

# House of Cards

The One-and-a-Half Story House  
in *Kisapmata* (1981)

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## Abstract

This paper looks into the undercurrents of the one-and-a-half story house in *Kisapmata* [*Blink of an Eye*] (1981) by Mike de Leon, where the domestic space becomes a character in the narrative. An adaptation of Nick Joaquín’s “The House on Zapote Street,” the film relays the events in the sparsely populated area of Makati City in 1961. The subject of the research is part of a longer body of work that centers on selected domestic structures during the Martial Law years. In underlining the characteristics of the domestic space, this study anchors on phenomenology with variations in cinema and in architecture.

At street-level, individuals could identify the ambience projected by the house; see the extent of security, maintenance, and assume the dynamics inside. In this vein, the sense of comfort and safekeeping tread on the reinforcements installed by the homeowners, including the limitations set by authority figures. Yet, some precautions can be suffocating for its inhabitants, also affecting how they move within the house. Looking at the one-and-a-

half story house in the film, how does it render itself as a prison-like space? The subject of the research is part of a longer body of work that centers on selected domestic structures during the Martial Law years.

### **Keywords**

cinema, architecture, domestic space, house, phenomenology

## Introduction

*Kisapmata* showcases de Leon's astute treatment of a psychological domestic drama that critiques Filipino society by outlining particular behaviors that lead to social degradation. This venture into people's invisible activities was influenced by American and European arthouse films which started in the 1970s. This contemporary approach by filmmakers stood in contrast to the formulaic storytelling practiced in the film industry. Nestor Torre recalls how these films were "characterized by a strong sense of irony, as filmmakers took a critical look at society, and occasionally even at themselves" (55). Mike de Leon was regarded as the most consistent, and while his body of work may not be as extensive, his films are constantly praised. Prior to his directorial debut with the psychological drama *Itim [Black]* (1976), de Leon worked as a cinematographer for Lino Brocka's *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag [Manila in the Claws of Light]* (1975), where de Leon's polished knowledge of cinematography was lauded, as it contributed in the improvement of the films produced during the period.

When Martial Law was nominally lifted in 1981, the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) was created by virtue of Executive Order 770, following the first Manila International Film Festival. The ECP primarily served as a venue for promoting artistic films that were commended by critics. While their works were not as heavily-controlled by the Board of Censors, the ECP was later indicted by many for producing "bomba" (sex drama) films, which eventually led to its closure in 1986. Presidential daughter Imee Marcos served as the organization's head in the ECP's brief period of operation. Even with the stern censorship guidelines, socially-conscious artists managed to work around the restrictions under Martial Law.

When the Marcos regime intended to take control of all the local media outlets, films expressed their opposition against the government. It was hypothesized that "the Marcoses ultimately decided that, in order to answer foreign criticism of martial rule's repressive policies, Philippine cinema would act as their showcase of cultural democracy" (David 231-232). Films deemed "subversive" by the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures (BCMP) were immediately censored. Two of de Leon's internationally recognized

works—*Kisapmata* and *Batch '81*—were subjected to the Board's scissors. In the uncut version of *Batch '81*, the interrogation scene of the fraternity neophytes boldly addressed if Martial Law was beneficial for the country. This sequence was deleted and as a result, tapered a significant macro-level representation of the time period and a firm statement of the film.

The Marcoses' idea of a "New Society" focused on moral restructuring, as the President intended to eradicate what he considered "sick" in pre-Martial Law Philippines. However, there had been statements from Malacañang Palace insiders that reported how the President engineered these disturbing affairs. In one article by film scholar Joel David, there were reports of "bomb attacks against the political opposition, assassination attempts against his own Cabinet officials, and possibly an extremely permissive film policy that enabled the *bomba*, the first descriptor in what has since become a recurrent trend of mainstream pornographic releases" (230). These suggested scenarios illustrate how a public figure manipulates certain incidents to get his desired result, even at the expense of including himself in the melee.

## Permutations

The representation of power relations stand parallel to the changes in domestic architecture when the American Occupation began in 1898, conveyed by a new thrust in architectural tradition. In contrast to the Spaniards whose form of control was through religion, the Americans constructed grand buildings for public services, academic institutions, and leisure. Notable structures include the Philippine Normal School (now the Philippine Normal University, 1901), the Philippine General Hospital (1907), the Manila Hotel (1912) and the derelict Paco Railway Station (1915). Most of these buildings were constructed in the neoclassical style under the direction of William E. Parsons, who was assigned to carry out the city plans made by fellow American architect and urban planner, Daniel H. Burnham.

From the 1910s to the 1930s, domestic architecture broke away from the classic orientation of the *bahay na bato* (a stone base and upper floors enclosed in wood)—home of the elite and the *bahay kubo* (a wooden house on stilts). Rodrigo Perez notes how as the city expanded, Parsons's design

principles were observed (qtd. in Tiongson 25). With urban reconstruction, residences of the post-war period developed into the **tsalet** (chalet), an unadorned house that was considered more practical. This dwelling space has a broad porch and some have T or L-shaped stairways made of wood or concrete that lead to the front door of the house. This type of residence accompanied the rise of the middle class, whose flexible economic standing allowed them to make changes to their dwellings whenever possible. At the time, the tsalet became a status symbol that “represented the Americanization of the Filipino house” (Perez, “The American Colonial and Contemporary Traditions” 27) and a standardization of the suburban setting. Following the popularity of the tsalet, living in a *California bungalow* became the trend. The *lanai*—a roofed or an open-sided veranda which originated in Hawaii, was a prominent feature with a garage space that can fit two to three cars or to be utilized as a storage area or a covered porch.

The third type of middle-class home is the *one-and-a-half story* house, which consists of two sections: the first story includes the kitchen, living, and dining room that allows seamless access across the entire floor, while the bedrooms of its occupants are on the second story. However, some one-and-a-half story houses do not follow this roofing system, since there are detached roofs for the one-story and two-story sides. Moreover, some homeowners would have the front part of their houses repainted or have their yards landscaped, others install more rooms, additional floors, and fix protective features. These physical changes in the homes of the middle class illustrate the fluidity of their economic position. However, the projected neutrality of these domestic spaces is only a veneer, as it conceals clandestine activities and disconcerting images.

## Fixtures

In cinema, views are manipulated by the camera, anchoring on the character’s body as a vessel. Audiences witness events through viewpoints held by the characters in a film. Referring to architectural components in experiencing a film, a character’s movement can be mapped as the camera goes through the domestic space. Filmic narratives are rendered as the purported “phenomena”

in the world onscreen. In classical phenomenology (the study of the structures of experiences through a specific viewpoint), Edmund Husserl underscored the crux of phenomenology as “the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (qtd. in Smith 305), where subjects and objects react upon each other in this world. As individuals then interact with their environment, perception becomes the key to understanding the dynamics of a place. Similarly treading on place sensitivity, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) followed Husserl’s work on the structures of consciousness, reiterating that perception holds a substantial role in engaging and experiencing the world.

*Kisapmata* is examined using two phenomenological strains to augment the features of the one-and-a-half story house. Phenomenology in architecture contends how built environments and atmospheres reveal the qualities of a space. Gaston Bachelard (1994) looks at the “phenomenon of dwelling” where a dwelling space influences an occupant’s worldview. Similarly, Juhani Pallasmaa (2001) emphasizes multi-sensory experiences both in cinema and in architecture where people gauge their partiality or dissonance to filmic spaces. In *Kisapmata*, Michel Foucault’s (1979) idea of the *panopticon* becomes evident in the narrative, as the rendering of the one-and-a-half story house builds on the visibility and invisibility of an authorial figure. In this vein, the home stands as an extension of the father’s surveillance.

By anchoring on the senses to articulate filmic experiences, the phenomenology of film views moving images in two-fold—as a subject and an object of viewing. Merleau-Ponty’s notion on perception as a device in experiencing the world is expanded by Vivian Sobchack (1992), who contends that the cinematic world can be experienced through our senses. In watching a film, our eyes have a grander duty in delivering the value of the other senses. Echoed by Laura Marks (2000), the viewers’ eyes are able to “touch” the objects and subjects in the film given the extent the work’s technical components. Audience members also experience cinema through concepts in film theories that work around the metaphors of the body such as seeing, hearing, and touching. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2009) jointly express that between the spectator and the screen, there is a union between

the mind and the body when watching a film. In addition, Elsaesser and Hagener suggest structures referring to the audience's immersion in the events onscreen: window and frame, door and threshold, mirror and face, the eye look and gaze, skin and touch, acoustics and space. Elsaesser and Hagener's shared proposal point to cinematic representations by alluding to the house and its fixtures that mirror certain parts of the human body. These dualities relate to the viewers' aesthetic experiences in the filmic world. Such concepts pertaining to the camera's eye and the narrative as the phenomena can be used as a structure in exploring the morose environment within the one-and-a-half story house.

### **Incarceration**

The film begins on dark Sunday night in November. A family of three gathers in the living room, where most of the surfaces are garbed in knitted runners. The mother, Adelina (Charito Solis) silently attends to her sewing as Mila Carandang (Charo Santos) nervously informs her father Dadong (Vic Silayan) that she is getting married to her boyfriend, Noel Manalansan (Jay Ilagan), a fellow bank employee. The subdued lighting and the soft glow from the table lamp adds to the foreboding atmosphere. When Mila confesses that she is pregnant, the mood turns acidic, complemented by a quick cut of the parents' reactions. Dadong appears to be indifferent. Adelina asks Mila about her decision to which Dadong gives her a sharp look. She quickly gets up and sidesteps her husband to get an ice pack from the kitchen. Soon after, the father roars at them to go to bed and both women quickly follow his order. The dwelling space reflects the dismal acoustics of their household, filled with silences than two-way conversations. Despite the mother being present, the daughter only addresses her father. Adelina's role in their household as an ancillary figure demonstrates Dadong's absolute power. Whenever she wants to speak, Adelina has to be wary of her replies to avoid upsetting the overbearing patriarch. There is a wordless direction going on, with Adelina frantically adhering to Dadong's orders.

The one-and-a-half story house sits on a substantial sized lot enveloped by a lawn. The outer walls of the house are painted in off-white and pastel

colors. The ground floor on the right side of the lot contains the living area, the dining room, and the kitchen. There is a mournful tone upon entering. The furniture of the middle-class is neither as elegant nor massive, but they are spotless and polished. Next to the living area is the dining room, where a wooden table for four stands in one corner, and which can be expanded to accommodate six people. A hallway connects the three areas. From the living room, one passes by the dining area and into the kitchen. The room is arranged on a modular side, where appliances such as the stove, the refrigerator, the sink, and the dishwasher are found. From the kitchen, a narrow hallway leads to the back of the property and eases into the rest of the lawn—a supposed breathing space. The upper floor is bounded by a long wooden balcony that stretches from the couple’s bedroom, the bathroom, and to Mila’s. Standing in the living room, the upper story has an unobstructed view of the comfort room and the bedrooms. If someone is in the hallway on the half-story, they can look down on the living and the dining rooms. Even with the medium-sized windows giving access to natural light, the spaces on the ground floor are distinctly melancholy.

The one-and-a-half story house is protected by a corroded steel gate and cement walls decked in barbed wires—reminiscent of a jailhouse. Underneath these reinforcements, the overprotected perimeter reflects the terror inside the house held by one character enviously guarding its household. Following the family’s strained conversation, Noel pays Dadong a visit to talk about the Manalansans’ *pamamanhikan* (request for a blessing). When the day arrives, Noel’s father, Peping (Ruben Rustia) offers pleasantries to Dadong, but with discretion. The table is heavy with dishes and drinks. Five occupants are seated together, with Dadong maneuvering the conversation. In this scene, their household help Onyang (Aida Carmona), experiences the father’s hostile nature by getting yelled at for another glass of beer, to which she nervously obliges. Dadong’s request for a Php 10,000.00 dowry surprises Mila and the Manalansans, who promise to supply the amount. Mealtime with visitors should project a positive atmosphere. Instead of being a jovial affair, their dinner is loaded with apprehension. In addition, the table acts



as the stage for imposing power where there are no reciprocal discussions. Only Dadong's interrogation of the cautious Manalansans is heard.

The sound of a revving car sees the father and son driving away, as Dadong observes them from their bedroom window—a predator watching his prey. Heavy footsteps reveal Dadong entering Mila's room. Finding out that her daughter is upset with his request, he tries to console her by putting his hand on hers, only for Mila to swiftly avoid his touch. In this moment of tactile exchange, we remember that a touch carries a multitude of memories (Marks, 2000). A sense of comfort stems from the relief brought by a touch from one's family member. Whether it is a tap, offering one's hand for respect, a kiss on the cheek, a comforting embrace, such gestures conjure memories of assurance and safety. In the film, tactile memory is filled with negative connotations when Mila avoids Dadong's hands. The sense of touch does not entail a calming emotion, but the discomfort is evident, marked by a jolt of alarm. Following this brief interaction, Adelina notifies Dadong of his bedtime, who barks at his wife. Reluctantly, Adelina retreats into their bedroom—a lingering eye on her daughter's bedroom door.

A montage shows the couple and their parents looking at potential homes. Dadong is upset when Noel proudly shows off their prospective bedroom. Dadong transacts for the couple—from the city hall to sending an application for their nuptials, choosing a bridal dress, and their sponsors who have administrative positions: one is a colonel while the other, a mayor. An interesting note in Joaquín's piece shows the actual wedding godparents which include the wife of a Cavite governor and Senator Ferdinand Marcos. One night, Mila dreams of going down the flooded stairs to light a candle before entering a confessional box. In this sequence, water becomes a metaphor for cleansing which is difficult for Mila to attain. As the house fosters the dreams of its inhabitants, therefore "dreaming inside homes reveals one's innermost desires" (Bachelard 15). In the one-and-a-half story house, the staircase allows continuous movement from one level to another. Its vital function refers to holding up the entire house, similar to how a spine functions in a body. Moreover, the similar purpose between the staircase and the spine represent people's "pathways of consciousness" (Pallasmaa 68). As

perception is rooted in repeated experiences, individuals are not conscious of their use as time passes by. Therefore, movement becomes a natural act. To continue, according to Pallasmaa:

Ascending a stair implies exiting from the social stage and withdrawal into privacy, but it may also signal a passage into an entirely private and prohibited realm, or the final journey to disclose a secret. Descending a stairway expresses self-presentation, joining a group and entry into the public sphere. (68)

These “pathways of consciousness” are influenced by one’s experiences. Some occupants prefer to “nest” inside their rooms, while others are open to socializing in communal spaces. Mila’s bedroom is directly across her parents’ room on the second floor with a door-less communal bathroom in between. Mila’s room lacks a doorknob, signifying that others can intrude anytime and she has to interact forcibly. The functional significance of the doorknob in allowing privacy and of the lock as a mental threshold are both ignored by the father. From the stairs in front of the parents’ room, the living room is an open space devoid of corners as seen from the kitchen. The telephone is placed beneath the parents’ room, making it nearly impossible to walk from one part of the house to another, even to use the telephone without Adelina or the father hearing. The space is configured as a panopticon, to use Foucault’s notion (1979) that some architectural spaces operate as a type of “social quarantine” which generates perpetual surveillance. In this regard, power functions as collective and individualized forms of control. In the film, there is no need for chains, heavy locks, or bars to enforce one’s rules.

Dadong’s brashness puts another level of strain on the family when the young couple is married. Their church wedding is filled with tension despite the festive environment; the discomfort is clear during the reception when the Carandang decide to leave after Adelina promptly faints. The father’s scheming continues when he forces them to stay in his house after the wedding and Mila obliges. Noel remains apprehensive about this decision. Upon arriving, Noel tells Onyang not to lock the gate because they will head out. Onyang dryly responds that Dadong has instructed her to close the



Figure 1. Mila's dreams of water cascading on the staircase (Source: Bancom)

gate as soon as they come home. The clanging of chains and clicking locks symbolize their confinement to the house, in which the father has successfully herded them. There is sustained silence inside the house and between its occupants. After closing the main door, Noel greets his father-in-law when he sees him on the stairs, but his gesture falls on deaf ears. Dadong turns off all the lights and retires to their bedroom, leaving Noel on the dark hallway. With the extended silence, the camera moves from the bedroom door of Adelina and Dadong, to Mila's, and back.

The morning after, Mila apologizes to Noel for persuading him to stay at the house. Noel tries to understand his wife's anxiety and manages to calm her down. He notices that there is no lock on their bedroom door. Mila nonchalantly replies that it is broken. In fact, there seems to be no locks in the rooms of the house, apart from the gate and the front door. The set-up in the Carandang house alludes to a penitentiary. The next day, during breakfast, Dadong orders that the newlyweds stay because Adelina is sick and will only feel better with Mila's care, who agrees with a heavy heart. She also asks Noel to get Dadong's permission to leave for the day. Following Dadong's consent, the couple is seen going into a drive-in motel to consummate their marriage. When the couple reaches home, Dadong barricades the front door and tells them to go straight to their room. This is another indication that

their stay in the house takes on a routine—arriving then following his orders. From the front gate's lock and chains, the barricade underlines Dadong's organization of the house's protective features. But, against who?

The next day, when the couple heads out for a movie, Dadong comes along, much to their dismay. From their bedroom, Adelina sees their vehicle leave the garage. She quickly takes her husband's pistol from under his pillow and relocates it to the bedside table. Recalling Bachelard, "wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life" (*The Poetics of Space* 78). Specific furniture hold the excesses of one's life, referring to the details of an individual's activities. Aside from the depressing environment inside the house, furniture reinforces the amount of undisclosed characteristics of the household. Dadong's extensive terrorizing of the household tries to be hidden by Adelina as a form of control on Dadong, whose authoritative approach towards the members of his family is felt by Noel, a newcomer to the Carandang household.

Later that evening, Dadong tries to extend his control over Noel, asking the young man to drink with him. The ambiance in the living room is similar to the opening scene, filled with tension. Even with Dadong's constant prodding, Noel politely declines and proceeds to look after his sick wife. His refusal pushes Dadong to mock him labelling Noel as weak and unfit for his daughter. Noel's naïve foray into the family's carefully arranged status quo further agitates the father. Dadong's obnoxious manner of talking is heard sparingly inside Mila's room, where the mother and the daughter talk about the couple's plan to relocate and finally leave the house. Noel meets up with a friend, Ernie (Juan Rodrigo) to disclose his uneasiness at the Carandang residence with Dadong's irrational control. Noel confesses that each day, he is more petrified of his father-in-law. When Noel comes home late, he finds the gate locked. Seeing lights inside the house, he expects that someone will open the door. The scene illustrates the power relations through the camera angles. A low-angle is directed towards Dadong standing by his bedroom window, unremittingly guarding his home. The windows become a malevolent set of eyes, whose owner looks at a figure outside his house. In a house,

lights indicate activity and a sense of life. Its presence allows the house to take on a human quality because: “It sees like a man.” (Bachelard 5). Some residents leave their lights on when they are away, behaving as guardians and temporarily occupying the home. A house that has a light on appears to be waiting for someone. But the lights of the Carandang house mock Noel, who continues to wait.



Figure 2. Dadong looks down on Noel from his room (Source: Bancom)

Noel looks in the direction of their room nervously. His reaction to viewing the window shows the domestic space taking on the characteristics of its occupants, the window now possessing an unsettling quality. Pallasmaa (2001b) asserts that the window opens certain characteristics that “a room can be terrifying or peaceful, aggressive or calming, imprisoning or liberating, dull or vivid, solely by means of the nature of its window” (124). The appearances of windows indicate the nature of the house. Windows fitted with heavy iron and grillwork indicates cautiousness about external factors that will threaten their safety. After watching Noel momentarily from their bedroom window, Dadong purposely turns off the lights. Domestic spaces should stimulate people to explore their private and public selves by promising security for its inhabitants. As Noel confronts Mila about getting

locked out the previous night, he continues by telling her that can no longer stand living inside the tension-filled house. He suggests that they move out, as his presence incites more changes in the father's scheming nature. Noel expresses that they are imprisoned in the house with Dadong's surveillance. Leaving his distraught wife who refuses to leave, Noel calls Dadong, who firmly declares that Noel cannot do anything about Mila's confinement. In a fit of rage, Noel leaves.

The Carandang gather in the living room once more. There is a sustained heaviness in the air, with Adelina sewing as a warm body in the conversation between Dadong and Mila, who inquires about returning to work. When Dadong disagrees with Mila, the girl shouts back, asking why he keeps meddling in her affairs. Surprised by his daughter's boldness, he slaps her. Back at the bank, Noel receives news that Mila has extended her leave. At the Carandang house, Mila hears the telephone ring, but Dadong and two police officers are drinking in the living room. He does not pick up. Later that night, Mila sneaks out of her room to call Noel, pleading to get her out of the house. The persistent misery in the Carandang house causes a heightened sense of alertness in the space where other senses come together in recognizing danger. Mila senses a presence at the top of the stairs. Quickly, she puts the receiver down and sees Adelina. In a series of reverse-shots, the mother and daughter declare their pent up anger and jealousy at the foot of the staircase where they unintentionally risk getting overheard by Dadong. In this scene, the two women are clothed in darkness, only their faces are illuminated.

In their conversation, it is revealed that incest takes place in the house. Adelina has full knowledge of the situation, but since she cannot act on Mila's behalf, she allowed it to continue. The father's relentless display of his power is beyond the archetypal parents, holding the best interests for their only child, as the revelation of incest explains Dadong's controlling nature. Adelina discloses that she has no one else to turn to but Mila retorts that their common-law union has no power over her. Dadong does not follow societal norms and by virtue of experience, he does not consider Mila's marriage to Noel as a chance to escape his grip. Their marriage is taken by

Dadong as an insult because his daughter is now with a man whom he sees as inferior. Adelina declines her daughter's invitation to leave with them. Mila closes their encounter by saying she has never felt at ease in the house, wondering how her mother is able to live inside a prison-like environment. In addition to the exterior of the one-and-a-half story house, their home is shrouded in darkness. The lack of adequate lighting allows the other senses a heightened function—a sensitive ear to listen to footsteps and the screeching of a swinging door, the significance of touch to grope one's way in the dark or react to another person's grip and a sharp sense of smell to pick up on the distinctive scents of other household members.

The next day, Noel comes to the house and is greeted by his mother-in-law, who replies that Mila is out of the house. Their interaction is witnessed by Dadong from their bedroom on the second floor. A recurring perspective, his view stands as the eye of the film, piercing through the grill-work on the window and the barbed wires on the gate. His eyes survey Noel, where a non-verbal confirmation is exchanged. Later that evening, Dadong steps out of their bedroom. With the house sleeping, he creeps towards his daughter's bedroom. In the silence surrounding the hour, Mila awaits an unfortunate ordeal. The girl hears footsteps as she tries to suppress her whimpers. Dadong enters her bedroom and Mila's cries fall on deaf ears. This scene highlights the disturbing secret within the one-and-a-half story house. Remembering that *Kisapmata* was subjected to the BCMP's "myopic censorship" during the Marcos Era, film scholar and historian Nicanor Tiongson, in *Censuring the Censors*, describes a deletion from the film's final cut:

The daughter helplessly waits for her father to come into her room to abuse her once again, Mike de Leon's camera, representing the daughter's point of view, focuses on the knob of her bedroom door as it turns and opens, then follows the father's pajama's fly as it approaches the daughter menacingly. (20)

Had the scene made it to the screening copy, a more powerful disclosure of the father's assaults could have been presented. In increments, we see Mila avoiding his touch, to conversing with her mother about permitting this

domestic abuse, to seeing the ordeal through Mila's standpoint. In this scene, Pallasmaa's (2001b) notion fits, how "a door is simultaneously a sign to halt and an invitation to enter [...] The door silences, but it is simultaneously a sign of the concealed voices both outside and indoors." (131) The act of going through the threshold is two-fold: closing off a memory and creating a new one. For the Carandang household, having no locks on their doors is a disadvantage they deal with regularly and it is Dadong who benefits from this set-up. Dadong disregards the door's function to separate himself and his daughter, as the door acts as a divider between the adjacent rooms of the house to Mila's bedroom, which becomes a space for his frequent assaults. The non-existent locks on the doors match Dadong's involvement in both personal and shared businesses within the domestic space. However, some features present the disparity of the occupants' mindset, such as the altar and photos of Christ. The father nonchalantly passes by these items each time in their living room while Adelina and Mila faithfully depend on these to sustain what is left of their sanity.

Following the assault, Mila cries in front of the altar before feigning sickness to be taken to the hospital. Determined to get away, Mila slips past her father and calls Noel, asking him to pick her up. Finding out that Mila is missing, he gets on his jeepney and drives off. He returns home and roars at Onyang to open the gate. Dadong runs to their bedroom where he retrieves his pistol. Mila and Noel escape to the town of Los Baños. Dadong then scares off the Manalansan's helper when he brandishes a pistol, screaming for Noel and Mila. Upset by their departure, Dadong is reduced to tears. As Mila and Noel plan their life in the sleepy town, Peping advises them to make amends with Dadong, and they concede. Bachelard (1994) spoke of memories being sorted out in one's mind through dreams. In another dream sequence, Mila and Noel are in their wedding attire. Noel closes the front door on Mila, who approaches an ambulance and finds Adelina strapped to a stretcher inside. Noel closes the garage door and they get on the jeepney now surrounded by fire. The lethargic movements in the dream sequence indicate the pace of their lives and the ominous tone is heightened by the fire. Mila's nightmare is a painting of recent events, where even as they try to get away



from Dadong, his presence remains searing on their trail. Noel wakes up Mila and they plan on returning to the house. As they pray, the altar gives off a faint light and the image of Christ dissolves into Dadong's face. The predator sits in front of the window, the shadow of metal bars clear on his stoic face, his eyes possessed. These cuts are contrasting images of carrying faith and losing sanity, holding onto the guidance of the eternal father figure and the irony of the patriarch as a constant threat.



Figure 3. Juxtaposing the image of the father's face and Christ (Source: Bancom)

Windows serve as the eyes of the house and these “may be benevolent or inviting, or cruel or threatening” (Pallasmaa 71). The activities behind these windows supply the changing characteristic of windows and from the outside; others may deduce what the person is doing inside once the outside world cannot enter. In previous scenes, Dadong's surveillance through the windows shows how the fixture is filled with malevolence affecting the other occupants. While the father's eyes dominate the film's vision, we are also looking at the father preying on his subjects. For Sobchack (1992), “neither the camera nor the projector mediates between the perceiving act and its intentional object” (204). Reality is experienced by the viewer and the filmic world. The actualities in the celluloid environment are delivered in first-person viewpoints, most of which are inclined to identify with a character in

witnessing events. Sets of eyes merge and viewers directly experience a character's consciousness. In *Kisapmata*, the audience is able to switch between the standpoint of the predator and his prey. Moreover, the audience anchors on the emotions delivered by the characters.

The couple follows through in their plan of returning to the city, where they stay at the Noel's. Later that night, a tight shot shows Dadong bidding his time. At the Manalansan's house, the telephone rings and Noel answers. It is Dadong calling for Mila, who uses Adelina's sickness once more to bid for their daughter to come home. The couple then returns to the Caradang residence, falling into the father's trap. Save for the light in Mila's bedroom, the rest of the house is veiled in darkness. Adelina pleads for them to stay and stresses that their father has gone mad. Dadong enters the room and begs for his daughter to stay. With fear surrounding the meeting, he reinforces their incestuous relations and declares that he has the right to Mila's child. However, Mila remains defiant and Dadong leaves, retreating into the shadows.

Adelina continues to delay their departure. As they were about to depart, Dadong returns with a pistol. The couple retreats into a corner of the bedroom. This sequence displays the core of the film—the predator finally closing in on his victims. His preys stand mute at his arrival and their horror-struck expressions confirm that they are aware of their fates. He draws the weapon and shoots Adelina twice in the chest then turns the barrel on Noel. A horrified Mila drops the cross from her hands as Noel falls on top of her. Dadong shoots his daughter point-blank before turning it on himself. The room falls silent and the camera looks around the carnage, showing Dadong's corpse sprawled on the floor while a lifeless Adelina's is slumped on the bed, and the young couple lie stiff in a corner—silence ringing throughout the house.

## Transgressions

In *Kisapmata*, the house is inhabited by anxiety-ridden characters illustrated as ordinary, middle-class citizens living in a suburban area who all meet their death at the patriarch's hands. The apparent normalcy in their lives is only

a projection because the house is occupied by a character that is adept in portraying a strict but good-natured father. Centering on the one-and-a-half story house in the film, how is it rendered as a prison-like space?

When Mila Carandang decides to marry Noel Manalansan despite Dadong's disapproval, the secrets contained within the house start unraveling. For Mila, her primary objective is to break free from Dadong's chains. The image projected by their household is misleading with the tame decorations and the docile nature. Some fixtures of the house stand as body parallels. In the film, the windows serve as the eyes for Dadong who constantly surveys his visitors, while the doors are the arms which let him tramp on other people's privacy. The lack of doorknobs inside illustrates the occupants' helplessness against Dadong's actions. While the ideal image of home connotes positive meanings, it can also evoke memories of abuse, fear, and isolation.

From the archetypal image of a domestic space as a symbol of security, the home becomes a representation of threat. What is more unsettling is that danger can come from inside the house. The Carandang house is configured for the father to watch his family without any strain. The one-and-a-half story house adopts the prison's layout (a panopticon), with the family members as the prisoners who cannot easily see their observers. Power is demonstrated as one enforces the disciplinary act, while the other has no choice but to submit to being observed. In a family-oriented country, taboos such as common-law unions and incest are rallied against. Both are committed by the Carandang. With the shifting times, some take a more casual approach in social norms while others have unashamed indifference. As rendered in de Leon's film, the Carandang's one-and-a-half story house is not a sanctuary but a penitentiary. The affairs of the household are strictly arranged by the father, but like a house of cards, the removal of a key element led to the collapse of the family. Rather than losing his beloved Mila, Dadong chose demise for all of them. Masked by an ill-omened atmosphere, they all meet their macabre ending inside their home: the briny scent of death on the blood-splattered walls and the one-and-a-half story house standing as a mute witness.

### Postscript: The Suburban Home

Mike de Leon came across Nick Joaquín's article in November 1980, and was inspired to do a film with the working title *Blood Secrets* which focused on incest. Screenwriters Raquel Villavicencio and Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. researched on cases of incest and wrote a storyline featuring Charo Santos as the mother and Snooky Serna as her daughter. As the project continued, Villavicencio suggested the title "Sa Isang Kisapmata" which eventually became "Kisapmata." Villavicencio shares that de Leon did not intend to do an adaptation. However, following several discussions, the three of them came to a decision in July 1981 to use "The House on Zapote Street" as the basis for Kisapmata (Lee 38). Perhaps even in its conception, it was a case of art imitating life (or life mirroring art) as certain similarities between the printed and cinematic narrative as well as the production became evident.



Figure 4. (Left) The facade of the filmic Carandang house where (right) a newly-constructed apartment complex now stands.

The setting of the Carandang house in the film is located in Quezon City, which formerly stood on the corner of Calamba and Cordillera streets on D. Tuazon, occupied by middle-class homes and commercial establishments. Similar to the actual home of the Cabadings, the house was oriented in the

prevailing domestic architectural style—a 1950s split-level suburban house. UP College of Fine Arts professor Cesar Hernando who worked as a production designer for *Kisapmata*, recounts that the real house of the Cabading family in Zapote Street in Makati City possessed an uncanny resemblance to the one in Quezon City:

[sic] When Nick Joaquin saw *Kisapmata*, he liked it very much and told Mike de Leon that the daughter and son-in-law was surprised to see the father sleeping under the daughter's bed. The other trivia that Nick told Mike that was not in his book was that the father shot himself in her daughter's bed. That would have been more apt and symbolical! (Personal Correspondence, 2015)

Hernando adds that the house they shot in was bare and the production design team had to fill it with furniture—from the sets of chairs, to the curtains and picture frames even installing the metaphoric barbed wires on the gate. These metal hedges intend to protect the household from intruders. But instead of keeping out trespassers, it became an obstacle for its inhabitants, and explicitly states their incarceration. Another interesting item inside the house is the taxidermied deer hanging in the living room which indicates the father's general haughty behavior towards people. On this note, the material is a trophy which also reminds them that he is the hunter, while the visitors and his family members are the prey. At present, the one-and-a-half story house in Quezon City has been replaced by an expansive Zen-inspired apartment complex. Interestingly, the apartment sets itself apart from the houses that are still in their original 1950s design, detached from the quaint neighborhood store on the street corner and its neighbors comprising two neutral-colored and unassuming bungalows.

As an indicator, the one-and-a-half story house stands around the eastern perimeter of the Quezon City campus of St. Theresa's College, an exclusive school for girls. More than the structural similarities, there is a significant variation in the house of the Carandang's in the film and the real home of the Cabading family. The large space under their bedrooms was used as a storage area because the Cabadings did not own a car. However, in the film,

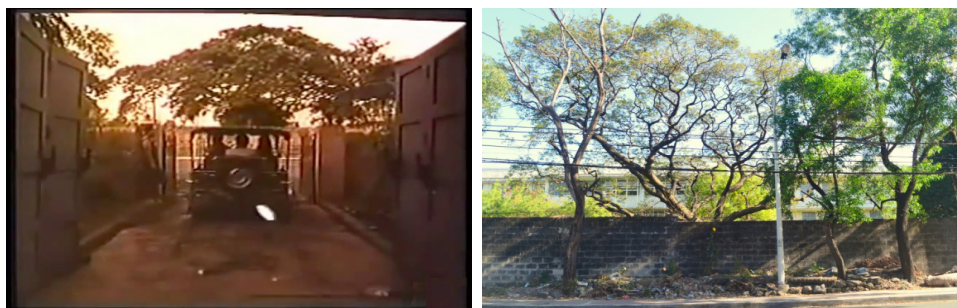


Figure 5. (Left) The acacia tree then and (right) now, a 35-year difference.

this space is presented as the Carandang's garage, where the vehicle's role is emphasized to ensure the father's surveillance on his daughter. Another marker in the landscape can be seen, as the young couple and Dadong head out in their owner-type jeepney, looking directly at the majestic acacia tree in the background, which is still standing inside St. Theresa's College. A few afternoon walks in this area and I observed how this suburban nook remains mellow despite its proximity to the hectic main street of P. Tuazon.

The area surprises the visitor with the sudden change in the ambiance within the vicinity, as its cadence becomes more subdued. If one stands on the sidewalk, the sounds of a revving vehicle and the rustling of treetops can be heard occasionally. Following the production for *Kisapmata*, the house was reportedly used in other film and television productions of the time, as long-time residents share how they used to see numerous set lights, private vehicles, and company trucks in the area. But many of them seem to be unaware, or perhaps have forgotten, that a landmark film was shot more than 30 years ago, which highlighted the experiences of a family caught in the machinations of a predatory father and the seemingly guiltless one-and-a-half story house that saw more horror than warmth.

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