RECONSTRUCTING THE ‘WORLDS’

MAPPING THE MATRIX OF STRUCTURES, SPACE AND EVENTS

by

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A B S T R A C T

This dissertation sets out to establish the urban amusement park as a distinct urban and
cultural form to have emerged in Singapore in the 1920s – 1930s. This is a significant but much
overlooked urban and spatial typology in the history of Singapore’s urban development, of which
the New World, Great World and Happy World are representatives. The early development of the
New World is identified to be synonymous with the emergence of the urban amusement park as a
typology.

A multi-disciplinary approach is adopted in an attempt to reconstruct an architectural and
urban setting as the product of a unique urban, cultural and social milieu in the history of Singa-
pore. The interpretation of original building plan records is interwoven with the reading of other
sources such as government records, and juxtaposed against a contextual narrative which draws on
various sources on planning history, cultural studies, community life and so on.

Rather than a purely abstract analysis of its formal and spatial qualities, the urban amuse-
ment park is examined and read as an inhabited or lived space – pulsating with the rhythms and
patterns of ordinary people inhabiting their city.

The urban amusement park played a critical part in the urban development history of Sin-
gapore and this is exemplified by the New World in Jalan Besar. On another level, the three ‘Worlds’
created a unique social and cultural space in the colonial society, where all classes, creed and race
gathered and meet for the purpose of enjoyment. The intrinsic appeal of this unique configuration
arose from the organisation and placement of structures and events, which sustained a synergistic
relationship between these elements, and generated a space pregnant with the potential of spontane-
ous events and occurrences.

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