The Architectural Meaning of the Seductive Domestic Spaces Described in Narratives: Yi Sang's The Wings (1936) and Inho Choe's Another Man's Room (1971)

Yoonchun Jung¹ and Byoungwook Min²*

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Kwangwoon University, Korea
² Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Kyung Hee University, Korea

Abstract
This paper aims to uncover the architectural meaning of the domestic spaces portrayed in two Korean modern short stories, Yi Sang's The Wings (1936) and Inho Choe's Another Man's Room (1971). By carefully describing Seoul's unique domestic spaces during two different time periods, a gisaeng house from the 1930s and a modern apartment unit from the 1970s, the two narratives qualitatively represent unique architectural conditions. In particular, with their detailed descriptions of architectural, material and immaterial elements and how these relate to a woman's body, the stories produce seductive atmospheres poetically.

In this sense, The Wings and Another Man's Room show significant architectural meaning, and architectural practitioners and scholars should consider their potential as architectural references. By criticizing the contemporary stylistic and formal obsession in architecture as well as design education, this paper intends to highlight the fundamental meaning of architecture as the creation of emotionally and intellectually charged communicative and harmonious environments, in other words, "attuned settings for significant human action," as they engage narrative forms.

Keywords: architectural meaning; domestic spaces; human body; seductive atmospheres; narrative forms

1. Introduction
Modernism in architecture has often been criticized that it has caused radical changes, or even destruction to the humanist tradition of architecture which sustains rich cultural and literary meanings. In particular, the modernist obsession with scientific and technological progress in architecture has resulted in neglecting its poetic potentials enriching human body related architectural experiences. Recently, inter-disciplinary and collaborative studies meticulously exploring architecture described in narrative forms have emerged among academics in the field of architecture and literature, and they are intended to shed light on the nature of architectural meaning in the fast-shifting technological world. The reciprocal relationship between architecture and modern novels has been extensively discussed by architectural scholars not only because it could provide them with better understandings about the architectural meaning in narrative forms describing human living conditions in various socio-cultural contexts, but also it could serve as a meaningful stepping stone leading to the emerging inter-disciplinary study of the two.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and uncover the architectural meaning of the domestic spaces illustrated in Korean modern short stories produced in two different time periods, the 1930s and the 1970s. Yi Sang's The Wings (1936) and Inho Choe's Another Man's Room (1971) were carefully analyzed to understand how poetic prose plays an important role in creating specific moods and atmospheres and they show important aspects of architecture creating emotionally and intellectually charged harmonious environments for meaningful human actions. Based on the hermeneutic and phenomenological research method, we focus on the English translations of the two short stories.

2. Architecture and Modern Novels
The interconnected relationship between architecture and narrative forms has manifested from antiquity to modernity in the West. In ancient times, the Roman architect Vitruvius talked about the potential of architecture with regard to place-bound narratives by telling us the sad stories of suffering women (Caryatids) destined to support the entablature of the Erechtheion

*Contact Author: Byoungwook Min, Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, Kyung Hee University, Room 511, College of Art & Design, 1732, Deogyeon-gaero, Gheung-gu, Yongin-si, Gyeonggi-do 17104, Korea
Tel: +82-31-201-3729
E-mail: bwmin@khu.ac.kr
(Received April 2, 2017; accepted March 19, 2018)
DOI http://doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.17.253
temple of the Acropolis as an eternal penalty (Fig.1.).

In the Renaissance period, Francesco Colonna (1433-1527) wrote a love story entitled Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (Poliphilo's strife of love in a dream) in which architecture plays an important role in developing the narrative about the protagonist's journey of chasing his lover in a dream-like setting. In the 18th century, French writer Jean Francois de Bastide (1724-1798) introduced an architectural novel in which a pompous French Casanova tries to entice an elegant lady by guiding her through a series of domestic spaces in his house, La Petite Maison (The Little House).

In the 18th century, French writer Jean Francois de Bastide (1724-1798) introduced an architectural novel in which a pompous French Casanova tries to entice an elegant lady by guiding her through a series of domestic spaces in his house, La Petite Maison (The Little House).

The contemporary Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk (1952-), whose architectural backgrounds from his early work are well known, describes the architecture of the Turkish Ottoman Empire using very detailed and meticulous language in his novel My Name is Red, poetically providing an architectural experience to the readers. By using hyper-realistic architectural descriptions, his narrative reveals cultural and historical contexts embedded in the place and confuses us between the fictional and the real, which, in the end, allows us to confront the architecture of the past in reality.

Architects, such as Bernard Tschumi (1944-) and John Hejduk (1929-2000), used fiction and narrative extensively to carry out new architectural experiments in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, except for Hejduk's poetic use of language in his architectural work, most architectural writers in this period focused on the methodological aspects of writing narratives and directly employed them in the process of designing and teaching architecture, exploring only the technical and formalistic qualities.

Recently, a great number of interdisciplinary studies exploring the close relationship between architecture and narrative form have been carried out in Western academia. In the summer of 2015, a symposium titled Reading Architecture took place in the Benaki Museum of Athens that focused on "how great novels reveal situations of life and architectural experiences in the socio-cultural context of the 20th century" (Fig.3.). The symposium explored "how the emotional, intersubjective and place-bounded world that reveals to us through novels can enrich architectural design and education," and its intention was based on the conviction that "designing architecture is not so much about making forms than imagining people's lives in places," as the well-known Finnish architect and educator Aulis Blomstedt (1906-1979) once argued.
Korean modern architects, Yi Sang (1910-1931), contributed greatly to expanding the architectural vocabulary of Korean modern narratives. In his short writing career, he produced a number of short stories in which contemporary surrealist influences and architectural knowledge can be easily detected. His narratives create unique architectural moods and atmosphere by meticulously describing places filled with people's activities, architectural and interior conditions, and even immaterial elements. An example is this quote from The Wings showing the atmosphere of a café in Gyeongseong Station (Fig.4.):

"What I liked about the place was that the clock there kept more accurate time than any other clocks anywhere. So I did not have to face any misfortune of returning home too early, mistaken by a stupid clock. I sat with nothingness in a booth and sipped a cup of hot coffee. Amid their busy hours, the passengers seemed to enjoy a cup of coffee with relish. They would gaze at a wall as if in deep thought, sipping the coffee in a hurry, and then would leave. It was sad. But I truly loved that sadness about that place, something I cherished more than the depressing atmosphere of other street-side tea rooms. The occasional shrill screaming of the train hoots sounded more familiar and intimate to me than Mozart."

Architectural influences on Korean modern short stories are also found in the works of Taewon Park (1910-1986), who was a very close friend of Yi Sang and sometimes collaborated with him; Yi Sang created the illustrations for Park's famous short story A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist. Influenced by Modernology, a contemporary architectural research methodology propagated by the Japanese architect Wajiro Kon (1888-1973), many of Park's writings describe Seoul's architectural (domestic) and urban conditions as well as people's daily lives in the 1930s in microscopic detail, which produces architectural atmospheres (Fig.5.). Below is a quote from A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist showing the mood of a Seoul teahouse created via detailed descriptions of people's appearances and the architectural and material conditions of the space:

"In the Teahouse about two in the afternoon, jobless types are sitting around on cane chairs, talking, drinking tea, smoking cigarettes, and listening to records. They are mostly young and yet, despite their youth, look already world-wearied. In the dark, particularly lit place, their eyes broadcast a litany of trials and tribulations. Occasionally, a buoyant footstep glides into the teahouse, or a bright laugh fills the room. But such luxuries are out of place here. The teahouse regulars disdain them above all else. After ordering coffee and cigarettes from a young waiter, Kubo heads for a cane table in the corner. Just how much would I need... A poster hangs over his head, a certain painter's "Farewell Exhibition upon Leaving for Europe."

With the premature death of Yi Sang, the interdisciplinary legacy blending architecture and narrative from the 1930s Korean modern context did not survive in the Korean peninsula, largely due to the consecutive wars, beginning with the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Moreover, authors like Taewon Park moved to North Korea following the socialist ideal after the Korean War (1950-1953). However, this tradition was revived in the early 1970s with the work of Inho Choe (1945-2013) Another Man's Room, where the author portrays the living situations of a modern man by describing the atmospheric qualities
of the domestic spaces of an apartment, the dominant architectural type of the time (Fig. 6.).

Given this historical background on the interconnected relationship between architecture and narrative in the Korean modern context, it is necessary to explore the architectural meaning of Korean modern short stories and their important bearing on architecture. In particular, analyzing Yi Sang's The Wings and Inho Choe's Another Man's Room together in a comparative manner is enlightening because these two short stories show the qualitative characteristics of Korean modern domestic spaces from two different time periods; both narratives create a seductive architectural atmosphere through the poetic involvement of the human body, describing material and immaterial conditions of the domestic space.

2. Seductive Atmospheres in Novels

As Jose Ortega y Gasset\textsuperscript{16} says, "Modern novels create atmosphere."\textsuperscript{17} By employing carefully selected poetic language, they allow the readers to imagine specific atmospheres of places where various human-related events take place. In this sense, modern novels have an important bearing on architectural meaning because one of the roles of architecture is to produce emotionally and intellectually charged communicative settings for significant human action.\textsuperscript{18} Modern narratives sometimes create seductive moods and atmospheres by engaging the human body.

A pioneering narrative describing seductive architectural qualities in the Western context is Jean Francois Bastide's La Petite-Maison (1763), known as "an architectural seduction."\textsuperscript{19} By carefully showing a woman a series of luxurious and fashionable atmospheres of the house including decorative architectural elements of various colors, gardens with exotic flowers, elegant furniture, master piece paintings and sculptures, background music, built-in automated technology and even spectacles, such as fireworks, the owner of the house (The Marquis de Tremicour) gradually seduces his guest (Fig. 7.). However, in the case of La Petite-Maison, the produced atmosphere seduces the woman in the narrative, but not the readers of the book. Here is a description of the boudoir in the house:

"Here again, the color was applied by Dandrillon, who had mixed his paints with the fragrances of violet, jasmine, and rose. All this decoration was also applied to a screen that concealed a spacious corridor, where the Marquis had arranged for musicians to play.\textsuperscript{20}"

![Fig. 6. Yeoido Sibum Apartment, Seoul, South Korea (1971). (Source: National Archives of Korea)](source)

![Fig. 7. New Technology of Using Water Flushing System in Toilet (Source: Jean Francois de Bastide, The Little House, 87.)](source)

Among the modern narratives, Jealousy (1957) by Alain Robbe-Grillet, one of the leading French authors in the Nouveau Roman period, describes the seductive atmospheres of the house where the voyeuristic eyes of the invisible observer (the narrator) chase traces of his wife (A) and her secret lover (Franck) while traveling its domestic spaces. In an effort not to miss a single moment of their being together, the observer scans every corner of the house and its surrounding tropical landscape and narrates them in great detail. In this process, the visual overlaps between the detailed architectural and material qualities of the house and parts of his wife's body create a seductive atmosphere-intended to evoke erotic desire in the reader.

"A… is in the bathroom, whose door to the hallway she has left ajar. She is not washing. She is standing against the white lacquer table in front of the square window that comes down to her breast."\textsuperscript{21}
The night does not take long to fall in these countries without twilight. The lacquered table suddenly turns deep blue, like her dress, the white floor and the sides of the bathtub. The whole room is plunged into darkness. Only the square of the window makes a spot of paler violet, against which A…’s black silhouette appears: the line of her shoulders and arms, the contour of her hair. It is impossible, in this light, to know if her head is turned towards the window or in the opposite direction.\(^2\)

3. Seductive Atmosphere in the Narrative of The Wings

"The structure of House No. 33 is just like that of a house of pleasure."\(^2\)

Narratives creating seductive atmospheres are also found in Korean modern short-stories; Yi Sang’s surrealist experimental masterpiece The Wings pioneered this tradition in the early 1930s. The work portrays a series of detailed situations of life in a Seoul’gisaeng, where the protagonist interacts with its domestic architectural and material and immaterial conditions. Sometimes, his architectural experiences extend to the city-level, such as the café in Gyeongseong Station and the rooftop of the Mitsukoshi Department Store (Fig.8.). The overall atmosphere produced in The Wings is dark and gloomy, manifesting the miserable and lonely living conditions of the helpless protagonist ceaselessly being suspicious of his wife's job as a hostess.

![Fig.8. Mitsukoshi Department Store in Seoul (1930)](Courtesy of Publishing Company Minsokwon)

However, there are some moments when the narrative portrays the seductive atmosphere of his wife's room; throughout the story, the protagonist keeps trying to sneak into her room when she doesn't have any guests. As opposed to his dark and unlit room, his wife's room, which is separated from his by a sliding door, is bright and luxurious and is always full of interesting things that entice him endlessly. Under the condition of his wife's absence, he plays with her personal belongings and even enjoys imagining her body through the smell of her cosmetic products as well as her clothes, which generates his sexual desires. In the following narrative, he describes the moods of his room and his wife's room:

"The front part of the room has a little bit of the sun. The sunshine, as large as a wrapping cloth in the morning, shrinks to the size of a handkerchief later and then slips out of the room. My den is the other part of the room without sunshine, of course. I do not remember who decided that the room with the sunshine was for my wife and the other without sunshine belonged to me. I have no complaints, though. It has become a major recreation of mine that I promptly go to the front room in the morning when my wife goes out and watch various bottles on her make-up chest brilliantly glimmer with the sunbeam trickling in through the eastern window I opened. (…)"

Soon I am tired of this fun, too. My mischievous mind evolves from the physical level to the spiritual one. I put the looking glass down and crawl on my knees to the make-up chest to watch the cosmetic bottles in various colors. They are the most charming things in the world. I pick one of them, open its stopper, draw the bottle to my nostrils and slowly inhale. As an exotic, sensual scent seeps into my lungs, my eyelids heavily hang down, despite myself. Definitely the scent is a segment of the smell of my wife's body. I replace the stopper and begin to think. Which part of her body did I smell this from…? I am not sure. Why am I not sure? Because my wife's smell is the collection of all the smells from the bottles here.

My wife's room was always luxuriant. While my room was so untrimmed that not even a single hook to hang the clothes on could be found on the walls, in her room, colorful skirts and vests hung in billowing bundles down from the numerous pegs nailed into the walls just beneath the ceiling. Various, colorful patterns fascinate me. I think I am not so respectable because I used to try to visualize her body and the possible shape her body might take inside those clothes.\(^2\)

The wife's room provides the protagonist with the pleasure of love; secretly hidden in his own room, he dreams of sleeping in her room because she never invites him there. He can only enjoy sensing the pleasant atmosphere, with the smell of good food and the sound of mellow conversation, penetrating through the sliding door. The secrecy of her being with a male guest increases his curiosity about her job. As time progresses, he has unexpected chances to break into her room, like when she is at work, and in the end, he sleeps there for the first time in his life.
4. Seductive Atmosphere in the Narrative of Another Man's Room

Inho Choe's Another Man's Room portrays a modern man's strange experiences in an empty apartment unit in Seoul left by his wife. The way he experiences its architectural and material/immaterial conditions is very different from that in The Wings, where the protagonist's sensory experiences of his domesticity are mostly static. In Another Man's Room, the lonely man keeps moving around his apartment unit and actively interacts with its spaces, furniture, and even household items through his (naked) body, which ultimately produces a seductive atmosphere in the condition of his wife's absence.

![An Apartment Living Room Built around the 1970s. (Source: Korean National Housing Corporation)](Fig.9)

While in motion, his body becomes very sensitive to various movements of things in the space, even to tiny changes, such as the way the fruit juice powder melts in the water, or the record player operates. As time goes on, his body gradually becomes immersed in the agitated atmosphere of the space, and he feels he is becoming part of the apartment, like a piece of furniture. This embodied perception of movement is amplified in his mind and arouses him sexually, immediately thinking of his wife's sexual organs; he imagines not only their shapes and forms, but also their seducing gestures.

"He came out of the bathroom and took some fruit juice powder from the cool living-room sideboard. Careful not to spill any on the floor, he puts in some powder and three spoons of sugar. He keeps adding sugar till in the end he feels he must have added an extra ten spoons. He mixes cold water with this. He stirs it all patiently with a long-handled spoon. He lifts the cup, one hand still holding the spoon, and goes over to the record player. There are a lot of records; he takes one at random. He doesn't know the title of the music. He turns on the power; all at once the motor begins to whir and the inside light grows bright. The record table begins to revolve. He tosses the slender record onto the record table, like an athlete gently throwing the discus. The record player with its bad needle gives off static, but eventually it begins to spit out the music. He stretches out on the sofa and listens to the music. There are still a few things that haven't been straightened out yet, but he feels more settled. The subdued light of the shaded standard lamp fills the whole room gloomily. Seen from above, from the ceiling, he doesn't even look human. He is lying motionless. For this reason, he appears lifeless, like a piece of furniture. (...)

I am well aware that my wife has sex organs different from other women's. It is as if she had a strong, high-quality zipper attached to them. In front of me and naked, she likes trying to run the zipper up and down, opening and closing. It makes one think of good-quality winter cloth; and it indicates a tremendous power of sexual embrace."

The verbs describing a wide range of movements in domestic environments are underlined by the authors. They in particular are considered to express human's voluntary or involuntary interactions with everyday household items in a linguistic way.

5. Conclusions

The narratives of The Wings and Another Man's Room create seductive atmospheres via poetic language, describing two Korean modern domestic spaces and, thereby, producing important architectural meaning. In The Wings, the protagonist's sensory experiences of the architectural and material and immaterial conditions of the gisaeng house are meticulously narrated from a stationary position. In Another Man's Room, the protagonist's sensitive body is in motion, and his embodied perceptions, catch every movement of the interior elements and household items in his apartment unit, are highlighted in great detail. In both stories, the absence of the wife makes the protagonist sexually agitated, which magnifies the erotic moods of the spaces.

In this way, The Wings and Another Man's Room have architectural meaning in the sense proposed by Alberto Pérez-Gómez; they show "communicative environments (attuned settings) in narrative forms" where various kinds of human actions, such as stationary and moving, are found. Moreover, they demonstrate that the atmosphere and sensory human body, whether present or absent, are reciprocal in that they constantly influence each other. Thus, in order to fully understand the qualitative aspects of the architectural space, embodied perception should be activated, and here lies the importance of phenomenology in understanding architecture.

By shedding some light on the architectural importance of these two Korean modern short stories, we also seek to critique contemporary architectural
practice and education, which focuses on formal and stylistic experiments in digitally-generated spaces. By fully understanding the qualitative aspects of architectural design, we believe that designers can benefit from the linguistic potential found in narrative form. As Paul Ricoeur argued, creative human imagination is fundamentally linguistic. In this way, poetic language plays an important role in creating atmosphere. Therefore, we imagine a new architectural experiment that incorporates various ways of creating narratives, not necessarily via text but via sketches and models, into the process of teaching and practicing architecture.

Acknowledgement
The present research has been supported by the Research Grant of Kwangwoon University in 2017.

Notes

2 Gisaeng house is a Korean restaurant type where female entertainers serve male guests food and alcohol.


4 The story of Caryatid is found in the first chapter of Vitruvius' Ten Books on Architecture, The Education of the Architect.


7 See Orhan Pamuk, My Name is Red (London: Faber, 2011).

8 See Tschumi's exhibition project "A Space, a thousand words" and Hejduk's Masques. This is addressed in the introduction of the forthcoming book titled Reading Architecture: Literary Imagination and Architectural Experience, edited by Angeliki Sioli and Yoongchun Jung (Routledge, 2018).

9 This is from the symposium's Call for Papers "Situations of Life and Architectural Experiences." See www.readingarchitecture.org. The symposium was organized by the history and theory program of McGill's School of Architecture Program.

10 See the symposium's Call for Papers (www.readingarchitecture.org).

11 Juhani Pallasmaa points out this. See Juhani Pallasmaa, The thinking hand: existential and embodied wisdom in architecture (Chichester Wiley, 2011).

12 Architecture was introduced as a new field of study in the Korean modern context by the Japanese in the 1900s.

13 There have been a great number of studies showing Yi Sang's use of architectural and mathematical terms and knowledge and surrealist techniques in his esoteric texts.


15 Tae-won Pak, A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist, On the Eve of the Uprising and other Stories from Colonial Korea, Trans. Kim O'Rourke, in Reading Architecture: Literary Imagination and Architectural Experience, edited by Angeliki Sioli and Hejduk's Masques. This is addressed in the introduction of the forthcoming book titled Reading Architecture: Literary Imagination and Architectural Experience, edited by Angeliki Sioli and Yoongchun Jung (Routledge, 2018)

16 Jose Ortega y Gasset is a well-known Spanish philosopher and writer influenced by the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

17 The original quote from the source reads: "We read the modern novel (he meant what we today call the "literary novel") for its atmosphere. According to Ortega y Gasset, the atmosphere novel is something more valuable. It is like a "landscape painting," and contains very little narrative." See Orhan Pamuk, "Our minds do what we read novels," in "The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist, trans. Nazim Dikbas (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), pp.30-31.


19 La Petite-Maison was written in the 18th century, and it presents a marriage between a libertine novella and an architectural treatise. See Jean-Francois de Bastide, Anthony Vidler and Rodolphe el-Khoury, The little house: an architectural seduction (New York: NY Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

20 Ibid., p.76.


24 Inho Choe, "Another Man's Room (T'ain ui pang)," translated by Kevin O'Rourke, in Modern Korean Fiction: An Anthology, ed. Bruce Fulton and Youngmin Kwon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p.188.

25 Ibid., p.189.

26 To understand the term, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Primacy of Perception.


28 According to Vilém Flusser, Model has a potential of being developed ceaselessly. See Vilém Flusser, Writings, ed. Andreas Strohl, trans. Erik Eisel (Minneapolis: Minn. [u.a.] University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

References


