

# LIVE/WORK FOR THE WORKFORCE





INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

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## WHY I FOUNDED THE IPA

Jonathan Kirschenfeld

Firmly believing that design can and should improve individuals' daily lives and strengthen communities, my small firm and I embarked on a challenging mission to break into the world of public sector design in the mid nineties. In the years following, whether designing below market housing for nonprofit developers, publicly financed daycare centers, a mobile floating swimming pool, or a demountable theater that traveled to under resourced communities, I had to get creative in steering my practice towards the kind of public projects that engaged a forgotten populous and further, that had the capacity to change peoples' lives.

It wasn't easy and it was often isolating.

In fact, there were times when I considered taking a more traditional path, following the well worn drill of working one's way up through the ranks of a larger firm and becoming partner, or putting in those long hours and paying dues while at a 'name' firm in the hopes later of receiving the castoff commissions considered too small or inconsequential for the partners.

But in the end, I stuck it out on my own and in the process, discovered that I possessed qualities that served me well in an alternate approach to design practice: entrepreneurial instincts, tenacity, patience, and most of all, a driving urge to use and stretch my design talents for the public good.

What I didn't have back then, and what I aspired to create with the founding of the IPA, was the support of a community of likeminded design practitioners, academics, policymakers, and developers working towards the diverse but common goal of high quality public architecture.

Thinking back to my original musings about the IPA, and especially the all important Residency, I had visions of a sylvan summer campus composed of rustic sleeping cabins and a main communal dining hall (that would do double duty as a lecture and presentation room), which must have derived from my experiences as a child going to 'Socialist' summer camp and as a recent high school graduate volunteering on an Israeli kibbutz. Or, as a colleague who had listened to me talk about this idea said at the end of my pitch, "Oh I see, like a McDowell Colony for architects."

While the idea of hosting a cohort of individual architects and designers in an environment of collective fellowship has always been at the core of the IPA Residency, what eventually changed

through Board formation and the vigorous debate amongst this core group was the notion of a ‘static’ versus a ‘dynamic’ home base. My original notion of a residency campus located somewhere in the Hudson Valley, where architects could find a respite from the daily distractions and frustrations of down and dirty public interest work in the city, gave way to a more mobile and actively engaged cohort that traveled to the urban areas of greatest design need.

Whenever I visited the 2016 Live/Work for the Workforce Residency headquarters in Sunset Park, whether for a team dinner, a public critique, or a Residency field trip, I was struck by what can be called the ‘fellowship of the Fellowship,’ a bonding of individual practitioners over the intensity of research, design, and especially of purpose of their work, a rarity in the profession. This is also unique in terms of the typical artists’ residency, where the vision and work of the individual artist or ‘creator’ is privileged.

At the concluding jury amidst the compelling dialogue between Fellows, jury members, colleagues, and the public, I felt great pride in what the IPA was providing here: a vibrant and rich educational setting that went well beyond a typical studio experience and catalyzed a new kind of creative process for design practitioners unlike any other. The positive feedback from our Fellows on the powerful effect this new type of residency has had on their professional careers has been equally gratifying.

One of the primary skillsets honed by the IPA Residency experience is prioritizing and leveraging limited resources for the most effective social impact. This is also the way the world must work across economic, environmental, and especially political realms, if we are to attain greater equity for our global citizenry.

With the IPA Residency we aspire to give our cohort of design activists the opportunity to be ‘on the ground,’ to roll up their collective sleeves, and to begin to be part of the solution.

## IPA FELLOWSHIP

Nadine Maleh

In May 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio unveiled NYC's Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan [1] to create and to preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. The plan proposed the creation of thousands of live/work housing for artists, entrepreneurs, and others in the workforce. At the same time, there was and continues to be intense pressure from the development community to rezone vast swaths of light manufacturing areas (M1), which, given the anticipated rise in value of these properties, could threaten the long term viability of existing artist spaces and light manufacturing shops. Per Kyle Kimball, former President of the NYC Economic Development Corporation, "We have to figure out as a city how industrial and commercial and residential uses can co-exist: through building typology, through modernization of zoning, and through a modernization of how we think about the co-existence of these three sectors."

The residency program serves a central purpose for the IPA and is unique among other residency programs in several ways. Our process is grounded by the idea that the combined pressures of disengaged low income residents, bureaucratic and underfunded public agencies, and market realities have all been contributing forces to the status quo and we see that our collective work will disrupt this inertia.

In 2016, the IPA's summer residency program concentrated efforts on creating proposals that address this issue by developing design concepts that enable the creation of affordable live/work spaces for artists and "makers". Working with the NYC Department of City Planning, community members, and select advisors in social justice design, we selected a cohort of 11 mid-career design professionals. The selection jury included: David Burney, Nina Rappaport, Deborah Gans, Sagi Golan, Toni Griffin, Miriam Peterson, Nathan Rich, Quilian Riano, Susanne Schindler, and Jared Della Valle.

Through research and collaboration with City officials, the Fellows were asked not only to develop their individual project but were also encouraged to collaborate with each other. To facilitate the collaboration, the IPA pressed the group to collectively problem solve and provided the cohort with 1) weekly guest lecturers, 2) shared team meals, 3) public panel/feedback sessions, and 4) informative field trips.

Rather than establishing a fixed location for the resident Fellows, the IPA employs temporary work spaces each year that incorporate the theme chosen for the research. The Live/Work fellowship was located in Sunset Park, a neighborhood affected by gentrification and a declining supply of both

affordable housing and commercial space. Specifically, we partnered with Bob Bland’s ManufactureNY, and held the Fellowship in the middle of this affordable light manufacturing “hive” for the development and production of ethical fashion. This provided the opportunity for all Fellows to be immersed within the community facing the issues of the IPA’s prompt in Live/Work. Weekly potluck dinners, symposiums, public reviews, and exhibits were surrounded by local manufacturers.

The following collection of essays convey both the design responses by our selected Fellows along with essays by the jury, academics, policy makers, and community members that had a presence throughout the program.

1. “Housing New York.” NYC. May 2014. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/housing-new-york.page>.

## INTRODUCTION

Linnéa Moore

The fringes of our city often serve to support the center of urban life. The market pressures to develop luxury housing in place of affordable spaces of living and production are continuously pushing this contiguous edge further from its epicenter of consumption. This is visible in the continuous displacement of large populations within our cities. Our society today faces a unique problem of overabundance and the challenge becomes one of ensuring a more equal spatial distribution.

Today, a new form of labor has emerged that encompasses a growing population of people who suffer from a lack of security in their work. They include young entrepreneurs, freelancers, and people with jobs destined for automation. Platforms born of the sharing economy offer an attractive opportunity for people to supplement their income, but are without the guarantee of work and the security of welfare benefits typically provided by employers rather than the state. This group is growing as income disparity has widened and wages for the general population have stagnated. Neoliberal capitalism has enabled the richest one percent to accumulate as much wealth as the lower 90 percent of the population.

Artists are one of the groups most vulnerable to displacement. They are vital to our city because they engage in the production of culture. Gentrification has always followed close behind the migration of artists within the city, as exemplified by the conversion of light manufacturing districts in New York City, from SoHo to Chelsea to Williamsburg to Bushwick.

The creative communities that have come to inhabit many of the light manufacturing districts fundamentally rely on these spaces for their means of subsistence, while utilizing them for their productive capabilities. For many artists, life and work are seldom distinct; they are often mutually inclusive conditions that overlap in delicate rhythms. As such, many of the warehouses strewn throughout these districts are imperative to the internal economy as spaces of production for these communities. IPA Fellows Angela Co, Julie Torres Moskowitz, and Xiaoyin Li investigate in their essay *In Defense of Loft Law*, how certain legal structures are in place to protect tenants inhabiting light manufacturing zones, but also how these frameworks are at risk.

Live/Work is an organizational model that predates architecture itself. As industrialization took hold, the value of our labor became increasingly abstracted. Living and working became institutionally and legally separated, as domestic space was seen as a retreat from work rather than an economically productive sphere. In fact, the domestic space is central to an economically productive society as it is



the space where life is reproduced. The future of our cities depends on our ability to host contemporary life. The health of our political and economic system is correlated with the efficacy in which we are able to provide workspaces and housing for a general population. This requires consideration of models outside of the nuclear family unit, and towards a broader accommodation of alternative forms of political and social imagination.

Technology and globalization has indelibly changed the way we produce and organize our systems of production. Labor has reentered the domestic sphere as the gig economy allows people to work from home or their local café. The distinction between live and work is noticeably blurred, which is evident in the organization of tech company office environments which offer otherwise conventionally domestic conditions: the provision of food, lounging spaces, social exchange, and general flexibility in terms of the individual's spatial and temporal organization of their own production. Though often habitual norms still dictate the reality of our working culture, companies offer 'unlimited vacation' and an increased sense of freedom in order to soften the oppression of work and bring the office environment closer to that of the living environment.

Companies such as WeWork/ WeLive have developed a model of decreased private square footage in favor of increased shared square footage, suggesting that our quality of life can be improved when we embrace shared social spaces. On the other hand, it also provides the image of comfort to an increasingly precarious condition. We inhabit our work as if we were in the comfort of our home. Work becomes life and life becomes work.

Also at risk are our cities' manufacturing zones, which, through acts of rezoning pressured by developers, have forced businesses to relocate to the fringes of the city or beyond, which has manifold effects. In an increasingly globalized world, we are losing a connection between what we produce and what we consume. Losing light manufacturing stagnates economic growth. As labor is increasingly immaterial, and our goods are increasingly foreign, we risk losing a sense of craft and origin. It is the consequences of this "process removal" that Nina Rappaport describes in her essay, *Working and Living*. We inhabit the city to be closer to the heterogeneous mix of life with its diverse set of activities and people, not further from it.

In this regard, the live/work question does not only consider the collapse of living and working into a localized space, but also the inability of work and life to coexist in the same city. In their

essay *Live/Work Seed Housing*, Emily Arden Wells and Zachary Stevens investigate how workers within the food industry are often forced to commute long distances at uncomfortable hours because the urban sector they feed and nourish is not one they can afford to live in. Their proposal suggests an industry specific live/work typology that combines light industrial food production, urban farming, and apartment units. The benefits of this type of project would extend into the community, narrowing the divide between production and consumption in our city.

Through discussion with Jeffrey Shumaker, former Chief Urban Designer for the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP), the IPA has been able to get a glimpse into what power city planning has in the process of forming a future city we can all live and work in. With a careful approach to rezoning strategies, cities may be able to host a diverse mix of uses without dissolving the rich character of their neighborhoods.

Our goal with this body of research is to investigate how the emerging live/work model and the rethinking of our urban zones can be emancipatory rather than a representation of systemic failures.

**FOREWARD:  
THOUGHTS ON A PHOTO BY JACOB RIIS**

Richard Plunz



Bohemian Cigarmakers at Work in Their Tenement, 1889, The Museum of Modern Art

I have always been intrigued by the Riis photograph of cigar makers from Bohemia in their East 10th Street home on the Lower East Side. Riis is not precise about location, but it seems to be a prelaw tenement with a huge advantage of windows on the street instead of into an interior room. Parents are at work making cigars; the father is smoking and the older son appears to be skinning tobacco leaves. While Riis points to the appalling conditions, he seems sympathetic to the domestic aspects of “home” and “family.” Published in *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890, what is pictured here is a live/work condition that had already been challenged by the time it was published.[1] In 1884, the Tenement House Law was amended to prohibit such nonresidential uses in tenements, an initiative of Samuel Gompers’ Cigar Makers Union, together with New York State Assemblyman Theodore Roosevelt. Apart from the immediacy of health concerns, the union sought to force manufacturers to assume more responsibility for their workforce welfare. The law, however, was repealed by a successful New York Supreme Court challenge from manufacturers, using the specter that it endangered a worker’s “morals by forcing him from his home and its hallowed associations;”[2] a justification with echoes today. Such questions have never been definitively resolved including the present day proliferation of variations on “live/work.”[3]

The Riis photo represents a typical home in one of the 80,000 tenement buildings in New York City, housing 2.3 million persons out of New York City’s total population of 3,369,898 at the time.[4] With the 1901 passage of the revised Tenement House Law of 1901, however, every new apartment had to have running water and toilet, properly delineated kitchen and living spaces, and each room with an exterior window. Minimum space standards were definitively mandated for an apartment, but with little recourse as far as undesirable multiple uses were concerned.

Multiple uses in residential buildings and surroundings were limited by the 1916 Building Zone Plan. The most severe controls of uses came in 1937, mandated by the U.S. Housing Act that disallowed any nonresidential uses in public housing project sites, due to ideological issues surrounding compatibility of “private enterprise” within publicly subsidized projects.[5] Queensbridge Houses was the first New York City Public Housing development under these constraints. With 3,147 apartments and more than 6,000 residents, it is still the largest public housing complex in the country, rivaling in size the city of Hudson, New York, but with nothing more than a single “Fine Fare” grocery in its midst on 41st Avenue. The struggles with inadequate heat and hot water, nonfunctional elevators, mold, and

broken front doors continue into recent years. Recently its condition received widespread attention with the proposal for the Amazon HQ2 as its neighbor across 42nd Avenue (“Queens Plaza”), attracted by \$2 billion in subsidies from New York City and State. [6]

It was not until 2016 that the many decades of housing law mandating reasonable apartment space standards was reversed, in large part given the changing nature of live/work. A “studio apartment” can now be reduced from 400 to 150 square feet and we see comparable reductions across the range apartment of sizes. The prevalent argument is that workers in the new tech industries cannot afford rents associated with larger spaces; and by implication, their sociocultural characteristics are such that much of their activity takes place outside of “home.”[7] Clearly a less transparent motivation has been boosting developer profits, given resultant higher rents per square foot than under the older standards; such was already underway by unscrupulous developers through sundry unit subdivision strategies. As alternative for new gig workers, if all of this is still too expensive, one can accept a \$10,000 incentive from the state of Vermont (or even the city of Tulsa), and move there with a much more competitive live/work advantage by telecommunicating.[8] Clearly our notions of “home” are changing.

Which leads as well, apart from “home,” to exactly what is the changing nature of “work.” And where is work housed? We are now heavily engaged with “live/work” in new configurations for next generation employment, or at least toward models that have spread to incomes and enterprise unimaginable in 1884. A recent study indicates that 94 percent of American jobs created between 2005 and 2015 were for “alternative work,” which is to say engage some form of gig economy temporality.[9] The “temp space” provider WeWork has expanded to more than 250 locations in over 70 cities globally. In New York City, it has become the largest private sector occupant of office space, recently overtaking JPMorgan Chase. In Manhattan, WeWork now occupies Lord & Taylor, vacated after 104 years as a household name in the retail business.[10]

WeWork is broadening to WeLive as we move from the domestication of workplace to the reverse, which is an intrusion of the workplace into domestic life; issues not so dissimilar to those in 1884. The gig economy has engaged a workforce that begins to share characteristics with the cigarmakers, and domestic life is increasingly compromised by work engaging ideals of personal independence; and also serving the economic convenience of “permatemp” for management of a new workforce. Piecework and home based production is becoming a business necessity, but without

safety net guarantees.[11] A central question is begged: might the new workforce be unionized beyond Freelancers Union health insurance options, and will “management” again be challenged to accept more responsibility for welfare of its “workers”?

To return to Queensbridge Houses, what about the “Amazon Effect”? In theory, the 25,000 jobs promised in the deal would have been a good thing, but it turns out that only half would have been somehow “technical” – others undefined. Who would get which jobs? Or would they have been in fact a mirage, intentioned or not, given Amazon’s increasingly robotized workforce innovation – Kiva (fetching), Slam (sorting) and whatever else is next.[12] Would Amazon have made the effort to increase human capital in its own neighborhood? Or would precedents like the fate of Public Housing residents in Chelsea, in Fulton, or Elliott Houses be replicated and scaled up? For them, with the High Line and Google “effects,” it became hard to find an inexpensive grocery within walking distance, not to mention an inexpensive apartment.[13] Perhaps WeWork and WeLive (now rebranding to WeGrow) will advocate for a jobs education programs specifically in neighborhoods like Queensbridge, with residents training in coexistence with Google or Amazon – as cyborgs, not robots.[14] Indeed, lots to think about, including the admonition from James Russell Lowell quoted in the concluding paragraph of *How the Other Half Lives*:

*And think ye that building shall endure,  
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?*

[1] Riis, Jacob August. *How the Other Half Lives, Studies among the Tenements of New York*, by Jacob A. Riis. New York: C. Scribners Sons, 1890: ch. 12.

[2] Plunz, Richard. *History of Housing in New York City*. Columbia University Press, 2016: 33, 35. For United Cigarmakers Union activities also see Burrows, Edwin G., and Mike Wallace. *Gotham a History of New York City to 1898*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999: 1102.

[3] For a comprehensive account of the evolution of workforce characteristics see Hyman, Louis. *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary*. NY, NY: Viking, an Imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2018.

[4] Plunz, Op.Cit., 30.

[5] Plunz, Op.Cit., 238-239; 268.

[6] Kilgannon, Corey. “Amazon’s New Neighbor: The Nation’s Largest Housing Project.” *The New York Times* (New York), November 12, 2018.

[7] Plunz, Op.Cit., 355-356.

[8] “Work Anywhere, Live in Vermont. Remote Worker Grant Program.” <https://www.thinkvermont.com/remote-worker-grant-program/>”Work

[9] Katz, Lawrence, and Alan Krueger. “The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995-2015.” March 29, 2016. as cited in Hyman, Op.Cit., 10.

[10] “The Capitalist Kibbutz: Big Corporates’ Quest to Be Hip Is Helping WeWork.” *The Economist*, July 12, 2018, 57.

[11] Hyman, Op.Cit. ch. 11,12.

[12] Carrión, Jorge, and Peter R. Bush. *Against Amazon: Seven Arguments/one Manifesto*. Windsor, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2017. Also see: Eugene Kim, “Amazon’s \$775 million deal for robotics company Kiva is starting to look really smart,” *Business Insider*, June 15, 2016.

[13] Navarro, Mireya. “In Chelsea, a Great Wealth Divide.” *The New York Times* (New York), October 23, 2015, MB1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/nyregion/in-chelsea-a-great-wealth-divide.html> accessed 1\_02\_2019

[14] Anderson, Jenny. “WeWork’s grand plan to disrupt schools assumes kids want to be startup founders,” *Quartz*, November 8, 2017. <https://qz.com/1122355/weworks-plan-to-disrupt-schools-with-wegrow-assumes-kids-want-to-be-startup-founders/>

[15] From “A Parable,” published in Lowell, James Russell. *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*. Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873, 96; Sinclair, Upton. *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest: The Writings of Philosophers, Poets, Novelists, Social Reformers, and Others Who Have Voiced the Struggle against Social Justice*. Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1915. 356-358.

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