

**Columbia University, GSAPP. AAD Studio / Summer 2017**

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**Occupy Gracie Mansion, *Revisiting the 'colonial' house urban legacy.***

### **What: Houses, Mansions and Gardens**

The studio will look at New York historical colonial houses and mansions as sites for a hypothetical architectural intervention and urban transformation. New York rural historical houses were built in the late 18th and early 19th Century, following the Dutch vernacular architecture, and later in the Georgian architecture tradition. Today the houses find themselves in public parks or neighborhood gardens, dotted across the modern city and its boroughs, like rural islands within an asphalt and brick landscape. The sites of those houses are the entry point towards the studio design exercise, which could start at the interior architecture scale of the house and extend to include the larger scale of the entire plot.

### **Where: Manhattan and the Bronx**

Gracie Mansion, the current residence of the New York Mayor and located on the upper east side, is one of the last inhabited historical structures still maintaining a political function of sort. It stands to represent a whole generation of houses that have slowly lost their functional properties and turned into museums. The studio will focus on historical houses that are located in uptown Manhattan and the Bronx. Built in what was once the rural areas of old New York, the so called 'colonial' houses are today in the middle of the metropolis, devoid of their original use, each with its own new urban and social milieu. Those houses and their gardens are currently supported by the Historic House Trust, and run by New York City Department of Parks and Recreations.

### **How: Deconstruct a private house, reconstruct a public network**

Each student is to select and investigate the site of her/his house, research the history that gave its birth, map its evolution and conceptually reframe the institution that currently inhabits and supports its fragile structure. With public funding secured, the studio would engage with and reimagine the role of public institutions and the public spaces they provide, in a city that is increasingly led into private hands. Working as a group, the collection of houses would be envisioned to become a robust network of social infrastructure sites across the city.

### **Why: Engaging the City, Reclaiming the public**

New York colonial historical houses and mansions, privately built, represented the European settlers' imaginary projected onto the 'virgin' landscape of the New World. Typically sited on highland with a view towards their property, the houses were the first step in the gradual 'enclosure movement', fencing and privatizing the native land.

Celebrating the wealth, success and fame of their owners, they also closeted a darker history of land appropriation and slavery. Acquired by the City and turned public in modern time, they became the city micro-museums of a sanitized history of the Revolutionary War, to be perpetually celebrated, funded and maintained. Sitting isolated in a hyper urbanized context as a freestanding castle in its garden, the historical house continues to propagate the idea of the 'American Dream' while glossing over the American reality of lack of access to urban resources.

The studio thesis proposes the undoing of the museumification of those public properties while excavating their history, and reinventing their role into more effective public sites by addressing contemporary social and urban concerns. Through the questioning of the figure (house) onto its ground (the garden), the aim would be to loosen the threshold between the site and its context, merging the interior and garden scale with the urban scale, multiplying its programmatic potentials, excavating and tapping into the infrastructure supporting it, while unlocking and harvesting along the way the question of a city - a 'sanctuary city'- that is increasingly becoming the battleground of social movements and change.

## **What If**

In 2015 a Black Lives Matter activist brought down the confederate flag in South Carolina State Capitol, in an act of defiance to the state narrative of American history and in reaction to the prevailing police brutality against minorities. This was followed by a collective public outcry against confederate period status and monuments occupying public sites. The 'colonial' house is the next protagonist of that period, a complex historical spatial urban artifact that needs to be revisited. **What if, instead of a city preciously preserving its contested past in the 'colonial' house, re-imagines itself through those sites, as a socially egalitarian place with a robust equal right to the city, more true to its 'revolutionary' history.**

## **Potential Historical Houses** (proposed but not limited to):

- 1 Gracie Mansion - 1799
- 2 Morris-Jumel Mansion Museum - 1765
- 3 Dyckman Farmhouse Museum - 1783
- 4 Merchant's house Museum - 1832
- 5 Hamilton Grange National Memorial - 1802
- 6 Valentine-Varian House - 1758
- 7 Van Cortlandt Mansion - 1748
- 8 The Edgar Allan Poe Cottage - 1812
- 9, 10, 11, 12**

**Schedule:****Week 1:**

Wed May 31 Lottery Presentation

Thu June 1 First session - presentation by Mayssa Jallad (HP program), Exercise 1

**Week 2:**

Mon June 5 Houses Tour, meeting with Historic House Trust director.

Wed June 7 Houses Tour, meeting with Department of Parks and Recreations.

Thu June 8 Building analysis presentations / site models mockup, Exercise 2

**Week 3:**

Mon June 12 Pinup / Site model finalization

Wed June 14 Desk Crit

Thu June 15 Desk Crit

**Week 4:**

Mon June 19 Pinup

Wed June 21 Desk Crit

Thu June 22 Desk Crit

**Week 5:**

Mon June 26 Pinup

Wed June 28 Desk Crit

Thu June 29 Desk Crit

**Week 6:**

Mon July 3 Desk Crit

Wed July 5 Mid term Review

Thu July 6 Desk Crit

**Week 7:**

Mon July 10 Pinup

Wed July 12 Desk Crit

Thu July 13 Desk Crit

**Week 8:**

Mon July 17 Pinup

Wed July 19 Desk Crit

Thu July 20 Desk Crit

**Week 9:**

Mon July 24 Review Preview 1

Wed July 26 Desk Crit

Thu July 29 Review Preview 2

**Week 10:**

Mon July 31 Desk Crit

Wed Aug 2 Desk Crit

Wed Aug 3 Final Review

**References: TBD****Contacts:**

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