Art Schools for Children and Young People

Discovering the ART in ARCHITECTURE

Pihla Meskanen

DOI: 10.24981/2414-3332-3.1.2016.21

Pihla Meskanen

Arkki, School of Architecture for Children and Youth, Finland

pihla@arkki.net

Discovering the ART in ARCHITECTURE

Abstract

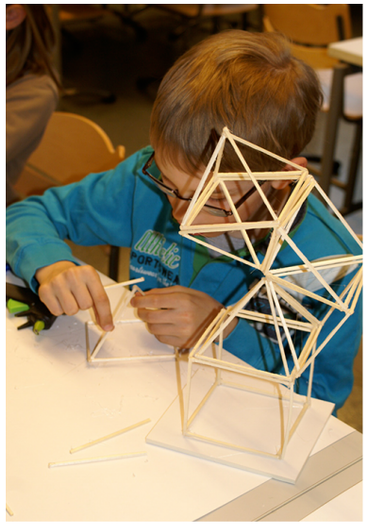
“Architecture more fully than other art forms engages the immediacy of our sensory perceptions.Th e passage of time, light, shadow and transparency, colour phenomena, texture, material and detail all participate in the complete experience of architecture” (Holl, 2006, p. 39).

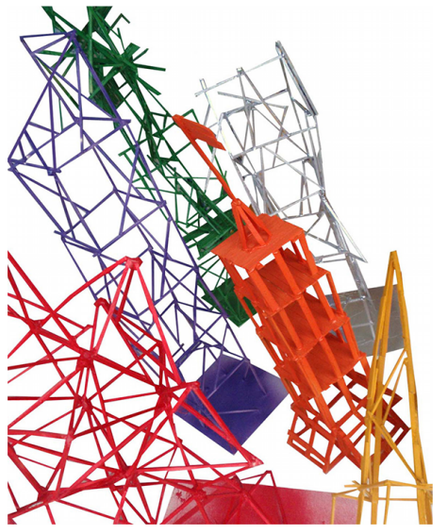
This essay contemplates the means and objectives of architecture education for children and youth. As architecture is a very complicated entity, it can be approached from various angles in architecture education for children. Architecture is much more than just physics, mathematics, geometry, economy, sociology and construction. In the only contemporary source on classical architecture to have survived, 15 BC architect Vitruvius wrote in his book *De architectura* that a structure must exhibit the three qualities of firmitas, utilitas, venustas – that is, it must be solid, useful and beautiful. Since the time of classical antiquity and its rebirth in Renaissance, architecture in its nature has been recognized as an esthetical form of art, considered as a means to bring delight to people, and represent the cosmic order.

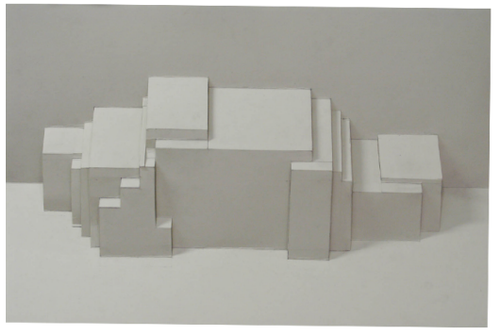
In this essay I discuss the immaterial aspects of architecture in relation to architecture education to children and youth.

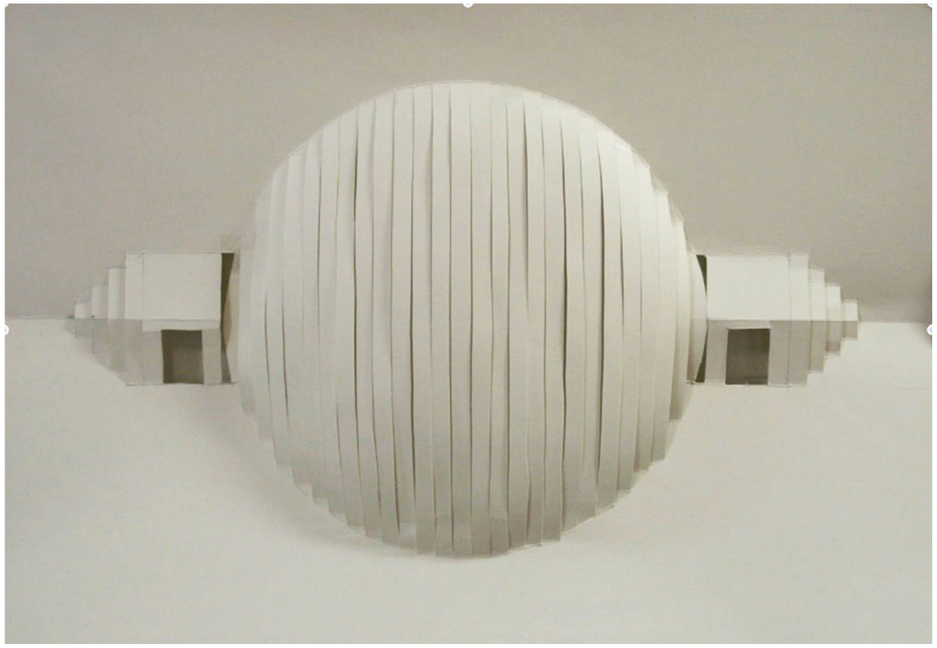
Keywords: architecture, architecture education, art education, sensing architecture, architectural experience, multisensory perception, aesthetics

Where is the art in architecture?















Where is the art in architecture?

Architecture as art is special in the range of different arts. It is not a ″free″ art form but it is a ″useful″ art form. It should enhance the lives of people alongside providing them with spaces for different human actions.

“Architecture is a poetic language of humanity which has an immediate impact on our physical body. At the same time architecture is science, technology and economy, in one word: culture. Architecture can make peace with nature and culture, with man and spirit” (Nyman,1998, p.167).

The phenomenological viewpoint of architecture is researching into the experience of built space rather than the forms, physical measurements and styles. From the phenomenological viewpoint good architecture evokes the sense of familiarity and the sense of beauty in the person experiencing it.

Architecture as art is a profound expression of our understanding of life. It is the expression of our cultural values. This inseparable binding between man and architecture sets the profound basic goals to architecture education.

Not only can architecture education lead to a demand for a better environment, but also architecture education gives means to a better and comprehensive understanding of the human way of living on earth.

I believe that this legacy is something that we want to cherish and give to our children, who are the citizens, designers, and decision makers of our future.

Material and immaterial elements of architecture

“A real masterpiece always pushes our consciousness away from its normal, everyday track and beyond imagination, directing it to the deeper structures of reality” (Pallasmaa1993, p.75).

Architecture is much more than just physics, mathematics, geometry, economy, sociology and construction. Sensual understanding or “reading” of architecture is necessary for understanding the built environment deeply. Some parts of architecture can be easily measured, defined and classified, such as height, area, mass, volume, thermal insulation, efficiency, expenses –the list is long. These things can be easily taught and learned. Yet these measures do not measure the architectural quality of the design – rather they measure economic and engineering efficiencies.

To me the most interesting aspect of architecture is the unquantifiable *quality of design* that cannot be defined with numbers. It could be compared to a musical composition; like different musical pieces are composed using the same basic notes, so too does architecture use a basic vocabulary and elements to compose unique entities. The most basic architectural elements are light and shadow, material, texture, color, shape, form, space, rhythm, structure, scale and proportion. These components and others are used to form the space and shape by means of composition.

These elements in itself can be measured, but an architect uses these elements in designing a piece, that has aesthetic values. Architecture uses physical elements to create sensual and psychophysical encounters that are experienced through moving in space in time.

“Like a skilled cook, a designer can create interesting parallels and combinations” (Kareoja 2014, p. 36).

Sensing, experiencing

“Architecture more fully than other art forms engages the immediacy of our sensory perceptions. The passage of time, light, shadow and transparency, colour phenomena, texture, material and detail all participate in the complete experience of architecture” (Holl 2006, p. 39).

How do we perceive architecture? Our nervous system binds us to the world. Senses are physiological capacities of organisms that provide data for perception. We use all our senses to form our experience and interpret our built environment. Architecture doesn't work with one sense alone, but with synesthetic hybrids. Aesthetic evaluation of architecture has to do with the architectural experience, or perception, that is unique to each person.

Perception

Architectural message is passed through the images, memories and correlations as well as through bodily feelings and sensations. Perception is the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organizing sensory information.

The complex perception of architecture, or space, or place, or city, involves not only our complex sensory system, but also our knowledge, our cognition, our assumptions and presumptions, which all affect the way we read – or interpret - our own sensual perceptions. Each and every person has his own personal experience of the same place. Architectural education increases the knowledge of the built environment and thus affects the way we perceive it or “read” it. Increased knowledge of the built environment changes the way of perception.

Many cognitive psychologists hold that, as we move about in the spaces and places, we create our own model of how the world works. That is, we sense the objective world, but our sensations map to percepts, and these percepts are provisional. As we acquire new information, our percepts shift. Just as one object can give rise to multiple percepts, so an object may fail to give rise to any percept at all: if the percept has no grounding in a person's experience, the person may literally not perceive it.

So one could say that we do not see things as they are, we see things as we are - depending on our personal history. Experiencing architecture is interaction between sensual memories and the environment.

Herein lies the key to architecture education to children. Architecture education can give endless possibilities for the children and young to create

their own 3D –observation libraries of the wonders of the built environment and enable them to become sensitive to the built environment.

Architectural education aims to develop a child's ability to perceive, consider, understand, conceptualize and evaluate his or her environment. Architecture education supports the development of individual cultural identity, which helps us belong to our local surroundings, to our country and to humankind. This sense of belonging is an important factor in cultivating the desire to participate and influence the shaping of our surroundings. Local identity is one step on the way to global awareness and sustainable development.

Teaching architecture to children in Finland

In Finland children's architecture education as part of the civic art education has already established its place. The Act on Basic Art Education was passed in 1992. The first national core curriculum of Basic Education in the Arts and Architecture was published in 1993. The objectives and core contents are determined in this national core syllabi devised by the Finnish National Board of Education for following forms of art: music, literary arts, dance, performing arts (circus and theatre), visual arts (architecture, audiovisual art, fine arts, and crafts).

Suvi Linden, Minister of Culture (2001, p. 4) explained in her Foreword: "The built environment provides all of us with a framework for our actions and our personal fulfillment. It forms the bulk of our national wealth and belongs to all of us, both builders and users. All citizens should have an active understanding of the built environment, irrespective of age, occupation or educational background. Every one of us will at some point have to take a stand on matters related to the built environment and thus have a say in the quality of our own lives and the lives of others."

Arkki

In 1993 Arkki was founded by Miina Vuorinen, Tuuli Tiitola-Meskanen and Pihla Meskanen. Since then I have worked mediating architecture to youth and developing ways to increase the awareness of the meaning of quality built environment. Over the past 23 years Arkki has done thousands of projects with more than 20.000 children and youth in 20 countries around the world. Arkki offers a wide range of architectural courses to children and youth, starting from workshops and short courses to long term step-by-step goal-directed long term education. We have developed a15 year educational program and curriculum of architecture for children and young people, that offers a child the possibility to study architecture continuously for 15 years and altogether 1500 teaching hours between the age of four and 19.

In Arkki we believe that architectural education gives children new possibilities, means and mediums to influence the creation of our future environment, no matter what their

occupation will be.

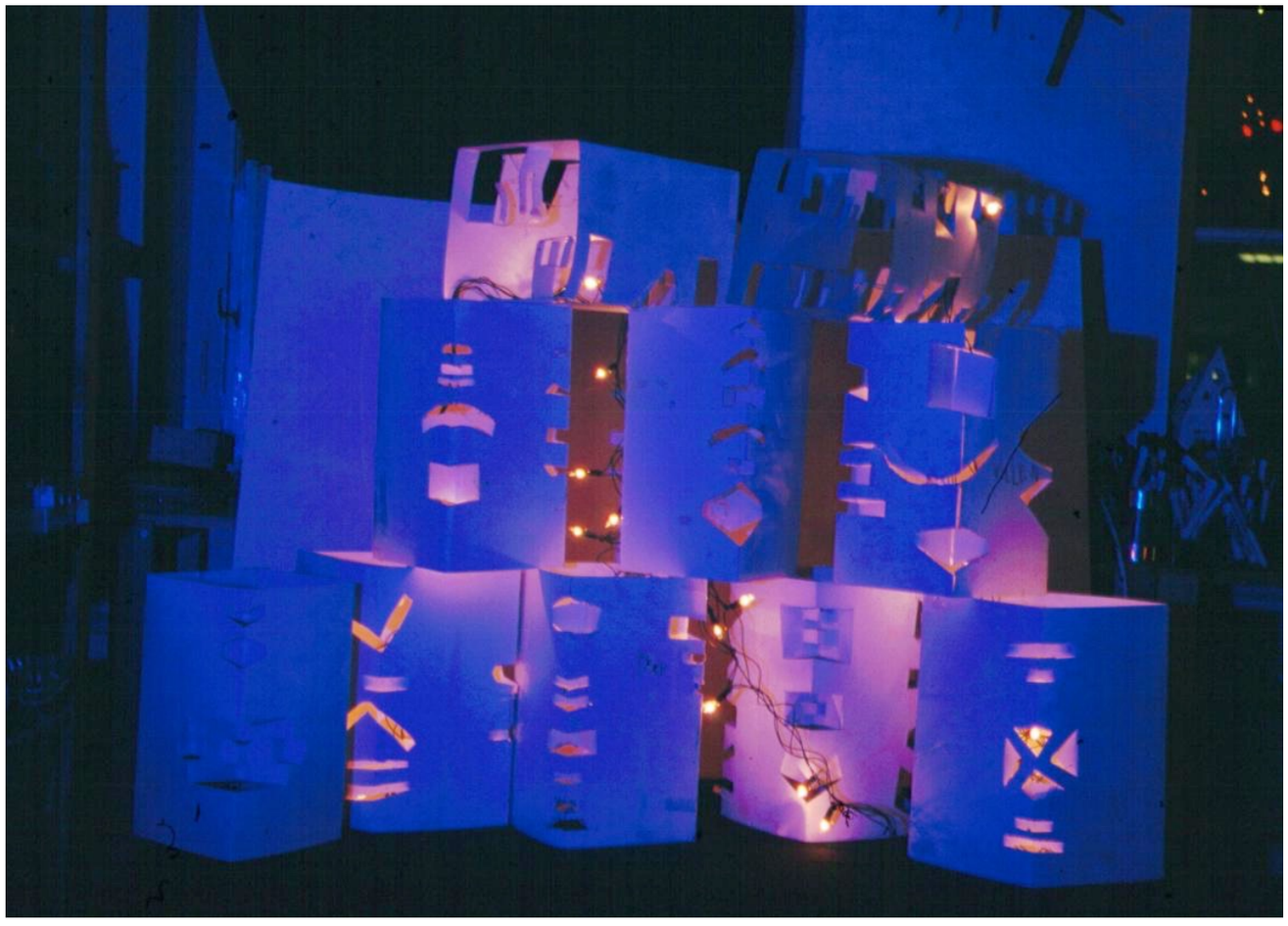
Arkki (www.arkki.net) activities video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_KSCG6fKd

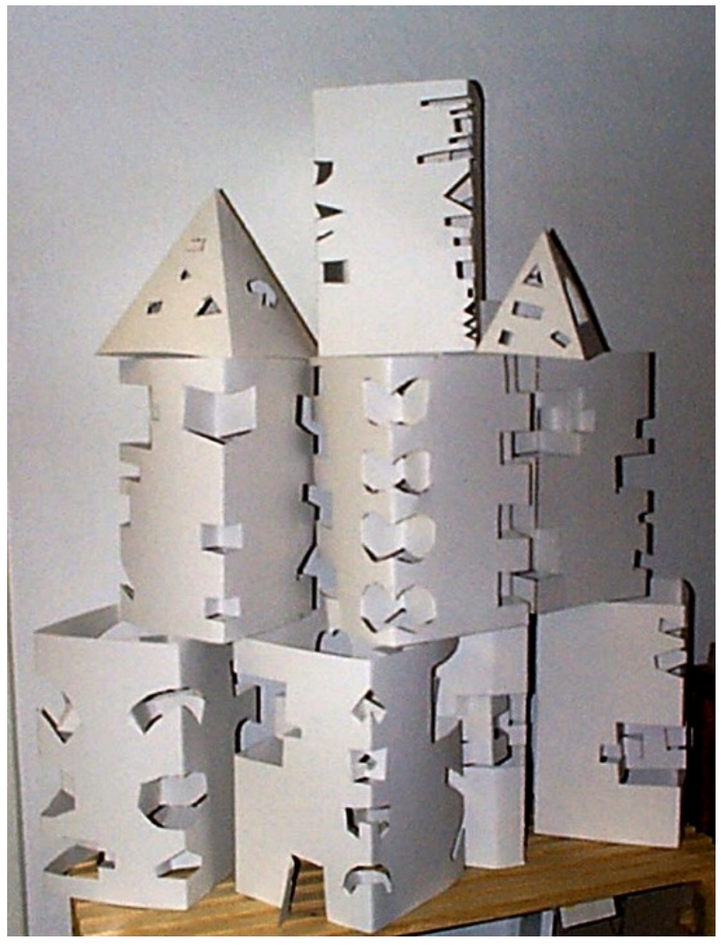
Imaginary worlds of light and shade – a study of the effects of light and shadow in the space

Light and shadow are some of the most important factors in forming the atmosphere of space in architecture. By changing the amount of lighting, the angle of lighting or the color of the light one can change the whole atmosphere of the space.

Usually the most poetic or most impressive spaces are created by moulding the space with light and shadow. Light permits us to see colours and shadows enable us to see forms, textures and structures. Various kinds of atmospheres can be created by using different ways of directing natural light in space. Indirect lighting, filtered light, reflections of light and straight light create diverse atmospheres. Artificial lighting gives additional opportunities to create and change the feeling in a space easily. These three dimensional effects are interesting to study with children and youth.

"It must be remembered that a light is nothing in itself, before it meets some surface, shape or color. It gives life only when it meets a partner to play with. The design of shape, color and space should start in co-operation with light and darkness" (Honkonen 2014, p. 40).





Hut building – learning about cultural traditions

Some of the most popular amongst Arkki's various architectural courses are the hut building camps, where architecture is discovered in 1:1 scale. Hut building courses initiate the children to the building traditions of different nations and cultures. By the year 2016, more than 5000 children have participated in these courses.

Man has always constructed shelters against the hostile elements of nature with different materials each environment has to offer. In the hut building camps the children are introduced to the history of movable huts and natural building materials as well as different cultures. We can learn from ancient, as well as present day nomads the simple and practical construction methods that have been refined over thousands of years. By building these different huts, one can discover the relationship between the climate, the materials, and the building methods, learn different structural systems, joining methods and knots, and expand our understanding of the world.

The need to build huts seems to exist in every child. Building and shaping, interacting with the environment, making one's own environment has been and is an essential part of living on earth.

"The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we

humans are on the earth, is dwelling" (Heidegger 1971, p. 3).


9 6'95

REFERENCES

- Arkki. Retrieved from www.arkki.net
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *Building dwelling thinking from poetry, language, thought*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Holl, S. (2006). Questions of perception: Phenomenology of architecture. In S. Holl, J. Pallasmaa & A. Perez-Gomez *Questions of perception: Phenomenology of architecture* (p. 39). Tokyo: A+U Publishing.
- Honkonen, V. (2014). Light and Shade. In J. Räsänen (Ed.). *The ABC of architecture* (p. 40). Helsinki: Lönnberg.
- Kareoja, P. (2014), Surfaces, materials, colours. In J. Räsänen (Ed.). *The ABC of architecture* (p. 36). Helsinki: Lönnberg.
- Lindén, S. (2001) forewords. In H. Korpelainen, A. Yanar, N. Mayow, (Eds.). *Discovering architecture* (p. 4.) Helsinki: Art Print.
- Nyman, K. (1998). *Talojen kieli*. Jyväskylä: Gummerus.
- Pallasmaa, J. (1993). *Maailmassaolon taide: kirjoituksia arkkitehtuurista ja kuvataiteista*. Helsinki: Painatuskeskus.