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AFTER THE LAST TRAIN: NARRATING THE TENTATIVE MONUMENT THROUGH SIMRYN GILL'S TANJONG PAGAR RAILWAY STATION

In June 2011, the railway station at Tanjong Pagar, which once marked the terminus of the Malaysian-run and owned Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) railway line, ceased operations. The station was an anomaly by Singaporean standards: a sign on the station platform read "Welcome to Malaysia;" in the concourse people sat idle reading newspapers or drinking coffee in the middle of the day; commuters instinctually shuffled along the platforms as announcements were sporadic and unreliable; pigeons, cats and bats occupied the same space. This was perhaps the only location on the island where litter-strewn floors were not obsessively cleared. The station was suspended in a spatiotemporal context which jarred against a Singaporean sensibility. Its architecture lived with, and was shaped by dirt, dereliction and decay.

Against this tenuous backdrop, this paper will examine Sydney-based Malaysian artist Simryn Gill's ongoing work on this station and its defunct Station Hotel. For the Singapore Art Biennale in 2006, Gill created a book titled Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. It was only available at the newspaper kiosk in the station. In it, Gill juxtaposed contemporary photographs of commuters with an architectural description of the station's murals. The murals – commissioned from the United Kingdom in the 1930s – depicted the working classes from dominant Malayan racial groups, each conducting stereotypical economic roles tied to race. In a deadpan and overtly factual manner, the textual account in Gill's Guide achieves the opposite of facticity as architectural history is placed adjacent to what one can see and feel today (the murals and the commuters).

This paper argues that Gill's approach to the station forefronts the architectural implications (and risks) of time passing and the affective component of architectural decay as central to the understanding of this anachronistic space.

“In the wide space of architecture, that which is not the building is of no consequence. Ideas, descriptions, critiques, theories, even ideology – all abstractions – are, in the end, passive and inert, the ether of architectural space. The object – separate and privileged – is the sole subject of an enclosed and centripetal order. Architecture is a collection of ruins that closes at six o’clock.”¹

As the last train drew out of the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station on June 30, 2011 driven ceremonially by Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar of Johor, whose grandfather had opened the causeway between Malaya and Singapore in 1923, the architectural narrative of this tentative monument found itself again at the brink of abrupt change.² After years of territorial dispute, a large section of the originally Malaysian-run and owned Keretapi Tanah Melayu railway line from the Woodlands Checkpoint to the Singapore-based city terminus ending at Tanjong Pagar, was decommissioned. The architectural presence of the terminus – a once imposing Art Deco building completed in 1932 – was overwhelmed for many years before, on the one hand by political wrangles over territory, and on the other by the building’s slow and silent descent into oblivion when the two neighbouring nations parted ways.

Prior to 2011, the station was an anomaly by Singaporean standards: a sign on its platform read “Welcome to Malaysia;” in the concourse people sat idle reading newspapers or drinking cheap coffee in the middle of the day; commuters instinctually shuffled along the platforms as announcements were sporadic and unreliable; pigeons, cats and bats occupied the same space; this was perhaps the only location on the island where litter-strewn floors were not obsessively cleared. The station was suspended in a spatiotemporal context which jarred against an over-regulated and sanitized Singaporean sensibility. Its architecture lived with, shaped by dirt, dereliction and decay.

When Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, the station constituted one of several cross-border infrastructural assets with both Singaporean and Malaysian interests. Managed originally by the Federated Malay States Railway (FMSR) on a 999-year leasehold term, the land on which the station and the remaining railway track are located constituted 200ha given over to the Malayan state by the British colonial government in 1918. Upon separation from Malaysia, it was agreed that Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM), which took over from FMSR, would be allowed to retain control and ownership of this Singapore-based asset. This meant that the station was legally in Malaysian sovereign territory. Border irregularities were cagily tolerated. Passengers embarking in Tanjong Pagar were cleared for entry to Malaysia even before they had reached the Singapore immigration checkpoint in Woodlands, a good half-an-hour train ride northwards where passengers were then cleared for exit from Singapore. The station was in itself a literal, if also deeply unsettled, border.



FIGURE 1 Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, entrance portico with marble sculptures and original cast iron lanterns beneath each statue. (Photograph: Liew Yuqi, 2015)



FIGURE 2 Exterior wall rendered in Shanghai plaster, cast iron downpipe and dual language signage. (Photograph: Liew Yuqi, 2015)

Yet its Art Deco-Neoclassical lineage suggests something more enduring. Designed by Serbian architect D.S Petrovich who practiced with the British firm Swan and Maclaren, the railway terminus was destined to be more than a large train shed. Petrovich's design was inspired by Eliel Saarinen's Helsinki Station. Together with the City Hall and Supreme Court buildings erected around the same time, the station was intended as a monument with colonial gravitas. The scale of the barrel-vaulted roof is immense. It demonstrates the aspirations the station vaunted before it fell into neglect. The roof span is almost 71 feet across, making it the largest free-span structure of its kind in this part of the world in the pre-war period. Other evidence of the building's privileged standing are still manifest in its exterior façade where four vertical reliefs of once white Carrara marble (for a long time, discoloured by dust) showing the allegorical figures of Agriculture, Commerce, Transport and Industry – pillars of Malaya's colonial economy – asserting colonial dominance and order. The pillars were carved by Florentine sculptor Angelo Vanetti as part of the triple-arched portico at the station's entrance. The portico also features green ceramic roof tiles, similar to the ones used in Chinese temple architecture. The exterior of the building still contains many of its original pre-war fittings today: cast iron fixings for its decorative fencing, downpipes, roof canopy, ornamental window frames and street lamps; terrazzo steps; cast bronze light fixtures and the station clock; timber doors and the external façade rendered in a distinct Shanghai plaster finish to simulate masonry.³

The station's main hall is both imposing in stature and pragmatic in function. Its north- and south-facing walls have tall clerestory cast iron windows which enable cross ventilation and daylighting. On the east- and west-facing walls are hung six vividly coloured murals. The murals were made of coloured rubber tiles, over 9000 pieces in total, produced by the Singapore Rubber Works using a patented process. On the second and third floors of the station, thirty-four rooms open onto semi-enclosed corridors which look directly into the central space of the station hall. When the hotel was still operating, there were two hotel room types on offer, catering to the different classes of travelers. The more expensive rooms overlooked the main hall while the lesser rooms faced the train yard. The hotel's generous corridors run behind a series of semi-circular openings that punctuate the entire length of the main hall on either side of the mural walls. These openings mirror the shape of the barrel vault ceiling.

During its heyday from the 1930s into the 1960s, the station was an oft-used commuter and industrial space. Located opposite the busy Keppel shipyard and port, it complemented the land-to-sea routes across the Malay peninsular for export and trading of goods and raw materials. Its platforms were designed to accommodate the longest mail trains of that time. And before air travel became popular and affordable in the late 1970s, the train journey to Malaysia was a customary one taken by individuals and families alike for business and holidays. Some commuted on a daily basis, others weekly. Travellers were treated to a host of modest, small-scale amenities which contrasted sharply with the station's purported grandeur – two popular 24-hour Indian-Muslim eateries operated since 1958 by the Hasan brothers who had migrated from India, the Habib Railway Book Store which was a convenience store and adjacent money changer established in 1936, and a 34-room hotel, pub and restaurant run solely for over 60 years until 1993 by one Lim Jit Chong and his family.

Yet as the border disputes between Malaysia and Singapore intensified on this site and subsequent bilateral agreements were reneged, the station slowly diminished in physical presence. It was dwarfed by public housing tower blocks and unremarkable road infrastructure which grew rapidly around its periphery. Today, the station literally stands in the shadow of the eight-lane Ayer Rajah Expressway built in 1988 to connect the eastern end of Singapore to its western fringes. The massive flyover completely obscures the station's façade and bypasses the main entrance with its now disregarded marble reliefs. Perhaps because of such impasse, the station continued to be sustained by its own peculiar ecology of small-scaled businesses run by familiar proprietors and subscribed by a dwindling pool of commuters. Anecdotal evidence from newspaper interviews in the last year of the station's life showed that lasting friendships were struck, eccentric habits accommodated, and in all these, the now outdated train shed was accidentally preserved. The station fell out of step with the rest of the globalized city which abounded with shiny surfaces, anonymity and speed. In contrast, the former was rendered anachronistic, utilitarian and unremarkable years before it became functionally obsolete.

Two months before its closure in 2011, the station, now under Singapore ownership, was declared a national monument. It has since remained unused, opening only on public holidays to accommodate sightseers and residents. Many had neither used the train service nor frequented the terminus before. Suggestions of its future use were solicited from the public, architects, planners and designers as early as a year before the station closed. The proposals conveyed a sense of dispossession for a building which before its demise, had a clear utilitarian purpose.⁴ It was thought the station could be many things – a hotel, a museum, a gallery, a market space, a community facility, another

train station. While its future is being contemplated, it is rented out for weddings, fashion shows, photography sessions and art festivals. Future plans suggest the station will become a new transit space and park connected to the public mass rapid transit system.

Stripped of its purpose and politics, the station has become an object of curiosity. How can we talk meaningfully about an architecture which failed to be a monument but is now forced to be one? If the monument is a cipher for a memory or a past, whose past is being preserved and narrated? Who are the station's future audiences? What can be said about such a space without risking oversimplification or crude commodification? The purpose of this paper is neither to offer a solution for the future of the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station nor to debate its political entanglements. As the station continues to be inundated by architectural perceptions and representations that attempt to recuperate either a nostalgic colonial past or an unsentimental future purpose, this paper searches for counter-narratives and other representations which might open up ways of thinking, seeing and framing this reluctant monument. Are there crucial trajectories, fragments, questions or angles that are eluded in a bid to return this architecture to a more useable, useful, stable and permanent condition? Rather posing a lack, is it possible to see the decaying and tentative monument as something far more complex and meaningful, as an architecture which necessarily elicits a more open, speculative, and indefinite response from its future audiences?

In order to address some of these questions and to re-enter the station, this paper will examine two sets of documents: a small artist book titled *Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station* and a series of unpublished photographs showing the interiors of the now defunct station hotel. These two pieces of work are by the Sydney-based Malaysian artist Simryn Gill. Gill produced the book in 2006 as a Singapore Biennale commission. While doing so, she serendipitously discovered the hotel rooms on the second and third levels of the station, an area long since restricted to the general public. Gill had chosen to work on the station because she was familiar with it, having used it herself as a child and then later, as a mother to two young children, shuttling the family between Singapore and Port Dickson in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the two works reveal an uneasy relationship with the architecture of the station. It is precisely this uneasiness which is productive for taking apart the station as monument.

Guide to the Murals and Other Trajectories

Gill's artist book takes the form of an unassuming 33-page architecture guidebook measuring 15 x 21 cm. It was stocked exclusively at the Habib Railway Book Store for the duration of the Biennale, and continued to be sold there for several months after the festival ended. In fact, its understated distribution network meant that the work (which is the book) remained for the most part, under the radar of the Biennale crowd. The book has a bilingual text written in English and Malay. It is accompanied by a series of black-and-white photographs on the inside.

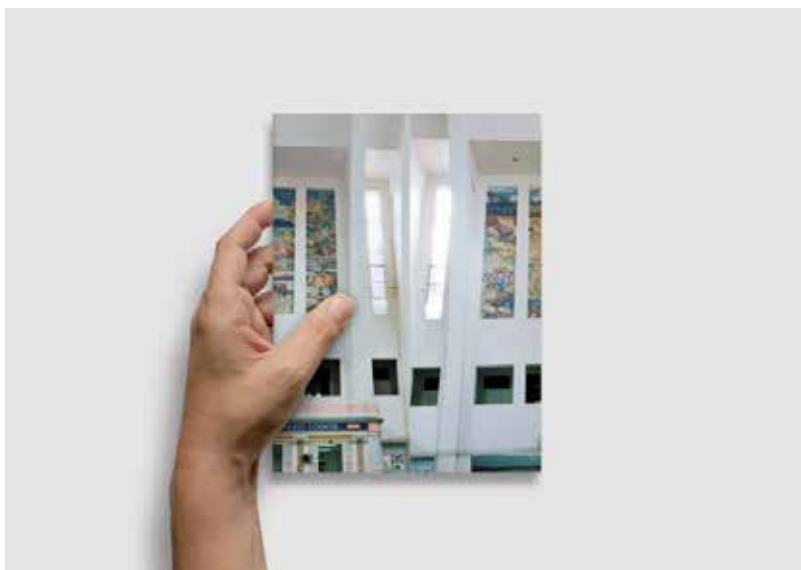


FIGURE 3 Simryn Gill, *Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station*. Cover, artist book, 2006. (Courtesy of Simryn Gill)

The mode of delivery used in the text is officious and factual. It tells about the building as a colonial edifice with design pedigree provided by “D.S. Petrovich, a Serbian architect of British training ... in the employ of ... Swan and Maclaren in Singapore.” It boasts about the building’s ‘Modern’ style, the kinds of materials used (reinforced concrete), its architectural influences of “Eliel Saarinen’s Helsinki Railway Station,” its ambitions “to impress the natives” through “grandiose and impressive structures” manifested no less in its “cavernous central hall” where six triptych murals are placed “up high” between “cathedral-like windows.”⁵

The murals, we are told, were designed and produced in the London studios of world-renowned ceramists Doulton. “They depict six scenes of Malaysians engaged in ‘heroic labour.’” There is a clear division of labour according to race – Malay women in a rice field, Indian labourers working in coconut and rubber plantations, Chinese workers beavering away in a tin mine. The guide also tells us that there was once a hotel of thirty-four rooms on the two upper floors of the railway station which was of the same standing as the luxurious Raffles Hotel.

Gill mimics the format of the architectural guidebook, even adopting its language of objective facticity. Yet, there are clear contradictions between the image and the text. For one, we never see the six murals inside the book until we start to fiddle with the book jacket which unfolds into a full-colour double-sided poster picturing the two sides of the grand hall with its six murals. The images in the book seem to bear no relationship to the text, which in turn, talks only about the architectural features of the building. Through the monochromatic images of commuters within the guidebook, only parts of the station emerge. Nothing is seen of its “impressive structure.” From the guidebook we encounter distinctly contradictory views of the station – the text reads of magnificence, remark, and grandeur; the photographs of ordinariness, neglect, and impending decay. If we are compelled to read again in search of some kind of correlation between image and text, we must read in-between image and text. Herein, we detect insinuations of colonial superiority, racism, border rivalry, nationalist tensions.



FIGURE 4 Simryn Gill, *Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station*. artist book, 2006, cover unfolded. (Photograph by Lin Derong, 2016)

A Guide to the Murals unsettles and reanimates the architectural monument. It focuses on the station not just as a space of transit but one that is itself altering, uncertain, ambiguous in its status. It shifts our perception of the building from a static and immobile object propped up by an architectural style and lineage, into a space of flows, populated by people, things (trains, chairs, luggage, trolleys, prams, food, newspaper kiosks, magazines, leaflets, money), animals (cats, bats, birds, ants, termites, spiders) and intangible forces (political tensions, racial tolerance, financial capital, social capital, neo-colonialist prejudices, wind, rain, damp, sunlight).

As readers of the guidebook, we do not see the murals upfront but initially only as segments that wrap around the book on its cover. We are made to think about these murals, imagine what they may look like, relying on the seemingly unrelated photographs of the commuters as our referent. The ultimate achievement in *A Guide to the Murals* is Gill's ability to make ambivalent what appears so unshakeable and solid – a colonial monument and its factual history – not by forceful opposition but by mirroring and doubling the geometries and strategies of power.



FIGURE 5 Simryn Gill, *Guide to the Murals*, 2006, artist book. (Photograph: Lin Derong, 2016)

Accompanying the station's textual factual histories, Gill offers a set of images that forefront daily activities in this forgotten colonial space. An experience of the railway station is frequently from this mundane and embodied commuter perspective, never from the lofty heights of those high cathedral-like windows which the architectural historian waxes lyrical about. We see fragments of people – Malays, Chinese, Indians – waiting, sitting, walking, queuing, pulling their luggage, pushing prams, pushing luggage trolleys, lugging overnight carryalls and plastic bags.

The racial mix of commuters milling about in the hall is a doubling of the racial composition depicted up high on the said murals. Hints of racial difference are deciphered from attire. We see the train passengers mainly as bodies in motion or temporarily at rest; phantom limbs waiting restlessly to leave as soon as the next train pulls into the station. In contrast with the described formality and scale of the cavernous hall, the photographs reveal an embodied space energized by use, wear-and-tear, a mundane and fragmented aesthetic that eventually becomes inconsequential or repressed in the architectural narrative because they are cast outside the privileged objecthood of architecture. Instead of a theory that projects architecture as exemplar and canon, Robert Segrest talks about an alternative “method and

theme” for thinking about an “out of order” architecture – one that violates “the shape of the field” which is predicated completely on an object without an outside; one must think through instead the edge, the perimeter, the border and the itinerary.⁶ He cites Michel Serres, who proposes an alternative architectural cartography of fragments, “. . . a mosaic of knowledge made up of borrowings, detours, codes and messages that cross each other, creating unforeseeable connections and nodes.”⁷

In Gill's mosaic, the architecture outlined in the text is disturbed in the images by a disorder projected through ungainly fragments of non-exemplary ordinariness: the commuters' casual footwear, their plastic bags and worn out luggage, commonplace plastic chairs sitting in an almost empty hall, unremarkable gridded plasterboard ceilings, jarring grid fluorescent lighting, unadorned walls, generic ceramic-tiled floors. As the text of the guidebook demonstrates, architecture remains inhospitable to such inconspicuous elements. And yet, this is cartography of the station, this is what and where commuters negotiate their bodies around. Gill's modest volume is critical in how it deals with these things together – both architecture and its discards – as a problem of interpretation, wherein a dichotomy of one versus the other cannot be so easily insisted. The book's strategic rehearsal of text and image highlights the disjunction between architecture and affect. The text follows in the tradition of uncompromising canonical architectural historical narrative. Its authoritative and factual voice – even exaggerated perhaps in two languages – unequivocally instructs and informs. The images on the other hand, are witnesses to an unfolding scene, acting in some cases in the capacity of Roland Barthes' “punctum.”⁸ They prick our conscience and take us out of the frame of the image into a pre-personal embodied context or itinerary – a childhood journey, the anticipation of a loved one arriving, the missed train, the lovers' tryst. The structure of text and image are here dialectically positioned – the text is teleological and finite; the images are open and associative.

In their provocative article on the preservation of monuments, Aron Vinegar and Jorge Otero-Pailos argue for the importance of granting a monument its diverse responses and meanings because “haunted by an irrevocable absence, the loss of a ‘world’ or ‘culture’ surrounding those material remains,” we are already separated by “inevitable distance and alienation from these worlds and works.”⁹ Vinegar and Otero-Pailos emphasize a more oblique and imaginative narrative to drive preservation since the monument is never “inertly there” but must be continually “exuberant;” it must be made and remade. For them, the monument is only bodied and storied forth through lived experience and “prodigious events” which could be collectively or individually significant, but should embed “multiple meanings, fantasies and desires.”¹⁰ The openness of the monument in Vinegar and Otero-Pailos' argument makes a compelling comparison with Gill's tentative and uneasy equation of the station with its disregarded periphery. In Gill's guidebook, the dissonant narration of the monument through dialectically positioned text and image opens up breaches in the hermetic category of the architectural object. It reminds us that the ways we order and structure our experiences of the station do not coincide with the ways architecture is ordered and preserved. There are shifting materialities, bodies and agencies entangled in the monument that cannot be accounted for in its preservation narrative. Gill raises the spectre of the monument caught up with things and processes that Mary Douglas argues, disturb because they are unravelling “pulverizing, dissolving and rotting” eating away at an established “clarity of the (architectural) scene” for which their “out-of-place” presence ultimately impairs.¹¹

It is this unsettling possibility of architectural decay that Gill focuses on in her series of seventy-six unpublished photographs of the abandoned Station Hotel. The untitled and unpublished work (which I will refer to here as the ‘Station Hotel’) systematically records the thirty-four hotel rooms looking from within and from without each interior space, its corridors, hallways and staircases. The photographs show spaces in abject disrepair. As sunlight rushes into each space, we see the monument disassembling in time. The rooms are enveloped in silvery dust, gossamers spin in the air, flowery stains of damp pattern ceiling boards, animal droppings make tiny ink blots on walls, satin concrete floors breathe away from the carpets that once buried them, the rectangular shapes of absent air conditioning units mark walls, leftover objects like ceiling fans and spring-coiled mattresses once purveyors of comfort now threaten with collapse or disease. In these photographs, we witness the immanent undoing of architecture: the building as object is returning into the building as flows; from immutable forms into fragile material entities.



FIGURE 6 Interior of hotel room in the abandoned Station Hotel, 2006. (Courtesy of Simryn Gill)

In the time-ravaged hotel rooms, almost all traces of architectural order have vanished. We can only just about make out the edges of each space. The vivid colours which illuminated and clarified the murals in the station, have a different effect in these rooms. The colours – hues of green, blue, brown and mustard – are the result of an architecture dissimulated by fungi, mould, rot, termite and dust. Through doorways and openings, we catch glimpses into the celebrated murals. Yet against these crumbling visual referents, the murals also appear to be only bidding their time.



FIGURE 7 Interior of hotel room, looking towards the central corridor into the station hall and the murals, 2006. (Courtesy of Simryn Gill)

Although conceived as two separate pieces of work, a dialogue between the guidebook and Station Hotel is viscerally enacted across the slippages that emerge between the static geometries articulated in the architectural text and the transient forms, subjects and materialities unfolding in the images. Gill herself has been reluctant or unwilling to frame the Station Hotel in order to offer a closure to this expired space.¹² In her previous work with abandoned pieces of architecture in the tropics including *Standing Still* (2000-2003), *Power Station* (2004) and *My Own Private Angkor* (2007-2009), the emphasis has been about thinking through entropy, and architecture's recalcitrance to entropy, as part of the architectural problematic, part of the natural evolution of space and our relationship with such spaces as they gradually dismantle and fall apart.

In these two works, architecture is neither static nor isolated. It is not an object. The works narrate an open circuit of actions and inactions initiated and/or abetted by human will, which for architecture, usually involves money, legislation, design and technology. They also tell about architecture's vulnerability to nonhuman forces like the weather, the animal world and simply building matter – concrete, plaster, glass, metal – falling apart. In the lifespan of the architectural monument, the nonhuman elements coalesce with the fabric of the building until they become indistinguishable from one another. Yet Gill is suggesting it is not just nonhuman forces which hasten architectural entropy. The buildings in disrepair here are equally the result of shifts in power and capital: the station and its decrepit hotel are evidently the remaindered objects of specific political maneuvers. Their imminent restoration into a condition they never might have been, is part of the same shifting political narrative.

Further, Gill's photographs of space are unlike architectural photography. Focusing in-between, around, beneath and beyond, the photographs perceive architecture as a kind of fog: the building is broken up into fragments which are sometimes recognizable and other times not. Architecture is glimpsed and made sense of, as Walter Benjamin proposes, in this state of distraction.¹³ It emerges and is inflected through the transient processes of occupation, use and decay. Drawing the viewer into moments of longing, despair, affection, poetry, resignation and desire for this architecture, and into pondering about one's relationship to this architecture, to its past and its future that no one has yet properly talked about, Gill's photographs are affective rather than instructive. "Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness... (these are) visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension."¹⁴ Or as Kathleen Stewart explains, affect is about "...being sentient to the world (one is) in. It is a matter of literal contact, exposure to rhythms, interruptions, bodies, pacings and *relations of a territory*."¹⁵ The unfurling of affect in Gill's photographs is prompted by a simultaneous gathering of various constituent parts – bodies, time, architecture – and their ever-changing mutual relationships marked by "rhythms," "interruptions" and "pacings".



FIGURE 8 Corridor along hotel rooms, overlooking the station hall. (Courtesy of Simryn Gill)

Gill's emphasis on transience – of the monument, the things and the people in it, the events and the stories which matter at different times – resurfaces the problem of architectural preservation as a finite task which can alienate, reify and commodify architecture beyond what it is. Gill's work is tentative towards the monument – it defers from assigning meaning, or specific memory, or a "correct" way of reading the monument. Instead it takes the monument apart – its historical narrative, the people, the politics, the building fabric, time – and forces us to recover the pieces in a constellation which will vary from person to person, precisely because we can do so only by re-evaluating how and why this monument matters to us.

Conclusion

Arguing against the urge to flatten out historical narrative into a "linear chronological progression," Caitlin deSilvey pioneers a mode of "anticipatory history" which attempts to rewrite a history through the effects of transience and time.¹⁶ Proposing a shift from critique to collaborative mode, deSilvey asks, "What kind of cultural work might be required to give time back to a timeless landscape, and to open up an appreciation of the past not as static and settled, but as open and active?"¹⁷ This question is also what the guidebook and the hotel photographs prompt. What deSilvey and Gill argue separately but unequivocally is that architecture is constituted through a complex constellation of forces. Yet the risk of any monument or heritage site is that these often discontinuous, contingent, contradictory and competing narratives are reduced to iconic representations and foundations which reject what might be transient, circumstantial, or invisible.¹⁸

The official architectural narrative which is already in-the-making as this paper is being written, will likely elide many events and things which are regarded as inconsequential to the realm of building. At the same time, it will likely overemphasize the station's Art Deco lineage and its heroic political past, or the timely rescue of the building from impending decay. Yet, the anticipatory nature of the architectural narrative for a monument like the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station suggests that a different representational strategy is needed to "give time back" to this space. If the monument must be "exuberant," ways of narrating, picturing, showing, documenting, and writing about it must be more open-ended and speculative. Gill's *Guide to the Murals* and *Station Hotel* reappropriate architecture's representational strategies using the architectural guidebook for the former, and the purist emptiness of architectural photography for the latter. In each, the iconic strategies which also predetermine a narrative thread is challenged. Text, image, light and colour are deployed to bring out movement, change and transience. The representations destabilize the monument's production, suggesting this endeavour to be multiply sited, jointly authored and still persisting.

This paper has attempted to bring the work of artist Simryn Gill into the realm of architectural discourse. It has engaged Gill's *Guide to the Murals* and *Station Hotel* to highlight specific questions about a reluctant architectural icon – the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, which diminished in status when Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, but was taken up as a national monument in 2011 when the building's ownership transferred back to the republic. Gill herself highlights the monument's intractability to decay and disorder in her reappropriation of architecture's representational media. The text she produces of the station critically mirrors possible biases within a definitive architectural history in making. Through her images, the building is conversely never pictured as finite – the station is glimpsed in bits and pieces; the hotel rooms are seen in totality but these spaces are already falling apart. Indeed, the discourse of entropy in the tropics, which is present in much of Gill's work, is an area which this paper does not have space to cover, but needs to be pursued further.

Gill's approach to the station is embodied, affective, open-ended and ambiguous. It salvages lost things, transient moments and decaying materials which an architectural narrative might overlook, or disregard. It emphasizes an embodied and occupied materiality about the building which can indirectly tell us "stories about power, agency and history that we could never grasp from more direct forms of representation."¹⁹ In Gill's work, the station emerges and fades with shifting traces of present and past occupation. It makes us think about what other figures, subjects and agencies should be told in an affective architectural history of such a tentative monument.

Endnotes

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