

## Life as Theatre in Singapore

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines forms of cultural performance and dramatization of life in public spaces in Singapore. Through the concept of the sociality of affect, it examines how affective elements are generated, how they are 'structured' and whether or not they can be mobilized for specific purposes. Affect and forms of emotional engagement are integral features of socio-economic life in the post-industrial economy. The dramatising of life and the transforming of the street into a theatre mobilises affect for the continued vitality of consumer culture. 'Territories of feeling' that offer performative possibilities are created to bring enchantment to the otherwise mundane. It is in these spaces, that the creation of value and the reproduction of the consumer economy take place.

### Introduction

It seems that we have never as a society acted so much or watched so many others acting (Williams, 2000 [1974]: 55).

Even today, Raymond Williams' observation and depiction of drama as built into the rhythms of everyday life (Williams, 2000: 56) is an apt description of one of the predominant modes of modernity. Williams describes a social and political life that is "played out" in ways that leave us continually uncertain as to whether we are actors or spectators (2000: 57). The vocabulary of political life—the public stage, tragedy, performance and so on—reflects the dramatic mode. The city itself is lodged in the imagination as a place of intrinsic theatricality where public places resemble lit stages awaiting a scenario (Raban, 1974: 27). One of the most vivid examples of this can be found in contemporary Singapore.

This article will examine certain forms of cultural performance and dramatization of life in Singapore that can be seen in public spaces. It examines this through the lens of Williams' concept of the "structure of feeling", a kind of feeling, both social and material, expressed in changes in style, dress, architecture, and language (Williams, 1977: 131). It is a historically specific and particular quality of social experience which gives the sense of a generation or a period (Williams, 1977: 131). It is concerned particularly with a lived social and material *presence* (Williams, 1977: 132) and how it is experienced. Williams says it is about:

... characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought; practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure'; as a set with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. (1977: 132)

Williams' concept encompasses ideas about the sociality of affect, and describes the structures that mediate between the social and the personal. The question of how affective elements are generated, how they are 'structured' and whether or not they can be mobilised for specific purposes, can best be answered with reference to site-specific examples. For this reason, contemporary Singapore is an excellent place to examine these ideas.

The affective relationships to social reality that Williams' structure of feeling implies are contingent upon various types of aesthetic practices. The affective register of cities can be studied through the increasing dramatisation of urban life. Affects as Nigel Thrift has pointed out, "continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at the grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life" (Thrift, 2004: 57). Aesthetic practices that can generate sensory and emotional gratification produce "affective alliances" and provide "the means of captivation" (Thrift, 2010: 292) that can take a number of forms. More importantly, they can also create "affective senses of space, literally, territories of feeling" (Thrift, 2010: 292). Performance is one aesthetic practice that is a powerful means of captivation in a territory of feeling.

An underlying presupposition is that affect and forms of emotional engagement are integral features of socio-economic life in the post-industrial economy. Affect is an essential aspect of emotional life, but also of economic behaviour; indeed, affect follows the logic of economic relations and exchange (Illouz, 2007: 5). For this reason, it is incumbent upon economies to be engaging because they must generate affects and then aggregate or amplify them in order to produce value (Thrift, 2010: 290). The dramatising of life and the transforming of the street into a theatre mobilises affect for the continued vitality of consumer culture. Theatricality in public places is an aesthetic practice and one of the "various mechanisms of fascination" (Thrift, 2010: 290) used to create value and reproduce the consumer economy.

In view of this, I will examine performances in public places in Singapore that create spaces in which both performer and spectator can *feel* the presence of a *zeitgeist* through the continuity between feeling and thought to which Williams refers. The 'structure' to which he alludes, provides the internal relations, both interlocking and in tension, between emotion and reason, and is in turn mediated by the market. The intention of this article is, therefore, to examine performances that have the power to create affect- charged urban spaces in Singapore. It is in these spaces that state strategies marshal feeling and structure social relations within the logic of consumer capitalism.

The next section examines the establishment of 'territories of feeling', enchanted places which offer performative possibilities; following that I focus on the cultural economy. Integral to this is the appropriation of the pre-modern carnivalesque tradition. It has created in Singapore a sort of endless carnival as a mechanism of fascination to ensure that consumers remain captivated and engaged in the material and social presence of the period; finally, I consider the Singapore Arts Festival as the central expression of this presence. None of these aspects of the theatricalisation of life in Singapore should be understood in isolation from the imperatives of the postmodern consumer economy.

## **Territories of feeling**

From its early success as an industrialising economy in the postcolonial period, Singapore has gone through a series of economic transitions, from the labour-intensive export focussed industrialisation of the 1960s to the postmodern consumer economy of today. These economic developments have been paralleled by transformations in the urban landscape, which has included extensive high-rise public housing projects, vast industrial estates and various forms of urban renewal. According to C.J. Wee, the spatial characteristics that accompanied Singapore's agenda of radical modernisation amount to a bland, homogenised, even authoritarian, urbanism (Wee, 2007: 77-79) befitting its relentless developmentalist agenda and "rather dour and puritanical modernity" (Wee, 2007: 85). The impulse, restraint and tone of the period was such that then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew,

imagined the people of Singapore as “digits” and their inherited attributes as “hardware” to be “programmed” with software in the form of ideology, education and culture (Heng & Devan, 1995: 210). In the last decade Singapore has undergone a cultural renaissance. The emergence of this new structure of feeling implies a new relationship to social reality, and has necessitated the transformation of instrumentalised “digits” into new kinds of citizens who are emotionally available for the creative revolution. The government of Singapore declared in 2000 that, “The Renaissance Singaporean has an adventurous spirit, an inquiring and creative mind and a strong passion for life” (Singapore Government, Ministry for Information, Communication and the Arts, 2000: 5).

In this newly aestheticised and reborn society, the Weberian nightmare of hyper-rationality and disenchantment has given way to new and excessive forms of re-enchantment. It is useful now to examine Singapore in the light of Colin Campbell’s (1987) “romantic capitalism”—a re-enchanted world of dreams and fantasies driven by the romance of consumption. In recent decades, shopping—with its magical ability to create and fulfil fantasies—has taken a more central place in Singaporean culture to the point where eminent Singapore sociologist Chua Beng Huat has argued that consumption *is* the culture of Singapore (2003). This has precipitated another transformation of the urban landscape. Chuihua Judy Chung, et al. (Chung, Inaba, Koolhaas & Sze, 2002: 217) describe the formulation of the government’s plan to transform the city-state into a shopping environment par excellence and to place shopping at the centre of urban renewal policies:

Singapore sees itself as a shopping centre. This self-image of nationhood dictates the urban conceptualization of the island. After more than twenty years of committed urban planning, Singapore no longer envisions itself as a city that can be planned in the traditional sense, but rather as an urban condition having a new degree of economic integration and exchange best developed as a series of highly porous, multi-functional cells. Adapting the concept of cooperation, Singapore has generated what it calls a ‘cluster’ network, a planning diagram that links diverse program, infrastructures, and consumer products into an extremely dynamic model for national growth. (Chung, Inaba, Koolhaas & Sze, 2002: 210)

Too much “authoritarian urbanism” and excessive instrumentalisation of economic and social life has required rationalisation to be tempered by new forms of enchantment. The result is that alongside the authoritarian urbanism of the Housing Development Board blocks have arisen some of the most spectacular versions of glittering high-end shopping malls to be found anywhere in the world. This has produced a “national image closer to a coordinated shopping landscape than a political territory” (Chung, et al., 2002: 217). Central to this image are Ritzer’s “cathedrals of consumption”—shopping malls with an enchanted, sometimes even sacred or religious character (2010: 7). They are not only “magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume” (Ritzer, 2010: 7), but in Singapore they are most often located in magical and enchanted places: ION Orchard, Ngee Ann City and the Paragon in Orchard Road (formerly an orchard); Vivocity at Keppel Harbour and Marina Square at Marina Bay—which is also home to the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix, and the Marina Bay Sands hotel and casino complex, to name just a few. These are all gorgeous, tropical locations, but are also, as Sharon Zukin would have it, contentious, compromised products of society (1991: 16). They are already places of natural beauty, but have been transformed into *landscapes*, a term Zukin uses to denote not just their geographical meaning but also an ensemble of material and social practices in their symbolic representation (Zukin, 1991: 16). In the 2005 National Day Rally speech Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reiterated the commitment to developing an ensemble of material and social practices in urban space, which create affect and offer theatrical possibilities, for both audience and performer:

In the city centre, we will rejuvenate Orchard Road. It’s one of our premier shopping districts, brand name, known all over the world but it’s facing competition from shopping districts in other cities ... We’ve already done some things, we’ve opened up. You’ve now got people, food, cafes on the sidewalks. We’ve got the malls opened up, so from the street you can see what’s going on. From inside you can watch the passing crowd ... We have vibrant street life—dances, drummers, entertainers. But we can do more. We’ll get the owners of the malls to do more ... Bras Bash and

Bugis and this is another area which we can do a lot with ... We're transforming it, bringing life back to it, activities, making it very exciting. (Lee Hsien Loong, 2005: np)

To further this re-enchantment of urban space and the generation of imagined possibilities linked to consumption through the generation of affect, there has been a proliferation of themed environments in Singapore. The themed food and beverages and themed shopping and merchandising has been accompanied by themed entertainment (Chung et al., 2002: 218) to create an ensemble of material and social practices which generate affect through sensory and emotional gratification to captivate consumers. A company called Breadtalk Group Limited has a chain of restaurants under the title "Food Republic". One, located at the Suntec City Mall, is decorated to resemble a gentleman's library (Figure 1).

To enter this space is to enter a space of theatricality, a stage set complete with props, lighting, costumes and attempts at creating 'old world charm', a place where the role of consumer is played in a 'another time and space'. It might be overly contrived and bordering on the gimmick, but it is also captivating and exciting to the imagination. Customers may be surrounded by the simulacra of books, chandeliers and other nostalgic symbols of the time and place of elsewhere, but the fine china is piled up, by and large, with Chinese, Indian, Japanese or even modern Western cuisine that is, generally speaking, not the standard fare of nineteenth century Europe. Simulation exists, according to Baudrillard, when the true has absorbed all the energy of the false (2008 [1990]: 27).

Recently, a new themed restaurant has sprung up on Clarke Quay, a popular nightclub and dining precinct on the Singapore River. "The Clinic" is a hospital-themed restaurant which offers cocktails named "Blood Transfusion", "Doctor's Order" and "Morphine X" delivered in syringes, and food served in kidney dishes (Figure 2).



**Figure 1.** "Food Republic", Suntec City Mall, Singapore





**Figure 2.** “The Clinic”, Clarke Quay, Singapore



**Figure 3.** ‘The Clinic’, Clarke Quay



**Figure 4.** 'The Clinic', Clarke Quay

In many of the themed restaurants customers are expected to abandon themselves to the stage set and act out “fictions that have taken up residence in reality” (Wood, 2005: 12). Thrift points to the increasing affect generated by changes to the form of the commodity that increase the emotional pull and demand a more extravagant investment in the act of consumption itself (Thrift, 2005: 7), including experiencing, acting out and participating in general. One can play at being Irish by celebrating St. Patrick’s Day, while diners at “The Clinic” sit in wheelchairs to enhance the experience and are served by waiters dressed as hospital orderlies and nurses, armed with drips and test tubes (Figures 3 and 4).

People go to the various themed restaurants expecting to consume the romantic and the fantastic with their dinner. The affective devices deployed by these restaurants captivate the imagination of the consumer and help to distinguish them from other consumer products.

## Endless carnival

In addition to this radically enchanted environment, Singapore has embarked on a strategy of economic restructuring to embed itself in a global cultural economy in which entertainment, the arts, and even creativity, are global commodities (Singh, 2011). One of the keys to this agenda to make the city-state attractive to global elites and the creative classes, and to Singapore citizens, has been the reinvention of Singapore as a “Global City for the Arts”.

To ensure that the citizens and visitors remain enthralled and excited, and to secure its ranking as a global city, Singapore’s ‘renaissance’ has facilitated the instrumentalisation of creativity and the continued generation of affect through the cultural economy. The *Renaissance City Report* (Singapore Government, 2000) provides the narrative of a regenerated, reborn culture and a mission statement for the orienting of Singapore to the global through the arts. The report describes the forms of emotional responses that are expected: “Renaissance Singapore will be an active

international citizen with a reputation for being dynamic, creative, vibrant, aesthetic, knowledgeable and mature" (Singapore Government, 2000: 40).

Excitement is now part of the narrative address of nation and a discursive strategy in an extended field of discourse. Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong announced in a recent address to students at the Nanyang Technological University that Singapore is a "Global City of Buzz". He stressed that citizens must ensure the continuation of the buzz, when he said: "... we [are] talking about the positive vibes of a place, where the environment is vibrant and exciting, and where people feel energised, engaged and happy. Some call such a place 'happening', 'funky' or simply 'lively'" (Goh, 2010). The Singapore government recognises and exploits a key feature of global and national economies. As Thrift puts it: "...capitalism is not just hard graft. It is also fun ... capitalism has a kind of crazy vitality. It doesn't just line its pockets. It also appeals to gut feelings. It gets involved in all kinds of extravagant symbioses" (Thrift, 2005: 1).

Yao Souchou argues that Singapore has developed a culture of excess (Yao, 2007: 26) where extravagance of response to crises and opportunities is continually played out in the public realm. The "Global City for the Arts" strategy has seen a proliferation of arts and cultural events on an extravagant scale, involving newly contrived events, and appropriations of traditional ones. In any one year one might experience some, or all, of the following: Thaipusam (a Hindu festival celebrated by the Tamil community); Singapore Formula One Grand Prix; Chingay Parade (part of Singapore's Chinese New Year celebrations, featuring magical floats and vibrant street performers); Huayi Festival (Chinese Festival of the Arts, showcasing talent through a program of theatre, music and dance, both traditional and cutting edge); Mosaic Music Festival; Chinese New Year Lightup; Singapore Biennale; the Qing Ming Festival (a traditional Chinese festival); Worldwide Festival Singapore, the Global Festival of Indian Dance and Music; the Flute festival; the Night Festival; the World Gourmet Summit; the Singapore Food Festival; Singapore International Film Festival; Singapore Fashion Festival; Shakespeare in the Park; Singapore Street Festival (taking place on Orchard Road and includes belly-dancing and rap music); Singapore Dragon Boat Festival; Singapore River Festival; the International Tamil Film Awards, the Hip-Hop Festival, hundreds of art exhibitions, constantly renewed special museum events, and that fabulous festival of consumption, the Great Singapore Sale. The huge number of spectacles that crowd the Singapore calendar in order to generate the collective affect is one of the keys to the government's economic agenda.

With this excessive number of events consisting of a year-long parade of spectacles in public places, Singapore, it could be argued, is an endless carnival. The commodification of culture in the post-industrial economy is accompanied by the production of images and sites of consumption which promote the pleasures of excess. This is also implicated in the symbolic regimes of postmodern life where, as Mike Featherstone has pointed out, there is a blurring of the boundary between art and everyday life (Featherstone, 2007: 22). One domain in which this can be seen is in the appropriation by capitalism of the pre-industrial carnivalesque tradition. The excitement, exhilaration, enchantment, novelty, indulgence and the excesses of physical and aesthetic pleasures traditionally generated by the carnival are now post-industrial commodities. The street—as a site of production and consumption of these commodities—is transformed into the space of the 'ordered disorder' that is a key element of the carnivalesque.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the carnivalesque in the work of Rabelais he comments that carnival does not know footlights (Bakhtin, 1984: 7) in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Since it occurs in the public space and everyone participates, it cannot be contained by footlights or any other physical structures. Carnival is not so much a spectacle seen by people, as a spectacle in which they are inexorably engaged. Bakhtin's work recalls the carnival of life in Singapore where forms of carnivalesque enchantment saturate everyday life, where there always seems to be something going on to excite people and transform the ordinary into the fabulous. To the list of events above, could be added the myriad events in

shopping malls such as special promotions complete with performers and spruikers armed with microphones, bands, magic acts, clowns and so on.

The traditional carnivals of the pre-modern world were liminal spaces, realms of pure possibility where novel configurations of ideas could arise (Turner, 1970: 97) and the world could become temporarily topsy-turvy. They provided a licence to invert norms and escape the constraints of social hierarchy (Bakhtin, 1984; Stallybrass & White, 1986). The festivals of postmodern societies such as Singapore, however, may be better understood as managed, more or less rationalised moments in post-industrial capitalist development, disordered within the frame of order.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White make the point that carnival is seen not simply as a ritual feature of European culture, but as a *mode of understanding* (emphasis in original, 1986: 6), an epistemological category. In that sense, the excitement—and affective responses—to the buzz of the shopping malls and the promotional activities going on in them, is an expectation, a mode of understanding of cultural life and a way of structuring feeling in the sense that Williams suggests. The ordered disorder of the post-industrial carnival appears to represent what Sharon Boden and Simon J. Williams recognise as a well consummated marriage between reason and emotion (Boden & Williams, 2002: 499). The relationship between reason and emotion in consumption, as elsewhere, is not one of opposition, but one mutually constituted in more or less harmonious ways. It should not be imagined as the domination or liberation of one form or another, rather, as Boden and Williams put it, as: "... a channelling of affect through the calculative deployment of emotion in the service, or under the guidance, of rationality" (Boden & Williams, 2002: 498).

In Singapore, the appropriation of the carnivalesque by consumer culture has resulted in the rationalised, short-term de-control of certain impulses. Rather than a symbolic inversion of the social order, it is more consistent with what Wouters, after Elias, has termed the "controlled decontrolling of emotional controls" (Wouters, 1986: 3). If the pre-industrial carnival which took place at the temporal and spatial margins—liminal spaces where social transgressions can be carried out with impunity—the post-industrial carnival appears in spaces that are like "liminoid symbolic repertoires" (Featherstone, 2007: 77), isolated expressions of liminality somehow embedded in ordinary life. In the post-modern cultural context, the pre-modern carnivalesque mode is divested of its transgressive and licentious features; only excess remains as a mode of existence owing more to the manipulations of the consumer culture than the desire for the temporary inversion of social norms. If carnival was employed throughout social revolts and conflicts during the nineteenth century as a mobile set of symbolic practices, images and discourses (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 15), these days, certain mobile symbolic practices, images and discourses ensure that the carnival appears anywhere and never ends. It requires people to be always available to respond to excitement. As Featherstone outlines it:

Certain themes, infinitely revisable, infinitely combinable, recur within advertising and consumer culture imagery: youth, beauty, energy, fitness, movement, freedom, romance, exotica, luxury, enjoyment, fun. Yet whatever the promise in the imagery, consumer culture demands from its recipients a wide-awake, energetic, calculating, maximising approach to life—it has no place for the settled, the habitual or the humdrum. (Featherstone, 1982: 20)

The symbolic regimes of consumer culture and the carnivalesque are mutually constituted and the everyday can be punctuated by moments of sheer excitement and exhilaration.

## Singapore Arts Festival

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the main event in this carnival world is the Singapore Arts Festival—a month-long spectacle attracting high profile international and local theatrical performance. In May 2009, a large number of events were staged in playhouses and theatres around the city, with a focus on the Esplanade Theatres on the Bay complex. In addition, however, the island's urban landscapes were animated by performances which went beyond the footlights and



into the streets to invade shopping malls, markets, spaces between high rise apartment blocks, parks, plazas, open fields, bus stations, squares, libraries, museums, community centres, public walkways, river banks and in the Singapore underground rail system, at the stations themselves and in the tunnels which link shopping malls with other shopping malls and the stations with shopping malls. Performers moved through all these spaces and through cafes and food plazas engaging and absorbing diners, shoppers, strollers and commuters into the dramatised sites, so that the boundaries between performers and audience became blurred. Posters for the Arts Festival announcing the existence of “Arts Where We Eat” and “Arts on the Move” were perhaps the most succinct statements of the mobile cultural experience and almost ubiquitous presence of the performative during May 2009. The narrative of excitement, expressed as an inexorable all-encompassing invasion of public space, appeared on the Singapore Arts Festival website:

Arts on the Move is set to liven up the streets with an onslaught of dance, music and visual arts performances. Taking to various locations in the heartlands, shopping malls and food centres along Orchard Road, and even in the MRT, the programme features both local and international acts to inspire and engage Singaporeans from all walks of lives (*sic*) ... Arts on the Move closes the gap between the arts and the public with quirky and fun performances. (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, 2009: np)

The arts were associated with consumption and fulfilment in an even more literal sense when performances moved into the food market frequented by workers: “Arts Where We Eat makes a return on weekdays to entertain lunchtime office workers and families, bringing a whole new meaning to the lunchtime experience” (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, 2009: np).

The re-enchantment of something as banal as eating lunch means that the office worker must abandon him or herself to the pleasure and excitement of the carnival that has intruded on reality, only to reemerge from a liminoid temporal and spatial zone one hour later as a rational, outcome-directed office worker. This is, perhaps, akin to Jameson’s schizophrenic postmodern experience as an “experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link into a coherent sequence” (1984: 19). These experiences might be radically discontinuous, but they are also moments of “heightened intensity bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy” (Jameson, 1984: 120). It may be that in post-modern consumer culture “everyone can be anyone” (Ewen & Ewen, 2000: 187), but only in the liminoid temporalities between working hours. When Daniel Bell outlined the contradictions of capitalism, he pointed out that subjects were now required to be “‘straight’ by day and a ‘swinger’ by night” (Bell, 1996: 72). In a postmodern economy, where life has been theatricalised and profoundly aestheticised, these alternative subject positions co-exist in an environment where the boundaries are less than rigid.

For the Arts Festival in May 2009, an island-wide sensorium was created, resulting in a distinct excess of affect, and what could be experienced as a “fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents” (Jameson, 1984)—moments of heightened enchantment in a seemingly incoherent sequence. The various discontinued ‘presents’ were difficult to avoid when the website advertising the 2009 festival made it clear that the Outreach program would invade the whole island and excitement would pursue citizens into even the most suburban locations:

Spectacular! Spectacular!—Coming to a location near you. True to its objectives of bringing the arts to a wider audience, this year’s Festival outreach programme will see the arts permeate the heartlands such as Toa Payoh, Ang Mo Kio, Bedok, Yishun and Tampines, as well as various iconic spots about the city. (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, 2009: np)

In a discursive move reminiscent of Althusser’s subject created through the ideological apparatuses of the state (Althusser, 1971), people were interpellated as fun loving consumers. The narrative address of the Singapore Arts Festival was the voice of the state circumscribing and predetermining affective responses when it exhorted people to, “Get ready to be enthralled, engaged and enriched by heartwarming stories, dazzling feats and stunning performances from 26 core productions and

more than 400 outreach activities staged around Singapore” (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, 2009: np). Citizens and visitors could be expected to be surprised and delighted by “entertainment where you least expect it” through the 420 diverse performances with an audience estimated to be around 800,000.

Since its inception in 1997, the Singapore Arts Festival has gone through several phases: firstly, as a platform for showcasing local arts and performance culture; then, secondly as an international arts festival, attracting the best performances from around the world. Since 2010, however, it has expanded both temporally as well as spatially, extending into a year-long “participation program” to ensure the captivation and fascination continues. If the traditional carnival was marginalized temporally and spatially (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 181), the postmodern version subsumes and colonises other social forms to emerge anywhere in calculated moments and manufactured spaces of liminality.

The 2011 Arts Festival provided a calculated moment and a manufactured space of liminality when a Festival Village was built in the space between the Esplanade Theatres on the Bay complex and Marina Bay at the mouth of the Singapore River. Karaoke performances turned spectator into performer, and interpellated them as both producing and consuming subjects:

Bring memories to life and create new ones at the Festival Village @ Esplanade Park ... There's also a whole Festival's worth of action at the Village, with different things to see and do every day. We're hosting staged performances, engaging exhibitions and striking installations. And when all that inspires you, you can even create art yourself. There are hands-on workshops, master classes and exclusive Artists salon sessions ... Make sure you stop by the Festival information booth. This one-stop-shop is your ideal place to find out about the Festival, buy tickets to your favourite shows and get your hands on official, limited-edition Festival merchandise. (Singapore Arts Festival, 2011)

The whole area became an enchanted space of liminality where one could experience moments of heightened intensity of affect and create the performing, artistic and consuming self.

## Conclusion

The theatricalisation of everyday life in Singapore has meant that moments of carnivalesque excess are not marginalised and isolated from everyday life, but appear as a repertoire of images that transform reality and captivate and fascinate citizens. The aesthetic practices that have the power to do this belong to a postmodern dimension where the generation of affect and the marshalling of excitement are integral to the political economy of the age. Chua sums up the dynamic of the post-independence economy: “Such is the inherent logic of capitalism: high savings and asceticism are necessary in the period of economic ‘take-off’, while hedonism is the necessary ethos of a mature economy” (Chua, 2003: 37). In encapsulating it in this way, Chua is also highlighting shifts in the “structure of feeling” that are expressed in the changes in style, dress, architecture and language that Williams describes (1977: 131).

The sense of a generation or a period can reside in historically specific modes of social experience, and a lived social and material *presence* (Williams, 1977: 131) can be discerned through examination of the cultural and economic development of a society. In 1966, collective affect was generated by the rhetoric of crisis, and Lee Kuan Yew grabbed the emotional attention of citizens of the new nation by declaring: “... if we develop a ‘soft society’, then we cannot survive ... What is required is a rugged, resolute, highly trained highly-disciplined community ... ” (Lee Kuan Yew, 1966). If a supremely rationalised, and super-pragmatic form of Confucian rationality was once necessary to drive Singapore’s industrial success, in the twenty-first century, hedonistic indulgence is required to keep the economy going. Controlled hedonism—the offspring of the marriage of reason with emotion—has necessitated the production of Renaissance Singaporeans who will respond to new forms of collective affect. While the rhetoric of crisis still comes in handy, the rhetoric of excitement and fun has challenged its pre-eminence. Educating the New Singaporean into

“controlled de-control of the emotions and the sensibilities and tastes that support a greater appreciation of the aestheticization of everyday life” (Featherstone, 2007: 80) has partly been accomplished by the intense spaces of affect created by performances in the public domain. Given the vast number of performances of all sorts that invade the Singapore streetscape, it might be argued that performance has become a fetish. I do not think it is going too far to say that if “life is not complete without shopping” (Chua, 2003) in Singapore these days, it is also not complete without performance.

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