LIVING LARGE
An Alternative Model for Urban Living

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Architecture
University of California, Berkeley, 2009

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ABSTRACT

A house once symbolized the American dream—frequently clustered in tight rows and cul-de-sacs, the single-family dwelling not only represented financial success but stability and hope for the future. However, as recent generations have come to face more and more economic difficulties, a house has, for many, become more of a liability than a dream.

Lack of home ownership in New York City has reached an extreme– more than 75% of residents rent rather than own. In light of this trend, this thesis seeks to imagine, through architecture, a new kind of American dream: housing for nomads where no one owns anything and people are free to roam around the city. This proposal suggests that rather than continuing to downsize the micro houses that constitute today’s solution to the home ownership problem, Americans can once again live large—together.

Thesis Advisor: Ana Miljački
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture
INTRODUCTION
In high-density cities like New York and San Francisco, the cost of living and demand for housing have both increased exponentially. According to Zumper, the median rent of a one bedroom apartment in New York ranges from $2,500-$3,000 a month. Similarly, according to Zillow, the median rent in San Francisco is $3,400. Due to the high cost of living, many people especially younger generations, find that it is almost impossible to live independently in such cities.

It is a widely known fact that housing in New York City is difficult to find. To deal with the increase in population, people are cramming into smaller spaces in increasing numbers. For example, a one-bedroom apartment with a living room is often converted into a “two-bedroom apartment,” etc.

In the fall of 2011, an exhibition called “Making Room: New Models for Housing New Yorkers” was held at the Museum of the City of New York. Partnered with Citizens Housing and Planning Council and the Architectural League of New York, a group of architects and urban planners got together and investigated different regulations and policies that make new housing models difficult to execute in New York City.
Making Room

An exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York attempts to disrupt the city's present housing situation, exposing the key housing regulations and policies and reinforcing the ambition to produce real and tangible change.

Architecture / Leigha Dennis
By looking at the changes from 2010 to 2012, one can see the financial difficulties that certain income groups face in New York City. The orange in the graph above indicates a decrease in the number of households with an income ranging between $20,000 and $60,000.

In contrast, the households above $60,000 and below $20,000 income showed a great increase, thus further worsening the income gap issues in New York City.
In response to the increasing population and lack of affordable housing in New York, Mayor de Blasio is promising 200,000 units of affordable housing, 40% of which is planned to be new units of affordable housing. That is 80,000 new units.

To put it into context, the current number of units in East Village and Greenwich Village is slightly less than 80,000. If we assume that these units are divided equally amongst the five boroughs in New York, each borough will receive 16,000 units, which is equivalent to 48 Unite d’Habitation’s that will fill up 12 standard New York blocks. In Manhattan, that would also equate to allocating about one Unite in every neighborhood, assuming there are about 50 neighborhoods.

In order to reach the number of units in the proposal, there are three strategies that the city proposes. The first strategy is inclusionary housing programs in which developers are granted more numbers of units if they are willing to allot 20% as affordable housing. However, in reality, the program has segregated different income groups and has created what is called a rich door and poor door. The second strategy is that the government provides subsidized affordable housing for those homeowners who provide affordable housing. In reality, over the last few decades, 68,000 units of subsidized housing units have opted out of subsidy programs. Lastly, the new affordable housings that are being proposed is getting smaller and smaller. And now it has gone down to 250-400 square feet.

So how much smaller can we live?
NUMBER OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

NUMBER OF NEW CONSTRUCTION

237 \times \text{UNITÉ D'HABITATION}
1 At city scale

200,000 units $\times$ 80% new construction

= 80,000 units
One in every borough

New York City
80,000 units ÷ 5 boroughs = 16,000 units / borough
One in every neighborhood

Manhattan
16,000 units ÷ 50 neighborhoods = 320 units / neighborhood
PROPOSED STRATEGIES

1. Inclusionary Housing Program

2. Subsidized affordable housing

3. New affordable housing complex

REALITY

1. Rich door/ poor door

2. Huge loss in subsidized units

According to the Subsidized Housing Information Project maintained by the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, which tracks the four largest subsidy programs,

68,000 units of subsidized affordable rental housing have opted out of those programs over the last few decades.

3. Shrinking unit sizes

250 SQ. FT. - 400 SQ. FT.

Data Source: http://furmancenter.org/files/fact-sheets/FurmanCenterNYCHousingSeries.pdf
BACKGROUND
Ever since the mid nineteenth century as New York City was on its way in becoming the American metropolis, housing has played a big role in defining the lifestyle of the residents. Due to its immediate impact on the lives of the people, the history of tenement housing in New York City directly portrays the environment in which the working class has been faced with. In this section, the history of tenement housing has been examined and put into a sequence in order to put the thesis in context.

While the idea of housing regulations in the early 1800’s were intended more to protect the rich rather than improve the lives of the poor, when Jacob Riis published *How the Other Half Lives* in 1889, the idea of understanding the lives of the poor was brought into people’s concerns. Since then, laws such as Tenement Housing Act of 1901 and others have addressed the ideas of light and air access. Similar concerns have been considered when designing this thesis proposal.

The understanding of the history of housing in New York City also leads to the understanding of the current housing situation. The timeline in this section illustrates the lineage of housing projects in the city that leads up to the micro-housing that is being proposed today. It is worth noting that this micro-housing, which is somewhere in between 250-400 square feet, is smaller than the tenement housing in Gotham Court in the 1850s.

Opposite Page

Source: *How the Other Half Lives*

http://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/his1005fall2010/2010/10/05/how-the-other-half-lives/
TYPES OF TENEMENT HOUSING IN NEW YORK CITY

Old New York dwelling-house transformed into a tenement house

Rear tenement caves - two buildings on one lot

Type of tenement housing without light or ventilation, except in outer rooms

Packing-box tenement built for revenue only

Type of tenement showing introduction of light-shaft

Typical double decker of the old style, covering 90% of the lot
The double-decker, where the civic conscience began to stir in 1879

Evolution of double-decker to date

Tenement housing permitted under the Tenement House Act of 1901 or New Law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1624</td>
<td>The arrival of the first colonists in New York City.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>New York State Commission’s Plan divides Manhattan into 2000 blocks of 200 by 800 feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Dr. John H. Griscom becomes one of the NYC’s first crusaders for housing reform—identifies the most crucial design issues as the provision of adequate light and ventilation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>American Civil War begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>13th Amendment to US Constitution is passed by Congress, abolishing slavery. Civil war officially ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Hundreds of Manhattan blocks had been overbuilt as tenement housing (transformed from single-family row house to railroad flats).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Tenement House Act of 1867 legally defines the tenement and mandates certain requirements, including fire escapes and maximum of 20 people per water closet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Chicago Fire of 1871 destroys much of the city, prompting new construction methods for rebuilding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>NYC’s Central Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, is officially completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Over-extension of railroad construction leads to the economic depression of 1873.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>First building in the US planned to incorporate an Otis elevator, ushering in the age of the skyscraper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Jacob Riis publishes How the Other Half Lives depicting the living conditions of immigrants in NYC in text and photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Millions of European immigrants continue to stream into Ellis Island of NY Harbor throughout the early modern era. Most move into urban tenement slums, while wealthy inhabit Beaux-Arts townhouses and estates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Theodore Roosevelt makes tenement housing standards in eastern slums an American issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>NYC subways is constructed as urban infrastructure advances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>New York City Skyscraper Set-Back Law shapes the tower architecture of Manhattan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>America is unprepared for the needs of workers’ housing; housing shortages plague America, as few homes are constructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Tenement House Act was revised to permit conversion of large single-family houses such as brownstones into apartments for less affluent occupants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Economy grows rapidly. Urban infrastructure improves as cities modernize, and middle-class American suburban homes are developed in the East and Mid-west.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gotham Court**  
Built by Silas Wood as a notorious early example of substandard new housing for the poor.

**Workingmen’s Home**  
Built by New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP).

**Tenth Street Studio**  
Artist’s housing, first collective housing in NY designed specifically for artists.

**Railroad Flats**  
Some of the tenement housing were called ‘railroad flats’ because the rooms were organized like cars on a train.

**Stuyvesant**  
Also known as the French Flats, is completed by Richard Morris Hunt. The Stuyvesant consisted of two identical five-story walk-up buildings, each occupying two 25’ by 100’ gridiron lots.

**Warren Place Mews**  
Consisted of modest single-family row houses along a private ‘parkway’.

**Monroe**  
Built using their variant on the Waterlow-type plan.

**Riverside Buildings**  
The largest and most refined perimeter block project in New York City by William Field and Son.

**Homewood Project**  
Working-class cottages designed in 1893; suburban working-class cottage becomes the object of housing philanthropy for the first time.

**Forest Hill Gardens**  
Quasi-philanthropic suburban estate in Queens by Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. and Grosvenor Atterbury.

**Linden Court**  
Completed at Jackson Heights.
NYC building code was revised to permit the use of automatic self-service elevators in large apartment building.

1922
Cambridge Court
attempted to increase contact between internal living space and both street and garden.

1928
Met Life Insurance Co Project
used highly efficient version of the U prototype, with a coverage of 53%.

1929
Sunnyside Gardens
cooperation for the limited-outfit City Housing Corporation: located along the Queensboro Skyway in Long Island City.

1933
GE Company House for
Modern Living Competition
design competition for single-family suburban house on a 75-by-150-foot lot.

1934
Parkchester
first and largest insurance company project in NY is built.

1938
Riverton
starts construction in Harlem (for black communities).

1941
US enters WWI
national defense housing projects are built using USHA money.

1945
WWII ends
The design of suburban dream houses start developing by Philip Johnson and Frank Lloyd Wright.

1946
Beginning of the baby boom

1947
Levitt and Sons begins building first Levittown on Long Island.

1949
Levitt and Sons begins building first Levittown on Long Island.
Other ‘tower in the park’ projects get built.

1954
National Housing Act of 1954 introduces urban renewal.
Introduction of the 10-foot-wide mobile home.

1964
Last year of the baby boom

1967
Stuyvesant Town
completed.

1972
Levittown
Levitt and Sons builds model house on Long Island in a 50-by-100-foot lot; 4,200 were produced in a single year.

1975
North Harlem Public Housing
Proposed by SCNY in 1951 as a slab block prototype.

1986
Riverband Houses
middle-income cooperative under Mitchell-Lama subsidy.

2000
Co-op City
Privately sponsored middle-income development with city tax abatement under Mitchell-Lama program.

2005
Roosevelt Island
Plan of the New York State Urban Development Corporation low and moderate income rental, middle-income cooperative.

2011
Micro-Apartments
Proposed by the City of New York.

2013
New York City plans to build a residential tower of tiny apartments between 250 and 370 square feet at 225 E. 27th St., in Manhattan.
If we look at music or transportation industries now, we can see that the idea of sharing culture has penetrated deep into the industries. From these industries, we know that the consumer experience can range far greater when things are shared. The pool of resources is much greater than if it were to be individually funded. However, this idea of sharing is not only a recent trend. The idea of a gym, where all the gym equipments are shared, has been around for decades and we understand and accept the logic. However, if owning a personal gym at your home sounds like an extravagance, why not owning a living room that you only use very small percentage of your time?

Needless to say, the idea of sharing has re-emerged into the housing as well. According to an article on NPR, called “Bay Area’s Steep Housing Costs Spark Return to Communal Housing,” young generations are voluntarily deciding to live together in a large household to reduce the cost of living in cities. To understand how this kind of communal housing fits into the history of communal housing in architecture, this section includes analysis of some historical communal housing projects as precedents.
HOUSING THAT LEARNS FROM OTHER MEMBERSHIP PLANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club Name</th>
<th>Club Hours</th>
<th>Kids Club Hours</th>
<th>Class Schedules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**CLUB RATES**

- **$99.00** initiation fee
- **$29.95** per month

*No long-term contract required*

Club Amenities

- Personal Trainer
- Equipment
- Racquetball
- Basketball
- Group Fitness
- Spa
- Sauna
- Pool
- Kids Klub
- Juice Bar

Join This Club
EMERGING SHARING CULTURE

Source:
(Bottom) Meal Sharing, https://www.mealsharing.com/
Bay Area's Steep Housing Costs Spark Return To Communal Living

Source: http://www.npr.org/blogs/alttechconsidered/2013/12/19/250548681/bay-areas-steep-housing-costs-spark-return-to-communal-living

This week, we're exploring the San Francisco Bay Area and the way income inequality is affecting the region. Check out the other pieces of the week.
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

10  Moriyama House
    SANAA
    shared component: everything but bedroom

39  Miss Sargfabrik Residential Complex
    Bkk-3 Architects
    shared component: garden, workspace

115 Fælledhaven Housing Complex
     Domus Arkitekter A/S
     shared component: gallery
337 Unite d’Habitation
Le Corbusier
shared component: rooftop

Narkomfin
Moisei Ginzburg
shared component: kitchen, dining room, childcare, gym
PEDREGULHO HOUSING

SITE PLAN
Scale: 3/64"=1'-0"

PROJECT DATA
ARCHITECT: Affonso Eduardo Reidy
YEAR: 1950-52
LOCATION: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
No. OF UNITS: 272 apartments
No. OF STOREYS: 7 storeys

UNIT PLAN
Scale: 3/16"=1'-0"

FLOOR PLAN
Scale: 3/64"=1'-0"

SECTION
Scale: 1/8"=1'-0"

CONFIGURATION LOGIC

UNIT ELEMENTS
1 UNIT = ++
K
L
B
BA

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
NURSERY
KINDERGARTEN
CHILDREN’S THEATER

SMALL 1-BEDROOM FLATS

2-BEDROOM MAISONETTES

Based on this premise, this thesis seeks to propose an alternative communal housing option that would provide another means of living in the city.

Similar to what we see in these industries, this proposal is a subscription system that draws in different resources from individuals and, hence, enlarging the pool of amenities and supporting different people’s wide range of necessities and preferences. By looking at housing elements as separate, distinct elements, this subscription system offers people the choice of different parts of the house to claim as their own so that you can choose to live large or compact.

This proposal questions how the housing units are being developed. We see that the house always comes in a pre-determined package. Essentially, if you are willing to pay more, you get larger everything. For instance, what if you are constantly dining out and have no need for a kitchen? What if you could save some money by opting out of having a kitchen? This is extremely applicable for the people in New York who have such varying interests. Instead, what is happening is that the units are getting smaller and smaller while the fundamentals that make up the unit are not being questioned.

Instead of thinking of a “housing unit” as the default package with kitchen, bathroom, dining room, living room, and bedroom, this proposal proposes to look at one “housing unit” as a bedroom and a bathroom only. Based on this logic, there are four types of spaces in this proposal that are separated by their level of shareability. First are the private units—the most basic space you will receive as any member—a bedroom and a bathroom. The second type is shared amongst the members who have specific access to these amenities. These are the amenities you specifically sign up for and, therefore, are more catered to narrower interests. Programs in these spaces might include kitchen, library, childcare, art studio, etc. Third, the residual spaces that make up the circulation of the building become the living room and dining room. This space is accessible by any members and therefore more public. Lastly, the fourth type is the public program that is accessible for everyone, including the non-members. These spaces will occupy the empty lots that serve as the vertical circulation to the air rights spaces.

Opposite Page
Locations of Zip Car and Citibike

Data Source:
https://www.citibikenyc.com/
https://www.zipcar.com
Who’d Live Here? Micro-Units and NYC Housing Needs

From Jacob Riis’ photographs of slum tenements in the 19th century to websites like Curbed, there’s ample evidence that New Yorkers are fascinated by the living conditions of other New Yorkers. So when Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s office announced on Monday a request for proposals to build a Kips Bay residence composed of 80 micro-units measuring 275 to 375 square feet, the Internet ran wild with speculation over who would choose to live in these tiny spaces, especially since rent is projected at $2,000 monthly.

Architects and urban planners have been calling for new models of housing to suit the needs of the city’s changing demographics. This project, aimed at singles, can only exist because Bloomberg will be waiving certain zoning codes. Those very codes were results of early 20th century reforms aimed at providing poor families humane living conditions, in terms of space and natural light. Ever since, residential buildings in the city have had the traditional nuclear family in mind and have not kept up with the alternative modes of living today.

CURRENTLY OFFERED HOUSING OPTIONS

B = L + L + BA + L

B = M + M + BA + M

B = S + S + BA + S

JASMINE KWAK 49
Housing Programs

- Kindergarten
- Gym
- Pool
- Theater
- Museum
- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Dining Room
- Living Room
- Exercise Room
- Dine-in Theater
- Art Studio
- Playground
MEMBERSHIP TYPES

PUBLIC
(non member)

TYPE A:
BASIC

TYPE B:
REGULAR

TYPE C:
PREMIUM
In order to imagine how the housing amenities can become communal and shared, individual housing elements have been broken down into separate entities and examined.

The programs are then thought of in terms of its capability of being shared. When the housing elements are thought of in terms of different scale, we can easily imagine how even the most personal items can become part of a larger shared amenity. Imagine a couple books on your shelf becoming part of something larger, such as a communal library that many can access. Or imagine that instead of owning a personal crib in your bedroom, you can utilize a communal crib in a childcare.
New York City is running out of space to build. Just looking at the East Village in Manhattan alone, the vacant lots that have been more frequent in the past have been bought out by private developers and are constantly being developed into housing towers. As the city is densifying very rapidly, we need to rethink the fundamentals of the zoning code in order to imagine a new typological development that can take on this kind of number in housing.

This proposal occupies both the existing vacant lots as well as the available air rights space. In some cases, the air rights zoning code must be revised in order to allow for higher density in different neighborhoods. In order to convert any block into "Living Large" block, first, existing vacant lots are identified and developed into public programs that benefit not only the members of this system but also non-members, such as residents of the block. This also serves as the vertical circulation of the proposal. 75 feet radius of this block becomes “buildable” zone in order to guarantee the walkability of each housing unit from the vertical circulation core. Each public program that occupies individual vertical circulation core then defines the type of neighborhood that the residents live in. Each “neighborhood” that is situated in the air rights space gets kitchen(s), large communal space, and residual communal space such as living room and dining room. Lastly, this volume that occupies the air rights space gets carved out by the direction of the sun angle in order to not only provide light for this new development but also the existing buildings underneath.
MOTHER OF TWO KIDS
Membership Type C
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Kitchen

ARTIST
Membership Type A:
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Art Studio

MOVIEGOER
KINDERGARTEN
TEACHER
Membership Type C:
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Kitchen
Dine-in
Theater/Stage

NON-MEMBER
USING PUBLIC POOL

V

JASMINE KWAK
TRANSFORMATION OF SECTIONS BASED ON LIGHTING STRATEGY

Transformation of Section A

VERTICAL CIRCULATION

EXTENT OF BUILDING BREADTH

SUN ANGLE STUDY

FINAL MASSING SECTION
Transformation of Section B

- Highest Building
- Vertical Circulation
- One story above
- Highest building
- Extent of building depth
- Sun angle study
- Final massing section

Latitude of NY: 40°
FINAL MASSING MODEL
SCALE: 1:1000
The explanation of the architectural proposal for this thesis is closely related to that of the urban strategy. Shown in the following pages are the ground level and tenth floor plans that illustrate the public, communal programs in relation to the private bedrooms.

In order to illustrate how the urban strategy and the architectural proposal would work out, a typical block located in East Village was chosen and the strategy was played out. This block was located in between E 12th and E 13th Street and Avenue A and B. In this case, the ground floor public programs included a museum, a childcare, a theater, and a gym. Two main vertical circulations serve as the main access to the upper floors where majority of the housing units reside. The upper floors also provide space for large public programs, such as pool and a theater.

The individual housing units consisted of a bedroom and a bathroom and it was determined from the beginning that each unit will have access to light and air by situating itself next to a carved openings.

Opposite Page

Final 1/16"=1'-0" model
Photograph by Andy Ryan
1. Museum
2. Childcare
3. Theater
4. Gym
1. Artist Studio  
2. Dine-in Theater  
3. Theater (Public)  
4. Playground Kitchen  
5. Playground  
6. Indoor track  
7. Pool (Public)  
8. Group Exercise Room
FINAL MODEL
SCALE: 1/16"=1'-0"

Photograph by Andy Ryan
FINAL MODEL
SCALE: 1/16"=1'-0"

Photograph by Andy Ryan
FINAL MODEL
SCALE: 1/16"=1'-0"

Photograph by Andy Ryan
LIFESTYLE SCENARIOS

In this section, different lifestyles of characters are explored to explain how these characters live out their personal life as well as a communal one.

ARTIST

Membership Type A:
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Art Studio
MOTHER OF TWO KIDS

Membership Type C
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Kitchen
Playground

MOVIEGOER + KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Membership Type C:
Amenities include:
Bedroom
Bathroom
Dining Room
Living Room
Kitchen
Dine-in Theater/Stage
POSSIBLE GROUP INTERACTIONS
Playground Kitchen
Kindergarten
APPENDIX
PROCESS MODELS

DESIGN OF MAT-BUILDING STUDY
Conceptual model showing the relationship between circulation paths, units, and light openings.
Initial massing model
Beads are packed into the transparent framework to represent the packing of housing units.
Alternate block showing
the urban strategy
Alternate block showing the urban strategy
INTERDEPENDENCY OF HOUSING UNITS

UNIT 2

UNIT 1

+ =

patio

front porch with overhang
Design of housing units - back
IMAGINING THE DREAM

Initial aerial renderings of the urban strategy
Imagining different scenarios that could lead to different types of communal lifestyle
(Top) Communal computer lab
(Bottom) Communal closet
Communal oven tower
FINAL REVIEW PRESENTATION

REVIEW PAMPHLET
(BY DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE)
Master of Architecture

Suhail Jabeen
Larry X. Schneider
Tina Goudey
Sabiesh Tumuluri
Oura Tatsuki
Sarah I. B. Martin
Yueyong Xu
Gretchen W. White
Kaya Yilmaz
Yi Zhang

An Alternative Model for Urban Living

Cheng Huan

Dynamism in Non-Equilibrium Architectural States

Lee C. Hsiao

From an Early 20th Century View of the House to a Contemporary House: Changing Practices and Changing Roles

JASMINE KWAK
GUIDE TO LIVING LARGE IN NEW YORK CITY
FINAL REVIEW BOARDS
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