

ARCH 433 / 533: POSSIBLE WORLDS

University of Michigan, Taubman College

Fall 2026, DAY & ROOM TBA

Professor John McMorrough, PhD (jdmii@umich.edu)



Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao, Project for Floating Cloud Structures (Cloud Nine), c. 1960

POSSIBLE WORLDS

[Possible World Building Media Architecture]

Every design entails assumptions, assertions, and arguments about how the world is (or could be) organized, creating its own "possible world." This seminar examines the propositional characteristics implicit in all designs by analyzing extreme cases and studying visionary schemes from architecture, film, and other structured narratives, in relation to scale and genre, within a framework of selected readings from architecture, literature, and philosophy. Seminar participants review weekly texts (readings, projects, other media), write weekly topic responses, and contribute to collective discussions regarding issues raised. The course culminates in a term-length research project, an analytical case study of an assigned "world" - considered as both real (within the story logic) and imagined (as recorded in set and setting).

"Possible World Building Media Architecture" explores this condition by examining the intersection of method and intention between architecture and film in the postmodern, pre-digital moment of the 1970s, when techniques were analog and budget-constrained, but aspirations were boundless. The project operates in four frameworks; "Possible World" and the rise of counterfactual framing in philosophy and other fields, "World Building" on the creation of design as not only object, but context; "Building Media" on the mediatic representation of spaces and structures; and "Media Architecture" on the limits and possibilities of the period's representational technologies.