empire”, its meaning or identity, can always be becoming something else insofar as the architectural and material forces of the galleries and cities and the various material and spatial forces emitting from the various assemblages of the concrete blocks are brought into ever differentiating relations as “Empire” undergoes different permutations across the globe. At Phatspace Gallery, in 2005, “Empire” was concerned with the Singapore City, but over time its concerns multiplied. For instance, when “Empire” was shown as a series of photographs as part of a group show in a Hong Kong artist run gallery in November 2005, specific kinds of architectural, material, socio-historical, political from the Hong Kong gallery and Hong Kong city itself, and even visual forces of the artworks hung next to “Empire”, all contribute to a remaking of what “Empire’s” identity was. Implicating the urban force of Hong Kong City, here, made “Empire” more than a mere representation of Singapore City. “Empire” becomes an in-between entity-event in the same way Singapore is a event-territory marked out as an amorphous in-between amidst cities, texts, artworks and flows of population and information.²⁶⁸

It is globalism, including the speed information can be transmitted across the globe as was the case when Chong emailed jpeg files to Hong Kong for the curators there to print out for her show, which enables “Empire” to continually change identity and form. “Empire” distributed across the globe becomes something more than a representation of Singapore; Singapore merely offers up particular nationalistic, spatial, geographical, socio-historical and cultural forces for “Empire’s” constant mutation. It is “Empire” being implicated into Hardt and Negri’s liberating and changing Empire that allowed “Empire” to contract various different architectural, informational, textual, national, spatial and material forces, to tap the power of the multitude, and thus transform its

²⁶⁸ Likewise, in September 2005 when those concrete blocks were re-assembled for the Sherman Artbox, a window space (~23” x 31” x 25”) in front of Sydney’s Sherman Gallery, the diminutive scale of the window space adds certain conceptual forces emitting from notions related theories on the architectural miniature. These conceptual forces emerging from the Sherman’s Artbox installation may transform “Empire’s” identity that was initially focused on Singapore City. The installation at Sherman Artbox added to “Empire” certain geographical, socio-historical, ideological and conceptual forces particular to Sherman Gallery’s locality in Sydney’s lush, young and hip suburb of Paddington.
“body”, and spatio-temporality. As seen with the aforementioned example of “Empire” being shown in Hong Kong, “Empire” is spatially and temporally spread across the South-East Asia-Australasia region between Hong Kong and Sydney, while congealing at various nodes such as Singapore. Once spread out as such “Empire” expresses Singapore’s dynamic and complex nature as much as it expresses Hong Kong and Sydney’s dynamicity. And, in expressing these cities dynamicity, it expresses its own.

As a complex spatio-temporality there is no right way to present or judge “Empire”; one can no longer say these are the art-theoretical, geographical, socio-political criteria on which “Empire” is to be judged. To encounter “Empire” variedly is to enable a heterogeneous production of new kinds of subjects and spaces, and potentialities. The capacity-to is what matters in “Empire”. And, this capacity-to is not tied to any pre-given value but is made and remade in the immediate. As Virno suggests, within the multitude there is an “immediate connection between production and ethicality.”

The ethical and natural right are derived not so much from pre-established laws but are remade as one these ‘laws’ and ‘rules’ to practice and hence transformation. As if echoing Virno’s concern for the practice-ethics nexus, philosopher Warren Montag notes that “the function of law must be reconceptualized as something other than an ideal foundation, a constitution, or a set of norms.” It is rather to understand “the causal processes and power relations” that constitutes those laws that “compel all those living in a domain to act in accordance.” And, from this understanding a will to change these existing power relations may emerge.

Following Spinoza, Montag argues that one’s “natural right” emerges not from the predetermined individual but from the transforming.

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269 Virno (2004), p.84
271 Ibid. cf. Spinoza, Benedict (2004) Political Treatise (“Chapter 3.2: Of the right of Supreme Authorities”) (Trans. R.H.M. Elwes), Mineola, New York: Dover Publications,p.301. Spinoza equates Natural Right not so much with laws based on extreme subjectivity or the Cartesian notion of the self. Rather, Natural Right is in a state of transformation, just as the multitude, which is itself like Nature, which proceeds without telos, and is very much accorded by the changing relations among bodies, thoughts, concepts and the growth of cities. It is for this reason that Spinoza suggests that within a multitude there seems to be “one mind” that shares a “common passion.” However, this is not a common passion of blind faith or have subjugation, rather, it is a commonality developed, and in development, amidst the differential relations taking place between and within bodies. See also: Spinoza (2004) Political Treatise (“Chapter 6.1: Of Monarchy”),p.316
From Montag’s argument we can see that individuality, one’s natural right and ultimately one’s subjecthood is produced and is at any moment peripheralizing and differentiating from itself, insofar as they are plugged into the multitude. To be one with the multitude’s richness is, as Virno suggests:

to be accustomed to mobility, to be able to keep up with the most sudden conversions, to be able to adapt various enterprises, to be flexible in switching from one set of rules to another, to have an aptitude for a kind of linguistic interaction as banalized as it is unilateral, to be familiar with managing among a limited amount of possible alternatives. Now, these requirements are not the fruit of industrial discipline; rather, they are the result of a socialization that has its center of gravity outside of the workplace.272

To survive and to enable the emergence of potentialities outside measure in the multitude is to be able to forgo meanings and identities sociology, post-colonial and cultural studies have long instilled in the world of objects. Instead we think of how these objects, for instance artworks in the form of their constitutive forces, can affect us who engage them, how they these objects transform our bodies and sense of self. An artwork’s power is its power to bring forth the emergence of subjects and spaces yet to be known rather than merely represent what already exists.

Thus, with regards to art’s function as to create rather than reiterate, the relation “Empire” has with Hardt and Negri’s Empire is not one of representation. Insofar as “Empire” is caught up with Empire’s “new and complex regimes of differentiation and homogenization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization”273 ad infinitum, “Empire” is to be produced by and produced within the changing Empire, and not merely an extraneous artwork that represents Empire.

Here, I will further elaborate Chong’s “Empire” and Hardt and Negri’s Empire’s non-representational relationship. I will do this by first outlining the forces that compose the Empire-cities of Singapore and Sydney where Chong lives and works in. Particularly, I will look at how these two cities became arts hubs in the region, and how arts hubs are really less centres in the imperialistic sense and more interfaces of various forces that

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272 Virno (2004), pp.84-85
form momentary compositions expressing identities, subjects, spaces and meanings that can be deterritorialized and remade into something else. More importantly I will discuss how the two cities are intertwined, primarily through educational and artistic channels. Thus, insofar as these cities are caught up in Hardt and Negri’s liberative form of Empire, it will be increasingly hard to say what is an invasive globalism or a recalcitrant localism in these cities. Lastly I will attend to how this flux of forces within this multitudinal Empire transforms the artist’s identity, the meaning of the artwork as well as the meaning of a text on an artwork.

In-between Sydney, Singapore and other cities

For around two decades now, Singaporean artists have been traveling to Sydney to study, live and work. The information and population flow between the two cities are plentiful. Some examples include: Chong who completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, and has lived and worked in Sydney since 2001; Suzann Victor who completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Fine Arts at the University of Western Sydney, and is currently completing her Doctorate in that field; Sydney’s Asian focused art gallery, Gallery 4A, is currently curated by Binghui Huangfu who was the former curator of Singapore’s Earl Lu Gallery at the La-Salle Arts College, which ran many joint fine arts and design degrees with several Australian universities. More educational inter-flow include a Bachelor of Design the University of New South Wales offers through Singapore’s Temasek Polytechnic, and a Master of Design offered through Cornerstone College, a private school in Singapore. There are also Australian academics like Leon van Schaik who, through RMIT University, conducts an invitational Master and Doctorate in the Architecture program that has attracted several prominent Singaporean architects and architectural critics. Through this program there have been intellectual exchanges, at least in the production of new inter-cultural design methodologies and analytical approaches to the post-colonial city.

Many artists and writers schooled in Australia do return to Singapore. For example, writer and literary theorist Susie Lingham who had contributed to the development of The Substation, one of Singapore’s few non-commercial arts centre/gallery and the publication of *Forum on Contemporary Arts and Society (FOCAS)*. There are also non-Singaporean artists like American artist Ray Langenbach who upon completing his PhD
at the University of Western Sydney relocated to Singapore (and Kuala Lumpur where he currently works). While all these examples do indicate the two cities’ development into being arts hub in the South East Asian region, this chapter and thesis’s aims is not to chart their past and future developments chronologically. Rather it is to provide a glimpse into the forces that produced them as arts hubs, and evaluate how these forces contribute to the production and remaking of Chong’s “Empire”, and how these same forces contribute to and sustain the kind of changing Empire Hardt and Negri understand as liberating.

What these educational and artistic exchanges and relations between Sydney and Singapore demonstrate is that the two arts hub attained their status and function not by being “centres” in the imperialist sense. It is precisely the exchange and relations, not just between Australia and Singapore, but inclusive of other countries and citizenships that produced them as arts hubs. Many of the academics working in Singapore and Sydney are from the United Kingdom and the United States. Bobby Wong, whose writing has been mentioned in this thesis, and who has contributed much to Singapore’s architectural and literary scenes, studied at the Architectural Association in London. Ien Ang, a Dutch-educated Indonesian-Chinese, is a professor who has been a graduate advisor to many of the Singaporean artists at the University of Western Sydney. And, the above-mentioned van Schaik is a South African who received his undergraduate and doctoral education at the Architectural Association of London (AA), which also educated several prominent Singaporean architects. Through AA van Schaik was able to form an intellectual resource triangulation between London, Melbourne and Singapore.

Following these flows and exchanges it is increasingly hard to say where an arts hub’s boundaries are, or even what its precise composing forces are, for forces are added and subtracted at such a maniacal pace. It is impossible to say that Sydney is a cultural centre where exotic Singaporean art and artists are showcased, or simply to reverse the equation and say Singapore as a rising Asian country is an artistic and economical centre where Australians are compelled to go. The spatio-temporalities of these centres are as diverse and as long-living as the existence of globalism itself, in fact produced by the processes and forces of Hardt and Negri’s changing globalist Empire.
Thus, an arts hub is very much produced by the interaction of various forces. Is the arts hub that is Singapore not a particular composition of the architectural, socio-historical, cultural, economical, political and ideological forces? As such, the Singapore arts hub, and what passes as the artistic Singaporean, is really a composition of colonial architecture built by the British, contemporary architecture like the Esplanade (opened October 2002) co-designed by London’s James Stirling Michael Wilford & Associates and Singapore’s DP Architects, an education system inherited from the British, and more recently American and Australian systems, the business partnerships Singapore has with the world, its socio-historical and cultural struggle for independence, and many other things. Arts hubs in the changing empire constituted by people and information flows can be conceived as more than imperial centres.274

Although as arts hubs Singapore and Sydney are constituted by global processes, one must not be too hasty to judge them as mere puppets of global capitalism. Being an arts hub does not just mean sell-out Broadway-style musicals and exhibitions of well-known paintings, and hosting obligatory biennales. In fact, biennales may open up opportunity for the interaction of various different cultures, peoples and art-forms allowing artistic projects that may produce new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities. Possible collaborations between Singaporean and international artists may follow from the nation-state’s inaugural Arts biennale in September 2006. Through such collaborations new understandings of nationhood, national boundaries, subjectivity may take form. And, such new subjectivities and spatialities may resist conventional conceptions of what the Singaporean and Singapore must be.

The flows of population and information do more than stultify culture. This is what the changing Empire offers that may produce resistances and countenance to imperialism. Hardt and Negri remind us that the “processes of globalization offer new possibilities to the forces of liberation” that traditional inward-looking views on nationhood cannot offer.275 They continue, “globalization… is not one thing,” there are “multiple processes” cutting across each other, inflecting and affecting each other producing new expressions.

274 In fact one may note that arts hubs such as London and New York are centres only to the extent that artists and patrons from outside London and New York were coming to them and contributing to them. An arts hub in this sense is produced by a collection of migrants, ideas and products. It was never a case as if New York or London had an innate drawing power. Its power to attract artists was in fact produced by the exchanges of ideas and works that migrant artist and theorists brought to it.

of subjectivity and spatiality. The forces that produced Sydney and Singapore as global cities and arts hubs are also the same “creative forces of the multitude” capable of producing “alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges.”

The upcoming Singapore Arts Biennale 2006 is a venue and event where the same forces of globalism can be harnessed to resist reified conceptions of Singapore. Again, the forces of Empire can be turned against Empire to enable potentialities and instances of liberation. Thus, for Hardt and Negri, the “political task” for artists, thinkers, academics and theorists “is not simply to resist these processes [and forces] but to reorganize them and redirect them toward new ends.” This is why for them the struggle against globalism must take place within globalism, rather than retreating to imaginary sanctuaries.

Singapore is not a centre in which Sydney is its periphery, nor vice versa. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

> It could even be said in certain respects... the periphery and the centre exchange determinations: a deterritorialization of the centre, a decoding of the centre in relation to national and territorial aggregates, cause the peripheral formations to become true centres of investment, while the central formations peripheralize.

However, when Deleuze and Guattari write that the centre and periphery have switched places, it must not be construed as the rise of the oppressed periphery as conventionally understood within reactive political circles. The term periphery is more accurately understood as the process of peripheralization – becoming other than oneself, differentiating from oneself. For example, both Sydney and Singapore are not centres but peripheries, or more precisely territories undergoing the process of deterritorialization or peripheralization. Chong and Victor’s lengthy stay in Sydney must not be understood as simply exotic Orientals going to the West to seek knowledge. Instead, an exchange of knowledge between them and other Sydney artists occurs. Victor, for instance, since moving to Sydney in the early two-thousands has contributed to the development of Gallery 4A in Sydney, not just in terms of holding solo exhibitions there but in terms of conducting conferences that eventually allowed for inter-cultural projects for artists from Australia and South-East Asia to emerge. And since Binghui Huangfu, a former

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276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
Singaporean was appointed curator of Gallery 4A there has been an increase in the number of artists of South-East Asian descent, including Singapore, exhibiting there. This increase exposure to South-East Asian and Singaporean artists allows for new understandings of the region, as well as offers these artists opportunities to implicate new kinds of conceptual, textual, visual, spatial, architectural and socio-historical practices and forces to their work, hence transforming the meaning of their works, the identities of their countries and themselves. In fact, Chong’s “Empire” developed from Gallery 4A’s weekend seminar series, Chong and I attended in late 2003 and, then, discussed how South-East Asia could be presented as ‘immediate’ rather than mediated or represented.

From the above example of the inter-cultural practices happening at Gallery 4A we can see how the same forces that produced Singapore and Sydney as global-capitalist cities can be harnessed to produce understanding for new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities. This is the creativity within the multitudinal Empire of change where Singaporean identity and the territory of Singapore are unbounded and remade as something else; peripheralization from itself happens.

**Beyond the local and global duality**

When judgment on what defines a nation-state, a city or citizenship can no longer be determined within localist and essentialist conceptions of self and nationhood, judgment takes place in what Hardt and Negri calls a “supranational centre.” However, the supranational is not the same as the “super nation” like America that assumes an imperialist gaze on the world. The supranational is not the super nation opposed to the local. It is that which surpasses the national, but does not yet become “international” in the way global capitalism is international. The supranational surpasses the dualism of the national and the international. It surpasses the conventional division between centre and periphery. The supranational centre is in fact no centre at all, but a mode of production of judgment that goes beyond the nation-state’s juridical, ideological and legalistic limits. In fact one may say the supranational centre emerges *in* the simultaneous peripheralization of the local and the global.

280 Ibid, p.9
In this process of peripheralization judgment does not have a set of higher principles dictating specific national (local) or international (super national) identities that constitute the good and the bad. However, when saying the supranational level of judgment is beyond a nation-state’s limits, this does not mean the ideological, juridical or legalistic institutions of the nation-state are ignored. What is stipulated is simply judgment is no longer dependent on the nation-state’s juridical institutions. It must be admitted that the legal and punitive systems in Singapore are harsh when compared to most Western countries. However, when speaking of judgment in this thesis, I want to limit it to judgment made within the practice of art-making and academic writing. Within such practices there are instances where the common judgment determined by the Singapore government and the common people, the ‘heartlanders’, can be resisted and even subverted. And, at the same time there can be resistance to what the global community’s, especially the Western media’s, impression of Singapore. In this sense there are resistances to both the local and the global when judgment goes beyond the local-global duality to a supranationality.

In this state of supranationality the constitutive forces of Singaporean identity and nationhood are recomposed but not according to a set of alternative ideals. Rather, these new sense of identity and nationhood must be developed from the actual practice and experimentations of recomposing those forces. This is a matter of devising a practical, and constantly changing, methodology rather than relying on analogy and pre-established identity. The supranational form of judgment concerns producing new identities rather than gauging whether people or objects fit within categories. It is in this sense that the imperialist, colonialist and localist gaze as well as the practice of linear telic-oriented narrative are resisted.

Such a mode of judgment concerns transformation through potentialities and invention. It is through this will to invent that peripheries do not become centres and sustain their peripheralization. Only then the forces that produce the subject’s life can gain movement, speed up and recombine as new compositions. The local and international are no longer framed as dichotomous entities. It is their capacity to intermingle and differentiate from themselves that is primary within a supranational judgment. The local’s reification and essentialization, as well as the blind faith in the glorious rhetoric of global-capitalism are thus resisted.
Hardt and Negri caution against this essentialization of the “localist” position. Specifically the risk of unwittingly turning the local into a centre and hence reiterating the imperialist gaze on its Other. As they elaborate, the localist position “can easily devolve into a kind of primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities.” Moreover, “this strategy of defending the local is damaging because it obscures and even negates the real alternatives and the potentials for liberation” that a local group has. The local according to Hardt and Negri is in fact produced:

What needs to be addressed... is precisely the production of locality, that is, the social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences understood as the local. The differences of locality are neither pre-existing nor natural but rather effects of a regime of production.

Hardt and Negri argue that the local should be understood in terms of a particular “networks of flows” of which have been given priority and been slowed down to form particular territories or local identities. Equally as important it is how the networks of flows can be sped up again, dispersed and re-grouped otherwise.

Thus, the re-creation or making anew of local identities is a matter of finding ways to remobilize or speed up those slowed down movements. The theorist, as much as the artists of the Sydneysider and Singaporean arts hubs, have great parts to play in remobilizing these slowed down movements and stagnant identities. The political task Hardt and Negri demand of writers, artists and theorists to recompose and redirect forces constituting the global involves what Blanchot calls, “strange jolts” and “paradoxical mutations” that do not let the “voice” of text or an artwork “be drawn forth following the simple and homogenous line required by a progressive [linear] writing.”

The re-organizing of networks of flows and forces can be initiated with the complication of the voices a theorist produces in his/her writing. S/he writes in such a manner as to turn the text into a powerful block of forces that can be interpolated into the social realm from which the text and the voices derive their composing forces. And in this process of

281 Ibid, pp.44-45
282 Ibid, p.46
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid, p.45
285 Blanchot (1993), pp.259-60
interpolation the forces of the text’s voices cut across and combine with those various
teaches of forces in the social realm to once again enable the emergence of new kinds
of subjects and spaces, new kinds of citizens and cities.

The voice or voices of a text no longer reflects the theorist’s subjective intentions, but
neither does it represent the irrefutable types and judgment of conventional sociology or
cultural studies. As Victor and Lingham had poetically put it: “The glass walls of the
Observation Space are chipped away, thinning into shatterable sugar-panes.”[286] The
sheltered observation space, where a Cartesian subject stands and judges the world
around, shatters. In fact, the subject itself shatters and mixes with the forces of the world
around. Victor and Lingham continue, in this shattering instance there is “the growing
amplification of possible meanings” in between the “visual and sonic rhythms” of the
urban, architectural, textual, conceptual and poetical forces’ differential “interaction.”[287]

To make strange jolts and to let the glass walls of the theorist’s observation space fall
apart, to expose or tend to potentiality is to pay attention to writing’s capacity – the
powers of words and sentences. As Bal notes, it is to write, and even read, without
following a pre-set logic. It is to let “words, one after another” chew each other up; to let
“words multiply, spread out, disseminate, and coalesce again” in other ways. But Bal
maintains this is not a plunge into chaos. She continues, words do not remain “dispersed,
they end up forming a rhizome.”[288] Forming a rhizome, words have relations that express
the potentiality of identities and spaces yet to come, without ever needing to define them.
As Blanchot suggests, texts in their non-representational and liberative form “neither
transcribes nor inscribes, but designates its own exteriority,” which is its absolute
condition and potentiality.[289] Written words and sentences cut across other socio-
historical, political, textual, theoretical and even spatial territories so that in this event of
ungroundedness new territories emerge; so that in the event the changing Empire is
further complexified by words that adds potentialities and intensities to it rather than
merely describe it.

[286] Victor & Lingham, p.26
[287] Ibid.
[288] Bal, p.16
Recomposing the territories of the artist/artwork/text

What constitutes the change in Hardt and Negri’s changing empire is basically this cutting across and recombination of territories in which writing and art-making both contribute to and sustain the motion. What constitutes Singaporean identity is in fact produced in this process of cutting across and recombination. Identities and meanings, if they are to be produced anew, necessarily peripheralize. I will, here, discuss how identities and meanings are produced by elaborating three interwoven processes of de/re-territorializations: first, the identity of an artist; second, the meaning of an artwork; and third, the meanings of texts on the artwork.

a) The artist in recomposition

Singaporean artists in Sydney, like Chong, although often branded by curators as ‘Singaporean’, are really produced as compositions of socio-historical, spatial, artistic, geographical, ideological and even textual forces from Australia and Singapore, as well as the other cities which emit conceptual, mnemonic, architectural, textual and informational forces to construct the particular ‘Singaporean-artist-in-Sydney’. These other cities for Chong include Hong Kong which she will also be exhibiting at, the suburbs of Los Angeles which she documented as part of her research of “Empire” as well as various London housing projects which she referred to as case studies for her project. The cities she will encounter can be more than these few.

Although we say Chong may possibly encounter all the world’s cities, we must not assume her identity, her being, equates the sum of all the world’s cities. It is only ever the particular facets of geographies, ideologies, societies and histories of the cities she has encountered that emit forces to constitute her being. Moreover the mixtures of these forces are never equal: there is, at present, more geographical, architectural, educational-institutional forces coming from the galleries and cities of South-East Asia and Australia that constitute her being. However this does not make her uniquely South-East Asian as we must include those conceptual forces emitting from the European and American texts on urbanism, architecture and photography she implicates in her research. For example, her notions of photography and art as being capable of offering non-representational forces are largely drawn from German media theorist Vilém Flusser’s *Towards a*
Philosophy of Photography. Such books offer conceptual forces that contribute to Chong’s being and identity as more than the easily identifiable South-East Asian. These are also the forces that in differential relations produce Chong as a subject of Hardt and Negri’s unbounded Empire. Considering this movement of forces Chong becomes more than an essential South-East Asian who is enchanted by Western texts. The differential relations of the architectural, socio-historical and ideological forces of the South-East Asian and Australian galleries and cities with those conceptual forces of Flusser et al. produces her as changing being which transforms along with the changing Empire. What Chong’s identity in this ceaseless flux and intermingling of forces can be, that we are yet to know.

b) The artwork’s meaning in recomposition

In terms of the meaning of a Singaporean artwork, Chong’s “Empire” is never a sculptural-visual equivalence of Singapore. As was discussed earlier what comes across as “Empire’s” meaning, or what is known of it, is always in-between the texts produced about it, the cities referred to in the texts, the materiality and spatiality of the concrete blocks, the cities in which it is exhibited as well as the material and spatial conditions of the various galleries it was and will be shown at. Like Chong’s identity, the meaning of “Empire” is essentially a continuous curious negotiation among all these elements, forces and conditions. Chong being born and raised in Singapore is no longer the sole cause for “Empire’s” existence. Birthrights and familial filiations must give way to the constant negotiations of different forces as constitutive of national and personal identity. In art-making, the seemingly autobiographical becomes the other-biographical. Art-making, as Deleuze writes, has “the fabulating function to invent a people. We do not write [or make artworks] with memories, unless it is to make them the origin and collective destination of a people to come.” With the artwork, with the engagement of an artwork, there “is a collective assemblage [agencement] of enunciation,” a multiplication of voices in which each differs from itself. Such is art’s power to perform “a displacement of races and continents,” to “set free” the quantified human-life from dictums and grant it “a possibility of life.”

It is not so much Chong the Singaporean artist who gives meaning to “Empire”. Rather the process can happen in reverse. It is the concrete blocks in its changing event-like form coming into relations with the various cities and galleries that constitute Chong’s identity, being and life. An artwork’s power to offer a possibility of life, or precisely a life not yet extinguished by the categories of capitalism’s census-machine, is achieved by the artwork’s refusal to represent. Thinkers like Deleuze and Andrew Benjamin, and architects like Peter Eisenman reserve the term “diagram” for artworks that express this power. For Eisenman, the diagram “is a performative rather than a representational device.” As such the diagram is a “tool” that produces the “virtual” or the potential rather than one that reiterates the “real” or pre-established fact. Eisenman further elaborates that the diagram is “neither a [autonomous] structure [as par High Modernist Art] nor an abstraction of structure.” It has a relation with architectural practices – including landscape architecture, planning and interior design – but “it is not isomorphic with it.” The diagram insofar as it is always engaged differently expresses “real space and time.”

What real space and time is can be further elucidated by Andrew Benjamin’s notion that when engaging or making a diagram there emerges a “presence”. However, presence does not indicate the present or now, but the continuous event where/when thinking and acting occur (here, ‘presencing’ may be a more suitable term). Real space and time is the continuum of that which is happening, that which has happened and that which will be happening. It is the perpetuity and eternity of real space and time that forces thinking and acting to the limits. One is no longer afforded a fixed spatio-temporal perspective or even a view at history’s finale to judge what this space and time can become. Thus, when Eisenman says the diagram generates real space and time, one may say it generates a reality of thinking and acting which go beyond the mere subjectival appreciation of an art-object.

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293 Ibid, pp.27-28
294 Benjamin, Andrew (2000) *Architectural Philosophy: Repetition, Function and Alterity*, London & New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, p.147. See also earlier discussions in this chapter about Agamben’s understanding of presence not as something already-existing but something that is coming into existence, which identity can never be fixedly represented.
Real space and time is, for Benjamin, one that figures with immediacy.\(^{295}\) However, when one says, “figures with immediacy” this does not indicate a figure such as a person or meaning that can be held in place. Rather it is that which is figuring, always coming-to-be but never a “being”.\(^{296}\) That, which figures with immediacy is, for Deleuze following Jean-François Lyotard, the “pure figural.” It is neither figurative as in representing the human figure nor a figure itself. The pure figural is, if we follow Benjamin’s terminology, the presencing taking place, “upsets the coded gaps of signifiers, works its way into them, and there labours under the conditions of the identity of their elements… violates the order of speech and crumples the text, creating new unities that are not linguistic.”\(^{297}\) It is *there* eternally but irreducible to an image or word, yet expressed as the absolute capacity of words and images in experimental compositions and relations. It is always outside of the conventions in which we speak of artworks.

Chong and I may produce numerous texts in the form of artist statements and essays explicating the pure figural, but these texts only contributes textual, poetical among other forces that sustain the eternity of the pure figural-event. The pure figural is always the in-between which form is shaped by the ever differentiating relations of those varied socio-historical, political, material, architectural and textual forces passing through and constituting the unbroken variation of “Empire”. There will never be one socio-historical, political, ideological or theoretical institution that can explain “Empire”. “Empire” existing as a material-event that differentiates over places and time becomes the pure figural, which is something that “passes between borders,” making “events explode, phenomena flash, like thunder and lightning” that at once fill its eternity in space and time, yet cannot be located within any particular spatio-temporality. This is its “spatio-temporal dynamism,” not because the site model in exhibited at many galleries, but because it cannot be said to be *here*.\(^{298}\) It is *there everywhere* but always outside of the “*here*”. As Lyotard himself writes, “[it is] une extériorité qu’il ne peut pas

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\(^{295}\) Ibid, p.154

\(^{296}\) Deleuze (2003), p.2


intérioriser en signification” Although the pure figural is “neither to be seen nor to be thought;” it is always “at the heart of discourse.”

Although the pure figural is “neither to be seen nor to be thought;” it is always “at the heart of discourse.” a discourse not predicated upon the equivalence of signifier-signified, addressee-addressee, and concept-object as in conventional understanding of communication.

Citing Lyotard, literary theorist David Carroll notes that discourse “does not belong to plastic space, nor to textual space either; it is difference itself.” What Carroll means by difference itself is the way the forces constituting the plastic and textual spaces differentially relate. He continues to suggest that it is in the indistinct blurring of these spaces where new thoughts and expressions emerge. For Carroll as for Lyotard this indistinct blurring or “confusion of spaces” is the “matrix” where “radical alterity originates.” This is an alterity that forces thinking outside of the reliance on the equivalence between an artwork and an established meaning or identity.

The pure figural is the radical exteriority, which bears on thought and act, bringing them to the limits. The pure figural of “Empire” is what incites, energizes, adds to, complicates and sustains Hardt and Negri’s Empire of change’s heterogeneity and intensity. It is “Empire’s” pure figuration that sustains this Empire of change’s potentialities beyond measure. Indeed for Benjamin the artwork’s pure figuration is its absolute “plural event” that enables “the emergence of different beginnings,” which surpasses the sequentiality, hierarchy and duality of “presence/absence, model real/object [and] plan/building.”

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299 Lyotard, Jean-François (2002) Discours, Figure, Paris: Klincksieck. p.13. The pure figural, for Lyotard, is an exteriority that cannot be interiorized upon the act of signification. The pure figural is the infinite form of a finite figure. (Translation mine)
301 Deleuze (2004), p.214
302 Ibid.
303 Carroll, pp.39-40
304 Ibid, p.40
305 Benjamin (2000), p.152
306 Ibid, p. 145
307 Ibid, p.147
While we say the artwork, in its pure figuration, can enable different beginnings to emerge, we must also take note not to privilege mere chaos. Agamben, following Nietzsche, notes that art’s power is indeed nihilism\(^{308}\), but Nietzsche distinguishes two nihilisms. “There is a nihilism that corresponds to ‘an increased power of spirit’ and to a vital enrichment (Nietzsche calls it ‘active nihilism’) and a nihilism that is a sign of ‘decline’ and an impoverishment of life (‘passive nihilism’).”\(^{309}\) It is important that we do not say “Empire” means nothing, for this would only reiterate the reactive arguments one often hears about Singapore as bland and soulless. Following philosopher Brian Massumi we may suggest that the task of critical cultural studies is not to merely brand the self as an empty vessel that merely receives while reminiscing of the once glorious Cartesian subjectivity. It is also not a matter of appealing to “hypercynicism” as demonstrated by those Koolhaasian arguments about Singapore being populated by capitalism’s interchangeable free-floating signifiers.\(^{310}\) To too quickly judge Singapore as empty is to limit its potentiality for transformation.

When “Empire”, as a diagram that is engaged, enables the emergence of different beginnings beyond quantification, there is what Benjamin calls “incompleteness”. However, Benjamin notes that “the incomplete cannot [be] taken as an end in itself.”\(^{311}\) The incomplete is that which has yet to come, and is still in the process of formation/production. It is not the infinite negativity found in traditional transcendental philosophies. Deleuze, contemplating the use of the (artwork as) diagram, notes that it indeed decomposes current relations, but this does not mean it leaves these relations in sheer chaos. Decomposition also entails recomposition; hence making of new and different relations expressing potentialities. Deleuze further explains, to make relations that express potentialities, is not the same as an utter loss of meaning. A flux of meaning is the constant and simultaneous decomposition and recomposition of meanings. Only in this doubled process is there transformation and not unproductive nihilism.\(^{312}\) Thus, Deleuze notes the importance for the diagram to be confined: “The violent methods must

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\(^{308}\) Agamben (1999), p.85. Agamben quoting Nietzsche writes, “The ‘value’ of art… cannot be appreciated unless one starts from the ‘devaluation of all values.’”

\(^{309}\) Ibid, p.86


\(^{311}\) Benjamin (2000), p.147

\(^{312}\) Deleuze (2003), p.105
not be given free reign, and the necessary catastrophe must not submerge the whole.”

The diagram, although able to enact violence on the business of representation, must nonetheless direct its violence towards a specific representation like two-dimensional art’s representation of pictorial scenes or sociology’s representation of non-Western cultures. It is with this specificity that the diagram can be transformative without necessarily denoting what these violated representations should be otherwise.

Thus, there must be control when making or engaging with a diagram like “Empire”. We can suggest that “Empire” as a diagram does not just mean meaningless global cities. As Deleuze suggests that the diagram must have its “frame”. The frame or frames in the making of “Empire” are the specific South-East Asian and Australian galleries, their spatial-material conditions, the texts that frame “Empire”, the cities referred to in “Empire”, and, last but not least, the specific urban global forces of Singapore, Sydney and Hong Kong that are interwoven with all the frames just listed. These are the frames that enable “Empire” to project specific trajectories of violence toward specific targets or locations of representation without itself being annihilated and turning into a post-modern empty signifier circulating on the global consumerist supermarket.

To make and engage “Empire” is to evaluate the capacities and potentialities of these frames and their differential relations have in order make new relations. If “Empire”, in one particular exhibition is concerned specifically with producing new kinds of architectural relations with the gallery, then the task of writing on “Empire” must also attend specifically to the material and spatial relations of the cast-concrete blocks and the walls, ceilings and floors of the gallery. It must find ways to make the words concrete and material, rather than simply textual reflections. This, in turn, requires certain specific techniques of textual composition and style that can make words affect its readers in ways that a representational mode of writing cannot do. The words must press concretely on the reader’s act of thinking. Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* is an example of how words do not just reflect on nineteenth century Parisian arcades, but in their ingenious composition and style express immediately chaos, wonder and marvel.

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313 Ibid, p.110
314 Ibid, p.112
315 As Benjamin scholar Susan Buck-Morss notes, Benjamin himself remarks Baudelaire’s *Rêve Parisian* was not just explanatory of the “phantasmagoria” of Europe of his time but his writing expresses and
Thus, it is not a matter of ‘writing anything’ as if words are free-floating signifiers that bears nothing on the production of those new kinds of architectural relations thus concerned with. The words must negotiate within those specific architectural, material and spatial frames. The production of varying relations is not infinite decomposition, or a will to nothingness. The transformation or differentiation of specific cities, galleries and texts and the specific relations among them must not be equated with post-modernism’s will to meaningless. The production of identities and meanings that are yet to be known is not at all nihilistic. More importantly, the potentials within the relations between the cast-concrete blocks, the cities and galleries and written words are not nothing. As Agamben following Nietzsche notes, “[passive] nihilism is surpassed” when we attend to “the universal becoming,” that stipulates everything and every relation is changing and the world is intensifying rather than moving to blankness or utter chaos. It is art’s ability to gather the forces of the outside, and transform its own essence, form and meaning, as well as its maker and audience’s sense of self that Nietzsche understands as art’s offering to humans their “destiny” – our destiny to be becoming-someone else. Art enables the emergence of a life amidst its own reinvention.

Attending to the production of potentialities is not giving up on meaning and the process of signification, or not retreating to negativity. As discussed earlier, when Lyotard writes that the process of signification/signifying will not produce any definitive interiorities or meanings; he does not intend that we give up on the practice of making art and writing. As Deleuze after Lyotard suggests, each word and sentence written, each artwork/installation made, and each gallery in being engaged enriches the “immense agitation of matter” to perpetuate this matter’s potentiality. As discussed in Chapter One the practice of making add to rather than cancel out potentialities. Art does not represent but emits the forces necessarily for the production of lives yet to come.

To write more texts, set up more installations and visit more cities is to enrich the Empire of change Hardt and Negri speak of. What “Empire” and this Empire of change mean is

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316 Agamben (1999), p.91
317 Ibid, p.92
318 Deleuze (2003), p.116
that we are yet to know for these Empires absolutely possess a great multitude beyond quantifiable knowledge. The artwork “Empire” and the event that is the Empire of change are, in this mode of negotiation, inseparable. Thus Nietzsche says, “The world is a work of art that gives birth to itself.” There is one entity: art-world.

c) The meaning of a text on an artwork in recomposition

Although we say “Empire’s” meaning is in-between the texts, cities and galleries, this does not posit the text as an external practice that governs or judges the artwork. The text is not produced from an external position that looks back reflectively. To write even theory, like art making, is never to simply document or reproduce one’s thoughts. Writing is never reproduction. “Reproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced.” One cannot produce anything radical if one is only “watching the flow from the bank.” Similarly, to write is to implicate the very practice of writing with non-textual and non-theoretical forces, and to fold in material, spatial, architectural, socio-historical and political forces. To write is to find ways to deterritorialize the centrality of one’s self-position and, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, to follow the flow and folds of those forces of life. Do not sit by the bank and categorize life into pre-established life-types. Escape the “gravity” of the ‘I’s’ position “to enter a field of celerity.” “When one ceases to contemplate the course of a laminar flow in a determinate direction, to be carried away by a vertical flow; when one engages in a continuous variation of variables, instead of extracting constants from them,” there will emerge not only different beginnings and lives yet to be determined. In following the flow, the ‘I’ is becoming more than itself.

How in following the flow of “Empire” does the “I” become more than itself? How in writing on “Empire” does the ‘I’ disperse into the flow of the empire of change? Do ‘I’ try to follow Lisa-Anne Chong’s exploration of global cities, and try to share her perspective of Singapore and the world at large? Do ‘I’ imagine myself as a person that may live in Chong’s city should it ever be built? How do ‘I’ find myself in “Empire” and

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319 Nietzsche (1967), p.225
320 It is not art-plus-world or a rarefied field that is the world of art production, exchange, exhibition and commerce. The art-world is one univocal entity; artworks do not represent the world but are produced by the changing world’s various socio-historical, cultural, commercial, textual, conceptual and material forces, and, more importantly artworks offer to this world new groupings of forces.
321 Deleuze & Guattari (2004), p.410
322 Ibid.
empire? Am ‘I’, in writing, changing “Empire”, and through changing “Empire”, adding textual, poetical, conceptual and philosophical forces that can change Hardt and Negri’s heterogenetic Empire?

“How do ‘I’ find myself in ‘Empire’ and empire?” is a question of doing and making. But it is not a defined way of doing. It involves experimentation without hypotheses. It is in this experimentation that the ‘I’ becomes something/one else, the ‘I’, even if it is another ‘I’, is not hypothesized in advance. Experimentation is a way of doing that is irreducible to a “method” understood in terms of a process of controlling the outcome. Philosopher Jacques Derrida, following Martin Heidegger, notes that “odos” or “the way” is not “methodos”, but more accurately something that is “on the way” or in the process of. Here, the hypothesis as one achievable result gives way to “an infinity of thinking.” Here, not only are there an infinite quantity of concepts possibly produced, but the way of thinking varies infinitely.323 Thinking of the ‘I’, and as an ‘I’, in “Empire” and empire involves this way of doing that is always on the way. There are no given methods to think of “Empire” and an ‘I’ in it. Each word or sentence written on it, and each question asked about the location of an ‘I’ in it, adds to the complexity of “Empire” rather than locating its heart.

What is to be searched for may sometimes not yet be there. The location of the ‘I’ and even the location of “Empire” as it is situated in-between all those galleries, cities and texts are not there yet. As Derrida notes, architecture and its people are not already in place but are “what will take place.”324 Writing is not to write of a place that already exists or to define what a place should be. As with odos or that which is on the way, to write is to enable this taking place. “As Mallarmé puts it, ‘ce qui a lieu, c’est le lieu’.”325

Searching is the enabling of this taking place of what one searches for. This is what Héline Cixous does in her essay Attacks of the Castle when/where she searches for Kafka in Prague:

324 Ibid.
325 Ibid. The phrase “ce qui a lieu, c’est le lieu” translates to “that which is to take (or taking) place, that is the place”. (Translation mine)
I mean it’s impossible for me to find myself there in the flesh in the streets in the squares in the roads in the walls bridges towers cathedrals façades courtyards quays rivers and oceans.\textsuperscript{326}

What do I want? I will see. I am expected. I am expecting it. I am waiting for myself there.\textsuperscript{327}

I was in Prague for the first time and Prague was not there. She has just left, or else it was he, the spirit of the City, the Doctor K, the inhabitant out of ‘Right this minute’ house.

[…] So where is he? Is he in the dictionary, in a museum? No, ‘he is now in the attic, now in the stairwell, now in the halls and now in the entranceway.’ He gets around a lot. He has no lodgings, he is in all parts of the house that do not lodge, that are not counted, places where one only passes through or else disappears.

[…] Or else was it I who was not there?

What are we in the promised cities?\textsuperscript{328}

Cixous’ ‘I’ as well as that entity/form/event/enigma form that is Franz Kafka emerges in-between her words (just as “Empire” emerges in between some of the words from Cixous’ passages and other concepts and figures within this chapter and thesis). She waits for Kafka ‘there’, in a Prague yet to come. She disperses herself in her writing/making. As Deleuze notes, “persons are finite synthetic propositions: finite with respect to their definition, indefinite with respect to their application.”\textsuperscript{329} To invent Kafka, to add to his intense figuration, Cixous had to follow him, and not just watch a representation of Kafka go by. She becomes aware that in her detective adventure it was her (‘I’) who was not there. But, who was the ‘I’ who was not there? What can it do? And, what is she in the promised cities, which are yet to come? What do these promised cities look like? What can these promised cities do? To write of one’s searches, and to invent and enable what one searches for to take place, is the infinitude of words. This is Cixous’ other-biography. Cixous writes of a ‘herself’ who is not yet there. Here I ask, am I in citing Cixous adding certain conceptual, textual and philosophical, even literary, forces to sustain this amorphous event-thing that is “Empire”?

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid. p.304
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid. p.306
Like Cixous in her search for Kafka, in writing on “Empire” ‘I’ will always ask “where am I?” And, in asking ‘where am I’, my other-biography is taking place, and the space of “Empire” intensifies.

Beyond *deus inversus*?

To enable one’s Other to take place, thereby enabling “Empire” to intensify, is not to say what one is not and what “Empire” is not. This enabling act demands an engagement with the ‘self’ and “Empire” that is positive; it is not a concern with the negative – non-self and non-art. Agamben suggests that, at least, in the Occidental world the framing of what is art by naming its negative has dictated the production of many critical texts on art:

> In the act of judgment that separates art from non-art, we turn non-art into the content of art, and it is only in this negative mold that we are able to rediscover its reality. When we deny that a work is artistic, we mean that it has all the material elements of a work of art with the exception of something essential on which its life depends, just in the same way that we say that a corpse has all the elements of the living body, except that ungraspable something that makes of it a living being. Yet, when we actually find ourselves before a work of art, we behave unconsciously like a medical student who has studied anatomy only on corpses and who, faced with the pulsing organs of the patient must mentally refer back to his dead anatomical model in order to orient himself.³³⁰

When unable to speak of that “something” that makes an object a work of art, we ascribe to this ‘something’ a negative status, which makes it an unknown origin that cannot be found. Although it seems that this ‘something’ is indeterminate, and, hence, fits well with current theories privileging indeterminacy, this ‘something’ is still posited as an original point. It is still a beginning that the theorist-critic strives for. In stabilizing this ‘something’ as an original point, it is essentialized.

There is, thus, danger if we ascribe to “Empire” this indeterminate point of origin as its cause. Judging “Empire” in this manner is to commit passive nihilism where we discard everything and proclaim nothingness as the world’s cause. In terms of a post-colonial project this not only sees the post-colonial world and its people as the emptiness exalted in postmodern literature, hence, reiterating a certain colonial gaze, but also desires the

³³⁰ Agamben (1999), pp.42-43
post-colonial world as unchanging and immediately representable. Here, the ‘something’, which cannot be seen or touched, is no longer the dynamism of the world’s potentiality. Rather it becomes a mystical fixed origin/end, to which the business of practice, writing and art-making, is rendered insignificant. And, as Agamben elaborates, this ‘something’ becomes treated as that which every postmodern spectator should grasp. So much so this ‘something’ is raised to the celebrated status of the “deus inversus, the inverted god, of non-art.”

Fixing this ‘something’ as (only) deus inversus, no amount of writing and art-making can affect and transform its quality. Each artwork or text is rendered as mere representations of the deus inversus, the ultimate failure or annihilation of a human’s capacity and ability to change. Koolhaas’ now famous essay stating Singapore as nothing but a tabula rasa city-state illustrates the type of theoretical writing that reiterates the deus inversus’ nothingness. This is an example of a mode of writing that surrenders its transformative function; it forgoes asking what the nations, artworks and architecture it encounters can do – their potentiality for change of itself and of those who encounter them. More importantly such a mode of writing turns the question of “what writing can do” to “what writing should do”. Writing of Singapore for Koolhaas documents the city detachedly and negatively, instead of finding ways to introduce new conceptual, textual, philosophical and poetical forces that can maximize and sustain the city’s capacity for change. This is a writing that wants to grasp Singapore in its entire rather than embracing it as a space that we are yet to know. To reduce Singapore to a Potemkin city filled with consumer junk, in other words to commit it to meaningless, is to treat it as the deus inversus.

It is this privileging of deus inversus or passive nihilism that encourages some writers and artists to treat Singapore’s development as perpetually belated, never able to go beyond the ills of capitalism and neo-colonialism. Yet, in stressing this perpetual belatedness, Singapore’s ‘future’ (what it should be) is already determined. Passive nihilistic writing does only two things: First, stress Singapore’s incapacity. Second, stress this idealized beautiful inactive future where Singapore should be. The future is for these

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331 Ibid, p.46
writers merely a utopic inversion of the current state of affairs, nothing innovative is produced.

With the deus inversus positioned as its future, Singapore is trapped in, what philosopher Jos de Mul characterizes as, a mode of “aspirational striving toward sense, even though this aspiration in its totality is unachievable.”332 This is the post-modernist’s love for failure, as if failure offered comfort (the same way High-Modernism and Cartesianism offered irrefutable truths for comfort). The scores of laments made about global-capitalist Singapore succumbing to “reverse orientalism” and “self-orientalism”333 attest to this passive nihilism.

Self-Orientalism is especially true within these strands of post-modernism that thrives within a culture of complaint, yet secretly harbour thoughts for ideal societies. For instance, Bobby Wong in his essay The Tropical City: Slippages in the Midst of Ideological Construction points out that Singaporean architect Tay Kheng Soon’s frequent pleas for Singapore to forgo its Western Modernist buildings in order to produce an “unique tropicality” is in fact “practicing ‘Orientalism-in-reverse’.”334 Citing the notion posed by post-colonial critic Abidin Kusno, Wong argues that Tay’s unique tropicality, first relies on very constructed and conventional notions of the tropical, and second, his tropicality is advanced at the expense in which “the Western modernist box and its paradigm has to be ridiculed and rejected,” instead of understanding how new forms of spatialities can emerge from the intersection of the forces of the tropical-Singaporean and Western-Modernist.335 Tay’s vision, in other words, proceeds from a negative view of Empire instead of seeing how Empire offers heterogenetic productions and liberation. Tay exalts the deus inversus in his celebration of an idealized cultural identity of Singaporean tropicality.

Yet something is amiss with the post-modernist’s visions of idealized futures, like Tay’s unique Singaporean tropicality, and meaningless existence, like Koolhaas’s Singapore-the-shopping state. What is amiss can be elaborated by ‘looking’ at the post-modernist’s spatial relation to his/her *deus inversus*. The case is, if *deus inversus* is indeed complete annihilation where nothing is left, or at least perpetually deferred, then, how can it still be seen and recognized as the future? Does its positioned ‘un-position’ not seem odd? And, does fixing the position of *deus inversus*, and recognizing it, not suggest a retreat to a certain Cartesianism where one’s stable ‘I’ is rooted steadfast on the straight and narrow path of historical development? Is claiming to fail and recognizing and attaining one’s failure not itself a teleological drive that seems so incompatible with post-modern pluralism and ambiguity? Moreover, how can the post-modernist claim to love failure and yet privileged *deus inversus* as the end of humanity? This is why to engage with “Empire” is to resist turning it into a negative critique of Westernized Singapore, like critic such as Tay who lambastes the nation-state’s concrete and steel buildings. It is, instead, to embrace those concrete buildings and find new ways to articulate them, to invent new spaces within them.

Agamben suggests that like the Christian God, *deus inversus* becomes the model for all post-modernists to follow. The post-modern artwork becomes a shrine to *deus inversus*. He further elaborates, by evoking Nietzsche’s critique of the “ideal”, in celebrating *deus inversus* one collapses the artwork’s “‘spectator’ into the [Kantian] concept [the universally] ‘beautiful’ [that cannot be explicated].” The spectator is assumed to know what is beautiful without resorting to “taste” and “without interest.”

What Nietzsche elucidates here is how the spectator is assumed to remain untransformed by the artwork. “To purify the concept of beauty… the sensory involvement of the spectator” is filtered out. As such the artwork’s material, spatial, and even textual forces are assumed to have no bearings on its composition. The spectator’s centrality is held steadfast; s/he is assumed to be unchanged by the differential relations of the forces that are abound, and in fact bypasses these in their active swirling forces to get to the artwork’s beautiful core. Such an engagement with an artwork in fact stultifies the artwork’s capacity to form new relations with other works, its surrounds and even its capacity to form new relations with

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337 Ibid, p.3
us, eventually changing us, giving us a new sense of life. To assume to be unchanged while engaging with an artwork reiterates the detached colonial gaze.

Engaging “Empire”: a joy of production

Instead of ascribing to notions that the meaning of an artwork is in the eye of the beholder, or that a spectator can really share the views of the artist, Nietzsche, according to Agamben, proposes an engagement with art that operates by “the creative experience of the artist.” It is “to consider art from the point of view of its creator.” The task of engaging with art is not a matter of figuring out its deep secrets. Rather, it is to evaluate the forces an artwork expresses, and like an artist find joy in playing with these forces to form new relations. The artwork is not an endpoint but becomes a palette where new subjects and spaces emerge. Happiness, or rather “une promesse de bonheur, a promise of happiness” emerges from the potential-to within the practice or joy of (art)-making.  

It is no longer a question of what must be seen, but what can be seen. The artwork is no longer an object the spectator as a stable subject grasps. S/he does not say even statements like, “the artwork represents nothingness”. S/he finds happiness in what s/he can do.

This “pure creative-formal principle” that Nietzsche proposed to replace the spectator’s stable ‘I’ “fulfils its [the artwork, including the engagement of the artwork] potentiality.” When engaging with art creatively, “art becomes an increasingly uncanny experience… because what is at stake seems to be not in any way the production of a beautiful work but instead the life and death of the author [the theorist, critic or writer], or at least his spiritual health.” In other words, the theorist who works creatively transforms and invents him/herself. This is the invention of him/herself as “living” rather than recounting him/herself as the spectator of the statically beautiful.

The creative theorist evaluates what s/he can do. S/he “leaves behind all content and all support, and agrees to enter the circle of absolute perversion.” S/he “negates his own

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338 Ibid. p.2
339 Ibid, p.47
340 Ibid, p.5
negation,” or that habit of pairing ‘I’ with the ‘not-I’, and affirms “the absolute will to be other.” S/he invents what – even the ‘I’ – s/he searches for.

With invention, the creative theorist no longer needs to fulfill the demand to make the artwork represent something. Deleuze, following Nietzsche, notes that to create one attends to forces not as ‘form’ but as being “in a transformation.” The artwork offers up various forces that the creative theorist plays with to produce new identities and meanings, even ones yet to come. Creation and invention is a matter of attending to the forces abound and always being ready to pick them up and evaluate what they can do.

And, as Hardt and Negri note, in the changing empire “there is no God the Father or transcendence,” and we may add, not even deus inversus. Instead the world’s future, in terms of its absolute potentiality, is immanent in our labour, our doing, creating and inventing. It is this evaluation of other relations to be made with the “technologies” of this world, that “joy” and an “increase of power” or capacity to change emerges. This is the “multitude” of life – what life can do, instead of merely appealing to pre-established categories of life, like for instance the deus inversus’ determined state of being. This ‘doing’ – a practice of creating and inventing – is “a surging forth of life,” life’s intensity.

Artworks are never visual-quotations of texts. And, texts are not just secondary to the artworks. We have, so far, said “Empire’s” meaning is in-between the texts, cities and galleries. We also have to note the text’s meaning or the knowledge it offers, is itself produced in-between the cities where the writer writes, the materiality and spatiality of cities and galleries where “Empire” is installed, and of course the other texts and concepts this text on “Empire” implicates. It is not enough to say the text represents “Empire” and empire’s change. As Deleuze notes, movement and the representation of movement are two distinct things. “It is not enough, therefore… to propose a new representation of movement” by writing of “Empire’s” globe-trotting adventures. If the text does indeed move “Empire”, it must express this movement that adds to “Empire’s” change. “It is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work,

341 Ibid, p.48
342 Deleuze (1998), p.105
344 Deleuze (1998), p.105
without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediated representation; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind."\textsuperscript{345} This is to push thinking and acting to the limits.

What \textit{can} a writer do? The artwork comes off the pedestal; the theorist no longer speaks, from a podium to an ideal audience/reader about the artwork in an imaginary museum that is on a theatre stage. The theorist’s practice of writing has a task to invent a “theatre of the future”\textsuperscript{346} in which the fourth wall collapses. The voice is neither from the stage nor from the audience. No one in this theatre reflects. Everyone is implicated together in order to invent and produce new subjectivities and spatialities. The movement in this theatre of the future cannot be mediated, and is not opposed to its inverse. As such it is not constituted by a defined core. Its interiority is “the interiority of movement.”\textsuperscript{347} It is the interiority of movement that makes the text’s expression the in-between of other texts, cities and galleries.

What \textit{can} ‘I’ as a writer do with “Empire”? The text and what it offers as knowledge is always produced through a negotiation of all the elements and conditions that are abound. In fact, this current chapter itself expresses an ongoing engagement with “Empire”, in the form of a practice of experimenting with words and ideas to work out ways “Empire” can become more than a tiresome representation of the concrete jungle. It is also a practice of experimenting with ways in which “I” as the theorist/critic can reinvent my existing perspective and position, to make new subjectivities and spatialities. It is also an awareness of “Empire” as an ongoing project, as always having the potential to implicate new modes of exhibition, new theoretical concepts and even new approaches to writing composition, style and form. For example, besides being shown as photographs and site models at various galleries in South-East Asia and Australia, Chong is considering making videos depicting ‘fly-throughs’ of the site models in their varied assemblages, and eventually showing these videos online, incorporating Flash programming to make these ‘fly-throughs’ interactive. Should this online “Empire” actualize, web-technology will offer new and specific kinds of spatial, material and conceptual forces that can, again, transform not just the form and essence of “Empire”

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{345} Deleuze (1994), p.8
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid, p.10}
but also its identity and how it affects and transforms its viewers. This is an instance when “Empire” implicates those networks of flows and forces of Hardt and Negri’s changing Empire to produce new spatialities and subjectivities that in turn add to, enrich and intensify the changing Empire itself.

The meaning and identities of “Empire”, and the meanings and identities writing on “Empire” produces, will always be changing. “Empire” never ceases because its future, its people, identities and meanings are only suggested and re-invented, never denoted.

The text and the writer never possess “Empire”. To write, to re-invent spatialities and subjectivities is to maintain “Empire’s” perpetuity. And, simultaneously, “Empire” as a territory of forces coming and going offers the “material” that sustains the activity of writing. Writing attributes to “Empire” and vice versa, insofar as the two cannot be said to be separate entities-practices. Writing on “Empire” and the galleries and cities implicated in the creation of “Empire” produces the identities of both Chong and myself. As Deleuze and Guattari note on the practice of writing, “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author).” Each is interwoven into the other two; each is produced as the in-between of the other two; none stands to be the cause.

To write is not to represent “Empire’s” life, or its meaning, but to enrich its life with other forces and relations. The story of “Empire” is never told from a “sedentary point of view” but from that somewhere in-between the texts, cities, cast concrete blocks, and galleries. The story of “Empire” is the story attributing to the empire of change’s continual transformation. It is a story that facilitates movement, one which emerges when socio-historical, political, ideological, material, textual and spatial forces are released from “capital and its institutions,” and re-related in new ways, expressing potentiality. This story, rather than being a continuation of “History”, expresses “historical capacities.” The story that takes what exists and produces a potentiality “beyond measure” becomes what Hardt and Negri calls a “revolutionary machine.”

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348 Deleuze & Guattari, p.25
349 Ibid.
Producing life is not, as Deleuze after Spinoza writes, “a matter of theory. It is a way of being.” Life is not something that can be defined by “a method of intellectual exposition,” but creating, practicing, doing and becoming. This is why the production of life is necessarily beyond measure. In this production, there is simultaneously revolt against what life was, and even propulsion away from what it is currently, it eludes the present for a future that is yet to be known. To produce life-in-motion is achieved not through “professorial presentation” but rather through “a method of invention.” In fact, Deleuze, following Spinoza’s understanding of life, writes that life or what we know as a particular “Being” or “mode” is univocal with, ONE with its “occurring”. “What is said” is inseparable from the saying-act or “what occurs.” To speak or write of life is life/living itself.

There is nothing hidden in “Empire” or within the text written on it, nothing central or prior to be unearthed. The lives of “Empire” and empire are taking place at/as all the peripheries to come.

“Empire”: a gathering of friends (forces)

The text is never just a realization of my (or Chong’s) mind. And, “Empire” is not a realization of Chong’s Singapore childhood. What I write of “Empire” is not an attempt to show what “Empire” is. The various arrangements Chong installs each time at each different gallery are not attempts to reiterate the texts she reads or the essays I or others write for each exhibition. There are what Deleuze calls “nuptials against nature” that are happening in this assemblage of ‘I’, Chong, the texts read and written, the concrete blocks and galleries. In this unnatural nuptial, there is a collaboration among all these persons, materials and spaces that goes beyond the seemingly discrete practices of philosophy, art, narratology, architecture and literature. Although the words ‘Singapore’ and ‘post-colonial’ surface numerously in the essays and artist statements written for “Empire”, what is produced is not necessarily working within ‘Singapore Studies’, ‘cultural studies’ or ‘Architectural/Urban Theory’. These genres or disciplines

354 Ibid.
are implicated into the production of “Empire” as forces – textual, conceptual, poetical and ideological – and broken down into constitutive forces, there is the possibility for these forces to be re-composed into something new.

With the production “Empire” there is not just the possibility of multi-disciplinary production, but, a trans-disciplinary production as this de/re-composition process of forces persists. As Deleuze notes, when various disciplines or genres, or “friends”, come together it is important to note they “do not work together,” and contribute their specializations in order to help realize their specific role in completing a project. Rather, they “work between.” Deleuze elaborates by saying that what is produced in this “work between” are “stories of becomings.”

In the case of writing on artworks, the writer is becoming-artist. And, his/her text is no longer produced as an example of cultural studies, but is becoming-artwork in that the words attend to and express the multiplicity and change that enables the artwork’s perseverance. Additionally, the text cannot be broken down into disciplinary parts; we do not say paragraph one belongs to cultural studies and paragraph two belongs to poetry. The words and sentences express the in-between of disciplines, and the disciplines’ becoming-something.

With stories of becomings there is no one thing, person, element or force that is the cause for the others. The site model of concrete blocks, the gallery walls, the galleries, the cities, and the theoretical essays about cities and nationhood are assembled together, but in a way that not one element is taken to be prior to the others. The theoretical essays, appearing as quotes and footnotes, that appear in the making of “Empire” never dictate what “Empire” is, or how those concrete blocks are to be arranged. Each element must be treated as a “friend” to each other, a compatriot, rather than a subordinate or boss. However, to maintain friendship and to enable it to blossom, “a careful approach” is needed. Attention to a respect for each element without essentializing it needs to take place. As writer Linda-Marie Walker notes, in regarding writing as an act of maintaining friendship, “friendship is a situation, a condition, of relations, of chances, of troubles, of powers, and disappointments; for friendship’s sake, one keeps one’s distance to keep from appropriating, from possessing, the other one.”

355 Ibid.
Just as the theoretical essays evoked and their espoused concepts do not dictate the way the blocks should be arranged or what city/gallery these blocks are to be shown within, the text on “Empire” cannot possess and, in turn, represent Chong’s mind or “Empire”. The text does not govern the identity of “Empire”. As suggested earlier, the text is but one of the elements offering conceptual, textual and philosophical forces that sustains this ongoing project “Empire”. More importantly the text itself is produced by the relations formed among the cities, galleries, other referenced and written texts that are implicated in “Empire’s” ongoing production. To write this text is to respect these elements, but also to evaluate what they can do – what changes can they bear, how these changes bear on the writing of this text, and how writing changes them?

When these varied elements or “friends” come together, like when Chong and I first met at Sydney’s Gallery 4A a few years ago to initiate an initial theoretical framework of “Empire” there was no common ground. Neither one of us could decide how we should frame “Empire” – we still do not always agree on what perspective to see “Empire” from. I am not the only theorist who writes of “Empire”, others have contributed to “Empire’s” longevity by bringing in texts that may offer counterarguments to the ones I make in this thesis as well as my other catalogue essays and conference presentations that explicate “Empire”. But it is this dynamism happening within this diverse practice of treating contemporary South-East Asian cities through diverse disciplines and practitioners that really makes “Empire” become one with the networks of flows and forces that constitute Hardt and Negri’s heterogenetic Empire. Besides, it is dynamism that makes for good friendship, for if all parties are silent how do we learn of each other and ultimately of our own constitution and capacity for change under these dynamic relations? This is why there must necessarily be other people coming into this project. And, there must necessarily be arguments and forces that can transform the laments of an ugly concrete Singapore that circulates the world’s various media.

So, to simply agree with the tried-and-proven model for making post-colonial complaints impoverishes the friendship among those texts, concrete blocks, cities, galleries, Chong and me. ‘We’ will merely be disciples of Koolhaas instead of a band of friends who are also inventors of new kinds of subjectivity, nations and cities. Moreover, when each element or friend within this friendship is treated by its friends to be stable, then there is the assumption that it has been possessed – one can hold it within one’s grasp because
this stable friend would not slip away, its location is fixed, the same will happen if concrete blocks can only mean dull urbanity. Friendship is enriched when one does not know what one’s friend can do, and what the relations one has with it can be. New relations are in formation; new ways to express each other are in production. As Deleuze and Guattari note, friendship is not mutual communication and recollection of the identical past, but, on the contrary, to enable those involved to “suffer an amnesia or aphasia capable of splitting thought, of dividing it in itself. Personae proliferate and branch off, jostle one another and replace each other.”357 A friend evaluates what forces compose his/her friend, and how those forces can combine with his/her own to produce new relations. One does not merely tolerate and essentialize one’s friend. To cultivate a friendship is to respect your friend for the forces your friend has to offer in order for amnesia of what one was to occur. It is to respect your friend for the capacities s/he has for transformation – of yourself, of him/herself, and of the relations between/within.

The question enabling this friendship is, “what can the various friends – the concrete blocks, the galleries, the cities, the texts, the concepts, the artists and writers – do?” And I ask, what can this chapter in this thesis do, as a friend, for “Empire”? 

The coming together of friends, as Walker notes, needs to spell trouble and disappointments; these are the “actions” that make for a blossoming friendship:

[...] a friendship without basis, without an agreeable starting point (from which to move-away or set-off from) or commonality, or family, but one based (or found) on the fact, again, of being in the same time and space (air and light) of the same world – no more than this, giving an ear, and thinking, and only doing this (perhaps); that is, producing a thought that passes instantly, that summons a space or a thing or idea unknown, all at once, in a flash – and lasting, forever.358

One gives an ear to a friend whose identity and being is not yet there. I do not hear my friend nor do I attempt to represent him/her/it. Yet, I embrace that mad swirling block of forces that may settle, congeal and become my friend because it is possible this block of forces may be capable of enriching my life.

358 Walker (2005), p.191
Friends do not speak for each other. Through their interaction, and through their building of new relations, they produce a voice that is in-between all of them that is nonetheless not a synthesis of their different voices. This is a voice of a subject and people yet to come. For “Empire”, this is the voice of an “Empire” yet to come, a voice of “Empire’s” absolute potentiality.

As long as writing and rewriting, exhibition and re-exhibition take place whatever is finite can become infinitely changing. “Instead of gambling on the eternal impossibility of the revolution” predicted upon telos and what Singapore should be, “why not think that a new type of revolution is in the course of becoming possible,” and that the forces of the art-making and writing machines, are combining with the forces of the urban, global, ideological, socio-historical and political machines to produce relations expressing subjectivities and spatialities, “which undermines the plane of organization of the World and the States?”

The ideological, socio-historical and political institutions can be engaged with as a composition and re-compositions of forces, rather than fixed forms. One evaluates the forces that produce Singapore city and see what they can do. What other relations can be made with those material and spatial forces composing Singapore city, and, what about the socio-historical, political and ideological forces, what other stories can be produced from these forces?

As Hardt and Negri suggest, in the empire of change, “we are situated precisely at that hinge of infinite finitude that links together the virtual and the possible.” We are at the point where what we see as possibly knowable in advance is becoming something else altogether. The finite thing – a being, identity and meaning – opens up to a virtuality that cannot be fathomed; the finite thing attains its absolute potentiality. Within global capitalism, the flows of information and people already open up the opportunities for new relations to take form. This is why it is important to engage with global-capitalist, internationalist and nationalist institutions as changing composition of forces, rather than infinitely oppressive forms. Considering compositions of forces as changing what is mere possibility opens up to an absolute potentiality beyond the measures of capitalism’s numerating machine.

359 Deleuze & Parnet (2002), p.147
Recompose these institutions. Befriend them. As Hardt and Negri suggest, change does not have to be predicated upon the negative (the categorically evil and/or *deus inversus*, the infinitely deferred hope). Resistance can be expressed in the “positive” when “being-against” becomes “being-for”. “[Negative] resistance becomes love and community,” that is, the love for potentiality and future instead of dwelling on what the past/present should have been.\(^{361}\)

To write is to love creating a future that cannot be predicated upon the dualistic and hateful laws of today. Writing on art utilizes the artwork not as a weapon to wage wars against others. Rather art, and all those other forces around and cutting through it, becomes a friend that helps the writer form new and different relations with the nation-state, with existing ideologies and policies, and even current readings of art in specific locales and epochs. Hardt and Negri go on to suggest that it is not just the individual who is nomadic, who is becoming-something/one else, but that space itself is becoming-some-space else. The changing space of Empire space is constituted by “irrepressible movements” that find “the walls of nation, ethnicity, race, people, and the like” become forces cutting across each other, speeding up and slowing down, but never fully stopping.\(^{362}\) It is not just new subjectivities and spatialities that are formed, but the continuous emergence of subjectivities and spatialities yet to come. Caught up in “Empire” this entity ‘Singapore’ is already something/where else, but not quite here nor there.

Take “Empire’s”, Singapore’s, Sydney’s Hong Kong’s and now the Internet’s socio-historical, global, capitalist, political, ideological, material, spatial, architectural, urban, textual and visual forces as friends. Evaluate these friends’ capacities, and see what can be said with/between/through them. As with the earlier mention of “Empire” eventually going online, here, we will have to reconceptualise the spatio-temporality of “Empire”. For instance, is “Empire’s” spatio-temporality still merely framed by the South-East Asian and Australian galleries and cities and those architecture, photography and philosophy books by Vilém Flusser, Peter Eisenman, Andrew Benjamin and of course Hardt and Negri? Or, can the Internet bring in specific kinds of spatial forces that

\(^{361}\) Ibid.
\(^{362}\) Ibid, p.362
unsettle the spatio-temporality thus framed so far by the nexus of South-East Asian cities and galleries and Western texts?

What the ‘global’ and ‘local’ can do
The ‘global’ need not be an oppressive entity that counters and opposes the ‘local’ at every instance. It is a question of asking what can the ‘global’ do. What are the forces that constitute the global, and what other ways of composing these forces can there be? What are the forces the writer can take up as a friend to aid him/her to express other relations between the local and the global?

The post-colonial writer’s task need not be to praise the uniqueness of his/her local culture at every step of the way. To establish the fact the local is always cut-off from the global is to establish some mythical past and place that the nation can (re)turn to. As was discussed in chapter one, the ‘New Asian’ and Asian values promoted by the Singapore government as the “core” of Singapore/ans demonstrates a limited engagement with the local. Uniqueness cannot be based on a model, for, if the local Singaporean is unique because s/he is based on a certain model of what Singaporeans should be, then ‘uniqueness’ is merely a feature, like having short hair or wearing white shirts and pants. ‘Uniqueness’ in this case is no longer that which distinguishes the individual from others, but that which allows him to form filiations with other identical individuals. If the Singaporean post-colonial writer takes his/her country and people’s uniqueness as mere identifiable features then self-Orientalization may occur; Singapore would be nothing other than the Merlion, Chicken Rice, Rojak, bumboat rides, Tiger Beer, Lee Kuan-Yew and Singlish. To treat ‘uniqueness’ as a set of identifiable features limits Singapore’s potentiality for change.

Here we revisit John Phillips’ question, “what can the local writer do”. What can the local writer do to surpass the limits of “uniqueness”? What can be done, so that the ‘local’ is still attended to, without resorting to essentialization? And with regards to a globalized nation like Singapore, what are those global forces that can be used to re-express the local?

As previously elucidated, Phillips suggests that attention must be given to the ‘can’ in “what can the local writer do”, because the “can” expresses a doing or making that in the
process of experimentation may offer up identities, meanings and spatialities that are yet to be determined. But, nonetheless, these are identities, meanings and spatialities that intervene and transform the current representations of local Singaporean-ness.\textsuperscript{363} In a similar argument, Hardt and Negri call for “the exodus from localism” as the moment of liberation from not just global-capitalism but also dogmatic nationalism.\textsuperscript{364} However, this is not to deny the local. Rather, as Hardt and Negri state, this call for an attention to “real alternatives and the potentials for liberation,” and to attend to and make use of the “mobile and modulating circuits of differentiation and [de/re]identification,” thus to direct any stagnant groups of forces towards other formations.\textsuperscript{365} In this sense the forces that constitute reified notions of the local can be shaken up to express other kinds of subjects and spaces that are yet to be quantified and qualified within the conventional sociological categories. And, writing, if it also attends to its own capacity for non-representation and experimentation, can also sustain these mobile and modulating circuits, so that writing’s own forces can cut across other groups of forces to be forming new territories, “new bodies and new lives.”\textsuperscript{366} But more importantly, to “keep in action” a “positive” and “constructive... mutation” without itself reifying into a already-identified and accepted alternative.\textsuperscript{367}

Maintaining positive and constructive mutation, for Hardt and Negri, begins by understanding these mobile, modulating circuits’ power to be, first, “critical and deconstructive.” That is, how their mobility can “subvert hegemonic languages and social structures, and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude [the changing world].” Secondly, it is to understand their power to be “constructive and ethico-political.” As such attending to how their mobility can lead to “the [constant] production of [new] subjectivity,” and move toward “the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constituent power,” instead of just relying on pre-established identities.\textsuperscript{368} These subjectivities, identities and these new constituencies of power are “in action” – speeding up and slowing down, but never completely stopping – moving with the empire of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{363} Phillips (2000), p.39
\item \textsuperscript{364} Hardt & Negri (2000), p.363
\item \textsuperscript{365} Ibid, p.45
\item \textsuperscript{366} Ibid, p.214
\item \textsuperscript{367} Ibid, p.216
\item \textsuperscript{368} Ibid, p.47
\end{itemize}
change’s mutation “in a creative indeterminate zone au milieu.” Finding ways to facilitate this movement is part of the post-colonial writer’s task.

Attending to the mobile modulating circuits’ critical and deconstructive, and constructive and ethico-political powers, Hardt and Negri note, history-making is no longer the task of reflecting on the past and charting out the prospects of life, or what life should be. As such, history-making is not a matter of proposing better alternative futures cast within the phrase ‘what-if’ – “what if the Singapore Democratic Party won the 2006 elections?”

The post-colonial writer who writes within the ‘what-if’ mode, still submits to pre-established socio-political models. For Hardt and Negri it is not a proposal of better and thus newer ways of being, but to refuse the “hegemonic order”, which often already prescribes the ‘what-if’ prospects within its drawers of socio-political categories. Hardt, following Foucault, elsewhere argues that in order to produce potentialities that are outside the grasp of capitalism’s hegemonic order, we must stop being too faithful to institutions and disciplinary machines, like political allegiances. Hardt writes, “We can begin to separate ourselves from the society of discipline and begin to think the lines of power and potentiality.”

Thus, for Hardt and Negri history in action “resides in potentiality” and cannot be represented in developmental and chronic history. As literary theorist Geoffrey Bennington observes, history in action operates in a temporality that no longer designates or answers a ‘when?’. Active history no longer consists of a succession of epochs where a ‘post-’ epoch succeeds an epoch that was also a ‘post-’ to another epoch ad infinitum. Instead of succession, there is transformation. We no longer speak of new paradigms that shame old paradigms, but rather how the subjects and spaces present are changing and tending toward absolute potentiality.

369 Ibid, p.215
370 Ibid, pp.48-49
372 Hardt & Negri (2000), pp.49
To make history is not to predict history but to attend to history’s absolute potentiality, or what was called ‘historical capacities’ as discussed earlier. And, if the post-colonial writer is to attend to history’s absolute potentiality, new experimental modes of writing must be involved. The power of the local is not what it (or what the various local institutions, artworks and texts) should be or mean, but what it can do. And also, what the local, when interwoven with the forces of the global, can do. Experiment so that an exodus from the duality of localism and globalism and tiresome chronicity can take flight.

The local writer is faced with composing forces that make up the ‘New Asian’, the Singapore government, the skyscrapers, the old colonial administrative buildings, the Giant Durian (AKA the Esplanade), the laments in various texts on Singapore, the philosophical texts at Borders Bookshop and of course the artworks installed in Singapore and elsewhere. S/he is faced with socio-historical, ideological, political, material, spatial, architectural, colonial, legal, national, critical, philosophical, textual, global and artistic forces. The question is not what is wrong with the institutions or ‘centres’ these forces compose. The question is what these ‘centres’ can do. What can the local writer do to attend to these centres’ process of ‘what-can’. To attend to these questions is to sustain the empire of change and its peripheralizing form.

**Writing-voyaging in place**

What can s/he/’I’ do to sustain “Empire” and the empire of change? There are many ways, and yet, when contemplating the enormity of possibilities, the specific ways these possibilities may actualize as well as the specific quantity of possibilities cannot be mapped out in advance. The ‘what’ in “what can s/he/‘I’’ do to sustain ‘Empire and the Empire of change?’ can no longer designate a specific end, it tends toward an absolute potentiality, the pure intensity of what may be without specification. A text written has immanently in it innumerable ways to begin again. As Blanchot notes, “To write is to surrender to the interminable.”374 The writer who writes on “Empire” and Hardt and Negri’s Empire of change does not produce a text representing these empires as proper entities. The writer who attends to the power of the written text “does not discover the

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374 Blanchot (1982) p.27
admirable language which speaks honourably for all.”

The world s/he makes is a world yet to come. S/he is only interested in how each letter written changes the composition of that world yet to come, and which s/he cannot represent. Joy is found in the power each letter, word or sentence has in transforming the composition of subjects and spaces yet to be determined.

The text, as Blanchot exclaims, “doesn’t speak anymore, but is.” The author has exhausted “the possibility of any personal relation” to reflect upon itself, or to relate itself to an Other, or to proclaim its Other. The author cannot say, “This is exactly how I must relate to my Other.” What s/he can do is to be concerned with what two or more bodies or subjects in differential relations can produce; how these bodies or subjects may together express absolute potentiality and not the moral duties of being.

Having exhausted all the possibilities to proclaim oneself as a Cartesian ‘I’ and thus give proper names to those around does not mean impotency or passivity. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, not making any extensive motions is a form of “immobility” that has an intensive speed. This speed or rapidity is an intensity or potentiality that is yet to be actualized, and may remain an inarticulabe potentiality. Immobility is an intensive movement, a speeding not from one point to another, but a moving within. To make a move and say what “Empire”, Singapore and Hardt and Negri’s changing Empire should be is to go from one point to another, from one idealized position to another. On the contrary, this intensive, immobile speed, as Deleuze and Guattari following Spinoza say, “constitutes the absolute character of a body” that can be “springing up at any point.”

The immobile writer, with his/her text that “doesn’t speak anymore, but is”, becomes Deleuze and Guattari’s nomad who “voyage[s] in place,” and whose space is an “Intense Spatium instead of Extensio.” The intense spatium is, however, not just...
within the boundaries of the exhausted writer’s body or mind. It is rather the space of forces coming into relations, and more importantly, the intensity of such formations. Relations on the brink of being actualized as new subjectivities and spatialities, yet whatever actualizes fold back into this process of (re/de)-formation of relations that constitutes the intense spatum. Moreover, the exhausted writer is not an autonomous person in the intense spatum. S/he is folded into the intense Spatum. The writer becomes lines of forces that are caught up in forming relations with other forces that had once constituted cities, galleries, governments, texts, nations and histories. It is this de/re-composition process constituting the intense spatum that also exhausts the writer’s ability to speak as an ‘I’ against Others. It is the intense spatum that decomposes a writer’s Cartesian vision and recompose the relations among the ocular, representational and visual forces into the perspective of a person yet to come.

Univocal with the intense spatum, exhausted by the intense spatum’s absolute potentiality, the writer’s interiority is affirmed by affirming its own differentiation. There is no longer anything, anyone else, any institution or policies to negate. But there are nonetheless institutions, policies, subjects and spaces to come. This concern for production is for Blanchot the “interior experience”\textsuperscript{381}, an affirmation of interiority without identity, opposition, semblance or representation. This is an affirmation of

\begin{itemize}
\item[a)] “Its original, thermodynamic sense in which it refers to intensive properties, like pressure, temperature or density. Differences in these quantities have a morphogenetic effect (they drive fluxes of matter or energy, for example) and when not allowed to get cancelled (as in non-equilibrium physics) display the full potential of matter-energy for self-organization.”
\item[b)] “A second derived sense in which it refers to the assembly of different components as such, that is, the creation of heterogeneous assemblages in which the components’ differences are not cancelled through homogenization.”
\item[c)] “A third derived sense in which it refers to the properties of ordinal series. These series are constituted by the differences between their terms, that is, by asymmetrical relations such as ‘in between’. When we consider more than one term between two others, this serial relation is called a ‘distance’, although this term must be qualified (Deleuze speaks of ‘non-decomposable distances’) to distinguish it from its non-technical meaning where it refers to a metric concepts (such as ‘length’). Finally, there are the uncancelable differences, or constitutive inequalities, which ordinal series present when compared to one another (only judgments of greater or lesser are possible, not of exact equality). [Forces in constant differential relations are of importance here.] It is mainly in this third sense that the term is used in the expression ‘intensive spatum’.”
\end{itemize}

Thus for DeLanda “difference, distance and inequality” expressing the event of non-telec change “are the positive characteristics of depth in an intensive spatum.” This is a space of potentiality, multiplicities capable of infinite multiplication through pure differentiation – difference from itself. Intensity is one and same as potentiality – the “potential to” without defining or predicting what will actualize from this potentiality. Pure potentiality is the form and essence of an intense spatum. See also: DeLanda, Manuel (2002) \textit{Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy}, London & New York: Continuum Books. pp.203-04

\textsuperscript{381} Blanchot (1993), p.209
interiority without an opposing exteriority or else the affirmation of an ‘Outside’ *outside* of interiority/exteriority binaries.

In this ‘Outside’ that is in between “Empire” and my writing there are ever more cities and Singapores that are *always coming to be*. Thus, that which is exhausted is the ability to say “Empire” and the empire of change are *my* Others. Yet, ‘I’ *write on.*

(Sections and plan drawn by Patrick F. Chan, 2006)
Some initial condensation of forces at “Still Waters”
Let us begin with some of the forces that the artist Suzann Victor encounters and implicates in the process of her making of “Still Waters” (1998):

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is the primary gathering of architectural, socio-historical, political, ideological, material and spatial forces Victor encounters and treats. The SAM began as private boys’ school designed by the priest and architect Father Charles Benedict Nain in the 1840s. It became the St. Joseph Institute in 1852. Until 1987 the building was used as a school when it moved to new premises. Following that, in 1992, the national Heritage Board of Singapore (NHB) acquired the two-storey building and commenced restoration works, and in January 1996 it reopened as the SAM.

One of the specific features of the SAM that Victor critiques and engages with is the giant glass façade that was installed along the museum’s front face upper floor balcony balustrade. This glass façade also runs along all the sides of the museum, although it is most prominent along its front. According to the museum’s management this glass façade was put in to keep out the elements in order to provide air-conditioned comfort for the visitors and to protect the artefacts from humidity and heat damage. Victor, through “Still Waters”, questions the management’s desire for protection and segregation of the museum’s architectural interior and interiority from the museum’s architectural exterior and the harmful exteriority of warm weather and the dust from the global urbanscape. Victor in her Master of Fine Arts exegesis describes this deliberate spatial – and climatic, socio-historical, ideological and political – segregation as Singapore’s “national desire for dirtlessness.”

But she continues to note that to speak of Singapore’s obsession with orderliness she “cannot escape from speaking of its underside – ‘dirt’ – swelling in its literal, corporeal and political charge.” However, we must take care not to assume this dirtiness belongs to another space. This dirty underside is not what is hidden but what exists within orderliness. It is dirtiness’ inseparability from orderliness and cleanliness that makes dirtiness powerful in critiquing Singapore’s

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383 Ibid.
cleanliness obsession. More importantly it is this inseparability, as I will demonstrate in this remaining half of Chapter Two, that shows how the nation-state along with its museum’s clean and orderly body is dynamic, capable of changing into something else. And, in this sense also demonstrates how Singapore and the SAM are plugged into Hardt and Negri’s changing Empire where nothing stays the same for too long. As Victor, citing Susan Sontag, suggests, there is more to Singapore than an immutable clean image; for, “in the real world, something is happening, and no one knows what is going to happen.”384 Not everything is cleanly measured or measurable.

Victor’s “Still Waters” structurally and spatially duplicates the museum’s giant glass façade. “Still Waters” is a floor-to-ceiling plexiglass enclosure (~ 40’ x 10’) that runs the length of the entire upper floor balcony. The “back” of the enclosure was in fact the glass panel of the façade that were affixed on the balustrade. Thus, structurally and spatially “Still Waters” is continuous with the museum’s architectural interior. It is structurally part of the museum but yet remains outside of it, never becoming part of the museum’s desire for containment, segregation and management of cleanliness. As Victor comments on her project a few years later, “Still Waters” is “neither truly organized inside nor actually outside of its host architecture,” it “operates as the presence and threat of the abject to the museum’s carefully honed integrity.”385

The plexiglass enclosure is filled with blue-coloured water in which Victor crawls through for the duration of the museum’s opening hours. In doing so her white dress and body are soaked with not just the blue-coloured water but with the condensation of her breath and sweat that fogs the enclosure’s plexiglass surface. Additionally her dress, hair, body and the enclosure’s air is thick with humidity as the sun shines into the liquid filled space. This humidity is something that the rest of the museum will not experience due to the dry and cool 18°C.

Victor wants “Still Water”, with its humid, sweat-filled, corporeal-motion-saturated space to be a countenance to the museum’s clean and orderly space. “Still Waters” is for Victor expressive of an “illegality” that can re-invent the “socio-political” and “personal-

political” relations and dichotomies existing to maintain the SAM’s ordered spatiality. “Still Waters” forces us to rethink what constitutes the orderly bodies of the Singaporean state and its citizens, as well as what the limits or un-limits these bodies possess. And, in some sense this challenge to the self-contained orderly body can be extended to a problematization of the theorist’s body: where does the theorist’s body, his/her text’s body, begins or ends when engaging with “Still Waters” and also with the SAM? It is the complexity of bodies – the body of the city, the state, the individual, the collective, and most importantly the body of the event where the other bodies come together – that the rest of Chapter Two is devoted to. In many ways this chapter also hints at how bodies are always intermingled, affecting and transforming each other in an Empire of change; it hints at a Singapore and a people that cannot be comprised by discrete Cartesian individuals nor by a collective espousing a defined set of localist values.

“Still Waters”: an intensive depth
What is my relation to “Still Waters” as I write this chapter eight years after I first encountered it live at the SAM? The question is more accurately framed when I ask, how has my relation to “Still Waters” changed in these eight years, what sort of new forces have been implicated thus changing my relations to it? And, how have these changing relations changed my sense of self? “Still Waters” still bears a power to affect and change; this is the intensive depth it has.

“Still Waters” continues to affect and transform me; it continues to pass through me and emerges as a stream of questions. And sometimes it emerges as an answer that is ever more puzzling and demands more questions to be asked. One of these puzzling, question-producing answers appears in one of Victor’s essays, titled Strange Meetings, on “Still Waters”. She opens this essay with a statement, “You were not there.” This is a statement that opens up to subjects and worlds beyond its initial simplicity. Who is the ‘you’ in this statement: Is it Victor herself or her audience? Or, ‘I’ who is writing these sentences and words for you my reader? Or is it you, my reader, who is not there? And, where is ‘there’? Is it the performance, the SAM, Victor’s artist statement and subsequent publications on “Still Waters” such as the essay Strange Meetings? Does one have to be standing in front of Victor’s plexiglass enclosure and looking at her contorted

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386 Ibid.
387 Ibid, p.70
body writhing and waddling about to be there? Or, can one, in quoting Victor’s statement and contemplating on the locality of this ‘there’ become already there? Are Victor’s readers and my readers in engaging with her statement already there as well? Or, is Victor’s ‘there’ a ‘here’, a position where she is writing to her readers from? Besides, where is the “there” of “Still Waters” itself now that it is engaged as more than a performance/installation that happened in 1998? Can this ‘there’ be a spatio-temporality that stretches out like the form of time itself? Can “Still Waters” have a body that is the event of various other bodies in their continuous entwinement?

The questions of whether this ‘you’ can be an Other to the ‘I’, and where the ‘there’ is, will persist in the rest of this chapter and the thesis. The questions will be elaborated variously, explicitly and implicitly. Perhaps Victor is suggesting that because we are reading her essay on “Still Waters”, we (as Victor’s “you”) are not there; ‘you’/we are not there in person and body. But then, what is the proper body/bodies of “Still Waters”? Such a question may be elaborated and addressed in the remaining pages of this chapter, but such a question will still persist.

Now, let us jump into the body/bodies of “Still Waters”:

Who occupies the ‘you’, or what sort of interiority and subjectivity characterize ‘you’? Where are the spatial and temporal boundaries of ‘there’? The ‘you’ and ‘there’ of Victor’s statement, and of “Still Waters”, do not run deep. They are not there at some core, or under some semiotic/semantic layers that will eventually be discovered. These ‘you’ and ‘there’ exist within what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term a changing empire where there are no more centres or depth from which society and culture emanate. As they suggest, this changing empire is “a superficial world.” However, superficial is not taken as inauthentic in a postmodernist’s reactive usage of the term. Rather superficial takes on the quality of an intensive depth that expresses potentialities beyond measure rather than the deep-seated meanings offered by conventional psychoanalysis and sociology. As they continue, what is considered a centre in this changing empire “can be accessed immediately from any point across the surface.”

A centre is merely a particular relation among forces formed by a field or surface of

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relations. The accessing or production of a centre is a practice relating particular forces together, rather than physically travel to a geographical and even historical centre as was during the times of colonialism. In fact, the nature of what a centre is becomes problematized. It is no longer indicative of a fixed identity, place or meaning but can become an event. It is no longer Victor as a centred subject who provides all the meaning for “Still Waters” and her later essays. It is no longer the colonial mindset of Great Britain that fills the SAM with meaning and values; likewise, it is no longer a post-independence Singapore that secures the SAM’s identity. At the same time it is not global-capitalism that determines the SAM as a museum of consumerables; it is also not the seventies and eighties’ radical feminism dealing exclusively with the abject that explains all of Victor’s actions in “Still Waters”. What “Still Waters” exists as, what Victor is to become, what her audience and readers are to become, is located in this amorphous spatio-temporality amidst all the terms, situations, institutions and bodies just mentioned.

Hence, the centre of the ‘you’ and ‘there’ in Victor’s statement can be accessed not by contacting Victor and asking her what she means exactly. The centre is somewhere in between Victor’s performance/installation, her various texts on “Still Waters”, and even this chapter ‘you’ are currently reading. As will be discussed later in the chapter, Victor’s ‘centre’ is also caught in between these texts, artworks, buildings and performances. Victor’s subjectivity or identity is accessed not by digging deep, but by adding various forces together to form new and different relations. Victor is expanding along with the textual, material, spatial, national, architectural, philosophical and socio-historical forces that are to be added to the personal, designatory, and spatio-temporal forces of ‘you’ and ‘there’. Victor becomes an event without a central point.

Yet, there is still depth in “Still Waters”, but this is a depth characterized by intensity rather than hidden secrets. Hardt and Negri’s notion of empire as a surface is indebted to Deleuze and Guattari’s “smooth space”. It is Deleuze and Guattari’s smooth space that I will use as an enabling concept to engage with “Still Waters” productively, to produce new kinds of subjects and spaces.

Smooth space, for Deleuze and Guattari, in contrast to “striated space” or ordered space,
is filled with events or haecceities, far more than by formal and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception. Whereas in the striated [space] forms organize a matter, in the smooth [space] materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. Intense instead of Extensio.  

They continue to suggest, following Antonio Artaud, that smooth space is like:

A Body without organs instead of an organism and organization. Perception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. This is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities.

A smooth space is not a space that one can judge as per the Cartesian scientist. One negotiates with smooth space by engaging with it immediately, being affected and transformed by it so that one’s perceptions are becoming indistinct from the very forces and matter that constitute smooth space. One’s body becomes indistinct with smooth space’s body; there are no organs and discrete functions but the flow and gathering of forces.

Yet, smooth space is not separate from striated space. Smooth space takes form when the striated space of government institutions, fixed concepts and essentialized peoples are broken into their composing forces, caught up in a swirling whirlpool that is capable of mixing these forces in new ways to produce monsters that may defy the categorizing machines of the institutions of striated space. It is the possibility for the emergence of new and different kinds of subjects and spaces that makes smooth space a space of potentiality, a space where a people and a nation yet to be known may emerge. Smooth space indeed expresses a great intensity or depth that is beyond the measures of governed divisions, like the division of labour between thinking and acting, theory and practice.

Smooth space’s intense spatium is a more profound depth than any extensive measurable depths. The intense spatium takes form when we begin to learn how to engage with the hierarchical and binary structures – that are sometimes manifested physically and materially – installed by capitalism and despotic paternalistic governments, decompose

390 Ibid.
391 Ibid, p.529
them and transform them into something else that enables and promotes heterogeneity. For instance, how Victor us the SAM’s glass façade and balcony balustrade and made them part of “Still Waters”. Victor literally took a structure enforcing hierarchization and segregation and made it work to subvert the museum and the state’s imagination of orderliness and cleanliness, and produce a kind of subjectivity and spatiality that are yet to have proper names. Moving bodies to which one cannot give proper names to; and plexiglass enclosures that are neither inside nor outside the architectural premise of the SAM are produced. Yet, these are subjectivities and spatialities that have the potentiality or intensity to become many things but withhold any determined actualizations based on reactive, relative and oppositional identities. They remain on the verge of being interiorized or understood but manage to resist this fate of being properly named. These are subjectivities and spatialities that are one with the surface of changing relations and that express the form of endless time itself.

To follow Hardt and Negri’s notions of the two instances of Empire as discussed at the beginning of this chapter we may say smooth space’s intensity emerges when Empire passes from its restrictive, limited form governed by conservative political parties, to its more liberative heterogeneous form. Smooth space takes place in the latter instance of Empire when the secret chambers of dead moral values dictating what nations and peoples should be are broken down into their constitutive forces and distributed across a surface of differential relations.

To engage and read “Still Waters” in terms of what it can do, the potentialities beyond measure it may possess, is to attend to its intensive depth from which nations, spaces, citizens and peoples yet to come may emerge. And, it is possible when attending to “Still Waters”’ intensity depth to be actually caught in it, to become one with it, so that one does not just represent this intensive depth but in one’s actions – writings, art and correspondence – express this intensity immediately. One’s body is one with the amorphous ever changing body of smooth space.
What can a Spinozist body do?
What becomes of one’s body when it is never there or here, but is everywhere, like the smooth space’s body or form? And, where is the mind or one’s thoughts when one’s body is capable of being everywhere? Where am ‘I’ when engaging with “Still Waters” – when watching Victor crawl through the plexiglass enclosure, walking along the length of this enclosure, looking at the condensation forming on the surface of the plexiglass, trying to stoop lower so that my torso will mimic hers? And, where am ‘I’ when reading her essay on “Still Waters”? Where am ‘I’ when writing on her performance/installation and essay? Am ‘I’ a body emerging in between these installations, performances, texts, essays, and localities?

The question of the body in its complexity is what the next few pages are dedicated to. We will begin by treating some texts, primarily Spinoza’s, and Deleuze’s treatment of Spinoza, dealing with the complex body/bodies in order to aid our understanding of how “Still Waters” can affect and transform reified concepts of subjectivity and spatiality of Singapore and the SAM. Following this, we will examine how the mind, or thinking, is inseparable and not prior to the (complex) body in action. Specifically, we will turn to Spinoza’s notion of univocity between that ‘which expresses itself’, that ‘which expresses’ and that ‘which is expressed’ as a theoretical framework to help elaborate the mind and body’s inseparability.

This mind/body inseparation, in turn, offers up new and different notions of subjectivity. Following this reversed notion of subjectivity we can begin to re-conceptualize what we mean by an individual’s adequate existence, natural rights, Nature, ethics and freedom. And, from this renewed sense of the body, we can begin to appreciate new relations the body, and hence the subject, has with other bodies like architecture, and texts. More than explaining the body/bodies’ complexity, we may also become aware how the implication of textual and philosophical, and material, spatial and architectural forces can produce and express this complex body/bodies.

a) Mind-body univocity
We will begin discussing the mind and body’s complex relation and inseparability with an apt quote from the philosopher Moira Gatens:
The human body is understood by Spinoza to be a complex individual, made up of a number of other bodies. Its identity can never be viewed as a final or finished entity, as in the case of the Cartesian automaton, since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment. Spinoza understands the body as a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity.

[...] The human body is permanently open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed, and decomposed by other bodies... The complexity of any particular mind... depends on the complexity of the body of which it is the idea.

[...] Reason, or the power of thought, thus cannot be seen as a transcendent or disembodied quality of the ‘soul’ or mind, but rather, reason, desire, and knowledge are embodied and express, at least in the first instance, the quality and complexity of the corporeal affects. 392

Gatens suggests here that the body is not always ‘ours’. What constitutes one’s body is, in fact, conditioned by the transformations one’s body undergoes as one’s body comes into relations with other bodies and their composing forces. The complexity of the body is expressed by the differential relations of all the forces that simultaneously composes and decomposed it. It is important to note that for Spinoza a ‘body’ need not just be a flesh-body, but can include the bodies of cities, texts, concepts, etc. This thesis follows Spinoza’s inclusive usage of the term ‘body’. It is this continual mutual transformation between bodies that defines one’s body. A body exists insofar it exists in relation with other bodies, and is constituted by the transformation it bears when relating to other bodies. And more importantly, a body exists insofar as it is constituted by the different forces it implicates from other bodies. 393

It is important not to treat the body as separate from other bodies. Or, as Hardt and Negri in a Spinozist turn reminds us, the “body becomes structure,” or perceptible, “not by negating the originary productive force that animates it but by recognizing it.” It is the body’s capacity to be affected by the forces around it, and capacity to produce itself anew that expresses “life in the fullest sense.” And, to this extent, the body in its capacity to be transformed by political bodies-forces expresses its integration into “politics in the

393 Spinoza, Benedict (1996) The Ethics (Trans. E. Curley), London & New York: Penguin Books. Book II, Lemma 4, Demonstration. For Spinoza “what constitutes the form of the individual consists the union of the bodies,” which can be bodies of other individuals, the State, institutions, the built environment, etc.
The body does not just represent the political sphere and its forces, but is constituted partly by these forces, and can also reconstitute the political sphere. This is the body’s structure and form. For example, Victor’s corporeal body – her crawling torso – together with the plexiglass enclosure’s and the museum’s balcony’s body becomes a corporeal-material-spatial-architectural complex body that decomposes the neat, orderly and tidy body of the museum management.

For Hardt and Negri, to study what constitutes a body or life, one must also examine “the process of the constitution of the world, of history,” which is always varied and dynamically changing. Bodies can combine in new ways to form new bodies as was the case with Victor’s torso, the museum balcony and her plexiglass enclosure. The process of examining or knowing a body is not to appeal to “ideal forms” stating what a body or life is, but to really engage those varied composing forces, and to be produced anew. Thus, Hardt and Negri stressed that the investigation of “social constitution” must “re-establish the importance of production.” One’s investigation of life is also the making of life, a new kind of body, a reinvention of one’s body. To know one’s body, as philosopher Timothy Rayner suggests is not a detached experience. Rather, following Foucault, he writes that this experience of knowing may be defined as “a transformation within experience, such that thought is directed from the interiority of forms of contemporary experience to the events that preside over their fragile and contingent existence.”

To know one’s body is to know the fragility and transformability of that body, and how thinking, or for that matter life itself, is caught up in the same peristaltic and amorphous form of existence as the changing body. So, are the bodies of Victor, the museum’s balcony and the plexiglass enclosure not beautifully fragile as they break up into a myriad of forces and recombine in ways that no longer represent proper identities, space and meanings?

Investigating what life can be cannot proceed independently of the body in its relation and transformation with other bodies. Spinoza writes in The Ethics, “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which
actually exists, and nothing else.” What Spinoza means here is that the mind or what amounts to thinking is produced insofar as the body exists in movement and relations (extension). Spinoza goes on to suggest that the “man” is constituted not first from mind followed by the body. Rather “man consists of a mind and a body.” Spinoza continues, “We understand… that the human mind is united to the body… [And] no one will be able to understand it [the mind] adequately… unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body.” One must first understand any body as always changing as it relates with other bodies and forces.

Following Spinoza, thinking and acting, mind and body, as Deleuze writes, are “parts of a whole” where “nothing can change in one without there being some corresponding change in the other, and neither thing can change without the whole itself changing.”

To change a body’s position, movements and relations is to produce in thought something new. The mind cannot remain at the same position whilst the body transforms.

The physicality involved in thinking, thus, deterritorializes, no matter how minute, any Cartesian perspectives the individual holds on to. Moreover, what the body can do, the relations and movements it is capable of entering cannot be solely determined by the mind. Each body exists by relating with other bodies, and by being constituted by the forces of other bodies. And no person, no mind, can state in advance what these other bodies are capable of doing. As Spinoza writes, “For indeed no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone.” As discussed in Chapter One, insofar as what the body can do derives its capacity from the laws of Nature, then the body, like Nature, expresses a non-telic change. No subjectival experience or categorized knowledge can determine the body’s capacities. Thus Spinoza surmises:

No one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions… This shows well enough that the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at […] Again, no one knows how, or by what means, the

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400 Ibid, Book II, Prop.13, Scholium
402 Spinoza (1996), Book III, Prop.2, Scholium
mind moves the body, nor how many degrees of motion it can give the body, nor with what speed it can move it. So it follows that when men say this or that action of the body arises from the mind, which has dominion over the body, they do not know what they are saying, and they do nothing but confess, in fine-sounding words, that they are ignorant of the true cause of that action, and that they do not wonder at it.  

What Spinoza points out, here, is that the mind cannot grasp the capacities of the body. And, the body is in fact capable of transforming in such interminable ways that it pushes thinking beyond the conventional limits, which designates the mind as master over the body. Instead, with Spinoza, the mind’s ability to surpass itself is united with the body’s capacity to enter relations and movements that cannot be predicted. As Deleuze elaborates, the mind, united with the changing body, surpassing its own limits, expresses the “power of thinking” as the “absolutely infinite.” Thought is caught up with the speed at which the body recomposes into something else. Caught up in this process, absolutely infinite thought is no longer determined by pre-established concepts and values. The mind functions no longer just as a repository and regurgitator of pre-established concepts and values, but as Gatens reminds us earlier, the mind is always in there with the corporeal affects and forces’ relations with other kinds of forces. Like the body, the mind produces itself anew.

Thus, insofar as the body expresses itself in “infinitely many modes,” goes into infinitely many relations and movements, and insofar the mind is united with the body, the mind expresses what Spinoza calls (God’s) “infinite intellect.” And, the body’s “power of existing” as always beyond the terminable, and the mind’s “power of thinking” as absolutely infinite, together in a “radical unity” or univocity express what Deleuze following Spinoza calls the “absolute”, the absolute condition of the world vested in a potentiality beyond representation.

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403 Ibid.
404 Deleuze (1992), p.118
405 Spinoza (1996), Book I, Prop.16
406 Deleuze (1992), p.118. As previously discussed in chapter one, the “absolute” is for Spinoza God, but the Spinozist God, unlike the conventional fixed entity/being of the Abrahamic faiths, is simply the substance of the non-teleologically changing world. God is “change” itself. It is God as “change” that makes God truly absolutely infinite, truly omnipotent and truly immanent in ALL creatures, spaces in ALL spatio-temporalities. When applying this Spinozist notion of God as absolutely infinite and is in effect an event of change to the context of post-colonial Singapore, we can begin to see that what makes up post-colonial Singapore, not just the city and buildings but also the various artistic and post-colonial theoretical projects taking place, to be interacting, fusing and changing.
b) Spinoza’s triad of expression, and a reconsideration of subjectivity and location

This mind-body radical unity can be further elaborated by what Deleuze, following Spinoza, understands as the univocal triad of expression. As Deleuze reminds us, “Expression presents us with a triad.” Expression is conventionally understood through equivocal terms: the signified equates with the signifier. However, with Spinoza, everything changes. Spinoza introduces three univocal terms: First, that “which expresses itself,” or the event of expression. Here, one finds Spinoza’s original contribution to the complex logic of expression in his consideration of the event itself. Spinoza’s event of expression does not just mark changes that have taken place as in comparative and sequential differences, but it is the event of change – continual differentiation itself. The second term is that “which expresses” or else the materials, bodies, and texts involved in sustaining the event of expression through their mutual continual differential relations, and that which holds content. Third, that “which is expressed” or else the content that is espoused.

However, with Spinoza that “which is expressed” or content is not always the first term at the start of a signifying chain. With the consideration of that “which expresses itself” as the event of expression, the whole pairing of signifier and signified, or that equating of that “which express” and that “which is expressed” is challenged. The event of expression, as never confined to one specific spatio-temporality but is carried out in “an indefinite continuation of [varying] existence,” guarantees the relations among that “which expresses” – those bodies, texts, etc – to be in continual variation as well. Insofar as that “which express” is in continual differential relations, the meanings, subjectivities, content, or simply that “which is expressed” will vary as well.

What we find here is the event of expression, or that “which expresses itself,” as the operative term enabling continual variation in that “which expresses” and that “which is expressed”. The event of expression is nothing other than the non-teleological change of Nature that through its continual differential relations of bodies, minds, concepts and spaces produces as its future the immense potentiality beyond representation. And, inasmuch as that “which expresses” and that “which is expressed” are one with that

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407 Ibid, p.27
408 Ibid.
409 Spinoza (1996), Book II, Definition 5
“which expresses itself”, the event of change, they too express difference-in-itself as their most profound essence and form. The body of the event of change is one and the same as the bodies that change in terms of physicality, materially and relationally.

In this sense, one may say Victor’s contorted body crawling through her plexiglass enclosure, the museum’s architectural body as well as the corporeal bodies of her audience, insofar as they maintain some form of relations together, constitute together as the body of the event of change. Corporeal and architectural bodies are that “which expresses”; in relation with each other they express that “which is expressed” which is that “which expresses itself”, the event of change itself. Herein, all bodies involved in the event of “Still Waters” are one and the same within the event of change. In this event of change bodies express something more profound than simple binarial identities based on predetermined notions of subjectivity, the city, the nation and citizenship.

That “which is expressed” and that “which expresses itself” are not equivocal but univocal terms; in fact, they are the same term. Deleuze and Guattari note that the ‘secret’ of any expression cannot be separated from the movements and relations of bodies and minds that are abound and changing. “The secret is not at all an immobilized or static notion” at the beginning or end of a signifying chain. “Only becomings are secrets; the secret has a becoming.”410 The most profound meaning or identity a body can offer is not what is accorded by a pre-established sociological identity, value or concept. Rather, it is the differential relations the body has with other bodies, the way other bodies may affect and transform it that most profoundly expresses its form and essence. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari note, “every secret is a collective assemblage.”411 Every secret expresses itself immanently in the event of a body changing as it is affected and transformed by other bodies, and in it doing the same to other bodies. This secret needs no code based on identity, opposition, resemblance and communication.

The movement and differential relations among and within bodies, texts as well as their constitutive forces make up expression itself. Through movement and differential relations expression “generates a second level of expression.” And “this second level defines production itself.” it defines the continual change in the world that secures the

410 Deleuze & Guattari (2004), p.317
411 Ibid.
world’s non-teleological, non-representable future, or its absolute potentiality.\footnote{Deleuze (1992), p.105} It is this absolute potential that is the world’s secret; a secret not hidden by depth, but is instead outside all mortal demands for subjectivity, interiority and fixity.

However, we should also caution against taking this second level of expression, otherwise the event of expression or that “which expresses itself”, as the first term of a signifying chain. It is not the signified, if signified is understood only as the fixed beginning and or end. If we are to follow the above mentioned relation, that of univocity, between that “which is expressed” and that “which expresses itself” then it stands to say that “which expresses itself” is perpetually changing. That “which expresses itself” continues to express itself as the differential relations – the pure difference – of that “which expresses” (those bodies and texts). That “which expresses itself” is never the first term, but simply a non-representable “thing” that persists throughout the event of expression. That “which expresses itself” persists not by a higher cause, but simply by existing, by simply being there.\footnote{Spinoza (1996), Book I, Prop.11. That “which expresses itself” is for Spinoza “God”. “God” cannot be caused by a higher cause – nothing is more divine – because of he is absolutely infinite, he is changing and what he may become, the worlds and beings he may create, go beyond anything imaginable, or else anything predicated upon cause-and-effect. “God” is thus for Spinoza less so a being but an event – the event of expression, the event of pure differentiation that the world expresses. Insofar the differentiation among and within bodies exists, God “necessarily exists.” As Spinoza writes, “God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.”} This is why Deleuze and Spinoza call it, “that ‘which expresses itself’”.

The event of expression and the event of change are one and the same. The voice emerging from this event of expression is neither of an individual nor that of a group-voice of a reified static people, nation or race. This voice expresses the intensity – the intense spatium capable of producing subjects and spaces we are yet to know – of the differential relations of bodies. And insofar that these differential relations denotes no notable beginning and end, this voice of the event of expression is one without origins, designating no enunciator or receiver, or even a (conventional) signified. This is a voice that expresses itself.

It is not enough to say these three terms of expression exist simultaneously, we must consider them to be univocal. Insofar as the three terms express each other, and express
that second level of expression, or the absolute potentiality of the world, it is not enough to say they exist simultaneously; instead, they are all ONE “indivisible” substance.414

What can Spinoza’s univocal triad of expression do for the mind-body relation? If we cast the mind-body relation into this univocal triad, we will find it is impossible to state that the mind or thought is that “which is expressed” or the definitive first term of a signifying chain. This is because insofar as a body, as that “which expresses” changes non-teleologically, enters new relations and movements, in the event of expression (that “which expresses itself”), the mind or thought as that “which is expressed” by the body cannot stay the same. As Spinoza notes, “The mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body.”415 The mind, thoughts and concepts emerge insofar as the body in relation with other bodies necessarily exists, and insofar as these differential relations necessarily exist. Thoughts do not exist by themselves. The whole notion of thoughts being codifiable independent of the body/bodies cannot be true insofar that the world is constituted by matter – flesh, texts, buildings, materials, and even sounds. Consider this little musing: does the recording of thoughts onto a diary-book not involve at least the hands and the eyes that guide the mind? The eyes glance around one’s surrounds; the visual forces in the retinas bear on thought. The hands’ motor/calligraphic skills bears on the way words are arranged on a page, and this physical-textual arrangement on a page to a certain extent bears that “which is expressed”. This is why Spinoza suggests that to be aware of one’s own thinking – one’s thought process – is also to be aware of the other complex body/bodies that are around. “This idea of the mind is united to the mind in the same way as the mind is united to the body.”416 One’s thoughts supposedly espousing one’s ‘I’ transforms in the activity of writing, the extensive movements of the hand and eyes, and certainly as the corporeal body mixes with other corporeal and incorporeal bodies. The mind persists insofar as it is univocal with the body in the event of expression, in the event of the body’s continually renewed relations and movements.

414 Ibid, Book I, Prop.13. “A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible.” As Spinoza suggested in Proposition 13’s “Demonstration”, if a substance can be divided into two or more substance then it will no longer be absolutely infinite, but simply comparable. The absolutely infinite is non-denumerable.
415 Ibid, Book II, Prop.23
416 Ibid, Book II, Prop.21
The power of thinking, even as an ‘I’, is never separate from the power of the body in action. To really consider an individual’s capacities, “to really think in terms of power, one must consider the matter in relation to the body.” The body is not the effect of the mind-as-cause, and, in fact, for Deleuze such a relation devalues what the mind is capable of for it treats the mind as a fixed entity as an immutable source. Deleuze suggests:

The question ‘What can a body do?’… be taken as a model. *The model implies no devaluation of Thought relative to Extension, but merely a devaluation of consciousness relative to thought.* One recalls Plato saying that materialists, if at all intelligent, should speak of power rather than of bodies. But it is true, conversely, that intelligent dynamists must first speak of bodies, in order to ‘think’ power. The theory of power according to which actions and passions of the body accompany actions and passions of the soul [or mind] amounts to an ethical vision of the world.⁴¹⁷

Ethics is not just based on pre-established concepts of what the mind, or the ‘I’, should be. Ethics is a practice of *doing* “what can a body do”, hence concerning the body, and mind’s, absolute potentiality. The issue of what is ethical, adequate and basically ‘perfect’ in a Spinozist sense will be elaborated shortly in more detail.

Let us, now, revisit something discussed earlier, namely Victor’s statement “You were not there” near the commencement of this section. Again we ask who is the ‘you’ that Victor addresses in here statement? And, where is the ‘there’? Is the ‘you’ a person who did not attend her performance? Is the ‘there’ the actual site of “Still Waters” in the SAM in 1998? Let us, perhaps, complicate things slightly here. Let us see what becomes of the ‘you’ and the ‘there’ in the changing event of expression:

The event of enunciating the ‘you’ and the ‘there’ is itself an event of expression, and not just mere representation. Thus, besides suggesting a person who has not seen Victor’s performance and the actual site of the performance/installation, the two terms can immanently express the event of expression. This is because the activity of implicating words, sentences and concepts to form some nominal notion as to who are ‘you’ and where is ‘there’ never really stops. We are doing it right now, and may continue doing it indefinitely in various forms. We will implicate more words, concepts and philosophers

⁴¹⁷ Deleuze (1992), p.257
to *elaborate* what the ‘you’ and ‘there’ *can absolutely do*. The body of the ‘you’ in the changing event of expression becomes more than a corporeal person. The spatio-temporality of the “there” in this event also goes beyond the actual site at the SAM. The ‘there’s’ spatio-temporality in Victor’s “You were not there” can become indistinct from the *current* pondering of the ‘there’s’ location.

“Still Water” spatio-temporality goes beyond the SAM. This indefinite spatio-temporality takes place when we consider how the plexiglass installation, the museum’s glass façade and balcony, Victor’s moving torso and the book she wrote (where the statement “You were not there” appeared) emit material, textual, architectural, conceptual, poetical and philosophical forces that can combine with the composing corporeal, social, spatial and political forces of the viewers of her performance/installation and readers of her book spanning the last eight years and continuing presently to produce subjectivities and spatialities we are yet to know. If “Still Waters” is distributed across these eight years and more, and into the moments when subjectivities and spatialities yet to be known emerge, then one may say its body becomes more event-like, or time-like, rather than simply a fixed entity that is now packed up at the SAM’s storage room. As Gatens following Spinoza reminds us, the body is “a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity that perpetually changes.”

In this sense the ‘you’ entails more than a finite entity of flesh-body housing a brain, and the ‘there’ becomes an indeterminate spatio-temporality that not only expresses the current but all those spaces and times that lie in an non-representable potentiality. As Deleuze notes, “it is not a matter of a being [such as the ‘you’ or ‘there’] which is distributed according to the requirements of representation, but of all things being divided up within being in the univocity of simple presence (the One-All).” ‘You’ and ‘there’ are expressed as differentiating; univocal with the changing event of expression itself. ‘You’ and ‘there’ express the pure difference in the process of differentiation. ‘You’ and ‘there’ become one and the same as that “which expresses itself”. ‘You’ and ‘there’ “is immediately present in everything, without mediation or intermediary.”

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418 Gatens (2000), p.61
420 Ibid.
The ‘you’ and ‘there’ as they are taking place without mediation never exist outside the event of expression. In the event of expression their finite nature as the person who did not witness Victor’s performance and the specific site at the SAM opens up to potentialities beyond measure. Here, a Singaporean and a Singapore that we are yet to know emerge. This is yet-to-be-known Singapore and Singaporean are Spinozist bodies that are strange mixtures of corporeal and incorporeal forces, which form and essence is change itself.

You who have not been at the SAM witnessing Victor’s crawling torso may in this event of expression that includes the very act of contemplating what her statement, “You were not there” is already there. There at “Still Waters” is an event which exists before those plexiglass panels were installed and after they were dismantled. Being more than a specific installation of glass panels along the length of a balcony, “Still Waters” attains the capacity to affect and transform those who continue to engage with it, those who embrace its multitude of forces and relations.

What we have elaborated so far is that the Spinozist body is no longer organized as a composition of flesh controlled by a soul or mind. The Spinozist body no longer concerns what each organ’s function is supposed to be, or how two organs should relate to each other. The body, here, is composed by more than what the skin envelops. As Deleuze and Guattari elaborate, the body’s composition is “not of organization.” Compositions of a body are “not based on types”, but constituted by “movement and rest, speed and slowness.” The body is an “absolute movement” tending toward an absolute potentiality.421 Or, as philosophers Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook summarize, the body itself becomes “the event of expression” that is constituted by “becomings, connections, events and activities.”422 And what about the Spinozist mind? The mind is expressed in the formless in-between of these becomings, connections, events and activities. The mind becomes, as philosopher Giorgio Agamben following Foucault suggests, torn from the “terrain of the cogito and consciousness,” and instead, is distributed in the “errancy” of living, a life that always “exceeds the [normative] lived experiences” and the Cartesian ‘Is’ perspective. The mind is distributed and transformed

421 Deleuze & Guattari (2004), pp.282-83
in a life in experimentation that also perpetually “opens onto entirely unexplored terrain.”\textsuperscript{423} “What the mind \textit{can do},” this question will serve well as a guide to the unexplored terrain, which has forgone ground and viewing towers.

c) Spinoza’s adequate idea:
The univocity of mind and body, and hence the mind’s perpetual change, signals, for Deleuze, “the end of thinking.”\textsuperscript{424} However, Deleuze does not mean we do not think anymore. On the contrary we truly think, but think not in terms of recognizing a concept and reconciling an object to that concept. He continues to state, thinking “is not so much in knowing something, as knowing our power of thinking,” or to live a life in which one’s thoughts surpass its limits. That itself \textit{is} knowing. For Deleuze, as for Spinoza, thinking is directed upon itself when we truly think. He writes, “Thought is from this viewpoint considered in terms of its form: the form of a true idea is an idea of the idea.” Thinking of thinking gives to thinking its “formal definition.”\textsuperscript{425}

To think is to not just to detachedly embody or grasp the world, but to become a composition of forces that cut through and combine with the world, its spaces and materials, and other bodies, and their constitutive forces. To think is to \textit{let} the world and other bodies embody the thinking subject; to distribute the thinking subject in the seismic ungrounding taking place.

In cutting through and combining with the world and other bodies, new and different forces are implicated to re-make what amounts to thought and even the ‘I’. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object, nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather thinking takes place in the relationship to territory and earth.”\textsuperscript{426} Thought is in

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\textsuperscript{424} Deleuze (1992), p.139

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid. In his book on Kant, Deleuze similarly notes that thinking is no longer corresponded to a Cartesian detached subjectivity. One does not think without also being transformed. What is thought does not amount to a fixed finality. Deleuze surmises Kant’s \textit{Critique of Judgment} “gives us a new theory of finality,” in which “\textit{finality no longer has a theological principle,} but rather theology has a ‘final’ human foundation,” which in turn is nothing but “a human practical activity” of actual doing and production. See: Deleuze, Gilles (1984) \textit{Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrines of the Faculties} (Trans. H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.69

between the territories of the earth and bodies that are simultaneously decomposing and recomposing, thought is distributed across the seismic event of change.

For Spinoza and Deleuze thinking without an ‘I’ who judges according to predefined categories of Good and Evil constitutes an “adequate idea”. Spinoza’s “definition of an adequate idea… is: an idea insofar as it expresses its own cause… An adequate idea is thus an expressive idea.”427 As mentioned earlier, this is the idea of an idea, thinking unto thinking itself. Thinking does not express something given but expresses itself, its own form, its change. Citing Spinoza, Deleuze says, “What constitutes the form of the true thought must be sought in the same thought itself, and must be deduced from the nature of the understanding itself.” To think thinking is the expression of “the absolute power of thinking.”428

An adequate idea for Spinoza is “not representative of state of things or of what happens to us.”429 As Spinoza writes, “By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.”430 An adequate idea does not refer to an object for validation. And, it is not the conceptual equivalent of an object. Hence, an adequate idea is not caused by something else. It refers to nothing other than its own occurrence.

In this sense, we cannot say we have an adequate idea of something else. As Deleuze notes, an adequate idea is not a representative thought, but it expresses “what we are.” It expresses, but it does not represent, the very process of thinking itself.431 He continues, “Since the adequate idea is explained by our power of comprehending, we do not have an adequate idea without being ourselves the adequate cause of the feelings that result, and that consequently are still active.”432 Following Deleuze’s Spinozist logic, we may say,

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427 Deleuze (1992), p.139
428 Ibid, p.141
431 Deleuze (1988), p.74
432 Ibid, p.76 cf. Spinoza (1996) Book III, Definition 2: “I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is, when something in us or outside us follows from our nature [as perpetually changing beings], which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.” For Spinoza, thinking which expresses itself, or,
that it is the body doing what it can absolutely do, and the mind surpassing its Cartesian perspective on the body, and doing what it can absolutely do that enables the true power of comprehending or thinking to occur, and thus, the adequate idea to emerge.

The dynamism (and not just a representation of dynamism) of thinking is the adequate idea. What is expressed is the differentiation process of thinking itself that has as its ‘end’ an absolute potentiality that cannot be imaged. In fact, Deleuze writes that if an adequate idea has a content and a form, this content is simply “the power of thinking,” the capacity of thinking to surpass the perspective of Cartesian consciousness. This power of thinking is also its “form”: “What constitutes the form of the true [adequate] must be sought in the same thought itself, and must be deduced from the nature of the understanding.” In a sense, insofar that there is an attention to the capacity of the word ‘can’ in questions like “what can a body do”, “what can a mind do”, and “what can a complex mind/body relation do”, the adequate idea’s form emerges.

While the adequate idea expresses the absolute potentiality, the absolute condition of what a body/mind can do, this does not mean the adequate idea exists without materiality, textuality and corporeality. As we have discussed in the preceding sections, what the mind or thinking can do (as expressive of an adequate idea) is always united with what the body can do. The body surpassing its limits bound by skin, nation, race and fixed identity is what enables the mind, and ultimately the sense of self, the ‘I’, to begin surpassing its own Cartesian perspectives of the body. It is what allows the mind or thinking to be its own cause, be ONE with the changing event of expression. The stability of my ‘I’ as a passive audience-theorist is surpassed when in encountering Victor’s crawling and by stooping low to imitate her moves I wonder am ‘I’ not already contributing specific corporeal forces to “Still Waters”’ subversion of the segregation of artworks and audience, architectural inside and outside, body and artwork, and architecture and artworks. Am ‘I’ one with that curious inside-out or outside-in space that is “Still Waters”? Additionally, eight years after encountering Victor and her plexiglass enclosure, am ‘I’, in the act of writing of “Still Waters”, still one with “Still

otherwise thinking tending toward its absolute potential (or power) is adequate, while thinking that relies on an established concept as cause is inadequate.  
433 Deleuze (1992), p.140  
434 Ibid, p.141
Waters” if, as we have discussed, “Still Waters” has a spatio-temporality that is stretched like time itself?

It is all these corporeal, material, architectural, climatic, conceptual, textual, philosophical, socio-political and ideological forces capable of affecting and transforming one’s body, and in turn this transforming body capable of actively changing its corresponding mind, which is univocal with the body, that thinking becomes adequate. Thus, from the viewpoint of how material, corporeal and architectural forces change one’s body and in turn one’s mind or thinking, one may say the adequate thought or idea is inseparable from these forces. And, if we consider how Victor’s essay, including her statement, “You were not there”, may continue to affect and transform those who engages with it as part of “Still Waters” expansive existence, then one may say textual forces, too, contribute to the production of adequate thinking or the adequate idea.

To produce a text does not mean that the artwork it treats is finalized or wrapped up. The text, as with Victor’s statement “You were not there”, is capable of opening up the artwork, stretching out its spatio-temporality, turning those deep-seated meanings based on conventional sociological and psychological types into a surface of changing relations only to have strange monstrous subjects and spaces we are yet to know to emerge. The text, in this sense, sustains the adequate idea or thinking. How does the text do that? Here, we can briefly revisit Agamben’s suggestion that every word written or actualize also expresses that which was not written or what remains un-actualized for explication. However, he states that what is not written does not designate the opposite of what is written or actualized. Instead of the negative, what is expressed is a pure positivity, the absolute potentiality of words and sentences that express words and sentences, identities, meanings, values and spaces yet to come. What is expressed in writing is “an absolute writing that no one writes: a potential to be written.” Thus, Agamben stresses, “pure actuality, that is, the actuality of an act, is [also] pure potentiality, that is, the potentiality of a potentiality.”

Writing’s pure or absolute potentiality consisting of all that is yet to be written is catalyst for thinking to think its own form whence unable to meditate on a pre-established value or pre-existing object.

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Agamben (1999), p.216
Artworks, performances, buildings and texts exist together by maintaining varying relations. It is not just how a text explains an artwork, or an artwork represents a certain text. Rather, it concerns how artworks and texts work into each other, and sustain each other. For instance, as Victor notes in her 2002 co-authored book with writer Susie Lingham, *An Equation of Vulnerability: a certain thereness, being*:

> The text does not interpret, nor reduce images to ‘pure meaning’ or [the artist’s] intentionality. Instead it generates more imagery that sublimes or transposes the image like a whimsical fugue bordering on chaos. Writing arises in complicity with the treachery of the image; partakes in an a/symmetrical conspiracy with the image.

> [...] Not only are the differing forms of textuality and visuality subject to mutual ‘permeability’, but the differences between textual conventions (from fiction and poetry to critical theory) and within image-making (from conceptual images in photographic documentation of visual works to image-writing) will be traversed, transgressed and reconfigured – allowing concepts to co-inhabit a diversity of new ‘forms’ wrought through these processes.  

The new forms of subjectivity and spatiality arising between the texts on “Still Waters” and the photographic documentation of “Still Waters” in *An Equation of Vulnerability* may challenge the conventional mode of thinking that relies on proper objects, meanings and identities. Victor and Lingham’s sentences are not exact descriptions of what are documented in the photographic images, yet these sentences are also not proper theoretical treatises seeking to explain or unveil “Still Water’s” meaning. Thought that may not be determinable, yet still adequate to the process of thinking emerge in between photographs of “Still Waters”, memories of “Still Waters” and textual productions of the project. All these things and events double on to the performance/installation of 1998 and stretch its spatio-temporality toward an indeterminate future expressing great immeasurable potentialities. This doubling process that enables innumerable multiplication becomes “Still Waters” form. Thus, it is of little surprise that Victor and Lingham will write this of “Still Waters”: “See? Doppelgangers are your best friends. Your double nods at you from the glass. *There, right beside you, even when there is space for less than one.*”

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436 Victor & Lingham (2002), p.6
437 Ibid, p.73
Once again, we ask who this ‘your’ in the above doppelganger sentence indicates. Whose doppelganger? Have we encountered our ghostly double, sensed its presence and yet find cannot articulate what it looks like or is capable of doing? Are we becoming our ghostly double? And, what was “there, right beside you [me]”? Your ghostly double? Or, does the ‘your’ and ‘there’ specify the Victor in the photograph who performs “Still Waters”? Or, is the double an “I” who had once stood in front of Victor’s performance and caught a faint outline of him/herself on the plexiglass surface? Or, is this doppelganger already immanent in me in all I do; is the doppelganger here as my infinitized self, my ‘I’ that surpasses itself? Thinking caught in this doubling process becomes itself a poeisis; it is what Blanchot calls “the poetic act.”

Victor and Lingham write and we read, and perhaps we even write after them, but, each written word and sentence does not bring us closer to the core of “Still Waters”. Each time ‘you’ and ‘there’ are written out on a page, ‘you’ and ‘there’ express all the subjects and places yet to come, which in turn express these two words’ utmost interiority. In fact, in reading these two words and not being able to determine their precise identity and locality, thinking expresses its own interiority. Thinking, here, does not rely on a mode of recognition, of tying an object or person to a fixed concept or identity, yet in doing it expresses its own form – thinking of thinking, thinking that thinks how it is to think through this incredible swell of untamed forces of texts, buildings, memories, nations, cities and artworks. As Deleuze remarks, thinking “does not exist outside of that which expresses it.”

Thinking emerges in its true form when it is not predicated upon pre-established values and concepts but as the amorphous middle of differentially related forces. The adequate thought’s form and “interiority” are not referenced-to but is immanent in the artworks, texts and their perpetual re-making/writing. It is inside everywhere and outside every-where.

d) “Perfection” according to Spinoza: a matter of differential relations and compositions

If an adequate idea attains its adequacy insofar as it is expressed as the differential relations of the material, corporeal and textual (among other) forces, and insofar in

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438 Blanchot (1993), p.167. Blanchot following Nietzsche writes that it is the “marks of breakage [brisées], fragments, chance, enigma” of writing that constitutes writing’s “poetic act” that makes the fragments work together, even unify to bring forth “the unity of the future,” albeit a future that overcomes our conventional teleological speculative viewpoint.

Nature the flux of forces will always exist, then it may be said there is no true inadequacy. This is because the differential necessarily means active change, and thus it is impossible to break this continuous change into good and bad segments. For this form of adequacy that is not predicated upon a determined negative or telos, Spinoza reserves the term “perfect”.

The changing world, as Nature, is necessarily a field of changing relations, so whether a particular relation produces a hero or a victim, any particular relation cannot be taken as stable for eternity. As long as a particular relation changes to promote heterogeneity and opportunities for liberation from reified notions of self, culture, nation, state, citizenship and space, it is perfect, and it expresses adequacy. Perfection, here, is guaranteed by change not by higher moral values. As Deleuze following Spinoza notes:

So if it be asked what evil amounts to in the order of relations, one has to reply that evil is nothing. For there is nothing, in the order of relations, but [varying] compositions. It cannot be said that the combining of some relations or others is an evil: any combination of relations is good from the viewpoint of the relations combined, that is, simply from the positive viewpoint. When a poison decomposes my body, it is because a natural law determines the parts of my body in contact with the poison to take on a new relation which combines with that of the toxic body. Nothing in this is evil from Nature’s viewpoint.

The ‘lesson’ Deleuze offers here is that any relations can vary and express something else. A victim can be recomposed into a hero, and vice versa. As we recall earlier discussions, that “which is expressed” insofar it is carried out in the event of expression will be infinitely different. Following the ‘law’ of variation and recomposition we may

\[\text{Spinoza (1996) Book V, Prop.40 For Spinoza, “the more perfection each thing has, the more it acts [becomes its own cause] and the less it is acted on [is an effect of a higher cause]; and conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is.” What Spinoza suggests here is that a thing’s perfection has got nothing to with what it is, but simply how much it can transform without being predicated upon a fixed telos. Conversely, if a thing – person, body or even a text – experiments and is willing to transform non-teleologically, it will persevere perfectly. The perfect thing is, thus, not categorizable into the essentially Good or Evil. The Spinozist notion of perfection has great implications for post-colonial struggles in its capability to move beyond the deterministically Good or better post-colonial era/subject versus the Evil (neo)-colonial era/subject.}
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\[\text{Deleuze (1992), p.248. See also Spinoza (1996) Book I, Prop.11, Demonstration: Insofar as bodies and their relations are ONE with the event of expression, thus, always changing, they are perfect. The event of expression is like the Spinozist God, absolutely infinite, absolutely different from itself. Insofar bodies and relations are ONE with the event of expression, and thus, change not because of some external given cause, but by their own nature (and like Nature itself which is non-telic), they express their own cause. These bodies are thus perfect. For Spinoza, to be ONE with the event of expression “does not take away the existence of a thing [e.g. a body], but on the contrary asserts it” As he continues, “there is nothing of whose existence we can be more certain than we are of the existence of an absolutely infinite, or perfect, Being – that is, God. For since his essence excludes all imperfection, and involves absolute perfection.”}
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say the relation between bodies is not a contest between essences as such, and that one body is determined from the start to come up as the victor. A stronger body is not guaranteed to be the victor. A stronger body can be destroyed by a weaker body if this weaker body can combine with the stronger body to produce new and different relations that destabilizes the current composition of the stronger body.\textsuperscript{442} What a (weaker) body can do is beyond what the mind can speculate! Of course, by this very same logic the (former) stronger body can combine with the (former) weaker body in ever newer ways, form newer relations and destabilize it, thus becoming the victor.

For Spinoza, Nature and reality necessarily change. And, bodies as really compositions within Nature (Nature here is understood more than trees and lakes, but world at large), too, necessarily change. As Spinoza notes, “by reality and perfection I understand the same thing.”\textsuperscript{443} It thus follows: A body that is weakened may be less perfect because it has to ‘obey’ another body. A body that is strengthened, that has the power to be its own cause (like, that “which expresses itself”), and to will its non-teleological transformation attains greater perfection. But these bodies are all perfect nonetheless. As Spinoza notes, when a body passes from lesser to greater perfection, and is able to produce adequate thought, it does not consists two separate essences or forms.\textsuperscript{444} This variation in greater and lesser perfection, in being able to be affected and transform more or less, is the Nature of living that constitutes all bodies. They may undergo changes that are imposed on them, or they may find ways to engage with other bodies that enables all bodies involved to transform non-teleologically, thus gaining greater reality. Insofar as this variation persists, there will be lesser or greater perfection, but never true imperfection.

A body, as we have discussed earlier, is a nexus of forces coming together in a particular composition, and this composition can always be recomposed. Relations and compositions are what define a body. Thus, when engaging with other bodies, it is important not to begin with resentment and pre-conceptions predicated upon Good and Evil, which is a dualism that has got nothing to do with what a body can do or become – a body’s absolute potentiality. As we have seen, the SAM is a very limiting institution; it

\textsuperscript{442} Ibid, p.242
\textsuperscript{443} Spinoza (1996), Book II, Def.6
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid, Book IV, Preface. As Spinoza said, “When I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed from one essence, or form, to another.” There is simply an increment or decrement, not a production of comparative series. This is variation pure and simple, not a judgment of whether something is ultimately Good or Evil.
is complicit with the Singapore government’s ban on many artistic projects dealing with alternative but still definable identities such as homosexuality or anti-government, pro-Marxist advocacy. However, the way Victor engages with the SAM, takes the architectural and material forces of the balcony balustrade and glass façade and re-gather these forces into new compositions, along with the corporeal, kinetic forces of her crawling torso, which in turn express new heterogeneous and indeterminate subjectivities and spatialities demonstrates how not all aspects of Capitalist-Paternalistic structures and institutions are necessary Evils. In between Victor’s flesh body and the museum’s architectural body, other bodies that are not quite architectural or corporeal, yet also not quite conceptual, begin to emerge.

c) Perfection within the body of the State

From the viewpoint of relations and compositions, the body of the State is not a necessary evil if one can engage with it in ways as to enable heterogenetic changes to occur. To come up victorious against the State may simply be to find new ways to relate to it. What are the forces that constitute the State, and how else can these forces be re-related? If Singapore’s built environment – the steel and glass towers – is seen to be complicit with the State’s push for a neo-conservative subjectivity, then our battle with the State may not necessarily begin with positing oppositional, but established, identities. Rather, we begin with looking at what the State and its built environment’s composing forces are. And, evaluate what other relations and compositions these forces can enter. For instance, as we will shortly discuss in more specific elaborations on “Still Waters”, we can find new ways to relate to the built environment, to produce relations and compositions that intervene with the State’s particular composition of subjectivity attained by its specific use of certain architectural forces. We can to evaluate how the State’s particular composition of ideological, socio-historical, material, nationalistic and architectural forces can be differently composed.

An engagement with the State does not begin with an established oppositional identity that is the inverse of the State. In fact, it is interesting to note that, according to Hardt and Negri, in the changing world empire, “no subjectivity is outside.”445 What they suggest here is not the impossibility of new kinds of subjectivities being produced. Rather, there

are no established subjectivity out there that can come messianically and defeat capitalism and Imperialism. As they elaborate, “the transcendental fiction of politics can no longer stand up and has no argumentative utility because we all exist entirely within the realm of the social and the political.” Rather than passive acceptance of capitalism and imperialism, what Hardt and Negri suggest here is that while we all exist entirely within the realm of the social and the political, this does not mean that the social and the political are static. In a Spinozist manner, it is really a question of what can the social and political do; how can the current relations and compositions expressing particular social and political regimes and institutions be becoming something else?

The question “what can the social and political do” requires a practice of living. We do not just describe what the ‘what’ should be. We attend to the ‘can’ as capacity. To attend to this maximization of capacity, we can experiment with ways of undoing current relations and compositions. And through activities like art-making and writing, we can rebuild those undone relations and compositions into new kinds of relations and compositions that express new subjectivities, even subjectivities yet to come.

As Hardt and Negri stress, resistance as a form of intervention can take on a “being-for” instead of the more conventional “being-against”. “Being-for” does not suggest that we give in to the State’s particular composition of subjectivity. Instead, it suggests we are for the State’s transformation. We are for how institutionalized subjects can be transformed, and particularly, as Hardt and Negri note, in how the subject’s transformation can become “defined by… irrepressible movements” that go beyond the mere dichotomy of the State and the oppressed individual. The whole notion of an ‘I’ as an immutable ‘inside’ opposed to the State as the ‘I’’s ‘outside’ is for Hardt and Negri rather hard to maintain when the world in its necessary existence is “a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality.” As Hardt and Negri maintain, “there is not more outside.” Yet, there are also no more insides. The relations and compositions of forces are that which persists. There is only the absolute outside. This is an outside beyond any dualism of inside/outside or self/other. It is beyond the measures of Cartesian

446 Ibid.
447 Ibid, p.361
448 Ibid, p.362
449 Ibid, pp.187-88
450 Ibid, p.186
perspective and capitalist census and cultural machines. The absolute outside is the absolute potentiality of the changing world – the spatio-temporality that is yet to come.

The absolute outside for Hardt and Negri, however, is not something “formal” or given. Indeed, it is a spatio-temporality yet to come, it is not there. It is also “material”. When we say the absolute outside is also material, we must be careful not to say the material explains everything. The absolute outside is what the materials – the bodies and texts – of the world in differential relations, or else in action, can be; simply put, their potentiality without definitive telos. The absolute outside only exists insofar as the world, which includes the State(s) and global capitalism, changes and is active. The absolute outside or potential as a spatio-temporality yet to come is the State’s greatest secret in which all bodies and States, tending to its ‘can’, partake.

It is this absolute outside or potentiality that becomes, for Hardt and Negri, “the positive character of the non-place” that global capitalism has created. It is this absolute outside that moves beyond the measures of imperialist hegemony, and enables a multiplicity irreducible to the kitsch of State-sanctioned multicultural fun fairs and campaigns.

If we follow Hardt and Negri’s understanding of the State as capable of producing an absolute outside and hence to foster potentialities beyond quantification machines, then it stands to say, the Singapore State, similarly, is not an immutable entity. The State is neither an ‘I’s’ outside, nor itself a stable ‘inside’. And, if we follow earlier discussions of Spinoza’s notion that a stronger body may be decomposed via the formation of new and different relations instead of just head-on battle, the State as a stronger body may be decomposed if we can engage with it through new and different relations.

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451 Ibid, p.357. Hardt and Negri conceives of this absolute outside as “beyond measure”, which expresses “the impossibility of [capital’s] power’s calculating and ordering production at a global level.” What is “outside” or “beyond” indicates the “vitality of the productive context” of the changing world. The spatio-temporality beyond measure is wholly of the “virtual” or that which is never actualized. However, this is not the failure of actualization, but (as we have discussed in chapter one), how production – writing and art-making – as actualizations still express a potentiality or virtuality that cannot be quantified.

452 Ibid, p.358
453 Ibid, p.359
It is not enough to complain about the State. As we have discussed, the State is not fixed, and hence, any analysis of the State’s constitutive forces, relations and compositions must also be an invention of new constiutions. An analysis, be it an artwork or a written text, must tend to the State’s change, and contribute to the change, not to mention the possibilities for alterity.

To conduct an analysis is not to merely dig through the archives online or at libraries and simply present them. To dig through these archives is to in fact build new relations and compositions, hence producing new archives. The same occurs when we are archiving or recording what is happening in the city or the State. As the literary theorist John Phillips, following Derrida suggests, “the techniques of archivization reconstitute their content – images, documents, buildings and events of the past – in a way that simultaneously produce what they record.” The process of archivization for Phillips, as for Derrida, has “a relationship to the future,” indeed a concern for what things can be. Moreover, the archive and the act of archivization is not a collection of dead knowledge but a “dynamic repository of knowledge” that shifts seismically.\footnote{Phillips, John (2004) “Urban New Archiving” in Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity (Eds. R. Bishop, J. Phillips & W.-W. Yeo), London & New York: Routledge.pp.204-221, p.218. cf. Derrida, Jacques (1996) Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (Trans. R. Prenowitz), Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.17. “The archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and conserving an archivable content of the past which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.”}

Through Phillips’ expanded understanding of archivization and analysis, we may say that to understand a State is also a matter of understanding its constitution and its potentialities for reconstitution. We do not begin treating the state as a necessary evil. It is a matter of seeing what the state and ‘I’, coextensive as Spinozist bodies that are all interconnected, can do; what new relations and subjects and spaces this coextension can produce.

The kind of analysis and archivization Phillips rallies for is productive instead of reiterative. It is no longer just about representing the changing world; it contributes to the world’s reality by increasing its intensity. The archivist or theorist, like a storyteller, in
this practice of radical archaeology invents a world and people yet to come. It is this world and people yet to come that consist in the world’s dynamic reality.

The Singapore State, even its neo-conservative pro-Bush government, can be engaged with not as a definite adversary. We do not have to go against it, but, as discussed earlier, we can develop what Negri calls a “being-for” relation with it – we can be for its and our own transformation. Negri explains that Spinozist freedom and even ethics is not something pre-given, which is then applied. Rather freedom is “a founding power,” or as we have discussed earlier that “which expresses itself” and is its own cause, in other words, “is the continuous source of itself.” The free and ethical being of a State is constantly reproduced as something or someone else rather than moving toward a determined teleological end as its higher cause. To be a free and ethical being is to “be power (essere potenza)” itself, to will one’s “own surpassing” and affirmation of differentiation. For Negri, as it was for Spinoza, ideologies that espouse what it is meant to be free and ethical will cease, while only “power”, absolute potentiality and capacity remain. Only with this approach to the state as possessing an absolute potentiality can there also be an “absolute opening.”

The State is no longer an impasse that we must avoid or negate. It is indeed a ‘crisis’; the Singapore State is indeed conservative when it comes to sexual relations, racial harmony, national identity and its management of its urban and suburban territories. But the ‘solution’ is not to move away or to demand Singapore adopt an American, British or socialist model for subjectival and spatial productions, for this simple unproblematic transplantation of other models reiterates the operation of imperialist subjectivity. The “crisis” for Spinoza is “an essential aspect of the phenomenology of the existent.” To engage with crisis is to treat it as de/re-compositional. Crisis cannot be replaced or else forgotten. What is demanded of thought and body is the production of relations and compositions that takes up the composing forces constituting a particular crisis as the “founding materiality” for the purpose of surpassing the present. Spinoza writes, “the crisis is not the outcome of fate but the presupposition of existence.” To go beyond the

456 Ibid.
457 Ibid.
458 Ibid, p.98
crisis is to radically rebuild not just the composition of the crisis but the bodies, subjects and spaces implicated. The ‘I’ engaging with the State’s crisis also develops a “being-for” relation with itself, to be for its own de/re-composition.

What the state and ‘I’ as a coextensive Spinozist body can do is perfect insofar as they no longer produce each other as necessary adversaries. The State and ‘I’ tend toward futures vested in neither Good nor Evil. Within Spinozist perfection they free themselves from final moral judgment. As Spinoza writes, “If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remain free,” and live “adequately.”

To recapitulate our argument so far, we see, through Spinoza’s (and also via Deleuze, Hardt and Negri’s Spinoza) logic, victory over a stronger body emerges “if we manage to ward off this feeling of sadness.” This is to expel the resentment that fixes our and others’ bodies in place without considering how else they can be recombined, what other relations can be composed, and, of course, what can the body do? Only in considering the necessity and importance of relations, and the perpetuity of the simultaneous processes of decomposition and recomposition, is perfection attained. In fact, as Deleuze suggests, as long as there is transformation, “a being is always as perfect as it can be.”

The Spinozist perfect ‘being’ is, thus, also the being who expresses the adequate idea. This is a being who forgoes “privation,” for it knows “privation is only negation,” the denial of life’s true multiplicity. It does not resent a stronger body or being, but finds ways to engage differently with it. It is a being that is already other than what is was. It

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459 Ibid, p.100. See also Spinoza (1996), Book IV, Prop.69. “The virtue of a free man is seen to be as great in avoiding dangers as in overcoming them.”
460 Spinoza (1996) Book IV, Prop.64, Correlate. Evil as Spinoza understood it is the incapability for one to be one’s own cause, or otherwise transform non-teleological. The evil mind and body are concepts and acts predicated upon established values, and, as such demonstrate inadequacy. As Spinoza writes, “if the human mind has only adequate ideas [or can be cause of itself, to have transformations beyond measures], it would form no notion of evil.”
461 Ibid, Book IV, Prop.67
462 Deleuze (1992), p.242
463 Ibid, p.252. Deleuze following Spinoza argues that perfection occurs when a body ‘exercise its capacity to be affected,” or otherwise to be maximally transformed by entering new and differently relations. The perfect being or body is that which surpasses its own limits, in thought and act, given the relations it is involved in. Thus, Deleuze, in a lecture (January 20th 1981) on Spinoza’s concept of affect, suggests that even a blind man cannot be said to be deprived because given the potential (puissance) of the relations the blind man can form. Given how these relations – existing and potential – can affect and change him, the blind man may be said to be perfect. See: Transcripts of Deleuze’s lectures on Spinoza, www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html (Accessed: July 28th, 2006)
464 Ibid, p.251
does not deprive itself of the absolute potentiality – the absolute multiplicity – of life. More than wanting to know what life is, it wants to know what life can do, what its body and mind, and their complex differential relations, can do. And ‘can do’ involves actualities and actions, the practice of living, including art-making, writing and reading. And, ‘can do’ is more than what this practice of living should do. This ‘can do’ as concerned with non-denumerable, non-representational potentialities, and experimentation, brings the mind and the body, and their relation, to the limits. The ‘can do’ releases the ‘what’ from a ‘should be’ determination. Experimentation in the practice of living “is above all the love of that which remains unmade in such a making [e.g. writing and art-making].” Such a practice and love is, as philosopher Cesare Casarino calls it, an “amor potentiae”.\(^{465}\) He continues, love is a “being-for”\(^{466}\); it does not advance conquests or subjugate others; it find perfection in the non-telic change outside the dictates of Good and Evil. A “being-for”, like Nature, loves changes rather than the infinitely-identical.

**What “Still Waters” can do**

To love potentiality begins with experimenting and creating texts and artworks that enable thought and body, and their relations, to surpass their limits. As Gatens notes “creation displaces the command function of [normative] language.”\(^{467}\) One can see from Gatens’ notion of creation a Spinozist turn that concerns less what the world should be, but how change is immanent in the world, and that this change “expresses other possible compositions.”\(^{468}\) This continuous variation of the world, and the bodies that constitute the world, moves arguments about what defines Good and Evil beyond their fixed determinations. From the point of view of variations in relations and compositions the concern is less for what the necessarily Good or Evil race, sexual identity, nationhood, ideology or judging position is, but what they can do and be. It is devising a way of understanding what constitutes one’s assumed identity, and what can that identity be becoming. It is a love for the immeasurable potentiality of the nation, the State and the subject and their mutual relations.

\(^{466}\) Ibid.
\(^{467}\) Gatens (2000), p.72
\(^{468}\) Ibid.
Considering what has been said about the love for potentiality and the world and bodies as necessarily changing, it becomes pertinent that when writing on, engaging with, or simply regarding Suzann Victor’s “Still Waters”, it is less a concern for what it has to mean, but what it can do. To engage or write on “Still Waters” is not to reiterate a lament on how depressing the state of affairs is at the SAM, but what “movements” can be generated from there. It goes beyond defining the precise oppositional identity “Still Waters” represent.

When engaging with or writing on “Still Waters” we cultivate a love for what else the compositions of architectural, material, spatial, textual, political, ideological, economical and socio-historical forces can be. And, how this “can be” intervenes with not just Singaporean State ideology but also perceived oppositional identities to state ideology. Here, let us review some of the SAM and “Still Water’s” composing forces, this time, however, focusing on the SAM’s social, ideological forces that Victor and “Still Waters” implicates to embark on creative and productive engagement with the SAM:

As mentioned at the commencement of this half of Chapter Two on “Still Waters”, the building that is the Singapore Art Museum within which “Still Waters” was performed/installed began as a private boys’ school. It was designed by the priest and architect father Charles Nain in the 1840s. In 1852 it became the St. Joseph Institute. It was used as a school until 1987 when the school moved to newer premises. In 1992 the Singapore National Heritage Board (NHB) acquired the building and commenced restoration, and in January 1996 it reopened as the Singapore Art Museum.

Together with other nearby former colonial administrative buildings the art museum forms Singapore’s “Civic District”, which is basically a collection of former colonial administrative buildings the NHB has assembled to showcase Singapore’s “grand colonial charm… which Joseph Conrad and Somerset Maugham wax lyrical.” Each building in this collection has an official plaque next to its entrance designating its status. And, next to this plaque is a map providing the location of the other Civic District buildings. What is curious about this map is the omission of non-Civic District buildings. It is as though these Civic District buildings are, at least graphically and

469 “Boat Quay Bumboat Ride” brochure (Collected from Singapore’s Boat Quay Jetty in December 2004)
representationally on the map, detached from their surroundings. They are isolated to represent the State’s exclusive imagination of national identity. With this decisive omissions, this map functions as what historian Benedict Anderson terms a “map-as-logo.”470 Post-colonial and literary theorist Bill Ashcroft notes that a map’s exclusions demonstrate the power to write out alterities, and exercise “an Eurocentric view of spatiality” which explicitly controls what comes into vision.471

According to Ashcroft, a Eurocentric view of space performs a “re-inscription” of the colonized’s lives and lands.472 This notion of re-inscription is of especial interest in engaging with “Still Waters”. However, following Deleuze-Spinoza’s logic that bodies, institutions and worlds are always varying, hence continually being doubly re-inscribed, one may say the Civic District map planted in front of the SAM can also be doubly re-inscribed. However, by double re-inscription I do not mean literally vandalizing the map. Double re-inscription occurs when the Civic District’s “mapped” geography, including the architectural exteriors and interiors of the buildings, are differently engaged, when the current composition of forces constituting the Civic District and the map are recomposed. The attention to how forces can be differentially related is what Victor gives to the SAM, rather than treating the museum with mere contempt and hatred. The museum becomes a friend, one develops a “being-for” relation with it. Specifically, Victor befriends the upper floor balcony just behind the museum’s façade by attending to this area’s composing forces – what these forces and compositions can do.

What is the balcony’s composing forces? During the restoration in 1992, a series of glass panels were fitted along the upper floor balcony of the building. According to the museum management this glass façade was for the purpose of “air-conditioning and climate control, keeping the environment cool for visitors, and protecting the artefacts at the same time.”473

This glass façade allows the museum to exercise a certain control over its visitors. It prevent a visitor from leaning over the edge of the balcony to catch glimpses of the

472 Ibid
Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Thai guest-workers on the construction sites around the museum. Deprived of other views the visitors are ushered into the art-galleries by an elderly gentleman playing the roles of both a security guard and a museum guide, although he does less of his latter task and is more concerned with making sure people do not loiter in the balcony. On one of my visits to the museum I was wandering around looking for the museum library when I was approached by one of these elderly gentlemen who asked what I was looking for. I told him I was looking for the library, to which he said the library was closed on that particular day, and suggested I revisit the galleries and have a “really good look” at the displays. Following our brief conversation I was escorted back into a gallery holding contemporary Chinese paintings.

The glass façade directing the visitors to the museum’s ‘core’, to where its treasures are held, is one of the ways the museum management maintains how meaning and subjectivity produced at the museum remains without alterity. One only gets to see the sanctioned alterities such as the ‘safe’ abstract paintings and sculptures of cutesy Japanese Manga characters as was the case during the Nokia Singapore Art Show – November 2001 to February 2002 – which theme was “Histories/Identities/Technologies/Spaces: Singapore Art Today” and “cyberart”.474

The glass façade creates within the museum a programmed world that is cut off from external influences. As Victor writes in the exegesis for her Masters project, the glass seals act as “a metaphor for the State’s desire to be impervious to any internal or external threats. The building, reconfigured and assigned a new role as a museum thus imprisons itself and the art within.”475

Spinozist ethology: decomposing and recomposing the museum and Suzann Victor

Despite Victor’s initial laments over the museum’s “political museumization”476 we must not be too quick to say Victor is proposing a better way of museumization or that better kinds of identities and meanings can be produced within the museum. What Victor does, in her performance, is simply to introduce another force – a corporeal force – to the museum’s current orderly composition of socio-historical, political and

476 Anderson (1991), p.182
spatial/architectural forces. This implication of a corporeal force of Victor’s body (and her audiences’ bodies) is not a true opposition to the museum, as in the proposal of another ‘Being’. Rather, this act of implication demonstrates a will to transform the museum’s composition so that other kinds of subjectivities and spatialities, even ones yet to come, may emerge. It is what the museum can do when in relation with Victor’s body that is of interest here. This is why we/‘I’/Victor resist, or simply cannot say what kind of subject or space the museum and ultimately what Singapore must produce.

As discussed earlier on several instances, what defines Victor’s subjectivity when her audiences encounter her performance-installation is yet to be known. What defines her audiences’ subjectivity is yet to be known as well. And, where is the space of the “Still Waters” insofar as it is architecturally inseparable from the balcony balustrade, corridor and glass façade of the museum? Where is Victor’s body when her corporeal twists, contortions and writhes are all affected and transformed by the architectural, material and climatic forces of the SAM’s architecture in conjunction with her plexiglass enclosure? What are her audiences’ bodies when these bodies, too, contort, stoop, and when their eyes are squinted, their knees are bent, and their walking gait are slowed down in order to mimic Victor’s motions within the plexiglass enclosure? As importantly, what is the museum’s body when these contorted torsos are scattered throughout its corridors and balconies? What becomes of the museum’s body in this transforming multiplying Spinozist corpus-ality?

Considering the power of transformation of bodies, and the ‘law’ guaranteeing variation of world and bodies, it is no longer Victor’s body versus the museum’s body. One no longer say ‘I’, as a theorist-critic, is a unified body unaffected and untransformed by Victor and the SAM. It is, once again, not a matter of whether Victor’s body as more corporeal than the museum’s body is thus better or more natural. As Gatens suggests, there is no “rule-based morality” that determines what a body is. Following Deleuze and Spinoza, Gatens argues, an ethics for the relations among bodies lies in the “micropolitics” that occur “in-between” bodies, between two or more bodies as well as within a body. What amounts to the ethical is “the capacities for affecting and being
affected” of each body. Spinozist ethology involves a body’s capacity for change. As Deleuze explicates, “ethology studies the compositions or relations or capacities between different things.” He continues to state, to be ethical becomes,

a question of knowing whether relations (and which ones?) can compound directly to form a new, more ‘extensive; relation, or whether capacities can compound directly to constitute a more ‘intense’ capacity or power. It is no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of socialibilities and communities. How do individuals enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum?

Now we are concerned, not with a relation of point to counterpoint, nor with the selection of a world, but with a symphony of Nature, the composition of a world that is increasingly wide and intense.

Thus, following Deleuze we may say an ethical engagement with the SAM and the Singapore state is not to reiterate their neo-colonial ways of capture and categorization. Rather, it is to find ways to relate to them that enable the emergence of new communities, peoples and spaces that we are yet to know. But these new communities, peoples and spaces are in no way idealized ones; they are expressed as absolute potentiality beyond measure, the infinitizing and transformative form, of governmental and architectural as well as subjectival bodies.

The Spinozist ethological body is not just a flesh body or shell of a fixed mind or soul that dominates it. The Spinozist body is capable of a great many things. It is this infinitely extensifying and intensifying body wherein the mind itself, in thinking of thinking, in moving toward an absolute potentiality, becomes its own cause. The infinitization of the body is one and the same as the infinitization of the mind. The ethological body does away with the dichotomy between the mind/soul as inside and the

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477 Gatens (2000), p.62. cf. Deleuze (1988), p.125. As Deleuze writes, “ethology is first of all the study of the relations of speed and slowness, of the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterizes each thing.” But the capacity for affecting or being affected remains a measure of power rather than of being. A body can be greatly transformed or can greatly affect others, but what it can be and do, that “you do not know beforehand.” “You do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination.”

478 Deleuze (1988), p.126
479 Ibid.
480 Spinoza (1996), Book V, Prop.39. Spinoza writes, “He who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.”
body as outside. Bodies are compositions that are simultaneously decomposing and recomposing and never fixedly representative of one moral position.

An ethics beyond the necessarily Good or Evil is no longer predicated upon the human as first cause, or the human as natural and higher than the artificial built environment. Insofar as the “body can be anything... a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity,” and can be simultaneously decomposed and recomposed of anything the human body is no longer the moral ground from which judgment begins. As Gatens notes, an Spinozist ethology of bodies is not merely to “provide alternative descriptions for a referent which remains unchanged. To think differently is, by definition, to exist differently: one’s power of thinking is inseparable from one’s power of being and vice versa.” Victor’s body is not a body that is opposed to the museum’s body while either body remain unchanged. In their bodies cutting across each other, both are transformed, new kinds of bodies emerge. Thus, whether Victor or the museum’s bodies are ethical bodies really depends on whether transformations can take place.

Victor’s body can no longer be treated as the irrational female body that is opposed to the rational male body of the museum. In fact, philosopher Elizabeth Grosz suggests, following Luce Irigaray, that sexual difference cannot be essentialized. In the cutting across of each other, bodies may indeed have different parts or organs, but what amounts to “sexual difference is that which has yet to take place; it is that which has staked a place in the future.” Sexual difference is not two oppositional or comparative different entities – male and female. Rather, it involves the differentiation of bodies. Sexual difference, for Grosz, goes as far as to move beyond even Utopic visions of sexual equality based on the “plan of the ideal society, or idealized relations between the sexes.”

481 As Deleuze writes, “the interior is only a selected exterior,” an exterior or outside constituted by a myriad of swirling forces. A body and a subject are nothing but the particular composition of forces, which can move at such speed and exert such intensity that it can be beyond the quantifiable machines of capitalism. See: Deleuze (1988), p.125.
483 Gatens (2000), p.62. Moreover, recalling earlier discussions on the unity of mind and body, one cannot think detachedly of bodies in transformation without thinking itself being caught up in change. A reconstitution of the composition of that “which expresses” immanently changes that “which is expressed” and that “which expresses itself” or the event of expression. A reconstitution of what the body is, including the relations among bodies, will change what these bodies express as well as what amounts to the thoughts and concepts the mind can produce.
484 Ibid, p.63
Bodies engaging each other generate new differences. What the differential relations among bodies can manifest as in terms of (sexed) beings remains beyond speculation. What bodies can do is beyond what the humanist mind can fathom.486

a) …becoming-woman…

Considering Grosz’s outline of sexual difference, one may say there is no longer a definitive and general sexed type call “Woman”, which unifies all persons with female biology. As Grosz notes elsewhere, what comes across as the “Woman” is the “effects or consequences of processes of sedimentation, the congealing or coagulation or processes, interrelations, or ‘machines’ of disparate components, functioning in provisional alignment with each other to form a working ensemble.” As such, the “Woman” as assembled and composed of forces is never the diametric opposite of the “Man”.487 As Gatens observes, it is frequently the alignments with certain “pedagogical, social and legal” identities “which prohibits movement.”488

The struggle of two bodies can no longer be predicated upon Man versus Woman. As Grosz elaborates:

Struggles occur not only in group-sized multiplicities, but also in those multiplicities internal to or functional through and across subjects, within subjects, against the control of the ego and the superego, against the processes of oedipalization, which will enable a proliferation of becomings and the production of marginalities of all kinds.489

Struggles are not based on some idealized version of what the sexed being or society should be. As Grosz continues to suggest, these struggles are concrete and actual. What is struggled-for is determined and re-determined in the actual struggles. As such these are “non-representational struggles, struggles without leaders, without hierarchical organizations, without a clear-cut program or blue-print for social change, without definitive goals and ends.” These struggles may evaluate “existing feminist political struggles” and see how else they can be recomposed to express new and different

486 Ibid, p.147
488 Gatens (2000), p.71
Such struggles are concerned with potentialities, and not just the righting of wrongs.

Victor construction of a water-filled glass enclosure through which she crawls cannot be treated as simply an irrational woman’s twisting mad flesh that stands in opposition to the museum’s rational space. To say Victor’s crawl as representing and inserting female sexuality into the museum’s masculine ordered realm is to reduce the bodies of both the female and male genders into immutable entities. Victor is no longer represents the “Woman”. The female body parts moving through the enclosure together with the water, the enclosure itself and the enclosure’s ‘back’ which is the museum’s glass façade express a composition of corporeal, material, spatial and architectural forces that can produce other kinds of bodies. This may be the body of the becoming-woman outside the “Woman” as imagined by the “Man” or the State, but also not the anti-bourgeois-woman the “Man” or State had also imagined. Becoming-woman is as Claire Colebrook notes, never an essential “‘woman’ as the Other,” which occupies a space that is the inverse of patriarchy. Rather, Colebrook suggests, one should “look at the way oppositions between identity and difference have been defined on the model of the male subject,” and then seek ways to decompose and recompose these binaries from within. The models of the male and female subjects as produced within patriarchal systems are to be re-constituted. “Only then can becoming-woman be affirmed as more than the celebration of what is different from man. Only then can difference be thought not as a value within a field of already defined terms but as what goes beyond the image of man as a thinking being who recognizes, defines and orders difference.”

Becoming-woman is not something like a copy of the “Woman” or even establishing or resurrecting the ideal (anti)-feminine form. There cannot be a “becoming-woman art genre” the same way there cannot be definitive Chinese painting or Aboriginal art. Becoming-woman is truly that “which expresses itself”, it is the process of differentiation of both “Man” and “Woman” in which all bodies partake. It is not exclusive to just women. Becoming-woman certainly does not embody “woman-ness”. Using Virginia Woolf’s writing as expressive of a deterritorialization of the “Woman”,

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490 Ibid.
491 Colebrook, Claire (2003) “Introduction” in theory@buffalo (No.8,2000: Deleuze and Feminism). pp.3-9, pp.5-6
Deleuze and Guattari note: “When Virginia Woolf was questioned about a specifically women’s writing, she was appalled at the idea of writing ‘as a woman.’ Rather, writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming.” They continued to note that becoming-woman is also the deterritorialization of “Man”. As such, “even those who pass for the most virile, the most phallocratic, such as Lawrence and Miller, in their turn continually tap into and emit particles that enter the proximity or zone of indiscernibility of women.”

In this regard becoming-woman, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “must first be understood as a function of something: not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relations of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfeminity.” Becoming-woman expresses a body and subjectivity that are yet to come. Becoming-woman is itself a decomposition of the “Woman” and its recomposition into something/one else that is yet to be visualized in sight or in words.

The body of this becoming-woman implicates and expels glass panels, waters, arms, legs, eyes, sunlight, condensation on the glass trough, and the sounds of the passer-bys’ quickening pace as they walk by “Still Waters” quickly in order to avoid eye contact with Victor. My eyes affixed on Victor’s crawling body become part of this becoming-woman. My bent back and squatting legs move as movements of this becoming-woman. What can moving body parts and torsos do when cutting across or cut through by glass panels and humid sunlight? What bodies are formed at the in-between of body parts, glass panels, ripples on still water, humid sunshine and an air-conditioned corridor? And, more importantly, what can these bodies that are being simultaneously decomposed and recomposed do?

492 Deleuze & Guattari (2004), p.304
493 Ibid. Deleuze and Guattari write that it is not just the “Man” who must be becoming-woman, but that the biological female must, too, be becoming-woman in order to be on a line of flight away from the stultified dichotomy of sexes. “We do not mean to say that a creation of this kind [a becoming-woman] is the prerogative of the man, but on the contrary that the woman as a moral entity has to become-woman in order that the man also becomes- or can become-woman. It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. The song of life is often intoned by the driest of women moved by ressentiment.” The notion of ressentiment, or more precisely a move away from ressentiment, will be elaborated with greater detail in Chapter Three.
494 Ibid.
What are these bodies in formation doing to the “Still Waters” viewer? Stealing from their bodies forces that can be recombined as other subjects and perhaps even other spaces? Where am I? Am I a viewer looking at Victor as my Other, or has my body become the amorphous body of this becoming-woman? Where and when is this becoming-woman’s outside, or does it constitutes its own outside in its absolute infinity? Victor’s statement mentioned at the opening of this section, “you were not there”, is quite right. The ‘you’ is no longer a specific ‘I’ that can be designated; the ‘there’ is there without being here. What becomes of Victor the female Singapore subject? What becomes of my body, which eyes are transfixed on Victor’s body and the SAM around her? What is a Singaporean subject becoming in this exchange of corporeal, material, climatic, architectural and conceptual forces?

b) The In-between

“What does it mean to reflect upon a position, a relation, a place related to other places but with no place of its own: the position of the in-between?” Indeed, where and when is the spatio-temporality of the ‘I’ when engaging with “Still Waters”? More importantly when and where is “Still Waters” as an event that continues forward and backwards in time? Where and when is it and the ‘I’ whence caught up in the becoming-woman, becoming-glass seal, becoming-corridor and other becomings? This ‘where and when’ is the spatio-temporality of the “in-between,” which for Grosz is, not unlike the choric space that Plato, in the Timaeus, posed as the condition of all material existence. For Plato, chora is that which, lacking any substance or identity of its own, falls in between the ideal and the material; it is the receptacle or nurse that brings matter into being, without being material; it nurtures the idea into its material form, without being ideal. The position of the in-between lacks a fundamental identity, lacks a form, a givenness, a nature. Yet it facilitates, allows into being, all identities, all matter, all substance. It is itself a strange becoming.

Grosz surmises that the in-between is “a position that is crucial to understanding not only identities, but also that which subtends and undermines them, which makes identities both possible and impossible.”

495 Grosz (2001), p.91
496 Ibid.
497 Ibid.
In this regard, the in-between is not unlike that “which expresses itself” expressive of the event of change. It is in the event of expression that “which expresses” – those bodies – attain their being/becoming. Following Grosz, we may say, it is when intermingling political, cultural, corporeal, architectural, textual, historical and conceptual bodies express an “openness to futurity” and “outstrips the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity” that genuine change and revolution not predicated on pre-established moral models can take place.\footnote{Ibid, p.92} This revolution takes place at the in-between which is a spatio-temporality that contains no one definite people, nation or even place, but is everywhere; an eternally changing space and time. As Grosz elaborates:

“The space of the in-between is that which is not a space, a space without boundaries of its own, which takes on and receives itself, its form, from the outside, which is not its outside (this would imply that it has a form) but whose form is the outside of the identity, not just of an Other (for that would reduce the in-between to the role of object, not of space) but of Others, whose relations of positivity define, by default, the space that is constituted as in-between.”\footnote{Ibid, p.91}

The implication this in-between has for post-colonial projects and struggles is a way of bringing to attention the “excluded middle”\footnote{Ibid, p.93} between the West and the East, colonial and post-colonial. And, not only that, but also the in-between of any post-colonial project or struggle itself. The post-colonial is no longer something based on a given identity. The post-colonial is itself composed by the relations of forces.

It is itself an in-between of bodies, texts and buildings coming together. And these bodies, texts and buildings are themselves the in-betweens produced by the coming together of forces. Resistance to capitalism, imperialism and statism need not proceed from the position of established identities. The in-between resists by resisting identification. As Ashcroft notes:

Transformation is not contrary to resistance, but it reveals that the most effective strategies of post-colonial resistance have not become bogged down in simple opposition or futile binarism, but have taken the dominant discourse and transformed it for purposes of self-empowerment.\footnote{Ashcroft, Bill (2001) \textit{On Post-Colonial Futures}, London & New York: Continuum Books. p.6}
The post-colonial nation and subject, according to literary theorist Cheah Pheng, cannot be “an archaic throwback to traditional forms of community based on the blind ties of blood and kinship but [is] a new form of political community engendered by the spectrality of modern knowledge, techno-mediation, and modern organization.”\textsuperscript{502} The post-colonial nation and subject is formed as the in-between of these modern gems of knowledge, technologies and institutions that are themselves phantoms, which fade as soon as we turn to gaze upon them. The nation and subject themselves are thus ghosts as well – ghosts of the future without determined spatio-temporality. ‘You’/‘I’ are/am not ‘there’. But your/my ghostly double is ‘there’. It is, as Victor and Lingham describe, at “a space between, where you can meet your estranged double and catch up with what you missed.”\textsuperscript{503} Although, ‘you’/‘I’ will be something/one else \textit{then}.

A post-colonial nation, subject and even a struggle has as its ‘core’ that in-between that is coextensive with all the forces and an outside that is vested in the spatio-temporality of absolute potentiality. Coextension is never with another determined form, but always with its own double – a nation, subject and struggle is coextensive with “what it can be”. The in-between is, thus, coextensive with \textit{itself}, its capacities. In this regard the in-between can be considered as detached from its own actuality. It cannot be postulated as something in a fixed future spatio-temporality. Its indefinite spatio-temporality is immanent in its actual form, in the very existence of material things.

The in-between, along with nations and subjects that are in-between, cannot be imagined beforehand. One’s work and life is not a living-up-to the in-between as an ideal form. The in-between as the mutating interstitial space amidst various forces in differential relations expresses an absolute potentiality insofar as its form is formed by the change within and between each line of force. The in-between is the immeasurable space, the space of potentiality, of bodies simultaneously decomposing into their constitutive forces and recomposing as other subjects, places, selves, nations and citizens. In this sense, the in-between is not an ideal space but the transformative space immanent within and between finite bodies, actual corporeal flesh, buildings, texts and artworks. The in-between does not exist as an a priori. Its \textit{existence} is immanent in actual things; it is that


\textsuperscript{503} Victor & Lingham (2002), p.73
yet-to-be-known subjectivity or spatiality that a body, or two or more bodies in
differential relation, can express – their potentiality beyond measure.

Yet, the in-between as this absolute potentiality cannot be destroyed. It is always the
absolute potentiality of any actual actions. As was discussed in chapter one, what
actualizes does not mean potentiality has been fulfilled. It does not mean the in-between
has been spatio-temporally determined and is representable. Insofar as relations between
bodies will vary as Nature varies itself, this in-between as expressive of a great
potentiality subsists. Potential must never be regarded as simply that which must or
should happen. As Agamben notes potential is also the “potential not to pass into
actuality.”504 What is actualized also harbours the “potential not to.” A potential that
cannot be represented or predicted subsists in the “actualized”, yet it is not just the
opposite of what has actualized, but the absolute outside beyond the dualism of what the
“actualized” is and what its opposite should be. It is what it absolutely can be.505

The act of making, or else actuality, expresses that “which expresses itself”, the absolute
potentiality immanent in bodies amidst their mutual differential relations. Actuality
insofar as it differentiates has an interiority characterized by the space of the in-between
that Grosz elaborates as “open[ing] itself up as new.”506 The in-between as a potential
that cannot be represented is thus not something a subject can grasp like an object.
Insofar as it is “formed by [and is immanent in] juxtapositions and experiments”507 that
constitute doing and making, of which the body is implicated and transformed, the mind
cannot be truly detached from the in-between. If we recall earlier discussions on how the
mind or thought transforms together with the body in the radical unity that is their
univocal relation, one may say the mind is, thus, caught up in the in-between’s
amorphousity.

To reflect on the in-between’s position is to find the body being transformed in being
caught up in the in-between’s absolute capacities, as such, the reflecting mind is
adequately in between things, bodies, forces, texts, buildings and cities. What the in-

504 Agamben (1999), p.180
505 Ibid, p.215
506 Grosz (2001), p.94
507 Ibid.
between *can do* is also what the mind/body *can do*. The in-between’s and the mind-body’s capacity for change express immediately “Still Water’s” capacity for change.

**The spatio-temporality of writing “Still Waters”**

We return to a theme brought up at the beginning of this chapter – a text’s capabilities – in order to find new beginnings:

A text written on “Still Waters” will never wholly represent it; there will be no equivalence between them. Rather, the texts – this chapter and Victor’s various essays – and the performance/installation that took place in 1998 gather together to contribute textual, corporeal, theoretical, material, spatial, architectural, philosophical and socio-historical forces to produce an “in-between”. However, this in-between is not their synthesis; it only expresses the eternally differential relations of the forces of those architectural, textual and corporeal bodies. The in-between tells nothing of a resultant subject or space that *must be*.

The complex spatio-temporality of “Still Waters” as it is cut across by the text renders the question of where the text or “Still Waters” is: Is the text *in* “Still Waters”, or is “Still Waters” *in* the text? Or, are they in the spatio-temporality of an in-between vested in absolute potentiality? “Still Waters” no longer reflect our imposition of meaning, nor reflect Victor’s voice. It catches all bodies and thoughts within an in/exteriority without reflection. The glass panels *bear* images, people and spaces yet to come. I catch a glimpse of myself who is not yet articulable. Amidst the shiny surface of the SAM’s glass façade and “Still Water’s” plexiglass walls there are Suzann Victors yet to come, there are museums, artworks and texts yet to be produced. The museum, artworks and texts that we can touch with our fingers along with the museums, artworks and texts that are potentially to be made and potentially to be touched by fingers that are yet to be seen, together, constitute the whole extensive and intensive reality of “Still Waters”. I will conclude this chapter with a quote from Irigaray that may add to “Still Water’s” growing reality:

> The play of mirrors gathers the whole together within its encircling loop. Imposing itself, still without a thinkable origin, it is the cincture/precinct: the ‘world’. Cincture/precinct of mirrors/ice that, in the end, reflects nothing back. Rejoining the no-longer to the not-yet in the constancy of a
furling that brings each one back to the enigma of its Being – that nothing whence it comes and to which it returns, endlessly.508

Suzann Victor is there in a “Still Waters” which form has become more than her performance, her installation and the museum’s corridors. Victor and “Still Waters” persist in between the texts I and/or others wrote, and will write, of “Still Waters”, the museum corridor which is now emptied of Victor’s corporeal body, and Victor’s own texts on “Still Waters”. Following Spinoza’s understanding of the complex body, we may say what Victor’s subjectivity and “Still Water’s” spatio-temporality amidst this growing volume of texts on “Still Waters” is that which we are yet to know.

To conclude this lengthy chapter, one may say it is a ‘can be’ (or ‘can do’) and a will to experiment that propel interiorities – subjects and space – in the changing global Empire, which “Still Waters” and Chong’s “Empire” are part of and add to, to go outside of themselves. This is an outside beyond the counterposing of two subjects and/or spaces, or the inside/outside dualism. This outside is “the transmutability of the inside,” it is when subjects and spaces are becoming someone or something else. The changing Empire in changing goes outside of itself.

509 Grosz (2001), p.66. As Grosz explicates that “it is not as if the outside or the exterior must remain eternally counterposed to an interiority.” The outside is the “virtual condition of the inside.” That is to say it is the potentiality of what an inside, a subject or space, can be becoming. In this sense, the virtual or the outside is not less real, but “equally real.” One can link the outside to what was discussed in Chapter One with regards to Agamben’s notion absolute potentiality as not merely imaginary, but containing the absolute quantity of possibilities that may actualize. The absolute quantity is beyond numeration; it is the transformative quality of all finite bodies, all seemingly static interiorities – subjects and spaces – which makes life in these bodies persevere dynamically. Furthermore, following Foucault Grosz equates the outside with the “unthought”, or that which Cartesian modes of representation cannot fathom. However, the unthought is the very process of thinking itself; the process of forming concepts and ideas, which as processual cannot always be represented. Citing Foucault, Grosz suggests “that man and the unthought are born simultaneously.”
Chapter 3
Mapping a Singapore yet to come

One of the first things encountered in this chapter is a photograph of an entryway into a posh apartment complex in an upper-middle class area of Singapore. The easy and tried-and-proven way to read this photograph is to say that it signifies Singapore’s class division: one may say the ornate iron gates depicted in the photograph are a metaphor for the upper echelons segregating themselves from what in Singapore are called the ‘Heartlanders’, those council housing dwellers perceived to be alienated from the nation’s relentless globalization, capitalization and Westernization. However, such a reading is reductive. We must forget such a reading, as it attends only to what the gates must mean, rather than what the photograph can do. As theorists and critics we can begin to consider what other conceptual, socio-historical, textual, philosophical and visual forces, even ones not commonly found within Singaporean postcolonial studies, can be implicated to enable the mapping of a Singapore yet to come, instead of a Singapore divided along the tiresome lines of bourgeois/Heartlander.

Instead of asking what this photograph means, why not attend to what its capacities to affect and transform conventional modes of thinking and being are? How may we attend to the non-representational forces the photographic medium has? And, how can engaging these non-representational forces, particularly through a practice of writing, forge new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities outside the conventionally sociological? In fact, this chapter is not about elaborating the conventional sociology and psychology embedded in the photograph, but attends to what other connections, forces, thoughts and lines of flight this photograph alone or together with writing can offer. This is what this chapter can do.

Although the chapter’s concerns are for a moving beyond a predictable Singapore, it is by no means an appraisal of bourgeois capitalism. As will be discussed shortly, the bourgeois must be forgotten. But in saying this, the heartlander must also be forgotten. In this chapter I will discuss the importance of forgetting and the necessity of overcoming self-identity in the production of subjects yet to come and the mapping of spaces yet to come, specifically through treating Nietzsche’s stress on the respective processes. This chapter will also hint at how a dynamic life, as understood by Nietzsche, is affirmed by the acts of forgetting and overcoming. I will discuss how the practice of writing can affirm these acts of forgetting and overcoming. And, how writing, in facilitating forgetting and overcoming through experimentation, can be a process of mapping a Singapore yet to come, a Singapore outside the duality of the conventional utopian spatio-temporalities imagined by either end of the nation’s socio-political spectrum.
Lisa-Anne Chong, “Balmoral Park” (C-type print, 2005)
Forgetting the photograph of Balmoral Park

Let me pre-empt some preliminary concerns for this practice of mapping a Singapore yet to come:

To produce subjects and spaces outside the reified imaginations of Singapore we need to first forget those reactive associations we may have of the upper-middles class neighbourhood depicted in the photograph at the beginning of this chapter. It is not incorrect, for those of you who may have some knowledge of Singapore’s general social geography that the neighbourhood depicted is in a suburb call Bukit Timah or ‘District 10’ where most of the nation’s upper-middle and professional class live. It is also the suburb where many members of parliament live. The suburb is peppered with country clubs founded during the colonial era, exclusive single-sex high schools and private houses that are generally worth from $1.5 million Singapore dollars up. The suburb, despite being less than ten minutes drive to downtown Singapore, is very lush, unlike most of the concrete council housing estates, initiated to solve housing shortage problems by the Housing Development Board since the 1960s, that most of Singapore’s lower-middle and lower class ‘heartlanders’ dwell. The particular apartment depicted in the photograph, like many apartment buildings around it, has a colonial name – ‘Balmoral Park’ – that befits its neo-colonial existence.

But, if we are to map a Singapore that is yet to come, we must also forget this neo-colonial name to be indicative of all evils. We must forget those conventional methods of reading a photograph that are only concerned with matching what is depicted visually with the social types and categories orthodox social sciences rely on. Thus, this chapter is not an investigation of what this photograph of Balmoral Park must mean. Instead, I aim to develop new ways to engage with the photograph; specifically, by engaging with some of the photograph’s non-representational forces such as its visual and photo-chemical forces, which I define as the colours and photo-chemical grains present on the photograph’s physical surface. And, amidst these new relations begin to elaborate how artworks do not just represent existing subjects, places, citizens, classes, peoples, suburbs and nations. Artworks, rather, emit forces that affect and transform bodies, subjects and spaces that become connected with it. In turn, those transformed subjects or peoples can go on to produce other works – artworks and texts – that can in their turn affect and
transform other subjects, peoples and spaces. The artwork, from this viewpoint, is productive instead of merely representative. The artwork, along with the bodies, peoples, nations, subjects and spaces it is connected with, affects and transforms, is a map of a Singapore in transformation – a Singapore that is always yet to come. Each subsequent artwork or text produced adds new dimensions and reality to this map. This chapter is not so concerned with explaining what the photograph of Balmoral Park represents architecturally, socially or culturally, but with demonstrating the subsequent processes of adding new dimensions and reality to this map of a Singapore yet to come. It is concerned with implicating conceptual, philosophical and textual forces unfamiliar to post-colonial studies in Singapore in order to increase the intense space of this Singapore yet to come. In this mapping process we strive to write of spaces that a Cartesian imaging and valuing system cannot represent.

Forgetting the bourgeois and the Heartlander

When speaking of a practice concerned with producing perspectives and territories outside both the plush bourgeois suburbs and the idealized post-colonial homelands of the heartlanders, it is to attend to a forgetting of the dualism between bourgeois-as-conservative and the heartlander-as-revolutionary. It is a question of how the familiar and conventional imaginations of Singapore – as either ruled by a neo-conservative bourgeois government or liberated from this government – can be overcome.

Hence, what is of major concern in this chapter is to make a switch from a descriptive to a productive practice: we move from what Singapore must be to how a future Singapore can be produced. Yet, resist denoting what this future Singapore should be, thus, this Singapore is always yet to come. Specifically this productive practice is a concern with what are the potentialities of the existing compositions of forces expressing current subjectivities and spatialities of Singapore; what can these compositions do. To speak of practice is not just to define steps to follow, but, to be in the continual process of producing subjectivities and spatialities as the construction of the text ventures forth – both in writing, rewriting, reading and rereading.

To forget the Singaporean bourgeois is not to define the heartlander as the necessary alternative subject. Rather, it is to engage in the sometimes incessant process of producing/writing an alternative – an alternative subject and space yet to come. Only
then we can avoid the (neo)-colonial trap of telos. Singaporean art theorist and writer Lee Weng-Choy remarked that in post-colonial Singapore there has always been a “seduction of telos.”

Illustrating this seduction, Lee gives the example of ‘New Asia’ which is imagined by the likes of the Singapore government as the finality of Asian “modernization” and “global capitalism,” the economical and social “telos of capitalism.”

Like Lee, cultural theorist Chen Kuan-Hsing notes that with the rise of Asia’s “Four Young Dragons”, which includes Singapore, there emerge among these countries’ citizens a sense that “the twenty-first century is ‘ours’; ‘we’ are finally centred.” They no longer feel that they are at the peripheries of an Imperial centre. Their belief is: “Asia is becoming the centre of the earth and we are at the centre of Asian, so we are the world.” Chen notes that this “mood of triumphalism,” although important for these post-war, post-independent countries to gain a sense of empowerment, nonetheless reiterates the “centred subject” founded within Imperialism and colonization.

Thus, Chen suggests, the whole “self-rediscovers movement” carried out to find the “uncontaminated self and authentic tradition” renders these citizens to be caught up in a “colonial cultural imaginary.”

Lee reminds us that this seduction of telos, however, is not limited to mainstream imagination. This “controlling of the schedule of liberalization” is also practiced by those who oppose the government’s imagination of the proper “national goal that is good for the nation.” Thus, those opposing the government’s national goal construct a schedule of liberalization that inverts the government’s schedule and telos. It follows: If Singapore’s development is accorded to the schedule of liberalization then the Singaporean’s subjectival development will be required to progress from the bourgeois ruled by neo-conservative values to the exact inversion of this bourgeois. In this sense, the inverse schedule of liberalization cannot forget the bourgeois; it relies on the bourgeois as an opposite to produce its own identity. The telos, the final subject and space, of this inverse schedule of liberalization is reactive. In fact, to wish for the end of

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511 Ibid, pp.647-48
513 Ibid, p.15
514 Ibid, p.2
515 Lee (2004), p.646
516 Ibid, p.648
the suburban Singaporean bourgeois and at the same time to wish for the triumph of the council flats’ heartlander is a reactive act. It reduces both social types to beings incapable of change – the bourgeois as unquestionably complicit with capitalist-globalist values and the heartlander as the essential local Singaporean. Spatially, this would also treat Singapore as a cleanly dichotomized nation rather than a space that expresses the fluid boundaries of the changing Empire discussed in the previous chapter.

Before further mappings of a Singapore and Singaporeans yet to come, it will be worthwhile to look at how the term “reactive” is used in this chapter. We will discuss how reactivity is associated with the inability to forget social dualities, and as such, a reactive person imagines the future as always the opposite (or better) of the sad current state of affairs. Following elaborations of this reactive mentality, we will address how, in contrast to reactivity, active thinking and doing enable a forgetfulness that may enable the emergence of subjects and spaces yet to come, as well as a map yet to come. Hence, active thinking and doing holds the potentiality of a future beyond the better-future/terrible-present duality.

Besides addressing reactive and active mentality I will also attend to other terms used in this chapter – particularly philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy’s “someone” and Friedrich Nietzsche’s understanding of “affirmation”, “chance” and the “Overman” – that aid in producing a Singapore yet to come beyond the binarized realm of the global-capitalist bourgeois suburb and its inverse territory made up of heartlander council flats. Additionally, I will connect these various enabling terms back to the concern raised at the beginning of this chapter regarding the production of perspectives and territories, subjectivities and spatialities yet to come.

Reactivity according to Nietzsche
The term reactive used in this thesis generally borrows from Nietzsche’s usage. “Reactive forces” for Nietzsche are forces that “limit action” and the possibility for change. Gilles Deleuze in his book Nietzsche and Philosophy elaborates “to react” is to hinder the “active forces [needed to] produce a burst of creativity” necessary for the
production of new kinds of subjects and spaces.\textsuperscript{517} One can suggest the reactive person is, thus, one who is hindered by his/her situation. This is to say that although the reactive person laments and complains about his/her situation, s/he accepts it. S/he only sees the situation in which s/he is destined to be caught within as caused by oppressors. The only path s/he conceives as liberatory from this oppressive situation is to assume the role of the oppressor. In other words, liberation for the reactive person functions upon inversion of situations rather than creating new situations that bore new kinds of subjectivities and spatialities. S/he is still caught within the vicious cycle of oppositional identity politics.

To be reactive is for Nietzsche to adopt a “slave morality” that disregards creative processes in favour of that which is sure and steadfast. As Nietzsche writes in \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}, “slave morality from the outset says No to what is ‘outside’, what is ‘different’, what is ‘not itself’.” And the slave conceives of this ability to say ‘No’ as his/her only “creative deed.”\textsuperscript{518} The slave mistakes resentment and hatred for creativity. S/he mistakes his/her opposition to everything around him/her as his/her power. The slave, as Nietzsche continues to elaborate, is basically one who views the people, things and spaces around him, including various forms of institutions, as a “hostile external world.”\textsuperscript{519}

The slave who too concerned with saying ‘No’ to everything misses the chance to see what other kinds of relations s/he can form with other people, things, spaces and institutions. The slave is not concerned with the production of potentials. Or, as Deleuze following Nietzsche observes: “The slave only conceives of power as the object of a recognition, the content of a representation, the stake in a competition, and therefore makes it depend, at the end of a fight, on a simple attribution of established values.”\textsuperscript{520} Everything that is not “him/herself” s/he “has conceived [as] ‘the evil enemy’, ‘the evil one’” who is opposed to him/herself as fundamentally and morally good.\textsuperscript{521}

\textsuperscript{519} Ibid, “On the Genealogy of Morals (‘1st Essay, §10’)”. p.473. The slave’s existence as Nietzsche notes needs this hostile external world in which it can react against. The slave’s life is framed as a series of reactions.
\textsuperscript{520} Deleuze (1986), p.10
Reading a photograph actively and productively

So how can we engage with a photograph, like that of Balmoral Park, outside of a slave mentality that depreciates what a photograph can do, and make it only represent an oppressive society?

Let us first postulate how a slave as a reactive viewer may read a photograph: A slave-approach to the Balmoral Park photograph would be an attempt not to create new values and meanings from it, but to simply relegate what is depicted in the photograph as an example of certain established values. The equating of the ornate iron gates with the neo-colonialism and petty bourgeois class attests to such reactive and slavish protests.

The reactive reader of this photograph looks for what post-colonial theorist Zahid Chaudhary in his essay *Phantasmagoric Aesthetics; Colonial Violence and the Management of Perception* calls “familiar markers of civilization.”\(^{522}\) The ornate iron gates for the reactive reader represent such familiar markers. When such markers are identified the reactive reader does not attend to what the visuality – the actual visual forces present – of such a marker can do. Instead, the marker functions as a signifier for a definitive sociological signified. The pseudo Baroque curves and the fictitious code-of-arms on the gate must indicate the Singaporean bourgeois’ colonial hang-over. The gates must trap these bourgeoisies within an ivory tower from where they rule, like their British colonial masters, without knowing what the rest of Singapore, the heartlanders, are like. And, for the reactive reader, following post-colonial theorist Arjun Appadurai’s equating of photography with the governmentality of “bureaucratic forces,”\(^{523}\) the photograph of Balmoral Park in depicting ornate iron gates becomes a chart where “what is right for the good of the nation,” in this case colonial values, is enforced.\(^{524}\) For Appadurai photographs are “classificatory” and “taxonomic” tools for the colonial masters as well as the post-independence leaders who have inherited the colonial mindset.\(^{525}\) But, we need to ask, is the continuation to read a photograph in terms of classificatory and taxonomic signifiers and signifieds not a reiteration of the colonial gaze?

\(^{524}\) Ibid, p.4
\(^{525}\) Ibid.
The point I make here is not to dismiss Chaudhary and Appadurai’s arguments as invalid. Their writings on photography are ingenious in exposing the racist and Eurocentric perspectives present in colonial and early post-independence era portrait and landscape photography. However, as I will suggest shortly this photograph of Balmoral Park has a visual composition that is more complex than those colonial portrait and landscape prints. This photograph can be engaged as more than a static figure against a staged background or an Arcadianized South-East Asian landscape.

I propose, rather, to ask, besides recognizing a photograph’s familiar markers of civilization and classified taxonomies, what other possible readings can be performed or produced. This is especially true for this Balmoral Park photograph which is not as ‘explicit’ in reifying Singapore as those colonial and early post-colonial era photos of traditional Malay fishing villages or ethnically-dressed dancers marching during Singapore’s National Day. This photograph with its ‘missing’ foreground has a certain abstract composition that can resist a (neo)-colonial scenographic arrangement of people, objects and background. The missing foreground ‘bars’ its viewer from entering its pictorial space. The missing foreground, instead, leads us to become aware of the rather large photographic-chemical grains on its physical surface, especially in the areas where these grains become shadows, like the shadows at the top end of the stuccoed columns and roof. It is the visual, and photo-chemical, forces of these photo-chemical grains that can enable a new kind of space not predicated upon the classified and dichotomized territories of the bourgeois and the heartlander to emerge. It is through these grains that we may begin to engage with the photograph in ways not constrained by established sociological research methods. It is to ask if an alternative to Balmoral Park can be other than the heartlander’s council flats; what other readings of the photograph can there be besides reactive and representational ones?

To produce other readings of a photograph is not to suggest there are other established meanings we can attach to it. Rather, it is to devise other approaches, relations and engagements with photography. It is to consider different ways of framing the photographic practice. It is to consider not what the photograph represents but what it can do.
This devising of new ways to frame photography can be elaborated by Elizabeth Grosz’s recent essay, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. In this essay she makes a suggestion for the reconsideration of the nature of “framing”. In Grosz’s opinion, the frame – and by extension this includes a photograph – can be more than a two-dimensional area delineated by four edges. The frame can be dynamic, created by the conflux of many forces. Produced by a dynamic act of framing, it is capable of being continually and simultaneously deframed and reframed. The radicalized framing of the photograph enables the photograph to make “the transitional passage from the frame to the screen.”

No longer is it bound by the conceptual force of Cartesian spatial rationality, but instead opens up to a surface, or screen, full of forces in shifting relations.

A screen is not a fixed arrangement of objects, people and spaces within a Cartesian perspectival box. Much like a cinematic or computer screen it is dynamic. It preserves within itself the capacity to be more than an immutable present. We must, however, not assume the photograph functions exactly like the cinematic screen. The two screens are similar only in the sense that they express change; the cinematic screen literally changes, whilst the photographic screen changes in terms of the different relations it can come into given the different forces that are brought to it. The screen functions, for Grosz, “as a plane for virtual [or potential] projection” of spaces and subjects yet to come. In an explanation similar to Grosz’s, architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter explains that “images”, even those “literal photographic ones” can be treated as “a constellation of elements and fragments projected onto a surface,” a changing surface of forces. One attends to what is on the surface, for instance the visual forces of colours, pigments or lines making up the image. What can these forces do? And, what other forces can they connect with to form new relations expressing new subjects and spaces? How can these forces together in their multitude and multiplicity produce maps of spaces yet to be known? How can these forces in the process of their differential relations immanently express maps that are themselves yet to be mapped, maps that are themselves spaces in the process of formation? Thus, Nietzsche encourages us to attend to the “surface” of

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527 Ibid.

things, to not seek deeper meanings if these deeper meanings are pre-established ones circulating societies built upon assumed higher morals:

One should have more respect for the bashfulness with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties… What is required… is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words… to be superficial – out of profundity.\textsuperscript{529}

Like Nietzsche’s adoration of the surface and suggestion that appearance is profound, Kwinter’s surface (or in Grosz’s terminology the screen) is explained as “one of an unlimited complication.”\textsuperscript{530} Kwinter’s surface offers more than what those deeper pre-established meanings from conventional sociology can muster. At the surface of change, any subjectival or socio-political position and defined locality can become complicated and explicated as something, someone and someplace else. There is, as Kwinter elaborates, “an ensemble, or a site of a potential transformation of states” where nothing will be “infinitely-the-same.”\textsuperscript{531}

According to Grosz, the photograph as a dynamic screen gains “a movement of growing dematerialization, a movement where the image becomes less and less dependent on a milieu and location.” She continues, amidst this movement a “complex and enfolded second-order constitution of the frame” emerges. In this second-order constitution of the frame, the photograph is “no longer for the mixed purpose of usefulness and pleasure, but for the generation (and never the reproduction or representation) of sensations.”\textsuperscript{532} What Grosz means by the generation of sensation here is the capacity for the artwork in its simultaneous deframing and reframing to be emitting forces that can affect and transform us, thus generating sensations in us that cannot quite be classified as emotions or feelings like sadness or happiness. In this sense, the artwork no longer serves as a composition of familiar markers of civilization. It no longer just provides us with the pleasure of being able to reconcile it with given social identities and values.

Grosz’s understanding of sensation follows Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of an artwork as less a representational object and more “a bloc of sensation, that is to say, a

\textsuperscript{530} Kwinter (2001), p.116
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid, p.115
\textsuperscript{532} Grosz (2005), p.21
compound of percepts and affects.” However, it is not just an artwork that is a compound of percepts and affects; these percepts and affects emerge in-between the artwork and those who engage with it. The generation of sensation – percepts and affects – never solely belong to us or the artwork, but emerge in-between, in the event of an encounter. As Deleuze and Guattari elaborate, “the aim of art is to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of the perceiving subject,” and “to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another,” from one emotion to another within a subject. These are percepts and affects, or sensations, not belonging to proper subjects. They are outside the autonomous Cartesian Being. These are sensations that, in fact, constitute the matter of subjects who are yet to come. Deleuze and Guattari continue, these are sensations not of the flesh, but of the “nonhuman forces of the cosmos” that attest to “man’s nonhuman becomings.” To engage an artwork is to found the emergence of sensations that can transform us in the event of the encounter.

For Grosz, and Deleuze and Guattari, encountering an artwork is to evaluate new relations that can be produced, to allow subjective lived-experiences to become something else, to enable personal perceptions and affections to become strange sensations that come back to change us. Encountering an artwork is to allow the “transforming [of] the lived body into an unliveable power, an unleashed force that transforms the body along with the world” that is perpetually changing. This is also why Deleuze and Guattari suggest art’s function is not just to represent established

534 Ibid. p.167
535 Ibid, p.183. For Deleuze and Guattari what amounts to the “flesh” is “the compound of sensation,” those affective non-representational forces that makes the work of art and the event of its engagement. And, “sensations are not perceptions referring to an object (reference)... Sensation refers only to its material.” Thus for Deleuze and Guattari sensation is never a pre-established adjective, describing happiness or some other emotion, added-to a material, an artwork. The sensation is “of the material itself.” Thus, there is “the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone.” Inasmuch as “it is difficult to say where in fact the material ends and the sensation begins,” they are indiscernible. “So long as the material lasts, the sensation enjoys an eternity in those very moments,” and the material will lasts insofar it is in turn made of the forces of the world that will indefinitely add and subtract from its composition. Bodies and thoughts all cut across each other and are indistinct from this material-sensation. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that engaging an artwork is to be at “the point that the body disappears into the plain colour or becomes part of the wall or, conversely, the plain colour buckles and whirls around in the body’s zone of indiscernibility.” See also: Deleuze & Guattari (1994), p.166
536 Grosz (2005), p.24
concepts or record the artist’s memories. Instead, art’s function is “fabulation.” Art brings us onto a surface of change.

Grosz writes:

Art is not only the movement of territorialization or the formation of subjects, it is also the converse movement, that of deterritorialization, of cutting through territories, breaking up systems of enclosure and performance, traversing territory in order to retouch chaos, enabling something mad, asystematic, something of the chaotic outside to reassert and restore itself in and through the body, in works and events that impact [and transform] the body.  

Art undoes the perceptions and affections we hold as unified beings; it transforms one’s mind-body, it problematizes the mind as a regulator of the flesh-body. As seen in Chapter Two, art challenges what the body is.

This transformation of bodies and minds, subjects and spaces into that which is yet to be determined, is the movement a photograph as a screen is capable of producing. Following Grosz, we may say the photograph as a screen attains the capacity “of moving beyond, and pressing against the [conventional] frame,” pressing for coextension with an outside beyond representation. All subjects and spaces become ONE with “the fluctuating, self-differentiating structure of the universe itself in which nothing is self-identical.” Once we consider the photograph as a screen to be one with this Outside where nothing is self-identical, then, what it can do and express will be more than the photographer’s intentions or the socio-political and cultural meanings and values we as sociologized viewers may imbue in it. At the Outside peoples and places beyond the signified-signifier binary emerge.

a) A space between Balmoral Park and the photo-chemical grains
The emergence of these differentiating and non self-identical subjects and spaces begins by attending to a photograph’s non-representational aspects. For instance, one asks what kind of space is produced between the shadows around the top of the columns depicted and the large photo-chemical grains that chemically-materially make up these shadows.

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537 Deleuze & Guattari (1994), p.168
538 Grosz (2005), pp.21-22
539 Ibid, p.22
540 Ibid.
What kind of space is this, that is in-between a photographic representation of shadows and the photograph’s actual physical surface? This is an in-between space in which Cartesian perspective cannot contain or even begin to represent. It is a space outside representation. This is a space forged as the interface of representational, visual and photo-chemical forces. Although acknowledged as the interface or in-between of these forces, we cannot specify its precise locality and temporality. Does it belong to the apartment block depicted? Does it belong to the photo-chemical stains? Does it belong solely to the viewer?

More importantly, what can this space do? How does it connect up to and reconstitute the established representations of socio-political, geographical, spatial and cultural realms of bourgeois Singapore?

I give another example. This the interstitial, supra-dimensional space in-between the actual plush Balmoral Park and the glossy film of photosensitive chemicals that have burnt shapes and colours on the photograph’s actual surface. In-between the social-historical, political, geographical, ideological and architectural forces of the actual Balmoral Park and the visual forces of the photo-chemical grains on the photograph’s surface there is another space constituted by these forces. Yet, while it is constituted by all these forces, it, by itself, has no proper spatio-temporal determinations. What sorts of subjects emerge from this indeterminate spatio-temporality? What sorts of perspectives are produced within this space by these subjects that we are yet to know? How can such a space be framed? More importantly, what new conceptions of framing must be made in order to engage with such a space? In many ways, the kind of space emerging here may be one beyond the subjectival lived-experience and the imaginable acts of the lived-body, beyond the imaginable geographies of the bourgeois neighbourhoods categorized by conventional sociology. This is a space where the visual forces gathered at the actual photographic surface are blasted into and combined with the particular composition of social-historical, ideological, representational, geographical and political forces that make up the conventional perception of Balmoral Park. In this monstrous swirl of forces we, as theorists and art critics, perhaps cartographers, are forced engage with Balmoral Park’s supra-dimensional territory in new ways, forging a new approach to mapping.
As art theorist Hal Foster argues, when considering a photograph’s capacities through an attention to non-representation:

The mastery usually afforded to the subject by (photographic) representation – a certain subject position, an empowered point of view – that unproblematically designates both the viewer’s perspective as well as the imagined inhabitant inside the photograph is withdrawn.\(^{541}\)

It is to attend not just to a photograph’s material aspects (such as those photo-chemical grains), but also how these material and non-representational aspects fold back to affect and transform the photograph’s function to represent. Following Foster, one may say the photo-chemical grains’ visual force, in attributing to this interstitial space, “belie the epistemological definition of the photograph as a fragment of ‘spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority’.” This interstitial space disrupts the photograph’s “conventional status as document, pure denotation.”\(^{542}\) The photograph when treated as more than a signifier, as Foster further remarks, becomes capable of producing a “message without a code.”\(^{543}\) It produces something significant but not necessarily decodeable. It suggests spaces and times, and even peoples that we are yet to know.

This incommensurable space that is a confluence of the composing forces of Balmoral Park and the photo-chemical grains’ visual force becomes a line of flight out of the reified image of bourgeois Singapore. This line of flight may slow down but it never stops. We may get moments of clarity but these moments are to pass. This space expresses the bourgeois and his/her suburb’s non-telic futurity. It is a futurity no longer seen as the better opposite of the current situation predicated upon the nation’s dichotomized geography. It is at this in-between space that the bourgeois’ fixed milieu and locality is trespassed, and it is here where we can begin to love the Balmoral Park photograph for the absolute quantity of territories it is becoming and the peoples we are yet to know emerging from it. It is in this act of love, a love for potentialities that a process of mapping begins. We may begin to map a map not based on reactive hatred or pity; we map a map of capacities and potentialities; we map a process of simultaneous deframing and reframing. We record groups of forces so that these forces can be picked

\(\text{\textsuperscript{541}}\) Foster, Hal (1985) *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle: Bay Press. p.70
\(\text{\textsuperscript{542}}\) Ibid, p.71
\(\text{\textsuperscript{543}}\) Ibid.
up one day to be used in other ways, to be thrown into other groupings of forces so that other groupings may follow.

Forgetting pity and slave morality
The production of subjects and spaces not predicated upon established social-types or places cannot begin by pitying or tolerating weak and reactive beings, and resenting socio-politico-geographical divisions. Here, we treat Nietzsche’s understanding of pity as an aid to elaborate why pity and resentment are not conducive to the emergence of new subjectivities and spatialities. Here, we are to forget laments of lost homelands-heartlands and crushed identities.

Pity is for Nietzsche the cancelling of the desire to live life as full of potential and as capable of entering new relations and new forming subjectivities and spatialities. The pitiful person reacts against everything and insists that this is the way things should be. Nietzsche in Thus Spoke Zarathustra understands the pitiful person as one who wants, and claims, to know everything. The pitiful person leads a life that is fixed; s/he rights wrongs by defaulting to established models of good morality or the good life. S/he takes pity in the weak and sick, seeing them as oppressed, and hoping their situation can be inverted. To illustrate the pitiful man’s pursuance of the right Being, Nietzsche recounts Zarathustra’s meeting of the “ugliest man” during his journeys. The ugliest man is one who “loved himself” and simultaneously “despised himself.” The ugliest man despised himself because he aspires to, but cannot attain, “a kind of height,” particularly the height and position of the “higher man” who envisions himself as humanity’s eventuality.544

The ugliest man for Nietzsche is also one who hopes to be pitied. The ugliest man said to Zarathustra that the world had persecuted him for his righting of wrongs. He saw Zarathustra as his “last refuge;” and he wants Zarathustra to pity him and be sympathetic to his cause. He cried for Zarathustra to understand and protect him; he cried for Zarathustra not to leave him.545 Initially Zarathustra pitied him, however, he came to his

545 Ibid, p.377
senses; he sensed how the ugliest man is “full of hidden shame” of himself. He is ashamed of saying he is no longer what he was; he fears a dynamic life because dynamism forgoes stable identity, perspective, locality and morality. The ugliest man is one who cannot forget, and thus cannot forge anything new. Zarathustra wants no part of this lament for bygone histories, he must journey on.

Deleuze, following Nietzsche, summarizes pity as this: “What is pity? It is this tolerance for states of life close to zero.” Life is static, subjectivities and spatialities are immutable. “Pity is the love of life, but of the weak, sick, reactive life. It is militant and announces the final victory of the poor, the suffering, the powerless and the small.” S/he who demands pity and who gives pity to others plays the role of the “divine” who despises the mortal life’s dynamicity. Thus, Deleuze asks:

*Who* feels pity? Precisely those who can only tolerate life when it is reactive, those who need this life and this triumph [of established moral values], those who build their temples on the marshy ground of such a life. Those who hate everything which is active in life, those who use life to deny and deprecate life, to oppose it to itself.

Pity depreciates life’s potentiality and dynamism. To feel pity is to feel that oneself or another person has been let down by society, denied the moral good life promised by divine beings. Following cultural theorist Martin Jay, we may suggest, to feel pity is “the suppression of heterogeneity in the name of identity.”

Deleuze notes that while the ugliest and pitiful man makes claims about his hatred for authority; he wants to assume these high positions. The pitiful and “reactive man puts God to death” because he “puts himself in God’s place.” Deleuze cleverly remarks, “Why would man have killed God, if not to take his still warm seat?” “What God is has not changed.” He is “always the divine, the supreme Being, a machine for manufacturing the slave.” Although he makes himself as a new God, nothing new is produced; he merely plays a role in an established schema of social identities. Deleuze continues, “God becomes Man, Man becomes God. But who is Man? He is always the

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546 Ibid, p.379
547 Deleuze (1986), p.149
548 Deleuze (1986), pp.149-50
550 Deleuze (1986), p.150
551 Ibid, p.151
reactive being, the representative, the subject of a weak and depreciated life. What is God? He is always the supreme Being as the means of depreciating life,\(^{552}\) the means of maintaining the opposites of Good and Evil.

As Deleuze observes, to be God, to maintain the opposition of Good and Evil, to correct Evil by enforcing the Good is to enact a form of “justice derived from a reactive feeling, from deeply felt offence, a spirit of revenge or justiciary reaction.”\(^{553}\) As such, to see the Balmoral Park photograph as symbolic of nothing but Singapore’s capitalist-bourgeois ills that need to be corrected is to forgo the potentiality of subjectivities and spatialities outside the bourgeois/heartlander binary. Pitying the heartlander as being silenced and marginalized by Westernization and capitalism not only reiterates dualistic mechanisms of modern Western thought, but also silences the heartlander’s potentiality for differentiation. The pitied heartlander has been represented by Singaporean filmmakers such as Eric Khoo in films like “12 Storeys” (1997) and “Mee Pok Man” (1995). Khoo’s films deal with loss of humanity amidst Singapore’s relentless urbanization and commercialization. “Mee Pok Man”, for instance, portrays a noodle-seller struggling and ultimately failing to make sense of Singapore’s quick pace change. Here, “Mee Pok Man” reiterates the irreconcilable divide between the autonomous individual with the cruel city. But, the film forgoes the potentiality of subjectivities and spatialities yet to come by exactly not forgetting, and even submitting to, acculturated dualities. In doing so, the film silences the heartlander’s heterogeneity. In not forgetting one becomes a slave to dualism and its minion, representation.

*On the Genealogy of Morals* expresses Nietzsche’s understanding of slave morality as “ressentiment” towards others. “Slave morality immediately says No to what comes from outside, to what is different, to what is not oneself.” And, the slave mistakes this insistence to say No as its “creative deed” whereas saying No, and resenting others, really does nothing outside merely enacting the reversal of values and roles. The slave mistakes this reversal of values and positions as “revenge” and finality. For the slave everything that happens to him/her is always the fault of others. It is always others who need to change. S/he never questions what can him/herself do, or what potentials can be forged. Nietzsche concludes, “this reversal of value-positing glance – this necessary

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\(^{552}\) Ibid, p.158  
\(^{553}\) Ibid, p.135
direction outward instead of back to oneself – is of the nature of *ressentiment*: to come into being, slave morality requires... a counterworld; physiologically speaking, it requires external stimuli in order to react at all. Its action is at bottom always a reaction." The slave requires high moral values espousing the necessity of self-centredness to proceed in anything s/he does.

Thus, Nietzsche urges us to forget these limiting reactive forces. Instead, take forgetting as “active oblivion.”

There could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is a form of robust health. Forgetting is no mere *vis inertiæ* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression, that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it as does the thousandfold process involved in physical nourishment – so-called ‘incorporation’.

Nietzsche summarizes, forgetting is “a plastic, regenerative and curative force.”

However, Nietzsche is careful not to present forgetting as the diametrical opposite of remembering and reacting. To forget, as Deleuze following Nietzsche observes, is “to work with reactive forces,” to be able to incorporate and reconstitute even reactive and sad memories. This is why to forget is not to expel all the pasts, but to evaluate what these pasts *can be*. What are their potentials? In the context of Singapore, it is to not ask what an artwork of its many public housing blocks or private condominiums must mean, but what this documentation of certain pasts and current state of affairs, can do. For instance, how can the forces that compose the actual photograph unsettle the conventional spatial imaginations of Singapore, hence, forcing to think spaces and places that are yet to come. Philosopher Jos De Mul, following Nietzsche, notes that the function of art is not just to represent, but to offer the conditions so that “the metaphoric transformation of reality” may occur. Art is capable of offering up non-representational forces like the photo-chemical grains’ visual forces that can fold back

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558 Deleuze (1986), p.113
into those settled compositions of forces espousing stable social-political representations. These non-representational forces can recompose existing socio-political, geographical and territorial compositions into subjects and spaces that we are yet to know. This is what Deleuze and Nietzsche mean by “to work with reactive forces”.

It is not to only champion the alienated heartlander. But, also to embrace the various forces that make up the Singaporean bourgeois intelligentsia, many of whom live in and around Balmoral Park, in the suburb of Bukit Timah, which is a twenty minutes drive to the National University of Singapore. It is, particularly, to embrace some of the conceptual, textual and philosophical forces that make up this bourgeois intelligentsia – such as the forces emitting from their beloved texts by Nietzsche, Deleuze, Nancy, Camus, Adorno, Derrida, Benjamin among other Western thinkers. To map a Singapore yet to come is not always a case of representing the street-vendor selling noodles, the skateboarders in Orchard Road or the ‘aunties’ and ‘uncles’ sipping Kopi-O (black coffee) at the al-fresco coffee shops found on the ground floor of many council flats. One can implicate the bourgeois intelligentsia’s conceptual forces to this mapping process. This is especially relevant if we are to consider Singapore as dynamic and changing, always implicating different forces from around the globe, from the West, from the Internet. Singapore is more than a collection of established localisms. Rather than treating these Western thinkers that the bourgeois intelligentsia read as the new colonial masters of Singapore’s literary, philosophical and geographical scenes, it is to find ways to form new relations with them in order to invent new subjects and spaces.

Do not hate the West as colonizers, for the forces emitting from some of Western texts can be harnessed to enable change. As Nietzsche suggests, those who are not slaves are capable of seeking out their opposites not in order to exact revenge and hate, but in order to see what good can be born out of renewed situations:

To be unable to take one’s own enemies, accidents, and misdeeds seriously for long – that is the sign of strong and rich natures… Such a man simply shakes off with one shrug much vermin that would have buried itself deep in others; here alone is it also possible – assuming that it is possible at all on earth – that there be real “love of one’s enemies.” How much respect has a noble [and free] person for his enemies! And such respect is already a bridge to love. After all, he demands his enemy for himself, as his
distinction; he can stand no enemy but one in whom there is nothing to be despised and much to be honoured.\textsuperscript{560}

In today’s context the noble and free person cannot be cut off from the ever changing world fostered by capitalism, the Internet and international travel. S/he cannot deprive him/herself of the potentiality for self-differentiation. S/he becomes, in the process of change, outside the duality of good-private individual and bad-public city. Here, we may further understanding how we can love one’s enemies through philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s consideration of the etymology of the term ‘private’. Nancy notes that the etymology of the word ‘private’ does not just indicate restful solitude. ‘Private’ can mean “to place apart from to distance from,” and in the act of this separation “privation” emerges.\textsuperscript{561} Privation is, thus, the cutting off of one from others, even the forgoing of potential change. Privation makes for the finitude and staticity that depreciate life. Nancy continues, “private” as depravation “would drag the totality of being into a nullity of which one cannot see how it [dynamic life] could even take place.” Here, the ‘private’ becomes “its own privation.” It constitutes a “being-deprived”.\textsuperscript{562} The deprived being does not know the world. S/he feels nothing of the globalized world’s dynamicity and the potentialities that are emerging.

In contrast, Nancy proposes that existence is already “exposed… [It] is already outside. It is being-outside.”\textsuperscript{563} It is outside of the insistence that the private individual must be the necessary final victor emerging unchanged in a struggle against the bad public city and government. The being-outside that Nancy proposes as an alternative to the private/public duality is not unlike Nietzsche’s proposal to love one’s enemies. One’s enemies are more than hated monsters. They can be decomposed; their forces can be harvested and combined with one’s own, hence spurring one’s own heterogenetic transformation. A person and his/her enemies can all be decomposed and recomposed into someone or something else, even subjects yet to come. This is one’s enemies’ potentiality and positive aspect.

\textsuperscript{560} Nietzsche (2000), “On the Genealogy of Morals (‘1\textsuperscript{st} Essay, §10’)”. p.475
\textsuperscript{562} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{563} Ibid, p.33
A readiness to forget the private/public duality and a readiness to enjoy life’s potentialities beyond prediction and representation constitute a noble and free person. As Nietzsche writes, “the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself.” The noble person takes risks and chances that opens him/herself up to change, whereas the resentful slave awaits the command of others espousing higher morals to begin his/her journey. For Nietzsche, the noble person looks to a future’s rich expansive and intensive depth. This is a future where its topographies and inhabitants yet to be known. The noble person finds new and different ways to act, to experiment, to write, to see and to walk that enable the coming of such topographies and peoples. S/he seeks lands that are not yet promised. S/he map lands that are yet to exist. Thus Nietzsche through his philosophical personae Zarathustra says:

O my brothers, I dedicate and direct you to a new nobility: you shall become procreators and cultivators and sowers of the future – verily, not to a nobility that you might buy like shopkeepers and with shopkeepers’ gold: for whatever has its price has little value.

Not whence you come shall henceforth constitute your honour, but whither you are going! Your will and your foot which has a will to go over and beyond yourselves – that shall constitute your new honour.

Verily, not that you have served a prince – what do princes matter now? – or that you became a bulwark for what stands that it might stand more firmly.

Not that your tribe has become courtly at court and that you have learned, like a flamingo, to stand for long hours in colourful costume in shallow ponds – for the ability to stand is meritorious among courtiers; and all courtiers believe that blessedness after death must comprise permission to sit.

Nor that a spirit which they call holy led your ancestors into promised lands, which I do not praise – for where the worst of all trees grew, the cross, that land deserves no praise. And verily, wherever this ‘Holy Spirit’ led his knights, on all such crusades goose aids goat in leading the way, and the contrary and crude sailed foremost.

O my brothers, your nobility should not look backward but ahead! Exiles shall you be from all father- and forefather-lands! Your children’s land shall you love: this love shall be your new nobility – the undiscovered land in the most distant sea. For that I bid your sails search and search.

In your children you shall make up for being the children of your fathers: thus shall you redeem all that is past. This new tablet I place over you. 565

**Voyaging to shoreless shores**

Where and when is the future Singapore? Can it be predicted? Or, do the acts of art-making and writing contribute ever more visual, material, textual and conceptual forces that simultaneously complicate and intensify this future Singapore?

Perhaps we can take Nietzsche-Zarathustra’s ‘advice’ to understand how a truly new place and new perspective, and a new form of life, cannot be predicated upon a promised land of one’s ancestors or a messiah, for promised lands are constructed from the reactive forces emitted from the ancestors and messiahs hatred. A promised land is a *terra inversus*; its difference to the current state of affairs is based on oppositions and reactive memories.

Instead of craving a return to a promised “homeland”, one should instead, as Nietzsche suggests, look ahead, and exile oneself from the land of the old. Embark on a journey in which the shores to come are yet to be mapped. As the philosopher, poet and novelist Georges Bataille writes in his book, or collection of notes, *On Nietzsche*:

> We still don’t know where we’ll have to go leaving this ancient territory. But this soil, having communicated a strength to us, now aimlessly pushes us toward shoreless climes that remain as yet unexploited and undiscovered; we have no choice, and we’re forced to be conquerors because we no longer have a country we want to remain in. A secret confidence impels us, confidence stronger than our negations. Our very strength doesn’t allow to us stay on this ancient soil; we’ll take a chance, start risking ourselves; the world’s still full of treasures, and it’s better to perish than become weak and vicious. Our very rigour drives us to high seas where all suns until now have set; we know that there’s a new world... 566

Forget the Singapore dispensed with global capitalism’s ills; forget the hatred for the bourgeois and his/her private apartment, but also forget the council flats’ heartlander. Instead, ask what other territories and topographies are yet to be made? Look ahead like Zarathustra and Bataille. Seek a soil that is yet to be forged from the seismic currents of this globalizing changing Empire of ours. Evaluate how the globalist forces composing

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Singapore can be engaged to form different compositions that can express new perspectives and spaces. Experiment with twisting words, concepts and textual perspectives in order to make provisional maps that will lead us not to telos but deliver us to embark on journeys to shoreless climes yet to be seen by the moralist telescope.

Chance, affirmation, experimentation and the Nietzschean dice throw

A readiness to forget duality and embrace potentialities is a readiness to take risks, and give over to chance. However, to take a chance is not to go forth with pre-conceptions of what the result should be. Rather, it is to really take a chance, to be open to those potentialities beyond measure.

To take a chance or risk is, as Deleuze, following Nietzsche, suggests, to be “affirming the whole of chance.” What does it mean to take on the whole of chance? Simply, to take on the whole of chance is not to be concerned with calculating the odds. The whole of chance expresses a potentiality beyond any determined sets of odds. It is not what will result with chance that matters, but chance itself that should be embraced.

To illustrate this taking on of the whole of chance, Nietzsche evokes the event of the dice throw. To play the dice throw is to not be concerned with what combinations the dice can come up with, or which side of the dice faces up. “It is rather a question of a throw of the dice… and of throwing as the only rule… the imperative is to throw.” As Deleuze observes, the act of the throw of the dice, the willingness to take a chance is a “combining all the parts of chance.” The absolute combination of all parts or probabilities, however, is not a mathematical process that synthesizes these probabilities into a formula. The absolute combination “is not subject to the persistence of the same hypothesis, nor to the identity of a constant rule” that attempts calculates the results or gives meaning to a seemingly arbitrary nature of the results. The absolute combination is “the unity of multiplicity,” which expresses a sum of potentialities beyond numerical calculations, divisions or serialization. Deleuze remarks, “the throw of the dice affirms

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568 As seen with regards to the quote two pages earlier, Nietzsche spoke only of the need to produce one’s “children’s land” without stating what one’s children *must be or what they should do*
569 Deleuze (1994), p.198
570 Deleuze (1986), p.26
571 Deleuze (1994), p.198
572 Deleuze (1986), p.26
chance every time; each throw of the dice affirms the whole of chance each time.”\textsuperscript{573} In other words the innumerable potentialities of what can happen are in each throw. Although to embrace this throw and “to make chance an object of affirmation” is “the most difficult thing,” it is only the imperative act of throwing alone that enables new thoughts, subjectivities and spaces to emerge.\textsuperscript{574} Only then can established notions of nation, race, citizenship and geography be surpassed.

Affirming the dice-throw and the act of taking a chance as more important than the results is for Deleuze and Nietzsche to play the “divine game” that is different from the “human game.”\textsuperscript{575} For Deleuze, “human games,”

presuppose[s] pre-existing categorical rules. Second, these rules serve to determine the probabilities – in other words, the winning and losing ‘hypotheses’. Third, these games never affirm the whole of chance: on the contrary, they fragment it and, for each case, subtract or remove the consequences of the throw from chance, since they assign this or that loss or gain as though it were necessarily tied to a given hypothesis.\textsuperscript{576}

Thus Deleuze states:

Human games proceed by sedentary distributions: in effect, the prior categorical rule here plays the invariant role of the Same and enjoys a metaphysical or moral necessity; as such, it subsumes opposing hypotheses by establishing a corresponding series of numerically distinct turns or throws which are supposed to effect a distribution among them; the outcomes or results of these throws are distributed according to their consequences following a hypothetical necessity – in other words, according to the hypothesis carried out. This is sedentary distribution, in which the fixed sharing out of a distributed occurs in accordance with a proportion fixed by rules.\textsuperscript{577}

The human game, with its reliance on hypotheses that carry out sedentary and static results, is played with slave morality, where certain results must mean Good whereas others Evil. To play the human game, for Deleuze, is to be in “an apprenticeship in morality,” dedicated “to separate out the modes of human existence, under the constant rule of the existence of a God who is never put in question.”\textsuperscript{578} One may say in this

\textsuperscript{573} Deleuze (1994), p.198
\textsuperscript{574} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{575} Ibid, p.283
\textsuperscript{576} Ibid, p.282
\textsuperscript{577} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{578} Ibid.
separating out of modes of existence there is neglect of the modes of existence yet to come; this is a reactive forgetting of what the ‘present’ modes can do – their potentialities.

The divine game is different. “First, there is no pre-existent rule, since the game includes its own rules.” The act of throwing in the divine game is not submitted to the constant rule probabilizing the odds. Each throw enjoys the creation of its own game and will to potentialities. It is because of this attending to potentialities that each throw, insofar as “the whole of chance is affirmed” becomes “a necessarily winning throw.” The throw “wins by embracing all possible combinations and rules.”579 This is a win beyond loss and gain. Thus, in the divine game,

nothing is exempt from the game: consequences are not subtracted from chance by connecting them with a hypothetical necessity which would tie them to a determined fragment; on the contrary, they are adequate to the whole of chance, which retains and subdivides all possible consequences.580

The divine game affirms an absolute potentiality, all the outcomes, even ones innumerable and non-representational. Each throw in a divine game is as Deleuze writes, “an aleatory point is displaced through all the points of the dice, as though one time for all times.”581 As with the throw that takes on the whole of chance, we must take a chance to invest faith in those photo-chemical grains and the visual forces they emit, travel with these forces to that interstitial space between the photograph’s surface and the plush Balmoral Park where it is all spatio-temporalities. At this interstitial space we do not know what subjects with what sorts of eyes we are becoming, we do not know what grounds is to be stood upon, if there is a ground. But, here is where a Singapore yet to come begins.

The divine throw that affirms the potentiality of change, as Deleuze puts it, is a “nomadic rather than sedentary distribution.” It is affirms even distributions yet to come.582 The divine game is “the game of the problematic and the imperative [that] has replaced that

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579 Ibid, p.116
580 Ibid, p.283
581 Ibid.
582 Ibid.
of the hypothetical and the categorical.”

The divine game has no definitive outcomes that represent necessary Good or Evil. To play it is to give over to chance, to what can be, to go beyond the reactive forces that construct the Good/Evil duality. To take a chance is to affirm a difference more profound than the demarcated roles afforded by identity politics. Thus, Nietzsche-Zarathustra says this of the divine game or the taking on of the whole of chance: “Over all the things stand the heaven Accident, the heaven Innocence, the heaven Chance, the heaven Prankishness.”

He continues:

‘By Chance’ – that is the most ancient nobility of the world, and this I restored to all things: I delivered them from their bondage under Purpose. This freedom and heavenly cheer I have placed over all things like an azure bell when I taught that over them and through them no ‘eternal will’ wills. This prankish folly I have put in place of that will when I taught: ‘In everything one thing is impossible: rationality.’

[...]

O heaven over me, pure and high! That is what your purity is to me now, that there is no eternal spider or spider web of reason that you are to me a dance floor for divine accidents, that you are to me a divine table for divine dice and dice players.

For Nietzsche-Zarathustra heaven or God is no longer an overlord controlling the schedule of the world until judgment day. Nietzsche’s God no longer expresses divine purposes as par Christian theology. Rather, God expresses a divinity beyond the hierarchy imposed by the morals of the church and society – God expresses potentiality and change. He is potentiality and change. As Deleuze remarks, Nietzsche’s God is “the universe [that] has no purpose” The only divine purpose of this God possesses, and his divine purpose is immanent in humans too, is to give to and embrace chance. In this divine universe there is no “end to hope for any more than it has causes to be known.”

To love a potentiality is the only “certainty necessary to play well” this divine game.

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583 Ibid, p.284
585 Ibid.
586 Here, one may say Nietzsche’s God expressed as chance and potentiality is not unlike Spinoza’s God as absolute potentiality, which we had discussed in Chapters One and Two. Both philosophers’ God is no longer a transcendental being, but is the immanent event of change expressing absolute potentiality of the universe’s creatures.
587 Deleuze (1986), p.27
588 Ibid, p.27
a) Affirmation, chance and the necessity of transvaluation

For Nietzsche as for Deleuze writing after him, this innumerable, non-representable potentiality, this whole of chance, is what must be affirmed. But, what does it mean to affirm? What is the “method” or way to affirmation?

To affirm, for Deleuze and Nietzsche, is most importantly to be “transmuting values, converting negation [and hatred] into affirmation.” Deleuze notes, “what transmutation or transvaluation means for Nietzsche… [is] not a change of values, but a change in the element from which the value of values derives.” In other words, transvaluation is not merely substitute one set of values for another but to produce new sets of valuing system(s). This is all the more why for new subjectivities and spatialities to emerge we do not begin with elevating the slave, like the alienated heartlander, to the status of the new master; this would merely be a role-value reversal. Indeed Nietzsche suggests transvaluation entails “that all those values that depend on the old element are to be destroyed.” Transvaluation “would therefore be a completed nihilism,” where one annihilate not just what is one’s opposite but also oneself.

Affirmation is the affirming of this total nihilism that undoes both the self and its Other. To embrace the necessity of this total nihilism is the imperative act for the creation of new values expressing new subjects and spaces. The simultaneous annihilation of established value systems and the creation of new ones cannot stop; as soon as a new value system emerges it is annihilated, transformed into something else. This double process is what gives to the form of not just a Singapore yet to come, but the mapping process of such a yet-nation.

Thus, “Nietzsche’s distinction between the creation of new values and the recognition of established values should not be understood in a historically relative manner, as though the established values were new in their time and the new values simply needed time to become established.” What is truly new about new values is that they are constantly differentiating. Nietzschean transvaluation,

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589 Ibid, p.170
590 Ibid, p.172
591 Ibid.
592 Deleuze (1994), p.136
concerns a difference which is both formal and in kind. The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new, just as the established was always established from the outset... What becomes established with the new is precisely not the new. For the new – in other words, difference [or differentiation] – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable terra incognita.\footnote{593}

In transvaluation the only model is the annihilation of models; its modus operandus is a will to chance, change and experimentation, which, in turn, is a will to the coming of a spatio-temporality yet to be representable.

Affirming the power of beginning and beginning again, the ‘I’, too begins and begins again. The self must be annihilated too. And, insofar this annihilation of the self occurs, “the trophy of pure recognition and representation” afforded to the Cartesian ‘I’ is, too, becoming-something else.\footnote{594} The ‘I’ can no longer be one who recognizes its own act of affirmation and self-differentiation as if from a third person position. As philosopher Brian Massumi, suggesting a Spinozist turn of the self, writes:

> When a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation. The range of variations it can be implicated in is not present in any given movement, much less in any position it passes through. In motion, a body is an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary.\footnote{595}

Following Massumi’s postulation on the body and self, we may say, to affirm is to give oneself over to chance, to will the coming of potentialities that emerge from one’s varying relations with other bodies. The ‘I’ does not know from a higher overarching perspective. To affirm, to create new values or else “creation takes the place of knowledge itself.”\footnote{596} One affirms movements. The changing ‘I’ does not know where its position is in this process of incessant creative movement that is Natural life itself.

To affirm is to become noble. Thus, Zarathustra praises those who affirm the necessity of life’s incessant transformation:

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\footnote{593} Ibid.  
\footnote{594} Ibid.  
\footnote{596} Deleuze (1986), p.173
What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.

I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.\textsuperscript{597}

The affirmative person is one who can will his/her own transformation rather than submit to pre-established and slavish models of life. To affirm or else to transvaluate what constitutes the “I” or self and to be capable of transforming is for Nietzsche not the ceasing of life. Rather, the process of affirmation without negation constitutes a joy. He elaborates, it is, specifically, “the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity.” This is a “joy which includes even the joy in destroying,” for it is in annihilating the pre-conceptions of the self that a self that begins and begins again emerges.\textsuperscript{598} Most importantly this is a joy beyond Good and Evil, beyond the mundane conception of joy predicated against its negative, sorrow. It is beyond the form of joy based on the denigration and suffering of others while preserving oneself as self-identical.

b) Experimentation and the joy of active destruction

If transvaluation is the ‘method’ or way to a joyful affirmation of life, what then is the actual practice needed to demonstrate this method? What can us as creative theorists do within the practice writing to cultivate a joyful and complete destruction of values, or else transvaluation itself?

There are no fixed ‘steps’ to follow in the actual practical destruction of values, but, in saying this we are not to subscribe to a “will to nothingness.” A will to nothingness, for Deleuze and Nietzsche, expresses passivity and a surrendering to fate.\textsuperscript{599} A will to nothingness is exemplified in the post-modernist slave who resigns to failure and naively celebrates the worldwide spread of Starbucks and Renzo Piano-styled.

The actual practice of joyful destruction requires real action – acts of writing and art-making – but its form must be the form of experimentation. Only experimentation warrants what Deleuze and Nietzsche understand as “active destruction” that enables the

\textsuperscript{597} Nietzsche (1976) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Book I, ‘Zarathustra’s Prologue’, §4)”. p.127
\textsuperscript{599} Deleuze (1986), p.174
emergence of subjects and spaces yet to come. Experimentations move away from “negative critique” and operate in what Massumi calls a “productivist” mode, which signals “a shift to affirmative methods: techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagrely) to reality.” In other words, the practice of joyful destruction is affirmative and productive because it does not merely detach itself to represent the world, but is engaged in finding ways to inject gatherings of forces to unsettle the world, to spur the world toward its strange futurity-reality.

As Massumi continues to suggest, active destruction begins by “a setting of systems into motion. The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system.” He further suggests that to write is to become interdisciplinary where concepts from one branch of the humanities are brought “more or less violently” to another branch. And, sometimes it requires the active and deliberate mis-reading of these concepts, so these concepts “will start to deviate under the force” of another discipline. But when this happens, Massumi reminds us to “let it”. It is from this deviation or mutation that “a whole new system of connections starts to form.” This complex changing web of concepts – broken, decomposed and mistreated – offers to one’s reader “a very special gift: a headache.” But for Massumi this headache is less a problem but a catalyst “where their [one’s reader’s] experimentation begins.” Only “then the openness of the system will spread.” Only then writing does more than represent and begins to add to the intensity and complexity of this world’s reality – creating the world anew.

From the viewpoint of continually creating the world anew we have forgotten the laments of an alienating neo-colonial Singapore, and the yearnings for bygone identities. However, to affirm the process of active destruction is, as Deleuze, following Nietzsche, understands, still to evaluate, insofar as evaluation is an activity of knowing how to move away from established models and to really begin the assembling of new compositions of forces. This is in order to know we are not taking those already-categorized models of alterity as figures of salvation, hence replaying the same old roles albeit in different garbs. Hence Deleuze writes, “to evaluate,” as to be really experimenting, is to advance

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600 Ibid.
602 Ibid, p.18
603 Ibid, pp.18-19
from the perspective of a will which enjoys its own difference in life instead of suffering the pains of the opposition to this life that it has itself inspired. To affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives. To affirm is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, to create new values which are those of life, which make life light and active. There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do.\footnote{Deleuze (1986), p.185}

Hence we see the inseparability of active destruction, affirmation and creation; inasmuch they can be considered one activity. This is why Deleuze can say that to affirm is not to affirm something extraneous, but to affirm affirmation-as-joyful-destruction-as-differentiation-and-as-creation. There is only “affirming affirmation itself.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Affirmation is the will to differentiation, and differentiation in its perpetuity is what gives dynamism to life and the world; affirmation in this sense extends and intensifies life. We affirm life’s difference from itself rather than destroy life’s differentiations by retreating to a position that states that life is a post-modernist-Schopenhäuerian void.\footnote{Ibid.}

Active nihilism, as Nietzsche suggests, is the “perish[ing] of the present;” hence, the transformation of the current state of affairs and creation of the conditions for the emergence of new subjects and spaces. Such is the joy and immense intensity within active destruction’s creative powers. Such is a moment when the “soul is overfull,”\footnote{Nietzsche (1976) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Book I, ‘Zarathustra’s Prologue’, §4)”. p.128} and capable of thinking and doing things a myopic individual is yet to know.

In this active perishment of the current state of affairs, in taking the forces that are abound and recomposing them, the nihilist becomes, as philosopher Gianni Vattimo says, an “active nihilist” whose concerns are creation and invention instead of categorization for the sake of generalizability. The active nihilist has the “capacity to grasp, accept, even augment the problematic and terrible aspects of life,” and that reactive and passive

\footnote{Thus for Nietzsche, the term nihilism or destruction can have two appropriations: First, nihilism can tend toward nothingness (the post-modernist’s declaration of the death of meaning is an instance). Second, nihilism can be an active destruction or creation as we have just discussed. The former nihilist sees the return of the same, and no possibility for futures beyond the already quantified categories of futures.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
acceptance of fate and nothingness, “into a sort of experimental hubris.” 609 To have this will to experiment directed not just toward others but oneself is, as Vattimo notes, “essential for the experimental capacity of the Overman” to emerge. 610 As per Vattimo, we may say it is essential to go beyond passive nihilism if any real change is sought.

The active nihilist, for Vattimo, is like an avant-garde artist, who resists all transcendental modes of being. 611 What s/he seeks, although it is not the current state of affairs, is what the current state of affairs can be becoming – the potentiality within. And to do so, s/he knows it is imperative that s/he must become a playful artist who refuses destiny, for destiny only tempts one back to stable identical roles. 612 S/he must actively dismantle the current state of affairs to begin to found new strange peoples and territories.

The art-critic can become this playful artist. As Nietzsche suggests, to engage with an artwork is not to proceed from the position of the ‘spectator’ who only attempts to sympathize with the artist’s position. Instead, Nietzsche proposes that to engage with artworks is to already take up the position of the artist. It is to engage with the immediate reality of the forces that compose the artwork and its significations, and to really engage with these forces so as to evaluate what can these forces do otherwise without relying on models. Only doing what the artist does – a practice of gathering forces to bring forth new perspectives and territories – can “une promesse de bonheur” emerge. 613 As Deleuze, following Nietzsche, writes, art “does not heal, calm, sublimate or pay off, it does not ‘suspend’ desire, instinct or will. On the contrary, art is a ‘stimulant of the will to power’, ‘something that excites willing’.” 614 Art, properly engaged, can stimulate active destruction-creation. Art, as Deleuze notes, is a block of sensations, and “sensation


610 Ibid, p.140

611 Ibid, pp.94-95. As Vattimo writes, the avant-garde artist “not only laughs at all the superior types invented by the tradition of Western morality; he laughs even harder at the kind of superior experience known in this tradition as aesthetic experience and conceived as a way of attaining (illusorily and by means of a surrogate) a domain of pure meaning detached from that of real life.”

612 Ibid. p.94


614 Deleuze (1986), p.102
is vibration,” which unsettles the calm mind-body of both the artist and his/her viewer.\textsuperscript{615} Once vibrated by the surge of an artwork’s emitted forces, we are whacked out of orbit and swung into new lines of flight, new becomings.

What is \textit{une promesse du bonheur} that Nietzsche speaks of? Philosopher Keith Ansell Pearson suggests that this kind of joy is one founded in the will to experiment, the will to chance and change. Because this joy is founded within (and across) change, it is one beyond dualities. Henceforth, this joy is rightfully “no longer joy in certainty” promised by sets of established values or models, but the joy “in uncertainty.”\textsuperscript{616} It is a joy that embraces the monstrosities and risks that emerge from experimentation. It is joy nonetheless, for it is “continually creative,” and continually capable of breaking free from the slave-moralizing “cause and effect” sequence. As Pearson further suggests, this joy is found no longer in the “will to preservation but power” and capacities.\textsuperscript{617} This is joy not just \textit{of} change, but immanent only in the event of change. There is joy not in a meaningless world but joy in the continual re-invention of meaning. It is taking on the whole of chance, and a will to the absolute “incorporation of truth and knowledge” beyond categories that incites joy.\textsuperscript{618}

To take on the whole of chance is to actively destroy those models conventionally relied upon for sources of stable identity. This is why, as discussed earlier in this chapter, we, as art-critics and theorists, must be playful artists who are capable of bringing to an artwork a dynamic framing process. One develops continually-renewable processes of engaging with an artwork rather than inscribing a model meaning to it. This is the double process of active destruction and creation. An artwork, as Félix Guattari suggests, is more than an object paired up with a fixed concept or value. Art-criticism is also the “artistry” of an engagement that as a process has a “power of emergence” expressive of


\textsuperscript{617} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{618} Ibid. As Pearson notes, when Nietzsche asks a question or enquires about what something/one can be, he does not demand an answer. Instead, the whole process of answering questions, for Nietzsche becomes an open-ended experiment when more and more questions can be produced; thus, sustaining the continual reinvention of meaning. As Pearson elaborates, the “truth” for Nietzsche is never universal validity but “a set of practices of truthfulness, such as doubt, suspicion, critical distance, subjecting all things to scrutiny.” In other words, “truth” is vested in a process of active destruction. (p.7)
yet-quantified subjects and spaces. One finds in creative criticism or theorization the artistry of active destruction. "The work of art, for those who use it," as Guattari surmises, "is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself." The text written of an artwork should consider its own composing forces and how these forces can vibrate and transform those who eventually engage with it.

To write as an active nihilist-cartographer is to experiment and attend to the spatiotemporalities of subjects and spaces yet to come. Only then can the text inspire joyfulness and une promesse du bonheur. Let us here revisit Spinoza’s notion of joy to further explicate Nietzsche’s une promesse du bonheur. Spinoza writing three centuries before Nietzsche, too, made a connection between power to change and happiness. Spinoza writes that the virtue of Man is his power to change and thus to go beyond the bondage of high morals. He writes in The Ethics: "By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is, virtue, insofar as it is related to man [and women], is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone." In other words, a human’s power for transformation can only be of his/her own nature and not predicable upon established models of subjectivity. For Spinoza there are no virtues that can be conceived as prior to or higher than the virtue of that which affirms Man-as-becoming.

There can be no joy higher than the joy founded in being virtuous (in the Spinozist sense), for there are no other nature(s) by which Man can be truer to his own being and becoming. Considering the interconnectedness of being virtuous and joy Spinoza writes: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself."

Here, one sees how Spinoza’s connection of blessedness with virtue as the capacity to change is not unlike Nietzsche’s connection between joy and the transvaluation and transformation of self. Both philosophers conceived of a joy beyond the conventional

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621 Ibid, Book IV, Prop.22
622 Ibid, Book V, Prop.42
duality of joy/sorrow. They conceived of a joy that is proper to the dynamism of life and not moral categories.\footnote{Deleuze (1986), p.62.}

Indeed, as Deleuze notes, “it is difficult to deny a Spinozist inspiration” in Nietzsche’s work.\footnote{Ibid.} Spinoza’s question of “what can a body do?” in \textit{The Ethics} as less a concern for what a body should be and the body’s absolute potentiality is not at all dissimilar to Nietzsche’s will to power as an increment in the capacity (\textit{pouvoir}) to be affected and thus be radically transformed. Both philosophers conceive of power as not some abstract overpowering force, but as immanent to the event of bodies in differential relations. For both philosophers “the capacity for being affected is not necessarily a passivity but an affectivity,” this is the capacity to change beyond the established moral and subjectival categories. The will to power is, thus for Nietzsche as he described in \textit{The Will to Power}, “the primitive affective form.”\footnote{Ibid.}

To cultivate Nietzschean or Spinozist joy is to forget the dichotomised territories and subjectivities of the Balmoral Park bourgeois and the Singaporean heartlander. Be joyful that there are spatio-temporalities yet to come in which we are yet to know. It is an embracement of these future space and times yet to come that makes life and the soul become overfull. As Deleuze, quoting Foucault’s \textit{Les mots et les choses}, surmises:

\begin{quote}
There is being only because there is life[…] The experience of life is thus posited as the most general law of beings[…] but this ontology discloses not so much what gives beings their foundation as what bears them for an instant towards a precarious form.\footnote{Deleuze, Gilles (1988) \textit{Foucault} (Trans. S. Hand), London & New York: Continuum Books. p.129 \textit{cf.} Foucault, Michel (1966) \textit{Les mots et les choses}, Paris: Gallimard. p.291. Hand’s translation here.}
\end{quote}

\textbf{The Nietzschean Overman: “someone” beyond figure and ground}

The reinvention or creation of the subject entails a reinvention of the approach to the ‘I’.

In the process of reinvention one does not detachedly view oneself as a graspable Other (in transformation). This detached gaze must be actively destructed. The ‘I’ in the process of reinvention will know from which position s/he can see or speak. One may say s/he does not know what the ground that s/he stands upon is.
Forgoing the stability and division of figure or subject against ground is necessary in the constant reinvention of the ‘I’ and for the ‘I’ to overcome itself. One must forget what we have traditionally learnt about space altogether. One must, as Nietzsche through his conceptual personae Zarathustra, ask oneself “how to climb on your own head” for “how else would you want to climb upward?” One must stand on one’s own head and move beyond one’s own comfortable standpoint. “One must learn to look away from oneself in order to see much.” The “peak” to which one must ascend is the overcoming of one’s inherited Cartesianism. This peak is one beyond the three dimensional space that houses the ‘I’. This is the “ultimate peak” which is higher than any higher moral principles.627 Such is a peak that even defies height. Its greatness is of intension not extension.

The ultimate peak beyond figure and ground, self and Other, is that of the Overman. What the Overman thinks, acts and sees is, for Deleuze, derived from “a new way of feeling” proper to transvaluation.628 Nothing the Overman sees, acts or thinks can be affixed within a permanent frame; there are only movements. The Overman is the active nihilist-artist who not only makes the simultaneous motions of unframing and reframing immediate in his/her work, his/her life expresses such a movement. So, the Overman-artist-theorist no longer writes as if s/he was never there in the chaos of the artwork. What his/her text “can offer art is not a theory of art.” But, what writing and art “share in common – their rootedness in chaos, their capacity to ride the waves of a vibratory universe without direction or purpose, in short, their capacity to enlarge the universe by enabling its potential to be otherwise.”629

The Overman is his/her own continual active destruction. The Overman becomes an event of change. As an event of change the Overman’s greatest virtue according to Nietzsche-Zarathustra is his “will to go under,” or to destroy oneself in order to recreate.630 Or, as Bataille, on his contemplation of the connection between the Overman and the will to power, notes, the Overman is the virtuous existence of humanity: “To

628 Deleuze (1986), p.163
629 Grosz (2005), p.25
create what surpasses us… that’s the real meaning of free will!" The will to power, or, the will to chance and change, places one “already on the path of the Overman.”

Differentiation is the essence of the Overman’s soul; differentiation is his/her interiority, but this is always an inside that overcomes its own constitution to become its own outside. There is nothing deep about the Overman. His/her body-mind is the event of change itself and stretched across all spatio-temporalities, extending even to a spatio-temporality yet to come. His/her body-mind becomes this “all spatio-temporality” itself.

Jean-Luc Nancy in an essay titled Someone conceives of a notion of the “someone”, which can be helpful in elaborating the Overman’s existence and potentialities. As Nancy suggests, “the some one is not the ‘subject’ in its metaphysical position. The metaphysical position is indeed always that of a supposition, in one or another of its forms: as a supposed substantial support for determinations and qualities, as a point of presence supposed to be the source of representations.” The “someone” does not represent itself as an ‘I’. Yet, this “someone” can also “be the power of its own suspension and overcoming.” As such this “someone” expresses itself, in its variance, as a “fiction” capable of re-fictioning.

This “someone” overcomes itself as a figure against ground; it wills itself to become one with the groundless field of relations – the event of change. As Nancy further elaborates:

Someone, a certain someone, anyone at all, each and every one, but also this and none other, of whom one says, ‘she (or he) is really someone!’ Someone inimitable and unique, someone identical to all, an outline, a configuration, a point without dimensions, a limit, (not) a step. The imprint of (the absence of) a step – the vestige – that no essence other the fugitive existence of its singularity configures.

[…]

What then is someone? This is precisely what one cannot ask – even though this is the whole question – because if there is someone, there has already been a response to the question (s/he has already responded). But there is someone, there are numerous someones, indeed, there is nothing else. They are unto the world. This is what ‘makes’ up the world and ‘makes sense.’

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632 Deleuze (1986), p.174
633 Nancy (1993), p.69
Someone, some ones, the numerous one, that is to say the plural singular ‘is’ the response that answers the question of the ‘sense of the world.’ Unified with the “sense of the world” the “someone” is no longer a figure against a static world as its ground. It is also not the person who grants the world its meaning. The “someone” in its multiplicity is the world; it becomes the essence and material of the world, insofar as it is a body-mind capable of combining with other bodies and minds to form new compositions that, in their immeasurable totality, express the world in its continual transformation.

a) Someone that is not just spatial but is space

Nancy’s “someone”, or Nietzsche’s Overman, is not just a spatial being but is coextensive with the changing space of the universe. When speaking of this “someone” it is to also speak of space itself, and vice versa. For Nancy “the cosmic opening of space” is also the opening up of this “someone” in its overcoming of Cartesian figure/ground. The oneness of figure and ground, in the context of Singapore, allows us to begin to consider how it is not just an autonomous individual who stands against the city as an oppressive ground that simultaneously grounds and alienates him/her. To speak of a Nancyian “someone” of Singapore or space of Singapore is to speak of the event where corporeal-bodies, the city, the international flow of informations, other corporeal-bodies, texts, suburbs and concepts are in a process of mutual engagement, affecting and transforming each other and themselves. Indeed, as Nancy notes, the world is “this mass or mosaic comprising myriads of celestial bodies, their galaxies, and whirling systems, deflagrations and conflagrations that propagate themselves with the sluggishness of lightning, the almost immobile speed of movements that do not so much traverse space as open it and space it.” This is a world that expresses itself as extensive with its future spatio-temporalities from which those subjects yet to come remain indistinct. This is the richness of a world beyond the Cartesian figure and ground that Nancy elaborates as:

A universe in expansion and/or implosion, a network of attractors and negative masses, a spatial texture of spaces that are fleeing, curved back, invaginated, or exogastrulated, fractal catastrophes, signals with neither message nor destination, a universe of which unity is nothing but unicity.

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634 Ibid, p.70
635 Ibid, p.37
636 Ibid. In this totality, proposed by Nancy, that is constituted by the differential relations of masses of bodies, galaxies and systems, one can certainly sense a Spinozist notion of the body.
[unicité] open, distended, distanced, diffracted, slowed down, differed, and deferred within itself. What is coming... is a universe that is unique insofar as it is open to nothing but its own distance from nothing, within nothing, its ‘something’ having been thrown there from nowhere to nowhere, infinitely defying all themes and schemes of ‘creation’ – all representations of production, engenderment, or mere orgination – and nonetheless not a mere, self-posed, sempiternal, inert mass but, rather, a coming more extended and distended than the coming of all origins, a coming always pre-vented and pre-venting, devoid of providence and yet not deprived of sense: *a coming that is itself the sense (in all senses) of its starting.*”

A world having this kind of ‘sense’, which *has* a “someone” that is enfolded and univocal (in *unicité*) with it, becomes “the contour of the unlimited, the contour of the absolute limit that nothing else delimits.” This contourless contour is the form of this world univocal with the “someone”. One with this changing world Nancy says this “someone” sees with “the eye of the coming,” seeing visions that are yet to be imaged. His movement and vision is as such:

Instead of securing himself an empire in space, this man, touching the limit (of space and himself), retraverses time, crosses the spatial distances of time all the way back to the origin, in order to stray, adrift, like a foetus floating in the placenta of the galaxies, a great eye open on disoriented space, on time without direction, and on us, the spectators of this pensive eye, which, however, is nearly devoid of gaze, absorbing all of space, even as it breathes and distends itself within itself.

The “someone” is yet to have eyes. Nonetheless, his/her eyes yet to come see *all* of the world that is yet to come. These eyes are everywhere and nowhere. There is no body, no eye socket or eye balls, in Cartesian form, which can house a vision of *all* of the world. The only way that such a vision can be *housed* is if the “someone’s” body is ONE with the non-Cartesian topographies of the world in transformation, a world yet to come. The “someone” forgets what land laid before for all the lands his/her event-like body has passed is already another territory, and where s/he is going and becoming is that s/he is yet to know or see. His/her eyes and the eyes of a coming people are the same set of

637 Ibid, pp.37-38
638 Ibid, p.39
639 Ibid, p.38
640 Nietzsche (1976) “Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Book II, ‘The Wanderer’),” p.265. As Nietzsche suggested, to be on the “way to greatness” that is the path of the Overman, one must have the greatest courage to efface the path behind oneself. This is say there must no longer be a trace back to any point of origin that can act as an overarching view that schedules and predicts the outcome of one’s wandering or experimentation. This is why we argue against taking up the position of the bourgeois or the “heartlander” for these positions still assume the surety of the future, and are not willing over to chance. In fact, we may
eyes – eyes that are yet to be framed as an organ producing ocular accuracy. The “someone’s” movement and changes becomes its own mapping process – a scattering of bodily gestures and scraps of text that can be engaged ever so differently in time.

Mapping spaces yet to come

Nietzsche’s challenge to climb upon one’s own head in Thus Spoke Zarathustra is to think the impossible, and to dispense with the conventional imagery of physiognomy and space, becomes a process of mapping spaces and peoples yet to be seen.

To climb on one’s own head is not a pre-existing act that Nietzsche reflects upon after witnessing the fact. Nietzsche’s phrase itself suggests what is to come without describing its actual representable spatial configuration. The ‘what’ of “what is yet to come”, the ‘space’ of “a space yet to come” is never described, at least in a Cartesian sense. Nietzsche’s challenge invents spaces rather than simply represents them; in writing, reading, using, and engaging with this challenging phrase, spatialities emerge. In fact, if we follow literary theorist J. Hillis Miller’s notion of topography as more than the “creation of a metaphorical equivalent in words of a landscape” and more as an act of writing (graphein) that invents a space or place, then Nietzsche’s phrase attests to the text’s power to resist conventional spatial representation, which in turn expresses spaces yet to come. From Nietzsche’s phrase there emerge a space that is in between a textual space, a poetical space and a conceptual space. It is a space that these three spaces may frame but cannot define. We seem to be able to figure it out, we can even conveniently say to climb upon one’s head is an impossible act, but each time we think of it in terms of an actual physiognomical figure our ability to reconcile the concept of the ‘impossible’ with a proper object falters. This climb upon one’s head goes back to being a spatiality that, although unrepresentable, forces us to really think, to think of the act and form of thinking itself. It forces us to acknowledge the existence of spaces and monstrous physiognomies that this changing world can breed.

To ask what is a Singapore that is yet to come, and in which we cannot envision how its landscape looks like and what its inhabitants are supposed to be, is to ask a question that

say that Nancy’s “someone” is s/he who gives over to chance, truly experiments, and is on the path of the Overman.

begets more questions. Such a question promotes the intensive act of thinking, and enriches the chaotic seismic reality of thought’s geography. To encounter and seriously dwell on a question of what a Singapore yet to come is but knowing what is yet to come cannot be defined is, as philosopher Frank Stevenson notes in his essay “Nietzsche’s Umsphinxt: Riddles and Rhetorical Questions”, to be “consumed by/transformed into the riddle itself, and/or the riddler him/herself.”642 One will always be forced to think that impossible unimageable Singapore and people, and how one can relate them – how can one stand as a detached viewer in front of a groundless yet to be territorialized space? How can one even stand on, less so climb above, a space that is yet to come even if just to survey it? As Stevenson notes, it is not just a matter of defining that strange space, “the question of himself/the self” will also be asked.643 How can one be one with this space, know it intimately, if not by becoming one with it, becoming caught up and dispersed in a swirl of conceptual, textual and philosophical forces? What is it to be a ‘self’ in this space-act, what sorts of experiences may emerge? Such questions of the self open the self into a future that the questioner and the questioned do not yet know. Thus for Nietzsche to encounter a question that is no longer based on a model answer but to incite a will to change “is a rendezvous, it seems, of questions and question marks.”644

In this process of asking questions upon question, (the map of) the space yet to come completely changes insofar as questions can re-express the sense of the world that is yet to come.645 Each word written to address the questions encountered transforms the whole reality of the encounter. Word upon word the textual space grows and so do the relations

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643 Ibid, p.7


645 de Certeau, Michel (1986) Heterologies: Discourse on the Other (Trans. B. Massumi), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.184. In a Nietzschean vein, philosopher Michel de Certeau writes that the work a writer produces, if it “should transform into philosophy” and attend to the practice of radical thinking instead of representation, ought to be “an open book” in which its readers will begin to pose questions. Likewise Michel Foucault writes that writing, even research itself, should express “the discourse of the limit,” or else transgress the limits of discourse. Then, “thought ceases to be the discourse of contradiction” where the oppositions of the self and the Other are pitted against each other on either side of the spatial, cultural, political or subjectival spectrum. The text is here “forsaking the wordy interiority of consciousness.” It “becomes a material energy,” a surge of forces released from their temporary compositions. In engaging with such a mode of writing, and surge of forces, there is only “the insane theatrical multiplication of the Self.” There is thus a tending toward a future yet defined whence within the company of such writing. See also: Foucault, Michel &Blanchot, Maurice (1990) Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside (Trans. B. Massumi) & Michel Foucault as I imagine Him (Trans. J. Mehlman), New York: Zone Books. pp.18-19
arising amidst this increasing mass of words. And the increment of relations, in turn, breeds an intensification of this mass of word’s potentialities beyond measure.  

646 a) The new image, and territory, of thought

No definitive space or action can be mapped from Nietzsche’s challenge to climb upon one’s own head. It is a space-act without proper form. The function of Nietzsche’s challenging question is never for a literal re-enactment by the corporeal body of climbing on its head. His question together with his wider body of concepts and stories in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which in this particular case is Zarathustra’s challenge for us to really go wandering and to be truly moving to utmost novel territories, is to express a new image of thought. This is an image of a space and a bodily act that cannot be thought representationally. It is an image yet to come, which is yet to be seen with human eyes.

To climb upon one’s own head is never something that Nietzsche wants us to literally follow. What is valuable in this imageless image is how it can become a ‘tool’ for radical thinking, acting, making art and writing. What his challenging question imparts to us forces to be used for the purpose of increasing our capacity for change. We can use his challenge as a source of conceptual, textual and philosophical forces to be used in conjunction with forces we may already have in order to construct ourselves as new spatio-temporality-subjectivities. 647 We do not just invent new images of thought, but

646 (As was previously discussed in chapter one) it is important to stress here that when we say “what writing can do” we do not take writing as realizing or actualizing what needs to be actualized. To write, as philosopher Giorgio Agamben put it, is to perform the act of “writing of potentiality.” Each word written is not an actualization of some prior already-existing potentiality. This reduction of potentiality to the “state” temporally prior to the act equates potentiality with the fixed concept that needs exemplification. Agamben, instead, argued that with each text written there is vested within it all the texts yet written, but can yet be imaged. And furthermore, every text as a composition of forces is capable of being recomposed insofar in the text being variedly engaged – read – different forces can be brought into, or subtracted from, the existing composition. Every text is thus capable of its own potential recomposition: a composition yet composed. This is what a text can do/be. It is in this sense the practice of writing/reading becomes the practice of producing a potentiality beyond representation. As Agamben states, “pure actuality, that is, the actuality of an act [of writing], is pure potentiality, that is the potentiality of potentiality:” Each writing-act, thus, preserves in itself, “the pure potentiality to write [more without stating what needs to be done].” See: Agamben, Giorgio (1999) Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy (Ed. & Trans. D. Heller-Roazen), Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp.216-17

647 Deleuze (1994), p.23. As Deleuze, following Nietzsche and Spinoza’s concerns for the immanence and immediacy of “lessons”, elaborates, “We learn nothing from those who say: ‘Do as I do’. Our only teachers are those who tell us to ‘do with me’, and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce. In other words, there is no ideo-motivity, only sensory-motivity. When a body combines some of its own distinctive points [or composing forces] with those of a wave [such as the gush of force of Nietzsche’s space-act], it espouses the principle of a repetition which is no longer that of the Same, but involves the Other – involves difference, from one wave and one gesture to another, and carries that difference through the repetitive space thereby constitute. To learn is indeed to
ourselves are reinvented; we undo our Cartesian vision into its constitutive forces and cast these forces across a territory yet to come, let these forces fuse with this territory.

It is when this becoming someone or something else takes place that we learn our lesson from the unanswerable, unthinkable, unrepresentable questions, like Nietzsche’s challenge. As Deleuze suggests, “to learn... is to conjugate the distinctive points of our bodies” with the forces that we encounter “in order to form a problematic field.”648 To truly think the new image of thought the Cartesian individual with its stable eyesight must be overcome; the individual must fuse with the forces s/he encounters and transform with them. Or, as Nietzsche quite beautifully put it, “philosophers today have become comets.” Philosophers “rediscover their [comets’] fantastic paths,” but not just to follow the comets’ paths but to become comets themselves. They become “philosopher-comets.”649 Learning is at once becoming-someone or something else. To write is to be becoming-philosopher-comets, rather than merely observing and reiterating formed knowledge. To write is to experiment, even make up propositions and challenges that beget more propositions and challenges to intensify this world’s reality.

Creative falsification
From the above, we can see the virtue of writing non-representationally, of attending to a text’s absolute capacities, of making words express spaces, acts and subjects that are yet to be conceived. Even in their inactuality, these are spaces, acts and subjects, nevertheless, continue to challenge both the writer and reader’s thinking.

As we have already discussed in Chapter One, the literary theorist John Phillips suggests that what writing can do is not what it should or must do in order to reiterate the signifier-signified order. He writes, “it might be more pertinent to suspend the ought or the should or the must implicit in such a demand.” It is more important, if radical transformation or Nietzschean transvaluation is sought, to be “considering a can,” for it is “the can that enables the what.”650 The ‘what’ is no longer something definitive, but constitute this space of an encounter with signs [and forces], in which the distinctive points renew themselves in each other.”

648 Ibid, p.165
can be an event, insofar as the ‘can’ entails a continual process of overcoming what is familiar, and transvaluing established sets of value-systems (not just replacing them with other readily available sets).

In this sense we may suggest the ‘can’ for Phillips is no longer an abstract and definitive entity or method. It is a will to experiment – a will to chance and change. Indeed, Phillips argues that the ‘can’ must attend to the act of writing, for it is in the process itself that new compositions of forces, possibly expressing new kinds of subjects and spaces, even ones yet to come as we have seen with Nietzsche, emerge.

In the context of Singapore, Phillips suggests that it is only by attending to the ‘can’ can the ‘local’ move beyond static representation reiterating naïve post-colonial struggles and neo-colonial Romanticism. The ‘can’ will always be “at war” with the ‘local,’ always taking apart the ‘local’, evaluating its composition and making something else of local subjects and spaces.\(^{651}\) Similarly, post-colonial theorist Peter Hallward notes that the writer in being “responsible to this openness” of the ‘can’ is capable of opening the ‘local’ to a cosmos, a globality and world beyond the local-good/global-bad duality.\(^ {652}\) Hallward continues to suggest the power of writing is “its capacity to invent new ways of using words (new in either form or practice, or both).” It is to will the act of writing toward chance and toward becoming transformative. Only then writing will “provoke people to think,” to think outside the representable and imageable, to acquire a new image of thought of the world and of themselves.\(^ {653}\)

To attend to Phillips’ ‘can’ or Hallward’s provocation to think, or else to develop what post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft calls a “politics of transformation,” writing cannot always resort to pre-established models of subjects and spaces as precedents. We do not forget these models, but we must deterritorialize and reinvent them. As Ashcroft suggests, it is not always reified academic categories that serve as the basis of post-colonial writing. In fact, to produce new theories and ways of thinking and acting, “new forms of cultural production” need to take place. These new forms of cultural production

\(^{651}\) Ibid, p.41
\(^{653}\) Ibid.
are processes attending to the “transformative energy of post-colonial textuality”⁶⁵⁴ This is the invention of different ways of writing that can undo the conventional (post)-colonial conception of self/Other, and figure/ground. This is not just ascribing to another model of representation, but to re-evaluate and create new valuing systems. A mode of writing challenging the values of representation can be forged. Experimentation can become the methodology to be adopted for transformative writing that provokes thinking.

To reinvent and experiment is to produce the false. However, this is not a false that is opposed to an infallible “truth”. The false is, for Deleuze, fabulation and creation, the capability to tell a new story, which never makes claims to infallibility, but only to its own reinvention. This is a story that may continually falsify itself. As Deleuze continues to note, the greatness of writing (he has in mind Nietzsche’s works), is its “power of falsehood” that goes beyond the duality of truth/un-truth.⁶⁵⁵ It is the text’s capabilities to suggest without denotation, its ability to offer up forces that readers can use for their own experimentations and undoing of stagnant subjectivities and spatialities.

The truly experimental “art”, as Nietzsche writes, “in which precisely the lie is sanctified and the will to deception has a good conscience” can undo the asceticism or purity of meaning society ascribes to be humanity’s highest achievements.⁶⁵⁶ It undoes the Cartesian surety that underlies spatial, subjectival and conceptual representation. An artwork’s will to deception succeed insofar as it reinvents the business of thinking, and denies any truth to itself. An artwork’s will to deception is a self-falsification process that expresses its capacity to bring about in those who engage with it a will to chance and change.

The artwork’s lie produces a radical newness that reified readings of art based on socio-political, psychological or cultural models cannot offer. As philosopher Ian Buchanan argues, a theory of art that is produced with strict accordance to a model, even an ‘alternative’ one, “does not in itself explain the pleasure of giddiness, or the thrill of the incomprehension, that sublimity provides; nor does it explain the longing we feel once it is understood.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ Deleuze (1986), p.103
[an artwork] has passed.” Such a theory of art is ‘true’ only by being validated by pre-existing models of meaning. But what is truly powerful in an artwork is how it can make us - the viewers and readers engaging the artwork – artists. It makes us work like artists, to become concerned with the experimentation and assemblage of forces in order to produce something different and new. Thus, what is ‘new’ about art, what “captures our attention even as we throw up our hands in despair of ever making sense of it,” is the ‘difference’ – the differentiation of subjects, spaces, meanings and relations – immanent in the event of engaging an artwork. This newness, for Buchanan, is one that goes beyond readings of artworks as either the high or popular, or the “postmodern relativism” still persisting in cultural studies. It is what an artwork can do when engaged, it capable of expressing a process of differentiation rather than predetermined meanings, that is constitutes its value.657

An artwork – a text, an installation or performance – which enables the new image of thought to take place is the one which offers Nietzschean joy: une promesse du bonheur.

…A Singapore yet to come…

Have maps of a Singapore yet to come been drawn? Perhaps these maps are themselves yet to come? Perhaps such a map is at the changing in-between amidst the photograph of Balmoral Park and all the philosophers, concepts, words and sentences that actualized in this chapter? Perhaps this map will take place when one becomes univocal with such an in-between space? Perhaps the map is immanent in a writer and a reader’s process of mapping? The Singaporean poet Arthur Yap eloquently expresses, in his poem Street Scene II, this shifting map-space-subject unity where one’s vision is unsettled in the city:

& by losing oneself, the solipsist’s nightmare
in which everything exists but oneself:
a big foeval eye.658

657 Buchanan, Ian (2000) Deleuzism: A Metacommentary, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press. p.181. See also: Camus, Albert (1991) “Absurd Creation” in The Myth of Sisyphus, and other essays (Trans. J. O’Brien), New York: Vintage Books. pp.93-113. To create and to engage with an artwork, for Camus, is to be “faithful to the rule of battle,” for it is the combatant mindset that “sustains a mind.” “War cannot be negated.” One can see in Camus’ praise for war the Nietzschean inspiration for transvaluation, overcoming of the familiar and the will to chance, the necessity of experimentation in order for art to express life. Insofar the artist, for Camus, is not there, not a person, unless he “commits himself and becomes himself [take place] in his work.”

We see through eyes that are stretched across the ‘everyone-everywhere’ constituting all spatio-temporalities and subjectivities:

We are at the confines of the multidirectional, plurilocal, reticulated, spacious space in which we take place. We do not occupy the originary point of a perspective, or the overhanging point of an axonometry, but we touch our limits on all sides, our gaze touches its limits on all sides. That is, it touches also – indistinctly and undecidedly – the finitude of the universe thereby exposed and the infinite intangibility of the external border of the limit. It is henceforth a matter of the vision of the limit, that is, vision at the limit – according to the logic of the limit in general: to touch it is to pass it; to pass it is never to touch the other border. The limit unlimits the passage to the limit. A thought of the limit is a thought of excess. Such a thought will have to be articulated not in terms of schemes of transcendence or transgression, but in terms of the beyond-scheme of the passage to the limit, in which the to combines the values of on the edge of, beyond, across, and along.659

We are beginning to map a Singapore, but it remains shoreless and featureless. Maybe this map will remain a riddle that resists clear perspectives. Maybe our maps will have no reverence for scale, plan, section, elevation, legends and edges. Maybe the lines of flight or becoming that forces which are abound – like those visual forces emitting off the photo-chemical grains of the Balmoral Park photograph – can produce are the only territorial demarcations we will use in this mapping. Maybe experimentation is the only cartographic method for lands that are not quite there yet. And, this task has great immensity considering how the cartographers themselves are also not quite here.

659 Ibid, p.40. The “we” that is used here is the “someone” Nancy uses to indicate someone beyond the duality of the individual versus the group. As he writes, “the ‘someone’ does not enter into a relation with other ‘someones,’ nor is there a ‘community’ that precedes interrelated individuals.” The “someone” always expresses a being who yet speaks. (p.71) Working from a similar concern to Nancy, the literary theorist Kevin Chua commenting on the issue of representing Singapore at the 2001 Venice Biennale, notes that Singaporean culture is more than the synthesis of “the grid of CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other)” that permeates popular imaginations of nationhood. Instead Chua notes, there will always be “a remainder in the concept of the nation” that cannot be represented. The “we” of Singapore cannot be any specific type of person, not even a synthesis of the different visible races. The “we” expresses the potential Singaporean, the Singaporean yet to come. See: Chua, Kevin (2002) “In Venetian Waters: Singapore at the 49th Venice Biennale” FOCUS: Work/Play, Kitsch and the Singapore Modern, Bodies & Text (No.3, January 2002), Singapore: The Necessary Stage. pp.273-287, p.284,n.3
Chapter 4

In the middle of writing, writing in the middle

With this chapter, we have come full circle and return to the concern of a gathering of forces. In previous chapters we have undertaken series of gatherings of forces that may potentially bring about the emergence of subjects and spaces yet to come. In this chapter, we will maintain with the gathering of forces as a thematic background, however, we will direct our attention to how the theorist and the theory s/he develops are always the amorphous middle of conceptual, textual, architectural, socio-historical and political forces gathered in differential relations. The theorist is always in the middle of things, theoretical and literary texts, philosophical-conceptual personae, historical locations and political and intellectual institutions.

This notion of being in the middle of things is, however, more than a theory. The ‘middle’ cannot be there without an actual practice; it is always located within actual practices of art-making, writing and reading. The space of this middle of forces and practices is a *terra potentiae*, a territory expressed as the absolute potentiality of the forces and practices involved and their differential relations, a territory beyond representation.

Following this notion of a territory beyond representation, we may add that a practice of writing of a post-colonial city in expressing the potentiality for making new differentiating relations with other texts, readers and cities, also expresses this *terra potentiae*. This potentiality will be elaborated by discussing Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke’s treatment of Singapore city through Walter Benjamin’s writings on the city, especially *The Arcades Project*. *Terra potentiae* as the emergent space between a text and a material, architectural city problematizes writing’s merely representational function. The *terra potentiae* enables post-colonial writing to express spaces that are outside of the popular imaginations of a nation or city as conceived throughout the socio-political spectrum.

This chapter ends by suggesting that since concepts, values, and the theorist him/herself within this *terra potentiae* are always changing, then what are produced as judgments are also potentially changing. Judgments are stretched across this changing middle of conceptual, material, socio-historical, textual and political forces. What passes as judgments are particular forces slowed down and congealed together, but this movement never ceases and can speed up again. Here, judgment, becomes more than the reiteration of the established values of the identitarian politics still seen in post-colonial projects. A judgment is a particular gathering of textual, conceptual, philosophical and poetical forces, a particular gathering that can in turn expel or contract other forces, thus re-gathered.
Debris

As a form of discourse about the city, The Arcades Project remains problematic in a number of ways. As process, it appears to be an interminable series of extracts interspersed with a modicum of comment. When his caustic admirer Adorno protested the presentation of so many undigested facts, Benjamin resisted the call to provide the mediation of an interpretive discourse informed by theory [Adorno et al. 179; Benjamin, C 581]. Instead, he invoked montage in order to claim—with injured pride as much as conviction—that "saying" was to be displaced by "showing" [AP 460], in order to accomplish “the art of citing without quotation marks” [AP 458]. As product, the Passagen-Werk remains frozen between the desire to document a new type of discourse corresponding to the modern city as a new form of experience and the admission that such an intention may be realized only when the experience of the text renders discourse into debris. As an "excess of intention over its content" the project is variously judged. Some of its fragments acquire, in the belief that "reality is..." [502x182]...an effect created of these six forces and, in part, for the attitude or state of mind preoccupied with such predicaments. For the last half-century, the postcolonial nations of Asia have responded—The image of debris scattered over Benjamin's writing equivocates between a constitutional inability to complete an undertaking and a principled resistance to closure. The project corresponds in metaphor to the city, and especially to the postcolonial city, dominated, as in Singapore, by the will to upgrade, the overt expression of the need for security and a repression of the fear of nonbeing. The postcolonial city fulfills the norm of a Benjaminian city at once everywhere the innovative center into the walled aspect of production. Just as quotations do not inject text but become the text, the cities of Asia have generally been turned inside out by their marginalia. The hong-kong-kongs of Manila and the轰-moment colonies of Calcutta or Bombay are a series of inscriptions coagulating energies and forms into marks and shapes as central to the city as its monuments of colonial heritage. Singapore's entire showing project scheme is an antithesis, illustrating the will to minimize the play of the random in concept, theory, model, and map. When Hansmann "cleaned up" Paris from 1853 to 1870, his wonderful boulevards, vistas, and strategically placed monuments and statues were accomplished by moving some 50,000 poor people out of the old quarter to make room for his model city. James studies this detail to reinforce the hallucinatory element discovered by Benjamin in the idea of a planned city: "the displacements brought about by Hausmannization impart a fantastic and elusive quality to life in the city" [47]. In most cities today, the success of growth is more susceptible of subversion than of planning. Each city becomes a giant kampong whose fence of rationality is open to the infiltration of design by chance. The Benjaminian city of words, like the general trend of postcolonial urbanism, is ripe for a perpetual negotiation between the providential and the unpredictable. In Benjamin's text, the emphasis on the drive to be better gets deflected. In his thought, a perspective focused on the City of God looks quizzically upon the idea that language is always headed upward on the gradient of the Possible. In its cautionary function, his allegory of modernity treats cities and texts changing in time into ruins as inexorable desire for unreal places—Arcadia, Utopia. Benjamin's cities become fantastic instances of the radical alienation Foscolo described in the 1960s, as here his utopia: "[Of Other Places]"—Naples (1924), Moscow (1927), Marseilles (1928)—came to represent the boundaries of a "nostalgianism" [AP 454] that was contained by Europe, with New York and Jerusalem marking a plane beyond the horizon of longing. During the last thirteen years of his life—from 1927 to his untimely death in 1940—Benjamin worked intermittently on a project of uncertain but growing ambitions. It survives in the form of essays, revisions, and fragments scattered amidst an enormous quantity of notes and extracts. The Arcades Project (Der Passagen-Werk) symbolizes Paris as the capital of nineteenth-century Europe and its shopping arcades as the emblem of capital, whose power to transform culture extends the urban history of the Second Empire into an allegory of modernity.
The post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha in the introduction to his book *Nation and Narration* notes that the theorist who writes of a post-colonial nation is never simply retelling an existing story that traces back to its indisputable origin. The theorist, even working as a historian, has a task that is much more complicated. For Bhabha the theorist needs to explore the “Janus-faced discourse of the nation.” More than simply constructing an anti-government/corporation/globalist position, s/he must produce narratives that go beyond mere opposition. This Janus-faced discourse goes beyond duality. The two headed Janus, God of transitions, looks one way toward the past and the other way toward the future. However, we ask, for Janus, where and when is the past and where and when is the future? Janus is always at the transition between a past without origins and a future without destiny. The future and past going on indefinitely make for a middle without a proper space and locality; this is where the Janus-faced discourse of the nation emerges. This is a discourse that refers to no definitive origin or future, a discourse in transition between two (or more) indefinite spatio-temporalities. Perpetually in transition between spatio-temporalities without proper names this discourse becomes a transforming and transformative discourse dispersed amidst words, places, memories, peoples and concepts. Anything amounting to ‘theory’ or ‘knowledge’ is rightly dispersed in this discourse.

To write of a nation that creatively maps pasts and futures yet to come as enabled by a Janus-faced discourse is, as architectural theorist Thomas Mical suggests, “to propose a departure from historical determinism.” The city is no longer a marker in the nation’s schedule from the past to the future. What the city can do when engaged critically and what it can be is not something a theoretical text can predict. A theoretical text only adds certain textual, poetical, and conceptual forces to this amorphous ever changing ‘entity’ that is the city. Following literary theorist Rodolphe Gasché, Mical considers a text’s capabilities to be powerful enough to make “cuts into stone bodies” and hence transform

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their form and composition. A text – even a theoretical one – tells another story, another genesis that begins over and over.

Following Manfredo Tafuri’s study of Michel Foucault’s understanding of Nietzschean genealogy, Mical suggests that the difficulty in articulating an origin or a definitive past becomes less of an impasse if we consider the writing and theorization of history as “not a piece of history complete in itself, but rather an intermittent journey through a maze of tangled paths, one of many possible ‘provisional constructions’ obtainable.” To write is to produce another kind of genealogy, which for Tafuri, as for Foucault and Nietzsche, is one that “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significance and indefinite teleologies,” and dispenses with “the search for ‘origins’.” “Genealogy,” in a Nietzschean sense, “can only be a Versuch (experiment), an aphoristic and fragmentary game in which various forces confront one another [and] which can only be expressed provided we acknowledge their dynamic relativity.” Furthermore this genealogical experiment as a continuous “textual labour and movement” is “irreducible to the systematic unity of [conventional] discourse.” It is a discourse that does not segmentalize space and time into discrete epochs, but rather considers what historical objects – buildings, nations, stories, and even theoretical texts of ancient sages – can do.

It is this ‘can do’ that a Janus-faced discourse attends to in order to express potentialities and futurities beyond historical determinism. This is why for Bhabha:

The ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the

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662 Ibid, p.83. cf. Gasché, Rodolphe (1990) “Ecce Homo or the Written Body” in Looking after Nietzsche (Ed. L.A. Rickels), Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. p.119. One can certainly sense the Spinozist-Nietzschean turn in Mical’s arguments for how the body of the city, the body of architecture as more than a composition of cement and mortar. But, more importantly how these bodies can be recomposed by being cut across by other bodies. The body is no longer a static entity, but is affected and transformed in ways beyond what the hierarchy of the mind-body split cannot comprehend. As Mical further suggests, following Nietzsche, what amounts to memories and subjects are first of all “corporeal processes,” which are not necessarily subordinated to the mind. “Memory is a process of the body… [as] an eruption.” (p.87)


political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.\textsuperscript{667}

The unpredictable forces, for Bhabha, that can cut across and recompose existing socio-political and historical structures, representations and institutions are thus never static. They are always capable of combining with other forces, and, thus, expressing political subjects and spaces that are ‘in between’, never belonging to this or that past or future, subject or space.\textsuperscript{668} This is, in fact, how the texts a theorist writes can become useful in the simultaneous undoing and redoing of dualistic political, historical and social structures in post-colonial nations. One narrates a nation that is in between times, spaces and peoples. Or, as Bhabha succinctly puts it:

The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, \textit{neither the one or the other}, properly alienates out political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics.\textsuperscript{669}

One produces a genealogy beyond the passing of one epoch to another, beyond the ‘rights’ guaranteed by higher morals that are passed onto ‘free people’. Such a genealogy makes for a theoretical text that enables transformation rather than being merely descriptive. It activates the gathering of forces.

We continue this chapter with a continual gathering of forces, adding further conceptual, textual, poetical and philosophical forces. Or, as the Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke, in a Benjaminian spirit, asks in his essay \textit{To Frame a City: The Singaporean Poet in the Postmodern City}, “what is a city when refracted… by the kaleidoscopic fragments that are art?” Patke is especially attentive to how the practice of writing can frame Singapore “the island-state-river-city” by attending to the city’s “episodes, movement and sensation” as significant.\textsuperscript{670} We can take from Patke’s question a willingness to find ways to move beyond the static representations by which academia have long

\textsuperscript{667} Bhabha (1990), p.4  
\textsuperscript{668} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{669} Bhabha, Homi (1994) \textit{Location of Culture}, London & New York: Routledge. p.25  
categorized Singapore city, specifically the economically efficient but dull Disneyland. What different forces can writing bring in to a construction of a Singapore city outside this tired image? As will be elaborated later, Patke proposes taking on a Benjaminian mode of writing that is, to write in fragments to make the text immediately express the intensity of the city, and to make the text contribute to the city’s intensity. How can there, as Patke asks, be “destructive creation” that can take apart what is normatively imagined by the act of “creative destruction” that turns everything in Singapore to consumerables? For Patke, following Benjamin, the text on the city must present itself as a problematic that raises questions instead of merely representing and thus pacifying the dynamic city. But for the moment we will treat some more general conceptual and philosophical texts to gather the forces that can help us understand Patke’s suggestion for a Benjaminian mode of writing as capable of undoing static imageries of Singapore. Before returning to Patke’s specific work on Singapore City, I will treat Bhabha’s space of translation, Blanchot’s expanded notion of communication, Deleuze’s stress on the role of time and the production of heterogeneous histories.

The space of translation

What does Bhabha mean by a space of translation where political objects and subjects that are “neither the one or the other” may emerge?

The space of translation is not a space where the voice of the Other, conventionally imagined as an oppressed or minority person, is clearly voiced and translated so that everyone, albeit through the theorist as translator, can begin to develop sympathies for them. The space of translation is more than communication with and understanding of the Other. It is neither a space where one accepts one’s Other on the terms of one’s own ground, nor a space where one can totally become the same as one’s Other. The whole notion of being able to grasp an Other’s “I” dissipates in this space of translation.

For Bhabha, the space of translation “is always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-
knowledges *in medias res*” or in the middle of things.\(^{673}\) Within this space what is produced as the knowledge of an Other is exactly a form of Janus-faced discourse dispensing with definitive pasts and destinies, and which invents new people. There is in this space of translation never the Other but subjects, including the theorist, all of whom are in the process of differentiating from what *was*. This is the creative and inventive logic of the space of translation.

In this space of translation the familiar divisions of theory and practice are breached.\(^{674}\) Nothing in this space is “prior to the act of *critique engagée,*”\(^{675}\) in which each ‘self’, a theorist or his/her Other, is cut across and recomposed by various corporeal, socio-political, historical, material, and architectural forces. Most importantly, in the practice of theoretical writing, the textual forces of movement and momentum can be beyond prediction. Indeed, Bhabha suggests that the “force of writing” must be acknowledged. He writes that it is “the dynamics of writing and textuality [that] require us to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy.” For him, “textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject.” Within the practice of writing there is the potential that “the political subject – as indeed the subject of politics – is a discursive event.”\(^{676}\) The space of translation takes place when subjects become discursive events.

As a discursive event the political subject, and this includes “the agent of the discourse” has “turned against itself,” and is becoming something or someone else.\(^{677}\) What emerges from a space of translation is not the already-told-tales of the oppressed, but, a voice of a people yet to come. This voice may also include the utterances of a theorist who has yet to form a subject position. These are voices in between what they were and what they have yet to become. For Bhabha, an effective and affective “textual process of political antagonism” is capable of initiating “a contradictory process of reading between the lines,” and of going between established subject and spatial positions. Such a textual process must also be capable of harnessing “the displacing and decentering forces” of the

\(^{673}\) Bhabha (1994), p. 22 
\(^{674}\) Ibid. 
\(^{675}\) Ibid. 
\(^{676}\) Ibid, p. 23 
\(^{677}\) Ibid, p. 24
discursive event so that what amounts to the portion of truth in popular and conventional imaginations of the nation can be radically politicized.678

Writing theory as an experiment in assembling forces in ways that can displace and decentre established values, even the values a theorist may have held steadfastly to, transforms theorization from a reiteration of known concepts culminating in a closed book to what Bhabha calls “the event of theory.”679 The event of theory is no longer a set of values particular to a specific spatio-temporality, but in the way it is composed expresses a continuous “dialectic without the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History.”680 This is a dialectic not marked by opposite sides, but by a gathering of forces cutting across each other in a mad rush wherein expression is an unforeseen, unsynthesizable potentiality. Theory capable of expressing itself as an event “is a sign that history is happening.”681

Theory does not just communicate established values and concepts. Theoretical writing can communicate something transformative and not just reiterative. Writing a few decades before Bhabha, novelist, playwright and philosopher, Maurice Blanchot writes that a text, when it is engaged, when one reads and uses it, offers up a mix of textual and poetical forces, besides conceptual forces, that can transform the reader instead of just imparting dead knowledge to him/her.682 Blanchot elaborates:

Communication of the work lies not in the fact that it has become communicable, through reading, to a reader. The work is itself communication. It is intimacy shared in struggle by reading’s demands and writing’s: by the work as form and measure, constituting itself as power, and the same work’s measureless excess, tending toward impossibility. It is intimate strife shared moreover by the form where the work takes its shape and the limitlessness where it is all refusal, by the resolution which is the being of beginning and the indecision which is the being beginning over. This violence lasts as long as the work is a work. It is violence that is never

678 Ibid.
679 Ibid. p.25
680 Ibid.
681 Ibid.
682 Like Blanchot, Albert Camus distinguishes two kinds of knowledge – savoir-vivre and savoir-faire, the former as changing, dynamic and living knowledge and the latter as completed or closed-off, unchanging knowledge. For Camus the radical and yet creative, what he calls the "absurd artist" who obeys no models, must have as his/her task finding ways to “acquire this savoir-vivre which transcends savoir-faire.” Art, for Camus, cannot just be reflective but must express “a great living being.” Only then, can the knowledge the artwork imparts embody "an intellectual drama.” See: Camus, Albert (1991) The Myth of Sisyphus, and other essays (Trans. J. O’Brien), New York: Vintage Books. p. 98
pacified, but it is also the calm of an accord; it is rivalry, and also the reconciliation – an understanding. But it breaks off as soon as it ceases to be the approach toward what rules out any understanding.\footnote{Blanchot, Maurice (1982) \textit{The Space of Literature} (Trans. A. Smock), Lincoln, NB & London: University of Nebraska Press. p.198. One can see how Blanchot’s advocacy of violence here is not dissimilar to the violence or active nihilism that Nietzsche advocates for, as we have seen in previous chapters. Violence is an act where one’s stultified bodily-composition of forces are unsettled and gaining the potentiality to settle as something else, this is the movement of change and non-telic development.}

Moreover, to write is never just to communicate oneself to another. Writing does more than become a textual quotation of a Cartesian subjectivity. The effective piece of writing that subverts bourgeois sense of selfhood, in Blanchot’s view, expresses a textual violence causing writer and reader “to lose itself in an ever restless migration.” What is communicated, or what expresses immanently in the act of writing and reading “is a revelation where nothing appears.” Who emerges as the writer, and who emerges as the reader “has never ceased to be developing in the course of the work’s [re]-genesis.” Their roles are not just reversed, but co-contaminated. A writer is becoming-reader or what Blanchot calls a “reader yet to come.” The writer addresses his reader no longer as a second person while, \textit{in} the pages, s/he writes of a third person who is not yet there. “The writer becomes the nascent intimacy of the still infinitely future reader.”\footnote{Ibid, p.199} Likewise the reader becomes a writer of a yet-to-come text on the text s/he reads. The reader is a becoming-writer. To write and read becomes a process where and when writer and readers are not what they \textit{were}, and also not what they \textit{are to be}. They \textit{can be but are not}.

As Bhabha writes, the writer makes no text that comes forth like “a pure avenging angel speaking the truth of a radical historicity and pure oppositionality.”\footnote{Bhabha (1994), p.26} The text is not a representation of his/her voice or that of a certain socio-political model. When writing of a certain nation or people, instead of using certain socio-politico-theoretical models to rectify the past and justify a certain future for this nation or people, why not see what forces compose these pasts, and then, re-combine them with the (not just conceptual, but textual and poetical) forces of the theoretical texts implicated. Experiment with assembling forces to produce something else.

Writing is not just the task of translating the lost voices of the oppressed past, and lamenting their disappearance. To translate is to break down existing relations between forces and rebuild these forces into some other compositions of relations without the imposition of any socio-political models. As philosopher Ian Buchanan writes, it is not to regret the past, but, to learn “how to embrace the past that it can be said to have conditioned the present in the most positive sense.”

Following the argument above, if the powers of writing and reading are attended to, there is no longer a conventional process of communication as a passing of knowledge between subjects, instead there can also be a Blanchotian process of communication. This form of communication enables the transformation of a writer and reader’s own system of valuation so that there is the “power of beginning and beginning again,” to then remain “forever new,” in which this ‘new’ is not telos. Writer and reader in this process are subjects coming to shape in the middle of the deterritorialization of the compositions of conceptual, material and textual forces that constituted the past, and the simultaneous reterritorialization of these same forces. What writer and reader can be are caught up in the way these forces are composed.

For the aforementioned reason the post-colonial theorist in the process of communication does not merely tell stories of past subjects and spaces. The Blanchotian process of communication like Bhabha’s space of translation produces complex histories and futures. History, including the theorization of history, here, becomes no longer an unfolding of epochs toward ultimate telos. Here, history expresses its dynamic organization of space and time, and it is in this sense that one may suggest the colonial scheduling of history and progress is resisted.

Following Spinoza’s understanding of life as dynamic, the philosopher Judith Butler suggests that if there is “the desire for life itself,” then, the very “conditions of recognition itself,” the act of knowing one’s Others, would be “undercut”. One does not simply know of Others and their stories by translating their voices into texts. One creates a new form of life in the act of translation, transvaluating the existing compositions of forces into something else. To recognize or to speak of Others, while attending to life’s

dynamism suspends judgment based on social norms. “Recognition,” or to write of Others, “could not be reduced to making and delivering judgments about Others,” based on established social types played out in a master-slave duality. Only then one may say the lives of Others, and oneself, are dynamic. Only then are these lives not relegated to the pages of History.

“What can I become, given the contemporary order of being?” This is a question Butler, following Foucault, asks with regard to writing of oneself and Others. It is a matter of how this “order of being” may be engaged by a writer or a reader so that it “conditions the possibility of his becoming.” The concern remains this: History is happening and active. How can writing sustain a Singaporean history that is happening and is in the middle of things?

Time in writing and reading, and the production of radically heterogeneous histories

History as happening signals the indispensability of reflecting on the role of time in the activation of theory, or producing active transformative theory.

Let us make a short detour to look at how the element of time enables writing and reading’s dynamism.

The space of translation that emerges from the act of writing and reading is never a space belonging to one spatio-temporality. It represents no specific spatio-temporality. Yet it belongs to time. Time is its form and core. Hence, this space of translation, in fact the space of writing and reading itself, cannot really be broken into discrete temporal segments, with each segment representing a self-contained concept, subjectivity or space.

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688 Butler, Judith (2001) “Giving an account of oneself” in *Diacrits* (31.4, Winter 2001). pp.22-40, p.30. As was discussed in the previous chapters, Spinoza understands the relations between individuals as more than a conventional communication between “Is” or selves. Individuals are conceived as bodies, which are compositions of forces in differential relations. Individuals are thus more than a soul within a mass of flesh. But more importantly, insofar as bodies are compositions of forces that may be recomposed, what one can conceive of as a proper “I” is brought into a constant shift motion. As Spinoza writes, “For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone… No one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions… This shows well enough that the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at.” The experience of the Cartesian “I” cannot completely fathom what the body, which like Nature is infinitely indefinite, can become. See also: Spinoza, Benedict (1996) *The Ethics* (Trans. E. Curley), London & New York: Penguin Books. Book III, Prop.2, Scholium

689 Ibid, p.24
As Deleuze quoting Hamlet’s famous line writes, “The time is out of joint.” Time is no longer divided into discrete spatio-temporal units, which in their succession represent movement and thus time. Rather, as Deleuze explains, “time out of joint signifies the reversal of the movement-time relationship. It is now movement which is subordinate to time … Time is no longer related to the movement which it measures, but movement is related to the time which conditions it.”

Space and time have “completely new determinations” now that time has become the condition of interiority of movement and space. The coexistence of spaces either in the form of one space alongside another, or one space in lieu of another (the conventional understanding of space as changing according to the demands of period, style or epoch) is not enough to explicate the complex nature of time. “Time is no longer defined by succession.” As Deleuze further elaborates:

> Everything which moves and changes is in time, but time itself does not change, does not move, any more than it is eternal. It is the form of everything that changes and moves, but it is an immutable Form which does not change. It is not an eternal form, but in fact the form of that which is *not* eternal, the immutable form of change and movement.

Time is the “form of interiority” that “constantly divides us from ourselves, splits us in two: a splitting in two which never runs its course, since time has no end.” Time as thinking’s form of interiority splits a thinker or theorist into two, caught between a origin-less past and a destination-less future. The changing world exists insofar as time *is there* as the world’s interiority supporting its infinite change.

To write or read in time is not to say the engaged text is breakable into discrete succession of concepts, characters, themes and movements. It is neither to say writer or reader goes through a succession of personalities or identities. An engagement with a text never stops with the act of writing and reading; as mentioned earlier, there are all these potential texts to be written or read emerging from the very act of writing or reading *this* text. And, *this* text we write or read is merely a particular gathering of forces from all the

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691 Ibid, p.viii
692 Ibid, p.vii
693 Ibid, p.viii
694 Ibid, p.ix
other texts written and read before. With time motivating the interiority of the acts of writing and reading the text becomes Bhabha’s event of theory, an event of change without demarcated successive states.

Inasmuch as writing and reading can dynamically transform concepts, subjects, values and spaces, time as their interiority is already well attested to. It is time that moves the event of theory that in turn can produce subjects and spaces, and even epochs, yet to come. To practice writing and reading that is transformative is to immanently express time’s powers. Write narratives that incorporate different textual and compositional manoeuvres that change the narrator’s voice, the space and place addressed as well as the time frame. If the post-colonial city like Singapore is a collection of curious goods, signboards and characters, then the post-colonial text, like a Chinese encyclopaedia or a *wunderkammer*, is a collection of curious gatherings of texts, words and concepts which readers can pick up and assemble into their own curious collection.

History, the narrative of a post-colonial nation, is, as literary theorists Barbara Fuchs and David Baker argue, out of joint with itself, insofar as time and the practice of writing and reading constitutes history’s interiority. Thus Fuchs and Baker question the exact spatio-temporality of the “post-colonial”. They suggest, the “post-colonial” is always a “when” that is yet to come. But, this ‘when’ as a yet to come is not a belated period in a predictable future, it is what defines the “post-colonial” as always a spatio-temporality within a process of change that is not necessarily moving toward socio-historical betterment (or degradation). The ‘not yet’ becomes the “post-colonial’s” spatio-temporal form, while never becoming “a historiographical principle” that informs a (neo)-colonial scheduling of progress. With the ‘not yet’ as the “post-colonial’s” form, History-making or narrativization of a post-colonial nation as a means of attending to sustaining this form is “radically heterogeneous.”

However, this radical heterogeneity must not be taken as consisting of a series of successive epochs. Not unlike the aforementioned complexity of time espoused by Deleuze, this heterogeneity may be understood as the potential to have many births

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696 Ibid, p.331
697 Ibid, p.330
(geneses) without fore-naming these births. ‘Hetero’ becomes not numerical multiplicity but a potential multiplicity that cannot be quantified. Fuchs and Baker, quoting post-colonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty, write that to theorize history is “‘to write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it.” Moreover, we can add, it is not just to represent these ambivalences and contradictions, but to truly express them, to make them present in the text one writes. The immediacy of these ambivalences and contradictions in enabling opening up to potential multiplicities affirms time as the text’s interiority. With time as its interiority the text expresses an expansive spatio-temporality.

The truly radical task of narrating a post-colonial nation is not just a matter of trying to rectify its past or to guess what its future should be. It is to experiment with new assemblages of textual, material, visual, poetical, conceptual or philosophical forces so that these assemblages express potentialities, it is to produce the nation’s history as happening, active and radically heterogeneous.

Gathering forces in Singapore

Singapore’s history is in medias res and radically heterogeneous. To write of its history is to begin in the middle, it is not necessary to begin with the island-city-state located one degree north of the equator, or begin with a ‘Singaporean’ voice. To write of it is to be caught up in the swarm of material, architectural, informational, textual and conceptual forces that makes this island-city-state coextensive with the changing global Empire. One never steps aside from the amorphous Singapore to grasp it as an unity; nor does one represent its interiority as an unified identity. Gayatri Spivak reminds us that within the globalized world, being “a member of an ethnic minority” no longer guarantees a writer unproblematic representation of his/her country of birth. Even the “native” writer has to gather varied forces to construct Singapore; s/he him/herself is constructed from these same textual, conceptual, socio-political, historical and philosophical forces. The critical difference is whether this native writer can gather these forces to produce a transformative text or merely reproduce one that is habitually ‘local’ or ‘native’. The practical question is how this writer can textually, stylistically and compositionally

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challenge the now-familiar voices, including his/her own, and narratives of his/her post-independent nation, in this case Singapore.

Even to write from the position of the ‘self’ – to say “this is my own theoretical position on Singapore” – is to work within a gathering of forces. Foucault, following the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus and Roman orator Seneca, stresses that writing, as an assemblage of forces, is never a direct representation of the ‘self’. The ‘self’ in writing is produced as one engages in ‘self-training’ in order to operate and manipulate the systems of rhetoric and persuasion. Insofar as one never stops self-training or finding new ways to engage with the systems of rhetoric and persuasion, the ‘self’ that is produced is infinitely different. To manipulate these systems of rhetoric and persuasion can be an activity of adding (or subtracting) forces to these systems, so that the whole system of rhetoric that produces the ‘self’ can become transformed.

The “care of the self” that Foucault speaks of is thus not just the insistence of the self as same. As he elaborates, “taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity,” in which the ‘self’ may begin over and over again. He continues, “the new care of the self involved a new experience of self.” That is to say, the care of the self produces a self in between spatio-temporalities, subjects and concepts.

It is for the reason of the care of the self understood as maintaining the self as differentiating that Butler, in a Spinozist-Foucauldian turn, writes that “there is also a history to my body for which I can have no recollection.” We can see here Spinoza’s understanding of the body as more than a shell for the soul, and rather like a gathering of forces expressing mutating compositions, which the Cartesian mind exercises no domain over. The Spinozist body that is produced in part by the textual and poetical forces of written texts has a history, a narrative, beyond specific spatio-temporality. To care for the Spinozist body is to attend to its complexity and dynamicity. Butler further suggests that this is why any narrative of the self is never represented:

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702 Butler (2001), p.27
My narrative begins *in medias res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story in language possible. And it means that my story always arrives too late. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I have no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account.\(^{703}\)

Following Butler, one may say the self, including the self of a theorist, is stretched across the changing interstitial space among forces in the process of gathering. Again, the question is how the theorist may celebrate his/her situation within this interstitial space of forces, and harness these forces to produce new gathering of forces that can resist linear progressive narratives of nation-building and subjecthood.

Likewise, the Singaporean theorist’s self is always the unformed middle of forces in gathering. As was discussed in Chapter One, Singapore’s intelligentsia are not ignorant of the wealth of literature circulating in current post-colonial studies, cultural studies, arts and design studies and philosophy in Europe, North America and Australia. In fact, most academics and artists working in Singapore are more interested in engaging with the theoretical forces of these literatures than a naïve telling of nativist and fiercely anti-colonial stories. For instance, in the works of literary theorist Rajeev Patke, which we will treat shortly his concern was never to simply lament globalist Singapore’s loss of innocence. Nearly all of his works evoke Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno’s writings to produce a kaleidoscopic textual (and sometimes visual) collage that can rescue or re-enchant the nation’s “historical objects.”\(^{704}\) His own works are constellations of Benjaminian and Adornian concepts with various poetical, literary, spatial and architectural forces of Singapore. Yet Patke does not obliterate Singapore in his works. Rather, Singapore cut across and merged with these Benjaminian and Adornian conceptual forces come across as a Singapore outside the conventional representations of it as being lifeless. Patke re-enchants Singapore by producing these new possible venues and vistas which his readers may engage with.

\(^{703}\) Ibid.

\(^{704}\) In 1999, when Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* with its references to the Parisian shopping arcades and the literary works of Charles Baudelaire was published in English the term *flâneur* appeared in quite a few architectural and literary essays published by Singaporean authors. Patke was one of the more prominent readers and users of Benjaminian terms and concepts. Since Arcades Project, many artists and theorists in Singapore wanted to wander through Singapore city with Benjamin’s *flânerie* glasses and find re-enchantment in its mass consumer world.
Following Benjamin’s treatment of the urban scene, many artists and theorists, like Patke, had as their objective “to rescue these historical objects by ripping them out of the developmental histories – of law, religion, art, etc.”

As Benjuminian scholar Susan Buck-Morss writes, “historical objects are first constituted by being blasted out of their historical continuum.”

Similarly, Patke suggests that for a city-state like Singapore populated by “descendants of migrants” and cut across by globalism it is only apt that histories, stories, bodies and values exist “in a state of in-betweenness.” Yet, for Patke, it is this in-betweenness that can wrest historical objects from the trappings of nostalgia that are so prevalent in Singapore’s consumerist urbanscape. As mentioned earlier, Patke, like Benjamin, favoured a montage mode of writing to unsettle the reified relations between histories, objects, institutions, artworks, places and peoples. Patke suggests that writing, like the Modernist poetry Benjamin admires, can become not so much a solution for or representation of the city, but “a recognition that what defines the [city’s] situation is that it has no solution that will suffice.” The text “hovers between what it could say, movingly, and what it would rather not, coolly.”

In fact, Patke’s essay To Frame a City is peppered with snippets of poems from Singaporean poets, as if each cut-up quote was a kaleidoscopic vista into Singapore city. Between most paragraphs where he theorizes about Singapore as a postmodern city, Patke inserts a few lines of poetry, although here he rarely acknowledges the names of the cited poets. For instance, in between his paragraphs appear poetic stanzas such as:

Lightning shivers in the spaces
between skyscrapers.

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This is not so much a place as a pause
between moments, as easily shattered
as the silence before the next word is spoken.

and,

a community centre – a cinema –
a multi-storey carpark – a poly clinic –

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706 Ibid, p.214
707 Patke (2002), p.113
708 Ibid, p.112
Without explicitly acknowledging the poets’ names, it is as if the voice in *To Frame a City* is becoming one produced in the middle of Patke’s, the quoted poets’ and the other voices and forces the reader brings to his/her engagement with the essay. Patke is becoming his poets and vice versa. It is never just a matter of his essay being a portrait of these poets, nor is the essay a textual depiction of Singapore. The voice(s) emerging in *To Frame a City* give rise to views of a Singapore City that is yet to come, yet to be framed as a definitive description of Singapore City. *To Frame a City* adds to Singapore City’s complex reality rather than simply representing it; it adds compositions of textual, poetical and conceptual forces that can undo those conventional imaginations of Singapore; it re-enchants the city.

Here, it can be said that for theorists like Patke Singapore’s history was no longer directed toward a final goal, but becomes what Benjamin calls an “Ur-history.” Political knowledge was no longer a matter of one school of thought fighting against its opposite in order to achieve victory, rather it becomes an experiment of gathering up compositions of socio-historical, poetical, textual and conceptual forces in order to produce a history that is happening and expressive of unmarked innumerable potentialities. Following Benjamin’s mode of writing, writers and theorists in Singapore...
can begin to construct theoretical texts that express thought’s complexity. As Buck-Morss summarizing this Benjaminian ethos writes: “what was needed was a visual, not a linear logic: The concepts were to be imagistically constructed, according to the cognitive principles of montage.”

In attending to how a text can add complexity and reality to a city, theorists and writers such as Patke begin to affirm Singapore City’s dynamic life. Singapore City is sustained as dynamic by this continual addition and subtraction of forces from its body. Singapore City’s form and essence is coextensive with the space that constitutes the middle of these theoretical essays, poems, artworks and of course the buildings themselves. Furthermore, Singapore City being one with the changing global Empire is also constructed by names like Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, Paul Virilio, Manfredo Tafuri, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Gianni Vattimo, Michael Hardt, Søren Kierkegaard, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Maurice Blanchot, Antonio Negri, Jean-Luc Nancy, et al. However, these non-Singaporean names are not guarantors of what Singapore City should be. Some of them like Benjamin and Adorno appear on Pakte’s pages as conceptual, textual, poetical or philosophical forces, or as I will later term as “conceptual personae”, to be used to sustain Singapore City’s dynamicity, and to express the City’s terra potentiae and peoples yet to come. As I had suggested earlier these European names are not there to help Patke define Singapore City as such, but to lend certain conceptual forces to help him construct a city that is yet to come. It is never a matter for Patke to construct Singapore as a nostalgic early twentieth-century European city, the European names are implicated to help resist a stultified image of Singapore.

In between Rajeev Patke, Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project and Singapore City

When speaking of evoking non-Singaporean names in theoretical writings Patke’s essay Benjamin’s Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City (2000), a collection of twenty “fragments” each with Benjaminian sub-titles like “Preamble”, “Ruins”, “Traces”, etc, is a notable publication. As if demonstrating certain concerns Benjamin has in Theses on the Philosophy of History, Patke sets about assembling an image of Singapore City that refuses “to recognize ‘the way it really was’,” that is, the city’s past. For Patke, as for

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713 Ibid.
Benjamin, to articulate the past – be it a city or a nation – is “to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Patke employs this Benjaminian mode of montage writing as a way to resist being “trapped in [the] unavailing nostalgia” so common in contemporary imaginations of Singapore City.

In a Benjaminian mode of telling a city’s history nothing is redeemed, there is only an invention of new images of the city. As Buck-Morss, elaborating on Benjamin’s concerns for producing a transformative montage-text, suggests, though an essay that tells of a city’s history may be “derived from the original context of the [city’s] fragments,” the way these fragments are assembled always poses a danger, an ability to subvert the dominant view. In The Arcades Project Benjamin suggests that the principle purpose of the montage, the assemblage of fragments, is to resist the “harmonizing perspective” conventionally granted to histories, cities, institutions and peoples. He continues to state that the montage mode of writing has “special, perhaps even total rights” as being radical and transformative because it “interrupts the context into which it is inserted”. The montage-text does not reconcile itself as representative of the city; it gives us the conceptual and textual forces needed to form new relations with the city. The montage-text thus counteracts the illusions produced by consumerism and capitalism. Thus in On the Mimetic faculty Benjamin says the montage-text made of fragments enables us “to read what was never written.” The “literary montage,” as Benjamin suggests, does not represent anything; it is there “only to show,” to express immediately the indeterminate relations that may take place between the fragments of texts in order to produce images of a city that are yet to come.

This concern for producing a city, and images of a city, that are yet to come is demonstrated in Patke’s essay Benjamin’s Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City.

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715 Ibid.
716 Patke (2002), p.114
717 Buck-Morss, p.225
719 Ibid, p.572
721 Benjamin (1999), p.574
Like the Benjamin writing in the inter-war years who wanted to use montage texts to counteract the illusion of unproblematic national, economical and even subjectival progress, Patke is concerned with undoing the image of an infallible Singaporean telic progress that the Singaporean government had so convincingly instilled in its citizens’ minds. As Patke suggests, he wants to trace out new kinds of relations “between nationalism (as the overlap between the colonial and the postcolonial) and globalism (as the translation of the modern into the postmodern).”\textsuperscript{722} The montage-text that is Pakte’s *Benjamin’s Arcades Project* produces a narrative that does violence to the government’s linear progressive narrative by reassembling textual, urban, spatial and architectural fragments found within/out Singapore into some other affective textual compositions.

However, Patke stresses that his essay is not an interpretation of Singapore City through Benjaminian theories. In his essay’s first paragraph, the “Preamble” he suggests the essay is an exercise in conjuring up several “Benjamins” in *The Arcades Project* in order to “invite a speculative discourse on the idea of the postcolonial city.”\textsuperscript{723} The postcolonial city of Singapore is not to be consigned to a fixed past and thus objectified; it is to be dynamic, to be able to affect those who read of this city through Patke’s essay, the essay must add to this city. Thus, the entire speculating process, one may add experimental investigation, is not found through reconciling historical objects with pre-established values and concepts. As Patke, citing Benjamin, explicates, the “work on the city [must] remains problematic.” The text is not external to the city. By writing in fragments, this mode of writing not only resembled the city in its diversity, but adds to the city’s complex reality.\textsuperscript{724} The views yet to come that are taking place in the text becomes views of Singapore City with no less reality than the views one sees with one’s flesh-eyes.

Following Patke’s suggestion for what the ‘role’ of writing on a city can be, we may say when writing of Singapore city, it is neither theoretical texts like Patke or Benjamin’s that define it, nor to assume Singapore City emits an immutable identity that we can

\textsuperscript{722} Patke (2000), p.11. In fact Patke conceives of his essay to be “A Dialectical Fairy Play”, the title Benjamin had originally wanted to name *The Arcades Project*. However, this is not a dialectic of the traditional master/slave relation. Rather, he, like Benjamin, takes dialectics to be a process of dialogue, or the multiplication of voices. See: Benjamin, Walter (1973) *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (trans. H. Zohn), London: Verso. p.496

\textsuperscript{723} Ibid, p.3

\textsuperscript{724} Ibid.
transcribe into text. Singapore City becomes something in the middle of Patke and Benjamin, among other writers’ texts and conceptual, textual and philosophical forces these texts bring in.

At this point, if we are to truly wonder at what Singapore City can be, including what those writers, artists, thinkers and theorists who engage with it may become, we have much to gain by drawing various forces from Patke’s essay and evaluating what other compositions and relations these forces can form: what other new compositions of subjects and spaces including ones yet to come can be produced within a Singapore City, in the middle of things? This is the activity from which the rest of this chapter develops its trajectory.

While Patke may indeed be one of the few Benjaminian scholars in Singapore, we must be careful not to conclude that Patke is trying to turn Singapore into a South-East Asian version of the Berlin of Benjamin’s childhood or a nineteenth-century Parisian arcade. We must also resist reducing Patke’s textual-poetical experiments into attempts for him to become a Benjaminian flâneur. The concern for this rest of this chapter is to extract the conceptual, textual, philosophical and even poetical forces from Patke’s essay, and join these forces with other conceptual, textual and philosophical forces to produce a Singapore city yet to come, a terra potentiae that is thus never a Platonic (hence weakened) copy of Berlin or Paris. It is never a matter of gauging how successful Patke was in applying Benjaminian concepts to the post-colonial Singapore City.

It is not a matter of writing theory ‘according-to-Benjamin’. There is no one Benjamin who dictates what an essay should be. As Patke himself writes, there are “several Benjamins to be conjured from The Arcades Project.”725 Particular to Patke’s essay we may say there are at least ‘Benjamin-becoming-postcolonial-theorist’, ‘Benjamin-becoming-Singaporean’, ‘Benjamin-becoming-tropical-city-citizen’, and so forth. It is not to suggest Benjamin is these “roles” or takes on these subject positions, but that in Patke’s essay the answer to the question of “what is Benjamin” becomes compositions or subjectivities composed with forces that these roles emit. In Patke’s essay Benjamin is no longer what he was in The Arcades Project, but he is also not of twenty-first-century

725 Ibid.
Singapore. Here, there is a Benjamin, or several Benjamins, in the middle of various histories, countries, cities and words.

In the next few sections I will further elaborate how in Patke’s *Benjamin’s Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City* Patke can be Becoming-Benjamin – neither wholly Patke nor Benjamin. I will then argue that in this complication of identities the theorist’s, which is Patke’s, ability to judge and pronounce what Singapore City is precisely becomes problematized. The voice of judgment is no longer produced by either Patke or Benjamin. The judgment produced within Patke’s essay is potentially and continually transformed insofar as it is always differently read and used by different readers who bring to it a variety of other conceptual, textual and philosophical forces.

a) Becoming-Benjamin

At the same time as there are many Benjamins, there are many Patkes. The ‘I’ – assuming the role of Patke’s I – in Patke’s essay is varied. Patke’s ‘I’ is not one who is identical to Benjamin-the-theorist who may judge Singapore from a 1930s European perspective. The ‘Patke’ in Patke’s essay is becoming-Benjamin; implicating the textual, poetical, philosophical, spatial and conceptual forces of the *flâneur*, the social-textual motifs of Charles Baudelaire as well as compositional techniques of Benjamin’s compatriots like Bertolt Brecht and Ernest Bloch. ‘Patke the theorist’ is in the middle of these characters, countries, cities and words.\(^{726}\) He is becoming-Benjamin among many other becomings.

Benjamin’s world view is not a model for Patke to follow strictly. Then, what or who is Benjamin? Deleuze and his long time collaborator Félix Guattari offer a useful consideration that may elaborate Benjamin’s function for Patke. Benjamin is for Patke what Deleuze and Guattari call a “conceptual persona”, a “precursor” to Patke’s ‘I’, his ‘cogito’. But, Deleuze and Guattari remind us, any ‘I’ is never just indebted to an ‘I’ before it, but is formed by the forces of many ‘Is’, many conceptual personae. This is why the “history of philosophy,” the business of thinking itself which the thinker

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\(^{726}\) One can see in Patke’s writing Foucault’s notion of taking care of oneself, producing or constructing oneself, as never apart from the activity of writing (which we had discussed earlier in this chapter). Writing is an activity that enables a gathering of forces to produce and transform particular subjectivities. To write is not to merely externalize thoughts. The whole activity of writing, as Foucault suggested, is “circular”: to write is to allow a “rereading” which in turn re-initiates the process of thinking, and so forth. In other words writing affirms the dynamic process of thinking. See also: Foucault (2000), pp.208-09
partakes in, must go through many personae at once, and be changed indefinitely according to the particular forces composing these personae. The forces of innumerable personae cutting cross and transforming each other affirm each persona’s livestines. In this sense it becomes possible to say that to evoke Benjamin and his concepts is to wrest Benjamin from his reification as a mere historical object. As Benjamin himself suggests, to engage with history is not to make it a “homogenous, empty time.” To write history is to make history to be happening. It is to make history be “filled by the presence of the now [jetztzeit].” But, this is not to make history a succession of “presents”. The jetztzeit for Benjamin is a “nunc stans”, an eternal now that is sustained by constant change. To write history, if we are to follow Benjamin’s stress on the jetztzeit is to find ways to produce assemblages of textual fragments that can actively incite an event of change, actively incite those who engage with these fragments to think and act outside their reified sense of self. Thus, to evoke Benjamin becomes less a ‘study’ of his life, or confining “Benjamin” to a fixed distant ‘present’ that is a now a ‘past’. It is to extract various forces from Benjamin the conceptual persona and use these forces to generate changes, to enable the jetztzeit to take place.

The attention is no longer on Benjamin the historical person. As philosopher Eugene Holland notes, although the conceptual persona may be derived from an actual historical person, one must not confuse the conceptual persona with the actual historical person s/he was. The evocation of a conceptual persona does not tell a story through the eyes of that actual historical person. This is why the Benjamin evoked in Patke’s essay is never the Benjamin from the 1930s. Patke’s essay is not a 1930s’ Benjamin’s story or views of Singapore City; the story and views are yet to come. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “it is possible that the conceptual persona only rarely or allusively appears for himself.” If s/he is there s/he often remains “nameless and subterranean.” S/he is often expressed only as there in the continuous event of writing and reading, as the

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727 Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (1994) What is Philosophy? (Trans. H. Tomlinson & G. Burchell), New York: Columbia University Press. p.63. Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, write that the task of philosophy is to “constantly bring conceptual personae to life,” and this is achieve not by holding them as revered conceptual entities, but as forces that one may use to transform other concepts or values. As such it is not wrong to say to sustain “life” in “Benjamin” is to cut Benjamin the conceptual persona with varied other textual, conceptual, spatial, material among other forces, to maintain his dynamic transformation and relevance.

728 Benjamin (1969), pp.252-53


730 Deleuze & Guattari (1994), p.63
detrimentalizing body of a composition of historical, conceptual and textual forces that in recombining with other forces affirm recomposition.

The philosopher who evokes a conceptual persona actively annihilates the existing relations among forces that currently compose this conceptual persona as a definitive historical figure. And in this annihilation the historical figure is connected with different forces; the philosopher gives the historical figure life to make him/her philosophically relevant once more. The conceptual persona operates only on the condition that the historical figure in its recomposition will spur the philosopher’s own life-composition in directions yet to be known. This relation between a philosopher and historical figures – other philosophers, writers, thinkers and even artists – is succinctly elaborated by literary theorist Jean-Jacques Lecercle:

The philosophical commentator 'fait un enfant dans le dos à son auteur'. He does not respect his [the other author’s] intentions of meaning for what they are worth; he is not content with respectfully expounding the solutions his author presents. He does not treat the work he comments on as a ‘boîte de signifiés’, a collection of ready-made meanings, to be reassembled for ease of exposition. What he does is extract a problem [or particular forces] from the [author’s] text, a problem that does violence to the text, of which the author himself may not have been aware, but which enables us to understand how the text works … He calls this ‘reading a text intensively’.  

For Lecercle, the philosopher ‘violates’ the order and sanctity of the authors, writers and historical figures evoked, but not without also using the forces s/he extracts from them to violate his/her own text and even the author-position and subjectivity of his/her own text. But the philosopher does this only to attend to the text and the author of this text’s intensity, their absolute potentiality. The philosopher attends to the forces the text and the conceptual persona can offer in order to incite change. As Deleuze and Guattari note, what subsists in the evocation of conceptual personae is the question “‘Who is ‘I’?’”. That ‘person’ who speaks in the philosopher’s text “is always a third person,” never the philosopher him/herself, but neither is s/he the authors, writers and historical figures evoked.

731 Lecercle, Jean-Jacques (2002) Deleuze and Language, Hampshire, UK & New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p.37. “The philosophical commentator ‘fait un enfant dans le dos à son auteur’” means the philosophical commentator is like a child who turns his back on the author, the conceptual persona, s/he uses. And, “boîte de signifiés” is a box of signifiers. (Translation mine)

732 Deleuze & Guattari (1994), pp.64-65
To evoke a conceptual persona is nothing short of finding ways to create new relations among the forces encountered in order to constitute new subjects and spaces, and most importantly new knowledge and ways of knowing. To evoke a conceptual persona is nothing short of finding new forces and relations one can enter into in order to affirm life’s dynamism. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “the conceptual persona is not the philosopher’s representative, but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors [intercesseurs]… Conceptual personae are the philosopher’s ‘heteronyms’.” Evoking conceptual personae is to write and rewrite, read and reread their concepts and construct one’s own life as tending toward newness, even if only to re-invent the “past” through other stories.733 Thus, Deleuze and Guattari continue to write of the act of evoking conceptual personae:

I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae, at the same time that these personae themselves become something other than what they are historically, mythologically, or commonly… The conceptual persona is the becoming of the subject of philosophy, on a par with the philosopher.734

Indeed the philosopher, the one writing a theoretical text such as Patke, is never just following his/her conceptual personae. Benjamin is not someone Patke writes about. All those sub-titles and fragmentary sections he has in his essay - “preamble”, “modern”, “Benjaminiana”, “who’s Hecuba…?”, “complicity”, “debris”, “ruins”, “traces”, “fetish”, “phantasmagoria”, “progress”, “postcolonial”, “dream”, “utopia”, “antithesis”, “thresholds”, “dialectics”, “globalism”, “city types” and “back to the future” – are not there just to explain Benjamin and his concepts. To evoke a conceptual persona, as Holland elaborates, involves “corralling the particles of information, combining particles of information, combining or condensing components drawn selectively from real problems and/or from pre-existing concepts into the formation of new concepts.”735 From this event of corralling and recombining information, textual quotes, textual and conceptual forces there emerges a subject yet to come that is neither the philosopher nor his/her conceptual persona.

733 Ibid, p.64
734 Ibid.
735 Holland (2003), p.164
In writing of Benjamin, in writing short phrases and quotes from *The Arcades Project* and other Benjaminian texts, ‘Patke’ is becoming-Benjamin, no longer *just* Patke but *not yet* Benjamin; he is in a middle that is neither a synthesis of identities. “Patke-becoming-Benjamin” is in between a Patke who is becoming-someone else and a Benjamin who is becoming-someone else.

b) A “City of Words”, or a city in-between words: an emerging *terra potentiæ*

In the middle of Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, Patke’s essay with its numerous sub-titles, the nineteenth century Parisian arcades, and the material-architectural-urban-geographical Singapore city there is a space, a territory, which no Benjamins, no Patkes, no Parisian nor Singaporean has walked. It is a space where Benjamins-to-come, Patkes-to-come, Parisian-and-Singaporeans-to-come *are to be*.

One may say that this place is a “city of words.”736 But it goes beyond the words’ function to represent. There is not *the* city, and then words coming after it. The city of words is a city *of* words; subsisting on the surface of words. It is a space between textual fragments – fragments depicting “scenes” from old Paris, another speaking of Calcutta’s slums, yet another lambasting Singapore’s pop culture and so forth – without any central theme cutting through to organize these fragments into a proper (syn)-thesis. What sort of city can these fragments produce? Are these fragments a formal presentation of postmodern, post-colonial collaged societies? Or, are they capable of adding certain textual forces to actual postmodern, post-colonial societies and cities in order to continually transform these societies and cities’ form? Most importantly, what is the form of these continually changing societies and cities? Their form is their potential beyond commensuration; their form is their potential to come-to-form. As Patke notes, the city of words does more than represent. The city of words “is the site for a perpetual negotiation between the providential and the unpredictable.”737 Every moment the words seem to suggest what *the* postcolonial city *should be*, the words set upon the *should bes’* deterritorialization. Patke elaborates, the critical text becomes critical of its own form

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736 Patke (2000), p.6. In fact this thesis can be a city of words, which needs to be navigated through, where a reader can find areas (or words) that connect most with, where readers can borrow words written here for their own use, hence in effect adding to this city of words. In many ways this is what my treating of Patke’s montage-essay on post-colonial cities is doing – adding to Patke’s city of word’s intensity and extensity.

737 Ibid.
and trajectories; every instant “the euphoria that rewards the drive to betterment” takes shape it “gets deflated.” Thus, for Patke the city of words becomes its own “ruins,” but a ruin in which more cities and ruins to come may emerge.\(^\text{738}\)

In writing words that subvert their own representational function, in producing this event-like city of words, there emerges a spatio-temporality beyond the socio-political and populist imaginations of what Singapore should be; therein lies the challenge to the reliance on historical determinism and schedules for national development. It is beyond the theories of what a post-colonial city and nation should be. As Foucault suggests, such a space admits a true heterogeneity beyond relative positions. Heterogeneity is the potential of many births, many genuses. This is a space which “looms on the horizon of our preconceptions, our theories and our systems.”\(^\text{739}\)  It is the potential of what a city, a text of a city, and the relations between a text and a city can be. It is a terra potentiae, all those spaces and times unforeseeable, which loom within and subsist in the production of writing and reading, affecting the actuality of the next word or sentence to be scribed.

One may add it is this terra potentiae’s incommensurability that drives words and sentences toward further experimentation: Writing, here, becomes a practice of finding

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\(^{738}\) Ibid. As Buck-Mors, citing Benjamin’s contemplation of the ruin in his book Trauerspiel, suggests, the ruins while portraying capitalist culture’s “transitoriness and fragility” and “destructiveness”, nonetheless through the “method of montage” can also be “elevated to the position of allegory.” As allegorical the ruin presents imagery, views, voices and spaces that are yet to be seen in refiled capitalist culture. The fragments of capitalist culture that lay in ruins in the form of a montage become the “antidote to myth.” Given Patke’s Benjaminian turn in his own writing composition and style, one suspects Patke’s assemblage of fragmentary paragraphs was trying to demonstrate this antithetical stance to capitalist culture’s harmonizing perspective, and to develop the textual conditions necessary for these views, spaces and peoples yet to come to emerge. See: Buck-Mors, p.164

\(^{739}\) Foucault, Michel (1997) “Of Other Spaces” in Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory (Ed. N. Leach), London & New York: Routledge. pp.354-356, p.354. The horizon is no longer the line dividing present and future as if the two temporalities are sequentially laid out, and that the future is pre-destined. The space that looms on the horizon of our preconceptions, theories and categorical systems is beyond numeration and predictive comprehension. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggested the horizon is “the horizon of the infinite.” At such a horizon the finite lay-out of finite things – bodies, thoughts, spaces and subjectivities – attain their infinitude; they become more than what they were/are but at the same time what they are becoming cannot be represented. Their infinitude is preserved by their difference from themselves. Thus, “the horizon of the infinite is no longer the horizon of the whole [the finite organized Cartesian space], but the ‘whole’ (all that is) as put on hold everywhere, pushed to the outside just as much as it is pushed back inside the ‘self’. It is no longer a line that is drawn, or a line that will be drawn, which orients or gathers the meaning of a course of progress or navigation. It is the opening (la brèche) or distancing (l’écartement) of horizon itself, and in the opening: us. We happen as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture.” The horizon is the spatio-temporality where/when the finite perspectives of the “I” or “self” deterritorializes, and become part of the great infinitude or the non-telic event of change. The horizon which otherside is unrepresentable is a terra potentiae; it is the terra potentiae of both earth and human. See also: Nancy, Jean-Luc (2000) Being Singular Plural (Trans. R.D. Richardson & A.E. O’Bryne), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. p.xii
ways to incite the emergence of this incommensurable space, which in turn may result in the future production of other textual combinations. Moreover, this practice is ceaseless given it is a non-telic process; the numerous combination of texts actualized attest to not just a numerical multiplicity but a multiplicity guaranteeing unmarked potentialities. A *terra potentiae* must be regarded as the spatio-temporality of all acts of (re)writing and (re)reading held *in potentiae*, and the future potentialities these acts hold. A *terra potentiae* is not represented by any one isolated act of (re)writing or (re)reading, but as the perpetual event of this incessant practice. It is not represented; it is *there*.

Insofar as this *terra potentiae* is preserved as all spatio-temporalities one may say there is not any one set of theories or concepts that explains *terra potentiae*. It is an event inclusive of potentially all theories and concepts inasmuch as writing and reading may generate new theories and concepts. Thus, it follows that Patke’s essay does not so much represent this *terra potentiae*, as it immanently expresses it. This ‘expressing’ is enabled in the way Benjaminian concepts and phrases are cut across the statistics of various Asian cities’ GDPs and other conceptual and textual-poetical forces from thinkers like Foucault and Singaporean poets like Arthur Yap that Patke includes in his essay. Ultimately, it is the potential relations Patke’s essay can make with other texts, concepts, theories, writers and thinkers that express a *terra potentiae*. *Terra potentiae* does not have a separate or prior identity outside a practice of writing, at the same time it cannot be represented by the words and sentences actualized in practice. It is a spatio-temporality that is, as Roland Barthes notes, “outside the sentence,” subsisting as the space of the potential relations a sentence can form with other sentences, readers, concepts and words. Barthes elaborates, the “figure of the text” is not what it represents externally or the protagonist-position guiding the readers. This figure is a text’s “movements”. What is *figuring* or moving is a text’s capacity to affect and transform thinking and acting. This movement entails transforming one’s

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740 One may say this entire thesis itself expresses a *terra potentiae*. It is the implicated forces of the different theories, philosophers, conceptual personae, histories and concepts cutting across each other – as an ongoing activity – that emerges as a *terra potentiae*.

741 Barthes, Roland (1976) *The Pleasure of the text* (Trans. R. Miller), London: Jonathan Cape Press. p.49. While Barthes writes that such a spatio-temporality may be *outside* the sentence, he does not suggest it existed before the sentence. That which is outside the sentence is a “non-sentence” – the absolute potentiality that sentences and words *can be*. It is the potentiality subsisting within the sentence, but outside the sentence’s representational scope.

742 Ibid, p.56
understanding of how the relations between a space and a subject can be conceived, and hence changing how one may engage with or write of spaces. These are movements that are there in the practice of writing and reading, including the practice of theoretical writing and reading, and are not merely represented. These movements form the *terra potentice’s* ‘form’. As Deleuze in a conversation with Foucault famously remarks, “Representation no longer exists; there’s only action.”

Outside the realm of representation there is no space of theory versus a space of application, or a presumption that the former precedes the latter. We speak of the practice of theory, and not theory versus practice. *In lieu* of ‘theory proper’, for Deleuze and Foucault, there is “a system of relays” that is composed of “a multiplicity of parts that are both theoretical and practical.” What amounts to theory is not a text that attempts to categorize what surrounds it. “A theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself.”

Following Deleuze and Foucault’s understanding of theory as multiplicitous one may say to write of Singapore as a post-colonial city, as Patke did, is not to discover the theory of the post-colonial Singapore city. Theory production is not an account of one theory versus other relativized theories. To produce a theory that truly multiplies itself is to produce, what was discussed earlier in this chapter, “the event of theory”, which is a discursive spatio-temporality/event that continually opens up the divisions between the binaries of “knowledge and its objects,” and “theory and practice” in order to forge new subjects, spaces and thoughts.

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743 What is philosophical of a philosophical text is not the text’s ability to impart something “external” or “referential”. Deleuze, following Spinoza’s consideration of thought’s nature in his *Treatise on the Correction of the Understanding*, notes to write or read philosophy “does not consist in our gaining knowledge of some thing, but in gaining knowledge of our power of understanding… it consists solely in the knowledge of pure understanding, of its nature, its laws and its forces.” This suggest that the truly philosophical part of a philosophical text is its capacity to enable thinking to transcend its own Cartesian limits of self and Other, individual and space. The philosophical text’s “enabling” of thought to go beyond its own Cartesian limits is that which is “moving” and “figuring” in a text. See: Deleuze, Gilles (1992) *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (Trans. M. Joughin), New York: Zone Books. p.129


745 Ibid, p.207. This system of relays is not composed of theory versus application, but at once both theoretical and practical. Actual writing practices forces new thoughts to emerge thus evoking a ‘theoretical’ and philosophical moment.

746 Ibid, p.208

747 Bhabha (1994), p.25
The event of theory is a practice of writing and reading in which there is a gathering of various forces, which together expresses subjects and spaces that may be yet to come. Writing theory as an event of theory, as Bhabha notes, produces “a narrative strategy for the emergence” of subjectivities and spatialities yet to come, and in turn “incite[s] us to think through – and beyond – theory.” A narrative strategy is an action, a practice and not merely abstract speculation; it involves actual experimentations with the act of narrating. The event of theory is, thus, also an action which unwrests formed theories or concepts from philosophical books and stretch them across a spatio-temporality that is itself spaced in-between indefinite pasts and futures. The event of theory makes concepts and theories vital by transforming – rereading and rewriting – them.

Hence, I ask, is Patke’s essay not a collection of textual, poetical, conceptual and philosophical forces that adds movement and intensity to the morphing form of the ‘event of Singaporean post-colonial theory’?

In the middle of judgement

The post-colonial city with its council flats and underground malls (like Singapore’s Raffles Link Mall), as Patke in his ‘becoming-Benjamin subjectivity’ suggests, is no longer a place where the ‘I’ as an immutable inside is opposed to the urban material world as an external entity. The bourgeois Cartesian ‘I’ is there only because the practice of collecting things, peoples, forces and concepts exists. Here, Patke writes:

Through Benjamin, we see the city of modernity not as the habitation of the bourgeois, but as a threshold experience foregrounded by marginal types such as the collector, gambler, prostitute, and the flâneur. They share one feature. They resist the notion of the city as home to the burgher. In modernity, the covered arcade provides a dialectical reversal of the traditional antithesis between indoors and outdoors, bourgeois interior and urban panorama.

In a terra potentiæ city, which is the middle of Patke’s Benjaminian Singapore, Benjamin’s Parisian arcades, Patke’s essay and Benjamin’s own essays, the bourgeois perspective guaranteeing a stable position from which one can judge the world around is ungrounded. There is no burgher to contain the bourgeois Cartesian stance and vision. As Patke notes, to approach such an amorphous city of words is to treat “urbanism as
riddle.” The city as a riddle is never a fixed spatio-temporality in which the question “what is this city about?” can be answered. The riddle-city prompts questions rather than produce answers. The concern switches from defining the city to a concern with what it can do. This ‘can’ enables the city’s absolute potentiality. The ‘can’ enables the practice of writing to go beyond the function of representation and become one of riddling, asking questions that beget questions. Each word or sentence written does not judge but adds forces to the city’s continuous changing form; words and sentences intensifies the city’s reality.

What then is judgment when a theoretical position, that has the form of Bhabha’s event of theory, takes place in a spatio-temporality that is in the middle of gathering forces?

Patke notes in an earlier essay, Voice and Authority in English Poetry in Singapore, what is powerful as a theoretical-critical force in post-colonial writings is the presence of voices that are “always at odds with itself, whose authority resides, paradoxically, not in their critique of the polity that voices them, but in the immanent critique” within. These are voices that are so much opposed to other voices as they are voices that differentiate from themselves. As such, this is a critique expressed not by references to notions of betterment or higher morals, but by the way the textual, poetical, conceptual and philosophical forces are potentially decomposed and recomposed so that what amounts to an author’s authority is immanently dismantled, subverted or undermined. Citing poet Czeslaw Milosz, Patke writes, the author(ity) of a text’s ‘I’ is “‘liberated, again and again, from his ego by the poetic idea’.” A text’s poetic idea is its capacity for heterogenesis – its event of autopoeisis.

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750 Patke, p.13
751 As was discussed in Chapter Three, to ask what is a Singapore City that is yet to come, and in which we cannot envision how its landscape looks like and what its inhabitants are supposed to be, is to ask a question that begets more questions. Such a question promotes the intensive act of thinking, and enriches the chaotic seismic reality of thought’s geography. To encounter and seriously dwell on a question of what a Singapore City yet to come is but simultaneously knowing what is yet to come is indefinable, as philosopher Frank Stevenson notes in his essay “Nietzsche’s Umsphinx: Riddles and Rhetorical Questions”, to be “consumed by/transformed into the riddle itself, and/or the riddler him/herself.” See: Stevenson, Frank W. (2002) “Nietzsche’s Umsphinx: Riddles and Rhetorical Questions” in Concentric: Studies in English Literature and Linguistics (28:1, January 2002), pp.1-28, p.3
The theorist no longer has a moral duty to deliver the ‘truth’. S/he does not speak from a place of stability, nor is s/he capable of speaking/judging confidently as an ‘I’ who remains untouched by the forces swirling around and passing through him/her. I ask, Where is “Patke”, his ‘I’, in his collection of Benjaminian, urban, architectural, philosophical, textual, poetical, statistical, and conceptual forces?; Where is his voice, if not sustained and transformed in an event of theory where and when his essay Benjamin’s Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City becomes an event that includes many texts coming before it and is recomposable through/as the many texts coming after?; Where is Patke the judge-theorist in this event of theory?

However, when questioning where, who and when the judge-theorist is we do not mean there is no judgment, as Deleuze writes, there is no “deferred destiny in an ‘unlimited postponement’.” He continues to note, deferred judgment still preserves the ultimate moral value at the end of the world which all Men are compared against and judged. Hence, deferred judgment is still judgment – the dividing into moral Good and Evil – that will be executed at end of (Christian-Judeo) chronic history. Against the notion of judgment as paying off a debt, righting a wrong, even if it is a deferred act, Deleuze argued that the whole element of judgment, the element from which values derive from, needs to be transformed. Judgment should be dispensed of the eschatological. In a Nietzschean-Spinozist turn Deleuze suggests:

The way to escape judgment is to make yourself a body without organs, to find your body without organs. This had already been Nietzsche’s project: to define the body in its becoming, in its intensity, as the power to affect or to be affected, that is, as Will to Power.

In fact Deleuze continued to elaborate the process of judgment as really composed of forces in constant differential relations, producing bodies and simultaneously deterritorializing bodies:

A body of judgment, with its organization, its segments… its differentiations, its hierarchies [becomes] a body of justice in which the segments are dissolved, the differentiations lost, and the hierarchies thrown into confusion, a body that retains nothing but intensities that make up

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755 Ibid, p.131
uncertain zones, that traverse these zones at full speed and confront the
powers in them.\textsuperscript{756}

To make a judgment is no longer to compare existing bodies or compositions of forces to
established models of identity, and to gauge the degree of similarity these bodies have to
such models. The whole element of judgment, what defines it, is changed. Judgment in
this Nietzschean-Spinozist turn becomes a matter of evaluating what the forces
composing an ‘I’, a subjectivity or spatiality \textit{can do} otherwise, what other relations and
compositions can it form? Evaluation is not the task of categorizing forces as Good or
Evil, but attending to what they can do. Evaluation is a concern with how forces can be
composed together to express further changes, becomings, dynamism and potentiality.
As legal theorist Nathan Moore, following Deleuze and Spinoza, suggests, it is this
concern with change rather than properties that prompts the production of a new
ethology and a new sense of “justice”.\textsuperscript{757} Deleuze himself elaborates,

\begin{quote}
Now it is a question of knowing whether relations (and which ones?) can
compound directly to form a new, more ‘extensive’ relation, or whether
capacities can compound directly to constitute a more ‘intense’ capacity or
power. It is no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of
socialibilities and communities. How do individuals enter into composition
with one another in order to form a higher individual, \textit{ad infinitum}?\textsuperscript{758}
\end{quote}

Hence, the question for the theorist is how can s/he make him/herself a body without
organs, a body that is capable of its own heterogenesis? How can s/he free him/herself
from the debt-task of having to represent his/her object of study? How, instead, can s/he

\textsuperscript{756} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{757} Moore, Nathan (2004) “Concept and Localities: Badiou, Deleuze and Law” in \textit{Studies in Law, Politics and Society (Vol.13)}, pp.143-173, p.165. Moore notes that Deleuze following Nietzsche and Spinoza distinguishes “judgment from justice (or jurisprudence).” Judgment denotes moral categories, hence posited as external to socio-legal machines, “whereas jurisprudence would be the assertion of a truth to come in its very unravelling, a duration of creativity” that allows the perpetual reconfiguration of these socio-legal machines. Justice or jurisprudence concerns true differentiation – \textit{difference from itself} – rather than different moral models. This is why for Moore “jurisprudence would be the opening of judgment.” Posing a similar view Singaporean writer/literary theorist Irving Goh in consideration of the relationship between justice and freedom in Singaporean novels, suggests that post-colonial justice is to give justice to the “just \textit{is}” of the people and nation. What Goh is hinting here with the term “just \textit{is}” is to attend to \textit{what things \textit{are}} rather than what they should be according to some external preconceived model. This is to attend to the way things are changing according to their internal nature, their natural capacities. To attend to the “just \textit{is}” is “to sustain that systole of the force of its [the people’s and nation’s non-telic] promise, to ensure the continual genesis of the thinking, the articulation of such freedom.” See: Goh, Irving (2001) “Promising ‘Post-Colonialism’: Deleuze-Guattari’s ‘Minor Literature’ and the Poetry of Arthur Yap” in \textit{Genre (Vol. 22: Postcolonialism and the Dislocation of Culture)}. pp.13-32, p.13
\textsuperscript{758} Deleuze, Gilles (1988) \textit{Spinoza: Practical Philosophy} (Trans. R. Hurley), San Francisco: City Light Books. p.126
proceed to find out what this object of study that s/he is engaged with can do? How can writing affirm and contribute to life’s dynamism, experiments and unpredictable change?

For Deleuze the theorist writes not to make the text meet up with what the text should or must do; to write is to experiment with a text’s capabilities. What is expressed as significant meanings in the text does not exist before the text is written or used. This is why Deleuze says, “It is a matter of one’s practical conception of the ‘plan’.” The plan is not conceived beforehand, but produced in the activity of writing. Such is the “plan of composition,” where/when “there is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force. Here the plan is concerned only with motions and rests, with dynamic affective charges.” In this ‘plan’ that exists only in practice there are only “frozen catatoniases and accelerated movements, unformed elements, nonsubjectified affects.” There are no more subjects corresponding to Oedipal-familial-sexual-social-cultural-historical-political types as ground; there are only bodies cutting across each other, deterritorializing and reterritorializing each other, and acting out their absolute potentiality.

A body of judgment, with its organization, segments, relative differences and hierarchies when transformed into a process of Nietzschean-Spinozist evaluation is “a system… indistinguishable from its own opening. It is the point where the elements of a system are gathered up (contracted) and re-distributed in a new way.” No longer can one say this...

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759 Ibid, p.129
760 Ibid, pp.128-29
761 As philosopher Ian Buchanan notes, what is truly radical in Deleuze’s corpus is how it offers a conceptual force to rethink the relationship cultural studies can have with peoples, groups, nations and places. One is no longer compelled to analyze these peoples, groups, nations and places as examples of “social types”. Rather, “social types become symptoms.” Social types become signs that affect us and in turn capacitate us to affect others. Hence the pertinent question becomes what these social types can do. See: Buchanan, Ian (2000) Deleuzism: A Metacommentary, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.56
762 Moore (2004), p.155. Moore, following Deleuze and Spinoza, understands a system indistinguishable from its own opening as a system capable of being ONE with the event of change, which in Spinozist parlance is “a being absolutely infinite” (this is the Spinozist God that is unpredictable as Nature, hence Nature itself – encapsulated in Spinoza’s famous formulation: Deus sive Natura). Thus when the dynamic event of judgment opens up, Moore like Spinoza and Deleuze does not conceive of it as opening up to “some heaven” or else a higher transcendental cause, but opening up to, being ONE with, the plane of immanence, the plane where ALL begins over and over anew, creating new subjectivities and spatialities. For any body of judgment to be opened up, it must be opening, first and foremost, to “the Open” itself, to the absolute potentiality of the event of change which it already partakes in. As such, it is inconceivable for Moore to distinguish a system from an opening: “the system-opening pair cannot be ended, meaning also that they cannot be separated. They are reciprocally determining of one another.” Absolute potentiality is not the state which must be actualized, but is preserved as the absolute condition of any system in its infinite transformation.
is the position from which the judge announces his/her ‘answer’. No longer can one say this is a ‘source’ from which a meaning stems, for meanings are but particular compositions susceptible to change. The judge, the judged and the judgment itself are always in the moving middle of things. Judgment is always in the middle of an event (of theory) with no ultimate cause or pronouncement.

a) Combat-between
What gets evaluated is no longer necessarily concerned with the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ body. It is not about asking whether Patke in his essay on Benjamin got it ‘right’ or not. It is not a war between Patke’s Benjamin and my (or another writer’s) Benjamin.

What happens in evaluation is the incitement of a body’s capacities. This incitement process is not predicated upon an end that must be fulfilled by prescribed procedures. It is not a process of proving a hypothesis correct or disproving another hypothesis. It is not a process of pitting one value system against another, but attending to a value system’s absolute potentialities. And this attending to its absolute potentialities can be understood as a “combat-between”. Deleuze observes, profound change, change without reliance on models, is expressed when it is “the combatant himself who is the combat: the combat is between his own parts.” To combat is to evaluate what other relations can be produced between the parts and forces between bodies and within a body. Deleuze further elaborates, “the combat-between is the process through which a force enriches itself by seizing hold of other forces and joining itself to them in a new ensemble: a becoming.” The act of combating-between “is a powerful nonorganic vitality that supplements force with force, and enriches whatever it takes hold of.”

It is with this sense of the combat that Patke’s fragmentary essay, with its Benjamin-inspired paragraphs, references, quotes, concepts, conceptual personae, does more than represent the fragmentary post-colonial city. As Patke suggests, the essay’s fragmentary ‘form’ has the ability to incite both writer and reader to “think in fragments.” Thinking in fragments becomes an act of combat instead of reconciling established concepts and values with objects, artworks and built environments. Each paragraph in Patke’s essay

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763 Ibid, p.133
764 Deleuze (1998), p.132
has its own title and concerns. In fact, Patke’s essay, like Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, which is made up of a collection of textual fragments, can be read non-sequentially; each paragraph can be its own miniature essay emitting its own particular mix of socio-political, textual, philosophical and poetical forces. The reader gains from reading Patke’s essay a kaleidoscopic image made up of paragraph-fragments such as “Globalism”, “City Types”, “Back to the Future”, etc. In one of the paragraph-fragments titled “Benjaminiana”, Patke, following Benjamin’s acknowledgment of the montage-text’s powers, conceives of his own essay as being able to resist synthesizing these paragraph-fragments “into a systematic theory or model.”

For Patke, as for Benjamin, the montage-text is not a handbook to navigate through the material-architectural-urban city. Rather, it is itself like a street that the reader must actively negotiate with and worked through. Patke writes, the montage-text “invites us to treat experience as stretching across time rather than simply extending in space.” Readers become temporal creatures that stretch across this space that has time as its interiority. The reader navigates for him/herself and picks up forces and concepts s/he can use to assemble his/her own assemblage of forces for his/her own post-colonial urban project. In this sense one may consider Patke’s paragraph-fragments to be what Deleuze calls “an affective constellation,” which has the power to affect and transform thinking and being, to make writer and reader constantly question where the protagonist’s position is.

In engaging with this collection of textual fragments there is no one position that is necessarily better than another, for “I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places.” ‘I’ pass through and become one with a plane of forces in varying relations. To even think as an ‘I’ in such an instance is to “already invoke[d] the madness of the double turning-away, which launched thought into infinite wandering,” but never “into error.” Such is the *flâneur* who no longer wanders as an unified subject through the city of words and fragments. This is a *flâneur* who cuts across his/her own body, when s/he is

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766 Patke (2000), p.4  
767 Ibid.  
769 Deleuze & Guattari (1994), p.64  
770 Ibid, p.54
becoming-Benjamin, becoming-Patke, becoming-Deleuze, becoming-Spinoza, becoming-Nietzsche, becoming-Singaporean, sometimes simultaneously. To think amidst these juxtaposed, collected words and fragments, and become is not to reconcile established concepts with objects, as Deleuze and Guattari reminds us, “thought is creation, not will to truth.” 771 Or as Patke notes, writing, as expressing “the image of debris … equivocates between a constitutional inability to complete an undertaking and a principled resistance to closure.” 772 The debris of words, sentences, quotes and conceptual personae that gathers on the pages of Patke’s essay functions not to judge but to bring into existence the condition that can enable the emergence of subjects and spaces yet to come, and these are subjects and spaces that differentiate from themselves, thus expressing a combat-between. 773

What is learnt here?

As Patke writes, “the explication of causality itself becomes a form of understanding.” 774 The process of explication imparts more than what is supposed to be learnt. In the process of explication, the textual forces cutting across socio-historical, political, conceptual and even referential forces may very well produce new kinds of compositions, bodies, subjects and spaces that are always on the brink of becoming-

771 Ibid. Blanchot writes that in the juxtaposition of words and sentences, in other words fragments, the relations within are not merely reiterative of a given narrative. Rather, in the juxtaposition words, sentences and fragments are an “arrangement [that] is entrusted to signs that are modalities of space, and that make space a play of relations wherein time is at stake.” Juxtaposed words, sentences and fragments express a space that is not referenced, but a space that is there in reality, a reality which exists with time as its utmost interiority. This is the “unity” among fragments. It is no longer the contradictions among fragments that gives meaning and significance to each fragment; meaning and significance is expressed from the potential yet unforeseen potentials that the fragments in relation can produce – what other new bodies can two or more fragmentary bodies make? Hence, Blanchot in consideration of the relations among written fragments remarked that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra who in “wandering among men” sees only “debris, always in pieces, broken, scattered, and thus as though on a field of carnage and slaughter.” Yet Zarathustra sees “unity” among the fragments instead of mere chaos. What unites the fragments is the affirmation of “chance”, the will to let these fragments become integrated into the event of change and chance itself. To will them to express that absolute potentiality that is there within their relations. It is “unity of the future,” one unpredictable that unites the fragments. Such is a future which can only be spoken of by “this other language that is not governed by light nor obscured by the absence of light.” See also: Blanchot, Maurice (1993) The Infinite Conversation (Trans. S. Hanson), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp.169, 153-54, 167

772 Patke (2000), p.6

773 Deleuze (1998), p.135. As Deleuze suggests, practices of writing that challenge mere representation are capable of harnessing new and different forces together to form new compositions expressing new subjects and spaces. It is this bringing forth of new subjects and spaces, ones that are yet to come, that Deleuze notes as writing’s ability “to bring into existence” something new, rather than merely judge as per-pre-established moral codes.

something or someone else. As Spinoza famously says, “no one has yet determined what the body can do.”\textsuperscript{775} What other bodies a body can be is not something one can map a schedule for. These bodies, composed of textual, corporeal, socio-historical, political, visual, conceptual, poetical, material and philosophical forces express a true difference – difference \textit{in itself} – that moral codes cannot impart.\textsuperscript{776}

What amounts to what is known or learnt is always stretched out in the side-less middle of this process. What is learnt or what happens in learning goes beyond specific socio-historical spatio-temporalities and established subjects. We are coming to learn of a Singapore that is “outside particular determinations.”\textsuperscript{777} This Outside, while non-representable, nonetheless activates thinking, wresting thinking from its Cartesian mode. As literary theorist Alan Bourassa writes, “We do not see unformed matters, or forces directly. They are outside not only of institutions and formations, but outside actuality as well. It is, however, an outside that forms the interiority of thought.” Thus we ask: what life (\textit{vivant}) would thought have if all it has as its task is to reconcile objects in the world with pre-established concepts? That which is unthinkable, those forces yet to be composed into subjects and spaces, is what subsists in thought. As Deleuze succinctly puts it, this unthinkable outside where forces express no formed individuals and places is

\textsuperscript{775} Spinoza (1996) Book III, Prop.2, Scholium  
\textsuperscript{776} Olkowski, Dorothea (1999) \textit{Gilles Deleuze and the Ruins of Representation}, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. p.220. The philosopher Olkowski remarks what is “expressed of a proposition” is not so much the proposition’s “referenced” as it is the intensity or potentiality the particular textual composition constituting the proposition. Thus, what is ‘expressed’ is the potentiality immanent in the event of engaging with the text that constitutes the proposition. What is expressed, although non-representable, is nonetheless never outside of the event of engaging the text, the proposition. This is why Deleuze notes that what amounts to knowledge emerges at “a point at which thinking, speaking, imagining, feeling, etc, are one and the same thing.” To learn and gain knowledge, and not just to acknowledge pre-established values and concepts, is for Deleuze never a matter of representation in which the text is the signifier for an external signified. The text that can truly affect and transform thinking – activate or rejuvenate thought – is “capable of pure presentation” that even begins to be ‘ungrounding’ the ‘Cogito’. See also: Deleuze (1994), p.194  
\textsuperscript{777} Bourassa, Alan (2002) “Literature, Language and the Non-Human” in \textit{A Shock to Thought: Expression After Deleuze and Guattari} (Ed. B. Massumi), London & New York: Routledge. pp.60-76, p.71. For Bourassa as for Deleuze, “when there are unrecognized or barely recognized perceptions, when there is language that only gestures to something that it cannot name, when there are effects that seem unrelated to any discernible causes – there the force of the singularity is at work.” (p.70) The subjects and spaces a text is capable of expressing is “communicated in and not through language.” When the written word can affect an entire change in sense of self, to raise questions about what is the ‘I’ and author then it attests to its power. (p.63) This is why Deleuze and Guattari note, “writing now functions on the same level as the real.” See also: Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (2004) \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia} (Trans. B. Massumi), London & New York: Continuum. p.156
“the element that thought does not and cannot think of,” yet it is “not external to thought, but lies at its very heart.”\textsuperscript{778}

What is learnt or known as an “inside” or “interiority” of a subject or space is but a momentary slowing down of these forces, their temporary congealing. As Foucault following Nietzsche’s understanding of “knowledge” in \textit{The Gay Science}, writes:

Knowledge is an ‘invention’ behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other; its production is not the effect of their harmony or joyful equilibrium, but of their hatred, of their questionable and provisional compromise, and of the fragile truce that they are always prepared to betray. It is not a permanent faculty, but an event, or, at the very least, a series of events\textsuperscript{779}.

Knowledge is but a “set of relationships.”\textsuperscript{780} Theorization is for Foucault a “discursive practice” that goes beyond the unproblematised communication of an established value or concept. A discursive practice is “embodied in technical processes… in forms for transmission and diffusion.” The “modality” of theory as a discursive practice, as an event, is the “mode of transformation,” which posits knowledge to be irreducible to “individual discoveries” or even “collective attitudes, or a state of mind.” “The transformation of a discursive practice is linked to a whole range of usually complex modifications that can occur outside of its own domain.”\textsuperscript{781} Hence, things like lessons and knowledge will \textit{move on}, transform, and become their own exteriority. Even the ‘I’-theorist will move to his/her own Outside. There is a certain Spinozan-corporeality in the act of theorization that \textit{enables} one to yet know what these bodies of knowledge as events can absolutely do.

What was learnt here is already somewhere else.

\textit{... just write…}

To produce a text on post-colonial cities like Singapore is not to produce an object that exists prior to the city, in which the text authenticates or validates the city’s existence. Nor is it merely a description of the city after the fact, as if the city stood still for the

\textsuperscript{778} Deleuze, Gilles (1988) \textit{Foucault} (Trans. S. Hand), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.97

\textsuperscript{779} Foucault (1977), pp.202-03

\textsuperscript{780} Ibid, p.202

\textsuperscript{781} Ibid, p.200
theorist to depict it like a *nature morte*. As literary and post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft notes, theoretical writing cannot be separate from the “material reality” it is part of. As literary and post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft notes, theoretical writing cannot be separate from the “material reality” it is part of. Here, one may suggest that Singapore’s “material reality” can be more than the asphalt streets, Singapore River, street hawkers, the countless council flats and plush bourgeois suburbs. Are theoretical books by Benjamin, Adorno, Deleuze, Spinoza, Nietzsche *et al.* not materials that contribute to Singapore’s complexity and reality? Do the theoretical texts on Singapore City by literary theorists Patke, John Phillips, architects William Lim, Bobby Wong, Tan Kok-Meng and artists Suzann Victor, Susie Lingham, Lisa-Anne Chong and Arthur Yap, with their various incorporations of Western philosophies and concepts, not adding to Singapore’s dynamicity as well? Singapore City is coextensive with these theoretical texts for these texts are, like bricks, glass, steel and mortar, indispensable building materials. Being coextensive with these texts, Singapore City is thus also changing univocally with these texts that express immanently what Bhabha calls the changing event of theory. The texts’ kaleidoscopic geography is one and the same as the city’s changing boundaries and skyline. Textual-bodies and buildings-parks-streets-bodies together constitute the city’s complex body. Theoretical texts and the material-architecture conjoined in the active event of theory produces a city potentially beyond both the sentences and the brick-walls’ edges.

The phrase, “this is the post-colonial city” no longer guarantees closure for the terms ‘post-colonial’ or ‘city’. As was suggested earlier, these terms are composed by various forces that are co-present with an event of theory, and at any moment they can be decomposed and recomposed as something else. The post-colonial city is yet to exist. But, this is not because one lacks competence to describe the city; description based on types and categories is easy. Instead of description why not ask what a post-colonial city can do? For Patke, the post-colonial city remains a “labyrinth.” However, this is not because the city conceals the truth from us; it is a matter of finding out what this labyrinth-city can do, and how writing can facilitate the labyrinth-city’s potentialities. Here, the labyrinth-city is more a space of possibilities than a prison, it is a space that is constantly deterritorializing and reterritorializing, as such, each step taken within this

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labyrinth-city spurs re-enchantment. Each word written sustains the labyrinth-city’s kaleidoscopic geography.

“One will write without stop”, as literary theorist Irving Goh remarks. It is only in writing and rewriting that subjects and spaces outside of the Singapore imagined by either ends of the political spectrum may be produced. For Goh, writing without stop or to begin writing again is “to keep open the thinking, and the act, of freedom... at a limitless horizon.” Goh (2001), p.32. In a very similar argument Ashcroft following phenomenologist Edmund Husserl notes that “the horizon itself is created in language,” and thus each moment language is “performed” the horizon is also transformed. The horizon no longer becomes the line that divides the present and the space beyond. The horizon is the line whereby the present – as happening in the act of writing – begins as its own absolute potentiality. See also: Ashcroft (1994), p.41. cf. Husserl, Edmund (1931) Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (Trans. W.R. Boyce-Gibson), London: Allen & Unwin Press. p.101 Goh (2001), p.32. In a very similar argument Ashcroft following phenomenologist Edmund Husserl notes that “the horizon itself is created in language,” and thus each moment language is “performed” the horizon is also transformed. The horizon no longer becomes the line that divides the present and the space beyond. The horizon is the line whereby the present – as happening in the act of writing – begins as its own absolute potentiality. See also: Ashcroft (1994), p.41. cf. Husserl, Edmund (1931) Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (Trans. W.R. Boyce-Gibson), London: Allen & Unwin Press. p.101

Perhaps, such a mode of writing can aid Singapore’s post-colonial project to resist romanticized ancestors, peoples, cultures and homelands. To write is to create a genus that begins over again. The genesis of subject and spaces is ceaseless. Mical (2003), pp.90-91. Mical, following Nietzsche’s understanding of “eternal recurrence” as the capacity to begin anew again and again, to overcome all already-established values again and again, writes: “Eternal recurrence problematizes history; in convulsing the telos of the historical ‘subject’, history as a master narrative is lost. The eternal recurrence is thus the end of history. Affirming eternal recurrence amounts to performing the exact recurrence of history to any variation on it. The singularity of history thus volatized, its origin in death is exposed in the fate of the perishable body, a perishing that is infinitely repeated. This fatality replaces history with the time of the chance combination, with a repetition of repetition.” Thus, we no longer have a genealogical line flowing from the start to the end, but one that is capable multiple births.

In this gathering of forces, writing is always at the growing middle: “Thought advances or grows out from the middle.”

784 Goh (2001), p.32. In a very similar argument Ashcroft following phenomenologist Edmund Husserl notes that “the horizon itself is created in language,” and thus each moment language is “performed” the horizon is also transformed. The horizon no longer becomes the line that divides the present and the space beyond. The horizon is the line whereby the present – as happening in the act of writing – begins as its own absolute potentiality. See also: Ashcroft (1994), p.41. cf. Husserl, Edmund (1931) Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (Trans. W.R. Boyce-Gibson), London: Allen & Unwin Press. p.101

785 Mical (2003), pp.90-91. Mical, following Nietzsche’s understanding of “eternal recurrence” as the capacity to begin anew again and again, to overcome all already-established values again and again, writes: “Eternal recurrence problematizes history; in convulsing the telos of the historical ‘subject’, history as a master narrative is lost. The eternal recurrence is thus the end of history. Affirming eternal recurrence amounts to performing the exact recurrence of history to any variation on it. The singularity of history thus volatized, its origin in death is exposed in the fate of the perishable body, a perishing that is infinitely repeated. This fatality replaces history with the time of the chance combination, with a repetition of repetition.” Thus, we no longer have a genealogical line flowing from the start to the end, but one that is capable multiple births.

786 Deleuze, Gilles (1995) Negotiations (Trans. M. Joughin), New York: Columbia University Press. p.161. Deleuze notes that “the history of philosophy, history in general, the sciences and the arts” is very much “a multilinear complex [that] can fold back on itself,” in order to regenerate itself anew. The event of theory, make up of the acts writing and reading that contribute to this lasting history of philosophy, is itself capable of its own birth, it is rightly suis generis.
other beginnings… in lieu of a conclusion

A text expressing ‘Outside-Singapore’ is “neither finished nor unfinished,” it is “‘it
is’,”\textsuperscript{787} It is there, of which the ‘there’ – of Outside-Singapore, of the text, of the acts of
writing and reading – is of another space and time. It is an opening that opens its own
space and time onto new spaces and times over and over again.

Where is this thing ‘Singapore’, or for that matter ‘Outside-Singapore’, heading? What
will the face of these Singaporeans-yet-to-come look like?\textsuperscript{788} A critique of the past and
present based on the notion there can be a better future accords only to the
Enlightenment’s schedule of progress that persists in the most well-meaning post-
colonial cartographer. One speaks not of the death of history but of a history yet to come,
a history energized with futures beyond the well-trained eyes and hands of the well-
meaning cartographer who wants the best geography for his/her compatriots. When this
well-meaning cartographer falters, the route linking the past to the future becomes a
spatio-temporality beyond synchronicity, yet this is when and where s/he entirely
transforms the practice of cartography; s/he becomes “a new cartographer.”\textsuperscript{789}

The new cartographer “does not deny the existence of class and class-struggle,” and does
not deny that Singapore may be physically, culturally and politically unique from the
West. S/he does not valorize these divisions, but is interested in how these divisions can
be told “in a totally different way, with landscapes, characters and behaviour that are
different from those to which traditional history… has made us accustomed. We are
shown innumerable points of confrontation, focuses on instability, each of which has its

\textsuperscript{787} Blanchot, Maurice (1989) \textit{The Space of Literature} (Trans. A. Smock), Lincoln, NB & London:
University of Nebraska Press. p.22
\textsuperscript{788} Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (2004) \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia} (Trans. B.
Massumi), London & New York: Continuum Books. p.27. The questions, “where are you going? Where
are you coming from? What are you heading for?” are for Deleuze and Guattari “totally useless questions”
from the point of view of “becoming” and non-denumerable multiplicity, or else absolute potentiality,
because such questions demand a fixed end rather than an opening as par the ever-expansive rhizomic
roots that has no centre nor definable edges.
Designers, architects and artists are basically cartographers in the sense that they create new spaces, insofar
as space can be understood as a field of changing relations that involved the human’s changing
engagement with it. And, insofar that designers, architects and artists bring forth a re-made built
environment, that particular environment’s ‘space’ is reconstituted. And, the ‘space’ of the human is
concurrently changed in this process of reconstitution.
own risks of conflicts, of struggles.” Instead of “analogy, homology, identity or oppositions… we have a new kind of possible continuity.”

Within the practice of this new cartography, the traditional mappings of global-capitalist empires, museums and shopping malls are becoming-something or someplace else. The maps and texts the new cartographer makes are never “an aim or end in itself,” but an attendance to the capacities and potentialities of things. Empires become empires without definitive centres and peripheries; each territory deterritorializes and peripheralizes. Or as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest, the new kind of empire becomes “a horizon of activities, resistances, wills, and desires that refuse the hegemonic order.” Its space is constituted by “lines of flight.” Its time, its history “resides in potentiality.” However, this does not indicate that the paternalistic Singaporean government and conservative outlooks in the nation-state are vanquished. At the same time it is not to say the practice of this new cartography – writing – allows us to retreat to a Singapore unfettered by its daily socio-political issues. The ‘Outside-Singapore’ which history resides in potentiality is not the ideal Singapore that lies in a predictable future. The practice of writing, or cartographing, is to produce various gatherings of conceptual, textual, philosophical and poetical forces that readers can pick up and use as tools for their own post-colonial projects, to construct their own gatherings of forces, to create their own subjects and spaces yet to come.

The potentiality spoken of here is the ‘potential-to-do’, specifically what the gatherings of forces in this thesis can do, and not the ‘potential-that-must-be-fulfilled-telically’. Thus, in this thesis I do not suggest that artworks – “Empire”, “Still Waters” and the photograph of Balmoral Park – on Singapore City or my thesis can solve Singapore’s ‘problems’ of paternalism, conservatism, essentialized nativism and nostalgic dreams of an imagined homeland or heartland. These artworks offer to me certain gatherings of visual, material, spatial, socio-historical and architectural forces that I then combine with other conceptual, textual, poetical and philosophical forces to produce within new gatherings this thesis that, in turn, may incite transformation in and for those readers.

790 Ibid, p.25
791 Ibid, p.23
engaging with this thesis. It is these potential subjects and spaces that may emerge from these engagements that form the ‘substance’ of ‘Outside-Singapore’.

As a writer I do not intend this thesis to offer a solution for building a better Singapore City or provide the technical know-how to set up a less conservative government; what this thesis offers are particular groups of conceptual, textual and philosophical forces that can be picked up and used variedly by other writers, theorists and artists concerned with Singapore’s spatiality and subjectivity. Artists may take these conceptual, textual and philosophical forces to produce material things that can, in turn, affect and transform other material aspects of Singapore City, just as Suzann Victor had done. In turn, these artists may then produce new artworks that other writers including myself can extract material, spatial, architectural, visual and conceptual forces from to produce new texts. Additionally, novelists, playwrights and other post-colonial theorists may pick up this thesis’ conceptual and textual forces to produce books and plays that may transform Singapore’s literary-, intellectual-, artistic- and even spatial- (in the case of theatrical plays) scapes.

It is within this growing sphere of exchanging forces that the ‘Outside-Singapore’s’ space is said to be in-between the museums, installations, performances, photographs, philosophers and concepts depicted in this thesis, and the other forces, texts, bodies, artworks and philosophers that readers may bring in during their varied engagements with this thesis.793 ‘Outside-Singapore’s’ space may be said to be an event that is constituted by these possible artistic and literary acts; its space goes on.794 These possible artistic and literary acts are ‘Outside-Singapore’s’ other beginnings in potentiae.

793 Grosz, Elizabeth (2001) Architecture from the Outside, Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press. p.91. The space of the in-between as Elizabeth Grosz explicates is: “The space of the in-between is that which is not a space, a space without boundaries of its own, which takes on and receives itself, its form, from the outside, which is not its outside (this would imply that it has a form) but whose form is the outside of the identity, not just of an Other (for that would reduce the in-between to the role of object, not of space) but of Others, whose relations of positivity define, by default, the space that is constituted as in-between.”

794 Rajchman, John (1991) Philosophical Events: Essays of the 80s, New York: Columbia University Press. p.153. Rajchman, following Deleuze, also explains that an event “is not defined by a fixed beginning and end, but is something that occurs in the midst of a history, causing us to redistribute our sense of what has gone before it and what might come after. An event is thus not something one inserts into a plotted dramatic sequence with its start and finish, for it initiates a new sequence that retrospectively determines its beginnings, and which leaves its ends unknown or undetermined.” See p.ix
Writing of global cities, museums, suburbs and artworks no longer means just to represent a temporal-slice of their long-lasting transformation and make that slice represent their entirety. As Bhabha suggests, in the field of post-colonial discourse, knowledge and theories, as well as concepts, subjects and spaces are “always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence,” and are “in medias res.”\(^{795}\) The written text is but a collection of particular gatherings, or one may say the framing, of forces that can be interpolated back into these cities, museums, artworks and suburbs in order to sustain their longevity by differentiation. Writing sustains “a duration of creativity.”\(^{796}\) Moreover, creativity also entails creating oneself anew, whether you are a theorist, reader, artist, novelist or designer, through differentiating-from-oneself.

A text’s end suggests a potentiality for other beginnings; here is \textit{when} the text is “not altogether its own interior.”\(^{797}\) Here is when it expresses an outside where subjects and spaces yet-to-come \textit{belong}. They belong \textit{there}, a ‘there’ which is at another spatio-temporality.

\(^{797}\) Blanchot (1989), p.28
I can see that this thesis was a way of writing *myself* into the place.

- Paul Carter, *Material Thinking*
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