

# COMMUNICATIONS AND NEW MEDIA PROGRAMME

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## Mediating the 'New' (in) Singapore: Gestural Politics, Creativity and Beyond

A Talk by Dr Terence Lee  
CNM Seminar Room, AS6 #03-33  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS  
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This research attempts to bring together several pieces of seemingly disparate research on various aspects of media, culture and politics in/of Singapore that I have undertaken since 2003. Based primarily on a recently-published book chapter entitled: 'Gestural Politics: Mediating the 'new' Singapore' (2008), in a new volume<sup>1</sup>, my research explores what the 'new' twenty-first Singapore – version 3.0 perhaps – marked by the Lee administration's embrace of greater 'openness' and 'inclusiveness' since August 2004.

The grandiose visions of a reinvigorated Singapore, especially in the areas of new media, the creative industries and the integrated resorts (along with the making of a new downtown in the Marina Bay area) have given rise to new rhetoric and buzzwords that have been strategically – also somewhat mindlessly – repeated and echoed ad nauseam. I argue that this has given rise to the discourse of gestural politics, which occurs when 'liberal gestures' in the forms of rhetoric, public statements, press releases and propagation of buzzwords by the regime are bestowed greater discursive powers in shaping perceptions compared to actual substances or power symmetries. What does this mean for those of us whose lives revolve around trying to make sense of the media and politics in Singapore?

In essence, I examine two areas that are arguably inter-related:

- (1) the voguish application of the 'creative industries' rubric in Singapore. I argue that Singapore is really interested in the industrialisation of the creative industries rather than allowing creativity to take root in all facets of life and development.
- (2) recent applications of 'liberal gestures' in Singapore: from tourism (re)branding, ongoing urban revitalisation of the cityscape to the 'Great Casino Debate' (from 2004 to 2005), culminating with the bold decision by the Prime Minister to proceed with the construction of Singapore's first two mega-sized casino complexes. Instead of seeing the Lee administration's overzealous use of buzzwords as mere rhetoric, this paper wonders if such rhetoric and political gestures are sustainable beyond this 'new Singapore' (version 3.0)?

### About the Speaker:

Terence Lee is Associate Professor of Mass Communication in the School of Media Communication and Culture and a Research Fellow of the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University, Perth Western Australia.