The Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies  
American University of Beirut  
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Urbicide and the Arrangement of Violence in Syria

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Thursday, September 10, 2015 at 5:00 pm  
College Hall, B1

Abstract: This presentation addresses the widespread destruction of the built environment in Syria by exploring the use of the concept “urbicide” and its limitations. It shows how the concept can also include a struggle over urban arrangements that give a provisional order to urban life. This struggle can entail destruction or construction of the built environment, but it can also involve processes in between those poles, such as granting or denying access to infrastructure like electricity, water systems, or roads. Further, the presentation illustrates how, through the violent imposition of an urban arrangement, urbicide can paradoxically be generative of new spaces, such as a utilized subterranean environment or new infrastructural configurations. To illuminate the distinct social-spatial formations urbicide engenders, it is imperative to consider not only the area of these arrangements, but their volume as well. To consider this, a shift is required from thinking only in terms of surfaces and areas to also thinking three-dimensionally in terms of height and depth. Considering how control of the skies or subterranean space forms urban arrangements provides a more expansive understanding of urbicide.

Bio: Deen Sharp is a PhD candidate in the Earth and Environmental Sciences program, specialized in Geography, at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Previously, he was a freelance journalist and consultant based in Beirut. He has published in Jadaliyya, the Arab Studies Journal and the Guardian. He is co-editor (with Claire Panetta) of Beyond the Square: Urbanism and the Arab Uprisings (Forthcoming: Urban Research). His current research project is on real estate and the corporation in Beirut.