Nien Yuan Cheng

"This is my doodle":

Non-Participation, Performance, and the Singapore Memory Project

On August 9, 2018, Singapore celebrated its 53rd year of independence with the usual pomp and circumstance that is the National Day Parade. At the beginning of the show, however, the five colourfully-dressed, endlessly chirpy emcees were quick to point out what made this year's Parade different.

> SONIA CHEW: You here at the [Marina Bay] Float, you're not just going to be spectators today, you're going to be *performers*!
> GURMIT SINGH: Exactly Sonia, with this year's theme of "We Are Singapore", we want to celebrate *all* the individuals who make up Singapore.[1]

This theme, "We Are Singapore", was typical of the generic themes about collective national identity that marked each year's Parade, but Chew's hail to the audience ("You here") as performers, not spectators, brought the idea of the National Day Parade as mass participatory exercise to the fore. Every audience member in 2018's Parade was given a tote bag containing free goodies, shopping vouchers, and a placard which, according to emcee Nadiah M. Din, represented "an expression of who we are and what we can create together." One side of the placard was red and the other white, corresponding to the colours of the Singapore flag. On the white side, there were two bold words in red: "**I AM**". Audience members were prompted to give an account of their individual identities by finishing this sentence with a provided marker pen. They also had to wave the completed placard about when called on by the emcees, collectively creating the shape of the words "WE ♥ SG" in critical moments of the spectacle such as during the chorus of National Day songs. Conveniently, the placard also doubled up as a sunshade for audience members.

I offer a description of this exercise because it epitomises Singapore's participatory condition as interpellative, spectacular and performed *en masse*. It is interpellative because individuals are hailed to participate as Singaporean subjects who citationally perform their national identity as "*all* the individuals who make up Singapore." The "I" in "**I AM**" is

recognised only in relation to the "we" in "WE ♥ SG", or the "we" who love our country. Participatory exercises in Singapore are performed *en masse* to display this collective identification. These performance are spectacular, not merely because of the large scale of such exercises, but in the way that they are mediated through images and commodities (or images *as* commodities) in the context of a late capitalist consumer culture.[2]

Within the confines and conditions of participatory exercises in Singapore, however, there is always room for refusal or little ways to avoid adhering to the interpellative demands of these exercises. In some cases, participation is deferred precisely due to the particular conditions under which these exercises are carried out. This article explores how refusals and deferrals occur in Singapore's participatory condition by using cases of what I deem as "non-participation" in the Singapore Memory Project (SMP), a state-led archival project launched in 2010 which aimed to crowdsource the memories of Singapore and Singaporeans. In doing so, I bring attention to spaces where citizens have room to opt out of the normalising participatory demands instigated from above and to explore alternative ways of being and feeling. My discussion focusses on the practices and attitudes of everyday Singaporeans, redressing the imbalance of current literature on state-society relations that presumes an all-powerful state and, correspondingly, the docile and passive citizen.[3]

Participation, Performance, and the Singaporean Context

It is important to begin this discussion with a brief examination of Singapore as context. This city-state and its inhabitants have been variously used as a point of reference for "soft authoritarianism," or what American-Canadian writer William Gibson famously described as "Disneyland with the death penalty" (1993). In an essay about performance research in Singapore, British and American scholars Paul Rae and Ray Langenbach provide a litany of socio-cultural engineering practices implemented by the state that reinforce this dystopian image.

> Domestically, a capable, driven group of men masterminded Singapore's substantial economic fortunes and infrastructural development […]. A comprehensive program of legislation, surveillance, and propaganda ensured a compliant work-force and homogenized behaviour […]. Myriad aspects of social life were engineered: personal hygiene and procreation habits, interpersonal and interethnic relations, language, the regulation of public and private space […]. This was underwritten by a rhetoric of pragmatism that privileged actions over words, and brooked no objections on grounds of mere principle. In short, modern Singapore and the modern Singaporean have been, to a significant extent, performatively produced. (2010, 137).

As a born-and-bred Singaporean, many of my embodied memories make it hard to disagree with Langenbach and Rae's assessment that I've been "performatively produced." I remember, as a child, being in the audience of the National Day Parade extravaganza,

waving glo-sticks and shouting the lyrics to national day songs at the top of my lungs. I remember the pride and pleasure I used to take in being in charge of student discipline in secondary school, pursing my lips at a skirt too short or a shirt untucked. I remember the anxiety of sitting an exam at the age of nine, the results of which would determine if I would get into the same "gifted" class as my best friend at the time (and crying bitterly when I didn't). That said, other kinds of memories complicate these recollections of adhering to the "comprehensive program of legislation, surveillance, and propaganda" that Langenbach and Rae describe. I also remember receiving a goodie bag for National Day and discarding the memorabilia while keeping the shopping vouchers, notebooks and pens. I remember rolling my eyes and laughing along with my friends at the most recent ham-fisted national advertisement campaign to encourage procreation.[4] I remember the passionate teachers who deviated from the national curriculum, indeed the national script, to introduce other ways of thinking about certain topics. These memories have also performatively produced me, instigating and shaping my research in ways that are hard to pin down and measure. I do know, however, that they have helped me recognise the instances of participation that I am about to explore as moments of *non*-participation that nuance the trope of an all-powerful state and the Singaporean-as-programmed-machine, repressed to perfection.

Where does Singapore's participatory condition stand in relation to the current general understanding of participation in scholarly literature? Participation is a contested concept across disciplinary fields and subjects, but fundamentally and broadly it is "the promise and expectation that one can be actively involved with others in decision-making processes that affect the evolution of social bonds, communities, systems of knowledge, and organisations, as well as politics and culture" (Barney et. al. 2016, viii). Taken in this sense, there is no real ontological distinction between what is traditionally defined as political participation (e.g. voting, running for government, attending a rally) and cultural participation (e.g. uploading a video on YouTube, participating in a crowdsourcing project like Wikipedia, creating art): all participation is political to a degree, and, as Henry Jenkins points out, "our cultural experiences (our fantasies and our desires) often motivate our choices as citizens" (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 268). This consideration is important in today's intensely participatory condition, in which "participation—being involved in doing something and taking part in something with others—has become both environmental (a state of affairs) and normative (a binding principle of right action)" (Barney et. al. 2016, vii). In this condition, individuals are hailed as participatory subjects in an Althusserian scene of interpellation in various ways as part of their social, cultural and political lives. "Recognising ourselves in that hail, we act accordingly: we participate," states Barney et. al., the compilers of a recent and important anthology unpacking this condition in the digital age (x).

This present participatory condition has been described in said anthology and elsewhere to be distinctly inherent to the Western political tradition of liberal democracy; indeed, it would seem that a participatory culture is lacking in the case of soft authoritarian Singapore. If one were to adhere to Sherry Arnstein's famous "ladder" typology of citizen participation, virtually all instances of participation in Singapore are examples of tokenistic

and manipulative "empty rituals" of participation, relegated to the bottom rungs (1969, 216). In Singapore's civil society and political sphere, state-led programmes have been said to give the appearance of participation without any real efficacy or enactment of social change in the realms of policy making and feedback schemes despite rhetorical calls for a more active citizenry from above and below (Ho 2000; Lee 2005; Rodan and Jayasuriya 2007; Noh and Tumin 2008; Sim 2011; Ho 2017). In the arena of cultural participation, participatory art (especially that which is overtly political) has been historically discouraged in Singapore, with censorship boards preferring to keep the line between spectator and performer intact.[5]

However, to deem Singapore as outside the participatory condition outright would be to uphold crude dichotomies and categorisations between "authentic" and "fake" participation as well as between the West and the "rest." Current scholarship agrees that true participation, no matter the political and cultural context, is an impossible ideal (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 266). Participation is multilayered and complex and the same participatory situation can occupy different, even opposing rungs on Arnstein's ladder across time, space and perspectives (Carpentier 2016, 6), or even abandon the ladder typology altogether (c.f. Bishop 2012, 279). Much like performance, participation is not an *a priori* good, empowering or even democratic activity, having been appropriated by neoliberal regimes and state power (Barney et al 2016, xxxi). With the above factors taken into consideration, the participatory condition very much applies to Singapore, albeit in particular, and particularly intensive, ways. Singaporeans are hailed to participate every day in some form of citizenship game, with government agencies understanding participation (on their terms) to be the key to cultivating national identity and belonging.[6] In the sense put forth by art historian Claire Bishop in the context of participation as an artistic device, participation in this national context often becomes "a highly ideologised convention in its own right" where participants are paternalistically manipulated to complete the task "'correctly'" (Bishop 2012, 93).

Again, keeping the complexity of participatory situations in mind, this does not mean that all participation in this context is nominal or fake participation, nor does it mean that power and agency is always solely in the hands of the implementers and creators of participatory situations. Within the confines and conditions of participatory citizenship games in Singapore, there is always room for refusal or ways to perform little transgressions. In the case of the 2018 National Day Parade that this article opened with, for instance, many placard holders in the audience strayed from the demands of the interpellative exercise of giving an account of themselves as loyal and loving citizen-subjects as recommended by the emcees (e.g. "**I AM** a dreamer"; "**I AM** a proud Singaporean.") Some were too tempted by the open-ended prompt to write a conventional normative response: after the celebrations, a photograph of a girl waving a placard saying "**I AM** BROKE AF" was circulated on social media. Many were disinclined to respond at all, and photographs of the sea of placard holders show most of them to remain unfilled.[7] As stated earlier, the National Day Parade highlights the interpellative and spectacular nature of Singaporean state-led participatory exercises, performed *en masse*. On the other hand, the (non-

)responses engendered by the placard activity also indicate how Singaporeans often circumvent participatory demands. Such non-responses are the subject of this paper.

The Singapore Memory Project and Its Participatory Imperatives

The year I began primary school in Singapore, 1997, was also the year the Singapore Story was introduced to the classroom. Then-Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, launched this Story as part of the National Education (NE) programme, declaring that young people "must know the Singapore Story—how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation […]. *Knowing this history is part of being a Singaporean*" (Ministry of Information and the Arts 1997, my emphasis). As I learnt it in school, the Story begins in 1819, the year Raffles arrived on the shores of an apparently idyllic and sparsely-populated fishing village in Southeast Asia. This event set the stage for all the other key, tumultuous plotlines that followed: the development of Singapore as a bustling colonial port, the Fall of Singapore in 1942 when the British surrendered to the Japanese in a humiliating defeat, the terrifying, gruesome years of the Japanese Occupation until 1945, the struggle for independence in the 1950s and 1960s (peppered with threats of communism, unruly trade unions, and violent riots and protests), merger with Malaysia in 1963 followed by the traumatic and shocking ejection from the Malaysian Federation in 1965. Despite this harrowing past of a nation that was never meant to be, a so-called "accidental nation," the PAP (People's Action Party) steered its people to prosperity and progress with good governance and strategic planning, to the unmitigated economic success Singapore is today.[8] But, precisely because of this traumatic past, which exposed our vulnerability to forces within and without, we could never take the material comfort, peace and racial harmony we enjoyed in the present for granted. I reproduced this official history in tests and examinations across my ten years of schooling. Indeed, "knowing this history" by rote became part of the academic requirements of "being a Singaporean." Singaporeans learned it by heart, but we did not necessarily take it to heart. There was still a gap between the epistemology of knowing and the ontology of being that NE's iteration of the Singapore Story arguably could not reconcile.[9]

The Singapore Memory Project, launched in 2010 and administered by the National Library Board (NLB), is an attempt at reconciling this divide. Branded as a "whole-of-nation" movement, its organisers interpellated, and continue to interpellate, the entire nation to its cause. The goal is to create a digital participatory archive of the stories of ordinary Singaporeans to, in the words of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, "weave the tapestry of our nation" (Prime Minister's Office 2011). This tapestry would embody the Singapore Story, the grand narrative of how the nation overcame all odds to progress from third world to first through good governance and communitarian "Asian values," with the living memories of real people who experienced and are experiencing this remarkable development. "The project must be democratic: everyone could [*sic*] share their memories of Singapore. […] The more people get involved, the bigger and stronger the archive would become," appealed Member of Parliament Irene Ng in 2010. From 2010 to 2013, the aim was to collect five million memories (on average one for each citizen) by the nation's 50th birthday in 2015. When it became clear that achieving this goal was an impossibility

despite the NLB's best efforts, the project shifted its focus from the quantity of memories to the 'quality' of memories (Wan 2014, 67). While today the SMP remains active in certain aspects, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on its campaigns prior to this shift in 2013.

With the initial goal of five million memories to be crowdsourced as a key performance indicator, a campaign proliferation programme was meticulously planned and executed (c.f. Foo, Tang and Ng 2010). The SMP ran numerous collection drives, events and exhibitions in Singapore from 2011 to 2015. For example, during the anniversary event of the Malay-Muslim organisation Mendaki at the Singapore Exposition Hall, a photo exhibition of the organisation was held as part of an SMP mini-campaign, "irememberMENDAKI", which "aim[ed] to trigger old memories in viewers" (Toh 2012). Next to the exhibition were cards where visitors could write down their memories to be uploaded to the web portal, and opportunities to be interviewed onsite about their memories. Similar drives were held across the island in collaboration with schools, libraries and public agencies, including: "iremembermySchoolDays," "irememberBookstores," "irememberDoingGood," "The Singapore Story: My Heart, My Hope, My Home," and when our founding father Lee Kuan Yew passed away in 2015, "irememberLeeKuanYew."[10] Almost all the campaigns included a contest with prizes to be won or monetary incentives. These campaigns extended to the larger-scale festivities of state carnivals in different neighbourhoods across the island from 2012 to 2013.

A large part of the SMP is facilitated by volunteer labour. Volunteers comprise interested Singaporeans and/or students recruited from schools and form part of what the SMP calls the "Memory Corps," many of whom are trained in special "induction sessions" and workshops on basic techniques of documentation and oral history interviewing (Tay 2013). In the aforementioned mini-campaigns, exhibitions and carnivals, there would be volunteers giving out memory cards and encouraging people to contribute to the project. In some cases, they would also be on hand to record short oral history interviews. Some of these volunteers would then transcribe or manually scan thousands of these handwritten or drawn memory cards and catalogue them with metadata for the web portal. Other ways to volunteer include contributing to the SMP's affiliated blog, iremember.sg, which updates readers about SMP activities and programmes along with uploading some human-interest stories and interviews. For the most part, however, contributions to the blog are made by paid and professional marketing agencies.

The web portal singaporememory.sg, launched in March 2012, allows users to create "memory accounts" and deposit text stories, images, and videos (of up to twenty megabytes each). The instructions to upload memories include creating metadata which includes the title of the memory, the date, whose memory it is, a "story behind the memory," the memory's location in the Singapore map and some tags related to the memory which would help other users find it if they searched for a similar topic, such as "transportation" or "friendship." Users can also pledge their personal blogs and Instagram accounts so that any new posts that they make on their personal social media will be automatically uploaded to the web portal. Every contribution uploaded counts towards a "memory meter"

prominently displayed on the top right corner of the portal's homepage interface (see Fig. 1). Students in schools were also tasked to write on memory cards in class, which significantly added to the meter as they were a demographic that could be relied on to contribute by en masse. Another kind of campaign that created droves of contributions occurred during the annual National Day Parade, where the large crowds were also encouraged to contribute their memories of the Parade: during 2011, the National Day Parade campaign amassed more than 120,000 contributions alone. Quantity was paramount, especially in the period of 2010 to 2013, so anything collected in the numerous campaigns or carnivals would be uploaded, no matter how mundane, as long as it was not "objectionable" in a way that violated the website's terms and conditions. The NDP "Singapore Spirit" campaign memories, for instance, consisted for the most part a generic stock photograph of the parade fireworks and banal one-sentence contributions collected by SMP volunteers from the crowd, like: "[The Singapore Spirit] means to be proud of our country," "It means all of us being united," "It is a nice country," and, in one case, "The Singapore Spirit to me means nothing."[11] Once memories are uploaded, under the terms and conditions of use it is decreed that all participants would cede to the SMP "the perpetual, worldwide, non-exclusive licence" to digitise and distribute their memories in the public sphere.[12]
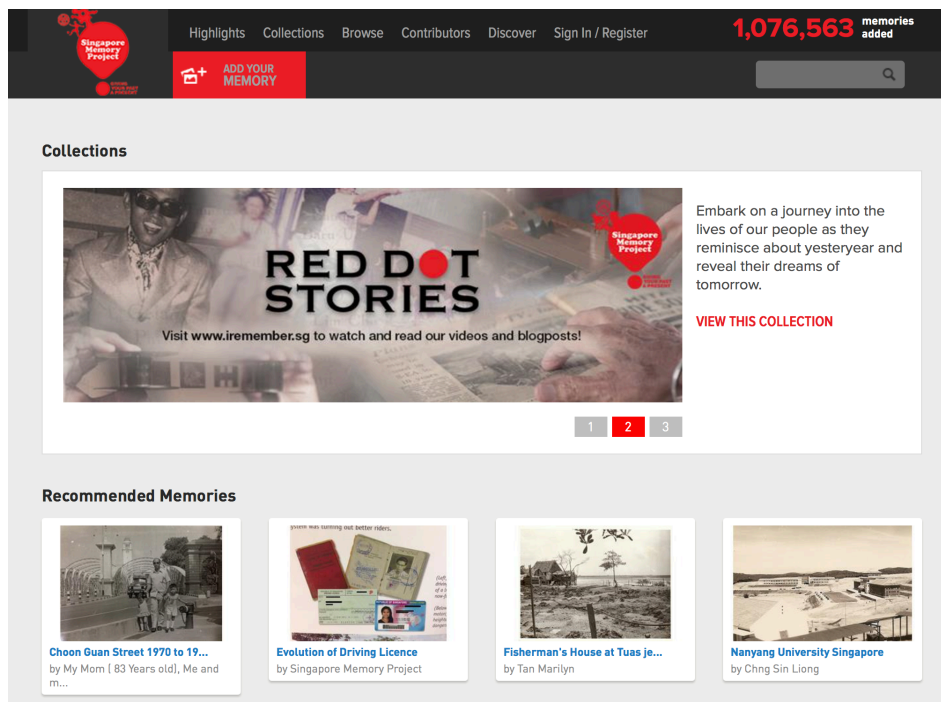

Fig. 1 The singaporememory.sg web portal homepage interface. Screenshot taken by the author, 30 April 2018. The memory meter is on the top right-hand corner. Image credit: the Singapore Memory Project.

As can be surmised from the above measures, memory under the SMP is understood in quantifiable, immutable and calcified terms, as programme head Wan Wee Pin's inappropriate and somewhat disturbing analogy of the SMP's archive to the victims of the disaster in Pompeii tellingly reveals:

The dream is of a library of the future in Singapore that somehow adapts Ranganathan's library law of "every reader his book" to "every citizen his book." For the library would be a collection of citizen's books—books of lives of generations past and present. It would be almost like being frozen in time and space like the people of Pompeii except that the figures could speak and describe their everyday lives. (2014, 68–69)

This vision of citizens' memories stored and preserved goes counter to the general understanding among scholars of the dynamism of remembering, as described by historian Raphael Samuel in his influential treatise on theatres of memory: "memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic" (1994, x). Instead, aided by the modern technologies of copyright and digitisation, the SMP's various apparatuses act collectively as a storage system that, to paraphrase Rebecca Schneider's performance analysis of the archive, places memories under "house arrest" and "domiciliation" to be appropriated under the Singapore Story (2011, 105).

The project has, unsurprisingly, been dismissed by local academics as yet another attempt by the state to reify the historical narrative of the Singapore Story and perpetuate the forgetting of alternative histories that would undermine state power, despite its claims of the democratic nature of its activities. Liew Kai Khiun and Natalie Pang, for instance, deem the SMP as mere "historical taxidermy" which perpetuate linearity, sentimentality and forgetting (Liew and Pang 2015, 550). Similarly, Kenneth Paul Tan puts forth the SMP as an example of "ritualised national-level activities that ride the wave of nostalgia and depoliticise the past in a renewed and seemingly more inclusive version and performance of The Singapore Story" (2016, 244). Daniel Goh interprets the SMP as the

cultivation of emotional citizenship that veils a more insidious operation characteristic of the epistemic state. It is to raid the last frontier of secrets stored in the memories of individual Singaporeans so as to produce a new archive from which a new authorised narrative could be sprung. (2015, 223)

These scholars critical of the SMP are not wrong in their general consensus of the top-down nature of the project and the fact that it is tied to the state's desire to reinforce The Singapore Story in insidious ways. In fact, I would argue further that the SMP is, fundamentally, not a historical project at all, but goes beyond the domain of heritage and history to use storytelling as a form of Foucauldian governmentality to "shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct of Singaporeans" for *present* purposes, in the sense put forth by political scientist Terence Lee (2010). The curated life stories and memories have become a means to this end.

That said, whether the SMP does succeed in this goal remains to be seen and an exploration of non-participation in this context is useful as a starting point for this discussion. For one, it brings our attention to the effects of the SMP as it was inscribed by ordinary Singaporeans,

as opposed to merely focussing on the abstract design of the project as conceptualised by its organisers. For another, it considers ways in which Singaporeans manoeuvre (and have always manoeuvred) such national exercises that defy or go contrary to their aims and purposes in ways big and small. This article discusses two different modes of non-participation in the SMP performed in two sub-campaigns of the project: the "iremembermySchoolDays" campaign and the memory collection drives in SMP carnivals. The former illustrates some creative ways students periperformatively refuse to conform to performative conventions of professing thanks and promising love within the performance frame of a commemorative scrapbook. The latter instance shows that the very efforts of socio-cultural engineering in Singapore as outlined by Rae, Langenbach among others ultimately serve to undermine the state's participatory efforts to engage with its citizens: carnival-goers instead create an illusion of participation.

Professions of Love and Periperformative Refusals

One collection drive was held in Nanyang Girls' High School (NYGH) as part of the "iremembermySchoolDays" campaign, which was a joint collaboration between the National Library Board (in their capacity as administrator of the SMP) and the Ministry of Education with the theme "Celebrating the Past, Inspiring the Future" (Ministry of Education 2011, 2). The aim of this campaign was to collect heartwarming stories of fond memories from students, teachers and alumni about their schooling years, building "a culture of remembering personal and shared experiences which will nurture bonds and a sense of belonging" (2). This was carried out in different ways nationwide, with each participating school setting up collection drives and memory projects of their own to contribute to the SMP portal. In NYGH, the graduating batch of students was prompted to share a "message of love" to their school through written stories, drawings and photographs to be compiled in colourful scrapbooks collectively titled, "Messages from our hearts." Over 600 pages of these scrapbooks were individually scanned, deposited and catalogued in the memory bank of the portal.

The "iremembermySchoolDays" campaign must be understood as an iteration of the aforementioned National Education programme, which has inculcated behavioural norms and values in Singaporean citizens since its inception in the school curriculum in 1997. More profoundly, scholars have argued that National Education is no less a continual attempt to imagine an ontological "Singaporeanness" in the service of nation-building (Koh 2005; Han 2017). Chaim Noy has remarked upon how nationhood "is an abstract sentiment that *demands* materialization and embodiment: it is sustained by and symbolically accessed via specific discursive actions" (2015, 101, my emphasis). The collective act of inscribing fond and heartfelt memories about one's schooling years is representative of this materialisation demanded by the state: to participate in this endeavour is to re-tell stories that thread together a part of one's normative Singaporean life. It is to perform a belonging to and an identification with a (conventionalised) way of being Singaporean.

Importantly, National Education is not merely an abstract, ideological exercise, but is necessarily interwoven with an affective dimension: instead of merely producing a way of acting Singaporean, it strives to also nurture ways of *feeling* Singaporean. This is exemplified through its three-pronged "Head, Heart, and Hands" framework, the central attribute of which pledges that "[i]n engaging the 'Heart', students should connect emotionally with the Singapore story; their love for the nation should be the outcome of their appreciating Singapore and having a deeper sense of belonging" (Ministry of Education, retrieved 2018). To love, to appreciate, to feel belonging: these emotions, as the work of Sara Ahmed has demonstrated, are very much part of "the loop of the performative," in which affects such as love generate and re-generate and associate and re-associate objects *as* objects of love (2014, 194). Love is not a natural or given ideal emotional state, but is embroiled in a sociocultural politics of feeling that determines what is loveable and, therefore, liveable. As the Head, Heart and Hands framework suggests, national love in Singapore is also embroiled in an economy of gratitude; loving and thanking are two sides of the same coin. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's important work on this economy comes to mind: to be grateful is to be indebted, and therefore invested—"[g]ratitude lays the foundation for loyalty" (2003, 101). In Singapore, under the rubric of National Education, professing love for your school is professing love for your nation, a sign of appreciation for the life that the state has been able to provide. If Ahmed is right to say that national love is "a form of waiting," to profess this love is also the performative act of a promise of patience and fidelity: I will always love you, no matter what (131). In the Singaporean context, where citizens are coloured in harsh, broad strokes with a wagging finger as either dutiful "stayers" or cowardly "quitters" by the political elite, there is a keen desire to evoke this performative promise whenever possible by the state.[13]

The majority of "Messages from our hearts" from the campaign at NYGH contain precisely such professions and promises, with participants painting a collective picture of idyllic Singaporean school life in an almost perfectly synchronised choreography of nostalgia for the recent past. Their messages, tinted with pens the colours of the rainbow and peppered with heart-shapes, vary in artistry and detail but nonetheless virtually depict the same sentiments of love and gratitude. "Thank you for having me although I might not be the best student but I still love you ♥ ♥ because you give me so many chances to excel in various ~areas~. Forever and always I will love and you will remain as the BEST SCHOOL in my heart," promises a student in purple marker. "Thank you Nanyang for the past 4 years! […] I will forever cherish the many memories I have made and hold them close to my heart," writes another in hot pink, with the word 'heart' encased in a heart shape as a final flourish. Uploaded onto SMP's web portal, these messages, scanned and digitised, are contextualised by the metadata provided by library staff and volunteers to allow for expedient searching. Across the 600 messages, the descriptive captions vary slightly depending on the content and information available. These slight variations notwithstanding, a piece of metadata remains more or less constant: "This drawing conveys a student's message of appreciation and love for her school."

Not all messages, however, conform to this expected formula. Hailed by the school to participate in this campaign, some students find creative ways of non-participation,

periperformatively refusing to engage not only in this project but, by implication, in the performative normalisation of certain affects as mandated by the institution of National Education. If performativity, or more precisely the scene of any performative encounter requires the assumption of mutual consensus between all participants that *this* way of speaking, doing, feeling is the norm, or *de rigueur* (in the etymological sense of rigourous strictness and inflexibility), then periperformatives skirt around this assumption by straying beyond this formulaic sphere. Periperformatives were conceptualised by Eve Sedgwick in order to bring to attention such moments and, importantly, the possibility of them (2003). They often occur (although not necessarily so) in the act of disinterpellation, of refusing to respond appropriately to imperative calls to participate: "[t]o disinterpellate from a performative scene will usually require, not another explicit performative nor simply the negative of one, but the nonce, referential act of a periperformative" (70). These acts also often require initiative and creativity, as there is usually no pre-existing conventional response.
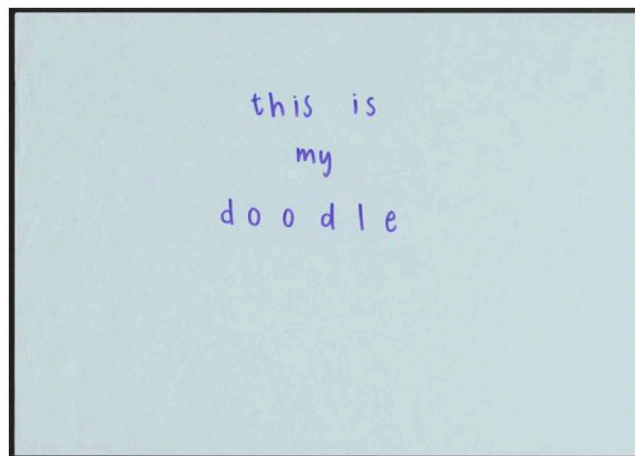
Fig. 2 An unsigned message in the scrapbook: "this is/ my/ doodle". Screenshot taken by author from the SMP portal singaporememory.sg, 5 December 2017. Image credit: Singapore Memory Project.

Fig. 3 An unsigned message in the scrapbook: "You shouldn't be looking at this". Screenshot taken by author from the SMP portal singaporememory.sg, 5 December 2017. Image credit: the Singapore Memory Project.

Between pages and pages of thanks and heart shapes, an anonymous message simply states in purple marker on an otherwise blank blue page, "this is my d o o d l e." This statement's constative clarity and conviction is also the very reason for its inaccuracy: its legibility as a fully-formed sentence and neat, clean lines make it less an aimless, scribbled drawing than a bold, mischievous claim made with intention within the performance frame of the commemorative scrapbook. This claim is also a direct reference to non-participation; doodling is the embodiment of not paying attention. It is to disengage from any surrounding

situation, to think of anything else but the task at hand, to be *absent*minded. Bearing in mind Sedgwick's theory that the spatiality of periperformatives (as surrounding loci of explicit performatives) allows them to "invoke (if not participate fully in) the force of more than one illocutionary act," the statement "this is my doodle" performs an act of illocutionary denegation in addition to what it literally asserts: it makes explicit that the utterer does *not* perform a certain illocutionary act (in this case professing thanks and promising love) (2003, 70). This distinguishes the anonymous doodler's act from, say, a student who does not write in the scrapbook at all. It is to make the performance of non-participation clear, and therefore more transgressive.

Another explicit performance of non-participation, this time a tiny scrawl in the middle of the page that one has to squint to read, comes in the form of a warning too late: "You shouldn't be looking at this." Again, there is a sense of misbehaviour, but this message explicitly refers to an audience in a way that is both an act of mischief—a prank pulled on the reader for wasting time trying to decipher the exact words, carefully and purposefully scratched to near illegibility—and an admonishment at the voyeur for a breach of privacy. Both of these effects are especially potent considering the multiple performance frames of the scrapbook: first as a commemorative object for the school, and second as an entry in the nation-wide memory project's publicly-available web portal. Indeed, in the cases of the doodler, the prankster, and other periperformative refusals, their transgressive non-participation is underscored precisely by the frame that surrounds and contradicts their messages of illocutionary denegation. These are neither "messages from our hearts" nor are they images that convey "a student's message of love to her school," no matter what the metadata says. . Interestingly, the library staff or volunteer who digitised these pages chose to spell out these acts of non-love in the captions, amplifying their transgressive force by injecting the silly and the inane into the bureaucratic language of the archival catalogue:

> This image conveys a student's message of love to her school, Nanyang Girls' High School. It contains the words "You shouldn't be looking at this". Nanyang Girls' High School Class 409 (2012). Title devised by Library staff.

> This picture conveys a student's message of love to her school, Nanyang Girls' High School. It contains the words "This is my doodle." Nanyang Girls' High School Class 401 (2012). Title devised by Library staff.

Other interesting examples in the catalogue include:

> This picture conveys a student's message of love to her school, Nanyang Girls' High School. It contains the words "The end".

> This drawing conveys a student's message of love to her school, Nanyang Girls' High School. It contains the words "Boo! What to do?" The first "o" in "Boo" is drawn as a face with three eyes.

> This picture conveys a student's message of love to her school, Nanyang Girls' High school. It depicts a giraffe and a ball.[14]

Ultimately, these instances of non-participation that I have highlighted fall into the slim minority. I also do not want to overstate these acts as organised acts of political resistance or revolt. Nonetheless, I draw attention to them as examples of how nation-building exercises in Singapore's participatory condition, however small and mundane, can and do fail to be taken up. This is important as while governmental policies and practices in Singapore have been thoroughly analysed in scholarship, the responses and reactions of Singaporeans themselves have not had the same treatment. Ideas of performativity and, correspondingly, periperformatives are especially interesting avenues to explore in this regard, for they refigure ideas of normativity, antinormativity, uptake, and so on. In particular instances where participation entails performative declarations of national love and gratitude, as is so often the case in Singapore, non-participation points toward alternative affects in the city-state.

One Memory, One Spin: SMP Carnival Participation and Gift Exchange

Besides soliciting the memories of schoolchildren, in 2012 the SMP embarked on several outreach initiatives that comprised mainly of carnivals and roadshows situated in Singaporean neighbourhoods. These carnivals aimed to create awareness about the project and to enable people without access to or knowledge of computers and the internet to contribute to the memory portal in person through various means: they could bring photographs to be digitally archived, write their memories down by hand on dedicated postcards to be slotted into collection boxes, or be interviewed by friendly SMP volunteer or staff. As carefully staged intercorporeal spaces of ritualistic participation, state carnivals lend themselves especially pertinent to performance analysis; over the years, these spectacular events have become a staple in Singaporean life and have developed into a unique genre of the carnivalesque with a distinct formulaic system of gift exchange. This system was particularly adaptable towards the SMP's aim of fulfilling the key performance indicator of five million memories in the web portal. However, as I argue in this section, such a system engendered a form of non-participation distinct from that discussed in the previous section. Non-participation here did not involve individual, periperformative refusals to take part, as outlined above, but was the inevitable result of the structure of the exercise itself, despite the organisers' sincere attempts to elicit genuine citizen engagement.

The SMP's inaugural carnival, held in March 2012 at Toa Payoh, one of Singapore's most historic satellite towns, did not deviate from the formula of most state carnivals. A large open marquee tent was set up along with different booths, where carnival participants, made up mostly of Toa Payoh residents, submitted memories of the neighbourhood. After doing so, they would be rewarded with tokens that could be exchanged for a spin at the "Wheel of Goodies" at the "Goodie Redemption" booth with the stipulated limit of one spin per memory submitted. There was also a lucky draw with cash vouchers at the end of the night and the more memories one deposited, the bigger one's chances of winning. Other carnivals that followed suit over the next year followed the same formula and layout,

customised according to the neighbourhood each carnival was set in. In Toa Payoh, the plaza that the carnival was held is the estate's prominent geographical centre, surrounded by shopping centres, megastores, myriad food centres and restaurants, two major roads, a public library and a supermarket, making it a prime intersection for human traffic, which served the SMP's purpose of attracting participants.

More than a merely a memory collection drive, I argue that SMP carnivals, embodied in the places that that acted as the backdrop of these carnivals, worked to performatively *remind* residents of the Singapore Story. Toa Payoh, for instance, is in many ways the epicentre of the Singapore Story's plotline of progress and development in its transformation from swamp settlement to bustling mini-metropolis. "[T]he work of reminding," phenomenologist Edward Casey states, "is *to induce the actual or potential remindee to do or think something that he or she might otherwise forget to do or think*" (2000, 93, emphasis in original). The SMP carnivals foreground the change in environment across time in a way that everyday living in these towns would not, reminding residents of the government's ability to "deliver the goods" for its citizenry, which is the ruling party's main claim to electoral victories and political legitimacy. Reminders are, by nature, a "sensuous or quasi-sensuous configuration conspicious enough to draw attention to itself," because they are instituted to combat forgetfulness in the first place (Casey 2000, 99). The special event that is the carnival, well-publicised and well-placed in the centre of town as a festive occasion in an otherwise ordinary Friday, is such a conspicious reminder of Singapore's progress.

In Toa Payoh, residents were encouraged (even incentivised) to reflect on their past vis-a-vis the neighbourhood, and, having deposited their memories, perused the exhibitions, and obtained their free gifts, they would ideally emerge from the carnival into the grand plaza— lit by Victorian-style lamps and the glow of surrounding shopping malls—with goodie bags and a renewed sense of pride of their neighbourhood. The efficacy of this reminder is reflected by the detritus of carnival participation archived in the SMP portal, namely the submitted memories that were digitised and deposited after the event. For instance, a witness to the changes in Toa Payoh effused in Mandarin, in a memory card entitled "Staying in Toa Payoh for more than 40 years":

> Happy Toa Payoh Residence. My family and I moved from the *kampung* [village] to Toa Payoh Lorong [Street] 1A in 1969. […] We are very happy, as long-time Toa Payoh residents, to see Toa Payoh's development over more than forty years, the improvement in environment, convenience in transport, garden city, convenient living and eating. Very proud! Very satisfied! Living in Toa Payoh is happiness! Hehe.

In this way, then, while the more overt call was for residents to remember Toa Payoh's past, these memories in turn serve as oblique reminders of what Singaporean scholar Selvaraj Velayutham, drawing from Australian sociologist Ghassan Hage, calls "the gift of social life" that characterises a Singaporean citizen's relationship with the state (2007, 191). According to Velayutham, Singaporeans identify with the nation most strongly through the

material experiences of everyday life, or the felt experiences of efficiency, cleanliness, safety and comfort.

This gift, however, comes with the expectation of reciprocity: "[As a Singaporean,] you are given this gift in order that you ensure the nation's economic survival and stay committed to Singapore. […] Singaporeans respond to the state's gift of social life by re-electing the PAP to power and are appreciative of what it has done for them" (Velayutham 2007, 193). In order to reciprocate the gift, however, citizens have to remember the gift. This reminder has implications for the future, as all reminders do: as something that is made in *anticipation* of forgetting to do or think something, the reminder is "a point of connection between past and future, a *Janus bifrons* which is apprehended in a present moment situated *between* the past of engagement and the future of enactment" (Casey 2000, 93). In the reminder that was the SMP carnival, residents engaged with the past through the bodily acts of writing and submitting their postcards, or performing stories in front of the camera, and in doing so they enacted the anticipatory promise of state loyalty and national belonging in the future, implicit in quasi-pledges such as that written by another happy Toa Payoh resident: "I am looking forward to living here until the end of my life."

However, in an event where personal memories are exchanged for 'free' gifts and goodie bags, could an argument be made that ultimately, *none* of the participation in the carnival truly fulfilled the organisers' and the state's intent to engage with Singaporeans through this project? It is precisely this economy and expectation of gift exchange habituated in Singaporeans that resulted in such incentivising means to elicit participation, where participation comes from a place of commodity exchange rather than that of spontaneous and generous sharing. In the context of multicultural state carnivals in Singapore, the gift as image-commodity has been compellingly argued by Daniel Goh as a spectacular distraction instituted from above, deferring real discussion about the issues of race and religion in Singapore. Describing the droves of residents more eager to queue for the free food than to listen to talks or interact with one another, Goh laments, paraphrasing Debord, about "the parody of the gift [that] made for the travesty of dialogue" (2013, 237). However, while incisive, the configuration of such an analysis is entirely top-down, painting a picture of a duped, hapless citizenry at the mercy of state machinations. Instead, I argue that organisers of the SMP carnivals shoot themselves in the foot, so to speak, when they employ such mercenary incentives for participation, in a way similar to how the state's "ideology of pragmatism" has cultivated a citizenry less prone to be active, loyal Singaporeans and more prone to think about their survival over the country's (c.f. Tan 2017). In both cases, inherent contradictions within and between desired outcomes and actual implementation produces the problem.

In SMP carnivals, despite the ample publicity materials that say otherwise, gifts are not free: the word "free" is meant only in terms of the lack of the literal price tag, but the payment for the gift is clearly conveyed from organiser to participant. While the true gratuitousness of any gift (as meticulously theorised by Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida and others) has long been questioned, what is unique about commodity gifts in Singapore is that the mercantile obligations behind the gift, usually unspoken, is put to the fore. The
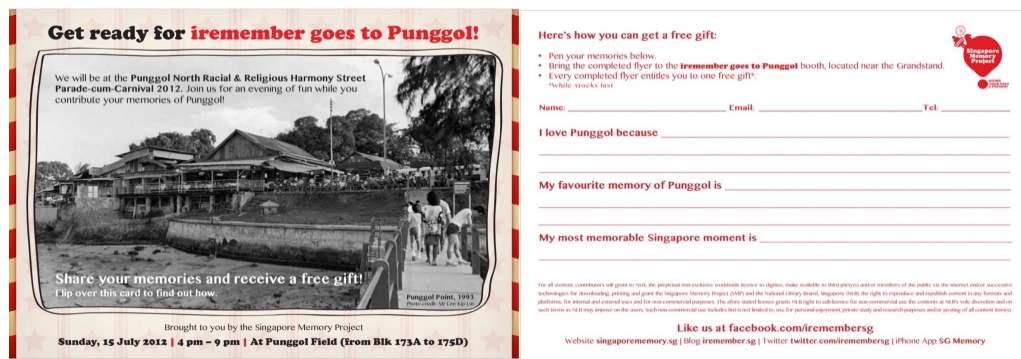
Fig. 4 An example of a memory postcard for submissions at an SMP carnival. Image credit: the Singapore Memory Project.

terms and conditions behind the gift, normally an imperceptible trace behind the illusory act of giving, is put on display to the point where it overshadows the actual reason and purpose of the event or project in which the gift is given. In the publicity postcard above, the statement on the cover side, "Flip over this card to find out how," is ambiguous: is the purpose of flipping this card to find out how to "share your memories" or how to "receive a free gift"? The answer, when one flips the card to the other side, with its first words in large, bold font, would suggest it is the latter: sharing your memories is the means to an end, not the end itself. As such, being part of the SMP becomes something much more mercenary. SMP carnivals, as indicative of Singapore's general participatory condition, preclude the genuine participation desired by its organisers. The box in which carnival-goers slot their personal memories carries the trace of the box for the grand finale where SMP director Gene Tan fishes out the winner of the lucky draw.

These gifts, and the conditions behind them speak to the SMP's desire for quantity over quality of memories, especially from the period of 2011 to 2013. "Every completed flyer entitles you to one free gift," states the aforementioned postcard. Correspondingly, to have the best chance at the lucky draw, participants had to put as many vouchers as possible into the lottery box and to receive a voucher they had to submit a memory. Such mechanisms clearly quantify and equate memory in accordance to specific amounts of material gain and incentivise quantity over quality. It is thus not surprising that many memories collected in SMP carnivals, while positive, were short and generic, as was the case for Toa Payoh: "Toa Payoh has lots of greenery and a lot of beautiful people," one reads. "Toa Payoh—see saw, played five stones in the park," says another. "Previously Toa Payoh is a big swarm [*sic*] place," "Old Toa Payoh is big swarm [*sic*]," "Toa Payoh Lor [Street] 1 renovated market, lots of good food," are some other examples. These are not the stirring stories that Prime Minister Lee called for when he announced the SMP in 2011, nor do they indicate that SMP has successfully "raid[ed] the last frontier of secrets stored in the memories of individual Singaporeans" as Daniel Goh claims in his critique of the project (2015, 223).

It is tempting to term these mechanisms as a form of manipulation on the part of the SMP to achieve its goals of participation, but it is precisely the implementation of such

mechanisms which prevents them from attaining the kind of affective and sincere participation they desire most. The end result is pseudo-participation, but in a sense distinct from the common top-down conception as put forth by scholars of participatory processes, "in which the emphasis is not on creating a situation in which participation is possible, but on [instigators of participatory situations] creating the feeling that participation is possible" (Carpentier 2016, 4). Instead, the illusion of participation is arguably carried out by the participants themselves, who do what is needed to get what is "in it" for them without attempting to or needing to engage meaningfully with the SMP. Even if this is not the case for some participants, the motivations behind submissions to the portal in this context, mediated through these material incentives, will always carry a trace of inauthenticity borne from the system of material gift exchange in both state carnivals and Singaporean culture at large.

Conclusion

In this article I have illustrated two scenes of non-participation from the Singapore Memory Project, a citizenship game exemplary of the participatory condition in the city-state. In the case of the "iremembermySchoolDays" campaign, we can see how some students choose to disinterpellate from the national imperative to profess love and gratitude by periperformatively fashioning creative ways not to conform and making their denegation explicit. As for the case of SMP state carnivals, carnival participation is rewarded and incentivised through instrumental means with conditions attached (one memory for one spin!), which arguably undermines the whole participatory enterprise. While each instance enacts the 'non' in non-participation in different ways, both surround issues of affect and the performance of citizenship. Returning to Velayutham's discussion of the gift of social life in Singapore, he warns that the transactional politics of giving and reciprocating this gift as it stands is ultimately ineffective when it comes to nurturing national love and loyalty (2007, 191–92). The state's strategy to elicit affective performances of this nature, exemplified by the efforts of the Singapore Memory Project, runs counter to the deeply-ingrained ideology of pragmatism that has pervaded state discourse and policy. As a result, meaningful engagement in the form of socio-cultural participation continues to be deferred.

At the time of writing, the Singapore Memory Project campaign may be on its last legs (the number of entries in the portal, for instance, remain stagnated at just over one million, well short of the original goal). The Singapore state, however, continues to use other means to intensify its attempts to elicit citizen participation and performances in illuminating ways. Further research is therefore necessary to tease out the rich implications of these participatory imperatives. The examination of non-participation brings attention to spaces where citizens have room to opt out of the normalising performative demands instigated from above and to explore alternative ways of being and feeling. Most importantly, such research would bring the discussion back to the practices and attitudes of everyday Singaporeans, redressing the imbalance of current literature on state-society relations that focus on all-encompassing social engineering by the state.

Notes

1. Vocal emphasis is indicated by my italicisation of the text.

2. For an analysis of the Singapore National Day Parade as spectacular ritual, see Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh (1997). That said, beyond Kong and Yeoh's limited view of the spectacular as awe-inspiring grandeur, spectacles in Singapore can be found in the everyday –the Singapore Memory Project's carnivals, for example, that are the subject of this article's second half.

3. See Teo Yeo Yen's sociological and ethnographic study of the uptake of family policy in Singapore for a discussion of this imbalance (2011, 2).

4. There are many such campaigns, but a particularly amusing one that comes to mind printed giant pictures of cartoon sperm on the floor of train platforms depicting them in a swimming race to find an egg.

5. Until 2004, both forum theatre and performance art were proscribed because they "have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation [posing] dangers to public order, security and decency, and much greater difficulty to the licensing authority" (quoted in Tan 2013, 201).

6. The term "citizenship game" was used by Terence Lee, drawing from the work of Nikolas Rose, to refer to ways in which the Singapore state utilises the media to engage the national public with ludic strategies to "increase levels of public acceptance of the way one is governed via 'policy'" (2010, 41).

7. See, for instance, blogger Kelvin Ang's photograph of spectators holding up the placard. One of them declares, "**I AM** GAINING WEIGHT". http://www.cheekiemonkie.net/2018/08/national-day-parade-ndp-2018-singapore.html.

8. "The People's Action Party has retained power in Singapore since 1959, resulting in a stable one-party dominant state. The PAP secures dominance over other parties through various legal means, but cultural measures such as the careful cultivation of the Singapore Story—and campaigns such as the Singapore Memory Project—also play a significant role in this regard.

9. Paul Rae mentions this issue in his account of the 2003 refurbishment of the Singapore History Museum: "concerns were being expressed by the Ministry of Education that young Singaporeans were not as receptive to [the Singapore Story] as had been hoped—indeed, they were suspicious of it. It was clear that a generational shift was underway, and that for young, techno-savvy Singaporeans, the turbulent independence period was distant, abstract and, in light of their scepticism towards national narratives, unknowable" (2009, 171).

10. For a full list of campaigns, see https://www.singaporememory.sg/campaigns.

11. This last entry can be found here: https://www.singaporememory.sg/contents/SMB-da93b0b4-2edb-460f-91db-9577fda5e3a9?nextrecord=8&listtype=searchResult&id=SMB-da93b0b4-2edb-460f-91db-9577fda5e3a9&pagenm=2&startrec=9&type=memories&keyword=the%20singapore%20spirit&memory=SMB-da93b0b4-2edb-460f-91db-9577fda5e3a9.

On the left, there are other "The Singapore Spirit" entries that users can browse through.

12. See the site's terms and conditions, under "Proprietary Rights":
https://www.singaporememory.sg/Help-Info#terms-and-conditions.

13. In 2002's National Day Rally speech, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong described "stayers" and "quitters" as such: "Fair-weather Singaporeans will run away whenever the country runs into stormy weather. I call them 'quitters.' Fortunately, 'quitters' are in the minority. The majority of Singaporeans are 'stayers.' 'Stayers' are committed to Singapore. […] 'Stayers' include Singaporeans who are overseas, but feel for Singapore. They will come back when needed, because their hearts are here. [...As one 'stayer' put it,] 'To love one's country, to fight and die for one's country, is the duty of every citizen. It is an honour as well.'" Transcript of speech taken from the National Archives of Singapore:
http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2002081805.htm

14. The last instance involved multiple students signing on a single page, following convention of the autographed commemorative scrapbook, but writing text that does not: "PAPER IS NOT FREE!"/ "Pls lose weight" (pointing to the giraffe).

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NIEN YUAN CHENG recently submitted her PhD at the University of Sydney's Department of Theatre and Performance Studies. Cheng's dissertation explores Singapore as what she calls the 'storytelling state', or the nation's newfound interest in a specific form of narration that emerged in the last decade through public (auto)biographical storytelling. Cheng is co-founder of the interdisciplinary research group Perspectives on the Past in Southeast Asia (PoP), which organises public seminars, conference panels, and workshops at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and Oxford University. Cheng holds a B.A. (Honours with University Medal) in Performance Studies from the University of Sydney.