COLLECTIVES

Instructor: Rafi Segal (rsegal@mit.edu)
TA: Luisa Schettino (luisa_s@mit.edu)

Wed 4:30 – 7:00 pm, Room TBD
Credits 3-0-6 / 3-0-9 (G)

Overview

Sharing economies, digital technologies and new notions of community are changing the way we live and work. Accessibility over ownership, community-based exchange and collaborative behaviors are increasingly transforming both economic and social patterns, but the form of the city has in larger remained unchanged. How is architecture to respond? How can design better serve these new conditions? What are the scales and modes of operations and how is the city to adapt? Or what kind of new urban forms are to emerge? The workshop will chart, investigate and explore a set of architectural-urban typologies that address present and future spaces and forms of collectivity.

COLLECTIVES calls for an architectural-urban project to reclaim and envision spaces for informal governance and community self-regulation, thus facilitating renewed modes of distribution for common goods and the creation of new identities and expressions for emerging publics. Urbanism plays a key role in producing and organizing systems and sequences of spaces that enable the forming of communities, while architecture expresses and strengthens notions of collective identity.
Premise

New socio-economic modes generally referred to as the sharing economy, and the civil distrust in the government’s ability to manage the public realm have put to question the traditional definitions and characteristics of the public-private dichotomy.

The sharing economy, although not politically neutral, is creating a new economic model – an interesting middle ground between capitalism and socialism – that also appears to lend itself to fulfilling the desires and needs of people who identify with the extreme ends of both the economic and political spectrums. More importantly, it has developed as an economic model that appears to lend itself to fulfilling the desires and needs of people who identify with neither of those extremes.


The syncretism of contemporary social movements and the growing momentum of the commons movement both illustrate the civil distrust of any form of institutional government and the rejection of deep structural categories embodied in the dualities of state/market, public/private, objective/subjective and universal/local.


As the failure of the public as a relevant critical category in present discussions has attested, it is sensible to consider a more nuanced understanding of the public and the private, an understanding that offers a plural account of their numerous ‘in-betweens’ as differentiations of degrees rather than of kind.


In relation to urban form:

1. Sharing platforms of recent years have been utilizing existing forms, typologies and infrastructure rather than inventing new.
2. The privatization of the public realm has maintained the appearance of familiar and traditional forms of urban public space but eliminated their political essence as spaces of action, spontaneous organization and emergent social practices.
COLLECTIVES calls to rethink the public-private dyad, moving away from a binary divide along a line demarking ownership (and liability), to a social space of varying conditions and degrees of collectiveness. For now, we will refer to these varying degrees or ‘in-between’ conditions as comprising a larger group referred to as ‘collective spaces.’

The architectural and urban domains play a key role in the shift of thinking from conventional boundaries of public-private to the expanded ‘middle ground’ of collective spaces.

Themes/Concepts

What are the concepts and working principles that can aid in defining these new conditions? Can we move beyond the mere “semi-public” and “semi-private” definitions to a broader spectrum of conditions?

We will explore the idea of spatial gradient as a concept that guides both the analysis of the built environment and the creation of new types of spatial modes, urban conditions and building types. This thinking will be applied to a variety of scales: house to street, street to neighborhood and neighborhood to the city.

In parallel, we will investigate notions and organizations of groupings, as a social-programmatic catalyst for the creation of collective spaces.

Methodology

The first section of the workshop will be dedicated to identifying case studies for collective living/shared activities on the one hand and individualized spaces on the other. Case studies will be analyzed through their architectural-spatial qualities and in relation to their cultural and urban contexts.

Two techniques of analysis will be applied:

1) Sequential space analysis: a combination of territorial (spatial) gradient and space syntax methods to describe the physical-spatial relationships between a series of related spaces (‘house to street’ for example describes the sequence of spaces as one moves between the most public to the most intimate/individual space). This technique will utilizing the architectural section and urban plan as tools of analysis.

2) Urban montage: the reading and experience of the environment through a sequence of images, views, symbols which are used to construct an urban narrative. Here we will primarily utilize the architectural elevation and detail, materiality and surface –elements that make up the architectural-urban
image. In addition, we will also explore virtual applications that partake in the ‘reading’ and experience of urban space and the city.

Once analyzed, the selected precedents will be situated within a table of potential ‘in-between’ conditions. This table will take the form of a working matrix that defines spatial qualities and conditions by type of activity, scale and time duration and rhythm.

**Outcome**

The matrix is both a tool of analysis that categorizes and organizes different phenomena in relation to shared themes, and a method for exploring architectural-urban inventions that suggests certain combinations and conditions that might not yet exist in physical form. The matrix/field of collective conditions will be a joint team project produced by the workshop. It will encompass drawings of various scales and mediums; plan, section, elevation, axon, perspective, as well as textual descriptions.

**Class schedule**

**Sept 07:** Introduction  
Distribution of first round of reading assignments: The Case for Collectivity

**Sept 14:** Presentation & discussion of first round of readings.  
Launch of Exercise 01, case-study analysis: Collective Living

**Sept 21:** Work session: group discussion of ‘collective’ case study analysis / Round-table discussion with guest lecturer Nadya Nilina: Collective Housing in Russia

**Sept 28:** Review 01: Presentation of case studies.  
Distribution of second round of reading assignments: Typologies and Spatial Analysis

**Oct 05:** Presentation & discussion of second round of readings  
Launch of Exercise 02, case-study analysis: Individualized Spaces

**Oct 12:** Work session: group discussion of ‘individualized spaces’ case study analysis

**Oct 19:** Review 02: Presentation of case studies
Oct 26: Round-table discussion with guest lecturer (tentative date): *Technology and the Nature of Human Cooperation, MIT Scalable Cooperation Research Group (TBC)*
Launch of Exercise 03, the Matrix Project

Nov 2: Work session: individual/group crits on matrix work

Nov 9: Work session: individual/group crits on matrix work.
Round-table discussion with guest lecturer (tentative date): *The role and implications of social media technologies in distributed collaboration, MIT Initiative on the Digital Economy Work (TBC)*

Nov 16: Mid-term review of Matrix Project, with guest reviewers

Nov 23: Work session: individual/group crits on matrix work/hybrid explorations

Nov 30: Final review with guest reviewers

**Course Requirements**

We will devote a substantial amount of time to discussion and to group work. You are expected to engage the course material by completing readings, and participating in round-table discussions. Attendance is assumed and your participation mark will be impacted if you fail to actively participate in class.

N.B. Failure to complete any one of the course assignments will result in an overall failure of the class. All work must be turned in by the due date indicated for each assignment. Students cannot make up work or receive a grade of incomplete, except as allowed by Institute policy.

MIT’s expectations and policies regarding academic integrity and honesty should be adhered to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu

**Grading Distribution**

Class presentations on selected readings: 20%
Case-study analysis: 30%
Design research: 50%
Case Studies (working lists)

Collective living:

- Two types of kibbutz settlements, Israel (select specific cases with Rafi)
- Nikiszowiec Workers Colony, Katowice, Poland (1908-)
- Conjunto Urbano Nonoalco Tlatelolco, Mexico City, Mexico (Mario Pani, 1960s)
- Christiania, Copenhagen, Denmark (1971-)
- Slab City, California, USA (1960s-)
- Mount Lebanon Shaker Society, New York, USA (1785-1917)
- Gidani Micro District (Soviet Microrayon), Tbilisi, Georgia
- Lange Eng, Albertslund, Greater Copenhagen, Denmark
- Pullman - Pullman Palace Car Company, Illinois (1880s)
- Sweden’s People’s Home movement (1930s)
- Urbana Villor, Malmo, Sweden
- Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India
- Findhorn Ecovillage, Moray, Scotland

Individualized living:

- Levittown, New York, USA (Levitt & Sons, 1947)
- Orange County (alternative: Irvine), California, USA
- Cuatitlán – Infonavit housing development, State of Mexico, Mexico
- International case of typical suburban single family detached houses
- 666 Fifth Avenue, New York City, USA (1957)
- Penthouse Morumbi, São Paulo, Brazil (1987)
- Grosse Point, Detroit, USA
- Broadway Plaza, Walnut Creek, USA
- Strip mall (eg. Watertown Mall, MA)

Other cases to be discussed (working list)

- Feijenoord, Rotterdam, Netherlands
- Soderort (South Suburb), Stockholm, Sweden (eg. Livlandsgatan)
Workshop Readings

Round 1


**Round 2**


Additional Readings


**Strategies for Design**


**Movies**


