A SPACE FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH? REASSEMBLING YOUNG SINGAPOREANS' PARTICIPATORY AND FRIENDSHIP PROCESSES THROUGH THE 2010 YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work
and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have
duly acknowledged all the sources of information
which have been used in this thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any
degree in any university previously.

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Wong Wei Ming Jared
26 July 2014

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"Friendship is not whom you've known the longest, but who came and never left your side."

This thesis is dedicated to all friends and family, those young and young at heart, who have participated in this journey with me. Thank you for your support, understanding and affection despite circumstances that have made my life so dynamic of late.

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SUMMARY

While the agenda for promoting young people as agents in their own right has gained prominence in popular and academic discourse, the practice of according them greater agency in society and academic research has been less productive. The 2010 Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was a spectacular and unique assembling of young people from around the world to form a community that demonstrated the Olympic values of 'excellence, respect and friendship'. The event was an opportunity for young people to showcase their voices and activism to the world through their participation in the event. For many young Singaporeans, their commitment to YOG was driven by similar goals of showcasing youth activism and friendship building even though participating in YOG created a moment of rupture to the established order of their everyday lifeworlds. Young people's spatialities and socialities during the games were influenced by a diverse set of actors that composed the event, including adults, institutional bodies, discourses and objects. In this way, YOG is viewed as a space-time of complex interactions that, on several occasions, diminished young people's participatory and friendship potential. However, young participants mobilised their agency to find other space-times for meaningful participation and friendship building through their skillful negotiations with actors in the event. This thesis utilised assemblage thinking to trace and capture these complex, multiple and dynamic participatory and friendship processes emerging from YOG. Assemblage was also used as a methodological framing to ensure that, amidst the complex intersections of multiple agents (human and nonhuman), young people took central place within the analysis of the processes of the YOG and within this thesis.

Key words: *Young people's geographies, Youth Olympic Games, participation, friendship, politics, assemblage*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANT	Actor-network Theory
CAN	Create Action Now
CEP	Culture and Education Programme
CP	Competitive Programme
GSLC	Global Scholars and Leaders Conference
IOC	International Olympic Committee
NOC	National Olympic Committee
PM	Prime Minister
STS	Science and Technology Studies
SYOBOC	Singapore Youth Olympic Bid Organising Committee
SYOF	Singapore Youth Olympic Festival
SYOGOC	Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee
YOG	Youth Olympic Games
YOV	Youth Olympic Village
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention to the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER 1:
LET THE (REASSEMBLING OF) THE GAMES BEGIN

1.1   Preamble

"From the day Singapore showed its bid for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), I was a cynic. What's the big deal?

Over the past month [however], I was proven wrong…

Now you might think that YOG may have hyped up the sports [element], but what about the other students who are not interested or involved in sports?

I wish you could be there to see my students from the Military Band. They were selected to perform for the YOG opening ceremony. The pride they hold, the commitment they give to the long hours of practices and commute to the floating platform, the weekends burnt - you have to see it for yourself to know what I mean.

I wish you could be there to see the Facebook exchanges of my ex-students and kids, who are involved in the performances for the opening ceremony or YOG-related events. Some of the things they love, such as cosplay, break-dancing, have been demonised and marginalised by their parents and other adults. Finally they have a platform to show that there is nothing wrong with it, and hopefully, let them have a better understanding of what their passion is about…

YOG is a platform and a catalyst for many aspects of development for our youths. It gives them not just a platform to display, but a platform to learn, to show, to benchmark, and a platform to be proud of. It's not just for the sports people or the sports super-stars.

I may be exaggerating, but this can very well be *a monumental event for many of our youths* [my emphasis] in Singapore, regardless if they are involved directly, indirectly, or not at all. It could very well be the common memory of their generation."

(Facebook post by a young teacher involved with his students in 2010 Youth Olympic Games) [1]

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[1] The quote is verbatim. Available from <https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=426192107128> [Accessed 01 Sep 2012]

This thesis aims to empower the youths who made the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Singapore possible, whose voices were side-lined in favour of the pomp and grandeur that such spectacles bring. It will reveal their experiences – their moments of participation, trajectories of friendships, and imprints of memories. This is *their* version of reality, through *their* (re)assembling of the event.

To launch the thesis, this chapter sets the context for this project by tracing the roots of and routes to YOG, looking at various institutional actors involved in assembling the event and locating young people's position in academia and society. Furthermore, it articulates the aims and key questions of the project.

1.2   The start of something 'youth'

SINGAPORE, 14 August, 2010 – A new chapter of the Olympic movement unfolded as the clock struck 20:10 local time (a play on the year in which the event was held), igniting a 12-day event in this city-state. On the surface, the dazzling opening ceremony at the Marina Bay Floating Platform mirrored many of those preceding it, steeped in pomp and stately elements, whilst intermittently showcasing both national and Olympic ideals. However, what set this opening ceremony apart from previous examples was its explicit focus on youth – not only in terms of its 'youthful' displays, but more importantly as a youth-filled extravaganza, bringing together 7000 Singaporean youth performers and 3530 international youth athletes onto the same stage (SYOGOC, 2010). Emerging from this theme was a show infused with motifs of youth-hood today such as monsters and warriors, hip-hop music and street dances, re-centring traditional elements of the ceremony towards youths themselves, much like the handing over of the Olympic flag from senior to younger athletes (Brijnath, 2010; Ngoo, 2010). The response to the spectacle received high praise from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for positioning youth "at the

centre of the story, not only in the storytelling, but also on stage, acting with enthusiasm and energy" (Chow and Tan, 2010). Indeed, the inaugural *Youth* Olympic Games had begun.

1.3 The wavering presence of youth in the Olympic Movement

The name 'Youth Olympic Games' seems tautological when one traces the relative age of athletes in the 'main' Summer Games. For example, in the recent 2012 London Summer Olympics, 437 of 10384 participating athletes meet the age criteria for athletes to compete in the Youth Olympic Games of being between 14 to 18 years old (Rogers, 2012). Moreover, over 90% of them may be considered as youth participants, as based on the age parameters used for this study (see section 3.2.1 for discussion on defining youth age).

The irony of the name is also evident when one looks into the history of the Olympic movement. Tracing back to the Ancient Olympic Games, Coakley (1992) affirms that the event aimed to showcase the physical excellence of *young* (wealthy Greek male) participants[2]. The modern Olympic Games – reincarnated by French bureaucrat Pierre de Coubertin in 1896 – bears similar traces of such an ideology, albeit with different motivations. Having witnessed the military defeat of France in 1870 by Germany, de Coubertin hoped to use the reinvented games as a platform to develop the physical condition of French youth, and to create a space for international convergence and interaction, uniting the world through sport (Short, 2008). In his autobiography titled *Olympic Memoirs*, de Coubertin (1979) expressed his hope that the aforementioned political goals of the games would supersede its sporting element towards a celebration of youth around the world.

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[2] In defining excellence through the abilities of young males, the competence of anyone who did not fall into such a categorization (namely women, elderly and the poor) was written off as sub-standard. The gender bias towards masculinity within both the Ancient and modern Olympic movement is not the focus of this project and has been accounted for elsewhere (Burstyn, 1998; Toohey and Veal, 2007; Jefferson-Lenskyj, 2013 are just some examples).

"The Olympic Games are not just ordinary world championships but a four-yearly festival of universal youth, the 'spring of mankind' [sic], a festival of supreme efforts, multiple ambitions and all forms of youthful activity celebrated by each succeeding generation as it arrives on the threshold of life."

(de Coubertin, 1979:185)

In this way, the Olympic brand may be seen as synonymous with the notion of youthfulness, not only in terms of the relative age of the participants, but also through the supposed benefits accrued to young people who encounter the Olympic ideals (MacAloon, 2008).

Since then, however, this initial focus on youth has been overshadowed by factors including political controversies and economic concerns as it transformed into a global political platform and business (The Straits Times, 2010). Likewise, academic research on the Olympics followed a similar vein, often examining the political and economic impact that the games brought to host cities (see Section 2.3). The appointment of Jacques Rogge as IOC president in 2001 bolstered a renewed attention on youth within the Olympic movement. Drawing from his experiences as a young Olympian, Rogge wished to use his leadership to re-recognise the Olympics as a people-centred movement, with particular attention on children and youth, viewing them as "the very future of the world" (Rogge, 2010). Such a direction was first sensed at the 117th IOC session held in Singapore from 2nd to 9th July 2005, where the city of London won the right to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games over initial frontrunner, Paris, due to a final presentation that was premised on inspiring the younger generation (Oliver, 2005).

1.4 **Returning to its roots whilst breaking ground: (Re)introducing the *Youth Olympic Games***

The conception of a youth version of the Olympic Games thus follows from such a revitalized interest towards placing young people at the centre of global attention. Although Rogge had nursed the idea since his inauguration as IOC president in 2001(BBC Sport, 2007), the event was only officially introduced six years later at the 2007 IOC session in Guatemala. This signalled the beginnings of a new chapter in Olympic history (Olympic Review, 2010).

The goal of the games was simple. It aimed to be a "platform to create a true community between youth of the world" and "support the development of youth" that is premised on the Olympic values of excellence, respect and friendship (Rogge, 2010). This would be achieved by blending sport with culture and education, a return to de Coubertin's goals for the modern games in the Olympic Charter (IOC, 2011:10). As Rogge (2013) proudly professed in a self-penned article, it is precisely the Olympic Charter that sets the Olympic movement apart from other sporting organisations, for the document mandates its leaders to "place sport at the service of humanity".

What was 'ground-breaking' about the proposed games was more specifically *who* they wished to attract into, and *how* they would go about building, this global youth community. Creating such a space for community building among young people undoubtedly required the participation of youth. Prior to YOG, IOC's notion of participation often revolved around athletes' competitive participation in the event. This is evidently demonstrated in the *Olympic Charter* (IOC, 2011), where a sub-section in the document titled *Participation in the Olympic Games* lists the eligibility requirements to take part as a competitor. However, this notion of participation was broadened for YOG to encompass all youth, taking consideration of the ways in

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which young people may be engaged with the Olympic movement through journalism, photography, organisational roles, volunteering, spectatorship and online media. This was exemplified in Slater's (2009:24) interview with Rogge prior to the games.

> "Slater: What do you hope young athletes will gain from participating at a Youth Olympic Games?
>
> Rogge: Of course I want these *young athletes and non-athletes* [my emphasis] to share and exchange their point of views and experience… But above all, I want these young people to have a wonderful time at the Games, to have an Olympic experience they can take away with them and share with their friends around the world."

To engage this wider scope of young people, the IOC treated the space of the games as a "laboratory of ideas" (Slater, 2009:30), experimenting with new models to the traditional Olympic schedule of events. Together with the aforementioned goals of YOG (and the Olympic Charter), IOC proposed a culture and education programme (CEP) that was accorded equal weight to, and held concurrently with, the competitive programme (CP) of the games. In addition to this, IOC recognised the value of new media technologies in reaching out to youth around the world despite their physical absence during the event (Slater, 2009).These propositions were a departure from the traditional Olympic games format, giving it a unique identity that differentiated it from its 'senior' Olympic counterparts and/or any other existing international youth sport competitions (Shohooki, 2010).

1.5   Growing up: A call for youth participation in Singapore

Singapore's bid for YOG came in a decade where the state of youth (and youth-hood) in Singapore became a heated topic of discussion. Despite receiving critical acclaim for their academic achievements (Mullis et al, 2000), the "post-65ers

generation"[3] are often portrayed in the local media as having a 'bochap' virus[4] (Huang, 2006; Tarulevicz, 2010). Such a discourse runs counter to a wider expectation of young people to "connect with politics in some shape or form and indeed become politically enfranchised when they reach the age of majority" (Skelton, 2013:130). The plight of Singaporean youth's apathetic attitudes escalated to a national concern through Prime Minister (PM) Goh Chok Tong's 2002 National Day Rally Speech. In his concluding statement, PM Goh (2002) addressed young Singaporeans by labelling the coming decade as a "baptism of fire" that will temper their generation.

PM Goh's successor, current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, too raised a similar concern about Singaporean youth. In his inaugural National Day Rally Speech, PM Lee (2004) challenged young people to step forward and play a more active role in Singapore society, voicing a need to

> "Give them a say in their lives… involve them in the
> community and in national affairs, to take ownership of
> the country and of the problems... Engage your ideals,
> your ideas, your energies, build a new generation, build
> tomorrow's Singapore… Find your own leaders, organise
> your own solutions, move."

Ball and Moselle (1999:57) proposed two reasons for young Singaporeans' political indifference. The first is intricately tied to the temporalities of young Singaporeans being dominated by school and school-related activities, thus only having time for the pursuit of academic excellence. As such, daily schedules of students in Singapore are filled with academic-related activities both within and beyond the space-time of the school, on weekdays and weekends alike. Additionally, the space of the home serves the continued function for academic ventures, with time

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[3] A term evoked by the ruling party when referring to young citizens born following Singapore's year of independence in 1965.
[4] Hokkien dialect term meaning general apathy.

at home being spent on school homework, personally-purchased revision exercises, and/or examination papers from 'renowned' Singaporean institutions. Traditional distinctions between weekdays as (work days) and weekends (as a time of rest) also become blurred as a result. Continued attempts to refine the education system to diversify academic pathways have been deemed as superficial rather than resolving the root problem – that of a meritocratic ideal (see Lim, 2013). This is highlighted by Woo (2008:172), who propounds that the "highly competitive and credentialist educational culture remains entrenched and continues to subvert the new reform efforts". Thus, the negative repercussion that has arisen in the pursuit of a meritocratic ideal via the current education system is the depoliticisation of the young Singaporean (Today, 2005; Channel NewsAsia, 2006).

A second reason stems from the highly authoritarian socialisation practices within Singapore society that are preserved through stringent means of control and protection. Through these draconian measures, Singaporean youth (or Singaporeans more generally) have cultivated a risk-averse predisposition, where failure to follow the well-trodden path (although ironically constantly evolving based on societal needs) is condemned as 'career suicide' (Yap, 2001; Lim, 2004; Chong, 2005). Attempts were made following PM Lee's (2004) address to treat the prognosis through the rolling out of several youth-targeted measures. This included the insertion of the word 'youth' into an existing ministerial organisation[5], and the appointment of the youngest cabinet minister at that time (43 year old Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan) to instil the belief into young Singaporeans that they can make a difference in society (Channel NewsAsia, 2004). However, these measures were met with fervent albeit sceptical reactions as Singaporeans (both young and old) debated whether a change in

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[5] The ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) was renamed Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) following PM Lee's 2004 National Day Rally Speech. In 2012, the ministry was reorganized into 3 ministerial bodies. Young people's affairs are now managed by Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY).

youth attitudes was possible moving forward (Buenas, 2004; Chia, 2004; Today, 2005; The New Paper, 2004). Resembling the palliative measures proposed to reform the local education system, Singaporeans wondered whether creating a *feeling* of making a difference to society was sufficient to tackle the problem. Many citizens viewed that civic participation meant "not just government led-exhortations for national cohesion… [but] an amalgam of everyday civic acts and initiatives by citizens who are motivated by various interests" (Chong, 2005). As summed up by Kwek (2005),

> "This is where the challenge [of rousing youth from apathy] truly begins. The government and the media must start connecting with the young populace not only by providing the means of socio-political involvement, but also by encouraging the language of political discussion… We need 'the prose' to evoke 'the passion'. Only then will we begin to free ourselves from political apathy and appreciate the joys of being useful. Only then will we begin to communicate, participate – 'live in fragments no longer'. Only then will we connect."

It is amidst the backdrop of these debates that the YOG bid came to fruition, following from PM Lee's pitch in 2004 to demonstrate to both Singaporeans and the world the progress made in developing Singaporean youth's active and vibrant participation in society (Ong, 2010).

1.6 At the right place and time? I: Coalescence of academic research and the event of YOG 2010

Both IOC's and the Singapore governments' recognition of youth's position within society parallels the paradigmatic shift in geographical research with young people, as influenced by the 'new' social studies of childhood (James et al, 1998). Such a shift has brought to light the reconceptualization of children and youth as competent social actors and agents and, accordingly, their childhoods and 'youth-hoods' as socially, spatially and multiply constructed (cf. Holloway and Valentine,

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2000; Kjørholt, 2001, 2004; Skelton, 2007, 2013). It is perhaps through the

commitment of both these institutions to the 1989 United Nations Conventions to the

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that such a unified vision emerges. Setting this

document apart from its predecessors is its added focus on *participation*, alongside

the provision for, and protection of, people under the age of 18 years old (Skelton,

2007). By highlighting participation in its agenda, the United Nations hopes to

endorse young people as "full and equal citizens in today's world" (UNESCO, 2002).

Scholars working with children and youth have come to treat this vision as an

epistemological cornerstone to their research, bolstering participation to become '*the*

word, concept and discourse to engage with' [author's emphasis] both within and

beyond the sub-discipline (Skelton, 2007:165). IOC chairman Rogge has also openly

declared the Olympic movement's continued support for the convention. In

celebrating 20 years from the conception of the convention, Rogge (2010) affirmed

that the IOC shares the common goal of helping young people realise their own

rights, through the transformative power which sport may bring. In 1995, Singapore

acceded (albeit has not ratified) to UNCRC, having more recently submitted to the

Committee on the Rights of the Child its second and third periodic report for review

in January 2009 (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2010). More

specifically related to the promotion of youth-led movements, the establishment of

the National Youth Council by the Singapore government on 1 November 1989

aimed to "connect with young Singaporeans so that their collective voices can

advocate and enable positive change" (National Youth Council, n.d.). Since then, the

notion of youth participation has regularly featured on the Council's agenda, evident

in the Council's support for local youth studies with the aforementioned theme in its

electronic journal 'youthSCOPE' (2006, 2007, 2012). Singapore's YOG bid in itself

can be seen as yet another avenue for young Singaporean's participation as many

Singaporean youths worked alongside the Singapore Youth Olympic Bid Organising

Committee (SYOBOC) to craft and support the bid proposal (Yip, 2008). Through these assertions and codifications, it is clear that participation resonates in unison as a progressive ideal on various scales – the academic, international and national agenda. This study thus draws on the claims made by these relevant bodies, and uses insights from scholarly writings to analyse how and whether young people's participation was achieved through the YOG event.

1.7   At the right place and time? II: Coalescence of Singapore's anxiety and the desire to host YOG 2010

On 21st Feb 2008, after a seven month long bidding process, Singapore was declared as host city for the inaugural YOG. SYOBOC centred on two beliefs. The first was based on its confidence in possessing the infrastructural and organisational capability to successfully host the global event (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007.). For its second goal, SYOBOC tapped into the state's unique position, both as a *youthful* country (attaining independence in 1965) and a *youth-full* region (60 percent of the population in Southeast Asia being under the age of 30[6]). Tarulevicz (2010) argues that this mirroring of ideals and concerns of the 'youth' (or young age) of the nation with that of young Singaporeans is a well-rehearsed argument often put forth by local authorities more generally. As such, it was unsurprising that SYOBOC leveraged on the envisioned legacy of YOG as a means to accelerate youth development efforts nationally, regionally and beyond (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007). Furthermore, SYOBOC affirmed that the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship, and Respect, resonated with the values that the reigning government wished to inculcate into its younger generation, as espoused in the national pledge (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007). According to SYOBOC, achieving this vision would require creating a youth-focused environment whereby:

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[6] Data taken from Singapore 2010 Bid Committee (2007) report.

"Young people will be involved in all stages – from the development of the concept and the Singapore 2010 story to rolling out the communications campaign. Young people will not only contribute ideas, but also be actively involved in the promotion of Singapore 2010 and be passionate ambassadors to their fellow peers. This will ensure that Singapore 2010 will be a successful event *for young people, by young people*." [my emphasis]

(Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007)

The result of this collaboration between IOC and SYOBOC – which evolved into the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (SYOGOC) once the bid was secured – was the participation of 3530 young athletes from 204 national Olympic committees in both the Competitive Programme (CP) and the Culture and Education Programme (CEP), 29 young reporters and 29 young ambassadors from around the world. More specific to Singaporean youth participation, 600 organisational staff and 22,000 volunteers, many of whom were young Singaporeans from all walks of life, were recruited to the project. In addition, students from across 369 educational institutions in Singapore were activated in assembling CEP. Steps were also taken to incorporate young Singaporeans into the CP, most notably through a bulk purchase of 80,000 tickets by Singapore's Ministry of Education to enable students from local schools to have priority live viewing of various competitive events (Lim and Wong, 2010). These initiatives were deemed as a "call to action" (SYOGOC, 2010:139) for young Singaporeans to participate in the event and received high praise from IOC Chairman Rogge, declaring the inaugural games at the closing ceremony as 'perfection' and acknowledging Singapore for setting a high benchmark for YOGs to come (Channel NewsAsia, 2010a).

As illustrated above, the organisers painstakingly attempted to paint a picture of the event as a bounded and cohesive, not to mention well-run and youth-centred, entity. Yet, YOG 2010 had its fair share of controversies. Media reports during the event unveiled a different story. Murmurs of youth volunteers' dissatisfaction over

the disparity in food quality provided to them against that of the organisers and athletes surfaced (mrbrown.com, 2010). Publicised complimentary tickets to events such as the Singapore F1 race and entry to Universal Studios Singapore as a reward of volunteers' efforts were only received after their date of validity. Certificates with errors were issued to participants. Of greater relevance to the state of youth in Singapore were two media reports that emerged. First was the arrest of a young Singaporean male for supposedly inciting violence through his Facebook comments on the games and its relevant officials (Chen, 2010). Second was the exposition of Singaporean students being pressured by schools to purchase tickets to watch the CP, resulting at times in a mass absence of spectators at competitive venues despite being pitched as sold-out events by organisers to the public (Lim and Wong, 2010). On the surface, such revelations siphoned attention away from the appearance of the event's 'success'. However, seen in a different light, I believe that these perceived 'acts of resistance' are an acknowledgement of a more realistic messy picture of/in an event that hauls apart a well-pruned rhetoric and disturbs current knowing (Cook, 2009). Furthermore, I argue that these narratives may be viewed as a testament to young people's agency in YOG – seen through moments of rupture in the space-time of the event where their opinions and experiences were brought to the fore (analysed further in section 4.4.2).

1.8   History in the (re)making: YOG as a journey of discovery

It is amidst this backdrop that this thesis emerges. Many more of such salient accounts have been left untold, and this thesis seeks to give voice to this systematically silenced group. By doing so, another narrative of YOG is brought to light – one that finds its expression through my young respondents themselves, via a different mode of (re)assembling the event. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with 44 YOG participants (with a definition broadened to look beyond the accounts of young athletes), many stories and experiences (from young organisers,

volunteers, performers and spectators) of YOG were unfolded, largely directed by my respondents themselves. In granting greater agency to the respondents in shaping the thesis, the themes and questions emerged in part from me at the start through the selection of several themes in my interview schedule (Appendix 1), but also in part through issues of concern and examination through my interaction with these young participants. Amongst the range of themes discussed, respondents had the most to say about participation and friendship in the event. These themes coalesce well with emerging interest within the geographical discipline on young people's participatory and friendship relations. Thus, these concerns have been fused into the thesis through research in process and practice, based on the methodological approach that I adopted.

In finding a theoretical framing that would encapsulate this broad range of issues, I have chosen to engage with assemblage thinking. Young people's geographers have more commonly tapped into the structure-agency dualism in illuminating issues regarding young people's participation, friendships or memories. However, I came to the decision that such a framework would be limiting for this research as complex stories were being revealed to me by my respondents that challenged the structure-agency binary. Assemblage thinking was subsequently chosen since it "supports the investigation of many possibilities of interconnecting heterogeneous elements that would not ordinarily be placed together, and in ways that resist the invocation of an overarching normative or organicist framework that relies on an ideal of an accomplished or finished object" (Mar and Anderson, 2010:36). While the retrospective take of this thesis may suggest fixity to the knowledge uncovered, a *reassembling* of young Singaporeans' participatory and friendship processes is necessary when one considers the absence of these young people's accounts in the larger YOG narrative. In this way, the YOG assemblage is open to being moulded by events such as the writing of this thesis.

Furthermore, it became evident through the interview process that critical to both facilitating and impeding young people's agency during the games were a range of materials. As argued by Whatmore (2006), adopting assemblage as a theoretical framing attends to this 'more-than-human' geographic condition, compelling us to relook at the ontological status of the 'social' to the material aspects of our everyday social relations. For my respondents, the role of materials, ranging from food to Facebook, fluctuated between being both structures and agents in the process of granting young people agency pre-, during, and post-event. Thus, it was vital to find a theoretical framing that grapples with such complex, fluid and non-linear phenomena. My experimentation with assemblage thinking for this thesis enables me to look at the interrelations between social, spatial and material relations that emerged during the event. At the same time, it introduces a different way of thinking into geographies of young people, one that is drawn from the field of science and technology studies (STS) and actor-network theory (ANT). By doing so, I hope to push the sub-discipline's engagement with theory beyond an "unimaginative, uncreative, unreflective, set-in-its-ways sensibility" (Horton and Kraftl, 2005:134).

The research questions for this thesis are as follows:

1. What were young people's patterns of (and thoughts on) participation and friendships that emerged through YOG? Were their participatory and friendship pathways meaningful?

2. What do young Singaporeans' politics look like? Did YOG promote young Singaporeans' political activism?

3. Was YOG a factor in young people taking up more agentic and engaged roles in Singapore?

4. How did the role of objects affect young people's patterns of participation, friendship and political activism?

5. What kinds of young people's agency might be possible in the research project?

6. How does this thesis contribute to existing knowledge on participation and friendship?

7. What is the value of using assemblage as a theoretical and methodological framing in thinking about the intersection between young people and space?

To achieve the aforementioned aims and answer the above questions, the thesis is structured in the following way. This chapter has given an introduction to YOG – the rationale behind its formation through the lens of different organisational bodies and how it shares a similar vision to that of geographies of young people. Chapter Two situates this thesis within the broader literature of geographies of young people and geographies of sport, and presents what the adoption of assemblage thinking can contribute to them. Following this, Chapter Three looks at the methodological practices and reflections for this project, in particular thinking about the methodological process through the lens of assemblage thinking. Chapters Four (on participation) and Five (on friendship) form the empirical chapters of the thesis, which discuss the findings of my research through the given conceptual framework. Chapter Six concludes the thesis by assessing YOG's wider impact on young Singaporeans' lives. It also relooks at the success and challenges faced in trying to

introduce 'assemblage thinking' into geographies of young people. With that, let the

reassembling begin.

CHAPTER 2:
CONNECTING RESEARCH ON YOUNG PEOPLE, THE OLYMPICS AND
ASSEMBLAGE

2.1   Introduction

This chapter considers the possibilities for assemblage theory as a theoretical framing through the intersection of geographical research on young people and the Olympic event. As the targeted participants of the Youth Olympic Games were youths and young adults, the literature review begins by establishing the general lack of attention on this group of individuals in geographies of young people due to their (lack of) position between the child/adult binary. More generally, young people's geographers' focus on everydayness and the micro-scale has neglected the participatory potential of young people in extraordinary and 'more-than-micro' spaces. Choosing the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) as an area of study thus presents an opportunity for intervention with this body of scholarship. In relation to research on the Olympic Games, geographical scholarship on this event has traditionally been economic in orientation, paying little attention to the socio-cultural aspects and, in particular, the extraordinary space and time of the event. Engaging with assemblage thinking for this thesis allows for a focus on heterogeneous actors and relations, and the temporality of these processes that constitute the event.

2.2   'Where do we go from here?': Advancing young people's geographies

Within the past decade, an interest towards geographies of young people has been ignited within academia (Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Aitken , 2001; Katz, 2004; Ansell, 2005; Weller, 2006; Evans, 2008; Hopkins, 2010; Foley and Leverett, 2011; Hörschelmann and van Blerk, 2012; and Kraftl et al, 2012 are just some examples). Recognising the world of children and youth as notably different from that of adults, this body of scholarship is united by a commitment to assert young people as important social actors in their own right and highlight their agency (James, 1990;

Aitken et al, 2007). However, within this expanding body of work, a growing number of dissenting voices have emerged regarding current directions of the sub-field. This section engages with three of these critiques.

2.2.1 *Bringing youth to the fore in young people's geographies*

First, despite the attempt to define 'geographies of young people' as a collective term that encapsulates children and youth, teenagers and young adults remain the 'neglected other' in geographical research (Weller, 2006; Evans, 2008). Being wedged between the age continuum of childhood and adulthood, Skelton (2000) suggests that youthhood disrupts the neat binary categorisation of child/adult. To solve this, adults deny youths' presence in the world or subsume them under childhood. One example is the naming of the journal that caters to investigating under the umbrella of *Children's* Geographies. Furthermore, Hopkins and Pain (2007:288) argue that the disproportionate attention on very young (and therefore neglect of youth and young adult) geographies is due to the conflation of children's position as at the extreme margins of both the age continuum and society, thus being "far more accessible, appealing and rewarding as research subjects".

However, I do not propose to return to earlier (1960s/1970s) studies on youth that was premised on identifying youths and youth-hood as a culture distinct from childhood and adulthood. On the contrary, I agree with Holt (2009:284) that an epistemological approach to youth (cultures) as a *pièce de résistance* to the mainstream unintentionally reproduces the idea of youths as a "distinct form, other to, and a potent threat to, broader society". Instead, taking a guide from disability debates (cf. Imrie and Edwards, 2007), it is pertinent that we turn away from questioning how youths fit into models of children/adults such as angels/devils and interrogate instead how our socio-spatial practices and performances (re)produce such stereotypical images of young people more generally. At the same time, reiterating

the objectives set out by proponents for a more engaged young people's geographies, it is important we recognise the value of researching youths who "participate in a range of activities which do not cause harm or annoyance – who basically get on with their lives as young people, but who at the same time have to face an enormous range of social, cultural, educational and financial pressures" (Valentine *et al*, 1998:24). Such a participatory focus on young people's negotiations in space forms the premise of Chapter 4 in this thesis.

Furthermore, young people's participatory practices in space are often interwoven with relations of friendship. In their review paper titled *Geographies of Friendship*, Bunnell et al (2012:500-502) highlight friendship to be one of the most prominent forms of sociality recognised by young people, providing them emotional and social support in the face of discriminatory socio-spatial practices against them. The authors also assert that these friendship relations among young people may drive processes of participation and empowerment, thus sharing a positively reinforcing relationship with the scholarly aim to magnify young people's voices and agency (see also Fine, 2002; Putnam, 1993). Yet, it is puzzling how empirical research on young people's geographies of friendships remains scant (Skelton, 2000, 2001; Morris-Roberts, 2001, 2004; Dyson, 2010; Erni and Fung, 2010; Blazek, 2011 are some exceptions). Chapter 5 therefore unearths the evolution of young people's friendship relations through their participation in YOG. In so doing, the thesis not only challenges the neglect of youth voices both within the sub-discipline and larger society, but also exposes a complexity and multiplicity to youth's lived experiences beyond a ubiquitous image of them as at risk (being on the interstices of the boundary) and/or as a risk (transgressing the boundary) to society (Weller, 2006).

2.2.2   Linking young people's geographies to wider disciplinary debates – the need for theorising

Several authors have lamented the sub-discipline's general obduracy against a deeper engagement with theory (Aitken, 2004; Horton *et al*, 2008; Valentine, 2006; Vanderbeck, 2008; Holloway and Pimlot-Wilson, 2011; Holt, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012). A prominent collaborative effort propounding this issue comes from John Horton and Peter Kraftl (2005; 2006a; 2006b), using the journal *Children's Geographies* as a platform to generate greater discussion into the matter. Horton and Kraftl (2005) observe a growing trend among researchers that appeals for a more 'useful' Children's Geographies through deeper engagement with policy-making. The authors caution that the continuous re-citing of the aforementioned goal may lead to a "predominantly unimaginative, uncreative, unreflective, set-in-its-ways sensibility" that is "too-often predominantly atheoretical… [or] so unreflected upon that it feels atheoretical, which is doubly troubling" (pg. 134).

It is perhaps in this same trajectory of thought that comments about the sub-discipline becoming "boring" (Valentine, 2006) and "insular" (Valentine, 2008) have emerged. Extending Horton and Kraftl's (2005) point of contention, Vanderbeck (2008) argues that the sub-discipline's *modus-operandi* of being predominantly of a consensus-based nature (in promoting the goal of policy making) has hindered the development of a vibrant intellectual environment of debate, therefore fabricating an 'atheoretical' feel. This is not to say that young people should be merely 'tagged on' to existing types of geographical analyses without adjustments to the theoretical assumptions underlying these analyses (cf. James, 1990). Rather, Horton and Kraftl (2006a) suggest that such a canvass of discussion may be initiated through synthesising the sub-discipline with wider contemporary lines of academic thought (some of their examples of concepts to be incorporated – everydayness and materiality – are explored in further detail in sections 2.2.3 and 2.4.1 respectively). In

this way, scholars may reinvigorate the field and be presented with greater opportunities to respond to the theories, philosophies and concepts that they engage with. Thus, I share in the spirit of these academics to incorporate emergent theoretical and conceptual direction into my work with young people, by engaging with assemblage theory (section 2.4) and exploring the concepts of participation (Chapter 4) and friendship (Chapter 5) for this thesis.

2.2.3   *Young people's geographies… beyond the micro-scale and everyday*

Finally, through a sustained call for researchers to investigate the everyday geographies of children and youth, the sub-discipline has developed a parochial lens of interest stemming from its disproportionate focus on micro-scale analyses (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Philo, 2000; Halfacree, 2004; Holt and Holloway, 2006; Ansell, 2009). In Sarah James' (1990:282) seminal paper, the author proclaims that a means to unmask children from geography requires stronger emphasis on understanding the "every-day lives and thoughts of ordinary [young] people". Since then, geographers have devoted unprecedented enthusiasm towards uncovering immediate environments of children and youth. In identifying the theoretical contributions that young people's geographers may make to the wider discipline of geography (and in relation to section 2.2.2), Horton and Kraftl (2006a) go a step further by affirming that, despite having attended to this challenge more full-heartedly than most areas of research in the geographical discipline, more could still be done to examine the notion of 'everydayness' theoretically and methodologically. Yet, it seems ironic that, in its push towards greater focus on the everyday, young people's geographers have been blinded to a note of caution which James (1990) raises:

> "The strength of phenomenological and humanistic approaches is at the same time a potential source of weakness. One major drawback of this approach is a tendency to glorify ordinary, every-day experience…

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[Instead,] encouragement of a child and geography
perspective within *all* streams of geography should be
our aim." [my emphasis]

This is not to say that attention towards wider processes affecting young people's lives is non-existent within the sub-discipline (noteworthy exceptions include Aitken, 2001; Ruddick, 2003; Katz, 2004; Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2005; Aitken *et al*, 2007; Skelton, 2010; Jeffrey, 2012). However, this body of literature is outweighed by a plethora of research on children and youth's micro-geographies. This is problematic on two fronts. First, focusing on the 'micro-scale' continues to play upon a stereotypical image of children's life-worlds being restricted towards the sphere of the intimate (Ward, 1978; Philo, 2000), thus leaving unchallenged the processes that affect young people across 'wider' spatial settings. Second, a related critique to that in section 2.2.2, a micro-centric perspective on geographies of young people may further isolate the field from the wider discipline.

To overcome this problem, we need to move beyond the confines of research on children and youths within particular everyday spaces, and instead attend to "the larger picture" that encompasses different sets of children and youth across different places. Discussion of the means towards achieving this goal, however, have been divided. On one hand, scholars such as Philo (2000) and Hopkins and Alexander (2010) propose devoting attention to the macro-scale and structured-based geographies of childhood and 'youth-hood'. While this seems to be an obvious choice of a solution since geographers have spent much time and effort at theorising scale (see Sayre and Di Vittorio, 2009 for review), the term scale has been subject to grave scrutiny in terms of its analytical value, having accumulated "a large amount of conceptual baggage that is increasingly employed in a sloppy and analytically imprecise manner" (Moore, 2008:205, see also Marston, 2000). In addition to facing similar critiques as those of the aforementioned binary understandings of child/adult,

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public/private and, in this case, micro/macro and local/global scale analyses for presuming a totalising epistemology (see section 2.2.1), there has been a tendency for researchers to conflate these dichotomies together. For example, Escobar (2001:155-156) ascribes that the term 'global' has come to be associated with other dyadic labels such as "space, capital, history and agency" while the 'local', conversely, is linked to "place, labour, and tradition – as well as women, minorities, the poor and, one might add local cultures". If thought of in relation to the child-adult binary, this perhaps explains the continuing overriding attention within young people's geographies towards micro-scale analyses as researchers still see the world of the child as within the sphere of the 'local' in contrast to a globalised 'adult' space.

Ansell (2009:205) develops this critique further through specific reflection on children's geographies, adding that "whereas political geographers may advocate 'scale jumping' for adults constructed as local, this is not a meaningful solution for children". She proposes conceptualising children's relationships in alternative ways to overcome the inherent problems with scalar thinking and bring about more meaningful impact on children's lives across the world. This thus forms the inspiration behind the choice of assemblage as a theoretical framing for this thesis due to its appreciation of the processual, indeterminate and emergent nature of phenomena (see section 2.4).

In addition to this, I argue that overcoming the banality and everyday-ness of geographies of young people may require diverting some attention towards the extraordinary spaces in which young people are engaged in. Kraftl (2009:114) suggests that the "hyper-ordinariness" of much recent research is a result of a move by scholars to oppose the spectacularization of society. This, however, has misled them to forget that extraordinariness is inherently a socio-spatial phenomenon, produced in the "meshing of the spectacular with the mundane, rather than a

separation from the other" (pg.112), and thus demands geographical attention. Taking the Hundertwasser-Haus in Vienna (described by Kraftl as social housing masquerading as artwork) as his example of an extraordinary building, he demonstrates how extraordinariness is "co-produced by changing assemblages of actors, texts and practices" (pg. 118). In this way, I believe that Kraftl's (2009) call to re-emphasize the significance of the spectacular and the extraordinary is a yet another way to overcome the aforementioned critique against geographies of young people – as a means to branch away, yet remain sensitive to, social-scientific inquiry into the everyday geographies of children and youth.

In making these criticisms I do not intend to deny the significance of the trends highlighted in work from young people's researchers. What I hope to demonstrate rather, is the need for a more rigorous and expansive understanding of what constitutes the foundation to the sub-discipline (making a case for an outward-looking geographies of young people that builds upon broader disciplinary debates), and young people's lives. Thus, the Youth Olympic Games provided the perfect confluence of highlighting young people's participatory and friendship processes through an extraordinary and 'more-than-micro' space of interaction.

2.3   Geography and Olympics – trapped within a language of the 'mega', 'hallmark' and 'economic'

In thinking about extraordinary spaces, perhaps international sport events come to mind most immediately. In recent decades, Olympic research has garnered greater attention from geographers due to an interest in the claimed 'legacies' that the event brings to cities and nations (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2011). Through this debate, notable contributions have been made to Olympic studies via themes of globalization (Short, 2004; 2008; Roche, 2006; Klauser, 2012), urban regeneration/gentrification (Essex and Chalkley, 1998; Olds, 1998; Chalkley and

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Essex, 1999; Jones, 2001; Beriatos and Gospodini, 2004; Ferguson et al, 2011) and place/city-marketing (Kearns and Philo, 1993; Hall, 1998; Waitt, 1999; Roche, 2000; Smith, 2005; McCann, 2009). Furthermore, this body of literature has played a critical role in establishing the sub-disciplines of tourism (Hall, 1992; Getz, 1997; 2008; Weed, 2008) and urban geography (Short, 2008; Gold and Gold, 2008) through its strong managerial and economic analysis. Yet, seen in a different light, these works have entrapped studies of the Olympics within a predominantly economically oriented approach, "in favour of the measurable or the marketable" (Dovey, 1989:73), thus neglecting other aspects of the games. Bale (1996) argues that such a critique is reflective of the broader research on geographies of sport. Seen as a "close knit specialty group" (Bale, 1996:170), sports geographers have generally disregarded the insights that the broader field of cultural geography may offer to this area of research. As such, Bale (1996:163) laments that the amassed body of work has been "hardly spectacular" due to a lack of a "more human framework for sport-geographic studies". It is only in a more recent editorial that Bale and Dejonghe (2008) claim to witness an emergence of more humanistic studies in sport-geographic research in recent years.

2.3.1   *Towards a socio-cultural geographies of the Olympics*

The tendency for academics to 'follow the fortunes' of the Olympic event is unsurprising to Malfas et al (2004) since it is often the economic benefits that the games bring which forms the prime motive for countries' interests in hosting them. Such a research trajectory is further compounded by scholars' tendency to employ the terms 'hallmark' or 'mega-events' as a means of categorising the event, coated in managerial and economic jargon.

> "[Hallmark events are] major one-time or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination in the short and/or long term".

> (Ritchie, 1984:3)

> "[Mega-events are] large events of world importance and high profile which have a major impact on the image of the host city."

> (Law, 1993)

It is perhaps through a similar recognition (and sense of weariness) that Jafari (1988:273) poses the question of when will this body of research "graduate from the bounds of the economic and marketing to amplify the subject in its fullest dimensions".

In addition, several authors have raised more specific contentions to tackle the weaknesses of these analytical framings. Critiquing the lack of attention from geographers, Gaffney (2010:8) suggests abandoning the labelling of the Olympic Games as a 'mega-event' as it acts as a "mutually reinforcing mechanism" to assert economic rationality as an end goal in Olympic research, thereby neglecting the "multitude of practices and techniques" that emerge from the event. Perhaps most apparently then, scholars have highlighted the need to complement existing geographical literature on the Olympics with an equal weight of studies that interrogate the socio-cultural dynamics of the games, particularly in drawing from social and cultural geography (Getz, 1991, 1997; Hall, 1992; Bale, 2000).

Gordon Waitt's (2003) piece titled *Social Impact of the Sydney Olympics* marks a notable exception to this gap within the literature. Tapping into social exchange theory (cf. Ap, 1992), Waitt analyses the emotional geographies experienced by local residents affected by the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Waitt traces the need to re-sensitize geographical research on the Olympic Games to the

various groups and individuals (and their socio-spatial practices) that are complexly and multifariously networked into the event. In particular, I argue that this is an angle of research that Olympic researchers may draw from geographies of young people through their engagement with the notion of (young people's) participation (see section 2.2.1). Roche (2003:109) asserts that 'mega-events' such as the Olympics similarly provide people with:

> "enduring motivations and special opportunities to participate in collective projects which have the characteristics of, among other things, structuring social space and time, displaying the dramatic and symbolic possibilities of organised and effective social action, and reaffirming the embodied agency of people as individual actors, even if the latter is only displayed in the activity of spectatorship."

As such, it is pertinent that our geographical agenda takes into account their voices, which are often seen as "antithetical to the workings of the market" and thereby excluded from current analytical processes (Silk, 2011:744).

2.3.2   The Olympics as an 'extraordinary' space and time

The subsuming of the Olympic Games under the label of 'mega-events' also inevitably blots out the 'extraordinary' character of the games that separates it from other so-called 'mega-events' (Gold and Gold, 2008:302). I interpret this 'extraordinary' status in terms of the *spectacular space* and *temporal uniqueness* of the games.

As expounded earlier in section 2.2.3, the notion of the spectacle (alongside the mundane) plays a critical role in the production of 'extraordinary' places. Debord's (1994) work on *The Society of the Spectacle* has been a key text towards developing the concept of the 'spectacle'. He describes the spectacle not as a specific geographical site, but rather as a "social relationship mediated by images" (no. 4),

providing society with a "means of unification… a focal point of all vision and consciousness" (no. 3). Kong and Yeoh (1997:216) add that spectacles are moments of "high degrees of display and theatricality… designed to create an impact through the use of fear or the use of awe and wonder". These qualities of the spectacle are evidently embedded within (and intricately connected to) the Olympic Games. As Olds (1998) attests, it is often the glamour and spectacle of the games that reside within participant and spectators' memories post-event. It is thus surprising to discover that geographers have generally disregarded interrogating elements of the spectacle that emerge from the games.

Instead, it has been through geographical scholarship on festivals that the notion of the spectacle has come under greater scrutiny (cf. Pinder, 2000; Gotham, 2005; Duffy, 2009). Combined with more recent conceptualisations of social space in more dynamic terms, researchers of festivals have developed a keen awareness towards analysing the social, spatial *and* material relations that emerge from these events (cf. Waitt, 2008; Markwell and Waitt, 2009). Gold and Gold (2008:303) remind us that such a means of interrogation is similarly befitting for research on the Olympic Games since, rather than being a single competitive sporting event, it is better conceived as a "festive assembly" that brings people together to participate in an a set of "interlocking component festivals". Thus, I argue that a 'hardly spectacular' literature on the geographies of the Olympics (due to a lack of attention to the spectacle) would benefit not only from research on the spectacular spaces within the games, but also through an engagement with developments in social and cultural geography that is informed by feminist and post-structural thinking.

Another element of the games that is 'extraordinary' is the special space-time structuring that falls out of the rhythm of everyday life. Thus far, less attention has been accorded to the temporalities of the games in studies on the Olympics (cf.

Carpenter, 1992; Roche, 2003; Waitt, 2003). In particular, scholars have often lacked developing their analyses around the actual space-time of the event, situating their research either in a pre-event – in particular the bidding process (Law, 1994a; Hiller, 2000; Shoval, 2002; Tufts, 2004) – or post-event context. This has therefore resulted in the question of 'what occurs *during* the event' being left unexamined (Roche, 2003; Malfas et al, 2004).

Maurice Roche's (2003) piece *Mega-events, Time and Society* is a laudable attempt to draw greater attention to the temporalities of the Olympic Games. Roche argues that the event "occurs outside of the annual cycle and outside of the cultural spheres, traditions rituals of nation-states, rarely appearing more than once a generation for the citizens of any given host nation" since IOC rarely awards the games to a country that hosted it before (pg. 102). He is also similarly aware of the mutually constitutive relationship that the event itself shares with its participants:

> "It is a common observation that an experience of life
> that is reduced exclusively to the ordinary everyday
> routine can in itself be restructuring of time and
> threatening to identity and agency, What is necessary to
> enable people to sustain a fuller time structure, together
> with the wider temporal perspectives discussed here, and
> to make it recurrently available in personal life is the
> periodic interpersonal, communal and societal
> organization of precisely non-routine, extraordinary
> special events... Among other things, these events are
> experienced as marking the passing of time and thereby
> generating time structure among individuals and groups
> in more substantive ways than is possible with routine."

(pg.110)

In this way, the Olympic Games may be understood as a unique melding of social, spatial *and* temporal relations that is worthy of geography's attention, especially with particular focus on children and youth's everyday geographies (as expounded in section 2.2.3).

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2.4 The practice(s) of assembling

> "Take assemblage as a mode of thinking; you thus
> research through thinking assemblages… rearticulating
> the way we see, understand and thus live the world."

(Dewsbury, 2011:148)

To find an 'analytical toolkit' which acknowledges the dynamic, fluid and multiple processes characteristic of young people's negotiations (section 2.2) and the Olympics games (section 2.3), I draw upon the notion of 'assemblage' for this thesis. Drawn from post-structural theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Latour (2005), and de Landa (2006), the term assemblage has recently witnessed a surge of interest within geography, with Anderson and McFarlane's (2011a:124) description of the term as a "familiar lexicon of contemporary social-spatial theory". It has gained prominence across sub-disciplinary boundaries, leading to a flowering of work across themes including architecture (Edensor, 2011; McFarlane, 2011b), policy mobilities (McCann and Ward, 2011; Russell et al, 2011), social movements (McFarlane, 2009; Davies, 2012), issues of race (Saldanha, 2007, 2012; Swanton, 2010), nature (Power, 2005; Braun, 2006; Robbins, 2007), and genealogy (Hinchcliffe, 2001; Keil and Ali, 2007; Ingram, 2009; Greenhough, 2011).

In its simplest form, the term 'assemblage' connotes an object in the world, a *descriptor* of a particular instance in which different elements come together (cf. Cowan and Smith, 2009; McFarlane, 2011a). This offers an alternative means to grasp the Olympic Games anew, as "complex wholes composed through a diversity of parts" that converge in a particular place and time (Anderson et al, 2012:172). However, Farias (2010:15) warns that an engagement with the term merely through a descriptive lens alludes to the assemblage being "an ontological achievement", an "out-there reality" that is in waiting to be uncovered. In this way, adopting the term assemblage involves not just a "change in vocabulary, but also the discovery of new

settings and new objects of research" (Farias, 2010:1). As such, it is necessary that, through engaging with assemblage, the researcher develops an understanding of the term not just as an *object in*, but an *orientation to* (ie. interrogating *how* all elements converge and function together), the world (McFarlane, 2011a). Thus, I have chosen to see this project not only as an assemblage in itself, but also how assemblage thinking may be adopted throughout the research process (see Chapter 3).

2.4.1   *Heterogeneous composition of actors and relations*

In line with the work of actor-network theorists, assemblage geographers accord equal significance to all actors (human and non-human alike) in the assemblage in recognition of a "more-than-human" geographic condition (Whatmore, 2006). As such, an actor in the assemblage is redefined as "any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon it and translates their will into a language of its own" (Callon and Latour, 1981:286). Robbins and Marks (2010:177) argue that this shift of focus to the material not only marks an effort amongst researchers to make non-humans 'matter', but also part of a wider project to reconstitute the 'social' through the blurring of traditional divisions such as social-material, near-far, structure-agency and global-local (de Landa, 2006). Moreover, an assemblage is not a result of a mere summation of the properties of its parts. Instead, what ties an assemblage together are the interactions between its components, whereby these relations formed are irreducible to individual properties alone (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). This is where assemblage thinking departs from actor-network theory. Rather than delimit focus only to the interactions of its component parts, assemblage thinkers acknowledge the assemblage as possessing agency itself (Bennett, 2005). By doing so, the notion of assemblage allows one to identify the diverse array of components - "objects, spaces, materials, machines, bodies, subjectivities, symbols, formulas and so on" (Farias, 2010:14), and the complex

connections among them that 'assemble' the Olympic event, and their interaction with the 'assembled' Olympic event itself.

2.4.2   Temporality of processes

At the same time, proponents for assemblage geographies affirm a need for an orientation to the temporality of the processes that form the assemblage (McGuirk and Dowling, 2009; Allen and Cochrane, 2010). Marcus and Saka (2006) argue that the influence of Deleuze and Guattari has helped develop a sensitivity to time in scholarly investigation of assemblages. In particular, advocates of assemblage thinking highlight a need to understand the concept through a "doctrine of emergence" (Harman, 2008). As explained in Ong and Collier's (2004:12) work titled *Global Assemblages*,

> "The temporality of an assemblage is emergent. It does
> not always involve new forms, but forms that are shifting,
> in formation or at stake."

This therefore enables us to shift our analytic gaze from "end-products to agents in the transient crystallization of a longer process" (Harman, 2008:373) as assemblages are seen as never fixed or stable but always in the process of making and unmaking. Seen as a whole, assemblage thinking may be thought of as a doubly-accented approach, focusing on "the material, actual and assembled", but also "the emergent, the processual and the multiple" (Farias, 2010:15). In this way, adopting assemblage thinking for this project allows me to re-envision the Olympic event as an "active assemblage of assemblages" (cf. Bender, 2010), taking into consideration notions of "indeterminacy, emergence, becoming, processuality, turbulence, and the sociomateriality of phenomena" (McFarlane, 2011a:23).

2.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I elucidated the inherent gaps within current geographical research on young people and the Olympics event. I believe that bringing these two bodies of literature into conversation bridges the gaps that each area of research needs to fill. In terms of young people's geographies, current research trajectories limit young people's ability to participate in society beyond the everyday and micro-scale. On the other hand, geographical research on the Olympics event has inadequately represented the dynamism, fluidity and multiplicity of social, spatial and temporal relations that constitute the event. Furthermore, both bodies of scholarship have had a general aversion towards incorporating more recent post-structural theoretical engagements in the discipline. Assemblage thinking thus provides a feasible meeting ground to investigate the intersections between young people and the Youth Olympic event as the concept emphasizes the complex interaction of social, spatio-temporal and *material* dimensions. Following on from this, Chapter 3 looks into the methodological considerations in taking on assemblage thinking as a framing for this thesis.

CHAPTER 3:
INSIGHTS INTO THE MESSINESS OF THE METHOD ASSEMBLAGE

3.1   Introduction

> "Method is not… a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities... It is also creative… It makes new signals and new resonances, new manifestations and new concealments, and it does so continuously."

> (Law, 2004:143)

In any given research project, scholars often describe their methodological process, writing in a structure deemed acceptable by academic standards. Details that are regularly featured include the profile of respondents, the methods employed, and the means of data analysis and so on. For example, for this research, a total of 44 young Singaporean participants of both genders and different ethnicities were recruited between the period of September and December 2011. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with them either individually or in groups based on their preferences, and thereafter transcribed, and analysed.

This results in a clinical treatment of the data gathering, emerging as linear, sanitized and 'factual' accounts (or rather rudimentary listings) of 'key' pieces of information that are meant to be overarching summaries of the research process (DeLyser and Starrs, 2001). Under the guise of academic rigour, such a systematic selection of what to include of the research process in scholarly writing leaves a bland and forgettable taste on the reader's palate (Law, 2004). Budding scholars, afraid of deviating from their predecessors, conflate the word methodological with methodical and, thus, are encouraged to use a definite and singular methodological reality that fits into a neat model of research. By smoothening the bumpiness of the research terrain, we become blind to the true and honest picture that the methodological journey in fact crafts social realities (Law, 2004). In doing so, we pass over the

opportunities of what *could have become* different, and perhaps more critical research outcomes (Crang, 2005; Cook, 2009; Revill and Seymour, 2000).

Rather than shy away from this challenge presented in the name of 'good' (or reliable and credible) academic practice, I am determined to bring to the fore this 'messy area' (cf. Cook, 2009) of methodological research so as to destabilize current knowing. Recognising that methodological decisions are "at heart, philosophical choices" (Graham, 2005:12), this chapter will thus be used as a space for 'written conversations' between theoretical engagements aligned with the 'messy turn' (Cook, 2009:16), and personal observations made through the research process. These reflections are guided by the principles of actor-network theory (ANT) as, argued by Ruming (2009:453), ANT supports research that is messy and heterogeneous because "that is just how research tends to be… that is the inherent nature of the world itself: messy". In particular, I tap into Law's (2004:122) proposal of understanding method through '*method assemblages'*, or processes of "enacting or crafting bundles of ramifying relations that condense presence and (therefore also) generate absence". These assemblages bear an acute sensitivity to all entities (both human as well as non-human) that are assembled, and mobilized into productive action in the research event (Callon, 1986).

3.2   The researcher – conceiving the research

As a child, I possessed a fascination with the 'glitz and glamour' of the Olympic event. This fascination was reinvigorated by the hype generated during the bid process of YOG 2010. In a chance encounter of Singapore's bid presentation video online, I was fascinated by the imagery used in portraying Singapore to IOC. Yet, I questioned the relevance of the representations of youth and youthhood in Singapore that were used in the video since such promotional tools employed by candidate cities during the bid process were meant to "establish powerful, visceral

connections between a candidate city and the values of the international Olympic movement" (McCallum et al, 2005:29). This question resonated when I watched the mass display segments of the spectacle during the opening and closing ceremonies of YOG 2010. As I delved deeper into academic research on young people's position in society, I was galvanised by the prospect of interrogating young Singaporeans' attitudes to an event that was organised to enrol more youth into the Olympic movement. This was thus the trigger point to the assembling of this thesis.

The fieldwork journey was truly a 'voyage into the unknown' (Driver, 2000), having decided only to embark on it following the conclusion of YOG, with no prior experience in the new movement other than being a spectator of the event via television and media reports. Yet, such a starting point liberated me from any preconceived notions of the event and its actors, leaving me open to whichever angles the thesis should be analysed from (Latour, 1999; Cowan et al, 2009; Latour, 2005). Furthermore, my shared identity as a young Singaporean positioned me as an insider, despite being an outsider in terms of having not participated in the event. This contributed to the ease and depth of the interview process with my respondents as compared with an adult researcher (Alderson, 1995; Schäfer and Yarwood, 2008). Knowledge of the event was thus being 'mapped' (cf. Isabell Stengers, 1997), or co-fabricated, by both the researcher and fellow actors during the research process as I was compelled to follow the "paths and movements of the people, things, metaphors, narratives, biographies and conflicts" (Robben, 2007:368) that my respondents led me along.

3.2.1   Age: Much ado about numbers?

In choosing an age range to focus on for this research, I initially used a combination of definitions of youth from the International Olympic Committees (14-18 years old for competing athletes at YOG) and Ministry of Community

Development Youth and Sports (15-29 years old). However, such a stipulation was unintendedly derailed as I found out on three occasions that my interviewees – Kevin (32 years old), Phillip (33 years old) and Alex (33 years old)[7] – were above the stipulated age range only during the interview itself. In the end, participants' ages ranged between 16 and 33 years of age (see table 3.1). Such a supposed methodological misstep steered me into a new domain of conversations with my respondents (of whatever ages) that gained greater insight into their constructions of youthhood and whether they considered themselves as youths.

Interestingly, a significant proportion of biologically younger respondents felt that they had passed the phase of youthhood, preferring the term 'young adult' being applied to them. However, the markers used to determine who constituted a youth differed amongst them. For some, their identification of youthhood was a perpetuation of functionalists' obsession with age (Jones, 2009:21), where respondents quoted specific age ranges that are used by various national and international bodies (albeit at times inaccurately) in determining youthhood. Others tapped into the concept of 'transition' as they moved on from being a student to a working adult (Skelton, 2002; Worth, 2009). 23 year old Wendy's answer was a product of double exclusion. As a participant via a supervisory role to her secondary school students, YOG was an extension of her workspace, thus holding her in a teacher-student relationship that is entrenched within the adult-child binary (cf. Plaut, 1993; Robinson, 2000, Valentine, 1997). Additionally, she believed that the event's target audience were those in the same age group of her students and athletes, thus segregating her further. Yet, for fellow teacher Natalie (24 years old), YOG was a space for bridging the gap between her and her secondary school students as they bonded over discussions about the games.

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[7] Pseudonyms were used for all research participants.

> "YOG blurred a lot of boundaries… When we were
> cheering together, we were no longer teacher or student,
> but young passionate Singaporeans."

On the other hand, all the aforementioned 'over-aged' interviewees insisted they be considered as youths since they all believed that youthhood is a state of mind rather than age-defined. In addition, Kevin's (aged 32) definition of youth was closely tied to a set of 'acceptable' youthful behaviours that was strongly influenced by society's positive imaging of 'youth as fun' (Wulff, 1995; Hebdige, 1998; Horton and Kraftl, 2005).

> "I think young or old is actually a mental thing… You
> can be aged 50 but you are still energetic and youthful. If
> you are 20 years old but sit down every day and mope
> around, how can you say that you are young?"

Kevin's attitudes may be seen as a product of sociologists' efforts in the 1960s to promote youthhood as associated with 'cultures of youthfulness' that was delinked from age (Berger 1963; Keniston, 1970). Thus, both younger and older people alike have been increasingly encouraged to actively construct themselves as "youthful" (Ruddick, 2003). These accounts serve as an important reminder of the complexities in defining youthhood that requires us as researchers to look beyond using age as a "category of convenience" (Jeffrey, 2012). It is noteworthy that during the time of my research, the classification of youth in Singapore's state of youth report was adjusted from 15-29 to 15-35 years old, demonstrating the fluidity of this seemingly fixed categorisation of youth (Ho et al, 2010). Moreover, it presents the researcher with an inroad to granting greater agency to his/her respondents in developing young people's geographies as more attention is given to respondents' own self-definitions and lived experiences (Weller, 2006). The next section investigates further into other areas in which agency has been granted to young people in this research process.

3.2.2   *'Power to the people?' The politics of crafting realities*

> "Researchers should treat participants in their research as people, not objects to be exploited or mined for information."

<div align="right">(England, 1994)</div>

One of the aims of the project was not merely to 'inject power', but 'empower' young people in and beyond the research process (Long and Long, 1992:275). I chose to use interviews as my primary means of research since the method allows young people to give voice to their experiences and concerns rather than being subjected to adult interpretations of their lives (Heath et al, 2009). Additionally, Sin (2003) argues that methods such as interviews "champion notions of interaction, reflexivity and intersubjectivity", thus aligning well with the ontological endeavour of this thesis. I hope to challenge perceptions of participation as understood by academics and IOC to acknowledge the heterogeneous ways in which young people participate. As such, I actively recruited young people who had participated in YOG via various routes, resulting in a rhizomatic arrangement of YOG participants from all walks of life whom, in at least one point in their lives, formed an assemblage (details of participants are listed in the Table 3.1).

As part of my university's ethical review process, participants under the age of 18 years old were required to seek parental/guardian consent before they were allowed to take part in the research. While the stipulation was adhered to in this research, its objective of doing so to protect the interests of children/youth suggests the incompetence of young people as agents in their own right and thus runs counter to the foundation of this thesis. As argued by Skelton (2008), subjecting young people to such ethical guidelines is in contravention of the UNCRC. Researchers like myself are therefore left in a dilemma as they are obligated to pass through university ethics procedure yet feel strongly towards viewing young people as competent actors.

TABLE 3.1 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

No.	Name	Age at interview	Age at YOG	Form of Participation in YOG	Gender	Recruited through:	Relation to other interviewee(s):	Space of Interview
1	Simon	24	23	Volunteer	Male	Researcher's friend		Café
2	Robert	23	22	Spectator	Male	1st shared facebook post		Café
3	Lisa	23	22	Volunteer	Female	Researcher's contact	Researcher's friend/Julia's sister	Fast food joint
4	Joanne	22	21	Volunteer	Female	Lisa	Lisa's friend	Café
5	Melinda	24	23	Organiser (seconded civil service staff)	Female	Researcher's contact		Café
6	Ethan	16	15	Athlete	Male	Researcher's friend		School
7	Sally	18	17	Athlete	Female	Lisa	Lisa and Jonathan's friend	Café
8	Corinne	19	18	Athlete	Female	Researcher's friend		School
9	Julia	18	17	Spectator	Female	Lisa	Lisa's sister	Café
10	Tammy	22	21	Performer	Female	Researcher's friend		Café
11	Mark	32	31	Volunteer (teacher bringing students)	Male	Researcher's friend		School
12	Meixin	18	17	Athlete	Female	Researcher's friend	Senthil's friend	School
13	Weijie	25	24	Volunteer	Male	Researcher's friend	Peiwen's brother	Café
14	Peiwen	23	22	Volunteer	Female	Weijie	Weijie's sister	Café
15	Yingying	21	20	Volunteer	Female	Researcher's friend		Café
16	Kate	27	26	Organiser (seconded civil service staff)	Female	Researcher's friend	Alex's fiancee, Phillip's friend	Café
17	Alex	33	32	Organiser	Male	Kate	Kate's fiance, Phillip's friend	Café
18	Natalie	24	23	Spectator (teacher bringing students)	Female	2nd shared facebook post	Researcher's friend	Café
19	Kurt	21	20	Spectator	Male	2nd shared facebook post	Thomas' friend	Fast food joint
20	Thomas	21	20	Volunteer (seconded military staff)	Male	Kurt	Kurt's friend	Fast food joint
21	Wendy	23	22	Spectator (teacher bringing students)	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Fast food joint
22	Eric	27	26	Spectator/Torchbearer	Male	Researcher's contact	Researcher's friend	School

No.	Name	Age at interview	Age at YOG	Form of Participation in YOG	Gender	Recruited through:	Relation to other interviewee(s):	Space of Interview
23	Lifeng	16	15	Performer	Female	2nd shared facebook post	Mindy and Carrie's friend	
24	Mindy	16	15	Performer	Female	2nd shared facebook post	Lifeng and Carrie's friend	Fast food joint
25	Carrie	16	15	Performer	Female	2nd shared facebook post	Lifeng and Mindy's friend	
26	Samantha	23	22	Volunteer	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Fast food joint
27	Rosalind	23	22	Volunteer	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Fast food joint
28	Senthil	18	17	Athlete	Male	Meixin	Meixin's friend	Café
29	Belle	24	23	Volunteer	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Café
30	Christina	17	16	Athlete	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Café
31	Victoria	26	25	Volunteer (seconded civil service staff)	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Fast food joint
32	Yiling	29	28	Organiser (seconded civil service staff)	Female	Researcher's friend		Café
33	Aminah	19	18	Volunteer	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Café
34	Tianwei	20	19	Volunteer	Male	2nd shared facebook post		Café
35	Phillip	33	32	Organiser	Male	Kylie	Alex, Kate and Kylie's friend	Café
36	Zhenghao	23	22	Volunteer	Male	2nd shared facebook post		Café
37	Shimin	24	23	Volunteer/Torchbearer	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Café
38	Charlotte	26	25	Volunteer (seconded civil service staff)	Female	2nd shared facebook post	Kevin's fiancee	Restaurant
39	Kevin	29	28	Volunteer	Male	Charlotte	Charlotte's fiance	
40	Lauren	18	17	Athlete	Female	Researcher's friend	Olivia's sister	Fast food joint
41	Olivia	17	16	Spectator	Female	Lauren	Lauren's sister	
42	Jonathan	18	17	Athlete	Male	Sally	Sally's friend	Café
43	Kylie	24	23	Organiser	Female	Researcher's contact	Phillip's friend	Home
44	Nicole	24	23	Volunteer/Spectator	Female	2nd shared facebook post		Café

It thus was important to me to find other means to grant greater agency to my young respondents in the research process itself. To ensure that their participation was not merely tokenistic, respondents were informed on two occasions (during the recruitment process and before conducting the interview) that their involvement in the project was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any point they felt uncomfortable as similarly accorded to adult participants (Kirby, 2004).

Another route taken was through their deeper involvement in framing the research questions and shaping the research agenda for this thesis (Vanderbeck and Dunkley, 2004). My initial interview guide comprised a range of themes for discussion inspired by the Olympic values of excellence, respect, and friendship, and from within the Geographical discipline such as young people's politics and legacy (see Appendix 1 for interview schedule). Despite this initial structure of questions, I adopted a more conversational style of interviewing (cf. Smart, 2009), tailoring the depth and breadth of questions asked based on the interests of the interviewee. This led to my decision to focus on the topics participation and friendship for this thesis. In particular, the topic of friendship was chosen as respondents selected the term most frequently (56.8%) as one of three words to sum up their YOG experience (fig 3.1). Quotes abstracted from transcripts for this thesis were also left in verbatim so as to better capture respondents' expressions of their lived experiences.
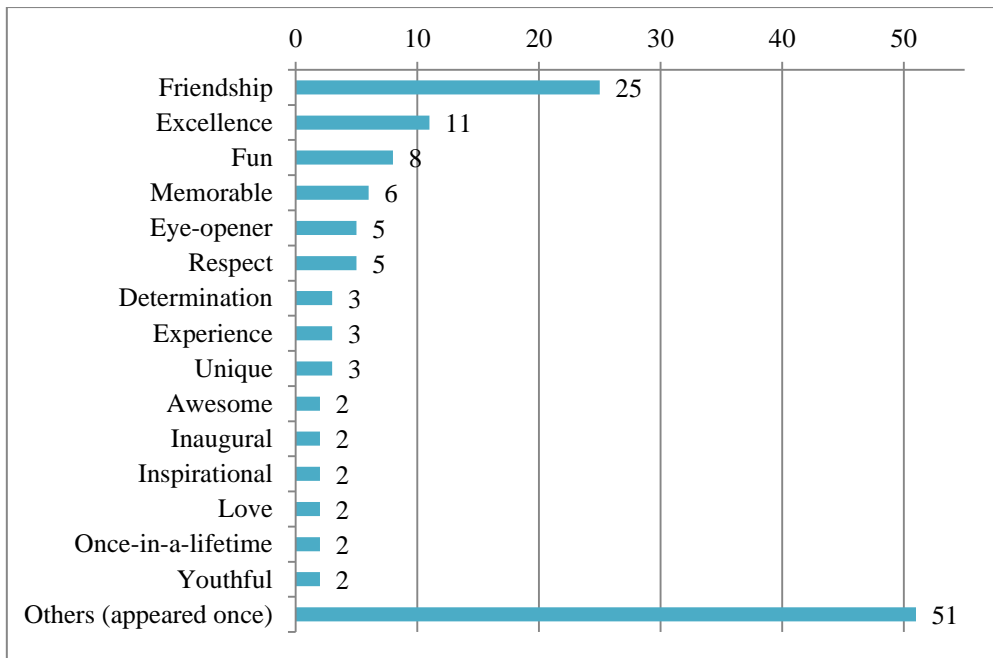
Figure 3.1 Breakdown of 3 descriptors used by respondents to summarise their experience of YOG

While I had intended for interviews to be conducted via a 'standalone method' (Hay, 2000; Longhurst, 2003), some respondents preferred being interviewed in pairs or groups. This introduced interesting perspectives to the research that amounted to more than the sum of individual responses (Hoggart et al, 2002:213). For example, I noticed that the questions posed to group interviewees at times introduced an element of controversy that led to unexpected fruitful banter (Valentine, 2005). One such instance unfolded during the group interview with friends and classmates Lifeng, Mindy and Carrie (all female and 16 years old) over the issue of the Singapore government's overspending on YOG 2010. While Carrie and Lifeng were adamant that the overspending was unnecessary, Mindy felt that spending the extra money was appropriate when weighed against the global recognition Singapore received through the event. Shortly afterwards, this discussion introduced questions on whether the acceptance of the amount spent was tied to the individual's class identity.

"Carrie: They really spent too much… especially considering the amount of junk we received from it.

Mindy: But I think it's worth it. [Carrie interjects: But they spent like 3 times their initial budget!] You pay a little bit more just to get recognition and fame for Singapore… is that such a bad thing? It's a global event. Don't you think it's worth spending? Just cut back on what they spend on big expensive cars for our ministers, can already.

Lifeng: But your parents drive such cars and are perpetually changing them!"

Yet, doing interviews in pairs or groups also presented the challenge of a more complex power field to be negotiated as certain individuals and/or views were silenced due to the dominance of a more authoritarian group participant (Valentine, 1999). This silencing also occurred unconsciously as I noticed some respondents developing a tendency to rehash responses that were given by other individuals in the group albeit in a different form. Thus, the aforementioned challenges serve as a reminder of the 'unavoidable complicity' that may emerge in the process of reality-making (Law, 2004:153). In this case, the goal to amplify young people's agency in the research process led to the manifestation of new forms of absences in young respondents' participation.

To grant respondents greater agency in the research process, I also allowed them to determine the location of the interview that would enable them to share their experiences without any potential discomfort (Heath et al, 2009). Interestingly, all interviewees (with the exception of Kylie) chose to have interviews conducted outside the space of the home, with the majority opting for cafes or fast food joints (see table 3.1). As expounded by Rose (1995), identities are in part constituted by the spaces through which individuals imagine themselves. The choice of these spaces may be intertwined with the aggressive youth-centred marketing strategies that these places have adopted which young Singaporeans have embraced as spaces of

empowerment, as opposed to the space of the home where may feel entrapped under adult surveillance (Valentine et al, 1998; Massey, 2003). Additionally, spaces such as cafes and fast food joints have become popular sites for studying among young Singaporeans, thus perhaps seen by my respondents as appropriate venues for their interview (Tee, 2003). The challenge of these spaces for interviews however was presented by non-humans which played roles in the method assemblage that ran counter to their intended functions. The next section thus examines the agency of these non-humans in shaping (both impeding and facilitating) this research project.

3.3   The importance of things

> "What, then, is an object? An object is not a passive
> clump of matter rusting in an otherwise vital universe. An
> object is *force-full*… there is not a world that first exists
> and is then populated by objects."

<div align="right">(Meehan et al, 2013:3)</div>

While there has been a call for a 'materialist return' in geographical scholarship in recent years (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Whatmore, 2006; Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Tolia-Kelly, 2012; Kirsch, 2012), less attention has been directed towards material concerns in the *practice* of geography (Paulson, 2001). In her review on using interviews as a research methodology, Valentine (2005) spotlights the audio recorder as a welcomed addition to the interviewer's toolkit due to its ability to capture interviewees' words without disrupting the flow of the interview process. However, she exposes the obstacles that the audio recorder presents to the research process, such as forestalling an interview due to the repeated expending of batteries, losing rich qualitative material due to the poor acoustics in a room or the buzzing sound of the blender in a café. I faced similar scenarios through my dependence on the audio recorder. However, rather than perceiving these situations as merely part of the "perverse law of interviewing" (Valentine, 2005:124), I argue that the agency of these objects nudges us to introduce a different way of

<div align="center">46</div>

conceptualising these interactions that diffuses a static and dualistic way of dealing with materiality. Thus, this section examines the complexities and energies of the material world that create new modes of relations in the method assemblage (Bissell, 2010; Edensor, 2011).

3.3.1 (Re)collecting materials

In composing this thesis, a range of materials was garnered from various sources including hardcopy materials (books, newspapers, magazines, government reports) and online resources (institutional websites, academic journals, blogs). In the process, an encounter with the 'non-compliance' of a key online resource for this research brought to my attention the potential of the material to disrupt the stability of the method assemblage. A year after the conclusion of the games, the official YOG website (www.singapore2010.sg) was taken offline for a period of time with no prior warning, leading to a mad scramble to retrieve any online materials from the website through other routes[8]. My conversation with interviewee Philip about this experience highlighted the different actants woven into a network that enable the presence and/or absence of online spaces, as he explained to me that the reactivation of the website required a couple of people from multiple governmental agencies to "start talking to each other". In addition to this, Phillip brought to light the tension regarding the choice between using paid or free online platforms as information storage for YOG.

> "The good thing about using free platforms like
> Wordpress for the blog, like Youtube, Twitter is that a lot
> of the contents is still floating out there. But don't take
> my word for it because at any time… you don't know…
> Youtube might decide to sell off to somebody and make
> everything private behind a pay wall."

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[8] At the point of writing, the official YOG 2010 website (www.singapore2010.sg) and its affiliate website designed to target youths of the world (www.whyohgee.com) have ceased to exist [Accessed 01 Dec 2013]. However, free online platforms linked to YOG 2010 found on the websites Youtube, Wordpress and Facebook are still in operation. This could be interpreted both as part of the disassembling of the YOG assemblage, but also indicative of the continued heavy censorship practices upheld by organisers post-event.

Phillip's quote introduces a broader issue that researchers face regarding the credibility of online sources. While there may be greater ease of access to information found in free online spaces, Clark (2005) questions the 'representativeness' of these qualitative sources due to little regulation of the web. However, I have chosen to tap into these avenues as a means to adhere to the principles of assemblage thinking that encourages the researcher to attend to multiplicity in the incommensurable 'truths' that emerge through the research event (Whatmore, 2003). These unofficial online spaces often provide youth with an avenue for self-expression and digital activism, an area which Zhang (2013) notices is growing in prominence in authoritarian democratic and censorship-heavy Singapore.

Objects also featured prominently during the interview process. Prior to the interviews, respondents were asked to bring along any objects that they felt were symbolic of their YOG experience. These objects became critical triggers for conversations as they eagerly recollected about YOG through their association with these objects (Pink, 2004). For some, these objects were brought down to the interview venues to be used in 'show-and-tell' moments between the researcher and the researched. For others, objects became mediators in relating the meanings invested in these treasured items to the researcher as respondents frequently whipped out their mobile technologies (iPads, smartphones) to substantiate their narratives. These visual stimuli were embedded within their devices' memory spaces or found on other online platforms such as blogs and Facebook sites. Thus, the interview process was extended beyond mere narrative accounts to engage a broader network of material relations that were folded into both the methods and YOG assemblage.

3.3.2   *Facebook as methodological interface*

Cognizant of the popularity of social networking websites with youths (cf. Heath et al, 2009, Evans-Cowley, 2010), Facebook became a key tool in recruiting

the 44 participants for this project through a Facebook post that was shared by friends of the author. While the choice of the platform for recruitment was fitting, the process of recruitment was not smooth-sailing. An initial Facebook plea posted in August 2011 was met with little success, with only one friend sharing the post and 5 people responding over the course of 2 weeks following the posting of the message on my Facebook wall (see Fig 3.2). It was only when a similar Facebook plea was reposted 3 months later (December 2011) did I meet the target number of research participants for this project, with 19 people responding favourably this time round in less than a week (see Fig 3.3).

Research on YOG 2010 Singapore

August 22, 2011 at 8:32pm

Hello. My friend is doing a research on YOG 2010. I know some of you were involved in one way or another, so please help him out.

Here's his message: "I am a graduate student from the National University of Singapore. Was inspired by the Youth Olympic Games that was held exactly one year ago for my research project. I would love to interview anyone who had participated in YOG 2010 and in one way or another and is willing to have a chat to relate their memories of the event to me. If so, do comment on this post and i hope to get in touch with you. Thank you!"

Fig 3.2 Facebook Plea 1

Please consider helping my friend Jared Wong out with his Masters research if you fulfill the following criteria! He is interested in finding out more about youth participation in the Youth Olympic Games 2010 and would love to talk to you if you were involved with the YOG (:

1) EITHER been involved in YOG in any way - athlete, performer, volunteer, worked for YOG, or even just watched the event and have something to say about their experience
2) between 14-29 years of age during YOG
3) Singaporean
4) OR knows someone who may fulfill the above criteria

Thank you!

Like · Comment · Unfollow Post · Share · Hide from Timeline   December 11, 2011
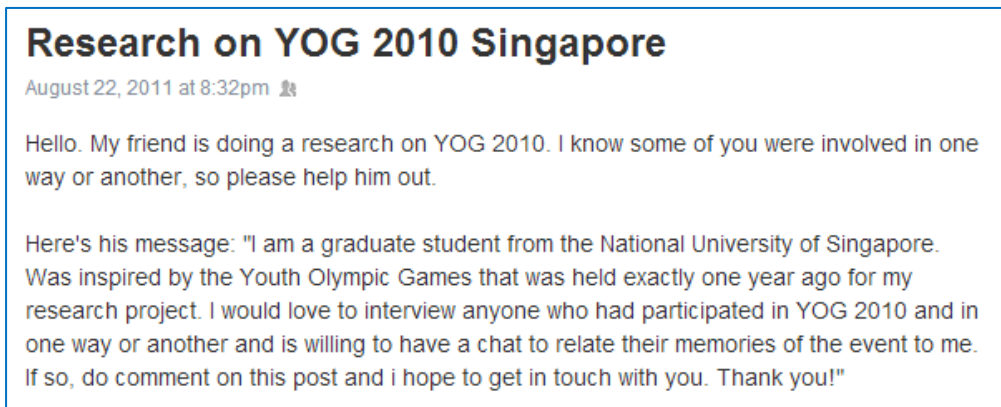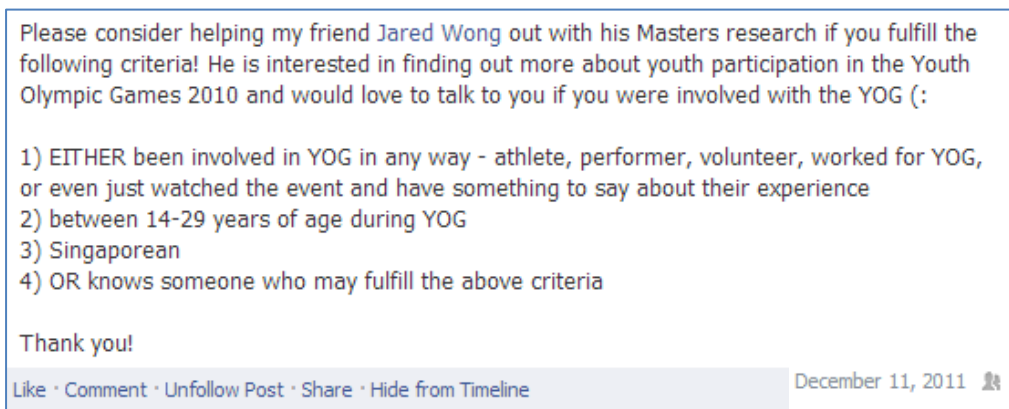
Fig 3.3 Facebook Plea 2

Upon reflection, this disparity could be a result of the different timespans of both recruitment attempts. August marked the middle of the school term while December was the school holidays for both students and teachers in Singapore. For

working individuals, December marked the winding down period of their work, thus freeing their schedules for personal activities. It was thus the convergence of these varied temporalities that led to the efficacious response from these young individuals to the 2nd Facebook plea. The experience therefore highlights the complex spatio-temporalities that cohere with the method assemblage, whilst serving as a reminder to researchers of the importance in choosing an appropriate space-time for the research.

The use of Facebook as a recruiting tool also presented a new space, and thus politics, of engagement with potential respondents. Although Facebook was a useful recruitment interface, it often led to requests from respondents to add them as friends on my personal Facebook account. While the addition of these respondents to my account granted me access to a greater set of resources in the form of photos and posts on the event, it led me to question the 'representativeness' of Facebook as a space for 'true' friendship. Furthermore, a Facebook encounter with a potential respondent, Faiz, signified the complexity between virtual spaces and offline worlds, as shown in an excerpt of my field notes below.

> "I was excited to hear from Faiz through a friend's shared post of my facebook plea for respondents, especially after he promised in his initial email that he would give me a very different, negative take on YOG. However, he seemed very cautious in his email exchanges with me to meet up for the interview, asking multiple times for the contents of discussion and wishing to vet my interview questions. Despite my assurance of confidentiality given, and alternatives presented to the option of a face-to-face interview, he stopped replying after the 4th Facebook message. Thus, I never got to interview Faiz."

On the one hand, the encounter with Faiz suggests a separation of his online identity with his offline world based on the premise of anonymity that virtual spaces offer, creating a veil that shrouds his offline identity from another online user (cf. Valentine and Holloway, 2002). On the other hand, the anxiety that Faiz showed towards the prospects of any form of interview (whether real or virtual) marks a

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practice of self-censorship that Singaporean youth have cultivated via the influence of

Singapore's political culture into the virtual sphere[9]. Thus, by following the networks

of associations that arise from the enrolment of Facebook as a recruitment interface

into the method assemblage, a complex (and politically-laden) space-time of the

research event is revealed, requiring the negotiation of the 'materially-conscious'

researcher.

3.4   Conclusion

In writing this thesis, I chose to focus on the voices of the actors that *matter*

in the assembling of this project. I set out with the goal of encouraging critical

responses within youth participation in the research process (Todd, 2012). By first

tracing the conception of this thesis, I foregrounded how my positionality as a young,

Singaporean and Olympic-interested researcher influenced my interactions with my

young respondents. These interactions led to analyses on the arbitrariness of age in

the recruitment of young people, and the politics involved in granting young people

greater agency in the research process. Attempts to get more 'in touch' with young

people in the research event also required the help of tools such as using objects to

trigger young respondents' memories of YOG and employing Facebook as a

recruitment interface. This brought to my attention how objects reshaped the method

assemblage in new ways, both enhancing and/or disordering relations whilst giving

rise to different relations of power (Sheehan. 2011). By elaborating these particular

relations between myself, young people and objects in this chapter, I do not wish to

make substantive claims on how the research event should be. Rather, I demonstrate

that an understanding of the method assemblage needs to be less driven by

universalism and stable conclusions and more adept to a language of multiplicity,

indefiniteness and flux (Law, 2004). In this same spirit, I move to the main event.

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[9] Rodan (2003) argues that the regulation of online activity by the Media Development
Authority Singapore has cultivated an apathetic and fearful citizenry that places limits on
Singaporean's online political expression.

CHAPTER 4:
GAUGING/ENGAGING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN YOG:
POSSIBILITIES OF ASSEMBLAGE

4.1   Introduction: the difference between incorporation and (meaningful) participation

Having established both the epistemological roots and methodological routes of the thesis, this chapter delves into young Singaporeans' participation in YOG, fusing the ways in which we *think* about space and young people's participation with the *doing* of participation as revealed by my interviewees. By combining assemblage-thinking and an empirically-focused approach to participation, I address the question of whether YOG was a space that enabled young people's agency and political activism during the time-space of the event (see research questions 2 and 3 in Section 1.8).

2010 was a big year for headlining youth participation around the world. Not only was the first ever YOG staged, the United Nations launched the year (commencing 12 August 2010 – 2 days before the opening of YOG) as the 'International Year of Youth' in commemoration of the first 'International Youth Year' twenty-five years ago. With the theme of promoting dialogue and mutual understanding among young people, the year-long activities culminated in the form of a global youth conference titled 'UN High Level Meeting on Youth' on 25-26 July 2011. This is aligned with the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) wider commitment to enable children and young people to express their views and be involved in the development of policies, programmes and activities that affect them (Rogge, 2010). Yet, emerging from the event were counter-narratives by young participants against such lofty ambitions (cf. Skelton, 2007). One such account made on the United Families International Blog by Ashley Tucker, a young female

participant at the UN meeting, captured her frustration over the irony between the event's goals and its actual execution.

> "I sat for hours listening to delegate after delegate in turn say the same thing- 'we need youth to be involved in government. Youth participation is critical for our future. The involvement of the youth is not just for tomorrow but today!'... Yet the youth attending were not allowed to participate in anything. The 'year of youth' is a big hypocritical joke. There are no round tables, youth participation, discussion, or input taken; only a one-sided conference declaration that was completed before any of the young people arrived."

(Tucker, 2011)

As exemplified by Ashley, participation is not about mere incorporation of young people into adult spaces, but the need to establish environments of possibility for young voices to be part of (Hill et al, 2004). What has emerged in the fabric of society is more commonly a patchwork of initiatives introduced by organisations that attempt to promise, yet err towards pacifying, young people with participation opportunities in 'public' decision making (Jupp, 2008). These accounts foreground the next challenge that scholars face in bringing young people's participation to the fore. As shown in Section 2.2.1, academia has been successful in assisting the rhetoric of young people's participation within policy and practice, but less effective in examining the political nature of these participatory initiatives. Less attention has been devoted to analysing the quality of such avenues of participation – such as asking whether these spaces have facilitated the conveying of young people's experiences, and how they are received by other stakeholders, especially amongst the collision of different voices (Percy-Smith, 2006; Hinton et al, 2008). As such, enabling young people to participate meaningfully requires the intertwining of spaces of possibilities and empowering relations of engagement.

In addition, Ashley's vignette is merely one voice in a chorus of young individuals that come together in global events such as YOG. Scholarly work on young people's participation has often tapped into the structure-agency dualism as a theoretical framing, falling prey to the trappings of a dualistic understanding that breeds the assumption of the state and/or adults holding power while young people begin as powerless victims (see section 1.8). In this manner, one loses sight of the wide ranging interplay of forces that are mobilized, enrolled, translated, channelled, brokered, and bridged by a plethora of actors when one examines the politics of an event. This is where using assemblage thinking contributes to scholarly research on young people's participation, paying attention to the social and material practices of different actors that are drawn together to temporarily establish order within a given setting (Davies, 2012:274). In addition, assemblage thinking provides a topological appreciation of the workings of power (Allen, 2011). As argued by Bergen (2010), politics is an orientation that is at the heart of every assemblage, arising through interactions among various actors as they co-exist, jostle and interrupt one another. Using this new way of viewing space and participation thus better equips us in tackling IOC President Jacques Rogge's proclamation of YOG 2010 being 'perfection' (cf. Parry, 2010b), in particular the agenda on whether the event was able to promote *meaningful* participation among young participants.

4.2   Tracing associations: The power of words

Thinking about YOG as an assemblage does not exclude the influence of representations. Assemblage thinkers acknowledge that actors do not 'act' in the world independent of socialized knowledge, discourse and scientific text. Instead, it is in their interest to understand how these representations are threaded through the plethora of actors and relations in an assemblage (Robbins and Marks, 2010). This emerged when my respondents analysed whether YOG was a space for youth participation through thinking about the power of the words 'Olympic' and 'youth' in

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the name of the event. The words were held in a binary relationship, with 'Olympic' construing global importance and thus the basis for garnering, and gathering attention on, youth participation, while 'youth' (seen as minor, younger, less important) ironically marginalised that effect. The question that emerged accordingly was, amidst the imagined totalizing epistemology, which word possessed a greater power of influence in the coming together of the event.

To my respondents, the establishment of the modern day Olympics as a global brand due to its illustrious history made YOG an appropriate platform to showcase their talents to the world. This was exemplified by Nicole, who felt that YOG managed to successfully 'upscale' the issue of young people's participation.

> "Because it has the word Olympic in it, people pay more respect to YOG… People are willing to travel for Olympic level events like these. If it were just another youth event you might think it might be amateur-ish, but this one wasn't."

Nicole's quote plays into the rhetoric of youths as 'lesser adults' (Skelton, 2010), unable to gain serious attention from society due to their subordinate position. In her interpretation, the Olympic brand held a stronger connection than the term youth in the building of the assemblage. However, such a perspective on the power of the Olympics being a global space of youth participation is complicated by Kevin as he believed that tagging the Olympic word to the event created more obstacles than opportunities in promoting youth participation from around the world. Having experienced the selection process for the Olympic Games previously himself as an athlete, he explains that IOC's selection criteria of participating athletes for all Olympic events (including YOG) only permits the best three athletes in a particular sport discipline to represent a country at the games. This criteria acted as a structural barrier to young people's participation should more than three of the world's top athletes in a particular sport come from the same country.

Furthermore, Kevin argued that the scale of YOG was kept intentionally smaller by organisers than the senior event, thus presenting a stumbling block to attracting a greater and more talented pool of young athletes. In critiquing the organisers' role at curtailing the scale of YOG, Wendy's response perpetuated the conflation of youth with (small) scale as she identified the youth of the event (both in terms of the profile of its participants and the age of the event) as the cause for the event's inability to garner greater attention for young people's participation.

> "Because it's a youth kind of thing, I don't know whether the organisers put a lot of effort in looking out for the youth, or thinking they are quite young so YOG doesn't have to be on a grand scale. Olympics is usually such a big thing, but then YOG first time so the organisers might have thought 'just try out and see how it goes'. I thought that probably they should have given youths more respect in organizing stuff and make the event more important. I don't know whether this idea of youth as falling short of what adults can do is the reason. Like we still get looked down on. We will never be as big as the official one. We are just the little brother."

Prominent young athletes were not the only participants that the event failed to draw into its assemblage. The media highlighted the inability of YOG to attract globally recognized youth icons to the event, including the withdrawal of sporting legends Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt as sport ambassadors of the event (Parry, 2010a), and music star Sean Kingston (Chua, 2010) who withdrew from performing the event's theme song at the last minute. Thus, what resulted was the assembling of a body of participants that, while international in profile, was less prominent in their fields.

4.3   Routes to participation

Despite being unable to garner the participation of prominent youth figures to raise the profile of the youth event, YOG paved the way for the translation of other

young people into its assemblage, drawing together diverse energies that were united around the premise of showcasing young people's excellence through their participation (albeit with different interpretations of this idea – as explored in section 4.4). This section works through the routes to participating in YOG for some of my respondents and how, in choosing to participate, their daily rhythms and routines were disrupted in the face of the space-time structuring of the event (cf. Section 2.3.2).

To participate in YOG, many of my respondents had to alter their everyday spatialities and temporalities. University student Yingying decided to participate as a YOG volunteer as it did not affect her studies in any way. This is because her educational institution (Nanyang Technological University Singapore) was designated as the Olympic village for athletes and thus postponed the commencement of her university semester until after the closure of YOG.

On the other hand, other students faced greater disruption to their daily school routine due to their participation in the event. One such example was Mindy, Lifeng and Carrie, whose involvement was paved by their secondary school's participation for most secondary three students (ninth grade, aged 14-15 years old) in the mass display performance at the closing ceremony. To cater to the demands of the rehearsal schedule, these students were regularly subject to school timetable changes with an increasing intensity of practices (and accordingly, decreasing focus on studies) as the games approached. Whilst the replacement of classes for rehearsals was a celebrated move during the lead-up to YOG, it consequently had knock-on effects on my respondents, leaving them with less revision time in their 'O' level year as their teachers delayed the completion of the syllabus, which was out-of-line with the usual window of time given by their school for examination preparation in other years.

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For Lauren, finding the balance between school and YOG commitments proved to be too great a challenge. To ensure that she was on track to qualify for the games, Lauren eventually opted to take a year off school to train in her sport full-time, which was seen by her peers as a risky decision due to entrenched attitudes amongst Singaporeans that a young person's priority should be education and that other pursuits remain secondary (cf. Section 1.5).

> "Only my parents supported this decision. No one else.
> They all thought that my studies should come first. Even
> my own teammates told me that I was making a stupid
> choice, telling me that I'm not going to succeed. I
> couldn't understand why no one wanted to support me
> and see things from my perspective."

Young working adults also faced similar situations such as having to apply for annual leave, making special work arrangements, or even delaying their transition into the working world so as to be able to participate in the event. In addition, the decision to participate in YOG as an organiser or volunteer was deemed by the friends and family of some youths as an undesirable career move. This was clearly demonstrated by Alex while reflecting on his initial concerns about joining the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (SYOGOC) due to the event's unique time-structure.

> "Since YOG would conclude by 26 August 2010, we all
> knew that we would be out of a job by end 2010. So it
> wasn't exactly the most secure job, and they paid us
> peanuts for what we did… Plus the job required very
> specific skills which are not transferrable outside of such
> large-scale event planning."

Despite the inconveniences that YOG brought for its participants with its distinctive space-time structuring,[10] it was precisely this extra-ordinary quality of the event, not only in terms of its temporal uniqueness but the spectacular space that

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[10] By this, I mean the distinctiveness for young people. At this age, young Singaporean lives are extremely rigidly structured in terms of time and space. Involvement in YOG brought substantive disruption to that.

propelled the desire for young people to participate in the games. In sum, this section has evinced how young participants negotiated their everyday spatialities and temporalities so as to cater to the spatio-temporal specificity of YOG in being enrolled into the assemblage (see Section 2.3.2). The next section will analyse the experiences of their participation and address whether meaningful participation was achieved amidst the spectacle of the games.

4.4   People, practices and participation

When recalling their participatory experiences, my respondents often took reference from the various spaces they were part of during the space-time of the event. In this way, these spaces served as physical locales whereby heterogeneous elements (peoples, ideas, objects) from elsewhere merge and find expression in a particular way through their interactions (Cresswell, 2011). However, these spaces were not confined to official YOG venues (18 competition venues and the Youth Olympic Village), but extended into other public sites in Singapore and also virtual sites that were fused into the YOG assemblage as young people played the role of intermediate entities in establishing associations between these spaces and the event. As such, I have chosen to elucidate the complexity of young people's participation in the games through spotlighting the back office, the front stage, and alternative spaces of participation.

4.4.1.   The back-office: An active but arrested workplace

For young organisers, working in SYOGOC was different from prior work experiences. The staff in the office were more youthful and many of them were presented with job opportunities that were otherwise unavailable to them outside of the YOG assemblage due to a combination of their young age and relatively limited work experience. Yet it was not the people *per se* but the relations that emerged, characterised by images of youthhood as fun, energetic and spontaneous (cf. Wulff, 1995), which they believed encouraged participation in the work environment.

"Kate: There was a great sense of fun working at YOG. There was lots of vibrancy in the office. We even played badminton over each other's work cubicles! And our bosses joined in too! So there was a great energy among us.

Alex: Yes the environment was very youthful. Everyone was very on [enthusiastic] to do things. I think our age was the advantage. Based on the limited amount of time we had to organise the games, I don't think you put a bunch of old people in you can expect them to pull off what we did. It would be too tiring and halfway through they would be sick of it."

To Kate and Alex, the positive youthful energy in the workspace helped their team navigate the power topologies of the YOG assemblage, as different actors with varied interests and agendas jostled against one another to make their presence felt. They shared that the ideal to showcase young people via the Olympic values of excellence, respect and friendship at times came in conflict with the dispersed set of interests that were surfaced by other institutional bodies in the assemblage, impairing the emancipatory potential of young people's participation in the face of corporate agendas (Barnes, 2007; Cahill et al, 2007; Percy-Smith, 2010).

"Kate: We were very idealistic because we actually wanted the games to be about showcasing youth through the three Olympic values. We actually believed in it! But different groups of people had different agendas. They each wanted different things. So when people asked us to put their politicians right smack in the middle of our event when we feel it should be a youth, we were really frustrated."

Occasionally, the conflict of different aims among various institutional bodies left some young organisers feeling like they had 'no space' to navigate these geographies of power. Such was the experience of Kylie. She had to work as a mediator between multiple organisations on the project she was assigned and was not able to leave her imprint on the project despite having laboured over it for months. Her reason for this sentiment alluded to the dense and stable arrangements of power in

the assemblage that were bound by the connections both between and within these

organisations. This was demonstrated when she shared in detail about the difficulties

she faced in decision-making processes on the project.

> "Jared: So how did the name of your project come about?
>
> Kylie: The organisation decided it. I wasn't involved in this entire discussion. Many a time lots of the decisions were made on the senior level, so as staff we were only left to carry out the decisions made. There were names that were thrown around earlier that I preferred. But in the end SYOGOC went with the final name, which I felt was so lame.
> …
>
> Jared: What was the working experience like on this project?
>
> Kylie: It was very difficult to do anything. The external organisation I had to work with was very bureaucratic. Because they made decisions via a very large group of people, many a time, work was frustrating and they questioned why we did everything, going through so many layers. It really killed the fun in it."

Despite being confronted by the dense and complex institutional landscape of

authority, young people remade the assemblage in their own terms via creative

practices that advanced their personal goals of conceiving YOG as a positive youth-

centred space. For example, Kate believed that featuring positive stories of young

people's abilities through her job despite receiving demands by other organisations to

headline prominent adult figures tied to the games (mentioned above) was her

personal attempt to promote YOG as a space for youth empowerment. These stories

were captured from different spheres of the games, ranging from Singapore's soccer

team's win against their larger-built African opponents to a young Singaporean boy's

willpower to chase after the Olympic torch wearing only his flip-flops. Alex suggested

that the creative forces generated to destabilise the assemblage was age-dependent,

perceiving young people as creative agents of change that older people were unable to

achieve (Saldanha, 2002).

"By the time certain matters reached us to handle, we
pretty much didn't have much of leeway. The big
principles were already set in stone. What we did do was
that we meandered around the principles and try to play
around with the wordings. I think having us youth around
was good because we knew how to play around the
system you know?"

While these moments demonstrated the capacity of young people and their

actions in moulding the YOG assemblage towards promoting young people's

meaningful participation, contribution and achievement, there were also other

moments that demonstrated the limits to their capacity in shaping the assemblage

(Davies, 2013). These may be enacted through legitimating conventions that mediate

the authority of institutional bodies woven into the assemblage (Allen, 2011). An

example of this was when Phillip was asked by IOC to take down an online blog entry

that was an opinion piece he had written on a performance in the event. This

demonstrated the ability of distant organisations (in this case, IOC that is

headquartered in Switzerland) to make their presence felt at close quarters, at the same

time inundating the voice of young people. Rather than viewing this incident as a

simple act of suppression by those who 'hold' power, Phillip perceived the experience

as an opportunity to test how far these relations of power in the assemblage may be

stretched to (re)define how young people may participate.

"I thought that, since what I wrote about was already out
in the news, I am not breaking any rules right? But then
later on in the night, I received a call from Switzerland
asking for the post to be taken down. That was a
reminder to me that IOC is an organisation of great
history, legacy, tradition, and have a reputation to
maintain. But I do feel that the new media ball game is
something very new and you need to constantly push to
find what is acceptable and what's not. So I guess I found
the mark."

On other occasions, young organisers' efforts at encouraging young people's

participation in the event were curtailed by other forces that were brought into

association with the assemblage. In finding another avenue for young people's participation in the YOG event, Alex and his team designed a virtual YOG space of engagement inspired by popular online games among youth such as World of Warcraft and Second Life. However, in this instance, it was the vendor's inability to execute the final product that curtailed this route of participation. Furthermore, having young people's opinions in eliciting participation did not guarantee the establishment of stronger associations between young people and the event in the long run, as demonstrated by Kylie's negative review of a project titled 'Create Action Now (CAN)' which her team, comprised of mainly young individuals, created to publicise YOG that did not gain traction among youth in Singapore.

> "We created the CAN event as a publicity tool for YOG
> with a mascot called Blobbie. This was one of the
> 'radical' things we did. But it didn't quite work and in the
> end, CAN was canned. On hindsight, it just didn't have
> anything spectacularly exciting when we conceived it."

Kylie's example thus emphasises that encouraging young people's participation goes beyond placing a few youths in a position of authority and granting these privileged few 'a say' in the decision-making process. Instead, generating meaningful participation requires young people more generally to take part, be involved and, in so doing, establish stronger connections to the assemblage. It is also important that their contributions are recognised and acted upon, otherwise the participation is meaningless.

In reviewing young organisers' relations to SYOGOC, their involvement was largely constrained by the stable orderings of the organisation in the assemblage. This is aligned with Percy-Smith's (2010:111) contention that participation on adult/organisational terms "reinforces, rather than contests, the power inequalities between adults and young people". The next section moves from back to front stage of YOG and argues that a vision akin to MacCannell's (1973) description of 'staged

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authenticity' was presented in this sphere of the assemblage that further constricted

opportunities for meaningful youth participation.

4.4.2. *Mere pawns on a chessboard? Questioning youth participation on YOG stage*

> "Sporting spectacles, like spectacle more generally, allow
> the state to mobilize citizens in ways that create an
> illusion of participation, without allowing any actual
> citizen input into the process."

> (Koch, 2013:44)

In a news article covering the inspiration behind YOG's performance

segments during the opening ceremony, journalists Chow and Tan (2010) praised the

organisers' choice to feature Singaporean youth's 'can-do' spirit, not only in terms of

youth being at the centre of the story on stage, but also behind-the-scenes as

organisers made the effort to consult young people in the process of composing the

storyline. This seemed to be a perfect opportunity to bring together young people's

interests in cultural forms such as dance and music with the public political sphere in

their participatory pathway (Butler and Princeswal, 2010). However, similar to

Ashley's scenario in section 4.1, such a means of participation is only made

meaningful when other actors in the assemblage similarly acknowledge (and therefore

act with this knowledge) young people's participatory potential. In the case of YOG,

it seemed that *doing* became the larger focus instead of *thinking* how young people

could participate meaningfully. This was demonstrated by performers Lifeng and

Carrie, who realised through the course of their group discussion that the lack of

communication between choreographers and young performers during rehearsals led

to their difficulty in recalling the meaning behind the actions in their performance.

> "Jared: So do you still remember what the meanings
> behind the shapes that you were tasked to do on stage?
>
> Carrie: Some were quite obvious. The bird was actually a
> dove… it's about peace.

Lifeng: But what about the star?

Carrie: Well… The star's cute. Maybe like idol or something?

Jared: So the choreographers didn't explain it to you?

Lifeng: I don't think so. They were more concentrated on getting us to know where our positions were and where to go. They didn't have the time to explain to us what was going on."

Lifeng and Carrie's lack of knowledge of what they were doing and why, even though they were doing it, demonstrates how actors in the assemblage are unaware of the motivations behind their practices as their actions become so naturalised (in this case, regimented) that it is unthinkingly reproduced yet affectively driven in expression (Koch, 2013). Their experience is a very telling context of the way in which the YOG assemblage was ordered. Participation was constrained by the organisation to tokenism, where young people were given "little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions" (Hart, 1992:9). Such a conception of participation bears resonance to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where participants in the mass displays during the opening and closing ceremonies seemed to be devoid of individual agency and mere pieces of a bigger 'participatory' picture in showcasing a unified vision of a harmonious and perfect society (Luo, 2010).

In other cases, being subjected to mechanical participatory ways in YOG left some respondents frustrated as they felt disregarded as intelligible actors in and by the organisational structure. Belle, a volunteer who was tasked to distribute souvenir packs to spectators at the opening and closing ceremonies, was disillusioned when she felt a barrier develop between organisers and her fellow volunteers in respecting their suggestions, leading to the perpetuation of inefficient processes in the assemblage.

> "I felt nothing more than a listener. A tasker supposed to carry out the task I'm told to do. I won't know and can't change what's going on up there [in the organisation] as well. I think the whole organisation was run like a military event. You don't know a lot of the 'confidential' things going on behind. You don't have control over anything."

The control over how young people participated in YOG was further constricted by organisers' stereotypes of how youth act (or *should* act), which at times came into tension with young people's imagination of themselves. As argued by Hill et al (2004:82), adult's perceptions – in terms of young people's capacities and adult's desire to maintain their own position in relation to young people – are often the foremost barriers to young people's participation. These stereotypes may unintentionally lead to a reordering of the assemblage that may undermine young people's participation further. One such incident was faced by Thomas, a volunteer at the closing ceremony, who felt uncomfortable with the instructions given by the commentators of the event to let loose and do whatever they wanted on stage following the conclusion of the event.

> "After the announcement, a few people started throwing bottles, flying all around, hitting people. And the organisers actually continued encouraging it. You could see from the audience at the stands, especially families that were there, they were looking at us young people disgusted by our actions. It got out of hand. I honestly thought that it was embarrassing. I was hoping that they wouldn't show it on TV. That was not good for us youth at all. Here you want to encourage people to respect the youth, yet you ask them to create havoc and mess around! It's like bringing us back into the stereotypes in society that we are already trapped within. We are actually much more mature than that."

In Thomas' situation, what was assumed by organisers to be youth's notion of fun instead fed into society's anxiety over youths' unruly behaviour, leaving them trapped in a legacy of the past that runs counter to the event's goal of freeing young people from such negative stereotypes. Thomas' fears materialised when a youtube

video that captured the scene was embroiled into the YOG assemblage. Captioned as 'Uncontrollable YOG @ Closing Ceremony', the video portrays youth participants as riotous and disrespectful as they threw water bottles around while the Singapore national anthem played in the background (See fig 4.1). The unexpected translation of objects such as the video into the assemblage inevitably negates efforts by various actors to reconfigure the spatialities of young people's participation via the event.

Fig 4.1 Image of youtube video capturing 'rowdy' youth at YOG closing ceremony[11]

The stringent measures by organisers in hopes of controlling the assemblage did not always produce the outcome that they hoped for. One such instance of YOG's inability to connect with young people was when youth's non-participation was made visible at several event venues. As argued by Zillman et al (1989), spectators and

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[11] Video available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jnq8PKnmJ28> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]

performers possess a symbiotic relationship in the making of the event. As such, the presence of spectators in the stands cheering athletes on is of equal importance as the athletes' performance on the competition grounds in the composition of such mega event assemblages. In the case of YOG, however, many of the competition venues were plagued with rows of empty seats despite organisers' pitch of competition tickets being sold out months before the start of the event (see fig 4.2).

Fig 4.2 Empty seats seen at one of the YOG competition venues[12]

Such a sight was vividly recalled by Melinda, who had brought foreign friends to one of the competitions but was surprised by the poor turnout.

> "You just see a big gap before you saw some secondary students in the next column… That was embarrassing. It came across as Singaporeans can't really be bothered about YOG. I don't think it gives the world a good impression about our support of youth excellence."

However, the Singaporeans that were labelled by Melinda as unconnected with the YOG event were found to be young Singaporean students themselves (Lee, 2010, Lim and Wong, 2010). While Singapore's Ministry of Education's bulk

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[12]Image available from: <http://www.transitioning.org/2010/08/21/sold-out-but-seats-empty/> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]

purchase of 80,000 tickets to be distributed to local students was intended to enable

students' spectatorship of YOG, the practice of allocating tickets to students in local

schools became a combination of persuasion and coercion as teachers such as Natalie

discovered their students' lack of interest in attending YOG competition events.

> "We tried to match tickets with the co-curricular
> activities in school and made it compulsory for them to
> attend. They could even leave school early to go watch
> the competitions. But even then, we still had lots of
> leftover tickets. Especially for those weird sports or non-
> important matches, nobody wanted to go. School was
> more important to them."

Empty seats were also a regular sight at YOG performance venue Celebration

@ Marina Bay, a stage that was setup by organisers with the aim to showcase local

and overseas youth performers (see fig 4.3).

Fig 4.3 Empty seats seen at Celebration @ Marina Bay[13]

However, unlike the competition venues, the reason behind the failure of

encouraging youth involvement in this space was due to a weak arrangement of social,

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[13]Image available from: <http://alvinology.com/2010/08/18/celebrationmarina-bay-concert-fail/> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]

spatial and temporal relations. The poor location and timing of performances arranged by organisers meant that young people were unaware and/or unable to locate this avenue of participation. These sentiments were shared by Shimin, who was a volunteer designated to the performance venue.

> "The area was very new. They only did up the area in time for YOG. So a lot of people really don't know that place existed in Singapore. Especially on weekdays, when everyone is working really nobody. We felt really bad for the performers. I don't know if the organisers and performers expected such a response too."

Thus, the above elucidations suggest how young people detached themselves from the main assemblage due to the constrained, tokenistic and impersonal routes of participation that were granted to them by organisers at the aforementioned venues. By choosing not to participate in these YOG spaces, I argue that these young people were actively doing politics, challenging adult's definition of what they should or should not being doing in a space that was meant to be for them. Furthermore, the empty seats not only served as poignant reminders of YOG's inability to engage young people, as evidenced by their non-participation in the official time-spaces of the games, but also highlight the liveliness of materials' transformative power in the assemblage. The distribution of the image of the empty seats through the assistance of media images and reports became a point of disruption to the seeming cohesiveness of the YOG assemblage that was being painted in official rhetoric. Following the emergence of these reports halfway through the event, organisers rushed to rectify the problem by reselling tickets to walk-ins should seats be unfilled once a competition session commenced, thus destabilising relations in the assemblage (Lim and Wong, 2010). In this way, the empty seat became an agent of change in reordering the membership to the YOG assemblage, enrolling new participants who bore greater interest in the event as young Singaporean students detached themselves from the assemblage.

4.4.3   Creating their own spaces of participation: Young people's activism in YOG

While the main event presented many barriers to young people's meaningful participation, other routes of participation were carved out from the main assemblage by young people themselves. Allen and Cochrane (2010:1171) argue that thinking of authority as a negotiation among various actors in the assemblage "opens up the prospect of all manner of persuasive, and potentially manipulative, ploys to skew agendas and steer targets in directions that may have not been fully anticipated by 'national' actors". This section thus highlights four junctures in the interview process where my respondents tapped into a rich and complex vein of tactics to move beyond the seemingly bounded YOG event towards something 'emancipatory *sin fronteras*' for them (cf. Aitken and Plows, 2010:332).

Eric, who volunteered to run a segment of the YOG torch relay, achieved meaningful participation in the event through an adherence to, and skillful negotiation of, the codes and structures in the assemblage set in place by the organisation that allowed for changes to its component parts within the organisation's defined parameters. Initially allocated by organisers to run a route closer to his home, Eric appealed to SYOGOC via email to change a route that was nearer to his alma mater as he felt the place bore greater to meaning to him.

> "I saw online that the torch relay route passes by my old school. So I wrote in to request to run that leg. I felt more connected to that leg as I have fond memories of that area being an alumni and I've continued contributing to the school after graduation. I'm glad I did it as it was a very significant moment to me when I passed the flame at the front gate of the school to a current student. It symbolized something meaningful to me."

Another tactic that successfully enabled more meaningful participation for youth in YOG was through the aggregation of other youth organisations with the YOG assemblage. One such occurrence was a tie-up between the Global Scholars and

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Leaders Conference[14] (GSLC) and YOG. Nicole, who signed up as a GSLC volunteer after missing the official registration date for volunteering in YOG, revealed how GSLC made visible young people's capability to make decisions that can lead to their positive participation in society.

> "The person that started GSLC was a youth himself. He came up with the idea, got a few partners, and then liaised with a friend who was working with SYOGOC. He found out ways which we could get involved in YOG alongside the conference proceedings. This was a great selling point for our international delegates."

Despite successfully negotiating the tie-up, GSLC committee members had to employ creative tactics that involved greater temporal and spatial intersection of GSLC and YOG to help GSLC attendees participate more actively in the YOG assemblage.

> "We wanted to work to establish closer ties with YOG. Like we wanted to get the delegates to volunteer for a day but SYOGOC said it was not possible because volunteers needed training and could not only volunteer for a day… we also wanted to get delegates to stay in the Youth Olympic Village but they said that it was only for YOG athletes and volunteers. So we booked a ballroom that was also a YOG competition venue to run our conference talks on some days during YOG. Then we tried to slot in YOG events that the delegates could go and see during break time or could catch on the television screens in the venue."

Other forms of socio-spatial negotiations of the event were less amicable, leading to the emergence of resistant political identities among youth that ran counter to the political authority of the centre. YOG volunteer Lisa, related how a common displeasure among young volunteers with their designated attire led to a concerted decision to dress different from organisers' stipulated attire during their event.

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[14] The Global Scholars and Leaders Conference is an international youth conference that was started by a group of Singaporean youth as a platform for international youth leaders to discuss what youth can do to improve the development of the world. Its first meeting was held in conjunction with YOG between 8th and 15th August 2010.

"We didn't wear our uniforms because we thought it looked like curtains. The jumper suit given was really ugly. And our venue was by the beach so it was going to be so hot wearing it. So we decided to just wear the casual YOG attire. They insisted that we wear the jumper suit, but as a team we agreed we would not. It was our little form of rebellion."

Another example of young people's tactics to challenge actions taken by organisers with more far-reaching effect on the YOG assemblage was through their use of online spaces to express opinions about issues related to YOG. In particular, two incidents during YOG received wide responses from Singaporean youth. These incidents are not only vignettes of political action taken by young Singaporeans, but also indication of the rhizomatic potential of objects in bringing together young people's political action. The first arose from a picture that was taken and uploaded on an online platform by a youth volunteer of one of the meals served to him during the event (see Fig 4.4).

Fig 4.4 Photograph taken by volunteer of his meal provided by SYOGOC that garnered significant public attention[15]

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[15] Image available from: <http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2010/08/youth-olympic-games-meals-fit-for-a-king.html> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]

Captioned by the photographer with the words "even my dog is fed better food", young people were galvanised into action to seek for more equal treatment among all participants (whether they were officials, athletes or volunteers). One person who took action himself with regards to this issue was Thomas, having been one of the volunteers who received the unpalatable meal that day.

> "I agreed with whatever was posted online and wanted to share my thoughts too. I was thankful he did it first. Seriously the food was crap as compared to what was served to athletes and officials. We didn't deserve it."

Another organiser-led initiative that received opposition from young participants was a song and cheer created by organisers with the purpose of providing an outward expression of the spirit of YOG. Organisers enlisted popular local singer JJ Lin to promote the cheer among youth. However, criticism from young people ensued when the official video of the cheer was released as many youth found the moves cheesy and unrelatable (Leong, 2011).

> "Kurt: They were trying to be youthful, but getting a lot of youth involved does not make it a youthful event. And just because they think that JJ Lin is a popular singer among youth, just because he did the cheer doesn't mean that youth will like it too. I think that was a very bad assumption. Obviously Singaporean youth have brains as well. They were just trying too hard."

Political satires of the cheer made by young people emerged through prose, images (see fig 4.5) or videos that gained significant attention in the virtual sphere. This material asserts young people's ability to "reinterpret [cultural youth forms instituted by other actors], invent new forms from their own productive creativity and conspire to render commercial forms obsolete" (Valentine et al, 1998:24). Furthermore, in these examples, online spaces such as Facebook and Twitter became their space of civic engagement while objects such as the lunchbox and cheer became the catalysts for political awakening.

Fig 4.5 Examples of images (centre and right) shared by young people that mocks organisers' YOG song and cheer (left image)[16]

Thus, to participate more meaningfully in the YOG assemblage, political action was required on the part of young people. As shown in this section, youth activism came in multitudinous ways, from deepening and negotiating socio-spatial relations with, to pronounced acts of resistance against, SYOGOC. Tracing such moments also highlights the role of space and objects, and their potential as fellow actors to alter the composition of the whole assemblage in support of the goal to stimulate more meaningful participation for young people during YOG.

4.5   Conclusion

This chapter has been a testament to young Singaporeans' participatory potential. To participate in YOG, many young Singaporeans had to make adjustments to their everyday lifeworlds in various ways (section 4.3). These were seen by them as small hurdles as compared to the perceived chance of being part of a global event with the ideals of promoting youth excellence to a wider audience (section 4.2).

However, the *quality* of young people's participation remained tightly controlled by institutional actors such as IOC and SYOGOC, especially within official spaces such as the working environment in SYOGOC (section 4.4.1), on

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[16] Left image available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-OHxeY_4WE> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]
Centre image available from: <http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2010/06/the-mrbrown-show-oh-yeah.html> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]
Right image available from: <http://www.mrbrownshow.com/2010/06/07/the-mrbrown-show-oh-yeah/> [Accessed 01 Jan 2014]

performance stages and competition venues (section 4.4.2). These mechanical and unpalatable routes garnered varied responses from young people, ranging from unmindful, discontented and/or absent participation in the YOG assemblage. Yet, young people were not mere victims of the organisational structures in the assemblage. As seen in section 4.4.3, youthful political agency emerged through the imbrication of other objects and spaces as young people carved out their own terms of participation, whether through skillful negotiation of defined institutional parameters or tactics that articulated 'alternative scripts' to those that were conceived by organisational bodies.

Looking at young people's participation through the lens of assemblage thinking has supported my aim to analyse dynamic forces and actors at play that construct the YOG event. As evinced by Gallagher (2008:145), to look at young people's political agency more intently requires looking beneath the camouflage of adults dominating young people and untangling webs of volatile relationships with different actors, like "lifting a smoothing stone to discover a chaotic mess of insects teeming in the earth below". Choosing assemblage as an analytical framing not only accentuates the messiness of young people's participation in YOG, but also reveals a dynamic topology of power where different actors come to the fore to assemble different realities, at different moments, and in different spaces of participation. By doing so, issues of youth participation may be broadened from entrenched, generalised and static understandings, to complex, dynamic and relational engagements that capture more fully these socio-spatial encounters.

CHAPTER 5:
FRIENDSHIP ASSEMBLAGES AND YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

Fig 5.1 Olympian Tommy Godwin then (during 1948 Olympics) now (2008) [17]

"To take part in the [1948 London] Olympic Games was a wonderful thing. It was the youth of the world getting together and you just enjoyed yourself… the friendship and camaraderie you have."

--- Vignette from Tommy Godwin: British Olympic track cyclist and medalist (Saner, 2008)

5.1   Introduction

Through participation, friendships among young participants were forged. Evinced from the vignette above, participants remember most fondly friendships made during the Olympic event. This chapter analyses whether YOG exemplified a space of/for friendship. As highlighted by Bunnell et al (2012), space plays an important role in the making, maintenance and dissolution of friendships. Echoing their sentiments, the chapter first traces the multiple and complex routes of, and space-times for, friendship formation that were experienced by young participants leading up to and during the games. Thereafter, it captures the opportunities and challenges faced by young participants to maintain and develop friendship relations from YOG outside the space-time of the event. Through analysing my respondents' narratives, I propose a need to broaden the inward-looking and linear definition of friendship that dominates popular discourse. As argued by Adams and Allan

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[17] Photo 1 taken from Saner's (2008) article from The Guardian. Photo 2 taken from Perry, Godwin and Powell (2012).

(1998:2), friendships have a "broader basis than a dyad alone". Friendships are developed and sustained in relation to a wider complex of interacting influences, leading to varied shapes and structures among different friendship relations. This requires a framework that shares an appreciation of the intersections of social, spatial, temporal and material relations, and my adoption of assemblage thinking for friendship is premised "on process and on the dynamic character of the inter-relationships between the heterogeneous elements of the phenomenon" (Venn, 2006:107).

5.2   The building of friendship

Friendship forms a key tenet of the Olympic movement. From its conception, Baron Pierre de Coubertin believed in the potential of the Olympic Games to educate young people in an unprecedented way. de Coubertin developed a universal philosophy for the games called 'Olympism' that emphasizes "the role of sport in global culture, international understanding, peaceful coexistence, and social and moral education" (Parry, 2006:190). Under the umbrella term 'Olympism', friendship features as one of three Olympic values (the others being excellence and respect) that were deemed by de Coubertin as universally desirable, an ideal that is to be shared among all people and throughout their lifetime. However, Parry (2006:191) acknowledges that while the *ideals* encompassed in these values have been universal and enduring, the *practice* of these values in the Olympic Games has found different expression over time and space. With de Coubertin's vision in mind, SYOGOC aimed to create a games that would "provide opportunities for thousands of young people from Singapore and around the world to... develop lasting friendships" (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007).

Looking at the big picture, the majority of my respondents believed that the goal of friendship was achieved in YOG. However, through my interviews, the

assembling of these friendships among young participants was found to be far more complex than assumed. This section thus analyses the success of YOG as a space for young people to "build strong and abiding bonds of friendship… [that] can help us build a more united and peaceful world" (Ng, 2010).

5.2.1   Official sites of friendship pre-YOG

While the Competitive Programme (CP) aptly embodied the Olympic values of excellence and respect, the Culture and Education Programme (CEP) was seen by organisers as an opportunity to downplay the competitive aspect of sport and weave the Olympic value of friendship more cohesively into YOG (Wong, 2012). Under the banner of CEP, three projects were emblazoned with the term 'friendship' in their names. The first was 'Friendship Camp', a gathering of young athletes from around the world prior to the games to enable interaction and friendship formation among young athletes through a range of activities[18]. Another project was 'Friends@YOG', where 251 local schools were twinned with 256 schools and National Olympic Committees (NOC) that participated in YOG (SYOGOC, 2010). However, the pairing of schools to NOCs/countries was wholly controlled by SYOGOC, thus being a missed avenue for young people's participation. Under the umbrella of 'Friends@YOG' was 'Friendship Fabric', an art exhibition comprising individual fabric art pieces created by students, aimed at capturing the essence of the country that their school was paired with as a gesture of friendship and welcome to the world (Fu, 2010). These friendship-making projects were all held pre-YOG as an added strategy to publicise YOG and "connect young people around the world to the Olympic movement and one another" (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007).

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[18] A total of 417 participants (262 student athletes from 130 NOCs and 155 Singaporean young athletes aged 15-17 attended the camp that was held 7-13 December 2009 in Singapore. (Ministry of Education, 2009)

While the aforementioned projects garnered significant media attention for the innovative projects under CEP offered in YOG, they were less successful in creating spaces for friendship formation among young participants. 'Friendship Camp' received the most positive response. For athlete Christina, the camp helped her establish close ties with fellow participants from different countries and sporting backgrounds. These friendships however were not necessarily with participants of the main event since the camp took place several months before the confirmation of all athletes' qualification for YOG's competitive programme. However, the friendships that were established remained within the confines of athletes rather than other potential participants in the YOG assemblage.

> "All participating countries in YOG were represented,
> but since the camp happened before the main event,
> many athletes were still unsure if they qualified for YOG.
> So I made a few friends there that I didn't get to see
> during YOG.[19]"

For the 'Friends@YOG' initiative, organiser Kylie felt that the project presented local schools with multiple spaces of possible interaction between local students and young people from their twinned NOC/country. Schools could send their students to pre-arranged YOG activities by organisers or initiate their own activities with the NOC/country's athletes. However, the assembling of friendships through this programme proved difficult due to insufficient time invested by different actors in the YOG assemblage. There were several reasons for this. First, the primary purpose for many international athletes' participation in YOG was to compete rather than to make friends (Wong, 2012). Second, local schools were unwilling to sacrifice too much of their curriculum time for students to form international friendships. As noted by teachers Natalie and Kevin, many local schools had pre-existing school exchange programmes scheduled for their students to interact with foreign students during the

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[19] As mentioned in Section 4.2, only the three best athletes from each NOC/country were selected to participate in a particular discipline, restricting the participation of other youth athletes.

school holidays. In addition, Kylie's work with the local schools as a SYOGOC organiser led her to conclude that the formation of friendship assemblages depended largely on a school management's willingness to participate in the project rather than youth themselves. This highlights young people's friendship formation as a political (and adultist) rather than autonomous process, whereby governing structures constrained young people's possibilities for friendship formation within the YOG assemblage.

Instead, emerging more commonly from the 'Friends@YOG' initiative was the development of fans within the short span of time spent with these athletes. Mindy, Carrie and Lifeng recalled how their single-sex secondary school's effort at hosting their twinned country's athletes erupted into 'fan-frenzy' as their schoolmates became spellbound by the presence of male foreign athletes in their school.

> "Mindy: Oh do you remember the athletes coming to our school and our schoolmates went crazy over them?
>
> Carrie: Ya they even followed them into the male toilets!
>
> Lifeng: All the teachers tried to stop us. We too wanted to go see for a while then return to lessons. Then more people started coming in and screaming at the guys. We were like oh my god what is wrong with these people! Then the teachers heard about it and came to make us go back to class.
>
> Mindy: And on the day that the athletes left, two of my friends even went to stalk them at the airport. They managed to add them on Facebook, get their autographs, and take photos with them. They are still Facebook friends till now so it's cool."

The least successful project in establishing friendships was the 'Friendship Fabric' project. Kylie believed that the name was a misnomer as the project shared a tenuous link to the Olympic value. Instead, the project had more to do with allowing schools to learn about the country's cultures and traditions that they were paired with. Furthermore, local students were not required to have any form of social interaction

with the paired NOC/country's athletes, thus hindering the formation of young people's friendships. As such, while these explicitly named friendship projects translated young people into the YOG assemblage, they were less able to generate friendship relations among young people within the assemblage.

5.2.2   *A village of youth, friendship and more*

A key venue envisioned by organisers to exemplify the Olympic value of friendship during the space-time of the games was the Youth Olympic Village (YOV). With all 3600 athletes living on site over the 12-day duration of the games, organisers pitched YOV as a "lively yet relaxed home away from home" where residents could create "fond memories of valuable friendships formed during their stay in Singapore" (Singapore2010.sg, n.d.). On the surface, several athletes concurred that the space was a respite from the competitive element of the games and created an atmosphere of global friendship networking. Athlete Lauren found the concept of YOV more conducive for friendship formation than in other global sporting events that she has participated in.

> "When we were not competing, we were all meeting at YOV and hanging out. It allowed us to meet more easily than staying in a hotel, where you're just confined to that room or that space you know? There's really not much where you can hang out or interact with other athletes."

For athlete Christina, it was not the space but the activities in the space that encouraged friendship building. At the heart of YOV is the village square, where SYOGOC planned activities that created arenas of interaction for participants (athletes, volunteers and organisers alike), including cultural exhibitions, youth performances and sports-related forums. These activities transformed YOV into an interactive space with an expanding assemblage of friendship relations. Christina highlighted one activity in particular that promoted global friendships – a treasure hunt inspired game that spurred interaction among international athletes.

> "Every athlete had the chance to win YOG souvenirs
> from this game. All we had to do was walk around and
> talk to people from other countries and sports. So these
> people can help you, you can make friends with them and
> you can have fun all at once."

However, the sense that YOV enabled all global friendships was not always shared. In particular, I observed that athletes who joined YOG in team sports found it harder to make friends in YOV beyond the sphere of their teammates. A reason for this was due to the intervention of other actors in the wider YOG assemblage. For example, Senthil shared how his team's coach disallowed them to interact with other athletes other than with their teammates until after his event's CP was completed, leaving him little time and space to establish friendships outside of his team.

> "I saw many Singaporean athletes from individual sports
> interact with international athletes from their sport during
> meal times. But our coach was strict with us. She wanted
> us to stay as a team even outside of training. Only after
> the tournament did she let us do anything we want. But
> by then it was a little too late."

Young people's friendly interactions in YOV also evolved into other forms of intimacy that blurred the boundaries of friendship. Yiling, an organiser based at YOV, shared how strategies to create spaces for social interaction resulted in unintended sexual relations.

> "To make their stay comfortable, we thought youths,
> being youths, would want a dance floor to have fun with
> their friends? So we converted one of the multi-purpose
> rooms for that. So I went down once to see it, and I was
> in shock! They are all with raging hormones and very fit,
> taking off their shirts... coming out of the venue I saw
> hanky panky-ing too! We even caught volunteers getting
> it on with the athletes. A different kind of fun I guess
> than what we were thinking."

In this way, organisers' attempts at ordering the composition of young participants' friendship relation found different expressions through young people's

agency in the assemblage. This section has thus shown that SYOGOC's intention of imagining YOV as a space for young people's friendship emerged as a more complex amalgamation of 'friendship' forms and formations. Furthermore, the success of assembling young people's friendship was dependent on their socio-spatial practices.

5.2.3 *Unexpected space-times of friendship*

Moreover, young participants found friendships in space-times of the event outside of the imposed spaces of friendship by SYOGOC. Contrary to the picture painted in the previous section, friendships were established not only in space-times of leisure and play but also through the space-times of work that authorised young people's participation in YOG[20]. The youthful environment of workplaces (elaborated in section 4.4.1 to be in terms of age and attitude of participants) was one reason given that encouraged the active assembling of friendships among young participants. Another reason suggested by Phillip and Alex was the intense yet temporary space-time of the games that differed from the mundane and structured space of work in their current jobs post-YOG.

> "Phillip: This was not a nine to five job. My colleagues and I spent so much time in the office working on crazy deadlines. We didn't have the luxury of space during the games. We were all crammed into a makeshift workspace. We had no choice but to make friends this way."

> "Alex: We were all young people with lots of energy. So we would hang out together even after a long day at work. It's very different from where I work now where lots of people are married with kids and are too old to hang out with me. It's not the same kind of environment already."

The intensity of social interactions among participants also led to blurred boundaries between friendship and family, as suggested by Bunnell et al (2012).

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[20] This encompasses all forms of work that was required in the (re)assembling of YOG. These spaces of work would differ for youth engaged in different forms of participation.

Through my research process alone, I recruited two couples (Alex and Kate, Kevin and Charlotte) and Phillip, who all got attached to their partners during the period of YOG and were either engaged or married at the point of the interview. Additionally, Kate could identify at least ten couples who were brought together through the YOG assemblage. These couples included young people of various nationalities who came to Singapore for the realisation of YOG.

The assembling of young people's friendships during YOG also went beyond their assigned roles of participation, especially between organisers and volunteers of the event whose work spaces and schedules overlapped during the space-time of YOG. This was exemplified by Victoria. Participating in YOG as an organiser enabled boundary-crossing socio-spatial relations that saw her establishing friendships with young(er) volunteers from comparatively lower socio-economic backgrounds. Through these friendships, Victoria was able to remove the stereotypes that she initially possessed of young people from these backgrounds as being deviant and disruptive to society.

> "My volunteers were much younger than me, coming from different educational backgrounds from me such as polytechnics and institutes of technical education[21]. I thought these youngsters would be tough to handle and not turn up for work. But they were so driven, cooperative, enthusiastic and entertaining. I was pleasantly surprised that I got on so well with them."

Thus, contrary to Adams and Allen's (1998) claim of friendship being a reinforcing mechanism of the status quo in terms of power and status, the workspaces of YOG allowed a wider assembling of friendships unbounded by axes of differences, whether in terms of participants' roles, nationality or socio-economic status.

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[21] In Singapore's educational landscape, polytechnics and institutes of technical education are often considered as alternative post-secondary school options for weaker students as opposed to junior college education.

Friendships were also formed during YOG through liminal space-times of the event that emerged during moments of movement and stasis. As argued by Skelton (2010), young people's occupation of such in-between space-times can lead to creative reordering of these space-times' original functions. In the case of YOG, journeys from one venue to another became opportunities for friendship assembling. For Simon, volunteering as a transport assistant meant spending much time on certain bus shuttle routes that SYOGOC assigned for the transportation of participants to different YOG venues. Weijie also concurred that the journeys to/from YOG venues created opportunities for friendship formation. His assigned role as a volunteer for an activity on a nearby island required him to travel daily on boats provided by SYOGOC. The repeated meeting of familiar people on these journeys allowed both Simon and Weijie to strike up conversations with fellow YOG commuters who used the service, leading to friendships forming. The formation of friendship through movement also expanded beyond the immediate YOG assemblage. As part of volunteering as ambassador for the Global Scholars and Leaders programme Conference (introduced in section 4.4.3 for being a successful tie-up international youth project with YOG), Nicole was designated to receive and send off foreign delegates from the airport alongside other ambassador-volunteers. The frequent journeys home from the airport during YOG with other volunteers helped develop her friendships with them as they bonded over conversations on romantic crushes and boy-girl relationships.

> "The long bus journeys meant we could chat more and form close friendships... We even ended up talking about matchmaking kind of things like 'I think he likes you' or 'I think she's cute' and 'oh I'm so gonna tell her' that sort of things."

These transport systems therefore aided the expansion of friendship assemblages beyond fixed spaces of YOG and through being on the move. Conversely, friendships formation arose through moments of stasis in the games.

Lifeng related how the performance rehearsal schedule for YOG closing ceremony was interlaced with many breaks. This meant long wait times that became opportunities for friendship formation.

> "We were left sitting under the sun a lot with nothing better to do other than talk to one another. So we started playing childhood games like AEIOU with our schoolmates. It was so much fun and bonded us together."

As such, the function of spaces of YOG was not mutually exclusive to the functions dictated by SYOGOC. The emergence of friendship assemblages during YOG occurred in a rhizomatic fashion as "reciprocal presuppositions and mutual connections play themselves out in the constitution of the social field" (McFarlane, 2009:566). The coming together of young participants' friendships was present in diverse and overlapping space-times of the games and the range of participants were not bound by their ascribed roles and identities. Young people were also active agents in carving their own opportunities for friendship in the YOG assemblage through moments of mobility and stasis that they experienced during the games.

5.2.4 *The object(ive)s of friendship*

In many cases, the assembling of friendships during YOG was made possible through the engagement with objects. Notably, three objects were mentioned by several respondents as key mediators of friendship building. The most talked about were YOG pin badges that were exchanged between young participants (Fig 5.2). Seen as an Olympic tradition that unites people from all nations (Olympinclub, n.d.), the practice of exchange was deemed by respondents to be a prime example of how YOG promoted the Olympic value of friendship as it occurred across multiple spaces and promoted cross-role and cross-nationality interactions among participants.

Fig 5.2 YOG pin badges collected by respondent Sally that symbolised the YOG value of friendship

Another object that was traded as part of gestures of friendship to a smaller extent was the competition jersey. In this case, the practice of friendship building was space, time and role specific, occurring on the last night of YOG in the YOV among athletes following the conclusion of YOG's competitive programme. In particular, Senthil was adamant that the practice of exchange was an apt indicator of friendships built in the YOV as he and his teammates chose only to trade their jerseys with those whom they befriended off the competition field but not those whom they competed against (and therefore clashed with).

The mobile phone also played a critical role in the forging of friendships. While these mobile phones were issued by SYOGOC to athletes and organisers with the purpose of keeping them abreast with the daily schedule of events and news, young people re-appropriated the intent of the phones to use them to authenticate friendships by downloading the Facebook application onto the phones and adding newfound friends via the application. The advantage of these mobile technologies

was that young participants could convene friendships at any place and time as long as the space had a stable internet connection. Senthil shared how the sight of young participants adding one another onto their Facebook accounts was commonplace during the games.

> "You see a lot of people stopping in their tracks while they were in the YOV, then they will ask the person to type their names into the Facebook application in these phones and add them as Facebook friends. So these phones helped facilitate us to immediately form friendships with each other."

In this way, the combination of objects, technologies, socialities and spatialities seemed to escalate the number of friendships assembled during YOG. However, upon further investigation, the question of whether such socio-material interactions were constitutive of friendships arose. This was evident when athlete Sally proudly showcased her collection of YOG pins which she amassed during the games to me during the interview (Fig 5.2), but could not recall who had given her those pins. Several respondents also believed that the value of friendship was lost when the aforementioned activities became a competition of who could collect the most YOG-related objects and/or Facebook friends through YOG. The sudden overwhelming addition of friends onto their Facebook accounts was especially felt by several young athletes through the media attention received regarding their performance in the CP. These athletes thus needed to choose between keeping their Facebook accounts as an online space strictly for friends and changing the nature of the space into a platform to connect with their fans.

> "Christina: My account was insane during YOG! There were requests from everybody and anybody. I was like, 'Do I know you? Who are you?' and then they are like 'I saw you in the newspaper.' So what if you saw me in the newspaper? You are a fan not a friend. Facebook is strictly for friends."

> "Ethan: Before the YOG, I only had 500 friends, and those were all from my school. Then, after YOG, it

jumped all the way to 2000. 1500 of them were fans. I decided to treat it as a publicity thing on my part thereafter. Because if I didn't add them right, they will feel that this so-and-so is so proud and doesn't want to add friends. So I just added them… Facebook is now more of a communication to my over 4000 fans to see what's happening in my sporting career."

Phillip also explained that the abovementioned practices promoted the formation friendship assemblages among countries rather than young people.

"I guess it was more a gesture of friendship from Singapore to the world. The object that was given didn't matter so much. I remember how, when we were in Greece for a YOG meeting with IOC, our chaperone ran out of stuff to exchange. So she took a pouch that was part of her uniform, ripped it out and gave it away. For the person who received it, it probably made some kind of impression and left a positive stamp for our country… forming friendships for Singapore as a whole rather than individually."

Thus, the ambiguous and fluid boundaries of the meaning of friendship led to varied interpretations of whether YOG allowed for the assembling of friendships. In particular, I argue that the intersection of social, spatio-temporal and material interactions were only able to achieve friendly rather than friendship relations among young participants.

5.3   The challenges of maintaining and developing friendships

While YOG allowed the building of friendships among young participants, it proved more difficult to achieve the goal of *lasting* friendships. As argued by Bunnell et al (2012), the maintenance of friendships is socially, temporally and spatially demanding work. This was *a fortiori* for an event such as YOG, where its spatially and temporally transient nature meant that there was a lack of shared space and time in young people's lifeworlds for them to interact with their friends post-event.

"Zhenghao: YOG was a single event that brought everyone together which otherwise won't happen.

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> Beyond the event, once you lose the social environment,
> you lose the compelling need for everyone to gather
> again. The basis of friendships formed was the event.
> Without the event, there is no basis anymore."

The only attempt by organisers post-event to build on the legacy of YOG and the Olympic values was the Singapore Youth Olympic Festival (SYOF). Initially pitched as an anniversary celebration of YOG in 2011, SYOF has evolved into an annual sporting competition for aspiring young international athletes. However, according to my respondents who attended the first occasion of SYOF, the lack of interest in and poor attendance of the event by their friends deterred them from participating in future events thereafter. As such, young people needed to find other spaces of possibility to sustain their friendship relations. These socialities may exist not only through 'physical and immediate presence' but also in 'occasional co-presence, imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence' (Urry, 2002:255-256). This next section analyses the opportunities and challenges for both local and global friendship assemblage maintenance and development through a range of space-times post-YOG.

5.3.1 Physical spaces of meeting

For many respondents, face-to-face interaction was recognised as an important process for the maintenance of friendships. Therefore, sustaining friendships with people from other countries after YOG proved difficult due to the physical distance between them. Rather than signalling a termination of friendship, Alex chose to see these relations as being suspended, only to be reignited when they meet in another space and time in the future.

> "Friendship to me is about how often you see this person.
> When they were here I definitely treated them as friends.
> But once they left things are different. They are doing
> their own things and so am I… But I guess if they came
> back or if I visited them, we probably can talk just like
> last time and have a go from there again."

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The only group of participants that found it easier to maintain global friendships were young athletes. Their participation in other global sporting events presents them with more opportunities to reconnect with their fellow athlete friends, producing a more spatially extensive set of interactions. This did not mean that both parties necessarily had to be participating in the same competition, as highlighted by Lauren.

> "We try to ask each other when we're coming out for competitions. I guess competitions become our spaces for reunions. Even if they're not competing but are in the area for some reason or other, they'll always make a trip back down to come and see me. And if the competition is in their home country, they may even take me out for a meal and just hang out after the competition ends, just like what I did for them during YOG."

The mobility that athletes enjoyed in maintaining global friendships indirectly reinforced the exclusion of other young people from being enrolled into these friendship assemblages. This resembles how class positions among youth are augmented through certain norms and practices that potentially exclude young people from other socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, while these friendship assemblages were malleable as they adapted to changing venues and schedules of global sporting competitions each year, the membership into these assemblages remained exclusive to those who shared the identity of being athletes.

Unlike the challenge faced in maintaining global friendships, the maintenance of local friendships seemed more likely for all participants due to the close corporeal proximity of friends after the event. Volunteer Yiling concurred that the small land area of Singapore was a reason for her ability to stay in touch with her friends outside of YOG.

> "Challenges to maintaining my friendships? [chuckles]
> At the rate that I'm going there are none. Singapore is so
> small. They are like a stone's throw away from me… so
> much so that I think I meet them too often. As a matter of
> fact, I'm meeting them again tomorrow?"

However, other respondents felt that it was not spatial but temporal barriers that prevented them from pursuing their friendships further. Their divergent life pathways and rigorous daily schedules after the event left them with little time to meet. It was only when friends decided to pursue shared passions that they found alternative common space-times to develop their friendships further. For example, Tianwei found it easy to meet with friends he made who were fellow volunteer photographers during YOG as they arranged photography excursions on a regular basis. The introduction of other photography enthusiasts to the excursions signalled the expansion of the friendship assemblage as other actors and spaces connected. Sometimes the agency of young people met with institutional hurdles to developing friendship assemblages. For athlete Senthil, his teammates wanted to continue playing for the national team together but were forced to split up due to age limits for participation rules.

> "YOG was for 17 and 18 year-olds. So now we have
> teammates who are 18, 19 and 20 years old. But our
> sport's federation only has an under-19 squad so some of
> my friends aren't playing with us anymore. It's a real pity
> as we bonded so well as a team during YOG."

For Lauren, her assemblage of YOG friendships dissipated from a strong group of four to a stronger bond with just one person, proving that the association and disassociation of young people from the assemblage were processes that may have been either constrained or voluntary in nature.

> "There were four of us who became friends through
> YOG. I'm only still close with one of them because she
> and I are triathletes and she invited me to participate in
> some local triathlete events, even offering to train me. In
> a way we became closer after YOG. But for the other

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two, one was much older and younger respectively. We
did interact during the period of the competition, but after
that I think it boils down to who you can communicate
with and how involved you are in each other's lives."

Friendships formed through YOG also generated other forms of engagement, such as creating work opportunities as friends acted as bridges into the jobs that they were currently doing. For these individuals, the intersection of their work assemblage with the friendship assemblage led to the reconvening and development of friendships through these new workspaces.

The ability of young participants to maintain and/or develop friendship assemblages formed during YOG depended not only on physical distance, but also on their ability and willingness to initiate space-times of interaction. Other factors (temporal constraints) and actors (institutional regulations) may also play a role in shaping the assemblages. The next section advances this point by stressing the agency of non-human actors in shaping friendship assemblages.

5.3.2   *The role of objects in imagined and virtual co-presences*

Objects embody memories of shared experiences and giving the person a sense of imagined co-presence with other people in the friendship assemblage (Bowlby, 2011). Furthermore, Law (1994b:4) attests that objects may be 'performed in, by and through' social relations. For some of my respondents, friendship relations manifest through the presence of objects when face-to-face interactions cannot materialise. For example, displaying the gifts she received from her YOG friends in her workspace preserved the friendships that Victoria shared with them.

"I display all their gifts in my work cubicle. They are part
of my life already so I think of them whenever I happen
to see the gifts on my table. To me it is a reminder of my
friendship ties with them."

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However, objects of memories were not only an exchange between friends and embodiments of friendship relations within the assemblage. For Senthil, a gift from his pre-YOG friends helps him recall friendship connections *before* and *during* the event.

> "My schoolmates did a photo montage board where they pasted all the photos they got of my YOG experience… during matches… some from my Facebook account. It's now hanging in my bedroom. I think it's very valuable as it connects me to the people who are important to me… my teammates… all the friends that I had and all the friends that I made."

Communication technologies also became important mediators in the sustenance of friendships at a distance, providing elements of co-presence in a virtual environment (Ellison et al, 2007). My respondents most frequently discussed the social networking website Facebook. The immense popularity and active usage of the website among young people provided a sense of being up-to-date with their friends' lifeworlds. Furthermore, by liking a photo or sending a private message occasionally, interviewees were given a sense that they had put in the work needed to maintain these friendship relations.

> "Zhenghao: I do have a few of them on Facebook. We don't really meet up anymore, but Facebook makes it easier for me to feel like I know what's going on in their lives. Once in while we would 'like' each other's posts or ask how they are doing."

In Lauren's scenario, Facebook was a platform to maintain and strengthen her friendship with a Japanese athlete after YOG; communication was easier with translation software.

> "I was close to her during YOG, but more of a 'hi and bye' thing, sprinkled with a bit of broken Japanese for me and broken English for her. Facebook is now the only thing we have in common. But it has created a space where we can actually interact properly as she can

translate what she wants to say to me. So we've taken
advantage of it."

However, the agency or materiality of communication technologies can result in dissolutions of friendship assemblages. When Charlotte's phone broke, she lost contact with a foreign friend made through the YOG as she could not extract her friend's contact number from the phone. Furthermore, the security functions on technological platforms such as Facebook prevented her from finding her friend's Facebook profile page, thus leaving her unable to rekindle the friendship. In Yiling's case, the disassembling of friendships with other YOG volunteers unfolded during the space-time of the interview when she tried to show me the Facebook group that she created to stay in contact with her friends, but it had been archived due to inactivity. The realisation of being unable to maintain the friendship assemblage anymore through the means of Facebook generated mixed emotions of doubt, panic and despair.

"Did I cancel it? I had a group... did I set it up for them or... Well I created it because I wanted us to become friends. And they used it a few months back to arrange a meeting. But if the group is archived, then how can we contact each other next time?"

Thus, the objects mentioned in this section provided a space of interaction through imagined and virtual co-presences, either being treated as substitutes for the people themselves or creating platforms for interaction other than through physical contact. However, these objects themselves can also play a role in the collapse of friendship assemblages when they did not work in the way that they were programmed to. This reaffirms the agency of nonhuman actors in shaping friendship assemblages.

5.4   Conclusion

Friendship is more than a social relation between individuals. As shown in this chapter, it shares a complex relationship with multiple actors, whether human or nonhuman, and space-times that are embroiled in the drama of assembling, maintaining, developing and (in some instances) disassembling of friendships. The application of assemblage thinking to this chapter enabled the tracing of the complex, multiple and dynamic intersections amidst the social, spatial, temporal and material aspects of young participants' friendships.

In the context of YOG, organisers' attempts to promulgate the formation of friendship assemblages among its young participants through creating spaces of interaction before and during the games were often structured in a top-down way and so appeared as contrived rather than organic contexts for friendship development. Furthermore, these spaces did not guarantee friendships due to the intervention of other actors and resistance from young participants themselves. The fluid boundaries to friendship meant the accompanying emergence of other forms of intimacies that were less-than or more-than friendships, such as friendly, fan, sexual and marriage relations. In addition, efforts by organisers to shape friendship assemblages post-event were scant, thus leaving the responsibility of maintaining these friendships to young participants themselves.

With this, young people became active agents in building, sustaining and developing friendship assemblages, carving out their own space-times for interaction. While the possibilities for building friendships during YOG were abundant, the disappearance of a common space-time post-YOG presented the challenge for young participants to find new spaces for interaction to maintain these friendships. Several strategies were undertaken that involved the translation of various physical, imagined and virtual environments into friendship assemblages.

At times, the building of friendships was not possible without the assistance of objects (cf. Bunnell et al, 2012). These objects played the role of material manifestations and mediations of friendship during YOG. Furthermore, through young people's interactions with objects post-YOG, memories and feelings of friendship were triggered when face-to-face encounters to maintain friendships were not possible. However, these objects were inferior in developing friendships as my respondents stressed the importance of corporeal interactions located within physical spaces and times. Furthermore, the dependence on socio-material relations may lead to the disassembling of friendships when these objects lose their ascribed functions. As such, understanding young people's geographies of friendship requires an attention to the social, spatial and material that abides to a language of flows, fluidity and multiplicity, rather than fixed, hierarchical and binary terms of structures (Bunnell et al, 2012).

CHAPTER 6:
**OF CLOSINGS AND OPENINGS – REFLECTIONS ON YOUNG PEOPLE,
THE GAMES AND ASSEMBLAGE**

6.1   The closing of one chapter and opening of another

SINGAPORE, 26 August, 2010 – With the extinguishing of the Olympic

flame, the 2010 Youth Olympic Games drew to a close at the closing ceremony, with

a spectacle that reflected on the experiences garnered by participants and the

symbolism of being part of a new chapter in Olympic history (Channel NewsAsia,

2010b). More than just an ending of a 12-day event, the closing ceremony also

signalled the *beginning* of new chapters for young people. One of which was the

movement of YOG to Nanjing, China between 16 and 28 August 2014 as the IOC

continues its efforts to promote youth activism to the world. Another was the

inception of YOG-attained lessons and values into young people's lives after the

event. What was significant about both junctures was the role that objects played in

marking the beginnings of these journeys. To mark the start of preparations for the

next YOG event, the Olympic flag was passed on to the mayor of Nanjing at the

closing ceremony. Similarly, the extinguishing of the Olympic flame symbolised the

transference of the YOG spirit into the lives of young people (Channel NewsAsia,

2010b).

In this same fashion, I employ the concluding chapter of this thesis to reflect

on what this project *has done* and *is doing* for young people, the Olympics and

academic research. Furthermore, I highlight the contributions of assemblage thinking

to this thesis, paying attention to its ability to consider the complex weaving of

bodies, relations and materials into the spatio-temporal negotiations of young people.

6.2   Stories of young people's participation and friendship through YOG

This thesis set out the task to analyse whether YOG was successful in illuminating young people's agentic potential to the world (section 1.8). With this aim in mind, I revealed young people's patterns of participation and friendship from YOG and therefore addressing research question 1 of the thesis. Choosing YOG as a space-time of study expands current academic trajectories to understand young people's socio-spatialities beyond the everyday and micro-scale (section 2.2.3). Through my empirical chapters, I have demonstrated the diverse, dynamic and interdependent nature of young people's participation and friendships. YOG was meant to be a spectacular event "by young people, for young people" (Singapore 2010 Bid Committee, 2007) that advances the promotion of youths as active citizens of the world and development of a community among youth of the world (section 1.4). However, the practice of participation and friendship making in YOG involved a complex amalgamation of heterogeneous actors and their practices that may have either facilitated or obstructed these processes. Through their interactions, a topological arrangement of power emerges where different actors "jostle, co-exist and interrupt one another" in different space-times of the games (Allen, 2011:287).

One of the actors that featured strongly in influencing young people's participation and friendships was SYOGOC. With the aim of connecting young people to the event, organisers attempted to order these relations through creating spaces and times with goals of youth participation and friendship formation. On the surface, these organiser-designated spaces were surmised by my respondents as achieving these aforementioned goals. However, deeper analysis showed that, while their efforts managed to bring young people into association with both the event and other young people, the codes and structures that were imbued into these spaces by organisers oftentimes led to the collapsing of opportunities for meaningful participation (section 4.4.1 and 4.4.2) and friendships (section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

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In addition, SYOGOC was not the sole determinant of young people's socio-spatialities. The overbearing presence of other adult and institutional actors in the YOG assemblage (coaches, teachers, schools, sporting agencies etc.) diminished young people's voices and interactions in the event . Social constructions on notions of youth (and youth-hood), the Olympics, participation (section 4.2) and friendship (section 5.2) also shaped young people's engagement in YOG. In particular, the open-endedness of these terms led to different interpretations of participation and friendship that merged (or deviated) into other terms such as tokenism, friendliness, fandom and intimacy (section 4.4, 5.2 and 5.3). Through these discoveries, I stressed the importance of generating *meaningful* participatory and friendship processes for young people that are endured and/or expanded beyond the event.

Simultaneously, I demonstrated the abilities (and capabilities) of youths as active political agents in their own lives, thus engaging with research question 2 of the thesis. Young YOG participants found opportunities for meaningful participation (section 4.4.3) and friendship formation (section 5.2.3) through their negotiation of other actors that composed the event. The means to procuring these space-times of interaction were multi-fold, ranging from the altering relations with activities that were intended for them in YOG, to enrolling other (real, imagined and virtual) spaces into the event that opened up opportunities for new routes of participation and friendships. Thus, through the doing of participation and friendship on their own terms, my respondents were able to transform these socio-spatial connections and bring to the fore a version of the games that showcased their active agency in society.

In certain instances, young people's ability to participate and make friends during YOG was only made possible through the enrolment of objects. As argued by Roberts (2012:2517), the "capacities of a body to act can come into being only in

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relation to the vibrations of its nonhuman environment". Through analysing the role of nonhumans in young participants' relations during YOG (aligned with research question 4), I revealed them to be key mediators in translating young people into association with each other which initiated pathways of participation and friendship. These objects may have been used in different and creative ways by young participants that ran counter to their initially ascribed-oriented functions (section 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 5.2.4 and 5.3.1). In addition, the objects pointed out by my respondents came in many shapes and forms, ranging from physical entities (chairs, badges, lunchboxes) to space-time shrinking technologies (mobile phones, online videos, social networking sites) that both extended and heightened young people's relations beyond the spatio-temporalities of the event. However, I have also highlighted the politics that emerge through the entanglement of nonhuman forces which may lead to the closing down of participatory and friendship relations. This was most prominently displayed when my respondents shared their challenges in maintaining friendships post-event (section 5.3.3). While objects may not inherently have a voice, their agentic qualities were conveyed through my respondents. Thus, I assert a need for us to consider the intertwined roles of material relations in the spatialities and temporalities of young people.

6.3   Opening theoretical routes: Assemblage, young people and the Olympics

The ability to reveal the messy complexities of young people's participatory and friendship processes in YOG for this project was made possible through assemblage thinking (examining research question 7). Adopting assemblage thinking for the thesis created a space of discussion (cf. Horton and Kraftl, 2005; Vanderbeck, 2008) with regards to the development of young people's geographies with deeper links to contemporary lines of academic thought. As argued by Ong and Collier (2004:12), assemblage as a theoretical approach moves researchers away from viewing things through a singular logic to products of multiple determinations. In this

way, the thesis contributes to research on young people's geographies by positioning young people beyond a scalar imaginary and towards a language of fluidity, multiplicity and dynamism (Ansell, 2009).

Using assemblage thinking also allowed me to re-envision YOG from being yet another economic venture as more commonly studied by academics (cf. Bale, 1996), to an extraordinary social space that brought together a multitude of relations which would otherwise have not intersected in ordinary everyday life (section 2.3). Imagining YOG as an assemblage for (and assembling of) youth directs attention to the heterogeneous actors (human and nonhuman) that were interwoven into the event (Section 2.4.1). In addition, contrary to critics of the theory for being an apolitical approach, assemblage helped me view power as a topological arrangement, existing "not as something intrinsic to entities but always as an exteriority of relations... or as the sum of unequal relationships in which a certain assemblage becomes entangled" (Ureta, 2014:244). By doing so, young people's political action in the event was not limited to a language of domination and resistance. Instead, through tracing their connections and interactions with other actors in the assemblage, I was able to tease out the workings of power in YOG that drove young participants to support, counter, disregard and/or parody the singular narrative of the event which was pruned by organisers and conveyed to the world.

Besides uncovering connections between entities and spaces that constitute YOG, such an approach also enabled me to consider the temporalities of the event as the theory offers an "orientation to the expressive capacity of assembled orders as they are stabilised and change" (Anderson et al, 2012:171). Such a temporally-sensitive approach is significant due to its subdued attention in Olympic research (Carpenter, 1992; Roche, 2003; Waitt, 2003). More specifically to YOG, a consideration of time was important to me on three counts. First, YOG is an event

with a unique space-time structure, occurring every four years with little possibility of returning to Singapore again. This means that many of the youth (especially youth athletes) who participated in YOG 2010 will have no chance to participate in following editions as they transit into different phases (adulthood, work, parenthood) in their lives. Through my research, I have shown that the transitory nature of YOG led to diverging pathways post-event as some youth embarked on new journeys through the relations established during YOG while others returned back to their routine schedules prior to the games. Second, young people's participatory and friendship relations were continually being (re)asserted, challenged and discarded during the course of the games that followed a "doctrine of emergence" (Harman, 2008). Third, I assert that the spatio-temporalities of YOG extend beyond the actual space-time of the games. As such, I found it important to demonstrate instances where YOG was being (re)assembled post-event as different actors gather together (whether it is part of maintaining friendship relations or socio-material interactions) in different spaces and times. This thesis itself is an effort to (re)assemble YOG, putting into flux its seemingly crystallised form and reigniting its waning presence. In so doing, YOG becomes a space that possesses the potential for dynamic change through the associations and disassociation of actors affecting elements of the assemblage.

Moreover, assemblage was also used as a methodological orientation for this thesis (chapter 3). This was advantageous as I was able to move away from commonly found linear accounts in young people's researchers' methodological reflections to explicate the complex and dynamic nature of research (cf. Law, 2004; Horton et al, 2008) to trace the messy entanglements of social, spatial and material elements of the project. I was also able to tease out the opportunities and challenges that were laden in the process of trying to place young people more centrally in this project, thus giving focus to research question 5. As such, assemblage thinking not

only opens up new theoretical directions for research on young people's geographies and the Olympics; it also holds methodological promise in developing greater sensitivity to the complexity and uncertainty of the research process.

6.4   Closing with a note from my respondent

The closing of this thesis signals the opening of vast possibilities for continued research on young people and the Olympics. In particular, this thesis has been less successful in working through research question 3 – to look at whether YOG enabled young Singaporeans' greater participation in society. With the dawning of the 2014 Nanjing YOG, it will be interesting to trace the evolution of young people's participatory and friendship relations through the enactment of new actors in the assemblage. What should remain constant in these suggested areas of research is a commitment to push forward the agenda of bringing forth young people's social, spatial, temporal and material experiences in a complex and everchanging world (as posed in research question 6). In this same spirit, I end with a quote from my respondent Zhenghao, whose sentiments on being a young person in today's world affirms the need to pursue greater research on young people's exciting and more-than-local geographies.

> "We now live in a world with a lot of opportunities for us to shape... very different from a young person just twenty years ago. We live in a privileged era, with electronics and material comforts. It's like we live in a global village, where we can travel around the world easily, and are easily connected through internet, google, and Facebook. So we have this powerful reach to reach out to people across the world, utilize these resources at our disposal and show them what we can do. And YOG was just another opportunity to spread our youthful spirit and youth consciousness to the world."

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Theme 1 – Youth Olympic Games (pre-, during and post-Games)

- How did you first find out about YOG 2010?
- What were your initial thoughts on the event?
- How did you feel when you found out that Singapore was hosting this event?
- When did you decide to get involved in YOG 2010?
- How did you get involved with YOG 2010?
- What role did you play during YOG 2010?
- What was the experience of it like?
- Do you still keep any souvenirs, photographs, pictures, videos about the event? If yes, would you be willing to share more about these memories to me?
- Have you seen or been part of any of the post-Games events that have been organized (YOG Festival)? If yes, what did you think of it?
- Have you been to the Youth Olympic Park?
    - If yes, what were your feelings of the park and the 'Photoscape' exhibition?
    - Does it help to bring back memories of YOG 2010 for you?
- Any other places that you go to which have helped you recall of memories of YOG 2010?

Theme 2 – Olympic Value 1: Excellence

- Did you see the opening and closing ceremonies of YOG 2010? What were your thoughts when you saw other fellow Singaporean youth being involved in the proceedings of the event (eg. the performances, the torch relay, lighting of Olympic flame etc.)?
- Were there any moments during the games in which you were really impressed by? If yes, what were they?
- Were there anyone or anything that you admired while being at the event?
- What were your sentiments when you saw fellow young people (either from Singapore or other countries) winning medals from the different sporting events?
- To what extent do you think YOG 2010 has achieved this goal (young people excelling in what they do and what they become)?

Theme 3 – Olympic Value 2: Respect (amongst peers and within the world)

- Were you familiar of the culture and education programme that was happening concurrently during the event?
- What were your thoughts on what you had seen of the programme?
- Did you feel a sense of respect from the following groups of people?
    - Other participants/athletes
    - Singaporean competitors
    - Singapore for hosting it
- Did you feel embarrassed while you were at the games in any way?
- Do you feel if young people were being portrayed in a positive light through the event?

- To what extent do you think YOG 2010 has achieved this goal (respect amongst one another and earning respect from the rest of the world)?

Theme 4 – Olympic Value 3: Friendship

- Did you participate in the event together with your friends or alone?
- If you had joined together with your friends, do you feel if YOG 2010 has allowed your friendship to grow stronger? If yes/no, why?
- Did you make any friends during the time of the event?
- Were they fellow Singaporeans and/or from overseas?
- How were the friendships formed?
- Have you managed to keep in touch with them? If yes, how so?
- Have there been any challenges in maintaining the friendship(s)?
- Do you think that you would have had the opportunity to make friends with people from around the world had you not participated in YOG 2010?
- To what extent do you think YOG 2010 has achieved this goal? (forming global friendships)

Theme 5 – Politics of being a young person in a global world

- Besides the role that you played in the games, did you follow the event closely?
- If yes, how did you keep updated with the proceedings of the games?
- What were some of the most memorable things that you had come across about the event?
- What were your reactions to it?
- *Did you feel that what had been reported in the media was fair?
- If yes/no, did you air your thoughts to anyone about the matter?
  - o To your friends/family?
  - o Through other media tools? (eg. Facebook, Twitter, online forums)
- Why did you use these methods to express your views?
- Were the following issues something which you had come across and thought about through the course of YOG 2010?
  - o Citizenship issues / voting
  - o Nationhood and belonging
- Did you feel that YOG 2010 failed to transmit the true aspirations and lives of young people in Singapore to the world?
- If so, have your opinions on these issues changed in any way after the conclusion of YOG 2010? If yes, how so?

Theme 6 – Young People's Legacy

- Would you say that YOG 2010 made an impact on your life in any way?
  - o If yes, how so?
  - o If no, why not?
- Do you think it will be an event that you will remember fondly 20 years down the road?
- Has there been any other event that you have attended that has been on such a large scale?
- If yes, did you enjoy these events?
- How have these experiences been different from that of YOG 2010?

- What role do you think young people play in the world today?
- What do you think such global events like YOG 2010 can offer to young people?
- Do you have any suggestions on what other possible opportunities that you may want to participate in that allows you to interact with other fellow young people in an international context and let your voice be heard to the rest of the world?
- Do you have any suggestions of what Singapore can do to promote and create other spaces for young people's interaction at a global level?
- How do you now feel about being a young person in today's world?