

Writing Architectural Pedagogies



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Abstract

This paper is focused on making a case for the importance of literary pedagogies in architecture. The first part delineates the bridges between architecture and literature (in the broad sense) that have emerged historically; and they consist of five unique propositions: architecture and literature, narrative and space, text as spatial practice, impossible feminist spatial futures, and architecture and/as research. Using these five positions, the second part of the paper builds a case for literary emergency in architecture. The third part demonstrates three case studies from my own academic practice that are manifestations of a literary approach to architectural education. The fourth and final part of the paper is a postscript that delineates areas of missed opportunities in architectural curriculum in India, with the paper being a call to action, to return to the origins and foundations of architecture as a literary and intellectual discipline.

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1. Introduction

The connection between language and architecture is a historically and epistemologically complex and contested terrain, but we negotiate and navigate it with agreements and disagreements. While language and architecture are inextricably linked, architecture can be said to have its own language in the same way that literature can be said to have its own architecture. Further, there is an enormous body of significant literary work around buildings, architects, and cities, in terms of theories, histories, analyses, and criticisms. Yet, here is another paper on writing and architecture with a focus on pedagogy. One might ask: What is the aim? The fact is, the case still needs to be made, or re-made, on the significance of writing in architectural education, which has diminished steadily, with the link to practice and professional “competency” further eroded.

For the purposes of this paper, the inquiries will focus on the liminal boundary between the written word and the built world, and the overlaps as well as slipperiness between the two, structuring the paper into four parts. The first part will delineate the bridges between architecture and literature—in the broad sense but avoiding discussions of writing about architecture and writing in architecture, which survive and thrive, but to varying degrees of success. The second part will make a case on literary pedagogies. In the third part, three pedagogical approaches (teaching projects) are presented, from my own transnational academic practice, not just to demonstrate methodologies for engaging literature in architectural education as an academic exercise, but to also suggest the possibility that these are forms of experimental architectural practice. The fourth and final part of the paper is a postscript, which identifies missed opportunities and suggests the way forward for a more evolved architectural curriculum.

2. Of Architectural Disciplinarity

2.1 Literature and Architecture

The first proposition is about the compelling ways in which architecture and literature come together in articulating modernity. David Spurr’s *Architecture and Modern Literature* is a significant book which explores this theme, through a study of writings that “appear to break down the barriers between the two art forms, or at least to construct bridges between [them].”¹ Architecture was important because it was used by many writers to foreground anxieties, alienation, and dysfunctions around the crisis of meaning and inhabiting the modern world. Spurr reminds us of the “basic truth that the human world is literally structured as the built environment, and symbolically structured as language. The art of the built environment is architecture; that of language is literature. Herein is reason enough to consider their common ground.”² For the purposes of this paper, I will bring focus to writers like Franz Kafka, Gaston Bachelard, and Georges Perec—also covered in Spurr’s book—as I have always been struck by the materiality of interiors and other spaces and built forms in their writings.

According to Spurr, Kafka, writing in the early twentieth century, often “described his own writing in architectural terms,” referring to it “as a process of construction (*aufbauen*), but in a way that also makes this a construction of the self.”³ Spurr adds that there is an intimacy between “writing and the self,” almost as if “through the constructive process of writing, could Kafka himself come into being, not just as a writer but as a human

being.”⁴ Roger N. Thiel, similarly, notes Kafka’s observations (in his diary), where he writes: “Everything appears to me to be an artificial construction,” and “I am on the hunt for constructions.”⁵ Thiel also notes that Kafka’s novels are full of all kinds of architectural forms and structures, which often serve as “organizing principles and poetological devices: cities, squares, palaces, cathedrals; walls, towers, pits; staircases, stairs, windows, doors, gates, attics, roofs; galleries, bridges, streets.” However, he also notes that they are not deployed to applaud the positive qualities of these structures—these are not enduring structures. They cannot defend or protect and they are bound to fail or be destroyed. In trying to depict the condition of spiritual homelessness, Kafka’s “towers cannot be built, bridges give way, and buildings cannot provide shelter.”⁶ His constructions and deconstructions speak to the societal condition of living in “dysfunctional communities characterized by failed communication,” and the “instabilities and dislocations” they embody, which are otherwise suppressed.⁷

Peta Mitchell argues that by the time Georges Perec was writing, the connection between architecture and literature—especially the post-structuralist theorization of buildings as texts—was starting to gain ground (via Peter Eisenmann and Jacques Derrida).⁸ Novels in which architecture was not just a backdrop but the “stage upon which everyday social life could be enacted” characterized French literature since before France’s second empire.⁹ However, argues Mitchell, Perec’s *La Vie mode d’emploi* [*Life: a User’s Manual*] (1978), set in a fictitious block of flats in the Rue Simon-Crubellier in Paris, France, does so much more than represent the literature of his time: he “fuses his interests in the everyday and architecture into what might be termed an “architext,” whereby the “book and building become one.”¹⁰ One cannot say *Life: a User’s Manual* is set in an apartment building. It is written in a way such that the “book is the apartment building itself.”¹¹ Premised on recovering the quotidian and the everyday, argues Mitchell, Perec creates a “play in the narrative sequencing of the novel’s chapter-rooms,” inviting the reader to become a participant in unraveling the puzzle that has been constructed.¹²

2.2 Narrative and Space

The second proposition is about narrative in/and architecture. Bernard Tschumi and Nigel Coates’s collaboration at London’s Architecture Association (AA) in the 70s and 80s, as argued by Claire Jamieson and Rebecca Roberts-Hughes, was influential in shaping these ideas further, but over time, their methodologies also evolved in different directions. Jamieson and Roberts-Hughes note Tschumi’s powerful statement in his “Space and Events” (1983) essay, which connects the “unfolding of events in a literary context” to the “unfolding of events in architecture.”¹³ To this end, Tschumi’s approach was to take the “literary text as a resource from which to select narrative sequences that could be projected onto a physical site as the basis for the design of architectural space.”¹⁴ It was “deliberate and precise,” argue Jamieson and Roberts-Hughes, and related to the “the manipulation of words in a text.”¹⁵ In contrast, Coates was more interested in the “effect created by the literary text—sensation, immersion, narrativity—as qualities to be produced by architecture.”¹⁶ In essence, while Tschumi was trying to “create new forms,” Coates was seeking to “create new narratives constructed through experience.”¹⁷

Sophia Psarra’s *Architecture and Narrative* (2009) further unpacks these ideas as she characterizes architecture as a carrier

of “content” through the “arrangement of spaces, materials, social relationships, and the cultural purposes.”¹⁸ It is linked with “sequence, space, and time,” but it is also about structuring and arranging the different parts to make the whole. It is not about the story or the content, rather, it is about the content being structured and presented to an “audience by an authorial entity.”¹⁹ Psarra’s inquiry is focused on the “relationship between narrative structure, perceptual experience and representation.” She adds further that buildings do not just express meanings, but that they are also active in the construction of meanings. What is at stake is not just the conceptual realm of ideas (“patterns we can hold in our mind”), but also the way this is aligned or reconciled with the perceptual realm (“those we grasp gradually through movement”) of an embodied experience of visitors.²⁰ These two realms are not “mutually exclusive;” in fact, they are “different and interacting systems of ordering experience.”²¹

2.3 Text as Spatial Practice

The third proposition is about writing as architectural practice.²² Jane Rendell’s articulation of this framing is particularly useful, as she says: “I wish to draw attention to the architectural aspects of the practice of writing, a practice which, like architecture, is both spatial and material, and with which historians, theorists, critics, and designers all engage, and yet [which] is usually rendered invisible.”²³ Indeed, writing is an act that is material, spatial, tectonic, and inhabitable. To write is to build, and to read is to inhabit. And while the structuralists’ claim that buildings and cities are texts that can be read, it is also possible to imagine texts as architecture. Because, when we read texts, we also simultaneously envision depth, surface, thickness, layers, structure, foundations,

and sequence. And when we are speaking about writing, we are also “constructing” an argument, “assembling” evidence, or using a theoretical “scaffold” or “framework.” Language and text are always textured and spatial, and writing as a practice of architecture is not a “flat” representation of what is otherwise experienced as built space.

Irish architect and writer Anne Ryan echoes Rendell’s frustrations around the marginalization of writing as architecture as she also resonates Jennifer Bloomer’s approach to constructive writing: “My writing practice follows the very same motivations. I manipulate words to express an idea. Selecting brick as the sole material with which to define the thresholds, direct the light, texture the ground, sculpt the courtyards, and vault the ceilings of, for example, a domestic house; pushing the use of brick to its very limits operates in an analogous way to shifting word order, varying sentence length, developing fluid yet coherent movement between paragraphs, and intensifying vocabulary. One practice constructs and manipulates three-dimensional space. One practice constructs and manipulates one-dimensional words. But both volumetric enclosure and written text can work through and define spatial ideas. What links both processes of spatial understanding is the person (author-architect) and their negotiation of their surroundings.”²⁴

Ryan says that if “architecture is a way of thinking about the world,” then “making physical buildings” is the most “obvious and most accepted mode of practicing architecture.” She asks why it is hard to imagine other ways of practicing, such as “writing architecture” or “writing as architecture,” and whether this might be because writing has not been considered as a “mode of representation within the process of constructing architecture.”²⁵



Figure 1
Naman Pandey,
*Glancing through
History*, published
September 13, 2020

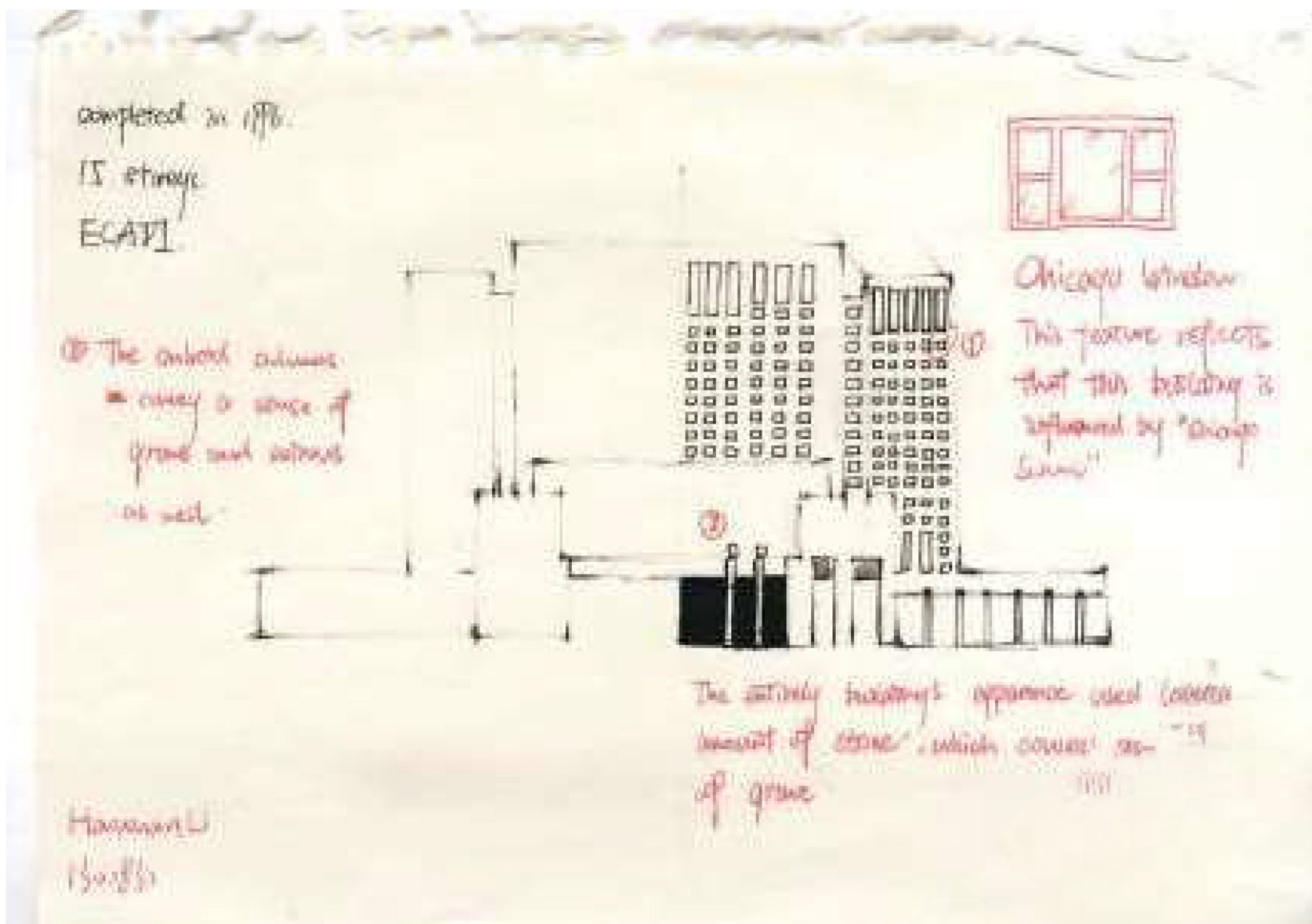


Figure 2
Shanghai field trip drawing
1, Haoxuan Li, 2014;
submitted to Xi'an Jiaotong
Liverpool University

To this end, while Rem Koolhaas proposed a parallel practice of writing—wherein he explained that all their best or original projects were “first defined in literary terms,”—writers like Italo Calvino offered yet another model of writing as architectural practice—through *Invisible Cities*—which contains “unseen possibilities embedded within the ruins of the city.” In John Hejduk’s theoretical projects, the writing not only completed the projects but also testified to a “new way of writing.”²⁶

2.4 Impossible (Feminist) Spatial Futures

The fourth proposition is about spatial futures and fiction. Not only has fiction the pre-emptive power to herald architectural, technological, and spatial futures, but it has also had a strong role to play in holding within it and keeping safe new, subversive, dissonant futures, specifically utopian fiction, including feminist utopian fiction.²⁷ Jennifer Sue Boyers emphasizes the political significance of feminist utopian fiction as a “medium which allows one to simultaneously critique existing hegemonic power relations and create alternative subversive visions.”²⁸ Examples of this are Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* (1905), which is characterized as “one of the earliest science fiction stories written by a woman” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), which is characterized as a “scientific utopia” and a feminist utopia.²⁹ The commonality between these two works becomes apparent when one considers how *Sultana’s Dream* “shares with *Herland* a playful depiction of a “good society” run by an all-female community harnessed by technology, that is living in peace, sharing, sustainability, and solidarity.³⁰

30 Léone Drapeaud’s “Founding the Feminist Utopia” (2018) essay presents a survey of feminist science fiction to suggest

the archetypes of city planning that can be utilized for imagining new feminist urban utopias, because architectural history does not really offer alternative spatial/social imaginaries. The archetypes are the fortress, which “creates a new context through isolation,” the city as a machine, which seeks to challenge how work is structured so that the “social status of women can be challenged and improved,” and the overlay, which is when “existing spaces are subverted, transformed, and questioned, often to the point where pre-existing spaces are barely legible.”³¹ The archetypes are not intended as instrumental typologies, rather, they are tools that allow us to think of ideal societies, social changes, and how that might be coded into spatial structures. However, most of all, Drapeaud emphasizes—through Erin McKenna—that one cannot let go of utopian thinking as that is like “forfeiting one’s future.”³² Literary works are particularly powerful as they contain narratives that have unimaginable spatial (built and unbuilt) consequences.

2.5 Architecture and/as Research

Finally, the fifth proposition about architecture and literature is about the definition of what constitutes research in architecture, even though not all research in architecture is literary. And while not all research in architecture is literary—as a lot of it is through practice and experimental methods, drawing, modeling, making objects, and such—it is a “systematic inquiry directed toward the creation of knowledge,” as Linda Groat and David Wang outline through James Snyder.³³ And often, but not always, this is documented and communicated through writing, in combination with other media and publication. There has been a lot of interest in the field of architectural research in the past 10 years, and the interest has been in defining what it is, notwithstanding that the

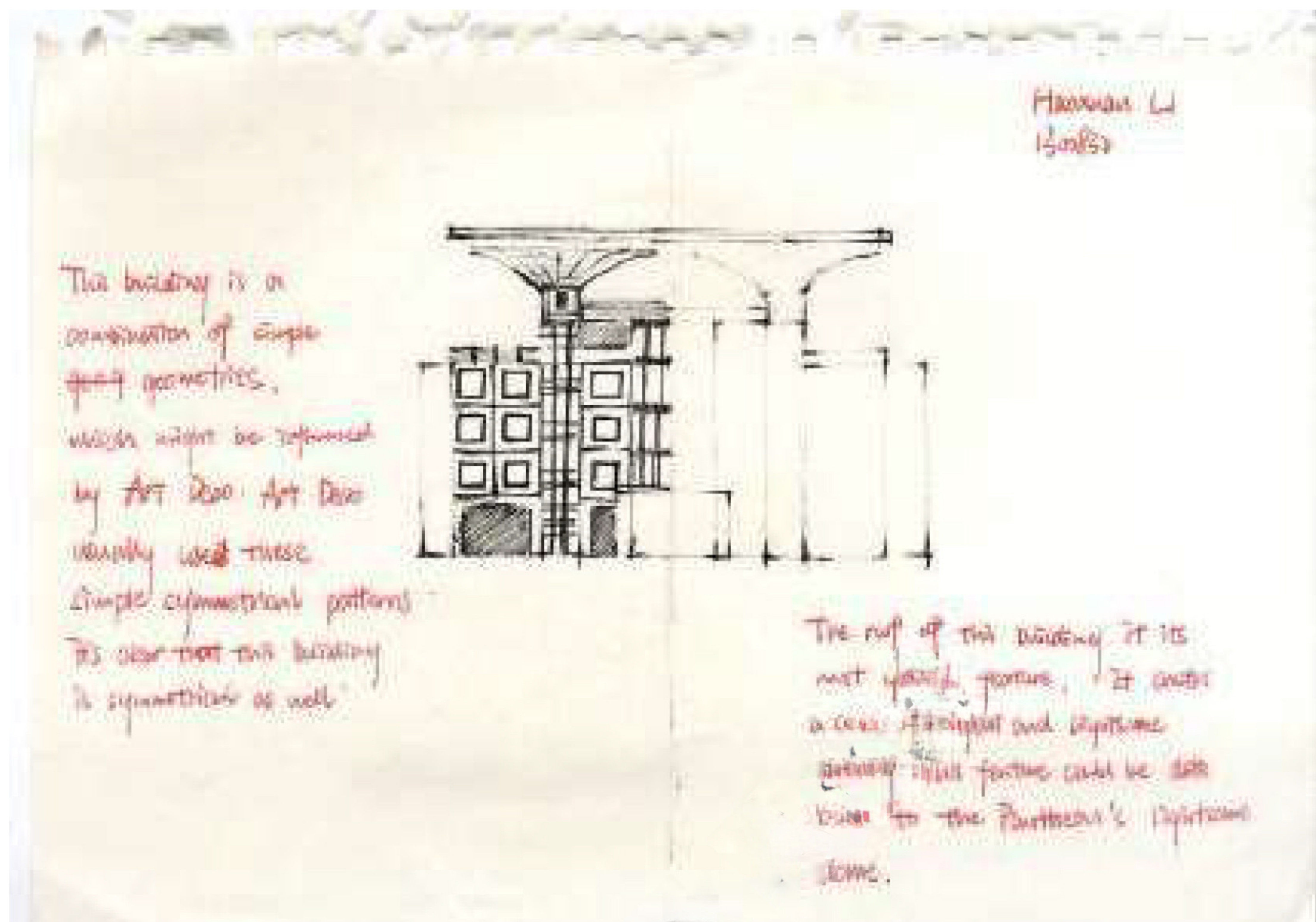


Figure 3
Shanghai field trip drawing
2, Haoxuan Li, 2014;
submitted to Xi'an Jiaotong
Liverpool University

well-established scholarship in the field of design research (Nigel Cross and Christopher Frayling, for instance) includes architecture and other forms of spatial practice, but is not limited to them.

There are three different ways in which research in architecture might take place across the following three domains of activity, and whilst they can be conceived as stand-alone, they are also often co-informing and intricately imbricated. The first is “Design/ Practice as Research,” which is “design work with a particular focus on the creation of new insight and knowledge,” with a specific focus on the contestation of methodologies and emphasis on speculation, risk, and experimentation.³⁴ The second is “Research Led Practice,” whereby the design process is cognizant of, as well as engaged with, the “state of art” in architectural design scholarship and is also open to engaging with disciplinary knowledge from “outside” architecture. Third is “Practice Based Research” that engages circular processes of testing and/or evaluating performance, making sense of and/or theorizing, undertaking critical interrogations of practice, processes, and buildings, and remaking as appropriate.

3. Of Pedagogies

3.1 Home Grown

It is important for me to note for our readers that these propositions and positions are not a Western import, emerging out of a European and North American discourse. Writing architecture has been a part of the Indian discourse for decades, starting with Gautam Bhatia’s extensive “body of unbuilt work encompassing his artworks, writings, and biting satire [which] have provided an accessible platform for both architects and non-architects to reflect on the complexities and

attendant absurdities of Indian architecture in its social, economic, and political context,” and Busride Design Studio’s recent manifestoes of contextual utopias,³⁵ as well as Rupali Gupte and Prasad Shetty’s myriad of speculative essays on the Mumbai public and their *First Questions* book by the School of Environment and Architecture (SEA) Mumbai; Kaiwan Mehta’s essays within his editorship of *Domus* and outside of it—all of which is further augmented by Rajesh Advani’s edited collections, *Unbuilt 1.0* (2019) and *Unbuilt 2.0* (2022); all these have created even more space for the genre of the architectural essay and critical and speculative writing in India.

3.2 Literary Emergency

As discussed in the previous section, there are many points of intersections between architecture and language—as writing, text, literature, theory, research, narrative, and fiction—and pedagogies in architecture may well take up one or some of these. However, it seems like we are almost always still making a case for writing, literature, and research in architectural education, not because they are so common, but precisely because they are not. As someone who works across professional and academic practice, I see a growing chasm and a disconnect in the industry from the act of writing, research, theory, and language in general in India as well as in Australia. Experienced architects, as well as graduates of architecture, are caught up in the never-ending cycle of making and perfecting drawings, understandably so because there is a crisis—reported formally by academic committees, and more anecdotally by architects—in the field of professional design documentation. To this end, writing in architecture is seen as a low priority, non-essential affinity and/or skill. Not



Figure 4
Tabletop installation of graphic tiles from M. Mukundan's novel, *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* by students of Avani Institute of Design, 2019

Figure 5
Studio Instagram (sensing space) showing tectonic explorations by students of Avani Institute of Design, 2019



only is this short-sighted because it centers professional competence entirely upon industry needs, but it is also focused on a short-term goal without considering how architects, emerging architects, and graduates might ever engage in a critical, reflexive practice without a recourse to writing. If we were to call for a “literary emergency” in architecture, now would be a good time, for two reasons.

One, research—and with it writing—is urgently needed for the industry and businesses, and even though this seems like a new idea in architecture, it has been “central to the history of the architect for over 500 years.”³⁶ The “business case” for research in contemporary practice is made well by Flora Samuel and Anne Dye who argue that practices are “using research to give clients evidence—as we all know how clients tend to like evidence—about why design makes a difference and on how the practice is continually improving what they do.”³⁷ Hensel and Nilsson contend that notwithstanding the orientation toward branding, business, and competitive benefits that this might deliver, there are “several practices internationally grounded in serious research efforts and collaborations using research to mainly develop the internal culture of the practice, with the open sharing of new knowledge externally.”³⁸ Katharine Martindale adds to this as she argues that practices engage in research to “expand and demonstrate practice expertise,” “innovate,” “fulfil passion projects,” “introduce new thinking,” “raise the practice profile,” “deliver commissioned research,” and to “attract talent.”³⁹ These ideas are bolstered even more in the figure of the *Hybrid Practitioner* (2022), the architect who writes and who simultaneously occupies the critical space between embodied knowledge (in practice) and academic research.⁴⁰



Two, and more importantly, is the centrality of writing in architectural criticism, and therefore, critical practice. Andrew Clancy's *Architectural Review* essay revisits this as he asks: "How can a practice be critical when it is so inherently intertwined with the culture it fundamentally serves? Ours is a time where the agency of the architect has to be developed in negotiation, as a catalyst, or even as an activist."⁴¹ It can be argued that to develop and sustain critical practice, we need to be able to delineate new theories, imagine impossible futures, and articulate radical transformations that are interested in "relentlessly shaking disciplinary foundations, disturbing assumptions rather than reinforcing and disseminating them."⁴² Writing and practice, while they move at differential paces and intensities, have the capacity of being complementary discourses, and instead of conforming they challenge and unsettle each other. Critical writing enters architectural discourse in the form of the essay in the eighteenth century, but it needs a more cogent history—a genealogy almost as powerful as the history of architecture as a discursive form.⁴³ In fact, as criticism is born out of the need to resist conservatism and absolutism, it may be that writing can imagine that which design is hesitant to think and do. Keeping these two points in mind, in the following sections, I will try to reflect upon my academic practice and present three case studies as propositions on literary pedagogies.

4. Three Propositions

4.1 Reading Buildings to Construct Texts

The idea of reading theory, reading buildings against theoretical frameworks, and building theories is a fundamentally literary-

tectonic process of studying the history of architecture, which I have explored in various settings. First was for the self-paced, field-based online course, "Chaukhat, Darwaza, Jharokha: Public Life of in-between Elements in Historic Architecture," which I developed and mentored for Acedge (an e-learning platform focused on trends in architecture, construction, engineering, and design in South Asia) between 2018 and 2022. Informed by own scholarship on architectural surface, the course provided the theoretical frameworks of surface as order, decorum, and animation; the source of theatrical urbanity, as shared territories, an event, and as urban; and as reflected repositories and the art of dressing well, to understand how threshold elements contribute to shaping life inside and outside the buildings.⁴⁴ Students were expected to use these lenses, visit historic buildings in their urban contexts, read threshold elements in historic buildings, and write new theoretical histories. The aim was not to de-historicize these elements, but to move away from relying on an exclusively text-based and classroom-based education in architectural history. Field study was, therefore, central to this, to subtly challenge the hegemony of canonical knowledge and appreciate new insights emerging from the embodying experience of buildings in context. (Figure 1, page 29)

For similar but slightly other reasons, I used a different methodology for teaching the History of Western Architecture module in Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University in China, which was in equal measures literary and tectonic. An important learning objective was to foster a sense of agency and independence in first-year students, especially considering Western education's indoctrination of Chinese students into English language and Western histories, which is constrained further by a lecture-based



Figure 6
(Re)thinking and (Re)making the Threshold Studio—montage showing application of conceptual wall to the existing building, University of New South Wales, 2011

format and a large cohort of 180 students. Therefore, a theoretical subject that was largely about reading and writing had to be more than just that. I proposed that instead of providing students with an essay topic or question, they should find one—which they did by combining two topics of their interest from my lectures. They then had to write a theoretical summary around these two topics and use them as lenses to read the buildings they visited during our annual Shanghai field trip. The way students composed their final essays was tectonic in nature. Constructed over time as an assemblage, it involved assembling topics and summaries as building blocks, using these to read buildings and make drawings, and using the drawings in the essay to present an insight. The process was neither neat nor conventional and there was a lot of collaborative “labor” involved in ensuring that there was an even spread of topics across a large student cohort to allow for distinctiveness in the essays. (Figure 2, page 30; Figure 3, page 31)

4.2 Fiction in Design

Design is an interesting way of understanding fiction, and as Hélène Frichot and Naomi Stead claim: “Every architectural proposition is a kind of speculative fiction before it becomes a built fact, just as every written fiction relies on a setting; the construction of a coherent milieu in which a story can take place.”⁴⁵ But further to that, fiction also has a function in architectural education, which Klaske Havik and Angeliki Sioli explore, as they argue that “imagination being at the very center of the architectural process, stories, and language can bring forward imaginative possibilities that have long been left on the margins of architectural curricula and pedagogical environments.”⁴⁶ And while architecturally invested texts like those of Kafka might be an interesting prompt for many educators—because the “narrative space in Kafka’s texts has ambiguous, incomplete, nonfunctional, non-geometric, and unusual peculiarities that allow students to explore and experience space in new ways,”⁴⁷ one may not always be lucky to find the kind of opportunism we found in seeking a foothold for our fifth semester studio at Avani Institute of Design, India. As a studio team, we collectively sought to engage with the complexities of the ex-French colonial town of Mahé in South India, which shares much more than a border with the state of Kerala, but which remains distinct due to its unique political history. Currently in a state of much neglect since its decolonization—with its original population having moved out or migrated overseas—it would have been a tough job for students to engage with the oral histories of the place that are now hard to access, and would have left them grappling with the opaqueness of the everyday.

This is where we decided that we were going to inhabit the fictive space of the 1974 novel by M. Mukundan, *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil* (translated as *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi*, 1999), which is based on the lives of people in Mahé around the time of its liberation from French rule, written by a novelist who was not only born in the city, but who also lived and worked there.⁴⁸ As a studio team, we did not want to document more urban-historical morphologies. We wanted a glimpse into the mythical past of the city. Therefore, we collectively inhabited the space of the novel, using it as our gateway into Mahé, as we sought overlaps between the city’s geography—as it was described in the novel and the way that the city is now—

34 mapping spaces and places of significance that have

persisted, disappeared, or that never existed, or that existed in other forms. As a design method, each student read one chapter from the book, narrated it to the cohort, identified five sets of spaces (with corresponding event and emotion) that they found compelling, and represented that as a series of graphic tiles. These were then subjected to further artifice as they picked out storylines or threads from this larger narrative and translated them into architectonic forms and spaces shaped to hold the stories and memories that gave rise to them. The architectural program of the Cultural Interpretation Centre was then reconciled into these emergent forms and made legible through logical spatial organization, as well as believable, as structurally buildable masses. (Figures 4 and 5, page 32)

4.3 Design as Dissertation

The format of the design dissertation in architecture curricula in India is a missed opportunity to weave in the idea of design and dissertation, as complementary modes of inquiry. Usually, the design dissertation projects proceed in a linear format, with an intense period of research, analysis, and project conceptualization, followed by a semester of design articulation, resolution, and representation. In the many reviews that I have participated in institutions in India—across Manipal University, Jaipur, School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai, and Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute for Architecture (KRVA), Mumbai—the point that has been made collectively by many educators is to consider research as a parallel inquiry that informs the design as a continuous process, which would mean that research does not stop, it continues as parallel activity that transforms the project-in-the-making, with the overall process taking on a non-linear form. Additionally, it has also been suggested that there is another way to proceed, which is to treat the design project as a form of dissertation. In architecture schools, before thesis became synonymous with design project, it was understood as a proposition, and as Koolhaas argued, design is a “demonstration of a thesis or a question or a literary idea.”⁴⁹ Engaging with design in this manner—like Salomon suggested—means jumping into design as an iterative, risk-taking process that is driven by inquiry and insight and not just by intention and outcome in search of answers for research questions (of the discipline) posed by and through the design project, whereby the outcome is there as a project, but it is secondary to the insight gained through the inquiry. (Figure 6, page 33)

This is demonstrated in my (Re)thinking and (Re)making the Threshold Studio project at the University of New South Wales, Australia, which marked a trajectory from architectural history scholarship to new theoretical lenses for studying contemporary architecture, to a design studio project.⁵⁰ Architectural surface was the focus of my PhD research on John Ruskin, which was extended to look at the theories and histories of the architectural surface. In *Surface and Deep Histories: Critiques, and Practices in Art, Architecture and Design*, I proposed five types of surfaces that persist throughout history and which constitute the “building blocks” of all built artefacts—representational surface, surface as an integrated element, surface as an urban event, surface as a transient phenomenon, and surface as a design tool.⁵¹ These surface typologies were used by students in my University of New South Wales studio to imagine a new threshold for the Red Centre building in the Kensington campus as they “proposed a surface intervention based on the conceptual wall of their choice. This was



Figure 7
 (Re)thinking and (Re)
 making the Threshold
 Studio—model showing
 proposed refurbishment of
 the threshold, University of
 New South Wales, 2011

imposed and impressed upon the existing structure. A given organizational order was infected and contaminated with another, with the aim of introducing a shift in the building's occupation, appearance, and experience, without a complete overhaul of the original building. The project was to be imagined variously as an extension, addition, insertion, and wrapping.⁵² The research question posed by this studio was: What happens when we design with models outside in, infecting an existing organizational order with a new one? What spatial and tectonic potentials and possibilities might that suggest, which a convention plan and orthographic based design process might not? (Figure 7)

5. Postscript: Architectural Curriculum in India

While my three propositions are manifestations of literary pedagogies in architecture, this postscript identifies areas of missed opportunities in architectural curriculum in India. The first is the area of field, ethnographic-based studies in architecture, which is an opportunity for students to empathize with people and their experiences and narrate their findings as stories which might give design proposals the soul that they often lack. Yet, a lot of student projects demonstrate a dispassionate, data-oriented mindset that takes the emotion and the particularities out because they cannot be generalized, and possibly because so much of architectural education is dominated by the visual and graphic documentation—which means that whatever does not have a visual form does not get represented.

Second, is the false binary between theory and practice in architecture curricula, as if education (like life) can ever be compartmentalized into units and modules. Theory subjects,

usually assessed through an examination format, often have lesser credits and contact hours. It is no wonder then that they are treated with less importance and they tend to have lesser traction in students' overall educational experience and professional career after graduation.

Third, as discussed in my *Seminar Magazine* essay, there is a lot of ground to be covered in terms of decolonizing architectural pedagogies (feminist principles, climate change, liberatory, critical and radical thinking, challenging knowledge canons, subverting cartographic hegemonies, and so on), but without making space for this to happen through the process of repeatedly reading, writing, and discussing, this is never going to become possible.⁵³ The job of architects is to first think. This essay is a “call to action” for a literary emergency in architectural education.

Notes

1. David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (United States: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 3.
2. Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature*, 49.
3. *ibid.*, 87.
4. *ibid.*, 88.
5. Roger Thiel, “Architecture,” in *Franz Kafka in Context*, ed. Carolin Duttlinger (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 139.
6. Thiel, “Architecture,” 143.
7. *ibid.*
8. Peta Mitchell, “Constructing the Architext: Georges Perec’s *Life a User’s Manual*,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 37, no. 1 (2004): 2.
9. Mitchell, “Constructing the Architext,” 3.
10. *ibid.*, 2.
11. *ibid.*, 3.
12. *ibid.*, 4.
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14. Jamieson and Roberts-Hughes, "Two modes of a Literary Architecture," 120.
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Figure Credits

- Figure 1: Naman Pandey, *Glancing through History*, published September 13, 2020 (<https://unsplash.com/photos/XwiKgYLyZHc>, free to use under the Unsplash License).
- Figure 2: Shanghai field trip drawing 1, Haoxuan Li, 2014; submitted to Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (photo courtesy of Haoxuan Li).
- Figure 3: Shanghai field trip drawing 2, Haoxuan Li, 2014; submitted to Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (photo courtesy of Haoxuan Li).
- Figure 4: Tabletop installation of graphic tiles from M. Mukundan's novel, *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* by students of Avani Institute of Design, 2019 (author's photo).
- Figure 5: Studio Instagram (sensing space) showing tectonic explorations by students of Avani Institute of Design, 2019 (author's image).
- Figure 6: (Re)thinking and (Re)making the Threshold Studio—montage showing application of conceptual wall to the existing building, University of New South Wales, 2011; photo by student team: Lu Gan, Christopher Bloor, Jiaze Lu, and Thi Y Tho Nguyen (photo courtesy of Christopher Bloor).
- Figure 7: (Re)thinking and (Re)making the Threshold Studio—model showing proposed refurbishment of the threshold, University of New South Wales, 2011; photo by student team: Lu Gan, Christopher Bloor, Jiaze Lu, and Thi Y Tho Nguyen (photo courtesy of Christopher Bloor).