

Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation
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House, City, Body

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*I am going to carry my bed into New York City tonight
complete with dangling sheets and ripped blankets;
I am going to push it across three dark highways
or coast along under 600,000 faint stars.
I want to have it with me so I don't have to beg
for too much shelter from my weak and exhausted friends.
I want to be as close as possible to my pillow
in case a dream or a fantasy should pass by.
I want to fall asleep on my own fire escape
and wake up dazed and hungry
to the sound of garbage grinding in the street below
and the smell of coffee cooking in the window above.*

Gerald Stern, 96 Vandam, 1998

Gerald Stern expresses a direct and unmediated connection between the individual and New York City. The house remains at the foreground, as if not to interfere with the interaction between the body and the city. In exploring the relation between house, city, and body, the studio calls to challenge conventions of housing design by approaching it simultaneously from two different scales and points of view: from the city inward and from the body outward, when architecture is that threshold space caught in between.

Conventional approaches to the 'problem of housing' followed twentieth century conceptions of the city as separated into function-based zones. Whole blocks unified into districts and designated solely for residential use encouraged housing to be treated as an independent project in the 'functional' or 'divided' city. Housing was laid out by its own internal rationale while too often disregarding the urban context.

We no longer understand the city in such a way. Contemporary urban life has diffused the boundaries between programs and activities: between the spaces of living, work and leisure and has further expanded the overlaps between public and private life. Not only are our live-work habits changing but also our general expectations of urban life, sense of community, sharing and ownership. How will these changing notions reflect in the way we approach housing? How will these 'diffused boundaries' affect the way we subdivide and designate space?

Closely examining the site in its broader urban context will uncover potential programs that could be combined and integrated with and within the housing program. How will the introduction of programs such as education, cultural, commercial and recreational alter the way we define the housing unit? How will these interactions benefit both programs, housing and other?

In parallel to the urban component, the studio will revisit the functional 'body units,' the conventions of measure and graphic standards that have been used throughout the twentieth century as the basis for modernism's housing project. These are, as Neufert's architect source book illustrates, technologically and culturally dated and in dire need of rethinking. The relationships between the body, space and various domestic tasks will be investigated and operated on through the section, which in turn will act as the primary architectural tool of the studio in designing new spaces for urban living.