

FORMING AND UN-FORMING THE URBAN CLOSET
presenting a geography of queer spaces in Singapore

by
Wong Zi Hao
A0041251Y

B.A. (Architectural Studies)
National University of Singapore, 2011

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE
at the
National University of Singapore

September 2011

FORMING AND UN-FORMING THE URBAN CLOSET

presenting a geography of queer spaces in Singapore

by

Wong Zi Hao

A0041251Y

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Architecture

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Abstract

This paper looks at the evolving nature and portrayal of queer spaces in Singapore, as these spaces are being shaped and re-shaped by the changing and advancing social and political influences which affect the queer community, within the last decade.

The research critiques and develops architectural theorist Aaron Betsky's reconstructions of the private "closet spaces" in the city.¹ The private "closet realm" that seems to be

¹ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1997), pp. 16-26.

separated from the mainstream hetero-normative city is re-constructed through a series of queer spaces that challenge the earlier readings of the “closet” and the city by dismantling its simplistic binaries such as private/public, homosexual/heterosexual and ordered/deviant. This dissertation adopts as its geography, three spaces, namely, Hong Lim Park, Chinatown and the Housing Development Board (HDB) flat.

1) The Park: Hong Lim Park challenges Betsky’s closet as a queered space that is open and public, yet able to be transformed into a site hosting *Pinkdot* – a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) affirming event, held once a year in Singapore.

2) The Street: Chinatown exists both as a tourist site as well as a gay district in Singapore, where many gay establishments are found. The site provides new lenses for looking at queer spatial practices that arise out of the mixed usage of the same space. It re-looks at the way closets are formed by the bordering of body-spaces within the site.

3) The Flat: The HDB flat presents an understanding of closet-forming within the multi-generational home interior, where the privacy of the home becomes encroached into, and where dichotomies of public/private are not strictly separated.

This geography of spaces reveals ways in which control mechanisms of the public realm are resisted, by the temporary forming (and un-forming) of the queer closet: the inversion of orders of the *Pinkdot* event in the park; the silent deviation of queer individuals in the street; and the re-definition of meanings in everyday objects within the home.

Keywords: queer, closet, park, street, HDB, body

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr Lilian Chee

Title: Assistant Professor

(total word count 10,730 words)

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the following persons who have made the completion of this dissertation possible:

Dr. Lilian Chee

For your guidance, motivation and patience.

Thank you for taking me through this journey of exploring architecture in writing.

My parents and family

For your love and understanding.

Soo Kuang, Gary, John and Jing Xiang

My muses: for being there and keeping me in check when the going got tough.

Felicia, Jolene, Fabian and Jack

For being my glasses, when I was short-sighted.

List of Illustrations

- p. 1 1
Tanjong Rhu: paradise lost?
Scenes taken from Boo Junfeng's shortfilm *Tanjong Rhu: The Casuarina Cove*, 2008.
[Source: <http://boojunfeng.wordpress.com/short-films/tanjong-rhu/>]
- p. 15 2
Hong Lim Green: the void in the city.
[Source: www.googlemaps.com, edited by author]
- p. 22 3
Pinkdot 2010: The Pink Dot and the city.
[Source: <http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com/>]
- p. 23 4
Pinkdot 2011: The Pink Splat and the city.
[Source: <http://sglinks.com/pages/857464-pink-dot-attracts-people-editorial-temasek-review-emeritus>]
- p. 29 5
Chinatown – Tourist site and gay capital in Singapore?
[Source: www.streetdirectory.com, edited by author;
tour destinations as listed in the guide around Chinatown, Singapore, in Heidi Sarna, *Frommer's Singapore Day By Day* (Australia: Wiley Publishing Australia Pty Ltd, 2009), pp. 46-53.
gay establishments as listed in <http://www.utopia-asia.com/map/singchin.htm>]
- p. 30 6
The alien in Chinatown.
Photograph taken along Pagoda Street.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 31 7
The tourists' gaze.
Photograph taken along Trengannu Street.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]

- p. 32 8
Pedestrianised open-air mall.
Photograph taken along Pagoda Street.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 36 9
Sterile alleys.
Photograph taken along Club Street.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 37 10
The hidden garden. A lover's park?
Photograph taken along Ann Siang Hill Park.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 38 11
Backdoors leading to hidden corners.
Photograph taken along Ann Siang Hill Park.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 42 12
Portal to another world.
Photograph taken along Amoy Street.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 43 13
Of seeing and being seen.
Photograph taken at Ann Siang Hill Park.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 44 14
The voyeur's view.
Photograph taken at Ann Siang Hill Park.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 49 15
The HDB flat.
Photograph taken from a HDB flat in Hougang.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]

- p. 51 16
The HDB: of parts and the whole.
[Source: Plan of HDB flat, taken from <http://tealida.webs.com/singapore.htm>,
Map of HDB estates in Bishan taken from www.streetdirectory.com, edited by
author]
- p. 54 17
The “secret” garden.
Photograph taken from a HDB flat in Hougang.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 58 18
The “family” table.
Photograph taken from a HDB flat in Hougang.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 62 19
“Rituals” of the bedroom.
Photograph taken from a HDB flat in Hougang.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 67 20
The queer fragmented HDB flat.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 84 Appendix: 21
Rules and regulations of park usage are exhibited within the park.
Photograph taken of information-board from within Hong Lim Park.
[Source: Wong Zi Hao]
- p. 85 Appendix: 22
Queer Bus electronic brochure.
[Source: <http://www.oogachaga.com/queerbus>]

Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	iv
List of Illustrations	v
Contents	viii
Chapter 1: A New Urban Closet?	1
1.1 Dismantling the Urban Closet	1
1.2 The Metaphor of the Closet and the City	4
1.3 Redefining CLOSED Borders: Situating the BODY within the CLOSET	8
1.4 Negotiating the Bodied Space:	
The Forming and Un-forming of Queered Space	11
A Geography of “Closet” Spaces in Singapore	
Chapter 2: The Park	13
2.1 Pink Park	13
2.2 The Ambiguous Park: How Ambiguous Is It?	16
2.3 Of Bodies and the Parade	18
2.4 The Dot (or the Splat) and the City	22
Chapter 3: The Street	26
3.1 Touring the Queered Streets of Chinatown	26
3.2 The Tourist’s Gaze	30
3.3 The Homosexual’s Gaze	36
3.4 The <i>Queerist’s</i> Gaze	42
3.5 The (B)ordered Body-Site	47

Chapter 4: The Flat	48
4.1 The Ubiquitous HDB Flat?	48
4.2 Un-doing the HDB Flat	54
4.3 Re-doing the HDB Flat	58
4.4 Over-doing the HDB Flat	62
4.5 The Fragmented Closet: Forming and Un-forming Queer Space	66
Chapter 5: Conclusion	69
Bibliography	74
Appendix	82

Chapter 1: A New Urban Closet?

1.1 Dismantling the Urban Closet



1: Tanjong Rhu: paradise lost?

A former military officer seeks closure by making a documentary film about a man whom he had furtively encountered in Tanjong Rhu many years ago.

Tanjong Rhu is a secluded beach on the east coast of Singapore, and a popular cruising ground for gay men. In an entrapment exercise in 1993, 12 men were arrested there and sentenced to imprisonment and caning [...] ²

The scenes above, and synopsis as provided in the excerpt, are from local film-maker Boo Junfeng's short film "*Tanjong Rhu: The Casuarina Cove*". The film documents the police entrapment of a gay cruising site in Singapore, revisiting a time when gay activity was almost non-visible to the public realm. It was a time when homosexuals had to look for spaces, untouched and ungoverned by hetero-normative constructs of society, such as the secluded beach of Tanjong Rhu, a site of gay activity in the past. If the homosexual closet was a space of sexual desire and fantasy that was acted out, this private strip of no-man's land became that place – a public space that was private at the same time, where gay men could interact and build their hidden fantasy spaces of escape from the homogenizing and controlling city.

The hidden space of fantasy was penetrated however, by external orders, where policemen masqueraded as homosexuals to entrap these men. The closet was not as safe as it was thought to be. Almost two decades after the incident, the strip of beach is now under development. At the same time, other spaces become seen as queer contestations,

² "Tanjong Rhu: The Casuarina Cove", 2008, Boo Junfeng: Short Films (accessed 10 August 2011)
<<http://boojunfeng.wordpress.com/short-films/tanjong-rhu/>>

resulting in the blurring of private and public boundaries; the homosexual closet manifests in other ways, claiming its spaces and leaving its mark on the city.

This study looks at the evolving nature and portrayal of queer spaces in Singapore, as these spaces are being shaped and re-shaped by the changing social and political influences which affect the community, within the last decade. The paper then puts writings and arguments in the existing field of study on queer spaces (and spaces appropriated by deviant communities) into closer inspection with the intention of providing new lenses to look at queer space within its controlled environment. Spatial manifestations of queer spaces and its culture can then be understood in ways that start to challenge the starkly differentiated binaries, often used to describe and make tangible the understanding of these spaces. These binaries take the form of: public/private, heterosexual/homosexual, normative/deviant, formalized spaces/gay ghettos; these dichotomies portray the metaphor of the gay closet space existing within the mainstream city.

This dissertation seeks to challenge such a perspective as being reductive in the portrayal of queer spaces, and the events that occur within such sites of resistance.

1.2 The Metaphor of the Closet and the City

If the closet represents the place where gay and lesbian desire remains hidden, what sort of space is it?³

Architectural theorist Aaron Betsky used the metaphor of the closet space to indicate a different sort of private fantastic realm created by homosexuals within the framework of the city.⁴ The metaphor draws relationships between an actual closet and the private spaces, whether physical, psychological or emotional, of queer men and women. A closet is a place where clothes, or outer coverings, are put away and where one can be naked and be himself, contained within the darkness of the closet.⁵ Much like the closet, queer individuals resort to creating for themselves both tangible and intangible spaces, where they can remove their outer “coats” in which they masquerade, and thus, occupy a private realm where they can live out their bodily same-sex desires.⁶

These closet spaces can then be seen as the re-construction of the private and domestic domains of the homosexual closet within the public realm of the hetero-normative city, where the activities of socializing and performance of sexual acts may take place in a safe and enclosed environment. These are spaces which psychologically remind the homosexual individual of a “closet” space – where the individual is allowed to be

³ Michael Brown, ‘Travelling through the closet’, in James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory (eds), *Writes of Passage, Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 185.

⁴ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1997), pp. 16-26.

⁵ Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, p. 17.

⁶ Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, p. 17.

himself/herself, unmasked and unclothed, and not having to conform to normative standards as imposed by the outside world.

The metaphor of the closet space is presented as a space that is private and separated from the hetero-normative city, as a form of non-intrusive escape for the queer community. It is built on a fairly reductive framework of binary opposites that relate the queer closet to the mainstream city. This binary framework sets up the closet space within clearly defined albeit oppositional sets of relationships as private/public, homosexual/heterosexual, hidden/visible, dark/light, fantasy/reality, deviant/normative, ambiguous/ordered spaces. In this sense, this concept segregates queer spaces from the city. Betsky's arguments also suggests that the interior space of the closet is homogenous, that is to say, the interior space of the closet is totally queered (as a personal fantasy space), as a result of the strict and reductive segregation between two distinctly opposite realms – the public and private.

Feminist and geographer Nancy Duncan emphasizes that the spatial discourse on gender and sexuality frequently relies on dichotomies, such as public/private, heterosexual/homosexual, or normative/deviant, male/female.⁷ She identifies these binary modes of space and societal constructs as often reducing complex relationships into simplified, and as such, problematic categories. The way that people view gendered spaces are easily influenced by these constructions. For example, Duncan states that it would seem only normal, that sexuality, as a deviant or illicit act, becomes confined to the

⁷ Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127-45.

private domains. Mainstream heterosexual behavior is generally accepted, when many of their accepted practices, such as weddings, couples displaying their affection in public spaces, as well as housing policies favouring the family, which are also sexed practices are however “normalized”, and allowed to dominate public space.⁸ As a result of this status quo, homosexual behavior becomes regulated as “sexed” and “deviant” behavior and is relegated to the interior and private domain of the metaphorical closet space.⁹ Hence, the closet serves not only to liberate the queer individual, it also ironically acts as a prison to contain acts that should not be practiced and made visible to the public.

This argument that the closet liberates the queer body, yet binds them within like a prison, is also mentioned by geographer Michael Brown who highlights that the traditional understanding of the closet serves to marginalize the queer community within hetero-normative orders.¹⁰ The queer community is confined within a space that serves to hide and forget them – which ironically forms the closet space.¹¹ Yet, this is not always the case now given that gay communities globally are becoming increasingly accepted and visible, as observed in gay pride parades and in openly gay villages/districts.¹²

Given these circumstances, the existing metaphor of the “closet” – what it is and how it is defined – needs reconsideration. To begin this study, the scope of gay spaces, that is seen

⁸ Duncan, ‘Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces’, p. 137.

⁹ Duncan, ‘Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces’, pp. 137-9.

¹⁰ Michael Brown, ‘Travelling through the closet’, in James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory (eds), *Writes of Passage, Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 187.

¹¹ Brown, ‘Travelling through the closet’, p. 187.

¹² Brown, ‘Travelling through the closet’, p. 188.

as 'closet' spaces of expression, both of the self and of the community, has to be widened, while new lenses have to be devised to view such spaces.

1.3 Redefining CLOSED BORDERS: Situating the BODY within the CLOSET

In “*Bodies-Cities*”, feminist writer Elizabeth Grosz examines the body in relation to the city – the body is described to be an organisation of structure, organs and mass, and various systems, being given a “unity and cohesiveness” and integrated into a whole.¹³ Grosz discusses the “body” as having form and being bordered, yet sometimes being formless and “amorphous” – concrete versus fluid; as an ordered system, yet possibly “incomplete” and “uncoordinated” or spontaneous; as a construct of society with implemented social norms and behavioural standards, yet also able to challenge the system that binds it together.¹⁴

The city can also be seen as a body, having ordered systems of buildings and networks, of people and spaces designed for, or of spaces being designed for specific communities of people.¹⁵ Yet this understanding of the bodied city can be too restrictive and reductive in the way considers public/private realms. Alternatively, the body or the bodied space can be seen to subvert restricting borders and definitive categories, since the city/body can be seen also as fluid and formless, temporarily taking forms at times to fill a space, whether intentionally designed for or otherwise self appropriated. This amorphous state of the body can exist – whether as physical entities of the individual or as a mass of bodies filling a space, or itself forming a space, pushing and pulling at its restrictive boundaries. The body can be a political one, at times challenging the system, whether taking visible form,

¹³ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Bodies-Cities’, in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (ed), *Places Through The Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 42-4.

¹⁴ Grosz, ‘Bodies-Cities’, pp. 44-8.

¹⁵ Grosz, ‘Bodies-Cities’, pp. 42-4.

or doing so, in subtle, almost invisible ways, or moving towards maintaining a balance.¹⁶

In other words, queer spaces could be approached as amorphous rather than segregated, and ambiguous rather than binary.

Geographer Gill Valentine discusses how lesbian space may exist alongside and in relation to the “heterosexual” street.¹⁷ She describes how the lesbian woman makes use of dressing, gestures, mannerisms and even music, to create her own queered space within this framework.¹⁸ Sometime she blends in and sometimes she stands out from the “heterosexual” crowd. Here, boundaries delineating queered space from the external hetero-normative are blurred. The traditional definitions of queer closet space are dismantled, in the light of other methods of queer space-making in the public realm.

The homosexual closet space does not have to be defined by strict physical elements of space, such as being in an enclosed or private setting. As mentioned earlier in the paragraph, since the boundaries are seen as ambiguous and amorphous, the closet can be formed and un-formed by the interactions of the body with the space – from the silent resistances seen in the appropriation of everyday objects and nuanced interpersonal bodily gestures in public space, to the outward display of hetero-normative subversions as observed in cross-dressing, the queering of public territory with the use of music and even in pride parades.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Bodies-Cities’, in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (ed), *Places Through The Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 44-8.

¹⁷ Gill Valentine, ‘(Re)Negotiating the ‘Heterosexual Street’: Lesbian Productions of Space’, in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 146-55.

¹⁸ Valentine, ‘(Re)Negotiating the ‘Heterosexual Street’: Lesbian Productions of Space’, pp. 150-2.

1.4 Negotiating the Bodied Space: The Forming and Un-forming of Queered Space

Several authors have written about the ambiguous demarcation of queered space.

Duncan's writing on the gendered and sexed spaces of the public and private realms revolves around the body being in a constant state of negotiation and re-negotiation.¹⁹ In other words the queer body is always negotiating his/her surroundings, which are seen as fluid and ambiguously bordered, and whose mainstream orders are challenged by the minority communities.

These writings can help to mount a discussion into the search for new lenses to interpret and understand queered space within the hetero-normative city. Queered spaces may not always exist as private spaces distinctly separate from the external public, as boundaries are perceived as less fixed and stable, and not necessarily visible and material – the way that we understand how these “closet” spaces are alternatively constructed, and how they are read as queered spaces, all become significant issues. Also the shifting and transforming boundaries of the closet realm requires a temporal reading of these queered spaces, since they could be time-based, forming and un-forming, constituting and re-constituting, or transforming within both spatial and temporal frameworks.

Like a fantasy realm, these spaces then take on an ephemeral presence that has to be constantly negotiated within the mainstream city – transcending the physical boundaries

¹⁹ This negotiating and re-negotiation of the homosexual in heterosexual space is discussed in both texts: Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', pp. 127-45. and Valentine, '(Re)Negotiating the 'Heterosexual Street': Lesbian Productions of Space', pp. 146-55.

of the spaces that constrain it, sometimes enabling, or empowering, the community, other times simply a space that the individual slips in and out of. This constant struggle to exist may be a mechanism that allows the queer body to be formed and un-formed within mainstream spaces.

In this paper, the private “closet realm” normally assumed as separate from the city, will be explored and re-constructed in a series of queer spaces that will serve to challenge the earlier divergent spatial relationships between the “closet” and the city. It will strive to position the body within the closet, in a geography of three spaces in Singapore – the park, the street and the home.

These spaces provide specific scenarios – the event in the park, the silent deviations of the streetwalker, and the everyday routine within the home – which act as critical lenses to re-read the mechanisms that allow for self-appropriated queered or deviant spaces to exist within the controlled frameworks of the city.

A GEOGRAPHY OF “CLOSET” SPACES IN SINGAPORE

Chapter 2: The Park

2.1 Pink Park

May 15, 2010 (Saturday), 1700hrs:

A park space at the edge of both Singapore’s Central Business District and Chinatown fills with people, all attired in shades of pink. Some of these people are standing; some seated on mats, picnic-styled, all eyes watching a performance unfolding in front of them. Singapore’s “Pride Parade” – the Pinkdot event, running for its second time, is themed “Freedom to Love”.²⁰ The event was held at the Hong Lim Park and celebrated sexual diversity as well as family love and support. Both straight and gay Singaporeans, permanent residents, and their friends and family members were present. An hour later, there were 4,000 people gathered at the park, forming a body of pink – a pink dot - that was captured on a balloon-camera.²¹

1500hrs (a couple of hours before the start of the event):

Hong Lim Park is an open green, park space that physically and visually separates the built-up high-rise concrete and glass jungle of the Central Business District

²⁰ “Press Release: Hong Lim Park becomes a sea of Pink, with over 4,000 turning up for Pink Dot 2010”, 16 May 2010, Pinkdot.sg (accessed 1 May 2011) <http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html>

²¹ Texts in italics, in this chapter, are written narratives based on the *Pinkdot 2010* event, as observed and experienced by the author, and as reported in the *Pinkdot* press releases. Refer to Appendix Part I for excerpts on the press article.

from the low-rise shophouses of Chinatown. A “void” in the centre of the city, Hong Lim Park usually goes unnoticed, by traffic and pedestrians surrounding its four sides.²² It is a scene of a heavily “mechanized” city, all in a state of clockwork movement, without time to spare or linger within this void.

²² The “void” was used to describe the area of Chinatown, as a space that was left out of city high-rise and programme-intensive developments in 1970-80s Singapore in Dennis Cheok’s dissertation, referenced here: Dennis Khang Wee Cheok, ‘A Hemisphere in Her Hair, or Chinatown: A Peculiar Inquisition’, in Limin Hee (ed), *Folio 08* (Singapore: Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore, 2008), pp. 136-8. Here, the void is used in a similar manner to describe Hong Lim Park.



- 01: HONG LIM PARK
- 02: TELOK AYER HONG LIM GREEN COMMUNITY CENTRE
- 03: SHELTERED OUTDOOR STAGE
- 04: KRETA AYER NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE POST
- 05: CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

2: Hong Lim Park: the void in the city.

2.2 The Ambiguous Park: How Ambiguous Is It?

In September 2000, Hong Lim Park became associated as a space for free expression, initially by means of free speech, a move by the State seen as the provision of a public platform where individuals and various communities alike could voice out their opinions on politically related matters. The park then subsequently became used by some political opposition parties to hold public rallies.²³ Acts of demonstrations carried out at the park had to be of a peaceful nature. The agenda and content of each public event had to be subjected to the strict guidelines set by the governing bodies which included the National Parks Board and the police.²⁴ The ambiguous void became gradually more defined as rules now apply to the usage of the “free” park.

Other than these formalized park activities, there were also ways in which the park was appropriated by individuals seeking spaces that enabled them to escape from the strict confines of the city. Even for these people, varied attempts were made to monitor and regularize the park space, which can be seen in the excerpt on Hong Lim Park taken from a website that describes Singapore’s gay venues in a historical, yet almost narrative and myth-like manner:

[I]ts dim lighting and tall shrubbery provided ideal conditions for quickies between gay men, especially elderly Chinese-educated ones, until the bushes were pruned

²³ “Hong Lim Park – Speakers’ Corner”, 2009, National Parks Board (accessed 20 March 2011)
<http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitorsguide&task=parks&id=67&Itemid=73>

²⁴ “Terms and Conditions of Approval For Events and Activities carried out at Speakers’ Corner, Hong Lim Park”, 2009, National Parks Board (accessed 10 August 2011)

<http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/docs/speakers_terms_n_conditions.pdf>

See Appendix Part II for the regulations governing the use of the park.

and bright lights installed in the early 90s to deter such activities [...]

In the 1980s, casual strollers were shocked to see young boys holding hands at night and wrote letters to the *newpapers* [a local tabloid] to complain. In spite of several police patrols in which these boys were questioned, no one was charged as nobody was caught *flagrante delicto*. The setting-up of the Kreta Ayer Neighbourhood Police Post in an old building next to the car park was also considered a measure to curb late-night cruising.²⁵

Hence, other than the park lights, and pruned trees and shrubbery, littered all around the park, a police post, a sheltered outdoor stage, as well as a small community centre are located at the periphery of this park. Security cameras can be found perched around the community centre and police posts, as a form of control and to aid the police post in monitoring the park space. All these structures are there to seemingly facilitate and oversee the “free” speeches and “non-regulated” activities that occur at the park. The urban void thus becomes a controlled and contained setting, where the external orders of the city seep inwards, defining and regularizing its space and usages. Yet there still remains a certain ambiguity about the park space as observed in the *Pinkdot* parade.

²⁵ “Singapore Gay Venues: Contemporary”, 15 February 2011, SG Wiki (accessed 1 May 2011)
<[http://sgwiki.com/wiki/Singapore_gay_venues_\(contemporary\)](http://sgwiki.com/wiki/Singapore_gay_venues_(contemporary))>

2.3 Of Bodies and the Parade

As 1700hrs draws closer:

Apart from the preparations that are ongoing for the Pinkdot event, such as workers busy mounting and checking the audio and camera equipment, the few people gathered there cannot be easily identified as gay from outward appearances. More pink-attired people enter the park. The park is slowly transforming into a queered space. Stepping across the boundaries of the park, from the concrete pavements to the grass surfaces, one is “transformed” from being part of the hetero-normative city to being part of a slowly forming, and gradually visible homosexual community. Not all the people in pink are homosexual – they include gay-affirming friends and families. The “pink dot” constitutes a community whose ideals continually challenge and transgress mainstream heterosexuality.

This mass phenomenon is captured by science-fiction writer Samuel Delany, in his autobiography, *“The Motion of Light in Water”*. Here, Delany describes his entrance into a large room in a bathhouse, and his emotions upon seeing the interior filled by a large mass of naked male bodies:

After clumsily walking around in the dimly lit building for a few minutes, he enters “a gym-sized room” with blue lights where “maybe a hundred twenty-five” people make up “an undulating mass of naked male bodies, spread wall to wall”. Both of these instances produce “a kind of heart thudding astonishment, very close to

fear [...]”²⁶

and that “[...] whether male, female, working or middle class, [...], the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies.”²⁷

Feminist theorist, Joan W. Scott, discusses the significance of this scene unfolding in front of Delany as a visible appearance of a usually hidden “other” category of people – the homosexual community in this instance – becoming real in front of him.²⁸ The power of this image, and the movement of the mass of naked bodies filling the space, makes tangible a repressed and hidden desire, now exhibited as other gay men in the nude and partaking in group sex – open and in full view of others.

There is a contestation of accepted notions of “normality” occurring in the space of the bathhouse: the space presents an inversion of heterosexual standards, where the shameful and usually unacceptable now surrounds the individual, to the extent that it is perceived as normal. Scott also adds that the sheer “[n]umbers – massed bodies – constitute a movement”; the containment of the bathhouse now becomes a space of empowerment for the marginalized community, where the individual sees himself as participant in the movement of the whole.²⁹ The making visible of the hidden gay community in Singapore, now identified in pink, and taking temporary possession of the

²⁶ Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water* (New York: Kasak. 1988), pp. 267-8, in Jeffrey Allen Tucker, *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. 2004), p. 178.

²⁷ Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, p. 268, in Tucker, *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference*, p. 179.

²⁸ Joan W. Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (The University of Chicago Press, Summer: 1991), pp. 773-4.

²⁹ Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, p. 774.

park space in the centre of the city similarly contests acceptable notions of heteronormativity. The park is seen as a site of empowerment that presents the gay community as real, now visible and made “normal”.

The growing mass of pink-clad bodies are taking form in the centre of the park, slowly converting the neutral park into a queered space. Suddenly, it becomes apparent to any visitor that they are in queer territory, when all around them, gay men and women are seen holding hands with their partners, hugging, kissing, and showing their affection in this public space.

These practices would otherwise be furtively conducted in private within the confined deep and dark fantasy realms of the homosexual closet spaces, within their homes, in hidden gay establishments or dark alleys or corners of the city. Here, the crowds are celebrating a public display of their hidden and concealed sexual orientations and identities. The culmination of the *Pinkdot* event leads to a temporary visibility of the gay community within a public and open setting. It is as though the deep and dark urban closet realm has opened itself up to become a walk-in wardrobe, or a display case, where the once hidden and marginalized become completely visible.

This “normalization” or inversion of societal roles, has been also explored in the writings of the *Carnavalesque* by theorists Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. The carnival “inverts the everyday hierarchies, structures, rules and customs of its social formation” by way of its masses of people partaking in the event, and further exaggeration of their behavior in a

public setting.³⁰ These can be observed in inversion of hierarchies, where “kings become servants, officers serve the ranks, boys become bishops, men dressed as women and so on”.³¹ It is in the carnival that everyday structures and conventions become displaced and distorted, where the usually repressed, marginalized classes of society stripped of their spaces and rights to the city, now gain prominence and empowerment, allowing them to reclaim the city temporarily.

Pinkdot is of a slightly different nature as compared to the carnival. However, it is this solidarity and the sudden appearance of the usually hidden and marginalized, now made tangible in a mass of (real) pink bodies, that temporarily queers the space and the other users by “normalizing” their once socially and publicly unaccepted behaviours. *Pinkdot* creates a similar inversion of orders within the park space. The usually hidden and “masked” community appear in a public setting and invert everyday norms temporarily, making acts like holding hands and displaying affection in public acceptable. Like the carnival, the marginalized community stakes their claim on open city spaces, public spaces that usually serve to bind and repress them into the confined and private. It follows then, that in such a queered space, anybody walking into the park attired in pink, or not, whether straight or gay, immediately becomes “queered”. This queer space has the ability to “queer” others.

³⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1986), p. 183. For chapter on the Carnavalesque, see pp. 171-90.

³¹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p. 183.

2.4 The Dot (or the Splat) and the City

1800hrs: the making of the dot

The mass of pink bodies is captured on a balloon-camera, culminating in the climax of the parade, marking the event. The pink dot of massed bodies has to be seen from the aerial perspective; it is the superimposition of the visible gay community onto the backdrop of the city.



3: Pinkdot 2010: The Pink Dot and the city.



4: *Pinkdot* 2011: The Pink Splat and the City.

Geographer David Harvey writes about the aerial perspective as capturing the “image of the city” from the highest point in a city and looking down on what he believes to be the “city as a whole”, and unlike being immersed in the streets, the aerial perspective “offers a superior – because total – view of social reality”.³² While Harvey refers to the aerial perspective as a mastery over the city; *Pinkdot* appears as a temporary parade that forms

³²David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 1989), pp. 1,3-4, cited in Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 1996), p. 209.

and uniforms, like an ephemeral closet space – staking its temporary claim on the city.

Like a “voyeur-god brought into existence with the image he sees”, the massed bodies superimposed onto the aerial perspective of the city presents a community made real by its momentary visibility – a temporal claiming of the open spaces as queer spaces, subverting conventional hetero-normative conventions of the city.³³

This park space, which is transformed momentarily through the mass event to become a queer space, or a space that legitimizes queer identity and its community, suggests a very different trajectory from the one Betsy proposes with his closet space. In this case, the queer space does not need to exist in a private realm separated from the public realm, physically or psychologically. In fact, it seems that the very public and open nature of the parade and the park are key for gay relationships to be legitimized.

³³Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1984), p. 93, cited in Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 1996), p. 211.

1830hrs (the end of the event):

The body of “queered” or queer people dissolves back into the hetero-normative city. As people slip out of the park, they recede and blend in once again with the mainstream public. The queered space then “transforms” back into the hetero-normative park space it once was. The walk-in wardrobe becomes opaque once again as it closes up. The temporary queer space is hidden within the hetero-normative frameworks of the city. The urban “void” is hollow once again, with the clearing out of the equipment and pink shirts: the only hints of the temporary queer space, formed (or imagined) within the minds of its participants, in photographs that were taken and in articles written, in anticipation of the next Pinkdot event.

A GEOGRAPHY OF “CLOSET” SPACES IN SINGAPORE

Chapter 3: The Street

3.1 Touring the Queered Streets of Chinatown

Queer Bus. 30 July 2011, Saturday. 10 am. Chinatown.

How much do you know about Singapore’s gay past? What are the physical gay spaces in Singapore beyond the Internet and your beloved mobile app? If you are a male between 18-25 years old, this is your opportunity! Join us on this journey to discover more. You get to meet and mingle with other gay, bisexual and simply queer young men too!³⁴

In her paper “*Transgressing Boundaries: Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap*”, theatre studies critic Liz Tomlin writes about the experience of the city of Sheffield through the windows of a tour bus as well as from the monologue of the figure playing coach driver, tour guide and performer in *Nights in this City*, a theatrical performance onboard a bus.³⁵ She presents the experience as “blur[ring] the line between real and theatrical”, the praising of the “unrehearsed streets” of the city from the windows of the bus, where “everything looks like a part of the action” – staged and highly dramatized.³⁶ It is not that the scenes were acted; they were made to be seen that way with the provision

³⁴ “Queer Bus!”, 2011, Oogachaga.com (accessed 10 August 2011) <<http://www.oogachaga.com/queerbus>> See Appendix Part III for the electronic brochure of the *Queer Bus* event.

³⁵ Liz Tomlin, ‘Transgressing Boundaries: Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap’, in TDR (1988-), Vol. 43, No. 2 (The MIT Press, Summer:1999), pp. 136-49.

³⁶ Tomlin, ‘Transgressing Boundaries: Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap’, p. 137.

of the narrative and the very presence of the bus, transforming the generic space into a toured landscape.

This chapter starts with an enquiry into the peculiar tour event that took place within Chinatown, which coincidentally is also known as Singapore's "un-official" gay district.³⁷ *Queer Bus* was an event organized by Oogachaga, a local charity that provides counseling services and affirms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) persons. It promises to be the first of a series of such tour events, where touring became used as a way in which the queer community could learn more about their social spaces within the heart of the gay district of Chinatown. The tourist and the queer have merged into one in this instance.

It became clear that Chinatown was indeed a shared site, both for tourists as well as for queers – *Queer Bus* further blurred these distinctions by allowing for the overlap of both sites and both users all at once! The queer district of Chinatown becomes a highly contested space where the homosexual individual would require specific practices to co-exist with the other users in the "shared" streets, and hence forming borders that define their bodies/spaces as queered.

³⁷ Chinatown/Tanjong Pagar is "un-officially" termed Singapore's gay capital, as cited from informal sources writing about the local gay scenes, on the internet, such as: "Tanjong Pagar – Singapore's Gay Central", 2009, Hot Journo's blogspot entry (accessed 1 May 2011) <<http://hotjournoblogspot.com/2009/07/tanjong-pagar-singapores-gay-central.html>> Its reputation of being a night spot for the gay community are also written in local novels, such as in: Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1992), pp. 31-2. See Appendix Part IV for related excerpts.

In the streets of Singapore's Chinatown, it becomes apparent that tourists, strangers, homosexuals and heterosexuals all collide within a common space in a strange (queer) coexisting manner, making ambiguous the roles of the consumer and the consumed.

CHINATOWN AS TOURIST SITE
 ● TOURIST VENUES

A: KRETA AYER PEOPLE'S THEATRE
 B: KRETA AYER SQUARE
 C: CHINATOWN COMPLEX
 D: TRAD. FOOD: LIM CHEE GUAN
 E: CHINATOWN HERITAGE CENTRE
 F: CHINATOWN STREET MARKET
 G: HISTORIC CHINESE OPERA DISTRICT
 H: CHINATOWN FOOD STREET
 I: SAGO STREET
 J: BUDDHA TOOTH RELIC TEMPLE AND MUSEUM
 K: TRAD. CONFECTIONARY: TONG HENG

L: EU YAN SANG MEDICAL HALL
 M: SRI MARIAMMAN TEMPLE
 N: MASJID JAMAE
 O: CLUB STREET AREA
 P: MAXWELL FOOD ENTRE
 Q: SINGAPORE CITY GALLERY
 R: AL-ABRAR MOSQUE
 S: THIAN HOCK KENG TEMPLE
 T: NAGORE DURGHIA SHRINE



CHINATOWN AS GAY CAPITAL
 ● GAY ESTABLISHMENTS/ EXISTING PHYSICAL CLOSETS

BRACKETS REFER TO UPDATES AS RECORDED IN UTOPIA.COM

01: EIGHT CAFE & BAR (2011)
 02: GAY ACCOMODATION: QUEEN RESIDENT (FEB 2009)
 03: GAY SPA: BODYLIGHT (FEB 2009)
 04: GAY BAR: TANTRIC (FEB 2009)
 05: GAY AND LESBIAN KARAOKE BAR: E-BAR (FEB 2009)
 06: GAY BAR: LOCKERROOM (JUL 2010)
 07: GAY BAR: DYMK (JUL 2010)
 08: SITE OF OLD PELANGI PRIDE CENTRE
 09: GAY CLUB: PLAY (FEB 2009)
 10: GAY SPA: HIDDEN PLACE (FEB 2009)
 11: MAXWELL FOOD CENTRE
 12: GAY SAUNA: Y CLUB (FEB 2009)
 13: GAY BAR: BACKSTAGE BAR (FEB 2009)
 14: GAY SPA: RELAXY BATHHOUSE (FEB 2009)
 15: GAY SPA: OASIS (FEB 2009)
 16: GAY SAUNA: SHOGUN (AUG 2010)
 17: GAY SAUNA: ABSOLUTE (FEB 2009)
 18: GAY SPA: NATURE FOREST SPA (FEB 2009)
 19: GAY SAUNA: 10MEN'S CLUB (FEB 2009)
 20: GAY LIFESTYLE SHOP: SPORTSMENASIA (DEC 2010)
 21: LGBT ORGANISATION: OOGACHAGA
 22: GAY MASSAGE PARLOUR: BYMEN4MEN (FEB 2009)
 23: LESBIAN BAR: COW AND COOLIES (FEB 2009)
 24: GAY ART GALLERY: UTTERLY ART (AUG 2009)
 25: LESBIAN BAR: TOCA ME (FEB 2009)
 26: GAY-FRIENDLY BOUTIQUE HOTEL: THE SCARLET (FEB 2009)
 27: ANN SIANG HILL PARK
 28: KARAOKE BAR: ILLUVIA (JUL 2010)

5: Chinatown – Tourist site and gay capital in Singapore.

3.2 The Tourist's Gaze



6: The alien in Chinatown.

The loud, modern interior décor bombarded my vision
with a set of bizarre images –
shapes and patterns with no flow or continuity,
here and there, and sometimes side by side,
with total disregard for consistency [...]³⁸

An alien structure rises from within Chinatown. Built of steel and glass, it rises out from underground, looming high above the roofs of the shophouses. A portal opens, where

³⁸ Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1992), p. 27.

Lee described a scene within a gay club in his novel, set in Tanjong Pagar, Singapore. See Appendix Part V for the full description.

*visitors to Chinatown pour out of the underground Mass Rapid Transport train network and flood the pedestrianised Pagoda Street where tourist-related merchandise spill out from the five-footways of the shophouses and onto the street.*³⁹



7: The tourist's gaze.

[...] a riot of bold primary colours splashed across the walls,

the ceiling and even the floor [...]

[...] The air was pregnant with cacophony of sounds –

of laughter, shrieks, little snatches of conversations

³⁹ Five-footways refers to the sheltered pedestrian corridors linking the ground levels of shophouses. Texts in italics, in this chapter, are written narratives by the author in describing the sights of Chinatown, as observed first-hand.

carried out at shouting level,

of clinking glasses and what have you.⁴⁰

The site resembles Chinatown from old, preserved in time, and on display like in a museum albeit, without the squalid health and living conditions, and unsightly clutter of the old hawkers. In the present day, a new clutter of tourist carts and stalls line the streets, selling tourist related merchandise – cheap reproductions and miniaturizes, and, kitsch-looking ornaments and souvenirs. The site has been re-imagined and re-constructed, in the course of its history, to serve its new needs of being a tourist street.



8: Pedestrained open-air mall.

⁴⁰ Lee, *Peculiar Chris*, pp. 27-8.

[...] There were people everywhere –
at the bar, at the tables,
on the dancefloor and against the walls.
Every single one of them was male.⁴¹

Armed with a camera, and an inquisitive mind, I was ready to make my entry into Chinatown – on foot, and as a tourist. Or rather, it was difficult for others to tell, by mere observation, if I was a local or foreigner – it was even more difficult to ascertain if I was straight or gay. I was just a visitor to Chinatown, in all its ambiguity, looking for signs from the site that indicated the usually nuanced queer parallels within the more overtly tourist site.

⁴¹ Lee, *Peculiar Chris*, p. 28.

In the imagination and construction of sites of tourism, geographers T.C. Chang and S.Y. Lim state that tourism “depicts destination sites as attractive and alluring, often in sharp contrast to the realities of a place”, in the process “commodif[ying] leisure environments that promise fun and fiction without the quotidian practicalities of everyday living”.⁴² A dichotomy of differences is hence presented in tourist sites – of leisure environments, or non-daily experiences, created within tourist sites, in stark contrast with the hustle and bustle of everyday work and living routines. Differences are also observed in the way historic sites are “preserved in time” and appear to function like spectres of its own past – as observed in Chinatown – in direct contrast to the surrounding city, progressing and functioning out of practical necessity.

The tourist gaze, as introduced by Sociologist John Urry, is seen to work on this very same juxtaposition of differences, where,

the tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary. The viewing of such tourist sights often involves different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than normally found in everyday life.⁴³

⁴² T. C. Chang and S. Y. Lim, ‘Geographical Imaginations of ‘New-Asia Singapore’’, in *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 166.

⁴³ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 3.

This understanding of the imagined tourist site, such as in Chinatown and as viewed through the lenses of the tourist gaze, can be seen as a parallel to the queered space – or the closet space, which challenges normative conventions, and function as sites of escape from the restrictive and repressive orders of everyday life. It is hence unsurprising that a parallel queered narrative exists within the same space as the touristic streets of Chinatown.

3.3 The Homosexual's Gaze



9: Sterile alleys.

[...] my ear
begins to trace
a moan
or the sound of somebody
coming [...] ⁴⁴

The shophouses stand as distant reminders of old Chinatown, now cleaned up and frozen in time. Blank end walls of the shophouses surround discreet alleys, without signs of deviant activity: vandalism and graffiti are non-existent – the walls appear as clean and

⁴⁴ “Ann Siang Hill”, Cyril Wong (accessed 10 August 2011) <<http://www.poetrybillboard.com/read.asp?id=8>>
See Appendix Part VI for the full poem.

sterile, as if freshly painted from yesterday. Globes of light like eyes watch over the streets.



10: The hidden garden. A lover's park?

[...] up from behind me,
his footsteps
matching the muted
drumbeat under my chest [...]⁴⁵

Dark and dirty alleyways from the past have been spruced up into a little park, leading up to the historic hill. This intimate park space is concealed from the front view of the shophouses – you had to enter the back alleys in order to find it. In the day, gardeners and

⁴⁵ "Ann Siang Hill", Wong <<http://www.poetrybillboard.com/read.asp?id=8>>

park attendants keep the park maintained in this idyllic state. Are these spaces where lovers come to occupy in the dead of the night?



11: Backdoors leading to hidden corners.

[...] I stop.

He pauses,

then begins again.

And stops, his breath

louder now.

He waits.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ "Ann Siang Hill", Wong <<http://www.poetrybillboard.com/read.asp?id=8>>

Along the path, back-doors lead to open corners, sometimes hidden from view, other times exposed to the park users. Here are quiet spots where workers gather to smoke, and couples come to be intimate in the absence of public scrutiny. Where else would lovers go to be intimate if not for hidden spaces like these?

Cultural and literary critic Ellen Strain defines the touristic gaze as “an ambivalent pursuit of the exotic and as an experiential structure”.⁴⁷ She discusses how tourists have to immerse themselves in the site, yet a distance is permanently present between them and the objects of interest – there is an inherent inside/outside-ness to the tourist/site relationship.⁴⁸ The very presence and gaze of the tourist on a site transforms it. This reading seems to suggest that the tourist is also a voyeur controlled by a relationship of difference, whether physically or psychologically “inside or outside”, which separates the object from the tourist. In this landscape of consumption, the tourist also becomes the object of interest – a walking exhibit, interacting within the tourist site itself. The exhibitionist and the voyeur play dual roles: a similar nature to the way gay men cruise, in the parallel queered streets of Chinatown.

Historian on gay culture, George Chauncey, described the homosexual act of cruising in the streets as “challeng[ing] bourgeois conceptions of public order, the proper boundaries between public and private space, and the social practices appropriate for each.”⁴⁹ The homosexual gaze, or cruising, could be seen as a set of tactics in which gay men could “identify and communicate with each other without alerting hostile outsiders to what they were doing”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ George Chauncey, ‘Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets’, in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 225-6.

⁵⁰ Chauncey, ‘Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets’, p. 238.

Like a secret visual code only understood by the initiated, homosexual men

[took] full advantage of the cultural injunction against men looking at other men in the same sexually assertive way they gazed at women; a “normal” man almost automatically averted his eyes if they happened to lock with those of a stranger, whereas a gay man interested in the man gazing at him returned his look.⁵¹

Cruising, hence appears as a subversive practice in which gay men, could legitimize their identities to others like them in the public street. The dual and interchangeable roles of the viewer and the viewed object – or the voyeur and the exhibitionist – like the tourist’s gaze, transforms the street; the individual body interacting with the environment, creating physical and psychological spatial boundaries of “inside” and “outside”. Closets form within these queered streets, the “inside” being formed by the initiated – a response to the homosexual gaze; the “outside” is denoted by the everyday hetero-normativity – a shying away from the homosexual gaze. The homosexual body becomes a site of deviation, silently resisting the orders of the public street in the homosexual gaze. In Chinatown, the homosexual’s gaze masquerades as the tourist’s gaze, allowing the act of cruising in public space to further appear “normalized”: eyes glancing, anticipating the response.

⁵¹ Chauncey, ‘Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets’, p. 239.

3.4 The Queerist Gaze



12: Portal to another world.

Two men talk.

Eyes hope for a sign of a gleam

In the other's, like a first star [...] ⁵²

Another portal opens, found wedged almost discreetly between the bars and dining establishments of the neighbouring shophouses. Crossing the threshold of the gate, one steps into the ephemeral realm of Ann Siang Hill, a quiet site once home to a graveyard and various schools now non-existent.

⁵² Alfian Sa'at, 'Plaza Singapura' in *One Fierce Hour* (Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd, 1998), p. 10. See Appendix Part VII for full poem.



13: Of seeing and being seen.

“[...] A nod, a smile, a switch is flicked

They looked at each other, naked light bulbs.

The heart white-hot, filament-thin [...]”⁵³

A corridor of light and shadows. Benches are niched in-between pillars allowing for people-watching – the seated observers recessed in darkness; the orange glow of lamps placed strategically to allow for glimpses of the passers-by. The niches and lamps provide a medium for the roles of the voyeur and the exhibitionist to be played out.

⁵³ Sa’at, ‘Plaza Singapura’, p. 10.



14: The voyeur's view.

[...] Caresses in the stairwell.⁵⁴

The voyeur stands on a higher plane, over-looking the passers-by below. Viewing from a distance, cloaked in shadows, the identity of the voyeur remains a secret. Which then becomes the spectacle? The exhibits of the passers-by; the hidden voyeurs; or the architecture of the space in itself?

⁵⁴ Sa'at, 'Plaza Singapura', p. 10.

The closet can be formed by the body itself: an unconventional “space”, yet is able to define itself within borders/boundaries. Cultural Geographer Jon Anderson presents the body as a site (b)ordered by its surrounding cultural and political conditions.⁵⁵ This means that the body be seen to alter the space that it inhabits or interacts with, and likewise, the space also has the ability to alter the body. Furthering this argument, queer theorist Lee Edelman discusses that the “straight male body becomes a closet itself: a spatial enclosure for an autonomous subject able to imagine inhabiting his body only by conceiving his body simultaneously as container and thing contained.”⁵⁶

In other words, the queer body can be seen as a closet space with boundaries denoting the homosexual “inside” and hetero-normative “outside” as a result of the surrounding conditions of the street. Deviances manifest via the homosexual gaze, while the external is of a normative appearance. In a similar manner, the tourist’s gaze presents the body as viewing the external site of the non-everyday, from behind “walls” of difference. The tourist’s gaze searches the site for deviances, or differences, comparing with everyday normativity as experienced by the tourist – this viewing from behind “walls” renders the viewer as a voyeur looking at the exhibit. Borders are formed around the body – between both the tourist and the objects of view, which confines the viewer within relationships of inside and outside, as well as comparisons of sameness and differences.

⁵⁵ Jon Anderson, ‘(B)ordering The Body’, in *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 153-65.

⁵⁶ Lee Edelman, ‘Men’s Room’, in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p. 152

In Chinatown, these social patterns of the tourist's and homosexual's gaze collide to form a hybrid: the *queerist's* gaze (the queer and the tourist now as in one body), seen in *Queer Bus*. In *Queer Bus*, as the queered streets and establishments become gazed upon by the *queerists*, the viewers expect "an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different scenes from the customarily encountered", the experience from the tour bus further distancing the queer tourist from the queered landscape.⁵⁷ The individual becomes distanced from his external environment; the body becomes a bordered site, playing interchangeable roles of the tourist and object of view, the voyeur and the exhibitionist, and the homosexual and his object of desire. The multiplicity of the site as both tourist site and gay district of Chinatown, as separate layers or overlapped as a *queerist* site, appears to encourage the consumption of Chinatown by both tourist and queers, co-existing in parallel realms of existences. Yet, this very co-existence results in the inevitable forming of bordered body-spaces, and the exchange of ambiguous gazes.

⁵⁷ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 3.

3.5 The (B)ordered Body-Site

The queer individual negotiates his way through the touristic streets of Chinatown, co-existing with the multitudes of tourists that flock to this site. He plays by rules of the site, masquerading the outward act of cruising as the ambiguous tourist/*queerist's* gaze.

Queer space is formed with the drawing of blurred lines of differences – of the “inside” and the “outside”, of sameness and differences – paradigms that are created out of perceived relations that are also as easily dismantled. Cruising, seen as a deviant activity in the street becomes a way for gay men to connect, a silent display of resistance against the orders and scrutiny of the public realm, and only understood by others within the community.

The body hence becomes a site for deviance in the street, causing the forming and un-forming of body-closets. The streets of Chinatown become ambiguous spaces that allow for deviances to occur out in the regulated public street, on one hand, while at the same time, inhibit and restrict the homosexual body within bordered closets.

The queer body becomes a b(ordered) space.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The termed (b)ordered is as used by Anderson, in his chapter “(B)ordering The Body”, in Anderson, *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces*, pp. 153-165.

A GEOGRAPHY OF “CLOSET” SPACES IN SINGAPORE

Chapter 4: The Flat

4.1 The Ubiquitous HDB Flat?

Through the brown, diagonal metal grills that for many years made me feel like a prisoner in my own home, you see the columns of windows in the block directly across [...]

From this vantage point, thirteen floors up, you can look into the flats opposite and catch scenes from other people’s lives, as if you’re watching clips of the grey movies that are their ordinary existences [...]

The disheveled housewife puttering around in her greasy-looking kitchen. The pimply teenage girl surrounded by dog-eared textbooks, cramming for her O Levels. The topless hot guy scratching his armpit on his way to the shower.

Here in this flat and the ones around it, lives of strangers fuse around the edges in a superficial way [...] ⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Johann S. Lee, *Quiet Time* (Singapore: Cannon International, 2008), p. 25.



15: The HDB flat.

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats refers to apartment flats that were initially built, starting in the 1960s, as a low cost and efficient housing solution, to deal with acute housing shortage in land scarce Singapore.⁶⁰ The lives of the inhabitants of these flats are confined within the closed physical boundaries of the generic facades and structures of the HDB flat – individuality seems to be kept confined within the private internal spaces of the home. The public, however, seeps into the private home, by way of the encroachment of the public via the inquisitive and watchful eyes of neighbours, and even public policies governing the family and the home unit, thereby influencing the architectural expression of the HDB flat.

⁶⁰ For an extended history of the HDB flat see Chua Beng Huat, 'Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore', in Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiang and Tan Em Ser (eds), *Understanding Singapore Society* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1997), p. 311.

This is observed in housing policies governing the HDB flat, where “citizens are instructed on family size, the timing of household formation and child birth”.⁶¹ The HDB flat was also a “shared” home space to multi-generational families due to “housing policies [favouring the ideal family unit] and parental demands” resulting in “most singles living with their parents at least till they are middle-aged, if not beyond”.⁶² Architectural theorist Lilian Chee observes how the HDB home is not a water-tight private space – it being heavily influenced by external standards of living, and as such, these public/private seepages are also the result of housing policies that hugely favour normative standards such as “pro-family structures premised on heterosexual marriage partners intent on pro-creative coupling”, the advocacy of extended, or multi-generational families living in the same home, and even “the influence of personal tastes and accepted public conduct”.⁶³ Such home policies encourage hetero-normative standards of living as exemplified in the family unit, as well as the encouragement of internal policing within the private home, which is expressed architecturally by the dominance of the family space or the living room in the HDB flat.

⁶¹ Martin Perry, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, *Singapore: A Developmental City State* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), p. 6, cited in Lilian Chee, ‘Flat Living: In Pursuit of Singapore’s Public Housing’, *1000 Singapores – A Model of The Compact City* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2010), p. 195.

⁶² Dinesh Naidu, ‘Making Room For Love’, in *Singapore Architect*, No. 212 (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2001), p. 98.

⁶³ Lilian Chee, ‘Flat Living: In Pursuit of Singapore’s Public Housing’, *1000 Singapores – A Model of The Compact City* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2010), p. 196.



"SITE OF FAMILY POLICING"

PUBLIC TERRITORY OUTSIDE THE HOME...

01: COMMON CORRIDOR

...AND INSIDE THE HOME...
02: LIVING ROOM

... WHERE THE PRIVATE...

03: BEDROOM 1

04: BEDROOM 2

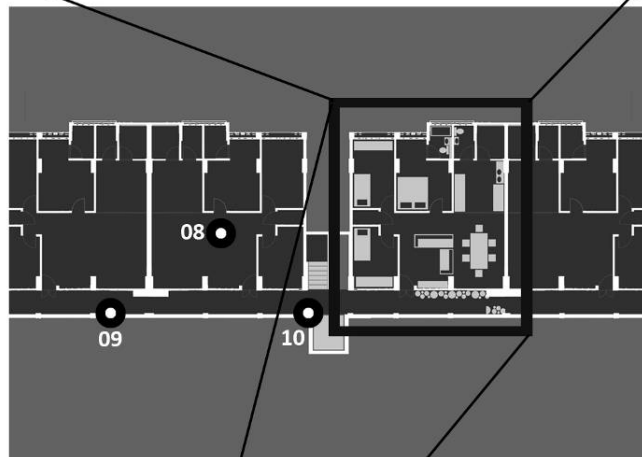
05: MASTER BEDROOM

WITH ATTACHED BATHROOM

06: KITCHEN

07: COMMON BATHROOM

...OPEN THEMSELVES UP TO.



"BEWARE THE NEIGHBOUR'S EYES"

WHERE THE INTERIOR SPACES...

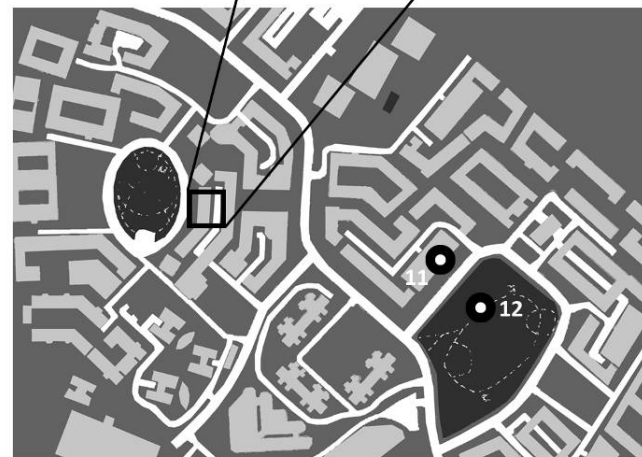
08: HDB UNIT

...ARE LINED UP ALONG...

09: THE COMMON CORRIDOR

...LEADING TO THE...

10: LIFT LANDING



"THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH"

11: BLOCKS OF HDB FLATS

...ARE ARRANGED AROUND

COMMUNAL SPACES SUCH AS THE...

12: PARK

16: The HDB: of parts and the whole.

On plan, the HDB flat interior suggests that all rooms open out into the living room – a central feature connecting the external public corridor, and the home entrance, to the private and personal spaces of the bedrooms, bathrooms and even the kitchen. With the living room acting as the social centre for the family unit – the space of the patriarchal figure during the after-work hours of the day, and shared by the rest of the family members – all exposed to scrutiny of the family figurehead. This essentially means that all personal space and behaviour of the individuals within the home, consisting of the “improper ones such as sexuality, dirt, and hygiene” are subject to an internal policing carried out within the central “public” space of the living room, seen as “proper places of familial order such as conversation, dining, and study” – the “seen and unseen” in the domestic realm all regulated by the “order of the father”.⁶⁴ The HDB flat is to be read as a rigid and structured “whole”, with an internal organization of spaces all opening out into the living room as the centre of control. Likewise, this structure can be seen in the way individual HDB flat units are arranged around central public void decks and lift lobbies; whole HDB blocks are clustered around central communal facilities like parks and playgrounds, further emphasizing on public (neighbours within the HDB block, and the neighbourhood outside of the block) policing and advocacy of individual adherence to public accepted standards of living.

This would suggest that any form of alternative modes of living and deviant behaviour, such as homosexual living spaces, that challenges hetero-normative conventions are not

⁶⁴ Gulsum Baydar, ‘Figures of Wo/Man in Contemporary Architectural Discourse’, in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (ed), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), p. 39.

only hidden from public view – they are seemingly coerced out of existence since even public policing efforts run central to the private home space. With more than 80% of Singaporeans living in HDB flats, how are homosexual spaces found within such homes?⁶⁵ This brings the closet space, as is traditionally defined by inside/outside and private/public binaries, into closer inspection, opening possibilities that the private interior space of the closet, as situated within the HDB flat, cannot be as private as it should be, and has to be formed via other less “invasive” methods.

Living in a multi-generational HDB flat is really a public affair!

⁶⁵ “Public Housing in Singapore”, 15 Aug 2011, Housing and Development Board Infoweb (accessed 1 September 2011) <<http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10320p.nsf/w/AboutUsPublicHousing?OpenDocument>>

4.2 Un-doing the HDB Flat



17: The “secret” garden.

[...] the balcony, [...] ⁶⁶

*Or the public corridor as is more commonly found,
with the inquisitive eyes of the neighbours,
prying into the privacy and on-goings of the home.*

[...] that is half the size of the apartment, [...] ⁶⁷

*“That same pairs of shoes on the neighbour’s door mat?
It was that boy, wasn’t it? That usual one?”*

⁶⁶ Cyril Wong, ‘Before The Afterlife’ in *Like A Seed With Its Singular Purpose* (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2006), p. 74.

See Appendix Part VIII for full poem.

⁶⁷ Wong, ‘Before The Afterlife’, p. 74.

The boy that he always brings back to stay the night?

Is he a friend? Just a friend... or more than just friends?"

[...] weighed

down by potted plants [...] ⁶⁸

"A routine, I've observed.

Done in the evenings, after their working hours.

Sometimes the neighbour's boy does it – he's all grown up now.

Sometimes it's his friend who does it – that same friend.

Funny how they take turns to water the garden."

[...] I must never fail

to water [...] ⁶⁹

The garden is healthy and flowering.

It's lots of work – they might need some pruning, though.

The garden is starting to obscure the main door.

Sometimes you don't see the boys,

but you know they've been doing their regular routines.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Wong, 'Before The Afterlife', p. 74.

⁶⁹ Wong, 'Before The Afterlife', p. 74.

⁷⁰ Texts in Italics, as found in this section, are narratives written by the author, from the perspective of the neighbour.

The HDB block was home to a mix of social classes, races and cultures – a conundrum of people from various backgrounds all packed into units on the same floor, becoming neighbours to each other, and in turn, imposing their ideals onto each other, via the close “inspections” of openings and the neighbour’s activities.⁷¹ The common corridor was hence a public space where the private on-goings of the home seeps out and where the home becomes subject to public scrutiny.

It is not uncommon to find such “gardens” along the common corridor of the HDB flat – these can also be seen as leakages of the cluttered interior of the home out onto the supposed ordered public walkway – signs that human inhabitation cannot be confined within the orders imposed by the concrete block. Here, the act of tending to the garden by the gay couple further pushes the limits of this encroachment into public territory: the everyday routine undertaken by the couple appears as a parallel to building a home together. Dinesh Naidu describes such routines which mirror traditional home-making activities, as “small acts” [that] are “easier to conceal, [but] are loaded with significance and become critical to the symbolic affirmation of the relationship, in the absence of familial and societal recognition and validation” within the multi-generational home, where their practices have to be hidden from the public’s scrutiny.⁷²

Public space is borrowed to become physically a garden, and psychologically a queered space of “home” and commitment, shared by the homosexual couple. The appropriation

⁷¹ Lillian Chee, ‘Flat Living: In Pursuit of Singapore’s Public Housing’, *1000 Singaporeans – A Model of The Compact City* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2010), p. 192.

⁷² Dinesh Naidu, ‘Making Room For Love’, in *Singapore Architect*, No. 212 (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2001), p. 100.

of space outside of the home suggests an avoidance of family policing from the interior living space of the home. Yet this exposure to the public, in the form of the innocuous caring of plants, becomes a way in which their queer identities can be legitimized in public space, claiming the space for their own. The stark architecture of the HDB flat becomes “un-done” by its queer inhabitants: formal architectural planning and structures of the HDB are challenged – boundaries of public and private become blurred with strategies of borrowing of space, the exposure of home clutter out in ordered public space, the everyday routine of building a queer garden together, the queering of space outside the home.

4.3 Re-doing the HDB Flat



18: The “family” table.

And just outside, the dinner table [...] ⁷³

“The family usually has dinner at 7.00pm around this table.

It’s a family affair – Dad is strict about us coming home to eat together.

But not tonight.”

[...] set for the company of ghosts, or more

invisible even, for the anticipatory [...] ⁷⁴

“The family is out.

My friends are coming over. We are very close.

They are like me and understand what it feels like to be me.

⁷³ Wong, ‘Before The Afterlife’, p. 86.

⁷⁴ Wong, ‘Before The Afterlife’, p. 86.

A homosexual.

They are more like family. A family of gays.”

[...] absence of ourselves, as if the air itself
was beginning to make room for us.⁷⁵

“A dinner party – not an everyday thing.

But we have them regularly.

Sometimes at my place, sometimes at theirs.

We take turns.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Wong, ‘Before The Afterlife’, p. 86.

⁷⁶ Texts in Italics, as found in this section, are narratives written by the author, from the perspective of the homosexual inhabitant.

The dining table is a common, yet symbolically loaded, piece of furniture found in the home. Sometimes it is part of the living room, other times, where space permits, it is found in the kitchen. In the space-constrained HDB flat, the dining table may be used for having family meals and interacting within the family; it is traditionally associated as a space where the father would read his newspapers, the children would study, and as an extension of the kitchen, where the mother would prepare food and at the same time supervise the children. The dining table hence embodies the living space of the home, as a site of family policing and regimentation of the individual: family members have to order their lives, whether work or play, around the everyday routine of the family meal.

In the scene presented above, the dinner table has been appropriated by the home's queer inhabitant under the conditions that the house was displaced of its original family, and temporarily replaced by another: the queer individual's "family". Geographer Andrew Gorman-Murray discusses how queer individuals open their homes to their gay friends, viewing their homes as spaces that provide "physical, social and emotional support".⁷⁷ Their homes thus become sites where socializing occurs, in the form of dinner parties, for example, in the process, re-defining the meaning of "family" for the queer individual. Architectural writer Jane Rendell states that "[p]lacing things and bodies in unusual combinations, positions us in new uncharted territory", that the inhabitants become "de-stabilized" and new spatial understandings become formed.⁷⁸ Here, the living space has

⁷⁷ Andrew Gorman-Murray, 'Reconfiguring Domestic Values: Meanings of Home for Gay Men and Lesbians', in *Housing, Theory and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Routledge: 2007), pp. 236-9.

⁷⁸ Jane Rendell, 'Doing It, (Un)doing It, (Over)doing It Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', in Jonathan Hill (ed), *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 245.

been appropriated as queer social space by the subversion of the traditional dining table, now re-defined and given new meaning to host the queer “family”. It is in this out-of-the-everyday occurrence of the temporary absence of the original family from the home, that a fragment of queer space has been formed. In this queered home, the house becomes re-organised: the very individuality and deviances that the living space tries to police now becomes exposed and made normal with the claiming of the traditionally matriarchal kitchen and the patriarchal living room. The “re-doing” of architecture re-defines the way the home is perceived and hence used.

4.4 Over-doing the HDB Flat



19: "Rituals" of the bedroom.

Visit the bedroom, but do not lay [...] ⁷⁹

"Whenever they're in the room, the door is locked.

You can hear that the curtains are drawn too;

I wonder what is it that they must be so secretive about?"

[...] down on our bed that is wide enough for two

men to curl up in each other's arms [...] ⁸⁰

"His friend always comes over to spend the night.

Seems like they're really good friends.

⁷⁹ Wong, 'Before The Afterlife', p. 86.

⁸⁰ Wong, 'Before The Afterlife', p. 86.

But doesn't he have other friends?

Doesn't he spend time dating girls too?"⁸¹

[...] or come apart during sleep.⁸²

⁸¹ Texts in Italics, as found in this section, are narratives written by the author, from the perspective of the parent.

⁸² Wong, 'Before The Afterlife', p. 86.

Steve Cohan presents the bachelor's apartment, or bedroom, in this instance, as a site of consumption, an imagined site for "liberating masculinity from the constraints of domestic ideology".⁸³ In this statement, the domestic bed becomes subverted; its purpose is now challenged by its new identity as a site where sex – undomesticated sex – is an act of consumption.⁸⁴ The generic bed has been queered by the sharing of its space by a homosexual couple, then defines the bedroom as a closet space; the interior private space of the bedroom legitimizes the gay couple and their identities – as living "an alternative to married life".⁸⁵

The queer bedroom is a space that has to be viewed from the inside. Before the bed can be "activated" as queer, stringent steps are taken to seal off the external prying public from transgressing the interior space. The queer closet is formed with the performance of a specific set of rituals: the securing of privacy by the locking of doors and possibly, the drawing of curtains. An "over-doing" of architecture, the rituals are performed to further enclose the bed-room, disconnecting the private space away from the rest of the house, especially the family living space. Rendell states that "[t]here is no moment of completion, rather you are aware everyday of the continually widening cracks, the disintegration of the building fabric, the shifting spaces and roles of the furniture contained within them."⁸⁶ The necessary rituals of encasement further cause the individual to be aware of the gaps in the walls and its openings, the sounds that are made

⁸³ Steve Cohan, 'So Functional For Its Purposes: Rock Hudson's Bachelor Apartment in Pillow Talk', in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p. 30.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 'So Functional For Its Purposes: Rock Hudson's Bachelor Apartment in Pillow Talk', p. 30.

⁸⁵ Cohen, 'So Functional For Its Purposes: Rock Hudson's Bachelor Apartment in Pillow Talk', p. 30.

⁸⁶ Rendell, 'Doing It, (Un)doing It, (Over)doing It Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', p. 245.

– the porosity of the room containing them to the outside public family space. The rituals cannot be taken for granted, if security is to be had in the making of a closet space – a fragment of closet space.

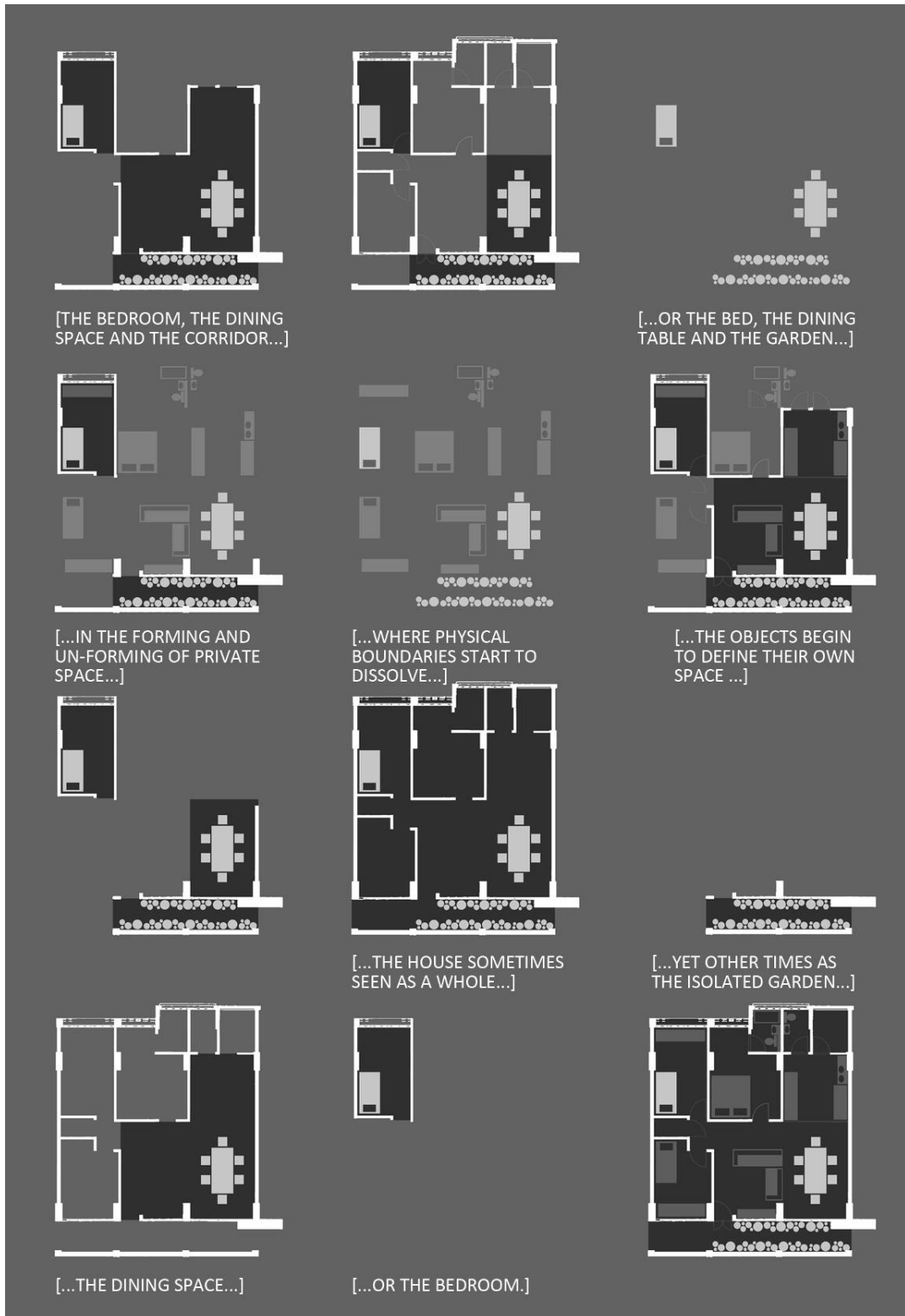
4.5 The Fragmented Closet: Forming and Un-forming Queer Space

Your parents on the brink of return;
that threat of discovery
at which desire is intensified rendered
more fragile or
exactly so.⁸⁷

The formation of queer spaces within the multi-generational HDB form and un-form with the un-doing, re-doing and over-doing of the architecture, subverting orders and meanings of the hetero-normative and appropriating them as queer. Rendell mentions that “[t]he doing, (un)doing, (over)doing of ‘home’, transgress architectural and social definitions of domestic space and time, implying blissful and dangerous notions of disorder and impermanence”, resulting in “spatial and temporal rhetorics of use” becoming “strategies of resistance”.⁸⁸ While the traditional family home of the HDB is read as a whole, with the many functions and rooms under scrutiny to the dominant living room, queer spaces within the HDB flat are seen as fragmented. It is the very avoidance of public and familial scrutiny that these fragments are formed.

⁸⁷ “Mnemonic”, 2004, Cyril Wong and gangan.com (accessed 10 August 2011)
<http://www.gangway.net/34/gangway33_34.Wong.html>
See Appendix Part IX for full poem.

⁸⁸ Rendell, ‘Doing It, (Un)doing It, (Over)doing It Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse’, p. 234.



20: The queer fragmented HDB flat.

The private interior spaces, that the closet promises, becomes challenged in the context of the HDB apartment due to the complex exchanges of public and private realms, resulting in a non-homogenous interior of the closet, which in the case of the multi-generational HDB, is a very public affair. The scenarios, as discussed above, present fragments of the closet space which form and un-form, allowing structures and objects of the everyday to be interpreted as queered sites which challenge the conventions of hetero-normative spatial expressions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Public space is hardly a neutral space: it can be a highly politicized space, imbued with contested meanings and agendas. The public space is most often governed by rules and regulations of traditionally accepted standards of behaviour in a given society. To be in a public space requires one to act in a certain acceptable manner, usually understood as mainstream – hence public spaces become associated as normal, heterosexual, and ordered spaces. These mainstream standards of behaviour in such public spaces meant that deviant cultures, such as homosexual communities, were negated from using them – or that they had to conceal their private selves behind façades of hetero-normativity when in public space.

In Singapore, as observed in the three spaces of the park, the street and the flat, the public realm exerts its presence in various forms that encroach into the use of these spaces by the homosexual community.

In Hong Lim Park, the seemingly “void” and “neutral” spaces of the city, have been tamed by the rules that govern the use of the park as a space for “free” expression. The external controlling mechanisms of the surrounding city moves inwards into the park. These take the form of public surveillance, with the introduction of park lamps, security cameras, police posts and patrols, the ordering of nature by its careful preening and pruning, as well as the community centre that programs and facilitates the use of the “free” park.

Individuals that exhibit deviant behaviour, which flout these rules within the park, such as the night cruising of homosexual men, were excluded from using these open spaces.

In the streets of Chinatown, the public realm influences the individual's usage of the street, as observed in the multiplicity of functions that the streets had to provide for. The "neutral" streetwalker formed an image of Chinatown that was branded as a touristic venue. The public streets were also governed by the same hetero-normative standards of the park, appearing to survey against deviant behaviour: back alleys and dark parks were spruced up, without any traces of public vandalism, all in the promotion of Chinatown as a safe space for the visitor. The body of the streetwalker became subject to the imposed orders of behaviour as ascribed by the public realm.

In the multi-generational HDB flat, the public realm encroaches into the private space of the home. This is a result of housing policies that influence the architectural expression and functioning of the everyday within the home. The interior spaces of the home cease to be private spaces, as familial policing govern the behaviour of the individual within the home as an extrapolation of the public realm, where living in the HDB flat really becomes a public affair.

It is hence inevitable that homosexuals had to remain hidden from view when in public space. It is also of no wonder that there is very limited formal first-hand documentation of the spatial appropriation of queered spaces in Singapore. This paper draws upon research that takes into consideration the fragments of stories of gay men in Singapore,

relating to the use of the park, the street and the flat. Almost anecdotal in nature, the reading of the three spaces were pieced together from these fragments: sometimes from an anonymous writer describing his experiences on an internet gay forum, sometimes from novels and poems written about fictitious protagonists –yet situated within events and spaces that might have possibly happened in Singapore – and at other times, from actual informal conversations had with gay individuals. This provides an almost myth-like reading of narratives of the queer spaces, of possible true scenarios with anonymous characters, as is the nature of the subject of study.

The public realm encroaches into voids, ambiguous sites and personal private spaces. Boundaries of public and private become blurred in this manner, where physical elements of enclosure are unable to keep the “public” out and where devices of control of the mainstream are able to infiltrate these barriers.

The queer closet space too, does not have to be defined by physical encasements separating the public from its private interiors. Eve Sedgwick writes about the closet as a space which “occupies a boundary that effects only to obscure the seemingly clear-cut difference between hetero- and homosexual signs”.⁸⁹ Her observation of the closet realm shows that the traditional separation of heterosexual and homosexual realms is simplistic. The closet space may be a redefinition of these simplistic binaries, having the ability to

⁸⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 1, cited in Cohen, ‘So Functional For Its Purposes: Rock Hudson’s Bachelor Apartment in Pillow Talk’, in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p. 33.

transgress spatial and temporal boundaries on many complex levels. The redefinition of the closet proposes a fluid space that constantly forms and un-forms as the homosexual body negotiates his way within public space. In this dissertation, this phenomenon is explored in the park, the street and the flat, which constitute a 'new' queer geography in the Singapore context.

In Hong Lim Park, the orders of the hetero-normative city are temporarily inversed within the duration of the *Pinkdot* event. The hidden homosexual community is now made visible, and exposed to the view of the public – their behaviour now seen as “normal” in the mass display. The open park has been queered temporarily, allowing the closet to be formed, out in public space. The closet un-forms itself when the event ends.

In the streets of Chinatown, the homosexual individual participates in the deviant act of cruising – an activity that openly challenges acceptable codes of conduct in the hetero-normative city. The homosexual's gaze, or the act of cruising, masquerades under the prevalent and dominant tourist's gaze as it occurs in Chinatown, revealing the identity of the homosexual individual to the initiated only – others in the gay community – by way of glancing and responding. A silent resistance to hetero-normativity, as performed by the queer individual, the deviant act enables the closet to form and un-form along the public streets of Chinatown.

Within the multi-generational family home of the HDB flat, the gay man appropriates the everyday routines and objects of the household, rendering queered meanings to them,

allowing closets to form and un-form in the performing of these specific routines, such as the tending of the garden, the hosting of dinner parties, and the close survey of the bedroom space. These routines of un-doing, re-doing and over-doing of the HDB flat destabilizes the family unit as a whole and erects barriers against public policing mechanisms within the home.

The forming and un-forming of the queer closet presents a complex interweaving of binaries – of private and public, inside and outside, homosexual and heterosexual, deviant and normal. Queer space can be formed out in public with these new re-definitions of boundaries. In the geography of the three queered spaces, the perspective is mostly from that of gay men, with the exception of *Pinkdot*. For the length of this paper, the study is limited to these specific scenarios in the context of Singapore, and does not seek to provide a comprehensive understanding into the diverse range of communities that are termed “queer”, consisting also lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and transsexuals – in other words, marginalized communities which would each require very different lenses to study their spaces. Ultimately, it is hoped that this paper may instigate other lens through which queered space, and the space of the closet, can be continually redefined, and understood.

Bibliography

Literature Sources:

Robert Aldrich, 'Homosexuality and the City: An Historical Overview', in Alan Collins (ed), *Cities of Pleasure: Sex and the Urban Socialscape* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 89-108.

Jon Anderson, '(B)ordering The Body', in *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 153-65.

Gulsum Baydar, 'Figures of Wo/Man in Contemporary Architectural Discourse', in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 30-46.

David Bell and Jon Binnie, 'Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance', in Alan Collins (ed), *Cities of Pleasure: Sex and the Urban Socialscape* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 177-90.

Karen Bermann, 'The House Behind', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds), *Places Through The Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 165-80.

Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1997).

Michael Brown, 'Travelling through the closet', in James S. Duncan and Derek Gregory (eds), *Writes of Passage, Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 185-99.

Judith Butler, 'Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 121-42.

George Chauncey, 'Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets', in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 224-61.

Lilian Chee, 'Flat Living: In Pursuit of Singapore's Public Housing', *1000 Singapores – A Model of The Compact City* (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2010), pp. 189-201.

Dennis Khang Wee Cheok, 'A Hemisphere in Her Hair, or Chinatown: A Peculiar Inquisition', Limin Hee (ed), *Folio 08* (Singapore: Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore, 2008), pp. 132-47.

Terence Chong, 'FLUID NATION: The Perpetual "Renovation" of Nation and National Identities in Singapore', in Terence Chong (ed), *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), pp. 504-20.

Steve Cohen, 'So Functional For Its Purposes: Rock Hudson's Bachelor Apartment in Pillow Talk', in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 28-41.

Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996).

Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces', in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 127-45.

Lee Edelman, 'Men's Room', in Joel Sanders (ed), *STUD: Architectures of Masculinities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 152-61.

Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds), *Places Through The Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 42-51.

Hilde Heynen, 'Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions', in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-29.

Michael Landzelius, 'The Body', in James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (MA/UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), pp. 279-97.

Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1992).

Johann S. Lee, *Quiet Time* (Singapore: Cannon International, 2008).

Laurence Leong Wai Teng, 'Sexual Governance and the Politics of Sex in Singapore', in Terence Chong (ed), *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), pp. 579-93.

Kean Fan Lim, 'Where Love Dares (Not) Speak Its Name: The Expression of Homosexuality in Singapore', in Alan Collins (ed), *Cities of Pleasure: Sex and the Urban Socialscape* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 129-58.

Daniel Miller, 'Behind Closed Doors', in Daniel Miller (ed), *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 1-19.

Wayne D. Myslik, Renegotiating the social / sexual identities of places: Gay communities as safe havens or sites of resistance?, in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 156-69.

Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile, 'MakingPlacesBodies', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds), *Places Through The Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-19.

Richard Phillips, 'Sexuality', in James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (MA/UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), pp. 265-78.

Jane Rendell, 'Doing It, (Un)doing It, (Over)doing It Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', in Jonathan Hill (ed), *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 229-46.

Alfian Sa'at, 'Plaza Singapura' in *One Fierce Hour* (Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd, 1998), pp. 10-11.

Heidi Sarna, *Frommer's Singapore Day By Day* (Australia: Wiley Publishing Australia Pty Ltd, 2009), pp. 46-53.

Kenneth E. Silver, 'Master Bedrooms, Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality and Post-War Art', in Christopher Reed (ed), *Not At Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), pp. 206-21.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1986).

Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

Philip Tabor, 'I Am a Videocam', in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell, with Alicia Pivaro (eds), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (US: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), pp. 122-37.

Chris Tan, 'Turning the Lion City Pink? Interrogating Singapore's Gay Civil Servant Statement', in Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap (eds), *Out In Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World* (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), pp. 317-37.

Jeffrey Allen Tucker, 'The Window of Autobiography: The Motion of Light in Water', in *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), pp. 150-98.

John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002).

Gill Valentine, '(Re)Negotiating the 'Heterosexual Street': Lesbian Productions of Space, in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 146-55.

Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Cyril Wong, 'Before the Afterlife' in *Like A Seed With Its Singular Purpose* (Singapore:

Firstfruits Publications, 2006), pp. 74-86

Kwok Kian Woon, C.J. Wee Wan-Ling and Karen Chia (eds), *Rethinking Chinatown and Heritage Conservation in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 2000).

Journals:

T. C. Chang and S. Y. Lim, 'Geographical Imaginations of 'New-Asia Singapore'', in *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 165-85.

Andrew Gorman-Murray, 'Queering Home or Domesticating Deviance?: Interrogating Gay Domesticity Through Lifestyle Television', in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), pp. 227-47.

Andrew Gorman-Murray, 'Reconfiguring Domestic Values: Meanings of Home for Gay Men and Lesbians', in *Housing, Theory and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Routledge: 2007), pp. 229-46.

Dinesh Naidu, 'Making Room For Love', in *Singapore Architect*, No. 212 (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 2001), pp. 97-104.

Gulsum Baydar Nalbantoglu, 'Thresholds of Privacy and the Ideal(ized) Home', in *Singapore Architect, Special Issue on Housing*, No. 189 (Singapore: Singapore Institute of Architects, 1995), pp. 26-31.

Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (The University of Chicago Press, Summer: 1991), pp. 773-97.

Liz Tomlin, 'Transgressing Boundaries: Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap', in TDR (1988-), Vol. 43, No. 2 (The MIT Press, Summer:1999), pp. 136-49.

Web Sources:

"Tanjong Rhu: The Casuarina Cove", 2008, Boo Junfeng: Short Films (accessed 10 August 2011) <<http://boojunfeng.wordpress.com/short-films/tanjong-rhu/>>

"Press Release: Hong Lim Park becomes a sea of Pink, with over 4,000 turning up for Pink Dot 2010", 16 May 2010, Pinkdot.sg (accessed 1 May 2011)
<http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html>

"Hong Lim Park – Speakers' Corner", 2009, National Parks Board (accessed 20 March 2011)
<http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_visitorsguide&task=parks&id=67&Itemid=73>

"Terms and Conditions of Approval For Events and Activities carried out at Speakers' Corner, Hong Lim Park ", 2009, National Parks Board (accessed 10 August 2011)
<http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/docs/speakers_terms_n_conditions.pdf>

"Singapore Gay Venues: Contemporary", 15 February 2011, SG Wiki (accessed 1 May 2011) <[http://sgwiki.com/wiki/Singapore_gay_venues_\(contemporary\)](http://sgwiki.com/wiki/Singapore_gay_venues_(contemporary))>

"Tanjong Pagar, Singapore's Gay Central", 29 July 2009, Hot Journo (accessed 1 May 2011)
<<http://hotjourno.blogspot.com/2009/07/tanjong-pagar-singapores-gay-central.html>>

“Culture and Heritage: Chinatown”, 2010, YourSingapore.com (accessed 10 August 2011)
<<http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/cultural-precincts/chinatown.html>>

“Queer Bus!”, 2011, Oogachaga.com (accessed 10 August 2011)
<<http://www.oogachaga.com/queerbus>>

“Culture and Heritage: Chinese Culture”, 2010, YourSingapore.com (accessed 10 August 2011) <<http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/traveller/en/browse/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/collage-of-cultures/chinese-culture.html>>

“Chinatown, Singapore Gay and Lesbian Scene Map”, 1995-2011, Utopia-asia.com (accessed 10 August 2011) <<http://www.utopia-asia.com/map/singchin.htm>>

“Mnemonic”, 2004, Cyril Wong and gangan.com (accessed 10 August 2011)
<http://www.gangway.net/34/gangway33_34.Wong.html>

“Ann Siang Hill”, Cyril Wong (accessed 10 August 2011)
<<http://www.poetrybillboard.com/read.asp?id=8>>

Appendix

Part I:

***Pinkdot* 2010 Press Release**

Source: "Press Release: Hong Lim Park becomes a sea of Pink, with over 4,000 turning up for Pink Dot 2010", 16 May 2010, Pinkdot.sg (accessed 1 May 2011)

<http://pinkdotsg.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html>

Press Release: Hong Lim Park becomes a sea of Pink, with over 4,000 turning up for Pink Dot 2010

Singapore, May 15, 2010 – Over 4,000 pink-attired people gathered at Hong Lim Park today at 6pm to form a giant pink dot in a show of support for inclusiveness, diversity and the freedom to love. This makes Pink Dot 2010 the largest public gathering ever seen at the Speakers' Corner since its opening in 2000, and is nearly twice the number of people who turned up at last year's event.

The milestone event, held for the second time here, is organised by a group of local volunteers and aims to raise awareness and foster deeper understanding of the basic human need to love and be loved, regardless of one's sexual orientation. This year's theme is family, and the peaceful event was attended by both straight and gay Singaporeans and permanent residents, some who came with their family members. Pink Dot spokesperson Jack Yong said: "We are immensely gratified and touched by the show of solidarity and support that Singaporeans have given us. Pink Dot 2010 has reached out and moved even more Singaporeans, straight and gay.

"It is extremely uplifting to know that Singaporean families are strong enough to look beyond the labels and social prejudices that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Singaporeans face to continue to love and support one another. Pink Dot 2010 is not a demonstration nor a protest, but a celebration of love and kinship."

In 2009, the inaugural Pink Dot, held at the same venue, saw 2,500 people in attendance. The peaceful event garnered extensive local and international press coverage, including the BBC and New York Times. Today's gathering is a further indication of Singaporeans' increasing awareness and support for the LGBT community – and significantly exceeding 2009's turnout.

Three local celebrities – veteran actors Adrian Pang, Tan Kheng Hua and DJ Johnson Ong, also known as DJ BigKid – have stepped up as ambassadors for this year's event. Adrian and Kheng Hua are parents themselves, and share a hope for a world where families can overcome the barriers to love.

Adrian Pang, 44, said: "Pink Dot carries a meaningful message about the belief that we all have a right to love and be loved. These values about love and harmony are ones that I would want to impart to my two boys – to teach them that life is so much happier when we live with love, understanding, generosity of spirit and compassion.

"This is why Pink Dot is significant. Things and views won't change overnight, and the wider society will take some time to understand LGBT issues. But it is a start to building

positive attitudes to a more open, inclusive and loving society.”

Actress Tan Kheng Hua said: “I am honoured to support the peaceful and loving event, which I believe signals a progress of a more open and inclusive Singaporean society.”

DJ BigKid added: “Seeing many Singaporeans at the event, both straight and gay, some who came with their families, was a moving experience. Pink Dot 2010 touched many lives, and is a landmark event in Singapore history.”

Pink Dot 2010 aims to highlight stories of honesty, openness and the strength of families who have unconditionally stuck by their loves ones, in the hope that all Singaporeans will join in celebrating the freedom to love within families, where sexual orientation represents a trait, not a barrier.

Pink Dot co-spokesperson, Stephanie Ong, said: “Although the presence of more LGBT individuals is slowly emerging into the mainstream, present societal attitudes keep many others from coming out of the closet. They fear that their honesty will cost them their family, friends, and even their jobs. We believe that Pink Dot 2010 carries a symbol of support and solidarity which will go a long way.”

Part II:

Hong Lim Park: Speaker’s Corner Terms and Conditions

Source: “Terms and Conditions of Approval For Events and Activities carried out at Speakers’ Corner, Hong Lim Park ”, 2009, National Parks Board (accessed 10 August 2011) <http://www.nparks.gov.sg/cms/docs/speakers_terms_n_conditions.pdf>

Terms and Conditions of Approval For Events and Activities Carried Out At Speakers’ Corner, Hong Lim Park

1. All events and activities carried out by any approved person at Speakers’ Corner, Hong Lim Park, are subject to the terms and conditions stated below and such other terms and conditions as the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation (‘the Commissioner’) may from time to time impose. The Commissioner reserves the right to cancel any approval or disallow any event or activity at any time without prior notice in the event of any breach of or non-compliance with the terms and conditions herein or where in the Commissioner’s opinion the event or activity may endanger or cause discomfort or inconvenience to other park users and/or the general public.

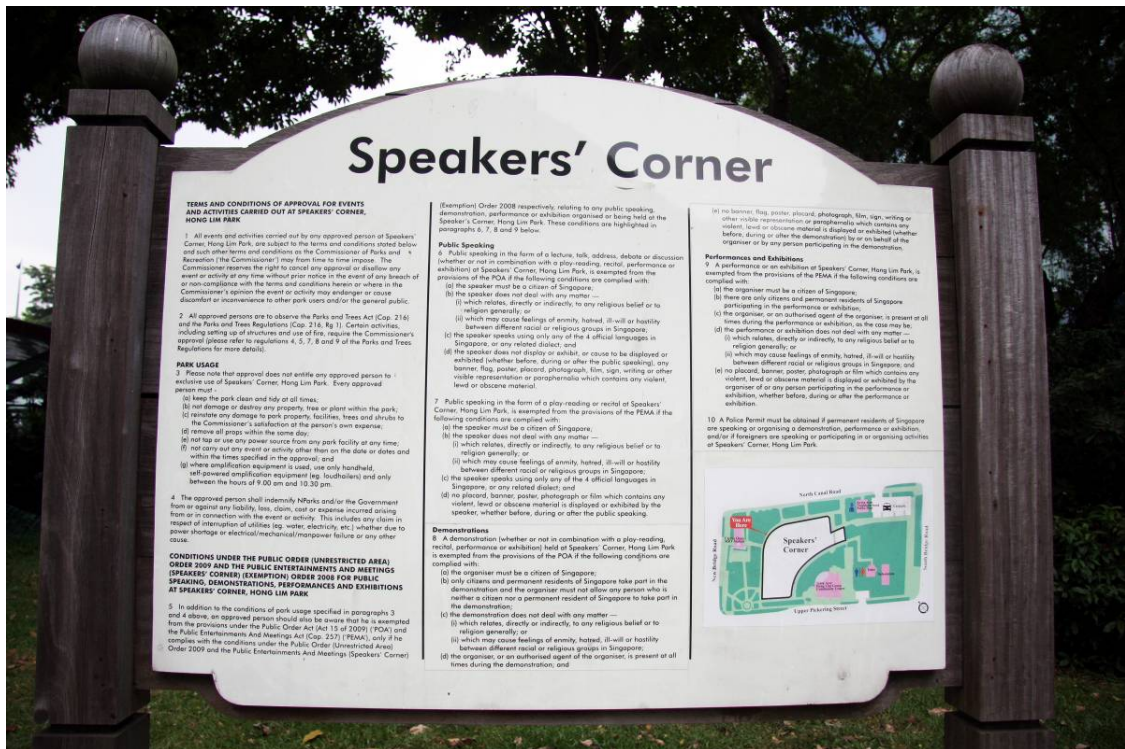
Public Speaking

6. Public Speaking in the form of a lecture, talk, address, debate or discussion (whether or not in combination with a play-reading, recital, performance or exhibition) at Speakers’ Corner, Hong Lim Park, is exempted from the provisions of the POA [Public Order Act (Act 15 of 2009)] if the following conditions are complied with:

- (a) the speaker must be a citizen of Singapore;
- (b) the speaker does not deal with any matter –
 - (i) which relates, directly or indirectly, to any religious belief or to religion

- generally; or
- (ii) which may cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different racial or religious groups in Singapore;
- (c) the speaker speaks using only any of the 4 official languages in Singapore, or any related dialect; and
- (d) the speaker does not display or exhibit, or cause to be displayed or exhibited (whether before, during or after the public speaking), any banner, flag, poster, placard, photograph, film, sign, writing or other visible representation or paraphernalia which contains any violent, lewd or obscene material.

10. A Police Permit must be obtained if permanent residents of Singapore are speaking or organizing a demonstration, performance or exhibition, and/or if foreigners are speaking or participating in or organizing activities at Speakers' Corner, Hong Lim Park.



21: Rules and regulations of park usage are exhibited within the park.

Part III:

Queer Bus electronic-brochure advertising the event

Source: "Queer Bus!", 2011, Oogachaga.com (accessed 10 August 2011)

<<http://www.oogachaga.com/queerbus>>



How much do you know about Singapore's gay past? What are the physical gay spaces in Singapore beyond the Internet and your beloved mobile app? If you are a **male between 18 – 25 years old**, this is your opportunity! Join us on this journey to discover more. You get to meet and mingle with other gay, bisexual and simply queer young men too!

When?

30 July 2011, Saturday, 10am – 5pm

What?

There's no such thing as too many queer friends. So come make new friends while learning snippets about local gay culture. Pubs, club, saunas, parks, cafés, gay businesses, and supportive resources. We're covering it all in day! What's more, there'll be games and discussions at different hot spots.

How much?

Just \$10! This is inclusive of a scrumptious lunch at Eight Café & Bar, light refreshments and transportation.

Where are we going?

Play
Eight Café & Bar
Pelangi Pride Centre
Hong Lim Park
AFA
SportsmenAsia
and of course... Oogachaga!

Additionally we'll be walking around Neil Road & Chinatown to show off the gay spots that make LGBT life in Singapore so colourful.

How?

As name states, we'll be riding on a chartered bus, and doing some walking too!

Tour guides?

Let our zesty young tour guides whisk you away. Queer Bus is an initiative of OC Youth Team. Hop onboard now as seats are limited.

***Registration closes 25 July**

Please read the terms and conditions before registering for the event.

22: *Queer Bus* electronic brochure.

Part IV:

Source: "Tanjong Pagar – Singapore's Gay Central", 2009, Hot Journo's blogspot entry (accessed 1 May 2011) <<http://hotjourno.blogspot.com/2009/07/tanjong-pagar-singapores-gay-central.html>>

"...Since the 1990s, it has long been known as the un-official "gay capital" of Singapore. There are lots of gay pubs and clubs in the area, especially along Tanjong Pagar Road, which are closed in the day. But come nightfall, and the area comes alive with neon lights, and gay men and lesbians can be seen openly holding hands and kissing at night. The businesses don't mind, and have gotten used to it..."

Source: Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1992), pp. 31-2.

Directly ahead, I could see the glimmer of gentle ripples on the surface of the river. The dramatic backdrop of towering skyscrapers in the Central Business District stood in stark contrast to the old shophouses that lined the quiet waterfront. The birthplace of our

country, an area which used to bustle with life and colour in its heyday, this place was now crawling with nocturnal activities of a totally different nature.

The first clue came in the form of solitary men who were strolling along the riverbank and sitting on the benches. A few of them were clad only in tank tops and shorts, and somehow I knew that this attire was not chosen with the warm, humid weather in mind. Whenever we passed by one of them, the person caught in the glare of the headlights would straighten up in interest and anticipation. But it was the occasional look of sheer desperation that created a hollowness within me.

... Amidst this, the search for carnal gratification swirled and mixed with hope and despair, remorse and recklessness, until one could no longer be detached from the rest.

Part V:

Source: Johann S. Lee, *Peculiar Chris* (Singapore: Cannon International, 1992), pp. 27-8.

The music was so loud that I became less concerned with its rhythm but greatly disturbed by its incredible throbbing effect. The place was lit by a haphazard display of neon lights but the illumination was dimmed by cigarette smoke that diffused into the air and clouded the atmosphere.

The loud, modern interior décor bombarded my vision with a set of bizarre images – shapes and patterns with no flow or continuity, here and there, and sometimes side by side, with total disregard for consistency: a riot of bold primary colours splashed across the walls, the ceiling and even the floor: the black and white posters of movie idols and rippling male bodies plastered all over the place.

The air was pregnant with cacophony of sounds – of laughter, shrieks, little snatches of conversations carried out at shouting level, of clinking glasses and what have you. There were people everywhere – at the bar, at the tables, on the dancefloor and against the walls. Every single one of them was male.

Part VI:

Source: "Ann Siang Hill", Cyril Wong (accessed 10 August 2011)

<http://www.poetrybillboard.com/read.asp?id=8>

Ann Siang Hill

(i)
I slip into a deserted shophouse
like a ghost. My ear
begins to trace
a moan
or the sound of somebody
coming

up from behind me,
his footsteps
matching the muted
drumbeat under my chest.

I stop.
He pauses,
then begins again.
And stops, his breath
louder now.

He waits.

A few men
turn to watch us,
their eyes
sudden stars.

(ii)
Not many ang-mohs come here.

That guy looks like he's from
China: Too fair,
without the dirty tan

of Singaporean men like me. And
walks
like he's only passing through -

shirt pausing at his navel, belt of
flesh
above the elastic mouth of shorts
sucking at his pelvis.

(iii)
Forgive me
if you are unable to catch up.

Forgive me
these firecracker spokes
of wrinkles from my eyes, this
loosening
sack of my belly. I have nothing

against your hard,
pubescent body, except that I
looked like you once
and don't.

(iv)
How I long for a lean man.
Who is to say I do not deserve
one?

I will not let another
chub come near, starved
for angular symmetry
in a face, a body
buttoned all the way
up with muscle and bound
by ropes of stark veins.

Maybe a chub-
chaser is waiting at the end of this
tapered alleyway of shadow
long as an outstretched arm
of a beautiful slim piece of man
willing to slide his hands
lovingly along the fat of me,
the much of me there is to love.

(v)
Not
the same boy.
Cuter, more straight-
acting.

One stroke
of his thigh and he is
stiff as a stick-shift.
We grope

along some staircase
down his jeans.

Another guy -
cigarette in one hand,
my ass in the other -

joins in. Then another.
I think the last guy
was my P.E. teacher from JC.

(vi)
Wonder what my wife is doing
now.

Around here, a gay bar
hums to its blue around the
corner.

Shadows reach in parallel lines
across the road, slide
wetly up along my stomach.

Remember
a muscled kid I masturbated once
behind that alley. Two years
older than my son now.

Not very crowded for a Saturday.
Few shadows swooning over a
wall.

Hairline glint of someone's
spectacles.

White shirtsleeves gracing dark
biceps.

(vii)
The courtyard is a chessboard
with silhouettes for pieces.

Visions cross like live wires in the
dark.

There stands a King but
really a Queen.

Manly Knight kneels before
Bishop,
gold crucifix hanging off his collar.

All are pawns in the end: always
checkmate, never soulmate.

(viii)
As a child, I thought trees
could love
and love me back.

When the truth came
out, that tree
outside my window
became a father.

Now, as a tongue
shivers up my neck, I
don't know why I remember that
tree.

I feel like the saint in that
painting,
his body splintered against a tree,
arrows raying from his ribs, while

gazing up at the unblinking stars
of a different father's eyes.

(ix)
Remember where we first met?
Our first date behind the bushes,
your wild hands
clinging on to my head, like a
buoy
on a wild ocean, as if terrified
of drowning,

while your dick
was a clapper
within the bell of my skull,
shuddering, filling it
with waves of a pure white ringing
I call love
for always that lack
of a better word.

Part VII:

Source: Alfian Sa'at, 'Plaza Singapura' in *One Fierce Hour* (Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd, 1998), pp. 10-11.

Plaza Singapura

Two men talk.

Eyes hope for the sign of a gleam
in the other's, like a first star.

Words unravel and hiss like
steam.
Speech a civil noise among
tongues
Burnt by strange tribal welts of
longing.

A nod, a smile, a switch is flicked.
They looked at each other, naked
light bulbs.
The heart white-hot, filament-
thin.

Caresses in the stairwell.

Each sigh echoing, a child
tumbling down the steps.
Fear the ecstatic engine of their
grotes. Their kisses so famished
it is almost incestuous.

And long, long after the footsteps
Of families ebbing outside,
Their grindstone mill of
perambulators,
Housing doll-eyed babies shaking
their rattles,
After the washing-machine pride
of wives,
And the nail-polish vanity of
girlfriends,
That parade beyond the sealed
door,

They hold each other, still in fear,
But this time of losing themselves
in,
Or simply losing, their
shipwrecked embrace.

Grateful, somehow, when pried
apart
By what is not shame, not futility,
That they had avoided the
territories
On each other's skin,
That could have stung them
with love,
Or even its pale embers.

Part VIII:

Source: Cyril Wong, 'Before The Afterlife' in *Like A Seed With Its Singular Purpose* (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2006), pp. 74-86.

Before The Afterlife

1
Before our afterlife, I begin to
envision
its warm-hued, easy-to-clean
furniture

in the living room with its kitschy
water-feature
in a corner, plastic koi frozen in
mid-swim;

the altar where you will bow and
reiterate
our gratitude to your cherished
deities;

our bedroom blessed by the faint
chords
of wind chimes above our door
each morning

when we come awake in each
other's arms,
the shelves where our books –
mine on art

and literature, yours on politics
and history –
would have found a home; the
balcony

that is half the size of the
apartment, weighed
down by potted plants I must
never fail

to water, its roof extended for
shade, a pair
of parallel deckchairs angled
toward the sun.

2
I am lost in this dream, this
waking present.

After finishing the laundry, you
are curled up
on the sofa, watching a Hindi film
on television;
the last scene induces a tear in
your eye.

Sunday. Soon I will wake from my
nap, hungry.

The film is over. You walk out into
the balcony
to taste the fading light on your
face.

Across the street, there is a
church. The singing
of a hundred tuneless voices
thirsty for calm.

Time to come back in, to stir me
with a kiss
to the head, a slow hand through
my hair.

Everything is different. Everything
is the same.

"Quick, go and shower," you will
tell me. I will
pretend to resist the ebb of your
voice easing me

out of slumber. I will raise my
arms to stretch,
so you may touch the exposed
skin of my torso.

3
Yes, we will fight. As with other
things, of this
we can be certain. *Sorry* is, once
again, insufficient.
Change and every knot in the air
unravels.
Beyond *why* and *whatever* is a
point in the road
when it would be safe, at last, to
cross. I do the dishes,
as you wipe the table, these
chores stitching the fissure
that has formed. Then come the
questions: *Are you...?*
Can we...? Out of nowhere, like
luck. Then I am
on the balcony again. You walk
out to reach me
and cup my waist in your hands,
as if I might spill.

<p>4 <i>What has changed for the two of you?</i></p> <p>Everything is different. Everything is the same.</p> <p><i>Where did you find those lights?</i></p> <p>I am lost in this dream. The lights I did not buy.</p> <p><i>How do you split the housework?</i></p> <p>The plants are mine alone to water. I do not mind.</p> <p><i>Why? Does he not like plants?</i></p> <p>He likes what I like. I might not have them after all.</p> <p><i>Where did the wind chimes come from?</i></p> <p>Bangkok. I was tired, but he walked on in the heat.</p> <p><i>Do they keep you awake at night?</i></p> <p>We have not moved in yet. They lull me even now.</p> <p><i>What do both of you disagree about now?</i></p> <p>He wants a transparent kitchen. I want walls, not glass.</p> <p><i>Does he love you more than you love him?</i></p> <p>I want him to inundate like light from the balcony.</p> <p><i>Does he love you more than –?</i></p> <p>Yes, that is why I must never leave.</p>	<p>5 What I did not ask to love I love. Like wind chimes. <i>To facilitate the chi of a home,</i> you tell me.</p> <p>I imagine <i>chi</i> as a giggling child, gambolling in and out of every room</p> <p>to listen closely to each chime when it sounds, briefly, a shimmering afterthought. I like to believe</p> <p>your faith in them would make sense, eventually, even as it is enough to know</p> <p>you are determined to set the stage of our apartment for a play of happy endings in countless, interchangeable acts.</p> <p>For now, allow me to only imagine waking to that subtle, glowing tune, or dozing</p> <p>to its lullaby in the dark. When you are off to work or not yet home, it would be a kiss deep in my ears</p> <p>when you are not there – a lingering comfort, shiny echo of feeling, the distant music of stars.</p>	<p>6 Caption appears on screen: <i>Two years later.</i></p> <p>Int.: A kitchen not made from glass.</p> <p>(Cyril enters, holding a spoon. Sheo is standing at the sink, pouring a glass of water.)</p> <p>Cyril: You sure you don't want some?</p> <p>Sheo: Is it vanilla? I only want vanilla.</p> <p>Cyril: Then never mind.</p> <p>Sheo: You want water? You should drink some water.</p> <p>(He holds up a glass.)</p> <p>Cyril: It's okay, I don't want.</p> <p>Sheo: You didn't smoke, right?</p> <p>(Sheo puts the glass in the sink.)</p> <p>Cyril: Want to smell my breath, my fingers?</p> <p>(Smiling, he offers his hands.)</p> <p>Sheo: You don't love me.</p> <p>(Sheo takes them and presses the fingers to his upper lip.)</p> <p>Cyril: I do, I do. So, did I smoke?</p> <p>(Sheo holds on to his fingers, and closes his eyes. They wait there like that.)</p> <p>Fade out.</p>
---	---	---

7
On Sundays, we could walk about
our home
naked. *Who would know, or care
to stop us?*

Together, we would have to learn
how
to stand upright again, arch our
backs, care

less if our penises hung out
further than they should.
How embarrassed you would
look, with

the janeo strung from your left
shoulder
to rest on your right hip – the
sacred thread

put on you at the temple
ceremony
that signalled a boy's entry into
manhood,

that you would never remove, not
even during sex.
We could watch Z-TV like this,
losing ourselves

in one Bollywood movie after
another, my finger
playing the string that crosses just
under a nipple

to tangle in the wiry commas of
hair risen up
below your navel, while your
hand open

and close on my inner thigh. We
could even dance
with the balcony as our sun-lit
backdrop,

nude as two spirits must be after
shaking
off their heavy coats of flesh, their
pockets

plump with too much regret and
memory.
Nothing left to fear but the
unforgotten voices

of our previous, less-than-
courageous selves,
haunting our minds as diminishing
echoes

of age-old admonishments, soft
barks
of prejudice and self-hatred. Two
men dancing

naked in their own home, bodies
pressed
against each other and swaying
unhurriedly

to that unspectacular rhythm, in
the light
of an ordinary Sunday afternoon.

8
Where would we display the
photos
your sisters took of you, from a
smirking boy
to a man in shirt and tie; my
handsome executive.
How about the ones our friends
took
of us on the couch in each other's
arms,
my head pressed against yours,
our legs
in a casual tangle above the floor?
What would my mother say if she
came
to visit, only to be assailed by
such images
in a pitiless row on the study-
room wall,
something else to splinter her
delusion
that you and I are nothing more
than friends?
Would your colleagues gossip
among themselves
after seeing them and pretending
not to notice?
Would the braver ones approach
us to comment
about the angle the photographer
has chosen
to snare our moment of intimacy
on film?
And what about your sisters?
(Can you already hear that sigh as
it is passed
from one sister to the next;
whether in resignation
or acceptance, who can know for
sure?)
*How good that their parents are
not alive
to see this*, other relatives would
say,
if they would ever come to visit.
*How good if we never invite them
again*,
I would say after they have finally
gone home.

9

There is nobody in the apartment.

The apartment has not yet
become a home.

The gleaming sofa is unoccupied.
The sliding door to the living room
is open,

disclosing some light from the
balcony.

No one is watching the news on
television
or reading the papers. Look, the
fan

is not turned on, but still it turns
upon the urging of an uninvited
breeze.

Come into the kitchen. Touch the
stove
that has never yielded a flame,

the unopened mouths of empty
cabinets,
the muted washing-machine.

Visit the bedroom, but do not lay
down on our bed that is wide
enough for two

men to curl up in each other's
arms
or come apart during sleep.

And just outside, the dinner table
set for the company of ghosts, or
more
invisible even, for the anticipatory

absence of ourselves, as if the air
itself
was beginning to make room for
us.

Part IX:

Source: "Mnemonic", 2004, Cyril Wong and gangan.com (accessed 10 August 2011)

<http://www.gangway.net/34/gangway33_34.Wong.html>

Mnemonic

I return often to that
memory:
silence sneaking us out of
our bodies,
leaving nothing
to dwell upon, feeling
everything at once.

Long after words had
shaped an intimacy
in the afternoon, smiles
on our faces
heroic as scars, each of
us retelling
the same lie about love
on the couch in the living
room, before
relenting, by evening, to
the floor's advances.

And truth was a natural
disaster
that took place simply
but somewhere else,

your parents on the brink
of return;
that threat of discovery
at which desire is
intensified, rendered
more fragile or
exactly so.

Now, the same truth
embraces us
separately – what we
keep insisting
to be truth: the
meaninglessness
of any life – as it did
once,
in our different corners
of the planet.

Our cages, at least, are
still similar.

Like birds,
we may turn to stone if
a door is opened,
casually
and without malice.