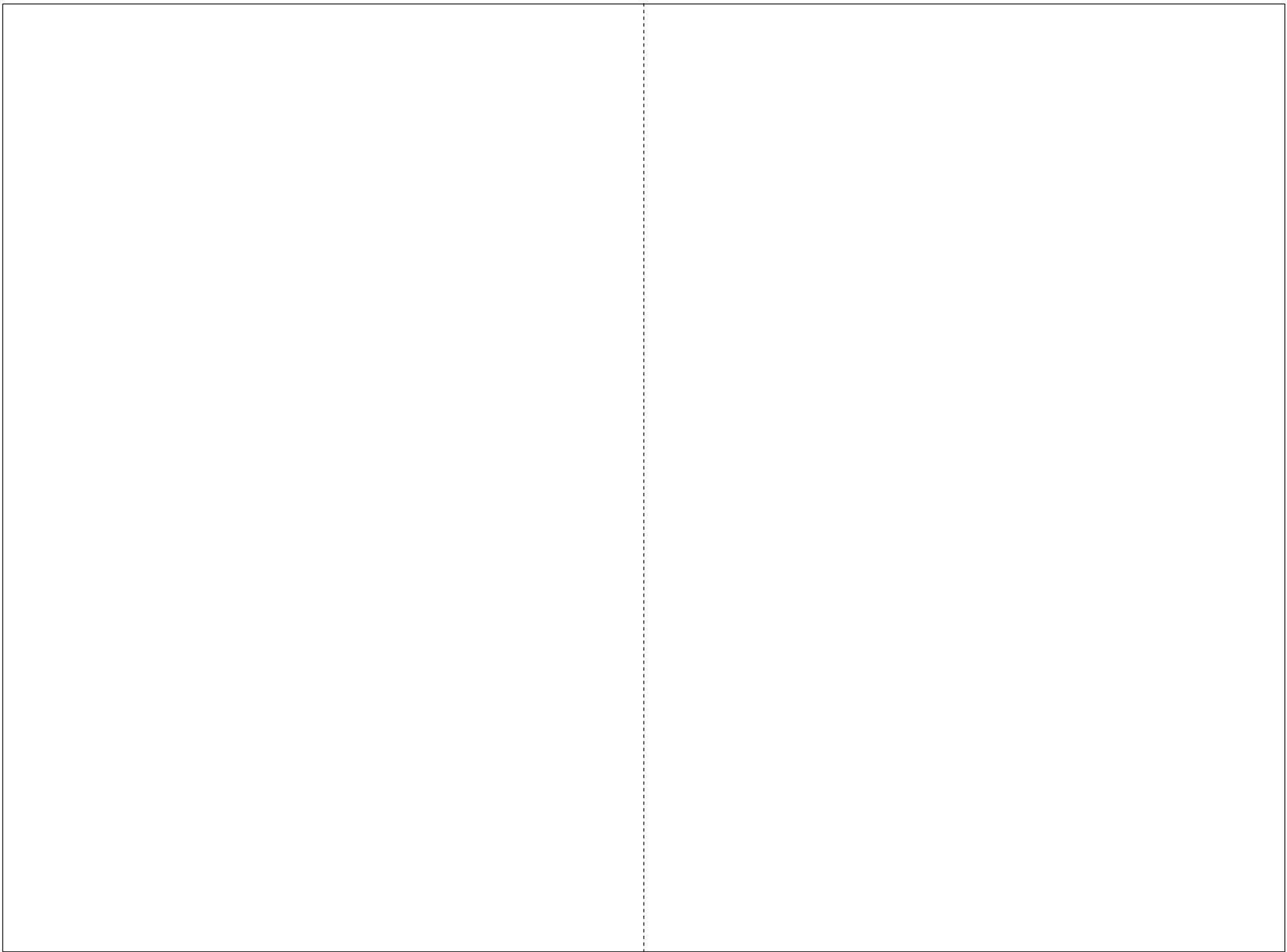


**OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR  
ARE CLOSER THAN  
THEY APPEAR**



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31 October - 14 November 2015

# OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

Of the numerous usages of a convex mirror, its most common employment is in the passenger side mirror of a car where it provides an essential field of view for any motorist on the road. Reflecting more in a small space, a driver can minimize blind corners and pick up better live feedback to visual activity happening on the other side, captured within its compressed reflection at any given second. However, the perception of distance becomes slightly altered: objects in these mirrors become smaller, and therefore appear to be of a greater distance from the car.

In many ways, the Dakota Crescent estate in Singapore has been reflected within a similar convexity in recent times: since the announcement of its demolition slated in 2016, the entire neighbourhood has been the loci for pop culture producers, academics,

heritage enthusiasts and photographers.

Like a convex mirror which expresses more in its panorama, the attention has made personalities out of Dakota's residents and augmenting architecture into landmarks: its Dove playground, established in the same panache of other terrazzo tiles playgrounds of the 80s, is now an icon, akin to the status of the Dragon playground in Toa Payoh. It has been the *mise-en-scène* of local rapper, Shigga Shay's Lion City Boy music video, filmmaker Royston Tan's 3688, and undoubtedly, constituted as the vivid subject of many pictures squared on Instagram.

In the provision of a macro perspective, we all have met with projections of Dakota Crescent. These documented manifestations persistently articulate the estate's past

in the present, and simultaneously, imagine a future without it, escalating for many, a sense of *déjà vu*. But from the same convexity, details are diminished. How about the crevices of the neighbourhood not captured in the repeated landscapes and narratives of its personalities and landmarks? What if the micro details that are missed can be found when we remember that in their convex diminution, objects in the mirror are, in fact, closer and nearer than they appear?

By looking at the estate through a peripheral lens, Dakota Crescent becomes a reactivated site; a conduit for discussions on the experience of space and material.

Rendering the public housing estate of Dakota Crescent through labels as text surtitles that narrate spatial and material encounters

throughout the scattered-site, this work provides an alternative *mise-en-scène* to the existing cultural status, meanings and collective imagination attached to the site—making it available for active re-appropriation through a situated interpretation.



**S390008**

*Pavement of carpark between Block 4 and Block 6*

Rental flat tenants in Dakota were able to upgrade and move on to their own homes and Block 8 was demolished between 1986 to 1989 to clear flats that fell vacant over the years. Yet, there was hearsay of its demolition due to ground instability, leading to its demolition.

By locating an approximate coordinate of where Block 8 used to be, S390008 creates a glimpse of Dakota postdemolition and ideates Block 8 as a metaphorical potential at the same time.



**In Transit**

*Block 14, lift journey*

Many non-residents have recorded the estate in videos, films or as stills, capturing the exteriority. How do residents feel about the place which they live- their interiority, called on by strangers? When does curiosity breach privacy? Can interest transit to intrusion? These 34 seconds in this unconventional elevator ride imagines both the residents' responses and the strangers who document these spaces.



**"Dakota escapes demolition"  
(14 January 2016)  
Playground**

The Today article "Iconic dragon playground in Toa Payoh escapes demolition" (14 January 2014) was shared more than 700 times on social media where readers lauded the preservation of the playground. This work questions the future of the Dakota if calls for conservation are answered: will dialogues change or stop? What happens when we finally have what we want? Do we still give it the same attention or does it fade into the background as a result of visual satiation?



**Antecedent**

*Intersection of playground and Care and Friends*

Antecedent looks to its left and right side to interrogate living and the passing of time. The last few decades after construction have left no marks on the playground but in an estate mostly occupied by the elderly, it is an incongruent presence. As a non-living

entity, it is immortalized in its unaging presence. Across it is Care and Friends, an elder care centre where of its visitors are where the visitors' lives are coming to fruition. This intersection marks the binary opposites of time: one frozen but eternal, and the other living but aging.





**Occupied and Absent**  
Blk 14 Unit 04-64

How much can the entrance to a home reveal about traces of occupancy beyond a locked door? Such claims to territoriality provide illusions of intended privacy even after one has relinquished the right to a space. Adorning their plots with artefacts, ex-occupants alter the meaning of public spaces



through placement and personalisation of objects to show its occupation. They exist as incarnations of emotional bonds, leaving behind yearnings for occupancy long after residents have vacated their homes.



where integration among the estate's inhabitants occurs via socially engineered hardware implementations. These readymade "social alleys"<sup>1</sup> are scattered throughout the estate, affording users the illusion of a private preserve where one can unmask and lapse into personal liberties.

<sup>1</sup> "Backlanes as Contested Regions: Construction and Control of Physical Space." In *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, edited by Beng Huat Chua and Norman Edwards, by Kong Chong Ho and Valerie Lim. Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, Singapore University Press, 1992.

**Airtime**  
Behind Blk 16

Located at the back of each block, these drying racks introduce the covert act of housework into an open setting. In the public display of laundry, occupants mark out private and proximate space via the corporeal intimacy embedded in personal articles of clothing. Through an intentional blurring of boundaries between inside and outside, public and private, spaces lay open for reclamation by occupants. Such open invitations bear the communal characteristics of public housing planning in Singapore,



**Please do not throw cats here**  
Block 18, Unit 01-60

In 1990, the then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board adopted the Singapura Cat or *Kucinta* as a tourism mascot. The move resulted in much controversy as attempts to identify the pedigree breed's origins led to speculations of it as the mere native *Longkang* (drain) cat, a species that was most prevalent in Singapore during the 60s and 70s<sup>1</sup>. Occupying a nebulous zone since their inception, these stray cats are at once endearing yet unwanted occupants of the urban domestic landscape. Despite a general indifference to their presence, their territorial inclinations and feeding patterns have been informed by human provision. As residents gradually vacate their units, the presence of these cats continues to bear evidence of past routines, habits and living in the estate.

<sup>1</sup> Dass, Annalisa. "Singapura Cat." Singapore Infopedia. Accessed October 25, 2015. [http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_867\\_2004-12-23.html](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_867_2004-12-23.html).



**Dakota DC-3**  
Round stone chess table

Dakota DC-3 explores our relationship with the urban landscape through the oft-occurring roar of planes that permeates the estate. Situated along the flight path of a nearby military air base, Dakota Crescent's association with local aerial history sits among the public's top fascinations with the estate. Yet, entries on property advisory forum, *PropertyGuru*, list the "unbearable noise"<sup>2</sup> from passing planes as a top complaint by residents of a nearby private property development. The

disparate views document our controlled receptivity towards urban spaces, where the historical-geographic identities of pioneer estates are accepted only if they fall within the clinical forms of iconic landmarks and heritage trivia.

<sup>1</sup> The title of the work refers to the "Dakota DC-3", a common American transport plane that landed at the now-defunct Kallang Airport.

<sup>2</sup> PropertyGuru, "Dakota Residences." Accessed October 25, 2015. <http://www.propertyguru.com.sg/singapore-condo-reviews/dakota-residences-1294>.

# Beyond the Convenience and Immediacy of Icons

Joey Chin

I came across Dakota some time after the recent unmissable commentary in the media; the Dove playground, Care and Friends, Tian Kee and Co. and the various neighbourhood personalities and custodians.

Walking up the stairs of Block 16 that day, I noticed some units were bolted but there was one with its door unlocked. Two steps into that particular unit were all it took for me to close the door and leave the building altogether, startled by the flat's vandalism, ripped trunking, litter and garish pink peeling walls.

Curiosities sometimes present themselves with certain expectations: as much as I did not know what to anticipate, my response to the flat only meant I was definitely not expecting a dereliction as specific as that.

When I think back on how I exited as quickly as I had entered the unit, I came to understand that I was merely responding to a flat threatened by an intrusion: it was confronting me by means of its chaos the same way I had with my invasion. I was an unwelcomed presence and was made to know it.

My reaction was a dislocation from the representations of the estate: media accounts beckon participation in a fecund sentimentality which leaves little room for the examination of many difficult, sometimes uninvited realities: deterioration of the physical estate, an aging community and inquisitive strangers such as myself.

To record the same characters and images of Dakota in social and mass media within such a short period is an act of immediacy but also a form of complacency.

It insinuates that loss, albeit impending, can be conveniently encapsulated in an icon, whilst ignoring the modest transparency of Dakota's tales, intersections and the average resident with neither quirk nor story; all which makes an estate an estate, not the estate.

Just like the words "Objects in the Mirror are Closer than They Appear" serve as a warning to a driver, this project is a reminder that persistent renditions of Dakota are like the reflections on the wing convex mirrors of cars: objects or crevices, that escapes the reflections in its macro survey and repeated anecdotes of the estate and its personalities, become inversely decimated. This is in spite of these features being as close, or with a narrative possibly closer to the personal vocabulary of the viewer, yet missed when overwhelmed by the amplification of other icons.

These site specific-narratives in the form of labels are non-invasive and nearly transparent. They are statements for the viewer to generate another vision of Dakota outside of the visuals that have been charged for them.

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# On Closeness

Selene Yap

*Objects in the Mirror Are Closer than They Appear* arose from both wanderings and wonderings of Dakota Crescent. As one of the 20 pioneer estates slated for demolition in the last decade, media accounts and documentary commentaries of the geriatric estate can be alluded to a memorial photoshoot-panoramic stills capturing the estate in photogenic angles before its demise. In the urgency to imagine its absence, popular representations adopt palliative undertones, fitting personalities and landmarks of the estate into visually presentable narratives.

Drawing reference to the optical metaphor of the convex mirror which reflects more in its panorama, this project questions the shared vision of Dakota Crescent that has been persistently articulated to us: How are the crevices of the neighbourhood diminished in attempts to provide an adequate field of view to audiences?

Spelt out in a cautionary saying, *Objects in the Mirror Are Closer than They Appear* acknowledges the distortion that accompanies popular manifestations of Dakota Crescent. Much like the title suggests, personal and micro complexities, most of which banal yet arresting, take on an alarming proximity during our encounters of the site.

Each work traces the broader ambivalences present in the estate through our spatial and object encounters, giving voice to speculations and uncertainties that might have been overlooked in the course of panoramic endeavour. In *Occupied* and *Absent* and *Airtime*, the texts echo the persistent construction and control of physical space within the domestic urban landscape. Explorations on the use of objects,

their personalisation, arrangements and permanence in the space reveal different relationships between user and space. The relationship between humans and their urban landscape is further explored in *Dakota DC-3*, an atmospheric observation of noise from planes that frequently pass above the estate.

Just as transparent decals on the side windows of a car repeat the warning to the driver about his perception of an object's distance, these translucent artwork labels disclose proximities to cyclical rhythms of daily habit that exist alongside popularised conceptions of the estate. They lend an indeterminacy to prescribed notions of Dakota Crescent, suggesting that, amidst the material and routine of daily life, it is perhaps these non-commemorative histories that embody the space.

*Selene Yap (b. 1988, Singapore) is a gallery manager with Chan Hampe Galleries. From 2014 to 2015, she was a member of Curating Lab, a curatorial mentorship programme by National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum. Her interests in multiple and ongoing discursive engagements that characterize urban culture is a development from her studies in NUS where she read Sociology and Southeast Asian Studies.*

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