2012
VIOLENCE ENTERS A GATED COMMUNITY

2010
THE NEW AMERICAN HOME FAILS

2009
BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES MINHA CASA, MINHA VIDA

2000
DWELL MAGAZINE CLAIMS A NEW FRONTIER

1994
FEDERAL HOUSING POLICY MEETS LOCAL RESISTANCE

1986
FEDERAL LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDIT APPROVED

1978
ARCHITECT DECONSTRUCTS THE SUBURBAN HOME

1975
CO-OPERATORS WITHHOLD CARRYING CHARGES FOR NINE MONTHS

1970
OIL MAGNATE’S HOUSTON NEW TOWN TO SHAPE GROWTH THROUGH SCIENCE

1962
CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY OPENS 1,096-UNIT WILLIAM GREEN HOMES

1952
HOUSE & HOME SPLITS FROM ARCHITECTURAL FORUM

1949
LIFE MAGAZINE HOLDS ROUNDTABLE ON HOW TO PRODUCE CHEAPER HOUSING

1944
CALIFORNIA ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE ENVISONS THE POST-WAR HOUSE

1939
FHA DENIES INSURED MORTGAGE FOR EAST LANSING USONIA

1937
ARCHITECT FINDS SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS

1933
PRESIDENT PROMOTES SAVING AS CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

1932
ARCHITECT PRESENTS BROADACRE CITY AS SOLUTION TO THE NATION’S HOUSING PROBLEM

1918
UNITED STATES HOUSING CORPORATION BUILDS HOUSING FOR WARTIME WORKERS

1910
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT SELLS HIS VISION FOR SUBURBANIZING AMERICA
House Housing is an exhibition installed by the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture in the third-floor apartment of Columbia University's Casa Muraro in June 2014, to coincide with the opening of the 14th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice. Assembled by a team of researchers at Columbia and staged as an open house, it represents the beginning of a long-term project that centers on the critical analysis of architecture's engagement with real estate development, particularly in the design of housing. The exhibition responds unsolicited to Biennale curator Rem Koolhaas's theme of “Fundamentals,” which includes what Koolhaas calls the “fundamentals of our buildings, used by any architect, anywhere, anytime.”

House Housing replies with a multimedia sample of economic fundamentals that show modernity's basic facts under construction—by governments, industries, institutions, and cultures—beginning in the early twentieth century. Its nineteen brief, historical episodes, running from 1910 to 2014, locate housing at the center of the current economic regime, with the United States as an influential node in a transnational network. In architecture, economic fundamentals begin from the ground up. The laws of real estate, relating to the acquisition of land, the financing of construction, the cost of building maintenance and services, profit from rent or resale, the value of equity, or the price of credit, inexorably constrain any building component (like a window) or any building type (like a house). They are visible even in the residential work of such singular figures as Frank Lloyd Wright, not least because the Greek oikos, or household, forms the root of the word “economy” itself. But look closely and you will see that what seems fundamental, basic, or natural is, like any other law, a historical artifact subject to change.

House Housing narrates its episodes in a mixture of domestic media that range across the century, from phonograph to television, answering machine to iPad, thereby converting the apartment into a whispering, humming history machine. Though they mainly focus on the continental United States, the discrete episodes are excerpts from transnational processes. As such, they address matters of universal concern, even in non-market situations. Their objects range from houses designed by figures as well-known as Wright, to a seemingly ordinary gated community in Florida. Their untimeliness is twofold. First, these episodes return us to financial matters widely discussed in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 foreclosure crisis but now largely abandoned, by mainstream discourse, in favor of greener pastures. Second, the historical episodes, which are assembled non-chronologically, disclose surprising repetitions—of themes, tendencies, and actions. This reminds us that the economic infrastructures on which architecture rests are the outcome of such repetitions, rather than an a priori, natural ground.

House Housing is about those infrastructures, where “infrastructure” is defined as that which repeats. Every time we turn on the faucet, the water system repeats. Every time a house is bought or sold, the real estate system repeats. But every transaction also reconfigures and rebuilds
that system, which in turn builds houses, which, in turn, cannot be built without architectural techniques that shape them, and stories that establish their value. In this way, the laws of real estate and the laws of architecture are constituted and reconstituted together, as effortlessly as flowing water.

**House Housing** sets out to show how such laws are written, as stories that form dominant cultural imaginaries. The “American Dream,” closely connected to American economic power and to global housing markets, is one such story. Others running silently in the background of the exhibition include the European doctrine that transnational debt be met with national austerity, and the ambiguous slogan “capitalism with Chinese characteristics.” All of these stories and many like them repeat through the channels of the house and of its equally troubled companion, housing. They do so discreetly, in focus groups, home décor, congressional hearings, press commentary, garages, fireside chats, residence permits, zoning laws, and investment portfolios. Each repetition reconstitutes the law of the household—the nomos of “economy”—while also suggesting the possibility that next time, things could be different.


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In architettura i fondamenti economici iniziano dal suolo. Le leggi del mercato immobiliare, relative all’acquisizione di terreni, al finanziamento delle costruzioni, al costo del mantenimento degli edifici e servizi, al profitto da affitto o rivendita, al valore di proprietà ipotecaria, al prezzo del credito, determinano inesorabilmente le forme di qualsivoglia componente edilizio (come, ad esempio, una finestra) o tipo edilizio (come, per esempio, una casa). Tali leggi sono visibili addirittura nei progetti residenziali di figure emblematiche come Frank Lloyd Wright, non ultimo perché la parola greca oikos, “casa”, è alla base stessa della parola “economia.” Guardando più da vicino questo fenomeno ci si rende conto che ciò che ci viene proposto come fondamentale, basilare, o naturale, è, come qualsiasi altra legge, un artefatto storico soggetto a cambiamento.

House Housing narra diciannove brevi episodi che attraversano l’ultimo secolo in un misto di media domestici, dalla fotografia alla televisione, dalla segreteria telefonica all’iPad, convertendo l’appartamento in un sussurro, una mormorante macchina della storia. Sebbene si concentri soprattutto sul territorio continentale degli Stati Uniti, questi episodi incrociano processi globali. Gli oggetti di studio vanno da
On the night of February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old African American high school student, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a Hispanic neighborhood watch coordinator, as Martin walked from a nearby 7-Eleven to his father’s fiancée’s house. That house is in a gated community in Sanford, Florida. The enclave consists of 263 two-story, 1400-square foot townhouses that sold at an average of $250,000 upon completion in 2004; after the 2008 foreclosure crisis, the average value of these homes dropped to below $100,000. At the time of the shooting, forty properties in the enclave were unoccupied and more than half of its remaining residents were renting.

LA VIOLENZA ENTRA NELLA “GATED COMMUNITY”
Adolescente viene Ucciso con Colpo di Pistola nel Rifugio dei “Laghi Gemelli”
La sera del 26 febbraio 2012, Trayvon Martin, un giovane afroamericano, studente liceale, viene ucciso con un colpo di pistola da George Zimmerman, un “neighborhood watch coordinator” (coordinatore di sorveglianza di quartiere), di origine iberica, mentre si dirige dal supermercato locale verso la casa della fidanzata del padre. La casa si trova in un condominio chiuso a Sanford, Florida. In quell’enclave si contano ben 263 case, a due piani, di 130 metri quadri, vendute ad un prezzo medio di 250,000,00 dollari statunitensi, dopo la fine dei lavori, nel 2004. In seguito alla crisi del 2008, il valore medio di quelle case è sceso sotto i 100,000,00 dollari. Al momento dell’uccisione di Martin, quaranta proprietà di quel complesso residenziale erano disabitate e più della metà dei residenti rimanenti viveva in affitto.

THE NEW AMERICAN HOME® FAILS
Model House Intended for Trade Show Foreclosed Before Built
The National Association of Home Builders is a more than sixty-year-old trade association dedicated to promoting residential construction in the United States. Since 1984, its annual trade show has included the design and building of “The New American Home®,” a high-end model house co-sponsored by the industry and a financial institution, which is subsequently sold on the market. The 2010 edition, a larger and more energy-efficient house than in previous years designed by the California-based KTGY Group, was befallen with various ills of its time. After the industry’s private investor pulled out, the financial institution supporting the construction, Cumorah Credit Union, was shut down by the government. The model house never made it to the trade show; instead it was foreclosed and auctioned at 11 percent of its stipulated market price.

IL FALLIMENTO DE “LA NUOVA CASA AMERICANA”
Casa Modello destinata ad una Fiera pignorata prima della costruzione
Da più di 60 anni l’Associazione Nazionale dei Costruttori di Case si dedica alla promozione dell’edilizia residenziale negli Stati Uniti. Dal 1984 la sua fiera annuale ha incluso la progettazione e la costruzione di “La Nuova Casa Americana”, una casa modello di fascia alta co-sponsorizzata dall’industria e da un’istituzione finanziaria, successivamente messa in vendita sul mercato. L’edizione del 2010 presentava una casa più grande e con un consumo energetico minore rispetto agli anni precedenti, progettata dal gruppo KTGY, con sede in California, che però venne colpita dai diversi mali del nostro tempo. Dopo che l’investitore industriale privato si fosse tirato, sarebbe toccata all’istituzione finanziaria che sponsorizzava i lavori di costruzione, la Cumorah Credit Union, ad essere chiusa dal governo. Non solo la casa modello non fu esibita alla fiera, ma venne anche pignorata e messa all’asta all’undici per cento del prezzo di mercato stabilito.

2012
2010
In 2009, the Brazilian government launched an extensive housing program aimed at addressing the housing deficit while providing stimulus in the wake of a recession. The program provides housing for those living under the most precarious conditions in large-scale tract developments on the outskirts of cities, and apartment developments for lower- and middle-class Brazilians in more urban settings. In 2010, the World Bank published reports expressing enthusiasm for the program’s general premise. However, in alignment with US policy, the global institution also advocated for the expansion of national and international private lenders’ participation in these home-financing programs, along with the privatization of the loans’ then-government-backed guarantees.


Since 2008, housing foreclosures have accelerated at a vertiginous pace worldwide. A cruel bureaucratic supplement to the war on terror, mass foreclosure exposed itself as an actually-deployed weapon of mass destruction. In Spain alone (one of the countries hit hardest by the sudden burst of an over-bloated, speculative bubble), almost half a million homes have been foreclosed—an especially painful figure in the face of the country’s nearly 3.5 million empty homes.

The mortgage equation, which juggles debt (minus) and equity (plus), has resulted in a kind of metaphorical social death—when not literal, as is the case with the suicide epidemic instigated by the foreclosure crisis in Spain—a country where neither the return of house keys nor death itself allows one to escape foreclosure’s unsparing claws.(es).

Housing then becomes a matter of life and debt, without the possibility of ever disentangling the two—a divine punishment unto eternity.

But why this impetus for mass-castigation? Wouldn’t it be simpler—and better for everyone—to write off these debts and just get on with life (or death)? Unfortunately, the cultural techniques by which this “writing” inscribes bodies with debt are somewhat indelible. Financial accounts—whether lead tablets, duty diaries, double-entry bookkeeping, or credit-report databases—don’t just represent obligations; they also enshrine them for posterity, sometimes elevating them to the status of sacred scriptures. Ledgers, in fact, were originally books permanently housed in churches. These documents acquire a force of their own, fixing all kinds of prescriptions—such as class or race—as mere inscriptions in a list, while also generating quasi-ontological distinctions between house and person, subject and object, “you” and “I.” Changing the numbers, and the relations they enact (house or no house), is difficult, they say.

Over time, relations have become securitized themselves, turned into further financially tradable assets. First, debts became inscribed with bodies—reversing the older model of bodies with debt—and then, dropping bodies altogether, they became relations of relations. And so on, like a hall of mirrors into infinity, a financial mise-en-abîme. The more differentiation, the more capitalization; the more information, the less risk. The “New Economy” promised the virtual dissolution of financial risk thanks to digital simulation models and real-time market pricing across the network. In theory, in practice, we have seen this house of cards tumble with the flick of a credit-rating agency’s switch, only to be reconstructed with further severe debt prescriptions.

From debt prescription to debt conscription and back again, we seem to be trapped in a regime where you are not a person, literally you are not recognized, unless a number has been ascribed to your persona. Financial credit, in other words, has become a matter of life and debt. Opting out of this regime, or even temporarily suspending it, is virtually impossible for most people, not even through the ultimate act of withdrawal: death itself.

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1. The waves of eviction-related suicides in Spain since 2008 have been widely reported by both NGOs and the mainstream media. See for instance: “Spain’s Crisis Sparked Another Revolution,” New York Times, March 5, 2013, http://nyti.ms/1e6QWYw.

2. Some hope can be found in the successes of many activists’ initiatives, such as Spain’s Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca). They have successfully halted over 1000 evictions and rehoused another 1000 people, as well as helped thousands of people cancel their mortgage debt after foreclosure since 2009. See: afectadosporlahipoteca.com.
In October 2000, San Francisco-based Dwell magazine released its first issue into an atmosphere of changing American cities. At this height of the dot-com boom, a search for simpler yet more stylish forms of living went hand-in-hand with gentrification, effectively relocating the frontier of development for the American house from suburban to urban areas. Under the umbrella of “home,” Dwell published stories not covered by other shelter magazines, including “pre-fab,” “sustainable,” and “small” projects, offering a newly urbanizing demographic ways to distinguish themselves with their first, and often second, home.

Dwell Magazine Rivendica un Nuovo Confine
Gli Editori Tracciano un Percorso “Dalla Casa Robie a Casa Nostra”

Nell’ottobre del 2000, la rivista Dwell, con sede a San Francisco pubblicava il suo primo numero in un atmosfera di cambiamento per le città americane. A questo punto della bolla speculativa delle “punto com” la ricerca di forme di vita più semplici e ciò nondimeno più eleganti andava di pari passo con una “gentrificazione”, un efficace trasferimento della frontiera dello sviluppo della casa americana da aree suburbane a quelle urbane. Attorno al grande argomento della “casa-abitazione”, Dwell pubblicava realtà trascurate sino ad allora da altre testate, inclusi progetti “pre-fab”, “sostenibili” e “piccoli”, proponendo ad una popolazione recentemente urbanizzata modi di contraddistinguersi con la sua prima, ed in alcuni casi seconda, casa.

Federale Housing Policy Meets Local Resistance
New Urbanists’ Arrival Postponed on Far Rockaway

In 1994, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) submitted a HOPE VI planning grant application to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The grant application helped procure $70 million to fund the replacement of the Beach 41st Street towers with new low-rise, mixed-income housing, and was awarded in 1995. After the project reached an impasse with residents, the funds were transferred to other NYCHA properties on Far Rockaway, but an acute housing shortage prevented the Housing Authority from demolishing structurally sound buildings. Instead, modifications for code compliance were made. In 2002, an additional $225 million HOPE VI dollars were shifted to the nearby Arverne Urban Renewal Area. Benjamin-Beechwood LLC was chosen to build Arverne by the Sea, a 90 percent market-rate New Urbanist enclave designed by EE&K, a Perkins Eastman Company. The 127 acre, city-owned parcel was sold to the developers for merely $8.6 million.

La Federale Housing Policy incontra resistenze locali
Arrivo del “New Urbanism” Posticipato a Far Rockaway

Nel 1994 il New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) presentò domanda di sovvenzione per i progetti di rivitalizzazione urbana denominati HOPE VI al Dipartimento Americano di Sviluppo Abitativo e Urbano. Tale richiesta di sussidio permetterà di ottenere, nel 1995, i 70 milioni di dollari necessari a finanziare la sostituzione del complesso di torri Beach 41st Street Houses, con un’edilizia di bassa densità e a reddito misto. A seguito dallo stallo raggiunto delle trattative con gli residenti, i fondi furono trasferiti ad altre proprietà della NYCHA, a Far Rockaway, ma la forte carenza di alloggi ha comunque disuaso la Housing Authority dal demolire edifici strutturalmente sani. Sono invece state fatte modifiche per l’adeguamento ai codici edilizi. Nel 2002 ulteriori $225 milioni legati al programma HOPE VI furono spostati al progetto rinnovo urbano del vicino arco di Arverne. La compagnia Benjamin-Beechwood LLC è stata scelta per la costruzione di Arverne by the Sea, un enclave progettato secondo gli stilemi del “New Urbanism” da EE&K e Perkins Eastman Company e destinato al 90 per cento al libero mercato immobiliare. L’area di 127 acri, proprietà della città, è stata venduta al costruttore per soli 8,6 milioni di dollari.

2000

1994
Given the Nixon-era end of direct federal support for the construction of low- and moderate-income housing, a variety of non-profit groups began to fill the gap. Faith-based Jubilee Housing’s efforts in Washington, DC, caught the attention of developer James Rouse, known for his “festival marketplace” malls. Realizing that the tax write-offs connected to housing development were of no value to tax-exempt non-profits, he successfully lobbied Congress to institute their transfer to for-profit corporations who would invest in these projects. Rouse’s Enterprise Foundation subsequently began managing what has become the main source of funding for low-income housing construction in the United States, while providing substantial returns for its investors—especially because most housing built through the LIHTC returns to market rates after a limited period of time.

Enterprise Foundation Seeks to Reconcile Purpose with Profit

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LIHTC

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Residents Join Ranks to Fight for Continued Affordability in High-Rise Enclave

With over 15,000 apartments in thirty towers, Co-op City in the Bronx is the largest planned urban community ever realized in the United States. It is also the largest non-profit, resident-controlled cooperative development in the world. Despite offering quality dwellings far below market prices, Co-op City has been criticized since its inception in 1966 for the scale and uniformity of its design, isolation from the existing city, exclusion of lower-income residents, and the amount of public subsidies required for its operation. The nine-month “rent strike,” which succeeded in keeping costs low in the face of rising energy prices, would also mark the model’s demise: political support for new cooperative developments did not survive the mid-1970s.

COOPERANTI NON PAGANO GLI AFFITTI PER NOVE MESI
Residents si Coalizzano in Lotta per il Mantenimento dell’Economicità del Quartiere ad Alta Densità

Con oltre 15 mila appartamenti distribuiti in trenta torri, Co-op City, situata nel Bronx costituiva la più grande comunità urbana pianificata realizzata negli Stati Uniti. È anche il quartiere cooperativo non-profit controllato dai residenti più grande al mondo. Sebbene proponga abitazioni di qualità ben al di sotto dei prezzi di mercato, Co-op City è criticata sin dalla sua inaugurazione nel 1966, per la scala e l’uniformità eccessiva del progetto, per il suo isolamento rispetto alla città esistente, per l’esclusione di residenti a basso reddito e in ragione dell’importo delle sovvenzioni pubbliche necessarie per la sua manutenzione. Anche lo sciopero dell’affitto per nove mesi, che ha permesso di mantenere i prezzi bassi a dispetto dell’aumento dei prezzi dell’energia, ha segnato il fallimento del modello: l’appoggio politico a nuove costruzioni cooperative non sopravvisse alla metà degli anni 1970.

1975
Vouchers and block grants devolved both initiative and discrimination to the local level. Real estate agents now filtered possibilities: search results would vary by race. Government took on the role of auditor in the new landscape of information and finance. From mortgage deductions to new towns, from infrastructure to vouchers, government was everywhere and nowhere at the same time.


George Mitchell’s goal for The Woodlands was to create an alternative to urban blight and suburban sprawl, a sustainable and socially integrated environment for living and working for up to 150,000 residents. It was one of thirteen New Towns approved through US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Title VII New Communities program in 1970, which provided multi-million dollar loan guarantees to these planning experiments that were generally undertaken by for-profit developers. The Woodlands project was a financial success and the controlling corporation is now listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Attaining the project’s original goals in terms of affordability and affirmative action (set to reflect the demographic make-up of Houston), however, has proven more elusive. Eighty-nine percent of the community’s residents are white; in Houston that percentage is forty-seven.

LA NEW TOWN DEL MAGNATE DEL PETROLIO A HOUSTON. MODELLO DI CRESCITA ATTRAVERSO LA SCIZENZA

Assume l’autore di Design with Nature Ian McHarg per creare un Piano Regolatore partendo dall’‘idrologia’


1970
LA CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY INAUGURA LE 1.096 UNITÀ RESIDENZIALI DELLE WILLIAM GREEN HOMES
Dopo un dibattito durato quattro anni, la scelta cade sulla tipologia a torre a discapito di edifici bassi

Nel 1962 il completamento delle unità immobiliari denominate William Green Homes – un complesso di sette torri dai sedici- a diciannove piani di altezza - porta a oltre 3.000 il numero di appartamenti realizzati nel contesto del programma di edilizia residenziale pubblica denominato Cabrini-Green. Per questa fase finale del programma è stata presa in considerazione la possibilità di realizzare edifici più bassi, considerandoli particolarmente adatti alle molte famiglie residenti con bambini piccoli. La Chicago Housing Authority – CHA ha tuttavia ritenuto che le torri siano la tipologia edilizia ottimale per rispettare il dettame federale. La Chicago Housing Authority – CHA ha tuttavia ritenuto che le torri siano la tipologia edilizia ottimale per rispettare il dettame federale. La CHA ha tuttavia ritenuto che le torri siano la tipologia edilizia ottimale per rispettare il dettame federale.

The 1962 completion of the William Green Homes, seven sixteen- to nineteen-story towers, brought the construction of the Cabrini-Green public housing development to a close at over 3,000 apartment units total. Lower-rise housing had been considered for this final phase, particularly in light of the development’s many residents with young children. But the CHA argued that the high-rise was the best way to comply with the federally mandated density of fifty units per acre and a per-unit cost ceiling of $17,000 for all urban public housing. Given the tight budgetary constraints, it was unusual that Chicago, unlike other cities, did not allocate federal urban renewal funding to the CHA; the city’s 70 percent land-cost subsidy was made available only to private developers serving middle- and upper-income households.

HOUSE & HOME SPLIT FROM ARCHITECTURAL FORUM
Time, Inc. Launches a New Magazine for a Rapidly Growing Industry

The US Housing Act of 1949 is commonly associated with inner city development and slum clearance. However, it also authorized billions of dollars for the indirect financing of private, large-scale suburban development. House & Home, established in 1952 as an offshoot of the long-running Architectural Forum, catered directly to the rapidly growing homebuilding industry. The trade journal presented a distinct discourse on the American single-family house, maintained by what were still mostly small-scale homebuilders and their in-house designers, building supply dealers, mortgage brokers, and bankers.
“Architects need to retake the pedestal as the alpha males of the construction industry.”

I would like to think that this quote is simply a stubborn statement, written sometime in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, specialized magazines and popular media alike discussed architecture and the construction industry as one single business. The architecture of the single-family house and the industry built around it is a clear example of a seemingly straightforward collaboration geared toward the extraction of value from both the building and the land where it was sited. However, architecture and industry were not alone in this enterprise. Their public—the nuclear family financially subsidized by the government, commanded by a working man with a wife and children at home—closed the necessary triad. Only when considered together does this threesome define the currency of a consolidating global real estate market in the immediate postwar period. Architecture, industry, and their public were and continue to be bound together by the constructed value of the ground beneath them.

“The secrets of modern architecture are like those of a family, where everybody knows about things that are never acknowledged,” writes Beatriz Colomina. It is our task as educators to acknowledge and interrogate the open secrets of the modern American house that are discussed in the larger family of public (and private) educational institutions, where the currency of industriousness is also being traded.

Since that immediate postwar period, things have changed less than we may like to think. The legacies of a bound-together architecture, industry, and specifically-defined public are still present, and not as ghosts: this piece’s opening quote is from a student of architecture, articulated in 2014. He is not to be blamed for what he wrote. His statement’s pervasive, gendered currency—scribed not only in the house he grew up in but also in the economic and social constructions that work through it—has been circulating since the time of his grandfather and is likely to be passed on to his own children (if, indeed, he has them). The heritage of this currency is not just haunting us; it lives and breathes in the hallways of institutions where architecture, virility, and industry are often indistinguishable.

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1. Statement made by a second-year architecture student in a course taught by the author.


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LIFE MAGAZINE HOLDS ROUNDTABLE ON HOW TO PRODUCE CHEAPER HOUSING
Key Housing Players Debate What is Holding the Industry Back

In sixteen hours of debate hosted by the popular weekly news magazine *Life*, participants voiced their concerns about the regulatory constraints preventing the housing industry from freely exploiting land and minimizing the cost of construction. The problem of the house, as the majority of panelists saw it, was that it had to be connected to an infrastructural system provided by the public sector and therefore out of their control, denying them the desired profit margin. The government, they suggested, should intervene in housing only in cases that are of no interest to the private sector; for instance, to alleviate the “social or moral” preoccupations related to slums.

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LA RIVISTA LIFE ORGANIZZA UNA TAVOLA ROTONDA SU COME REALIZZARE ABITAZIONI PIÙ ECONOMICHE
Figure chiave dibattano le cause dell’arretramento del settore edile

In sedici ore di dibattito, organizzato da *Life*, il più famoso settimanale statunitense, i relatori esprimono le proprie perplessità verso il sistema normativo vigente che impedisce agli operatori dell’edilizia di sfruttare liberamente il terreno, e di minimizzare i costi di costruzione. Il problema della casa, sostiene la maggior parte dei partecipanti alla tavola rotonda, è che essa dev’essere connessa ad un sistema infrastrutturale fornito dagli enti pubblici, che si desidera margine di profitto. I relatori suggeriscono che il Governo intervenga in aree urbane più povere per alleviare i problemi “sociali e morali”.

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Further Reading


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1949
Nel marzo di luglio 1944 del CAA, i direttori John Enzenz e Charles e Ray Eames, sollevavano un quesito chiave, in vista della smobilitazione post-bellica: “cos’è una casa?” La risposta consisteva in un manifesto che celebrava la visione di un’abitazione monofamiliare, suburbana, costruita con prefabbricati di produzione industriale e, per questo, alla portata di tutti. L’articolo proponeva che le tecnologie sviluppate nel corso della II Guerra Mondiale e messe a disposizione dei soldati potessero, negli anni a seguire, dimostrarsi altrettanto utili per soddisfare le esigenze delle mogli di quei combattenti. Per dimostrare tale affermazione, i direttori del CAA commissionarono le Case Study Houses, un programma per la realizzazione di case prototipo: purtroppo gli investitori non colsero la rilevanza del progetto. Pierre Koenig realizzò la casa in vetro solo grazie all’intervento mediatore di Paul Williams, uno dei pochi architetti afro-americani attivi a Los Angeles, oltre che progettista delle prime abitazioni pubbliche costruite in città grazie alla sinergia tra proprietari e banche locali che concederanno prestiti anche a chi presentava scarse garanzie.

In 1939, Frank Lloyd Wright progettò una comunità Usoniana di sette case destinate a un gruppo di professori della Michigan State University che avevano acquistato un lotto di terreno della superficie di quaranta acri. Dopo la desistenza del finanziamento privato, Wright si rivolse, invano, alla Federal Housing Administration [Amministrazione Federale per l’Abitazione] istituita poco tempo prima. Le residenze di Wright non soddisfacevano i requisiti che la FHA riteneva un immobile dovesse avere per ben posizionarsi sul mercato immobiliare: tetto a spiovente, netta divisione degli spazi domestici e molti altri elementi tipici delle abitazioni tradizionali. Solamente una coppia di committenti, i Goetsch-Wincklers, riuscirono eventualmente a costruire la loro residenza, anche se in un altro luogo. I lavori furono finanziati utilizzando la casa della madre vedova di Winckler come garanzia.

1944

FHA DENIES INSURED MORTGAGE FOR EAST LANSING USONIA
Frank Lloyd Wright Houses are Declared Bad Investments

In 1939, Frank Lloyd Wright designed a Usonian community of seven houses for a group of Michigan State University professors who had purchased a forty-acre parcel of land. After a private funding source fell through, Wright appealed to the recently created Federal Housing Administration, but to no avail. The houses failed to meet the FHA’s underwriting principles, which were largely based on achieving good resale values—generally meaning pitched roofs, clear division between domestic spaces, and other traditional features. Only one couple, the Goetsch-Wincklers, managed to eventually build their house, but on a different site. It was financed using Winckler’s widowed mother’s home as collateral.

1939

FHA NEGA UN MUTUO ASSICURATO AL PROGETTO EAST LANSING USONIA
Le abitazioni progettate da Frank Lloyd Wright vengono dichiarate un pessimo investimento

Nel 1939, Frank Lloyd Wright progettò una comunità Usoniana di sette case destinate a un gruppo di professori della Michigan State University che avevano acquistato un lotto di terreno della superficie di quaranta acri. Dopo la desistenza del finanziamento privato, Wright si rivolse, invano, alla Federal Housing Administration [Amministrazione Federale per l’Abitazione] istituita poco tempo prima. Le residenze di Wright non soddisfacevano i requisiti che la FHA riteneva un immobile dovesse avere per ben posizionarsi sul mercato immobiliare: tetto a spiovente, netta divisione degli spazi domestici e molti altri elementi tipici delle abitazioni tradizionali. Solamente una coppia di committenti, i Goetsch-Wincklers, riuscirono eventualmente a costruire la loro residenza, anche se in un altro luogo. I lavori furono finanziati utilizzando la casa della madre vedova di Winckler come garanzia.
ARCHITETTO INDIVIDUA SIMILARITÀ FRA RUSSI E AMERICANI
Ricerca di una Forma di Proprietà Privata Basata sulla Libertà e Giustizia Sociale

Invitato dal Congresso Internazionale degli Architetti come Invitato d’Onore, Frank Lloyd Wright visitò Mosca nel 1937. In dichiarazione pubblica, dichiarò la sua ammirazione per la libertà e responsabilità sociale come fondamentali nella costruzione di ambienti di vita.

Invited by the International Congress of Architects as an Honored Guest, Frank Lloyd Wright visited Moscow in 1937. In public statements, he declared his admiration for the “simplicity of freedom.” In an exchange with the American Communist Party related to negative media coverage following his trip, Wright explained that while he opposed speculation and the private exploitation of land, he did support its distribution to individuals who would each work for the common good. This nuanced Wright’s otherwise antagonistic relationship with US housing policymakers, who at the time were developing the country’s first permanent public housing models.

ARCHITECT FINDS SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS
Seeks a Form of Private Ownership Based on Freedom and Social Justice

VIDEO

DOCUMENT


PUBLICATION

Further Reading


ARCHITECT FINDS SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS
Seeks a Form of Private Ownership Based on Freedom and Social Justice

PRESIDENT PROMOTES SAVING AS CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY
Roosevelt’s First “Fireside Chat” Addresses Fear and the Banking Crisis

By March third of 1933, 5,504 US banks with deposits totaling $3,432,000,000 had closed their doors. The following day, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated as the country’s thirty-second president. Eight days later, on March 12, he took to the airwaves to prevent a panic from bringing down the banking system with the first of his weekly radio addresses to the nation. In this first presidential “Fireside Chat,” Roosevelt attempted to reinvigorate depositors’ confidence: explaining why so many of the country’s banks had recently failed, why he had closed them down, and what government intervention could do to alleviate the situation. His broadcast came at the peak of a housing crisis characterized by some 1,000 home loans foreclosed daily and 43.8 percent of owner-occupied homes with a mortgage in default.

PRESIDENTI PROMUOVE IL RISPARMIO COME FORMA DI RESPONSABILITÀ CIVILE
La Prima delle “Chiacchierate al Caminetto” di Roosevelt Tratta delle Paure e la Crisi Bancaria

Il 3 marzo 1933 5,504 banche americane con depositi per un totale di 3,432 miliardi di dollari chiusero battenti. Il giorno seguente, Franklin Delano Roosevelt veniva insediato come trentaduesimo presidente del paese. Otto giorni dopo, il 12 marzo, Roosevelt andava in onda radio con il primo dei suoi discorsi settimanali rivolti alla nazione. In questo primo “Chiacchierate al Caminetto” presidenziale, Roosevelt provò a rinvigorire la fiducia dei correntisti spiegando perché così tante banche fallirono improvvisamente, perché dovette chiuderle definitivamente e quali interventi del governo avrebbero potuto alleviare la situazione. La trasmissione fu messa in onda al culmine di una crisi immobiliare caratterizzata da oltre mille case pignorate quotidianamente e il 43,8 per cento delle case occupate da proprietari con un mutuo inadempiente.

1937

1933
Frank Lloyd Wright responded to the economic depression of the early 1930s—which he diagnosed as a result of industrialized urbanization—with a new, decentralized form of human settlement. In his design of Broadacre City, he embraced technological innovations such as individualized transport by land and air, but also harkened back to a vague Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian self-sufficiency. The US Housing Act of 1934 did not include any redistribution of land or concepts of self-building; rather, it prioritized stimulating the private sector by insuring personal credit. While Broadacre City thus remained a more radical vision in terms of ideas of ownership and profit, its land-use pattern and automobile usage is strikingly similar to the massive suburbanization that would occur in the postwar years.

**ARCHITETTO PRESENTA BROADACRE CITY COME SOLUZIONE AL PROBLEMA ABITATIVO NAZIONALE**

Visione Radicale Propone di Distribuire Un Acre di Terra Federale a Ogni Famiglia Bisognosa

Frank Lloyd Wright rispose alla depressione economica dei primi anni Trenta — che aveva diagnosticato come un risultato dell’urbanizzazione industrializzata — con una nuova forma decentralizzata di insediamento umano. Progettando Broadacre City, Wright adottò innovazioni tecnologiche come il trasporto individuale via terra e via aria, facendo allo stesso tempo riferimento a un vago ideale Jeffersoniano di auto-sussistenza agricola. La Legge Abitativa del 1934 non includeva nessuna ridistribuzione delle terre o riferimenti all’auto-edilizia; dava piuttosto priorità agli stimoli del settore privato assicurando il credito personale. Mentre Broadacre City rimase una visione più radicale in termini di idee di proprietà e profitto, il suo modello di utilizzo delle terre e dell’automobile è invece sorprendentemente simile alla sub-urbanizzazione che sarebbe avvenuta nel dopoguerra.

**ARCHITECT PRESENTS BROADACRE CITY AS SOLUTION TO THE NATION’S HOUSING PROBLEM**

Radical Vision Seeks to Distribute One Acre of Federal Land to Each Family in Need

Frank Lloyd Wright responded to the economic depression of the early 1930s—which he diagnosed as a result of industrialized urbanization—with a new, decentralized form of human settlement. In his design of Broadacre City, he embraced technological innovations such as individualized transport by land and air, but also harkened back to a vague Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian self-sufficiency. The US Housing Act of 1934 did not include any redistribution of land or concepts of self-building; rather, it prioritized stimulating the private sector by insuring personal credit. While Broadacre City thus remained a more radical vision in terms of ideas of ownership and profit, its land-use pattern and automobile usage is strikingly similar to the massive suburbanization that would occur in the postwar years.

**1929**

**CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN?**

Pollyanna Rhee

Upon the 1931 completion of the thirty-story, high-end Majestic apartment building, which replaced Hotel Majestic on Central Park West in New York City, its builder, Irwin S. Chanin, used the occasion to envision the new tower’s eventual destruction. Despite its innovative features such as solariums, modern heating, and “noiseless” walnut floors, Chanin predicted that by 1981 the Majestic, reduced to a mere architectural curiosity, would be demolished and replaced by a new and much larger structure for 30,000 inhabitants. His vision went well beyond the building’s immediate surroundings to encompass the social and environmental transformation of Manhattan: parks would cover two-thirds of the island, its mere fifty residential buildings would lack individual kitchens in favor of communal dining services, and new technologies would allow individuals to work only twenty hours per week.

Ostensibly a product of a fantastic imagination, Chanin’s forecast had a basis in contemporary anxieties about the economy that reverberated throughout the American population during the late 1920s. As slums were cleared to make way for working-class housing and luxurious buildings for the wealthy went up, Manhattan’s middle class had few financially viable options for quality housing in the city. The rising unemployment that followed the 1929 stock market crash, which made it nearly impossible for women to remain outside the labor force, added to these concerns about housing. Rates of female participation in workplaces had been increasing since the end of World War I, but the onset of the Great Depression signaled broader shifts not only in large-scale patterns of employment, but also in individual living habits. Imagined over a year before Franklin D. Roosevelt’s election and the launch of the New Deal, Chanin’s vision harnessed public unease over the ever-worsening economy as an opportunity to articulate a radical vision for the future.

A box lodged some names of its first tenants, costs of construction, and information about the former hotel. Chanin hoped the box would be opened in 1981 at the time of the building’s demolition, in an entirely new city. But almost 35 years after the expected date of its demise—despite subsequent economic downturns and ruptured housing bubbles including the 2008 financial meltdown—the average selling price for an apartment in the Majestic hovers around $4.5 million.  

1918

Until World War I initiated a reversal, international economic integration attained a level that remained unsurpassed until the late twentieth century.¹ Nineteenth-century transnational capital flows drove territorial expansion across colonial and New World frontiers; from railroads and canals to land development and agriculture, foreign capital helped finance the construction of American infrastructure while paving invisible connections across continents and hemispheres. If the American prairies produced food for European markets, they also linked capital from the northeastern United States and Europe with the West through mortgages and early versions of mortgage-backed securities for farmlands.² Global events such as the 1896 crop failure in India “forced Liverpool instantly to raise its bid for American wheat,”² causing commodity prices to rise rapidly in Chicago³ and generating Midwest wealth from global commodity markets that made possible Chicago and so-called Prairie School architects’ search for an “American architecture.”⁴

In 1901 a “head-turning” financial boom led even conservative bankers to believe that old economic rules no longer applied. New financial products, unsecured by real property, were created to meet the demands of “money chasing investment.” European credit supplied US bankers with capital to lend for speculation in inflated securities.⁵ In that same year, The Ladies Home Journal published a series of designs for American houses, including two by Frank Lloyd Wright. The first of these was a new model “subdivision” of second homes on the prairie, intended for prosperous city dwellers; the other a “small home” for under $6,000 intended for the “average home-maker.”⁶ The “average” house, unlike that for the prairie, occupied a space of no place in particular. Designed to conform to a “one-hundred-foot lot,” the house’s design specified only one essential condition for selecting a building site: access to a market infrastructure providing labor and materials at “standard market rates.”

The bursting of 1901’s bubble, followed by the Panic of 1907, would eventually lead to the passage of the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, which implemented the US national banking system through legislation intended to protect investors and instill public confidence in the functioning of financial markets.⁷ In 1909, preparing for the German publication of his work from a villa outside Florence, Wright composed an introduction to his drawings without reference to transnational flows of capital on the prairies of the United States. Instead, Wright framed “America” as one side of an “Old” versus “New” world dichotomy. Renaming his 1901 small house a “typical low-cost suburban dwelling,” Wright’s original image was circulated in Europe without its economic foundations, while his Midwestern model for land subdivision became a model for American identity. As Wright’s re-visioning erased the links between architecture and finance it transformed the projects into a national architectural imaginary.⁸

As Wright’s Wasmuth portfolio was prepared for European publication in 1910, the New York Board of Real Estate Brokers met for its
annual dinner. A record audience listened as the president of the American Real Estate Company likened ownership of real estate to investment in any other commodity. Despite real estate's declared superiority for return and stability, however, the speech ended with a dilemma: “I believe there are now in this city and throughout the country vast sums of money, the owners of which are desirous of investing in real estate but they do not know how.” One hundred years later the global financial system would nearly collapse in part because investors around the world thought they had figured it out.

8. Never the only, nor even majority, spokesman for a national architectural identity, Wright’s American imaginary
For many people inside and outside the architectural profession, “housing” is a bad word. It conjures images of an imagined, probably governmental, agency warehousing passive individuals into high-rises. Hence “public” is the worst possible qualifier for the already maligned word, but even “multi-family” is a sign of moral failure. Housing haters instead prefer to speak of “community development,” “neighborhood,” or more recently, the “ecologies” enveloping us all. And they are right: life requires not only a “dwelling unit” as the language of zoning or the IRS might declare it, but a “home” with access to transportation, education, work, and so on.

But we don’t talk about work as an “income-generating context,” so why talk about housing that way? Feel-good terms like “community” or “choice” are generally invoked precisely when they are absent and corporate profit needs cover. Let’s talk about housing for what it is: “that fundamental and American right…a right to a roof over your head,” as Lyndon B. Johnson, to cite just one president to do so, declared upon the passage of the 1968 Housing Act.

In contrast to housing, talking about the “house” seems so much less problematic. It’s treated as if its definition were obvious: an ur-type, a free-standing structure for a single family, assumed to be the father-mother-children that live therein. But what does “house” really tell us? Just as in multi-story, multi-unit housing, we don’t know who its occupants are, or whether they “own” or “rent.” In either case, it is likely they are paying another entity for the right to be there—either the bank, who holds the mortgage, or the landlord, who is likely paying a bank for his mortgage with the rent paid by the residents. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the bank has increasingly become synonymous with the landlord, no longer dealing in mortgage-backed securities but in rental property-backed securities. At the same time, the properties’ actual physical structures remain the same, as do the people within (i.e. previous owners who were foreclosed have stayed, becoming tenants who can no longer be foreclosed, but rather evicted).

Pitching house against housing is based on a misunderstanding of type, or rather, on an overemphasis of its morphological aspects. While a Cape, a rowhouse, a courtyard building, and a point tower certainly organize spatial relationships in different ways, the socio-economic connotations of these housing forms can change so rapidly that a former factory in the city now affords its residents a higher social status than a suburban cul-de-sac ranch. Conventional understandings of architectural types are able to account for the former differentiation, but the latter has proven more difficult. Bracketing the long-running and re-emergent theoretical debates about the nature of type, its proper role in design processes, and its place in history, how might typology take economic and cultural determinants more productively into account?

For contemporary practice in the United States, perhaps the more vexing issue is the conceptual split not between house and housing, but between housing and architecture. The problem with this is twofold. First, housing, especially since the turn toward market-driven policy in the mid-1970s, is considered a socio-economic issue, not a cultural endeavor. Housing is not evaluated or seen as architecture, but in contrast to architecture. Second, it is not enough for architects to contribute by claiming that the housing that is being built is alright since it serves its socio-economic purpose. Its dismal quality is precisely what has led to the distinction in the first place.

So if architects have stopped staking a claim in housing, the reasons are twofold: while it no longer seems permissible, from a professional perspective, to talk about housing as housing, i.e. as a real socio-economic need; it also no longer seems possible to talk about housing as architecture, i.e to bridge those real socio-economic needs and the project of design. Understanding type as an economic proposition may open new models of thinking within and beyond the profession. More fundamentally, understanding all works of architecture as devices through which multiple, recurrent, and contradictory historical forces circulate—and designing them with this in mind—might allow for change where it was previously hard to imagine possible. Thinking architectural history in this way, through house and housing, is what we have tried to do with this exhibition.

1. For instance in “Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program,” the name given to subsidies to low-income households to rent on the open market, which, studies have shown, have generally not lessened the economic and racial segregation that they were meant to counteract. (See, for example: US Housing Scholars and Research and Advocacy Organization, “Residential Segregation and Housing Discrimination in the United States: A Report to the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.” January 2008). Or “Choice Neighborhoods,” the most recent federal program to improve areas impacted by “distressed public housing.”
3. This is referencing Denise Scott-Brown and Robert Venturi’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular their studies of Levittown and Co-op City.
TO BE UPDATED
CASA MURARO  
DORSODURO 350, VENEZIA

OPEN HOUSE  
5–16 GIUGNO, 
14:00 – 18:00
1932 ARCHITECT PRESENTS BROADACRE CITY AS SOLUTION TO THE NATION’S HOUSING PROBLEM

1929 CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN?

1918 UNITED STATES HOUSING CORPORATION BUILDS HOUSING FOR WARTIME WORKERS

1910 FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT SELLS HIS VISION FOR SUBURBANIZING AMERICA

1910 ARCHITECTURAL AND FINANCIAL IMAGINARIES ECONOMIES OF ONE TYPE OR ANOTHER

1986 FEDERAL LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDIT APPROVED

2000 DWELL MAGAZINE CLAIMS A NEW FRONTIER

2009 BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES MINHA CASA, MINHA VIDA

2008 HOUSING AS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEBT

2012 VIOLENCE ENTERS A GATED COMMUNITY

2010 THE NEW AMERICAN HOME FAILS

1978 ARCHITECT DECONSTRUCTS THE SUBURBAN HOME

1975 CO-OPERATORS withhold carrying charges for nine months

1973 THE FINANCIALIZATION OF RACE

1970 OIL MAGNATE’S HOUSTON NEW TOWN TO SHAPE GROWTH THROUGH SCIENCE

1962 CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY OPENS 1,096-UNIT WILLIAM GREEN HOMES

1952 HOUSE & HOME SPLITS FROM ARCHITECTURAL FORUM

1949 LIFE MAGAZINE HOLDS ROUNDTABLE ON HOW TO PRODUCE CHEAPER HOUSING

1949 ARCHITECTURES OF INDUSTRIOUSNESS

1944 CALIFORNIA ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE ENVISIONS THE POST-WAR HOUSE

1939 FHA DENIES INSURED MORTGAGE FOR EAST LANSING USONIA

1937 ARCHITECT FINDS SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS

1933 PRESIDENT PROMOTES SAVING AS CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

CASA MURARO DORSODURO 350, VENEZIA

OPEN HOUSE 5–16 GIUGNO, 2014 14:00 – 18:00