URBAN TALK
Tuesday, 16.06.2026, 5.30 p.m. | IfA Forum

Lilian Chee
Housing's Extras: Domesticity, Architectural Ethnography, and the Affective Life of the Flat

Housing is a planner‘s category — scalable, policy-legible, reproducible. Domesticity is something else entirely: processual, tactical, intimate, and saturated with affect. This lecture argues that attending to domesticity‘s „extras“ — its micropractices, gestures of care, improvisations, and residual objects — transforms what housing research can see and say. Drawing on a decade of creative practice research conducted in Singapore, I work through three architectural essay films — 03-FLATS (2014), Objects for Thriving (2022), and At Home with Work (2025) — to show how architectural ethnography and film together hold domesticity, housing, and affect in productive tension. Each film surfaces a distinct register of precarity folded into apparent stability: the biopolitics of eligibility, the labour of ageing in place, and the colonisation of domestic time by paid work. Brought together under Lauren Berlant‘s frame of cruel optimism, the three films argue that domesticity is not housing‘s soft supplement but its affective infrastructure — the daily work through which policy is made liveable, and through which its costs become visible.

Photo © Film still, 03-FLATS, Lei Yuan Bin (dir.), Lilian Chee (PI, concept), 2014.

Lilian Chee is Dean’s Chair Associate Professor of Architectural Design

and Visual Cultures at the National University of Singapore. A writer, curator, and award-winning educator and researcher, she is recognised internationally for advancing architectural knowledge through feminist, creative, and socially engaged frameworks with her research focused on domesticity, architectural ethnography and affect. She serves as Assistant Dean, is Founding Co-Director of the Social Design Lab, and leads the Research by Design Cluster at NUS Architecture. Notable works include the award-winning film 03-FLATS (2014), Objects for Thriving (2022), and At Home With Work (2025), as well as the monograph Architecture and Affect (2023). She led the SSRC-funded project Foundations for Home-based Work (2021–24) and is DAAD Visiting Professor to Berlin (Spring 2026).

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