
COLUMBIA PROJECT ON HOUSING

Research Lab
Michael Bell, *director*

At its inception 30 years ago, what is known as the Housing Studio at Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, was not a separate component of the curriculum. Today the Housing Studio is a unique course within the GSAPP program and a threshold studio—the culmination of the core design studios within the Master of Architecture program. Housing and metropolitan life are key and long running projects at Columbia—both in the studio and in the wider work of the GSAPP faculty. While students reinvent the Housing Studio's identity with their design work, they have also been energetic in engaging the longer histories of the GSAPP involvement with housing and housing's deep political history in New York City.

To further this work the school has launched The Columbia Project on Housing (CPH). Operating as a dedicated design and research unit focus-

ing on urban housing, the Columbia Project on Housing coordinates the wide range of research and design that is done by GSAPP faculty in housing and applies this work to case studies with professional and state based clients. The CPH pilot project links the CPH and the Bridgeport Connecticut Housing Authority (BHA). The BHA recently acquired a set of scattered sites on the perimeter of downtown Bridgeport and is working with the CPH to investigate architectural design and urban planning for this new scattered site development for public housing. The collaboration is exploring the design of duplex and triplex housing models that will replace older larger centrally planned public housing developments from the 1940's and 50's.



PILOT PROJECT: THE NEW PUBLIC HOUSE

Partner Organization: The Bridgeport Housing Authority

The BHA acquired the scattered sites in a land swap with the city of Bridgeport—the BHA gave control of a larger single urban site to the city in return for the residential scales properties. In an era of diminished federal financial support for Housing Authorities nationwide, the BHA, like the New York City Housing Authority, is seeking entrepreneurial ways to leverage their often-formidable property holdings. Public Housing Authorities nationwide hold large-scale sites that are increasingly understood to be underdeveloped and newly desirable development sites by

cities—in terms of density these sites have historically been characterized by large open spaces that are now seen as developable as markets adjust to housing demands. While simultaneously seeking to develop new scattered site housing stitched into the wider urban fabric Housing Authorities are also seeing the economic value of the older properties rise allowing land swaps that often can assist both the city and the Housing Authority.

The Columbia Project on Housing has a pre-history in this type of work: in 2001 and 2002 GSAPP faculty provided urban planning and architectural design for the New York Department of Housing Preservation and Development for a 100 acre parcel of city-owned ocean-front land deemed newly attractive to commercial development. Sited on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, New York, the GSAPP project provided research, urban planning and design that aided the city and private development's projected re-development of the property. Surrounded on three sides by various forms of public housing the site was seen as a prototype and forerunner for an era when city initiatives in redevelopment were coupled with historically difficult sites adjacent to or even within public housing sites. Shown here, the GSAPP project sought to provide prototypes for new housing models of varying densities, including a full spectrum of income sectors. The new housing was to be produced within market systems—that is, built within the market/developer realm—while integrating fully into the more than 13,000 units of public housing on adjacent sites.

The Bridgeport Housing Authority is seeking Columbia's assistance in designing its future housing stock; as a hybrid of federally subsidized housing being built in the context of market rate and existing housing stock there are opportunities and pit-falls. Of particular concern is the problem of scale—the pricing and financial aspects of smaller development weigh against and diminish the cost saving economics of larger scale development. Still, it is the desirability of scattered sites and mixed income development that reflect a federal shift away from centrally planned/large scale and homogeneous public housing development of the past.

The GSAPP Housing Studio and The Columbia Project on Housing are committed to renewing what has often seemed to be an extended collective memory—a vague and even somewhat inflated memory of what the current studio faculty, and students often assume had been a directly activist original housing agenda at Columbia. If the current work has become overtly political in its structure today, it has not taken on the appearance or means of direct





A QUEENS: ROCKAWAY PENINSULA, ARVERNE BY THE SEA

Proposal: 2200 units of housing on 108 acres of city-owned property
 Architecture: Michael Bell Architecture, Marble Fairbanks Architects, Mark Rakatansky Studio

Urban Planning: Michael Bell Architecture

B QUEENS: ARVERNE BY THE SEA

A prototypical duplex housing block provides 12 two-storey dwelling units. Prototype provides a hybridized pre-fabricated structural truss and thermal envelope.

Michael Bell Architecture

C THE COLUMBIA HOUSING STUDIO AND NEW YORK CITY

Seven Studio Sites: 2000 to 2006.

D PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDY

An increasing focus on performance and a resistance to building form evolve in students work. Based in an analysis of performance art but also time elapsed photography a team of designers perform and are performed by a drawing. Their actions are anticipated by the geometry and character of drawings. An incomplete work, it was hoped to become a model for housing residents to act and project their ultimate home.

Mehmet Bozatli, Mateusz Tarczynski
Bell Studio, 2006

E PUBLIC HOUSING AS SINGLE FAMILY HOUSES AT BRIDGEPORT HOUSING AUTHORITY

The CPH will propose replacement housing for these houses and sites.

activism or even overt reform. The Project on Housing and Studio address a nexus of now decade old and also very recent housing legislation—often in the original texts from Congress or federal agencies. The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998, for example, has been read for both a literal understanding of intent, but also for language that has powerful resonance within the architect's spatial imagination: for example, in low income and poverty housing new federal incentives enacted in the under the QHWRA have supported leasing procedures that abet the decentralization of public housing. Similarly they allow new legal tools to de-concentrate homogeneous sectors of poverty in federal housing projects. All of these concepts, and initiatives have been key to the past seven years of the Housing Studio's direction, and have been examined in the context of advanced mapping techniques, visualization tools—and ultimately within the spatial imagination of the architect.

The QHWRA can be argued to constitute the most significant change to United States federal poverty housing since the New Deal and the first rise of public housing. While the act is not well known the architectural results of it are extremely visible in the form of countless neo-traditionalist housing developments that have replaced former public housing across the United States. The studio and the Project on Housing addresses the parallel changes that have occurred in housing policy and housing de-

sign—that is the neo-privatization of public housing in the United States (and worldwide), and the coincident neo-traditionalist architecture and planning that has embodied the QHWRA's since 1996. In this case, policy work and design work have often appeared to be equivocal—New Urbanism has seemed to be the architecture of QHWRA. The Project on Housing has been set up to reveal the lack of inevitability in this equation and to foster the innovation in work at Columbia and to help give it traction in the real world.

RESEARCH QUADRANTS:

Quadrant I: The Rise of a New or First Public House

Is it possible that public housing has never existed in the United States? And that it could be invented for the first time in our generation? What would it be? Where would it be? Who would it be for? How would you conceptualize and design it in relation to standardization? Location? . . .

Is it possible that public housing never materialized, appeared or even took hold, despite what we could commonly say is a broad public perception that it not only existed, but that it systemically failed on numerous levels, caused countless social maladies, and that it can now be universally understood as ready for a wholesale renovation and partial destruction?

The appearance of public housing is, of course, far more than a fiction, but also less than a fact—less than verifiable. As it stands today, what we commonly call public housing—the CIAM inspired housing developments—centrally planned and executed by federal housing agencies in the United States

The Columbia Project on Housing formalizes and stands on the work done during this past seven years in the GSAPP Housing Studio: shown is a sample of work done during this time. It offers an overview of Columbia's deep focus on housing.

F MANHATTAN: FAR WEST SIDE

The Far West Side is a recently titled sector of Manhattan extending from West 34th Street to West 59th Street and from 10th Avenue to the Hudson River. The area is one of many in the city that has been up-zoned; it was projected to receive a influx of new 28 million sq feet of office space and 12,000 new housing units as possibly new subway and commuter rail service. Students were asked to model future scenarios for the entire area and then focus on providing

design for a city block on West 43rd Street. The area was formerly a manufacturing sector and continues to be a major transportation hub—Penn Station, the Lincoln Tunnel, the Port Authority, and shipping depots for Fedex and UPS.

Kartik Desai, Toru Hasegawa
Rothstein Studio, Fall 2004

G MANHATTAN: LINCOLN TUNNEL

A site at the traffic entry to the Lincoln Tunnel epitomized remnants of the city grid that are being newly considered for housing. Economic pressures have made formerly overlooked sites into speculative development—students worked on a site that bridged the tunnel entry and spanned a city block. Transit patterns and the

tunnel vectors were laced into the building plan.

Philip Speranza, Won Jung
Marble Studio, Fall 2000

H MANHATTAN: THE BOWERY

The Bowery is an important site in the city's housing history; at the opening of 20th Century it included a dense array of "flop houses" and SRO's. Students worked with Common Ground Community in renewing the design and programming as well as economic feasibility of a new form of very low-cost short-term housing. GSAPP studies of the Bowery included an examination

of new upper income development such as Nolita Place developed by the Carlyle Group sited immediately adjacent to our site. The site was a more formally constrained infill site.

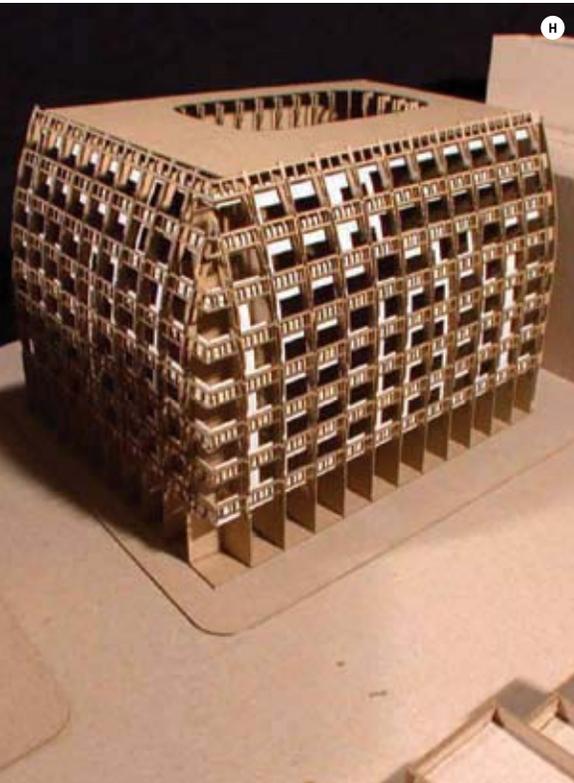
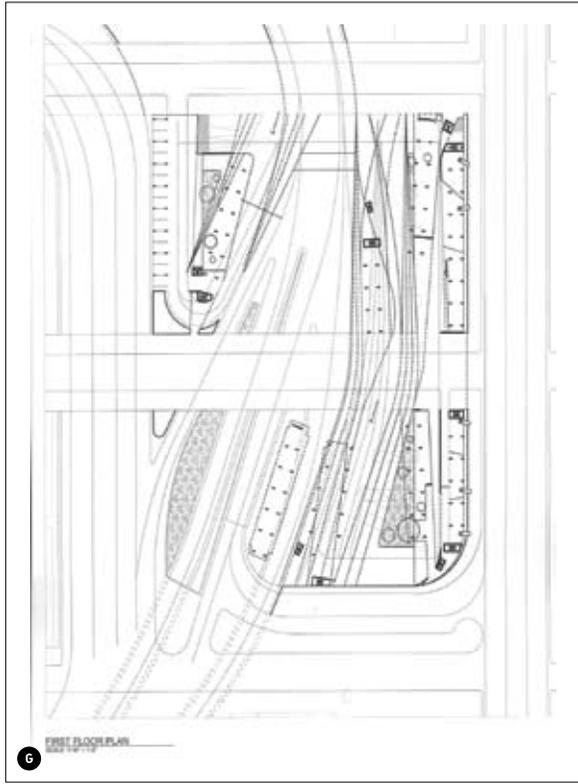
Robert Kraus, Kyle Matthews
Marino Studio, Fall 2002

I MANHATTAN: THE LOWER EAST SIDE

The Lower East Side at Avenue D forms a hard line between some of the New York's largest and contiguous Public Housing Developments and the rest of the city. Students re-designed a full city block with an option of infilling or removing existing buildings. The project placed GSAPP students opposite the centrally planned public

housing sites—and within a fragmented and rapidly re-developing adjacent neighborhood. The site included an existing elementary school.

Kimberly Nun, Andrew Payne
Bell Studio, Fall 2003



since the establishment of the Federal Housing Act of 1937, do indeed exist. They have, however, achieved a mythic status—something brutally real, but also in fact more emotionally complex and spectacular in the public imagination than the facts of their existence reveal. What would public housing be, if we imagine that we are indeed preparing it for the first time?

Despite the facts of its existence, public housing has never been what many imagined and believed public housing should be. Attacked at its outset as quasi-Socialist, public housing in the United States has never found easy acceptance in the United States except as an anti-market zone—a last resort. Instead of serving as transitional housing, it has instead often been fabricated as a generation's long separate society that isolates its constituents—racially and demographically—in precincts embedded within—but separate from—the urban site that hosts these federal works. What can be learned from those that have lived in this realm, withstood the circumstance of intense interiority, sustained in the most public of ways. Is it possible that a far wider group of people—citizens of the top tier first world—is indeed now living in a new form of un-intended public housing? Not one that easily appears as centrally planned, constructed or monolithic in its constituency, but one is in fact produced by distributed but still centrally organized means—and one that is increasingly produced between tremendously public processes, massive market systems, yet intends to house the most private aspects of life.

Quadrant 2: Where was public housing? Where could it be in the future?

Between 1937 and 1968 the United States built public housing in each major American City.

The greater bulk of this housing was built in the North East and Chicago—forming a belt of public housing in the United States that today is being re-evaluated on all fronts.

What shape demonstrates the locations and contexts of a new lower-middle class working poor in the United States? How do we understand their economic conditions in relation to income—to variables such as housing ownership and location, but also to conditions such as assets, commuting time, energy costs per household? What “New Map of Public Housing” might exist if these sites were conceived in contemporary terms: urban public housing locations become sub-urban; federal government financial structures became privately based and demand new performance. The new public house/ing is situated in three zones and is no longer created against the overt images of urban life, overt poverty, or an urban population. It does appear next to current public housing in urban situations, but it also is now situated in the U.S. south, in the southwest and mid-west—it is situated in the wider American edge city and appears in at the conflation of broadly urban technologies and the intimate aspects of private space. It shows up in the form of countless market rate housing units/houses that are subsidized via income tax deductions on mortgage tax; it is the site of a new working poor

Quadrant 3: Post-Ethical City: A new site for Architects and a Difficult new Terrain.

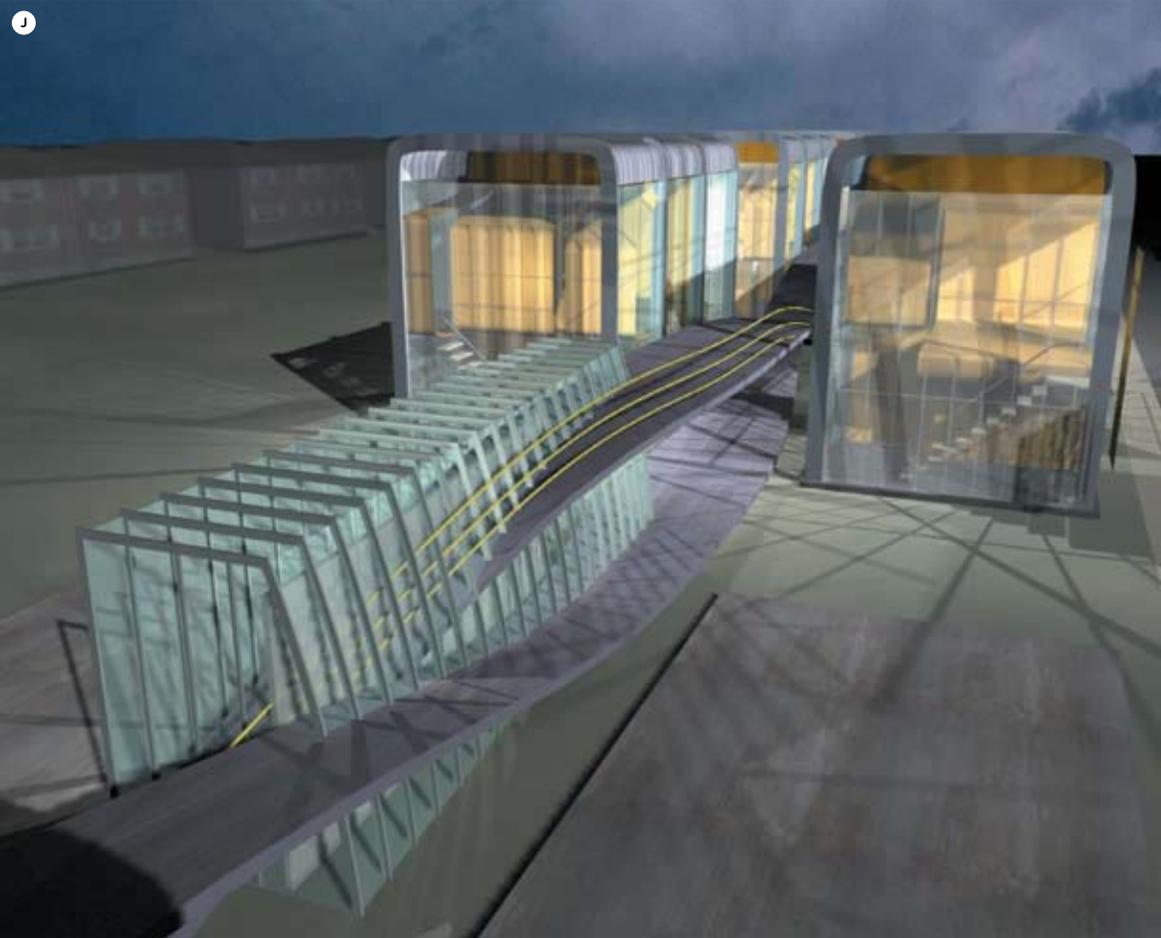
As market practices are continually naturalized, valorized, and un-tethered from 19th and 20th century critiques based in themes of equity or moral and ethical judgment, upon what grounds does the production of the Post-Ethical city base itself? The primary counter-arguments for the free market city of the 20th Century—in the U.S. or Europe—were largely based within socialist or Marxist philosophies; these, of course, constituted a basis from which to challenge those deemed to be morally irresponsible, or unworthy of the gains tendered by market systems. Power derived from disproportionate aggregations of capital or non-responsive or non representative forms of a state was understood as morally inferior—and worthy of critique if not outright reorganization. The weaker constituents might suffer and fail at this task, yet withholding their anger, expressing indignation, remained a tool for showing moral superiority over those who maintained un-due and unjust power and possibly to hinder their progress. As financial systems increasingly naturalize power within un-challenged domains of monetary techniques, is there a role for indignation by which the non-moneyed can assert power against the economically mighty? What does this imply in terms of the long-term demographics of world cities? In his introduction to *Looking for a City in America*, Kurt Forster offered a view of the city where one could expect inequality to be addressed, if not solved: “The physically compact historic city,” wrote Forster, “has long been considered the crucible where the alchemy of new multiracial and multicultural life could take hold; but the reality of inner-city conditions in the United States has rarely been able to sustain these hopes.” How does the Post-Ethical city re-

spond to and sustain the mix of constituents the city often historically idealized, and made central its identity? Is there a new left for architecture, or has the crisis of post 9/11 security infantilized the former social crises of the left, and created a city of new non-security/security?

Parallel Conditions: in an era of globalization has it has long been clear that within each first world condition lies a third world milieu. New precincts of populations are not participating in the new fluidity and tributaries of wealth. Like those nations that have not participated in the first tier of wealth, these inter-nalized zones, though hosted by the first world, do not receive the benefits of the first world prosperity. How do these zones in the United States reveal themselves in the context of non-U.S. sites, and what can the U.S. sites learn from this growing population and its conditions?

Quadrant 4: Prevention rather than Remediation

The current Housing Studio has situated its work in the context of both an actual and imagined former Housing Studio—and in the context of numerous regimes of power that might be more easily addressed in schools of law or public policy, but it has done so not to justify our work artificially or to bring extra-architectural qualities to our design practice. It has been an attempt to develop a theory of space and practice that could address a larger picture of how poverty/wealth issues are changing globally—and to examine both what housing programming would look like if the legal or financial aspects were better addressed. It has also been an attempt to organize the studio both in relation to the school's location in New York City, but also in response to the wider world in which New York City situates itself today. This question seems to be the key that would allow the Housing Studio to re-affirm its relation both to New York City and to its own history, by bringing advocacy back to design, within a tough market driven not only by New York City economy, but one that is now global. We believe the Housing Studio has the potential to stand as more than a New York City studio. Does the history of social equity that strongly affects the studio offer a lever that can become unique in the school? In addressing this question the Housing Studio increasingly finds itself tending towards themes of prevention rather than remediation; towards situating its work within emerging ideas of public health, energy use and natural resources rather than responding to questions of injustice after they occur or of poverty after it has done its damage. To do this the studio is increasingly substantiating its relations to planning, but also to public health and law, and to a wide range of experts who could serve as consultants.



J QUEENS: ARVERNE BY THE SEA

Arverne by the Sea—a 308-acre open stretch of city owned property sited oceanfront on the Rockaway Peninsula in New York City. In 2002 property at Arverne by the Sea was released by the city 34 years after the property was cleared. A public private partnership officially mandated as an upper middle-income development was launched amid three types of subsidized/public housing. GSAPP students provided planning and design for the site concurr-

ent to the city's RFP and sought a new form of housing that could address the history of public housing and a need for new forms of housing development and design. The new development sat on the cleared and now partial dune-scape at the beachfront.

Ian Dunn, Aaron Hockett
Bell Studio, Fall 2001

K QUEENS: THE BLAND HOUSES

The Bland Houses are sited on the edge of a primarily Asian neighborhood and within the wider demographic of Queens—the most racially and ethnically diverse county in the United States. Queens represents a shift in the Housing Studio's recent focus on Manhattan and Brooklyn—and it brought more recent demographic shifts in the New York City population to the forefront of studio work. The studio asked students to add market rate housing as a new version of income

producing housing for NYCHA to its Bland Houses site.

Ji Young Kim, Yea Hwa Kim
Rothstein Studio, Fall 2006

L BROOKLYN: BROWNSVILLE AND PROSPECT PLAZA

Brownsville and Prospect Plaza are located in central Brooklyn. The Prospect Plaza site was the first and only Hope VI project initiated by the New York City Housing Authority. The students entered the project at mid-point: one of four existing public housing towers had been demolished and a new market rate housing tower was proposed. GSAPP students examined the history of public housing and its mid-1990's transformations in policy and design and sought an alternative that could keep public housing at its original density and resist de-

motion and displacement of tenants—while also taking part in an expected resurgence of the neighborhood and what appeared to be an inevitable gentrification.

William Arbizu, Randall Holl
Marble Studio, Fall 2005



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