

# HOME

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# HOME.

## FINDING A SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE WAKE OF SUPERMODERNITY.

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A home is how I find myself in the world – if at all.<sup>1</sup>

This research is about the home. It is about locating ‘home’, wherever in the world it may be. It is about exercising choice and freedom to bestow, once found, the status of being a home upon my home. Most people tend to think of the home as the ultimate trophy, the bounty at the end of a quest.<sup>2</sup> For was it not *The Wizard of Oz* that taught us no matter where you roamed, “... there’s no place like home”? But today this has become confusing. Defining one’s home, let alone locating it is troubling.

This body of work addresses dualism within the site of the home. I utilise the high-rise, high-density mass-produced urban housing and the singular home unit as metaphors for the masses and the individual respectively in relation to the home. I contrast the public with the private, the exterior and the interior, the objective and the subjective – all of which take form within the space of the urban apartment block. Issues of permanency and non-permanency of the home are also addressed in defining the location of one's home. All these and other antagonisms seem engaged in some kind of battle, but I hope in spite of obvious conflicts, I can highlight these. I will show that these are not opponents but companions, residing within one cohesive body of work. This paper demonstrates that in spite of my own point of origin, I am challenged and confronted by similar attempts to define my home and to locate it. And that perhaps this condition of “homelessness” is a phenomenon that arises in the wake of globalisation, the twenty-first century and the second wave of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Through my theoretical research into Jon Bird, Beatriz Colomina and Vilém Flusser – along with the works featured in *Claustrophobia* – I would like to define how I will be applying the terms ‘home’ and ‘house’ for the purpose of this body of work. ‘Home’ adopts a sentimentalised notion of the domestic and of the space of social interaction. The home is the site of memory, bonds and formative experiences. The ‘house’ on the other hand engages the physicality of the walls, roofs and windows: existing as a space. However in using such definitions, both the home and the house become interchangeable. Home is articulated as a relatively permanent location while the house is transient and easily replaced. The contrary can also be true: people can move through homes and yet always require a house.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the house, there is a definitive focus in this research on urban housing especially high-rise and high-density housing. Such housing, with similarities among the American projects, Australian housing commissions, British council estates and Singapore's public housing, is visually the perfect metaphor of the contemporary masses. I am interested in the visual metaphors suggested by such housing with an emphasis placed on the motifs and their rhythmic repetition of the structures of the units and the windows.

In this body of work there is a contrast between the interior of the home and the exterior of high-rise housing. The homogenised exterior of the housing debases individuality and yet in the tiny details within the façade – usually found in the windows – rest clues and hints about the individual inhabitant. In this interior space lies the demarcation of the individual and all of his/her distinct and unique characteristics.

Such high-rise and high-density housing is not just pivotal in this research because of its visual, metaphorical overtones. It is also a result of the fact that there is a personal connection with it. I was born into such housing and spent many years – formative ones – growing up in them. Hence there is this paradoxical mix of affinity and loathing for these houses: a disgusted fascination towards their conceptual birth, their rise in popularity and how they manage to look so consistently dull and equally drab regardless of location.

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## NOMADIC BEGINNINGS

This body of work is a continuation from last year's work *non\_spaces* which was based on Marc Augé's text *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.<sup>5</sup> Non-places, according to Augé, are those characteristically unspecific areas that can only acquire and maintain a sense of identity, history and relation via the population that interacts with them. Non-places are found almost everywhere and anywhere – from corridors to freeways, hotel rooms to airport terminals. These are the spaces that witness everyday rituals and transitions. A 'place' can be defined as having specific identity, local history and anthropological relations. Subsequently a 'non-place' is defined in opposition to these. However, neither the 'place' nor 'non-place' exists in pure form and yet the two are in opposition; they can never absolutely disappear nor be thoroughly established. My previous body of work, *non\_spaces*, addressed the art and states of travelling, transience and ultimately questioned the relationship between permanency and non-permanency of being. I believe there are definitive threads that continue from *non\_spaces* through this current body of work and remain key components in my work. (See Plate 1)

Issues of the 'home' and the placement of oneself within the home – and on a larger scale, in the world – have been significant for me. I was born a citizen of Singapore but as second generation. My grandparents immigrated from China, Malaysia and Wales for reasons of work opportunities, family and as a result of the Second World War. I now find myself residing in Sydney but was raised in a hybrid culture of Asian and European values and ideals. I find myself lost, dragging the baggage of histories gone by and can only ask: "who?" and "where from?" As Flusser writes: "I am homeless, because there are so many homelands that make their home in me."<sup>6</sup> I have since come to renegotiate

the permanency of both home and house. My definition of the home and house has evolved, if not entirely changed, since I was a child. I believe there has been a paradigm shift and this may be due in part to a sense of global connectivity that links the world, making it seem smaller than it was before:

I myself... linked to the world through mass media and the Internet, have no particular reason to go home again, except for occasional visits... I am already home. I am home because of the Americanization of much of the world... and because of contemporary technology.<sup>7</sup>

In the era of the Internet and globalisation, (universal connectivity or Americanisation, depending how one is placed), each developing city is fast becoming another New York, Sydney or Hong Kong. These cities all have their imposing skyscrapers, everlasting motorways, spidery rail networks, booming shopping malls, frantic airports and high-density residential areas. The trading of infrastructure, knowledge and information has made cities parallel replicas of each other. Global consumerism has allowed (or caused) cultures to mix and mingle ('invade' perhaps?) until they no longer have a sense of individuality but are rather a vast cultural supermarket with an extensive and unlimited array of choices from which to select. This sense of connectivity has shrunk the world and all of a sudden, nowhere seems to be foreign anymore. Individual culture is rapidly conceding to a global culture. In a world where the inhabitants uproot themselves and migrate for reasons of education, work, asylum or love, can we truly define the locality of our homes? Are we all homeless? Is 'home' but a romanticised resonance of memories, relationships and time? Perhaps one's home is wherever in the world one most truly feels comfortable; a sense of belonging:

Home is where I am when I am there.<sup>8</sup>

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## THE URBAN CATASTROPHE

High-rise and high-density housing – the pivotal imagery used in this body of work – is really a reduction of the home to a machine-like entity. This originated through the pragmatism and Modernist desires of architects such as Le Corbusier.<sup>9</sup> His approach to simplifying the home into a unit or ‘cell’ that could be slotted into a lattice-like structure originated in the works of the *Wurkbund* theorists and his own observation of monastic life. Le Corbusier was completely pragmatic in his approach to urbanising the home, constantly concerning himself with economic factors, the number of units and the ability to shape the home, a single-family dwelling, into a collective mechanism.<sup>10</sup> Le Corbusier used the metaphor of the bottle and the wine-bin to illustrate the rationale and reasoning for his modular machine for living:

A bottle may contain champagne, beaune or just vin ordinaire, but the one we are talking about invariably contains a family... It must be designed with the same rigorous observance of order as if it were a machine, an aeroplane, a motor car or any other product of modern civilisation... And having made our bottle, the dwelling, we can plump it down under an apple tree in Normandy or under a pine tree in the Jura. We can equally well push it into a pigeon-hole, that is to say into a space on the 5th or the 17th floor of a framework... we can put it anywhere we like in what we might call the supporting skeleton. Or more simply a wine-bin. We just stow the bottle in the bin.<sup>11</sup> (*See Plates 2 & 3*)

The simplification of the home into the “... modular, lattice-like structure, capable of being infilled with a range of prefabricated cells” took its primordial shape in the development of Marseilles in France.<sup>12</sup> However, due to many constraints, technical inexperience, inefficiency, and general poor management, Marseilles took five times longer than expected to complete, ironically becoming contrary to its assembly-line model for the modern mass-production of the home. Le Corbusier’s ideas and message of humanism were lost along the way, and the slide from utopian ideal into a grim reality became “... symbolic of the failure of the project of Modernism as a whole.”<sup>13</sup>

Every year, 2 to 3 million people emigrate in the world. At the outset of the 21st Century, 130 million people live outside their country of birth.<sup>14</sup>

Housing blocks are the phenomenon of urbanisation and the ever expanding population. How else could anyone justify producing mass box-like dwellings in such magnitude, obscuring both sky and horizon?<sup>15</sup> The booming population and the mass migration to cities is inversely proportionate to the amount of land available to house them. In the 1966 May issue of *Asia Magazine*, it was predicted that high buildings would be the norm rather than the exception.<sup>16</sup> Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas writes that many cities are now one huge housing project; an urban jungle peopled by concrete boxes and slabs that stand “in militaristic form.”<sup>17</sup> The quintessential urban jungle is the island of Singapore. It eradicated its history and the entire island was artificialised having nothing that survived beyond a relatively short existence.<sup>18</sup> (*See Plate 4*)

High-rise and high-density housing has become the model of choice for many cities. It allows for the most number of people to be housed on a limited area of land. Besides making economic sense, this is also due to the fact that there is limited available land area. The only solution is to build upwards. It is interesting to note that when the British Government tried to sell people the idea of high-rise living in the United Kingdom, Housing Councils talked about “a return to smaller communities” and “a sense of independence from the huddled masses that form the city.”<sup>19</sup> However, in reality, the high-rise dwellings became more alienating and miserable than the terrace houses they were designed to replace:

Witness the crap attempts at public areas and spaces in high rise estates. They're all abandoned and empty, sometimes, even vandalised because of a lack of a sense of ownership and affection for the surroundings. An example is Milton Keynes, a fake city with grid references as road names. When the builders left, they made concrete cows in the outlying fields as a joke. They're still there.<sup>20</sup>

Koolhaas highlights the trauma of the transition from the English slums to the notorious council estates. He also compares this to the *tabula rasa* of Singapore's residential environment, the 'urban renewal' from shop-houses to high-rise containers, which was even more merciless.<sup>21</sup>

What does an apartment complex on a huge artificial slab represent today in the popular mind, if not the embodiment of the non-city and of what must be called the urban catastrophe? How then can we imagine that this kind of urbanism can be home to mobility, creativity, flexibility, autonomy, and identity?<sup>22</sup>

The reality of mass-housing is grim: great big slabs of concrete that "pock-mark" the city and its fringes are the failure of Modernism and Le Corbusier's utopian projection of standardised housing.<sup>23</sup> The multi-residence of a concrete frame, staircase and an elevator shaft, capable and ready to be filled with units is but a machine for living in. It offers simplicity of construction, is economical and is a formula that can be repeated infinitely: the basis of modern vernacular architecture. Although the individual apartments are understood to be part of this, all the other elements within the greater picture of the slab – windows, rows of them – make us reread the imagery as empty vessels for human activity. Such images confront the viewer with gridded structures of ominous blocks that depict a sense of order, arcane control, imposed unity and strict proportions. These housing blocks are part of a machine-age aesthetic, stripped of ornament, in which form and detail are reduced to the lowest common denominator of banality. They are architecture without architectural merit.<sup>24</sup> These buildings and their massively ordered structures veil individuality and promote with their repetitive box-like units "unity within multiplicity".<sup>25</sup> Such housing with homogenised façades prescribe a uniform de-individualised life.

The continuous repetition of the unit and window is based on a system that tends to subscribe to a degree of simplicity. These rhythmic repetitions of grids, lines and geometry instil a sense of order and control. From the mathematical forms of cubes to the graphic two-dimensional motif, they offer visual simplicity.<sup>26</sup> To appreciate such things cannot be taught and sometimes it takes many viewings before being able to see them for what they are.

But then this expansive imagery reveals, on closer inspection, many tiny details. This is one of the oldest, simplest and most rewarding pleasures of photography – the patient detection of details, too small, too incidental to have been noticed at the moment of exposure. This is the foremost trait of photography and invokes Walter Benjamin’s ‘optical unconscious’.<sup>27</sup> The photograph can record material that the photographer may not recognise or not yet understand: “... the camera does not need our detailed knowledge to record complexities before us.”<sup>28</sup> It is in these unexpected details of humanity in the occupancy of such housing blocks that we find hints of intimate interiors. The manner in which we have come to consider architecture is through our understanding and comprehension of the relationship between the interior and exterior, private and public. The exterior is the mask that evokes a threatening impression, representing the impossibility of communication. But it is just this incommunicable silence that protects the intimate interior, which speaks the language of culture and individuality. This silence is the cover that provides the shell for its intimacy, alluding that “... there is more within me.”<sup>29</sup>

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## INTERIORITY COMPLEX

The polarities within this body of work – exteriors and interiors, public and private, objective and subjective – are addressed through the device of the ‘window.’<sup>30</sup> In his essay *A Dark Space*, Anthony Vidler introduces windows as the eyes or vision, as mirrors of the self:

... ‘blank’ windows that might be traced back to romantic tropes of blocked vision, the evil eye, and the uncanny effect of mirrors that cease to reflect the self... boarded-up houses whose secrets might only be imagined.<sup>31</sup>

Due to their overwhelming number per block, the windows are prominent features. It is the window – either boarded-up, burnt-out or with its curtains half-drawn – that indulges the viewer, allowing a brief peek into the lives beyond it, sometimes also reflecting the dark undercurrents of a reality we can only begin to imagine.

In the case of Andreas Gursky’s *Paris, Montparnasse* – a large-scale photograph of a huge apartment block with a grid-like structure, playing on binary opposition of individual and mass – the windows of the individual units are what first confronts the viewer.<sup>32</sup> The image was shot utilising Cartesian perspective and the modern structure becomes overwhelming and imposing, more so due to the fact that the print stood at two by four metres. But with its myriad subtle tints and hues apparent in the windows of the units – bearing a resemblance to Gerhard Richter’s *1024 Farben* – it individualises the masses and forces the viewer into paying closer attention to the details in the repetitive box-like units. The very notion of the window conveys the idea of the relationship between inside and outside, the transition between the private and the public space.<sup>33</sup> (See Plates 5 & 6)

High-speed lifts disgorge onto subdued and artificially-lit *rues-intérieur* which continue the shadowy theme as a counterpoint to the revelatory lightness of the individual apartments.<sup>34</sup>  
(See Plate 7)

The interiors of the homes are metaphors for the individual, and there are few places like these that can mark out the individual. Within the home – sometimes empty but never uninhabited – lie signifiers and evidence of the individual, the occupant. The interiors are idiosyncratic and characteristic. They have identity, and are distinct, personal and emotive.<sup>35</sup> Each unit reflects a distinct identity and they vary from home to home, unit to unit. The home is the fundamental physical entity that is paramount in the development of the identity of the individual. The home is thought to be the quintessential, private, space of the individual.

Jon Bird is very concise in his establishment of notions of the home and the house. In his article ‘*dolce domum*’ about Rachel Whiteread’s *House*, Bird introduces the home as a “... key component in the constitution of identity”, defining it as the platform from which all social relationships are initiated and maintained.<sup>36</sup> As children, the house is the first and foremost space in which we create our formative bonds. It is in this space that we learn to differentiate interiority from exteriority, to distinguish between safety and danger, private and public. Le Corbusier defined the basic purpose of the home as being “... a shelter, an enclosed space which affords protection against... outside observation.”<sup>37</sup> The distinction between the private and the public is neatly defined and from this, we learn to separate what should be hidden from what can be shown.

In Whiteread’s *House*, however, she manages to make the contrary true as well. She turns the space inside out, opening up the private for public view, exposing the intimacies of the living space, the space of life for the entire world to witness. The home space thus

becomes the untold narrative of a life being lived. Home, being the symbol of the self – an identifiable place and the place of identity – becomes the public expression of the individual and represents the specific identity by which the individual wishes to be known. The home affords protection and privacy thus allowing the inhabitant to carefully select how he / she would like to be perceived on the outside. Only when the façade is stripped away and the interiors exposed can we then see what lies beneath.<sup>38</sup>

Within the interior, details of the home space lend themselves to establishing the individual's identity. The 'look' of the home reflects who people are and the way they cope with the problems of life: a bookcase can become an informal clue that reflects individual concerns and character.<sup>39</sup> The selection of objects and the manner in which they are grouped and displayed are non-verbal expressions of the individual; the very nature and arrangement of possessions allude to a great deal about the inhabitant's views on existence. The individual is at liberty to demarcate and personalise the space as he / she sees fit, and in these demarcations, notions of gender, age and other characteristic traits and idiosyncrasies are observed.<sup>40</sup> However sometimes simple objects reveal ambiguities that shift the identity and introduce an element of uncertainty, leaving the viewer estranged from everyday normality.<sup>41</sup> (*See Plate 8*)

Additionally, the home can now be thought of as "... a place of work, a place of conflict and a place of entrapment."<sup>42</sup> Just as it is the primordial place of safety and shelter, the home is also a place for secrets, fear and danger. The home exists on parallel levels and creates simultaneous themes within the same space. The home as the emblem of safety and shelter also depicts entrapment which in turn poses a dilemma. In this urge to return to the womb, the safety of the home runs parallel to the need to exercise personal freedom and the choice to break free from the confines of the home and explore the world beyond.<sup>43</sup>

Since the late twentieth century, the home has been transitory, created and then re-created in quick succession in new localities. The home has become nothing more than a romanticised projection of identity and (be)longing, a sentimentalised ideal that we insist on carrying around with us like emotional baggage: it becomes fiction. When the home becomes transitory, the fiction can be located in a myriad of locations. According to Soo Jin Kim, non-places such as hotel rooms, foyers, and airport lounges mimic the home since they too have become the spaces that witness everyday rituals or transitions.<sup>44</sup> Hence globalisation has not just homogenised mass media and cultural icons, but also redistributed the home. The home as myth begs us to question where our homes might actually be and whether we might all be homeless, since the experience of homelessness is one of feeling out of place.<sup>45</sup>

I am my own paradox, wanting to return to the safe haven of the home and desiring the freedom to travel and explore. This is evident in my body of work: images of the home and the house have accumulated from different cities and countries in which I have resided or with which I have established some kind of intimate bond. Perhaps the irony lies in the fact that I need to be nomadic and transient in order to find a sense of (be)longing. I may be that global citizen, "... a representative of a new class of supra-terrestrial nomads" that Paul Myoda talks about in his foreword to Macro Brambilla's *Transit*.<sup>46</sup> Gordon Mathews proposes that having, "... nostalgia for home and roots... may serve as an advertisement of one's privileged position..."<sup>47</sup>

I am a living parody of my own homelessness. Perhaps, with Susan Sontag's prompting, I take photographs to help me deal with my own insecurities and to take possession of a space with which I am uneasy and uncomfortable.<sup>48</sup>

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## EUROCENTRICITY

This section is about the birth of contemporary photography and its links with German architecture. I will be introducing the artists – mostly contemporary German photographers – who have made significant impact on my own photographic sensibilities through their employment of scale, presentation methods and viewpoint.

Ever since its inception, the medium of photography has been linked to architecture.<sup>49</sup> Never has a medium been so perfectly adapted to the two-dimensional representation of static space. In Germany there is a relationship between photography and architecture, the urban condition and a fascination with its industrial design aesthetic. There is an engagement on some objective level in contemporary German photography with the urban environment. *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which translates to *New Vision* or *New Objectivity*, is a modern definitive style of contemporary German photography. It was first practised by Bernd & Hilla Becher who explored architecture and “the implications of photography in architecture”.<sup>50</sup> *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which developed in the wake of World War One, would come to replace expressionism. It became a critical description of paintings, and later influenced and introduced this idea to other art forms. The Bechers would proceed to provide influence through their teachings to much of contemporary German photography, inspiring the likes of Thomas Demand, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, Heidi Specker and Thomas Struth.<sup>51</sup> (*See Plate 9*)

The on-going polemic between reproduction and production in photography, the objectivity of the medium and the subjectivity of the image, is perhaps nothing more than a paradox co-existing within the one entity, each with no distinct beginning or end.

The physical nature of photography depicts and records reality.<sup>52</sup> The fundamental difference between photography and the other forms of visual arts lies in the fact that photography is limited and has no alternative but to reproduce what it ‘sees’.<sup>53</sup> However the photograph furnishes us with information that we perceive subjectively.<sup>54</sup> Photography collects and compiles information but the information is specific. The phenomenon of human observation means that there is little we can see that is absolutely free from bias or personal and subjective perception.<sup>55</sup>

Every image embodies a way of seeing... For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights.<sup>56</sup>

Gursky’s photography cannot be viewed as a mirror to a fixed material reality. In many of his images, he goes further than just recording locations and scenes, transforming the photograph into an analysis of things and allowing for another perspective.<sup>57</sup> With the advent of personal computers in the 1980s, the endless capabilities and possibilities of the digital – once only servicing big-budget professionals – had become readily accessible and available to the individual user. It is common knowledge that Gursky was one of the first artists to have embraced this new technology and incorporate it into his work. Gursky had originally intended to use the technology for retouching, but soon “upped the ante” beginning with images like *Paris, Montparnasse*. Gursky would continue to delete, add, refine and enhance, if not completely reconstruct a horizon, in his following images. He invented his own world, a fiction, establishing his personally ‘aided-reality’. By utilising the technology, Gursky was also able to challenge painting in terms of scale by printing his images as large-scale photographs.<sup>58</sup> (*See Plate 10*)

There is conflicting evidence about the birth of large-scale photography and its acceptance into a fine arts milieu. This was, according to Peter Galassi, either due to the fact that photographers were once classically trained as painters and hence still had the tendency to produce works of considerable scale or because photographs were now in direct competition with paintings for wall space and the viewer's attention.<sup>59</sup> (See Plates 11 – 13) In 1986, Thomas Ruff was about to showcase his portraits of headshots at *Galerie Philip Nelson* when Nelson approached the photographer, offering to pay for the enlargement of three prints. The enlargement transformed Ruff's modest prints into colossal pop icons. Both Gursky and Thomas Struth would follow suit in three years' time.<sup>60</sup>

The sudden explosion of the continually expanding photographic image prompted artists to reconsider and reassess methods of presentation and display. The sensitive photographic surface would always require protection; it used to be placed beneath glass. Artists began leaving allowance for a white border all around the image, serving as separation of the image from its environment, and as protection for the image that resided within. Now, the large-scale photograph would independently exist as an object in its entirety.<sup>61</sup>

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## THE HOMELESS ARTIST

The images that I have produced aim to be both banal and sublime.<sup>62</sup> Prints that measure 50 by 40 inches consume the viewer and draw them into a realm of concrete and steel, for I am one of the “... paper architects who do not simply represent the space before [us], but construct a whole environment for the camera.”<sup>63</sup> Blocks that obscure the sky and the horizon stare down upon the viewer, exaggerating their ominous presence. I feel almost apologetic standing in front of them. This is reminiscent of my youth growing up in such estates, having to strain my neck to gaze upwards at these blocks. Rather than frame these buildings through the Cartesian perspective – popularised by the Bechers – I chose to confer importance to the subject by looking up at these slabs, creating a forced perspective reminiscent of a trapezium. This serves to intensify their grim anonymity. There is a disconcerting similarity to standing in front of an authority figure who is about to reprimand you for stepping out of line. But the punishment is much more severe than some angry words.

Expect to be confined to a box-like dwelling, biding your time until you next relocate into an equally grim “cell”. Units in such estates have unusually limited natural light source. Most units, packed side-by-side, have two points of entry for natural light – if you are lucky. The windows, which appear black, stare blankly back at you. The weather-beaten, mossy façades, riddled with crackling paint and deteriorating concrete create a forebearing appearance and give an impression that is unhomey.<sup>64</sup> (*See Plate 14*) But it is home for some. Home to 86% of Singapore’s population.<sup>65</sup>

Now I am gratefully homeless – a happy nomad – in spite of the knowledge that I indeed once belonged to a homeland. As Flusser suggests: “It was my birth that threw me into

my first homeland, without anyone asking me if this was something I wanted.”<sup>66</sup> I have chosen this new path, and earned my “freedom” to decide where to go and call home. But what happens if I am called to return to my first home?

I am anxious, if not a little disturbed by the possibility of having to resign to a fate of living in such sterile and claustrophobic housing; a fate worse than death. But I am not alone in this paranoia of dread:

Work so hard for what? A box?! Even then it's only for 99 years and then the Government can take back. Sometimes not even 50 years and they take back!<sup>67</sup>

Koolhaas has mentioned that nothing in Singapore survives past a short existence – sometimes even 30 years is stretching it too far. This is tabula rasa gone awry. I do not want to be housed in colossal, democratised, mass-produced slabs in which my own identity as an individual is compromised and undermined by an institutionalised doctrine of cohesive unity, imposed or otherwise. The images that I produce exist as a result of both my present state-of-mind and an unparalleled fear of becoming another faceless individual amongst the throngs of banality.

And maybe that is why I make art.

My work represents the struggle of the individual to establish and maintain a sense of identity against the masses. And yet, in my images, the presence of man, woman or child is obviously absent. The identity of the individual does not require the physicality of the body. Like Gursky, the individual is never physically present, never at the centre of my photography, and yet it is my primary focus in this body of work, my sole purpose in my photographs.

Individual versus the masses. Interiors versus exteriors. Subjective versus objective. Home versus homelessness. These and other contradictions have propagated what should be a conflict, but which, in my work, form symbiotic relations, blurring the line between where one ends and the other begins. It is hard to fully establish one aspect of the argument without the other. Perhaps my work is then an accumulation, accommodating a wealth of apparent polarities.

Hence what emerges from this body of work is not so much the last word, or the definitive attempt to locate the home and return to it. Rather it prompts journeys back and forth, through the sites of memories, relations and time, through the places and locations of 'home' all across the world and its location in our minds.

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**END**

## NOTES

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- 16 'The Future of Asian Cities' in Asia Magazine, May 1966, pp. 5, 7, 8.

- 17 Koolhaas, S, M, L, XL, p. 1021.

The deregulation of Dutch policies in the 1990s had resulted in official subsidies for housing commission projects to be terminated, forcing such projects to operate in the open market. Without any form of government supervision over town planning, public housing would slide into chaos. In 1995, Adriaan Geuze and West 8 erected a model consisting of 800,000 (the estimated number of houses that would be required by 2005) tiny wooden houses in the arcade of the Netherlands Architecture Institute. The visual impact was astounding and disturbing, the implications of the expected housing boom without regulated control became intrinsically clear. The result was an endless sea of houses that continued well into the distance: reminiscent of over-populated suburbs of North America.

B. Lootsma, 'The Second Modernity of Dutch Architecture' in SuperDutch: New Architecture in the Netherlands, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000, p. 21.

(See Plate 15)

- 18 Koolhaas, Mutations, p. 310.

- 19 B. Cowell, personal communication, August 27, 2002.

- 20 *ibid.*, August 27, 2002.

- 21 Koolhaas, S, M, L, XL, p. 1021.

- 22 Y. Dubalin, P. Mantziaras & J. L. Violeau, 'Subversions and Diversions: The "Italie" Slab in the 13th Arrondissement of Paris' in Mutations, p. 382.

- 23 Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

- 24 S. Sesser, The Lands of Charm and Cruelty: Travels in Southeast Asia, Picador, London, 1993, p. 30.

- 25 G. Breuer, 'Pictures of Paradox: The Photographs of Andreas Gursky' in Reconstructing Space: Architecture in Recent German Photography, p. 22.

- 26 J. Pawson, Minimum, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, pp. 8 – 10.

- 27 "It was in 1931, in his 'Small History of Photography,' that Walter Benjamin first used the term 'optical unconscious'... he speaks of how the naked eye cannot penetrate movements of even the most ordinary kind... we have no idea at all... what happens during the fraction of a second when a person steps put. But photography... with its devices of slow motions and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis."

W. Benjamin quoted in:

R. E. Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 178 – 179.

- 28 J. Collier & M. Collier, Visual Anthropology. Photography as a Research Method, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1992, p. 16.

- 29 B. Colomina, Privacy & Publicity. Modern Architecture as Mass Media, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 35.

- 30 In 1977, an extensive photography exhibition entitled *Mirrors and Windows* was showcased at the Museum of Modern Art where it was conceptualised that the 200-odd prints could be “apprehended either as records of some exterior reality (windows), or as interiorized visions revelatory of the photographer’s own inner being (mirrors).” The problem was that many of the images could easily shift between the two categories and continue to make as much, or as little, sense.  
A. Solomon-Godeau, ‘Photography after Art Photography’ in Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 103.
- 31 A. Vidler, ‘ADark Space’ in Rachel Whiteread. House, Phaidon Press, London, 1995, p. 65.
- 32 P. Galassi, ‘Gursky’s World’ in Andreas Gursky, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001, p. 33.
- 33 Colomina, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 34 Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- 35 I should clarify that this research is not so much focused on the concept of “Identity”, but rather the demarcation of the standards of architecture; marking out one’s territory that is the signification of the individual. I also do not wish to engage in referring to “Identity” with a capital “I” but as identity: a somewhat lighter notion of the individual without the theoretical and history baggage that might send this project on a different trajectory.
- 36 J. Bird, ‘dolce domum’ in Rachel Whiteread. House, Phaidon Press, London, 1995, p. 114.
- 37 Colomina, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 38 Whiteread’s sculpture piece, *House*, is an indexical recording of the home space, enabling the viewer to collect information via both touch and sight, something which photography renders insubstantial. Adolf Loos privileged the sense of touch, and highlights photography’s inability to communicate tactility: “...what I want in my rooms is for people to feel substance all around them, for it to act upon them, for them to know the enclosed space, to feel the fabric, the wood, above all, to perceive it sensually, with sight and touch, for them to dare to sit comfortably and feel the chair over a large area of their bodily senses...How can I prove this to someone by means of a photograph?”  
A. Loos quoted in:  
*ibid.*, p. 64.  
Is photography inept in communicating sensuality effectively, if at all? What if a photograph with all its explicit details was to become so overwhelming that it was able to render the viewer’s periphery vision redundant, allowing him / her to perceive the enclosed space in its entirety? A photograph of substantial proportions can be considered an indexical recording of the space, revealing lucid information of its surroundings.  
M. Burns, personal communication, September 19, 2002.
- 39 Collier & Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 40 Femininity has always been the constant that remains firmly rooted in the realm of the home. It seems that in their domestic detail, the home space is “insistently gendered”. According to Howard Arkley, the home had always, throughout the modern era, been regarded as a woman’s domain, far from the masculine world of work.  
L. Jardine, ‘Nina Saunders. Forever’ in Claustrophobia, 1998, p. 71.  
H. Arkley, ‘Home Beautiful’ in Claustrophobia, p. 24.

- 41 Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
- 42 D. Massey, 'Space-time and the politics of location' in Rachel Whiteread. House, 1995, p. 41.
- 43 P. Newell, 'Permindar Kaur. The Silent Partner' in Claustrophobia, 1998, p. 58.
- 44 S. J. Kim, 'Uta Barth. The Space of Non-Place' in Claustrophobia, 1998, pp. 28 – 31.
- 45 Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
- 46 P. Myoda, Marco Brambilla. Transit, Booth-Clibborn Editions, London, 1999.
- 47 Mathews, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- 48 S. Sontag, On Photography, Penguin Group, London, 1979, p. 6.
- 49 M. Mack, Reconstructing Space: Architecture in Recent German Photography, AA Publications, London, 1999, pp. 5 – 8.
- 50 *ibid.* (text from back sleeve).
- 51 *ibid.*, pp. 5 – 8.
- 52 Note the similar relation between objectivity and subjectivity in the medium of photograph, compared with the exterior and interior of the home, and the masses and the individual. Each exists within each other, and like the difference between a place and a non-place, neither can be established solely on its own.
- 53 F. Wagner quoted in:  
R. Pfab, 'Perceptions and Communications. Thoughts on New Motifs by Andreas Gursky' in Photographs from 1984 to Present, Trans. J. Gaines, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, 1998, p. 10.  
Sontag, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 6.
- 54 Pfab, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- 55 Collier & Collier, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 – 10.
- 56 J. Berger, Ways of Seeing, Penguin Books, London, 1977, p. 10.
- 57 M. L. Syring, 'Where is Untitled? On Locations and the Lack of Them in Gursky's Photography' in Photographs from 1984 to Present, 1998, p. 5.
- 58 Galassi, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- 59 *ibid.*, pp. 27 – 28.
- 60 Cindy Sherman's large-scale photographs produced in 1981 and 1982 predates Thomas Ruff modestly. M. Burns, personal communication, September 19, 2002.

- 61 As well as being reminiscent of the traditional mat boards used in framing, the borders would come to represent a window through which the viewer was able to look through to a continuous and uninterrupted surface of an entire print.  
Galassi, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 – 28.  
Gursky mounted the back of his images to Plexiglas and the face of the print was protected underneath glass. He still continues to present his images beneath a sheet of glass, sitting within a white, inconspicuous frame. Wolfgang Tillmans on the other hand uses dress pins and clear tacks that are discreetly relinquished to the corners of the white borders, never visually interfering with the image. However, at *Open City: Street Photographs since 1950* at the Hirshhorn Museum, Tillmans hangs five of his large-scale prints of overhead angles of city streets with black and silver bull-clips. The clips and method of display seem to become as prominent and as intrinsic as the images they are holding up.
- 62 By photographing such “trite” I pass on and confer importance to the subject.  
Sontag, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- 63 M. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- 64 A. Vidler, ‘Introduction’ in Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 2.
- 65 While the remaining 14% of Singapore’s 4 million population is said to live in private residence, there is a large proportion within that remainder that reside in high-rise private apartments.  
K. Mahbubani, ‘Singapore. United Nations Report, 2001’ in United Nations, Internet, Available. <http://www.un.org/ga/habitat/statements/docs/singaporeE.html>, (September 17, 2002).
- 66 Flusser, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- 67 Personal communication with a taxi-driver in Singapore, May 28, 2002.

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