POLITICS OF A STRIP BLOCK

COMMUNITIES BEYOND TWO HAVANAS

AA Intermediate Unit 8 2018-19

Inter 8 10th Anniversary
Considering Cuba’s gradual exposure to a global economy, the future development of Havana City has come into question. Physically frozen for decades, Havana has addressed its slow urban redevelopment with a keen eye on tourism. Clear examples of this tendency can be found in the ongoing plan to build a 42-floor luxury hotel and the Ministry of Tourism has proposed the construction of a further 7,500 new hotel rooms by 2025. However, in adjacency, 132,000 Cubans have no home and live in government shelters as urban decay continues to displace Habaneros across the city. All these conditions reinforce the idea of two different, but co-existent Havanas: a visible and festive haven for tourists and certain elites, on the one hand, and a dense and hidden constellation of local communities on the other. This academic year, Intermediate Unit 8 proposes to work on new building typologies in Havana capable of imagining scenarios for a possible inclusion of these ‘two Havanas’ into specific strips of friction.

Students will work on a linear urban block strategy for 3,000 inhabitants (ranging 300 to 500 metres long and 10 to 50 wide) to negotiate these political tensions and their occurrence in urban, social, cultural and material contexts. Examples of linear buildings will be scrutinized so as to understand this urban typology and material experimentations will be conducted to challenge local prefabricated construction methods. In short, confronting the relation of these ‘two Havanas’ not only informs a deeper understanding of local community, but also – as forms of knowledge that can challenge the global status quo – forces a consideration of its technologies and economies.
Unit Work

In Inter Unit 8, we believe that architects’ work is fundamentally intellectual. This does not mean that architects should not master certain techniques to articulate their own ideas properly, but these techniques have to be subordinated to intellectual and conceptual preoccupations which guide them. Following this principle, Inter Unit 8 proposes an intermediate year work based on a compelling argument related to critical questions able to give certain guidance to design work throughout different stages. Thus, the unit-work will be phased throughout a phased learning process to understand the complex mediation between sociopolitical, cultural and urban matters, and most importantly, architecture while acquiring different technical tools and skills. This academic year, the unit work will be focus on designing a range of proposals for a strip-block mediating two different conditions in Havana, Cuba. Each STRIP-BLOCK proposal will be supported by rigorous investigations developed through four main briefs distributed along the three terms (see schedule and next pages). A prolific production of drawings, images, texts and material tests will be encouraged, but only in relation to precise and sophisticate individual arguments.

Design Portfolios and Models

The unit work developed throughout this academic year will be summarized in a A2 MAIN PORTFOLIO, which will prove the ability to consistently relate theoretical enquiries with each design solution. In addition, some LARGE SIZE DRAWINGS (A1 or A0) will be created, mostly in the third term, to clearly represent the spaces generated in each individual proposal and to demonstrate a control on the STRIP-BLOCK design. As the unit has a major focus on materiality, drawings will be complemented by some KEY MODELS describing material experimentations at different scales.

Besides these large format documents and models, THREE SMALL BOOKLETS will be produced. The first booklet will summarize an analysis of different relevant case studies scrutinized during the whole academic year. The second one will include all city observations and specific investigations conducted during the unit trip. Finally, the third one will be a report on housing examples (contemporary and historical) and an investigation on ways of living.

PORTFOLIO CHECKS will occur at the end of each academic term. The laying out of portfolios and booklets is seriously considered by the unit, as they are a fundamental part to communicate individual arguments and ideas. Therefore, a basic knowledge of photographic camera usage to take adequate photographs of models produced along the year.
Unit Methods

History and Theory Seminars
Students joining Unit 8 should have a strong interest in sociocultural, urban and architectural THEORIES, aiming to translate this into specific design proposals. These theories are considered a fundamental part of design development, driving the unit work conceptually. The unit recommends to combine History and Theory work with individual design researches and to find a common conceptual grounding for both. Therefore, a familiarization with the READING LIST provided at the end of this document is mandatory in order to progress within the unit. This means a commitment to read them when each brief requires it. Specific SEMINARS and TALKS related to the unit interests and bibliography provided will be conducted throughout the first and second term of this academic year. These will cover three major questions related to design development: the politics of architectural space and form, an understanding of urban questions within the city of Cuba and their relation to a global condition, and sociocultural conditions that define forms of inhabitation. Tutors and guests will conduct different talks, being the seminar discussion within the unit about specific readings. The aim is to facilitate a clear understanding of key concepts along the year.

Workshops
For helping progress of STRIP-BLOCK designs, there will be two main workshops to learn specific drawing techniques. In the first term there will be a RHINO WORKSHOP to help those who have more difficulties with this tool and some GRASSHOPPER tutorials for those who are high-skilled at it. In the third term a PHOTOSHOP & VRAY WORKSHOP will help to represent spatial atmospheres created.

Tutorials & Unit tutors
Mondays or Tuesdays, and Fridays. Schedule will be announced via email and in http://newformalism.aaschool.ac.uk/

Intermediate Unti 8 tutors are Francisco González de Canales and Nuria Álvarez Lombardero, who are co-founders of Canales & Lombardero and Politics of Fabrication. Francisco studied architecture and theory at ETSA Seville, ETSA Barcelona and Harvard University, and worked for Foster + Partners and Rafael Moneo. He has lectured in England, Chile, Mexico, Spain and the US. Among his recent publications are First Works, Experiments with Life Itself, Rafael Moneo: A Theoretical Reflection through the Professional Practice and Rafael Moneo: Building, Teaching and Writing. Nuria studied architecture and urbanism at ETSA Madrid and the Architectural Association and worked for Machado & Silvetti Associates. She has previously taught at the University of Cambridge, Bartlett, TEC Monterrey and University of Seville. Her work on gender studies in architecture and urban typologies has been widely published, as her award-winning book Arquitectas: Redefining the Practice. Both hold a PhD and are co-authors of Politics and digital fabrication: an ongoing debate (2017) and have been teaching Intermediate Unit 8 since 2009. Any enquire please email to: nuria.lombardero@aaschool.ac.uk; francisco.gonzalezdecanales@aaschool.ac.uk
Unit Trips

Cuba

At the end of the First Term, weeks 11 and 12, we will travel for 10-12 days to HAVANA, capital city of Cuba, and other locations in the island of CUBA to understand local ways of living. Specific visits to local exemplary buildings in Havana will be arranged, such as the exceptional National Art Schools by Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti, Roberto Gottardi, the wavy concrete shells of the Nautic Club and Tropicana Cabaret by Max Borges y Recio, and gigantic Coppelia ice-cream parlour by Mario Girona. Besides these architectural highlights, some visits will be focus on understanding past and new housing examples. This trip will help to get certain knowledge of local architectural culture, material experimentation and ways of living. After the unit trip, some analytical drawings of the architectural examples visited should be elaborated. All documents produced will be compiled in a Unit Booklet or Video that will complete the first hypothesis reflected in London. A conclusion from this portfolio will help later to define both the CONTEXT or location for each building proposal and its programmatic CONTENT.

Readings:

Spain

Depending on work progress and reviews, a second non-compulsory visit of 3 to 5 days to housing examples in Spain will be organize at Second Term Open Week or Spring Break.
Unit Schedule

TERM 1

WORKSHOP 1
Rhino, Grasshopper

January Progress Reviews
11th January

UNIT TRIP
Cuba (10-12 days)

TERM 2

UNIT TRIP
Spain (3-5 days)

Technical Studies Previews
11th & 12th March

Second Year Reviews
11th & 12th March

Third Year Reviews
11th & 12th March

FIELD

Technical Studies Reviews
18th & 19th March

TERM 3

WEATHER
VRay, Photoshop

Second Year Previews
11th & 12th March

Third Year Reviews
18th June

Third Year Reviews
18th June
Shape & Material
Term 1 - Weeks 1-4, Term 2 - Weeks 4-6

Shaping the Strip-Block

As a starting point the unit will explore through models the initial shape of 2,5 Ha plan STRIP-BLOCK (SB). For this aim, this exercise will encompass two main explorations: the overall SB shape and the intricacy of its fragments. Firstly, this exploration will be developed in a purely intuitive manner. Different materials, such as paper, cardboard, cloth, foam, cables, wood and metal sticks, will be initially used to have a range of schematic shapes that will be later used to define formal ideas. After a critical analysis of these first models to find their intrinsic principles, two models of the SB will be constructed individually. The first a 1/500 scale model showing the overall shape and the second a 1/250 model showing in more detail its intricacy. In this second exploration, the experimentation will be focused on material aspects of the proposal. Stiffer materials such as wood, metal, stone, terracotta and plaster are recommended to discover other possibilities for SB schematic designs. Students are invited to feel comfortable with these materials, and learn rules and modelling criteria out of their manipulation.

References: Mathias Goeritz, Manuel Felguerez, Jorge Yazpik, Jorge Oteiza, Eduardo Chillida, Saloua Raouda, Lygia Clark, Gego and Helio Oiticica, among others.

Reference Books:
Form
Term 1 - Weeks 5-9

Finding Formal Principles

Following the definition process of individual proposals, examples of linear urban configurations, such as Pedregulho by A. Reidy, Walden 7 by R. Bofill or L’illa by R. Moneo and M. Solá-Morales, will be scrutinised to understand this urban typology. General aspects defining these different examples form, such as voids, modularity, porosity, repetition and circulation, will be explored by diagrams. As we are working with a building typology with a big presence in the city. Critical studies on bigness and large-scale formal proposals will help to understand STRIP-BLOCK spatial organisation. Consequent findings of previous exercise will be later applied to initial SB proposals. Here, we will study diagrammatically various spatial organizations of medium and small scale buildings to find new compositional solutions for this typology. The initial proposals will evolve through different compositional iterations DEFINING their FORMAL INTRICACY.

Seminar: The Sphere and the Labyrinth (tbc)
Workshop: Rhino and Grasshopper (date tbc)

Readings:
Field Research
Term 1 - Weeks 10-12  Term 2 - Weeks 1-2

Havana Urban Fabric

Before deepening into material aspects of the block the unit should be familiarize with the different formal aspects of Havana City. In groups, the unit will create an archive of drawings in different scales (Large, Medium and Small) with information about the urban grain, voids, density and urban form. A special attention will be given to urban voids, buildings in derelict state and borders generated by tourist-directed developments and local constructions. Readings on Havana city history and an understanding of its complex social structure will be also conducted to learn about its evolution and configuration of its urban fabric.

Seminar: Havana urban history and contemporary configuration (date tbc)

Readings:

Investigating Havana Urban Complexity

A research on Cuban sociocultural, political and economical issues will be conducted before and during the UNIT TRIP and summarized in a collection of maps, diagrams, photographs and video fragments. Before the unit trip, a previous research-planning will be individually defined. Readings, visioning of documentaries and check of references will help in this process. This investigation will have a major focus on tourist temporary inhabitation experience, local ways of living, different cultural customs and spatial characteristics where everyday life takes place. Findings will be expressed in different analytical diagrams and information maps that will be completed after the unit trip. The major aim of this exercise is to build individual political arguments that will define each STRIP-BLOCK proposal CONTEXT and CONTENT.

Reference books for diagrams:

Photography:

Readings:


Politics of the Strip-Block
Term 2 - Weeks 3-7

City Insertions

Urban analysis catalogue and research done in the First Term and Unit trip will help to select a location or CONTEXT for each STRIP-BLOCK (SB) in Havana. Individual proposals can take any location in the city, vacant or not, as their aim is to change existing dynamics. Building on the discussing on formal aspects started in the first term, the politics generated by the SB in the city fabric after placed will be assessed and discussed. Collages and short texts will define each proposal critical position. Afterwards, SB proposals will be interrogated regarding their relationships with its immediate context and the passer-by. The placement of the SB in its particular location will bring the context forward in the progress of design definition. Its capability in specific locations to engage with the city public space will be also put into question.

Readings

Programme
Term 2 - Weeks 8-9 Term 3 - Weeks 1-2

Programmatic Compositions

Field research into political, sociocultural and economic aspects of Havana done in the First Term and Unit Trip will inform the programmatic CONTENT of each STRIP-BLOCK proposals. Responding to the conflict generated by foreign private investments and local public governmental strategies in this city context, the SB proposals will respond with a certain programmatic composition A specific investigation on housing and different ways of living, as they relate to both informal and formal structures, will be done before composing the entrails of the SB All documents will be compiled in a SMALL UNIT BOOKLET.

After having an overall programmatic definition, SB proposal will be interrogated under various questions. Firstly, the PERMEABILITY, POROSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY of the building design in relation to the immediate CONTEXT will be evaluated. As the building linearity generates a continuous contact with the exterior, inside-out and outside-in relations with the street level should be deeply investigated and tested. Architects such as Paul Rudolph, Zaha Hadid and Rafael Moneo were conscious of this difficulty using unusual drawing techniques at their time to represent it. Following their examples, specific graphic representations will be explored to show the relation between inside and outside, and its consequences in the overall shape of the proposal. Then, INTERIOR CONNECTIONS, TRANSITS and DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRIVACY between programmes will be questioned. Collapses between global and local when related to different social communities and intersection of private/public spaces will be interrogated within building interior configurations. Relationships established between different spaces will be expressed through sections and conceptual drawings. These scenarios are also an opportunity to work with different building users, interior environments and the impact of circulation main trajectories. All these drawing explorations will include a more detailed conception of the internal spaces created, their multilayered variables and sensual perception.

Seminars: The habitat in Havana (tbc) & Immediate Politics (tbc)
Workshop: Rhino, VRay and Photoshop (tbc)

Readings:
- Robin Evans: Figures, doors and Passages: in Translation from drawings to buildings,
- Richard Sennet: Building and dwelling : ethics for the city, London : Allen Lane, 2018
Unit Main Bibliography

Material

Form & Politics

Latin-American Art, Architecture and Cities

Havana Field Research

Programme
ABALOS, I.: Good life: a guided visit to the houses of modernity, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2001
Inter Unit 8 understands the Technical Studies (TS) investigation as an integral part of the design process. The unit has been exploring the role of large buildings in the context of contemporary social and economic changes experimented in Latin-American metropolises. In particular, this academic year, the unit is interested in exploring the tension and negotiation between long buildings and Havana city urban fabric. In the Cuban context, this also implies conflicts between permanence and change, public and private, or in other words, among foreign global large architectural schemes, local government urban and housing planning, and communal bottom-up processes. This exploration implies a level of sophistication in the possibilities of stability and responsiveness of the building which requires a certain technical resolution. In short, the unit will work on individual linear block design proposals for 3,000 inhabitants with a footprint between 300 to 500m long and 10 to 50m width in Havana, Cuba. Under this condition, the unit suggests possible TS exploration on MATERIAL, STRUCTURAL AND CONSTRUCTION possibilities drawn from the richness of local culture, and also on NEW ENVIRONMENTAL POSSIBILITIES as Cuba is a tropical country that yearly suffers the consequences of tropical hurricanes; but any other interesting topic related to this typology is welcomed to be discussed.

**Technical Studies**

for 3rd years only - 2nd Term- Option 2

**TS Work & Schedule**

As the unit follows TS Option 2, previews will be in week 9 of Term 2 and final submissions in the first week of Term 3. Students’ work for TS has been structure in different stages along the first two terms that run in parallel to the development of STRIP-BLOCK designs. TS work will start by defining an individual research topic by the first two weeks of the second term, when unit designs are developed enough. Once the topic has been defined, most of TS work will be developed through the term with assistance of the TS tutors. We strongly recommend all students to book in advance tutorials with TS tutors and use these tutorials intensively for the development of their designs. These sessions are an opportunity for the students to be helped and discover the potentials of their projects. Along the term, students will analyse the fundamental aspects of their technical interest, select and analysed relevant case studies, apply their research to the design development, experiment with different possibilities working with models, mock-ups and simulations.

**TERM 1** - W9 - First meeting with TS tutors to understand TS work dynamic and development.

**TERM 2** - W 1-2 DEFINITION. Coherent description of the TS theme according to the development of the design deciding between structural innovations or vertical interfaces definition.

  - W 3-4 COMPREHENSION. Analysis of the fundamental aspects implied and selection and analysis of relevant case studies with the guidance of TS tutors.

  - W 5-6 EXPERIMENTATION. Experimentation with different possibilities and hypothesis as part of the design exploration in its technical aspects

  - W 7-8 APPLICATION. Translation of the acquired knowledge to the reinforcement and development of the unit design

  - W9 TS3 INTERIM JURY OPTION 2

  - W10-11 REVISION. Assimilation of the criticism derived from the interim, improving the necessary aspect for the development of the TS

**TERM 3** - W1 TS3 FINAL SUBMISSION OPTION 2

  - W 2 HIGH PASS, panel and exhibition.
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Hyperbuilding proposal in Lima, Peru, by May Bentourment, Inter 8, 2015-16
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