

Outcasts The Highest Bidder

In neighbourhoods where private property is king, there is no way to stop your neighbour from selling to the highest bidder.

Leslie Kern, *Gentrification Is Inevitable and other Lies*, Verso Books, 2022

The Highest Bidder. With more and more of its own community struggling to live in the city, housing should be high on ETH Zurich's agenda. You would think that if anyone could and should make a difference, it would be ETH Real Estate, with its more than 200 buildings portfolio. As a public property developer, it has a duty to contribute to a fair and accessible city. Instead, ETH has decided to play the market and sell its obsolete building stock to the highest bidder. This inevitably contributes to the ongoing gentrification and monocultural character of certain neighbourhoods. As we experienced first hand in the autumn of 2024, when we temporarily occupied two of the ETH villas for sale in Kreis 6, the very presence of students in this privileged residential area caused a lot of unrest. Add to this the fact that the obsolete character of the buildings for sale is determined by their ecological underperformance, and you have a direct taste of green speculation: getting rid of the 'Outcasts' directly contributes to a better result in the sustainability charts of the ETH portfolio. And someone else will have to clean up the mess.

Outcasts. This spring we will focus on a second wave of 'Outcasts', ETH buildings that will soon be available on the market, once again moving from public to private ownership and contributing not only to further gentrification, but also to the wave of green speculation that so many institutions are quietly undertaking. How can we use fictional design proposals to demonstrate a different attitude and underline ETH Zurich's accountability to contribute to a different kind of urban transformation: one that promotes densification from within, and one that allows low-income people to be as much a part of the city as their richer counterparts? How can an architectural design demonstrate alternative models of ownership, different ways of living and building new communities to change ETH's perspective and enable us, architects and researchers, to become the highest bidder?

Preparation Phase. You will look at several buildings in ETH's real estate portfolio that will be sold in the next few years. You will show how these buildings came to be owned by ETH in the first place and uncover the underlying mechanisms of the commodification of these buildings. From there, you will imagine how the predicted profit-making sale will affect the inhabitants, the architecture of the building, the site, the neighbourhood: we will examine their histories, uses, comforts, structures and architectural values. You will study different models of ownership and their spatial characteristics, look at other ways of living together, and imagine alternative communities that will house the future.

Elaboration Phase. You will choose a specific Outcast and will propose an alternative future and a different path that ETH Immobilien could take. You will rethink our own agency as an architect and demonstrate that architecture can become an active tool to design with and act from. You will design a sustainable future, using your own tools and charts to define how Outcasts can contribute to a dense, more durable and accessible city center.

The semester will take place in the Ernst Gisel Atelier.

An Fonteyne & Géraldine Recker

in collaboration with ETH Wohnforum - Carina Sacher & Hannah Widmer

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Teaching formats

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

Research formats

- Historical, archival, statistical & technical research
- Discourse analysis & theory reading
- Site survey through walking, observing, inhabiting, interviewing
- Drawing and model making
- Film & Literature

We appreciate and stimulate experimentation and the discovery and exploration of personal design methods.

Grading by cooperation partners

- Affective Architectures 60%
- Wohnforum 40%