



Photo: Ivan Nemec

4.s24 Special Subject: Architecture Studies — Utopias, Camps, and the Architecture of War: The City of Terezín, Czech Republic

Instructor: Rafi Segal

Credits: 3-0-9 G

Schedule: R 9-11 Room 41-5510

Utopias, Camps, and the Architecture of War, is proposed as a research- design workshop that examines the layered histories of Terezín to think critically about how architecture participates in the making of trauma, memory, and recovery. Conceived as a fortified utopian city and later transformed into a Nazi concentration camp, Terezín embodies the shifting functions of urban space and architecture as both agent and witness. Its bastions, mounds, and urban fabric are not merely remnants but active carriers of political and historical meaning. By tracing the trajectory from fortification to camp, from architecture of war to the ongoing dilemmas of inhabitation, memorialization, restoration and reconstruction, this workshop foregrounds the ethical and epistemological challenges of engaging with sites where architecture itself was complicit in violence.

This workshop class is offered as collaborative project together with: Czech Technical University in **Prague**, Czech Republic (lead by Veronika Sindlerova); TU **Liberec**, Czech Republic (lead by Radek Kolarik, Iva Dvorakova) TU **Dresden**, Germany (lead by Angela Mensing-de Jong); Technion -Israel Institute of Technology, **Haifa**, Israel (lead by Eliyahu Keller, Aaron Sprecher).

The class will sponsor a trip to the Czech Republic (flight & accommodation) to take place between October 9 – 14, 2026, including participation in a two-day conference: Oct. 12-13, of ongoing studies undertaken on this subject by our collaborating universities. On this trip the MIT class will work together with the students and researchers from the Technion and TU Dresden in conducting field research on site, learning first-hand the physical and historical conditions that have shaped the town of Terezin.



Photo: Ivan Nemecek

Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit, 1944

Media as war propaganda: Following the deportation of Danish Jews to Terezin camp (referred to as Theresienstadt) in the mid 1940s, the Danish Red Cross asked to visit the camp to examine its living conditions. Months in advance of the visit the Nazi authorities forced the Jewish prisoners to alter the camp and ‘beautify’ certain facades and spaces that were to be part of a carefully choreographed and staged route intended to create a false impression of normalized life, concealing the purpose of the camp as a transfer station to send Jews to death camps. On June 23, 1944, representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Danish Red Cross, and the Danish government visited Terezin. The international inspectors were lead in a fixed route of staged normalcy and left with positive impression. The event was later followed by a propaganda film created by the SS, titled *Theresienstadt: Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*, that showcased a “model ghetto” and humane image to the world - a false image of life in Terezin.

Utilizing archival footage, 3D scanning on site, 3D modeling, the class will work collectively to virtually reconstruct the spaces of this visit. In an uncanny juxtaposition of realities and mediums, this event exposed the power of architecture to reveal and conceal at the same time. Supposedly revealing normalcy of urban life, while perfectly masking that same reality – a theatrical set constructed of and onto the same reality it wishes to present and hide. A play in which prisoners become actors of themselves leading a life of safety in the same space and time in which they are struggling to stay alive.

Schedule

9/10 Overview of class format, objectives, scope and schedule. (Final decision on participants by 9/11)

Assigned readings & films: history of Terezin

9/17 Film screening & discussion

9/24 Meeting with Technion research group (over zoom)

10/9 – 10/14 Trip to the Czech Republic:

Work will commence Friday Oct. 9 at 10am, Oct. 9-11 site visits and field work in Terezin with Technion and TU Dresden students.

Oct. 11 tour of Prague

Mon 10/12 – Tues 10/13 conference in Terezin.

10/22 Meeting with Technion / Dresden group (over zoom)

11/12 Work session at MIT

11/19 Final review

Readings, Reports, Films:

To be shared during first class.

EVALUATION & GRADING

Grades for this class will be P/F and represent the balance of attendance, participation, engagement in class discussions, incorporating feedback, completion of assignments, individual growth over the semester, and quality of work produced in the class, with an emphasis on clarity and originality.

COURSE CULTURE AND ABSENCE POLICY

Work in the course will be built sequentially. The course necessitates your regular attendance and requires that deadlines are consistently met. Group reviews are collective for a reason, as each of you has something to gain from your peers. Therefore, attendance for the duration of all formal reviews is mandatory.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and knowledge. At MIT, students will be given unusual opportunities to do research and undertake scholarships that will advance knowledge in different fields of study. Students will also face many challenges. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute's policies regarding academic integrity, which is available in Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students. <http://integrity.mit.edu>