Protracting Heterotopia

Geylang, the androgynous urbanscape between inside and outside

By

Lorain Kok Chia Hui
HT004021M

Academic dissertation Submitted to the Department of Architecture
On 14 December 2001
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

Abstract

Geylang illustrates an archetype that has escaped the usual mainstream approaches of urban design. It successfully eludes the usual, not only purist, but pluralist rationalization that Singapore has been based upon.

Geylang is an alternative urbanscape, existing in this unique state of ‘splendid’ isolation. It challenges the widely accepted notions of culture, society and urbanism. Because of its isolation, Geylang has managed to sustain a careful balance between its heritage and the demands of contemporary life. It is chaotic but simultaneously spontaneous, compared to the homogeneity plaguing Singapore and other rapidly developing cities.

Its isolation becomes ‘splendid’ when used as a source for authenticity. Can this condition then serve as a catalyst for emergent urban strategies?

Geylang’s condition is not just geographical, but also social and political. The dissertation sets out to establish the process, historical and otherwise which renders this urban condition.

The concepts of Heterotopia makes legible this seemingly illegible urbanscape, broadening the definitions of spatial limits in understanding the intrinsic appeal of Geylang.

The dissertation also seeks to postulate Geylang, as an alternative example to learn from, a Heterotopic space, where all classes and races gather, for engaging our increasingly complex and ever-changing urbanscape in the future.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr Li Shi Qiao
Title: Assistant Professor