

Neovix Estate: Previously serving in other locations for British army staff, it is now an army HQ. It has 214 black-and-white houses (13 are work-up apartments, 59 are semi-detached houses), which are increasingly popular as work-live spaces, with the majority of them being ex-officers'.

The outline of Kuo Joo's little island village is more accurately described as bottle-shaped with dense patches of green nesting here and there within it. Though hillside and contending slingshot, the scene above exemplifies the concept of a 'paper' which reaches around at a slant, to define and raise some of Singapore's recent inflections with once abandoned and a settled institutional grounds. I enter in Temproy in the newly set Joojoo village, Rochford Park, Leong's 1990s 'house' centrally fill the school of Woon Sook and the initial cluster of West Estate – dilapidated spaces situated with a patch of

[illegible]

From the surge of press releases, notice of powery forces, publicity exercises and the relief in the local media, the collective word here is *boom*, *boom*, which is to say, an exotic liberation by the local males, in their own past – color of their natural – accelerated and mutated by a series of architectural initiatives in these ancient city – now they want it. So for example, *Old shaw san was small*, in *The New York Times* 2000, *English Village goes 'hot'* in a weekly all 2015, in *The Business Times*, 8 December 2006, *Temple Street becomes go-kart*, in *The Straits Times*, 10 November 2007, *Landscaping is studied*, in *The Straits Times*, 16 September 2007, *Old shaw san is hot*, in *The Straits Times*, 4 November 2007. A recent phenomenon triggered by corporate forces such as the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) and JTC Corporation (JTC) – who control the availability of the sites for short-term commercial lease – the late-late commercial use of these rejuvenated spaces, once the purview of powerful colonial and post-colonial state, the plainly rich, altered and beautiful, beyond reorganization, mid and minor used, rustic and sophisticated, in a way that shames nature and culture, historical and consumerist, this thrive in comparison of opposites. Conydescribes richly a culture of use with the Chinese, a relaxed, confident, owning culture, and how the 'equality' has been good in the contemporary and state could

Rochester Park: Also run by JTC as part of the One-North development, Rochester Park was one of the first colonial areas turned hip destination with the refurbishment of 11 black-and-white bungalows in mid 2005. As this fashionable and profitable trend threatens to spread to other similar estates such as Keat Hong Camp in Choa Chu Kang, another former Singapore Armed forces camp, there is anxiety that capitalist investment may ultimately overwhelm the delicate balance of consumption-history/nature, which seems key to these areas.

never be so simple. The 'cool quotient' 3. See for example, Arthur Sim, 'Cultural-retail landmark to up cool quotient for One-North', in *The Business Times*, Singapore, 17 January 2007 of these adaptive-reuse areas is some distance away from the untroubled and the carefree, encumbered as it is with social and cultural engineering in the architectural forms of 'unique dining and lifestyle retail hub(s)'. 4. See for example, JTC Chairman's welcome speech at the Rochester Park Open House, 27 March 2007, <http://www.jtc.gov.sg/newsroom/pressreleases/pages/20060327ip.aspx> (30 January 2008) and the haunting shadow of history, frequently though problematically abbreviated as quaint, charming and nostalgic. 5. See for example, Sonia Kolesnikov-Jeuon, 'Updating an era of black and white', in *The International Herald Tribune* (Properties), 31 May 2006, online edition <http://www.ihb.com/articles/2006/03/14/business/tesinga.php> (30 January 2008).

As old barracks and schools are snapped up to accommodate 'creative clusters' (small businesses pooling together to create either self-initiated or state-sponsored communities found in Mount Sophia, Emily Hill and Wessex Estate) and also support capitalist-driven bohemian lifestyles (such as the eateries, spas and upcoming resort in Rochester Park and Dempsey Hill), there appears to be a common pattern in the way these spaces have been occupied and continue to grow through use. Rather than appreciating the building as something extraordinary, out of its context or as rarified object, there is growing awareness about the fragility of the architecture here as more than the buildings themselves, more than the site, more than its histories. This pattern is intriguing. Granted that they were initially engineered by state-controlled bodies, these spaces have subsequently triggered experiences, expectations, and a conscience that exceeds the deadly sameness of conclusions summarily drawn from urban design and conservation guidelines.

So, how does one make sense of this, shall we call it, 'atmosphere'?

Something in the air

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Charles Jencks has argued that the notion of 'atmosphere' is slippery but undeniable: '...Where does the atmosphere of New York stop – in Berlin or Bombay?' 6. Sylvia Lavin and Helene Furjan eds., *Crib Sheets: Notes on Contemporary Architectural Conversation* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005), p.69. Andy Warhol noted that New York restaurants, '...don't sell their food, they sell their atmosphere... They caught on that what people really care about is changing their atmosphere for a couple of hours.' 7. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (San Diego: Harvest, 1975),

p.159, cited in Lavin and Furjan, *Crib Sheets*, p.69. The notion of atmosphere operates through what Jeffrey Kipnis calls, 'a family of indexical effects', 8. Jeffrey Kipnis, 'On those who step into the same river...', in *Mood River* (exhibition catalogue) (Columbus: Weener Centre for the Arts, 2002), p.40, cited in Lavin and Furjan, *Crib Sheets*, p.69 that is, architecture conceived as a simultaneous web of objects, events, sensations and times, where associations are triggered off by selective details, textures and experiences.

Hence, the black and white houses at Rochester Park, for example, are more than the sum of their architectural parts. It is indexical, that is, it has the potential to psychically trace and more importantly, viscerally embody values, aesthetics, practices and rhythms embedded in a time and place located outside of our contemporary encounter. Nonetheless, the indexical experience is unlike museumic conservation since the

atmospheric relies on the contemporary encounter to meaningfully manifest. It revolves around our living, walking, sensing and changing through the spaces of our present, in order to bodily make sense of this other time and place.

Understood as atmospheres, the series of revived old spaces project more complex surfaces, boundaries and notions of time and space than one can possibly capture through simple typology. It offers an insight into a spatial-temporal context where there is a bleeding of time and space, thus, opening possibilities for an imaginative occupation of simultaneous contexts where the harshness of colonial history and the pleasures of sipping gin pahit may be re-membered viscerally, through kinematic, emotional bodily experience, by a generation who have otherwise no occasion to remember nor reason to forget. To this note, it is striking that relatively inexperienced and young Year One students from the Department of Architecture could immediately sense the density of histories by simply walking through the unkempt fields encircling Dempsey Hill.

To put it simply, the sensual urbanity of the 'it' place, P5, Café, cannot be detached from the grimy skin of surrounding overgrown fields of grass and army sheds, faintly betraying their past in leftover dusty files about young men who were processed at this former army central manpower base. The atmospheric seems especially relevant in the context of these previously deserted Singapore haunts, a term used intentionally since unresolved histories have inevitably also produced urban myths and ghostly tales that add numinous value to these sites. Similarly, dirt, dust, grime and stains, once rejected by modern architecture as matter out of place, are here embraced as bohemian or cool but also, as standing for the real. This new penchant for the object in such revived sites begins to resist an old but persistent discourse of matter out of place, one related closely to the discussion of architectures from this region.

Theoretically, it is interesting that as a concept, the atmospheric may be used to critically flesh out the problematic, if highly, apolitical climate-architecture question. While nineteenth-century colonial epistemologies decried the tropical belt as a zone of disease and licentious morality, mid-twentieth century architectural discourse picked up the tropical question and depoliticized it into a seemingly neutral but inherently hegemonized matter of form 9. The term 'tropical architecture' was popularized in 1953 after a conference held in London, an event which further spurred the setting-up of a diploma course in tropical architecture at the Architectural Association, headed by British architects Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew in 1954. Fry's twentieth-century notion of 'tropical architecture', which was firmly controlled by a Modernist architectural agenda and its attendant formal language, may be compared to nineteenth-century colonial categorizations of tropicity alongside the establishment of related disciplines such as tropical geography, tropical medicine, tropical agriculture and tropical engineering. If the former colonial discourse denigrated the effects of the hot and humid zone as risky and primitive, the latter architectural one sought to domesticate it through modernist forms and functions. To perceive the spaces in question – Dempsey, Rochester, Wessex, Emily Hill and Mount Sophia – as merely illustrative of either discourse, is to miss the point. What I want to suggest here is that the atmospheric offers a way to re-enter these spaces so that our readings are not limited to the predetermined meanings of these tried and stale discourses. By focusing on this complex condition, one moves beyond colonial and modernist arguments, which cast climate and architectures in this region as productive of defective, secondary forms – bodies wasted by disease, primitive cultures and rudimentary architectural forms. What if the emphasis shifted away from the formal to the material?

Atmospheres, Mark Wigley reiterates, 'is some kind of sensuous emission of sound, light, heat, smell and moisture; a swirling climate of intangible effects generated by a stationary object' 10. Mark Wigley, 'The Architecture of Atmosphere', in *Daidalos* 98 (1998): 18, cited in Lavin and Furjan, *Crib Sheets*, p.8. The atmospheric privileges amorphous matter so that instead of form (louvers and pitched roofs) we may understand the architecture as matter (rain-slivered plywood, insect gossamers, sun-burnt brick, cobwebbed filing cabinets). Space that resides in amorphous matter is profoundly other, dictated not by a modernist or colonial economy of secondary forms but evolving from its own internal economies and histories. The atmospheric allows a reading of tropical spaces to be other, not in the sense as an alternative to what is acceptable but as pure difference. It re-politicizes the climate-architecture question. In that sense, these old buildings rely precisely on their ethereal fragility, such that the natural weathering process in the hot and humid climate becomes an event, which makes this space immediate and palpable rather than defective.

To rethink these spaces as encompassing events, effects, emotions and processes, is, to finally move beyond the 'objecthood' of architecture, and to begin, as Katie Lloyd Thomas argues, to recognize 'the social and material practices in which its generation is embedded and the forces at work in the realization of its objects (and their continuing lives) which range from the conceptual, to the practical and technical, to the institutional' 11. Katie Lloyd Thomas, 'Introduction: Architecture and Material Practice', in Katie Lloyd Thomas, ed., *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.2. In effect, the atmospheric further makes a category such as 'tropical architecture', into which the schools, barracks, sheds and houses in question may be summarily grouped. Immaterial architecture is, as Jonathan Hill, argues, 'a formless phenomenon' that shifts the emphasis towards 'actions rather than forms' 12. Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p.3.

The conception of formlessness coincides with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's milieu, understandable both simply and complexly as being in the 'middle' of something, or as Andrew Ballantyne elucidates, constituting an inseparable part of an 'environment' 13. Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.85. Deleuze and Guattari give the example of the tick as an organism that survives on the precondition that its environment (or milieu), which effectively becomes a part of the organism's body, is sufficiently protected. Transposed



Mount Sophia and Emily Hill were mainly occupied by Protestant missionaries, in particular the Methodists, from the mid-nineteenth century. Although two prominent 'Sophias' were associated with it (Sophia Cook founded the Chinese girls' School in this area in 1850s and Sophia Blackmore founded the Methodist Girls' School in 1887), Mount Sophia was originally named after Lady Sophia Raffles (this name was already inscribed in a view of this area by Lt Philip Jackson in June 1823). At the turn of the century, Mount Sophia was also an early Jewish enclave or 'mahallah' which means 'home', especially in the areas around Wilkie Road, Sophia Road, Selegie Road, Prinsep Street and Short Street. 'Old School' was previously the Methodist Girls' School. Accessible via a grueling 140+ steps up the hill or alternatively by car, it was developed as a creative cluster in 2007, and houses, amongst other creative-arts based spaces, Singapore's first ever local film cinema.

our knowledge of them. They draw us further into an immersive understanding of their overlapping histories and contradictions, manifesting the past as a profoundly complex part of the contemporary encounter, and questioning formalistic conclusions by making architecture truly matter once again. SA

onto an architectural context, when conceived as part of a milieu, the preserved buildings at these old sites survive as viable organisms only insofar as their environments, their milieux, remain more or less intact. Yet, 'environment' here does not simply reiterate the old idea of respecting the context or keeping the surroundings more or less as they are. The radical significance of the Deleuzian figuration of buildings as milieux is how the entire notion of boundary, which is fundamental to the creation of form in architectural thinking and especially pervasive in urban design practice, becomes destabilized. What it means is simply this: 'Milieux – environments – are formless' 14. Ballarín, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*, p.86. This is not to say that the spaces lack shape but rather to understand that form is only one point in a constellation of forces, which define a space. An architectural milieu is constructed through social and political dimensions, and exists as self-organizing network encompassing 'geographic, ethnic, linguistic, moral, economic, technological particularities' 15. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), p.433. To suggest that 'tropical architecture', which has entrenched itself in apolitical form-making, as a 'formless' phenomena, is at once fascinating and terrifying since it forces us to reconsider its forces of production, re-production and representation as more complex and varied than the decisions of the architect and the planner.

The experience of Rochester Park, Wessex Estate, Dempsey Hill, Mount Sophia and Emily Hill may be meaningfully defined, I argue, not merely by their colonial or institutional architectural typologies, but by a constellation of material and immaterial effects, or what one may call atmospheric fields (material, social, cultural, political, historical), a condition which 'returns the "spectator" to bodily awareness and to a kinetic, tactile field' 16. Helene Faján's definition of 'atmosphere' in *Latin and Faján*, Cibo Sheno, p.72, and which operates in contrast to the planner's totalizing gaze. The facts and fictions of these old sites intuitively inform and ground