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ADV STUDIO IV - TUTORIAL

why pretend?

The (pretend) studio may be taken as an invitation to truth or to fiction.

What if we simply stopped pretending?

What causes would you cease to feign interest in?

What adopted processes would you drop as mere pretexts?

Who would you design for?

Who would you want to be?

Who are you really?

What would that look like?

What premises, perhaps even false, form the pretexts of contemporary architectural production?

What would happen if we dropped such pretenses?

Would this lead architecture to truthfulness and sincerity, whimsical irrationality or simply a status quo?

Or does the pretense, etymologically bound up with the disciplinary claims of a "profession," make the architect?

What if the pretense is all there is?

Absurd claims of clients (invisible to the outside), needs of occupants you will never meet or be, places you may never visit, construction that may never happen, materials that stand in for what you really wanted, structures that are no longer what they once were, times that have changed. Real or pretend? We must pretend in various cognitive ways to acknowledge and address these issues routinely in reality. To what extent does any architectural problem require the construction of pretense--requiring us to pretend we are someone else (the client, the occupant), somewhere else (geographically or temporally), or something else (an architect, an engineer, an artist or a computer)?

How do you make believe?

I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions.

The studio will examine the role of paracosms in architectural design.

INTRODUCTION

This is the tenth studio in a series exploring sensory architectures and emergent technology. Sensation provides a means of exploring the intersection between emergent technologies and design through a logic derived from bodily intuition. In displacing, amplifying, and re-circuiting the sensory limits of the body to the spaces and

objects that surround it, they provide an extended field for critically rethinking the relation between the technological and the material.

Pretending involves representations of cognitive, social, and cultural systems, as well as the behaviors associated with them--from the social etiquette of a tea party to the ability to put oneself in the mind of another in risk management. Not purely a conceptual conceit, pretending requires action and enactment. From pillow forts to mock materials, the pretend in its performance shifts material and programmatic attributes, even as pretending uses the same sensory and perceptual mechanisms used in perceiving reality. While pretend play is a communicative activity, it is an expressive rather than instrumental communication. Consistent yet open to improvisation, pretending constructs possible worlds. Could the improbable, the impossible and the invisible lies of pretense in their fictions unmask truths? Pretending, beyond initiating the pretense, requires inference and elaboration--a flexibility conceptually that remains cognitively distinct from belief or desire. Specifically, the invention of paracosms (make-believe worlds) in imaginative play has been shown to enhance the capacity for cognitive flexibility, and ultimately, creativity.^[1] While the pretend episode clearly ends and is not mistaken for reality in our memory--it may shift not only what we conceive as possible, but also our cognitive capacities. Plausibly conceived, imaginary worlds and acts may become real or actualized in time, materially or bodily.

Pretense is of particular interest to a studio investigating sensation and perception. The studio research will focus on the cognitive, material and sensory cues to the recognition of pretense. The same sensory pathways and neurological mechanisms underlie our sensory perception of material reality as well as pretend constructs (from facial recognition to object naming), yet pretending involves a conceptually distinct cognitive processing of sensory stimuli (a matter of philosophical debate in cognitive science). Reasoning about time, space, identity, constraints, alternates, categories is employed in physical reasoning, yet shifts in pretense through object substitution, attribution of pretend properties, and entertaining imaginary objects.^[2] A "triggering relationship between the sensory input and conceptual forms by which the same sensory input can be exploited by different types or systems of sensory forms,"^[3] pretense behavior is supported by variety of mental representations including counterfactual reasoning. "One of the most striking set of correspondences in the developmental literature is between performance on tasks involving counterfactual reasoning, engaging in pretense, and success on tasks requiring an agent to reason about the false beliefs of another agent,"^[4] indicating pretend play may also involve a theory of mind (the ability to conceive the mind of another)--which is central to empathy, behavior prediction, and causality.

Six Core Features of Pretense^[5]

1. An agent who is doing the pretending.
2. A reality that is being pretended about.
3. Explicit mental representations that guide the pretense.
4. Projection of the pretense onto reality.
5. Intentional imitation and maintenance of the pretense.
6. External manifestation of the pretense via action.

STUDIO METHODOLOGY

Symbolic or literal, representations of client, architect, program, site, and material will be examined through a series of thought experiments in material, which will be related to the construction of a thoughtfully conceived, coherent and cohesive building proposal.

Who do you design for?

Students will choose an imaginary client. Like an imaginary friend, this imaginary client will accompany you throughout the design process, and may be animal, vegetable, mineral or fictional. Distinct from yourself in consistent

ways, such productive doubling will serve to challenge your point of view while buffering you from reality. Like a pseudonym, your imaginary client might loosen the limitations of structured or consistent identity, yet it will impose strict requirements, establishing program, budget, site, and design identity. An ideal (imagined) client you cannot have but wish you could, yet the imaginary client must not be idealized, but rather must be imagined thoroughly with idiosyncrasies made manifest specifically and consistently.

Who do you pretend to be?

Posture, poseur, impostor-- disguise to conceal, or mimic to reveal? How to construct an architectural identity? What is the role of precedent, influence, personal development or public perception? Do you "play it safe" listening to the internalized critics, thinking of prospective employers, blending into your contemporary context? In a world of architectural images, from renderings to branding, where are you? Students will pretend to be another--emulating an architect, artist or maker of their choice. Students will act as another, make acts of design as another. Another's tropes, style, cliches--perhaps what they were but no longer are (as in early work)--will be explored through design (act)ions, constructed situations and sensory duplication to engender insights beyond superficial resemblance. Behind the mask, evolving character, motivation, method and process--how you miss your mark may reveal who you are.

What does that look like?

The banana may be a phone. Any number of things may be a gun. What is wood really? It can be as thin as paper or petrified into stone. Is its essence based on performance or resemblance? If a pillow can be a stone wall, and your living room can be the woods, or a hallway can become a car wash--where does program lie? In enactment or designation? What are the possible slips between designated function and situational enactment? From symbolism to knockoffs, counterfeits and mock materials, things may not be what they seem, engendering coincidences of resemblance, performance, conceptual, material, or linguistic (word) play. Students will explicitly describe their project through specifications, both performance and prescriptive.^[6]

Can you feign interest?

If Benjamin noted the change in our perception from attention to distraction at the beginning of the 20th century, and Kant noted the sublime as an emotional mix of beauty, fear and awe, what is the nature of attention and emotion in the contemporary context? Disinterest and vague ambivalent emotions seem to characterize current aesthetic practices--informing the way we perceive space and interact with objects. The *Necomimi* (which is cute, boring and impudent simultaneously) will be used to explore the urban context of New York. Students will construct and film an immersive performance to explore architectural spaces and the city with respect to attention and mood.

How do you make believe?

Students will examine the material and architectural conditions required to make their paracosm believable, as well as the physical cues to its pretense.

STUDIO PROGRAM

The pretext of the studio is the design of an embassy.

"When a caricature in a newspaper causes people to blow up an embassy, you are driven by diplomatic security," says Blyth. "We would love to be building the embassies of the past, but we're not provided that luxury anymore."^[7]

Since the Embassy Design and Security Act of 2010 (S3210), the U.S. government has begun a series of embassy renovations and new construction. Symbolic of the identity of a nation, yet reflecting local character, expertise and materials, the embassy represents a nation to its host. "Respectful of its neighbors," while maintaining "diplomatic security standards," the embassy provides "a safe, functional and inspiring space for diplomacy," conveying "dignity, stability, innovation, humanity and openness"^[8]--the stated purpose of the embassy is explicitly representational. Such representations extend throughout the program from the subtle social structures like etiquette, to broader cultural representations, such as the US State Department's Art in Embassies Program. Highly visible or nearly

imperceptible, overt or covert, the embassy constructs and mediates numerous pretenses, gathering and disseminating information through workspaces, meetings and public performances.

The site of the embassy is chosen to be "both practical and symbolic." Located but elsewhere, its extraterritoriality remains at the boundary of identity-- territorial (national), personal (citizens), and abstract (thought). The embassy is an outside, an extension lobbying for major interests (mineral rights or markets), but also a site for those non-coincident (minor) interests of protest and displacement.

Apart from the obvious precedent (thousands of embassies and consulates across the world, over hundreds of years, by numerous architects, noted or not), the explicit precedents of the studio will range from endangered, unrecognized, non-human, and fictional embassies to include the US embassies of Neutra, Saarinen, and Sert, the *Aboriginal Tent Embassy* and *The Nimbin Hemp Embassy* in Australia, Ant Farm's *Dolphin Embassy*, Greenpeace's *Whale Embassy*, the *Animal Embassy*, and the immersive theatre of *The Embassy of Untrue Reality*, respectively.

The studio will also consider non-embassy precedents for the embassy. From artists working in WWII to camouflage or misrepresent troop positions, to White House Advisor Karl Rove meeting several dozen studio executives in Beverly Hills in November 2001 to discuss the "War on Terrorism," [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) the creative thought in constructing pretense and paracosms may be used to serve quite rational interests. Or by contrast, to what extent are the representational requirements of the embassy distinct from the architectural follies of the previous century--"sham buildings" without an explicit functional use. Ostensibly purposeless, but often serving a personal interest--built for communicating in clandestine affairs, surveying interests of land, sea or fox hunting, often housing rabbits or doves, or simply bridges to nowhere like the "famine follies" built to employ a starving Irish labor force--follies drawn from different architectural types and histories, that feigned to be something they are not.

Students will explore the results of their thought experiments in material in conjunction with OBO's Standard Embassy Templates (in defining scope, site and program of the project) and OBO's *Standards of Design Excellence*, to design an Embassy of (*your choice*).

SELECTED PRECEDENT

Jose Luis Sert, *US Embassy*, Baghdad, 1955-1967

Marcel Breuer, *US Embassy*, The Hague, 1955-2012

Eero Saarinen, *US Chancellery*, London, 1956-2008

Richard Neutra, *US Embassy*, Karachi, Pakistan, 1959-2011

Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canaberra, Australia, 1972

The Nimbin Hemp Embassy, New South Wales, Australia, 1972

Ant Farm, *Dolphin Embassy*, Esquire Magazine, 1974

Greenpeace, *Whale Embassy*, Ulsan, Korea, 2005

Animal Embassy, Stamford, CT

The Embassy of Untrue Reality, Beirut 2011, Copenhagen, 2012 (eour.wordpress.com)

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[1](Russ, 2004; Singer & Singer, 2005)

[2](Leslie, 1987)

- [3]MausFeld, Ranier. "Intrinsic Multiperspectivity: Conceptual Forms and the Functional Architecture of the Perceptual System."
- [4](Riggs et al., 1998; Harris, 2005; Buchsbaum et al., 2012), from Bello, Paul. Pretense and Cognitive Architecture, p.56.
- [5]Bello, Paul. "Pretense and Cognitive Architecture," p.54.
- [6]required by the OBO.
- [7]"Space of Diplomacy," *Dwell Magazine*, January 9, 2009.
- [8]U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), *Guide to Design Excellence*, 2012.
- [9]Lyman, Rick. "White House Sets Meeting with Film Executives to Discuss War on Terrorism," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2001.
- [10]Spike Jonze was rumored to have attended the October 17, 2001 meeting between creative artists and lower level White House Staff members.