

An Ambiguous Utopia: Experiments in Collective Form

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Winter Term 2, 2023/24
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Image: Maps of the two planets in Ursula Le Guin's 1974 science fiction novel, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*.

Description

This studio is guided by two simple principles. 1) That architecture is always formal. 2) That form is always ideological.

Beautiful and empowering form has the capacity to raise the human spirit and enhance community. This studio, at its most basic, is aimed at helping students become expert formalists. To shape movement. To position light. To offer material depth.

At the same time, the studio asks students to consider the political and ideological aspects of formal decisions. We will be seeking, together, formal conditions that enhance community bonds and build resilience.

We will be collectively exploring the formal qualities of position, proportion, shape, dimension, texture, colour, and sequence to help build a tomorrow that is better than today. In a sense, this is a little bit like architectural science fiction. World making through form.

Project & General Methodology

The entire studio is devoted to one continuous formal investigation that results in a design for a public building on a site in east Vancouver. This singular journey is divided into three parts that iteratively build upon each other.

Students can choose whether to work as individuals or in pairs for the full duration of the term.

Schedule

Part 1: Close Encounters

Duration: Approximately 4 weeks

The first part of the studio is devoted to experiencing, learning, and experimenting with instances of great design in and around Vancouver in a direct, embodied fashion.

Students will be provided with a list of buildings/spaces from which they are asked to select a project to work on. As a group, we will visit these projects and try to become closely acquainted with their qualities. We will sit quietly within them. We will walk around and through them. We will discuss them.

Each student or pair of students will analyse their chosen project through drawing, digital modelling, and physical modelling. Emphasis will be given to the importance of iterative/investigative experimentation through physical modelling. Students are asked to find elements from within their chosen projects to 'sample' and 'remix' in the creation of a new spatial condition. Part 1 will culminate in the creation of a physical model that represents this new spatial condition that has creatively emerged from the analysis of found conditions.

Part 2: Expanded Horizons

Duration: Approximately 4 weeks

After having the completed Part 1, students will be given a new list of outstanding buildings/spaces from which they are asked to select a second project to work on. Only this time the projects will be from around the world.

While we cannot visit these buildings firsthand, drawings and photographs will serve as the base material of engagement. The analytical and creative operations of Part 1 will be repeated with the newly chosen building. Part 2 will culminate in the creation of a physical model that represents this new spatial condition that has creatively emerged from the analysis of found conditions within this international precedent.

Part 3: New Synthesis

Duration: Approximately 6 weeks

The final phase of the studio takes the formal insights and inventions of your earlier work and combines them into a new building design. One can consider that this building, in formal terms, is the 'love child' of your work in Part 1 and Part 2.

The class will be given an approximately 10 square block area in east Vancouver, within which each individual or pair will choose a specific location to site their building.

Students are free to determine the exact program based on their interests and formal experiments. But, the program in a general sense, must be public. It could be, for example: A cultural centre, a recreation centre, or a community garden, kitchen, and dining hall and it could even incorporate public, non-profit housing.

The goal is for students to arrive at schematically resolved building designs that are inventive, thoughtful, and calibrated approaches to shape, position, dimension, material quality, and light in the service and celebration of shared human experience.