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INTERSTICES 23

## Measured love: Regulating infantile bodies, the Plunket Society and modern architecture

The Plunket Society in New Zealand has been involved in regulating infantile bodies since its foundation in 1907. The primary objective of the Society was, however, directed towards a detached and genderless body: “To uphold the Sacredness of the Body and the Duty to Health.”<sup>1</sup> The Plunket Society has always had its critics and has had a long, complicated history since its inception in the early 1900s and the emergence of child psychology in the 1950s, which promoted a more permissive and child-centred child-rearing.<sup>2</sup> A number of studies from the Otago University School of Medicine completed during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s also began to question the worth of the Plunket Society to mothers.<sup>3</sup>

This paper considers the Society’s published imagery from the 1940s, reading this against modernist construction in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1960s, but specifically in light of the new Plunket building on 96 Symonds Street in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland (1968). Drawing connections between paediatric practices and modernist architectural principles in early twentieth-century Aotearoa New Zealand, the paper draws parallels between a modernist advocacy of sanitising purity and what I am terming ‘measured love,’ a form of mediated care centred on Plunket’s founding paediatric practices. The broader aim is to render a structural portrait of maternal love relative to modernist architecture. To this end, the paper will follow Plunket’s strategies to ensure a connection and disconnection between mother and baby listing architecture not only through notions of foundation and inception but also the control of time and space. The regulation of the babies’ bodies also shares the rhetoric of the advocates of architectural modernity—both making similar calls on fresh air and sunlight.<sup>4</sup> Erik Olssen points out that if we consider the history of New Zealand in terms of modernisation, then Plunket was also one of the important actors.<sup>5</sup>

The paper looks at the representation of modern architecture and the Plunket Society in the 1940s to discern the connections and disconnects between these seemingly separate worlds of high art and popular culture. Images from publications from both fields are examined through the notion of control and discipline and the regulation of time and space. At stake is a body that can be understood as intimately combining mother and child, producing, as it were, a reproductive and produced body whose corporeality is the living manifestation of vulnerability as lived uncertainty. Certainly, for many women, the emphasis was on survival.