

Worldbuilding as Critical Architectural Pedagogy

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Abstract : This paper discusses worldbuilding as a pedagogical approach to the first-year architectural design studio. The studio ran for three consecutive terms between 2016-2018. Taking its departure from the fifty-five city narratives in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, students collectively designed in a "nowhere" space where intersecting and diverging narratives could be played out. Along with Calvino, students navigated between three main exercises and their imposed limits to develop architectural insight at three scales simulating the considerations of architectural practice: detail, building, and city. The first exercise asked each student to design and model a ruin based on randomly assigned incongruent fragments. Each student was given one plan fragment and two section fragments from different Renaissance Treatises. The students were asked to translate these in alternating axonometric projection and model-making explorations. Although the fragments themselves were imposed, students were free to interpret how the drawings fit together by imagining new details and atypical placements. An undulating terrain model was introduced in the second exercise to ground the worldbuilding exercises. Here, students were required to negotiate with one another to design a city of ruins. Free to place their models anywhere on the site, the students were restricted by the negotiation of territories marked by other students and the requirement to provide thresholds, open spaces, and corridors. The third exercise introduced new life into the ruined city through a series of design interventions. Each student was assigned an atypical building program suggesting a place for an activity, human or nonhuman. The atypical nature of the programs challenged the triviality of functional planning through explorations in spatial narratives free from preconceived assumptions. By contesting, playing out, or dreaming responses to realities taught in other coursework, this third exercise actualized learnings that are too often self-contained in the silos of differing course agendas. As such, the studio fostered an initial worldbuilding space within which to sharpen sensibility and criticality for subsequent years of education.

Keywords : architectural pedagogy, critical pedagogy, Italo Calvino, worldbuilding

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