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Hilary Sample, Studio Statement

Stresses in Housing and Health

New York City has been at the forefront of developing new types of housing and strategies to improve and maintain public health from colonial times to the present. In the previous administration, as part of Mayor Bloomberg's "New Housing Marketplace Plan" and adAPT NYC competition, New York City sought proposals for "micro-unit" housing. These affordable units will measure just 275 – 300 square feet, approximately the size of two parking spaces. At the same time across the country, there exists a trend toward increasing dimensions of living space, as well as increasingly prevalent levels of obesity. There is at the same time a debate over whether the city creates healthy individuals or whether the very nature of urban life attracts more active and healthy individuals. Taking these observations as its starting point, the studio seeks to explore the relationships between health and housing, through the investigation of stress, in all its meanings but especially as a physiological manifestation.

Structures: Beauty of Failure

G. Robert LeRicolais (1894-1977) examined the beauty of failures.ⁱ He considered the stress of the elements upon built form, including gravity, wind loads, shear, lateral forces, and strain. Extending his research, we can ask: what types of structure can respond to such stresses? Will a particular type of stress produce a formal response, and is this stress examined from the inside out or the outside in? We will explore structural concepts through model making, and challenge any concept of structural stress to address at the same time a particular position on the domestic.

Social Replaces Urban

Stress is also found across a wide range of urban settings, where new modes of communication and data exchange are constantly reshaping the idea of social relationships. If the social is replacing the urban for a certain group of people, what happens to the urban life of those whose daily interactions are not mediated through technology? Harlem, East Harlem, and the Bronx, the larger site of the studio, is arguably one of the most challenging places within the city for development due to the evolving culture, and rapid development, gentrification, and latent health stresses. And the specific site provokes questions about the very nature of socialization and urbanization within an intervention at the edge.ⁱⁱ

Urban

Similarly, urban infrastructures are also stressed from roads, bridges, highways, sewers, railroads, waterways, and maintenance systems. As the city builds and proposes new infrastructures, from Greenways to the 2nd Avenue subway line, how do these new infrastructures alleviate stresses? Alison Smithson (1928-93) wrote about the effects of stress upon public housing in her *Byelaws of Mental Health* and responded through the design of a "stress free zone" in the Robin Hood Gardens project by Alison and Peter Smithson (1923-2003). A simple hand sketch illustrates the influence of ideas of health upon both the architecture and larger urban plan of the project.ⁱⁱⁱ

Acts, Forms, and Ends

Stress offers a critical lens for further understanding housing, architecture, urbanism, site, structures, economics, infrastructures, and so on. The examples of LeRicolais and The Smithsons are but two references for the studio. Each team should collect their own references throughout the term. The studio can be thought of in three parts: Acts, Forms, and Ends. The first is *Acts*, where each student proactively questions architecture's performance through structures and technologies. *Forms* indicate a straightforward demonstration of knowledge and understanding through concepts of forms under different types of stress. Finally, *Ends* requires that these studies produce end results that will be critiqued and evaluated within a collective setting. In the end, architecture should produce new subjectivities for further exploration and questions typology within the city.

ⁱⁱ 1 <http://www.design.upenn.edu/archives/majorcollections/lericolais.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/nyregion/east-harlem-landlords-keep-apartments-sealed-up.html?pagewanted=all>

ⁱⁱⁱ Smithson, A., *Byelaws for Mental Health*, Architectural Design 1960, no. 9, September, 356-357.