

"TERRITIZE!"

—A Personal View on Today's Cities (#339)—

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[Credit details: Singapore photography submitted by NT. Beijing photography by JH.

Main concept & text by JH. Singapore related text by NT, edited by JH.

Basis for Singapore photography captions by NT, edited & augmented by JH.

Beijing photography captions by JH.]

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A Personal View on Today's Cities

Content:

1. *A Theoretical Framework (inferred from daily experiences)*
2. *Two Case Studies*
 - 2.1. *Case Study One —Singapore— (Introduction and images + caption)*
 - 2.2. *Case Study Two —Beijing— (Introduction and images + caption)*
3. *Epilogue*
4. *References*

1.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (inferred from daily experiences)

For the occasion of this essay we opted for a less conform verb and title: "*TERRITORIZER!*" It symbolizes the (lack of) dynamics observed within the two case studies supporting this text. Within the two following case studies, any reference to this essay shall mainly be made by two mutually accompanying formats: photography and its caption. These two shall be explored below this introductory essay. Both case studies, Singapore and Beijing, are similar and yet tremendously different, especially by means of the specific attributes the co-authors decided to point their lenses and attention to. Although this text is planned, produced and constructed around two intricately folded focuses, yet it shall aim to hint in a direction of far more complex considerations in regards to an idealization of a near-future city.

A noticeable major tension lies in how seemingly, in both case studies, territories have been allocated and fixed by means of centralized planning. However each differ in how these territories are sustained or claimed by others. Hence—in a somewhat superficial ode to Deleuze and Guattari (1972)—one could speak of dynamics related to the action of territorialization, namely: deterritorialization and reterritorialization. These create complex mechanisms where areas—themselves territories—are stuck in-between other territories, have been seemingly fixated in spacetime by means of regulation, social consideration, form and fixtures—or contrary to this—are gradually in struggle with other territories.

All these dynamics create processes that could be, if artificially seen as a moment in-between function, community, culture, form, and other (note: here as a textual reduction of a non-demarcated, non-linear and multidimensional fluidity of moments into moments). The idea of 'in-between-ness' is lightly borrowed from Bhabha's 1994 work entitled *The Location of Culture*.

With 'in-between spaces' we shall poetically (cf. Bachelard, 1958) refer to those spaces between nexuses of habitation or labor. As these are poetic references to space, these spaces do not simply refer to physical spaces nor to their reduced forms of infrastructural constructs or public spaces (i.e. roads, bridges, parks, strips of land, etc). Hence, 'in-between spaces' are not a critique on landscape architecture nor structural engineering. 'In-between' shall secondly, and more specifically, also refer to being and becoming 'in-between' or being mid-struggle for occupation of space. Thirdly, in further detailed connotation and as previously hinted, 'in-between' shall refer to a mechanism of unsettled territorial functionality (proprietary, aesthetic, social, cultural, political, etc).

As it was decided to associate these concepts with the texts as provided within this assignment it is aimed to work around the following citation from Lemann :

"There is something delightfully counter intuitive...: you would have thought it was dull Babbitts who made a city commercially successful, but no—it's kids with scruffy beards and tattoos... What is the connection between them and prosperity?" (Lemann, 2011, p.77)

We would like to explore, expand on, support or contradict this image and consider the 'in-between spaces' not only from a point of view of "commercial success" but also add-on 'social success' (or lack thereof) and the dynamics as implied in the citation of struggles or uncanny communities (i.e. scruffy bearded men with tattoos) (or lack thereof; or variations thereon). These considerations would then ideally be trans-coded into the visions of this assignment's team as well as the conceptualizations concerning an ideal twenty-first century city.

In an ideal city of the twenty-first century, city planning would consciously consider 'in-between space' (tangible and intangible; and both in infinite flux) as spaces not simply as disconnected structures supporting facilities (such as for transitional transportation) or such as desolate landscape architecture. The consideration would occur from several angles such as:

- 1/ the socio-political and the multi-sensorial aesthetic,
- 2/ the formal and functional,
- 3/ the interactive or immersive and psychological, and
- 4/ the business and infrastructural.

The convoluted consideration of these (and possible others) would aim to maximize the in-between as essential and inherent breathing parts of the whole; equally important as one or other composer supposedly claimed composite silences to be equally if not more important than sound. However, currently, in our today's cities some of these in-between territories are stuck others are in flux. Some have settled and created more desirable conditions and while others do not seem maximized some are still too much in flux to realize their full potential. Combining both case studies we noticed that some (imposed) territories terrorize. That is to say, they poetically terrorize form, function, aesthetic, ideal, community (or the potential thereof), commercial viability, sustainability, and so on while others seem to support (cultural, economic, social, aesthetic, functional or other types of) poetic nourishment.

Thus, "*TERRITORIZER!*" is an *outcry* (opposing the terror) as well as a *call-for-action*; promoting the fluid and dynamic maximization (as mentioned, and more: cultural, ecological, aesthetic, communal manners of maximization) of urban(ized) spaces.

2.

CASE STUDIES

While high-levels of central urban planning are prevalent in both Singapore and Beijing, we see two cities of contrast. On one side we have the modern, clinically-clean yet tropically green Singapore which has largely solved the infrastructure and environment issues stemming from its dense population with in-between spaces virtually non-existent. Juxtaposed, we see Beijing rapidly growing but struggling to transition from its communist past with many urban development problems still to be resolved. The two contributors for this assignment also took a divergent approach to examining the cities to show alternative ways that an urban setting can be viewed and experienced. Whereas, the view on Singapore is more of a high-level, city-wide perspective the way a foreigner touring the city might experience it, the approach with Beijing takes a specific path through the city, a path not too different from the one an ordinary Beijing citizen would take on a regular day. Singapore's case offers an urban panorama providing the reader with a broad view of how territory and in-between space can be observed and experienced. In contrast, Beijing's case hyper-focuses on a single trajectory.

2.1

Case Study One

—Singapore—

For his participation in the team-driven first assignment, one resident of Singapore took a broad look at Singapore, visiting some distinct destinations indicative of Singapore's character. Geographically, several of the photographs were taken at the central business area. The ones focusing on infrastructure (port, subway, cameras, etc) were made in various, more distant locations. However, in all cases, the contributor has tried his best to pinpoint the salient features of this highly-developed nation. Some of the photos were taken for this assignment specifically, while others were taken earlier, some time during the year before. The order of the photos follows thematic order rather than geographical or chronological order.



Title: *Pragmatic Singapore*

Caption: *The Parliament of Singapore- a building where important decisions are made every day, yet a building void of any pompousness and imposing stature. While cameras videotaping passers-by are of course abundant, lacking any kind of fence or military guards nearby, the Parliament has the demeanor of a very open and accessible building. In fact, probably one of the most noticeable features of the Singapore Parliament building is its lack of notice-ability- one never sees crowds of tourists taking pictures of themselves in front of the Parliament. Open, pragmatic, yet well-fortified, the Parliament of Singapore exemplifies Singaporeans and Singapore itself.*

Although differences shall be evident when viewing the Beijing photography, one similarity can be identified: hardly any one frequents the areas in-between the nexuses of activity such as the Singapore parliament and the surrounding architectural structures. Similarities between two cities in regards to a lack of dynamics among some territories can be found. The parliament is such an example. The examples given for Beijing shall speak for themselves as well. Such spaces seem to be fixed in space-time (sustained either by means of technology, such as cameras, white metal fences, or watch-groups). Although one might hide it behind pleasantries and blue skies while the other one (and its chosen imagery) might appear far more crude, each in their own right seems to lack a certain organic or communal feel.



Title: *It started with a port*

Caption: *Devoid of almost any natural resources, the naturally deep port of Singapore located key geographically in the Straits of Malacca is about the only natural endowment Singapore inherited. Today, it is the world's busiest port. The port and the closely related shipping and logistics industry, have been the fundamental driver which raised Singapore's economy from the post-WWII shambles to the world's most competitive economy in the span of 50 years. In addition to its economic importance, the magnitude of the port, the efficiency with which it operates, as well as how well defined and specialized the different parts of the port are is also symbolic for Singapore in general. Thanks to the port and thanks to the qualities which the port represents, Singapore has become the poster child, the shining exception that proved developed countries can also emerge in the hot, subtropical regions of the world (Sachs, 2001). Yet, such economic success has not come without some sacrifices as hopefully, the later photos would prove.*



Title: *Big Brother*

Caption: *In Singapore, cameras are literally everywhere. Every bus stop, every metro station and any larger building or street boasts a handful of cameras videotaping. One simply cannot go outside their home without being videotaped by at least a few cameras. Fines for misbehavior are heavy and as a result, law is followed strictly by everyone. Crime is virtually non-existent at the expense of Big Brother constantly 'watching over' Singaporeans. We leave it up to the reader to decide whether Singapore today is a heaven of safety or an Orwellian 1984 city.*



Title: *Singapore is a FINE city*

Caption: *Singaporeans like to joke that Singapore is a 'fine' city. Shown above are signs about what one is not allowed to do while in the subway (no chewing gum either, please). In addition to the signs, many subway stations play voice recordings and play short TV clips reinforcing some of the*

same messages about food and drinks not being allowed. The result of all the cameras and the heavy fines, Singapore is probably the cleanest big city in the world not just inside the metro but also city-wide.

P.S. Durian is a type of tropical fruit noted for its strong taste and smell.



Caption: Control and safety

Caption: The subway station photographed in this picture is among the many that people use to commute to work. A safety glass prevents people from accidentally falling over or intentionally jumping on subway tracks. The yellow arrows on the photo are directions as to how to enter and how to exit the subway in order to achieve maximum efficiency. Additionally, TV screens instruct people at the station how to spot terrorists who might have boarded on a train and to prevent disasters from happening.

Noted for its cleanliness, Singapore's metro is also known for its convenience- most Singaporeans live within a walking distance from the train station allowing majority of population to live and work without having a car. The fewer cars driven by Singaporeans is the major reason why air pollution is very low and traffic jams are significantly smaller than those in most mega cities.



Title: 'Underground' Singapore

Caption: In a small, densely populated and pragmatically ruled island such as Singapore, in-between spaces are virtually non-existent. On the contrary, lacking enough space on the ground, the city state has developed a maze of underground passageways not just for the subway but also for shopping. Numerous shiny shops inside can sell you from a high fashion clothing to a household good. With some of these underground shopping centers hosting as many as six underground floors of shops one easily gets lost in the shopping frenzy of the locals. Indeed, for many people visiting Singapore, the island seems like a giant shopping mall both above the ground and under.



Title: *Green Singapore*

Caption: *In spite of being the second most densely populated country and boasting numerous high-rise residential and office buildings, Singapore is unmistakably green. Both in-between areas of the city as well as the specially designated parks and gardens, are home for many evergreen trees. This photo is taken in Eastern Singapore, close to the East Coast Park, but it could have well been taken in any other part of Singapore. With its 15 kilometers length, East Coast is the longest park in Singapore stretching all the way from the city center to the Changi airport. To further lengthen the parks available, a recent initiative has connected different parks via park connectors for Singaporeans to enjoy an uninterrupted tropical greenery experience.*



Title: *Pockets of ethnicity*

Caption: *Little India. Together with Chinatown and Arab Street, Little India is among the three distinct ethnic areas in the city state. Whereas the country has been known for its order and cleanliness, the little ethnic neighborhoods allow Singaporeans and tourists to still experience the Asian culture in the otherwise very modernistic, efficient, clinically-clean city state.*



Title: *A nexus of cuisines and traditions*

Caption: *Cohabiting variation within one territory: the hawker centers. Singaporeans like good deals and love food. Food courts which in Singapore are referred to as hawker centers are a popular hang-out place as they offer affordable food from various cuisines and vendors. In fact, one*

frequently finds food stalls called 'Economic rice'. There is at least one hawker center in every neighborhood and they are a vibrant part of the community. Photographed here is Lau Pa Sat, Singapore's most iconic hawker center. Singapore's food courts are also an interesting juxtaposition to the rest of the city. Whereas, Singapore's cleanliness and efficiency is well-known, the inevitable messiness of the street food providing a quick escape from Singapore's glitter and modernity to our cultural past. It is also a great opportunity to dive into the food cultures of various cuisines. Located right in the middle of the business center, Lau Pa Sat is probably the best study of compare and contrast between Singapore's 21st century modernism and its cultural past.



Title: *Attracting tourists*

Caption: *Land deterritorializing sea. Welcome to the Sentosa Island! An artificial island which the Singaporean government decided to create out of the blue ocean waters as a way to attract more tourists to the country as well as to offer Singaporeans a popular weekend destination for relaxation and enjoyment.*



Title: *Building a city icon*

Caption: *This nexus does not simply stay isolated within itself; its aura or its features (light, color, social status) radiate outwards into other areas. An icon is in battle with those city elements that have to give way for a far reaching status of the iconic. Thanks to its signature three skyscrapers connected via a ship-resembling structure at the top, Marina Bay Sands is perhaps the most recognizable view of Singapore. Just like Sentosa Island, Marina Bay Sands attracts millions of tourists to Singapore every year and adds a visual image to the name Singapore. The Singapore's Formula 1 race is the only night race and runs around Marina Bay Sands allowing million of sport fans around the globe to see Singapore's most iconic building, further enhancing the image of the city-state.*



Title: A hub of innovation

Caption: Attributes seen as important within spaces and their accompanying territories are evaluated, devaluated and reevaluated over and over again. Green buildings is one such collective of attributes that has been evaluated replacing those attributes that no longer are considered desirable. Fusionopolis is the first green building in Singapore showing government's desire to support sustainable buildings. Fusionopolis is also designed to become the hub for IT, data management and communication technology companies in Singapore. In the immediate proximity, Biopolis and Mediapolis are currently being built with which the area is planned to become a vibrant cluster for innovative companies from IT, R&D, life sciences and media sectors. A number of universities are also close by to further strengthen the connection between the academia and real-world applications.



Title: *Attracting universities*

Caption: *Territorialization crosses borders and crosses industries. Among the top business schools in Europe, INSEAD was the first major foreign university to establish a campus in Singapore. Singapore's Economic Development Board is actively looking to attract top universities to come and further enhance the quality of Singapore's workforce. So far, INSEAD, Duke, University of Chicago, NYU and MIT among others have established presence in the country. Yale University will be opening its first campus outside of US, this coming Fall as well. Do these institutions alter the dynamics within communities; if so how? Do they replace users/communities, reshuffle them? What happens?*

Case Study Two

—Beijing—

For his participation in the team-driven first assignment, one citizen of Beijing offers a case study hyper-focusing on a pedestrian trajectory between the 'Pingguo Shequ Beiqu' residential/cultural business area —located in the southern part or south of 'Beijing's CBD' area (Central/China Business district)— and leading via the 'Tong Hui He canal' along and under the 'Guomao bridge' to the buildings (and one of the publicly accessible rooftops) of 'Guomao' (all the while contextualizing such background architectural structures as Koolhaas' CCTV tower; which after all these years has still not been occupied). Adopting a few words from Bachelard: although several of the spaces shown here as photographic highlights have "*no vital necessity*" they do have a "*bracing effect on our lives.*" (Bachelard, xxvi)

This co-author chose to walk the distance based on a believe that an urban setting should be enjoyable not simply from aerial photography or comfortably observed from top-floor based

boardroom windows, but rather also on the single human's active and participatory scale. The walking distance between the two parts takes about 30 minutes and constitutes a conglomeration of virtual urban islands, perhaps insufficiently radiating their influence into the in-between spaces. These "islands" struggle with various types of physical (i.e. formal and functional) as well as cultural (i.e. social, political, historical, sub-cultural) in-between areas and dynamics of (de-) or (re-)territorializations.

Several such similar 'clouds' have been identified within Beijing yet are not included due to textual, project and temporal constraints. As supportive examples: the 'dramatic' area including and surrounding Steven Holl's MOMA complex—with numerous empty apartment units; the post-Olympic sport facility area and its larger surroundings; the supposedly hundreds of thousands of square meter of empty spaces in Beijing; and so on). This photographer/writer plays with the thesis that such in-between spaces and their dynamics can be found across the globe and across time.

Associated photography and comments can be [found here](#) or in-line (including captions) here below:



Title: *Team #339 01 IMG_2224 (in-between area; a starting point)*

Caption: *This is the starting-point of an urban excursion. Its location and trajectory covers parts of Beijing's CBD area (on a commonly smoggy/polluted day). It show-cases a large "in-between area" as a starting point of one of the ways a city can be experienced.*



Title: Team #339 02 IMG_2329 (in-between mediation)

Caption: This photograph is entitled "In-between Mediation." It shows a space of tension between two types of architectural media. At one hundred or so meters north from the starting point of this excursion (Beijing's Baiziwang lu north of the Pingguo Shequ Beiqu building complex) one can find an in-between space contrasting established and streamlined media/messaging in the style of out-of-home (static/paper) signage on one side and free-style copy of graffiti on the other/superimposed by the signage (possibly minus any gang-related connotation). This underpass (underneath the railroad) is hardly ever frequented. Once and a while a car might pass. The pedestrians possibly passing are most likely those living in a nearby small and impoverished nook of a few house-like constructs cramped between the railroad tracks and a train terminal. The road gives the impression it comes from nowhere (a dead-end into a little frequented building's area) and seemingly leading to newer constructs that are yet unoccupied. Due to the absence of an actual citizen-base/audience-base, the outdoor communication here seems to be, as well as not be (as the sound of a falling tree in a jungle where no one is available to hear the sound).