

UNFAMILIAR AGEING II

Care.

MASTERTHESIS

Chair of Architecture and Care in collaboration with queerAltern and Queerbeet.

Care.
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■ The intersection of ageing and a life that does not conform to traditional heteronormative structures requires forms of care beyond our existing provisions. At present, most caring facilities, spaces, services, and legal frameworks are structured around a highly limited understanding of “next of kin”. In recent times, LGBTQIA+ collectives have been seeking alternative communities and spaces of care that respond to other social realities. To give a response to the later life stages of homosexual co-living nuclei, single persons, transgender individuals, and other variations of non-conforming coexistence, self-initiated architectural projects have emerged in different countries.

Switzerland is no exception, and associations like queerAltern and Queerbeet promote buildings that look at care relationalities from a different perspective, transgressing traditional understandings of family, dismantling binary understandings of ability/disability, and fostering interdependencies and mutual care.

Expanding on the work of these self-organised projects, this Master’s thesis programme will explore alternative caring spaces while understanding bodily dependencies as means to create positive kinships and ageing as a political condition. Ageing tends to be oversimplified, reducing the individual to a non-productive member of society. Often, elderly people are segregated within constricted spaces of heavily regulated care that impede self-determination on multiple planes. In the design process, we will look to the ageing body with all its potentialities, addressing its spaces, contexts, and rituals. The LGBTQIA+ community will be taken as an entry point to defy assumptions and biases around caring models and collective living. With these premises, we will seek architectural and aesthetic proposals that embrace non-normative relationalities and distributed forms of care at different scales, from the body to the city.

PROGRAM

The students will work on housing facilities with care infrastructures, both able to host the members of queerAltern and simultaneously respond to wider neighbourhood needs. There should be critical reflection on how LGBTQIA+ ageing experiences may differ from heteronormative ones, and what the spatial implications of these kinds of otherness are.

The project and its position within its context should mirror, amplify, and reflect on existing provisions of care – or their absence, if this were the case –, in order to offer alternative scenarios from an understanding of the urban context as an indispensable medium for care beyond the confinement of the home. Recognising the current conflicted relationship between domesticity and care, or the also conflicted isolation of care homes or retirement homes, the projects need to be able to dismantle biased constructs, ‘unworlding’ or, in other words, unmaking spatial dispositions of inequality and predefined architectures of seclusion. This process of redefinition and reorganisation needs to consider the present context in order to propose a construction that, while implemented at the scale of the building, operates at the same time in a transscalar manner, linking the body to the city.

■ METHODOLOGY

→ Preparation Phase

We will spend our first weeks building up a discourse around ageing bodies and architectures of care through readings and lectures. These initial sessions will take place around a common table as a collective happening. We will set a place to share knowledge, experiences, and thoughts. We will pay close attention to how we communicate ideas, caring for the words we use and their architectural correlation. We will have inputs and lectures by QueerAltern and Queerbeet.

During this phase we expect students to formulate clear and precise questions, using abstract ideas to interpret information, considering diverse points of view, reaching well-reasoned conclusions, and testing alternative outcomes. Performing qualitative and quantitative architectural research and translating it into architectural language. Gathering, assessing, recording, and comparatively evaluating relevant information and performance data in order to support conclusions. Designing an initial strategy in response to territories of care and their characteristics, including the urban context and historical fabrics, soils, topography, ecologies, climate, economies, etc.

→ Elaboration Phase

After the preparation phase, projects will start to be detailed. We will work on the proposals so that they are sufficiently and adequately resolved. Discussions around form, materiality, construction, and structural systems, as well as environmental control and impact, will be part of our weekly conversations. Experts in different fields will provide input to support the development of the project.

During this phase we expect students to use formal, organisational, social, and environmental principles informing two- and three-dimensional design. Understand construction and structural systems and their coherent formalisation. Consider the environmental impact and reuse of the design. Make clear architectural drawings and moving images at different scales to illustrate and communicate an architectural design both technically and experientially.

■ RATIO OF GRADING

→ Preparation phase

Chair of Architecture and Care: 60%

QueerAltern / Queerbeet: 40%

→ Elaboration phase

Chair of Architecture and Care: 80%

QueerAltern / Queerbeet: 20%

■ SITE

We will work on one of the sites in Switzerland that needs to be occupied by housing for the queerAltern community in the coming years. We will have a precise context. The site is not to be seen as a limited building lot, but rather as the starting point through which to conceptualise an urban territory of care, ranging from the scales of the body to the city. This way, we will rethink the boundaries of care, transgressing the domestic and the institutional domains in which they are conventionally located.

■ ABOUT QUEERALTERN

Founded in 2014, the association queerAltern promotes the social life of ageing LGBTQIA+ people, is committed to LGBTQIA+ housing, LGBTQIA+ friendly care and assistance, supports LGBTQIA+ politics, and organises events. The association has been working with the Foundation for Retirement Homes (Stiftung für Alterswohnungen, SAW) and the Health Centers for Old Age (Gesundheitszentren für das Alter GFA) to promote housing and living space for ageing members of the LGBTQIA+ community as one of the first measures of the Ageing Strategy 2035.

■ ABOUT QUEERBEET

Founded in September 2022 in Bern, the association aims to create places of life for LGBTQIA+ people, rainbow families, and refugees. The association was founded with the aim of proposing a concept of housing for the development project in Viererfeld, responding to an open call for visionary ideas initiated by the Hauptstadt Genossenschaft of Bern (HGB), in 2022. The project "Queerbeet im Viererfeld" won the contract with the HGB and will subsequently be a part of the new neighbourhood.

■ FEEDBACK

Students will work in constant conversation with the teachers as well as with external voices who will be invited to participate, not only in formal crits and reviews, but also during the project development process. QueerAltern's members will review the work and provide feedback every two weeks. Three major interim crits will be organised during the semester.