

Ho Rui An

Crisis and Contingency at the Dashboard

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A funny image recurs in the promotional videos for the rollout of Singapore's Smart Nation initiative. We see a man at the driver's seat of a car, but he's not driving. Yet the car moves, as does the steering wheel. Seen in profile, the driver's hands are resting by his sides almost too idly, as if to declare: "Look, no hands!" A countershot reveals the view from the dashboard, where familiar push-button controls have been supplemented by a digital interface stretching across the car's windshield, filling it with an array of maps, indicators, and fancy widgets.

If the image appears kitschy, perhaps it is because of how much the driverless car recalls the flying car, that retrofuturistic antique rightly consigned to the dustbin of lapsed utopias. The difference is that the driverless car, or Self-Driving Vehicle (SDV), is already a reality; it is the most valorized of the "100 million smart objects" that will together form a "national operating system" at the center of Singapore's Smart Nation program. "We are working to 'dashboard' the entire nation of Singapore," says Steve Leonard, executive deputy chairman of the state's technology arm.¹ Taking the internet of things not simply as a tool but as an *act* of statecraft, the program naturally finds in the digitally augmented dashboard of the SDV a synecdoche for the integrated urban dashboard of the Smart Nation.

This urban dashboard heralds what Shannon Mattern calls "the age of Dashboard Governance."² Originating in the multiscreen Bloomberg terminals tracking real-time market activity against current events and historical trends, the urban dashboard is the state appropriation of the techno-political form produced at the intersection of the datafication of capital and the capitalization of data. The key image here is a centralized, seemingly all-seeing platform with the power to aggregate, analyze, and visualize the data gathered from across the city's network of sensors, and from which "weak signals" pointing towards an emerging crisis or opportunity can be identified and acted upon.

While the urban dashboard's most populist, self-congratulatory manifestation is the nascent Smart Nation, its stakes are far better articulated by an earlier program developed by the city-state of Singapore, known as Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning (RAHS). First launched in 2004, RAHS is the civic adaptation of a data analysis and model-building system known as Total Information Awareness (TIA), which was first developed by the US military as a counterterrorism weapon. Extending the logic of TIA to all levels of governance, RAHS today is used by state workers to pool data and expertise from across departments to generate a changing

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Still from a promotional video for Singapore's Smart Nation initiative featuring a Self-Driving Vehicle (SDV).

set of “narratives” on the emerging issues of the day.

Given the notoriety of the US program, which was disbanded by the US Congress over privacy concerns only to be later reconstituted under the National Security Agency, the Singapore counterpart might immediately recall the specters of mass surveillance and predictive policing. This concern with algorithmic authoritarianism is certainly warranted, but it is equally worth considering how the program might instead mark the very limit of that mode of governance. As Singapore’s National Security Coordination Centre puts it:

The RAHS system does not perform data mining. Data mining attempts to extract patterns automatically from databases, which can then be used to identify threats automatically against incoming data. Past efforts around the world have shown that fully automated early warning systems can result in high false alarm rates. The RAHS system is not an automated early warning system.³

If there is something we can take from RAHS, it is that, while the fantasy of total optimization that Mattern cautions against will always be present in any urban dashboard, the algorithm must never completely displace the analyst, for whom a place is reserved before the dashboard. Not quite the panopticon, the urban dashboard today is better described by the optical-motor schema of that comically idle driver sitting before the self-operating steering wheel.

The driver’s overstated inactivity in the image only deflects the question of why the steering wheel is even needed in the first place. The joke is that the anachronism of the physical dashboard must remain as a check for the virtual dashboard. Its purpose is not just to buffer against accidents but, more crucially, to impress upon the body the principle of contingency performed by the virtual dashboard itself – the dashboard that manages accident as contingency. It is through the dashboard’s mediation of this principle that the demand arises for a persistent observation/anticipation of the accident – not least the road accident, or that which is always on the horizon when we look out from the dashboard. The dashboard today therefore does not just organize data; it also produces a non-locus from which observation takes place, and from which pronouncements on “the economy” or “the nation” can be made. This site of negative occupation is itself unobservable insofar as it is outside the scene/screen, external even to contingency. It does, however, have a name: “crisis.”

Screening Crisis

What does it mean to be “in the midst of crisis”? How can crisis, long assumed to be a historical event to which we bear witness, be also an enduring, transcendental condition from which our acts of witnessing commence? In her reading of the financial crisis of 2008, Janet Roitman argues that the contemporary discourse of crisis does not simply describe a state of social injury or breakdown, but more crucially turns crisis into a “blind spot” of observation itself:

Crisis is claimed, but it remains a latency; it is never itself explained because it is necessarily further reduced to other elements, such as capitalism, economy, neoliberalism, finance, politics, culture, subjectivity. In that sense, crisis is not a condition to be observed (loss of meaning, alienation, faulty knowledge); it is an observation that produces meaning.⁴

Crisis, by this definition, does not mean widespread plunges in stock market values or mortgage defaults. These are merely observations of crisis, the existence of which is already affirmed by an externalized self-reference. In other words, crisis is not what appears before us on the dashboard, but what is already behind us and what brings us to the dashboard to begin with. Its intelligibility is only secured through what Niklas Luhmann calls a “second-order observation” that structures the undecidable effects of a world taken as already in crisis by having us observe the work of observation itself, that is, by observing others observe.⁵ This submits the uncertainty of the world to the principle of contingency: that which reorients knowledge from questions of being to questions of what modes of observation can best allow us to approach this uncertainty (which itself is posited as beyond contingency). Put simply, in claiming crisis, or by taking our place before the dashboard, a scene is secured for us to test our abilities for witnessing.

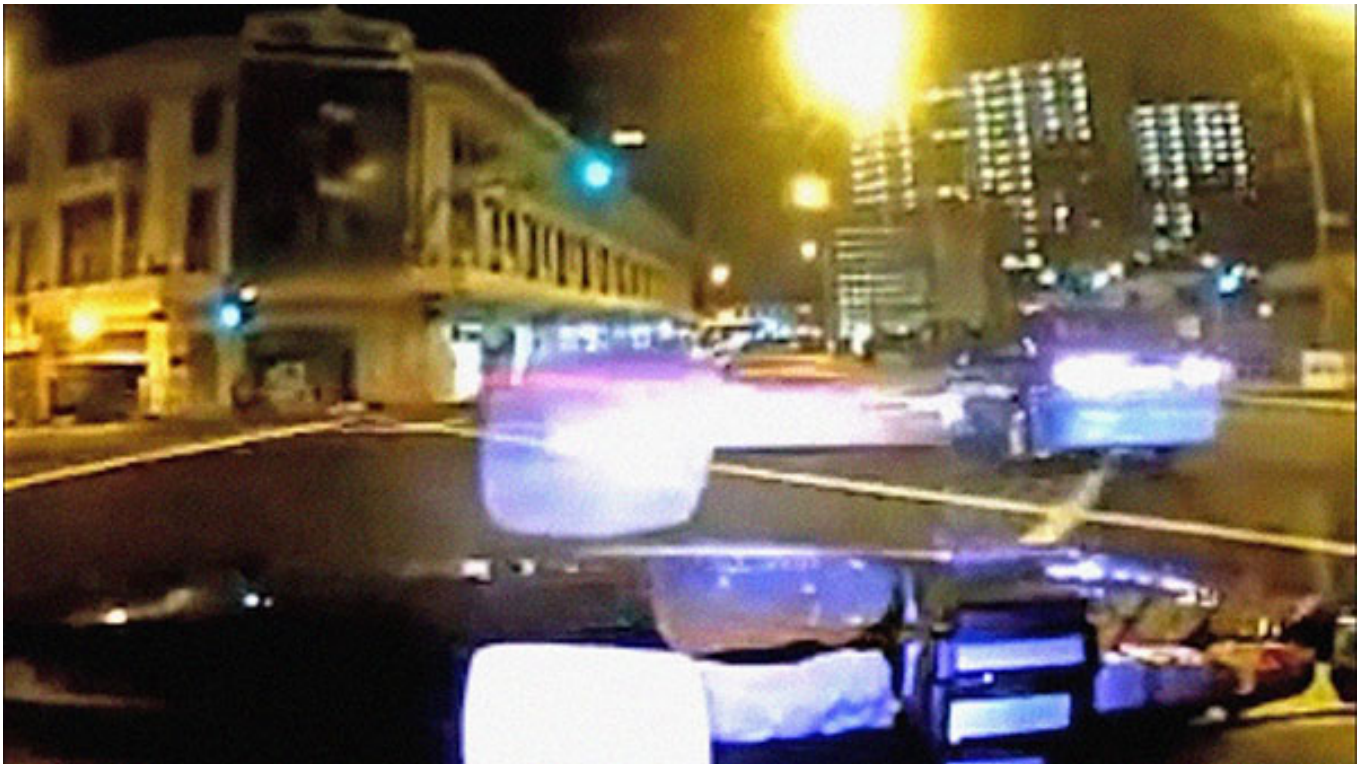
Today, this scene is most likely a screen, filled with observations in the form of indices, signals, graphs, and endless newsfeeds. This is the screen that naturalizes the “risk society” described by the likes of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck as definitive of modernity, where risk is understood as an unintended consequence of modernity that would eventually strike back at its center.⁶ This is the screen before which data analysts, hedge-fund managers, and state workers stationed at dashboards across the world await the signs of the crisis looming on the horizon – the crisis that is the “tragedy of the horizon.”

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Still from a promotional video for Singapore's Smart Nation initiative.



Still from dashcam footage of a crash between a Ferrari and a taxi in Singapore.

The “tragedy” was invoked by Bank of England governor Mark Carney when he suggested in 2015 that the financialization of the energy industry meant that any attempt to halt fossil-fuel extraction in order to avert planetary catastrophe would immediately destabilize financial markets. As he puts it, “An abrupt resolution of the tragedy of horizons is in itself a financial stability risk.”⁷ Such is the condition that the financial crisis as scene/screen sets aside for assessment, measurement, visualization, and capitalization by first externalizing what is in fact its immanent origin – “risk.” Understood by “risk society” theorists as an incommensurable excess of modernity, risk is in fact the source of its (financial) power. The financial derivative, in particular, demands this volatility insofar as what is valorized is the future itself, or what Elena Esposito calls “the difference between the present future and the future presents in the present, between what one can expect to happen tomorrow, today, and what will actually be achieved tomorrow, as a result of what one does today in order to prepare for it.”⁸

Financialization cannot proceed without this temporization specific to its present, without this interval that makes pricing possible. The problem with financial modeling is not its inaccuracy, but that it operates at a different order of observation altogether, one where the observation of observations produces a self-referential system from which the world as we know it appears remote, even as the pillage of its earthly matter continues to be abetted by that system. It is this abstraction of the future as volatility that, as Esposito suggests, becomes the reference for the empty signifier of money, and that in effect transcendentalizes the aporia of the future. If we were to stay with Janet Roitman, we might say that it is crisis, to the extent that it is often invoked in relation to volatility, that becomes a “transcendental placeholder.” And it serves as a placeholder because what it signifies is contingency itself, that which is supposed to enable us to think “otherwise.” Yet, it is exactly this setting of the scene/screen of crisis as contingency that enframes this “otherwise” and provides a “self-authorizing ground” for some narratives to foreclose others.⁹

It is on this basis that Ben Bernanke, chairman of the US Federal Reserve, was able to declare amidst the meltdown of the banking system in 2008 that “we may not have an economy on Monday” if the comprehensive bailout was not passed by Congress.¹⁰ For Bernanke, the real crisis (as event) is on the horizon, but its existence can never be demonstrated so long as it is posited as being

outside the economy, as beyond the domain of contingency.¹¹ A non-economy – is that what we should call an economy where private markets are no longer financed through public debt?

With each claim of crisis, figures for describing “the economy” are produced, adding to an archive that naturalizes some over others. A distinction is made between “the economy” and what is not the economy, such as the “black swan” event – Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s infamous metaphor to describe rare, hard-to-predict events of great consequence that are rationalized only in hindsight; the metaphor has itself transformed into a catch-all signifier for contingency.¹² Otherwise, one can draw upon this archive to redistribute culpability to subjects figured as “foreign” and “bad,” shot through a racialized imaginary. This was what happened with the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2008 crisis, during which the “Asian” and the “subprime” borrower were respectively cast by some crisis narratives as misbehaving capitalist subjects, while the complicity of the hegemonic Wall Street–US Treasury–IMF complex was diminished.¹³

Crisis produces a moment of witnessing where figuration comes into play. Yet what accompanies and delimits this potentially ethical moment is the necessity and urgency of critique and recovery. In crisis, we are left with no time, only the impetus for movement, for getting over crisis. In a mockery of the Marxian imperative to not just interpret the world but change it, change here is reduced to actionability, to the activation of buttons at our disposal. It is at this point that we formally reenter the dashboard, the space where observation and action converge. Here we find that the crisis imaginary might be best articulated through our experience of the road from the dashboard, where despite all the uncertainty lying in the horizon, the only certainty that must remain is that of moving on. The accident, if it happens, can only be experienced as interruption, or as “a bump on the road ... of a necessary drive to the end of history.”¹⁴

A Return to the Road

If there is a feature that distinguishes Singapore’s Smart Nation initiative from the more familiar smart cities being developed in many parts of the world, it is to be found in the signifier of the nation. While this shift in signifier from “city” to “nation” might arise from Singapore being at once a city-state and a nation, it also betrays the program’s ideological underpinnings. After all, what else can be meant by the imposition of the “nation” upon the uneven and heterogeneous topography of a

global city with a sizeable transient population, of which at least a million people have no access to citizenship? What does the Smart Nation mean for the workers, sourced largely from the region, whose lives are made vulnerable by transnational capitalism and for whom data is often missing, falsified, or withheld?

By closely examining the spatial logic of the city, we will find that underlying the techno-utopianism of the Smart Nation is the anxious anticipation for a panacea that can tackle the multiple crises facing the global city amidst the resurfacing of globalization's discontents. Apart from ameliorating the problems of climate change, traffic congestion, and changing demographics that plague most urban areas, the Smart Nation promises to fundamentally transform and rejuvenate an economy that has come to a standstill in recent years.¹⁵ It is in this context that we can approach the Smart Nation, much like the dashboard itself, as a framing device, applying its scene-making function to the global city defined by speed, mobility, and porosity. Unsurprisingly, the site that lends itself best to this transformation is the road – that which permits the movement required for capitalist circulation but also too often the site where accidents happen.

It's no exaggeration to say that the road gives rise to the very idea of the accident as we know it. By inventing the car, one invents the traffic accident, but also the industrialization of the accident, which, as Paul Virilio suggests, lends itself to a general administration of fear.¹⁶ Yet, in this generalization of the accident, we also see a constant return to the accident on the road, the accident that happens to a *particular* vehicle, as part of a recathexis that reverses any kind of rupture from its structural basis, throwing it back onto the road, as it would seem. As Rosalind C. Morris, writing on the imaginary of the road in South Africa, argues, "Developmentalism and the technology which subtends it are threatened by accident, even though the concern with accident belies a sense that it is foreign to the machinery that would otherwise function smoothly and in perpetuity."¹⁷ Like crisis, the road offers a ground for judgment that enables the distinction between accident and an inviolate condition of order.

It is with this reckoning that we come to understand the significance of recent "crises" in Singapore happening around scenes of traffic or actual traffic accidents, and mostly involving the country's growing immigrant population. The first took place in May 2012 in the aftermath of a horrific crash between a Ferrari and a taxi that killed both drivers. Footage of the accident, captured by the dashboard camera, or "dashcam," of a third vehicle, quickly circulated

online and stirred the population when it was revealed that the sports car was driven by a financial investor from mainland China.¹⁸ In November that same year, over a hundred immigrant bus drivers from mainland China held the country's first strike in over twenty years as they protested against wage disparity and poor living conditions. A year later, the country's first riot in forty years took place in Little India, a weekend spot for South Asian migrant workers, after an angry mob gathered around the scene of a motor accident that killed an Indian construction worker. Then there is the more banal reality of the city's increasingly visible urban strain felt in the once-unthinkable repeated breakdowns of the public rail system – catastrophic for a country that boasts of its clockwork efficiency.

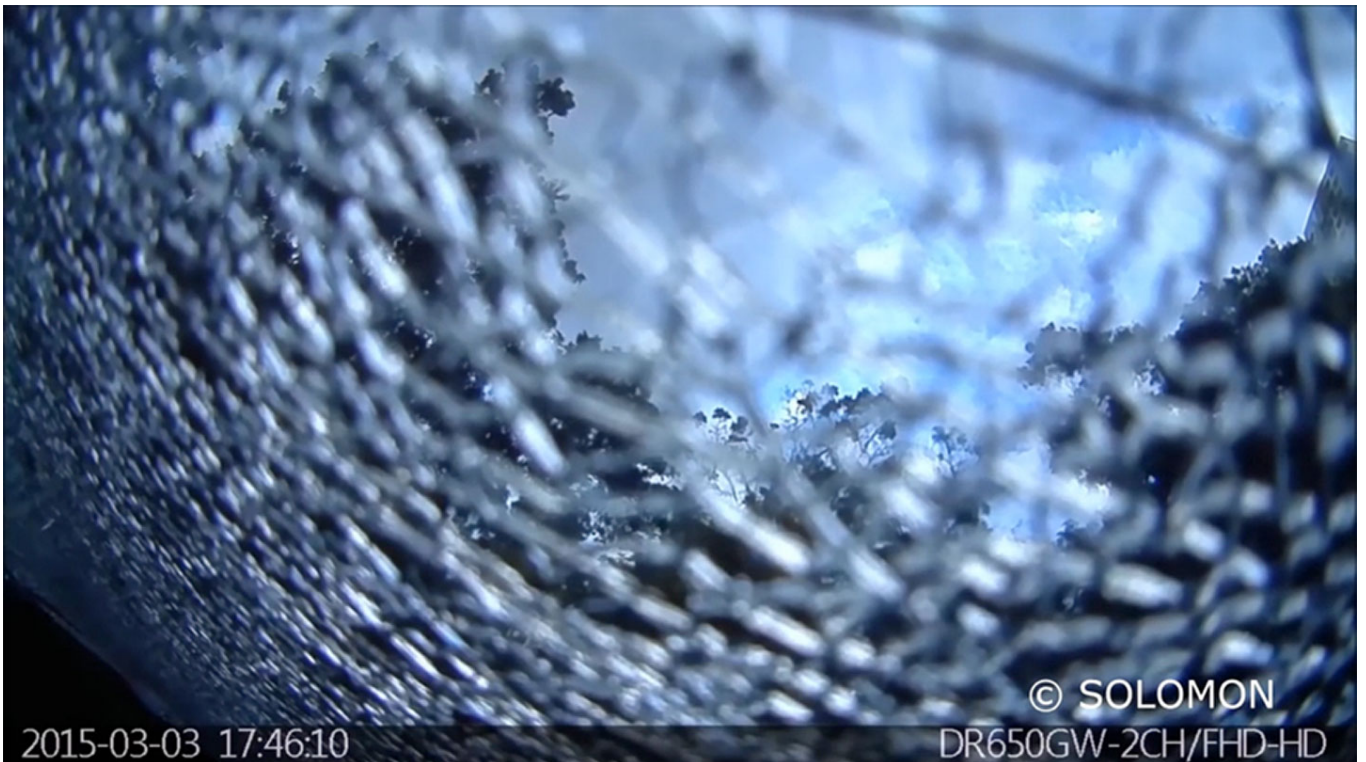
Liberal critics blame the government's overreliance on immigration policy as a tool to sustain growth figures in a country facing the double threats of falling productivity and low birth rates. The more popular tendency, however, is to direct the anger towards the racialized migrant body, collapsing problems of class by framing these incidents through the "foreigner problem."¹⁹ Outside observers may find it puzzling that this xenophobia has not escalated into a populist tide against the ruling government, but this is a peculiarity of a city that, at least since its establishment as a free port by the British East India Company, accumulates its wealth through the flow of foreign labor and capital.

This is why, where the popular crisis narrative displaces the frustration of the people onto the migrant body, the narrative produced by the state turns instead to the road, the space where things circulate and accidents would appear to happen naturally. The official inquiry into the Little India riot, for one, identifies the motor accident as the main cause of the riot, with nothing mentioned about the grievances of the migrant workers.²⁰ The problem, simply put, is on the road but never *of* it. The road itself, not least a road laid by migrant labor, must remain the unexamined ground upon which we begin our inquiry. In throwing the problem (back) onto the road, the road literally becomes the external holding site – the transcendental placeholder, if you will – for contingency. It becomes a figure for crisis itself.

In 2014, Little India, together with Geylang, another neighborhood with a high concentration of migrant workers, became one of a few areas in Singapore selected for the first phase of the Smart Nation Sensor Platform (SNSP). A key feature of the Smart Nation, the SNSP, when completed, will be an integrated national sensor network that makes "every lamppost a smart



Still from a promotional video for the Museum of the Future, launched by the Dubai Future Foundation and slated to open in 2019.



Still from dashcam footage of an accident in Singapore. The footage was posted on YouTube and circulated widely.

lamppost” where a variety of sensors monitoring everything from temperature, humidity, and water levels can be mounted.²¹ Furthermore, augmenting the already extensive network of CCTV cameras will be a video analytics system designed to detect anomalies in crowd patterns and traffic movements.

Coming about a year after the Little India riot, the selection of the neighborhood as a test-bed for the platform marks the literal imposition of the Smart Nation upon the streets where the discontents of global capital spilled over. If framing the riot as (motor) accident secures a crisis imaginary through a return to the road, we start to see how the dashboard proposes itself as a solution to the crisis. This point was made by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong himself when he conceded that the authorities were caught “flat-footed” by the Little India riot, as there were “too few CCTV cameras.” Instead, they had to rely on footage posted on social media, captured by civilians who, as Prime Minister Lee added, will in time become integrated into the SNSP as mobile sensors on the ground.²²

Again, what should concern us here is not surveillance itself. The surveilling of migrant bodies here is merely a symptom of how the urban dashboard has become the means through which the state responds to the successive crises of capital without undermining the logic of capital itself. That is, insofar as crisis frames the very view from the dashboard with which we apprehend a world felled into abeyance by crisis. Capitalism is in crisis; something must be done. But so long as in claiming crisis, much like the laying of a road that appears to go on forever, we posit an a priori reference for judgment that is beyond the horizon, that in fact secures the horizon as an object of observation, our actions are limited to simply smoothing the asphalt.

As crisis frames the Smart Nation’s urban dashboard, the latter turns the former into a material-semiotic operation, pegging motion to vision as it drives down the road and clears the dirt, reinscribing the geo-body of the nation as it does.²³ While in most parts of the world, the infrastructure of the city renders it a political exception to the rest of the country, in Singapore the Smart Nation recuperates the nation through an infrastructure of crisis.²⁴

Dashboard Nation

From TIA to RAHS, smart cities to the Smart Nation, the increasing investment in urban dashboards across the world contests the now banal assertion that the state has withdrawn its authority in the face of the neoliberal turn. Indeed, if it is true that neoliberalism thrives on crisis, the expanded powers of the state afforded by the urban dashboard only serve to augment its

role as a witness and responder to crisis. It might be more accurate to say then that the state, instead of retreating, is constantly reemerging, as it returns to set another scene of crisis – one from which it must then immediately pass on.

Not quite a camera obscura inverting reality, as Marx would have it, the ideologizing function of the state today is more like a dashcam hurtling past the crash towards the horizon where more accidents await. And unlike Marx’s invocation of the camera obscura as metaphor, the dashcam in this formulation is literalized by the phenomenon of dashcam footage increasingly becoming a key optic through which the discontents of late-capitalist modernity become observable. Originally designed to watch for accidents that could happen to the vehicle it was fitted for (to be used as evidence for insurance claims), the dashcam today, with its relentless frontal gaze replicated across vehicles the world over, is the techno-biopolitical inscription of the perpetual vigilance performed by the state in a time of crisis.

Through the view from the dashcam, superstructure collapses onto infrastructure through what Michel Foucault calls a “neo-liberal art of government,” where crisis is not disavowed but simultaneously affirmed and deferred: *we are always averting crisis, and always in the midst of it*.²⁵ The task of the state is to negotiate this contradiction between crisis as event and crisis as a condition of possibility, between admitting to the play of contingency (“We are at a crossroads”) and foreclosing the field of possible actions (“Or we may not have an economy”).²⁶ While the former is sometimes undertaken under the guise of democratization, whereby the state actively solicits the intelligence of the masses to fill its lack of knowledge, the latter immediately sets the limits to such an exercise. Here, the pronouncement of crisis, more often theorized as a sovereign performativity, forecloses upon itself, producing forms of agency (whether of the state or of the masses) that are ultimately circumscribed by the crisis imaginary that enabled the initial speech act.²⁷

Is this how we can also approach the “performativity” of the dashboard? After all, the dashboard, as software, is built on code, which Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, among others, has pointed out as being a unique kind of language where writing, as executable command, allegedly does what it says.²⁸ And like crisis, code is both lived abstraction and abstracted reality. Crisis begets executive speech acts that produce real effects on the economy, in turn creating an appearance of the instantiation of sovereign power, when in fact force does not emanate from an originary subject but arrives after passing

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through multiple agencies and layers of mediation. The same can be said of the “sovereignty” of the dashboard user who relies on complex processes of compilation to turn source code into executable command.

Consider the language of individual autonomy and civic engagement wrapped around the various urban dashboard projects supported by the Singapore state. For example, LIVE Singapore!, a collaboration between MIT’s Senseable City Lab and the Singapore–MIT Alliance for Research and Technology that predates the Smart Nation, sold itself as an “open platform” for developers to build multiple applications that harness “the creative potential of citizens in extracting new value from real-time data.”²⁹ Welcome to the “real-time city,” or better, the “crisis city” – given that it is in crisis where the dashboard’s ability to keep us “in touch” becomes crucial.³⁰ However, touch can also feel disabling for a user whose capacity to respond is largely limited to toggling, or moving an existing array of objects around. Developers are likewise limited by what data is made available by the state. That such projects, if fully realized, will bring conveniences to the public is beside the point; the bigger concern here is how the retooling of the nation-state through the urban dashboard demands a retheorization of the relationship between the nation-state and capital.

One popular interpretation sees in the rise of governance by dashboard the triumphant return of the state as a driver of technological innovation, of which the exemplar is not Singapore but Dubai. Since 2016, the state-run Dubai Future Foundation has been running the Dubai Futures Accelerators, an annual program that pairs government departments with selected companies and entrepreneurs to develop working prototypes or pilot programs that can address the most urgent challenges faced by the global city.

From the conscripting of vultures as trackers of illegal waste dumps to video analytics for counting cigarettes butts, from forecast-based financing to participatory budgeting, a consistent thematic emerges across these dashboard-related projects: the expression of state power not as law, but as something that *directly* contacts the city, touching it. Chun relates this to policing, or what she calls “every lawyer’s dream of what law should be: automatically enabling and disabling certain actions, and functioning at the level of everyday practice.”³¹ But “policing” is too dramatic a term for a process I would rather call “testing.” This is not just to avoid conjuring the too-often overplayed terrors of predictive policing, but also to reflect the probabilistic basis of such “test-

bed urbanism.”³² The direct contact enabled by the dashboard is indexical, which is to say that it points us *elsewhere*, where something has happened even as it remains uncertain what it is. Accordingly, we have to test to find out, but in testing, we also confirm uncertainty as the unquestioned horizon from which we begin *merely* managing the discontents of global capital.

Put bluntly, the point is to interpret and act on the world, *but never to change it*. The contemporary turn towards the “innovative state” thus cannot be taken plainly as some counter-hegemonic project to prove the state’s ability to achieve the social optimization that neoliberals expect from the free market. Instead, in testing, experimenting, and reinventing itself, the state too often displaces existing functions of social redistribution through its new role of *reengineering* a defunct system requiring no more than an upgrade.³³

For the state as “reengineer,” crisis is both norm and exception. In figuring crisis as historical event, the state as reengineer is forced to act, to make decisions, yet in doing so, it also iterates the set of codes that maintains the “engine” through and into which the state performs its interventions. The state as reengineer, it follows, accounts for the enduring presence of the nation-state amidst the rapaciousness of capitalism’s deterritorializations. In tending towards its impossible dream of universalization through the dissolution of territorial closure, it turns out that the capitalist machine, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call it, still requires the particularism of the nation-state to ratify crisis – the event that summons “from the depths of its immanence” the reterritorializing force of the state to ward off the *absolute* limit of capitalism: total deterritorialization or schizophrenia.³⁴ Within this sequence, crisis, in being secured by the nation-state, in turn reconstitutes the nation-state as *residuum* – an internalized, *relative* limit to be overcome once globalization completes itself in an ever deferred future.³⁵

Indeed, what is today’s renewed Keynesianism (pushed to perversity in Japan with the implementation of negative interest rates) but a relegation of the state to the role of ad hoc and self-loathing crisis manager, following the neoliberal disintegration of the developmental state that drove much of East Asia into developed status?³⁶ In the same way that the dashboard’s fantasy of totalizing the social demands the presence of the driver while mocking his redundancy, the nation-state today fills a supplemental space within the logic of capital where it is constantly under unprecedented threat of erasure, but from which

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it will, inevitably, reemerge.

Dash, Crash ... Dash?

We reassume our positions behind the dashboard – not just the dashboard as a formal construction, but the physical dashboard that incarnates us as “smart” national subjects. While still not quite settled in our idleness before the self-operating steering wheel, we are for once able to relish the experience of movement itself. In relieving us of the labor of movement, not least a movement that, in shuttling us between home and work, delivers us to labor, the SDV, at least until its novelty wears off, expresses the fantasy that underlies the road of capitalist modernity: “the blissful autonomization of movement per se.”³⁷

But any sense of euphoria must expire, for it takes only the ever growing archive of crash footage, captured by dashcams the world over, to return us to our all-too-precarious embodiment. In the past few years, the internet has become a vast disposal site for such images: a Ferrari crashing into a taxi, street lamps collapsing onto traffic, trucks swallowed by sinkholes, actual flying cars. Entire online communities have even been created to facilitate their circulation, testifying to the emergence, by accident, of a new cinema of the accident.³⁸

This is a cinema inscribed by death, for sure, but also by survival. This is because without the fortunate vehicles that manage to both witness and escape the scene, there would be no footage. The footage that makes its way online is often anonymously attributed: the driver behind the dashcam is neither known nor seen. Yet their presence is still registered, often as a voice. In the shocking dashcam footage of the Ferrari-taxi crash in Singapore, it was the cry of relief made by the driver as he passed the scene, avoiding the fate of the taxi by mere seconds: “Lucky!” It is a cry that speaks to the time of contingency, where one emerges unharmed from the accident only because others did not. The accident has been redistributed to the margins of the frame, to the other disposable bodies by the side. Here, the general administration of fear that pervades the age of Dashboard Governance is intensified through a mass spectatorship of the accident, where in rewinding, replaying, and looping the crash, we reproduce for ourselves each time the sensation of surviving, of speeding past, into the ever receding horizon.

There is, however, another view: the view from the accident itself, or from within the vehicle that crashed. Footage captured from this vantage point is rare, and all the more unsettling when retrieved, especially when the fates of the bodies carried by the vehicle are unknown. This

time, the crash has happened not to just anyone, but to the viewer. The shattered windshield suggests a body pulverized, or what happens when capitalist desire is pushed to its limit in the Freudian death drive, where finally the driver has been removed altogether. This is the decisive rupture of the scene/screen of crisis, or crisis as pure event. This is the “non-economy.”

Yet, strangely, in this evacuation, an opening arises. The camera is still running; I am still looking on. Watching the footage, I take on a viewpoint that has been evacuated, yet is somehow still there. What is the ghostly subjectivity haunting this still vigilant gaze? The body, no longer moving, continues to take time, a time that can no longer be reduced to the time-code still running in the corner of the screen. Neither looking nor moving forward, the subject, perhaps ironically, recovers some kind of freedom in no longer being hostage to a time that is *timed*. Might this finally be a vision untethered from movement? Will we finally be able to pry open the frame for a new kind of witnessing? That is, to not just witness an “otherwise” but witness otherwise?

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1
Adele Peters, "Singapore Plans To Become The World's First Smart Nation," *Fast Company*, January 22, 2015
<https://www.fastcompany.com/3041192/singapore-plans-to-become-the-worlds-first-smart-nation>.

2
Shannon Mattern, "Mission Control: A History of the Urban Dashboard," *Places Journal*, March 2015.

3
National Security Coordination Centre, Singapore, "Explaining the RAHS Programme," in *Thinking about the Future: Strategic Anticipation and RAHS*, eds. Edna Tan Hong Ngoh and Hoo Tiang Boon (Singapore: National Security Coordination Secretariat, 2008), 5.

4
Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2014), 39.

5
As Luhmann suggests, "Everything becomes contingent whenever *what* is observed depends on *who* is being observed." See Niklas Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, trans. William Whobrey (Stanford University Press, 1998), 48.

6
See, for instance, Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford University Press, 1991); and Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (Sage, 1992).

7
The broader argument here is that the distant but ever encroaching horizon of ecological disaster falls outside the "traditional horizons" of most of our institutions, thus disincentivizing any corrective action until it is too late. As an example, Carney points out that the horizon for monetary policy typically lasts no more than a decade. See Carney, "Breaking the tragedy of the horizon – climate change and financial stability" (speech, Lloyd's, London, September 29, 2015).

8
Elena Eposito, *The Future of Futures: The Time of Money in Financing and Society* (Edward Elgar, 2011), 105.

9
While the scope of the present essay prevents me from describing the complexity of Roitman's historico-philosophical account of crisis, it bears mentioning that the elevation of crisis into a "transcendental placeholder" comes at the end of a historical process through which God, reason, and truth were successively displaced by a mode of observation taking place from within immanence, leaving us to assume a "negative occupation of the immanent

world." Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 9, 69–70.

10
Quoted in Joe Nocera, "As Credit Crisis Spiraled, Alarm Led to Action," *New York Times*, October 1, 2008.

11
Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 83.

12
Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (Random House, 2007). The turn of the black swan from singular event to enduring condition was made official at the 7th International Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning Symposium held in Singapore, where the theme was "Black Swans and Black Elephants."

13
See Laura Hyun Yi Kang, "The Uses of Asianization: Figuring Crises, 1997–98 and 2007–?", *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (September 2012): 411–36.

14
Rosalind C. Morris, "Accidental Histories, Post-Historical Practice?: Re-reading *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* in the Actuarial Age," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 599.

15
For a recent assessment of Singapore's Smart Nation initiative, see Lily Kong and Orlando Woods, "The ideological alignment of smart urbanism in Singapore: Critical reflections on a political paradox," *Urban Studies* 55, no. 4 (2018): 679–701.

16
Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, trans. Julie Rose (Polity Press, 2007).

17
Morris, "Accidental Histories," 599.

18
I've explored in a previous text the perverse libidinal economy producing the reception of the dashcam footage of the Ferrari-taxi crash. See Ho Rui An, "An Accident: Two Views from the Dashboard," in *Concrete Island*, eds. Kenneth Tay and Luca Lum (NUS Museum, 2016), 60–69.

19
This seeming eclipsing of class in the racialization of the migrant might be partly the result of race, specifically the categories of CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) inherited from colonial policy, being the dominant biopolitical schema for governance in Singapore. For a detailed account of the development of Singapore's CMIO framework, see Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbis, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project* (NIAS Press,

2008).

20
For a considered reading of the riot against labor conditions of migrant workers in Singapore, see Daniel P. S. Goh, "The Little India Riot and the Spatiality of Migrant Labor in Singapore," *Society & Space*, September 8, 2014.

21
Lee Hsien Loong, "National Day Rally 2017" (speech, Institute of Technical Education College Central, Singapore, August 20, 2017).

22
Lee, "National Day Rally 2017."

23
By "clearing the dirt," I mean to invoke the original referent of "dashboard": the wooden panel fixed at the front of the horse carriage to protect the rider against the dirt being "dashed up" by the horses' movements. I borrow "geo-body" from Thongchai Winichakul, who describes the production of national self-image as a process inextricably bound up with technologies of mapping. See Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

24
This is in line with Keller Easterling's work on the zone as a space of exception from which the state withdraws only to further increase its power. Easterling cites Singapore to demonstrate how the city-state has become the model to negotiate this apparent contradiction. I would only add that what further complicates the case of Singapore is the implication of the "nation." See Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014).

25
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, eds. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 146–50.

26
The notion of Singapore being "at a crossroads" as it faces an uncertain future has been repeated by politicians in recent years to the point of it becoming a running joke. What's remarkable is how the "crossroads" that once served as a spatial metaphor to describe the city-state being at the intersection between East and West has today come to denote instead a temporal horizon where decisions have to be made before it's too late.

27
To this end, one might question if in Giorgio Agamben's influential theory of the sovereign performative as the power to decide the state of exception, his reading of the

aporetic origin of state power reinstitutes crisis as its own "blind spot" by taking crisis as a condition postulated from the outset, rather than coming about through some breakdown of representation. See Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*, 70.

28
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2016), 82.

29
See <http://senseable.mit.edu/livingsingapore/>.

30
Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 74–76.

31
Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 82.

32
For a reading of how uncertainty constitutes the epistemology of the test-bed city, see Orit Halpern, Jesse LeCavalier, Nerea Calvillo, and Wolfgang Pietsch, "Test-Bed Urbanism," *Public Culture* 25, no. 2 (2013): 273–306.

33
My reading of the state worker as reengineer draws upon Stefano Harney's account of the post-Fordist turn of public administration in North America. See Stefano Harney, *State Work: Public Administration and Mass Intellectuality* (Duke University Press, 2002).

34
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 261.

35
I understand that in invoking Deleuze and Guattari, there is a risk of conflating the (postcolonial) nation-state with the state, or the *Urstaat*, as Deleuze and Guattari call it. But to the extent that the social democratic basis upon which most postcolonial nation-states were established has since been eroded, this subsumption of nation to state retains its critical force. I would further add that it would take much more for the interval between "nation" and "state" in the "nation-state" formulation to be foreclosed, but this is a subject for a separate essay. For critical accounts on this "depoliticization" of the nation-state, see Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (Verso, 2009); and Chan Heng Chee, *Politics in an Administrative State: Where Has the Politics Gone?* (Department of Political Science, University of Singapore, 1975).

36
For a theoretical treatment of the "unsublatability" between

11/12

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capitalist development and the nation-state in the context of recessionary Japan, see Yukata Nagahara, "Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre Do Their Ghost-Dance: Globalization and the Nation-State," in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, eds. Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (Duke University Press, 2006), 299–330. This discussion is especially pertinent to the economies of East Asia, where the strong hand of the state credited for the region's decades of "miracle" growth has seen its role significantly reconfigured since the so-called Washington Consensus.

37

Morris, "Accidental Histories," 603.

38

In Singapore, one such community, focusing on footage of traffic violations, is the Singapore Reckless Drivers Community on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sgrreckless/>.