

To Ponder

1 On literacy metaphors close to our hearts

...Our favorite metaphors for literacy – literacy as erotic act, as ecology, as world-making, as empowering technology – may all be too grandiose at last, at worst delusional and dangerous. So I invite you to consider two more modest and yet no less profound alternatives. First, Laura Esquivel connects writing with cooking in her novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, a deep meditation that inverts Plato's complaint against rhetoric, showing how in cooking and in writing about cooking, the present invokes the past, and the past informs the present, the aromas of meals from old recipes stirring the senses and stimulating the memory like the phrases of an old family story. Second, consider the metaphor used by one of Larry McMurtry's characters, the brilliant Kickapoo scout, Famous Shoes. The great tracker in his later life has but one ambition, to learn to read the tracks in white people's books, the shapes and letters, to see if they might lead him to worlds he has yet to see.

What if literacy involves little more than finding practices that help us visualize fragments of our thoughts and those of others and to record experiences or impressions that might otherwise disappear from our all too fallible memories – like recipes scrawled on paper napkins and maps sketched in West Texas sand, or like letters written under duress in wartime trenches and homefront parlors? Even if our metaphors are humble – literacy as cooking, literacy as tracking – so long as they show that reading and writing stand close to the center of our lives, so long as we are cooking feasts and tracking big game, then literacy remains close to our hearts, and there is hope for those of us who are called to craft, study, and teach the written word.

Killingsworth, M. Jimmie. Texas A & M University. Excerpt from a paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2000.

2 On architecture and literacy

A door not only admits us to a building but also to a world of senses, the mind and the heart. Doors, together with windows, stairs and balconies, combine to produce something which speaks and at times even sings. The result is a building PLUS – that is to say, a work of architecture.

What can a building say or sing about? Whatever we, as individuals or as a society, want it to. It can tell about our powers, our dreams, concerns, fears, hopes – whatever can contribute to our present or future welfare. What we build will then combine with what we carve, paint, sing or write in order to learn from our past, to enrich our present and to project our future.

However, before a building can speak it must do: it must function efficiently, be accessible and fit into its neighborhood. It must help us cope with the problems of day-to-day living. Only then can the functional and the inspirational combine in an expressive duet.

This book, then, is about shelter, not only as protection, but as a vehicle for further understanding our world and revelling in it.

A little knowledge of the building's language – its grammar and vocabulary – will enable its song to ring more clearly in the ear, and even permit us, the listeners, to contribute to the chorus.

The building's language

We humans can communicate with each other by word – whether spoken, printed, written or electronically transmitted. We also make ourselves understood by body language. A building speaks to us also through signs, inscriptions or billboards. It usually tells us what it is and how it wants to be understood by its outer clothing – its special kind of body language. Its variety of gestures enables it to speak in prose, in poetry, in symbols. Its gestures can assert its dignity, flaunt its daring, or soar into fantasy.

Mayerovitch, Harry (1996). *How Architecture Speaks and fashions our lives*. Montreal: Robert Davies Publishing. 10 & 28. ISBN 1-895954-55-5 This book can be ordered from the publisher: <http://rdppub.com>