The massification of urban life brings two new conditions: the city has to be shared with more people and the activities are compressed in space. In this way, not only the single-family house is turning into collective housing, but also the workplace is increasingly being mixed with the domestic space. Faced with this sort of neo-medieval scenario, this project proposes an alternative for this double synthesis between the individual and the collective and between life and work.

In his series of polemical articles “Zur Wohnungsfrage” (The Housing Question), Friedrich Engels critiqued alternative housing models within the capitalist system as “bourgeois socialism”. For Engels, the issue was not to build houses for workers, but to establish a working-class critique of the capitalist city, and thus of capitalism itself. This claim, which has long haunted architects and activists who have researched alternative housing models, is a reminder that the housing question is inseparable from capitalist social relationships.

Engels’ argument is that housing alternatives are an illusion or, worse still, a reactionary palliative. Yet, we believe that to abandon any alternative to market-driven housing disempowers those who struggle to afford decent living conditions. To reject housing alternatives altogether, therefore, is to ignore how the dialectics of production and reproduction in the current conditions of class struggle are also spatially defined and that housing plays a significant role within it.
Our intention is not to answer to the current Wohnungsfrage (The Housing Question) by way of a typological solution, but to use the typological transformation of the villa from family to communal house in order to question the political and economic framework that the ‘house’ imposes. As Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Muller have argued in their critique of this typology, the villa is a “negative utopia,” which attempts to construct an idyllic image of living, freed both from pressure of the city and the burden of productive and reproductive work. Yet, the evolution of the villa is not only linked to the economic exploitation of the land; its self-sufficiency had to be supported by workers whose hard toil was often at odds with the pastoral image of the villa. Above all, the villa embodies the idea of the house as a microcosm protected from the pressure of the city.

As an alternative to this condition, we have developed our project Communal Villa, a model
for a collective house for about fifty artists. Our proposal focuses on a realist-housing model for artists who have chosen to live and work together. Today, new forms of production imply the overlap between work and life, to the point that they become indistinguishable. No longer organized by the traditional 9 to 5 schedule, contemporary forms of production involve the entire life of workers and their spectrum of social relationships. Work – but also life at large – is thus more mobile, precarious and not containable within rigid typologies. This condition is even more extreme in the case of creative work. Here the distinction between the realm of living and the one of working seems to collapse into a common space. Yet cities continue to be developed around a clear distinction between workplace and housing, reinforced at the same time by a legal framework that considers living and working as two distinct domains. This condition clashes with the very purpose of the domestic interior, which, since its invention in the eighteenth century supposedly existed in compensatory opposition to the sphere of work. In our proposal for a Communal Villa, we challenge this vision of domesticity by putting forward a space that is generic and thus goes beyond the distinction between living and working.

What sort of cohabitation model would be able to challenge the framework of private property that up until now has been one of the most important goals for housing?

Our Communal Villa is a house organized within principles such as the Mietshäuser Syndikat
(Syndicate of tenements). The organization of the syndicate has existed in Germany for over twenty years and aims at withdrawing housing from the commercial real estate market by becoming part of a collective ownership structure. Our Communal Villa attempts to link a reconsidered living-space typology with the economic framework of the Mietshäuser Syndikat.

Each villa comprises individual spaces (cells) and collective spaces (studios, workshops, kitchens, sauna, sound studio, kindergarten, etc.). This organization aims at maximizing collective space and minimizing individual space, so that the latter can become a true space of refuge, while at the same time encouraging tenants to dwell in the collective space.

Each cell is equipped with an 'inhabitable wall,' an element designed to blur the distinction between furniture and architecture. Made of plywood, the inhabitable wall contains all the necessities for
Villa Suburbana

8 Planta nivel calle
Ground floor plan
E. / S. 1:500

9 Planta primer nivel
First floor plan
E. / S. 1:500

10 Planta segundo nivel
Second floor plan
E. / S. 1:500

11 Planta tercer nivel
Third floor plan
E. / S. 1:500

LEYENDA / LEGEND
1. Acceso / Entrance
2. Loggia
3. Sala de reuniones y seminarios / Meeting and seminar room
4. Cocina / Kitchen
5. Sauna
6. Piscina / Pool
7. Taller ruidoso / Noisy workshop
8. Estudio de grabación / Recording studio
9. Lavandería / Laundry
10. Habitación para una persona
(puede ser combinada con otras para formar habitaciones mayores)
Room for one person (room can be united to form larger rooms)
11. Bodega / Storage
12. Espacio colectivo multipropósito / Collective multi-purpose space
13. Habitación / Room
14. Área de estudio en galería / Gallery studio
15. Galería / Gallery
living: storage, bathroom, and sleeping alcove with book shelves. The reverse side of the inhabitable wall is designed as a large storage area for collective use.

The collective nature of our villas is emphasized by the abstraction of its architecture. If style, decoration, character, and representation have always made domestic space the space of the individuation of the subject (male, female, father, mother, son, etc.), with Communal Villa we aim to create an architecture of de-individuation where every member of the community, whether adult or child, has an equal amount of space and facilities. ARQ
COMMUNAL VILLA

Arquitecto / Architect: Dogma (Pier Vittorio Aureli, Martino Tattara), Realism Working Group, Florian Schmidt
Equipo de proyecto / Project Team: Luciano Aletta, Ezio Melchiorre, Ophélie Dozat, Giovanna Pittalis

Ubicación / Location: Wohnungfrage exhibition (Jesko Fezer, Nikolaus Hirsch, Wilfried Kuehn, Hila Peleg), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
Materiales / Materials: Modelo 1:1 en madera contrachapada / Plywood 1:1 model
Año de Proyecto / Project year: 2015

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Architect, Università IUAV di Venezia, 2002. Master of Architecture, Berlage Institute, Rotterdam, 2005. Doctor, Università IUAV di Venezia, 2008. Together with Pier Vittorio Aureli co-founded dogma. He has taught at the Berlage Institute, Rotterdam and as a visiting professor at the Università di Cagliari. He is currently a professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the Catholic University of Leuven.

Realism Working Group  
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Founded in 2007, the Realism Working Group began as a student self-organized free-class seminar in Frankfurt am Main that since 2013 shifted to exploring the possibilities of collective housing. The current conditions of excessive gentrification in Frankfurt am Main led the Realism Working Group to focus on the model of the Mietshäuser Syndikat (Syndicate of Tenements) as a core field of research. In the project Wohnungsfrage the Group is represented by artists Martin Stiehl, Jessica Sehrt and Jeronimo Voss.
Outside the Box: On Dogmas, Property and Alternative Models

Our cities and architectures are informed and affected by ideologies. Over the last 40 years, neoliberal hegemony has increased privatization and commodification of resources, common goods, and domains of our life. Current global order based on private property and everlasting debt – with housing as its most emblematic case – privileges a few, dismantling existing commonalities and installing the idea that there are no alternatives.

Here, artistic practices – including architecture – have a key role. They can straightforwardly confront the prevailing culture, translating emancipatory politics into a form. Thus, they invite us to think about ways to push the barriers of what is possible from all flanks.

The Wohnungsfrage exhibition attempted the above. Conceptualized and co-curated by Jesko Fezer, Nikolaus Hirsch, Wilfried Kuehn and Hila Peleg, it was an ambitious and unprecedented opportunity to explore the possibilities of the social self-determination regarding the future of housing.¹

Within this context originates the project Communal Villa, designed by Dogma together with the German collective Realism Working Group. As the name suggests, the proposal develops “a realist-housing model for artists who have chosen to live and work together” in the city of Berlin (Dogma et al., 2015). The proposal is based on the fact that new forms of production are gradually blurring the boundaries between life and work, while the notion of ‘domesticity’ – a market-tailored instrument and a desire – is more effective than ever.

In this case, the authors worked within the framework defined by the Mietshäuser Syndikat (Syndicate of Tenements), a German organization founded in 1992 in the squat scene of the nineties, whose objective is to protect housing from the insatiable real estate market, managing 97 projects – with over 1,800 inhabitants – and preventing any sale or privatization attempt, partial or total, through advice and funds for the development of new projects. In short, the model suggests the definition of a shared property that operates through leasing, where residents have full decision-making power over their homes but are not in possession of any of their spaces, lacking individual property.² A ‘hack’ to the private property system.³

The proposal defines two models: the urban and the suburban villa. Both cases insist on the cloister strategy, minimizing individual space and maximizing collective ones.⁴ Both models are based on industrial architecture with prefabricated components, concentrating services...
in an ‘inhabitable wall’ – a self-supporting plywood device – that separates the private sphere from the collective one. This provides the framework for a specific kind of community life while reducing building costs by avoiding detailed finishing. The authors suggest to locate these volumes in disused areas (usually close to infrastructure and owned by the district or railway companies, which would facilitate their transfer).

At times when a large portion of contemporary architecture has been able to represent and shape the neoliberal system (in many cases, even paying it homage), it is desirable that strategies based on alternative values proliferate. Not only to cover the historical debt with majorities but to expand the possibilities of architecture itself. As in the case of the rent subsidy or the celebrated Popular Real Estate Agency launched by the Municipality of Recoleta, the invitation is to think outside the box and scrutinize areas where the market operates poorly or does not operate at all because of lack of interest.

This is how architecture will become political and, hopefully, emancipatory.

Bibliografia / Bibliography


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**Notas / Notes**

1. The title of the exhibition is a reference to Friedrich Engels’ 1872 essay.
2. See: <syndikat.org/en>.
4. The room has 45 m² that go up to 80 m² including collective spaces, without any distinction between different members of the community.
5. According to the authors, 800 Euros/m².