

BLOWING UP THE BOMB SHELTER:
Sifting Through The Rubble Of Domesticity

by

Toh Hu Cheong Terence

A0047565X

B.A (Architecture)

National University of Singapore, 2012

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Architecture in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

at the

National University of Singapore

September 2012

Signature of Author:

Department of Architecture

Certified by:

Dr. Lilian Chee
Dissertation Supervisor

BLOWING UP THE BOMB SHELTER:
Sifting Through The Rubble Of Domesticity

by

Toh Hu Cheong Terence

A0047565X

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Architecture

On 17 September 2012 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Architecture

Abstract

The post-independence existence of bomb shelters proliferating island wide in the public spaces of Singapore is testament to the fervour to defend and assert the state's survival after having experienced WWII. The anxiety of a small country with a small population and land size has driven the state towards an enchantment with 'national survival'. Trauma inflicted as a result of air raids by Japanese bombers bombing Singapore was exacerbated by the inadequacy of the fortifications constructed during colonial rule under the British Empire. Haunted with such a past, the state becomes anxious. The Civil Defence Programme that pervades throughout the island is the product of such an enchantment.

In Singapore's anxious pursuit of survival, biopower transplanted the bomb shelter into the domestic realm under the welfare guise of readiness for our protection. The bomb shelter's existence in the home participates in the pursuits of an anxious state that moulds an ideal domesticity for the purposes of achieving a global city-state. The movement of the bomb shelter into the realm of domesticity allows biopower to enact its grasp on domesticity.

The state and its actions is cast as perpetuating a culture of excess trauma. Trauma and pain however, is characterised by its unsharability. When we hear of others in pain, doubt arises. The state finds itself losing the connection with its audience. When doubt creeps in, abuse and misuse occur at the edges.

The bomb shelter accommodating foreign domestic workers allows for the establishment of thresholds within the domestic realm; a phenomenon complicit with the state's ideals, towards the moulding of a family nucleus able to participate in the building of a global city state. Through time-space arrangements, domesticity's complicity and negotiation with the state's ambition is explored

through the site of the bomb shelter. Subsequently, the bomb shelter becomes a liminal space that allows state constructs, social relations, and identities to be negotiated or even subverted.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Lilian Chee

Title: Assistant Professor