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From Writing to Making

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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Homing Objects: From Writing to Making

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Can architects design with words? Can they move from words to models and then hands on making, bypassing the medium of drawing altogether? “Homing Objects” was a recent four-week workshop that tested this possibility. The workshop—part of the master level design course “The Space of Words” which explored different ways to address the above questions—was taught by three architects combining expertise in architectural theory, building technology and timber construction. “Homing Objects” asked architecture students to fabricate unprecedented domestic objects that were dreamed up and drawn out through language. “Homing” (borrowed from messenger pigeons) intends to turn “home” into a verb and an act, through a journey into memories and words that engender new possibilities of enacting and finding home, disrupting our preconceived notions about home and domesticity. We introduced the students to literary texts that describe everyday familiar objects. This introduction was meant to question and bring forward new possibilities of what a domestic object can be, as the literary texts offered unusual, uncanny, and unpredictable ways of seeing and relating to these objects. Following the close study of these texts, students were prompted to bring objects from their daily life to a shared common table. They “warmed up their inside voice” by writing short descriptions for three of these objects, in such a way that objects were hidden between the lines and were not named directly. This instruction pushed the students to see the familiar otherwise. Then they imagined possible combinations of these objects (or parts of these objects) that would create unprecedented new ones. Based on these imaginary combinations they proceeded with writing narratives that would describe, explain, and envision the new objects in the space of a home. Iterations of these narratives harvested, always in writing, design ideas for experiential qualities of these unique objects. Through writing and re-writing, many students moved further in envisioning objects that did not connect any more with the ones that were brought to the shared table. The students moved then to scaled models that gave the imagined objects a three-dimensional presence. The decision to exclude drawings from the process shifted the focus from what these invented objects might look like, to their sensorial qualities: what does it feel to hold an object in your hand, what sound does the use of an object create. Offering feedback on the models, always relating them with the narratives, led to more nuanced versions of these mock-ups and took us to the construction of the objects as finished and reproducible products. The students concluded the workshop composing a narrative that describes the use of their object from the perspective of a particular character. This narrative communicated functional aspects of the objects: elements that somebody could not easily understand without directly engaging with them. The end of “Homing Objects” meant the reinterpretation of what home might mean and the beginning of the studio’s final assignment: the building of full-scale domestic rooms, merging again through writing and language, that further questioned the notion of domesticity