

Urban Singapore

Yale-NUS College AY 2021-2022 Semester 2

Instructor: Professor Chua Beng Huat

This course is divided into two sections. The first section, before the mid-term break, will deal with the physical planning of Singapore, from colonial planning to the reorganization of the island as a singular planning unit of a city-state. The second half of the course will focus on urban culture practices and visual cultural representation, from consumption to street life and artistic works.

The course structure consists of two components: An in-class seminar that primarily focuses on selected readings and understanding of a few key concepts in planning and urban culture. Each of these seminars is then followed by a field trip which leads the students to experience, record and analyze the sites and sights of urban cultural practices. Visual representation of urban Singapore will be examined through film screenings and other artistic medium.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, fieldtrips may be more limited.

Assignments:

There will be six topics covered in the seminar-cum-field trip during the semester. Students are to write a short essay (1000-1500 words), after every topic is completed. There will be no final examination. The final grade for the course will be an average of the bi-weekly short essays; each essay is equally weighted.

Urban Singapore Readings

Introduction

Alan Blum, "Excitement", in *The Imaginative Structure of the City*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2003), 262-293.

Section One: Planning Urban Singapore

1. Planning History: Colonial City

'Founding of Singapore', pp. 139-148; 'The Treaty with Tengku Long', pp. 153-168;

'Mr Crawford and Sultan Hussain Shah', from pp. 218-230. Excerpts from *The Hikayat Abdullah: The autobiography of Abdullah bin Kadir (1797-1854)*. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Kwa Chong Guan, 'Why did Tengku Hussain sign the 1819 Treaty with Stamford Raffles?', in Khoo Kay Kim et al. (eds) *Malays/Muslims in Singapore: Selected readings in history 1819-1965* (Singapore: AMP Publications, 2006), pp. 1-36.

Imran bin Tajudeen, 'From Riau to Singapore, 1700s-1870s' in H. Koon Wee and Jeremy Chua (eds.) *Singapore Dreaming: Managing Utopia* (Singapore: Asian Urban Lab, 2016), pp. 102-126.

H.F. Pearson, 'Lt. Jackson's plan for Singapore', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 42 (1) (215), 161-165,

Brenda Yeoh, "Conclusion: The politics of space in colonial Singapore", in Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1996). (HT 243.12 Yeo), pp. 136-174.

Fieldtrip: Walking tour of the colonial district: From Tiong Bahru to Kampong Glam (29 January)

2. Planning the City State and Public Housing Estates

Centre for Liveable City, *A Chance of a Lifetime: Lee Kuan Yew and the Physical Transformation of Singapore*. (Singapore: Centre for Liveable City, 2016).

Chua Beng Huat, 'From city to nation: planning Singapore', in *Political Legitimacy and Housing: staking holding in Singapore* (London: Routledge, 1997); pp. 27-50.

Phang Sock Yong, *The Singapore Model of Housing and the Welfare State*. Singapore: Research Collection School of Economics, Singapore Management University (2007).

Aline K. Wong and S. H.K. Yeh (eds.), Chapter 3 'Physical Planning and Design', *Housing a Nation: 25 years of public housing in Singapore*. (Singapore: Housing and Development Board, 1985); pp. 56-112. (HD 7371.12 Hou)

Neo, Boon Siong, June Gwee and Candy Mak, "Growing a city in a garden", in June Gwee (ed.) *Case Studies in Public Governance: building institutions in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 11-63.

URA Concept Plan: <https://www.ura.gov.sg/Corporate/Planning/Concept-Plan/Past-Concept-Plans>

Agency Visit: URA (19 February)

3. The Economic Dimensions of Singapore

S. Rajaratnam, 'The Global City' in Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq (eds.) *S. Rajaratnam: the prophetic and the political* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1987), pp.223-231. (RBR DS 599.51 Raj.P 2007).

F. F. Frobel, J. Heinrichs and O. Kreye, *The New International Division of Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); 1-48.

W.G. Huff, 'The developmental state, government and Singapore's economic development since 1960', *World Development* 23 (8): 1421-1438.

Chua Beng Huat, 'State-owned enterprises, state capitalism and social distribution in Singapore', *Pacific Review* 29 (4): 499-521.

Wee Wan-ling, 'Economic development and the national narrative' in *The Asian Modern: culture, capitalist development, Singapore*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), pp.53-76.

Section Two: Urban Culture

4. The idea of the Everyday

Henri Lefebvre, 'The Everyday and Everydayness', *Yale French Studies* (1978) 73: 7-11.

Georg Simmel, 'Metropolis and mental life', in K.H. Wolff (ed.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

Michel De Certeau, 'Walking in the city', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) pp. 91-110

Ervin Goffman, 'The individual as a unit', in *Relations in Public* (NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1971); pp. 3-27.

5. Consumerism

Lauren Langman, "Neon Cages: shopping for subjectivity", in Rob Shields (ed.) *Lifestyle Shopping: The subject of consumption*. (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 40-82.

Kevin Hetherington, 'The distracted flâneuse' in *Capitalism's Eye* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.103-130.

Ann Clark, 'The Girl: a rhetoric of desire', *Cultural Studies* (1987) 1 (2): 195-203.

Hee Limin, "Orchard Road as Conduit: between nostalgia and authenticity", *Traditional Dwelling and Settlements Review* (2005) 17 (1): 1-13.

Fieldwork: Go Shopping. (26 March)

Field Observation Concepts:

Scene: Setting

Regularity – repetitive

Duration

Collectivization

Theatricality – Performance – private-in-public – intimacy in the light

Transgression

Spectacle – creating a scene

Seen and Be Seen – doing

Activities – aestheticized, playful, leisurely

Performers and audiences

Life of a scene – charismatic, habituation, normalize and dissolution

6. Night as Frontier/Scenes (2 April)

A. R. Ekirch, 'Benighted realms' in *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2005), pp. 185-258.

Bryan D. Palmer, 'A walk on the wild side' and 'Dark cultures and the politics of transgression/transformation'. In *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 13-20 and 453-458.

Alan Blum, 'Nighttime' and 'Scenes'. In *The Imaginative Structure of the City* (Montreal and Kingston, Canada: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2003). (HT 119 Blu 2003); pp. 141-163; pp. 164-188

Fieldtrip: Streets and Scenes: Night Scenes: Geylang/ Clark Quay/Telok Ayer Street/Kampong Glam

7. Cultural Representation: Films (16 April)

Kwok Kian Woon, 'The Bonsai and the Rainforest: reflections on culture and cultural policy in Singapore', in Tan Chong Kee and Tisa Ng (eds.) *The Necessary Stage in Singapore Theatre* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2004), pp. 1-26.

Edna Lim, 'Counterperformance: the heartland and other spaces in *Eating Air* and 15', in Lilian Chee and Edna Lim (eds.) *Asian Cinema and the Use of Space: interdisciplinary perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2015); pp.187-203.

Chua Beng Huat and Meisen Wong, 'Aesthetics of the Pathetic: the portrayal of the abject in Singapore cinema', *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural and Policy Studies* (2012) 31 (2): 67-78.

Screening: Kelvin Tong and Jasmine Ng, *Eating Air* (1999)

Kelvin Tong, *Grandma Positioning System (GPS)* in *Seven Letters* (2015)

8. Urban Singapore History at National Gallery of Singapore.

Guided tour by a curator of the gallery