

Science-Fictioning Architectural Pedagogy

Abstract submitted to CA²RE Trondheim, 1.12.19

Joel Letkemann, PhD Fellow
Aarhus School of Architecture

Science fiction (SF) has often been used as a descriptor, sometimes dismissively, of much work in architecture and architectural pedagogy. Often, the descriptor is used as a synonym for a project's novelty, or for its aesthetic relationship to works of popular culture, rather than for its more nuanced investigation of futurity. Such banal aestheticization merely reproduces the normative, easily digestible imagination of the future - what futurist Scott Smith calls "flat-pack futures," rather than opening a discursive space about what we, collectively, might want the future to be like. Thus, the qualities which might make an architectural work most like SF — its SF-ness, so to speak — are insufficiently established, and as such, the nature of *what architects might learn from SF and how such learning might happen* has been insufficiently explored. On the other hand, SF authors and critics describe SF as a mode of speculation rooted in interwoven technical, socio-political, and affective imaginings whose difference from empirical experience produces a dialectical relation between that future imagination and the readers' present — a revelation of the present through the projection of something that does not yet exist.

The paper describes two experiments in architectural curriculum designed to take advantage of elements of SF storytelling to illuminate what and how prospective architects might learn from SF. In these examples, SF pedagogy oscillates between hermeneutic and heuristic modes of engagement with students hopes and imaginations for the future. The research engages with SF literature directly, as well as drawing on the fields of SF and Utopian Studies to elaborate potential avenues for an SF pedagogy through such vehicles as estrangement, critique, and worldbuilding. Rather than providing a blueprint for any specific future, SF pedagogy aims at understanding the future as a contested space, a space open to continued definition by those who will live in it.