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Creative imaginings: Living Singapore's Creative City Policies by arts practitioners

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to examine at the relationship between the state and the arts in Singapore. It explores the issues surrounding the consequences and outcomes of Singapore's creative city policies on the practice and production of the arts in the city-state since its implementation in 1999. Current Literature suggests that state driven cultural policies play a significant role in curating specific types of arts that is desirable for the state. However, they provide inadequate attention to how the arts practitioners interact and operationalise with said policies. Thus, I argue that these desired outcomes and unintended consequences are mainly the result of how the arts practitioners imagine the presence of the state in their lives through the enactment of these policies. These imaginings then shape their lived reality and daily practices, as well as inform them of how they allow themselves to be governed. Furthermore, I posit that differences in genres that exist within art-forms could account for and explain the existence and reproduction of some of the inequalities that are present within the lived experiences of the Singaporean arts practitioners.

This paper elicited the articulations of nine arts practitioners from different practices regarding their imagination of their personal as well as institutional vis-à-vis their organization's relationship with the state. By doing so, I hope to discover what are some of the common factors and resonating issues that exist within the practice of art making that these art practitioners consider to be influential to the creation and practice of the arts in Singapore as well as the arts in general. By extension, I also hope to understand further if there are indeed differences of how each genre is believed to be treated differently by the state. The findings strongly suggest that the premise that the way in which the arts are practiced and produced in Singapore is significantly influenced by the state, and that the impact and outcomes of the creative city policies have failed to live up to its promise of creating a distinctive cultural city of the arts.

Introduction:

Singapore's economic success is described as the "East Asian Miracle" (Chong 2010a; Sandhu and Wheatley 1989). This success is reflective of the state's reflexive developmental model and its ability to enact the necessary measures and policies to stay economically competitive. This reflexivity is an exercise of reimagining by the state, and is informed by the shifts in the regional and global markets. This paper looks at a recent re-imagining by the state. In his speech during the 2002 National Day Rally, the then prime minister of Singapore Mr Goh Chock Tong gave a retrospective account of the decade that just preceded.

> "The benign global climate of the early 90s may have turned less hospitable. But the future is what we make of it." (Goh 2002)

Goh (2002) explained how it was necessary to "remake the Singapore economy". He gave examples of Singapore facing stiff competition from the emerging economies of India and China which provided a cheaper and larger skilled workforce to the multi-national companies. He also added that closer neighbours like Malaysia were also developing their infrastructures and industrial capabilities and have already been successful in diverting investment and trade away from Singapore (Goh 2002). These events were happening alongside new technological and scientific developments that would influence how the new economies play out. The advent of newer, faster and more efficient communication and transportation technologies have ensured that all cities became increasingly unhindered by geographical limitations (Tay 2005). This meant that Singapore was losing its geo-positional edge against their formerly less-accessible competitors within the new global market in the face of these modern advancements. On the other hand, the advent of such new communication and transportation technologies incidentally increased every city's connectivity to the global market (Tay 2005). The newly established global networks of communication allow every city to be connected from anywhere around the world. In facing these new global and economic realities, Goh (2002) argued that it was imperative for the nation to develop the creative and knowledge industries as an alternative means for national economic growth.

These changes brought about a grand re-imagining of Singapore as a *creative city*. The creative city is an urban space of that has been "reimagined, rejuvenated and re-purposed within a competitive global framework" (Tay 2005:220). The *Renaissance City Plans* (RCP) was first introduced formally to Parliament by Mr Lee Yock Suan on 9th March 2000. Lee (2000) outlined the goals of the masterplan as such:

> "… it is to establish Singapore as a global city of the arts. We want to position Singapore as a key city in Asia and as one of the cultural centres in the world. *The idea is to be one of the top cities in the world to live, work and play in* (Emphasis mine). Where there is an environment conducive to knowledge-based industries and talent. Where Singaporeans can be creative and well-rounded individuals." (Lee 2000)

In his speech, the RCP was the state's creative city masterplan, and that it was conceptualised and enacted in response to the new demands set by the reality of the 1990s (Lee 2000). The state sought to implement an institutionalised mimetic isomorphism, which is essentially the re-imagining of the city-state borrowed from six existing creative city models such as New York, Hong Kong, and Melbourne, but drew heavily from London's 'Cool Britannia' movement. (Chong 2010b; Lee 2000; Tay 2005:225; Wee 2003). For the state, transforming into the creative city was how Singapore remained relevant in the regional and global markets. The primary focus of the state had always been geared was towards economic growth and job creation, but now it looked for other means to attract and retain top talent and foreign capital. Lee (2000) began his speech with a mention of how the then Prime Minister had PM "promised more funds to promote the arts at his National Day Rally Speech" the previous year. This was the prelude to a government-wide approach in re-inventing the city-state. The creative industries such as architectural design, film and video, and digital multimedia were earmarked to cultivated by the Ministry of Trade and Industries (MTI) and statutory boards such as the Economic Development Board (EDB) through significant government grants, tax rebates and subsidies "in order to unleash the economic value of our arts and cultural resources" (Ministry of Trade and Industry 2001:vii). Infrastructure for culture and the arts such as the construction of the Esplanade Theatre were built to provide for more spaces for world class performances to come to Singapore and perform. The government also pushed the creation of integrated resorts at Sentosa and Marina Bay, where high couture fashion and entertainment intermingle for regional and global tourists to spend big money.

Physical infrastructures weren't the only focus of the state's re-imagining of the creative city. In 1999, the government allocated an additional $50 million dollars which would be disbursed over the next 5 years into NAC and NHB's operational budgets. This fund was to be used "to strengthen the development of Singapore's cultural 'software' – capabilities, audiences and vibrancy" (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts 2008:6). In addition to that, during the 2002 National Day Rally Speech Mr Goh also mentioned that that it would be in the nation's best interest to equip the citizenry with not only relevant skills, but values and outlooks that would be beneficial to shifting emphasis from manufacturing to knowledge-based economy (Goh 2002; Gopinathan 2007; Lee 2007). This meant that the policies also sought to influence the capabilities and behaviours of its citizenry in preparation for the transformation of the city-state to become a creative city. The policies enacted through government agencies and bodies such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) , Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Ministry of Trade and industries (MTI) and the then Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) sought to "enhance the creative capacity of our people, arts, design and media can be embedded as creative learning tools for all levels of education" (Ministry of Trade and Industry 2001:V). This translated into various initiatives and programmes from the mentioned state bodies that targeted towards influencing the citizens towards becoming more familiar with the mechanics of the creative industries. For example, in 2003 The Ministry of Education sought to infuse Innovation and Enterprise within national school curricula. In his speech during the 2003 MOE Workplan Seminar, Mr Tharman

Shanmugaratnam, who was then the acting Minister of Education, mentioned that the inculcation of innovation and enterprise into the national school curricula would allow for students to nurture a sense of creativity as well as critical thinking, and that this was part of the overarching developmental model strategy that would allow future generations "to stay relevant in a fast shifting world" (Shanmugaratnam 2003). New institutions such as the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, School of the Arts, the NYU Tisch School of Film were launched, and older institutions such as Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and La Salle College of the Arts were given additional funding to set up international links with other institutions to offer degree programmes and other professional qualifications.

Since its inception in 1999, the Renaissance City plans had already undergone through three distinctive stages. The second stage of the Renaissance city plans project (RCP II) was launched in 2005, and was "introduced as part of a broader Creative Industries Development Strategy, and articulated an industry approach for developing arts and culture" (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts 2008). RCP III conceptualised in 2008 with the aim to transform Singapore into the desired international arts hub by 2015 (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts 2008). In 2010, the National Arts Council (NAC) has commissioned an Arts and Culture Strategic Review which made a claim that "after decades of hard work to achieve our prosperity and security, we now have the cultural foundation and economic means to springboard to our artistic and cultural success" (National Arts Council 2012). The product, as articulated in the Renaissance City plans, was to "transform Singapore into a *Distinctive Global City for the Arts* (emphasis mine), where arts and culture would make Singapore an attractive place to work, live and play, contribute to the knowledge and learning of every Singaporean, and provide cultural ballast for nation-building" (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts 2008). Essentially, these are the official tropes of which the state through its various bodies, has articulated in its position as to why and how these policies are enacted.

This grand re-imagining of Singapore as a *distinctive global city for the arts*, by both the state as well as the arts practitioners, forms the background of this study. Superficially, the state's imagined desired outcome of Singapore being an international creative hub is positioned to be beneficial to the arts practitioners in Singapore. However, there seems to be ruptures between how the policies facilitate the transformation into the creative city as imagined by the state and the realised outcomes which are experienced by the arts practitioners.

This paper showcases part of my ongoing dissertation project for the completion of my doctoral programme. Specifically, the sampling, data collection and analysis presented in this paper was conducted for my pilot study in preparation of my candidature qualifying examinations. I will firstly share my methodological approach, and then touch upon two significant themes that emerged from the findings, namely the issues of the bureaucratization of the arts, as well as the ambiguities of the arts market and its ecology. This paper concludes

by describing what some of the inherent issues are from deploying a multi art-form sampling, and how these issues are addressed in my (currently ongoing) dissertation.

Methodological Approach

This paper uses a phenomenological approach to demonstrate how the social and cultural policies that are collectively embodied by the RCP are experienced by the arts practitioners in Singapore. This approach focuses on how "the corpus of commonly held knowledge" which constitutes the life-world of aesthetic culture and its production as "inter-subjectively available" (Siddique, Sharon 1990). Therefore, this phenomenological study is to demonstrate how elements of this this corpus of commonly held knowledge are used by arts practitioners to make sense of situations in relation to art making in Singapore.

As a researcher, I understand that inequalities exist in all spaces where there are social structures. Scholars such as Chua Beng Huat and Tan Tarn How argue that while some of the inequalities that exist in Singapore are deliberately reproduced in the view to perpetuate the dominance of the ruling elite, many of the issues that arose from inequalities are actually unintended consequences (Chua 2004; Shotam 1989; J. Tan 2010; T. H. Tan 2010). This is also true with the arts scene in Singapore. My roles as an orchestral-choral conductor as well as the artistic director of a local community choir allows me to posit a hypothetical bracket that closely describes what I assume to be the reality of aesthetic cultural production in Singapore. I have experienced and observed different and preferential treatments embodied by difference in genre and art forms. I have observed how within the field of music the differentiation of treatment is predicated on genres. Genres that are perceived to be more 'visible', such as groups performing popular and western classical mediums, are provided much more resources such as platforms for performances and funding than those genres that have 'niche' audiences, such as punk-rock and metal.

Phenomenology centres on how an individual constructs and negotiates meaning in the daily lived reality through his or her experiences. Nieswiadomy (2012) posits that the researcher should employ a 'bracket' that allows the researcher to better understand the lived experience from the vantage point of the subject by taking to account his or her own beliefs and emotions. She further adds that the researcher must first identify what he or she expects to discover and then deliberately put aside these ideas (Nieswiadomy 2012). Thus, my personal bracket informs me of the direction of enquiry. This study to discover how other arts practitioners from different art forms make meaning from state enactments towards aesthetic cultural production in Singapore. In this study, the interviews with my informants have allowed me to discover that each art-form and genre is regarded differently by the state. The paper's research focus would be on how the state utilizes and disburse resources through the cluster of policies as an important component of the corpus of commonly held knowledge. By eliciting responses from arts practitioners about the previously mentioned state enactment is

situated in their daily lives and artistic practices, the paper then puts forward three phenomenological "brackets". Firstly, the art's practitioner's their own imagined relationship with the state shapes their lived reality and daily practices. Secondly, this imagining inform them of how they allow themselves to be governed. Thirdly, I posit that differences that exist across as well as within art-forms could account for and explain the existence and reproduction of some of the inequalities that are present within the lived experiences of the Singaporean arts practitioners. As such, the purpose of this paper would be to increase our understanding of contextual reference and relevance of aesthetic cultural production in Singapore. In sum, this papers endeavours to use the phenomenological approach to observe and describe the interplay between government policy and the aesthetic cultural production at work in the process of meaning making by arts practitioners in Singapore.

Technicism, Governmentality and Bureaucracy

As mentioned in the introduction, Singapore's image of the 'East Asian Economic Miracle' is carefully curated by the state. Singapore is also known for its strong paternalistic governance style and how it micromanages every minutia of Singapore's daily life (Lee 2007; T. H. Tan 2010). Scott (1998) suggests that nation-states inherently want to codify and make everything "legible" to control society (p. 2). He further argues that when the state cultivates a legible space to be controlled, it created gross simplifications and obscured the complex heterogeneity of society. Scott (1998) cautions that this attempt by the state to make society legible, in conjunction with some other features, created some of the worst agrarian disasters of the 20th century. In sharp contrast to this, scholars have attributed Singapore's economic success to the state's all-encompassing control (Chong 2010a; Lee 2007; Sandhu and Wheatley 1989). Here, I posit that these two arguments aren't exactly diametrically opposite. Rather, the issue that thread both arguments together is how the arts in Singapore were made "legible" by the state, and how this legibility becomes embodied through systems of control vis-à-vis the administrative bureaucracy of arts policies.

PS-01 identifies himself as a professional photographer. He shared with me his experiences of interacting with administrators from both the NAC as well as government schools when he was teaching photography as an elective course. He mentioned that every instructor had to register with NAC first (in this case, under the auspices of the AMIS programme) with paper qualifications as well as experience to qualify to teach in government schools. He added that these pools of instructors *"had to be part of a roster which need to be updated annually"* and only after registering and being approved in the NAC system will these instructors be allowed to apply for positions in schools (PS-01, 2016). The second layer of administration he had to deal with was engaging in an online government bidding process called GeBiz. He shared that as a system, it was very *"troublesome"* (emphasis his). He further clarified that there are several forms and templates that needed to be filled, and many of the fields in these forms weren't even relevant to teaching photography. When he clarified this with the school

administrator, the response he received was that everyone "*has to* do this" (emphasis his) because this is "standard government procedure" (PS-01, 2016).

The bureaucratization of the arts is a major theme that emerged from the dialogues and vignettes offered by the participants. Two recurring examples that came out were the applications for teaching or coaching positions in government schools, as well as grants application offered by government and statutory bodies. The respondents unanimously shared with me their sense of tediousness and frustration when having to deal with such applications. When I further clarified to ask them about the source of their frustration, the responses reflected on how they are individually questioning the meaning (as opposed to the purpose) of the tasks involved when attempting to do the such applications, as well as how the process vis-à-vis the effort put in to complete the application is perceived, utilized and valued by the government bodies. While the state is not reducible to a single institution, the participants imagining of the state is significantly informed by their interactions with state bodies and institutions. Subsequently, these work and grant applications form a significant part of their interaction with the state.

Geertz (1973) posits that culture embedded within a social institution is "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Informed by this, I then argue that the act of navigating and negotiating the bureaucracy as a system rather than a collective of administrators form an integral part of the culture of being an arts practitioner. The example given by PS-01 regarding his interaction with the school administrator shows how the performative task of form filing and submission is enforced by the *habitus* of enacting 'standard government procedure'. This is not to say that there is no meaning made by the arts practitioners in performing and completing the tasks, especially when the non-reply of 'this is standard procedure' comes to the fore. PS-01 and others feel that this is the medium in which the state communicates with the arts practitioners. Furthermore, for the arts practitioners themselves to engage the state to get the jobs and the grants, they need to learn to fill in the forms in a manner that can be understood and accepted by the bureaucracy.

In Singapore, policy and bureaucracy are intertwined. Yet, my informants share with me that they are more familiar with the latter rather than the former. Other than invoicing and billing, form filing and applications form the bulk of the administrative work that comes along with art making here in Singapore. In fact, administration is seen by most of my informants as a very Singaporean affectation. By this, I posit that the implementation of the RCP policies and its resultant bureaucratization are a manifestation of Singapore's governmentality. This paper refers to Governmentality as the way in which the state governs its peoples, and it is in part structured by a nation's history. Gopinathan (2007) argues that Singapore's governmentality is structured by a technicist affectation, and this is historically rooted when manufacturing was the primary industry of post-Independent Singapore. Technicism, as defined by Sharpe and Gopinathan (2002) is the socio-economic practices that regard technology and technical

knowledge as a structuring force that shapes the lived practices of a society. This technicist rationality of Singapore was the result of its civil bureaucracy expansion in the 1970s. This coincides with the expansion of the nation's infrastructure as well as the civil structures of the developing nation. Lee (1989) suggests that this expansion has two purposes. Firstly, the state sought to structure these new bureaucracies to regulate the expansion and growth of the nation. Secondly, this structuring allows for the bureaucracies to practice transparent accountability. In the early years of independence, the Singapore government formed the civil service by predominantly recruiting individuals from the fields of Engineering, Architecture, and Law (Lee 1989). The expertise brought forward from such disciplines reflected the affinity towards technicist practices.

Gopinathan (2007) argues that the state employed Neo-Fordism principles vis-à-vis the process of quantifying measuring indexes (such as budgets, and key result areas) which was emulated from the practices in the other neo-liberal nation-states in the West, especially Great Britain under the Thatcher government. Scholars such as Lily Kong as well as Gopinathan and Sharpe argue that the practice of neo-Fordism became the governmentality of which Singapore regulated the working bureaucratic structures as well as its peoples (Kong 2000; Lee 1989; Sharpe and Gopinathan 2002; Wee 2010). This ordering is also imposed on the arts. A published transcription of a radio interview of Ong Keng Sen by Channel NewsAsia correspondent Bharati Jagdish gives us an insight to how technicism is pervasive in Singapore. Ong had outlined the structural limitations that the government has imposed on the arts practitioners. Ong suggested that these limitations are made evident as the notions of over-production, Key Progress Indicators (KPIs), markets, and grants administration have forced the performing arts to be a facet of the creative industry (Jagdish 2015). He further argued that a significant part of the problem is that the bureaucrats who work in the governing bodies that regulate the arts are disconnected to the art form. Ong accuses these bureaucrats are, at best, uninformed of the demands of creating and performing, or at worst, dispassionate about the arts in itself, and are only there as mindless *administrati* (Jagdish 2015).

Scott (1998) arguments echo the sentiments brought forward by Ong. He uses the term "high modernist ideology" instead, and that this is "best conceived as a strong … version of the self-confidence about scientific and technological progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature) and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws." (Scott 1998:4) These similarities can be seen in how Singapore polices, curates and administrates the arts. Furthermore, Scott mentions that four factors that potentially can cause a state project to fail. There are:

1. the "administrative ordering and legibility of the state as well as of nature" (p. 4),
2. A high modernist ideology shared amongst the elites (p.4)
3. "an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs to being" (p. 5)

4. and relatedly “a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans” (p. 5).

Scholars have argued that these factors closely reflect Singapore’s state of being (Chua 2002, 2004; Kong 2000; Thio 2010). While economically Singapore remains strong, this paper questions the state of the arts in Singapore, and how my informants may argue as Scott (1998) argues of how the aesthetic cultural production in Singapore is severely inhibited due to these factors. The vignettes my informants shared with me gave further insight to how legibility is carried out within the state’s cultural policies. PS-04 is a writer and an editor. She articulated that the “one size fits all policies”, especially in relation to application and disbursement of funding, do not work for every art-form (PS-04, 2016). More often, the more niche genres get either plugged into larger umbrella categories and are judged by its physical and economic output as opposed to its aesthetic value. Other genres that deal with taboo subject matter are completely unrecognized by the state, and as such are also being “discouraged” to produce through the lack of seed grants and even censorship through the relevant authorities such as the iMDA. PS-01 shares this sentiment. He mentioned that some of these administrative requirements for grants may ‘work’ for ‘stagework’ including dramas, musicals, dance, concerts, and orchestras. He further suggests that why it works for all these is because they are produced in pretty much in similar, controlled locations. However, art-forms such as photography are place in a precarious space due to the dynamic nature of its media and content.

> “Sometimes you get inspired in the spur of the moment, if you change your proposal that you submitted and got approved in the middle of it, you’re going to be in trouble. You lose your grant whereas musical scores, scripts, maybe not dance movements but at least there are certain things that you expect from say traditional ballet. These things are more or less fixed. It’s just the differences in inflection, the nuances will be different but they are more comfortable with something that is fixed, that something they can see, that they can approve, it’s like the American senses where the life programme gets a 5-second delay in case somebody left out a swear word in the middle of something. It’s that…they’re not comfortable with that.” PS-01 (2016)

Arts Economy and Ecology

In exploring the notion of control of the arts by the state, my informants shared with me their concerns and frustrations about how they see the state place value and worth in the arts and their art-form. More importantly, my informants expressed their dismay about how there is a discrepancy in the purpose of art making as articulated by the state and as articulated by arts practitioners. PS-02 is a choral director. He shared how the state has always articulated that are supporting the arts. One of the issues emerges when the state bodies themselves engage arts practitioners to perform at their internal events. While these state bodies are willing to

have performing arts group entertain guests during their organized events such as dinners or conventions, they're not so willing to give remuneration to the performers themselves. "They (the organizers) will always tell us 2 words - 'no budget'" (PS-02, 2016). This becomes a source of frustration to him as well as some of the other informants. They feel that the state does not really "put the money where the mouth is" (PS-02, 2016). My informants question why the state is willing to spend lots of money on other things such as infrastructures, but when it comes to supporting local performers, they rarely, if any, offer a substantial amount of money for remuneration.

When I ask my informants about how the state values the arts, many are in the opinion that the notion of value is a loaded word. When I probe further, some of them offer that the value of the arts is tied to how much it costs and how much it is worth, as well as how much can an art artefact or work can bring prestige to the nation. PS-01 shared that while Singapore doesn't "want to be seen as a Draconian country with too many rules and regulations so if you want the arts to flourish, I'd say that we air put to make it seem like we are quite cosmopolitan but what they're bringing in to Singapore is a big spectacle." (PS-01, 2016) My informants also shared how they felt that the notion of uncertainty and precarity for the arts that is closely tied with the state of the nation's economy. When I asked PS-02 to explain further, he shared that every citizen knows that every aspect of life is controlled "from the top" and these top down decisions will always privilege the economy. He further clarifies:

> "From the whole direction that the country has taken. It has long been a country of economic growth first, and other things second. So anything that does not help the GDP, I don't think that the government bothers to put much emphasis on it. You see, every time we have a financial crisis, what is the budget that gets cuts first? It's music. It's all the arts. They will never cut budgets for defence. So I have been facing this in all my schools. I have been told, rather, schools have been telling me to reduce my hours of rehearsals, because there is no budget. 'This year my budget has been cut' and this has been an ongoing thing. If you are supporting the arts, then why are you cutting the schools budget for arts and CCA?" (PS 02)

These sentiments have also been echoed by scholars. Wee (2010) argues that much of how the state view the arts is predicated on its economic value. Furthermore, he argues that because of the developmental model's focus of economic sustainability, Singapore "forsook not only many of the political dimensions of democratic life but also its cultural dimensions, taken in both the "High Culture" and "way-of-life" senses" (Wee 2010:48). He further added that what was left was an industrial and commercial understanding of culture, and "manufacturing and productive institutions became the collective basis of social life" (Wee 2010:48). Essentially, this scepticism held by arts practitioners regarding Singapore becoming a distinctive global city for the arts is rooted in how the arts had been treated prior to this re-imagining exercise. Much of the differences in re-imagining Singapore as a 'distinctive global

city for the arts' was stemmed from how the arts practitioners perceived the state's treatment of culture and the arts during the early years of nation-building after Singapore's independence in 1965. The developmental model adopted by the state at that point in time reflected a capitalist modernity that placed more emphasis towards industrial progress rather than the cultivation of cultural and artistic development (Wee 2010). The state reports that its approach to cultural matters from the early years of independence to the late 1980s was that the arts was frequently utilized as a convenient vehicle for the central purpose of nation-building. However, actual support from the government for the literary, visual and performing arts was scarce, and most of the forms of support and praxis were situated in the government schools under the auspices of the ministry of education. Beyond the schools, the practice of the arts by adult arts practitioners mostly relied on the support by the various ethnic communities whom regarded the arts as tangible manifestations of their own ethnic culture (Chong 2003) . Wee (2003) also mentioned that during this period, the state had referred to "culture" to the context of "multi-ethnic cultures and values", as well as an allusion to signify "the mythicized Asian/Confucian values that were the alleged foundation of Singapore's "East-Asian Miracle" status" (p.85). He further adds that "Cultural policy—policy that fostered the arts and high culture—was not a real concern" to the state (Wee 2003:85).

Despite how the arts is seen to be an extension of Singapore's economic growth, the notion of arts practitioners being able to earn a living through arts making is something my informants find problematic. Not all my informants consider themselves to be "full-time" arts practitioners. Here, being full-time means that they earn a living and maintain their daily expenses through art making. Most of them have what they call "day jobs" that provides them a steady income. While economically their art making may seem secondary, most of them spend a significant amount of time beyond normal working hours in pursuit of arts making. Very few arts practitioners are privileged in working in creative industries that run parallel to their arts making. Furthermore, the largest employer of arts practitioners is the state, and more specifically, the Ministry of Education (MOE) through their various schools' arts and enrichment programmes. While there are some employment opportunities available for arts practitioners through schools, this doesn't mean that the income is sustainable. PS-08, a dramaturge and an arts educator, shared:

> "Our (the arts practitioners employed by schools) hours are completely at the mercy of the school and its time tables. If there's a common test or exam, that means we don't teach. If we don't teach, we don't clock billable hours. The 'good' schools are the ones that have their act together and tell you these things in advance. The 'not-so-good' schools are the one that will call you while you're on your way to teach that your class has been cancelled. And with the new policy of not having holiday practices, we don't earn anything in May to June and October to December. It's hard to be a full-time instructor if you don't get paid full time wages. While we don't teach in those months, we still have to pay our rents and our bills. We still have to eat." (PS-08, 2016)

The NAC often refer to the idea of the Arts Ecosystems in Singapore, and how that the markets and circles of consumption are an integral part of having a sustainable arts scene. This idea isn't a new innovation. Becker (1982) posits that the art worlds isn't predicated on just the art artefact itself, but exists in an interconnected weave of arts producers and consumers. The Straits Times reported in 2016 that the economic value of the visual arts industry had increased over a 10-year period (Huang 2016). Furthermore, the visual arts industry's total nominal value-added rose from $340.3 million in 2003 to $528.7 million in 2013, per the latest data from the Singapore Cultural Statistics 2015. However, Huang (2016) cautioned that this overall growth, however, belies the struggle of arts galleries and arts practitioners. Many arts galleries had to close due to rising costs and lack of consumers. This is also reflected in Ong's statement of over-production, whereby this became "a case of too much, too soon" (Huang 2016; Jagdish 2015).This issue of consumers, or lack thereof, is something of a paradox. In qualifying this, my informants unanimously shared that they feel that Singaporeans now are more receptive towards the arts, especially those below the age of 30. That said, they feel that Singaporeans are not consuming the arts, and there is a parity between what is worth going to and what is worth paying for. PS-07 is a young dramatist as well as an undergraduate in a local university. He himself articulated how he was willing to pay huge sums of money to watch the pop superstars perform Singapore, but was somewhat more reserved when supporting local performers and performances. He later adds "Singaporeans nowadays want more 'bang for their buck'" (PS-07, 2016). He clarified by saying that it's not that Singaporeans are becoming more discerning regarding the aesthetic quality of a performance or show, it's that they want to know if their money is well spent on aspects of cost per cost of producing a show (PS-07, 2016). Here, I qualify by saying that the cost of artmaking is also tied to inflation, and as materials get more expensive, so is the cost of making art. PS-02 adds to this by lamenting that "gone are the days of $10 dollar concerts", and that "if you want to do a concert at the esplanade, be prepared to sell your tickets at a minimum sum of SGD25.00 so that you can break even." (PS-02,2016)

Initial Conclusions

Responses with the participants of this study suggests that the goals of Singapore transforming into a creative city means differently to the state as it does to the arts practitioners. Furthermore, while the state is now open to creating a cultural superstructure that would match its status as a major regional financial and industrial hub, my informants questioning what the roles that they are required to play in the state's imagining. Some of them hoped that the tacit promise of being a global city of the arts and the enactment of these polices are a shift away from the old state practices. However, the way in which the state sought to operationalize how the creative city is created and run is very different from how the arts practitioners themselves hoped or imagined it would be. These differences in the imagining of how and why the creative city should be run is the basis of tension between the

state and the arts practitioners. Indeed, one of the participants mentioned these policies seemed to "have promised much, but have yet to deliver" (PS-02, personal communication, August 23, 2016). The differences in the re-imaginings of Singapore as a creative city forms the underlying basis of the tensions between the state and arts practitioners.

Whilst conducting this phase of the study, I discovered several emergent issues and complications. When attempting to analyse the different responses from my informants and coding them into significant themes, I came to the following conclusions: Firstly, the universe of the arts in Singapore is wide and complex. Each art-form has its own variations, and even these variations have significant differences with the genres within each art-form. Each of these arts practitioners experienced how the state's presence differently. Subsequently, these individual experiences influence the way in which the state is imagined to be projected in their lives and in their practice. Thus, I discovered that even each genre within art-forms have their own life-worlds. Furthermore, dome genres exist across different realms and universes. By this, I mean that some art forms, such as Literary Arts and film, exist in a nexus more closely ties in other life-worlds, specifically publishing and mass media respectively. While this intersection is sociologically fascinating to explore, these intersects would take me away from my focus of examining the relationship of the state and the arts practitioners. Finally, there are differences in the type of interactions between the practitioners of certain genres and the state. By this, I mean that different art forms require different interactions with different state bodies to interact with, and these interactions and transactions have different requirements, and different structures of interaction. For example, a theatre production requires the theatre company or troupe to deal with not only NAC for funding, they would need to get the necessary required permits from iMDA as well as MFA. Other art forms, such as choral music, are privileged in so much as they do not even require permits for public performances. Hence, these interactions influenced the imagining of the arts practitioners, and the differences of these interaction is a rich study in its own accord that cannot be contained within a single dissertation.

By understanding what the possibilities and issues that manifested during this study, my dissertation now focuses solely at the choral music scene in Singapore. I posit that studying choral music makes a case of arts making and production in Singapore. Every art-form is nested within a specific constellation of policies and actors, and exists in its own art-world and ecology. Here I argue that while the actors and interactions with the state across art-forms are heterogenous, the process of meaning making by arts-practitioners is essentially the same. By this, I am informed by Geertz (1973) as well as Baldwin et al. (2006) that this study should focus on the forms of practices, relations and meanings in order to sociologically explain the phenomena, in this case would be the production of aesthetic culture in Singapore. Thus, this specificity then allows us to further examine of the state's presence as imagined by the arts practitioners, and how this informs them in the making of aesthetic and operational decisions that would then determine how the arts is curated and consumed. This study endeavours to

address, as well as to allow the arts practitioners to voice their own notion and understanding of the reality that is how the state influences the production of culture and arts in Singapore.

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