Japan, as a territory, appears to harbour a close relationship between change and tragedy. Unprecedented cycles of destruction have traditionally allowed radical political and social reform. Which have resulted in changes to the rituals of the home. If after Second World War, the western-influenced modern housing types emerged -raising new sensibilities towards the concept of privacy and family roles-; the last two big earthquakes -1995 and 2011- have boosted the emergence and the speculation of unfamiliar domesticities. The visibility of both disasters propagated an alertness toward the progressive individualism and social fabric loss. Which, consequently reinforced the emerging trend to reestablish neighborhood relations and local communities.

In the eighties when projects such as the well-known Tokyo Nomad Girl emerged there was already an awareness of a Japanese society based on the individual. The project designed by Toyo Ito and Kazuyo Sejima in 1985 imagined a mobile domestic infrastructure, composed of just a bed for sleeping, dressing and displaying taste in consumer choices. The project envisioned a new type of living where the whole city was the space of the house itself, a type of domesticity based on mobility and mutation through the urban territory. In this mutable living, private kitchens were left behind in favor of restaurants and consumerism.

This project could be considered a moment of transition after Metabolist attempts, which emerged in the 1960s seeking of a promising future after the war. Metabolist architects envisioned a prospective territory where buildings, supposedly, could be easily adapted to changes by means of standardization, capsules and other technological biased devices and solutions. But instead, what really happened after the 1960s, is that the surface of the city was occupied by very tiny, two- or three-story high houses promoted by individual initiatives. The imagined huge Metabolist infrastructures could just be tackled with public initiative; however the
Government didn’t have sufficient budget to promote them. Instead, incentives were given to people, allowing them to build their own houses, thus promoting individual private investments. So as Momoyo Kaijima and Yoshi Tsukamoto claim, the reconstruction of the city was not achieved through a concentration of capital and power, as Metabolist architects would believe, but instead, it was achieved by the dispersed nature of capital and power based on individuality.

Nowadays, we know that Tokyo daily live is far from how it was imagined, but surprisingly as an answer to the progressive social fabric loss, a set of new domestic proposals have emerged that claimed again the elimination of private food production in favor of a collective one, such as the Tokyo Nomad Girl project did. From real estate companies that promote kitchenless living to the popular Kodomo Kitchens -community kitchens for the children-, the kitchen is understood again as an urban infrastructure able to define new social structures and systems of governance, as well as new values of capital and labor. Despite having different natures, these community kitchens go beyond the publicity of restaurants, shaping bonds and expanding families while maintaining their urban character.

This studio will look at the contemporary reality of the city of Tokyo as a radical trial-and-error urban and architectural experiment. Studying the current community kitchens as a starting point for an architectural speculation, we will research and understand how these recent urban infrastructures operate in order to imagine their impact in the existing house. As a response, the students will be asked to speculate and design a contemporary domestic landscape.

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

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GENERAL READINGS


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