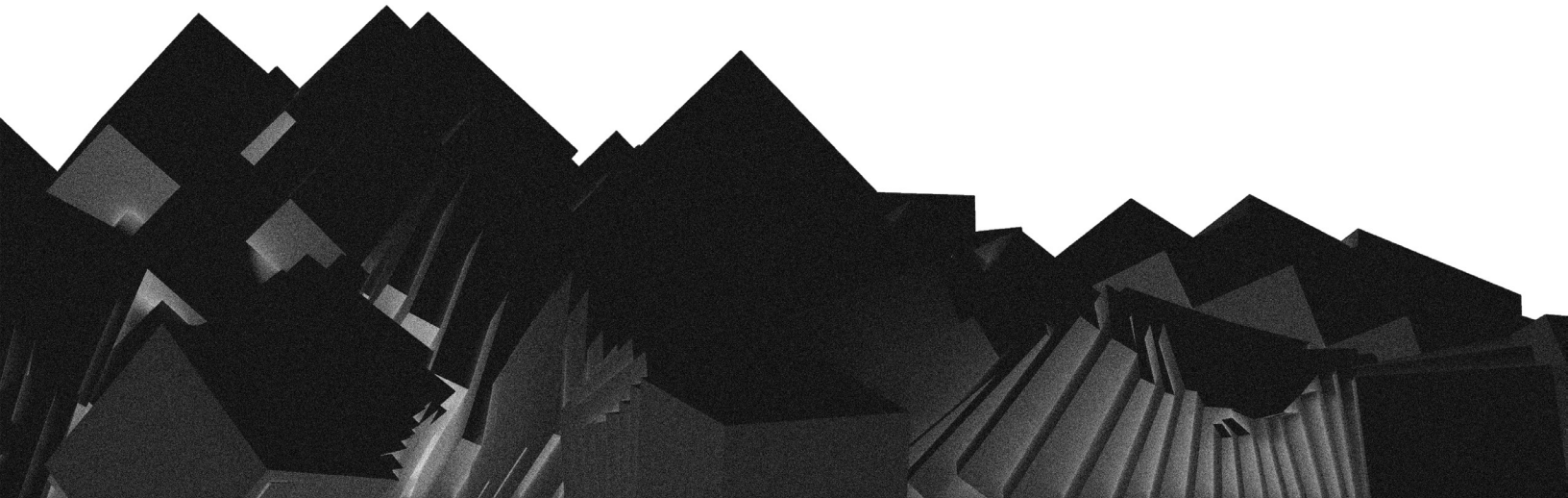**Condia + Orenlas Traveling Prize**

Matthew Murphy

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## Statement of Purpose <span>+</span>

I have often found that the most insightful reflections on the architectural discipline emerge from fields outside of it. Over the course of my education, I have attempted to focus on the perspective of architecture within these fields, whether through art, literature, or philosophy. I believe that studying the discipline through external lenses uncovers potential transformations that are otherwise difficult to access. Through these misunderstandings and mistranslation of concepts across fields, ideas which challenge basic disciplinary assumptions about space, form, and experience can be developed. This boundary blurring mindset has guided my research and engagement with architecture, always viewing projects from multiple vantage points.

In particular, my minor in French has opened up unique opportunities to explore theories of language, narrative, and structure that have shaped my methods for reading architecture through "literary" structures of storytelling, symbolism and layered meaning. It has made me aware of the unique capacity for text to produce spatial knowledge and experience.

One pivotal research project that exemplifies this cross-disciplinary approach involved the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Through the Modern Languages Department I was able to receive funding to hike the Camino de Santiago during the summer of my second year. I was concerned with applying Deleuze's spatial philosophy to the fluctuating pilgrimage route as a living city in motion, where tradition and contemporary tourism intertwine. Over a period of 30 days I hiked the path from the Pyrenees mountain toward the Santiago cathedral, the historic sacred endpoint of the pilgrimage.

However, on arrival I was surprised to find this endpoint to be mirrored by a modern counterpart, Peter Eisenman's Cidade da Cultura. Unlike traditional urban spaces that grow from smaller interventions and mutual adjustments, the Cidade abruptly disrupts Santiago's urban fabric. While researching the project, I found Deleuze's notion of the pli was used extensively to defend its complex form, and yet the reading never went beyond this. In my final paper, I critiqued the project for not learning from the broader work of Deleuze, with profound socio-spatial concepts like milieu, and the successful and lively Camino itself, a model of a vibrant contingent urbanism. Instead, the project became a failed satellite utopia.

Building on this application of postmodern theories of space and society, I was able to apply Deleuze to the space of literature in the work of Franz Kafka. The philosopher argues that Kafka's narratives depict the ideological spaces of fascism, totalitarianism, and capitalism. I carefully examined the dimensions of his novel "The Castle" to manifest these written characteristics into direct architectural form.

Over the same semester, I spent time working on an independent research project "Urbanisms and Techno-Ideologies" which explored technology's role in urban landscapes, from early 20th-century avant-garde movements to contemporary critiques. In particular I took an interest in the narrative utopias of the 1960s and ironic utopias of the 1970s. This "counter-utopian" narrative approach aligns with the fragmented, ideologically charged landscape of postmodern cities, challenging assumptions about urban identity and order.

It was during this project that I left an important footnote for further investigation: "Even postmodern literature of the time investigates the multiplicity of the cityscape in an arguably more successful analytical and critical fashion, as with Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities (1972)." As architecture turned to literature for utopian concepts in the late 1960s, literature in turn began addressing architecture's layered social and ideological dimensions. I have been attempting to explore the qualities of Calvino's writing for more than two years, and now I believe this opportunity represents the perfect moment to return to this investigation.

## Curriculum Vitae <span>+</span>

### Education <span>+</span>

**Masters of Architecture**  KSU
*aug. 2020 – may 2025*

**Minor in French**  KSU
*aug. 2020 – dec 2023*

### Awards <span>+</span>

**DCA Drawing Award of Distinction**
*oct 2024*

**Arts and Sciences Research Award**
*may 2022*

**OURCI Summer Research Award**
*may 2021*

**Kirmser Undergraduate Research**
*dec. 2020*

**Kansas Seal of Biliteracy**
*may 2019*

### Skillsets

C1 Proficiency in French

Rhino
Adobe Suite
Grasshopper
Photography
Videography
3D Printing
VRay
Revit

### Experience <span>+</span>

**DIS Research Assistant**  Modes of Architectural Production
*jan. 2024 - present*

**Oz Architectural Journal**  Editor
*dec. 2022 - present*

**Architectural Theory**  Graduate Teaching Assistant
*aug. 2024 - present*

**Weigel Architectural Library**  Peer Research Consultant
*dec. 2021 - dec. 2023*

### Service <span>+</span>

**Dean's Student Advisory Council**  President
*dec. 2020 – may. 2022*
*Planning college-wide Club Fairs, Open House events and Festivals.*
*Regular communication with Dean and APD faculty.*
*Member of Dean's Selection Committee for new APD Dean.*

**Modern Languages**  Ambassador
*aug. 2021 - may 2023*
*Facilitating outreach to students entering the program.*
*Regular lectures on my experience with language at K-State and abroad.*

**National Merit Honor's Society**  President
*may 2018 – may 2019*
*Designed and fund raised the construction of an amphitheater in the school garden.*

<span>+</span> ### Research <span>+</span>

**Milieux Misalignments**
*dec. 2021 – jan. 2023*
*Funded by the OURCI Summer Research Award and the A&S Research Award.*
*Presented at the OURCI Research Fair 2022.*
*Research was conducted across Spain over 31 days on the Camino de Santiago and critiques Eisenman's Ciudad de Cultura through the rhizomatic potential of the albergue.*

**Rousseau's Émile: Pedagogy, Voluntarity, Independence**
*dec. 2020 – may 2021*
*Funded by the Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award.*
*Presented in French at Initials 2021.*
*Investigates the totalitarian underpinnings of Émile and student-mentor relationships.*

**Urbanisms and Ideologies: Toward an Escape Trajectory**
*aug. 2023 - dec. 2023*
*Explores the history of modernist urbanism over the 20th century, its reactionary cynical movements and later critical and analytical periods with a focus on the shifting means of production.*

**Tracing AI in Architecture**
*sep. 2023 – oct. 2023*

# Resarch Proposal



*"Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."*

*Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities, 1972*



In 1972 the Italian writer Italo Calvino attempted to depict the essence of urban experience. In lieu of a traditional plot, his novel Invisible Cities would unfold through a series of dialogues as the explorer Marco Polo describes to Kublai Khan the cities of his empire, so vast as to evade understanding. Across 55 descriptions of surreal cities each organized by 11 themes, such as memory, desire, signs, trading and even thinness, Polo describes impossible micro utopias. Cities on stilts in the sky, made of thread, or hovering between the ocean and the desert. As the novel unfolds, it is gradually revealed that these varied descriptions are actually all facets of the same city: Marco Polo's home, Venice. Through this layered narrative Calvino invites readers to perceive cities not as fixed realities but as a mosaic of spaces shaped by perception, memory, and imagination.

The novel was written during a unique period of urbanist thought that emerged in Italy during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Avant-garde groups like Superstudio, with Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas (1971), critiqued modern urban theory through ironic, speculative visions of ideal cities, reflecting the vastly different utopian vignettes Marco Polo describes. Thinkers like Aldo Rossi in The Architecture of the City

(1966) examined the city as a physical and cultural entity shaped by history, collective memory, and political decisions, echoing the final layered vision of Venice which Polo leaves us with. Calvino's approach unites these tactics, providing a holistic picture of the city, containing the past and radical possibility.

## Venice: The Archetype

For Calvino, Venice was more than a city; it was an archetype, a city that held within itself the roots of myth and memory. From an archipelago of islands, the mercantile city of Venice opened up to become one of the most important sites of the Renaissance. This unique city evokes duality, floating between land and water, past and present. it is here where Invisible cities derives its rich storytelling...

In my proposal, Venice will serve as the starting point,contextualizing Calvino's themes through my own exploration of the city. My goal is to immerse myself in Venice for the first two weeks of the trip, studying its form and character guided by Calvino's method. I aim to locate the images of Marco Polo's imaginative stories within the very real architecture and culture of its neighborhoods.

The different themes of the book can be seen to echo the neighborhoods of Venice. Cities & Eyes could symbolize Santa Croce and San Marco's tourist-laden zones, reflecting the act of seeing, observing, and the myriad interpretations of Venice experienced by different visitors. Cities & the Dead might parallel San Michele, Venice's cemetery island, echoing themes of mortality, memory, and legacy. Thin Cities could resonate with Giudecca or Cannaregio, where thin, light buildings embody the delicate balance Venice maintains with its sinking foundations. Finally, Trading Cities naturally evokes Rialto and San Polo, historically centers of Venetian commerce. These themes of exchange and connectivity relate to how people, goods, and ideas move through these districts. These





weeks spent within the city Calvino is attempting to evoke will prepare me to extend his vision to a new city, the Venice of the North.

## Amsterdam: A Contemporary Counterpart

Amsterdam is a trade city of canals and bridges, a network built on water and commerce. The city is constantly evolving, actively involved in adaptive reuse projects that breathe new life into historic structures while respecting the past, a method that Venice's protected status often constrains. The city serves as an ideal contemporary counterpart to Venice for its unique typologies and integration of pedestrian spaces, trade history, and novel relationships with water, becoming a pioneer in contemporary urban design.

Just like Venice, the different themes of the book can be seen to echo the neighborhoods of Amsterdam. Perhaps the thin canal houses of Grachtengordel, the bustling tourist center of Dam Square, the signs and symbols of the Museumkwartier, or Jordaan's sense of embedded memory. I aim to analyze Amsterdam through Calvino's poetic and fragmented method, examining how this city's historical legacy as a trade hub has transformed to meet the needs of contemporary society. I intend to craft new invisible cities narratives inspired by Calvino's storytelling techniques, framing Amsterdam not as a static urban entity but as a living and evolving narrative.

## Research Output

This project will be realized through photographs, using inverted black and white photography to evoke the raw, abstract quality of film negatives. This technique will capture the delicate, surreal imprint of the city, mirroring the way Calvino presents Venice, not through direct description, but by suggestion, capturing the essence of a place in its fleeting moments.
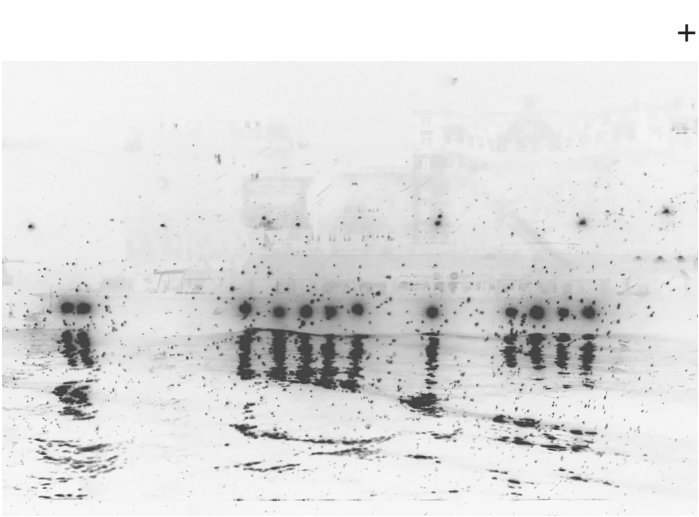
The photographs will not immediately present the real, instead, they will appear as figure-ground compositions that demand recontextualization from the viewer. I will then compose my own descriptions of Amsterdam's Invisible Cities, blending these narratives with the images in a final composition that reflects Polo's conversation with the Khan: multiple cities and their descriptions converging into a single, evocative vision.

## Reimagining the Urban through Literature

By juxtaposing Venice and Amsterdam through Invisible Cities, this project seeks to reframe contemporary urbanism through the poetic and imaginative lens of Invisible Cities. As we face new and evolving challenges in urban environments, Calvino's method provides a way to see cities not as static entities, but as evolving narratives shaped by history, commerce, nature, and human imagination. Venice, with its decaying beauty, and Amsterdam, with its forward-looking dynamism, are powerful archetypes for understanding both the endurance and transformation of urban spaces.