

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

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Housing, Art and Culture



Interior, Moshe Safdie, HabiTad, Montreal, Canada, 1967

Paradox:

“Modern civilization spells the paradox: The more (a society) produces, the less (some) have, the more riches (some) create, the poorer (some) are.”

Alexander Berkman, “Observations and Comments”, Mother Earth, February 1914

There was a time, back in 1914, when Housing was not subsidized, assisted or provided by Government agencies. Only private for profit entities built Housing then. In the 1910's and 1920's, people routinely

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perished in the cold of winter or heat of summer in New York streets. Overtime, this condition came to be considered untenable and institutions to provide and assist with the constructions of subsidized Housing were created.

Conversations about subsidize and affordable Housing often center on negative aspects: its difficulties, scarcity, debt, disrepair, outdated architecture, crime rate, neglect, and malfunction. What would happen if we were to allow our Columbia University's campus to go 50 years without investments, upgrades, expansions or repairs? What would happen if we did not have an expert team whose task is to lobby, publicize and fundraise for the University?

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. We will aim for high density and low rise, environmentally sound and sustainable development, and access to natural light, air and outdoor spaces.

Additionally, 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 Housing residents into the networks of artistic expression will not be seeing as a luxury for our studio, but rather as an integral proposition.

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 incarceration. In terms of investment our studio will test the idea that a fraction of proactive investment is worth many folds in later reactive responses.

Our goal is to link every resident to the Arts, Cultural, Urban, and Sports 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 a 10-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 Moshe Safdie Habitat, Montreal, Canada, 1967
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.

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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.

- What are the constraints that affect urban form?
- What can our studio add to the ongoing Housing conversation?
- How does the engagement with Art and Culture enable better Housing?
- What is better Housing?



Exterior, Moshe Safdie, Habitat, Montreal, Canada, 1967