

Columbia University  
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## **Speculations on Housing**

Laura Kurgan, Studio Critic  
Juan Francisco Saldarriaga, Research Associate

### **Quantify**

From the “self-quantify” movement to “governing with data,” the revelations about wholesale spying by the NSA to the customization of advertising content by Facebook, we seem to live in a world where collecting, recording, counting and processing data has become ubiquitous. But how much do we really understand about what is being recorded and how it is being quantified? And how about what does not show up in the data at all? Measuring the city has a very long and controversial history -- it has led to profound changes in the way we see, live in, demolish, restore, and organize urban environments. If for a long time data was effectively the private property of bureaucrats and policy makers, today the explosion of data sources and the advent of new technologies for working with it has transformed operational urban space. A reexamination of this history and this present, and the tools and processes that make data essential to urban form and experience, seems crucial. The studio will base its investigation on collecting, mapping, analyzing, and quantifying different sets of urban data, allowing us to construct a complex image of our site and of the issues surrounding urban housing, so that we can attend to the less obvious but no less important factors that bear on the site and ultimately speculate critically and imaginatively on its future.

### **Probe**

Data is often used to analyze urban conditions and to extrapolate from them, for purposes of prediction or comparison. But it is rarely used to ask questions or as an investigative and navigational tool. Even though just asking for data can be a form of doubt or interrogation, a rigorous process that uses data as its primary tool has remained primarily the domain of scientists and field experts. In this studio we will challenge this status quo. We will use the data that we have collected and analyzed in order to uncover and visualize specific housing and urban problems, interrogate common assumptions, and contest current trends in housing and urban development.

### **Drive**

Both in terms of the larger, more speculative, moves, and in the specific details and physical configurations of our work, data will be a rhetorical, investigative, and driving element for the studio. It will provide conceptual and empirical support for the studio's questions and proposals -- it will help us identify new phenomena and set new agendas, let us tell different (and different kinds of) stories about housing and the city, and allow us to think openly and radically about the city's future. In addition, data will also be a propelling force in the formal and physical decision-making processes, guiding the design intentions and their actual physical/formal manifestations.

### **Speculate**

Data, however, is not enough to drive the design process. Today it is a commonplace that the most recent financial crisis was brought on by a vicious combination of housing and speculation. However true it is, that claim depends on a narrow definition of speculation, which can also be understood as a constructive process that helps us imagine the future. It is these multivalent definitions of both data and speculation that will fuel our interpretations of the past, current, and future relationships between housing, the city and the world. Without leaving the very practical considerations of the pressures and demands of a specific site and economic-political-social-environmental moment, our studio will use the tools and methods relevant to architectural imagination -- drawings, models, images, predictive data, formal urban models, and social housing models -- to speculate and imagine new futures for housing in New York City.