



ECOLOGIES OF EXISTENCE
RADICAL MUNICIPALISM

ADS7

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In collaboration with Barcelona en Comú and the Municipality of Barcelona



Rojava defenders, Rojava, Northern Syria, 2016.

ADS7's

main research question is what kind of architecture could emerge if we consider ecology, subjectivity and living, as indispensable political and architectural categories. To do so, ADS7 proposes a way of thinking and designing architecture as a collective political practice.

radical municipalism

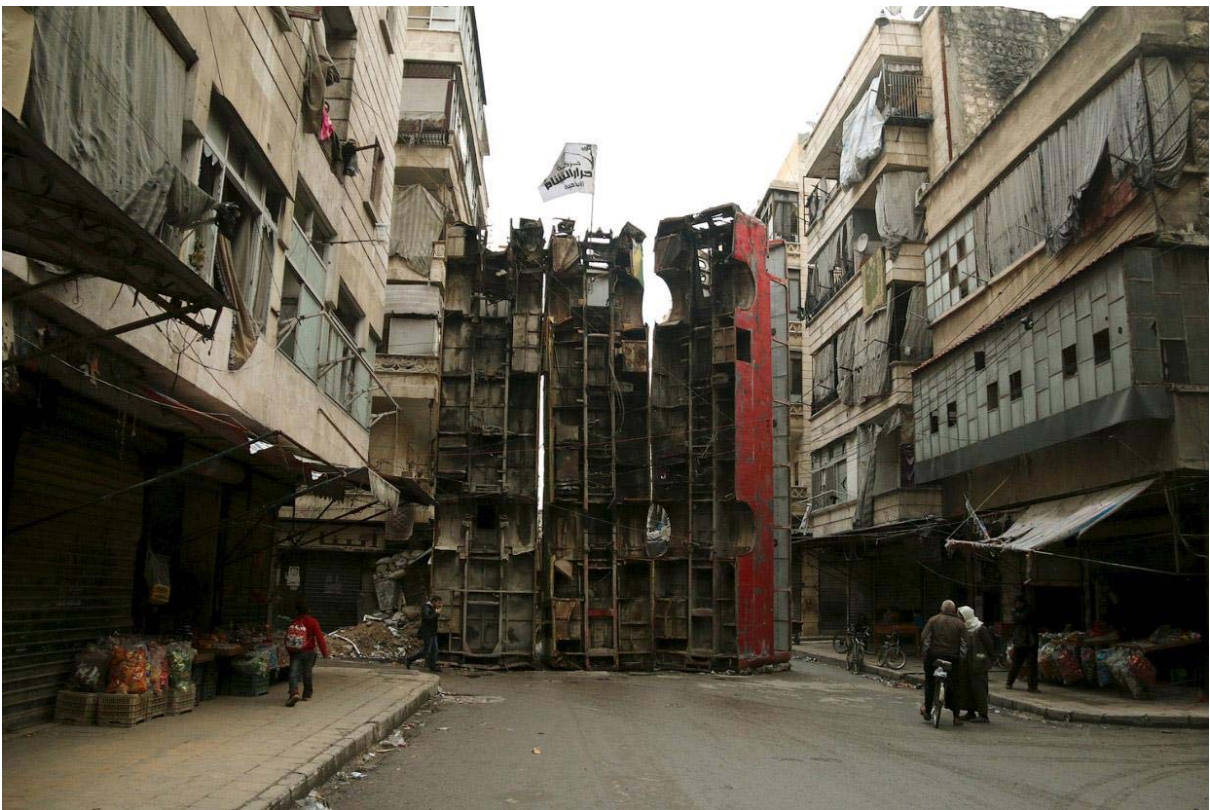
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1 – URBAN REVOLUTIONS

In 2018, ADS7 will focus on the relation between politics, social movements and architecture, what we define as “*the architecture of urban revolutions*”. The city has historically been the centre of politics, of social transformation and of the constitution of problems, claims and demands. The very idea of the city is defined by conflict, not necessarily located in dialectical oppositions but on a field of forces, interests and power relations. This is why the question of governance, inside, outside, in opposition or in parallel with any official or institutional structure, is not only crucial but formative for the definition of an ecological project: each revolution projects a transformation of modes and ideas of governance. Contrary to resistance, every revolutionary process carried implicitly a different distribution of powers in the city. And we argue that within revolutionary conceptions of governance lie as well fascinating architectural and design problems.

There is a very strong tradition that we want to revisit and study, the one defined by radical political experiments in modern times. From the 1871 Paris Commune to the self-management experiments of revolutionary syndicalism in South Europe in the turn of the XXth century, from the period of Red Vienna between 1918 and 1934, to the social welfare programmes of the Black Panthers Party in the 1960s and 70s, to contemporary urban struggles of the autonomous Syrian region of Rojava and Barcelona en Comú, the foundation of collectives, the struggles for a different reality, and the formalization of subjectivities has been inseparable from the struggles for the mode of organizing and governing cities.

Today again, we observe a fascinating shift in governance, what is often called as “*radical municipalism*”. With its most recognised example in Barcelona, where the social movement *Barcelona en Comú* won the municipal elections, radical municipalism consists of a model of governance based on direct democracy and the feminisation of politics that has in the right to housing and the city its main objects of concern. A model that, following from Murray Bookchin’s anarchist-municipalist agenda, is today the most important political mutation in the ways in which cities are governed around the world, from Barcelona in Spain to Rosario in Argentina, from Rojava in Syria, to Jackson, US. We believe that this new paradigm offers incredible opportunities to develop unique design research and architectural projects, since it allows students to define the way public authorities, social movements, even corporate partners and industry collaborate in the formulation of urban and architectural projects. It’s a platform that allows for a radical transformation of how we understand scale, how we define urban problems and how we deal with the management of space and distribution of rights and responsibilities in cities.



Upended buses barricade a street in Bustan al-Qasr neighbourhood, Aleppo, Syria, 2015. © Ammar Abdullah/Reuters.

Local governments are the closest governmental structure to the people, they are managing everyday life directly and citizens across the world feel their presence. But, most importantly it is how local problems mobilise the population and operate as paradigms to discuss broader issues, and to then frame political and urban questions and projects in regional, national and global scale.

In our point of view, the radical and transformative possibility of these new municipal movements lies precisely there. And, it's what poses a brilliant architectural challenge. Architecture is a practice that has a profound multiscalar nature to organize its complex characteristics and defining parameters. Resources, materials, infrastructure, labour conditions, construction methods, social practices, symbols, ideas and habits, diagrams of use and activities are all formative elements of architectural and urban space.

2 – ECOLOGY

Ecologies of living bring together material, environmental, technical, social and mental domains. In our point of view, to think ecologically is not so much a matter of protecting existing ecologies, but more importantly, a matter of generating conditions for different ones to emerge and affirm themselves. Only on these terms can a properly *ecological* project take place.

In our proposal, architecture is understood as a practice that has the ability to give consistency, or even to formalize, certain modes of living. Students will be asked to identify multiple aspects of living from emerging modes of production, to types of social organization, of inhabitation or relations to nature, that do not conform to the ossification of social structures, familial relations and psychological imaginaries inherent to neoliberal forms of urban development.

The studio aims to investigate the possible role that architecture can play in giving both material and social consistency to these processes, sometimes by providing spaces for events to happen, other times by formalizing a specific program, and others even by giving visibility to certain communities and their particular ways of life. In our view architecture gains its political relevance precisely when it is able to think space and its configurations in terms of living. And it is in this sense that we argue that architecture is a significant category of ecological struggle.

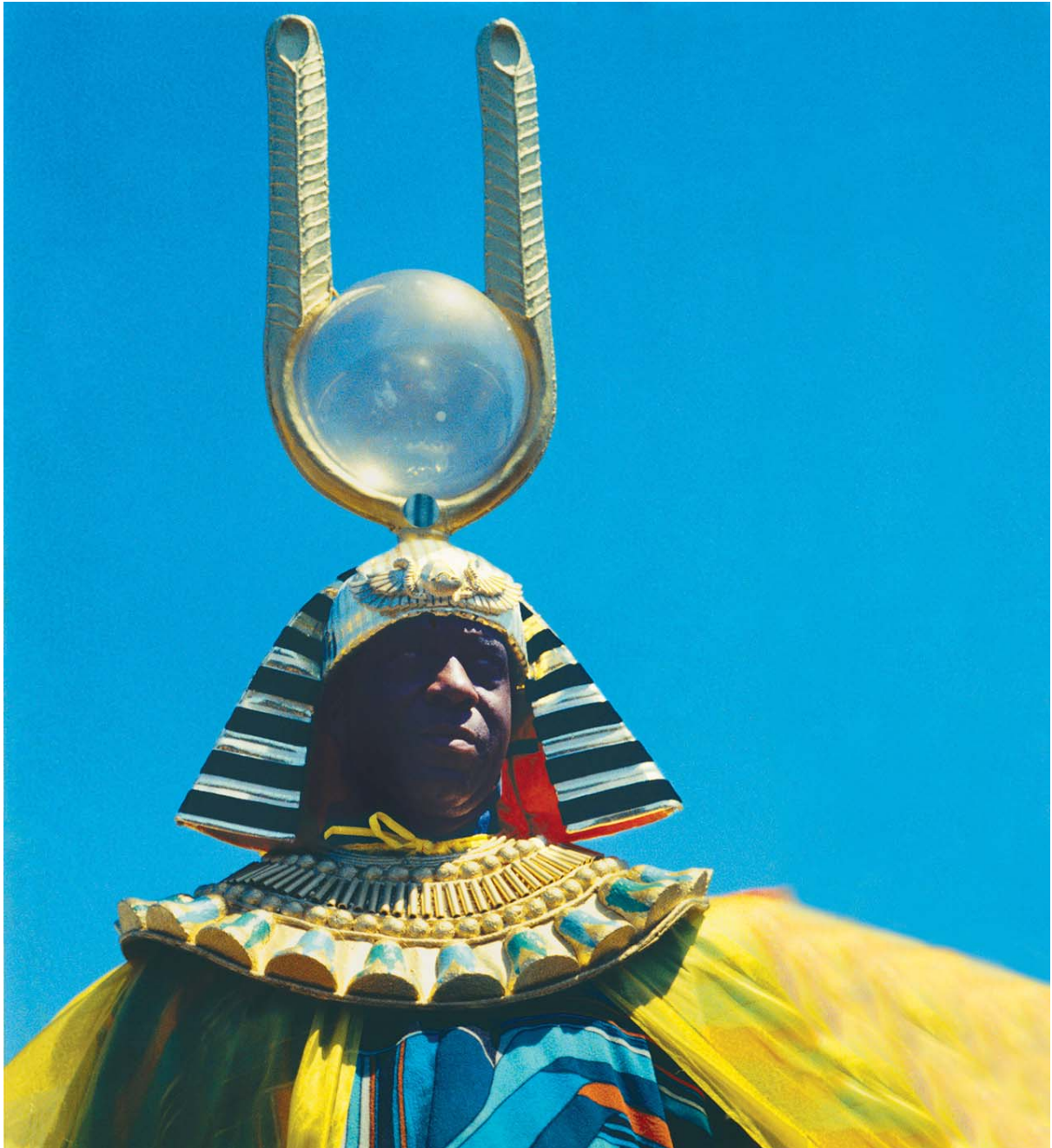
We propose a radical model of ecological thinking, where conceptions of nature are inseparable from practices of living. Traditional environmental perspectives tend to separate the human from nature. Instead, we will look at how each mode of living carries with it a specific mode of relating to nature. We aim to disrupt one of the central tenets of neoliberal forms of city making which is the promotion of *lifestyles*: what is the worth of supporting the cosmopolitan coexistence of multiple cultures if only one kind of (capitalist) production is allowed? If only the entrepreneurial self is validated as the subject of the contemporary city? Against this, we aim to encourage students to speculate about how architecture can promote alternative subjectivities that are grounded not simply in cultural transformations but in actually different practices of living.



Standing Rock, North Dakota, USA. Protesters face off with police and the National Guard on Feb. 1, 2017.
© Ryan Vizzions/Standing Rock Rising



Lacaton & Vassal, *House in Coutras*. 2000.



Sun Ra: Space is the Place, 1974.

3 – STUDIO FRAMEWORK

The studio will explore the potentials of *radical municipalism* through the architectural, technical and political problem of *repetition*:

Revolutionary processes and social transformations have always required a thinking of repetition, be it in the relation between the individual and the collective, the cell and the field, the neighbour and the city. In the thinking of the material composition of cities, repetition is the central problem of revolution: it is only through the repetition of building types, of modes of production and of systems of construction that revolutionary potentials can ever be actualised. The repetition of structural systems, of urban models, the repetition of housing types, the repetition of strategies of spatial occupation, the repetition of social protocols, the implementation of adaptive and evolutionary models. Urban politics is always traversed by the problem of repetition: does it become restrictive and normative, or does it open up new existential territories? Indeed, one might say that it is through the ways in which models of repetition were conceived of and designed (in their material, social and subjective dimensions) that processes of radically reorganising cities have either crystallised or managed to actualise new urban potentials.

Repetition, therefore, is how we intend to develop an architectural approach to the questions posed by *radical municipalism*.

YR 1 consists of a LIVE project on Collective Equipment in Barcelona. The LIVE project is an opportunity to develop a design within a real-life context, and with specific clients and requirements, including budget and time-constraints. Students will work in groups of 2 or 3 students to address a series of briefs set up in collaboration with the Social Movement Barcelona en Comú and the Municipality of Barcelona. Today, Barcelona is developing new public policies aiming to adapt existing equipments as intercultural spaces of social empowerment. Some of these projects are: supervised drug addiction points and shelters, libraries as spaces for the reception of refugees, health-care cooperatives or integrated services centres.

In working in collaboration with real-world partners, students will gain an insight into a mode of practicing that is often forgotten: working for and together with state institutions and popular organizations concerned with architectural and urban issues. With this project we hope to widen the student's horizons of what the architecture profession is.

YR 2 will follow the typical format of ADS7 and directly address the brief of radical municipalism through the perspective of *repetition*. As in previous years, we promote a focus on popular culture and its semiotics. The studio encourages students to propose architectural strategies for an urban revolutionary collective of their choice. Possible choices would be movements such as Black Lives Matter, Occupy (US), Radical Housing Network, Plan C (UK), or any other that the student finds relevant. Students have to identify specific architectural and urban problems that emerge from the organization and the activities of such collectives, and address them in both their spatial, technical and subjective dimensions.

Additionally, this year we expect YR2 students to have completed a first iteration of their project by the end of Term 1. Instead of the conventional academic format in which a research period precedes the development of a brief and design proposal; this year we will invert the format: students will start by developing a design proposal until the end of the first Term. By December students are expected to present images, models and plans of their design. This proposal and its modes of representation will then be re-accessed, expanded upon and radicalized during Terms 2 and 3. Given this year's topic, we would strongly encourage and support students in contacting existing municipalities, social movements and popular organizations for collaboration.

SUBMISSIONS & DELIVERABLES

From the start of the year students should develop their work and research across three key platforms: models; images or film; plan drawings. These are radically different mediums that students should engage with *in parallel and from the start of the year*. Each term's submission will reflect this, and regardless of its stage, every project will have to be presented across these three main lines of production.

THE RESEARCH BRIEF

From the start of the year, Y2 students should start framing their year-long research brief. The following constitute the deliverables for TERM 1:

Y2 Submission of 1st draft brief: 750 words, including research question, methodology and site, integrated with the framework of ADS7. The setting-up of a convincing research & design method, including scheduling will be a key factor of assessment.

Y2 Final brief submission: 1500 words, including, site, type, and inventory of outputs. Assessment will value strongly the student's ability to reinterpret the ADS7 brief

according to their own research interests; the development of a particular visual language, modelling of specific architectural types, spaces, prototypes, etc.

Y2 TERM 1 final Reviews: students should present a first iteration of design project making use of the following modes of representation: models, images / film and plan drawings. Specific outputs will vary but should include at least: site plan; design up to a resolution of 1/50; series of physical model iterations; visual and representational strategy explored in images or film.

4 – GUESTS / PARTNERSHIPS

This brief is aligned with the research being currently developed at the RCA on Architecture and Social Movements. In this context, the YR1 briefs and LIVE Project will be organized in collaboration with the social movement Barcelona en Comú, with the Municipality of Barcelona. In addition to this we expect to have a constant presence of architectural practices currently working on similar approaches, such as Arquitectos de Cabecera or Ateliernob.

In addition to this, throughout the year lectures, tutorials and workshops will be developed in collaboration with Susana Caló, David Burns, Kamil Hilmi Dalkir, Antoni Font, Elisavet Hasa, Samaneh Moafi, Georgia White, Nabil Ahmed.

5 - FIELD TRIP (YR1 + YR2)

This academic year, ADS7 will travel between **Thursday, November 23** and **Wednesday, November 29** to Barcelona, Catalonia. Its purpose will be to investigate the radical urban policies implemented by the social movement *Barcelona en Comú* after it was elected to run the Municipality. In particular we will be looking into the role that collective equipment such as nurseries, social clubs or health care centres currently plays in the city, and its potential as a system to promote intercultural relations, the feminization of politics, self-management and social empowerment. Site visits, lectures, and roundtable discussions with selected guests will be organized.

Partners: Barcelona en Comú, Municipality of Barcelona, Centre for Social Innovation - BCN Municipality, Arquitectos de Cabecera, School of Architecture, ETSAB, DPR - Barcelona.

Key Dates: Students should arrive to Barcelona by Thursday evening, November 23. Site visits, lectures and workshops will take place from Friday, November 24 (morning) to Tuesday, November 28. Venues, timetable tbc.

7 – OVERALL SCHEDULE

Studio tutorials will take place every Tuesday from 10am to 6pm. There will be additional tutorials on Thursdays from 10am to 2pm in dates that will be circulated in advance. Crits, interim and end of term reviews will be on Tuesdays (see below).

TERM 1 Key Dates:

October 17	– Year Starts / Introduction / Presentation of studio brief (YR1)
October 24	– Launch Event of the RCA / BeC research partnership (6-8pm)
November 7	– YR2 Draft Brief Deadline
November 14	– YR2 Crits
November 23-29	– Field Trip Barcelona
December 11-13	– End of Term Crits