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Making futures? Technology start-ups in Singapore

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This dissertation examines the cultural significance of the future through the everyday practices of early-stage technology start-ups in Singapore (2010–2016). It develops an ethnographic approach to futurities—culturally specific ways of imagining and structuring futures—showing how they are lived, embodied, and contested.

In Singapore, start-up futurities promised empowerment, innovation, and growth, yet relied on hard labour, hidden resources, and practices that reproduced inequalities. Across six domains—global imaginaries, state agendas, ecosystems, companies, subjectivity, and embodiment—the analysis traces how start-up futurities demanded radical malleability of ideas, places, selves, and bodies, but proved fragile: as infrastructural constraints, financial precarity, and the gendered and racialised bodies exposed the limits of entrepreneurial flexibility.

Start-up culture sustained optimism and entrepreneurial risk-taking while serving state planning and capitalist valuation. Far from universal, start-up futurities were contingent, historically situated, and marked by contradictions, revealing how neoliberal capitalism is lived and reproduced through everyday efforts to “invent the future.”

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Zane Kripe

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