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**A Comparative Rereading “Library of Babel” and “Ocean Sea” for Writing “Architecture” of Wor(l)ds**

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**Abstract**

A literary product could be assessed as an architectural education material because every artwork has potential to be interchangeably used for explaining/introducing what the order is and how structure could be build via elements. In a literary product, author creates a pattern with the words similarly, an architect does the same with the architectural elements. Both of them have the same concern; to build an imaginative world. The more to be searcher as an inventory traveler between the wor(l)ds is the more to discover the way to use the language. Could the architectural student follow “how to make” with wor(l)ds as the masters who know “how to tell” with the stones? Are there any traceable paths between how to make (to build) and how to tell (write-rereading)? Two different texts constituted with spatial narrative elements will be used to make a nexus to architecture; poetic novel of Alessandro Baricco, “Ocean Sea” and Borges’s short story, “Library of Babel”. This comparative analysis signifies how spatial elements are capable to structure philosophy of the wor(l)ds.

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**Anahtar kelimeler:**

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**Kelime-dünyaların Mimarlığını Yazmak için Karşılaştırmalı  
bir Yeniden Okuma**

Rabia Çiğdem ÇAVDAR\*

**Öz**

Yazınsal ürün, bir mimari eğitim materyali olarak değerlendirilebilir, çünkü her sanat işi, düzenin ne olduğunu, birtakım öğelerle yapının nasıl inşa edilebileceğini açıklamak üzere dönüşümlü kullanılabilecek potansiyele sahiptir. Bir yazınsal üründe, yazar kelimelerle bir örüntü yaratır, tıpkı bir mimarın mimari elemanlarla yaptığı gibi. Her ikisi de benzer kaygıyı taşırlar, hayali bir dünya inşa etmek. Kaşif gezgin olarak kelime-dünyalar arasında daha fazla araştırdıkça, dili kullanma biçimi daha fazla keşfedilir. Taşlarla nasıl söyleneceğini bilen ustalar gibi bir mimarlık öğrencisi de kelimelerle nasıl yapıldığını takip edebilir mi? Nasıl yapılacağı (inşa edileceği) ile nasıl söyleneceği (yazılıp-okunacağı) arasında izlenebilir patikalar var mıdır? Mimarlıkla bir bağ oluşturmak için mekânsal anlatı unsurları ile oluşturulan iki farklı metin kullanılacaktır; Alessandro Baricco'nun şiirsel romanı, "Okyanus Deniz" ve Borges'in kısa hikayesi, Babil Kitaplığı. Bu karşılaştırmalı analiz, mekansal elemanların kelime-dünyaların felsefesinin inşa edilmesinde nasıl yetkin olduğunu gösterir.

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*“When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about,” goes the German saying, people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives, one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman.” – Walter Benjamin, Storyteller.*

Spanish Architect Campo Baeza, who gave architectural courses at Madrid Polytechnic University, prepared a syllabus and list of books for reading in 2006. In the list, between many books, there was the one, which I never heard, “Oceano Mare”- Ocean Sea written by Alessandro Baricco, a contemporary Italian writer. The interesting point is that, why an architect chooses that poetic novel, not from the field of architecture, for narrating architectural design principles. Why an architect uses a literary product as an architectural education material? What does an architectural student look for in literature? The more to be searcher as an inventory traveler is the more to discover the way to use the language. Could the architectural student follow “how to make” with words as the masters who know “how to tell” with the stones? Are there any traceable paths between how to make (or to build) and how to tell (or to write- rereading)? To know the road, which is walked on, could require walking on many different ways.

As Bachelard (1994, p.177) stated that, “Spirit dreams, thinks and then imagine. Poet situated us to a boundary-condition between madness and reason, between livings and the death, to the border which we pass through.” To find or to draw the road, firstly, pass from the road walked by the poet/the maker. It is possible to state that sometimes it is important to follow the same road with the author to learn more about how s/he structure that pattern, how that fiction was constituted. The reason behind this comparative analysis between the two books, “Ocean Sea” and “Library of Babel” is that to conceive and to differentiate two different approaches to structure a universal statement related with and by the wor(l)ds. Although the methods of writing are different, the authors, Baricco and Borges unravel the order of the world via words and spatial elements. The aim of this research is that to discover and to reread their ways of to write/to build spatial elements for exploring the universe orders.

### **Ocean Sea/**

Borges (2007, p.58) depicted:

“The library is unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the

same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: The Order) my solitude is gladdened by this elegant hope.”

As being an eternal traveler, an architect has to pass by “Ocean Sea” for discovering to learn how to tell with the words to re-write with the stone. Alessandro Baricco wrote the book “Ocean Sea”, in 1993, which consists of three books, *Almayer Inn*, *Bosom of Sea*, and *Songs of Comeback*. It is almost twenty-five years far from today, but actually the story is oscillating between today and Homer’s time, may be goes down to the Herodotus time. Ocean Sea escapes from linear structure of time as telling stories as old as history of human; such as, what the truth is, what self and other are, what destiny is and how it is “written”, how the moral values could get shape, such as the values, judgments, love, meaning of life.

“Ocean Sea” has its own time bounded with the characters lives. Some characters’ lives have been compressed in the three books in Ocean Sea, but some of them have been spilled out the book, waited the readers to finish the unending story. “Ocean Sea” is the story of the web of lives perpetuated at the edge of, over, front of, and inside the Ocean Sea, which could be read as searching the meaning of life. The intersected lives of characters recalled the dichotomy of the play of the fate and the constructed way of doing. It is possible to emphasized that writer is also at the edge of “Ocean Sea” while looking for the borders of characters, both in temporal and in spatial meaning.

If “Ocean Sea”, as being unnamed structure, could be re-read as “Borgesian library”, which was unlimited and cyclical, each of “spatial elements” and “main characters” could be read as “books”, “directions” and “volumes”. This interpretation involves a profound travel/read both “spatial elements” and “main characters” in “Ocean Sea”.

As an escaped story from time, “Ocean Sea” uses all the fundamental spatial elements for constructing the story in a timeless way; spatial elements in the story undertake temporal qualities. Author used many spatial elements both in physical and mental platforms to construct the fundamental concepts and thoughts. If it is exemplified, “Sea” is the main spatial element where entire book and entire story narrated in it and which is not named. “Inn”, *Almayer Inn*, which is located at the edge of the sea, and which has the beauty of who are defeated and which reflects the clarity of frail things. “Road(s)” is the path, which one lost and found while it was questioned. “Garden”, as sheltering a certainty inside, is the helper of the seamen who had blurred mental character. “Room(s)” is that houses the character and secrets of lives. “Window”, which is settled at one side of room between inside and outside, which is a point to leap to out or in, which is framed the sea by whom afraid of looking out of it. “Beach” is a place where the questions asked and has a character of changeable borders. “Raft” is both the house of humans in the bosom of “Ocean Sea”, and the platform for war of life and death. The “door”

is a both physical and mental element, which is located at the end of a lightened “corridor” in which many doors are sided. Even the “weather” is used as a spatial element; milky air is an empty space that makes invisible all the things in it.

There are eight main characters in the book, it could be possible to say that eight directions to capture entire book of Ocean Sea. These eight directions refer to eight different underlined borders. These borders has sheltering transitivity, they are in an in-between character. Elisewin, who is a beautiful girl lives with a secret illness, which will be recovered in the sea, and who is very fragile for life but full of life for death, is at the border of adulthood and childhood. Father Pluche, who is a Father whom wrote a book of prayer related with humans’ behaviors and demands from God, and who is afraid of looking at “Ocean Sea”, is at the border of God and human. Ann Deveria, who is a beautiful woman, had a lover, who is sent by his husband to the edge of the Ocean Sea for keeping herself her sin. She, who always lives in front of the sea even she wants to be inside of it, has an ability to look at the world truly in an innocent way, who described the Almayer Inn as a place where the reality fades away and everything becomes memory, she is at the border of past and present. Mr. Plasson, who draws the painting of the sea with the water of the sea, whose most paintings described as totally white by Bartleboom, who is looking for the eyes of Ocean Sea to understand what the Ocean Sea is, who could not finish his sentences, is at the border of visible and invisible.

Bartleboom, who is a researcher writing an encyclopedia of limits which name is “An Encyclopedia of the Limits to be found in Nature with a Supplement devoted to the Limit of the Human”. The reason being at the edge of the Ocean Sea for him is searching the limit of end of the sea. He wrote a letter every night to his lover who he never ever meet, who claims that his approaches scientific while writing a story which he heard from a seamen in his encyclopedia of limits, he is at the border of science and philosophy. Savigny is a doctor, who is the second men be able to manage come back from bosom of the Ocean Sea with many stories different from the other men came back from the Ocean Sea. He is the forbidden lover of a beautiful woman, who recalls his memories from sea in newly ordered way; he is at the border of hunter and victim. Adams, who does not tell his own name, who was able to manage to come back from bosom of the Ocean Sea with many stories that are related with “Timbaktu”, is at the border of victim and hunter. The Man from the Room 7, who is the narrator, storyteller could not find the truth name of the “ocean sea”, which is not “sea”, but a different word, like potato, or help or etcetera, is at the border of real and fiction.

There are many other people, who come to scene and play a small role, in the story. But the written text mainly concentrated on these eight characters as telling the songs of their travel back to “home”- the place they are look for. However, there is one man that is more important on the stage who is Mr. Langlais, either judge or admiral. His position is different as being at the

back of a writing desk to classify the sea stories, which are real, or fiction; he is a kind of reflection (or projection) of the writer of the "Ocean Sea".

Each of these characters identifies inbetweenness; they are located at the void/border of a dichotomy. Author constitutes this inbetweenness via the passages, which settled on the relationships between characters, and inner investigations of characters with "Ocean Sea". Each inbetweenness was consisted of a kind of travel, which includes a type of coming back to homeland, like in Iliad and Odyssey. The third book in Ocean Sea, Songs of Comeback, constructed several literary forms, which could be identified with one character, such as Elisewin with verbal expression, Ann Deveria with writing letter, or Bartleboom with written expression. This means that each character has a genuine, characteristic expression. It could be possible to read these characteristic expressions as "style", different styles were constructed to comeback from bosom of the Ocean Sea.

### **The Library of Babel/**

"The beach. And the Sea. It could be perfection- an image for divine eyes- a world that happens, that is all, the mute existence of land and water, a work perfectly accomplished, truth-truth- but once again it is redeeming grain of a man that jams the mechanism of that paradise... " (Baricco, 1999, p.3)

In the Library of Babel, narration is constructed with the spatial components to express a real/fiction conceiving, but in Ocean Sea, narration is constructed with verbal components to express real/fiction conceiving. In Library of Babel, architectural expressions were used to structure fundamental concepts. As Psarra (2009, p.90) well-definably expressed:

"But in the Library of Babel architecture and language are so entangled with each other that the architectural expression becomes an integral part of the narrative content. The library is the universe; its architectural forms the universal substance. So, the underlying dilemmas in the story of whether the universe, or by allegory The Library and its books, have a meaningful design becomes implicitly a question of whether its architecture can have a meaningful pattern for navigation and orientation."

In the Library of Babel, it is possible to find a space constructed by words, but in Ocean Sea, it is possible to swim in words space. By using architecture as an allegory for language, which explains universe, Library of Babel was posed in the dichotomy of philosophical and poetic image. For the "Ocean Sea", vice versa is acceptable; the flowing of the words, the repeated

period of the words and the structure of the words as continuous lines, which suddenly stopped, resembles the “sea” and constructs the space.

Library of Babel used architectural expressions for defining “universe” while Ocean Sea using literary expressions for defining “life”. In both, it is explicitly legible that for writing architecture of wor(l)ds, it is inevitable to find a genuine way, “a style”.

### **Rope of Sands / Rope of Words**

“In “Ocean Sea” he spins out long sentences, elaborate ropes of words practically absurd in their gorgeousness, sentences that go on and on, just phrases and clauses strung together, really, something like what I'm doing now, except of course that what I'm doing is merely a trick with commas, Baricco does it with genius, with humor and grace, and occasionally he sets;

The type

like

this

for

moments of

high

drama.” (Seligman, 1999)

As Seligman stated Baricco improved a stylistic way of combining words, which is not only a linear construction but also a narrative pattern. Here, the key words are combining the “rope of words” which remembers the quotation made by Borges from George Herbert, who is mentioned at the beginning of the story named “Book of Sand”. Herbert (1593-1633) said that; “Thy [your] rope of sands...” In additionally, Borges (1977, p.117) narrated a geometry story at the beginning of Book of Sand:

“The line is made up of an infinite number of points; the plane of an infinite number of lines; the volume of an infinite number of planes; the hyper volume of an infinite number of volumes... No, unquestionably this is not--more geometrico--the best way of beginning my story. To claim that it is true is nowadays the convention of every made-up story. Mine, however, is true.”

In his short story "Book of Sand", Borges mentioned a book which neither had a beginning nor an end, and that book consisted of many word that had many letters, thus rope of words established a kind of eternal array which never ended. Baricco definitely played the game reversibly; used language as an allegory of architecture-space, to explain the "Ocean Sea" not named yet. He constructed a kind of rope of "spaces" and "characters" via literary elements, for gaining a "volumetric structure" to "Ocean Sea". While Borges was constructing worlds of words via architectural expressions in Library of Babel, Baricco constructed words of worlds via literary expressions in Ocean Sea. Therefore, both Ocean Sea and library of Babel are referring to different concepts in itself; they could be replaced with other concepts, such as universe for library, life for Ocean Sea. That is why; it is not easy to name them.

### **Defining- Naming /Looking for another name instead of "Ocean Sea"/**

"The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings." (Borges, 2007, p.51)

In the Library of Babel, Borges combines two words (concepts) each other; universe and library. While the story is developed, Borges remarked to the definition of library again, and asked that "are you sure of understanding my language?"

"(An n number of possible languages use the same vocabulary; in some of them, the symbol library allows the correct definition a ubiquitous and lasting system of hexagonal galleries, but library is bread or pyramid or anything else, and these seven words which define it have another value. You who read me, are you sure of understanding my language?)" (Borges, 2007, p.57-58)

As asking this question, Borges pointed out the close relationship between the system of values and language, definitions and concepts come from a value system and directly related with the knowledge. For Borges, it is very clear what the library and universe is, the same, and he constructs the concept of universe, some others call library, via the structural elements of cosmos; architecture and language (literature).

When Baricco is naming "sea", he is not as clear as Borges, he gives an important role to the individual experiences of each character, that's why "sea" is called "destiny", and sometimes "sea" is called love or recovering, "etcetera". In addition, he constructs the perception of "Ocean Sea", some others call "etcetera", via the structural elements of cosmos, language (literature) and architecture. It is very interesting to point out that the Library of Babel



constructed as continuously constructed space from the center to periphery, has a character to reflect the infinity through macro cosmos, but at the Ocean Sea, there is slightly thin difference, its space through the deeper inside, through the microcosms of human memory and feelings. While Baricco pursued a way from macrocosms to microcosms in fiction, Borges preferred vice-versa of what Baricco did; he structured story from individual entities to entire whole. It could be possible to read different approaches of authors as “scalability” problem; in Borges’s approach, scale moved from human (or book) to universe (or library), enlarge through to exteriority. In Baricco’s approach, it is seen enlargement through to interiority.

### **Ladder- Storyteller/**

“All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier.” (Benjamin, 2007, p.102)

Stories, “Library of Babel” and “Ocean Sea”, pursued an order, one is through the macrocosms, into the clouds and the other is through the microcosms, down to the sea-earth.

“The inventor of a narrative is not obliged to bring coherence, logic or resolution to the text. That (as Diderot would later make clear) is the task of the reader, the mark of his freedom.” (Manguel, 2008a, p.277)

So that, storyteller do not have to write something new, storytelling is a work of repeating, recalling the experienced world. Storytellers grounded themselves to soil as craftsman, or to sea as seamen. In the story of “Ocean Sea”, Mr. Langlais gave a job in his rose garden as a gardener to Adams, who did not tell his own name and who came from sea. After being gardener, Adams could able to provide the connection between his soul, eyes and hands that coordination lost in the bosom of the sea. Mr. Langlais thought that Adams would begin to tell the stories about “Timbuktu”, as a seaman who saw the “Timbuktu”, after recovery process in garden. As Benjamin (2007, p. 109) emphasized that to be a “storyteller” means to be ready to encounter thyself. For Adams to be ready to encounter himself would be a possible condition after being in the certainty of garden, like an artisan who was mentally in peace. Mr. Langlais did not want to lose the hidden stories. A verbally expressed story could easily be lost in the history, for keeping the story alive, story should be chained. Borges cleverly solves the problem to reach the hidden stories; he suggests a place to look for where many of them were put.

“Somewhere I recalled reading that the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest. Before retirement, I worked on Mexico Street, at the Argentine National Library, which contains nine hundred thousand volumes. I knew that to the right of the entrance a curved staircase leads down into the basement, where books and maps and periodicals are kept. One day I went there and, slipping past a member of the staff and trying not to notice at what height or distance from the door, I lost the Book of Sand on one of the basement's musty shelves.” (Borges, 1977 p.122)

If the story (some of the calls total book) is exist, it is somehow included to the universe, but hard to find if it out of catalogue.

“It does not seem unlikely to me that there is a total book on some shelf of the universe. [Continues on footnote] I repeat: it suffices that a book be possible for it to exist. Only the impossible is excluded. For example: no book can be a ladder, although no doubt there are books which discuss and negate and demonstrate this possibility and others whose structure corresponds to that of a ladder.” (Borges, 2007 p.57)

Mr. Langlais as being the judge, or as librarian, who was cataloging the sea stories, did not want to lose the hidden stories, which were thought as true, and which were forgotten as being fiction on behalf of Realm. He was tracing boundaries of the stories. For Mr. Langlais, if one story could not be written or chained, that story would not be found forever.

### **Key book- Catalogue**

Librarians behave like a judge of the books, they classify them, and describe the book before put it to the shelf. They could design a key to reach the books for all the others, readers. Librarian is who the one prepared that key book as catalogue after all judgment procedures. In the “Ocean Sea” Mr. Langlais, as being the judge, made this important role with his pen as a rewriting procedure. The selection of which book will be on shelf is presenting a limited frame to readers. This selection procedure could be specified as "constructed framework" which has some exclusion.

“A universal library (or at least universal in one order of knowledge) could not be other than fictive, reduced to the dimensions of catalogue, a nomenclature, or a survey. Conversely, any library that is actually installed in a specific place and that is made up of real works available for consultation and reading, no matter how reach it might be, gives only a truncated image of all accumulable knowledge.” (Chartier, 1994, p.88)

Even a catalogue could be defined as library; it is not a universal one, which carries all way of doing and way of telling. A catalogue is a limited key book, which is an entrance through to the unlimited worlds of books. Although this key book is created according to one librarian's way of looking, it suggests unexpected roads to navigate in library (or in universe).

### **The maker- the teller**

If the journey were gone back to beginning to Babel, in which the pyramid and language formed through the sky before separated, it would be possible to meet where making and telling, architecture and literature were in the same structure. Both of the stories, "Library of Babel" and "Ocean Sea" could be seen as efforts to claim, or to retell or rebuild the same story on the opposite directions as reflecting each other in the same scene. The poetry of "Ocean Sea", as being in the oscillation of time, is trying to telling human story by repeating the words and the words as in the analogy of architectural space. Meanwhile "Library of Babel", as using the architecture as analogy of language, is trying to reconstruct the universe. Each story recalls the other side of itself, architecture or literature, each story is at the trace of finding the one both telling and making and each story is looking for both sounds and stones. The reason of reading a literary piece for an architectural student (or an architect) is to pursue missing part. Human is trying to collect himself from where he lost a piece of himself. Actually, this searching procedure works a kind of unifying procedure of dialectical equivalent. In both stories, readers, with in the author's perception, looked for the invisible side of the one whole, like in Janus faced structure. Janus-faced structures could be defined as a coin in which one side could not be able to see the other side of it, but it is one entity combined of two faces. After Babel, making and telling separated as in the form of dialectical expressions, but in archaic languages, there are some signs of unified version of making/telling activity. As Manguel (2008b, p.10) pointed out,

"Dreaming up stories, telling stories, putting stories in to writing, reading stories are all complementary arts that lend words to our sense of reality, and can serve as vicarious serving, as transmission of memory, as instruction, or as warning. In ancient Anglo-Saxon, the word for poet was maker a term that blends the meaning of weaving words with that of building the material world."

So that, "the maker" has an ability both to tell with the words and to make with the stones; s/he is an expert who creates meaning in both types of expression -in architecture and in literature. Therefore, this expert searches "architecture" in "literature" or vice-versa; s/he pursues the "truth". As in the Mr. Plasson's paintings, instead of the marked by the visible, to see the invisible one with the eye of justice is the "real" question of the understanding of the "truth". In the story of "Ocean Sea", Mr. Plasson, who settled in the sea, draw the sea to the canvas with

the water taken from the sea; that is why there is an invisible sea on canvas, which means that the watcher could not detect the “sea” via her/his eyes. The only possible way to conceptualize the sea on canvas is to experience the performance of painting. This means that for pursuing “truth”, an in-depth operation could have to be occurred not only on searching process but also on experiencing. Here it is possible to say that, visualizing the “Ocean Sea” or “meaning of life” is something, which is experience-based. In addition, this experienced-based structure constituted via architectural/physical and linguistic/mental interfaces. When that interfaces directly and jointly intake, to solve or to perceive the “truth” could be possible. The poetry of Baricco, and the imagination of Borges could be the pathbreaking for structuring everyone’s own way.

### **As Conclusion**

As an inference taken from this comparative reading, it is possible to state that every stylistic attempt to combine architecture and literature could be seen as an attempt to give meaning to the structure of life or to approach to understand the structure of the universe. Both Baricco and Borges individually realized this attempt to open up new ways to readers of themselves. To understand both macrocosm and microcosm from the point where human is stand, that interpretive way of creating a nexus between architecture and literature could be a beginning point especially for architects. Architecture as being open to interdisciplinary approaches could renew itself via learning from how to tell with the words. Thus, this renewing process could signify new directions for epistemology of architecture.

After digital turn, in contemporary architecture, where tectonic of the building became effective on the episteme of architecture, to contribute to architectural episteme from another domain – here it is literature- could be the reason behind this comparative analysis. It is obvious that at the uncertain times and at the threshold of paradigm shift, each discipline turn to its own borders for renewing and re-structuring itself. However, this comparative analysis could be a proposal to support architectural domain for interpreting new era and new universal norms with the help of other discipline. To learn how to tell with new architectural materials could be possible with analyzing how other disciplines made the pattern with spatial elements. To conceive new forms and norms of universe, until structuring own knowledge in-discipline of architecture, it is significant to feed from interdisciplinary level. Not only literature could be supportive to designate "episteme of architecture", but also other artistic domains could be pathbreaking.

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