Stories about the City

film and media arts enclave in Bugis

by

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ABSTRACT.

The fractured cityscape of Singapore, perhaps more than any other cities in the world, lay bare her successive metabolic cycles of largely state-driven urban modernisation processes of displacement, demolition and replacement. Beyond current fixation with the superficial rendering of remaining heritage structures as fetishised spaces, or the uncritical dismissal of ‘dull’ landscapes, there is a need to be able to relate deeply again these sites and structures as breathing cultural spaces performing a host of spatial, social, economic and political functions, as real, performative spaces relevant to the living networks of the city fabric. By coming to terms with how we got here, embrace the losses sustained in the process of the city’s making, and most importantly acknowledge what we behold here and now, we may finally be able to read the city, once perceived as incomprehensible, and the stories encrypted in its fragments.

The area of Bugis has been chosen as the focus of investigation for this thesis. Following a mapping exercise of the area, three sites straddling different urban fragments with their own rhythms, networks and stories that sometimes overlap, have been identified to accommodate a media-arts collective development, comprising a film repository cum resource centre, an urban community park cum underground car park and a media workshop cum experimental theatre, strung together by an Urban Gallery in the sky. Although the repository cum resource centre plays centrepiece in the design project, the three sites work together as an urban enclave, with the intention to manifest the rich potential offered by what could easily be perceived as a ‘dull’ backyard of Bugis.

This project does not attempt to make a conclusive architectural or urban statement to deal with the fragmented reality of the city. Rather it offers a critical commentary on the existing paradigm of urban development and illustrates an alternative attitude to read and envision the city.