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Politics, Governmentality & Cultural Regulation in Singapore

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Whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether this is his intention or not.

Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (1991)

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Abstract

Singapore's importance as an economic powerhouse in the Asia-Pacific region should not be underestimated. As a polity, Singapore espouses many democratic ideals, though these are typically applied with deep communitarian, authoritarian and/or illiberal leanings. The aim of this thesis is to explore this inherent contradiction present in most facets of Singaporean cultural and political discourses, and to identify the key regulatory strategies and technologies that the ruling People Action Party (PAP) government employ to regulate culture, and thus govern the conduct of Singaporeans.

This thesis begins by introducing contemporary Singapore culture and politics through a survey of scholarly literature, mostly from the humanities and social sciences. As the theoretical foundation of this thesis, Michel Foucault's (1978) liberal discourse of governmentality, understood as the conduct of conduct, will be elucidated in Chapter Two to help make sense of Singapore's illiberal approach towards the governing and regulation of culture. The thesis will then establish conceptual links between governmentality and the study of cultural policy, arguing that contemporary cultural policy in Singapore is designed to shape citizens into accepting and participating in the rationales of government. In Chapter Three, the historical development of cultural policy in the city-state will be examined vis-à-vis Raymond Williams' (1984) warning that culture and the state would become inextricably linked. The thesis contends that cultural policy is an useful ideological tool, practicable for the conduct of Singaporeans' conduct.

Chapter Four looks at attempts by Singaporean authorities to engage with the global discourse of civil society by its deliberate de-politicisation into 'civic society', and by the sagacious and subtle reduction of physical and metaphorical spaces for feedback and political participation. Chapter Five examines the Internet and its regulatory framework in Singapore, one of the most networked societies in the world. It introduces the notion of 'technological auto-regulation' – a concept derived from Foucault's (1977) embodiment of Bentham's *Panopticon* structure which represents the automatic functioning of power through concurrently 'visible'/'unverifiable' surveillance – to explicate the extensiveness of governmental control in Singapore. The final chapter, Chapter Six, looks at the subject of nationhood and examines how government policies are being popularised in Singapore at National Day parades and through the commissioning of national songs. As these songs provide a 'soft' approach towards the propagation of politically endorsed messages, they are seen as powerful mediatory tools for the conduct of governmentality.

In summary, this thesis offers a strategic and original approach towards the rethinking of culture and politics in the modern, technologically sophisticated and hybrid city-state of Singapore. It proposes, in conclusion, that the many contradictory discourses in and about Singapore will begin to make sense once the politics and governmentality of cultural regulation in Singapore are understood.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, where deposited in the University library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed /

Terence Theng-Boon Lee

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CHAPTER ONE:
The Politics of Culture: An Introduction to Singapore

Introduction: Singapore Culture and Politics

> Singapore today is a frightened community, where people nervously glance over their shoulders and lower their voices. [...] Not only are the newspapers gray [*sic*] in Singapore, but little of note has been produced in the worlds of literature and poetry, drama and theater, painting and sculpture, while in industry and technology, Singapore has proved remarkably non[-]innovative. It may be a green city-state, but all color has been leeched out of the cultural landscape (Davies, 1999: 104).

> The case for Singapore stems from the nation's success in four areas: economic growth, political stability, compatibility of politics with culture, and international relations. From its first days of semi-independence in the 1950s to the present, Singapore has emerged as a prominent, vibrant nation-state, viewed by the peoples of both developing and industrialized countries as "the nation that works." There are few other nations in the world where economic growth has been more rapid or sustained, or where transformation from a somnolent, swampy fishing village to the world's most technologically modern city has been more dramatic (Neher, 1999: 39).

It would appear rather schizophrenic to begin a thesis by citing two opposing views of the city-state of Singapore, one of the most important economic powerhouses in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet in conducting research on culture and politics of Singapore, one cannot help but observe that Singapore embodies a high degree of schizophrenic ambivalence – in ethnographic and material terms, as well as ideologically. As a society and polity, Singapore espouses key democratic ideals, though these are typically applied with authoritarian and communitarian leanings (Mutalib, 2003: 11-2; Chua, 1995). As a nation that is plugged into the global economy, it embraces capitalist ideals whilst adhering to a form of state corporatism, where the state is intrinsically linked to most

business activities and where civil liberties are curtailed for the sake of economic development (Rodan, 2002; Paul, 1992). In this regard, Singapore has also been referred to as a "developmental state" in which the government utilises materiality and economic growth as indicators of its performance and to claim political legitimacy (Mutalib, 2003: 4; Chua, 1997).

Singapore's paradoxical existence is also well documented by several humanities and social sciences scholars (e.g. Birch, 1993a, 1993b, 1999a; Chua, 1995; Ang and Stratton, 1995; Tamney, 1996; Wee, 1996a, 2001; and others). Among them, Ang and Stratton suggest that Singapore culture and polity can be articulated as: "an ambivalence", "a contradiction in terms", "thoroughly heteroglossic" and "thoroughly hybrid", all of which are descriptions arising from the global cultural logic of a prevailing East/West divide (Ang and Stratton, 1995). They argue, in a nutshell, that Singapore "cannot be represented", at least not in conventional political, cultural or social terms (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 71). What Ang and Stratton are in fact implying is that the task of 'representing', or writing and talking about Singapore, is fraught with difficulties, since one has to continually contend with many competing cultural and political influences. In recognising that representations are always, as Edward Said makes clear, "implicated, intertwined, embedded and interwoven with a great many things besides the 'truth'" (Said, 1978: 272), Ang and Stratton advance the notion of 'hybridity', with its celebration of cultural mixture and fusion, as one useful approach towards understanding contemporary Singaporean culture and reality (1995: 85).

The notion of hybridity has been prominently employed by cultural theorist Homi Bhabha (1990; 1994), and concisely explored by Robert Young (1995) and several others, to explicate issues pertaining to cultural difference within the scholarly contexts of postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and analyses of postmodernism and globalisation. The idea of hybridity provides a conceptual term desperately needed to capture the general phenomena of cultural mixing, fusion, creolisation and so on, all of which are increasing in frequency with mass migration, travel and technological advancements, mostly captured under the 'globalisation' mantra (Tomlinson, 1999: 147).[1] As a post-colonial nation of migrants, and utterly reliant on human innovation and external trade to nurture its recent economic ascendancy, Singapore has found much comfort in the contemporary era of globalisation. Since being declared by the World Bank in 1993 as one of the 'dragon' and 'miracle' economies of East Asia, Singapore has begun to promote and capitalise on its new "cultural self-confidence" (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 65). As one of several developing nations striving to overcome its peripheral cum 'Orientalist' position vis-à-vis the East/West dichotomy (Said, 1978), the concept of hybridity provides an added boost to Singapore's effort to interpellate the West on its own terms. Indeed, since the 1990s, political leaders and the media in Singapore have, on many occasions, snubbed the crassness of Western culture and inefficiencies of liberal democratic rule with the assertion that Singapore can deliver a better 'Asian' model of governance (see Mahbubani, 1998; and, Birch, 1993a and 1995; see also Chapter Two of

[1] Globalisation, a contemporary buzzword, circulates amidst diverse disciplines and spheres with much ambiguity to its 'actual' meaning, if any. My use of 'globalisation' simply refers to the "ever-densening network of interconnections and inter-dependences that characterize modern life" as proposed by Tomlinson, (1999: 2). Probably the most contemporary example of globalisation is the now-ubiquitous Internet, which allows people to be interlinked at a breakneck speed across geographical divisions and boundaries (see Lee and Birch, 2000; see also Chapter Five of this thesis).

this thesis). The Asian model of development proposed by Singapore has been, to some extent, captured in Singapore's contribution to what has become known as the 'Asian values' discourse (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 66), which will be touched on later in this chapter. But suffice to underline at this juncture Singapore's regional and global prominence not just on the political front, but also on the cultural stage.

Since Singapore is widely recognised is one of the most global and cosmopolitan cities in the world,[2] the notion of hybridity can be used productively to describe Singapore culture as it exhibits publicly the intermingling of "cultures originating from different territorial locations brought about by the increasing traffic amongst cultures" (Tomlinson, 1999: 142; Moreiras, 1999: 395). This perception is empirically justified on the basis of Singapore's demographic composition, with its multiracial immigrant population originating mainly from China, India and the Malay archipelago of Southeast Asia (see Chua, 1996: 51-2). These communities – collectively referred to in Singapore as the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (CMIO) racial structure – bring with them characteristic cultural practices from their homelands, and as such add colour to the cultural mosaic of Singapore (Vasil, 1990: 38; Siddique, 1989: 563). This depiction is, on one level, diachronically opposed to Davies' (1999: 104; as cited in the opening quote) sketch of Singapore as 'culturally colourless' if one accepts that multicultural hybridity and harmony is the most distinctive marker of a nation's cultural landscape.[3] Certainly,

[2] In 2000, Singapore was in fact declared the most globalised economy in the world by global consultancy firm A. T. Kearney in conjunction with research to develop the world's first globalisation index in partnership with American think-tank magazine *Foreign Policy* (A. T. Kearney, 2001).

[3] There is, however, the level of 'cultural policy' within Singapore's cultural landscape that will be considered comprehensively in Chapter Three of this thesis.

by virtue of this rich ethnic mix and consequent cultural encounters, such as inter-racial marriages, convivial exchange of languages and food, Singapore necessarily becomes a new and hybrid space (Young, 1995: 25).[4] Compared to the term 'schizophrenia', or even 'ambivalence', the notion of hybridity, which also represents the multicultural and multiracial identities of Singaporeans, thus becomes culturally preferred and politically more acceptable in reading, theorising and deliberating Singapore culture and its politics.

From a political perspective, however, Singapore can look a little different. In a volume of critical essays on Singapore entitled *The Singapore Puzzle* (edited by Haas, 1999a), from which the two opening quotes have been extracted, Haas argues that there are many social, cultural and political paradoxes operating on the island. He calls these paradoxes 'sub-puzzles' that are politically difficult to fully resolve (1999: 1). In putting together eight in(ter)dependent writings on Singapore into a single volume, Haas has attempted to throw some light upon various aspects of contemporary Singapore, ranging from its political history (Haas, 1999b), its political economy (Lingle and Wickman, 1999), the mass media and the press (Davies, 1999) the judiciary (Seow, 1999), to its foreign policy (Deck, 1999). Haas' conclusion, in essence, is that Singapore remains a 'puzzling' experience in most areas because it fails to embrace liberal democratic ideals, as represented in political discourses such as transparency and openness in public

[4] Hybridity in Singaporean food is so prevalent that it has come to be signified by the food reference *rojak* - a colloquial term that has become synonymous with the concept of hybridity in Singapore. *Rojak* is a hybrid dish that mixes rather disparate ingredients together, and comes in either the 'Chinese' or 'Indian' version. The 'Chinese' version usually comes with deep-fried bean curd, slices of raw pineapple, turnip, cucumber, *kangkong* (the Malay name of a local vegetable), bean sprouts, and other ingredients added by particular hawkers at their own discretion and taste (Chua, 1998: 187-8); whereas 'Indian' *rojak* consists of a wide variety of fried or deep fried food: bean curd, prawn in batter, potatoes, hard-boiled eggs in batter, among others, and served with a dip made from tomato sauce and chillies (Chua and Rajah, 1997: 15, see also Chan, 1995).

consultation, political participation and civil society (Haas, 1999c: 182-4).[5] Veritably, political scholars and critics have variously described Singapore's rule under the dominant People's Action Party (PAP) government as an "illiberal democracy" (Jones, 1998; Mutalib, 2000, 2003), and an 'authoritarian' and dominant one-party state (Rodan, 1993a, 1993b). More recently, the concept of 'soft authoritarianism', a mode of governing which seeks to systematically obstruct alternative social and political voices whilst allowing some scope for the functioning of "procedural democratic norms", such as the holding of regular elections, has been used to explain Singapore's 'hybrid' political structure (Mutalib, 2003: 12-3). Yet, this does not completely remove or negate the widespread belief that Singapore's political structure lacks openness, freedom and transparency, the very markers of democracy in liberal societies (Rodan, 2000a).

The mass media in Singapore exemplifies this lack of individual and political freedom, as Davies (1999) argues, most potently.[6] Instead of acting as the Fourth Estate, the mass media in Singapore is required to inform the people of government policies as directed by the government, a political stance first articulated by Lee Kuan Yew, and subsequently repeated by his ministers and deputies (Birch, 1993a: 20-1). This position was reiterated in 1999 by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in an interview with Filipino journalists, and reproduced in the local *Straits Times* daily to publicly 'inform' and 'educate' Singaporeans that media and information is tightly regulated in Singapore:

> [T]o inform. That is the primary role of the media. You inform objectively. Better still if the media can also help to educate the people. Meaning if there is a message from the government, the media

[5] Some of these social, cultural and political issues will be addressed in the proceeding chapters of this thesis. Chapter Four, for instance, looks at the subject of civil society in Singapore.
[6] Chapter Five will further elaborate on media control and Internet regulation in Singapore.

> understands that the message is for the good of the country. Not for a particular political party, but for the good of the country. Then, they should help get the message across to educate the people, to bring the people along with the government to achieve a result that is good for the country. I would see those as the two primary roles of the media (*The Straits Times Weekly Edition*, Nov 6, 1999: 5).

The role of Singapore media is, in short, twofold: to inform and to educate (Birch, 1993a: 20-1). Of course, what it means to "inform objectively" and "to achieve a result that is good for the country", as articulated by Goh in the above interview, is completely arbitrary, a conclusion that the PAP leaders have empowered only themselves to make.[7] This tremendous privilege to scope and define the message (and messages) from the government is, as will be pointed out in this thesis, a tool and technology of governmentality, designed to shape the hearts and minds(ets) of Singaporeans to conform to desired cultural and political moulds (Foucault, 1978, 1988a and 1988b).

Following Haas' (1999a) attempt to detail what he calls the "megalomaniacal" puzzle of Singapore, this thesis aims to consider how culture, to be understood at this point as the human conduct of everyday life and discourses, is being utilised to manage the political and economic conduct of Singaporeans. In taking on board Haas' (1999) proposition that Singapore is a 'puzzling' experience, as well as Ang and Stratton's (1995) preference for Singapore to be seen as "thoroughly hybrid", this thesis does not purport to hold all the answers to the sub-puzzles and ambivalences. Rather, it offers an original way of thinking through how Singaporean citizens are shaped, conducted and

[7] It is the PAP government's habit and strategy to re-articulate, and thus, remind citizens from time to time of the 'national' role of the Singapore media (i.e. to inform and educate the public on government policies). This was most recently done by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in January 2004, about seven months before he was due to become modern Singapore's third Prime Minister (Ibrahim, 2004). See Chapter Three for a brief discussion of this landmark speech by Deputy Prime Minister Lee (2004).

governed autonomously and in an orderly fashion through the powers of culture (à la Rose, 1999b). Foucault's discourse of governmentality, understood most fundamentally as "the conduct of conduct" (Burchell, 1996: 19), as well as other cultural and political theories, will be employed and applied to make sense of Singapore's approach towards political control and cultural regulation.

This thesis is entitled *Politics, Governmentality and Cultural Regulation in Singapore* to signify its intention to pay close attention to key aspects of culture and politics in contemporary Singapore. 'Politics' here is understood, firstly, as a tool for the exercise of power (Jordan and Weedon, 1995: 11), and secondly, as a technology for the discursive construct of cultural citizenship and conduct (Barnett, 2001), what Leo and Lee (2004) have sagaciously described as the big 'P' and small 'p' of politics respectively. In this thesis, both approaches to 'politics' are examined mostly concurrently in view of the centrality of the PAP government's involvement in just about every facet of everyday life (George, 2000: 17). As Clammer has noted most cogently:

> Far from being a depoliticised society, Singapore is actually one of the most politicised anywhere in the world, since any issue, from art to the content of movies, from the reproductive behaviour of young female graduates to the type of education available, from the languages that may be spoken to the availability of alternative medicine, can become and have become political issues (Clammer, 1998: 14).

Singapore can thus be said to be micromanaged, where nothing occurs without a substantive involvement of politics. This is the point that Neher tries to make when he commends the state's compatibility of "politics with culture" (Neher, 1999: 39).

Politics in the Singapore context clearly encompasses culture, or more fundamentally, the management of culture via the enactment and enforcement of cultural policy, not unlike the way the acclaimed economy of Singapore has been delicately managed (Clammer, 1998: 14). This is where the concept of cultural regulation, defined by Kenneth Thompson as the organisation of conduct and practices that are intended to "set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed" (1997: 1), fits in. Thompson adds that the very task of regulation, especially when directed by a government or regulatory authority, is largely cultural since it "inevitably raises questions of cultural policy (by some regulating authority) and of cultural politics, involving struggles over meanings, values, forms of subjectivity and identity" (Thompson, 1997: 3). What this means, in short, is that culture cannot be seen apart from the political apparatuses that seeks to contain, shape and govern it (Peterson, 2001: 3; see Jordan and Weedon, 1995: 4).

Within this 'cultural-political' framework, this opening chapter sets out to introduce readers to Singapore as a modern political entity, and to act as a backgrounder on the culture, society and politics of Singapore by drawing on a wide range of inter-disciplinary literature and recent writings on Singapore. The next section will begin by assessing how culture is defined both broadly and within the context of Singapore. It will trace Allen Chun's (1996) demarcation of the three 'cultural phases' of Singapore, as a way of contextualising the modern cultural history of the nation-state. It will highlight attempts by the government, since the early 1990s, to demarcate cultural regulatory spaces in Singapore. The structure of the thesis, and the chapters, will then be introduced.

This introductory chapter concludes with a brief and preliminary response to the question of whether Singapore is indeed, as Davies alleges, "a frightened community" politically and 'colourless' culturally (Davies, 1999: 104), or whether it is "the nation that works" due to the "compatibility of politics with culture" (Neher, 1999: 37).

Elucidating Culture, Understanding Singapore

> The discourse of the East/West divide is essential for an understanding of Singapore not only because it lies at the very historical origin of Singapore as a colonial construct, but also because [...] it is structurally constitutive of Singapore as a modern national cultural entity. Many aspects of Singapore's social and political reality have been shaped precisely by the ambivalent cultural status of the Singaporean nation-state within the modern world-system of nation-states – an ambivalence emanating from its positioning as a country which in a fundamental way, is both non-Western and always-already Westernized (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 67).

Founded as a British Trading Settlement in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles, the tiny island of Singapore became British possession in 1824 and was made a Crown Colony of the British Empire in 1867. Singapore was accorded this status in recognition of its tremendous value as a central trading port of Asia, or more specifically, the Malay Archipelago. Except for the period of Japanese Occupation during World War II from 1942-1945, Singapore was under British rule until 1963 (CPDD, 1999: 11). Although Singapore achieved 'semi-independence' as a self-governing state of the Federation of Malaya in 1959, two years after Malaya was granted similar autonomy by the British, colonial rule 'officially' ended with the formation of the nation of Malaysia in 1963. This was achieved by the political uniting of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) with Malaya (West Malaysia) on 16 September 1963. The British relinquished political

control that year but maintained military presence in Singapore for defence and foreign affairs purposes until 1971. On 9 August 1965, Singapore was ejected from Malaysia somewhat under politically contentious circumstances to become a fully independent and sovereign Republic (Wee, 1993: 716). With the PAP taking office upon full administrative independence and emerging as the ruling party, governing Singapore uninterrupted for the next four decades, Singapore was destined not only to become a new political entity governed by its own constitution, legislation and will, but also a nation with its own cultural codes and practices (Mauzy and Milne, 2002).[8]

It is important to point out from the outset that there are appreciable limits and potential problems in talking about 'culture', particularly when used in a contemporaneous sense. The term 'culture' is considered by the late literary theorist Raymond Williams (1958 and 1976) as one of the most complex and complicated in the English language. 'Culture' often escapes lexical definition, especially since it is often loosely applied in varying contexts: from corporate culture to pop-culture (see Frow and Morris, 1993). In considering its various historical uses and connotations, particularly within the British context, Williams suggests that there are two main senses of the term 'culture' (Williams, 1976: 76-82). The anthropological or sociological perception is that culture represents "a whole way of life", which incorporates virtually all forms of social and political activities; while the second and more specialised sense of culture pertains to

[8] Many references are available for further reading on the politics and political history of Singapore. See, for example: Yeo and Lau (1991) and Mutalib (2003) for documentations of Singapore's transition to independence; analyses by Chan H. C. (1971 and 1991) on post-independence developments; Vasil (1988 and 2000) for a history of national development and democracy in Singapore; and, Mauzy and Milne (2002) for a general perspective of Singapore under PAP rule. For a quick summary of Singapore's modern history, see *Understanding Our Past*, the secondary school textbook produced by the Curriculum Planning & Development Division of the Ministry of Education, Singapore (CPDD, 1999).

"artistic and intellectual activities" (Williams, 1981: 11). While these 'activities' originally referred to 'high arts' or elitist culture, as represented by traditional arts and forms of intellectual production, it was later extended to popular and mass-market culture, or modern 'signifying practices' ranging from language to philosophy to media, journalism and much more (ibid.).

More noteworthy, however, is Williams' (1981) assertion that the two senses of the term 'culture' have tended to converge in contemporary life, to the extent that when the concept or word 'culture' is used, one invokes either all or part of the above meanings. After all, artistic and intellectual enterprises as well as the mass consumption of popular cultural items and practices are, categorically speaking, constituents of a "whole way of life" in contemporary society. As Frow and Morris have also noted, culture should be conceived "not as organic expression of a community, nor as an autonomous sphere of aesthetic forms, but as a contested and conflictual set of practices or representation bound up with the processes of formation and reformation of social groups", or with society at large (Frow and Morris, 1993: xx). The contestation that occurs when people begin to deliberate and debate about the location of culture in society makes culture, especially as understood from the late twentieth century, a site of political struggle and conflict. Since culture, in contemporary situations, is seen as "the production and exchange of meanings" (Teo and White, 2003: 3), governments, authorities as well as private enterprises desiring to manage struggles over meanings have become interested in the arbitration and regulation of culture, and in doing so, begin to govern the everyday life and conduct of individuals and groups in society.

The concept of culture, though exemplifying the complexities of life in general, has represented different things at different periods of time in Singapore, even within institutional discourses and government policy. Allen Chun (1996) makes this observation when he distinguishes three phases of official cultural discourse in Singapore, beginning from its political independence in 1965 (Chun, 1996: 60). The first phase, dating from 1965-82, focused largely on the promotion of the values of "rugged individualism", referring to a disciplined and achievement-oriented work ethic, not unlike Weber's depiction of the Protestant work ethic (Weber, 1930). Driven by an 'ideology of survivalism', or a do-or-die mentality, after being ousted from the Federation of Malaya on 9th August 1965 (Yong, 1992: 57), the fledgling nation-state of Singapore had little choice but to accentuate physical 'nation-building' through the cultural ethos of hard work and sheer grit. As Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew once remarked:

> Singaporeans have only their energy, ability, and the desire to survive. To succeed, Singaporeans have had to find a working combination of programmes and policies which can use this human drive (Lee, 1979: 39).

If the aim was to turn Singapore dramatically from a "swampy fishing village to the world's most technologically modern city", as Neher (1999: 39) has suggested, the task of nation-building in Singapore has been phenomenally successful beyond that of basic survival. In fact, nation-building has come to be defined in Singapore as "the construction if an appropriate institutional and motivational setting for the practice of citizenship" (Hill and Lian, 1995: 11). In other words, the foremost agenda of nation-building was not really about mere survival, but about the enshrining of Singapore

citizenship as a common pursuit and a highly-valued commodity. While in most Western liberal contexts, citizenship implies both activity and reciprocity, where individual rights are balanced by the state's accountability in attending responsibly to these rights (Giddens, 1985: 199-200), citizenship in Singapore is subtly different.[9] Singapore citizenship is about being accepted as a privileged member of a multiracial, multicultural, multilingual and multireligious community in return for one's tacit agreement to play a part in contributing actively to the – mostly economic – welfare of the nation (Hill and Lian, 1995: 130).[10]

Nevertheless, one should not dismiss the central concern of "practical survival" during the first cultural phase of Singapore (Chua, 1995: 48; Hill and Lian, 1995: 189). From the nation's independence in 1965, led by its charismatic premier Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore was compelled to base all governmental policies upon the reason and rationale of survivalism to combat both domestic and external threats. Domestically, religious and ethnic tensions between the Malays and Chinese people were rife, so too was communism. Externally and geopolitically, as a predominantly Chinese majority state sandwiched in a sea of Islamic-Malay nations, Singapore had the potential to be perceived as a 'Third China' by its neighbours (Chua, 1995: 48).[11] With these concerns,

[9] For further information on the cultural theory and sociology of citizenship, Marshall's (1950) seminal work on 'Citizenship and Social Class' is essential reading. See also Marshall (1965) and Barbalet (1988).
[10] The term and concept of 'active citizenship' was introduced in 1999 in the national vision statement *Singapore 21: Together, We Make The Difference* to respond to calls for a citizen-initiated, or 'ground-up' civil society (see: Long, 1999; Kwok and Chua, 2000; and, *The Straits Times Interactive*, Oct 13 and Oct 14, 1999), and to capture the reciprocal meaning of Singapore citizenship. Further discussion of these important topics will be undertaken in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[11] The formation of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a forum for regional cooperation and dialogue has helped, in some ways, to diffuse the intensity of external threats to Singapore, though geopolitical threats are still present (see Huxley, 2000).

coupled with an absence of natural resources to create a self-sufficient economy, Lee's "human drive" route of economic development was seen as the only solution against both internal and external threats. The socio-cultural attribute of 'rugged individualism' brought about by human drive was, quite plainly, the only solution available at that time.

From the early days, the importance of human resource as the most important developmental tool had been rarefied into the ruling People Action Party's (PAP) pervasive ideology of 'pragmatism'. Pragmatism, in everyday language, is about maintaining a mindset of "being practical" (Chua, 1995: 10, 50). While it is not necessary to elaborate on the PAP government's embrace of pragmatism here as the subject has been much theorised,[12] it is important to emphasise the extent to which the ideology – and culture – of pragmatism has been internalised and institutionalised within the entire governmental and civil service machinery. It is *fait accompli* that all exercises in government planning and policy-making since 1965 have had to adhere to this one defining criterion of pragmatism: that is, the question of whether the policy will stimulate or retard economic growth. As Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat has noted:

> [P]ragmatism is governed by *ad hoc* contextual rationality that seeks to achieve specific gains at particular points in time and pays scant attention to systematicity and coherence as necessary rational criteria for action (Chua, 1995: 58)

The result, therefore, is a politicised ideology that readily privileges the economic over the cultural because economic growth and development is seen as the best guarantee of social and political stability.

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[12] For further reading on the ideology and practice of pragmatism in Singapore, see: Schein (1996); Hill and Lian (1995; Chapter 8); and, Chua (1995; Chapter 3).

Indeed, 'political stability' is one of the key traits that Neher (1999) underlines as the cause of Singapore's remarkable success. Although Neher defines political stability as "the continuing capacity of the government to meet the changing needs of the citizenry" (1999: 45), which exhibits a deeply-ingrained culture of pragmatism, he is in fact drawing attention to the PAP leadership's relatively unhindered rule over Singapore since independence.[13] The PAP is known to take each election with much seriousness and deep-seated anxiety that each time a parliamentary seat is lost to an opposition ward – though this is extremely rare – the electorate would be publicly chastised for being ungrateful and unwise at the ballot box (Mauzy and Milne, 2002: 150; People's Action Party, 1999: 147). This suggests that political stability – understood as stable, dominant and uninterrupted single-party rule by the PAP – is perhaps the primary driving force behind the ideology of pragmatism (see Mutalib, 2003). If so, its longevity must be maintained with whatever means available at the government's disposal.

Singapore's foundational socio-cultural and highly politicised policy of multiracialism, which represents the aforementioned CMIO racial/ethnic structure in recognition of Singapore's geopolitical situation, is in fact an expedient application of pragmatism (Benjamin, 1976: 120). The embrace of multiracialism, along with multiculturalism, multilingualism and multireligiosity, collectively referred to as the '4Ms' (Siddique, 1989), has been adopted as national policy to ensure uninhibited economic growth and political dominance. Although pragmatism appears to be a purely

[13] The PAP government lost two parliamentary seats, out of a total of seventy-nine seats (at the time), to the opposition in 1984. This was PAP's first 'defeat' at the polls since Singapore's full political independence.

politically-motivated economic trait, it is also very much cultural as it has a major part to play, as will be presented in this thesis, in the content and shaping of contemporary cultural policy in Singapore. The culture of pragmatism has affected Singaporeans so much that Lee Kuan Yew himself observed in the late 1990s that the younger political leaders of Singapore are "less ideological" and "more pragmatic", and are therefore more focused on "practical results" (in People's Action Party, 1999: 135). As much of this thesis will illustrate, the ideology of pragmatism in focussing on economic returns and political dominance remains equally, if not more, pervasive in contemporary Singapore.

The second cultural phase from 1982-90, according to Chun, was spawned by the search for an Asian ethic, using indigenous religion and ideologies as the basis for the promotion of an Asian model of modernisation cum modernity (Chun, 1996: 60; Wee, 1993).[14] This phase was borne out of the PAP leadership's concern that 'individualism', which evolved into a form of self-centredness rather than 'ruggedness', would threaten not just its political reign but also weaken the socio-cultural bases of the polity. Chua calls this defining phase the 'critical break', or the period when individualism as a motivating force was replaced with the more efficacious concept of 'communitarianism', the central idea being that collective interests are placed above individual goals (Chua, 1993: 27-8). The most conspicuous inscription of communitarian ideals during this cultural phase was the government's decision to introduce the teaching of moral education and religious knowledge education in primary and secondary schools respectively (Chua, 1995: 10-1). Religious knowledge as a compulsory curriculum for

[14] See also C. J. W.-L. Wee (1993, 1996a, 1996b and 1997) for an understanding of Singapore's search for a postcolonial Asian identity cum modernity.

secondary school pupils was introduced in 1982 as an effort to shore up the moral values of an increasingly 'individualistic' and 'Westernised' (read: morally decadent) population. Students were made to study the canonical teachings of one of the following beliefs: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or Confucian ethics. As a non-religion and popularly subscribed as the rudiments of Chinese culture, Confucian ethics became a residual option for the majority of Chinese students who professed none of the affiliated religions.[15]

To develop a conceptual framework for a Confucian ethics syllabus that would fulfil the ideological agenda of the government, eight Confucianism scholars based in a variety of disciplines and academic institutions in the United States were invited by the government to propose a suitable 'Singaporeanised' curriculum. Strangely enough for a country comprising more than three-quarters of ethnic Chinese in its population, this panel of experts (of Chinese descent) had to be employed from the 'West' to propose a way of teaching Confucianism – a value system that was presumably innate and an intrinsic part of the cultural values of Chinese Singaporeans – to Chinese Singaporeans. Yet in the words of Wang Mong Lin, Director of Curriculum Development at the Ministry of Education at the time: "Confucian ethics was a field which [all Singaporeans] were not familiar with" (Wang, 1983, in Tu, 1994: xi).

[15] I was personally schooled under this cultural phase of compulsory religious knowledge education. Although I opted for Bible Knowledge as my religious subject, I was often told by some teachers and fellow students that Confucian ethics and/or Buddhist studies were 'better' options, for many reasons including the fact that I am an ethnic Chinese and that it would be easier to obtain better grades.

Professor Tu Wei-Ming, regarded as a world expert in Confucian scholarship, and the leading member of the panel, subsequently proposed a conveniently synthesised "new Confucian ethic" for a multiracial and multicultural Singapore, one that could fit Singaporeans of all cultural backgrounds, shapes and sizes (Tu, 1984: 111). As Tu declared:

> As a creative response, this new [Singaporean] Confucian ethic has already integrated some of the values taken for granted as Western within its ethical structure. It does not oppose Western ideas of rights, individual dignity, autonomy, or competitiveness in the healthy and dynamic sense. Therefore, I do not believe this new ethic is exclusively Chinese or even exclusively Confucian (Tu, 1984: 111).

Confucianism, in the Singapore context, thus became more than just a cultural response to the impact of the 'wild' West. It provided a way of condoning specially handpicked 'Western ideas' (such as 'rugged individualism' and technological progress and innovation) as "healthy" and "dynamic" whilst elevating and endorsing politically unproblematic Confucianist, and by extension, Chinese, values as culturally meritorious and highly desirable (Tu, 1984: 111). This enables the East, through Singapore, to 'write back' at the West on its terms (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989), and in the same breath, mount a defence for authoritarian rule and non-democratic practices (Mahbubani, 1998).

In 1990, as the second cultural phase was giving way to the onset of the third phase, the government discovered that the curriculum in religious knowledge was beginning to lead to greater religious fervour among students, as well as the hardening of religious divisions, which threatened the harmonious applications of multireligiousity. As a consequence, compulsory religious education was abolished (see Kuo et al., 1998). The

new discourse of 'Singaporean Confucianism', however, did not disappear. The new Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, prior to taking office in November 1990, had called for the institutionalisation of an explicit 'national ideology' or 'shared values' (White Paper, 1991: 1; see Clammer, 1993). The third Singaporean cultural phase, dated from 1991 onwards by Chun (1996),[16] thus began with the unveiling of a White Paper (1991) simply entitled *Shared Values*. With an explicit focus on Confucian-derived values (Tu, 1984), these five 'shared values' were to become Singapore's contribution to the larger Asian values discourse spearhead by value-systems such as Indonesia's *Pancasila* and Malaysia's *Rukunegara* (see Hill, 2000; and, Kua, 1990):

1. nation before community and society above self;
2. family as the basic unit of society;
3. regard and community support for the individual;
4. consensus instead of contention;
5. racial and religious harmony.

(White Paper, 1991: 10)

The government had hoped that these five 'shared values', borrowed from Confucianism but crafted in secular and pan-ethnic terms, would become a set of core social principles which all Singaporeans could identify with and upon which a genuine 'national ideology' and culture could be constructed (Hill, 2000: 187).[17] But as Birch (1993a) has argued, this 'shared values' project was destined to fail. Despite massive publicity and media discussions, the vast majority of Singaporeans, regardless of race,

[16] The third cultural phase identified by Chun does not have a cessation date as Chun's paper was published in 1996. This chapter proposes that this cultural phase be seen as continuing to 2003.

[17] Religious harmony is more than mere 'shared values' in Singapore. A separate White Paper on the *Maintenance of Religious Harmony* was tabled earlier in 1989; this was subsequently legislated as 'Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act' in 1991. For further reading on the 'shared values' and/or the 'Asian values' discourse, see Clammer (1993); Hill and Lian (1995: Chapter 8); and, Hill (2000).

language or religion, were – and still are – unable to name the five values, much less explicate them (Birch, 1993a: 4). Yet they remain effectual in regulating the 'Singaporean-ness' and 'Asian-ness' of Singaporeans, insofar as these ideals have been mobilised to "buttress Singapore's Asian value system against over-Westernisation and deculturalisation" (*The Sunday Times*, Jan 6, 1991, cited in Birch, 1993a: 4).

It is interesting that the search for a unitary and cohesive national identity had led the 'shared values' to be couched in the terms of a 'national ideology', rather then as a 'common culture' (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 80). The difference between 'ideology' and 'culture' is, of course, exceedingly subtle, and purely representational insofar as 'ideology' appeals to the grandiose of officialdom, whilst 'culture' seems to refer to ground or grassroot-level activities. However, the term 'ideology' was eventually dropped in favour of 'core' or 'shared values' for an extremely pragmatic reason: the idea of a set of 'shared' values was more 'communitarian' and hence more political expedient as there were 'other' races, with little or no Confucian affinity, to win over (Chua, 1993: 27). It was also needful for the PAP government to avoid being held hostage to a Marxist conceptual baggage brought about by the term 'ideology', although this was a less material reason (Chua, 1995: 32).

Whether or not the desired outcome of increased national cohesion had been achieved with the imposition of 'shared values' is uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the government, having experimented with the shaping of cultural norms and practices through much of the first two cultural phases, albeit in piecemeal forms, began

to recognise that political intervention through increased involvement in cultural regulation was essential to ensure that the thoughts and mindsets of Singaporeans were in sync with the establishment's. Although the regulation of culture does not necessarily lead to a mechanical reproduction of the status quo (Thompson, 1997: 3), the PAP government's early adoption of a pragmatist ideology meant that it is not predispose to taking chances. Consequently, Singapore's third cultural phase from 1991 up to 2003, has been marked by the institutionalisation of cultural regulation and more defined governmental control over the citizenry.

Institutionalising Contemporary Culture

Following Raymond William's (1958, 1976 and 1981) detailed exposition of the term 'culture', John Clammer (1995 and 1998), a social anthropologist and an early academic researcher on Singapore culture and identity, echoes William's definition when he proposes two definitions of Singaporean culture. The first definition equates culture with 'high arts' in the likes of ballet, symphonic and classical music (as representations of Singapore's Western-ness), and to a lesser extent, forms of Beijing opera and Asian music (as representations of Singapore's Asian-ness) (Clammer, 1995: 162; and, 1998: 63). This definition, which Clammer considers a "government-inspired one" in view of the government's obsession with showcasing Singapore's economic success, modernity and cultural civility to both Singaporeans and foreigners (Clammer, 1998: 63), is akin to William's 'specialised' definition of culture as artistic and intellectual undertakings. His second definition is likewise similar to Williams' anthropological take on culture. According to Clammer, it is the portrayal of Singapore's everyday life via the rich

mosaic of the vernacular and exotic practices and traditions of the various ethnic groups that make up Singapore culture (Clammer, 1998: 63-4).

Clammer further notes that although there are two differing notions of culture circulating in Singapore, the situation should not be read as a contradiction. Instead, he asserts that there is an interestingly dialectical relationship between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' cultural levels, to the extent that the 'unofficial' has become conversant, even convergent, with the 'official'. What this means is that with the authorities taking an interest in various modes of cultural practices, culture in Singapore has become 'governmentalised'. This is particularly true of art forms that show economic promise and potential humanist values (Ooi and Chow, 2002: 217; see also Leo and Lee, 2004). This chapter suggests that the 'governmentalisation' of culture in Singapore took off most prominently during the third cultural phase, with the government becoming more cognisant of the discursive role of culture, as well as the need to manage the form and conduct of culture through cultural policy, management and policing (Leo and Lee, 2004: 212; Kwok and Low, 2002: 150; Ooi and Chow, 2002).

The Singapore government's management of culture and the arts originated with the setting up of a Ministry of Culture in 1959, when Singapore was made a semi-independent state of Malaya. This Ministry was subsequently dissolved in 1985 due in part to cost-cutting measures as the country encountered an economic recession, with its Information Division coming under a new Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and its arts and cultural management component assimilated into the Ministry of

Community Development (MCD). In 1990, upon the realisation of the significance of culture and the arts mostly for economic, but also political, purposes, the government decided to re-establish a 'cultural' ministry in 1990. The Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) was born that year, with George Yeo as acting Minister, and subsequently its first, and probably most articulate, minister. In November 2001, the high-profile communications portfolio was transferred to MITA with the acknowledgement that technological convergence was rapidly leading to regulatory convergence (Barr, 2000: 20-1). To reflect this change, MITA became known as the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts from 2002.[18]

The 1990s to early 2000s, fitting neatly into Singapore's third cultural phase, witnessed a period of heightened activity with regard to arts and cultural regulation in Singapore. This period was marked by an unprecedented number of newly formed or consolidated cultural agencies or regulatory bodies, all of them eventually coming under the parentage and jurisdiction of MITA. In particular, the following Statutory Boards of MITA were established during this period (in chronological order):

- National Arts Council (NAC) – formed in 1993 to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore, and to disburse government scholarships and funding to promising artists, arts groups, and performing tropes and companies;

- National Heritage Board (NHB) – formed in 1993 via the merger of the National Archives, National Museum and the Oral History Department to promote public awareness, appreciation and understanding of the arts, culture and heritage;

[18] More detailed information about the history and responsibilities of Singapore's Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA) can be found by visiting the website: www.mita.gov.sg. Alternatively, refer to the publication by MITA: *create.connect@sg: Arts, Media and Infocomm in Singapore* (edited by Menon et al., 2002).

- Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) – formed in 1994 following the corporatisation of public broadcasting to oversee and promote a more liberalised broadcasting industry in Singapore.

- National Library Board (NLB) – formed in 1995 to manage Singapore's public library system and to promote reading and learning among Singaporeans.

- Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) – formed in 1999 via the merger of the former Telecommunication Authority of Singapore (TAS) and the National Computer Board (NCB) to establish Singapore as an information and communications (infocomm) hub.

- Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) – formed in January 2003 by the merger of the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), the Films and Publications Department of MITA (FPD), and the Singapore Film Commission (SFC) to promote the growth of the media industry and to manage media and cultural content.[19]

These government agencies, although tasked with regulating different industry sectors, are in effect part of the overall and centralised conduct of cultural regulation since they determine various modes of social and cultural interactions in everyday life. For example, MDA's jurisdiction on the amount of local and foreign content, as well as levels of content censorship, permitted on national free-to-air television has a major impact on the ideological positions of Singapore citizens. This in turn has a deep influence on their social, cultural and political values (Thompson, 1997: 2).

In addition to the establishment of statutory bodies, several extensive strategies, reports and policy statements were unveiled during this period. Not only does this

[19] Five out of six Statutory Boards under MITA, as at July 14, 2004, are listed here. The sixth Statutory Board is the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), which was formed back in 1971 to preserve monuments and related data of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or artistic interests. Further information on all six Statutory Boards can be obtained by visiting their respective websites. Go to http://www.mita.gov.sg/aboutus/abtus_st_board.html for a direct gateway to these websites (accessed on: July 14, 2004).

demonstrate that much work was being done to define the place of culture, the media and the arts in contemporary Singapore, it suggests more broadly that 'culture' in an increasingly global society was being judged too important to be left in the hands of an unregulated – or perhaps under-regulated – and uncontrolled market (Thompson, 1997: 2). Some of the key statements and policies that will be discussed and critiqued in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three, include: *Singapore: Global City for the Arts* (MITA and STPB, 1995); *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Singapore* (MITA, 2000); and, *Creative Industries Development Strategy: Propelling Singapore's Creative Economy* (CIWG, 2002a). In addition to arts and cultural policies, three national vision statements were unveiled during this period: *Singapore: The Next Lap* (1991), which marked the first political leadership transition in Singapore, with the transfer of prime ministerial responsibilities from Lee Kuan Yew to Goh Chok Tong on November 28, 1990; *Singapore 21: Together We Make The Difference* (1999), to articulate Singapore's 'new' vision for the 21st century; and, *The Report of the Remaking Singapore Committee: Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships* (2003), designed to uncover new economic directions to 'remake' Singapore for a new and more competitive global economy (Leo and Lee, 2004). These national statements, at times doubling as cultural policies, will also be cited and discussed, where relevant, in this thesis.

In conjunction with the above events and updates, the mission statement of MITA was also amended in 2003 in an attempt to publicly articulate its desire to respond to and keep up with global cultural shifts:

> To develop Singapore as a global city for information, communications and the arts, so as to build a creative economy and a connected society

> with a Singaporean identity rooted in our multicultural heritage (MITA website, accessed: July 14, 2004).

While it is important to understand that such visionary terms and phrases in Singapore are not inherent in words, and therefore do not always hold denotative or connotative meanings (Lee and Birch, 2000: 148), it is nonetheless interesting to note how aspirations towards being a "global city" and a "creative society" are being linked to "a Singaporean identity rooted in [a] multicultural heritage". Such cultural descriptions of Singapore as concomitantly modern and traditional are quite commonly portrayed, appearing not just in mission statements, but also in tourism promotional material and writings on Singapore. Instead of such a hybridised existence on the cusps of East/West and past/present ambivalences (Ang and Stratton, 1995), Singaporean literary and cultural theorist C. J. W.-L. Wee prefers to see contemporary Singapore in the terms of what he calls a 'neotraditional modernity', a cohesive and up-to-date acknowledgement of Singapore's modernity (*neo*) which concurrently provides reference to the habits, customs and attitudes of Singapore's past (*tradition*) (Wee, 1996: 500). Oxymoronic though it may seem, a 'neotraditional modernity' aptly describes a nation that "aspires to be modern yet Asian", or Westernised in terms of its high-tech ambitions, but attempting – or as some may see it, pretending – to remain Asian or traditional socially and culturally (Tamney, 1996: 2).

One of the most visible sites – and sights – of 'neotraditionalism' or convergence in Singapore culture can be found in the city-state's theatre scene, described by Peterson as the cultural form "most actively and consistently engaged with and controlled by Singapore's political culture" (Peterson, 2001: 3). In a book length study of English-

language theatre in Singapore, Peterson (2001) makes the point that theatre and performing arts in Singapore operates on the threshold of traditionalism and modernity, with the *lingua franca* status of the English language to a large extent a marker of Singapore's 'neotraditional' identity (see Pakir, 1992: 236; and Wee, 1996). The institutionalisation of the English language as Singapore's working language since the nation's independence, and doubling as a 'neutral' or 'bridge language' for inter-racial or inter-ethnic communication, thus embody both cultural and political meanings (Lim, 1989: 530; Kuo and Jernudd, 1988: 7). The use of the English language to manage Singapore's 'multicultural heritage' does not mean that one's native language, described as 'mother-tongue' in Singapore, should be discarded. Rather, Singaporeans are required to embrace an "English-knowing bilingualism" (Pakir, 1992), where English becomes the "instrument of Singaporeanization" and the 'mother-tongue' gets relegated to the status of a subsidiary language (Bloom, 1986: 406).

Local theatre groups have shown that they are cognisant of this language, and by extension, cultural, policy. For example, the Tamil language theatre group *Agni Koothu*, formed in 1991 to break away from conventional Tamil theatre, have recently begun to perform their plays in both Tamil and English (Oon, 2000). Similarly, *Teater Kami*, a predominantly vernacular Malay language theatre company which turned professional in 1997 after some years of amateur operations has begun to cater to a broader scope of English and Malay-speaking audience (Oon, 2000), if nothing else, to demonstrate that it is part of the cultural mosaic of modern Singapore.[20] Certainly, the economic pragmatism

[20] For further reading on Singapore theatre and its relation to cultural politics, see also Birch (1998 and 1999b) and Lo (2004, forthcoming).

of such 'compliance' with the language policy of the nation should not be dismissed, especially when there is a need to rely on limited funding from the National Arts Council (NAC), or other regulatory or funding bodies linked to the government, for commercial sustenance and viability. With the ability to adjudicate on funding matters as well as politico-legal codes, the regulatory power of the NAC gives a small glimpse of how penetrative, influential and complete cultural regulation can be. Chapter Three of this thesis will analyse Singapore's contemporary cultural policies, particularly during the third cultural phase, in greater detail, since this is the period which saw the rise of a more definitive regulation of culture and the arts in Singapore.

Whilst the aim of identifying and documenting Singaporean governmentality vis-à-vis the regulation of culture in the contemporary city-state of Singapore is the subject – and primary object – of this thesis, its scope is much wider (cf. Cawley and Chaloupka, 1997; Foucault, 1978). The thesis performs the task of what Birch (1999a) calls the 'reading' of the nation's culture, which implies that all cultural activity and national discourses are imbued with meanings which must be read 'deconstructively'. As Birch notes, with reference to Singapore:

> Reading communication and culture as text, in a critical way, does not imply reading negatively. It requires reading deconstructively. It requires reading context. It requires reading subtext. It requires reading intertext. It requires reading beyond, around and outside the text. It requires a critical literacy which assumes from the very start that not everything that a text means can be "found" in what a text says (Birch, 1999a: 27).

To read Singapore culture and politics 'deconstructively' in the context of this thesis means to unpack and scrutinise the elements that comprise and compose Singapore culture and politics. In this regard, Singapore becomes text, context and subtext, and as

such must be read critically alongside and against the social, cultural and political 'inter-texts' of Singapore culture and politics (Kramer-Dahl and Chew, 1999: 2).

In attempting to understand how cultural regulation is being conducted in Singapore, this thesis will utilise and extract Foucault's (1978) theoretical concept of governmentality to uncover the texts, contexts and subtexts of things to do with culture and politics, or "the art of government" (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991: ix), in Singapore. Although most applications of the theoretical discourse of governmentality by many Foucauldian scholars, and by Foucault himself (1978, 1988a and 1988b), have tended to be situated within Western liberal contexts, this thesis is original in that it will extend and re-locate the notion of governmentality onto the economically-successful, but politically authoritarian and illiberal Singapore. This will allow readers to critically re-think the governmental role and regulatory functions of culture in a modern and technologically-advanced city-state that is ideologically different from the liberal West, yet desires to be networked to the developed economies of the West. Once again, Singapore appears to be somewhat schizophrenic, if not highly ambitious, in wanting the best of both the 'new' as well as 'traditional' worlds (Wee, 1996). Indeed, such schizophrenic ambivalence portrayed in reading and writing deconstructively about Singapore is what makes this thesis, and the chapters that follow, intellectually stimulating, critically thought-provoking and, hopefully, fun to read.

The Chapters

The next chapter of this thesis, Chapter Two, provides the theoretical foundation to the thesis by explicating and situating the Foucauldian discourse of governmentality – defined as "the calculated direction of human conduct" and behaviour (Dean, 1999: 2), or simply, the conduct of conduct – to make sense of Singapore's approach towards the governing and regulation of culture (Foucault, 1978). The concept of governmentality, as an extension of Foucault's earlier works dealing with extant disciplinary mechanisms in society (e.g. Foucault, 1973 and 1977), has been used in recent times by liberal scholars to locate the 'mentalities' of political rule and the contemporary practices of government in liberal and neo-liberal contexts (Dean, 1999: 16). I argue, in this chapter, that the liberal discourse of governmentality is not incompatible with the illiberal context of Singapore because the very idea of Western 'liberalism' is no longer a philosophical position about the rights of individuals. Rather, liberalism has become synonymous with the governing of the 'self-organising', 'self-regulating' and moral subject (Rose, 1999a: xxii; Dean, 2002: 42; Hunt, 1999: 6), ideals and regulatory practices that have been circulating within various Singaporean public discourses – including the aforementioned 'shared values' debate (White Paper, 1991) – for some time.

In and through Singapore, one might begin to see that the liberalisation or 'opening-up' of culture in an illiberal society, often mistakenly presented as the democratisation of its rigid political structures (see Paul, 1992), is enhanced by 'indirect governmental mechanisms' and 'technologies of rule' that are commonly enforced in liberal democracies to allow governments to manage its citizens centrally and 'at a

distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990: 83). Indeed, Barry Hindess identifies these 'neo-liberal' practices as inherently "authoritarian" and "anti-democratic" (2001a and 2001b), designed to govern the culture – what Nikolas Rose (1989) calls the 'soul' of individuals – in and of society. The aim is to 'rationalise' and 'discipline' subjects into becoming, *inter alia*, hard-working, morally-upright, law-abiding, socio-culturally docile and economically-productive, the preferred traits of all good cultural citizens and the very indicators of governmental success in a contemporary society. These ideals are also well captured in the accompanying discourse of cultural citizenship, which will also be discussed in the latter part of Chapter Two (and as a precursor to Chapter Three).

Tony Bennett, one of the early proponents of a Foucauldian approach towards the increasingly popular sub-discipline of cultural policy studies, has argued that Foucault's work on governmentality is theoretically useful in problematising the relation of culture with politics (Bennett, 1998: 60-1; see also Bennett, 1992a, 1992b and 2000; and, During, 1993: 18-20). This position is further externalised by Toby Miller, who contends that cultural policy exists at the "site at which the subject is produced" and moulded (Miller, 1993: 16). Cultural policy, and its concomitant of cultural policing, is therefore about getting citizens as audiences and consumers to accept and participate in the rationales of governmentality. Chapter Three, following on from the theoretical framework of governmentality posited in Chapter Two, looks at contemporary cultural thought and policy in Singapore. The chapter will trace the history of cultural policy in Singapore: from its early emphases on nation-building and 'anti-Westernisation' (in the 1960s and 1970s), to its focus on economic outcomes via heritage preservation and arts tourism (in

the 1980s and 1990s), and finally, to its twenty-first century vision of becoming a global 'Renaissance City' of the arts and creative industries from 2000 to 2003 – and beyond.

Chapter Three will also draw on a rarely cited essay by Raymond Williams, entitled 'State Culture and Beyond', which argues in essence that cultural policy has become so well-absorbed within government and public policy in general that it is hardly recognisable as an "aspect of the of the state" (Williams, 1984: 3). This section of the chapter will detail Williams' words that echo Theodor Adorno's (1991) cynicism and warning, first articulated in 1938 (in German), about the rise of the industrialisation – and indeed the regulation and 'governmentalisation' – of culture (Bernstein, 1991: 4). In doing so, 'culture' can be readily mobilised by governments seeking not only to extract economic worth from culture and cultural workers, but also to police and shape the social forms and thoughts of its citizens (Barnett, 2001: 19; Throsby, 2001: 138-41). As a nation that privileges the economic and embraces the doctrine of political 'survivalism', whilst eschewing social and artistic endeavours, Singapore presents an interesting study on how culture and creativity can be conceived in the language of economics without impacting on the state's political agenda (Kong, 2000a: 286). This chapter argues, in a nutshell, that the cultural thought and political values of the city-state of Singapore is expressed in its cultural policy, which in turn demonstrates the pervasiveness of the discourse of governmentality therein.

Chapter Four, entitled 'Gestural Politics and Civil(ising) Society', looks at attempts by Singaporean authorities to engage with the global discourse of civil society,

but on its terms. Although civil society is mostly seen in contemporary situations as an incursive political force, this chapter argues that the Singapore government has successfully depoliticised 'civil society' into 'civic society', thereby avoiding or sidestepping the political connotations of the term (Chua, 2000: 63). In addition, the idea of a 'civic', or civilised and civic-minded, society fits in well with attempts by the state to frame the moral and cultural values of Singaporean via the annual courtesy campaign (from 1979 to 2000), which has been re-branded as the 'Singapore Kindness Movement' from 2001 (Singapore Courtesy Council, 1999). Although such campaigns and moral regulatory projects are 'gestures' intended to distract individuals from participation in political activities, they also serve a dual purpose in governing the cultural conduct and behaviour of individuals, thus fulfilling a wider and arguably longer-term agenda.

Singapore's national vision statement, *Singapore 21: Together We Make The Difference* (1999), will be discussed in Chapter Four. The chapter will pay close attention to the final pillar of the vision, which encourages 'active citizenship' in Singapore, as it is correlates directly with the unresolved subject and project of civil society. The confounding ambivalences, or puzzles (Haas, 1999a), that permeate Singapore culture and politics will undoubtedly (re)surface in this chapter. While 'active citizenship' calls for Singaporeans to speak up and be involved in policy-making, the key elements of an active and independent civil society, its application is starkly different, even contradictory. As debates rage on about the role of 'active citizens', physical and metaphorical spaces for feedback and participation in Singapore are being subtly reduced or minimised. This is done in Singapore by simply employing the golfing term 'OB-

markers', or out-of-bounds markers, to arbitrarily delineate the parameters of political debate. This ingenious political invention is designed to avert political dissonance and dissenting voices whilst managing what some believe to be the inevitable rise of civil society (Lee and Neo, 2003; Rodan, 1996: 114). Chapter Four concludes that the discourse of civil, or civic, society in Singapore exemplifies what I refer to as 'gestural politics', where the sense or rhetoric of a politically- and culturally-open society is more important than its substance.

Chapter Five sets out to consider the ways in which the Internet, as the epitome of digitalised or new media technologies, has been and can be used as a technology of governmentality in Singapore, widely acknowledged as one of the most technologically advanced and networked cities in the world. Entitled 'Technological Auto-regulation', this chapter analyses the Internet regulatory practices in the 'intelligent island-state' and introduces the notion of 'auto-regulation', a term I have coined to suggest that the regulation of the Internet as a channel of communication in Singapore is mostly about enabling what Foucault calls the "automatic functioning of power" (1977: 200). As a discourse of power and governmentality, the conduct of 'technological auto-regulation' in Singapore is modelled after Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, the prison structure that wields both supervisory and surveillance powers over its inmates (Foucault, 1977: 200). The enactment of such powers is done either 'visibly' (or directly) or 'unverifiably' (or indirectly), or if appropriate to the circumstance, both approaches can be applied simultaneously, in order to extract total disciplinary compliance from the governed (Foucault, 1977: 201-2).

In addition to demonstrating the extensiveness of governmentality and political control in the city-state, best described in Andrew Barry's terms as a "technological society" (2001: 31), I argue in this chapter that the 'automation' of Internet controls are essentially a fine-tuning exercise to extend traditional gate-keeping strategies onto electronic media (see Rodan, 1988, 2000a and 2000b; Lee and Birch, 2000). The chapter will also provide a brief background of Internet use and regulation in Singapore, looking specifically at key aspects of Internet content self-regulatory codes issued by the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA), and how they perpetuate social, cultural and political control and technological auto-regulation. The chapter concludes with a study of the status of electronic government (e-Government) in Singapore. It suggests that with rapid implementation of e-Government in the contemporary era of anti-terrorism, high security alert and increased surveillance, technological auto-regulation as modelled after Singapore will become a lot more widespread – not just in Singapore, but in many parts of the world. With improved electronic technology, the art of governmentality can thus be scientifically advanced for cultural regulation to be conducted, or even perfected.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, takes a slightly lighter look at the subject of Singapore's nationhood by looking at how governmentality and cultural policy ideals are being promoted in Singapore via the annual National Day Parade and through the commissioning of national songs. Entitled 'Popularising Policy: The Nation in Parade and Songs', this chapter is based on fieldwork conducted at the National Day Parade in

August 2000 as well as analyses of the lyrics and music video clips of two popular national songs: *Home* (1998) and *Stand Up for Singapore* (2000 version). It will argue that attempts by the state to popularise the nation at National Day parades and in the broadcast of national songs can not only be used to evoke nationalist sentiments, especially amongst younger Singaporeans, they can become powerful mediatory tools practicable for announcing and 'soft-selling' of new policy and political agendas to the public.

As Phua and Kong have noted, the playing of national songs, especially during national day season in August every year, are "part of the ideological tools used by the ruling elite to legitimise its rule and policies" (1996: 220-1). I argue, in this chapter, that national celebrations and music performances extend beyond the goal of political legitimisation. Such popularisation tools and strategies are essentially technologies of governmentality, designed to portray, present and popularise Singapore as a modern city that is socially desirable, culturally vibrant, and hence, a creative and fun place to live, work and play in. The gradual, and eventual, mastery of this strategy would mean that Singapore's cultural policy of control over the governed would no longer be visibly enforced, but becomes more self-managed and self-regulated, hence inert and unverifiable (Rose, 1999b: 3; Foucault, 1977: 201-2).

The thesis will conclude with a summary of the salient points covered in the chapters. It will also address Haas' (1999) – and many others critics' – depiction of Singapore as a puzzling, schizophrenic and ambivalent city-state. It will not do so with an

overarching statement or a position of justification, but with a displacement of such views and perceptions. Contrary to widespread perceptions about Singapore's contradictory existence, I would argue that Singapore is 'frighteningly' consistent, particularly with regard to its embodiment of governmentality in cultural policy and regulation. In this regard, Singapore can perhaps be described as a "frightened community" of well-disciplined, docile or well-regulated and highly productive cultural citizens (Davies, 1999: 104). As in all aspects of politics and culture, there will always the occasional social or cultural fracture and economic challenge. But in keeping with its economic survivalist and pragmatist ideology, as captured in the motto "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39), Singaporean authorities are certain to draw on all available governmental technologies not just to tide through difficult times, but to rebound with further strategies and new technologies to expand its political arsenal, and thus extend its cultural cum technological auto-regulatory abilities.

Final Introductory Note

Returning to the two contrasting opening quotes of this chapter, it is not too difficult to detect a chasm between those who admire Singapore's mode of existence and those who (prefer to) find faults in the polity. From the 1990s and through the third cultural phase of Singapore, there was an evident influx of literature, books and published written material on Singapore emanating from both Singaporean and non-Singaporean sources. With few exceptions, just as the opening quotations have revealed, scholars and critics who have undertaken to read and write about Singapore have tended to fall on either side of a for/against divide that tends to be more ideological than real.

Many authors tend either to bestow the state with high accolades, usually in terms of its unparalleled economic growth and development, coupled with its urban and infrastructural achievements,[21] or criticise its many social, cultural and political 'lacks'. Or perhaps more interestingly, critics have a peculiar tendency to praise Singapore's economic achievements, only to tear it down shortly after by over-emphasising its seemingly uninspiring cultural, creative and political landscape (see, for example: Sardar, 2001; and, Gibson, 1994). Not surprisingly, the most criticised aspect of Singapore has been and remains the PAP's paternalistic and 'authoritarian-capitalist' mode of governing the country and its people, leaving little space for creativity, individual freedom and an autonomous civil society to flourish (Lingle, 1996; Lydgate, 2003; Haas, 1999c: 158-9).

Although Singapore has thrived on various social, cultural and political ambivalences in the past, it would prefer to be seen more positively – and more consistently – in the twenty-first century, which is why positive reports about Singapore appearing in international media would almost always be proclaimed loudly in the local media (e.g. McCarthy and Ellis, 1999; see also Kraar, 2000). The aim of this thesis, however, is not to fulfil the government's 'desire' to propagate its preferred reading of Singapore, but to critically examine and negotiate the increasingly complex politics and governmentality of culture, cultural policy and regulation in Singapore. It should be noted that while instances of criticisms and criticality will be present in this thesis, it is not the intention of the author to slip into either sides of the for/against divide. It is important to emphasise, especially when dealing with the text and context of Singapore,

[21] A wide range of works on Singapore's economy is now available. See, for example: Pang (1981); Tyanji (1985); Lee T. Y. (1999); and Rodan (1989).

that criticism should not be (mis)read as cynicism, or vice versa. The primary aim this thesis is to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the culture of politics as well as the politics of culture in Singapore. All other readings should thus be seen as extraneous.

CHAPTER TWO:
Governmentality and Culture

> The art of government can take all sorts of stances towards freedom. It can try to shape it or treat it as an artefact of certain governmental arrangements. It can seek to educe it among some and presuppose it among others. It can treat the governed as free persons or citizens, and rely on their capacities to govern themselves rather than try to govern them. It can use freedom as a technical means for achieving its ends (Dean, 2002: 37).

Introduction

The French philosopher Michel Foucault's wide-ranging works on the uses of power, discourse, language and politics have prompted much discussion and debates in various spheres of humanities and the social sciences, and continues to influence many. His concern with politics and public administration, or the management of human subjects, was apparent, though much of it was investigated in specific institutional contexts (such as schools, prisons, barracks, *et cetera*).[22] In 1991, a collection of Foucault's writings was published alongside other essays dealing with the subject matter of 'government' to specifically address issues surrounding the art, activity and problems of governing or of political control over people (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). These essays deal with what Rose and Miller (1992: 181) refer to as the "problematizing activity" of government, a task which involves the consideration of both the diagnosis and programmatic solutions of political rule, what Dean (2002: 37) refers to, in the opening quote of this chapter, as the "governmental arrangements" that are readily

[22] See, for example, Foucault's three volume study on the history of sexuality (1978, 1985 and 1986); and his analysis on the discourse of prison, reform and disciplining of the human body in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). See also Simons' extensive work on Foucault's political thought, especially Chapter 3 (Simons, 1995).

available at the disposal of governments, as well as their affiliates (see Colebatch, 2002: 425-6). This volume, entitled *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991), has helped incite further thoughts on Foucault's discourse of governmentality or 'governmental rationality', and made Foucault's thinking on political and cultural issues a lot more accessible (Gordon, 1991: 1).

Governing through the role and apparatuses of public administration is so pervasive in the contemporary nation-state that few have questioned its existence, rationality or authority. Foucault's now-influential work on governmentality has sought to fill this glaring lack. For Foucault, governmentality is effectively "an art of government" – or "a way of doing things" – whereby sovereignty and discipline via the subjection of individuals to technologies of rule could be rendered thinkable and practicable (Foucault, 1988; Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991: ix). In other words, government – commonly understood in contemporary and general terms as "the conduct of conduct" – is a methodical and rational task that can be positioned within any liberal, or even illiberal, governmental discourse (Burchell, 1996: 19; see Colebatch, 2002), so that it is sufficiently understood by both the ruler and the ruled, or by the government as well as the governed (Gordon, 1991: 3). Governmentality, therefore, deals with the different 'mentalities' of government, or the thinking *about* as well as the thinking *behind* government. Indeed, a hyphenated 'govern-mentality' helps to elucidate the point that Foucault was essentially interested in the kinds of thinking associated with particular approaches to government. The primary objective is to make sense of the oft taken-for-granted and generally unquestioned practices of government and rule (Dean, 1999: 16).

While Foucault situates the concept of governmentality within a Western-led liberal political thought, where notions of freedom and liberalism are, to a large extent, foundational and pivotal, this chapter, as the theoretical chapter of this thesis, aims to consider how the theory and notion of governmentality may be employed to make sense of Singapore's approach towards the governing and regulation of culture. As Bennett (1998: 60-1) proposes, the influence of Foucault's work in problematising the understandings of the relations of culture and power makes the 'Foucault effect' a positively useful theoretical tool for the study of cultural policy, and by association, the cultural thought and political thinking of a nation. Taking a leaf from Bennett, this chapter provides a theoretical basis of governmentality as a practical and practicable cultural discourse, one which prepares the ground for a concise understanding of cultural regulation in Singapore and its policies towards the framing of cultural citizenship. The chapter that follows, Chapter Three, will then undertake to critically examine Singapore's approach to culture, cultural policy, and what might be understood as Singaporean cultural thought.

This exercise will not only provide an original contribution to the debate surrounding Foucauldian governmentality and culture, a field of research which existing literature has neglected, it will also extend the notion of governnmentality beyond Western liberal democratic contexts onto Singapore, a society seen by many Western eyes as non-democratic and dictatorial at worst (e.g. Huntington, 1991; 1996: 106), or as a semi-authoritarian or soft-authoritarian state at best (e.g. Fukuyama, 1992: 49-50; and

as mentioned in Chapter One). The annual United States Department of State Human Rights Reports on Singapore since the 1990s have consistently declared that the Singapore government generally respects the rights of its citizens, although there are some significant problems. It also acknowledges that although Singaporeans have democratic means to change their government, primarily via regular general elections, formidable obstacles are often placed for serious and threatening political opponents (Mauzy and Milne, 2002: 128). As highlighted in Chapter One, such contradictory political positions are not only common and unremarkable in Singapore, they are taken-for-granted in a nation which continues to present its government as democratic to its citizens.

In thinking about the link between governmentality and Singapore, I would contend that the apparent gulf between Western liberalism and Singaporean authoritarianism can be highly problematic. In fact, it could be potentially illusory if one considers the 'decline' of taken-for-granted liberal concepts and ideologies. After all, the gradual erosion of liberalism and practices in 'liberal' societies in the contemporary age marked by globalisation and anti-terrorism discourses can be seen to gravitate towards 'illiberalism' or an 'illiberal democracy' exemplified by Singapore's brand of communitarian authoritarianism, a position favoured by Chua (1995) and preferred by political theorists desiring to move beyond semantics (see, *inter alia*, Jones, 1998 and Zakaria, 2003). Essentially, communitarianism or illiberalism in Singapore has the effect of "preventing democratisation from taking the course of liberal democracy" (Mauzy and Milne, 2002: 128-9), a charge that can arguably be levelled at Western liberal societies

since the Cold War era, and hastened by the rise of global terrorism post-September 11, 2001.

It comes as little surprise then that Hindess makes a reference to what he calls 'the liberal government of unfreedom' in his analyses of authoritarian practices inherent in the liberal democratic process (Hindess, 2001b). This 'unfree' mode of liberalism in Western societies has also been referred to as 'advanced liberalism' (Rose, 1989, 1996b, 1999a, 1999b and 2000) and 'neo-liberalism' (Hindess, 1998, 2002), albeit with different socio-political and cultural inflections. Political analyst and editor of America-based *Newsweek International* Fareed Zakaria (1997, 2003) combines these seemingly disparate political ideologies and modes of rule by arguing that most democracies, particularly those that are newly established, fare best under what he calls "illiberal authoritarian regimes" where authoritarian practices are 'balanced' with liberal order (see also Devan, 2003 and Judis, 2003: 10). According to Skene (2003: 190), authoritarian practices include activities such as the utilisation of devices to bypass legislatures or restrict oppositional parties from operating freely, the restriction of political and civil rights of the citizenry, and the politicisation of the judiciary. These practices clearly run counter to the liberal order marked by a rule of law, independent judiciary, free enterprise, civil liberties and such like, making the concept of an illiberal political order or an authoritarian regime a deeply contradictory political discourse.

Amidst this debate, it is interesting that Zakaria (2003) identifies Singapore as one of his role models for a state that offers a path towards what he calls a "restoration of

balance between democracy and liberty", where democracy is understood minimally as a political system based on the regular holding of open and fair elections, whilst liberty – or more accurately, constitutional freedom – refers to a Western tradition that "seeks to protect an individual's autonomy and dignity against coercion, whatever the source – state, church or society" (Zakaria, 2003: 19). To Zakaria (2003), Singapore exhibits "strong strands of constitutional liberalism", but is strictly not a 'democracy' because of its authoritarian and/or illiberal bents. Nevertheless, he makes a bold prediction – based on his own intellectual observation of Singapore's rapid economic growth and progress, its administrative cum bureaucratic efficiencies and increasing openness to the world vis-à-vis its unrelenting embrace of globalisation – that "Singapore will be a fully functioning liberal democracy within a generation" (Zakaria, 2003: 86). Differently put, Zakaria has been won over by the political and economic logic of Singapore as "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39). While it is not my intention to dismiss political predictions or undermine the strengths of democratic movements internationally, it is apparent that Zakaria fails to consider the significance of culture, and the indeed, the governmentality of culture. In Singapore, so much is subject to arbitrary governmental control and manipulation that any attempts at democratising or liberalising politics would typically emanate from the centre; hence Cherian George's (2000) assertion that 'centralised control' permeates in Singaporean political discourses. The corollary is that Singapore is neither 'democratic' nor 'liberal' if we apply Zakaria's terms to the letter.

Nevertheless, instead of entering into a potentially endless debate about the extent of liberalism in a contemporary liberal society or the extent of authoritarianism in an

illiberal or unfree society (if at all quantifiable), this chapter suggests that a more productive exercise would be to consider the impact of culture and how Singapore's authoritarian or illiberal 'success' has much to do with the regulation of culture and its understanding of cultural citizenship. This chapter aims therefore to negotiate and make sense of what might be perceived as governmentality in Singapore by rationalising, to some extent, the links between liberal democratic ideals and authoritarian practices, both of which claim to govern in the name of freedom and/or democracy (Dean, 2002: 58; Hindess, 2001a). It will pay particular attention to how these ideas are reflected and expressed with regard to the cultural regulation of the citizenry in Singapore.

This chapter will begin by setting out an explanation of the concept of governmentality. It will then prepare the theoretical ground for Chapter Three, which deals specifically with cultural thought and policy in Singapore, as well as the entire thesis, by looking at the technologies of cultural conduct, cultural citizenry and government in Singapore. It aims to suggest how the governmentality framework or the 'Foucault effect' has been – and can be further – utilised, appropriated and possibly perfected by the Singaporean authorities tasked with the promotion and management of culture in contemporary Singapore. Although Foucault's own writings and lectures will be looked at, analyses will also be drawn from a range of recently published 'applied-

Foucauldian' works that puts Foucault's thoughts on governmentality into contemporary contexts.[23]

Effecting Foucault's Governmentality

Interpretation and application of Foucault's work on governmentality depends a great deal on one's disciplinarity, although a general understanding of the concept can be extracted from a broad-based reading of Foucauldian and 'applied-Foucauldian' writings (see Gordon, 1991; and, Burchell, 1996). Although Foucault does consider the term 'government' in terms of the managerial state, his notion of governmentality does not in any sense 'equate' with the state. Rather, Foucault's intent is to challenge common conceptions of the state as the primary site and source of power, preferring instead to see the state's ruling power as "one instrument among others" (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991: 17). In this context, government refers broadly to "any calculated direction of human conduct" (Dean, 1999: 2). In other words, government is interested in the 'conduct of conduct'. The 'conducting' of one's conduct is an activity that aims to shape, guide or affect the behavioural or cultural conduct of a person, a collective or group of people (Gordon, 1991: 2). As Dean (1999) explicates:

> Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for

[23] These 'applied-Foucauldian' works include, *inter alia*, academics and thinkers such as: Dean (1999, 2002); Hindess (1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002); Helliwell and Hindess (2002); Hunt (1999); Johnson (2000); Miller and Rose (1990); and, Rose (1989, 1999a, 1999b, 2000); as well as edited collections by: Burchell, Gordon and Miller (1991, also referenced as Burchell et al. in this thesis); Gane and Johnson (1993); Barry, Osborne and Rose (1996); Dean and Hindess (1998); and, Bratich, Packer and McCarthy (2003). There are also others who work under the interdisciplinary rubric of 'cultural studies', such as: Bennett (1992a, 1992b, 1998, 2000); Miller (1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998); Cunningham (1992); and, O'Regan (1992, 2001).

> definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes (Dean, 1999: 11).

The governmental goal is thus to get members of populations to behave and conduct themselves in ways which fit determinations of what has been prescribed as desirable by a higher authority, typically the government itself or a supreme being. As Dean elucidates above, this is typically carried out by working through "desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs", most of which are humanly intangible and often emotionally-charged, and hence irrational. In short, governmentality is designed, in part, to rationalise the irrational. As Dean denotes, this is done by "employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge" (Dean, 1999: 11).

To Dean and Hindess (1998: 11), studying government as the 'conduct of conduct' entails a concern for the government of conduct as much as the conduct of government. In this light, one does not only need to pay attention to the ways in which authorities and agencies attempt to shape, mould and direct the conduct of individuals and groups (i.e. variety of techniques), one should also take heed of the agenda (or agendas) at play in the exercise of authority (i.e. forms of knowledge). Veritably, this thesis is interested in the strategies and techniques or technologies that are employed in the setting of Singapore's cultural policy agendas; or if one prefers, the politics of cultural regulation in Singapore. The 'Foucault effect' in the study of culture suggests that such tasks are carried out with governmental strategies and techniques intended to achieve a convenient end, always positioned as a desirable outcome, not just for the individual or group, but also for the society at large (Bennett, 1998: 82).

Whether one is involved in strategic planning for commercial ends or for the management of a population, a certain degree of confidentiality and tact must necessarily be applied. In much the same way, the manipulation of citizens as cultural subjects is best carried out in an indirect – or perhaps to an extent, deceptive – yet calculated manner. Of course, in a highly mediated post-modern world, the tailoring of specific messages is managed via discourses of public or investor relations (Nair, 2003: 9). There are undeniably many ways to legitimise new strategies and techniques of government to enhance credibility. To cite a common example, a government department or ministry could produce information handouts to promote the positive attributes of a new taxation policy. Or perhaps, public relations expertise could be employed to devise a large-scale glossy advertising campaign on an aspect of general public concern. A classic example would be the issue of road safety, which would include speeding, wearing of seat-belts and crash helmets, drink-driving and other dangerous driving or riding habits. Spinning a campaign under the mantra of 'public safety' would generally be viewed in a positive light by the public, but if it is seen to mask an increase in traffic fines or police enforcement, it may not receive widespread support. Of course, one way of overcoming public rejection is for authorities to offer statistical evidence and/or draw on reliable expert advice, a strategy typically employed by the news media.

In April 2003, in an attempt to combat the negative economic impact of the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus that threatened to cripple key East Asian economies including Singapore, health authorities in Singapore issued a SARS advisory booklet entitled *Fighting SARS Together*, accompanied with free digital

thermometers, to all Singaporean households in the hope of providing information and 'expert advice' on how deal with the mysterious virus (Ministry of Health, 2003). Printed with attractive cartoons and caricatured illustrations in the four main languages in Singapore (namely, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil), this unsophisticated but nonetheless costly exercise offers a textbook example of what it means to govern a nation or society. Not only was the mass distribution of the booklet and thermometer a potent demonstration of governmental concerns for the physical well-being of citizens, it was a well-orchestrated attempt at boosting economic, social and political confidence by propagating the myth that the government, through its respective bodies and agencies, is always in control.

The management of the SARS crisis in Singapore during the period of March to June 2003 demonstrates the amenability of tools in and of governmental control. On March 25, 2003, the Singapore Parliament invoked a 1970s Infectious Diseases Act originally designed to protect the island's inhabitants from 'old-fashioned' and mostly eradicated diseases like cholera (Arnold, 2003). This law allowed the Health and Home Affairs Ministries to 'join forces' to issue and enforce home quarantine orders to those at risk of contracting the virus. In addition, an amendment was rapidly passed in Parliament to raise the penalty for violating quarantine to a S$5,000 fine for first time offenders, and a S$10,000 fine or six months prison sentence for a repeat offender (Nadarajan, 2003). On April 11, 2003, *The Straits Times* reported that twelve people had flouted quarantine orders, and that the Government would go on to introduce high-tech electronic surveillance in the forms closed-circuit web cameras, along with personal electronic

bracelets, to 'police' those who were quarantined more efficiently (Nadarajan, 2003). The intention was to keep the quarantine system, in the words of Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, "watertight" (Nirmala, 2003a). Although civil libertarians condemned the intrusive legislative measures, the Singaporean authorities were able to contain the virus and delivered the desired outcome of a SARS-free Singapore, as declared by the World Health Organisation, on May 31, 2003.

In May 2003, a dedicated SARS free-to-air television channel was set up by Starhub Cable Vision (SCV), the sole government-linked cable television operator, to provide real-time updates and emergency advice to citizens. This SARS channel, along with existing television channels (namely, MediaCorp Channels 5 and 8 and MediaWorks Channel i and u), provided a platform for 'experts' in the forms of medical personnel and government officials to front news and current affairs programmes to assuage public fears and queries with regard to the mysterious health crisis. The overriding message was that the government and its agencies were making all the right moves – not in a draconian fashion, but with a 'caring touch'. As Dominic Nathan, Deputy News Editor of *The Straits Times*, declared in no uncertain terms in his commentary on Singapore's management of SARS:

> Tough action will be combined with compassion as the entire Government machinery goes all-out in the war against SARS. The objective: To make Singapore as safe a place as possible to live and do business in (Nathan, 2003).

The management and the control of a public health situation like SARS in Singapore offers one of the most contemporaneous and a highly pervasive technique of governmentality: the drawing or co-option of external, independent expertise to render

'expert' support, to comment on an issue, to chair a strategic planning committee, or perhaps front a current affairs programme. Depending on how the principles are applied, the applications are virtually limitless. In the case of Singapore, the success in controlling the spread of SARS won the government local and global accolades to the extent that Singapore was declared "a model for other countries" to emulate (see Koh, 2003; and Lee, 2003).

Straits Times journalist Sharon Loh's (2003) commentary, boldly entitled "Pragmatic 'Disneyland' shows how to fight bug" – titled such that it would be read, intertextually, as sharp rejoinder to William Gibson's (1994) description of Singapore as a sterile 'Disneyland with a death penalty' – made it clear that the Singapore Government was prepared to demonstrate to the rest of the world that draconian governmental measures were not out of sync with 'freedom' and public welfare. As Loh articulates:

> Ironically, those very qualities that brought Singapore a derisory reputation in the West appear to be working in favour now in containing the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak [...]. The factors that seem to be working for Singapore in this current public health crisis are: the state's obsession with powers that it will not hesitate to use, and a citizenry that expects only to bend its will to that higher one (Loh, 2003).

The World Health Organisation's endorsement of Singapore's pragmatic and draconian approaches to containing the SARS virus as 'exemplary' thus gives impetus to illiberal or authoritarian governmental strategies and controls.[24]

[24] The Singapore Government took up full-page advertisements in various newspapers around the world to announce its SARS-free status in early June 2003. The advertisement which appeared in *The Australian* on June 6, 2003, declared: "It's official, Singapore is off WHO's SARS list." The advertisement also quoted Dr David Heyman, Executive Director for Communicable Disease at the World Health Organisation (WHO), as saying: "From the start, Singapore's handling of its SARS outbreak has been exemplary... This is an inspiring victory that should make all of us optimistic that SARS can be contained everywhere" (in *The Australian*, June 6, 2003: 5).

It is worth emphasising that the abilities of governments to conjure rationality or corroborate facts by tapping on expert knowledge on just about any policy or public issue should not be underestimated. Indeed, among other things, they demonstrate the depth and breadth of resources accessible to modern governments to control the conduct of its citizens via seemingly moral, rational and transparent means or methods. In the case of the SARS advisory booklet in Singapore, the fact that the killer virus (and its cause) was unidentified at the time became a lesser problem. Command and control of the conduct of the people and the subsistence of the economy, both of which provide legitimacy for governmentality and politico-moral authority, clearly took precedence. To widen the reach of the Singapore government's politically astute manoeuvres, television and radio programmes were even allowed to broadcast in Chinese dialects, outlawed since 1982, to reach out to older and less-educated Chinese Singaporeans (Tan and Neo, 2003). The government's willingness to renege, albeit temporarily, on a firm Mandarin language-only policy, aimed originally at strengthening the cohesiveness of an otherwise disparate ethnic Chinese community, suggests the purveyance and art of governmental disposition. Nick Stevenson (2003) makes an apt summary of the applicability Foucault's concept of governmentality when he notes that:

> Government intervention through a variety of health campaigns, the regulation of disorderly activity, the monitoring of viruses and other mechanisms which bypass traditional ideas of politics, helps constitute good government (Stevenson, 2003: 343).

The constituents of 'good government' are well manifested in the case of SARS crisis management in Singapore. After all, within the proscribed sphere of modernity, as Foucault (1991) would argue, the moral aim of government is the continuing and

sustained welfare of the population via the shaping of the conduct of citizens (Stevenson, 2003: 342).

The legitimate and rational shaping of conduct is intrinsically akin to the practice of moral regulation and government. Moral government involves the ongoing deployment of the discourses of ethics, which has a tendency to lean towards simplistic dichotomies of right and wrong, good versus bad, or positive versus negative values as determined by one's socio-cultural and ideological background. Dean contends that government is "an intensely moral activity" because the practices and policies of government presume to know what constitutes good, appropriate and responsible conduct of individuals or collectives (Dean, 1999: 11-2). As Hunt puts it more cogently in his comprehensive study of the social history of moral regulation, "all practices of governing involve some element of moral regulation" (1999: 6). The key problem, though, is that such practices are often arbitrarily instituted and tends to invoke utilitarian elements drawn from taken-for-granted religious, or quasi-religious, framework, many of which have become detached from contemporary discussions on morality and are, in effect, political ideals (Hunt, 1999: 7).

In societies governed by the rule of law, moral regulatory guidelines are typically written into constitutions, legislations, codes of conduct and policies covering various social and cultural practices. Despite its authoritarian approach to governing, Singapore adopts similar governmental practices as they exhibit a high degree of transparency insofar as such legislations and codes are available for public perusal as and when

required. The Government of Singapore can thus be said to be administratively and bureaucratically efficient. One useful way to understand the subject of moral regulation in Singapore is by looking at its current media and cultural censorship codes. The censorship of media and cultural content in Singapore is, by necessity, both a moral and political issue, yet one that is perpetually unresolved due to its arbitrariness. Using Singapore's 1992 censorship codes as a guide to analysing film policy in Singapore, Birch (1996) considers censorship as the primary tool of cultural policy and governmentality in the city-state.

Recognising that no policy or guideline is immutable, Singapore embarked on a full censorship review from 2002 to 2003 (Tan, S. E., 2002). The result was an 'update' of Singapore's censorship regime with the release of the *Censorship Review Committee Report 2003* in July 2003 (CRC, 2003), a review which took into account the fact that public Internet was not yet available at the previous review conducted in the early 1990s (CRC, 1992). Although the local press reported this new regime as a move towards "less censorship, more choices at the right pace" (Oon, 2003), the review was designed primarily to validate 'old' rules that have been accepted by the "moral majority" of Singaporeans in the past (see Tan, K. P., 2003), and extending them, where appropriate, onto "a new array of media formats and communication platforms" (CRC, 2003: 10). This approach has the effect of maintaining the currency of censorship as cultural control into the near future.

Although many Singaporeans claim to be morally conservative and highly supportive of a strictly enforced censorship regime, few would agree on the degree of content prohibition or control required to maintain a fair level of decency. In effect, many Singaporeans, especially those who work in the arts and cultural sector, feel emasculated by a censorship code marked by ambiguity and fluidity (Yusof and Tan, 2003). Yet the government, through the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA), considers the task of prescribing censorship guidelines both a moral as well as a symbolic necessity. The belief is that even if it serves little, at the very least it would symbolise Singapore's ongoing concern with the undesirable, which refers most of the time to mass mediated violence and pornography.

However, censorship also has a far-reaching political dimension. In the *Censorship Review Committee Report 2003*, this was alluded to under the subheading 'Managing Sensitivities':

> In the ever-changing scenario, our multi-racial and multi-religious society, and the need to protect the young remain constant. We have to be sensitive to the feelings of every ethnic and religious group and the widespread concern for morality of the young, as was clearly registered in the Censorship Survey 2002. Censorship guidelines are needed to keep out content that may denigrate race and religion, harm the young, prejudice public order and erode community's moral norms (CRC, 2003: 11).

The cryptic notion of "public order" and "community's moral norms" can imply that 'content' that criticises important policies of the government can be censored, or perhaps censured, by the authorities. The governmental application of censorship in Singapore thus has the effect of shielding the ruling PAP government from overt dissident voices, as well as covert criticism, emanating from the artistic and cultural community. The need to

position censorship guidelines as a moral regulatory practice for public consumption means, then, that the more politicised reason for censorship is rarely invoked in any 'public' discussion on the issue. Yet they remain nonetheless pervasive for the purposes of cultural regulation and the conduct of conduct in Singapore.

The discourse of censorship also highlights the difficulty of devising a 'one-size-fits-all' approach towards moral and cultural regulation, one of many reasons why the governing of culture remains a site of constant struggle and ongoing anxiety (Hunt, 1999: 10-1; see also CRC, 2003: 11). It is important to recognise that the field of culture is, as Bennett (1998: 61) makes clear, "increasingly governmentally organised and constructed", suggesting that culture is progressively invoked as an apparatus of rule and political legitimacy, and less as a moral code. Consequently, we can see the justification for a structured and rational approach towards the administration of culture as a means of controlling or "acting on the social" (Bennett, 2000). This would be done via the regulation of thought, behaviour and the actions of citizens publicly positioned as free individuals. Yet these same individuals are concomitantly perceived by their administrators as incoherent in their social, cultural and political choices. Hence the need for well-crafted governmental strategies and programmes aimed at 'automizing' and normalising the individual to manage oneself via self-regulation (Foucault, 1977). Foucault observes quite plainly that the desire by authorities for principled and systematic approaches towards the regulation of conduct leads to the development of powerful strategies towards the 'government of oneself' (Foucault, 1991: 87). These strategies rely on what might be understood as the 'technologies' of self-government.

Technologies of Self-Government

The government of oneself (and one's self), or the practice of self-governing, which minimises the need for direct political and/or policing intervention, is enabled through the invention of an array of what Foucault calls 'technologies' that connect strategic calculations by political centres or establishments to thousand of micro-locales where individual or group conduct is shaped (Rose, 1999a: xxi-xxii). The harnessing of such 'micro-locales' of power, according to Rose (1999a), allows powers-that-be to extend their disciplinary control over space and time via "indirect mechanisms" or technologies of rule that have become part and parcel of liberal democratic practices (Miller and Rose, 1990: 83). Contemporary governmentality, increasingly demonstrated in self-regulatory frameworks commonplace in many liberal societies today, accords a crucial role to such technologies. These technologies apply and extend Bruno Latour's (1987) complex but well-employed phrase of 'action at a distance'.

In an attempt to offer a theory on how people make sense of scientific activity and inventions, Latour suggests that a broad network to facilitate information exchange and communication across distances must exist within the scientific and technological community so as to "necessitate the weaving together of a multitude of different elements" for the propagation of scientific knowledge (Latour, 1987: 232). According to Latour, the task of building, extending and keeping up those networks is to 'act at a distance', that is "to do things in the centre that sometimes makes it possible to dominate spatially as well as chronologically the periphery" (Latour, 1987: 232). While those

residing or plugged-in to the centre of the network would obtain a definite edge, the ongoing task is to work to ensure that those on the periphery would receive some benefits from this scientifically-derived model of control. What we have as a result is the idea of 'governing at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990: 76), where populations and events across vast distances can be managed by governmental and technological "centres of calculation" (Latour, 1987: 232). Being 'distant', these technologies are "mechanisms which promise to shape the economic or social conduct of diverse and institutionally distinct persons and agencies without shattering their formally distinct or autonomous character" (Miller and Rose, 1990: 88). In other words, these governmental technologies can be mobilised and operated surreptitiously and with great subtlety, so much so that individuals will see these codes or rules as representations or technologies of 'truth' (Foucault, 1983: 214).

It is important to note at this juncture what Foucault means by 'technologies'. For Foucault, there are four major types of 'technologies', which he spells out in his lecture on 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988a and 1988b; see also Martin, 1988). There are "technologies of production", which permit the production, transforming or manipulation of material objects; "technologies of sign systems", which permit the use of signs, meanings, symbols or signification; "technologies of power", which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination; and, "technologies of the self", which permits individuals to effect by their own means or autonomy, or with the help of others (via, for instance, the aforementioned technologies of power), a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being,

with the ultimate aim of transforming themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault, 1988a: 18; see also Miller, 1993: xiii-xiv).

The contact between the two latter modes of technologies, according to Foucault, constitutes the fundamental understanding of governmentality (1988a: 19). Government, therefore, is a 'contact point' where technologies of power or domination 'interacts' with technologies of the self to bring individuals into subjection and subjectification (Burchell, 1996: 20). According to Foucault, this is where "technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, where [technologies] of the self and integrated into structures of coercion" (Foucault, 1980, cited in Burchell, 1996: 20). As Miller and Rose (1990) put it, the term technologies:

> suggest a particular approach to the analysis of the activity of ruling, one which pays great attention to the actual mechanisms through which authorities of various sorts have sought to shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable (Miller and Rose, 1990: 82).

Extracting from Foucault, Toby Miller suggests that governing of the self as a cultural citizen which leads to the routine (re)formation of the public is done through 'technologies of truth', which he defines as "popular logics for establishing facts" (Miller, 1998: 4-5). To Miller then, the complex task of governing is really about normalising specific state and/or governmental objectives so that they are seen as rational, logical, sensible, popular, moral, desirable, and other such attributes. In a word,

they are seen as 'truths', or more precisely, 'technologies of truth' (Miller, 1993 and 1998).

When such 'technologies of truth' become available to the state, they are both individualising and totalising. To Foucault, this ability to produce a universalising 'truth' is known as 'pastoral power', a complete form of power that "does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during his entire life" (Foucault, 1983: 213-4). In fact, pastoral power, which borrows from the well-rehearsed Christian doctrine of salvation and sacrificial giving cum service within the church, is all-encompassing because of its deep concern with eternal life marked by the soul of the individual along with the individual's relation with all the other 'sheep of the pasture', otherwise known in modern terms as the wider community. When applied to the discourse of government, such individualising and totalising technologies are immensely potent. As Foucault points out with cogency:

> This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth – the truth of the individual himself (Foucault, 1983: 214).

Foucault's notion of governmentality also recognises that the 'autonomous character' of "the individual himself" is of utmost importance to the preferred ideology of liberalism, commonly understood as a normative political doctrine concerned with the promotion of individual liberty, as well as the defence of that liberty against encroachment by the state (Hindess, 2001b: 93; 2001c: 366). Within this modality lies the

sphere of civil society, widely acknowledged as the autonomous and non-state sector tasked to watch over the excesses of government and ensure that states do not 'govern too much'. This, at least, is the general(ised) idea of a civil society vis-à-vis governmentality. Foucault, however, has a somewhat different take on civil society. He rejects the 'aboriginal nature' of civil society which repels and contests the will of government (as the state), preferring instead to view civil society as "an instrument or correlate of a technology of government" (Gordon, 1991: 23). As Gordon makes clear, Foucault's view of the concept of civil society is a "transactional one, an encoding of the mobile interface of the game between government and governed", where the 'governability' of the economy and society takes precedence over autonomy and liberty (Gordon, 1991: 34). This suggests that governmental decisions, in its limited state, must take into account "forms of regulation that exists outside itself" conventionally derived from civil society and their proponents (Dean, 2002: 39-40).

Although civil society continues to be seen as an incursive force in popular political discourse today, Dean contends that the tools which attempt to guarantee liberty can become objectives of governmental policies and practices, that may, under certain circumstances, require or legitimise the use of "instruments of authority" (Dean, 2002: 37-41; see also Hindess, 2001a, 2001b and 2001c). This means that civil society can become, for better or worse, part of the pastoral power that Foucault (1983) speaks of. As Chapter Four of this thesis will show, this is arguably the case for Singapore where the employment of the term 'civil society' has more to do with discourses of courtesy, kindness and gracious living – best referred to as 'civic society' – rather than a separated

'non-state' sector aimed at keeping the government accountable for its enactment and application of policies.

In his analysis of the genealogy of liberalism, Dean highlights the historical and didactic role of civil society in imparting social orders of the market, law and language. All of which are, in effect, rules of conduct aimed at 'perfecting' the human subject (Dean, 2002: 42). The perfection of the self-regulating subject is indisputably the ultimate goal of governmentality, and of cultural regulation. Nikolas Rose's (1989) landmark work on *Governing the Soul* offers some insights into the techniques used within what he terms the 'psy' disipline (psychology, psychiatry, etc.) to construct the ideal free yet 'governable' subject (see also Rose, 1996a). Rose argues that the practices of the 'psy' sciences, via claims to specialist knowledges and expertise of truth, have played a key role in the rationalities of government, particularly within 'advanced' liberal government (Rose, 1999a: xxii). Rather than seeing liberalism as a political philosophy, Rose defines liberalism as:

> a family of ways of thinking about how government is to be exercised, stressing the importance of fostering the self-organizing capacities of natural spheres of market, civil society, private life, individual (Rose, 1999a: xxii-xxiii)

From this perspective, 'advanced liberalism' aims to fashion an enabling state that will govern without governing 'society'. Governing in this regard is done by "acting on the choices and self-steering properties of individuals, families, communities, organizations" (ibid.), what Rose creatively refers to elsewhere as the "invention of the self" (Rose, 1996a). These strategies of 'advanced liberal' government are, in effect, rationalities directed at creating new forms of control, couched in terms of freedom but animated by

the desire to rule, control, or simply to 'govern at a distance' (Rose, 1996b: 43; see Rose, 1999b: 61-97).

Contemporary government is, therefore, about governing through freedom: like the Singapore puzzle, an idea that is most paradoxical yet highly pervasive. For contemporary governmentality "operates through the delicate and minute infiltration of the ambitions of regulation into the very interior of our existence and experience as subjects", to the extent that we believe "in making our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives, our ethical systems, and our political evaluations, that we are, freely, choosing our freedoms" (Rose, 1989: 11). To borrow Rose's analogy then, governmentality targets not just the 'heart' but the 'soul' of the individual, where the notion of the 'soul' becomes a key signifier of humanity's desire for freedom from all variants of oppression.[25] The irony though is that in order to overcome the material reality of adversity, one needs to abide by rules that typically demand subjection to a higher and supreme authority. This idea is vividly captured in the following verse, referenced from the Authorised King James Version of *The Holy Bible*:

> Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your *souls*, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17; emphasis added).

[25] It is worth looking at Markowitz, Helman and Shir-Vertesh's (2003) anthropological review of Black Hebrews' struggle for recognition and citizenship in the State of Israel, in which they advance the notion of 'soul citizenship', an alternate citizenship discourse that opens new space for misplaced individuals and/or groups to gain membership in the states that meet their cultural aspirations and identities.

While the government of the soul demands a belief in the technological powers of freedom,[26] it also necessitates a certain disciplinary approach towards the management of the self. As Rose puts it, there is a need for each person to idealise one's existence through ambitions, aspirations and "a normative judgement of what we are and could become" (Rose, 1989: 11). In doing so, there is an incitement to achieve and attain the ultimate everlasting prize by adhering religiously to political 'truths' and values of consumption, efficiency and social order and in following the advice of government leaders and politically-endorsed 'experts'. Foucault is acutely aware of such discursive apparatuses in his theorisation of governmentality. Drawing on notions of sixteenth century Protestant and Catholic pastoral doctrines of the government of souls and lives, as well as the general government of the state by the Machiavellian Prince, Foucault calls the instruction towards obedience and submission to authority – as reflected in the above biblical quote on 'soul-watching' – "the ritualization of the problem of personal conduct" (Foucault, 1991: 87). Indeed, the invocation of a higher being or authority, whether God or state, makes docile obedience and submission to devices, gazes and techniques – or technologies, as Foucault would call them – a necessary and 'ritualised' task (Rose, 1989). Like the pastoral power of media cum cultural censorship in Singapore, whether this task is deemed good or evil depends greatly on one's moral subjectivity and ideological inclination, not to mention political affiliation.

Since adherence to specific rules and codes are not always spontaneous or guaranteed, there is a need to utilise governmental rationalities to resolve minute

[26] *Powers of Freedom* is the title of Rose's (1999b) book investigating political power derived from the practices and government of liberalism, freedom and other aspects of governmentality.

problems of personal conduct. This draws on Foucault's narrower conceptualisation of governmentality, which has more to do with precise institutional power and the panoptical disciplining of the body, consistent with Foucault's analysis of power and subjectification in his other works, most prominently exemplified in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977). Government is used here as synonym for the exercise of base power over free individuals as a way of acting to affect the way they conduct themselves (Burchell, 1996: 19). Instead of a stick-and-carrot approach to disciplining, governing in this regard is carried out via the application of 'governmental technologies' which seek to translate political rationalities and thought into the hard and practicable reality of 'cultural citizenship' (Miller and Rose, 1990: 82). The next section looks at the two contrasting views of the concept of cultural citizenship and considers how it may be invoked on citizens, most of whom would guard their political, social and cultural rights jealously

Advancing Cultural Citizenship

One of the most potent means of enabling and maintaining discipline via the government of the self is through the concept of cultural citizenship, understood here as a mode of citizenship intended "to foster dialogue, complexity and communication in place of silence and homogeneity" (Stevenson, 2003: 345). The rise of modern mediated, globalised and post-modern cosmopolitan societies – collectively referred to as the "network society" by Manuel Castells in his famous trilogy on 'The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture' (Castells, 1996, 1997 and 1998) – has led to increased diversification and fragmentation of public tastes and lifestyles. The most evident

outcomes of a network society are notions of multiculturalism which incorporates and gives voice to new cultural formations (such as gays, women, diasporic and other minority groups). The concept of cultural citizenship, as advanced by Stevenson (2003: 333), posits that a revised citizenry framework that offers inclusive public spaces to these 'minorities' would be able to make "their social struggles visible and open the possibility of dialogic engagement". This would then enable individuals to deconstruct normalising assumptions of what citizenship entails. In this regard, cultural citizenship is mostly about opening up new sites for communicative discourses and challenging status quos. This is certainly important, though I would add that such debates must necessarily take place within the bounds of governmentality, using only available and disposable governmental technologies.

Toby Miller suggests that the concept and governmental technology of cultural citizenship, marked by a society organised by agreed rules of moral and civil conduct, "one in which meanings, not force of arms, bind subjects together in their identification with the polity" (Miller, 1993: 12; see also Miller, 1998), is the only way to deliver a sustainable and economically-productive self-governing community. The composition of this 'community' is somewhat open and does not need to negate multicultural or cosmopolitan 'minorities'. According to Miller,

> Citizenship is an open technology, a means of transformation ready for definition and disposal in disperse ways at dispersed sites. [...] This technology ensures that subjects [govern] themselves – and willingly – as such. It is a technology that produces a "disposition" on their part not to accept the imposition of a particular form of government passively, but to embrace it actively as a collective expression of themselves (even though this expression itself derives from preconditions for knowledge set by the state) (Miller, 1993: 12).

Coercion or the use of force to wrest control over individuals would achieve instantaneous compliance and obedience, but it would also be one that is fashioned out of fear, and subject to future backlash and further violence. The ongoing socio-historical problem of colonialism, along with the uprising of dictatorial states following colonialism as well as the perennially problematic discourses of post-colonialism and neo-colonialism, bears sufficient testament to this problem. The governmental technology of cultural citizenship, however, overcomes such problems by enabling the state to elicit productive services from individuals without exercising brute force or physical violence. Willingness to comply with or abide by rules of the nation or community, couched in terms of citizenship, becomes a choice *for* and *of* freedom and democracy (see Hindess, 2002). As such, it would go down well with existing and prospective citizens.

Drawing from Tully's (1999) metaphorical idea of political 'citizenship games', Rose makes a similar point when he notes that contemporary forms of "government through freedom" tend to multiply the points at which the citizen has to play his or her part in the games that govern them (Rose, 2000: 97). Rose's analogy of 'citizenship games', although inscribed for an advanced liberal society, is useful for our examination of culture and cultural citizenry in contemporary Singapore. There are essentially two ways of thinking about the rules of a citizenship game: the first is to see them as fixed, given, closed, imposed and impervious to change, which is how most critics would view a society like Singapore.[27] Those who want to play this game must obey the rules or be

[27] With reference to Chapter One, those who consider Singapore to be a "frightened community" (Davies, 1999: 104) would fall under this category.

excluded from it. Such exclusions could be instituted voluntarily or out of displeasure with a lack of individual and liberal freedom, as witnessed in the ever-increasing desire of Singaporeans to emigrate to the 'greener' pastures of Australia or Canada,[28] or it could be imposed from above via religious and/or political persecutions. Indeed, such exclusions could be seen as attempts to modify the rules, but most of the time, contestations actually confirm or cement the rules of the game (Rose, 2000:97).

A useful example of cultural citizenship gamesmanship in Singapore is the employment of the term 'quitter' by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his National Day Rally Speech in August 2002 to denigrate "fair-weather Singaporeans who, having benefited from Singapore, will pack their bags and take flight" overseas when Singapore "runs into stormy weather" (Goh, 2002). This description is made in contradistinction with 'stayers', the majority who prefer to etch out a living, however difficult, in the geographical confines of Singapore. To avoid negating the professed advantages of a global, cosmopolitan mindset, Prime Minister Goh was careful to point out that:

> 'Stayers' include Singaporeans who are overseas, but feel for Singapore. They will come back when needed, because their hearts are here. The Singapore nation is not just those of us living here, but also the thousands of loyal Singaporeans who live around the world (Goh, 2002).

[28] Political analyst Derek Da Cunha's analysis of reactions to the 1997 General Election in Singapore, which saw the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) government attain a landslide victory, suggests that rising emigration by Singaporeans to places like Australia is increasingly driven by push factors (including displeasure with a highly restrictive government) rather than pull factors such as a better living environment (Da Cunha, 1997: 102). Da Cunha notes too that Australia is the top choice for emigrating Singaporeans (1997: 113). See also comments by Sullivan and Gunasekaran (1994). More recently, in August 2003, a *Straits Times* survey of 510 Singaporeans revealed that a quarter of Singaporeans would like to retire overseas. Consistent with previous findings, Australia was the top destination for 43% of the respondents (Yusof, 2003).

From a governmental cum policy perspective, Prime Minister Goh's intention was to offer a topic for introspection by younger Singaporeans, or if one prefers, a way of obtaining heartfelt feedback from the grassroots by charting out a new cultural citizenship game. As *The Straits Times* editorialised, two days after the Rally Speech, in a piece strategically entitled 'Angst of a nation', all Singaporeans "are invited to respond and rebut; [to] tell the Prime Minister if they think he is spot-on or way off beam; what they should never be is to remain detached" (Editorial, Aug 20, 2002).[29]

The act of thinking about one's allegiance to Singapore makes the entire discourse of Singaporean 'quitters' versus 'stayers' highly symbolic and to some degree irrelevant, particularly for those who are not globally mobile. As expected, a lively debate ensued, with emigrants overseas critical of the 'quitter' label while those resident in Singapore either sympathetic of the government's 'brain-drain' quandary or dismissive of the entire discourse on the grounds that Singapore is too young a nation for people to have deep-seated emotions and attachments (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Aug 23, 2002). What is most significant about this simplistic dichotomy is the well-rehearsed fact that the notion of national – or more accurately, cultural – rootedness is an 'imagined' entity and thus cannot be quantitatively measured (see Anderson, 1983). As the Prime Minister himself alluded to in his speech, just as there are Singaporeans living in Singapore who could be quitters at heart, there are stayers among overseas Singaporeans. The challenge for the Singapore Government, therefore, is to embody a new sense of 'soulful' identity or

[29] One of Singapore's national songs, *Home*, written by Singaporean musician Dick Lee for Singapore's National Day celebration in 1998, captures some of the issues that the Prime Minister highlighted. See Chapter Six for a more comprehensive analysis of this national song.

'cultural citizenship' among existing and aspiring Singaporeans, whether localised or globalised (Rose, 1989). As Singaporean journalist Chang puts it in his attempt to wrap up the 'quitters' versus 'stayers' debate, "the larger issue we should focus on is how we can all foster a deeper sense of belonging to this nation, even as globalisation means a far greater mobility among the talented" (Chang, 2002). Veritably, the application of a workable cultural citizenship discourse, one that extends 'governing at a distance' into a global discourse, has become part of the Singapore government game plan.

Another approach towards developing cultural citizenship, which tends to be adopted by citizens in advanced liberal societies, is to consider the game as open to modifications by the players themselves, which thus allow it to be played to different ends. In this version, certain individuals or collectives are encouraged to be 'active' in their own government. They can challenge, subvert or modify the rules and create something new, much like Stevenson's (2003) call for a communicative praxis to exist under the rubric of 'cultural citizenship', but this has to be done within certain 'points' of allegiance and rootedness to a naturalised community (Rose, 2000: 98). As Rose summarises:

> Citizens here are imagined as bound to communities through ties of allegiance, affinity and mutual recognition, and as acquiring their identities – thought of as a complexity of values, beliefs, norms of conduct, styles of existence, relations to authority, techniques of self-management, ways of resolving dilemmas and coping with fate – in and through these identifications (Rose, 2000: 98).

Therefore, in an advanced liberal citizenship game, governmentality seeks to create a culture that encourages creative modifications to the rules of cultural citizenship

without upsetting or unsettling civic or community relationships, economic agency and political dependency of citizens. Within the context of a civil(ised) society discourse, as will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, I term this practice 'gestural politics', where the politics of gesture overrules irrefragable truths. Consistent with the works of Bennett (1992a, 1992b and 1998) and Miller (1993 and 1998), one needs to interpret the concept of cultural citizenship in the terms of cultural policy, where culture is, or has become, a form of social and political regulation. This debate will continue in the next chapter, which will delve deeper into the elements and forms of cultural thought and cultural policy in Singapore.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the well-developed and calculated rules of governmentality and cultural citizenship are actively portrayed in Singapore. Indeed, the lines between an advanced liberal society and an authoritarian regime become blurred when looking at Singapore, an administrative state where the discourses of governmentality and cultural citizenship are overwhelming employed. While many consider Singapore an unadulterated authoritarian regime, or even a dictatorial set-up, I would suggest that the cultural technologies that have been used to shape, normalise and instrumentalise the conduct of Singaporeans for the sustenance of the PAP government's political power are very similar to that of an advanced liberal polity (Miller and Rose, 1990). For the so-called practices of communitarianism or (soft-)authoritarianism in Singapore is characterised not by the absence of a formalised parliamentary democracy and its contents, but by an "extensive extra-parliamentary controls and influences enjoyed

by the PAP", intended on the one hand to obstruct oppositional dissent, yet aimed at institutionalising and cementing the government's social, cultural and political worldview on the other (Rodan, 1992: 3). In this regard, Singapore is no different from any governing entity seeking to establish its autonomous cultural and national identity for the sake of economic, social and political enhancement.

In Singapore, the contact between the technologies of power affecting the conduct of individuals and the technologies of the self is made manifest in the ways Singaporeans are (pre)disposed towards becoming morally-upright, law-abiding, economically-productive, disciplined but, at the same time, 'free' citizens. This idea is captured in Singapore's National Pledge, one of several iconic representations of Singapore's national sovereignty. The National Pledge, recited by school-going children every morning with a clenched fist upon their chests, yet largely unspoken by adults (apart from the National Day Parade every August 9th), reads:

> We, the citizens of Singapore
> Pledge ourselves as one united people
> Regardless of race, language or religion
> To build a democratic society
> Based on justice and equality
> So as to achieve happiness,
> Prosperity and progress for our Nation

The daily recitation of the Pledge performs the task of 'anchoring' national aspirations into the hearts and minds of the young, who would presumably grow up to become useful Singaporeans (Birch, 1993: 2), well aware of their responsibilities in the 'citizenship game' they have to play as cultural citizens of Singapore. Birch makes the added and astute point in his 1993 monograph on *Singapore Media: Communication Strategies and*

Practices that the moral and ideological values of the Pledge are "not fixed in the words" (Birch, 1993: 2). In other words, very few Singaporeans, if any, have actually contemplated the meaning of the Pledge, much less realise the political significance of it.

The strategic advantage of governmental citizenship games are that rules can be updated or tweaked from time to time, always in the name of increased freedom (or liberty), libertarianism or liberalisation and to engender a stronger sense of national identity and solidarity. In the final report of the government-appointed Remaking Singapore Committee (2003), entitled *Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships*, a proposal for the relaxation of guidelines on the use of national symbols, including the National Pledge, was tabled. As the Report poses:

> There should be greater emphasis on promoting the idea that the [National] Pledge represents the values for which Singapore stands, and which citizens should strive to live up and defend. Schools could hold discussions and activities that enable students to understand and practise the ideals in the Pledge. Citizens should be encouraged to treat the Pledge as a solemn promise, and debate whether government policies are aligned with values such as justice, democracy and equality as espoused in the Pledge (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 26).

Certainly, Birch's (1993) criticism has been taken on board, but whether this enlightened attitude towards the Pledge changes the dynamics of a governmentalised cultural citizenship practice remains a moot point. Regardless of the outcomes, governmental acts or gestures replicating and representing the discourses of freedom have been performed for the consumption of the citizenry. Social or political participation via discussions and debates over the meaning of the Pledge thus becomes the responsibility of the 'citizen-player' of the citizenship game (Rose, 2000: 97).

The ways in which the Singaporean authorities exact political submission or acquiescence are, on the one hand, highly structured and authoritative. By these terms, I refer to the fact that governmental rules in Singapore are often conspicuous and overt. As a police state, there is a direct reliance on the legal system through legislations, rules and regulations, and backed up by regimental enforcements provided by uniformed organisations, namely the military, civil defence and police forces.[30] On the other hand, governmentality works well precisely due to its insidiousness and covertness, relying almost entirely on the determinacy of pastoral power to conduct or attain the subjectification of (otherwise) autonomous individuals. Nevertheless, the inclination towards that which 'works' in Singapore, as highlighted in Chapter One, makes the coupling of culture with policy not only a cost effective way of developing and attaining political disposition, it also opens a way for governmentality via cultural policy to normalise the pastoral power of the Singapore government (Miller, 1993: 14), and in so doing, ramify the "hegemony of the economic" in Singapore (Kong, 2000b: 423). The next chapter continues on this line of inquiry by extending the governmentality discourse into discussions of Singapore's cultural policy, cultural regulatory framework and its more recent attempt at embracing creativity via the voguish concept of the creative industries (Leo and Lee, 2004: 211).

[30] Foucault (1977) offers useful analysis on the regimentalisation of the body, particularly of the uniformed subject, in *Discipline and Punish:The Birth of the Prison.* See also Foucault's (1973) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* which provides some interesting rationales for the importance of social and political standardization of 'order'.

CHAPTER THREE:
Cultural Thought and Policy

> Cultural policy obviously concerns governmental and philanthropic funding for arts and culture, but it also encompasses a range of issues such as freedom of expression, international cultural and artistic exchanges, intellectual property questions, and the effect of corporate consolidation on the nation's artistic life. [...] On a still broader level, cultural policy addresses basic democratic concerns: matters of identity, diversity, and social harmony; innovation and creativity; and civic engagement and discourse (Smith, 2000: ix).

Introduction: Culture, Policy and the Public

> A policy should state no more than three or four clear, comprehensive principles explaining what is to be done and, what the public benefits are (Horne, 2003: 15).

Policy, writes Australian political analyst H. K. Colebatch, is "a concept which dominates our understanding of the ways we are governed" (Colebatch, 1998: 1). The term 'policy', according to McGuigan (1996: 6), was originally derived from an old French word 'police', which referred mainly to 'government'. The early notion of the term 'police' is not very different from contemporary understanding of the term as it implies the authoritative presence of order, control and regulation (McGuigan, 1996: 7). It is a term that aids in our understanding of the process of government, where policy is both a vision as well as the action taken by government, of "what is to be done" (Horne, 2003: 15) in relation to some defined area of practice which affects the 'public', a term which refers broadly to "a body of people within a society and a domain within which debate about that society occurs" (Craig, 2004: 47).

Much of our current understanding of the notion of 'the public' is attributed to German philosopher Jurgen Habermas' seminal work on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). According to Habermas, the *ideal* 'public' which arose around the mid-17th to 18th century existed in a bourgeois (public) sphere where private individuals gathered together, in *public* places like coffee houses and libraries, to debate amongst themselves the role of civil society and the governmental conduct of the state. Here the public sphere could be understood quite simply as "the forum within which public opinion is circulated and formed" (Craig, 2004: 50). However, following rapid industrialisation and the formulation of state apparatuses in the 19th and 20th century, the public sphere was seen to have been taken over by the mass media and the resulting climate of cultural production and consumption (Habermas, 1991: 160). This changed the character of the 'public' from one involved in rational debate to one fashioned by the manipulation of the media and state power. This in turn led to new ways of thinking about 'the public': as differentiated audiences, as mediated beings, or perhaps in the context of this chapter, as citizens within the geopolitical confines of a 'national public' (see Craig, 2004: 191). This 'national public', by definition, would include Singaporeans and aspiring Singaporeans who continue to participate in 'citizenship games' that are typically designed to increase levels of public acceptance of the way one is governed via 'policy' (cf. Rose, 2000; as discussed in Chapter 2). The 'publicness' of policy, especially when it relates to a mediated collective cultural and national identity, gives us a sense that policy is the application of governmentality via "legislation en masse" (Bradford, 2000: 11).

The fact that policy is typically carried out on a defined 'public' causes the term 'public policy' to be widely circulated and accepted without much afterthought to its applicable meaning(s). Regardless of what the 'public' thinks, the notion of policy comes with important characteristics. Colebatch (1998) identifies three primary characteristics or elements in his reference book simply entitled *Policy*. First of all, policy is concerned with generic order and coherence. It needs to be systematic and consistent across disparate organisations and state apparatuses or government departments. Colebatch also notes that policy is hierarchical and bureaucratic, which suggests that policy is seen as an authoritative determination of what is to be done in some particular area, officially endorsed and coordinated by a 'central nervous system', typically the 'government', 'authorities' or 'the state'. Finally, policy implies expertise and instrumentality as policy is "seen as a process of bringing the power of the organisation to bear on some particular problem area" encountered in the public domain (Colebatch, 1998: 3-7).

Since the activity of government is about setting goals – and indeed, making strategic decisions and choices – to solve both physical and fiscal problems of the public, policy is therefore very much about the application of governmentality in the disciplining of individual citizens via the conduct of public conduct (Miller, 1993: 14). The 'personalising' of policy for and on individual citizens makes the yoking together of 'culture' (as a vehicle for individual expression) with 'policy' (as legislative command and control) an interesting governmental discourse (Bradford, 2000: 11). In order to make good citizens out of every individual, the technological application of 'policy' as 'policing' merits deployment. Along these lines, Miller makes a case for studying culture

with and *as* policy when he contends that cultural policy is the "site at which the [cultural] subject is produced" (Miller, 1993: 16; see also Miller, 1994). What Miller is really saying is that cultural policy – along with the *act* or task of policing – is designed to *order* the subject into becoming useful and productive. The rationale is that in order to govern the civic subject and mould him/her into an ideal cultural citizen, it is needful to apply the technology/ies of cultural policy so that even if personal actions of individuals differ somewhat, the overarching aims of political order, economic productivity, and 'the conduct of conduct' are fulfilled. As Miller notes, drawing from political philosopher John Stuart Mill's famous work On *Liberty*,

> It is cultural policy's object to find, serve, and nurture a sense of belonging through educational and other cultural regimens that are the means of governance, of the orderly formation of public collective subjectivity in what [John Stuart] Mill termed "the department of human interests amenable to governmental control" (Miller, 1993: 26).

Cultural policy, in this regard, is about getting citizens as audiences and consumers to accept the rationales of governmentality. This is done via the administering and policing of culture, amidst its sophisticated existence, as mode of everyday life and human interaction (McGuigan, 1996: 6). This implies that the amenability of human beings to ordering and disciplining their bodies and conducts makes the practice and enactment of cultural policy highly desirable, particularly, though not exclusively, for those wielding political powers. As McGuigan makes clear:

> Cultural policy raises questions of regulation and control but its meaning should not be restricted to an ostensibly apolitical set of practical operations that are merely administered and policed by governmental officials (McGuigan, 1996: 7).

In other words, although cultural policy appears to be predicated upon political order and control of people and their everyday lives, its effects extend far beyond. For cultural policy is very much about the ongoing contestation of policy with the ideologies, interests and power relations which both typifies and transcends the sphere of politics (McGuigan, 1996: 7). It often encompasses the ongoing struggle over preservation of traditional culture versus the embrace of the contemporaneous. It is also, very importantly, about the extent and amount of economic transactions occurring in the cultural sector of a society or nation (Throsby, 2001: 12). As Lily Kong (2000a) posits, both local and national governments have, in recent times, recognised a dialectical relationship between culture and the economy: "while local cultures contribute to the nature of economic activity, economic activity is also part of the culture-generating and innovation in particular places" (Kong, 2000a: 185). Such a discourse results in governments increasingly formulating and implementing policies – best described as "cultural economic policies" – that harness such linkages (Kong, 2000a: 186).

This chapter contends that an ability to make sense of the cultural policy and cultural thought of a society, tribe or nation-state would equip us with a useful approach to comprehend and read deconstructively its governmental mindset. Although McGuigan's (1996) remarks about the "merely administered and policed" aspects of cultural policies were made predominantly with liberal democratic societies in mind, I suggest that all modern administrative states – whether liberal or illiberal – apply and embody such principles in the governing of culture. Since the state, for better or worse, does play a manifest role in cultural regulation, it is useful to think about the relationship

between culture and policy by employing governmentality ideals advanced by Foucault, as well as those applied-Foucauldian scholars highlighted in the previous chapter. As the agenda of enabling and advancing cultural citizenship has become a crucial goal for all governments, there is vested interest in the framing of a 'policeable' or governable cultural policy within any given society. This is perhaps the 'conduct of conduct' *par excellence*. Whether this society is liberal, illiberal, authoritarian, democratic or semi-democratic, or an esoteric combination of all modes of rule, loses its pertinence. After all, as discussed in Chapter Two, the desire of nation-states to govern for and towards 'freedom' has narrowed these ideological gulfs, if there were any in the first place (Hindess, 2001b; Rose, 1999b).

Toby Miller (1993) also argues for the congruency of studying culture with policy by highlighting two kinds of "cultural regimens" that are subject to governmental control. Both of these 'regimens' will be discussed somewhat separately in this chapter. The first 'regimen', which will be addressed in the next section of the chapter, tends to be concerned with the maintenance of a local or national culture cum heritage, in the name of preserving the dual senses of the past and personhood. Raymond William's essay on 'State Culture and Beyond' (1984) will be appropriated to make sense of the governmental and political direction of culture in contemporary Singapore society. The chapter then turns its attention to the second 'regimen' of cultural policy which looks at governmentality and the framing of mainstream and nationalised culture, where new modes of cultural expressions can be generated and (micro)managed. This is partly manifested in Singapore's vaunted ambitions of becoming Asia's 'Renaissance City' of

culture and the arts (MITA, 2000) and a 'creative industries' hub of the 21st century (CIWG, 2002a, 2002b). Through a comprehensive tracing of the history of cultural policy in Singapore, both of these strategic policy directions, as well as their governmental impulses, will be introduced and critiqued in this chapter.

Maintaining Cultural Symbolisms

Cultural maintenance of a nation's history and heritage, the foundational 'cultural regimen' that Miller speaks of, is traditionally managed using "terms of ethnicity, gender, [religious] faith, or class" (Miller, 1993: 26). Although Miller does not refer to Singapore, his terms of reference fit quite neatly to the current context of Singapore. For Singapore, cultural maintenance as the task of imagining and documenting the primordial identities and values of a glorious past has been well etched onto socio-cultural and political discourses such as the '4Ms' (multiracialism or multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, multilingualism and multireligiosity) and in political rhetoric about pragmatism and 'ruggedness', all of which have been introduced in Chapter One. These discourses have not only been articulated *ad nauseam* in ministerial speeches and history or civic education textbooks (e.g. CPDD, 1999), they have been 'iconicised' into the four prime national symbols of Singapore: the National Flag (to be discuss in Chapter Six), the National Coat of Arms (otherwise known as the State Crest), the National Pledge (cited in Chapter Two) and the Singapore Lion Symbol (which is used to represent Singapore as 'the Lion City', its Malay name) (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 24-6). These national symbols, according to the Singapore Government, are the visible

representations of the nation's "sovereignty, pride and honour" (MITA Press Release, Jan 3, 2004).

While these icons are undoubtedly cultural regimens, prescribed and delivered as top-down policies by the Prime Minister's Office, the highest administrative office of the state, they are also designed to 'produce' the self-regulating subject (Miller, 1993 and 1994). Although these icons are seen by many as attempts to effect a sense of nationalism and patriotism among the people, they have been minimally successful – or mostly unsuccessful – due to the rigid restrictions governing their public and personal use. The rules governing the use of the Singapore Lion Symbol provide a case in point. Up to the relaxation of its use in January 2004, as a belated response to recommendations by the Remaking Singapore Committee (2003), organisations or individuals intending to use the Singapore Lion Symbol – officially or unofficially – were required to seek approval from the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA), Singapore's official governmental cultural and media gate-keeper (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 25).[31] This situation is deeply ironic given the fact that the Lion Symbol was introduced in July 1996 as an alternative national symbol to sidestep legal restrictions prohibiting the use of the State Crest, the National Flag and National Pledge for non-governmental or commercial purposes (MITA, 1995: 43). The intention, at that time, was to turn the symbol into Singapore's equivalent of Canada's maple leaf or even New Zealand's kiwi or the fern leaf, to be used for the purposes of identifying with the nation and its ongoing

[31] For this reason, the Remaking Singapore Committee recommended the relaxation of some of these rules in its Final Report (2003) by instituting clear guidelines to prevent misuse or abuse and a graduated penalty system for abuse/misuse (as opposed to immediate prosecution). See also Chapter Six for a discussion on the sacredness of the National Flag, another significant National Symbol.

endeavour to achieve administrative excellence (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 25). The Lion Symbol, however, became *truly* symbolic when new rules were promptly enacted to protect its sanctity, thus negating its public and semiotic utility. To be sure, the Lion Symbol, like the national flag, is recognisable and ubiquitous in Singapore, especially for school-going children who have the icon stamped on every page of their writing notepads or exercise books, yet many Singaporeans are either unaware of the symbolism of these icons, or prefer to avoid them for fear of running foul of the law.

On January 3, 2004, MITA issued a press release declaring that "Singaporeans are [to be] encouraged to use the national symbols more often" (MITA, 2004). With amendments passed to the Singapore Arms, Flags and National Anthem Act, it was announced that the Lion Symbol can be incorporated in a design, trademark of logo.[32] The only provision stated is that it should be used in "good taste", that is to say, "its design should not be modified in any way nor have words or graphics superimposed over it" (MITA, 2004: 7). Although governmental codes and statements have a tendency to be cryptic, as in the vague definition of 'good taste', there are signs of attempts to realise the functionality and symbolism of national regimens as a means of extending the reach of cultural policy. However, as Birch (1993: 2) has argued, few Singaporeans accept or understand the depth of values embedded within such cultural regimens. This implies that

[32] Other changes announced in this press release include: permission for home and non-governmental buildings to fly the Singapore flag all year round, provided it is hung from a flagpole and illuminated when flown at night; and, the ability for organisations to sing or play the National Anthem on any appropriate occasion. Other than the official government version, re-arranged versions of the Anthem can also be played, provided it is complete and performed with dignity (see MITA, 2004). See Chapter Six of this thesis for further comments on the cultural politics of the 'new' National Anthem.

while many may agree with the loosening of seemingly irrational rules on national symbols, few would venture to utilise or test them.

This poses interesting questions regarding the formulation of a shared culture and national identity. If Singapore's cultural policy is about governing and maintaining a national culture via the ability of citizens to embrace the '4Ms' and complementary discourses in their everyday lives, it is fair to argue that a *modus vivendi* has not been reached, due largely to pre-existing – and constantly shifting – political and legal encumbrances. Singaporeans thus translate their embodiment of 'pragmatism', and fear of politico-legal recourse, into political expedience and apathy. As a result, many Singaporeans stay away from most modes of social and political participation, preferring instead to focus on economic pursuits. The corollary is that any attempt to evoke social and/or cultural change must be packaged by the government and presented to the national public through media campaigns, policy statements and/or national education initiatives. Hence the denigrating label of 'campaign country' to refer to Singapore's reliance on propagandist-styled campaigns to continually mould – and re-mould – the civic consciousness of citizens (Long, 2003). Whether these campaigns actually work to change behaviours or mindsets remains a moot point, though the next chapter of this thesis, which will look at the 'rise' of civil society discourses in Singapore, will identify some of the factors affecting cultural and political change in Singapore.[33]

[33] Chapter Four of this thesis introduces one of Singapore's foremost government-led public campaigns, the Courtesy Campaign, now known as the Singapore Kindness Movement, in the light of a government-led attempt to fashion a *civic* society in Singapore. For preliminary reading on Singapore's Courtesy Campaign, see Nirmala (1999). See also Long (2003) for a write-up on Singapore as a 'campaign country'.

In a paper which looks critically at political and policy reforms in modern independent Singapore under founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Michael Barr argues that Singaporean society under Lee's rule (from 1965-1990) had been "remarkably open to new ideas and re-evaluations" despite his widely celebrated pragmatist ideologies (Barr, 2003: 86-7). In Singapore, the constant rhetoric of the need to re-examine old assumptions from time to time, not to mention actual policy shifts, engenders what Barr refers to as an intensive cum 'perpetual revisionism' (Barr, 2003). By the same token, one could argue that Singapore's revisionist policy mentality is based on a pragmatic "flexible economic strategy" which recognises that the best way to organise – and indeed police – a society is dependent on a combination of global and domestic economic environmental factors (Tan and Parasuraman, 2003: 125-6). Although Barr does not make mention of any aspect of cultural policy in his research, the 'perpetual revisionism' of policies and ideologies – notwithstanding the politically ascribed limits of change – is very much a strategic conducting of one's cultural conduct. As Barr points out, such 'revisionisms' occur rather frequently in Singapore, whether they be in the forms of educational or health policies, which were the original subjects of Barr's scrutiny (2003; see also 2001), or in National Day slogans, National songs and other national vision statements, issues that will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

Another way of thinking about the maintenance of culture is by considering 'old-fashioned' notions of cultural localisation and cultural heritage. Its proponents would typically lobby for the protection of indigenous art forms and cultural products by putting

a premium on locally-made meanings and their systems (Miller, 1993: 26-7). Contemporary critiques of cultural domination by an imperial 'other' tend to embody such images of protectionism, accompanied by attempts to position traditional cultures as pure and untainted amidst the rapid invasion of globalisation (see, for example, Schiller, 1991; and, Herman and McChesney, 1997). More often than not, cultural policy as the maintenance of cultural heritage or cultural conservation tends to consider culture from a religio-anthropological stance, that is, via an existential notion of culture as sacred and so must be preserved at all costs. The application of such a policy, however, tends to be highly problematic. In Singapore, attempts at conserving and/or preserving cultures are more often than not synonymous with revisionisms and sanitization of the cityscape, what Ziauddin Sardar has referred to as a confrontation with "cultural homicide" (Sardar, 2001).

Kwok and Low make a similar observation, though couch in less cynical terms, when they articulate:

> In a systematic fashion, the conservation project has inadvertently erased a former landscape that does not fit comfortably with the image of Singapore as a modern and progressive nation-city-state. [...] In a sense, the simulation of history through a process of replication via the conservation project has subsequently brought about the disappearance of the "real" city: the city as chaotic, messy, uncontrolled. It has been replaced by an image of what the city should be like (Kwok and Low, 2001: 155-6)

Clearly, an 'uncontrolled' city marked by chaos and mess could never fit into a Singaporean 'centralised control' discourse marked by order and efficiency (George, 2002). Turning heritage into a space designated for public consumption and spectacle means 'exoticising' a culture for the purposes of inculcating prescribed values and new

forms and norms of behaviour. Hobswan and Ranger (1983) have famously termed such attempts at normalising new cultural identities as 'the invention of tradition'. These 'inventions' include, *inter alia*, the replication and reproduction of historical information and artefacts for mass exhibition, cultural tourism or capitalist consumption via the sale of cultural paraphernalia.

Singapore's attempt at revitalising its Chinatown district in the heart of the central business district (CBD) provides a case in point of how cultural policy as heritage has its limits. Although largely a cultural project, urban planning of streetscapes in Singapore comes under the purview of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), a statutory board under the control of the Ministry of National Development (MND). The URA's revised concept plan of 1991 marks out Singapore's Chinatown area, part of a larger 'arts' zone known as the Civic and Cultural District, as a 'reusable' site for arts and conservation purposes (Kwok and Low, 2001: 154; see also Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 134-5). Since the mid-1990s, the URA, with the assistance of MITA and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), has been working to realise the government's 'imagined' vision of a "bustling Chinatown with traditional cuisine, small specialized shops, arts and crafts, and cultural activities" (Kwok and Low, 2001: 156). This revitalisation project, funded to a tune of S$97.5 million, involved turning Chinatown into what I would call a tourist-centred 'theme park', with a new interpretative centre as the entrance 'gateway', a newly constructed theatre (for *wayang* or Chinese opera performances), and a commodification of street life with the (re)introduction of street performances (from puppet-making demonstrations to martial arts shows, etc.) and street bazaars selling cooked food and

fresh produce, among other things (Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 142; Kwok and Low, 2001: 157). In the words of the STB's Annual Report of 1996:

> [Chinatown's] final product should be able to allow any visitor, whether in a packaged tour or in a free and independent format, to understand how and why Chinatown came to be – covering for example the Chinese diaspora, Sir Stamford Raffles' town plan which led to the creation of ethnic zones in Singapore, the trades of yesteryears, present conservation efforts and future developments (STB, 1996: 28; cited in Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 142).

This strategy has the effect of reifying a particular version of the past, thus commodifying 'Chineseness', making Chinatown more Chinese than it *really* is. This 'postmodern pastiche' of Chineseness relies on a calibrated use of Chinese race, culture, history and landscape in political governance, economic development and cultural imperatives, a deliberate function of what might be construed as a "situational ethnicity" which necessitates the constant renegotiation and rearticulation of the meaning(s) of Chineseness in Singapore (Tan, E. K. B., 2003: 752).[34] Not only does this apparent '*Disneyfication*' of Singapore's Chinatown and Chineseness eradicate any cultural spontaneity, it renders other forms of hybrid and lived cultures invisible in the new and simulated version that has been designed primarily for tourist consumption (Kwok and Low, 2001: 157).[35]

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[34] The concept of 'Chineseness' and the Chinese diaspora is an ongoing subject of scholarly inquiry. For further information about Singapore's attempt at re-engaging Chineseness for the purposes of nation-building, see Eugene K. B. Tan (2003). For a more global perspective, see Ien Ang (2001).

[35] Walt Disney's vision of a Utopian landscape was that of a "city that caters to the people as a service function. It will be a planned, controlled community, a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities" (Pawley, 1988: 39). This is captured, to some degree, in his 'Disneyland' in Orlando, Florida – codenamed the 'Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow' (EPCOT). For further reading on this subject, see Zukin (1991, 1995) and Sorkin (1992).

The Singapore Government's attempt at preserving cultural heritage by conserving the cultural streetscape of Chinatown offers a glimpse of the cultural policy mentality, or the cultural thought, of the Singapore Government not just in the bygone past, but intensified in contemporary times. While the state sees no contradiction in its claim that the so-called 'conservation' and 'revitalisation' of Chinatown "serves both tourists who wish to savour the sights and sounds of the old Chinese lifestyle and locals who need a tangible reminder of their roots" (Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 144), I would argue that an overarching policy that seeks to 'protect' local culture by propagating it for mass consumption – and ignoring what early socio-cultural theorists Wagner and Mikesell (1962) have referred to as the "inner workings of culture", not unlike Stuart Hall's conceptualisation of the importance of everyday 'lived experiences' in determining a culture's relevance (Tomlinson, 1997: 118; and, Hall, 1997) – is in effect a policy of cultural destruction. As Kong and Yeoh (2003: 144) denote, Chinese Singaporeans living in Chinatown are conscious of the irony that, in its attempt to refurbish Chinese architectures and revive the 'dying trades' of the past, "the state's conservation efforts have essentially damaged the day-to-day cultural life of [Chinatown]".

Whilst discussions about Singapore's relentless pursuit for cultural relevance and meaning – euphemistically couched as the derivation of a national culture and identity – as well as its desire to become a regional and global arts and cultural hub have heightened since the 1990s, not much has been written or discussed about Singapore's official – and

unofficial – cultural policy.[36] If, as Colebatch (1998) and Miller (1993) suggest, policy is the application of governmentality, then an understanding what cultural policy entails in the Singapore context would allow us to extrapolate the mindset of government, and of 'supervisory' and 'centralised control' in Singapore (Foucault, 1988, Burchell et al, 1991; see also George, 2000). The combination of Foucault's discourse on governmentality, as related in the preceding chapter, along with theories on cultural policy presented in this chapter, will give rise to what I will refer to as the 'cultural thought' of Singapore, to be understood as the nation's cultural and political 'discourse' in the Foucauldian sense of a multiplicity of concepts and technologies coming together to form a new and coherent 'technology of truth' (Miller, 1993, 1998). This 'truth' as expressed in the term 'cultural thought', it is hoped, will enhance and deepen our understanding of contemporary politics and culture in Singapore.

The next section of this chapter looks at the different conceptualisations of the term 'cultural policy', especially the way it has been and still is employed in the broader intellectual context. The chapter then traces the brief history of the term 'cultural policy' in Singapore and suggests how it has responded very nimbly to global visions and trends, yet adhering to Singapore's own governmental definitions and strategies. Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter takes a crucial look at why – more so than how – contemporary Singapore culture has been 'governmentalised' into the sphere of

[36] Singaporean human geographer Lily Kong (2000b) makes this point when she notes that "in the context of Singapore, no systematic attention has been given to analysis of cultural policies" (p. 410). Kong makes an important contribution to the debate on cultural policy in that same piece, although her approach to cultural policy looks predominantly at the disjuncture between economic and social-cultural agendas in the arts as representative of the cultural landscape of Singapore. Other scholarly research that have been published on aspects of cultural policy in Singapore to date include: Leo and Lee (2004), Bereson (2003), Leo (2003), Wee (2002), Kwok and Low (2001), and Koh (1980, 1989).

proscribed creativity, a modern day rendition of Adorno's (1991) 'culture industry', aimed at strengthening what Kong (2000b: 423) calls the "hegemony of the economic" whilst attempting to maintain 'pastoral power' in the conduct of Singaporeans' conduct (Foucault, 1983).

(Re)conceptualising Cultural Policy

Raymond Williams' popularised expansion of the term 'culture' to include the activities and artefacts of everyday life has been most instrumental to the constitution of the interdisciplinary academic field of Cultural Studies, as well as its 'cultural policy studies' spin-off in Australia in the early 1990s (Stevenson, 2000: 3; Bennett, 1992b and 1998), so much so that many theorists attribute Williams as one of the key founders of Cultural Studies (Sardar and Van Loon, 1998: 5).[37] Regardless of one's disposition on the foundational premise of Cultural Studies, there is a general consensus that Williams played a big part in the rethinking of culture and the arts, especially with regard to the erstwhile distinction of 'highbrow' (elitist) versus 'lowbrow' (crass and popular) culture.[38] To a large extent, despite moves towards cultural pluralism and the embrace of cultural diversity in many developed societies, this dichotomy continues to confound

[37] The more prominent contributors to a revival of interests in cultural policy in Australia from the early 1990s – candidly referred to as 'the policy moment' – include *inter alia*: Bennett (1992a, 1992b, 1998, 2000) Cunningham (1992, 1994), Hawkins (1994), Mercer (1994), Miller (1992, 1994, 1996, 1998), O'Regan (1992, 2001), Turner (1989); more recently, Gibson (2001) and the volume edited by Bennett and Carter (2001) entitled *Culture in Australia: Policies, Publics and Programs*. Key contributors to the cultural policy debate outside Australia include: in the US, Paul DiMaggio (2000 and his 1986 edited volume), Miller (1996, 2000), Dominguez (2000), and Cargo (1995); and, in the UK, Frith (1991), McGuigan (1996), Thompson (2001), Barnett (2001), Hesmondhalagh (2002), and others.

[38] For an interesting and critical questioning of Raymond Williams' position as a 'founding father' of cultural studies and cultural policy studies, see Jones (1994).

governments, media and cultural theorists and artists engage in the propagation of art and popular culture (DiMaggio, 2000).

Williams makes a valuable and direct contribution to the debate on cultural policy in a rarely cited essay entitled 'State Culture and Beyond' (Williams, 1984). With mostly British arts and cultural heritage in mind, Williams begins his essay by declaring that cultural policy is so well absorbed by most that it is hardly recognisable as an "aspect of the state" (Williams, 1984: 3; see also Braman, 1995). He then goes on to identify five senses of cultural policy vis-à-vis the State. The first is what Williams calls "a stately sense of cultural policy" which is typically about public performances of the State or governmental power in the likes of a grand opening of a parliamentary session or the changing of the guard outside an official residence (Williams, 1984: 3). Such events, though typically transient, present great opportunities for the official consecration of new traditions or presentation of a version of national heritage. Although this mode of cultural policy has little to do with the everyday, it reminds the ordinary person or citizen that government is, for want of a better description, in a 'governmental mode'. Government is therefore 'open for business' in the field of culture and the arts.

William's second sense of cultural policy deals with opposing attitudes towards the arts. One could see the arts as embellishing either public power or as economic and political tools of the nation-state (1984: 3). The former position would preserve an 'arts for arts sake' policy mentality, which sees the arts as a noble, autonomous endeavour that should exist beyond utilitarian and decorative 'stately' functions, and one that transcends

governmental control (Cargo, 1995: 215-6). Correspondingly, the latter would turn the sphere of arts and culture into marketable components, extending it to tourism, business entertainment and foreign policy via the representation of a particular national culture to other cultures, much like the earlier discussion on the maintenance of one's local/national cultural heritage. The third and fourth senses of cultural policy address what Williams presents as a "real argument of a professional kind" (Williams, 1984: 4). The third sense of cultural policy sees the State as patron of the arts, and by extension, tasked to preserve its tradition, mostly in the forms of traditional or fine arts. Williams' fourth sense of cultural policy, marked by a shift towards a "positive cultural policy as distinct from patronage and limited intervention" by the state, is effectively a response to the rise of new artistic and mediated creativity brought about by the rise of mass communication and broadcasting (Williams, 1984: 4). In this mode, state patronage extends beyond traditional arts to embody aspects of new cultural displays, practices, even structures (such as Singapore's new *Esplanade - Theatres By the Bay* world-class performing venue, to be discussed below). Here, Williams seems to embrace the expansion of culture to include popular arts and cultural practices, thereby attempting to remove the hierarchical distinction between high and low art, or high and low-brow culture.

Williams' fifth and final sense of cultural policy is intended as his envisioning of the future. He proposes a developmental cultural policy that supports the growth of actual communities (rather than to a relatively abstract centralised State) and one that is self-managed by a co-operative of artists and cultural workers. In his conclusion, Williams cautions against subscribing to a fully state-controlled and state-funded approach because

of the inherent risks highlighted in his first and second senses of cultural policy (Williams, 1984: 5). Indeed, Williams culminates his essay by warning against conflating the State with cultural policy such that it becomes:

> a public power which merely enhances itself with the arts, which engages in its own reproduction using the arts and culture for its decoration and imagery, and not really for the development of the arts themselves (Williams, 1984: 5).

In a somewhat ominous way, Williams' concern about the prospects for a state-dictated culture does reflect to a large degree Adorno's historically portentous warning about a "merely administered culture" designed to be consumed by a mass audience (Adorno, 1991: 131).[39] As Bernstein notes in his introduction to a recent re-publication of Adorno's seminal writings on *The Culture Industry*, the form of culture that Adorno expressed cynicism of – as did Williams (1984) in the abovementioned essay – was one that had the "potentialities for promoting or blocking 'integral freedom' of people" (Bernstein, 1991: 2). While Adorno philosophises about the commodification and industrialisation of culture through mass mechanical and systematic reproduction (*à la* Walter Benjamin, 1968), which is the crux of his 'culture industry' thesis, Williams takes issue with the way culture could be governmentalised and used by the State as "public power" to enhance itself politically whilst weakening the autonomy of individuals to choose their own cultural modes and expressions (Williams, 1984).

[39] Although the theory on the culture industry made its first perspicuous appearance in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1973), the central tenets of the theory were attributed to Adorno, as expressed in one of his earliest piece: 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' (1938; cited in Bernstein, 1991: 4). For a sample of Adorno and Horkheimer's early writings, see 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (1977), reproduced in Simon During's (1993) edited collection *The Cultural Studies Reader*.

What Williams has done, perhaps inadvertently, is offer several conceptual models of cultural policy, looking first of all at culture as the arts, hence policies for the arts as 'cultural policies' (see also Williams, 1958: xiii-xx; 1976: 87-93; and 1989). This would then progress to embrace culture in an all-encompassing fashion, paving the way for 'new' culture – typically mass mediated culture and cultural products – arising out of media cum technological convergence as well as business services and industrial convergence brought about by rapid globalisation (Herman and McChesney, 1997). With increased trade and mass communication in the global era, the ease of media and cultural exchanges has brought about an economic transformation of cultural policies (Di Maggio, 2000: 57-8). Since governments in the era of the nation-state are tasked to protect the sanctity of borders via the licensing and regulation of all trade activities, economic cultural policies are necessarily enacted to maximise profits from the trading of cultural goods and services (see Kong, 2000a). Although one could argue that cultural policies can no longer be approached (intra)nationally in contemporary times, national governments continue play a major role in the setting of parameters for localised cultural production and distribution, whether this is carried out in the management of scarce resources such as radio frequency spectrum or through the funding of local media programming content and/or artistic endeavours (Canclini, 2000: 312-3). These agendas and practices combine to form a nation's cultural policy as they determine, to a sizeable extent, the cultural consumption patterns of the citizenry (Bennett, 1992b: 490-1).

The way cultural policy is understood by most capital-orientated societies in the post-industrial and contemporary era has been reconfigured to reflect both concerns about the commercial viability of various cultural and aesthetical practices as well as the role of the government in maintaining what is traditionally perceived to be a public good. Concomitantly, governments are expected to regulate by funding or subsidising this typically non-income generating industry (Barnett, 2001: 18). As Bennett and Carter (2001) observe in the context of contemporary culture in an increasingly multicultural Australia,

> Two understandings of culture which recur in the policy environment, culture as a set of economically-significant industries and culture and a national, public good, have been both complementary and contradictory at different times and for different domains (Bennett and Carter, 2001: 3).

Quite simply, contemporary conceptualisations of culture have become major objects of politics and policy concerns. In a nation like Australia, governmental commitment to reflecting cultural diversity in multicultural settings and provision of equitable access to cultural artefacts and events serve to complicate the development and administration of culture (O'Regan, 2001: 2). The need and desire to deliver an all-inclusive cultural policy that reflects to some degree the totalising definition of culture as 'a whole way of life' – both aesthetically and economically – makes the sphere of culture politically malleable and therefore an exemplary field for the exercise of governmentality (Barnett, 2001: 19). As Barnett opines:

> Thinking of culture in terms of practices of government might be one means of better specifying the ways in which those activities recognizable as politics depend upon broader cultural conditions through which people are constituted as certain sorts of subjects, but to do so without collapsing the difference between political and other forms of practice (2001: 19).

Ultimately, the availability and 'readiness' of culture as a mode of governmental rule is what ties culture with policy. This is not only true in liberal democracies with established arts councils or cultural policy statements in the likes of Australia, Britain or the United States, it is also proactively pursued by a technologically advanced yet authoritarian cum illiberal regime like Singapore, eager to position itself as a model cultural 'Renaissance City' of the 21st century (MITA, 2000; Chang and Lee, 2003). What this 'Renaissance' model entails or consists of remains highly cryptic not least because cultural terms and political markers are being perpetually refined and redefined in Singapore. Veritably, in order to make some sense of such grandiose terms and ideals, one needs a historical understanding of the place of culture and cultural policy within Singapore, which is the subject of the following section.

Re(de)fining Cultural Policy in Singapore

If the former notion of culture amenable to governmental control has to do with the historical past (as expressed in notions of cultural history and heritage), then the other aspect of culture would have to do with the present, but more so as an 'envisioning of the future' (Williams, 1984; as discussed above). Indeed, Miller suggests that culture can also be 'regimented' or managed in terms "which generates new modes of expressions" that would "embrace developments in the social technology of culture in ways that talk about the need for a citizenry to have available the latest and best from wherever" (Miller, 1993: 26). This 'latest and best' approach towards 'the future' – whether coming in the form of an enlightened censorship regime, a revised arts and cultural policy statement or a new state-of-the-art performing arts centre – is highly pertinent to our

understanding of the governing of contemporary culture in Singapore. Indeed, cultural policy tends to mobilise the innate desire for improved and greater social, cultural and political participation either by tossing up of new policy directions from time to time (as will be discussed in this section) or the mapping of new civic spaces to capture the hearts and minds of the people while concomitantly erasing old ones (as witnessed in the earlier discussion on the 'cultural destruction' of Singapore's Chinatown district).

The perpetual promise of new(er) and more enlightened policy regime is carried out with the hope that citizens would find new terminologies (in the case of a new policy direction) or new spaces (in the case of a newly constructed or renovated physical arts or cultural structures) sufficiently captivating so that they would not wallow in nostalgia for the 'glorious' past, nor complain about inept government administrators. Brazenly disregarding William's (1984) warning against conflating cultural policy and the arts with the State, cultural policy thus becomes part of "the state's attempt to secure political legitimacy, build ideological consensus, and forge a sense of national identity" (Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 15). Kwok and Low put it more cogently:

> The art of Singapore's governmentality [...] has relied on erasing memory, inventing tradition, and re-writing history to support the construction of a national identity and ensure a loyal and cohesive electorate (2001: 161).

Ultimately, a "loyal and cohesive electorate" is one who buys into state goals and aspirations, and does not engage in politics of dissent. Although there are active and ad hoc resistances to state dictates – for example via internet-based lobby sites (to be elaborated and discussed in Chapter Five) – citizens are required, by implicit or explicit consensus, to function as receptive and well-ordered cultural citizens.

As Kong and Yeoh (2003: 14-7) point out, there are many examples of 'new' national public spaces in the Singapore landscape that are designed to reflect state aspirations, and to possibly evoke a new sense of belonging. One of several such cultural sites is Singapore's largest and grandest performing arts venue *Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay* (hereafter referred to as *The Esplanade*), which was opened in October 2002 amidst a multi-million dollar fanfare. Built at a significant cost of about S$600 million, *The Esplanade* comprises a series of top-rated 'latest and best' performance halls and arts spaces, built on a six-hectare reclaimed site along the popular Marina Bay waterfront (Kong, 2000b: 420).[40] It also houses extensive food and beverage outlets, a specialist arts public library and a shopping mall, making it not just an arts space but a mega-commercialised-civic space (Bereson, 2003: 11).[41] More importantly, *The Esplanade* was built as an iconic representation and realisation of the city-state's cultural 'renaissance' (MITA, 1999), intended to shape Singapore into a 'global city of the arts' of the 21st century (Kwok and Low, 2001: 150; MITA and STB, 1995).

The Esplanade has thus quickly become Singapore's most conspicuous demonstration that a cultural sector exists in Singapore and that the government's envisioning of Singapore as a "cultural bridge to the world" is founded on geophysical

[40] Although not openly acknowledged, the situating of this new arts structure by the waterfront is manifestly inspired by the architectural and iconic success of the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

[41] During a research visit to *The Esplanade* in January 2004, I observed that apart from the performance halls and large foyers, other public areas within the structure resemble a typically (post)modern Singaporean shopping centre. This is unsurprising when one considers the overtly commercial and tourism-driven imperatives of the arts and culture in Singapore (as argued in this chapter) as well as the common description of Singapore as 'one big shopping centre'. For further reading on Singapore's culture of shopping and consumption, see Chua (2003b).

reality (MITA and STPB, 1995; Chang and Lee, 2003: 135). It signals to locals and foreigners alike that Singapore has a functioning and strongly-funded 'cultural policy', understood herewith as a policy for the arts sector aimed at overcoming past – and present – criticisms of Singapore being a "cultural desert" (Kwok and Low, 2001: 150; see Wee, 2003). Although the notion of cultural policy here draws predominantly on the artistic fraternity's practice of developmental and promotional funding à la arts patronage, akin to Williams' second and third senses of cultural policy, there are social and political implications behind such a costly and widely-publicised development. As Anthony King points out, structures and landscapes are able to be used by the state, "both consciously and unconsciously, as social technologies, as strategies of power to incorporate, categorize, discipline, control, and reform" the citizenry (King, 1990: 9; cited in Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 15). In other words, the Singapore government has begun to recognise that cultural policy has the potential – indeed the propensity – to become technological enhancements of governmentality, thus providing the transition between Raymond Williams' (1984) fourth and fifth senses of cultural policy. As Singaporean cultural theorist Wee (2003) puts it, the highly-publicised and commercialised *Esplanade* is nothing more than a "statist attempt to create a commercial Cult of the Beautiful" for a Singaporean 'community' comprising mainly of visitors and expatriate business executives, but few locals, desiring 'high culture' whilst residing, often temporarily, in Singapore (Wee, 2003: 87).

To gain a better appreciation of the governmental roles and thinking behind the functions of cultural policy, it is important to be equipped with an historical

understanding of cultural policy in Singapore. It is worth noting that the study of cultural policy has a very short history in Singapore, with acknowledgement of the importance of a 'nationalised' cultural policy even more recent. In fact, many people – including those professing interests in culture and the arts – are still grappling with its significance owing to a lack of what influential French thinker Pierre Bourdieu refers to as 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's landmark study on the sociology of taste as a marker of class offers a fairly precise explanation of why the foregrounding of culture and the arts in Singapore is highly discursive and fraught with problems of acceptance and identity/identification.[42] There is, quite simply, a generally unspoken acceptance amongst the middle-class and well-educated Singaporeans that in order for art, music and cultural appreciation to take root in Singapore, Bourdieu's habitus of cultural capital – best understood as "culturally acquired competency" in the appreciation of the arts (McGuigan, 1996: 32) – must be developed. This is a problem not least because the arts (along with other fields within humanities, social sciences as well as the broadly constituted 'liberal arts') are deemed of lesser economic value than professional disciplines like medicine and law, or industrial disciplines in the likes of engineering, mathematical and, more recently, biotechnology and the life sciences. This cultural 'lack' is then shrewdly dismissed under the rubric of economic pragmatism, what Singaporean arts academic Koh Tai Ann has referred to as "moneytheism" (Koh, 1980: 239), or a quasi-religious obsession with the acquisition of capital. The cultural thought of the day, to put it bluntly, was – and still is – on making money to maintain the myth of physical and economic survivalism.

[42] See Chong (2003) for an interesting Bourdieusian analysis on the liberalisation of Singapore theatre.

As Kwok and Low point out, up to the mid-1980s there had been no significant attempts at developing an overall long-term cultural policy (2001: 150). The term 'culture', whenever it was employed or deployed, tended to focus on the *exotic*, or how 'culture' and 'traditional' arts could be used for tourism and other income-generation purposes. The emphasis was on the *economics* of culture (Throsby, 2001) – or an 'arts for survival' mentality (Kong, 2000a, 2000b; Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 162) – more so than an appreciation of the arts for its own sake. As Kong and Yeoh explicate:

> [F]rom independence until the late 1970s (some would argue into the mid-1980s), landscapes of the arts were conspicuous by their absence because the arts were accorded low priority, given the view that scarce national resources should be diverted to develop Singapore's fledgling economy, reflecting the ideology of pragmatism and survival (2003: 174).

Nevertheless there were attempts, by certain sections of the State and government statutory bodies, to define, refine and re-define 'cultural policy' from the late 1970s.

Although Singapore was, in the words of Bereson (2003: 1), "created" in 1957 and achieved full political independence in 1965, the very first official mention of the term 'cultural policy' in Singapore was made more than 23 years later on 26th December 1978 by then Acting Minister of Culture, Ong Teng Cheong.[43] The term 'cultural policy' was used within the context of cultural heritage protectionism, and had almost nothing to do with the arts and other cultural expressions. According to Minister Ong, cultural policy in Singapore was predicated upon "the policy of allowing Singapore's rich cultural

[43] This speech by the late Minister Ong Teng Cheong, widely regarded as one of Singapore's most acculturated Ministers for his deep love for music and the arts, was the earliest locatable reference to the term 'cultural policy' based on extensive (re)search conducted at Singapore's National Archives, as well as online, during fieldwork in August 2000. This reference was palpably omitted in Bereson's (2003) paper which claims to investigate Singapore's arts policy from 1957-2003.

heritage [to] gradually interact and blend into a distinctive Singaporean culture" (Ong, 1978: 1). This speech was particularly significant as it provided Singaporeans with early insights into the government's cultural thought and mentality at the time, much of it still applicable to contemporary discourses. Minister Ong summarises Singapore's cultural thought cum policy thus in his speech:

> The Ministry [of Culture] will strive for the better co-ordination of the cultural promotion efforts of other Government, quasi-Government and private cultural bodies. A key objective will be to provide our young with the necessary cultural ballast and to guard against the erosion of traditional norms and values (Ong, 1978: 1).

Clearly, the overriding concern of those 'early days' (i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s) was the importance of the local media, the arts and cultural activities to act as 'cultural ballasts' for the purposes of nation-building, against what was perceived quite simplistically as the dark forces of Westernisation and Americanisation. 'Nation-building', as underlined in Chapter One, was mostly equated with the countering of 'decadent' Western values. As Kong (2000b: 412) elaborates, the values and lifestyles that were associated with the so-called 'decadent West' included "the keeping of long hair [for men], hippism and drugs, and it was believed that these were purveyed through cultural products such as rock music, foreign films and television programmes". Success in overcoming these negative influences meant the advancement of a "distinctive Singaporean Culture" (Ong, 1978). As Chapter One has argued to some degree, the constituents of this supposed 'Singaporean culture' were ambiguous then, and remain hazy today.

It is interesting to note, in what must be seen as an over-determined attempt to engage in direct censorship by blocking out 'foreign' socio-cultural influences, that the

government made no overt intent to delineate popular (and crass) culture with high (civilised and refined) culture which typifies performance-based and creative arts. This may be read by some as an enlightened perception of culture, and by others as a demonstration of the absence of cultural capital and knowledge by governmental administrators. In any case, the government clung on to the view that the arts did not constitute a 'basic need' of the people and was therefore optional or redundant (Koh, 1989). The only exception then was arts and culture for tourism consumption, where visitors could enjoy 'Instant Asia' – the tagline used by the then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) – in one fell swoop by visiting the tiny island.[44] Such pragmatist ideology of 1960s and 1970s (and arguably one that continues in the 1980s and 1990s) meant that Singapore society was very much bereft of a Bourdieusian sense of 'cultural capital' as interests in the cultural sector existed either via an artificially-concocted 'Asia' within the tourism industry or only at the margins. Cultural policy through much of the 1980s was therefore unremarkable, with the position that economic prosperity was a necessary pre-condition for artistic creativity (Sabapathy, 1995; cited in Kong, 2000b: 413).

The first explicit governmental acknowledgement of the significance of culture and the arts came in 1985, ironically while Singapore was mired in its first economic recession. A government-appointed Economic Committee tasked to chart future directions for growth identified "the arts as a potential growth area", and some attention

[44] It is interesting to note that Malaysian Tourism adopted the Singaporean idea of 'Instant Asia' with the selling of Malaysia as 'Truly Asia' from 2002, reinforcing the marketability of 'Asia' as a site of economic and cultural consumption.

began to be paid to cultural policy, albeit with the sole intention of boosting the economic bottom line (Kong, 2000b: 413). However, the *real* watershed in the history of cultural policy in Singapore was marked in February 1988 with the formation of the government-appointed Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) (Kwok and Low, 2001: 150). The Council's Report arrived in April 1989 in the form of what must be conceived as Singapore's first discernible 'cultural policy', insofar as the term is taken to denote a complete document on the principles of culture in Singapore, and proposals to advance these principles for public interest and benefit (Horne, 2003 and Colebatch, 1998). With a set of well-defined Terms of Reference, which encompasses an assessment of the state of the arts and culture as well as an identification of new measures to make Singapore culturally-vibrant, the 1989 ACCA *Report of The Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts* "was to form the blueprint for cultural policy in Singapore" (Kong, 2000b: 414).

Chaired by the affable Ong Teng Cheong (who was by then elevated to the post of Second Deputy Prime Minister), the popularly labelled 'Ong Teng Cheong Report' was intended as a ten-year cultural development plan, with the realisation of a "culturally vibrant society" in Singapore by 1999 the strategic thrust of the vision (ACCA, 1989: 5). It is noteworthy that the Report offered a 'governmental', and therefore an officialised cum 'mainstream', definition of culture and cultural policy:

> Culture and arts mould the way of life, the customs and psyche of a people. They give a nation its unique character. [...] The *Government's cultural policy* is to promote widespread interest and excellence in the pursuit of the arts in our multi-cultural society, and to encourage cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (ACCA, 1989: 3; emphases added).

As a government policy document, it is a given that the ACCA Report would be littered with terminology best described as 'officialese', or bureaucratic language. But what was remarkable was the almost nonchalant way the nation's cultural policy was couched as "the Government's cultural policy". This, I suggest, speaks volumes about the uni-directional and didactic approach to politics and culture – and indeed, the politics of culture – in Singapore. The government of the day saw itself as a cultural administrator whose job was to frame "the customs and psyche" of the people who were constructed not as society stakeholders but as economic subjects. This chapter will go on to argue that this position has remained mostly unchanged as Singapore entered the twenty-first century.

The 1989 ACCA Report made a series of key recommendations that was slated to alter the cultural landscape of Singapore. This included the establishment of a new agency "to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore", the creation of a museum precinct in the central civic district, and the construction of a new world-class performing arts centre at Marina Centre (ACCA, 1989: 5-6).[45] The following year, a cultural agency was (re-)established after a five year 'hiatus' when culture and the arts were not accorded a dedicated minister or ministry. The Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) was thus founded with the mission: "To help inform, educate and entertain, as part of the national goal to make Singapore a hub city of the world and to build a

[45] Other ACCA recommendations included: the establishment of a Literature Board and a National Heritage Trust (under the banner of 'Organisational Improvements'); improvements to arts education in schools; improvement of cultural facilities (including *The Esplanade*, development plans for new museums, a new National Library, etc.); and, greater promotional efforts for the arts (including extended public-private partnerships) (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989: chapter 4).

society that is economically dynamic, socially cohesive and culturally vibrant", clearly reflecting the ACCA's primary policy recommendation.[46] Based on recommendations made by the ACCA Report, the government also announced in the same year that a multimillion-dollar arts venue, now *The Esplanade*, was to be built. As a matter of course, both the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Board (NHB) were established under the jurisdiction of MITA in 1991 and 1993 respectively. Whilst the latter body, the NHB, was tasked to oversee the development of the museum precinct and to spearhead the promotion of the nation's artistic, cultural and historical heritage as well as archival record-keeping,[47] the former body, the NAC, had to take on the arduous task of drumming public interest in culture and the arts to predominantly culturally (and arguably politically) apathetic Singaporeans.[48]

Although 'cultural capital' was still somewhat lacking, the formation of the NAC gave an implicit, if not explicit, 'stamp of approval' for various organisational aspects of the arts. This was in many ways a realisation of Williams' final sense of cultural policy: a developmental cultural model that speaks to actual communities (Williams, 1984: 5). Assisted by a government grant of S$22.3 million over the first three years of operation,

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[46] The Mission Statement of the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), renamed the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (with the acronym 'MITA' retained) in 2002, has since been changed to: "To develop Singapore as a global city for information, communications and the arts, so as to build a creative economy and a connected society with a Singaporean identity rooted in our multicultural heritage." Information about MITA's 'new' mission can be accessed on its website: www.mita.gov.sg.

[47] For more information on Singapore's National Heritage Board (NHB) and the three national museums – namely, the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the Singapore History Museum – visit the NHB website at: www.nhb.gov.au. See also Ooi's (2003) critique on the regional cum local challenges facing these museums.

[48] For more information about the National Arts Council (NAC), visit the website: www.nac.gov.sg. See also the glossy 2000 publication by the NAC entitled *Selves: The State of the Arts in Singapore*, edited by Kwok, Mahizhnan and Sasitharan (2000).

the NAC set up the Singapore Arts Endowment Fund to solicit public and private donations for artistic use (Kwok and Low, 2001: 151). The newfound endorsement of the arts in Singapore resulted in a flurry of internationally renowned stage(d) events through the 1990s. These included hit gala musicals like *Cats*, *Les Miserables* and *Miss Saigon* as well as pop-music concerts featuring Western chart-topping artistes. Thousands of Singaporeans and tourists were attracted to these events, turning Singapore into a prominent international arts and pop-culture destination. The box office successes of these 'world-class' foreign acts no doubt had much bearing on the infrastructural blueprint of *The Esplanade*, with the main theatres – with capacities of 2000 and 1800 seats respectively – clearly designated for money-spinning 'blockbuster' performances, ironically by foreign rather than local theatre troupes (see Wee, 2003: 87).

Despite these 'false' starts, there were attempts to improve the image of local(ised) arts and culture. With the inclusion of an annual Singapore International Arts Festival, an ongoing 'Artreach' programme "that takes the arts away from traditional downtown location to new sites and locations" (Chang and Lee, 2003: 135), and outdoor performances at various spots throughout the island, just to name a few, the NAC's coordinated approach to managing the arts made substantive changes to the perception of the arts and participation in the arts in Singapore. In December 1997, the NAC launched a public radio station, Passion 99.5 FM, to increase arts awareness and to send a signal that the government was serious about promoting the arts. Despite these and other community attempts, the level of awareness and appreciation remained low for various reasons. Empirical research conducted by Chang and Lee (2003) found that there was a

general perception amongst Singaporeans that arts events were costly, elitist and inaccessible. In addition, they note that:

> The cultural mindset of Singaporeans is [a] challenge. Many Singaporeans still prefer free cultural events to paid performances; others are more interested in being entertained rather than challenged by the arts (Chang and Lee, 2003: 137).

Certainly, these are important issues for the NAC to continually contend with, but perhaps more significant is the perception by Singaporeans that local or indigenous arts and performances are inferior. Such prejudices, according to Chang and Lee (2003: 137), stem "from ingrained misconceptions of artists as not having respectable professions", where 'respectable' means being endowed with paper qualifications and high salaries, symptomatic of the aforementioned economic pragmatism ideology. While these are valid observations, I would argue that policies governing and affecting culture and the arts over the years, the majority of which reinforce the supremacy of economic forces one way or another, have contributed in no small ways to negative perceptions of the arts and cultural sector in Singapore (Wee, 2003: 91).

Hopes for a genuine paradigm shift in thinking about culture and the arts following the 'Ong Teng Cheong Report' and the establishment of MITA and the NAC were dealt a major blow in 1995 with the release of *Singapore: Global City of the Arts*, a joint policy document of MITA and the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB).[49] In this statement, the government envisions Singapore's future global role as the "cultural

[49] A pro-economic sympathiser would read the release of *Singapore: Global City of the Art* (MITA and STPB, 1995) as favourable rather than inimical to the arts in Singapore. My reading in this section is intended to point out that 'selling' the fledgling arts sector for tourism and economic purposes may lead to the curtailment of its growth and development.

and artistic bridge to the world" (MITA and STPB, 1995: 8), consonant with MITA's mission of making Singapore "a hub city of the world". This was, again, an economic policy initiative that, in the words of then Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo, "hopes to do for the arts what it has done for banking, finance, manufacturing and commerce, and help create new ideas, opportunities and wealth" (cited in Kwok and Low, 2001: 152). The cult of 'moneytheism', marked by deeply rooted forms of instrumental-rationalist thinking, was apparent as development of the arts as a means of attracting talented individuals and business ventures into Singapore became a strong component of policy thinking. Cultural policy from the 1990s was therefore marked by an appreciation for the arts – not for its intrinsic humanist values, but for its sheer economic potential (Wee, 2002: 232-3; Kong, 2000b: 409). The involvement of the state's tourism agency was sufficiently telling as 'cultural economic policy' – "the conceiving of culture in the language of economics" (Kong, 2000a: 286; see also Throsby, 2001: 138-41) – thus became entrenched in the social and cultural landscape of Singapore.

The 'Renaissance Singaporean'

The next shift in cultural policy came in 1999 while Asia was still battling with economic recovery following another financial crisis (which began around 1997). Having weathered the effects of this crisis unscathed, relative to neighbouring Southeast as well as East Asian economies, Singaporean authorities could luxuriate in talking about a new 'Asian Renaissance' to be led by Singapore.[50] Since the 1980s, several parliamentarians

[50] See also the deposed former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim's (1996) framing of *The Asian Renaissance*, albeit from a Malaysian-Asian economic and political perspective.

in Singapore have referred to the term 'Asian Renaissance', but few have captured the discourse as poetically, and prophetically, as George Yeo in 1992, during his tenure as Singapore's Minister of Information and the Arts:

> What we are witnessing is an economic and cultural renaissance of a scale never before experienced in human history. Like the renaissance in Europe a few centuries ago, this East Asian renaissance will change the way man looks at himself, at human society and at the arts. The rise in the level of cultural life in Singapore is part of an oceanic tidal flow that will wash onto every shore in the Pacific (Yeo, 1992; cited in Bereson, 2003: 6).

The emergence of the era of globalisation from the 1990s enabled Singapore's articulation of this new 'cultural renaissance' policy to be particularly audible, if not very loud, especially for global investors wanting to capitalise on the East- and Southeast-Asian region which was readily poised for growth following lengthy periods of economic downturn and inertia. Politically, this was a sagacious attempt at cementing Singapore's competitive position as the region's 'cosmopolis', a 'global city' not just for the arts, but in all aspects of economics and trade. As Bereson observes,

> All aspects of government policy, be they economic, language, education, transport, taxation, tourism, land-use or defence determine a country's culture and the development of its country arts environment. Of equal importance is the fact that a country's art and culture are determined by its history and by its interaction with other states and civilisations (Bereson, 2003: 12).

Or as Kwok and Low summarises, "In a word, Singapore' cultural policy has everything to do with staying on top as a focal node in the late-capitalist world system of the new millennium" (2003: 154).

To maximise the momentum kick-started by the newly articulated 'Renaissance' discourse, a new cultural policy document was released by MITA in March 2000 with the

intention of charting Singapore's cultural development into the twenty-first century. Entitled *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore,* this report gives evidence that the state has become deeply cognisant of the economic potential of culture and the arts (MITA, 2000). The desire to become a global cultural hub, benchmarked against the cultural capitals of the world, was boldly articulated. As Chang and Lee summarise, drawing from the *Renaissance City Report* (2000: 4):

> Its short-term aim is to develop the local arts scene to match regional hubs like Melbourne, Hong Kong [and Glasgow], with the eventual goal of achieving a status comparable to cultural capitals like London and New York (Chang and Lee, 2003: 130).

Despite its global aspirations, the key aims of the Report demonstrate that the dual regimens of cultural maintenance and policing as cultural policy in Singapore have not changed. Indeed, the Report comprises two well-rehearsed aims:

1. To establish Singapore as a global arts city [and to] position Singapore as a key city in the Asian renaissance of the 21st century and as a cultural centre in the globalised world. The idea is to be one of the top cities in the world to live, work and play in, where there is an environment conducive to creative and knowledge-based industries and talent.

2. To provide cultural ballast in [Singapore's] nation-building efforts. In order to strengthen Singaporeans' sense of national identity and belonging, we need to inculcate and appreciation of our heritage and strengthen the Singapore Heartbeat through the creation and sharing of Singapore stories, be it in film, theatre, dance, music, literature or the visual arts. (MITA, 2000: 4)

The 2000 *Renaissance City Report* acknowledges the foundation stone that was laid by the 'Ong Teng Cheong Report' (ACCA, 1989), noting that Singapore has made good strides since then, especially with the development of institutions and infrastructures, what it refers to as the "hardware" for culture and the arts (MITA, 2000:

4). It then declares that the next move would be to give greater focus to the "software" aspects, what Chang and Lee (2003: 133) have termed the "heartware places" of culture and the arts, which relate to "more intimate and intangible aspects that transmogrify [hardware] structures into incubators for the arts". This 'new' direction, in part, is a tacit admission of Singapore's 'cultural lack' marked by Singaporeans' inability to understand or appreciate the fullness of the arts, as well as an attempt to further shore up the economic potential of the arts. In an attempt to capture a vision of Singapore as a creative and vibrant city that is imbued with a keen sense of artistic and cultural 'software', Singaporean policy-makers seized on the 'Renaissance' discourse in an unproblematic fashion "as a means of enhancing the image of Singapore" (MITA, 2000: 33).

In August 2003, in the midst of an economic slowdown, it was announced that the arts radio station, Passion 99.5 FM, was to close because it was deemed unprofitable to run a low-listenership broadcasting outlet (Lee, S., 2003). Not only does the switching-off of an arts publicity platform validate the hegemony of the economic in Singapore (Kong, 2000b), it re-opens old questions about the government's motive in embracing the arts. This suggests that the concept of a 'Renaissance Singaporean' in a 'Renaissance City' needs to read with political as well as economic lenses. Instead of a 're-birth' of the innate artistic and cultural essence residing in a person, as understood within the context of the European Renaissance in the middle ages (Chang and Lee, 2003: 135; see also Bereson, 2003: 2-3), the 'Renaissance Singaporean' envisaged in the Report is not an 'artist' or arts aficionado but an adventurous and civic-conscious person who "is underpinned by a fine sense of aesthetics" (MITA, 2000: 38-9). Although social,

political, intellectual and emotional developments of the individual were hallmarks of Florence, Italy during the Renaissance period, the Singapore-led Asian Renaissance imagined by the Singaporean policy-makers is somewhat different. He/she has to be one "attuned to his [sic] Asian roots", "an active citizen" who "is not just a mere actor in a vast nameless play, but a co-writer of the *Singapore Story*, with the latitude and responsibility to input his own distinctive [and creative] ideas" (MITA, 2000: 39; emphases added). To be sure, the 'Singapore Story', as defined by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in his highly-publicised two-volume memoirs of Singapore's rise from Third World oblivion to First World powerhouse status, is a political/politicised story about the economic miracle of Singapore fashioned by Lee himself (Lee, 1998 and 2000). Although current and future cultural policy directions may not necessarily resonate with Lee Kuan Yew's personal ideological stances, the structural features of Singapore's political economy set in train by the man himself continues to underpin its performance (Hamilton-Hart, 2000: 196). Hence, the 'Renaissance Singaporean' who is empowered to tell the 'Singapore Story' is one who vindicates, both figuratively and literally, the political and economic meanings inherent within the Singaporean discourse of cultural policy.

Read in this light, the cultural policy agenda advanced by the *Renaissance City Report* appears less interested in the development of culture and the arts from an artistic standpoint. Rather, it is more attuned to the economic activity and political longevity of Singapore in an increasingly competitive global era – and the continued scripting of the

'Singapore Story'. Indeed, as the final paragraph of the *Renaissance City Report* makes clear:

> As Singaporeans become more global in their outlook in the 21st century, the need to develop a stronger sense of our Singaporean identity will intensify. Our culture, arts and heritage is the common language through which Singaporeans can express and share their *Singapore stories* (MITA, 2000: 59; emphases added).[51]

The desire to frame a 'common language' for the articulation of a 'Singapore identity', derived from the sharing of 'Singapore stories', makes the entire discourse of cultural policy most 'stately', as Williams (1984) would have put it. The *Renaissance City Report* (2000) has unwittingly led cultural policy in Singapore to fulfil all five senses of William's (1984) notion of a 'State Culture': it is, as mentioned, 'stately' as witnessed in the grand promise and purpose of *The Esplanade*, along with newly refurbished museums and other cultural hardware (first sense); it is an economic and political tool (second sense); it preserves national traditions and heritage (third sense); it embraces mass culture and creative arts (fourth sense); and last but not least, a 'developmental' cultural policy (fifth sense). It is a cultural policy that is ironically inaugurated within the *Renaissance City Report* (2000), a government policy document, like any others, that was always destined to be replaced and/or superseded by a 'newer and better' (Miller, 1993: 26) – and possibly a wordier and more sophisticated, though rarely critical (Bereson, 2003: 12) – policy document. Indeed, the next section of this chapter will look closely at the *Creative Industries Development Strategy* (2003), Singapore's first creative cum cultural policy document commissioned and unveiled in the 21st century. It will also consider if

[51] It is worth noting that Singapore's 'new' cultural renaissance policy resonates with the larger goal of 'Singapore 21', the national vision statement which details Singapore's social, cultural and political agendas for the 21st century (MITA, 2000: 42). Entitled *Singapore 21: Together We Make The Difference* (1999), these agendas will be touched on in Chapter Four of this thesis.

there are any overt policy shifts and reiterate how cultural policy has become an ideal tool and technology for the extension of governmentality in Singapore.

Creativity as Cultural Policy

In a 'perpetually revisionist' state like Singapore, policy changes tend to come sooner rather than later (Barr, 2003). Indeed, before Singaporeans could fully digest, appreciate or scrutinise the issues raised in the *Renaissance City Report* (2000), a new policy document which heralds the arrival of the new 'creative economy', with obvious bearing on the arts, media and cultural industries, was to be released. On 26th September 2002, as Singapore faced up to its worst economic year since attaining full administrative independence in 1965, the Creative Industries Working Group (CIWG) of the Economic Review Committee (ERC), a government-appointed high-level body tasked with identifying future economic growth sectors and opportunities for Singapore, unveiled its report entitled *Creative Industries Development Strategy: Propelling Singapore's Creative Economy* (CIWG, 2002a). This was the first time the voguish concept of the 'creative industries' – with its definition extracted straight out of Britain's *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (UK Creative Industries Taskforce, 1998) as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (CIWG, 2002a: iii; CIWG, 2002b; see also Flew, 2003: 115) – had been acknowledged and publicly embraced in Singapore. It was no coincidence that the press conference to launch Singapore's latest cultural policy statement took place at the public arts library located within the 'baggage-laden' *Esplanade* structure (CIWG,

2002a), declaring in no uncertain terms that 'creative industries' is really an extension of the 'Renaissance City' project to enliven the arts and cultural scene in Singapore.[52] Indeed, the Creative Industries Report recognises that "the arts and culture sector is the artistic core" of what is known as the "creative cluster" (CIWG, 2002a: 10), essentially a concentration of interconnected industries or institutions which rely on innovation and creativity for growth and development (Flew, 2002: 130).

The 'creative cluster' idea is drawn very heavily from the work of Richard Florida, a regional economic development professor at Carnegie Mellon University, who champions the concept of a fast-growing 'creative class' in his best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002). For Florida, creative people have become the decisive source of competitive advantage in contemporary economy and society. For this reason, businesses seek to locate in places where clusters of creative people reside (Florida, 2002: 5-6). The aggregate of these creative people forms what Florida calls the Creative Class, where:

> A *class* is a cluster of people who have common interests and tend to think, feel and behave similarly, but these similarities are fundamentally determined by economic function – by the kind of work they do for a living. All other distinctions follow from that (2002: 8; emphasis in original).

[52] On 26th September 2002, the day after the *Creative Industries Development Strategy* was launched, *The Straits Times* daily published no less than four articles on the subject. The diversified coverage of the issue suggested, among other things, that the concept of the 'creative industries' was intended to encompass all and sundry. Arts correspondent Ong Sor Fern (2003), for instance, entitled her report 'Give arts and sports more weight in school'. Technology reporter Denesh Divyanathan (2003), on the other hand, reported on how Singapore could profit in the 'Selling of media content to overseas market'. The other articles were perhaps more politically and economically astute: 'Creativity can flourish even with censorship' and 'Arts can be lucrative' (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Sep 26, 2003). The economic value of the creative industries to Singapore's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was again reiterated by the Information, Communications and the Arts Minister Lee Boon Yang in July 2004 (see report entitled 'Government to double size of creative industries', in *The Straits Times Interactive*, Jul 25, 2004).

Florida goes on to argue that those cities, regions and nations that can succeed creatively – and therefore, economically – are those that can combine the '3Ts' of economic development: namely, Technology, Talent and Tolerance (Florida, 2002: 249). While the idea of harnessing technology and talent fits in well with the general economic policy of Singapore, the promotion of tolerance – or diversity expressed in terms of a place that welcomes the gay and lesbian community as well as freelance artists and 'bohemians' – is problematic for the Singaporean moral majority (Tan, K. P., 2003: 408-412). This is particularly significant in view of the various legal guidelines against homosexuality and unacceptable "bohemian" behaviour that exist in Singapore. Nevertheless, Florida believes that in any context, "openness to the gay community [i.e. tolerance] is a good indicator of the low entry barriers to human capital [i.e. talent] that are so important to spurring creativity and generating high-tech [i.e. technology] growth" (Florida, 2002: 256).

A generally uncritical and bureaucratic acceptance of Florida's notion of the '3Ts' of economic development led to a declaration by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in July 2003 that the Singapore Government was prepared to hire gays in "certain positions of government" (Nirmala, 2003b; see also Teo, 2003: 1, 4). As the Asian version of *Time* magazine reported on July 7, 2003:

> Prime Minister Goh says his government now allows gay employees into its ranks, even in sensitive positions. The change in policy, inspired at least in part by the desire not to exclude talented foreigners who are gay, is being implemented without fanfare, Goh says, to avoid raising the hackles of more-conservative Singaporeans. "So let it evolve, and in time the

> population will understand that some people are born that way," Goh says. "We are born this way and they are born that way, but they are like you and me." (Elegant, 2003: online)

This issue sparked a short but lively discussion in Singapore, mainly occurring on the Forum (letters from readers) page of *The Straits Times*, with the majority speaking out against such attempts at 'liberalising' Singapore society and culture.[53] *The Straits Times* columnist Chua Mui Hoong, however, made it patently clear in a brief article that the seemingly enlightened decision to open up employment avenues for gay people was not about gay rights per se, but about economic competitiveness and survival amidst the harsh reality of globalisation (Chua M. H., 2003). While the fact that creativity at a critical level calls for one to operate with a questioning disposition – that creativity ventures into the realms of conventions and status quos for the purpose of challenging creative workers to discover innovative alternatives (Leo and Lee, 2004: 209; see also Leo, 2003) – is also implied by Florida (2002), the government remains cautious about where and how 'bohemian' activities may be carried out. For instance, the Government 'liberalised' the city's night-time economy scene from early 2004 by allowing bar-top dancing and 24-hour nightspots, but only at licensed 'party zones' like Marina South and established hotels (Mulchand and Nadarajan, 2003; and, *The Straits Times Interactive*,

[53] The Forum page of *The Straits Times* is widely seen and cited as Singapore's prime space for lively public debate (see discussion in Chapter Four of this thesis). It should be noted however that because the Forum and General Editors are trained to exercise discretion (read: self-censorship), this 'space' is neither uninhibited nor unrestricted. Within the present context of the gay issue, some of the letters were sufficiently open and, to a degree, provocative. See for example letters in *The Straits Times* on July 15, 2003, with titles such as: "Government should rethink the hiring of gays" by George H. C. Lim and Phiroze A. Rahman, and "Gay-rights study heavily tainted" by Brian Lynch; and, various comments published on July 18, 2003 under the generic title "Threat to family system". See also letters written in support of 'tolerance' including: "No reason to condemn gays" by The Reverend Dr K. H. Yao, "Keep an open mind and respect differing views" by Anthony Yeo (July 18, 2003).

Jan 31, 2004).[54] Similarly, the move to develop a 'creative cluster' of arts and cultural workers as well as 'bohemian-creatives' can be seen as an attempt to govern the productivities and innovative capacities of these individuals (Flew, 2002: 130-131). These creative workers will thus be given more subjective 'freedoms' or wider ideological spaces to practice their crafts, but one needs to be aware that under the implicit terms of cultural policy as a discourse for the conduct of conduct, the letter of the law may be wielded against them if they are seen to provoke the moral majority and/or the ruling elite minority (Tan, K. P., 2003: 419).

In the case of Singapore, three broad groups of people who work in the arts and culture, in design and the media industries were identified as the 'creative cluster' to be developed for the "propelling of Singapore's Creative Economy" (CIWG, 2002a; 2002b). The concept of 'clustering' here refers mostly to the geographical concentration of creative individuals for the production of goods and services (Flew, 2002: 130). The first 'creative cluster' initiative is a minor revision of the *Renaissance City Report*, mainly to include 'innovation' as a key policy outcome within the arts and cultural sector. This was codenamed 'Renaissance City 2.0' – read: Version 2.0 of the *Renaissance City Report* (originally published in 2000) – to reflect Singapore's ability to keep up with 'cool' management trends and technological buzzwords, within the *Creative Industries Development Strategy* (CIWG, 2002a: Chapter 2). In essence, however, this section is

[54] With a new tourism slogan "Uniquely Singapore" unveiled in March 2004 (see STB, 2004), the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) started a worldwide advertising campaign to promote Singapore's new 'liberalised' culture by proclaiming in one of the advertisements that: "Things change fast in Singapore. These days, nightlife stretches to daybreak. And at many pubs, dancing on the bar is actually expected" (in 'Weekend Extra', *The West Australian*, Jun 19, 2004: 32). Another marker of Singapore's attempts at opening-up society, and introducing a culture of 'risk-taking', is the introduction of reverse-bungee jumping at Singapore's Clarke Quay (see Wong, K., 2003: H5 and Wong, S. M., 2003).

mostly a rehash of old policy statements pertaining to Singapore's 'Asian Renaissance' vision.

The second vision of the Creative Industries policy is about the spearheading of a 'Design Singapore' initiative, which aims to develop domestic multimedia design capabilities and position Singapore as a global design hub (CIWG, 2002a: Chapter 3; see *The Straits Times Interactive*, Mar 21, 2003). Apart from a general recognition of the importance of good commercial design, particularly in product packaging and the (re)branding of Singapore as a high-tech and global hub city, not much has been articulated about the significance of a 'Design Singapore' initiative under the rubric of the 'creative industries'. This is due to the fact that the concept of creative and multimedia 'design', even within the higher and tertiary education sector, has had very little discussions in the public domain. While the government has announced plans to invest in design education within the tertiary and vocational institutions (CIWG, 2002a: 24-5), it remains to be seen whether the foregrounding of design as a viable 'creative industries' pursuit will invoke cultural shifts amongst culturally and politically apathetic Singaporeans.

The third and final 'cluster' initiative, also known as 'Media 21', "envisions Singapore as a global media city, a thriving media ecosystem with roots in Singapore,

and with strong extensions internationally" (CIWG, 2002a: 37).[55] The drawing of the 'ecosystem' idea within 'Media 21' is intended to link the Singapore media sector within a broader network that includes the arts, digital technologies as well as media exchange and trading for the sake of maximising economic gains in and for Singapore. As the *Creative Industries Development Strategy* puts it in no uncertain terms:

> Economic value is derived from being a trading centre for copyrighted material and from specialising in high-end media development. Media 21 also envisages made-by-Singapore media products that travel successfully overseas (CIWG, 2002a: 37).

'Media 21', in essence, is an overwhelmingly economic policy agenda, although its physical manifestation lies in the "creation of a media city to capture public and industry imagination", and to "underscore government commitment to develop [the media] sector" (CIWG, 2002a: 39). Referred to as "Mediapolis@one-north" in the *Creative Industries Development Strategy*, its other fanciful name designed to captivate new audiences is 'Fusionpolis', defined as a "state-of-the-art work, live, play and learn environment for media and infocomm [i.e. info-communications] companies, and the artistic community" (SBA, 2002: 7; and, CIWG, 2002a: 39).[56] The official statements and documents claim that the intention behind this physical 'creative clustering' of media and media-related professionals under one roof is not only to bring about economic vibrancy, but also a ripple effect in the wider community to be inspired into greater

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[55] The 'Media 21' agenda was first unveiled by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (restructured into the Media Development Authority in January 2003) in early 2002, entitled *Media 21: Transforming Singapore into a Global Media City* (SBA, 2002) as part of its long term strategic plan to 'liberalise' and enliven Singapore's media sector. For further information on SBA's 'Media 21', see: SBA (2002); Leo (2003); and, Leo and Lee (2004).

[56] This project bears some semblance to Brisbane's major Creative Industries Precinct project at the inner city suburb of Kelvin Grove, part of Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) innovatively ascribed Creative Industries Faculty and part of the 'new' Brisbane city revitalisation project detailed by Glover and Cunningham (2003). See also Flew (2002: 116; and, 2003).

creativity and social vibrancies (CIWG, 2002b: 2). In actuality, the Mediapolis/Fusionpolis concept is intended to replicate 'cluster centres' such as New York's 'Silicon Alley' and the world-renowned San Francisco's 'Silicon Valley' with the belief that it would be a draw card to lure creative 'foreign talents', many of whom would fit under the loose category of 'bohemians', from around the world to work, live and play in Singapore (Flew, 2002: 130).

The roping in of the media industry into the 'new' creativity discourse is significant insofar as the 'Media 21' policy framework has subjected the media to 'public glare' and scrutiny. It is well-documented fact that the media in Singapore is designed to act as government mouthpieces to inform and educate the public on government policies, and as such, has been largely segregated from other cultural and economic sectors (see, Birch, 1993a; and, Leo, 2003). Singapore's founding Prime Minister, now Senior Minister in the Cabinet, Lee Kuan Yew was clear about it when he wrote in 1979 that national television, as an educational tool, should be able to stand up to "the litmus test [of] whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and co-operate in a civilised way" (cited in Heidt, 1987: 144-5; and, in Leo, 2003: 6). This prescriptive philosophy of the media was re-articulated on the eve of Singapore's second political leadership transition by Deputy Prime Minister (and Prime Minister-Designate) Lee Hsien Loong at a speech on January 2004:

> The [Singapore] media should report news accurately and fairly, in order to inform and educate the public. It should adopt a national perspective on issues, educating Singaporeans on the reality of global competition, or the need for healthy habits during the SARS outbreak. But it should avoid crusading journalism, slanting news coverage to campaign for personal agendas. This way, the media helps the public to decide and judge issues

for themselves, and provide a valuable channel for them to voice news and opinions (Lee, 2004).

On the subject of 'global competition', it is paradoxical that the key media players in Singapore – namely the Singapore Press Holdings Group (which publishes Singapore's flagship daily *The Straits Times*) and the Media Corporation of Singapore (which operates the prime free-to-air national broadcasting radio and television channels, including the up and coming regional news network *Channel NewsAsia*) – have been largely quarantined from the greater influences of economic ebbs, flows and manipulations of the marketplace in the name of "a national perspective on issues", or better known as 'public interests' in the context of Singapore. After all, 'public interests' in Singapore covers a myriad of issues: from national security, to a spectrum of sensitivities of a multiracial, multicultural, multilingual and multireligious society. Even economic viability of key industries, of which the media is a part of, as well as the need for sound and pragmatic economic management, are often included in the realm of 'public interests'.[57] If creativity via the media industry is the future lifeblood of the Singapore economy, as articulated in 'Media 21', then the new creative industries framework put forth by the government is probably worth embracing. Yet the assumed knowledge about the basic attitudes, ethos and cultures of this new creative economy appears to pose challenges to the vast majority of Singaporeans who have grown up in a

[57] One major indication of Singaporeans' unwavering belief in economic pragmatism lies, in the midst of a tense global war on terror, in the result of the General Election of 2001. In the face of Singapore's worst economic downturn since its independence, 75.3% of votes cast, an increase of 10% from the previous General Election, went to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Support for the only two returning opposition seats sunk. Economic deliverance, it seems is still entrusted to the political incumbents. For further information on the 2001 General Election, see Mutalib (2002) and Tay (2002).

manufacturing-cum-services era and relied on the government for moral and indeed cultural guidance. Like the 'Design Singapore' initiative, it remains to be seen what part an increasingly commercialised media sector that remains politically-compliant and free of what Minister Lee refers to as "crusading journalism" – or, journalism that is laden with anti-establishment political agendas – will play in the supposedly 'creative industries-driven' future of Singapore (Lee, 2004).

Conclusion

On 19 July 1999, *Time* magazine fronted its issue of the week with the heading: "Singapore Swings: Can Nanny State Give Up its Authoritarian Ways?". The lead story in the globally distributed current affairs magazine, entitled "Singapore Lightens Up", attempted to answer the opening question by declaring: "Nanny state? Hardly. Once notorious for tight government control, the city-state is getting competitive, creative, even funky." (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999: 17). Since then, there has been several overt attempts to enliven the arts and 'bohemian' climates in Singapore, described by Kenneth Paul Tan (2003) as an attempt at "sexing up Singapore" for the sake of the new economy. At the beginning of 2004, as Singapore prepared for its third changing of the guard since attaining Independence in 1965, the Prime-Minister-in-waiting Lee Hsien Loong promised in a wide-ranging speech that Singapore "society must open up further" (Lee, 2004). While it is obvious that these government-driven reports, statements and images and are attempts to sell the softer and more 'funky' sides of otherwise strait-laced Singapore, both for external and internal consumption, they point us to a more important 'technology of truth': that cultural discourses have implications beyond the more

conspicuous sphere of 'culture' and its portrayal in everyday life. The cultural thought of a nation, which refers a great deal to its thinking and receptiveness towards the arts and other creative pursuits, reveals its attitude towards change, political openness and mode of rule. In other words, cultural thought as expressed in the cultural policy of a nation demonstrates the extent of what Foucault has termed 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1988).

Although the creative industries policy document appears to focus on only three cultural industries, its reach and governmental conduct appears to be socially, economically, political, even culturally, all-encompassing. With few exceptions, including projects that have been in train since the release of cultural policies since the seminal 1989 *Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts* (ACCA), the *Creative Industries Development Strategy* of September 2002 (CIWG, 2002a) has effectively superseded earlier cultural policies and arts documents discussed in this chapter. As the Creative Industries Development Strategy declares:

> This Creative Industries Strategy report presents a blueprint for Singapore to define its new competitive edge as we transit into the innovation-led economy. Moving beyond the traditional manufacturing and services industries, we need to identify new areas which are innovation-driven and offer excellent growth prospects and economic spinoffs. The creative cluster not only fits these criteria but can potentially change the whole texture of our economy by advocating the fusion of arts, business and technology, and inspiring creativity and innovation across all sectors of the economy – hence propelling the growth of the Creative Economy (CIWG, 2002a: 51).

As Singaporeans subscribe both to the broader and finer details of the new creative/cultural policy statement, they will begin to organise themselves around the declared aims of the policy in the name of 'creativity'. Aspiring commercial and

computer-based multimedia designers, for instance, would identify themselves as creative workers and seek perhaps to locate themselves within the 'Fusionpolis' Media City structure. In this way, the tools and 'technologies of power', typically held and articulated by the authorities, would interact with 'technologies of the self' to activate the concept and practice of governmentality (Foucault, 1988a: 18). Singapore's cultural policy's key agenda which is to propel the growth of a new creative economy is premised on the ability to extract innovation and creative energies out of each loosely-defined 'creative' and/or 'artistic' person residing in Singapore. This entails developing mechanisms, or as Foucault would prefer, 'technologies', to harness the creative and, indeed, the economically-productive conduct of each person in a rational and ritualised fashion (Rose, 1989). In the context of Singapore, this involves heralding the economic potential of the arts, culture, and the creative sectors, and concomitantly establishing the boundaries of political and social exchange (a topic that will be discussed further in the remaining chapters of this thesis).

Although contemporary psychology and convention wisdom tend to reject innovation that exists within pre-defined conditions as 'creativity' (see Osborne, 2003), they appear to be the only governable model for a Singapore which is explicit in its desire for commercial success coupled with political order via docility and acquiescence. Yet, Singaporean political scientist Kenneth Paul Tan has warned that while the arts and culture can "set off a multiplier effect in the economy, their capacity to unleash social and cultural vibrancy [which in turn induces creativity] can easily be shackled by an uncompromising focus on the commercial" (Tan, K. P., 2003: 418). Indeed, it is

important to recognise whilst attempting to make sense of this ideological versus economic struggle over the focus of cultural policy in Singapore that:

> the creativity explosion [and direction] is also a product of human agency and machinations of experts and – loosely speaking – of workers of the intellect. It is, then, as much a matter of governmentality as of ideology (Osborne, 2003: 508).

The development of the creative industries in Singapore, with a fixation on the potential economic spin-offs, can thus be seen as an attempt to govern and regulate the marketplace of culture, the arts and the intellectualism of new ideas as creativity. As Flew puts it quite succinctly, in a review essay on the rise of creativity as a cultural discourse, "creativity is both big business and a lot of different things to a lot of different people" (Flew, 2003: 90).

Creativity, or the lack of it, identified as one of several obstacles preventing Singapore from progressing economically in the 21st century, is certainly 'big business'. It has become, as this chapter has put forth, the cultural policy of Singapore for the increasingly competitive and global future, where policy represents the application of governmentality in the disciplining of its citizens (Colebatch, 1998; Miller, 1993). As noted earlier in this chapter, the conflation of culture with policy makes cultural policy the site at which the subject is framed and produced for the effective governing of people's hearts, minds, and as Rose (1989) would add, their souls (Miller, 1993; 1998). The contemporary invocation of creativity, and the creative industries, to the debate effectively broadens the scope of 'culture' into the realms of technology (multimedia and design) and the ubiquitous mass media and communications. In effect, this extends the field of citizenship games and cultural practices into human activities that are readily

amenable to governmental control and intervention. By ordering people's social, cultural and creative pursuits, their economic and political dispositions can thus begin to be managed, administered and 'conducted' (Dean, 1999: 2).

CHAPTER FOUR:
Gestural Politics and Civil(ising) Society[58]

> We are bound together by the Singapore idea but it is not easy to define what exactly constitutes it. It involves both the heart and the mind, and probably includes aspects like good governance, civic responsibility, honesty, strong families, hard work, a spirit of voluntarism, the use of many languages and a deep respect for racial and religious diversity.
>
> - Minister of Information and the Arts, George Yeo (2000: 25).

Introduction

On 28 November 1990, Goh Chok Tong became Singapore's second Prime Minister since Singapore attained full self-governing independence in 1965. Instead of retiring from the political scene, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew assumed the newly-created post of Senior Minister in Goh's new administration, ensuring that the 'changing of the guard' was merely an exercise of "self-renewal" within the People's Action Party (PAP) (Rodan, 1992: 3; see Rodan, 1993a and 1993b). Indeed, as Senior Minister, Lee continues to wield considerable power and influence on political proceedings in Singapore. On several occasions since 'stepping down' in 1990, Lee showed the world – in applying Foucauldian techniques of governmentality and the notion of 'police' – that he remains in charge of Singapore. For example, as recently as January 2004, Lee decided to intervene in an industrial relations dispute between Singapore Airlines, the government-owned and stock market-listed flagship carrier of

[58] Preliminary research for this chapter was undertaken while I was on a visiting scholarship at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), The Australian National University, from August to October 2000. I am grateful to Dr Christopher 'Kit' Collier (Department of Political and Social Change, RSPAS) for providing inputs as my arguments were being formulated.

Singapore, and its pilots' union. Lee's direct involvement was justified on the grounds that Singapore Airlines is an iconic representation of Singapore's governmental efficiency. As such, any issues undermining its management would damage the otherwise excellent reputation of Singapore – and therefore its government (Lim, L., 2004). In this regard (and as expounded in Chapters Two and Three), Singapore exemplifies Foucault's discourse on governmentality in that it is a "modern form of power which intervenes in citizens day-to-day lives" in order to maintain peace and social harmony, as defined by the powers-that-be (Bratich, Packer and McCarthy, 2003: 7). Despite being undermined by Lee's interventions – either directly or indirectly – from time to time, the new prime minister nevertheless sought to establish his own identity along with a new image of the PAP government. Upon entering into the highest office of the land, Prime Minister Goh declared his intention to embrace a more open, consultative and consensual leadership style (Lim, 1994b: 12). To many observers, this meant that Singapore was on course for a less authoritarian mode of rule, which translated into a more participatory form of democracy (Rodan, 1992: 5).

In June 1991, while government administrators were still implementing 'voter-friendly' strategies of the 'New Guard' led by Goh, the concept of civic society was promulgated in Singapore by a 'New Guard' minister, George Yeo, who was at that time acting in the portfolio of Information and the Arts.[59] Widely regarded as one of contemporary Singapore's most eloquent politicians, Yeo made his – and indeed Singapore's – seminal speech on 'civic society' to suggest a need for Singaporeans to be

[59] Shortly after, George Yeo's appointment as full Minister for Information and the Arts was effected, a portfolio he held for nine years until 1999. He moved on to become Minister of Trade and Industry.

actively involved not so much in parliamentary, partisan or lobbyist politics, but in creating a 'Singapore soul', marked by a nationalistic and deep emotional attachment to Singapore (Yeo, 1991: 2-3).[60] His intention was to urge Singaporeans to participate or play a part in enhancing the civic life in/of Singapore so that the Singaporeans will treat the country as home, rather than a hotel where one can come and go as one pleases. The rhetoric of 'home' is a familiar one in Singapore, bearing close affinity to the ideals of national/cultural identity and nation-building (see Koh, 1998: 12 and Lee, 2000: v). As pointed out in the same speech, these Singaporean ideals are perpetual struggles of a 'mythic' proportion, that is to say, they continue from generation to generation (Yeo, 1991: 3; see also Tamney, 1996). As Minister Yeo elaborates:

> If we are not to be only a hotel, we must have a soul. To develop that soul, we need a lively civic society. The State must pull back some so that the circle of public participation can grow (Yeo, 1991: 12).

The use of the term 'soul' to refer to one's deep and ideal affiliation with the nation is synonymous with Rose's argument, discussed in Chapter Two, that contemporary government "operates through the delicate and minute infiltration of the ambitions of regulation" into the very interior – or soul – of human existence and experience (Rose, 1989: 11). To equate a "lively civic society" with the "soul" of a nation is to effectively forge symmetry between the desires of the individual as citizen and the urge of governments to manage the individual as subject, or as a cultural citizen and

[60] It is important to note that the term 'civil society', as well as its closely-linked variant of 'civic society', has been posed since Singapore's colonial days. Therefore, I do not suggest that the notion was conceptualised in Singapore by Yeo. My point – which has been and will be reiterated in various ways throughout this chapter – is that the Singapore government is now prepared to engage in public discussions about the theoretical concept(s) and practice of civil/civic society. See also Hewison and Rodan's (1996) argument that civil society in Southeast Asia, Singapore included, has strong historical precedence.

participant (Stevenson, 2003). In this way, the state would be able to, as Yeo (1991: 12) puts it quite plainly, "pull back some" to provide 'space' for citizens to perform their cultural citizenship roles. In the case of Singapore, I would argue that the intention of raising the stakes of civil society cum public participation is not so much to enable a thriving public sphere, but to advance and perfect the regulative apparatuses cum technologies of governmentality (Foucault, 1978: 102). After all, Yeo's vision of a civic society is consistent with Prime Minister Goh's declared commitment towards a more consultative style of government.

Yet, this chapter argues that the meanings inherent in the use of the term 'civic society', or even the more politicised concept of 'civil society', are not fixed in word or deed. As Singapore political observer Garry Rodan assesses:

> If the New Guard's commitment to a more consultative style of leadership [...] represents breaks from the approach taken by Lee [Kuan Yew] and his Old Guard colleagues, there remains nonetheless a crucial continuity in the insistence of a sharp distinction between political and civil society. It is in this continuity that suggests that the New Guard leadership is, in essence, no less committed than its predecessors to political authoritarianism (Rodan, 1992: 11).

In this regard, the so-called 'space' for consultation and civil society or civic participation remains circumscribed by rules and markers laid down by a continuing authoritarian government. The employment of civil society, as this chapter will assert, is therefore best understood as a technological apparatus designed to enhance the conduct of conduct, or the arts and rationalities of governing contemporary Singapore (see Bratich, Packer and McCarthy, 2003).

The Idea(l) of Singapore

George Yeo's call for Singaporeans to embrace the notion of 'civic society' is significant for two key reasons: first, the government itself was issuing a call for a participatory civic society which closely resembles what has become known in social and political circles as 'civil society' (see Walzer, 1991); second, and of particular interest to the discussion in this chapter, Yeo's use of the term 'civic society' to affront issues pertaining to the forging of a unitary national identity and culture; or in other words, of creating an aura of 'togetherness' (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999). Yeo, described by Rodan (1995: 15) as "the chief ideological spokesperson within the PAP", carefully referred to *civic* society as that space (to be) filled by the family upon the 'pulling back' of the state, and not one between an individual or a non-governmental body and the state as the notion of *civil* society would commonly connote. Invoking the concept of the family as dichotomously opposed to the state is a judicious choice given that one of Singapore's best-remembered 'shared values' emphasises the family as "the basic unit of society" (White Paper, 1991). Civic society thus takes on a metaphorical dimension, becoming a signifier of the familial home as city/nation/state – in Singapore, these entities are often coalesced into a single unit (see Chua, 2003a; and, Kwok and Chua, 1999) – and as the place where one ought to plant his/her cultural roots.

In May 1998, a conference themed 'Civil Society: Harnessing State-Society Synergies' was organised by Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies, a fully government-funded public policy think-tank, to revisit the civic and/or civil society issues first

articulated in 1991.[61] It was no coincidence that George Yeo – who was by then elevated to the full senior status of Minister of Information and the Arts – was invited to deliver the keynote address. In his speech, as spelt out in the opening quote of this paper, Yeo puts forth what he terms 'the Singapore idea' (Yeo, 2000: 25). The gist of 'the Singapore idea', and his message, is summarised in these lines:

> It is hoped that [this conference on] civil society in Singapore will stimulate thought on defining more precisely *the Singapore idea*, and on finding new and better ways to bind state and society together. For it is in working together that we optimize our position in the world. In the web world, the state is not completely above society. Both exist together drawing strength from each other (Yeo, 2000: 26; emphases added).

The 'Singapore idea' is thus an update, even an improvement, of the aforesaid 'Singapore soul'. It is a term that has much to do with the reinforcement of past and existing cultural policies of governmentality, of control and the maintenance of authority. Yet it is a term that eludes precise definition as it seems to encompass all Singaporean communities, both state and non-state.

Differently put, Yeo's vision of the 'Singapore idea' suggests a civic-minded cum harmonious society which embraces the founding principles of Singapore culture – namely, the '4Ms' (multiracialism, multiculturalism, multilingualism and multireligiosity), the much-vaunted Asian or shared values discourse, the five pillars of the *Singapore 21* Vision (to be discussed later in this chapter), and most other government-endorsed social and cultural policies. Significantly, Yeo makes a conceptual departure from his original (1991) speech on 'civic society' by emphasising that the idea

[61] The talks and presentations at the conference were subsequently collated and compiled into a book entitled *State Society Relations in Singapore*, edited by Koh and Ooi (2000).

of 'civil society' is about enhancing the relationship between state and the non-state for the sake of the nation and its citizens. To Yeo, the non-state aspect is best understood as the realm of civil society.

At this juncture, one could ask how the term 'civic society' became conflated – or perhaps confused – with the term 'civil society' within a mere seven years? Are they therefore one and the same thing? In an interview with Singapore's Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) – a group which epitomises civil society insofar as the phrase is taken to refer to a non-governmental organisation that aims to engage in debates on policy issues with the government of the day – Yeo made no apology for using the terms 'civic' and 'civil' society interchangeably. He argued that it is everyone's prerogative to use these terms for their purpose/s (Yeo, 1999: 12).[62] As Singaporean sociologist and political commentator Chua Beng Huat cautions, though:

> [T]he difference between the two terms, 'civic society' and 'civil society' is not some inconsequential play of words, but an indication of one's political stance on the appropriate balance in the relationship between state and society in Singapore (Chua, 2000: 63).

The act – and art – of finding an "appropriate balance", especially with regard to terms within the political realm, is a familiar, and often elusive, political discourse in Singapore. Yet it is one that cuts into the heart of public-policy framing and decision-making processes in Singapore, so much so that most aspects of Singapore everyday life

[62] Established in 1990, the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) is a self-help group that mobilises Malay/Muslim professionals to play a leading role and active role in the development and long term transformation of Malay/Muslim Singaporeans into a dynamic community taking its pride of place in the larger Singaporean society. AMP was born out of frustration with Mendaki, the government-sanctioned council representing the Muslim community in Singapore. For further reading on the AMP's (and Mendaki's) involvement in civil society, see Rodan (1996: 102-6).

are deeply embroiled in politics, although these are often either not spoken of as such or are taken for granted (see Rodan, 1996b, 2000a and 2000b; and, Lee and Birch, 2000). The Singaporean notion of civil and/or civic society is no exception, for it transcends the broad field of politics into the realm of culture and everyday civic life.

Given the heavy political baggage often associated with the language of civil society, the question as to whether the Singapore Government's willingness to engage in discussions of such political nature is driven by uncontrollable circumstances, or is a wisely calculated move, needs to be explored further. To broach this and related questions, this chapter will examine the Singapore Government's political stance and rationale for embracing the 'Singapore idea' of civil society. The next section gives a brief background of civil society as a political theory, introducing the prime trajectories of thought on the subject as theorised by some of the key scholars in the social and political sciences. Following this, the 'civic' or cultural aspect of civil society will be discussed. The chapter will show quite clearly that topics and cultural practices encompassing civic consciousness, civility, manners, codes of conduct and the like are the ones that meet with far less political problems and oppositions. Although this chapter will focus largely on the politics of civil society vis-à-vis active citizenship and political participation, its overall aim is to make sense of how the premise has been – and will be – employed, and deployed, by the Singapore Government (as the state) and the citizenry (as the *essence* of civil society). In so doing, this chapter hopes to deliberate on the complex workings and "coordinating function" of culture, politics, citizenship and the governing

of the Singaporean 'soul' in contemporary Singapore (Bratich, Packer and McCarthy, 2003: 5; Foucault, 1991: 102-3).

Civil Society: Theories and meanings

Civil society is considered a classical political theory, with its roots stretching as far back as to the works of Cicero and other Romans to Aristotle and the ancient Greek philosophers. The Aristotelian version of civil society, for instance, was named *politike koinonia*, meaning political society or community. This implied that the 'political' cannot be separated from the 'social' (society). Since, according to Aristotle, all humans are political beings, there was no real distinction between civil society and the state. Aristotle's 'state' was therefore divided between political society (*polis*) and the household (*oikos*), with civil society part of this larger structure.[63] So for the early thinkers, civil society was a society governed by laws, based on the principle of equality before the law. It was, in other words, a type of state characterised by a social contract agreed among the individual members of society (Kaldor, 2003: 584). Modern conceptualisations of civil society, however, from which current interpretations of the state as being distinct from civil society draw their intellectual bases, emerged mostly during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[64] These formulations came in various contours, forms, even content, and as such, played a big part in the ideological underpinnings of the different types of civil society in circulation both then and now. But

[63] For further reading on Aristotle's (384 – 322 BC) conceptualisation of civil society, see Sinclair (1992: 55-58), Cohen and Arato (1992: 84), Bobbio (1989: 34-5) and Kaldor (2003).

[64] Most scholars, including Keane (1988a, 1988b, 1996, 1998), Carothers (2000) and Katz (1998), attribute the rise of civil society to thinkers of the eighteenth century, but as Thomas (1999: chapter 6) has charted, modern civil society discourse evolved over a long period of time. The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are, as it were, 'the prime years'; while the late eighteenth century were the definitive years which provided most of the contemporary meanings of civil society.

from the mid-nineteenth century, the term fell into practical obscurity as political thinkers turned their attentions to the social and political consequences of the Industrial Revolution, among other things (Carothers, 2000; Keane, 1988b: 1).

In recent decades, particularly from the 1970s, the term re-appeared all of a sudden – like a piece of 'lost treasure' (Kumar, 1993: 383) – and became a shining emblem, taking its place within academia, and more recently became a mantra for politicians and state administrators seeking to revitalise their societies (Gellner, 1994: 1).[65] The current theme of civil society, arguably more inclined towards liberal thinking and democratic ideals, has moved to occupy the "centre-ground of contemporary political thought" (Keane, 1998: 65). As a result, many distinguished scholars – including John Keane (1988a, 1988b, 1996, 1998), Ernest Gellner (1994), John A. Hall (1995, 2000), Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992), Krishnan Kumar (1993), and others – have sought to explicate the meaning and 'correct' usage of the historical and political term. Yet, as John A. Hall notes most cogently, these recent debates have tended to lack precision (Hall, 2000: 47; see also Hall, 1995), mostly due what Frank Trentmann considers as the ongoing tension caused by civil society's multiple and paradoxical meanings (Trentmann, 2000: 5-6). Hall's 'search for civil society', for example, finds the concept complicated because it is one and the same time a social value (civic virtue and moral character) as well as a set of social institutions (societal self-organisation in opposition to the state) (Hall, 1995: 2). Singapore Minister George Yeo exemplifies this

[65] Other scholars, like Walzer (1991) and Markus (2001), attribute the beginning of contemporary (i.e. twentieth century) civil society discourse to 1970s Eastern European intellectualism, especially in Poland, where discussions of the merits and suitability of democracy were rampant during the time.

tension and/or complication amply with his seemingly lackadaisical approach to the meaning(s) of 'civic' or 'civil' society. Nevertheless, to understand the meaning of civil/civic society, especially in the context of contemporary Singapore, one needs, at least in broad outline, a background of the key developments in the evolution of the concept within the liberal – as well as neo-liberal – tradition.

Up to the eighteenth century, as mentioned earlier, the term civil society – from the Latin *societas civilas* – was synonymous with the state or political society (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 83-4). Civil society referred to a community of citizens "where men [*sic*] regulate their relationship and settled their disputes according to a system of laws; where 'civility' reigns, and citizens take an active part in public life" (Kumar, 1993: 376-7). It was governed, or perhaps more accurately self-governed and self-regulated, by its own legal code that is supported by a broader set of ethos and/or values that is agreed upon by society as a whole. Here, the idea of civil society originated in an attempt to articulate the ideal well-tempered and ordered community (Miller, 1993), marked by the practices of lawfulness, civil obedience and good social and cultural conduct. In this formulation, civil society denotes an all-encompassing culture and social system, existing somewhere between 'state of nature' and the republic or administrative state (*polis*). To be sure, there was always a relatively clear equation between political rule and society in this model of civil society.

The concept of civil society further evolved with early nineteenth century thinker Georg Hegel, who saw civil society as a domain above the individual or the family but

below the realm of the state wherein free association takes place between individuals and corporate bodies (Thomas, 1999: 106-7). For Hegel, civil society was "the achievement of the modern world" (cited in Kaldor, 2003: 584) where the state was analytically distinct from, but mutually constitutive of, civil society through the enactment of laws and regulations, so as to prevent the excesses of liberal freedoms. In this model, the supremacy of the state allows civil society, being analytically separate, to act as the mediator (Kumar, 1993: 378). Hegel's view of state versus civil society, founded upon somewhat illiberal mindsets (Thomas, 1999: 106), is 'balanced' by the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, who saw the rise of the universal state (which Hegel advances) as inherently dangerous: one that could give rise to a new type of state despotism which is popularly elected (Keane, 1988a: 49-51). He believed that the mechanisms for preventing monopolistic power by the state must be strengthened with a strong and autonomous civil society (Nicholas, 1999: 108; Keane, 1988a: 50). In other words, Tocqueville felt that an 'independent eye of society' comprising a plurality of interacting, self-organised and constantly vigilant civil associations was necessary to curb the excesses of the modern centralised democratic state and hold the state and its politicians accountable (Keane, 1988a: 51).[66] This view is lucidly captured by the late Ernest Gellner when he defines civil society as:

> that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society (Gellner, 1994: 5).

[66] A popular, albeit crude, way of phrasing this, especially in Australia and the United Kingdom, is 'keeping the bastards honest'.

Tocqueville's conceptualisation, which borrows from Hegel to a certain extent, remains one of the most significant trajectories of thought on the subject. The rise of the modern, liberal and bureaucratic state, which brought with it the establishment of disciplinary institutions such as the military, police, judiciary, as well as the legal rights of each individual, serves to reinforce this model. The corollary is that civic/civil associations and interest groups have sprouted both locally/nationally, and more recently, internationally. Local and national groups are prominently represented by groups such as educational institutions, trade unions, religious bodies, voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and town councils. In fact, the term 'community', insofar as it refers to real people subject to societal and political governance, is increasingly used in many locally-based circles to imply the active functioning of civic/civil society. On an international level, due to the rise and influence of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in world governance, especially those concerned with environmental and globalisation issues, there is now a domain of what has been termed 'global civil society' (Keane, 2003).[67] As Kaldor defines:

> [G]lobal civil society is a platform inhabited by activists, NGOs and neoliberals, as well as national and religious groups, where they argue about, campaign for (or against), negotiate about, or lobby for the arrangements that shape global developments. There is not one global civil society but many, affecting a range of issues – human rights, environment and so on (Kaldor, 2003: 590-1).

[67] For further reading on the concept of global civil society, see Keane (2003), as well as Elliot's (2003) brief review of Keane's proposition. See also Kaldor (2003), Scholte (2000), and the volume of essays edited by Oran R. Young (1997).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which operate globally, such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Oxfam International, to name a few, have taken on this powerful yet unfamiliar neologism (Keane, 2003: 1-2).[68]

Whether local, national, regional or global, there is general agreement that civil society is an emancipatory idea which allows every individual the potential to engage in social, cultural and political debate at a certain level. In this regard, one could consider civil society as a socially and culturally autonomous, self-governing and hence, self-defining space (Nicholas, 1999: 110-1). In Singapore, authoritarian structures are often in place to minimise such 'spaces' (Rodan, 1992: 8). Although many NGOs, VWOs and civic groups in Singapore openly articulate their desire to participate in the shaping of this 'self-defining' social space (see Singam et al., 2002), they are more often than not unable – or too afraid – to pursue their preferred agendas or participate in meaningful policy debate to the fullest. This 'lack', according to Rodan (1996a and 1996b), is due to the expanding realm of the state through the extension and refinement of the mechanisms of political co-optation, where vociferous but useful individuals are 'co-opted' – or roped into the 'inner' political circle, a reversal of civil society's aim of bringing the 'inside' outside, as described by Kaldor (2003: 591) – to contribute to policy-making in a non-confrontational and regulated manner.

[68] Although John Keane offers perhaps the most detailed attempt at disambiguating the 'unfamiliar' and 'confusing' meaning of the phrase 'global civil society' in Chapter One of his book (Keane, 2003), I am not convinced, in view of the spuriousness of various 'civil society' movements around the world, that this would remove the ambiguities of the term. An examination of how global NGOs and their members perceive of the neologism of 'global civil society' is probably due, though that should ideally be undertaken elsewhere.

The introduction of the Nominated Member of Parliaments (NMP) scheme to the Singapore Parliament in November 1989 demonstrates at the highest level the extent to which the Singapore Government is prepared to constrict emancipatory ideas with political co-optation. The NMP scheme provides for the appointment of up to six NMPs, most of whom are either prominent Singaporean professionals or civil society sympathisers, for a renewable term of two years. As Rodan explains, these NMPs "have the same voting rights as non-constituent members of Parliament, [but] are unable to vote on money bills, bills to alter the Constitution, or motions of no confidence in the government, although they can speak on these issues and can vote on all other bills and motions" (Rodan, 1992: 8). The 'nomination' of these individuals into Parliament fulfils several related objectives. One, the channelling of outspokenness through PAP-controlled mechanisms enlivens debate in a single-party dominated Parliament, and hence provides a convenient way of enhancing the law- and policy-making process. Additionally, by appointing non-partisan 'experts' in their various fields, a potent and pervasive technology of governmentality (as outlined in Chapter Two), the government can lay claims to being consultative and objective (Rodan, 1992: 8). The fact that political support and 'objectivity' has been attained in a dictatorial or authoritarian fashion gets sidestepped. After all, the PAP government's understanding is that civil society, via the activities of individuals as well as social groups or organisations, is inherently political and must therefore be constrained in whatever legislative means and strategies available at its disposal (Rodan, 1996a: 28). Quite simply, most of these strategies or governmental technologies, which seek to control the autonomous movements of individuals and groups, subvert the independence that civil society represents.

The rise of civil society is also tied to the emergence of a particular form of economic life, namely a market-driven economy based on the ownership of private property. The desire for territorial rights in the form of private property and land ownership causes people to concentrate their productive energies on personal, self-interested enterprises – including aspects of buying and selling, or consumption and production – so as to accumulate wealth for themselves (Kaldor, 2003: 585). This generates a domain of extensive commercial networks autonomous from the state as well as other social spheres. Within these networks of horizontal interactions and commercial associations, civil society, characterised by the quality of human experience and exchange, is thus given room to thrive. Civil society, in this regard, refers to the social relations of individuals and associations as they jointly pursue personal economic interests (Wapner, 1997: 71).

Here, the eighteenth century writings of Scottish moralists David Hume and Adam Ferguson which stress the importance of manners, decency, tolerance and the like are useful for analyses (Bryant, 1995: 142-3).[69] For instance, Hume's version of civil society requires a civil establishment of society with the existence of law and order, but outside the purview of the state. Ferguson extends Hume's liberal position a little further by inscribing economic rationales. Ferguson describes the state as that which is created by civil society to help safeguard property and civilisation, so that people can pursue

[69] The key publications were Humes' *Essays: Moral and Political* (1748) and Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Another key civil society philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment is Adam Smith, who is better remembered for his rationalisation of the maximisation of economic self-interests. See Katz (1998) for a summary of Smith's work on civil and moral sentiments.

wealth accumulation and other self-interests in orderly fashion (Thomas, 1999: 104-5). For both Hume and Ferguson – ideas found also in the later work of Ernest Gellner (1994) – the conjunction of a market economy based on private property and a limited state that respects citizen rights forms the basis of a liberal civil society.[70]

Concomitantly, civil society is used by the Scottish moralists and others as a contrast to 'uncivilised' and 'uncultured' human behaviour. Although it originally depicted the (snobbish) gentility of the gentry, civility – understood in essence as the civil treatment of others – gradually became associated with all types of sustained social interaction (Bryant, 1995: 142).[71] Herein lies the "social value" aspect of civil society that John Hall (1995 and 2000) speaks of, the "sociological variant" that Christopher Bryant (1993 and 1995) defends, as well as the 'civic society' that George Yeo puts forth in his 1991 landmark speech. In this regard, civil society, and its close affinity of civic society, is 'cultural' since it represents a way of everyday life (Hall, 2000: 54). For when people associate with each other in a sustained manner and over time, whether they are in the economic, social or cultural spheres, it is as if they are cultivating manners and exposing themselves to elements of civility and civilisation. As Bryant notes with cogency:

> Civility bespeaks a common standard within which a multiplicity of ways of living, working and associating are tolerated. It demands that in all life outside the home we afford each other certain decencies and comforts as fellow citizens, regardless of other differences between us (Bryant, 1995: 145).

[70] The work of the Scottish moralists can be counterposed to the laws brought about by the 'state of nature' or John Locke's 'war of all against all'.

[71] See also Meyer's (2000) interesting comparison between a 'liberal civility' (civility performed in the public sphere of a polite society) and a 'civility of etiquette' as an embodiment of "respect owed to fellow citizens in a civil society" (p. 73). For a detailed study of civility, see Carter (1998).

The 'civility' of civil society thus helps to develop an implicit sense of social trust and mutual regard which enables cultural tolerance and political pluralism to flourish, thus strengthening the bond of society.

Markus adds to the debate on civility within civil society by suggesting that "while a thriving civil society has to be civil, not all societies that are civil have a flourishing civil society" (Markus, 2001: 1021). Contending that civility engenders a 'society of strangers' insofar as it is depersonalised and extended to 'members only', Markus prefers the idealised concept of a 'decent society' which promotes the dignity of each person. According to her,

> a decent society is one whose institutional arrangements are oriented by principles, norms, and rules directed at creating and maintaining conditions of dignified, humanly meaningful life for all its members and that is able to extend its civility and decency to non-members as well (Markus, 2001: 1022).

Markus' utopian wish for a so-called 'decent society' is an extension of how civility is perceived by most people who desire to (re)capture the communitarian ideal. Yet it does not detract from the fact that civility, civic-mindedness, manners, decency and the likes are really cultivated norms, useful for the purposes of conducting one's moral conduct. As Hunt makes known in his extensive study on moral regulation, social, cultural and political practices which enforce the (re)shaping of the self to engender civic and moral order in society contributes most effectively to the overall functioning of governmentality (Hunt, 1999: 214-5).

In summary, the concatenation of a limited state, a market-driven economy, and the emergent practice of civility constitutes the somewhat liberal and most prevalent elucidation of contemporary civil society. It can be said at this juncture that Singapore's approach to civic/civil society does conform on the whole to this popular understanding. The problem, however, lies with the fact that the phrase 'civil society' has been (loosely) applied to anything and everything requiring state, non-state and/or grassroots involvement. I would argue that Yeo's separate exhortation for civic society vis-à-vis civil society should be taken as a delineation of the concept in Singapore (and possibly elsewhere). If so, *civil* society would refer to 'political' activity, meaning participation in governmental policy and decision making; whereas *civic* society would refer to the socio-cultural aspects of civility and/or decency, including the (stereo)typically Singaporean public discourses of courtesy, graciousness and politeness, to which the next section of the chapter will turn to.

Civilising Singapore: Courtesy as Civil Society

The discourse of civic society in Singapore, which stresses the positive attributes of civility, kindness and public orderliness, is certainly not overtly problematic in a political sense. In fact, with its direct emphases on civic responsibility, honesty, spirit of voluntarism, decency and respect for racial and religious diversity and harmony, it echoes very strongly of what George Yeo terms 'the Singapore idea' in the opening quote to this chapter. Furthermore, Singapore's 'courtesy' agenda is a welcome contribution to a vast collection of literature on how to attain a refined and gracious society, especially in a city notoriously ridden with rigid rules and regulations. Certainly, many forms of civilised

societies have been advocated throughout history, from Plato's *Republic* to Moore's *Utopia* to Confucius' depiction of *Great Harmony* where he describes an ideal society (Hsing, 1993: x-xi).

Such 'manuals' on life and morality, including the Singaporean discourse of courtesy, would arguably come under the category of 'moral regulation' advanced by Hunt (1999). According to him, moral regulation "comprises 'moralisation' rather than 'morality', and thus is relational, asserting some generalised sense of the wrongness of some conduct, habit or disposition" (Hunt, 1999: 8). The act of 'moralisation' is really an act of division, what Foucault refers to as "dividing practices" (1983: 210), delineating between those who are civil or well-mannered as opposed to those who are deemed uncivil and, perhaps, immoral or amoral. These dividing practices impact upon those who are caught under such loose moral categorisations, for they unwittingly become de facto targets of moral campaigns. According to Hunt (1999: 8), these people are then constructed, both through the actions of others and their action upon themselves, as 'subjects' for the purposes of moral regulation and the conduct of conduct (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1989).

The moralising discourse of civic society in Singapore is well captured and exemplified by the annual Courtesy Campaign, which took off in 1979 upon the initiation of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lee was really interested in engineering a 'cultivated society' that would move in tandem with economic and political developments to ensure the long-term security and prosperity of Singapore (MITA, 1995:

20). The first campaign slogan, 'Make Courtesy Our Way of Life', not only encouraged civil servants to be polite to the public, it attempted to 'moralise' the public into behaving in 'acceptable' manners, especially in public. Basic manners and public-spirited behaviour such as giving up of one's seat to the elderly while travelling on buses or trains and saying 'thank you' in response to a kind deed were some of the notable highlights of the early campaign(s). Since then, and with each new slogan, the target groups have grown to include issues of poor neighbourliness (1982), irritable bus and taxi drivers (1992), and more recently, inconsiderate mobile phone users (1998, and again in 2000) (Singapore Courtesy Council, 1999: 11-2). The broad-based approach of these campaigns meant that all citizens would fit into the 'target audience' group at one point in time or another, thus "keeping the courtesy message always visible" (MITA, 1995: 23), and ensuring the continual 'subjectification' of the individual (Foucault, 1983; Hunt, 1999).

To keep up with changing times and to promote Internet etiquette (or 'netiquette') in cyberspace – perceived by many in its early days as existing in the realm of the 'ungovernable' – the Singapore Courtesy Council launched its website in 1998 not only to address the subject of courtesy on the Internet, but also to demonstrate its ability to keep in touch with technological progress.[72] Judging by the plethora of activities on aspects of civility and graciousness since the commencement of the Courtesy Campaign in 1979 – which aimed to produce a highly cultivated, and therefore civic, society – it is

[72] This Internet site, formerly http://www.sg/courtesy, has been decommissioned following the dissolution of the Singapore Courtesy Council in 2001. For more information on the workings and history of Singapore's Courtesy Campaign, see the 20th Anniversary publication by the Singapore Courtesy Council (1999), or visit the Courtesy 'sub-page' within the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) website at: http://www.singaporekindness.org.sg/courtesy/c_index.htm (correct as at March 2004). Website links can also be made via the main website of the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA): http://www.mita.gov.sg.

evident that more innovative ways of promoting such positive behavioural traits and moral characteristics will continue to be employed. Although state leaders and event organisers inevitably speak fondly of the usefulness of the many campaigns and movements, its actual success in moulding civilised and civic-minded citizens is and will remain a moot point. One thing, however, is clear: Lee Kuan Yew has stated unequivocally that the annual Courtesy Campaign – like the rule of the PAP government – "is a marathon with no finishing line" (Lee, 1994, in Singapore Courtesy Council, 1999: 21).

In 1996, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong reinforced Singapore's attempt at 'civilising' society by launching the pilot Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM). The SKM's mission aims "to inspire graciousness through spontaneous acts of kindness, making life more pleasant for everyone" (SKM website).[73] In February 2001, the Singapore Courtesy Council was dissolved and all courtesy campaign programmes were subsumed under the SKM from 1 March 2001. The SKM, which emphasises the development of a gracious society, where "kindness embraces courtesy" – deemed in the SKM's creed as "one of the hallmarks of a civil society" (SKM website) – was seen as an appropriate and rational successor of the much-vaunted Courtesy Campaign. After all, according to official SKM statement, courtesy (the 'form') is the most fundamental expression of kindness (the 'substance').

[73] The mission statement, as well as information regarding the activities of the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM), is available on its website: www.singaporekindness.org.sg.

The Singaporean campaign *for* courtesy and kindness, whilst apparently socially and culturally focussed in its attempt at inculcating civility in thought and behaviour, also serves a political purpose in helping Singaporean citizens to, as Benedict Anderson (1983) would say, 'imagine' Singapore as their beloved nation. Indeed, campaigns are seen as "the proving grounds" for the government to display its moral values and its effectiveness in managing day-to-day grassroots issues and problems (MITA, 1995: 20). As Minister George Yeo reveals most succinctly:

> The Courtesy Campaign helps us to build a Singapore nation. We inherited from the British a Singapore that prospered as a trading post but had no sense of nationhood. With independence, our goal must be to create a sense of oneness among the diverse groups that live here. Part of the glue is proper behaviour which courtesy expresses. [...] While our strategic objective to promote courtesy is fixed, our tactics must be constantly refreshed (Yeo, in Singapore Courtesy Council, 1999: 113).

With its emphasis on 'proper behaviour' to achieve 'a sense of oneness', the discourse of courtesy is arguably one of many governmental techniques developed to define the scopes of cultural citizenship, identity and nationhood in Singapore. More importantly, it enables the authorities to remain creative in conjuring and refreshing "tactics" and strategies for governmental engagement with the citizenry, and vice versa (Foucault, 1978: 95; and, 1988b: 153).

Although Yeo's reference to the constant refreshing of "tactics" is made in the context of the former Courtesy Campaign, it is conceptually and analytically useful to think in Foucauldian terms (cf. Foucault, 1978, 1988a and 1988b). For moral regulation, as enacted in the task of governing oneself and one's civic behaviour, is as Hunt puts it,

> a discrete mode of regulation existing alongside and interacting with political and economic modes of regulation. Moral regulation as a form of

> regulation is not itself static; it changes its forms, its language and also its associates (Hunt, 1999: 17).

The re-packaging of courtesy as kindness and graciousness is therefore part and parcel of Singapore's political cum economic lifecycle. Just as there are 'perpetual revisionisms' of public policies in Singapore (Barr, 2003; as discussed in Chapter Three), there are bound to be revisions and movements in moral and cultural discourses. Notwithstanding these changes, one thing stays constant: these attempts at reframing 'civility' are really concerned with the conduct and ethical subjectivity of individuals, groups and the Singaporean society at large. It is therefore crucial, in attempting to understand the composition and construct of civic or civil society in Singapore, to make sense of its 'politics'.

The Politics of Civil Society

> [A] prince must have the friendship of the common people; otherwise he will have no support in times of adversity. [...] And, a wise prince should think of a method by which his citizens, at all times and every circumstances, will need the assistance of the state and of himself; and then they will always be loyal to him (Machiavelli, 1979: 35-36).

In many parts of Asia, as in other parts of the world, the revival of interest in civil society both as an analytical concept and as a social revitalisation programme has much to do with the end of the Cold War, the virtual eradication of communist threats, and the beginnings of a global transition from authoritarianism to democracy which is closely aligned to the embrace of a free market economy (see Katz, 1998; Hewison and Rodan, 1996). The emergence of civil society in Asia has also coincided with transformations brought about by rapid modernisation, the rise of a 'new rich' middle class with demands

for greater political participation and transparency (see Robison and Goodman, 1996), and the heralding of the new information economy, a project that is being re-ignited with Asian economies recovering from the financial crisis of 1997-99.

Notwithstanding the historical and global contexts of civil society, when state authorities, political actors and the general public give voice to civil society in government-made Singapore, chances are that they are referring to an orderly 'civic society', but at times to the non-state sphere of 'civil society', or perhaps to an uneasy combination of both. The ambivalence and confusion, if any, is dismissed, even 'de-politicised' by Minister George Yeo as the concept of 'civil society', according to him, is really a challenge for Singapore's state and society to 'bind', 'optimise' and 'exist together' (as cited in the opening quote to this chapter). Differently put, civil society is not just about citizenship in the form of voting rights and the right to carry a Singapore passport, it is more veraciously about emotional and ideological attachment to Singapore (Yeo, 1991: 2; see also Yeo, 2004). To be sure, every discourse on civic and/or civil society in Singapore is highly politicised, for the act of 'de-politicisation', if at all possible, is always-already political.

The political dimension of civil society, as it has evolved in Singapore and as noted in the opening section of this chapter, promises opportunities for citizens to become stakeholders and joint owners in the social, cultural and economic milieus of the country (Koh and Ooi, 2000: 13). Singaporean academic Koh Tai Ann (1998) suggests that Singapore's model of *civic* society seeks primarily to forestall the potentially

destabilising 'politicking' practices of civil society. One novel way to divert attention from 'politicking' is to place stress on the term 'civic', for it spells how citizens ought to behave and conduct themselves in the public domain, as discussed in the previous section on courtesy as civic/civil society. Clearly, Minister George Yeo, along with other ministerial or community leaders, has prudently opted to emphasise the 'civic'. This strategy is undoubtedly elemental, yet most practicable. The 'trick' is to keep citizens occupied in activities that are deemed civic, gracious and civilised so that they would keep a safe distance away from *real* political activities such as political lobbying, protests, campaigning, or even politically-induced violence. After all, the aim towards a gracious, kind and cultivated (and) civic society appears to be the preferred reading of what a 'civic' version of civil society might mean in Singapore. As Chua Beng Huat discloses:

> [Civic society] is preferred by the government for its emphasis on the 'civic' responsibilities of citizens as opposed to that of the 'rights' of citizenship emphasized in the conventional understanding of the concept of 'civil society'. This shift of emphasis is consistent with the PAP's language of politics (Chua, 2000: 63).

The emergent Singapore idea of civic/civil society retains its strong affinity to issues of democracy, culture, politics and governance, notwithstanding the preference for a civic citizenry model based on 'responsibilities' rather than 'rights' (see Jones, 1998; and, Rodan, 1996a/b).[74] Indeed, the very use of "language of politics" by the ruling PAP party

[74] Singapore is an active participant in the Inter Action Council (IAC), led by former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and graced by key members from the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Thailand, and others. Following the 1997 Hamburg meeting, The IAC issued a draft Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities to 'complement' the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 Dec 1948. Schmidt's rationale, which applies most cogently to the present discussion of civil society in Singapore, is that "for any society to function well, there must be a balance between rights and responsibilities" (Koh, 1999: 16). The crux of the matter is that Singapore subscribes to 'human responsibilities' above 'human rights'. See the volume entitled *Human Rights Perspectives* edited by Tan and Sridharan (1999), especially the chapter by Kwok (2000).

to describe both civic and civil society makes the entire discourse deeply political (Chua, 2000: 63). Even George Yeo himself concedes that the political dimension is always-already present whether one talks of civic or civil society; for terms in politics and politics itself are, after all, part and parcel of culture and everyday life (Yeo, 1999: 12; Kumar, 1993: 382-3).

Like most aspects of politics and culture in Singapore, civic or civil society has its own 'special meanings', explicable and interpretable only by the ruling PAP government (see Yao, 1996). Whether or not citizens of the island-state comprehend the Singapore idea is of little relevance; the fact that its influence remains highly pervasive renders civil society, or any other political discourse, most pertinent. This is because the cryptic notion of the 'Singapore idea', like the ambivalent and hybrid East/West cultural set-up of Singapore, represents the ideal-typical version (*à la* Weber's *Idealtyp* category) of civic/civil society that the Singapore government hopes to shape with the active participation of every citizen (Keane, 1998: 6-7; partly discussed in Chapter One). Yet, as Chua points out, the shape of this 'Singapore idea', marked by a 'new relationship' between the PAP government and the citizenry is unclear, with the process of negotiation between what he considers the 'two partners in governance' remaining in constant flux (Chua, 2000: 65).

To Chua, such semantic and conceptual ambiguities are useful for political praxis as they accord negotiating room for both parties within the state-civil society 'partnership' paradigm. It is certainly political expedient to couch state-civil society

relation as a strategic business-like 'partnership' rather than a 'great dichotomy' (see Bobbio, 1989). However, Chua fails to point out that negotiations have a tendency to be carried out inequitably and with a strong bias towards the more powerful 'partner'. It would certainly be ideal if the moulding of this new 'civil society' paradigm is carried out equitably, for it would demonstrate the strengths of a dialogic and participatory civil society. Yet this is precisely what is lacking in the Singaporean discourse of civil society. To put it cogently, civil society groups in Singapore are not sufficiently autonomous for debates to be deemed dialogic. For this reason, a high-profiled, non-partisan policy discussion and civil society advocate group adopted the name 'The Roundtable' to illustrate the need for a more amicable and transparent relationship between the state and society.[75]

The likelihood of a truly dialogic and participatory civil society materialising in Singapore, under existing regulations and legislations, remains questionable. This can be attributed, among other things, to an extremely low rate of political participation, especially in terms of public feedback. From a 'civic' perspective, citizens tend to exhibit a general unwillingness to sign up as members of (civil society) interests groups or volunteer themselves for social work (Chiang, 2000: 191-3).[76] Indeed, much has been

[75] The Roundtable announced its dissolution in April 2004, having come to the cryptic conclusion that "it had fulfilled what it set out to do" (*The Straits Times Interactive*, April 13, 2004). Originally established at the end of 1993, its mission was to encourage and enlarge the scope of citizens' participation in civil society. During its tenure, the Roundtable's Committee comprised mainly successful professionals, most of whom have some links to the government directly, through employment, or through co-optation (such as via the Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) scheme (as discussed earlier).

[76] Abdullah Tarmugi, Singapore's Minister for Community Development, noted at an Institute of Policy Studies conference in November 1998 that the rate of volunteerism in Singapore stands at about 10% (as compared with 39% in the United States and 25% in Japan). According to him, volunteerism has a crucial role to play in the development of a 'civil society' (in Ooi, 1998: 3).

said about how Singapore polity resonates with a climate of fear, which gives rise to the prevalent practice and sentiment of self-censorship (see Gomez, 2000; and, Tremewan, 1994), to the extent that many avoid or even vilify participation in activities that are held within the public sphere. After all, most Singaporeans are well aware of their 'rightful' place in a society that demands utility via docility (Foucault, 1977). Singaporean political scientist Ho Khai Leong expresses the view of most Singapore citizens when he proclaims that:

> the extent to which Singapore's citizens can influence policy making depends on the extent to which the PAP allows it to happen. The basic ground rules are set from above and citizenry is merely passively reacting to those regulations (Ho, 2000: 447).

On the one hand, Ho's statement represents a popular (mis)conception of Singapore. On the other hand, to say that the Singaporean citizenry is 'merely passive' to state actions and regulations is, I would argue, too simplistic and reductive. Not only does it dismiss the possibility of a civic and/or civil society, it also negates efforts to open up new or prospective spaces for different levels of political participation, whether these are passive or active, or whether these efforts materialise or not. In other words, attempts made by individuals or groups to fashion some degree of civil society, however embryonic, must be acknowledged.[77]

The early work of Carole Pateman, better known for her ground-breaking feminist work *The Sexual Contract*, stresses political participation as the key foundation of

[77] Examples of groups that would fall under the umbrella of 'successful' civil/civic society groups in Singapore (as at April 2004) would include: the eco-environmental group, The Nature Society (www.post1.com/home/naturesingapore) and the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) (www.aware.org.sg). For further information on these groups, refer to the respective websites.

democracy (Pateman, 1970). Political and social scientists often make distinctions between passive and active participation in politics, with the former referring to those who are generally well-informed of public affairs (usually via the mass media), and the latter to a range of political 'activities'. 'Active' participation, for most people, is restricted to vote-casting at elections, whether done compulsorily or voluntarily. For a minority, it also involves joining civic and/or political organisations and voicing grievances directly to authority figures and government bodies (Painter, 1992: 21-2; see also Richardson, 1983). While it might appear that only members of the more vocal group are 'active citizens', I would argue that political participation *willy-nilly* involves both the vociferous as well as the muted. Political participation, whether actively or passively applied, is an *activity* of immense importance and consequence. Those who choose not to vocalise their thoughts on a particular policy issue are, in effect, rendering and registering their support via acquiescence. One could, in effect, call this 'passive' or non-confrontational participation. As Pateman points out, "participation must be participation in something", meaning to say that one is either a participant in the role and method of decision-making or a recipient who 'participates' in a decision that has already been made (Pateman, 1970: 68).

Rather than dwell on the dichotomy between active versus passive participation, I suggest that a more fruitful approach is to look at Pateman's (1970) establishment of three different participatory situations: 'pseudo', 'partial' and 'full' participation. The first, *pseudo* participation, is restricted to such processes as informing and endorsement of a pre-determined decision. In this model, no participation in decision-making actually

takes place; rather, a feeling of participation is created using what Pateman calls "a technique of persuasion" (Pateman, 1970: 69). In contemporary contexts, persuasive techniques could be categorised under the umbrella of public relations practice and the management of what has become popularly known as 'spin'. The second approach of *partial* participation gives the participant some opportunities for exercising influence, but reserves final power and authority to the key decision-maker. In this model, ideas and opinions are welcome, but whether or not they will be heeded is at the absolute discretion of the power-wielding elite. The third is a situation of *full* participation where each individual of a decision-making body is accorded equal power to determine the outcome of decisions (Pateman, 1970: 70-1).

The third model of *full* participation, which would appeal to the idealist, is arguably unworkable in an illiberal or authoritarian regime like Singapore for many reasons. Not only would it weaken established authoritarian structures, its affinity with 'Western' ideas of individualism and liberal interpretation of democratic cum human rights makes its application in a society that professes Confucianist 'Asian-ness' highly problematic. In this regard, the Singapore Government's ambivalence towards political participation and active citizenship makes both *pseudo* and *partial* participatory models more meaningful in considering the elements of civil society in Singapore. The next section of this chapter expands on these two participatory models by examining *Singapore 21*, the official vision splendid of Singapore in the twenty-first century. *Singapore 21* is, as will be outlined, one of the most wide-ranging government statement of recent years, encompassing all facets of Singaporean life from the economic,

intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural, to the social (Fernandez, 1997: 1). Above all, though, the vision of *Singapore 21* is an exercise in political and public relations expedience: it is aimed at managing political apathy and allaying increasingly widespread fears – predominantly by the middle class – about the lack of citizen participation and civil society in Singapore.

As Machiavelli advises in the opening quote to this section, the prince should "think of a method" to ensure political support and longevity (Machiavelli, 1979: 35-6). Unveiled on the eve of the new millennium (2000), *Singapore 21* adopts this very Machiavellian approach by attempting to establish necessary rapport with the people. Using highly politicised terms like 'active citizenship' and 'every Singapore matters' in seemingly depoliticised ways, I argue that the *Singapore 21* vision – like all other governmental visions as well as cryptic calls to embrace civic cum civil society – is aimed at (re)establishing, as Machiavelli puts it, the "friendship of the common people" so that "they will always be loyal to him" (1979: 35-6).

Active Citizenship as Civil Society

> Citizenship is not a reality TV show. You cannot just watch in the comfort of your home. You need to participate. Every time we participate, we reaffirm our membership and allegiance to our fellow citizens, our community and our country. [Participation] is critical in rooting Singaporeans to the country.
>
> - Raymond Lim, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry (2004: 11)

In 1999, Singapore's national vision for the 21st century, entitled *Singapore 21: Together We Make The Difference*, was unveiled. Published as a glossy hardcover document, *Singapore 21* was adopted as the governmental vision statement for Singapore as it prepared for the new millennium to unfold. It has been preceded most prominently by somewhat similar statements, including *Singapore: The Next Lap* (in 1991) and *Vision 1999* (in 1984). Although *Singapore 21* has since been partially superseded by – or, as some would argue, fine tuned with – the 2003 report of the Remaking Singapore Committee, entitled *Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships*, it remains highly significant due to the many debates on related issues of political participation, active citizenship, and indeed civil society, that ensued following its public release in early 1999.

The project of *Singapore 21* was launched by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong on 19 October 1997, almost two months after mooting the idea during the annual Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech on 24 August 1997 (Fernandez, 1997: 1). The primary objective of this project was to build and strengthen the 'heartware' of Singapore in the twenty-first century. 'Heartware', a term coined by PM Goh at his National Day Rally Speech, can be construed as the Singapore Government's attempt to redefine citizenship as embodying a 'sense of ownership' (Goh, 1997: 43). According to the Preface to *Singapore 21*, the social capital of 'heartware' is to be attained via "the intangibles of society – social cohesion, political stability and the collective will, values and attitudes of a people". These terms are arguably vague as the "will, values and attitudes" of people are almost impossible to pin down at any point in time. Yet they are

supposed to be understood and embodied by the people in an uncritical and unproblematic way.

Instead of attempting to define intangible and possibly ineffable ideals, the Prime Minister's office appointed a centralised Singapore 21 Committee and five subject committees with a total of 83 members drawn from all walks of life.[78] The issues for deliberation were posed by various ministerial offices as five apparent dilemmas that Singaporeans commonly encounter, not unlike Haas' (1999a) paradoxical 'sub-puzzles' introduced in Chapter One of this thesis. The task for each subject committee was to offer practical recommendations to 'resolve' their respective dilemmas.[79] The five dilemmas and their corresponding proposals, presented as the five pillars of *Singapore 21*, are summarised in the following table:

Singapore 21 Table – The Five Dilemmas and Their Corresponding 'Solutions'

No.	**Dilemmas**	**Corresponding Proposed Solutions (i.e. Pillars of *Singapore 21*)**
1	Less stressful life vs retaining the drive	Every Singaporean Matters
2	Needs of senior citizens vs aspirations of the young	Strong Families: Our Foundation And Our Future
3	Attracting talent vs looking after Singaporeans	Opportunities For All
4	Internationalisation/regionalisation vs Singapore as home	The Singapore Heartbeat
5	Consultation and consensus vs decisiveness and quick action	Active Citizens: Making A Difference To Society

[78] The Singapore 21 subject committees comprised Members of Parliament, volunteers in welfare and community organisations, lawyers, unionists, technicians, teachers and many others 'officially approved' citizens. Their names are fine-printed on the inside front and back cover of the *Singapore 21* document.

[79] The deliberations of all five subject committees were summarised and published as five separate booklets. The booklets were then consolidated into a folder entitled *Summary of the Deliberations of the Subject Committees to the Singapore 21 Committee* (1999) and submitted to the Main Committee.

The *Singapore 21* blueprint is, to a certain extent, a triumphant step forward for local civic or civil society groups seeking to enhance citizens' participation in public affairs. Indeed, the central theme of this vision is, as noted by Singaporean public policy researcher Gillian Koh, "to encourage active citizenship where Singaporeans would take ownership of the issues and problems of their community and nation, and rise up to address these needs to build a brighter future together" (Koh, 1999: Introduction). *Singapore 21* has also been referred to as a 'new social contract' between the government and citizens, aimed at building social capital for citizens to stay cohesive and rooted to Singapore and to give voice to all Singaporeans (*The Straits Times*, Aug 7, 2000: 6-7; Ooi, Tan and Koh, 1999: 127). As David Lim, former Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts, declared in a speech commemorating the first 'anniversary' of *Singapore 21*:

> [W]e believe the Singapore 21 can grow: Not by a top-down directive and push, but rather through bottom-up initiative and association. We believe that Singapore 21 can be a sustaining and empowering idea, if those who believe in it come forward to identify with the idea, and to claim this as their foundation for the future. By their example, others will be encouraged to follow (in *The Straits Times*, Aug 7, 2000: 6).

Despite the apparently well-intentioned agenda of *Singapore 21* to "encourage active citizenship", it is most ironic that its very foundation – that is, the five pressing dilemmas and the specially selected subject committee members – has been laid down in a top-down fashion. On this issue at least, Ho's (2000: 47) contention that citizenship is about passively reacting to regulations "set from above" is not unwarranted. Although *Singapore 21* has been depicted, from the outset, as a large-scale consultative exercise

involving some 6,000 ordinary Singaporeans (Singapore 21 Committee: Preface), it is negatively perceived by many as yet another motherhood statement of the self-proclaimed all-knowing Singapore government. In a survey commissioned by the authorities to gauge public opinion on *Singapore 21* (in June 2000), almost one in four respondents expressed scepticism – and cynicism – at the vision statement, dismissing it as government propaganda or a political ploy. In other words, *Singapore 21* is deemed an exercise in *pseudo* participation. The Government, in what could be seen as tacit collaboration with the local *Straits Times* local press, chose to interpret the results of the survey as "encouraging and instructive", arguing that this 'significant minority' can be won over, or perhaps co-opted, to play a useful role in providing constructive feedback (*The Straits Times*, Aug 7, 2000: 7).

The concept of feedback, understood quite simply as the expression of one's views on public policy, is deemed one of the most evident and active signs of citizen participation in government (Painter, 1992: 22; Munro-Clark, 1992: 13). Yet, it has been – and remains – a vexed political issue in Singapore, with a sizeable number of Singaporeans politically apathetic, passively docile or fearful of reprisal.[80] This condition is understandable in view of the fact that the highest consultation channel in Singapore, the centrally-controlled Feedback Unit, headed by PAP Members of Parliament (MPs) and civil servants, was created "out of political necessity" in March 1985 (Nirmala, 2004; Fernandez, 2004). The formation of the Feedback Unit was a result of the PAP

[80] See study done by Ooi, Tan and Koh (1999) on the extent of political participation and policy involvement in Singapore. See also an earlier study by Tan and Chiew (1990); and, most recently, Ho (2000).

government's frustration of losing two seats to the opposition and winning a smaller share of the popular vote than expected at the General Elections of 1984 (Nirmala, 2004). As Birch (1993a: 8-9) explicates, one of the key words of the post-Lee Kuan Yew's 'New Guard' has been 'feedback', designed not so much to replace a top-down mode of rule, but to manage dissenting voices or public dissonance. At the annual conference of Feedback Groups in Singapore in January 2004, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry, Raymond Lim, reiterated the prime objectives of the Feedback Unit, in a speech entitled "Feedback and the Public Purpose", by declaring that:

> Feedback makes policy formulation in government a more informed process, ensuring above all that it is relevant. It also makes policy implementation a more effective process, as it enhances public receptiveness based on a better understanding and acceptance of the policy (Lim, 2004: 11).

Minister Lim's statement makes it quite clear that prime intention of the Feedback Unit is to enhance "public receptiveness" to government policies. Any feedback on policies, especially impending and potentially unpopular ones, would thus facilitate the forging of "consensus politics" between the citizenry and the government (Birch, 1993a: 9). In this way, the concept of feedback and/or consultation becomes another technology of governmentality, used to gauge political support or otherwise. As a result, those who do not support specific policies would never use established feedback channels to voice their thoughts.

The framing of 'Active citizenship: Making a Difference to Society', the fifth pillar of *Singapore 21*, is both a measured response and a subtle attempt at addressing this long-standing problem of political apathy and passivity, measured predominantly by

Singaporeans' reluctance or lackadaisical approach to feedback. It is interesting to note from a 2003 survey that while 80 per cent of Singaporeans find the Feedback Unit's channels accessible and adequate, and 77 per cent acknowledge the Unit as an effective means for feedback, only about 6,800 feedback inputs – out of a total population numbering more than 4 million – were received that same year (Tan, 2004). By contrast, however, the Forum page of the national and most widely-read daily *The Straits Times* attracts more than 2000 letters every month. The *Straits Times* Forum page has become, virtually by default, the most popular site for public feedback and discussion in Singapore, serving to amplify public sentiments on a broad range of social, cultural, economic and, to a lesser extent, political issues (Liew, 2002). However, it is important to note that while the Forum page has been labelled the "most democratic space in Singapore" (Lim, 2002), the extent to which one can engage in political debate through this forum is almost solely determined by editorial decision and judgement. If the media in Singapore is, as Birch (1993a: 40) notes in Althusserian terms, an "ideological state apparatus", then genuine or active participation in policy-making via the state-managed newspaper outlet is either futile or not possible. The corollary is that letters that are deemed politically offensive or destabilising would not make the cut, thus making the Forum page a politically-unproblematic space for the establishment.

The call by *Singapore 21* to embrace active citizenship needs to be examined against the backdrop of authoritarian governmentality and political apathy in Singapore. Calls to participate are typically accompanied by important caveats, including unwritten rules about the limits of participation. Riding on the context of the Forum page, what is

not being said tends to speak louder than what is or has been (Lim, 2004). In this regard, active citizenship is about how one could become a good and obedient citizen by working with and alongside the state to minimise resistances to government policies. Indeed, according to *Singapore 21*:

> Active citizenship means taking an active part, as a citizen, in making the country a better place to live. It means realising that every citizen has a stake in this country. Active citizens keep themselves well informed of issues and challenges facing the country. Instead of leaving it to the Government to do all the thinking, they offer feedback and suggestions founded on thoughtful consideration, with the aim of making things better. And more importantly, they take action and assume responsibility, rolling up their sleeves to help implement what they envision or suggest (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999: 51).

It is interested to note how this preferred definition of 'active citizenship' draws upon all three levels of political participation put forth by Pateman (1970). Keeping oneself "well informed of issues and challenges facing the country" is an obvious form of *pseudo* participation. Offering "feedback and suggestions" – whether directly through the government's Feedback Unit or indirectly via *The Straits Times* Forum page or elsewhere – takes it a step further into the realm of *partial* participation; and last but not least, "rolling up sleeves to help implement" contains elements of *full* participation.

Due to the political underpinnings and connotations, the question of active participation cum citizenship has become one of the most, if not *the* most, discussed and contested aspect of the *Singapore 21* vision. Corresponding media, and thus public, attention paid to the cultivation of civil society in Singapore at that time had been a direct result of the call for active citizenship. The willingness of the authorities to engage in discussions on civil society can thus be construed as an attempt to engender active

citizenship in the hope of appeasing apparent demands from the ground for increased political participation and to deal with growing political alienation of the citizenry (Ooi, Tan and Koh, 1999; Tan and Chiew, 1990).

It came as little surprise that many civic groups seized the opportunity to publicly announce new agendas and goals. For example, The Working Committee (TWC), a civil society advocate group, proclaimed in October 1999 that it was going online to promote civil society (Lim, 1999). Even the well-known Internet-based association 'People Like Us' (PLU), a group which aims to promote awareness of issues concerning gays, lesbians and bisexual persons, decided – following the unveiling of the *Singapore 21* vision – to "roll up their sleeves" and take the Government to task over their 'rightful' place in society. In May 2000, an application by PLU to hold a public forum on 'Gays and Lesbians within Singapore 21' was rejected by the Police Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) on the grounds that "the mainstream moral values of Singaporeans are conservative", and that Singapore's Penal Code has clear provisions against certain homosexual practices.[81] Such rejections are, of course, not new for the PLU, which has failed twice – in 1997 and again in early 2004 – to register as an official civil society group. Other marginalised groups are also likewise bound by various legislative codes, as well as a highly restrictive and subjective Societies Act. According to this piece of legislation, the Registrar of Societies may turn down applications because they are either likely to be used for unlawful purposes or purposes "prejudicial to public peace, welfare

[81] Reference is made to Singapore's Penal Code Sections 377 and 377(a), which clearly outlaw homosexual practices. For a summary of these legalities, as well as the history and activities of 'People Like Us', see PLU's website at: www.plu-singapore.com.

and good order"; or are likely to act against broad "national interest" (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Apr 6, 2004).[82] PLU's attempt to capitalise on the 'momentum' of *Singapore 21* in 2000 for the advancement of gay rights, barely a year after the release of the grand vision, was curtly dismissed by the authorities. This episode sparked a short-lived controversy within the pages of local newspapers. More importantly, it sent a clear reminder – or more accurately, a stern warning – that the so-called active citizenship and participation in Singapore's context not only has legal, social and cultural limits, but comes with political and ideological boundaries that can and will be strictly enforced at the sole discretion of the authorities.

With the final word always resting upon the authorities, political and/or public participation in Singapore is at best *partial* and at worst *pseudo*, but never *full*. Or as Rodan puts it, there is an "apparent gulf between government rhetoric about increased political tolerance and the practice of the authorities" (Rodan, 1996b: 112-3). In other words, there has been no careless error in the framing of the fifth *Singapore 21* dilemma: 'Consensus and Consultation vs Decisiveness and Quick Action'. The 'new' rhetoric about cultivating civil society and active citizenship is, in effect, a public relations exercise aimed at establishing a credo that endorses the existence of political boundaries under the umbrella of "decisiveness and quick action", particularly when bureaucratic efficiency is called upon or when Singapore's "competitive advantage in the global

[82] Following a review, and subsequent amendment, to Singapore's highly pervasive Societies Act in 2000, civic or interest groups that do not pursue "civil or political rights" have been allowed to be "automatically registered" via a 'light-touch' approach that is, I would suggest, similar to how Internet Class Licence regulation operates in Singapore (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jul 17, 2004). See Chapter Five of this thesis for a detailed analysis of what I refer to as Internet and technological auto-regulation in Singapore.

economy" is at stake (*Summary of the Deliberations*, 1999: 16). The corollary is that "consensus and consultation", the hallmarks of genuine participation, can be conveniently and tactically dismissed. As a result, political boundaries in Singapore – euphemistically termed 'OB markers', a golfing analogy which stands for 'out-of-bounds markers' – remain firmly etched in the minds of many Singapore citizens and observers, even though most, including government ministers, do not quite know how to define them.

'Not Playing Golf': OB-markers and Gestural Politics

> [S]ome groups would like [the government] to open faster – not just loosen restrictions but remove them altogether. But while we talk about OB markers and wider fairways, remember that most Singaporeans still do not play golf. Bread and butter issues are still uppermost on their minds. [...] The test of our policies is not how closely we approach an idealised model, but how well we move the majority forward so that we remake Singapore into a dynamic global city and the best home for Singaporeans.
>
> - Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister Designate Lee Hsien Loong (in *The Straits Times Interactive*, Jan 7, 2004)

The concept of the OB-markers arose following an episode in 1994 dubbed 'The Catherine Lim affair' (Koh, 1998: 4).[83] On 20th November 1994, well-known Singaporean novelist and social commentator Catherine Lim's political commentary entitled 'One Government, Two Styles' was published in the Sunday edition of

[83] Although the category of 'OB-markers', in various forms of (self-)censorship codes and legislations, had always-already existed, it received unprecedented publicity with the 'Catherine Lim affair'.

Singapore's *Straits Times* daily.[84] In it, Lim opined that Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's promise of a more open, consultative and consensual leadership style had been abandoned in favour of the authoritarian style of his predecessor, referring specifically to the former premier Lee Kuan Yew (Lim, 1994b: 12). The gist of Lim's contention was that:

> Over the years, a pattern of governance has emerged that is not exactly what was envisaged. Increasingly, the promised Goh style of people-orientation is being subsumed under the old style of top-down decisions (Lim, 1994: 12).

Exactly a fortnight after this (on December 4, 1994), the 'Catherine Lim affair' officially 'began'. In a written reply to Lim, published in the same newspaper, the Prime Minister's press secretary, Chan Heng Wing, defended Goh's style of rule by stating that "PM Goh remains committed to consultation and consensus politics" (Chan, 1994a: 4). Goh himself reacted the following day, rebuking Lim for "going beyond the pale" in undermining his authority as Prime Minister, an action deemed unacceptable and disrespectful in the Confucianist 'Asian context' (Chua, 1994: 1). More significantly, Goh articulated in no uncertain terms that political commentators should expect strong rebuttals from the government if they attacked specific politicians or policies. In addition, Prime Minister Goh outlined what were to become known as OB-markers, or the parameters of political debate:

[84] Catherine Lim's article of Nov 20, 1994 was preceded by an earlier, less critical, piece entitled 'The PAP and the People – A Great Affective Divide', published in *The Straits Times Weekly Edition* (Sep 10, 1994). It is interesting to note, somewhat uncannily, that another article which appeared on the same day (Nov 20, 1994) also questioned in the PAP's style of government. Written by prominent *Straits Times* columnist Sumiko Tan, this article was not mentioned through the entire 'Catherine Lim affair', probably because of Tan's measured – and 'safe' – conclusion that it was "too early to measure the progress of Mr Goh's more open government, or the lack of it" (Tan, 1994: 2). Nevertheless, Tan's 'escape' from any scrutiny remains somewhat mysterious.

> If a person wants to set the agenda for Singapore by commenting regularly on politics, [the government's] view has been, and it is my view too, that the person should do this in the political arena. Because if you are outside the political arena and influence opinion, and if people believe that your policies are right, when we know they are wrong, you are not there to account for the policy (Goh, cited in Chua, 1994: 1).

Press Secretary Chan reiterated the Prime Minister's message with a second letter to the press on December 29, 1994. Not only did Chan re-emphasise the aims of OB-markers, he rationalised their dubious existence by contending that the boundaries are really "to define limits of the space [the Prime Minister] is expanding" (Chan, 1994b: 26). What Chan means by the 'expansion' of political space is as puzzling as the concept of OB-markers. Last but not least, when Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, effectively a minister without portfolio in Goh's Cabinet, endorsed Goh's authoritative – and indeed, authoritarian – response to Lim's comments almost two months later (Ng, 1995: 1), the political boundaries as well as the depth of surveillance on those boundaries were reinforced and firmly cemented.[85]

Through this saga, it was made patently clear that OB-markers are invoked to limit political engagement, civic action and participation, and anything else remotely linked to domestic politics in Singapore (Tan, K. Y. L., 2000: 103). Of course, what at any point in time constitutes 'politics' remains unclear, and deliberately so. What is evident here, in context of the civil society discourse, is that the PAP government uses a curious combination of political forms and practices to accommodate greater socio-cultural plurality on the one hand, while concurrently using both suppressive and 'auto-

[85] For further reading on the 'Catherine Lim affair', see Fernandez (1994: 30) and other reports in *The Straits Times* (Dec 17, 1994 and Jan 24, 1995). See also comments by Rodan (1996b) and Krishnan et al. (1996).

regulatory' structures to limit its growth and development on the other (Rodan, 1996b: 114; see Lee and Birch, 2000).[86] This is perhaps what Press Secretary Chan was alluding to in his earlier statement on "expanding" political space in Singapore. By invoking the concept of OB-markers, the government is able to restrict public participation and censor commentary on any aspect of politics deemed problematic. The net effect is that any policy or political viewpoint that gets through the government's 'razor gang', real or imagined, is necessarily uncritical, unscrutinised and undebated, or at best, poorly debated.

In June 2003, Raymond Lim, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry and a panel member of the Remaking Singapore Committee, commented that while "the ingenuity of the OB markers is their ambiguity", they have had "a dampening effect on public discourse" (Lee and Neo, 2003). Such admissions by key members of the PAP elite, while useful as far as identifying political apathy among Singaporeans and other related policy failures is concerned, are more often than not futile or purely gestural. Like the presence of OB-markers, these and other governmental statements or decisions facilitate the formation and operation of what I call 'gestural politics' in Singapore. To borrow Pateman's (1970) participatory analogy, gestural politics is essentially *pseudo*-politics, aimed solely at maintaining the feel and appearance of a fully-functioning liberal democracy whilst simultaneously extending its authoritarian stronghold as smoothly and surreptitiously as possible.

[86] Auto-regulatory structures should be read here as disciplinary tactics to ensure the automatic functioning of power and control, so that the need for governmental supervision and surveillance is minimised (see Lee and Birch, 2000). The concept of 'technological auto-regulation' as adapted from Foucault (1977) will be detailed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

The 'Singapore idea' of civil society is an excellent example of gestural politics: on the one hand, citizens are encouraged to harness the positive energies of the *Singapore 21* vision, especially with regard to becoming active citizens; but on the other hand, stern warnings are issued at regular intervals to remind people of the existence of OB-markers and other state-defined – and typically draconian – conditions. For example, in a June 2000 interview with Singapore's main Chinese-language daily *Lianhe Zaobao*, unambiguously entitled 'Views count, but they don't enslave policy', Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng argued that because the government makes the right decisions most of the time, it has the mandate from voters, and therefore the right and responsibility, to "judge and choose from public views" (reported in *The Straits Times Interactive*, Jun 28, 2000). At that interview, Minister Wong made it patently lucid that "while the government listens to public opinion, it will not let popular opinion sway policy decisions". His justification was – and still is, despite the increasing rhetoric of political and cultural openness – that unlike 'myopic' citizens, the government has the long-term view and therefore long-term interest of Singapore(ans) at heart in all of its policy decisions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to counter such panoramic claims in Singapore.

An example of gestural politics in recent times is the opening of a 6,000 square metre Speakers' Corner at Singapore's Hong Lim Park on September 1, 2000. Loosely modelled after London's Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park, the 'official' decision to create Singapore's inaugural – and only – free-speech venue was to "help develop civil society"

by making active citizenship "more visible" (Koh, 2000: 10). Although no special permits are needed, speakers are required to register – preferably up to 30 days in advance – at an adjacent police post, and show proof of his/her Singaporean citizenship, typically one's bar-coded identity card. Aspiring speakers are also advised that all existing Singapore laws, along with the cryptic OB-markers which bars the discussion of racial, religious and sensitive political issues, apply unconditionally (Yap, 2000: 3; Lim, 2000b: 4). While supporters hailed the decision as a positive move towards encouraging 'participatory citizenship', detractors and political opponents consider the soapbox a political farce, arguing that it makes a mockery of Singapore's constitutional right to free speech.

As expected with all political decisions, many questions were raised with regard to the rationale for the opening of a free speech venue in Singapore. The most noteworthy – and also the most overlooked – explanation of Speakers' Corner came from Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong when he described the decision to allow the public airing of views as having 'emblematic' rather than practical significance (Ng, 2000a). In other words, Speakers' Corner is purely gestural, a political tactic ironically aimed at 'silencing' opponents and libertarians who have campaigned many years for the right to open and free speech. The gestural politics of Speakers' Corner also extends into cyberspace as it attempts to lure typically anonymous Internet-based dissent out in the open. With such political and politicised reasons for the existence of Speakers' Corner, the success of this venue in promoting free speech and civil society is nothing short of doubtful. As *The Straits Times* reported on 12 November 2000, less than three months

after its opening, the novelty of Speakers' Corner had faded away with few regular speakers and a sparse, disinterested crowd of listeners (Yeoh, 2000). For better or worse, the deliberate lack of political attention given to issues articulated at the Speakers' Corner from its early days has made it a political non-issue. Its performative and thus gestural existence would ensure its eventual and uneventful demise in due course.

In January 2004, shortly after Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lee Hsien Loong was declared Singapore's next premier, he gave a major speech on the future of politics and society in Singapore at the 35th anniversary dinner of the Harvard Club of Singapore. In a speech clearly intended to set out how he plans to run the country as Prime Minister, slated to take place on August 12, 2004 (Ibrahim, 2004), Lee laid down his protocol for government-people interaction, and the limits of political discourses, by declaring that Singapore "must open up further" by promoting "further civic participation" (Lee, 2004). In a typically Singaporean fashion, Lee offered five broad 'suggestions' – better read as 'instructions' – on how to promote civic participation and therefore build a more 'civic society' in Singapore, namely: guidelines for public consultations on new policies or regulations, space for rigorous and robust debate, an emphasis on action (in the likes of 'active citizenship'), a constructive and "non-crusading" media and a government that continues to lead the way even as it becomes more open to views (Lee, 2004; Chia, 2004a). In recognising that the strength of the state is dependent upon its governmentality, or the proper governing or disposition of "people and things" (Foucault, 1991), Lee Hsien Loong – the elder son of Singapore's elder

statesman Lee Kuan Yew – effectively spelt out *his* rules of governmentality in that speech. As Foucault has already noted:

> The things with which... government is to be concerned with are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other king of things, customs, habit, ways of acting and thinking, etc (Foucault, 1991: 93).

By detailing the terms of engagement and governmentality, the prime minister-designate is pre-empting the effects what Catherine Lim (2004), in a new *Straits Times* commentary piece written in response to Lee's landmark speech, considers as the 'noise' and 'nuisance' of civil society and political criticism. Lim argues that "the problem of political criticism and public debate is entirely manageable, [since it] is only a nuisance and therefore will never merit the attention of a national problem such as unemployment" and other economic challenges (Lim, 2004), referred to by Lee as "bread and butter issues" (refer to the opening quote to this section). Demonstrating the effectiveness of the PAP government's *Realpolitik*, Lee cautions that the (in)famous OB markers, designed to ensure that government authority was not eroded, would continue to apply because the less articulate majority "still do not play golf" (Lee, 2004). In essence, Lee sagaciously uses the 'not playing golf' metaphor to justify further extensions to the parameters of OB-markers into newly-marked commercially- and politically-sensitive areas such as state finances, security and terrorism. As Lee points out in a somewhat Machiavellian tone:

> [N]ot all policies are amenable to public consultation. Security issues are often by nature secret, and foreign policy is best not conducted in the public arena. Tax matters are both market sensitive and difficult to deliberate productively. [...] But even in these cases, we must explain the

> decisions taken publicly, and make a major effort to persuade people to support the policies (Lee, 2004).

The art of governmentality ensures that all available technologies of rule and techniques of persuasion will be utilised not so much to suppress political participation that poses little threat, but to win either active support or passive acquiescence of the less vocal, and presumably moral, majority (see Machiavelli, 1979: 35-6). On these terms, I would argue that the ongoing existence of the wide-ranging and newly-expanded OB markers will continue to control the voice of civil/civic society and deliver greater political mandate to the ruling PAP government, even as it prepares to come under the stewardship of the new Prime Minister Lee from August 2004 (Ibrahim, 2004).

Lee's attempt at (re)presenting the ideals of a "more open" and participatory society in Singapore, particularly using the term 'civic' instead of 'civil' society, is neither new nor novel. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had declared a similar goal for his government in 1990, only for the terms of engagement to be re-defined as OB-markers following the original Catherine Lim saga in 1994. Lee is effectively reinvoking discussions on the discourse of civil society via the less politically-laden term civic participation and society. This 'second take' on civil versus civic society is not so much to declare an 'open' season when Lee takes office, but to signify Singapore's maturity as a society marked by "political openness" and "transparency" as defined by the PAP government. As Prime Minister Goh puts it, in response to Lee's speech, the idea of 'opening-up' is "to give Singaporeans a *sense* that they can make a difference" (Chia, 2004b: 4; emphasis added). In effect, the "sense" and

rhetoric of a politically-open society, whether couched as civil or civic, are elements of what I have referred to as gestural politics.

Veritably, Catherine Lim makes a similar prognosis on the politics of civil society in Singapore when she concludes that:

> The PAP['s] intolerance of political dissent [and civil society] in Singapore society remains, for no other reason than the society's own good; suggestions for change will be taken up only if they happen to fit in with government decisions already made, but the Government will continue to keep an open mind and listen and consult with unfailing patience, in the belief that only in this way, can Singaporeans evolve and mature (Lim, 2004).

If Lim's observation is an accurate depiction of gestural politics in Singapore, the increased take-up of participatory 'golf' in Singapore will remain, for better or worse, negligible (see Teo, 2004).

Conclusion

> 'Civil society' sounds good; it has a good feel to it; it has the look of a fine old wine, full of depth and complexity. Who could possibly object to it, who would not wish for its fulfilment? (Kumar, 1993: 376)

Singapore is emblematic of a globally-savvy, well-plugged-in society that is highly adept at appropriating and advocating the latest management, information, technological, even governmental buzzwords. The concept and language of civic cum civil society is no exception. Like most other social, cultural and political theories, however, each existing application of the theme of civil society is highly variegated, and as such, tends to exhibit its own peculiarities. But given its unique ability to encompass

and encounter a whole range of problems – including, *inter alia*, political participation and active citizenship, ownership, social mores, cultural values, courtesy, kindness and civility; and since September 11, 2001, issues pertaining to global terrorism and homeland security – the concept and ideology of both civic and civil society will continue to be mobilised and promoted in Singapore, albeit under the terms and conditions of the existing political establishment.

Like most policy and political issues, the embrace of civil society will appease and appeal to those who are or have been seeking greater political voice, whilst leaving many others highly sceptical of the Government's genuine intentions (see Lim, 2004). Those who find the political pressure of civil society too 'painful' to bear will either exit the civil society scene altogether or participate via the Feedback Unit or other PAP-established channels of communication. On 15 August 2001, Tan Chong Kee, founder of the popular Singapore Internet Community or 'Sintercom' website dedicated to alternative viewpoints on local politics and other issues, and widely heralded as the leading light of civil society in Singapore at the time, announced that he was shutting down the website after eight years of self-funded operation (Sivakkumaran, 2001b). In an interview with *The Straits Times*, Tan admitted that the unfortunate decision was prompted by his personal conviction that civil society was a "lost cause" in Singapore (Tan, 2001; see also Tan, C. K., 2002). Not only did Sintercom's demise saw the receding of civic or civil society 'space' in Singapore, it gave the government one less 'nuisance' to contend with, and therefore, one less political problem to solve.

Not long after Tan Chong Kee's withdrawal from the civil society 'scene', Sintercom was revived by an anonymous person and renamed 'The New Sintercom';[87] while Tan himself was co-opted to participate in government-led initiatives, most prominently as a member of the Remaking Singapore Committee commissioned by the Prime Minister in 2002 and chaired by the Minister of State for National Development Vivian Balakrishnan (see Remaking Singapore Committee Report, 2003). With Tan's 'defection', the strategic application of co-optation, so successfully executed by the PAP government since the country's independence, looks likely continue, even extended, but with greater finesse and subtlety. Additionally, with visionary statements like *Singapore 21* (1999) and occasional landmark speeches addressing concerns with active citizenship and political participation, the government clearly recognises the need to manage and proactively anticipate emerging social, cultural and political forces arising from a more well-informed, better-educated and affluent younger generation (Jones, 1998: 156; Rodan, 1996b: 95-6).

What then is the 'Singapore idea' of civil society in contemporary and future terms? I would suggest, in view of the entrenchment of PAP rule and governmentality in the past and in contemporary times, that not much will change in the short to medium term. Civic or civil society will continue to 'sound good' and 'feel good', and as such would find little resistances or highly-manageable criticisms and dissent (Kumar, 1993: 376). But in the longer term, it is hoped that civil society will find its own voice, the

[87] The 'New Sintercom' website (www.newsintercom.org) was able to retain much of the information stored in the original Sintercom. Although it has expanded somewhat with regular and current updates, it appears to have lost its original allure and vibrancy.

shape of which would have to be somewhat different from what *the Singapore 21* vision has charted. When this can or will happen remains a moot point. For the time being however, the Singapore idea of civil cum civic society will continue to (re)present gestural politics *par excellence.*

CHAPTER FIVE:
Technological Auto-Regulation

> At the end of 1995, the first year of widespread use of the world wide web, there were about 16 million users of computer communication networks in the world. In early 2001 there were over 400 million; reliable forecasts point to about 1 billion users in 2005, and we could be approaching the 2 billion mark by 2010, even taking into consideration a slowing down of diffusion of the Internet when it enters the world of poverty and technological retardation. The influence of Internet-based networking goes beyond the number of users: it is also the quality of use. Core economic, social, political, and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet (Castells, 2001: 3).

> In a world where nation-states have simultaneously been trying to shore up their cultural and social defences while ceding much power of regulation to the marketplace, new media of communication such as the Internet have become increasingly significant. The capacities of cyberspace for information processing [and surveillance] have a high impact ... on how nation-states govern their populations (Lyon, 2003a: 69).

Introduction: Perfecting the Internet

On August 2, 1999, Britain's largest selling tabloid *The Sun*, owned and operated by Rupert Murdoch's global media conglomerate News Corporation, published an editorial which encapsulates the hype that has emerged around the Internet since it became publicly available in the early to mid-1990s:

> The Internet is delivering power to the people. At last, the consumer is king. Communism has collapsed – but here is a force that is truly taking power from the few and transferring it to the many. It has happened in America. It will happen [in the United Kingdom]. Perfect information. Perfect democracy. Perfect competition. Choice for all (*The Sun*, 2 Aug 1999; cited in Gibson and Ward, 2000b: 25).

The rapid expansion of digital and new communication technologies has been heralded as having significant implications for the improved functioning of democracy in general and

politics in particular. As an open source technology designed and founded on 'libertarian' ideology and cultural conceptions of freedom (Castells, 2001: 31-3), the advent of the Internet brought about much hope and democratic "power to the people", many of whom were socially, economically and politically disenfranchised (Lee and Birch, 2000).

The term "libertarian", and indeed the very notion of liberty and freedom, is understood somewhat differently in different contexts. As Castells explicates, it refers in most parts of Europe to a "culture of ideology based on the uncompromising defense of individual freedom as the supreme value" (Castells, 2001: 33). In North America, however, libertarianism is a "political ideology that primarily means a systematic distrust of government, on the understanding that the market takes care of everything by itself, and that individuals take care of themselves" (Castells, 2001: 33). The common ground in both of these approaches is that libertarian ideology implies that the individual is granted the requisite freedom and autonomy to choose and participate in political and community debates in a democratic fashion, hence the derivation of the concept of 'liberal democracy' as discussed in Chapter Two (see also Rose, 1999b, 1999a and 1999b; and, Hindess, 1998, 2001a, 2001b and 2002).

Since the mid-1990s, the opening up of interpersonal electronic modes of communication – including electronic mails (emails), Internet-based websites which facilitate electronic-commerce (e-commerce) transactions, digital mobile telephony with its short messaging service (SMS) and multimedia messaging service (MMS), and, more recently, the rise of electronic Government or 'e-Government' services – has enabled

individuals in the developed world especially to 'experience' libertarianism by becoming more involved in political debates and public administration. With the ability to access wider information and the availability of space for a plurality of voices, "technologies such as the Internet are seen as offering potential for bringing government closer to the people, making it more responsive and relevant" (Gibson and Ward, 2000a: 1). Or in the words of Chadwick (2001), with the Internet, governments around the world now have an "electronic face" where citizens can not only access government services electronically, but also engage in various governmental discourses such as political debates and feedback.

This chapter takes the position, one that is becoming increasingly publicised and popularised, that the early blue-sky vision of the Internet as a catalyst for the 'perfection' of democracy is somewhat premature, even mythical (see Lyon, 2001, 2003a, 2003b and 2004; Penfold, 2003; Resnick, 1998; and, Shapiro, 1999). As Shapiro (1999) has suggested, the notion that the Internet is inherently democratising is a myth that should be debunked. In an era marked by the ubiquity of digital technology and computer-mediated communications – what Castells (2001) calls the "Internet galaxy", drawing on Marshall McLuhan's (1962) description of the diffusion of the printing press in the West as the 'Gutenberg Galaxy' – the Internet has become implicated in various political and regulatory struggles, much of which has already begun (Shapiro, 1999: 14-5; see also Penfold, 2003). Resnick makes a similar point when he argues the space of the Internet, commonly referred to as 'Cyberspace', has been "normalised" (Resnick, 1998: 49). As Resnick notes:

> Cyberspace has not become the locus of a new politics that spills out of the computer screen and revitalizes citizenship and democracy. If anything, ordinary politics in all its complexity and vitality has invaded and captured Cyberspace (Resnick, 1998: 49).

The normalisation of the Internet into 'ordinary politics' and everyday life also means that utopian fantasies of citizen empowerment and freedom that once accompanied the advent of mass Internet access are being balanced and offset by "dystopian fears of technocratic domination" (Resnick, 1998: 48). As Shapiro also posits:

> We should not be surprised to see governments and corporations trying to shape the code of the [Internet] to preserve their authority or profitability. But code is not everything. Even if we could lock in the democratic features of the Internet, the ultimate political impact of [communication technologies] must be judged on more than design. We must also consider the way a technology is used and the social environment in which it is deployed (Shapiro, 1999: 15).

In other words, the 'perfect competition' brought about by a supposedly 'perfect democracy' is starting to resemble a potent power struggle within the highly contentious sphere of politics. As in 'ordinary' or pre-Internet politics, this struggle is mostly about the maintenance of political control and the winning of the hearts and minds of the citizen-electorate, either directly or indirectly. Or in the context of Foucauldian governmentality, this political struggle occurs at the "contact point" where technologies of power interact with technologies of the self to bring the governed individual into greater subjectification (Burchell, 1996: 20; as has been discussed in Chapter Two). As an extension of arguments presented thus far in this thesis, this chapter will go on to contend that to continue to wield power over the 'soul' of the governed (Rose, 1989), governments around the world need to be actively involved in shaping both the design as

well as the societal, cultural and regulatory environment in which the Internet and other new media technologies operate.

This chapter sets out to consider the ways in which new media technologies, led by the Internet, have been and can be used within the context of Singapore, widely acknowledged as one of the most technologically advanced and networked societies in the world. With labels such as 'police state' and 'nanny state' constantly heaped on the city-state, Singapore is well known – or to be precise, notorious – for being a politically censorious and highly-regulated society. With toilet-flushing and anti-spitting rules, as well as widely derided laws banning the sale and distribution of chewing gum, it is not too difficult to understand why Singapore has come under frequent insults and criticisms by those hailing from liberal democratic traditions (Sheridan, 2000: 2-3).[88] In addition, Singaporeans are often described as living in a socially-engineered and 'self-censorious' climate of fear (Gomez, 2000; and, Tremewan, 1994). Against such a backdrop, it would be interesting to see how certain groups in Singapore attempt to employ the Internet to find their voice and seek their desired social, cultural and political ends. Equally, if not more, significant are the regulatory devices and strategies adopted by the highly pervasive PAP government to respond to and set limits to these online ventures whilst concomitantly pursuing national technological cum economic development strategies.

[88] The oft-ridiculed ban on the import and sale of chewing gum in Singapore was lifted from early 2004 following intense lobbying by US-based Wrigley's (the world's largest chewing gum manufacturer) during negotiations for a free-trade agreement between Singapore and the United States of America in 2003. The justification given by the Singaporean authorities are that only medicinal chewing gum, particularly those designed to help smokers quit, are allowed (Chan, 2004; Arshad, 2004).

This chapter will begin with a short presentation of statistical data as evidence of Singapore's 'intelligent' island status within the Asia-Pacific region. It then goes on to introduce the policy cum policing discourse of 'technological auto-regulation', a concept I would advance to suggest that the regulation of the Internet in Singapore is mostly about enabling what Foucault (1977: 200) calls the "automatic functioning of power" and control. This 'automatic' – hence automated – power is derived from the architecturally superior model of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, a structure that wields both supervisory and surveillance powers over prison inmates (Foucault, 1977: 200). This chapter will argue that far from embracing the rhetoric of democracy, the Internet in Singapore is a highly contested space where the art of governmentality, in the forms of information controls and 'automatic' modes of regulation, is being tried, tested, and subsequently perfected. Acknowledging the potential of what Spears and Lea (1994) have termed the "hidden power" of computer-mediated communication to bypass regulatory hurdles and political control, this chapter will show how the Singaporean authorities have been swift and far-sighted in introducing online content censorship, legislative measures and other surveillance techniques to minimise spaces for political expressions via the Internet and other computer-mediated technologies.

In thinking about the politics and governmentality of culture in Singapore, this chapter asserts that it is important to make sense of Singapore's approach towards the regulation of the Internet and new media. Understanding the governmentality of Singapore's Internet policy is useful not just for the purposes of this thesis, it also provides a useful tool to engage in further comparative studies insofar as Singapore's

model of Internet regulation and policing, what I refer to as 'technological auto-regulation' in this chapter, is being emulated both regionally and globally (see Penfold, 2003; and, Rodan, 1998).[89] In discussing the uses, abuses and regulation of the Internet as a representation of modern technology in Singapore, this chapter aims therefore to make sense of the close relationship between technology and governmentality. Or as Barry puts it more cogently in the context of what he calls a "technological society" – one that takes technical and technological change to be the model for political invention, intervention and development. According to Barry,

> Technology itself, in the form of interactive and networked devices, is thought to provide a significant part of the solution to the problem of forming the kind of person who can exist, manage, compete, experiment, discover, invent and make choices in a technological society. Citizenship of a technological society demands active [political] participation (Barry, 2001: 31)

In examining Singapore's technological governance and control, we may be able to start envisaging the future of politics, governmentality and cultural regulation in the technologically-sophisticated 'Intelligent Island' of Singapore.

The 'Intelligent' Island

> On an international scale, the Net is becoming a great leveller. Where Third World countries have often accused the West of cultural imperialism and of creating an imbalance in the world of information, the Net can give these countries a means of correcting this imbalance by creating their own content. Singapore can perhaps show how this could be done (Rahman, 1999: 14-5)

[89] For example, on June 21, 2004, *The Straits Times Interactive* reported that the Chinese government has adopted a "'self-discipline pact' designed to stop the spread of information that could harm "national security". This new rule is in addition to online policing of postings that are critical of China's central government. See also Lokman Tsui's (2003) article on the panoptic control and regulation of the Internet in China.

With first-world infrastructure and a highly-educated and technologically-savvy workforce, Singapore is widely acknowledged as one of the most networked societies in the world, both metaphorically and technically (see Lim, A., 2000). At the dawn of the new millennium (2000), Singapore attained the status of the 'Intelligent Island', a term originally coined by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1990 in a televised programme featuring Singapore's bold information technology (IT) developments (Lee and Birch, 2000: 151). With almost all homes and businesses in the Central Business District (CBD) connected to an island-wide hybrid fibre-optic cable network, Singapore became the first fully wired-up country in the world in 2000 (Mahizhan and Yap, 2000). This network was the realisation of a cornerstone master plan, entitled *A Vision of an Intelligent Island: IT 2000 Report*, to create a nationwide information infrastructure which would:

> interconnect computers in virtually every home, office and factory. The computer will evolve into an information appliance, combining the functions of the telephone, computer, TV and more. It will provide a wide range of communication modes and access to services. Text, sound, pictures, videos, documents, designs and other forms of media can be transferred and shared through this broadband information infrastructure made up of fibre optics cables reaching to all homes and offices, and a pervasive network working in tandem (NCB, 1992: 19).

The completion of this network in 2000 not only enables the delivery of both cable and must-carry free-to-air television channels via the predominantly government-owned Starhub Cable Vision (SCV) Limited, every home in Singapore has been made ready for Singapore ONE (One Network for Everyone), Singapore's much-vaunted broadband interactive network site which promises a host of digital and multimedia services,

including ultra high-speed Internet access.[90] The Singapore government's widely proclaimed aim, first articulated in its 1986 National IT plan, is to turn the country into an intelligent IT and media hub so that it can be transformed into an intelligent and creative knowledge-based economy (see Kuo, 1990, 1994; Reid, 1996). Through newer statutory agencies such as the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) and the Media Development Authority (MDA), formed in 1999 and 2003 respectively,[91] the government remains committed to constantly implementing strategies to spread and speed-up the use of computing technologies in everyday life (Kuo et al, 2002). The conventionally accepted belief among Singaporeans is that for the country to achieve economic growth in the twenty-first century, rapid adoption and mastery of technology by citizens is paramount (Rodan, 2000b).

The manner in which large-scale nationwide technological imperatives are spearheaded and centrally managed by the government demonstrates that Singapore is very much a 'technological society' along the lines proposed by Barry (2001: 29), where citizens are "expected to have a certain knowledge of technology, and to make choices on the basis of this knowledge". This is consistent with the government's economic

[90] Singapore Cable Vision was re-designated as Starhub Cable Vision, retaining the same 'SCV' abbreviation, following the merger of Starhub Telecommunications company, Singapore's newest full service telecommunications firm, with Singapore Cable Vision in 2002.

[91] The IDA was formed on 1 December 1999 by the merger of the National Computer Board (NCB) with the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore (TAS) to continue the work of the IT2000 master plan as well as pursue new growth opportunities in the era of information and communications convergence. See Lee and Birch (2002) for more details about the formation of the IDA. The MDA was established on January 1, 2003 by a three-way merger of the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), the Films and Publications Department (FPD) and the Singapore Film Commission (SFC) (see *The Straits Times Interactive*, May 22, 2002). The FPD and the SFC were previously under the direct purview of the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MITA). See Leo, 2003, for further information on the new MDA.

developmentalist policy since Singapore's independence in 1965, a process which has always entailed the importation and mastery of new technologies, particularly those imported or emanating from 'the West' (see Clammer, 1985). As Mahizhnan and Yap put it succinctly:

> There is evidence that from the very beginning the government has considered both economic and social well-being as the raison d'etre for IT development in Singapore (Mahizhnan and Yap, 2000: 1750).

Certainly, even prior to the establishment of 'convergent' agencies like the IDA (which merged the functions of the former National Computer Board and the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore) and the MDA, the government has been mostly successful in promoting the merits of the Internet and the inevitability of IT in everyday life (Mahizhnan and Yap, 2000: 1751-4). The global currency of the 'Internet galaxy' has meant that the importance of the Internet in continuing the economic prosperity of Singapore in the twenty-first century has been re-emphasised (Yao, 1996: 73).

The Singapore government's pro-technology mentality and general success in promoting high Internet use is reflected by and large in statistical data derived from quantitative research. According to a survey of 1,500 Singaporean households carried out by the IDA in 2000, 66% of the population are knowledgeable on the use of personal computers, 61% of households have at least one computer, while 50% of homes are connected to the Internet in one form or another (IDA, 2001). This suggests that Singapore is more connected than developed countries like the United States (with 42% connection), Australia (37%) and Britain (35%) (Dawson, 2001a). The survey also found

Singapore to be an 'e-inclusive' society, with high incidences of personal computer ownership and Internet access across Malay, Indian and Chinese – the three main races in multiracial Singapore – households (Dawson, 2001b). In September 2001, mobile telephony penetration rate in Singapore reached 76.7%, with a broadband audience exceeding 400,000 and rising exponentially (IDA 2001).

A monograph published in 2002 by the Singapore Internet Project (SIP) Team on the *Internet in Singapore* reaffirmed Singapore's high level of IT use and status as a technological society. It reports that about 46% of adults, age 18 and above, are active users of the Internet.[92] The number is markedly higher for local Singaporean students, many who are being IT-trained and exposed from early childhood, with Internet penetration at 71% and rising (Kuo et al, 2002: 100). Even 'non-users' – defined in the SIP Report as people who do not access the Internet due to three key reasons: did not know how, no time and no interest – were found to be generally supportive of Internet use and development. As Barry points out, while citizens of a technological society are expected to have "a certain knowledge of technology, and to make choices on the basis of this knowledge", not everyone will be "willing or able to meet these expectations" (Barry, 2001: 29). At the very minimum, it is crucial that such people do not become hindrances to the 'technologizing' process of turning computers and the Internet into essential tools for the conduct of everyday life. Singapore appears to have done remarkably well in this

[92] The SIP is part of a World Internet Project (WIP), coordinated jointly by research teams from the School of Communication Studies at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Centre for Communication Policy, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Both teams have worked out general research frameworks and a platform for comparative research on how people utilise the Internet and how the interactive technology will impact individuals and societies within as well as across nations.

regard, so much so that the government has come to define the 'digital divide' as "the gap between those who are Internet savvy and those who are not" (George, 2003: 6).

In order to understand the significance of the SIP study, the notion of 'Internet use' needs to be put into perspective. The SIP team identifies the two main purposes of the Internet as "a source of information and as a tool for communication" (Kuo et al, 2002: 8). The researchers found that emails and information searches were by far the most popular Internet activities, followed by entertainment and online discussions. Electronic commerce (e-commerce) activities, most commonly carried out in online shopping and browsing for goods and services, were not as popular due largely to concerns about transactional security and privacy protection (Kuo et al, 2002: 103-4), although it should be noted that numbers are rising steadily with the mass availability of electronic security softwares and assurances by the authorities, particularly in regards to e-Government services (to be discussed later in this chapter). Nevertheless, closer analysis of these figures suggests, among other things, that the depth of technological expertise and innovative uses of the Internet in Singapore remains surprisingly low.[93] Although Internet use is relatively high, Internet 'expertise' is limited to emailing and other elementary personal and commercial functions. Sophisticated use comes in mainly at the 'youth market' level, with the downloading of music, movies, graphics, interactive online gaming and other multi-media tools as the key applications (see Lee and Chan, 2003).

[93] This critical analysis was not articulated by the SIP research team, probably due to the fact that the SIP was funded by the IDA and the former SBA, both of which are publicly-funded statutory boards under the direct purview of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA).

The slow take-up of basic e-commerce activities in Singapore contradicts the expressed goal of the government for Singaporeans to embrace new technologies. This anomaly can be explained by looking at another aspect of the SIP report: the perception that the Internet has not led to a stronger sense of political empowerment (Kuo et al, 2002: 111). According to the SIP researchers, the percentages of users who believe that the Internet enables increased engagement on government policies and political issues are extremely low at less than 20%. In other words, the vast majority of Singaporeans do not consider the Internet to be useful for political engagement and civic participation. This in many ways negate 'libertarian' impulses that the Internet was slated to bring, and it appears to sidestep the importance of the "political" in Barry's (2001) conceptualisation of what a technological society should embody. But if we adopt Barry's understanding that the 'political' is "an index of space of contestation and dissensus", then there is much to consider in thinking about Singaporeans' supposed lack of interest in political engagement via the Internet (Barry, 2001: 7).

On one level, public disinterest in political uses of the Internet could be attributed to the PAP government's intolerance of political dissent and the ongoing presence of 'OB-markers', along with other ambiguous rules circumscribing political participation (as elucidated in Chapter Four). Indeed, as this chapter will detail, virtually all rules aimed at the conduct of Singaporeans' political conduct were extended to include the Internet and other communication technologies as soon as public Internet access became available. But on another level, while such negative perceptions of the Internet's political role suggest that there are limits to how the Internet and new media technologies can be used to effect

political change in Singapore, proponents of civil society and political opposition figures refuse to dismiss the political possibilities of the Internet in Singapore (see, for example, Gomez, 2000 and 2002), believing that technology is value 'neutral' and can therefore "provide ways of avoiding political disagreements" (Barry, 2001: 8). Barry summarises such viewpoints thus:

> If we understand technology to refer to any kind of association of devices, techniques, skills and artefacts which is intended to perform a particular task, then the deployment of technology is often seen as a way of avoiding the noise and irrationality of political conflict. From this perspective, if the political is a conflictual relation, technology offers a set of skills, techniques, practices and objects with which it is possible to evade and circumscribe politics (Barry, 2001: 7).

Nevertheless, Barry takes an ambivalent view of technology, particularly in societies and economies that have become technologically progressive and technology driven. He argues that debates and controversies about the role and extent of technological application in any society are forms of political controversies which in turn may "open up new objects and sites of politics" (Barry, 2001: 9).

In the present context of the Internet in Singapore, it is noteworthy that the many codes and guidelines aimed at encouraging its take-up, as well as governing its use, makes the medium a ready site for political struggle and contestation. Given the fact that the Internet has been earmarked as a key tool for transforming Singapore into a knowledge-based, innovative and creative society (George, 2002: 188-9), it is vital to understand how governing of the Internet as a medium of communication works in Singapore. The next section begins by looking at how the Internet is being strategically

regulated and policed, with a careful eye on not upsetting its economic potential, via the discourse of technological auto-regulation.

Governing and Regulating the Internet

In December 1996, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) commissioned the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) to conduct a pilot study to consider a range of issues pertaining to the increasing spread of the Internet as a communications and information medium. The final report published in October 1997, entitled *The Internet and some international regulatory issues relating to content* (ABA, 1997), provides a comparative overview of the regulatory developments in four countries: Australia, the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Singapore. This 1997 study reveals the advanced state of Internet use as well as the rapid development of a policy framework to regulate the Internet in the city-state of Singapore relative to the other three countries surveyed.

The ABA report noted that Singapore had declared, from the early days of public Internet access, that it "does not intend to over-regulate the Internet" (ABA, 1997: 39). It was clear from the outset that the widely held economic potential of the Internet had led Singaporean authorities to opt for a 'lighter', or less restrictive, approach to managing the Internet, as opposed to its notoriously strict and censorious "lockdown" of traditional print and broadcast media (Rodan, 2000b: 169). But as Yao clarifies:

> The State of Singapore has always seen itself as having the legitimate right to influence and manage citizens' choices in a wide range of activities from what one can read or watch on the screen and television to the right to chew gum, and the Internet is no exception (Yao, 1996: 73).

As this chapter will validate, Yao's 'prophetic' statement about the prospect of Internet control in Singapore, made in 1996 at the dawn of public Internet roll-out, were to be fulfilled very promptly. Singapore's so-called 'light touch' regulatory regime for the Internet was unveiled, as a matter of course, in July that same year.

In most contexts, the concept of 'light-touch' regulation usually points to self-regulation on the part of the user based on an agreed-upon code or guidance (Ang, 1998a: 251-4; 1998b: 12).[94] Singapore adopts and embraces a similar set of Internet self-regulatory principles, but only in conceptual terms. In application, it relies on aspects of illiberal governmentality – what I term 'auto-regulation' – where Internet and media users as governed cultural citizens are steered towards making 'correct' choices and decisions via the joint application of legislative codes with other subtle mechanisms of 'discipline' (Foucault, 1977). Foucault's notion of 'discipline' is understood in this context as a functional device or apparatus aimed at making the exercise of power more effectual and efficient through the subtle coercion of people (Foucault, 1977: 136-6). I would argue that a 'light-touch' self-regulatory approach has worked – and continues to work – in Singapore not because of its functionality or the inherent ability of individuals or Internet industry players to discipline or conduct themselves. Rather, the practicability of self-regulation relies on the application of 'auto-regulation', where cryptic and

[94] In some other places, self-regulation of the Internet and media outlets has been packaged and re-presented as 'co-regulation', defined by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) in the context of broadcasting as a system which "leaves the regulation of broadcasting to the broadcasters themselves, but leaves a role for the ABA [regulator]. First in the registration and review of the codes. And second, where complainants [i.e. the public] are not satisfied" (Flint, 1998: 12). 'Co-regulation' could effectively be interpreted either positively or negatively. Positively speaking, and to some extent, 'co-regulation' offers a clearer understanding of 'self-regulation'. On the other hand, it makes it obvious that governments continue to play an influential role in media policy and policing.

arbitrary policies and legal codes as governmental technologies are employed by regulatory authorities to "shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others" (Miller and Rose, 1990: 82). With the holistic application of 'auto-regulation', the otherwise complex and arduous task of Internet policing in Singapore is made less onerous, aided and empowered or 'co-regulated' by laws, policy codes, statements and generalised techniques and technologies of surveillance designed to shape the conduct of individuals and groups within society (see Wood, 2003; and, Lyon, 2001).

Since 1995, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) has been empowered by its Act to manage the nation's Internet policy and regulate Internet content. This responsibility was passed on to the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA) from 2003 following the passage of the *Media Development Authority of Singapore Act* (Chapter 172) (2003). This has meant that all Internet regulatory codes and guidelines under the jurisdiction of the SBA were transferred, wholesale and mostly unamended, to the newly established statutory board. According to general information on Internet regulation in Singapore extracted from the MDA website:

> MDA fully supports the development of the Internet and oversees the regulation of Internet content in Singapore. In regulating the Internet, MDA adopts a balanced and light-touch approach to ensure that minimum standards are set for the responsible use of the Internet while giving maximum flexibility to the industry players to operate. MDA also encourages industry self-regulation and public education efforts to complement its light-touch regulatory approach (www.mda.gov.sg; accessed: June 15, 2004).

Singapore's concept of a "light-touch regulatory approach" to the Internet is predicated upon the 'Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification' which came into effect on 15 July 1996 (Lee and Birch, 2000: 160-1). Commonly referred to as the Class Licence scheme, this subsidiary piece of legislation is presented as a convenient and communitarian approach to regulation because it embraces self-regulation on the part of the content provider and/or user. The 'automatic' Class Licence scheme is complemented by a Schedule entitled 'Internet Code of Practice' (MDA, 1997), intended as industry guidelines for Internet Service Providers and Internet Content Providers. Both of these codes, apparently developed in consultation with key regulatory partners and industry players, are intended to encourage responsible use of the new medium whilst facilitating its healthy development in Singapore (ABA, 1997: 39). Both codes combine to form Singapore's self-regulatory Internet policy relating to content, which the MDA describes as "balanced and light-touch" (cited above) in view of its tacit acceptance by the Internet industry and what might be perceived as a light-handed, or even a hands-off, approach taken by the regulator.

The concept of self-regulation, irrespective of whether it is 'light-touch' or otherwise, appeals to many primarily because it appears to vindicate the liberal ideology which the Internet is said to represent (Thompson, 1997: 2). For individual and public Internet users, it is a step closer to a utopian and 'de-regulated' state of "perfect democracy" and ideologies of freedom (Gibson and Ward, 2000b: 25). For commercial players operating in a capitalist and consumerist society, self-regulation supports the consumer's or citizen's right to free choice (Thompson, 1997: 2). For government

administrators, self-regulation makes the arduous task of monitoring, accounting and reporting less onerous, especially when licensees are 'classed' or categorised collectively, and therefore subject to a uniform set of rules. As the MDA website clarifies:

> Under the Class Licence Scheme, Internet Content Providers and Internet Service Providers are deemed automatically licenced and have to observe and comply with the Class Licence Conditions and the Internet Code of Practice, which outlines what the community regards as offensive or harmful to Singapore's racial and religious harmony (www.mda.gov.sg; accessed: June 16, 2004)

Since the *quid pro quo* of a class licensing approach to self-regulation is that all agencies involved are compelled to 'agree' to operate responsibly and in accordance with the laws of the land, the fear of legal or political reprisal ensures that non-compliance does not occur (Lee and Birch, 2000: 160). As would be expected, no one in Singapore has been taken to task for violating MDA's Internet policy guidelines. I would suggest, however, that such a clean record in policy adherence has less to do with the self-proclaimed transparency of the authorities than it does with the application of auto-regulatory principles that have been strategically applied at various times throughout Singapore's brief history of the Internet. How and why auto-regulation is so potent, and can be construed as the governmental technology that 'works' in a technological society like Singapore, will be examined in the section that follows.

Internet Policy via Auto-regulation

When first unveiled in 1996, two years after mass subscription to the Internet began, Singapore's Internet policy did not face much public opposition as concerns at the time were centred on the proliferation of violent and pornographic content. One year after

this, the former Internet content regulator, the SBA, announced that a shortlist of one hundred pornographic websites were to be blocked via the proxy servers of the three main government-controlled public Internet Service Providers (ISPs): SingNet (the Internet arm of Singapore Telecommunications Limited), Pacific Internet and Starhub (then known as Cyberway Internet). This became the first instance of *en bloc* direct Internet censorship anywhere in the world, and certainly one that prompted both critics and sympathisers of authoritarian rule to cast their eyes on Singapore. Despite receiving widespread criticisms and scorn, the government's stand on this new policy was firm and unapologetic. According to the SBA, this blockage was a mere gesture of concern to bring Internet content in line with the nation's societal and 'Asian' cultural values (Tan, 1997: 27; Lee and Birch, 2000: 149).

Although this blatant act of censorship offended critics and other liberal-minded citizens, local media support for the move made it publicly acceptable in Singapore in a very short time, notwithstanding the fact that the vast majority of Internet users in Singapore were probably not interested in accessing these banned sites in the first place. The preference for the authorities, nevertheless, was to err on the 'safe' and 'conservative' side, mostly to ensure continued political support from the "moral majority" of Singaporeans who would readily profess social and cultural conservatism when asked or surveyed (Tan, K. P., 2003). Of course, whether this 'conservatism' is a myth or a representation of reality becomes irrelevant in a climate where cultural regulation and policing, via the symbolic declaration of the government's and community's values, hinge on the politically expedient enforcement of censorship (Birch,

1996: 207-9). Indeed, as the Censorship Review Committee appointed by the Minister for Information and the Arts made clear in its 1992 *Report of the Censorship Review Committee*:

> In Singapore, censorship plays a role in creating a balance between maintaining a morally wholesome society and becoming an economically dynamic, socially cohesive and culturally vibrant nation (CRC, 1992: 19).

Since values are never fixed in time, a new Censorship Review Committee was convened in April 2002 by Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts David Lim, to "update" and "refresh" censorship policies (Koh, 2002: 3; Tan, S. E., 2002). Minister Lim's 'unofficial' terms of reference were made when he commented that "Singapore needs to be more playful, but that doesn't mean we're going to be naughty" (cited in Koh, 2002: 3). Minister Lim's remarks bears deep semblance to a commonly quoted phrase articulated by his predecessor George Yeo with reference to media and cultural censorship: "Leave the windows open, but carry fly-swatters" (cited in George, 1999: 44-5). These words have the effect of cautioning Singaporeans who may mistakenly conclude that a loosening of the nation's censorship regime implies socio-political liberty (Lee and Birch, 2000: 164). In the report documenting the findings of the Censorship Review Committee of 2002-2003, released in August 2003, some 'tinkering' to the censorship rules were recommended, particularly those relating to film, television and literature classifications (see CRC, 2003: 13-14). For Internet content, the Committee recommended a 'more of the same' approach. This included a continued commitment to "light-touch regulation" as well as a reaffirmation of the symbolic ban on online

pornography, suggesting that the existing Internet regulatory regime continues to work well for the government. As the Report makes clear:

> The symbolic ban on the list of 100 websites has attracted international attention. It has served as a symbolic statement on the kind of content unacceptable to society. The 100 banned sites should be updated to include other harmful content such as those which promote paedophilia and child pornography. This symbolic ban should remain until MDA or industry players find a viable alternative (CRC, 2003: 47).

In an era whereby political legitimacy is increasing linked to the morality of governing (Hunt, 1999: 17), it is not too difficult to understand how and why citizens would overwhelmingly support measures aimed at keeping out harmful and objectionable content, especially when the protection of children or minors are brought into the picture. The ability of the authorities to deny access to selected websites – whether with children or social/political dissidents in mind – reaffirms the means by which governmentality, exercised via the conduct and social control of the public sphere, can be enforced and reinforced in Singapore (Lee and Birch, 2000: 149). After all, with the Class Licence scheme, any person or group posting content on the vast and ever-enlarging 'cyberspace' of the Internet becomes a de facto licensee as an 'Internet Content Provider', defined under the Class Licence as:

> Any individual in Singapore who provides any programme, for business, political or religious purposes, on the World Wide Web through the Internet; or any corporation or group of individuals (including any association, business, club, company, society, organisation or partnership, whether registrable or incorporated under the laws of Singapore or not) who provides any programme on the World Wide Web through the Internet, and includes any web publisher or any web server administrator (MDA, 1996, Clauses 2a and 2b).

The power of a light-touch self-regulatory regime via a Class Licence scheme lies in the fact the scheme operates *carte-blanche* in a 'catch-all' manner, with Internet Service Providers and Internet Content Providers automatically deemed to be licensed without the need to apply to the MDA for permission to operate a website or publish online. The ease of setting up personal homepages, individual 'weblogs' and do-it-yourself online publications means that one could inadvertently become an Internet Content Provider and fall under the jurisdiction of Singapore's Internet policy. Such ambiguously crafted rules widen the scope of policy enforcement, giving the authorities discretionary powers to deal with offenders, or would-be offenders. In addition, all web providers and users are reminded that all off-line laws and rules also apply to the online world (Ang, 1999: 111). Accordingly, the final clause of the Class Licence reads: "Nothing in this Schedule shall exempt the licensee from complying with the requirements of any other written law relating to the provision of the licensee's service" (MDA, 1996, Clause 18). With all possible bases covered, the MDA can unproblematically lay claims to being 'light-handed', transparent and fair.

Nevertheless, to ensure absolute compliance, the Broadcasting Act empowers the Internet regulator to specify and act on Class Licence conditions as required from time to time (ABA, 1997: 39). One of these conditions, Clause 4 of the Class Licence Notification, requires the pre-registration of all websites dedicated or seeking to promote political or religious causes. It states:

> An Internet Content Provider who is or is determined by the Authority to be a body of persons engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political or religious issues *relating to Singapore* on the World Wide Web through the Internet, shall register with the Authority within 14 days

> after the commencement of its service, or within such longer time as the Authority may permit (MDA, 1996, Clause 4; emphases added).

It is worth noting that this clause does not only refer to websites based in the geographical confines of Singapore, since the global nature of the World Wide Web (www) browser means that websites "relating to Singapore" can be established and domiciled beyond Singapore's borders. Again, by including such arbitrary statements within the Internet policy, all possible regulatory loopholes are either removed or effectively negated. Although the highly politicised Clause 4 of the Class Licence Notification (MDA, 1996) had always existed, its first and highly public invocation was made in 2001 to deal with the "political nuisance" of civil society caused by the 'Singapore Internet Community' (Sintercom) website, an Internet-based forum well known to Singaporean Internet users at the time (Lim, 2004; also mentioned in Chapter 4).

In July 2001, notice was issued to Sintercom's webmaster to register as an Internet site "engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political issues relating to Singapore on the Internet" (Goh, 2001). At that time, this move was seen by critics as bizarre given that the independent website, founded in 1994 and perceived by many as the beacon of civil society in Singapore, had previously received exemption from pre-registering as a political site. Sintercom had been one of the most innovative non-governmental websites, set up to encourage candid discussions of social, cultural and political life in Singapore for local and overseas Singaporeans. A month later, Tan Chong Kee, founder of Sintercom, announced that the website was to shut at the end of August 2001. Tan put the blame squarely on the arbitrariness of political terms within the Class

Licence, adding that he believed civil society to be a "lost cause" in Singapore (Tan, 2001; see Chapter Four).[95] Although Tan stressed that his decision had nothing to do with Sintercom's regulatory tussle with the SBA, the Internet content regulator at the time, it became clear that the so-called 'light touch' Internet self-regulatory framework had succeeded in muting alternative voices that could become politically problematic. As elucidated in Chapter Four, the widely publicised closure of the alternative political discussion website has had a grave impact on Singapore's nascent civil society movement, much of which had originated from Internet-based forums.

The "automatic" licensing approach of the Class Licence scheme (MDA, 1996), coupled with the 'Internet Code of Practice' (MDA, 1997) and other established laws in Singapore, gives rise to what I refer to as 'auto-regulation', a policy discourse where discipline and control is carried out 'automatically' without the need for direct policing or overt surveillance and supervision. The notion of auto-regulation is an appropriation of Foucault's (1977) critique of the disciplinary power of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* prison structure:

> [T]he major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. [...] It is an important mechanism, for it automizes and disindividualizes power (Foucault, 1977:201-2).

Auto-regulation is predicated upon Foucault's belief that power, understood here as the political management of the Singaporean populace, is perfected when it is 'automized'

[95] For more information on the former Sintercom, see the essay by Tan Chong Kee (2002) himself, which details the brief history of the electronic forum, including the unfortunate decision to shutdown.

and 'disinvidualized' (Foucault, 1977: 201-2). As Foucault points out, the *Panopticon* architecture provides the "principle" of how to 'automize' power, and therefore discipline, via a supreme control of one's cultural thought and conduct:

> [T]he principle on which [the Panopticon] was based: at the periphery, and annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell, a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. [...] The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that makes it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately (Foucault, 1977: 200).

Foucault then goes on to summarise Bentham's principle by declaring that the exercise of power should be "visible and unverifiable" (Foucault, 1977: 201). This suggests that surveillance via the policing of citizens – and indeed their Internet sojourns – must be conducted both 'visibly' (or directly) and 'unverifiably' (that is, indirectly and behind the scenes). In an extensive study on Bentham's approach to liberal governmentality via "indirect legislation", Engelmann points out that the central idea is to "enlist the governed as supplementary governors of themselves and others" (Engelmann, 2003: 379). Indeed, this same rationale is propagated by Foucault in his governmentality discourse, which relies on the shaping of the individuals' conduct via the regulation of oneself (Dean and Hindess, 1998: 11; Gordon, 1991: 3). The aim, as highlighted through much of Chapter Two, is to secure conditions by which individuals will predictably govern themselves and each another in accordance with the dictates of order and utility (Engelmann, 2003: 379).

Bentham's principle of being simultaneously 'visible' and 'unverifiable' is explained by Foucault thus:

> Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen (Foucault, 1977: 201-2).

More than just a surveillance and policing technology, the *Panopticon* is "above all a form of government" (Foucault, 1994, cited in Elden, 2003: 248), or in other words, a function of Foucauldian governmentality (Foucault, 1978). The ability to strike a delicate balance between being visible and unverifiable makes it possible to 'govern at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990: 76; Latour, 1987: 232), where the only course of 'real' actions needed by authorities are to issue regular compliance reminders and to fine-tune legislations and codes from time to time to ensure currency and relevance (see Engelmann, 2003: 374).

Writing about Singapore's politics of comfort and regulation, Cherian George, a well-known former political journalist of *The Straits Times*, calls Singapore's tightly consolidated governmental power "central control" (George, 2000; see also Ellis, 2001). Although George does not make references to Foucault or Bentham, his description of the Singapore government's 'central control' mentality mirrors the idea of the supervisory 'central tower' in the *Panopticon*, a conspicuously privileged position from which to exercise power and surveillance on citizens who are frequently construed and constructed

as 'inmates' needing constant watch (Foucault, 1977: 202). The notion of 'auto-regulation' embodies the key elements of the *Panopticon* in that one does not know when the 'supervisor', as the analogical extension of the authorities, is really watching. As a result, regulation appears to be carried out automatically and with machine-like precision. As Foucault puts it,

> [the] architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers (Foucault, 1977: 201).

In a climate of auto-regulation, where regulation is carried out 'automatically', both directly and unverifiably – or both overtly and subtly – at the same time, the regulatory powers-that-be are often further empowered to invoke existing laws, rules and codes and/or enact new ones to tighten its already tremendous grip on social, cultural, political and disciplinary powers (see Rodan, 1998). If justifications of new or revised rules are required, broad statements emphasising the importance of safeguarding 'public interests', such as the need to maintain public order, public security, public morality and national harmony, are readily issued and mobilised to silence critics and cripple opponents (Lee and Birch, 2000: 149). It is no coincidence that these highly discursive political terms, contingent on the determinations of ministers and state officials, appear in most Singaporean laws that impact upon social and cultural policies. As such, these critical terms do not necessarily conform to a 'common understanding'. They often have their own distinctive characteristics, euphemistically referred to by social anthropologist Yao Souchou as "special meanings" (Yao, 1996: 73), tailored to suit whatever the political requirement of the day might be. This enhances the application of auto-

regulation as it is essentially a potent combination of the 'visible' and the 'unverifiable': while the legal codes and terms are manifestly available for all to see, the meanings are not inherently inscribed and are, therefore, 'not verifiable' (Rodan, 2000a: 217-8). As Thompson explicates:

> Meanings regulate and organize conduct and practices – they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed. They are, therefore, what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and idea of others seek to structure and shape (Thompson, 1997: 1).

The deliberate employment of ambiguous and arbitrary terms, that are often legally-binding yet interpretable only by state officials, is but one of the key foundations of auto-regulation. Its practice is further aided by other visible mechanisms, including, *inter alia*: direct policing or patrolling, the surveillance of citizens, issuing of media reports that are mostly uncritical of government policies, and more recently, willingness to call for public feedback on certain policies (particularly those that carry less political risks).[96] Despite recent moves towards embracing greater openness, indirect gate-keeping 'activities', including covert surveillances or indirect policing, are also employed at strategic intervals to ensure that direct measures that are usually laborious and resource-intensive can be gradually phased out over time. In short, these auto-regulatory strategies are calculated to attain policy compliance and political subservience, what Foucault calls the shaping of disciplined and "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977: 138).

[96] Call for public consultations in policy formulation is a very recent phenomenon in Singapore. Based on broad observations, the author notes that the IDA has emerged as one of the early adopters due to the global and mostly technical (or engineering-based) nature of the info-communications industry. Since 2000, the IDA has issued numerous calls for public and industry feedback, mostly via its website: www.ida.gov.sg, on proposed codes and policies governing the IT sector and the telecommunication industry.

Media and Political Gate-keeping

Singapore's Internet policy as exemplified by the discourse of technological auto-regulation has become the epitome of political and media gate-keeping in Singapore. Contrary to early libertarian ideologies about the democratising potential of the Internet, Singapore has demonstrated – and continues to demonstrate – its technical ability to monitor usage and Internet communication exchanges. On this note, James Gomez, a prominent Singaporean political activist has revealed that Internet and political surveillance through the Internet is technically easier due to its built-in ability to intercept electronic communication messages at the point of departure or reception (Gomez, 2002: 43). In Singapore, the fact that all three main dial-up and broadband Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are directly government-owned or government-linked gives the authorities the upper hand in enforcing electronic surveillance. Indeed, several such occurrences within the first decade of Internet use in Singapore are sufficiently telling.

In 1994, the year when public internet access was first made available through SingNet, Singapore's largest ISP and the Internet arm of the state-owned monopoly Singapore Telecommunications (SingTel), at least two instances of illegal file scans were conducted on users' email accounts. Both episodes were dismissed by the authorities on the grounds that the scans were for unlawful pornographic materials and computer viruses. Although the government indicated, following these episodes, that it does not intend to conduct any further unannounced searches, Rodan argues that "its demonstrated

capability to search files on this vast a scale may in itself and by design have a suitably chilling effect" (Rodan, 1998: 10).

In November 1998, the local *Straits Times* newspaper reported that a section of the Singapore Police Force has been set up to "patrol the alleys of cyberspace" (Chong, 1998). While their official role is to keep hackers and cyber-crime at bay, the very existence of a 'cyber-police' branch, as reported at that time, served to reinforce the widespread belief that Internet surveillance is vigilantly conducted in Singapore (Lee and Birch, 2000: 159).[97] This suspicion was confirmed or reaffirmed in April 1999 when SingNet was again found to be conducting secret scanning of its subscribers' web accounts, supposedly for vulnerabilities to virus attacks (Chong, 1999b: 1; Pereira, 1999: 67). This particular case made the front-page news and caused a public outcry because the Ministry of Home Affairs, the parent ministry of the Singapore Police Force, was found to be involved. There was also a hint of a covert operation going awry as the unauthorised scanning was brought to light only after a complaint by a local law student who detected a hacker meddling with her computer system (Chong, 1999a: 3). To avoid implicating the Singapore Police Force or the government's Home Affairs ministry, SingNet was compelled to issue a public apology – via email – to conclude this embarrassing episode (*The Straits Times*, May 3, 1999: 26). This was followed a week later by a government announcement that guidelines on scanning would be established to

[97] No further information on this 'cyber-police' has been available since. It is probable that this branch has been subsumed under the Technology Crimes Division of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of the Singapore Police Force (SPF). For further information on the CID and/or the SPF, visit the website: http://www.spf.gov.sg (Note: up to July 31, 2003, the URL was: www.spinet.gov.sg).

safeguard the privacy of Internet users (*The Straits Times*, May 12, 1999; see also Maria, 2000; and, Lyon, 2003a: 73).

Although the government, through the SBA and subsequently the MDA, has categorically stated and insisted that it does not conduct file-searching exercises or online surveillances, many believe that it has the capability and capacity to do so. I would argue that this denial has the effect of reinforcing the 'automizing' functions of auto-regulation, so that Internet users would be prudent to remain compliant. Given this, actual surveillance would appear superfluous. As Gomez asserts, Singaporeans have come to accept surveillance and expect certain people to be under its regulatory control (Gomez, 2002: 46; see also Ho, 2000). At the same time, significant public attention given to the scanning 'scandals' in 1994 and 1999 have had a 'gestural' effect of warning users about the technical capabilities of the authorities, not unlike the symbolic ban of the one hundred high-impact pornographic sites by the MDA since 1998. Hence, whether or not actual online monitoring is done becomes irrelevant in an auto-regulatory environment. The demonstration of a government's technical capability – whether real, imagined or perhaps even fabricated by the authorities themselves (Rodan, 1998: 11) – becomes far more potent and intimidating.

Although Singapore's Internet policy is said to have been developed in consultation with the converging media, telecommunications and IT industries, there continues to be perceptions that a panoptic mode of centralised surveillance continues to dominate in Singapore – if not physically, then technologically and ideologically. Auto-

regulation works because the enclosed nature of a panoptic regulatory supervision "does not preclude a permanent presence from the outside" (Foucault, 1977: 207). As Foucault points out, the general public is always welcome to inspect the central *Panopticon* tower by scrutinising the guidelines or codes (by contacting government departments or downloading them from official websites) or by examining other functions of surveillance (by visiting or speaking to the authorities concerned). Auto-regulation, like the *Panopticon*, is as Foucault notes, "a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole" (Foucault, 1977: 207). But because auto-regulation is a widely dispersed function, with each individual and group playing a vital role in maintaining its conduct and applications – in self-regulating, self-censoring and self-governing – it is difficult for the public to identify specific flaws. Although avenues for public complaints are available, few Singaporeans (if any) actually register their disapproval with codes that could be seen as draconian and authoritarian. This is congruent with a society that is known for being politically apathetic and mindful of the political risks of feedback and criticisms of public policies (as discussed in Chapter Four). Nevertheless, in the context of Internet regulation, monitoring and surveillance, silent acquiescence based on a convenient belief that 'those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear' can only be interpreted as consent (Lyon, 2004: 27). As a consequence, the authorities are able to create, in Bourdieusian terms, "a highly influential habitus of controlled behaviour" among Singaporeans (Lee and Birch, 2002: 148).

In effect, the concept of technological auto-regulation that is conducted both 'visibly' and 'unverifiably' with regard to the Internet in Singapore hinges on an ideology

of control with the sole aim of producing law-abiding, self-regulated and therefore, economically productive, docile and compliant cultural citizens (Foucault, 1977). This ideology of control has been the key driver of media policy and politics in Singapore since the nation's independence. Singaporean gatekeepers have long been wary – even paranoid – of foreign media and international broadcasters engaging in Singapore's domestic politics (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Mar 10, 2001). Media censorship laws, particularly those relating to foreign publications and screen products, were enacted and quite regularly amended to control the inflow of negative foreign social, cultural and political influences (Seow, 1998; see CRC, 1992 and 2003).

In July 1986 for example, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA), the key legislation governing all forms of media publications in Singapore, was amended to enable the government to restrict sales of foreign publications deemed to be interfering with Singapore's domestic politics. Following the passage of this law, many foreign media were taken to task for their reports of unsavoury aspects of the PAP system (Chee, 2001: 173). Foreign publications falling victim to this law include the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Economist*, *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Asiaweek* (Seow, 1998: 148). In addition, over the past thirty years, international media organisations including *Newsweek*, *Reuters*, *The Times* (London), *The Star* (Malaysia), *Time*, and the *International Herald Tribune* have had their editors and/or journalists arraigned, and subsequently sued and fined heavily, on charges of publishing defamatory or libellous articles (see Rodan, 2000a; Seow, 1998; and, Chee, 2001).

The spirit of the NPPA's systematic muzzling of the foreign media was extended to the global broadcast media in April 2001. After a very brief debate in a one-party dominated Parliament, the SBA (Amendment) Bill 2001 was passed. Under this legislation, foreign broadcasters which meddle in 'domestic politics' – a term that only the Minister of Information, Communications and the Arts is empowered by law to define – could be slapped with restrictions on the number of households which can receive their broadcasts through cable (operated by SCV); or worse, the broadcast channel could be 'blacked-out' altogether with minimal warning (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Apr 23, 2001). If such an action is effected, advertising and/or subscription revenue of the broadcaster in question would be severely affected. In his parliamentary speech on the new Bill, the incumbent Minister of Information, Communications and the Arts Lee Yock Suan revealed that the Singapore government has a clear grasp of the political economy of the media industry:

> This Bill makes it clear to foreign broadcasters that while they can sell their services to Singaporeans, they should not interfere with our domestic politics (Lee, Y. S., cited in Latif, 2001).

Indeed, the touchstone of all commercial media is the market and as such any decision on regulatory compliance would thus be market-dictated and targeted. Undoubtedly, Singaporean law and policy-makers understand – and apply – this knowledge only too well. As journalist Eric Ellis has observed and opined in *The Australian* newspaper:

> Where [international media] are all vulnerable to Singapore [laws and] justice is that each has an economic interest in Singapore itself. The city-state might have a tiny population but it is a wealthy, English-speaking one. Foreign titles print in Singapore because it guarantees efficiency. So, if the Government chooses, as it has done, to cut Singapore circulation, advertising and profits are threatened (Ellis, 2002: 9).

The government further demonstrated its technological auto-regulatory abilities in the new media arena by tackling an online publication in August 2002. On August 4, 2002, the international news agency Bloomberg published an article by its US-based columnist Patrick Smith that described as nepotism the appointment of Madam Ho Ching, the daughter-in-law of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and wife of Prime-Minister designate Lee Hsien Loong, as Executive Director of Temasek Holdings, the powerful government-owned corporation that controls most of the government-linked companies in Singapore (Ellis, 2002: 9; *The Straits Times Interactive*, Aug 30, 2002). This article was published electronically on Bloomberg's website and terminals, and appeared in print only in Malaysia's *The New Sunday Times* on August 11, 2002. Upon knowledge of a possible defamation suit, Bloomberg retracted its article, apologised unreservedly to the Senior Minister, the Prime Minister as well as his Deputy Lee Hsien Loong, and offered damages amounting to S$595,000. Both the apology and compensation was accepted and the case was settled promptly in three weeks. Bloomberg's quick settlement demonstrated a pragmatic understanding of political constraints of both media operations and Internet use in Singapore, and that the Singapore government has no intention of relinquishing its auto-regulatory control in the digital age of the "Internet galaxy" (Castells, 2001). As technology develops, one is likely to see a further fine-tuning of rules and regulations that favour the political status quo.

Commentators and critics on Singapore have variously argued that the real intention of restricting access to websites is 'ideological', a term used broadly to imply that the agenda is always political. On June 8, 2001, whilst launching the official website

of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that new regulations on how political parties may use the Internet at election time would be unveiled (Chua, 2001a: 3).[98] It is interesting to see how the PAP government, being one of the most vociferous proponents of IT and the info-communications industry, had taken such a long time to show its 'electronic face' (Chadwick, 2001; see Chua, 2001b: 12). This 'face', however, was somewhat limited as the website at launch was more like an exercise in public relations, featuring interviews with party leaders, most of whom, as cabinet members, receive sufficient local media coverage anyway. Gomez argues that absence of a discussion forum, along with the disclaimers found in the 'Conditions of Access' page on the PAP website, reveals the inherent anxiety of the PAP leaders to be "out in the open and in an interactive domain policed by the very laws that it has introduced" (Gomez, 2002: 28). But for a party that has dominant control of the apparatuses of government, such rules can be easily circumvented or revamped to its advantage.

On August 13, 2001, in clear preparation for the 2001 General Elections, eventually held on November 3, 2001, the Singapore Parliament passed an amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Act to regulate Internet campaigning and advertising during General Election season. The new Bill was essentially an extension and further refinement to the MDA's Class Licence scheme. Instead of leaving Internet Content Providers to self-regulate online political content, the Parliamentary Elections Act defines specifically what

[98] *The Straits Times* reported that the PAP website (www.pap.org.sg) took six months to put together and cost a tidy sum of S$50,000 for the party (Chua, 2001a: 3). For further reading on the impact of the PAP website, see: Chua (2001a and 2001b); and Sivakkumaran (2001a).

is allowed on political party – as well as non-partisan but political – websites, most of which should already be registered with the MDA. As a pre-emptive measure, even new communication technologies like mobile telephones, along with data and text functions like short messaging services (SMS), were brought under the purview of this new law. According to Minister Lee Yock Suan, the amendment was designed to "keep political campaigning serious and responsible", and it should therefore be perceived as a positive step forward in "liberalising the use of Internet" and communication technologies for political purposes and advertising (Ng, 2001; Editorial, Aug 15, 2001; and, Lim, 2001). The equivocal use of terms such as 'liberalising' within political discourse in Singapore may seem like pernicious nonsense to some, but they remain highly constraining, especially for oppositional political figures and civil society activists, who would be prompted to curtail their online as well as offline activities. What remains most baffling – and surprisingly unquestioned – is that the amendment was passed with the complete set of Internet campaigning rules (or a list of 'dos and don'ts') still in a draft or 'work-in-progress' stage, something that could arguably happen only in an authoritarian, or perhaps a totalitarian, regime. The Minister did however 'assure' the House that the full list of Internet features which would be allowed on these websites would be released before the election (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Aug 14, 2001).

Minister Lee Yock Suan's promise was made good when the rules were subsequently unveiled and made effective on October 17, 2001, just two weeks before polling day. Opposition political parties, most of which are typically under-staffed and short-handed, were forced to make necessary adjustments to their websites within the

short time frame, whilst having to campaign and canvass for votes.[99] This had the effect of further weakening the already parlous state of political opposition in Singapore. As Rodan comments:

> Political competition in Singapore operates within tight strictures. Periodic refinements are meant to keep it that way and take the risk out of elections for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). Adjustments include fine-tuning controls over electronic media. The PAP is accustomed to conducting election campaigns with media that promotes rather than question or scrutinise its message. That is not about to dramatically change (Rodan, 2001: 26).

Rodan's pessimism about the usefulness of electronic media, primarily the Internet, for political purposes in Singapore is not shared by James Gomez, a Singaporean political activist and founder of the Think Centre, a news events and self-publishing company devoted to raising awareness on political reforms within Singapore and the region. Gomez believes that there are yet frontiers of the Internet to exploit for the purposes of engaging Singaporeans (Gomez, 2002). Using the Internet to organise activities on the ground or grassroots level and openly publicising correspondences with the authorities, thus placing the authorities and their decision-making processes under public glare, the Think Centre could be seen to have brought politics to the Internet in Singapore – but only for a brief season. In October 2001, the policing authorities in the central *Panopticon* tower acted by gazetting the Think Centre as a political society. This led to the immediate suspension of funding sources, aimed at crippling its already lean operations. Not only did this blatant and widely publicised action weaken the foundations of the Think Centre, it acted as a potent and visible warning for Singaporeans to dissociate themselves from the website,

[99] See Gomez (2002; chapter 11) for an account of how 'The Think Centre', a non-partisan civil society organisation which disburses its information online, was systematically crippled by the amendment to the Parliamentary Election Act (2001).

and hence to apply self-censorship in an auto-regulatory manner (see Gomez, 2000). This involves staying clear of the Think Centre and other 'political' websites because one does not know when the 'supervisor' in the Central Tower may be watching (Foucault, 1977: 201).

Staying somewhat optimistic after the clampdown of the Think Centre in 2001, Gomez boldly – but erroneously – declared that:

> Internet legislation in Singapore to date stands to cover websites and for election time covers political parties and organizations. It does not yet cover individuals and there has been no instance for the PAP to move against an individual (Gomez, 2002: 92).

It is evident that Gomez fails to comprehend the extensiveness of Singapore's class licensing approach to Internet policy, which has the potential to implicate all users of the Internet. More fundamentally, he fails to understand that in a panoptic and auto-regulatory environment such as Singapore, the technologies of governmentality can be readily mobilised for various social, cultural and indeed, political, ends (Foucault, 1978; also discussed in Chapter Two). If Gomez's intention was to alert individuals about the possible risk of overstepping political boundaries in private Internet postings, his response came soon after.

In July 2002, the police embarked on a criminal defamation investigation into Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff, the former chief of Fateha.com, a Singapore-based Muslim rights activist website, who took the government to task in early 2002 on the rights of young Muslim girls to don their *tudung* (traditional Islamic headscarves) in public schools. This racial cum religious encounter was particularly sensitive in the wake of the

terror attacks on America on September 11, 2001 and the thwarting of the regional Jemaah Islamiah (JI) terrorist plot in Singapore in January 2002. Although Zulfikar ventured into a sensitive socio-political territory in Singapore, it was more likely that the investigations had more to do with political annoyance than with genuine social threat. As *The Straits Times* reported on July 4, 2002, Zulkifar was being investigated for three articles posted on his organisation's website questioning Muslim Affairs Minister Yaacob Ibrahim's standing as leader of the Malay/Muslim community and, echoing the Bloomberg's case, criticising Ho Ching's appointment as Executive Director of Temasek Holdings (Osman, 2002a).[100] The probes intensified the next day when the police impounded the computer of another unrelated man, by the name of Robert Ho, for two articles that appeared in June in 'soc.culture.singapore', a popular Internet newsgroup in and on Singapore, that were suspected to have also criminally defamed government leaders and officials (Osman, 2002b).

Through this brief episode, the policing strategy of auto-regulation was applied very swiftly, effectively warning would-be online offenders to watch their 'cyber-journeys' and to avoid dabbling in politics. Tan Tarn How, a veteran journalist with *The Straits Times* 'closed' the saga with a seemingly innocuous report that the Internet community was "spooked" by these events, adding that "some users [would be] wondering if they would be targeted next" (Tan, T. H., 2002). The fear of falling victim to the widening electronic powers of the technological auto-regulation as conducted by

[100] The anonymously written articles were entitled: "Is Yaacob Ibrahim a Hypocrite?"; "The Real Reason for Forcing Muslim Girls to Remove Hijab"; and, "The Ho Ching Miracle" (Osman, 2002b; accessed Nov 2002). The website, originally at www.fateha.com, has since been removed from the World Wide Web.

the Singaporean authorities suggests that the regulatory net has been tightened, contrary to Gomez's (2002: 92) perception of a regulatory loophole. Tan's report also served as a warning to all Singaporeans – especially those with 'anti-government' tendencies – that panoptically-inscribed disciplinary mechanisms are already in place to deal swiftly and decisively with offenders (Foucault, 1977: 208-9). It is evident, in analysing these cases of regulatory enforcements, that the task and function of technological auto-regulation is being rolled-out as rapidly as the uptake of new media technologies. The next section of the chapter will demonstrate that the fast-developing array of e-Government services, via Singapore's widely-used e-Citizen portal (www.ecitizen.gov.sg), looks set to hasten and set the scene for the future of technological auto-regulation and socio-political control in Singapore.

E-Governing the Future

> In the developed world, the Internet is now ubiquitous; government use of it is fast becoming so. For such countries, the issue is no longer whether government is online, but in what form and with what consequences (Chadwick and May, 2003: 271).

The concept of electronic government (e-Government) has been widely heralded as a governmental technology that would bring about greater freedom and information exchange by enhancing political participation and dialogic democracy – or e-democracy, as it is commonly referred to in political discourse – not unlike the early rhetoric about the Internet's libertarian impulses (Thorp, 2004: 1). The ubiquity of the Internet, as well as other digital modes of communication, has meant that everyday exchanges, whether for political or other purposes, can be readily made online. This has opened the way for the

proliferation of e-Government, defined by John Morison, Professor of Jurisprudence at Queen's University, Belfast, thus:

> E-government involves using the power of information and communication technology (ICT) to help transform the accessibility, quality and cost-effectiveness of public services and to help to revitalise the relationship between citizens and government through improved consultation and participation in governance. The principal ICT is the internet, accessible through a variety of means including personal computers and kiosks, mobile phones including text messaging (SMS), and digital television (Morison, 2003: 14).

Essentially, with e-Government, the provision of public services online, along with promises of electronic voting at elections, is thought to offer a new level of openness in the operation of government.

To the general public, e-Government implies a simplification of their interaction with government via Internet connectivity, or as Netchaeva (2002: 467) puts it, a new way of understanding 'governance'. But the idea of e-Government to most governments has mostly been about the 'modernisation' of the government as well as the processes of government (Morrison, 2003: 15-6). As Chadwick and May point out, the project of 'modernisation' is mostly about the development of benchmarks to measure and gauge the government's managerial efficiency and technological competence (Chadwick and May, 2003: 272). While the modernisation of government services may appear to be a mundane exercise, I would argue that such benchmarks have the potential to unseat governments at election times. In this regard and at the very minimum, e-Government can be said to be inherently political, especially if it is conducted in a 'technological society' (Barry, 2001).

While it seems obvious that e-Government projects on the whole facilitate citizens' access to ministerial or departmental websites, what is less clear is whether the 'electronic faces' of government bodies enhance or solicit public consultations (Chadwick, 2001). In other words, there is yet no veracious evidence that the Internet enhances political democracy, especially in illiberal or authoritarian regimes. As Norris observes,

> although governments have developed websites to promote "top-down" publicity, and even state propaganda, there are few opportunities so far via these media for genuine "bottom-up" interaction, public criticism or discursive deliberation (Norris, 2001: 114).

Singapore presents an interesting case study of e-Government because of its unique and sophisticated ability to balance authoritarianism with technological modernisation and rapid economic progress (Castells, 2001: 164; George, 2003: 3). Singapore's foray into e-Government, which in actuality extends the vision of panoptic surveillance whilst appearing to 'open-up' government, offers a glimpse of the further reaches and uses of the Internet and technological auto-regulation.

Led by technologically advanced societies like the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia, the concept of e-Government surfaced in the late-1990s, following a large-scale establishment of governmental websites from the mid-1990s (Chadwick and May, 2003: 272). Although not officially recognised as a 'developed nation' by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Singapore's pattern of rapid and advanced e-Government development mirrors those of other developed

nations.[101] Although set in train earlier, it was not until June 2000 that the Singapore government, through the IDA, made public its adoption of its new electronic or digital 'governance' strategy (IDA, 2001: 36). In a nutshell, Singapore's original S$1.5 billion e-Government Action Plan sought to:

> develop thought leadership on e-government; build new capabilities and new capacities; encourage the spread of electronic service delivery; innovate with info-comm technologies; and finally be responsive and proactive (IDA, 2001: 36).[102]

In effect, this first e-Government Action Plan, which is very much an improved or 'modernised' version of the nation's inaugural National IT Plan of the 1980s (Kuo, 1990 and 1994; Reid, 1996), calls for all civil servants and government administrators to fundamentally rethink all aspects of governance and consider how technology can be used to improve internal efficiencies and improve governmental interaction with individuals and businesses (IDA, 2000: 36). This mission to improve its mode of governance should not be seen as any different from the goals of other state or national governments. Indeed, as Norris (2001) points out, the ability of any government to move towards e-Government is partly a demonstration of its technological prowess, and partly a fine-tuning of its ability to meet the administrative needs of citizens.

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[101] The OECD originated as the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), which was formed to administer North American aid under the US-led Marshall Plan (1947) for the reconstruction of Europe after World War II. Since the OECD took over from the OEEC in 1961, its vocation has been to build strong economies in its 30 member countries, improve efficiency, hone market systems, expand free trade and contribute to development in industrialised. In recent years, the OECD has expanded its focus to offer analytical expertise and accumulated experience to developing and emerging market economies. For further information about the OECD, visit its website at: www.oecd.org.

[102] The 2000 Annual Report of the IDA was accompanied by a video (in CD-ROM) detailing the mission of Singapore ambitious E-government Action Plan I (IDA, 2000).

Singapore has impressed the developed world with its speedy and wide-ranging implementation of online government services. In June 2002, Singapore was presented an 'Explorer Award' in recognition of its innovative online public programmes by the prestigious American-based E-Gov Institute (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jun 26, 2002).[103] In addition, Singapore has been recognised for being the second most mature e-government location, and of equal standing with the United States, in a worldwide study done by management consultancy firm Accenture (IDA, 2001: 36). In June 2004, Singapore's second-place global standing was not only reaffirmed for the fourth year running, Singapore was also declared the top e-Government nation in Asia (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jun 19, 2004).

Since April 1999, Singapore's e-Citizen portal (www.ecitizen.gov.sg) has been the 'electronic face' of Singapore's e-Government plan. The e-Citizen website offers more a vast array of electronic services grouped in 16 online units based on categories that address family life, health, housing, education, employment, transport and other day to day issues (IDA, 2001). In 2001, close to one-third of Singaporean taxpayers filed their income tax returns online, a figure that is reportedly one of the highest in the world. More than 95 per cent of all government services have been made available via the e-Citizen portal since the start of 2003 (Dawson, 2002). According to the IDA, the regulator in charge of e-Government roll-out and policies, the aim is to streamline administration such

[103] The E-Gov Institute website (www.e-gov.com) declares its mission as: "dedicated to providing quality educational offerings to those involved in government IT [and technology]. Developed in conjunction with industry professionals, designed to provide real world solutions, and presented in a collaborative setting, the E-Gov Institute forums and conferences aim to encourage innovation in public service." The E-Gov Institute, in short, is where government leaders around the world are trained to manage citizens via e-Government. Visit the E-Gov Institute website for more information.

that citizens would not need to visit government offices at all in the near future (IDA, 2001). As recorded in November 2002, the e-Citizen portal received an average of 4.2 million hits a month, which works out to about one in two persons using e-Government services in Singapore (Dawson, 2002). Not contented with basic services, the Singapore government has also been actively developing a nationwide electronic business transactional system known as the Government Electronic Business (GeBiz). When operational, GeBiz would link all government departments with its suppliers, thus streamlining the often-cumbersome processes of issuing purchase orders, government tenders and procurement of goods and services (IDA, 2000 and 2001). In addition, the IDA has announced that it would look into extending e-Government services to mobile telephones and handheld computing devices as part of its newly-funded S$1.3 billion second e-Government Action Plan launched in 2003 (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jun 19, 2004).

It is noteworthy that the IDA has termed the entire electronic project a democratic aspiration towards a "citizen-friendly state" (IDA, 2000). Although the ability to carry out necessary bureaucratic tasks and to access comprehensive information about government policies, white papers, official reports and other abstruse documents are undoubtedly useful, improved access to information in itself does not, and must not, equate with greater transparency. Chadwick and May (2003) allude to this same point when they suggest that one of the base models of electronic interaction between states and their citizens is "e-government managerialism", which they define as:

> A concern with the "efficient" delivery of government information to citizens and other groups of "users"; the use of ICTs to improve flows of

> information within and around government; a recognition of the importance of "service delivery" to "customers"; the view that speeding up information provision is, by itself, "opening up" government (Chadwick and May, 2003: 272).

For a government that prides itself in managing and delivering "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39), a 'managerial' approach towards e-Government, where the delivery of administrative information to citizens perceived as customers requiring guidance, is hardly surprising. What is more pertinent is how, if possible, information flows "within and around government" via the e-Government network could be used to enhance and perfect the functions of technological auto-regulation in Singapore (Chadwick and May, 2003: 272).

At the most elementary level, electronic linkage of citizens to various government offices would enable greater direct scrutiny and surveillance, which translates to a (further) loss of personal and corporate privacy. Of course, one could easily point to the fact Singapore is always-already a surveillance state, since it is one of several countries that has continued to rely on a numbered identity card to track and manage each citizen and resident in Singapore (Rodan, 1998: 11). This bar-coded identity card is needed for a range of basic services, including job applications and the opening of banking and Internet accounts. What is different, and certainly more potent, with e-Government and Internet-based communications is the prospect of immediate information transfer across a vaster and more precise governmental network (Castells, 2001: 184-5). Indeed, this e-Government network allows Singaporeans the convenience of getting their addresses or other personal particulars updated for all government accounts and public services by

simply making one visit to their local police post.[104] Not much, or virtually nothing, is mentioned of illiberal government surveillance or the intrusion of one's privacy (Lyon, 2003a: 67). Understandably, the keywords in most public presentations about e-Government in Singapore have been: 'user-friendliness' and/or 'convenience' (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jun 19, 2004).

Consistent with the Singapore government's strategy of regulating the Internet for the purposes of gaining economic advantage whilst maintaining authoritarian power, e-Government in the Singapore context has, in reality, little to do with genuine attempts to improve political openness and transparency, to advance active citizenship or to enable wider feedback and consultation (issues that were critiqued in Chapter Four). For a polity that indulges in 'gestural politics', greater public participation in politics is never the primary, nor is it the ultimate, goal of the government. After all, the Singapore government has always held the belief that regulatory control must precede openness and transparency, and that 'civil society' or any forms of participation in politics must be done within the geopolitical arena of Parliament (see Lim, R., 2004). Although Singaporean authorities embrace the Internet and e-Government in a manner that appears 'citizen-friendly' and enlightened, the policing principles of technological auto-regulation remain fully in force and enforced. Even then, any 'open' interaction via the Internet and e-Government channels are necessarily circumscribed by cryptic codes and arbitrary rules that operate in the same fashion as 'OB-markers' (Lim, R., 2004; see Chapter Four).

[104] This point was visually emphasised in the IDA video on *E-Government* (IDA, 2000).

On September 29, 2001, the Singapore Government reversed its decision to allow overseas Singaporeans to vote at selected voting centres, despite an earlier amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Act which would have allowed Singapore's first overseas voting, due to security concerns in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks (Fernandez, 2001). Critics saw this as a political tactic aimed at minimising the possibility of voters' backlash during uncertain times. But more importantly, this incident offered a case in point of how democracy does not necessarily strengthen with technological advancements, or more specifically, with the proliferation of Internet sites and the advent of e-Government. The indefinite postponement of overseas voting – what would have been the first of several steps towards the setting up of electronic voting facilities within Singapore and abroad (Fernandez, 2001) – sent the ominous signal that Singapore could thus lead the Asian region, if not the world, in clamping down Internet websites and other online activities that are best described, in borrowing George's (2003) terminology, as "politically contentious".

Conclusion

> Guided by a strong, capable government, Singapore has fully embraced technological modernization as a development tool. At the same time, it is widely considered to be one of the most sophisticated authoritarian systems in history. Attempting to steer a narrow path between these two policies, the government of Singapore has tried to expand the use of the Internet among its citizens, while retaining political control over this use by censorship service providers (Castells, 2001: 164).

With widespread fears of terrorism caused by the events of September 11, 2001, as well as online sabotages in various forms, increased threats to global and national

securities are likely to enhance the regulatory role of authorities around the world (see Lyon, 2002 and 2003b). This has been demonstrated around the world by increased police surveillance not just on suspicious individuals, groups and structures, but on the movements of ordinary people in everyday life. Most of such policing activities have been permitted by new intelligence and public surveillance laws that were rapidly passed in the aftermath of September 11, the most prominent being the Patriot Act in the United States (Lyon, 2001: 1-2). It is undeniably ironic that such authoritarian practices that used to be criticised as restrictive, anti-democratic, illiberal or plain draconian have become widely endorsed and perpetuated in liberal democratic societies. Justifications, if needed, can be put in simple terms: such pre-emptive legislations and auto-regulatory strategies protect the 'innocent', most of whom are responsible and have nothing to hide, and should therefore have nothing to fear (Lyon, 2004: 26-7).

In much the same way, as the world moves closer towards global online exchanges and widespread electronic commerce (e-commerce), it is certain that more auto-regulatory rules and strategies will be enacted to guard against uses and abuses of the Internet and other new media technologies. Since regulating the media is, as James Michaels (1990: 40) puts it, mostly deciding through legal means who has access to a medium and what information may – or may not – be communicated on it, it is by design a mode of Foucauldian governmentality and a continuous exercise in cultural regulation. As Foucault makes clear,

> with government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics – to arrange things in such a way

> that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved (Foucault, 1978: 95).

The 'ends' of auto-regulation in Singapore, to extend Foucault's point, is the cultivation of a well-disciplined, hardworking, morally-minded, technology-savvy and a well-tempered or regulated politically-complaint cultural citizen (as identified in Chapter Four of this thesis). With its well-documented ability to utilise 'visible' technological and legal apparatuses whilst 'unverifiably' conducting the social, cultural and political conducts of its citizens (Foucault, 1977: 201), the authorities in Singapore have demonstrated, with some success, how governmentality could be imposed or 'disposed' of in the digital age (Foucault, 1978: 95). Through the wielding of "centralised control" (George, 2000), along with what Foucault (1977: 137) calls "the elegance of discipline" in extracting 'docility-utility' from citizens via the enactment of publicly-endorsed Internet codes and e-Government initiatives, the concept of technological auto-regulation can be applied and subsequently perfected.

Castells, in the opening quote to this section of the chapter, uses Singapore's ambivalence towards the Internet media to illustrate his position that the Internet is neither an instrument of freedom and democracy nor a weapon of one-sided control and domination (Castells, 2001: 164). This in-between "narrow path" is highly reflective of the political strategy of technological auto-regulation. It is blatant yet subtle; it is open yet surreptitious; and, it is concomitantly visible yet unverifiable. Crucially for Singapore, it is able to promote strong economic growth whilst keeping social dissent and "contentious politics" at bay (George, 2003: 12). It appears to embrace technological progress and

development, whilst making sure that its regulatory control over technology remains watertight. As Singaporean media law academic Ang Peng Hwa summarises:

> The Singapore Government has categorically stated that its media will be different from those of other countries. However, Singapore is also commercially minded and keenly attuned to the *zeitgeist* of the commercial media world outside. This means that, insofar as the new media in particular are concerned, the government will continue to regulate them as far as possible without upsetting their commercial potential (Ang, 1999: 114).

Unlike Haas' (1999a) many (sub)puzzles, there are no schizophrenic ambivalences in the eyes of the government regulators in Singapore, certainly not with regard to Internet media, electronic communication, e-Government and technological auto-regulation.

With increasing global competition in the media and infocomm industries, Singapore has in recent times come under increased pressure to 'loosen' monopolistic hold on the overall media sector (Leo, 2003: 5). What has been happening instead is a gradual and further tightening of media and Internet policies, to cushion or shield the existing politically-endorsed players from genuine competition, in the name of 'liberalisation' (Lim and Wong, 2004; see also Leo, 2003; and, Leo and Lee, 2004). As the government continues to fine-tune its legal cum regulatory structures in preparation for the mainstreaming of e-Government and wider e-commerce applications, the discursive application of technological auto-regulation for the continued conduct of citizens' conduct looks set to intensify – whether one realises it or not. As Foucault puts it in his *panoptic* terms, "surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" (Foucault, 1977: 201).

CHAPTER SIX:
Popularising Policy: The Nation in Parade and Songs

> Music, alongside national artistic traditions, common religions, ethnic identity and a range of visual symbols (flags, emblems, crests, currency, figureheads), is embedded in the creation of (and constant maintenance of) nationhood. Music has been used in a variety of political contexts related to the construction and maintenance of national identity, notably through some classical music, national anthems, state music policies and the more recent construction of national rock 'n' roll traditions and 'music ambassadors' for many countries (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 118).

> All music, any organization of sounds is... a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms. Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form (Attali, 1985: 6).

Introduction

On August 8, 1966, the eve of the first anniversary of an independent Republic of Singapore, the incumbent Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew delivered his inaugural National Day Rally Speech to the nation.[105] Among other things, Lee, the founding father of Singapore, recounted the unpleasant chain of events leading to the formation of Singapore as a sovereign nation, caused by Singapore's sudden ejection from Malaysia, on August 9, 1965. The official reason for Singapore's supposedly reluctant separation was Malaysia's unwillingness to embrace a 'Malaysian Malaysia' agenda, where non-

[105] The Prime Minister's annual National Day Rally speech, often described as a 'marathon' speech – which bears semblance to the presidential State of Union Address in the United States of America (USA) – is continued to this day. Unlike the first Rally speech in 1966, which was held on the eve of National Day (as well as speeches in the 1960s and part of the 1970s), the National Day Rally speeches of contemporary times, typically held in the final week of August, mark the 'close' of Singapore's National Day celebrations. The Prime Minister continues nevertheless to issue a shorter speech for National Day itself.

communalist politics and multi-racial integration is paramount (Lee, 1965). In short, the nation of Singapore was to become culturally and politically different from its neighbour. This, according to Lee (1966), was Singapore's 'reality' – in other words, its destiny of 'survival'. As Lee declared in his deeply propagandistic, but nonetheless visionary, National Day Rally speech that year:

> [T]his is one of the greatest strengths about Singapore: its willingness to face reality including the 9th of August. [...] Every year, on this 9th August for many years ahead – how many, I do not know – we will dedicate ourselves anew to consolidate ourselves to survive; and most important of all, to find an enduring future for what we have built and what our forbears will build up (Lee, 1966).

Following the above declaration, Lee reiterated his government's social and cultural policy of multiracialism – encompassing the familiar elements of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and of multireligiosity, or the '4Ms' (as explicated in Chapter One) – which was intended, to a large extent at the time, to differentiate itself from its northern neighbour. In addition, Lee effectively enshrined the political and politicised ideology of 'survivalism' that has become the cornerstone of Singapore's mode of governmentality since its independence (Velayutham, 2004: 13-14). To ensure that his instructions would be heeded and adhered to in years to come, Lee decreed every '9th of August' as a day of 'dedication' for all Singaporeans to "consolidate" themselves for survival (Lee, 1966). Lee was not only 'inventing' a ritualised National Day 'tradition', to borrow from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), he was also attempting to fashion a new Singaporean culture, regulated and marked by deep and enduring allegiances to a fledgling new 'nation' (see Kong and Yeoh, 1997; and, Leong, 1999).

It is noteworthy that Lee's original idea of a national day had little to do with the pomp and pageantry, or the Bakhtinian 'carnivalesque mesalliance', of contemporary National Day parades in Singapore (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 231). It is not surprising, therefore, that the first National Day parade was referred to as the 'First Independence Anniversary Parade' (Chng, 2000: 17), with the idea of 'celebration' palpably omitted. With the new government's dominant preoccupation with economic development captured within the ideology of survivalism, the National Day envisaged by Lee had a stern and phlegmatic demeanour, akin to a memorial service to honour victims or veterans of a war or tragedy (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 217-8). The aim was quite simply to orchestrate the 'invention' of a state-defined national culture and national identity, a project collectively and popularly referred to as "nation-building" (see Hill and Lian, 1995). Although the precise shape and definition of 'building' the nation, which typically refers to a deep identification with the nation or the formation of a uniquely Singaporean identity, was (and still remains somewhat) vague and contentious, it was made pointedly clear from the outset that it had to be distinctly different from Malaysian culture and identity. As the former Prime Minister had identified, multiracialism as the privileging of individuals based on merit, rather than on race or ethnic belonging, became the *zeitgeist* of social and cultural policy in the modern nation-state of Singapore (Hill and Lian, 1995: 5; Chua and Kuo, 1990; cf. Chapter One of this thesis).

Despite the historical, political and cultural gravity of Singapore's nationhood, not many critical insights have been proffered on the event of National Day, with the exception of the usual journalistic reports and government (or government-inspired)

statements. Writers and researchers who have commented on Singapore's treatment of and approach to its National Day have tended to focus on the spectacular and propagandist aspects of the National Day parade, the highlight of the month-long commemoration of the nation's independence (See Anon, 2000: 20-22). In one of the first published scholarly texts examining the hegemonic success(es) of National Day parades in Singapore, Kong and Yeoh consider how "the state attempts to persuade Singaporeans of the naturalness of its ideologies by using the spectacle and ritual of National Day parades" (1997: 217). This fairly well-rehearsed argument is also taken on board by Singaporean sociologist Leong Wai-Teng (1999) in his analysis of the National Day parade as a commodity that is typically consumed by two fairly disparate groups of Singaporeans: the 'believers' of the myth of the Singapore 'nation' and the 'unbelievers'. According to Leong, the believers are simply those who are mostly convinced that Singapore is governed by the best possible bureaucrats and power-holders; whereas the 'unbelievers' are the not-so-patriotic citizens, described by Leong as "repressed consumers" who prefer to find other modes of distraction. Instead of having to deal with criticisms of what appears to be a lack of 'patriotism', some of these 'unbelievers' take full advantage of the 9th of August public holiday for a brief overseas escape, thus resisting the hegemony of – and for – the moment (Leong, 1999: 12).

Theresa Devashayam (1990) makes a similar observation when she highlights the significance of identity formations within the National Day parade, and the resulting responses – both positive and negative – from the people. Although these tactical "resistances" to state hegemony are mostly "latent", and therefore non-threatening to

political control and order in a polity where feedback and political participation are mostly 'gestural' (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 217; as discussed in Chapter Four), such countering discourses illustrate that there are 'gaps' yet to be plugged in the ever-expanding operations of technological auto-regulation. But in the context of shifts towards a new 'creative industries' approach to cultural thought and policy, such politically non-risky resistances are likely to be tolerated (Flew, 2002: 130; Tan, K. P., 2003; see Florida, 2002; and also Chapter Three of this thesis).

Another research approach is to treat the National Day, especially the annual parade, as a media or mediatory event. Irvin Lim's (1999) semiotic and textual analyses of the live-telecasting of the 1993 parade on Singapore national television is an excellent case in point. As Lim points out, the media(ted) spectacle of the nation in parade is a very powerful tool in engendering public consumption and 'staged' participation of this national event. Selvaraj Velayutham (1995) takes a slightly different approach when he positions the National Day parade as a mediatory event aimed at publicising and negotiating the differences, divisions, conflicts and contradictions which result from Singapore's multiracial, multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural national polity and socio-cultural policies.[106] As Velayutham writes in his dissertation, the parade is actively involved in processes of identity mediation and the management of difference for "the purpose of positioning the nation and the character of its people" to produce and deliver economic progress (Velayutham, 1995: iii). As Kong and Yeoh also surmise, National Day parades "form part of the larger strategy of developing and maintaining a

[106] For further reading on the politics and 'disciplining' of language, racial and cultural difference in Singapore, see Puroshotam (1998).

sense of belonging and national identity, drawing on pomp and pageantry, visual and aural effect" to fulfil prescribed economic and political goals (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 236).

Most of the earlier studies done on Singapore's National Day emphasise the symbolic and mediatory functions of parades for the primary purpose of nation-building and economic survivalism. Whilst not dismissing these important contributions, this chapter, as the final of the thesis, takes a different stance by analysing the introduction and popularisation of Singaporean national songs as techniques and technologies of governmentality. It asserts that governmental technologies utilising such cultural practices allow the authorities to extend their disciplinary reach over the cultural thought and personal conduct of citizens (Rose, 1999a: xxi-xxii). As posited in earlier chapters, this can be carried out either directly and openly, or indirectly and with discreet subtlety. The composition and commissioning of national songs, designed to capitalise and popularise symbolic and historical narratives of the nation-state (Shapiro, 2001: 583), has arguably emerged as one of the most potent and persuasive governmental strategies adopted by the PAP government in recent years. By combining ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the National Day parade and celebrations of August 2000 in Singapore with textual analyses of the lyrics and music video clips of two national songs – *Home* (1998) and *Stand Up for Singapore* (2000 version) – this chapter aims to make sense of how the popularisation of the nation in parade and songs can not only be used to evoke nationalist sentiments, but to announce and 'soft-sell', even stoke political support for, new policy agendas. In other words, this chapter argues that such national discourses have the ability

to assert, re-affirm, even foreshadow, a nation's cultural thought and policy, its political ideology and, through inference, its mode of governmentality (MITA Media Release, 2000).

Mass Celebration of The Nation

Since its inception almost 40 years ago, Singapore's National Day has served as an "official reminder of Singapore's achievements" (Velayuthum, 2004: 5). From the articulation of Singapore's "willingness to face reality" in the 1960s (Lee, 1966) to defining Singapore's national identity in the 1970s and early-1980s (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 229), National Day themes, parades and other events have been used consistently and overtly for political propaganda. From the mid-1980s, there were overt shifts towards making National Day events more 'people-friendly'. Celebratory elements, referring mostly to visually appealing and crowd-pleasing items such as high-tech laser shows, choreographed fireworks, military hardware displays and stunts, free-falling commandos, multi-coloured floats, mass flashcards and other such cultural displays and spectacle, became a lot more pronounced. Indeed, parade organisers promised in 1986 that there would be "less parading, more entertainment and more audience participation" (*The Straits Times*, July 12, 1986, cited in Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 229). This 're-branding' exercise led to a whole hour (or more) prior to the start of the National Day Parade proper to be set aside for pre-parade entertainment, which includes 'audience-loosening' exercises to drum up a celebratory atmosphere of fun at the parade, similar to 'warm-up' routines conducted with 'live' television studio audiences prior to the filming of variety game shows and situation comedies (or 'sitcoms').

Although the date of August 9th has been religiously adhered to since Lee Kuan Yew ordained it in 1966, it is evident that the elements, style and focus of National Day have shifted with the times. Even the idea of a national 'celebration' has been radically altered – both semantically and visually/visibly. Although the idea of a national 'celebration' on National Day first surfaced in August 1969, the term was synonymous with the idea of 'dedication' as articulated by Lee Kuan Yew in 1966. The National Day message delivered by Colonel R. J. Minjoot, the military chair of the 1969 National Day Parade Committee, elucidates the cause and purpose of 'celebration' in those early days:

> We celebrate each National Day with unfeigned happiness and pride for this is the day that is dedicated to the people of Singapore. We celebrate the achievements of the past year and take note of our failings and we set our minds and steel our hearts to carry the nation forward to yet another milestone of progress in the coming year (in *National Day Parade 9th August, 1969*).

The modern conceptualisation of 'celebration' as fun and entertainment became the *sine qua non* of National Day from the mid-1980s, with each National Day becoming more elaborate and each parade promising greater fanfare and spectacle (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 229-30). As a matter of course, the National Day celebrations in contemporary times have become "mass entertainment" (Chng, 2000). This is enabled and enhanced by the deliberate "constitution of the spectacle" which "impresses not so much by its actual substance but through a pageantry, fanfare and show" (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 321). Indeed, Guy Debord's (1973) well-known thesis on *The Society of the Spectacle* suggests that mass spectacle may be used to create political impact through the use of fear (as a punitive strategy) or via the use of awe and wonder (as a celebratory strategy). Either

way, it allows for the evocation of nationalist sentiments for the discursive application of governmentality.

Recognising the potential of mass spectacle and entertainment to promote the 'nation' and to 'order' citizens into supporting existing and/or new policies, the government has stepped up efforts from the 1990s, through to the early-2000s, towards what I would describe as the further popularisation of the nation in songs, displays and moving images. With music and accompanying video images of the nation often described as "powerful weapons" to establish emotional responses to political parties and products (Street, 2003: 114), the successful implementation of popular songs and video footage representing Singapore gives the authorities tremendous power to manipulate social, cultural and political attitudes and opinions. This governmental strategy conforms to Street's concept of the "pragmatic use of music", which occurs when "a common identity and interest already exist, and music is deployed to advance these pre-established aims" or to express prior political goals (Street, 2003: 126). In the context of Singapore, this 'common identity' exists in the form of a young nation that has succeeded materially in the face of harsh economic conditions of the past (Velayutham, 2004: 4); while the primary target audience for such mass spectacle is the many younger generation of Singaporeans, most of whom are either unaware of the 'reality' of Singapore's independence or are simply disinterested in dull, historical details.

Whereas listening to a speech delivered by the eloquent Lee Kuan Yew was a popular activity in the past, it is difficult to incite similar crowd fervour and interests

today, not least because the citizenry in Singapore has been systematically de-politicised by the ruling PAP government (see Chapter Four). Likewise, as the National Days of yesteryears were fixated on the pertinence of economic survivalism and the Herculean task of nation-building almost from scratch, it is expected that the National Day celebrations of current times would have to reflect in creative ways the changing social, cultural and political demands of present and future generations. That which remains constant is the challenge that the government has to continually engage the people in as many ways as possible. This is where the governmental strategy and discourse of popularisation comes in. By popularising national events and symbols through songs and other cultural spectacle, the 'nation' becomes socially, culturally and aesthetically pleasing to the ordinary citizen cum consumer. This in turn renders the often arduous task of communicating, especially unpopular, governmental messages and new policy ideas more manageable.

The move towards creating an atmosphere of celebration and entertainment via the popularisation of national songs and cultural spectacle should also be perceived as a strategy of engagement, where Singaporeans, especially the young and/or the politically-apathetic, would be incited to participate actively by internalising the pleasurable sights and sounds of nationhood (Shapiro, 2001: 583). This approach widens the possibilities, or in Foucauldian terms, the "governmental arrangements", available at the disposal of the central authorities whose key task is to regulate and shape the conduct of their cultural citizens (Dean, 2002: 37; Foucault, 1978). As Street articulates most cogently in his study of the 'Politics of Music',

> It is the political possibilities inherent in pleasure that are important. Musical – or any other cultural – texts cannot simply be read as documents of political aspiration or resentment or compliance. They have to be seen, first and foremost, as sources of aesthetic pleasure. The question then becomes how that pleasure is linked to politics (Street, 2003: 128-9).

Street then goes on to suggest, drawing from the pioneering work of cultural theorist Simon Frith (1996), that music, as well as the political employment of popular cultural tools, has the capacity to evoke an ideal order so that political and communal values can be grasped in positive terms by citizens as "aesthetics in action", as opposed to seeing them as deceptive or illusive government propaganda (Frith, 1996: 275, cited in Street, 2003: 129).

The ability to harness political mileage out of cultural pleasure and aesthetics, as Adorno and Hockheimer (1977) have warned, creates a sense of liberation and autonomy by disguising the reality of systematic 'exploitation' of the people. This strategy is also reflected in Rose's interpretation of Foucauldian governmentality, demonstrated in the idea that the governing of oneself and one's soul is conducted through the autonomous powers of freedom (Rose, 1989: 11; see also, Rose, 1999b). Having recognised the potential of popular culture and music to promote approved political causes, the next section will go on to look at how such cultural 'aesthetics' have been put into political 'action' in Singapore at the National Day celebrations of 2000.

National Day 2000: Parading and Politicising Culture

> Today, we celebrate our nation's 35th birthday, and our first in an exciting new millennium. People remain our central focus. We must create opportunities for Singaporeans to develop to their fullest potential, and promote active citizenship in the shaping of our collective future. We value strong extended families – for they are our foundation and our future. Everyone of us has a part to play in building Singapore. Together, we make the difference to our home, our nation and our future. I wish all Singaporeans a Happy National Day!
>
> - Message by S. R. Nathan, President of the Republic of Singapore (in *Souvenir Programme*, 2000: 1)

Singapore celebrated its 35th National Day in the millennial year of 2000. The annual National Day Parade of 2000 was staged at the traditional 'Padang' ground, magnificently described by Kong and Yeoh as:

> [T]he expanse of green characteristically situated at the heart of the colonial city. Fronting a premier recreation club and surrounded by municipal offices, the court house, and other religious and educational institutions, the Padang had served both as cricket and ceremonial ground (a quintessentially British combination) in the colonial days. Its location marks it out as a locus of power and civic pride (1997: 220).

In addition to the parade, the National Day celebrations that year included a fringe event in the form of a national carnival – called 'Carnival@TheBay' – held at Marina South, a 44-hectare reclaimed land touted as the republic's new downtown of the 21st century (Andrianie, 2000a; 2000b).[107] With a clever association of the 'old' Padang (as the site of the 'traditional' and ceremonial parade) with the 'new' Marina South (as the site of Singapore's future as a global hub city) the symbolic capital of National Day 2000 as

[107] I am grateful to the Organising Committee of National Day Parade 2000 for granting me a special 'invitation-only' ticket to the parade to facilitate research for this chapter. I was also able visit the Marina South 'Carnival@TheBay' event. For more information on National Day 2000, refer to the *Souvenir Programme* of the National Day Parade (2000).

"aesthetics in action" was made very apparent (Street, 2003: 129). Indeed, as Lee Kuan Yew had prescribed (1966), Singapore's National Day is predicated on celebrating the 'reality' of the past whilst anticipating the future.

At the 'Carnival@TheBay' in Marina South, attempts were made by the organisers to drum up a party atmosphere, although the sheer size of the makeshift carnival site – which at times required shuttle buses to ferry patrons from one exhibit to another – made it extremely difficult. Designed as a sprawling theme park, one of the highlights of the four-day long carnival was a cultural display comprising a group of mini-villages showcasing the culture, handicrafts, dances, and 'folksy' music of Singapore's four official ethnic-based categorisations: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (referring mainly to 'Eurasians', or those of mixed European and Asian descent). These mini-villages were constructed to reinforce the nation's multiracialism policy and to (re)assert its importance for Singapore's political and cultural stability as the new millennium began. As Kong and Yeoh have observed, the message of multiracialism – along with multiculturalism, multilingualism and multireligiosity, or the '4Ms' – has unfailingly and repeatedly emerged at national day events, declaring in no uncertain terms "their importance in the bedrock of state ideology" (Kong and Yeoh, 1997: 231).

Also featured at the carnival were four static 'giant dolls', reminiscent of 'older' parades in the 1970s, once again representing the four 'official' races in Singapore, dressed in their stereotypical 'traditional' costumes (*Souvenir Programme*, 2000: 19). Although most Singaporeans would have by now done away with such 'traditional'

outfits, these representations are popularly employed at national and community events. The power of such representations, I would suggest, lies in its ability to foster new understandings, especially for those who would have witnessed such displays for the very first time, whilst simultaneously promoting old values and familiar discourses. This, according to Kurin, has the effect of valorising and legitimising political stances by the government and community (Kurin, 1995: 12). Further to being mere static cultural displays, these 'giant dolls' or racial figurines were to make their grand appearance at the actual parade at the Padang in a mass display segment entitled 'Home: A People in Harmony'. This was done to ensure that the politicised message of multiracialism is relayed not only to those in attendance at the carnival, but to all Singaporeans, since every National Day parade is beamed via 'live' telecast into the living rooms of all Singapore homes (Lim, 1999: 92-3).

The National Day celebration of 2000 was themed 'Together, We Make The Difference', a minor revision of the 1999 theme: 'Our People: Together We Make The Difference' (*Souvenir Magazine*, 2000). More than mere celebratory statements, these themes were intended to echo the national vision statement *Singapore 21: Together We Make The Difference*, unveiled in 1999 to direct Singaporeans towards a rethinking of their citizenship roles in a fast-changing society (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999; as discussed in Chapter Four). The decision to replicate the 1999 theme in 2000 suggests that the government wanted sustained emphases on the vision of *Singapore 21* as captured in the five 'pillars': Every Singaporean Matters; Strong Families: Our Foundation and Our Future; Opportunities For All; The Singapore Heartbeat; and, Active

Citizens: Making a Difference to Society (refer also to the *Singapore 21 Table* on page 164). Although these 'pillars' appear as discrete 'visions', they were made somewhat coherent and politically meaningful by 'press-ready' speeches and public statements issued by ministers and senior public servants. The brief 'National Day Message' by Singapore's second Elected President, S. R. Nathan, cited in the opening quote to this section, is a classic example of politically-sanctioned media sound bites written by policy-makers or official speechwriters to add (cryptic) coherence to such 'visions'.

In the frenzy and spectacle of a "mass entertainment" parade in 2000 (Chng, 2000), also described as "the grandest bash yet" (Andrianie, 2000c: 1), any attention to the details of *Singapore 21* seemed diluted or lost. The National Day parade of 2000 had an unprecedented focus on fun, partying and audience involvement. Spectators were repeated urged by well-recognised television celebrities, mobilised as cheerleaders at the parade, to sing out loud, to wave little national flags, to blaze battery-powered torches, to drum rhythms in unison (on their hand-held drum kit), even cheer, scream and make noises, to demonstrate and vocalise their 'love for Singapore'.[108] Far from being devoid of meaning, the frenzied and boisterous participation of the parade crowd serves to underscore Attali's argument that the ability to control 'noise', or the art of making mass noises audible, and hence controllable, "is a reflection of power" (Attali, 1985: 6; McClary, 1985: 153-4). As Attali further notes:

[108] National Day Parade spectators in the viewing gallery are usually given free parade kits filled with a brightly coloured baseball cap, sponsored snacks, drinks and other goodies. Also included in the 2000 parade kit were gadgets – including flags, torches and drum kits - for the spectator to use during the audience participation item and other segments of the mass displays. See Chng (2000) and Leong (1999: 11).

> The economic and political dynamics of the industrialized societies living under parliamentary democracy also lead power to invest art, and to invest in arts, without necessarily theorizing its control, as is done under dictatorship. Everywhere we look, the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power (Attali, 1985: 8).

The ability to control both participants and the 'noises' they make in response to the mass displays and parade spectacle allows messages to be transmitted not in an interpretative manner, but via a direct 'sender-to-receiver' route, enabled by the monopolisation of political symbols, national songs and other paraphernalia. In the study of media and communications theory, this approach towards the relaying of messages is often referred to as the "transmission model of communication", which assumes that messages are typically transmitted lineally between a sender and a receiver (Lewis and Slade, 2000: 9-10). In this model, noise is anything that interferes with the successful reception of the message, and should be removed as far as possible (ibid.). The ability to manage rather than eradicate 'noise' or alternative discourses can and should therefore result in the successful transmission of the preferred message. Indeed, this is what Attali refers to as "the institutionalization of the silence of others" (Attali, 1985: 8). This would in turn ensure that most, if not all, who attend or participate in the National Day parade would feel a sense of affective connection with the 'nation', thereby vindicating the political vision and 'pillars' of *Singapore 21* (see Velayutham, 2004; and, Jameson, 1984).

Transcending the original purpose of symbolising the nation's survival, the 9th of August has become possibly the most popular social and cultural event in Singapore. Its

popularity is comparable to a sell-out rock music concert, with aspiring spectators having to queue, often for more than twelve hours or even overnight, just to obtain two free tickets to the big parade (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jul 2, 2000). Those unable to obtain tickets would have to be content with live telecast or webcast, an option made available to the technologically savvy since the 1994 National Day (Teo, 2000). Not only is the National Day parade webcast a powerful demonstration of Singapore's technological competence and readiness for the new information economy, it also enables the transcendence of the traditional domestic sphere of a national audience to a greater global audience, reaching out especially to Singaporeans residing abroad (Lim, 1999: 142).

While it is undeniable that the NDP is a great source of entertainment, with the live-telecast of the NDP consistently attaining one of the highest free-to-air television ratings, most Singaporeans aspire to attend the parade in person – at least once in his or her lifetime. Whether or not such 'aspirations' have to do with deep patriotism or national pride, if at all quantifiable, is questionable. Apropos, Leong suggests that for some Singaporeans, a less than desirable motive for attending the parade is to receive a complimentary parade kit containing a wide range of goodies and discount vouchers (Leong, 1999: 11), to the extent that many are prepared to queue long hours or find various means to obtain tickets to the parade. On August 8, 2000, a day before National Day, *The Straits Times* reported that the much-coveted tickets to the parade were being sold over the Internet for amounts ranging from S$50 to S$250 per ticket (Arshad, 2000: 1). These transactions occurred despite a "Not For Sale" notice clearly printed on the

back of each ticket, with sellers citing 'free-market' reasons to justify their greed, and buyers rationalising the 'black market' price as a "token of appreciation" for long hours of queuing.[109]

Like any other forms of popular culture, Singapore's National Day – the parade, as well as the event in general – is a discursive site of meaning-making and contestation (Phua and Kong, 1996: 215-6). It is ideally suited for debates surrounding the imaginary status of the 'nation', as exemplified in issues pertaining to national identity and culture, shared values, patriotism and parochialism, and so on. For example, as National Day approaches every year, the national press finds itself inundated with letters about the representation of the national flag, and whether displaying it outside or over the balcony of one's home signifies patriotism (Leong, 1999: 12). Debates of such nature are always-already polarised, even futile, with some believing that raising the flag demonstrates national pride (*The Straits Times*, Jul 31, 2000: 36), and others arguing that true patriotism or loyalty to the nation needs no such public showcasing (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Aug 1, 2000). Of course, there are yet others who are simply unperturbed or unmoved, fitting neatly into Leong's (1999) aforementioned category of 'unbelievers'. The displaying of the national flag, however, has been circumscribed by rules and regulations aimed at preserving its sacredness by limiting its public use. In May 2000, during the lead-up towards the nation's 35th National Day, MITA issued a memorandum on how Singaporeans should treat the national flag with respect. Not only should the flag

[109] In an attempt to maintain law and order at ticket distribution outlets (where long queues are formed) and to eradicate 'black market' trading of National Day parade tickets, suggestions were made in 2002 to introduce a 'balloting' system to distribute tickets in an equitable and orderly manner (see Sim, 2002; and, Editorial, Jul 14, 2002). This balloting system was to be tested for the 2004 National Day Parade.

be raised or displayed strictly during the National Day commemorative month of August – that is, between the 1st and 31st of the month,

> The flag must also be washed and dried indoors separately, and not together with other laundry. If it is torn or worn-out, it should be disposed of by packing it in a sealed, black trash bag. Or it can be handed to the nearest Residents' Committee or community centre for disposal (*The Straits Times Interactive*, May 26 and Jul 7, 2000).

With such clear and rigid instructions, Singapore's notoriety as a well-regulated – or perhaps over-regulated – 'nanny' state is made manifest here. While it remains uncertain whether or not the abovementioned rules pertaining to the state flag have been properly adhered to, what is interesting are the ways in which such ideas and meanings are relayed, digested and contested in Singapore. The issue of the correct method of displaying the national flag offers a glimpse of the PAP government's highly measured but successful approach to public administration and cultural regulation, demonstrated in and by its exactitude in policy-making. The result is that most Singaporean homes can be found neatly adorned with the national flag and other decorative ornaments during the month of August – but whether this is done proudly or perfunctorily, as an annual decorative ritual, without much afterthought remains a moot point.

In 2003, the Remaking Singapore Committee's aptly titled report, *Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships*, recommended that guidelines on the use of the flag and other national symbols be relaxed to "engender a stronger sense of national identity and rootedness among its citizens" (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 25). Specifically, the Report suggests:

> Instead of imposing a blanket prohibition on the use of symbols, citizens should be encouraged to affirm their loyalty to the country by, for example, being allowed to fly the National Flag at all times of the year, and not just during the National Day celebrations period (ibid.).

In January 2004, MITA announced its acceptance of the Remaking Singapore Committee's recommendation and gave official permission for homes and non-governmental buildings to fly the Singapore flag all year round, provided it is hung from a flagpole and illuminated at night (MITA, 2004). Considering that the vast majority of Singaporeans live in high-rise apartments, with no access to personal or shared flagpoles, I would contend that these newly relaxed rules are but political gestures aimed at displaying socio-political openness and cultural liberalism. Although such moves signify 'openness' to a mild extent, they are irrelevant to the majority of Singaporeans and hence do not quite represent the 'popular'. The next section of the chapter continues on this line of inquiry by considering what the 'popular' is, as well as the political rationale for 'popularising' policy.

Popularising Policy

> [The popular] cannot be defined by appealing to either an objective aesthetic standard (as if it were inherently different from art) nor an objective social standard (as if it were inherently determined by who makes it or for whom it is made). Rather it has to be seen as a sphere in which people struggle over reality and their place in it, a sphere in which people are continuously working with and within already existing relations of power, to make sense of and improve their lives (Grossberg, 1997: 2, cited in Connell and Gibson, 2003: 5).

The host of events and such debates that characterise Singapore's National Day makes it an ideal site for articulating and examining the nation's cultural policy,

understood as the "clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings" pertaining to the everyday life of the nation and its citizens (McGuigan, 1996: 1). As the previous chapter has argued, Singaporean authorities are well aware of the need to constantly produce and circulate new symbolic meanings with the sole aim of maintaining technological auto-regulation via 'centralised control' of its citizens. This implies that cultural displays, songs and symbols circulated during National Day parades and events are not only about the legitimisation of celebration and fun, they also articulate and frame the cultural policy of the nation by determining the thought and behaviour of the people vis-à-vis governmental discourses and policies. This reinforces what American anthropologist Richard Kurin (1995) refers to as the capturing of "broad public sentiments" through cultural displays and artefacts for political purposes.

The cultural displays and dazzling spectacle associated with National Day offer a way of reaching out to the masses and of attempting to win the hearts and minds of citizens. Since there is never a perfect mechanism to gauge the responses of citizens to government measures and policies – apart from raw instruments like elections and opinion polls – it is arguably more expedient to concentrate on steering and fine-tuning, and thereby framing, the cultural thought of the people towards the ideals and mentalities of government (Barnett, 2001: 19). Although Singapore has thrived in the past on a dictatorial and deeply entrenched authoritarian rule, the emergence of younger, better-educated, technologically-sophisticated and globalised middle-class Singaporeans has meant that the government can no longer treat the present population in the paternalistic

ways of the past – if not in substance, then at least in appearance. Persuasion rather than coercion becomes necessary to secure the political support or acquiescence of individuals and subordinate groups (Phua and Kong, 1996: 217). This is where and how the role of technological auto-regulation as a mode of governmentality can be applied to the realm of culture: by giving citizens 'free rein' to participate in popular and public celebrations while ensuring that such celebrations are kept within the bounds of decency and political order. The annual National Day thus becomes politically and culturally relevant and productively useful for the conduct of conduct.

In recent years, Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has utilised the annual National Day Rally speeches, now delivered at the end of the celebratory month of August, to flesh out new ideas and 'test' public reception to prospective policy directions. This 'pre-emptive' strategy enables the authorities to mentally-prepare the people for policy change, and to gauge public opinion sufficiently early to make informed decisions on the next political move. A good case in point of how such 'policy pre-emption' works in Singapore can be found in the issue of the 'foreign talent' debate from the late-1990s. This debate arose partly in response to the meaning of the first pillar of the national vision statement *Singapore 21*: Every Singaporean Matters (1999: 16-23). Although *Singapore 21*, like other preceding national statements, was intended primarily as an exercise in economic and political expedience, it became – by extension and default – a cultural policy statement because of its tacit call for Singaporeans to embrace attitudinal and lifestyle changes.

The *Singapore 21* exercise was first mooted by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his 1997 National Day Rally Speech entitled 'Global City, Best Home'. Among other things, Prime Minister Goh opined that just as are many Singaporeans living and working overseas, there is also a need for Singapore to "gather talent and make Singapore a cosmopolitan city" in the likes of London, New York and Hong Kong (Goh, 197: 28-39). Goh seized the opportunity to foreshadow an imminent shift in immigration policy which was to become favourably predisposed to an increase in 'foreign talents', or white-collar professionals from other developed economies. Apropos, this simple speech was to radically affect practically all government ministries and departments, including those managing the arts and cultural portfolios. As expected, less than two months after the prime minister's speech, the project of *Singapore 21* was launched with terms of reference that included the study of Singapore's immigration policy and global labour arrangements, among other pertinent national issues (Fernandez, 1997: 1).

Although the plan to inject foreign know-how into Singapore is a sound policy as far as the economy is concerned, the prospect of born-and-bred Singaporean citizens losing their 'rice-bowls' to foreigners did not go down too well with many people. In short, it was an unpopular policy as xenophobia, ignorance and false patriotism began to take over. The government had to manage such overtly nationalist sentiments not by withdrawing or reversing the policy, but by assuring every Singaporean that they would be well looked after in an increasingly global era. There was, in other words, a need to 'popularise' the policy position by mobilising the mass media, the press, government departments and statutory authorities and other public apparatuses to speak favourably on

the issue. Veritably, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong decided to give greater prominence to the issue of 'gathering talent' at the next National Day Rally Speech in 1998. In a clear attempt at assuaging public discontentment, Goh articulated:

> For while we attract foreign talent and welcome foreigners who contribute to our economy, Singapore must always have a hard core of citizens, cohesive and totally committed to the country, around whom we can attract other talent and build a nation (Goh, 1998).

As government departments have had ample time and feedback to prepare an all-inclusive policy and vision statement, the final outcome of the *Singapore 21* vision was able to attend to some of the key concerns of the people.[110] Cryptic phrases like "Opportunities for All" and "The Singapore Heartbeat" were employed, in addition to "Every Singaporean Matters", to assure the "hard core of citizens" that their needs would not be overlooked.

Popularisation in the Singapore context does not imply that a policy is well-liked or fully supported by the people. Rather, the strategy of popularisation aims primarily to minimise opposition and attain, if necessary, blind or generally muted acceptance of the government's supposedly flawless foresight and performance. The "struggle for the popular", according to Tony Bennett's analysis of Marxist cultural politics in Britain, is conceived as one of "seeking to displace current and actual forms of 'the people's' culture with a different content" in the hope that the 'people', or the general public, might eventually be led to appropriate the new content, and therefore culture, as their own

[110] I do not imply here that *Singapore 21* was a wholly successful exercise in public consultation and consensus-seeking. Although *Singapore 21* has been couched as a large-scale consultative exercise involving some 6000 Singaporeans, many views and comments were conveniently overlooked both before and after the exercise (Singapore 21 Committee, 1999), although it should be pointed out that efforts towards wider consultations have increased somewhat with each new national vision or statement.

(Bennett, 1983: 17). In other words, popularisation is utilised as a tool of governmentality to manage socio-cultural change by attaining political legitimacy and public endorsement not necessarily for the betterment of society at large, but for the maintenance of power. With immense power to define the future mould of Singapore's citizenry vis-à-vis the 'foreign talent' issue, and to construct the terms on which the people should be mobilised, *Singapore 21* is undoubtedly a useful popularisation strategy of the PAP government in enacting and enforcing a cultural policy of socio-political control of the citizenry.

The next section of the chapter extends the notion of popularisation by looking at the employment and deployment of national songs in Singapore. Rather than perceive national songs as peripheral or mundane accompaniments to the annual National Day parade, and key celebratory events such as the National Day Rally Speech by the Prime Minister of the day, I aim to raise the symbolic profile of national songs by positioning them as tools of cultural policy or "cultural regimens" designed and calculated to gain political support or acquiescence, and nurture a sense of belonging to the nation (Miller, 1993: 26). The music, video images and lyrics of national songs become, ergo, purveyors of 'truth' about the political legitimacy and cultural policy discourses of the nation (Miller, 1998: 4-5). I submit that music does not merely reflect the concerns of the state, it is a "vital arm" of state cultural policy (Stokes, 1994: 11). As Stokes makes clear:

> Musics [*sic*] are invariably communal activities, that brings people together in specific alignments, whether as musicians, dancers or listening audiences. [They] can provide a powerful affective experience in which social identity is literally embodied (Stokes, 1994: 12).

Therefore, I argue in the next section that Singaporeans who participate in the performance, singing, or plain listening, of these national songs are in effect participating

in an "affective experience", not unlike the cultural "citizenship games" advocated by Nikolas Rose (2000: 97). In playing their parts, so to speak, these citizens reinforce the ability of the authorities to 'perform' governmentality "at a distance" (Miller and Rose, 1990: 76).

National Songs: Governmentality and Cultural Policy Performed

> Music is not innocent: unquantifiable and unproductive, a pure sign that is now *for* sale, it provides a rough sketch of the society under construction, a society in which the informal is mass produced and consumed, in which difference is artificially recreated in the multiplication of semi-identical objects (Attali, 1985: 5).

In their study of popular music in Singapore, Singaporean geographers Phua Siew Chye and Lily Kong (1996) note the proliferation of official national songs in Singapore from the mid-1980s. In 1988, the government introduced a 'Sing Singapore' programme "to encourage community singing of traditional as well as contemporary 'national' songs" (Phua and Kong, 1996: 220).[111] The success of this 'Sing Singapore' programme subsequently led to the inclusion of some of these contemporary songs, along with other popular cultural items such as skits and dance performances, at National Day parades and celebrations (Leong, 1999: 4). The inclusion of these 'national' songs – described by Leong as a "populist strategy to engage the masses" (Leong, 1999: 4) – has been phenomenally successful, with the most participatory element of National Day

[111] Sing Singapore was introduced by the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) (now known as the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts) in 1998 to promote a collective national bond through group singing of national songs. In 1995, the National Arts Council (NAC) took over the organisation of the Sing Singapore project. For more information or to listen to these national songs, visit the Sing Singapore website: www.singsingapore.org.sg (accessed on: 23rd July 2004).

celebrations the mass singing of national songs (along with the National Anthem). This view is also held by feature writer Rosemary Chng as she notes most cogently in her preview of National Day Parade (NDP) 2000:

> The build-up for the NDP and National Day starts with the latest [national] song played over the TV and radio in July. There is also a Sing Singapore Committee [...] to discover and promote original songs written by Singaporeans. Songs such as 'Count on Me Singapore' and 'Stand Up for Singapore' have become *NDP classics*. Always sung at the NDP, they never fail to bring forth a swelling of national pride even for viewers at home (Chng, 2000: 18; emphasis added).

These national songs are, as Phua and Kong note, "part of the ideological tools used by the ruling elite to legitimise its rule and policies" (1996: 220-1).

Over the years since the commencement of 'Sing Singapore' in 1988, many of these songs have become national 'hits', described by Chng as 'NDP classics' (Chng, 2000: 18). Some of the better-known 'NDP classics' over the years include:

- *There's a Part for everyone* (1984)
- *Stand Up for Singapore* (1985; new version 2000)
- *Count on me, Singapore* (1986; new version 2000)
- *We are Singapore* (1987; new version 2000)
- *One People, One Nation, One Singapore* (1989)
- *Home* (1998)
- *Together* (*Singapore 21* theme, 1999)
- *Shine On Me* (2000)
- *Majulah Singapura* (National Anthem, 1959; new version 2001)
- *We will Get There* (2002)
- *A Place in My Heart* (2003)

Not only are the song titles and lyrics explicit in promoting the nation and sovereignty of Singapore, many of them have "rousing anthem-like melodies and choruses designed to arouse feelings of patriotism", whether sung individually or in masses (Phua and Kong, 1996: 221). Furthermore, these national songs are usually composed and performed by

well-known local artistes or television/radio celebrities. The songs – and their performing artistes, who are probably more interested in boosting their public persona and increase their commercial marketability – receive extensive publicity on local television, radio, and the Internet through the months of July and August each year. In addition, these songs are generously commissioned and officially endorsed by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA). As a result, national songs have become powerful mediators in the relay of government messages and nationalist images to the Singaporean community as a whole.

In recent years, not only have these national songs been aired over the dominant local mass media, they have also been digitally recorded, distributed and sold in various formats: in compact disc (CD), video-CD (VCD) and digital versatile disc (DVD). Examples of such recordings include: *NDP 33:Remembering Our Past 33 National Day Parades* (TCS, 1999); *My Home, Singapore: Documentaries and music videos on Singapore* (MITA, 1999); and, *Singapore: One Voice* (MITA, 2000), which boasts a complete collection of national songs accompanied by music video clips. With these portable recordings, Singaporeans not only have their favourite national songs 'on-demand', they are able to screen images of National Day (and landscapes of the nation) within the private domain of their living rooms. The notion of the NDP as a 'mediatory' event, as advanced by Velayutham (1995), thus takes on an added cultural dimension with the nation being brought closer to 'home' in more ways than one (Velayutham, 2004: 3; Morley, 2001: 425).

The appeal of a well-composed national song, like a good and timeless piece of music, is one that traverses both time (e.g. 'NDP classics') and space, since the direct broadcast of the NDP reaches out to media audiences, whether they are watching at home or in attendance at the Padang parade ground. To ensure that home viewers get the best of a live telecast parade, lyrics of national songs being performed are subtitled in real time, encouraging home participation in a karaoke fashion (Lim, 1999: 133). More recently, the lyrics, soundtrack and video clips of most national songs have also been lodged on the 'Sing Singapore' website (www.singsingapore.org.sg). This website vividly captures the essence and imagination of Singapore's technological society status by allowing fans, especially those gadget-savvy youths, to download their favourite national song(s) onto their portable MP-3 devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs) or computers. Any accompanying music video may also be copied for personal viewing in the future. The National Arts Council (NAC), the statutory body tasked with the responsibility of managing these national songs, has spared little effort in making them widely and easily available to Singaporeans at home, and also away from home. After all, making these songs easily accessible via all means possible is clearly one of the most, if not the most, rudimentary aspect of (self-)promotion and popularisation of the nation (Phua and Kong, 1996: 221; Stokes, 1994: 13).

Carl Engel (1866), in an early anthropological study into the background and traditions of 'national music', contends that the form and spirit of popular music compositions vary greatly in different nations, an observation also made by Connell and Gibson in their book-length study of *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*

(2003: 11-14). The study of popular national music illustrates the distinctive characteristics of various countries and their people (see also Williams, 1963; and Mach, 1994). When used as cultural artefacts or oral recordings, national songs are particularly useful in marking out particular periods of significance in a nation's history (Engel, 1866: 12), thereby contributing to the collective memory of the nation or formations of national cultural heritage (Kong, 1999: 5). As Engel explicates:

> The term National Music implies that music, which, appertaining to a nation or tribe, whose individual emotions and passions it expresses, exhibits certain peculiarities more or less characteristic, which distinguishes it from the music of any other nation or tribe (Engel, 1866: 1).[112]

Engel also submits that the more a nation advances in civilisation and self-esteem, the more it seeks to symbolise and express its feelings about itself via popular songs, folklore and other monuments, for the sake of posterity and for the establishment of a new political and cultural order for the nation (Engel, 1866: 12). In other words, as Attali (1985) has spelt out so lucidly, the 'noises' of national songs and music make them inherently political:

> [M]usic localizes and specifies power, because it marks and regiments the rare noises that cultures, in their normalization of behaviour, see fit to authorize. Music accounts for them. It makes them audible (Attali, 1985: 19-20).

The recognition of music's ability to 'normalise' and 'authorise' a person's or society's behaviour, and therefore cultural thought and construct, has been embodied in recent Singaporean cultural policy documents. In the arts and cultural policy statement,

[112] The use of the term 'National Music' covers a whole range of musical types, including *Volksmusik* (folk music in German), popular music, songs, tunes, anthems, various musical performances and instruments, etc. These terms are used somewhat interchangeably in this chapter.

Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore (MITA, 2000), for instance, Singapore's aspiration to become a premier 'Renaissance City' of the world has been clearly specified and boldly proclaimed (as discussed in Chapter Three). At the local and national level, however, the goal is more down-to-earth. The policy agenda is to "strengthen the Singapore Heartbeat through the creation and sharing of Singapore stories" (MITA, 2000: 4), or as Attali puts it, to mark and regiment the "rare noises" of local culture and the arts (Attali, 1985: 19-20). Official national songs and 'NDP classics' can be classified as such 'rare noises' as the themes, lyrics, images and, to a lesser extent, style tend to focus on the distinctive characteristics, what Engel (1866: 1) calls the "peculiarities", of Singaporean culture and identity. In this way, the performance and display of national songs become a visible – and an audible – part of the social, cultural and political 'Renaissance' of Singapore, marked and distinguished by the (re)construction and (re)branding of Singapore's nationhood.

The emotive and heart-warming appeal of the national song *Home* (1998) offers an excellent illustration of how music is able to specify such cultural power. As the theme song of the 1998 National Day parade, *Home* attempts to capture the unverifiable uniqueness and other intangible aspects of being Singaporean. Written by reputable singer-songwriter Dick Lee and performed by popular local female vocalist Kit Chan, this melodious ballad suggests that Singapore is 'home' wherever one chooses to go.[113] The lyrics of *Home*, "designed to support government positions" (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 122), read:

[113] For further reading on the works and 'new Asian' appeal of Dick Lee, see Wee (1996a and 2001). See also Phua and Kong's (1996) general case study on English language popular music in Singapore.

Whenever I am feeling low, I look around me and I know
There's a place that will stay within me, wherever I may choose to go
I will always recall the city, know every street and shore
Sail down the river which brings us life, winding through my Singapore

Chorus (1):
This is home truly, where I know I must be
Where my dreams wait for me, where the river always flows
This is home surely, as my senses tell me
This is where I won't be alone, for this is where I know it's home

When there are troubles to go through, we'll find a way to start anew
There is comfort in the knowledge that home's about its people too
So we'll build our dreams together, just like we've done before
Just like the river which brings us life, there'll always be Singapore

Chorus (2):
This is home truly, where I know I must be
Where my dreams wait for me, where that river always flows
This is home surely, as my senses tell me
This is where I won't be alone, for this is where I know I'm home

In this song, 'home' is depicted both as a metaphysical construct as well as a geographical reality. It a place that stays 'within' one's 'senses' while at the same time an urbanised 'city' with 'its people', a flowing 'river', 'street and shore' and other landscape imagery. In essence, the song suggests that Singaporean identity does not simply consist of rooting oneself geo-physically to Singapore; it is more important to stay passionately true to Singapore, for it is where 'my dreams wait for me, where the river always flow', validating Velayutham's (2004) research findings that economic materiality has become an integral component of Singaporean national identity. As he puts it:

> The experience of home and belonging amongst Singaporeans is largely framed in materiality and social modernity of everyday life in urban Singapore. These have become homely symbols of the nation (Velayutham, 2004: 4).

The lyrics of *Home* reinforce the vision of *Singapore 21*, which, among other agendas, calls for Singaporeans to be global in their outlook, echoing the familiar 'think global, but act local' globalisation mantra. It is thus consistent with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's call to attract foreign talents to situate themselves in Singapore, and to embrace the culture of cosmopolitanism so that Singapore can be seen as a truly vibrant global city (Goh, 1997 and 1998). Although not overtly expressing it, the song also issues a call for skilled and 'talented' Singaporeans residing or working overseas to return to the 'street and shore' of homeland Singapore, for this is where one is finally 'home'. Concomitantly, those Singaporeans who do not venture abroad, euphemistically referred to in policy statements, and by the politicians and the media, as the 'heartlanders', are also assured of their place in a society that is 'about its people too'. Like other national songs, the images in the music video of *Home* are "carefully selected to evoke national pride in the audience" by reminding them that "life in Singapore is comfortable, peaceful and harmonious" (Phua and Kong, 1996: 221). This perpetuates the ideology that the current ruling order in Singapore is the ablest and best to ensure Singapore's economic survival and longevity, so that 'there'll always be Singapore'. With its ability to confidently chart a bright future for Singapore, governmentality as represented in Foucault's conceptualisation of 'pastoral power' – which promises to attend to the needs of the 'well-tempered' or 'well-conducted' individual through his/her entire life (Foucault, 1983: 213-4) – is presented and popularised in and through the song.

Home, in effect, popularises and performs Singapore's cultural policy statement as exemplified in *Singapore 21*. Putting the ideals of the government into a national song

not only entertains, it fulfils erstwhile aims to further root Singaporeans – near and far – to their beloved 'imagined' nation, while signalling and preparing the people for further policy changes ahead. In this case, one can expect the city, street and shore to be filled with 'non-Singaporean' foreign talents – or to put it in more politically correct terms, 'new' Singaporeans. A 'patriotic' Singaporean who calls Singapore 'home' must therefore 'go through troubles' and accept such changes graciously, or be left behind – if not economically, then socially and culturally. Such is the new social and cultural 'reality' of Singapore as proposed by the *Singapore 21* vision and re-enacted in *Home*.

Like *Home*, the remade version of the 1985 'NDP classic' *Stand Up For Singapore* by the government for the National Day celebrations of 2000 is another example of the popularisation of cultural policy in and through national songs. *Stand Up For Singapore* (2000) is arguably, to date, the most conspicuous attempt at popularising Singapore as a 'hip' and 'cool' cosmopolitan city of the future. It is also the most illustrative as the music video, made to accompany the new version, was a radical departure from more subdued video-making conventions. While the original music video of the song portrays the message of the song in a strait-laced and austere manner, the new version is quite the opposite. Energetic and youthful in every aspect, the new clip was done to promote and perform Singapore's new 'sexed-up' cultural policy of 'creativity' and 'bohemianism' (see Tan, K. P., 2003; and, Leo and Lee, 2004). The lyrics of the song look unmistakably political and nationalistic in its intent, which does to a large extent belie the radicalness of the new version:

Stand up for Singapore
Do the best you can
Reach out for your fellow man
You've got to make a stand
Recognise you can play a part
Let it come right from your heart
Be prepared to give a little more
Stand up, stand up for Singapore

Stand up for Singapore
Do it with a smile
If you stand up for Singapore
You'll find it all worthwhile
Believe in yourself
You've got something to share
So show us all you really care
Be prepared to give a little more
Stand up, stand up for Singapore

Bridge:
Singapore, our home and nation
Together with determination
Join in like we've never done before
Stand up, stand up for Singapore
Stand up, stand up for Singapore

Whether the audio and visual remaking of *Stand Up for Singapore* was done deliberately to shock or surprise audiences is not so important. I would suggest that its ability to signify and portray a culturally vibrant city-state that is creative and fun-loving – hence, promote its 'Renaissance City' cultural policy (MITA, 2000) – is more lasting and potent.

In the *Stand Up For Singapore* (2000) music video, the four lead singers (two males and two females), typifying Singaporeans in their teens to early-twenties, are filmed having fun and dancing – in a city subway station, on the streets, in parklands, on the rooftop of a skyscraper (overlooking the central business district skyline), and in and on other aesthetic locales – to a jazzed-up version of the song. In a video clip that

(over)emphasises the vigour of youthful Singapore, one of the male leads even sports long and unkempt hair. This caricature is somewhat shocking if one recalls the well-circulated rumour that men with long hair must have their hair cut by Singapore customs officers before entering the country. Furthermore, to this day, males in the civil service, and in many Singapore organisations, are not permitted long hair at work. This clip indicates that, among other things, the authorities are now prepared to overlook such rigid rules, since these are dated and irrelevant from an economic standpoint (Kong, 2000a; Leo, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Three, the government believes that in the new economy, entrepreneurial flair and artistic creativity should be encouraged, but within certain (un)defined political limits. But by showing that Singaporeans are able to loosen-up, 'foreign talents' and profitable businesses might be persuaded to establish themselves in the country. Last but not least, the closing sequence of the music video depicts a group of police officers, military and other uniformed personnel joining the four leads in jumping and dancing to the beat of the music, and lip-synching the final refrain: 'stand up, stand up for Singapore'. This scene is equally unfathomable in view of the disorderly conduct it could imply. One could mistakenly think that the song was entitled *Jump for Singapore*!

Stand Up For Singapore (2000) exemplifies the Singaporean government's popularisation strategy *par excellence*. Not only does this rendition work to debunk many of the myths associated with Singapore, it is successful insofar as it promotes Singapore as a truly progressive city to outsiders. It also didactically imparts this new image to the younger generation of Singaporeans – many of whom, if left unchecked, risk defecting to

the dubious category of the 'unbelievers' (Leong, 1999) – clearly the prime target audience of this national song and video campaign. The popularisation of Singapore as young, energetic, (pro)active, vibrant and 'cool' is aimed at displacing the old stereotypes of Singapore as a sterile city-state of boring, econocentric leaders and humourless people (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999: 17; Sheridan, 2000: 2-3). The gradual perfection of this popularisation strategy means that Singapore's cultural policy of governmental control to maintain strong economic growth and fast-track development while shaping the conduct of conduct is no longer visible, but becomes more inert and 'unverifiable' (Rose, 1999b: 3). After all, the signs and sights of Singapore's economic success are visible for all to see (e.g. the cityscape of Singapore as displayed in the *Stand Up For Singapore* video clip). In addition, its status as an advanced 'technological society' works to enhance this visibility (Barry, 2001). But as I have argued in Chapter Five, these strategies in turn obscure the presence of a central regulatory tower that ensures Singapore's fine reputation will not be eroded by undisciplined cultural conduct nor through other unlegislated forces (Foucault, 1977, 1978).

In order to perfect the mechanisms and technologies of governmentality and cultural policy, citizens are urged to actively participate and support, thus legitimising, the state's panoramic vision – whether this comes in the form of a ministerial speech, the *Singapore 21* (1999) blueprint, the *Renaissance City Report* (MITA, 2000), national songs or any new cultural sign-posts. In the final analysis, popularising Singapore is about attaining political legitimacy and longevity for the ruling party. As Kong elucidates most cogently:

> [T]he ultimate concern is to develop in Singaporeans a love for their country, a sense of patriotism, and a willingness to support the ruling elite who have led the country through the short years since independence to tremendous development (Kong, 2000b: 418).

In this regard, the 'reality' of Singapore's fragility and desire to maintain economic survival has not really changed. Certainly, from a governmental and political perspective, it appears that the Singaporean authorities will continue to write and sing the same national tune for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion: Onward Singapore!

> [In Singapore,] the officially sanctioned music of the state [...] created the image of a complex city, where social engineering stifled diversity and physical expansion removed both history and open space (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 123).

The PAP government recognises that popularising Singapore via parades, carnivals, national songs, and other modes of entertainment are extremely effective in mobilising the people to support government-led initiatives and policies. As discursive symbols of nationhood, the consumption of these popular cultural items has the potential to raise and re-engineer public consciousness regarding the framing of a communitarian society and national culture, identity and history. When officially sanctioned by the state, these are seen as noble agendas that are unlikely to be resisted by most Singaporeans (see Chua, 1995). As a result, the popularisation of national songs, for instance, a project which began in the mid-1980s, and that has intensified in the 1990s, looks certain to continue into the new millennium.

Leading to National Day in 2000, the Singapore government decided to allocate a large amount of money to commission the audio and video production of new songs. In addition, the older favourites (or 'NDP classics') including *Count On Me, Singapore*, *We are Singapore* and *Stand Up For Singapore*, were given major revamps, with new arrangements, new performers and innovative new music video clips made to captivate, and capture, new audiences. In 2001, this 'revisionist' mentality, to borrow Michael Barr's (2003) phrase, was extended to the familiar and well-revered National Anthem *Majulah Singapura*. Composed in 1957 and sung in the national language of Malay, *Majulah Singapura* – which means 'Onward Singapore' – received a makeover to the tune of S$200,000 to make it "more accessible to all Singaporeans" (MITA Press Release, Jan 19, 2001).[114] Such a bold attempt to raise the profile of the National Anthem, described by Connell and Gibson as the "embodiment of the nation in song", should not be underestimated. As the official announcement by MITA predicted:

> A new recording of the National Anthem, *Majulah Singapura*, with a grander and more inspiring arrangement, is set to become *more popular with Singaporeans*. The new recording also comes with a revised English translation of the lyrics so that the meaning of the Anthem can be better understood (MITA Press Release, Jan 19, 2001; emphases added).

Like some other national songs, the new version of the National Anthem came in a packaged 'National Symbols' kit complete with its own music video, performed by well-known "homegrown jazz singer Jacinta Abisheganaden" (Tan, 2001a), as well as music score sheets to assist in choral arrangements. In addition, seven different arrangements of the anthem, including orchestral, choir, solo and piano, were recorded

[114] The original tune and lyrics of *Majulah Singapura* was composed by the late Zubir Said in 1957. It made its public debut in 1959 and was adopted as Singapore's national anthem in 1965 (CPDD, 1999: 168).

for teaching and choral singing purposes (Tan, 2001a and 2001b). To ensure that the National Anthem would become 'more popular' with all Singaporeans, the government published an 'unofficial' English translation of the Anthem for the very first time, despite its politically pragmatic decision to keep the 'Malay-only' version as the official Anthem (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jan 22, 2001; CPDD, 1999: 164). The English version reads:

> Come, fellow Singaporeans
> Let us progress towards happiness together
> May our noble aspiration bring Singapore success
>
> Come, let us unite
> In a new spirit
> Let our voices soar as one
> Onward Singapore
> Onward Singapore

The extension of the popularisation strategy to the revision of the National Anthem fulfils two objectives. First, the song has been given a slower tempo and transposed down a tone from the key of G to F to make it easier for people to sing (Tan, 2001a). Children, who are required to sing the Anthem at school assembly every morning, are thus able to reach the notes comfortably and will, hopefully, be moved by it. The second, and arguably more pertinent, objective is that an English translation of the lyrics enables Singaporeans to understand what they sing (*The Straits Times Interactive*, Jan 22, 2001). As Birch had earlier observed, while most are able to sing the song 'with pride', very few actually understand what the Malay lyrics mean (Birch, 1993: 1). This suggests that there is either no affective connection with the nation or that such 'pride' amounts to a degree of false consciousness (Velayutham, 2004: 9).

Singapore's desire to spurn all things 'Malaysian' has thus been misdirected and misappropriated in language policy terms, resulting in the loss of national proficiency in the Malay language (or Bahasa Melayu), the prime indigenous language of the Malay archipelagic region. As a consequence, it became necessary to remedy this language barrier not by teaching conversational Malay, but by translating the National Anthem into English, the neutral *lingua franca* of Singapore. After all, since *Majulah Singapura* symbolises and celebrates Singapore's newfound freedom – first from colonial British rule, then from Japanese occupation in the 1940s, and subsequently from being bound by Malaysia's engagement in communal and racial politics in the 1960s (Lee, 1965) – it is important to spread the message as widely, and as clearly, as possible.

Gibson and Connell have argued that although national anthems evoke patriotism and nationalist sentiments, they "remain open to (re)interpretations in ways that subvert the dominant meanings of nation they usually convey" (Gibson and Connell, 2003: 129). While this may be true in most cases, the situation in Singapore is fascinatingly different: for when the state plays the role of the 'author' and 'interpreter', the new meanings are not subversive but progressive, since they take into account new cultural norms and policies whilst reaffirming old political ideologies. The corollary is that it is vital for all Singaporeans to internalise any political and politicised message sent by the state, though the most important message is always the one first vocalised as Singapore's 'reality' by Lee Kuan Yew back in August 1966.

The popularisation of the nation in parade and celebrations, and the singing of popular national songs and the National Anthem, is a strategy not only for the long-term evocation and sustenance of nationalist sentiments, it has the immediate effect of reinforcing the hegemony of the economic and the legitimacy of the political (Shapiro, 2001: 583-4). While new policy statements and strategies may be devised from time to time, the rationales of governmentality in producing and maintaining docile cultural conduct remains the *zeitgeist* of cultural regulation and policing in Singapore. Using the tools of cultural displays, artefacts, parades and national songs, the PAP government has uncovered a potent 'technology of truth' which popularises the nation as rational, moral, desirable and, more recently, a creative and fun city to live in (Miller, 1998: 4-5; Miller and Rose, 1990: 82). In this way, Singapore, by 'popular' consensus and through the complex workings of governmentality, becomes the best place in the world. 'Onward Singapore' indeed!

Conclusion

> Things change fast in Singapore. These days, nightlife stretches to daybreak. And at many pubs, dancing on the bar is actually expected. On the shopping front, new boutiques continue to pop up islandwide, and an ever-growing alfresco dining scene is a treat if you love the tropical outdoors. With thrills like reverse bungee, exciting cabaret acts and so many international concerts, no two visits to Singapore are alike. In fact, your travel guide may already require a reprint ("If your Guide Book is more than 8 months old, burn it", 'Uniquely Singapore' advertisement, in *The West Australian*, 'Weekend Extra', Jun 19, 2004: 32).

> As an island of contrasts, Singapore is home to architectural marvels and historical splendour. You can't miss the Esplanade, our landmark arts centre, which is reminiscent of a durian. From avant-garde theatre to traditional Chinese opera, you'll find an abundance of art here. Mythical creatures and youthful self-expression exist in harmony. And whilst you meander along the five-foot-ways in Chinatown, five-star luxury is never far away. So call your travel agent. And enjoy the best of both worlds. ("Singapore. Where the traditional meets the cutting edge", 'Uniquely Singapore' advertisement, in *The Weekend Australian*, July 3-4, 2004: 3).

The 'New' Singapore: Cultural Contradictions and Political Consistencies

On March 9, 2004, the Singapore Tourism Board launched Singapore's latest tourism branding 'Uniquely Singapore' to market Singapore as a premier tourism destination, with the primary aim of achieving a target of 7.6 million visitor arrivals for 2004 (STB, 2004). Although this new branding, comprising a range of advertisements for different global markets, was developed in the wake of the city-state's 'recovery' from its economically-crippling encounter with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic during the first half of 2003, it also coincided with the circulation of a broad 'new' rhetoric that speaks of a 'more open' and creative Singapore (Leo and Lee, 2004: 205). This 'new' vision of Singapore followed a report unveiled in mid-2003 by the

government-commissioned Remaking Singapore Committee (2003), entitled *Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships*. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had appointed this new committee in February 2002 to look at the 'remaking' of Singapore, with a "focus on the political, social and cultural aspects of [Singapore's] survival as a nation", amidst the nation's worst economic downturn since gaining independence in 1965 (Prime Minister's Office, 2002). The result was a one hundred page report that recommended, among other things, more avenues for Singaporeans to express themselves socially, culturally and artistically, and more spaces to "participate meaningfully in national and community life" (Remaking Singapore Committee, 2003: 20-1).

Although the Remaking Singapore Committee's report (2003) was not particularly well-received by most Singaporeans, due largely to poor economic sentiments which translated to disinterest in political matters at the time, its effects and influence across many government ministries began to unfold from late-2003 to early 2004. The Singapore Tourism Board's new brand positioning is one of the more prominent attempts to capture the image(s) of a 'new' Singapore (STB, 2004). In the first advertisement cited above, the image of a socially and culturally 'remade' Singapore is evident as Singapore is presented as a 'cool' and 'funky' city of excitement and thrills (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999; Sheridan, 2000). In instructing the reader – who is likely to be a prospective visitor – to burn travel guides on Singapore that are old and outdated, defined in the advertisement as any guide book "more than 8 months old", these inscriptions mark a form of radicalness that is intended to displace old mindsets about Singapore's 'colourless' cultural landscape (Davies, 1999: 104; Wee, 2003). In its place,

Singapore's new cultural policy of 'creativity' for the twenty-first century, as detailed in its *Creative Industries Development Strategy* (CIWG, 2002a) and discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, has been earmarked to 'remake' Singapore and position Singaporeans to compete in a globally competitive and creativity-cum-innovation driven future.

At the same time, Singapore continues to situate – and celebrate – itself as an "island of contrasts", "where the traditional meets the cutting edge", as cited in the second advertisement above. Not only are the descriptions in this advertisement reflective of many of the earlier exotic cum orientalist images of Singapore (see Wee, 1996; Ang and Stratton, 1995), they also bring us back to some of the 'old' puzzles and paradoxes that have come to represent Singapore (Haas, 1999a; as discussed in Chapter One). While Singapore continues to (re-)brand itself as the 'cutting-edge' and innovative "technological society" (Barry, 2001), it aspires to be seen, as described in the concluding sentence of the second advertisement, as the place to "enjoy the best of both worlds". Although this phrase has been used in the tourism advertisement to promote Singapore as a comfortable destination to indulge in modern culture as well as traditional/historical sights, I would suggest that it can also be meaningfully appropriated to address some of the ambivalences, paradoxes or contradictions that have been raised in this thesis. What these 'two worlds' comprise, however, is open to wider interpretations, as Singapore continues to re-brand and remake its nation.

Despite its 'miracle' economy status granted by the World Bank in 1993 (Lingle and Wickman, 1999: 56; and World Bank, 1993), and reaffirmed in February 2000 shortly after the Asian economic crisis of 1997-99 (Lee, K. Y., 2000), Singapore has not escaped ridicule by many foreign critics and journalists for its illiberalism and 'nanny state' status (McCarthy and Ellis, 1999: 17; Elliott and Meyer, 1999). Singapore has gained infamy with such unflattering labels because it functions politically – and unapologetically – as an 'authoritarian', or even a 'near-totalitarian' society. Veritably, it is seen by many as a police state, with the cultural life of its citizens 'micro-managed' by government authorities (Haas, 1999c: 176-7). But at the same time, with most aspects of everyday life under some forms of regimentation, the conduct of Singaporeans' moral and cultural conduct also invokes the liberal practice of governmentality (Bennett, 2003: 61). As discussed in Chapter Two, Foucault's notion of governmentality, akin to the task of cultural regulation and policing, is a "distinctly modern form of power which intervenes in citizens day-to-day lives in a non-coercive fashion in order to simultaneously nourish the life of the individual and the State" (Bratich, Packer and McCarthy, 2003: 6). Although the power of governmentality lies in its ability to rely on the self-governing capacities of individuals in society, disciplinary mechanisms and precise governmental technologies are always in place to ensure absolute, if not close to full, compliance with rules and regulatory codes that are crafted, implemented and revised from time to time. With such a system in place, Foucauldian governmentality can be conducted in an enlightened and non-coercive way, akin to the exercise of "pastoral power" (Foucault, 1983: 213-4; as detailed in Chapter Two).

I have argued in this thesis, particularly in Chapters Four and Five, that the majority of individuals residing in contemporary Singapore recognise the principles of governmentality too well. Not only is the space of civil society in Singapore limited and mostly 'gestural', Singaporeans are arguably well aware of their place in a society that demands socio-political docility and economic utility as preconditions for cultural citizenship. As such, Singaporeans have been criticised for being "too frightened to think", a view most vociferously made by Dutch writer Ian Burama in his review of *The Singapore Story*, Lee Kuan Yew's two-part autobiography which records his first-hand account of Singapore's success as a nation (Lee, K. Y., 1998 and 2000; *The Straits Times Weekly Edition*, Oct 2, 1999).[115] Derek Davies makes this same criticism when he writes, in the opening quote to Chapter One of this thesis, that "Singapore today is a frightened community, where people nervously glance over their shoulders and lower their voices" (Davies, 1999: 104; see Gibson, 1994; and, Sardar, 2001).

I would argue, however, that the view of Singaporeans as 'frightened' is no longer accurate. What Burama and Davies, as well as others like them, fail to understand is that in a society that is centrally-managed and culturally-regulated via the notion of 'technological auto-regulation', which ensures the "automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977: 200), citizens have been co-opted and/or disciplined to either vocalise their full political support for the establishment or accept the status quo with minimal grouse (as elaborated and discussed in Chapter Five). What this means is that

[115] Burama's view of Singaporeans as unthinking people is emphatically rejected by the highly vocal Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's representative to the United Nations and author of the much-acclaimed book: *Can Asians Think?* (1998). See also Tom Plate's (1999) defence of Mahbubani's viewpoint.

Singaporeans have chosen and accepted – either overtly or tacitly, but nonetheless 'freely' – to be subjected to the principles and practices of governmentality. As Rose puts it in his terms,

> The irony is that we believe, in making our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives, our ethical systems, and our political evaluations, that we are, freely, choosing our freedom (Rose, 1989: 11).

The paradox(es) of Singapore's cultural and political contradictions can thus be resolved by seeing the city-state in a 'liberal' light. In other words, with the politics of governmentality and cultural regulation well-enacted, Singaporeans should be seen neither as self-censorious nor self-regulating. Instead, Singapore should be understood under the terms of 'auto-regulation', since its citizens have learned to automatically and objectively subjectify themselves to the rationalities of governmentality (Rose, 1999a: xxii; Dean, 2002: 42; Hunt, 1999: 6).

Unlike Burama or Davies, however, Neher (1999: 39; in the second opening quote to Chapter One) has clearly opted to read Singapore in the positive terms of 'success'. Singapore's success, according to Neher, arises from four key areas, namely: economic growth, political stability, compatibility of politics with culture, and international relations. By economic growth, Neher refers to the rapid and sustained growth enjoyed in Singapore since attaining independence in 1965 (Neher, 1999: 40-4). With a per capita income of about US$22,000, Singapore is by far the most affluent nation in Southeast Asia, and one of the richest countries in the world (Lyall, 2004: 12; see also Ness and Ciment, 1999: 769). Neher even remarks that Singapore's standard of living has already surpassed that of its former coloniser Great Britain (Neher, 1999: 40).

Political stability is then defined by Neher (1999: 45) as "the continuing capacity of the government to meet the changing needs of the citizenry", a project that appears to be continually in train with the "perpetual revisionism" mindset of the government and its citizens, especially with regard to economic and cultural policies (Barr, 2003).

The next reason for Singapore's success, its "compatibility of politics with culture", is really an extension of 'political stability' as the governmentality of a nation is inextricably linked to the regulation of culture (Vasil, 1992: 35; see Bennett, 2003; Thompson, 1997). Neher's final reason for Singapore's success has to do with its excellent diplomatic ties with other countries, a strategy which has enhanced its ability to focus on trade and commerce with little perturbation, and has in turn contributed extensively to its economic well-being (Neher, 1999: 50-1; Deck, 1999: 125-49). In a nutshell, Neher's case for Singapore stems from the visible and material aspects of Singapore: it is quite simply "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39). I would suggest that thinking about Singapore in terms of 'the nation that works' is ideologically useful and productive because governmentality in Singapore is predicated upon the promotion, and perfection, of a 'Singapore model' of governmental rule and conduct.

On the evening of June 29, 2004, a massive blackout, caused by a cross-border natural gas supply failure, plunged many parts of Singapore into darkness for about two hours (Woon, 2004). Although this was not the first time Singapore experienced a power failure, it was the longest, most massive and also the most disruptive in many years. In expressing its deep concern about the dent to Singapore's international reputation caused

by this episode – particularly as 'the nation that works', though not in exact terms – the government pledged to thoroughly investigate and repair the damages on all fronts (Kaur, 2004a and 2004b). In a press conference convened by the government on July 9, 2004 to publicly explain the cause of the blackout and to detail its courses of action following the disastrous episode, Singapore's Minister of State for Trade and Industry Vivian Balakrishnan – who was, up to this occasion, better known as a the affable chairman of the aforementioned Remaking Singapore Committee (2003) – articulated the government's resolve with deep cogency:

> I want all of you to have absolutely no doubts that in our typical Singapore Government fashion, we are going to be obsessive and we are going to be, if need be, heavy-handed.[...] While at the systems level, we make sure we have our standby and contingency plans, and we make sure nobody needs to suffer losses or inconvenience unnecessarily. This is not a situation we are happy with, but this is a situation we will fix (in Goh, 2004).

Although the government's statement was generally well-received by the quarter of Singaporeans who were inconvenienced by the blackout, it was also politically significant in that it demonstrated that the government was primarily interested in fixing the economic and political damage to its reputation. This would be done, according to the statement, in a "heavy-handed" manner, but only "if need be" (Goh, 2004). In articulating his plan of action in a didactic and dictatorial manner, and thus in a "typically Singapore Government fashion" (in Goh, 2004; Kaur, 2004b), Minister Balakrishnan made it patently clear that the government has the discretionary capacity not only to gather together "the disparate technologies of governing", but also apply them in a coordinated and successful way (Bratich, Packer and McCarthy, 2003: 5). Following this assurance

by the minister, there is little doubt in the minds of Singaporeans, and non-Singaporeans, that it will be a long time before another blackout of such magnitude hits the nation of Singapore. As *The Straits Times* editorialised on July 23, 2004, "Singapore's reputation demands that they succeed". Singapore would, once again, be perceived as "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39).

What this episode illustrates, in the context of this thesis, is that contrary to widespread perceptions about Singapore's schizophrenic and contradictory existence, Singapore is really 'frighteningly' consistent, particularly with regard to the application of politics to most aspects of life in Singapore and the embodiment of governmentality in Singaporean cultural policy and regulation. In this regard, Singapore can perhaps be described as a "frightened community" of happy and contended, but well-disciplined and well-regulated – or auto-regulated – and thus highly productive cultural citizens (cf. Davies, 1999: 104). Instead of seeing such a cultural existence as ambivalent or contradictory, Singaporeans could be said to "enjoy the best of both worlds". Yet, as in all aspects of politics and culture, there will always the occasional social or cultural fracture and economic challenge, as exemplified in the June 29, 2004 island-wide blackout. But in keeping with its economic survivalist and pragmatist ideology, as captured in the motto "the nation that works" (Neher, 1999: 39), Singaporean authorities are bound to draw on all available governmental technologies not just to tide through difficult times, but to rebound with further strategies and new technologies to expand its political arsenal, and thus extend – and perfect – its cultural and technological regulatory, and auto-regulatory, abilities. In doing so, Singapore could perhaps chart the future mode

and model of governmentality in the culturally and politically challenging twenty-first century.

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