PERCEIVING THE SUBJECT PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical speculations have often come to conclude contemporary urban
conditions as fragmentary and discontinuous, with an equivalent fragmentary impact
on the subject. Particularly, Frederic Jameson has emphasised on the unmappability
of the situation. This dissertation seeks to understand perceptions of the urban
conditions in the Singapore context from a ‘first person’s perspective’ of the subject.
It proposes to sieve out different subject perceptions by analysing local poems
relating to urban conditions.

There is the observation that subjects in these poems do indeed see a
dismantling and fragmenting of their lives, affirming speculations of such a
fragmentary impact. Oppression and reification are other conditions experienced by
the subject within this unmappable situation. Due to this ‘partial perception’ of
being unable to situated itself with respect to rapid transformations, the subject’s
own anxiety leads to a nostalgia and reverting to the sense of place. These reactions
are seen as problematic ‘misrecognitions’.

A remedial solution of cognitive mapping proposed by Jameson allows the
subject to map a mental totality. However, such a prescriptive solution, besides
being criticised as having a bias from politico-socio-economic viewpoint, is highly
representational, which then becomes irrelevant to the subject itself who directly
experiences the situation. A different attitude of subject perception is highlighted by
Korean theorist Miwon Kwon, who sees the impact of experiencing his own
fragmentation as offering insights into an understanding of a whole. Such a
perception is likened to a condition of exteriority, following what is set out by
Michael Hays. This is a detachment evoked in the subject by disrupting
preconceived assumptions of the subject through art practices or in Kwon’s case, the
urban environment. It is shown that this condition can also be evoked from Lucas
Jodogne’s photographic compositions of the Singapore urban landscape. A
condition of exteriority evoked in the subject can then bring about a more
meaningful reading and understanding within fragmentary urban conditions.

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