

Paper Abstracts

Applied Modernism: Living in the Now

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Diego Rivera and the 'Building' of Mexican Identity

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In 1937, *Architectural Record* dedicated an 86-page article to the rise of functionalism and International style; alluding to Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, the authors titled it "New Architecture in Mexico." What was praised by the American journal was worrisome to several of the architects showcased in this article, including Mexico's functionalist pioneer Juan O'Gorman as well as the architect-developer Luis Barragán. Disappointed, O'Gorman withdrew from architecture altogether in 1938 to dedicate his life to painting, and Barragán did similarly in 1940 to explore landscape architecture. Equally concerned was the muralist Diego Rivera, proprietor of one such building, his studio-house in the neighborhood of San Angel. Although in the 1920s and early 1930s Le Corbusier's ideas were promising for what Rivera called the "humanization of the habitat for the poor," by the 1940s the artist saw in the proliferation of functionalism, and consequently International Style, another symbol of Mexico's dependency on foreign cultures. Unlike the two architects, Rivera took architecture in his own hands to produce an autonomous and identifiable American architecture, independent of Europe. From late 1930s to 1957, he proposed a new housing development (c.1939); tested ideas in the addition for his wife's studio, the artist Frida Khalo (1947), and personally designed and built his museum-studio-house, the *Anahuacalli* (1939-1957).

Rivera the architect had thus been born. Soon O'Gorman, Barragán, and many others would opt for a distinctly localized modernism. Not surprisingly, the transformation of Mexican architecture was already underway when Frank Lloyd Wright visited Mexico in 1952. Upon this visit, he declared enthusiastically, "more than ever [I am] sure that American Architecture needs only American influences originating in the Toltec areas as the great basis of all future Architecture."

By carefully examining the muralist's writings, drawings, and building, as well as the reactions he prompted on Mexico's architectural community, this paper analyzes Rivera's influential role in the making of Mexican modern architecture.

Generalizing Away Uniqueness: James Stirling's Interrogation of the Oxbridge Courtyard

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Abstract TBA

Pittsburgh's Chatham Village: The Enduring Relevance of a Housing Revolution that Wasn't
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Chatham Village is a planned residential community built in Pittsburgh in 1932 by the philanthropic Buhl Foundation as a demonstration of the provision of high-quality housing for workers of moderate income. To design Chatham Village, Buhl Foundation director Charles Lewis hired planners Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, who promoted the construction of "New Towns" by adapting principles of the English Garden City movement to twentieth-century American communities and the technologies, such as automobiles and the electric power grid, that served them. Stein and Wright believed that a complete break with earlier patterns of urban development was necessary to create a habitable environment for the future. Rejecting the traditional grid street pattern as dangerous and streets themselves as the most wasteful form of open space, Stein and Wright advocated the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic through the relegation of roads to the perimeter of residential neighborhoods and the construction of modest, egalitarian housing set in shared park-like open spaces, connected by pedestrian pathways and surrounded by a wooded greenbelt. At Chatham Village, these features have been treasured, protected, and meticulously preserved by generations of residents.

The Buhl Foundation rented out units at Chatham Village, managing its investment and presenting an alternative to homeownership at a time when the prospect of mortgage foreclosure threatened many American families. In terms of financial structure, the foundation built Chatham Village as a long-term investment, albeit one which would return limited dividends; it wanted to create a model of both physical and financial planning in order to demonstrate to the private real estate industry that it was possible to build exemplary housing for the working class – a comfortable, affordable alternative to both tenement apartments and conventional, detached single-family houses – and still make a profit.

Although this idea failed to take hold in the American housing market, Chatham Village remained a powerful model for residential community design through the late 1930s, when the federal government launched a public housing program initially meant to serve not only low-income but also middle-income families. The planning of Chatham Village resonated with contemporary concerns about reinforcing democracy, providing for the physical and financial well-being of vulnerable socioeconomic groups, and accommodating technologies of the future. It also presciently addressed many concerns which remain or have re-emerged at the forefront of the housing field today, including affordable housing; pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development; sustainable development as an alternative to suburban sprawl; and the production of physical spaces which foster social community and civic participation. However, largely due to association with the failed public housing projects of the 1930s and 40s, the planning principles demonstrated at Chatham Village have been eclipsed by other models of community development, most recently the revival by the New Urbanist movement of the traditional town planning patterns that Stein and Wright rejected. Yet Chatham Village, itself, is a successful demonstration of community design which shares many of the New Urbanism's core values, if not their physical expression.

Housing for Spatial Justice: The Women's Development Corporation of Providence, Rhode Island

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The dominant model of public housing in the US was the high-rise, high-density “project” until the 1960s, when legal measures and programs (e.g., Fair Housing Act of 1968 and Section 23 of 1965) paved the way for scattered-site projects that sought to overcome racial discrimination and the concentration of poverty. Over the next three decades, federal policy shifted from a project-based approach to tenant-based assistance. During this transition, locally based community development organizations (CDCs) stepped in the gap left between the cutbacks to the public housing sector and the private market. Yet, how did CDCs emerge, what motivations did they have, and how did they perform? This presentation explores this question using the case study of Women’s Development Corporation (WDC) based in Providence, Rhode Island since 1979.

WDC emerged through the feminist movement in architecture, and from within the itinerant Women’s School of Planning and Architecture (Women’s School). The growth in the demands of women architects in the 1970s was mostly establishment related; they demanded for professional equity and equality. The Women’s School was unique in this sense, proposing alternatives to mainstream practice. Several of the key figures within the Women’s School came together and chose Providence, RI in 1979 to found a locally based community development organization, WDC. The aim of the group was to build affordable housing for women in need. They continued the pedagogical agendas of the Women’s School in the field through a participatory design process; and took up the idea of converting existing historic houses into low-income units that cannot be distinguished and stigmatized as poor people’s housing. However, the realization and success of WDC as a developer over the years then turned participation into a myth.

WDC’s path and approach to development fitted perhaps too well with the restructuring of the economy and its impact on cities: Just as downtown revitalization schemes corresponded with the feminist critiques of suburban living, the rise of complex public-private collaborations which encouraged a new generation of architects to turn to development corresponded with the feminist critique of the male-dominated architectural design office. Nevertheless, a key contribution of the women’s movement in architecture back in the 1970s was the spatial dimension of social justice; that space is not simply a container of politics; that justice is spatially produced, and becomes visible in space. The Women’s School had showed its participants that their marginalization within the profession was not a singular phenomenon: If they instead aligned with other marginalized groups, they could create new kinds of spaces that foster human equality. Hence, they organized and networked in experimental summer schools, horizontally organized open offices, and development corporations that would house low-income people. In the case of WDC, the right to housing would be the basis for a just society. This examination of WDC brings in the perspective of gender to recent neo-Marxist scholarship on 'spatial justice.' It also seeks to open up discussion on successful initiatives marginalized by the dominant narrative about the end of public housing, with the fall of the high-rise 'project' from grace, marked in public memory by the spectacular mediated demolition of Pruitt Igoe in the 1970s.