

# The Urban Imaginary Project

## Barcelona's Moveable Feast: a Post-Crash Urban Imaginary

Columbia University GSAPP, Advance Studio

Fall 2014, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 2:00-6.00 PM

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*Imaginaries are historical constructions defined by the interactions of subjects in society...and the set of values, institutions, laws and symbols that are common to a particular social group.<sup>1</sup>*

Jean-Paul Sartre



### *Architectural Agonism. The Construction of Urban Imaginaries*

This studio belongs to a collection of courses that explore the potential of *Agonism* to opening unexpected paths for the identification, confrontation and discussion of current polemics in architecture. It takes architecture as a *Semi-Autonomous* field, studying not only its disciplinary advances but also their reverberation in society at large. It vindicates the role of the architect as a *Public Intellectual*, that is, a designer that participates in the public debates that shape the city, someone able to risk his or her own position by questioning institutions, received ideas or the general status quo.

***The Urban Imaginary Project* studies the construction of the desired idea of cities that their inhabitants consciously produce—through their urban configuration, policies, disciplinary discourse and certain architectural typologies—before and after relevant events in history such as revolutions, wars, openings to the market or economic crashes among others.** The concept of *The Imaginary* has been studied by authors like Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault or Cornelius Castoriadis. Charles Taylor defines *Modern Social Imaginaries* as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with each other, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underline these expectations”<sup>2</sup>. Yet if we talk about *Urban Imaginaries* we could say that they are the construction of the chosen idea of cities that their inhabitants intentionally produce, a system conformed by social relations, architectural operations, urban policies and the ideology behind them.

<sup>1</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie Phénoménologique de l'Imagination*, Paris: Gallimard, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2004

## ***Spain, a Post-Crash Urban Imaginary***

In few places the 2008 financial crisis hit harder than in Spain. A country whose architectural quality is highly recognized and was the pioneer in often questionable city branding by star-architects —Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona by Richard Meier, The City of Culture in Santiago de Compostela by Peter Eisenman etc.—needs to reinvent its *Urban Imaginary* model. A country with one of the most complete architectural professional educational systems sees a whole generation looking for opportunities abroad. A land with a deep tradition in the design of public space, can barely fund it any longer. A place, with the best quality housing projects and the lowest kind of speculative real state products has thousands of empty dwellings and an intense social drama of foreclosures. However, as Spain seems to drown in its worst economic crisis since its civil war, it is lately the focus of attention given that it seems it has turned its architectural and urban problems in opportunities for reinvention.

Barcelona is the perfect example of a city that has constantly reinvented itself through diverse *Urban Imaginaries*. These images were executed through big scale events as the 1929 World Fair (the modern city), 1992 Olympics (the sports city), 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures (the culturally diverse city) or long term operations as the construction of a fake gothic quarter (medieval city), the recuperation of the *Barceloneta* neighborhood (the seaside city). Yet, the imaginary of Barcelona that might remain in our subconscious is that of a city driven by culture, pleasure and a celebratory spirit.

## ***Barcelona Party Scene, Controversies and Possibilities***

In times of economic depression there are two things that flourish: the party scene and the banks. Following the tradition of decadent hedonism after a crash that other cities encountered in the past as Berlin in the 20's or New York in the 70's, Barcelona's parties are in excellent shape: From the past cafes, absinthe dens, cabarets, prostitution houses, dance halls or music halls to the recent rooftop parties, transvestite shows, bars, cocktail places, electronic music festivals or the ancient traditional seasonal festivities of fire, music and street theatre. The popularity of celebratory spaces contrast with its bad reputation among politicians and designers. Never a typology of spaces have been as ignored by architecture as loved by the public, who inhabit them with a fanatic sense of amusement. Yet, the scale of the Barcelona's *Fiesta Scene* its jeopardizing its image. There are current constant street demonstrations in the city against the drunk tourism that's fills its most popular neighborhoods. The citizens are finally rebelling against the official Urban Imaginary created by the government.

## ***An International Consulting Agency of Secret Agents Infiltrated in Barcelona's Party Scene***

This studio will operate as an international urban consulting agency, that is, as a group of experts or independent observers able to deliver a diagnosis and potential future *Urban Imaginary* based in urban configurations, programmatic strategies and architectural operations.

We will travel to Barcelona and briefly to Madrid during the third week of September. Our base of operations will be in MAIO headquarters in Gracia neighborhood: An architectural office, gallery and soon research center and the editors of the magazine *Quaderns de Arquitectura i Urbanismo*. Our daily schedule will include field work at night, group studio, work, the *Party Lecture Series* with Santiago Cirugeda (Urban Recipes, Sevilla), Ivan Lopez Munera (art historian, journalist and curator, Madrid and New York), Pol Eteve (Architectural Association, London), Daniel Fernandez Pascual (Cooking Sections, London and OfficeUS, Biennale de Venezia), Urtzi Grau (Director of Master of Advance Architectural Design UTS, Sydney and Co-Director of Fake Industries Architectural Agonism, New York), MAIO (Barcelona), AIXOPLUC (Reus) among others; visits to specific actors in the reinvention of the architectural practice after the crash (Ethel Baraona, PKMN, Zuloark etc...) and *Vermut Interviews Series* with different guests with roles in the construction of Barcelona's Party Urban Imaginary.

## ***Critical Pedagogy. Collaboration versus Competition***

This studio will work with a methodology based in Critical Pedagogy and in the idea *of less competition and more collaboration* between its participants. The students will be trained to develop independent critical skills and work agonistically, that is, taking radical positions and defending them with their designs, graphically, orally and in the general construction of strong and well-studied arguments. Approximately once a week the class will celebrate pedagogical experimental sessions that will include: acting workshops, a wide range of time constrained games/exercises, exhibitions of their work, dates with a wide range of books, excursions to architecture and art galleries, lectures, debates etc. The students will develop in parallel and with the same intensity their designs, a personal research in architectural representation, exhibition design skills, model making, oral presentation abilities, the construction of arguments and how to become a critic in an architectural jury.

**The students that are interested in this studio should quickly investigate if they require a visa in order to travel to Spain, and in that case, if it is possible for them to acquire it in approximately one week and a half. In the next page you will find a list of nationalities that do NOT require a visa to enter Spain.**

IF YOUR  
HOME COUNTRY  
**IS NOT** IN THIS LIST,  
YOU **WILL NEED** A VISA  
TO GO TO SPAIN:

### **A**

ALBANIA  
ANDORRA  
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA  
ARGENTINA  
AUSTRALIA  
AUSTRIA

### **B**

BAHAMAS  
BARBADOS  
BELGIUM  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA  
BULGARIA  
BRAZIL  
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

### **C**

CANADA  
CHILE  
COSTA RICA  
CROATIA  
CYPRUS  
CZECH REPUBLIC

### **D**

DENMARK

### **E**

EL SALVADOR  
ESTONIA

### **F**

FINLAND  
FRANCE

### **G**

GERMANY  
GREECE  
GUATEMALA

### **H**

HONDURAS  
HONG KONG  
HUNGARY

### **I**

ICELAND  
IRELAND  
ISRAEL  
ITALY

### **L**

LATVIA  
LITHUANIA  
LUXEMBOURG

### **J**

JAPAN

### **M**

MACAU  
MACEDONIA  
MALAYSIA  
MALTA  
MAURITIUS  
MEXICO  
MOLDOVA  
MONACO  
MONTENEGRO

### **N**

NEW ZEALAND  
NETHERLANDS  
NICARAGUA  
NORWAY

### **P**

PANAMA  
PARAGUAY  
POLAND  
PORTUGAL

### **R**

ROMANIA

### **S**

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS  
SAN MARINO  
SERBIA  
SEYCHELLES  
SINGAPORE  
SLOVAKIA  
SLOVENIA  
SPAIN  
SOUTH KOREA  
SWEDEN  
SWITZERLAND

### **T**

TAIWAN

### **U**

UNITED KINGDOM  
URUGUAY  
USA

### **V**

VATICAN CITY  
VENEZUELA