

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: INHABITING THE MEMOIR:
ARCHITECTURE THROUGH NARRATIVE
STRUCTURE

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Narrative structures have the ability to elevate architecture to more meaningful, poetic places. Memoirs in particular enable the reader to dissociate from his or her self to experience multiple ways of seeing and thinking about the world. The act of reading a memoir is a participatory and vicarious one in which the reader actively engages with and “experiences” the events of the story, told by another. My thesis will explore how architecture can serve as a related medium in which to imbue narrative content and structures. This thesis seeks to translate and explore narrative structures into form/space implications as a means of re-presenting and enhancing processes of self-discovery, meaning, and architectural experience.

INHABITING THE MEMOIR:
ARCHITECTURE THROUGH NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

By

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00_Introduction

“A story is not like a road to follow...it’s more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while...and you, the visitor, the reader, are altered...by being in this enclosed space...You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time...”

—Alice Munro, *Selected Stories, 1968-1994*

This thesis examines architecture through the lessons I have found in the personal memoir. This document will evaluate various theories surrounding architecture and memoir writing and demonstrate ways to use the rich narrative structures within memoirs to enrich spatial and formal explorations of architecture. I have selected three contemporary memoirs and six architectural precedents to serve as case studies that will guide and prompt my exploration of architecture. Through various modes of representation ranging from drawing, collaging, and modeling exercises, I will generate a range of these narrative structures and then deploy them in the design of a sample project in Reykjavík, Iceland. The aim is to conduct a cross-disciplinary investigation that will serve as a springboard for a more nuanced and adventurous approach to architectural design.

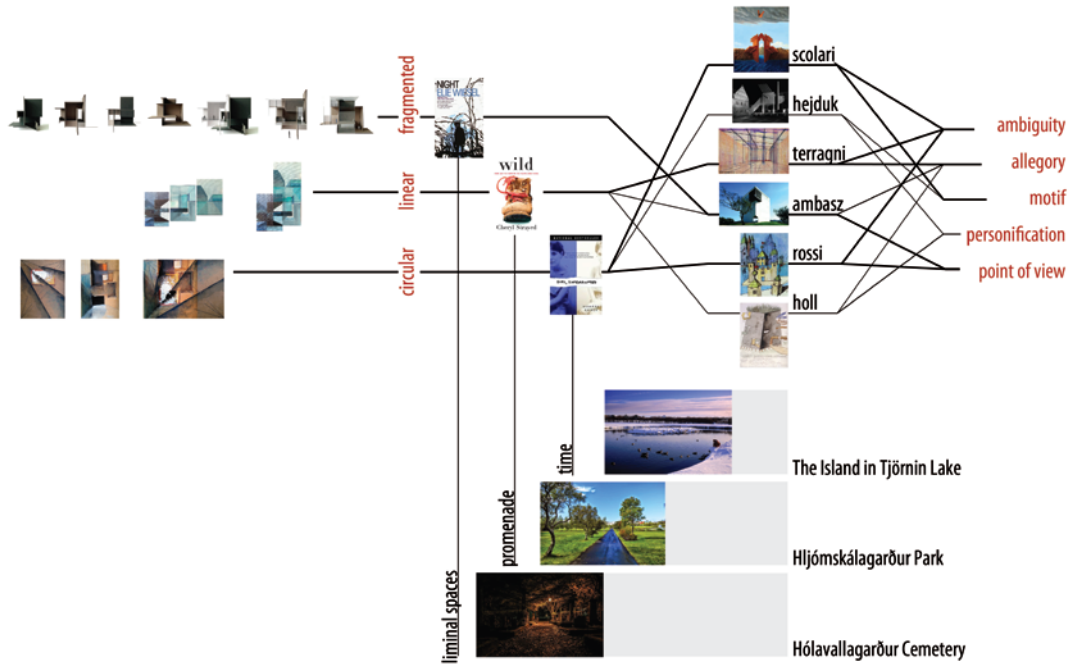


Figure 1 – Methodology on Translating the Memoir

01_The Importance of Storytelling

Writing as Artifact

In his article, “The Significance of the Artifact,” geographer Yi-Fu Tuan examines the role of the artifact in making human experiences manifest. Tuan’s definition of artifact is broad, considering artifacts to be manmade objects that are either constructed or imagined. The imagined artifact might be the myths and legends passed on through an oral tradition while material artifacts are those rendered visible in the built environment.

Artifacts can act as links between human emotion and our surroundings—between inside and outside. Tuan posits, “It is an essential characteristic of being human that we feel the urge to reify experience, to give those moments of pleasure and pain a narrative outline or visual shape” (Tuan 462). Experiences are made meaningful when they are captured, reconstituted, and shared through story. They “have a certain durability in personal consciousness and in the minds of persons who listen and look” and have meaning “by virtue of being reflected on, of being consciously held, and of having a public—or potentially public—existence” (Tuan 463). The act of writing enables this process of reification and reflection. Memoir writing is particularly poignant in the way it reflects on people, places, and events as experienced rather than objectively known. Memoirs thus become artifacts of self-discovery. They showcase important experiences in a public way, and in doing so, make those experiences more meaningful for both the writer and reader. I am interested in materializing artifacts imbued with story and making them inhabitable. I

believe that materializing the internal can tap into powerful, alternate ways of experiencing architecture.

02_Background of the Memoir

“True memoir is written, like all literature, in an attempt to find not only a self but a world...To write one’s life is to live it twice, and the second living is both spiritual and historical, for a memoir reaches deep within the personality as it seeks its narrative form and it also grasps the life-of-the-times as no political analysis can”

—Patricia Hampl

Defining Memoir

As works of literary non-fiction written in the first-person perspective, memoirs have traditionally been categorized under the genre of autobiography. I wish to highlight the ways in which memoirs stand apart from autobiographical writing and why they merit investigation in the field of architecture.

While the autobiography presents itself as whole, factual, and detached, the memoir exists in an ambiguous state between memory (the word memoir derives from the French word *mémoire*, meaning memory) and history. As a collection of memories that an individual writes about, memoirs are highly personal, reflective works that map an author’s (often fragmented) process of self-discovery. Memoirs are thus vehicles for self-reflection and self-discovery in architecture in the way they create a correspondence between the internal and external—between our thoughts of the world and our experience of the world.

Why Memoir?

The earliest memoirs can be traced back to ancient times and were generally an account of political events by famous people. By the late 18th-mid 20th century, notable people within a profession utilized the memoir to recount their work and significant life events. Contemporary memoirs, however, showcase a surge in life writing by ordinary people in virtually every subject. Memoirs today are no longer

instruments of the elite, but rather accessible and relatable modes of expression to the everyday person. Perhaps the widespread popularity of the memoir speaks to a kind of longed-for access to the past that no longer exists. Critical theorist Jūra Avižienis states, “[...] the past is over. Any access we have to it is inevitably mediated through memory or through texts [...]” (44). This mediation through text suggests a special link between the writer and reader of a memoir in the way that the reader becomes an active participant in the telling and re-living of the memoir. Avižienis notes the corresponding relationship between a writer and reader when she states that “The memoirist (and hence the reader) is always both spectator and witness of the events [s]he describes. As witness, [s]he is the ‘I’ within the events, but as spectator, [s]he, like the historian, stands detached, critical, able to situate the events in temporal if not historical context” (Avižienis 46-47).

Memoir writing becomes a cathartic practice as a result of this link to the past. The act of recalling, recounting, and reliving significant moments allows us to work through lessons, traumas, and mysteries of the past. Sharing these experiences satisfies a basic human need to relate to others and make permanent our existence in the memories of others. French artist Eugene Delacroix notes this sentiment in his April 7, 1824 diary entry: “I feel that I still retain control of the days about which I have made entries, even when they are past. But as for the days which are not mentioned in the diary, it is as if they had never existed” (qtd. in Tuan 469).

Writing a memoir is ultimately a process of reassembly that takes fragments of memories and reconstitutes them into a collaged or synthetic whole.

03_Design Thinking Methodology

This chapter investigates six precedents for a design thinking methodology that is closely tied to memoir. The selected precedents all deal with the externalization of the internal early in the design process utilizing various modes of representation. The following precedents are organized on a spectrum of unbuilt-to-built, or idea-to-thing and are either examples of a body of work (Massimo Scolari, John Hejduk, and Aldo Rossi) or a specific project (Giuseppe Terragni, Emilio Ambasz, and Steven Holl).

Massimo Scolari (1943-)

Massimo Scolari is an Italian architect, sculptor, painter, and writer. His myth-based body of work investigates representation and privileges the use of imagined narratives as a means of provoking architectural thinking and design. Scolari's work is about visualizing an architectural idea and does so through decades of work exploring various themes in order to achieve clarity of form. His work does not follow a linear methodology. Rather, each investigation produces a new body of work with its own artifacts of interest (flying and floating objects, architectonic elements within a landscape, etc.). These artifacts reappear throughout Scolari's works—each time reused, reimagined, and re-presented as if they were vague, faded memories or dreams (Lutz).



Figure 2 – Selection of Paintings by Massimo Scolari

This selection of paintings showcases Scolari’s trajectory of realistic surrealism over the course of 30 years. The built forms in his works are highly intricate and suggestive of reality while the treatment of the image as a whole—its composition—destabilizes realistic readings of space. One example of this can be seen in the way Scolari constructs a clear foreground, middle-ground, and background, but then disrupts readings of depth through the use of ambiguously placed objects. In the third painting of Figure 2, Scolari distorts the spatial reading of the gate by rendering it as a parallel projection in two directions. This results in an inverted central perspective whereby the object gets bigger as it goes back into space.

Another interesting theme within Scolari’s work is his interest in landscape and its relationship to built forms. His imaginary landscapes are rendered organic and mythical and seem to provide a narrative to his object-like, platonic forms. In addition to distorting spatial readings, the juxtaposition of his built forms and mythical landscapes challenge readings of time and place. It is difficult to decipher whether his works produce nostalgia for the past or a vision of the future. They appear to us as both otherworldly and familiar at the same time.

Conclusions:

1. Scolari produces a body of work inspired by imagined narratives

2. Scolari challenges readings of space through representation; he creates ambiguity in readings of depth
3. Scolari challenges readings of time through an investigation of artifacts that take on qualities of lived-through experiences

John Hejduk (1929-2000)

John Hejduk was an American architect, artist, and educator who spent his career exploring ideas ranging from abstract, geometric, and compositional questions to object-buildings deeply inspired by narrative. This paper considers Hejduk's narrative-based projects known as the architectural masques that developed later on in his career.

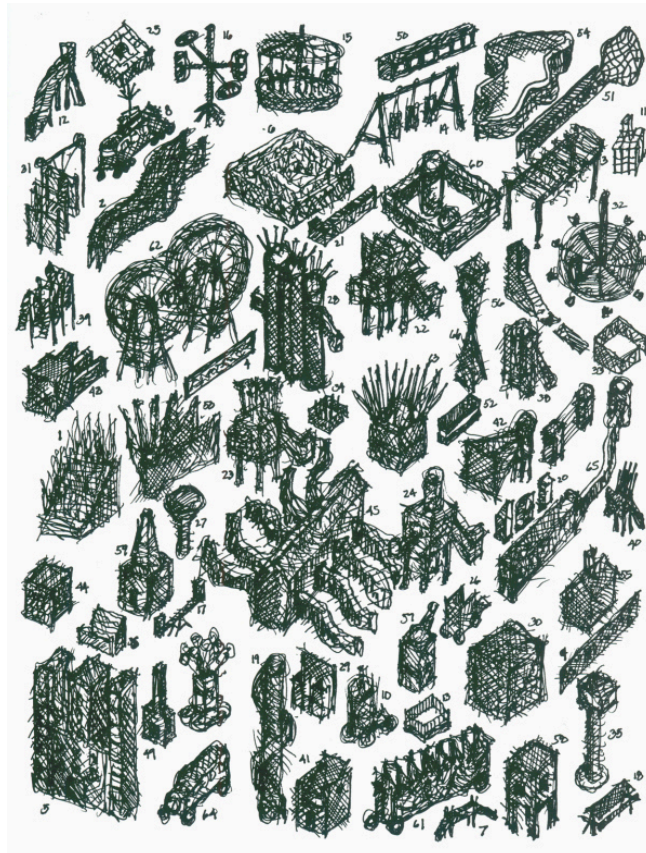


Figure 3 – Berlin Masque, 1982 by John Hejduk

Hejduk's masques are anthropomorphic structures with a nomadic quality not typically associated with architecture. Often depicted with wheels or limbs, the masques are autonomous, nomadic entities that move about from city to city performing various duties. The concept of masque, which suggests a veil in order to conceal something, is interesting to think about in terms of architecture. Do Hejduk's masques subvert static conceptions of architecture? Do they try to convince us of an imagined reality, or do they comfortably exist in our reality as relics of another place and time? Daniel Libeskind notes the mysterious quality of Hejduk's work in his introduction to Hejduk's *Mask of Medusa*, stating, "What is decisive about his work is that it leads to a different place, one which is both alien and inalienable: a place which consecrates Architecture with mysteries that are no longer decipherable within the ordinary code of *Mimesis*" (Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa* 9).

Hejduk's body of work is significant because it presents an alternate way of practicing architecture (Shapiro). Rather than designing works for a specific client and site, Hejduk instead created a repertoire of hundreds of characters throughout his career that have begun to emerge in different places throughout the world. Formally, Hejduk's characters and their stories live within the drawn page and, like the artifacts of Scolari's work, they reappear, slightly altered, in other places.



Figure 4 - Collapse of Time, London, UK, 1986; Security, Oslo, Norway, 1989; The Joker's Perch, Groningen, The Netherlands, 1990

Perhaps it is through the masque figures that Hejduk injects poetics into built form. The success of Hejduk's work is measured through the sponsoring of his masques in cities throughout the world. There is a mystery to Hejduk's realized projects that stems from their pre-existing life on the page and mind of the architect. For Hejduk, powerful architecture exudes an aura or spirit. This aura, he says, is hard to explain in words, but is rather something felt in the body like an unearthly sound that he describes as a soul-sound or sound-aura (Shapiro). The impact of architecture on an individual occurs through a correspondence between the space of the architecture and the internal space of the observer. In other words, the process of internalizing architecture is significant and produces meaning within the observing body.

Conclusions:

1. Architecture can start from deep within, from the subconscious or soul which then resonates with others
2. The internalization of experience is critical

Giuseppe Terragni, *Danteum* (unbuilt, published in 1957)

Giuseppe Terragni (1904-1943) was an Italian architect commissioned to build the Danteum—a temple to celebrate, disseminate, and promote the works of Italian poet Dante Alighieri—in 1938 by Mussolini. The monument was to be built on an irregular quadrilateral site in Rome at the intersection of *Via dell'Impero* (now *Via dei Fori Imperiali*) and *Via Carvour*. The site sits between the Basilica of

Maxentius and the Torre dei Conti and is adjacent to a view corridor to the Colosseum. Terragni's interpretation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a three-part epic poem describing Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven (and symbolically the soul's journey to God), inspired the design for the Danteum.

Terragni drafted the *Relazione*, a text to accompany his drawings for the Danteum, to explain his design process. Architect and scholar Thomas Schumacher, who wrote extensively on the Danteum, notes that "For Terragni the poem's structure had to exist independently, applicable to either the Poem or the building; otherwise the Danteum would be *dependent* on the Poem and unable to 'confront' it on equal footing" (Schumacher 138). While the Danteum had to accommodate the programmatic needs of a museum and library, "[...] the major spaces of this large building were designed to represent the *cantincas* of the Divine Comedy, intended as a symbol of what Dante represented in politics—Italian unification and imperial pretensions" (Schumacher 22).

Terragni draws from a variety of narrative elements in his design for the Danteum. He looks at the pattern of the poem (A-B-A, B-C-B, C-D-C, D-E-D), which employs an interlocking rhyme scheme known as *terza rima*, to generate the overlapping square parti of the building (Schumacher 78). He also dissects the modes of discourse within Dante's work into the literal (the description of Dante's trip), the allegorical (the amelioration of Dante the writer), and anagogical (the vision of eternal happiness for humanity via the restoration of the Roman Empire and Church) (Schumacher 123-124). In addition to the form and mode of the narrative, Terragni looks at the topography and atmosphere of the text (Schumacher 29, 118). He notes

that Dante's promenade through *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* is one of ascension towards the heavens, and thus integrates sectional changes between the major spaces of the building.



Figure 5 – Perspectives of the Danteum: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* by Giuseppe Terragni

Terragni's representation of the three *canticas* becomes a link between the space of the text (idea) and the space of the Danteum (thing). Figure 5 shows watercolor perspectives of these textual spaces in an evocative way, enabling them to teeter on the edge between imagination and reality in their conscious ambiguity. The perspective of *Inferno*, for instance, conveys the atmosphere of hell as experienced by Dante. Terragni writes,

The sensation of the *impending*, of the void formed under the crust of the earth and through a fearsome seismic disorder caused by the fall of Lucifer, can be plastically created by the overall covering of the room. This fractured ceiling and the floor, which is decomposed into diminishing squares, the scanty light that filters through the cracks in the blocks in the ceiling, all will give the catastrophic sensation of pain and useless aspiration to gain the sun and light [...]. (Schumacher 128)

The second image of *Purgatorio* embodies a sense of threshold in the way it frames views of the heavens while still being positioned beneath the heavens. Finally, the atmosphere of *Paradiso* is noticeably more ethereal and perhaps the most ambiguous of the three spaces. In it, Terragni renders the glass columns "concrete and nonexistent at the same time" (Schumacher 86). The both/and reading of the columns is poetic in the way it evades definition. Like a text that evokes ambiguous imagery

of a time, place, or event, the representation of *Paradiso* creates an ambiguous space within our imagination.

Conclusions:

1. Representation is the link between idea and thing

Emilio Ambasz (1943-), Casa de Retiro Espiritual (Sevilla, Spain, 1975)

Emilio Ambasz' House of Spiritual Retreat is a precedent for an image-driven architecture that relates to site and considers issues of sustainability. The house consists of two large, stuccoed white walls that meet at a right angle and denote entry into the home. The traditional Andalusian courtyard is reimagined and sunken into the earth, enabling the house to stay cool in the hot climate of southern Spain. The sunken courtyard brings light into the entire house, aided by the two reflective white walls. The architecture above ground is highly platonic while the forms below the earth take on an organic quality much like the surrounding landscape (Ambasz).

Like the title of the project suggests, the house is spiritual. It is similar to Terragni's Dantéum in the sense that it uses architectural language to convey a narrative—in this case, one about spiritual retreat. Similar to Terragni, Ambasz conceives of his design through perspective. The photographs of Ambasz' built work are clearly intentional views imagined early in the design process. Reminiscent of orthographic drawings, Ambasz' work transforms conventionally unobserved perspectives into inhabitable experiences.



Figure 6 – Photographs of Casa de Retiro Espiritual

Conclusions:

1. House of Spiritual Retreat is a precedent for how to contextualize a narrative
2. There is a mysterious quality to the architecture that stems from an early representational interest

Aldo Rossi (1931-1997)

The Italian architect Aldo Rossi is yet another example of someone who has contributed to the discourse of architectural representation. In his introduction to *The Sketchbooks*, architect Paolo Portoghesi describes Rossi's work as "demonstrate[ing] the type of research that is pure reflection and yet at the same time poetic statement; it

is the poetics of the fragment, or, better still, of a ‘montage’ of fragments which converse among themselves as they wait to be reunited” (Rossi 8). Rossi’s composition of fragments, like Scolari’s, creates surreal atmospheres that ultimately translate to his built works. Though Rossi distorts perspectives, he approaches his drawings with the intention of their realization and thinks about color, materiality, and constructability at the start of each exploration.

Rossi’s use of *torsione*, or twisting in his drawings is an interesting lens through which to study his works. In a formal way, the *torsione* helps call attention to specific artifacts within a field of volumes (Rossi 12). The notion of twisting can also be understood in the way Rossi teeters between abstraction and naturalism, often reproducing a reality with a slight, unusual angle. His work thus carries the thread of the Cubists in the way it depicts objects from multiple points of view. In doing so, the object in question is preserved more wholly. Portoghesi states, “for Rossi, *torsione* is a means of maintaining contact with memories without abandoning them, without any illusion of redemption [...]” (Rossi 13). In essence, Rossi fragments reality in order to give a more realistic and profound view of reality. Through this type of representation, Rossi is able to understand and design objects more completely, as they would be experienced architecturally.

Conclusions:

1. Reality can be slightly altered to delve into the unreliability of memory, experience, and time.

Steven Holl, Knut Hamsun Center (Hamarøy, Norway, 2009)

Steven Holl's Knut Hamsun Center is a museum dedicated to the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun that consists of an exhibition area, library, reading room, cafe, and auditorium. Located above the Arctic Circle close to where the writer grew up, the museum is inspired by Hamsun's early novels and relates to the local vernacular with its stained black wood exterior and reinterpretation of the traditional Norwegian sod roof (Holl). Holl's "building as body" concept for the museum is evident in his early anthropomorphic drawings and watercolor studies for the project, which represent balconies projecting from the body of the building like limbs. Similar to Hejduk's masque characters, the Knut Hamsun Center is animated and full of story.

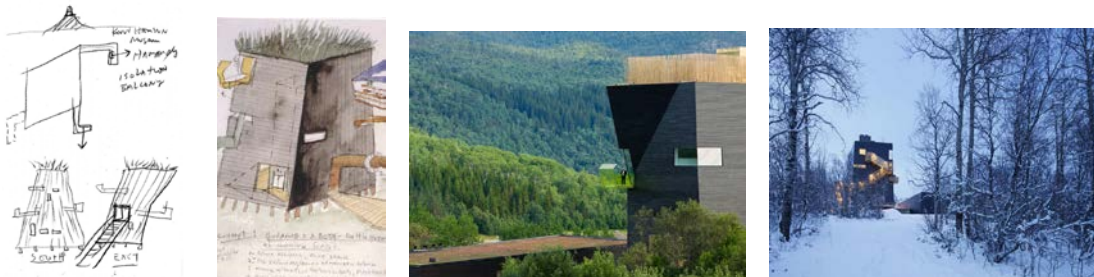


Figure 7 - Knut Hamsun Center

Conclusions:

1. The techniques and quality of architectural representations can translate into built work.

04_Narrative Structure of the Memoir

This thesis considers narrative structures in terms of the form and mode of the memoir in addition to more qualitative aspects of stories such as atmosphere and the personal journey of the writer.

Form of the Memoir

The form of the memoir refers to the organization of the narrative. The following examples of narrative forms apply to all works of literature and can be combined in any way: linear/chronological, fragmented, flashback/stream of consciousness, and circular forms.

Mode of the Memoir

The mode of the memoir refers to the manner in which a writer conveys a narrative. Memoirs possess a unique narrative structure in that they oscillate between the mimetic and diegetic modes of storytelling. Memoirs are thus hybrid narrative structures, “telling history as memories while at the same time contextualizing the memoirist’s memories within history” (Avižienis 40). This hybrid mode relates to architecture in the way that architecture oscillates between its own narrative ideas and those of its context.

Mimesis

A memoirist uses the mimetic mode to imitate or re-present places and events of the past through descriptive language. In turn, the reader is able to imagine being someone and someplace else. The textual use of imagery, which appeals to the senses, can be translated to architecture in the form of sensory experiences.

Examples of this can be seen in the way a viewer relates to a building and its surrounding landscape. The sound, smell, taste, and texture of an environment has the ability to induce memories and displace a viewer from his or her reality to another place and time.

The position of the viewer relative to a building and landscape can also produce localized, visceral effects. When a viewer stands in one place, he or she experiences an environment from one perspective. Traversing a space, however, uncovers multiple perspectives of the surrounding environment. Promenades can be seen as an architectural manifestation of this traversal of space and are perhaps mimetic in the way they employ sensory experiences to tell a story. The difference between an architectural promenade and a literary journey towards self-discovery is that the former exists in the world in a concrete way. Stories, on the other hand, are not bound to tangible, sequential experiences, but rather live in an unconscious state of flux. Building on the precedents for a design thinking methodology, I propose that linear architectural experiences can be destabilized and rendered ambiguous to evoke richer experiences of simultaneity.

Diegesis

While the mimetic mode personifies events of the past, the diegetic mode simply refers to past events from an objective point of view. In the diegetic mode, the memoirist acts as an historian. Likewise, the reader takes on an historical view of the events described. Diegesis often manifests itself in text through detailed yet detached language. It presents itself more as information rather than something that has been filtered or lived-through. Moments of diegesis juxtaposed to mimetic experiences are

a powerful way of connecting to people. The mimetic mode encourages an unconscious displacement from the self while the diegetic mode reminds the self of that displacement. The two modes working in tandem lend themselves to a structure promoting self-reflection and self-discovery. The diegetic mode in architecture might be employed to convey understanding of a construct via framed views. Through the device of the frame, the viewer is knowingly removed from an object, place, or event.

05_Memoir Case Studies

This thesis uses three contemporary memoirs with varying narrative structures as case studies for generating architecture: *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed, and *Girl, Interrupted* by Susanna Kaysen. Each memoir is examined through a conventional literary analysis that considers the form and mode of the memoir. The analysis is followed by exploratory, free-play, visual exercises.

Night (Elie Wiesel, 1956)

Elie Wiesel, winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, writes about his experience in the Nazi German concentration camps, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, from 1944-1945. The memoir explores the author's closeness to death. The space of this memoir is liminal, or a condition of being at the threshold between life and death and day and night. *Night* is a personal story written about a collective experience that powerfully evokes in the reader feelings of emptiness, melancholy, and disillusionment through its terse and broken narrative.

“Was it not dangerous to allow your vigilance to fail, even for a moment, when at any minute death could pounce upon you? I was thinking of this when I heard the sound of a violin. The sound of a violin, in this dark shed, where the dead heaped on the living. What madman could be playing the violin here, at the brink of his own grave? Or was it really an hallucination?” (Wiesel 90)

“I tried to distinguish those who were still alive from those who had gone. But there was no difference” (Wiesel 93)

“The days were like nights” (Wiesel 94)



Figure 8 – Physical Models and Collages of Liminal Spaces

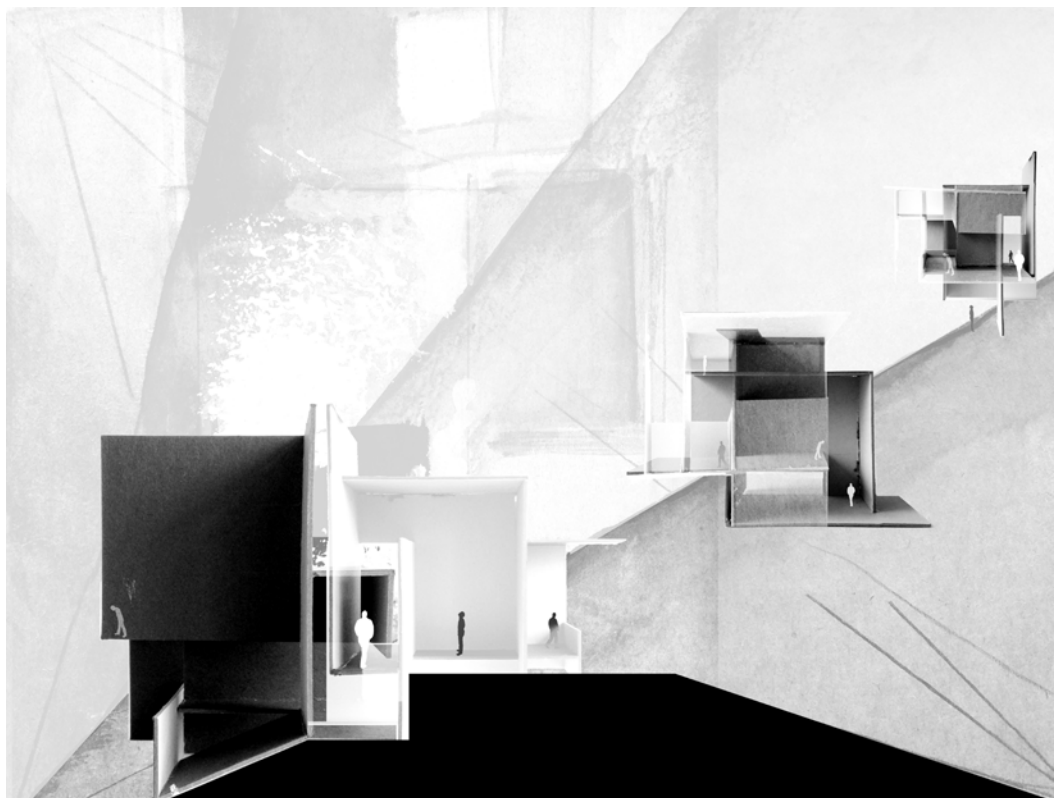


Figure 9 – Collaged Models in an Imagined Landscape

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail (Cheryl Strayed, 2012)

Cheryl Strayed writes about her experience hiking over one thousand miles on the Pacific Crest Trail in 1995 following the death of her mother and a deteriorating marriage. She begins her journey at the Mojave Desert and hikes alone through California and Oregon until she reaches the border of Washington State.

Wild is a linear narrative with regular, anticipated flashbacks throughout. Strayed introduces her story to the reader in the midst of an emotional breakdown during which she describes feelings of anger, devastation, and hopelessness. Her descent into a state of abyss prompts her to embark on an introspective journey through nature. The majority of Strayed's memoir is thus about her physical and emotional journey on the trail. She uses the recurring theme of an "altered vision" to describe the changing terrain as well as her personal growth.

"I felt myself splitting in two. There was the woman I was before my mom died and the one I was now, my old life sitting on the surface of me like a bruise" (Strayed 33-34)

"Alone had always felt like an actual place to me, as if it weren't a state of being, but rather a room where I could retreat to be who I really was. The radical aloneness of the PCT had altered that sense. Alone wasn't a room anymore, but the whole wide world, and now I was alone in that world, occupying it in a way I never had before" (Strayed 119)

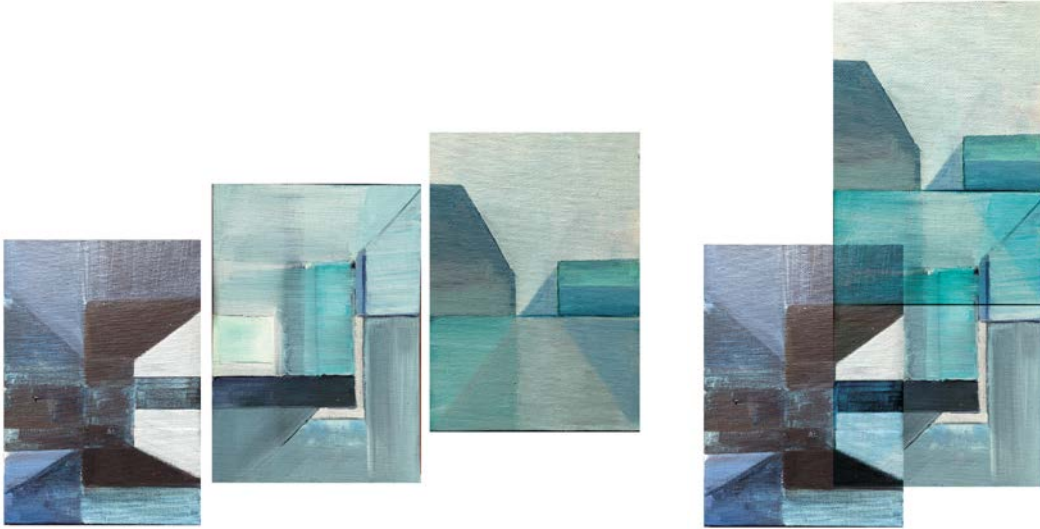


Figure 10 – Mapping the Spiritual Journey; Altered Vision

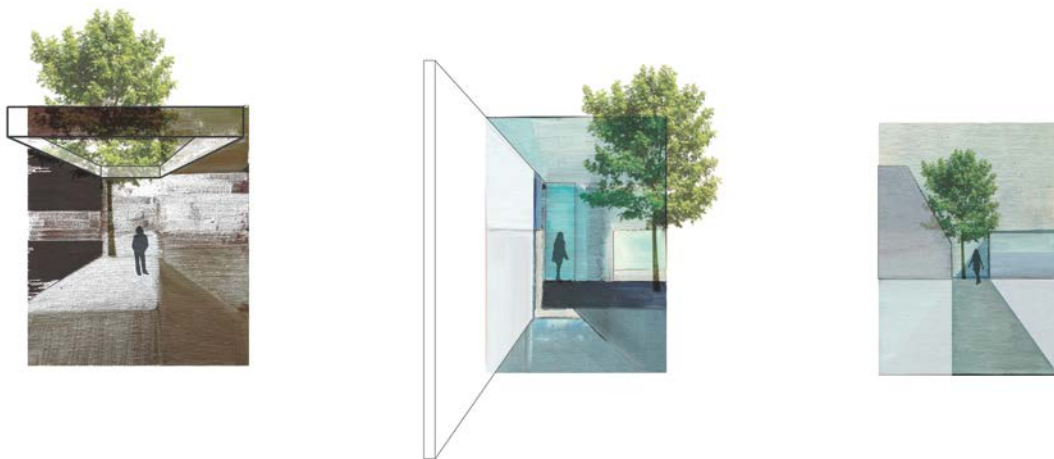


Figure 11 – Imagined Perspectives Inspired by *Wild*

Figure 10 is an exercise that imagines Strayed’s emotional and physical journey in two-dimensional form. *Mapping the Spiritual Journey* is a series of three acrylic paintings that reflects the linear progression of the narrative yet also acknowledges moments and emotions of the past. *Altered Vision* collages the three images in an attempt to transform a linear reading into an experience of simultaneity.

Overlapping these paintings begins to suggest Strayed's spiritual journey using allegory. One might enter a building inspired by *Wild* by moving downward to symbolize descending into state of abyss. The promenade throughout the building might then move upward to represent a journey towards enlightenment. I liken the allegorical nature of this exploration to that of Terragni's Danteum.

Girl, Interrupted (Susanna Kaysen, 1993)

Girl, Interrupted tells the story of Susanna Kaysen's 18-month stay in the psychiatric ward of McLean Hospital in 1967. The memoir explores feelings of isolation and living in an alternate reality. Kaysen writes about her interactions with the staff and patients of the hospital, a place she renders entirely antithetical to the realm of the "real world." Describing McLean Hospital as a "parallel universe" that "exist(s) alongside this world and resemble(s) it, but (is) not in it," Kaysen lays the

"And it is easy to slip into a parallel universe. There are so many of them: worlds of the insane, the criminal, the crippled, the dying, perhaps of the dead as well. These worlds exist alongside this world and resemble it, but are not in it" (Kaysen 5)

"And most people pass over incrementally, making a series of perforations in the membrane between here and there until an opening exists. And who can resist an opening?" (Kaysen 5)

groundwork for an otherworldly place (Kaysen 5). She writes, "in the parallel universe the laws of physics are suspended. What goes up does not necessarily come down; a body at rest does not tend to stay at rest; and not every action can be counted on to provoke an equal and opposite reaction" (Kaysen 6). There is an interesting motif of time—suspending time, losing time, and accounting for time—that takes place in this parallel universe.

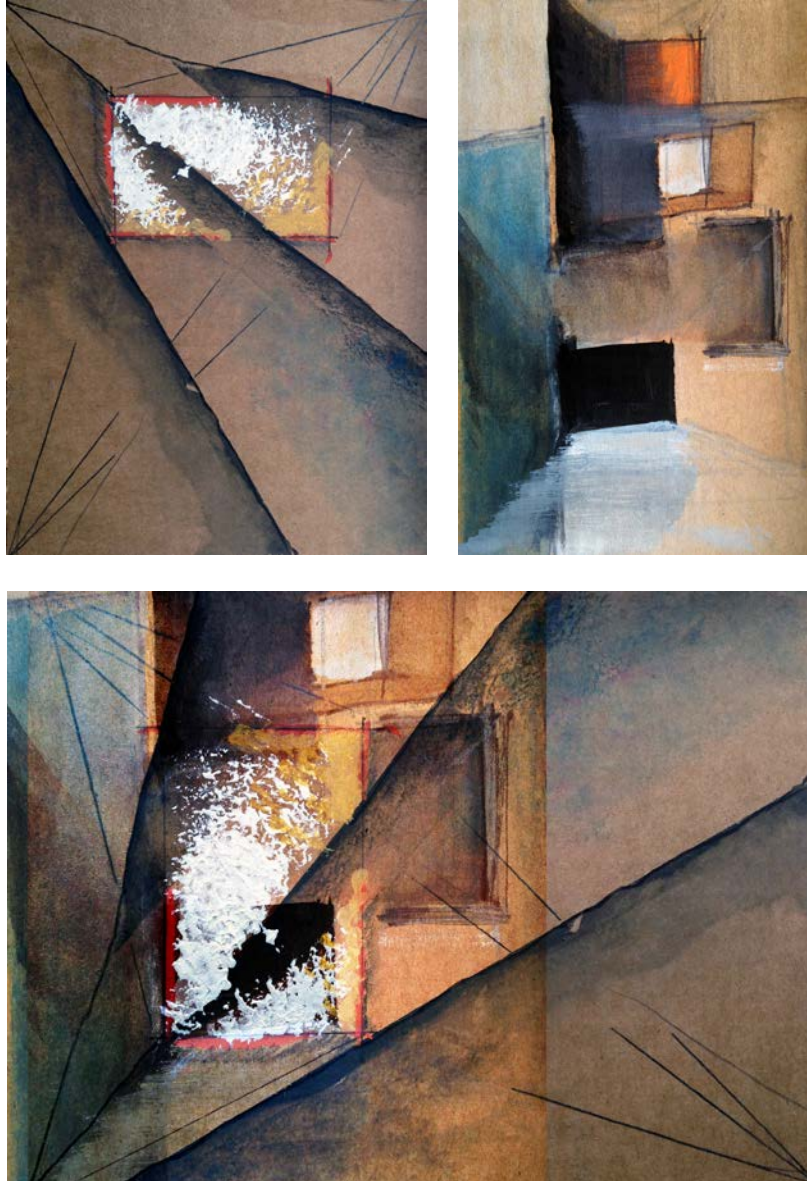


Figure 12 – Perforations in the Membrane 1 + 2; Parallel Universe

Figure 12 is a visual exercise that imagines portals, or perforations in a membrane leading to a parallel universe. I was particularly interested in exploring the motif of time and found inspiration in Scolari's imagined landscapes. *Parallel Universe* is a collage of *Perforations in the Membrane 1 + 2* guided by composition and ambiguous visual planes.

06_Reykjavík, Iceland



Figure 13 – Map of Iceland

Why Iceland?

Recognized as a UNESCO City of Literature, Reykjavík is renowned for its strong literary tradition rooted in Nordic mythology and the medieval sagas. A BBC article on Iceland notes that the country “has more writers, more books published and more books read, per head, than anywhere else in the world” (Goldsmith). In addition to Iceland’s literary achievements, the country also has the oldest extant parliamentary system that I believe is closely tied to storytelling and the crafting of a cultural memoir.

The Icelandic sagas are prose histories written in the 13th and 14th centuries about events that took place in Iceland during the Middle Ages. While the authors of

these histories are mostly unknown, there is a strong emphasis on genealogical history within the sagas (Icelandic Saga Database). In many ways, the Icelandic saga can be seen as a prototypical memoir that promotes a tradition of remembering history and documenting life events. It is a text that tries to merge personal and historical experiences.

While the sagas are a fixed, written documentation of historical events, Icelandic folklore is instead the product of a rich oral culture that perhaps stems from the althing assembly. Dating back to 930, the althing is a parliamentary system in which leaders, farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen, and storytellers would historically travel from all over the country to participate in an outdoor democratic assembly. This yearly event is significant because it served as a platform for cultivating a cultural identity. The assembly ritualized the act of coming together, exchanging ideas, telling stories, and dispersing knowledge. It was thus a means through which the country could reflect on itself and craft a national and cultural memoir.

Site Selection

This thesis formally investigates imagined narratives in three sites located in central Reykjavík, Iceland: Hólavallagarður cemetery, Hljómskálagarður park, and the island in Lake Tjörninn. Each memoir has been mapped to a site based on the spatial qualities of the memoir: liminal spaces inspired by *Night* is mapped to the cemetery, promenade inspired by *Wild* is mapped to the park, and time inspired by *Girl, Interrupted* is mapped to the island:

Hólavallagarður Cemetery: **Liminal Spaces:** *Night*

Hljómskálagarður Park: **Promenade:** *Wild*

The Island: **Time:** *Girl, Interrupted*

Important buildings within the larger context include the Reykjavík City Hall and Parliament House to the North, the University of Iceland to the South, and the city center to the East. The unique conditions surrounding each site—connotations of life and death, various boundary conditions, and blurred relationships between the public and private realm—allows for a rich exploration of narrative structures.



Figure 14 – Site Location in the City Center



Figure 15 – Existing Site Plan

Hólavallagarður Cemetery

Hólavallagarður Cemetery, which translates to “garden on a hill,” is the largest and oldest cemetery in Iceland. Listed by National Geographic as one of Europe’s “Loveliest Cemeteries,” Hólavallagarður has remained untouched by war, neglect, and vandalism since its consecration in 1838 (Barone). The most compelling feature of the cemetery is its trees, which consist primarily of birch (*Betula*), two types of rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia* and *Sorbus intermedia*), spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), poplar (*Populus trichocarpa*), and various kinds of bushes (Cemetery Hólavallagarður). Hólavallagarður Cemetery is perhaps the most heavily forested spaces in the capital region—an uncommon site in a predominantly deforested

country. Moss-covered stone ledges or metal railings surround the graves and leave behind winding pathways through the cemetery.

The notion of boundary becomes important for this site and its conception of liminal architecture. There are the physical boundaries that mark the cemetery as a figure in the city—it is on a hill, enclosed by a stone wall, and heavily forested.

There is also the unseen but sensed boundary between the earthly and the spiritual realms. Inherent in cemeteries is a narrative about life and death. The cemetery is full of story and artifacts—names, epithets, and offerings from the living—waiting to be unearthed.

Hljómskálagarður Park

Hljómskálagarður Park lies to the south of Lake Tjörninn. Dating back to the 1900s, the park was built on landfill and is considered to be one of Reykjavík's first planned public parks. It consists of a music pavilion constructed in 1923 to the east of the lake (from which the park derives its name), a sculpture garden at the southwest corner of the lake, and a 2011 memorial of 50 cherry trees dedicated to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the west of the lake. More recently in 2014, Reykjavík City Council dedicated a new sculpture park to honor the work of six female sculptors (Iceland Travel Guide). Hljómskálagarður Park is interesting in the way it expresses Iceland's national identity through built form. Like a memoir, the park is a reification of national experiences, ideas, and beliefs.

The Island in Lake Tjörnin

The island is approximately 50 feet in diameter (2,000 sf) and lies within Lake Tjörnin, a prominent body of water located in central Reykjavík. Frequented by people and wildlife, the lake is a popular site for bird watching and feeding and recreational activities such as walking, biking, and running. During the winter months, the lake often freezes to allow for alternate recreational activities such as ice-skating.

The unique feature of the island is its transformation throughout the seasons. Surrounded by water, the island is a figural landform isolated from the city fabric. The lake acts as Reykjavík's mirror, reflecting the passing of day to night from the 21 hours of summer daylight to just four hours of winter sun. When the lake freezes, the water transforms into a surface of connection rather than separation. The ice becomes a bridge to the island and the island is temporarily reconnected to the city. In many ways, the island can be seen as a microcosm of the althing; it stands isolated for much of the year yet transforms into a place of gathering during the winter. The island thus epitomizes Iceland's cultural memoir of coming together to share in story.

07_A Writer's Retreat

Program Selection

This thesis interrogates the narrative structure of the memoir case studies through the program of a writer's retreat. The retreat will promote processes of self-discovery for its resident writers and the public at large through the sharing of ideas and experiences. The sponsor for this project recognizes the cathartic effects of storytelling and hopes to reach out to both the consciously and unconsciously creative community.

The typology of a writer's retreat can vary in scale and function. Some retreats are intended for small groups of writers while others aim to house a colony of writers. Moreover, each retreat has its own set of events and rituals that make it a desirable place to visit. The proposed writer's retreat is designed to be a campus integrated into Reykjavík's city fabric and includes nine resident studios, two public saunas, a dining hall/event space with service kitchen, and a specialized library.

Resident Studios

The retreat consists of nine resident studios comprised of a bedroom, bathroom, closet, kitchen area, terrace, and writing studio. The resident studios offer writers a quiet, private place to read, write, and reflect. One resident studio is reserved for a graduate teaching assistant from the writing program at the University of Iceland. The teaching assistant benefits from his or her interaction with fellow writers and participation in workshops. In return, he or she manages administrative tasks related to operating the retreat.

Public Saunas

The public saunas are a programmatic element intended to bring together resident writers and the local community. The collective act of purifying the mind and body connects writers and locals to one another and to the rich Icelandic culture.

Dining Hall / Event Space

The dining hall is a special place for writers to partake in the ritual of communal meals. It is a place that encourages collaboration and the exchanging of ideas. The space is flexible and can transform to accommodate activities ranging from small workshops to large events.

Specialized Library

The specialized library features collections on Icelandic history, the medieval sagas, and Norse mythology. Reading nooks located throughout the library provide spaces for quiet contemplation.

08_Translating Narratives to Architecture



Figure 16 – Proposed Site Plan



Figure 17 – Aerial View with Proposed Design

Hólavallagarður Cemetery

The resident studios occupy the eastern edge of the cemetery, straddling the stone wall so that the front of the studio engages the street while the back of the studio opens up to the burials. The 5 southernmost studios are set perpendicular to the wall to provide a continuous street edge. Moving towards the north end of the wall, the studios take advantage of site conditions and begin to rotate about the wall to gain different views of the lake and city center.

Translating Night

The positioning of the resident studios on the seam between the living and the dead intensifies notions of liminality. Nestled into to the earth, the bedroom is a

space that acknowledges mortality. The heaviness of the curved ceiling evokes the heaviness of death (Figure 20).



Figure 18 – Cemetery Collage

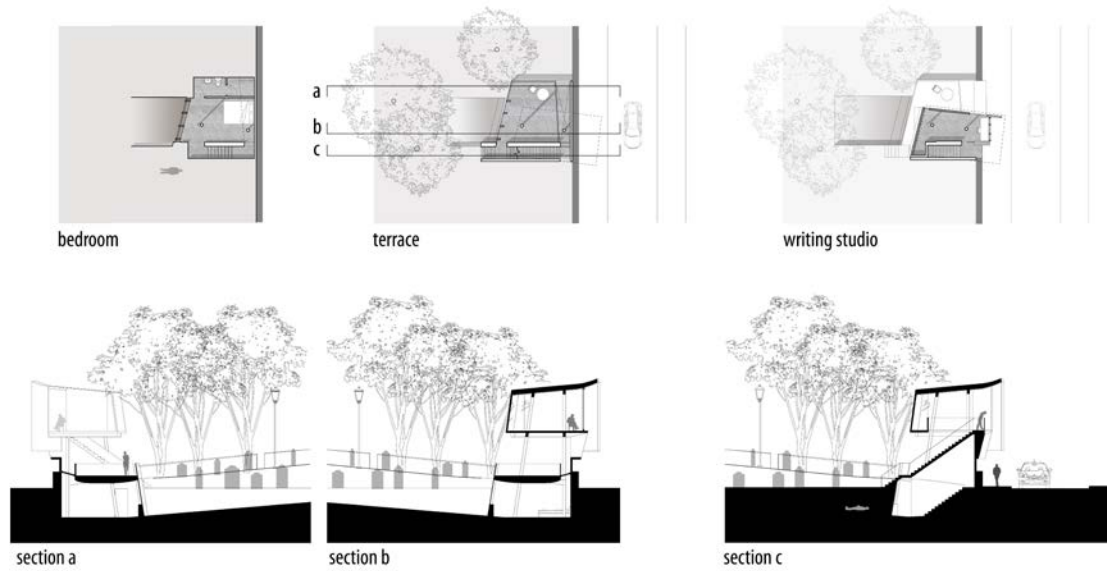


Figure 19 – Plans and Sections of Resident Studio



Figure 20 – Bedroom Perspective Looking Towards the Cemetery

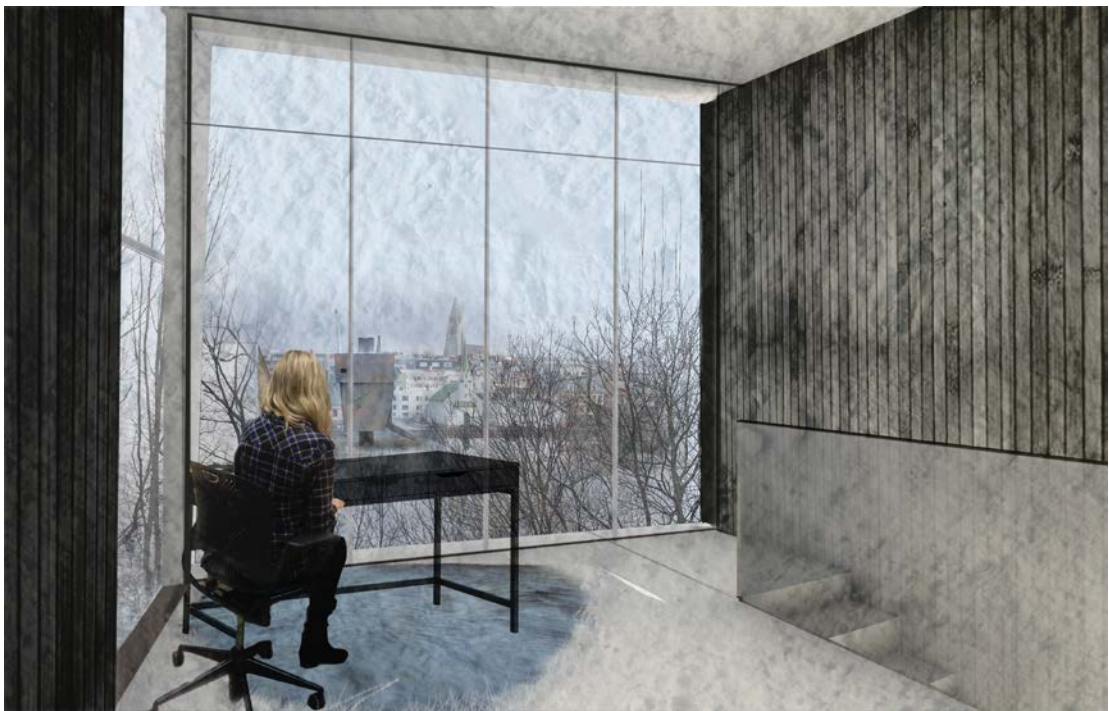


Figure 21 – Writing Studio Perspective Looking Towards the Lake

Hljómskálagarður Park

The public saunas and dining hall are situated in the park between a corridor of wild trees and a field of manicured grass with picturesque views of the lake.

Translating *Wild*

The pavilion in the park embodies the promenade of a spiritual journey. One enters the building adjacent to the corridor of wild trees by descending down a ramp. Symbolically, this descent represents coming to terms with personal hardships. The journey at the point of entry is characterized by confusion, which has been architecturalized through the design of a weathered canopy edge. Figure 24 shows the blunt, uneven edge of the wood canopy terminated by the public sauna, a symbol of purification. Following this descent, one arrives in an open-air space under a bosque of trees. The tree canopy encloses the space around the saunas yet allows flickers of light to shine onto the space (Figure 25).

Each of the two public saunas is made up of a restroom, changing area, and sauna room. The quality of the sauna room is intentionally dark with small apertures that filter light into the space. The experience in the sauna is deeply reflective. Following the completion of the sauna, one reemerges under the bosque of trees feeling cleansed and healthy. Resident writers and guests move towards the patio and dining hall / event space by ascending up a much shorter ramp. The promenade at this point of the journey is characterized by clarity. Architecturally, the edge of the canopy structure is clearly articulated and seamless, framing panoramic views of the lake. Figure 26 is a perspective inside the dining hall showing the symbolic end of the promenade. The view back towards the sauna reminds the writer of the journey he or she has just been on while the view towards the library on the lake inspires the writer to continue with his or her creative pursuits.



Figure 22 – Park Collage

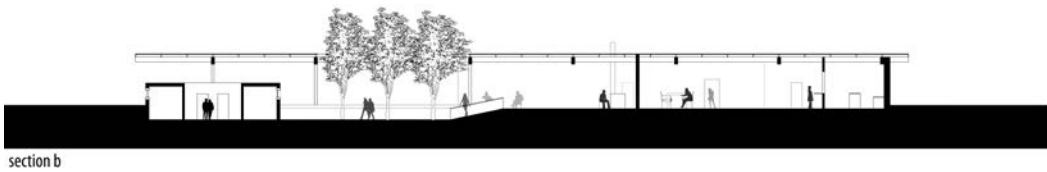
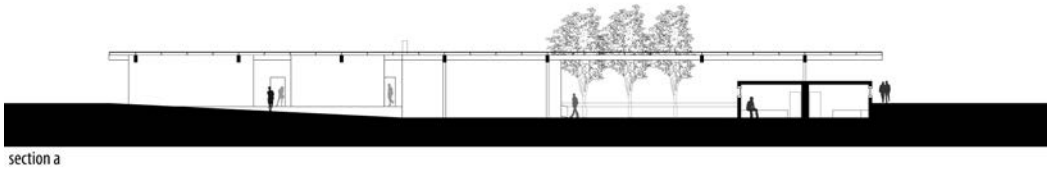


Figure 23 – Park Plan and Sections



Figure 24 – Entry Perspective Showing the Weathered Edge



Figure 25 – Bosque Perspective Looking towards the Saunas



Figure 26 – Dining Hall Perspective Looking towards the Lake

The Island in Lake Tjörnin

The specialized library is located on the island in Lake Tjörnin and acts as a contemplative symbol for Reykjavík.

Translating Girl, Interrupted

Due to the site constraints of the island, the massing of the library manifested into a tower. The library is surreal. Framed views of the sky above and water below are intentionally disorienting and confuse any sense of time or place. The writer moves up through the library on stairs that force one along an irregular but circuitous path. Private nooks for quiet contemplation are present throughout. The façade is made of polished metal panels that reflect the water and changing seasons. The ephemeral reflections register the passing of time. The building, like a memory, is ever changing.

The top of the tower opens up to an observation deck where shielded views of the city and landscape emerge. The library, home to collections on Icelandic history, the medieval sagas, and Norse mythology, represents a cultural memoir for Iceland.

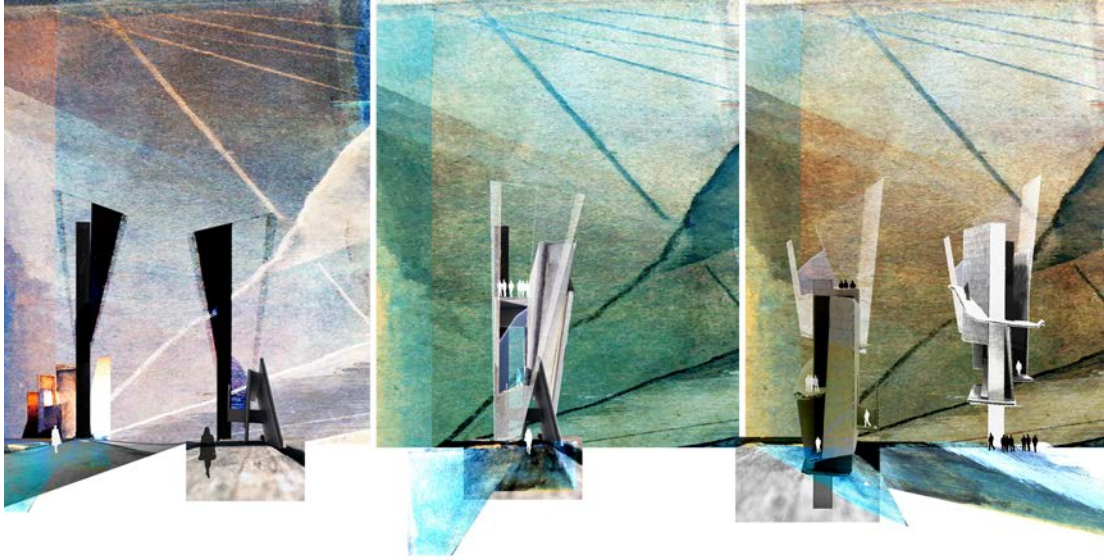


Figure 27 – Tower Collages

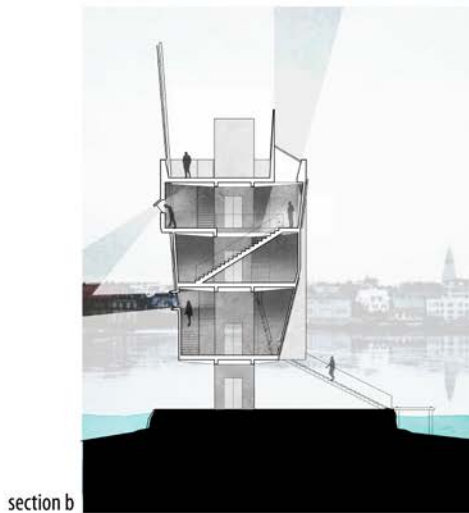
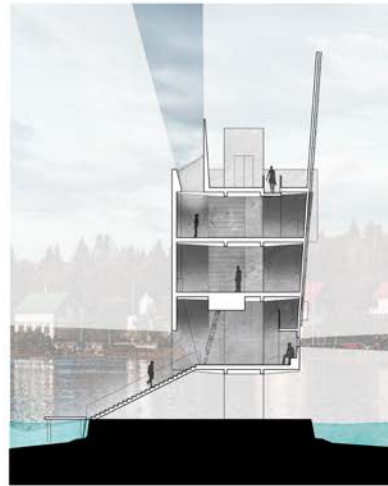
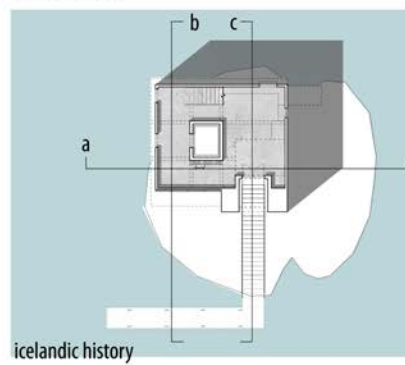
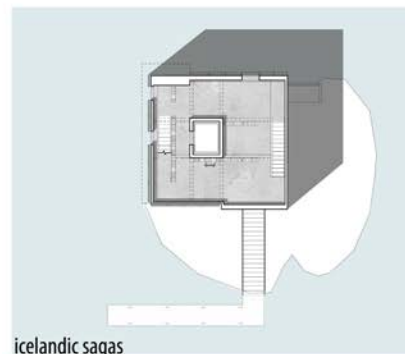
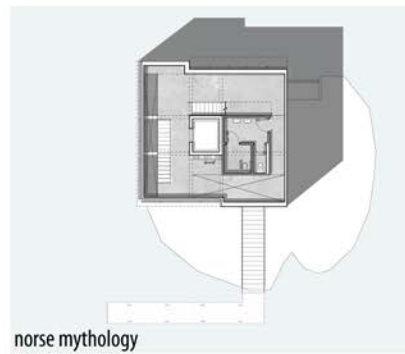
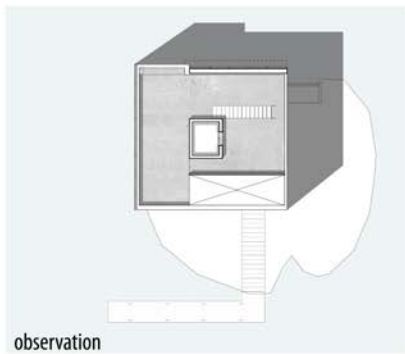


Figure 28 – Plans and Sections of the Specialized Library



Figure 29 – Perspective of the Specialized Library



Figure 30 – Interior Library Perspective



Figure 31 – Site Section



Figure 32 – Site Section: Cemetery



Figure 33 – Site Section: Park

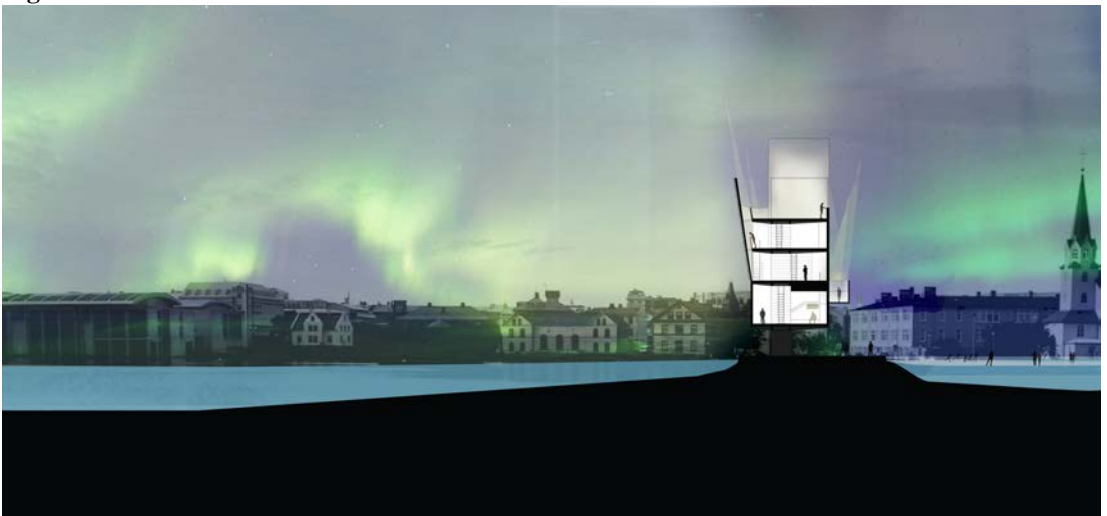


Figure 34 – Site Section: Island

09_Conclusion

This thesis was an exploration of my personal design process. The process images and collages became the link between idea and thing—between ideas from the memoir and the architectural expression of those ideas. This thesis is about operating outside of a rigid design framework and privileging the representation of architecture in order to create profound and meaningful architectural experiences.

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