

DAVID BRUCE

The following is adapted from a blog post written in February of 2014 on David's 2013-2014 Thomas J. Watson Fellowship. The project was an investigation of coastal resilience in Rotterdam, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Jakarta, and Ho Chi Minh.

Claiming the Void: observations on shelter in Mumbai

In Mumbai, squatters grow produce between railroad tracks, hawkers sprawl from fringe to fringe among the colonial-era bazaars, and informal housing unfolds on the periphery of the rail, water, and power infrastructure. It is as if none of the city's footprint goes unused

Segments of the urban fabric are continually reinvented—daily, monthly, yearly. I watched the cricket ovals in the Maidan (one of the city's few expansive green spaces) transform into an elaborate wedding venue once the heat and humidity rendered the sport unbearable. I watched as neighborhood corners were converted from parking for rickshaws and mopeds into ornate archways for the celebration of Diwali. Lights, flowers, and plaster of Paris softly transformed the imagery of the street, only to be restaged a few days later. Mumbai's streetscapes are in flux

Temporary dwellings, too, repurpose spaces in the public realm. Outside my apartment in Agradada, the Muslim quarter two blocks from Mumbai's Central Station, I watched recent migrants from rural India deploy a string of shelters on the shoulder of the street, carving into the space between the city's circulatory network and the fixed architecture of the neighborhood block. The most recent arrivals had partitioned off domestic spaces by hauling road barriers or scrap material from the city's construction sites to form walls stitched together with a tapestry of tarps and found plastic.

Proceeding down the street the structures appeared more rugged. Burned and flattened oil barrels and sheets of corrugated metal reinforced the newer, flimsier frames. Rounding the corner, like walking a physical timeline, these lodgings had developed sturdier floors, second stories, and electricity. They were completely enclosed with an elaborate skin of plastic, interlaced with a tangle of cables and dish antennae. The result was a collage of recycled materials, a kaleidoscopic representation of past and present perpetually shifting and changing. **The new city was built out of an agglomeration of left-over materials reinvented and upcycled.**

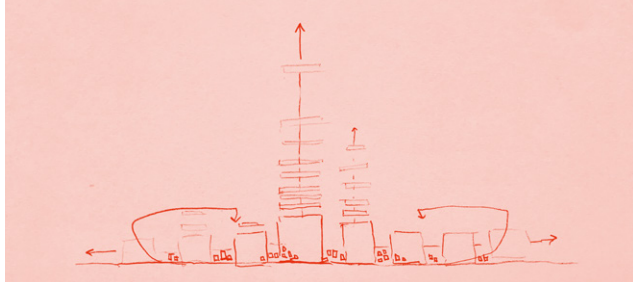
Walking by, I saw flashes of life inside these homes: neat kitchens with refrigerated produce, steaming kettles, and glaring televisions. Women chopped vegetables and washed clothes while sitting along the roadside. Kids clamored on ladders and peered out from second-story stoops. Children pitched cricket balls in what little public space was left. Inches from bustling feet, taxis rushed by. Goats and chickens scavenged for scraps in the gutters and crevasses, often mistaking plastic for food. Groups gathered around houses for three reasons: fights, weddings, and deaths. What began as shelter on the road shoulder transitioned with time into a vibrant community.

At night, elsewhere in the city, even less likely nooks and crannies in the urban fabric are claimed for shelter. By 9 p.m., the bumper to bumper traffic unclogs, and the cacophony of horns, bells and whistles pauses. The city eerily transforms from a loud, bustling urban jungle into a quiet and fog-ridden peninsula at sea. The night reveals where masses take refuge: on train station platforms, on the highway breakdown lanes, within oceanfront jetties and wave-breakers. Individuals sleep on storefronts, doorsteps, or up against trees. It's staggering to move through the city and see the conditions under which hundreds of thousands make due for the night. **With the morning light, the makeshift shelters disappear, conveniently concealing the extent of city's horrific housing problem.**

Mumbai has a history of repurposing the landscape. Since the beginning of the city's history, the peninsula's occupiers have claimed previously unconsidered territories. Mumbai began as seven islands, and only became the coastline we recognize today when the British reclaimed land from the ocean. A century later, the city's peninsula has become one of the densest in the world.

Rural migrants perpetually flood into the city in search of jobs and better futures.

With increasing scarcity of land and exorbitant cost of real estate, the city's housing develops up, out, and even within.



These directions are inextricably tied to wealth. The city's elite are building up, stacking the ground plane vertically. The middle class is expanding out into new territories to the north and east, tethered by the efficiency of the city's overcrowded central railway line and bound only by how far they are willing to commute. **The poorest find voids within the city, filling spaces not conventionally thought suitable for habitation, on land few would bother to speculate on.**

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. In Mumbai, the necessity for shelter in dense urban conditions exploits existing infrastructure and forges new structures of dense urban housing in previously unimagined cityscapes. **This is not a grand vision by an architect or master planner, but a grand adjustment, a restructuring of the existing fabric by the public itself.**

These systems demonstrate a remarkable elasticity. Materials are reused and structures are redeployed. Built of a moving kit of parts, they soften the binary between what is temporary and what is permanent. It's a conceptual framework that stands in opposition to the way we build buildings here. What if we were to shed the idea that architecture has a specific lifespan of 50 years (after expensive renovations) in favor of a model that has flexibility embedded in its DNA? What might this look like? **Further, what if we, too, were to explore the voids of our cities, those places left untouched, forgotten, dismissed?** Or, perhaps more importantly, the voids in our practice, the modes of intervention where the architect can intervene politically, without a physical presence. Indeed, we too are experiencing a housing crisis, in many ways exacerbated by the structural prevention of those with nothing to make something. We must take seriously our own necessity, as citizens and designers, and seek potential in these voids, be they isolated highway underpasses or gaps in legislation.

MARTIN MAN

is a first year M.Arch I currently participating in the 2017 Jim Vlack Building Project.

The Problem with the Housing Problem This year's Jim Vlack Building Project has been notable for its significant departure from the model followed by the projects of the past decade or so. Instead of constructing houses to be sold on the market, we are working with the non-profit organization Columbus House to build homes for the formerly homeless. Instead of the vague category of 'low income persons,' we know the future inhabitants of the house will have experienced housing insecurity for likely a protracted amount of time—indeed, it is possible we have already met the future residents. Rather than a conventional wood-frame house, we have the additional task of tackling pre-fabricated building techniques.

The sweeping changes to the building project, however, appear to have stopped short of one crucial aspect—the house itself, to which the project is dedicated. Partnering with Columbus House this year reignites the strong social agenda under which the project was first established, an aspect which had eroded somewhat in recent years. With the problem of housing insecurity brought to the fore this year, entraining attendant issues of precarity regarding food, healthcare, employment, etc., it is perhaps surprising that the answer we're about to provide looks set to be rather similar—a semi-detached, multi-family home.

Much more important than the form, however, is the mode of living it catalyzes. More than one project at the final review for individual projects received strong criticism for proposing shared living spaces, landscape elements, and other communal resources. These critics' perspective was clear: each unit must remain segregated.

Is it ironic, then, to claim that we are tackling the issue of homelessness whilst reproducing the very forms of housing engendered by a logic that contributes to the problem in the beginning?

That is to say, the designs chosen to serve as departure points for the group phase leave unchallenged a certain way of living—the free-standing house, surrounded by open lawn on four sides, with parking space for cars, etc. These assume an attitude toward private property, delimiting one's land and space from another's. The stipulation that each dwelling unit be self-contained assumes that even though this is a multi-family home, each family will live separately.

Although we are building on a street corner less than 1.5 miles from the Green, we conjure up the entire mythology of the 'American Dream'—the private yard, the picket fence, the 'freedom of the open road'—with all its aspirations and failures. Splitting life up into private lots and detached houses mirrors the inscription of individuals into relations of constant economic competition for everything from healthcare, education, jobs, and the barest of necessities.

When we build the way we do we implicitly accept this status quo, without challenging why shelter is not a guaranteed right in this society, or why so many are a bad fall, a sick day at work, or a family emergency away from losing their home. Instead, we merely re-inscribe them into a mode of living underpinned by an ideology that allowed them to be deprived of shelter in the first place.

If architecture is about the shaping of space and its provision for life, then the building itself may be the narrowest interpretation of the scope of our concerns. **The problem of affordable housing, for example, is ultimately not a problem of trying to fit less into smaller spaces using fewer materials.** If it were, then the problem would have been solved a hundred years ago, not least with the Modernists' efforts at determining *Existenzminimum*. Even in 1929, however, standardization and rationalization were already running into barriers posed by continually rising costs, rents, falling wages, and the limits of how small a space could be tolerated.

Design alone cannot achieve our aspirations for social impact. The transformation of space must also come from the shaping of economy, production, culture, politics, societal structures, and so on. Many

...a weekly column published by the Paprika positions editors.

BOOK REVIEW *The Mushroom at the End of the World* by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsinga

Review by Thaddeus Lee

The Mushroom at the End of the World tells the enchanting story of *matsutake* and the various ecological, ethnographic and commercial assemblages it participates in across the globe. Be prepared to join Tsing as she travels from Oregonian post-industrial forests to Japanese *satoyama* landscapes, into newly-privatized woodlands in Yunnan, China, and through the Finnish Lapland, all in search of the people and environments that contribute to the commodity chain of *matsutake*. Beautiful, dynamic and rigorous, Tsing's book is a wondrous expression of intellectual curiosity that affirms the presence of rich and nuanced narratives that permeate our globalized world.

To say that the book is about a prized mushroom or even that *matsutake* is the proverbial lens through which Tsing presents the world, perhaps does the work an injustice. However, how does one relate rare fungi to Southeast Asian refugee identity, to Japan-US supply chain histories, or to a questioning of the very definition of 'species'? Tsing's agile and diffuse narrative is best understood through the analytical paradigm she presents in *The Global Situation* (2000). Here, she argues that the only way of confronting historical stereotypes and stagnant social sciences is by studying 'the landscape of circulation as well as the flow' of objects, constantly asking the question, 'How are people, cultures, and things remade as they travel?'

The pertinence of this approach is heightened by apocalyptic overtones in Tsing's writing. Given the shortfalls of modernity, Tsing contends that it is important to study the intersection of human activity, ecology and culture. In this conception, *matsutake* exist at the peripheries of capitalist society and are an anomaly in the eyes of economists, environmentalists and scientists alike. Tsing argues that if we were to broaden our unit of analyses to include assemblages of things, human and non-human, we would more often realize the interrelatedness of human society and our environment.

Running in and out of this narrative is also a recognition of the cosmopolitan nature of our globalized societies. *Matsutake* is a spoil of the 'hunt' to US Veteran forest-men, an embodiment of American freedom to Southeast Asian pickers and ultimately a prized gift in the eyes of many Japanese. (It is rarely actually valued for direct personal consumption.) As an object of discourse, *matsutake* has brought together scientists and entrepreneurs from Japan, China, and both North and South Korea. Yet, Tsing is stern in pointing out the failure of both Americans and Japanese, hindered by different economic paradigms for forestry, in recognizing the other's work with *matsutake*. *The Mushroom at the End of the World* is a tantalizing offering of scholarship that is sensitive to cultural nuance, but unfettered by narratives of the nation-state or the West.

While it is, at heart, a work of modern anthropology, Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* left me wondering if more disciplines could benefit from such mushroom-inspired thinking.



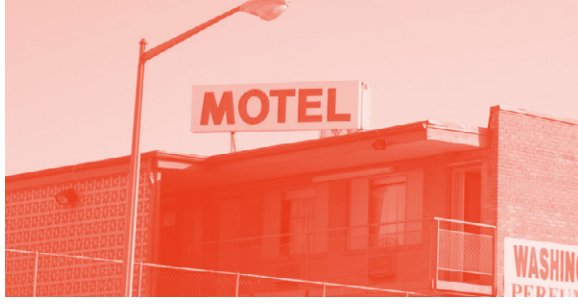
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- 1 A view of New York City by Iliria Ortensi
- 2 Jesko Fezer's R50 Baugruppen, Berlin
- 3 A homeless shelter in New York
- 4 A motel shelter in D.C.
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- 6 A painting by David Bruce
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- 8 An installation view of *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream*, MoMA.

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Although the ever more-pertinent issue of **housing** continues to manifest more and more both in academia (there are three housing studios at Yale just this semester), and the media (affordable housing discussed but rarely addressed), the conversation is detrimentally partitioned: politicians speak to developers, developers speak to investors, architects speak to competition boards, teachers speak to students, students try to be relevant, etc. In pursuit of actionable understanding, Paprika XXIII brings these often contradictory yet necessarily supportive ideas into uncommon proximity through a diverse array of conversations. This issue consists of a series of brief interviews with thinkers and practitioners who engage housing from wildly different vantages—be they conceptual, material, financial, political, or otherwise—

Housing must be a human right, but still, housing is a commodity (Angotti) / The affordable housing crisis produces the homelessness crisis and the Right to Shelter is not the Right to Housing (Staudenmeier) / You can't say 'public housing' in public without using it in the past tense. Today, private real estate governs, often violently (Martin) / Style is the great equalizer, and sometimes, we need a new image (Plater-Zyberk) / Housing should be a social process related to the collective urban surrounding, not manifest out of our individual dreams (Fezer).

These perspectives illuminate, undermine, bolster, repeat, and contradict one another. Together, they are in service of each other, and in turn, in service of those seeking to do something about the housing crisis.

TOM ANGOTTI

teaches at Hunter College, where he directs the Center for Community Planning & Development (CCPD). His recent book, *Zoned Out*, outlines gentrification and displacement of low-income communities of color across New York City, and seeks to resist these inequalities through authentic community-based planning. This is an excerpt from a longer conversation.

What do you do?
My starting point is with **housing as a human right**. That's a very general principle that everybody would agree with. Now, what does that really mean? It's juxtaposed with the real housing system that we face every day, in which **housing is a commodity**; it is a product that is bought and sold on the market, it has a price, and the price very consistently shapes how it is used, how it is distributed.

In today's discussion on housing, it's often about getting government out of the housing market so that the market forces can magically stabilize the situation and produce more housing. This is rooted in the phony notion that greater supply will meet the greater demand. The laws of supply and demand presumably will fix all ills in the housing market. That just has never worked. In fact **wherever housing is regulated the least, and government has the least intervention in the housing market, there are the most problems.**

The United States is the only major nation in the world that does not officially recognize housing as a human right. It's no accident that we have such a large homeless population, and so many people living in poor housing conditions when we are one of the wealthiest nations in the world. **What about the phrase 'affordable'?**
Does your organization pursue government-provided housing? Or is it just budgetary support for private development?

The larger context is that I wouldn't have any of these clients if there was enough affordable housing in DC, and so a lot of what my office does as a whole is advocacy at the DC Mayor level and city council level about budgetary issues: getting more money in the budget for affordable housing, getting developers to build more affordable housing and less luxury housing. **Is this more lobbying individual politicians or writing legislation?**
We work on legislation—like the 'Right to Shelter,' which describes people's right to get into shelters and their rights once they're in—but we also work a lot on the budget.

For example, is the mayor putting enough money in the budget to build housing?
In DC, there is the Housing Production Trust Fund, which is meant to provide money for the government to produce some affordable housing, but the pipeline for that is so slow and convoluted that it feels like it takes twenty years to get one housing unit out of the government. **In the old days, HUD provided money for local governments to build housing via public housing. Now HUD, god forbid under this president, could completely disappear.** There hasn't been new public housing built in years. I think people have just gotten used to that. It doesn't even cross people's minds to say that the housing authority should create more housing. **They have rejiggered public housing and supposedly made it more safe and habitable, but that has not meant a net increase in housing.**

In DC, they do it, but they don't do enough of it.
With this artificial binary of 'market' vs. 'affordable,' how do you address housing for the very poor?
If the developer builds a certain number of units of affordable housing, the city is the one who decides who is eligible for that housing. We're lobbying to bring that cap down. 80% AMI [Area Median Income] is too big of a pool and cuts out a lot of people at the lowest end of the spectrum. We lobby to make it 20% AMI, for example. **Is there a world in which your organization would look to some form of housing that is off of the private market?**
We had someone in our office working on a constitutional right to housing, but it hasn't really gone anywhere. It doesn't have the political momentum that it needs. **A lot of people don't even make the connection that homelessness is growing in the United States because there isn't enough affordable housing. In that way, the 'Right to Housing' argument is somewhat dead on arrival.** I hate to sound jaded, but it doesn't have the political backing that it needs. **Could you describe the Right to Shelter legislation you helped pass? DC is one of three jurisdictions in the country that has a so-called 'Right to Shelter.'** There are literally three in the country that have something akin to that. But, in DC, that right only exists when the temperature is 32 degrees or below. So, it's not a year round right to shelter, it is only when the weather's really cold. However, the 'Homeless Services Reform Act' that our office was instrumental in getting passed twelve years ago, codified this right to get into shelter when the temperature is too cold, and once people are in the shelter system, to make sure that their rights were respected. All these things that seem like they should exist, but before that law was passed, there wasn't actually any legal right to any of this.

What is the confrontation between that right and the capacities of the shelter infrastructure in DC? That is a really good question. There isn't enough capacity. Over the last five years, the DC government has taken over a number of motels that were on the low end of the spectrum—like Motel 6, the Budget Inn—and has basically turned them into family shelters. These were regular DC motels that the government has contracted and paid a lot of money—a lot more than they would make from just tourists—and turned them into ad-hoc family shelters because they ran out of shelter space. They said it was a temporary measure... but it has now been a temporary measure for five years. Every year more and more families get into these motels. When our current mayor came in two or three years ago, she hired a Human Services director who actually started letting people in year round. Now they have run out of space in motels in DC, so they are putting people out in Maryland, but still in a part of the DC family shelter system. **Has the Right to Shelter built any momentum?**
I don't think anybody would say it has gotten us any closer to a right to housing. This is so far from housing **In my view, housing means you have a key, you lock the door, and you have your own space. That is not how the shelter system operates.** If you get one of the motel places, yes, you technically have a key, but you are in a motel, and the motel staff can come in there whenever they want. It is not your own space. I don't think that is getting us any closer to the right to housing.

What is the initial premise of homeownership need reconsidering? Should we be focusing on making it more accessible?
Homeownership is bound up with the whole creation of the settler economy, by settlers from Europe who came and took land from Native Americans, and who developed privately owned property to stake a claim on land, a vast amount of land, that had been held in stewardship by Native Americans. Second, at the creation of America as an independent nation, **homeownership was available only to white males.** For at least a century, it was difficult for even women to own homes, African-Americans did not have access for a much longer time. **Homeownership has always been conditioned by class and race and by the colonial mentality,** which includes a very instrumental view of the relationship of people to land.

How can a community resist unsustainable increases in land value while improving public services, whose funding comes in large part from property taxes?
Local governments control and pay for education and many other services. The question must go back to the original sin of federalism in the United States. **The US Constitution does not guarantee housing as a right,** and it doesn't guarantee healthcare or education as a right, unlike many developed countries. The states and local governments are supposed to provide these services. Since the grand move towards suburbanization of the 20th century, there has been a growing population divide between central cities and suburban regions. The exclusion of minorities from the suburbs is entirely entwined with the local government's power of taxation. **In order to provide bigger revenues that provide better school systems, they structure their land use rules around promoting highest value new construction.** Originally of course, it was one and two family homes. Now it's even McMansions. The greater the value the better. It provides more money for better schools, while guaranteeing that the local population will remain relatively low, exclusive and relatively white. There's your problem. **It's not just a matter of property ownership, it is intertwined with the exclusionary character of US democratic development.**
What is your attitude towards the existing city fabric? Where are the financial opportunities for an increased interest in reuse and re-appropriation?
The economy that revolves around the commodification of land and housing winds up producing the kind of urban fabric we currently have. There is a problem that everything depends on the ability to make money through the buying and selling of land, buildings, and housing. New things always sell for higher prices and the higher prices jack up rents and land values in the surrounding areas.

One of the problems is that all of our professions—architects, designers, planners—were created hundreds of years ago [planners 150], at a very different time when cities were starting to be built, and the majority of the world's population lived in rural areas. The architects were servants of the feudal monarchies and some became servants of the state, but by and large, these professions grew with the vast transformation of the world from a rural to an urban one. Now that it's mostly urban, urbanization continues, but it's time to ask the other question **what kind of professionals are needed to turn existing cities into decent living environments? How can we help make housing a human right?**

JESKO FEZER

is an architect, writer, activist, editor of political architecture magazine An Architektur, and designer of the R50 Baugruppen, a cohousing project shared by 19 families, including his own. The R50 is an investigation of collective ownership, shared resources, delayed decision making, and building/living together. This is an excerpt from a longer conversation.

Could you describe the uniquely participatory design process you employed with the R50 Baugruppen project?
We were building something economic, something straight, something simple, something that did not destroy too much, something that could be there or is possible in the future, to produce a rough situation/starting point for those participations, negotiations, adaptations to come. We were using architecture to stimulate fields of debate, involvement, participation, communication.

This was an opportunity to relate the **social process of thinking about how to live together—as a family or as a single person—to the design process,** to make them less separate than they are typically made out to be. **How did this manifest in the design?**
We initiated the project because we had a piece of land, we had a group of people, we had a budget to work on it, and we had to do it, but we had not discussed what it should look like, who wants to live in what way, what the neighborhood was like, whom we knew. We started by taking positions, architectural positions, while postponing as many decisions as possible. **This meant clarifying things at a certain moment, but also clarifying what is not clarified by a decision, and what we can postpone** [i.e. determine the location of services without establishing individual floorplans]. For the community of people living here, this opened up many opportunities to change things, to come up with suggestions.

It is an open system that sets up a dialogic process of planning, where the basic structure and the infill—the apartment—are in a way interconnected, but also have a separate life, in terms of how they are designed, how they are produced. **It's about separating (not fundamentally, but strategically at some moments) collective decisions and individual decisions to enable them to inform each other.**
We built up something that was sort of capital—of functioning, of different lifestyles—but did not manifest those living models. This is a model that, by its nature, could be extended, and it is also a model of how buildings work. They first build a concrete structure, then they bring in the façade, then they fill in the apartments. **Why shouldn't the apartments be a little more separate from the infrastructure?** It would be cheaper, more flexible, adaptable, and much better than how these buildings look nowadays.

There is something amazing about what you have done: everyone in the building not only feels ownership of the collective spaces, but also of their own apartment that they have designed for themselves. That is really an interesting point. On the one hand, I agree completely, but on the other, it could be seen as very normal. Why do people not design the apartment that they live in? Why should they look for 50 apartments and then decide on one that is more or less adequate? Or, they then in apartments that don't make sense for them at all, with big sleeping rooms, small living rooms, no space to work. This is why we need collective spaces in neighborhoods that can help to make apartments much smaller, less equipped. **If you are not trying to build up your apartment as your own city, it doesn't have to contain everything you need.**

On the other hand, I can say for myself, for the project, and also of theoretical considerations, this is extremely heavy. People and architects are not able to plan perfect apartments for themselves. It drives them crazy. Couples divide. Kids cry. In the end, you are sitting there, thinking why did I not make the window here? That is why I think it is fair to offer this opportunity, but probably not everyone in every situation needs to do this, because it is an enormous undertaking and is quite problematic. **The other thing is, often when people get together to build joint houses like this, they tend to build something around their expected or supposed identity. They try to fulfill all those dreams they read in design magazines or saw in journeys in interesting countries, and they invest too much money, energy, fantasy, and wrong directions in their apartments, and in the end, individual dreams are stocked together into something that isn't a home.** I think we should not support this tendency, in which urban homes become **more expensive and lose this charm of anonymity, urbanity, collectivity, greatness.**
As a counterpart, I believe in a certain simplicity, a certain banality, a certain boringness, a certain distance. **Collectivity and unfinishedness enables a building to grow.**
Could you explain the interplay between expertise and cooperation in your design process?
So I think it is an interesting and non-solvable point between convincing and expertise, and being extremely open to what an individual or a group suggests, how it develops, and what it looks like. **We were not the authors of this building, we were the authors of the process,** helping to keep it in the economic framework, and we brought up solutions for how to make it happen. **But the building—what it looks like and how it functions—that was the inhabitants.** And they convinced us to a certain degree, but we were also inhabitants, so we had a voice in this process.

Housing authorities and investors say, 'This is not what people like. This is not what people want to do. This is not what we think is adequate, and what is even legal.' So, we could convince them that it is nice, cheap, reasonable, technical, and that people love it nowadays. But, we would prefer to work with those people together, and then they can talk in their own interest with us and other experts about what would be the appropriate answer to those problems. It is easier to convince someone if they can understand, can follow, can correct or modify your suggestion, and is also in the position to make a decision. To be in the position to make a decision, you either have to own the building, or you need to at least have the right to be a relevant part of the design process. Then, it is not only about convincing, but really about a cooperation.

ELIZABETH PLATER-ZYBERK

is an architect, urban designer and planner, and a founder of the Congress for New Urbanism. Her work shaping the tenets of New Urbanism was instrumental to the design and legislation of both private and public housing in recent decades. This is an excerpt from a longer conversation.

How do you frame housing in a larger socio-political context?
This is a complex context. I would like to focus on the fact that housing is part of a larger real estate development and finance picture. **These are peripheral forces that determine many aspects of housing production and that have a larger impact than anything architects can do for the so-called housing crisis.** Housing has become an equity class, part of real estate portfolios in which people invest and assess value completely abstractly. It is a market of buying, selling, and trading on that abstract value that has relatively little to do with the market of need or users. The world of finance has infected housing—in fact all of real estate development—in a way that perhaps it had not yet when we were starting out, 30 or 40 years ago. I have heard it said there is no housing crisis, it's just all in the wrong place. That refers to the urban places that have lost jobs and population, a phenomenon that is the result of the larger national and indeed global economic reality.

So, is this the avenue of the architect—to speak the language, and engage with that financial and political discourse?
I think you have to understand it. Only then can you set off to impact housing design and production. **When the New Urbanists started out with change in mind, we already understood some things about housing production:** for instance, builders really valued the floorplans of their building—that was their brand: 'I put this diagonal wall by the front door and I sold 6 houses that way. I don't want to change it.' We understood the field of operation for us really could only be the master planning of the aggregation of houses. If we didn't touch the inside of the house, we could move the garage to the back alley. So some of the urban design changes we proposed may not sound like a lot, but they enabled the making of places more compact and walkable, to achieve the environmental and social goals we thought were important. **So, as an architect, I think you are always looking for how you can be more clever than the system that has been set up, its components independent and uncoordinated: finance wants one thing, regulators want something else...**

Can you discuss the significance of image in housing, specifically in New Urbanist designs for government programs like Hope VI?
Image is important in housing, as it embodies identity for the residents. Contemporary expression seems more acceptable now. But when we were starting out, there was no way that you could build for the market anything that was not in some way historically derived, at least in the United States. That wasn't true in Canada or Latin America. But in the U.S. the image of housing needed to be related to either the American Colonial tradition in the northeast, or maybe the Mediterranean tradition, which was somewhat invented, but nevertheless represented the beginnings of South Florida, for instance. In the 1970s the Venturi's created a show at the Renwick (Washington, DC) about the American culture of housing, when I was working for them just out of school. So as young architects working with developers (as distinct from patrons) we were acutely aware of that reality. And, we said, instead of being cynical about it, or Post-Modern, or trying to reinvent it, let's just do it well. **Let's do the traditional design with dignity, let's see if we can make it beautiful for our time.**

The historical derivation, that was initially a market-driven decision? Yes, housing customers (customer as distinct from client) were more comfortable with it. Our first suburban housing commission was for a subdivision of 110 units of houses. We misread the code, and instead of making garden apartments we made side-yard housing, using Charleston as a precedent. The developer decided to call it Charleston Place. It remains, many years later, a very appealing place. There are never any for sale signs, ownership changes hand to hand. **We used to say, 'Don't experiment with the poor,' which is kind of what early affordable housing did. The residents got beautiful modern architecture, but they didn't like being distinguished by that.** This can still be a problem to disentangle these different forms of oppression—economic inequality, racial inequality, gender inequality, and so on. **Real estate is a form of conquest,** though it's not usually experienced this way. The real, systemic violence is generally abstracted, it's moved over, out of the frame. And so real estate, as property, is seen as a luxury good. But every now and then the violence shows up again. The New York City developer's 'poor door' for subsidized renters in a mixed-income high rise was one of those cases. You have to wonder: in what world? What the hell were they thinking? But the point is that this was permissible, it was thinkable, it was even seen as marketable: **the return of Jim Crow through the real estate industry.** That was a relatively transparent expression of wishes and desires and fears, and a very articulate one as well.

That's why The Art of Inequality concentrates on the hegemony of real estate, which is not limited to the sphere of commodification. **We're not just talking about the privatization of the city. We are talking about a strategy, a strategy for managing and distributing populations, for governing. Simply put: Real estate governs.**

What about recent political history and the defunding of public housing in America?
I'm not a fortune-teller, but think about it like this: a real-estate developer from New York City is now the President of the United States. That's not entirely circumstantial or accidental. It could have been otherwise, there could have been other types of demagoguery from the corporate sector (indeed, as we know, all of this is propped up by multi-national capital), but there is something specific about the real-estate industry and its hegemony to which architecture has special access. Why? Because we can talk about the land under the building, and who owns it, and how that happened, and what sort of profit must be extracted from it in order for that building to exist, but we can also talk about the ways in which the building itself articulates and enables all of this. That's what *The Art of Inequality* is all about, with a special focus on buildings, and on the clearly architectural dimensions of real estate development. It's not just about following the money; it's about the world in which architects work, seemingly with no choice. The challenge therefore is to educate oneself in the logics of this system, to understand how it works, and to ask: How could this be?

The title expresses this clearly. Inequality is a project. **The point of financial capitalism is inequality. It's not some byproduct. It's the whole idea.** And as architects know well, projects require a kind of artful execution. Where, by 'art' one can understand beauty, but also—and these are not mutually exclusive—a kind of artifice, a set of techniques. And architecture is among those techniques. **We just came out of a meeting with Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk...** Did you ask about the Hope VI public housing demolition program?

We did...
I recommend Season III of 'The Wire.' That's ideology, as architectural style. Disputes over style may seem academic with respect to the matters we have been discussing. Much damage has been done elsewhere. **But a progressive sounding, well-meaning (and in certain ways genuinely progressive) project, promoted by the Congress for the New Urbanism, licensed the demolition of mostly black people's housing in the interest of style, as well as in the interest of the real estate markets.**

The problem is the violence, and I really mean violence. How many times have you seen the image of Pruitt-Iggo going down? The sheer aesthetic pleasure that white people have taken in the destruction of that housing is, to my mind, obscene. Yes, it's full of problems. Yes, it was racist from the beginning, there's plenty of scholarship on that. But that's not the point. **The point is that this legalized bombing of public housing goes hand in hand with the neoliberal program of removing such institutions wholesale from the public sphere and thus, from the public imagination.**

Indeed the idea of the American Dream has been used to justify these programs of inequality... The financial crisis depended on the dream as fuel for its mortgage tranches... This so-called American Dream of private property and homeownership as the site for the realization of the soul is an old one. The country was more or less founded on it. This 'dream' was formalized by the Homestead Act and other legislation that authorized and reproduced its logic right up to the present. **And at every step along the way, there is violence.** First in the form of a colonial land grab, and subsequently, in ever greater degrees of abstraction that pushed the violence further outside the frame, through segregation, red-lining, the color line, etc. The color line is about real estate. **It's a line that says 'whites only' on one side, and it has to do with the production of economic value in a market that is basically racist.** It's impossible to disentangle these different forms of oppression—economic inequality, racial inequality, gender inequality, and so on.

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What is your attitude towards deletion and then rebuilding? I'm referencing the legacy of the HOPE VI project, which was a reinvention of something that was already there; a removal and a replacement.
At some point you make judgements about rebuilding or building new. More often than not I want to save things and remake them, as they represent cultural history and embodied energy—more often than the implementers do.

The client or developer may argue that the codes have changed, we'd be practically rebuilding it anyway, and it will take longer and be more expensive. I think you have to pick your battles about what you choose to save, and what not. **There is another side to that coin, which is that when you are working with an area of a certain character, if you add something that supports that character, you are elevating everything that is still there, re-valuing rather than de-valuing.** You are saying that the old place has value. If you add something that is a contrast, you are saying, the old is out of date, and therefore only the new has value. So, that is an issue we have often dealt with. Some of the HOPE VI used the structures and just did things like turn them front to back or added porches. **But, sometimes, there is also this overwhelming, pervading sense of 'We've just got to get rid of it, we need a new image.'**