

Stronger Together: Tackling housing speculation through cooperation

Jacqui Alexander, Wednesdays 9.30am-4.30pm.



Image: Arno Brandhuber, *Terrassenhaus*, Berlin (2018).

This studio explores cooperation as a strategy to tackle housing speculation in cities, using Fitzroy, Melbourne as a test site. Since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, real estate returns have played a major role in the growth of Western economies. Considered a “stable asset” in investment terms, housing is increasingly exploited by the elite as a means to obscure their taxable income and disperse their financial risks geographically. The result is a systemic, artificial shortage of housing in global cities, and a commensurate increase in the cost of living. Digital platforms like Airbnb that triangulate “space time and money,” operate as amplifiers for these speculative cultures. These platforms have established a two-speed rental market where housing can attract higher premiums for short-term use, leading to its monopolisation, and a reduced supply of housing on the ground for residents. In other words, we have entered a new era where local housing is being subsumed by new global markets, at a scale and speed not previously seen.

Yet, land is a finite resource, and cannot be treated in the same way as any other form of capital. This studio believes that we, as architects can and must do more to address these conditions, and

reclaim housing as a common good. This semester we will be researching strategies to creatively and cooperatively overcome these financialised conditions, and expand the role of the architect to include the redesign of the frameworks under which housing is produced.

Cooperative models have proven successful in tackling this problem in a number of contexts, but are under-explored in Australia. Together we will investigate strategies, tools and platforms for collectivisation, to wrestle back inner-city land from the speculative market on a series of sites in Fitzroy – a former working-class suburb whose residents are facing displacement as a result of these exact processes. Informed by contemporary and historical shared housing experiments, we will play out a range of scenarios for alternative economic and spatial models that prioritise people rather than profit. Ultimately we will aim to develop a collection of approaches that demonstrate that another way forward is possible.

In the spirit of cooperation, this studio will involve collaboration, openness and shared knowledge. It is recommended for students interested in the politics of space.