

Invisible Cities

This book was made by:

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in Graphic Design V class

with help from: **Matthew Gaynor**

**Invisible Cities - building new realities
by Italo Calvino**

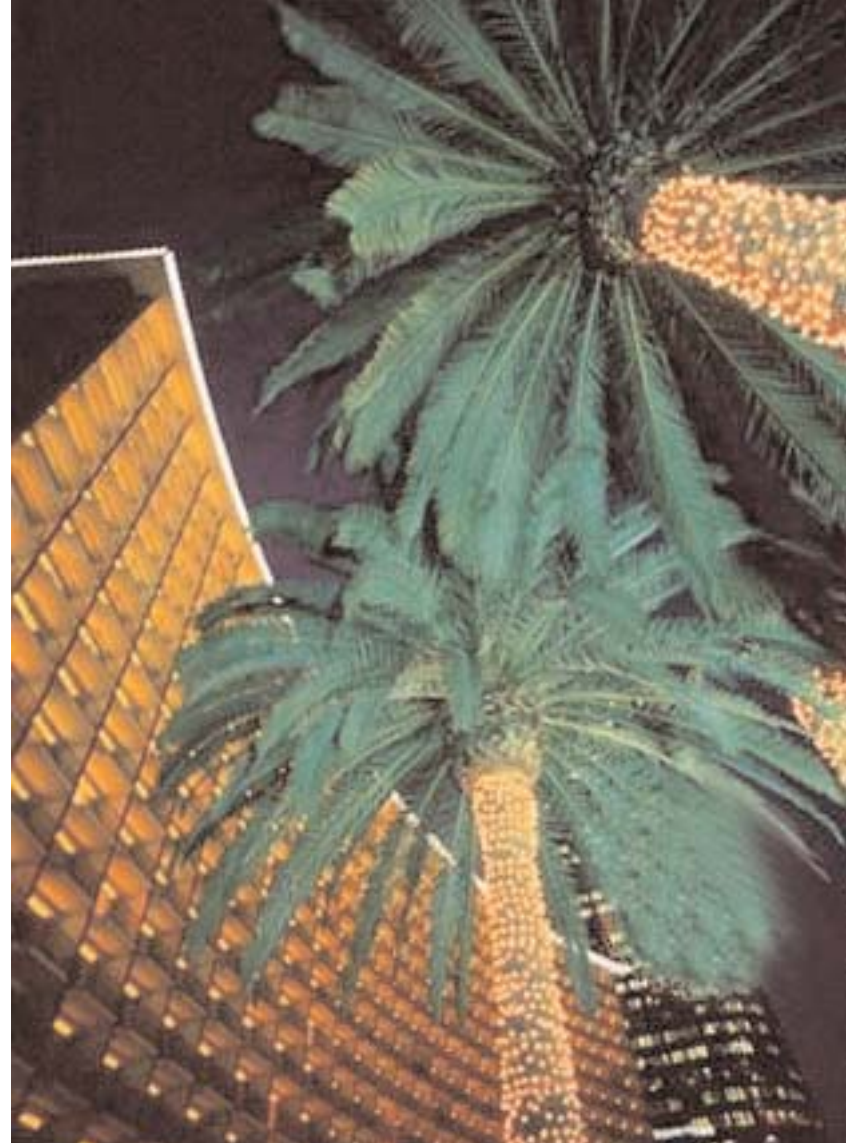


sunny street

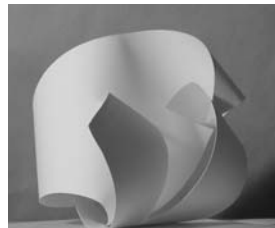
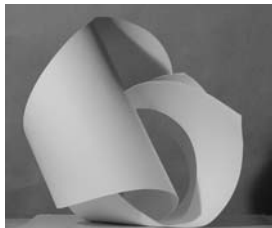
As I was driving through town I came across a very jungle like area, a street that was different from any other streets that I have seen. It was sunny and **warm**, there were children playing outside with no guardians around them and every kid out there felt safe playing outside. When someone would drive by, people would stare and wonder who was going through their little street called Sunny. The buildings were **old**, just like the men that were playing cards right outside the apartment **buildings**. Dogs were running around outside with no leashes and no keepers, and no one was afraid of the dogs, everybody knew everybody. It seemed very strange but everyone felt safe. No one was afraid that their dog would run away or that the children were not safe outside by themselves. The whole town was peaceful, not a soul was bothered, for some reason people trusted one another. Going up through the street you came to a stop. It was the end of the block, a dead end. In order to get out of the street you either walked up the rest of the way or you had to come out the same way you came in. I parked the car and looked around more. People seemed very familiar but nobody recognized me! It felt like my childhood life belonged here, but not me, not now.

It felt like old memories were born here, but it felt strange. I wanted to stay but I couldn't, I looked over at the house that seemed to be similar to the one I was brought up in, I couldn't go inside, the house belonged to someone else. I wanted to cry, it felt like I had no place here. The town already had its people and did not need any more, there were no houses to buy no apartments to rent the whole happy town was full. I was very sad, probably the only gloomy person there. Out of nowhere, all of a sudden I looked up and someone was running towards me, yelling out my name. Someone actually knew me from this cheerful town. I was so happy that I ran towards that person, as soon as I came closer I realized that it was my grandmother Helen, but it could not be, this is not the town I was born in. Everything is different it is not the way I remember it. The people here do not know me, they don't say hello like they used to, back in my old town, it is not the same this cannot be my old hometown.

When I started reading the book *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino my first thoughts were empty and I did not know how to understand it. Marco Polo, the main character, was going through one dreamed like city to another, traveling through, and seeing very peculiar things happening. There seemed to be no plot. But in about the middle of the book it turns out that all of the **magical** cities described were one beautiful Venice. That was when it hit me, I started to identify with it a little bit more. It appears to me that if you feel affection for a city, like Marco Polo appreciated Venice, and perhaps once lived there you will always remember it the best, the first time you left it. So every time Marco Polo came back to the city that he loved, it changed little by little and he only wanted to remember it the way he saw it for the first time. In order to keep the first image of the **city** alive in his heart he made his other trips to Venice a different city, creating a different story every single time. I believe that when Marco Polo is describing the invisible cities to Kublai Khan they are still beautiful mesmerizing cities. Venice, on the other hand, is only an old image of a city that he once loved from the first time he saw it. That is how I felt going through my home street in Poland, called Ulica Sloneczna in English, Sunny Street.



When I went back to Poland for a vacation the Ulica Sloneczna looked very different from the time I had left it, and I did not want to remember it otherwise. My memories were caught on that old **image** in which I once belonged. Now Poland's Ulica Sloneczna is only my vacation spot and it is not my hometown any more, maybe like Marco Polo's Venice. In order for the old image to stay in my mind I want to remember the town the way I left it ten years ago and not as it is known when I go on vacation. Marco Polo wanted to remember his **beautiful** Venice only the way he remembered it the best, the first time he saw it.



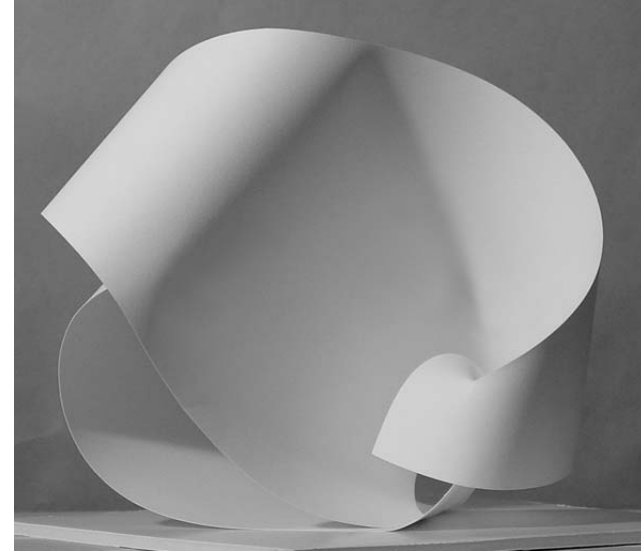
In summary, I believe that Italo Calvino tells a thrilling and stylish story with his creative picture of these dreamlike cities. The book is pure imagination, with no plot to get in the way. It gave my mind a well-needed workout. My thoughts on the book are still somewhat "invisible." The beginning of the book was especially hard to understand, I did not know what to think, especially how to follow the story. It seemed very bizarre, but interesting. Especially when the character Marco Polo would go from one "weird" city to the other with really no point of adventure, but just passing by. I sort of made my mind think of an explanation, why was he making all these trips? I think the book is mind opening, because you experience the thrill of the cities, but on the other hand it is also extraordinary because it has no ending. It feels as if the book is for you to finish, for you to use your imagination to complete.

“From there, after six days and seven nights, you arrive at Zobeide, the **white city**, well exposed to the moon, with streets wound about themselves as in a skein. They tell this tale of its foundation: men of various nations had an identical dream....” (*Invisible Cities* page 45)

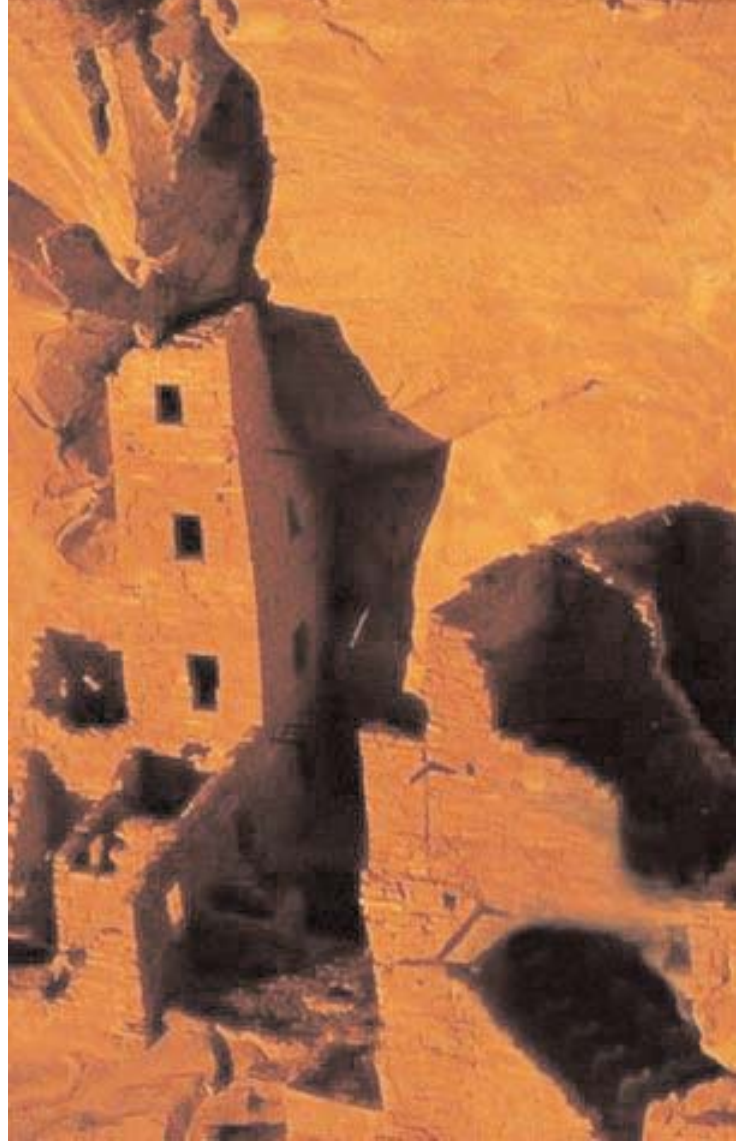




“When you have arrived at Phyllis, you rejoice in observing all the **bridges** over the canals, each different from the others: cambered, covered, on pillars, on barges, suspended, with tracery balustrades. And what a variety of windows looks down on the **streets**: mullioned, Moorish, lancet, pointed, surmounted by lunettes or stained-glass roses; how many kinds of pavement cover the ground: cobbles, slabs, gavel, blue and white tiles. At every point the city offers surprises to your **view**: a caper bush jutting from the fortress’ walls, the statues of three queens on corbels, an **onion dome** with three smaller onions threaded on the spire. “Happy the man who has Phyllis before his eyes each day and who never ceases seeing the things it contains,” you cry, with regret at having to leave the city when you can barely graze it with your glance.”
(Invisible Cities page 90)



“What makes Argja different from other cities is that it has **earth** instead of air. The streets are completely filled with dirt, packs the rooms to the ceiling, on every stair another stairway is set in negative, over the roofs of the houses hang layers of rocky terrain like skies with clouds...” (*Invisible Cities* page 126)





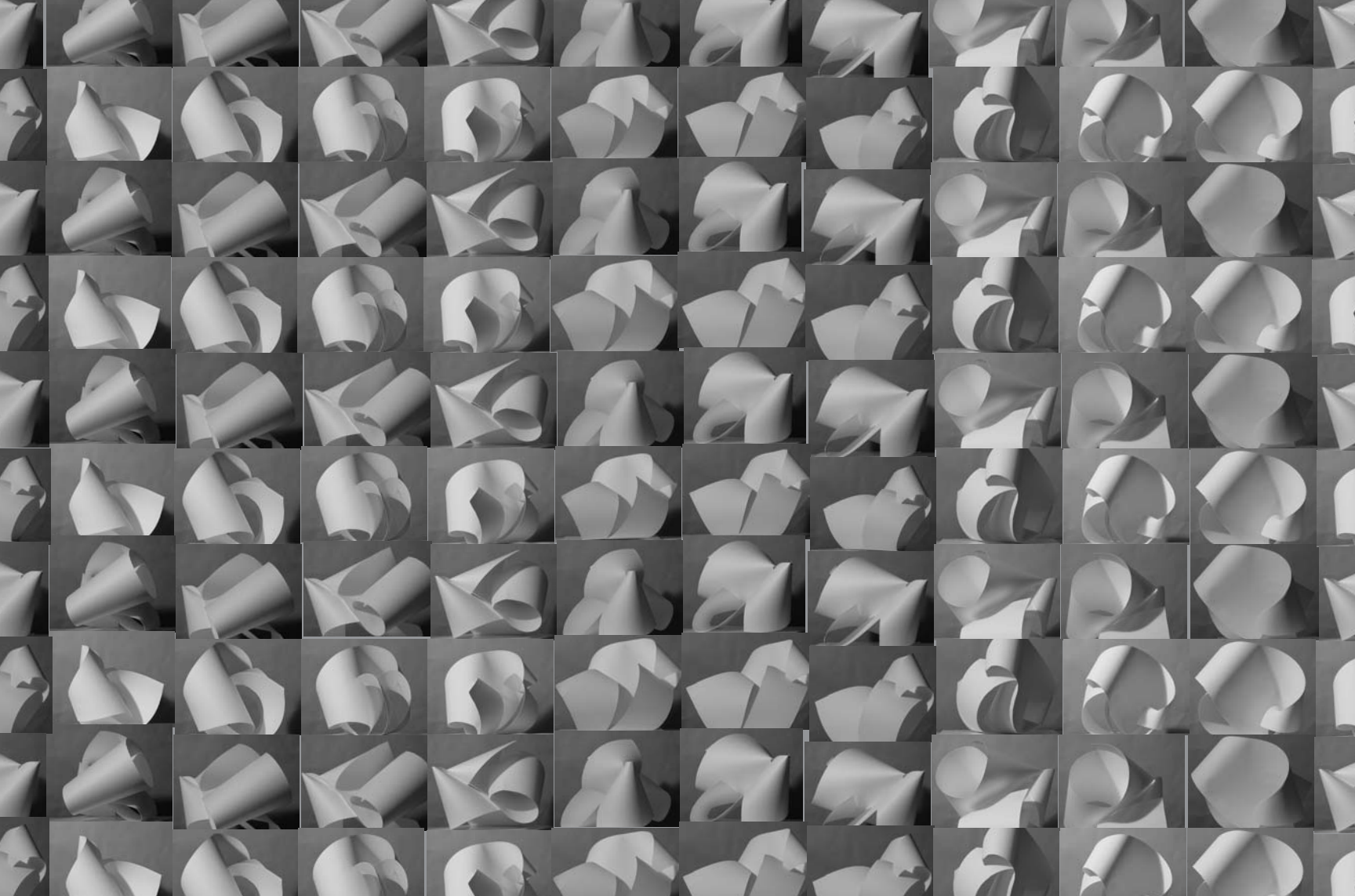
“The ancients built Valdarda on the shores of a lake, with houses all verandas one above the other, and high streets whose railed parapets look out over the water. Thus the traveler, arriving, sees **two cities**: one erect above the lake, and the other **reflected**, upside down...”
(Invisible Cities page 53)

“Irene is the city **visible**
when you lean out from the edge of the plateau at the hour
when the **lights** come on, and in the limpid air, the
pink of the distance below: where the windows are more
concentrated, where it collects the shadows of gardens, where
it raises towers with signal fires; and if the evening is misty, a
hazy glow swells like
a **milky sponge** at the foot of the gulleys.”
(Invisible Cities page 124)

10: building new realities







“Leaving there and proceeding for three days toward the east, you reach Diomira, a city with sixty **silver domes**, bronze statues of all the gods, streets paved with lead, a crystal theater, a golden cock that crows each morning on a tower. All these beauties will already be familiar to the visitor, who has seen them also in other cities. But the special quality of this **city** for the man who arrives there on a September evening, when the days are growing shorter and the doors of the food stalls and from a terrace a woman’s voice cries ooh!, is that he feels envy toward those who now believe they have once before lived an evening identical to this and who think they were happy, that time.”

(Invisible Cities page 7)

Works Cited:
Italo Calvino *Invisible Cities*
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