

CIRCUIT BREAKERS and BIOPOLITICAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract Taking as a starting point the challenge of containing the spread of epidemics, this article provides an oblique critique of the connections between biopolitics and contact tracing. Aligning the question of biopolitical strategies with epidemiology, the article follows the lines of continuity between containment strategies, contact-tracing technology, and circulations and networks. The uptake of mobile application surveillance by government entities to trace the spread of SARS-CoV-2 has seamlessly supplemented containment measures. Singapore's deployment of TraceTogether, an application developed by the Ministry of Health and Government Technology Agency, circumvents the use of geolocation tracking: formulating a network of infected bodies using proximity data, the population undergoes a topological change. Drawing on a tradition that acknowledges the transformative quality of technology and its implications on information societies, the article frames the enquiry within the parameters of Martin Heidegger's and Gilles Deleuze's deliberations on the ways in which technology is brought to bear on the biopolitical imaginary of a population. The technological rationality that, according to Heidegger, has gripped the entire horizon of thought is opened up for interruption wherever technology fails. In these slippages emerge spaces in which a critique of society's faults may be advanced. This article proposes a critical reading of application surveillance with a view to the biopolitical and philosophical implications of overdetermined network structures against the backdrop of contagion-related phenomena.

Keywords biopolitics, technology, network, circulation, TraceTogether

Life in and out of Circulation

On April 3, 2020, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that a circuit breaker would be implemented to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Preempting what would otherwise be a dangerous overload on the health-care system, Singapore's epidemiological circuit breaker not only suspends the circulation but also redirects the movement of bodies (Government of Singapore 2020b). The leaching of this electrical metaphor into the parlance of epidemiological crisis management prefigures the population as a modulatory network whose nodes are emergent and always in motion: the node becomes the politico-ontological referent of life and the network as its continuously shifting parameters. The mobilization of the circuit-breaker metaphor to describe the ceasing of circulation conjures the fecund tradition of contemporary philosophical thought that critiques the way in which life enters into a relation with the (bio)political economy. In one way or another, the topological conceit of circulation is mobilized in their biopolitical and bio-philosophical exegeses.

In Karl Marx's (1990) analysis of the metamorphosis of commodities, he identifies a crisis in the relations between labor and commodities as a result of money entering circulation. The currency of money not only transforms and alienates the commodity, it also functions as the very medium of its circulation. That the medium slides into the end itself comes as no surprise: the movement of money—which drives rather than reflects the circulation of commodities—is derived in part from the social necessity of circulation. This co-implication of circulation and money delineates a myriad of class-inflected biopolitical ramifications. Where circulation is bound up with the currency

of money, the question concerning power dynamics weaved into the process(ing) of circulation becomes imperative. This question is picked up implicitly by Michel Foucault's biopolitical thought.

Threaded through Foucault's (1995, 2009) work on biopower is the notion of circulation within which power is encoded. Power, for Foucault, is neither applied nor appropriated: rather, it is exercised through the circulation of bodies, ideas, and discourses. Where circulations are "unusable" or "dangerous," disciplinary mechanisms intervene. Confinement as a premedical disciplinary measure is deeply invested in labor and, obversely, the idleness affiliated with sickness and mendicancy (Foucault 1988). Implicated in this disciplinary measure is the concern apropos of economically useless bodies who are confined to correction houses with the aim of containing social ills. However, even as discipline affords each individual his or her own place and diffuses collective dispositions, complications associated with the mechanism of confinement, especially on the epidemiological front, concern urban density and mobility. The analytical space organized by discipline finds its limitations in the physical-architectural capacity for "social distancing" and in the physiological capabilities of individuals to disperse. The immobilization of bodies as a method of containment becomes the very problem: in a short-circuit of contagion, this intractable coagulation of infected bodies—immune to the machinery of confinement—ends up being cut off from useful forms of circulation.

The conditions for falling out of these class- and power-permeated circulations are explored in Giorgio Agamben's (2009) deliberations on the apparatus. Through the theological structure *oikonomia*, the different domains within which things

can circulate are fleshed out. Key to the circulation across metaphysical domains is the concept of sacrifice, which sanctions the passage of an object from the human to the divine sphere. The secular version of this sacrificial passage involves the “exit of things from the sphere of human law,” while its opposite was to restore this thing to its circulation within the boundaries of society (18). If sacrifice entails the withdrawal of the protection of law over these exited things, then falling out of circulation inevitably brings along with it the ramifications of juridical disavowal.

The conundrum presented by the imperative of being in circulation and the implications of being out of circulation consolidates itself around bio-philosophical discourses on immunity and its specter: autoimmunity. Exemption from technological imperatives of circulation, as Foucault implicates and Agamben exhorts, may not necessarily constitute a protected form of immunity. Insofar as immunization involves the protection of the self (*autos*) from an exteriorized threat, this legal-medical metaphor transmutes biological and political discourses into a problem of hyperprotection and misrecognition. In Jacques Derrida’s (1994, 2002, 2003) later—more political—work, he postulates that a logic of autoimmunity undergirds and undermines juridico-geopolitical and cultural systems like democracy, the nation-state, and religion. As a “hyperbolic” expression of self-protection, autoimmunity haunts every community that attempts to maintain its internal integrity. The politics of self-protection and recognition is further explored in Roberto Esposito’s (2008, 2015) writings on autoimmunity. Underpinning immunitary logic is a discriminatory system by which the body—whether social or somatic—distinguishes the self from the nonself.

Protection taken to the extreme thus short-circuits the immune system’s binary program of recognition—the self/nonself distinction—so that immunity slides into *auto*-immunity, from which the misrecognition of the self as nonself ensues. At every ruminative turn, the problematics of being sacrificed, disavowed, or misrecognized are coimplicated in being out of circulation.

In addressing the imperative of being in circulation, the question of what topological form the biopolitical imaginary takes becomes pertinent. Through the lexicon of circulation, the topologies of economies, networks, and systems are wrought on the biopolitical imaginary from the late twentieth century onward. Particularly in Gilles Deleuze’s (1992, 1995) application of the circuit-breaker metaphor in the age of control societies, the network stands as the topological structure by which life is conceived as informationalized, emergent, and adaptive. Expounding on Foucault’s (2003) analogy of individuals as relays of power, Deleuze formalizes the network as the topology through which control traverses. The unit of governance within this network topology is no longer that of the discrete individual susceptible of physical partitioning but rather the “dividual”: the interoperable figure whose divisibility opens them up to discretionary control (Foucault 1995; Deleuze 1992). If the plural of *individual* is the mass population, then the “dividuals” come together as a network. Control, according to Deleuze’s delineations, presupposes a network, which is a marked shift from Foucault’s disciplinary mechanisms taking the population as its point of intervention. Whereas discipline regards the population as a resource of active bodies that can be partitioned and whose movements can be arrested, control reconfigures the population into a network within which “dividuals” orbit continuously

(Foucault 1995; Deleuze 1992). In fact, control's concern lies not in arresting or regulating movements but, rather, in encouraging the flows and circulations in a state of perpetual modulation.

The conceit of circulation is made all the more pertinent against the backdrop of epidemiological crises wherein the lines of connectivity that facilitated the flows of goods and services also expedite the transmission of pathogens. The pharmacological structure of the network becomes apparent: the extensiveness of SARS-CoV-2 is an unsurprising outcome of an interconnected global network. The method of tracking these circulations and movements is encapsulated appositely within the process of epidemiological contact tracing. The core assumption about this process centers on the stochastic nature of the population and the nonlinearity of tracing the infected. Concomitantly, the logic underpinning epidemiological contact tracing follows Deleuze's rubric of control, which presupposes the metastability of the infected.

Politics of the Network

From Geolocation to Proximity

Although studies investigating the efficacy of using mobile phones to trace infectious disease contact networks began surfacing in recent years, this method of contact tracing had not been implemented on a national scale hitherto the SARS-CoV-2 emergency (Farrahi, Emonet, and Cebrian 2014; Nguyen, Luo, and Watkins 2015). On top of traditional containment measures like manual contact tracing and quarantine, Singapore launched a digital contact-tracing application—TraceTogether. In line with the Smart Nation initiative, the TraceTogether application was introduced on March 20, 2020, to supplement manual contact-tracing techniques, which hitherto

relied on the memory of interviewees (Government of Singapore 2020a). As the first Bluetooth-based contact-tracing system, TraceTogether is one of many digital surveillance apps that have since been trialed across countries, including Israel, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. With special attention to the way technology is wrought on tracing this form of bioeconomic circulation, this article draws on a historicization of the network and its attendant biopolitical implications to advance a critique of the ways in which technology (re)organizes the topology of life. Using the recent epidemiological crisis as a paradigm of this new form of topology, a reading of TraceTogether's proximity contact tracing not only delineates Singapore's biopolitical strategies whereby information-era promises of freedom, choice, mobility, and agency belie technologies of containment and control; it also lays bare the social and architectural faults in Singapore's landscape by locating the failures of this technological supplement in its inability to account for bodies that lie outside this network topology.

The purpose of Singapore's circuit breaker was to break the points of contact between people, a quarantine measure accompanied by the manual and digital tracing of proximities between people. The use of digital technologies to trace the spread of SARS-CoV-2 has gained traction, with some of these tracing protocols exercising discretion in emphasizing that the applications used by the user do not track their geolocation but rather their proximity data (Apple 2020; GovTech 2020). While the former employs a classic approach to confinement based on geographical location (i.e., absolute location), the latter uses proximity or relative location to selectively quarantine individuals. TraceTogether's "privacy-preserving protocol," BlueTrace,

touts the ability of the application to not only supplement the individual's memory in contact-tracing interviews but also retain the user's privacy (GovTech 2020; TraceTogether 2020a). This section delineates the implications of the shift from geolocation to proximity on the way in which Singapore conceives of its citizenry: while not completely abandoning the optimization of circulation in the Foucauldian sense, Singapore's biopolitical strategies apropos of the epidemiological crisis reveal their conception of citizens not just as a population made up of individual bodies and forces but also as an adaptive network whose nodes circulate ceaselessly.

In addressing the concerns of the application's mode of surveillance, the TraceTogether (2020a) team assures its users that the app "does not collect or use physical location data (e.g., GPS, WiFi Fingerprinting, cell ID)"; instead, it identifies the "who" rather than the "where" through Bluetooth proximity tracing. Implicit in the BlueTrace protocol is the assumption that adaptive network tracing is less invasive than absolute geolocation surveillance: that the "where" reveals more personal information than "who" you encounter (GovTech 2020). Underlying the rationale of proximity tracing is the acknowledgment that urban cities are characterized not just by their architecture and urban design but also by the continuous circulation of bodies, information, and services. Geolocation, shackled to the limits of its physical domain, becomes an inadequate framework for contact tracing in contemporary societies. The implementation of TraceTogether is indicative precisely of the recognition that the "where" has been relegated, especially on the epidemiological pretext.

What emerges from this paradigmatic shift are networks of "whos"—reorganized

by the prevailing logic of proximity tracing—that derive information from the nodes' freedom to circulate. Beyond the Foucauldian (1995, 2009) concern with optimization of circulation, in which the state is preoccupied with how to intensify good and arrest bad circulations, TraceTogether's protocol recognizes the expedience of not attributing a value to circulation. As a reflection of Singapore's instrumentalist approach to technology, proximity tracing mobilizes a Burroughs-Deleuzian notion of control within which freedom to circulate is encoded. The rubric of freedom, choice, and agency is constitutive to the network insofar as control necessitates a liberatory space between controller and the controlled: within this space lies the potential for control to be exerted (Deleuze 1992; Burroughs 1998: 339). The ostensibly liberatory network that arises from this reading compels us to interrogate the historicity of this topological structure within which technology and life intersect.

"War on COVID-19"

Discourses on hijacking, interrupting, deconstructing, or jamming the network constitute an index of attitudes toward the problematics of this topological structure (Derrida 1992, 1995; Baudrillard 2009, 2012; Deleuze 1992, 1995). An early use of the word *network*, in the sense delineated in this section, can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century. Describing the topographical features of transportation and telecommunications, the concept of the network with which we are familiar today contains vestiges of strategies for containment. In Ryan Bishop's (2004: 65) exposition of the network as a Cold War legacy, the caveat concerning global networks in urban cities today is given historical cogency: "Undergirding this moment is

the terrain-less flow of information, goods, capital, and sovereignty facilitated by and put into operation through the technologies developed for the Cold War C³I demands.” The seemingly “horizontal” decentralization that characterizes the “terrain-less flow” finds its origins and motivations in the “verticality” of military strategies that emerged during the Cold War. Command, control, communications, and information/intelligence constitute a set of technological, political, and military strategies involved in containment, especially of communism. Against this historical backdrop of surveillance and control technologies weaved into the structure of the network, Singapore’s deployment of the TraceTogether application reveals its biopolitical strategies. By endorsing proximity tracing as a technique to contain the SARS-CoV-2 spread, Singapore’s Ministry of Health is able to promulgate a rhetoric of agency and choice, all the while drawing on a centralized control of the information collected by the application. The fact that TraceTogether depends on a “community-driven” method of contact tracing brings nothing to bear on the complementary—even symbiotic—nature of the “horizontal” and the “vertical”: the promise of freedom and agency apropos of proximity tracing is a corollary of this military-infused biopolitical strategy (TraceTogether 2020b; Bishop 2004: 66).

Indeed, Singapore’s “war on COVID-19” mobilizes a bellicose imagery to describe the epidemiological crisis (Tan and Matthew 2020; Ramakrishna 2020). By rendering proximity (rather than geolocation) surveillance as the nation’s *modus operandi* for containment, the conjunction of epidemiology and warfare fuses a militant ideology (which operates along a binary logic of friend/foe) with a biopolitical notion of control (whose modulatory

nature suspends the binary to the effect of staking a simultaneous claim on both sides of the *solidus*). If discipline seeks to disperse dangerous coagulations by partitioning bodies, then control brings something altogether different to containment strategies: rather than collapsing friend into foe—or healthy into unhealthy—and vice versa, control suspends this process insofar as any “friend” can turn into a “foe” at a moment’s notice. Not unlike the sinister suspension of law in Agamben’s (1998, 2004) state of exception, the imperative of the *solidus* defers the partitioning of bodies according to the binary. This effectively means that citizens are neither friend nor foe at any given moment: more precisely and in practical terms, the category of “friend” is tenuous at best and is always on the verge of giving way to the other side of the *solidus*. The apocryphal freedom that accompanies control serves as the justification for continual surveillance. Control transmutes the binary into a unary formulation that ramifies the health statuses in which citizens might find themselves. No longer merely coding for positive/negative, the network structure is able to account for the *solidus*—the susceptible, the potential, and the threshold—which forms the basis of containment ideology: undergirding the logic of containment is the a priori of contagion, whether ideological or viral.

What is at stake in this reading of the epidemiological network that TraceTogether envisions becomes clear from a politico-ontological perspective. Control’s aim is not to deindividualize the individual, pace cultural theorists like Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, but, rather, to frame the free-floating “dividuals” within an ever-deforming and emergent network. While the “harmless citizen” need not necessarily be declared “a potential terrorist,” they

will be perceived as vectors of transmission and a fortiori be implicated in the continuous circulation within a network (Agamben 2009: 23). Discourses lamenting how our freedom, choice, desires, and needs have been farmed out to or robbed by technologies are tangential in interpreting Singapore's biopolitical strategies during this epidemiological crisis: rather, the stakes concern the "network" imaginary that has worked its way into biopolitical discourse. As a putative imaginary of the digital era, proximity-based networks not only render the stochastic nature of populations legible by visualizing temporal encounters with tokens emitted at regular intervals; they are also equipped with the flexibility to cope with crises, especially those of a communicable nature. Having a complicated history of communism and epidemics, Singapore's move toward proximity tracing is not just a result of advancements in Bluetooth beacon technology but also a turning point in how the citizenry is conceptualized apropos of crises that deal in contagion.

Failures of Technology Obstinate Tools

The network, for all its discursive traction, stalls where social infrastructure eludes the reach of this extensive topology. Trace-Together's contact-tracing network, which is enunciated in the rhetoric of emancipation, agency, and mobility, is shown to fail at critical points in Singapore's social and physical infrastructures. The BlueTrace protocol, notwithstanding its technological prescience of the future of epidemiological contact tracing, runs up against its limits in areas and communities that have been left out of the narrative on freedom and mobility. Setting aside the common limitations to contact tracing using digital apps—inter alia privacy concerns, adoption rate, and

scale—this section explores the social and architectural implications of tracing technologies' failure.

The failure of tracing technologies opens up new avenues to critique the socio-architectural landscape of Singapore. Where technology runs up against its limits, fails, or proves redundant, it is there that we can begin to advance a critical reading of social, economic, and architectural problematics. The structural productivity of technological failure finds its foundations in Martin Heidegger's (2001) critique of the history of philosophy, which reduces everything to some kind of presence. In his tool analysis in *Being and Time*, he postulates that equipment that has been damaged, gone missing, or rendered redundant reorganizes the way in which the user relates to its presence. A tool that is ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), or ready to be used reflexively, becomes conspicuous, obtrusive, or obstinate when we encounter the tool's *un*-readiness for use. In Heidegger's words, with special attention to the obstinacy that arises from a redundant tool, "That to which our concern refuses to turn, that for which it has 'no time,' is something un-ready-to-hand in the manner of what does not belong here, of what has not as yet been attended to. Anything which is *un*-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else" (103). The insistence exerted by an obstinate tool, which refuses to relent until it has been attended to, directs our attention to it. This manner of orientation "disturbs" us into an awareness of what would otherwise be a withdrawn or invisible tool tacitly operating in the background. Keeping the urgency of the call for attendance in mind, we can begin to mobilize a reading of

Heidegger's tool analysis apropos of the condition of failure. What is at stake in our relation to the essence of technology concerns "the arrival of the truth of Being or its failure to arrive" (Heidegger 1998: 280). Technology all around us aims to be as transparent and concealed from our view as possible, so as to facilitate its speed and efficiency: to withdraw (*zurückziehen*) itself from observation ensures its smooth unfolding in the background (Heidegger 2001: 99; Irwin 2020: 363). When technology fails—when a hammer breaks or when an application crashes—our attention is called to these mediating tools.

The failures of technology possess this power of calling for attendance and circumspection. Interrupting technology's frictionless operations, the "un-readiness" opens society up for scrutiny. Heidegger's concept of failure in his ontological rendering of technology holds us accountable to interrogate not just the etiology of this predicament but also its teleology. Located within the "breaks" in operations, technology's failures compel us to extrapolate the points where technology becomes redundant to the faults in society (Heidegger 2001: 105). Especially for Heidegger, this interruption disturbs both our ontic and ontological relationship with the technology brought to our attention. On the one hand, skepticism toward tracing technologies' scope and efficacy may arise from this "un-readiness"; on the other hand, an awareness of technology's limitations instills a sense of responsibility toward (at)tending the "gaps" overlooked by technology.

"Not in My Backyard"

By shifting to a mobile attempt to control the SARS-CoV-2 spread, immobility becomes the very site of contagion: confinement as a form of disciplinary

control backfires in Singapore's biopolitical strategies. The use of proximity as a measurable variable in the epidemiological landscape presupposes mobility in its reorganization of a population into a network. However, when proximity is shown to be an ineffective method for tracing immobile/immobilized groups, the vulnerabilities in Singapore's social and architectural landscape are brought to the fore. If the network facilitates sovereign mobility, and the technology supplementing contact tracing presupposes a level of motility for each node within the network, then the TraceTogether technology fails where there are immobile groups who are nevertheless exposed to mobile others. The SARS-CoV-2 clusters that persist through Singapore's circuit-breaker period are structural indicators of where tracing technologies fail. As community cases fell steadily since the start of the circuit breaker, the cases in foreign workers' dormitories increased exponentially (Baker 2020; Leung 2020). Moreover, nearing the end of the circuit breaker found new clusters in nursing homes (Yong 2020; Ng 2020). Contact-tracing technologies hit an impasse with these cases in which the problem is no longer tracing (mobile) proximities but (immobile) proximity itself.

In March 1994, the Singapore government announced that migrant worker accommodations would be constructed in industrial estates away from Housing Development Board (HDB) estates where local residents lived. Since then, petitions against building nursing homes, eldercare centers, and migrant worker dormitories near HDB estates have gained momentum (Seow 2017; Ho 2020). Coined as "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome, this exclusionary sentiment reveals the class-inflected assumptions about what constitutes a community: almost a wistful

throwback to the premodern political dream of establishing a “pure” community, NIMBY syndrome demarcates the criteria for belonging not just along national lines. Bodies that are excluded from the community find no purchase in circulation: these stagnant bodies remain in infrastructures that are strategically confined to the fringes of the community. In the biopolitical economy, bodies that circulate are, by virtue, commensurable in terms of relays of power, repositories of usable information, and points of technological intervention. In a capitalist system, commensurability comes in metrics of labor, commodities, and money whereby bodies with purchase have the currency to circulate. At the nexus of these two modes of circulation, we find bodies that have not so much fallen through the crevices of the rhetoric on progress and freedom as they have become the sacrificial targets of urban planning.

Every community that relies on the logic of sacrifice (of the vulnerable) eventually sacrifices itself: the specter of death haunts the gesture of sacrifice not just because sacrifice always initiates another sacrifice like a sepulchral concatenation constitutive of the *munus*, as Esposito (2010: 43) intimates, but also because the logic of sacrifice will always presuppose death. As Esposito and Agamben note, immunization from the expropriative effects of the community entails not only being exempt from the debt to which you owe the *munus* but also, more insidiously, being left unprotected by the very laws from which one is exempted. Following an immunitary logic and in the name of self-preservation, sacrifice entails the eventual removal of the usual protections accorded to members belonging to a community. Urban planning that acceded to the NIMBY attitude of protecting the

purity of the mobile community finds its logical conclusion in the unrelenting spikes in SARS-CoV-2 cases contained to the bodies that accrue no value in their circulation. The predicament Singapore faces is neither incidental nor an aberration: it materializes, rather, as a corollary of strategic urban planning redolent of the seventeenth-century design of cities of confinement and a late twentieth-century biopolitical conception of community. Even as circulation exposes mobile “dividuals” to technologies of containment, those out of circulation are laid bare to the brunt of contingencies and sacrificed in the name of progress and freedom.

Conclusion

At the end of an interview on control societies, Deleuze (1995: 175) proposed to “create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control.” Feeding into discourses that write against the reduction of life into information and code, Deleuze’s abstract nostrum sits uncomfortably with the urgency surrounding the recent epidemiological crisis. Managing contingencies, especially of the epidemiological nature, is increasingly wrapped up in ways that inscribe the lexicon of freedom and mobility into the logos of surveillance and health. This article followed the putative ways in which control facilitates mobility and freedom in proximity-tracing technologies. In Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero’s (2009: 12) words, “Freedom becomes the freedom simply to be in circulation.” From this form of circulation, a different topology emerges: the network, which supports and depends on mobility, becomes the topology through which control traverses. What should be foregrounded here, instead of the ostensibly less invasive implications of proximity tracing, is the way in which

COMMUNITY CASES*

Community cases include Singapore residents and pass holders but exclude work permit holders and dorm residents

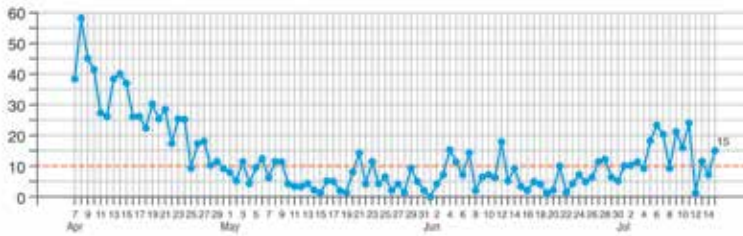
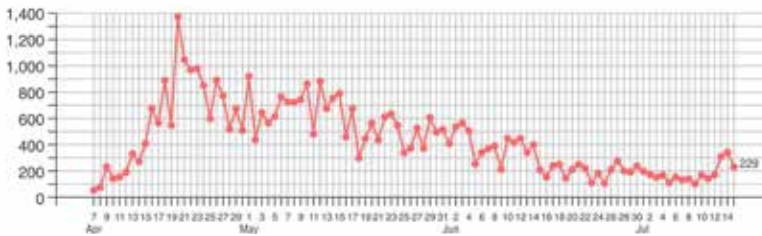
**DORM RESIDENTS**

Figure 1 Community and dormitory COVID-19 cases in Singapore. Screenshot from ChannelNewsAsia (CNA 2020).

these technologies imperceptibly reconfigure life into a topology whose rhetoric on liberal values belies not just the centralized control the government continues to exert on its people but also the myopia concerning vulnerable communities. In the case of TraceTogether where—in a spatial sense—tracing technologies prove redundant, the critical points in Singapore’s social infrastructure are thereby revealed.

While it took a pandemic to create socio-architectural change, Singapore’s biopolitical strategies, in an attempt to forestall the contingencies of future epidemiological crises, seem to be driven instead by these contingencies: challenged to govern through the SARS-CoV-2 contingency, Singapore discovers itself thus governed by said contingency. The prompt implementation of circuit breakers, quarantine measures, and contact-tracing methods preempted the extensive spread of the virus in the local community. However, these containment measures only managed to contain the spread to foreign communities: containment strategies

that kept the local community protected from the circulating virus, in an uncanny autoimmunological implosion, created the very conditions on which the virus could proliferate in the contained dormitories. The contained and immobilized foreign laborers emerge, against the backdrop of this biopolitical crisis, as sacrificial bodies who are laid bare to the epidemic in a short circuit of this viral network.

Illuminating is the pattern and scale of graphs comparing total community and foreign workers’ dormitory cases in figure 1: as “community cases” began their descent to low-double and single digits since the implementation of the circuit breaker in April, the dormitory cases saw an exponential increase during this period and remained in the range of low to high hundreds well into June. Whether the cases were separated into local community and foreign workers’ dormitory for purposes of representational clarity or to account for differences in scale, the unmistakably political nature of this division—and its material ramifications—linger uneasily

alongside Singapore's proud status as a global city. The government's commendable but belated reaction to this local crisis involved revising urban and manpower planning: proposals to build additional dormitories and earmark new building sites have since been put in motion with a view to creating new living standards (Phua 2020). However, inasmuch as a global crisis spurred new technologies and socio-architectural reform, Singapore will continue to be governed by contingencies if it persists in shoring up the narrative of national progress without (at)tending to the most vulnerable members of society.

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