



CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL

CONTESTED_CITIES

EJE 2

Artículo nº 2-012

**MODEL AND THE LIVED, BEYOND THE 60M2 MEAN
AN INVESTIGATION INTO HONG KONG'S DOMESTIC
MODELS AND ITS SQUARE FOOT SOCIETIES.**

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An investigation into Hong Kong's Domestic Models and its square foot societies

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ABSTRACT

What insights can a spatial interrogation of Hong Kong's domestic models and its transformative variants deliver in terms of a territory's processes of compressed domesticity? Furthermore, how would the understanding of these models not only question, but, concomitantly reflect the ideologies of a 'square foot society'?

According to the Hong Kong SAR Government, 60m² is seen as the official and standard domestic module. As territorial construct Hong Kong's geopolitical complexity and its 'Special Administrative Region' status has, since 1997, gradually realigned a number of speculative, housing and political ideologies to establish a unique 'east-meets-west' social-spatial context. The interlacing of rich-versus-poor, limited availability of exploitable property, and the recent emergence of socially driven resistance movements have ruptured conventional spatial tangents, forcing the emergence of tactical strategies as generators for domestic structures far below to the 60m² mean.

In this framework housing and its domestic valance has become questionable in its deployment and mechanization as urbanization instrument, that is to say, the 'model versus the lived'. Drawing from the theoretical concepts of Urbanism (Wirth, 1938), territoriality (Elden, 2013) and 'commoning' (Bruyns, et al., 2015) the proposed analysis is meant to show a number of consequences in terms of radicalized dwelling and spatial compression. The comparison of Hong Kong's 'Tong-lau' housing model, as the archetypical historical shop-house standard, and its contrast to contemporary dwellings highlights the social realities operative in high-density urban dwellings of the 21st Century.

Expression of the mutative orders, between the 'model and the lived' concludes on the questionable forms of occupancy and tenancy within hyper-capitalism, the establishment of a 'square-foot-society' and its sharing of resources that ultimately shifts the focus to continued challenge of the 'model' through human necessities of the 'lived'.

PALABRAS CLAVE: 60m², Model, Lived, Housing, Speculative, Hong Kong.

1. INTRODUCTION

What insights can a spatial interrogation of Hong Kong's domestic models and its transformative variants deliver in terms of a territory's processes of compressed domesticity? Furthermore, how would the understanding of these models not only question, but, concomitantly reflect the ideologies of a 'square foot society'?

Domestic dwellings, expressed as models, not only represent social modularity, they globally have become a malleable urban resource. As urban necessity housing generally remains part and parcel of developmental models informed by political ideologies and social aspirations. At an individual level, it embodies human necessity manifested through adaptability and a desire for stability. Defined by the United Nations as basic human right, (UNEC, 2016) housing - its provisions and minimum standards – coupled with policy standards, bringing to bear the full burden of what can only be referred to as 'speculative' domesticity within the 21st Century. Housing and domestic models can determine urban image, direct societal development as well as highlight the misgivings of misinterpreting lifestyles, family structures or societal needs (Housing Generator, 1998).

At its core, domesticity remains specific to each context and culture. Limiting the focus of inquiry to 19th and early 20th century's industrialisation processes, a number of housing types are modular conscripts meant to reflect the roles and contextual ideologies through social and spatial planning. 'Shawl' or tenement housing models of India, the '51/9' apartheid housing types built prior to South Africa's 1994 democracy represent dwelling 'models', which in time have become spatial registers of social processes. In retrospect, although used as foundational blocks to establish Neighbourhoods or cities, these very domestic models represent transformative processes evident in the manner(s) of (re)appropriation through the acts of the 'lived'.

The discussion in this paper is meant to show a number of consequences in terms of dwelling and its instances of transformation, through the 'lived' within Hong Kong's sub-currents of contestation. The comparison of Hong Kong's 'Tong-lau' housing model, the archetypical shop-house standard compared to contemporary dwellings, is meant to highlight the spatial fragmentation of high-density urban dwellings in the 21st Century and the personal strategies that occur within small 'tremors' of domesticity. Expression of the mutative orders, of how the 'model' is adapted through the 'lived', is meant to highlight the divisible breaks between socially driven processes and a hyper-inflated capitalist model. Forced upon citizens, domestic models instil social polarization, solidify social-financial relationships of tenure whilst 'radicalizing' domesticity within most levels of the social strata.

2. TERRITORY AND DOMESTICITY

According to the Hong Kong SAR Government, 60m² is seen as the official and standard domestic size. As a territory, Hong Kong's geopolitical complexity and its 'Special Administrative Region' status has, since 1997, gradually realigned a number of speculative, housing and political ideologies to establish a unique 'east-meets-west' social-spatial context. Viewed as a predominantly 'commercial' hybrid, the one-country-two-system, a model in own right, embodies a post-colonial form of governance mixed with exaggerated politico-economic (China aligned) land-driven developmental strategies. The interlacing of rich-versus-poor, limited availability of exploitable property (Shelton, et al., 2015 and Lee, 2010), and the recent emergence of social resistance have ruptured conventional spatial tangents, forcing the emergence of tactical strategies to counter act domestic norms below

the 60m² mean. In this framework housing and its domestic valance has become questionable. In its deployment and mechanization as urbanization instrument, domesticity is problematized in 3 areas of focus; (a) urbanization register, (b) domesticated radicalization and (c) excessive density.

A first theoretical alignment draws from Louis Wirth's original concept of 'city', or what he terms 'Urbanism' (1938). Essentially described as a social process and product, urbanism is perceived as a 'way of life' – a right to the city - within permanent settlements and its various heterogeneous agents. Through the inquiry of three interrelated components 'urbanism' is expressed as; (1) the physical nature of the city comprised out of a population and forms of technologies, (2) a social system of organization involving social structures, institutions and relationships, and, (3) the set of attitudes which produce norms, standards of behaviour and regulations within the city. Particularly relevant to social structures and their organizations the question of domesticity and dwelling standards, therefore, remains key within the quintessential concept of the 'city-ness'. In addition, as echoed throughout Harvey's *Rebel City* (2012), Castells' *Aftermath Project* (2011) or in Weizman's *Civil Occupation* (2003) housing extends its political prowess beyond the mere definition of city, claiming a position of resistance, as a territorial construct and an instrument to accessed rights and privileges within 21st century urbanity.

Secondly, Hong Kong's 'spatially-fractured-territory' has forced a city to adopt spatial measures of radical compression effectively rescripting the modes of domesticated radicalization. Consequences of hyperdensity, have inexplicably collapsed all rich-versus-poor spatial tangents (Wilson, 2015), producing concealed territories – tactical interiors - as practices of resistance, occupation and nuanced radicalization. Spatial occupation and subdivisions have become inherent localisms. As rationale parcelling, inner-informality and other lived subaltern territories set new standards that inform human processes (Gottlieb and Hang, 2011). Linked to the speculative property market and general acceptance of commercial strategies outside 'normative' policy, the city's 1.3 million urban poor have become 'street wise' confirming Sundaram's concept of 'Pirate Modernity' (Sundaram, 2010). With the institutionalization of 60m² (645 ft²) as standard mean, the reality seems contradictory. Compressed domesticity equates to 30 – 40ft² per dwelling, with 'cage homes' claiming a mere 15.06 ft² (Soco, 2014). For those less fortunate 2 ft² is demonstrative of the size of a chair, occupied by 'McRefugee's' (Ngo, 2015) the destitute, with no real form of income who territorialize 24 hour Macdonald's outlets as make shift sleeping quarters.

Thirdly, the act of territorialization could possibly be reframed, not as a result of spatial extension, but, rather as a consequence where a variety of urban process are interiorized. As 'city-territory' Hong Kong is known for its laminated flyovers (Framton, et al., 2012), internal courtyards, pedestrian thoroughfares, interconnected labyrinth walkways, extended escalator systems through buildings that blemish both the spaces and process of social exchange. With the extraction of 'public spaces' from the street and reconstructed through podium structures, the urban become internalized. Drawing from the wider discourse on territoriality (Elden, 2013) and its geopolitical undercurrents, further questions are raised to examine the very premise from which domesticity operates, expressed as legalities and rights associated with (a) tenure, (b) occupation and (c) ownership. Whereas other global cities had to tackle problems of density, heterogeneous societies and notions of achieving acceptable forms of development, Hong Kong's position is additionally challenged operating as a consequence of a deliberate territorial 'lock down'. Gradations of ownership and tenure, therefore, become fluid within capitalist mindsets, allowing for informality, occupation and habitual alternatives to be interpolated, interiorized so to say, and fused with the domestic means and housing standards.

3. THE FORMATION OF A MODEL; LIVING UP TO THE 60M2 NORM

If infrastructure is classified as the so-called ‘skeletons’ of cities, then it would be possible to postulate that housing is the ‘muscle structure’ of the lived landscape. According to the Hong Kong Housing Authority (2016), the domestic landscape of the Hong Kong Region consists out of (1) rental options, (2) privately owned, (3) temporary or (4) stock housing types. In contrast to other housing authorities who emphasises socially driven housing programs, Hong Kong’s overview does not include water dwellings, free standing houses, multi-story structures, high-rise dwellings and their relevance, need or desires to address housing to a part-transient part-localized society. Therefore, we are left to question what typifies Hong Kong’s housing model and its formative logics.

Domestic models particular to the Canton region has had its historical origins as a by-product of the region’s modes of production. The first model, walled villages, characterized as the generic 18th and early 19thth Century settlement type in coastal areas of Asia, was the embodiment of communities tied to practices of agriculture. A walled enclosure, with controlled access points, encircled a collection of tightly packed family dwellings, with internalized private and semi-private spaces.

The Tong Lau model, characterized as the dominant housing type within Hong Kong’s history, is a consequence of the gradual industrialization of the territory coupled with colonial influence. Referential to the locally derived shop house, literally meaning, ‘Chinese Building’, (Lee, 2010) Tong Lau’s typified a 19th-century mixture of a British colonial product with distinct Chinese influences. Moreover, with the spatial synthesis of Singaporean and Panang housing typologies, the Tong Lau became the generic model for a variety of shop house configurations, influenced by the norms and standards required by small scale industrial endeavours in Southern China. Drawing from the availability of material, customs and living standards, the shop house standards have influenced urban life since the 19th century.

In summary, the standardized Tong Lau was a 2 – 4 story structure, 15 foot in width. Intentionality of the 15-foot frontage was to maximize trade spaces protected by a small portico spanning the entire width. Each Tong Lau situated the ‘hongs’ or production spaces at the ground floor. First, second and third floors were dedicated to the domesticated side of life. ‘Pre-Statutory Control’ Tong Lau configurations had a foundation, floor, walls and roof, spanning 13 – 16 feet. Overall spatial depth was limited to 30-60 feet, with 2 additional services spaces, located within the interior (Ibid).

Apart from the series of informal squatter settlements during the 40’s and 50’s, the 1950’s saw the emergence of a third and fourth housing typology. A derivative of the original Tong Lau model, both the Resettlement H-Block types (1954) and Canter levered types - ‘stepped back from the street’- Tenement Buildings (1956) types harnessed the development of concrete technology to test new domestic typologies and standards. These multi-story structures had larger floor areas for greater resident capacity fusing residential necessity with commercial speculation. Notably, the 1964 typologies appeared racialized in terms of capacity, following the Territory’s age of government led industrialization. ‘Massive’ housing blocks became the norm, consisting on average out of 16 floors and each containing 16 traditional shop houses at ground level.

In parallel, the period witnessed the reformulation of a second domestic model, known as the podium typologies (Shelton, 2015). Eradication of the ‘hongs’ (production spaces) within the blocks in favour of commercial enterprises, allowed for the first small block, podium and tower typologies, setting the genetic formulae for the eradicating of tenement models entirely. Podium structures’ spatial langue and formal configurations consciously

separated domesticity from commerce, focusing importance on commerce's interiorization. As type, the podium structures have become the commercial and domestic model on which Hong Kong presently thrives, with the Tong Lau typology reminiscent of a historic vernacular still used by a number of urban dwellers and appreciated by students and architectural historians alike.

In terms of historical effects of the 'lived', the Tong Lau model has mutated through a number of social factors. The Impact of the 1882 Report on The Sanitation Conditions of Hong Kong (Chadwick, 1882), discussed the problem of overcrowding and poor sanitation issues characteristic of the social and environmental issues associated with 19th Century Tong Lau's. Later the acceptance of the 'Public Health and Building Ordinance of 1903', written by Dr. W.J. Simpson, argued for the necessity of sanitation to be absorbed into all Chinese tenement blocks. As a response to the prescriptive recommendation, the building ordinance of 1935 implement more stringent measures of control, defining the Tong Lau to 5 story residential unit, 35 feet in depth, with adequate ventilating and circulation per floor (ibid.). From the once low-rise building with a colonnade frontage, the 1950's tenement buildings housed mostly post-war mainland migrants. It was the type commonly associated with its adaptability to accommodate extended families. Ironically it is the same model recognized as the origins of the cage homes, subdivisions and roof top dwellings. Bed placed along 'airless' corridors (Shelton, et al., 2015) saw the rise of minimum sized dwellings - equated to the size of a man - with the upper floors of the concrete structures further subdivided to increase rentable space, in some instances allowing for only one family per room. An overall lack of space forced a number of users to appropriate concrete rooves as new communal spaces with cooking displaced to the back alleys of the buildings attesting to illegal domestic practices.

4. CRISIS VERSUS MODEL, THE INFLUENCE OF THE LIVED

"... 'I'm not even dead yet but I'm already living in my coffin - four walls and nails'." (Gottlieb and Hang, op.cit.)

Apart from the historical development of the Tong Lau, the questions regarding the contemporary conditions of domestic models remains key to the understanding contestation in its nuanced formats of cities today.

One particular segway into the contemporary crisis of housing and contestation is through the symbiotic duality between financial deregulation and housing commodification (Peralta, 2011). Peralta's discussion on Mexico traces the role of housing, both as a social necessity and as revolutionary mean. Within Mexico City's development, housing was deemed 'infrastructure' for what was then, seen as a rural society. Enforced by institutions responsible for new social and state organizations, housing became the operative mechanism in the 1960 Mexican crisis to transform city-state organizations, forms of labour groups and types of financial models. Governments and local authorities, it is said, delegated housing and housing standards to directly address societal requirement shifting its position from a socially driven type of necessity - rental based - to a private property model. Only during the 70's and beginning 80's did the failures of neoliberal policies become clear, exposing untenable developmental conditions under misdirected political ideology. Wave after wave of housing crisis caused by financial deregulation, reframed housing as a commodity, forming the just of Peralta's criticism against governmental and fiscal policies where developers become main beneficiaries.

Recent postgraduate research has problematized the possibilities of social-spatial redress, taking Athens as example, focusing on the city's diverse housing stock (Sohn, 2015). Other housing studies have returned to questioning housing models within the age of

affordability, scrutinizing models' forms of social and financial valance in times of global urban crisis (van Andel, et al, 2015).

Using Hong Kong's Sham Sui Po region, domestic radicalization is spatially explicit. In contrast to the city's Central district, and its high-end expat focus, Sham Shui Po remains a working class region where a local populous mix with working-class immigrants, from mostly China. As an area historically known for its industrial production, the region is still typified as a place where small scales industry and sociability meet. On the one hand the region houses small electronic recycling centres, decorative industry, building supplies and fashion accessories and many other small industries, whilst on the other, housing a diverse social landscape, comprising of mostly families, the elderly and Chinese immigrants. It remains a tell-tale example of a society adapting habitual conditions against speculative encroachment.

A survey of 30 families express the realities of compressed domesticity. Meant to establish the basis of dwelling patterns within domestic types, the survey documented; (a) identity of the inhabitants, (b) ethnic background, (c) statutory and residential status, (d) living qualities, (e) current and desired leisure. The survey additionally established characteristics at a domestic level, capturing (f) forms of sharing, (g) appropriation and (h) domestic transformation require to facilitate their ways of life.

The sharing of household possessions and living spaces was the tell-tale of a domestic model functioning as a framework for social incubation. Hong Kong locals and Chinese immigrants, living side by side, consisted out of single and double occupancies, making provisions for extended family to cohabit rooms, spaces and facilities. A 200% occupancy rate meant the sharing of kitchens and bathrooms placing make shift sleeping quarter or bunk beds in the living rooms. Corridors and hallways are domestically (re)appropriated. Similar to the subdivisions of existing apartments, rooftop surface areas provide additional living spaces, generating - mostly illegal - income for landlords. 21 from the 30 surveyed units expressed a fear against the speculative powers landlords hold as well as the rate per square foot being higher than in expat regions.

A closer study of Hong Kong reveals the inaccessibility of the models by Hong Kong's urban poor. A number of destitute are forced into lifestyles of 'kerb' side dwelling. Sidewalks, kerb and other left over - accessible - public spaces quickly become makeshift homes for the destitute. Mostly chosen for their proxy to public washrooms, each kerb dwelling consists out of some bedding and one or two bags and a suitcase used by one particular individual continuously. Coffin homes (Lam, 2013) marks another scenario of domestic necessity¹. Appropriation of the term 'coffin' is representative of the limited means of income which affords residents tenancy of a rectangular space equivalent to the size of a person or coffin. Coffins are stacked vertically in order to maximize space necessitating sharing all forms of domestic life, totalling between 10 - 30 'coffins' per apartment, in Jordan, Causeway Bay and Sham Shui Po (Ibid).

5. CHARACTERISTICS, A WAY FORWARD

What can be derived from the Hong Kong contemporary challenges and what conclusions can we draw to reflect on the domestic rights of contemporary cities?

First, in this framework, and specifically relevant to the Hong Kong territory, the 'square-foot-society' (Bruyns & Lo, 2016) problematizes territory in relation to occupancy and tenancy at all levels within hyper-capitalism. Evident through both commerce and policy, the 'ft2'- concept is mechanized to become a social-financial unitary standard, registering

¹ cf. <http://hongwrong.com/hong-kong-underbelly/> and <http://hongwrong.com/hong-kong-coffin-homes/>

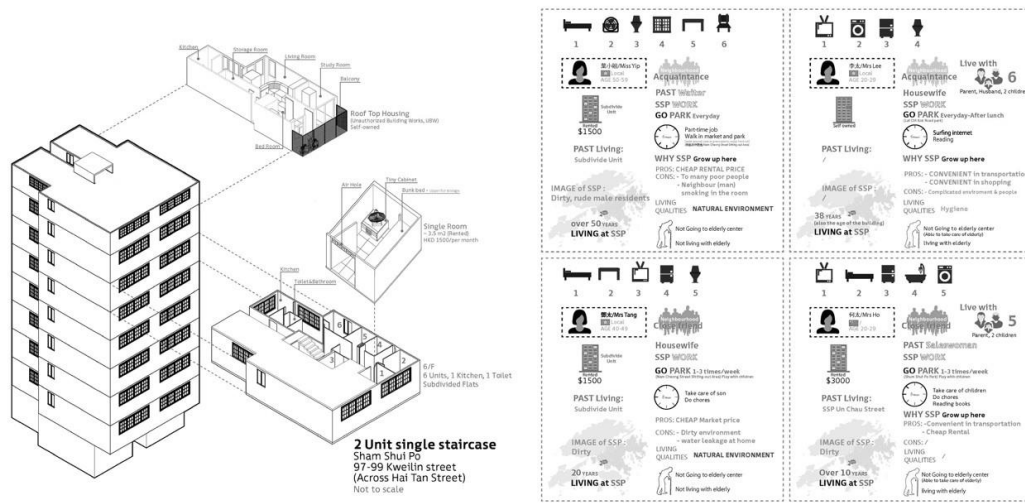
social reality against spatial and speculative models. With the territory's emphasis on market values and real estate, the ft² mean becomes the quintessential social-spatial mantra. Simplified to a single unit, that is to say, one square foot, the measure dissects human endeavour, collective and individual redress, religious compression, standardization, spatial appropriation or cultural believes through a 'domestic' unit. Coupled to this, the emphasis of the 'foot' compression constructs a social register divorced from an architecture of exteriority. Viewed as an emphasis on the interior, walls, ceilings and floors, and volumes become double operatives; as either spatial modularity and that of a socially lived. Condensed to its extreme the domesticity of encroachment, (cf Lyman and Scott, 1967) challenges all forms of the 'model' through violation, invasion and contamination able to absorb conditions of an ageing society, extended family structures or prolonged periods of children living with their parents. Transformation of the hallway into storage space or living rooms into bedrooms, challenge models against societal valance. Place, notions of identity and spatial appropriation - as an inherent vernacular - oscillate between, on the one hand, the interiorization of the urban, whilst on the other, urbanization of the domestic. The deliberate divorce from architecture capitalizes on the 'square foot's' use, representation and means of social life. Evident in the cardboard homes of the destitute (10 ft²), commercial hotspots (4 ft²), make-shift community centres (12 ft²) to the weekly encampment of Filipino domestic workers along flyovers averaging 20 ft² per group of five represents a 'square foot society' at its very core.

Second, as an extension to the 'square-foot-society', how are capacities shared? Moreover, how can a sharing of resources reformulate 'co-produced' (Low, 2011) agendas and question the impact of social 'commoning'? (Bruyns, et al., 2015). From an array of diverse insights into practices, Hong Kong's commoning moves beyond the dichotomy of the public and that of the private. Cohabitation and coproduction, for instance, reveal the emergence of new forms of citizenry and a variety of habitual ecologies, mitigating public and private spheres of life. A reading of a lived landscape through the 'commoning' lens, shows the prowess of habitual strategies – collectively as well as individually. Gradation of plot encroachment, infrastructural, informal or mere piecemeal additions to existing dwellings collectively mirror principles that become operative once resources are closed-off. Placed side-by-side these conditions of cohabitation confirm the conditions of the 'tactical' strategies (Brenner, 2015) as extensions of 'radical-activist city' agendas (McGuirk, 2014) and what is known as 'occupancy urbanization' (Benjamin, 2008). In this light, the occupancy urbanism is the embodiment of the 'lived', the urbanization of the 'local, facilitating individual mobilization as part and parcel to a continued struggle against the 'model'. Although sometimes viewed as so-called 'light' contestation, the processes nevertheless remain valid as they draw from local historicity where the individual claims the possibility to conceptualize, exert influence and jointly destabilize normative political and economic forces previously inaccessible. As concept it represents alternatives through the formulation of complex alliances, reconstituting new incentives, whilst finding different economic avenues expressed through discursive forms of tenancy, ownerships or relations to domesticity.

Finally, if 'necessity is the mother of all invention', the only way forward remains the continued effort to challenge the 'model' against that of the 'lived'. As a deliberate shift away from the 'model' and its neoliberal influences, such actions could reformulate Hong Kong's historical 'Made in Hong Kong' mantra as territorial strategy. Triangulation of collective action against the square foot notions, whilst harnessing social commoning is meant to strengthen agency within the systems of tenancy and any affected forms of domesticity. Different to 'Handmade Urbanisms' (Rosa, 2013) and its scalar confinements, the 'model versus the lived' remains necessary to radicalization Hong Kong's historic

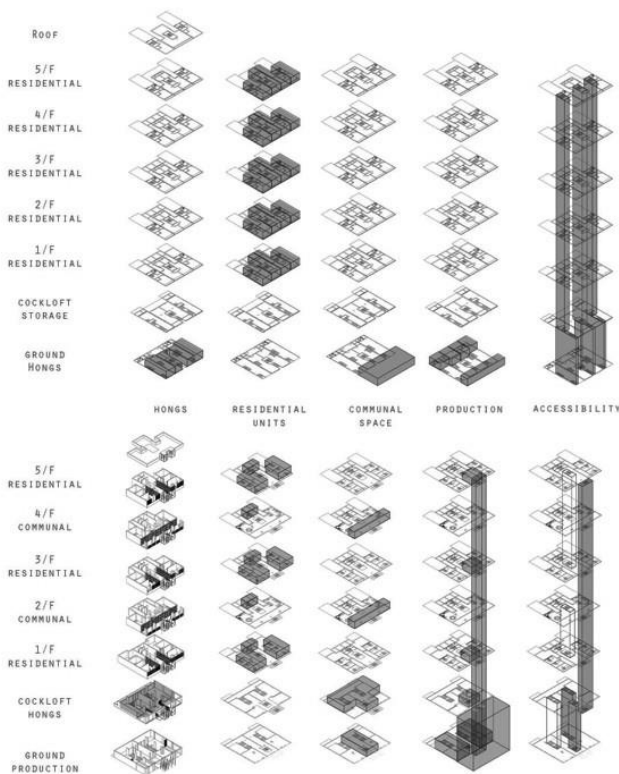
modes of production that are socially specific and spatially unique...from 'Made in Hong Kong' to 'Home-Made in Hong Kong v.1.0'.

Figure 1: Analysis of the 'model versus the lived', Sham Shui Po's social and domestic analysis.



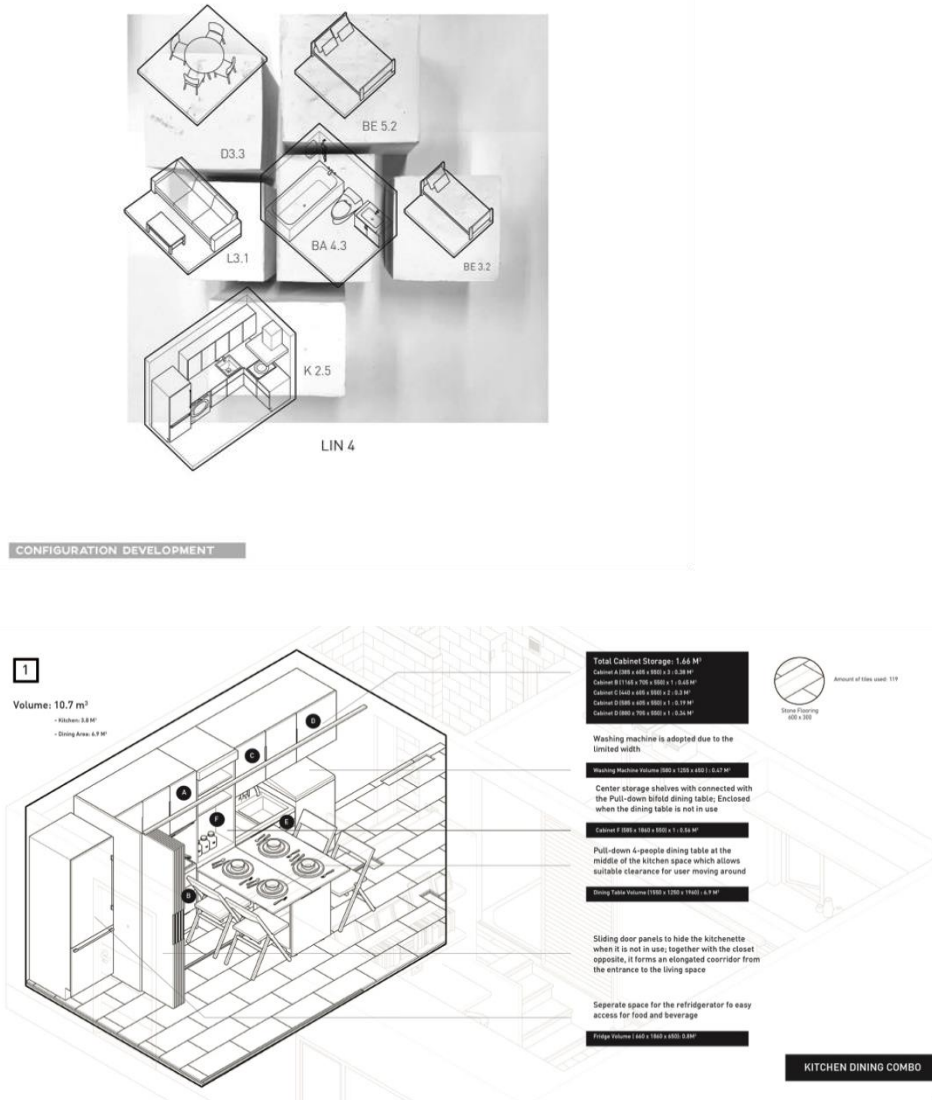
Source: Chan Wan Fei, Graduation Project; 'Cities in a City'. Supervisor: Dr.ir. G Bruyns. Environment and Interior Design Unit, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2015.

Figure 2. Analysis of the model, Hong Kong Tong Lau's



Source: Lee Ching, Graduation Project; 'The Interpolated Hongks'. Supervisor: Dr.ir. G Bruyns. Environment and Interior Design Unit, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2016.

Figure 3 and 4: Challenging the model, spatialization of the ‘square foot society’



Source: Lam Suet Ning, Graduation Project; ‘From m2 to m3D’. Supervisor: Dr.ir. G Bruyns. Environment and Interior Design Unit, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 2016.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Lee Ching (Veronica), Lam Suet Ning (Fion) and Chan Wan Fei (Winnie) for their input in the discussion of this paper.

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