

Master Thesis HS24

Outcasts

Life is full of contradictions; reality has long surpassed fiction in terms of credibility. This also holds true for our efforts to tackle climate change. As public institutions and authorities with large real estate portfolios commit to self-declared deadlines for reduced CO₂ emissions, they also find themselves in the inconvenient presence of a number of 'underperforming' buildings. Bringing these buildings up to standard demands capacity and time, which these public institutions seem unwilling to invest. As a quick fix, they usually decide to sell them on the private market.

In this master thesis, we turn to these buildings – the 'Outcasts' – and ask ourselves: what alternative strategies can prevent large-scale transfers of public property to the private market? Could institutional 'Outcasts' become a driving force for a more equitable and inclusive development of cities, anchored in affordability and accessibility, rather than contributing to the ongoing practice of property speculation? Can public institutions take up responsibility in the public interest, and avoid repeating the same mistake in the name of sustainability by replacing the speculation of today by the 'green' speculation of tomorrow?

To tackle this more concretely, we will engage with our own institution, ETH Zurich, and with a significant number of residential buildings that are listed to be removed from its portfolio. Designed for a use that no longer complies with the three focus areas – teaching, research and knowledge transfer – and in need of urgent renovation to improve their energy performance by 2030, these buildings are not a priority for ETH Real Estate. Yet, instead of selling these buildings to the free market and making this public property private, we ask: can these ETH Outcasts play a role in the Swiss search for housing the projected population growth of one million by 2050? And, can they contribute to Switzerland's ecological goals set for 2050?

Let us for a moment imagine the following:

ETH Zurich, acknowledging its role and responsibilities as a powerful property owner in Zurich, decides to donate its outcasts to community-driven, anti-speculative organisations like "Stiftung PWG" and "Stiftung Edith Maryon". These ETH donations come with a clear condition: the buildings will be treated as research projects in the form of living labs. Renovation and reconfiguration will happen as testing grounds for new ways of living together, while also rethinking our comfort standards.

We will visit and research exemplary dwelling practices in Switzerland, listening to and learning from places and people. Through in situ interventions and performative actions, we will expand on our understanding of what 'home' can be, and apply this understanding to propose new ways of dwelling in the former institutional buildings. By considering different bodies, uses and subjectivities, across different generations, needs, collectivities and domesticities, we will dwell with outcasts, while proposing a future in which public institutions such as ETH act upon their agency in and for the city to which they belong.

In case of questions, please contact Géraldine Recker
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LRR, 1972



Je, tu, il, elle - Chantal Ackermann, 1974

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Preparation Phase

1. SITUATING DWELLING

How else might we dwell? What do we understand as home? What spatial, social and climatic situations can both densify and enable the energetic performance of an existing building, while proposing new types of dwelling beyond the mainstream? We will actively learn with and from existing modes of dwelling to expand and diversify our understanding of home-making, and come to terms with the normative frameworks embedded in them. We will re-imagine and re-inform the Outcast's spaces, by preparing happenings, performances, and spatial experiments. Our findings and our triggered imagination on how to dwell otherwise, will then be used as a generator for the ETH Outcast Living Lab.

- Analyse references of spatial and social dwelling configurations, performances and happenings - both fictional and existing - proposed or self-chosen. Engage with these references by drawing them, building them, observing them, fictionalising them, inhabiting them, spending time with the dwellers in them: by becoming complicit with them.
- Through an introduction into the Undercommons, referencing Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's work, engage with often overlooked modes of dwelling in the cracks of the existing built environment, to address the affective and normative nature of dwelling and think it in relation to multiple bodies, experiences and worldviews.
- Through a reading of Vilém Flusser's "Taking Up Residence in Homelessness", engage with the idea of Collectivity.
- Pick one dwelling situation that you're interested in and try to reimagine it in different ways - how to cook, sleep, bathe, how to enter or exit a space, where to share and meet, while reimagining our comfort, cultural standards, privacy, togetherness, outside, inside, in-between.
- Re-enact or create your own performance or happening in or in relation to one chosen ETH-Outcast, as a rehearsal of a different understanding of home within the city. Experiment with in situ performances, 1:1 spatial re-configurations or happenings that reimagine ways of dwelling.
- Find a suitable way to represent or document your performance, as it will be part of the final exhibition.

2. SITUATING OUTCASTS

- Make an analysis of your chosen ETH Outcast building, its inhabitants and dwelling type, its energy metabolism, its neighbourhood, history and structure, identify its tangible and intangible qualities, concluding on how to value what is there.
- Build a basic understanding of the ambitions, drives and ownership models of non-profit real estate organisations active in Switzerland, such as Stiftung PWG and Edith Maryon, and propose one of them as the inheritors of your ETH Outcast.

Elaboration Phase

- With your findings from the preparation phase, make a proposal on how to rethink and densify your ETH Outcast: housing typology, integrated uses, ownership model, comfort, architectural character, energy metabolism, etc.
- With this proposal, address the Swiss housing shortage and urgent ecological goals. How can a new understanding of comfort or energy consumption respond to the existing building structure? Can redrawing housing types push for a broader understanding of domesticity, beyond the heteronormative? Elaborate how your project functions as an Outcast Living Lab.
- Find an appropriate representation for transforming the Outcast, showing awareness of the issues at stake.
- Address the Outcasts' fictional future community and the way that they might dwell in the living lab.

Formats

Teaching formats

- Collective walks & visits
- Readings and discussions
- Table talks
- Reviews
- Lectures

Research and working formats

- Historical, archival, statistical & technical research;
- Discourse analysis & theory reading;
- Site survey or analysis through walking, observing, inhabiting, interviewing;
- Drawings, models of the existing building and its context
- Performance and in situ interventions

Ratio of grading by cooperation partners

Preparation phase	Chair of Affective Architectures: 50% Chair of Art in Time and Space: 50%
Elaboration phase	Chair of Affective Architectures: 50% Chair of Art in Time and Space: 50%