

5 Chasing Inuka

Rambling around Singapore through Tan Pin Pin's Films

Lilian Chee

The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not believe in the events which happen to us, love and death, as if they half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us like a bad film.

—Giles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*¹

By my decision to move back to Singapore, I made the sub-conscious decision regarding the work I would be making.

—Tan Pin Pin, “Why and for Whom Do You Film Today?”²

In their iconic text on the modern city *Collage City*, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter lamented that despite its “good will and good intentions,” modern architecture has failed to materialize a city which carries the greater good, hopes and liberalism of its people.³ This shortcoming is attributed to the conflict between “a retarded conception of science and a reluctant recognition of poetics” on the part of its urban planners and architects.⁴ Until today, the unresolved dualism between “efficient (urban) management,” which Rowe and Koetter critiqued was being “disguised” as “science,” and the dynamism of a “counterculture” generated by city life, its people and communities, continue to fracture and divide cities.⁵ *Collage City*'s postmodern reaction to a “total design” approach is its advocacy of fragmentation and bricolage to produce a constellation of micro-utopias across the city's spaces. Indeed, Rowe and Koetter's reminder about the importance of historicity in the formation and perception of the modern city is particularly relevant to a critique of Singapore's contemporary urban evolution.

In this sense, *Collage City* sets the urbanistic, poetic and political contexts for Tan Pin Pin's Singapore films. An award winning documentary filmmaker, Tan's persistent object of inquiry is “Singapore,” a site as simultaneously opaque and unknowable as it is banal and predictable. She has openly declared her interest in immortalizing the city-state, a Sisyphean task against time as the city reinvents and obliterates itself at an alarming rate.⁶ This

intellectual anxiety is not particular to Tan alone. It signals a shared concern amongst a younger generation of artists, writers and filmmakers working in the current Singapore milieu, who recognize that the rapid remaking of this city is taken at the cost of irreparable historicity, and that the standardization of space will no longer accommodate singular differences.

Tan's filmic output, which surveys Singapore's statist prerogatives at the same time as it develops a counternarrative to these, similarly weigh between control and poetry, discipline and freedom, the collective and the singular, "History" and "histories." Armed with her own childhood memory of frequent visits to buildings sites and architectural destinations, Tan, whose parents were architects, professes an obsession for Singapore's distinctly uncertain spatial future, which makes her feel she is "standing on soft ground."⁷ Asked "why and for whom do you film today?", Tan expressed her desire to open up views of Singapore as "a teeming, contested terrain."⁸

A significant number of reviews have placed Tan's work in the recurring registers of history, memory, nostalgia, alternative nationalism, or recognized its ability to offer a counterstatist narrative to Singapore society.⁹ This essay traverses an altogether different route. My subject is Tan's perspective of Singapore's spaces constructed through her cinematic output. Notwithstanding her films' obvious emphases on presenting Singapore's alternative memories and histories, I am intrigued by Tan's "other," perhaps even covert, constructions of filmic space. I suggest that even as her documentaries focus on its arresting human subjects or a forgotten historical narrative, there is an important subtext which is steadfast in all of Tan's films, and this subtext is concerned with the narrative potential, emotive dimensions and materiality of *space*. However, it would be misleading to claim that such space is readymade in Tan's oeuvre. It is not. Instead, her films can be seen to consistently *produce* space—meaning that space is not a priori but specifically manifested for the viewer's personal experience, with the latter's realization of its presence significantly augmenting an identification with the documentary's counternarrative. Moreover, the space in Tan's films does not just represent, or mirror, or simply critique Singapore's "soft ground." Instead, it undermines her audiences' fixed perceptions of the spaces in which they were born, in which they grow up, live, grow old and die.

The spaces in Tan's films tend to be tangentially encountered. They may be glimpsed through peripheral vision, caught only as it were, in flight, just as the camera pans and leaves her motley Singapore, a cacophonous counterpoint to the controlled urbanism of this hyper-capitalist city-state, where not only is space scarce, but also restricted for visual representations and counterstatist narratives. At the same time, the spaces that emerge in these films are neither abstract nor supplementary. They provide precise conditions that interpellate Tan's documentary subjects, giving them voice, context and prominence.

The route to Tan's spatial subtexts, however, necessitates a corresponding method which mimics the filmmaker's technique of fragments. As Tan sieves Singapore society for what is left behind, left out, or buried in history, I am

reminded of Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* in which "the 'refuse' and 'detritus' of history, the half-concealed, variegated traces of life of 'the collective'," became the subject of his study and made Benjamin more akin to a "collector of antiquities and curiosities," or a "ragpicker" rather than a historian.¹⁰

As though storing up seemingly unrelated objects in a cabinet of curiosities, the distinctive montaged fragments in Tan's films are, I argue, key to unraveling the way she sees Singapore's spaces. Montage is a conscious, non-organic form of art, which, as Jonathan Hill reminds us, "proclaims its artificiality":

Montage deploys all the techniques of allegory: the depletion of meaning, the fragmentation and dialectical juxtaposition of parts and their dissemination through a new context. The uneasy resolution of montage indicates that meaning is historically contingent, open to revision, and cultural rather than natural. It opposes the mythical autonomies of culture and can directly engage in ideologies and modes of representation outside the confines of a discipline through the appropriation of procedures and images taken from the world as a whole.¹¹

The use of montage, of course, is not revolutionary in film. Yet more than its oft-discussed juxtaposition of subject diversity, what distinguishes Tan's montaged sequences of Singapore's variegated urbanism and its unexpected subjects (who are neither famous nor important figures) are the unremarked silences and gaps in the montage. These gaps and silences are specific points where Tan quietly diverts her audience's attention to the space around the documentary subject. It is this, the network and capillaries of space within and across the montaged sequences, that I argue produces a new kind of filmic space, one that changes with time, history and context, and works against the static conceptions of urban space embedded in the state planning agencies' psyche.

IN NO PARTICULAR SEQUENCE, SIX FILMS AND THEIR FRAGMENTS

breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*¹²

Film ceases to be images in a chain. . . . Between two actions, between two affections, between two perceptions, between two visual images, between two sound images, between the sound and the visual: make the indiscernible, that is the frontier, visible . . .

—Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*¹³



Figure 5.1 The gravediggers opening up an ancestral tomb.

Moving House (2001): At the break of dawn, an extended family treks cautiously across uneven landscape. Upon arriving at their destination, they light candles and lay out a spread fit for a sumptuous picnic. What follows is unexpected. Accompanying them are gravediggers who use mechanical and manual means to break open the family's ancestral graves (Figure 5.1). Exclamations calling forth protection and prosperity from the heavens ensue as the tombs are violated. The scene is macabre, bizarre and surreal—bits of human bones and precious belongings of the dead are retrieved for safe-keeping. The family migrates their ancestral remains to a pristinely maintained columbarium, accepting the nation's need to sacrifice sacred ground in order to house the living.

80km/h (2004): Traversing Singapore in a car cruising along an expressway at a constant speed of 80km/h. The viewer travels from Changi Airport at its eastern-most end to Tuas in the island's furthest west side. An entire country measuring one long cinematic take of 38 minutes with no toilet stops. This cartographic document is intended to be updated yearly, a filmic topographical map where the eye may choose to sense, absorb or dismiss space in its usual distracted state.¹⁴

Yangtze Scribbler (2012): A journey narrated by an amateur archivist of city signs, Singapore artist and hobbyist psychogeographer Debbie Ding, about her repeated encounters with a set of symbols, first found in the grimy

stair core of the Yangtze Cinema in Singapore's Chinatown. The cinema, a haunt for elderly men of the Internet illiterate age, is infamous as Ding explains, for its sexually explicit films with "salacious titles" but also for screening award-winning art-house films. It is a space which perpetuates a counterculture that a blogger notes "oozes its appeal, both dirty and nostalgic."¹⁵ The symbols—three rows of digits, scrawled in haste—are placed next to two stick figures, and these altogether enclosed in a circle. Ding who puzzles if these "could be gang messages, or a message to someone" finds them on every floor in the cinema, and as she is absorbed by the trail, the symbols also lead her deeper into the bowels of the building.

Singapore GaGa (2005): A sonic landscape of Singapore never performed before. Among these, two stand out for their inscriptions of space. First, John Cage's 4'33", performed by Singapore-born, New-York based avant-garde pianist Margaret Leng Tan on a toy piano, in the unadorned interstitial space of the public housing "void deck," which is ordinarily used for casual gatherings, Chinese funeral wakes, Malay weddings, the occasional football game (Figure 5.2). Second, six persons reading the daily news in six southern Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, Hakka, Hockchew). These nightly three-minute radio broadcasts are faithfully followed in taxis and domestic spaces, those citadels where the unwritten "mother



Figure 5.2 John Cage performed in the spare surroundings of one of Singapore's public housing "void decks."

tongue”—passed gently from grandmother to mother, and then to child, or stalwartly held onto by an endangered species of “uncles” plying the streets of Singapore—is being erased with the official decree of Mandarin as the “native” language for the majority southern Chinese population.

The Impossibility of Knowing (2010): An abandoned house, two apartments, a burnt out mosque, a canal, a green field and an expressway are captured on film with the camera looking for something “other” that might designate these as previous sites of trauma (Figure 5.3). A found skeleton, two suicides, an act of arson by an angry teenager, a deer crossing the expressway that had its antlers dislodged on impact with a car, and was left on the road, bleeding from the nose for four hours, before it was put down. A schoolgirl was swept away by the sudden swelling waters of a neighborhood canal as she climbed in to retrieve her mobile phone. A nondescript green field, whose only evidence of a tragic ordeal was the presence of joss paper and sticks that had been burnt for the dead, scattered at a particular grassy patch. A tunneling contractor was buried alive here. A few days after filming, Tan “noticed the rain had washed everything away.”¹⁶

Snow City (2011): A group of people in ties and high heels walk into a new traffic tunnel amid cheers and clapping, with champagne glasses and canapés in hand, music, confetti and dry ice in the background. A slither of a beach littered with signs of previous occupancy—bricks from a defunct factory and mosaic pieces mix with stone and overgrown with weeds—an urban wilderness proximate to expensive condominium apartments. Then we are taken back to manicured landscapes, pristinely ordered glass towers, air-conditioned food courts and office workers beavering away in their neat cubicles. The film moves on to witness Singaporeans in full winter wear, tobogganing down an icy slope, with a sign behind them saying, “Snow is



Figure 5.3 The transient signs of tragedy above a Mass Rapid Transit tunnel site.



Figure 5.4 Inuka at the Frozen Tundra section of the Singapore Zoo.

slippery. Play with care.” Next, a white polar bear drifting languorously in his icy tank (Figure 5.4). And to finish off, two workers seated in their makeshift shelters at the exit/entrance to a construction site, patiently waiting for the next vehicle to drive out so that they can hose it down before it leaves the site.

UNFOLDING THE SHRIVELED HEART OF SINGAPORE

The camera eye is the one in the middle of our forehead, combining how we see with what there is to be seen.

—Wright Morris, *Time Pieces, Photographs, Writing, and Memory*¹⁷

I want to put practically everything in, yet to saturate.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*¹⁸

Placed side by side, these fragments remind one of Michel Foucault’s description of a Chinese encyclopedia by Borges, in which the presented list of items do not merely escape any known taxonomy but also confound any knowledge of a suitable “site” in which such diverse items may occupy proximate positions. This “site” is what Foucault famously calls “the table,” or

“the tabula”—a physical location *and* an epistemological space—for which to accommodate and conceptualize such inconceivable bed partners. And yet, what appears like a non-site for Foucault is, in Tan’s case, a reality which is Singapore, a location marked by a “culture of excess,” a “spectacularly successful nation . . . troubled by historical trauma, (and) permanent vulnerability,” ambivalence over of immigration, fear of a brain drain, inferior in its territorial assets with a perennial crisis of space, but with a political structure so stable that its citizens may be lulled into complacent ennui.¹⁹ The fantastic joints, fissures, networks, fault lines and gaps in Tan’s films are arguably emblematic of this amazingly complex yet also arguably overplanned and, consequently, too predictable city.

Nevertheless, the absurdity of Borges’ encyclopedia is consistent with Singapore’s condition. A space that has evolved through diverse circumstances: a mystified native history, a mythicized origin legend, enduring colonial affiliations, an abrupt severance of political incorporation in Malaysia (that still rankles older Singaporeans), accelerated growth and prosperity under the ruling People’s Action Party, whose tight governance propelled the rapid reinvention of the tiny city-state into one of the four Asian Tigers—Singapore is nothing short of a spectacular urban phenomenon. It is completely urbanized with no countryside, no hinterland and may be easily crossed from one end to the other, in under an hour, as Tan’s documentary *80km/h* attests. A space of multiple, conflicting and overlapping scales—simultaneously a city, a state, and a nation—Singapore is much more complex than what is it is generally perceived to be: the outcome of top-down urban renewal, a homogeneous city of no prevailing past which successfully made the big leap from tabula rasa to first world nation without bloodshed.²⁰ Tan’s films open up spaces that refute such generalizations.

Watching and re-watching these films over the years, Tan’s subtle critiques about Singapore have been refined through her use of its spaces. This is evident when comparing *Moving House* (2001) to *Snow City* (2011). Where *Moving House*’s reference to the tussle between tradition and development is clearly played out between three related spaces—the graveyard, the public housing flats (shown as archival footage and in their contemporary state) and the compact multi-storey columbarium—*Snow City* is an allegorical, ironic and elegiac work which captures the entangled banality, absurdity and hyper-ordering of the city’s spaces and accompanying practices. *Moving House*’s spatial narrative is more obvious, while *Snow City* requires a combination of insider knowledge, a measure of sophistication and the ability to detect strategically placed clues and cues. In this respect, one might say that the growing complexity of Tan’s films are moving in tandem with the growing maturity of her primary audience of Singaporeans, towards whom Tan’s work is specifically targeted.²¹

Without the aid of narration or intertitles, the guideless *Snow City* presents a surreal ramble through Singapore. Its itinerary features a traffic tunnel’s grand opening party; an office; a land reclamation site; an

air-conditioned food court; the Frozen Tundra section of the Singapore Zoo, with its chief attraction, the magnificent Inuka, a white polar bear and a temporary snow park. The film unfolds at a languid pace as though mimicking Inuka's graceful movements. Through this seemingly pointless amble, the audience witnesses some distinctly Singaporean practices: the revulsion of dirt necessitating construction vehicles to be washed down at every construction site exit, the physical disconnect between the inside and outside for desk-bound office workers, and the unbridled enthusiasm for wholly artificial spaces of leisure.

Perhaps if inconceivable actions such as reclaiming almost a third of the country's land from the sea, or demolishing a much-loved library building for the sake of constructing a traffic-easing tunnel (that takes only 10 seconds to drive through), are taken as norms, these neutralize the strangeness that accompanies the wearing of winter clothing in the tropics, tobogganing down a fake icy slope, and giving a carwash to every construction vehicle. All in all, these may indeed be "natural" reactions, embedded in the spatial psyche of denizens belonging to this postmodern, posthuman city-state.²²

Instead of seeing Tan's filmic space as representative of specific meanings, I am intrigued by what these spaces *do*—how they are projected, the kinds of atmospheres and actions they provoke in her audience. Tan's sense of space is in many ways acute. I use the word *sense* intentionally because she is trying to capture in very material terms—through details, space and duration—what is specific to this island yet indescribable through the kinds of narratives and representations in current, unhindered, circulation. Tan's perspective on space is not intense in a conventionally aesthetic way, say by its framing, or use of long or short takes, or application of nostalgic overtones. Its acuity comes from the absolutely equal partnership she brokers between the human subject and space, where the former and the latter collaboratively perform to relay the film's agenda. Given that the human subject's role is something Tan chooses not to control, it is space instead that becomes the conduit through which she converses directly with her audience.

Contrary to hackneyed accounts of Singapore as over-controlled and homogeneous with an existence bordering on mere platitude, Tan's spaces burst with unthinkable events. Many of these are spontaneous rather than self-initiated. These spatial vignettes serve to remind her audience of what is probable, to realize the potentialities of the spaces they encounter daily beyond what they are conditioned to accept, or habitually act upon.

Chosen as the site for Margaret Leng Tan's performance of John Cage's "4'33"—a three-movement composition where the musicians do not play their instruments for the entire duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds, thus translating the musical score into a parallel duration of unpredictable ambient sounds—the spartan and purposeless space of the public housing "void deck" is brought into relief.²³ This shared space was designed as an integral

architectural feature of the Housing and Development Board's (HDB) first-generation flats, which were rolled out in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴ The HDB "void deck" was intended as a communal ground, ultimately attempting to mimic the unbounded settlement spaces that most of the flats' first residents had been part of (including resettled from). Yet, the move from a usually clustered hamlet setting to high-rise public housing did not translate so easily in terms of habits and spaces. Residents became more inward looking, seldom venturing out of their flats to socialize. The sense of loneliness in the semi-public "void deck" is magnified in the fragment from *Singapore GaGa*.

Elsewhere, the unsavory staircase at the landmark Yangtze Cinema is recast as a beguiling scene of mystery, or otherwise reconsidered as a cabinet of unresolved curiosities that must be revisited again and again, slowly peeled apart like a delicate flower. The nondescript expressway built across land wrested from once extant villages, farms, forest and wilderness, is rematerialized as a site of urban "violence" manifested through the loss of its surroundings, and brought into relief by the unfortunate incident of a decimated deer. Yet elsewhere, unremarkable infrastructure—a canal or a tunnel—are transformed into temporary memorial sites where human lives are lost but quickly forgotten with the accelerated pace of Singapore's urban development.

At the same time, ethical questions are raised through these spatial forays: Is Singapore so completely built-up as to have no natural features or wild animals? Is there such scant attention to social memory and even less of a collective conscience? Where and how do we live? Where and how do we *want* to live?²⁵ These are huge existential questions of history that no film can adequately address. What Tan achieves, or what the spaces in her films do, is to allow us to intuit these uncertainties in a very material and concrete way, such that what we sense is directly linked to our singular, temporary occupation and personal experiences of these filmic spaces, thus circumventing the route of the clichéd narrative.

By "material" and "concrete," I mean that although the documentaries are not dramatized, there is an intensity of space from within which Tan's subject matter unfolds. Instead of the prosaic backdrop, every space throbs with a force: the "non-places" of the void deck, the expressway, the cinema stair core, the canal and the open field, as well as the sanctity of home in the three dwellings—a public housing flat, a terrace house and a private condominium—featured in *The Impossibility of Knowing*, and the placid public housing blocks in *Moving House*, built over ground in which ancestral bodies long laid to rest are now susceptible to disruption since "the Singapore government requires this land for further national development."²⁶ Here, space is perceived as immanent sites of importance, charged with history, loss, intrigue, death, crime or trauma.²⁷ Neither filtered nor manipulated, these spaces are also captured straight on, pictured in their actual physical condition. Tan uses space as part of the film's "cinematic body," or the cinematic as Barbara Kennedy puts it,

“as a ‘material capture,’ not as a text with a meaning, but as a body which performs, as a machine, as an assemblage, as an abstract machine.”²⁸

The audience’s experiences of these spaces are not fixed by the films’ narratives since there is an absence of conventional plot in these documentaries.²⁹ Rather, the outcome of such an open-ended experience is what Gilles Deleuze calls “affect,” which is an intuitive and process-conscious event of perception—the viewer experiences the space through various registers—through the film’s visuals, the sensing of an environment that envelops and gives place to the human subject of Tan’s documentary, and the viewer’s own sociocultural and political makeup. The experiential outcome is restless. The meanings generated are fluid, depending on the way these different registers assemble and reassemble themselves. Writing about *Yangtze Scribbler*, Ho Rui An discusses the impact of its “affective” status:

affect refers not to emotion, for emotion is intensity already captured and qualified by a sensing body that makes possible the utterance of one’s feelings as ‘happy’ or ‘sad’. Affect is really more of a force—the sense we get of something acting upon us but which has yet to be assimilated into our subjectivity and to ‘make sense’ to us on the level of the body.³⁰

Kennedy also emphasizes affect as prepersonal, acting at the level of the sensorial and the material, “the affective is formulated through color, sound, movement, force, intensity,” with the film experience acting as an “‘event’ . . . explored as a mind/body/machine meld,” where meaning emerges through a conscious process (as opposed to something which is consumed and predetermined) in the “in-between” of these different registers.³¹ I argue that space is used in Tan’s film as affective background, with this background taking on a conscience-forming role: “If background seems inappropriately modest, we should remember that in our modern use of the word it means that which underscores not only our identity and presence, but also our history.”³²

Here, space is only sensed in the background but it lingers on, in the back of the viewer’s mind, imprinting itself as a network of interconnected and entangled routes. I would even say that such mental connections of Singapore’s spaces, as I have tried to make in this essay, are enacted across Tan’s different films—what Claire Colebrook calls an “out-of-field” perception of space that designates an awareness not confined to one scene or one film, but a spontaneous sensing of connections and relationships of space, event, and subject that moves fluidly in between the different films and contexts.³³ This faculty exposes the audience to a nascent “elsewhere”—an aurally rich nation, a city of trauma, a landscape of absurdities, a partisan people whose passion for where they live and love drive them to make choices that confound the status quo, and whose singular spaces with differentiated durations need to be recognized rather than homogenized.

WE, IN WONDERLAND

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice . . .

—Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*³⁴

What you chart is already where you’ve been. But where we are going, there is no chart yet.

—Audre Lorde, in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*³⁵

In closing, some remarks about Tan Pin Pin’s approach to space—the way it is used in her films, and how she sees space as instrumental in creating meaning and forging relationships require reiteration.

Contrary to the objective and distant nature of documentary, Tan’s approach is arguably personal, instinctive and intuitive. She has, for example, admitted that she has a huge and random archive of Singapore scenes that she has filmed but not used, and like Benjamin’s nineteenth-century collector, has amassed over the course of a decade, newspaper clippings detailing crimes of passion. Such casual rambles through Singapore life, space and society are, for Tan, a vital creative resource. Partly due to lack of financial resources and partly because of the crowd she thinks her work will (or will not) attract, Tan has also chosen to showcase her films in non-commercial venues—higher education institutions, schools, art venues, museums, community-run locations and international film festivals. This is the space of reception which Tan controls. Local bloggers review her work with critical acclaim, and much of her newer shorter films are available online. The screening of her documentaries are low-key events, popularized through social media and by word-of-mouth.

This community-level, bottom-up approach coheres with what Rey Chow argues is a new trajectory towards gaining “visibility” in a postcolonial, media-saturated milieu. Chow emphasizes that “visibility” means not just being seen, but also a force to be reckoned with since “visibility is implicitly analogized to power, hegemony, status and authority”:³⁶

What must now be recognized as embedded in the postcolonial as such are the thresholds, limits and potentialities of visibilities, of visibilities as the “multisensorial complexes” of shifting social relations.³⁷

Chow cites Helen Grace’s research which taps on the changing site-spectator dynamics. Grace, a photographer, filmmaker and producer, writes about the advent of “a strange new domestication of history” which focuses on the affective engagement of audiences, through popular sites such as YouTube and Flickr, around “images of local significance.”³⁸ Although Tan’s work does not operate in the same realm, Grace’s argument about the importance of having a “co-extensive” relationship between the image

(film) with the present (with a community, or a group of people who can be motivated into action) resonates with the affective power of Tan's films.

Summarily, affect in Tan's documentaries is propelled by her ability to give different durations to different spaces, and in doing so, strategically transform what is unremarkable and homogeneous into something singular and unrepeatable. In *Singapore GaGa* and *Moving House*, the concept of time and space becomes highly differentiated as diverse practices—the fragile existence of Singapore's talented street buskers and their relationship to the didactic street laws and ruthless passersby, dialect-speaking southern Chinese newsreaders persistently broadcasting each evening to unknown listeners whom they believe exist all over the island, the slow trek through uneven landscape to pay respects to the dead versus the violent and rapid act of exhumation—reveal competing durations that persist in maintaining tradition, personal habit, forgotten rituals, fraternal and filial ties. These differentiated durations are then mapped onto space, thus challenging “the case that the space we have mapped on to time is a space devoid of intensity, devoid of differing speeds and dimensions.”³⁹ When we can understand these different durations, we can also “intuit durations other than our own,” thus empathizing with, and understanding the need for, the construction and preservation of different pockets of space, or micro-utopias.⁴⁰

Space is *not* the point of Tan Pin Pin's films. Nonetheless, her use of space, in its subtle and tangential way, is inseparable from the meanings of her films, however diverse or similar these meanings may appear to the individual viewer. This strategic use of space and its ability to demonstrate the physical (size, scale), the socio-political (power, wealth, hierarchy, privilege), and the psychical (love, resistance, commonsense, nonsense) is nowhere better exemplified than in the hypnotic scene in *Snow City* where Inuka, the first polar bear born in the tropics, swims in his artificial arctic habitat. Inuka momentarily transfixes us in his, and our, Wonderland. In this one fantastic, endearing, humorous, absurd and unforgettable moment, Tan brings home the complexities of Singapore's spaces in all its critical and entangled dimensions.

NOTES

With thanks to Melany Park, Serene Ng and Tan Pin Pin.

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), 171.
2. Alexis A. Tioseco. “Why and for Whom Do You Film Today?” posted August 23, accessed June 21, 2014, http://criticine.com/feature_article.php?id=40&pageid=1187886966
3. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1978), 2–3.
4. *Ibid.*, 3.
5. *Ibid.*

6. Tan Pin Pin, "Death-defying Act," an interview by Billie Cohen in *Time Out Singapore*, posted July 17, 2007, accessed November 8, 2013, www.time-outsingapore.com/film/feature/death-defying-act
7. Emily Chua, "Works by Young Singaporean Artists reflect a deep sense of loss," in *The Straits Times*, December 5, 2004, 31.
8. Tioseco, "Why and for Whom Do You Film Today?"
9. See, for example, Kenneth Paul Tan, "Violence and the Supernatural in Singapore Cinema," in *New Cinema: Journal of Contemporary Film* 8, No. 3 (2010): 213–23; Kenneth Paul Tan, "Alternative Vision in Neoliberal Singapore: Memories, Places, and Voices in the Films of Tan Pin Pin," in *Film in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural Interpretation and Social Intervention*, David C. L. Lim and Hiroyuki Yamamoto, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 147–67; Gaik Cheng Khoo, "Where the Heart is: Cinema and Civic Life in Singapore," in *New Suburban Stories*, Martin Dines and Timotheus Vermeulen, eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 97–109; Joanne Leow, "The Future of Nostalgia: Reclaiming Memory in Tan Pin Pin's *Invisible City* and Alfian Sa'at's *A History of Amnesia*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45, No. 1 (2010): 115–30. An exception which focuses on how difference is mapped through Tan's multilingual, multidialect aural landscape of Singapore is Olivia Khoo's, "Singapore, Sinophone, Nationalism: Sounds of Language in the Films of Tan Pin Pin," in *Sinophone Cinema*, Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo, eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 77–97.
10. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, "Translator's Foreword," in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1999), ix.
11. Jonathan Hill, *The Illegal Architect* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1998), 46.
12. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xv.
13. Deleuze, *Cinema* 2, 180.
14. "With no cuts, I document every inch of the country. I keep the speed consistent at 80km/h so that this document has cartographical value. If the same route along the Pan Island Expressway is recorded every year, Singapore's topographical changes can be mapped with previous recordings." See Tan Pin Pin, "80kmh," *Notes from Serangoon Road*, accessed June 18, 2014, www.tanpinpin.com/wordpress/?page_id=31. For a discussion on the role of art or film in addressing what Walter Benjamin calls "reception in a state of distraction," see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 232–4.
15. Low Beng Kheng, "Yangtze Cinema: Curating to the Masses," *Singapore Memory*, accessed June 21, 2014, www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMA-39cb3836-858b-4ee6-a9df-26c19c6ccb2b
16. Tan Pin Pin, "Production Talk: The Impossibility of Knowing by Tan Pin Pin," interview by Jeremy Sing, in *SINDie*, posted October 11, 2010, accessed June 15, 2014, www.sindie.sg/2010/10/production-talk-impossibility-of.html
17. Wright Morris, *Time Pieces, Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 11.
18. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, eds. (London: TH Hogarth Press, 1980), Vol.3, 210.
19. See Souchou Yao, *Singapore: The State and the Culture of Excess* (London: Routledge, 2007); Tan, "Violence and the Supernatural in Singapore Cinema," 214.
20. For a discussion and debates on Singapore's meteoric rise into first-world status, see Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis," in *SMLXL*, ed. Jennifer Siegler (New York: Monacelli

- Press, 1998), 1008–89; C. J. Wee Wan Ling, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007).
21. Tioseco, “Why and for Whom Do You Film Today?”
 22. For their pioneering text on postmodern space, see Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1972).
 23. For an updated critique of the void deck as a space of transgression, see Stephen Cairns, “Singapore’s Void Decks,” in *Public Space in Urban Asia*, William Lim, Sharon Siddique and Tan Dan Feng, eds. (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2014), 80–9.
 24. For a comprehensive history on the early years of the Housing and Development Board, its objectives and output, see Aline K. Wong and Stephen H. K. Yeh, eds., *Housing a Nation: Twenty-five Years of Public Housing in Singapore* (Singapore: Housing and Development Board, 1985); Chua Beng Huat, “Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore,” in *Understanding Singapore Society*, Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong, and Tan Ern Ser, eds. (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997), 307–27.
 25. For a discussion on the effects of losing old villages, and the absence of a hinterland in Singapore, see Alfian Bin Sa’at, “Hinterland, Heartland, Home: Affective Topography in Singapore Films,” in *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, ed. Tilman Baumgärtel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 33–50.
 26. Dialogue from *Moving House*.
 27. According to Marc Augé, a non-place is a space of passage, somewhere to pass through, which has no particular historical value: “they are not integrated with anything; they simply bear witness, during a journey, to the co-existence of distinct individualities, perceived as equivalent and unconnected.” Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2000), 111.
 28. Barbara Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 5.
 29. “The two English words ‘experience’, ‘experiment’ are one ‘experience’ in French . . . so in the Deleuze-and-Guattari-world, life’s experiences are also always experiments.” Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2007), 42.
 30. Ho Rui An, “Documenting Affect: *Yangtze Scribbler*, *Jalan Jati* and *All the Lines Flow Out*,” in *Cinematheque Quarterly*, Oct–Dec 2012 (Singapore: National Museum of Singapore, 2012), 27.
 31. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, 5.
 32. John B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.
 33. Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 48, 49. Here Colebrook is explicating Deleuze’s thesis on the vital connections that film can make through montage.
 34. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Random House, 1998), 35.
 35. Audre Lorde, in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 180.
 36. Rey Chow, *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 154.
 37. *Ibid.*, 162.

38. *Ibid.*, 166. See Helen Grace, "Monuments and the Face of Time: Distortions of Scale and Asynchrony in Postcolonial Hong Kong," in *Postcolonial Studies* 10, No. 4 (2007): 467–83.
39. Colebrook, *Deleuze*, 26.
40. *Ibid.*, 27.

WORKS CITED

- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. London: Verso, 2000.
- Ballantyne, Andrew. *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zorn, 211–44. London: Pimlico, 1999.
- Cairns, Stephen. "Singapore's Void Decks." In *Public Space in Urban Asia*, edited by William Lim, Sharon Siddique and Tan Dan Feng, 80–9. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2014.
- Carroll, Lewis. *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Random House, 1998.
- Chow, Rey. *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Chua Beng Huat. "Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore." In *Understanding Singapore Society*, edited by Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong, and Tan Ern Ser, 307–27. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997.
- Chua, Emily. "Works by Young Singaporean Artists Reflect a Deep Sense of Loss." *The Straits Times*, December 5, 2004.
- Colebrook, Claire. *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone, 1989.
- Eiland, Howard and Kevin McLaughlin. "Translator's Foreword." In Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ix–xiv. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1999.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Grace, Helen. "Monuments and the Face of Time: Distortions of Scale and Asynchrony in Postcolonial Hong Kong." *Postcolonial Studies* 10, No.4 (2007): 467–83.
- Hill, Jonathan. *The Illegal Architect*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 1998.
- Ho Rui An. "Documenting Affect: Yangtze Scribbler, Jalan Jati and All the Lines Flow Out." In *Cinematheque Quarterly*, Oct–Dec 2012, 24–38. Singapore: National Museum of Singapore, 2012.
- Jackson, John B. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Kennedy, Barbara. *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.
- Khoo, Gaik Cheng. "Where the Heart Is: Cinema and Civic Life in Singapore." In *New Suburban Stories*, edited by Martin Dines and Timotheus Vermeulen, 97–109. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Khoo, Olivia. "Singapore, Sinophone, Nationalism: Sounds of Language in the Films of Tan Pin Pin." In *Sinophone Cinema*, edited by Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo, 77–97. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

- Koolhaas, Rem and Bruce Mau. "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis." In *SMLXL*, edited by Jennifer Siegler, 1008–89. New York: Monacelli Press, 1998.
- Leow, Joanne. "The Future of Nostalgia: Reclaiming Memory in Tan Pin Pin's *Invisible City* and Alfian Sa'at's *A History of Amnesia*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45, No.1 (2010): 115–30.
- Lorde, Audre. *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, edited by Joan Wylie Hall. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
- Low Beng Kheng. Singapore memory. "Yangtze Cinema: Curating to the Masses." Accessed June 21, 2014. www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMA-39cb3836-858b-4ee6-a9df-26c19c6ccb2b
- Morris, Wright. *Time Pieces, Photographs, Writing, and Memory*. New York: Aperture, 1999.
- Rowe, Colin, and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1978.
- Sa'at, Alfian Bin. "Hinterland, Heartland, Home: Affective Topography in Singapore Films." In *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, edited by Tilman Baumgärtel, 33–50. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012.
- Tan, Kenneth Paul. "Alternative Vision in Neoliberal Singapore: Memories, Places, and Voices in the Films of Tan Pin Pin." In *Film in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Cultural Interpretation and Social Intervention*, edited by David C. L. Lim and Hiroyuki Yamamoto, 147–67. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- . "Violence and the Supernatural in Singapore Cinema." *New Cinema: Journal of Contemporary Film* 8, No. 3 (2010): 213–23.
- Tan Pin Pin. "Production Talk: The Impossibility of Knowing by Tan Pin Pin." Interview by Jeremy Sing, *SINdie*, posted October 11, 2010. Accessed June 15, 2014 www.sindie.sg/2010/10/production-talk-impossibility-of.html
- . "Death-defying Act." Interview by Billie Cohen, *Time Out Singapore*, posted July 17, 2007. Accessed November 8, 2013 www.timeoutsingapore.com/film/feature/death-defying-act
- . "80Kmh." In *Notes from Serangoon Road*, posted July 1, 2006, http://www.tanpinpin.com/wordpress/?page_id=31
- Tioseco, Alexis A. "Why and for Whom Do You Film Today?" Posted August 23, 2007. http://criticine.com/feature_article.php?id=40&pageid=1187886966
- Venturi, Robert, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1972.
- Wee Wan-Ling CJ. *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; and Singapore: NUS Press, 2007.
- Wong, Aline K. and Stephen H. K. Yeh, eds. *Housing a Nation: Twenty-five Years of Public Housing in Singapore*. Singapore: Housing and Development Board, 1985.
- Woolf, Virginia. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 3, edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie. London: TH Hogarth Press, 1980.
- Yao, Souchou. *Singapore: The State and the Culture of Excess*. London: Routledge, 2007.

FILMOGRAPHY

80km/h. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2004. Singapore. Accessed May 5, 2014. <https://www.viddsee.com/video/80kmh/fd8ly>

- Moving House*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2001. Singapore: Objectif Films, 2008. DVD. Posted June 6, 2012. <http://vimeo.com/43520630>
- Singapore GaGa*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2005. Singapore: Objectif Films, 2006. DVD. Posted November 10, 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWRcv4hCGqU
- Snow City*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2011. Singapore. Posted January 12, 2012. <http://vimeo.com/35411289>
- The Impossibility of Knowing*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2010. Singapore. Posted January 12, 2012. <http://vimeo.com/34982743>
- Yangtze Scribbler*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin. 2012. Singapore. Commissioned by the Singapore Memory Project. Accessed June 6, 2014. <http://vimeo.com/42105383>