

Exploding the Container: A Spillage of Women

Contain yourself (women). If not plainly stated, this expectation is made explicit in the ways that women are judged and defined. Though this manifests differently across cultures and geography, a distinct type of derision is cast upon women who indiscreetly take-up space. Not only is the space occupied by her body contested, but also the vocalization of her opinions, assertions of intellect, demonstrations of ability, and expectations for recognition.

Some ways for women to be in public

- Legitimate**

  - Heading to a destination
  - Shopping
  - For “professional” reasons
  - By belonging to someone:
    - Caring for a child/care-giving,
    - accompanying a male partner
- Illegitimate**

  - Aimless
  - Idle, passing time
  - Sex work
  - Visibly queer
  - Loitering

In 2014 I visited Hong Kong, and while wandering around on a Sunday, I was surprised to see multitudes of women on and around public spaces purposefully demarcated with tarp and cardboard. Although I recognized the rituals of weekend socializing, the epic proportions of exclusively female groups sharing foods, grooming, and worshipping in public is distant from my own experiences. The women, I later learned, are Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs). Where I am from, women do not take-up space this way.



Jennifer Davis and Su-Ying Lee, *How to Make Space* research image, 2016, Digital image



Stephanie Comilang, *Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come to Me, Paradise)*, 2016, Video with sound, 30 mins (still)

I am Chinese, but the context of my formative years, socialization, and education is Canadian. At home in Canada, I am part of continual conversations about what it would take to make space for women in the work place, social sphere, academic world, various fields of practice, and with one another, as allies countering a dominant culture. On occasion, a woman will recount an incident when she was given space but, more often, women relate meeting opposition in their struggle for space. For these reasons, witnessing the MDWs taking-up the space they need struck me as a noteworthy achievement.

My own preoccupation with female agency over space and the consequences of women’s visibility led to considering the strategies being employed by MDWs and their effects. Through research undertaken by myself, co-curator Jennifer Davis, and artists **Tings Chak, Stephanie Comilang, and Devora Neumark (in collaboration with Open Door and Rowena Yin-Fan Chan)**, *How to Make Space* approaches the matter of how the visibility of women is met.

Predominantly from the Philippines and Indonesia, over 300,000 women have migrated to Hong Kong for domestic or care-giving work. MDWs are required to reside with their employers, compounding the vulnerability of their positions created by restrictive government regulation of their movements and terms of employment. In the population-dense city, where surplus space is unlikely, guidelines governing conditions for domestic workers are loosely regarded and largely unmonitored by officials. It is not out of the ordinary for sleep accommodations to be in the living room, bathroom, kitchen, corridors, in their charge’s bedrooms, on tables, appliances, balconies, and worse. Profoundly, MDWs perform vital roles while expected to be otherwise imperceptible, at once allowing their female employers to increase their own social presence and engage in pursuits outside the home.

Under such strictures, it stands to reason that the women are literally “uncontainable,” spilling out into the space of the city on Sunday, their only weekly “holiday,” equipped with belongings typically considered personal and domestic. Their presence is asserted through activities that encompass streets, walkways, and parks with rituals of bodily care, creative expression, performance, religious worship, commerce, and gaming. Scents of food and sounds of shared cultures and languages occupy and energize the environment. These material, visual, aural, and olfactory aesthetics re-form the built environment of Hong Kong and hold a space of self-determination.

During duty hours, “neutral” dress meets the expectations of paternal or suspicious employers. On Sundays, MDWs dress freely against anxieties and governance over women’s sexuality. Autonomous self-fashioning, contrary to normative gender expectations, contributes prominently to the “queering” of public space.

Within the deliberately designed communities of intermittent architecture, the agenda for the day appears to be leisure. Perhaps less obvious is the effective construction and maintenance of a network of information, resources, and action, both informally and formally organized. Regardless of whether these activities are considered legitimate, the women’s occupation of time and space must be considered as their own.

Critics seeking to position the MDWs’ presence as a nuisance point to the women’s success in permeating public space. These arguments affirm classism, serving to privilege and legitimize other groups’ use of civic space. The MDWs’ hyper-visibility clashes with perverse expectations that they take-up the labour of care, but do not “take-up” space in the city, and also highlights the insistence on cheap foreign labour while rejecting foreign bodies.

The women hold strong the practice of assembly against designations of difference and social hierarchy to the effect of complicating characterizations of femaleness. Their refusal to comply with prescriptive expectations on the female body risks being seen as unruly. The refusal to be invisible is radical.

Su-Ying Lee, co-curator

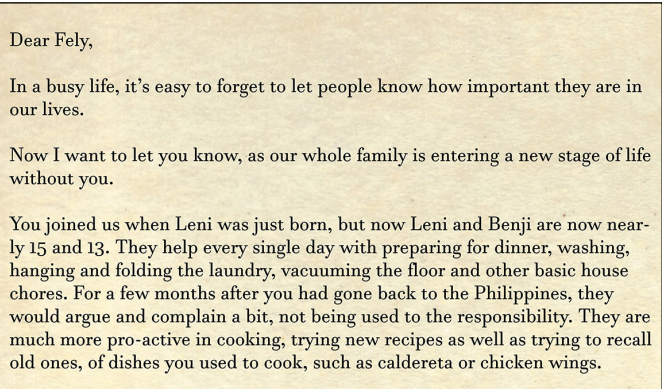
Female Feedback

I’m an architect: the discipline permeates my vocabulary and frames how my colleagues and I see and understand the city. When we design buildings, the people and activities become *users* and *programs*. Binaries such as *public* and *private*, *commercial* and *domestic*, and *inside* and *outside* articulate our understanding and approach to organizing spaces at all scales, from a single family home to a city-wide zoning map. Although our terminology can be a useful tool, in using it we risk erasing the specificity of individual experience and the ways identity can influence the built environment.

Unlike most of my architect colleagues, I am a woman. And in the last few years I have been struck by how my discipline, in its parlance and paradigms, negates gender.

I undertook *How to Make Space* as a journey in self-education. While most North American architects would travel around the world to experience the “city without ground” of Hong Kong’s soaring skyscrapers, I wanted to understand how women in this city enact a kind of architectural agency that I had never seen in my architectural training. Could their tactics of making space be used by other women? What might this mean for the field of architecture? Could their spatial knowledge, fed back in to the architectural discipline, reshape it?

The HSBC bank headquarters in Hong Kong’s Central District has been a beacon for architects, financiers, and tourists since it was built in the 1980s. Its high-tech aesthetic, designed by English architect Sir Norman



Devora Neumark in collaboration with Open Door and Rowena Yin-Fan Chan, *Part of the Family?*, 2016, Letters written by families to their domestic workers + “Best Employer” Contest, Dimensions variable (detail)

Foster, was intended to be a bold assertion of the economic sophistication and ambition of Hong Kong. The design was featured in television documentaries, heralded in an exhibition at MoMA in New York, and discussed in business journals including the *Far Eastern Economic Review*:

...[Foster’s] design keeps the user, not just the developer, in mind. Pedestrian circulation should be good and the building incorporates a major public amenity, a plaza under the building at ground level. (A design so interesting to look at must also be counted as a public amenity.) This open atrium and escalators will make it easier to see, be seen or converse...The good lighting, among other factors, should make it a better place to work. (James Sterngold, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 July 1984, p.31-32)

What a contrast between this image of public efficiency supporting the smooth circulation of money and people and the Sunday scenes in Central and Causeway Bay, when Migrant Domestic Workers install temporary micro-architectures that transform pedestrian bridges and office plazas. The women’s ad hoc structures are tactically installed on hand railings, sheltered by outdoor stairways, and nudged up against benches and walls. Inside provisional rooms, they host communal activities typically associated with domestic space – eating, socializing, worshipping, and grooming – carving out spaces of care for their primarily female community.

MDWs are integral to Hong Kong society, yet their spatial experiences are circumscribed by their intersecting gender, national, and class identities. The women’s interventions in the existing architecture afford them spaces of human comfort neither found in their spaces of work nor provided by Hong Kong’s official city planning.

*How to Make Space* presents three artworks that highlight the spectrum of spatial experience of MDWs in Hong Kong, acknowledging the relationship between identity and space. *Suitable Accommodation*, by architect **Tings Chak**, includes 1:1 illustrations of the various living spaces assigned to MDWs according to the ambiguous requirements outlined in the standard employment contract, inviting us to consider how the definition of “habitable” may be conveniently changed depending on who is being housed. **Devora Neumark’s** *Letters of Gratitude* recognizes the shared terrain of the household as simultaneously a workplace for the MDW and a space of leisure and refuge for the employer’s family. The letters act as a distancing tool, providing



Stephanie Comilang, *Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come to Me, Paradise)*, 2016, Video with sound, 30 mins (still)

a space for communication between employer and worker, While their public display as posters brings visibility to positive stories that are rarely heard in the media. **Stephanie Comilang’s** sci-fi inspired video *Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come to Me, Paradise)* eschews the construct of the generic “user,” navigating the urban landscape from the MDWs’ point of view. Together, the artworks illustrate that physical space is not a neutral platform for events, but a discursive site that is inextricably linked to identities and that can give rise to conflicting interpretations of who has the right to claim space and decide how it can be used.

These projects add context to the Sunday phenomenon, recalibrating our expectations about who has, or *should* have, the authority to shape the city. The MDWs’ refusal to be defined only by their domestic labour and the architectural agency they demonstrate by inserting a quasi-domestic sphere into public space constitutes a pragmatic and political disruption of the status quo. By making permeable the borders between public and private, commercial and domestic, and inside and outside, the women re-order public space. Their actions both critique the existing city and offer a proposal for how it could be reformed, making and an important gesture toward the possibility of a feminist architecture.

Jennifer Davis, co-curator

Su-Ying Lee and Jennifer Davis © 2016  
Franchise Program Winner 2015-16

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Central Market Public Passage 2/F, 80 Des Voeux Road  
Central, Central, Hong Kong



## 引爆束縛：女性的滲漏

自我約束（女人們）。除非另有說明，寄於這一說法中的期望值明確指出了女性是如何被評判和定義的。儘管不同文化和地域背景下的表現會有所不同，隨性佔用空間的女人一定會被人當成笑柄。不僅是她身體所佔用的空間會備受爭議，還有她所聲張的見解，對自身才智的斷言，能力的展示，以及被認可的期望。

## 女性在公共場合的一些表現

### 正當的

- 前往一個目的地
- 購物
- “工作”需要
- 屬於某個人：照顧小孩/被看護人，陪伴男性伴侶

### 非正當的

- 漫無目的
- 無所事事，打發時間
- 性工作
- 獨行
- 明顯的酷兒
- 遊蕩

2014年，我去了次香港。一個週日，在閒逛的時候，我驚訝地發現大批女人在公共空間內和周圍用油布和紙板頗為用心地為自己劃出地界。儘管我能認出週末聯誼的慣例，分享食物、梳妝打扮、敬奉祭拜，但這些群體中驚人的女性比例超出了我以往的任何經驗。之後我了解到，這些女人都是外來家庭傭工。在我所來自的地方，女人們是不會這樣佔用空間的。

我是中國人，但我的成長階段，無論社交還是教育，都是在加拿大度過的。在加拿大國內，我長期參與如何為女人在工作場所、社交領域、學術環境、以及在不同實踐領域爭取空間的討論，並作為彼此的支持，對抗主流文化。有時候，女人們會被給予空間，講述自己的經歷，而更多的時候，女人們的共鳴來自爭取自身空間過程中的不滿。正是出於這些原因，見證外來家庭傭工做到如何占用自己所需的空間，在我看來，這是不容忽視的成就。

我全心貫注女性對空間的能動作用和女性可見度的重要性，這使我開始思考外來家庭傭工所採取的策略和它們的效應。通過我和聯合策展人詹妮弗•戴維斯，以及藝術家 翟庭君、斯蒂芬妮•康米蘭、和德芙拉•紐馬克（與家·傭同行及陳燕芬合作）的調查研究，《如何開拓空間》致力探討如何獲取女性可見度的問題。

目前已有超過三十萬的女人遷徙到香港從事家庭傭工和護理的工作，其中大部分人自來菲律賓和印度尼西亞。外來家庭傭工必須與她們的雇主同住，這進一步加重了

由於政府對其活動限制的法規以及就業條件而導致的弱勢地位。在這個人口高度密集的城市，剩餘空間幾乎沒有可能，政府對管理家庭傭工生活工作環境的準則缺乏重視，基本不作關注。睡在客廳、廁所、廚房、走廊、受護人的臥室、桌子、家電用品、陽台的情況比比皆是，有時甚至更糟。外來家庭傭工扮演著重要關鍵的角色，卻被要求低聲下氣，與此同時，她們的女性雇主可以有機會提升自己的社會存在感，參與到家庭之外的事務中。

面對如此的約束，女人們理所應當地可以“不受束縛”，在周日，她們唯一的每週“假日”，灑入城市的空間，帶上通常被認為是私人、家用的個人用品。通過在街道、人行道、和公園裡進行身體護理、創意表達、表演、宗教禮拜、商業 和遊戲等活動，她們的存在得到了維護。食物的氣味和共享文化與語言的聲響佔領了周遭環境，並為其注入了生命力。這些材料、視覺、聽覺和嗅覺美學重構了香港的建成環境，並為自決性留有了一席之地。

在工作時間內，“中性的”服飾滿足了雇主們作為家長或是疑心重重的期望。在周日，外來家庭傭工們可以拋開對女性性徵的焦慮和管理，隨意穿著。充滿主見的自我造型，與規範化的性別期望值背道而馳，為公共空間的“酷兒化”作出了顯著的貢獻。

對活動在間歇性建築中那些精心構建的社區們來說，當日的議程表面看來是休閒。也許不太明顯的是，對信息、資源、和行動網絡的有效構建和維護，其中同時包含了正式與非正式的組織方式。這些活動正當與否並不重要，關鍵在於女人們所佔有的空間和時間是屬於她們自己的。

針對女人們如何成功地滲透進了公共空間，批評家們試圖把外來家庭傭工的存在定位為一種社會妨害。這些論點證實了階級歧視的存在，即如何服務於特權階層，並將其他社群對市政空間的使用正當化。外來家庭傭工的超級可見度與那些不近情理的期望值產生了衝突，後者認為外來家庭傭工應該佔用的是護理勞動力，而不該“佔用”城市的空間，同時強調了使用廉價外來勞動力卻排斥外來身體的極力主張。

李疎影，聯合策展人

## 女性反饋

我是一名建築師：專業素養貫穿於我的措辭用句，並表達了我和我的同事們如何看待和理解城市的概念。當我們設計建築時，人和活動成了“使用人”和“方案”。公共與私人、商業與家居、還有內部與外部，這些二元概念構成了我們對各類規模空間的理解和組織手段，小至獨戶住房，大到全市範圍的區劃圖。儘管我們的專業術語可以作為有用的工具，但在使用的同時我們也承擔了抹滅個體經驗的特別性與認同如何可以影響建成環境的危險。

不同於我大多數的建築師同事，我是一名女性。在過去的幾年中，我強烈意識到我的專業，就其措辭和範式而言，是如何地否定性別。

我把《如何開拓空間》視作一次自我教育的旅程。當眾多北美建築師選擇環遊世界，僅僅為了體驗香港摩天大廈中的“懸浮城市”，我想要了解這個城市裡的女人們是如何扮演建築能動者的角色，這在我的建築教育中曾是一塊空白。她們開拓空間的手段是否也能被其他女性使用？這對建築領域又意味著甚麼？她們的空間知識是否可以反饋至建築學科本身，為它打開新局面？

自1980年代建成以來，香港中環的匯豐總行大廈一直被建築師、金融家 和遊客們視作地標。這座由英國建築師諾曼•福斯特爵士設計的建築，就其重技派美學而言，意在大膽斷言香港的經濟複雜性和野心。該設計曾在電視紀錄片中被專題報導，在紐約現代藝術博物館的展覽中受到追捧，並出現在商業期刊的討論中，其中包括《遠東經濟評論》：

.....【福斯特的】設計對使用人作出考慮，不僅僅關注開發商。行人流通順暢，建築同時引入了一項重要的公共設施，建在建築底層的一個廣場。（設計本身極具可看性，又必須被當作一項公共設施。）開放的中庭和自動扶梯使其易於觀看，被看或交談.....除去其他因素，良好的照明應該會使它成為更好的工作場所。（詹姆斯•斯特恩格德，《遠東經濟評論》，1984年7月5日，31–32頁）

這是如此的一對反差，一邊是公共效率的形象支撐著資金與人流的順暢流通，另一邊是中環和銅鑼灣的周日場景，外來家庭傭工搭建的臨時微型建築將行人天橋和辦公樓廣場改頭換面。這些女人們的臨時結構頗具策略地安裝在扶手欄杆上，受到戶外樓梯的庇護，靠著長椅和牆壁輕微上推。在這些暫時性的房間裡，她們組織各類涉及家居空間的公共活動——用餐、聯誼、敬拜、美容——為這個以女性為主的社區開拓出關愛的空間。

外來家庭傭工是香港社會不可缺的一部分，然而她們的空間經驗受制於她們性別、國籍和階級認同的組成。女人們對現存建築的介入為她們提供了人體舒適的空間，這是無論在她們的工作空間，還是香港政府的城市規劃中都不存在的。

《如何開拓空間》推出三組藝術作品，多角度地體現香港外來家庭傭工的各類空間經驗，以及身份認同與空間的相互關係。建築師 翟庭君 的作品《合適住宿》由一組不同生活空間的1:1插圖組成，圖中記錄了根據標準僱傭合約中列出的含糊要求分配給外來家庭傭工的居住空間，引發我們思考“適於居住”的定義如何可以根據居住的對象輕易地作出改動。德芙拉•紐馬克的《感恩信》試圖識別家庭中的共享地帶，外來家庭傭工的工作場所同時又是雇主一家休閒與避難的場所。信作為一種疏離的工具，為雇主和傭工提供了交流的空間，而海報的展示方式將這些在媒體中鮮有所聞的積極的故事帶入公眾視線。斯蒂芬妮•康米蘭的電影《來我這兒吧，天堂》受科幻小說啟發，迴避了對普通“使用人”的構建，而是從外來家庭傭工的視角穿行於城市景觀。這些作品共同闡釋了實體空間並非事件的中立平台，而是一個發散性的場所，各式認同緊密地連接在一起，並引發對誰有權索取空間並決定其使用方式的爭議理解。

這些作品為周日現象添加了語境，重新校准我們對於誰有權，或應該有權，決定我們城市發展的期望值。外來家庭傭工拒絕被簡單地界定為家庭勞動力，她們通過在公共空間內插入準居家空間所展現的建築能動力，從實效性和政治上構成了對現狀的破壞。將公共與私人、商業與家居、內部與外部間的界線彼此滲透，這些女人們重新組織了公共空間的秩序。她們的行動批判了現有的城市，提出如何改革、開拓的設想，並是走向女權主義建築可能性的重要舉措。

詹妮弗•戴維斯，聯合策展人

李疎影和詹妮弗•戴維斯© 2016  
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**apexart's** exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by the Lambert Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Degenstein Foundation, The Greenwich Collection Ltd., Affirmation Arts Fund, the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, the Fifth Floor Foundation, and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

This exhibition is funded in part by Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies.

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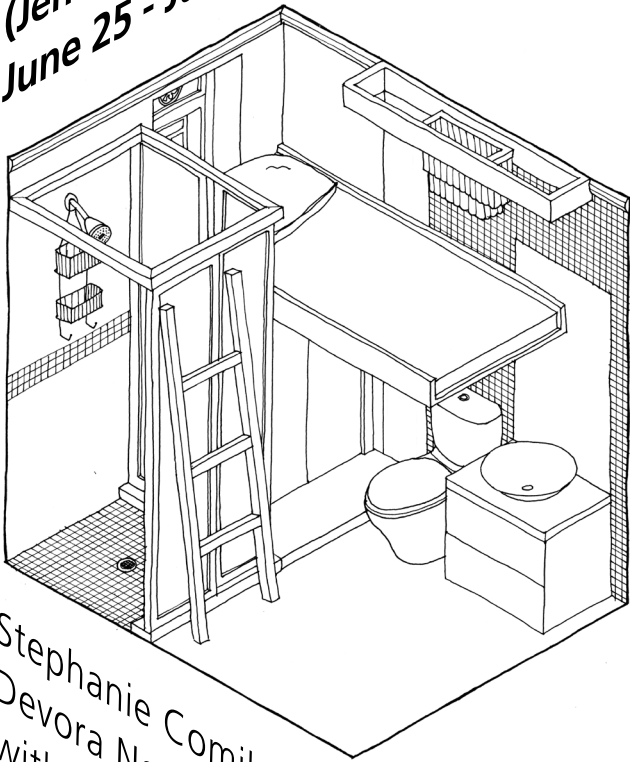
ISBN: 978-1-933347-91-2

cover image: **Tings Chak**, Suitable Accommodation, 2016, Masking tape, 1:1 site specific drawing,

A4 paper posters, Dimensions variable

apexart Hong Kong

*How to Make Space*  
organized by Rear View (Projects)  
(Jennifer Davis and Su-Ying Lee)  
June 25 - July 23, 2016



Stephanie Comilang  
Devora Neumark in collaboration  
with Open Door and  
Rowena Yin-Fan Chan  
Tings Chak