

# Singapore

Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis

# Songlines

... or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa

1995

Rem Koolhaas





*Fung Suay*: old Chinese belief that client will continue to prosper  
if he remains on original site...

We want to guide the bulldozers to the right places.  
— Singapore Green Plan

Singapore is a very small place in a very, very large, variable,  
changing world, and if it is not nimble, if it is not swift in making adjustments,  
it will perish and the people know that.  
— Lee Kuan Yew, *Straits Times*, May 27, 1990

I turned eight in the harbor of Singapore. We did not go ashore, but I remember the  
smell—sweetness and rot, both overwhelming.  
Last year I went again. The smell was gone. In fact, Singapore was gone, scraped,  
rebuilt. There was a completely new town there.

Almost all of Singapore is less than 30 years old; the city represents the ideological  
production of the past three decades in its pure form, uncontaminated by surviving  
contextual remnants. It is managed by a regime that has excluded accident and random-  
ness: even its nature is entirely remade. It is pure intention: if there is chaos, it is  
*authored* chaos; if it is ugly, it is *designed* ugliness; if it is absurd, it is *willed* absurdity.  
Singapore represents a unique *ecology of the contemporary*.

16e. Tel.: 42.24.69.13. Devant l'Église de Passy. De 11h à 18h, brunch solide de 50 à 120F. Prevez également la marquise au chocolat. Gentillesse un peu naïve de l'accueil et confort des fauteuils Roset pour oublier Passy le dimanche.

#### PARLEZ

Parlez en anglais, for Christ's sake. Je ne parle pas français.

#### PARODIES

And the singers, they wear rhinestones—and rhinestones, you see, are already parodies of diamonds, so you can't parody rhinestones.

#### PARTICIPATION

A brilliant boyhood, a brilliant start in life: the road lay clear ahead, the future seemed within his grasp. Then suddenly came four years of war, in which Gropius played his part. As an officer he invented a special signalling system.

#### PARTY

The back pages of local newspapers are filled with phone numbers to call to alleviate loneliness. Sometimes the loneliness is generic; more often it is for a voice that will fill a jarringly specific hunger. They are known, optimistically, as party lines. For as little as a dime a minute, you are hurled anonymously into a chattering mob of others who share your obsession—or, perchance, a staticky electronic void in which one other voice is calling, faintly, "Hello."

#### PASS

Pass by a tree  
or let some object pass by a tree  
but each time differently.

#### PASTED

The world is steeped in good taste and ignorance pasted together.

#### PATCHWORK

There is considerable support for the view that brains are not logical machines, but highly cooperative, nonhomogeneous and distributed networks. The entire system resembles a *patchwork* of subnetworks assembled by a complicated history of tinkering, rather than an optimized system resulting from some clean unified design.

#### PATIENCE

Patience, patience,  
Patience in the blue sky.

#### PCM

(Paranoid-Critical Method) "The spontaneous method of irrational



1 a steadily growing island 2 the brainchild of one man: Lee Kuan Yew

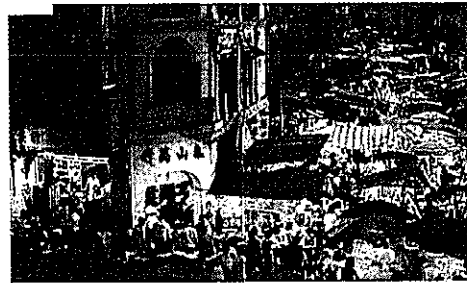
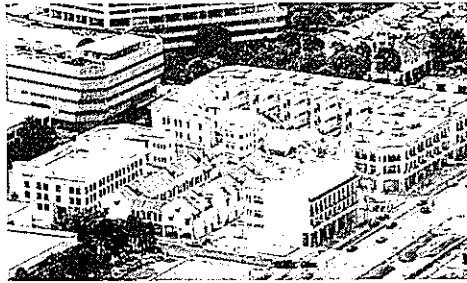
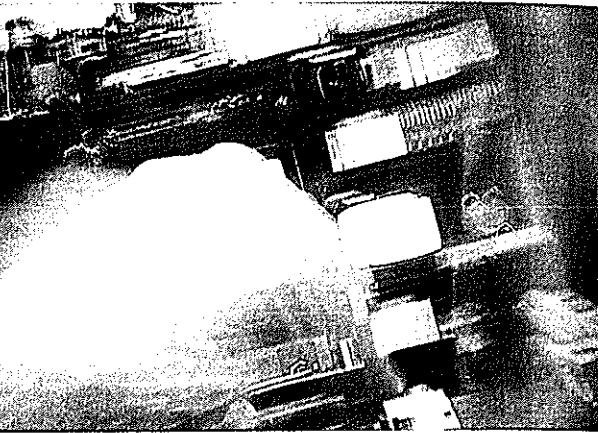
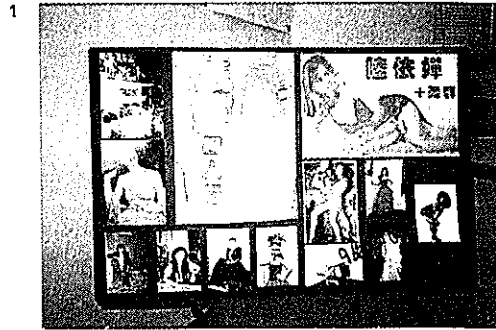
Like similar conditions of newness, it has been received with derision. As the notion of the West becomes increasingly enfeebled, "we" will always remain in possession of our ultimate weapon, the power of irony. A disproportionate amount of it is aimed at this territorially negligible mini-Sparta: William Gibson calls it "Disneyland with the Death Penalty";<sup>1</sup> Deyan Sudjic, "Virtual City."<sup>2</sup>

Our refusal to read Singapore on its own terms is frivolous; our most sophisticated reflections on the contemporary condition of city are completely disconnected from the operational; our incapacity to "make" the city, internalized to the point where any evidence of its fabrication is by definition suspect and unbelievable. Singapore is a paroxysm of the operational, *therefore* inaccessible to our imagination and interpretation.

Singapore is incredibly "Western" for an Asian city, the apparent victim of an out-of-control process of modernization. The temptation is to leave it one of those conundrums doomed, in a last polite little spasm of colonialism, to remain so, simply because they are *Asian*, or Chinese.

This perception is a Eurocentric misreading. The "Western" is no longer our exclusive domain. Except perhaps in the regions of its origins, it now represents a condition of universal aspiration. It is no longer something that "we" have unleashed, no longer something whose consequences we therefore have the right to deplore; it is a self-administered process that we do not have the right to deny—in the name of various sentimentalities—to those "others" who have long since made it their own. At most, we are like dead parents deploring the mess our children have made of their inheritance.

Singapore is a steadily growing island, 1°17' north of the equator, on the most important passage between the Indian and Pacific oceans. It is 650 km<sup>2</sup>; its coastline is 140 kilometers—20 kilometers less than the length of the Berlin Wall. It has a "unique Multi-Ethnic Character":<sup>3</sup> 75% Chinese, 15% Malay, and 9% Indian. It is the brainchild of one man: Lee Kuan Yew. As an island—its territory is known—it is endowed with indispensable elements for the construction of a mythology: it is small, it is threatened, it has to be protected, it is finite—an enclave—it is unique.



1 *female female impersonators* 2 brand-new intersection 3 traditional street life resurrected 4 in the control room: zoom in on each table, watch every stall... 5 stalls connected by dishwasher 6, 7 systematic variety

Singapore can be weird. Five years ago it became clear that the upward curve of tourism was about to intersect the downward graph of historical presence—in the rush for development, history had been almost completely erased. On the exact site that had been known in the now-laundered past for its extensive and varied sexual options—the splendor of its transvestites—the state sponsored Bugis, a brand-new intersection of two “traditional” streets, framed by entirely new Chinese shophouses. One of the streets was declared “market”; the other accommodates a systematic variety of restaurants. On the upper level are clubs, one—the Boom Boom Club—discreetly anticipating the possible resurrection of the transvestite in the form of *female female* impersonators.

The block is hypermodern. The seemingly individual food stalls are connected by a single huge dishwasher-conveyor; on our first visit we are invited to the control room, a wall of monitors connected to hidden cameras that allows supervisors to zoom in on each table, watch each transaction at every stall.

It is shown with pride, not shame.

*They* think there will be no crime.

*We* think there can be no pleasure.

Singapore is clearly not free, but at the same time it is difficult to identify *what* precisely is unfree, how and where the exact repression occurs, to what extent its magnetic field—the unusual cohesion of its inhabitants—is imposed or, more ambiguously, the result of a “deal,” a perceived common interest: liberties suspended in return for the unlimited benefits of a roller-coaster of development that, in 30 years, has only gone up.

Singapore stands out as a highly efficient alternative in a landscape of near universal pessimism about a makable future, a pertinent can-do world of clearly defined ambitions, long-term strategies, a ruthless determination to avoid the debris and chaos that democracy leaves in its wake elsewhere.



1



2

The next round of East-West tension will be fought over this question: whether democracy promotes or erodes social stability; whether free speech is worth the cultural trash it also produces; whether the health of a collective matters more than the unfettered freedom of the individual. To the West this authoritarianism seems a temporary aberration, a deviation from the norm; but it is more likely that a new norm is being synthesized in Singapore: a hard-core Confucian shamelessness, a kind of ultimate power of efficiency that will fuel Asian modernization. "The American view that out of contention, out of the clash of ideas and ideals, you get good government and a healthy economy... that view is not shared in Asia."<sup>4</sup> Singapore has developed its own way. "The tenacious vitality of Confucianism lies in its combination of the dross of feudalism and the cream of democracy."<sup>5</sup>

Singapore seems a melting pot that produces blandness and sterility from the most promising ingredients. I have tried to decipher its reverse alchemy, understand its genealogy, do an architectural *genome project*, re-create its architectural songlines.

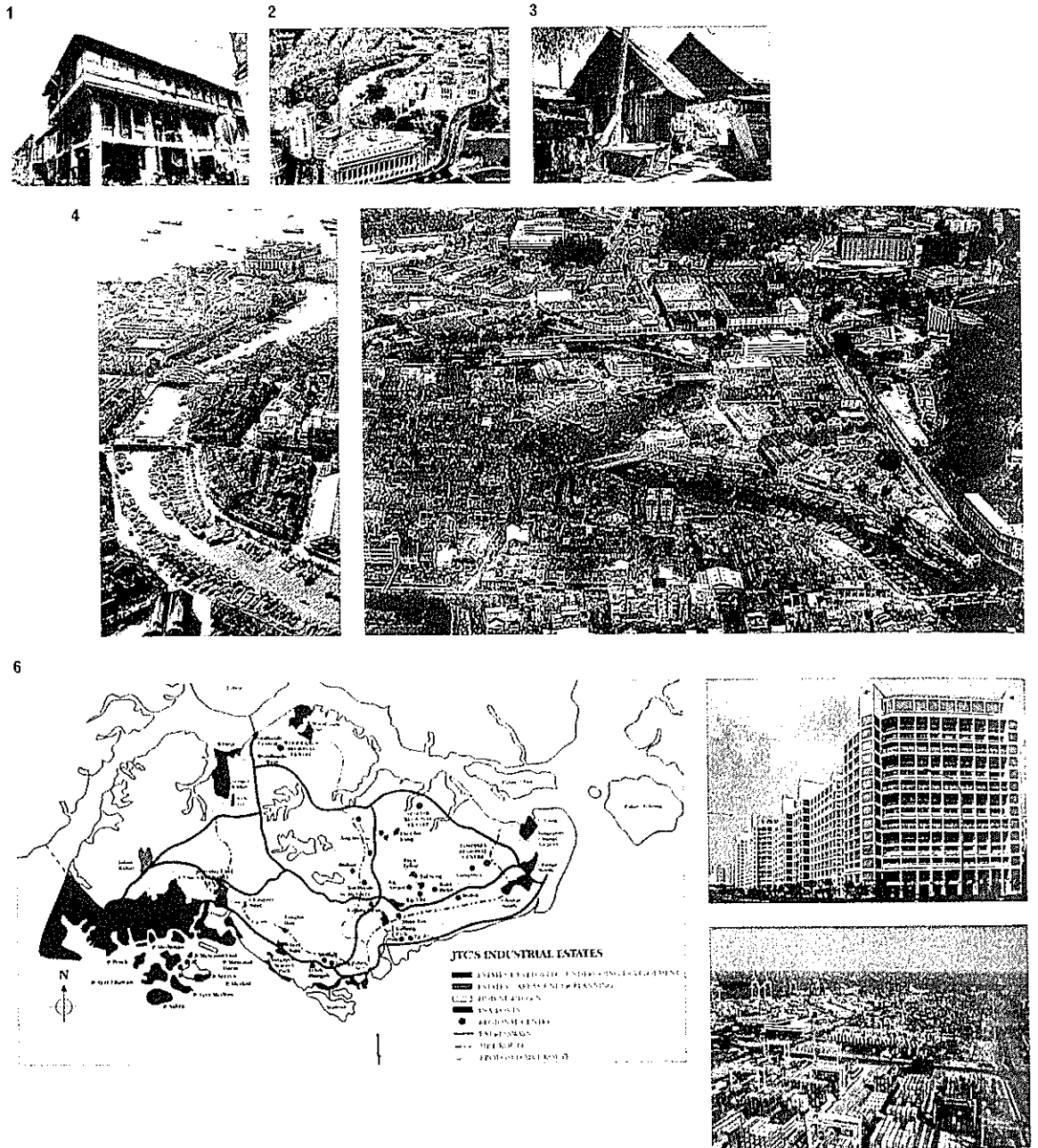
An analysis of Singapore is also, inevitably, a close-up of the mid-sixties, revealing once unassailable demographic urgencies—the brutal evidence of numbers that, on all continents, presented an overwhelming need to construct unprecedented quantities of new urban substance and offered compelling arguments for the discipline of urbanism and the notion of urban renewal that have completely unraveled in the past 30 years (or were successfully repressed).

It seems as if, in the world, only Singapore heeded these alarms *and* dealt with them, developed a solution. Singapore is an apotheosis of urban renewal, a built answer to the shift from country to city which was thought, 30 years ago, to force Asia to construct in 20 years the same amount of urban substance as the whole of Western Europe.

In unearthing its brand new archaeology, the most disconcerting question is: Where are these urgencies buried?

1 a hard-core Confucian shamelessness

2 the unusual cohesion of its inhabitants—imposed or the result of a "deal"?



After 140 years of British rule 1 overcrowded Chinatown 2 stylish colonial clumps 3 neglected hinterland 4 port 5 mess 6 the island "denatured": first industrial estates 7 multilevel factories 8 new harbor facilities

### Intermezzo

In 1959 Singapore—a British colony—becomes self-governing. The first full elections sweep Lee Kuan Yew to power with his People's Action Party (PAP—subliminally close to PAPA, DAD?). Nixon describes Lee as an Asian Churchill: "talking left and walking right";<sup>6</sup> at 35 he already has a number of tactical identities behind him, all later consolidated under the ideological umbrella of neo-Confucianism.

The island he and his party inherit after 140 years of British rule is a mess: clumps of stylish colonial enclave (it had been settled in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles), shabby military bases, a port, embedded in a huge, overcrowded Chinatown with a neglected hinterland of marsh, jungle, incidental farming, largely covered by squatter encampments.

"During the fifties all visitors were struck by the extreme precariousness of living conditions, the misery of the vast majority... What is more, conditions were constantly worsening: a galloping demography, pervasive tuberculosis, escalating joblessness, overcrowding in inhabitable housing, all this against a background of economic stagnation..."<sup>7</sup>

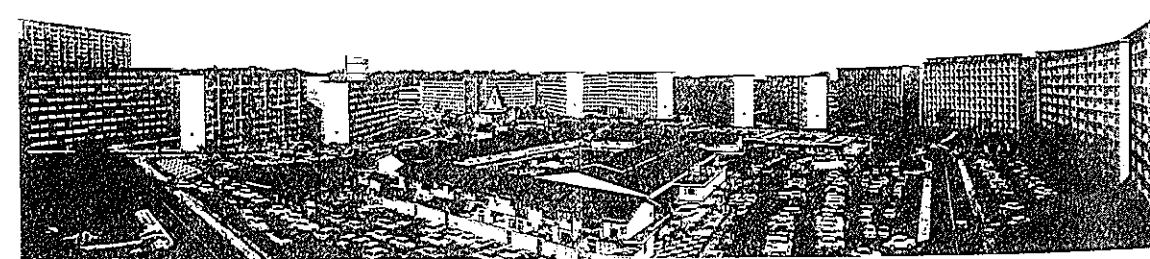
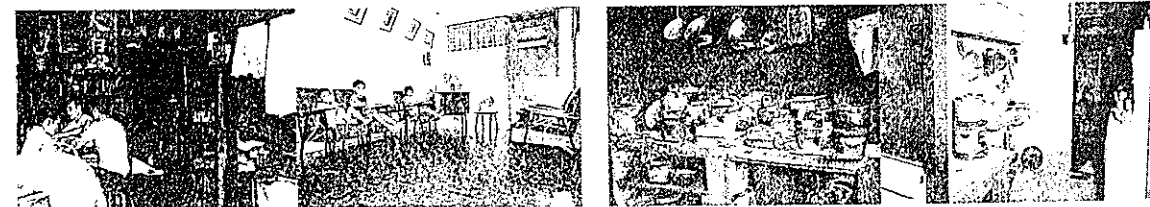
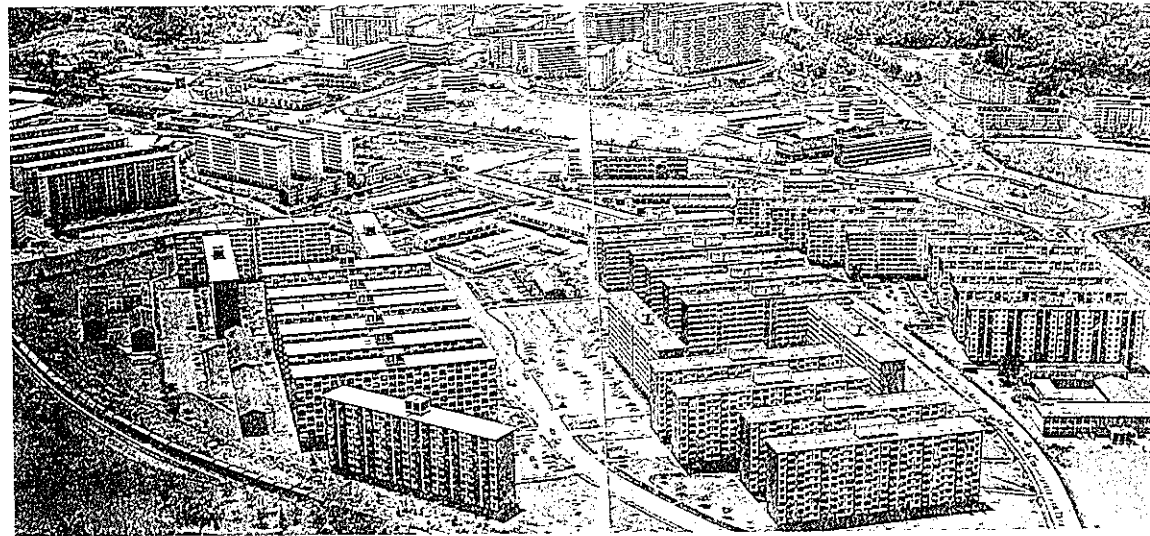
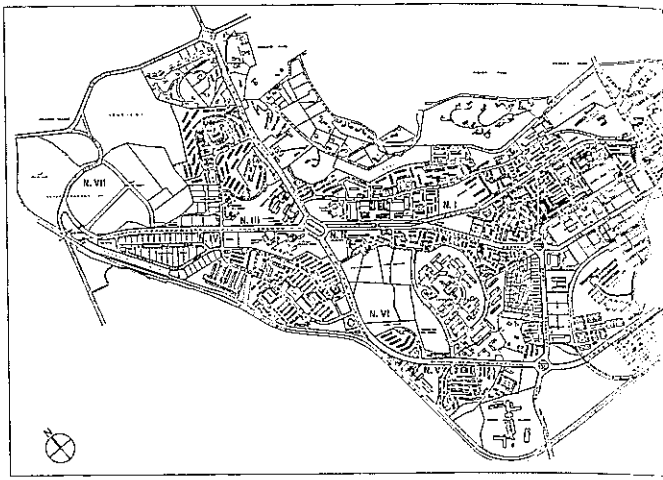
The very direness of the situation—its unpromising ingredients—provides the underpinnings for the program of the incipient city-state in the form of an undeniable crisis. "The general features of the PAP's ideological system unfold from a central concern... the survival as an independent island nation. Survival has been the structuring and rationalizing centre for the policies by which Singapore [has been] governed since it gained the right to self-government in 1959... The result was, and continues to be, an ideology that embodies a vigorous *developmentalist* orientation that emphasizes science, technology, and centralized public administration as the fundamental basis for an export-oriented industrialization programme, financed largely by multinational capital."<sup>8</sup>

For Lee, advised by Western thinkers/futurologists of the caliber of Herman (*The Next Two Hundred Years*) Kahn and Alvin (*Future Shock*) Toffler, the post-colonial period is in *every* sense a new beginning, a stunning overdose of newness. With unparalleled zeal, Lee's regime embarks on a campaign of modernization.

Immediately, a considerable section of the island is "denatured" to become a platform for industry; at Jurong, in the southwest, preparations are made for a huge industrial city of "flatted" (multilevel) factories connected to vast new harbor facilities.<sup>9</sup>



- 1 plan of Queenstown
- 2 colossal accumulations of slabs
- 3 before and after: living rooms
- 4 before and after: kitchens
- 5 "Town Centre" surrounded by slabs



In 1960 the Housing and Development Board (HDB) is created. It will be the major vehicle for Singapore's future overhaul. Within months, construction of Queenstown (160,000 inhabitants) is begun on "virgin" land (liberated from squatters) outside the center: colossal accumulations of slabs seemingly without architectural qualities, their only concession to tropicality continuous balconies, stand in militaristic formation (with an occasional incomprehensible exception, conspicuous like a fainted soldier). They impassively surround communal areas that frantically attempt to discharge the neglected semantic duties of *interest* and *life*: shopping centers, playgrounds, places of worship.

Queenstown "reflects the policy of... the so-called 'Total Environment' ... A shopping centre... for each Neighbourhood... Town Centre with cinemas, emporium, restaurants, night-club, Japanese Garden... A sports complex is under construction in neighbourhood VI... Focal areas and open spaces around the housing blocks have been landscaped... The high-rise blocks... located near primary and secondary schools... Frequent and efficient bus service criss-crosses the neighbourhood... A vigorous social atmosphere is already evident... Queenstown can be said to have been 'lived in.'"<sup>10</sup>

Years later—in 1985—the HDB admits: "In the first stage of public housing development, urgency to find a solution to the problem of housing shortage in Singapore did not allow time for research. Pragmatism prevailed..."<sup>11</sup>

To the extent that pragmatism has a look it is utilitarian, Anglo-Saxon: the slabs are purely quantitative emblems—modernity stripped of ideology, like the notorious English council estates. If the transition from the English slum to the estate was traumatic, the leap from the Chinese shophouse—typology that packs store, factory, family living quarters together in a single block around a courtyard—to Singapore's high-rise containers is even more merciless, not only in terms of material difference—from the Asian to the Western—but because the new inhabitants, cut off from connective networks of family relationships, tradition, habits, are abruptly forced into another civilization: the slab as time machine.

A second New Town, Toa Payoh, is launched for 1966. "Built on virtually virgin land, the whole town was conceived in its entirety: the Road System, Neighbourhood Precincts, the Shopping, Town Centre, and Sports Complexes, and a Town Park."<sup>12</sup>

knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectifications of delirious associations and interpretations."

#### PC/VME

The PC expansion card is not only standard to most DSPs; VME boards have also proved to be a popular choice with several manufacturers. Of course, they represent a greater investment than PC cards. But flexibility of the VME standards does have its advantages especially if previously designed systems were based on it.

#### PERCEPTION

Now since we perceive that we are seeing or hearing, it must either be by sight that something perceives that it is seeing or by some other sense. But given the consequent identity of the sense that perceives sight and that which perceives the colour that is the object of sight, there will either be two senses with the same object or the one sense will perceive its self. Further, if the sense that perceives sight were some other sense than sight, [the] only alternative to an infinite regress will be that there be some sense that perceives its self.

#### PERFECT

I get so sentimental when I see  
How perfect perfection can be.

#### PERISHABLE

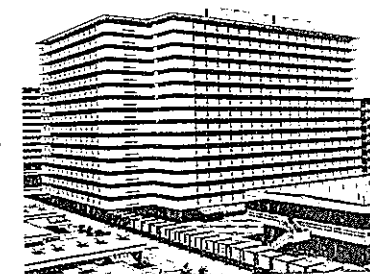
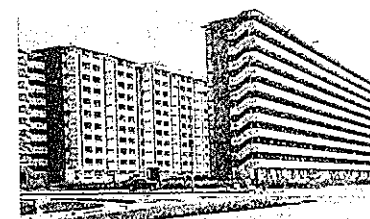
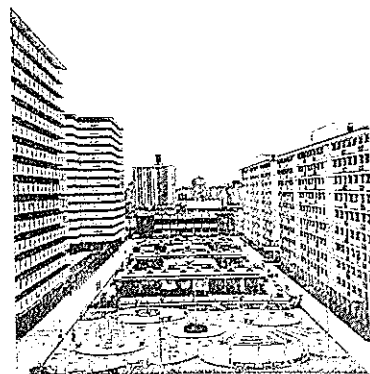
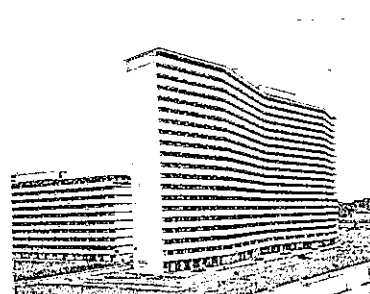
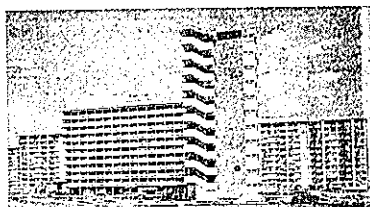
It was current consumer preference which determined product design and not any Platonic categories; it was a full-blown, emphatic style banking on the assets of competitive sex and as quickly perishable as the obsolescing product it wrapped.

#### PERMANENT

The rites of passage are no longer intermittent—they have become permanent.

#### PHILOSOPHERS

A couple of hundred years from now, maybe Isaac Asimov and Fred Pohl will be considered the important philosophers of the twentieth century, and the professional philosophers will almost all be forgotten... Whenever Pohl or Asimov writes something, I regard it as extremely urgent to read it right away. They might have a new idea. Asimov has been working for forty years on this problem: if you can make an intelligent machine, what kind of relations will it have with people? How do you



Scenes from Toa Payoh

In the mid-sixties, such confidence is common. What is unusual in Singapore is the scale of the operation—this time a city for 180,000 people—undertaken by a fragile, emerging state. But again, it is not perfect. "From the Land Use Plan of Toa Payoh New Town, one can easily detect that the HDB was still struggling in its experimentation... evidenced in the uneven distribution of facilities..."<sup>13</sup> So it continues, a neck-and-neck race between convulsive production and a dawning bureaucratic awareness that there is "room for improvement."



negotiate when their thinking is so different? The science fiction writers think about what it means to think.

#### PHOBIAS

In order to be really convinced of something you need a profound dislike for almost everything else. So it's crucial in certain projects to explore your phobias in order to reinforce your convictions.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Perhaps the true, total photography, he thought, is a pile of fragments of private images, against the creased background of massacres and coronations.

#### PICTURES

At this moment Jacqueline comes in. Josette races toward her and says to her: "You know, Jacqueline, pictures aren't pictures. Pictures are pictures."

#### PLACE<sup>1</sup>

The Stiles and Morse dormitories at Yale reproduce an Italian hill town which is not gross enough to qualify as High Camp nor integrated enough to qualify as Non Camp. And this failure must be connected with Saarinen's obsessive interest in his historical "place," as if history were some sort of encyclopedia, or Hall of Fame, or shelf to sit on next to other powders, cosmetics and ingredients and had nothing to do with intrinsic worth.

#### PLACE<sup>2</sup>

This mess is a place.

#### PLAN<sup>1</sup>

The Plan is the generator.

#### PLAN<sup>2</sup>

The plan is of primary importance, because on the floor are performed all the activities of the human occupants.

#### PLAN<sup>3</sup>

To invent a Plan. The Plan justifies you to such a degree that you can no longer be held accountable, not even for the Plan itself. Just throw the stone and hide your hand. If there really were a Plan, there would be no failure.

#### PLANES

He approved of planes. When the weather was calm, you couldn't even tell you were moving. You could pretend you were sitting safe at home. The view from the window was always the same—air and more air—and the interior of the plane

Restricted

November 1963

#### GROWTH AND URBAN RENEWAL IN SINGAPORE

Report  
prepared for the Government of Singapore  
by  
Charles Abrams  
Susumu Kobe  
Otto Koenigsberger

Appointed under the  
United Nations Programme of Technical Assistance  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Restricted: UN Report, November 1963

Fun, Fun, Fun, Families are Fun, Fun, Fun

#### UN Mission

In this herculean but conceptually inarticulate climate falls the 1963 visit of a mission from the United Nations.

Three experts—the American Charles Abrams, the Japanese Susumu Kobe, and the then-stateless but formerly German Otto Koenigsberger—prepare a report to the government of Singapore and title it, manifesto-like, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore." The subject of the mission is "the general development of the island... with the specific objective of recommending the right strategy for Urban Renewal..."

The report was, and still is, "restricted."

When the mission comes to Singapore, *urban renewal* is a relatively recent coinage. "Urban Renewal is a generic term which received its name and impetus from the United States in 1949..."<sup>14</sup> This combination of two apparently straightforward words, *urban* and *renewal*—music to the ears of architects and urbanists—contains a latent margin of interpretation. Is it renewal *of the old* or *through the new*? Does it perform undeniably "good" roles—stamping out poverty, disease, overcrowding—or is it a ruthless form of destabilization?

As the three experts explain: "It is now generally accepted that the three indispensable elements of urban renewal are (1) conservation (2) rehabilitation and (3) rebuilding." They then articulate Singapore's dilemma—clearly it already *was* a dilemma in 1964: "In view of these objectives, the question that an urban renewal programme must face and resolve is whether to make a commitment to the retention of some of its areas or to raze them and create something different in their place. *We recommend that a commitment be made to identify the values of some of Singapore's existing areas as well as their shortcomings and build and strengthen these values while planning to remove some of their shortcomings.*"<sup>15</sup> Is this pondering of preservation lip service or do the experts know that they will seal the island's fate with the transformations they are about to set in motion?

First, they identify Singapore as "the first Asian city to embark on a programme of Urban Renewal." In case the radicalness of this ambition is missed, they clarify: "This programme is not intended to be an exercise in conservation or restoration but a bold

was practically interchangeable with the interior of any other.

#### PLANETARY

We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot.

#### PLANIKTON

Holland is traditionally known as a country that contains various cities, some more important—like Rotterdam, the Hague, and Amsterdam—and some less known like Utrecht and Arnhem. There is an intriguing phenomenon that of the 6 million people living in this region, only 2 million inhabit the historical cores. In that case, there are 4 million lost Dutchmen who live in the characterless plankton between the major cities.

#### PLANNING

I find it interesting to understand the city no longer as a tissue, but more as a "mere" coexistence, a series of relationships between objects that are almost never articulated in visual or formal ways, no longer "caught"

attempt to modernize and develop the city centre in preparation for the role Singapore will have to play..." (At this point, 1.6 million people live on the island, 900,000 in Singapore city.)

To increase the stakes, the UN experts first establish the urgency of the demographics: "We must prepare for at least 3.4 million inhabitants by 1982 and expect to pass the 4 million mark well before 1990..."<sup>16</sup> That implies the construction of astronomical numbers of new housing units per year.

Unfazed, they continue: "Because Singapore is a fast-growing city, it will need more *new* housing than *re*-housing, more *new* development than *redevelopment*. However much we may wish to concentrate on urban renewal"—clearly implying the renewal of the existing city fabric—"we shall have to build five new housing units for every old one we demolish."

To facilitate this coming upheaval, the UN mission attacks the existing master plan, last revised by the British in 1955, for its lack of vision: "It is a plan for a medium-sized town with rural hinterland, not a plan for a metropolis."

Like any master plan, the planners write, it assumes "a society that is fundamentally conservative in outlook and practically unanimous in considering *the preservation of the achievements and institutions of the past as a main objective of all planning*... The mission

has been told that Singapore needs 'a more flexible plan... a more positive approach.'"<sup>17</sup>

What the transformation of the island needs is a manifesto. Instead of the master plan, with its rigid procedures and emphasis on controlling the built, the UN experts propose to "guide, accelerate, and coordinate public development" under the umbrella of a more fuzzy *guiding concept*, which will be decomposed in *action programs*<sup>18</sup> "comprehensive insofar as they should deal with *all* aspects of urban life: employment, shelter, communications, traffic, education, welfare, capital formation, stimulation of savings, community development, and public relations," finally translated in "a mosaic of *action maps* which will eventually cover the whole island..."

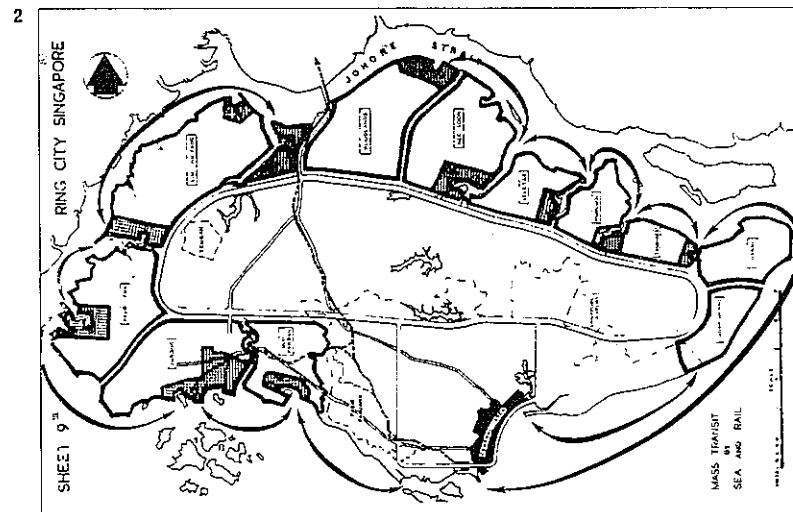
Once the tripartite planning vehicle is defined—guiding concept, action program, action map—they look for targets: "The central business district is flanked by mixed commercial and residential zones"—the Chinese shophouses that form the vast majority of the city's substance—"of spectacularly high density. Overcrowding of buildings and streets reaches proportions known in few other cities of the world... An earlier report by a UN expert found that substantial sections were ripe for demolition and rebuilding."

Probably aware that they are about to unleash a bureaucracy of almost communist omnipotence, the experts see it tempered and complemented by private enterprise: "Performance standards or social principles are needed to ensure a healthy and pleasant urban environment for all Singaporeans... without stifling the initiative of the developer or the inventiveness of the designer..."

They extend the reach of the guiding concept over the whole island: "The first principle should be the acceptance of Singapore island and Singapore city as one unit. We must look at the island as an *urban complex* which includes essential open spaces rather than as a province or county containing 2 different elements, a town and its rural hinterland."<sup>19</sup>

Then, daringly, they project—*ex nihilo*—the Dutch model, "the Ring City idea," on the newly prepared planning canvas: "A chain or necklace of settlements around a central open area has been called a 'ring city.' The idea comes from Holland where a group of major towns including Amsterdam, Haarlem, Utrecht, Delft, The Hague, Leiden, Dordrecht, and Rotterdam forms a large circle around a central stretch of open country. This constellation is the result of historic forces rather than of deliberate planning. Yet it





1 Ring City, Holland: Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Delft, The Hague, Leiden, Haarlem (clockwise from north) encircle so-called Green Heart — the void as center  
2 projection of Ring City model on Singapore island (UN Report)

has been found to have distinct advantages over other forms of conurbation. Each town of the ring has remained a compact and complete entity and preserved its character and individuality. At the same time, the inhabitants of each individual town can take advantage of the facilities offered by all the others, because they can reach them quickly on roads crossing open country and not densely built-up urban areas. They thus enjoy the social advantages of life in a small or medium-size community (a strong asset in the education of young people) together with the commercial advantages of a large conurbation. It is significant that the eight Dutch towns which together form the 'ring city' can manage with one international air field situated in the central open space and therefore easily accessible to all of them."<sup>20</sup>

The language of bureaucrats is often boring; the report is no exception. What gives it power is our *retrospective knowledge of its effects*. It unleashes, legitimizes, exacerbates, amplifies, encourages, extrapolates the ambitions that the regime has so far not revealed so explicitly.

The UN experts are the *souffleurs* of a revolution in urban renewal; their report whispers additional radicalities, suggests easy steps toward megalomania. (Twenty years later their diagram is realized: around a shrunken central preserve, the entire island turned into New Town.)



### Tabula Rasa

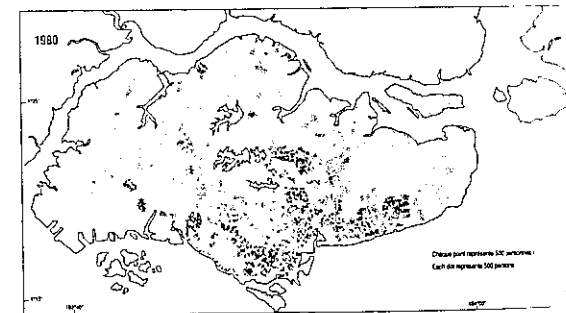
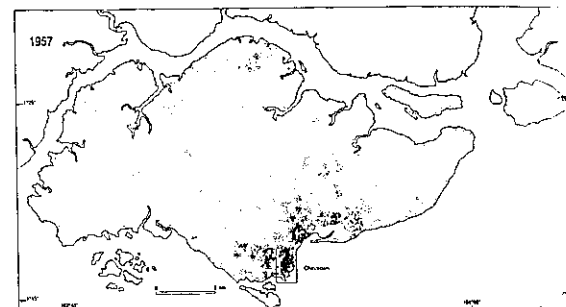
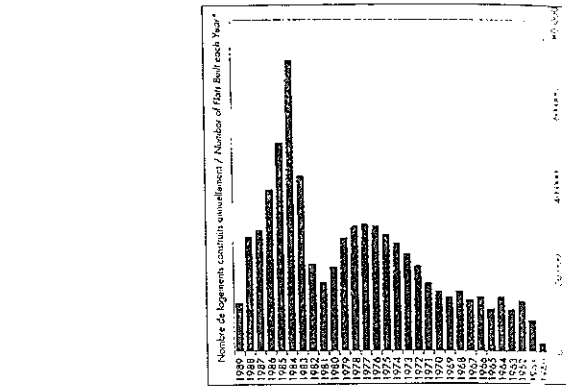
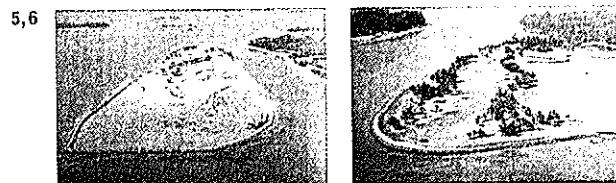
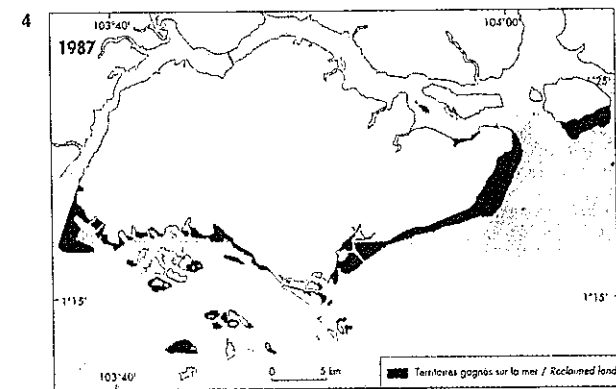
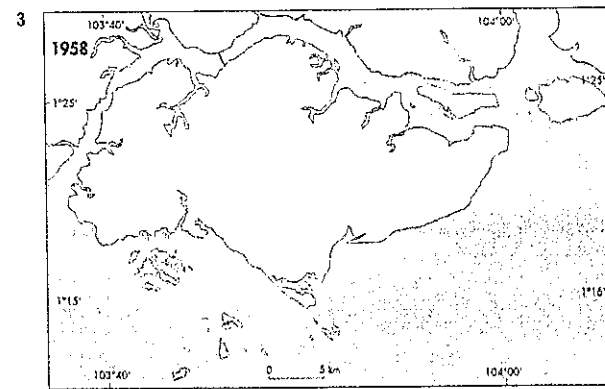
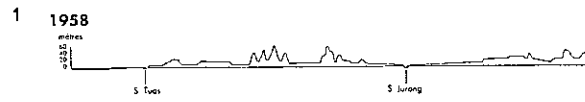
With the sanction of the UN report, the Singapore bureaucracy is now unleashed on a Promethean enterprise, limited only by the size of the island. It is conceived as the apotheosis of the tabula rasa: the razed plane as the basis for a genuinely new beginning.

Still firmly marooned in underdevelopment, Singapore's only resources are physical—its land, its population, its geographical position. Analogous to the way poverty can lead to prostitution, Singapore's transformation is conceived again and again in terms of work *on the body of the island itself*. Its territory—its ground—is its most malleable material; the housing program and the UN vision turn it into an infrastructural manifesto, a palimpsest of Singapore's political evolution. Like the Dutch, who also fabricated their country, Singapore is about selling and manipulation—an ideology, a population, an island. This process starts innocently with New Towns, accelerates with the UN report, and radicalizes with independence in 1965, the official beginning of the Republic of Singapore.

Some of the most drastic erasures and transformations are invisible. An amendment to the Land Acquisition Act of the British “empowered the government to acquire any land it deemed necessary in the interest of national development, including acquisition on behalf of private developers... The rate of compensation was to be determined by the state itself... The act clearly violates the common laws that govern property rights...”

But in the language of the HDB: “The majority of the acquired private lands comprised dilapidated properties or neglected land where squatters had mushroomed... The government saw no reason why these owners should enjoy the greatly enhanced land values... without any effort put in by them...”<sup>21</sup> In fact, such radical expropriation makes any ownership provisional: any terrain can be claimed by the state for any reason. (Certain sites have been requisitioned two or even three times over the past 30 years.) “During a period of just over 20 years, from 1965 to 1988, well over 1,200 sites were selected for expropriation and nearly 270,000 families were displaced, i.e., about a third of the country's population.”

Further evidence of remorseless change is the creation of additional *Lebensraum*. “In 1959, the total size of the country stood at 581 km<sup>2</sup>. Still unchanged in 1965, it has



1 1958: section through Singapore island 2 1987: section through Singapore island 3 1958: Singapore island  
4 1987: Singapore island, enlarged 5 "The expansion... 6 will continue..." 7 number of flats built each year  
8 1957: distribution of population 9 1980: distribution of population

since increased steadily, reaching 626 km<sup>2</sup> by 1988. In 1991 it is probably 640 km<sup>2</sup> over. According to declarations made by the Minister of National Development, the expansion will continue, Singapore reaching 730 km<sup>2</sup> by the year 2000...<sup>22</sup> (a growth of 25% in 35 years, equivalent to adding the combined territory of Texas, Georgia, and California to the US).

This enlargement is achieved through landfills that radically alter the geography of the island: as the coastline expands, hills disappear;<sup>23</sup> Singapore becomes larger but flatter, more abstract. (Later, whole islands are bought from Indonesia, swallowed, and transplanted, to reappear on the map as part of Singapore.)

The redistribution of inhabitants, which turns the entire island into a modernistic, dismantled Chinatown, proceeds according to plan too. "In 1959 less than 9% of the population was sheltered in public housing, by 1974 nearly 43% of the population lived in HDB flats, and by 1989 the proportion was 87%; i.e., 2.3 million persons. Twenty New Towns encircling the original urban core cover 16,000 hectares, or a quarter of the national territory."<sup>24</sup>

Farming is displaced, replaced by housing. Pushed into the sea, farmers become fish farmers.

Low-cost housing in the New Towns and urban renewal in the old city—or what remains of it—are "communicating vases." The enormous volume of new construction creates room for the destruction of the old. According to the urban renewal program launched by the government in 1965, the entire island will be covered with New Towns, the city renewed beyond recognition.

In Singapore, this moment—1965—represents a showdown between *doing* and *thinking*, won hands down by doing. The civil servants—the bureaucracy of Singapore—are obsessively active. Like the horsemen of the Apocalypse, they will not rest before the entire island is plowed over, made utterly unrecognizable.

They force all others, especially those handicapped by a need for reflection (i.e., Singapore's intellectuals) into different degrees of more or less humiliating passivity or complicity.

Its young architects, trained in Europe and America and ideologically still in their

in architectural connections... But if you have come to the insight that connection is no longer necessary, in a way you put a bomb at the base of your professional existence. If planning is not necessary, or irrelevant... why "plan"?

#### PLASTIC

Each year 14.4 million tons of plastic are thrown away in the United States.

#### PLAY

Play needs firm limits, then free movement within these limits. Without firm limits there is no play.

#### PLENUMS

And part of that liberation is finding a way as well to develop services so that the walls themselves act as whole plenums. Instead of having ducts here and ducts there, you take two planes and incline them. Instead of a ceiling and a wall plane in a room you could take the two and incline them or you could taper them as well and the very elevation of that wall could be a plenum that also expresses the volume of air; the minimum air, the maximum, etc. Those are the kinds of explorations we do.

#### PLOT

Eating oysters with boxing gloves, naked, on the *n*th floor—such is the "plot" of... the 20th century in action.

#### POETIC

You shouldn't try to be poetic. It doesn't, somehow, go with your face.

#### POINT

If you want to get to Cherry Tree Lane all you have to do is ask the Policeman at the cross-roads. He will push his helmet slightly to one side, scratch his head thoughtfully, and then he will point his huge white-gloved fingers and say: "First to your right, second to your left, sharp right again, and you're there. Good day."

#### POLES<sup>1</sup>

Enduring art cannot be founded on a negative statement. Art requires an assertion of belief. Yet the age of architectural ideology is over. There are no rules; only choices and inventions. What is left as a design process is the critical synthesis of what T. S. Eliot has suggested are the twin poles between which creativity oscillates: tradition and individual talent.

Third-World/Developing Country phase, underestimate both the determination and the ability of the regime, do not realize that a miracle is taking place before their eyes, that their skepticism now will disqualify them later from full participation on anything but the regime's terms: something that offends their sixties sensibilities.

By the mid-sixties, the darker side of urban renewal is well known. The prewar urbanism of the modernist heroes that had depended on the tabula rasa had been discredited. The war had razed entire cities that had been rebuilt from scratch with mixed results: they were "soulless." In America slum clearance was increasingly suspect in its inability to transform anything except physical conditions, leaving a culture of poverty unchanged. Yet Asian cities, neglected by waning colonial regimes, now had to prepare for massive renewal to accommodate both city dwellers living in intolerable conditions and invasions from the countryside.

"The tremendous increase in urban population clearly justifies the warning that, after the question of keeping world peace, metropolitan planning is probably the most serious single problem faced by man in the second half of the 20th century," claims the World Health Organization.<sup>25</sup> "In the next 40 years we must rebuild the entire urban United States," asserts President Lyndon Johnson.<sup>26</sup>

Compared to its sheer numbers, the existing substance of Singapore is in every sense insignificant. The tension between these anticipated quantities and cultivation of what exists is acute.

An evasive consensus is developing: urban renewal, but without tabula rasa; a new beginning, but not from scratch.

"There is nothing less urbane, nothing less productive of cosmopolitan mixture than raw renewal, which displaces, destroys, and replaces, in that mechanistic order," writes Fumihiko Maki in 1964 in *Investigations in Collective Form*, a small but influential book that is an early Asian voice in the so far almost exclusively Western debate.<sup>27</sup>

But in Singapore it is as if Maki's diagnosis is taken as motto, becomes the new republic's blueprint, its dystopian program: *displace, destroy, replace*.

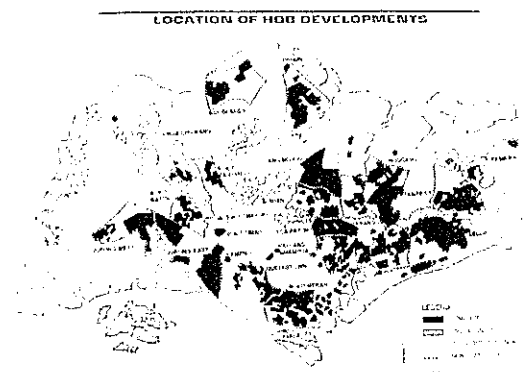
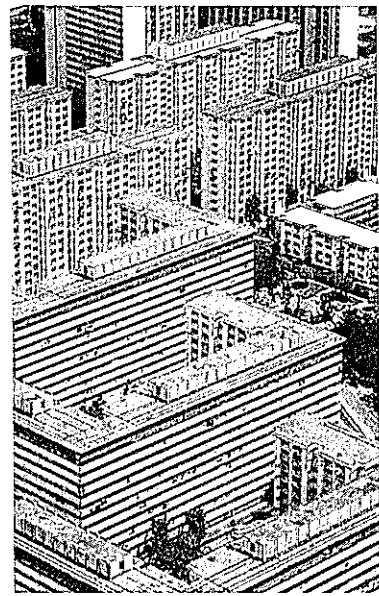
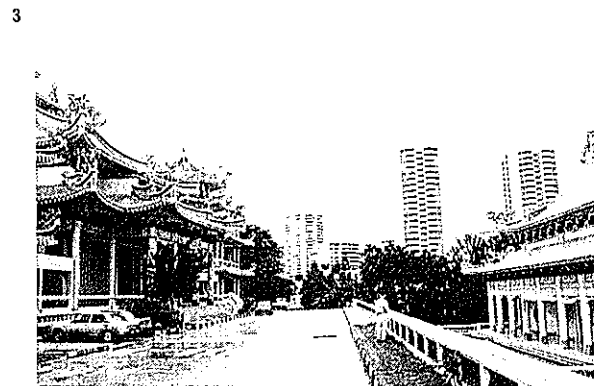
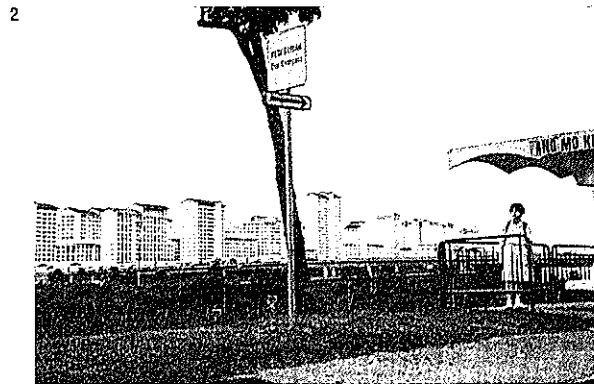
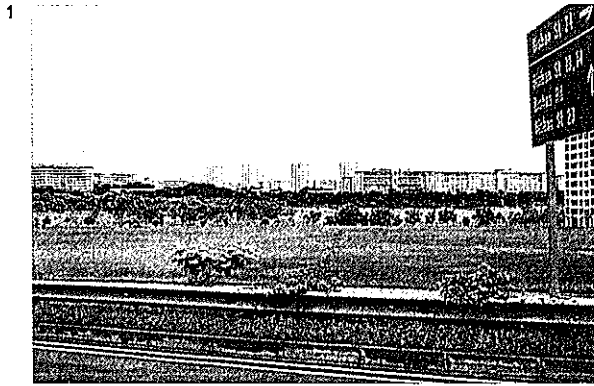
In a delirium of transformation the island is turned into a petri dish: gigantic clearances, levelings, extensions, expropriations create laboratory conditions for the importation of social and architectural cultures that can be grown under experimental protocols, without the presence of anterior substance. Singapore is turned into a test bed of the tabula rasa.

The transformation of the *entire* island in the name of an apocalyptic demographic hypothesis is in apparent contrast to its smallness and its permanent land shortage, which would suggest a careful husbanding of the territory and the definition of long-term ideals—guiding concepts—that could be slowly implemented. But the true implication of this herculean rush is that, since the island is considered changeable in its entirety, no version is ever definitive. After the first wave of transformation, there will be further conversions, new destructions, a second wave, a third...

A regime like the one in power in Singapore is a radical movement: it has transformed the term *urban renewal* into the moral equivalent of war, based on a "patchwork manifesto," an improvised amalgam of Confucian ethos, UN support, economic ambition, demographic urgency, "a loosely organized complex conceptual system that develops over time with an ever-expanding network of concepts, as the ruling group copes with solutions to problems in the body politic. However, this expanding conceptual network is not entirely random; rather, it is an expansion guided by a few core concepts."<sup>28</sup>

Singapore's regime installs a condition of permanent instability, not unlike the "permanent revolution" proclaimed by the students of May '68, but with a Confucian agenda: "The common people can be made to follow a path but not to understand it."<sup>29</sup> The entire operation ambiguously combines the fulfillment of some basic human needs with the systematic erosion of others—tradition, fixity, continuity—a *perpetuum mobile*





1 In Singapore... 2 each perspective... 3 is blocked... 4 by good intentions...  
5 locations of Housing and Development Board projects

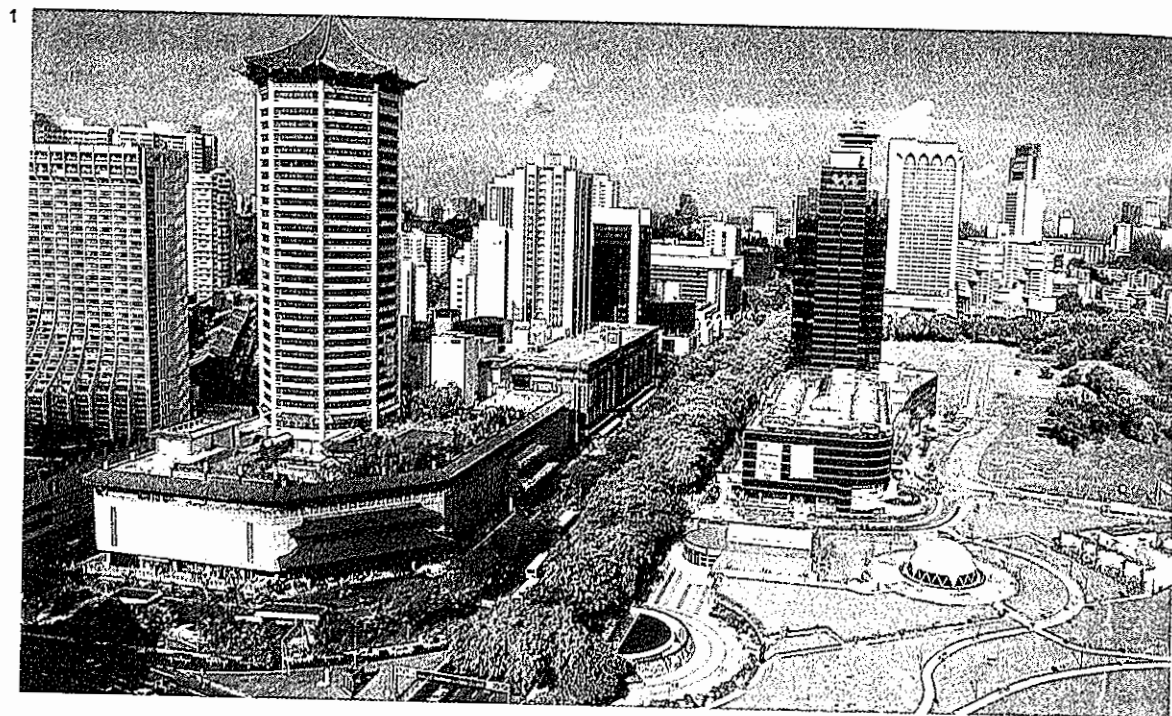
where what is given is taken away in a convulsion of uprooting, a state of permanent disorientation.

All the new housing, accommodated in high-rises, close together, entirely devoid of the centrifugal vectors of modernism, obscuring both sky and horizon, precludes any notion of escape. In Singapore, each perspective is blocked by good intentions.

"The overwhelming presence of more than half a million completed dwelling units is a constant reminder... of the government's achievement. The extensive public housing programme is symbolically, hence ideologically, a powerful sign of the existing regime's ability to fulfil its promises to improve the living conditions of the entire nation."<sup>30</sup>

How can the republic now known for establishing the ultimate capitalist environment begin with a quasi-socialist transformation of its entire territory? Turning the island into one huge housing project created the most brutal evidence of its "taking care" of its people, proof of the Confucian dictum "to give extensively to the common people and bring help to the multitude."<sup>31</sup>

The mystery of how—on an island almost antipodal to its geographical origins, for a people completely removed from its implied scenarios—the strategy of modern housing that failed in much more plausible conditions could suddenly "work" is left suspended between the assumption of greater authoritarianism and the inscrutable nature of the Asian mentality.



1 Singapore now: tenuous quality of a freeze-frame... 2 that can be set in motion again at any time...

## Promethean Hangover: The Next Lap

From one single, teeming Chinatown, Singapore has become a city *with* a Chinatown. It seems completed.

But as a (former) theater of the *tabula rasa*, Singapore now has the tenuous quality of a freeze-frame, of an arrested movement that can be set in motion again at any time on its way to yet another configuration; it is a city perpetually morphed to the next state.

The curse of the *tabula rasa* is that, once applied, it proves not only previous occupancies expendable, but also each *future* occupancy provisional too, ultimately temporary. That makes the claim to finality—the illusion on which even the most mediocre architecture is based—impossible. It makes Architecture impossible.

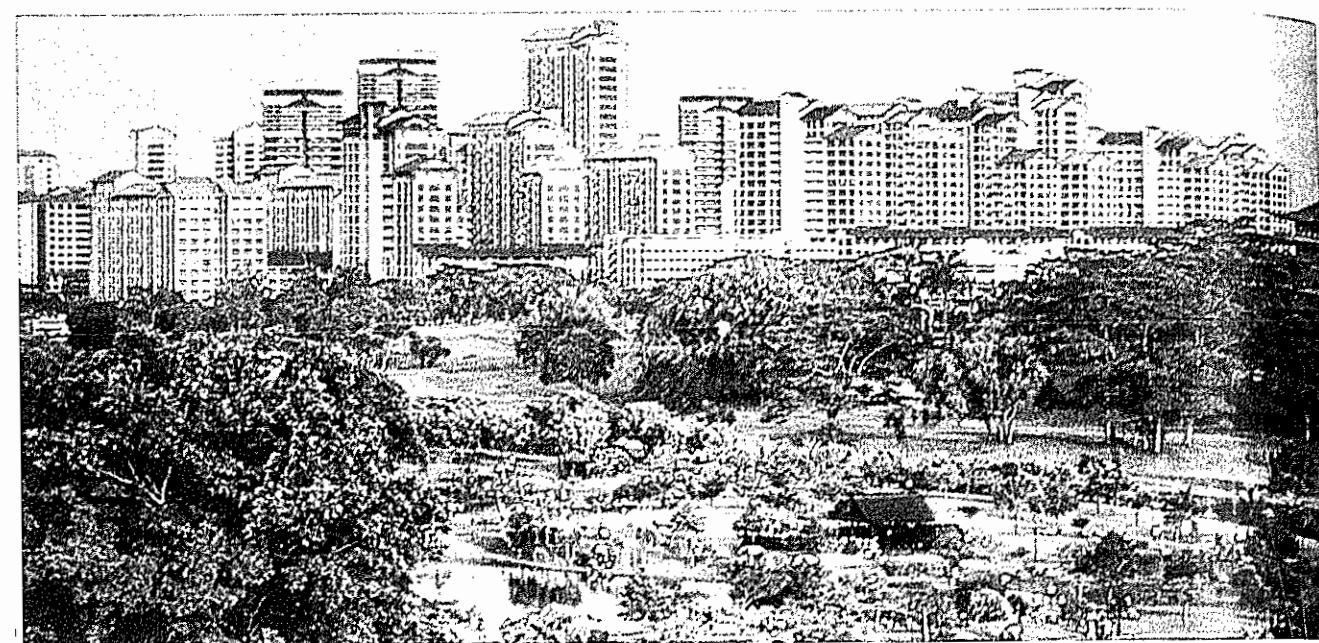
The anxiety induced by the precarious status of Singapore's reality is exacerbated by the absence of a geometric stability. Its courage to erase has not inspired a new conceptual frame—*guiding concept*?—a definitive prognosis of the island's status, an autonomous identity independent of infill, such as the Manhattan grid. Singapore's proliferating geometry is strained beyond its breaking point when it has to organize the coexistence of the strictly orthogonal super-blocks of average modernity that comprise the vast majority of its built substance. Singapore's "planning"—the mere sum of presences—is formless, like a batik pattern. It emerges surprisingly, seemingly from nowhere, and can be canceled and erased equally abruptly. The city is an imperfect collage: all foreground, no background.

Maybe this lack of geometry is typically Asian; Tokyo is the eternal example. But what does that make the present, almost worldwide condition? Is Paris encircled by an Asian ring? Is Piranesi's Roman Forum Chinese? Or is our tolerance for the imperfection of "other" cultures, "other" standards a camouflaged form of post-colonial condescension?

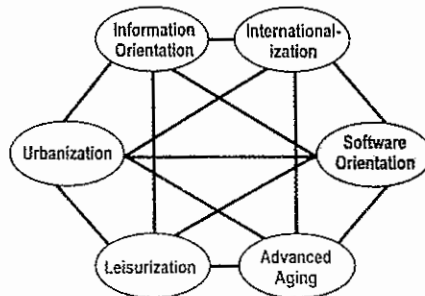
The resistance of these assembled buildings to forming a recognizable ensemble creates, Asian or not, a condition where the exterior—the classic domain of the urban—appears residual, leftover, overcharged with commercial effluence from hermetic interiors, hyper-densities of trivial commandments, public art, the reconstructed tropicity of landscaping.



2



3



1 Lee Kuan Yew, former prime minister, and his successor, Goh Chok Tong

2 a more relaxed version of Sparta

3 "New Orientations" diagram

As a manifesto of the quantitative, Singapore reveals a cruel contradiction: huge increases in matter, the overall effect increasingly unreal. The sinister quality of the windows—black glass, sometimes purple—creates, as in a model-railroad landscape, an additional degree of abstraction that makes it impossible to guess whether the buildings are empty or teeming with transplanted Confucian life...

In spite of its colossal substance, Singapore is doomed to remain a Potemkin metropolis.

That is not a local problem. We can *make* things, but not necessarily make them real. Singapore represents the point where the volume of the new overwhelms the volume of the old, has become too big to be animated by it, has not yet developed its own vitality. Mathematically, the third millennium will be an experiment in this form of soullessness (unless we wake up from our 30-year sleep of self-hatred).

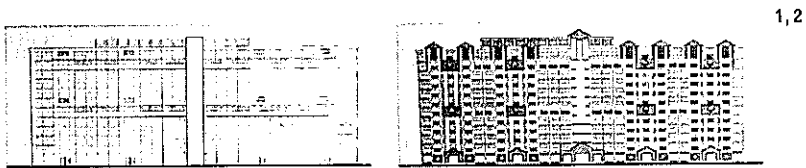
After its monumental achievement, Singapore now suffers a Promethean hangover. A sense of anticlimax is palpable. The "finished" Barthian state is grasping for new themes, new metaphors, new signs to superimpose on its luxurious substance. From external enemies, the attention has shifted to internal demons, of which doubt is so far the most unusual.

Lee resigned in 1990 but remains prominently in the background as an *éminence grise*. His successor, Goh Chok Tong, must assure the transition from a hyper-efficient garrison state to a more relaxed version of Sparta.

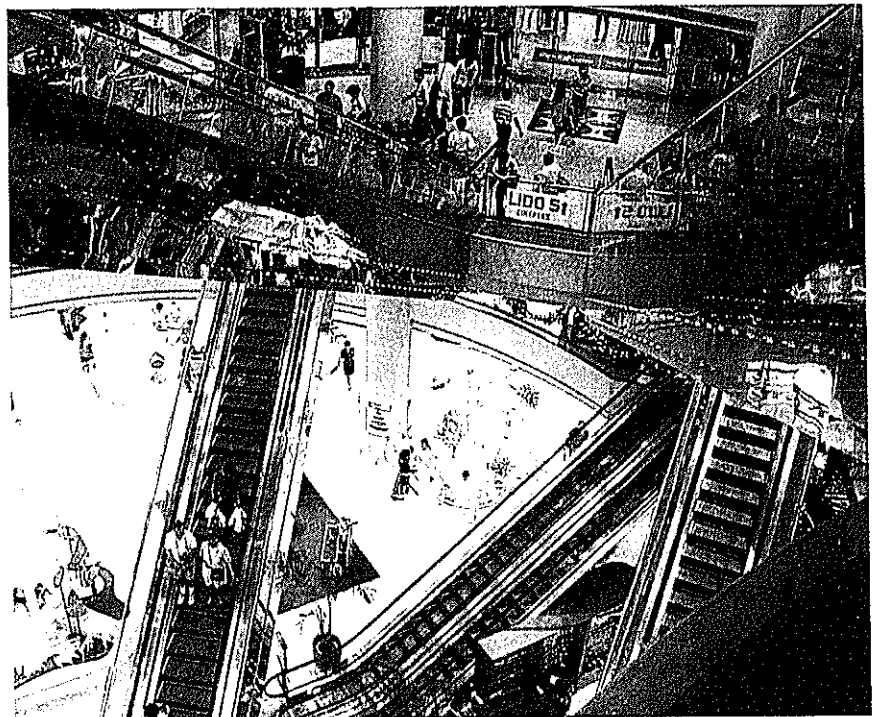
It is a period of transition, revision, marginal adjustments, "New Orientations"; after urbanization comes "leisureization." "Singaporeans now aspire to the finer things in life—to the arts, culture, and sports..."<sup>50</sup>

The recent creation of a Ministry for Information and the Arts is indicative. As Yeo, its minister, warns, "It may seem odd, but we have to pursue the subject of fun very seriously if we want to stay competitive in the 21st century..."

Singapore is a *city without qualities* (maybe that is an ultimate form of deconstruction, and even of freedom). But its evolution—its songline—continues: from enlightened postwar UN triumvirate, first manifestation of belated CIAM apotheosis, overheated metabolist metropolis, now dominated by a kind of Confucian postmodernism in which



1, 2



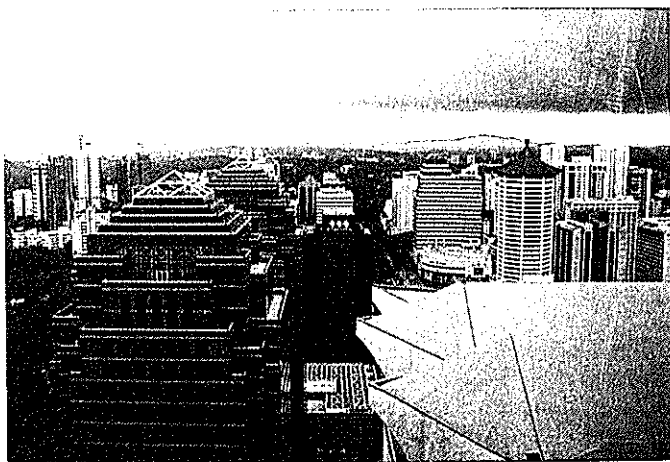
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6

1, 2 Confucian postmodernism: early housing slabs rehabilitated 3 shopping center atrium, Orchard Road  
4 city as shopping center 5 global consumer frenzy 6 Nge Ann City, roovescape

the brutal early housing slabs are rehabilitated with symmetrical ornament.

In the eighties, the global consumer frenzy perverted Singapore's image to one of repulsive caricature: an entire city perceived as shopping center, an orgy of Eurasian vulgarity, a city stripped of the last vestiges of authenticity and dignity. But even in a terminal project such as Nge Ann City, the elements of former ideological life are present, latent under the sheen of garish postmodernity (granite, brass, brick) which, in the new rhetoric, is based not only on Asian life but on the resurrection of Asian aesthetics: the Chinese Wall, pagodas, the Forbidden City, etc. Under the forms and decorations it is still a stunning urban machine, with its lavish parking decks on the 11th floor, the diversity of its atriums, the surprising richness of its cellular department stores, mixing Nike with Chanel, Timberland with Thai food: Turbo-Metabolism.

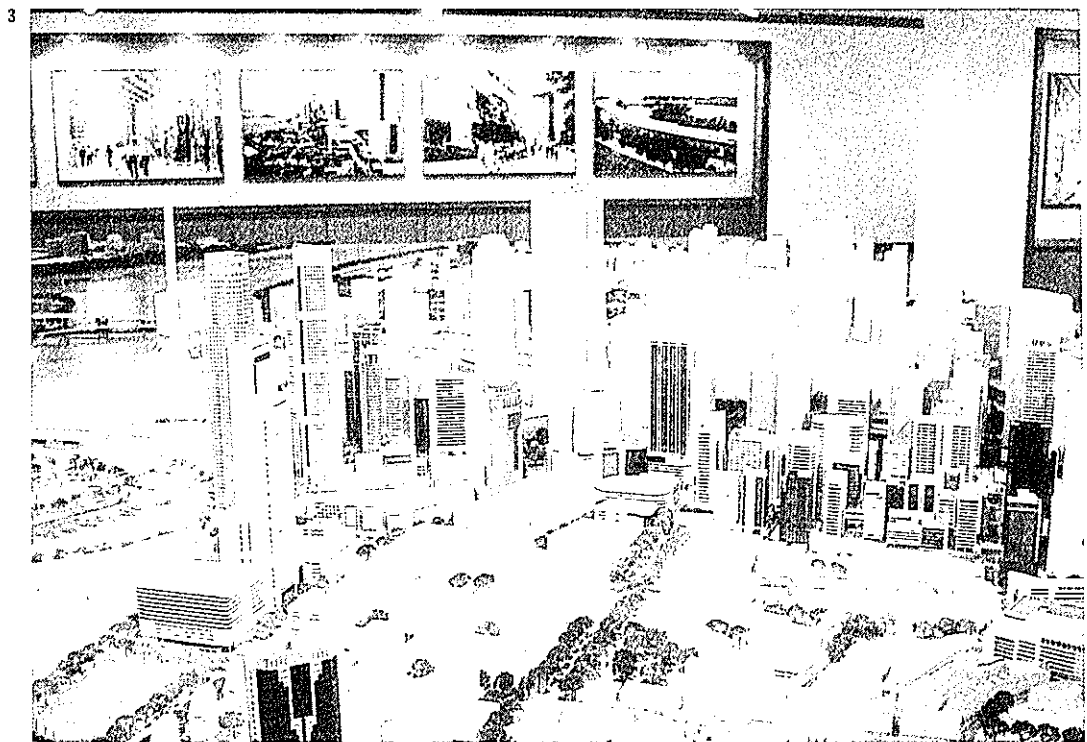
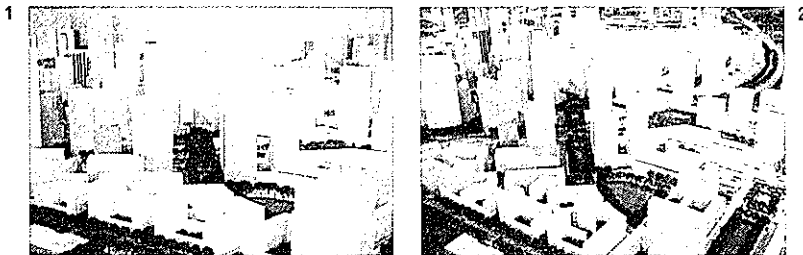
History, especially colonial history, is rehabilitated, paradoxically because it is the only one recognizable *as* history: the Raffles Hotel, painstakingly restored in the front, is cloned in the back to accommodate a shopping-center extension that far exceeds the original in volume.

Paul Rudolph reemerges from limbo. Somewhere in the city one of his American prototypes—it started its conceptual life in the sixties as a stack of mobile homes hoisted in a steel skeleton—stands realized in concrete.

In 1981 he had been part of the Beach Road experiment—presumably unknowingly. For a developer, and without contact with his Singaporean colleagues, the American designs a metabolic project: a rotated concrete tower next to a deformed bulge of a podium, one of the first manifestations of the independent atrium. Thirteen years later, it too stands realized, but in aluminum, the rotation of the tower replaced by indentation, a metallic corncob, its "American atrium" more hollow than its Asian counterparts.

Singapore's center will be hyper-dense; a massive invasion of stark, undetailed forms crowds the city model on the top floor of the planning office. On newly reclaimed land, the last center pieces are being fitted with contextual masterpieces: a "Botta," a posthumous "Stirling." But how can buildings be sympathetic to their environment if there *is* no environment?

Various anxieties (repressed? imported?) come gingerly to the surface, most insidi-



1, 2 the center will be hyper-dense: city model at Urban Redevelopment Authority, top floor, November 1993

3 "all of our efforts are marked by the desire to balance development with nature"

4 Lee Kuan Yew launches tree-planting campaign, 1963 5 after development, Eden...

ously about the disappearance of history. "There is a call to preserve and explore our rich cultural heritage..."

Goh has identified his reign as the Next Lap (it supersedes Vision 1999). At his November 1990 swearing-in he proclaims, "Singapore can do well only if her good sons and daughters are prepared to dedicate themselves to help others. I shall rally them to serve the country. For if they do not come forward, what future will we have? I therefore call on my fellow citizens to join me, to run the next lap together..."<sup>51</sup>

But the name alone betrays an inbuilt fatigue, like a marathon run around a track. Goh's Next Lap is like an invitation to join him on a treadmill.

Mostly, the Next Lap represents further work on Singapore's identity. "Our vision is... an island with an increased sense of 'island-ness'—more beaches, marinas, resorts, and possibly entertainment parks as well as better access to an attractive coastline and a city that embraces the waterline more closely as a signal of its island heritage. Singapore will be cloaked in greenery, both manicured by man and protected tracts of natural growth and with waterbodies woven into the landscape."<sup>52</sup> Altogether, Singapore is poised to evolve "Towards a Tropical City of Excellence."

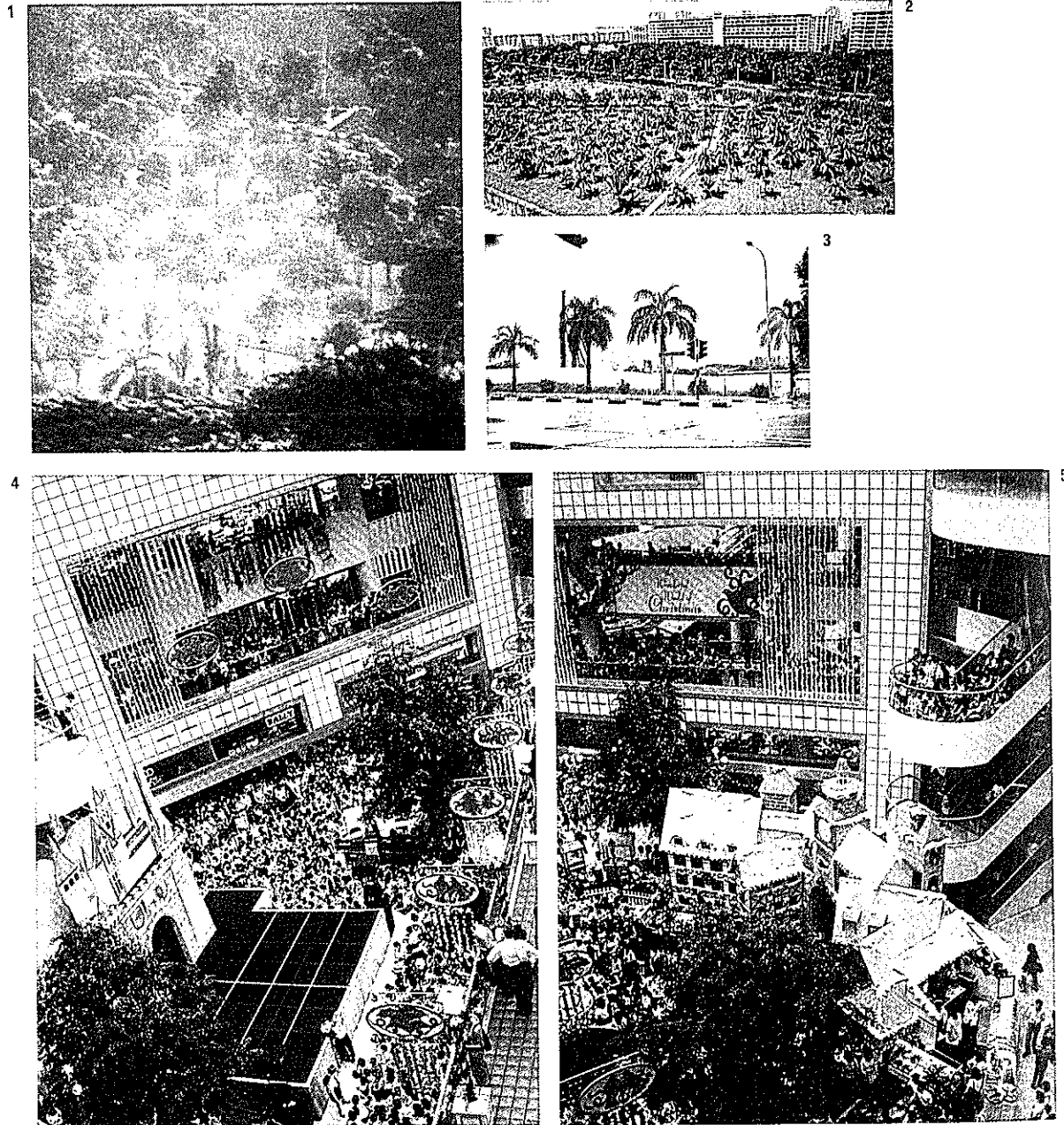
In this climate of relative reconsideration, if not contemplation, nature itself is a prime candidate for rehabilitation, sometimes retroactively. "All of our efforts are marked by the desire to balance development with nature... Sometimes, as elsewhere around the world, we have tended to over-develop a few. In some such cases, there is a need to roll back time, remove the buildings and rehabilitate the old vegetation." Almost ominously, it even seems as if nature will be the next project of development, throwing the mechanics of the tabula rasa into a paradoxical reverse gear: after development, Eden.

Already in 1963, Lee Kuan Yew "personally launched a tree-planting campaign" as prophylactic compensation for the urban renewal programs that were to be initiated. "Active tree planting was carried out for all roads, vacant plots, and new development sites."

Parallel to the intensification of urban renewal, a "garden city" campaign was started in 1967, "a beautification programme that aims to clothe the republic in a green mantle resplendent with the colors of nature..."<sup>53</sup>



1 "Tropical Excellence" 2, 3 outdoors: Potemkin nature  
4, 5 indoors: shopping Eden, Raffles City, 1993



Now the state is about to complete a "park network," an ambitious web implemented through a "park connector system" that will convert Singapore into a "total playground."

Worldwide, landscape is becoming the new ideological medium, more popular, more versatile, easier to implement than architecture, capable of conveying the same signifiers but more subtly, more subliminally; it is two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional, more economical, more accommodating, infinitely more susceptible to intentional inscriptions.

The irony of Singapore's climate is that its tropical heat and humidity are at the same time the perfect alibi for a full-scale retreat into interior, generalized, non-specific, air-conditioned comfort—and the sole surviving element of authenticity, the only thing that makes Singapore tropical, still. With indoors turned into a shopping Eden, outdoors becomes a Potemkin nature—a plantation of tropical emblems, palms, shrubs, which the very tropicity of the weather makes ornamental.

The "tropical" in "tropical excellence" is a trap, a conceptual dead end where the metaphorical and the literal wrestle each other to a standoff: while all of Singapore's architecture is on a flight *away* from the heat, their ensemble is supposed to be its apotheosis.

The only tropical authenticity left is a kind of accelerated decay, a Conradian rot: it is the resistance to *that* tropicity that explains Singapore's uptightness. "It corresponds to a deep primordial fear of being swallowed up by the jungle, a fate that can only be avoided by being ever more perfect, ever more disciplined, always the best..."<sup>54</sup>





2



Finally, in a move beyond the reach of irony, the island is now being outfitted with a perimeter beach. "By the year  $x$ , through reclamation and replanning, the amount of accessible shoreline is almost doubled, while the inaccessible areas are correspondingly reduced. There are ample opportunities for us to create beaches, promenades, marinas, resorts, etc."

Singapore now becomes a willed idyll—"like in May '68," the former chief planner, Liu Thai Ker, whispers to me. It is a subtle revision. Not "under the pavement, beach," but "after the pavement, beach."

thermal insulation is to control heat transfer and thereby protect a building from excessive heat loss during cold seasons and heat gain during hot seasons.

#### PROVOCATEUR

The architect proceeds as the avant-garde does in any battle, as a provocateur. He saps the edges of taste, undermines the conventional boundaries, assaults the thresholds of respectability and shocks the psychic stability of the past by introducing the new, the strange, the exotic and the erotic.

#### PROXIMITY<sup>1</sup>

Anyway, these two nuns were sitting next to me, and we sort of struck up a conversation.

#### PROXIMITY<sup>2</sup>

As long as two buildings share the same space or are in each other's proximity, whether the architect wants it or not, or whether anybody cares, they do have a relationship. It is an enormous farce to believe that to create a relationship, one thing has to be like another thing, or one thing has to adjust to another thing. As anybody who shares the world with anybody else knows, the simple proximity—the simple juxtaposition of things—creates a relationship that is there, almost independent of the mutual will of the people who created these objects.

#### PSEUDONYM

No, I'm not Thomas Pynchon. I am, however, John Fowles, uh, I'm John Barth, and I used to be Flannery O'Connor—but I killed that one off.

#### PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

Psychogeography is the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

#### PURGE

I felt stifled. Everything I looked at reminded me of myself. I opened wide the doors of my wardrobe and threw in all the debris from the floor. I pulled the sheets, blankets and pillows off my bed and put those in too. I ripped down pictures from the wall that I had once cut out of magazines. Under the bed I found plates and cups covered in green mold. I took every loose object and put it in the wardrobe till the room was bare. I even took down the light bulb and



#### Postscript: Metastasis

As it stands, the Singapore model—sum, as we have seen, of a series of systematic transubstantiations which make it, in effect, one of the most ideological of all urban conditions—is now poised to metastasize across Asia. The sparkle of its organization, the glamour of its successful uprooting, the success of its human transformation, the laundering of its past, its manipulation of vernacular cultures present an irresistible model for those facing the task of imagining—and building—new urban conditions for the even more countless millions. More and more, Singapore claims itself a laboratory for China, a role that could lift its present moroseness.

The sums are stark: “Eighty percent of China’s population is still rural,” argues Liu Thai Ker, former head of the URA, now in private practice. “The mere shift of one fourth of them to the city over the next 20 years—an implausibly low figure—would imply a doubling of all their urban substance.”

It is unlikely that the deconstructivist model, or any of the other respectable contemporary propositions (what are they anyway?), has a great attraction in these circumstances. Singapore represents the exact dosage of “authority, instrumentality, and vision” necessary to appeal. In numerous architectural offices in Singapore, whose names few of us have ever heard, China’s future is being prepared. In these countless new cities the skyscraper is the only surviving typology. After the iconoclasm of communism there will be a second, more efficient Ludditism, helping the Chinese toward the “desired land”: market economy—but minus the decadence, the democracy, the messiness, the disorder, the cruelty of the West.

Projecting outward from Singapore, an asymmetrical epicenter, there will be new Singapores across the entire mainland. Its model will be the stamp of China’s modernization.

Two billion people can’t be wrong.

#### Exit

Singapore mantra: don’t forget to confirm your return flight.

light shade. Then I took my clothes off, threw them in and closed the doors. The room was empty like a cell. I lay down on the bed again and stared at my patch of clear sky till I fell asleep.

## Q

### QUANTITY

Mies van der Rohe said, "The least is the most." I agree with him completely. At the same time, what concerns me now is quantity.

### QUASI-HISTORICAL

But of course, the modern architecture in OMA's scheme of things is not Ville Radieuse rationality, nor Hilberseimerian sobriety, nor megastructural systematicity. It is already a quasi-historical modernity which harks back to the decade of the twenties in Russia and in America. It recalls the abstractions of Malevich and Lissitzky, the idealities of Chernikov and Leonidov, the sensuous, wayward and episodic in a way which has not been seen since the early days. All that strange variety of modern architecture in the days before Pavillon Suisse defined the canon of rationality and commercial expediency once and for all, returns now in OMA to haunt us with the possibilities of a future which we had already thought was over.

### QUERY

Dame Mouse went to the Sun and said to him,  
"Sun, do you know why I have come to you?"  
"How should I know?"

### QUOTE<sup>1</sup>

I hate quotations.

### QUOTE<sup>2</sup>

I am a foreigner to myself in my own language and I translate myself by quoting all the others.

## R

### RADIUS

Since the internal radius of turn of a commercial vehicle is about 8m,

## Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges William S. W. Lim, Tay Kheng Soon, Chua Beng Huat, and Liu Thai Ker for contributing their time and insights; nevertheless, the ideas and opinions expressed in this text are those of the author.

1. William Gibson, "Disneyland with the Death Penalty," *Wired* (Sept.-Oct. 1993).

2. Deyan Sudjic, "Virtual City," *Blueprint* (February 1994).

3. Official slogan.

4. Lee Kuan Yew.

5. Lim Chee Then, "The Confucian Tradition and Its Future in Singapore: Historical, Cultural, and Educational Perspectives," in Yong Mun Cheong, *Asian Traditions and Modernization* (Times Academic Press, 1992), p. 214.

6. Richard Nixon, *Leaders* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), p. 311.

7. Jean Louis Margolin, 1989, as quoted in Rodolphe de Koninck, *Singapour/ire: An Atlas of the Revolution of Territory* (Montpellier: Reclus, 1992), p. 25.

8. Chua Beng-Huat, "Not Depoliticized But Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Programme in Singapore," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 15, no. 1 (1991), p. 27.

9. At the moment of writing, Singapore is poised to overtake Rotterdam as the largest harbor in the world. It is already the most efficient.

10. *First Decade in Public Housing* (Singapore: Housing and Development Board, 1969), p. 18.

11. Aline K. Wong and Stephen H. K. Yeh, eds., *Housing a Nation: 25 Years of Public Housing in Singapore* (Singapore: Housing and Development Board/Maruzen Asia, 1985).

12. *First Decade in Public Housing*, p. 26.

13. Wong and Yeh, *Housing a Nation*, p. 95.

14. Charles Abrams, Susumu Kobe, and Otto Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore" (report to the UN, 1963), pp. 7, 109.

15. Abrams, Kobe, and Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore," pp. 121-22 (italics added).

16. Abrams, Kobe, and Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore," pp. 9, 10 (italics added). In 1994, Singapore has 2.7 million inhabitants.

17. Abrams, Kobe, and Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore," pp. 10, 11, 45 (italics added). In the subsection "The Silent Assumption of British Planning," the tone is surprisingly anti-colonial/anti-English.

18. Political name under People's Action Party.

19. Abrams, Kobe, and Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore," pp. 59, 16, 12, 61.

20. As noted in "Growth and

Urban Renewal in Singapore," the term Ring City was coined by Professor Jacobus P. Thijss in his paper "Metropolitan Planning in the Netherlands" (Conurbation Holland, UN, 1959). In Holland, the "central stretch of open country" is called its Green Heart. Abrams, Kobe, and Koenigsberger, "Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore," p. 63.

21. Chua, "Not Depoliticized But Ideologically Successful," p. 29.

22. De Koninck, *Singapour/ire*, p. 84, 37.

23. "At the turn of the sixties, the Jurong district was still covered with hills... 30 to 40 meters high... By the early eighties, the hills have nearly all been leveled." De Koninck, *Singapour/ire*, p. 44.

24. De Koninck, *Singapour/ire*, p. 88.

25. World Health Organization, in Donald Canty, "Architecture and the Urban Emergency," *Architectural Forum*, Aug.-Sept. 1964, p. 173.

26. President Lyndon Johnson, in Canty, "Architecture and the Urban Emergency."

27. Fumihiko Maki, *Investigations in Collective Form* (St. Louis: Washington University School of Architecture, 1964), p. 34.

28. Chua, "Not Depoliticized But Ideologically Successful," p. 26.

29. Confucius, *The Analects*, VIII/9, trans. D. C. Lau, in Lim, "Confucian Tradition."

30. Chua, "Not Depoliticized But Ideologically Successful," pp. 35-36.

31. Confucius, *The Analects*, VI/30, in Lim, "Confucian Tradition."

32. Lee Kuan Yew, as quoted in Ian Buruma, "Singapore," *New York Times Magazine*, June 12, 1988, p. 58.

33. "Many traditional Chinese language textbooks are no longer suitable for use because of the students' lower level of proficiency in the language." Lim, "Confucian Tradition," p. 215.

34. Maki, *Investigations in Collective Form*, p. 3.

35. Christopher Alexander, "A City Is Not a Tree," *Architectural Forum*, April 1965.

36. In the introduction to "Notes on the Synthesis of Form," Peter Blake writes that Alexander "spent several months in India planning the development of a small village, which he now admits to having organized as a tree."

37. Maki, *Investigations in Collective Form*, pp. 3, 34, 4, 5, 6, 8-11 (italics added).

38. Fumihiko Maki, "The Theory of Group Form," *Japan Architect*, Feb. 1970, pp. 39-40.

39. Maki, *Investigations in Collective Form*, pp. 11, 27-35.

40. Maki, "Theory of Group Form," p. 40.

41. Maki, *Investigations in Collective Form*, pp. 82, 84, 85, 23, 21.

42. *SPUR* 65-67, pp. 1-2, 29,

34, 38, 52.

43. "The Future of Asian Cities," *Asia Magazine*, May 1966, pp. 5, 7, 8.

44. Lee Kuan Yew, lecture, in *SPUR* 65-67, p. 58.

45. Chua, "Not Depoliticized But Ideologically Successful," p. 30.

46. Its distance from the coast has increased since, through additional land reclamation.

47. William Lim, *Cities for People* (Singapore: Select Books, 1990), p. 8.

48. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Chronicle of Sale Sites*, 1967, p. 25.

49. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Chronicle of Sale Sites*, p. 30.

50. *The Next Lap* (Singapore: Times International Press, 1991), p. 101.

51. *The Next Lap*, p. 3.

52. Urban Redevelopment Authority, *Living the Next Lap: Towards a Tropical City of Excellence*, 1991.

53. Lee Sing Keng and Chua Sian Eng, *More Than a Garden City* (Singapore: Parks and Recreation Department, 1992), p. 8.

54. Buruma, "Singapore." In some cases, through the pervasiveness of the interior conditions, there is an acute point of reversal: it is as if the exterior is the unusual condition, seen through plate glass like a window display.