THE NOTION OF PLACE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY, NOSTALGIA AND HERITAGE IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate the links between place and time, and the intersections between the geographical imagination and the historical mind. These issues are explored in the context of Singapore by looking at the links between place and three concepts usually associated with the temporal sense — history, nostalgia and heritage. We argue that the two imaginations can be simultaneously engaged by means of a focus on the concept of *place*. The making of a place is closely intertwined with individual biographies and collective histories; at the same time, place does not record history in an unproblematic way. We next argue that a sense of nostalgia is a yearning to return to a lost period and place and why memory is often best served by anchoring it in the materiality of place. This is precisely the case in the inscription of heritage into the concrete elements of specific sites as a state strategy to codify and naturalise its own version of heritage as part of the the everyday, visible world. In concluding, we reflect on the salience of place. While it lends itself to ideological uses by the powerful, a sense of place is also equally significant in the experiences and aspirations of a people.

THE SALIENCE OF PLACE

In the introduction to their book *The Power of Place*, Agnew and Duncan (1989:1) explore the multiple meanings of the word "place", a commonly used and deceptively simple term in the geographical lexicon. Place could, *inter alia*, mean a "portion of space in which people dwell together", temporal ordering ("took place"), or "position" in a social order ("knowing your place"). "Place" may also refer to a specific, concrete setting — Singapore — a state (a politically defined territory) in Southeast Asia, the home (a term with emotive connotations for individuals) of Singaporeans, or a site which lies somewhere in between state and home at the intersection of collective histories and individual biographies. "Place" in this sense provides

> both the real, concrete settings from which cultures emanated to enmesh people in webs of activities and meanings and the physical expression of those cultures in the form of

> landscapes (Agnew & Duncan, 1989:preface).

It is the local milieu which is "fundamental...in structuring how people tackle...the small and usually trivial problems of everyday life" (Johnston, 1991:50); at the same time, it provides the context for collective acts of organisation and destruction, celebration and conflict (Cooke, 1989).

Alternatively, the phrase "Singapore's place" could also suggest that Singapore occupies a particular moment in time, possibly a critical juncture or turning point in history which calls for contemplation of time that has passed (the past) as well as time to come (the future). In other words, Singapore today occupies a place between times, from which to survey the past and the future from the vantage point of the present.

Place and time, or period, are interlinked in another sense. Places are socially constructed positions and sites within the context of a particular period, that is, places have meaning only in relation to an individual's or group's goals and concerns (Entrikin, 1991:5). Far from being a rather inert and ahistoric form, place may be thought of as a process, a "process of becoming" (Pred, 1984). People are active participants in the historically contingent process of the making of place: within the context of their times they construct places by investing them with human meaning. This view recognises that all social life is "regionalised and regionalising" and that place-making is situated in specific time-space contexts (Rogers, 1992:245). Constructed places are not confined to the here and now (that is, concrete settings of the present) but include places of past experiences (memory), those which reside in the imagination (geosophies) (see Wright, 1947) or even those which exist in simulations and iconographies (re-presentations). In fact, place is often constituted by a nesting of different but overlapping images and interpretations.

If place is both a specific concrete setting (as described in our first definition) as well as a constructed image (following our third definition), then it is in Daniels' (1989:206) words both "a way of life" and "a way of seeing."[1] In practice, these two ways of conceptualising "place" are inextricably interwoven. Following Daniels (1989:206), it is:

> a dialectical image, an ambiguous synthesis whose redemptive and manipulative aspects cannot be finally disentangled, which can neither be completely reified as an authentic object in the world nor thoroughly dissolved as an ideological mirage.

On the one hand, "place" articulates social constructions imposed by those in power —planners, architects, administrators, politicians, property owners, developers — intent on advancing state policies and goals, consumer capitalism or some other prevalent ideologies. On the other hand, "place" is also a "multicoded space" which in its everyday usage, is constantly used and interpreted by "everyday people who may be 'reading' and 'writing' different languages in the built environment" (Goss, 1988:398). For the everyday users of a particular place, it is an environment of opportunity and constraint. From this perspective, place is an active setting inextricably linked to the lives, movements and activities of individuals and, as such, a location of collective experiences which "evokes and organises memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings and the works of the imagination" (Walter, 1988:21). Putting both perspectives together, place is:

> a synthesis of charisma and context, a text which may be read to reveal the force of dominant ideas and prevailing practices, as well as the idiosyncracies of a particular author (Ley & Duncan, 1993:329).

People and place are hence intimately integrated and both are locked into relations of power. Place has a dual character, as a repository of elite or state power and as a site of individual and collective struggle and resistance. The social relations of everyday life are often objectified, and naturalised,

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1 Daniels' (1989) analysis focused on the term "landscape." We have taken the liberty to transpose some of his ideas to apply to the word "place."

in the specificities of place. The powerful are often able to remake place in its own image, as seen in the creation of places of nationalism and pageantry such as civic centres and parade grounds (see Konrad, 1986); places of heroic consumption such as shopping malls and fairs (see Ley & Olds, 1988); and "heritagised" places such as historic conservation districts and museums (see Jacobs, 1992). At the same time, places are also sites of negotiation and resistance, not simply as concrete settings for action but also drawn upon in symbolic ways to express individual and collective sentiments. An organised group may seize upon a specific public place not simply as an arena to stage a protest, demonstration or some form of public collective behaviour but also to appropriate, manipulate or sometimes invert the symbolic values associated with the place. Individuals and communities may also invest specific places with memories and meanings which may be, if not contradictory, different, from the views and intentions of the powerful. In effect, "place" is neither fully defined by those who hold power nor completely appropriated by ordinary people; instead, "place as process" implies a politics of place where social relations dependent on particular combinations of social, cultural, economic and political factors are mediated in different ways. For Agnew and Duncan (1989:7), the "power of place" resides in the fact that place:

> serves as a constantly re-energized repository of socially and politically relevant traditions and identity which serve to mediate between the everyday lives of individuals on the one hand, and the national and supra-national institutions which constrain and enable those lives, on the other.

PLACE AND TIME

Singapore's rapid transformation from a city of squatters and slums with a serious unemployment problem in the 1950s to a foremost newly industrialising country with a "showcase economy" (Lim, 1991:197) is well-known. The rapidity of economic change brought in train various social impacts and, by the 1980s, unease over what Kwok (1993:7) calls "the complexity of our cultural condition." As Singapore has developed an open, capitalist economy which is increasingly locked into regional and global dynamics, society has also become exposed to western ideas and norms. The governing elites were increasingly apprehensive of the dangers of Singaporeans losing their "Asian" roots and the consequences for society. For example, in 1988, the then First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, declared that:

> We are part of a long Asian civilisation and we should be proud of it. We should not be assimilated by the West and become a pseudo-Western society. We should be a nation that is uniquely multiracial and Asian, with each community proud of its traditional culture and heritage (Goh, 1988:15).

It is in this context of rapid societal change that questions of place and time, roots and heritage have become particularly pertinent in Singapore since the 1980s. According to a state-appointed Committee on Heritage set up in April 1988, an understanding of one's roots and the lessons of history can help younger Singaporeans "balance our Asian values and western influences", appreciate and "draw inspiration" from the city's multicultural diversity and "constantly renew work values and maintain the adaptiveness which underlies our economic success" (*The Committee on Heritage Report*, 1988:6-8). Reclaiming Singapore's rightful place and time is perceived to provide a cultural bulwark against the pressures of modernisation and westernisation and "can play a vital part in nation building" (*The Committee on Heritage Report*, 1988:6). Considerations of history, nostalgia and heritage have thus entered both official and public discourses in the form of pronouncements and debates on a number of themes urging or obstructing the preservation of "Asian" and "traditional" values and the maintenance of "local" cultural identity.

In the light of this critical juncture in Singapore's development, we explore the links between place and time, the intersections between what some have called the geographical and the historical or

sociological imaginations.[2] How does a sense of the *durée* feature in a sense of place and vice versa? We explore these questions by looking at the links between place and three concepts usually associated with the temporal sense — history, nostalgia and heritage — in the context of Singapore. In brief, we argue that the two imaginations can be simultaneously engaged by means of a focus on the concept of place.

HISTORY: THE INTERLOCKING NATURE OF PLACE AND TIME

The making of a place is closely intertwined with individual and collective biographies; at the same time, the unfolding of personal and social histories is not only about the passage of time, but also about being "in", moving "through" and experiencing changing places. In fact, the invisible movement of time is sometimes indexed by changes which have taken place in the visible landscape: the demolition of the last *kampung* (rural village) on the main island of Singapore signals the passing of an era while the construction of skyscrapers of steel and glass heralds the arrival of the technological age.

As the palimpsests on which people write their stories, not only are places repositories of history and memory, they often contain multiple levels of sedimented history. Everyday places gain significance because they are part of an individual's routinised biographical traces. They may also feature prominently because of their identification with exceptional events (such as the rites of passage; events of momentous or tragic proportions) which form part of an individual's life history. Beyond individual memory, some places are given meaning through association with the life and times of prominent personalities. Villages such as the now defunct Chong Pang Village (a Chinese village formerly located in the northern part of Singapore named after its founder Lim Chong Pang) stood testimony to the renown of its founder (Sequerah, 1995). Similarly, Haw Par Villa (formerly a rich man's pleasure gardens) despite its transformation into a theme park evokes memories of the brothers Boon Haw and Boon Par and their Tiger Balm kingdom of Chinese medicinal products (Teo & Yeoh, forthcoming); and Tanjong Pagar (an old residential area which developed around the docks) "established for itself a landmark position in our post-1955 history by electing Mr Lee Kuan Yew to Parliament in every election" (Kwa, 1989:15). Places also become identified with national histories because they feature in an integral manner in events and episodes of collective proportions. For example, the Padang (a sward of greenery located at the heart of the city dating from colonial times) with its backdrop of imposing civic buildings and its use as the venue for National Day Parades takes on national significance while Changi Beach (a beach along the eastern shoreline used as an execution ground during the Japanese Occupation) still evokes memories of bloody massacres. Places thus have a "depth" which goes beyond the visible landscape: they contain layers of meaning derived from different biographies and histories. Place meanings are further strengthened when levels of personal biography and collective history are compounded.

Places are hence prodigious (but not unproblematic) recorders of the passage of history. Not only do social and cultural change necessarily occur in places, they are often inscribed and transmitted in places. In the words of Johnston (1991:50):

> Places differ in..."collective" memory. For a variety of reasons,...people's responses to

2 The *sociological imagination*, according to C.W. Mills, is something which "enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meanings for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals...[It] enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two in society..." (quoted in Harvey, 1973:23). In contrast, the *geographical imagination* "enables the individual to recognise the role of space and place in his [sic] own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognise how transactions between individuals and between organisations are affected by the space that separates them. It allows him to recognise the relationship which exists between him and his neighbourhood, his territory, or, to use the language of the street gangs, his 'turf.' It allows him to judge the relevance of events in other places (on other people's 'turf' ...wherever he is now" (Harvey, 1973:24). Apart from Harvey (1973), others, including Harris (1978), Daniels (1985), Driver (1988) and Soja (1989) have also discussed the relation between the two.

> the problem of surviving collectively vary from place to place... How they respond becomes part of the local culture, the store of knowledge on which they draw as they face the problems of survival. They add to that store as they tackle new problems and their success in some cases provides the resources with which to alter their mode of living. That store of knowledge then becomes the inheritance of those who succeed, being transmitted inter-generationally to others who will modify it as they in turn tackle problems old and new. Thus cultures develop in places and are passed on in places.

If places are the amalgam of forms and meanings laid down in various historical eras, interpreting places involves understanding the human legacies of the past. However, as Driver (1988:499) has observed, "the past does not bequeath an immutable legacy, if only because history is continually rewritten by its inheritors." As such, the association of a place with its own history is not a straightforward one. As history is constructed and reconstructed, as each generation emphasises particular historical "truths" and subject others to the workings of amnesia, places also change in meaning.

Conversely, history may also be rewritten through the rewriting of places. The renaming of streets in postcolonial societies, for example, divests the landscape of colonial associations and reinforces the legitimacy of the newly independent state (Lewandowski, 1984; Yeoh, 1992). In the local context, the change of "Japan Street" to "Boon Tat Street"[3] at the close of World War II and the re-christening of "Pulau Blakang Mati" (literally translated as "the island of those who die behind" refering to its legendary roots as the material paradise of warrior spirits buried at an adjacent island, Pulau Brani) as "Sentosa" (meaning "peace and tranquillity") to foreshadow its development as a resort island are but two examples where place-name changes signal a reworking of history. Place histories may also be obscured if not obliterated by rapid, radical changes of the natural or built environment. The metamorphosis which Tiong Bahru (formerly cemetery ground) underwent in the construction of a Singapore Improvement Trust housing estate between the 1930s and 1950s and the more recent transformation of Bishan into a middle-class Housing and Development Board (HDB) public housing estate erase from people's memories their older histories as places with extensive Chinese burial grounds. Curiously, in these two instances, the only hint of its more macabre past can be found in the place-names: "Tiong Bahru" means "new cemetery" while Bishan is the *hanyu pinyin* (Mandarin system of romanising Chinese characters) version of "Pek San Theng" which is a Cantonese burial ground.

In recent times, social theorists have called for a conceptualisation of human action and agency "as a continuous flow of conduct in time and space" (Driver, 1988:501). Postmodern geographers (as well as those who would eschew the label "postmodern") such as Michael Dear (1988) and Edward Soja (1989) have argued that modern social theory has been overly preoccupied with historicism with its emphasis on individual and collective biographies at the expense of spatiality. The power of a "space-blinkered" historical imagination which has created a "critical silence" where space is concerned, however, is increasingly challenged by the postmodern move towards dismantling disciplinary privileges and the attention to a consideration of space and time in tandem as signposted in the works of Michel Foucault (1979), Henri Lefebvre (1991) and John Berger (1972). Soja (1989:22) reminds us of Berger's view that "prophesying now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us." He also claims Foucault as a "postmodern geographer" and applauds his "provocative spatialisation of power" (Soja, 1989:16; 21). Philo (1992:142) has further argued that Foucault's critique of a "total history"

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[3] This street was renamed by the Municipal Commissioners in 1946 after the Japanese Occupation. The new name commemorated the Singapore-born businessman and former Municipal Commissioner, Ong Boon Tat (1888-1941), the elder son of Ong Sam Leong (*Minutes of the Proceedings of the Municipal Commissioners at an Ordinary Meeting*, 23 May 1946; Song, 1984:99).

which "posits a 'central core' to the social world" can be read as a critique (which often draws on spatialised vocabularies) of historians' and social scientists':

> insensitivity to the *geography* of the social world that manifests itself in stressing the homogeneity of events, phenomena, and their hypothesised determinations within *spatial* "great units" (continents and perhaps countries) and thereby ignoring the reality of *smaller-scale areal differences and distributions* (emphasis added).

It is by "the taking seriously of space, place and geography as sources of fragmentation" that Foucault negotiates "the snares of totalisation" (Philo, 1992:144). Of interest in critical social theory today are manoeuvres which focus on the difference that space and place makes to historical modes of understanding and at the same time anchor places in social practice and historical context. The importance of integrating space and time or period and place is clear in recent developments such as structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and time-geography (Hägerstrand, 1973; Pred, 1981).

At both the theoretical and substantive levels, time and place are interwoven in complex ways. Just as time and place are indivisible in real life, thinking historically is no luxury in the understanding of place; neither is thinking geographically in the pursuit of historical knowledge.

NOSTALGIA: YEARNING FOR THE LOSS OF A PERIOD AND PLACE

Just as history concerns the interlocking nature of place and time, our second concept "nostalgia" requires an understanding of the links between the two. Nostalgia is an attitude towards the past wherein elements of the past are viewed favourably, celebrated and even glorified. While the modern sense of the word usually implies a yearning for a point in time (childhood, pre-war days etc.) rather than for a point in space, "nostalgia" (a word of Greek roots coined by Johannes Hofer, a medical student, for the well-known symptoms of homesickness or *Heimweh*) originally described a longing for a place from which one is removed (Tuan, 1971:189).

According to Chase and Shaw (1989), there are at least three conditions for nostalgia. First, societies with a secular and linear (as opposed to cyclical) sense of time are more prone to the syndrome of nostalgia. Second, the stance of nostalgia requires some apprehension of the deficiency of the present. Third, nostalgia is likely when social change is rapid enough to be detectable in one lifetime; at the same time, there are must be available evidences of the past — artefacts, images and texts — to remind one of how things used to be. We would like to show that particular constructions of place and time are both strongly implicated in the stance of nostalgia.

In societies where both public time (as measured by the public clock) and private time (the subjective experience of time as measured by our psychological-internal clocks) are viewed to move in one direction, people carry "the memory of an age when the experience of time was different" (Chase & Shaw, 1989:4). This is time which is irretrievably lost, a period which will never return, and such a sense of loss engenders a nostalgic perspective. Drawing on Mircea Eliade's work on sacred and profane space and time, Woods and Gritzner (1990:234) describe the logic of nostalgia as the desire to "overcome and transcend the bonds of profane or historical time and to recapture the wholeness of sacred time." This search is often expressed symbolically as a quest for paradise: "a universal desire to transcend humankind's existential crisis, which has resulted from his or her ensnarement in profane or historic time and space", hence Eliade's term, "nostalgia for paradise" (Woods & Gritzner, 1990:236). Such a sense of nostalgia is thus a yearning to transcend the constrictions of time and space, to return to a lost period and place, a lost social world. In the local context, Chua (1995) argues that the disappearance of the *kampung* from the Singapore landscape symbolises the conflation of a lost time and a lost place, which in turn translates into a loss of

community and the innocence of childhood on both individual and collective levels. In the stance of nostalgia, lost time is inextricably linked to a lost place: the remembered characteristics of the lost place are often used as referents to signify the passing of an era. Individual and collective memories are transformed into nostalgic sentiments not only when a period has passed but also when place has changed beyond recognition.

By characterising past time and place as "lost" and mourned, nostalgia compares the present unfavourably with the past. As Chase and Shaw (1989:15) put it, "some elements of the present are felt to be defective and [yet] there is no public sense of redeemability through a belief in progress." The past, "defined not by the painstaking investigation of the historical record but by positing a series of absences" (Chase & Shaw, 1989:8), is held up as a critical foil to the present. Nostalgia is hence a critique of the present time and place. Chua's (1995) work shows that the popularisation of nostalgia for *kampungs* in the 1990s reflects an unease with the frenetic pace of life, high stress levels and new-found materialism characteristic of modern living driven by the logic of capital. It is a critique of the *present historic moment* when Singapore has "arrived" in an economic and material sense but lost the meaning of leisure and time to stand and stare. It is also a critique of the *place* Singaporeans find themselves, a city bristling with efficiency and productivity but without a certain intangible spirit and soul.

Nostalgia is hence a construction of the past but a condition of the present. As it is positioned in the present but draws on resources of the past, nostalgia is paradoxically best nurtured not in circumstances when the past has been completely obliterated but when remnants of the past remain to constantly remind one that the past was different, a "foreign country" where "they do things differently" (Hartley, quoted in Lowenthal, 1985:xvi). Pervasive nostalgia thus requires the presence of artefacts, images, texts and other visual and oral records of the past. Indeed, a nostalgic harking back to common roots is well served by continuous exposure to landscape texts and visual images of the past. It has been argued that paradoxically, the greater the exposure to texts and images of the past, the further we are distanced from the reality they represent. The danger is that "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Chase & Shaw, 1989:10). While individuals collect the past in the form of family memorabilia, photographs and increasingly video-recordings, the nation-state also retains and occasionally manufactures clues to its past. The need to conserve and deepen the nation-state's memory has been expressed by political leaders from time to time, as seen in the following words of S. Rajaratnam, the former Senior Minister (quoted in Urban Redevelopment Authority, n.d.):

> A nation must have a memory to give it a sense of cohesion, continuity and identity. The longer the past, the greater the awareness of a nation's identity ...A sense of a common history is what provides the links to hold together a people who came from the four corners of the earth.

To conserve "our remarkable past" (Urban Redevelopment Authority, n.d.) in a manner most accessible to all, an important strategy on the part of the state is to impress the form of the past onto the visible landscape. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), for example, explains its aim to conserve the past in specific places in the following manner:

> In retaining parts of old Singapore, we are retaining the memory of early immigrants who transformed Singapore from a fishing village to a bustling city. The languages, cultures and beliefs of the immigrants as embodied in their churches, temples, mosques, houses, street names and localities are reflected in the conservation of these historic districts (Urban Redevelopment Authority, n.d.).

To resist the ravages of time, memory is best served by anchoring it in the firm bedrock of place (as well as pictorial representations of places such as postcards, photographs and prints, commonly sepia-toned). While a place comprises both the material built environment as well as the activities and lifestyle

of inhabitants, state conservation efforts have paid greater attention to the former (Kong & Yeoh, 1994:260). This can be seen in the meticulous restoration of the physical fabric in historic districts such as Tanjong Pagar and Kreta Ayer (two subdistricts within the Chinatown Historic District designated in 1988 as part of the URA's Conservation Master Plan) and close attention to "authentic" architectual styles and ornamentation, original roof forms and colour schemes and so forth to create physical verisimilitude *vis-a-vis* a much more liberal policy with regard to the types of trades and activities to be retained in conservation areas. As a landscape text to generate awareness of the nation's past, place is invoked as a concrete showcase of history rather than as an active process. Emphasis is given to the visual qualities, the facades and concrete forms which constitute place rather than the lifeworlds integral to the making of place. Part of the reason for this could be that while lifeworlds are much less susceptible to state control and can only be retained with warts and all, built forms are easily amenable to sprucing up to reflect an idealised picture of the past. The re-creation of the past in a place gives the state the opportunity to filter out what it deems undesirable and to retain what it considers beneficial to cultivating a sense of cohesion and national identity. History is thus recycled as nostalgia.

Thus, while nostalgia is in one sense a critique of the present as argued earlier, it may also be reshaped to serve the present needs of nation-building and national cohesion. Selective visual reminders of the past embedded in the landscape which people encounter in everyday life — historic districts and conservation areas, monuments and memorials, icons and signage — are intended not only to evoke a positive evaluation of the past but also to inspire a collective sense of where we have come from. As Lowenthal (1985:13) puts it, "nostalgia has compensating virtues...Attachment to familiar places may buffer social upheaval...Nostalgia reaffirms identities bruised by recent turmoil...."

The phenomenon of nostalgia thus entails certain constructions of time and place. Nostalgia is most acute when a sense of the loss of time is conflated with a loss of place. It may also emerge as an unfavourable appraisal of the present organisation of time and space by looking back to and envisioning a different period and place. Alternatively, nostalgia may also be constructed on the basis of specific images and texts (and in particular landscape texts with strong visual qualities) which represent the past in ways which serve present-day purposes.

HERITAGE LANDSCAPES: THE POWER OF HISTORIC PLACES

While nostalgia describes a general and somewhat nebulous sentiment of looking back into and yearning for the past, heritage refers to the making of "an apparently immutable history present in the *now* of society — as a logic of the concrete" (Crang, 1994:341). This fixing of history into heritage is by no means an uncontested process because what constitutes heritage is differently interpreted in different quarters with different sectoral and communal interests. Hardy (1988:333) reminds us that the term "heritage" does not simply describe an assemblage of cultural traditions and artefacts belonging to a particular community but is a value-laden concept, "embracing (and often obscuring) differences of interpretation that are dependent on...class, gender and locality; and with the concept itself locked into wider frameworks of dominant and subversive ideologies." The question of what constitutes heritage that is worth conserving is thus highly problematic as it depends on what is thought to be historically significant.

For the sake of polarising the issue, Hardy (1988:333) draws a distinction between "heritage used in a conservative sense" and "heritage as a radical concept." In the former sense, the definition of heritage is strictly circumscribed to include ideas and artefacts of "high culture meaning." By this measure, elements of the urban landscape which qualify as heritage include the majestic and monumental, such as palaces, stately homes, national symbols and civic buildings. More recently, the perspective on heritage has been widened by those who advocate "more cogent, credible, realist alternative views [of the past], centred on the lived experiences of a wider spectrum of the populace"

(Butlin, 1987:37). Such a "radical" concept of heritage focuses, *inter alia*, on reclaiming the lived landscapes of common people such as the homes of the labouring classes, neighbourhood streets and alleys, factories and workplaces, and community structures. According to Lowenthal (1985:388), in the west, conservation efforts formerly reserved for "features of renown and widely venerated monuments" are now more generally extended to the "everyday neighbourhoods of purely local import." More specifically, Tunbridge (1989:316) argues that in Canada, the awareness of "vernacular heritage, that of the common people" was already firmly established by the 1970s.

In Singapore, from the state's perspective, heritage has important social, economic and political purposes. Not only does it represent the city's cultural wealth and diversity, it serves to bind Singaporeans in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural state together and also to "sell" Singappore abroad as an exotic tourist destination (Kong & Yeoh, 1994:253-55). For heritage to serve these purposes, it must be carefully defined and packaged. In codifying heritage, the state's strongest strategy is to objectify heritage either in "specialist" places (such as museums) or broader showcase-type landscapes (such as historic streets and districts or sites where signage and other markers help signify historicity). Carving out a place for heritage in society literally involves furnishing heritage a place in a visual sense. Thus, the Preservation of Monuments Board was established in 1971 with the aim of preserving specific sites including buildings, structures, memorials, and places of interment or excavation (Section 2(1), Preservation of Monuments Act, 1985). In the 1980s, the URA expanded the definition of preservation to include the conservation of whole areas. Conservation master plans were released for historic districts such as Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam (a Malay heartland) and the Civic and Cultural District and in recognition of these efforts, the URA was appointed the national conservation authority in 1989. More recently, a precinct with a five-museum network comprising a Singapore History Museum, a Fine Arts Museum, an Asian Civilisations Museum, a People's Museum and a Children's Museum was proposed (*The Straits Times*, 31 January 1992) and a National Heritage Board to oversee museums, archival and heritage centres set up to "make sure that Singaporeans have a deep sense of the past, which will provide Singaporeans with 'cultural depth' to see [them] through crisis" (*The Straits Times*, 18 March 1992).

Given the contentious nature of heritage and the multiple meanings it holds in different quarters, inscribing heritage into the concrete elements which constitute place furnishes the state a strategy of codifying and naturalising its version of heritage. By becoming part of the everyday, visible world, the landscape text of a place acts as a powerful ideological tool which:

> ...masks the artifice and ideological nature of its form and content. Its history as a social construction is unexamined. It is, therefore, as unwittingly read as it is unwittingly written (Duncan, 1989:19).

By objectifying heritage in concrete, visual form, values and ideologies are reified and fixed, and made much less transparent. For example, in the creation of the Tanjong Pagar conservation area as a landscape spectacle,[4] three themes were highlighted and firmly put in place: architectural splendour; economic vibrance and viability; and the idea of an "aesthetic" (as opposed to "social") community which represents the wider "nation" of Singaporeans (Yeoh & Lau, 1995). The production of Tanjong Pagar as the repository of spectacle obscures more problematic tensions and contradictions such as the reduction of history to architecture; the uneven competition between new commercial joints and older activities; and the wiping out of a localised sense of community constituted by social biographies, affective ties, local referents and daily routines to make way for the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) of nation-building.

As ideological tools, heritagised landscapes and historic sites convey powerful impacts: for example,

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[4] Yeoh and Lau (1995) interpret the conserved area as a landscape of spectacle, a socially powerful landscape which allows the elite to exert control not only in the area of commodity relations in the economic sphere but also beyond, in the realm of social life and popular consciousness (Ley & Olds, 1988).

they are considered the best forms of "psychological defence" because they bind the Singaporean to "his [sic] mental picture of his country" (*The Straits Times*, 16 December 1988). Through these places, the state also promotes the ideologies of multiracialism and multiculturalism as somehow innate to Singapore. What more immanent proof of the reality of Singapore's four principal races (Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (usually construed as Europeans and Eurasians)) is there than a map of historic districts comprising Chinatown representing the Chinese, Kampong Glam representing the Malays, Little India representing the Indians, and the Civic and Cultural District representing the European colonial presence, especially if authenticated by reference to Raffles' 1822 town plan? It is when socially constructed categories become embodied as part of the landscape, that they become more readily accepted as natural and unquestionable.

Yet, while it is often the powerful whose ideas and categories are inscribed in the landscape, further contributing to their power (Schorske, 1980), the less powerful do attempt to redefine the constitution of heritage using particular sites of resistance and negotiation. The failed initiative to save Eu Court, a curved, corner residential cum office building located in the Civic and Cultural District, from the bulldozer, for example, testifies to people's attempts to secure a stake in defining heritage in everyday places. Similarly, the attempt to save the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, a complex of buildings in Victoria Street, first, from demolition and then from commercialisation reflects the efforts to inscribe grassroots interpretation of heritage in place. Yet, it is clear that most of these efforts to define the meaning of heritage fail precisely because "ordinary" people do not have the power to "define" places in the same way that the state does. Defining our past thus involves defining the nature of place in the present; and because the powerful have control over the making of place, the definition of the past has hitherto remained in their hands.

REFLECTIONS

A sense of place, with all its multifarious meanings, is thus an integral element in the conceptions of history, nostalgia and heritage. As a concrete, localised setting, place provides the receptacle for the outworkings of history, nostalgia and heritage; but beyond that, place is also intimately drawn into individual interpretations, social constructions and the political uses of time and the temporal sense.

Given the salience of place, both as a concrete and constructed form, both in the taken-for-granted realm of everyday encounters and the critical junctures of official policy making, those of us who value the past — whether as history, nostalgia or heritage — should also be conscious of place. In the words of Tuan (1974:217-19), those who are concerned with "the nature of being, becoming, duration, and experience", should also heed the primacy of space and place, for space is "more basic to human experience" and "can be comprehended more directly" than time. In our present place in the flow of time, the fleeting nature with which time flies and generations change is often registered in and apprehended by the way places change. To signal fast-changing times, we often use the language of place in speaking of a sense of "dislocation", "displacement", "placelessness", (Relph, 1976) and a lack of "rootedness."

By embodying history and meaning, and because it "incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people" (Tuan, 1974:213), place signifies history in both subtle and manifest ways. Beyond that, however, the rendering of memory and history in place solidifies that which is less palpable. This has effects: for the individual, a playground captured on a photograph conjures up particular constructions of our childhood days while revisiting a former home or school which has changed almost beyond recognition stirs up emotive memories of what used to be. On the collective level, the objectification of history in the landscape in the form of monuments and historic districts inevitably ossifies particular versions of collective memory and at the same time erases from present consciousness other versions of the past. Places in the present are historical, but they only represent history in partial ways.

If this is the case, in constructing history, we must heed how we subject places to change and

stability. In changing places, we are rewriting history, both on the personal and collective levels. This consciousness should not be clouded whether we are considering "public symbols", places which command attention and inspire awe (Tuan, 1974:236-40), or "fields of care", places which evoke affection and provide the everyday material objects for the "sustenance and deepening" of human relationships (Tuan, 1974:241-43). On the national level, with Singapore poised on the threshold of a new generation in urban landuse planning signalled in the Conservation Master Plan of 1986, the Revised Concept Plan of 1991, and the 55 Development Guide Plans which translate planning visions into detailed plans for particular areas, planning should move beyond the principles of economic rationality and efficiency to also embrace an awareness that in urban planning, history is often constructed, conserved and fractured. Given the intimate connections between the spatial and the temporal, the state's active and prominent hand in constructing place must necessarily mean an active and prominent hand in constructing history. Likewise, in any (re-)writing of history, a re-organisation of place is inevitable. It is imperative that these interconnections are explicitly acknowledged, for only then will urban planning and redevelopment incorporate a critical temporal sense of some depth. Only then will other meanings and values have some place alongside efficiency and pragmatism in the rewriting of places.

On a personal level, not only do places change, people change places frequently in Singapore. The likelihood of people staying in one place throughout the different stages of their lives is small. Many will have the opportunity to settle in at least two localities — one in their childhood and formative years, and one in their adult lives after marriage. One of the effects of the insistent emphasis on economic development, higher standards of living and the achievement of excellence is that a value system has evolved whereby many Singaporeans are constantly concerned with material betterment. This is nowhere more apparent than in the attempts by Singaporeans to upgrade their living quarters. With an ever-escalating set of expectations among Singaporeans, many, in fact, are caught in the process of upgrading. Three-room HDB flat dwellers in a quest to better their physical and social place strive to own five-room HDB flats while five-room HDB flat dwellers reach out for private property even with their ever-escalating prices. The effect is that few stay in a place long enough to develop a deepening of human relationships in a field of care and few will have the "critical historical dimensions" (Rowles, 1983:303; see also Kong, Yeoh & Teo, 1993) in relationships with their places. Will there be a generation of displaced people, "a people without history" (Wolf, 1982), in the years ahead? Place and history are closely intertwined in the rich texture of individual and social life. There is no history without place, and no place without history; to lose sight of one would be to lose a sense of the other.

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