

Utopia in action: co-housing in the future?

Sara Brolund de Carvalho/Action Archive

With support of the non-profit association Action Archive, I will look closer at three existing “utopian” co-housing projects and an historical visionary exhibition proposal of co-housing and analyze the four examples focusing on the aspect of alternate forms of spatial co-existing and practices of care. The examples are from Stockholm and Vienna and they will be addressed through participatory historical research using predominantly film. The term utopia is used here as a hands-on and pro-active form of “embodied utopia”¹ that takes process, time as well as personal experience into account.

Why is it relevant to study co-housing projects? What importance can this form have for future societies?

Many aspects make collaborate housing forms worth revisiting. Co-housing can be discussed, for instance, as a model which lives up to increasing demands on social, economical and ecological sustainability. It is a building and living model that has been undervalued during long periods of time² but there are some indications³ of a possible revival. Therefore, I claim, there is an urgency for looking closer into different models of co-housing through particular examples and to foreground and share the personal experiences of people who live and lived in co-housing projects as well as to look closer to the actual common spaces and their usage and accessibility they have produced. Co-housing is not mere *space sharing* –it means a higher level of commitment and negotiation with neighbours. These can take different forms and be of shifting intensity but they all presuppose a certain level of care- for the common space and for others. I am especially interested in the question of how practices of caretaking can become important social and political forums for learning, exchange of ideas and support, and how they reproduce these spaces. Considering that activities and actions concerned with care are often undervalued and made invisible in our capitalocentric economic system, my question is: Can co-housing make visible the importance of care-work or reproductive work beyond the small circle of its own inhabitants? And, how do co-housing inhabitants of today imagine the co-housings of the future?

Case studies

- 1. Kvinnors Byggforums** (Womens Building Association) and **Bo i Gemenskaps** (Living Together) proposals presented at the **exhibition Boplats 80** in Stockholm in 1980⁴. Both groups presented visionary collective housing and common spaces and used for that time unexpected and visionary exhibition forms/techniques.
- 2. Cigarrlådan** is a rental co-housing project in Hökarängen, Stockholm. This co-housing celebrated recently 30 years and has a thriving community with many active “theme” groups. They offer regular guided tours to their house and are very open and inviting towards their surrounding community extending the concept of share and care outside the physical boundaries of the house.
- 3. The Frauwohneprojekt** ro*sa Kalypso in Vienna is a housing project where only women can sign a rental lease. It was inaugurated in 2009 and is imagined and planned by the women who became its

¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “The time of architecture”, in *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change and the Modern Metropolis*, eds: Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders, Rebecca Zorach. London: Routledge, 2002

² Dick Urban Vestbro, *Kollektivhus från enkökshus till bogemenskap*, 1982

³ *Europa: Gemeinsam wohnen*, Wohnbund e.V., Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2017

⁴ Helena Mattsson, “Shifting gender and acting out history: is there a swedish postmodern-feminist architecture?”, in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, eds: Schalk, M., Kristiansson, T., Mazé, R., Baunach: AADR / Spurbuchverlag, 2017. Bo i Gemenskap, “Det lilla kollektivhuset. En modell för praktisk tillämpning”, 1983.

first inhabitants. The building has certain physical spatial features like accessible rental work spaces that aim to particularly support women in precarious economic situations such as single mothers⁵.

4. Türkis Lila Villa Rosa in Vienna is a self-administrated queer housing project that started 1982 as a squat but managed to negotiate its survival and “legality” with the municipality⁶. Their role as a guidance center for the LGBTQI community transforms the Vila itself into an activist as much as a “house”⁷.

Methods

This project will result in micro histories of ‘filmic essays’, models, and a printed documentation. Educated as an artist in the media of photo and film and as an architect, I have worked with film as a means in architecture production and in urban studies. I put emphasis on the role of the moving image as a “participant” and a co-creator in these processes. In my practice, I found film a valuable asset in the development of participatory methods that encourage the personal and subjective stories of people and spaces. Example of previous *architectural film projects* is a short in collaboration with Anja Linna, called “Underground Urban Caretaking”⁸ where we explore film as a mapping tool within the fields of urban planning and architecture. In 2013, the film and a corresponding paper were presented at that years Architecture Humanities Research Association (AHRA) conference in Bristol; “Underground Urban Caretaking - Unearthing social knowledge through image and sound” which was subsequently published in a British anthology⁹.

I have also used film as part of my graduate dissertation in architecture as a means to both explore and to portray urban activism¹⁰. Inspiration for the dramaturgy of the films came from what is known as a witness seminar¹¹.

Biography

Sara Brolund de Carvalho is an artist, filmmaker, architect and educator based in Stockholm. She is currently the project leader for Grannskapskontoret (the neighbourhood office), a one year “youth shop” in Hökarängen, Stockholm focusing on local civic engagement and urban planning.

She runs since 2013 together with researchers Helena Mattsson and Meike Shalk the research group Action Archive. Their methods are based on collaborative formats, such as participatory action research, and simultaneously, these formats are also part of the dissemination of the research. They have developed participatory historical records through public actions that bring together diverse actors and a public around urban cultural, historical, and political issues by employing experimental research formats such as witness seminars, walks, films, re-enactments, and collective time-space mappings. Their current research **The Political City: From Community Spaces to Common Spaces** (funded by Formas / SRE: Architecture in the *Making*) is concerned with citizen initiatives desiring participation in city planning and architecture, and the civic or common spaces their engagement produce. The project employs apart from the above mentioned methods also Forum

⁵ Julia Wieger, “Reproductive Commons”, in *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies*, eds: Frichot H., Gabrielsson C., Runting, H. London: Routledge (2017)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The film can be seen at: <http://vimeo.com/49600998>

⁹ Brolund de Carvalho, S., Linna, A., “Underground Urban Caretaking: Unearthing Social Knowledge Through Image and Sound”, *Transgression: Towards an Expanded Field of Architecture*, eds: Rice, L., Littlefield, D., (London: Routledge Chapman & Hall) 2014.

¹⁰ The 2 mentioned films can be seen at: <https://vimeo.com/65922022> and <https://vimeo.com/65909985>

¹¹ A procedure frequently employed by the School of Historical and Contemporary Studies at Södertörn University but originally developed by the Centre for Contemporary British History in Great Britain.

Theatre as research method. The project will disseminate in a publication and be part of an exhibition in 2019 at the Az W, Architecture Centre in Vienna.

Biography of the other members of Action Archive:

Meike Schalk is an architect, associate professor of Urban Studies and Urban Theory and docent of Architecture at KTH School of Architecture. She is head of the doctoral programs in Architecture, and in Art, Technology and Design, a collaboration with Konstfack, the University of Arts, Crafts and Design. Since 2015, she is the director of the strong research environment Architecture in Effect: Rethinking the Social. While her first discipline is Architecture, she holds a Ph.D. in Theoretical and Applied Aesthetics of Landscape Architecture from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 2007. Her research on architecture and urban questions combines critical inquiry into issues of sustainability, democracy and participation in urban development processes with practice-based research methods. Schalk was co-founder of the feminist architecture teaching and research group FATALE, and is part of the nonprofit association Action Archive (with Sara Brolund de Carvalho and Helena Mattsson) dedicated to urban research through approaches of oral history and participatory historiography. Schalk is also an editor for the culture periodical SITE. Her recent publications include *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, co-edited with Thérèse Kristiansson and Ramia Mazé, 2017; *Architecture and Culture*, Vol.5 (3), Styles of Queer Feminist Practices and Objects in Architecture, 2017; and *Field 7, Becoming a Feminist Architect*, 2017, both co-edited with Karin Reisinger.

Helena Mattsson (b. 1965) is an architect and a researcher based in Stockholm, Sweden. Her doctoral thesis was published 2004, *Arkitektur och konsumtion: Reyner Banham och utbyttbarhetens estetik* (Architecture and consumption: Reyner Banham and the aesthetic of expendability). She has written extensively on architecture, art and culture, and is the editor of (with S O Wallenstein) *Swedish Modernism – Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* (2010) and *1%* (2006). Mattsson was in charge for a research project at the Museum of Architecture in Stockholm, Architecture and consumption in Sweden 1930 – 1970 (2005 to 2007). She is an Associate professor in History and Theory of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Mattsson is partner in Testbedstudio Stockholm, and editor for the culture periodical *SITE* and is part of the nonprofit association Action Archive (with Sara Brolund de Carvalho and Meike Schalk) dedicated to urban research through approaches of oral history and participatory historiography.