

“Worlding sites”: Globalized visions and material constructions of future Southeast Asia

“We see the worlding city as a milieu of intervention, a source of ambitious visions, and of speculative experiments that have different possibilities of success and failure [...] Such experiments cannot be conceptually reduced to instantiations of universal logics of capitalism or postcolonialism. They must be understood as worlding practices, those that pursue world recognition in the midst of inter-city rivalry and globalized contingency.” (Roy, A., Ong, A., 2011: xv)

In this panel, we would like to extend Aihwa Ong’s idea of “worlding cities” to a larger acceptance of “worlding sites,” land- and seascapes modified in line with massive, modern transformation in Southeast Asia. Some of these sites are seminal projects representing best practice, not only in terms of commercial profit but also innovation. Such original, experimental, yet contested places are often engineered according to a specific vision that bespeaks aesthetic, economic, moral and political ideas of a good future. Land reclamation sites modifying the sea/land border, real estate mega projects and Special Economic Zones where global capital is emplaced and shown off are of particular interest here. We focus on the experience of transformation and the responses to such sites, the compliance, indifference and resistance to them. We also include visions, standpoints and the control of them. Another interesting field is the dichotomy between the seen and the unseen. What is made to be seen and what needs to stay unseen when a worlding site is planned and constructed?

We suggest a few hints: pollution (sea pollution, for example), impacts on the ecosystem (decrease in fish population, seabed destruction, erosion), hazards (climate change and natural hazards), work (workers’ lodging in urban peripheries, in building sites, on the sea itself), cross-border mobility, signs of poverty or backwardness (dormitories, slums, food stalls, wanderers, beggars), immorality (prostitution, drinking, drugs), and wild exploitation (massive sand displacement, gas exhaustion...).

We invite contributors to explore the powerful *visions* which are brought into play and emplaced in worlding sites, addressing modern industrialization, development and progress, nation, citizenship, emplacement of global capital and entitlement and rights. Beyond visions, we are also interested in soundscapes. How do they shape sites and vice versa?

In order to explore these visions in their concrete and embodied forms, we invite contributors to ask questions such as:

- Are all the sites of transformation in SEA inspired by similar models? Are all the land reclamations alike, the SEZ alike, the new cities alike?
- How are these sites produced and reconstructed in the face of the challenges of exploitation and political aspirations?
- To what extent are humans part of the visions? Who is supposed to work, live and stroll in the worlding sites, and who actually does? Who is not supposed to be there?
- What happens if large-scale projects are constructed but there are hardly any people inhabiting them?
- What is the interplay of governmental schemes, local interests and other, immaterial values when it comes to uprooting homes, modifying the coastline or filling “empty” spaces with buildings? How does this show in concrete objects and bodies?
- How is memory inserted into global visions (for example as “tradition”)? Who remembers? Is memory connected to sites or does memory ‘travel’?
- Is there a common temporality in similar sites?
- What is the gender bias in a worlding site?

This is an interdisciplinary subject but to keep the dialogue alive we invite contributors to privilege the human factor over the technical analysis.

Double session

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