



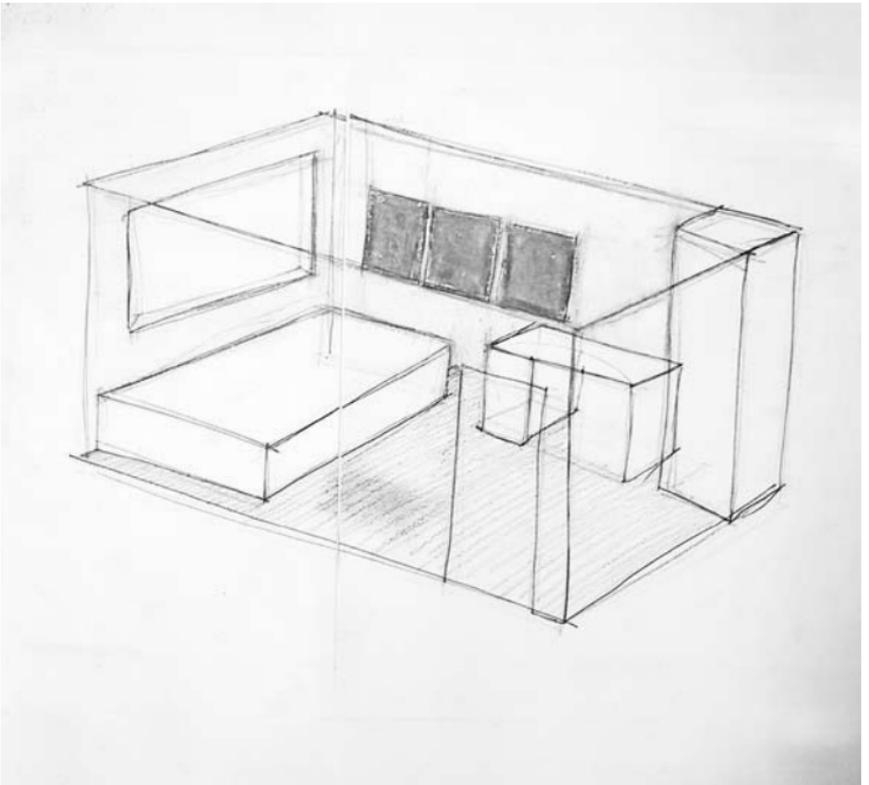
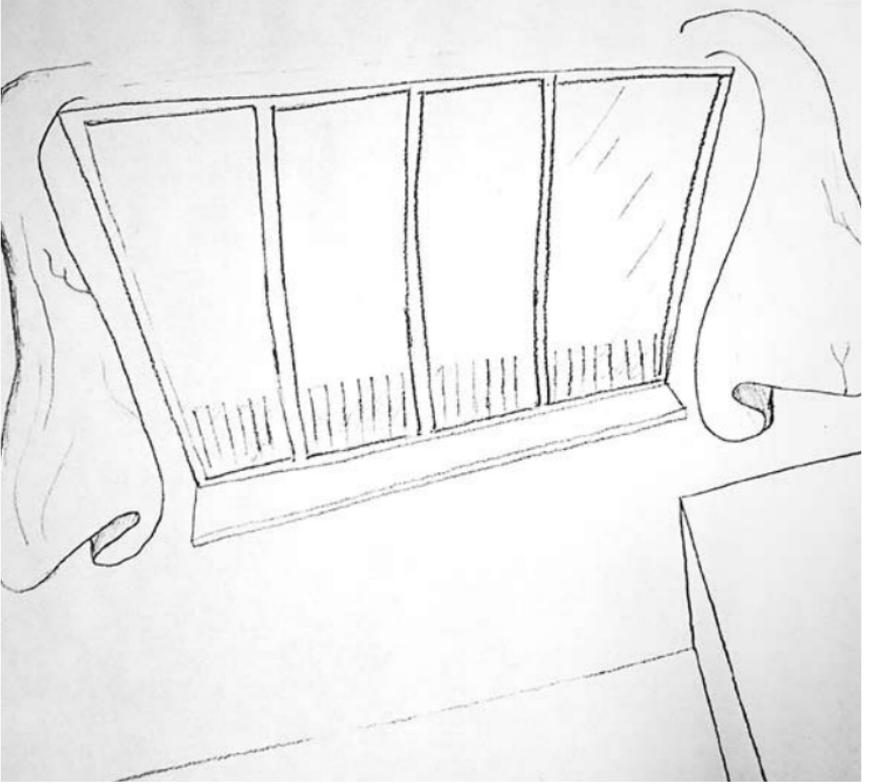
Guja Dögg Hauksdottir

ARCHITECTURE AT EYE-LEVEL: TELEVISION AS MEDIA

As with other forms of art, architecture can be read at many levels. When working with children and young people I prefer to focus on the basic issues of *sensing* and *experiencing* with all the senses – from touch, smell and hearing to taste and vision. This gives the kids good ground for *wondering* and experimenting on their own, preferably through playing with real materials in not-too-complicated tasks, which makes a clear frame to work within.

To deepen understanding, I strive to relate each personal search or discovery of basic elements such as form, light, space, texture etc. with *real stories* from our man made environment, and use historical examples, ideological comparisons, questions on social habits and identity etc., and generally put different approaches in context, so the kids can derive their own meaning, according to their own age, level and place. The emphasis on *perception* and *context* is a central theme in my regular classroom or workshop education for young people, but it is also the main thread in a series on the reading of architecture, which I have been doing on a monthly basis for three years now for the media of television and the grown-up audience of The Icelandic National Broadcast Service.

If one looks at architecture as a form of *communication*, as a language of meaning and memory, written in close relation to

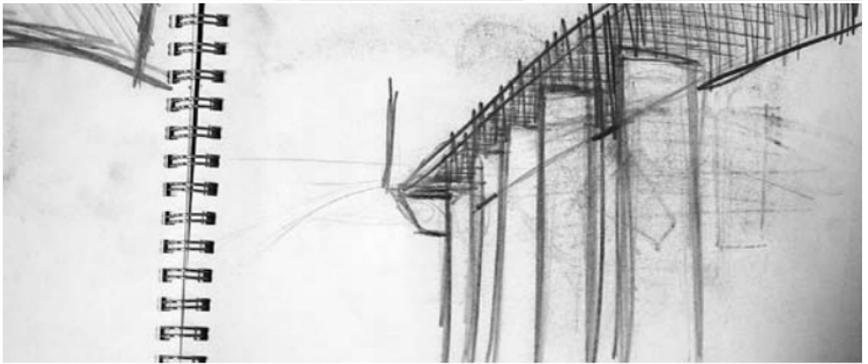
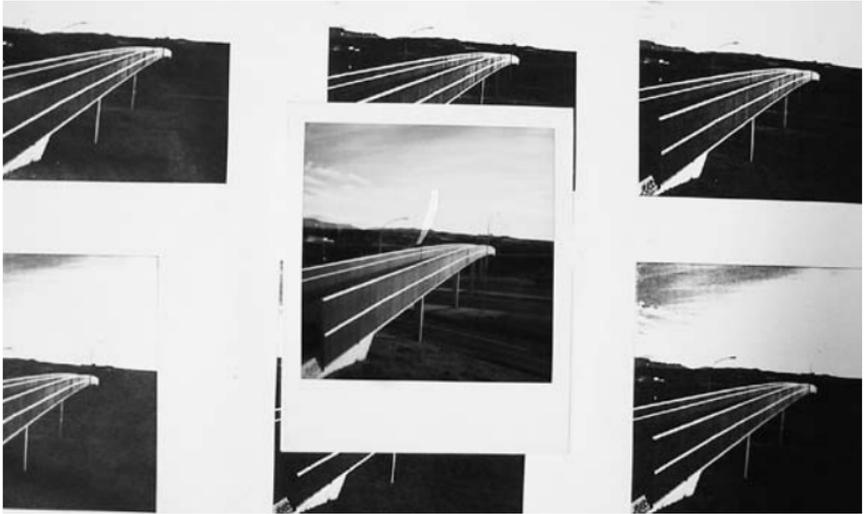


My room: identity and surroundings.

civilization and prevalence of each time; appealing to the *eye and the body* as well as the *mind*, it is clear that it is a rather complex form of "talking". On the other hand it usually works and is understood across normal national language barriers. To fully understand architecture, you have to experience it first hand – to "read" it in its own place with your own senses. From the educational point of view, where this is often not possible, architecture is unfortunately not easily interpreted or compromised in words or in two-dimensional pictures on the pages of a book, without an important part of it being left out or lost.

My attention and ambition towards the relatively new face of the television media - compared to books and travelling - relates to the fact that television, deriving from the "living pictures" in the cinema at the start of the 20th century, invites one to address and interweave intellectual information with visual language in a *spatial* manner. The fact that television is a common and living part of most people's - including children's - lives, and therefore reaches out to a broad public, adds to the inbuilt qualities of the media as an excellent tool for educating and enlightening, as it appeals simultaneously to so many of our senses as well as the wit. It offers creative ways of composing and editing various information in space and time, guided by the presence of a living human host which leads you with his or her body and eyes through the different phenomena of form and space, combined with jumps across historical times, descriptive figures, unusual views from the sky etc.

Of course the television can never replace a "live" experience on site, but as a compensation it offers these very interesting possibilities for communicating and giving parallel insights to the many aspects of architecture - be it introduced as subject or object, matter or mind, existing or even vanished from the earth, close to home or at the most remote end of the world. In a television sequence you can "enter" a room and look around, see how the light flows in through an opening in the wall and sets a certain spot of the material in the floor alive – just as you would in real life, and for instance by touching the lightbeam you suddenly find yourself to be in the same space but at a totally different time. The image can be black and white instead of the actual colour, maybe it's winter instead of summer, the materials can look different because the building is now brand new, or you have been transferred to a distant civilization where this type of room or this use of materials originally derived...



Two bridges: dynamic versus static, personal opinions.

In "Mosaik", my own regular programme for the Icelandic National television I have tried to emphasise and use to the fullest the power of the *visual* aspect of the media, as the visual language can bear incredibly strong communication which is perceived and understood with very little effort by most people. My approach is very much the same as I mentioned at the beginning of this text, to emphasise the perception or "reading" of architecture with all the senses, supported by parallel insights to similar projects or related themes in history or ideology. I am very conscious to keep the focus on certain issues such as "the language of materials" or "art in architecture", rather than leaning on solitary figures or names in history – and in good cooperation with the cameraman and the soundguy, it is quite possible to draw a coherent image that appeals to the eye and the ear, with a supporting text that guides rather than directs your attention to the phenomena of importance each time.

In the beginning my assignment was to introduce contemporary Icelandic architecture on television for the broad public, but very soon I realized that I had to work with supporting layers in order to get *behind the commercial surface* or the mere outer appearance of the projects. By comparing two or more projects each time, and weighing them under certain issues – such as "Building in landscape", "Form and expression", "Stories settled in the walls of spaces", "Five houses for God", I was able to draw in elements that suited each session, such as ideological references or historical origins, artistic means or spatial perception, similar examples from abroad etc., and in short touch on the various matter and mind, combined in the context that makes the art of architecture. It seems that this different approach has had a very genuine appeal amongst the viewers, as if it has opened up or inspired a personal understanding of the basic elements and advanced compositions of architecture, and I have been asked to publish the series for libraries and educational use.

The awareness of civil and children's architectural education been rising rapidly in Europe in recent years, and the Alvar Aalto Academy has been leading the debate and action with the Playce workshops and seminars. For this purpose it is exciting to analyse the need and eventually to further develop educational material for the television media, in order to enrich architectural education for children and young people. The culture of television for children varies from one country to another, but for instance in the Nordic Countries where there is a strong emphasis on conscious educational and enlightening purposes on the national channels, one could easily imagine the



Bird watching towers.

subject of architecture to be a part of the programme – eventually with focus on the use of our senses for *personal experiencing and learning about the different aspects of architecture and living.* 35

For school purposes it would be very interesting to introduce and compare *local versus foreign* architecture. According to age and level, the television material could involve supporting projects for the schoolroom or the playground or the neighbourhood – and by learning about other countries, cultures and civilizations the pupils begin to see things in a different light, or at least begin to question if architecture and their own man-made environment could be different, as well as the learning itself giving them tools and knowledge to judge good from bad!

In Iceland, where I live, there is a strong concern for our old Icelandic language. The language is thought to be a bearer of a culture, of an identity, of past, present and future dreams of a nation, and it is rooted in its actual use and development. Many people have an escalating fear that the young people are gradually losing the touch of their language and thereby losing the connection with their cultural heritage. I am ashamed but not surprised to learn that only about 20% of the television broadcast material is Icelandic of origin. Need I say more about the importance of television on young people's language development and the influence this media has on our everyday life? Need I say more about the importance of educating through television the intellectual, visual and spatial language of our architecture?



Home as a nest?

