Editorial:
Valuing housing in the normalised crises:
Resistance, fatigue and lexicons of struggle

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The Coronavirus pandemic is not abating. 'Normal' life has allegedly resumed in many parts of the world, but Covid-19 remains as an exhausting background, and sometimes frontline, noise that continues to deepen pre-existing social divisions and crises. Global health inequalities have been further entrenched by the 'vaccine apartheid', and the rise of new waves of infections continues to draw borders and blockages to movement. Several temporary eviction moratoriums, shelter to the homeless and subsidies that provided respite for many are being lifted, leaving hundreds of thousands both at risk of homelessness or otherwise precarious housing and of greater exposure to contracting Covid-19 (Benfer et al., 2021; Sandoval-Olascoaga, Venkataramani, Arcaya, 2021). Meanwhile, speculative housing investors pursuing high yield are even more intensely roaming the housing and accommodation transnational landscape, capturing rent gaps and further deepening socio-spatial inequality (Christophers, 2021; García-Lamarca, 2021; Sanderson and Özogul, 2021).

In the continuum of intersecting housing crises, then, the direct impacts of Covid-19 in people's lives constitutes an additional layer of struggle for those already living at the frontline of dispossession. While, in some places, the pandemic has become a catalyst for transformation and change, it is overwhelmingly still testing individual and collective capacities to survive displacement, surveillance, precarisation and policing. It is in this context of normalised new and old crises piling up that Issue 3.2 of the Radical Housing Journal emerges: both from *and within* the fatigue and normalisation of current 'exceptional conditions' and their implication for housing activists and engaged academics, and from the search for places and languages of resistance as sites for transformation.The essence of the latter is underlined in an **Update** from **Huda Abu Obaid** and **Elianne Kremer** at the Arab-Jewish organization, **Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality** (NCF), which

highlights how the Covid-19 pandemic has only deepened the profound and ongoing housing crisis that a sizeable portion of the Naqab's Bedouin citizens have been living for decades in southern Israel. Powerful photos taken by the local community and shared through the exhibition R*ecognized: Life and Resilience* captured by Bedouin women, organised by the Negev Coexistence Forum, accompany the piece and grace this issue's cover.

Despite the extraordinary pandemic circumstances (see our May 2020 editorial, Reyes et al, 2020 and The RHJ Editorial Collective, 2020), a 'return to normal' has also forced its way into our own worlds of teaching, writing and activism, where competing demands on the always-too-little time for care and meaningful relations have resumed. In the world of formal research and publishing, this new normality is marked by ever greater inequalities across lines of gender and caring responsibilities, which disproportionately affect women and people of colour (Fulweiler et al, 2021; Staniscuaski et al, 2021). At a time when academic publishing is increasingly spinning out of control, situated radical scholarship is forced to fall by the wayside by disparities of available time and energy. This makes this issue 3.2, the labour of its authors, peer-reviewers and editors,[1] ever more valuable (ephemera et al. 2021).

The texts in this issue navigate these challenging scenarios by discussing housing practices and resistances in the current uneven understanding of values related to housing and people. Issue 3.2's Long Read, Retrospective and Update pieces do this both through active claims to denounce abusive housing regimes and through nuanced accounts of the construction of collective and intimate spaces for action and resistance. All three Conversation pieces in this issue delve into this last question of resistance through exploring and challenging housing lexicons, which we designated with the title 'Lexicon Conversations'. Our interest in questioning the dominance of English in academic practice and international publishing (Fregonese 2017) led us to open a call for contributions in early 2021 on Lexicons of Housing Struggle (also in Spanish, *Léxicos de luchas por la vivienda*). Recognising the need to question and disrupt how linguistic privilege shapes knowledge production in terms of where we write *from* (Müller, 2021) but also in terms of the very words we use, the call sought reflections on the problems related to the use of English in/for housing struggles and their translations, while at the same time acknowledging that many use it as a lingua franca, including ourselves at the Radical Housing Journal in our collective practice. We hope that these reflections about housing lexicons will continue as a cross-cutting exploration for future RHJ issues, as a way to promote processes of linguistic decolonisation, internationalism and counter-generalisation.

Intimacies, surveillance and uneven calculations of value in homes and lives

The affective qualities of home that move through intimately personal attachments are hindered by and become coextensive with processes of speculation, surveillance and value extraction. As the epidemic has made widely visible, the normative idea of home as private space is constantly challenged by the realities of everyday experiences of overcrowding and

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[1] For an account on the estimated cost of researchers' time spent on peer review, see Aczel et al, 2021.

the 'intimate political economy' of exorbitant private rented sectors that force intimate proximities out of need, within house-shares and even room sharing. In **Faith MacNeil Taylor**'s **Long Read** piece, a critique of rental housing is combined with individual reflections on forced intimacies between friends, couples and strangers, as well as across the blurry power relations between landlords and tenants in highly unregulated private rental markets, in what she terms *displaced sovereignties*. Proximity and intimacy in those relations bleed into forms of micro surveillance, constantly blurring and reasserting boundaries, with an immediacy amplified by emails and text messages, raising questions about the affective powers at play, and its implications for housing politics.

The tight interconnection of home and forms of policing and surveillance periodically emerges to the surface of political debate after spectacular acts of violence, such as the racialised police brutality that led to the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor, in her own home, on March 13, 2020. These often have profound roots in longer histories of racialised dispossession (Poe & Bellamy, 2020) and the interconnection of real estate interests and racism.[2] In more mundane acts, surveillance and policing are closely intertwined with the criminalisation and stigmatisation of those unhomed and precariously homed, and has been an ongoing thread in RHJ. The primacy of protecting private property above life reappears in different forms, in some cases in the actual overlap of dwelling and security, such as the **Long Read** piece by **Elara Shurety** on property guardianship, surveillance and policing in the UK. Guardians —who 'guard' vacant spaces by living in them, paying below market rent in hyper-gentrified London— are increasingly expected to extend their guarding functions within and outside the buildings, with the logic of surveillance becoming intrinsic to their subjectivation as precarious 'licensed' dwellers. The logics of surveillance thus become welded to the very everyday practices of inhabitation, implicating subjectivities and bending the rules of what is acceptable, as individuals become unwillingly compliant, and in so doing, complicit with the moral economies of protecting property and its value.

Linked to the questions of property value, **Masha Hupalo**'s **Update** on the politics of the Zestimate —a formula-based online estimate of property values— provides an important heads up about the political and structural equity implications of the US online real estate platform Zillow's home valuation model. With over 36 million views per month, over the years the platform has radically transformed the housing market in the United States through digitally-mediated geolocational data mining. Zillow employs supervised machine learning techniques to a vast range of known and unknown data sets to give housing price estimates (a Zestimate) to users, placing data accumulation at the core of its business model. Hupalo details how over the last ten years, Zillow has consistently acquired other online real estate platforms and introduced features like custom loan quotes and online tenant applications as a way to further expand its market reach. Hupalo shows the political implications of this type of real estate platform capitalism and how Zillow and other proptech companies are changing the logic of the housing market.

[2] See the amazing mapping story-telling project by Root Cause Research Center as well as the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project's recent storymap produced in collaboration with UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy on exposing the effects of community policing in Los Angeles, among others.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are mechanisms of surveillance and de-valuing of unhomed lives. In her **Long Read, Deyanira Nevárez-Martinez** explores the role of the bureaucratic state in the lives of homeless, developing the concept of *performative productivity* as a set of structurally violent, non-negotiable practices. Examples of these practices include scheduling meetings, deploying the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) and being entered in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Through an ethnographic examination of how the state operates in the lives of homeless people, Nevárez-Martinez considers how street-level bureaucrats unfurl these practices in an attempt to include homeless people in a system that will never be able to meaningfully address their situation. She tells three powerful stories from Spencer, Teresa and Amanda in Beach City, California, whose interactions with the state ended in death, family separation, stress, and frustration when they sought assistance because of their material conditions as homeless individuals. Nevárez-Martinez shows how performative productivity is tantamount to state violence, and is intertwined with the structural violence of extreme and deep poverty.

Memory-work and making visible the loss of home

How life and memory get devalued and erased in the context of state-imposed 'solutions' to housing is a common thread in three pieces of this issue. In the **Long Read '**Social housing in ruins: heritage, identity and the spectral remains of the housing crisis', **Zeena Price** explores how the now demolished Robin Hood Estate in London, and its working class residents, became an object of heritage and spectatorship. At the heart of this piece lies the crucial question about how we (dare to) memorialise the loss of home under painful circumstances. The author is deeply critical of the potential for a museum exhibit (in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in this particular case) to do that work in a way that values the lived rather than architectural dimensions of social housing.

While the contexts are vastly different, and the variable modalities of violence attached to them are also distinct and historically specific, the erasure and preservation of memory through materiality is a critical space, too, in the aforementioned **Update** about the Naqab, which relates to a historic form of discrimination against Bedouin communities that denies its minority residents basic rights of inhabitation, like access to essential infrastructure and services. Here, the Israeli state not only demolishes and displaces original residents, denying them a right to return through legalistic measures that disenfranchise them, but also then (and in parallel) pushes people into manufactured warehouses called 'settlements' that violate basic human rights to adequate shelter. In both of these differing environments, while the social and cultural life they previously knew is forcefully ruptured, such ruptures serve to also mobilise protest (in the case of the Naqab's Bedouin communities) and artistic interventions (in the Robin Hood Estate). As an antidote to the 'museumification' of destruction, **Obaid** and **Kremer** present us, instead, with a different aesthetic of the violence of demolition, combining historical and personal accounts with photography (see also our cover image in this Issue) to denounce and protest the ongoing dispossessions of their homes and land. In

their visual-textual depictions, rubble is not aestheticized but presented in its full disorderliness, pointing us to the political *and* affective quality of such foundational losses.

Alex Vasudevan's **Retrospective**, 'Celluloid Critique: Documentary Filmmaking and the Politics of Housing in Berlin's Märkisches Viertel" stays close to the question of the visual frontiers of memory-work and the politics of representation amidst contexts of housing dispossession. The article brings to life a unique moment in1960s and 1970s West Berlin when "experimental filmmaking, housing insecurity, and emergent feminist screen cultures" came together, tracing the wider links and fractures between activist work and documentary filmmaking of that era. Vasudevan foregrounds the underexplored role of Helga Reidemeister as a feminist filmmaker who developed a unique collaborative orientation to work *with* tenants and argues that the direct input of women in particular captured not just the broad and emotional landscapes of insecurity experienced by so many, but also the specific (and undervalued) social reproductive conditions faced by women. As political artefacts, the films highlighted here are relevant to us today, as they involved "... not only the documentation of particular struggles and the demands they produced but a different kind of ethos – collaborative, makeshift and experimental – that challenged and re-imagined the very relationship between urban activism and documentary cinema."

Lexicon Conversations

As we mention above, in Issue 3.2 we are introducing a brand new series: the Lexicon Conversations. These are Conversation pieces that specifically reflect on the use of alternative and reclaimed vocabularies for housing struggles, discussing questions of translation, identity, colonial legacies and the coexistence of multiple lexicons —across languages, institutions, cultures and disciplines— in housing practices. Counter to the logic of neighbours as surveillance and security of private property, exemplified by the North American and more broadly Anglo-Saxon idea of 'Neighbourhood Watch'— enters the **Conversation** that **Carla Rivera,** with RHJ's **Melissa Garcia-Lamarca** and **Mara Ferreri**, led with three members from housing struggles in Barcelona's Sant Andreu neighbourhood. '*Vecinas* ≠ neighbours: language politics in the struggle for housing in Barcelona' [also published in its Spanish original] explores how the notion of 'neighbour' has been mobilised and reclaimed, with different and novel nuances, how and why the term has become widely used in its femine form (*vecinas*) and its difficult translatability into English.

Alongside the reflections of the notion of 'neighbour' from Barcelona, this issue brings the voices from activists of the London-based charity, 'Latin Elephant', **Patria Román Velázquez, Natalia Pérez, Santiago Peluffo Soneyra** and **Sophie Rebecca Wall**, in conversation with RHJ's **Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia** and **Camila Cociña**, discussing their work with local *migrant ethnic groups* struggling for their rights as traders and dwellers, in the context of aggressive urban development in South London. The conversation discusses how Latin Elephant navigates the challenges of 'translating' urban struggles in a context of diverse communities, of choosing languages and words for naming struggles, opening up spaces to those that voice different lexicons in and against spaces of resistance and change,

as well as the multilayered translations taking place between different languages that include the 'technical' and often exclusionary formal language of planning.

Finally, along similar lines, **Swati Janu** and **Anushka Shahdadpuri** from the 'Social Design Collaborative' present a **Conversation** in which they discuss their work in the Delhi-based project '*Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hain Plan*' ('Who is the Master? What is the Plan?'). This project developed a toolkit and engagement process that sought to destabilise the typically exclusionary process of Delhi's Master Planning. The authors discuss how they deconstructed the technocratic documents in English in order to work with communities who are typically left out of planning processes. In doing so, this Conversation interrogates how planning languages have failed not only to move beyond colonial language, but also to engage with adequate lexicons that give account of the actual ways in which cities are produced in the majority of Indian informal settlements.

Beyond normalised crises? Collective strength in resistance and re-seizing value

The construction of coalitions to advance towards housing rights finds different sites of reproduction and inspires us towards a future beyond normalised crises. The current crafting of a new constitution by a Constitutional Convention in Chile, triggered by the social unrest and mobilisation in October 2019, has become another battlefield for housing struggles. The **Update** by **Ciudad Constituyente**, a collaborative space that gathers more than 30 organisations linked to the habitat, shares their fight for the inclusion of the right to habitat and the city in the Chilean new constitution and beyond, and the principles and proposals that they have mobilised to influence current discussions in the Convention, which composed by purposefully <u>elected members with gender parity and pluri-national representation</u>. In this update, Ciudad Constituyente shares the importance of mobilisation in different institutional, political and social spaces in this *constitutional moment*, and the significance of embracing a rights-based approach for setting the institutional bases for future housing struggles, organised upon democratic, anti-neoliberal, environmental and feminist principles.

Also coming from a space of collectivity articulated between inhabitants, social movements, university, activists, and public sectors that seek new forms of producing and inhabiting the city, **Juliana Canedo** and **Luciana de Silva Andrade**'s **Long Read** explores in detail the experiences and learnings from a squat in Rio de Janeiro. "The Experience of Solano Trindade: Squatting and Creative Resistance in Rio de Janeiro" builds from the authors' seven years of active engagement with the squat and the accumulated research and teaching experience in the field of informal settlements. In outlining political, urban and social tactics for transformation, the authors detail and reflect upon different tools and experiences that are able to produce concrete transformations in the urban and social spaces towards the right to another city.

In another major Brazilian city, São Paolo, **Renato Cymbalista, Fabiana Endo, Roberto Fontes** and **Rodrigo Millan** detail the development of an anti-speculative

experimental fund —which was initially crowdfunded— and that since 2021 has provided highly affordable, secure rental housing to eight low-income families in dire and long-term need for shelter. Entitled 'Crowdfunding property in downtown São Paulo: the case of FICA fund', this **Retrospective** demonstrates how a collective, incremental process led by (a professional sector of) civil society built on socially progressive and non-speculative models of real estate, integrally tied to the city's network of social movements, can generate small yet nevertheless crucial steps towards models of housing provision that can offer almost immediate benefits to its social renters.

At RHJ and in our own political and activist practice, we find strength and hope in such forms of collectivity and organising for and towards alternatives. As much as we remain attentive to the conditions that continue to reproduce global housing crises for so many, we are also committed to recognising, valuing and amplifying initiatives that create different registers through which to *do* home, centring the value of human life, its flourishing, and its mutual nurturing with the environment, in the fight for housing justice. In this work of valuing the knowledges produced from marginalised sites of housing research and struggle, we recognise our role as editors in processes of exchange in academic currency and in the organisation and visibilization of the labour involved. Inspired by the reflections of the Feminist Legality & Knowledge seminars (Naqvi et al. 2019), we start by addressing the 'occult economy' of publishing work. As a small gesture of gratitude, we have begun to publish the list of all RHJ peer-reviewers whose unremunerated work is absolutely central to the journal. More work, we are aware, is required to address the inherently colonial roots of academic and activist epistemic communities, the tendencies towards international generalisation as a mode of knowledge validity, and to counter the modes of hyper-productivity 'that are mobilised by the re-colonising dynamics of contemporary academic capitalism' (Naqvi et al. 2019: 132). For the sake of decolonising and internationalising scholarship, we must recognise the fatigue of inhabiting normalised crises, and the need for collective resistance, in our languages and practices of valuing housing and home.

Acknowledgements

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