

HEATWORKS / 72-13
Products

RESERVOIR

28-30 Aug 2008 | 72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road

Syonan Jinja as the Invented Tradition
by Ken Takiguchi (Department of Japanese Studies, NUS)

During the time of "advancement" to Asian neighboring countries, Imperial Japan built numerous Jinjas or shrines in the newly occupied territories as the symbol of Japanese spirit and the holiness of the Emperor. One of the earliest examples is Taiwan Grand Shrine, which was built in 1901, six years after the Qing Dynasty ceded the island to Japan as the result of the First Sino-Japanese War. By the end of the Japanese reign, more than 200 shrines were built all over Taiwan. The list of such "overseas shrines" contains those in Korea, Manchuria and Micronesian Palau.

Syonan Jinja, built by MacRitchie Reservoir, was one of these overseas shrines. It was officially opened in February 1943 commemorating the first anniversary of the establishment of Syonan, i.e. British surrender to Japanese army. Japanese military government changed the name of the island from Singapore to Syonan-To, and posited it as one of the most important bases in the region. Thus, Syonan Jinja was built in the grand scale as the guardian of the entire region.

These Jinjas represented the idea of so-called *Kokka Shinto* or State Shintoism which became the spiritual pillar of Japanese nation building since Meiji revolution. Japanese government forced the residents of the occupied area to visit shrines to show their loyalty to the Emperor.

State Shintoism was developed by Meiji government based on the thoughts of Hirata Atsutane, an influential Kokugaku (National Study) philosopher, who systemized Shinto as a religion. As Hirata's arguments stressed the importance of the "original" Japaneseessence before Chinese and Korean cultures influenced Japanese, it was exploited as a convenient ideology to inflame nationalism in the project of building the modern nation-state. State Shintoism was, if borrowing the words of Historian Eric Hobsbawm, a project of inventing traditions to create the myths of the nation. It provided justifications to the discourses of nation building, such as the divine nature of the Emperor and the superiority of Japanese nation. Syonan Jinja is one of the fine examples of such invention.

However, it should also be noted that State Shintoism does not represent the whole idea of

Shintoism. Rather, it should be considered as only a small part of Shintoism. The very original Shintoism, for example, stresses the importance of interaction between human beings and nature. The idea that all natural artifacts and processes are gods – according to the myth, there are eight million gods in total – clearly shows the animistic nature of Shinto. As a religion, Shinto is quite vague and subtle. In other words, there are many areas which cannot be covered by the arguments on State Shintoism.

It hints to us there can be a way to go beyond the discourses of nationalism. The space which escapes from the powerful narratives of nation-states still remains. This work, Reservoir, can also be considered as an attempt to find such a space.

Director Notes

The impetus for Reservoir came about while researching the "insignificant histories" of Singapore; histories that we have been made to forget as a generation. I chanced upon the Singapore Paranormal Investigators (SPI) website, where there is extensive research and documentation of the ruins of Syonan Jinja.

I was fascinated by the stories and mysteries buried with the ruins. Armed with information from the internet, we made our maiden journey into the heart of MacRitchie Reservoir in search of the shrine.

A Reluctant Monument

I see the Syonan Jinja as a reluctant monument: a monument that has been marked as a Singapore heritage site, yet remains hidden in the depths of the forest.

It was burned and destroyed, and yet there was no complete erasure. Proposals were made to restore the site, but these projects never took place. The ruins had too many histories, symbols and memories buried within them.

Yet can we really remember? Can we really feel for the past anymore? We claim that the persistence of memory has made it almost impossible to embrace the shrine, but my generation has never experienced the Japanese Occupation. Could the shrine become a space of many possibilities, a space of nature, a site we can reclaim and revisit in the heart of the city?

Constructing Conversations
In Reservoir, we present three layers of attempted investigations:

Historical, Scientific and Cultural.
Our research materials have run from archival materials to the supernatural to the human-to-human relationships that exist between ourselves as Singaporean and Japanese artists.

In our effort to talk to the shrine – an object dead and incapable of communication – we find we are creating a condition where conversation is possible between our worlds today.

The Shinto tradition of re-building a shrine every 20 years was a way to pass on the tradition, skill and craft of ceremonial shrine-building to the next generation. Reservoir, in its own way, follows this Shinto idea of the cycle, de-constructing the fragments of the hidden Syonan Jinja and re-assembling them on stage for the first time in 63 years.

Reservoir would not be possible, if not for the support of Tay Tong, Keng Sen and the company as well as the generosity of all the collaborating artists, who keeps on believing in me. Lastly, a big thank you to the tremendous support from Charles Lim, Mohd Fared, Aik Wee, James Page, Andy Lim and all who have helped in different ways.

Hope you will discover with us in our journey into the invisible shrine.

Choy Ka Fai

ACT 01 –

Parallel Universe

Opening Ceremony 1942

Imagine: It was here

Tamura's Vision: Song of Jinja

Shrine as Theatre

ACT 02 –

Conversations

Love/Hate

Journey to the Shrine

Offerings

Treasure/Destruction

Respect

ACT 03 –

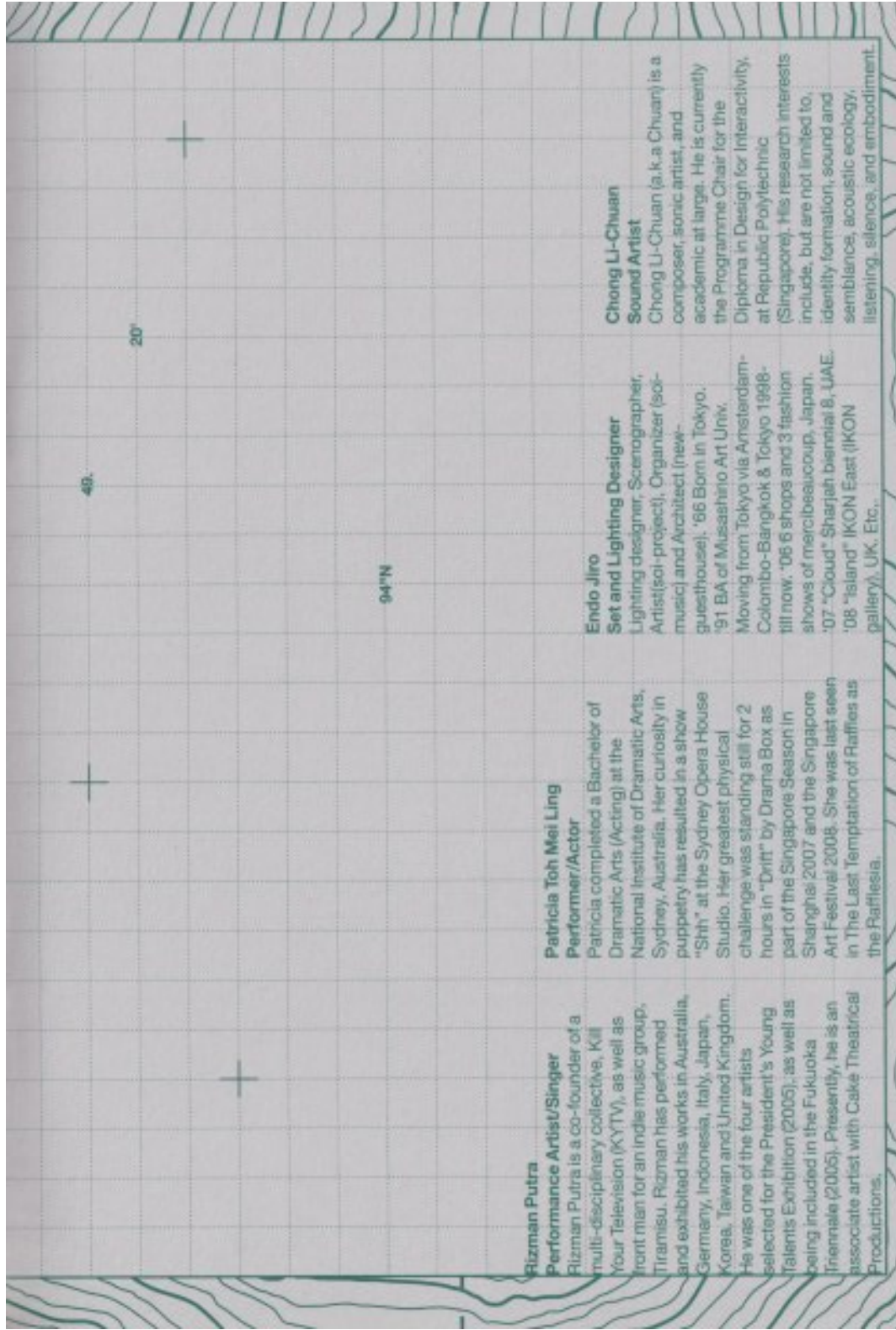
Transcendence

The Imaginary Beauty

Empire of Nature

Revelations

<p>The Writer's Fantasy</p> <p>I'm doing this play because I love collaborating with Ka Fai, full stop. So instead of coughing up some philosophical spiel, I'm going to use this space to share a story.</p> <p>My mother's family was living in Thomson Road during the first days of the War, when there was heavy bombing. They wanted to dig a bomb shelter behind the house, but the neighbours wouldn't let them.</p> <p>Then one night, my great-grandma dreamt that an old man came to visit. He shone an electric torch in a corner of the house, and said "This is where the bomb was supposed to fall, but I bargained with the gods and made it fall somewhere else."</p> <p>The next morning, my great-grandma told everyone about her dream. Her daughter laughed at her. But at night, when the bombs fell, it was the neighbours' house that was destroyed.</p> <p>Everyone in my mother's family was unharmed, except for my grand-mother, who received a small shrapnel wound on her leg as punishment for her laughter. She still has the scar, even today.</p> <p>Ng Yi-Sheng</p>	<p>Choy Kai Fai</p> <p>Director/Multi-Media Artist</p> <p>Since 2007, Choy is the Associate Artistic Director of TheatreWorks. He continues to focus on intersections of performance, technology and media arts where his works Drift Net, V.I.S.T.A Lab Series, Dance Dance Dance have excited local audiences. His video installation-Rectangular Dreams, on HD/B living in Singapore is recently presented at Knoklovskaya Manufactura in Moscow, as part of the Spotlight Singapore in Moscow project. Currently, he is also working as part of the curatorial team to create SUPERGARDEN, the Singapore Pavilion for Venice Architecture Biennale 2008, presented by DesignSingapore council.</p>	<p>Ng Yi-Sheng</p> <p>Writer</p> <p>Yi-Sheng writes poems, plays, fiction, songs, journalism and corporate flash. He has published three books, "last boy", "Eating Air" and "SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century". His plays include "Hungry" (TheatreWorks), "251" (Toy Factory), "Georgette" (Musical Theatre Ltd) and "The Last Temptation of Stamford Raffles" (Wild Rice). He blogs at http://lastboy.blogspot.com.</p>	<p>Noriko Sunayama (Dumbytype/Japan)</p> <p>Choreographer/Dancer</p> <p>Member of artist collective Dumbytype since 1990. As a solo artist, she is known for her provocative, boundary-breaking performances crossing over in different worlds, from the contemporary art to the sub cultures, cabaret dance to performing arts. Her performances cover a wide range of styles.</p>



Rizman Putra

Performance Artist/Singer
 Rizman Putra is a co-founder of a multi-disciplinary collective, Kill Your Television (KYTV), as well as front man for an indie music group, Tramisu. Rizman has performed and exhibited his works in Australia, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and United Kingdom. He was one of the four artists selected for the President's Young Talents Exhibition (2005), as well as being included in the Fukuoka Triennale (2005). Presently, he is an associate artist with Cake Theatrical Productions.

Patricia Toh Mei Ling
Performer/Actor

Patricia completed a Bachelor of Dramatic Arts (Acting) at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, Sydney, Australia. Her curiosity in puppetry has resulted in a show "Shh" at the Sydney Opera House Studio. Her greatest physical challenge was standing still for 2 hours in "Drift" by Drama Box as part of the Singapore Season in Shanghai 2007 and the Singapore Art Festival 2008. She was last seen in The Last Temptation of Raffles as the Rafflesia.

Endo Jiro

Set and Lighting Designer
 Lighting designer, Scenographer, Artist(solo-project), Organizer (solo-music) and Architect (new-guesthouse). '66 Born in Tokyo. '91 BA of Musashino Art Univ. Moving from Tokyo via Amsterdam-Colombo-Bangkok & Tokyo 1998-till now. '06 6 shops and 3 fashion shows of meribesaucoup, Japan. '07 "Cloud" Sharjah biennial 8, UAE. '08 "Island" IKON East (IKON gallery), UK, Etc.,

Chong Li-Chuan
Sound Artist

Chong Li-Chuan (a.k.a Chuan) is a composer, sonic artist, and academic at large. He is currently the Programme Chair for the Diploma in Design for Interactivity, at Republic Polytechnic (Singapore). His research interests include, but are not limited to, identity formation, sound and semblance, acoustic ecology, listening, silence, and embodiment.

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About TheatreWorks

TheatreWorks (Singapore) was established in 1985. Under the artistic direction of Ong Keng Sen, it is an international performance company based in Singapore, known for its reinvention of traditional performance through a juxtaposition of cultures, along with its cutting edge productions that set new benchmarks for artistic excellence. Its works reflect a concern with cultural negotiation and artistic exchanges with artists, through a network of traditional and contemporary artists from different disciplines.

www.theatreworks.org.sg

About 72-13

A converted rice warehouse, 72-13 is the new home of TheatreWorks. The space is flexible enough to be a gallery, a cinema and a theatre, its primary purpose, through SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus) and the IC4A (International Centre of Asian Arts), is to encourage collaborations, house residencies from creatives around the world and to encourage hybrid creative expressions from young Singaporeans. TheatreWorks, responding to the needs of the creative scene in Singapore, has consciously created 72-13 to have a wider and a more inclusive agenda.

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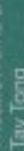
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