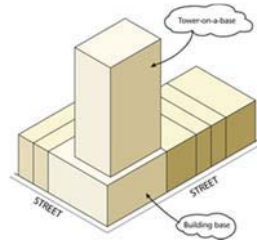


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Typical

Studio Critic: Charles Eldred



Violence: Two proud men on a rooftop show off a construction drawing, c. 1973. Behind them, their Coney Island development from 1964. The neighborhood did not used to look like this. You can tell by the form of the streets—truncated, with perpendicular parking, not the typical New York City grid. This neighborhood has been re-mapped and re-built. Old building types have been taken down, new building types have replaced them (probably not for the first time). Here is evidence of a physical violence to the physiognomy of the City, to its face, its form, to its spaces, its order. And to its subjects: who lives in these slabs? Who used to live here? Who has been displaced, and where did they go? Who got to decide that this was best? What is the relationship between development Speculation, and Architecture? And what is their combined complicity as instruments of violence?

Stillness: In his work *“A Brief History of Housing in New York City, 1960-2007”* New York artist Glenn Ligon develops a series of compact but evocative essays about each of the places he has lived during his life. From 1960-1973, a public housing project in the South Bronx: “My mother claimed the projects were “beautiful” when we moved in. Given the decrepit tenements that surrounded us, I could see why she was grateful for our tiny Spartan apartment with its New York City Housing Authority-chosen paint scheme and blistering but reliable steam heat.” But rising crime and deterioration force Ligon’s mother to relocate the family. From here, at age 13, Ligon’s *History* moves through low-rise public housing in the North Bronx, a share of a floor of a brownstone in pre-gentrification Fort Greene, Brooklyn, an illegal co-op sublet on Riverside Drive near Columbia, a wood-frame house near Atlantic Yards, doomed by eminent domain, a converted factory loft in Long Island City, and so on. Always: the Neighborhood, and its Types. And always: movement, displacement. Away from deterioration, crime, violence, eviction, discrimination. Toward space (for safety, for work, for rest, for community, for anonymity). Ligon’s text conveys a simultaneous sense of a human flow through the matrix of urban Housing, and of the stillness of dwelling in its pauses.

Negotiation: 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the New York City Zoning Resolution. The 1916 law is famous for placing limits upon bulk in response to egregious overbuilding. But it also was written around the existing City, around the building types and street spaces that already existed. In 1961, responding to new images of architectural modernism, a revised resolution embraced a tower-in-the-park planning that was almost immediately regretted. By the 1970s, Architecture was moving back toward a set of more traditional urban (or at least European-urban) animating principles and techniques (figure grounds, Rowe, etc.). But in today’s New York, this type of retro-development cannot fully negotiate economic needs (or: demands). Zoning’s answer: Tower-on-a-base. The ultimate hybrid type, a blunt negotiation of traditional streetwall neighborhood urbanism at the base with massive revenue-generating bulk and height in the view-machine tower above. But it is also a mono-type, at giant scale, seemingly the City’s answer to all sites from Manhattan to Greenpoint to Mott Haven. Tower-on-a-base development is driven by, and responds to, huge aggregations of property and capital. A recent New York Times article notes that 40 percent of buildings in Manhattan could no longer be built today. Why has the City diminished its own catalogue of typological richness, turned away from the unique urban knowledge embedded in the types that have established its Value?

Typical: The recurring thread is Type, and the idea of the Typical, as both objects (buildings), and subjects (humans). Type links the violence of Speculation to the possibility of creating (or destroying) neighborhoods (in Glen Ligon’s South Bronx, Fort Greene, Washington Heights, Tribeca, and Long Island City, or in Fred Trump’s Coney Island). Type transmits the idea of Neighborhood as both a social community and a physical module of the City, and is its vessel for inhabitation-- of people, their bodies, their memories and lives lived (in towers, prewars, brownstones, tenements, converted lofts, wood-frame houses). Type underpins Zoning, the regulation of the richness of a City’s types that can no longer be constructed under its own laws, of the strange hybrid non-type/mono-types that come into being—unquestioned by Architecture—as the negotiation between the imperatives of Regulation and of Speculation. And Type embodies the latent possibility of inventing new techniques to negotiate these demands, or circumvent them, to construct new neighborhoods that address new needs, to link all scales of domesticity, and to engage the tensions between reproducible Housing solutions and the hyper-specificity of unique sites.

The studio will engage the persistence (and possible revitalization) of type from the Bronx to Mexico City and back, and speculate on how typological diversity, hybridization, and transformation might intersect with subjectivity and value in the design of Housing.