

EPIC ARCHITECTURE

Barcelona and the Theatre of
Estrangement

MIT Architecture, Opt Studio 4.154

Critic: Cristina Goberna Pesudo

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Room : 3-415
Time : Th, F, 1-6pm

*Un théâtre est d'abord un instrument
avant d'être un bâtiment et
éventuellement un monument urbain.*

Epic Architecture: Barcelona and the Theatre of Estrangement

Taking Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre as primary reference, *Epic Architecture* aims to encourage architects to address current polemical issues from the discipline, the city and beyond. The idea is to create architectural artefacts that more than resolve problems render them visible, more than show good intentions rise questions and instead of being pragmatic are designed to create an estrangement effect, that is, moments of revelation that will transform their users in critical observers of architecture and reality.

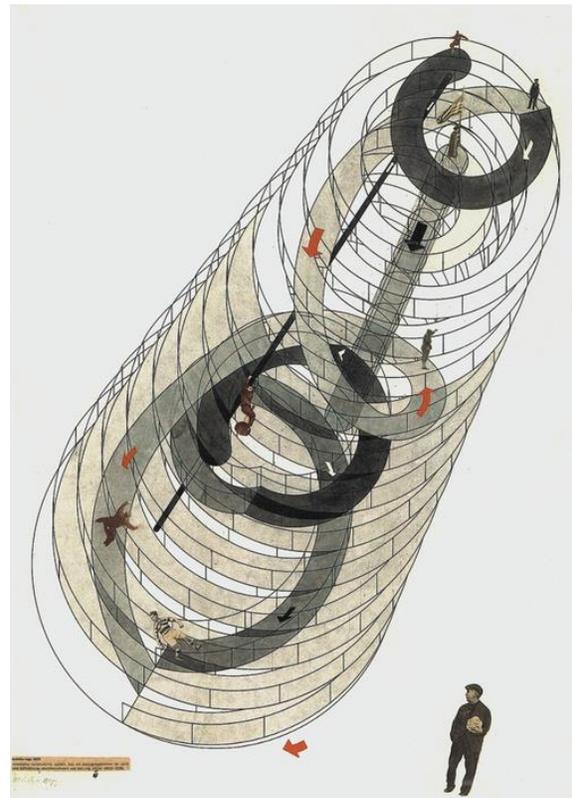
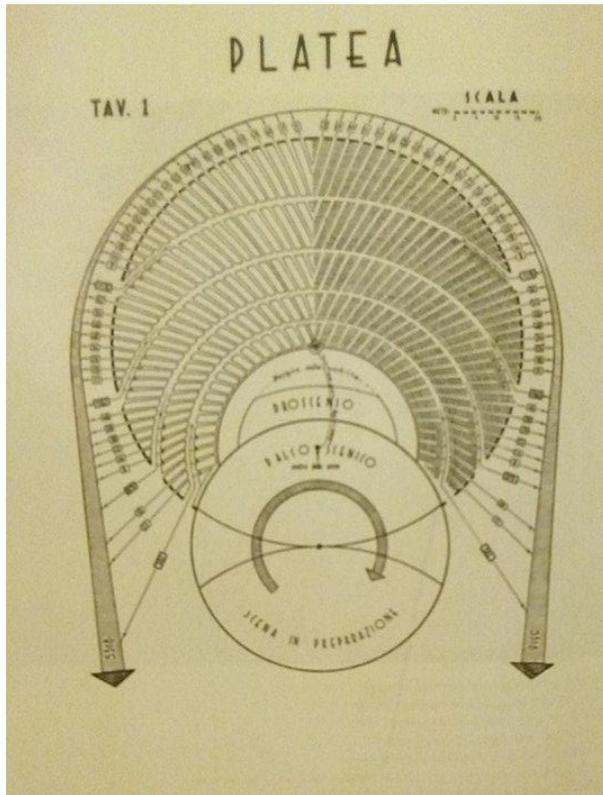
Since its invention, theatre has served as a mirror for society. Across cultures, playwrights have seized theatre's subversive potential as an antidote to ruling authorities and subversive forms. Theatre spaces had a fascinating evolution changing in size, visibility, respectability, capacity, monumentality etc. as political, social and cultural conditions advanced around the world.

Barcelona has an exceptionally rich culture and tradition of theatre, from opera palaces as el Liceu to cabarets in the former red district of El Raval, popular venues in El Paral.lel or avant-garde experimental venues from the 60's on. But we can say today that Barcelona is the stage of the world for other reasons. In the last six months it had suffered terrorist attacks, the raise of nationalism, police violent repression, the imprisonment and exile of its political representatives. One feature that characterizes theatre and its architecture in general across the centuries is that it operates as a social condenser or space of cultural friction as well as a disciplinary thermometer, and therefore as a potential agent for provocation. In the current atmosphere of political turmoil, this studio explores the design of theatres in contested areas of Barcelona. Taking as precedent the local tradition of drama in its varying formats we will propose *Replicas* or *Critical Typological Corrections* to historical theatres of the architectural avant-gardes from the XXth and XXIth centuries that will address current architectural, cultural and political affairs from Barcelona.



Architectural Agonism

This studio explores the potential of agonism in architecture to open unexpected paths for the identification and confrontation of current polemics in the field. Its final aim is to produce architecture that operates as a double (secret) agent working for opposite ideological agendas. The term *Agonism* comes from the Greek *Agos* that means fight. The current high-speed consumption of architectural imaginary entails the naturalization of issues that could otherwise be publicly contested. This domestication of architectural polemics and the general disinterest in discussion that it produces hinders the debates that could potentially generate advancement in the field. From the 20's avant-garde movement's trust in architecture as agent for revolution, to the 70's sense of disbelief, the complicated relation of architecture and class struggle has been a recurrent source of discussion that seemed to be dormant for the past decades. Yet movements as the *Arab Spring*, the uprisings in Greece, *Indignados* in Spain or *Occupy Wall Street* in New York evidenced a remarkable absence of architecture and architects—especially as producers of representation— that makes urgent the re-evaluation of architecture's participation as a potential agent of provocation or change. Assuming that current architecture doesn't seem to be interested, able or accepted in frontline confrontations of dissent, questions emerge: Could it act as an infiltrated agent working with and against opposite ideological agendas? This course vindicate the role of the architect as a *Public Intellectual*, that is, a designer that not only is actively involved in discussions about the construction of cities, but also takes critical positions in controversies that inform the evolution in the design of architectural typologies.



Modus Operandi

This class is based in principals of critical pedagogy, that is, the students will become aware of power structures and will develop critical thinking skills through intense graphic experiments. There will be three parallel lines of investigation:

The design of a theatre building, the construction of a strong, controversial and sophisticated critical architectural argument and an intensive investigation on architectural representation through drawings, models, films, texts and oral presentation. The class will be organized in *Research and Design Specialized Groups* that will operate daily in intensive production workshops with weekly pin ups, presentations, roundtables and constant explanation of their advances in orchestrated games and open discussions.

The participants of this studio will be members of the ***Epic Architecture Theatre Company*** that will produce a theatre play in order to present the class' final results during our Final Review.

Exercise

This studio will focus in the study and replica of a number of radical theatre buildings designed by the architects of the avant-gardes of the XXth Century (mainly Russian constructivism, fascist Italy, Weimar Republic, the 60's) proposing their relocation and critical typological modifications to their design so that they address urgent political, social

and cultural issues related to a city that is currently a stage of the world: Barcelona, Spain. In order to do so, a research fieldtrip to Barcelona will take place in March.

The production will be divided in different steps:

- 1-The study, selection and redrawing of one theatre from the Avant-gardes (individual)
 - 2-The study of the political, social, cultural, architectural and theatre related situation in Barcelona today (teams of two students)
 - 3-The selection of one controversy/urgent topic to address about Barcelona today (teams)
 - 4-The selection of one of the Avant-Garde theatre developed in chapter 1 in order to address the chosen controversy in Barcelona.
 - 5-The critical typological modifications of the chosen theatres in order to address the selected topic.
 - 6-The writing and production of a theatre that will present the class results
- Material to produce: Research, drawings, model(s), manifesto, film, theatre play.

