DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN
AUTHORITY AND AUTONOMY:
STUDY INTO THE
PUBLIC HOUSING OF SINGAPORE

by

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Submitted to the School of Architecture
on November 29, 2000 in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

Abstract

Framing that different configurations of built space has a direct bearing on the
social activities engaged, enabled or inhibited by it, the dissertation postulates
that the meanings intentionally encoded in public spaces by the direction of the
authority, obstruct the intentions of the individuals who inhabit these spaces.

The paper investigates the precarious line between the realm of “public” and
“private” and the role of the individual as the actor negotiating the two realms. To
understanding the rationale behind the deliberate effort of the authority in
shaping the level of participation in the realm of the “public”, the situation of the
public housing in Singapore will be examined, being the most immediate form of
“instituted space” in the reality of most Singaporean. Beside looking into the
mode of residence determined by the authority, the paper proposes an in-depth
disclosure of the various values encoded into public spaces that are deemed
desirable by the authority. These values are manifested in the activities
promoted in the space provided by the authority.

To facilitate the understanding of discrepancy, the paper also attempts to
capture the effects of such endeavors to the experience of the individual by
matching the activities that they engaged in and the meaning that they have
decoded from the spaces that either enable or prohibit their intentions. Unlike the
authority that has the tendency to record all traces of their actions, the individual
in the form of masses are generally less motivated to state their thoughts in
writing. To secure a glimpse into the private thoughts of the individual, the paper
solicit the poems written by Singapore poets, specifically on their sentiments towards public housing.

In addition, the paper seek to investigate as to whether the authority acknowledge the difficulties encountered by the individual in the enactment of their everyday lives in the public housing. In the case of having such knowledge, the paper will attempt to explore whether the authority has taken concrete steps towards the mitigation of the discrepancies.

In the proper functioning of society, both the "public" and "private" realms have importance towards to well being of the individual. The demarcation of the two realms is slippery and the balance of the two is tricky. The interference of the authority in influencing how the individual navigates the two realms has extensive repercussions on the individual perception of the values of the two realms. In looking at the discrepancy between the direction of the authority and the intention of the individual, it is to make explicit the consequences of such interruption, as well as to understand the gulf between the two parties that architecture fails to bridge.