

COOPERATIVE HOUSING

NEIGHBORHOODS AS COMMONS

STEFAN GRUBER

**How will we live post-covid19?
How will we live post-oil? And how
will we live post-capitalism?**



Background

The worldwide stay-at-home-orders in response to Covid19 have launched the single largest and most radical experiment in scrutinizing prevalent notions of domesticity and housing. If life under lockdown has demonstrated our collective ability to change everyday habits, it has also exposed the inadequacies of our houses for addressing contemporary challenges. But as with many other systemic societal flaws the pandemic has laid bare, the housing crisis has been long in the making. Architecture imaginary continues to be burdened by the binaries of private versus public space, although they no longer reflect today's social behaviors and relations. The modernist division between work and life, production and social reproduction, are rooted in superseded gender policies and normative ideas of nuclear families. And the very idea of isolated single-family homes as lowest common denominator of the American Dream is fundamentally at odds with dwindling resources and the accelerating climate crisis. But most and for all, the structuring of social relations and urban life around the concept of home ownership and regimes of private property are at the root of growing inequity and social polarization. These challenges urge us to radically questioning how we live, how we access and distribute resources, what and how we produce and consume, and how we care for our individual, community and planetary well-being. In response, this studio will explore the design of affordable cooperative housing as a means for communities to pool resources and lead a more self-determined life based on collective governance and shared ownership. The collective sum of the studio's housing proposition aim at reimagining neighborhoods as commons.



Privacy

In response to the school-wide theme, this studio will deconstruct privacy as a bourgeois concept that continues to define contemporary notions of domesticity. On the one hand, we will explore privacy in relation to narratives of freedom and the liberation of individuals from collective ties, who unhindered by outdated attachments dedicate themselves to cultivating a diversity of lifestyles. Meanwhile, individualization is fueling social isolation and what is widely referred to as a loneliness epidemic. On the other hand, we will study privacy's ties to contemporary forms of domination: the dispossession and commodification of land on which capitalism is founded, the racism by which BIPOC have often been deprived of home ownership and building equity, and gender discrimination by confining women to unpaid domestic labor in the privacy of single family homes. Thus, we will challenge the distinctions between private and public space: The home is no longer a place of intimate privacy, but the site of everyday activities including productive labor and public communication. Conversely, the center of communal and political life is not only to be found on the square or streets. The domestic sphere is not limited to house the familiar, but is often the site for the encounter of differences and controversies, while domestic activities are increasingly spilling into the public sphere and challenging prevalent ideas of spatial boundaries.

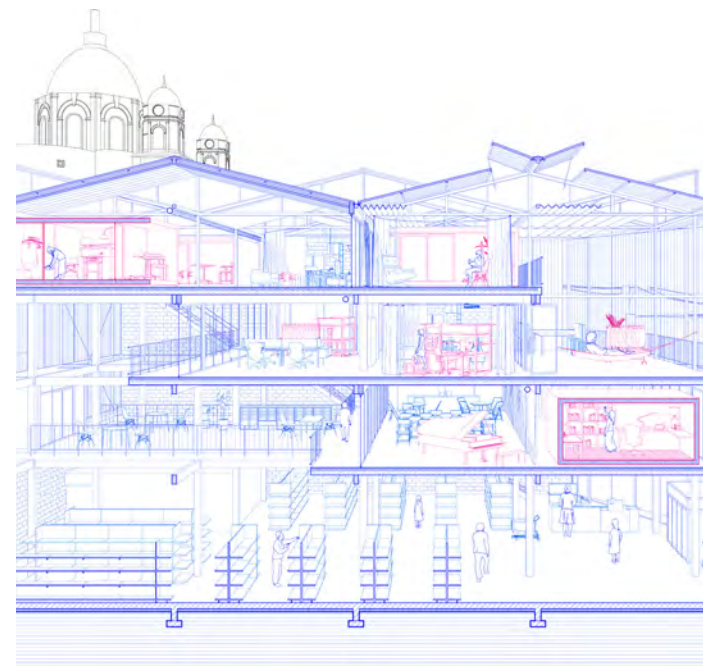


Left: Yokohama apartments by ON design
(Photo: © koichi torimura)
Top right: City in the Making, Rotterdam by
Stealth.unlimited
Bottom right: The Essex Apartments, San
Diego by Ted Smith & Others

Program

The studio will take "a proposal" by Hans Widmer and the 2000-Watts society as its starting point. According to the 2000-Watts society model each earthling is allotted a fixed primary energy budget of 2 kWh. This entails our individual and shared energy for housing, mobility, food, goods and waste, including embodied energy. In "a proposal" writer Hans Widmer (also known as p.m. and author of bolo'bolo) lays out how such lifestyle menu would have to look: 20m2 of private living space, 2.5m2 of communal space (or 1250m2 in a microcenter), no cars, no flights, 6km by train per person/day, 15kg of meat per year (4.3kg beef, 7.6kg pork, 3.2kg fowl), 70l water per day... While these constraints seem extreme, they are not farfetched: only in the 1960s did Western cultures meet these targets. More recently, the pandemic has constraint our lives to a much more local footprint and reduced our energy consumption accordingly. But while our habits can change overnight, the re-designing our homes will require more time and thought.

The studio will test the implications of the 2000-Watts society for Pittsburgh by envisioning new typologies of collective living and working. More specifically, we will develop proposals for low-rise high-density limited equity housing cooperatives in which the ground floors serve as mixed use community facilities. Each student or team will work on one of a series of distributed sites across a Pittsburgh Neighborhood as part of a Community Land Trust. Together, these housing interventions will form a network aiming at building community resilience and more local, self-sufficient and circular economies. Thus, the studio will work both at an architectural scale on individual housing projects and at an urban scale as a group, reframing the neighborhood as commons.



Above left: S20 project Hugh Lee
Above right: S20 project by Deepthi Ganesh
Right: Collage with case study model and diagrams of Odenbergerstrasse 56 by Yeong-Il Jo, prototyping collage by Hugh Lee and floorplan by Fon Euchukanonchai



Learning Outcomes

- You can situate your design work in the context of broader social, ecological and economic transformations and find design agency beyond dominant forms of practice. Your goal isn't merely to adopt contemporary best practices, but to prepare and transform architecture practice for the future.
- You understand the fundamental organizational principles of housing and can translate these into developing new typologies.
- You adapt your design to the specificities of an urban context and consider your design impact on community wellbeing and resilience.
- You recognize the impact of architecture within the overall metabolism of cities and inform design decisions based on resource efficiency.