

## Literary Methods in Architectural Education

Havik, Klaske; Perrotoni, Davide; Proosten, Mark

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## EDITORIAL

### **Klaske Havik, Davide Perrotoni and Mark Proosten** Literary Methods in Architectural Education

The topic of the journal's first issue, Literary Methods in Architectural Education, derived from our observation that many of the contributors to the 2013 Writingplace conference shared a particular practice: that of architectural education. Realizing that many scholars interested in the crossovers between architecture and literature find room to experiment, particularly in the environment of seminars and studios, we decided to dedicate the first issue of the Writingplace journal to this topic, in the hope of creating an international dialogue upon the topic of architecture and literature within the space of architectural education.

Too often, architectural education is based on problem solving, emphasizing issues of programme, formal composition and the rendering of stylistic images. Seeking to introduce other perspectives of architectural education, this journal issue explores the potential of literary methods to emphasize more experiential aspects of architecture and to investigate how literature can engage the power of imagination to conceive and analyse spatial futures. Literary language, in its many forms and applications, has the capacity to depict the multifaceted nature of lived space. From the values and meanings of myths to the hermeneutic illumination of a poem, literature allows us to grasp and express many values of space that go well beyond its positivistic representation and analysis. Would, by extension, a literary approach to architectural education teach students to explore their own sensitivity and creativity towards such ambiguous, multifaceted aspects of architecture? In which ways do literary modes of observation allow for a more focused and perceptive 'reading' of places and buildings? How could narratives and scenarios provide ways to develop possible new situations? Could creative writing exercises provide a way to engage the creativity of the designer in a different and fruitful way, a way to sketch by writing?

This journal issue intends to create a common platform to gather the many different possibilities offered by literature in our field and to give them space for discussion and diffusion. From academic research to pedagogical reflections and experimental student work, it offers a peek into the multifaceted relationship between architecture, in its wider meaning, and literature, and opens up perspectives as to how this relationship can be productive in architectural education.

This first issue opens with two articles that explore the ways in which literary influences have shaped the curriculum at two remarkable architecture schools: the School of Porto and the School of Valparaíso. Located at the periphery of the Western and Anglo-Saxon axis that is often dominant in architectural discourse, these two articles expand the discussion into different linguistic regions, while presenting insights into the key figures and developments of a poetry-influenced curriculum. Bruno Gil's article on the School of Porto (Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto) provides an underlying cultural theory for the education of a generation of Portuguese architects, among them Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura. By focusing on the transition from fine arts school to university, and the written accounts of two key-figures, Fernando Távora and Alexandre Alves Costa, the author explores the intrinsic role of literature in architectural education in Porto.

In the second article, Óscar Andrade focuses on the Valparaíso School of Architecture in Chile. Here, the combination of word and action, and specifically what is called the Poetic Act as an origin of every process of building, is key to the school's educational approach. By providing insight into the teaching methods of professor and poet Godofredo Iommi, Andrade sheds light on the presence of poetry, the artistic production and the academic structures within the school.

The first section of this issue ends with an article by Willem de Bruijn that expands on the idea of the school as a place of experimentation; it introduces the notion of alchemy to reflect upon the laboratory as the workplace that historically accommodates experiments and proposes a particular connection between literature and science. With the introduction of laboratories, both within and outside the academic institutions, such as those of Walter Gropius in the early years of the Bauhaus, or today's 'Writing Labs' set up at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, argues de Bruijn, educators explore the boundaries and sources to investigate alternative ways of looking at architecture.

This reflection on the laboratory as a space of experiment with architecture and text opens the floor for the second part of the journal, a series of articles on recent projects in architectural education. Ranging from bachelor's degrees to master studios and PhD workshops, and from Canada to South Africa and Europe, these articles present current pedagogical experiments that, each in a different way, introduce literary methods to explore new directions in architecture. Architecture, and the studio design assignment in particular, involves the challenging double task of interpreting a multiplicity of forces – tangible, objective, implicit, subjective – and to organize them in a coherent result through the tools available to the designer. Anca Matyiku argues and demonstrates in her paper how literature and storytelling can play a decisive role in this interpretative task, by discussing an exploratory design project structured around the prototypical figure of the ancient Greek architect Daedalus. Through a series of exercises that required students to translate between tactile and literary mediums, it asked the students to concentrate on 'building' as a verb rather than a noun, an action rather than an object. The contribution by Christos Kakalis and Stella Mygdali discusses the roles of narrative and performance in a series of workshops in Athens and Edinburgh exploring notions such as urban emptiness and silence. In enhancing new techniques and methods, Angeliki Sioli's paper introduces the act of collecting words as a fruitful way of exploring the urban environ-

ment that opens unforeseen avenues. These words formed the poetic geography in which the students, through the use of different literary techniques, then continued their designs. By explicitly introducing these techniques, Sioli's students worked within a linguistic design process that is characterized by three stages: the collecting, the writing and the oral presentations. Stephen Steyn and Sumayya Vally introduce us to dream readings and discuss how the condensation of dreams has an analogy in design, which can create new and remarkable readings of inglorious heritage sites throughout South Africa. Their students have been engaged in developing a new language that can express possibilities and that can go beyond the limitations of current political imagination.

While the examples of Steyn and Vally show the works of students who are quite advanced in their work and are challenged to take a political stance through their projects, we might wonder if literary methods are also applicable at the bachelor's degree level. The contribution of Mark Proosten and Katrin Recker had the ambition of teaching bachelor's degree students the understanding necessary to handle a relatively small architectural design project from concept to detail by introducing a fictive character in an imaginary place. Taking the character of a lighthouse keeper and a series of unique, remote islands as the two main starting points for the projects, students had to imagine their own narrative framework to develop the local, climatological and social conditions of their designs.

The third and final section of this issue presents individual projects in which students worked with literary methods and techniques. The tools applied vary from analytical and creative writing to study urban locations in Bogotá to poetry and comic strips that trigger the design of such varying programs such as a comics museum in Tampere, Finland, a series of three libraries in the Italian Alps and a sequence of follies scattered throughout the Scottish Isle of Islay. These master projects close this journal issue as testimony of the possible applications of the literary approach advocated in many different ways throughout the journal.

As most of the authors in this journal issue argue, literature can provide many new insights and tools into architectural pedagogy, from the ways in which it influences the whole educational philosophy of a particular school to the possibilities it offers to teaching methods in design studios and diploma works. What all presented educational efforts in this issue have in common is that the literary methods they apply open up our approach towards design, and that reinforces the acknowledgment, often taken for granted, that every design is, essentially, an act of imagination.