

Phase 4: Invisible Moments

A journey through the optical illusionism.

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The imagination is essential for knowledge but only when its results can be controlled by the understanding.

—Andrew Benjamin

Within the multitude of the senses lies a deeper understanding of each situation and creating a more meaningful set of mental experiences. Literature has a superb possibility of creating multiple conclusions and experiences based on the individual's recollection and understanding. The reader, following the map unfolded by the author, is allowed, "to wonder amidst the imagination without fixed boundaries."¹

In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino presents a series of five memos, which are used as a stylistic tool for the collective use of senses. Within Calvino's memos, lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity there are a compilation of virtues that produce a desired effect or mood. Calvino utilizes his own method of accentuated vagueness towards the ultimate goal of "not" telling us things, but rather "reminding" us. In using these five different virtues, one reaches a new level of understanding, similar to the experience discovered in the interplay between the senses.

Calvino's memos share a direct parallel with guidelines in the design profession established in the modern movement. Like the term used by Hal Foster, "*Visuality*" which involves the gaze and the psyche both of which produce signals. These

guidelines are described to designers using similar terms that Calvino titles each of his six memos:

Lightness: the use of white space in design. The work of nothingness in space.

Quickness: the delivery of a concise clear message in a given time frame.

Exactitude: the precision of the designer's craft.

Visibility: a clear communication of a message.

Multiplicity: the dissemination of ideas via a system of communication.

Literature, although technically a visual sensory stimuli, has the capability to touch forgotten and unknown memories and senses. Through thoughtful orientation and a tactful command of language, an author is able to insinuate a representation in which the reader constructs the completion of his own. Literature, in its own right, is a dialogue. It is an exchange between author and reader where images and emotions are interpreted into words, and then words into the imagination. Within the exchange, a reality is lost but a meaning is found.

There is an interdisciplinary connection between the senses and the memos. Literature, as a method of



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written speech, enables the use of the senses beyond that of visual speech. Calvino focuses on this consistent use of observational tools in the entirety of his writing. He guides the reader (observer) to create their own experiences from his written words and create their own stories. We must have experiences to have imaginations, and likewise, the process is reversible.

For the past few years I have been discovering fascinating images of space with students using the work of Italo Calvino as a catalyst. What Calvino provides students and designers with is a structure that gives them the ability to look past an expected outcome and situate the process of design within an utopian framework. This is a philosophical approach to design that helps students step beyond reality and stretch their imagination.

Calvino seeks scenes that act as quotations, an indication of the idea to be communicated. His proposals for the designer are very clear. The use of visual-typography or images as an outline for the designer can become the framework for the contents. It then becomes the responsibility of the student to fill in and interpret the overall message while preserving the magical power to envision alternatives.

One should observe the words as questions, views and thoughts, the words describe and defined the poetics of place, in this case, the imagination.

These projects are about a constructive acceptance to uncertainty.

Phase One

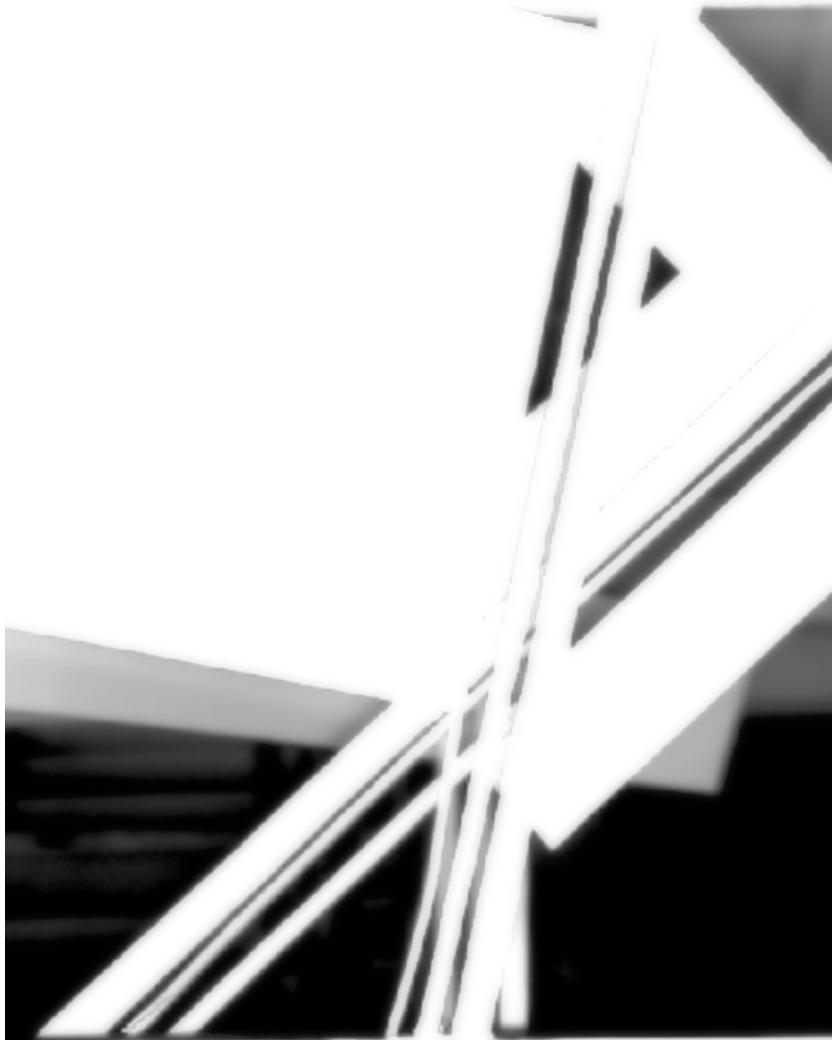
Phase One is an introduction to *Invisible Cities* by Calvino. Once the students read the book, at least twice, a paper space is given and the student are to begin to draw with pencil what their imagination tells about a particular space produced by the readings, perhaps the entire book or a story even a word. The connection of words, mind, imagination, gaze, hand and paper are tools for design. In a very abstract way students are engaged in a process of discovery, a connection of what is imagined and a search for the by product of this process.

Phase Two

Phase Two is very similar to Phase One with the difference of media. The chosen media is watercolor having the qualities of transparency and delicacy. In both phases one and two, a restriction of paper size is given. The paper becomes the site and the site becomes the space of imagination.

Phase Three

Phase Three is the introduction to the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. Here the students chose one of the six Memos and with a given format and guidelines students start to position together layers of white board subtracting space and superimposing them together to discover form and space. This process lead students to explore



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the unknown, keeping in mind that there has been a process behind it.

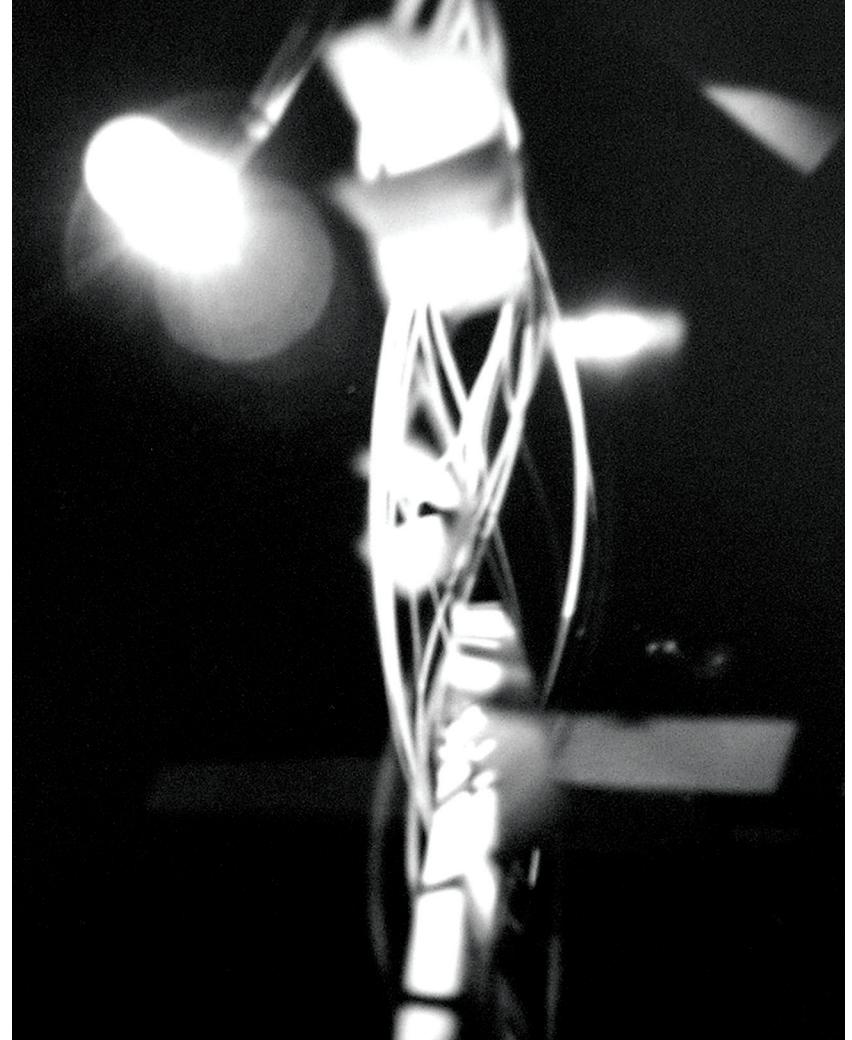
Phase Four

Phase Four is the culmination and the given name to the project. Phase Four is about invention through discovery. Again related to both Calvino's readings, the students choose a site, it could be a city, a street, a plaza and with guidelines and tools they become familiar with the space, basically a site analysis. Using photography as a tool for recording images, the students are free to engage in a series of decisions in order to overlay and superimpose images into a composition that will discover unknown space. This project is about how space is discovered through process.

Illusionism

A journey to the optical illusionism is an intriguing work that attempts to reveal ideas and theories that manifest an understanding of space to an observer. The images that appear can be accurately described, but the space within the projects is ambiguous and must be unveiled.

One way to explore these projects is based on their sectional properties. This section is an element that attempts to describe the indescribable: space. To accomplish this, the realm of ideas that influenced the work must be accessed and the surface of the project must be understood. Therefore, this section focused immediately upon the theme of the work. These works show that con-



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templating the creative act should not be left exclusively to writing. Exploration of a poetic work that employs a different end: an end that maintains the character of the original without reducing it to a less meaningful metaphor.

Phase Four Illusionism

A journey to the optical illusionism is an essential question on how the space dimension interweaves with the spatial in the perception and creation of space. A basic assumption is that in architecture, the interpretative act is composed of both the general perception of the space and project as a spatial measurable object. Furthermore the mind's recollections and associations that are triggered by the architectural experience must be accounted for. The

aim is to investigate the potential of *Moments*. To reveal an architectural representation and make "visible" these moments and extend their simplistic understanding.

These projects search for the principles of design, the pursuits of origins. The philosophical position of these projects will be to acknowledge architectural design as its own realm of inquiry. The investment through the process of this exercise will improve rational skills and develop a disciplined mind. The work suggests individual interpretation, it activates and involves. The observer is not an observer on the outside; but instead becomes part of the imagination, engaged in the creation of space. These projects make connections, seek

similarities and find paths; it simplifies elusive concepts and brings them to a conscious level of thought.

Space, given from the image has relinquished its role as the measure of time. The image of time is no longer reduced to the thread of chronology where present, past, and future are continually aligned. The chronological continuum is condemned, taking past, present, and future into distinct series of times, discontinuous and incommensurable. The narrative sections of the projects are disconnected spaces, divided into blocks of time linked in a probabilistic manner: the piazza, the street, etc. These images are attached as references, to themes or real things in the world. Inside and outside, mind and body, mental and physical, imaginary and real are no longer decidable qualities. This is another theory of mind and another logic of sense, defined by a decisive break of the observers mind.

The intervals or sections dividing any two or more spatial moments serves simultaneously as the end of the first and the beginning of the second. In every section, one encounters a moment of rationality where the identification of moment and image assures the continuous unfolding of adjacent space. The consequence of this identification is the subordination of time to space. Time is measured only dynamically, as a process of action and reaction rebounding across contiguous spaces through the memory.

The development of these images provides the observer with a privileged site for comprehending a decisive shift in strategies of signification, understanding, and believing.

What is specific to the images of the installations is to make discernible and visible the relationships of space which cannot be seen in the represented object and to do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present moment.

Phase Four Illusionism: A journey to the optical illusionism is an eager quest for the intricate and rich actuality illuminated through metaphorical and literal images of space.

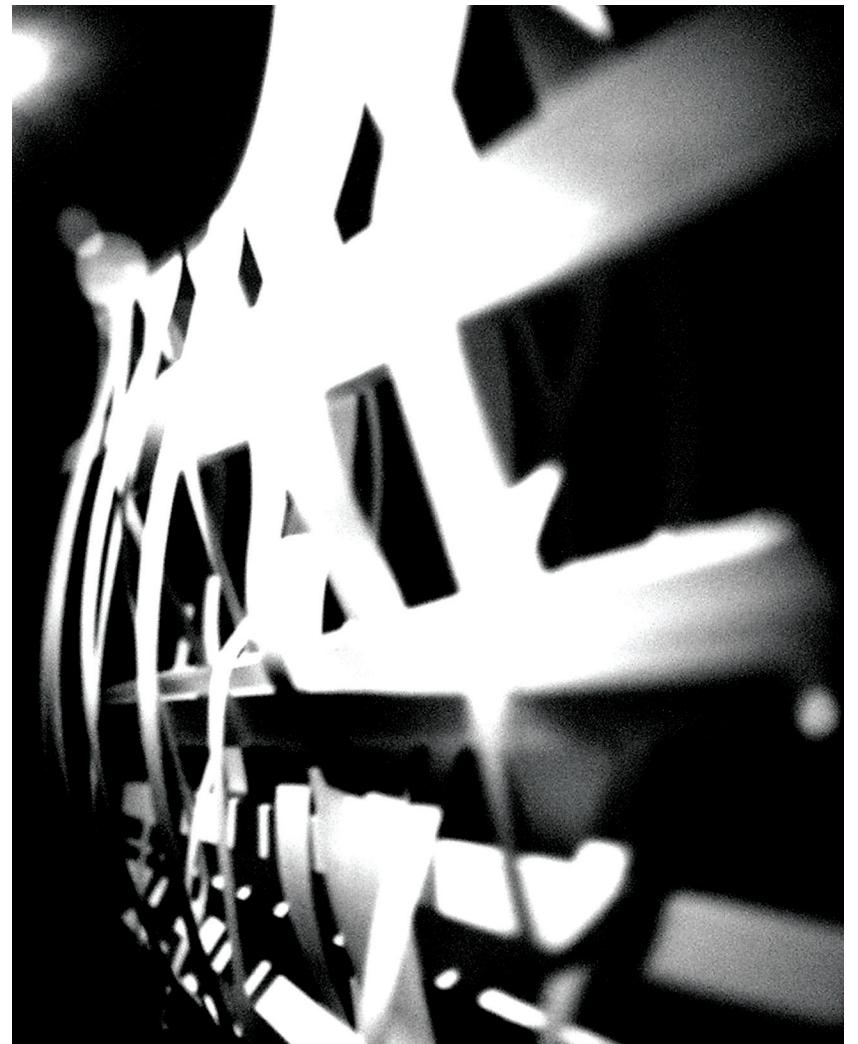
For the past two years I have been working with Six Memos for the Next Millennium and Invisible Cities to help design a new kind of learning experience for students. By venturing outside the dominant culture and into a utopian realm, a new space is created in which students can trust their own creativity and learn their craft.

Note

1. Juhani Pallasmaa's University of Calgary Lecture, 2000.

Bibliography

1. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, October, no. 45.
2. Italo Calvino, 1988. *The Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts.
3. Hal Foster, 1988. *Vision and Visuality*, Dia Art Foundation.
4. Robert Harbison, 1988. *Eccentric Spaces*, Nonpareil Publishing.



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