

STORIES OF KHAYALAN ISLAND¹

Reparative Islands

Along the dock
I ask at another booth

“how much to pick up at St. Johns?”

“no no this is a bus service”

“oh I see”

“do you like working here?” Toru asks

“today is my first day” he replies with a grin

“we sell tickets to raffles place, little india...”

he points at our ferry boat in the harbour

“the only one”

seems we are destined for the next quick ferry trip

just enough time to look

only a few minutes’ setting foot on the island

¹ *Stories of Khayalan Island* (2014–ongoing) is a collection of 29 poems, including *Reparative Island*, written by James Jack as part of an artist research project reviving stories of an island rumoured to have disappeared near Singapore in the early 19th century.

warm air, breeze, passing immigration
Panstar Line on another pier

“before it was a very nice place
different pier
now become hotel
many people was fishing there”

“now I am 64
follow my father
no motor on the boat
holding his pole
even when on land
we only go to islands
we can see
now we go islands
we can't see
engines now!”

“do islands exist without a boat to go there?” I ask
“Rahan Tiu does
but need to hire a private balloon”
“I like Kusu” he mentions nonchalantly
what is that
seems something is lost in our words

It seems impossible
to find a pathway
by water, air, or land
to this island
there must be another route
along the ocean
somewhere between this urban island we are on now
and reparative islands

Oral records say
Khayalan has traces of bukit timah granite
which lie below the surface
unlike the abundance of granite
underneath most urban areas of Singapore.
this keeps the nation firm
amidst rapid changes,
but Khayalan was composed of
layers of sandstone which crumbled beneath footsteps
one on top of the other
disintegrating slowly
as each creature stepped and left a footprint
that forever changed the land.

The ever-shifting coastline that was estuarine mud
we now stand on layers of sandstone, quartz, and mudstone
a “work in progress” or a “work in regress”?

An is-land is “land”
claimed and reclaimed
white kaolin clay mixed with old alluvium to solidify
up to and including now.

what “is” this land?

the sound of waves
slowly touching the land
crossing the straits of durian
the Rio island chain extends
far into the healing potential of this social landscape
but are our systems too firm

to do a full prostration?

lean over to rediscover

bow to repair