

# SOCIALITIES

**"The creation of instituting society, as instituted society, is each time a common world – kosmos koinos: the positing of individuals, of their types, relations and activities; but also the positing of things, their types, relations and signification – all of which are caught up each time in receptacles and frames of reference instituted as common, which make them exist together".<sup>1</sup>**

**Cornelius Castoriadis**



Collage II-  
lustrating the  
intersectional  
programme @  
Gabu Heindl,  
2016.



**INTER**

**SEKTIONALES**

**STADTHAUS**

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For Silvia Federici, the house acts as a central node for social reproduction where contested modes of being in relation intersect.<sup>2</sup> A house can be imagined as a patriarchal enclosure, a man's castle which for a Black man, according to Crenshaw, acts as a shelter protecting him from a racist society while for Black women it can be a location of domestic violence rendered invisible through intersectional structures of gender and race.<sup>3</sup> And yet, a house can also be imagined as an empowering support structure for intersectional coexistence. *Intersektionales Stadthaus* illustrates how the latter is made possible. This is the story of a housing community in Vienna who confronts material, cultural, political, linguistic, and economic enclosures—or barriers in intersectional terminology—and their strategies for transforming these barriers into spaces of cooperation, interdependence, and mutuality.

The story begins in 1989 with the birth of intersectionality in the US: a concept-tool that has since travelled across multiple disciplines and geographies<sup>4</sup> until it reached Ottakring, Vienna, and now the urban commons discourse via this text. Intersectionality, as an analytical tool rooted in Black feminism, was initially theorised by Kimberlé Crenshaw to address the marginalisation of Black women within anti-discrimination law.<sup>5</sup> In her article *Mapping the Margins*, Crenshaw localised the intersectional violence facing black women in what she called “homes of others”.<sup>6</sup> In a series of stories, she maps “othered” homes as marginalised settings of domestic violence which is made invisible by intersectional structures and often imposed by unexpected agents such as social movements (political exclusion of women's subjectivity from anti-racist

1. Conversations with protagonists of the story—Gabu Heindl (GH) and the Association for Accessibility in Art, in *Everyday Life, in Minds (A)*—are presented in italics.

2. Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, 2011, 14.

3. Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1990), 1241–1300 (p. 1257).

4. Devon W. Carbado and others, 'INTERSECTIONALITY: Mapping the Movements of a Theory', *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10.2 (2013), 303–12.

5. Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989 (1989), 139–68; Carbado and others.

6. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins', p. 1260.

7. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins', p. 1299.

8. Gabu Heindl, 'Towards a Radical Democratic Politics of Urban Land: The Case of (Red) Vienna', in *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, ed. by Angelika Fitz and others (Vienna : Cambridge, Massachusetts: Architekturzentrum Wien ; MIT Press, 2019), pp. 125–30 (p. 126).

9. Gabu Heindl, 'Friendship to the City! On Intersectional Solidarity in Social Housing', in *New Social Housing: Positions on the IBA\_Vienna 2022*, ed. by IBA\_Wien 2022 and future. lab (Berlin: JOVIS Verlag, 2020).

politics); support services (providing information unsuitable for minority positions); shelters (practising linguistic or cultural exclusion); or legal tools designed to combat domestic violence (that are blind to minority conditions). After mapping structural, political, and representational challenges imposed upon intersectional identities, Crenshaw ends with an affirmative proposition: these identities subordinated at the intersection of power are also “potential coalitions waiting to be formed”.<sup>7</sup> This potential coalition revealed through the conceptual framework of intersectionality is actualised in a house that is collectively rented by a community of 20 members in Ottakring, Vienna, a historical working-class housing district that transformed into an arrival neighbourhood.

Gabu Heindl, the architect in this story, is critical about parts of the legacy of 1920s Viennese social housing while celebrating the struggles for public land ownership during that era. For Heindl, one should resist inheriting “strong and unified identities” of Red Vienna that are entangled with “centralistic paternalism and veiled racism” where access to public housing remains a privilege for the more established citizens and excludes marginalized populations.<sup>8</sup> She is rather invested in democratising housing through decolonising, queering, and feminising its socio-spatial production on multiple fronts.<sup>9</sup> Amongst other modes, this has included publishing a manifesto for a politics of care in housing discourse and production; actively taking part in Raum4Refugees, an initiative providing spatial support for refugees in Austria; and making demands for policy change to tackle urban segregation and inequality. In addition, she builds alliances



and supports those communities who share a similar desire for radical politics of care towards urban outcasts and marginalised subjects. Her alliance with the Association for Accessibility in Art, in *Everyday Life, in Minds* was forged in the field of struggle while working towards a caring housing politics and practice.

*GH: "The relationship of trust between an architect and the community is generated with the work one does before a project like this. I met one member of the group at a discussion about the value of formerly squatted places for the city [Vienna]. Generally, I have been supportive of non-profit and activist groups with regards to their spatial claims long before and have been working on spatial justice theoretically and practically as much as is possible from within an architectural practice."*

### **The Community: Association for Accessibility in Art, in *Everyday Life, in Minds***

The Association is the result of companionship amongst its members who shared a common history. This involved years of anti-racist and queer activism for non-violent forms of living together

Intersektion-  
ales Stadthaus  
detail from  
the kitchen  
@Alejandra  
Loreto, 2016.



alongside artistic practices challenging the limits of discrimination and exclusion. In the summer of 2015, the companionship organised into an association and it took physical shape when they found their house, named as the Barrier-Free House. The house became a base of artistic interventions for members of the association targeting all sorts of barriers that trigger inequality.<sup>10</sup> The barrier-free house currently has 20 members ranging from 10 to 56 years of age.

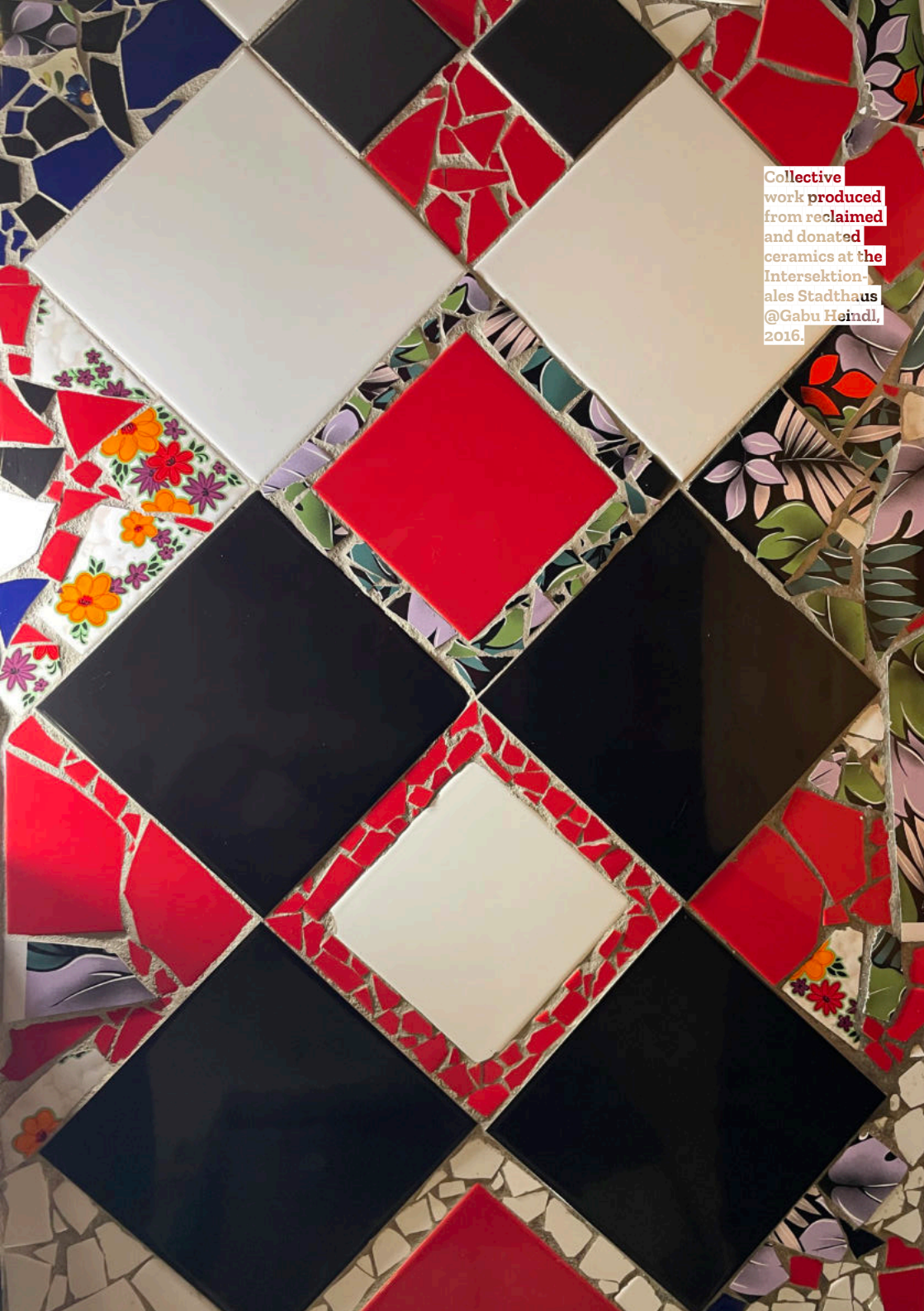
10. Association for Accessibility in Art, in Everyday Life, in Minds, 'Über Uns\_ about Us\_o HaC', *Barrierfreehouse*, 2016.

### Removing Barriers as Practice of Commoning

The Association uses intersectionality as a practical framework for the identification and dismantling of multidimensional barriers that enclose the housing commons. The community introduces an intersectional social system by removing cultural, affective, linguistic, spatial, and economic barriers. They negotiate and translate different values, needs, and languages. This negotiation takes place across different classes, genders, sexuality, cultures, abilities/mobilities. Members of the Association develop an intricate structure of intersectional support: as an open structure, it allows the community to keep expanding as a diverse community.

*GH: "[...] a founding member of the Intersectional City House describes the intersectionality which forms the house's foundations like this: "There are many 'wes', a 'we' may form between those who share the same language, who share the same (lack of) privileges, who have passed through the same difficulties. But, sometimes members of different 'wes' intersect. They find that they themselves can conceive of their own 'we'. And in this*





Collective  
work produced  
from reclaimed  
and donated  
ceramics at the  
Intersektion-  
ales Stadthaus  
@Gabu Heindl,  
2016.

*moment of recognition, the compartments of ‘wes’ begin to dissolve, like the walls that separated our now shared – collective living space.”*

The Association presents an exemplar case of commoning where “interdependent vulnerabilities” are conceived as a condition of power and agency being performed collectively.<sup>11</sup> Classed, gendered, disabled identities—isolated from each other within a competitive and market-driven society—are empowered through their intersectional interdependence by performing collective forms of mobility, economics, and gender. Intersectional interdependence reconstructs vulnerability as a “terrain of agency”.<sup>12</sup> For example, “queering disability” is mobilised as an artistic practice for an intersectional production of alternative socialities where queer and mixable subjects are conceived as performative assemblages.

*A: “One of the challenges is to keep a feeling of community knowing that there is nothing like a safe space. We think we mostly manage to keep the idea of caring for each other and the house in many different ways although individual plans in life change, people leave, new people come—like in every group. Our house is more than a living space, it is more than a regular house project, it is the effort of putting intersectionality into a daily living practice without creating a division between those that support others and those that need support.”*

The community collectively designed the principles of a solidarity economy through which rent is not distributed according to the size of units—reflecting needs—but according to financial capacity. This distribution is negotiated by translation processes

11. Irina Velicu and Gustavo García-López, Thinking the Commons through Ostrom and Butler: Boundedness and Vulnerability, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35.6 (2018), 55–73 (pp. 57, 66) .

12. Velicu and García-López, Thinking the Commons through Ostrom and Butler: Boundedness and Vulnerability.

13. Gabu Heindl, URBANE GERECHTIGKEIT, 2016 <[https://barrierfreehouse.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/11\\_urbanbe\\_gerechtigkeit\\_gabu\\_heindl-1.pdf?usg=ALkjrj5Ss-RjtIOLKvDwLZh-KipVdlB4kkA](https://barrierfreehouse.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/11_urbanbe_gerechtigkeit_gabu_heindl-1.pdf?usg=ALkjrj5Ss-RjtIOLKvDwLZh-KipVdlB4kkA)> [accessed 23 January 2021].

14. Gabu's architectural production involves a method she identifies as "inheriting from the past with critique". This is a process of critically filtering typologies, policies, concepts, and tools that are learned from the past and subsequently adapted to meet contingent terrains of radical politics in the here and the now.

amongst different economic classes that coexist within the house. In this mode, the rent is no longer a financial obligation determined by an abstract market value system but, rather, it is determined as an active translation between community obligation and the financial vulnerability of members. A solidarity-based rent system, based on collectively sharing the burdens of financial vulnerability, was made possible by adopting the Right to Use model when the building was rented. The community was able to convince the owner—the Catholic Church—for an unlimited lease period by agreeing to make renovations to the property themselves. Renovations were carried out following a collective planning process and for the most part through collective self-building processes with the exception of large scale construction elements, such as the lift. The lift connected all levels, removing physical barriers, and was a generous addition to the structure considering the financial constraints of the community. The solidarity economy is applied to the work and procurement strategies of the house by adopting an equal pay structure whereby the architects, craftspeople, the plumbers are all paid equivalent hourly rates for their work.<sup>13</sup>

The Association inherited the typology of one-kitchen house.<sup>14</sup> The one-kitchen house enables new forms of living together by transcending the structures of the nuclear family where daily activities of cooking, eating and communing takes place outside of the private domain and spill into corridors, landings, the kitchen, and other common spaces of the house. The kitchen as a shared infrastructure acts as a convivial tool contesting the modern compartmentalisation of living.

TRANSLATION

CONVIVIALITY









Collective work produced from reclaimed and donated ceramics at the Intersektionales Stadthaus @Gabu Heindl, 2016.



***GH: “[...] by sharing the kitchen everyone could afford somebody to cook for them from time to time. This means luxury by supporting each other.”***

Public, community, and individual scales are nested and interlocked in the Intersectional City House. While boundaries exist, they are open for negotiation and translation. Boundaries of commoning in the House recognise both intimate and public needs, such as the need to withdraw into one’s room or to expand their collective desire for an intersectional city into the garden, the street, and the neighbourhood.

***A: “As some of the people in the house had a higher risk of falling sick heavily [due to Covid-19], we had to come up with distancing solutions in the house, in our shared rooms and spaces. It took many meetings and talks, dealing with various fears, with the need to still go out and work, with lost jobs, with organising ourselves as 17 people who come and go on a daily basis. We also decided to remain an open house for friends and people who felt very alone and lost in times of heavy lockdowns. So, we had to navigate between the efforts of keeping the virus away and still being open and leave space for each individual to deal with the circumstances in her or his own way. We found transparency to be one of the most important tools to deal with everything.”***

Through boundary commoning, the community creates porous thresholds across cooperating social groups; they also create strategies to navigate contested boundaries when confronting conflicting socialities. The coalition formed across interdependent identities—queer, metal-worker, refugee,



Intersektionales Stadthaus  
kitchen, @  
Alejandra  
Loreto, 2016.

anti-racist, mixabled subjects—acts as an “intersectional hegemony” that maintains and expands the collective’s obligations toward one another, including less willing and cooperative members who coexist within the community.<sup>15</sup> This counter-hegemonic social system is a useful convivial tool for mediating relations with an antagonistic member from a fraternal background who occupies part of the house.

***A: “The enormous value of multilingual and different (body) experiences of migration and connection to history, needs to be seen by society and authorities as a necessity and an opportunity for decolonising countries like Austria instead of heavy racism and deadly border regimes.”***

A question remains: how to scale the model of the Intersectional City House to go beyond the limits of its garden gate? How can we replicate the codes, protocols, methods, tools and innovative social systems of a small-scale community housing project? The SchloR project, by GABU Heindl Architecture, illuminates possibilities for scaling the Intersectional City House model. SchloR benefits from being part of a wider solidarity network called habiTAT which is formed in alliance with the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* in Germany. The solidarity economy and knowledge exchange model of the Syndikat supports trans-local communities to make their first investment and remove housing from the speculative market system. What if intersectional interdependence of the Intersectional City House—as a model of living together through mutualised vulnerabilities—meets the non-speculative solidarity network model of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*? What if we rethink our housing commons at the scale of municipal politics and trans-local solidarity to give way for intersectional praxis?

15. The concept of intersectional hegemony was introduced by Gabu Heindl in her Politics, Positions and Planning lecture at SSoA (2019).

# Intersectional City House

537m<sup>2</sup> CITY HOUSE + 350m<sup>2</sup> GARDEN  
 Association of the Removal of Barriers in Art,  
 in Everyday Live and in Our Heads

60m<sup>2</sup> COMMUNITY KITCHEN / COMMUNITY



35m<sup>2</sup> BATHROOMS / COMMUNITY



173m<sup>2</sup> ACCESS AREA / COMMUNITY



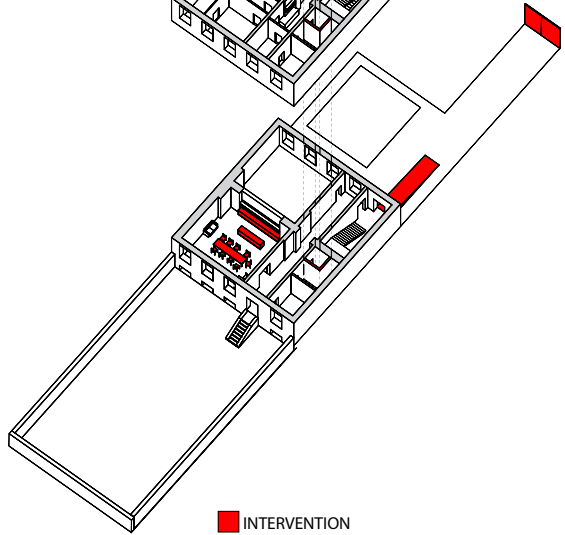
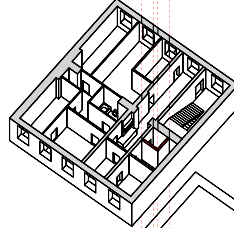
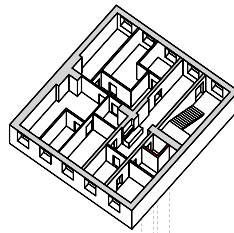
110m<sup>2</sup> WORKINGSACE



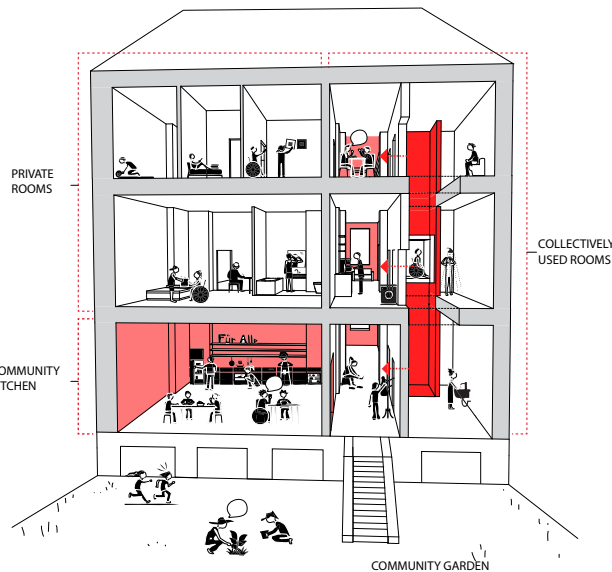
159m<sup>2</sup> PRIVATE ROOMS



350m<sup>2</sup> GARDEN / COMMUNITY



 INTERVENTION



Section and axonometric drawing illustrating intersectional programme, Architecture, (<http://www.gabuheindl.at/en/overview/living-and-working/intersectional-city-house.html>) @ GABU Heindl Architecture, 2016