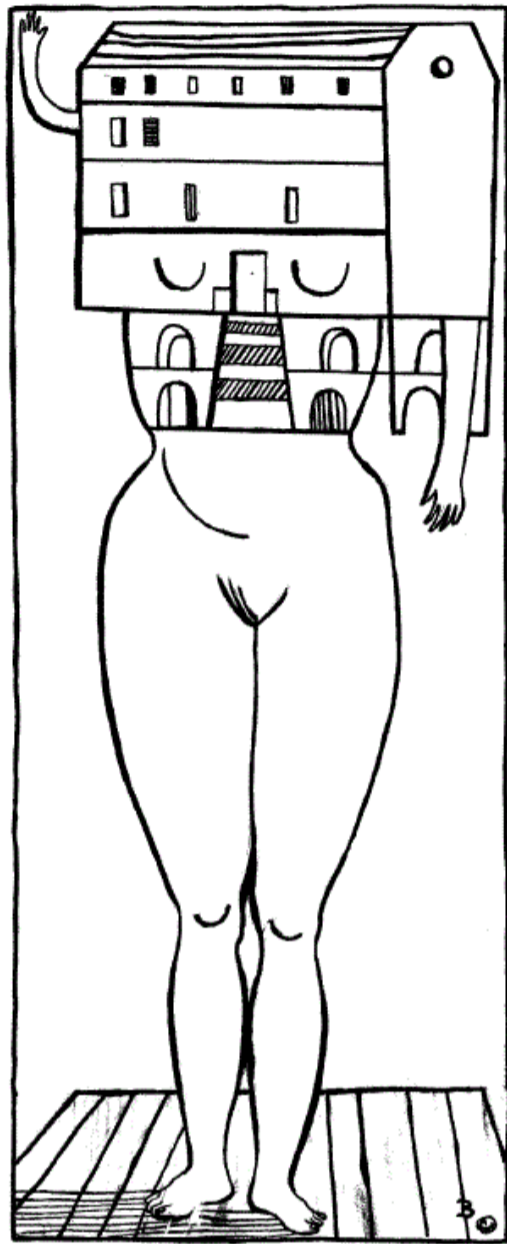


House as a Story Story as a House



Louise Bourgeois, Femme Maison, 1947

Five Houses Many 19th century houses in the center of Zurich are owned by our very own institution, the ETH. Once converted from private residences to offices, the question is now how to go the other way round. As the university is more interested in larger, flexible building ensembles, it has decided to sell them. Given the current housing crisis, the city is very supportive, as the buildings will be returned to their original purpose: a home for many people. We will explore how these buildings can be re-adapted and extended, using the language and traces of their past, to shape their possible futures.

Writing Stories Using Alice Munro's quote from the introduction to her Selected Stories, we will draw the parallel between making architecture and writing literature. As architects, we project imaginations and ideas onto spaces that do not yet exist. We sketch, draw, write and model what we have in our heads to help ourselves and others access it. We will be guided by short stories written by Lydia Davis, chosen for their affective relationship to spatial situations. They will help us to focus our imagination, but also to immerse ourselves in writing our own physical memories of space - memories that often have a universal quality. Together, we will translate our stories into houses and houses into stories.

Atelier Gisel As you approach Ernst Gisel's atelier, you are immediately reminded of the sensual expression that architecture can convey. Gisel had an extraordinary ability to create an architecture that is affective, offering its users a conscious experience of space, proportion, material and colour, while actively engaging with the natural elements: light and shade, the heat of the sun, protection from wind and rain. The Atelier Gisel will become a direct source of architectural thinking and making.

A story is not like a road to follow ... it's more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows.

And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you.

Alice Munro, Selected Stories, 1996

for context on Alice Munro, see a.o.
'What Alice Munro Knew' by Giles Harvey
New York Times, 8 Dec 24