

Works

Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?
Sila Mengkanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak?

Erika Tan

Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You? *Sila Mengkanibalkan Kami, Mahu Tak?*

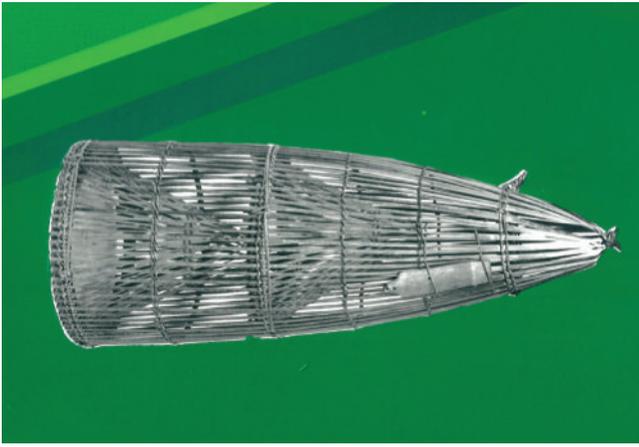
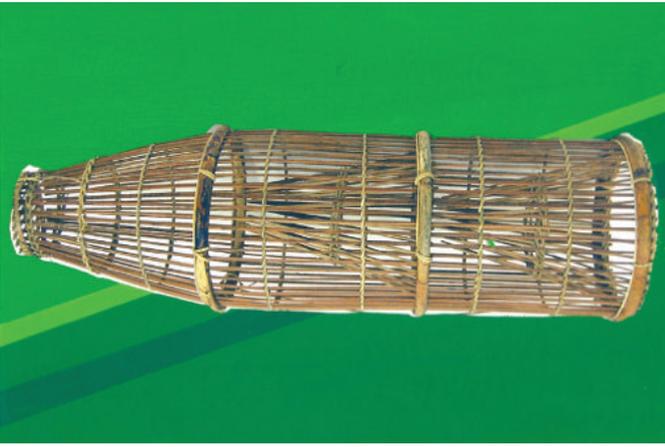
Emerging from an ongoing discussion between NUS Museum curators and artist Erika Tan since 2009 about the multitudinous potentials of the museumised object, the colloquially titled *'Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?'* is an artist's response that re-visits through re-use, re-enactment and repatriation, the artefacts and writings from, and referenced in, the exhibition *Camping And Tramping Through The Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya* (2011–13). In addition, newer artworks developed by the artist that include film, objects and works on paper are shown alongside. The guiding principle being a form of aesthetic cannibalism, speculative in its *method* and oscillating between formats, the site-specific installation reveals the contingent rules and contextual considerations of the colonial museum in Malaya as it came to be formed in the 19th century and the particular interpretative technologies and translationary *mediums* that continue to murmur a discourse in the contemporary postcolonial museum of Singapore and in the dis-located Southeast Asian collections elsewhere.

Exhibition text, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa & Erika Tan
NUS Museum, Singapore, 2014











The Moral Green Interweb

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa & Erika Tan



Erika Tan, *Persistent Visions*,
NUS Museum, 2008

SHM: Going through this process, of first discussing the problematics of *Camping and Tramping*, and later facilitating your cannibalism of the same objects, and despite our differences in approaches, if we were obsessed with anything, it was the relation of culture to the moral imagination of the object. You approached it from the side of repatriation; I came at it from the side of retention. But in your work, to portray an object betwixt and between that mysterious conjunction of recurrence when it is taken as a work of art – a conjunction we have agonised with since our engagement began in 2008 (when the NUS Museum showed *Persistent Visions* [2005]) – I think we can meet. What I am (probably) getting at here is that, it does not matter whether we agree with the deconstructivist logic of simply recovering these stories and leaving it at that, or if indeed these objects ought to be returned to maker, source community, whoever: the moral imagination of the object may just be a single subject of inquiry.



Erika Tan, *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, NUS Museum,
2013

Opposite: Slab Grave, Raffles
Museum display c1950s, collection
of National Museum of Singapore,
National Heritage Board

ET: The narrative you present Mustafa is interesting. It presents the kinds of binaries or tensions one might expect when artist and museum meet, however, this would be to down-play the kind of work you as a curator have already been working around, and to perhaps fall into the trap of seeing this project as a form of institutional critique. *Camping And Tramping* for me was not just an exercise in 'recovery' and 'retention' but more the foregrounding of the *on-going* possibility for objects to have multiple roles, meanings and use. We discussed in relation to *Persistent Visions* the notion of subaltern voices, their absence or their implied but muted presence, then as now, my project seems to be one of finding *our* own voices within/despite/because of the competing narratives delivered to us. The museum is but one place in which this possibility needs to become apparent, not purely or indeed because of ethical issues, or moral issues towards as you say, maker, source community, but because I feel interpretation should not be co-opted with issues around ownership. In this respect, 'repatriation' for me, is not the



physical, material and geographical ‘return’ of an object, but a movement of sorts that extricates the object from proprietorial notions of interpretation and value. In *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* one of the explorations has been around introducing an instability of form, a kind of ‘shape shifting’. This takes the form of replica yams, *fimo* adze heads, digital *youtube* videos returned to film, of British Museum artefacts re-materialised as paintings. Ultimately the exercise is one of producing a reflexive approach to systems of knowledge and cultural production, where the question of the moral is not already a given. It's also one of circulating and re-circulating as a form of preservation (preservation of the objects on-going possibilities).



SHM: Within the circulation and re-circulation there are particular modes of working determined by the levels of institutionalisation of practices. Within this, the modern artist possesses a tremendous advantage when making statements through their art to the general public. One critical feature being that very few of those listening or reading would have much in the way of independent knowledge of the supposed proposition being retailed. I understand, this is a very restricted sense of the term ‘artist’, but I present it here as a provocation to the modernist claim that art rests within a sovereign realm, and the artist may take particular liberties in its production and presentation, and even remain absolutely stubborn by denying ‘access’ to the works. This is usually not the case for the modern curator, who is faced with the unattractive choice of boring his/her public with massive amounts of exotic information or attempting to make his argument in an effectual vacuum. In many ways, this project was about testing those limits...?



Mustafa performing Remnants From *The Corner Of My Eye*, a re-enactment gesture towards the Dayak model house and Erika setting up *Turning In wonder, Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?*, NUS Museum 2013

ET: I'm not sure it's helpful to create or re-inscribe the dichotomy of curator/artist – or that of material culture vs. art object as it obscures perhaps the institutional and individual positions and alignments (there are choices). Certainly curators in museums which sign up to the ICOM's Code Of Ethics For Museums¹ are faced with a series of protocols to uphold – e.g. Point 4.2, ‘Museums should ensure that the information they present in dis-



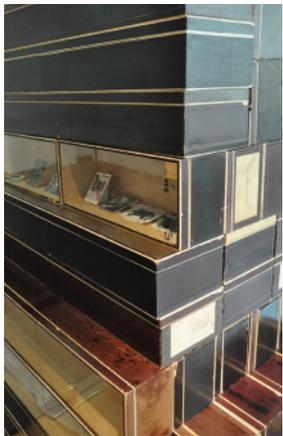
plays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups and people'; so perhaps it depends on what kind of a museum one is talking about, or what context the art work is shown within and whether you are interested in problematising these terms such as ‘accurate’ and ‘well founded’. In the exhibition *Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You?* all the works were shown without captions (including the artefacts on loan from other museums). There was a booklet contextualising the works through a series of fragmented archival images and texts, there was the exhibition catalogue of *Camping And Tramping*, and there were the research binders originally shown within *Camping And Tramping*. In the video work *Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through*, there were also references back towards the other objects on display. The connections (or gaps) are necessarily made by the audience. This is not about the sovereignty of the artist or artwork, or ‘refusing access’, but the opposite. Meaning here is contingent, specific, and personalised. The green screen is no less neutral than the white cube (not that NUS Museum can in any way be seen as a white cube), but for me indicates much more readily the dis-locational technologies at work. Perhaps also, with its reference to cinema, the green screen speaks more openly about the prospects of fantasy and projection entering the frame. Once the object/actor has been transported (via green screen back-lot or museological processes), technically, anything should be able to happen, can happen and has happened. What limits or shapes this comes back to us.



SHM: This re-framing was always a curious one. Perennially driven by this confusion, estrangement and intimacy with the 19th century that we have both shared over the course of this collaboration. Mining the colonial text at different platforms, seeking techniques, modes of working and unstructured gestures and murmurs, we assumed that it might just be possible to narrow our differences and recover something of an aesthetic imagination of peoples separated from us by time and intellectual disposition, maybe even add something to the history of modernism in the region. I am not sure to what extent each of us succeeded, we probably knew that this premise



was foolish to begin with (?), but nonetheless we marched on, armed with their lineaments, seeking those informal and unspoken suppositions, those that might allow us to locate even the faintest traces of a Southeast Asian (or perhaps, Malayan) aesthetic insight. In this push though, I am unsure if we did end up glancing over affirmations and critical moorings about the nature of ‘art’ that ran counter to or existed simultaneously to our own reigning convictions. Or perhaps, if we are too highly embedded in the setting of the ‘modern museum’ and ‘contemporary practice’ that forever gets in the way rather than releases, when we encounter objects that had supposedly mattered deeply to Others. It’s odd, I never cite him, but Geertz captures this dilemma, he says: ‘that the significant works of the human imagination (Icelandic saga, Austen novel, or Balinese cremation) speak with equal power to the consoling piety that we are all like one another and to the worrying suspicion that we are not.’



ET: Perhaps a failure in this project is that having started with colonial texts, it was very unlikely that the Southeast Asian aesthetic imaginings that you pointed to would ever manifest, other than as footnotes, marginal texts and as you say murmurings. There are many dead ends also and things that still need following up. What happened to Din Bin Brahim, Ivor Evans’s suggested romantic as well as domestic companion? Left with half the curator’s ethnographer’s estate, what did he go on to do? And what about Halimah Binti Abdullah, the Weaver from Singapore who died in London during her stay there as a human display in the *The Empire Exhibition*, (Wembley, 1924/5)? The hundreds of animals Prince Edward donated to the London Zoo after their display in *The Malaya-Borneo Exhibition* (Singapore, 1922), or the materials and models for the Malay village displays in the *The Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, (London, 1886), *The Festival of Empire Exhibition* (Crystal Palace, 1911) or the Malaya pavilion in *The Empire Exhibition* (Wembley, 1924/5). Some of these remnants surface in the catalogues of The British Museum or The Victoria & Albert Museum, and other traces elsewhere. There are very few images I can find documenting the Malayan elements of these exhibitions, but fragments like the newspaper clipping below, give a



loaded description: ‘There are to be seen at times in the Malay houses erected on piles in the gardens of the Exhibition some specimens of the inhabitants of this part of the world. They are not quite so ferocious-looking as the popular imagination designates their race, but still look as if they could be awkward upon very slight provocation. As they walk about with a slouching gait, they evidently inspire different feelings from what the moody-looking Chinamen do in the Hongkong Court.’²



The (attempted) recovery or ‘repatriation’ of these material objects, became a route through which to approach ‘other histories’ or ‘lost modernisms’ within the transnational context of Singapore, Malaysia and Britain. The project took me to Taiping (site of Malaysia’s first museum, and a once pivotal town in the British Federated States of Malaya), to ‘recover’ the colonial museum, only to find that it was too late. Its colonial hard wood carved display cases were being replaced with new laminated plywood designs; its early painted dioramas (also associated with Raffles Museum’s previous display formats) had just been updated with digital backdrops (ironically photo-shopped to look like oil paintings), its books being packed up for restoration, its colonial collections being re-distributed around the country and displays reformulated to reflect a more localised nationalist focus. The museum’s own knowledge of its colonial history, its accessions, books and colonial remnants had somehow been lost, rendering its curators reliant upon Wikipedia to help in my research.



The missing links, the gaping holes, lost moments – these for me are still the location where things might happen. My somewhat haphazard anthropological approach to the colonial archive, giving it the status of ‘local informant’, has not brought me to an external ‘source’, but rather a reminder, that in the world of contemporary art, the artists themselves might be (mis) taken for the ‘local informant’, the ‘source community’ or the ‘anthropologist’, or indeed they might choose to take up these possible roles with all their attendant complexities and problematics knowingly.

Vocationem Universalem / Universal Call

Erika Tan

The script excerpts are adaptations from the speeches, public addresses, reports and articulations between 1874 and 1977 of the following individuals:

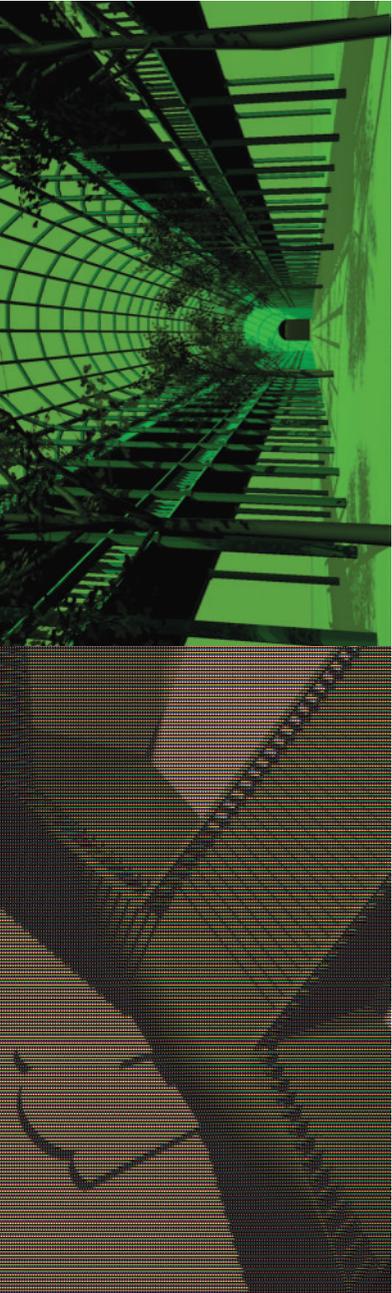
D.H. Hodgson, Ivor H.N. Evans, James Collins, H.N. Ridley, Roland Braddell, Governor Fredrick Weld, Archdeacon Hose, R. Hanitsch, E.J.H. Corner, Eric R. Alfred, J.C. Moulton, Constance Sheares, Cecil Boden Kloss, Dr. G.D. Haviland and T.S. Raffles.

All images are stills from the video work *Vocationem Universalem / Universal Call*.

Script excerpts:

[From] what I can remember of my own early impressions, I believe that I pictured a dark gloomy forest where the light of day hardly penetrated, and where walking was almost an impossibility. This sombre scene was relieved by the presence of gorgeously coloured and strongly perfumed flowers depending from trailing creepers, which hung from tree to tree. In addition to the flowers there were brilliantly plumaged birds, which flittered from bough to bough before the traveller, while troops of monkeys chattered and screamed among the branches overhead. Enormous butterflies with jewelled wings sailed across the open spaces in the forest, and gigantic horned beetles watched the intruder from every log of rotting wood. Pythons curled themselves round branches overhanging the only track, herds of tapirs, pigs or deer, frightened at the approach of human beings, stampeded through the undergrowth of graceful palms and tree ferns which reared their heads on all sides, and the atmosphere was that of a hot-house in the museum's gardens.³

Later still a Museum or Museums are formed, with scientific men attached who, assisted at least by the Government, are able to devote their time to collecting and preserving specimens, as well as recording observations and data, and storing the specimens in the Museums for



reference, and publishing the information obtained in reports or publication.⁴

... it is essential that the traveller should not trust this to his memory, ... Everything should be noted down in such a way that it would be intelligible to a person absolutely ignorant of the country.

The collected information should differentiate between information obtained by personal observation and that obtained on the testimony of others.⁵

The Central Hall now holds the statue of the founder, which was brought to the Museum for safety. Behind it is a case showing some of his letters and early history. On the walls are paintings of the early settlements. Immediately on the left of the entrance is the sole fragment of the great stone with indecipherable inscription, which stood at the mouth of the River when the founder first landed.⁶

The countries under our influences are of surpassing interest and great natural wealth. Their development and progress under the protection of the flag for the last hundred years and more has provided a chapter in the history of the [our] Empire, of which we who come after may well be proud. That such a great variety and wealth of exhibits, illustrating the actual and potential resources of these countries, can be gathered together to form our Exhibition is due to the sure foundations laid by those early Empire-builders whose names will ever live in the history of our enterprise. It is hoped that an Exhibition, such as the one now planned, will be made worthy of our illustrious forebears. 'Our object is not territory but trade.' His [The] aim was to establish a great commercial emporium, a free port which should attract the trade of all surrounding countries.⁷

Notwithstanding the contributions of its handful of professional staff to scholarship throughout its long history, the Museum remained, little more than a storehouse of the material evidence and remains of the fauna and flora, and of the material cultures of the peoples of the region.⁸

A Museum which makes any pretence of being a scientific institution must adopt as a basic principle that science is 'ordered knowledge'. The work of classification is therefore to be regarded as of primary importance.⁹



The object of an ethnological collection is mainly to illustrate and to afford a sure and ready means of comparing the modes of living and customs of different people represented in the collection. An ethnological collection to be of real value should be made systematically, and with an end in view; every object should be carefully and properly labelled... mere unlabelled curios are not worth the cost of housing and caring for. Most of the ethnological specimens now in the Museum have no label or history...¹⁰

[Additionally we have as yet] no satisfactory method devised by which the specimens can be preserved for any length of time with fidelity... The deteriorating influences of the tropical [hot] and extremely moist climate is such that collections of butterflies and moths exposed to the light rapidly lose their colour and it is therefore important to arrange that specimens that have not been subjected to these influences...

Nations, governments and races rise, decline, and fall but science, which extols human nature, rises only.¹¹

If the time shall come when we shall have passed away, these monuments of our virtue will endure when our triumphs shall have become an empty name. Let it still be our boast to write our name in characters of light; let us not be remembered as the tempest whose course was desolation, but as the gate of spring [morning] reviving the slumbering seeds of mind, and calling them to life from the winter [evening] of ignorance and oppression. Let our Sun arise on these islands, not to wither and scorch them in its fierceness, but like that of our own genial [more genial] skies, whose mild and benignant influence is hailed and blessed by all who feel its beams.¹²

The rays of intellect, now divided and lost, will be concentrated into a focus, from whence they will be again radiated with added lustre, brightened and strengthened by our superior lights. Thus will our stations not only become the centres of commerce and its luxuries, but of refinement and the liberal arts.¹³

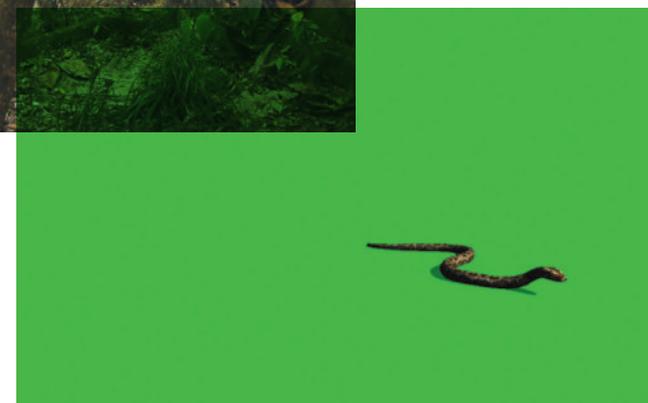
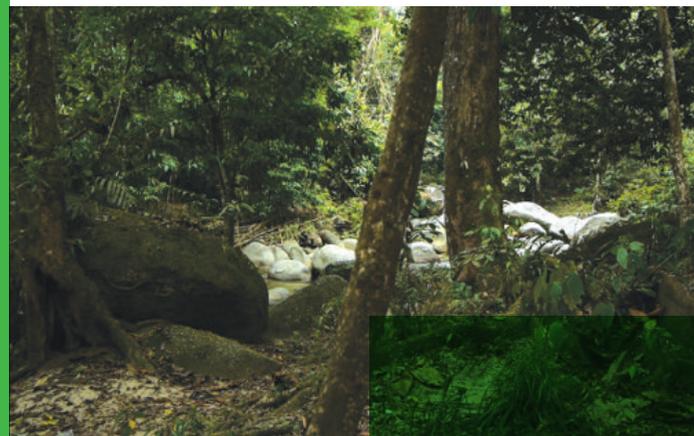
Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through

Erika Tan



Repatriating The Object With No Shadow: Along, Against, Within And Through takes the structure of an A to Z (a 'gesture' towards the encyclopedic or comprehensive), to approach a glossary of terms/ events/ artefacts/ and personal accounts which connect us to the historical through the specifics and the context of the colonial museum in Malaya.

A is for adventure, advantage and advocate



It was in 1914, I was on a collecting expedition with the Director of the Museum, 100 miles up the River. We had planned to trek further into the interior, when the war cries of the tribes people spread through the jungle and they were on the path thirsting for heads, our 100 porters left us, and there we were, a small body of 17 collectors.¹⁴

The colonial archive is littered with 'we set off at day break' accounts. The history of collecting cannot be seen without some recourse to the discourse of adventure and exploration. It would seem that they go hand in hand. So too, the accounts of illness; many an ill fated expedition end-

ed up aborted, with fever wracked bodies being sent back to milder climates. The accounts seem to heave with unspoken dangers, of illness, poison darts, un-faithful porters, but equally the numbers accumulated of dead stuffed embalmed dried cooked deboned animal carcasses, crated and ferried across and through the jungle, rivers, seas to museums, zoos, and private collections seem enough to prove some sort of advantage. An advantage in the technologies of dislocation.

Advocacy is when we speak for something or someone, often assumed unable to be otherwise heard.

B is for body



I was looking for bodies, bodies of knowledge, forgotten bodies and the kind of bodies that might make you think, think differently. A small paragraph in Raffles Museum's Annual Report describes the museum's most popular and curious object; the cast of a Malay man.

'One of The Raffles Museum's most popular artefact was a life-size model of a Malay man dressed in traditional clothes, or *baju kurung* complete with *sarong* and *kris*. A museum staff had volunteered to have his body cast in plaster for this purpose. The life-like model led some visitors to believe it had been made using the same method of skinning and stuffing the creatures found in the animal gallery of the museum.'¹⁵

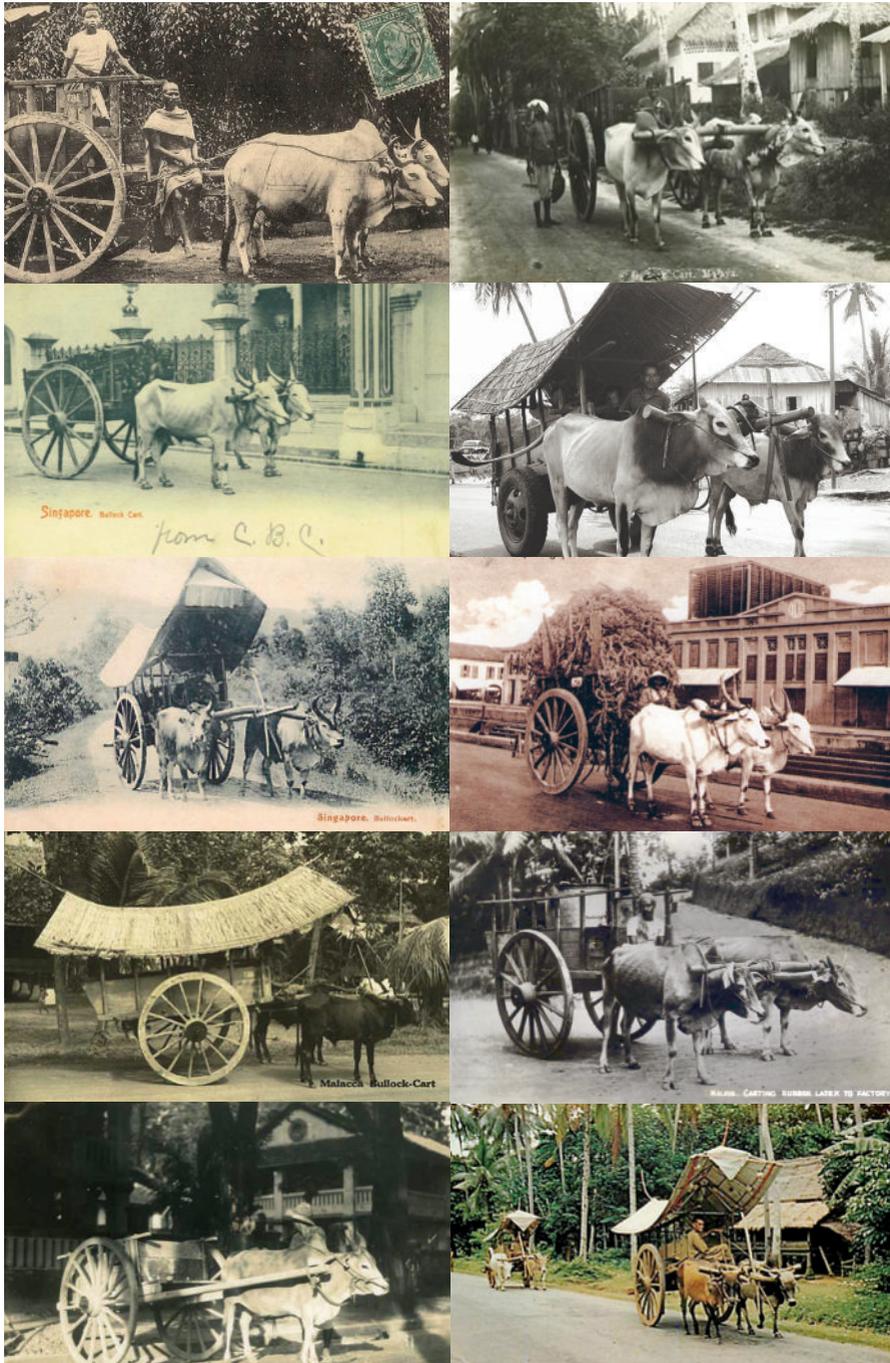
He was willing. Do you know the process of casting the human body? Incarcerated in slowly fixing plaster. The process of *going off* is a chemical reaction. The heat slowly swells, and from worrying not to move, you realise you no longer can move. Fixed, held in place.

I think about re-casting a Malay body, re-casting physically and metaphorically. We do not know the name of the Malay man who lent his body for the cast, but we know his designation. Working in the museum as a *jagar* (watchman), or janitor, or caretaker. The Museum is a hierarchi-

cal place, directors are like gods, who give (or not) permission to access this cultural resource, our heritage, the intellectual capital of our nations, or in the colonial museum, the temporarily appropriated nations of others, or for some museums the more permanently held intellectual property of other nations. The Director is the man that wears socks, the *jagar*, warden, invigilator or caretaker, the one who does not.

Returning to our cast Malay body, this object was never accessioned, which means although it may have been a part of the display within the museum, it was never a part of its collections. So too the support structures, the plinths, the vitrines, the things that both protect and hold up and fix the objects in time and place. They are dispensable. The Malay man, was only a cast, a mannequin with local features, something to demonstrate the wearing of *sonket* and *sarong*. I think about Ahmad, the current director of the museum [NUS Museum] and think about casting his body. I imagine the process of applying Vaseline to all his body parts, I imagine the conversation during the time it would take to complete this and I imagine the care and control I would need and have over this body during this period of incarceration. I do not ask him to undress for me. There is no subservient Malay body here this time.

C is for copy, cartography and cartwheel



D is for Din, Din Bin Brahim



Mt Kinabalu (over 13,000 ft), Mt Nungkok (right) and the Kadamaian (Tempasuk) valley from Kota Belud

In one of Ivor Evans last published books, *The Religion Of The Tempasuk Dusuns Of North Borneo*, there is an inscription, which is often left out of the various digital copies in circulation.

Din however re-appears in Evans's preface to the book, which recounts the process of writing his book as one of a major 'recovery' job. The primary material was all but lost during the Japanese occupation and Evans had to re-write his manuscripts.

*To DIN BIN BRAHIM
Companion of my travels for more
than thirty years, whose care of me has
made this work possible.*

E is for elephant, exhumation and exile

She was, a weaver.

He was a manservant, companion,
and inheritor of his estate.

It was an escapee, angry, traumatised and
unlucky. Preserved for posterity.

She went willingly.

He had 3 wives.

It stampeded, dying on the tracks in a
headlong collision with a train.

She died of double pneumonia and was
buried in Woking cemetery. We looked for
her gravestone, but could not find it. Deed
allotment No.189, 343, somewhere between
a section called the M1 and another
section called the Zoroastrian. She was
buried with full Muslim rites; her funeral
was arranged by the London Necropolis
Company.

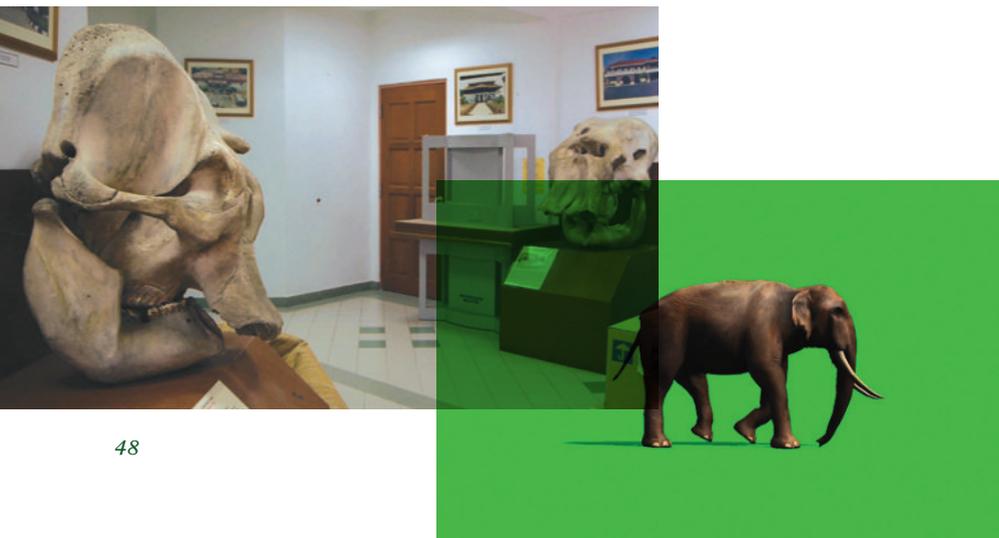
He had a lover. He was his cook,
bought newspapers home for him every-
day and safeguarded his writings through-
out the Japanese occupation. He accom-
panied him back to England and lived

with him in a small Norfolk village. The
same village my aunt lived on a house boat
in. Din was his name. Would it bring him
shame to name in retrospect the relation-
ship he had, that the archives speak about
through acts of silence, and omissions.
What are the signs that we are reading?
On death, Din inherited half of his em-
ployer's estate. There seems no record of
what happened next.

It was de-skinned, boned, preserved
and put on display.

Her name was Halimah Binti Abdul-
lah, she was an expert weaver. She survived
for almost a year living in a space at the
back of the Malay pavilion animating the
displays, providing entertainment for the
visitors, and weaving baskets... although I
prefer to think of them as traps.

We could not find her grave, but did
find that of Abdul Rahman Andak – who
was exiled to the UK from Johor on a sal-
ary of a £1000 [early 1900s]. He too was
originally from Singapore.



F is for fidelity, high fidelity

The technological development in sound
recordings in the 1940s made a newer,
cleaner sound, with minimal noise and
distortion, reproducing a closer semblance
and illusion of reality.

'After about 12 months, I could con-
verse tolerably well in the Malayan lan-
guage. The conversation of my friends
no longer appeared a chattering jargon,
tiresome to listen to. The prominent ex-
pressions first impressed themselves on
the memory; then by degrees, a soft flow-
ing language issued out of the apparent
chaos of words. With the possession of
the language of the country, the people
no longer passed and repassed as groups
of strange folks, in coloured cotton prints
of grotesque costume. Our recognitions
now were frequent, and our conversations

friendly. The Malay – the bloodthirsty, re-
vengeful, perfidious Malay – had subsided
into a good humoured, respectful, unso-
phisticated, little copper-coloured man,
with a scanty light dress upon him. With
such men who could not be good friends?
When out on excursions, hot, knocked up,
gasping for breath, melting with the fierce
noonday sun, who would not climb the
tall coconut, and bring down the sweetest
of the tone? Or when this was not to be
had, who would not search the pineapple
garden to bring forth the most luscious
fruit, redundant with juicy nectar? Or if
this was also wanting, who would not draw
the grateful niris from the pendant atap
plant? This was the Malay man in his own
home – in the country of his birth, family,
and affections.'¹⁶



G is for green which replaces blue and Gigi Guntor

‘An Amateur Ethnologist, Ivor Evans took up his post as a junior civil servant of the British North Borneo Company in 1910. This was his chance to study ‘savage’ culture at first hand. He noted with interest that archaeologists in neighbouring Sarawak had already unearthed ancient stone implements, and he hoped to pioneer the discovery of such treasure in British North Borneo.

Armed with the trusty catalogue of the Scottish Museum of Antiquities, Evans set off to make enquiries about the local villagers. To his surprise, he found that they recognised some of the illustrations in his catalogue, stabbing excited fingers at the smooth, palm sized stones labelled as adze-heads. These, the villagers informed him with straight-faced authority, were not adze-heads at all, but *gigi guntor*, or thunder teeth. To be precise, they were thunderbolts, charmed objects that could be found among the roots of coconut palms, which had been struck by lightning.

Evans, who was not about to go digging for thunderbolts beneath coconut trees, set off to get a second opinion.²¹⁷



I is for index, which implies order and meaning



The supporting cast in the film, *Lubalang Daik*, directed by Jamil Sulong, 1962

Nordin Ahmad (middle) and supporting cast in a scene from a film, 1960s

Anchor Beer cast iron bottle opener, 1940s–1970s

Cast iron wok, 1970s

Courvoisier cast iron bottle opener, 1940s–1970s

Cast ornament, unknown date

J is for journey, against time and through space

IV. AN EXPEDITION:

Planning The Start

B: Ali, bila tetap gamak kita nak bejalang esok?

B: Ali, what time are we starting to-morrow?

B: Ali, bila tetap gamak kita hendak ber-jalan esok?

A: Kawang ikuk bila-bila pung.

A: Whenever you like.

A: Kawan ikut bila-bila pun.

B: 'dah, kalu begitu gak, gelap esok.

B: All right then, crack o' dawn to-morrow.

B: Sudah, kalau bagitu, gelap esok.

A: 'dah apa-la, 'tapi takuk 'dak tekejut, 'tu-la. Dang jenera gak, 'dak tahu-la.

A: All right. The only thing is I'm afraid I shan't wake up. If I once go fast asleep, there's no knowing.

A: Tidak apa-lah, tetapi takut tidak terke-jut, itu-lah. Dan jendera tidak tahu-lah.

B: Amor, ayang mu bukang ada? Boleh dengar kukok.

B: Well, you've got some fowls, haven't you? Their crowing'll wake you.

B: Ambohi, ayam mu bukan ada? Boleh dengar kukok.

A: Hey, ayang 'dak boleh bechara, kadang sepuluh kali semalamang pung bekukok.

Kalu murai boleh jugak bechaya, 'tapi bunyi pulak aluh sangat.

A: You can't go by the fowls. Sometime they crow ten times a night. You can trust the Robbins, but they don't sing loud enough.

A: Hey, ayam tidak boleh bechara.

Kadang sa-puloh kali samalaman pun berkukok. Kalau murai boleh juga perchaya tetapi bunyi pula halus sangat.

B: Ho'r, kalu begitu gak, mari kita tidor semegek-la. Orang pukul geduk 'tu, kita jaga-la.

B: Well, lets go and sleep at the mosque then. We shall wake with the drum.

B: Ho'r, kalau bagitu, mari kita tidur mesjid-lah. Orang pukul gedok itu kita jaga-lah.



On The Way

B: Ali, mu tengok ‘dak kapal terbang?

B: Have you ever seen one of these aeroplanes, Ali?

B: Ali, mu tengok tidak kapal terbang?

A: ‘dak rajing sekali lagi.

A: Never in my life.

A: Tidak rajin sa-kali lagi.

A: ‘gewana, mu bechaya-ka tidak orang ‘dok kata ada ‘tu?

A: Do you believe what people say, that there are such things?

A: Bagaimana, mu perchaya-kah tidak orang dudok kata ada itu?

B: Tetu-la ada.

B: Oh, there must be.

B: Tentu-lah ada.

A: Hey, aku s’orang tadak arah nak kata. Nak bechaya kabar ‘tu pelek sangat, terbang mega burong, ta’amboh bechaya orang-orang kata belaka.

A: Well, I don’t know what to say myself. It’s an extraordinary thing to believe, flying like a bird; but when everybody says they do fly, it’s hard not to believe.

A: Hey, aku sa-orang tiada arah hendak kata. Hendak pershaya khabar itu pelek sangal, terbang (seperti) burong, tidak emboh perchaya orang-orang kata belaka.

B: Kabar ‘tu begitu-la, ada sayap, ada ekor, gamak tiru burong-la.

B: That’s what they say, wings and tail, just like a bird.

B: Khabar itu bagitu-lah, ada sayap, ada ekor, gamak tiru burong-lah.

A: Allah, pandai sungguh nya chari ketiar ‘tu machang-machang: tidak begitu, begitu. Berapa tinggi terbang itu?

A: People can devise almost anything these days. First this, then that. How high can they fly?

A: Allah, pandai sungguh dia chari akhtiar itu macham-macham: tidak bagitu, bagitu. Berapa tinggi terbang itu?

B: Orang kata sayuk.

B: Out of sight, they say.

B: Orang kata sayup.

Possibly it’s a bit late to study these dialects. The vernacular schools teach a ‘standard Malay’ to the kampong children and the vernacular press does much the same thing for their parents. Possibly it never was worthwhile studying dialects of the Malay at all. In 1895 Clifford and Swettenham wrote: ‘the local dialects of colloquial Malay form a subject of minor importance and consist more in slight differences of pronunciation than in the variety of words employed.’

C. C Brown, 1935¹⁸



Out of sight, they say.

K is for knowledge, distributed

Distributed knowledge is a term used in multi-agent system research that refers to all the knowledge that a community of agents possesses and might apply in solving a problem.



Camouflage: men of the Gurkha Rifles being instructed in the use of camouflage in Malaysian jungle, October 1941, Palmer LT

L is for local (local informant), location and loss

‘Oamut was a true Malay; and as I was more in contact with him than with any other persons for a whole year, I will describe him as well as I am able. At the time, I may say, I lived entirely amongst the Malays, seldom seeing Europeans. My conversation was in Malay, and current events were discussed in that language.

Oamut might stand about five feet four inches. He dressed in the usual manner of Malays viz, in the *sarong* (plaid), *saluar* (trousers), and *baju* (coat). On his head he wore a *bugis* handkerchief; and on his feet he wore sandals. By his side was a *Kris*, with which he never parted for a moment. At a distance he might have been taken for a Scottish highlander; when near, his copper-coloured skin, black

twinkling eyes, Mongolian physiognomy, proved that he was Malay. He was independent in his tone, but respectful in his manners; and during my long intercourse with him, he neither betrayed a tincture of low breeding, nor a sign of loose and improper thoughts. Indeed his sense was delicate and keen; his ideas had a tone of high standard. He was mindful of money for any other object than what was necessary to maintain himself and family. He gradually commanded my friendship. I felt I could not but respect him. His conversation was intelligent on the affairs of the surrounding states; his information was deep in the characteristics of his own race; and his description of past and passing events interesting and instructive. Yet he



could neither read nor write – a defect he bewailed with much sorrow.

Oamut was a wild young man, and wanted to see the world; so in a moment of unguardedness, he was caught in the meshes of an enlisting sergeant of the Ceylon Rifle Corps. Dosed with narcotics, and before seeing either father or mother, he was carried on board a ship bound for a long foreign service... Oamut was borne off; and he landed safely in Ceylon, was drilled and stiffened into the shape of a British soldier. He was also sent to school but could never learn the difference between a and b; he however progressed so far in English as to speak it, parrot like; but what he said was better understood by

himself than by his white friends.

While in Ceylon he assisted in the reduction of the hill tribes; and on one occasion stuck by his wounded captain for 3 days. He concealed him in the jungle, and bore him out to safety. This gave Oamut a step; but he was bodo (unlearned), so could not be made a sergeant. He served for 27 years, after which he yearned to return to his native land. He got his discharge without pension (the reason of this I could never satisfactorily learn).

So he returned penniless to Pulo Pinang to find father and mother, sisters and brothers, gone! The very posts of his father's house had rotted away.¹⁹



The exhumation and repatriation of Ngah Ibrahim's remains from Singapore to Matang, Perak (2006). Ngah Ibrahim was exiled to the Seychelles by the British in 1877 for his perceived role in the

assassination of J.W.W Birch, Perak's first British Resident. He later moved to Singapore, where he died, having never returned to his homeland.

M is for mute, martyr and Matang



'The objects' *performance* emerges when they are utilised in exhibitions; curators provide their *lines* in the form of labels and text panels. When they are back in the museum store, they are *resting*, like actors between jobs. We may question these objects' roles, their relationships to the stories they tell during a *performance*, and how their role in a museum can be reconciled with their previous role in *real life* as opposed to *stage life*.²⁰



P is for proof, precision and power



Keris Berdiri, various internet sources

R is for repatriation, repetition and refuse



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Wells C. 1925

A Jungle Wallah At Large, Charles H. 1927 (re-published as Romance and Research in Borneo)

Malay Beliefs, Evans I.H.N. 1927

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The Confessions Of A Planter In Malaya: A Chronicle Of Life And Adventure In The Jungle, Ainsworth L. 1933

Fasciculi Malayeneses,
Robinson & Nelson. 1957

S is for sabotage, stability and stores



Along, against, within, and through, we are all inextricably linked to the archive and its demands.

Not a place or location but a methodology.



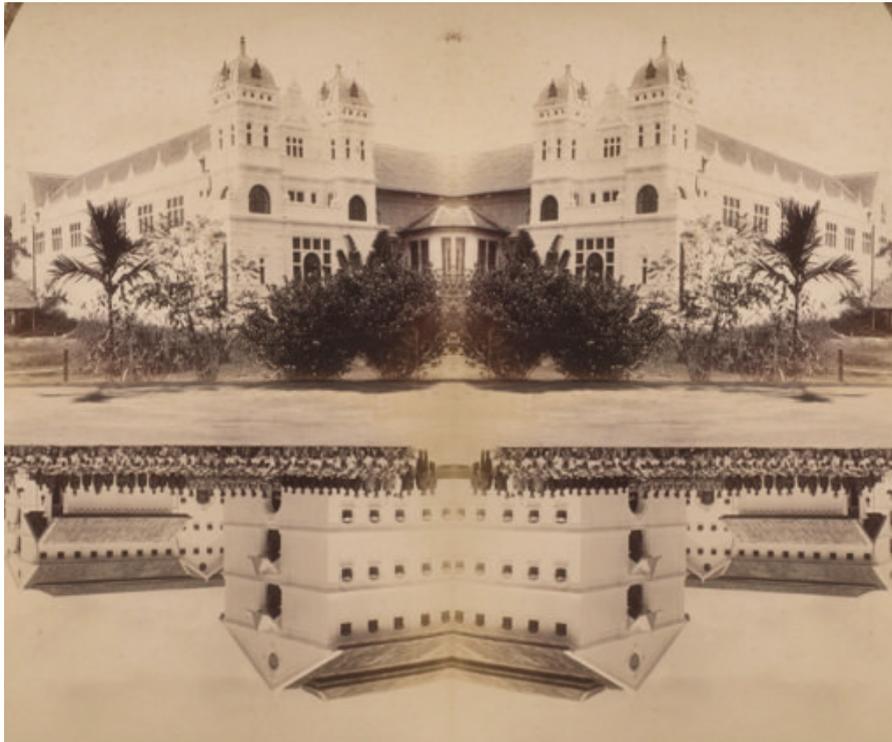
Seeking stability, creating crisis, suspending time.



Can we choose who we swim downstream of?

Bathing downstream of a contaminant is never a good idea. But the opposite for an enlightened one.

T is for technology, taxonomy and tautology



In Taiping there are over 40 firsts: the first hill resort for experimental plantations and cooler leisure time; the first swimming pool nestled in amongst the hills; the first clock tower to bring time into order.

The first jail and the first museum were developed 4 years apart, sandwiched in between the first turf club and the first hospital. Sited directly across the road from each other, one rehabilitates minds and the other bodies.

Taiping Prison is one of the earliest permanent penitentiary institutions in the Federated Malay States. It was built in

1879 to quell further unrest in the wake of the Larut Wars. This is a few years after the murder of J.W.W. Birch, but it was successful in suppressing further large-scale warfare between the Chinese clans. It remains till today in the same spot.

Perak Museum was built in 1883, and opened in 1886, the museum is the oldest museum in Malaysia. There are 5,074 cultural collections, 523 nature collections and 2,877 miscellaneous items. Its Nature Gallery houses 100-year-old animal species and some of its original dioramas are still on display.

V is for voice, the ones that weren't heard

