
Drawing Form from Fiction: A Reflective and Projective Approach

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Introduction

“What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.”¹

This paper presents undergraduate and graduate student collage drawings from a 3-credit architecture course exploring spatial form in literary fiction. Students analyzed various spatial types found within literary texts: ‘physical’ settings, such as architectures, cities, and landscapes; relational structures of character and plot; compositional arrangements of time and movement; and the architectonic form of the texts themselves.

The course introduces students to the literary discourse of spatiality through readings by Walter Benjamin, W.J.T. Mitchell, Gaston Bachelard, Michel de Certeau, and others. A broad range of architectural-literary works, from Giovanni Piranesi to Douglas Darden, Jean-Jacques Lequeu to John Hejduk, Giuseppe Terragni to Peter Eisenman, serve as experimental exemplars for student analysis. Revisiting historical and neo avant-garde practices with a focus upon those engaging narrative, collage and appropriation, architectural precedents are utilized as direct source material for student works. Combining appropriated precedents with digital collage techniques, students explore alternative drawing methods toward an expanded engagement with architectural precedent, narrative structure and experimental design. Drawing prompts request the development of relational diagrams, cut-up, sampled, and remixed drawings, topological projections, allegorical studies, and hybrid and composite compositions.

Objectives

An excerpt from the course syllabus reads as follows:

Through the works of Djuna Barnes, Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Pynchon, Virginia Woolf and others, the seminar will study some of the complex and significant roles of space – whether literary representations of architecture, cities, and landscapes, the architectonic form of the work itself, or other theoretical spatial forms – within selected modern and contemporary works of literature.

Students will create original analyses and designs in response to selected literary works – models, diagrams, and drawings – investigating spatial structures within modern literature and exploring conceptual relations between and among image, text, analysis, and design.

The objectives of the course are to:

- Identify and analyze spatial forms within works of literary fiction
- Study and deploy appropriation and collage as experimental drawing techniques of analysis and design
- Translate narrative structures into visual, architectural languages
- Construct topological and allegorical representations of a text

Literary Space

To begin, the course introduces students to concepts of space in literature. A key characteristic of modern

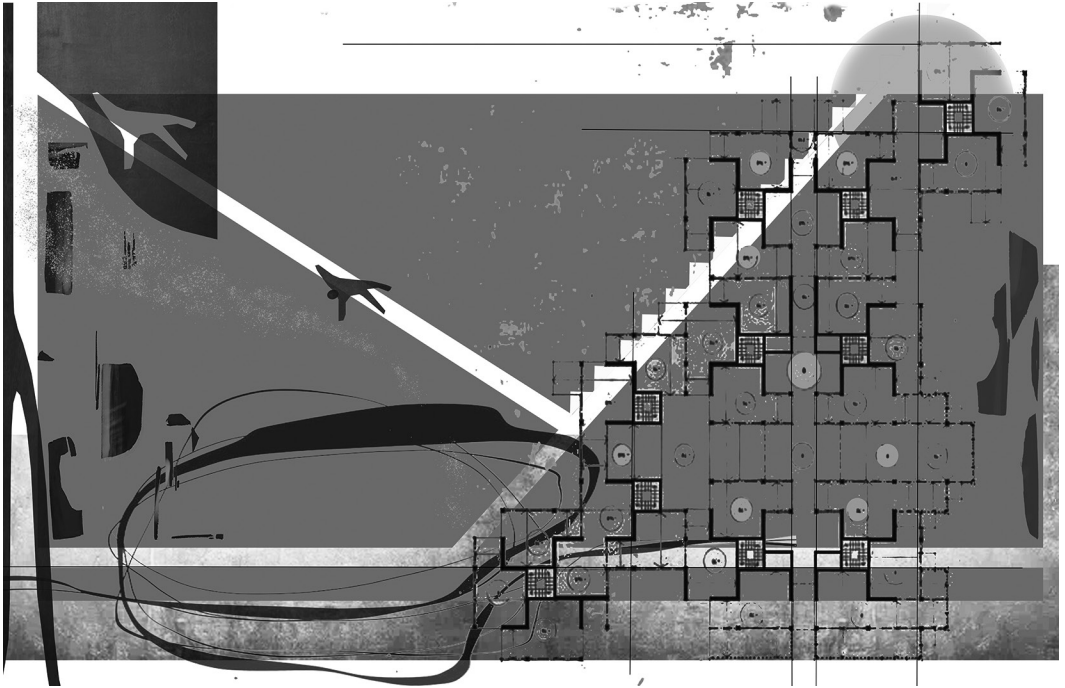


Fig. 1 (*The Castle*, Topological Analysis. Kolbie Jones, University of Idaho, 2022).

literature is, of course, its fragmentation of sequential time and explorations of space-time. As Joseph Frank writes in “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” “the reader is intended to apprehend [the] work spatially, in a moment of time.”²² Students learn how fragmentation and simultaneity help set the stage for a story to take place as well as make room for the active reader.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau writes, “an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.”²³ A reader’s itinerary, for example, is a potential spatial practice. “Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.”²⁴ Narrative has the power to reorganize space. ‘Space’ within literature then, can also be understood to accommodate the itinerary of an active reader, a reader producing other sites, other spaces, other structures.

That space is produced, inscribed and then

reconstituted again by individuals and their stories is underscored by other readings in the course. Georges Poulet argues that the discontinuous and fragmented experiences of Proust’s narrator can only be united by memory.⁵ Similarly, Walter Benjamin describes the “correspondences” of Baudelaire as “completing time,” an act that “involves not experience, but recollection.”²⁶ Or, as Gaston Bachelard’s method of topoanalysis attempts to demonstrate, that memory and space are inextricable.⁷

In response to these readings and discussions, students develop analyses of their selected literary texts exploring structural, relational, topological, and/or allegorical drawings. (See Figure 1.)

Collage

Rosalind Krauss notes that ‘both authorship and signification are challenged by collage.’²⁸ This is to say, by deploying appropriation, collage effectively undermines notions of originality and simultaneously establishes a visual discourse engaging representation itself. “The extraordinary contribution of collage

is that it is the first instance within the pictorial arts of anything like a systematic exploration of the conditions of representability entailed by the sign.” Collage establishes the discourse of representation in place of mimetic ‘presence;’ like modern literature, it utilizes the structural conditions and limits of its medium to investigate the representation of space-time. Budd Hopkins makes a case for the structural metaphor of collage in literature: “The collage aesthetic is at the heart of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, each of which unfolds in ways closer to modern cinema than that of the traditional novel.”¹⁰

A method as well as a metalanguage, collage is a vehicle for visualizing simultaneity. Placing the remote in proximity, collage insists upon a nonlinear understanding of historical time. Martin Heidegger’s concept of *geschichte* is useful here. As Randall Teal explains in his essay, “Foundational History;” “*Geschichte* [...] presents a view of history that is distinguished by the suddenness and coming to presence of a past that has not really passed away.”¹¹ Such a view of history does not support simple nostalgia nor mere recapitulations of static precedents.

Precedent and Appropriation

In *The Journal of Architectural Education* issue, “Beyond Precedent,” editor George Dodds notes that within architectural education, “the use of precedent has become pro forma—as ubiquitous as it is often perfunctory.”¹² The 2011 *JAE* issue is a response to and meditation upon the *Harvard Architectural Review* issue, “Precedent and Invention,” published 25 years prior. Dodds is especially interested in the discursive and pedagogical engagements of the precedent/invention binary; paraphrasing Colin Rowe, he writes, “precedent is little more, and nothing less, than the verso to the recto of invention.”¹³

The work in this course opens the tensional field of precedent and invention with a straightforward proposition: appropriation. Students experiment with precedent without fear of charges of plagiarism. As Winy Maas states, “In contemporary Western culture, the act of copying is seen as dishonest, immoral and even illegal.”¹⁴ Proffering a corrective to this ideology, Jonathan Lethem writes, “Finding one’s voice isn’t just an emptying and purifying of oneself [...] but an adopting and embracing of filiations, communities, and discourses.”¹⁵ (Lethem will reveal

to readers at the end of his essay he ‘plagiarized’ this particular quote and furthermore, the essay is entirely composed of quotes from beginning to end.) As both Lethem and Maas point out, our collective obsession with originality is a recent development, a rejection of traditional understandings of the continuum of knowledge in favor of its privatization and commodification.

Students are instructed to develop topological or allegorical ‘plans’ and ‘sections’ of their selected novel using only quotations, that is, directly using architectural precedents as the source material for their compositions. The drawings are constructed as interpretive analytics of the literary text, mappings of spaces, elements, characters, movements, or relationships. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

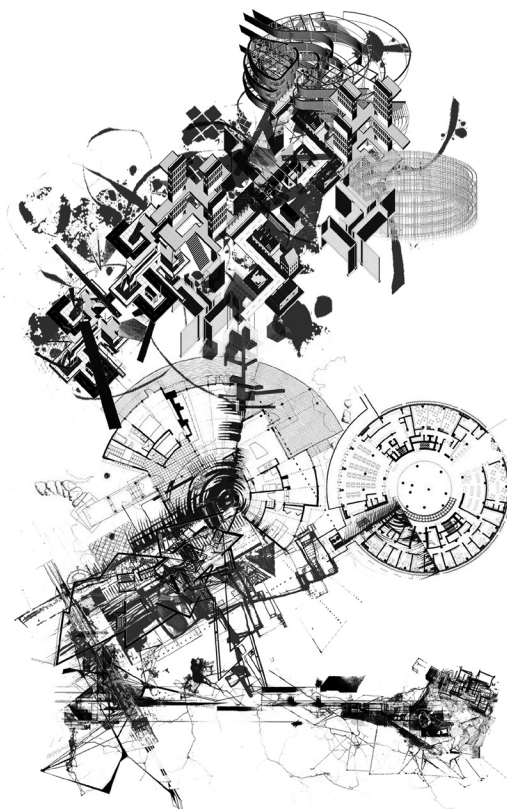


Fig. 2 (*The Tunnel*, Composite Drawing. Kaitlyn Beyrouly, University of Idaho, 2022)

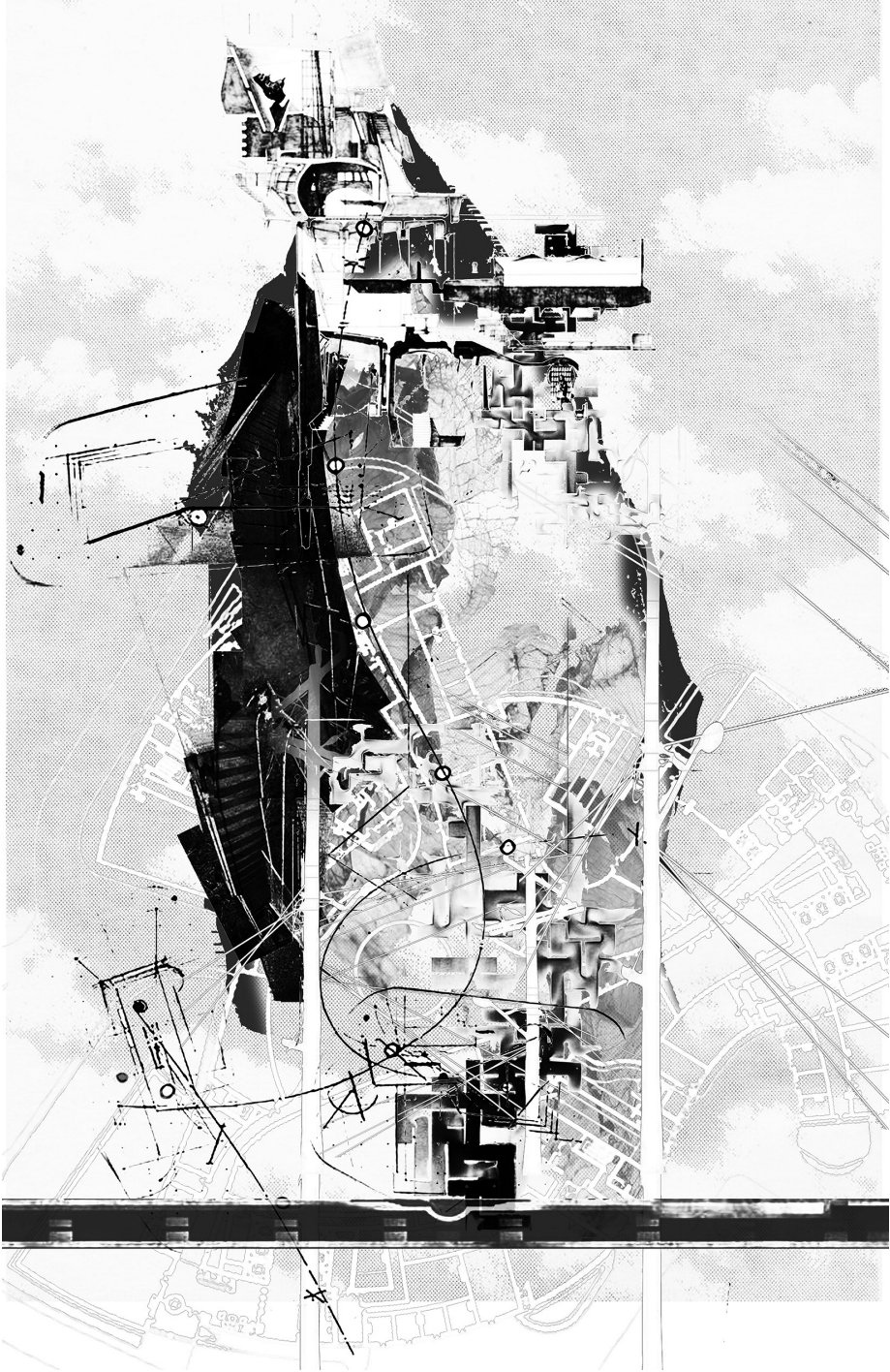


Fig. 3 (*The Castle*, Composite Drawing. Kolbie Jones, University of Idaho, 2022)

Syntactics versus Semantics

The course also attempts to transform quoted materials at a smaller scale. The literary technique of ‘cut-up’ as well as the musical analogs of ‘sample and remix’ are applied by students to building-scale works. These concepts allow for a finer grain of appropriation, sampling from precedents at the scale of building elements: wall, column, room, window, detail, et cetera. By focusing upon assembling plan and section fragments and details, the architectural collage works are able to shift away from iconicity and façade to explorations of ‘structural’ form at a syntactical scale.

With this shift from meaning to rules, the course asks students to create an architectural fragment, a topological threshold based upon a particular transitional moment from their selected text. The fragment is requested to clearly exhibit the characteristics of a space in-between, of liminality, of both/and, or transition. (See Figure 4.)

Reflective and Projective Practice

Enlisting historical precedents into the service of experimental design methods is at once a reflective and projective practice, a proposition that gives equal weight to tradition and experiment, to discourse and innovation, to ‘remembering and forgetting.’ In challenging originality, the course seeks to think both beyond and within precedent, speculating that a cultural ‘commons’ of architectural knowledge might still be well equipped to facilitate experimentation and invention for ‘active readers’ of history.

Notes

[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 129.

[2] Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” *The Sewanee Review* 53, (1945), 221.

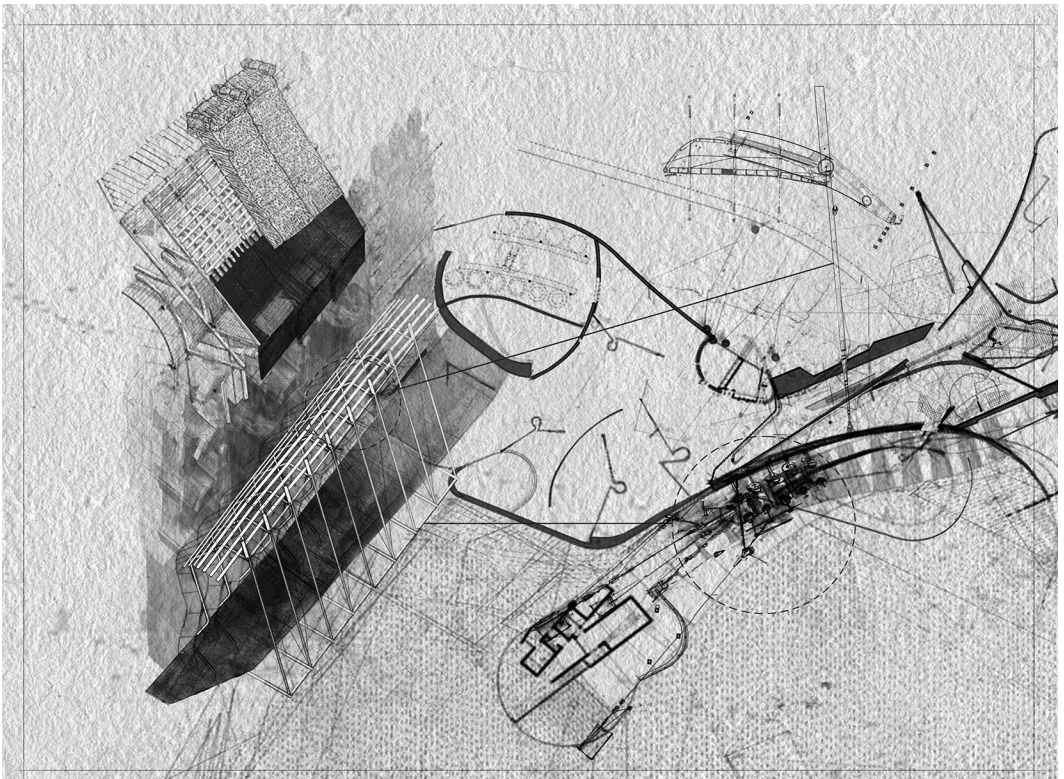


Fig. 4 (*The Castle*, Threshold Study. Mason Miles, University of Idaho, 2022)



Fig. 5 (*The Castle*, Topological Section. Mason Miles, University of Idaho, 2022)

Notes continued

[3] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

[4] *Ibid.*, 117.

[5] Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, trans. by Elliott Coleman, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[6] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," trans. By Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

[7] Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by M. Jolas, (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994).

[8] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 5.

[9] *Ibid.*, 34.

[10] Budd Hopkins, "Modernism and the Collage Aesthetic," *New England Review* (1990) 18, no. 2 (1997): 5–12.

[11] Randall Teal, "Foundational History: An Integrated Approach to Basic Design, History, and Theory" *The Journal of Architectural Education* 64, no. 2, (2011).

[12] George Dodds, "Editorial: Re-precedented," *The Journal of Architectural Education* 64, no. 2 (2011): 4–5.

[13] *Ibid.*, 5.

[14] Winy Maas, F. Madrazo, *Copy Paste: The Badass Architectural Copy Guide*, (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2017) 98.

[15] Jonathan Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism," (New York: *Harper's*, 314, no. 1881, 2007) 59 – 71.