

Hilary Sample, Housing Studio Coordinator

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## Housing: Dilemmas of the Sharing Era



Interior, WeWork, Washington DC

“The first ‘sharing economy’ organizations allowed members to timeshare things such as summer homes, cars or power tools, rather than owning one each and leaving it idle most of the time. In their purest form, such groups were ‘peer-to-peer’: self-organizing, with no central authority. Once a for-profit company is set up to handle the logistics – such as [Zipcar](#), Uber, Airbnb, WeWork – however, the notion of ‘sharing’ is arguably already out of the window. Still, there remained the kernel of a communitarian idea in the origin of Airbnb, founded by two tech workers who rented out airbeds in their spare rooms for a conference, and thought there might be a market. Airbnb’s marketing still plays on the feelings of virtuous and adventurous sociability in the idea of a ‘guest’ staying in a spare room of the ‘host’s’ home. Yet, as [Tom Slee’s superbly argued book \*What’s Yours is Mine\*](#) points out, the vast majority of Airbnb’s business is now ‘entire home’ rentals: self-contained flats or villas. Long-term renters in cities such as San Francisco are being forced out by landlords who see more profit in short-term Airbnb stays...What is explicitly not shared by any of the poster children of the ‘sharing economy’ is *responsibility*.”

Steven Poole, *The Guardian*, April 2, 2016, a review of Tom Slee’s book, “What’s Yours is Mine”

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Throughout evolution, whether we hunt, gather or code, humans have relied on each other's strength, talent, and expertise. Now that sharing—cars, work spaces, living spaces, tools, child care, elder care—is on the rise, what is at stake for each one of us? How can society maximize efficiency of resources while maintaining choice, allowing individuation and freedom of expression? How do we maintain the link between freedom and responsibility? How can housing and public space be made better, for more people, through sharing?

By **better**, we mean: allowing more opportunity for expression, creativity, wellness, efficiency and a new kind of fluency. A fluency where each person can access what they need, and give back what they produce; where gender differences are attenuated, work and leisure are continuous, one does what one is best at, and things get done more efficiently and at higher level than ever before.

The current disparity of wealth and extreme inequality are understood as obstacles in the advancement of such a fluent society. While few have multiple, luxurious, unused homes, many more become homeless, suffering in the face of growing environmental extremes. Formulating affordable housing solutions in the face of this growing disparity has proven a challenge.



Anti-UBER protest, London, August 6, 2017

**Columbia University**  
**Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation**  
A4003: Core Studio III, Fall 2017  
States of Housing

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Our housing studio will study the current polemics of the sharing economy, and aim to integrate housing with contemporary culture. We will move beyond the tower-in-the-park housing scheme, and propose new hybrids that amend surrounding landscapes and cultural contexts.

We will aim for high-density, low-rise, environmentally-sound and sustainable development, with shared access to natural light, air and outdoor space. Our studio will consider the value of sharing and not, and try to understand both sides.

Our view is that sharing in housing, culture, sports and education offers many advantages, yet requires a clear understanding of responsibilities and investments in education. In terms of investment, our studio will test the idea that a fraction of proactive investment can produce substantial aggregate improvements.

Our studio will follow the three States of Housing assignments, outlined below, beginning with an urban and typological analysis; followed by a 10-week design project. The studio is organized by two principal means: research and analysis; and architectural design.

1. The first assignment will focus on site, infrastructure, and typology using a cross section from Manhattan to the Bronx.
2. The second assignment will examine the architecture of housing units, building programs and systems at VM Housing, by BIG/JDS, in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2008.
3. The final project will consist of designing high-density, mixed-use housing and public space integrated with Art-Culture-Urban networks.

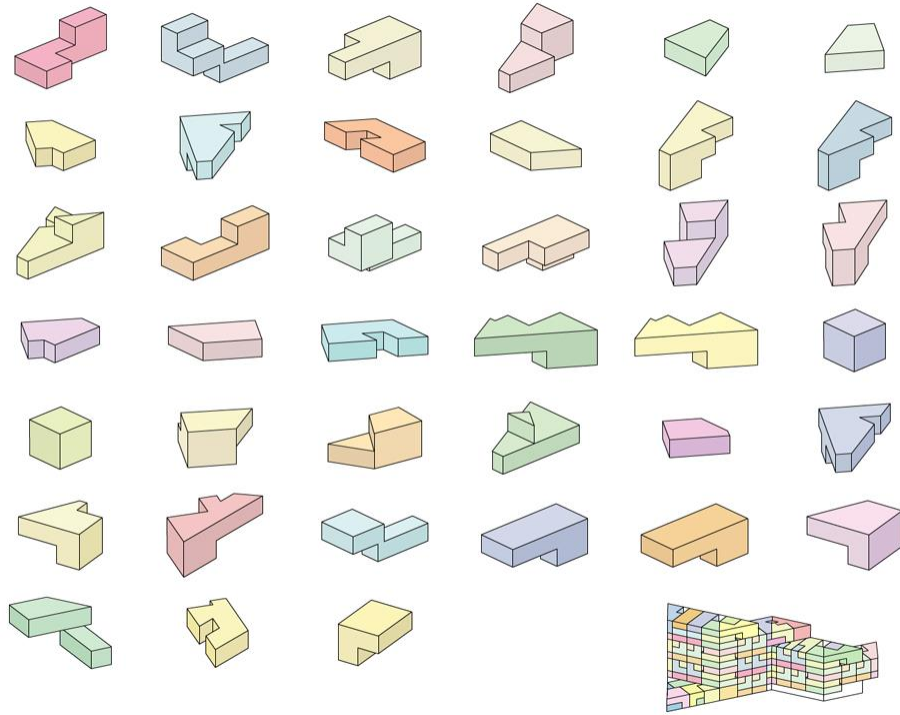
Each assignment builds upon the previous one: starting with the urban scale, zooming into the dwelling unit, and finally integrating the different systems into the larger context of the city.

With 7 million inhabitants and 28 million visitors annually, New York constantly shares its housing types. Through an ongoing discussion and team-based projects, we will speculate on the potential for contemporary urban housing, explore models of repetition and difference, and investigate the effects of seriality, monumentality and their relationship to the ever-changing city fabric.

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Kit of parts, VM Housing, BIG/JDS, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2008