CATENA AND GLOSSES
Textualization through Spatial Writing and Materiality

Anna Odlinge

Abstract: Revisiting my research project from 19 years ago, which deals with notions of integrity in architectural creative processes, this article reflects upon the underlying techniques of forms of spatial writing, as part of my ongoing doctoral thesis work. I approach writing now as a process of ordering references and thoughts for inspection, in relation to the textile-like patterns that I created in the previous project and concluded with a licentiate thesis or halfway doctorate. To understand more about the differences between such textile writing versus the gathering of individual threads into the format of a book, I turn to, and use as my method, the medieval arts of memory, ars memoria, specifically with regard to books, textual systems such as catena and glosses, and illustrations, or bas-de-page. I use these formats as both an instruction for making and as a tool for a speculative evaluation of the result. In the center of this article is the question of how to create a book.

Keywords: Spatial Writing and Reading; Text; Book; Ars Memoria; Catena.

Text or book?

The licentiate thesis »Form in the margins« which I finished in 2003, circled around the idea of integrity, or rather variations of integrity, in creative processes, focusing on different forms of creative work but mainly on architecture. With integrity I identified, to name one example, uncompromised work ethics in regard to an exploration of space that attempted to break away from the limits of built architecture for instance, a direction I found in the work of the architect and artist Lebbeus Woods. Woods is known for his complex experimental and visionary drawings (Woods 1992). Just like Woods aimed to find non-established expressions of spatial configurations and non-hierarchical orders, I wanted to explore new ways of arranging texts

Corresponding author: Anna Odlinge (KTH School of Architecture in Stockholm, Sweden); odlinge@kth.se; http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4197-7291

and writing, to involve the reader in new, less hierarchical ways of reading and discovering written thoughts.

At that moment in time, I had three specific aims for the layout of my text. First, I invited the reader to explore my text through a *spatial representation* of my thinking processes. Second, I wanted every spread to offer a continuously developing composition of texts constructed from references gathered in my thesis as in a compilation. Third, I wanted the reader to stay engaged with the reading, in the sense of not falling into reading habits such as reading a text from the left to the right and from top to bottom. I wanted the reader to create their own text(s) and to co-create them together with me while drawing their own conclusions through a spatial form that enabled explorative reading.

To achieve this, I layered texts on top of each other, graphically, creating a spatial depth. My own and most up-to-date text was on top, and my sources and earlier thoughts were in the background, forming a knowledge base and making my own working process transparent. My main text was running on the left-hand page of each spread and on the right-hand side was placed a kind of textual image; a collage of text fragments displaying a reading made by me, hinting at only one possible conclusion. To guide the reader through the layers on the left-hand side, I used images of woven textile to inform the layout; one for each chapter.

The two discussants who were asked to do a reading of my work, one within the field of psychology with a special focus on creativity, and one within the field of architecture, had similar experiences encountering the text; they were lost and frustrated upon first contact with it. As they expressed it, they »knew how to read a dissertation« and »there I was, pulling the carpet away under their feet«. But they had agreed to examine my work so they individually explained how they had then given in and started reading, where they felt that they could enter my thesis. They expressed that finally, they had enjoyed their reading experiences following my journey.

A reviewer of my thesis wrote in a later article that she might indeed not have read the same text as the others did. She pointed out that everyone will create their own text and draw their own conclusions while reading my material. She also described my collection of texts as a book. At that time, I would have been inclined to agree with her, but now I think differently and describe it as a weave of texts that have not been combined or arranged in a way so as to form a book yet. However, in my current work, I am now speculating about the possibility of constructing a book based upon my previous

material. With me I bring a few questions, such as: What is a book in contrast to a weave of text? When does text become a book? Could book writing be a method for reframing previous work? These questions will not necessarily be answered in this order in my doctoral thesis, but they are part of the textual explorations that I have begun undertaking.

Spatial Thinking, Reading and Writing in Religious Texts as Precursors

In *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction*, Anke K. Finger et al. give an account of Flusser's thoughts on *pilpul* (2011: 113). Flusser regards pilpul to be both a sophisticated and playful way of studying the Talmud. He likens it to »a dance around a given object, it attacks the object from different vantage points, recedes in different directions only to approach it again and come upon other reflections. This dynamic of reflection, by the way, figures concretely on the Talmud page: the object in the middle of the page, the reflections in converging circles«. This system or structure offers an example of a spatial configuration of text that asks for focus and spatial reading, something that I was aiming for in my own work.

For instance, I understood spatial reading as a challenge to linear reading, from the beginning to the end. For example, my compilation started at the end on page 120 and ran to page 0. In the back of my head, 18 years ago, I was speculating about making it possible to read the work in both directions but in two different ways. Back then, my aim seemed completely unattainable and more like a gimmick than something to be taken seriously. What was clear to me however, when picking up my work again recently, was the necessity to clarify a few things to myself and the reader.

Over the years I have gained an interest in the arts of memory – ars memoria – an interest that grew out of a will to understand more about our perceptions of, and interactions with, spaces. Through studying this technique, I learned more about the creation of texts and gained insight into why medieval illustrated works look the way they do. What fascinates me is the combination of text and images with the contemplation of spaces, architectures, and artifacts as an art of memory (Carruthers 2010: 205–206 and 2013: 2). I learned about the social reading and writing experiences of the time: Medieval texts reflect not only a conscious »handing on« (*traditio*) but also a »chain« (*concatenatio*) of shared and borrowed words and concepts. There was a conscious re-use of complete passages; plagiarism was a foreign concept (Anderson/Bellenger 2003: 2).

Lebbeus Woods produces enormous amounts of drawings for this project with numerous studies of details that would be able to function within these special circumstances, under these particular conditions.

Not only did he make several drawings but also many models and even models[3] scale 1:1 that were shown at the exhibition in the enormous hall of the Pavillion d'Arsenal in Paris.

These two projects are part of a series of projects that are referred to as *Terra Nova – the New World*. In this set of projects Woods uses different strategies in different cities and on different sites around the world, and he finally also returns to Berlin after the Wall has collapsed.

Like in the Paris project, fragments arrive in the air above the city of Berlin.

They are *meaningless* – that is, they carry no meaning. Built of very thin and light folded metal sheets they float around without obvious relations to each other.

These structures ingratiate themselves into the existing built structures of Berlin. As they are built of folded metal they are in need of no other structural support, but function like shells to void spaces. They are partly constituted by undefined geometries. Lebbeus Woods calls them *free-spaces*.

The freedom they provide and *intermediate* rises from their characteristics; the characteristics of being very special, very precise and unique in their spatiality, in their form and their tactility. These spaces or structures are not comfortable in themselves but have to be *claimed* by any individual who wants to use them. These individuals have to be inventive to make them habitable.

...For Piranesi and Woods, standing at the beginning and the end of the era of architecture as a profession, the methods of controlling reality through reason are deeply suspect. Rather it is their incompletion, internal contradictions and doomed nature that is rich with possibility, because it presents us with an architecture which we will have to fix, mend, unearth, build, or otherwise participate in.

The result of this romance of the ruin is, as Woods himself has pointed out, a sense of the un-heimlich: that which is strangely familiar, that attracts one because it is made up of the most essential quotidian reality, and then disturbs what one thought was safe haven from the vicissitudes of an unknown world out there. ...
[Betsky, Aaron, 1991, Lebbeus Woods: Materialist Experiments and Experiences, Criticism, p.9, a+u, 1991 08, Lebbeus Woods]

All of Lebbeus Woods' projects – in fact his architecture as a whole – has liberated itself from everything that we traditionally regard as architecture.

That is of course not an easy task. He cannot rely on pre-established orders, such as hierarchy, syntax or understandable scale, nor can he use the arguments of functionality or site distinction in any traditional sense. As we see in the Paris project he even distances himself from the need of gravity and of static relationships. What is left is *'nothing else but space'*[4] as Aaron Betsky phrases it.

The purpose of this, of course, is to come back from the experiment and be able to establish new rules in the reality as we know it; to come back and see the difference between habit and possibility. This architecture establishes a ground for the creation of new confederations of individuals.

These confederations, however, are not static; they are temporary and they will change their configurations continuously. This architecture secures that no static hierarchical structures can exist and it secures that a new world will always be built – again, again and again.

Experimental architecture is a comprehensive, if transitory, form of knowledge, a universal yet personal instrument of experience, a vital tool of human change that changes only itself.
[Woods, Lebbeus, 1991, Terra Nova, p.21, a+u, 1991 08, Lebbeus Woods]

1940 born	in Michigan
Studies	at the University of Engineering
	University of Illinois School of Architecture
Featured	in Publications
	at Exhibitions
	through Lectures
	with Work Shops
1988	establishes RIEA with Olive Braun
	Visiting Professor at Cooper Union, New York

He has been teaching Studios and Work Shops and been lecturing all over the world for the last thirty years.

1.
Graphics: Anna Odlinge, 2003.

A further inspiration came from the writing of comments into the margins or between the lines, *catena* and *glosses* in religious texts, which were constantly expanded through adding on passages, a common practice by medieval scholars. Catena denotes authoritative commentary, repeating original sources and older commentaries, meant as an aid to read and interpret the main text (Carruthers 2008: 240). In my earlier licentiate thesis, the texts printed in blue and red are an aid to both orient oneself in the often-dense texts with comments in both the margins and between lines. These two ways of organizing a textual space help a reader *recollect* a larger context when reading a specific selection of thoughts and suggestions, and at the same time offer reading help with the aid of comments or catena.

Material Textualities

In *The Book of Memory* (2008 [1990]: 14), the literature scholar Mary Carruthers writes:

> »The Latin word textus comes from the verb meaning ›o weave‹ and it is in the institutionalizing of a story through memoria that textualizing occurs. Literary works become institutions as they weave a community together by providing it with shared experience and a certain kind of language, the language of stories that can be experienced over and over again through time and as occasion suggests. Their meaning is thought to be implicit, hidden, polysemous, and complex, requiring continuing interpretations and adaptation. In the process of textualizing, the original work acquires commentary and gloss; this activity is not regarded as something other than the text, but is the mark of textualization itself.«

She explains that it is both the gathering of comments that creates the institution, but also the way the material is displayed on a page. The actual authority is formed when the pages carry carefully laid out fragments and reading is made joyful and thorough; that is when the pages have become a book (Carruthers 2008: 14, 323; 2010: 201–203).

It was etymology that helped me see the relationship between text and textile, as is explained above. Fiber crafts of various kinds were an important part of my childhood, so it may not be surprising that textile construction techniques and principles and the metaphor of textile remain present in my spatial explorations.

In medieval times and according to the analysis and theories of Mary Carruthers in respect to works created during that historical period and her studies of the importance and art of memory for medieval culture(s), there is a significant difference between text(s) and a book.

A book can be seen as an institution and an authority. So, she too, adheres to the idea of the integrity of a book, as mentioned above. The rebel in me likes that idea. I like it because it allows me to form my own institution with this creation of mine.

The catena in this case is *my voice, my word my creation of a possible world.* Obviously, there were words spoken and I speak though and so my creation does not come from nothing or pure vibration but from my own reverb.

My voice should rather be compared to a *solo in a quire of voices.* I believe that this makes this particular catena stronger. It may be compared to *chain that is interlaced with other chains.* At moments in time, it may even turn into a *mail,* to then transform back into a fine and thin *trace, rolo* or possibly a *foxtail.*

This remains to be seen. I will have to re-trace this and the following sections many times over, over the next couple of years. So, dear reader, if you are reading at this specific moment in time (summer of 2021 - spring of 2022), be aware that the landscape you are going to stroll through is an everchanging one. It is new even to me as I have not been here for a very long time.

I will re-start here because this is where I describe *the work and creative processes of Lebbeus Woods,* which are crucial to my continued work, but also because it is the last chapter of my licentiate thesis that holds *the specific definition of integrity* that I am underlining above.

If I want to create a book instead of a compilation of texts, this is where I begin. And at the beginning there was the possibility of *globalization   mondialization*

I prefer the later.

This work is dense and asks for time as an investment in exchange for clues about how to handle the content at hand. As I have not read all his work I do not yet have to wait in vain for new writing to be published. He is still very much alive. Lyotard does not offer a method for criticism. He explains the...

Experiments are made. This is our postmodernity's entire vocation, and commentary has infinite possibilities open to it.

... But what do innumerable artists do? They are careful not to make pronouncements on the matter. Instead they essay. And so through them we glimpse the importance that must be given to the Essay. Being or beings do not reveal themselves; they present tiny universes with each work. They essay and make micrologies that babble, huff and puff, and are envious of one another. And these essays together constitute satire....

What do we want of art today? Well, for it to experiment, to stop being only modern. By saying this, we're experimenting.

And what do we want of philosophy? For it to analyze these experimentations by means...

The woman draped in red fabric just enters the room, picks a glass with a drink from the counter next to the entrance and approaches the Japanese man and the guy who watched the basket-ball game, both glasses in their hands – *Zaha Hadid, Toyo Ito and Lebbeus Woods.* The older man seems to be lingering in the sky still but is also watching the crowd from his seat in the front row – *Jean-François Lyotard* – he is waiting for the show to start. *Frank Lloyd Wright* will announce the film and *Ayn Rand* will lead the following discussion, even though they may not appear in person. What will they say to each other? What will the crowd talk about?

The tube ends next to the outdoor theater where a large screen can be mounted later at night when it is dark enough. While wondering what films are on and what will be shown in the theater, you decide to join them and walk along the wall of the center towards the entrance. The sign reads *'The Right Stuff', 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'* and a *Surprise Documentary* for tonight, only revealing its connection to the other movies but not its exact theme. Sounds of laughter and the murmur of the crowd below meet you upon entering the auditorium high up in the hall, close to the ceiling. - The lightscape in front of you changes and everybody settles down. You are just about to pick a seat next to the people you have met earlier and are curious to what will be discussed later when a hologram enters and walks across the stage ···

But 'WAIT! NO! This does not work! This is not an appropriate space. – I will have to draw a new one!

2.
Graphics: Anna Odlinge, 2021.

For me, the idea of the »line« and the word itself are related to linen threads and the straight lines that occur when one of them is pulled out of a woven fabric. Linen was typically dyed with pigments giving it various blue-colored hues around the world. I was taught to use a fine blue line on the back of pencil architecture drawings as an aid to construct the drawing precisely and a similar blue line can now be found in software for making computer-aided design (CAD) drawings. The blue line is almost ephemeral. My red thread is much more woolly, unruly, and physical. It may be a mix of 90 percent mohair and 10 percent acrylic, but both the precise line and the sprawling thread are equally important to the construction of the text.

In this article, I have tried to perform the retracing of my steps that featured in my earlier work. Initially, I chose a part of my woven textual space and unraveled it. In doing so, I discovered a blue line and a red thread, but I also understood that my action was destroying an essential part of my work. Instead, I now use my line and my thread to start the construction of a book. At this stage, I reread and expanded on my previous material through the spatial writing techniques of ars memoria, paying specific attention to catena or glosses, the reflective comments in the margin, and the bas-de-page, deviations from a strict chain of thought to relax the mind. These are, according to Carruthers, crucial for creating the authority and institution of the book. So far, this reflection on spatial and material text work has helped me to understand my previous explorations within my research and to recollect my thoughts to support the taking-up and reframing of my research project. The working title »Form in the Margins« is beginning to make sense, not least as a spatial writing and reading device. I would like to know, starting the process with this article, how the text format influences the acts of reading, the acts of writing, and the art of recollection. Hopefully, in the long run, that knowledge will also help me understand something more about what occurs in the margins of our creative processes when we make (write, read, and recollect) architectures – »Forms in the Margin«.

References

Anderson, Roberta/Bellenger, Dominic, eds. (2003): »Introduction«, in: *Medieval Worlds: A Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 2–27. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315012803

Carruthers, Mary (2008) [1990]: *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107051126

Carruthers, Mary (2010): »The Concept of Ductus, or Journeying through a Work of Art«, in: *Rhetoric beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 190–213.

Carruthers, Mary (2013): »Sensory Complexion and Style«, in: *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199590322.001.0001

Finger, Anke/Guldin, Rainer/Bernardo, Gustavo (2011): Vilém Flusser: *An Introduction*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttttont

Woods, Lebbeus (1992): *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act*, New York: Academy Press.