

MOTHERS, MAIDS AND OTHERS:

Domestic Productions of a Nation and Her Households

By

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Abstract

Since its inception in the 1960's the state has through the HDB, constructed the physical space of most Singaporean homes. Prominent figures from the housing authority have publicly prescribed scripts for familial living to go along with the homes, and these have in turn influenced the gender roles and biological reproduction that are tied to them. Within such a backdrop, the dissertation seeks to explore questions such as: How has the architecture of Singapore's public housing defined, and worked in conjunction with the scripts of domesticity imposed on it? Where are occupants positioned in this kind of space, and do they have the power to change the functional codes embedded in these flats? Notably, traditional forms of drawing (i.e. the plan and section) fall short as architectural texts in answering these questions as they only represent physical space; new architectural texts are necessary. Framing the flat through Charles Rice's theory of *interiorization* and entering it through the *body*, the dissertation studies how codes of gender and hierarchy are written at the level of the interior, and explores how these scripts may be teased out and read. Exploring the physical space of the flat and images of its interiors through the specific "bodies" of the (i) mother and her family, (ii) the maid and (iii) "Others," this dissertation demonstrates how the architectural production of the HDB home is impacted upon by the priorities of these bodies who inhabit it. As scripts are played out, codes embedded in the flats change, complicitly shaped by those who dwell in them through demarcations of gender, race, approximations, substitutions, and hierarchies.

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Dedicated to my mom and dad.

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It started in part from a conversation with Mark Cousins along Bedford Square in the spring of 2014.

“Male and female He created them”

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Section 01

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From the placement of walls to the formation of nuclear families, the generic HDB apartment is both a domestic product and a site of domestic production in Singapore, that is to say, it is the site for enacting state-produced scripts of familial living, gender roles and biological reproduction.¹ Implemented through the Housing Development Board (HDB), Singapore's governing authority has since its inception in the 1960s, constructed most of Singapore's residential real estate, privileged the formation of heterosexual family units through its policies and prefigured scripts for living. Until recently only Singaporean and permanent residents who are married or are siblings can purchase heavily subsidized HDB flats, and even then, singles are only eligible upon turning 35 years of age.² As David Sibley argues in *Geographies of Exclusion*, single family apartments (such as HDB's) are not neutral.³ As the architectural production of the HDB flat is impacted upon by the priorities of the married couple who inhabit it, codes embedded in the apartment's predetermined physical spaces change, complicitly shaped by those who dwell in them.

Tying in theoretical work by Charles Rice on the *interior* with the notion of the *body* as developed by Heidi Nast and Steve Pile, this dissertation will examine how the interior and the spatial practices it comprises are generated and negotiated by several means. First, I will flesh out the architectural means through which particular planning norms associated with familial household needs are incorporated in the architectural planning of the HDB unit. Then, I will explore how these norms are reinforced through images which appear in various HDB publicity collaterals such as the

¹ For a discussion on the semantics of the domestic vis a vis the foreign, see Amy Kaplan in *Manifest Domesticity*, *American Literature*, Vol. 70, No. 3, No More Separate Spheres! (Sep 1998): 581.

² The HDB only started selling subsidised two-room flats to singles in 2013 July. Janice Heng, 3-room BTO flats for singles - not now, but not never; The needs of other groups arguably come first, but situation can change, *The Straits Times* (Singapore, April 10, 2014, Thursday)

³ Dorte Kulhman, *Gender Studies in Architecture: Space, Power and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2013), 133.

Resident's Guide Handbook (1973, 1975); the *Resident's Handbook* (1980); the magazine *Our Home* (1973—1987); and the more recent publication *Dwellings*, which started circulation in 2012. Consequently, the dissertation examines how these images and physical spaces are negotiated through the occupant's body. Borrowing from Gulsum Baydar's *Figures of Women in Contemporary Architectural Discourse*, one goes on to ask: How does the architecture of Singapore's public housing define the domesticity that is imposed on it?⁴ How is the body positioned in this kind of space, and do occupants have the power to change the functional codes embedded in these flats?

Indeed, the institution of the family in the interior of the HDB flat forms a text from which we can read the scripts of domestic productions in the Singaporean household – written by the state, projected upon images, negotiated by bodies and, more often than not, resulting in deviations from the policy aims that enabled these controls in the first place. In effect, what interests me most is how the body politic of the occupants engage with what is fixed or given in these households. The dissertation will thus explore the physical space of the HDB flat and the projected images of its interiors through these specific “bodies”;

- i) The mother and her family, as gendered and constructed by the state;
- ii) The maid, who is linked by her work to the family interior;⁵ and
- iii) “Others”, who are categorically excluded from official accounts but traceable as occupants.

In contrast to the material from HDB, I propose that enactments of family life unavailable to conventional architectural texts (i.e. the plan) may be derived from the public housing interiors featured in film. Moving beyond the static, single image of the photograph/ illustration, film gives architecture the

⁴ Gulsum Baydar, “Figures of wo/man in contemporary architectural discourse,” in Hilde Heynen and Glsm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 31.

⁵ Domestic Workers in Singapore are more commonly known as “maids.”

added dimensions of bodies that interiorize and inhabit “lived” space. Through Anthony Chen’s *Ilo Ilo*; Colin Goh and Woo Yen Yen’s *Singapore Dreaming*; and Eric Khoo’s *Twelve Stories*; the occupants’ bodies are shown to inscribe, react and contest – not just for space in the HDB interior, but state produced notions of the body. The appropriation of these films as architectural texts thus allows us to test the success of those official interior images, correlated against conventional drawings and the spatial productions of the HDB.

1.1 THE INTERIOR

Beyond its commonplace definition that evokes ideas of decoration and aesthetic production, the idea of the *interior*, as developed by Charles Rice, incorporates the spatial reality of inhabitation (the occupation of the house) and the creation of a mental image of the desired (ideal), lived out by the imagination.⁶ The framework allows a nuanced maneuver between the architectural space of the house, the negotiation of the body through it, and the broader concepts of domesticity. While the house involves the physical act of construction, of bounding actual space, *domesticity* evokes notions of inscription, of gendered codes and the production of “lived space.”⁷ It is thus through the process of *interiorization* that the HDB flat is first inhabited, a representative image of ideal dwelling is formed, and domesticity – scripts of gender and hierarchy – are enacted through the habits of its inhabitants. The encoding of domesticity on the architecture of the home is a product of its interiorization.

As Rice argues in *The Emergence of the Interior*, the interior developed as an architectural counterpart to physical construction, ornament and surface definitions of inside space.⁸ It acts as a frame of domesticity in its modern form within the duality of its theoretical construct. His argument is not without flaws—one of his premises is that the “interior, domesticity and the home”

⁶ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior - Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2.

⁷ Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.). *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁸ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior - Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

has been treated as idealized, universally recognizable “representations of domestic life.”⁹ A fleeting glance through the work of contemporary theorists would indicate that many do not.¹⁰ This being said, the framework itself is highly relevant towards bridging the gap between physical and representational realms.

The interior and domesticity are thus closely related – domesticity is “framed” by the interior, which comprises of the (i) physical inhabitation and the (ii) mental image of inhabitation which occupants live out. In close relation to images of idealized occupancy, the codes of gender and hierarchy are written at the level of the interior, and it is the text of the interior that we are reading when describing domesticity.

That being said, the relationship between the image of the interior and the spatial practice(s) of domesticity is not an easy one. Beatriz Colomina argues that “domestic manifestations” became modern “in relation to mass media,” suggesting that developments were made precisely at the level of the image.¹¹ The complex connection between representation and physical spatial condition is such that “it is easy to imagine oneself in” precise static positions “indicated by the unoccupied furniture.”¹² Photographs can be “entered” and inhabited.¹³ According to Colomina, “the perception of space is produced by its representations,” and in this sense, “built space has no more authority than do drawings, photographs or descriptions.”¹⁴ This might be the case, until one considers the agency of bodies in the inhabitation of space. In this respect, Colomina and Rice’s framework of interiorization is insufficient to deal with the process of inhabitation. These do not accommodate the body of the occupant and its negotiation with interiorized spaces.

⁹ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior - Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.

¹⁰ In *Understanding home: a critical review of the literature*, Shelley Mallet traces how critics of the “ideal home” such as Peter Somerville, Michael D. Jackson and Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson have rejected exclusively positive descriptions as “naive expressions of false consciousness” that do not reflect diverse experience. Rice appears to have done exactly the latter in approaching the home in its valorized form. For a further discussion, see Shelley Mallett, *Understanding home: a critical review of the literature*, *The Sociological Review*, 52, No.1 (Feb 2004): 82.

¹¹ Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 94.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

1.2 THE BODY

To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have ... breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go.

Adrienne Rich¹⁵

The concept of the interior involves the body and its inscriptions, and it is only through the conceptual figure of the body that we may begin to map out what Mark Rakatansky describes as the "complex array of mentalities and practices concerning the relations between genders; parents and children; inside and outside; public and private; what is supposed to be seen, smelt or heard and what is not."¹⁶

The house is thus a site of body-politics. Until the 1998 edition, Neufert's *Architects' Data* represented gendered bodies in differentiated manners – male bodies were drawn as users of the bathtub (fig.1), while female bodies were assigned to cleaning.¹⁷ As Baydar argues, spatial hierarchies associated with women in the (nuclear) family home have been largely absorbed and naturalized by the architectural discipline.¹⁸

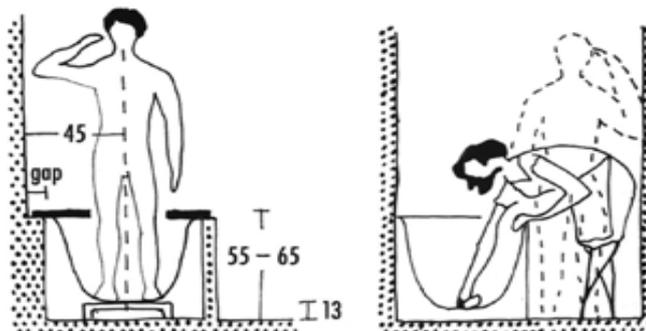


Fig.1 "He" uses the bath, Ernest Neufert, *Architects' Data* 1998

¹⁵ Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds.), *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3.

¹⁶ Dorte Kulhman, *Gender Studies in Architecture: Space, Power and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2013), 180.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁸ Baydar, "Figures of wo/man in contemporary architectural discourse," 42.

For Nast and Pile, sites like the home are “made-up out of relationships between, within and beyond them.”¹⁹ Bodies and places are “woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations,” and it is through the body that architecture can become *interior*.²⁰ The physical architecture of the house is interiorized as the institution of the family enters the flat and acquires its own codes, frustrating prefigured ones.

Citing Adrienne Rich, Nast and Pile also argue that at the micro-geography of the body, boundaries other than gender have to be negotiated as well. For Rich, it is her skin color that has brought her “places and stopped her going to other places,” and as Elizabeth Grosz argues, many “other hierarchical forms of power” contribute to making the body.²¹ The body-politic highlights the point of entry many in Singapore use as access into the family interior as well. For example, it is precisely because the body of the maid is female, physically approximate to her female employer’s, and colored – culturally distinct – that it is welcomed into the home of the Singaporean family.²²

The body thus provides both a literal and theoretical point of entry into the family interior—through demarcations of gender, race, approximations, substitutions, and hierarchies.

1.3 PUBLIC HOUSING’S DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Founded in 1960, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) has implemented Singapore’s successful public housing scheme which has gone through several stages of development to become the primary form of housing for 81.2 percent of the population.²³

¹⁹ Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds.), *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Shirlena Huang and Joaquin Gonzalez, “Migrant Female Domestic Workers: Debating the Economic, Social and Political Impacts in Singapore”, *International Migration Review*, 33, No. 1 (Spring 1999)

²³ Department of Statistics, *Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 2 Households and Housing*, Ministry of Trade & Industry (2011).

In its first stage, public housing was implemented to resolve an “urban housing crisis” which the government inherited from the British colonial government in the post war period.²⁴ 117 000 units in three prototypical forms – the 1, 2 and 3-Room “emergency” and “standard” flats were constructed to house as many people as quickly and as cheaply as possible.²⁵ Designed as self-contained units, each consisted of a kitchen, a toilet and varying numbers of additional rooms. A one- room flat was 23.5 square meters; a two-room flat was 42. 0 square meters; and a three room flat was 53.0 square meters (fig.2).²⁶ The first stage of construction saw primarily rental flats for the poor, who had been living in “congested shop houses in the central area of the city.”²⁷ Any improvements to such dire living conditions were perceived as positive, and the foundation was laid for the subsequent nuclearization of families as residents were transferred into rectilinear modernist high-rise designs.

FIGURE 1 PROTOTYPE FLATS (1-ROOM TO 4-ROOM)



Fig.2 Prototype Flats, 1-Room to 4-Room

²⁴ Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC), Ministry of National Development, *Housing : Turning Squatters into Stakeholders*, (Singapore, June 2013), Foreword.

²⁵ Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (Pion: London, 1990), 226.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 227

²⁷ Park, Bae-Gyoon, "Where Do Tigers Sleep at Night? The State's Role in Housing Policy in South Korea and Singapore", *Economic Geography*, 74, No. 3 (1998): 283.

The second stage of public housing implementation saw the transfer of ownership of the flats to their occupants, in a bid "to encourage a property-owning democracy in Singapore, and to enable Singaporean citizens in the lower middle income group to own their homes."²⁸ With a goal of having "100 percent homeownership for public housing residents by 1997," the government wanted citizens to own their homes, and, indirectly, instill in the largely immigrant population a larger "commitment to the existing society."²⁹

In line with this strategy, households were allowed to use a portion of their state-imposed Central Provident Fund (CPF) forced-savings to pay for the monthly mortgages of the flat.³⁰ Prior to the scheme, CPF withdrawals could only be made upon retirement age or disability. Following its implementation, families were committed to their HDB flats by mortgages and there was a greater impetus for women to leave their homes to work – this shift also coincided with the policies that made provisions for the employment of maids in such households.

In 2002, the Build-To-Order system was introduced, where buyers balloted for the chance to select a flat. Couples intending to get married or those applying to live near their parents were given priority, and when the quota is met, the flats were built within three years.³¹ Almost every flat under construction represents a hetero-normative conjugal family unit waiting to move in.

The policy switch towards constructing not just physical residences, but also encouraging the growth of families, was a strategic one. The HDB formed its own Statistical and Research Unit in 1968 to collate and analyze public housing demographics for its Design and Research Unit, which was responsible for formulating standards and plans.³² In 1982 the multi-

²⁸ As quoted in Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (Pion: London, 1990), 231.

²⁹ Park, Bae-Gyoon, "Where Do Tigers Sleep at Night? The State's Role in Housing Policy in South Korea and Singapore", *Economic Geography*, 74, No. 3 (1998): 283.

³⁰ Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W. *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (Pion: London, 1990), 231.

³¹ Mah Bow Tan, *Reflections on Housing a Nation, A Collection of Commentaries* (Singapore: Ministry of National Development, 31Feb 2011): 31, app.mnd.gov.sg/PDF/Reflections_on_Housing_a_Nation_2.pdf.

³² Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing*

generational family type flat was introduced as well, providing families with the prospect of grandparents supporting with childcare.

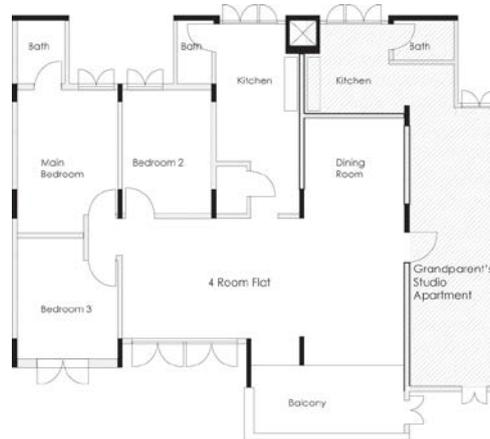


Fig.3 Multi-generational Type A Flat with 4 Room and attached Studio Apartment

The HDB and its policies influence the way people live by its sheer scale alone. One may argue that the typical Singaporean is “one who lives in the HDB estates.”³³ Whilst changing aspirations have led to demands for other forms of housing, the structure of life progression through the public housing institution and its architecture has become part of the Singaporean psyche.³⁴ “Shall we apply for an HDB flat?” has become a colloquial convention for marriage proposals, with the intimacy of marriage closely linked with the image of one of a generic HDB housing unit.³⁵ The HDB flat has become a domestic product as well a producer of heteronormative, conjugal family interiors.³⁶

in Hong Kong and Singapore (Pion: London, 1990), 233.

³³ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 10.

³⁴ Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (Pion: London, 1990), 243.

³⁵ Mah Bow Tan, *Reflections on Housing a Nation, A Collection of Commentaries* (Singapore: Ministry of National Development, 31Feb 2011): 37, app.mnd.gov.sg/PDF/Reflections_on_Housing_a_Nation_2.pdf.

³⁶ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 10.

Section 02

MOTHERS

2.0 SCRIPTS FOR LIVING

In their book *The International Style*, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson note that modernist constructions implied design was not for a *given* family but for a *typical* family.³⁷ As Natalie Oswin points out, the idea of the typical family in the HDB flat took on certain specific state definitions as well. Quoting Lee Kuan Yew, the family is described as the “basic building block of our society,” and “by policy, we have reinforced this.” The government tried to further define the family in 2007:

By “family” in Singapore, we mean one man one woman, marrying, having children and bringing up children within that framework of a stable family unit.³⁸

HDB units were thus built for a specifically heteronormative, reproductive, nuclear body of the state-defined family.³⁹

Developed ideas of projected government control over the bodies of its residents permeated state policy. At a convention in 1983, Liu Thai Ker, who was then heading the HDB, compared staying in the already ubiquitous HDB flat with a “stage performance.”⁴⁰ The metaphor’s use suggested that residents held agency in the theatre of domestic life. The HDB was to be the “producer” in a “joint-effort,” where families wrote “good scripts” and put up a “good performance” – for the state.⁴¹

³⁷ Quoted in Geoffrey Broadbent, “Architecture and the Human Sciences”, *Design in Architecture: Architecture and the Human Sciences*, (United Kingdom: Surrey, 1978) 83.

³⁸ Natalie Oswin, “The modern model family at home in Singapore: a queer geography”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 35, No. 2 (April 2010): 257.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 15.

⁴¹ Ibid.

In painting out the roles of the family, Liu conceded that the government also “makes a small, though significant input in the script.”⁴² Referring specifically to public housing rules and regulations set by the HDB, Liu suggested that state intervention was limited to guidelines and merely reinforced by grassroots committees volunteering within the housing estates.⁴³ In return for a good “way of life,” the body of the family implicitly entered into an unwritten contract with the state, which promised to “realize certain social and economic objectives.”⁴⁴ Yet state input most certainly expanded beyond being mere guidelines.

In a bid to encourage family planning, the state launched an aggressive Stop at Two campaign in 1972, advising families that having “Two is enough.”⁴⁵ Non-compliance directly impacted the family’s eligibility for a HDB flat as they were given lower priority in flat allocation.⁴⁶ On the other hand, as a HDB publication proposed, “the advantages of family planning are many.”⁴⁷ Highlighting the body of the mother, it argued that family planning “means better health... Mothers with many children tend to become haggard in appearance earlier on in life.”⁴⁸ Contrary to Liu’s suggestion, planning policies that appeared external to the HDB were directly tied into the flat – state “input in the script” of

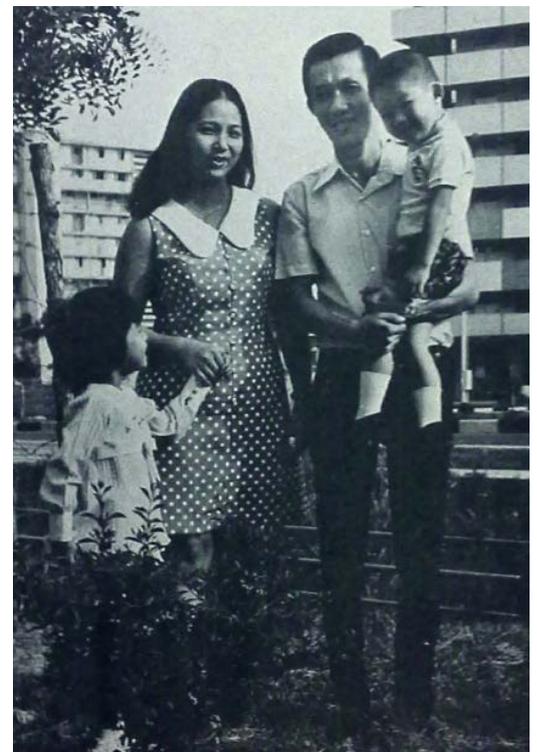


Fig.4. “What Family Planning Can Do”

⁴² SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 15.

⁴³ Citizen Consultative Committees are essentially grassroots organizations that currently help to administer social welfare schemes for the under-privileged. Resident Committees are formed by groups of residents who similarly operate under the ruling party’s grassroots organization *People’s Association* to ‘disseminate information and gather feedback on government policies and actions.’ Whilst their role is to function as extensions of grassroots organizations, they are linked to the ruling party.

⁴⁴ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 15.

⁴⁵ Mavis Toh, “Two is not enough; The Stop At Two policy, launched in 1972, came with tough measures that made it ‘over-successful,’” *The Straits Times (Singapore)*, August 24, 2008, Sunday.

⁴⁶ Having a lower priority on the list meant longer, indefinite waiting times, and in that period the average waiting time for a flat was five years – lower priority meant this could be much more.

⁴⁷ HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Oct 1972), 25.

⁴⁸ HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Oct 1972), 25.

family life was not small at all.⁴⁹

As part of the campaign, teams from the family planning board were dispatched to antenatal clinics to “educate mothers on various methods of contraception.”⁵⁰ Of the opinion that “many did not even know how to use a condom,” they promoted “sterilisation more than anything else.”⁵¹ Assuming that fathers were incapable of using contraceptives, the family planning board opted instead to coerce maternal bodies towards the permanent solutions of vasectomy and ligation, placing the responsibility for birth control solely on the mother. Quoting Michel Foucault, Nash and Pile comment how the disciplinary power of the state “seeps into the very grain of individuals,” reaching “right into their bodies.”⁵² In this case, it was very literally, and very specifically into the female body of the mother.

On top of disincentives directly related to the provision of housing, parents also faced other deterrents such as incremental hospitalization charges, reduced maternity leave, and – after the third child – the harsh possibility that they would have issues enrolling their younger children in school.⁵³ The policies singled out the mothers as couples were encouraged to volunteer for ligation after having two children, and required to show school administrations their certificates as proof.⁵⁴ Linking the reproductive capacity of the family to housing policy and the sterilization of mothers to school enrolment policy, the state drew barriers around access to housing, and education for children. Negotiating these was contingent on the compliance of the mother, and she had to do so *with her body*.

The earlier policies were successful beyond expectations, and in the 1980s the state found itself making a detour. The educated were urged to have larger families, with slogans of “Three or more, if you can afford it.”⁵⁵ Recalling

⁴⁹ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 15.

⁵⁰ Mavis Toh, “Two is not enough; The Stop At Two policy, launched in 1972, came with tough measures that made it ‘over-successful’,” *The Straits Times (Singapore)*, August 24, 2008, Sunday.

⁵¹ Ibid.

^e Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds.), *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), 213.

⁵³ Mavis Toh, “Two is not enough; The Stop At Two policy, launched in 1972, came with tough measures that made it ‘over-successful’,” *The Straits Times (Singapore)*, August 24, 2008, Sunday.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ai Yun Hing, “Ideology and Changing Family Arrangements in Singapore,” *Journal of Comparative*

the terminology first introduced by Liu, the state was indeed a producer – literally and figuratively – in the theatre of HDB living. Constructing both houses and the bodies of the families within them, it sought to script and calibrate even the most intimate details of reproduction; in the maternal body.

At the urban level, “scripts” for living were built into HDB New Towns as well. With the high-rise, high-density development pattern chosen for HDB new towns, most planning was done in plan — extruded between floors with no variation, in accordance to state, not individual desires.⁵⁶ Pursuing “better planning,” site layout and “better recreation facilities,” the HDB shifted emphasis to the urban landscape that was also more visible instead.⁵⁷ Images of “happy community living” in void decks began appearing in the 1980 HDB-issued *Resident’s Handbook* (fig.4), and designs began to focus on ancillary spaces surrounding the home — these would prove to be the most visible indicators of the quality of life the HDB promised to provide.⁵⁸

Interestingly enough, a HDB sponsored study in 2007 concluded retrospectively that in the initial years “community ties among neighbors” were fostered by the “housewives in the estate.”⁵⁹ Consequently, when more mothers re-entered the workforce, “interaction between neighboring families” declined.”⁶⁰ The study implied that the decrease in neighbourly interaction was due to a shift in women’s lifestyles, and yet the mental image described fails to correlate with the images of “Happy Community Living” the HDB had provided 27

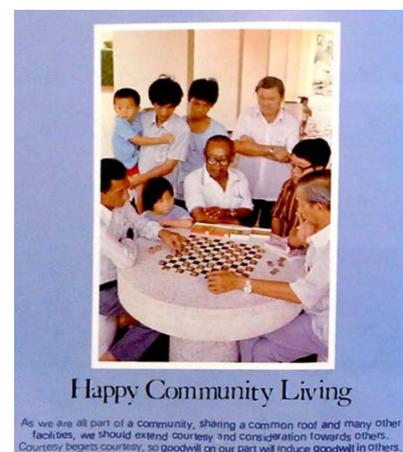


Fig.5. Happy Community Living

Family Studies, 35, No. 3 (Summer 2004): 377

⁵⁶ Park, Bae-Gyoon, “Where Do Tigers Sleep at Night? The State’s Role in Housing Policy in South Korea and Singapore”, *Economic Geography*, 74, No. 3 (1998): 283.

⁵⁷ Castells M, Goh L, Kwok R Y-W, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (Pion: London, 1990), 248.

⁵⁸ HDB, 1980 Residents handbook (Singapore).

⁵⁹ Forum on HDB Heartware, *Forum on HDB Heartware 07: beyond home ownership to community ownership: a report* (Singapore, 2007), 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

years before (Fig.5).⁶¹ The images HDB projected did not have any mothers in it; it only had men.

Nevertheless, contemporary HDB - published images of "community connectedness" in its 2013 publication *Dwellings* saw the community figuratively move out of the ground floor void deck into the open spaces between the HDB blocks (Fig.6).⁶² Out of the void deck and into the landscape, residents were encouraged to take as much "interest in and ownership of their surroundings" as they did in the family home.⁶³ Homeowners were now encouraged to regard the urban, ancillary spaces of the HDB as extensions of their interior.

While recent images produced by the HDB in its publications came with captions such as "Creating Attractive, Lively Homes," (Fig.7) suggesting a "lived" space tailored to the family and ready to be inhabited, they tended to provide a clearer picture of the overall urban form than the houses themselves.⁶⁴ In stark

contrast to the clarity of housing policy and outward urban planning, there was vagueness to the reality and the processes of the family interior.



Fig. 6a "Community Connectedness"



Fig. 6b "Community Connectedness"



Fig.7 "Attractive, Lively Homes"

⁶¹ HDB, 1980 Residents handbook (Singapore).

⁶² HDB, "Shaping a Master Blueprint", *HDB InfoWeb Dwellings*, Issue 02 (2013): 30, accessed August, 2014.

⁶³ HDB, "Housing Roadmap", *HDB InfoWeb Dwellings*, Issue 1 (Oct 2012): 8, accessed August, 2014.

⁶⁴ HDB, "Shaping a Master Blueprint", *HDB InfoWeb Dwellings*, Issue 02 (2013): 30, accessed August, 2014.

2.1 THE INTERIOR

“Having a room of one’s own” is a desire, but also a control.

Hilde Heynen⁶⁵

Developing my critique of Charles Rice’s interior through the introduction of Heidi Nast and Steve Pile’s theoretical work on the body, I will use the term “interior” to refer to this expanded definition of the interior as mediated by the occupant’s body. This framework allows us to examine the physical interior as simultaneously an image constructed and projected by the state (which coincides with Rice’s definition), while also subjecting the examination of these imaged interiors through the instrument of the occupant’s body or body-politics (Nast and Piles’ argument). Following the expanded definition of the interior as a framework for reading inhabitation and the domestic, this dissertation traces the body politic of the family and the state as it is produced through the HDB flat with the state’s projected images of the interior, and the resistance of the occupant’s body to such images.

Along with instructions on how to upgrade the house found in the 1975 *Residents Guidebook* distributed to new homeowners, the HDB decided “not to provide the finishes except in the bathrooms and kitchens.”⁶⁶ The HDB endowed the family with agency in the realm of aesthetics, and as Jane M Jacobs and Stephen Cairns argues, decorative consumption practices emerged from “the resident’s imaginative and practical world.”⁶⁷ Quoting Knut Sorensen, she notes that the flat is a filter through which a household encounters society – through ideas of how it “should look,” or “be modern, or, even, how one can be Singaporean.”⁶⁸ For Jacobs, the state “played a significant role” advising on “style” and determining “aesthetic limits to the

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze, 'Foreword' in Jacques Donzelot, *Policing of Families* (USA: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), xvii.

⁶⁶ SPC Convention, *High-rise, high-density living: SPC Convention, 1983: selected papers* (Singapore: Singapore Professional Centre, 1984), 17.

⁶⁷ Jane Jacobs, and Stephen Cairns, "The modern touch: interior design and modernisation in post-independence Singapore", *Environment and Planning A*, 40, No. 3 (2008):573, DOI:10.1068/a39123.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

extent of creative expression.”⁶⁹ Her argument, however, limits itself to what Rice describes as “surface definitions of inside space,” and stop short of breaking beyond the realm of the aesthetic, into the interior.⁷⁰

Notably, when the HDB outsourced the construction of flats under the Design Build and Sell Scheme (DBSS), private developers did away with even this shallow definition of agency, swinging to the other extreme. With its pre-built fittings and more expensive costly finishes, the DBSS HDB flat came planned and codified with conventions – families were expected to use the house as labelled and dimensioned.⁷¹

In an example of the released plan of a “four room apartment” built under the scheme (fig.8), furniture placements in tight configurations were suggested and labelled. The main bedroom is pre-determined, similar in size to the other bedrooms and even overall smaller than the balcony, as if most family life was to be spent on the balcony. Labels have been applied to spaces in the house as well — the main bedroom is marked as ‘master bedroom,’ with an accompanying ‘master bath,’ next to the “study.” As Heynen points out, these labels carry implications of gender, coming “with the expectance that it will be inhabited by a married couple,” the mother an expert user of the kitchen, and the husband insistent on privacy.⁷² Prior to the entrance of the family, the HDB flat comes coded with predetermined labels, and expected patterns of use.



Fig.8 4-Room DBSS HDB flat

The task of interiorizing the house was not a small one either – as shown in figure 7, the placement of shear walls precluded major renovations,

⁶⁹ Jane Jacobs, and Stephen Cairns, "The modern touch: interior design and modernisation in post-independence Singapore", *Environment and Planning A*, 40, No. 3 (2008):573, DOI:10.1068/a39123.

⁷⁰ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior - Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

⁷¹ Under the DBSS scheme, flats were built by private developers, but sold by the HDB with government subsidies. They are considered HDB flats.

⁷² Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), "Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture," (New York: Routledge, 2005), 24.

preventing the extension of, for example, the bedroom into dining space. Even the placement of furniture is limited by the tight dimensions of the flat. As Heynen has argued, in the course of purchasing the house, families implicitly accept these rules embedded in physical form.⁷³ What is of great interest, then, is how these rules are negotiated later by the body of the family during the process of interiorization.

As defined earlier, the family interior is both the (i) space inhabited by the body and the (ii) enacted representational image of inhabitation. While Liu's metaphor of the theatre served to highlight the tacit contract between the familial body and the state in the HDB flat, the same metaphor can be used in the to help break down the codified flat. When the interior is seen as a theatre for living, spaces such as the "master bedroom" can be re-read beyond its functional label as an intimate site for scripts of consummation, inhabitation and even quarrelling. Re-appropriating Liu's metaphor, the flat as a theatre becomes not just a stage for a family's desired performance, but the performative site of the body.⁷⁴ Performativity here refers to how activities, enacted by the body reflect actual ideas of "gender, age, and role" beyond superficial labelling.⁷⁵ Beyond state-produced labels, the family interior can be further understood through the body.

2.2 IDEAL MATERNAL BODIES

When the HDB started circulating the quarterly magazine *Our Home* in 1972, the female counterpart in the conjugal HDB couple was represented as a slim, busty female, feminine in that her dresser was full of make-up and homely in that she was actively exercising charge over the home, nailing a peg into the wall to put up her marriage portrait (Fig.9). The



Fig.9 Newly Wed Wives

⁷⁴ Shelley Mallett, Understanding home: a critical review of the literature, *The Sociological Review*, 52, No.1 (Feb 2004): 76.

⁷⁵ Shelley Mallett, Understanding home: a critical review of the literature, *The Sociological Review*, 52, No.1 (Feb 2004): 76.

husband, on the other hand, is portrayed as authoritative and compliant to government regulations (Fig.10), an image that is also echoed in subsequent publications like the *Resident's Guide* which was distributed to new homeowners.⁷⁶



Fig.10 Home-owning Husbands

The female body was portrayed as an active and sexualized one, in the process of performatively inscribing her image of the interior on the architecture of the home. In the first phase of public housing, owner owned or not, most of such activity had to be “permitted” by the government, and the cartoon implied that wives, if left to their own devices, could run wild in making it their interior.⁷⁷ In this, the caricature portrayed the HDB interior as one actively performatively claimed by the wife into her feminine domain – to the extent that masculine restraint was necessary. The male, on the other hand, is pictured as being aligned to HDB governance, pleading that his wife to ask the government for permission to putting up their wedding photo. Newly married wives were presented as robust occupants, actively interiorizing the house into their feminine sphere through acts of inscription.

The publication also provided articles that taught home owners how to appropriate the flats as well. Featuring model households who had a “do-it-yourself” attitude, home owners were encouraged to interiorize the house, making the bedroom “cozy” and the living room “lighter.”⁷⁸ All that was required was that couples would ask for permission first, issued “almost immediately” upon the couples’ application.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Dec 1972), 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ For a discussion on the home and consumption encouraged through the *Our Home* magazine, see Jane Jacobs, and Stephen Cairns, “The modern touch: interior design and modernisation in post-independence Singapore”, *Environment and Planning A*, 40, No. 3 (2008):573, DOI:10.1068/a39123

⁷⁹ HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Dec 1972), 9.

A series of sketches published in August 1975 indicated how the newly completed “New Generation” (NG) 3-room and 4-room flats were designed to be occupied by specifically defined bodies.⁸⁰ The common corridor was also widened from 1.6 to 2.1 meters so that “small children can have room to play in safety close to home,” and in contrast to the earlier portrayal, the female body is shown at work in the kitchen and undergoing rituals of beautification at the dressing table (Fig.11).⁸¹ Unlike the earlier portrayal of the energetic, newly wedded wife, the 1975 version in the more child-friendly NG flat was that of a mother whose self was domesticated within the interiors she creates. The two contrasting images suggest that the state viewed newly-wed wives differently from mothers, as vigorous, sexualized, feminine bodies. As the female body transited into its role as housewife and mother, it was expected to become a tempered one, locked into the habitual rituals of housework and beautification.

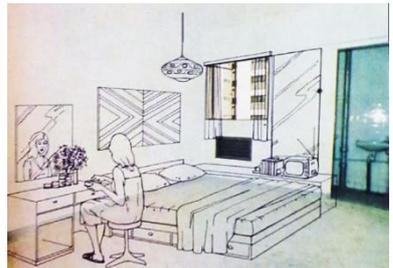
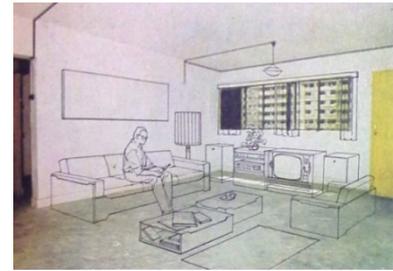


Fig.11 “New Generation” Flats

Alongside these images, *Our Home* also ran articles on parenthood that served to reinforce the female body as performer of familial rituals. In *The Importance of Your Child’s Early Years* ran in Oct 1972, mothers are praised as the “most important person” who should talk to the child whilst doing “household work every day.”⁸² The performance of household chores at home was elevated, as if work done outside the home by males was irrelevant to the running of the family. At the end of the day, according to the magazine, the mother who plans for her family will have “more time for

⁸⁰ HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Aug 1975), 18.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, Oct 1972), 20.

her children, her husband *and the home.*"⁸³ In contrast to the overtly-sexualized image of the newly wed wife, the ideal image of the female body was to be that of a nurturing mother, loving wife and faithful home-maker.

⁸³ Ibid.

Section 03

MAIDS

3.0 MAIDS

By the late 1970s, a labor shortage drew many women to join the workforce, with advertisements encouraging them to do so also appearing in *Our Home*.⁸⁴ In support of this, the Foreign Maid Scheme was created in 1978 to encourage the “participation of Singaporean women” in the workforce.⁸⁵ Developing into the 1986 work-permit system, employers now post a security bond of S\$5,000 and pay a monthly levy of around S\$330 to the government to hire a domestic helper, also known as *maids* in Singapore.⁸⁶ Maids are forbidden from marrying Singaporeans, and have to go for mandatory pregnancy tests every six months.⁸⁷ As a condition of their work permit, they also have to live in the homes of their employers as stay-in workers.⁸⁸ While Singaporean women left the flat for work, foreign female bodies entered to replace the former as surrogates for reproductive labor, that is, to take over the household chores and to look after the children.

Following the entry of the domestic worker into the interior, the state itself has vacillated between considering the maid as being part of the household and excluding it. Until the year 2000 the HDB census of its residents considered employment of maids as an indicator of household wealth – alongside household income, the ownership of consumer durables and vehicles, and the booking of holiday tours.⁸⁹ In the 2003 and 2008 *HDB Sample Household Survey* however, maids, along with tenants who rented rooms, were excluded from the HDB population count.⁹⁰ Yet, in the 2010 Population Census published by Singstat (a different government statutory

⁸⁴ Hing Ai Yun, "Foreign Maids and the Reproduction of Labor in Singapore", *Philippine Sociological Review*, 44, No. 1/4 (Jan 1996): 37.

⁸⁵ MICA, Information Division, *Singapore Into the 90's*, (Singapore: Ministry of Communication and Information, 1986), 64.

⁸⁶ Hing Ai Yun, "Foreign Maids and the Reproduction of Labor in Singapore", *Philippine Sociological Review*, 44, No. 1/4 (Jan 1996): 41.

⁸⁷ Hing Ai Yun, "Foreign Maids and the Reproduction of Labor in Singapore", *Philippine Sociological Review*, 44, No. 1/4 (Jan 1996): 41.

⁸⁸ Lenore T Lyons, *Embodying transnationalism: The making of the Indonesian maid* (Research Online, University of Wollongong, 2005), 3.

⁸⁹ HDB Research Department, *Profile of residents living in HDB flats* (Singapore: Research and Planning Department, Housing and Development Board, March 2000), 6.

⁹⁰ Fong Chun Wah, et al, *Public housing in Singapore: social aspects & the elderly: HDB sample survey household, 2003* (Singapore: HDB, 2005).

board from the HDB) there seemed to have been an about-turn, and maids were re-included as members of the household, although they were not considered as working members of the household.⁹¹ However, in the most recent *Population Trends 2013* maids disappeared from the statistics yet again. From first being treated as an economic indicator of wealth, to being a tenant, the maid's body is to the state what it is to the household — welcomed as labor, but quickly and conveniently forgotten wherever possible.

In a similar vein much work has been done to criticize the way the bodies of maids have been catalogued and commoditized as part of the recruitment process.⁹² Detailing bio-data reflecting names, photographs, age, and skin color, height, weight, birth date, and interests, employers have the opportunity to choose what kind of foreign body they will bring into the interior.⁹³ As employers decide in part whose work permit application they want to sponsor based on such data, they too are implicit in transactions of domestic labour across both familial and state-controlled boundaries.⁹⁴

The state control enforced through the work permit also reinforces the “otherness” of the domestic worker. Contained within her employer's private house, and not covered by labour laws, maids are excluded from the formal labor market.⁹⁵ As labouring bodies, maids have to negotiate not just the family, but also working hours and job scopes defined by the latter.⁹⁶ In justifying this move the Ministry for Manpower argued that:

...the nature of work, the duties performed and the standard of performance... vary from household to household. It is therefore not

⁹¹ Department of Statistics. *Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 2 Households and Housing* (Singapore: Ministry of Trade & Industry, 2011), 121.

⁹² For a discussion on the commodification of maids see Appadurai (1986), Ehrenreich & Hochschild (2003), Kopytoff (1986), Russ (2005), Valeri (1994) as quoted in Nicole Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 38 (2009): 56.

⁹³ Roland B Tolentino, "Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space", *Social Text*, 48 (Autumn 1996): 67.

⁹⁴ Lan Pei-Chia, "Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers", *Social Problems*, 50, No. 4 (Nov 2003): 525.

⁹⁵ Lenore T Lyons, *Embodying transnationalism: The making of the Indonesian maid* (Research Online, University of Wollongong, 2005), 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

practical to lay down in law standard rules regarding the specific employment conditions (Minister of State for Manpower, Ng Eng Hen cited in *Reuters* 2002).⁹⁷

As Lenore Lyons points out, the state has aligned itself with discourse that distinguishes between the public, and the private “domestic sphere”, where the state leaves jurisdiction to the family.⁹⁸ The state’s “deployment of home space” enables the family to delimit its own boundaries, which, within the home, are subject to shifting and negotiation.⁹⁹ Acquiring the boundaries of the family interior for its own use, the state has mapped it onto the body of the maid to sidestep responsibility for it.

That being said, the entry of the maid’s body into the interior of the HDB home has facilitated the exit of the Singaporean woman into the exterior of the workforce and formal public sphere.¹⁰⁰ The bodies overlap precisely at the intersection of work and home, with part of the maid’s body subject to “patriarchal discourses and practices” of housework, and the other in the feminine realm of a home not her own.¹⁰¹ In this intersection, the image and roles of the female body in the HDB, as constructed by the state, has become interchangeable and substitutable.

⁹⁷ Brenda S.A Yeoh, “Bifurcated labour: the unequal incorporation of transmigrants in Singapore”, *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie : Orgaan Der Nederlandsche Vereeniging Voor Economische Geografie*, 97, No. 1 (2006): 26-37.

⁹⁸ Lenore T Lyons, *Embodying transnationalism: The making of the Indonesian maid* (Research Online, University of Wollongong, 2005), 4.

⁹⁹ Pei-Chia Lan, “Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers”, *Social Problems*, 50, No. 4 (Nov 2003): 527.

¹⁰⁰ Angelia Poon, “Maid Visible: Foreign Domestic Workers and the Dilemma of Development in Singapore”, *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 17, No. 1 (2003): 4.

¹⁰¹ Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 37.

3.1 SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

The idea of substitutable female bodies in the interior was already present even before maids were introduced into the house. In the May 1973 edition of *Our Home*, an article titled *Every Woman Can be Beautiful* reminded stay-home mothers to make sure they “look lovely.” In fact, according to the writer, “there’s much more necessity for her to take that extra bit of trouble,” to give her husband a “pleasant surprise” when he returns from “work (*where the competition tends to be young and attractive!*) (author’s italics).”¹⁰² The accompanying image entails a bespectacled, messy lady with a sad child in one image, and an “attractively made-up, fresh and welcoming wife” in the next. Premised on the



Fig.12 The Attractive Wife

basis that stay-at-home mothers had to beware of attractive competition at their husband’s workplace, the article encouraged readers to forestall any contestations for their husband’s attention.

Although the attraction of mothers does not sway the attention of their children, the mechanics of substitution remains the same. As cited by Pei Chia Lan, Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that “the dichotomy between the maid and the mistress of the house blinds us to women’s multiple roles and fluid trajectories.”¹⁰³ In this case, it has hidden the occasional (if subconscious) relinquishment of the mother’s role as primary female figure in children’s lives.

The filmic text of Anthony Chen’s *Ilo Ilo* serves to flesh this out, as Hwee Leng, a pregnant working mother who remains actively involved in her son’s life retains the status of “mommy” whilst she shuttles between home and her

¹⁰² HDB Publication, *Our Home* (Singapore, May 1973)

¹⁰³ (Nakano Glenn 1994, 16) quoted Pei-Chia Lan, ‘Maid or Madam? Filipina Migrant Workers and the Continuity of Domestic Labor’, *Gender and Society*, 17, No. 2 (Apr 2003): 188.

work as a typist.¹⁰⁴ Despite the hierarchy implied by Hwee Leng's position, her maid Terry, the latter herself a mother, overlaps with the former's roles at home and becomes both emotionally and physically closer to Jia-Le. In the bedroom which they both share, we watch the 12-year-old Jia-Le break into the room while Terry is changing, seating himself on his upper-bunk bed and comparing her sexuality to his mother's – "your breasts are smaller than my Mummy's". When stripped of positional hierarchy, the female adult body acts as a physically substitutable one. There are two mothers, one is a maid.



Fig.13 "It is maid's work mom!" Still from *Singapore Dreaming*

Other modes of substitution occur upwards, towards grandparents as well, and in *Singapore Dreaming*, Mei asks her mother to stop washing up, doing what she calls the "maid's work."¹⁰⁵

In a moment of dramatic irony, the audience realizes that the execution of housework is precisely what forms the structure of her mother's family life. The only thing her mother knows how to do has taken on new positional meaning; it is now the maids job.

The irony implicit in the mechanism of substitution is that the baton of reproductive labor is passed to someone mothers consider lower than themselves. Whilst the state-promoted image of the female body at home is that of the wife, here, this role is substitutable. Maids can outperform matriarchs, and even be closer than natural mothers to their charges.

The convolution of boundaries also extends beyond the domestic borders of the state. Migrant women are employed to perform the reproductive labor of working women, who in turn leave their own children in the care of

¹⁰⁴ *Iloilo*, Directed by Anthony Chen, Performed by Yeo Yann Yann, Chen Tian Wen, Angeli Bayani, and Koh Jia Ler, Fisheye Pictures, 2013, Feature film.

¹⁰⁵ *Singapore Dreaming*, Directed by Colin Goh and Woo Yen Yen, Performed by Yeo Yann Yann, Richard Low, Jacqueline Chow, Serene Chen, Alice Lim Cheng Peng, and Kai Boo Lee, Independent production, 2006, Feature film.

another woman back in their home countries. In *llo llo* the practice is embodied by Terry, who has a 12-month old boy. The dual roles Terry plays as both *mother* and *maid* are further complicated as she treats her ward like her own son, performs her domestic work and sleeps in the same room with him — completely frustrating the “separate sphere” feminine-interior masculine-exterior domestic-work place binary which much feminist literature about domesticity is premised on.¹⁰⁶

3.2 DOMESTIC CONTAINERS

The filmic reading of the family interior provides the opportunity to compare the images of “home” that occupants live out, in the physical space of their own flats, with formal representations of the architectural plan. The text of the interior provides intimate readings of domesticity as acted out on the architectural plan, and teases out the interstitial, temporal spaces that contain the body of the maid. These emotive aspects are otherwise absent from the architectural drawing, allowing for a re-reading of the plan.

In the last set of published demographics detailing maid-employing households, HDB statistics (2003) revealed that 13.5% of families with children 12 and under rely on a maid to take care of the children.¹⁰⁷ A more recent unpublished internal report (2008) noted that “it has become a necessity to have maid and car to take care of the kids” and parents.¹⁰⁸ With the typical single family HDB flat designed around the ideal of mother as full-time home maker, HDB flats were *prefigured* for the gendered and territorial contestations that lead to substitution.¹⁰⁹

As discussed earlier in section 02, “New Generation” (NG) four room flats were specifically designed for the body of the family, and were never meant

¹⁰⁶ Dona Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence Zuniga as quoted in Hilde Heynen, “Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and contradictions”, Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 7.

¹⁰⁷ HDB Research Department, *Public housing in Singapore: Residents' Profile & Physical Aspects: HDB sample survey household, 2003* (Singapore: HDB, March, 2005). Whilst the government no longer provides statistics according to dwellings, in Dec 2013, there were 214,500 maids in Singapore. maids in Singapore.

¹⁰⁸ HDB Project Team 2. *Study of housing Mobility & Affordability to meet the changing needs of HDB lessees* (Singapore: unpublished working document, 2008), 26.

¹⁰⁹ Angelia Poon, “Maid Visible: Foreign Domestic Workers and the Dilemma of Development in Singapore”, *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 17, No. 1 (2003): 28.

to accommodate a maid. Captured in Eric Khoo's semi-documentary *No Day Off* (2005), a married couple, their daughter and her grandmother each take up a room in the four room flat, leaving their maid Siti to stay in the kitchen on a foldable mattress which is kept every morning.¹¹⁰ The kitchen, the very space of her work, also serves as thoroughfare for the bathroom (fig.14), and when the drunken father uses the toilet at night he enters her private sleeping space to vomit on the floor next to her. When the toilet light shines on her, it wakes her up and exposes her presence in the passageway. With no walls and only a mattress to demarcate her shifting territory, the maid's body in *No Day Off* exists in liminal space, an ambiguous body forced into the typical Singaporean home.

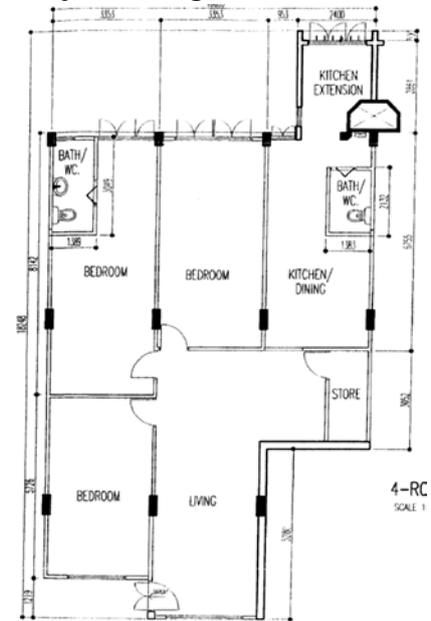


Fig.14 4-Room Flat Plan

Similarly, when filming *Ilo Ilo*, Anthony Chen appears to have purposefully omitted the third bedroom (see Fig.15) (which would otherwise exist in a typical floor plan between the master bedroom and the kitchen) from his film's set of the family home.¹¹¹ The maid is housed on the lower bunk bed in the children's room, and the adult female body of the maid is juxtaposed on the private space of the child's bedroom, something which Jia-Le, the young son, protests against when the privacy of his bedroom is involuntarily removed. The gendered contestations previously discussed ensue in this tight interior.

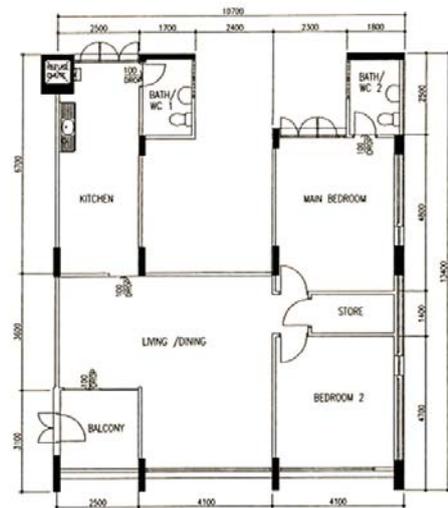


Fig.15 Effective 4-Room Flat Plan

¹¹⁰ *No Day Off*, Directed by Eric Khoo, No Performers Listed, Zhao Wei Films, 2006, Short film.

¹¹¹ *Ilo Ilo*, Directed by Anthony Chen, Performed by Yeo Yann Yann, Chen Tian Wen, Angeli Bayani, and Koh Jia Ler, Fisheye Pictures, 2013, Feature film.

Nevertheless, despite the existence of one more room there still is no proper space in the house for the maid. Offering the maid a normal bedroom would effectively normalize her body into the family interior, giving it similar importance to the children's or grandparents' bodies. When space is a luxury, assigning foreign labour bodies individuated spaces seems inappropriate regardless of the value of their labour. The diametric opposite thus occurs — the store room, usually too small to hold a mattress might behave as a changing room, while the living/ dining room will temporarily accommodate a mattress at night.¹¹²

The NG flats were eventually upgraded in the 1990s as part of the Main Upgrading Programme, through which the HDB upgraded its old housing stock at a large subsidy.¹¹³ Involving the addition of prefabricated units to the apartments along with other improvements, a "kitchen extension" was attached to the exterior of the apartment block. It effectively meant the provision of an additional room — ventilated, enclosable with a folding door but not big enough to count as a room for a family member. In doing so, the HDB could be said to have added a maid's room similar to what was then currently available in private housing.

When the kitchen extension was formalized and drawn as part of the contemporary flat design, it would appear in the form of a service yard, designed for the hanging of laundry. The toilet windows and the kitchen would ventilate into it, and noisy air compressors would operate in close proximity on the "air-con ledge." Whilst the older NG flats were upgraded and could house an extra adult body, similar spatial provisions built into flats from the mid-nineties onwards took on a different form.

In 1994, Household Shelters (HS) were built into new HDB flats in order to free up the void-deck on the ground floor. Consisting of thickened reinforced concrete walls, blast doors and a protected ventilation shaft, they replaced

¹¹² Lenore T Lyons, *Embodying transnationalism: The making of the Indonesian maid* (Research Online, University of Wollongong, 2005), 10.

¹¹³ Wong Tai-Chee and Xavier Guillot, *A roof over every head: Singapore's housing policies in the 21st century : between state monopoly and privatisation* (Calcutta: Sampark, 2005), 105. *For an in-depth discussion on HDB Upgrading programmes, see Wong, Tai Chee; Yuen, Belinda; and Goldblum, Charles (eds.). *Spatial Planning for a Sustainable Singapore*, Singapore: Springer (2008); 143.

the ground floor communal bomb shelters which the HDB had been building since 1987 until then.¹¹⁴

By moving the public communal bomb shelter into the private space of the flat (Fig.16), the Household Shelter displaced the storeroom, proportionately increasing in size to accommodate a family in the event of war. The new name given to the space semantically neutralized its previous one, and many families took the opportunity to house the (extra body of

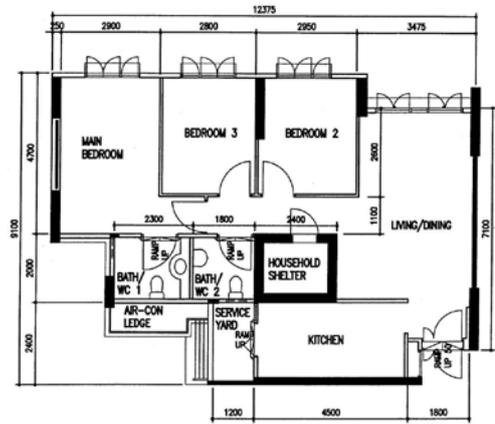


Fig.16 Household Shelter in 4-Room Flat

the) maid in it.¹¹⁵ With the minimum dimensions of 1.6-2.8 square meters, the HDB Household Shelter precludes the installment of a normal “single” size bed, thus necessitating child-sized beds for these maids, and sprouting a network of online forums advising one how to make these changes.¹¹⁶ This new accommodation provided the maid’s body a semblance of agency—thick, continuous, windowless walls cocooned her at night, and she could choose to negotiate between suffocating privacy, or ventilated intrusion; unless homeowners make illegal modifications, the door to the shelter has to be left ajar.

Although not uncommon, this particular phenomenon is of course not the official position of the state. In response to a suggestion that Studio apartments (typically suited for aged couples with its smaller area of 36 or 45 square meters) be built with a maid’s room in 2013, the HDB made one of its first official comments on the maid’s body in the interior. Describing Studio apartments as having “sufficient space in the living room” for a “helper to stay in,” the living space could be put to “dual use” that would “optimize”

¹¹⁴ “Shelter Programme”, SCDF, Accessed August 2014. http://www.scdf.gov.sg/content/scdf_internet/en/building-professionals/cd-shelter/shelter-programme.html.

¹¹⁵ “Maid’s room = bomb shelter, is this normal in Singapore”, Singapore Expats Forum, Accessed on June 19, 2014, <http://forum.singaporeexpats.com/ftopic87108.html>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

it.¹¹⁷ Through the installation of sofa beds, according to the HDB, “the living space can be converted to a sleeping space at night.”¹¹⁸ State propagated ideas of “optimization” and conversion betray the functional mode of construction, ignoring territorial interiorizations of the house by the body, both for the owners of the house and their permanent tenant.

With a bedroom, kitchen and living room in a compact layout (Fig.17), such a move would only accentuate the duality of the maid’s position—her sleeping area would be larger than the master bedroom, but her privacy completely subject to the habits of her employers. Similar to earlier HDB models, the Studio apartment for the elderly was essentially designed around the assumption that the elderly woman would continue to perform the role of full-time homemaker. Any extra female body brought in to help would, again, be subject to the family’s diurnal use of space, a practice physically prefigured by the state and entrenched by the latter’s proposed image of the interior.



Fig.17 Studio Apartments for the Elderly

Determined by state-dimensioned design, the physical spaces available for housing the maid are subject to daily activity, at times completely overlapping with the residuals of the family interior. When they are assigned, separate spaces do not necessarily equate to privacy as the maid’s quarters are subject to surveillance, intended or not.¹¹⁹ Where no room is available, territorial boundaries for the maid shift every day along with the mattress.

¹¹⁷ Lily Chan, “Enough Space in Flats for Live-in Helper”, *The Straits Times* (Singapore, January 24, 2013).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion on privacy and the inspection of domestic helpers quarters, see Lenore T Lyons, *Embodying transnationalism: The making of the Indonesian maid* (Research Online, University of Wollongong, 2005), 10.

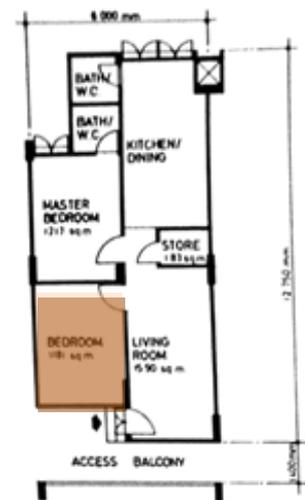
Section 04

EPILOGUE

4.0 OTHERS

Other bodies categorically excluded from official accounts, but traceable as occupants have also found spaces in the flat.

In Colin Goh and Woo Yen Yen's film *Singapore Dreaming*, we witness this with the entrance of yet an "other" adult female body into the family interior. As Irene cohabits with Seng in his parent's three room flat her position as his girlfriend gains her access into a family interior. With aspirations of getting "married ... (and having a) baby," the couple plan to move out when they have the means to. Staying in what would have been Seng and his sister's room, they approximate the HDB-promoted heterosexual conjugal couple, and their actions as a couple transform what was previously the children's room into a site of pre-marital consummation (Fig.18).¹²⁰ Through the performative acts of an "other" body, the otherwise single-family 3 room flat transforms into a multi-generational home and the children's room, a pseudo-master bedroom.



TYPICAL 3-ROOM NEW FLAT



KEY PLAN

Fig.18 3-Room Flat,
Typical Plan

Excluded from state narratives of nuclear family housing, the live-in partner embodied by Irene is an instance of an "other" body in the family interior—performing the multiple roles of heterosexual conjugal partner, pseudo daughter in law and guest of the family she inhabits the interior comfortably without ever fitting into any official state-recognized category. The typical family body reproduces itself in their HDB interior, only to find that previous labels inscribed upon it no longer fit.

¹²⁰ Cherian George, "HDB board member defends single-mum rule", *The Straits Times* (Singapore, August 29, 1994).

Adult children who choose singlehood fall into a similar predicament as well. In 2013 the HDB allowed singles to purchase subsidized flats from the HDB upon turning thirty five years of age, limiting them to the option of small, two room flats.¹²¹ Within this group, however, those who have children find themselves purposely excluded from even this. In 1994 single mothers were debarred from purchasing subsidized flats on the grounds that “unmarried motherhood” was not “a respectable part of our society,” and in an ironic slant, their access to housing has been limited *precisely* because of the maternal status.¹²² Motherhood, according to the state, must only be within its own terms. HDB labels penalize singles - first for their marital status, then (if they are mothers) for their maternal roles, at times excluding them altogether.

Another anomaly that has also developed in apparent contradiction to the “family nuclei” policies of the state is the HDB rental market. Following the successful purchase of flats from the HDB, owners are allowed to rent them out after staying in the flat for a minimum occupancy period of five years. Family interiors are moved out of the flat and other bodies ones enter, no longer through familial structures, but through transactional rental agreements.

Those who enter through these new structures of tenancy have not been spared government labelling either. In 2010 *The Straits Times* reported Member of Parliament Lim Wee Kiak being “disturbed” at what he described as the “ethnic congregation” of “permanent resident... foreigners” in his ward.¹²³ Like the body of the maid, these “other” bodies are tied to the post-family interior through financial transactions. Despite operating within legal means, expatriates and migrants have found their rental payments welcome, but their bodies at times not; regardless of permanent residency status.

¹²¹ The term “family nuclei” has been used by the HDB in contemporary documentation to describe family units that are eligible for home subsidies. In 1991, the definitions were changed, with those aged at least 35 could buy three-room or smaller resale flats. In 2004, resale flats of any size were open to them.

¹²² Cherian George, “HDB board member defends single-mum rule”, *The Straits Times* (Singapore, August 29, 1994).

¹²³ Rachel Chang, “HDB quota for PRs may not avoid enclaves; Many PRs congregate through renting, rather than buying flats: MPs BYLINE”, *The Straits Times* (Singapore, January 29, 2010, Friday).

As a response to this, the state has considered implementing quotas similar to the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) it laid out in 1989, for permanent residents renting flats as well.¹²⁴ Conflating not only cultures, but entirely different geographies as well, the EIP inscribes (for instance) migrant Sri Lankans, Bengalese, Pakistanis and “northern Hindi-speaking Indians” with the label “Indian.”¹²⁵ PRs now stand to have incorrect labels, along with boundaries of citizenship inscribed upon their bodies as well.¹²⁶ In the absence of relevant apparatus to control the bodies of these tenants, the state is considering the regulation of rental agreements as an alternative mechanism for inscribing upon the bodies of these “others” as well.

4.1 EPILOGUE

The body in the HDB flat has provided both a literal and theoretical point of entry into the family interior—through demarcations of gender, race, approximations, substitutions, citizenry and hierarchies. Owing to constraints of the dissertation, some of these (e.g. ethnicity, ageing, and pseudo-family constructions) have only been touched briefly, and signal future avenues for further exploration. By developing the framework of the *interior* and entering it through the *body*, the dissertation has teased out various scripts of domesticity that are performed within the architecture of the HDB flat.

In producing the “theatre” of the flat, the state has both constructed and written the domiciles and scripts for the kind of heteronormative, reproductive domesticity it desires to see. While some of these scripts are physically embedded in the house, others have come in the form of family policy tied in with flat subsidies. The state has also demonstrated the capacity to literally reach into the interior to inscribe scripts of reproduction on the maternal body. The formation of the “typical” Singaporean family is intimately tied to the construction of the flat.

¹²⁴ In 1989 racial quotas were imposed on HDB blocks as part of the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) to forestall the formation of ethnic enclaves.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ In the interest of space, this will have to be discussed in a different essay.

Following the formation of the family, the enactment of these scripts, however, produces very different results. On one hand, by active biological reproduction, the family interior expands, necessarily, into unscripted shapes in order to accommodate new members. Physically embedded functional codes give way to new family-determined structures, and family policies lose their power.

On the other hand, the ideal bodies and interiors found in state-endorsed images have been shown to spontaneously break down. The image of the ideal mother, as promoted in HDB collaterals and performed by the maternal body begins to depart from its original role as maternal bodies discover their labour to be substitutable, and their bodies interchangeable. The state-promoted image of the mother becomes mired in layers of substitution.

The family interior itself has morphed in similar ways. As transient structures of tenancy enter the flat to replace the body of the family, the state has had to devise new scripts and new boundaries. In the place of directives for familial living, these "other" tenants find their bodies inscribed with conflated labels of ethnicity and citizenship as they are prejudiced against in the absence of citizenship.

The HDB has indeed produced domestic (architectural) products of physical homes along with the various scripts of domesticity that are tied to them. At their best, scripts of familial living, reproduction and gender reach deep into the flat, producing enactments of domesticity that align with state policy. The results are not consistent, however, and other scripts of ethnicity and citizenry perform as barriers to entry into the HDB flat more than anything else. Upon entry into the interior, these too begin to break down as they fail to morph according to the changing, reproducing, and ageing forms of the body.

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