

BREEDING MONSTERS
Resistance Within Singapore's Heterotopic Public Housing System

by
Tan Qian Rou
B.A. (Architecture)
A0053132X

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Architecture
on 10 September 2014 in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT

Singapore's public housing scheme is unique in that it is the only emergent case of success: apartment blocks provided by the Housing Development Board (HDB) house more than 80% of the nation, creating a landscape of uniform architectural entities. Initially conceived to affirm Singapore's transition from colony to nation, the HDB block has become a symbol of nationhood, progress, social identity and domesticity. Each estate forms a community, the 'heartland' which rallies its residents around a system of civic values that organize it and echo the state's tenets of family, cohesiveness and harmony. Inhabitation of a HDB flat and adherence to state ideology becomes an implied condition of citizenship. Uniformity becomes a crucial factor in the success of HDB housing and the nation.

This dissertation proposes that through its function to consolidate and spatialize the civic values of the nation, the HDB block becomes a heterotopia, a site for the definition and contestation of the Singaporean identity. Inseparable from state ideology, the HDB block forms a dialogue with Foucault's discourse on structures of power and discipline, with its utilization of space to manage and organize inhabitants both physically and psychologically. The dwelling and occupation of the HDB block juxtaposes, within its confines, several overlapping and frictional sites, thereby producing a condition of monstrosity.

Monsters, scientifically identified as a category of beings who are unaccommodated by and oppose systems of power, embody the resistant force to power and normalization.

This dissertation argues that the HDB's unrelenting and specific requirements for inhabitation breed monsters unique to its architectural context. Monstrosity becomes the apparatus through which the heterotopic HDB block can be revealed and examined in its primary function as Singapore's prescription of citizenry and domesticity. Through an understanding of monstrosity as contextually located and created within the state constructed monolith of the HDB, this dissertation presents the monster as evidence of a complex relationship between power, form and societal milieus in the constitution of architecture.

Keywords: HDB, public housing, heterotopia, monstrosity, national identity

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Lilian Chee

Title: Assistant Professor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest and most affectionate gratitude to:

Lilian, for your unwavering guidance, interest and insight,

My comrades-in-thought, *Joel, Jing Xiang and Kin Kit*, for your encouragement
and critique,

My *family and friends*, for your invaluable support and patience,

& *I*.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.

Still from *Berita Singapura, A New Look at Housing*.

[Source: *Berita Singapura: A New Look At Housing*. Videocassette. (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, Broadcasting Division, 1967)]

2.

A Summer Night in Singapore; residents of an apartment block cool down in the night air.

[Source: Winfield Parks Jr., 1962]

3.

Stills from *The Impossibility of Knowing*. The scene of a suicide.

[Source: *The Impossibility of Knowing*. Dir. Tan Pin Pin. (Singapore: 2010)]

4.

An example of monstrous birth from *The Doome: Warning All Men to Judgement*.

[Dr. Stephen Batman, *The Doome: Warning All Men to Judgement*. (Scholar Facsimilies & Reprint, 1999)]

5.

Above: Elevation view of old HDB flats.

[Source: Jason Leong, (accessed 8 September 2014)]

6.

Below: Presidio Modelo prisoners in their cells.

[Source: Unknown, http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-vytZkXLNDjA/T0ON9QGZ5rI/AAAAAAAAATI/JjcMFPXboTg/s1600/tumblr_l9vwx0wesn1qbofogo1_500.png, (accessed 8 September 2014)]

7.

Stills from *12 Storeys*. Meng with his sister Trixie, and a chance encounter with a neighbour at the playground.

[Source: *12 Storeys*. Dir. Eric Khoo. DVD. (Singapore: Zhao Wei Films, 1997)]

9.

Stills from *Eating Air*. Boy's Kungfu fantasy.

[Source: *Eating Air*. Dir. Kelvin Tong. DVD. (Singapore: 1999)]

CONTENTS

Abstract	-2
Acknowledgements	-4
List of Illustrations	-5
Contents	-7
Prologue	-8
1: Heralds of Modernity	-9
2: Through the Looking Glass	-18
3: Mutations and Mislocations	-32
4: Breeding Monsters	-41
5: Epilogue; Heralds of Possibility	-55
Bibliography	-59
Appendix	-63

PROLOGUE

Over half a century, two generations of Singaporeans have grown up in HDB flats. Public housing helped to mould our unique national identity and collective experience as Singaporeans. It created and shaped our communities, and provided the foundation for our social stability and economic growth.¹



Still from *Berita Singapura*.

¹ From an address by the current Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, at a gala dinner for the International Housing Conference, 26th January, 2010, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesinterviews/primeminister/2010/January/address_by_primeministerleehsienloongatthegaladinnerfortheintern.html#.VAwJzPmSx8E (accessed 8 Sep 2014).

1

HERALDS OF MODERNITY

1.1

In the late 1950s, at the cusp of nationhood, Singapore looked at the new modernist typology of the high-rise and saw an opportunity. The first apartments, or flats, were conceived as a quick and relatively cheap way to provide mass housing in the land-scarce country. The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) built a series of housing estates, starting with Tiong Bahru, in an attempt to meet the needs of a fast-growing population. However, the response was lukewarm—until Singapore's independence in 1965, only 8.8% of the population would live in SIT-built flats.²

In 1960, two years after self-government had been granted to Singapore as a colony of the British Empire, the Housing Development Board (HDB) was set up. Replacing the SIT as the primary provider of public housing, the formation of the HDB was an official commitment to resolving the housing shortage and heightened presence of slums which had burgeoned on the island. Vernacular low-rise housing typologies were no longer able to keep up with the growth of the population; in 1947 a survey done by the British administrators declared that the island had 'one of the world's worst slums... a disgrace to a civilized community'.³ Compared to the cramped, primitive houses of before, the new HDB flats were spacious and modern, with luxurious provisions such as

² 'Public Housing in Singapore', http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1585_2009-10-26.html (accessed 20 July 2014)

³ Belinda Yuen. 'Squatters no More: Singapore Social Housing', *Global Urban Development Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Nov. 2007), p.16.

electricity and water systems. And they were certainly successful—currently, more than 80% of the population resides in HDB housing estates.⁴

The rise of the HDB flat⁵ as the most prominent housing typology in Singapore is neither accidental nor purely practical, for its construction necessitated a deliberate destruction of the existing landscape. In his critical examination of Singapore's post-colonial development, Rem Koolhaas attributes the abandonment of the vernacular for the high-rise to Singapore's aspiration towards a metropolitan city.⁶ More crucially, this reinvention was driven by the need to establish a political tabula rasa through the destruction of the old Singapore.⁷ British colonial constructs, both political and architectural, were torn down to make space for a new nation, 'acres of red bull-dozed earth foregrounding stark white modernist housing blocks.'⁸ Only through this conscious redevelopment could Singapore disengage from the colonial landscape and establish itself as a nation. Public housing was simply one of the myriad technologies which the government could employ in realizing its vision of the modern city-state. HDB blocks became a monument to progress, a stark physical reminder that the inhabitants were now living in a new Singapore.

More precisely, the apartments were heralds of modernity; as Singaporeans were taught to aspire towards upward mobility through a revamped education system and intense industrialization, the new HDB flats gave them a prize to work towards. The

⁴ The official figure given in the HDB 2012/2013 Annual Report (Key Statistics) is 80-82%.

⁵ This dissertation will use 'HDB housing' and 'public housing' interchangeably as in the Singaporean context they are the same.

⁶ Rem Koolhaas. 'Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis ... or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa', in Bruce Mau and Hans Werlemann (eds.) *S M L XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995).

⁷ Eunice Seng. 'Hom-e-scape(s): tabula rasa, or a denial of a Singaporean contemporaneity', *Singapore Architect Journal*, (1999), p.72.

⁸ Seng, 'Hom-e-scape(s)', p.72.

financial ability required to afford a flat was silent proclamation of membership to a certain economic class. As a 1965 *Berita Singapura* segment elaborated:

By far the most stimulating and exciting [of the HDB's new 5-year plans] is the far-reaching scheme to build a new city on the site of the old dilapidated buildings and unhealthy slums. This is how the new Singapore will look: multi-storied blocks of apartment houses... Singapore is acquiring the one hallmark of a great civilized community⁹: magnificent buildings plus comfortable workers' housing.¹⁰

1.2

A 'civilized community': summarily, includes two of the government's greatest goals for Singapore in the latter half of the 20th century. A former trading colony quilted from various ethnic and national groups, Singapore's success as a polity could only be achieved through the normalization of these inhabitants into a cohesive community of citizens.¹¹ The HDB managed to achieve this through the condition of home ownership: its grand vision of ensuring that every Singaporean had a home to call their own also created a new proletariat class that was classified by only one thing: the fulfillment of a mortgage.¹² By buying a HDB flat, you were buying into an informal citizenship; a deed proclaiming one's Singaporean status and stake in this new, civilized country.¹³

⁹ Coincidentally echoing the terminology used by the British administration in disparaging the housing situation of colonial Singapore, but certainly the HDB was a triumph in overcoming the situation

¹⁰ *Berita Singapura: A New Look At Housing*. Videocassette. (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, Broadcasting Division, 1967). National Archive accession no. 1992000566.

¹¹ Normalization is discussed in length by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment*, as a device of modern power which is concerned with the establishment of authority; in Singapore's context, normalization tends towards national identity.

Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)

¹² Oswin, Natalie. 'The modern model family at home in Singapore: a queer geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35 (2010): 258.

¹³ The government maintains that home ownership is not a right of citizenship, but that as a social boon it would aid every citizen in achieving the homeowner status.

As the newly formed state's first gesture for its citizens, HDB housing cannot be discussed apart from its nationalistic intentions. With the problem of overcrowding, the basic need for shelter transformed the HDB into a device which allowed the state to assert power over its citizens. Its role as an apparatus of normalization has continued into the contemporary context, albeit as an avenue to reinforce national identity rather than establish it, a role we may examine through Michel Foucault's¹⁴ discussion on power and normalization:

*...the emergence of the power of normalization... has established itself without ever resting on a single institution but (through) interactions between different institutions... has extended its sovereignty in our society.*¹⁵

As the hegemonic housing typology of the nation, Chua Beng Huat observes that public housing is framed within an 'explicit ideological language', intent on defining the Singaporean citizen.¹⁶ The HDB's position as a completely state-controlled operation allows it to utilize the web-like power system Foucault recognized, invoking other institutions of finance, economy, citizenship and civic morality, to both define and normalize the Singaporean family as the basic unit of the nation.¹⁷ Consequently, by

Chua Beng Huat. 'Private Ownership of Public Housing', (Working paper No. 63, Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Australia, 2010), p.9.

¹⁴ French philosopher Michel Foucault (15 October 1926 – 25 June 1984) introduced an extraordinary collection of theories, largely exploring the relationship between power, deviance, knowledge and control. His discussion of these ideas, rendered in spatial terms, prove invaluable in geographical and architectural discourse.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault and Graham Burchell (trans.) *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975*. (London: Picador, 2004), p.26

¹⁶ Chua Beng Huat. *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 140-142.

¹⁷ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p.129. Interestingly, it seems that the actual construction of HDB housing itself is the only part of the process in which the government is inactive. This ideology is often articulated by the state, as the Ministry of Community and Development has done in 1995, and the HDB as well in 1970.

legitimizing this family model through requirements for home ownership, it proclaims its right to sieve potential homeowners in service of the nation.

The HDB block's continuous rectilinear form both echoes and provides the backdrop for this domestic narrative. Its homogenous façade betrays no individuality; uniformity is required and expected. Even the modularized flat units are suggestive of this, built according to pre-determined floor plans to house specific family structures. This conformity validates each individual unit's position within a pre-determined social system, using normalization to assert state control while simultaneously stripping the individual of power and identity through the rejection of deviance.¹⁸

Scholarship¹⁹ on the state's use of ideology notes the correlation between social development and national progress, a notion not so much implied as articulated:

*I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters – who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right.*²⁰

¹⁸ Deviance here refers primarily to behaviour which falls outside the Singaporean state's norm.

¹⁹ Chua Beng Huat examines it through the numerous publications cited elsewhere in this paper.

²⁰ Part of a speech given by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, *The Straits Times*, 20 April 1987.

Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's speech articulates the government's position on the necessity of exemplary behavior for both personal and collective success.²¹ The fundamental structures of perfect citizenship—racial harmony, a heteronormative, pro-family lifestyle, civic responsibility and acceptable social behavior—are further enforced through the HDB agency – provider of home and community. By attaching ideology and normative values to the physical form of the HDB, it becomes impossible for us to separate the domestic experience of the apartment from the idealized home vaulted by the state.²² The tenets of meritocracy and equality are thus concretized alongside the generic construct of the HDB block.²³ One block, one people, one nation, one Singapore.

1.3

*A place to be avoided, this,
How in its vastness it devours hours.
Little wonder then,
Why residents rush through void decks
Back to the cramped comforts of home
As if in fear of what such open space might do
To cosy minds.*²⁴

Alfian Sa'at's 1998 poem *Void Deck* illustrates the myriad scenes of a communal space in the HDB block, the titular void deck, documenting the interactions of its residents. A

²¹ Currently the Minister Mentor for Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew is the first Prime Minister elected to Singapore's state government; he was also the acting Prime Minister during the declaration of independence. His political allegiance lies with the People's Action Party, which has been the ruling political party since independence.

²² Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p. 142.

²³ Singapore's National Education syllabus, available through the Civil Service College, identifies meritocracy as a key component of governance in Singapore.

http://www.ne.edu.sg/principles_of_governance.htm (accessed 25 July 2014).

²⁴ Alfian Bin Sa'at. 'Void Deck' in *One Fierce Hour*, (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1998).

tension, barely detectable, underlies the conversation. Gossip and boasting accompany the sounds of children's games, passive-aggressive competition juxtaposing the HDB's state narrative of a harmonious community with the residents' individualism and distance.²⁵ 'All a wanton fantasy,' remarks the poem, before the void deck, previously a facilitator of community, is transformed into a 'meeting point/ for loners and loiterers.'²⁶ The void deck becomes a space that is rushed through and navigated only because it – unavoidably – precludes the domestic comforts of home.

Void Deck is merely one amongst the extensive corpus of Singaporean literature which addresses the struggle of the individual against the leviathan of the HDB.²⁷ Nationalism and identity has been a fundamental theme in Singaporean literature, primarily due to the HDB flat's prominence as home for the majority of the nation.²⁸ The HDB block becomes the site of conflict and friction in the individual's struggle to actualize an identity which may or may not conform to the state normative. Considering this friction, the HDB block can thus be interpreted as a heterotopic space; which, as Foucault deliberates, 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.'²⁹ Specifically, the site of the HDB nurtures the norm and order of Singapore's idealized society, as well as its inversion.³⁰

²⁵ A common Singaporean trait; here Sa'at refers to it through the housewives of the HDB block, who 'with careful put-downs they/ Fashion boasts, about stubborn sons,/ Lazy daughters, who by some miracle or mistake/ Always score well in class'. It is a lazy attempt to coat pride with a false and thin veneer of humbleness.

²⁶ Sa'at, 'Void Deck'.

²⁷ This dissertation will examine more examples in the proceeding chapters.

²⁸ Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo. *Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.23-24.

²⁹ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec (trans.), 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p24-27.

³⁰ Kevin Hetherington. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.14.

HDB housing contradicts its rhetoric of the home, a space meant to prioritize the individual, through the overlapping of state narrative within the same site.³¹

In examining the unique condition of dwelling within the heterotopic HDB block, this dissertation proposes that it be negotiated through a language of monstrosity. The monstrous has been primarily explored in terms of architectural formalism and aesthetics, through the common portrayal of abhorrent, malformed objects.³² Instead, this dissertation proposes that the monstrous be read as a category of beings who are unaccommodated by and oppose systems of power, articulate resistance to normalization, but are always defined through the very language of the normative.³³ Monstrosity helps us to identify the presence of duality in the heterotopia, which places the state and its citizens in a constant, diametrically opposite state of tension.

³¹ Gaston Bachelard and Maria Jolas (trans.) *The Poetics of Space*, (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1969). Walter Benjamin, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLoughlin (trans.) *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002).

³² See for example, Joshua Cormaroff and Ong Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture*, (Singapore: Oro Editions, 2013), or Marco Frascari. *Monsters of Architecture: Anthromorphism in Architectural Theory*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991).

³³ Similar to Foucault's definition, see Foucault, 'Abnormal', p.55-65.



2

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

*But among all these sites, I am interested in certain ones that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.*³⁴

2.1

When he first used the text we now know as *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* as the basis of a lecture, Michel Foucault could not anticipate the fervour with which the academic community would take to the concept of heterotopia.

Heterotopia provided the means to concurrently address the complex, numerous and contradictory conditions that govern space. By Foucault's definition, heterotopia is real space, determined precisely by the set of socio-cultural relations that it designates, contests or subverts. As such, a heterotopia is necessarily related to other spaces that serve as its counterpoint.³⁵

Foucault argues that heterotopias are contrasted against utopias, which imagine an idealized perfect society or its absolute opposite. While utopias are 'fundamentally unreal spaces',³⁶ heterotopias are real, tangible spaces that strive to realize or enact a utopia. It is, however, important to note that heterotopias and utopias are not necessarily positioned as diametrical opposites. Rather, they may also be understood

³⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.3.

³⁵ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.3-5.

³⁶ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.3.

through 'a sort of mixed, joint experience', a specific instance of which Foucault describes as the metaphorical mirror.³⁷

The mirror and its reflective properties are deployed in relation to the nonphysical space of utopia and the tangible heterotopia. The literal frame of the mirror inscribes a spatial image that is imagined and intangible, but which, as a reflection, is connected to the real space it describes. Foucault proposes that the mirror, itself as a heterotopic object, acts as a 'virtual point' which must be passed through before the utopian space can be perceived and thus constitute a heterotopia.³⁸ At the same time, the act of looking requires the necessary presence of the human gaze, both literal and as a metaphor for social context. If this instance of looking is the moment of heterotopic formation, then the utopian space beyond the mirror is fragmented, since only the object or space which holds our visual focus becomes real in the mirror and also in heterotopic space; thus heterotopia as defined by Foucault's mirror is simultaneously real and imaginary space, both fragmented and whole.

For Walter de Gruyter, the mirror-heterotopia allows him to frame the space of the *Heimat* through a wide spectrum of topics, as specific as the Polish community or as broad as nationalism.³⁹ Conversely, he goes on to note that heterotopia allows the connection and cohesive examination of distinct and separate locales under the categorical space of the *Heimat*, through 'an arsenal of images that wander from text to text',⁴⁰ and that narratively compose its imaginary space. Although *Heimat* bears strong rootedness in the specifically place-based origin of the German countryside,

Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 4.

³⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.4.

³⁹ The German concept of 'homeland', which is the main focus of de Gruyter's book.

Walter de Gruyter. *'Heimat': At the Intersection of Memory and Space*, (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

⁴⁰ This description is quoted by Eigler and Kugele from Elizabeth Boa, in discussing a definition of what can be considered the literature of the *Heimat*.

de Gruyter, 'Heimat', p.7.

heterotopia allows an examination of the changing connotations of *Heimat*. Borne across various cultural manifestations that become increasingly detached from, it is referenced nonetheless to the space of a homeland which only exists in memory.⁴¹

Just as *Heimat* is the reconstitution of the imaginary, historical space of the German homeland through heterotopia, the HDB block seeks the erasure of Singapore's physical, colonial space, replacing it with the utopian space of the Singaporean nation. Singapore's eclectic origin as a trading port rendered its governance cumbersome at its achievement of independence. A trading hub and migrant colony, Singapore's population comprised not only local settlers from around the Malay Archipelago, but as far as China, India and the European colonies.⁴² Organizing Colonial Singapore around racial and ethnic enclaves proved to simplify the mechanics of British rule – they could oversee their subjects without fear of excessive racial conflict, or the need to foster a common identity. Chua Beng Huat and Eddie Kuo observe that the physical typology of the enclave and its strong racial identity would prove to cause severe problems later on, during the move forward into modernity. It also resulted in the failure of the SIT's first flats as opposed to the HDB's later attempts:

*The population was drawn from a variety of geographical origins... embedded in the population's cultural orientations to different 'homelands' that did not include the island itself... transmitted at homes and in schools financed by the respective vernacular groups. Singaporean culture as such was an 'absence,' something inconceivable.*⁴³

⁴¹ de Gruyter, 'Heimat'.

⁴² N..J. Ryan. *A History of Malaysia and Singapore*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁴³ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p.101.

2.2

As Nirmala Purushotam notes, the 'homeland' for colonial subjects was located primarily through ancestral origin, as is the case with most migrant communities.⁴⁴ However, as these migrant groups reproduced and grew, the first-hand memory of their homeland blurred and became unimportant; eventually, the homeland functioned much like the *Heimat*, perpetuated through a shared culture, language, and the physical zone of ethnic enclaves.⁴⁵ The homeland became the utopian paradise that was aspired to, 'her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering'.⁴⁶ Singapore provided the canvas onto which the homesick heart could project and detail its longing, the ethnically organized landscape emerging as a heterotopia which attempted to reconstitute the homeland.

Even those born within Singapore's borders were not immune to the lure of the homeland; Teo Sum Lim observes that in particular, the poetry of the Left-wing Literary Movement expressed a strong ethnic and cultural Chinese identification towards China.

⁴⁷ This Chinese nationalism occasionally clashed with Singaporean state identity,⁴⁸ and would culminate in conflict during the 1956 Chinese school riots: a series of riots that broke out in the Singaporean Chinese school community, stemming from pro-communist

⁴⁴ Nirmala Purushotam. *Negotiating Language, Constructing Race: Disciplining Difference in Singapore*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), p.30.

⁴⁵ Purushotam discusses this in length through the frame of language. To this day we retain more caricatured forms of these enclaves: Chinatown, Little India, Kampung Glam, and many other smaller districts.

⁴⁶ Line 16 of Sir Cecil Spring Rice's *I Vow to Thee, My Country*, in description of the heavenly homeland. Gustav Holst. *I Vow to Thee, My Country; Unison song. Words by Cecil Spring Rice*, (London: J. Curwen).

⁴⁷ A group of Chinese poets in Singapore who were active around the period of independence. As Teo details in her thesis, *A Study of State Awareness in Singapore's Chinese Poetry (1945-1970)*, they were deeply concerned with nationalism, identity, anti-colonialism and state awareness.

Teo Sum Lim, *A Study of State Awareness in Singapore's Chinese Poetry (1945-1970)*, Master's thesis. National University of Singapore, 2011, p. 37-79.

⁴⁸ Teo uses Singapore-born poet Huai Hua (槐华) as a recurring example; Teo regards Huai as having explicitly stated a longing for the Chinese homeland in his earlier works such as 《昨天,今天》, or *Tomorrow, Today*. Eventually Huai would shift his allegiance first towards Singapore within Malaysia, and finally, the Singaporean state as we know it. Teo, 'State Awareness', p.177.

sentiment which reflected the nationalistic struggle of China and by extension, the global Chinese community during the 1950s.

In this manner, the idea of homeland posed significant problems to the emergence of Singapore's nationhood. Stephen Ortmann proposes that due to its nature as a migrant colony, Singapore possessed an imbalanced racial structure with several significant minority groups that disqualified it from taking an ethnically organized route in governmental discourse.⁴⁹ The numerous homelands which contested the space of colonial Singapore posed too many risks in aligning itself with any particular one. Singapore could only operate, as the United States of America does, through a civically defined governmental structure, by creating the space of the Singaporean nation, essentially birthing a new homeland to which the population could pledge its allegiance. Ortmann defines this through Eric Hobsbawm's 'invented tradition':

*'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.*⁵⁰

Chua identifies this tradition as a communitarian, Confucian-based philosophy loosely branded as 'Asian values' in order to suggest the geographical and racial location of Singapore within the separate ethnic histories of its people.⁵¹ These values were easily translated into cultural developments which 'abide by the dictates of the logic of the

⁴⁹ Stephen Ortmann, 'Singapore: The Politics of Inventing National Identity,' in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 4 (2009): p. 25.

⁵⁰ Ortmann. 'Inventing National Identity', p.25.

⁵¹ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p.118.

economy,' such as discipline in the work-place, encouraged competitiveness for self-improvement both materially and educationally, and an emphasis on community and society over the individual.⁵² Distilled into social responsibility, communitarianism and meritocracy, the invented tradition became an ideology which defined a cohesive national identity and citizenship for Singapore.

Chua notes that it was a series of riots in Singapore, as early as the 1956 Chinese school riots and culminating in the racial riots of 1964 that legitimized the state government in establishing this new civic ideology.⁵³ With a backdrop of racial discord, the government rejected ethnic categorization and proposed a newly invented national identity based on civic values aligned to the state – instead of ethnic loyalty to the homeland. Citizens were hence organized according to the new state ideology. In order to reinforce these new civic values, the physical heterotopia of the ethnic enclave had to be uprooted, so that the new space of the Singaporean nation could be enacted, in its place.

HDB housing provided the perfect physical and spatial solution. It improved overall standards of living by offering hygienic, modern conditions, at the same time replacing the distinctly vernacular buildings of the enclave with a deliberately uniform, anonymous architecture that suppressed racial identity in favour of Singapore's new-found modernity. It allowed the state to ensure that future enclaves would not be formed within through the ethnic quotas imposed on its residents.⁵⁴ Most significantly, it legitimized the housing authority as a governmental body. Through this

⁵² Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p. 105 and p.117.

⁵³ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p.18.

⁵⁴ Currently there are three: the Ethnic Integration Policy which organizes citizens in each block into a ratio resembling the national ethnic percentage, the Singapore Permanent Resident quota which limits the number of Permanent Residents within a block and a rental policy which as of January 16th, 2014, imposes a quota on flats that can be rented out to non-citizens, in an attempt to 'prevent the formation of foreigner enclaves in HDB estates, and maintain the Singaporean character of our HDB heartlands.'

legitimization, the architecture of the resultant HDB blocks could subsequently be effortlessly orchestrated to bear state ideology. The institution of the HDB became Foucault's heterotopic mirror, reflecting on the real space of the apartment block the invented traditions of the new nation. Furthermore, by assigning the architectural form of the HDB block the primary function of nurturing the family and community, the HDB normalized a specific understanding of the domestic in support of state ideology.

2.3

The HDB block achieves this normalization through various judicial-legal and socio-economic systems. The previous section identifies home ownership as a condition which facilitates this. Singapore's land scarcity turns the house or apartment into an important asset, and the ease with which legislature allows it makes home ownership a widespread condition in Singapore.⁵⁵ The institution of the HDB is able to enforce social discipline through the incentivization of state-specified, 'nation-building' domestic models through the implementation of priority schemes. As Chua elaborates, quoting John Agnew, HDB ownership facilitates 'the expansion of commitment to the prevalent social order by the development of personal stakes in its survival.'⁵⁶ It is a stick-and-carrot approach, presented through a grand vision of providing homes for citizens. In this vein, applicants must prove themselves adequate as Singaporeans:

- Singapore Citizens/Permanent Residents over the age of 21 may apply to purchase a HDB flat,
- only if you are part of a family nucleus,
- or are about to start a family, legally recognized by the act of marriage,

⁵⁵ Chua Beng Huat goes into detail on how various governmental policies such as the Central Provident Fund facilitate and encourage home ownership through his various works.

⁵⁶ Although Chua uses the concept to frame a discussion on property pricing, Agnew's more generalized ideas can be applied to the social hegemony of the HDB as well. Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p. 136.

- otherwise, you may not apply until the age of 35,
- and even then you may only buy a 2-room flat in non-mature estates.
- ethnic quotas are also applied to each individual HDB block to achieve a racial balance.⁵⁷

The purchase of a HDB flat is a legally binding contract, one which judicially compels the owner to act out this state-sanctioned narrative of proper, acceptable domesticity within the theater of their apartment. As Natalie Oswin argues the HDB's primary focus on 'proper' families—those that conform to the heteronormative, married, productive family model, is motivated by an aspiration towards modernity, a key aspiration of the Singaporean nation.⁵⁸

Chua Beng Huat suggests that propriety also appealed to the importance of family and inter-generational interaction lauded by Confucian values, therefore providing a cohesive link between civic identity and the family unit.⁵⁹ Furthermore, by making the family unit directly responsible for the success of socio-economic progress, the HDB apartment is transformed into a space of production and reproduction. Domesticity performs an essential role in the HDB, constructing and elaborating a direct relationship between the real space of the family and the projected space of the nation. In this way, the space of the state and the space of the family can no longer be separate, but must be perceived as a singular entity. The HDB apartment becomes the heterotopic enactment of the utopian nation.

⁵⁷ 'Eligibility to Buy New HDB Flat', <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10321p.nsf/w/BuyingNewFlatEligibilitytobuynewHDBflat?OpenDocument> (accessed 2 June 2014).

⁵⁸ Oswin, 'Model Family', p.7.

⁵⁹ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p. 118-119.

2.4

Insofar as we have determined, HDB housing has aligned itself to Foucault's definition of heterotopia set in text, as a site which 'contradicts all other sites', creating a spatial distinction between the heterotopia itself, and a space of otherness.⁶⁰ By framing this space through legislature, the HDB block suggests that this space is one of absolute otherness; but as Arun Saldanha asks, other to whom?⁶¹ This 'other,' in the HDB, opposes the Singaporean definition of family and national identity as absolutely defined through its heterotopic space. Saldanha argues that because they are essentially spaces of ideology, heterotopias can only ever be relative, shaped by systems and values which are constantly in flux; the only absolute feature of heterotopias is the individual's experience of them.⁶² The HDB, through the rigidity of its system, is thus only ever capable of accommodating a highly specific, static group of individuals who cannot be identified through means other than legislature.

Foucault would probably have agreed; his singular essay on heterotopia was never approved for publication prior to his death, and years after his lecture Foucault would express his concern that 'space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile,' as opposed to the fecundity of time.⁶³ David Harvey proposes that this reconsideration of spatial dialectics on Foucault's part stems from the heterotopia.⁶⁴ Heterotopia's fundamental flaw is its inflexibility in categorization, which 'reinforces a reified notion of space' in assuming that heterotopia is able to determine absolutely

⁶⁰ Foucault, 'On Other Spaces', p.3.

⁶¹ Arun Saldanha. 'Heterotopia and Structuralism,' in *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 40 (2008), p.2089.

⁶² Saldanha, 'Heterotopia', p.9.

⁶³ David Harvey. 'Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of all Geographical Evils' in Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (eds.) *Millenial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, (Duke University Press, 2001), p. 161.

⁶⁴ Harvey, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 161.

the dominance or transgression of a space.⁶⁵ Wherever on the spectrum the governing values and conditions of heterotopia lie, it does not allow for variation or resistance against those values. In order to cater to the Singaporean ideals of harmony and unity, HDB housing thus falls into this inflexibility. As a means of imposing the state's will, it must necessarily forgo the agency of inhabitation in favor of a stable ideological definition. Thus the HDB heterotopia can only be perfectly inhabited by the model citizen: a facsimile of state values.

In a paper examining the viability and success of HDB flats in the general discourse on social housing, Chua Beng Huat suggests that 'the problems in high-rise housing are not with the built form but with the financing, management and tenants.'⁶⁶ Chua argues that HDB housing succeeds precisely because of the characteristics ascribed to it: uniformity, integration of various public institutions, the development of community and strict policing.⁶⁷ These aspects of the HDB create a harmonious environment in which residents are able to perform their daily routines. Within the heterotopic space of the HDB block, reification occurs through an assumption of total obedience and adherence to state values on the part of the occupant. In fact, Chua Beng Huat touts conformity as the basic, crucial factor of success within the HDB housing system:

*The most fundamental necessary condition for success in high-rise living is the acceptance of such living as a way of life, even if acceptance is the result of having no other option.*⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Saldanha, 'Heterotopia', p.9.

⁶⁶ Chua, 'Private Ownership of Public Housing', p.15.

⁶⁷ Chua, 'Private Ownership of Public Housing', p.6-12, p.20-23.

⁶⁸ Chua, 'Communitarian Ideology', p.16.

The legal pre-conditions to the inhabitation of a HDB flat reinforce the cultivation of the model citizen, but simultaneously, create a barrier to entry which Foucault notes, is common in heterotopias so as to protect the ideological space from contamination.⁶⁹ While these pre-conditions are not unchanging, they rely on obedience and acceptance. The assumption of total state control, on the other hand, is very much dependent on the successful normalization of the individual inhabitant into a generic citizen. The complexity of interactions between conditions inscribed within the HDB frame simply proves too fragile to promise this absolute. Cracks form within the heterotopic space, pockets that foster resistance and dissent because of, and from within the system of the HDB:

I don't know why this home is where my heart is no longer.

I don't know why my body shrinks with age but my loneliness never does.

I don't know why my children watch me with their father's hollowed eyes.

I don't know why I keep telling my son I will kill myself if he refuses to marry.

I don't know why I never kill myself.⁷⁰

The protagonist of Cyril Wong's⁷¹ *Mother Doesn't Get It* finds herself trapped within an illusion of domesticity. Having put her faith in the normalized description of family, she built her identity through performances of it, only to find her family members turn away as they reject the prescribed domesticity she seems to embody. 'I don't know why,' she laments, 'I still believe the dream of the happy life will surely fit itself back

⁶⁹ Foucault, 'On Other Spaces', p.7-8.

⁷⁰ Cyril Wong. 'Mother Doesn't Get It', in *Unmarked Treasure*, (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2004).

⁷¹ Cyril Wong is an award-winning local poet who is prominent for his literature and involvement in the arts and arts education, but for also being openly queer. He has been labelled 'Singapore's first truly confessional poet': his work deals with identity, family and sexuality within the Singaporean context.

inside my body tighter than a screw tomorrow.’⁷² This incompatibility between the ‘happy life’ promised to her as a guaranteed condition of the HDB and her body’s own performance expands to fill the space of her house. The tight space of her home is unable to withstand the conflicting identities of her family, none of which conform to the state domestic inscribed within the flat.

This dissonance experienced by Wong’s mother figure between her own domestic situation and the plastic image suggested by the HDB reveals how the home has become a different sort of heterotopia, one which embodies a narrative of resistance to the state ideal. The heterotopic space of her home becomes distinct and different from the heterotopia imagined by the state in its denial of the model domestic. This heterotopia, in its affordance of agency, dismantles the reification put in place by the heterotopia of the state. ‘I don’t know why’, she repeats, questioning not the mantra and image of domestic bliss, but the emptiness in her own reenactment of it. Her dismay at the lack of promised fulfillment reveals a facet of HDB housing which has been ignored by the categorization of heterotopia: the experience of dwelling as seen from the perspective of the individual. Bearing in mind the essential conflict between the state-heterotopia (which seeks to establish utopia) and the heterotopia of resistance, one wonders how to proceed with language that adequately accommodates an understanding of both.

It is here that this dissertation proposes a language of monstrosity which allows us to frame and explore the heterotopia of resistance while acknowledging the heterotopia of the nation. Monstrosity describes a category of beings that, by definition, both

⁷² Wong, ‘Mother Doesn’t Get It.’

demonstrate and defy a system of power or ontology.⁷³ Being fundamentally a language of genealogy, it allows us to position the heterotopia of the HDB block as a progression in natural order, normalized and declared through the authority of the state, instead of idealized construction.

Monstrosity is able to explain the dissociative heterotopia of resistance as necessarily in opposition to the normative, while still bearing characteristics of belonging within. It allows us to explore the complex relationship between the HDB and inhabitant through the heterotopia of resistance, which details the condition of dwelling within the public housing system. Monstrosity also allows us to allegorize this resistance and relate it directly to the state's attempt to discipline the performance of the body, as this dissertation will discuss in the following section. The relationship between monstrosity and power precludes a further examination of Foucault's discourse on deviance, power and space, devices that will flesh out the significance and depth of HDB housing as the heterotopic space of the nation.

⁷³ Jacques Derrida and John Leavey Jr. (trans.) 'Heidegger's Hand.' in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 161-196.



Stills from *The Impossibility of Knowing*. The scene of a suicide.

3

MUTATIONS AND MISLOCATIONS

3.1

The first identifiable monsters both in literature and science generally described mutated creatures, malformed in the body. Physical abhorrence, immediately identifiable as a violation of biological law also represented a defiance of the power of God, cast monsters as manifestations of evil and malcontent. The writings of Francis Bacon eventually translated into a scientific study that was based around genealogy and mutation.⁷⁴ Monsters were now cyclopean embryos, goats with two heads: more frequent, less fantastic and still dismal figures. The obsession heightened, aided by a pedestrian curiosity and more readily available specimens. It also brought forth a significant scientific concept, of natural, normalized bodies, to which the monster was a deviation.

The mutative and malformed properties of the monster often indicated, in medical terms, a lack or excess of physicality, much as in the case of the Siamese twin, where two separate beings were violently compressed into non-corresponding bodies. As Ian David McCormick points out, the misplacement of isolated body parts also constituted monstrosity as the body was read as a textual metaphor for the soul. Bringing up the example of a child born in Kent, whose mouth appeared in the back of his head, was hailed as a warning against sodomy.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Katherine Park and Lorraine J. Daston. 'Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteen-and-Seventeen-Century France and England', in *Past & Present*, Vol. 92, No. 1, p.20-54.

⁷⁵ As he observes, the descriptive verse goes: "This monstrous shape to thee, England,/ Plain shows thy monstrous vice." For "The hinder part doth show us plain/ Our close and hidden vice."

Appropriately, such a displacement of physical traits is a medical heterotopia.⁷⁶

Although it may also refer to the appearance of tissue in a non-native site, both the medical and biological definitions of heterotopia necessitate the displacement or even absence of the original tissue matter. This medical understanding, of 'one or the other', succinctly parallels the constant tension between state and individual. The system of the HDB assumes that the space of the state will displace the space of the individual; however, as we have seen, this assumption is too generalized.

The previous chapter posits that as a leviathan, governmental institution, the HDB uses the architecture of the HDB to express subjective values as natural order. Medical heterotopia, which operates according to biological norms, concurs with the definition, allowing us to position monstrosity and heterotopia as complimentary concepts. The biological language of monstrosity is thus infused with moral and ideological value.

Ian David McCormick, 'The Monstrous and the Sportive Grotesque', Ph.D dissertation, School of English, University of Leeds, 1993, p.165.

⁷⁶ Mary Jane West-Eberhard. *Developmental Plasticity and Evolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.255-259.

A simplified definition can be found at Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary's definition. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heterotopic> (accessed 8 Sep 2014).

Towne men into a greate feare, and put the Enemies in hope to get the towne, for there appeared a terrible signe of the *Lirgonian* crosse in the Element ouer the towne of a yellowish colour, feareful to beholde, and because it was the badge of the house of *Burgundie*. they did thus interpret it on both sides, that the towne in short space should belong to the dukedome of *Burgundie*, yet there were some among the *Hattienians* which expounded it far otherwise.

The nyght of *Januarie* about tenne of the clocke at nighte there was scene a great gaping of the Element, which *Iouianus Pontanus* hath learnedly described.



Here Effeling there was a *Pont* Ser borne, to wit, a child with one head, hauing foure eares, foure armes, two thighs, and foure feete. The asssemblies of the kingdome of the *Healine* of *Germany* were helde at *Spire*, concerning matters of sayth, & warlike policies against the *Turks*. A rapine *Scunner* this yeare did miserablye spoyle euery where all thinges growing vpon the earth. At the feast of *S. Mathewe* the Apostle, in the beginning of *ynighte* at *Vindislan* the top

of the *Tower* of *Sainte Elizabeth* with a great pile of *Timber*, and a myne masse of *Copper* and *Linne*, wherewith it was couered, fel to the ground with a great violence of winde, of which *Tempest* reade more in *Iob Vincelius*.

At *Basle* the . of *June* the riuer *Birsu*, which hath his passage through the Citie for many commodities did so swell and arise with continuall shoures of breack of a clowde, that in breacking on euerye side, strong

buil,

3.2

In the middle of the 16th century, troubled by what was appeared to be the slow, widespread corruption of social morality, writers and scholars turned back to the 'rhetoric of monstrosity'⁷⁷ as a demonstration of divine power, with the primary goal of instilling discipline in sinners through a campaign of terror. This rhetoric was employed as a literary device to suggest that monstrosity could be a condition which described external deformities, as a result of inner evil. Writers of the age heralded deformities as a sign of God's displeasure against man, coupling these warnings with dramatic verses preaching repentance.

Whether these outcries were taken into serious consideration, the hysteria over the birth of monstrous creatures certainly mounted, spread through ballads and broadsides.⁷⁸ Specifically in the case of monstrous children, parents were denounced as sinners whose inner monstrosity must have begotten their misshapen offspring. Now localized with its cause identified, monstrous deformities were seen as the physical expression of moral evil. Slowly, as the concept of the 'inner monster' gained traction, it was applied to traits such as heresy and treachery. Thomas Norton's accusation famously denounced a pack of traitors as having been physically malformed as a result of their crimes:

⁷⁷ Kathryn Brammall. 'Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 8-9.

⁷⁸ Kathryn Brammall notes at least 15 instances from deformed animals to various examples of malformed children and even bestial hybrids. All are geographically described. Brammall, 'Monstrous Metamorphosis'.

*see as in a glasse, the deformitie of your faulte, learne to wbye away those spots that have so fowly arrayed you, that you loke not like Christian people but like monsters in nature and policie.*⁷⁹

While the image of monstrosity still encompassed somatic malformation, it was also seen as partially stemming from sins of the flesh. Whatever focused on the body before the soul was seen as immoral and scandalous. Pride in appearance and apparel were seen as impermanent trappings that adorned the body – and was denounced as morally shameful, and evidence of hedonism. Lust was another condition set in the body which was frequently presented as sinful, focusing purely on deriving pleasure from physical sensation, a kind of decadence which was primarily indulgent. Foucault notes that the ‘body of pleasure’, being aware of its sexual capabilities, was not understood as a body which could perform sins of the flesh, but as flesh itself, harboring the potential of all those sins.⁸⁰

Flesh, as it were, was the primary bearer of monstrosity, rather than the body. While the body was understood to be capable of showing somatic symptoms, the flesh was subject to diseases of the mind as well, including that of sin.⁸¹ Initially classified as somatic deformities, the insertion of morality into the language of monstrosity irreversibly linked monstrosity to the soul. Thus in the 18th century, while it was the

⁷⁹ Thomas Norton. Treaties, tract 1, ‘To the Queenes Majesties Poore Deceived Subjectes of the North Countrey Drawen into Revellion by the Earles of Northumberland and Westmerland’, sig. C3 v.

⁸⁰ Foucault, ‘Abnormal’, p.191.

⁸¹ A distinction needs to be made in Foucault’s use of the two terms: while he does discuss at length the concept of the flesh in Christianity, as being related to lust, he also describes masturbation as being born of the flesh and not the body. He later, though, contradicts himself through the subsequent discussion of how the disease of masturbation is carefully discussed without moral implications of child-bodies; it is safe to conclude that Foucault when talking about masturbation in particular is referring to the body and not the flesh.

body which bore illness, it was the flesh which birthed monstrosity. Foucault inadvertently illustrates the difference in his examination of the hysteria accusing childhood masturbation to be the cause of illness and wasting, which if not cured, were inevitably fatal.⁸² Notably, moral penance was not described as a cure for this disease; the child was seen as the victim, a sign of some monstrous sin committed by others and expressed through their body.⁸³

Foucault's narrative is important for two primary reasons: firstly, it gives us context in which previous definitions of monstrosity form a genealogy. Illness is expressed through the body, and thus through a new language of monstrosity based on the power of institutions such as medicine, the body becomes a metaphorical heterotopia, the site of struggle between opposing powers revealed through the absence or presence of monstrosity. Secondly, it provides us with an instance in which socio-cultural institutions insinuate and establish power within the domestic sphere through illusions of morality and mortality, a method replicated by the Singaporean state in the heterotopia of the HDB.

Foucault's detailed account of how masturbation was dealt with almost as a pandemic reveals several important ways in which domesticity changed in its power structure. Medical communities speculated that the root cause of masturbation lay in the family structure. The negligence and physical absence of the parents allowed for the occurrence of masturbation. In compensation, parents were asked to physically supervise their children's bodies, to constantly stay alert for signs of budding sexuality:

⁸² Foucault, 'Abnormal', p.231-262.

⁸³ Foucault, 'Abnormal', p.244.

There is extreme closeness, contact, almost mixing; the urgent folding of the parents' bodies over their children's bodies; the insistent obligation of the gaze, of presence, contiguity, and touch... The parent's body envelops the child's and at this point the central objective of the maneuver or crusade is revealed: the constitution of a new family body. ⁸⁴

This almost literal 'new family body' tightened the domestic structure of the family through the dismissal of servants and usurpation of the child's privacy, even in sleep and ablution. The child's body comes under the indirect policing of the state, acting through the 'scientific' authority of medical health. Foucault speculates that it is in this way that the nuclear family was eventually formed, as the onus of the child's life was placed directly on the parents and their own performance within the domestic interior.

3.3

The association of illness and sin with the performance of the body at home was merely a precursor; Foucault's primary interest was the way in which monstrosity and crime had become linked to the performances of the flesh within the home. With the rise of psychoanalysis as a valid medico-judicial tool, definitions of crime in terms of legalese was altered along with the definition of monstrosity. ⁸⁵ While crimes which were previously deemed motiveless were unpunishable by law when they fell outside legalese, such crimes were now labelled as monstrous, based on their unreasonable nature and in their inability to be classified by a legal system. Psychoanalysis provided

⁸⁴ Foucault, 'Abnormal', p.248.

⁸⁵ Foucault, 'Abnormal', p. 121-134.

an avenue through which these crimes could be persecuted, proving that it was not the crime that was monstrous, but the criminal. Evidence from the criminal's childhood and domestic life were harvested to illustrate that the criminal himself was the monster- reasonable legal links could subsequently be drawn: monsters would commit monstrosities.

While this change in legal operation was to find a method whereby which law could react to the monstrous, the monstrous in Foucault's work can also be interpreted as a pre-cursor to the concept of heterotopia. The figure of the child masturbator provided a way for the state to infiltrate the privacy of the family, giving the state indirect control over the child's body. This imposition of power on the body, within the space of the home, is startlingly similar to the way in which the HDB attempts to constitute heterotopia. By creating a legal barrier to entry for the HDB flat based on a normalized definition of family, the HDB is able to exert control not just over the performance of the body within the domestic, but what kind of bodies should be permitted access to the domestic.

Foucault also brought a startling revelation to light: monsters could be cultivated within the domestic realm. In several cases of hermaphroditism, the 'monstrous' was hidden in the privacy of the domestic interior.⁸⁶ Any (literal) unveiling of monstrosity could only occur within the shelter of home.⁸⁷ Under the conditions of privacy, within the walls of the house, exploration, realization and the performance of monstrous conditions could happen. In other words, home was the space which dismantled the monster, by denying entry to social stigmas and assumptions which categorize the

⁸⁶ In that they were not allowed to publicly present a gender other than the one assigned to them by the state.

⁸⁷ In that they are both genders at once, a condition then unrecognized by law.

monster. To society, home hides Foucault's monstrous hermaphrodite from the world, but to the hermaphrodite herself⁸⁸, the physical, spatial and categorical agency ze has over the space of home allows hir to shed the imposed status of monstrosity. The domestic became a subverted heterotopia of resistance.

By equating the home to a space of both discipline and shelter, state ideology as understood through Foucault's mirror becomes the device which produces monstrosity. The control of bodily performance in compliance to the state is juxtaposed against the notion of home as a space for retreat and self-actualization.⁸⁹ Essentially, the invasion of state narrative into the domestic both violates and denies the individual's opportunity to recategorize themselves as something other than monster.

Consequently, the frame of heterotopia is crucial to the creation of monsters, as deviance is only categorized after passing through the heterotopic mirror, whose glass functions as a lens for hegemonic, utopian values such as those we see in the HDB's domestic parable, and located in the physical space of the home.

As an instrument of discipline and utopian realization, the institution of the HDB carries out this invasion. Its flats become spaces subject to a heterotopic frame of Singapore's desired domestic narrative, akin to a theatre where players must follow script or be cast out as others. As monsters. Foucault's hermaphrodite would find no shelter here.

⁸⁸ Here, in order to fit the theoretical narrative, the assumption is made that the 'hermaphrodite'/intersex person is truly comfortable with their non-binary gender/sex and thus employs ze/hirself pronouns.

⁸⁹ Benjamin, 'The Arcades Project', p. 211.

BREEDING MONSTERS

4.1

Whilst monstrosity is neutral in its scientific context, morality has been imposed upon the concept of the monster, moulding it into a disciplinary device of the body – in this case, towards an ideology. Ideology dictates what makes up natural order, implemented in terms of the monotonous structure of the HDB block. Physically and metaphorically, it determines the construction of the flat, and thus the home. Consequently, deviant bodies and monstrous behaviors are in opposition to the order of the HDB, as if similar the historic conflict between good and evil. This section will explore how the ideological values of the state are equated by heterotopia to the space of the HDB, and consequently, how the HDB makes monsters out of bodies which do not conform to it.

Although, as Victoria Rosner speculates, domesticity is a product of the inhabitant and thus ‘there is a difference between the blank spaces of the floor plan and the lived experience of the household’, she also acknowledges that the plan and its resultant architectural space help to stratify the domestic realm, establishing a hierarchy of both domestic and social activities within the home.⁹⁰ The space of the HDB, as a categorical heterotopia, brings state ideology as an additional organizing force into the home, aided by an ambiguity between public and private spaces within the block.

Alfian Sa’at’s short story, *Corridor* details how the public space of the corridor, immediately preceding the HDB apartment and accessible to all residents, is conflated

⁹⁰ Victoria Rosner. *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 81.

with the private space of the flat. In *Corridor*, a man is stabbed and killed along the common corridor, his body discovered by a woman who the narrator observes 'always keeps her windows closed and once in a while she would bring a man back to her house.'⁹¹ *Corridor* further imparts the narrator's point of view as she judges the morality of her female neighbor based on descriptions of her domestic situation and presented image. The neighbor is presented as a monstrous deviant to the community of the HDB, unwelcome amongst the corridors and flats.

Examining *Corridor*, Lilian Chee notes that this judgment is only made possible by the narrator's observations of her neighbor's behavior from within the corridor, made from the space of her flat. Through these observations, she proceeds to translate the woman's public behavior and appearance into speculations of her domestic propriety. Here, 'an uncertain threshold between public and private space'⁹² facilitates the observation and equation of shoulder pads, early schedules and male visitors into debauchery and sin.

This mixing of the public and the private stems from the HDB's heterotopic, and thus ideological nature. Civic morality enters the private spaces of home, and the HDB, as the site which encourages the communal practice of these social values, consequently leads to the blurring of thresholds between the private interior and public space. The porosity of HDB's private interiors is based on the assumption that the space of heterotopia naturally disciplines, in adherence to the adage of 'nation before community and society above self'.⁹³ Moreover, in order to instill discipline and civil

⁹¹ Alfian Bin Sa'at, 'Corridor', in *Corridor: 12 Short Stories*, (Singapore: Raffles 1999), p.25.

⁹² Lilian Chee, 'The Public Private Interior: Constructing the Modern Domestic Interior in Singapore's Public Housing,' in *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design*, Graeme Brooker and Lois Weinthal, eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 207.

⁹³ As expressed, Stephen Ortmann notes. by the government in 1991. Ortmann, 'Inventing National Identity', p.31.

identity, the HDB necessarily engages in panopticism:

*So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearer.*⁹⁴

For the HDB, panopticism is transformed from Bentham's literal architectural form of the Panopticon. Chee further elaborates that the HDB flat is aligned 'with the ideals of having personal space' in order to 'operate outside the norm,' but in a manner that does not upset the status quo.⁹⁵ The visual access the corridor offers to the flat, and vice versa, echoes the structure of the Panopticon, differing in that the hegemonic entity of supervision is not a person or an external authority, but rather, an amorphous community comprising the residents of the HDB themselves who have accepted, as in *Corridor*, that state civic values are imbued within the layout of the HDB block. It is only with this as a physical backdrop that the narrator can make this tacit condemnation of her neighbor. Observing and commenting on her behavior and morality, the narrator unconsciously expresses, in a microcosm, the state's attempt to observe and control their bodies.

⁹⁴ Foucault, 'Discipline', p. 202.

⁹⁵ Chee, 'The Public Private Interior', p. 207.



Above: Elevation view of old HDB flats.

Below: Presidio Modelo prisoners in their cells.

4.2

Control over the body and its performance, as we have determined, is also attempted through the exemplification of specific domestic structures. Natalie Oswin observes that in colonial Singapore, the house and the household were not equivalent,⁹⁶ due to the existence of numerous households within the same house, but also because the varied ethnic understandings of the domestic institutions, including marriage, were actively perpetuated by the racial enclaving that characterized colonial rule.⁹⁷

When the time came for Singapore to confront post-independence modernity, the problematic concept of family had to be redefined. The reinvention and rehousing of the family within the HDB block tangibly separated it from the colonial past. By linking the family directly to the success of socio-economic progress, home ownership was strengthened as an indicator of both belonging and responsibility to the nation. The apartment was transformed into a space of production, its physical and institutional structures become devices by which the body and its operations may be controlled and even harvested.⁹⁸

With the conclusion of World War II in the 40s, a post-war baby boom resulted in a lack of housing, educational facilities and medical care for Singaporeans. Seeking to ease the situation in the 70s, the Family Planning and Population Board (FPPB) spearheaded a campaign to reduce to size of the then traditionally large family. Interestingly, its *modus operandi* echoed Foucault's anecdote of the control of childhood masturbation, with its suggestions of illness and the charge it gave to

⁹⁶ Oswin, 'Model Family', p. 263.

⁹⁷ Oswin, 'Model Family', p.263.

⁹⁸ Foucault, 'Abnormal', p.64.

parents to be keepers of their children.⁹⁹ Empathically asserting that inadequate affection was given to children in large flats, the FPPB pointed to the HDB flat's inability to accommodate numerous bodies, claiming which would only lead to a decline in happiness amongst large families.¹⁰⁰ It would later make an about turn in the early 1980s, when it encouraged statistically desirable households to propagate under the 'Graduate Mother's Scheme'.¹⁰¹ Incentives including medical grants, insurance waivers, housing priorities and educational privileges for the eventual children were implemented, while cash awards were given to 'undesirable mothers' in return for their voluntary self-sterilization.

In both cases, parents were held culpable for the development of 'illness' in the bodies of their children, and the solutions are recommended by the authorities, to be administered through the performance of the parents' bodies in the domestic interior and incentivized through state institutions.¹⁰² The HDB and FPPB chose a cease-and-desist method, discouraging the act of reproduction, going as far as to suggest, as Oswin details, that a child from a large family would develop withdrawal symptoms; the suggested precursors to mental illness and social deviance were similar to the masturbator's illness in that they veered dangerously on the edge of monstrosity.¹⁰³

The manipulation of the female reproductive body in the HDB domestic interior along changing definitions of domesticity speaks to its importance within the state as a literal vehicle of future productivity. Foreign citizens, under law, are not allowed to

⁹⁹ Foucault, 'Abnormal', p. 248.

¹⁰⁰ Oswin, 'Model Family', p.265, referencing the HDB publication *Our Home*. (1976a, p.28 and 1976b, p.4)

¹⁰¹ Which as Oswin observes, contained 'women with university educations and belonging disproportionately to the Chinese community'

Oswin, 'Model Family', p.266.

¹⁰² In the HDB case, 'higher incidence of prematurity and low birthweight' and 'pregnancies prone to complications' (*Our Home* 1979, p.2)

¹⁰³ Oswin, 'Model Family', p.266.

purchase a HDB flat and are only allowed to rent in restricted numbers through quotas. The only exception to this rule is if they are spouse to a Singaporean citizen. It is this reproductive capability which causes the foreign body of the non-citizen to be accepted into the HDB, with the fulfillment of one specific condition: matrimonial ties to a citizen or permanent resident. The foreign body, typically denied and seen to be monstrous by the HDB, is redeemed through its reproductive capacity.

To that end, one must note the architectural configuration of the HDB flat, which is primarily intended to accommodate the family. The HDB apartment has expanded in typology, mainly in the number of rooms, to adequately house the state's varying definitions of family. The direct provision of the HDB apartment specifically for the state's ideal family can be discerned from early iterations of the HDB interior.¹⁰⁴ As Chee describes:

*The toilet and shower room... were installed as two separate spaces, accessible only through the kitchen. This meant that the two most private spaces, one for sleeping and sexuality and the other for cleansing, were detached and connected only through two more public rooms—the living and kitchen-dining spaces... This layout privileges the legitimate intimacy between nuclear-family members, as opposed to more transient and furtive relationships between/with strangers or lovers.*¹⁰⁵

Not only does this arrangement encourage familial intimacy, it also strengthens the portrayal of the Singaporean domestic body as primarily reproductive instead of

¹⁰⁴ Chee, 'The Public Private Interior', p. 209.

¹⁰⁵ Chee, 'The Public Private Interior', p. 209.

sexual.¹⁰⁶ Matrimony is the legal institution which legitimizes a couple in granting them the right to own their own HDB flat. This flat serves as a private conjugal space previously denied to the couple through the presence of their respective family members and the intimate layout of the apartment.

The specifically reproductive definition of family also eliminates those which Oswin describes as 'heteronormativity's other 'others'' from the space of the HDB.¹⁰⁷ Singles, platonic households unrelated by blood and single-parent families become 'foreign to the domestic' and thus become monstrous to the normative family.

In examination of this, we turn to Eric Khoo's *12 Storeys*¹⁰⁸. An exploration of various tragic domestic narratives within a single HDB block, *12 Storeys* is a critique of how the very structure which is meant to foster community and family instead results in isolation and dysfunction. One of Khoo's protagonists, Meng, acts as temporary guardian to his younger siblings in their parents' absence; this restructuring of their domestic realm quickly descends into dysfunction as Meng oversteps his boundaries, physically invading his siblings' privacy and forcing his opinions onto them. In particular, Meng's invasion of his sister's physical space and scrutiny of her personal effects is accompanied by a persistent questioning and subsequent uncovering of her sexual habits and finally, the suggestion of Meng's incestuous obsession.

It is suggested that Meng's fascination with his sister arises from the conflation of his identities as a heterosexual man and as a brother, brought about by the close proximity forced through the HDB flat and Meng's own sexual repression. Meng's monstrous behavior, erroneously engendered by an unintended compromising of the

¹⁰⁶ Reminiscent of Foucault's distinction between the body and the flesh.

¹⁰⁷ Oswin, 'Model Family', p.266.

¹⁰⁸ *12 Storeys*. Dir. Eric Khoo. DVD. (Singapore: Zhao Wei Films, 1997).

family structure, subsequently dismantles it through the exposure of sexuality; both his sister's, and arguably his own. Whereas previously his monstrous desires could only be realized within the privacy of the flat, the exposure of his desires puts his sexuality into conflict with the performance of his role as a brother. Realizing that this contradiction cannot be tolerated within the domestic sphere, Meng is forced to flee to the playground in order to lament what he perceives as his sister's sexual betrayal.

Meng's plight is evidence that despite the malleable technical definition of the family unit and the changing typology of the flat, both must be reconciled within the HDB. The misinterpretation or deliberate resistance of this manufactured domestic by the body violates this cohesion, thus denouncing the body as monstrous and expelling it from the space of the flat.



Stills from *12 Storeys*. Meng with his sister Trixie, and a chance encounter with a neighbour at the playground.

4.3

This expulsion of the body from the HDB is portrayed as voluntary and perhaps even redemptive in Kelvin Tong's *Eating Air*¹⁰⁹. The opening scene shows Boy, transforming his morning routine and interaction with his parents within the flat into a sequence of Kungfu movie action scenes, replacing banal scenes of domesticity with glamourized violence. The end of this daydream sequence coincides with Boy's departure from the flat and the domestic.

Throughout the movie, Boy attempts to escape the space of the apartment which symbolizes the conformity expected of him. His primary mode of escape is the late night rides he embarks on with his friends on their motorcycles. The motorcycle, constantly in motion, is placeless, but for the lost and struggling Boy, is the prelude to a destination.¹¹⁰ The motorcycle promises him freedom and self-discovery, but at the same time carries him away from the space of the HDB, transforming him into a delinquent – a deviant who while at home can only maintain his identity through a monstrously violent imagination.

4.4

I have become

a foreigner

in my own home,

padding past an

¹⁰⁹ *Eating Air*. Dir. Kelvin Tong. DVD. (Singapore: 1999).

¹¹⁰ The movie's title, *Eating Air*, is the translation of a Hokkien dialect term, 'jiak hong', which means joyride. At the same time, the literal 'eating of air' insinuates the futility of the act, alluding to the way Boy and his friends are uselessly struggling, only to end up with nothing of substance.

unmade bed
someone else had
slept on,
...
the body has already
been removed and
I am really its spirit,
trapped between the past
*and that other place.*¹¹¹

These extracts from Cyril Wong's *Unmade Bed* detail, like an out-of-body experience, the distance felt by the poem's protagonist from his intended existence within the home. There is a deliberate distinction between a life lived by the mechanical body and conscious spirit. Two entities, one 'padding past the bed' that the other has inhabited, ambiguous and interchangeable, separated and irreconcilable. *Unmade Bed* demonstrates the fragmented nature of the domestic space that is reflected by Foucault's mirror. The spaces of the poem: the bedroom, the living room and the hallway each reflect a suggestion of domestic activities which should be performed in them. In the heterotopic HDB, these pieces suggest a home. But Wong juxtaposes these spaces with monstrous images: the foreign body in the protagonist's bed, the father, caught between life and death on the living room sofa and finally, a corpse, bleeding over the whiteness of the tiles.

Fittingly, these horrific, imaginary scenes are more alive, in their struggle and activity, than Wong's protagonist, the silent observer. By situating themselves against the HDB flat, the monstrous fragments constitute another narrative that runs subversive to that

¹¹¹ Cyril Wong, 'Unmade Bed' in *Unmarked Treasure*, (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2004).

of the domestic. The protagonist serves as the catalyst for this contradiction, but he may only do so from a state of detachment between his consciousness and the performance of his body. The escalating violence of the imagery is suggestive of the protagonist's increasing resistance towards the restriction of domesticity while physically trapped within it.

The same motif of imaginary, monstrous acts is used as a means of escape in both works. Wong's protagonist expresses his dissonance by splitting his soul from his body, whereas Boy reconciles it through deviant behavior which ousts him from the space of the HDB. In this aspect, Boy and Wong's protagonist are similarly dissociated from the apartment: both characters, unable to dwell within the domestic sphere, become monsters who can only express themselves through violence.

All these characters expose the collusion of governmental institutions to directly instill social discipline and national identity within the population by alluding to a natural order and subsequently making monsters out of those who resist it. The validity of the HDB flat as both housing and instrument for shaping the family only extends as far as the body performs domesticity within state-accepted definitions. As a point of convergence for the multiple values inscribed in the HDB, the heterotopic mirror, when understood through the monster's original etymology as a physical creature of horror, serves as a reminder that the description of monstrosity is an invented condition which demonstrates the limits of socio-cultural milieus and seeks to reinforce the institutions which describe it.



Stills from *Eating Air*. Boy's Kungfu fantasy.

5: EPILOGUE

HERALDS OF POSSIBILITY

Remember your self: your raw lion heart,

Each beat a stony echo that washes

through ribbed vaults of buildings.

Remember your keris¹¹², iron lightning

ripping through tentacles of waves,

double-edged, curved to a point-

flung high and caught unsheathed, scattering

five stars in the red tapestry of your sky.¹¹³

Inseparable from the bones of buildings and the hopeful twinkle¹¹⁴ of a young nation's future, the titular *lion heart* is the Merlion, mythical mascot of Singapore and a creature of entirely fictional origin, a symbol invented¹¹⁵ by the Singapore Tourism Board for the express purpose of promotion. Conceived as a national symbol and beacon, the half-lion half-fish, monstrous in form, becomes instead an allegory of Singapore's constructed national identity. Throughout the poem, the narrator urges the Merlion to consider not only a contemporary Singapore, but its origin. An event that is historically plausible but has been sensationalized through repetition, this origin story recalls the Javanese prince Sang Nila Utama landing on an island after enduring a supernatural

¹¹² A traditional Javanese dagger, a symbol of authority and power in Southeast Asia, and believed (or assumed) to be carried by Sang Nila Utama during the founding of Singapore.

¹¹³ Amanda Chong, 'lionheart' in & *WORDS: Poems Singapore and Beyond*, (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2010).

¹¹⁴ The five stars on Singapore's national flag represent its ideals, while the waxing crescent moon symbolizes its youth and ascension.

¹¹⁵ Lion with fish tail is tourist board's new emblem. (25th April 1964). *The Straits Times*, p. 6.

storm at sea. There, he saw a lion, or 'singa' in Sanskrit, which lead him to name the island 'Singapura', or 'lion city'. This myth is cited as the reason for Singapore's name, and undeniably, is an event which precedes the Merlion's birth in the mid-1960s. This does not deter the narrator, who invents the Merlion's identity through the dictation of false memories, casting the Merlion as the legendary lion within the myth in spite of its obvious incongruity.

Amanda Chong's¹¹⁶ anachronistic retelling of Singapore's birth, which conflates the fictional construct of the Merlion with a historical myth,¹¹⁷ mirrors Singapore's reinvention of itself from colony to nation. The Merlion is allegorical of the demolition and reconstruction that Koolhaas observes within Singaporean spatial history. Ironically, the British East India Company, who were crucial to the formation of Singapore as a trading colony under the British Empire, bear a pair of merlions on their coat of arms; it is unclear whether this reference is intentional. Regardless, it enriches the Merlion as a symbol of Singapore's nationhood, where in pursuit of modernity, the state attempts to reject its colonial origins, choosing to rely on an intangible, ambiguous half-truth.

The birth of Chong's Merlion is reminiscent of what this dissertation has explored – the construction of the HDB as a heterotopic space intended to house the nation. Both rely on fiction and allegory for validation: the Merlion appropriates a folk legend, while the HDB necessitates the implementation of an absolute and artificial order within its architecture. The imaginary, unanchored space of the nation which only remains tethered to Singapore's ground through a reliance on ideology echoes the Merlion as an image dependant on an unprovable folk tale.

¹¹⁶ Amanda Chong, a law graduate from Cambridge University, wrote *lion heart* when she was a 16 year old student at Hwa Chong Institution, which would win her the Angus Ross prize. An engraving of the poem part of a permanent art installation at the Youth Olympic Park.

¹¹⁷ such as the Merlion with the more realistic lion of the myth.

In these endeavours to articulate a national identity, the Singaporean state inadvertently fragments the subjects of identification. Just as the Merlion is strewn across time, the occupant of the HDB apartment is torn between his role as projected by the HDB and his actual self. Both are transformed into monsters. Yet while the Merlion's chimeric nature is the basis and reason of its existence, the monstrous individual is systematically ejected from the space of the HDB block.

Foucault spoke of heterotopia as a kind of fantastic space, where utopia could be actualized, or spaces of deviance unaccommodated elsewhere could exist unopposed. The Merlion represents this romantic heterotopia, where the selective reconstitution of fragments could map a nation. Yet Singapore's reality lies in the space of the HDB, where it made an active, concerted effort to construct its utopia. Revealing the fault of HDB architecture in its dominance over its occupants, this dissertation surfaces a complexity of relationships between form, programme, society, power and agency in the construction of architecture. Contextually located and created through the heterotopia of the HDB, monstrosity demonstrates the fragility of language and order present in the architecture. Although this fragility has led to the emergence of the monster, it paradoxically harbours a potential for newness. As Jacques Derrida notes:

*The future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters... All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous arrivant... This is the movement of culture.*¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Passages—from Traumatism to Promise,' in *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf, et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.386-87.

Within the HDB context, the monstrous arrivant provides an alternative angle of examining the HDB flat, its domestic narrative and peripheral concepts significant to its development. Monstrosity is a new language through which we can construct a counter-narrative or examination of the HDB structure, enabling us to address its context without submitting to the absolute nature of its ideology. The monster, as this dissertation has noted, provides an allegory through which the alternative Singaporean identity can be born, in resistance of the imposition of national authority. Through this allegory, the Singaporean identity is enriched and given both complexity and agency, expressing itself in a series of creative endeavors such as those previously examined in this dissertation. Where HDB flats once heralded the birth of a nation; now, the monster heralds an exploration of what it truly means to be Singaporean.

-

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References: Literature

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1969.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLoughlin. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002.

Bishop, Ryan, Phillips, John and Yeo, Wei-Wei. *Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Brammall, Kathryn. 'Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 3-21.

Chee, Lilian, 'The Public Private Interior: Constructing the Modern Domestic Interior in Singapore's Public Housing.' In *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design*, Graeme Brooker and Lois Weinthal, eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 199-212.

Chong, Amanda. 'lionheart' in & *WORDS: Poems Singapore and Beyond*. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2010.

Chua, Beng Huat. *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Chua, Beng Huat. 'Private Ownership of Public Housing', Working paper No. 63, Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Australia, 2010.

Chua, Beng Huat and Kuo, Eddie C.Y. 'The Making of a New Nation: Cultural Construction and National Identity in Singapore', Working paper 104, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, Singapore, 1991.

Comaroff, Joshua and Ong, Ker-Shing. *Horror in Architecture*. Singapore: Oro Editions, 2013.

de Gruyter, Walter. *'Heimat': At the Intersection of Memory and Space*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012.

Derrida, Jacques. 'Heidegger's Hand,' Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, edited by John Sallis, p.

161-196. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. 'Passages—from Traumatism to Promise.' Translated by Peggy Kamuf in *Points ...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, edited by Elisabeth Weber, p. 386-87. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975*. Translated by Graham Burchell. London: Picador, 2004.

Fascari, Marco. *Monsters of Architecture: Anthropomorphism in Architectural Theory*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991.

Harvey, David, 'Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of all Geographical Evils', in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, edited by Jean Cormanoff and John L. Cormanoff, Duke University Press, 2001.

Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Holst, Gustav. 1921. *I vow to thee, my country; Unison song. Words by Cecil Spring Rice*. London: J. Curwen.

Koolhaas, Rem. 'Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis ...or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa', in *S M L XL*, edited by Bruce Mau and Hans Werlemann. New York: Monacelli Press, 1995.

McCormick, David Ian. 'The Monstrous and the Sportive Grotesque', Ph.D dissertation. School of English, University of Leeds, 1993.

Norton, Thomas. Treaties, tract 1, 'To the Queenes Majesties Poore Deceived Subjectes of the North Countrey Drawen into Revellion by the Earles of Northumberland and Westmerland', sig. C3 v.

Ortmann, Stephen. 'Singapore: The Politics of Inventing National Identity,' in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 4 (2009): p. 25.

Oswin, Natalie. 'The modern model family at home in Singapore: a queer geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35 (2010): p. 256-268. Doi: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2009.00379.x

Park, Katherine and Daston, Lorraine J. 'Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteen-and-Seventeen-Century France and England', in *Past & Present*, Vol. 92, No. 1, p. 20-54.

PuruShotam, Nirmala. *Negotiating Language, Constructing Race: Disciplining Difference in Singapore*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000.

Rosner, Victoria. *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Ryan, N.J. *A History of Malaysia and Singapore*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Sa'at, Alfian B. 'Corridor' in *Corridor: 12 Short Stories*. Singapore: Raffles, 1999.

Sa'at, Alfian B. 'Void Deck' in *One Fierce Hour*. Singapore: Landmark Books, 1998.

Saldanha, Arun, 'Heterotopia and Structuralism', in *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 40 (2008), p. 2089-2096.

Seng, Eunice. 'Hom-e-scape(s): tabula rasa, or a denial of a Singaporean contemporaneity', *Singapore Architect Journal*, (1999).

Teo, Sum Lim, *A Study of State Awareness in Singapore's Chinese Poetry (1945-1970)*, Master's thesis. National University of Singapore, 2011.

West-Eberhard, Mary J. *Development Plasticity and Evolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Wong, Cyril. 'Mother Doesn't Get It', in *Unmarked Treasure*. Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2004.

Wong, Cyril. 'Unmade Bed', in *Unmarked Treasure*. Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2004.

Yuen, Belinda. 'Squatters no More: Singapore Social Housing', *Global Urban Development Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Nov. 2007, p. 16.

References: Film

Berita Singapura: A New Look at Housing. Videocassette. (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, Broadcasting Division, 1967). National Archives accession no. 1992000566.

12 Storeys. Dir. Eric Khoo. DVD. (Singapore: Zhao Wei Films, 1997).

Eating Air. Dir. Kelvin Tong. DVD. (Singapore: 1999).

References: Web

'Definition of medical heterotopia',
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heterotopic> (accessed 8 Sep 2014).

'Eligibility to Buy New HDB Flat',
<http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10321p.nsf/w/BuyingNewFlatEligibilitytobuynewHDBflat?OpenDocument> (accessed 2 June 2014).

'Public Housing in Singapore',
http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1585_2009-10-26.html (accessed 20 July 2014).

'Singapore's National Education syllabus',
http://www.ne.edu.sg/principles_of_governance.htm (accessed 25 July 2014).

References: Newspaper

Part of a speech given by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, *The Straits Times*, 20 April 1987.

'Lion with fish tail is Tourist Board's new emblem', *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1964.

APPENDIX

Void Deck

Alfian Bin Sa'at

Where the neighbourhood wives,
After a morning at the wet market,
Sit facing the breeze
To trade snatches of gossip
About leery shopkeepers,
The local louts,
(Like that fella who's always drilling his walls –
Gives me migraine)
And that mad woman
Who throws things from her window.
With careful put-downs they
Fashion boasts, about stubborn sons,
Lazy daughters, who by some miracle or mistake
Always score well in class.
When words falter,
Gestures take over: pursed lips, rolling eyes,
Animated hands adorned by bangles of
Gold, jade, steel, string.

And children orbit around them
Laugh without diction –
Their games of tag a reassurance
That there has been no hothousing
Of who is unclean, unwashed,
Untouchable. When they break out
Into some kindergarten song,
One almost believes in a generation
Cleansed of skin-deep suspicions,
And free from the superstitions of the tongue –

And old folks sit like sages
To deploy chess pieces with ancient strategies.
In a corner, a caged bird bursts
With the song of its master's pride
And wrinkled women breathe, through
Tai-chi-tuned windpipes, the operatic melody of the air...

All a wanton fantasy.

Eyes reveal a meeting-point
For loners and loiterers:
A sense of things reduced-
Conversations that trickle through
Brief noddings at lift landings,
Teenage rhetoric scrawled, in liquid paper,
On the stone-table chessboard,
(Where the king used to sit)
The grandiose house-selling dreams of residents
Compacted in anonymous letterboxes;

As an afterthought, an old man pees
Under a public phone.

A place to be avoided, this,
How in its vastness it devours hours.
Little wonder then,
Why residents rush through void decks
Back to the cramped comforts of home
As if in fear of what such open space might do
To cosy minds.

Published in **One Fierce Hour** (1998)

Mother Doesn't Get It

Cyril Wong

I don't know why I don't know love.

I don't know why my sister sleeps with white men and likes it.

I don't know why I don't like sex.

I don't know why I turned into my mother no matter how hard I resisted.

I don't know why my son does not look at me in the eye anymore.

I don't know why my daughter used to bring home other girls dressed as boys.

I don't know why my daughter likes men now and the men are never Chinese.

I don't know why I believe in God even though He does little to make me happy.

I don't know why I can say such things and still believe I will go to heaven.

I don't know why I keep waking up in the middle of the night after dreaming of lying at the bottom of a pool.

I don't know why even as there is no light in such dreams I can feel I'm not alone and that something is waiting to hold me down to drown.

I don't know why my husband loves to mop the floor to a meaningless shine.

I don't know why the self is a shadow I keep trying to pin down to point in one direction.

I don't know why this home is where my heart is no longer.

I don't know why my body shrinks with age but my loneliness never does.

I don't know why my children watch me with their father's hollowed eyes.

I don't know why I keep telling my son I will kill myself if he refuses to marry.

I don't know why I never kill myself.

I don't know why it is precisely these moments when I am almost sure I am happy that doubt pours up inside me like a cloud of mosquitoes through the grate of a roadside drain I saw in India and could not stop staring.

I don't know why I can almost forget my pain when I am at my busiest and most distracted.

I don't know why I still believe the dream of the happy life will surely fit itself back inside my body tighter than a screw tomorrow.

I don't know why the pain comes back.

Published in **Unmarked Treasure** (2004)

Unmade Bed

Cyril Wong

I have become
a foreigner
in my own home,
padding past an
unmade bed
someone else had
slept on, then
examining things
I used to think
I needed.
In the living room,
I observe the inert
body of my father
on the sofa as if
from behind
a velvet rope,
fascinated by his
stillness; not dead,
yet not quite alive.
Next, I scrutinise
the hallway as if
I am standing at
the scene of a crime,
except there is no
body sprawled across
the white of the floor
over a growing pool
of blood, its vague
outline delineated
by chalk; perhaps
the body has already
been removed and
I am really its spirit,
trapped between the past
and that other place.

Published in **Unmarked Treasure** (2004)

lion heart

Amanda Chong

You came out of the sea,
skin dappled scales of sunlight;
Riding crests, waves of fish in your fists.
Washed up, your gills snapped shut.
Water whipped the first breath of your lungs,
Your lips' bud teased by morning mists.

You conquered the shore, its ivory coast.
Your legs still rocked with the memory of waves.
Sinews of sand ran across your back-
Rising runes of your oceanic origins.
Your heart thumped- an animal skin drum
heralding the coming of a prince.

In the jungle, amid rasping branches,
trees loosened their shadows to shroud you.
The prince beheld you then, a golden sheen.
Your eyes, two flickers; emerald blaze
You settled back on fluent haunches;
The squall of a beast. your roar, your call.

In crackling boats, seeds arrived, wind-blown,
You summoned their colours to the palm
of your hand, folded them snugly into loam,
watched saplings swaddled in green,
as they sunk roots, spawned shade,
and embraced the land that embraced them.

Centuries, by the sea's pulmonary,
a vein throbbing humming bumboatsyour
trees rise as skyscrapers.
Their ankles lost in swilling water,
as they heave themselves higher
above the mirrored surface.

Remember your self: your raw lion heart,
Each beat a stony echo that washes
through ribbed vaults of buildings.

Remember your keris, iron lightning
ripping through tentacles of waves,
double-edged, curved to a point-

flung high and caught unsheathed, scattering
five stars in the red tapestry of your sky.

Published in **& WORDS: Poems Singapore and Beyond** (2010)