

ALICE

RESONANCE PLAY

EPFL SECTION D'ARCHITECTURE PREMIERE ANNEE 2025/2026 SEMESTRES 1+2

ALICE ONLINE
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RESONANCE:
TRANSFORMING DESIGN
PRACTICES
EPFL-ENAC-ALICE: *RESONANCE:
FOUNDATIONS—PLANES—
ROOMS—PLAY* (2022-26)

We live in a time when fundamental ecosystem disturbance announces its proximity through ecological precarity, abnormal climatic occurrences, pollution, and extinction (Tsing, 2018). It is essential that architecture adapts to this change and recognizes its complicity by questioning the foundational lessons inherited from our teachers, from history, and our practices as professionals. By questioning if these foundations are adequate. How should we learn from the incredibly rich and abundant environments built up by the many cultures of this planet, both human and non-Shuman? We have a choice and an obligation in how we listen to the world, understand it, re-read it. We have a choice and an obligation as to which values we keep and which we may have to replace.

The ALICE Year One (Y1) program approaches this challenge to architectural practice in two ways. The first is its processual nature. Architecture does not belong to an abstract world conceived as a series of coherent problems, a world where architecture would form objects to solve those pre-defined problems. Rather, architecture is always entangled in questions directly linked to how we understand our existence and therefore emergent in nature. As gestures and inventions, architecture has both cultural and technical meaning. These two aspects of architecture cannot be separated as they are of one and the same nature. The things that we invent and produce to act upon the space and environment that we live in are extensions of our body. They are never static, but are in constant transformation, situated in relation to us as living individuals and societal beings, and in relation to the environment that is itself an evolving eco-system of other living organisms. Being alive, we—humans, plants, other species, our languages, our arts, our society—are intertwined in perpetually evolving relationships. Architecture is therefore both an expression and concretization of the relationships that we build with all life.

The second aspect that we stress in ALICE Y1 is architecture's collective nature. Architecture is never made alone; it is a means of communicating in society and with the environment. The collective languages by which we discuss architecture play a fundamental role in how we conceive of architecture itself. Gestures—the making and the significations that emerge through making—form a cultural and technical language that we craft together. We think, speak, and make architecture together. ALICE Y1 emphasizes the collaborative nature of architecture by making projects as individuals, in pairs, as small groups, as collectives, and as one large group of people. ALICE projects are collaborations with many public partnerships beyond the university. To emphasize the importance of the collective act, we have hypothesized, and succeeded, in thinking, designing, and building projects with 200 people and more, all authors and co-authors, as the culmination of the academic year.

The most important aspect in the ALICE series is however not the final form of the end-of-year construction, but rather the explorative processes of its contributors, and the capacity of an articulated *mise-en-espace* to support the search for new forms of living together, through architecture, we learn. As such, the ALICE series becomes a research agenda through which we not only build, but learn, architecture. Ways to co-inhabit, practicing collective acts, between us and a living environment. Will we, in such initiation, reconsider our individual responsibilities?

Lessons of collective practice require regular periods of reflection: what have we learned—about architecture, about community needs, and the local environment—as we produce architectural projects collectively? How do we evolve this knowledge—for pedagogy, for students and teachers alike—to constantly improve our ways of practicing? After the single-year cycles of INSIDE (2019–2018) and BECOMING (2018–2021) program, we have adjusted the program to allow for a more attentive, continuous, acquisition of knowledge. 'RESONANCE' is a multi-year pedagogical cycle based on the annual stages of FOUNDATIONS (2022-23), PLANES (2023-24), ROOMS (2024-25) and PLAY (2025-26). In May 2023, FOUNDATIONS were constructed that responded to the site and territory; in May 2024, PLANES responded to these foundations taking into consideration how these FOUNDATIONS have weathered and been used. In summer 2025, ALICE Y1 built ROOMS. RIPPONNE—the first only partial realization of an ALICE project—inscribed into the uncertainties of an ongoing construction site, its delays, and an election year approaching. For this academic year we will embrace uncertainty even more: we will open up the questions towards site(s) and meaningful intervention to full negotiation between many. Potential partners who have contacted us, students, the ALICE team, in order to learn with people, animals, and the living in places still to be decided, and with the resources according to the region(s) where we may land.

The term RESONANCE articulates a search for a respectful relationship with our natural world, including a thoughtful use of natural materials, of knowing where they come from and who and what was implicated in their production. It strives for a generous, and more mutually-beneficial, connection with the places where we build, more consideration for how all human structures are transient and will return to the planet at the end of their lives. It assumes that the environment is not a neutral context that we act upon, but a living world that can teach us about its needs if we listen carefully enough to it (Robin Wall-Kimmerer, 2021). While, pedagogically, the emphasis is on the process of imagining, designing, transforming, reconfiguring and constructing, the resulting projects will take on a life of their own after they are complete. The projects become places inhabited, changed, and adapted by the people who gather there. After ALICE leaves, they become spaces re-built and un-built by many.

The terms that we have introduced to structure our first-year program are crafted around a simple idea: they are intended to help constitute a conception of the world, to engage with it, and to situate ourselves in it, both as an individual and as collectives. In the first phase, FRAGMENTS, we begin with measuring as an act of examination of how scalar correlation and infinite proportion relate our bodies simultaneously to environments and to drawings, how we situate ourselves in a place with the living. We then begin our first collective constructions by designing and building 1:1 fragments of hybrid elements on site, partly architectural and partly environmental, that translate gestures into built form and relate our bodies to a place. With ROOMS, students work individually to synthesise the findings of prior findings into an architectural proposal for a 'room' around the Riponne. We end the semester with a workshop, AFFORDANCES. Here we will compose ideas towards meaningful intervention of our ALICE Y1 project(s) for the upcoming summer 2026. Site(s) and places will be open for debate.

In PLAY? collectives of students first propose constellation(s) of group projects relating to the affordances workshop. Affinities between individual projects become the catalyst from which collective projects emerge. These projects will be brought to tectonic articulation, and programmatic and architectural relevance. Students will work with engineers and craftspeople to develop their collective projects and to negotiate amongst one another to create a common project for the future sites. The final phase, PLAY I, emerges as a continuation of this process through collective building on site with our institutional and community partners.

To scaffold these ways of designing, we lean on several concepts that have been developed in collaboration with ALICE's Research and Design Research teams. The first that has emerged is that of *protostructure*, simultaneously concretized as a physically proportionate coordinate system that relates the site to the paper as well as a conceptual support that organizes the ideas of the larger collective. For architecture students, it makes explicit the notion of having to scale from the world to the drawing studio. *Protostructure* is at times made explicit through matrices and at times manifests itself graphically—projecting the site(s) of exploration onto the tables and walls of the ateliers. A second concept to have emerged over the years is that of *protofigure*. If *protostructure* implicitly recognizes sites as the physical, political, and economic realities in which we situate architectures, *protofigure* becomes a conceptual support as we search for the affordances uncovered through acting within our environment. Often articulated via vectors that cross sites and operate in view of new connectivities and potentialities, *protofigure* recognizes that by acting, by architect-ing, we discover and co-create places that hold significance. Materiality is emerging as another concept for the ALICE investigations, understanding our constructions as temporary manifestations of earthly materials that have been moved from, and have required labour in places beyond the sites upon which we build.

Through this pedagogical approach, we hope and believe that such an architecture can shift values. Architects are not only problem-solvers; they have the potential to relocate values—from economic profit to an ecology of space and of contribution. We continue to learn how to relate architecture to the ground; how to situate ideas and spatial constructs, not only in society, but also in relation to life in general, to our resources on this planet; how to root architecture, how we let it live, how we let it relate. It is in the spirit of ecological and social urgency that we propose to work on values other than efficiency, profitability or expertise. We initiate architecture as a process—architect-ing—and not a thing. Architect-ing would be the *thinking* and *making* of space according to intrinsic principles of contributing and caring. These acts imply values that change, that are based on both the individual and collective desire of experts and non-experts alike.

ALICE, July 2025

It is here that such architectures may embark upon other routes. They may emerge not as rigidly ordained and easily legible objects, packaged in eloquent speech, or used as functional machines in view of a pre-determined purpose. Spaces may rather take on a strange form that resemble organisms like whole cities, with their many imperfections and inconsistencies. They may become constructs embodying collective histories of deliberation, rather than embodiments of the architectural canon. They may, at times, sound like symphonies—loud reverberations in the streets followed by quiet whispers in the night. They may be uncomfortably polyphonic (Tsing, 2018). Grounds, plants, structures, rhythms, details, and materials may all evolve into new forms in the interplay with many, and in continual, ongoing deliberation. It is the open field of potential that draws out new collective ideas to be brought into material life through open operations, intrinsically coordinated.

Such an architecture is again immersive: it will respond to the experiential comprehension of the places within which we live. Such an architecture is also a political practice: the way we design space reconfigures matter, places, people, and biological life. To act upon space is a collective responsibility. We must therefore, first and foremost, question the individual values that exercise control in these actions and look for ways to allow collective values to emerge.