Translations of literary fiction to architectural narratives: an experiment with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*

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> A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he's capable of. Novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility.
>
> Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*

1.

The problem of what should be an architectural school is as old as the opening of the first one, the Académie Royale d'Architecture in 1671 as a consequence of a long process of the architects' claim for the need of professional training. Furthermore, and ever since the institutionalized instruction of architecture incorporated the practice within its curricula, it became a pedagogical issue, subject of revision of its goals and methods, oscillating between the idea of teaching and learning.

In fact, when the apprenticeship becomes academic it cannot be a replica of architectural offices, otherwise its existence would be completely redundant on the one hand, and on the other it would face the problem of the total impossibility of exposing the students to all sorts of problems (usually misunderstood with functional programs).

But what is, or what should be then, the role of design studios? What can be done to improve the student's skills and tools of spatial reasoning?

This paper attempts to create a theoretical framework to investigate the essence of spatial qualities, rather than the architectural object with direct reference to codified forms of architecture focusing on the creative process of designing through the translation of literary fiction into architectural narratives.

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Considering literature as a generative material, given the potential of its nature to create a fictional reality that is open to multiple interpretations, the investigation aimed to test this *modus operandi* as a way to explore mental ideas, concepts and images of space, anchored in two experiments with Lewis Carol's seminal texts.

They were both developed with first year students within the design studio and they were challenged to interpret, synthetize and spatially translate *Alice's*

Adventures in Wonderland in first place, followed by *Through the Looking Glass*. The results of these two exploratory exercises worked as simulacrums for new pedagogies that questioned the apparently stable concepts of program, representation and their correlation.

2. From the Grand Prix to the design studios

The Academy of Architecture was preceded by the Italian Academies of Art in the 16th century when architecture aspired, together with painting and sculpture to be elevated to the condition of liberal art, closer to science, mathematics and literature. Even the word *disegno* was understood in a different way, as an idea or abstract concept able to be represented graphically.

This was definitely a heritage of Alberti (1404-72) namely the enunciation of architecture as a prerequisite for the development of society - from the individual to the family - through the transformation of the built world to meet the needs of man, from public to private activities. Philibert Delorme (c.1510-70) had also an important role: he was the first, outside the Italian circle, to describe the idea of an autonomous profession of specialists with particular training patterns, to define their responsibilities and privileges and to recognize that the traditional training as builders or stone masons was not enough.

Thus, painters, sculpturs and architects joined together to found the Accademia di San Luca in Rome with the support of Pope Gregory XIII in 1577, but since its opening in 1593 it only worked on Sundays and bank holidays due to the absence of a proper curricular agenda and lack of funds. One of the goals of the Accademia was to develop artistic creativity and practical skills and for that reason competitions were implemented since 1596, although they were just formally integrated in the curricula from 1702 onwards.

In the late 17th century, France witnessed the emergence of the first formal school of architecture as a result of the efforts of Louis XIV (1638-1715), the French Minister of State Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), and the engineer and mathematician Nicolas-François Blondel (1617-86), its first director. Within the formation of the Académie Française, it followed the opening of the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture (1648), the Académie Royale de Danse (1661), the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres (1663), and in the same year, the Académie Royale des Sciences and the Académie Royale de France à Rome (1666). The school was committed with training architects, as in other fields, through a system of teaching-production that would anticipate the normative character that later would spread from the École des Beaux-Arts.

Until that, the teaching of architecture was based essentially on the oral transmission of technical and symbolic knowledge to reproduce. But Colbert, less than a century after the discoveries of Galileo, understood - as the Italian courts have had understood - that the existing corporations of artisans , given its conservative and protectionist nature, did not encourage the innovation necessary to the corresponding French military and economic power. It was necessary to create a new institution for this purpose - the academia, a solution similar to that which the Italians had already discovered, notably with the founding of the Academia del Disegno in Florence (1563) by Giorgio Vasari (1511-74).

But the visionary nature of Colbert was not focused just on the technical aspects of architecture, he was also concerned with the discovery of the principles of beauty, real and positive, similar to what Galileo had instituted regarding the stability of buildings. And it should not have been coincidence that the inaugural class of N-F. Blondel was about "le bon gout".

In fact, in the very beginning, the Académie functioned as a kind of "club", where its initial members – N-F. Blondel, François Le Vau (1613-76), Libéral Bruant (c.1635-97), Daniel Gittard (1625-86), Antoine Lepautre (1621-79), Pierre Mignard II (1640-1725), François II d'Orbay (1634-97) and Andrew Félibien (1619-95) - met once weekly. The morning was devoted to the teaching of "the rules of architecture" and the afternoon to scientific subjects such as geometry, arithmetics, physics and other diverse areas of mathematical science whose principles were already developed in treatises.

However, the practice was still developed within architectural offices under a system of patronage/tutelage and it was with the Grand Prix de l'Académie Royale d'Architecture, created between 1700 and 1702 (although only formally established after 1720), that the first step for an academic apprenticeship begun, aspiring to a rigorous teaching, informed by the increasing importance attributed to technical fields as well as to social and political sciences. But the competition did not follow the Italian model, it was exclusively for students and more regular.

The award, decided according to the academy members, was designed to send students to the Académie de France à Rome, where they would finish their studies in direct contact with the classical culture, whose works could imitate and copy, later bringing that knowledge back to France.

To the annual competition, the Académie implemented the Prix d'Emulation, a monthly competition that students had to participate, and therefore it can be pointed as the beginning of the 20th century design studios, symbolizing the passage of the academies' system for the professional education, which evolved to incorporate a discipline of architectural design within the schools themselves, independent of previous systems of patronage, and prescribing an increasingly normative character for what was seen as the "creative side" of architecture.

This does not mean a disbelief in the role of creativity, but rather a modern heritage of understanding it as a problem-solving based on scientific analysis, which still lingers revealing the modern belief that architecture has to be validated for its applicability, this informed both by the increasing importance given to the social and political sciences. However, it was in the context of the Polytechnique, opened in 1795, and paradoxically in a course for engineers that architectural practice started to became part of the curriculums, particularly due to Jean-Nikolas Louis Durand with the implementation of the teaching of history through his "panoramic atlas" *Recueil et parallèle des édifices de tous genres, anciens et modernes, remarquables par leur beauté, par leur grandeur ou par leur singularité, et dessinés sur un même échèle* (1799-1801) and the operationalization of a design method proposed in *Précis des leçons*

d'architecture données à l'Ecole Polytechnique (1802-05), a teaching system that lasted until the advent of modernism, when it started to be questioned.

3. Project as fictional narrative

By the 19th century, the process of education reform, particularly in what concerned primary school, to a great extent influenced by Europeans such as Jean Jacques Rousseau (1717-1778), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) and Wilhelm Friedrich Froebel (1782 - 1852) would be reflected also in the teaching of architecture. The pedagogical models that have outlined the concept of individuality and creativity and the notion of "learning by doing", extrapolated the concept and principles underlying the Grand Prix, putting it in a new perspective that found translation in the pedagogical practices of the Bauhaus (1919-33), a school of architecture founded in Weimar by Walter Gropius (1883-1969). This will embody a system of education anchored in the idea of artistic creativity, active experimentation and the Froebel's theme of 'play' as a fundamental process in the acquisition of important theoretical discoveries. Its pedagogical value was understood as a contribution to the removal of academic abstraction, moving towards a real active work embodied in a method through which students would gain experience and most productive knowledge on their own.

Nevertheless, as we saw, the concept underlying the word "project", "progetto" in Italian, "projet" in French, "projekt" in German was not born from the Enlightenment desire of systematization as a way of being scientific validated. Its origins can be traced back to the late 16th century (Knoll: 1997, 1). In fact, as academic competitions were purely hypothetical tasks they were called "projetti", firstly at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, intended as exercises in imagination, since they were not intended to be built (Knoll: 1997, 2).

But its ever changing nature slowly moved from a device for teaching to a principle for learning, that is replacing the architecture of the object by the process of architecture, implying a close interplay between design and construction, and the demonstration of the effectiveness of the first validates the second.

Despite the crisis of rationalist thought and the denial of absolute reference systems - as the classic and modernist architecture were - and universally valid methods underlying architecture, which led to a new paradigm that valued the design process rather than the object itself, architectural schools remain tied to a practice that consists in running a specific program with increasing degrees of complexity over the years that make up the course, based on rational analysis and critical evaluation of the functional program, a legacy of Viollet-le-Duc. The prevalent categorizations from constant organizational and structural or functional types reveal a technocratic approach. Students start their design processes from analyses and inconsequent organizational charts that inform, from a typological point of view (in the functional sense of the term and not in the Quatremère Quincy) the design process.

"The belief that the use of a building and its expression in built form should be a central concern of architects emerged relatively recently in Western history. While for Vitruvius, utililitas comprised but one branch of architectural work collinear with venustas and firmitas, the destination or purpose of a building became increasingly the focus of debates on architectural principals and form during the eighteenth century. By the end of the century, the tenet "An edifice should present a character fitting to its destination" had become a common trope in architecture treatises. The expression communicates to us a familiar enough intent: to regulate form and ornament to purpose or programme." (Chi, 1996, p.18)

This situation seems to occur given the apparently inescapable reality that architects always work with a program and for a client. Consequently, the methods that architects, and architectural students, have to transform it into spatial ideas remain limited to the mapping and organigraming of it in a two-dimensional way directly related with a preconceived image where a mathematical logic such as the calculation of areas and the percentage of interstitial spaces plays a fundamental role. The result, more technocratic than creative, tends to underestimate the multi-sensorial aspects of space to build up its own identity. Although this is not always the case, we intended to reflect about ways of developing creative, critical and intelligent spatial skills to allow a new engagement with architectural program, not as a ready-made formula of translating pragmatic requirements of a building into its drawing.

Generally a text ready to be interpreted and spatialized, an architectural program can be understood as a creative interpretation not of the quantitative aspects of it, but instead the qualitative and relational cause-effect between them and the way in which space is configured.

4. The role of Phantasía in the design process

The parallels between architecture and music, painting and other arts have been widely discussed. Literature, on the contrary, and although frequently referred by architects as metaphors for projects, has not been studied by its structural similarities.

Peter Eisenman, when referring to timeless buildings compares them to literature classics saying that what makes one return to them is not the story, but the way the story is written or narrated. The same exactly happens with architecture. The project is not finished with its construction, it surpasses its own time - it is a problematization project with a "longer time". The built object is transient; it does not close the question, instead keeps it suspense and raises others. By extension, in an academic project this is even more emphatic – a professor does not make questions whose answers he already knows but rather creates the necessary conditions for the students to find their own questions, and the answers, in turn, are just provisional states of the mind.

In this sense, an architectural program, understood as a theme with its particular specifications can be compared to a story, and as in literature, the real subject of architecture is the construction of an argument around it. So, as

a story can be narrated differently, therefore acquiring new meanings and opening up new points of view, the same with the architectural program. As a relatively incipient list of intentions it does not mean anything in particular, its meaning arises from the way it is creatively interpreted in order to question and expand the potential of space configurations.

Looking at a general literary structure one can identify a plot and a setting. The narrative consists in the construction of an argument through the articulation of sequences (both in space and time) which presupposes an organization, a thread, a plug or switch. The narrative has to have a character, but the character does not have to be a person, it can be an emotion, a city, a room. And exactly as in literature, architectural characters have different hierarchies – they can be the protagonist, the antagonist, the secondary character or a figurant. And both the action and the characters have to be composed and characterized.

Also the role of the narrator within the story, both in terms of participation and focus can be compared to the architect in relation to his design project. That is reflected in the modes of representation, as well as in the reasoning behind it that could connect different objects, therefore incorporating the architect and its own history. If the process cannot be seen as just a compositional problem but rather as the construction of an argument and clarification of a method (by method we mean everything that can be followed by a third party, even if to conclude the contrary) than, representation techniques acquire a very important role, as they define the ways in which one choses to perspective an idea.

As our goal with the students is not the object itself but rather the process of designing it, we had to move from a program in its traditional sense that is, directly relating to pre-codified forms of architecture. It was therefore necessary to set up the conditions for developing spatial creativity and intelligence without the constraints of the real.

The Greek word Phantasía originally meant the human faculty of inventing or evoking images and Aristotle described it as something between the real and the unreal, responsible for the creation of intelligible forms of art. Inventing presupposes the (re)creation of another real by analogy. That was precisely the goal behind the choice of two literary sources as a basic material - *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* – which relied upon the recognition of an opportunity to work with what was already a representation as an operative support of intervention. As the subject of investigation, they had to be interpreted, synthetized and spatially translated into an object.

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5. Translations of literary fiction to architectural narratives

The fact that the representation of literary fiction (the text) does not stand to represent something that is real, but, on the contrary, creates a fictional reality that is open to multiple interpretations — becomes evident, for instance,

in cinema adaptations. Secondly, having many different students working on the same text, a kind of multilayering deconstruction and reconstruction of fragments, would prompt several disparate and autonomous narratives of the same fictional reality.

Writing and drawing have in common the capacity to transform something (either real or fictional) just by the way reality is chosen to be described or represented (Pacheco:2012, 155). In fact, both of them build up the landscape, set up the stage where existence takes place.

The first literary source, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, proposed a simulacrum of a path in the sense of what Le Corbusier called promenade architectural and its filmic implications such as motion perspective, time and the symbolic meaning of scale in terms of relation between body and building. The text was an opportunity to sketch up the cartography of *Wonderland* and as such, like an ancient cartographer, the student was to invent not only a physical geography but, in a more ambitious way, the place where Alice's character could develop inverting the relation between Alice and the space in the text. The space becomes the focus of the story without which Alice couldn´t even exist.

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The second, *Through the Looking Glass*, a kind of sequel, provided the ground for the definition of a "spatial camera" as a territory with limits defined by a specific structure, order, rhythmic sequences and arrhythmic threads, repetition, hierarchy, proportion between parts and the whole, contrasts of light and shadow and a surface quality as means for conditioning the personal perception of space. In this case, the architectural concept of limit or boundary was taken further, not only in its geometrical nature, but also by excavating the multiple meanings of symmetry and asymmetry on an overall design and its implications in the perceptual experience of space. Moreover, in *Through the Looking Glass* that ephemeral moment of the passage, of crossing to the other side, so many times neglected and by contrast with the first text, where space was the realm of the story, is explored. The in-between, the interstitial spaces, become an important suspension or acceleration of time and a privileged, and often uncommon, angle to look at reality.

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From the critical examination of the results, one can say that the migration of disparate representation formats between different disciplinary fields that as the potential to take further the abstract nature those when deprived from its original setting. The provisional condition of migrating could be the locus for the construction of ideas through a series of possible transformations such as the (re)interpretation of spatial sequences and differentiation, the (re)composition of relational spaces and transitions, the (re)assembly of fragments through spatial articulation and the (re)appropriation of themes, provoking unforeseen possibilities and unfolding original proposals.

Acknowledgments

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Images
MonicaPachecoimage 1 Lewis Carroll, cover of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
MonicaPachecoimage 2 Lewis Carroll, cover of *Through the Looking Glass*

MonicaPachecoimage 3 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 4 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 5 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 6 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 7 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Through the Looking Glass* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 8 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Through the Looking Glass* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 9 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Through the Looking Glass* (2008)

MonicaPachecoimage 10 ISCTE-IUL, students work upon *Through the Looking Glass* (2008)