

Green Apparatus: Ecology of the American House According to Building Codes

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In 2008, California introduced the first-in-the-nation Green Building Standards Code to encourage sustainable construction practices. While the adoption of the CALGreen Code marked a significant moment in the process of the greening of building regulations, it represents only one moment in the nation's history of code-making, and in that of environmental action. Two parallel narratives, and the effects of their eventual mergence are the subject of this study. The first is a story of the agendas that shaped the American house, and the regulations that govern it. The second is an account of the rise of environmental awareness as gradually standardized by law-makers, interpreted through technology, and shaped by the market. The goal is to evaluate the wide-ranging consequences of their convergence; the combined influence of building regulations and green incentives on environmental awareness, rather than the isolated impact of green building standards on environmental performance.

As Gregory Bateson observed, ideas and programs interact and survive in circuits. It would then be a fallacy to assume that by changing ideas and programs, and updating standards, we can alter environmental awareness, or minimize environmental impact. Ideas and standards must be updated, but the rule-making circuits from which they originate need to be questioned and occasionally re-circuited as well.

