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Schrijver, Lara; van der Hoeven, Frank

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Design and Method in Architectural Research: From Objective Quantification to Material Speculation

Lara Schrijver ^[1], Frank van der Hoeven ^[2]

^[1] *University of Antwerp, Faculty of Design Sciences (Belgium)*

^[2] *Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment (The Netherlands)*

This issue of SPOOL introduces a new thread: 'Method and Design', titled "Design and Method in Architectural Research: From Objective Quantification to Material Speculation". The issue explores the conventional understanding of method through both theoretical contributions and visual essays. The theoretical contributions discuss methodology, material practice, studio approaches, or design principles. The visual essays are more experimental, allowing for design proposals or artistic expressions that explore specific methods, depict scenarios, or articulate a material logic.

The history of establishing reliable research methods in architecture is fraught with uncertainty, influenced by cultural habits, individual opinions, subjective positions, and institutional incentives. It is the story of a field that has aimed to establish its objectivity while still preserving the individual horizon of creative solutions.

A modern, positivist approach to theory and science might argue that this complicated history is little more than an indication of the unreliability of research approaches in architecture. This issue, instead, argues that approaches rooted in perception and material reality provide a situated understanding with its own merits. What if the idiosyncratic habits of drawing and design are considered an index of collective values and intentions? What if scientific relevance is measured by a variety of specific observations rather than quantifiable or reproducible results? What if drawings can provide an approach similar to laboratory experiments, with a hypothesis iterated in multiple possible outcomes?

The possibility that the materials of architectural design themselves may provide a foundation for methodological innovations seems intuitive from within the discipline of architecture, where drawings and diagrams are a self-evident mode of inquiry. At the same time, current habits of scientific research leave limited space for this explorative approach. With this issue, we aim to show that architecture is particularly suited to provide new modes of academic inquiry. Studio training develops skills such as spatial projection and scenario thinking, requiring visual and diagrammatic renditions of spatial intentions. Moreover, the design process explores a series of possible solutions, and these narratives of possible futures explore the values they wish to encourage or constrain. It is this blended condition, materialized in drawings and models, that this issue focuses on as a valuable trajectory for architectural research.

The contributions included in this issue support our hypothesis that a new thread on 'Method and Design' is fertile ground for a range of systematic and methodical approaches. SPOOL thus provides space for expanding our notions of scientific research.

The issue starts with Valerie Hoberg, who explores practical examples from art and architecture spanning the 20th and 21st centuries, shedding light on artistic practices that, apart from enhancing designerly qualities

and fostering a reflexive approach, have a significant research impact in architecture. Heidi Svenningsen Kajita and Katie Lloyd Thomas delve into the communicative processes between residents, architects, and other parties, as found in the lists and letters of the archive of the Byker Redevelopment in Newcastle Upon Tyne. They reconstruct how mainstream practice collected and filed residents' experiences and understanding of their homes and how, through the circulation of those papers, residents' notes were also embedded in the design process. Ionas Sklavounos delves into the installation designed by Hans Hollein for the Künstlerhaus facade in Vienna in 1985. By doing so, he discusses how such speculation entails the physical replication of carefully chosen 'historical' forms and their reassembly in what would be best described as a 'fragmentary whole'. Manuela Triggianese explores the pivotal role of design as a decision-making tool within multi-stakeholder collaborations, focusing on the early phases of the Rotterdam Central Railway Station and its surroundings project.

Next, we continue with contributions where drawing takes center stage. Ellen Verbiest, Julie Marin, Bruno De Meulder, and Andrew Vande Moere explain how comics function as a narrative assemblage method for critical analysis, bringing together different data sources and rendering their research process on circularity contextual and visual. Lucia Jalón Oyarzun, Rubén Valdez, Tiphaine Abenia, Aurèle Pulfer, Malcolm Onifade, Emmanuelle Augustoni, and Dieter Dietz explain how the methodology of ALICE (Atelier de la Conception de l'Espace) evolved to include data-based drawing techniques, skillfully merging precise surveying with qualitative data analysis, thereby bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative facets of design. Hong Wan Chan focuses on two methods employed in the selection, interpretation, and representation of diverse source materials for developing alternative biographies for her ancestral landscape - Nanhai district in the Pearl River Delta in southern China.

The issue closes with a contribution from Peder Anker and Mitchell Joachim. The particular qualities of the eco-social design work of students at the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies at New York University that evolved over the last decade led us to add a new section to SPOOL: Field Notes, which will allow for contributions that explore new territory at the forefront of design.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our external reviewers, on behalf of all our authors, editors, and readers, for your willingness to provide thoughtful and constructive reviews.

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