



Shaker Rainbow  
Photograph Wolfgang Tillmans, 1998

# UNDER THE RAINBOW

## COMMUNES IN NORTH AMERICA FROM BOSTON TO CHICAGO

Our journey will set out in search of the architecture of new beginnings. We will visit the wonderful experimental Communes, Villages and Towns of North America. Most of these amusing and radical examples of social reform were built in the 19th century, representing the architectural promise of creating a better world for oneself, a vision of a new society.

The counter-design or alternative project has always inspired societal, art and architectural developments, where the known and the familiar are challenged. The ideal counter-model of a fairer, more efficient and healthier world is set against our established social structures. These utopian dreams of a perfectly organised society, dreaming of an alternative way of life, have often led to spectacular social and architectural experiments. These currents of radical renewal are particularly revealing in times of crisis and uncertainty. Technological progress, economic shifts and political upheavals fuel the need for new social designs. Today, we find ourselves in such a moment of crisis and change. Our contemporary society is still in search of examples of social and ecological change; the longing for a new beginning remains still present for many people today.

Our North American road trip will traverse the locations where these idealistic groups united to test their new communities, where they dared to make a new start. Mostly somewhere they thought to be untouched nature, these new ideal settlements and houses were built. The Shakers are the best-known of these success stories, but they are by no means the only examples. Liselotte Ungers, in her important book "Communities in the New World, 1740 - 1972" which she published together with her husband Oswald Matthias Ungers in 1972, painted a critical and fascinating portrait of a large number of different communities and their way of life.

This publication from the 1970s will serve to guide our journey of discovery into the architecture of the new beginning. By bus and car, we travel to the places documented in the book. We want to get to know the often astonishingly simple, almost classicist architecture of these communities more closely. An architecture that is based on the elementary principles of the vernacular but at the same time seeks an idealistic, often religiously motivated goal, a higher truth of the pure, the perfect (perhaps even an aspect of the transcendental religiousness) in its form. Seen in this light, the architecture of the communes is not only functional, but often also a spectacular art form. Its purism, elegance and optimized economy anticipate in many ways what modernism later sought in art and architecture: the beauty of simplicity and the elegance of perfection.

And so, we will also see modern and contemporary buildings and works of art on our journey. Together with experts, artists and architects, we will discuss and critically reflect on what we see. The journey starts in Boston and takes us through the wonderful landscape of New England to the Midwest.

LINK

CHRIST-GANTENBEIN.ARCH.ETHZ.CH

### TEAM

Mona Fögler  
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### SEMINAR WEEK

20.10. – 27.10.2024  
Expense category  
F (1001 – 1500 CHF)  
12 – 21 participants  
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