

Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
A4003: Core Studio 3, Fall 2015
States of Housing

Hilary Sample, Coordinator Housing Studio

Galia Solomonoff, Studio Critic, galia@solomonoff.com
Alejandro Stein, Teaching Assistant, alejandro@solomonoff.com

Consider a positive:

“A hip hop enthusiast from New York City has always heard that 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx is the birthplace of hip hop. The story goes that on August 11, 1973 DJ Kool Herc, a building resident, was entertaining at his sister’s back to school party, and tried something new on the turntable; he extended a instrumental beat (breaking and scratching) to let people dance longer (break dancing) and began MC’ing (rapping) during the extended break-dancing. This, the contributor believes, marked the birth of hip hop. The music led to an entire cultural movement that’s altered generational thinking – from politics and race to art and language.”

Tufuku Zuberi, PBS

www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/birthplace-of-hip-hop

Conversations about Housing often center on its negative aspects: its scarcity, debt, disrepair, outdated architecture, crime rate, neglect, and malfunction. What would happen if we were to allow Columbia University’s campus to go 50 years without mayor investments in infrastructure, expansions and repairs? What would happen if we did not have an expert team whose task is to track alumni, publicize and fundraise around them? President Jimmy Carter and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor; Elvis Presley and Jay-Z; CEO of Goldman Sachs, Lloyd Blankfein and CEO of Xerox, Ursula Burns; Whoopi Goldberg and Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), among many others, were all residents of Public Housing. It is fair to say that, as an institution, Public Housing has contributed a wealth of ingenuity and inventiveness to our culture.

Our Housing Studio will aim to integrate housing with Art, Culture and Urbanity; overcoming the tower-in-the-park scheme, and proposing new hybrids that amend surrounding landscapes and cultural contexts. For our studio, Art is not a privilege for a few, but a constant common and popular search to transcend our finite selves. The integration of public housing residents into these networks is not seen as a luxury, but rather as a pragmatic alternative. Our holistic view is that proactive investments in housing, culture, sports and education offer better financial returns than reactionary investments in policing, health remediation or jails. Our goal, then, is to link every resident to the Arts, Cultural and Urban networks and provide every residence with sunlight and outdoor space. Aware, as we are, that achieving a pleasant, dense urban arrangement for all units is easier said than done, we will delve into the critical study of precedents in search for the right lessons from the past.

Our studio will follow the three States of Housing assignments, outlined below, beginning with an urban and typological analysis; followed by visiting and examining Affonso Reidy’s Pedregulho Housing Complex in Rio de Janeiro; and concluding in an 8-week design project. The studio is organized through two principal means: research and analysis and architectural project design.

1. The first assignment will focus on site, infrastructure, and typology using a cross section from Manhattan to the Bronx.
2. The second assignment will examine the architecture of housing units, environment, building programs and systems at Affonso Reidy’s Pedregulho Housing Complex (1947-1955) in Rio de Janeiro.
3. The final project will consist of designing high-density, mixed-use housing and public space integrated with Art-Culture-Urban networks.

Each assignment accumulates upon the previous one, starting with the urban scale, zooming into the dwelling unit, and finally integrating the different systems into the larger context of the city. Generally speaking, Housing relies on generic typologies and is based on the general understanding of common routines engrained over time. However, it is precisely through the examination of typologies that the particulars of context, site, temporality and subject emerge. Our studio will explore new and specific possibilities for urban living appropriate to this New York site. With its 7 million inhabitants and 28 million yearly visitors, New York is faced with having to constantly invent and reinvent housing types. Through our ongoing discussion and team projects, we will speculate on the potential for contemporary urban housing, inquire models of repetition and difference, and investigate the effects of seriality, monumentality and its relationship to the changing city fabric. How does the city receive new large buildings? What constraints affect urban form? What can our studio add to the ongoing Housing conversation? How does the engagement with Art and Culture enable better Housing?