



**The**

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# Editorial

Research seems to be both loved and hated by architects as well as by our faculty at the university. If one looks at the endlessly ongoing discussion on a 'scientific' approach towards our field, a contradiction comes to mind: apparently nobody seems to know how architectural research should be done, yet everybody is practicing it. How did we get this ambivalent attitude? During the last AnArchi symposium on research and education in March 2011, a statement was made by Jacob Voorthuis: architecture is neither Geisteswissenschaft, exact, nor behavioural science ("alfa, beta, nor gamma"), so we need a new language to describe our profession. For a discipline that already exists for a few millennia, this seems strange. Do we question our own abilities as we are surrounded by the bèta focused engineers of Eindhoven? Is a University of Technology not the right place for a study that wishes to understand the world on the one hand, but learns us to be the creator of a new world on the other? Or do we lack both the rhetorical strength of alfa, as well as the statistic skills of gamma? These questions become especially relevant in the discussion on the plans of a university wide bachelor system, which is said to be the kiss of death for the design education programme for architectural students. What we actually would like to accomplish, is a magazine about research and education. This issue of Archiprint may be seen as a catalogue of research methods. Several different people, both university related and external writers, are asked to write about their opinion on the architectural discourse while they try to grasp the research in their own fields of interest. By explanations on the methods used and description of the results in the design processes we hope to offer some insight in what is already present. Perhaps this may contribute to a solution for this problem we seem to have.

Erik Hoogendam, Jan Verhagen

## Colophon

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## Content

## Opening statements

## Narrative

## Design Support Systems

## Eindhoven Method

## Models and Making

## Urban Research

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## AnArchi

<b>The Research Issue</b> Maarten Willems, Irene Curruli, Laurence Bolhaar, Bob l'Herminez	<b>08.</b>
<b>The Industrial Narrative</b> Myrthe Buijs	<b>10.</b>
<b>The Narrative Method</b> Gijs Wallis de Vries	<b>11.</b>
<b>Enoia</b> Mark Proosten	<b>12.</b>
<b>Generative Design of Brickwork</b> Ricardo Ploemen	<b>14.</b>
<b>Educating Intuition</b> Gerald Lindner	<b>15.</b>
<b>Ex-plau-ra-li-sa-tion</b> Thomas Krijnen	<b>16.</b>
<b>Amsterdam Alphabet</b> Gijs Adriaansens	<b>18.</b>
<b>Contextual Awareness</b> Martijn Kruijf	<b>19.</b>
<b>Delirious Amsterdam</b> Martijn Schlatmann	<b>21.</b>
<b>Models and Making</b> Sanne, Reinaerts, Jan Schevers, Raoul Vleugels	<b>22.</b>
<b>Cultural Heritage</b> René Führen	<b>28.</b>
<b>Measuring Mental Maps</b> Mahshid Shokouhi	<b>30.</b>
<b>Three Quarks for Munster Mark</b> Han Westelaken	<b>32.</b>
<b>Berlin as Model</b> Tim Brans, Sem Holweg, David de Kool, Loes Martens, Robert Peters	<b>34.</b>
<b>Research as a Part of the Design Process in Theory and Practice</b> Tim Kouthoofd	<b>36.</b>
<b>AnArchi</b> 3th board of AnArchi	<b>37.</b>

# The Industrial Narrative

## The Relationship between Stories and Architecture in Industrial Buildings.

“Tell me (since you are so sensible to the effects of architecture), have you not noticed, in walking about this city, that among the buildings with which it is peopled, certain are mute; others speak and others, finally – and they are the most rare – sing?” (Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos* or the architect, 1921) <sup>[1]</sup>

When we design or examine a building, we take into account its walls and roof, its construction and interior spaces, its materials and its doors and windows. These concrete typological elements construct a viable piece of architecture. Nevertheless, there is a more sensitive and subjective side to architecture. To me, that side consists of the stories that inhabit buildings. In the quote above, Paul Valéry introduces the idea that buildings can speak, even sing. In ‘The architecture of happiness’, Alain de Botton goes even further, imagining a dictionary for what buildings speak of <sup>[2]</sup>. In my graduation project, I investigate the stories of a specific building type: industrial buildings. **What stories do they tell, and how do these stories relate to their architecture?**

### Narrative Helmond

The research originated in the graduation studio Industrial Water Street, which is supervised by Gijs Wallis de Vries and Irene Curulli <sup>[3]</sup>. The studio did an extensive literature study and analysed current strategies in reuse, as well as studied the canal zone of the city of Helmond. One of the most challenging parts of the research in Helmond was the interviews we

conducted according to a method derived from that of Kevin Lynch <sup>[4]</sup>. Passers-by at the local library and at the city hall were asked to sketch and narrate their experience of the city centre of Helmond. The interviews resulted in a Lynch-map that reproduces the most important elements of Helmond as experienced by its people. Another, unexpected result of the interviews was the personal attachment to the city that we as interviewers developed by getting to know the personal stories of Helmond’s inhabitants. <sup>[5]</sup>

### The narrating factory

After the collective research of the studio, the research focussed on a specific building. Helmond’s oldest industrial building is, as are many factories in the city, located along the Zuid-Willemsvaart. It was built in 1840 by the Bots family and is often called ‘Auw Fabriekske’ [6] in the vernacular of the region. The building housed many functions related to textile production through its life, but now accommodates a flower shop and several other small businesses. The first step in the research of the Bots building was discovering its stories. Two different types of stories have been collected. **The stories of the first type, which consist of the history of the building, were found in the regional archives. Stories of the second type are more personal and often occur in an anecdotal form.** Collecting these stories was inspired by the anthropological approach of Mélanie van der Hoorn in her book ‘Indispensable Eyesores’ <sup>[7]</sup>.

After her example, I collected the memories and anecdotes of several people with a personal connection to the Bots factory.

### The reciprocal relationship

The collected stories were high in detail and consisted of both historical facts and very personal anecdotes. From these stories I selected six themes to study the industrial narrative of the building. **The analysis of these themes led to the construction of a tentative theory about the relationship between architecture and the narrative.**

Considering the relationship between stories and architecture, it is important to first realise that both architecture and stories have an autonomous aspect. Nevertheless, stories and architecture do influence each other, and this relationship is reciprocal. What they influence is not each other’s physical presence, but the experience of the other. If architecture influences the way in which stories are experienced, these stories can become more visible and tangible, and they can be easier to remember. Conversely, when stories influence architecture, the architecture becomes more meaningful and intelligible, and stays in people’s minds longer. **Thus, stories and architecture strengthen each other and can even ensure each other’s existence.** The opposite effect, in which stories and architecture contradict, can result in the change or even denial of stories and in less intelligible architecture.

Though they are both autonomous, architecture and the narrative mutually

# The Narrative Method

influence each other. Considering this, it is hard to understand the subsidiary role for small history and personal anecdotes in architectural design. In the final phase of my graduation project, I am now experimenting with the possibilities to let stories and architecture influence each other on a deeper level. In a dialogue, written after the example of Paul Valéry, two buildings become the protagonists of their own story. In a model, architecture is distorted to tell its story in a more powerful way. Finally, a small design intervention explores the possibilities to strengthen the relationship between stories and architecture by small-scale means. With all these different approaches, ranging from historical research and interviews, to creative writing and making models, I have explored the complex and somewhat obscure field of narrativity. An exploration that is certainly not finished yet. To me, stories are the most fascinating part of architecture.

## Notes:

- [1] Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos or the architect*, in: Valéry, P., *Selected writings* (1964), New York: New Directions Publishing, p. 175
- [2] Botton, A. de, *De architectuur van het geluk* (2006), Amsterdam: Olympus, p. 109-112
- [3] *The other students participating in this studio: Dominique Geelen, Milou Piethaan, Cyriel Prinsen and Rik Verhalle*
- [4] Lynch, K., *The image of the city* (1960), London: Harvard University Press
- [5] *The results of the M3 research of Industrial Water Street are published in: Curulli, I. (ed.), Kanaalzones B5 - 4 Helmond, University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Eindhoven, 2011*
- [6] 'Auw Fabriekske' is the corruption of the local dialect for 'Oude Fabriek' or, in translation, 'Old Factory'
- [7] Hoorn, M. van der, *Indispensable Eyesores* (2005), Dissertation, University of Utrecht

In my teaching I am looking for a narrative approach to architecture - with dubious results. No method! Lots of inspiration. Two papers presented on worthwhile congresses. Sympathetic response of colleagues. Prize winning graduates. Yet, no theory. More than in geography and history, where a 'spatial turn' followed the linguistic turn, narrativity has a dubious reputation in architecture. Perhaps, the whole narrative idea is doubtful. Methodical doubt however is a philosophical position. In this issue of Archiprint, Myrthe Buijs (now graduating) and Mark Proosten (graduated last year) give examples of narrative approaches to architecture. I would like to reflect on their positions.

To tell a story is an ancient art. It is called literature, oral or written. What is the interest of literature and its tales and tongues in the global visual culture of today? If it is the freedom of art, the danger is arbitrariness and vanity. But if it escapes from social conformism and defies political correctness it can freely tell about our lives under globalism, capitalism, socialism, or fundamentalism. In what way do its explorations of life and death, of the self and the other, of the individual and the collective, and of the local and the global matter to the design of our environment? A typology of novels may help to clarify this question. Since Plato, the utopian narrative, and its dystopian cousin, often in the form of science fiction, addresses questions of technology, power, and space. Its idea of a project is close to design. Just now, Jacob Voorthuis has announced a studio on it. The second type is the Bildungsroman, that stages the coming of age of a protagonist, like Thomas Mann did in *Buddenbrooks*, commented by Bernard Colenbrander in his oration. Such novels often stage (an avatar of) the author himself, like in *The Portrait of the artist as a young man* by James Joyce. A variation that arouses intense complicity with the reader is the novel which reflects on its method: Mark Proosten mentions a few. A third type is the regional novel (Dutch: 'streekroman'), considered a minor art, but its vernacular tongue and picturesque scenery disclose how local experiences are tied up in world history. Both Myrthe and Mark read such novels to conceptualize the climate and culture of a place. The successful relative of the regional novel is the so called world literature, whose heroes and adventures open the gates to vibrating cities and their destinies – an example is Milan Kundera, mentioned by Mark. >

A special type is the historical novel, in which the recently deceased Hella Haase excelled. It is a genre that is superficially characterized by the fact that since the author has not lived the story, events and persons are (partly) 'invented' - which of course is the essence of fiction. Fiction is what makes the reader live the past, and that is quite interesting now that architecture is more and more involved with 'heritage'. The last type of literary fiction is oral history - the source material of all literature. The problem is, that popular narrative rejects the idea of fiction: it is a 'true story'. No factual argument can dismiss its deep truth, and that is why myths, legends, and folk tales constitute the domain of many scholars, from psychologists (Freud) to archeologists (Schliemann) - and it is where Myrthe picked the clues to reconstruct a family saga and the vicissitudes of a factory. Beyond recording 'what really happened', she designed a 'possibility', thus wishing the factory a happy future.

Different from the objective technical and formal languages of architecture, the subjective languages of fiction acquaint us with street life, give a close reading of dwelling, impart commitment with cities, and stimulate personal experience of places, of events, of landscapes, and of climates. Architects have known this for a long time. To escape the dreariness of social housing in the 1970's, Emile Aillaud paid homage to poets like Rimbaud and Hölderlin depicting them on blind end facades of housing blocks and inscribing their words in formerly left over space, to introduce 'monumental' urbanity in suburbs like Chanteloup les Vignes near Paris. In designs for Trieste Aldo Rossi used Slataper's *La vita calda* and Blanchot's *Le Bleu du Ciel* as motto's to evoke love stories and its everyday décor. As we all know, Rossi coined quite a different method than the one I'm looking for! His typological approach to architecture is formal and that is its force, with which he opposed functionalism. He also said that typology is a language, it expresses collective memory. Probably the clear and hard method of typology correlates with the vague and soft method of 'narratology'. The essays of Myrthe and Mark eloquently argue the importance for architects to join space and language, stories and images, fiction and reality.

#### Notes:

[1] 'Eunoia' is the shortest word in English to contain all five vowels, and the word quite literally means 'beautiful thinking'. The perfect title for a poetical book that is directly inspired by the exploits of Oulipo (*Ouvrier de Littérature Potentielle*) - the avant-garde coterie renowned for its literary experimentation with extreme formalistic constraints. This work shows that even under extreme improbable conditions of duress, every chapter contains only one vowel, language can still express an uncanny, if not sublime, thought. Christian Bök, *Eunoia*, Canongate Books Ltd, Edinburgh, 2001

[2] Zumthor, Peter, *Thinking Architecture*, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2006, p. 29-38

[3] Hoffman, E.T.A. *Tales of Hoffman*. Penguin Classic: May 2004, p.161

[4] 201101\_Ulaval extension, in collaboration with Daniele Aulenta IT, Sara Jordao P, Maura Massone IT, for more information and details of the competition entry visit [www.mlpproosten.net](http://www.mlpproosten.net)

[5] Calvino, Italo. *Six memos for the next millennium*, 2009, Penguin, London, p.48

By: Mark Proosten

## Eunoia

Eunoia<sup>[1]</sup>, a literary approach within architectural practice.

The title of this article introduces us to the beautiful thoughts of Christian Bök, a Canadian poet. To write "Eunoia", he restricted himself by the use of only one vowel for each chapter. Nevertheless, each chapter transcends a character of its own; chapter 'a' the arab world of spices and herbs, chapter 'e' the adulterous woman of French nobility, and chapter 'u' the violence of a Mongolian warrior. The work of Christian Bök shows that the meaning of a text is not based on the single interpretation of words, but can be derived out of interpreting the text or chapter as a whole. Bök's poetic work exemplifies the concept of literature and theory in contemporary culture.

A culture in which the ever increasing speed of media, the fragmentation of information and a dominant need for visual metaphors are influencing literature and the architectural practice.

When theorising a literature based approach one faces a challenge: the compatibility with the kind of knowledge as traditionally understood by the discourse of a technical university. This approach argues against the favouritism towards an unambiguous theory and opens up creative possibilities that in turn can be theorized. It sheds a light on the creative process of the architect and on the concept of knowledge production. When using literature within architectural design, one should consider the freedom of interpretation, a subjective approach that can strengthen the attitude of architects.

There are multiple examples of literary works that contain spatial experiments. Take for example the books of Mark Z. Danielewski that need to be turned into multiple directions for making it possible to read them. Or George Perec, one of the most active and creative members of Oulipo (Workshop of Potential Literature), who investigated the spaciousness of the novel in all of his works. In “La disparition” (translated into English as *A Void*, 1994) he never uses the most common French letter ‘e’, and in “Species of Spaces and other pieces” he continues to investigate the use and position of words and letters.

Beside the writers who question the spatial qualities of language, there are architects and thinkers who refer to literary works. Peter Zumthor, a world-renowned architect, refers to Italo Calvino’s concept of vagueness when he addresses the ‘hard core of beauty’<sup>[2]</sup>, opting for a poetic precision that contains the richness for the multiplicity of observation. Furthermore, in the theoretical words of Steven Holl and Juhani Pallasmaa, references to the works of Milan Kundera and Calvino can be found, while Antony Vidler’s critique on “The Architectural Uncanny” is based upon Freud’s concept of ‘Unheimlichkeit’, a concept that emanates from the literary writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann. To strengthen Vidler’s main argument against the modern unhomely he uses another work from the same writer; E.T.A. Hoffman’s short story “Councillor Krespel”.

Instead of knowing what he wants to build as his new house, Councillor Krespel orders four walls, without doors or openings whatsoever, to be constructed. It is from this structure that he starts addressing the masonry man where to put the door, floor, interior-walls and windows. Therefore, Councillor Krespel’s house is enveloped around the physical needs of the inhabitant; the dimension of the space, the entrance of the daylight, they all derive out of intertwining common human condition with the spatial qualities of architecture. The result is a house with a rather awkward appearance from the outside, but ‘once inside you were filled with a quite unexampled sense of wellbeing and comfort’<sup>[3]</sup>.

It seems to me that within architectural design, a literary approach supports the architects position in contemporary culture. Instead of knowing beforehand what he wants to build, with a preconceived image is his mind, he starts a research within literature and theory. **Within this research, literature can be used to characterise space, which forms an important aspect within the stimulation of creative solutions.** It creates these solutions by intertwining common human conditions with the spatial qualities of architecture.

In my current practice, the literary approach that I was able to develop within my architecture education results in questioning every building assignment with a research

question. Each projects derives out of a research that combines morphological, typological, historical and theoretical studies with a vast reading of literature. For instance, I have read the works of Gabrielle Roy and Margaret Atwood when I was doing a typological research for developing the design of an extension to the architectural academy in Quebec <sup>[4]</sup>. These works gave an insight to the cultural and social values which were used in interpreting the other parts of the research: the traditional typology of the Canadian cabin. Because of a harsh climate the need for a comfortable zone, traditionally the room where a fireplace is located, became the conceptual tool within the design.

**A literary approach does not differ from an academic approach; it introduces a freedom of interpretation and subjectivity within the research.** This can result in a more open and emphatic attitude towards architectural design. Instead of answering a complex assignment by adjusting it to a preoccupied image we have in our mind, we move towards a research driven design that can evolve into an idiosyncratic work. According to the Italian writer Italo Calvino we can distinguish two types of imaginative processes: “the one that starts with the word and arrives at the visual image, and the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression” <sup>[5]</sup>. As for me, I opt for the use of the imaginative process that starts with words, words that contribute to the beautiful thinking of the architect.

Narrative

Design Support Systems

Typology

Models and Making

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Education vs. Practice