

## **The Jane Fonda-Kit House: architectural prototypes and the promised bodies of sustainability**

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Today's post is the result of a collaboration between a brilliant group of Spanish architects, [Elii](#), and myself. The text that follows accompanied the Jane-Fonda Kit House that Elii designed for an exhibition that took place at [CIVA](#)'s room in Brussels.



The Jane Fonda-kit House at Night

## And 1...and 2....warming up!: Stretching & flexing sustainable futures

Conceived as an experimental “house of the future”, the Jane Fonda Kit House departs from those grand architectural visions that have attempted to offer normative or desirable models, to offer instead a rhetorical artefact that seeks to interrogate hegemonic and taken for granted models of sustainability and green architecture.

The JF-Kit house renders the image of a possible future where citizens produce part of their domestic energy requirements with their own physical activities. By bringing this model to the extreme, the house aims to explore some of the grotesque and perverse effects of this model, as well as some of its unexpected potentialities.

This exploration takes place through four different, although tightly interconnected, scales of sustainability. First, the JF-Kit house explores the **urban scale** by offering an infinitely replicable model for a self-sufficient and off-the-grid ‘parasitic’ structure that can be added onto existing rooftops and walls (such as CIVA’s rooftop). The JF-Kit House thus renders the image of a future in which it will be possible to augment urban density while maximizing energy consumption through the invasion of these parasites. Second, the prototype explores the **architectural scale** of sustainability by investigating how energy efficiency criteria can be incorporated into architectural practice itself—for example, through the design of the house as an active energy production unit. Third, the JF-Kit House investigates the **economic scale** of sustainability by offering a model to ‘unblackbox’ domestic energy consumption patterns through the use of different display devices and monitoring tools—like smart energy meters or saving energy devices—, community energy networks, and through the implementation of ‘energy mortgages’ that will use energy savings to pay off house mortgages. And fourth, the houses addresses the oft-neglected **socio-cultural scale of sustainability** by revealing how the three previous scales of sustainability will remain ineffective unless they are followed by the inscription of a new set of habits and practices into the *body politik*. The house brings the metaphor of the *body politik* to its literal extreme by showing how the achievement of sustainable futures will require the production of new bodies: bodies that can be productively mobilized within the domestic space as active agents in the process of energy production.



The Jane Fonda-kit House, from outside

## ...and 3...and 4: domestic workout routines for a new *bodypolitik*

The JF-Kit house reveals the body as a critical passage point and a central battlefield in the articulation of sustainable futures. Bringing the centrality of the body to an extreme, the houses offers an ironical model of citizenship for future sustainable societies: the “Jane Fonda model of citizenship”, which defines the ideal citizen as an individual who can satisfy all her domestic energy needs through her own bodily exercise. Through the radicalization of this model, the JFK house aims to open a debate about the kind of bodies that are required for political participation and for the proper functioning of sustainable economic systems. Specifically, the JFK house asks: What kinds of bodies are imagined to fulfil the promises of these sustainable futures? What kind of domestic infrastructures are required to produce those bodies? What are the new domestic rituals, practices and habits that will have to be inscribed and enacted by those bodies? And more importantly: Which bodies are excluded from participating in those sustainable futures and their promises?

By revealing the home as one of the key spaces where the *body politik* is being continually made and remade, the JFK house invites us to go beyond those modern distinctions that have separated the public from the private, or political actions from everyday practices. The JFK house envisages a future in which the private space of the home will be transformed into a *sui generis* political space, that is, into a place in which it will be possible to engage with larger political projects, like sustainable societies or low-carbon economy, through seemingly mundane choices and practices. It does so by showing, for example, how ordinary domestic devices—like ‘domestic fitness furnitures’—can be productively employed to raise awareness of the energetic and economic costs involved in mundane activities—like cooking, or watching TV, watering the plants, swaying in a rocking chair, or working at home—, and to induce, in so doing, other forms of consumption and political behaviours.

As an experimental exercise in the underexplored field of architectural teratology, the JFK house does not aim to offer the solace of utopian promises or the assured comfort of normative models. It simply aims to create a plausible monstrosity that offers a polemical prototype to extend the sphere of the *body politik* beyond its traditional formats and sites. The unsolved, and perhaps unsolvable, nature of the questions the house poses is the productive polemical space in which democratic politics take place, and in which a critical architectural practice can be deployed to generate—and, crucially, *imagine*—, habitable fictions and practical ways of being and dwelling together.

In the video below you can see the JFK-House in action!

<http://vimeo.com/45832528>