

Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
A4003: Core Studio 3, Fall 2014
The Housing Studio: Different States of Housing

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Stresses in Housing and Health

New York City has historically been at the forefront of new types of housing and new strategies for maintaining public health. Contemporary NYC is no different although the types of housing and health that exist today are radically different than they were at the beginning of the city's modern history. As part of the previous administration, Mayor Bloomberg's "New Housing Marketplace Plan," and the current city competition, adAPT NYC, New York City is sought proposals for housing composed of "micro-units." These new models for an affordable unit measure just 275 – 300 square feet, or approximately the size of two parking spaces. This introduces a paradox to the national obesity epidemic that has resulted in an increase in overall human proportion and dimensions. There is a debate over whether the city supports healthy individuals or whether the very nature of urban life attracts more active and healthy individuals. While this is one debate to consider, what this studio seeks to explore more deeply are the relationships between health and housing analyzed through the topic of stress. Stress is above all a physiological manifestation. For the purpose of the studio, the topic should be explored through every possible meaning, no definition is off limits.

Structures: Beauty of Failure

G. Robert LeRicolais (1894-1977) examined the beauty of failures. The stress of the elements upon a built form include gravity, physics, wind loads, shear, lateral forces, and the strain placed on its structure. What type of structure can be made in response to such stresses? Imagining a stress diagram, will a particular type of stress produce a formal response? Is this stress examined from the inside out? Or is it from the outside in? Structural concepts shall be explored primarily through model making. The structural stress should promote a fundamental concept for the project that equally reflects a particular position on the domestic.

Social Replaces Urban

Stress is also found across wide range of urban settings, and here the very idea of social relationships has become reconfigured based on new modes of communication and data exchange. If the social is replacing the urban and by extension, brings to question what happens to the urban life of those who are not privy to a mediated daily life. Harlem, East Harlem, and the Bronx, the larger site of the studio, as a whole, 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.³

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.⁴

Acts, Forms, and Ends

Stress offers a critical lens for further understanding housing, architecture, urbanism, site, 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.

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

2 <http://blog.thomsonreuters.com/index.php/tag/mark-wigley/>

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

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