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Gunn, Wendy

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MAKING PLACES

Professor Wendy Gunn BA (Hons), PG dip, MA, PhD, FSA
Scot, FRAI

This article builds upon research conducted during my doctoral and post-doctoral research (1998-2005) working with architects and landscape architects at Snøhetta's office in Oslo (1998), and then continuing this dialogue with two of Snøhetta partners, Craig Dykers and Jenny B. Osuldsen (2002-2003) through a series of workshops carried out in various sites in Scotland (1). Integral to this research, I foregrounded the skills of architectural and landscape design practices and their relation to physical landscapes, and the transformations that ensue while involving computer aided design technology within such practices. At the same time, I offered a dynamic approach to understanding the relation between movement and gesture, ways of knowing, and forms of inscription and description and the relations between creative movements and forms they generate. Addressing the idea that construction of meaning within an environment exists within dialogic contexts of intra-action (2): engaging with an ongoing activity or dialogue among skilled practitioners, the question is at what point are you aware of this intra-action? For skilled practitioners, such as Craig Dykers, Kjetil Trædal Thorsen, Jenny B. Osuldsen and Elaine Molinar from Snøhetta, then designing is not so much about imposing as relating to, or engaging with the constituents of the landscape in a particular way. Taking as a starting point Leroi Gourhan's (1993) notion that intelligence lies in human gesture itself, as a synergy of human being, tool and raw material, it becomes apparent

that the interrelationships between perception, creativity and skill are fundamental while studying how a person undergoes growth and development within an environment. How an individual perceives the environment and how this perception informs a way of being in the world raises the question: What does it mean to perceive an individual as moving and actively engaging within an environment that is continually changing?

Jenny B. Osuldsen: Not many places are left that are not man-made or managed. Landscape architects often assume that if you cannot see that a landscape architect has been in a place and if it still looks like nature, then you have done a really good job. I do not agree. Sometimes that is what you should do but sometimes it is good to leave traces of people who have been there. They have made a history. I think storytelling is very important because most people remember a story, but do not necessarily remember a place. If the place has a story attached to it, it immediately becomes more interesting. Animals make architecture and very often we cannot perfect their designs as well as they can. In nature we find many examples of geometry and in some cases it is more architectural than the architectural designs made by humans. A lot of the external environments humans have designed or managed are not outside but inside – in the sense that they are built (Lumsden, Scotland 6th-8th of June 2003).

Showing and Telling

When the architect and urbanist Knut-Erik Dahl proposed in 1998, 'It is in the telling', I realized that it is through the performance of telling a story that shared meanings and built form emerge (Gunn 2002: 328). Meaning is generated in the relations between the acts of speaking, sketching by hand, gesturing, writing and counting, situated within the context of collaborative discussion.

Architects at Snøhetta tell different stories depending on who is being addressed and for what purpose the story is being told. In some instances, by bringing together text and image, it is not the images that you see, nor the text that you read. Rather, their importance lies with helping the architects and landscape architects at Snøhetta to tell a story involving many people. The story can act as a catalyst in the city to instigate discussion about what constitutes change in an urban landscape. In this instance, stories are not limited by geographical boundaries. The act of telling a story can be likened to a narrative journey of exploration and discovery. Through getting to know a site the architect is reminded of a particular instance, landscape feature or memory of engagements with other people. Memories of a site endure long after the memory of its architecture fades. These memories provide guidance throughout the design and building process in a way that is not so much about physical orientation as about value judgements. Storytelling at Snøhetta takes their architectural concepts beyond formal geometric or geographical understanding. The design unfolds through telling stories and the story becomes intertwined with both the team members and the project's identity. Snøhetta stories therefore, are not so

much trying to represent something, as to draw people's attention to things. This resonates with what Ingold says of the relation between storytelling, buildings and landscapes:

Tim Ingold: ...So if you are within a landscape and telling a story about a place, along with someone who does not know the story, you use the story to direct the other person's attention towards the landscape. Storytelling allows people to see things that they would not see otherwise. How would it be if one thought of a building organically in that sort of way – that is, processually? Then you could have a democratic conception of it because anybody whose life touched in some way on the building could add to its story and in that way contribute to its form (Lumsden, Scotland 15th-17th November 2002).

Returning to Snøhetta's offices in Oslo and New York, as work sites and meeting places for the many knowledge traditions involved in making, assembling and building environments. Within multiplicities of creative processes, movements between and across knowledge places distinguish the novice from the skilled practitioner. For the architects and landscape architects working at Snøhetta designing is not so much about imposing as relating to, or engaging with the constituents of the landscape in a particular way. I would call this way of working a gestural response to fluctuations within an environment, as opposed to reacting towards a situation. So meanings are discovered, coming out of this particular kind of engagement and places come into being through being involved with the activity itself. This way of working differs from an approach that overlays meaning onto the physical world, as if it were possible to take yourself out and above the surface of the world you

inhabit. Snøhetta's relation to landscape thus is nurtured through knowing how to attend to it, while at the same time acknowledging as Ingold says:

Tim Ingold: 'Every feature, is a potential clue, a key to meaning. So feeling and form, life and story, movement and place, activity and landscape are not ranged on opposite sides of a boundary but emerge and develop along a single line. We cannot say of any one of these pairs that is unequivocally the expression of the other. That is, we cannot say what is the description and what is being described. If a conversation describes a building, we could just as well say that the building is a description of the conversation. Life can describe stories, and activities can describe landscapes. In no case can one ever say, for sure, that this is a description and that is what is being described' (Lumsden 15th-17th November 2002).

During a collaborative design process involving architects, landscape architects, interior designers, clients, engineers... words written and spoken come from many sources, not only intellectual but also physical (Dykers).(3) Written or spoken words can come from telling stories or visiting a site. Visiting a project site is essential for the architect to form emotional and physical relations with the environment within which the form will be built. And, as Frank says, it is the evidence of the senses gained through the site visit that forms the basis from which to create a place (Kristiansen). Due to increasing pressures on architectural practices to compete for international contracts, it is not always feasible to visit a project site for economic reasons. Replacing this multisensory experience with technical information about a site, rendered visible through a computer perspective,

can prevent the various team members involved in designing from being able to convert bodily experience into subsequent built form.

Improvisation within Landscapes of Making

Building a relation to landscape for Snøhetta is concerned with tying and binding together different strands and threads. This involves interweaving a cognitive dimension, planning and abstract mental mapping, and a route with embodied experiences. Their mappings are remembering's of what is actually happening and what was experienced as they go along. This journeyed landscape leaves traces for others to find in the form of inscriptions, notations, sketches, marks, scribbles... and where de Certeau says, 'Moves, not truths, are recounted (1988:23). Improvisational moments along the way: 'provide a possibility for understanding and gathering together of the structure: drawing together the lived moments of activities, events and experiences – maybe there are times when we find out about it – a moment of decision, action, improvisation that it becomes apparent to us as in ethnography' (Lee, 2007).(4) Observing improvisational moments involves attention to the formative and transformative processes, alongside attention to the dynamics of perceiver and the phenomena being observed (Ingold, 2007).

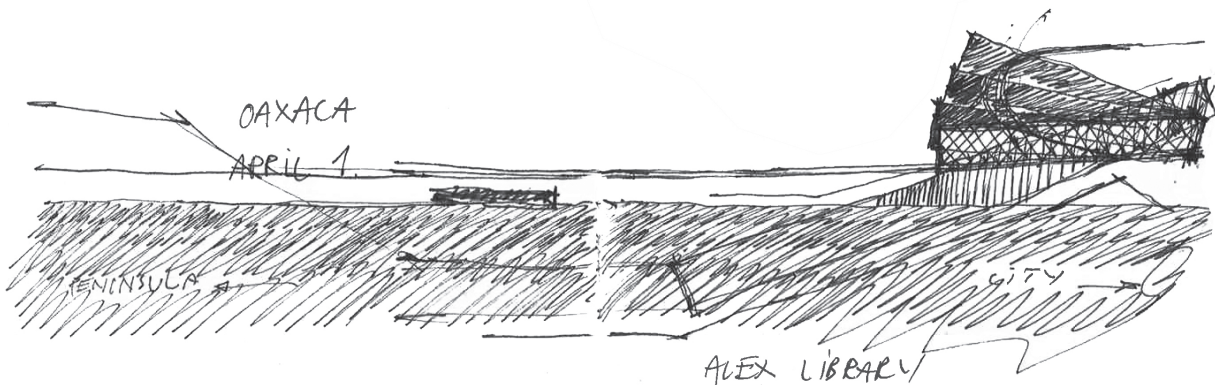
Responding and improvising on site is the key to understanding architects and landscape architects creative design practices. Thinking through and engaging with the physical embodies a consciousness as feeling in the body. Through movement within design practices, architects and landscape architects are learning to respond to landscapes

by, 'fine-tuning of the entire perceptual system (comprising of the brain, receptor organs and associated neural and muscular linkages functioning in an environmental context) to the pickup of certain kinds of information' (Ingold 1993: 220). During such a 'kinaesthetic interplay of tactile, sonic, and visual senses, emplacement always implicates the intertwined nature of the sensual bodily presence and perceptual engagement' (Feld 2005: 181). Architects and landscape architects working within different sites of practice, learn as they go along, their bodies remembering through tactile, visual and auditory experiences (Finnegan 2002: 213). Learning thus becomes, an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in-world and implies continual growth and discovery along the way (Finnegan 2002: 262). There are 'constant adaptations of existing practices, mergings, new twists on existing practices' (Finnegan 2002:262). The improvisational and specific tasks of architectural designing can be likened to a journey into an unknown. The journey requires making sense of landscapes, getting lost and finding oneself

again. This requires attuning oneself to lines of movement and responding to another's moves. Becoming skilled at responding to fluctuations within the landscape with which Snøhetta make architectural design moves is not a matter of acquiring knowledge as a static body of information because information is not in the mind but in the worlds they are working within (Ingold 2000:55). Knowledge of these worlds is gained 'by moving about in it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed (Ingold 2000:55).

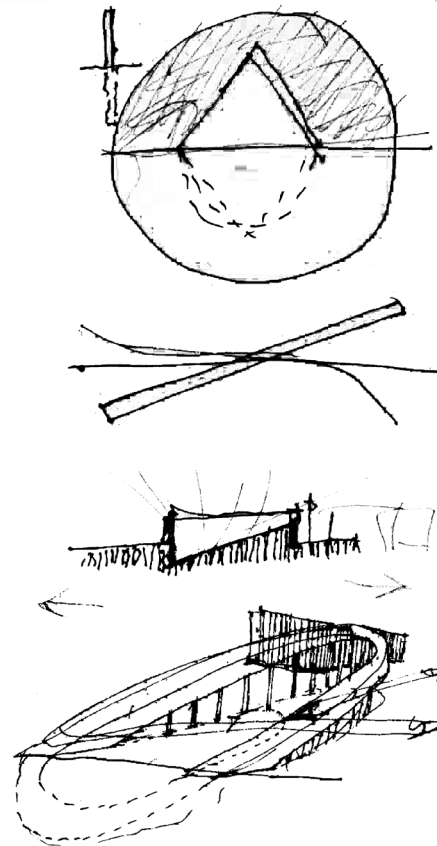
Pages from Kjetil's Sketchbook

As I have discussed previously, storytelling is central to Snøhetta's work and is a way of relating to both a temporal and a physical landscape (Gunn, 2006). During the generation of architectural and landscape propositions, sketch drawings, written words, speech, gestures and numbers are interwoven within oral narrative, bringing together the social and the technical within a creative process. As Ingold says, it is in this 'weaving





together, in narrative, the multiple strands of action and perception specific to diverse tasks and situations', that the practitioner's most important skill resides' (2000: 361). Translucent pages from Kjetil's sketchbook act as support for different forms of language (Gunn 2002: 245). If a page in his sketchbook contains written words, numbers, and graphic expressions, and if the written words are in a language that is not understood by the viewer, then graphic expressions and numbers are interpreted differently (Dykers). But whereas a text might be translated from one language to another, the idea of translating the pages of his sketchbook, or even the written words, phrases or numbers appearing in them, would be inconceivable (Derrida 1994: 159). Because sketch drawings are produced and used in relation to an ongoing activity, it is necessary to go beyond conventional approaches to interpreting these documents. Instead of treating them as encoding information that can be read off from the document through a reverse process of decoding, they should be regarded as records of ways of doing in their own right that create impressions upon



Kjetil's concept sketches for the Alexandria Library Competition

the people involved in the work. The documents are not understood as diagrammatic, but rather as integral to the process of telling.

Craig explained to me that during a process of architectural designing, written and spoken words, numbers and graphic expressions are all of a kind (Dykers). The interrelations between written and spoken words, gestures, graphic expressions and numbers differ, depending on the context. Elements are removed, emphasized or downplayed, depending on how and for whom the documents are created. Speaking about the meanings of spoken and written words in the architectural design process, Pallasmaa noted that while they can play an important educational role, they also play another role for which they have to be responsibly and very carefully selected. This is to evoke images and feelings for purposes of provocation, in both the individual and the group. They are rarely used for the purposes of description since words, according to Pallasmaa, are very weak in this field (Gunn 2002: 247).

Traces and Mappings

Let us return for a moment to the bodily gestures connected to architectural designing such as tracing, sketching... made during the conceptual stages of a design process in response to landscapes within which design moves are made. During these processes of designing Snøhetta make sense and create meaning through responding to traces left behind of previous drawings (Ingold 2007:62). Seeing here is a way of looking and it means feeling one's way through with the eyes and hands. Looking is turning your ideas about something into an understanding. By collaborative

pointing with the fingers and talking, the skilled practitioners at Snøhetta are bringing attention to, or conducting another person's attention into a landscape. In this way, 'attending to, arranging differences and perceiving traces, is to co-opt whatever possibilities their environments may afford to make their ways' in the tangle of many worlds (Hallam and Ingold 2007:5). As such, architects and landscape architects at Snøhetta are carrying on from where their predecessors left off (Hallam and Ingold, 2007). In practice architects and landscape architects are continuously threading their own ways through environments within which they are working, 'Built as assemblies of connected elements' (Ingold 2007: 75). They do not however interact with their computer system interfaces as a surface, instead they are contributing to the entanglement of traces of others movements (Ingold 2007:103). In this zone of entanglement – this meshwork of interwoven lines – there are no insides or outsides, only openings and ways through (Ingold 2007: 103). Seeing thus is a way of looking and it means feeling one's way through with the eyes and hands. Looking is turning your ideas about something into an understanding. By collaborative pointing with their fingers and talking, they are bringing attention to, or conducting another person's attention into an environment (Goodwin, 2003). They are drawing in the air a gestural response to a situation as it unfolds (Thorsen, 1998). During this social interaction, as Roepstorff has argued while comparing the ways of seeing and knowing in the navigation practices of fishermen in the Torssukattak Icefjord, Greenland and in a brain imaging laboratory in Denmark, joint fields of attention are being created (2007:194). Gesturing in this way, architects at Snøhetta do not produce a map rather they are making

a mapping (Ingold 2007:84). During the course of an unfolding of narratives during their collaborative design processes, they are mapping ways of navigating in-between the cognitive and the practical (Roepstorff 2007:204).

Watercolour Wash and Layering

Snøhetta's way of bringing together the threads of a narrative in the act of storytelling can be compared to the overlapping of translucent layers of watercolour wash in order to reveal new architectural concepts. Each successive wash of watercolour transforms the same surface without ever erasing what went before. Moreover to every layer – that is, to every wash –there corresponds a specific gesture, performance or story. Far from encoding information, the surface of the watercolour congeals and reveals 'a kind of vibrating movement' that comes from trying to find democratic ways of discussing the meaning of transformations within an urban landscape. For Snøhetta then, knowledge learned through such journeys of making opens up multiple worlds, whereby the act of telling a story allows both the teller and the listener to become immersed within a world that has transparency and depth, 'transparency, because one can see into it; depth, because the more one looks the further one sees' (Ingold, 2000).

Notes

(1) The first Making Places workshop was held at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden, Scotland, 15th -17th November 2002. A further series of two workshops under the overall title of Making, Finding and Responding to Places, was organised by Wendy Gunn at (1) The Lighthouse, Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City, Glasgow, 14-16 February 2003, (2) Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden 6-8 June 2003. These addressed the idea that meaning within an environment is constructed within dialogic contexts of intra-action, this series of workshops provided a context and possibility for people from differing knowledge traditions, to discuss the nature of place-making activities and environmental relations. Instead of relying on conventional academic models for instigating dialogue, the series explored the importance of doing to effective interdisciplinary communication. Central to this approach was the idea that practice-based exploration is the best way to enhance collaboration. In addition to involving professionals (from the following organisations: Scottish Environment Protection Agency, West of Scotland Archaeology Service, The Lighthouse) and academics (from the following disciplines: Town Planning, Architecture, Anthropology, Fine Art, Design, Landscape Architecture, Photography, Psychology, History) the series attracted Masters and PhD research students. The workshops aimed to show how information transmitted through formal instruction relates to the skills that learners develop through their own practical experiments. International contributors included Craig Dykers and Jenny Osuldsen, both from Snøhetta.

(2) Karen Barad (2003) says of the notion of intra-action, '... (in contrast to the usual "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful' (p.815).

(3) In this instance and hereafter, except where reference is explicitly made to bibliographic sources, I acknowledge material gathered from interviews with members of Snøhetta staff. To avoid confusion between primary and secondary sources all surnames of people I have been working with, and whose words are reproduced here are italicised.

(4) Jo Lee and Tim Ingold. 'Landscapes beyond land: new ethnographies of landscape and environment'. Seminar 2 – Routes, boundaries, journeys, 9th of January 2007. Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen.

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