Moving Images - Static Spaces. Architectures, Media, Film, Communication, Digital Art and Design

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Polyphonic Asia: Contemporary City Symphonies of Singapore and Seoul

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• Abstract (300 words):
Even now, discourse on city symphonies remain focused on the notable ones that celebrate engineering innovations by showcasing the modern city experience of Paris, Berlin, Moscow and New York. But unlike the early twentieth century predecessors that are distinctively tied to modernity, the millennial features are the products of globalization and digital connectivity. This paper extends scholarship on this film genre to include contemporary city symphonies that play homage to leading cities in Asia: urban sites of Asian cities offer a different situated experience and demonstrate variations of global cosmopolitanism (Ong 2011). Through a comparative study of Singapore Gaga (2005) and Bitter, Sweet, Seoul (2014), three lines of investigations are pursued: how facets of each city are translated to film; the ways in which the modes of production of contemporary city symphonies in Asia differ from their Western predecessors, which then illuminate innovations in the conceptualisation and realisation of each project.

In city symphonies, the city is cast to play itself, emphasizing the axiomatic fact that cities have their own distinct flavour. As such, they highlight characteristics unique to
each city and its people. The comparative component is important: a single film may present several aspects of a culture but several films when considered collectively, can also reveal certain underlying features (Keiller 2013). Furthermore, whilst films shot in real locations implicitly contain a great deal of information about the spaces they portray (Penz 2012), these two examples explicitly express the voices and viewpoints of its resident population. Rather than fielding a dominant narrative, it is the personal stories of the actors in Singapore Gaga and contributors of the crowd-sourced Bitter, Sweet, Seoul that are foregrounded. This more democratic approach to honouring the respective cities reflects how truly polyphonic and rich in content contemporary city symphonies can be.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Simone Shu-Yeng Chung is Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore, and an associate at the Asia Research Institute. She holds a PhD in Architecture and an MPhil in Screen Media and Cultures from the University of Cambridge, and an MSc in Advanced Architectural Studies from the Bartlett School of Graduate Studies, University College London. A recipient of the Rome Scholar in Architecture award and AHRC-NIHU Fellowship at the Nichibunken, Kyoto, she also practiced as a registered architect in London for several years after completing her studies at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, and the Architectural Association. Her research interests reside in the synergistic potential offered by the moving image medium to the discipline of architecture and urban studies, and issues pertaining to conservation practices and intangible heritage in Asia. She is co-principal on the MOE Tier 1 ArRF project Re-mappings, Re-constructions, Re-layering and Re-visits: cinematic pasts as urban cultural resources (2015-2018) in Singapore and international co-investigator on the AHRC funded project Cinematic Musée Imaginaire of Spatial Cultural Differences (2017-2019) in the UK.