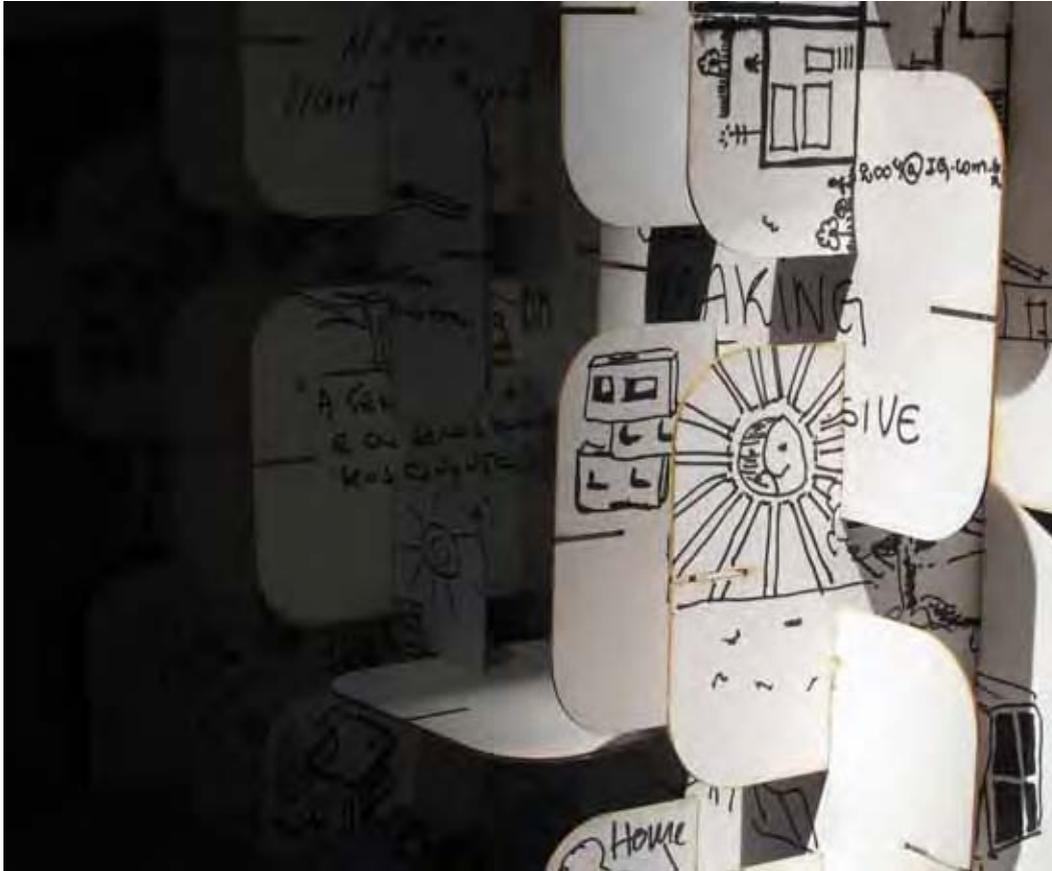




The Ubiquity of the American Dream

Housing priorities around the World



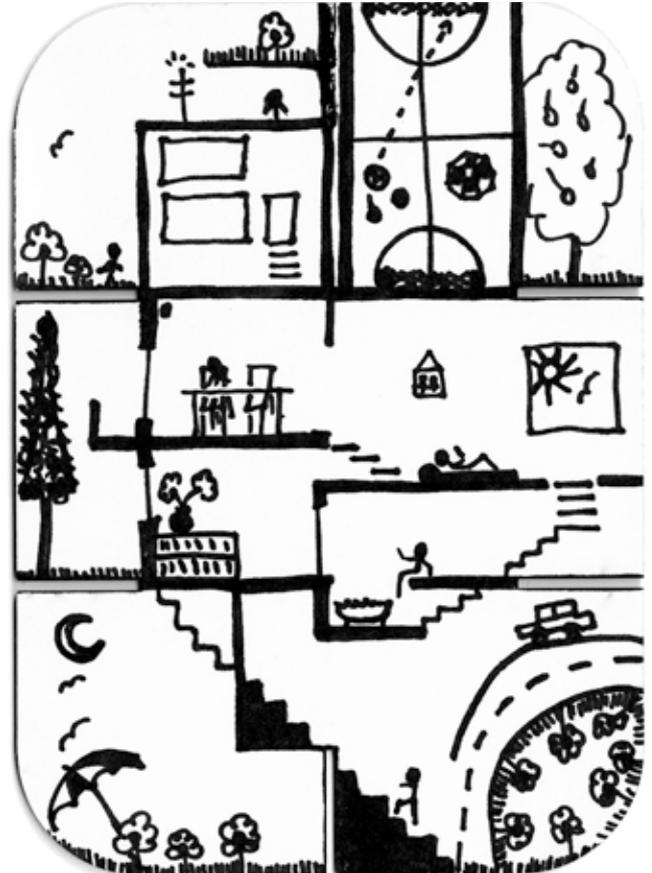
assembly of card units

united nations world urban forum 5

rio de janeiro

march 21-26 2010

participatory housing experiment



lee dykxhoorn

INCREMENTAL HOUSING

JOIN THE PROCESS

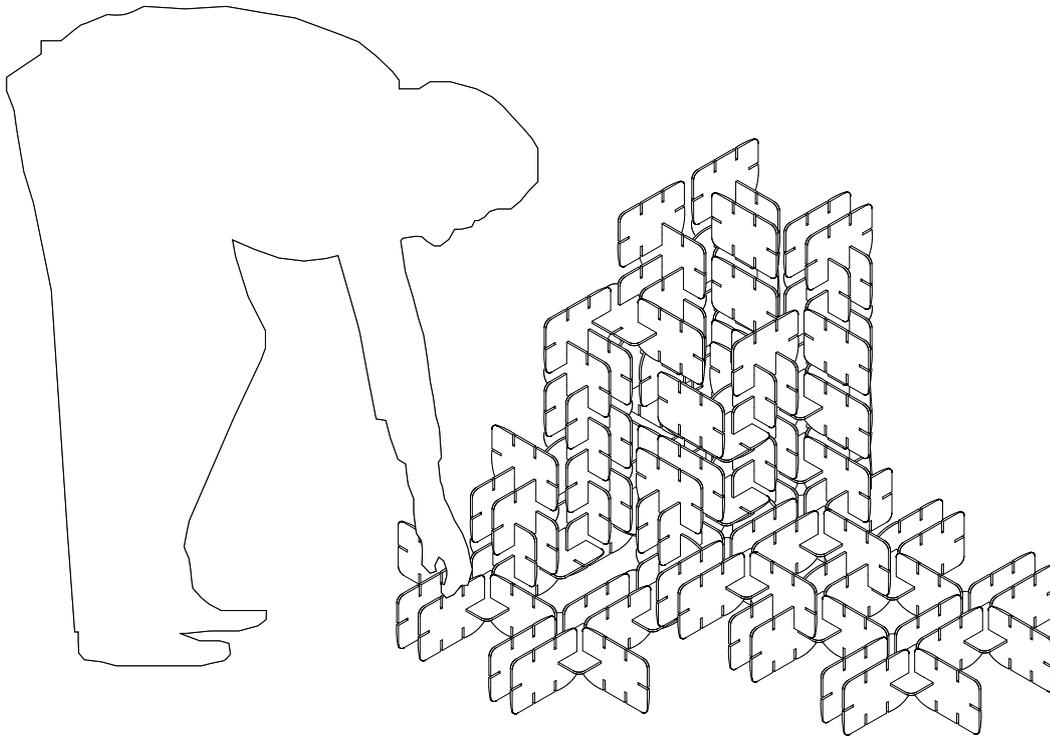
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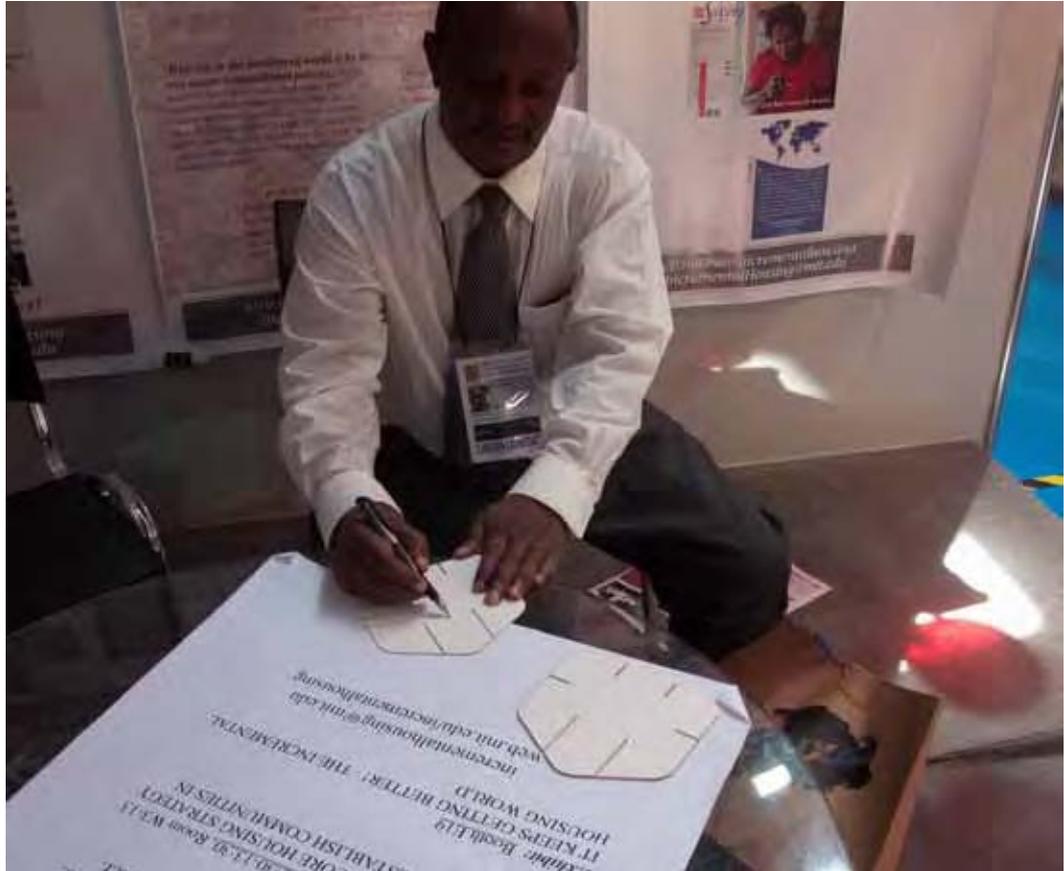
?

1 TELL US WHO YOU ARE:
NAME, EMAIL, PROFESSION, COUNTRY

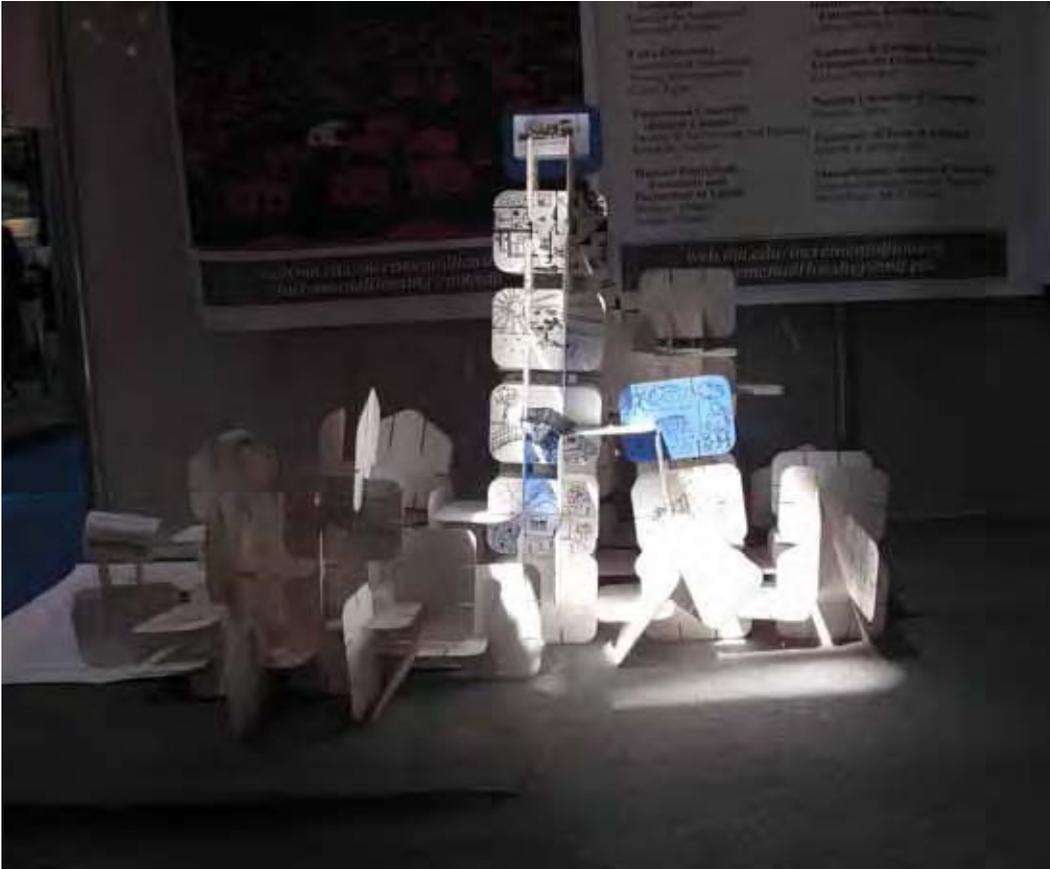
2 DRAW WHAT HOME
MEANS TO YOU



3 HELP BUILD THE COLLECTIVE FORM



participant process



structure of cards

Assumptions of Similarity Incremental Housing Structure

The critical view of the international forum as a vehicle for exchange of ideas and productive dialogue challenges the assumptions of similarity around the world. When practitioners, politicians, academics and other people concerned with urban issues gathered for the World Urban Forum 5 in Rio de Janeiro in 2010, the focus of the debate was on housing issues around the world. The underlying assumption of such a gathering is that there is a common problem facing the disparate peoples of the world, and that through dialogue, we begin to find solutions that have common ground in these problems.

What is interesting is that very little effort is made to look at this basic assumption that the conference makes in treating all urban housing issues as belonging to the same base set of issues. This project attempts to unravel the biases inherent in any discussion of housing - the image of what it means to create a home, and how that image is reflected in different parts of the world.

This installation seeks to reveal some of the biases inherent in the conception of house and home that are relevant to the discussion on the role of urban spaces in contemporary society. Situated within the context of the exhibition hall with thousands of occupants per day, a participatory structure was developed. Meant to build off the diversity of the viewer, this allowed a mapping of the conception of home from a myriad sources. Each viewer was asked to take a blank card and draw something that represented their home on the front side. The reverse side was reserved for viewer name, occupation and contact information, used for tracking purposes. The correlation of the types of images depicted on the cards and the origin of the viewer themselves is what is most interesting about this installation.

The final step in the participatory process was in allowing the viewer to place their card onto a stacked system built up over the several days of the duration of the installation: each card was cut to have slots that fit together, making a house of cards. The informal nature of the aggregation led to an irregular pattern of growth, sometimes taking different directions, sometimes aligning with the past additions. The unusual nature of the card-sculpture attracted the notice of the occupants, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of more additions.



assembly of card units

The Ubiquity of the American Dream

Regardless of the diversity of sources of the additions to the installation, a few threads held constant. First, was that the majority of people drew homes in the same way: a bird's eye axonometric view accentuating the building and its relation to the ground. The house shown not in the context of other houses, transportation networks, or amenities, but rather in relation to the yard and the green spaces around the house. This seemed to be an almost universal consideration in the responses, raising questions on the ubiquity of the American Dream and the permeation the aspiration to own a single family detached house, complete with white picket fence, has had on the international community. It is interesting because it forces us to question several things: one, is the American Dream another example of exported American culture to the rest of the world, or is it more emblematic of a larger social debate that is inherent in all people. Two, it raises issues with the current state of urbanization in the world. The rapid and almost totalizing urban shifts happening in the developing world seem at odds with the ideal of the single family detached house, and this crisis of disagreement is interesting to consider.

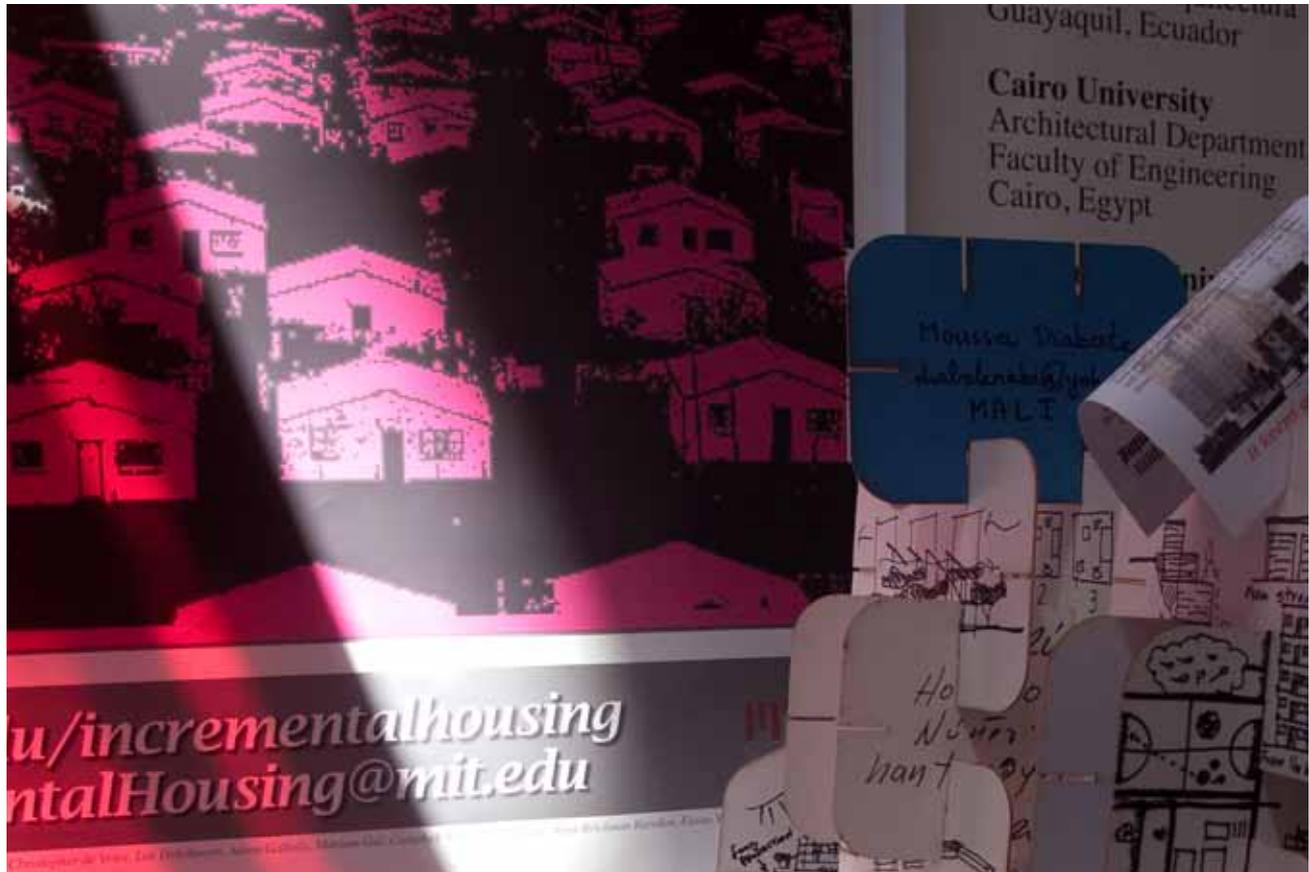
That being said, there was still some disagreement in what was considered ideal, and I think that it is the range of responses that makes this experiment useful. Some people chose to represent home as a single unit in a massive matrix of similar units (New

York City) and some drew traditional grass huts (Kenya). As striking as the physical differences in the built environment can be, the social conceptions of home can also vary dramatically. Some responses defined their home as a place close to work, some defined it in relation to the people they lived with, and others defined it in relation to a pet. So even among the greater string of responses that dealt with the common narrative of the American Dream, there was still enough variation in the way people define their conception of home that it bears remembering, that housing is an intensely personal endeavor. In the context of the UN World Urban Forum it is easy for policy makers and professionals to throw around large numbers and generalizing statistics, because in a way, the scope of their jobs require them to look at the big picture to solve problems for the most people. However, it is still good to remember that while certain narratives of desires can be mapped onto the idea of a home around the world, ways of living are an intensely personal undertaking that is best answered by the people themselves.

You can plan for certain needs and eventualities at the largest scale, but the energy of the people living in any particular place are what drives the idea of a home and partnering with that energy is the most effective strategy for developing functional large-scale housing plans.

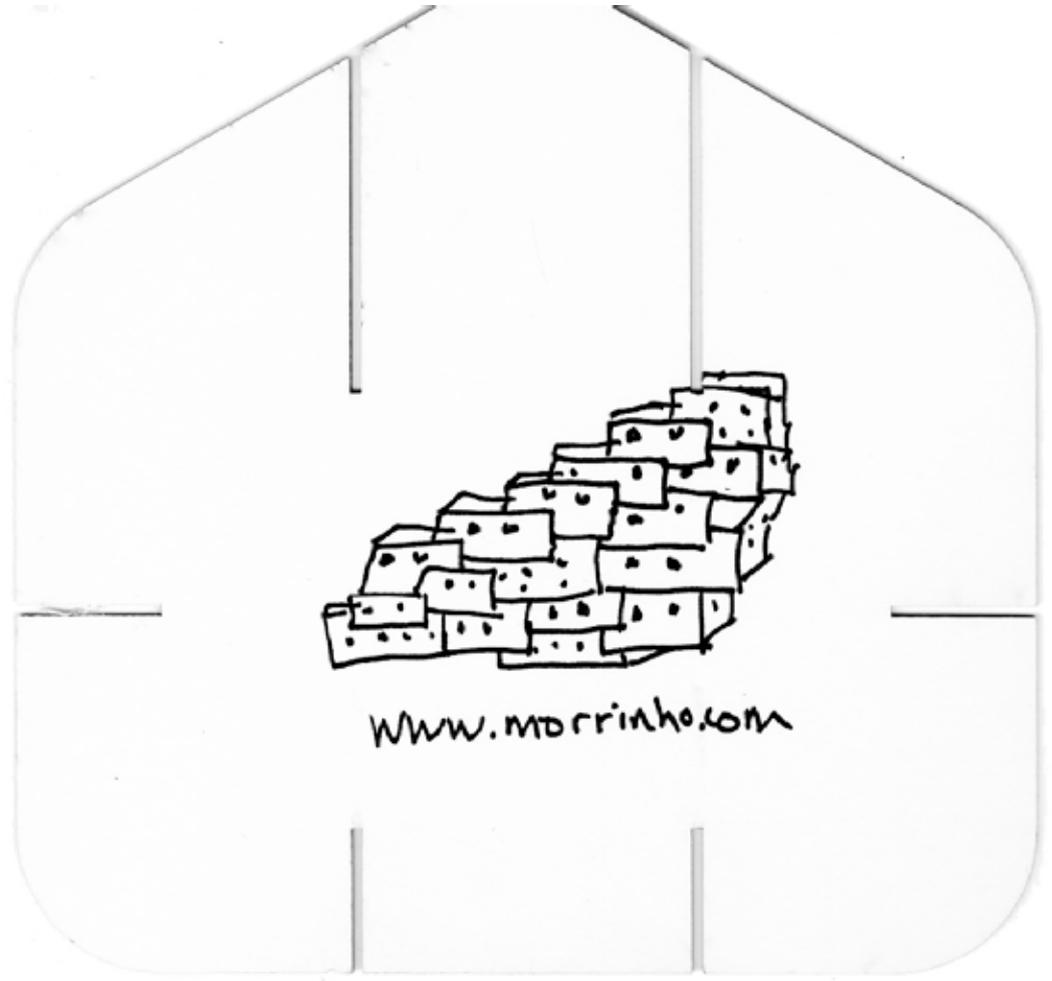


assembly of card units



installation in world urban forum exhibition hall

aggregated housing



participant drawing

relation to outside amenities



single unit housing



participant drawing

relation to outside amenities

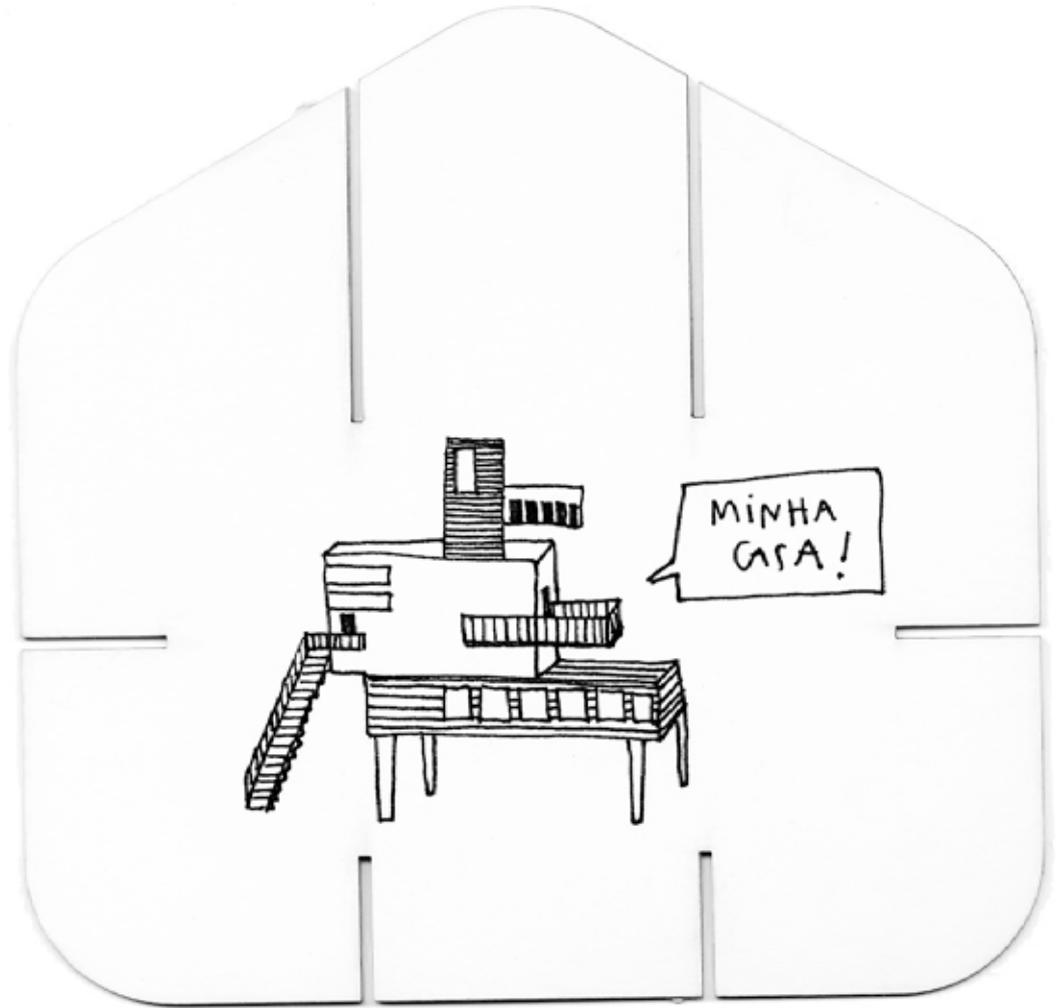


single unit housing



participant drawing

single unit housing



participant drawing

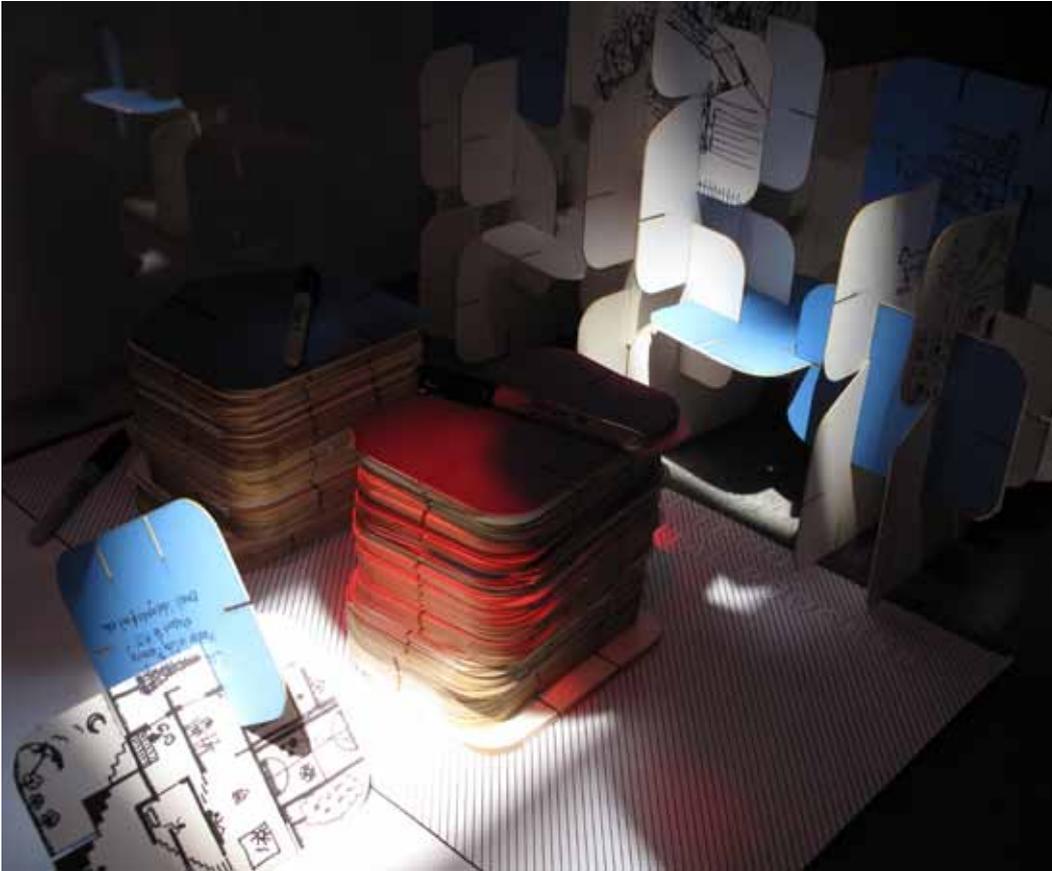
relation to outside amenities



single unit housing



participant drawing



assembly of card units

About the Author

Lee Dykxhoorn holds a Bachelor of Design in Architecture from the University of Florida. After working for a time in the field, he is currently living in Boston as a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pursuing a Masters degree in Architecture. Originally from Florida, his interests in the built environment and the spaces that people live in are a lifelong obsession, stemming from an awareness of the relationships between built and natural ecologies, and the relation of the individual to the city. He views architecture and his area of study as an exploration of architecture as a larger social and cultural project, as well as the relation of the built environment to globalization, modernity and tourism. In addition, he enjoys being a tourist, camera culture, and long biographies.

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