

**TOWARDS A GLOBAL CITY:  
EMERGING ARTS SPACES IN SINGAPORE**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
2004**

*For all of you who believed in me.*

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## **Acknowledgements**

*Acknowledging one's intellectual debts would be unmitigated pleasure but for the realization that it is an impossible undertaking. Intellectual debts are endless and innumerable.*

Tuan, 1974

☞ To those I owe endless and innumerable intellectual debts, and immense gratitude, my supervisors **A/P T.C. Chang**, and **A/P Brenda Yeoh**, thank you both so much for guiding me along the narrow and perilous paths of academia these two years. This door-stop of a thesis would not exist but for the care of your intellectual arms around my oft-vacant mind. Thank you too, **A/P Chang**, for the use of your room during your sabbatical. Where else could I find the peace to write this tome?

☞ I am also indebted to **Dr Lisa Law** – thank you for providing ideas, suggesting concepts and possibilities, and especially for encouraging me when the going got tough. Thank you for sharing your thoughts as well as your cats with me.

☞ My fellow postgrads, especially ‘uncle’ **Hamzah Muzaini**, **May ‘-May’ Tan**, **Karen ‘hurricane’ Lai**, **Winston ‘mad cow’ Chow**, **Ong Chin Ee ‘OCE’**, **Albert ‘fatboi’ Wai**, and ‘auntie’ **Theodora Lam**, who shared with me the joy and the pain, the laughter and the tears, the overwhelming experience of writing a thesis, taking non-existent modules, finding the cheapest flights to overseas conferences, and struggling to publish, among other things, thank you for being there. I owe many of you intellectual debts as well. Thank you for helping me with my fieldwork, finding elusive readings and other assorted data, and for providing clarity of thought when I had none.

☞ I especially thank my ‘network’ of friends and acquaintances who invariably assisted in this research by helping me with contacts and finding potential interviewees. In the same vein, I also thank all my interviewees and everybody who contributed to my data by answering questionnaires and other miscellaneous requests. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

☞ For my family, who unquestioningly accept my peculiar career choices, and who invariably support me, emotionally, financially, and spiritually, I reserve my greatest, most heartfelt gratitude. Where would I be without you?

☞ And finally, because sometimes working on this thesis is such a lonely thing, when nobody really understands what you’re talking or writing about in the distant hours of the night, and because sometimes the geographical concept of space just becomes too vast, thank you **God**, *because Your light shines so bright, I don’t feel no solitude; You are my first star at night, I’d be lost in space without You.*

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## Summary

Since the late 1990s, there has been abundant attention lavished on promoting the arts and culture in Singapore. The state's impetuses for creating a strong arts industry in the country are two-fold, namely to strengthen the social cohesion of the nation, and to boost the economy by contributing to the tourist and entertainment sectors. The ambitions of the state are global and outward-looking. The continual emphasis on developing the arts and allowing more room for creativity in the cultural industry is sustained by the state's aspiration to become an international arts centre. The development of the cultural industry will provide more avenues for expansion and progress of the economy. This thesis explores how new arts spaces, in the midst of being developed to promote Singapore as a global city, inadvertently result in localised issues for its citizens.

This research focuses on the types of arts spaces that are created in the midst of active promotion of Singapore as a *Global City for the Arts*. I consider three main issues in this study. The development of the arts entails the building of more physical infrastructure, resulting in the creation of more arts spaces in the country. There are two distinct agencies that create new arts spaces, namely the public sector, and the private sector. Through differing objectives, these two sectors produce different types of arts and performing spaces. I draw on the *symbolic economy* concept to examine the objectives and impetuses of the state in creating more arts spaces.

The second issue explores how the spaces of the country are changed for the citizens even as arts development progresses. The new arts spaces that are created by the public and private agencies change landscape meanings in Singapore. Through a *spatial politics* approach, I show that arts performances in public venues change the identity of the space. The presence of the arts produces physical, social, and perceived changes upon the nation's landscape.

Finally, the study concludes with an investigation of the conflicts and complementarities faced by the state, its people, and the local arts practitioners, addressing the issues that arise between creating a *Global City for the Arts* and building a strong, cohesive national identity. While the concept of *nationhood* plays off against the *Global City for the Arts* vision as the process of creating arts spaces is fraught with conflicts between the objectives for creating more arts spaces, the agencies which create the art spaces, and the different types of arts spaces that are ultimately produced, there are complementary efforts between the agencies to build a nation that is global and outward looking and at the same time bearing a strong sense of national identity.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACCA	Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts
AHS	Arts Housing Scheme
CC	Community Club
CDC	Community Development Centre
GCA	Global City for the Arts
HDB	Housing Development Board
MITA	Ministry of Information and the Arts
MRT	Mass Rapid Transit
NAC	National Arts Council
NAFA	Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts
NDP	National Day Parade
NHB	National Heritage Board
NUSSO	National University of Singapore Symphony Orchestra
RC	Residential Committee
SAC	Singapore Arts Centre
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SDT	Singapore Dance Theatre
SSO	Singapore Symphony Orchestra
SLA	Singapore Land Authority
STB	Singapore Tourism Board
STPB	Singapore Tourism Promotion Board
TAPAC	Telok Ayer Performing Arts Centre
TNS	The Necessary Stage
URA	Urban Redevelopment Authority
VCH	Victoria Concert Hall

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION:

### SINGAPORE: A SPACE FOR THE ARTS

*We are a nation intimately connected with the notion of space. Or more correctly, we are a nation intimately connected with the lack of it.*

T. Sasitharan, *Space, Spaces and Spacing*, 1996:54

*New Singapore will be one of the world's finest, most liveable cities. Arts, theatres, museums, music and sports will flourish. Singapore will be a lively and exciting place, with plenty to do and experience. Our city will not only have depth, but also the richness of diversity.*

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, *National Day Rally Speech 2001*

#### 1.1 Introduction

As Sasitharan (1996) so aptly puts it, Singapore is familiar with the lack of space. Space is the basic requirement for all activity, and we categorise and classify spaces according to the activities at these places. Hence, if we experience an arts performance at a particular space, for example, at the theatre, we associate the theatre with the arts, and classify it under the category of 'arts space'. The authority that controls and manages the events at any particular space creates a categorisation of that space. This means that the agency which dictates the functions of the space has power over the landscape. Space is an overarching focus of this research because there is so little of it in Singapore, and as such, it is important how these spaces are used.

As a consequence of limited land, the spaces of Singapore are constantly changing – being landscaped, constructed, and reconstructed because there is limited room to expand (Chua & Edwards, 1992; Ooi, 1995; Chang, 2000; Kong & Yeoh,

2003). As a result, the country requires conscientious urban planning to ensure that every plot of land in the country is effectively and efficiently used. Buildings and structures are frequently torn down and replaced by other structures deemed necessary by the government in order to promote continuous economic growth and development. The chief goal of the state is the creation of a cosmopolitan nation, a *Global City for the Arts* (Nathan, 1999; Savage, 2000). “Cosmopolis” (Mah, 1999), “Renaissance City” (Goh, 1999), “global city” and “globapolis” (Goh, 2001) are just a few examples of the government’s vision for the country.

Part of this global-city vision entails the creation of a strong arts and cultural industry. The arts in Singapore only came into focus in 1988 when then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong requested that an Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) be set up “to review the current state of the arts and culture in Singapore and to recommend measures that will make Singapore a culturally vibrant society” (ACCA, 1989:Letter to ACCA). One of the main moves following the report of the Advisory Council in 1989 was the establishment of the National Arts Council (NAC) to oversee the development and implementation of arts policies in the country. Prior to this, cultural promotion in Singapore was administered by the Cultural Affairs Division in the Ministry of Community Development, and in the ACCA report, the lack of qualified professionals to oversee proper developments for the arts and culture in the country was recognised. The move to establish the NAC as an authoritative body signalled an acknowledgement of the value of the arts to the country.

The main benefits of the arts to the country, according to the ACCA report, are two-fold. Firstly, the arts are an advantage to society. They “broaden our mind and deepen our sensibility”; give the nation a “much needed social bond to hold its people together”; and “add to the vitality of a city”, thereby enhancing the quality of life of its citizens (ACCA, 1989: letter to DPM Goh). Secondly, the arts boost the local economy by “[contributing] to our tourist and entertainment sectors” (ACCA, 1989:3). In addition, developing the arts will entail the building of good infrastructure, which would “help to attract world class performances and exhibitions, thus creating a more congenial environment for investors and professionals to stay” (ACCA, 1989: letter to DPM Goh). Singapore’s aspirations to be a *Renaissance City* and a *Global City for the Arts* calls for the country to expand globally as a city where the arts can be displayed and consumed, and in time become a “cosmopolitan city plugged into the international network where the world’s talents and ideas can converge and multiply” (STB, 1996:9). The goal of the *Global City for the Arts* plan requires sufficient space and infrastructure to support the projected growing market for the arts and culture in the city, hence the significance of *arts spaces* in Singapore.

This thesis argues that the issues involved in the emergence of new arts spaces in Singapore affect the country’s goals of becoming a *Global City for the Arts*. Factors like the potentially conflicting relationship between the economic and the political objectives for developing more arts spaces in Singapore have a direct bearing on the developmental aspects of nation-building and the country’s global aspirations.

## 1.2 Introducing Arts Spaces

The concept of *arts spaces* is central to the thesis. All art exists and functions in space, hence its spatial characteristic. Zukin (1995:119) contends that high culture (art) is manifested both in physical space, as well as symbolically: “the production of symbols (more art) demands the production of space (more space)”. What Zukin means is that the creation of more arts spaces is vital to producing more artworks, both quantitatively and in terms of quality. The creation of arts spaces occurs in two ways. Firstly, it takes place physically in the form of well-equipped infrastructure, such as the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay (Singapore), which was built to accommodate world-class performances. Secondly, the creation of arts spaces can also transpire in the perceptions of the people who use the landscape. This is to say that, from the personal perspective of an individual, good art need not occur in world-class structures designated solely to arts performances. Good art can also take place in unexpected locations, such as public spaces.

*Singapore: Global City for the Arts* (MITA & STB, 2000:13) positions the city-state as “an international art dealing and auction centre; an international theatre hub; an international cultural and entertainment centre; and an international film hub”. In order for Singapore to become a global city in all senses of the word, the state has planned for the entire country to be developed and marketed as an arts, cultural and entertainment hub of Asia. This marketing strategy would contribute to the nation’s international status.

### 1.2.1 *Defining Arts Spaces*

At this point, it is essential to explain three key terms that are the focus of this study. They are *arts spaces* and the two related terms *conventional arts spaces* and *unconventional arts spaces*. *Arts spaces* refer to any space or landscape that contains, whether permanently or temporarily, a form of art (be it a sculpture, a cultural performance, a staged play, or a music concert). *Conventional arts spaces* are spaces that have been clearly designated by the state, or by popular agreement, as a specific arts and cultural space. Examples of these include New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bilbao's Guggenheim, and the Louvre in Paris. In Singapore, there are the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, the Singapore Art Museum, and the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. *Unconventional arts spaces* are sites whose primary intended function is not to cater to arts and culture, but were originally meant to serve other purposes such as open-air walkways, public squares or shopping centre open spaces. Spaces I term 'unconventional arts spaces' are venues at which performances have taken place. Examples of these include decorative fountains, open-air public spaces in the suburban heartlands of the island, as well as the atriums of shopping centres.

*Emerging arts spaces* connotes the production of new arts sites. These arts spaces do not necessarily include only those that have been built as a structure from the ground up – like the Sydney Opera House in Australia, which is a quintessential *conventional arts space*. Arts spaces can also be unassuming locales that, at first glance, do not look like arts venues. These sites are however in the process of becoming a space because of its regular association with the arts, for example the Singapore Botanical Gardens. The Botanical Gardens, a large public park in central

Singapore, is in the process of becoming an arts space because of the concerts and performances that are held there regularly. The presence of orchestras and music groups contribute to giving the park an ‘arts’ ambience. And so, utilitarian spaces can be transformed into performance spaces by artists, and the productive task of transforming that space into an arts space falls upon the shoulders of the artist as he/she presents the arts to his/her audience at that particular site. Such is the process of an *emerging arts space*.

### *1.2.2 Introducing Art Spaces in Singapore*

Arts spaces in Singapore can also be representational spaces, or spaces filled with meaning. Miles (1997; 2000) has examined in great depth the various forms of art found in public spaces of cities in France, Russia, and the United States. According to him, the art at public art spaces causes the site to be seen as “representational spaces” (after Lefebvre, 1974), serving both aesthetic functions as well as representative roles that contain monuments to public memory. According to Miles, public art can also serve political purposes, because art displayed in public places often make political statements. The representative role of art in manipulating landscapes through creating and changing space meanings is testimonial to this. Although Miles speaks only of installation art (sculptures, murals), I believe his term *public art* also denotes performing arts which I refer to in this research. As explained in section 1.1, the main purpose that the arts serve in Singapore is to establish a creative city, and to encourage economic growth through its status as an arts hub. Kong and Yeoh (2003) surmised that the creation and expansion of arts spaces in Singapore closely mirrors the state’s growing involvement with the arts. Arts spaces, as such, are *political* representative spaces, and their meanings are

constructed according to the agent which created that particular space. Hence, the construction of a *conventional* arts space, such as the Esplanade, symbolises the state's ambition of developing Singapore as a *Global City for the Arts*. In the same way, the formation of an *unconventional* arts space, like the staging of an arts performance in a park or shopping mall, occurs when an artiste establishes his or her perception of that particular landscape upon a place, thereby changing its meaning and representation.

The creation of arts spaces is seen as contributing to the country's global aspirations. This creation also has implications for national identity. There is also a nationalistic need for a strong identity that may be complicated by the creation of more arts space. The importance of nation-building to Singapore is evidenced in the government's emphasis on social cohesion, and building a strong national identity that promotes loyalty and commitment to the country. The state desires for Singaporeans to be rooted "to ensure [the] country's long-term survival" (Goh, National Day Rally Speech 2002). The conundrum in this instance is the country's globalising aspirations, for to create a global city, the citizens of Singapore are necessarily exposed to the rest of the world; the cosmopolising influences brought about by globalisation in turn has a potentially negative effect on one's sense of belonging and rootedness to his/her country.

The presence of old, existing, and newly created arts spaces in Singapore thus creates both tensions and synergies. There are conflicts and complementarities in the relationship between conventional and unconventional arts spaces. An example of this is the achievement of the *Global City for the Arts* vision through the well-



publicised construction of the conventional arts spaces such as the national museums of Singapore; however, there are also benefits to the city created by unconventional arts spaces that the public may not be aware of. Conventional arts spaces are consequently emphasised as more important, and are favoured over unconventional arts spaces. There are also issues in the relationship between nation-building and the *Global City for the Arts* vision, which involves the economic motivation behind the development of the arts. This motivation has potential consequences on Singapore's cultural life and national identity as the role of the arts and culture are downplayed in the quest for globalisation. The thesis aims to discover the effects, both intentional and unintentional, of the state's utilitarian purposes for the arts.

### **1.3 Thesis Aims & Objectives**

As the title of the thesis indicates, the focal point of this study is the formation of new arts spaces in Singapore. My thesis will explore how new arts spaces, in the midst of being developed to promote Singapore as a global city, inadvertently result in localised issues for the citizens of Singapore. These issues manifest in the way the space is changed for the citizens, not only in the physical sense, but also from their experiential perspectives and how their encounter with art at these spaces has changed the space for them. The research focuses on how arts policies, and reactions to these plans, result in the creation of both *new* and *unconventional arts spaces*. These new arts spaces have an effect on Singapore's landscape. The changes to the landscape contribute to a global future for the country, as illustrated in the envisioning of Singapore as a *Renaissance City* and a *Global City for the Arts*. The government creates a creative and artistic image of the nation, and this image helps to promote the country and contributes to building a national identity. However, this

image is also perplexing because the aspirations of globalisation are potentially contradictory and conflicting against the demands to forge a stronger national identity.

As such, there are three objectives to this thesis. The first is to explore the agencies that result in the creation of more arts spaces. The two main agencies at work here are the public sector – the government, and the private sector – the artistes and arts companies. While the public agency introduces arts policies that result in the creation of more arts spaces, the private sector also reacts to these policies by creating different arts spaces.

The second thesis objective is to discover how public spaces are changed when an arts performance transpires at the site. The creation of more arts spaces, explored within the first objective, includes the emergence of *unconventional* arts spaces. These arts venues are *contested* landscapes filled with spatial meanings and representations that are created and changed by the arts performances occurring there.

The final objective is to evaluate the conflicting and complementary relationships between nation-building and the government's goal of making Singapore a *Global City for the Arts*. I show that there are important factors involved in the creation of more arts spaces, and these factors are significant in influencing the nation's dual goal of achieving the *Global City for the Arts* status and nation-building.

Ultimately, the thesis reconciles the creation of a *Global City for the Arts* through the creation of arts spaces with the vital necessity of building a strong national identity. Having said this, I need to clarify that the term *arts* in this thesis refers solely to *performance art* unless stated otherwise. This is a limiting factor that has been imposed with the purpose of keeping the study area from becoming too wide, and ergo, an unwieldy research subject matter. However, performance art is also well suited to the thesis objectives because it is the temporal and fleeting events that do not leave permanent physical marks on the landscape. Rather, these transient events are remembered through peoples' social experiences, which is a significant theme in this research.

#### **1.4 Thesis Organisation**

This thesis is organised into seven main chapters. In this chapter, I have established the focus, aims and objectives of the research. I have also provided a definition of arts spaces and discussed the concept of arts spaces in Singapore. The second chapter provides a literature review and explains concepts pertinent to the thesis. An outline of the conceptual framework concludes this chapter. Chapter three provides a rationale to my methodological approach and discusses the methodologies I have adopted for the field work in the research.

Chapter four marks the beginning of the analytical themes I developed from the results of my fieldwork. I begin with an explanation of how economic goals are the impetus for arts and cultural development in the country. The outcome of this is the production of arts spaces, and the chapter specifically details the creation of *unconventional* arts spaces. Chapter five explores how arts performances change

their performance venues, and examines the spatial politics that occur as a result of these *unconventional* arts spaces. Chapter six returns to the big picture to discuss the conflicting and complementary relationships that arise from the objectives, agencies and spatial dynamics involved in developing a *Global City for the Arts*.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis by summarising the main points and discussing the research implications for arts spaces in Singapore.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of concepts pertinent to the thesis. A literature review of relevant key works follows, and the chapter concludes with an illustration of how the various themes pertinent to this study, derived from the research literature, are combined with the concepts to form a framework to guide my empirical analysis.

#### 2.2 Concepts & Themes

In this section, I introduce and review the overriding concept that is central to the thesis, and the two themes that are related to the research. The leading concept is that of the *politics of space*. Spatial politics are important to this study because they explain the evolution of spatial meanings and define the power relations that control these meanings. The two themes central to this research are the *symbolic economy*, which is crucial to understanding the importance of the development of arts spaces to the state; and *nation building*, which explains the mechanics behind how arts spaces can contribute to, or detract from, a sense of national identity.

##### 2.2.1 Arts Spaces & Spatial Politics

The politics of space is important because it draws attention to the notion of power over space. The production of space (after Lefebvre) is involved with the social

production of the spaces within which social life takes place (Johnston, *et. al.*, 2000). As such, the production of arts spaces is involved with the social processes (arts performances) that function upon that space. Keith and Pile (1993) argue that space is invested with politics and ideology. Following Soja (1989), they suggest that relations of power and discipline are an undeniable part of the spatiality of social life. Spaces are produced from the social and political interactions between space and society, and the social entity that has power over a space defines and classifies that particular space. The consumption of these spaces by social groups also subsequently occurs, producing issues that focus on the experiential perspectives of space.

Labelling a site an *arts space* inevitably entails politics and power relations between different peoples with differing claims to and perceptions of these spaces. Both Lee (2000) and Low (2001), for example, conceptualised the idea of artistic negotiation of arts spaces in Singapore. Both studies involve the idea of 'socio-scapes', a term used by Albrow to indicate "the vision of social formations which are more than the people who occupy them at any one time" (1997:38). Being dependant on the vision and perspectives of the individuals and the society who occupies the space, this further establishes the research within the humanistic concepts of geography, which are based on the experiential perspectives of people who consume the space. These perspectives are entrenched in the idea of socially created landscapes and imaginative geographies. More than just individual perceptions, the image of the spaces that we construct are also shaped and influenced by social authorities (Driver, 1999). The prevailing social perspectives of space will eventually define that particular space, which are subsequently experienced and

consumed by individuals. This shows that space and place are defined by the experiences of both individuals and the collective consciousness of society.

The concepts of *space* and *place* have been expounded upon by Tuan (1977). He explains that socially experienced spaces are filled with meaning and are often represented by the dominant function of that space. The concepts of *meanings* and *representations*, in reference to arts spaces, are related to the idea of experiential perspectives of space (Tuan, 1974; 1977). This discussion involves human interaction with place, which is embodied by the politics of negotiating arts spaces. There are two points to the discussion; firstly, how space is used and manipulated to serve the artists' ends; and secondly, how space meanings influence the perspectives of the people who utilise the space. A notion of place that geographers have often adopted, 'sense of place', is defined as 'identification with a place engendered by living [or otherwise interacting] with it' (Agnew & Duncan, 1989:2). This notion is significant to the thesis because it is with experiencing arts performances at a particular place that makes that space an arts space.

Power relations are evident in the negotiation between global and local arts spaces. This is evidence of the importance of recognising that place is not defined only by 'ordinary' people who interact with places, but is also often subject to 'the power of others' (Eyles, 1988). Furthermore, bell hooks suggests that there needs to be a "community of resistance" (1991:149) because individuals and societies need to locate themselves in reference to other individuals and societies. Hence, it is inevitable that there are distinct and irreconcilable understandings of space that exist in society (Keith & Pile, 1993). In this light, the opportunities and constraints posed

by government policy, planning authorities and community organisations are part of the process of spatial politics. In the Singapore context, the struggle between developing spaces for the establishment of global arts and making available space for the local arts was explicated by Chang (2000). In a similar vein, Kong's (1996) work on Dick Lee's music finds intersection between global and local cultures in the fusion of "East-West" influences, and shows how music as an art form provides an avenue for understanding the intersections of global and local forces. The theme of globalisation versus localisation is also exemplified as "sites of struggles" or "contested landscapes" within cities (Chang *et. al.*, 1996; Kong & Law, 2002). Many local artists feel that the physical spaces available are insufficient and too limited to be able to cultivate, support, and to "home" the arts (Chang & Lee, 2003). Many recently-built establishments appear to cater specifically to global events and foreign artistes – for example the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Local cultural organisations find the costs for organising events at the Esplanade exorbitant. As local artistes also require space for their arts and performances, they are compelled to carve out their own local arts sites.

Resistance and contestation are inherent in the politics of place. This theme places emphasis on the creativity, ingenuity and resilience of non-dominant groups and individuals (Johnston *et. al.*, 2000) to oppose and to challenge the definitions and meanings imposed upon them by other authorities. Landscapes are often contested through the resistance to dominant culture from subordinate groups. The demolition and imposition of monuments, the struggle for public space and its meanings, and the appropriation and transformation of landscapes and symbols are indicators of how landscapes are contested (Kong & Law, 2002:1503). In the context of arts spaces,



resistance and contestation often refer to the social politics over the use of public space. Low (2001), for example, considered the role that the arts play in expressing resistance. According to her, as arts in public spaces are accessible to all, they serve to represent a critique of society by the artist. Drawing from examples of sculptures and installations in public spaces, she suggests that public art serves as a means of social commentary. Similarly, Miles (1997) describes how spaces are representations of ideas, and explains that the arts produce social processes and values that usually pose as a statement of resistance. The example of the *Harburg Monument Against Fascism* (by Jochem and Esther Shalev-Gertz, 1986, cited in Miles, 1997:80) was a work of art that attempted to reveal, and then subsequently bury, the prejudices and discrimination of society at that time. It was an aluminium column in a shopping area that was raised above, and then periodically sunk into, a pit, and citizens of and visitors to Harburg were encouraged to write on the column. Resistances may also oppose an ideal that the space originally represents. Tolstoy (1990) hypothesises that the motivation for mass agitational art arose from the October Revolution that took place in Russia in 1917. According to him, public art, in the form of political posters, newspaper and magazine graphics, oratorical poetry, heroic theatre, mass dramatisations and popular street processions, became a means of affecting national transformation (Tolstoy, 1990). Public performance art became a means for publicising political preferences.

Also implicated in spatial politics is the concept of insider-outsider relations, which was introduced by Relph (1976). He described 'insiderness' as a condition when one belongs to and identifies with a particular place. When one identifies with a space, it is full of significance and includes a "multifaceted phenomenon of

experience” (1976:29). To be ‘outside’ is to not have any personal experience with a space, and to lack a feeling of belonging to a place. The “‘insider-outsider’ dualism is conceptually useful in the interrogation of socioscapes of the arts because multiple levels of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ are often played out” (Lee, 2000:18-19). The tensions occur at many levels – between local and foreign artists, and also between the audiences of the arts. Local artists would identify with places in which they have performed whereas foreign artistes often perform in unfamiliar landscapes. This duality may present several differences in their art. A local artist who is familiar with a space would be aware of the original function of that space. With this knowledge, the artist is able to intentionally use or manipulate the audiences’ common perception of this space. The representation of ideas in a particular space through the performance art may be more meaningful if the artist possessed an intimate sense of, or relationship with, that space.

The concepts of the politics of space, and the meanings and representation of space are rather extensive, involving many themes relating to how ‘spaces’ are transformed into ‘places’ (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Tuan mentions that “an object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total... through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind” (1977:18). This indicates that human relationships with place are important because “objects and places are centres of value. They attract or repel in finely shaded degrees. To attend to them even momentarily is to acknowledge their reality and value” (1977:18). Hence, meanings and representations of arts space involve a humanistic concept apprehended from the perspectives of experience. Since place is a reality, which is a construct of

experience, a creation of feeling and thought (Tuan, 1977), meanings and representations of arts spaces cannot be indifferent to human experiences.

Hence the experiential perspective of arts spaces is important as it reveals a person's image of a place after he or she has had an experience in a particular site. Mapping social perceptions of space is a technique to examining perceived changing landscapes. These landscapes are affected not only by permanent physical changes, but also by transient arts performances that leave no physical marks, but indelible mental ones. This discussion on the meanings and representations of arts spaces has attempted to highlight how both artists and audiences negotiate and at times even contest the spaces that are officially classified as 'arts space' or 'non-arts space'. It also begins a dialogue on how unconventional arts spaces are produced and negotiated, by both the artist and the public.

### 2.2.2 *Arts Spaces & the Symbolic Economy*

Arts spaces are heavily implicated in the symbolic economy. In *The Cultures of Cities* (1995), Zukin outlines the concepts of symbolic economy and cultural capital. She described how arts and arts spaces become part of a symbolic economy: "by their marketing of cultural consumption, great art has become a *public* treasure, a tourist attraction, and a representation... of public culture. ...the work of art and the museum itself have become icons of the city's symbolic economy" (1995:14). The arts have an inherently economic foundation because "art confers money and power" (Zukin, 1995:15), and "the display of art, for public improvement or private gain, represents an abstraction of economic and social power" (1995:23). Promoting culture and cultural institutions reveals a city's fine qualities, and stands to reap

economic gains. Significant themes pertinent to the *symbolic economy* include the role of arts spaces in the symbolic cultural economy (Harvey, 1989; Zukin, 1995), cultural policy (Kong, 2000), urban regeneration and gentrification (Zukin, 1989; Bianchini, 1991; Cameron, 1991; Law, 1992), and arts tourism (Poon, 1989; Philo and Kearns, 1993; Chang, 2000).

In examining the role of *cultural policy* in Singapore, Kong (2000) explained the perennial conflict between the economic and socio-cultural agendas of the arts. The main motivation for cultural development in many cities is often economic. In Singapore, the main impetus for developing more facilities and encouraging progress in the arts is the capital that cultural promotion is able to attract from the international and regional spheres. This is accomplished through economic globalisation and developing a 'world class city'. It is for this reason that more arts spaces and infrastructure, such as the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, have thus been constructed to cater to economic gains that can be reaped from hosting more, and better arts events.

The theme of urban regeneration and gentrification further emphasises the potential of arts spaces to revitalise city-scapes through physical and economic renewal. Zukin's (1989) *Loft Living* exemplifies how artists moving into abandoned warehouse areas in Soho (New York City) have transformed derelict districts into bohemian artistic sites, and in the process raised the demand for urban space by other cultural and retail land uses. The revamped image of the site appealed to the upper-middle class, who subsequently increased demand and property prices. At the same time, there are also residents who are displaced by the gentrification of the area as

they are unable to afford the increasing rents and land-prices. The transformations of urban spaces through public art show that the cultural economy impacts the city through aesthetically decorating shopping malls, restaurants and cafes, clubs, theatres, galleries, boutiques, and so on (Zukin, 1995). Architectural and design trades are hence important, not only because they contribute to the cultural economy through the aestheticisation of the city, but also because the urban landscape itself is one of the main products of this industry (Hutton and Giddens, 2000). In addition, there are public efforts of urban rehabilitation viz. the attempt to enhance local prestige, increase property values, and attract new investments and jobs (Kearns and Philo, 1993). Similarly, Bianchini (1991) articulates how urban regeneration is brought about through urban art forms, such as public art installations. These enhance not only the physical properties of the landscape, but encourages economic regeneration as well. This is because the refurbished landscape, through promoting an image of optimism, civic pride and fun, attracts more tourists, foreign investments, and employment opportunities.

The concepts of *arts tourism* and *place marketing* illustrate how public and private agencies 'sell' the image of a place to tourists (Philo & Kearns, 1993). This "deliberate manipulation of *culture*" to appeal to up-market tourists (Philo & Kearns, 1993) is exemplified by Chang's work on Singapore as a *Global City for the Arts*. He argues that the government attempts to create a "situation that is conducive for the arts" and "a place where local, regional and international arts and culture are displayed and consumed" (2000:818). The key term, *global*, clearly demonstrates the state's desire for worldwide recognition of Singapore for its economic achievements and its cultural aspirations. New York and London are chief examples

of how arts-led tourism has generated considerable economic gains. Arts tourism becomes increasingly popular as the arts are added to an itinerary that previously included other cultural elements such as heritage, religion, and ethnicity as a means of attracting tourists (Lee, 2000).

Arts festivals (Waterman, 1998a & 1998b), carnivals (Jackson, 1987), fairs and culture-consumption sites of spectacle (Ley & Olds, 1988) are also examples of place-promoting events that encourage economic development in the city. Arts festivals are a deliberate manipulation of landscape with the power to create a sense of place. Even though the events are temporary, they are capable of leaving a permanent mark on the landscape. The events remain a memory in the minds of the people who were there, creating an indelible mark in their minds. There is hence a reorganisation of significant ways in which the spaces of the city are perceived, before, during and after an event has taken place.

Collectively, the concepts and ideas introduced above on the *symbolic economy* illustrate the potential of the arts in attracting foreign investments and promoting tourism to globalising ends. The creation and expansion of arts space is crucial to place marketing and urban tourism promotion. Arts activities attract capital to a city or country not just through tourism, but also through attracting talented foreign workers and investments (Chang, 2000). The concept of symbolic economy, however, also questions the capitalistic capabilities of unconventional arts spaces – arts performances in these spaces are often either free or charge a token sum. As Kong & Yeoh (2003) have discovered, “profit-making theatre” which draws in large crowds in Singapore will be favoured above “exploratory, indigenous forms”

which have less of an audience-attracting, and hence profit-making, potential. Hence the inherent economic quality of the arts and arts spaces is stressed, as the majority of government funds are directed towards large, conventional arts spaces like the Esplanade which would host crowd-pulling foreign acts. In the meantime, small-time, small-earning, exploratory and indigenous artistes are left largely unsupported. It becomes a cycle that is propagated by the lack of funds to promote and develop these small-scale and low-profile performances. The symbolic economy questions the capitalistic potentials of such small-time art forms because they are low-profit and are hence not seen as contributing significantly to the economy.

### 2.2.3 *Arts Spaces & Nationhood*

As mentioned earlier, landscapes are socially constructed and so too are the concepts of *nation*, *nationhood*, *nationalism*, and *national identity* (Clifford, 1988, Jackson & Penrose, 1993). These terms, which exist only as an effect of political, cultural inventions and local tactics, are socially constructed. They allude to ideas of common interest between heterogeneous groups of people, establishing them physically by drawing boundaries and borders to delimit and declare a territory, and thereby creating a belief in the existence of a distinct, inviolable entity of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983; Kong & Yeoh, 1997). Hooson (1994) notes that “place and national identity are bound together. Attachment to the one is almost always inseparable from the sense of the other”. This is an indication that the notion of ‘place’ is important to national identity. Where there is a sense of place, one builds an identity with it. It has been argued that that “the (re)creation of landscapes is... unlikely to be an innocent event but must instead be read as being deeply ideological” (Kong & Yeoh, 2003:2-3). Indeed, the way that people interpret

landscapes in their everyday lives may possibly be divergent from the imposed meanings of the dominant.

How do arts spaces contribute to building national identity? Kong & Yeoh (1997) have examined how the production of a particular ritual, the National Day parade, contributes to national identity in Singapore. The parade is annually held at large, high-profile locations such as the National Stadium or the Padang. While this type of performance is not explicitly *art*, the theatricality of the displays does include elements of the fine arts, such as dance and music performances. The annual parades are clearly patriotic events designed specifically to bring the citizens of Singapore together to celebrate and commemorate the nation's day of independence. The nation-wide performance of patriotism and nationalism is evidence that rituals and performances produce a significant impact on the citizens of the country and contribute to nation-building.

Arts performances in public spaces are able to contribute to a sense of national identity, as evidenced by Waterman's (1998a, 1998b) case study demonstrating that arts festivals transform everyday settings (public space) into temporary environments (performing arts space). Festivals therefore produce, process, and consume culture in time and space. The production of art performances at a festival is a process that converts mundane public spaces into enchanting arts places. Furthermore, at these events, the production and the consumption of art occur simultaneously. Arts performances transform familiar locales into otherworldly and spiritually uplifting environments (Waterman, 1998a) contributing to strong place identification and symbolic attachments. These performances and



spectacles create associations and symbols (Relph, 1975) which contribute meanings to, and help define space. Arts performances at public spaces contribute to building national identity through producing sense of place and belonging in the spectators. According to Anderson (1983) national identity is enhanced at similar events and spectacles through developing an “imagined community”.

Conventional arts spaces like the Sydney Opera House in Australia, the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City contribute to nation-building through the experiences that the population has with the structure. These structures are large-scale, high-profile monuments to national pride, and they help to build a sense of identity to the nation. In Singapore, these patriotic structures are affirmed through the strengthening of the *Global City for the Arts* vision. Unconventional arts spaces also play their part in nation-building. As mentioned earlier, the population’s experience with displays of public art (Miles, 2000) and street festivals (Waterman, 1998a; 1998b) creates a sense of place, which also affirms identity. Tolstoy *et. al.*’s (1990) study of mass public performances in the wake of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union showed the massive support of the population as a whole for celebrating Revolutionary anniversaries and advancing national transformation. The arts performances at these disparate locations help to build collective national identity. Performances in unconventional, public spaces are usually contextually structured towards the viewers by addressing issues and themes that are local and important to the target audience. The relevance of the performance to the local population is a drawing factor for an incidental audience. Bibikova (1990) noted the effectiveness of public theatre activists in connecting with their audiences by

performing popular and traditional forms of art that were familiar to the masses, rather than risk losing them by immediately introducing them to an entire range of artistic tendencies. Unconventional arts venues are also spaces of resistance and alternative meanings. Furthermore, in Singapore, most public performances are staged by the local arts groups; whereas many performances in the conventional arts spaces are foreign-based, and these cater to an educated, knowledgeable, and discerning global audience. Hence, the performances in conventional arts spaces may produce an art form that is less accessible to local, less cosmopolitan-inclined audiences. The issues raised by the local and global relationships created by these arts spaces are often both conflicting and complementary, and these have significant, but not necessarily unidirectional effects on national identity.

### **2.3 Reviewing Arts Performances in Urban Spaces**

Although Waterman (1998a:69) comments that “[arts spaces have] been almost entirely neglected not only by geographers but also by social science as a whole”, I have found a reasonable amount of research written and published on the subject of the arts in relation to geography, and arts spaces in general. Evidence of this is observed in Johnston *et al.*'s *Dictionary of Human Geography* (2000), under the entries “art, geography and” (p. 37), and “performance” (p. 577). According to Johnston *et al.*, art has long been associated with geography since the concept of *art* is inherent to the meaning of *geography*. The art-geography relationship is evident in many separate art-in-geography themes, ranging from pictorial representations of landscape and spatial imageries to landscape gardening and the aesthetics of urban architecture. Some of these themes have economic leanings, such as the use of public art in advertising, promotion and place selling (Kearns & Philo, 1993; Gold &

Ward, 1994), while some themes focus on the aesthetic, for example landscape art and aesthetic geography, viz. the traditions of Carl Sauer (see also Zukin, 1989; and Miles, 2000). Equally important are humanistic themes on the landscape as a moral and aesthetic expression of socio-environmental relations (Bonnett, 1992; Tuan, 1995); the ideals of community art and public involvement (Foster & Blau, 1989; Miles, 1997; Cohen-Cruz, 1998); iconography (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988); monuments and memorials in constructing and identifying spaces (Mitchell, 1992; Soja, 1995); and many other themes involved with matters of spatial experience, mapping and landscape imaging. The art of cartography and the use of painting as a medium for tracking landscape changes and modernity also testify to the links between art and space. All of the above are examples of how art is related to geography, and an indication of the range of research undertaken on arts spaces.

According to Miles (1996), there are three functions of public art. Firstly, it can function as a monument; secondly, as an outward expansion of works shown inside art galleries, or as aesthetic additions to public space; and thirdly, as interventions in public issues. In line with Miles' second function of public art, Sayre comments that art in the public spaces "offers a fundamentally different experience from art in the museum or gallery. It becomes part of the material of its place and refers beyond itself" (1989:212). In this case, art refers beyond itself by drawing upon its context and its environment, instead of existing solely in the primacy of the blank and empty spaces of galleries. In such a sense, it becomes directly linked and connected to the public and society. The effects of art on the public spaces have impacted contemporary culture through introducing controversies and debates into the public sphere, where they are more easily accessible (Mitchell,

1992). The function of public art in enhancing the public realm and economic regeneration is explicated by both Zukin (1989) and Roberts (1998). Roberts furthermore suggests that public art “assists in the creation of identity and therefore facilitates the commercial objectives” (1998:128).

The impact of public art on culture is demonstrated by Cohen-Cruz (1998), who argues that performances in public spaces, what she terms ‘street performance’ challenges reality because “theatre transports the audience to a reality apart from the everyday... street performance strives to transport everyday reality to something more ideal” (1998:1). The importance of street performances lies in expressive behaviour intended for public viewing. There must be minimal constraints on access to the performance; it must be easily accessible by anyone. The draw of performances in public spaces is in the wide range of audience it can reach. As such, these public performances have the power to promote or resist ideologies. Much has been written on the art as a form of activism (Felshin, 1995), which is touted as effective because of its potentially long reach. In being accessible and influential, public art is a manipulative media. Felshin contends that public art makes innovative use of public space to “address issues of socio-political and cultural significance”, and lists such issues as “homelessness, the AIDS crises, violence against women, the environment, sexism, ageism, illegal immigration, racism, and trade unionism, among others” (1995:9). This shows that art, on the ground, lends voice and visibility to the “disenfranchised”, and raises awareness of issues relevant to the community, and hence connects art to the masses. Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz (1994) examine a form of political theatre known as ‘theatre of the oppressed’, which was introduced by theatre activist Augusto Boal. This form of theatre gave voice and

power to the disenfranchised audience and encouraged spectators to participate in the performances to address such issues as raised by Felshin above. The effect of public art on the masses can be overwhelming. In Russia, “monumental theatrical spectacles corresponded to the feelings of the masses... such performances, with thousands of participants, took place in towns all over the country and *always, at the most emotional moments, the spectators themselves took an active part in the performance*” (Bibikova, 1990:24-25, emphasis mine). Performances in public spaces allow the audience to transcend physical space by moving into the imaginary realm of theatre. Normal, everyday landscapes are hence transformed into theatrical settings through involvement with the performance.

Community theatre is an art form that involves performances staged in the public realm. These context-dependent events cater to the community through being relevant to both the audience and the actors (Erven, 2001). Johnston (1991:50) argues that “fundamental... is the role of the local milieu in structuring how people tackle problems, both the small and usually trivial problems of everyday life and the large, infrequently met, problems which call for major decisions”. The collective art-making process between audience and actors emerges from, and tries to express the interests of, the community (Schechter, 2003). In this manner, place meanings are formed from the creation of arts in the public realm. People are active participants in the process of the making of place (Pred, 1984). Places are constructed when they are invested with human meaning. The process of participating in public art through watching a performance or actively participating in one creates an opportunity for people to form meanings in the context of their locations. Collective sentiments of the audience can accord meaning to place. The resultant social places, or “communal

sites” (Rotenberg, 1993:xiii) are therefore textured by multiple layers of everyday meanings and experienced events. When experienced and collectivised meanings intersect, place meanings are augmented for the population.

Tolstoy *et. al.* (1990) examined community theatre on the national and political scale. After the October Revolution in 1917 in Russia, public festivals began to play an important role in the political and artistic life of Russia. They were not only one of the most powerful means of social and political agitation on behalf of Soviet power, but they also “embodied in bright, exciting forms that everyone could understand, the people’s dreams and hopes for a glorious future” (Bibikova, 1990:17). This movement reflects the power of the performing arts in promoting political objectives in the nation. The performances were widely influential because they took place in a form familiar to the working masses; hence the majority of the population were able to identify with the issues raised. Indeed, Cohen-Cruz also mentions that “popular forms of entertainment, even if originally produced for commercial reasons, have frequently been adapted to political ends” (1998:4).

Specific literature on urban arts spaces in Singapore is relatively more recent and scarce. Chang notes that “places, landscapes and environments are increasingly being used in novel ways for public outreach” (2002:61). According to him, arts spaces play an important role – “the use of novel environments to showcase the arts helps to break down the barrier between high-brow art and everyday art forms” (Chang, 2002:61). Staging performances in public places such as on street sidewalks and in shopping malls not only creates opportunities for public exposure to the arts, it also challenges artists to be more creative and interactive. The context of the

performance, in terms of location, lends meaning to the performance (Siemens, 1997), for example by making use of the present environment, like the history of a public building, to help advance the plot of a theatrical performance. This makes for more dynamic and exciting performances, while also contributing to Singapore as a vibrant arts city. The transformation of Singapore into a vibrant and global arts destination is echoed in how arts tourism has been introduced to cater to cultural tourists (Law, 1993; Lee, 2000). This form of tourism, however, has raised contentions relating to whether arts establishments in the city are catered to the enjoyment of money-spending tourists, or for local consumption.

Conflicts engendered by the arts are an important insight into how and why arts spaces in Singapore are created. Kong (2000) has looked at the economic and socio-cultural agendas of cultural policies in Singapore, outlining the “disjuncture between the state’s policies and the intents of [arts] practitioners” (2000:410). She argues that while government policies focus on economic development, the practitioners’ main concerns include social and cultural development. This again shows that while many practitioners are encouraged by the government’s goal of developing a sense of nationhood and identity through the arts, others fear that the arts have evolved into a tourism strategy geared towards attracting global and regional visitors and investments.

Lee (2000) addresses the physical spaces for the arts in Singapore, by mapping the arts landscape in the city, revealing clusters of arts spaces, inclusive of major arts structures such as concert halls and museums, as well as housing for art groups, and other infrastructure like small-sized arts venues hosting performance and

visual arts groups (2000:34, 38). He also gave an overview of the Arts Housing Scheme (AHS) which provides the physical infrastructure for performance and installation art. In his assessment of the AHS, Lee argues that while the scheme has provided structures to *house* the arts, these structures fail to become *homes* for the arts (2000:45). In other words, while providing basic physical infrastructure arts spaces, the arts practitioners and organisations do not develop a sense of attachment to these spaces – usually renovated shophouses, pre-war bungalows and old school campuses. Such is the difference between making a *space* for the arts, and making a *place* for the arts. Lee thus reveals that many artists have etched out alternative arts spaces for themselves (2000:45). These spaces are the bottom-up, private-organisation initiatives of artists who feel that the arts spaces provided by the government are insufficient and inappropriate for them. Such alternatives include The Substation, a non-commercial organisation, which offers artists the spatial freedom, to experiment to meet their artistic objectives; as well as other alternative performing and exhibition spaces such as the fountains in Suntec City and at Bugis Junction, the open spaces of Fort Canning Park, various shopping malls, and even transportation sites such as at the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) stations.

The creation of unconventional performing and exhibition arts spaces by artists also creates metaphorical spaces for social commentary. Low (2001), in dealing directly with public art (sculptures) in Singapore, argues that sculptures beautify the urban environment as well as serve political and social agendas, as both Mitchell (1992) and Miles (1997) have similarly discussed. Low illustrates that the government and private organisations have provided spaces for installation art in the city, and that there are economic, social, political and cultural effects that public art



has on people and places (2001:104). She notes that the installation of sculptures contributes to Singapore's vision of a *Global City for the Arts*. However, both Lee (2000) and Low's (2001) studies have shown that although there is much participation and cooperation by the government, private corporations and arts organisations in providing such arts spaces, the general public does not respond to these initiatives in a positive manner – a large proportion of the population remain unaffected by and unaware of the new arts spaces.

The available studies above only skim the issue of unconventional arts spaces in Singapore. They have focused primarily on policy changes in Singapore, the provision of arts structures and housing, and the cultural agency of sculptures in public places. We have seen that while arts infrastructure is important, socio-political atmosphere that is conducive to the arts is equally essential. Lee (2000) has ventured that artists, dissatisfied with state-provided premises under the AHS, have created alternative arts spaces for themselves. However, other than naming the Substation, his study did not elaborate what these arts spaces are. This lacunae forms the *raison d'être* for my study as I focus on the alternative and unconventional spaces that artists and arts organisations are creating for themselves in Singapore.

#### **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

I began this chapter by outlining the concept of arts spaces through the processes of the *politics of space*. This concept is central to this research because of the nature of the context. Singapore is land-scarce, hence land use functions are well-monitored in order to maximise the amount of space available. Furthermore, the impact that arts performances have upon spaces in the public arena changes the functions of these

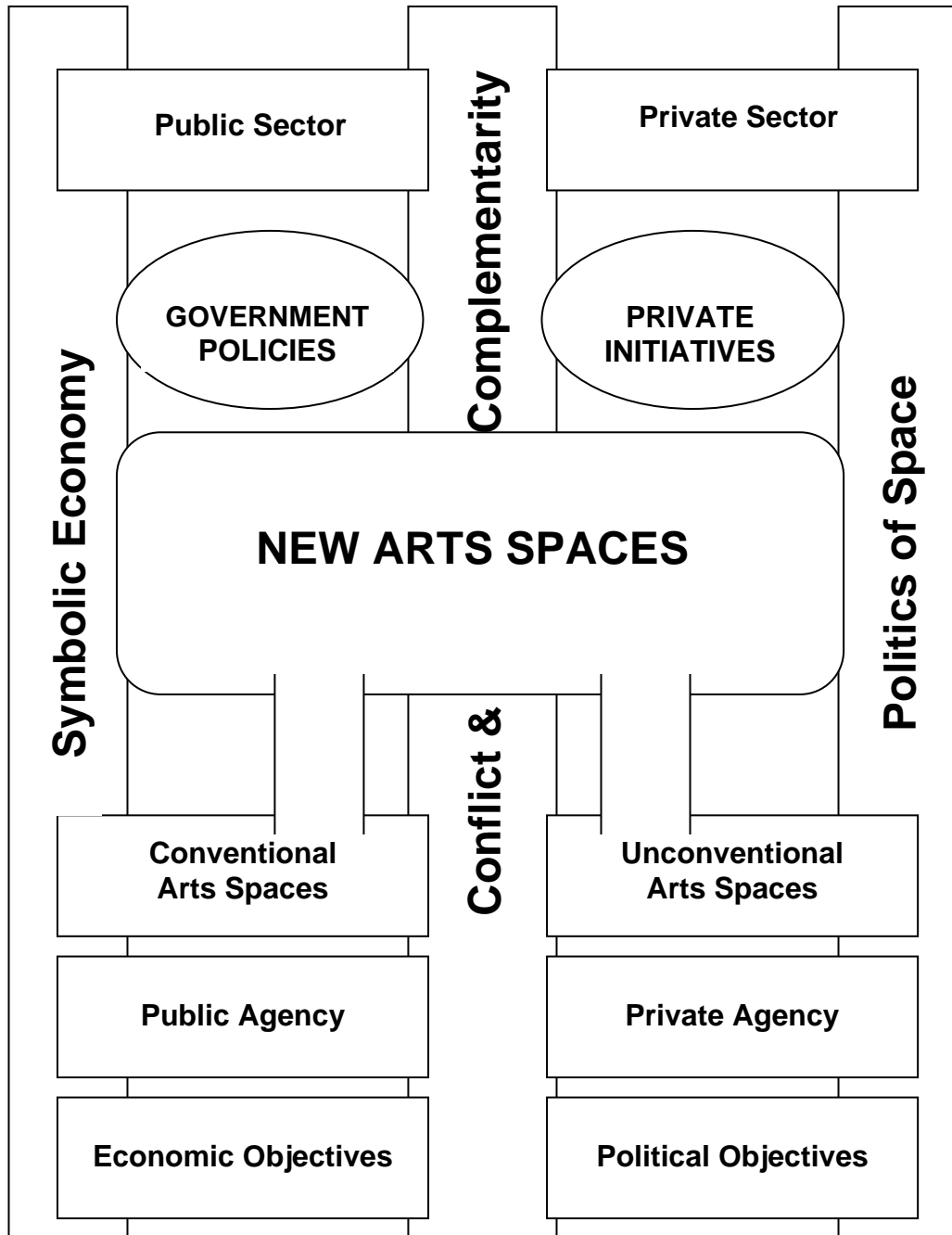
spaces, and involves a degree of power relations by changing the apparent function of the place, which makes the space inherently political. This was followed by exploring the concept of the *symbolic economy*. I pointed out that arts spaces are necessary to build a viable symbolic economy and to contribute to continual economic growth for the country, as envisioned by the state. The impact of arts spaces on nationhood is an important theme in this thesis because of the heavy focus by the state on nation-building. An understanding of the politics of arts spaces is imperative to comprehend the subsequent correlation between arts spaces in Singapore and building a *national identity*. Following this, I reviewed the existing literature on arts spaces, both in general, and in Singapore.

The framework for this thesis (Figure 2.1) demonstrates the correlations between arts spaces and the above-mentioned themes. It shows that both the public and private sector, through policies and initiatives, have created two types of arts spaces. These spaces are directly related to the agencies that create, and objectives of creating new arts space. These new arts spaces are also created through the politics of these spaces, as well as the imperatives of the symbolic economy. This raises issues of potential contention and complementarity between the conventional and unconventional arts spaces. The various factors in the agencies, objectives, and spaces can both work together or against each other to promote Singapore's *Global City for the Arts* goal, as well as to build national identity.

Chapter Four will examine how the policies and the public sector influence the *symbolic economy* (left arrow in Figure 2.1) to shape and build arts spaces in the country. Chapter Five studies how the private sector initiates and deals with *politics*

*of space* (right arrow in Figure 2.1) to develop new arts spaces. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the conflicts and complementarities (middle arrow in Figure 2.1) at the centre of the issue of new arts spaces in Singapore.

Figure 2.1  
Conceptual Framework



## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY & APPROACH**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The nature of this research entails the implementation of different methods. No one method is free from criticism, nor is any by itself wholly appropriate for the research at hand. My thesis employs a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this chapter I explain the research techniques used to garner data from the field, beginning with an overview and explanation of the quantitative methods used (3.2), followed by a justification of the qualitative methods employed (3.3). In addition to this, a list of other techniques I have used to conduct the rest of my research (3.4) is explained. I conclude by summarising and providing a brief analysis of the methodologies employed in the research.

#### **3.2 Quantitative Approach to Research**

##### *3.2.1 Background*

The main method of gathering primary data for this research was through a questionnaire survey. With a survey, I was able to derive generalisations from a portion of the Singapore population. The objective of the survey (Appendix I) is to discover the awareness of the population regarding arts spaces, how they feel the arts has affected the urban landscape, the types of arts spaces they prefer for different art forms, and their opinions on the effects of the arts on the national identity. The

questionnaire was designed to be quickly and easily answered, and consisted mainly of close-ended questions which required the respondent to indicate a fixed answer (for example yes/no, or a range from 1 – 5). A few open-ended questions were also included for the respondents' optional responses. This allowed them to include comments which help to qualify and add value to the data by being more precise and detailed in their answers. These feedback channels also served to allow respondents to expand on their thoughts and opinions on the issue at hand.

### *3.2.2 Field Techniques*

Dissemination of the survey questionnaires was carried out in two separate phases. The first stage involved the distribution of hard copy surveys, by hand, to random members of the population at major intersections of pedestrian traffic in Singapore. This includes four major stations of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line: Jurong East in the Western region, Woodlands in the North, Tanah Merah in the East, and City Hall MRT Station in the Southern/Central region of the island. The rationale to divide the distribution of survey questions into four main regions was to ensure an equal spread of respondents from all over the island. As such, the distribution was carried out on workday evenings in the middle of June 2003. This timing ensured two things. Firstly, that there would be a higher chance of the respondent living in that particular area, so that the distribution of questionnaire surveys would remain within their designated quarters. This ensured an even spread of the questionnaire over the country. Secondly, that the respondents would be on the way home from work, and were thus able to complete the survey in the comfort of their own home, rather than standing in the street. To facilitate this, the questions were distributed with self-addressed and stamped envelopes.

The second stage of questionnaire dissemination took place on the Internet. Using the programme *Perseus Survey Solutions XP*, I constructed an online survey of the same content as the preceding one, posted it on the Internet, and invited networks and contacts to participate in the survey and to promote it by word-of-mouth. The online survey was accessible for a period of one month (July 2003) to ensure that a reasonable number of people were able to partake of the survey. The data from each respondent was emailed directly to an email account, and the raw data that was collected in this account could be directly input back into the *Perseus* programme, which computed and tabulated the results.

When the online survey was closed, I entered the mailed-in replies of the hard-copy questionnaire into the online survey itself so that the data could be generated and added to the *Perseus* programme.

### 3.2.3 *The Respondents*

Two hundred hard-copy survey forms were distributed by hand; fifty at each MRT Station. Of these, fifty-five (22.5%) useable surveys were subsequently received, and tabulated into the *Perseus* programme. The online survey garnered two hundred and twenty replies, bringing the total number of respondents to two hundred and seventy-five. A breakdown of the background characteristics of the sample can be found in Appendix III.

#### 3.2.4 *Limitations*

The statement “the biggest problem with mail questionnaires is a low response rate” (Neuman, 1997) is unfortunately true in this study. The return rate of 22.5% of hard-copy surveys could not provide a reasonable and balanced data set for analysis, which was why an online survey was set up. Also, the questionnaire survey directly precludes people who were illiterate in English, making it difficult to obtain an unbiased sample size for people with lower educational qualifications, or who are elderly and were not schooled in English. The online survey also precludes people with no Internet access. This means that the resulting sample profile of 275 respondents (see Appendix II) is limited and cannot represent the true population profile of Singapore.

### **3.3 Qualitative Approaches to Research**

#### 3.3.1 *Background*

The other chief method of gathering data for my research was qualitative in-depth interviews. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews with select individuals is to obtain detailed perspectives on specific issues. Interviews were carried out with nine artistes – singers, musicians, dancers, actors, and the art directors of private arts organisations/companies. A sample of the interview question guide is provided in Appendix III. These interviews allowed for a greater understanding of how the artistes viewed their performance spaces. The purpose of the interviews was also to discover how the interviewees felt they had changed the performance venues where they had performed. As an additional approach to this qualitative method, I also casually interviewed three personal contacts, two of whom were artistes, and another who worked for an arts group.



An interview was also conducted with Yeo Li Li, a corporate communications executive with the Marketing Communications & Business Development Division in the National Arts Council (NAC) to determine the council's opinions on the development of *unconventional* arts spaces by arts groups and organisations not affiliated to the government. I also wanted to ascertain the council's reasons for planning and organising structured arts spaces like the Little India Arts District and the conglomeration of arts companies under the heading 'Arts by the River'.

Short, structured interviews of three quick questions were also conducted on-site at street performances and during events held at *unconventional* arts spaces, with random members of the audience. These questions were designed to determine the interviewees' perceptions of the arts space and whether the arts performances have helped to create a sense of place for them. The list of structured questions can be found in Appendix IV.

### 3.3.2 *Field Techniques*

Most of the interview sessions with the artistes and arts directors, conducted face-to-face, were arranged through contact by email, and lasted 45 minutes to an hour. These were recorded on audio tape for subsequent transcription. On occasions when a recorder was not available, I wrote down key notes and observations during the interview. Two interviews were conducted over email. This was done because the personnel I wanted to meet were repeatedly unable to meet at a convenient time or place. One phone interview was also conducted for the same reason.

For interviews that were conducted in person, a list of questions was sent to the artistes and art directors before the meeting. I used the same list of questions as a guide during the actual interviews. Interviewees at arts performances were approached at random, and the interviews lasted less than five minutes. Interviews with my personal contacts were impromptu questions asked during casual conversation. As these questions were asked in a relaxed environment, interviewees were generally frank and upfront with their opinions on outdoor performances and their perceptions of unconventional arts spaces.

Face-to-face qualitative in-depth interviews were extremely useful because the interviewees were able to speak their mind, and I could encourage them to elaborate on sentient points that were important to my research. This was slightly harder to accomplish in the email interviews because of the time-lag between posing the questions and receiving an electronic reply. However, I was able to respond and request for clarifications and elaborations if needed.

### 3.3.3 *The Respondents*

A detailed list of artistes that were interviewed can be found in Appendix V. Altogether, I interviewed the artistic directors from two dance companies, an ethnic performing group, three theatre companies, a symphony orchestra, and an artiste from a small music group. I also interviewed the director of an events organising company that organises annual busking events. Eight interviews were conducted with random audiences at the arts performances, and three personal contacts – two musicians from an orchestra, and an administrative staff from a theatre company,

were candidly and informally interviewed. Artistes and arts companies were chosen on the basis that they had conducted performances in *unconventional* arts spaces before.

#### 3.3.4 *Limitations*

The chief disadvantage to carrying out qualitative in-depth interviews is that, due to constraints on the amount of time available for field-work, I was only able to interview a small number of artistes and organisations. I dealt with this limitation by selecting arts groups which had the most experience with conducting performances at unconventional venues.

More limitations of the qualitative interview method were encountered when I attempted to interview the audiences at the performances at various unconventional arts spaces. For one, the performances at the unconventional arts venues were extremely noisy. With the loud music and sounds of the performances, as well as the background noises created by the spectators, it was just as difficult for the interviewees to hear my questions as it was for me to hear their answers. Furthermore, the tape recorder picked up most of the noise, making the subsequent transcriptions difficult. Another problem was with uncooperative interviewees who were either unwilling to be interviewed, or who refused to answer the questions properly. Coincidentally, there were also interviewees who were extremely verbose and who expounded lengthily on irrelevant issues. These interviews lasted longer than the average time taken, and consequently many chances to interview other people were missed. The third problem is to do with the weather. As many of the performances were conducted outdoors, performances were cancelled when it rained.

If shelter was available, there were fewer spectators, and hence fewer interviewees available.

### 3.4 Other Approaches to Research

#### 3.4.1 *Experiential Methods of Data Collection*

A part my fieldwork is grounded in personally experiencing *unconventional* arts spaces as perceived by a member of the audience. Humanistic geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan suggest that a phenomenological approach, combined with elements of existentialism, can be used as a method for understanding a person's relationship with his/her surrounding environment (Tuan, 1971). With this method, I analyse my own experiences in order to find out how public spaces are affected and changed by arts performances.

Table 3.1  
Arts performances attended by the author

Performance	Location	Date
Singapore Street Festival	Heeren side, Orchard Road	11 June 2003
Singapore Street Festival II	Cineleisure, Orchard Road	11 June 2003
Singapore Street Festival III	Heeren front, Orchard Road	11 June 2003
Singapore Street Festival IV	Field next to Faber House, Orchard Road	11 June 2003
B.A.D. (Arts Festival)	Forum Shopping Centre, Orchard	13 June 2003
Tribal Tap (Arts Festival)	Raffles City Shopping Centre, City Hall	13 June 2003
Railroad Bill (Arts Festival)	Lot 1 Shopping Centre, Choa Chu Kang	16 June 2003
Arts Festival Closing Performance	Lot 1 Shopping Centre, Choa Chu Kang	22 June 2003
Javanese Wayang Kulit	Fort Canning Park	4 July 2003
Storm Motion Pixel Art	Esplanade Bridge	4 July 2003
Hamlet	Raffles City Shopping Centre, City Hall	4 July 2003
Sri Warisan Som Said Performance	Little India	23 July 2003

I attended twelve performances that were held in these *unconventional* arts spaces. Most of these were between the months of June and July 2003, during the Singapore Arts Festival. Using a personal journal and a camera, I took note of the ambience of the environment, the reactions of the audience, how the audience

arranged themselves around the performance area, and most particularly, my own response to experiencing the performance. The list of performances that I attended is shown in Table 3.1.

#### 3.4.2 *The Internet as Data Source*

I found the Internet a very useful source of data. As already mentioned earlier, the Internet was used to garner responses for my online survey, and I could also interview people via email. Websites were also useful in providing such information as details of previous performances by arts companies, as well as objective information posted online by the NAC.

#### 3.4.3 *Textual Analysis & Secondary Data Sources*

Textual analysis is involved when reading and interpreting sources of information provided by secondary data sources including: the media, such as the newspapers, any online content, media reports, and other archival materials gathered from interview respondents. Library and archival research was also integral in locating sources of information that were older.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

My methodological approach involved both qualitative and quantitative techniques, as well as other methods, such as the Internet and secondary data analyses, to complement the entire data set. The quantitative methods are required to provide empirical breadth to the investigation, to find out the general public's opinions on using unconventional spaces for arts performances and purposes, to discover if the use of unconventional spaces for arts performances has changed their perception of

the place, and to determine the effectiveness (if any) of having performing arts in such spaces. The qualitative methods are required to find out, from arts practitioners, companies, and critics, their opinions on performing in unconventional arts spaces; to learn from individuals and the general public their detailed opinions on performances in unconventional arts spaces; and to discover, from government representatives (NAC) how the government bodies view the use of unconventional spaces for performative art purposes.

This mixture of methodological techniques reflects the broad scope of the research in the sense that I require data from many varied sources to analyse the effects that the performing arts have on arts spaces, and how these arts spaces in turn affect the image of the country.

## Chapter 4

### ARTS POLICIES IN SINGAPORE: MAKING THE SPACE

*The provision and maintenance of good infrastructure will continue to be an important factor in supporting culture and the arts. Upgrading of existing facilities and the creation of new ones need to take place at a rate commensurate with the growth of the cultural scene.*

MITA, 2000b:8

#### 4.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, there has been abundant attention lavished on promoting the arts and culture in Singapore. This has been accomplished through the erection of more arts buildings like The Esplanade, as well as converting established old buildings into arts housing; for example, the conversion of the Old Parliament House into the new Arts House. This profuse promotion masks the fact that arts development suffered greatly in the country's early post-independence days. The lack of coherent development of the arts and culture at that time was a result of the government's emphasis on promoting Singapore as a regional economic hub. Recognising a dearth of development in the arts, the government set up an Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) in 1988 to recommend measures to develop Singapore into a "culturally vibrant society" (ACCA, 1989). The main intention of infrastructural investments in the arts is to nurture a successful "Global City for the Arts: a cosmopolis plugged into the international network where the world's talents and ideas naturally converge and multiply" (MITA & STB, 2000:10). In addition, developing a cultural industry would drive the symbolic economy of the nation. In

the government's perspective, sound physical infrastructure is imperative in maximising economic benefits because of its potential to attract world-class arts performances and international audiences. To promote the country as "the global arts destination in Asia offering world-class events" (MITA & STB, 2000:13), much effort has been put into developing physical arts structures. However, development of the arts in Singapore is geared not only to attract foreign investment and tourist dollars, but also to enhance the quality of life for Singaporeans. A consideration of the government's policies in the arts is critical in understanding the emergence of arts spaces in Singapore.

Government policies are vital to the country for many reasons. A key reason being that land area in the country is undeniably limited, and competition for space is a major issue. Another important reason is that the long period of political stability and centralisation in Singapore has made possible an integrated and comprehensive economic and social planning of the country, providing a central planning agency as well as a concentration of administrations (Perry et. al., 1997). Hence it is often government policies that act as initiatives paving the way for the implementation of ideas as well as to develop new spaces for new programmes and schemes.

In this chapter, I argue that the creation of arts spaces in Singapore is a two-pronged process, one led by the state in order to establish a vibrant and interesting society that is also economically viable, and the other led by arts practitioners as a reaction to this state-led arts development. This reactionary movement is also a means of creating an independent arts space for the private artistes themselves. The public and the private sector both create conventional and unconventional arts spaces.



However, the objectives for creating more arts spaces differ between the two sectors. As a result, the different goals of the two entities result in different outcomes in the landscape. As such, I explore the arts policies of the government over the years that provide and maintain arts and cultural development in Singapore as a measure of social development and added economic ballast for the nation. This is done by detailing the background of the arts scene in Singapore in the midst of the changing economic and social climate (4.2). A mapping of the growth of physical infrastructure since the establishment of the ACCA will demonstrate the effect of the government's policies in advancing the symbolic economy (4.3). It is my contention that the government-led development of arts spaces has resulted in bottom-up, private organisation initiatives to develop *other* arts spaces that would cater to local needs. Hence, in addition to mapping the spread of physical arts infrastructure, I will also map the spread of arts activities and performances over the island over the past 15 years, as well as briefly analyse the origins of 'new' arts spaces (4.4).

#### **4.2 The Changing Economic & Social Climate: A Background**

To better appreciate the changes that have occurred in Singapore's arts scene, the wider context of the national economy is analysed. The country's economic climate is extremely significant to arts development policy. This is because the state had previously concentrated all of its resources on securing an established economy before turning its attention to issues perceived to be less significant, namely the arts and culture. The nation's economic and social conditions are important factors affecting the state of the arts in the country, as arts policies were developed and implemented only after a stable economy and a secure, dependable society were established. In her seminal paper on cultural policy in Singapore, Kong (2000:411)

described the ideological position of Singapore as a developmental city-state that “subscribes to the tenets of pragmatism”. The hegemony of the economic, supported by the ideology and language of pragmatism and globalisation, functions as the objective behind the state’s cultural economic policies.

With a relatively short history that began with independent statehood in 1965 following a brief and tumultuous union with Malaysia from 1963-1965, “nation-building” has become an activity of great necessity. With a diverse multiracial and multicultural immigrant society, the exercise of nation-building is a challenging one. At independence, the country was also confronted by many other social, economic, and political problems, and both ideological and material battles had to be fought in the process of constructing a “nation” (Kong & Yeoh, 2003). Constructing the ‘nation’ as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) is essential in order to root the citizens of Singapore to the country. The construction of Singapore as a ‘nation’ would assist in maintaining constant economic growth, building a modern city-state, and developing a “gracious society” (Kong & Yeoh, 2003). These three aspects will sustain a social cohesiveness that would strengthen the political legitimacy of the government.

Singapore is a developmental city-state that prioritises economic growth and structural advancement. This growth is used as a prime indicator of government performance (see Castells, 1992). Kong (2000) summarises Singapore’s economic development in four main phases according to differences in performance and management (see also Perry et al., 1997). The first of the four phases, being the period that saw the most rapid growth, beginning in the 1960s of the immediate post-

independence years, saw an economy largely comprised of the secondary sector, producing electronics and electrical goods, which generated about half the manufacturing employment growth and entrepot trade (2000:411). The PAP government at that time concentrated solely on battling the stagnant economy and turning it around (Low, 1998). The second phase saw a slowing down of economic growth, largely affected by a general slow-down in the world economy in 1973. The structure of the secondary sector changed as low value, labour intensive industries declined in importance as industries like petroleum refining, chemical products, and machinery and precision equipment took over. At this time, the service sector burgeoned as the country established itself as an international financial centre, and moved into high-technology areas such as research and development. These sectoral developments called for more infrastructural expansion in the form of investments in technology centres such as Science Park. As a result, the deliberate attention placed on industrial development reaped rapid economic success as the government completely overhauled the import-substitution sector. This restructuring was accomplished by transforming the sector into export-oriented industrialisation, and furthered by converting to high technology. This move proved “to the world that a small city-state can survive economically and politically” (Low, 1998:43), setting Singapore as a prime example of an economic success story.

The third phase of development was the shortest, caused by the first recession that the country encountered in 1985. It was during this period that the government appointed a ministerial committee to review the economic crisis and propose new directions for growth. Various strategies were proposed, and the main recommendation of the committee was to boost the service sector which had the

greatest potential for growth. This strategy would position Singapore as an “international total business centre” (MTI, 1986:12) and encourage overseas businesses to relocate their headquarters to Singapore, making the country an important node for global companies in the Asia-Pacific region (Kong, 2000). The implementation of these strategies signalled the fourth phase, which reiterates the established goal of positioning Singapore as a global city, through offering attractions such as a hi-tech infrastructure and knowledge-intensive industries. At this point, locally-based companies were also encouraged to regionalise by “expanding Singapore’s economic space beyond its limited geographical boundaries” (Kong, 2000:412).

The lack of support for the arts in the post-World War II and early post-independence years was stark. By moving “from developing country to newly industrialising economy to its present status of ‘advanced industrialising nation’” (Kong, 2000:411), the rapid industrialisation and economic success of Singapore was accomplished over the relatively brief period of three decades. However, this achievement is testimonial to the government being “very good when it came to things related to business (the airport, the harbour), but negligent when it comes to the arts” (Kang, cited in Kong, 2000:409). The government spent significant amounts of money on schools and other infrastructure like the National Stadium but neglected critical culture-building assets like arts education and funding arts development and related infrastructure. As an illustration of the pragmatism and economic priorities of the government, the National Theatre, one of the great symbols of nationhood that celebrated the newly independent Singapore, built in 1963 through money collected by public subscription as a community-built structure

for the arts, was demolished in 1986. It is argued that while this decision was substantiated by claims of structural instability, the real reason for demolishing the building was to make way for additional transport infrastructure (Beamish & Ferguson, 1985, and Edwards & Keys, 1988).

The economic prioritisation of the arts in the 1980s is also evident in the way the government treated the arts “as a reservoir of cultural markers to be used to entertain tourists who wanted to experience ‘Instant Asia’ or to affirm on public occasions the specific multicultural composition of Singapore” (Tamney, 1995:154). Even in the mid-1980s, the government was still under the opinion that “material and social welfare, earning a living, and economic survival” were the primary concerns of Singapore’s community, and that the arts were not perceived as a “basic need” (Koh, 1989, cited in Kong, 2000:409). However, it is about this time that the government decided that artistic pursuits were becoming increasingly important to the economy, as well as to the Singaporean society as a whole. Apart from seeing the arts as a potential growth area in the form of a cultural economy, it was also considered as a means of contributing to raising the quality of life in the country.

The arts may be considered as a part of the “service sector”, under the label “cultural and entertainment services” (Kong, 2000). These services were defined as including the performing arts, film production, museums and art galleries, and entertainment centres and theme parks. These were all deemed strategies to promote economic activities for many reasons. Firstly, these services promoted Singapore as a tourism destination by being marketed as tourist attractions. Secondly, they improved the overall quality of life and encouraged the population to be more

productive and creative. Thirdly, they contributed to a vibrant and cultural and entertainment scene which would make the country more interesting for foreign professionals and skilled workers. Such cultural capital will help draw skilled foreigners to work and develop their careers here (*Report of the Sub-Committee on the Service Sector*, 1985:211). With these strategies on developing the arts and cultural sector, policies were devised and implemented. This image would be one that would attract multinational companies looking for appealing foreign ventures and investments. Furthermore, the projected image of the city would also be one that would interest and attract foreigners. These are the impetuses that would lead to the creation of a ‘Renaissance City’ and a ‘Global City for the Arts’, which will be explained in the next section.

#### **4.3 Arts Policies: Local Redevelopment for a Global Future**

Just as the government had achieved considerable success in developing the local economy by the 1980s, the arts became increasingly important as the government began to see the “culture industry as a new, desirable area for economic growth” (Tamney, 1995:154). In the third phase of economic development, the 1987 recession was countered by proposals for new directions of growth, primarily through the strategy of transforming Singapore into a global city that would attract international businesses, investments, and tourists. As such, the government is redeveloping the *local* landscape in order to realise the goal of *Global City for the Arts* (GCA). The arts constituted a *symbolic cultural economy* to economic ends. It was to beautify the country, to make it more interesting and exciting for visitors as well as to encourage creativity in the nation. The government implemented a wealth

of arts policies to ensure continuous economic growth. These policies would also bear considerable impacts on the local population and the landscape of Singapore.

The creation of arts districts is part of the urban regeneration and gentrification plan brought about by the birth of an arts industry. Public policy aims to increase the visibility of arts spaces to “add vibrancy into”, “enliven”, and to transform the areas into a “cultural campus” (MITA, 2000a). The envisioning of a population that thirsts for knowledge, culture and the arts must manifest in the landscape – in the form of “[increasing] demand for spaces for libraries, bookstores, museums, theatres, concert halls and exhibition areas” (2000a:41). Dedicated arts precincts in the city centre would also encourage creativity. In addition to this, there must be an effort to promote artistic landscapes. According the MITA, “culture and the arts are mobilised to animate our city because we recognise that surroundings that reflect a low or commonplace taste have a debasing and dehumanising effect upon the human spirit” (2000a:40). The effect of the arts in Singapore would not only attract global investments but also promote creativity in the local citizenry. It is hoped that human creativity will help to boost the national economy by encouraging local entrepreneurship (Prime Minister’s National Day Rally Speech, 2000).

According to Kong (2000), the development of Singapore as a “world class city” through the construction of more physical infrastructure is driven by the impetus of putting the country on the global cultural industry map. Tourism is an impetus in the creation of arts spaces, particularly evident in the construction of the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, which contains two huge concert halls aimed at attracting international performances as well as an international audience. The

*Singapore: Global City for the Arts* publication (STPB & MITA, 1995) promotes Singapore as an arts-tourism destination, where world-class performances are staged, and where a collective market for Asian arts and cultural artefacts can be promoted. There are also incentives to attract arts entrepreneurs and foreign talent to invest and set up businesses and headquarters in Singapore.

This section presents an insight into how the local landscape is changed in order to bring about the global ambitions of the state. The next few sections will establish how the arts policies result in an impact on Singapore's urban spaces. Section 4.3.1 introduces the reasoning behind the implementation of local arts policies. Section 4.3.2 delves into greater detail by analysing the effects of the Arts Housing Scheme, while Section 4.3.3 examines the policies that lead to the creation of disparate arts districts. Finally, Section 4.3.4 looks at the government-led outreach programmes that lead to the creation of more arts spaces in Singapore.

#### *4.3.1 Background to Official Arts Policy Statements*

To better appreciate the decisions that the government has made which result in the development of local arts spaces, a background to Singapore's arts policies is briefly sketched. Singapore's cultural foundation was laid in 1978 with the establishment of the Cultural Affairs Division in the former Ministry of Culture. However, the government's voice on arts and cultural spaces in Singapore began formally only with the formation of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) in 1988. The Report of the ACCA, published in 1989, outlined various measures to make Singapore a culturally vibrant society. An imperative in making Singapore an



“International Centre for the Arts” is to develop appropriate and sufficient facilities to foster artistic creativity to house and exhibit the arts (ACCA, 1989).

The report of the ACCA included a list of the principal performing venues in the 1980s which comprised the Victoria Theatre, Victoria Concert Hall, Kallang Theatre and the Drama Centre. These venues, while well-used, were reported to have inherent technical difficulties. The report also mentioned the lack of cultural facilities and the inadequacy of performing arts venues, which limit the number and quality of performances staged. Such inadequacies were cited as reasons why cultural groups were less active in producing imaginative and novel performances and exhibits (ACCA, 1989:4). The ACCA called for the development of more purpose-built performing, working and exhibition facilities for the arts, the improvement of cultural facilities, and the introduction of more art works in public places.

The report expounded on the insufficiency of arts and cultural spaces, both in terms of quality and quantity (1989:17). It argued that the inadequacy of available space and facilities for the preparations and rehearsal of arts groups hindered progress and development, and that “large world-class symphony orchestras cannot perform in Singapore as there is no suitable concert hall” (1989:20). The report also recommended improvements to cultural facilities. One of the chief proposals was the construction of “a new performing arts centre at Marina Centre”, which “should be fitted with state-of-the-art staging facilities to accommodate large world-class companies” (1989:30). Simultaneously, “existing theatres should be upgraded... to complement the facilities of the new centre” (1989:30). The ACCA also involved

the private sector in the provision of additional arts spaces by introducing incentive schemes to encourage private developers to incorporate performing spaces in the form of convention spaces and auditoria within their corporate buildings. A final recommendation for arts spaces involved increasing the accessibility of the arts by developing arts and cultural programmes in community centres in every suburb in Singapore, as well as through resident's committees, social clubs, trade unions and clan associations.

The policy agenda in Singapore since the 1989 ACCA report has been to continually develop arts infrastructure to provide for a more vibrant cultural scene. The *Renaissance City Report* published by MITA, aims to “establish Singapore as a global arts city” (2000a:4). The arts scene in London and New York City provided yardsticks of a world-class cultural city – “visitors to these two cities immediately associate them with opportunities to partake of their cultural offerings, be it going to the theatre, visiting the museum, attending a concert, browsing their bookshops or simply, soaking in the ‘culture’ on the streets” (2000a:24). In terms of benchmarking, MITA notes that Singapore lags behind Glasgow and Melbourne (two other cities of comparable population size) in terms of arts facilities (2000a:25). The goal is to make Singapore’s “cultural vibrancy” comparable with cities such as Hong Kong and Glasgow. It is to this end that the government has escalated initiatives on creating more arts spaces. The main focus has been the provision of physical arts space, by providing artists and arts organisations with ‘homes’. This is accomplished through careful planning by the National Arts Council to create arts districts within the city, establish the Arts Housing Scheme, and outreach programmes that bring arts to the general populace.

### 4.3.2 *The Arts Housing Scheme*

In 1985, the Arts Housing Scheme (AHS) was set up by the Ministry of Community Development for the purpose of providing practice and administrative space to arts groups at a subsidised rent. The main objective is to give arts groups a home within which they can develop their activities and thereby help to foster a culturally vibrant society<sup>1</sup>. The plan was also to assist more arts groups to obtain rehearsal and working facilities. The AHS is important because it involves the creation of more arts spaces in order to house the arts. It is also a significant indicator of the top-down, government-led approach that fuels the increase of more conventional arts spaces.

The scheme currently functions as a collaborative project between the National Arts Council (NAC) and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). The URA identifies suitable vacant government buildings that can be converted for use by the various arts organisations, and the NAC allocates these buildings to the organisations. Many of these buildings are renovated shophouses, pre-war bungalows, and old school campuses. These facilities, offered to arts and cultural groups at a nominal rent, have also been integrated into conservation schemes for historical and cultural areas. The Ministry of Information and the Arts is itself housed in the Old Hill Street Police Station, which has been gazetted as a preserved monument. The building also houses the NAC and the National Heritage Board (NHB). Some organisations have also been housed with community clubs, for example, The Necessary Stage, a theatrical company, was allocated space within the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nac.gov.sg/local\\_arts\\_scene\\_ahs\\_01.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/local_arts_scene_ahs_01.html)

Marine Parade Community Building in 2000. To date, about ninety arts organisations and artists have been housed by the AHS.

Based on statistics of ticketed performances and the attendance rate for performances, official government publications tout the AHS as being successful, and there are plans to include a further 7,000 square metres of arts spaces over the next five to seven years (MITA, 2000a). There are also plans to expand the arts housing scheme to create belts of cultural activities (MITA, 2000a:6). However, it has also been pointed out that the AHS is successful only in terms of ‘quantitative’ spaces, rather than in ‘qualitative’ terms (see Lee, 2000, and Chang & Lee, 2003). The argument for this one-sided success is that while physical spaces have indeed been made available for arts companies, these structures *house* rather than *home* the arts (Chang & Lee, 2003). What is meant by this is that while physical structures for the arts companies are provided, the companies are unable to use these spaces to the fullest. As Lee (2000) noted, many artists feel that the buildings provided are inadequately furnished for artistic needs. For instance, several companies spent exorbitant amounts to renovate the housing provided in order to create a space relevant to their specialisation, such as an appropriate studio for a dance company. The Singapore Dance Theatre, for example, has been resisting efforts by the NAC to house them because of the inappropriateness of the space offered. Ng Siew Eng, the General Manager explains, “we are trying to find a place that can give us the space we want, and yes we have been talking to NAC. But so far they cannot find the right place!” (Personal Interview, 20 August 2003). Hence, the provision of the space must be suitable for the arts. Other problems include the temporary leasing of sites to the companies, which means that the companies are given housing only for short

periods of time. As a result of this, they are unable to renovate the premises to turn them into usable spaces. For example, dance companies require rehearsal spaces equipped with certain facilities which are prohibited at the temporary premises.

This is not to say that the arts companies are unappreciative of the subsidised arts spaces provided by the AHS. As Lim Chin Huat, artistic director of Ecnad, a dance company, mentions, “I would say certainly we’re quite lucky we’re subsidised by NAC, so for that part we [have] got to thank them” (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003). However, most agree that the main concern is the lack of appropriate space. Lim (Ecnad) later adds that the facilities of the spaces need to be improved. Nevertheless, he is generally optimistic because in his opinion, NAC is gradually gaining an understanding of the requirements of different art forms and arts companies:

*It started with one unit downstairs, then they realised, for a dance company, it’s too little space, so you need more space. So there’s two, and then later on we had our third unit, then we had our fourth. So it grew slowly. It took some time. I would say that in Singapore, they don’t really know a lot about the what different types of companies need, because the people who run the management for the arts housing, they work very hard, but to know what the individual need is, that is an extra effort they have to [make]. (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003)*

As a result of the intermittent accumulation of additional units and spaces, some arts companies have ended up with a number of disparate spaces that are not joined together. Ecnad, for example, has four unconnected office and studio spaces spread over two floors of the Telok Ayer Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC). The Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts company has a studio and office in two different shophouses in the Little India Arts District, separated by at least five shophouse units (see figure 4.2, below). The problems caused by these are largely that of (un)useable space. While the total size of the companies’ accumulated spaces are relatively large,

the spaces are in actuality separated into small rooms. As both Ecnad and the Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts company are dance companies, they require large expanses of space to rehearse in. As a result, these separate spaces do not meet their needs.

Nevertheless, there are also arts companies which have been allocated appropriate spaces. Well-established companies like The Necessary Stage have been allocated more than satisfactory quarters. In this case, for a nominal fee of S\$350 a month, the company occupies a generous space in the basement of the newly built Marine Parade Community Building. In addition to sizeable offices and storage areas, the company also has a black box of its own. Alvin Tan, the artistic director, acknowledges the government for supporting the company as well as the arts as a whole. He recognises that the local arts companies need to “give credit when you’re at [the receiving end]... in other countries, other artists are envious of the artists here, because we have this kind of support” (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). It may be a point of contention that better-established and more successful arts companies have the better end of the deal when it comes to arts housing. Companies like The Necessary Stage may have been given housing preference because it is recognised as one of the four major arts companies in Singapore. Furthermore, the company also meets the selection criteria for arts housing through merit of planned activities and commitment to organisational and artistic development. The tenants and artists of the AHS are selected for housing based on “good track record[s], managerial strength, artistic standard, level of activity and growth potential”, as well as the need for housing (Yeo Li Li, NAC, Personal Interview, 14 July 2000). While the selection criteria ensure that the local arts companies are encouraged to meet certain standards,

it is also a hindrance to smaller and newly started arts companies without any previous track record. Consequently, this merit system may discourage the formation of new arts companies, as well as cause the demise of the smaller ones.

#### *4.3.3 Planning Art Spaces*

The plan of the NAC to strategically expand arts housing to create zones/belts of cultural activities meticulously avoids housing the arts at disparate or isolated sites. The main incentive for artists and organisations subscribing to the arts housing scheme is the heavily subsidised rental, of which they are charged a nominal amount of 10% the initial lease, with the NAC providing the remaining 90%<sup>2</sup>. Places like Waterloo Street, Smith Street (Chinatown), Kerbau Road (Little India), and Robertson Quay ('Arts by the River') are planned as arts and cultural belts. In addition to this, there are also other conglomerations of Arts Centres like TAPAC and ONE-TWO-SIX Cairnhill Arts Centre, each housing several arts groups. Apart from fostering synergies between various arts groups housed in the same area, a main intention of the arts district strategy is urban regeneration and gentrification. The call is for the "artists and arts groups occupying such prime locations" to "strive to add vibrancy to these areas" (MITA, 2000a:55). Yeo (NAC) also hopes that "providing such buildings for arts groups will help to raise the level of artistic creativity; the arts could then help to revitalise and value-add to new developments in forgotten areas" (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003). More people, both locals and tourists, will also be attracted to these areas possibly generating economic activity in these sites. Arts organisations are hence allocated spaces in these arts districts under

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.nac.gov.sg/local\\_arts\\_scene\\_ahs\\_01.html](http://www.nac.gov.sg/local_arts_scene_ahs_01.html)

the housing scheme in keeping with NAC's plans of establishing specific arts districts.

The primary objective of arts housing is to provide administrative and rehearsal space for the arts groups. According to Yeo (NAC) "arts districts/belts can play a larger role of showcasing the vibrant arts scene in Singapore by pulling together a group of artists, creating and experimenting their works in the same locality" (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003). The NAC also hopes that there will be interaction between the various arts groups to produce collaborative projects, as well as to inspire creativity in each other. Kaylene Tan, the director from Spell #7, suggests that "what [NAC is] trying to do in Little India is they're trying to create quite a mix of arts groups... this was an experiment to put quite a diverse range of people here to see what happens". Her associate, Ben Slater, also mentions that the situation of companies near to each other would create opportunities for artistes to "meet up and talk about certain issues" (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003). Hence, these kinds of arts 'agglomerations' are aimed at inspiring creativity between the various arts companies. Ben Slater (Spell #7) has also noticed that the various arts districts are made up of different types of arts companies. Some arts districts are entirely comprised of theatre companies, but others include a variety that ranges from art galleries to music and dance companies. The different composition of arts groups would encourage different types of creative and collaborative efforts.

Physical spaces for the arts in Singapore exist as "clusters" – the Ethnic Zones, Civic and Cultural District, Arts and Heritage Precinct and Arts Districts (STPB, 1996; Lee, 2000). One historic ethnic zone is Chinatown (figure 4.1). Along



Smith Street and Trengganu Street, previously named “Theatre Street”, are a number of arts organisations like Toy Factory Ensemble, Chinese Theatre Circle, Harmonica Aficionados Society and several Chinese opera groups. Another is Little India (figure 4.2) which houses arts groups like Dramaplus Arts, Spell #7 and Wild Rice Ltd. along Kerbau Road. All of these organisations have been allocated office spaces through the AHS.

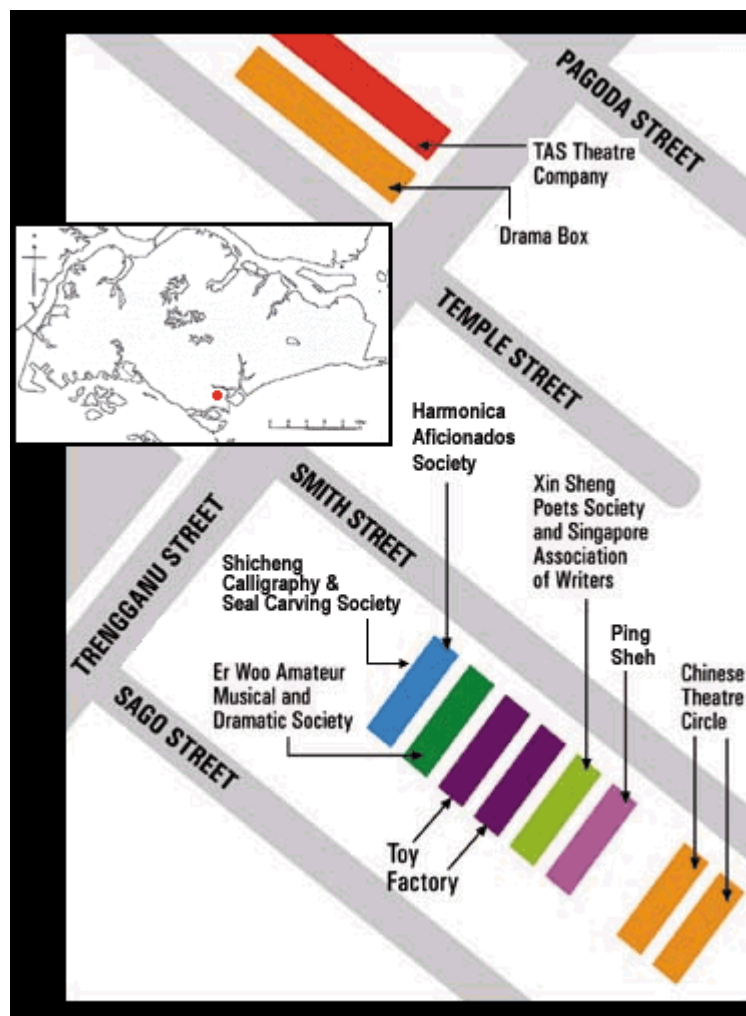


Figure 4.1. Arts Spaces in Chinatown Arts District

The Civic and Cultural District (figure 4.3) hosts many major arts structures – most notably the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, as well as long-established ones such as Victoria Theatre, Victoria Concert Hall, and Jubilee Hall at Raffles Hotel. The Arts and Heritage Precinct is also within the Civic and Cultural District, and

hosts the various museums as well as other arts groups/buildings like The Substation, Singapore Dance Theatre, and TheatreWorks at the Black Box at Fort Canning.

The Rochor Arts District (figure 4.4) straddles Waterloo Street and Middle Road. This area houses arts groups such as Action Theatre, Dance Ensemble Singapore, Singapore Young Musician’s Society, Sculpture Square, Stamford Arts Centre, Selegie Arts Centre, and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) campuses (STPB 1996; Lee, 2000). The other Arts District is at Robertson Quay, by the Singapore River. Singapore Repertory Theatre is located here, and there are plans by the NAC to house more performing and visual arts groups here, as well as at adjacent Mohamed Sultan Road.

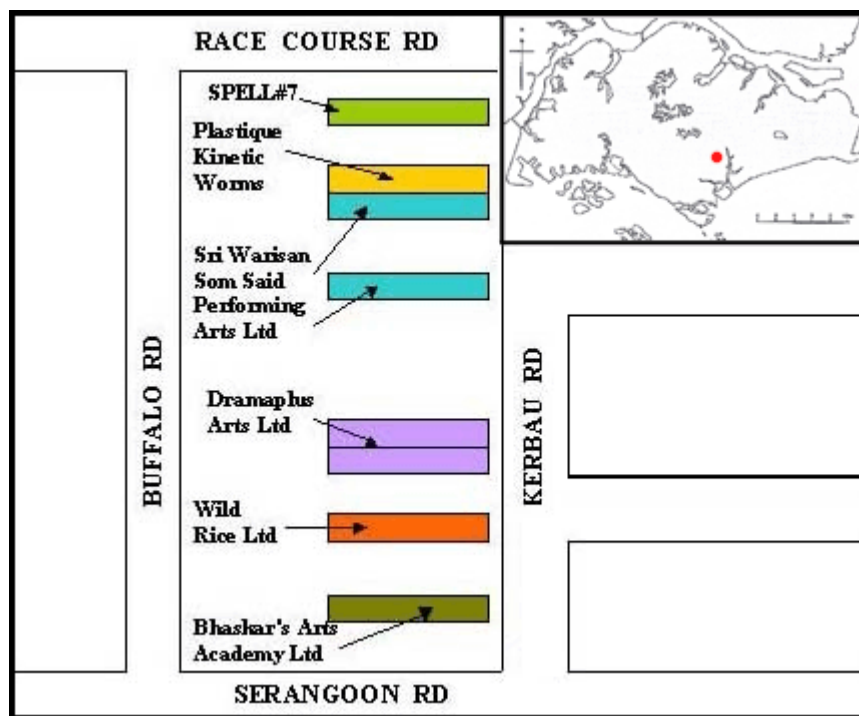


Figure 4.2. Arts Spaces in Little India Arts District

A large number of other arts infrastructures exist outside these major zones. One belt is at Cairnhill Road, which houses groups like Act 3 Theatrics, Teater Kami and The Arts Fission Company. There is also TAPAC which plays host to groups

such as Arts Theatre of Singapore and Teater Ekamatra. This centre is the earliest initiated scheme by the AHS to site a large gathering of organisations and artists in one place in 1985. There are also other popular performing spaces such as Kallang Theatre and Singapore Indoor Stadium at Kallang, Singapore Expo, as well as the Marine Parade and Ulu Pandan Community Clubs.

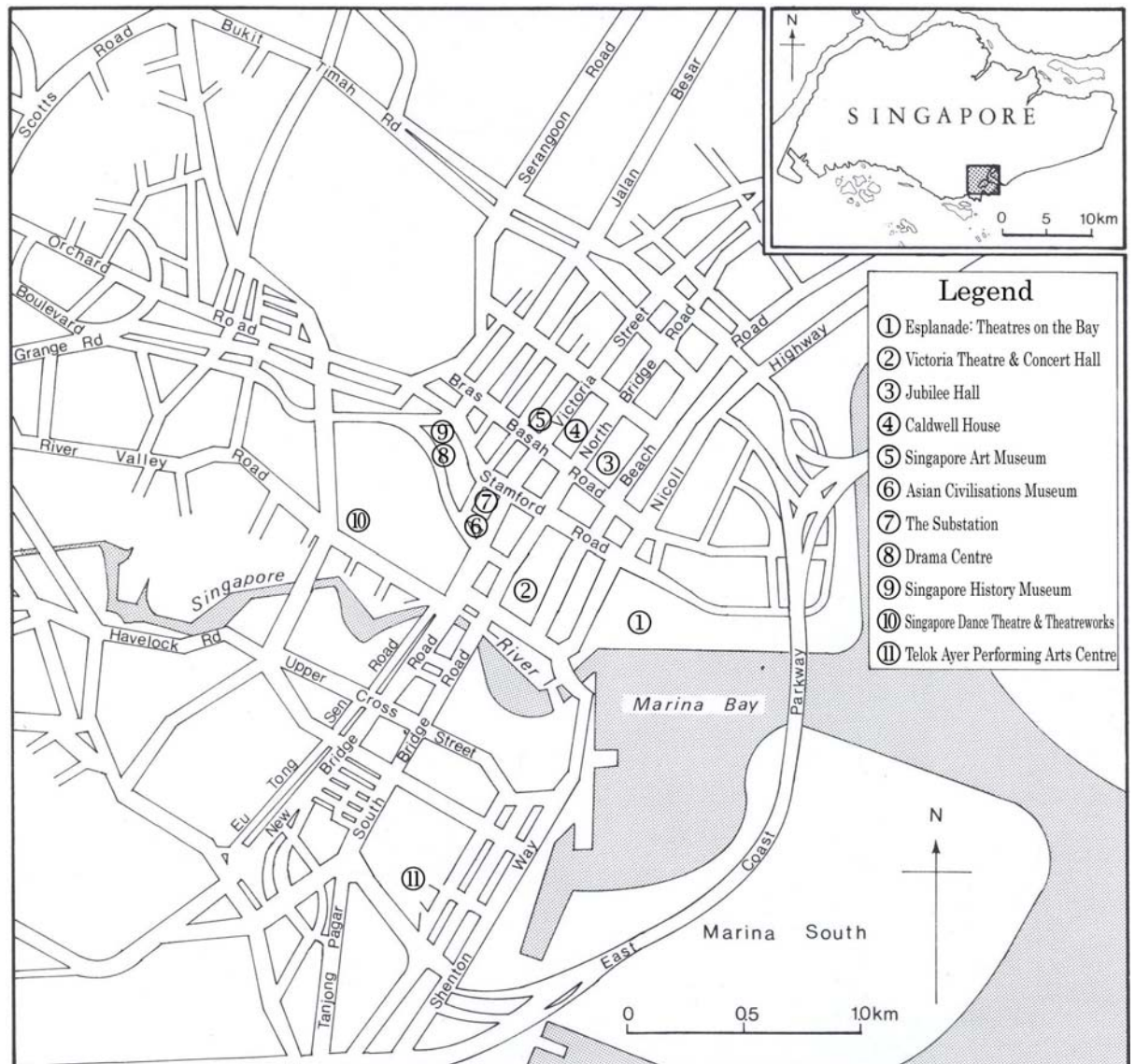


Figure 4.3. Arts Spaces in the Civic & Cultural District

From the figures, it can be seen that many arts spaces in Singapore are government induced and planned by NAC. The reliance on heavy rental subsidy by arts organisations has resulted in a dependence on the AHS, which allows the NAC to locate them as it sees fit. The NAC offers space based on availability, and most

arts groups accept the spaces that they are allocated because they need it. Ben Slater (Spell #7) concurs that his company was not offered a choice. They “were told that this space was available and we were asked if we wanted it, so we just said yes” (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003). While the NAC is predominantly successful in planning and creating arts spaces through agglomerating arts companies in these select areas, the government has been less successful in revitalising these sites.

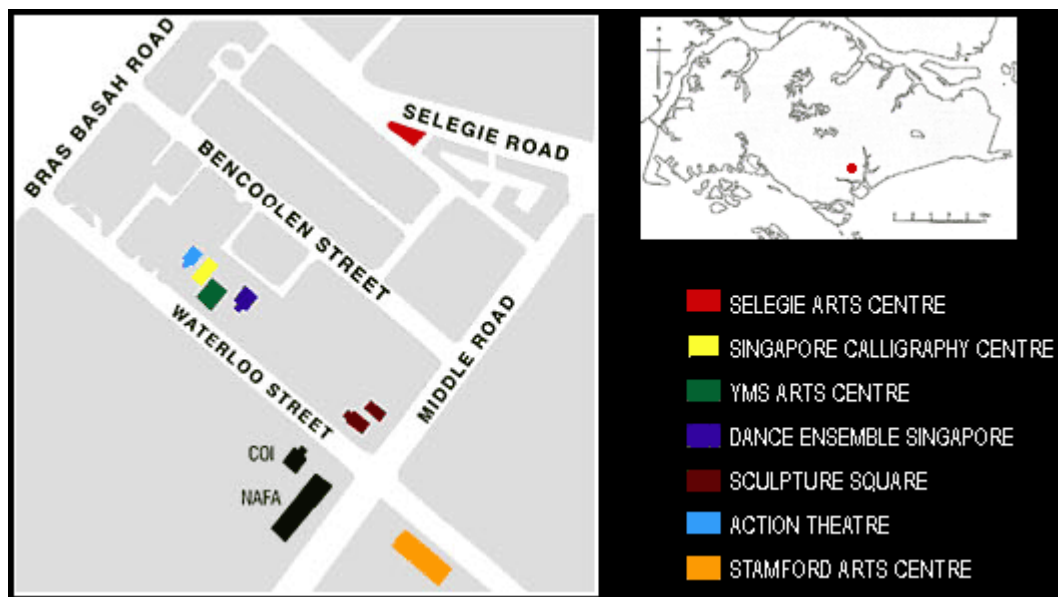


Figure 4.4. Arts Spaces in Rochor Arts District

The state’s failure in effectively implementing arts districts can be seen in Figure 4.5. The figure shows that only a minority of the questionnaire respondents know about or have heard of the arts districts, even though some are aware that there are arts companies in Little India and Chinatown. Only 29% of the respondents have heard of arts performances at the Arts and Heritage Precinct; 21% have heard of performances at the Chinatown Arts District; only 13% have heard of performances in the Little India District; and a dismal 8% have heard of the Rochor Arts District. Ben Slater (Spell #7) has also noticed that he rarely sees artistes from other arts companies in his district (Little India Arts District). He mentions that “you’d expect to see people on a daily basis wandering in and out of their office, but we actually

don't". He cites the positioning of the companies as a reason for this – the companies are “all spread along the road” (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003). While the arts companies add a ‘creative value’ to the areas by staging works of art and performances, they fail to add ‘vibrancy’ to these districts. As Slater (Spell #7) has noticed and I have observed as well, these districts are not any more alive or populated than they were before the arts districts were planned. Slater also mentions that although there had been a proposal by the companies in the Little India Arts District to organise an event to present the myriad types of arts available in the area, no artistic collaborations have materialised from the companies in the district. The arts agglomeration may not have led to artistic collaboration because these events require an active initiative, such as from the NAC, to succeed.

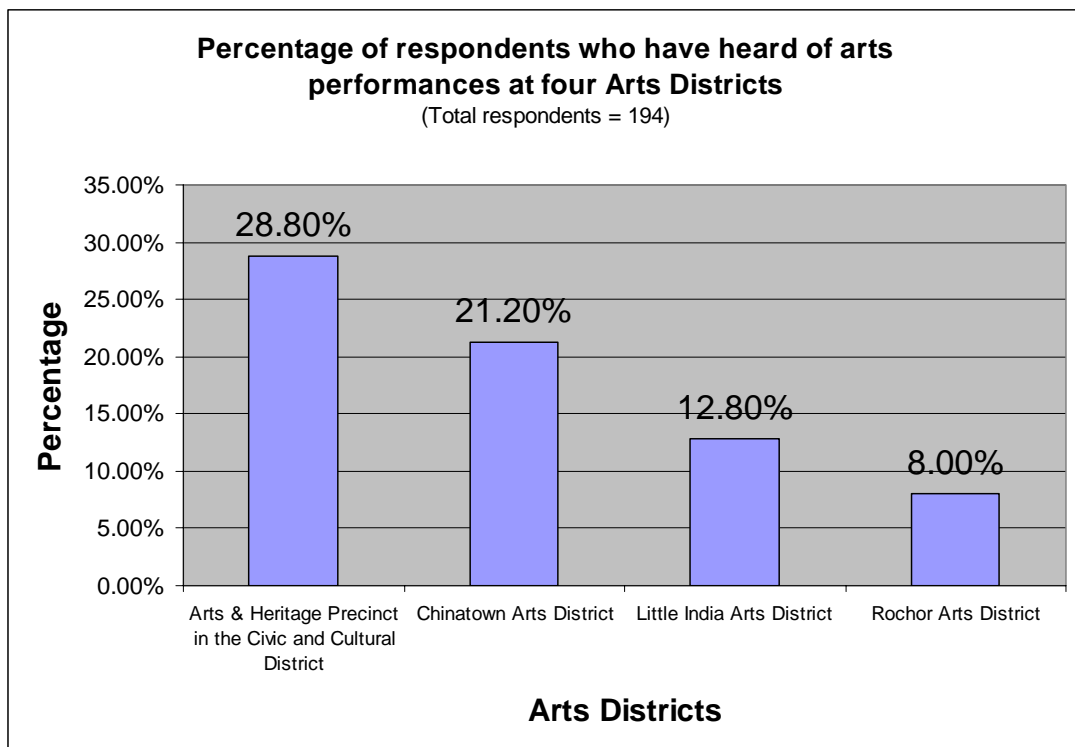


Figure 4.5. Percentage of respondents who have heard of performances at four Arts Districts

#### *4.3.4 Outreach Programmes*

Arts spaces can take various forms other than museums and indoor performing spaces. ‘Arts space’ may be considered any site/locale in which arts and cultural activities take place. Hence, permanent features in the form of an installation on a landscape, or the transient staging of a theatrical performance in a venue creates an ‘arts space’. Through the initiative of the NAC, arts spaces have been created in many sites other than the prescribed arts and cultural belts described earlier. Popular examples include alfresco venues such as the Botanic Gardens, East Coast Park, Bishan Park, Pasir Ris Park, and West Coast Park (MITA, 1998). Other novel activities include the ‘Lunch ‘N’ Arts’ concert programmes which include ‘Arts in the City’ and ‘Arts round the corner’. The Concert-In-The-Park series and the Poems on the MRT scheme are also outreach programmes to bring the arts to the general public (NAC, 2001; 2002). These arts spaces differ from those discussed in the earlier sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 because they break away from the mould of ‘conventional’ arts spaces, structures and buildings specifically catering to arts use. Hence, arts venues which are not within ‘conventional’ arts spaces are termed ‘unconventional’ arts spaces.

The ‘Lunch ‘N’ Arts’ concerts bring the arts to people working in commercial areas, hospitals and manufacturing companies (NAC, 2002). According to Yeo Li Li (NAC), the intention of this scheme is to “bring the arts closer to the public since these [commercial areas] are considered to be accessible locations” (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003). The scheme seeks to expose the public to the arts and make it part of life in the country. Under the Concert-In-The-Park series, music or theatre performances are held monthly at various public parks to draw

casual passers-by who do not normally frequent arts events. This series commonly draws families and large groups of people who take pleasure in the event by making it a social event. The casual setting of this series is one of the main draws of the performance. The Poems on the MRT scheme features poetry by Singaporean poets displayed on the panels inside the MRT trains, to instil an appreciation of poetry among Singaporeans. Collectively, the outreach programmes offering free arts events and organised in housing estates, parks, town centres, office buildings and shopping malls, attracted more than 67,000 people in the 2000/01 financial year (NAC, 2001).

These NAC-initiated outreach programmes are part of the government's 'Artreach' scheme to showcase both local and foreign talents in the city and the suburban heartlands. The objective of the scheme is also to expose the population to the arts. Various community arts performances have also brought the arts to neighbourhood town centres such as Braddell, Hougang and Jurong West, creating more arts spaces in hitherto non-cultured sites. 'New' arts spaces are thus emerging outside of 'conventional' arts venues. Previously showcased only in the downtown outreach programmes, the arts are now shifting into the suburban heartlands of Singapore. The NAC-Shell Community Arts Series and Community Arts Day received strong support from the Community Development Centres (CDC), facilitating NAC's objective to bring the arts to the heartlands. The NAC-Shell Community Arts Series concerts have been organised in various town centres like Bedok, Clementi, Tiong Bahru and Jurong West, and have attracted large local audiences. Several collaborations to bring the arts to business parks have even been introduced. The International Business Park in Jurong and Science Park at South

Buona Vista, for example, were such beneficiaries (NAC, 2001). Once again, these concerts create 'new' arts spaces that exist not simply in prominent downtown spaces like the Civic and Cultural District, but also in the outskirts of the city and industrial areas. While the outreach programmes are mainly targeted at introducing the arts to mass audiences, they have also succeeded in transforming open spaces, suburban sites and industrial areas into arts spaces.

NAC has also initiated a busking scheme in 1997 aimed to "enliven the streetscape and make the arts more accessible to the man on the street. It also acts as a platform for budding artistic talents to showcase their varied skills to the audience in a relaxed environment" (NAC, 2002:45). NAC lists a large number of private and public outdoor locations where artists can exhibit their talents (Appendix VI). These sites are categorised into four groups, namely Selected Areas in the Orchard Road District, Singapore River, Stamford Road Area, Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India and Albert Mall; Public Parks managed by the National Parks Board; Open Spaces run by the Public Utilities Board, Jurong Town Corporation, Port of Singapore Authority, Housing & Development Board and People's Association; and Town Council Areas. This scheme functions as both an outreach programme to make the arts a part of life in Singapore, as well as a promotional outlet for artists who need more visibility. Attesting to the effectiveness of busking as an arts promotional strategy, Figure 4.6 shows that 82% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they would stop to watch buskers on the streets and in public areas. Buskers are generally mobile and are able to move from place to place. The locations where busking activities are permitted are plentiful, and range from both



main city areas to heartland locales. A large proportion and a wide variety of audience can thus be targeted and exposed to the arts in this manner.

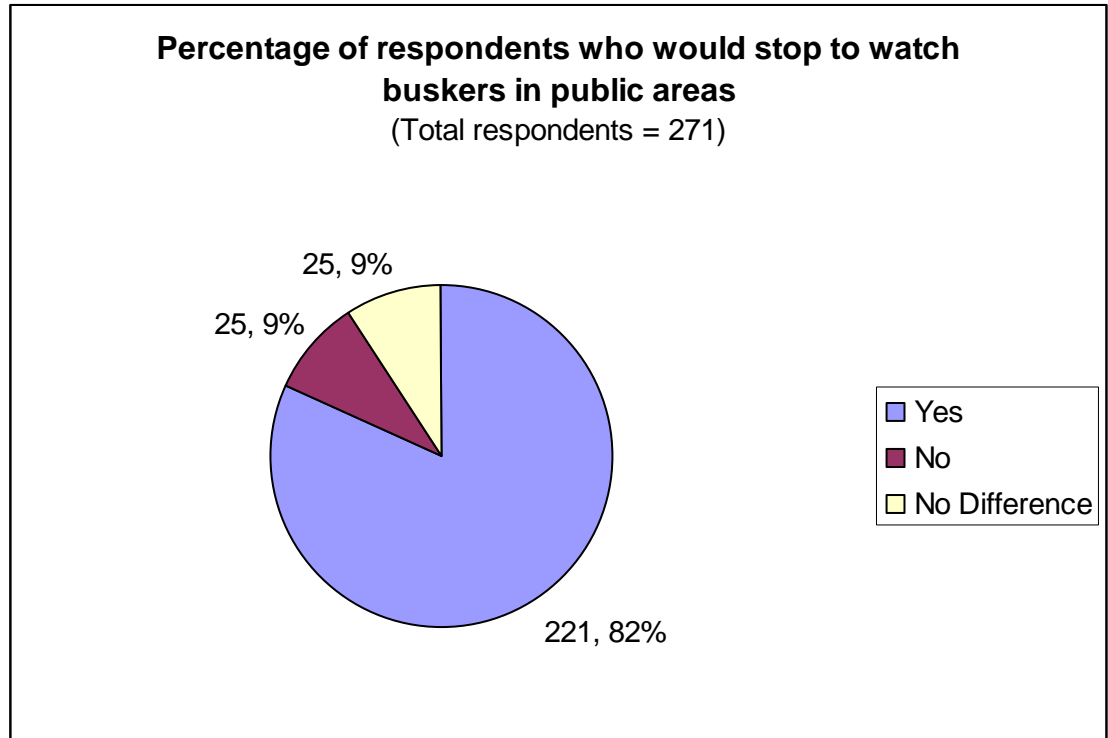


Figure 4.6. Percentage of respondents who would stop to watch buskers in public areas

The Committee to upgrade LaSalle and NAFA (1999) has suggested that arts institutions and organisations in Singapore should establish strong links with the community by being involved in public performances and exhibitions. This creates further opportunity for the creation of more arts spaces through the staging of performances in public venues like parks and shopping malls. Recommendations from the *Renaissance City Report* include showcasing sculptures from all over the world in both “indoor and outdoor venues” (MITA, 2000a:57), as well as the aforementioned outreach programmes like lunchtime concerts in commercial buildings such as the Raffles City shopping centre.

The annual Singapore Arts Festival has also increasingly brought the arts to unconventional outdoor areas. Under the heading 'Arts on the Move', street acts and multi-media performances have taken place in central areas like Orchard Road as well as neighbourhood town centres at Choa Chu Kang, Bishan, Toa Payoh, Tanjong Pagar, Holland Village and Sembawang (NAC, 2002). The majority of residents in these areas are particularly pleased with this scheme. According to a respondent, "I rarely have the time to attend arts performances in the city, so it's really good to have performances here, when you come home, and you can just watch it on your way home, or while you're buying dinner," (Personal Interview, 13 June 2003). Bringing arts to the masses, 'Arts on the Move' in 2001 also featured outdoor performances in high-traffic public spaces such as parks and MRT stations, with more large-scale events on weekends. Free performances ranging from traditional puppetry to a bizarre window theatre displays were staged throughout the festival. Just like busking, these performances continually bring the arts to the heartlands, providing a larger and newer audience base, exposing more people to the arts. Figure 4.7 shows that 69.7% of questionnaire respondents felt that the art form becomes more accessible to the public when performed in 'unconventional' spaces, while another 70.8% believe that the performances would attract people who would otherwise not attend the event. As a respondent put it, "performances held at 'non-intimidating' venues also act as a kind of appetizer/teaser, which could possibly create new audiences" (Questionnaire Respondent). It is the attraction of drawing and converting new audiences, as well as the desire to change societal mindsets that the arts belongs only in the downtown areas that more and more arts companies are beginning to stage their performances in 'new arts spaces', as reflected in the 64.4%

of respondents who felt that unconventional performance venues would change the perception that the arts can only be held at ‘proper’ arts venues.

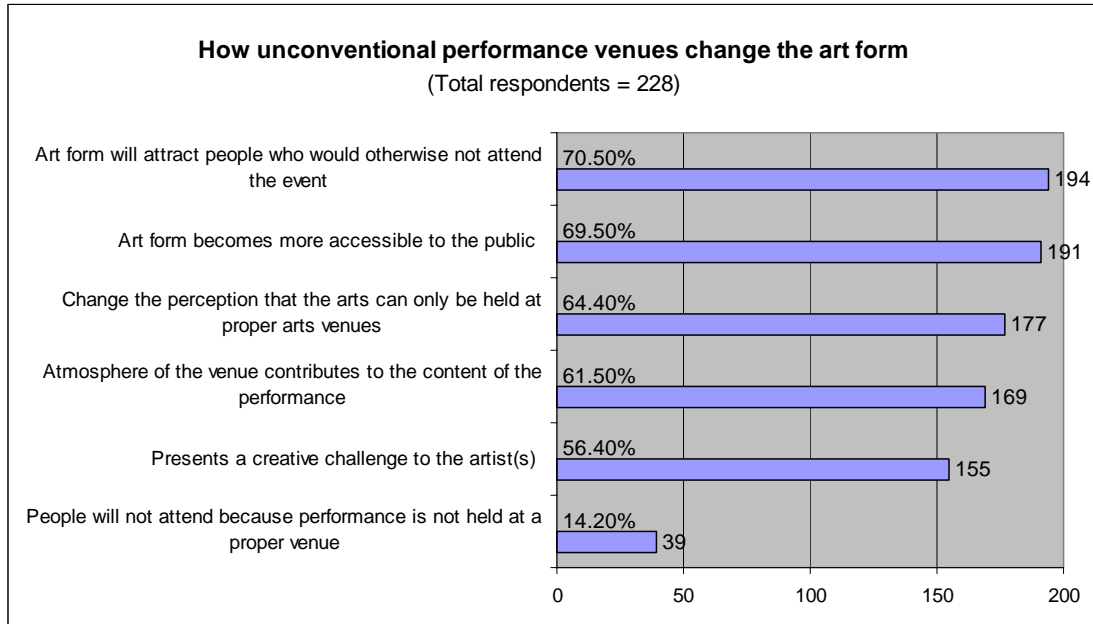


Figure 4.7. How unconventional performance venues change the art form

#### 4.4 Local Reactions to a Global Impetus: the Rise of Alternative Arts Spaces

*The most visible accomplishments since 1989 have been the development of institutions and infrastructures... and The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay... these developments have enriched the arts and heritage scene in Singapore, keeping pace with and sometimes even exceeding the expectations of the population.*

MITA, 2000a:13

The arts spaces that have emerged since the 1989 report of the ACCA have largely been due to the initiatives of the public sector – through organisations such as the NAC and URA, as well as under the auspices of the Arts Housing Scheme. As shown in section 4.3.3, the government has also demarcated arts and cultural belts such as the Rochor, Chinatown, and Little India arts districts. The completion and the grand opening of the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay in 2002 can be seen as a symbolic culmination of the achievements of the ACCA. This section considers how

efforts have also been made to develop the local arts base in the hope of attracting global audiences. Indeed, just as tourists are drawn to newly built ‘conventional’ arts structures like the Esplanade, they will also be interested in the more community-based arts spaces in locations such as Little India and Chinatown. In reaction to the drive for global arts development, in recent years, there has been an emergence of ‘unconventional’ arts spaces, and this is perhaps the role of the locals in the country’s global development. In this section, I posit that there are two separate impetuses that create arts spaces in Singapore. The first of these, as I have explored in Section 4.3, is at the initiative of the government. The second impetus for the emergence of new, unconventional arts spaces is the local, bottom-up reaction of the artistes and private arts companies to the globalising forces in the country. Local incentives to construct and utilise community based arts venues such as public spaces in the suburban heartlands of the country, instead of the more high-profile and global performance sites like the Esplanade, are largely private organisation initiatives rather than government-led.

Even as developments in the 1990s have produced numerous ‘conventional’ arts spaces in Singapore, many ‘unconventional’ and ‘newly emerging’ arts spaces have also materialised. With careful planning, the public sector has situated arts spaces so that they can be found where they are commonly expected to be found – in downtown areas in the Arts or Civic and Cultural Districts. However, as mentioned in 4.3.4, the government has also aided in the creation of unconventional arts spaces, particularly through its outreach programmes. The development of more arts spaces around the island is in keeping with NAC’s efforts to create a culturally vibrant Singapore in which “artistic sensibilities are invoked, whether it be in the design of a

book, a busshelter or a building” (MITA, 2000a:40). This section moves from the initiatives of government arts policy and focuses on private initiatives in creating new and unconventional arts locales.

#### *4.4.1. Local Impetuses for Unconventional Arts Spaces*

As mentioned in section 4.3.4, the creation of unconventional arts spaces by the government in the form of performances at al fresco venues (such as in parks and other open spaces) as well as places not conventionally known to be performance spaces (for example, shopping malls), were mainly driven by outreach purposes. However, many local private organisations – artists and the arts companies themselves – have also introduced initiatives of their own to conduct performances in these spaces. For example, Spell #7 had previously attempted a theatre performance that included a night tour of Little India, while Ecnad has held several dance performances in public fountains around the city.

The impetuses for such local initiatives are numerous. Many local arts companies are committed to exposing Singaporean audiences to the various forms of art available. There are also other reasons for holding performances in unconventional spaces. Creating visibility for both the art form as well as the arts company/artist is an important reason. Organisations see the need to promote themselves so that the public is aware that such an arts company exists, and they also hope to convert the spectators at their outreach events into a paying audience at ticketed performances. George Wong from the SSO explains:

*[Our objective is] to also go out and maintain visibility, because a lot of people don't know we exist, although we're supposed to be the flagship orchestra, we're supposed to be a national icon of Singapore, but a lot of people don't know we exist – or maybe know of us in a very vague sort of*

*way... instead of people coming to you, you go to them, and give them exposure, in the hopes that one day they will take some interest and come by themselves to the concert hall. (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003).*

Audience-conversion is part of a symbiotic survival plan for most arts companies. Converting the general population into an active arts audience leads to having higher sales at ticketed events, which then alleviates the costs that the company has to bear for putting up the performances.

Artists also see outreach as an opportunity to expose the arts to different types of audiences – one does not have to be highly educated or rich to be able to enjoy art, or to attend arts performances. This is the reason why an increasing number of performances are being held in suburban heartland spaces a distance from the city – to reach the population base that does not frequently patronise the downtown areas. Mogan Subramaniam, an *a capella* musician who has performed in “just about every shopping centre in Singapore” (Personal Interview, 7 August 2003), believes that his performances exposes Singaporeans to the arts, particularly to *a capella* music. He explains, “the people you want to educate are the people who haven’t taken the time to go and find out what it’s all about”. He also feels that exposing people to the arts in such public venues is the most effective way of converting an audience. He explains that “because in that sense, that might be the biggest strength of these venues... you’re going to catch people that you wouldn’t catch at any other point of time”.

There are also some arts companies whose main purpose is to educate and to share their culture. The Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Group is one such company. As a group specialising in Malay cultural dance and music, they aim to

create and increase awareness of the Malay arts image, as well as to foster the vision of Singapore as a multi-ethnic society. Zarudin Yob Ahmad (manager of the company) emphasises that the cultural arts are important because they foster a sense of identity for the Malays. This is particularly important in his opinion because many are unaware of their own culture. The Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Group's role is to encourage and contribute to an appreciation of traditional ethnic culture.

Another reason many arts companies perform in unconventional spaces is because they are attempting to change the common perception of the arts as an abstract and elitist activity restricted to the rich or well-educated. Certainly, a large proportion of the public believe that the arts are relatively inaccessible, owing to the prohibitive prices of performances in the formal venues such as the Esplanade, Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, or Kallang Theatre. It is also a common perception that one must be 'high-class' and cultured to attend such performances. Arts companies bring their performances to shopping malls and suburban heartlands with the purpose of proving to the masses that everyone can enjoy the arts. The arts can also occur anywhere and everywhere, and not solely in the prohibitive spaces of formal arts venues. Lim Chin Huat from Ecnad mentions, "because a lot of people just put a term [to the arts as] abstract, they then just push it to one side. If [the arts] are so easy to access, they might change their mind [about it]" (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003). Bringing arts performances out into public areas is also an attempt to incorporate the arts as part of everyday life for everybody. The reason why Lim Chin Huat holds outdoor performances is because he intends to show that "[the] arts is part of life – it's not so far away... [the arts] can become a habit".

In addition to incorporating art into life, some artists who stage performances in unconventional venues are also attempting to incorporate life into art. Kok Heng Leun, the artistic director of Drama Box, directs forum theatre in the public squares of several household estates to encourage the public to participate in the action onstage as well as interact with the actors. Kok Heng Leun presents plays with a focus on current affairs and which are relevant to the community, and invites the audience onstage to present their interpretation of the issue. In doing this, Kok intends to have “real neighbourhood people” using their real life experiences to act out the solution to the problem imposed during the play (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). He feels that unmarked open spaces, where there are no limitations and restrictions to audience participation, contribute to incorporating life into art. This is because the performance is staged at a ‘real’ space, mundane locales used daily by the population, as opposed to an empty stage in a conventional arts venue.

Artists also hold performances in unconventional spaces because they hope to challenge themselves to work with the environment. Artists want to use different spaces for a change, to take advantage of a particular feature of novel *al fresco* spaces to base a performance on, or simply to explore different spaces for arts’ sake. Many artists find it challenging and exciting to bring an art form out of the blank, empty space of a theatre or a performance hall into the busy, crowded and occupied streets of public spaces. Ecnad terms its work in unconventional spaces as ‘site-specific’ performances, using the environment as a setting, or a backdrop, and choreographing a dance around the aesthetics of that site. Lim Chin Huat (Ecnad) sees working in unconventional spaces as a challenge. To work with different



environments, such as fountains, and to create different types of dances, adapting and reacting differently to each distinct place is an experience that conventional arts venues are unable to offer. Spell #7 performed *Kinda Hot*, a play which included a tour of Little India at night. Ben Slater (Spell #7) explains that the appeal of the show lay in the environment. As he explains, “we didn’t have to do very much as performers, because the space was so alive”. He also felt that the experience of the play was made much more real “because it was quite intense to be in a performance situation in a real place, in a busy street where anything could happen” (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003). The public spaces that offer a wide variety of environments to work with contribute richly to plays and dances because the atmosphere does not have to be created specially for the performance – it already exists at these venues.

However, this does not mean that private sector initiatives only result in the creation of unconventional arts spaces – although this does appear to be the large majority. While there are advantages to performing in public spaces and unconventional venues, there are also other organisations which have no use for unconventional arts spaces. Private arts organisations such as The Substation have successfully set up its own space in the Civic and Cultural District. Companies such as The Substation simply aim to provide a suitable alternative space for the staging of arts performances; it is not part of their objective to perform at unconventional venues.

#### *4.4.2. Placing Unconventional Arts Spaces*

With the advent of private initiatives holding performances in unconventional areas, the growth of unconventional art venues has been noticeable. No longer can arts spaces be seen only in relation to the downtown and conventional art locales. Figure 4.8 illustrates the spread of newly emerged unconventional arts sites. It is clear that the conventional arts spaces are confined mainly to the central area. The map also indicates that the unconventional arts locales have emerged in many areas outside of the city, particularly in outlying areas, in the residential suburban heartlands such as Bedok, Tampines, Toa Payoh, Hougang, Woodlands, Yishun, Jurong, and Lim Chu Kang.

The shift of arts performances away from the central cultural district into the heartlands is mirrored by the shift of arts performances away from formal performance venues – the conventional sites of stage and theatre – into unconventional venues of the streets and the parks. Even within the city centre, various unconventional arts spaces have emerged because of musical performances in shopping malls and outdoor public busking. What this means is that the total area that are being used for arts events is expanding throughout the country. This development also debunks the common perception that the arts are exclusive and available only to those who frequent the city, and those who can afford it. This is due to the fact that most of the arts performances in unconventional spaces and suburban heartlands are usually free of charge and highly accessible.

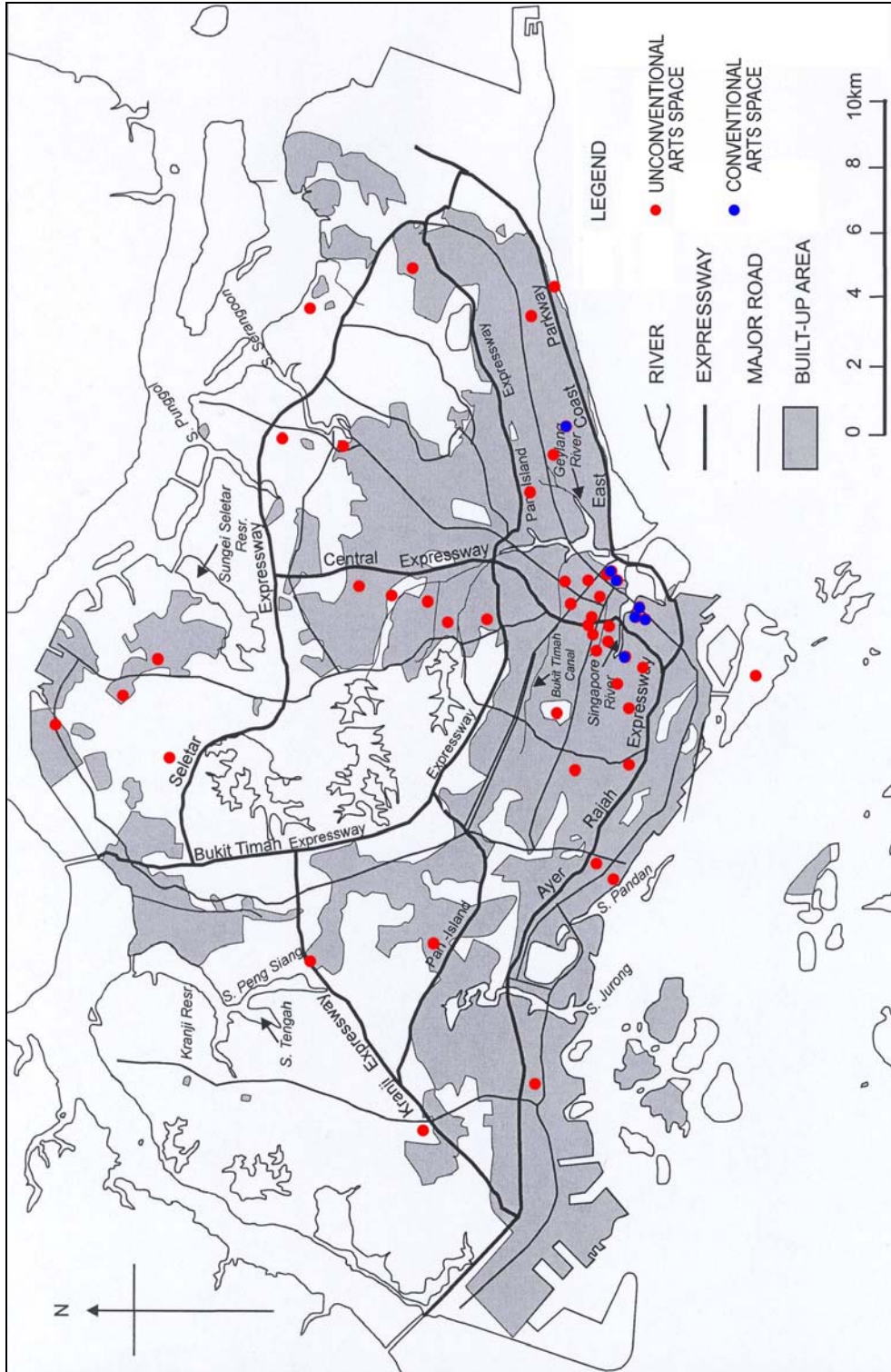


Figure 4.8. Map of Conventional and Unconventional Arts Spaces in Singapore

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the economic background of Singapore leading to the development of arts policies, and has demonstrated that the economic condition of the country is crucial to having government backing for the arts. It is important to the state that the practical security of the economy is ensured before turning to other non-essential pursuits. The chapter has also shown that not only may arts spaces be important to the national economy, the national economy is important in creating more arts spaces in the country. Following this, I have focused on the implementation of government's arts policies. The implementation of arts policies by the government has an economic impetus, designed to make Singapore an internationally recognised and renowned arts city, and to put the country on the cultural world map. The creation of a symbolic economy allows for an expansion in the arts and cultural sector, and as a result, more private arts organisations have been set up. This in turn has led to the creation of more arts space in the country – for example, through outreach programmes and the creation of the Arts Districts, the Arts Housing Scheme, the conversion of old and unused buildings into arts quarters, and ultimately, the building of the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. The increase in arts spaces represents a redevelopment of Singapore's local landscape to better gear it for a *Global City for the Arts*.

The latter part of the chapter considers the reaction by local arts practitioners who have created their own arts spaces in preference to having the government create specific arts spaces for them. Choosing to shun newly erected structures that symbolise the global arts effort, like the Esplanade, these private arts organisations have begun holding performances wherever they chose – inevitably doing their part

to create more unconventional arts spaces. I have also mapped the resulting spread of arts spaces over the island, showing not only that conventional arts spaces lie mainly in the city areas and unconventional arts spaces have been distributed over the entire island, but also that there are many more unconventional arts spaces than there are conventional.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that while it is the government who dictates the arts policies in order to create more performing arts venues for largely economic reasons, the artistes and private arts companies have also taken it upon themselves to create their own arts spaces. Therefore, the government's aggressive developmental arts policies have been successful in progressively raising the profile of the arts. These actions have resulted in the emergence of two types of arts spaces in urban Singapore – the conventional and the unconventional.

## Chapter 5

### UNCONVENTIONAL ARTS SPACES IN SINGAPORE: CHANGING THE SPACE

*Arts spaces are by no means neutral or value free; neither are they static. Indeed to understand the dynamics and ideology of art spaces is to square up to the problem of artistic production and spectatorship in relation to changing and contest[ing] notions of the public sphere.*

T. K. Sabapathy, in *Space, Spaces and Spacing*, 1996:12

*Potentially, street performance creates a bridge between imagined and real actions, often facilitated by taking place at the very sites that the performance makers want transformed.*

Cohen-Cruz, 1998:1

#### 5.1 Introduction

As Sabapathy (1996) notes above, arts spaces are spaces filled with meaning. These meanings are created and communicated to the public by the artistes who perform at a location, and are also interpreted and imagined by the audience watching the performance. Making or changing the meaning of a space entails a change in the space itself; as Cosgrove (1984:35) mentions, “[landscapes] undergo *change* because they are expressions of society, itself making history through time”. The close relationship that exists between space and performance is further emphasised by Johnston *et. al* (2000:577) who point out that “performance gains many of its effects through the speculative manipulation of space and time”. Cohen-Cruz (1998, above) also notes the effects that performance has on space; that street performance can form a link between everyday actions and the imagination to create new landscape

meanings, and these spatial representations are orchestrated by the artistes, who are agents of change.

This chapter follows on from the theme of arts policies and the creation of arts spaces in Chapter 4 by bringing into focus how public spaces are changed when an arts performance transpires at a site. The physical features of performance venues are altered during the event when props, like a stage or set decorations, are used to aid a performance. However, once the performance is over, there is nothing visual left behind to remind the audience that an event had occurred there. What remains, however, is the memory of the performance, and the meanings that the performance had imparted to the audience at that point in time. These changes in landscape meanings affect the Singaporean population. As landscapes meanings are changed, the locals' perceptions of place and public space are also changed, giving rise to localised issues unique to the residents of the country.

Hence in this chapter, I argue that arts performances change public spaces by modifying landscape meaning and identity. Artists use their art to manipulate representations of their performance spaces, and are hence agents of re-presenting perceptions and recreating representations of public spaces. Drawing upon concepts of spatial politics and contested landscapes, this chapter explores how public spaces in Singapore are changed by the incidence of arts performances. Through investigating what the arts performances communicate to the audience, the chapter also deals with how spaces are transformed during the course of the performances. To do this, I employ primary data garnered from in-depth interviews with artists and arts practitioners who have performed at these spaces. I also highlight two case-

studies of arts companies that frequently organise performances in public spaces to illustrate how the spaces are being transformed and how landscapes take on new meanings and identities.

Myriad representations of public spaces are continually created by the perceptions of the people who use them regularly. These spaces derive an identity as they are constantly accessed by people. The apparent representations and identities become the norm until an agent is introduced to disrupt the existing perceptions of that particular space. It is in such a manner that marked spaces become 'arts spaces'. These marked spaces are usually ordinary and mundane public spaces like train stations and open squares which have identities such as 'open space', 'waiting space', and 'traversal space'. This chapter considers how the incidence of an arts performance makes a difference on a public space. An important feature of spatial politics involves the idea of power, and it is with power that the artists, as agents, change the meanings of the performance spaces. Pertinent themes in the concepts of spatial politics and contested landscapes include re-imagining and subverting the nature of space – the deliberate manipulation of the meaning of a space. Re-imagining a space is the act of having the audiences' perceptions of the space changed to represent something else. Places can therefore be remapped; the action of placing a different map over an existing marked space. In this instance, the audience is encouraged to imagine that the space is not what they originally perceived it as, but as another place altogether. This causes the space to take on a completely different meaning. Subverting the nature of a space is how actions performed on a space can completely alter the meaning of that space. This is accomplished by the artists and performers. Both of these themes function under the premise that the



meanings of spaces are changed by the functions performed upon them. The other important theme is that of exoticising or romanticising space, making the audience view the same space differently from before, through rose-tinted lenses, and changing the perception and meaning of a certain space. This is the difference that art makes, the act of transforming public space into a performance space.

The rest of this chapter follows with case studies of two theatre companies, section 5.2 on Drama Box, and section 5.3 on Spell #7, to show how their performances in public areas have transformed the landscape meanings and perceptions. Both companies are relatively contemporary, conducting plays with a focus on issues of public interest. Drama Box plays to heartland suburban audiences in public squares, usually near town centres where there is a reasonable amount of pedestrian traffic. The company also conducts its plays in Mandarin. Spell #7 is slightly more experimental, and conducts plays in English. This company performs plays in what they term 'alternative' spaces like dance clubs, old cathedrals, train stations and ethnic districts like Little India. The focus of the two case studies is on theatre performances; however, this does not mean that only theatre performances have the power to change urban space. I use these two examples firstly because, although they are both theatre companies, they involve different methods of changing landscape identity. Secondly, both companies impact and transform different types of spaces. Section 5.4 discusses how changes in public spaces impact Singaporeans. How the arts make a 'difference to space' will also be discussed.

## 5.2 Case Study: Drama Box

*I never realised geography was so important until I started doing community theatre, and thinking about the usage of space, the complication of urban space...  
...the day when my work ends is when the discursive space has been created.*

Kok Heng Leun (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003)

This section begins with a brief introduction to the Dramabox theatre company, and then followed by how the company's performances have changed landscape meanings in Singapore, through re-imagining and subverting the nature of the space, through changing the public's perceptions of it.

### 5.2.1 Drama Box – a background

My informant from Drama Box is Kok Heng Leun (hereafter Heng Leun), the artistic director of the company. Drama Box is one of the few arts companies in Singapore to have, in recent years, conducted a previously censored form of performance known as 'forum theatre'. Briefly, forum theatre is a form of theatre that encourages the audience to play a part in providing solutions to the various conflicts and problem scenarios that are raised by the actors. Forum theatre promotes audience-actor interaction, which has traditionally been discouraged in Singapore by the government because it constituted 'scriptless plays' – plays without a fixed script, which makes it difficult for the authorities to vet the performances. As a result, this form of art remained unfunded and unsupported in the country until the 10-year no-funding rule was lifted in 2003. The performing arts company also emphasises the importance of 'community theatre', which is theatre that is directly relevant to community issues, and involves the input of ideas and participation from the target community, or

audience. Heng Leun believes that it is in Singapore's public spaces that the shared process of creating art, between the artist and the community, is possible.

In this manner, community theatre and forum theatre work hand in hand to raise social awareness of current and relevant issues, and to create something that belongs to the community. In doing so, the community not only participates in providing ideas to the arts group, but also helps to solve the problems and challenges that are raised during the process of creating a work of art together with the theatre company. For example, the company previously performed a play that featured domestic abuse. In the first part of the performance, Drama Box actors enacted a scene in which a child was abused by his father. The following part of the play saw various members of the audience volunteering to replace some of the characters to try to resolve the situation. Heng Leun sees this process of working with the community as contributing to the creation of *discursive spaces* in Singapore. By this term, he means spaces where the community is able to gather to discuss and debate current issues.

When Drama Box presents plays at public spaces, it has a definite goal in mind. Heng Leun's ultimate ambition is to create physical discursive spaces in public areas of Singapore. As he insists, "I'm constructing a play with them (the community; the local residents); I'm making art with them, so my space has to be an open space" (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003; all quotes in this section unless stated). In stating this, he suggests that community theatre needs to take place in "an open space" – not just a physical open space where the Drama Box actors can interact with the community through playing out issues in forum theatre, but also a

figurative open space where the community feels at ease to communicate and discuss concerns and problems. According to him, open spaces and public squares in older housing estates and suburban town centres, such as Toa Payoh, Bedok and Ang Mo Kio, are frequently used as informal spaces by Singaporeans for discussion and dialogue. It is indeed a common sight to see many people spending their leisure time interacting and talking at these spaces. As he mentions, “Those centre squares are so important... [they are] supposed to be spaces where you actually allow discussion[s] to happen”. He also points out the lack of open spaces in newer residential estates and town centres by saying that “only the older estates have [them]... try finding one in Bukit Batok; try finding one in Tampines! It’s the older estates that provide the best space for discussions; when you don’t have the big shopping centres as distractions, and these are getting [fewer]”. Heng Leun’s point is that in order to facilitate discussions and dialogues, there needs to be open space. Without open spaces, Singaporeans are unable to freely express themselves and discuss with each other various current events. In addition, newer housing estates lack public squares and open spaces, hence the lack of discursive spaces. Heng Leun’s concern is that because discursive spaces are disappearing from the landscape, Singaporeans are becoming more apathetic, apolitical, and anti-social. His aim is to bring back the practice of community-led discussions of current issues in community spaces.

Because of Heng Leun’s objective, the plays by Drama Box are focussed on current events and social issues like domestic violence, social discrimination, education, retrenchment and other relevant topics. For example, during the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the company staged a public performance on the subject of SARS in the public squares of several HDB

estates, and he encouraged the audience – local residents of the area, to get up and perform how they feel about the subject matter. The company did this by introducing scenarios to the audience, and then allowing them to volunteer themselves as performers to act out possible solutions to the problems posed. In doing so, Heng Leun turns a public space into a setting where the audience is able to express how they feel, like a soapbox. As Heng Leun explains, “the space becomes... no longer a space where you watch the artists play... you articulate, and you actually discuss”. And even as Heng Leun alters the landscape of Singapore through his mission to create discursive spaces, he also creates arts spaces in the process.

### 5.2.2 *Drama Box & the Deliberate Manipulation of Space*

What Heng Leun actually does when he creates discursive space in Singapore is the deliberate manipulation of space. He becomes the agent that creates or changes meanings in public spaces, and he does this *deliberately*. When evaluating public spaces to stage his plays, he looks for places that would make “good discursive environments” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). He also realises that “it’s the older estates that provide the best space for discussions”, because these places have fewer distractions, and hence do not impede discussion. An example of a venue that distracts from the performance is shopping centres. As a result, he is constantly on the look out for spaces to change and to *manipulate*, and this is how his art has the effect of changing landscape meaning.

Surrounding services, pedestrian traffic, accessibility, and demography of the suburban neighbourhood spaces are some of the qualities by which Heng Leun and

his team access potential performances sites. These are important to provide a conducive artistic and discursive environment. The presence or lack of services and amenities like shopping centres, parks and supermarkets affect the staying power of the incidental audience at these spaces. The presence of a shopping mall, for example, distracts from the performance as it functions as a competing factor that draws audiences away. As Heng Leun mentions, “it’s still not a very good space because you realise the people are all going to the shopping centre... once you go to a shopping centre, you get drawn in and lost, because there are ten thousand shops there”. However, shopping centres also attract large crowds, a large proportion of which may stop to watch the play in its entirety. Heng Leun prefers squares and open spaces nearer to supermarkets because “people sometimes will sit there to wait for people... you don’t have to spend three hours in there... [passers-by] will still have time to watch the performance”. These amenities all add significantly to the amount of pedestrian traffic, and therefore, incidental audience, that would chance upon the play.

Accessibility to the performance space is also important. Most of the suburban housing estates are centred around train (MRT) and/or bus stations. Heng Leun calls these “terminal spaces” because a particular mode of transportation (bus or train) *terminates* there. Around these “terminal spaces” are usually amenities like shopping malls or supermarkets, typically surrounded by open space and residential estates, and commuters have to pass through these spaces to get to their destinations. These open spaces are ideal performance sites that will secure a good amount of incidental audience, according to Heng Leun. Before planning a play, he studies the environment by visiting “possible congregation points” and observing “where people

walk” and whether “people sit down... and discuss things” at these places. Demographically, Heng Leun looks for neighbourhoods with families, lower income groups, and the elderly – people who would be able to spare the time to watch and participate in the plays.

Heng Leun also chooses spaces that are not clearly defined and structured performance spaces. He dislikes open-air amphitheatres and Community Centres in the suburban towns because apart from the physically rigid characteristic of such environments (the physical features of these places, like walls and built stage areas, render the venue inflexible to modification for specific plays), there is also “a bigger structure under that structure”. This alludes to the potential underlying political affiliations that these places have, because they have been planned and built by government-affiliated organisations. According to him, audiences do not feel at liberty to fully voice their opinions and react to his plays when they are in a structured government-created space. The politics of place are sometimes imagined, causing audiences to feel as though they are under government surveillance, thus further inhibiting open and free-ranging discussions of pertinent topics.

Heng Leun’s method of manipulating a space involves a process of repetition. He believes that by constantly returning to the same space to perform forum theatre plays, the community will not simply see that area as an arts site, but as a discursive space as well. There is hence an identification with the space as an arts space, and as an open forum where ideas and solutions can be found. As he says, “I’m trying to make [it] a practice... that we go back to the same place constantly, two to three times a week, so that they know that... this place, there’s going to be a play, there’s

going to be a discursive kind of environment, a place of dialogue”. This is the creation of a place identity – where the community begins to associate a particular space as a performance site. Heng Leun expresses this sentiment by mentioning that he has to “keep going back there until people know us”, signalling a need for the community to identify him and Drama Box with that particular public space. Identifying an open space with a performance or theatre company is an indication of how the public geographically imagines an arts space. Consequently, there is a progression in the eventual transformation of this space. The public space, previously perceived as ‘open space’, is transformed through an arts performance, becomes an arts space, and a discursive environment.

Drama Box, in changing public perceptions of urban spaces also manipulates spatial meaning and identity. The forum and community theatre approach necessarily involves the audiences in the performance because it calls upon them to create a satisfactory conclusion to the plays. According to Heng Leun, an important factor of community-based forum theatre is the level of ‘realness’. He maintains that reflecting real life (real problems and real people) on stage is crucial to capturing an audience’s undivided attention and commitment to the play. As he says, “people will start taking it seriously – nothing can beat something real on stage... so that they will not discredit [the performance]”. By presenting real problems in his plays in public spaces, for example performances focussing on domestic violence and abuse, and using ‘real’ people (members of the audience) to solve the problems, Drama Box recreates real life on stage.



The experience of the audience in both watching and taking part in ‘real life on stage’, as created and presented by the theatre company, is a prime example of how Drama Box manipulates space. When members of the audience participate in the play (Heng Leun calls them spect-actors), they have an experience with the space that would not normally occur in their daily lives. As a result, the spect-actors’ perception of the space changes. The public space has become a stage and their awareness of the space inevitably changes. From being merely a public space, it has been transformed into a performative environment, and hence an arts space.

In staging arts performances in empty spaces such as open squares, waiting areas, public walkways, and other shared public spaces frequented by a pedestrian population, Drama Box transforms blank spaces and meaningful locales into arts spaces. The company’s plays fill these spaces with activity, and infuse the landscapes with meaning, changing the spatial dynamics. As agents with the power to change the perceptions and meanings of public spaces, the arts company wields control over the landscape, and through strategic manipulation, discursive spaces are created.

### **5.3 Case Study: Spell #7**

*You’re taking them somewhere, and making them see it afresh, and that’s always interesting for an audience.  
It’s like re-imagining the night-club as a city, and placing another map on top of Zouk.*

Ben Slater (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003)

This section begins with a brief introduction of the Spell #7 theatre company, and proceeds with an examination of how the company’s performances have changed and affected public spaces in Singapore.

### *5.3.1 Spell #7 – A Background*

The main objective of Spell #7 is to experiment with space. The company prefers to work with unusual and unconventional spaces, making use of interesting and unique atmospheres and including them into the performance. It enjoys the artistic freedom that comes from being able to experiment with the themes and energies that these different types of spaces can offer. Ben Slater (henceforth Ben), the Artist-in-Residence mentions, “the site itself becomes part of the material of the performance” (Personal Interview, 17 July 2003; all quotes below unless stated). My other informant from Spell #7 is Kaylene Tan (henceforth Kaylene), the director of the company. As mentioned in the quotes at the beginning of this section, Spell #7 strives to make its audience see places anew and differently from what they initially perceived it to be. The Spell #7 office is located in the Little India arts district under the Arts Housing Scheme, and the theatre company is inspired by its environment. When working with different environments and other site-specific performances, Spell #7 uses the setting as a tool to guide the play. As a result, the theatre company responds by creating works that reflect attitudes and reactions to the neighbourhood it finds itself.

One of Spell #7’s preferred performance art is ‘promenade theatre’, which involves the movement of the audience around the performance space, as opposed to sitting static in designated seats. Ben reveals that this form of theatre provides “a very immersive experience for the audience – they’re not just sitting down watching a show anymore... they play a more active role”. This style of theatre completely immerses the audience in the experience of the play, and makes the show a more

intense experience for them. This experiential impact in turn changes the performing space even more for the audience.

### 5.3.2 *Spell #7 & Exoticising the Space*

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, Spell #7 performed a play called *Kinda Hot*, which involved a tour around the Little India ethnic district in Singapore at night. This play is significant in many ways, mainly because of its unconventional method. More than just ‘promenade theatre’, the play takes a small group of spectators on a tour around the Little India ethnic district in Singapore, and incorporates a fictional love story involving the main actor, a tour guide.

The play was, according to Ben, “a reaction to [Spell #7] coming to Little India and setting up an office... it was about [Spell #7] dealing with the environment”. Working and operating out of Little India resulted in changing their perception of the area, and they wanted express that change with a play. They also wanted to experiment with the idea of tours and the way tour guides talk about and deal with space. The eventual audience for this play was largely made up of locals and expatriates who had been living in the country for sometime. Most were interested to find out more about Little India, and the prospect of learning about the area in an “unconventional” manner – through a play, was also attractive to them. Part of the draw of the play was in the story-telling qualities that tour guides employ to create an atmosphere for their audiences. This story-telling attribute is not dissimilar to performing a play, and it was a feature that became the quality that Spell #7 intended to re-enact for their audiences.

The significance of *Kinda Hot* is the way it changed the audiences' perceptions of Little India as a whole. Little India is a cultural and ethnic enclave frequented by many Indians, both local and foreign. The district also provides many Indian goods and services. However, many Singaporeans – Chinese, Malay, and some Indians have qualms about visiting the area because of pre-conceptions of the place. Many of the pre-conceptions are tinged with racism; as Ben puts it, “[Little India] has a certain notoriety”. Many imagine the area to be dangerous, unfamiliar, dirty and run-down, all of which may not necessarily be true. While the company wanted the experience of the play to be “exciting and edgy”, they also wanted the audience to feel reasonably safe, and that involved familiarising the audience with the landscape.

As the play proceeds, it completely changes the way the audience views Little India. Indeed, touring an area changes one's perspective of the place, because one becomes familiarised with the environment. *Kinda Hot* adds more than just familiarisation as it also incorporates a fictional narrative to the audiences' experience of Little India. Ben agrees that the play had changed Little India for the audience – “[*Kinda Hot*] probably changed their perception of Little India, in a way that's become a bit more fictionalised for them, a bit more romanticised; and they also see different parts of it, and walked to places they might not usually walk”. This is how a space is exoticised – the fictional narrative that the audience learns even as it discovers more about the space will remain in its mind and will be part of Little India the next time the audience thinks about or visits the place. The audience has been exposed to the landscape and has formed a new awareness of the environment. Although the narrative was completely fictional, to their experience, the story has

actually happened, and Little India, previously perceived with fear and lack of familiarity, is newly seen through romantic rose-tinted lenses as created by the narrative. Performances in public places are thus a method through which both actors and audience begin to see the quotidian in a different light. The daily activities of inhabitants and utilitarian functions of a place become theatricalised; the exotic is reinforced as the landscape becomes the play's setting, while shop vendors and random passers-by become extras in the play.

The total immersion of the audience in the performance plays a big part in its spatial experience. At a certain point in the play, the audience is given headsets, and are seated in a coffee shop to listen to music and voice-overs. This is a moment where they become part of the setting. As Ben mentions, "they were seeing Little India with new eyes; and that point where they sit and listen to the voice-over and they hear the music, it was a moment where they could be in a film". When the audience becomes part of the performance, they also become part of the landscape, which completely changes the space for them. It is not just through the tour that the audience become *insiders*, but also through the experience of being part of and belonging to the landscape. This adds to the value of site-specific performances, as public spaces are marked and filled with meaning. In Ben's words, "the space was so alive" that they "didn't have to do very much as performers". Spell #7 therefore made use of the environment to add to the rich experiences of the performance.

Another play that Spell #7 performed, *Bud*, took place in Zouk, a popular nightclub in Singapore. The second half of the quote at the beginning of Section 5.4 refers to this play. The significance of this particular play is in the complete

transformation and remapping of the dance club. *Bud*, like *Kinda Hot*, was also a promenade theatre piece, and involved the ‘placement’ of urban Singapore over the Zouk landscape. Spell #7 remapped the club, transforming separate rooms and parts of the building into spaces that represented different parts of the city. The play addressed issues dealing with living and moving about in the city.

Ben notes that staging plays like *Kinda Hot* and *Bud* in unconventional spaces, such as Little India and Zouk, has changed the spaces for him, and also for the people around him:

*I think performances, site-specific shows, do definitely change the spaces for those audiences who experience it, and particularly for performers as well, because obviously you’re been there a lot, and you’ve seen that place a lot. I’ve ended up doing tours of Little India for people who were visiting, friends who were visiting, or Singaporeans who don’t know it very well. I’ve taken people around so I’ve ended up doing the performance in some weird way, re-enacting it on a real level, because I know the area very well now...*

With regards to Little India, Ben possesses a certain familiarity with the landscape that goes much deeper than just having walked there; instead it is an attachment that derives from having performed at that space, even when he is not consciously putting up a play. The entire Little India has become, to him, a stage from which he ‘performs’ to his friends when he takes them around the area, and in that sense, it has become a definite performing arts space to him. Clearly, there is a merging of ‘performance’ and ‘real life’.

In the case of *Bud*, at Zouk, Kaylene concurs, “[Doing a show at Zouk] changes your perception of the space, because we could rehearse in it during the day, without all the lights... and you just see it as it is, really horrible, smelly, sticky, tawdry”. Seeing Zouk in such a state is revealing, because, as Ben remarks, “when

you go [to Zouk], it's kind of as an outsider", because one pays to get in, and there are still certain restricted areas all around. He also describes it as "such a marked space – a nightclub, it's dominating, what it does, and its function". This is important because Zouk, as a popular nightclub, is already a heavily marked and structured space. People identify it as a nightclub, and nothing else; presuming to remap the entire space is thus an ambitious undertaking. As a result, having the actors rehearse in and see this space without the usual trappings of a nightclub – with all the lights on, and none of the usual crowd, allows them to see the space differently. This completely changes their perception of the club. It also reveals to the Ben and Kaylene the power that the management of Zouk has over the space:

*It makes you realise – it's nothing; they've invested these parts of the building with this power, and of course it's absolutely meaningless. It has meaning for those few hours, from eleven o'clock at night to three o'clock in the morning, suddenly the VIP lounge is a place you'd really like to be. Of course, at six o'clock in the evening, it's a piece of shit... it looks like a horrible bar... but night clubs are really interesting spaces.*  
(Ben)

Performing in such spaces allow the actors and performers to overcome the presumed power that has been imbued over the landscape. Kaylene mentions that she found Zouk an intimidating place before performing *Bud*. She was previously aware that the areas are zoned, and negotiating the space is difficult because movement is limited in the club. However, after having staged a show there, she finds Zouk much easier to navigate now. Although she is once again an *outsider* when she patronises the nightclub today, she is able to "navigate through it in a much easier way, and cope with it better". In this respect, Kaylene has a better sense of the space.

While the actors were able to see the space differently because of their involvement in the play, the audience also had a chance to see the space in a different way. The audience who turned up to watch *Bud* were ‘clubbers’, as Kaylene termed them; people who patronised the club frequently, and were “really adventurous people”, who were “really up for seeing the space in a different way”. The play helped the audience to see Zouk as not just a nightclub but also as a performance space. There is hence a change in the way they use the space. Having previously only used Zouk for nightclub functions like drinking, dancing, and appreciating the music, the audience is now aware that that Zouk can be an arts venue as well.

In addition, Kaylene felt there were advantages to performing in a club. Although the space is very deeply marked, the nature of the space, as a night club, adds to the nature of the play *Bud*. As Ben says, “Zouk... is a place where some of the conventional rules of society don’t apply”; adding that it is a space “where you know you can do quite subversive things”. There is an atmosphere unique to the nightclub which cannot be found anywhere else, that adds to the performance as a whole. This highlights the importance of the environment when considering a site-specific performance; the atmosphere of a site adds immeasurably to the performance.

Hence, Spell #7 utilises both promenade theatre and ideas inspired by their environment in order to remap, exoticise, and romanticise their performance venues. In doing so, the company not only changes the space for the audiences, but also for the actors performing there.



#### 5.4 The Difference that the Arts Make

*Artistically, the choice of theatre space defines the spatial relationship between the characters and the audience, and is unique and has to be respected for the production to work.*

Alvin Tan, in *Art vs Art: Conflict & Convergence*, 1995:42

Although both case studies focussed on theatre companies, the similarities between the two are few. The manner in which the two companies change their audiences' perception of public space is vastly different. Drama Box, in utilising open spaces and public squares creates landscape meanings and identities by purposefully manipulating the performance space. They fill blank open spaces with specific performance-based activities and meanings, giving empty spaces new identities such as 'arts landscape' or 'discursive space'. Spell #7 prefers to use heavily marked spaces – the prime examples being the Little India ethnic district and Zouk the nightclub, subtly *changing* the way people view these spaces. In doing so, the arts company remaps the landscape and creates new landscape meanings, thereby exoticising and romanticising the environment.

Creating discursive spaces and exoticising performance venues, while different approaches, both change spaces for audience and actors. However, public space is only transformed in the process of creating discursive space. The end product of Drama Box's endeavours is not arts spaces, compared to Spell #7's attempts. Creating discursive spaces impacts the audience by encouraging people to be more outspoken. This will, in time, change the landscape of the country. Remapping and exoticising the spaces, as Spell #7 attempts to do, will eventually change peoples' perception of landscape of Singapore. Only the audience will experience this change; whereas for discursive spaces where audiences actively

discuss issues at public sites, a wider cross-section of the community will also be able to experience these discursive spaces.

The methods used – forum theatre by Drama Box, and promenade theatre by Spell #7, also have different effects on landscape. With forum theatre, the eventual end result is the creation of discursive spaces. This is because forum theatre simply encourages and facilitates discussion amongst the population. In contrast, promenade theatre allows the audience to perceive the space in a different way. The change in perception for the audience is more apparent as they experience environments in a different manner through the remapping process.

The other difference between Drama Box's and Spell #7's performances is in the locations at which they stage their plays. As explained earlier, Drama Box's plays are performed at the heartland open spaces in suburban Singapore, whereas Spell #7 performs at vastly different places. For example, Little India and Zouk cater to different crowds as compared with local neighbourhood suburbs. The issues raised by the two companies are extremely different, as well. So while Drama Box changes heartland spaces, places close to where most of the population live, Spell #7 transforms space with functions such as work (Little India) and leisure (Zouk). The spaces are transformed differently. The heartland spaces are changed into discursive spaces, while Little India and Zouk are turned into arts space through theatrical performances.

The discursive spaces that Heng Leun (Drama Box) creates are echoed in Alvin Tan's (Artistic Director, The Necessary Stage; henceforth TNS) vision for

community theatre. Alvin (TNS) stages performances in public areas with the intention to provoke public memory. He interacts with the inhabitants of these spaces – typically the open squares and public spaces that can be found around residential estates in the heartland areas. He describes these spaces as “a kind of village point where you meet” (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). These are the places he mentions are where people make conversation, “talk about the war years”, and remember the past. According to him, this is “because you can only think of that [old jokes and customs] if you lived that era which we young people or younger generation will not”. Alvin sees these interactions and discussions as vitally important for Singaporeans “because in that sense [the history] is organic and of the times... you zoom into a kind of time capsule, and then you get in touch with the world of that time and that place”. To remember such historical spaces, Alvin uses his interactive community plays to recreate these histories and memories at the very sites where he learnt about them.

Public performance arts have the ability to bring attention to spaces. Many arts companies use the arts to convey a message about the spaces that they use, just as the Spell #7 case study has shown. Alvin Tan (TNS) notes that the arts make the audience more conscious and aware of their surroundings. Citing an example from one of the company’s plays, *Let’s Walks*, a promenade theatre piece that brought its audience to a public hawker centre, Alvin describes how his actress, as part of the act, dressed up some of the hawker centre tables. He comments that “you’ve never seen a hawker centre dressed up like that”, causing the audience to re-evaluate their perceptions of places;

*We had to reconsider what is a hawker centre... she’s serving them, prettifying the place and we’re observing her, because there’s a frame of*

*her interacting with the people who are wondering what's happening to them because they're being watched. But you also realise that you're also being watched by them, watching you, and things like that. That's performance art. (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003)*

The point here is that the meanings of public spaces have been changed as a result of the arts performances at those sites. Indeed, the actors exercise power over the spaces, because they are in control of the play and present new ways of understandings and new meanings of the space to their audiences. Everyday users of the space thus have to navigate the space differently during and even after a performance has transpired at that particular location.

On a different scale, Lim Chin Huat (Artistic Director) from the dance company Ecnad notes that performances in public places do not solely affect the immediate location where it is staged, but that it also involves the rest of the country. He explains that “the main point is to share [the arts] with people... the objective of doing it is to create awareness towards contemporary dance... and to let people know that Singapore is not just about finance or import-export stuff” (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003). Chin Huat sees public art as a way to change peoples’ perceptions of Singapore as a whole, and this is also represented as a change in Singapore *space*. In addition, Chin Huat also notes that the presence of the arts changes spaces by making them more interesting. He clarifies, “rather than to let all this creation (public spaces) just lie there... why don't we make it more exciting, something people can look forward to?”. In saying this, he is referring to how the arts can make people more aware of their surroundings, citing that performances in unconventional locations change “our lifestyle and our environment quite a lot, so if there's something [at public spaces], it will be more interesting”.

Figure 5.1 shows that arts performances do indeed have an effect on public space. 72% of the survey respondents felt that watching a performance at a public venue transforms the place for them. This data is supported by Figure 5.2, which shows that 62% of the respondents expected more arts events to be held at that venue again, which shows that, for the majority, arts performances at unconventional venues have had the effect of changing public perception of space. Furthermore, in Figure 5.2, 55% of the respondents consider unconventional performance site as legitimate art space. We can thus say that the public has begun to identify such public spaces as performances venues.

Many of my interview respondents similarly agreed that arts performances conducted at public venues change their perception of spaces, causing them to identify such locations as arts spaces. As Mrs. Ong concurred, “it doesn’t mean just shopping [at Lot 1 Shopping Centre], but you also have some form of entertainment” (Personal Interview, 16 June 2003). She also mentions that “all neighbourhood malls should have these [performances], too”. Not only have these spaces been changed, some respondents also feel that more spaces ought hold more arts performances. In fact, many interviewees felt that the spaces should be made more conducive for performance. As Mr. Lim mentions, “it’s very good, if they want to have these [performances], to prepare some shelter, so that [audiences] can see what is happening... if the stage can be raised higher, more people can enjoy the show” (Personal Interview, 16 June 2003). In this instance, he is commenting on contingency plans that should be made in view of bad weather, which would provide a better arts experience for the general public, as well as for the performers.

Suggestions by the audience for better performance facilities are a good indication that there is indeed demand for more arts spaces.

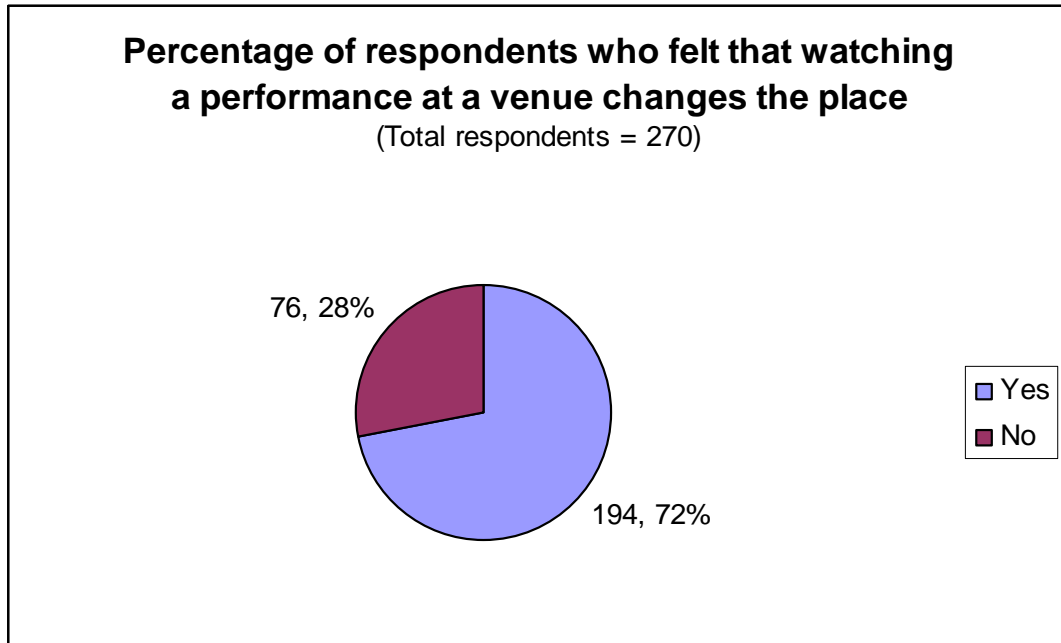


Figure 5.1. Percentage of respondents who felt that watching a performance at a venue changes the place

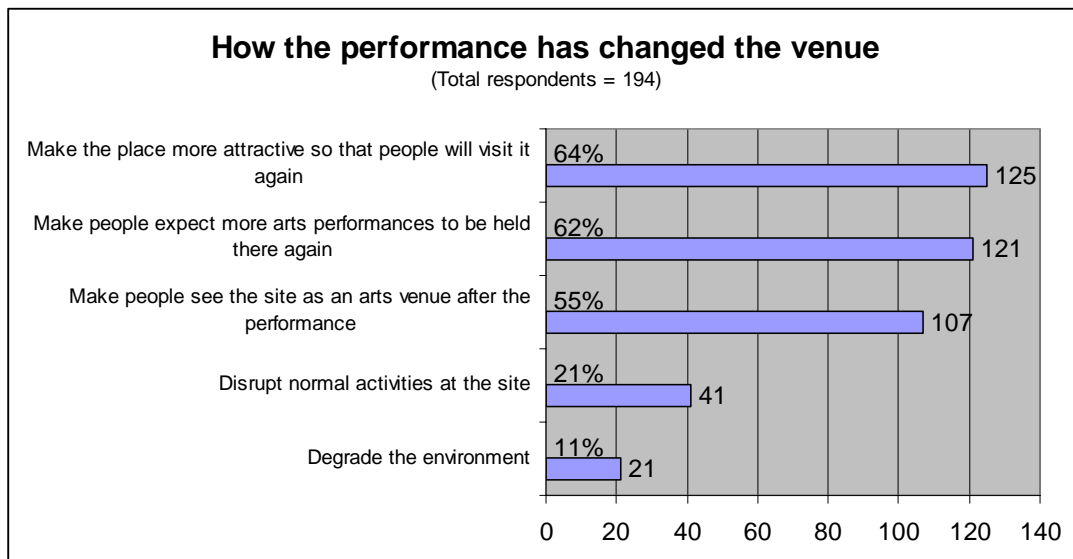


Figure 5.2. Opinion of respondents on how the performance has changed the venue

Respondents to the questionnaire survey also made comments to establish the point that watching performances at unconventional venues have had the effect of

changing the place for them. Respondents are generally aware of the effect that arts performances have on the landscape. Table 5.1 shows a few examples of the comments given. As Respondents 1 and 4 commented, “performances have a certain way of... changing the landscape... people view the place differently”, and “[the performance] creates a carnival atmosphere”. These comments show that respondents are aware of the effect of arts on place identity. Comments by Respondents 2 and 3 not only show that the audiences’ perception of the venue has been changed, but further demonstrate that audiences can develop a ‘sense of place’ after watching a performance. Remarks like “enhances the sense of place to the residents” (Respondent 2), and “provides a point of reference in time... adds to the memory of the site” (Respondent 3) clearly indicate that the audiences’ spatial awareness that has been altered by the performance, and that these sites have become ‘marked spaces’. Audiences will henceforth remember that a performance had occurred at that particular site, and their perception of the place is forever changed.

**Table 5.1**

How Respondents Felt Performances at Unconventional Arts Spaces Changed the Venue

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Respondent 1	“performances have a certain way of attracting an audience and changing the landscape. Once a performance has taken place in a certain location, a relaxed mood is created and people view the place differently”
Respondent 2	“imbues the place with a sense of the ‘arts/culture’, and enhances the sense of place to the residents”
Respondent 3	“provides a point of reference in time in the public’s mind, just as street opera performances or seventh month <sup>3</sup> performances mark our minds, and adds to the memory of the site”
Respondent 4	“creates a carnival atmosphere”

<sup>3</sup> Traditional Chinese festival known as ‘Hungry Ghost Festival’ that involves public performances (usually in residential areas) to appease the ‘ghosts’ that are believed to visit the living during the period; colloquially known as ‘seventh month’ as it occurs during the seventh month of the Chinese calendar

This chapter has shown that public art has the capability to transcend the limitations of physical space – from simply existing at its performance venue, and in the minds of audiences. As shown by survey and interview respondents, after the performance is over, the spaces are remembered in the minds of the audiences, and they identify the art venues with the performance the subsequent times they visit it. Drama Box’s Heng Leun succinctly summarises the spatial power that activities have on the landscape by observing that “you are changing a place whereby you’re just there to play chess, or a play whereby you watch real life happening on stage” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). Every activity, no matter how insignificant, has an effect on space. This chapter has shown that arts performances lead people to perceive their environment differently. Indeed, arts performances have power over a space because they have the ability to change space. Hence *arts performances* upon a space beget *arts space*.



## Chapter 6

### ARTS SPACES IN SINGAPORE: CONFLICT & COMPLEMENTARITY

*Can it be that this conference, by its very designation, Art vs Art, be sited along an axis with the SAC<sup>4</sup> and the museums marking one end, and arenas such as The Substation, 5<sup>th</sup> Passage and the Space (which alas is no more) marking the other? If so, then does the axis point to, at one end (the SAC, museums) a place in which commemorations, orthodoxies and authoritative significance are enacted? And at the other (i.e. The Substation, 5<sup>th</sup> Passage, the Space) a place where exploratory, divergent, challenging practices and provocations are continually transacted? If such is the case, it is vital that the situation not be resolved into an 'either-or' situation, but that both be kept alive, each generating and thriving on difference in the face of the other.*

Kanaga Sabapathy, *Art vs Art: Conflict & Convergence*, 1995:19

*All you can do then is to keep in tension the relationship between one kind of art and another – or in practical terms, the tension between The Substation (the sub-centre) and the Singapore Art Centre, a tension which, if it doesn't already exist, one must create and sustain... I don't think that you can ever do without a centre. The centre will arise, the centre will exist whether you like it or not. If the Singapore Arts Centre does not exist, The Substation might become the centre... [there is] the necessity of keeping in tension the relationship between what is in the centre and what isn't.*

Janadas Devan, *Art vs Art: Conflict & Convergence*, 1995:55, 66

#### 6.1 Introduction

As Sabapathy (1995) notes above, there exists both complex synergistic and antagonistic relationships between different types of arts spaces. The changes in Singapore's landscape affect what the *Global City for the Arts* (GCA) objective means for the country. Even as a global arts identity is created through the development of more arts spaces (as seen in Chapter 4), there is still a vital necessity to build a strong national identity for the citizens of the country. The changes in the

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<sup>4</sup> SAC is the term for Singapore Arts Centre when it was initially proposed in 1989. This is now the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

local landscape have been brought about by the increasing occurrences of performance art in Singapore's public spaces (as shown in Chapter 5). This chapter is based on the premise that there are significant nation-wide synergies and antagonistic relationships created by arts spaces in Singapore, and these are shaped by changes in the landscape as has been shown in the last two chapters. These relationships are important because they are an indication that the presence of arts spaces has changed the country, demonstrating that arts development affect the GCA vision as well as the nation-building ideal. Furthermore, these changes are not simply in physical terms, but also have social repercussions that affect the whole nation.

The synergies and relationships develop in three main themes. These are firstly, the relationships between arts spaces produced by public and private organisations; secondly, the dynamics between conventional and unconventional arts spaces; and thirdly, the dialectics between the political and economic objectives of nation-building and globalisation. Devan's (1995) remark above is indicative of the tensions that exist between each of the three themes. Where there are spaces created by the public administration, there are also spaces constructed by the private and independent arts companies; where there are arts performances conducted at conventional arts spaces, there are also performances carried out at unconventional arts spaces. These contrasting poles are created by the need for one type of space to make up for the lack it sees in the other type of space. On one hand, this can be seen as a complementary action; however tensions are created between the two polemical types of space when intentions differ between the two, or when one is afforded more priority than the other.

In this chapter I will examine in detail how the synergies and antagonistic relationships between these three themes come about. Section 6.2 will focus on the *agency* factor – the issues that arise in the relationships between state-led created arts spaces (public agency) and arts spaces created by private arts organisations (private agency). Section 6.3 will discuss the *spatial* factor – the dynamics that emerge when conventional and unconventional arts spaces are played off against each other. Finally, section 6.4 looks at the *objectives* factor – how the developmental aspects of nation-building (political objective) and the economic focus of the GCA (economic objective) produce synergistic or even conflicting relationships. Hence, I argue that the conflicts and complementarities between agency, space, and objectives are significant factors in influencing the nation’s dual goal of achieving the GCA status and nation-building.

## **6.2 Agency: Public versus Private Arts Spaces**

The different arts spaces created by government (state-led) planning and private organisation initiatives produce potentially volatile issues. But, as Sabapathy (1995) notes at the beginning of this chapter, these differences need not produce antagonistic relationships; rather the different spaces should complement each other to generate synergies that further the nation’s global arts ambitions. The top-down (state-led) directives to create arts spaces are usually highly-publicised large-scale and well-funded projects, like the Esplanade and the newest development, The Arts House. In comparison, it is commonly argued that the bottom-up (private organisation-led) initiatives lack the means and funds to create their own spaces, resulting in the eventual demise of many independent projects like The Artist’s Village, 5<sup>th</sup> Passage

and The Space. The one existing independent organisation that still endures is the Substation.

As examined in chapter 4, public agencies (for example the government; NAC) play a major part in creating all types of arts spaces. They encourage and motivate private arts organisations and artistes to perform. Many of the artistes and arts companies interviewed have mentioned that many of their performances – especially those held in unconventional venues, were commissioned by the public sector. Mogan Subramaniam from the *a capella* group Akatones mentions that most of their performances at events like the annual Arts Festival and various charity affairs at unconventional venues were co-opted by statutory boards and other government-linked agencies such as the NAC, the National Parks Board, and so forth (Personal Interview, 7 August 2003). He also notes that the Akatones are not so much interested in looking for these public performances themselves, but would rather hold paid concerts or perform at private parties. Similarly, Zarudin Yob Ahmad from the Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Group states that the NAC requests for them to hold “outside performances” regularly (Personal Interview, 23 July 2003). Even Yeo (NAC) concurs: “Usually such events [arts performances in public places] are organised by the artists, event organisers such as the People’s Association and the Community Centres/Clubs or the Council” (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003). These quotes show that the public sector is a major agency in initiating performances in public spaces, and in the process creating more unconventional arts spaces.

One of the main motivating points for private arts organisations to hold performances at the request of the public sector is funding. Alvin Tan, from The Necessary Stage (TNS), notes that most of his community-based plays which are located in Community Clubs (CCs) are supported by the Community Development Councils (CDCs). Lim Chin Huat, Artistic Director of the dance company Ecnad, mentions that while NAC requests for them to perform in local schools, both the NAC and the Singapore Totalisator Board subsidise their fees for the school performances.

For the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), the importance of funding works two ways. Firstly, as mentioned above, public initiatives such as the Organising Committees from various CCs request the SSO to perform in unconventional venues like in CCs or at various locations in the heartlands of Singapore. These requests usually come with funding, which greatly alleviates the production costs of holding the performance at these places. This is because amenities such as sound facilities, seating arrangements, tents, and insurance for the instruments would be paid for by the public committee sponsoring the event. Secondly, it is through the heavy subsidy from the NAC that they are able to remain in their Victoria Concert Hall (VCH) premises – at the annual “nominal fee of \$1” (George Wong, Personal Interview, 19 August, 2003). In this example, there is a shared responsibility between private organisations and the public sector in ensuring the continuation of performances, especially those held in unconventional spaces.

The evidence above points to the fact that public agencies believe that creating arts spaces are beneficial because they help to encourage and contribute to

the artistes and organisations who perform at the venues. However, this is not to say that private organisations lack the capacity for funding. Nevertheless, private funding is frequently less common than public. Only a few of the artistes and organisations interviewed mentioned the financial aid that comes from private sponsors. Only Chin Huat (Ecnad), who sites many of his performances at the fountains in local shopping centres mentions it directly – “the venue sponsorship is a big help because we can save certain costs to rent a venue, if you compare to theatre” (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003).

The problem with government co-opted performances that most artistes and arts companies encounter is the politics that are inevitably connected to these events. Alvin Tan (TNS) comments that the main drawback of public sector-requested and -commissioned performances at government-linked venues like CCs and CDCs is that “the council becomes demanding”. By this he means that the public sector wants to have a say in the content and the type of performance that the organisation eventually puts up (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). The situation also becomes inevitably political when the government is involved, especially if there are several different CDCs involved in the same event. As Alvin (TNS) notes, artists in general prefer to avoid politicised confrontations and have to maintain an equal footing between separate organisations, but as funding is provided at these events, there is a large incentive for them to carry on with the performances. As a result, many artists and companies become cautious about the spaces they choose to perform at and the commissions they accept.

*There’s more to it than just space. Why certain spaces are not used and why certain spaces are used, it’s dependant on how organisations and structures actually deal with them... if there are no alternative spaces, and why are there so few compared to other countries, it could be that the*

*environment is still not supportive, or the bureaucracies are still very heavy, but other people might tell you differently.* (Alvin Tan [TNS], Personal Interview, 5 June 2003)

In addition to Alvin's comments, Kok Heng Leun (Drama Box) also agrees that spaces become political when publicly funded; "geographical space, physical space, becomes politicised". He adds that "the RCs (Residential Committees) are government-affiliated organisations... and what happens is that at such a space, to have a real conversation is really difficult". He expands on this by saying that "there is a bigger structure under that structure... the structure is not right; the space is not right for this kind of open space [performance]". The 'structure under that structure' Heng Leun describes is the government and the political structure underlying the CC spaces. Spaces under the jurisdiction of the CCs and RCs are perceived to be linked to the government, which he feels inhibits the discursive potential of that space. He explains that "anybody going to the CC will still think that it has to do with the PAP<sup>5</sup>" (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003), which then makes the space inherently political and related to the government. "All their spaces are very political – whether I can feel safe, or not safe, whether what I say people can hear or can't hear... so there's no [actual] community space". The self-consciousness created by the perception that the government's eye is upon the performance inhibits both the audience and the artists from fully expressing themselves and this dulls the performance space. As a result, spaces which are affiliated to the government are not ideal for arts performances.

In relation to politically charged spaces, Heng Leun (Drama Box) also comments on the annual National Day Parade (NDP) in Singapore. In his words,

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<sup>5</sup> Peoples' Action Party, the ruling political party in Singapore.

“that’s the biggest political theatre in Singapore... It’s an interesting geographical space... directed by the government. We can never fight that. It’s a political arena... they constructed the thing almost like a play” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). This highly publicised and visible performance constructed by the state is the annual highlight of the nation. It entails a nation-wide scale of participation from the population and it imparts a strong sense of national pride and identity to the nation’s citizens. While the space used is physical, the event also encompasses space on a metaphysical, political scale.

The conflict between arts spaces created by the public sector and the private arts organisations also hinge on the difference in the amount of publicity that these two types of spaces possess. There is an underlying perception among the artistes and arts organisations that public sector-created spaces, as a result of having more financial stability, are able to generate more publicity (and hence more population awareness and audience). George Wong (SSO), when asked if the Esplanade has made an impact on the arts scene in Singapore said that “it’s very hard to know now; in the first few years it may be a novelty factor”, and that “once the novelty of the Esplanade dies down, the next few years we’ll see” (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). This perceived hype that the spaces created by top-down directives have creates a rift between the two types of spaces and results in a conflict. Public agency-created arts spaces may be perceived as better than private organisation-created ones, generating a class conflict between the types of spaces.

Spell #7’s private initiative to create and use performance spaces for themselves, through performing in places like Zouk, Little India, and Chijmes, is a



major example of private initiatives creating arts spaces. However, these initiatives are frequently heavily censored and restricted through the prohibitive procedures and amount of red-tape they have to go through before the performance allowed to take place, all of which may be futile effort if there is a denial of licence to perform. There are complicated relationships with the authorities such as the censorship board, the NAC, Singapore Land Authority (SLA), as well as the police, that generally discourage the large-scale development of more bottom-up initiatives to create artistes' own spaces.

As such, there are many issues involved with the public and private agencies that conflict or complement the GCA ideal as well as the state's nation-building efforts.

### **6.3 Space: Conventional versus Unconventional**

*Actually, it's a bridging – you see good artistic work, that's bridging into the city centre space...*

Lim Chin Huat, Ecnad (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003)

The dynamics between conventional and unconventional arts spaces involve both synergistic and antagonistic relationships. This section considers both the causes and effects of these relationships. Antagonistic relationships between the two types of arts spaces give rise to a segmented local arts scene, which in turn has repercussions on the GCA. This is because a unity between conventional and unconventional arts spaces will create a cohesive and strong arts scene that not only promotes the entire country as a GCA, but will also reinforce the nation's culture and identity. A synergistic relationship is ideal to strengthen both facets of national development, as

well as being beneficial to both the general population and the artistes and arts organisations. As Yeo (NAC) comments, “we support an increase in both aspects [conventional and unconventional arts spaces] to cater to the needs of artists” (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003).

There are many synergistic and complementary relationships involved with conventional and unconventional arts spaces. These play a part in promoting the GCA goals of the country. Issues involved in this relationship include an increased exposure to the arts and culture, and the conversion of the general population into audiences. This means that many of the performances at unconventional venues are aimed at creating more arts-performance attendees. The goal is to raise the profile and awareness of the arts among the general population and to eventually increase the numbers of audience and amount of sales at ticketed arts events. This issue is linked to that of ‘bridging’. Bridging, a term introduced by Kok Heng Leun (Drama Box) occurs when there is audience conversion at unconventional venue performances. The audience that is converted into part of the arts performance-attending population begins to attend performances at conventional spaces. As a result, the performances at unconventional venues act as a ‘bridge’ to increase audienceship at ticketed performances and other cultural events. This bridging phenomenon is important to promoting Singapore’s GCA aspirations. Yeo (NAC) concurs by stating that “the main objective [of holding arts events in unconventional spaces] is to bring the arts closer to the public since these are considered to be accessible locations” (Personal Interview, 14 July 2003). The action of bringing the arts closer to the public is aimed at increasing cultural awareness among the population and creating a more creative and attractive nation.

As such, there are positive spin-offs and synergies in the relationship between conventional and unconventional arts spaces. Indeed, many of the artistes and organisations interviewed, as well as the random surveys with audiences at unconventional arts performances see performances at unconventional venues as beneficial to the GCA goal and general arts awareness. Mogan Subramaniam (Akatonnes) also realises this when he performs at venues like shopping malls. “The biggest strength of these [unconventional] venues [is that] you’re going to catch people by surprise, you’re going to catch people that you wouldn’t catch at any other point of time”. In saying this, he points out that his concerts expose the arts to people “who haven’t taken the time to go out and find out what [the arts are] all about” (Personal Interview, 7 August 2003). Ng Siew Eng, the General Manager of Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) agrees: “these people are not going to come and get into the theatre in the first place, so this subtle introduction to our artform is a good start” (Personal Interview, 20 August 2003). This action is a contribution to arts education and awareness, and a step closer to achieving the GCA ideal.

Alvin Tan (TNS) makes the ‘bridging’ point clearer. “We were also doing community stuff, outreach, and audience conversion, so that Esplanade wouldn’t be a white elephant. So we’re also concerned about increasing the pool of audienceship” (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). In this case, Alvin sees his work and company as actively supporting the conventional arts spaces.

Lim Chin Huat (Ecnad) observes from his unconventional venue performances that “there’s an audience who came to watch the theatre production

after they watch a fountain production” (Personal Interview, 17 June 2003). This means that he notices he is actually converting ‘incidental audiences’ – the passers-by who watch his performances at various locations like outdoor fountains, into actual audiences who attend his concerts at more conventional venues. Likewise, Ng Siew Eng (SDT) agrees: “we want to be able to introduce the heartlanders to dance... we have to find ways of getting to people who are perhaps daunted by the fact they have to visit a grand looking theatre like Esplanade or Kallang or [Victoria Theatre]; putting them in an environment to introduce the artform would be the first step” (Personal Interview, 20 August 2003). The unconventional performance venues are seen as a non-threatening and friendly environment where arts and culture can be introduced to the public.

George Wong (SSO) mentions that SSO’s outdoor performances have two aims, namely exposure for the audiences, and visibility for the orchestra. “Instead of people coming to you, you go to them and give them exposure... it’s more of exposure and it’s more of visibility”, and it is “part of education and outreach” (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). Audience conversion is a one of the company’s objectives as well. George states that during their outdoors performances, the orchestra actively promotes their concert series which are held at conventional arts spaces such as VCH and the Esplanade. However, he also notes that despite the company’s efforts on audience conversion, “but the conversion rate is usually very low” (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). This could mean that the SSO’s performances at unconventional spaces are not a completely effective means of bridging the gap between the conventional and unconventional performance venues.

Mr. Lum, a spectator at one of the outdoor performances at Lot 1 Shopping Centre during the 2003 Arts Festival, is an ardent supporter of performances in unconventional spaces, especially in the heartland suburban areas of the country. “It’s good that... they bring it to the HDB heartlands, then you’ll have more audience, especially from this sector of the population that is not aware, [or] don’t have the time or interest” (Personal Interview, 16 June 2003).

Other synergies are created when conventional and unconventional arts spaces complement each other through providing for the audience what the other arts space does not. As Ng Siew Eng (SDT) notes, “[different types of space] just attract the appropriate audience; the conventional space attracts its own audience...” (Personal Interview, 20 August 2003). The availability of different types of spaces catering to different crowds allows for flexibility and choice for the audiences. Furthermore, it is noted that the general public adapts itself to the performance they are watching, as well as the type of venue they attend; “outside, you don’t expect them to be quiet – it’s an open space; but in the concert, we request... switch off your phones and pagers and so on. And it’s more or less understood for the general public” (George Wong, SSO, Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). To sum up this point, Zarudin Yob Ahmad (Sri Warisan) notes that “for art’s sake, formal venues are better; but for outreach, outdoors is better” (Personal Interview, 23 July 2003). This further shows how the complementarity between the two types of arts spaces work together to produce synergistic relationships that benefit each other and bring the arts experience to greater heights.

Figure 6.1 reveals that the general population maintains a preference for either conventional or unconventional arts spaces for specific types of arts performances. This shows that audiences have preferences and appreciate different venues for specific types of performances. The obvious preferences for conventional venues are for theatre events, musical theatre, and large-scale music performances; unconventional venues are preferred for small-scale music and busking performances, and a mix of both venues are preferred for dance events.

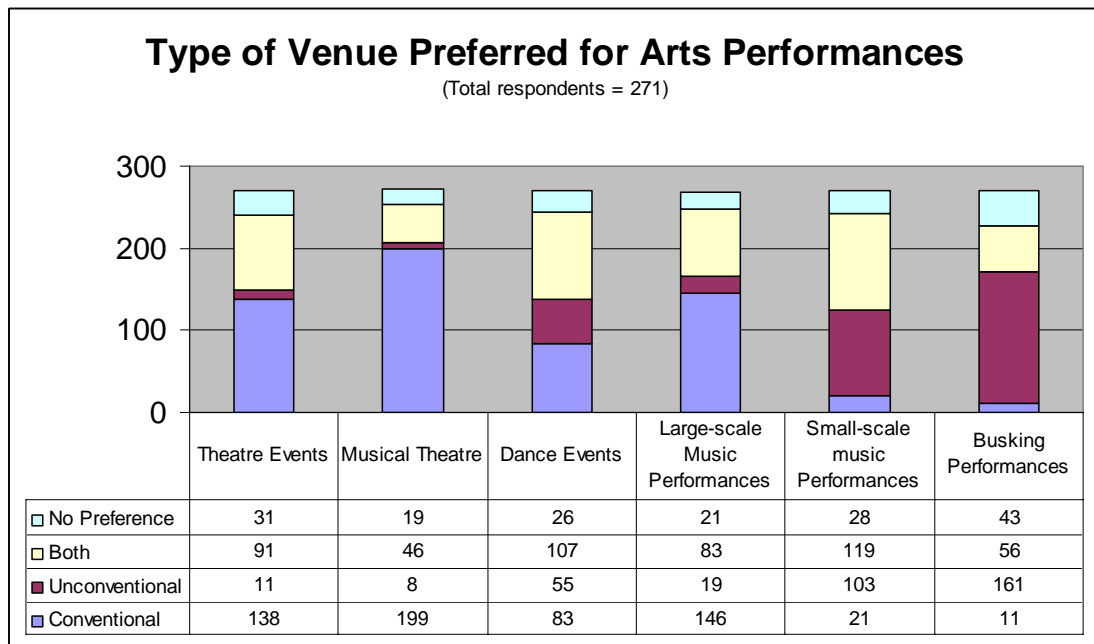


Figure 6.1. Type of Venue Preferred for Arts Performances

There are many reasons for antagonistic relationships between conventional and unconventional arts spaces. One of these issues involves a perceived class divide that is created by the impression that arts performances in unconventional spaces are inferior to those in conventional spaces. This is because the performances at unconventional spaces are usually either free of charge, or very lowly priced. In comparison, performances at conventional arts spaces such as the Esplanade or Victoria Concert Hall are relatively highly priced and are given a higher profile,

especially in terms of marketing and publicity. There is also the perception that performances at unconventional spaces are of lower quality and skill than those at conventional arts spaces. In addition, conventional performance venues are more expensive to rent as compared to unconventional performance venues, which are usually free of charge, or subsidised by the owner. For example, Zarudin Yob Ahmad (Sri Warisan) notes that “the Esplanade space is very nice but also very expensive” (Personal Interview, 23 July 2003). This contributes to the perception that conventional arts spaces are more restrictive and less accessible. Zarudin Yob Ahmad further comments: “performances at outside spaces – free is good, and a lot of people don’t go for formal venues because of their perception of higher prices” (Personal Interview, 23 July 2003).

What Heng Leun (Drama Box) likes about unconventional arts spaces is the flexibility that they offer to the audience. “The best place... is... a square. I put my mats, and they can sit. [If] they don’t like [to sit], they come up in the back. [If] they don’t like [the performance], they walk off” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). The open concept of the unconventional venues allow for the audience to leave when they are not comfortable with the performance, or if they need to go. This flexibility is limited in conventional venues because of seating arrangements, as well as the fact that the audience has, in all probability, paid to watch the performance. Having done so, the capacity to leave is somewhat limited. Heng Leun notes that when the audience purchase tickets to watch a performance at a conventional venue, they enter into a contract, a form of agreement with the artiste to attend and view the performance. The flexibility at unconventional venues entails that there is no contract, and the audience are free to do as they wish.

There is also resistance against the use of unconventional arts spaces as a bridge to promoting performances at the conventional venues. Heng Leun (Drama Box) questions the rationale behind holding performances at unconventional spaces.

*My main aim is also to do this – to say that let's not pour all resources into the city centre space, but pour resources into this communal space (heartland community spaces). Why must all arts only happen in the city centre? But that seems to be what NAC thinks. They always say – you do outreach here, you bring more people into the [ticketed events]. I think that's a very, very middle-class, bourgeois kind of mindset, of creating what art is. (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003)*

Heng Leun addresses an important issue that is related to the antagonistic and conflicting relationship between the two types of arts spaces – that of perceived class differences. By describing the bridging action as a “middle-class, bourgeois” kind of mindset, he battles the public’s opinions that performances at unconventional spaces are merely a means to an end. Rather, he argues for a vision of unconventional venue performances to be an end, an actual form of art in itself, striving for the credibility of these performances to be recognised as a complete entity in its own right. Furthermore, he says “I actually want to draw the resources and put these resources into the community spaces, which are at the fringe – you know we are always creating fringe places [for the arts]” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). This shows that unconventional arts spaces can be viable performance venues.

For the performers and the artistes, there is also a preference between conventional and unconventional performance venues. For many, the comfort and the good facilities of conventional arts spaces make it a preferred space to perform. George Wong (SSO) concurs, commenting on the benefits of performing in the Esplanade. “It is a premiere arts venue, it’s got fantastic acoustics; in fact the



orchestra sounds much better than it ever has... maybe they're more inspired by the ambience and the acoustics" (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). Even musicians agree, "I prefer having it indoors, there's air-con! Outside's too hot and humid, then you sweat and get all sticky..." (Musician, NUSSO, Personal Interview, 4 August 2003).

On the other hand, there are also benefits to performing in unconventional spaces – "performances at the heartlands, you're closer to the public and very relaxed, we're not afraid to make mistakes, but at formal venues we're more tense and stressed" (Zarudin Yob Ahmad, Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Group, Personal Interview, 23 July 2003). Many artistes and performers enjoy the informal interaction with the casual crowd that gathers to watch them perform at unconventional spaces. According to George Wong (SSO), "it's just generally a very relaxed atmosphere when you play outside... as a performer we're usually playing an easier repertoire; it's a bit more formal when you're in the concert hall, you play more serious works..." (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). There are lower expectations and less pressure to perform perfectly (not that standards should be lowered, as George Wong (SSO) insists), especially since the audience do not pay for the show. In addition, some performances work out better in unconventional spaces. Good examples of these are seen in Ecnad's dance performances, Spell #7's site-specific plays, and Drama Box's forum theatre events, all of which utilise the advantages of unconventional spaces to succeed. Alvin Tan (TNS) commented on a particular play his company organised that was "a very delicate thing that can't work in Jubilee [Hall]", where a corporate sponsor requested for them to perform. He also links this preference for specific 'better spaces' to the lack of corporate funding – "so

we lose sponsorship that way as well” (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). This is because many corporations favour conventional venues – for status reasons, which results in the lack of funding for performances in unconventional venues.

Unconventional performance venues can also become conventional arts spaces when the space has been adjusted to accommodate a performance. For Heng Leun (Drama Box), the simple placement of chairs in the open areas where he performs causes the space to become conventionalised and politicised, which he feels is detrimental to the purpose of his forum theatre plays. “It becomes a territory! So political. A discursive space is not territorial; it is opened up” (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). The spaces taken up by the chairs create little territories which are commandeered by the audience who sit in them. Once seated, the audience loses the flexibility to adapt to a performance because there is an inertia, and audiences may be less willing to move around and contribute to the performance.

#### **6.4 Objectives: Politics versus Economics**

*How can the indigenous work be presented on the national stage?*

Alvin Tan, TNS, Personal Interview, 5 June 2003

The issues arising from the dialectical relationship between the developmental aspects of nation-building and the GCA goal of the state are the result of the effects of the economic motivation for the arts. As a result, there is a conflict of interest in the development of the arts that creates consequences for Singapore’s culture, nationhood, and identity. This section will attempt to draw out the conflicts and complementarities that the economic and political purposes of creating arts space has on the nation. The political objectives of producing more arts spaces are vague. It is

more common to see the economic objectives of arts development in Singapore in various press releases, state addresses, and media publications. This section will begin by addressing the original intentions of public space in Singapore, and then continue with a discussion of the conflicts and complementarities involved with the political and economic objectives for creating arts spaces.

As mentioned in chapter 4, the developmental aspirations of the state have resulted in the need to utilise most of Singapore's available land for economic purposes. Hence, most available spaces are developed with economic intentions in mind. Singapore's limited land quantity demands that all space should serve a useful function. However, Heng Leun (Drama Box) insists that "real communal space is not utilitarian. It is supposed to be a space where you actually allow discussions to happen" (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). Heng Leun feels that spaces which are already marked by certain functions inhibit the public's ability to produce valuable and thought-provoking discussions. Because of the economic agenda for spaces in the city-state, Singaporeans are hindered from freedom of expression and discussion, and this results in the dearth of creativity and social development in the population. He also mentions that "in all of the upgraded spaces, they create one small amphitheatre. This small amphitheatre is always a reminder of this bridge space, because it's always empty", and he dislikes holding performances in "an amphitheatre because it's too structured" (Personal Interview, 12 August 2003). He believes that the open spaces such as amphitheatres and structured squares created by the state in hopes of generating social cohesion (through social gatherings) and discussion fail in their purpose. Heng Leun views the state-planned amphitheatres in heartland areas as conventional arts spaces, because he feels that they were created

for the purpose of conducting performances. Discursive spaces – and hence creativity and constructive dialogues, need to evolve naturally and spontaneously from unstructured and unmarked space. As a result, there is no space for the arts, since all spaces have been created with a function in mind. These are the unintentional effects of the utilitarian purposes of the spaces in Singapore.

The political objectives of creating more arts spaces in Singapore are championed mainly by the artistes and arts organisations, as well as by well-meaning Singaporeans. Table 6.1 shows a list of comments left by respondents on their returned questionnaires. The comments from respondents 1-4 show that some locals do feel that more arts and cultural spaces benefit the country on a political level that builds on the local culture and national identity. ‘Socio-political issues’, challenging ‘the status-quo’, ‘space for dialogue’ and being ‘a living entity’ all indicate the beginnings of awareness and creativity that contributes to the awareness and reinforcement of national culture and identity. However, respondents 6-8 also exhibit awareness of the economic benefits that more arts and cultural spaces would bring to the country. References to ‘local’ and ‘foreign talent’ are phrases lifted from various government speeches that refer to building the nation’s economy. Respondents 7 and 8 directly refer to the economic benefits that more arts spaces would garner for the country.

Respondent 5, in a different vein, notes that there are both political and economic benefits. His comments on the creation of a ‘gracious society’ and ‘characteristics of any developed society’ appear to show that more arts and cultural spaces in Singapore contribute to building better national cohesiveness and a national

identity. At the same time, the comments of ‘a more cosmopolitan image’ and ‘a certain stage in development’ point towards the economic objectives of more arts spaces. It is well known that the nation’s idea of cosmopolitanism is geared towards garnering more economic investments in the country; and the phrase ‘stage in development’ usually denotes economic development.

**Table 6.1.**  
How Will More Arts and Cultural Spaces Affect the Country: Respondent Opinions

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Respondent 1	Get Singaporeans thinking about socio-political issues in a different light; help Singaporeans to challenge the status-quo
Respondent 2	Provide space for dialogue, both literal and figurative
Respondent 3	Help Singaporeans to relax and have fun more often as well as inculcate (hopefully) in Singaporeans an attitude of looking at life issues at a deeper level
Respondent 4	Strengthening the expressive aspect of being a living entity (an individual’s response to his/her communal relationship)
Respondent 5	Give Singapore a more cosmopolitan image; make it look more like a gracious society. A well developed arts scene seems to be characteristics of any developed society. It is an indication that a country has reached a certain stage in development.
Respondent 6	Attract foreign talent & retain local ones
Respondent 7	Tourist dollars (performers spend money in Singapore)
Respondent 8	Tourist dollars (attracts tourists)

## Effects of More Arts Spaces on Singapore

(Total respondents = 275)

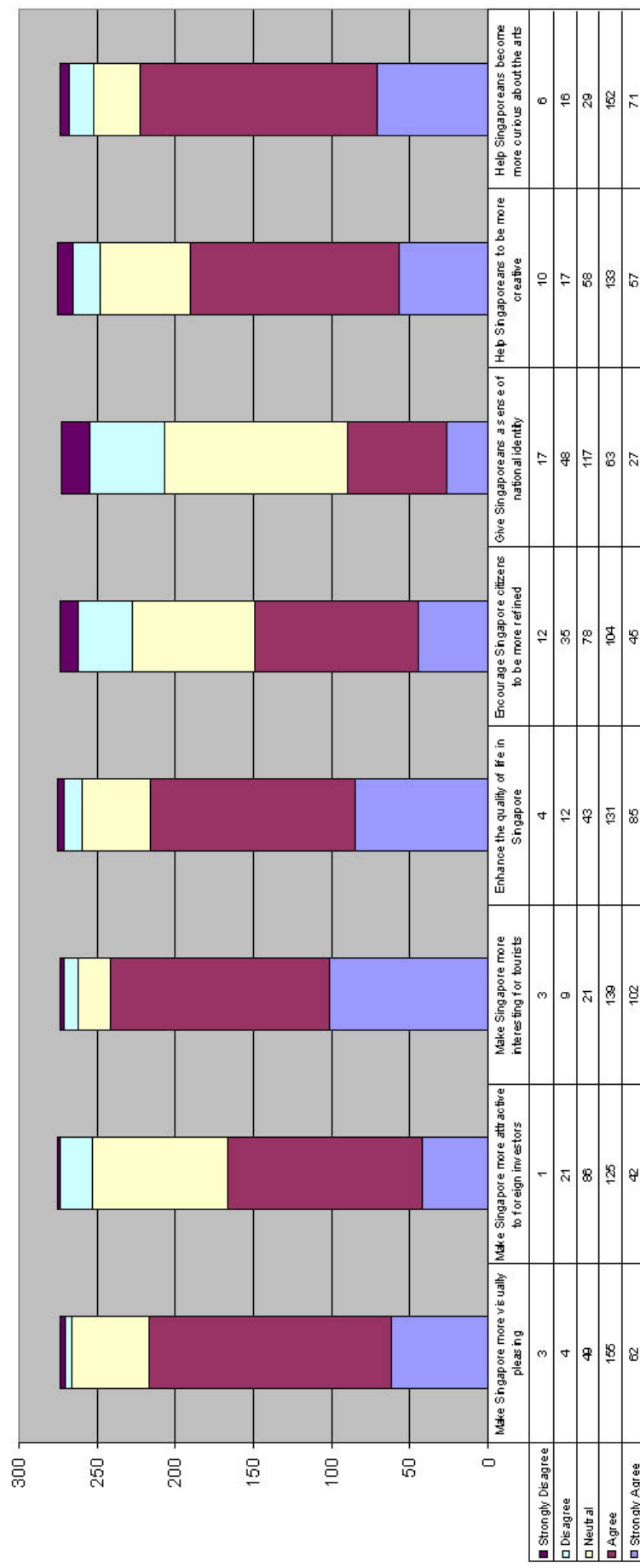


Figure 6.2. Effects of More Arts Spaces on Singapore

In spite of this, figure 6.2 shows a slightly more skewed perception of the political and economic agenda of creating more arts spaces in Singapore. The strong concurrence to the option 'Make Singapore more interesting for tourists' shows that respondents believe more arts spaces and activities will affect the country the most by bringing in the tourist dollar. In stark contrast to this is the weak agreement to the option that more arts and cultural spaces would give Singaporeans a sense of national identity. Furthermore, the figure also shows the largest number of respondents strongly disagreeing to this option. This means that the majority of the general population perceive that the arts do not contribute to nation-building. The implication of this is that from the point of view of the arts consumer, there is a strong case for pushing the GCA vision for economic reasons, but not for nation-building impetuses.

Championing the political objectives of more arts and cultural spaces in Singapore, the artistes and arts organisations are well aware that many of their activities are geared towards nation-building. They contribute to this in many ways. One approach is through community development – as Ng Siew Eng (SDT) notes, “obviously you cannot charge for performing [in unconventional spaces] as we are expected to do our share of community development... give all residents a taste of dance”. She also believes that exposure to the arts through these arts spaces “makes Singapore a happening place. The activities and buzz is good to create a certain quality of life not just shopping and eating... these activities help to anchor us I think” (Personal Interview, 20 August 2003). This indicates that the dance company is committed to strengthening the community and national identity through sharing their art form. George Wong (SSO) feels that touching the population through the

company's music performances has a reinforcing effect on the community as well. "Possibly I would feel that I've reached out to some people there... I've changed the space in terms of the inhabitants. They have learnt something new, they have been enlightened somehow, even to the tiniest degree, their lives have been enriched" (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003).

Another means through which more arts and cultural spaces contribute to nation-building and strengthening of the national identity is through making the citizens feel better about their neighbourhood places and their homes. "Maybe in their minds somehow it would've moved just one notch up as a more happening place or more hip, or that, wow, our CC was good enough to attract an orchestra, or whatever troupe who played there" (George Wong, SSO, Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). Creating a sense of pride for the population's neighbourhoods is a means of building attachment to the nation.

Most importantly, Alvin Tan (TNS) notes that his art not only strengthens the community through interacting with it and contributing to it – "we also owe to the community... there's a dynamic interaction with the community, and not just thinking in terms of bringing art to the community... being an indigenous theatre company... in a very huge sense of the word" (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003), but it also boosts national identity through promoting 'indigenous works'. As he mentions,

*To bring the HDB, the way we speak, to the international stage... sometimes the implication is that we're inward-looking, parochial, but it's not about that. Who platforms Singapore? Our voices, our concerns, just because Singapore is not sexy... so because of that we have to represent Asia in order to actually get currency... we're more intra-cultural... so that is captured and that is Singapore, with cosmopolitan*



*influences incorporated in there as well. So that is my idea of community.*  
(Personal Interview, 5 June 2003)

Alvin assumes great responsibility in promoting Singapore culture to the world, and he draws from the community to promote this culture. These actions reinforce and affirm Singapore's identity to the world. TNS organises community arts festivals with a political agenda to promote Singaporean identity and to maintain community cohesiveness. "We want Singlish<sup>6</sup> dialect... like our Arts Fest Revelations – the first 15 minutes we spoke Teo Chew<sup>7</sup>. So we want that, because that's what we call cultural capital". Cultural capital is important because it is the nation's culture that promotes the country to the rest of the world. This culture, when reinforced, will strengthen the local community and built national identity. However, Alvin also notes that the government has a different perception of 'cultural capital' – "but for them (the government), cultural capital is how many people we can fill in Esplanade" (Personal Interview, 5 June 2003). The government's perception of 'cultural capital' reflects the state's economic objective in creating more arts spaces and boosting arts awareness.

In addition to this, George Wong (SSO) sees the orchestra as an important arts entity that identifies with and represents the nation; however he also notes that the SSO is "supposed to be a national icon of Singapore, but a lot of people don't know we exist" (Personal Interview, 19 August 2003). The lack of awareness for important local bodies that represent the nation is symptomatic of a dearth in the developmental aspects of nation-building.

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<sup>6</sup> Colloquial Singaporean English

<sup>7</sup> A Chinese dialect

## **6.5 Conclusion**

These three synergistic and antagonistic relationships have direct effects on the GCA aspirations of the country as well as the nation-building ideal. In section 6.2 the agencies that created new arts spaces in Singapore both work together and against each other to further both ambitions of the nation. The public agency plays a big part in helping to create more arts spaces by providing financial aid. This aid both builds top-down directives that produced large-scale and high-profile spaces like the Esplanade and The Arts House, as well as lends a hand in helping bottom-up, private initiatives to make their own arts spaces – by helping to fund their projects, as well as encouraging them to hold more performances. While I have demonstrated that this collaborative effort has resulted in the eventual creation of more arts spaces, I have also shown that in certain cases, the public sector has restricted artistes and arts organisations from carrying out performances at certain spaces, and this impedes the creation of more arts spaces. Furthermore, some artistes resist the involvement of the public sector in their performances for fear of politicising their performance spaces. Hence, there exist both conflicts and complementarities between the two agencies that both promote and impede the twin goals of the nation.

In section 6.3, the two different types of arts spaces – conventional and unconventional, created by different sectors, for different purposes, also serve the nation's ambitions. Having a plethora of arts venues to choose from benefits the country because it is in this way that there's 'something for everyone', and all sections of the population is reached – no one is left out. Albeit the class divide that is apparent between the conventional and unconventional spaces, it further embraces the nation's GCA goal because it spreads arts spaces all over the country, and

maintains accessibility for all citizens to the arts. Unconventional arts spaces serve conventional arts spaces by raising awareness of the arts and converting audiences into ticket-buyers that furthers the nation's GCA goal. In addition, there are also unconventional arts spaces that do not form a bridge for conventional spaces but instead exist to serve the population and encourage nation-building.

Section 6.4 works with the previous two themes to show that the political and economic objectives of creating more arts space in the city encourages both the developmental aspects of nation-building as well as the GCA focus. While it does show that the state's main focus is economic – which translates into the thrust for achieving the GCA ideal, it also reveals that the private sector's efforts in creating more arts spaces and unconventional arts spaces do help in nation-building, and culture and identity formation for the country. This section has also demonstrated how the three themes of *agency*, *space*, and *objectives* have come together to advance both nation-building and the global city for the arts.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has examined in detail the effects that the arts have had on both the people and the places of Singapore. The changes that the performing arts have wrought upon the public spaces of the country have affected the way the citizens view the landscape of the nation. Specifically, the research has considered three main issues. The first of these is how the creation of arts spaces in Singapore has been initiated by two distinct agencies – the Singapore government, or the public sector; and myriad groups of arts practitioners, the private sector. The second issue concerns how performances at public places have changed landscape meaning through creating unconventional arts spaces. The final issue examines the conflicts and complementarities between the arts spaces created by public and private agencies; conventional and unconventional spaces; and the economic and political objectives for arts development. Through these three issues, I have analysed the effects of arts spaces in Singapore. I have argued that the creation of new arts spaces in Singapore has created more public arts spaces and changed the public's perception of these spaces. The new arts spaces have also problematised the nation's dual goal of achieving the *Global City of the Arts* status and nation-building.

This thesis has shown that there are both private and public agencies and impetuses for creating new arts spaces. These new arts spaces, in turn, have resulted in a change in the citizens' perceptions of the local landscape. The change in the type of spaces frequented by the locals, from public space to *arts space*, creates a more vibrant landscape that makes Singapore a more exciting and attractive place. This fulfils the economic purpose of the state by encouraging more tourists, foreign investments, and expatriate workers. The other effect of a more attractive country, although to a lesser degree, is that Singaporeans may begin to feel more cohesive as a nation, having local arts creations to rally around and to help build a stronger national identity.

Chapter 4 addressed the creation of arts spaces in view of the *symbolic economy* concept. I examined the arts policies implemented by the government which altered the local landscape. This change would bring about the eventual creation of a *Global City of the Arts* which would in turn raise the nation's profile as a globally successful economic society. The chapter also demonstrated that the private sector has reacted to the government's arts policies by creating its own arts spaces in different public places. I have also shown that while the public sector governs the creation of arts spaces, private initiatives have also independently created arts environments throughout Singapore's domain. Such arts environments may be labelled unconventional arts spaces, and they help to bring the arts to the people. The chapter also demonstrated that the arts spaces created by the public sector are mainly conventional arts venues like the Esplanade and the new Arts House, while those created by the private sector are mostly unconventional spaces, such as The Substation.

Chapter 5 drew upon concepts of *spatial politics* and contested landscapes to focus on unconventional arts spaces. These spaces are important because they change the meanings of Singapore's landscapes. The peoples' perceptions of the local spaces have changed as a result of having experienced arts performances in the public places of the country. The chapter showed that the arts have made a difference to the space where they are performed. As a result of arts performances, previously blank, open spaces were given an identity and labelled 'arts spaces'. I have also detailed the process through which these spaces and their meanings have been transformed. As mentioned, during the performance, physical spaces are changed by the presence of the artistes and their props. After the event, the space has been changed in the minds and the perceptions of the audience and the actors. Hence, the performing arts in unconventional spaces have the ability to change space. Chapter 5 has shown that the presence of the arts produce a great impact upon the spaces in the country.

In Chapter 6, I return to the objectives for developing the arts in Singapore. The concept of arts spaces in terms of *nationhood* was used to show that the process of creating arts spaces is fraught with conflicts. I have also demonstrated that the main objective of the government is to promote and support the arts for economic gain. However, there are also collaborative efforts on the parts of all players – government and private agencies, to create arts spaces together. These complementary efforts have resulted in a cohesive effort to advance the dual goals of nation- and identity-building and the *Global City for the Arts*. This chapter rounds up the study of new and emerging arts spaces in Singapore. For their differences, the

objectives of the public and private agencies and the conventional and unconventional spaces together further the dual and sometimes conflicting causes of building a better nation.

The *Global City for the Arts* aspiration has been the driving force of this research. There is sustained and continual emphasis on developing the arts and allowing more room – both literally and figuratively, for creativity in the cultural industry to expand. Increasingly, the impetus for arts development has been fuelled by artistes who create more art (and more arts spaces) *for art's sake*, and who create for the people, as opposed to creating more art for economic gain. While the state still emphasises on the importance of creating arts for the sake of both the *nation* and the economy, it is also beginning to stress the importance of supporting the arts in order to promote an increased quality of life for the people. The nation is slowly, but surely, opening up and becoming more exposed to the arts. Annually, there are increasing amounts of performances being held at public places, and these can only serve to advance and play up the function of the arts in Singapore. With this kind of arts development, the *Global City for the Arts* aspiration is within reach, and Singapore's goal to become a city recognised for its cultural industry is imminent.

## **7.2 Avenues for Further Research**

My thesis has contributed to existing literature on culture and the arts in Singapore. From a conceptual and theoretical aspect, it has also added to research on spatial politics and urban studies in the land-scarce country. The study has contributed to an understanding of how specific functions performed at a space change the social and individual perception of that space. On a more practical level, it has analysed the

government's thrust for more arts space. It has also given voice to the private sector, allowing the artistes and arts companies to articulate their opinions on, and to express their drive for, more spaces for the arts.

However, the research has merely skimmed the surface of arts spaces and their repercussions in the country. This thesis has opened many avenues for further research on the subject of arts spaces. On the subject of space, further research can focus on the physical transformation of spaces into arts space, or the evolving functions of spaces and their effects on the spatial perceptions of the people who use them. The differences between conventional and unconventional arts spaces are also possible avenues for subsequent studies. Examples of these would be the possible types of performances that can be held at these diverse spaces; the objectives of holding performances at these spaces; how different types of spaces are affected differently by the performances; how the spaces affect arts outreach schemes; and the preferences of both the artistes as well as the audience.

On the political front, the thesis has introduced the myriad uses of new arts spaces and how these can be used to endorse government propaganda or even to promote other types of political agenda. In a similar vein, additional research could be conducted to examine the economic advantages of having more arts spaces, such as how these would contribute to the country's tourism industry, or bring in more foreign investment. Other studies can investigate more specifically the social effects of staging more arts performances in spaces, for example how it affects the mindset of the population, and encourages creativity.



This study, in addition to contributing to the existing research on arts spaces and the arts in Singapore, has also hoped to encourage *more* research on arts spaces in Singapore. The importance of the arts to the nation cannot be ignored. It is significant in terms of contributing to both the economy as well as to society as a whole. *Arts spaces* in Singapore are also significant when considering urban planning and geography in an island-state where land is scarce, highly commoditised, and requires careful land-use planning.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX I**  
**Questionnaire Survey**

## A STUDY OF PERFORMING ARTS SPACES IN SINGAPORE

I am a student with the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. This survey is part of a postgraduate research project to study public perceptions of *performing arts spaces* in Singapore. I am very interested in your opinions and would really appreciate it if you could answer the following questions. All data collected will be confidential and used only for research purposes. Thank you!

Please tick your answer  or fill in the blank \_\_\_\_\_ as required.

*Please note that in this questionnaire, “arts events” refer to the **performing arts** – dance, theatre, music, and busking performances. I do not refer to art exhibitions, sculptures, or installation pieces of any kind.*

### Part I

**1. The National Arts Council (NAC) promotes the arts in Singapore by holding arts outreach events – “Artreach”. Which of these events have you heard of OR attended in the past 2 years? (Please tick all that apply)**

			Heard of	Attended
<i>Arts in the City</i> (lunchtime events)	at	(a) Raffles City Shopping Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		(b) Caltex House, Raffles Place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		(c) ARTrium@MITA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Concert in the Park</i>	at	(d) Botanic Gardens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		(e) Other Parks <i>East Coast, Bishan, Pasir Ris &amp; West Coast Parks</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Concerts in the Heartlands</i>	at	(f) open field next to Bishan Junction 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any of these events in other locations (please state) (g) _____			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**2. Several places in Singapore (Chinatown, Little India, Rochor) have been established as “Arts Districts”. Have you heard of OR attended arts performances at any of these places in the past 2 years?**

		Heard of	Attended
(a) Arts & Heritage Precinct in the Civic and Cultural District		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Chinatown Arts District		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Little India Arts District		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Rochor Arts District		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. The government is developing more arts spaces and activities in Singapore in recent years (e.g. the Esplanade, events like the Arts Festival and Buskers' Festival). How do you think these arts spaces and cultural events will affect the country?**

Please tick the relevant box according to this scale:

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

- |  | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Make Singapore more visually pleasing                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Make Singapore more attractive to foreign investors  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Make Singapore more interesting for tourists         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Enhance the quality of life in Singapore             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) Encourage Singapore citizens to be more refined      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) Give Singaporeans a sense of national identity       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (g) Help Singaporeans to be more creative                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (h) Help Singaporeans become more curious about the arts | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (i) Others: _____  |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |

**4. Many arts events and performances are held at *conventional* venues (e.g. The Esplanade, Victoria Concert Hall, Jubilee Hall) and in *unconventional* venues (e.g. Suntec City / Bugis Junction Fountains, HDB void decks, on public streets, in shopping centres, at public parks). Please indicate whether you prefer to attend the following performances at conventional or unconventional locations.**

- |  | Conventional             | Unconventional           | Both                     | No Preference            |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) <b>Theatre events</b><br>(e.g. plays, <i>Emily of Emerald Hill</i> , <i>Titou dao</i> )                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) <b>Musical theatre</b><br>(e.g. <i>Beauty World</i> , <i>Miss Saigon</i> , <i>Chang &amp; Eng</i> )                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) <b>Dance events</b><br>(e.g. <i>The Red Shoes</i> , <i>Ballet Under the Stars</i> )                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) <b>Large-scale music performances</b><br>(e.g. Orchestral concerts, S'pore Symphony Orchestra)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) <b>Small-scale music performances</b><br>(e.g. Jazz, small bands, a capella groups)                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) <b>Busking performances</b><br>(e.g. buskers in train stations, theatre feature of several different busking groups) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**5. (i) Would you stop to watch buskers on the streets and in public areas?**

Yes  No

**(ii) Would you be more inclined to stop to watch *foreign* busking events than *local* ones?**

Yes  No  No difference

6. (i) Do you feel that *unconventional* performance venues make a difference to the art being performed (e.g. a dance performance held in the Bugis Junction Fountain as opposed to at the Esplanade)?

- Yes  [please proceed to question 6(ii)]  
No  [please proceed to question 7]

(ii) If “yes”, how does the venue make a difference to the art? Please tick the options that you agree with.

- (a) Art form becomes more accessible to the public   
 (b) Art form will attract people who would otherwise not attend the event   
 (c) People will not attend because performance is not held at a “proper” venue   
 (d) Atmosphere of the venue contributes to the content of the performance   
 (e) Presents a creative challenge to the artist(s)   
 (f) Change the perception that the arts can only be held at “proper” arts venues   
 (g) Others: \_\_\_\_\_

7. (i) Do you feel that watching a performance in a particular venue changes the venue in any way (e.g. a dance performance in the Suntec City Fountain of Wealth, a music performance in a shopping centre, or buskers on the street)?

- Yes  [please proceed to question 7(ii)]  
No  [please proceed to question 8]

(ii) If “yes”, how has the performance changed the venue? Please tick the options that you agree with.

- (a) Degrade the environment (e.g. littering, congestion)   
 (b) Disrupt normal activities at the site   
 (c) Make people see the site as an “arts venue” after the performance   
 (d) Make people expect more arts performances to be held again   
 (e) Make the place more attractive so that people will visit it again   
 (f) Others: \_\_\_\_\_

8.

- |   | Yes                      | No                       | No difference            |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Would you rather pay for <i>foreign</i> arts events than for <i>local</i> ones?                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Would you pay more for <i>foreign</i> arts events than for <i>local</i> ones?                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Would you watch <i>local</i> arts events just because they were free?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Do you feel that <i>foreign</i> arts events get more publicity than <i>local</i> ones?          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) Would you prefer to watch foreign arts events rather than local ones if both were free?         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) Should more arts support be given to <i>local</i> performances rather than <i>foreign</i> ones? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Part II: Personal Data

### 9. Are you Singaporean?

(a) Yes  (please specify ethnicity) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) No  (please specify nationality) \_\_\_\_\_

### 10. What is your gender?

(a) Male

(b) Female

### 11. How often do you attend arts performances?

(a) More than once a week

(b) A few times a month

(c) About once a month

(d) Several times a year

(e) About once a year

(f) Never

### 12. Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

(a) Below 20 years old

(b) 20 – 29 years old

(c) 30 – 39 years old

(d) 40 – 49 years old

(e) 50 – 59 years old

(f) 60 years old and above

### 13. What is your educational background?

(a) Primary and below

(b) Secondary/vocational

(c) Pre-university

(d) Tertiary and above

## Part III

If you are interested in participating in a structured interview relating to arts and cultural development in Singapore, please kindly leave your name and contact details. The interview should not last longer than 30 minutes. Please be assured that all information obtained will be used strictly for research purposes only. Thank you.

**Full name: (Ms/Mrs/Mr/Dr)** \_\_\_\_\_ (for reference only)

**Contact Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (O) \_\_\_\_\_ (HP)

**E-mail Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for your time and kind cooperation! Please kindly send this questionnaire back in the envelope provided by **30<sup>th</sup> June 2003**. Have a pleasant day.

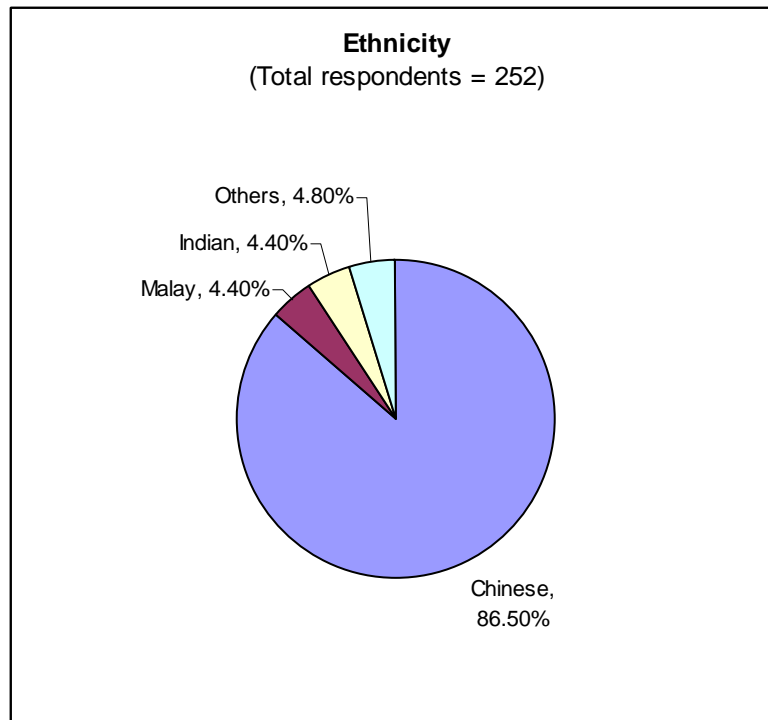
For enquiries, please contact me:  
Name: Serene Tan Keng Ling  
Email: g0202699@nus.edu.sg  
Tel: 6874 3831 Fax: 6777 3091

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Questionnaire Survey Profile Sample**

## Ethnicity

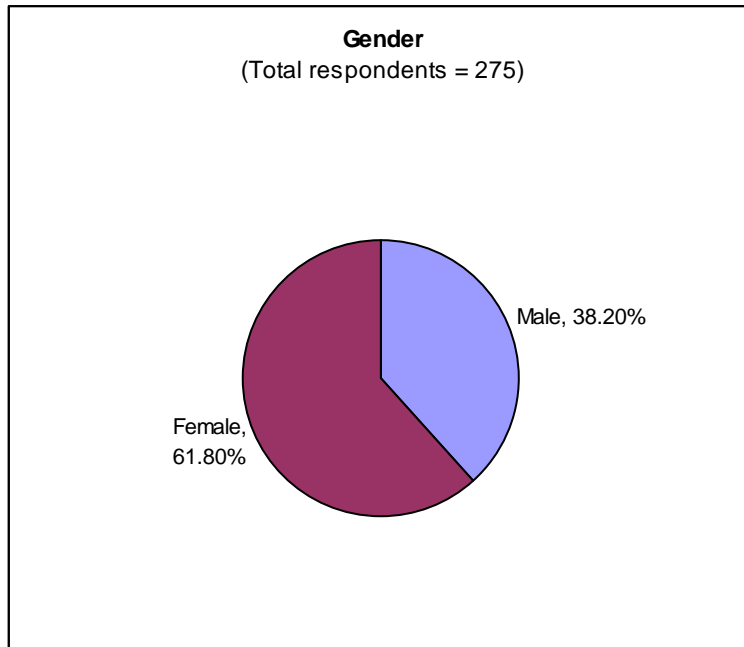
Ethnicity	Percentage
Chinese	86.50%
Malay	4.40%
Indian	4.40%
Others	4.80%
	100%





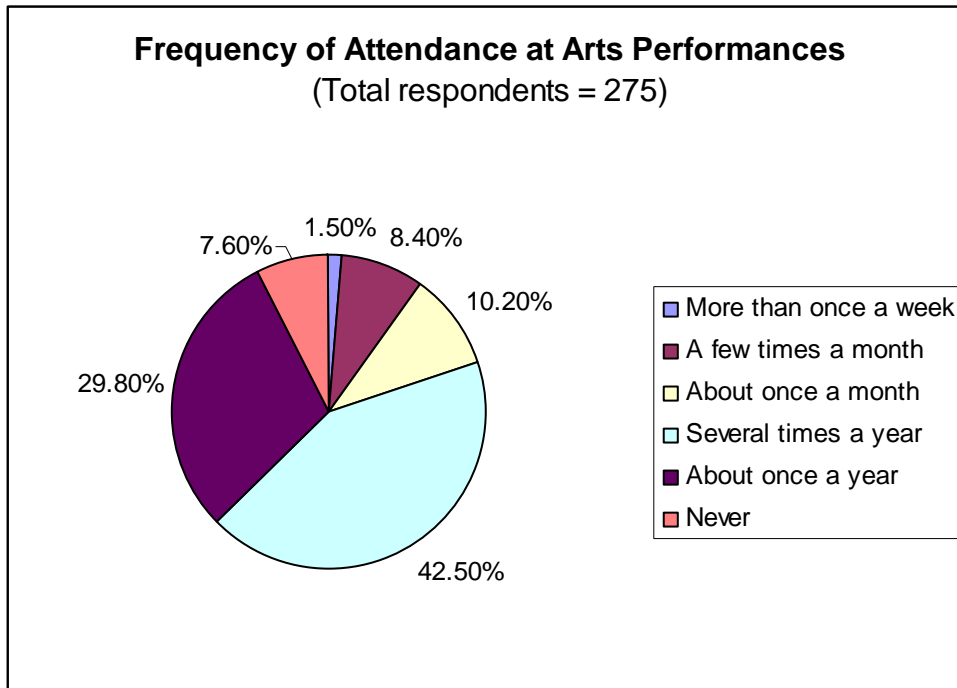
## Gender

Gender	Percentage
Male	38.20%
Female	61.80%
	100%



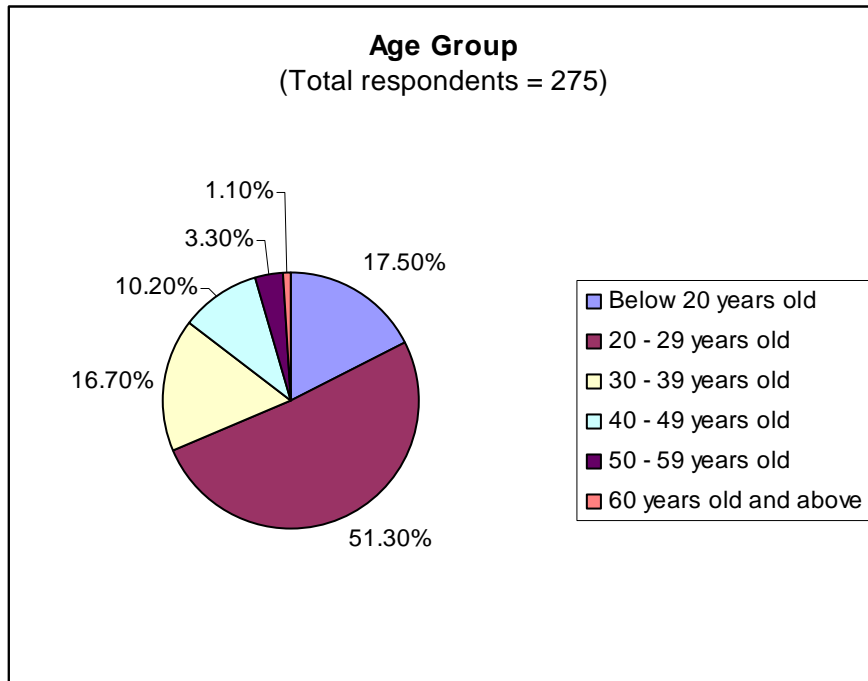
### Frequency of Attendance at Arts Performances

Attendance Frequency	Percentage
More than once a week	1.50%
A few times a month	8.40%
About once a month	10.20%
Several times a year	42.50%
About once a year	29.80%
Never	7.60%
	100%



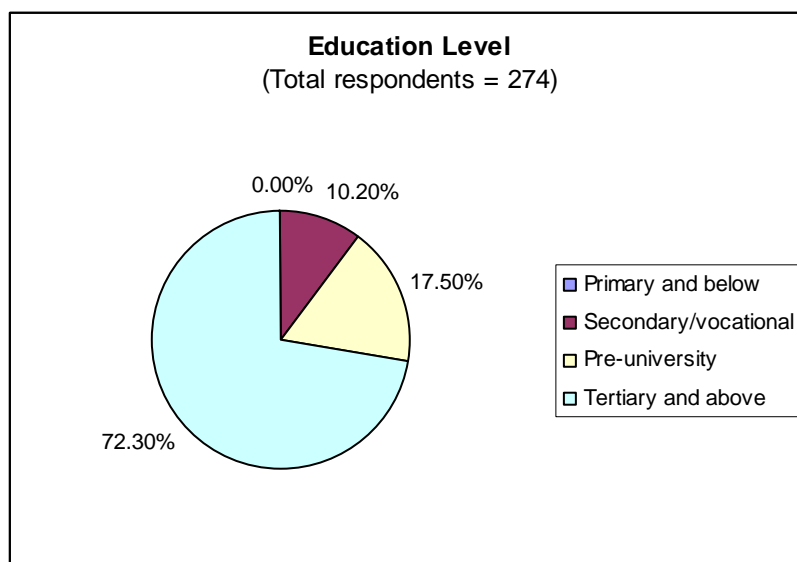
## Age Group

Age Group	Percentage
Below 20 years old	17.50%
20 - 29 years old	51.30%
30 - 39 years old	16.70%
40 - 49 years old	10.20%
50 - 59 years old	3.30%
60 years old and above	1.10%
	100%



### Education Level

Education Level	Percentage
Primary and below	0.00%
Secondary/vocational	10.20%
Pre-university	17.50%
Tertiary and above	72.30%
	100%



## **APPENDIX III**

### **Qualitative In-Depth Interview Questions**

## Interview Questions for Artists and Arts Organisations

### Production of *Unconventional Arts Spaces*

1. We are aware that the government (NAC, primarily) is keen on holding performances in *unconventional* arts venues – which are places like the heartlands, shopping malls, along the streets, and generally any space that isn't considered an “arts venue” in an effort to reach out to the general population and increase exposure to the arts.  
What are the reasons **you** hold performances outside of the *conventional* arts spaces (like Victoria Theatre, the Esplanade, Jubilee Hall, etc.)? What are you attempting to do when you hold a performance in these *unconventional* venues?
  - b. Was holding performances in *unconventional* venues an idea made by the government or was it an initiative by artists and arts companies?
2. In your opinion, how do performances in *unconventional* venues (outdoors, in shopping centres, in parks, at HDB void decks, etc.) affect Singapore as a whole – eg. do you feel it makes Singapore a much more vibrant place? How do you think it affects Singaporeans as well?
3. The arts performances held in these *unconventional* arts venues are always free of charge (correct me if I'm wrong!). Why is that, and how does that affect your decision to hold a performance at that particular place?
4. a. How do you specifically choose the venues to hold your performances at? What are the criteria for selecting these venues? Is there a process to choosing an appropriate venue?
  - b. Does the content of the performance (eg. play, dance, music performance) dictate the venue in which the performance is to be held? Or do you first choose a venue and then tailor the contents of the performance to that particular venue?

### Effects of *Unconventional Arts Spaces* on Performances

5. Performing at *unconventional* venues must be very different from having a performance at *conventional* arts venues. What sorts of differences are there, and how does holding a performance at these *unconventional* venues affect the performance/ art form? How does it change your performance?

### Dealing with *Unconventional Arts Spaces*: Negotiation & Perceptions

6. How does having performed at an *unconventional* venue change your perception toward that particular space? Do you feel like you have changed the space in some way, or left some indelible mark (tangible or otherwise) on it?
7. What are the difficulties you face when performing at an *unconventional* venue? Are there any restrictions imposed on the performances in terms of content? What are the regulations that you have to adhere to with regards to the use of space?
8. Do you experience *resistance* from the public when you perform at these *unconventional* venues? Does the public ever react unfavourably to the performances?

9. Do you feel that a performance in an *unconventional* venue connects more with the audience than if it were held at a *conventional* venue?

**Arts Infrastructure**

10. (If your company was housed by the Arts Housing Scheme (AHS)) Did you have any say in your location through the AHS – were you able to state a preferred place, or was the place allocated to you by the NAC?

- End -

Thank you for your time!

## **APPENDIX IV**

### **Short Structured Interview Questions**



### **Short Structured Interview Questions**

1. Are you here for specially the performance or were you just passing by?
2. How do you feel about having arts performances in public spaces such as these?
3. Will you remember that an arts performance had taken place here after the event is over?

## **APPENDIX V**

### **List of Interviewees**

## Artists and Private Organisations Qualitative Interview List

Genre	Artist/Company	Date
Dance	<i>Ecnad</i> Lim Chin Huat Artistic Director <a href="mailto:chinhuat@ecnad.org">chinhuat@ecnad.org</a>	Interviewed 17 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Dance	<i>Singapore Dance Theatre</i> Ms Ng Siew Eng General Manager <a href="mailto:generalmanager@singaporedancetheatre.com">generalmanager@singaporedancetheatre.com</a>	Emailed interview Received 20 Aug 2003
Dance	<i>Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Ltd</i> Zarudin Yob Ahmad Arts Administrator/ Production Executive/ Instructor <a href="mailto:sri_warisan@pacific.net.sg">sri_warisan@pacific.net.sg</a>	Interviewed 24 <sup>th</sup> July 2003
Theatre	<i>The Necessary Stage</i> Alvin Tan Artistic Director <a href="mailto:alvintan@necessary.org">alvintan@necessary.org</a>	Interviewed 5 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Theatre	<i>Drama Box</i> Heng Leun Artistic Director <a href="mailto:dramabox@pacific.net.sg">dramabox@pacific.net.sg</a>	Interviewed 12 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
Theatre	<i>Spell #7</i> Ben Slater Artist-in-Residence <a href="mailto:bs_unknown@yahoo.com">bs_unknown@yahoo.com</a>	Interviewed 17 <sup>th</sup> July 2003 3pm
Music – Large Scale	<i>Singapore Symphony Orchestra</i> George Wong – Education & Outreach Manager <a href="mailto:george@sso.org.sg">george@sso.org.sg</a>	Interviewed 19 <sup>th</sup> Aug 2003
Music – Small Scale	<i>Akatones / Es'choir</i> Mogan Subramaniam <a href="mailto:mogan.subramaniam@apb.com.sg">mogan.subramaniam@apb.com.sg</a>	Interviewed 7 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
Others	<i>Gwyndara International</i> Jimmy Wong Director <a href="mailto:gwyndara@pacific.net.sg">gwyndara@pacific.net.sg</a>	Phone Interview 11 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Government Sector	<i>National Arts Council</i> Yeo Li Li Corporate Communications Executive Marketing Communications & Business Development Division <a href="mailto:YEO_Li_Li@nac.gov.sg">YEO_Li_Li@nac.gov.sg</a>	Email Interview 14 <sup>th</sup> July 2003

<b>Artist</b>	<b>Company/Genre</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Hamzah Muzaini	<i>National University of Singapore Symphony Orchestra</i> Large-Scale Music	27 <sup>th</sup> August 2003
Jaclyn Zhuang	<i>National University of Singapore Symphony Orchestra</i> Large-Scale Music	2 <sup>nd</sup> September 2003
Louis Pang	<i>Toy Factory Theatre Ensemble</i> Theatre	5 <sup>th</sup> September 2003

### **Street Interviews**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Date</b>
Ms. Wong	Chinese	Female	32	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Ms. Goh	Chinese	Female	16	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Mr. Edmund Branson	Eurasian	Male	58	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Mrs. Masnah	Malay	Female	35	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Mr. Colin Goh	Chinese	Male	30	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Mr. Lim	Chinese	Male	32	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2003
Mr. Lum	Chinese	Male	46	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2003

## **APPENDIX VI**

### **Locations for Busking**

## LOCATIONS FOR BUSKING

### Instructions

- Please indicate your choice of location(s) on the application form by entering the corresponding number next to the location found on this list.

### Designated Locations

- A) Selected areas in Orchard Road District, Singapore River, Stamford Road area, Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India and Albert Mall
- B) Public parks managed by National Parks Board
- C) Open spaces run by Public Utilities Board, Jurong Town Corporation, Port of Singapore Authority, Housing & Development Board and People's Association
- D) Town Council areas

*For Sections C and D: Please obtain written approval from the relevant organisation(s) before the commencement of busking activities in those premises. This should be done only after you have successfully applied for a Letter of Authorisation.*

#### **A. Selected Areas** (No prior approval required)

<u>No.</u>	<u>Locations for busking</u>
1	<u>Orchard Road District</u> Pedestrian malls along Orchard Hotel to Orchard Towers; Forum The Shopping Mall to Mandarin Hotel; International Building to Shaw House; Marriott / Tangs to Heeren;
2	Pedestrian mall outside Orchard Plaza and Orchard Shopping Centre <i>the above ie. nos.1 &amp; 2, refers to all open-air, non sheltered areas which are not under Temporary Occupancy Licence</i>
3	Orchard MRT area (outside MRT station)
4	<u>Stamford Road Area</u> Along Stamford Road (SMRT building side, opposite Capitol Building)
5	2 parallel malls next to war Memorial Park along Stamford Road
6	<u>Singapore River</u> River promenades flanking both sides of river starting from <i>Kim Seng Road to Anderson Bridge</i> ( <b>Please note that this excludes the area outside The Riverwalk, Boat and Clarke Quays and all other privately owned properties along the river</b> ).
7	<u>Chinatown</u> Area surrounding Chinatown Point (on all 4 sides outside the building)
8	Pagoda Street (portion between South Bridge Road and New Bridge Road only)
9	Trengganu Steet (whole street)
10	3 empty plots of land between Sago St, Sago Lane, Spring St and Dickenson Rd bounded by Banda St and South Bridge Rd / Neil Rd.
11	<u>Kampong Glam</u> Bussorah Mall (between Sultan Mosque and Bagdad Street)
12	<u>Little India</u> Open area between Veersamy Road & Morris Road (on the side flanked by Kg. Kapur Road)
13	Open area between Desker Road & Syed Alwi Road (on the side flanked by Lembu Road)

<u>No.</u>	<u>Locations for busking</u>
14	<u>Albert Mall</u> Open circular space between OG, Fu Lu Shou Complex, The Bencoolen and the market at Blk 270.
15	Pedestrian malls along & between: a) Fu Lu Shou Complex & the market at Blk 270 b) Fu Lu Shou Complex & OG c) OG & The Bencoolen d) The market at Blk 270 – Stamford Arts Centre & The Bencoolen – Sri Krishnan Temple

**B. Public Parks** (No prior approval required except for Fort Canning Park)

<u>No.</u>	<u>Locations for busking</u>		
	<u>North</u>		<u>East</u>
16	Ang Mo Kio Town Garden West	42	East Coast Park
17	Ang Mo Kio Town Garden East	43	Katong Park
18	Bishan Park	44	Bedok Town Park
19	Toa Payoh Town Garden	45	Bedok Reservoir Park
20	Punggol Park	46	Pasir Ris Park
21	Lower Seletar Reservoir Park	47	Pasir Ris Town Park
22	Sembawang Park	48	SunPlaza Park
23	Woodlands Town Garden	49	Changi Beach Park
24	Yishun Park		
25	Yishun Neighbourhood Park		
	<u>South</u>		<u>West</u>
26	Tiong Bahru Park	50	Mount Faber Park
27	Bougainvillea Park	51	Labrador Park
28	Esplanade Park	52	Telok Blangah Hill Park
29	Istana Park	53	West Coast Park
30	Mount Emily Park	54	Kent Ridge Park
31	Kampong Java Park	55	Clementi Woods
32	Kallang Riverside Park	56	Bukit Batok Town Park
33	Malcolm Park	57	Bukit Batok Nature Park
34	Marina City Park	58	Choa Chu Kang Park
35	Marina Promenade		
36	Marina Padang		
37	Pearl's Hill City Park		
38	Telok Ayer Park		
39	Telok Ayer Green		
40	Duxton Plain Park		
41	Fort Canning Park (designated area only: please report to the Park Ranger Station or the Security first)		

**C. Open spaces** Please obtain written approval from the relevant organisations before including the site as a busking location.

No.	<u>Locations for busking</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Contact No.</u>
59 60 61 62 63	MacRitchie Reservoir Park Kranji Reservoir Park Upper Seletar Reservoir Park Upper Peirce Reservoir Park Lower Peirce Reservoir Park  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>busking in reservoir parks is permitted from 10am to 7.30pm</i></li> <li>• <i>Please obtain approval &amp; other conditions from PUB before commencement of busking activities.</i></li> </ul>	Public Utilities Board	6731 3841 - Cheong Yong Young Senior Properties Officer  6731 3838 - Jennifer Yip Senior Technical Officer
64 65	Chinese Garden Japanese Gardens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please obtain approval from Jurong Gardens Pte Ltd before commencement of busking activities</i></li> </ul>	Jurong Gardens Pte Ltd	6261 3632 - Joan Lim or Michael Diamond Events & Ops Executives
66	Underwater World Singapore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please obtain approval from the Underwater World Singapore's management at least <u>two weeks</u> before the commencement of busking activities.</i></li> </ul>	Underwater World Singapore Pte Ltd	6279 9215 – Lee Chen Yuan
67	Millenia Walk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please obtain approval from the Millenia Singapore's management at least <u>two weeks</u> before the commencement of busking activities.</i></li> </ul>	Millenia Singapore	6377 5374 – Ms Anna Leong
68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82	<p><b>Shopping complexes managed by HDB:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please obtain approval from HDB before commencement of busking activities.</i></li> </ul> <p><u>Choa Chu Kang</u>            Limbang Shopping Centre (Blk 533 Choa Chu Kang St 51)            Yew Tee Shopping Centre (Blk 623 Choa Chu Kang St 62)            Sunshine Place (Blk 475 Choa Chu Kang Ave 3)</p> <p><u>Jurong West</u>            Taman Jurong (Blk 399 Yung Sheng Road)            Gek Poh Shopping Centre (Blk 762 Jurong West St 75)</p> <p><u>Pasir Ris</u>            Loyang Point (Blk 258 Pasir Ris St 21)            Pasir Ris West Plaza (Blk 735 Pasir Ris St 72)            Elias Mall (Blk 623 Elias Road)</p> <p><u>Bukit Panjang</u>            Fajar Shopping Centre (Blk 445 Fajar Road)</p> <p><u>Woodlands</u>            Woodlands North Plaza (Blk 883 Woodlands St 72)            888 Plaza (Blk 888 Woodlands Dr 50)            Vista Point (Blk 548 Woodlands Drive 44)            Woodlands Mart (Blk 768 Woodlands Ave 6)</p> <p>Tanjong Katong Complex</p> <p>Greenridge Shopping Centre (Blk 524A Jelepang Rd)</p>	Housing Development Board – Commercial Complexes Unit  <b>Please note that performances can only take place outside these complexes.</b>	6273 9090 - Andrew Tan Commercial Properties Officer



<u>No.</u>	<u>Locations for busking</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Contact No.</u>
83	Rivervale Plaza (Blk 118 Rivervale Drive)		
84	Open spaces managed by: standalone community centres/clubs; National Youth Park & the People's Association Headquarters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Please obtain approval from the respective management committees of these spaces is required before the commencement of busking activities. Call the People's Association for more information.</i></li> <li><i>Please state exact location of performance on the application form.</i></li> </ul>	People's Association	Ms Adlina Jaffar Head, Corporate Relations Public Affairs Office Tel: 6340 5430 Fax: 6440 1553
85	<u>Commercial Properties along the Singapore River Boat Quay</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Please obtain approval from the Clarke Quay's management at least <u>two weeks</u> before the commencement of busking activities</i></li> </ul>	Boat Quay Business Assoc.	Mr. Gerard Nadar – Manager 67 High Street #03-11 Satnam House, SE 179431 Tel: 6334 4870 / 9630 9441 Fax: 6334 4871
86	Clarke Quay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Please obtain approval from the Clarke Quay's management at least <u>one month</u> before the commencement of busking activities.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>*For other private commercial properties along the river, please obtain approval from the building management before the commencement of busking activities – call STB for further information</i></p>	Clarke Quay Pte Ltd  Singapore Tourism Board	Mr. Patrick Lai - Marketing Communications Manager 3E River Valley Road, #01-13 Singapore 179024 Tel: 6433 0111 Fax: 6334 8423  Mr. Craig Shim Tel: 6831 3886 Fax: 6734 9035

**D. Town Council Areas** No prior approval required for the use of open spaces managed by Town Councils, unless indicated. Please also note the following:

- For locations where Town Council approval is required –  
Step 1: Approach Town Council & obtain written permission  
Step 2: Inform NAC officer who will reissue the Letter of Endorsement – please bring along the Town Council's letter of permission (original)
- Kindly keep place litter-free
- Buskers to pay for any damages caused during performance
- Please note that no performance is allowed directly in front of shops

<u>No.</u>	<u>Town Council</u>	<u>Contact No.</u>	<u>Recommended locations for busking</u>
87	Aljunied	6840 1334	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedestrian mall in front of Blks 115 &amp; 125 Hougang Ave 1</li> <li>Maplewood Park at Blk 126 Hougang Ave 1</li> <li>Park at Blk 238 Hougang Ave 1</li> <li>Petal Garden near Blk 616 Bedok Reservoir Road</li> <li>Park near Blk 132 Simei Street 1</li> </ul> <p><i>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities. (Contact: Ms. Jean Lim)</i></p>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Town Council</b>	<b>Contact No.</b>	<b>Recommended locations for busking</b>
88	Ang Mo Kio Yishun	6453 0511	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blk 720 Concourse Area, Ang Mo Kio Ave 6</li> <li>• Blk 226H Concourse Area, Ang Mo Kio Ave 1</li> </ul> <p><b>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities.</b></p>
89	Bishan – Toa Payoh	6259 6700	<p><b>Please obtain approval and locations from the town council before commencement of busking activities. (Contact: Mr. Dennis Foo)</b></p>
90	Bukit Timah	6562 1203	<p><b>Please obtain approval and locations from the town council before commencement of busking activities.</b></p>
91	Cheng San	6456 1633	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serangoon North N5 Neighbourhood Park located near Blk 542A Serangoon North Ave 3</li> <li>• Neighbourhood 6 Park between Blks 686 &amp; 697 Hougang St. 61</li> <li>• Punggol South Park between Blks 616 &amp; 627 Hougang Ave 2</li> <li>• Harmony Park between Blks 464 &amp; 468 Upper Serangoon Rd</li> <li>• Sengkang Neighbourhood Park located behind Blks 120B/C/D Rivervale Drive</li> </ul> <p><b>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities. (Contact: Ms Cindy Ng).</b></p>
92	City Centre	6272 3559	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Square in front of Chinatown Complex along Banda Sreet</li> <li>• Square between Hong Lim Complex and Chinatown Point</li> </ul>
93	East Coast	6444 9549	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amphitheatre &amp; open space in front of Blks 537, 538 &amp; 539A (Bedok North St. 3)</li> <li>• Open space at Bedok Town Centre</li> <li>• Open space in front of Blk 57 New Upper Changi Rd &amp; Blk 18 Bedok South Rd</li> <li>• Open space between Blks 25 &amp; 26, New Upper Changi Road</li> <li>• Linking building between Blks 58 &amp; 59 New Upper Changi Road</li> <li>• Open spaces at Blks 93, 103, 108, 124 &amp; 138 Bedok North</li> </ul>
94	Hong Kah	6560 0911	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbourhood Park behind Blk 469 &amp; 471 Jurong West St 41</li> <li>• Open space near Blks 501 &amp; 502 Jurong West St 51</li> <li>• Nanyang Neighbourhood Park near Blk 938 Jurong West St 91</li> <li>• Hardcourt in front of Blk 953 Jurong West St 91 (<b>approval from HDB required</b>)</li> <li>• Hardcourt near Blk 283 Bukit Batok East Ave 3 (<b>approval from HDB required</b>)</li> <li>• Plaza &amp; amphitheatre near Blk 233 Bukit Batok East 5</li> <li>• Plaza near Blk 317 Bukit Batok St 32</li> </ul> <p><b>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities.</b></p>
95	Hougang	6286 3533	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbourhood Park at Hougang Ave 5 (near fitness corner)</li> <li>• Between Blks 9/10 Hougang Ave 7</li> </ul> <p><b>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities.</b></p>
96	Jalan Besar	6298 9603	<p><b>Please obtain approval and locations from the town council before commencement of busking activities. (Contact: Ms. Julianna Ng)</b></p>
97	Marine Parade	6241 6044 6282 0551	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amphitheatre between Blks 224 &amp; 226 Serangoon Ave 4</li> <li>• Multi-purpose court between Blks 5 &amp; 8 Haig Rd</li> <li>• Amphitheatre beside Blk 263 Serangoon Central Drive</li> <li>• Amphitheatre beside Blk 3 Upper Aljunied Lane</li> </ul>

<u>No.</u>	<u>Town Council</u>	<u>Contact No.</u>	<u>Recommended locations for busking</u>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open space beside Blk 50 Marine Terrace</li> <li>• Open space in front of Blk 87 Marine Parade Central</li> <li>• Communal Plaza beside Blk 23 Eunus Crescent</li> <li>• Amphitheatre beside Blk 99 Aljunied Crescent</li> </ul> <p><i>Please obtain approval from the town council <b>at least two weeks before the commencement of busking activities.</b></i></p>
98	Pasir Ris	782 1162	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tampines North Park, Tampines Ave 7 Contact: Pasir Ris South Constituency Secretariats, Tel - 785 7166</li> <li>• Seashell Park, Pasir Ris Drive 4 Contact: Pasir Ris Central Constituency Secretariats, Tel – 584 2798</li> <li>• Atlantis Park, Pasir Ris St. 41 Contact: Pasir Ris Central Constituency Secretariats, Tel – 584 2798</li> <li>• Time Park, Pasir Ris Drive 6 Contact: Pasir Ris Central Constituency Secretariats, Tel – 584 2798</li> <li>• The Green Oval Park, Pasir Ris St. 72 Contact: Pasir Ris Elias Constituency Secretariats, Tel – 585 2538</li> <li>• Brontosaur Park, Pasir Ris St. 71 Contact: Pasir Ris Elias Constituency Secretariats, Tel – 585 2538</li> </ul> <p><i>Please obtain the support of the <b>Constituency Secretariats</b> before approaching the town council for approval to busk in the above locations.</i></p>
99	Potong Pasir	6284 5000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-stage between Blks 136 &amp; 140 Potong Pasir Ave 3</li> </ul> <p><i>Please obtain approval and locations from the town council before commencement of busking activities. (Contact: Ms. Angeline Or)</i></p>
100	Sembawang	6758 0129 (ext 22 or 25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chong Pang Garden</li> <li>• Nee Soon East Courtyard</li> </ul> <p><i>Please obtain approval from the town council before commencement of busking activities</i></p>
101	Tampines	6781 2222	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Neighbourhood 11 (Blks 201A/E, St 23)</li> <li>b) Festival Park (Blks 254, St 21)</li> <li>c) Community Park (Blk 916, St 91)</li> <li>d) Gateball Court of Tampines West CC (Ave 3, St 81)</li> <li>e) Changkat Neighbourhood (Blks 137 – 139, St 11)</li> <li>f) Tampines Central in front of MRT Station (Blk 513)</li> <li>g) Outside Tampines MRT</li> </ul>
102	Tanjong Pagar/West Coast	6272 6415	<p><u>Telok Blangah</u> Blks 45 &amp; 47 Telok Blangah Drive</p> <p><u>Radin Mas:</u> Blk 38 Telok Blangah Rise Blk 12 Telok Blangah Crescent</p> <p><u>Tanjong Pagar:</u> Tanjong Pagar Plaza Courtyard Spottiswoode Park Open Plaza</p> <p><u>Buona Vista:</u> Stage between Blks 1 &amp; 2 Holland Close</p> <p><u>Leng Kee:</u> Leng Kee Park (near Blk 35 Lengkok Bahru)</p> <p><u>Bukit Merah Central:</u></p>

<u>No.</u>	<u>Town Council</u>	<u>Contact No.</u>	<u>Recommended locations for busking</u>
			<p>Amphitheatre in front of Blk 166 Bt Merah Central</p> <p><u>Clementi</u>: Clementi Town Centre at Blk 442 Clementi Ave 3</p> <p><u>Pasir Panjang</u>: Dover Park (near Blk 35 Dover Rd)</p> <p><u>West Coast</u>: Blk 603 Clementi West St 1 (multi- purpose Court) Blk 723 &amp; 724 Clementi West St 2 (multi- purpose court)</p> <p><u>Tiong Bahru</u>: Seng Poh Garden in front of Blk 48 Moh Guan Terrace</p> <p><u>Queenstown</u>: Amphitheatre in front of Blk 36 Tanglin Halt Road</p>

***NB.**Buskers may also perform at **outdoor spaces** belonging to private commercial properties not located in Sections A – D, provided that **prior permission has been obtained from the property owner**. Please note that buskers must ensure that **NAC is kept informed** of all such arrangements.*