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To cite this article: Lilian Chee (2023) Swerving with a tiger: architecture after the animal, The Journal of Architecture, 28:6, 980-995, DOI: [10.1080/13602365.2023.2283208](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2023.2283208)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2023.2283208>



Published online: 14 Feb 2024.



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Swerving with a tiger: architecture after the animal

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Why is a tiger prowling through the passages of architectural discourse? Since its appearance in 1902, a tiger called Stripes continues to be associated with the Billiard Room of the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. Coalescing other non-human and animistic worlds omnipresent in Southeast Asian folkloric beliefs, the tiger's enduring persistence in the colonial monument demands scrutiny. This paper is constructed around the ongoing stickiness of Stripes and other tigers, and the presence of animals and their anecdotes in architectural discourse. Taking up Jennifer Bloomer's provocation to go with the swerve of the unexpected, here I adopt the tiger as an alternative figure of thought — a theoretical and poetic trope of the tropical world — to decolonise architectural history. Besides making the animal central to a disciplinary discourse that remains largely anthropocentric, the tiger is also what Donna Haraway calls a 'material-semiotic' figure which reveals biases, assumptions, and perceptions about the environment and the collective in which it is found. The appearance of the tiger at the Billiard Room coincided with the gradual extinction of the species on the island, several decades after tigers were actively hunted for bounty in their depleted habitats. Thus, the tiger's anecdotal form, when placed adjacent to the colonial architectural history of the Billiard Room, is ultimately disruptive. I trace the tiger's influence in Southeast Asia's intertwined natural, social, and cultural histories, and discuss how this Other animalistic world swerves the imagery and perception of a colonial space whose enduring reputation rests on its significant animal Other. Through Stripes, Bloomer, Haraway, and Bruno Latour, I argue why thinking-with the tiger matters for reconsidering what matters in architectural history today. And why the animal anecdote, precisely because of the slips and swerves of its storied forms, transforms architecture's epistemological and ethical frontiers such that it can traverse otherwise unimaginable and unexpected modes of knowing-with.

Introduction

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
William Blake, *The Tyger* (1794)

In the early hours of 12 August 1902, a tiger by the name of Stripes was spotted cowering under the raised Billiard Room of Singapore's preeminent Raffles Hotel. In no time, Mr C. M. Philips, the head teacher of the nearby Raffles Institution, was 'jerked' awoken from his sleep. Still in pyjamas and nursing a hang-over from the previous evening, the head teacher — disoriented and nonplussed — aimed, fired, and missed the tiger several times. Eventually, Stripes, a runaway from a touring circus, was rudely shot. Philips allegedly fired wildly under the Billiard Room, hitting its pillars repeatedly before finally striking the tiger. Still, the beast did not surrender to the bullet willingly. It was 'seen lying at length on the ground, but not dead; for he raised his head'. The half-dying tiger was then shot between its eyes. It took 'a good deal of persuasion to get several onlookers to crawl beneath the floor and drag out the body; but at length one, bolder than the rest, got hold of the dead tiger's hind legs' and dragged him out to daylight. The mess was considerable. 'A big portion of the tiger's head was blown away'. Phillips was disconsolate about his torn coat. Abandoning their muted civility, the crowd gaped over the hind legs of the ill-fated circus escapée.

Through this event, the Billiard Room is unflatteringly mapped. It is entered from the 'lower' edges — from under the floorboards, between an animal's hind legs, framed by a pair of pyjamas, and colonial guests who lacked the courage to pull out the dead tiger from under the building. Whether intentionally or not, the newspaper report posed similarities between Stripes and Philips: the pyjamas worn by the head teacher and the tiger's striped body, the wounded tiger and the head teacher's spoilt coat. The tiger maintained an upper hand even when it was 'dead as a nail'.

The account of the near-botched kill at the Raffles Hotel is anecdotal. There are neither photographs of the ill-fated tiger nor of the head teacher.¹ The architectural archives of this colonial monument bear no evidence of the ill-fated beast.

Consequently, fact slipped into fiction. The historical anecdotes of the tiger, recounted by different witnesses, chart a frenzied and non-corroborated route of the animal's movement through the hotel. Stripes' body was retrieved from the undercroft of the billiard room, and migrated to several spaces with the animal reputedly discovered in various states: dead *in* the billiard room, asleep *on* the billiard table, jabbed awake with a billiard cue,² and, finally, dead *under* the billiard table.³ Although the tiger anecdote is questionable, its intransigent role as the founding moment in the Billiard Room's history is unshakeable. Established in 1896, this space existed anonymously for six years before the botched hunt in 1902. In the intervening 70 years between its closure in 1917 and its restoration in 1989, the Billiard Room remained enigmatic; the affective anecdote of the tiger overwhelmed its architectural narrative.

That tiger continues to haunt the Billiard Room. Coalescing other non-human and animistic worlds and beings, which remain omnipresent in Southeast Asian folkloric beliefs, the tiger's still-enduring persistence in a colonial monument demands scrutiny. The species' gradual extinction in Sin-

gapore, less than three decades after the fateful Billiard Room encounter, fuels continued intrigue with the monument's animal connection. My own encounter with Stripes interfered with my doctoral research at the turn-of-millennium London. Just as the architectural archives left out the tiger in the hotel, it was near impossible to position Stripes in my dissertation without radically unhinging a status quo conception of architectural history. Even in a thesis, the tiger is risky. What should we do with the tiger that persistently prowls through the passages of architectural discourse?⁴

Swerving, tripping, storying: webs of discourse via Stripes, via Bloomer, via Haraway, via Latour

[T]hese are the times of urgencies that needs stories.⁵

To be clear, the tiger is not architectural. But the tiger is affective, talismanic, totemic. The tiger compels us to look askew. It presses us into action. Stripes' role at the colonial Billiard Room comes from how it recapitulated the divided realms of the coloniser and the colonised; leading us to think again about who dwells, who serves, who controls, and who is controlled. The tiger is thus, *clinamen*.⁶ The *clinamen* is the 'materialism of encounter', or the 'swerve' given by the vitality of chance in 'things' that produce 'a moment of independence from and resistance to us and other bodies: a kind of thing-power'.⁷ In Jennifer Bloomer's 'Writing on the Wall' (1991), the '*clinamen*' refers to a knowing swerve oscillating between rule and improvisation.⁸ Through the swerve, Bloomer negotiates the divide between authorised architectural construction — whether built or written — and the creative impulse to deviate, twist, veer, slide, slip, and swing into something else. Bloomer's allegorical stories connect fragments of evidence in an unimaginable web, making tenuous relations visible. Allegorical address is not uncomplicated. In her early conceptualisation of an allegorical architectural history, Bloomer tells us that these are 'constructions which are fragmented, hieroglyphic, palimpsestic, incomplete; the piling up of fragments, [...] dissemination upon a fuzzy plot'.⁹ The fuzzy plot opens up capacious connections. They constitute Bloomer's vision of theory as always moving, contingent, relational, enlarging, and interwined; theory and thought formed through relational webs of evidence will shake up how we perceive the whole. Bloomer reiterates Walter Benjamin's allegorical schema:

The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste.¹⁰

In other words, the brilliance of the mosaic depends on how its seams and connections are rendered. Or how the disparate but relational pieces of evidence

are sutured in the ways we tell architectural history. Or how the tiger is recounted as part of the colonial hotel's architectural history.

Further, in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway connects the telling of stories (Greek: *tropos*) with 'tropes' or 'figures of speech', which necessitate 'swerving or tripping [...] only the dogmatic think that trope-free communication is our province'.¹¹ Haraway argues that fact and fiction are not opposed since they essentially swerve, trip, and overlap each other. 'Facts' reference something accomplished while 'fiction is in process and still at stake, not finished, still prone to falling afoul to facts, but also liable to showing something we do not yet know to be true, but will know'.¹² Haraway, via anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, reminds me that feminist thinking must concern itself with non-binary topologies of thought where 'partial connections' can give us insights into what is at stake, how things work, who is in action, who is accountable, and what else might be possible.¹³

Nevertheless, making such 'partial connections' with their 'counter-intuitive geometries and incongruent translations' pose disciplinary risks.¹⁴ The value of placing a tiger in architectural discourse will always be challenged because the tiger is conceptually out of place; perceived as an unnatural, or worse, a frivolous piece of evidence orphaned in the cultural endeavour of architectural history. Yet, prowling at the seams of the nature-culture divide, the recognition of the tiger makes us confront the ideological compartmentalisation of colonial knowledge. It tells of colonial conquest in a patriarchal billiard room within a hotel found in a dissembling tropical environment at the turn of the twentieth century, where racial discrimination, wild animal hunting, and rapid deforestation were normalised as modernisation. What is architectural history's responsibility (and my ethical reaction) to the asymmetry of power flagged by the unwieldy evidence of the tiger? How do we deal with the discontinuity and discrimination between architecture and its nonmodern, nonhuman Other?

Comparing conceptual narrowness of thought with unlikely alliances forged in recent sustainability practices, Bruno Latour argues that conceptual thinking must also transform itself by becoming more relational, acknowledging that things are not so neatly separated, not so categorically divided, because they are inevitably entangled: 'Between modernising and ecologising, we have to choose'.¹⁵ 'Ecologising' requires thinking through fuzzy webs of relations, conceptualising agency, and accountability through partial connections, confronting the discontinuity between what we know and what we do not know, and embracing the uncertainty of what has already played out, and is still playing out in our certain, but really only partial, knowledge realms.¹⁶ Conceptual transformation follows from a questioning of our value systems, and in Latour's ecological schema, there is a quest to approach and understand the plural and multiple 'modes of existence' which are different yet adjacent to, and entangled with, our own. Opposed to the modernising impulse to clarify the world by reduction and abstraction, Latour's metaphysical notion of thinking *with* 'modes of existence' focuses on the concrete particular and the dynamic multiple connections one particular constituent leads us towards. Hence, against the singular history of the colonial monument, the tiger juxta-

poses its depleted habitat, its risk of extinction, the repression of a local society, and the hierarchical colonial system which subjugates its colonised Other, both animal and human. Its troublesome status comes from its ability to reveal the biases of postcolonial epistemology which, to an extent, still perpetuates the same weaker binary term: Postcoloniality still subjugates the Other. In Latour's ecological model of thought, the world is always recomposing itself because of multiple modes of existence and their differences. These modes and differences matter even if we do not yet fathom all of it. So too history must recompose and conceptualise its responsibilities.¹⁷

The tiger is Bloomer's hieroglyphic fragment, Latour's ecologically entangled protagonist, and Haraway's 'material-semiotic' figure, whose critical value derives from showing us something we do not yet know to be true.¹⁸ It compels the telling of both fact and fiction, to reveal assumptions and negations about the environment and the collective in which this figure is found. In this paper the tiger is my collaborator; a figure that decolonises not just the content of architectural history but also its workings and blindspots.

Yet I write, like many who have written about tigers, from the sidelines, faced with scarcity of traditionally concrete evidence even when the encounter, such as the one at the Billiard Room, is explosive. The tiger alive is ephemeral. Once shot, it is sublimated into a recurring narrative of control and conquest. Thus, the absence of this tiger (or the animal) in the archives and discourse also necessitates a reconsideration for what counts as evidence, and how to read that which takes the place of the normative. Indeed, to get to the animal in architecture, we have to rely on creative telling. The anecdotal is one such creative act of relay. Haraway's multimodal 'SF' (science facts/fictions, speculative fabulations, string figures in the game of Cat's Cradle, speculative feminism)¹⁹ is an abbreviated manifesto for us to change the story, to learn how to narrate on the go as we think *with* a multispecies ecology, defying academic silos and humanistic certainties. The anecdote and the story are creative holding spaces for what does not belong and what cannot be admitted except through dynamic relay.

Weretigers, ancestral tigers, shamans: vitalist matter and affect

Tigers [...] turn into men; they enter the markets and walk about mixing with people; after they have been recognized, they are captured and killed.²⁰

Confounding animal-human binaries, the Southeast Asian tiger is a complex shapeshifter, capable of transforming beyond normative reason. In this region, the tiger is a spectral creature embedded in vernacular understandings of space, which often blur myth and fact, the physical and the psychical. Once plentiful on the island, the Malayan Tiger, or *Panthera Tigris Jacksoni*, was extirpated from Singapore in the 1950s with the onset of urbanisation.²¹

Historian Peter Boomgaard reminds us that historically, inhabitants of the Malay world, which included Singapore, the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra, revered the tiger as the embodiment of their



Figure 1.
Shadow puppet [*wayang kulit*]
showing *Kayon* which depicts the
water buffalo-tiger ritual, from the
set Kyai Nugroho, Yogyakarta, Java,
1913, courtesy of Yale University
Art Gallery, Creative Commons
licence

family's departed souls and ghosts; the big cat was perceived as a supernatural emissary.²² Popularised in culture, tigers appear in vernacular fables and myths. The *macan* [Indonesian for tiger]²³ features in a leaf-shaped shadow puppet called the *Kayon* (Fig. 1), the puppet which opens the Javanese *wayang kulit* performance. The *Kayon* is a symbolic rendering of a tree which connects

the earthly world to that of spirits. The pre-modern Malays of the Peninsula and Sumatra had 'a superstitious aversion to slaying tigers [...] considered in many instances to be the receptacles for the souls departed of human beings'.²⁴ Ancestral tigers were sacred beings endowed with supernatural powers. It was believed that ancestral spirits resided in these tigers. Thus, the beast was benevolent to its human descendants, and protective of them. The ancestral tiger shades into the figure of the weretiger, wherein certain persons were believed to have the powers of a 'tiger familiar' to transform from their human selves into tigers.

Reputedly shamanic creatures, weretigers' interaction with humans were anecdotally reported. British officer T. J. Newbold stationed in the Malay Peninsula wrote of his encounters with this phenomenon, known as *Jadi Jadian* (Malay for transformation) in the 1830s, '[the villagers] will point out that men have the facility of transforming themselves at pleasure into tigers, or are doomed nightly to become tigers, returning to their natural forms by day'.²⁵ Weretiger stories were often sited in market towns with the oldest known tale dating back to fifteenth-century Melaka, where the Chinese explorer Zheng He's translator Ma Huan records anecdotal knowledge of weretigers.²⁶ Art historian Kevin Chua makes a compelling argument that given their transitional status and mythic reality, tigers were powerful in enacting an embodied 'boundary maintenance' between two realms — human and animal, the living and the dead.²⁷ They served as 'spiritual in-betweens who variously cautioned, cajoled and assisted humans in relating to the life-world'.²⁸

The weretiger anecdotes were also intimate. Anthropologist Robert Wessing relates one from an informant who described how an aging relative's 'body hair became as long as fur', 'his finger and toenails became as long as claws', and these were cut on his request by his grandchildren. The man-turned-weretiger's rice-based diet changed to meat only, until 'finally he went off to the forest on the slopes of the mountain to live. I make offerings to him now'.²⁹ Chua contends that these stories were remarkable in the way they 'envelop us as readers into the scene, [co-opting us into] the binding reality of the transformation'.³⁰

This intimacy is also entangled with the co-evolution of tiger habitats at the fringes of human settlements. Contrary to popular conception, tigers thrived not in deep virgin forests but in secondary ones with savannah-like *alang alang* fields, the tall grasses providing a camouflage for their striped bodies.³¹ Tiger populations, ironically, expanded with the clearing of forests for human settlement and infrastructure. As subsequent agricultural expansion attracted wild boars and deer, tigers thus congregated at these ecotones wherein food was plentiful.³²

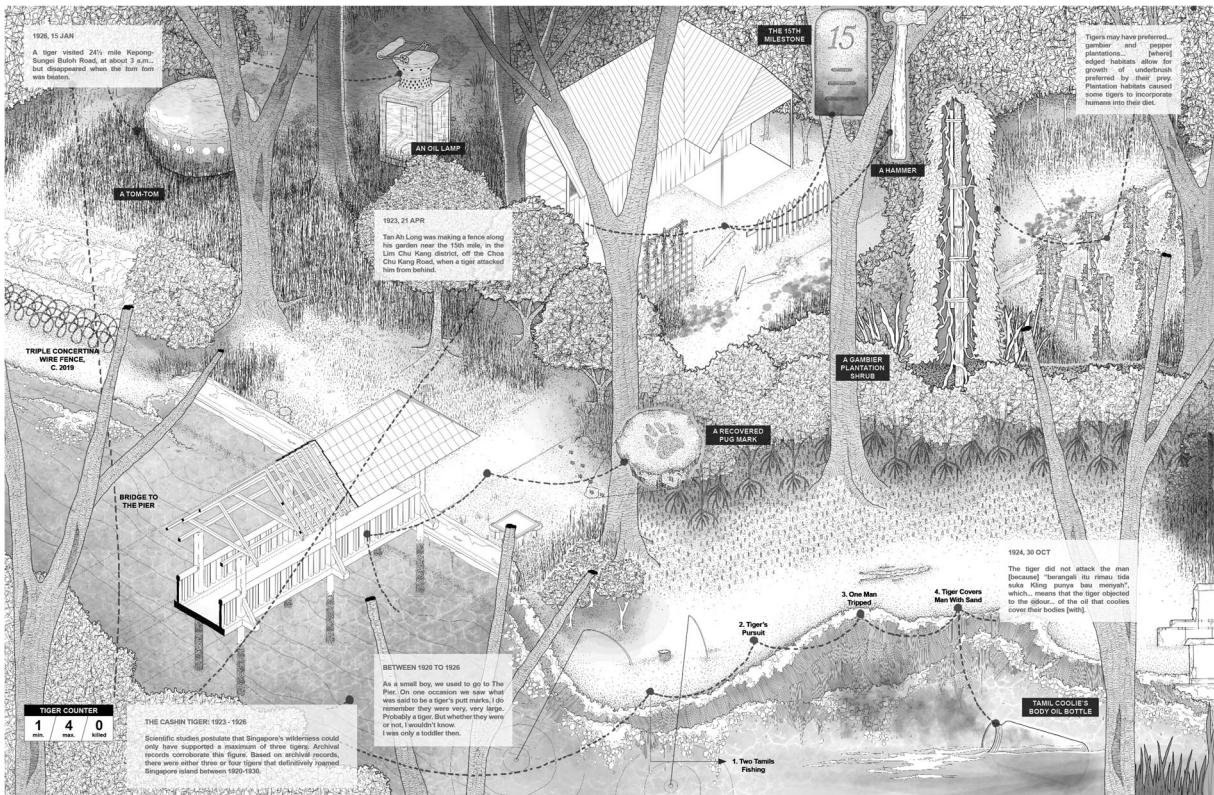
'Not distant beasts of nature, they are instead permanent spectral embodiments of civilisation, conjured up by and for us.'³³ Heinrich Leutemann's lithograph, titled *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore* (1865) (Fig. 2) and produced roughly a century before the tiger's extirpation from the island, depicts Singapore's first Government Superintendent of Works, Chief Architect and Land Surveyor George Drumgoole Coleman, and his entourage of Indian workers being attacked by a tiger. The scene is based on a historical incident



in 1835 when Coleman was surveying a swampy part of the jungle near town in preparation for imminent road building. Being also the Superintendent of Prisons, Coleman's workforce were prison inmates, amongst the group who were transported from Indian gaols to British Malaya to serve as low-wage labourers.³⁴ Evidence of the tiger ambush was anecdotal. There was widespread disbelief that the attack had happened, were it not for the fragments of Coleman's broken theodolite.³⁵ Chua observes that the composition and narrative hold elements of the fantastical: If tigers were widespread by the 1830s, why was this attack unbelievable? That the tiger did not harm a single person in that group was miraculous, and the frontal attack was uncharacteristic. Tigers were known to attack prey from their rear. Migrant Chinese workers in gambier and pepper plantations were targeted when their bent-over postures cast uncanny resemblance to quadrupeds which tigers mistook for prey (Fig. 3).

Responsible for constructing colonial founder Stamford Raffles' town plan for Singapore, Coleman began clearing land in 1835, not coincidentally, the same year as his alleged tiger attack. Chua sees the lithograph and written account of Coleman's anecdote by John Cameron, then editor of the *Straits Times*, as instrumental in materialising the event and, in the absence of any

Figure 2.
Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore, by Heinrich Leutemann, 1865, wood engraving on paper, courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board



ARCHIVAL NEWSPAPER REFERENCES:

A Collection of Newspaper Articles between 1923 to 1930: *Straits Times*, 'Tiger on Singapore Island', April 21, 1923, 8; *Straits Times*, 'A Fastidious Tiger: Remarkable Incident At Sungei Buloh', October 30, 1924, 9; *Straits Times*,

untitled, November 19, 1925, 8; *Straits Times*, 'Coroner's Heavy List: Clawed by Tiger: Alleged Murder and Suicide', November 20, 1925, 5; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 'Tiger At Selat', November 25, 1925, 9; *Straits Times*, *untitled*, January 22, 1926, 8; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 'Tiger At Large', February 6, 1926, 9; *Malaya Tribune*, *untitled*, February 6, 1926, 8; *Straits Times*, *untitled*, July 19, 1928,

Figure 3.
Tracing the Last Tiger, drawn by
Lilian Chee and Toby Fong, 2020

concrete evidence, becoming the event itself. The wild and dangerous tiger was conjured into being in these two anecdotal accounts becoming print and image. Chua argues that these accounts betray 'the urban unconscious of this moment in 1835. It speaks to the colonial desire to penetrate into and symbolically claim virgin territory'.³⁶ In the lithograph, the fleshy tiger in flight attacks the theodolite rather than the men; tiger threats were likely heightened with the tiger acting as scapegoat for imperialist ambitions. Perhaps not unlike the Javanese kings, the imperialist government also saw the same importance of producing an imagination of a tiger-infested city and squashing this threat as proof of their prowess. The imagined control over a beast, perceived regionally as natural *and* supernatural, legitimised colonial claims on occupied territory and cultivated trust amongst a people whose lands were being wrested away. Thus, looking back at architecture through its tiger, unjust relationships and power relations perpetuated by the discipline become relational, taking on an immediacy. They gain vitality. The Southeast Asian trans-species-object grouping of tiger-human-architecture is an affective 'confederation of human and nonhuman elements'.³⁷

Jane Bennett's vital materialities understands such hybrid configurations as 'modes' or 'protobodies', which in their encounters with each other, form everchanging 'mosaics' or 'assemblages'.³⁸ These assemblages require rebalancing and reinvention to survive. Their stories, told to children and adults in this part of the world, hold open a space for these speculative fictions within our shared future.

The animal in architecture: telling from the in-between

Tiger, tiger, in the night
How can you see without a light?
To separate your foes from friends
Are you wearing contact lenses?
Remember, tho', he's from the jungle –
He once ate my Aunt and Uncle
Eating people isn't nice:
Wouldn't you rather curry and rice?
So in your suit of striped pyjamas
Promise you will never harm us
Spike Milligan, *Tiger* (1971)

Upholding propriety, anthropocentricity, and orthogonality, architecture, Catherine Ingraham argues, embodies the 'principle of the inert'.³⁹ In *Architecture, Animal, Human*, Ingraham revisits the resistance of architecture to animals. She argues that architectural history, since the Renaissance, has privileged the notion of 'life' defined primarily by nineteenth-century biological science research on the human-animal or the *homo sapien*. Even so, architecture's attitudes towards 'life' have often been generalised; nostalgic and flattened, it was prone to detachment from human life, and more so aloof towards animal life.⁴⁰ The animal, thus, is still located firmly outside architecture even if architecture has borrowed its physical, structural, and symbolic forms (think: anthills, beehives, spiderwebs, rabbit burrows, and birds' nests), where buildings can even literally represent animals. Ingraham suggests that the parallel development of architecture and biology in the nineteenth century, their exchanges and shared terminologies — '*structure, typology, organization, evolution and development*'⁴¹ — might have cleaved an opening for rethinking how architecture can reconfigure its design and discourse.⁴² 'Viewing architecture from the point of view of life — in its full array of manifestations — also suggests that we might now understand life-figures and 'aliveness' in architectural work, both theoretical and built, in a different way.⁴³ Certainly, the vitality of the Billiard Room, is owed in no small part to Stripes.

My reluctance to give up Stripes derives from an embodied investment in this piece of evidence. In other words, I am curious why the tiger asserts such a pull over me, and why this tiger seems so much more important than the colonial architecture I was tasked to research on and write about. I was unable to separate Stripes from the Billiard Room. Or if one is looking at this psychoanalytically, I saw something of me in Stripes.

A Southeast Asian native, I grew up on a diet of tall tiger tales, taboos, and myths. Consequently, a tiger holds a similar attraction for me as it did for the nervous hotel attendant who first spotted Stripes under the Billiard Room. The word used by Roland Barthes to describe this magnetism is 'advenience'.⁴⁴ 'Advenience' means to come to, to arrive at, to be called by, a poignant something. Political and cultural theorist Davide Panagia locates 'advenience' within the realm of sensorial aesthetics, where the image or object wields a disruptive force that disorganises mind and body: 'By "advenience" I refer to the capacity of things to stand forth and affront the spectator and, through this bodying forth, to strike at one's perceptual milieu'.⁴⁵ Panagia describes this arresting experience as necessarily elusive to our cognitive grasp, further fuelling a desire to scratch at the impression which sticks. Convenience holds us to the event. We recognise it as unsettling; we allow that which advenes to intrude upon our space and our bodies and, in beholding it, the encounter points us askew.

When Stripes advened to encounters at the Billiard Room, it changed the knowledge of this architecture into something partial and affective. The tiger story overwhelms the architecture narrative. Quite unlike the postcolonial histories I had read, my own version of the Billiard Room was markedly different. It did not emanate from the theories of persuasive postcolonial interlocutors. Its politics was low brow, its architecture one of commonplace leisure, the occasion explosive only insofar as the tiger had its head blown off. Consisting of a cast of animals, the British head teacher, a rotund Singh who was the hotel's watchman, a billiard table, plus scraps of evidence which faintly resembled children's tales, this architectural history of the Billiard Room worked around the uncertainties of historical anecdotes and the blindspots of architectural knowledge. The intent evolved from authoritative architectural history towards a performance of the backstories surrounding the tiger hunt, how these were circulated and perpetuated, through what means and to what ends. It mattered how the Billiard Room came to be known to me and to so many others *not* through its colonial architecture, but instead being tethered to a fugitive circus tiger. Following Stripes allowed architectural history to question its premises and ethics; particularly for me, this involved a realisation that postcolonial architectural history was not much different from the colonial version since the relational prospects of the former remained locked within human agency and within binaries. Thus, in exposing the equivalence between colonial and postcolonial architectural histories, anyone who attempts to aggregate the tiger as architectural evidence will face some kind of resistance.

Embracing a collaborative reconfiguration of the Billiard Room's founding connections with its non-human cast — a tiger, a wild boar, two snakes, and a billiard table — my interspecies/multiobject methodology raised anxieties, not least my own. Although informed by gender and feminist inclinations, I asked myself if my argument could be located within the field of postcolonial architectural history? If not here, then where else? These questions derive from a dependency on disciplinary mastery and, with such mastery, blindness and violence towards 'otherness' in knowledge production. Outwardly frivolous, the insertion of Stripes into the Billiard Room's architectural history in

fact agitates architecture's premises — its ontological (categories and concepts) and epistemological (modes of knowing) bases. The disciplinary partitioning — in this case, the amputation of biological life or animality from architecture — renders us speechless when we attempt such heterogeneous associations, or as Ingraham writes, the ambiguities and uncertainties of working through animality or animals 'has no legs to stand in architecture'.⁴⁶ Indeed, knowledge is accumulated and judged by mastery of a discipline over the subjects being examined. 'To make concrete its authority, a discipline must remain blind to what is beyond its limits, disavowing the ways it remains affected and permeated by its outside.'⁴⁷ What might happen when we surrender disciplinary mastery?

In her reading of novelist J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, literary theorist Julietta Singh argues that Coetzee's narrative breaks away from a familiar anticolonial stance of human mastery.⁴⁸ Acknowledging 'the porousness of our disciplined ways of knowing', Coetzee invites us 'to risk seeing more than we are able to "know" concretely', to be open to intuition and to be committed to 'sympathetic imagination', when we encounter something that escapes our disciplinary grasp.⁴⁹ Such knowing is intermodal, in-between. Following the swerve means learning how to ungrasp.⁵⁰

The in-between or the middle, Gilles Deleuze reminds us, 'is not an average, but an excess. It is through the middle that things grow'.⁵¹ The middle is where things and thoughts slip between positions of orthodoxy. It is where ideas gain velocity and potential. The tiger slips between empirical knowledge of the monument on the one hand, and the philosophies of postcolonial histories and theories on the other. Its anecdotal form is also intermodal, neither fact nor history but also not fiction. The anecdote is 'exorbitant', linked to 'exteriority [...] exits, departure, attempts to get out, and in particular, the attempt to get out of a rut'.⁵² In *Material Thinking*, Paul Carter writes that 'interconnected anecdotes' do not merely assert an alternative historical perspective. They raise foundational questions about history's premises, assumptions, and lapses.⁵³ The anecdote conjoins architecture with stories told *around* the latter, thus the anecdote immediately locates architecture in the midst of Other things which architectural discourse leaves out. Indeed, the anecdote's exuberance casts light on otherwise repressed relations.

Under the influence of ... : theorising the tiger with Bloomer

To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or identity; it produces its own insights and blindness.⁵⁴

Indeed, what I did not see then but recognised later is that the tiger in the Billiard Room constitutes *both* subject and theory. The tiger encounter as architectural event bears little resemblance to the usual suspects of postcolonial history and theory. Its obliqueness enables it to move in and out of focus, being simultaneously frivolous, undeniable, ephemeral, cultural, historical, and critical.

Thus, the tiger compels me to question my assumptions about architecture. The lack of extant architectural language — historical and theoretical — to think with and write with the tiger when I was a PhD student necessitated some creativity in theorising how Stripes could be co-located with the history of the Billiard Room.

In 'Hold It (Meditations upon a Gorgonzola Cheese)' (1987), Bloomer writes with disarming honesty about two camps fighting over what architecture is: on the one hand, there is the architecture of 'image, expression, and representation' held together by the primacy of form, geometry and metaphorical associations; on the other hand, there is an architecture concerned with materials, connections and patterns of possibilities drawn together by metonymic networks. Bloomer leans more to the latter's grounding on 'inquiry and exploration', though she admits her fascination with the former's 'leap of faith' and 'mumbo-jumbo'.⁵⁵ She asks for intellectual inquiry to be tampered with 'mumbo-jumbo' — the willed collision of analysis and intuition. Her vision of architectural discourse is contingent labour, a work-in-progress — not neat, not conclusive, and never authoritative.

This discourse, to use her word, is 'wonder' — the fascination and pleasure that comes from putting together fragments, making connections, and conjuring spaces for material and intellectual exploration, which are equally curious because these relationships are yet to be seen, much less understood. In swerving towards something, we are caught off-guard, unprepared by our academic training to maintain distance and assert authority. We are occupied with, and by, our subjects. They consume us. These objects are inevitably noticed in the middle of something happening, and noticed at 'an oblique'; thus, as Kathleen Stewart writes, they produce their own genre of theory:

Theory becomes a *method* that turns its objects into an impasse, an enigma, a thing of promise and contact. A pocket. Theory is a skidding into tricky alignment with analytic objects that can only be approached awkwardly, described around.⁵⁶

Theory is generated from the subject that refuses to give up easily to the rules of the discipline. Thus, theory does not come before, nor does it anticipate how to make sense of this subject. Theory is constructive; it is constructed from within this enigmatic subject which occupies our curiosity. Significantly, the conceptual receptacles which hold Bloomer's architectural discourse are messy and unruly — fertile hatcheries, leaky vessels, crypts oozing secretions and secrets, jerry-rigged quilts, and overflowing big jugs. The theoretical clearings enabled by these conceptual sites are reciprocally promiscuous, relational, and contingent, crisscrossing between architecture's still taboo subjects of gender, nostalgia, beauty, sentimentality, and ugliness. They admit imperfections, recognise the curious, embrace the unseen, and acknowledge the inclinations of the writing subject who veers towards minor things and risky situations. They allow 'thought-in-action'⁵⁷ that becomes 'unstuck from its own line of thought to follow the objects it encounters, or becomes undone by its attention to things that don't just add up but take on a life of their own as problems for thought'.⁵⁸

My encounter with the tiger and the resultant swerved decolonialised scholarship are inspired by the energy of Bloomer's allegorical method. In tracing the web of connections that made the tiger an architectural event to be reckoned with, I have attempted to extend Bloomer's thinking, and enlarged her points of reference, connecting her tentacular world to that of Haraway's and Latour's. This paper thinks through the tiger which I have regarded as key evidence, thus also, an allegorical fragment, a clinamen, a material-semiotic figure. Bloomer's capacious scholarship is vital because it places architecture in the world-at-large, and acknowledges the implications of architecture's deeply entangled existence. Bloomer has also given a generation of scholars without voice — my younger and my present selves — outlets for expressing what we see and sense as incommensurate with what we are taught to think and write. But most significantly, Bloomer showed me how to unmake theory, to be bold in advancing the claim that theory is made where it finds itself — the theoretical bends to encounter is anchored upon the researcher's ethical position. Ultimately, Bloomer's legacy is the impetus to recompose, decolonise, and look askew so that our discipline is kept relevant and grounded but also unceasingly visionary, and always relational.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the constructive comments offered by Hélène Frichot, Emma Cheatle, and the two blind reviewers, and the opportunity to discuss this paper at the Architectural Association with Doreen Bernath and Lorens Holm.

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