

**UHB2212: SINGAPOREAN NOSTALGIA**  
**UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS PROGRAMME, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**  
**AY2021-22 SEMESTER 1**

Seminar: Tuesdays and Fridays 4-6 pm in Stephen Riady Centre LT53

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“My generation,” Singaporean playwright (and USP alumnus) Joel Tan remarks, “is sick with nostalgia.” Perhaps Tan (b. 1987) means “generation” in a narrow sense, but we can certainly wonder if, post-1965, Singaporeans and even Singapore as a nation have often seem gripped by nostalgia—if not continuously, then at various and multiple moments of our history. The most fundamental thing we will do in this class is to identify and examine such moments, though not in a strictly chronological way. We will look at the decades after independence, when, among other things, the physical landscape of Singapore drastically changed; the years around SG50, when Singapore celebrated its golden jubilee and the state explicitly encouraged us to look back at our past; and more recently, when immigration has transformed the country’s demographics. At the same time, even as this way of talking about “moments in Singapore’s history” implies that nostalgia is some sort of emotion that the whole nation feels at historical junctures, the module will also consider instances of Singaporean art that may not so much reflect an existing nostalgia, but participate in or even initiate its creation.

If the first part of Tan’s comment identifies nostalgia as rife in Singapore (and Singapore art), the second part provocatively characterizes such nostalgia as an illness, a disease, an affliction—more generally, as negative. Tan is not alone in this characterization, and the module will also try to understand how and why many artists, cultural and intellectual historians, geographers, literary critics, political thinkers, and sociologists have argued against nostalgia, and how and why just as many have sought to rehabilitate it. We cannot hope to be exhaustive here, but will focus on several debates about the effects of nostalgia that may be especially relevant to Singapore. Thus, we will analyze the politics of nostalgia, its relation to progress and progressivism, and in the context of exile; and we will examine the relationships between nostalgia and heritage, memory, history, sentiment, temporality and historicity. Do these critiques and debates apply in the case of Singaporean nostalgia? Or can the cases of nostalgia in Singapore help us rethink the potential and power of nostalgia?

Our more theoretical readings will come from Kevin Blackburn, Alastair Bonnett, Svetlana Boym, Chua Beng Huat, Fred Davis, Margaret Farrar, Paul Grainge, Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, Michael Kammen, Loh Kah Seng, Andrew Murphy, Pierre Nora, Kenneth Paul Tan, Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong. The works and genres of Singapore art, expansively defined, will include: advertising campaigns; short stories by Alfian Sa’at and speculative fiction; poems by Boey Kim Cheng and Koh Jee Leong; essays by Simon Tay; a graphic novel by Oh Yong Hwee and Koh Yong Teng; a documentary by Tan Pin Pin; films and telemovies by Abdul Nizam Khan, Boo Junfeng, Eric Khoo, K. Rajagopal, Royston Tan, and Kelvin Tong.

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## **SCHEDULE**

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**Aug 10**

### **Seminar 1.1: Introduction**

Bergman, Justin. “Singapore’s New Wave of Nostalgia.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 Nov 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/scene/2013/11/22/singapores-new-wave-of-nostalgia>

**Aug 13**

**Seminar 1.2: Histories, Definitions, Conditions (I)**

Hofer, Johannes. "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia, 1688." Translated by Carolyn Kiser Anspach. *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, vol. 2, no. 6, 1934, pp. 376-391.

Batcho, Krystine Irene. "Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept." *History of Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2013, pp. 165-176.

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**Aug 17**

**Seminar 2.1: Histories, Definitions, Conditions (II)**

Davis, Fred. "The Nostalgic Experience: Words and Meanings." *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. Free Press, 1979, pp. 1-29.

Grainge, Paul. Excerpts from "Theorizing Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be." *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America*. Praeger, 2002, pp. 19-32, 35-37.

**Aug 20**

**Seminar 2.2: Histories, Definitions, Conditions (III)**

Davis, Fred. Excerpt from "Nostalgia and Art." *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. Free Press, 1979, pp. 73-85.

Shouse, Eric. "Feeling, Emotion, Affect." *M/C Journal* vol. 8, no. 6, 2005, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>

Flatley, Jonathan. "Glossary: Affect, Emotion, Mood (*Stimmung*), Structure of Feeling." *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 11-27.

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**Aug 24**

**Seminar 3.1: Histories, Definitions, Conditions (IV)**

Chase, Malcolm and Christopher Shaw. Excerpt from "The Dimensions of Nostalgia." *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, edited by Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase. Manchester University Press, 1989, pp. 2-17.

Turner, Bryan. "A Note on Nostalgia." *Theory, Culture and Society*, no. 4, 1987, pp. 147-156.

**Aug 27**

**Seminar 3.2: Progress, and the Politics of Nostalgia (I)**

Sa'at, Alfian. "Corridor." *Corridor: 12 Short Stories*. SNP Editions, 1999, pp. 41-53.

"Koridor." Telemovie. *Koridor: Episode Terakhir*. Directed by Abdul Nizam Khan. Mediacorp TV Suria, 2002.

"Corridor: A Short Film." Directed by Isazaly Mohd Isa. 2010. <http://vimeo.com/15033224>

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**Aug 31**

**Seminar 4.1: Progress, and the Politics of Nostalgia (II)**

Chua, Beng-Huat. "Nostalgia for the *Kampung*." *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore*. Routledge, 1997, pp. 152-167.

### Sep 3

#### Seminar 4.2: Progress, and the Politics of Nostalgia (III)

Loh, Kah Seng. Excerpts from *Squatters into Citizens: The 1961 Bukit Ho Swee Fire and the Making of Modern Singapore*. NUS Press, 2013, pp. 1-4, 10-12, 21-24, 243-261.

Barr, Michael and Zlatko Skrbis. Excerpt from "The Singapore Story: Constructing a National Myth." *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project*. NIAS Press, 2008, pp. 18-20.

Nugent, Walter. "Introduction." *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 1-5.

Pestritto, Ronald J. and William J. Atto. Excerpt from "Introduction to American Progressivism." *American Progressivism: A Reader*, edited by Pestritto and Atto. Lexington Books, 2008, pp. 1-3, 7-10.

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### Sep 7

#### Seminar 5.1: Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Nostalgia (I)

*The Provision Shop*. Telemovie. Directed by Royston Tan. Tribal Worldwide Singapore, 2016.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-Sj7M-7a-Y>

### Sep 10

#### Seminar 5.2: Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Nostalgia (II)

Murphy, Andrew. "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics: The American Jeremiad and the Power of the Past." *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2009, pp. 125-141.

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### Sep 14

#### Seminar 6.1: Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Nostalgia (III)

Oh Yong Hwee & Koh Hong Teng. *The Garden of Foolish Indulgences*. Pause Narratives, 2016.

Bonnett, Alastair. "The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia: Acknowledging the Power of the Past in the Politics of the Left." *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present*, edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen. Routledge, 2020, pp. 116-129.

### Sep 17

#### Seminar 6.2: Multiculturalism, and the Politics of Nostalgia (IV)

Discussion continues

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### Mid-term Break

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### Sep 28

#### Seminar 7.1: Exiles and Émigrés, and the Politics of Nostalgia (I)

*To Singapore, with Love*. Directed by Tan Pin Pin, 2013.

Bonnett, Alastair. "Migrant Nostalgias: The Persistence of Loss." *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 97-109.

### Oct 1

#### Seminar 7.2: Exiles and Émigrés, and the Politics of Nostalgia (II)

Boey, Kim Cheng. "Wanton with James" and "Change Alley." *Days of No Name*. EPB, 1996, pp. 42-3, 56-8.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Placenames." *After the Fire: New and Selected Poems*. First Fruits, 2006, p. 21.

\_\_\_\_\_. "La Mian in Melbourne," "To Markets—Change Alley," "Ahead My Father Moves," "The National Theatre, Singapore," "Soup," and "The Migrant Ledger." *Clear Brightness: New Poems*. Epigram Books, 2012, pp. 3-4, 8, 16-17, 18-19, 29-30, 46.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Change Alley." In *Between Stations: Essays*. Giramondo, 2009. 127-152.

Kwek, Theophilus. "North Bridge Road" and "Michaelmas." *Giving Ground*. Ethos Books, 2016, pp. 16, 47.

Koh Jee Leong. "Kinder Feelings" and "Airplane Poems." *Steep Tea*. Caranet, 2015, pp. 32, 65.

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## **Oct 5**

### **Seminar 8.1: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (I)**

National Heritage Board. "Our SG Heritage Plan." [https://www.oursgheritage.gov.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Our-SG-Heritage-Plan-Publication\\_2.pdf](https://www.oursgheritage.gov.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Our-SG-Heritage-Plan-Publication_2.pdf)

Yeoh, Brenda and Lily Kong. "The Notion of Place in the Construction of History, Nostalgia and Heritage." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1996, pp. 52-65.

"Seletar Airbase—Singapore's Secret Garden." Youtube videos. Directed by Li Xiuqi. 25 Jun 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZZoWm7Hk3Q&t=9s> (Part 1) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs4Sm9X2w4o> (Part 2).

Tay, Simon. "The City and My Home." *Ethos*, vol. 2, 2007, pp. 66-69.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Seletar and the Unreality of Wild Chickens." *Balik Kampong 3A: Northern Shores*, edited by Verena Tay. Math Paper Press, 2016, pp. 1-22.

## **Oct 8**

### **Seminar 8.2: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (II)**

Farrar, Margaret E.. "Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory." *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2011, pp. 723-735.

Gaik Cheng Khoo. "Of Diminishing Memories and Old Places: Singaporean Films and the Work of Archiving Landscape." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2013, pp. 31-52.

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## **Oct 12**

### **Seminar 9.1: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (III)**

Kammen, Michael. "History is Our Heritage: The Past in Contemporary American Culture." *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 213-225.

Hartog, François. "Time and Heritage." *Museum International*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2005, pp. 7-18.

## **Oct 15**

### **Seminar 9.2: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (IV)**

National Heritage Board. "Hawker Culture in Singapore: Submission of Nomination to UNESCO." <https://www.oursgheritage.gov.sg/hawker-culture-unesco-submission/>

Hicks, Robin. "Tiger Beer Launches Campaign to Preserve Singapore's Street Food Culture." *Mumbrella Asia*, 18 April 2016, <http://www.mumbrella.asia/2016/04/tiger-beer-launches-movement-to-preserve-singapores-street-food-culture> (read, and watch all three videos ["Popiah," "Hokkien Mee" and "Char Kway Teow"] embedded in the article)

R  e, Wayne. "Satay." *LONTAR: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*, vol. 10. Epigram Books, pp. 79-92.

*Republic of Food*. Webseries. Directed by Kelvin Tong, 3 Mar 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTUsK75GWHXYaEDB0YGFUGfoBZ0MIB6PX>

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**Oct 19**

**Seminar 10.1: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (V)**

Jameson, Fredric. Excerpt from "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan. Verso, 1988, pp. 13-20, 26-29.

\_\_\_\_\_. Excerpt from "Nostalgia for the Present." *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 279-287.

Boym, Svetlana. "Prospective Nostalgia." *The Off-Modern*. Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 39-40.

**Oct 22**

**Seminar 10.2: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (VI)**

The Singapore Memory Project. Web portal. Ministry of Communications and Information/National Library Board, 2011-. <https://www.singaporememory.sg>

Nora, Pierre. Excerpt from "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de M  moire*." *Representations*, vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7-18, 25.

Blackburn, Kevin. "The 'Democratization' of Memories of Singapore's Past." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* [*Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*], vol. 169, no.4, 2013, pp. 431-456.

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**Oct 26**

**Seminar 11.1: Heritage, Memory, History, Historicity (VII)**

Discussion continues

**Oct 29**

**Seminar 11.2: Once More, with Feeling (I)**

*7 Letters*. Directed by Eric Khoo et al, Objectifs Films, 2015. <https://www.netflix.com/sg/title/80089007>

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**Nov 2**

**Seminar 12.1: Once More, with Feeling (II)**

Tan, Kenneth Paul. "Choosing What to Remember in Neoliberal Singapore: The Singapore Story, State Censorship and State-Sponsored Nostalgia." *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2016, pp. 231-249.

**Nov 5**

**Seminar 12.2: Once More, with Feeling (III)**

Solomon, Robert C.. "In Defense of Sentimentality." *In Defense of Sentimentality*. Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 3-19.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." Originally published online at <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, 19 Jan 1998 (now offline).

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**Nov 9**

**Seminar 13.1: Conclusions (I)**

**Nov 12**

**Seminar 13.2: Conclusions (II)**

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## **RESOURCES**

### **Education Technology**

The module is listed on the USP website (at <https://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/curriculum/usp-modules/singapore-studies-singaporean-nostalgia/>), though this will largely be a static page. It also has a presence on Luminus, though the main tools that we will utilize are its Files and Multimedia (see below).

The primary and most active EduTech tool we will use is a class blog, at <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/2021uhb2212>, so you will have to register as a user of blog.nus. Not only will I post instructional materials and updates on the blog, but a couple of your assignments, as explained in the "Requirements" section below, will have to be completed on that platform.

### **Readings and Other Materials**

We are reading *The Garden of Foolish Indulgences* in full. There are copies in the USP Reading Room and NUS Library, but I would encourage you to purchase your own if possible—say, from <https://www.booksactuallyshop.com>

The majority of the films and videos we are discussing can be streamed online (e.g., "Seletar Airbase—Singapore's Secret Garden," *The Provision Shop*, *Republic of Food*), on various platforms (Vimeo, Youtube). One such platform is not free (*7 Letters* on Netflix), but DVDs of the film are also available (one copy in the USP Reading Room, two in the NUS Central Library).

Two films are *not* available via streaming: *To Singapore, with Love* and "Koridor." In the USP Reading Room, there is a DVD copy of the former, and two subtitled DVD copies of the latter (the NUS Central Library also has a copy of "Koridor," but that has no English subtitles). I may arrange screenings of these films, or provide access in other ways.

All other readings are available as pdf files from our Luminus workbin. I have provided pdfs even for essays that were published, and are accessible, online (e.g., Shouse, Hutcheon) because these pdfs will be easier to refer to during our class discussions. The one exception is the news article by Hicks (Seminar 9.2)—that you should read online, since it includes embedded videos that you will need to also watch.

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## **REQUIREMENTS**

There is no final exam for the module, which is 100% CA. The CA is in turn based on five components, which are briefly described below (you will receive fuller and separate instructions for the last three components).

Note that you must complete and pass each and every component in order to pass the module as a whole (you cannot, for example, not submit a final paper, or only submit one that is half the stipulated word count).

### **1. Attendance, Engagement with Readings, and Seminar Participation (10%)**

Attendance of seminars is mandatory. You are allowed one unexcused absence; anything beyond that will negatively affect your grade. If you need to be excused from a class for good reason—family emergencies, documented illnesses—let me know, in advance if possible. When you miss a meeting, you are still responsible for doing the readings for the day (especially since the readings tend to refer to and build on each other), and for completing any work assigned during the class.

The assigned readings and viewings are a key part of the module: we will learn a lot of information from them, but also from questioning and pondering them. The requirement is therefore that you carefully read and think about the assigned readings before each class. The onus is then on you to thoughtfully demonstrate, during our seminars, that you have indeed done so. This is usually done by participating in the seminar discussions—by answering or posing basic questions about the readings, analyzing and interpreting them, and so on. Even when you find a reading difficult, you can still think and speak about how it is difficult, where in the text the difficulty arises, why this difficulty might be significant, and so on.

### **2. Introductory and Orienting Comments (10%)**

Some of our seminars focus on works of Singapore art. During such seminars, one or more of you will provide some introductory and orienting comments. These comments may be on topics such as: the artist's biography; the genre or reception of the artwork; relevant political/cultural background; allusions or references in the artwork; etc. In general, the comments do *not* have to be analytical, though you are welcome to raise questions or possible topics of discussion that you think may arise out of the orienting information you are providing. For instance, your comments would not be an analysis of, say, *7 Letters* (that will obviously be the collective task of the seminar itself). Rather, you may be asked to tell the class about the career of the filmmaker, or point to some questions ("given that the filmmaker studied and now lives outside of Singapore, we might wonder if her geographical location means that she is likely to regard Singapore with nostalgia"). Your comments should be brief (no more than 5 minutes), and chiefly oral (as opposed to, say, a powerpoint presentation).

### **3. Blog Entries: Making Connections and Article Review (20%)**

You are expected to contribute to the class blog at <https://blog.nus.edu.sg/2021uhb2212> in two ways.

*Blog entry #1 (no specified length; throughout the semester):* Nostalgia is not simply an academic subject, but often part of everyday discourse. Over the course of the semester, you should post to our class blog interesting examples of, or discussions about, nostalgia that you come across in the non-academic sphere. These do not have to be restricted to the context of Singapore. Your contributions should be several, and span this spectrum: in some cases, you can simply provide a link to a newspaper article on nostalgia that you've come across, without too much commentary. In at least one instance, however, you should provide a more extensive response. You should also capitalize on the medium of blogging, and comment on and respond to your classmates' posts. One aim of this assignment is to help you make connections between our classroom discussions and the world "outside" of it, and it is also a way of building up a resource bank for the module.

*Blog entry #2 (300-500 words; by Week 11):* Your second blogging assignment requires you to review an academic article or book about nostalgia that we are *not* reading in the module. Many of the assigned readings are broader considerations of nostalgia; in contrast, you should select for this assignment an article or book that utilizes a case study. Your specific task is to reflect on how the article/book moves between its case study and broader conclusions about nostalgia. One objective of this review is to get you thinking about how academic arguments move between the specific and the general—and thus prepare you for your own final paper, when you will likewise have to do so.

Since these are blog entries, they are not expected to be highly rigorous, though they should still be reasoned. Furthermore, since you'll be able to read each other's entries, you can and should also respond to and converse with your classmates.

#### **4. Paper 1 (25%)**

*1000-1500 words (or self-defined length for creative projects); due Week 4/5:* your first paper requires you to demonstrate your understanding of the mode or formal aspects of nostalgia. You will have two options for how to do so. One will be to analyze an existing nostalgic text, in which case your task is to explicate *how* that text evokes—or comments on, or undercuts, etc.—nostalgia. A second option is creative: here, you would actually author your own nostalgic text. This text can be in any medium: hence, you can write a short essay or story or poem that is nostalgic, or you could submit a video, photograph, painting, etc.

#### **5. Paper 2 (35%)**

*3000-4000 words; due Reading Week:* your final paper should be an argumentative essay. In it, you should pose an interesting question about some form or aspect of Singaporean nostalgia, and then—through research and the analysis of textual evidence—make an original and intriguing argument about that work, and about how your analysis might advance our understanding of nostalgia.