

# UNFAMILIAR AGEING

## ■ MASTERTHESIS

Chair of Architecture and Care

In collaboration with Barbara Bosshard (queerAltern)  
and more to be confirmed

Care.

Office HIL E 70.5

## ■ TEACHING TEAM

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And more TBC

■ The intersection of ageing and a life that does not conform to traditional structures of heterosexual descentance requires forms of care beyond our existing provisions. At present, most caring facilities, services, and legal frameworks are structured around heteronormative understandings of next of kin. In recent times, LGBTI+ collectives have been seeking alternative caring communities 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 projects have emerged in different countries. Switzerland is no exception, and associations like queerAltern foster architectural projects that look at care relationalities from a different perspective, transgressing traditional understandings of the family, dismantling binary understandings of ability/disability, and promoting interdependencies and mutual care.

Jack Halberstam argues that queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities that allow life narratives outside paradigmatic markers of life experience. Ageing, and the increase of dependencies associated with it, affects in a differential manner social groups who do not conform to heterosexual temporalities. LGBTI+ individuals often face discrimination when confronted with existing care systems. In response to the lack of public and governmental provision, LGBTI+ communities self-organise and thus depend on activism, volunteer work, and solidarities to function. Many, if not all LGBTI+ spaces in Zurich rely on, or initially relied on such forms of interdependency and kinship. In most of these scenarios, the need for care is answered collectively, and beyond the dichotomy of care-giver and care-receiver.

In response, this Masterthesis program will understand 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 LGBTI+ 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

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 LGBTI+ 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.

## ■ 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 LGBTI+ people, is committed to LGBTI+ housing, LGBTI+ friendly care and assistance, supports LGBTI+ politics, and organises events. The association has been working with Stiftung für Alterswohnungen (SAW), den Gesundheitszentren für das Alter (GFA) in promoting housing and living space for ageing members of the LGBTI+ community as one of the first measures of the Ageing Strategy 2035.

## ■ METHODOLOGY

→ Preparation Phase  
28.08.2023 – 16.10.2023

### Bibliographical and theoretical research

The course will start with an immersion in the topics. 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.

## ■ ON SITE AND CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

After this initial theoretical phase, students will start studying the site and the particular context of the queerAltern community – their housing and care needs. Members of queerAltern will provide insights and any relevant information needed to develop a

design proposal. During this phase, site information as well as expanded research around LGBTI+ ageing in Switzerland will be provided to students to facilitate their understanding of the context.

## ■ DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITICAL POSITION AND PROGRAM SCHEME

As an answer, students will be asked to take a critical position and define a design strategy around housing and care that needs to answer to different scales: from the body, to the building, to the neighbourhood. During this phase, students will also define a program, select a community and strategize a management scheme.

→ Elaboration Phase  
16.10.2023 – 15.12.2023

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.

## ■ 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. Two major interim crits will be organised during the semester.

Care.