

Spaces for Stardom: Urban Spatial Practice and the Feminization of Flânerie in the SMDC Advertising Campaign

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This paper explores spatial practice and social ordering in the advertising campaign of the SM Development Corporation (SMDC)—the country's largest real estate developer. Through print, outdoor, and video materials, viewers are invited to "Live like a star!" in any of SMDC's 16 high-rise condominiums. In framing images of the built environment, celebrity endorsers, and luxury retail and tourism, the corporation creates a heterotopia, or a juxtaposition of otherwise incompatible images, that simultaneously represents and influences the social order. For the purposes of this paper, the researcher has chosen to focus on the heterotopia created at the intersection of the built environment and the images projected through the SMDC billboards.

Using this heterotopia, SMDC exploits reconfigurations of the domestic sphere within the new economy, and the shifting role women play within it. Both star and sanctum are composed into a utopian prescription, projecting how architecture, the entertainment sector, and the advertising industry come together to construct a global future in the framework of celebrity and abstract space, built on the unstable foundations of institutionalized dispossession and separate development.

Keywords: accumulation by dispossession, cosmopolitanism, feminization of labor, heterotopia

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In the video, we follow a beautiful young woman as she welcomes us into her home. We begin with the "living room" a grand lobby decked in marble and softly lit by crystal chandeliers. From there, it becomes clear that we are not just looking at a typical place of residence. As the woman moves from room to room, her outfits change, with her hair done up to match varying degrees of formal dress. From afar, we see her lying on a chaise in the plush lounge where she reviews all her scripts and contracts. Observing her from above, we watch her lithe figure sprawled out on a deck chair by a crystalline pool, her flowing commentary uninterrupted by the flurry of activity throughout this short tour. Finally, with her back to us, we find ourselves at the threshold of this woman's innermost sanctum the bedroom; but before entering, the woman turns to tell us that unlike everything we saw earlier, "Not everyone is allowed in here" (SMDC and Ace Saatchi & Saatchi, 2012). She then closes the door to leave the viewer wanting.

This video is part of the advertising campaign for the SM Development Company (SMDC). Through a massive development program involving the construction of 16 high-rise condominium towers in the metropolis, SMDC has led the way in gentrifying the built environment. With materials plastered to the backs and sides of buses, inside other public and commercial spaces, and online in the form of banners and videos—which are also broadcast over mainstream media channels—these images possess an unprecedented capacity for using the grammar and vocabulary of the commercial and domestic sphere, as well as the entertainment sector, in compelling their viewers to “Live like a star.”

My interest in the SMDC campaign stems from bombardment. I have lived in Metro Manila for my entire life, Quezon City to be specific, with travel routes from the family home in Cubao (on the northeast) to the Makati Central Business District in the south, then to Malate in the west. In my third year of working at the University of the Philippines (UP), I began living on my own in Sta. Mesa Heights, near the Mabuhay Rotonda, on the border of Manila itself. For those familiar with the geography of Metro Manila, this means regularly travelling from end to end of Quezon Avenue. This adds up to a professional life spent traversing each of Manila’s major thoroughfares on a regular basis and countless hours spent sitting in traffic with the city’s many outdoor advertisements lighting my way.

The submersion of Metro Manila in an abyss of commercial imagery shows how widespread privatization can compromise the liveability of a city. In the interest of selling various commodities and services, from cosmetic surgery, to cake, to clothing, to condominiums private corporations continue to exploit the vehicular traffic that piles up in the absence of a strong or centralized state apparatus. Aesthetic issues surrounding billboards are not a new problem, with outdoor advertising taking a sizeable portion of the blame for the visual pollution and “uglification” of Metro Manila (“Billboard blight,” 2011); but this is not a call for additional “cleanliness” and beautification drives to rid the metropolis of outdoor advertising. Instead, I would like to point out how the case of real-estate advertising is unique not only in its promise to reshape the built environment.

The SMDC campaign was first launched with Filipino actress Marian Rivera in the proverbial spotlight. Billboards were erected within the proximity of the future sites of SMDC buildings. Originally promoted as “student hubs,” the possible target for both the campaign and the residences themselves may have been to provide student-priced housing for those migrating to Manila, where the country’s top-performing schools are all located. According to a local entertainment blog, Anne Curtis was chosen to replace Rivera as the face of the SMDC campaign on September 15, 2010, granting her endorsement of 13 out of the 16 developments (two are being endorsed by Kim Chiu, an even younger Chinese-Filipino actress), and changing the campaign’s slogan.



Figure 1. Rivera in the original SMDC campaign. (SMDC, n.d.)



Figure 2. Curtis in the current campaign. (SMDC, n.d.)

Combining images of celebrity endorsers, luxury retail, and tourism, SMDC creates a heterotopia through which a gendered engagement with capitalism can be traced, moving towards utopian prescriptions for spatial practice and methods of social ordering. I expand the terms of structure and space beyond the residences being sold by SMDC, drawing the parallels between the images projected by the commercial sphere and the foundations laid by education in enabling separate development. These parallels illuminate how the spaces of femininity at the turning points of modernization are used to aestheticize the imbalances that made this type of development possible.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In its ubiquity, the SMDC campaign does not only motivate potential consumers of private housing: it actively inhabits emerging economic, cultural, and social power structures, by both representing them and by influencing them. I propose that this cyclical process of influence and representation is carried

out through the interaction of three phenomena relevant to the current global economic situation in general, and the role that the Philippines plays within it, in particular.

The images SMDC uses to sell real estate serve as a prime example of the visual culture arising at the intersection of a diaspora made up largely of a female labor force, the gentrification and vertical development along Metro Manila's major thoroughfares, which strive to establish it as a "global city," and the ensuing reconfiguration of domestic space. As large-scale outdoor media, the real estate billboard simultaneously exists in space while representing it. In this case, the images in the SMDC campaign serve as utopian prescriptions for private housing that visually affirm David Harvey's (2008) seminal essay on "The Right to the City," where:

[I]ncreasingly, we see the right to the city falling into the hands of private or quasi-private interests. The right to the city, as it is now constituted, is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires. (p. 32).

In Harvey's words, cities are "often a focus for utopian desires and utopian thinking" (Harvey, 2012, para. 10), making them incubators for the terms of development. The typical result is what he calls "accumulation by dispossession" (para. 10), in which low-rent or illegally settled areas are cleared of residents to make room for the type of architecture that fits a specific image of modernity, as idealized in the frame of the ad. From Engels, Harvey (2008) describes this phenomenon—which is not restricted to urban development—as one which "gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those areas which are centrally situated, an artificially and colossally increasing value" (p. 34). Moreover, because billboards are situated in public space while serving private interests, they inevitably distort the "essential nature of a commons, or an area that is not traded upon for and by private capital and has no potential to alienate communities" (Slee, 2013, para. 6).

It is estimated that along the 23-kilometer stretch of EDSA (one of the capitol's main thoroughfares), there are at least 2,000 gigantic billboards standing, which adds up to an average of about one billboard for every 11 meters ("Billboard blight," 2011). Arguably, their ubiquity on major roads creates an effect that is analogous to the presence of monuments in public squares, where the endorsers smiling at us from within the frame of the ad can be likened to the gaze of the icon cast in stone.

Representations of an ideal inhabitant foregrounding an abstract space have the power to communicate who claims the right to the city, extending the concept of accumulation by dispossession into visual culture through

the commodification of the mental environment. In the form of large-scale outdoor media, this message precedes the actual structures, fragmenting the communication of media and content, and reconfiguring the mental environment before encroaching upon the built environment. The resulting mental environment thus creates a context in which Guy Debord's (2013) *Society of the Spectacle* is updated. This is described by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1999) in *Debord and the Postmodern Turn: New Stages of the Spectacle* in which Debord reframes classical Marxist thought to trace the postmodern consumer to the industrial worker, tracking the evolution of the "image industry." This formed the foundations of the society of the spectacle, in which Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession occurs not only from massive changes to the built environment, but also to its commitment to serving private interests. By claiming the skyline, outdoor advertising becomes a prime example of how capital homogenizes and commodifies otherwise common spaces. The evolution of the image industry only shows how this practice was accepted and trivialized—ironically—to the point of becoming invisible.

What SMDC advertises is a proposition to fundamentally change urban spatial practice through projections of instantaneous, yet temporal, pleasure and leisure. In order to aestheticize the basic functions served by shelter, SMDC embeds utility within appearance of enjoyment, allowing life to be overshadowed by lifestyle and replacing the idea of housing as a public good with the illusory privilege of celebrity. By definition, celebrity involves speculation and spectacle, in which private life becomes an object of public interest. This results in a campaign that addresses a need for shelter as an afterthought or an aside to the realization of "a later form of capitalism organized around consumption" in which "new forms of domination and abstraction appear, greatly complicating social reality" (Best & Kellner, 1999, para. 3).

While this paradox has long been exploited by the mainstream media (think tabloid and showbiz publications), SMDC's campaigns to sell private space through public spectacle remain unprecedented in scale and reach. Kevin Hetherington (1997) describes this formation of spatial practice, through the juxtaposition of multiple representations, as a heterotopia. The term is from Michel Foucault's 1966 lecture in which he designates spaces where "several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault, 1984, p. 6), come together. In the case of SMDC, a heterotopia is created when the multiple elements within the ad are composed into a view, serving private consumption from public space.

The size and availability of the advertisements extend a panoptic presence and bombard urban dwellers in every class with "hegemonic ideological representations associated with the space that is produced," (Hetherington, 1997, p. 22), as described by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre (1971), whose work is largely preoccupied with theorizing the everyday, illuminates how celebrity as spatial practice resolves the tensions between publicity and privacy that one

is bound to encounter in advertising space. Such spatial practices result in structures that are as invisible as abstract space, which thus obscure or conceal the social relations of power. Heterotopias, such as the ones created in the SMDC ads, provide “obligatory points of passage” (p. 64), to which some of the problems encountered in the resulting social order can be resolved.

The updates to flânerie portrayed in the SMDC campaign show startling differences in these portrayals not only of the “social space of modernity” (Giloch, 1996, p. 84), but of its occupants as well. In Walter Benjamin’s (1999) chapter on Baudelaire in the unfinished *Arcades Project*, the male urban dweller was described as a fixture of the public sphere and icon of modernity. Inextricably linked to the public sphere, flânerie was expressed on the ground, in the market, amidst crowds: “The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room. Both become elements of the department store, which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods” (p. 10).

Like the flâneur, women at the postmodern turn are portrayed not with agency (echoing Benjamin again), “[t]o the uncertainty of its economic position corresponds the uncertainty of its political function” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 10), but in a capacity for appearing which is made problematic by the association between the lived experience of inhabiting a 25-square meter condominium, and its representation. Instead, the spectacle draws immediate prestige and ultimate function from its signifiers of social prestige (Best & Kellner, 1999). The switch from the studious, laptop-toting, cardigan-wearing Rivera, to the carefree and bejewelled glitz and glamour signified by Curtis as the “star student” drastically altered SMDC’s marketing strategy, switching the bait from meritocratic academic life to the exclusivity of stardom. Metro Manila is thus redefined from being a place where one goes to study, into a place where one goes to be a star—or just live like one.

This reconfiguration of urban spatial practice does not only glamorize domestic space, it persists to conceal “the services associated with a wife’s traditional role” (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002, p. 177), in order to build and maintain the image of utopia set by the First World. By using the visual vocabulary of the public realm, the glamorization of private spheres guarantees the invisibility of those performing the actual labor that is necessary to sustain living like a star. Thus, of particular relevance to this paper is a discussion of the Home Economics (HE) curriculum, in which the binaries of private/public and the definitions of feminine or soft labor were conceptualized and institutionalized.

Beyond teaching rules of housekeeping, hygiene and childcare, the lessons encouraged students to adopt methods of order and discipline in their daily life. Most importantly, the

lessons compelled students to regulate their own behaviour, accomplishing what Boltanski called a ‘total transformation of spirit, a peaceful and internal revolution.’ (DeRoo, 2006, p. 166)

Contained within these terms for development were the specific roles assigned to men and women in order to fulfil the needs of industrialization. The Home Economics curriculum thus became a mechanism for gendering which would institutionalize separate development through heteronormative labor divisions. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) in their introduction to *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* wrote: “Third World migrant women achieve their success only by assuming cast-off domestic roles of middle- and high-income women in the First World” (p. 177). This institutionalized separation would permeate every sphere of modern life, leading to the imbalances that shadow globalization, in which women “are bought directly as goods and services or indirectly through hired labor” (Sassen, 2002, p. 196).

These three phenomena are central to aestheticizing neoliberal ideology, concealing the realities occurring in the midst of globalization—what Eitzen and Baca Zinn (2011) refer to as the transformation of social worlds. These also pinpoint three areas of responsibility, in which governmentality, private developers, and the role of the media and the educational system fail to create models for urban development that are inclusive—spaces where women are recast, without being co-opted, to fit into the changing spaces and, consequently, the changing roles they have come to occupy in the New Economy.

Place: Dispossession by Spectacle in Metro Manila

“The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire” (Harvey, 2008, p. 23)

Metro Manila is the Philippines’ centerpiece of urban and economic progress and the backdrop for the country’s tallest buildings and largest shopping malls. Notoriously deregulated and controlled heavily by private interests, what has come to be known as the Greater Metropolitan Area is made up of sixteen cities and one municipality. According to the National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) records, within the past few decades, the population of Metro Manila has grown from 9.45 million residents in 1995 to over 11.5 million in 2010 (NCSB, 2013), and yet the region has a fairly recent history of developing vertically. It has the largest concentration of schools at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, and is a densely packed hub of commercial, industrial, cultural, and social activity. These are the characteristics exploited by SMDC in their aggressive campaign to sell not only condominium units, but also the allure of cosmopolitan living.

As Metro Manila races to catch up with the rest of Asia through rapid vertical development, SMDC has identified itself as a key player in gentrifying the cityscape, arguably to cultivate the image of a globalized cosmopolitan future. This cultivation includes the “the ideal of free individual choice” (Kotz, 2000, p. 2), but also recommends the “deregulation of business; privatization of public activities and assets; elimination of, or cutbacks in, social welfare programs; and reduction of taxes on businesses and the investing class” (p. 2). In moving from retail developments to the private housing market, and reshaping desire literally from the ground up, the ad campaign for SMDC can be seen as representative of the conglomerate’s transition from selling commodities to commodifying lifestyles.

The company’s possible intention to shelter the region’s growing population is betrayed by the marketing of SM developments as gateways to “five-star” living. This vague distinction made between “living” and lifestyle begs the question of how the astonishing pace and scale of urbanization (i.e., the shift of urban dwelling space from single-detached houses to high-rises) has contributed to human well-being.

Urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands. This general situation persists under capitalism, of course; but since urbanization depends on the mobilization of a surplus product, an intimate connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization. (Harvey, 2008, para. 5)

Rather than developing horizontally, companies like SMDC explore the potential of building their villages vertically (possibly to maximize land use). In doing so, they employ the same sales strategies that lured Metro Manila’s residents into gated subdivisions, by advertising private enclaves that create value around the ideas of exclusivity and escape, only implicitly promising safety and security—that can only be bought and sold—in an increasingly precarious urban environment. Related to this was the massive merging of three of the SM group’s business units with another private land developer under the name of SM Prime. On May 31, 2013, online news network, Rappler.com, reported that SM Investments Corp. (SMIC), SMDC, and SM Prime were set to merge with Highlands Prime, to create “a corporate behemoth” that would establish it as the country’s biggest property group (Rimando & Calzado, 2013).

The combined current market capitalization of these firms is estimated at P591 billion, SMIC officials said. In effect, the move allows SM Prime to dislodge Ayala Land as the biggest

listed property firm...SMIC has a diversified portfolio that includes the biggest retail and mall chain in the country, the largest bank in terms of assets, and one of the most aggressive real estate property developers, and gaming. (para. 4).

In a similar fashion that constructed the ideology behind the suburban sprawl, the same “juggernaut of commodification” (Gotham, Shefner, & Brumley, 2001, p. 326) was seen at work in the transformation of the built environment and in the workings of the private sector. According to Harvey (2008), the “[q]uality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself” (p. 31), showing how these seemingly innocuous representations can shed light on a value system that advocates exclusivity and pecuniary emulation, and fails to prioritize public service. Safety, security, and a measure of equality between classes fall into private interests and become commodities. Harvey continues with a quote from the urban sociologist, Robert Park, who describes the city as:

[M]an’s most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself. (para. 2).

This raises more questions around the architectural forms advertised by SMDC. In adopting forms from a different geocultural and economic setting—one which requires climate control and needs to be propped up by an invisible (usually female) labor force, working 24-hour days, in order to sustain it—Park sheds light on how, in building architecture, urban populations in turn allow architecture to build them, constructing not only a skyline but a system of labor divisions and the accompanying values. In the west, sustaining this dimension of urban living casts a shadow of subordination, typically involving an immigrant workforce to absorb the labor cast-off through the terms set by first world privilege. What is interesting in the Philippine context is the involvement of the feminized overseas labor force in the generation of the wealth upon which this aesthetic was built (or replicated), which will be discussed in a later section.

Space: Imagining the Exclusive

“Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.” (Debord, 2013, para. 2)

A typical SMDC ad shows ball gown-clad Anne Curtis (currently one of the country’s most popular celebrities), on her own, appearing to have the time

of her life. Behind her is a rendition of the good life that “the good guys” of SMDC have to offer—the exterior of a structure showing not only an imaginary environment, but an imaginary lifestyle, heavily infused with the collective dreams on which so much of advertising depends.

These images are replicated in fliers, online banners, and viral videos, contributing to the ubiquity of this particular portrayal of cosmopolitan living. Here, I describe the contents of five fliers, left by a real estate broker at a laundry service in Quezon City, which I found in late February of 2013. These five fliers were for *Shell*, *Grass*, *Grace*, *Green*, and *Blue*; all five structures are defined as “Residences” (i.e., Shell Residences), with only *Blue* written up as a “home” in the subhead, “Topnotch home for the topnotch student” (SMDC, 2013a). All five fliers feature Curtis, framed from the hip upwards, posing in a red gown, with the exception of *Grace*, the “Suburban Sanctuary in the City” (SMDC, 2013b), which shows Curtis from the waist up, wearing a green asymmetrical top. None of these advertisements feature the actual structures, only architectural renderings, with the exception of *Blue*, which features Curtis standing by the window of an imaginary unit, overlooking an equally imaginary skyline. Only *Blue* was flagged at the upper right-hand corner to be undergoing “CONSTRUCTION IN FULL SWING!” (SMDC, 2013a), whereas *Grass* claimed to have “READY FOR OCCUPANCY & FULLY-FURNISHED UNITS AVAILABLE” (SMDC, 2013c), further underscoring the campaign’s dependency on creating a market for abstract space – one that would consume based on a sensationalized narrative surrounding the life of a largely fictional occupant.

Three of the fliers (*Grass*, *Shell*, and *Blue*) show floor plans, location maps, and descriptions of the available amenities and facilities on the back. The fliers for both *Blue* and *Green* feature the subhead, “Experience a taste of 5-star living with these luxury amenities” (SMDC, 2013c), while *Grass* proclaims itself as “an oasis of green living in the heart of Quezon City” (SMDC, 2013b) where one can “Enjoy country club living” (2013b). *Grace* invites one to, “Enjoy the blessings of life amidst lush greens at the heart of the city” (SMDC, 2013b), and *Shell* features pictures of “the magnificent fireworks display at SM Mall of Asia” (SMDC, 2013d), alongside a Manila Bay sunset. All five feature swimming pools, jogging strips, playgrounds, “commercial areas,” and landscaped gardens, with *Shell* even boasting of a “Vast Modern Tropical Garden” (SMDC, 2013d). Unit sizes range from 21.56 square meters in the *Blue* studio unit, to 52 square meters for the *Grass* two-bedroom unit, with the option of purchasing and combining units. Unless an occupant decides to combine two units, all bathrooms are shared.

Vital to the advertising copy of Five Star Homes and living “like a star” is the working of the belief that these spaces have been reviewed by a body or board using standardized criteria for evaluating space. Calling this a five-star home does not only resort to the contradiction of using the temporal and escapist

vocabulary of tourism to describe a permanent dwelling; it also describes a space that has already been constructed and made habitable—neither of which are true in the case of the SMDC campaign. The advertisements never even showed pictures of the actual space being sold or leased, resorting instead to terms such as “Country club living” or “Modern tropical,” thus evoking the moods associated with their different locations, in place of actual descriptions or depictions.

While the advertisements display no outright stigmatization of the realities of housing (or lack thereof) that most Filipinos face, they do represent a mythic realm of velvet ropes, soft lighting, and uninhibited consumerism to influence and possibly impose a form of social order. To sell a dwelling space is to sell a primary component of everyday life, a habitat once defined by its antithesis to fantasy, the tenets of which depend on temporary pleasures. Through this particular brand of gentrification, visual culture becomes a tool for accumulation by dispossession.

As media for pitching ideology, these images could be addressing the need to participate in a globalizing economy alongside shifts in the composition of the class targeted by this concept of “five-star living.” In the SMDC campaign, the temporary highs in the fantasy realm of stardom are rolled in to the business of living and equated with what Hetherington (1997), via Foucault and Lefebvre, calls “the spatiality of modernity” (p. 12), resulting in the reconfiguration of domestic space, the beginnings of which were executed through wholesale promotion of single-occupant units that have the potential to change spatial practice within cities, and the social order of their populations. This can be read as an appropriation of neoliberal ideology—the dangers of which are described by Hetherington (1997) in their capacity to often involve “the idea of utopia but not the creation of utopia in themselves” (p. 56).

These signifiers, as Pendergast and McGregor (2007) contends, construct the foundation for an “insidious platform of power” (p. 4), one that is “hard to challenge and dismantle” (p. 4), because as abstract space it becomes invisible. The image becomes both a proposition and a solution to the limits set on habitable space, showing that dispossession does not have to take the form of actual eviction, but by re-ordering societies through the commodification of public space for the purposes of advertising. This reduces habitats to abstractions and citizens to marketing segments, echoing Marx that all that is solid melts into air (Marx, 1848).

Face: Gendered Development and Cosmopolitan Transitions

A cursory assessment of this campaign may represent progress in recasting and redefining femininity, through which women are made equals in the public sphere of commercial consumption. With Anne Curtis endorsing SMDC condominiums as “her choice,” women become the primary target market for this influx of vertical development. Showing Curtis alone conceals the social

relations that were typical of past representations of the domestic sphere, while maintaining her privileged position through appearance and expression. With the exception of the fliers for *Blue* and *Green*, all the advertisements not only show Curtis in the foreground, but have her positioned in such a way that she looms larger than anything else in the frame, thus placing further emphasis on the ideal occupant—a beautiful and well-dressed young woman, thus creating a point of passage through which one can better comprehend and enter this heterotopia.

Yet, even in the images that do show other actors, she still appears to be on the receiving end of the star lifestyle, and not in any position of active pursuit. When shown from head-to-toe, she is in high heels, flowing gowns or carefully tailored ensembles. She is never casually dressed despite the fact that she is home. These images of Curtis exemplify the heavily mythologized fantasies projected in prestige marketing, in which to “live like a star,” means to borrow tropes and archetypal images that prevailed in the perpetuation of the star system. As Ramamurthy (2001) writes:

Here we are invited to join the experience in which stars have taken part. Yet, we are not simply coaxed into consumption by suggestions of glamour and beauty...The suggestion is also that she is the woman, imbued with qualities of womanliness.
(p. 157)

As an addition and further reiteration of Ramamurthy’s argument: Femininity remains a screen, through which the male gaze retains its privilege. It is this same screen that allows Curtis to occupy this uneasy intersection in her portrayal of a leader only in the most loose definition of the word, while projecting the fantasies commonly employed in the visual vocabulary of prestige marketing, and reflecting the belief that what is feminine must be beautiful. The prevalence of the male gaze is evident in the composition of the images, in which Curtis is often captured from a medium range of distance, with her shoulders angled towards the camera, as if she is being approached. This signifies that to be a celebrity not only means being desired but being perpetually observed—a concept that contradicts the privacy of the domestic sphere.

Jillian Clare (2002) addressed the relation of body, gender, and aesthetics in the representation of women in power when she said that “[p]hotographic images of women can reveal the uneasy intersection between spectacle, visual displays, and the representations of women’s performing bodies” (p. 5). In the same article, she cites Mary Russo in *The Female Grotesque* (1994), who argues for “femininity as a mask...[t]o reveal femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off” (Russo as cited in Clare, 2002, p. 6), in recognizing female agency. Working within the assertion that the term “woman leader” is “no longer

an oxymoron” (p. 6), Clare proposes the development of new theoretical tools in reconfiguring how we view the bodies of women as they transition from the domestic to the public sphere.

The potential of the Philippine advertising industry to promote local brands and develop the national economy has come with a rise of local endorsers, thus replacing the international (often American) brands that used to monopolize both the commercial sphere and the skyline. Among these endorsers was Curtis, who began her acting career as a teenager on local soap operas. By moving to a rival network, Curtis, has repositioned her image and diversified into hosting, singing, and endorsements. In the past decade, Curtis has never taken a supporting role and, unlike many of her contemporaries, flew solo in an entertainment industry saturated with the image of the “love team”—a trope of Philippine cinema and television that enables the incapability (or outright impossibility) of portraying women without men. Contrary to what the term suggests, a “love team” is not an actual “team,” but two actors, usually in the early stages of their careers, who are consistently paired on-screen in the romantic comedy or drama genres.

It is crucial to note that Curtis climbed the entertainment industry ladder by way of multi-hyphenations and aggressively campaigning on a platform of status and class, privileging herself with an image of belonging to the Philippine showbiz elite, despite her young age. The Philippines in particular offers a unique case for what is commonly known as the “triple threat,” (i.e., the multitiered identities that fill the public consciousness and merit multiple hyphenations added to their names); common combinations are “actor-singer-politician,” resulting in a celebrity attained not from a depth of accomplishment in any specific field, but from one’s capacity to cast a wide net over a variety of titles. This becomes even more problematic when actors are so carefully groomed and packaged to fit the results of marketing surveys, enabling the primacy of a carefully controlled top-down process, with Curtis filling the roles of TV host-actress and endorser (while Curtis has sung to a stadium-sized audience and released an album, she has no claims to being a singer), with product endorsements ranging from gin to tuna.

Incidentally, the country’s two largest film production units are also the country’s largest television networks (one is ABS-CBN, which manages Curtis’ career), thus allowing their biggest stars (called “talents”) to transition back and forth between television and film roles. Rather than identifying Philippine actors with the characters they play, a common tendency is for the entertainment industry to develop characters around a loose perception an audience has of the actor—if characters are developed at all.

These have profound effects on how Philippine audiences tend to confuse the roles actors play with the personal lives of the actors themselves; yet, to Curtis’ advantage, this confluence of industry monopolization with the top-down management allowed her to become her network’s brightest star. Her identification as an individual player and a multi-hyphenated performer, have

turned her into SMDC's ideal spokesperson for selling real estate. Curtis not only becomes the face for independent living, but for upholding the individual agency and cult of the self that characterize neoliberal ideology.

Spaces of (M)Othering : Femininity and Separate Development

Feminized consumption is apparent in the SMDC campaign's use of adornment, fitness, and beauty to attract a female target market and acknowledge that women do not buy homes: they consume lifestyles to which space is incidental and abstracted. Even with the complicated shifts brought about by globalization, in which women venture around the world, "achieving a degree of independence [their mothers] could not have imagined" (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002, p. 175), they remain confined to the traditionally feminine roles.

The Home Economics (HE) curriculum carries this tradition of enabling a patriarchal definition of femininity that confined women to the domestic sphere and to the roles of mother and nurturer. What began in 1862—as North America was undergoing massive industrialization and urbanization—as a "housewifery" course offered at Emma Williard's school in New York City evolved into "Domestic Science," and was offered in US public schools at the secondary level. At the tertiary level, HE can be traced back to lectures on topics ranging from home and clothing maintenance, to cookery, and millinery at Vassar and La Salle (in Massachusetts) in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These courses were preceded by a treatise written by Catherine Beecher on "Domestic Economy," which appeared in the book *Use of Young Ladies at Home* (Tabbada & Mapanao, 1994).

In the Philippines, the HE curriculum dates back to the American colonial period, where it might have been a crucial component of benevolent assimilation, playing a pivotal role in what Vicente Rafael, in *Colonial Domesticity* (2000) refers to as "manufacturing a sense of the everyday" (p. 54), modelled after the Western terms of middle-class femininity. This sense of the everyday was adapted into a course on hygiene, taught at the Philippine Normal School as early as 1901. The Normal Schools were established to prepare Filipinos for public school teaching. However, the hygiene course was taught exclusively to women, and thus "surmised" by Philippine Home Economics Association to be the start of Home Economics education in the Philippines (Tabbada & Mapanao, 1994).

Through advocacies in fields such as "Domestic Science" and "Home Industries," the HE curriculum evolved to emphasize the practical and entrepreneurial—which in practice meant small-scale industries that could be done within the confines of the home, such as embroidery and tatting or knitting lace. The period between 1912 and 1922 saw the intermediate curriculum gradually "vocationalized," absorbing the products of the Home Economics courses into the American colonial administration's General Sales Division.

What this meant became clearer in 1914, when the public school curriculum was further subdivided, tracking Filipino students to concentrate either on “publication” or “industry.” Categorized under industry were “farming, trade, business, domestic science, and agricultural education” (Tabbada & Mapanao, 1994, p. 26).

Interestingly enough, this was also the period in which the Western world was taking a turn from the industrial revolution into an economy driven by financial capital. The separation of industry and creation of curricula devoted specifically to vocational pursuits, under which HE fell, can signify this turning point from the production of commodities to the creation of cognitive capital—from which the HE courses were separated, if not outright excluded. This relegation of women into the industry aspect may also explain why so little has been published about Home Economics and domestic sciences in the Philippines, resulting in further confinement to home-based work and alienation from the commercial and increasingly public sphere of financial capital.

This also implied tracking students towards specific roles in the benevolent assimilation of a population under a colonial leader. To quote Dr. Charles Prosser, who surveyed vocation education in the Philippines, “...I believe intermediate home economics will compare favourably with any other practical training provided by the school...In no country of which I am aware is the valuable device used more extensively than in the Islands” (Tabbada & Mapanao, 1994, p. 26). This echoes an earlier quote from Boltanski. When translated into the context of a colonial project, such as the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, Boltanski’s analysis of the Home Economics curriculum make it a mode not only of transmitting middle-class values; it also became a means of assimilating colonial subjects (De Roo, 2006).

This “insidious platform of power” (Pendergast & McGregor, 2007, p. 4), has been constructed on the terms of patriarchy, capitalism, and empire that can be traced back to education, specifically the HE curriculum. I argue that this curriculum functioned as an instrument of benevolent assimilation, analogous to the valorization of a feminized overseas labor force, and its role in globalization and neoliberal ideology. This valorization of a female diaspora recasts women in the public sphere, thus reconfiguring social ordering and spatial practice within private dwellings with the propagation of neoliberal values as an added consequence.

Cosmopolitan Transitions: Valorizing a Female Diaspora

In an essay that appeared in the second issue of *The Manila Review*, Walden Bello (2013) gives the current statistics of “the most dynamic sector of the economy”—labor export, where he states that some 11 percent of the Philippines’ total population and 22 percent of its working age population are now migrant workers in other countries. Out of this, roughly two-thirds are women filling

domestic jobs overseas, meaning crossing international borders is just another way of remaining confined to domestic servitude (Parreñas, 2002). It is no accident that the feminization of Philippine migrant labor coincides with what I will refer to as the feminization of *flânerie*, or the increased representation of female figures in urban space—whether as a student or as a star.

It is tempting to assume that Curtis is first cast in the role of a female *flâneur*, or *flâneuse*; however, further discussions using Lefebvre's theory on spatial aesthetics and John Rennie Short's chapter on *The Gendered City* (Short, 2006), illuminate the vast differences between the "true subject of Modernism" (p. 67), in Benjamin's (1999) *Arcades*, and SMDC's renditions of Metro Manila. Short cites Gill Valentine's *Geography of Women's Fear*, who contends that "[w]omen are pressurized into a restricted use and occupation of public space" (2006, p. 386), illustrating the complex relationship not only between gender and fear that is reflected not only in the built environment, but with the tenuous binary of public and private, negotiated by the women who inhabit it. This structuring is taken further in the public imagination, while simultaneously being sanitized for commercial purposes in SMDC's pitch to sell the drama of living like a star as a consolation prize to the domestic constraints produced by fear of the urban landscape. Short continues, describing the city as "a stage for the performance of gender identities, often with the surveillance of the male gaze" (p. 129). An optimistic reading (i.e., the reading offered by SMDC) offers that gaze as spectacle, a dystopian view would render this gendered space as a structure not only of separation, but a separation that justifies surveillance, risk, and outright violence.

The promise of spectacle and stardom at the heart of the city, so central to SMDC's ad campaign, feeds off the idea of the woman as a global citizen, guaranteeing her a celebrity lifestyle that runs counter to the terms that made this level of prosperity conceivable. According to Sassen (2002), two distinct dynamics continue to alter the lives of women in global cities: on one hand, a feminized immigrant labor force makes up an "invisible and disempowered class of workers in the service of the global economy's strategic sectors" (p. 202).

On the other hand, immigrant labor also serves as a site of subjectivity or agency which, in the words of Sassen (2002), improves their "access to other public realms" (p. 201), and better allows them to "incorporate themselves into the mainstream society" (p. 201). These dynamics not only contain the potential for autonomy and empowerment through greater participation in the public sphere—as illustrated by the female star of the SMDC campaign—they have already begun to reconfigure economic relationships between men and women, thus altering gender hierarchies (Sassen, 2002). Through this expansion of female access to cosmopolitan values, this phenomenon inevitably redefines a woman's place in the global economy, resulting in what Ulrich Beck (Beck, 2002) calls a "transnational place-polygamy" (p. 24). He writes:

[E]mpirical definitions of class identity are founded on categories of household, defined by either a male (head) of the household, or, at least, the leading person of a household. But what is a “household” nowadays, economically, socially, geographically, under conditions of living-apart-together, normal divorce, remarriage and transnational life forms? High mobility means more and more people are living a kind of place-polygamy. They are married to many places in different worlds and cultures. Transnational place-polygamy, belonging in different worlds: this is the gateway to globality in one’s own life. (p. 24).

Beck sheds light on drastic shifts: families are no longer the prime targets when it comes to the prescriptions for habitation, such as those found in real estate advertising campaigns; another is the shift to “micro apartments,” in order to suit the carrying capacity of an urban environment that is hard-pressed to keep up with the demands of a global economy. In a market of one-bedroom apartments and studios, Curtis represents women as the primary customers, signifying not only their capacity to earn for themselves and their willingness to live on their own, but their role as global citizens.

However, even as Curtis is re-cast as an endorser for a Filipinized cosmopolitan imaginary, the cosmopolitan in her image displaces or conceals the reality of Filipino world citizenship. While migration may be a means to profit from economic opportunities provided by advanced capitalist nations, the compromises posed by the de-skilling of the Philippine labor force (locally and abroad) are not as clearly distinguished. As the developed (i.e., Western) world deals with the entrance of immigrant labor, those residing in less developed countries must learn to make do with the mass exit of human potential on one hand, and the re-entry of cosmopolitan values and foreign influence, filtered through the experiences of a feminized diaspora, on the other.

For Filipino women, globalization does not necessarily correspond to participating in urban space—even as women’s bodies are co-opted into the image of urban development. The paradox is that as the representation of women increases as they prosper in the global economy, the source of this prosperity renders them invisible. By accepting cast-off jobs in developed countries, overseas workers not only help maintain the infrastructure that the developed world is known for—with “[s]ome 34 to 54 percent of the Filipino population” (Parreñas, 2002, p. 185), sustained by overseas remittances, they are helping create the same infrastructure on local soil—an infrastructure which will require a similar system of subordination and invisibility to maintain it.

Conclusions

That the image of a beautiful woman being used for endorsements comes as no surprise, but this practice begs the question of just what is being sold by real estate ads. Seeing Curtis's face and SMDC's representations of what it means to live like a star, we find a confluence of celebrity and civilian, lifestyle and life that contributes greatly to an emerging aesthetic within late capitalism. In this case, celebrity, or more specifically, star power could be seen filling the void left by the once idealized nuclear family unit, drastically changing roles in residential community development. Where mothering played a vital role in maintaining the suburban social order, a new role for women comes into play as high-rise developments and the charm of cosmopolitan living come to replace the ideals of sprawling village life that confined women to private space and cast them in the roles of mother and nurturer.

SMDC captures and displays a portrait of an ideal inhabitant of a capitalist utopia—a citizen of a system that does not radicalize social inequality, but is co-opted into it by representing social mobility as a result of individual achievement; thus, using a potential source of social inequality as a site of agency. In these images, we observe a turning point in the New Economy that can arguably empower women through asserting their capability to claim property, making these advertisements into an argument or a proposal to embrace neoliberal models, while filtering out the less desirable consequences of globalization (Kotz, 2000), one of which is the fact that this capitalist utopia was, I argue, made largely possible by the role of women in what Bello has called “the New Slave Trade” (Bello, 2013, p. 19).

The intersection of urbanization, spatial practice, and the feminization of *flânerie* and cosmopolitanism sheds light on how the gentrification of Metro Manila and its manifestation as an advertising campaign for private housing requires the cross-pollination of disciplines. If first we build architecture and then it builds us, then the built environment begs questions not only about those who will use it and those who built it, but also those who are displaced and dispossessed by it. Aside from the actors who build and are built by architecture, there is an ideology upon which it is founded as well as an ideology which it adds and further constructs.

The SMDC campaign constructs ideology before architecture, addressing and illustrating how capitalism works in the Philippines not as a proposition against freedom, but against the humiliating degradation of poverty. It is in this regard that SMDC's dreamscapes of cosmopolitan living maintain their luster, formulating the promise of living like a star as a necessary antidote to the reality of urbanization, and who bears the right to it (Harvey, 2008). Rather than arguing for the possibility of communal participation in large-scale residential developments, the advertisements stress proximity to luxury and the pleasures to be gained in the most prestigious slices of commercial activity, creating an aspiration to exclusivity.

Abstracting space and spatial practice through the confluence of private and public, celebrity and civilian, only highlights the boundaries between invisible, that is, private, spaces, and the more democratic common areas. When taken without a sense of agency, placing people in the middle of it all, with the economic, social, and cultural opportunities of city living readily available at the expense of a more humanizing built environment, can just as easily reduce them to anonymity, which Beck (2002) clarifies as “[t]he fundamental fact that the experiential space of the individual no longer coincides with national space, but is being subtly altered by the opening to cosmopolitanization” (p. 29).

Beck’s crucial disclaimer is that this opening “should not deceive anyone into believing that we are all going to become cosmopolitans” (Beck, 2002, p. 29). The deception is subtly illustrated in the exterior architectural renderings of the endless blocks of concrete and steel, which emphasize height rather than space. These utopian prescriptions of space and inhabitants only affirm the fragmentation both across and within social classes. They are consistent with SMDC’s goal to sell status, privilege, and power, through tower blocks that are being sold as “residences,” but not homes. Thus, to live like a star becomes an allegory—in which cosmopolitanism only results in the confusion between a myth of universal equality and the invisibility resulting from getting lost in the universe, of which the condominium tower is just one metaphor. Both abstract space and female body are juxtaposed to recall literary tropes of tower, pedestal, and cage, which display and objectify the body; thus co-opting Curtis into the logo techniques of a capitalist system that remains patriarchal in its very constitution.

The SMDC advertising campaign thus communicates the contradiction of how upward social mobility for women can inhibit lateral movement, by equating their independence with the allegory of being put on a pedestal, further disempowering their femininity by rendering it as ornamental, and enabling the damsel archetype. This also shifts the narrative of the real-estate advertisement from the archetypes of happily ever after (seen in advertisements for subdivisions and “villages”), back to the story of the damsel in the high tower, waiting to be rescued by her prince. Both of these readings testify to the female as a victim of limited mobility in a male-dominated urban space that subordinates women. The ability to move across space, writes Short, is “gendered;” and this mobility is not only a question of transporting female bodies from place to place, but of economic and political agency (Short, 2006).

These literary metaphors, alongside Short’s statement that “[e]conomic restrictions are a gendered experience” (2006, p. 131), at the expense of women, bear a complicated reflection not only in the Philippine economy, but in the political realities as well. While the limits to which their power and agency extend are terms for debate, the presidential terms of Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo maintain considerable influence over Philippine society. This confusion resulting from the feminization of leadership runs deep in Philippine history. To this day, whether or not the Philippines is a patriarchal or matriarchal

society is still considered by some to be a matter of debate. However, it cannot be denied that the narratives of modernity and the current trends of advanced capitalism and globalization follow a definitively patriarchal arc, which goes back to concepts of *flânerie*, represented by the discourse surrounding the male producer and the female consumer.

Finally, the increasing visibility not only of women, but of immigrants, in urban space has therefore not resulted in the emasculation of the *flâneur*, nor has it armed the identity of the *flâneuse*. The tensions resulting from the juxtaposition of occupying private space while benefiting from public attention stem from the enduring idea that a woman in public is a woman in harm's way. Despite the attempts to mimic modernity, the environment built to sustain these ideas is still governed largely by fear and objectification, in which even as women enter the New Economy and transition into independent and successful global citizens, women in postmodern space still suffer the consequences of both commodification and invisibility, in which their sex as a weapon is actually a double-edged sword.

Liesbet van Zoonen (1994) in *Feminist Media Studies* wrote: "If we do not conceive of advertising as a reflection of reality, but as an expression of capitalist consumer culture it is clear that the 'new woman' is primarily interesting for her increased purchasing power" (p. 72). She continues with the observation that the presence of women in advertising did not, at the time, signify progress, instead they supported the capitalist market economy, revealing a marginal departure from more traditional images, such as those signified in early Home Economics courses. Similar trends can still be observed today, not only with the SMDC campaign, but with other real estate advertisements that appeared simultaneously or followed suit; such as those featuring model and actress, Solenn Heusaff, for Robinsons Land, Corp., former beauty queen Venus Raj for Empire East, and Georgina Wilson for Monarch Park Suites.

To persistently exploit traditional images of women would be to ignore their role in the prosperity that made this level of capitalist consumer culture possible, while denying the diverse roles they could fill—and benefit from—in the current trajectories of economic as well as social development. This inhibition of lateral movement, and its manifestations in different areas of study, still needs further examination in the Philippine context. While the role of women in the New Economy has been studied extensively, these studies have largely been limited to roles that cast women to the margins or focus on their exploitation. To go beyond the limits of studying women as consumer groups or decorative elements in large-scale ad campaigns would mean looking at the social order and spatial practices that were made possible by their agency (a few examples could be living independently, self-employment, and transnational mobility that does not involve overseas domestic work). I propose that to recast women begins with studying them in the sites through and in which they create their own subjectivity, which would begin with redrawing the limits of female stardom.

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