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Writing a post-colonial city: Theory in medias res ipsum

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ABSTRACT

Engaging with ideas of Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke through his montage essay, Benjamin's Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City, this article explores how the techniques of montage text can inspire theoretical writing to go beyond its conventional representational function. Besides challenging the conventional nature of theoretical writing as reflection, I will suggest the montage form can inspire readers to engage with the city they inhabit in new ways, and in turn produce new kinds of subjectivities, spaces and meanings that can resist (neo)-colonial and conventional sociological modes of categorisation. What readers – including artists, designers and other writers – may 'learn' from encountering a montage text arises from their own process of 'producing'.

Initial words

To write *about* a city is not hard. It is easy to detach oneself from the city and its dynamic spatial and material conditions in order to make it an immutable object suitable to be represented by theoretical statements based on established sociological, cultural and political classificatory terms like 'fluid' or 'dynamic'. However, to write *with* a city or to produce words and sentences that may intensify a city's dynamism is another matter. To write *with* a city requires rethinking the relationships between words and the physical built environment. It is to understand a city as constituted by words as well as bricks and mortar; words are not there to merely describe the assemblages of streets, buildings, policies and skylines. Transformative writing entails a process of making words contribute to the dynamicity of the built environment. I will suggest through this discussion that a transformative text consists of gatherings of forces. These are assembled in ways that enable the production of subjectivities and spaces that escape conventional classifications of post-colonial city life. A transformative text is concerned with the emergence of a city's potentialities.

Instead of producing textual representations of the city one may ask what can words do to change a city's fabric? Specifically, how can these words incite readers to embark on a course of production that exceeds the satisfaction of familiar national, cultural and social symbols and identities? To incite the emergence of a city's potentialities one must craft one's writing style, composition and form so that it can incite artists, designers and other writers to rethink their current modes of engagement with the city. This incitation should inspire them to conduct artistic and/or textual experiments in order to produce new concepts and actions. Writing as a practice of incitation moves from a merely descriptive mode to a productive mode. As a mode of production, or at least instigative of production, writing becomes co-extensive with the city's process of change, insofar as 'production' within a city encompasses all productive activities like writing, reading, walking,

navigating, designing and viewing. It is this production that unites writing with the city's infinite and changing forms.

The city of concern here is Singapore. Why Singapore? On an obvious level, Singapore with its kitschy shopping malls and benevolent, yet paternalistic, pro-capitalist agenda is in a sense a 'perfect case' for consideration. It is easy to describe this island nation using terms like 'neo-conservative', '*tabula rasa*' or 'Potemkin-like'.[1]   However, to find ways to engage with Singapore without relying on these reified terms is to do something novel and productive rather than descriptive.

Singapore is a 'site-event' where socio-historical, architectural, textual, corporeal forces intersect with each other, and where new spaces and subjects are continually being forged. Singapore *is* a territory governed by time's elasticity and perpetuity, its space *is* its time. This discussion investigates how a montage-formatted, theoretical text may harness Singapore's shifting forces and assemble these forces into new gatherings that can be re-interpolated into the city so as to sustain the city's dynamicity. The theoretical text must also address its own implication within these flows of textual, material, urban, architectural, socio-historical, philosophical, cultural and political forces. The text should address how it is produced and transformed by these flows, and how the concepts it espouses are momentary condensations of these forces.

Following this notion of the theoretical text as produced in between a variety of forces I will suggest that the theorist, especially in global Singapore, is also produced amidst these flows of forces. A theorist amidst Singapore city *is* a gathering of Western and local concepts, memories and philosophies. This logic suggests that a theorist's judgment is also produced in the middle of things. Judgment is a momentary viewpoint produced in the middle of the practice of writing, which is itself a shifting constellation of forces.

Working with Singaporean literary theorist Rajeev Patke's montage-format essay, *Benjamin's Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City*, is a way of contributing to and sustaining this dynamic Singapore. Through Patke's essay I will elaborate how a theoretical text may incite new ways to engage with the city and inspire the production of new subjectivities and spaces. By momentarily casting aside the detached position that writers and theorists conventionally adopt, the acts of writing and ultimately thinking and learning are not external to a *happening* city but are implicated within it. Writing, reading, thinking and learning take place in the middle of the variety of forces that constitute the city. One writes, reads, thinks or learns not from afar but while being transformed by the surrounding global, socio-historical, architectural and textual forces.

It is in consideration of how a writer is implicated within the web of forces he or she encounters that I hope my writing, in being caught up with the forces of Patke's essay, can incite further productions within this amorphous site-event that is Singapore. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, to write is to be 'refolding' the book and the sources, which we draw upon to overload these precedents so as to invent new expressions (Nancy, 1993: 320). If we are to treat writing as an art-form then writing is inventing.

The montage and *happening* history

Patke's montage essay, *Benjamin's Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City* is a collection of twenty fragments or paragraphs, each with Benjaminian subheadings like "Preamble", "Ruins", "Traces", etc. As if expressing Walter Benjamin's own concerns in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* about the relation between writing and the city, Pakte sets about assembling an image of Singapore city that refuses to recognise "the way it [a city] really was" (Benjamin, 1969: 247). For Benjamin, to articulate a city is not to assign to its "present" a status of the "past". Rather, it is "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1969: 247). Memories of a city are not "presents" that have passed, which writers must try to recollect with utmost resemblance. Memories are to be evoked as gatherings of mnemonic, textual, conceptual and visual forces that can transform or even

violate stultified memories and the whole conventional practice of writing/reading. This is a memory's productive danger.

To engage with history, for Benjamin (1969: 252–253), is not to make the text refer to a "homogenous, empty time". To write an historical text is to make history *happen*. A *happening* history is a history that is "filled by the presence of the now [*jetztzeit*]". A history filled with the presence of the *jetztzeit* is not a linear history constituted by a succession of "presents". The *jetztzeit* for Benjamin is a "*nunc stans*", an eternal now that is sustained by constant change (1969: 252–253). Radical history writing inspires readers to enact change and thus to write their own histories *now*.

Writing can express this *jetztzeit* by drawing up new relations between the text and the dynamic city. Such a text may disavow a centred perspective that stands detached from happening history. Without a centred perspective readers must continually and immediately renegotiate their own relations with both the text and the city of which the text speaks. They must develop new ways to interpret this decentred text, its nuances, symbols, gestures and style. In the process they may encounter a myriad of transformative forces that can reconstitute their sense of self in a happening 'now'.

In this Benjaminian mode of communication nothing is redeemed, there is only an invention of new images of and new relations to the city. Technically and methodologically this act of making the new is facilitated by the use of the montage. Susan Buck-Morss (1999: 225), elaborating on Benjamin's montage, suggests that although an essay speaking of a city's history may be "derived from the original context of the [city's] fragments", the way these fragments are re-assembled and re-disseminated always poses an ability to subvert the dominant view. In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin himself suggests that the montage's principle purpose is to resist the "harmonising perspective" common in institutionalised modes of representation (1999: 678–698). He continues to state that the montage mode of writing is radical because it "interrupts the context into which it is inserted". The montage forgoes itself as a representation of a city. Rather, it offers the conceptual and textual forces needed to form new relations with a city by offering its readers kaleidoscopic vignettes which refuse any singular interpretation. Readers must work out new relations between these vignettes and the physical city that the montage text references. Through instigating readers to produce new ways to think of and experience the city, the montage counteracts the consumerist illusions produced by problematising the bourgeois' assumptions of world progress and social representation (Benjamin, 1999: 572).

To encounter a montage is for Patke to encounter a "city of words", which is "the site for a perpetual negotiation between the providential and the unpredictable" (Patke, 2000: 6). However, a city of words is not the equivalent to a city of bricks, steel and glass. Any encounter includes both cities. To encounter a city of words is to actively work out new relations these words may have with those bricks, steel and glass and living people. In this encounter readers may begin to redefine the ontology and limits of a city's boundaries. Ultimately readers may begin to question what a city is and how to begin describing a global city that is exponentially changing. In his essay *On the Mimetic Faculty,* Benjamin says the montage enables us "to read what was never written" (1979: 161). The montage recognises the impossibility to wholly describe a city but does not shy away from offering conceptual, textual and philosophical forces that may be picked up by a reader so that he or she may produce his or her own experience and stories of the city. Additionally the reader may use these forces to reconstitute a sense of self as a citizen-within-the-city and may ask what it is to be a Singaporean who lives only two months a year in Singapore. Or, what are the island nation's boundaries as the island nation becomes increasingly connected to the rest of the world via mobile technology and convenient travel? Amidst these new relations and questions that may be forming between the city of words and the physical city there is a city that is yet to be defined in advance.

Writing and reading that concern potentialities and futures present a way to resist being "trapped in [the] unavailing nostalgia" commonly imagined by Singapore's politicians in hopes of

capturing a definitive East Asian identity (Patke, 2002: 114). The unpredictable potentialities a montage may incite are especially useful in resisting this form of coerced nostalgia and cultural past.

Patke uses the montage to undo the image of an infallible telic progress that the Singaporean government has so convincingly instilled in the minds of citizens. Through the montage Patke traces out new kinds of relations "between nationalism (as the overlap between the colonial and the postcolonial) and globalism (as the translation of the modern into the postmodern)" (2000: 11). He achieves this by mixing fragments of statistics of South East Asian economy, Benjaminian concepts, and snippets of Singaporean literature and poetry. He does not offer a clear view as to what nationalism or globalism might mean for contemporary Singapore. Like the physical city itself, Patke's city of words is a field of concepts in which readers must create paths and vistas for themselves. Within this mix of information a curious narrative emerges that not only does violence to the government's story of linear progress but also does violence to the whole tradition of narration of a nation. In between these textual fragments Patke renounces the role of the Singapore-expert; he becomes a facilitator who brings together disparate elements to enable the appearance of other voices that ceaselessly change their tone, positions and intentions.

'Becoming-Benjamin' … 'Becoming-Patke'

Despite Patke's extensive use of Benjaminian concepts and terms, he maintains that his essay is not an interpretation of Singapore through Benjamin-tinted glasses. He does not present himself as a twenty-first century Benjamin. Working through textual fragments Patke disperses his own voice in order to produce new voices that are neither his nor Benjamin's. Patke considers his essay an exercise in conjuring up several Benjamins in order to "invite a speculative discourse on the idea of the postcolonial city" (2000: 3). However, this does not entail a speculation predicated solely on Benjamin's ideas. Speculation here is not a matter of proving a hypothesis. For Patke, Singapore is not a contemporary example of Walter Benjamin's Paris. Speculation becomes a will to experiment in order to garner new relations and ways of being. Through experimentation one begins to embrace beings that are becoming. Amidst the textual, conceptual and philosophical forces of Benjamin's *œuvre* that are evoked, one may possibly encounter a Patke who is neither quite Benjamin nor quite himself, but one who is 'Becoming-Benjamin'.

This notion of becoming-someone else can be further explicated through what philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a "conceptual persona". In Patke's essay Benjamin becomes Patke's conceptual persona. A conceptual persona is someone who imbues an author with various conceptual forces that transform the author's subjectivity. To evoke and be affected by one's conceptual persona is to find ways to create new relations with the concepts that the conceptual persona offers to one's practice of writing. Thus, evoking a conceptual persona is also the forging of new ways of knowing. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 64) suggest:

> the conceptual persona is not the philosopher's representative, but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors [*intercesseurs*] … Conceptual personae are the philosopher's 'heteronyms'.

To evoke a conceptual persona is to write and rewrite, read and reread that particular thinker's concepts in order to invent new stories. This invention of new stories is a process of creating narratives that will unsettle existing narratives, even the familiar narratives of one's selfhood.

Eugene Holland elaborates on Deleuze and Guattari's point by suggesting that to evoke a conceptual persona involves "corralling the particles of information, combining particles of information, combining or condensing components drawn selectively from real problems and/or from pre-existing concepts into the formation of new concepts" (2003: 164). This is a process of pushing oneself as well as one's conceptual persona beyond the limits. Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 64) write of this breaching of limits:

> I am no longer myself but thought's aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae, at the same time that these personae themselves become something other than what they are historically, mythologically, or commonly… The conceptual persona is the becoming of the subject of philosophy, on a par with the philosopher.

In Patke's evocation of Benjamin as a conceptual persona there are "Benjamins" who are no longer *the* Benjamin from inter-war Europe or *the* Benjamin of *The Arcades Project*. Instead, there are Benjamins who are becoming-someone else. Patke's Benjamins are infused with those poetic, textual and conceptual forces seeping out from those snippets of South East Asian economic statistics, poetry and literature. The Patke who is 'Becoming-Benjamin' is simultaneously a 'Benjamin-becoming-postcolonial-theorist', a 'Benjamin-becoming-Singaporean', a 'Benjamin-becoming-tropical-city-citizen', etc. To be becoming-someone else involves more than one becoming.[2]

To evoke a conceptual persona and to enable the emergence of 'becomings' is to violate the identity of the historical philosopher from which a conceptual persona is derived. Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2002) succinctly comments on the relationship between a "philosophical commentator" (such as Patke) and his or her conceptual persona:

> The philosophical commentator '*fait un enfant dans le dos à son auteur*'. He does not respect his [preceding author's] intentions of meaning for what they are worth; he is not content with respectfully expounding the solutions his author presents. He does not treat the work he comments on as a '*boîte de signifiés*', a collection of ready-made meanings, to be reassembled for ease of exposition. What he does is extract a problem from the [preceding author/philosopher's] text, a problem that does violence to the text, of which the author himself may not have been aware, but which enables us to understand how the text works … He calls this 'reading a text *intensively*'. (Lecercle, 2002: 37)

Following Lecercle's argument that a violation and a transformation is at work when an author or philosopher is evoked, one may suggest that Patke's voice is changing too, insofar as Patke himself can become a conceptual persona for his readers. What amounts to his voice is contingent upon how his concepts and imagery are subsequently used by his readers. In encountering Patke as a conceptual persona, Patke becomes someone who is becoming-someone else; we have a Patke who is differentiating *from* himself.

In between all these textual fragments of Benjaminian terms and cultural vignettes, Patke becomes a curious hybrid of an observer of South East Asian capitalist economy, an insightful reader of Benjamin's Europe, and an instigator for a post-colonial South East Asia that cannot be contained by current categorising machines. More importantly, these 'roles' Patke plays in his essay offer conceptual forces his reader may use to begin production of his or her own literary or artistic project. It is through this variety of potential uses that Patke embarks on his line of becoming. These 'Patkes-becoming-someone-else-who-is-yet-to-be-named' will emerge in the interstitial areas between his montage essay's numerous textual fragments such as *preamble, modern, Benjaminiana, who's Hecuba…?, complicity, debris, ruins, traces, fetish, phantasmagoria, progress, postcolonial, dream, utopia, antithesis, thresholds, dialectics, globalism, city types* and *back to the future*. Insofar as his readers will pick up concepts from these fragments to be used differently in their own projects, Patke the conceptual persona gains a certain longevity. Finally, and most importantly, scouring through Patke's textual fragments for concepts that can be used, his readers themselves may be becoming-Patke amidst countless other becomings.

Theory/theorist *in medias res*

The notion that Patke's identity and concepts can be decomposed and recomposed into someone or something else allows us to conceive of a theorist and his or her theory as something that can be continually (re)produced *in medias res*. As such, to use a theorist's work can mean to enable an opening up to the formation of new subjectivities and meanings. A theoretical text, in being able to incite this act of opening up, exceeds its representational function. Concepts and identities amidst this act are cast in the middle of things to be transformed.

It is this move from a function of representation toward a function of incitation that allows a theoretical text to become coextensive with its field of inquiry – in Patke's case, Singapore. His montage essay is a transformative object, a nexus of theoretical, textual, conceptual and philosophical forces, placed within Singapore in order to spur his readers to produce radical concepts and actions. In fact a theorist and his or her theoretical texts are always going to be implicated within the network or field of investigation with which he or she is engaged. As Stephan Fuchs (2001: 33–34) notes, a theoretical text is often more than an object displaying mere observation, it "matter[s] directly to the network's behaviour". Fuchs further suggests that a theoretical text may in fact adopt the same mode of production as those artworks, peoples and places with which it is engaged. Indeed Patke's montage essay, *Benjamin's Arcades Project and the Postcolonial City* is composed just like Singapore city – full of fleeting vignettes, references to events and concepts from other times and spaces, and ultimately potentialities for change. Insofar as Patke's readers may pick up concepts and use them for their own discipline-specific projects – art, architecture and literature – Patke's essay can be regarded as already within the field of change that is the amorphous Singapore city.

This intimate relation between the city and the theoretical text is especially true in Singapore where the nation's diminutive physical size has 'pushed' literary theorists, like Patke and several key members of the architectural fraternity, closer together. Theorists teaching at the National University of Singapore often work alongside architects holding full-time and adjunct positions at the university.[3] Many of these architects read the same theoretical texts as do their English-literature and sociology colleagues. They are also beginning to adopt experimental writing techniques more conventionally used in the field of literature in order to explore the city's extensity and limits. For instance, one of Patke's colleagues, architect William Lim produced a pamphlet that utilised montage for his exhibition pavilion at the 2000 Venice Biennale. The pamphlet was deliberately composed of writings and graphics by various authors in order to express with immediacy the kind of ad hoc multiplicity characterising Singapore. Readers are to decipher the play and possible relations between the text and graphics in order to produce for themselves a sense of what Singapore city can be. Here, readers may ask themselves the same question that Patke asked in another montage essay, *To Frame a City: The Singaporean Poet in the Postmodern City*, "what is a city when refracted … by the kaleidoscopic fragments that are art?" (2002: 108). One may interpret Patke's question as follows: What defines a city when the city is infused with a montage's multiple textual fragments and conceptual forces? How may we readers see, experience and speak of Singapore when becoming aware of the montage's transformative powers?

The montage, in possessing powers to change the way we see, experience and speak of Singapore, no longer stands detached from the city. In fact, one may say to write and read this montage is to 'practice' living with/in the city albeit in different ways. The montage becomes more than a reflection of Singapore; it becomes a catalyst for immediate transformation in one's sense of space and self.

Montage writing is not the same as manufacturing lies or euphemisms in order to hide what Singapore really is. It is not a matter of naively celebrating commercial pastiche or marvelling at the spectacle. Montage writing is to find ways to write so that the city can be viewed in terms of fragments that do not simply remain as passive ruins, but manifest as bits and pieces that can be reassembled into something new. Montage writing in this sense instigates readers to find ways to

physically, architecturally and relationally reassemble the city they inhabit. For example, Patke's montage is refusing to say what Singapore is. Instead it presents us with a myriad of textual fragments and various conceptual forces that can be seen as an attempt to bring Singapore out of its tiresome image as a Disneyland with the death penalty, an identity with which it is often charged. These kaleidoscopic textual fragments and concepts incite readers to *truly* think, produce new thoughts, and not just reconcile Singapore with established sociological definitions of place, culture and people. The methodological question for the montage writer is this: How to write creatively so as to maximise the transformative impact of his or her work upon the readers?

A practice of writing *is* an active practice of theory

For Patke to partake in a city's transformation is to attend to its "episodes, movements and sensation" through creative composition (2002: 108). Compositionally, this attention demands that the writer find ways to express a spatiality through writing, and to a certain extent graphic design and layout, that can express the kind of excitement, confusion and potentialities one may experience when physically navigating through the streets, malls and transit systems. The montage will immanently express, rather than merely reference, this exciting, confusing spatiality. It is the immediate expression of this spatiality that can problematise the conventions we use to read the city and treat space in general. Following Benjamin, Patke (2000: 3) argues that a montage must present itself as a problematic act that raises questions about the city's existence, our perceptions of it and ultimately its ontological boundaries. It is this act of problematisation that affirms and promotes the city's dynamicity and state of change.

A theoretical text in a montage format displaces representations of the city, not because the text is unable to meet the task of representation but because it refuses to present a myopic perspective that neglects the importance of time and change in the fabric of the city's interiority. As Homi Bhabha (1994: 22) suggests, theories espoused by a theoretical text should be "always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself ". It is the process of reading and using these theories and concepts in different ways that actually gives longevity to the theoretical text. Through these diverse usages the theories can in fact be themselves transformed. This is why for Bhabha theories are always "*in medias res*", always in the process of being changed by their difference usages (1994: 22).

Through a montage way of writing the espoused theory becomes more than a fixed system of concepts and methods. As the textual, conceptual and poetical forces of the montaged-theoretical text come into conjunction with the physical city's architectural, material, visual, socio-historical and political forces there can begin an emergence or a new gathering of forces that may spark new subjectivities, spaces and meanings. It is from these possibilities that a dynamic theory arises. This theory is in fact an active process of theorisation: a process of making new concepts and meanings. This is the process we can call a 'practice of theory', a practice of forging new concepts, subjectivities, senses of space and meaning.

A practice of theory recognises the importance of composition, style and other techniques that are particular to the practice of writing. A practice of theory *is* a practice of writing. Bhabha (1994: 23) suggests that "the force of writing" must be acknowledged, for it is "the dynamics of writing and textuality [that] require us to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy … [And] textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject". Bhabha (1994: 23) further points out that it is the practice of writing that produces the political subject and the subject of politics, including political theory. Thus, political theory and the political subject are more like "discursive event[s]" than they are like unwavering entities that serve as cause.

To practice theory is to find new ways to communicate, to experiment with words so that these experiments may themselves generate new ways of knowing and thinking. To write is not merely to communicate something pre-established. Like Bhabha's stress on textuality's importance, and Benjamin's notion that the creative montage-text offers up forces for readers to form their own vignettes, Maurice Blanchot (1982: 198) elaborates on this practice of writing as production:

> [The] communication of the work lies not in the fact that it has become communicable, through reading, to a reader. The work is itself communication. It is intimacy shared in struggle by reading's demands and writing's: by the work as form and measure, constituting itself as power, and the same work's measureless excess, tending toward impossibility. It is intimate strife shared moreover by the form where the work takes its shape and the limitlessness where it is all refusal, by the resolution which is the being of beginning and the indecision which is the being beginning over. This violence lasts as long as the work is a work. It is violence that is never pacified, but it is also the calm of an accord; it is rivalry, and also the reconciliation – an understanding. But it breaks off as soon as it ceases to be the approach toward what rules out any understanding.

For Blanchot writing communicates something that is non-representable. Writing is not mere conveyance. What is communicated in writing is the incitation to change, to effect change in both writer and reader and their subsequent thoughts and actions. In Blanchot's (and Benjaminin's) terms this is the productive violence persisting in the text that makes the writer and reader "lose itself in an ever restless migration" (Blanchot, 1982: 199). As Blanchot states, the voice of the author, the theory and concepts produced "never ceased to be developing in the course of the work's [continual] genesis". The reader, in using concepts found in the text toward other applications or in transforming these concepts, becomes him or herself a writer. Vice versa a writer is becoming-reader or what Blanchot calls a "reader yet to come" as the writer in writing prepares him or herself to become a reader-who-will-become-another-writer. "The writer becomes the nascent intimacy of the still infinitely future reader" (1982: 199).

Reader and writer are both in the middle of things, in the middle of a journey without beginnings and ends. There are only temporary plateaus that are ready to shatter to reveal new paths. Experiencing the city through the transformative vignettes of the montage essay, Patke (2002: 113) notes that we are in "a state of in-betweenness". This state of in-betweenness is not a state of loss for Patke; it is rather a way of seeing that resists the detached colonial gaze situated at the end of history and the reified homelands that naïve nationalists posit at the beginning of a nation's history.

In the middle of judgment

In this state of in-betweenness where writers are becoming readers yet to come and where writer and reader both have the potential to become someone else, we have to ask: What is judgment? For if writer and reader can have differentiating 'selves' then where is the position from which they judge? One may even suggest that the judgment presented within a text is a set of ideas that is liable to contract and/or expel other ideas and concepts. As such, to judge is less a comparison of moral-rights and moral-wrongs, and more a practice of combining and/or wresting apart ideas in order to form new ones.

Patke's works do not present a theory of Singapore. As it is, his montage essays with their fragmentary format encourage acts of recombination so that new theories may be born. To engage with Patke's montages, to be actively recombining ideas to form new theories is to be engaged in the *practicing* of practical theory.[4] Experimental forms of writing that attend to the transformative power of the written word itself are, for Deleuze and Foucault, "a system of relays" that does not distinguish the solely theoretical and the solely practical. This is why for them "theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself " (Foucault, 1977: 207–208).

A judgment is not an a priori condition but a momentary congealment or body of forces that constitute the diversifying system of relays of practical theory (or theorisation). As a momentary congealment of forces, judgment becomes dispensed of the eschatological. To judge is not a move toward the indisputable morally good. Rather Deleuze (1998: 131) says:

> A body of judgment, with its organization, its segments … its differentiations, its hierarchies [become] dissolved, the differentiations lost, and the hierarchies thrown into confusion … [It] retains nothing but intensities that make up uncertain zones that traverse these zones at full speed and confront the powers in them.

Instead of judgment being a reiteration of the morally good it can produce moments of uncertainty. However, judgment for Deleuze is not a matter of anything goes nor perpetual uncertainty. For him judgment, although it has dispensed with the act of reconciling with established models of subjectivity, spatiality, citizenship and nationality, is still an act of evaluation. What is evaluated here is how particular gatherings of forces can be transformed. Thus, a will to change and a love for emerging potentialities is what drives the act of evaluation or judgment. This will to change is manifested for Deleuze in the practice of composing textual, material, graphic, architectural and conceptual forces so that these new gatherings may offer up hints of new knowledge, subjectivities and senses of space. This concern for change marks a new kind of ethology that is not predicated upon oppositional and/or identitarian politics. Deleuze writes of this new ethology (1988: 126):

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

In many ways Patke's montage essay expresses with immediacy this new ethology in that his writing does not pronounce determined moral judgments on Singapore as a post-colonial city. Rather, his textual fragments merely lay out a set of ideas, which we readers may pick up and mix with those other ideas that we may carry with us in order to assemble new gatherings of ideas. These may result in the production of other kinds of subjectivities and another sense of space that cannot be categorised in advance. In this process new kinds of citizenship and thoughts on post-colonial urbanity may emerge.

In the middle of words … a 'lesson' is performed

Patke's kaleidoscopic montaged-essay does not teach us lessons that must be remembered by rote. The lesson, so to speak, a reader may grasp is immanent in the reader's own process of producing new concepts, subjectivities and sense of space. His or her lesson is actively performed; his or her lesson is in the middle of things. This is a lesson with theories and concepts that are in perpetual 'becoming'.

Notes

This paper is re-assembled from elements of Chapter Four of my unpublished PhD thesis titled, "Outside-Singapore: A Practice of Writing: Making subjects and spaces yet to come" (RMIT University, 2006).

1. The influence of architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas's generalizing notion of Singapore as a façade with nothing substantial behind and effectively a *tabula rasa* on the current generation of writers working on/within the island nation cannot be understated. The Singaporean architect Tan Kok-Meng, for instance, opened his essay "The Artifice Park" with a quote by Koolhaas on how Singapore is a *tabula rasa* city. For Tan, Singapore suffers from "collective historical amnesia" and as a result the nation has to turn to a pastiche of artificial trees, plastic colonnades and façades in order to construct national identity (Tan, 1999: 200–202).

2. One may argue that one cannot step back and wholly describe one's own becoming. As Ian Buchanan, following Deleuze's treatment on the subject of experience succinctly writes, our experience of anything, even of ourselves, is always in the process of construction. One cannot have an experience of an experience in this sense. There is only an experience that is itself in a process of becoming. The world and one's self is experienced only as we construct them (Buchanan, 2000: 84).

3. In fact, only the National University of Singapore (NUS) has both a Faculty of Architecture and a Faculty of Humanities. Singapore's other universities are mainly geared toward business, technology and the medical sciences. At NUS, there have been several publications involving collaborations between the departments of English, sociology and architecture. *Postmodern Singapore* (2002, Singapore: Select Books) edited by architect William Lim; and *Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity* (2004, London and New York: Routledge) edited by John Phillips, Ryan Bishop and Yeo Wei-Wei are good examples.

4. The cultural critic Raymond Williams maintains that theory is produced by practice or action. In doing one produces a set of ideas that can culminate into a theory of a people, a place or a series of artworks. Williams writes, practice is "informed by *theory* and also, though less emphatically, *theory* informed by *practice*, as distinct both from *practice* uninformed by or unconcerned with *theory* and from *theory* which remains *theory* and is not put to the test of *practice*. In effect it [practice] is a word intended to unite *theory* with the strongest sense of *practical* (but not conventional or customary) activity: *practice* as action" (Williams, 1983: 318). The division of theory and practice framed as such becomes rather unnecessary. To theorise is to engage in practical theory, which is an action.

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