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Towards a radical housing responsibility

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Towards a radical housing responsibility

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Abstract

Responsibility—as an analytic or topic of political debate—is out of vogue in critical housing studies. Rather than offering progressive potential, the call for responsibility has been seen to foster neoliberal governance, racial structural violence, and forms of dependency. Conversely, this paper posits that a critical engagement with notions of responsibility can provide a domain for critique, everyday engagement, and legal political struggle against housing injustice when the concept's foundational premises are radically revised. To develop this radical notion of housing responsibility, we combine a multipronged theoretical approach with a discussion of housing struggles in different empirical domains. Our theoretical intervention is based on a critique of how liberal notions of responsibility that forefront liabilities for past damages dominate moral claims around housing (e.g., who ought to provide, care for, and profit from housing). As these liberal understandings of responsibility organize the intersection of legal, spatial, and material interventions in housing, they hinder a more encompassing assumption of responsibility. Drawing from feminist, legal, sociological, and philosophical scholarship, this paper develops an alternative and propositional account of a *radical housing responsibility*. Rather than from notions of individualized subjectivity, this notion of responsibility derives relational commitments from our co-being in one common world. To explore how such a notion of responsibility can play out in contemporary housing struggles and guide a decolonial, feminist, radical political practice, we join up three empirical domains focused on housing struggles in Berlin (Germany), Athens (Greece), and Geneva (Switzerland). In conclusion, we bring these theoretical and empirical domains together into a discussion of how a radical housing responsibility can be used to cause effective political change.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

As residents across the globe are experiencing an ever-deepening housing crisis (Madden & Marcuse, 2016), we are faced with a responsibility lacuna for that crisis: markets fail to deliver adequate social housing (Holm, 2013); states—devoid of powers and a mandate to act—fail to take on responsibilities for delivering housing or for redistributing responsibilities effectively to markets; individuals are held responsible, but cannot always cope with the responsibilities imposed on them. But responsibility—as an analytic or topic of political debate—is out of vogue in housing studies. If at all a topic of debate, responsibility has been seen to foster neoliberal ideologies (Heeg, 2013; Samec & Kubala, 2022), racial structural violence (Bhagat, 2021), and forms of dependency (Trundle & Trnka, 2017). Yet while certainly on point with their critiques, these interventions refer to a particular understanding of responsibility, even if this notion has come to dominate much of the capitalist world: an understanding of responsibility as a negative reciprocal obligation that is shared among different liberal traditions and interpretations of liberalism (Miller & Rose, 1990).

In this intervention, we propose to revive debates about housing responsibility by radically revising the fundamental tenets that undergird liberal notions of responsibility, especially so-called 'classical' liberal approaches endorsing a conception of 'negative liberty' (Petit, 1993; Berlin, 1969; Brennan & Tomasi, 2012). To grasp these tenets of responsibility requires unpicking understandings of the subject and its relation to the world. Prevalent grammars of liberalism characterize these relations through heightened emphasis on rational choice, individual (negative) freedom, and personal autonomy. It is from these characteristics of liberal subjects that legally rooted understandings of responsibility derive: the negative obligation to reciprocal respect of others' freedom and the attendant liability to doing no harm (Veitch, 2007) or 'to repair the damages one has caused' (French Civil Code, 1804). As the ideological foundations of liberalism determine a subject's relation to its environment, they translate into limited responsibilities for housing: to bounded responsibilities for the house-as-object (not the community or wider housing needs); to a narrow notion of how to care for housing (while exploiting nature); and to circumscribed accountabilities in the provision of housing or home which do not extend to hospitality towards the other (but maintain the primacy of private boundaries).

This paper revisits assumptions about how individuals are connected in societal structures and engage with the world. In distinction to the relations implied in notions of liability or reciprocal obligation, we propose a radically revised notion of responsibility that is rooted in an idea of relationality which departs from our implications in common social structures: from a regime of commitment based on our 'co-being, co-belonging and co-becoming' (Clement, 2019, p. 287). We follow Iris Marion Young's social connection model of responsibility (2011, p. 104), where responsibility emerges 'from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes', in particular, as they produce structural injustice (Young, 2011). Based on these ideas, we define responsibility as an umbrella concept that encompasses multiple *modalities* of taking responsibility, i.e., ways of responding or attending to the other, including through care, accountability, hospitality, or political action.

In this reading, responsibility may emerge from a variety of *motives:* it may be driven by ethical convictions (e.g., solidarity, hospitality), attendant commitments such as rule abiding (prudential considerations), as well as by forms of affective attention and attachments (e.g., care, concern). Together, responsibility allows us to assess the intersections of *modalities of acting*—of taking responsibility—and *the abstract, normative, or emotional motives*—convictions, justifications, affects, and attachments—that drive these practices of individual and collective engagement. In this framing, thinking radically about responsibility opens up anew the exploration of what one owes to others and our world in housing and of how to address these concerns. And it requires us to ask *who* should respond to (housing) injustice: What are the expected individual and collective commitments to build up just modalities of inhabiting the world?

Thinking through this question is a generational task. In this paper we neither provide an in-depth theoretical discussion of liberalisms' subjects and their responsibilities, nor a fully-fledged framework and clear-cut instruction for radically responsible housing practice. Rather, our intervention is propositional in nature. It takes the political philosophies on which we draw (Young, 2006, 2011) to instigate further debate in housing studies: This debate departs from decolonial, feminist, and critical studies of housing, even if these literatures discuss responsibility under a different conceptual terminology. This encompasses scholarship on the divisive foundations of housing responsibility (e.g., on racial exclusions, McElroy & Werth, 2019; Roy, 2017), literatures concerning different modalities of practicing housing responsibility as maintenance (Fernandez-Arrigoitia, 2014) or as hospitality (Boano & Astolfo, 2020), and feminist accounts of care (Power & Mee, 2020).

In addition to these theoretical inspirations much of the ideas we draw on are practiced on the ground. Our contribution thus builds on a set of worldly examples of a radically responsible housing practice in three empirical domains: The recent Berlin (Germany) referendum against financialized housing providers offers a starting point to discuss responsibility's legal underpinnings; A refugee squat in Athens (Greece) allows us to consider the relation between housing's spatial organization, responsibility, and hospitality (amongst other ethical convictions); A post-squat cooperative in Geneva (Switzerland) supports an analysis of how responsibility can be put into action to care for the living and question the private boundaries of the domestic sphere. Rather than a thorough analysis of these examples, their ambiguities and nuances, this discussion aims to create an opening for further inquiry. We conclude on a discussion of how the multiple modalities of responsibility, solidarity, hospitality, care, and forward-looking political engagement allow for practicing a different relation between the subject and the world. Thus, while this article begins from our interest in a set of theoretical questions, we hope to make this discussion useful to those who seek to act on housing in radically different ways.

2. Theorizing responsibility for a radical housing practice

2.1 How notions of the liberal subject shape responsibility norms

Much of contemporary thinking about responsibility as a liability or an individual duty bases its assumptions on liberalized ideologies and post-Enlightenment philosophies (Lacey,

2001). While the variety and heterogeneity of liberalisms (in the plural) has been demonstrated convincingly, scholars also find some 'interconnection' between liberal grammars of thought— 'characterized by certain shared or overlapping political ideals' (Fedirko, 2021, pp. 374-375).[1] We focus here on how core values of liberalism shaped understandings of the subject and its relation to the world: Liberalism, as a philosophy and an umbrella for a diversity of political traditions (see e.g. Fedirko et al., 2021, pp. 375-376 for a discussion of the differences between key liberal thinkers such as Adam Smith or Isaiah Berlin) is founded on an understanding of the rational self, the Kantian subject that is defined by its ability to reflect. Most liberal traditions derive a heightened emphasis on personal choice, individual freedom, and autonomy—'freedom from dependence on the wills of others' (Macpherson, 2011 [1962], pp. 263-264)—from this reading of 'human beings as beings of reason' (Auer, 2020, p. 50, our translation). These ideas about autonomy imply assumptions about a person's relation to others and her attendant obligation to the wider world (Barnett, 2005).

With the rise of the free, autonomous, and rational individual that was celebrated perhaps most trenchantly in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) emerged a rationality of relating that implied a fundamental differentiation between the self and the other, the private and the public, the human (male, abled) body and the natural world across wide strands of liberal thought. This relationality is based, as Barnett (2005, p. 3) writes, on 'the failure or refusal to recognize the reciprocal and constitutive characteristics of subjectivity'. Although various in their breadth and nuance, these liberal understandings of the subject crucially shape dominant understandings of responsibility. The capacities of the rational and autonomous subject as well as the primacy of individual freedom and autonomy, imply that responsibility gets placed on the self (Barnett, 2005, p. 3). Iris Marion Young (2011, p. 23) puts it like this:

> *What it means to be responsible [in this reading] is for a person to maintain control over his or her actions and their consequences, and to make sure that they and only they bear their costs. A capable and responsible person does not depend on others. Insofar as some people, particularly children are necessarily dependent, it is their family members who should care for them; the unit of the responsibility is the family, which should internalize all costs.*

As Young notes, this reading understands responsibility as an individual act resulting from rational choice, rather than as a practice embedded in shared, material, and societal structures (Young, 2011) or forms of affective attention.

Through their historical emphasis on autonomy and self-responsibility, major liberal traditions have come to consider responsibility as essentially a question of imputation linked to a negative understanding of liberty. Moreover, the focus on freedom and choice implies that responsibility is limited to 'such obligations and rules (that) are necessary to secure the

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[1] Fedirko et al. thus speak of 'grammars of liberalism' building on Ludwig Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a 'grammatical investigation', which they take to mean deciphering the "implicit and explicit 'rules' by which liberal values, and their configurations become intelligible *as liberal*." (2021, p. 379, emphasis in the original).

freedom of others' (Macpherson, 2011 [1962], pp. 263-264). This ideal of 'negative liberty' (Berlin, 1969) thus limits responsibility to an ideal of doing no harm.

Crucially then, liberal notions of rights and responsibility are limited, exclusive, and excluding. For one, they produce 'zones of non-responsibility' (Veitch, 2007) or 'organized irresponsibility' (Beck, 1995). Related state-citizen relations are derived. Across many liberal democracies they promote a limited role of the state (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 19), aimed at the protection of the autonomy of its self-reliant subjects. Moreover, as feminist and post- and de-colonial writers have shown, they have patriarchal and colonial roots and fundamental consequences on regimes of representation. Based on the patriarchal culture of Western political philosophy, responsibility was assumed to be the virtue of a masculinist model of a white adult (Hage & Eckersley, 2012). Others were marked as lacking reason and autonomy, or as not fully human (McKittrick, 2015) and associated with the natural world or other virtues: Joan Tronto (1993), for instance, vividly shows how morality became thought of as a female virtue and by that associated with the private realm, i.e., disassociated with public and political life. Thus, enshrined in its basic foundations, grammars of liberal responsibility demarcate deep lines of difference (Hage & Eckersley, 2012) between whites and blacks, men and women, working- and middle-classes, as well as adults and children. We go on to argue that these foundations order housing in crucial ways, considering, amongst others, how liberal ideas about the subject shape legal, material, and spatial housing relations.

2.2 How liberal ideals of the responsible subject are enshrined in housing

Entangled in the historical rise of the liberal subject and associated assumptions about responsibility, housing developed spatial, legal, and material norms. To start, spatial norms of modern housing that emerged in dialogue with liberal ideals of the responsible subject have been key in controlling social relations (Heyden, 2003). For example, as documented by Elizabeth Collins Cromley (1990), liberal moralists engaged in the 19th century in a crusade against shared dwellings that dominated the housing conditions of the poor in 1860s New York. Mixing hygienists and moral arguments, they defended the idea that sharing kitchens or bathrooms was detrimental to the edification of a healthy and morally sound household. The spatial separation of public and private spheres was expected to reinforce the virtuous effect of family life on core liberal moral values, such as respect for the laws, hard work, domestic care, and savings (Cromley, 1990). This example vividly shows how the modern nuclear-family typologies that pervaded both private and social housing developments during the 20th century in the USA and much of the world are deeply embedded in the expansion of dominant ideas about the liberal subject.

We can also trace the relation between the responsibility norms of the liberal subject and dominant norms of housing when considering legal conventions. Against the back of the Kantian idea of the individual as the source of right, morality, and freedom, modern private law privileges, as Nicholas Blomley (2004, p. 2) writes, 'a unitary, solitary, and identifiable owner, separated from others by boundaries that protect him or her from nonowners.' In this way, argues Blomley, property is reduced to the 'relations between people

and things' (Blomley, xv), rather than understood as a set of social relations. From there follows an owners' power to exclude others, the right to manage property only as one wishes, and the right to profit from one's house—even in the face of housing crises—as well as the call to limited state interference into property (Hilbrandt & Dimitrakou, 2022). Deriving from the separation between the self and the world, property conditions private and public spheres of life (Blomley, 2005).

This division dominates most of liberal legal and political thought (Tronto, 1993) and has historically been enshrined in housing spatialities. Thereby the idea of private life became synonymous with the physical space of the house. Whether in the form of a suburban house in late-Victorian Britain, a white picket-fenced house in the American suburbs, or the modern condominium in continental Europe, housing came to embody ideals of individualism, privacy, and domesticity throughout its history (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Moreover, modern housing has been marked by and reinforced dichotomous understandings of the ideal liberal subject as distinct from the natural world. The housing as a 'machine for living' manifesto by Le Corbusier (1923), an influential vision in 20th-century architecture and planning (Hall, 2014), reflects these ideals and relations. This vision reduced notions of dwelling into a depoliticized human practice of building, disciplining, controlling, and exploiting nature (Cerbone, 2013), while it obscured metabolic relations and reinforced value hierarchies between (wo)man-made social and natural worlds.

2.3 How housing shapes ways of relating

In the past two centuries, liberal orderings of responsibility expanded and reproduced through housing, as its spatialities, materialities, and legalities came to reinforce the primacy of individual autonomy and freedom in crucial ways.

As the dichotomies that reinforce liberal understandings of the subject have been built into housing, they have influenced the ways we relate with the world and understand *who is responsible for housing*. Consider how the individualization of domestic relations have rendered housing into a matter of private affairs: Seeking housing and making a home is often assumed to be the responsibility of households and individuals (often in the free market), despite the existence of diverse housing trajectories and solidarity networks (e.g., family) that shape access to housing in practice. This dominant framing promotes the idea that the differentiated access to housing is a result of individuals' effort, talent, and hard work, rather than of societal structures and their intersectional injustices. For instance, the exclusive middle-class dream of the privately owned house is associated with an individual achievement (Harris, 2013) while inhabiting social housing is often stigmatized as an undue abuse of state responsibility (Cupers, 2017; Roland, 2008). These moral claims built into dominant understandings of responsibility spatialize and acquire meaning through housing.

In this perspective, housing played an important role in the enforcement of a liberal governmentality by articulating legal, spatial, and material processes of social and political

ordering.[2] Hence, to question liberal politics, it is necessary to redevelop the legalities, spatialities, and material dispositives that shape housing processes and entangled dichotomies between the self and the other, the private and the public, the human body and the natural world.

In particular, the social and gendered divisions that modern housing has reinforced (Heyden, 2003) have historically shaped dominant definitions of *what responsibility is and who practices it*. Thereby they masked and devalued modalities of responsibility that take place at home, such as the responsibilities for social reproduction. The well-defined boundaries of the private house coupled with the functional separation of the domestic spaces of the ideal modern house obfuscate gendered divisions of domestic labor. While increasing the burdens of household maintenance and care for women (Hayden, 2002), these duties for social reproduction are rarely framed as forms of responsibility of broader social relevance. As a consequence, everyday affective practices of care at home are reduced to individualized moral practices tied to familial relations and detached from the realm of politics (Tronto, 1993). These perspectives not only reproduce familialist visions and gendered power relationships within the household, but crucially they also shape what counts as (political and social) responsibility, who counts as a (responsible) subject, and who is capable of assuming responsibility.

Lastly, the nature-society divides that are reinforced through (the ideal modern) housing play a crucial role in the ways we define the addressees of responsibility—i.e., *towards whom we are responsible*— in the realm of housing. Responsibility (as a consequence of free will) and housing (as a means to inhabit the world) are still mostly understood as exclusive realms of human activity and as distinct needs and capacities that make us humans (Hage & Eckersley, 2012). As Val Plumwood (1993, p. 42) suggests, these human-centered distinctions are crucial in the construction of otherness in terms of inferiority and alienation. Then, perspectives that see responsibility as strictly related to individual freedom, designate asymmetrical society-nature relations. By dissociating society and nature, these perspectives exclude metabolic relations from the definition of housing responsibility and neutralize the destruction of the earth happening under capitalism through housing (e.g., framed as societies' need for growth and housing).

2.4 Radicalizing responsibility in housing

We argue that radicalizing responsibility requires breaking down the liberal grammars of urban ordering to make space for a practice of housing based on a different normative foundation. Radicalizing, in this reading, is a project of fundamental de- and reconstruction:

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[2] We refer here to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality as a control exercised on human life processes, such as birth, and reproduction, amongst others (Foucault, 1994, pp. 641-642). De facto, our argument could be expanded into a discussion of his concept of 'biopolitics', as it was precisely developed to account for the specificities of this liberal governmentality. To govern human conduct at the level of large populations, biopolitics was based on biopower operating as a set of liberal governing technicalities anchored in the biological properties of subjects (Bossy & Briatte, 2011). One can argue that the legalities, spatialities, and materialities of modern housing are part of those liberal governing technicalities as they guide the way the embodied subject relates to him- or herself and the other.

Following the etymological notion of radical as concerning the roots (*radicalis)* we take radicalizing to imply a claim to tackle the fundamentals. Thinking radically about responsibility in housing is then a call to re-founding our ways of understanding the expected individual and collective commitments to build up just modalities of inhabiting the world. This implies, on the one hand, rejecting, as Carol Azumah Dennis (2018, p. 200) writes, 'the arrogance of the Cartesian cogito' and overcoming the duality of 'the Cartesian cogito' and the world. Thinking radically about housing is then a radical rethinking of responsibility's understanding of being human, as an epistemological, decolonial, and feminist project of deconstruction. Moreover, this critical revisioning is a project of reconstruction. For Nicola Lacey (2001, p. 257) responsibility has no prior ultimate reason (or values for that matter). It is a 'normative device' that serves to order a particular (not a timeless) society. We can then think of different convictions for the societal foundations of housing. We follow Young in that a radical notion of responsibility must respond to structures of injustice through a related emancipatory project. This is a notion of responsibility that is not based on the selective choice of an autonomous individual and resulting reciprocal obligations towards others. Instead, it is based on the recognition of mutual dependence among humans as well as between the human and the natural world, and a resulting shared commitment towards others.

In rethinking societies' relationalities, the responsibility debate we outline has much to learn from existing theorizations of solidarity, hospitality, and care. Solidarity and responsibility require one another, although they are traditionally thought of as competing notions (i.e., the former linked to collective and the latter to individual action). For Young (2011), however, solidarity can be 'a call to responsibility' (p. 120), as it concerns the engagement and the value upon which political commitments to justice are practiced. Thereby, enacting solidarity requires the acknowledgement and practice of 'a shared responsibility' to make institutions and practices just (Young, 2011). Both solidarity and responsibility are entwined with belonging to a political community, in which (shared) identity and spatial-temporal proximity is assumed to play a key role (Barnett, 2005; Massey, 2004). Yet, it is the notion of hospitality (as framed by Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas) that provokes an extended understanding of responsibility regarding ways of relating (cited in Barnett, 2005). As a notion it shifts the focus to the ethics and actions that acknowledge and respond to the needs of distant (human and nonhuman) others. In this sense hospitality and solidarity emerge as forms of responsiveness that exceed relations of reciprocity, reason, and choice. By considering social, spatial, and temporal distance, they promote a model of responsibility that has the potential to address diachronic (Levinas, 1981 cited in Barnett, 2005) and global (Massey, 2004) injustices.

Furthermore, responsive attitudes that exceed reciprocity can also surge from affective practices attached to the broad realm of care relations. Feminist scholars have long pointed to the entanglements of responsibility and care (hooks, 2000; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Tronto, 1993) in order to place an ethic of care at the center of democratic politics (Tronto, 2013). In this context, rethinking democratic citizenship in terms of care implies reconfiguring a notion of citizenship that is based on agency and responsibility (rather than rights)

(Sevenhuijsen, 2000). Challenging individualistic views, a feminist ethics of care promotes an understanding of relational political identities (Massey, 2004) and therefore of responsibility itself. As a matter of politics, both care and responsibility concern our relationships to others and the world (Zheng, 2019). While the former looks at the affective response itself, the latter points to the ability of being responsive, answerable, and accountable to the claims of others (Beausoleil, 2016).

The ethics of solidarity, hospitality, and care expand our understanding of responsibility as a relational notion and praxis. All three concepts bring questions of unequal power relations and vulnerability in responsibility debates to the fore, as they stress the need to be attentive and aware of the different positionings and capacities amongst subjects embedded in and affected by responsibility relations. Taken together, thinking about responsibility in these affective-political terms enables thinking within and beyond formal political rights, legal obligations, and interests bound in a community. It enables linking the shared political responsibilities emerging from our very embeddedness in political communities and structures of injustice (Young, 2011) and from an affective relationship with others and the world at large.

But the debate we foresee also extends theorizations of solidarity, hospitality, and care in two ways: First, responsibility is an umbrella concept for multiple modalities of response. In that the notion of responsibility encompasses diverse modalities of attending to others, it enables a debate about adequate modes of response (e.g., how liability and care need to be combined in the governance of housing). Second, responsibility extends concerns about modalities of relationality (care, hospitality, solidarity) with questions about the allocation of competencies and tasks: In that it directly asks who ought to do the hard work required to respond to and transform the conditions of structural injustice, it allows us to shed light on the unequal power positions we occupy to do that work individually and collectively and, relatedly, the uneven responsibility requirements.

Key to relating this approach to questions of housing is the idea that to act responsibly is not a mere cognitive capability, depending on one's isolated strength of will. Rather, it is dependent on one's material and social positions, thus, one's embodied and situated everyday conditions. It follows that acting responsibly requires an 'equipped' (Thévenot, 2005) and relational agency. The relevance of these situated and structural conditions for furthering possibilities to respond to others and the world implies that housing becomes a core analytical issue. Thinking about responsibility in housing entangles questions about differentiated subjectivities with legal, spatial, and material forms of relating to others. This also implies that questioning negative forms of responsibility associated with the liberal subject cannot be done without rethinking how housing is practiced and produced.

Thinking about responsibility in a situated and embodied way also shapes what counts as radical in housing practice. In this sense, radical politics does not consist of organizing only. It also requires practices of inhabitation that respond to injustice through new rationalities of relating—practices that translate the primacy of individual freedom and autonomy into relations between spaces and other human and non-human beings. Such

practice can look ordinary; they take shape through multiple registers of responsibility—including through care, accountability, hospitality, and forward-looking political engagement.

3. Practices for radicalizing housing responsibility

While a radical housing responsibility seems utopian in a liberalized housing market, much of our underlying assumptions stem from actually existing housing struggles—even if entangled in 'organized irresponsibility' (Beck, 1995). Thus, to illustrate how our theoretical assumptions translate into worldly practices, to nourish these considerations, and to discuss how they can foster emancipatory politics, we discuss three empirical examples: the initiative Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co in Berlin, the squatted hotel City Plaza in Athens, and the post-squat cooperative Equilibre in Geneva. We draw explicitly on housing struggles that are well known in European housing scholarship to allow for a better grasp of these examples. Data for these discussions derives from existing literature on these struggles, rather than our primary data only.

In these empirical discussions, we consider how a radical notion of responsibility is practiced in different domains as a way of blurring and transcending the binaries that are built into housing's legal, spatial, and material organization regarding, e.g., into the legal management of property, the spatialization of private-public divisions, or understandings of the ecology embedded in practices of inhabitation. And as a profound way to question the predominant liberal understanding of the subject itself and of what one owes to the other. Both are certainly entangled and mutually constitutive. This can imply overcoming the individualization of social life in housing through a renewed 'grammar of the life together' (reference anonymized); actively caring (about others and the living) through forms of housing maintenance, and rupturing housing ownership regimes.

3.1 The socio-legal orders of a radical housing responsibility

First, our discussion is informed by the initiative Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co (hereafter: DWCE) and their 2021 campaign to socialize the housing stock of large corporate landlords in Berlin.[3] DWCE has been widely discussed and celebrated for taking on the legal foundations of private capital (Kusiak, 2021; Metzger, 2021; Richter & Humphry, 2021). While we do not want to rehearse these arguments here, we are interested in learning from the initiative about how a radical housing responsibility can take shape in legal practice.

DWCE responds to a decade-long history of privatizing Berlin's social housing stock and the subsequent displacement of the tenants living in this housing. It built its campaign on the German Basic Law (Art. 74.1.15), in particular, on article 15 according to which 'land, natural resources, and means of production may, for the purpose of socialization, be transferred to public ownership or into other forms of public enterprise'. There are some legal hurdles to implementing this article as property transfers need to be justified on the basis of a common good (*Gemeinwohlinteresse*). DWCE argued for socialization by reference to the Berlin housing crisis and the right to housing included in Berlin's local constitution

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[3] Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen (2021) https://www.dwenteignen.de/.

(Drohsel et al., 2019). By means of a referendum, this initiative demanded socializing housing and to transfer the housing stock of these companies into an institution that serves the common good (DWCE, 2020).

The company Deutsche Wohnen is an example of a housing provider that treats housing primarily as an investment opportunity. Through a set of deregulatory politics and privatizations, Deutsche Wohnen got hold of a massive housing stock, which it systematically exploited for profits thereby abdicating responsibility for its tenants and its housing stock. Differently put, the company practiced legal irresponsibility towards the tenants, long known from other financialized providers (Hilbrandt & Dimitrakou, 2022), working through disinvestment and the extraction of ever-higher rents.[4] In tackling these providers the initiative directly targeted understandings of property as possessive individualism (Macpherson, 2011), thus a fundamental tenet of the liberal orders of responsibility translated into institutional and legal structures. The initiative questions the right to the autonomy and freedom of individual claims to ownership and the negative freedom to do with one's property whatever one desires. By relegating the powers of the autonomous individual owner, it also breaks with the primacy of corporate responsibility towards the shareholder value.

Moreover, the initiative acted against the roots of classical liberal norms in housing as it demanded a different role of the democratic capitalist state—as a guarantor of the common good and of the political community. It disrupted the state imperative to protect the functioning of property and private investment (Eller, 2022). It also suggests a different right to govern property for the city's tenants, thereby creating a notion of political community that has the collective right to question the sovereignty of the state in its role to protect private property. Considering that the campaign employs the German basic law itself to return to a (however modified) public responsibility for housing made the campaign particularly effective. Building on the German basic law, it embedded the radicality of their claims in the very traditional means of democratic practice.

Taken together DWCE outlines forms of responsibility that are bound to the existing institutional and legal frameworks but go way beyond the limited notion of liability. While DWCE takes responsibility to redress structural housing injustices, it also questions who ought to take responsibility. By demanding that state institutions take on political responsibilities for housing, it opposes responsibilization discourses that render individuals responsible and blameworthy for their housing situation (Young 2011, p. 23) and other dominant statements suggesting that there are 'no alternatives' to property and the market.

3.2 The socio-spatial orders of a radical housing responsibility

Second, our analysis considers the 'Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza' (hereafter: City Plaza), a well-known squat (2016-2019) and a community that transformed a vacant hotel in central Athens into a space of refugee accommodation,

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[4] In 2021 Deutsche Wohnen was acquired by the company Vonovia, which thereby expanded its housing stock to 568.000 flats (https://www.vonovia.de/de-de/ueber-vonovia/ueber-uns/historie)

integration, and solidarity. In the wake of the so-called EU refugee crisis, left activists and grassroots organizations, volunteers, and refugees joined forces to practice housing and hospitality differently. City Plaza responded to the mounting need for dignified housing, while becoming a space of political struggle against border regimes and refugee segregation (Lafazani, 2018). We draw on the City Plaza case to illustrate how transgressing the spatial structures of liberal housing ideologies and the negotiation of boundaries between the individual and the collective give rise to new notions and practices of radical housing responsibility.

The City Plaza community questioned the mainstream refugee reception regime by challenging power asymmetries rooted in liberal understandings of responsibility in hospitality practice (Rosakou, 2012). For instance, the initiative opposed divisions concerning who deserves responsibility and care (e.g., between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' immigrants). It created a cohabitation space open to diverse people fleeing their homes globally, as well as to volunteers and activists (Lafazani, 2018). Moreover, the community jointly negotiated the spatial terms of this cohabitation. Instead of spatially reproducing normative ideals of dwelling and political life, refugees, activists, and volunteers shaped the rules of the house and the spatial reconfigurations required. Thereby, they challenged hospitality's asymmetries by which refugees (as inferior and indebted 'guests') have to passively comply with the rules of the house and the 'hosts' to access support (Rosakou, 2012).

Rethinking these dependencies in everyday practice implied reworking (rather than abolishing) public-private divides that are constitutive of the spatialities of liberal housing. In analyzing these spatialities we must consider the dual role of City Plaza as a house and as a place of political struggle against structural injustice. For instance, preserving private dwelling spaces on all the upper floors of the squat was not a reproduction of privatized housing ideals. It resulted from the wants and needs of people who suffer from the lack of safe space for themselves in overcrowded refugee camps. Moreover, the spatial boundaries towards the public, such as maintaining the former hotel's entrance situation and establishing a 'door policy' emerged as a prerequisite for building a common life. Besides the shared threat of evacuation by the police affecting everyone involved, refugee inhabitants faced additional hostility (Katrini, 2020) because of the building's location at an epicenter of anti-immigrant mobilizations of the post-2008 years. Yet, City Plaza was thought of as an 'inclusive enclave' (Berger & Moritz, 2018, 152): by hosting regular open assemblies, by accessing the public school system, and by participating in political protests, inhabitants engaged in different social and political spaces (Kotronaki, 2018) in and outside the space of the house (Raimondi, 2019). Rethinking these boundaries shows that taking on radical housing responsibility requires rethinking the spatialities of housing to enhance social and political engagement and to 'receive and protect those who seek refuge in its milieu' (Felder et al., 2020, p. 56; Stavo-Debauge, 2017).

Common spaces shaped the thresholds between the domestic, public, and collective life and were associated with new responsibility roles and practices. The creation and maintenance of common spaces—such as the kitchen and the dining room, the classrooms,

or the women's space—secured the community's reproduction beyond shelter and required active engagement in everyday care from all inhabitants. As these spaces supported collective life, their participation in the making of the commons framed refugees as care-giving and care-receiving subjects within a community—as 'members of a community with responsibilities and obligations' (Lafazani, 2018, p. 900), as people having agency (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2022) rather than as responsibilized individuals. This is not to say that the initiative did not face major challenges in enhancing the participation and engagement of inhabitants in the care of the space (Katrini, 2020).

Overall, City Plaza expands our understanding of the scope of housing responsibility. Responsibility is here 'a virtue that exceeds reciprocal obligations' (Barnett, 2005, p. 11). It encompasses political responsibilities towards the subjects facing the structural injustices of border and hospitality regimes, as well as everyday solidarity and care. Considering the links between the individualization of responsibility and the spatial orders of liberal housing ideologies, the case illustrates the crucial role that spatial appropriations play in practicing responsibility differently. Radicalizing responsibility requires creating spaces that can house broader political struggles and new practices of sharing and collective life. At the same time, reconfiguring housing spatialities gives rise to fragile solidarities and new (individual and collective) responsibilities for cohabiting the world. The ways in which these responsibilities are negotiated can challenge dominant responsibility asymmetries, for instance, who are subjects capable of giving and deserving responsibility.

3.3 The material orders of a radical housing responsibility

Our third example concerns post-squats housing cooperatives in Geneva that emerged in the 1990s within the broader prefigurative politics of the squatter's movement (Pattaroni, 2011). Contrary to the cooperatives of the first half of the 20th century, post-squat cooperatives, as the one we study named Equilibre, entail broader political objectives such as the reduction of the inhabitants' 'ecological footprint to less than one planet' or the 'strengthening [of] social ties while respecting each individual singularities'.[5] In opening up a broader transformation of the material orders of housing responsibility articulating dwelling bodies, architectural dispositives, living ecosystems, gestures of care and commoning in new ways, post-squat cooperatives question liberal grammars of housing responsibility beyond their legal and spatial frame.[6] To borrow from Beatriz Preciado, they contribute to turning architecture into a 'practice of biopolitical disobedience' (Preciado, 2012).

Among others, the Equilibre buildings present striking examples of feces commoning through composting systems of toilet waste. In their six-story building of Soubeyran, innovative toilet systems separate fecal matter and urine with a minimum of water. The feces are collected within a large 80sqm tank where they are transformed by earthworms into

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[5] https://www.cooperative-equilibre.ch/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CHARTE-EQUILIBRE-VF3-NOV-2020.pdf
[6] As in literatures on new materialism (Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012), we understand the material to entail a dynamic and interactive relation between human bodies and their material performative milieu.

compost used for their productive garden (providing for the restaurant of the cooperative), while the evaporated water is reinjected in the toilet system. Inhabitants have to contribute actively to the maintenance of the recycling system. This renewed material order operates at other levels too. Besides the well-documented commoning of living space (Davidovici, 2022), Equilibre challenges the material configuration of the liberal household economy. For instance, the creation of collective storage for household stocks allows the community to collectively buy and manage natural cleaning products and consumable goods such as olive oil or salt while reducing household waste and domestic storage in private dwellings. Such commoning affects the privatized handling of domestic consumption as households are expected to avoid buying their own products. One of the inhabitants explained that he had been using the same oil bottle for the past five years.

Furthermore, the inhabitants' enrolment in this renewed material order works through affective and cognitive motivations. Significantly, Equilibre, as most post-squat cooperatives, has been drafting a member's chart indicating what is expected from each inhabitant. The initial 2005 chart was collectively modified in 2015 and 2020 to adapt it to the accumulated experiences and to revitalize the collective craze for cooperative dwelling. Those revisions manifest the processual and reflexive dimension of the cooperative, which is not simply relying on well codified knowledge or clearly pre-established, fixed responsibilities. The chart is intended to equilibrate individual and collective needs along consumption and renewal of natural resources.

> *We affirm that our raison d'être is to work with solidarity, sincerity, and enthusiasm for the establishment of a sustainable balance between nature, in particular its capacity for renewal, and its use by human beings. (Ethical Chart of the Cooperative Society Equilibre, 2020)* [7]

Complementing the call to cognitive and affective states such as 'sincerity' and 'enthusiasm', it is striking to note that the first point of the 2020 revised chart is an invitation for each inhabitant 'to embody the purpose, values, and objectives of the cooperative in my own choices'.[8] This claim for the embodiment of values suggests clearly that the relationship at stake here is not one of formal compliance with external rules and responsibilities. It is one of adhering to them "enthusiastically" and performing them in one's everyday life. Inhabitants are invited to display positive attitudes of care and solidarity toward the other by working 'to create harmonious links with their neighbors, members, and non-members, in particular to make everyone feel welcome in the cooperative and to avoid any form of extremism or exclusion' (ECCSE, 2020).

The delineated behavior expands far more than the strict delimitation of liberal responsibility. To contribute to the charted goal of an 'ecological, economic and social transition' inhabitants of the post-squat cooperative are expected to play an active role in the

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[7] https://www.cooperative-equilibre.ch/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CHARTE-EQUILIBRE-VF3-NOV-2020.pdf

[8] The three main articles of the charts are: 1. To embody the purpose, values, and objectives of the cooperative in my own choices; 2. Participate in the life of the cooperative (general assemblies, residents' associations, working committees and/or various contributions); 3. To seek a balance between my individual freedom and our collective responsibility (authors' translation).

commoning of their feces, adapt their mobility habits, revise their domestic organization, and nurture care relations with their neighbors. More than just rule followers, they are expected to embody the value of the cooperatives within their everyday forms of consumption and relation to others. This material order fosters a thicker conception of the apt subject of the collective, raising questions of enthusiasm, convictions, and affects. Contrary to housing movements concentrating on rent or tenure issues, this biopolitical dimension is a core element of squats' and post-squats' experiences as it perpetuates a countercultural ideal of an enacted critics of capitalism (Pattaroni, 2014), performed at the level of the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière, 2013).

Nonetheless, such institutionalized forms of prefigurative politics are, as one would expect, not devoid of ambiguities and shortcomings.[9] As observed already in lasting squats, through time one can see the return of certain forms of liberal ordering (stricter private boundaries, limited individual responsibility for the maintenance of common spaces, and so on) (Breviglieri & Pattaroni, 2005). Hence, the rewritten and softening of the inhabitants' chart did not suffice to palliate the exit of part of the inhabitants from the collective life of the cooperative. Collective tasks such as the cleaning of the water recycling system have been turned into an individual tax used to pay third parties to maintain the system. On a more problematic note, confronted with a recent claim to allocate their visitor studios to Ukrainian refugees, the cooperative was unable to find a consensus (due to one opposed inhabitant) to do it, going against to their first manifesto's claim for more hospitality to refugees (as demonstrated in Athenian squats). The formalization of possession contains hence always the risk of closure. In a similar long-term perspective, attachments are hard to be discussed and recomposed within democratic arenas (Cheyns, 2014), as illustrated by one of the major crises of the cooperative around extra room allocations. The Soubeyran cooperative possesses three extra rooms allotted for a five-year timespan to specific households that needed them at the time of the collective attribution. After the first five years, an important (and ongoing) crisis surged, as the households were unwilling to let go of those spaces that now constituted their everyday life milieu.

Even if such difficulties and tensions nuance the possibility of radically collectivized responsibilities, the cooperative milieu keeps its transformative potential as households keep on experiencing new domestic boundaries. Cooperative decisions are now taken by majority vote opening up, paradoxically, the possibility to pursue more demanding commitments.

4. Responsibility in housing: An agenda for theory and practice

We argued in this paper that understandings of responsibility and norms of housing and home are tightly entangled. In the empirical examples we discussed, collectives engage a new politics of responsibility as they challenge dominant ideals about housing and related legal, spatial, and material responsibility norms, i.e., strictly delineated, and self-constraining responsibility norms that are based on liberal grammars and related duties bound by the law.

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[9] For a broader reflection on the whereabouts of squat's institutionalization, see for example Martinez, 2014; Pruijt, 2003.

In these housing struggles, collectives practice and call for forms of responsibility that are anchored in a different anthropological and moral conception of the subject; one that is rooted in a commitment to and acknowledgment of one's connection with (human) others and the (nonhuman) world; in a collective imaginary of responsibility that starts from a relational subjectivity defined by one's implications in one common world.

Hence, the call to renew the analysis of housing responsibility has two main aims: On the one hand, it is an analytical attempt to go beyond the modern and liberal reduction of individual and collective responsibility based on a negative and formal relation to the other; reproduced by and reproducing social divides along private and public spheres, the individual and the collective, as well as nature and society, among others. On the other hand, it is a call to enact responsibility through inhabitation. This is to consider that housing plays a central role in producing solidarity or caring relations, or differently put, responsibility milieus. Housing appears as the locus where ontological security emerges from the possibility to dwell, i.e., of anchoring one's body in a familiar context. Away from ideals of responsibilities based on one's strength of will and dematerialized autonomy, housing tells us about the need to ground responsibility and anchor it within material and relational contexts. As housing constitutes the milieux enabling the production of collective alternatives to dominant social forms, one could suggest that responsibility must literally be housed.

The examples we looked at illustrate modalities of responsibility based on practices of solidarity, hospitality, and care that are entangled with forward-looking political engagement. Not least because they are carried out by lower and middle-class activists with limited capabilities and resources, it is necessary to ask how their practices of responsibility differ from those expected of the responsibilized neoliberal subject. Yet, instead of individualized acts that respond to requirements of autonomy and self-sufficiency, or are outputs of a calculative exchange, the practices we studied speak of subjects capable of giving, receiving, and sharing responsibilities. They enact housing responsibility on the basis of our interdependencies in the shared (yet unequal) struggle to dwell. Moreover, these initiatives are embedded in broader political struggles against injustice and call on institutions to take on responsibility through different means, such as referenda, protests, or charts. In this way, they promote versions of responsibility that oppose neoliberal governmentalities.

Still, the project of rethinking and undoing dominant responsibility norms is a generational task. While research and theoretical deliberation are necessary to delve further into the expected individual and collective commitments to build up just modalities of inhabiting the world, some of the thinking we presented shares insights with long-standing and ongoing debates—even if these might not explicitly be framed around the idea of responsibility. It follows, first, to establish better linkages between political philosophies of responsibility and ongoing debates in housing, such as approaches to decoloniality and racial justice that have long criticized the liberal devaluation of racialized bodies and subjects (Safransky, 2022, p. 300); feminist approaches to care work and maintenance in housing that have long discussed the value and recurrent devaluation of these modalities or responsibility (Fernandez-Arrigoitia, 2014; Tronto, 1993). In addition, geographical work into the multiple commitments of housing on a warming planet calls for an extended theorization of a global

responsibility (Massey, 2004) that takes questions of responsible housing into the realm of material production, maintenance, and resource extraction.

Finally, fostering a radical housing responsibility requires further thinking about the practical and institutional possibilities to enact and divide this work. While Young's account derives forward-looking responsibility to remedy injustice from being involved in structures of in/justice (2011), her Social Connection Model suggests that we are not called to respond in the same way. Instead, Young sees each actor's responsibilities to respond in relation to their socio-structural position and related capabilities (in addition to a collective ability she finds people to have when they are part of organized structures, such as unions or associations). Yet, Young is also clear that to initiate change and remediate injustice, it is civil society that needs to make change through 'vocal criticism, organized contestation, a measure of indignation, and concerted public pressure' (2011, p. 151). How will housing actors develop the responsiveness (Schiff, 2014) to act this way? And how can the multiple modes of responsibility—care, accountability, hospitality, and forward-looking political engagement—be institutionalized into a wider radical politics of responsible housing that can cause effective political change?

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