Dissonant Voices from the Chinese Diaspora:

Dramatists Robert Yeo in Singapore and Kee Thuan Chye in Malaysia

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Since 1955 and 1959 respectively Malaysia and Singapore have been governed by entrenched, highly successful, paternalistic parties with very little opposition. Both the Malay-dominated Barisan Nasional in Malaysia and the Chinese-dominated People's Action Party in Singapore have used the post-war chaos in their respective countries to rationalize government with an iron fist in a velvet glove; a relic from the 1950s racial and political emergencies, they maintain the right to arrest seditious suspects without trial or legal counsel under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Though neither government has used this act in the last decade it is still possible to do so. Playwrights like Robert Yeo in Singapore and Kee Thuan Chye in Malaysia are among the very few who speak out against the climate of self-censorship in their respective nations, and argue for the open discussion of so-called "sensitive" issues.

Chinese playwrights Robert Yeo in Singapore and Kee Thuan Chye in Malaysia belong to a rare breed of artist in their respective nations, nations where trenchant self-censorship under the paternalistic, watchful eye of government is the norm, and where speaking out on "sensitive" issues is, at best, frowned upon and at worst punishable under the Internal Security Act.[1] Before the dramatic careers and political theatre of Yeo and Kee are examined I want briefly to fill in the historical and political background of Singapore and Malaysia so that the ensuing discussion of the playwrights makes better sense.

Self-Censorship

What separates the democracies of Singapore and Malaysia from those in the West is the omnipresent view in both countries that there are things which ought not to be debated in the press and other public forums. Civil disagreement is seen to be one of the cornerstones of the Westminster and American democratic systems, but in ASEAN democracies the discussion of sensitive issues must be avoided. Robert Yeo and Kee Thuan Chye and other contemporary creative artists have thrived on sensitive issues, something which has consistently made them targets of suspicion.

In both Singapore and Malaysia a "sensitive" issue is, by definition, one the government proscribes for public debate. Usually these concerns are racial, economic and party-political, though by its very nature art, while desirable and prestigious and one of the marks of a civilized nation is, at the same time, highly suspect. In Singapore, for example, a massive

performing arts' complex is being built on reclaimed land on the Esplanade to rival the best in the world; but government funds for "performance art" have been non-existent after two artists caused a well-known scandal about fifteen years ago. There is also a general pervasive notion that it is not the province of art to be political, since politics should remain firmly in the hands of the practising experts who know better. It is not only politicians themselves who believe that. In speaking out on political issues, Yeo and Kee are not only working against the wishes of their government, they are also out of tune with a sizable-though-impossible-to-quantify number of enfranchised citizens who respect the notion of self-censorship and the segregation of matters political and artistic.

In *Self-Censorship: Singapore's Shame* James Gomez repeatedly laments the role citizens at large play in the national predilection for eschewing debate:

> The operation of this censorial mindset indirectly legitimizes, in the minds of the majority, that ordinary citizens do not have the right to alternative comments on politics, and should not articulate them, especially if these are vividly different for the dominant viewpoint. Politics is rationalized as being the exclusive domain of the ruling party. Any alternative expression is seen to be disadvantageous by the majority, for the majority. This explains why, in spite of economic development and the growth of a large middle-class base, a more liberal and democratic political process, as predicted by some theorists has not materialized in Singapore, and is not likely to do so in the near future.[2]

Kee Thuan Chye in his program notes for the first production of *1984 Here and Now* has this to say about self-censorship. "We are retreating deeper into our coconut shells, yearning more and more for protection from the reality around us. Soon, the world may be too big and frightening for us and we will not dare step out…. Consequently, self-censorship is one of the greatest diseases we have come to regard as health."[3]

On-stage political polemic that questions long-term prevailing attitudes of government has been seen as highly undesirable by members of the general public and by the People's Action Party (in power in Singapore continuously since 1959) and by the United Malays National Organization (in power continuously since 1955 as the major player in the Alliance Party[4] which segued into the Barisan Nasional in 1974). On the one hand Malaysia and Singapore are neither tyrannical nor oppressive in the manner of other authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century but on the other hand neither can they be described as liberal democracies.[5] Cherian George argues that the electorate which theoretically could get rid of the PAP and the Barisan will not do so in the foreseeable future because they "appear willing to overlook the sacrifice of civil liberties for the practical benefits of an orderly and comfortable society".[6]

Things were not always so comfortable. In the two decades following World War II it looked as if social disintegration and economic collapse were distinct possibilities—something the two current governments remind the electorate of even today, which they manipulate for all sorts of ends: this fuels the fires of the playwrights under examination.

Post-War Chaos

Things were tough in the post-war era. Widespread confidence in British potency and protection was a thing of the past, largely the result of the ease with which the Japanese charged down the Malaya Peninsula on—of all things—bicycles and captured supposedly

impregnable Singapore in a matter of days. The Malaysian Communist Party had gained enormous prestige and experience in guerilla warfare during the Japanese occupation, so after liberation was able to finance and man the twelve-year guerilla war, which came to be known as the Emergency. The largely Chinese MCP wove a network of influence in Chinese student associations and in multi-racial trade unions. Industrial strife was legion. The Singaporean wing of the MCP "controlled two thirds of … trade unions" and in a two-year period from 1945 to 1947 organized no fewer than 119 strikes.[7] There were race riots in dominantly Chinese Singapore (the most infamous in July 1964) and in dominantly Malay Malaysia (the most infamous in May 1969). Fear of Chinese hegemony and of Lee Kuan Yew's craft and ambition brought about the expulsion of Singapore from the young Federation in 1965. There has been an uncomfortable truce between Singapore and Malaysia since. In the region, Communist dominoes were falling in Korea, Viet Nam, and Laos, and there were solid threats from Indonesia, climaxing in the "Confrontation" which actually saw Indonesian troops landing on Malayan soil — Sukarno's infamous vow to "crush Malaysia" looked conspicuously possible. Even the mild-mannered Philippines expressed opposition to the formation of the Malaysian federation, having its eye on some of the territory which was mooted for inclusion. It was clear at the time that Malaysia and Singapore were threatened from without and within.

When the PAP and the Alliance/Barisan Nasional ultimately provided security, economic prosperity, better housing, higher standards of health, regional influence, and international recognition—the former with spectacular, unparalleled success and the latter with notable success—the stage was set for their long-term political survival. Any opposition was viewed (and is still viewed) as likely to bring back the bad old days. Race is still a sensitive issue; Singapore is governed by a multi-racial cabinet, only because the Chinese majority think it wise to do so. The Malaysians are less subtle in their racism, the New Economic Policy still favoring the Malay majority together with a host of other advantages given to the Bumiputras (literally the sons of the soil). Yeo's protests lie in his desire for a more open discussion of things political and his distaste for the ISA; Kee's protests on the other hand are those of a member of the Chinese minority smarting under the racism which is an entrenched part of the very fabric of Malaysian society.

1984 Here and Now is Kee's reworking of the Orwellian vision, but instead of placing it in the future, as can be seen from the title, he places it in a thinly disguised contemporary Malaysia. Big Brother is probably a stylized form of the Prime Minister; the Inner Party is thinly disguised as the UMNO; the Proles are the Chinese minority; the danger of the Kloots (communists) supposedly hovering around the far reaches of the nation just waiting to take over, is continually used by Big Brother and his oligarchy to excuse emergency measures and racist policies. The play is a raw, unashamed, shattering critique of Malaysian racism, fundamental fanatical religion, the misuse of the law, the manipulation of the populace, and the subtleties of brain-washing. It is openly critical of the ISA and the New Economic Policy which favors the Bumiputra, and it makes a heartfelt plea for equality under the law for all races. It is not a great play, but it is very powerful theatre.

After watching *1984 Here and Now*, an American said this to a cast member: "I envy you…. You're lucky to be living in a country in which the theatre can still offer a sense of vitality and danger."[8] This is a singular kind of envy—almost like saying "I could write

challenging and dynamic plays if I lived in a society with inbuilt racism under a law, a law upheld by a paternalistic government that talks softly but carries a big ISA stick." An odd kind of envy indeed. But it is true: we do have to thank discomfiting socio-political realities for Yeo's and Kee's work for the stage.

Yeo and Kee: Seminal Figures

Yeo and Kee certainly share much in common though their style, content and approach is quite dissimilar. They are fearless seminal figures in the development of a highly topical, post-colonial drama in their respective nations. They attack socio-political realities head-on, when head-on is definitely *infra dig*. Furthermore, they wrote local plays when there were few precedents for such. Drama societies had been largely British or Anglophile social circles which performed a staple of Whitehall farce at one end of the spectrum and Shakespeare at the other. These were the days when the canon was the canon, and nothing else was admitted. Even after independence, according to David Birch, "the expatriate control of drama in English was overwhelming, and reviewers covered expatriate drama in detail, but paid scant attention to Singaporean productions." The press was partly responsible for this, attesting to the momentum that the canon itself can carry:

> One of the writers of "The Theatre" column was Merry Andrew…. Writing about the role of the "props man" (*sic*) and the difficulty of finding props, Andrew said: "You only have to think of items like a London telephone directory, fire irons, a coal scuttle, biscuit barrel or cake stand, a wheelbarrow or a London newspaper (an airmail copy won't do) to understand what I mean." (*The Straits Times*, 19 September, 1965)[9]

While Kee Thuan Chye belongs firmly to the second generation of post-colonial playwrights in Malaysia, Yeo belongs to the first generation of writers in Singapore who had the audacity to write local plays about local issues, which even included the rhythms, syntax and cadences of "Singlish", the local English. It is ironic that the first play Yeo wrote and had performed in Singapore, *Are You There Singapore?*, is set in late 60s London, telling the story of a group of Singaporean students responding to their new status as citizens of an unexpectedly independent nation—all this against the background of a city which offers the Beatles, recreational drugs, flower power, demonstrations and free love. Yeo's was not the first Singaporean play to be performed in English but it was certainly the most influential.[10]

As Kirpal Singh mentions in his introduction to *Interlogue III*, the first performance of Yeo's *Are You There Singapore* "was epoch making—for the first time, there were full houses and Singaporeans were queuing up to see this original play energetically dramatize many of their own concerns." It "set the pace for all manners of Singaporean plays to find their way" from pen to stage.[11] Violet Oon in her review of the opening night of the play in *The New Nation* also commented on the singularity of a full house for a local play: "It is about the best attended [local] play I have seen and it all went off with a shot…."

In the "Introduction" to Yeo's soon-to-be-launched *The Singapore Trilogy*, which includes *Are You There Singapore?* (1974), *One Year Back Home* (1980) and *Changi* (1997), K. K. Skeet and Chitra Sankaran appraise Yeo's achievements against Wole Soyinka's four phase model for the development of a post-colonial literary discourse. Phase one obtains its momentum from a twin desire: to express resentment against the imperial power and to find

a local voice through which to do so. Phase two sees a celebratory, somewhat overblown optimism in and around the time of independence; here writers revel in pro-national sentiment. Phase three is one where fallen dreams of a nationalist paradise are allowed a voice, and this is where both Yeo and Kee fit in to Soyinka's model. It is here that "hopes and expectations associated with independence prove to be chimerical and this is accompanied by much soul-searching and efforts to negotiate the complexities of the situation."[12] In effect this is directly describing concerns explored in *The Singapore Trilogy* and *1984 Here and Now*. The final phase sees a more balanced literary product which can explore and present all sorts of personal visions which are not necessarily a reflection of prevailing social consciousness or shaped by the current political situation. The later drama of both writers fits this final phase.

Just as the first part of *The Singapore Trilogy* is described as a landmark in people's thinking about local theatre, Kit Leee recalls the staging of *1984 Here and Now* as one of those unique moments in literary history when the perceived world does not quite seem the same the day after the performance:

> Kuala Lumpur has certainly seen better plays, far better productions. But this particular event was a very different matter.
>
> It was more than a play.
>
> It represented a radical departure from the accepted, the constrictive, norms of decorum, or protocol, or respectability. Kee's offering marked a new kind of candour and boldness for the Malaysian stage….[13]

It certainly is "more than a play." It marks the first time since independence that someone is allowed to openly catalogue everything he thinks iniquitous in Malaysian politics and society.

There are many other areas where Yeo and Kee meet. Both use the unique cadences of local speech patterns for both comedy and irony, thus claiming a new linguistic niche in the international literary scene in English. Both are "political" writers—though I think it unwise to think of each play merely as a thinly disguised political treatise. These playwrights are neither politicians nor even political scientists in disguise. In 1980 Yeo himself confesses in *The Straits Times* he is "too naïve even to think about entering politics" and though he is "passionately interested" in things political he won't enter pure politics through the stage door.[14] And, finally, both Yeo and Kee left their respective nations for a while to study in the UK, something which gave them the kind of perspective which can only come from temporary divorce from and a later imperfect reunion with their respective nations.

The Scope of *The Singapore Trilogy*

The *Trilogy* covers about eight years in the lives of the characters in a largely naturalistic way —though as I have argued elsewhere Yeo's brand of simple realism is yet to be fully understood by critics or some directors who want to turn it into a post-modern exhibition.[15] At first Yeo's plots seem so deceptively simple that directors find them uninspiring propositions for staging,[16] but when the interplay of national concerns, personal development, and personal rivalry are taken into account the plays take on level upon level of ramification.

Eight years of three characters' lives form the heart of the three plays—initially in *Are You There Singapore?* they are searching for post-adolescent identity and its concomitant sense of place in the world. Then in the two later plays, *One Year Back Home* and *Changi*,

when they think they have found both they have to work out what to do with them. Quiet, cautious, conservative, and sincerely pragmatic Ang Siew Chye moves from being a post-graduate student in the first part to successful PAP candidate in the second, to successful member of parliament in the third. His sister, Hua, succumbing to the spirit of free love in 60s London, falls pregnant, but decides not to abort. She searches for a husband for the next seven years with her illegitimate daughter in tow. Hua cannot return the love she receives from their friend and left-wing idealist, Reggie Fernandez, whose unrequited love for her becomes one of the dynamics in his complicated life. The sensibilities of all three characters are assaulted by what is happening in late-60s London: Beatles' songs, recreational drugs, experimental sex, demonstrations about Viet Nam, the absence of Singaporean restraint. Yet things Singaporean are never far from their minds—these are heady days at home: the three-year-old young republic is marked by racial clashes and industrial unrest; the British military are withdrawing threatening economic doom; Indonesia is a thorn in the side; Malaysia is tense; the opposition parties in Singapore, the Barisan Sosialis and the Workers' Party, are unable to challenge the all powerful PAP; and there are the economic uncertainties like the property boom and chit fund scandals where many pensioners lost every penny of their savings through get-rich-quick schemes which backfired, and which the government did not or could not control.

In *One Year Back Home* Chye and Reggie fight in the bi-election for a vacant seat in Parliament. Chye, of course, is the Lee Kuan Yew PAP candidate, and almost 100% sure of being returned; Reggie represents David Marshall's Workers' Party; Hua is caught in the middle and tries to be loyal to both men. The third volume *Changi* begins where the second ends, that is with the detention of Reggie under the ISA for making seditious and inflammatory comments during the election, which he loses as all expected except him. Towards the close of *Changi* he ultimately accepts PAP conditions for release, that is a TV confession and an avowal to stay out of politics. *Changi* ends ambiguously, as do all Yeo's plays, with both Chye and Reggie not knowing whether to threaten each other with unpublished, damaging information in their possession, or whether to love each other as long-term friends. We don't know which will dominate: rivalry, friendship or regard for the state.

1984 Here and Now

While the implications of the *Trilogy* are national, the narrative is essentially domestic. The complex forces of developing nationalism, its politics, economics, race, disciplines are all gathered together by the playwright and manifest at the level of individual experience. Kee's *1984 Here and Now* is the reverse: individual experience forms the essence of the plot, but instead of moving inwards it moves outwards—so that all the world's a stage, or at least the Malaysian version of it. "In writing the play, I had to walk a narrow tightrope between depicting a society as it is and what is could or would be like in a totalitarian State. I am writing about things that move me—racism, unequal opportunity, backwardness, our closing ourselves up, about curbs to freedom of speech and expression. Of course, I haven't included everything—the play's a shorthand of the situation."[17]

In the play Inner Party membership is reserved for the Bumiputra and the opposition Proles are largely the Chinese. The Kloot are communist infiltrators, or other such forces the

very idea of which makes manipulation of the people a piece of cake. If we produced the play today there would be little doubt about the countenance we would recognize as Big Brother. *1984 Here and Now* is a fast-moving theatrical collage of nineteen scenes, and these can often be subdivided into two or three sub-scenes.

Wiran, a sincere, decent, confused, cynical Malay journalist is the focalizer for the audience. The audience member walks at the side of this everyman as he moves from one scene to the other as observer, participant, and finally as orator. In the first ten minutes of the play alone he takes us to the following: 1) protests by religious fundamentalists about disco music on TV, and Western soap operas; 2) anti-Kloot propaganda; 3) speeches by Big Brother; 4) a discussion between his colleague and friend Jumon and his Chief Sub about newspaper censorship; 5) the arrest of the Chief Editor and Cartoonist; 6) morally outraged Party Members who are seen dragging a couple from under a hedge *in medias res*; 7) a Prole mother who chastises her son for playing with Inner Party member children; 8) the police stopping a tiger dance since the troop do not have official cultural approval. The socio-political scope of the play is enormous.

Here is one of the above scenes: notice the economy of presentation where Kee is determined to do more than one thing at once. As Wiran walks towards the angry Prole mother he passes through a maze of surrealistic newspaper headlines which enumerate some of the extreme measures the Inner Party takes:

> [… *WIRAN walks on. He comes across newspaper posters screaming headlines*: "Newsmen detained for threat to peace", "Students abroad recalled for violating Party policies", "Party members nabbed for desecrating Prole place of worship", "Infighting among top leaders of Prole party". *A little distance on, Wiran sees a prole mother dragging her young son*.]

Mother:	You doan play widem, hnarh. I doan like. You play wit our kind.
Son:	I wan, I wan.
Mother:	You hear wat I say or I beat you.
Son:	Wy I carn play widem?
Mother:	Dey all Party member.
Son:	But dey got nice toy.
Mother:	I don't care. Dey all Party member. You come back. (12–13)

In this short extract it is easy to see how powerfully this play reveals things about misplaced loyalty to race, about miseducation, about envy, about reverse racism, about parenting, about inequality based on race—and about violence: "You hear wat I say or I beat you." This scene has a compelling mirror scene later in the play. Wiran's girlfriend Yone in a flashback reverts to her teenage experience—her Prole father is incensed to find out that his daughter associates with inner party members and chases her with a meat cleaver to seek retribution for her indiscretion. Inter-racial conflict, with its bedfellow of miseducation, inevitably leads to intra-racial conflict. Thus Kee makes the strong point that no one is served by a system which encourages inequality, even the group which seemingly benefits from it.

Such scenes continue throughout the play with a breathless pace, weaving in and out the development of Wiran's personal story; his rocky love affair with prole Yone; his arrest and interrogation for participation in the Movement for a New Brotherhood; and finally his probably temporary escape at the play's conclusion. There are two unusual additions to this narrative. When the intermission begins each audience member is given a leaflet by members

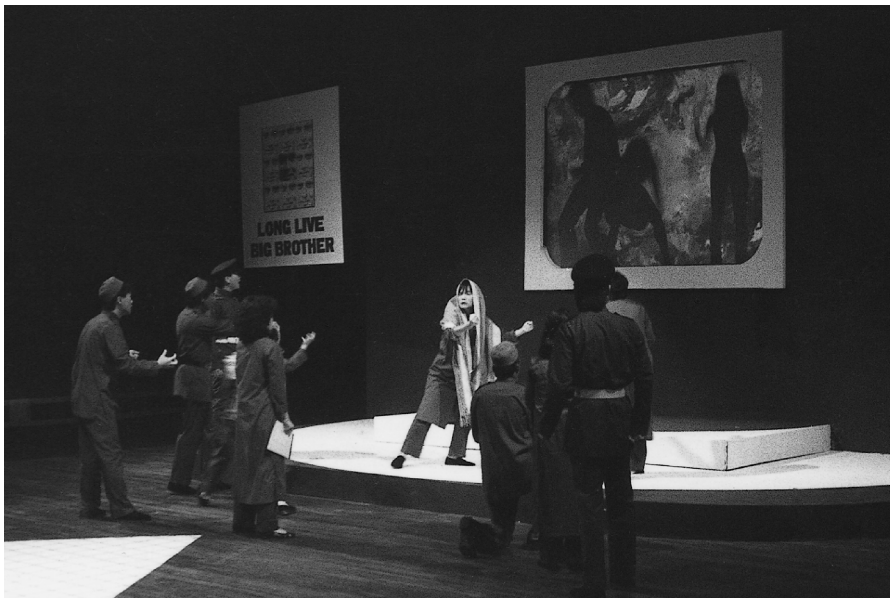

Plate 1
1984 Here and Now premiered in 1985 in Kuala Lumpur. This picture and Plate 2 below were taken at the first performance. In Plate 1 Party Members scorn Western entertainment that is being screened on television. The same television features Big Brother's propaganda broadcasts. (Scene 1)

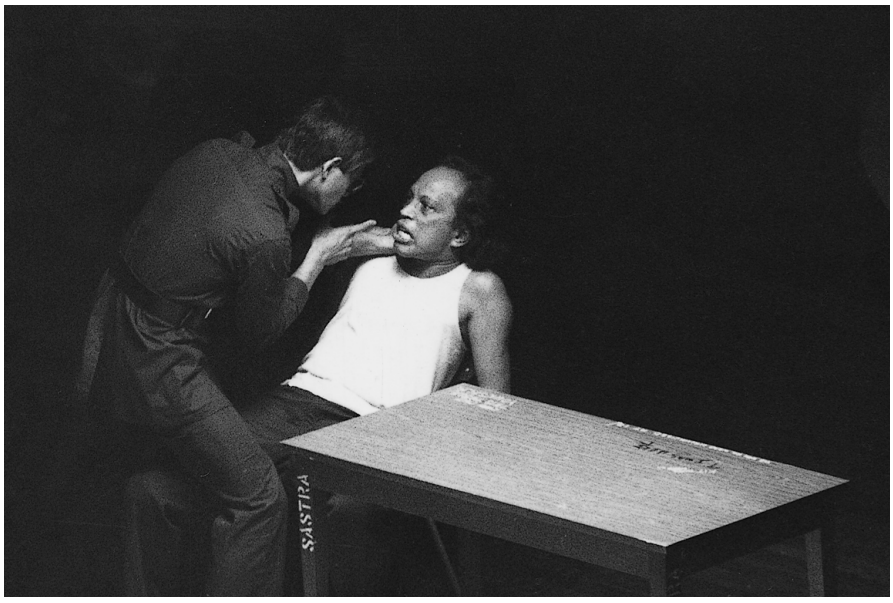

Plate 2
1984 Here and Now. "You are a threat to the nation's security!" the Interrogator (Kee Thuan Chye) accuses Wiran (Salleh Ben Joned) (Scene 17). The controversial nature of the play meant that seasoned actors were hard to commit to the project; the playwright himself took part in the performance.

Plate 3
One Year Back Home. The premier season was presented by TheatreWorks in Singapore in 1990. Plates 3 and 4 come from that production. Here in a lighter moment, Reggie (Colin Rosario) and Hua (Tan Kheng Hua) enjoy each other's company.

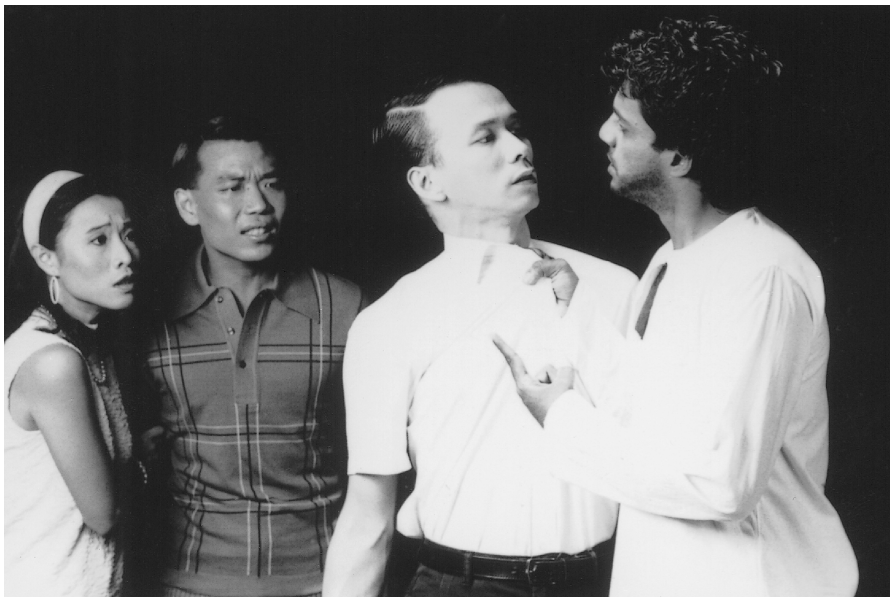

Plate 4
One Year Back Home. Former friends from student days in London, Chye (Ken Low) and Reggie are now political enemies. Reggie tries to convince Chye that he should deliberately lose the election as PAP candidate to ensure the presence of a meaningful opposition in a parliament which did not have one. Watching on are a worried Hua and her boyfriend, Gerald Tan (Loong Sen Onn).

of the cast who breech the imaginary barrier between performer and observer. The paper is worth quoting in full as an example of Kee's rhetoric against self-censorship, and his attempt to stop play-watching remaining as just that:

> There is no resolution to this play. You, the audience, will have to provide it. If there is any hope, it lies with you. You can make things happen. You can make the end of this play the beginning. So, if you are moved to participate, please do not hesitate, do not hold yourself back. If you are moved to contribute to an event stand up—express yourself, leave your seat, shout if you will, the platform is yours. This will no longer be theatre, it will become real. Your act of participation will matter. It may only be a symbolic gesture of commitment, but it is a first step. In you lives the seed of positive change. (51)

This post-modern breaking of the imaginary wall between the stage drama and real life is repeated at the end of the play. Wiran is being pursued since he has just escaped from incarceration. Instead of running away and saving himself he risks life and limb by stopping to talk to the audience members who all of a sudden are part of the real action of the chase. That they are there implicates them in his probable capture. The frenzied journalist calls them to arms:

> Are you all going to sit there and do nothing? The hope of this nation lies with you! Are you going to sit there and let it go to the dogs…. You have the power to bring about changes. Unite! Stand up and say yes! Yes, the future lies with you. Yes, you will rise above fear and complacency! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! (88).
>
> *[The police come after WIRAN. It is up to the audience to react as they wish—whether to betray him or protect him. Blackout. The play has ended.]*

Of course, the average Western audience member would be highly suspicious of this unsubtle rhetoric and its open declamatory didactic style, but it is fine to have such aesthetic and thematic sensibilities when you live in a liberal democracy which fosters equality under the law. Kee, whose first plays were performed in England, is well aware of this possible reaction from visiting audience members or Western readers. Unashamedly he admits in his short program notes: "I know this is propaganda—mine as opposed to others. My only excuse is that it comes from the bones. They ache for release from the uneasiness of fear, from the discomfort of dislocation" (ii). It is, after all, more than a play.

Sensitive Issues and the Performance Licence

One more thing is worth comparing before a specific theme is explored in both works—the performance licence. Without it no play could be staged in either country. Yeo had great trouble getting a licence for *One Year Back Home*, yet for some miraculous reason *1984 Here and Now* was awarded one without rancour. Examining the question of licensing tells us much about contemporary Singapore and Malaysia: the fact that both critical plays were allowed performance rights puts pay to the notion that we are dealing with heavily repressive regimes; on the other hand the fact that the playwright has to beg for performance rights points to the subtle ways in which the governments aggrandize themselves and through this superior exercise of power hope to quell rebellious subjects into "voluntary" submission.

After several difficult months of rehearsal, in 1980 Chin San Sooi's *Refugee:Images*, a

play about Vietnamese boat people in Malaysia, is refused a permit one week before opening. The play is too "sensitive"; it might cause "security problems"; it is a "diplomatic embarrassment".[18] Chin's play was rejected despite his efforts to court the government's favor, efforts which some liberal observers found distasteful. "Chin's biggest oversight", writes Kee Thuan Chye, "is his statement that … Mahathir Mohamad's apparent threat … to shoot incoming refugees on sight was an act of love."[19] This sycophancy still didn't save the play. The same thing might just as easily have happened to *One Year Back Home* and *1894 Here and Now*.

The author's 1990 "Preface" for the first published edition of *One Year Back Home*[20] reveals that while an apolitical foreign play would get a permit in about two weeks in Singapore, his play took eighteen months:

> A normal application for an innocuous western play, the standard fare of those days, took about two weeks. That my play was not innocent was obvious. It dared to tackle, overtly, politics as a subject and referred to real people and issues in Singapore. The play was regarded as so sensitive that it had to go through the Deputy Director, the Parliamentary Secretary, and the Acting Minister of Culture. 1980 was, it is important to remember, an election year.[21]

One Year Back Home is about an election itself, and offers a direct debate about things that had been in people's minds for a decade before the 1980 election. It is not, I suspect, that the play is overtly supportive of Reggie Fernandez as an opposition figure which disturbed the department responsible for awarding the play licence (a hundred Reggies fighting for seats in the election would not change the hold the PAP had on power—they were certain to be returned in any case) but that the play takes it upon itself to discuss politics *per se*. Self-censorship and Yeo are not easy bedfellows, and it is this more that anything else which disturbed those in power. A more detailed version of the long negotiation is included in the introductory section to the new *Trilogy*, along with several letters on the matter from Yeo to the authorities and *vice versa*.

Of course the Singapore licensing authority's argument was essentially that the play shows a good PAP government in a bad light; and that Fernandez, the zany "communist", is shown in a good light. In defense, Yeo points out that the play is equivocal about Reggie's zeal (an equivocation I will discuss below as being characteristic of Yeo's general approach to matters controversial); he agrees to make minor textual adjustments such as not mentioning Lee Kuan Yew by name, but he refuses to retreat from what he sees as his fundamental right to have fictional characters criticize the government. This is from one of his letters: "Of course, there is in the play implied criticism of the Government ["implied" is actually a diplomatic understatement], in the sense that it makes an implicit plea for more public discussion of sensitive issues. But this, you will agree, is not necessarily a bad thing." After eighteen months, a surprisingly curt letter of defeat finally arrived on Yeo's desk from the Ministry of Culture. The signatory's department is particularly worth noting:

> Please refer to your letter dated 7.4.80.
> We have no objection to the revised script of "One Year Back Home".
>
> Yours faithfully,
>
> Signature
> CONTROLLER
> UNDESIRABLE PUBLICATIONS[22]

This could come right out of *1984 Here and Now*—yet another example of life imitating art.

In their own way the writer, cast and crew of *1984 Here and Now* showed a different but related kind of faith and courage in trying to get their play from script to performance. The1984 production had to be abandoned mid-stream—there were difficulties with casting and finding sufficient talented actors who were willing to join an obviously critical project. Then the director, the normally irrepressible Krishen Jit—a living post-colonial theatre legend in Malaysia—had to withdraw because of stress and heart trouble. A second attempt had to be abandoned at the end of the year, this time Kee Thuan Chye suffering from a stress-related condition. The 1985 production looked uncertain as well, since it had to go ahead with a manic-depressive Salleh Ben Jonad playing Wiran, the play's version of Orwell's Winston. (An interesting aside: the final scene of *1984* reveals Winston pickling himself in alcohol and crying tears of Victory Gin. In a variation on this theme, the critic Kit Leee meets the gin-soaked Salleh Ben Jonad in the pub after the play had closed in Kuala Lumpur. "He showed me the bottle", recalls Leee, "pointing emphatically at the label. 'It's okay. You see, it's not Victory.' "[23])

Miraculously, the unexcised script received the go ahead. How did it happen? There are several speculative reasons in circulation: "One of the young actresses who went to the police said that the officer she met … told her the play was too complicated and asked her to give him verbal summary, which she quickly did. He then approved the script."[24] A "well known journalist" offers a different account wherein no one in the Special Branch actually bothered to read it.[25] A third option is that the police were not too worried about the damage one play could do. Maybe there was no election in Malaysia at that time? It could also have been given to maintain the illusion that Malaysia is, in fact, a fair liberal democracy.

Ideal or Pragmatic?

Now I want to spend the second half of this paper looking at one theme that weaves in and out of the *Trilogy* and *1984 Here and Now*. It is possible to argue that the plays are about the ideal versus the pragmatic, and that politics as a sphere is the crucible in which those issues are put under pressure, boiled down and clarified.

The idealist in the work of Yeo and Kee is certainly vulnerable in the so-called real world ruled by a pragmatism which holds that something true today might be false or misleading tomorrow—and *vice versa*. According to the PAP and the Barisan Nasional the only thing that does not change is the wisdom of the party. The idealist is vulnerable because he seeks in himself and others the permanent physical embodiment of abstraction. Here Jumon, a friend and initial supporter of Wiran, is talking to his Chief Sub Editor about the Party's intention to change the constitution to protect a Government minister who made seditious statements (this is based on an actual occurrence which was almost similar).

Jumon: I'm sure if a Prole had made a similar statement, he would have been arrested.
Chief Sub: I don't want to argue with you, Jumon. That's the reality of the situation and you should be aware of it.
Jumon: But we are a newspaper. Our job is to tell it like it is. Call a spade a spade.
Chief Sub: You are too much of an idealist. (5)

It is interesting that the many debates we witness between Reggie and Chye in the *Trilogy* come down to this—one person's version of reality opposed to another's version of the ideal. Here Chye comes to Changi Prison in the final part of the trilogy to talk Fernandez into recanting and giving up, confessing on TV and walking out of the prison. It is a deeply disturbing scene on a personal level because Fernandez and Chye both realize the latter tries to sound like a friend but also can't avoid adopting the discourse of the interrogator. This is one of the many ways in which Yeo presents the individual acting for the state and the state acting through the individual in an highly complex and indivisible way. The meeting place of the public and the private is something that Yeo finds fascinating in all his poetry, prose and drama. In any case it is easy to see Reggie's political ideals pitted against Chye's political reality in this extract from *Changi*:

Chye: The government is prepared to release you early on condition, as you know, that you agree to a TV interview and abstain from politics.
Fernandez: Abstain from politics? Is your party so afraid of me that it uses extra-political means to silence me?
Chye: Your anti-capitalist tirades against what you call conspicuous consumption do not worry us, Reg. It's out of date. Your Marxism is another thing altogether.
Fernandez: At least I have a coherent philosophy. What have you got except your so-called pragmatism which is nothing more than opportunism masquerading as *rojak* socialism?
Chye: What you call opportunism we call flexibility…. (17–18)

Here Chye virtually repeats the sentiment of Jumon's Chief Sub, "You are too much of an idealist." In listing the government demands for release, Yeo is making an exact copy of demands made on many political internees under the ISA from the early sixties to the early nineties. The longest serving detainee was former opposition member Chia Type Po (see n. 5 below), who was in detention from 1966, then under house arrest of one kind or another from 1988 for another decade before being awarded full citizen rights. At any time he could have been released from detention simply by publicly and unconditionally "renouncing communism and the use of force". For decades he refused to do so since he argued that he was not and never had been a communist nor had he ever advocated the use of force under any circumstances:

> In his final National Day Rally speech, in August 1990, Lee [Kuan Yew] called Chia an "ageing diehard". "I admire him, I respect him," the prime minister said. These remarks qualified Chia as a bona fide newsmaker again, so a colleague and I were assigned to pay him a visit. "What's the use of telling a person incarcerated in your cage, 'Oh you ageing diehard, I admire you,' and so on. It won't help ameliorate the fact that he is being caged by you, he is imprisoned by you," he said.[26]

Here in real life is the battle between the pragmatics of comfort and sacrifice for the ideal. It is this common struggle that Yeo uses to base most of the detention/interrogation scenes in *Changi*.

Chye and Reggie had the same kind of word-play debate eight years before in *Are You There Singapore?* when they were students, though the subject matter was ostensibly different. To Chye, the protest walkout in the late 60s of the only opposition party in Parliament, the Barisan Sosialis, who wished to take their struggle back onto the streets, was political suicide; but to Reggie it was a heroic assertion of an altruistic point in the face of PAP hegemony. In a way it is arguable that both are right and both are wrong in their own

respective ways. Yeo steps back as far as he can from the conflict, putting the onus on his audience to come to a conclusion if it is able to do so. Kee, on the other hand, tries to give his audience no choice at all.

To Chye, Lee Kuan Yew's consolidation of power was common sense in the face of possible disintegration from within and without. Reggie, who admits to the impressive work of the PAP, berates what he sees as an artificial nationalist sentiment—what he calls "all this breast beating" or another "Lee Kuan Yew stunt" (19). The debate continues all the way through *One Year Back Home*, but this time Chye senses that he needs to borrow from Reggie's discourse so he can fight him on his own turf. Notice the soon-to-be politicians' manipulation of ideal-reality discourse:

> Chye: Joe [the previous incumbent for the seat that Chye and Reggie are contesting] was a man who tempered realism with idealism. He knew that he had done a reasonable good job as MP in his term. That's realism. He also knew that he hadn't done enough. That's idealism.
> Fernandez: You mean holding on to power is idealistic?
> Chye: Yes, holding on to power in the belief that you can do further good, yes, that's idealistic.
> Fernandez: Bullshit! All a politician wants to do is to get reelected. And a PAP politician is no different despite your attempt to whitewash them. (58)

That final line from the extract is a none too subtle dig at Lee Kuan Yew's advice for PAP politicians from the 50s on to wear only white clothing: in was a clean-government policy both literally and figuratively. In preaching the party line, Chye sounds, from time to time, as convincing and as "rational" as does Big Brother and Shadrin, his First Minister for Truth and Information in *1984 Here and Now*!

The intriguing and confusing thing is that from any perspective both Yeo's Reggie and Chye are correct in their own way and wrong in their own way. Kee takes overt bold angry sides in his play—there is no room for equivocation is his polemic, but I think Yeo is more distant from his work, setting up the tension between the ideal and the pragmatic then letting it do its own work. That is not to say he doesn't plainly object to many things relating to the ISA, including incarceration without trial, and gross and subtle methods of interrogation. But finally, Yeo is more interested in the nature of debate itself, and being allowed to represent this national debate on stage without censorship. On one hand Reggie is sincere and noble, particularly under pressure in *Changi*. In *One Year Back Home* he seems totally without a reality principle.

In the following scene he asks Chye quite seriously (as only an extreme idealist might) to advise voters to give their support to Reggie over himself so that the expressed wish of the PAP for a responsible opposition could be realized. There are also elements of the absurd in this interchange, something that lends a certain black comedy to the dialogue:

> Chye: What are you suggesting?
> Fernandez: If your party is really serious about encouraging a responsible Opposition, about raising the level of public debate, you can be magnanimous and encourage the electorate in the forthcoming election to vote for me.
> Chye: Are you serious? Are you asking me to be magnanimous in politics?
> Fernandez: Yes, I am. All you stand to lose is an election—but the people of Singapore will forever be grateful to you for reviving the prostrate body of parliamentary democracy. And you would have introduced magnanimity in politics: an element sadly lacking in the percentage politics of our country.

> Chye: You must be joking, Reg. I thought you were merely idealistic, now I think you are positively naïve. (56–57)

It is telling that Chye uses the diminutive "merely" to qualify "idealistic", and the bolder and normally affirmative "positively" to qualify "naïve". This kind of reversal of linguistic expectation marks the politician's plastic rhetoric and manipulative discourse, so while Chye does not come out of this scene smelling of linguistic or political roses, neither does Reggie.

Reggie can be either comically idealistic as in the extract above, or he is verbose to the extreme, continually sprouting clever aphorisms from such greats as Pericles, Marx and Shakespeare, most of which have a resonant quality but which in context don't make any sense at all. What voter is going to be interested in or understand the subtle dialectics of this line from Marx: "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (48). He also argues that since Lee Kuan Yew first got into power through partnership with the communists in 1959 then he too can get away with doing so in the late 70s.

The cast and director of the original production of *One Year Back Home* were puzzled by the number of laughs Fernandez was awarded "at the oddest moments much to … [their] consternation …" as revealed in the review "Local idiom brings play to life" (*New Nation*, 21 November, 1980). The cast and director may have taken Reggie's idealism at face value, in the same way as the licensing authority, both assuming that the audience would do so too. In her review Margaret Chan suggests two reasons for this response: the audience could easily identify with the characters, so their laughter is self-directed. On the other hand Reggie's naivety is so absurd in his over-zealous verbosity and regressive late-adolescent idealism that all one can do is laugh. Yeo's last word on Fernandez might well be this: "All along I saw no reason why this play shouldn't go on stage. After all what could any opposition do with a play like this?"[27] Or with a man like Reggie, who is hardly a positive role model for would-be opposition candidates. Follow him and your political career is doomed before it starts.

If Yeo takes great pains to reveal Reggie's limitations, he does not ultimately favor Chye. Chye is certainly sincere at times, but there is something of the opportunist in him which, if it does not approach the cowardly, approaches a passive acceptance of the status quo, and the absence of any desire for change. In *Are You There Singapore?* when the post-adolescent idealist's conscience is allowed some play, Chye worries about his seeming inability to get aggressively involved in issues like his friends and those around him—or even to feel deeply about them. There is a sincerity in Chye but he is also somehow emotionally shallow. This gives him sufficient composure to reason things out and to plan his moves, and in addition to this he is naturally conservative and cautious. As such he is the ideal candidate for a PAP vacancy—he will never rock the boat. It is he who suggests that Hua hide her illegitimate daughter in the hope that a man will fall in love with her and propose marriage before he finds out. And there is always the suggestion in the play that he uses Hua (and Reggie's unrequited love for her) to encourage him to confess, something which will give him merit in the upper echelons of the party, and counteract the known embarrassing detail that they were once friends in London. We also don't know if Chye consciously or subconsciously allowed himself to be followed by the police to Reggie's apartment just prior to his arrest at the conclusion of *One Year Back Home*.

The Polarized Position

There are too many cloudy issues and contradictory personality traits in both main characters to allow for a bare taking of sides—the play does not take a stand on who is right and who is wrong and as such is interrogative and equivocal in nature. So if who is ultimately right and who is ultimately wrong is not the real issue in the play, then what is? What is crucial to Yeo's psycho-socio-political commentary is his examination of a distinctly Singaporean predilection for the reduction of ideas and ideals to simple polarized positions. Yeo shows this at the personal level as it is happening in the lives of a few individuals. Here is Gerald Tan, Hua's possible future husband in *One Year Back Home*, on his desire to leave Singapore at one stage early in the action:

> Gerald: … I don't understand why I should be loyal to the State or the ministry or the idea of filial piety. I can be loyal to people, but not to ideas to institutions…. [My CO] wants me to stay because the army needs engineers. It's good for the country, he says. It always comes down to some abstract idea, an obligation to something impersonal. (40)

Perhaps the important things in life are, perforce, always reduced to the abstract, but Gerald feels there is something specially worrying about the Singapore version. This is also Reggie's complaint about Chye. In *Changi* he quips "Trust you to elevate personal relationships into matters of state" (55). In *One Year Back Home* when Chye enters he is greeted by Reggie's welcome: "Well, look who's here. One of the -isms walking in person. And all in white too" (50). Of course the very thing he berates Chye about in being a perambulating -ism could equally be leveled at him.

Ironically, in both Kee and Yeo the Prole opposition in Malaysia and the opposition forces in Singapore are ineffective simply because they can't reduce their ideologies to bite-size pieces which make for effective propaganda. Reggie is just too diverse, too honest, too verbose—by comparison the PAP (whose spokesman is Chye) and the Inner Party in Kee's play are experts in the use of easily digestible pieces of propaganda, and at the expression of simple polarized ideas, which are neatly used to fit their aims and entrenched positioning. In *One Year Back Home* Reggie cooperates unwillingly in the election strategies of the quiet and shadowy figure of Soh Teck Soh. Trying to balance his ideals with those of this real Chinese communist agitator is one of the reasons for his downfall—it is all too complicated.

In one of Kee's most effective scenes, Wiran watches Prole *mah jong* players use the lack of unity in the Prole opposition party and its inability to convey a simple unquestionable unified picture to support their own uncommitted passivity:

> Player 2: And now, quarreling some more, der leaders. Wan more power, wan top post. Firs, they should be more strong to bring our problem to Big Broder. Instead, every time big Prole party meeting, big quarrel. Trow chair some more….
> Player4: Ya, man, Wy boder? We can still do a bit of business, can have mistress, can jolly. Aiya, life is short la, why worry so much. (16)

These are the other pragmatists who will never be as vulnerable as an idealist who tries to wrestle with the odds of complex expression as an opposition candidate.

Interrogation and the Ideal

I want to go back to Jumon and his idealism which introduced this section above, and get back to the notion of the idealist as vulnerable, far more vulnerable than plastic realists who sense the tenor of the times, sit back and go with the flow. The Chief Sub feels Jumon is too idealistic for a newspaper which exercises stringent self-censorship and allows (or even encourages) direct interference from powers above Managing Director level. Jumon laments that "All it takes is for Big Brother or his deputy to fart and he'll get 20 paragraphs on the front page…." But creative inter-racial thinking by the opposition has a couple of inches relegated to page 10 so that it is not likely to be read (6–7). Jumon joins Wiran in the struggle, but his ideals collapse like a house of cards in the face of detention and interrogation. "Please … I'll give you a list of other traitors. I'll do anything. I'll eat shit, I go out and kill the Proles…." (72). Ideals seem so permanent and so important because they form the imperatives that underpin all that is civilized and optimistic in our world, but the twentieth century perhaps more than any other demonstrates they can fly out of the window in an instant.

Furthermore the interrogators in both *Changi* and *1984 Here and Now* know that people with ideals—personal and national—can be manipulated through those very ideals. In the interrogations of Wiran and Reggie, as you would expect, there are good-guy-bad-guy techniques which attempt to challenge, bully, confuse and disorientate the exhausted prisoner. In *1984 Here and Now* the power exercised by the interrogators is quasi-sexual in nature, something highlighted by the fact that the final interrogator is a woman playing the male role of Shadrin, the Minister for Truth and Information. (There is a tasty irony in the ministerial title which implies that information can be something very different from truth.) As Shadrin administers electric shocks which are grotesque parodies of orgasm he/she knows that the final shock will be an assault on Wiran's ideal view of his love for Yone. Shadrin shows Wiran a videotape of his girlfriend allegedly enjoying sex with another man. This is prodding a wound with a sharp stick since earlier in the play he forced her to enumerate her past sexual experiences. That request is a self-imposed attack on his own conservative idealistic reduction of the feminine. Even a heroic idealist like Wiran, who is willing to sacrifice himself to bring about racial equality and political fairness in Malaysia, can have ideals—in this case the desirability for female virginity and purity—which encourage him take on the role of oppressor. This is yet another view of the ethical vulnerability of the idealist.

In the *Changi* interrogation, which opens the play, there are no sexual overtones in the text, but it is worth noting that for some reason the director of the only production of the play gave it plenty. The three interrogators are given long phallic poles which they disport in a crypto-dance around Reggie and use to assert their potency and potential for violence. These interrogators might exercise all the potency they like: they leave Reggie's ideals untouched. His ideals are his strength but they are also his weakness. It is his ideal unrequited love for Hua, who is probably used as an *agent provocateur* on Chye's behalf, and his sense of filial duty which lead to his confession. What does the idealist do when one ideal clashes with another? How do you sort out a hierarchy of ideals? This is also what I mean by the vulnerability of the idealist.

Democratic or Totalitarian?

What makes it difficult to be a critic of the Malaysian and Singaporean governments is the clear fact that they are not out and out tyrannical. That would make the idealist's position rather easy, much like anti-fascist movements in the 30s and 40s—compared to the local critic they had it easy. What makes things complicated in this part of the world is the governmental mixture of sounding and being democratic and not sounding and not being democratic at the same time. Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Mahatir unashamedly admit to this when they suggest (frequently) that Western democracy does not quite fit the Asian situation—that "Asian Values" should be used to replace them. The fact that *1984 Here and Now* was heard and Kee Thuan Chye never detained, and the fact that Yeo's career as a lecturer in a state tertiary education was not ultimately challenged, keeps things in perspective. But it is the possibility of totalitarianism which makes for an odd fear in the air and lends an underlying sinister tone to all the plays mentioned above, plays which are every bit as relevant now as they were in the days when artists had to turn mendicant to get the script on stage and at least temporarily bow before the master who has the power to determine what art is good for you and what art is not.

Refusing licences may be a thing of the past in Singapore and Malaysia, but there is more than one way to skin a cat. The musical *Rent* which ran to packed houses in Singapore on January and February 2001 had National Arts Council funding removed a few days before it opened because it "contains certain themes acknowledging alternative lifestyles as an accepted way of life". One of the major sponsors also coincidentally withdrew support at the same time. Licensing has simply put on a different mask. The editorial of *I-S Magazine* has this to say: "If there is no money for *Rent*, how about a musical called *HDB*, which features a cast of young, well-educated Singaporeans, blissfully married, all raising their 2.1 children while singing songs that extol the virtues of their clean air, political stability and personal trainers? Oh, did we say that the 2.1 children will be Siamese twins? It can't miss."[28]

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Gerry Meister and Jeffrey Quinn for their sound advice and practical assistance.

Notes

1. Malaysia and Singapore inherited their respective Internal Security Acts from the British. The original was included as a cornerstone of the declared state of emergency in the face of the armed Communist insurgency—commonly known as the Emergency—which began in 1947 and lasted for twelve years. The insurgency would probably have been successful had it not been for the multinational Commonwealth "police" force brought in to fight the guerilla war. Both the Malaysian and Singaporean governments insist that the Internal Security Act is still necessary, and without it the industrial, racial and political chaos of the 40s and 50s might well return. Again in both nations, the ISA allows for arrest and imprisonment without trial or legal counsel for an indefinite period of time. In Malaysia the ISA is backed up by the additional Sedition Act, which makes illegal the discussion of sensitive issues. In *Crossroads* Jim Baker notes that between 1960 and 1981 "over three thousand people were detained without trial" under the ISA in Malaysia. Normally opposition politicians have been detained under the Act, but writers

and artists have also been included. I ought to note, however, that in Singapore at least it has been over a decade since any politician, playwright, novelist or poet as been so detained. The recent trial and detention of the Deputy Prime Minister in Malaysia, however, proves that there are many ways to detain potential rivals or unacceptable critics.

2. James Gomez, *Self-Censorship: Singapore's Shame* (Singapore: Think Centre, 2000), 66.
3. Kee Thuan Chye, "Call a Spade a Spade," reprinted in *1894 Here and Now* (Selangor: K Das Ink, 1987), i.
4. The Alliance included UMNO, which was the dominant member, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress.
5. Of course I am thinking of Stalinist USSSR, Nazi Germany, Pol Pot's Kampuchea, apartheid South Africa, Idi Amin, the destruction of the Aboriginal tribal system in Australia—to name only a few. Next to these examples of terror, Singapore and Malaysia are benign. But tyranny is a relative term. While generalizing it is possible and reasonable to say neither Singapore or Malaysia is tyrannical. But try telling that to Ibrahim, who is currently imprisoned in Malaysia, perhaps ultimately for threatening Mahatir's leadership. Also try telling that to Singaporean Chia Thye Poh, who was detained under the ISA for more than twenty-three years, then released in 1989 under semi-house arrest, ironically on the theme-park island of Sentosa. He was not given full freedom of movement and other citizen rights until 1998. For a short sympathetic description of Chia's life and personality see Cherian George, *Singapore the Air-Conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control 1990–2000* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000), 19–20; for the government's view of Chia see Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965–2000*, 113–14.
6. George, 21.
7. Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau, "From Colonialism to Independence, 1945–1965," in Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, (Eds.), *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), 118–20.
8. Kit Leee, "Introduction", in *1984 Here and Now*, iv.
9. David Birch, "Singapore English Drama: A Historical Overview 1958–1985", in *Lives: 10 Years of Singapore Theatre 1987–1997* (Singapore: The Necessary Stage Limited, no date), 27.
10. Yeo is the third in terms of chronology, being preceded by Lim Chor Pee and Goh Po Seng, both of whom had plays in English performed in Singapore. Yeo's impact on the future of Singaporean drama after the beginning of the 1970s is generally assessed as greater than his predecessors.
11. Kirpal Singh, (Ed.), *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature*, Vol. 3: *Drama* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2000), 13.
12. K. K. Seet, "Introduction", in Robert Yeo, *The Singapore Trilogy*. In process of publication.
13. Kit Leee, "Introduction", *1984 Here and Now*, v.
14. John de Souza, "A playwright's reality", *The Straits Times*, 20 November, 1980.
15. See George Watt, "From Frump to Femme Fatale? A Short Performance History of Robert Yeo's *Second Chance"*, in *Interlogue*, Vol. 3: *Drama*, 63–87.
16. The director of the first performance of *Changi* in 1997 obviously felt that the simple, realistic character of the play was too old-fashioned, so he supervised a metamorphoses of the play into a multi-media spectacle more suited to the kind of post-modern theatre produced by companies like The Necessary Stage and sometimes by Theatre Works. Guy Sherborne's cooperatively realized version of *The Second Chance* worked from the standpoint that the original version was rather dull and needed to be "departicularised". They did mount a highly professional production but really changed the personality and nature of the play.
17. Kee interviewed by Maureen Tan, "Just When We Thought it Was Safe to Go to the Theatre Again", *New Sunday Times*, 7 July, 1985 reprinted in *1984 Here and Now*, 93–96.
18. Kee Thuan Chye, "Play on Boat People Banned From Staging", *Asiaweek*, 29 August, 1980. Reprinted in *Kee Thuan Chye: Just in So Many Words* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1992), 72–73.
19. Kee Thuan Chye, "Play on Boat People Banned from Staging", 73.
20. Even as late as 1990 Yeo had trouble finding a Singaporean publisher willing to publish *One Year Back Home*. The 1990 edition of the play, the first published edition, was taken on board by the Solidarity Foundation Inc. in Manila. It was not until 2001 that a Singaporean publisher felt it safe to publish Yeo's drama scripts.

21. Robert Yeo, "Author's Preface", *One Year Back Home* (Manila: Solidarity Foundation Inc., 1990).
22. "Interview: Robert Yeo Talks to Ban Kah Choon", in Robert Yeo, *The Singapore Trilogy*. Not yet published.
23. Kit Leee, "A Long-Distance Postscript", in *1984 Here and Now*, 149–56.
24. K. Das, "No Wild Cheers Just Yet, but a Quiet Yes to 1984", in *1984 Here and Now*, 130–35.
25. Kit Leee, "Introduction", in *1984 Here and Now*, iv.
26. Cherian George, 20.
27. Yeo quoted in de Souza, "A playwright's reality".
28. Editorial, *I-S Magazine*, 6: 14 Feb.-16 Mar., 2001, 4. *HDB* refers to the Housing Development Board, which has made apartment ownership possible for the large majority of Singaporeans. Siamese twins refers to another highly successful musical which has had at least two Singapore seasons.