Architectural Ghosts: Storytelling & the Architectural Imaginary

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‘Architectural Ghosts’ proposes architecture as a series of eleven speculative cities that function as characters engaged in a theatrical masque set in contemporary Rome, Italy.

A re-imagining of the novel Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino, this project utilizes narrative storytelling as architectural medium, method and site. The framework of the original novel was analyzed, collapsed and re-written in a contemporary context. The project offers a critique of the use of the novel in architectural education and challenges the marginalized role of women presented in both the original text and throughout much of architectural history.

Calvino used cities as metaphors for women conquered by powerful male explorers. In this project, each city was designed and illustrated relative to site, theme and the work of a prominent female storyteller, philosopher, or architect as a way to presence their ghosts. Much of the research was oriented around unearthing the accomplishments of women engaged in a partnership wherein a male counterpart received credit for much of the work. The plot is structured by an overarching conversation between a female narrator and a male character. Desire for what her voice brings into being creates a tension that drives the entirety of the plot, representation and sequencing of architectural experiences. Eventually, it is revealed that she herself is also a city; she too is a ghost catalyzed by architectural and phenomenological experiences that imply presence.

This project explores ‘architectural ghosts’ as allegory for the presence of the absence of presence that reveals architecture as performance. The universal gap between lived experience and representation is explored as primary function of the paradox of human desire. Literary narrative is utilized as structure for the gap of philosophical lack and as active agent for the discrete, conditional alignments that generate and inform productive encounters with the architectural imaginary. The masque, as performance between complex characters, reveals the individual and collective nature of architecture, cities and the stories we tell about both.

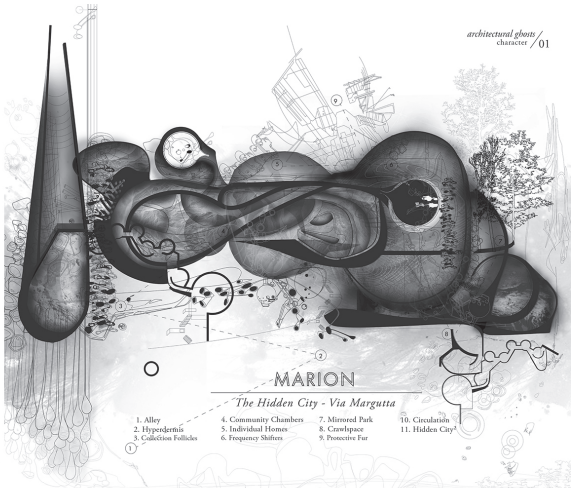
ARCHITECTURAL GHOSTS

A Masque for the Architectural Imaginary

'Architectural Ghosts' is a re-imagining of Italo Calvino's seminal work, *Invisible Cities*, as a proposal for eleven speculative cities that function as characters in an architectural masque deeply embedded in the historical and cultural imaginary of Rome, Italy.

- Eleven Stories (210 pages), 144 photographs, Eleven Speculative

architectural ghosts / character / 01



MARION

The Hidden City - Via Margutta

1. Alley
2. Hyperdermis
3. Collection Follicles
4. Community Chambers
5. Individual Homes
6. Frequency Shifters
7. Mirrored Park
8. Crawlspace
9. Prosective Fur
10. Circulation
11. Hidden City[1]

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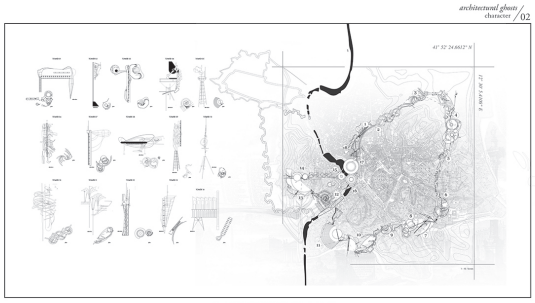


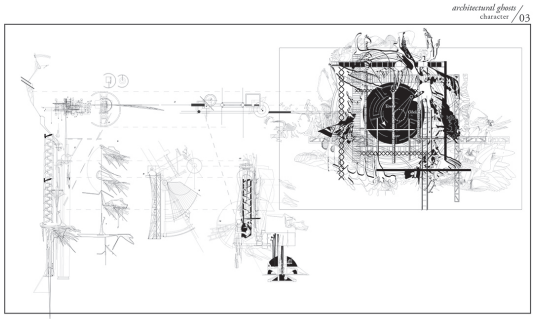
SCHEHEREZADE

The Continuous City - Mura Aurelia

The Infinite Loop :18 Hinges & Towers

1. Head & Quarters
2. Vertebrae
3. See of Justice
4. Emotional Topographies
5. Museum of Safekeeping
6. Timekeeper's Piece
7. Infinite Market
8. Preservation Facility
9. Theater of Loss
10. Crematorium
11. Room of Words
12. Political Parlour
13. Bath House
14. Sleeping Chambers
15. Collection of Old Time
16. University
17. Zoo of Life Forms
18. Quarries & Head

architectural ghosts / character / 03



HANNAH

The City of Names - Columna Trajana

Obelisk, Tower, Labyrinth & Scar

1. Inscription Switchboard
2. Platform for the Muses
3. Switchboard Hinge
4. Needle Mechanism
5. Air Intake Funnel
6. Bed of Feathers & Wax
7. (Bed Becoming Table)
8. Mechanical Shell
9. Exterior Wing
10. Whispering Room
11. Seamstress Chambers
12. Watchtower
13. Procedure
14. Spiral Core

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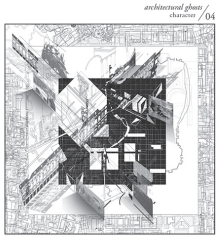

DENISE

City of Signs - Cinecitá

Signifier/Signified Axonometric Collapse

1. The City of Signs is constructed of absolute truths that are lies; falsehoods not in words, but in things.
2. The City of Signs is both truths & lies. Falsehoods are in both words & things.
3. Though you have passed through her gates; the city is not here.
4. She never was.

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SIMONÉ

City of the Sky - Parco Gianicolo

Identities

1. Soft Topographies
2. Soils Laboratory
3. Air Laboratory
4. Observation Deck
5. Lockbox
6. Seven Programs
i. Wood Tower
ii. Citrine Campanile
iii. Obelisk of Internal Rhythms
iv. Observatory for Day & Night
v. Garden of Trim Hedges
vi. Amphitheater of Mirrors
vii. Lanterning for the Sick

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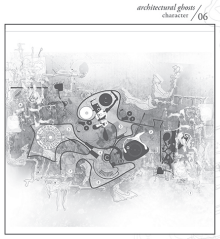

POLIA

City of Desire - Villa Borghese

Seductive Plots

SEQUENCE	CONSEQUENCE
1. Hedge	1. Flirtation
2. Forecourt	2. Foreplay
3. Grotto	3. Purification
4. Throat	4. (The Fall)
5. Boudoir	5. Desire Maintained
6. Back Garden	6. Search for Beloved

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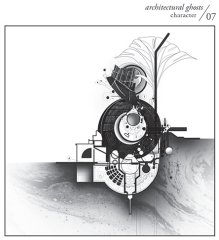

SILVIA

City of Eyes - The Pantheon

Occulus Ciphers

1. Eyes that see
2. Eyes that do not see
3. Vaults for the Collection and Storage of Images

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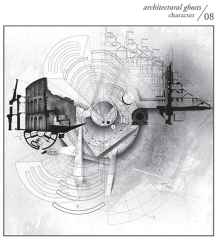

HÉLOÏSE

City of Memory - Flavian Ampitheater

Memory Theater

1. City on the Horizon
2. Threshold
3. Hypogeum
4. Memory Theater
5. Oldest Histories
6. Frontal Cortex

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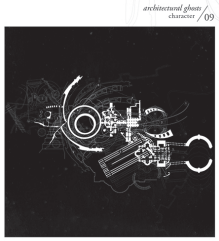

MOMOYO

City of the Dead - Piazza San Pietro

Acts of the Apostles

1. Tomb for the Beloved
2. Necropolis
3. Circus
4. Shadow
5. Original Footprint
6. Plan (New Basilica)
7. Cremation Ovens
8. The Great Bell
9. Double Ringed

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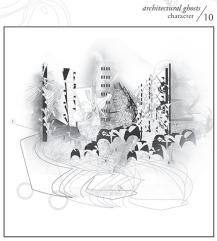

SAPPHO

Trading City - Campo dei Fiori

Pavillions

1. The Aventine
2. The Caelian
3. The Capitoline
4. The Esquiline
5. The Palatine
6. The Quirinial
7. The Viminal

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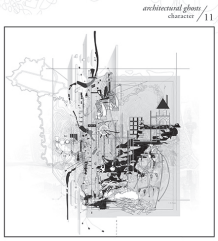

PHILLIPA

The Thin City - Porta Maggiore

Characters

1. Tomb of Marcus Virgilius Eurysaces
2. Offices of the Subversive
3. Portus / Hubs for Information Exchange
4. Lagoon for data mining
5. Apartments
6. The Well

I. (Frame 01)

L' Linizio / The Beginning

The Mapmaker stands at the center of the city's third oldest bridge looking down at the rivers of ink that snake across his weathered hands. The faded tributaries carve thin ravines across this landscape of flesh; a lifetime reservoir of cities and traces. In focus beyond his hands, the Tiber river softly glides through the night, glossy skin reflecting the serene image of a sleeping city. The water slips underneath this image - enchanting and alive.

The Mapmaker tries not to believe all of the extraordinary tales that the Storyteller weaves into his ears. Her voice conjures exotic, improbable places - cities of which no maps can be made - where architecture is spun from spider webs, clouds and dust. The stories seize him; vertigo of neurotic obsession that he does not understand. The Mapmaker tries not to believe everything that the Storyteller whispers into existence, but he cannot make himself stop listening. Her voice possesses him; gentle scalpel blade that slips through his flesh and lays him bare with bones exposed and vulnerable in the night. Her absence lures him down the winding streets and across bridges as he searches, desperate for her to explain more of these cities that he cannot seem to conjure alone. The thread of her voice carries a small and unforgiving truth that he cannot seem to ignore. In the thickness of nights such as this one, the Storyteller's cities do not feel quite so far away.

In this soundless night, standing at the center of a bridge in the heart of Rome, looking down at the traces tattooed into his hands, he finds not one, but two glittering cities looking back. These bittersweet gloves quietly erase the line between earth and sky and pry open the night. He is haunted here in a waking dream; her voice a bewitching, nocturnal spector that does not leave, even when he closes his eyes.

MARION

The Hidden City - Via Margutta

The best place to hide is usually in plain sight. It is precisely the place where one has assumed that something should not be hidden, which ends up being the best place for it. This is the one place that no one is expecting to find that which is hidden or hiding.

The same is true for cities, despite the complexities involved. To reach the Hidden City, head south on the eastmost main road off of the Piazza del Popolo. There is an alleyway on your left entirely overgrown with foliage and vines. The passageway is tiny and charming. The architecture of secrecy is a delightfully colorful world pieced together out of fragments of crumbling plaster facades, chipped window sills, thick curtains of vines, silvered cobblestones, and the creeping sense that you should move and speak delicately here.

The vines are adorned with thin metal filaments that chime softly in the slow breeze. Not one of the doors along this street opens and the windows too, are sealed shut and covered with mirrors. The vibrant facade that stretches down this street is a mask for the Hidden City that weaves behind it. The residents of the Hidden City, if they are about, appear to float from one side of the path to another. Gentle phantoms who trail their fingers through the trellis, sway slightly with the chimes, arc their faces in slow, peculiar angles, they appear to vanish abruptly, slipping into the hidden air of the city beyond.

If you examine the trellis closely, you may notice the nodal apertures and tentacled scopes peeking through the vines. Each resident has their own, unique threshold into the skin of the city wall, and to access this portal each must perform a precise sequence of operations with the passageway, activating it through touches, phrases whispered into disguised receptors and glances into hidden cameras. This is the only key; efficient and secure in its ephemerality. Visitors are not allowed to enter the Hidden City, the only way for you to experience her is through quick glimpses of the space beyond that open momentarily when residents come and go.

Just beyond the facade the wall space itself is a pliable, fleshy poche containing all of the utilities and programs of the Hidden City. The walls and ceiling are continuous, sensually curving into each other, revealing inner spaces like voids of removed organs carved away. These spaces are programed as in all cities: marketplace, library, community pool, food garden, offices, and so on. Particular to the Hidden City is the intimate place of the excess folds of membrane, reserved for individuals who wish to pry open, crawl into, and inhabit the inner face of the threshold between inside and outside the city. The city skin can be stretched to accommodate new functions, if the need arises.

Bathed in a diffuse golden light transmitted from the scopes in the trellis, the waxy surfaces of these chambers absorb and radiate a transfixing amber luminosity. Entirely porous, the spongiform walls filter, purify, and transmit air throughout the interior. The exterior of the Hidden City is covered in fur both highly reflective and almost entirely translucent in the sunlight. As each fiber moves it generates energy for the City, storing it deep inside the membrane in a grid of follicle sacs. An independent network of pipes for the water supply and sewage arcs through this membrane as well, ensuring that the city will never be detected from the outside.

Extending beyond the fleshy communal space is the intricate system of circulation pathways for reaching the dwellings. In places, these circle around and afford incredible panoramic views out over the countryside. In the Hidden City, each element has been designed such that it is kept out of every possible view from those outside. Apartments run along the shadows cast by neighboring antennas and mirrored green spaces reflect their surroundings so that people may walk their dogs unseen. The unsettling thing about the Hidden City is that there are pieces hiding even from itself, an intricate labyrinth of secrecy deep inside of another. This city within the city is built on top of a frequency wavelength shifter that subtly vibrates the buildings and it's inhabitants such that they can see each other because they are all moving at the same speed, but onlookers cannot see them. It is unknown how many citizens live here and unknown too, how many more cities are hiding inside of this, and each one subsequent to it; increasing degrees of invisibility.

It is quite common to see people flailing about along this street, especially those who have been evicted from the tranquil city. They can be seen hysterically grasping at the vines and screaming at the walls, desperately trying to enter though they never will.

The Hidden City keeps her secrets.