Defining Singapore public space – from sanitisation to corporatisation

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Introduction
In analysing the historical events that have spurred socio-political reform in South East Asian cities and the creation of their public spaces, observations have been made that suggest that spaces planned in a socio-cultural vacuum can prove to be the places of contestation and potentially capable of political activity and activism (Ooi, 2004). There have also been observations that the State plays a crucial role in governing the provision of access to public spaces through its powers to make and enforce law, and to create non-commercial, safe, democratic and tolerant public spaces in the city. The increasing interface between public/private interests in order to create open spaces for public good has also been considered, leading to the increasing privatisation of space (Field, 1992). Such observations are worthy of consideration as I set out to define Singapore public space, through a brief history overview, a literature review and to a closer consideration of the contestation and increasing privatisation of space.

Historical Overview
Ideals of social control, and the inscription of order and rationality in post enlightenment streets influenced the creation of the colonial city (Ooi, et al 2004). Tensions and power struggles between the Industrial, European colonist, and the agrarian or crafts based local have further shaped the Colonial city (ibid) - characterised by the transposition of European planning principles to an alien climate, culture and topography to create, as Foucault describes, a heterotopia with a dominant (colonial) power and sub servant (local) (Foucault, 1986).

Such a transposition took place with Jackson’s first master plan of Colonial Singapore in 1822, which similarly inscribed social control and order in maintaining colonial rule. Created under the watchful eye of Sir Stamford Raffles and his town plan committee, the townplan sought to maximise mercantile trade, preserve administration of the colony, and prescribe social order in space through the compartmentalisation of the plan according to race and function.

Principal roads were to run parallel to the coast leading north to the mercantile establishments and along the river to an open square, known then and today as the Padang. A series of secondary roads were to run perpendicular to the primary roads. Together they formed the urban structure of the Town, generating principle developments around the Raffles place and Boat quay areas.

Raffles vision was simple and orderly; like his land use stipulation and ethnic segregation. In the allocation of lands, first preference was given to merchants, second to artisans and the third to the farmers. The town was divided into distinct areas (for instance, China Town, and European Town) according to nationalities and provincial groups. The imposition of the new paradigm of ‘corridors, avenues straight lines and grids’, was not only to create the image of imperial splendour or for pragmatics of municipal administration, but as a means of spatial sectorisation and insidious surveillance and thus control of the indigenous population (Ooi, 2004).

China town expanded rapidly to accommodate the anticipated growth of a predominantly Chinese labouring population, leading to congested spaces that lacked natural light and ventilation. The urban spaces of China Town starkly contrasted the colonial centre of the upper social classes and Europeans, which were comparatively under utilised, as social interaction took place on the Verandah within the confines of the Colonial Bungalow (Savage, 1992). The opening of the Suez canal contributed to continued urban growth of Singapore. New docks and harbours were created in 1879 by Telok...
Ayer Bay in the first land reclamation scheme. Infrastructure was also improved to create a more effective Colonial trading port. With urban growth came population increase and migration to respective ethnic quarters, contributing to rising power struggles between the municipal colonial authorities, seeking to preserve the order of Colonial public space; and the local community, seeking to appropriate public spaces for their everyday livelihood.

Singapore gained freedom from Colonial rule in 1965, but was forced to leave the federation of Malaya and gain independence unwittingly (Devan, 1994). The small island state, predominantly Chinese in a Malay region, lacking in natural resources, facing declining trade and a fast growing, largely unskilled population, embarked on a programme of nation building that would see Singapore exert itself as an economic hub through rational policies that would lift it beyond its regional status and allow it to compete at an international level (Tremewan, 1994).

Such a step similarly found its expression in the built environment through mass slum clearance and relocation in order to industrialise and modernise, despite recommendations by UN appointed experts to rehabilitate rather than demolish and rebuild (Gamer, 1972). The prevalence of the 2-3 storey shop house gave way to the tower and podium model, in anticipation of efficiency and modernity. State run Urban renewal projects during the 1960’s became inseparable from housing and relocating the majority of the local population from the centre, and resettling them in high density, Corbusian blocks to the periphery. The city centre became the reserve of International banks, hotels, and shopping centres, appropriated by expatriates, tourists and wealthy entrepreneurs. Public space for social and commercial benefit became relegated to the void decks of the social housing schemes or to the Padang (a ceremonial public green space) for National day celebrations.

Such physical and social disjuncture in the city through, firstly, the demolish and rebuild culture; and secondly, the migration and subsequent re-colonisation of the centre by transient foreign workers, made the State realise that a considerable part of Singapore’s urban heritage had been removed through their programme of renewal. Attempts to reinvigorate the tourist economy through pastiche reconstructions of historical streets and public spaces did little to address such a disjuncture (Eng, 1994) prompting private lobbying of the State to protect historical areas. The conservation movement, popularised by Boat Quay, saw the traditional shop houses renovated and restructured. Once a place for labouring classes to work, it became a place for affluent local and transient business workers to socialise (Powell, 2000).

The final urban morphological change of the 20th century came in the form of the Mass Rapid Transport system (Heng, 2006). The MRT was planned to permit mass commuting from the periphery to the city centre as a means of addressing social disjuncture. Movement and accessibility took precedence in the positioning of stations within walkable radii of key sections of the CBD, ultimately creating invisible corporate and economic delineations not dissimilar to Raffles’ colonial demarcations. Points of ingress and egress from the stations, being highly accessible to commuters at peak periods, were positioned adjacent to existing open spaces and primary streets, reactivating the spaces that were once the sources of interaction and movement and providing greater local and global integration. Pocket sized spaces, restaurants, cafes and retail, homogenised with a new, sanitised subterranean continuum of public space, provided convenience to commuters, expatriate transient workers and locals that would encourage greater social cohesion amongst spatial (1) and transpatial (2) groupings at the weekends (Hillier and Hanson, 1987).

Today, open space for tourism, leisure and recreation has become a priority of the State, and the number of planned green open spaces in Singapore to supplement the existing is under the control of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). With this comes Society’s expectation that such spaces will be maintained by State automatically, which, according to the URA, does not engender socially responsible behaviour - prompting explicit limitations of use (for
example running, cycling, smoking, rollerblading being forbidden) for fear of public spaces being used in such a way that would cause a disturbance or unrest. City authorities have lauded the privatised street and arcade, like at Clarke Quay, as the model public space in its exclusion of ‘undesirables’ and promotion of surveillance and safety. However, it can be argued that the resultant purified, anesthetised environment negates spontaneity.

Singapores’ built environment history demonstrates three areas in defining Singaporean public space worthy of closer consideration – one of contesting space through municipal / local relationships in colonial and post colonial Singapore; one of the reclamation and re-colonisation of space in what could be deemed post post colonial Singapore, and how alternative public spaces have sought to create a greater sense of social integration; and finally the privatisation of public space, and the relationship between corporation and civil society.

Literature Review

Literature on Singapore public space has tended to largely focus on two critical stages in history that can be catagorised chronologically into colonial and post colonial / municipal rule. Discourse has tended to focus on the phenomenological reviewing the social make – up of public space, the power struggles that have taken place over the course of the last 180 years in the contesting and reclamation of space, and the gradual privatisation (corporatisation) of the public domain. Given the contests over space, it only seems apt to consider Lefebvre, Foucoul, Struver and Best and Rowe to consider power relations; and Newman, Jacobs, Hillier and Hanson in a more global discussion of territory theory and the programming of space to set the predominantly local theorists into context.

Savages’ (1992) account of Singapore public space relies heavily on anecdotal evidence of early European tourists and colonial workers in Singapore, with particular emphasis placed on their sensual experiences of the traditional street and shophouse. He highlights that the congested and often contested nature of public space was not a result of conscious encouragement by the colonial authorities but arose from extant living conditions in the population. The heterogeneous vibrancy of street-life that catered for coolies, merchant and locals also satisfied a romanticised view held by visitors to the Orient that effectively hid the true reality of the urban condition: the unhygienic and overcrowded conditions of living and inefficient circulation and movement in the streets. Within the streets and the shop house area were fertile breeding grounds for pornography, gangsterism, communism and communalism.

Yeoh (2003) similarly considers the spatial appropriation of the 5-foot way - a public pedestrian thoroughfare that was maintained by municipal authorities and offered respite from the tropical sun and rain whilst permitting motion and surveillance by the dominant Colonial power (Ooi 2004). However, she explores more of the territorial struggle between colonial power and local Asian community. She demonstrates how space was contested between the colonial administrators seeking to create an exemplary commercial entrepot for the British Empire that was sanitised, orderly and a means of social control; and the local Asian communities, who were dedicated to making public space effective for their own, often mercantile, purposes. Both of these constituent groups’ opposing outlooks on health and disease, order and disorder, and management of life and death in the urban context saw their spheres of influence intersect in the appropriation of the 5-foot way, necessitating a process of conflict resolution and negotiation that resulted in the ceding of space and power to the public.

Contested public spaces have similarly been considered by Ooi (2004), though in post-colonial Singapore. She discusses how the ceding of Colonial power to the new self – governing State led to a programme of urban redevelopment that saw the slow eradication of historical heritage and public space and the creation of overtly programmed public void deck spaces within repetitive, social housing blocks, in the States’ belief that modernity and social order was required for the Country’s economic success. She argues that such high rise; homogeneous void deck spaces became contested
environments between Municipality and the Inhabitant. The formers’ strict governance and lack of understanding of their social function conflicted with the latter’s intended social appropriation, exacerbated by their shift from the heterogeneous shop house street to homogeneous high-density compound.

Chang (2002) goes further by making reference to the changing nature of the Singapore citizen through social engineering by the State, from being Baudelaires’ vision of Man on the street to Le Corbusiers’ man in the car. He argues that the shop house street that catered for the unplanned and spontaneous had, in the eyes of the State become undesirable, given their preoccupation with efficiency, discipline and modernity. Economic progress and a heightened retail economy had killed the traditional street, and relocated the crowds to the sanitised and purified, comfort and social controlled environments of the internalised street, shopping mall or thoroughfare. He states that these privately owned spaces further segregate society and create a perception of safety and desirability through being with ones own kind, implying a particular usage, attracting a particular social group and tenant, and requiring a particular behaviour through explicit governance via security guard or CCTV.

The success and failure of urban conservation projects that sought to re-inject the urban and cultural character into the urban area and thereby revitalise the local tourism industry have been documented Huo and Wei (2006). Bugis streets’ nocturnal sub-culture was sanitised by the State in the 1980’s, bringing to an end a unique part of the areas cultural identity, much to the disappointment of tourists and locals alike. The States’ attempt to recreate Bugis street (opposite the original street) under the theme of ‘exotic East’ through the reclamation of 30 shop houses, failed to capture the original sense of place, prompting a further private commercial revitalisation, which would provide a point of difference from the established western international orientation of Orchard Road. Despite conservationist sympathies that err towards the heterogeneous environment of the traditional shop house, Huo and Wei believe that the privatised and sanitised interior street spaces are the future of Singapore, or even South East Asian public space.

Heng (2006) further considers privatised space in the form of the MRT as a generator of activity and movement that can be the catalyst for the reclamation of public space. He states that global demand and the post colonial seeking of identity and belongingness has led to a disjointed, physical city comprising a wide range of spaces, landscapes and building forms, undertaken at different times, as a response to different socio-economic and political agendas since independence. He asks whether its identity can be reclaimed and transcend the image of a sterile city of shopping centres. Heng argues that a way to address the disjuncture between the people and place is through the reclamation of space via a programme of activities via the MRT. Its ability to provide subterranean movement and accessibility as a continuum of public space plays an important role in the reclamation process.

Field (1992) takes a more economic perspective by considering the need for public open spaces as public goods - often defended by economists as goods that may be of benefit to more than just the purchaser / consumer. He cites examples of publicness in the built environment (such as the hotel lobby and the shopping mall atria), arguing that the costs to developers in providing such spaces can be seen as a form of betterment levy – the price paid to the community in exchange for the increase in land value arising from its efforts when granted planning permission. He suggests planning authorities should be encouraging private developers to provide semi public spaces for recreation, amenity and social interaction, in environments that are not exposed to climate. He argues that their provision can be justified in the same way that public space is defended as essential requirements for the health and well being of civil society.

In considering the relationship between space and power, Levebvre (1991) discusses how the space of a society is formed as an instrument for those in power. Its spatial code isolates and separates fragments of everyday life. Struver and Best’s (2002) notion of critical spatial identities however acknowledges relationships between groups as opposed to
boundaries. Groups may have different spatial interpretations of a given space which set up power struggles, requiring one power to be dominant (appropriating the space in such a way that would be deemed normality) the others subservient. Foucault (1986) considers the interdependence of dominant and sub-servient powers in the creation of a formative tension that can be used as an instrument of power. The enforcing of such, whether by a private corporate body, council or association can be the device to control, maintain or manage, allowing the space to be appropriated in different ways without marginalizing any faction of society. If we consider the dominant and subservient to being Civil Society and State (or vice versa), Rowe (1997) has identified this as ‘civic realism... a concept based on the belief that it is along the politico–cultural division between civil society and the state that the urban architecture of the public-realm is made best, especially when the reach of both spheres extends simultaneously up to a civilizations loftier aims and down to the needs and aspirations of its marginalized populations’. He argues that spaces that cater for civil society’s ever changing social, cultural, political and economic needs are created by a constructive tension between public and private (for instance, civil society’s ability to hold public institutions accountable for their actions), facilitated by the slight upper hand of one sphere.

Hillier and Hanson (1987) have considered the social consequences of architectural and planning decisions, and in particular that of correspondence in design (as advocated by Newman, 1972, 1980) and non – correspondence (as advocated by the likes of Jacobs, 1961). The former argues that a heterogeneous urban environment does not properly cater for the territorial need of man and his various kinds of social groupings. Design should be responsive to such social groupings by adopting a territorial, individually homogenous perspective in design (i.e for design to correspond to social groupings) in order to avoid territorially heterogeneous places that can breed dysfunction in the urban environment. The latter argues to the contrary, in that spatial diversity plays a positive role in generating and controlling heterogeneity. Hillier and Hanson argue that a ‘structured non – correspondence...[that] relies on numbers and frequencies of events, which take place to reproduce a statistically stable global system, rather than on the formal clarity of its structure can create environments that can be both reproducible and can tolerate a greater amount of disorder.

**Contesting Space - From Sanitisation To Corporatisation**

Colonial Parallels can be drawn between Raffles vision of the Colonial city and that of Newmans’ notions of creating spaces that correspond to particular social groupings in order to avoid social dysfunction. The homogenised approach to the town plan that sought to strongly classify and demarcate according to race, social group and mercantile function saw physical and social barriers constructed that acted as containers; the boundaries of which being policed by the Colonial authorities as the dominant power (Foucault 1986). Such homogeneity and correspondence was further expressed in the shop-house typology, which similarly sought to minimise promiscuity in urban life and sustain a social and physical order.

This however contrasted with the heterogeneous and diverse make up of the subservent Asian community and their appropriation of the 5-foot way. Unlike the strong rules of exclusion and the highly classified nature of the Colonial bungalow Verandah, the 5-foot ways’ weak classification implied a social inclusion that permitted the space to be appropriated by the local Asian community as a multi functional, 24-hour, semi public environment that contained hawking, sleeping, begging, socialising and trading activities. Its’ weak framing, partly attributed to the laissez faire of the local municipal administration, provided an opportunity for the spontaneous and the unplanned, fostering and necessitating complexities of socio – cultural communication and interaction. A further level of complexity was engendered in the space by the creation of invisible boundaries and territories that were established by the Chinese underworld (known as Samseng) which explicitly enforced order amongst the labouring classes. Their implicit delineation of space impacted on street life in the individuals’ day-to-day usage of these semi-public, ambiguous spaces, which bore little correlation to the municipal understanding of the thoroughfare. In summary, rather than a fixed boundary dividing the city into ‘public’ spaces accessible to all and ‘private’ spaces permissible to none except those
admitted by owners, there were degrees of accessibility and exclusions to verandah space largely determined by the relations of the persons involved, by time and by circumstance’ (Yeoh 2003).

Such heterogeneity and multiplicity of function that blurred the boundaries of governance, ownership, and maintenance heightened the perceived differences in the use of the space; much to the chagrin of the dominant power. The municipal perception of such social – cultural and economic practices by the Asian community within the 5-foot way was that of disorder, pestilence and disease, for which a programme of sanitisation and control was to be explicitly applied through relocation programmes (3), harsh penalties and court proceedings (Ho and Lim 1992). The Asian perception of the dominant power, and their mechanisms of management was one of control, discipline and surveillance, for which resistance and non co-operation was required.

It would appear that the municipal authorities’ imposition of boundary control and stronger framing to the weakly classified space, coupled with the differing socio - cultural perceptions as to how the space was to be appropriated led to the 5-foot way becoming a contested space on a daily basis between Asian community and the municipality, the shopkeepers and police; and to a lesser extent between rivaling coolies and Samsengs. The Asian communities heterogeneous appropriation of the space for mercantile and social activities frustrated the municipality, who sought to keep the thoroughfare clear of debris and fit for passage in the interests of preserving order and Colonial dominance and power through surveillance of the subservient Asian community. Within the Asian community, further territorial contests took place that persistently challenged and renegotiated implicit boundaries. The result was a space that was kaleidoscopically multi functional and sufficiently malleable in serving communal, interactive and economic purposes [that were] redefined as socially neutral space, subservient to the public right of way and open to view and regulation (Yeoh 2003).

Post Colonial
Post colonial Singapore saw the ceding of dominant power from Colonial rule to a municipal system of self government. Local spatial groupings, accustomed to living and working within the shop house typology were relocated to the peripheral housing blocks of the city in the interests of a socio - economic improvement, but at the expense of spatial and economic recolonisation of the Colonial centre by International, transpatial groupings. Such a National programme of urban redevelopment saw housing object take precedence over public space, as aptly demonstrated in the HDB properties within the Woodlands, Pasir Ris and Punggol areas. Despite urban morphological change, it could be argued that the social and spatial legacy laid down in Colonial Singapore - that of a homogeneity and a correspondent approach to design according to social grouping, continued, albeit that the classification and the framing of space increased in strength.

Void decks at the ground floor level of the new housing blocks acted as the new public space; appropriated by the relocated residents for socio - cultural festivities, group meetings, and social interaction. As with the 5-foot way, their social function changed during the course of the day – ranging from a recreational space after school to a late night venue for conversations amongst residents. However, the States’ preoccupation with creating a modern and efficient nation that mitigated complacency also meant an implicit social engineering that engendered multi-racial occupancy and correspondent designs that were culturally and socially responsive to particular social groupings. Such an increasing classification and framing through the governance of the dominant municipal power saw more explicit physical and social boundaries of exclusion that aimed to mitigate the creation of ghettos and the forming of social groups that would pose a threat to the newly formed government.
The physical permutations of the dominant power and their explicit rules of exclusion and governance were evident in the void decks, as documented in the research by Ooi and Tan and Ooi and Hee (Ooi 2004). The overtly programmed spaces that corresponded to particular socio-cultural functions tended to be the least occupied, with the spaces that were the least programmed (i.e having the weaker frame strength and classifications) being the most occupied, given their ability to allow for the unplanned and spontaneous (4). However, the explicit rules of governance (such as the banning of running, smoking, ball games, speaking loudly, to name a few), that were applied to the void decks with the weaker frame strengths, created either a sterility of space, or in extreme cases the contesting of the space between resident (sub-servient) and municipality (dominant).

The continued correspondent and homogeneous approach to the design of the housing blocks saw the Void deck become a more classified public space under the explicit rules of governance, compared with that of its 5-foot way predecessor. However, such explicit and specific functionality of the spaces, coupled with rules of exclusion and appropriation, created sterile environments that, when challenged by the tenants in their own spontaneous appropriation, created power struggles between dominant (State) and sub-servient (Tenant), which largely resulted in ambivalence and dis-ownership of their assumed territory.

Post post colonial
The States’ demolish and re-build programme of the central business district with international retail, hotels, business centres and pseudo local tourist icons sought to gentrify and support the transpatial community of tourists, entrepreneurs and expatriates through privatised development, effectively ceding power to the private corporation in the interests of sharing the burden of public goods (Field 1992). This increasing privatisation of open spaces became internalised as part of more heterogeneous, non - correspondent mixed-use developments. These spaces were in turn connected via comfort cooled, subterranean concourses that offered respite from the climatic and infrastructural constraints of the external climate and the suffocating road network.

The integration of retail, (that provided amenity and recreation for transpatial groups), with the new Mass Rapid Transport system (that provided access for the residents from their State housing development to the central business district), created an abstracted continuum of privatised space that provided the opportunity for the reclamation of the inner city by the previously dispossessed locals, and a greater opportunity for co-presence, recreation and movement between spatial and transpatial groupings. City Hall MRT, the largest network of underground public space, is connected to One Raffles Link and the Esplanade through City Link Mall. It has a street level connection to the Esplanade, Marina Square, Suntec city mall, and Raffles city mall. During the week, it serves the commuter during peak hour as an improved means of accessibility to the Central Business district; at the weekend it serves spatial, transpatial and transient groupings as a recreational destination.

Despite the concourse being a non-correspondent space within the heterogeneous mixed-use environment, the retail and transport infrastructure programmes are highly classified environments that have implicit and explicit rules of inclusion or exclusion respectively. In the case of the former, the rules are often implicit – retail outlets being incorporated within the concourse so as to attract particular user groups (and sometimes even discourage others) at particular times of the day. In the case of the latter, the rules are explicit – physical boundaries are established to keep those not permitted to travel to pass onto the platforms. If we consider the concourse, it may be assumed that its ability to provide movement as well as interface with the highly classified retail environments bears a resemblance to the Colonial 5-foot way. However, closer inspection demonstrates that its classification is stronger than its predecessor (i.e stronger rules of governance and maintenance of boundaries). It has a specific function (i.e a linking space that permits movement), with explicit rules as to how it is to be used (e.g no loitering or running). Any ambiguities as to what is, and
what isn’t, permissible is removed by the presence of the security guards and CCTV, which secure the boundaries of the dominant power (i.e. the corporation). The explicit rules of governance limit the contest over space between the tenant and the corporation, and often negate such contests arising.

Despite its heterogeneous capability of attracting spatial, transpatial and transient groupings, and its weaker classification that provides opportunities for recreation, movement and co-presence, the increasing dominance of the corporation has socially sanitised the privatised public space through surveillance, nullifying any opportunity for both the contesting of space and spontaneity.

Today
The increasing privatisation of space has similarly taken place at street level, most notably in the Clarke Quay area – a private quayside development that demonstrates the political leverage the private corporation has over the State in its continued sharing of public good for its own economic benefit. Today, the State must contend with the privatisation of public space, which has led to the Urban Redevelopment Authorities’ dictation of social and urban morphological parameters that private corporation must comply, with little or no room for negotiation (S).

Unlike the neighbouring Boat Quay conservation area, which has undergone a public programme of urban renewal in the preservation of its quayside, Clarke Quay has been permitted to develop as a privatised space with superficially public characteristics and similarities. Whilst initial perceptions may be that of a permeable, weakly classified quayside that is appropriated by those wishing to promenade, it is in fact a highly classified space in its predominantly food and beverage arena that caters for spatial, transpatial and increasingly transient groupings. Unlike its weakly classified neighbour, whose tables, chairs and waitresses occupy and continually contest the use of the quayside space in a similar vein to that of the colonial 5-foot way, the corporate dominant power that governs and maintains Clarke Quay has explicit demarcations of the territories for use by its tenants. Areas are let to the subservient tenants in the interests of drawing a particular sector of society known locally as PMEBs (Professionals, managers, executives and business people) over the age of 25 in order to restrict unruliness and undesirables, thus instilling implicit rules of inclusion and exclusion. In a fashion not too dissimilar to the semi public domain of the 19th century arcade, these spaces are under constant surveillance by the dominant power - those not abiding by the rules, be they tenant in their operation or customer in their use can be evicted.

Despite the perception of being a public space, the private / public relationship and the strong framing actually starves spontaneity, creating a sterilised, homogeneously themed environment. However, it is the privatised nature of the space that appeals to the State, in its ability to share the burden of public good, much to the detriment to society in appropriating spaces for social interaction and to the fine grain urban fabric that was traditionally a heterogeneous and diverse mix that encouraged street life.

Conclusion
Raffles homogenising vision of Singapore sought to retain colonial order and dominance over the sub-servient local communities by the physical sanitisation, classification and correspondent design according to mercantile trade, social group and race - creating implicit rules of exclusion and the opportunity for boundary control through surveillance. Despite Singapore’s’ post colonial socio - economic success, the sanitisising and homogenising legacy of the Colonists continued, particularly in the demolish and rebuild era of urban redevelopment that sought to cater specifically for a transpatial, International audience in the central business district, and the relocated, local spatial groupings to the peripheral housing blocks. The States’ realisation that large areas of national heritage (namely the quayside and shop houses) were being eradicated, coupled with an infrastructural programme that sought to improve movement to the
central business district, saw a more heterogeneous, non-correspondent approach to planning implemented that would allow the reclamation of space by the dispossessed locals as well as an integration with transpatial groupings, and the increasing number of transient tourists.

Despite colonial and post colonial Singapore being beset by urban design of homogeneity and correspondence, both the shop house 5-foot way and void deck demonstrate weaker classifications that permitted on the one hand spontaneity and vibrancy, but on the other, the contestation of space. It could be argued that the post colonial, municipal powers’ commitment to nation building and social control however saw the imposition of greater social rules in the interests of modernity and efficiency. The resultant strengthening of the spatial classification and framing, the heightened rules of exclusion, and increased surveillance led to sterility and under utilisation of space that the dominant power has tried to rectify through more heterogeneous, non correspondent designs of inclusion that aimed to attract both spatial and transpatial groupings.

As the nature of these developments in the last 20 years have become more heterogeneous in their mix in order to attract a broader spectrum of society, public space has paradoxically lost its spontaneity, and become less of a contested realm. Raffles environmental sanitisation, in the interests of social order and hygiene, appears to have given way to the States vision for a social sanitisation in the interest of political and economic efficiency. This may be largely attributed to the increasing privatised nature of public space, and the more explicit governance, determinism of physical and social boundaries and implicit rules of exclusion, outlined by the private corporation.

As the State continues to cede power to the corporation in the interests of relinquishing the burden of providing public goods, perhaps the public / private model of creating public space, such as in Clarke Quay, could be the answer. It would seem imperative though that the State start to reclaim an element of power in order to allow more spontaneous environments that are not shackled by the corporations’ drive for a movement economy. It is perhaps at this very juncture of contest between State and Corporation that the new public realm of Singapore can be created and best appropriated by civil society.

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Notes

(1) Spatial grouping – an office worker working within a firm for example. Such a grouping would be based on proximity within the physical office space.

(2) Transpatial groupings – a relationship independent of space. Eg. the membership of a Club, or clan, or visiting lecturing post to a university.

(3) The municipality sought to transpose the market and hawking functions to pre-destined, homogeneous environments that could be maintained in an orderly fashion and placed under constant surveillance – much at odds to the Asian socio-cultural street life that promoted heterogeneity and diversity.

(4) The spaces that appear to be appropriated the most - the coffee shops, hawker centres and market places - were not even the public spaces consciously planned or within the interests of the State in their quest of encouraging social interaction. Research has shown that the greatest amount of social interaction has taken place on the linkways, corridors and void decks, whereby neighbours cross paths on their daily routine. Accessibility and where residents actually meet is incidental to the design and planning purposes of public space.

(5) URA have established urban design guidelines for execution by corporate interests that strikes a symbiosis between public and private, including:

- 10-15 m wide walkway (State)
- Fountains and sculptures (Private funded and delivered)
- Tourism board organises events (State) as well as the private sector
- Mix of public and private development (State and Private)
- Mix of materials / street furniture / finishes to the floor that still allows continuity
- Erected heritage markers (State)