

**Repetition and Transformation:
The Housing Project and the City of New York**

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: The Housing Project and the City

PART I

THE GENERIC AND THE GENERAL DISCURSIVE CONDITION Discourse versus Discipline.

1	DISCIPLINARY EXTERIORITY Domesticity, The Housing Project and Strategic Spatial Reasoning.
1.1	Introduction: The Familial-Social and the Domestic Subject
	Building the City with Housing: Contemporary Housing Manuals 2006 – 2015.
1.1.1	The Question of Dynamism: What is at Stake in Housing.
1.1.2	The Repressive Hypothesis: The Problematization of Sexuality and Intimacy.
1.1.3	The Familial Social: The Single Family Dwelling and The Modern Family
1.1.4	The Rise of the Social: Space, Governance and the Nineteenth century City
1.1.5	The Conduct of Conduct: Constituting the Modern Family.
1.1.6	A note on Marxist Accounts of the Prehistory of the Family.
1.1.7	Domesticity: the Internal Differentiation of the modern Family
1.2	Spatial Reasoning and Knowing the City
1.2.1	Spatial Reasoning and Knowing the City: The Social Survey
1.2.2	Prior ways of knowing the city through drawing
1.2.3	How Booth's Statistics were Gathered.
1.2.4	Urban Spatial Strategy: The Undifferentiated Mass.
1.2.5	Truth made Visible.
1.2.6	Disease, Order and Regulation of the City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century.
1.2.7	Foucault's Disciplinary Project: Placing Bodies in Space
1.2.8	Enclosure.
1.2.9	Presence and Absence.
1.2.10	Programmed and Managed Space.
1.2.11	Rank and Hierarchy.
1.2.12	The Disciplinary Machine, the Panopticon.
1.2.13	The Strategic Exemplary Diagram, The 1851 Model Apartment.
1.3.1	Conclusion: The Social Map and the Disciplinary Machine: The Socio-Political Spatiality of the Modern Family and the Urban Condition.
2.	DISCIPLINARY INTERIORITY Architecture's Disciplinary Value: Organizational and Material Experimentation
2.1	Introduction
2.1.1	Continuity in Architecture versus Dynamic Experimentation
2.2	The Housing Project and the City of New York
2.2.1	The Historical Project and the Archive
2.2.2	The Housing Project and the City of New York: Twin Parks. 1968-1975.
2.2.3	Twin Parks Northeast (TPNe) Richard Meier and Associates 1973.
2.2.4	Contextualism and the Call for a Return to the Existing and Traditional City.
2.2.5	Narrative Historiography and Accounts of Transformation: The Architectural Object as Reflection.
2.3	Architectural Typology

- 2.3.1 Architectural Typology: Descriptive Tool and Category Designation in Judgment.
- 2.3.2 Type Understood as Image: Vidler and The Third Type.
- 2.3.3 The Typological Burden: Trajectories of Experimentation.
- 2.3.4 Type and Design Process: ideology, Discipline and Discourse.
- 2.3.5 Diagrammatic Typology: Hannes Meyer and the 1925 Petersschule
- 2.4 The Site of Experimentation: Architecture's Graphic Realm and Scientific Methodology**
 - 2.4.1 Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand and Type v. Typology
 - 2.4.2 The Précis 1803: Composition
 - 2.4.3 Transformations in the Practice of Architecture.
 - 2.4.4 The Square Grid: Repetition and Transformation.
- 2.5 Negotiating With the Outside: The Transactional Space of Architecture.**
 - 2.5.1 The Transactional Work of Architecture's Graphic Realm.
 - 2.5.2 Charles Sanders Pierce: A Theory of Signs.
 - 2.5.3 A note on the Indexical and the work of Eisenman.
- 2.6 Conclusion: The Dynamism of the Typological Burden: Material and Organizational Experimentation**

PART II

THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION: The City of New York, the Housing Project and Architecture's Disciplinary Negotiation.

- 3. ITERATIVE INSTRUMENTALITY: THE CONDITIONS OF EXPERIMENTATION**
THE CONCEPTUAL INSTABILITY OF THE CITY: Size, Scale and urban governance.
New York City 1920-1960.
- 3.1 Introduction**
Retrospective Readings of the City: From the Ville Radieuse to New York City.
The urban understood as continuous and stable
 - 3.1.1 Twin Parks, The Bronx 1969-1974
 - 3.1.2 Twin Parks Northeast (TPNe), Richard Meier and Associates 1973
- 3.2 The City Always About to Become**
Robert Moses v. The New York City Housing Authority
- 3.3 Constitutive Terrains of Dispute**
Decentralization and The Myth of Comprehensive Planning in 1920's New York City.
 - 3.3.1 Moses and the Tradition of the New
 - 3.3.2 Context/Dispute: Decentralisation
 - 3.3.3 Lewis Mumford and the regional city
 - 3.3.4 The Metropolitan Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, 1929
- 3.4 The Public Authority**
Space, governance and establishing the size of the scale of the city
 - 3.4.1 Special Autonomous Agency: The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, 1917.
- 3.5 Housing as Metropolitan Regional Infrastructure**
 - 3.5.1 Special Autonomous Agency: The New York City Housing Authority 1934
- 3.6 Conclusion: Establishing all that can already be said, Scale.**

- 4. **THE PRACTICE OF THE HOUSING PROJECT: AN ALTERNATE HISTORY**
The Ground, Object and Strategy
- 4.1 **Introduction:** Sites of Transformation
- 4.2 **The Ground, Object and Strategy.**
The Burden of Type: Ongoing Trajectories of Experimentation and Transformation
- 4.3 **The Ground as Strategy within Urban Reform and Urban Renewal**
- 4.4 **Constituting the Ground as Object: Architecture's Disciplinary Experimentation**
 - 4.4.1 Opening up the Interior of the Block: Governance, Ownership, Use, and Collective Life.
 - 4.4.2 Lot to Superblock: Neighborhood, Community, City
- 4.5 **Conclusion:** New Urban Subjects/New Urban Spaces, 'The Traditional and Existing City.' Design Process: The Diagnostic and Propositional Gesture

- 5. **ITERATIVE INSTRUMENTALITY: THE CONDITIONS OF EXPERIMENTATION**
Blight, Physical Takings and constitutional definitions of Public Use
- 5.1 **Introduction:** Public Use, Economic Benefit and Transforming Definitions of 'The Public.'
 - 5.1.1 Housing, the Public Authority and Slum Clearance.
 - 5.1.2 Funding Conditions around the Production of Housing
- 5.2 **Eminent Domain + the Dispute around Blight**
 - Part I: Kelo v. The City of New London 2005
 - 5.2.1 Blight as Productive + Galvanizing discursive dispute.
 - 5.2.2 Taking Property: Physical Takings versus Regulatory Takings.
- 5.3 **Eminent Domain, Sovereign Responsibility + Constitutional Meaning.**
 - Part II: Parker v Berman 1954
 - 5.3.1 Constitutional Meaning: Transformation versus Conservation
 - 5.3.2 The Early Use of Eminent Domain: Jurisprudential Testing of Constitutional Concepts and Sovereign Responsibility
 - 5.3.3 Arguments for Economic Benefit and the Use of the Instrument of Excess Condemnation.
- 5.4 **Conclusion:** The Iterative Instrumentality of the Coming into Form of the Architectural Object: What is the City and who are 'We' on the occasion of the housing project

- 6. **CONCLUSION**
Domains of Reasoning/Fields of Effect. The Housing Project and Urban Transformation

7. **APPENDIX ONE:** Images

8. **APPENDIX TWO :** Publishing and Conference outputs

8.1 Conference: Type versus Typology. 6th February 2014. Architecture Association London. Invited speaker.

8.2 Publication: FINNEY, T. December 2015. The Ground, Object and Strategy: Architectural Transformation in Housing Projects, New York City. *Journal of Architecture*, 20.

8.3 Conference: Architectural type and the Discourse of Urbanism. Co-organizer, UTS with Nottingham University hosted by the Royal College of Arts, London. 14th December 2015.

9. **Bibliography**

REPETITION AND TRANSFORMATION: The Housing Project and The City

Abstract

From the early decades of the twentieth century the housing project has, with varying intensities, acquired a critical instrumentality within urban spatial reasoning. The following thesis examines this reasoning across several terrains. The first concerns architecture's disciplinary outside: an agonistic governmental rationality regarding the constellation of home, work, leisure and transport in the formation of urban and domestic subjects. It is a disputed terrain that can be seen to consistently cut through the urban diagram of the housing project. The second is seen through architecture's limited and iterative autonomy to engage and experiment with this diagram via a strategic field of material and formal organization, that is, through the disciplinary specific work of architectural typology in its negotiation with this outside.

The decades 1960-1980 are generally identified within architectural and urban history and theory as marking a dramatic critique and transformation in the field of architecture. This critique involved a review of architecture's relationship to the city and is particularly evident with reference to the tower in the park housing type of the Modern Movement and its perceived failure in terms of an 'existing and traditional city'. This thesis reframes several projects argued to be definitional of such change. Examples here are drawn from the specificity of the city that throughout the twentieth century has repeatedly been held up as the exemplar of all that the delirious metropolis of change might be: the City of New York.

Through an examination of specific projects, this thesis aims to clarify where architecture's iterative and limited autonomy can be seen in action through this period. In the first instance this is examined through the housing project's definitional role as part of its coming into form, of understandings of the city itself. Evident here is an inherent instability to understandings of the city that has not been central to historical accounts of change as part of architectural history's writing around transformation. In the second instance, the thesis proposes the typological burden, first identified by Kenneth Frampton, as evidence of sustained trajectories of spatial and formal experimentation that belong entirely to architecture's disciplinary autonomy. As such the typological burden, in this instance the ground, is the site of space and form emerging prior to,

rather than as a consequence of, function, challenging the Modern Movement's account of its own design process and understanding of architectural agency. Finally, the thesis demonstrates the discipline's agency relative to legislative change in the United States during this period and the transformation of the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution in the context of Eminent Domain and slum clearance in cities on the occasion of the housing project.

In clarifying architecture's disciplinary interior and exploring its iterative and conditional autonomy to a discursive exterior, each of these instances demonstrates a unique kind of directed material politics that is specific to architecture's disciplinary skill set, and quite different to either the passive reflective role typically attributed to it by historical accounts of change, or the formal political role that many contemporary accounts of architecture claim for it. By bringing together the two lenses of governmental rationality and architecture's limited and iterative autonomy this thesis has clarified, to a field that insists on defining itself in terms of the new, where architecture's limited actual agency for transformation is – not the avant-garde edge of a discipline defined in terms of the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, political science or anthropology, or the politics of revolution and subjugation found in contemporary art practice, but rather architecture's disciplinary agency involves a significantly more nuanced directed material politics transformative of both the city and we its urban and domestic subjects.