

Interior topography and the fabric of terrain

A starting point:

A useful starting point for us is to ask what could these two activities: Interior and Landscape design, possibly have in common, particularly when human artefacts and processes are often thought of as being in opposition to the natural world.

However, both designers of Interiors and landscapes are engaged in producing cultural artefacts. Both set out to create environments to enable people to live, work and play and no matter how “natural” a landscape appears to be, for example Central Park in New York it is, as Jonathan Bate reminds us “a work of art, it is a representation of the state of nature “ Bate (2000) pg 63-64, and therefore as much a product of human culture as any interior. They are both cultural practices.

We seek to locate our observations on the relationship between Interiors and landscapes by looking at the impact of modernism on them both, and in particular the manner in which modernist conceptions of space have affected not only them, but all environmental disciplines

We propose that Interior and Landscape design, and experience, share common characteristics of surface, dressing, performance, transience and potential.

The argument is presented in two parts:

Part 1 outlines general propositions that pertain to both interior and landscape design practices, where conditions of nature and culture, nature and art, are seen as overlapping and correspondent.

Part 2 examines these characteristics in the context of the Woodland Cemetery Stockholm, designed by Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, principally between 1915 and 1940.

Propositions

1 Modernism & Space

As David Leatherbarrow has noted “ in modern architecture generally “ space “has been described as a framework or medium that is uniquely expansive and continuous; it expands and flows from here to there, through and across not only individual rooms, buildings and sites, but entire cities and their surrounding landscapes “ Leatherbarrow (2002) pg 25.

A consequence of this conception of space, as fluid and continuous, sets the discipline of Architecture at the centre of environmental design. Everything becomes Architecture with both the interior and exterior absorbed into a continuous field of activity resulting externally on the one hand in the loss of the garden, the Hortus Conclusus, and internally, on the other, the loss of the room, as the primary demarcation of the interior experience.

In the place of both has come the merging of interior and exterior where horizontal definition replaces the vertical.

There have, of course been many exemplary works conceived under the influence of these ideas but also there has been, as Massimo Cacciari has noted, *the destruction of place* in favour of the primary concerns of space.

Cacciari wrote that “*the conquest of space is the plundering of places*: space is conceived ‘as a void to fill, a pure absence, a lack. Space is mere potentiality at

the disposal of the technico-scientific project. To the architect belongs precisely this conception of space; space is pure void to be measured-delimited, void in which to produce (his) new forms” Cacciari (1993) pg 167

The consequence of this approach has been as Kenneth Frampton notes the tendency of much modern development to seek” a totally flat site, which aspires to the condition of placelessness” Frampton (2002) pg 86, as a precondition for building. Here one can say that the site is being treated in a manner that is analogous to a blank canvas, or computer screen. Its only contribution to the creative process is to act as a receptacle for its realisation. It is to all intents and purposes absent.

2 Place & the Primacy of Site

For the designer of interiors, when faced with altering existing buildings and working with the new, and for the landscape architect, the work is always situated somewhere, a particular physical place with specific qualities, both visible and invisible, that are worked *with* or mitigated in some way. Designers of interiors and landscapes begin with some pre-existing situation and both therefore are *practices of adaptation or transformation*.

The *primacy of site*, or of situation, for both disciplines reminds us of the linkage between practices of agriculture, building or indeed city building where the process of *forming a boundary* defines an interior in opposition to its counterpart an exterior.

3 Interiority, cultivation & habitation

Interiority, whether it is a clearing in a forest, or the result of building a wall to define- a city, field, or temple precinct is a condition shared by all environmental disciplines and it is an act, which when conjoined with the creation of level ground, creates the condition for both *cultivation* and *habitation*.

Out of these fundamental needs comes building which Vitruvius in chapter 1 of book 2 describes as emerging from “the coming together of man for their councils and social life, because of the discovery of fire” Vitruvius (2009) pg 37. There have been many attempts to define the basic elements of building and we have found the writings of Gottfried Semper, the 19th century architect and theorist particularly useful. He defined building, as Kenneth Frampton has summarised, as being formed of four related elements: “*the earthwork*, the base of construction; *the framework*, structure and roof, and the *textile surface* of the infill walls. The fourth and separate element is *the hearth*, denoting the social centre of the building. “ Frampton (1996) pg 85

4 *Textile surface*

Of these elements, *the textile surface* is of particular interest as the key spatial and experiential component of building and also landscape. The Textile surface is, by necessity supported (by a structure). In other words *the surface, in its spatial and communicative roles, is of more importance than its support*. Semper links this idea to the foundation of monumental architecture where “ The festival apparatus- the improvised scaffold with all its splendour and frills that specifically marks the occasion for celebrating; enhances, decorates, and adorns the glorification of the feast, and is hung with tapestries, dressed with festoons and garlands, is the motive for the permanent monument, which is intended to proclaim to future generations, the solemn act or event celebrated”. Semper (2004) pg 249

5 *Weaving the wall*

Semper examined the root of the word wall and remarks that “ In all German languages the word wand (wall), which has the same root and basic meaning as

Gerwand (garment), directly alludes to the ancient origin and type of visible spatial enclosure” Semper (2004) pg 248

From this comes Sempers theory of dressing, which as Harry Mallgrave indicates in his introduction to Sempers Style in The Technical and Tectonic Arts” means “to clothe, to dress” with its sartorial associations Semper (2009) pg 50

He goes on “The dressing (of the building) becomes a veiling camouflage or artistic mask, a physical masking of the material behind the paint but also a symbolic or allegorical masking of the works thematic content” Semper (2009) pg 50

We find the idea of ‘*dressing*’ a persuasive one. Both vertical and horizontal planes can be dressed. Both interiors within buildings and interiors outside of buildings can be dressed, and dressed appropriately, to grow experience and distil meaning.

By ‘*dressing*’ we mean the inner linings or coverings of floors, walls and ceilings, the furniture and fittings that make up spaces we inhabit, or the many overlays of the land – from the ground cover, under- storey, tree canopy within the garden or wider landscape with the attendant layers of kinaesthetic and sensory reverberations, visible or invisible, audible or not, all of which when a focus of consideration, may serve to reorient significance or priority.

6 *Temporality*

The question of *temporality* needs foregrounding.

Interiors and landscape share *temporal affinities*, of *mutability*, *mobility* and *masque(rade)*. In particular besides narratives of their use and occupation, there are also important considerations of care and husbandry.

Sweeping or polishing a floor or not, mowing or scything a lawn or not, and the regularity of these operations have fundamental impact on the experience of

'being there' and are as much a part of the 'design' as the choice of materials and their specification.

Interiors and landscape both possess an underlying structure which is relatively stable, the structure of the building in the case of one and of the land in the case of the other. Both have surfaces, or dressings, which are, or can be, relatively unstable (*terra fluxus*); shifting ecologies exhibiting varied and interrelated life cycles, which experience erosion, deposition, colonisation, growth, competition, permeability and porosity.

Temporality extends to *performative natures*.

Importantly both interiors and landscape are worked and change under diurnal and seasonal cycles and are in a very real sense never actually complete.

They carry inherent narratives of what has gone before, what will come after, and the measure of a moment or a phasing of moments rather like a pattern of change or—discontinuity. Thus allowing for adaptive and changing '*Inventories of Contents*' and '*Vocabularies of use and care*'.

7 Image

Both interiors and landscapes are consumed as images, created for the pleasure of the eye, or as the picturesque landscape. They are as things to be looked at, but both are also ecologies, situated in time and space, a web of relationships.

Contrary to the 'product' or 'object', landscapes and interiors confound creative representation. This is a function both of scale from the very big to the very small, the passage of time passing and the individual and collective relationships bound up in their occupation. They can be understood as Joseph Rykwert suggests as "image through experience", Rykwert (2004) pg 100

Woodland Cemetery

It is at this point that we turn to the woodland cemetery created by Sigurd Lewerentz and Eric Gunnar Asplund between the years of 1915- 1940 in the suburbs of Enskede, Stockholm, in Sweden. As a seminal project embodying a clear lineage from 19c and earlier influences through the careers of its architects, and from inception through construction, the project has spanned much of the twentieth century with ongoing and current transformation beyond the lives of the original authors.

Today, the Woodland Cemetery can be described as a fundamentally theatrical environment where the ground is dressed, in the Semperian sense, to enable the act of mourning and remembrance to find its proper expression.

The cemetery occupies a liminal place, situated between the everyday world of our daily existence and a spiritual world, where the act of mourning is staged and contained through acts of organisation and husbandry.

In contrast to monumental cities of the dead which were prevalent when the cemetery was first conceived. Lewerentz and Asplund placed the experience of landscape at the centre of their thinking in order to in Asplunds words” give form to a sorrow that cannot be told” Asplund quoted in Spirn (1989) pg 61.

Considered one of the most significant of 20th century landscapes, the cemetery was granted UNESCO world heritage status in 1990 and was the subject of a competition for an addition crematorium building in 2010 which is due to start construction in 2011.

Thus the cemetery, which hosts over 2000 funerals each year, is still very much a working landscape.

Both Lewerentz and Asplund belonged to the generation of designers who were trained and first practiced in a classical manner, for example Asplund's Woodland Chapel is a rustic Doric temple and Lewerentz' Chapel of the Resurrection is, according to Colin St John Wilson a "masterpiece of neo-classicism" Wilson (1998) pg 32-35, and around which, according to Alison Smithson " the forest floor undulates and stresses the wonder of a flat plane at the entrance- a tongue of inside floor is stuck out to get the first taste of snow" Alison Smithson quoted in Flora (2002) pg 373

However, both architects shifted their respective positions and embraced the new language of modernism – and produced acknowledged works in this new idiom, Asplund at the Gothenburg law courts and Lewerentz at St Peter's Church at Klippan for example.

Asplund and Lewerentz were educated to think about architecture in a pre-modern way and the cemetery, although modern in certain of its conceptions – the humanist context of death as a part of every day life for example, and in the abstract quality of the portico of the Chapel of the Holy Cross, or the way in which its approach is oblique to its main façade, but In the consideration of the layout of grave stones and the prevalence of a common dimension to respect equality in the face of death, the majority of ideas which inform the design of the landscape as a whole are as much pre –modern as they are modern.

The use of rooms, for example and the care and attention invested in the particular qualities of place is totally opposed to the modernist ideas of space described earlier. Here, Lewerentz, who is acknowledged as the prime author of the landscape, paid particular care and attention to qualities, both visible and invisible that the site offers for attention to create a landscape that both looks natural and as if it had always been there.

The cemetery orchestrates the visitor's experience at a range of scales, from the most intimate and personal, at the side of a grave, to the collective and shared experience of the funeral procession and to the most expansive expression of cemetery in city.

Lewerentz' last chapel

A part of its power comes from the manipulation of material to screen, emphasise, enclose, and define the spaces in which the various actors move.

This orchestration of materials is we believe essentially theatrical in the sense that Mallgrave argues Gottfried Semper's concept of monumental architecture is "essentially theatrical: theatre in the positive sense of the Greek word theatron, meaning "a place to view, to behold and the related Greek word theoria, which means a "knowledge of the divine", a sight or spectacle by which something unexpected or other is revealed Semper (2009) pg 51

We argue that many of the ideas that informed the concept of the cemetery are pre-modern and we suggest that some are ancient – as old as human settlement. One can see in the deployment of symbols, materials, textures, paths and destinations, ideas which are as Thomas Barrie has suggested common to sacred architecture where " (it) sacred architecture utilizes a broad range of surface and spatial media to perform its symbolic functions. The form, scale, and placement of the architecture serve to establish formal hierarchies and underline the significance of the sacred place. External and internal surfaces serve to communicate symbolic content and spatial relationships and sequences choreograph its dynamic serial experience." Barrie (2010) pg 45

For example one can begin by the examination of the manner in which the cemetery is defined as a place that is separate from the surrounding city. It is bounded and cut off from the everyday by a limestone wall, 3.6 Km long that describes its perimeter.

As Leatherbarrow has suggested through his reading of Vitruvius “ Cutting into” the soil, (as a precursor to building) results in cutting off the site from the surrounding expanse. The artefact resulting from such a cut – a boundary wall- was not a line but a container symbolically equivalent to a wall or ceramic jar or vase, a limit that serves as a receptacle of civic life.” Leatherbarrow (1993) pg 34

He also notes, “At the centre of the word contemplation is the English version of the Latin and Greek words templum and temenos, which signify amongst other things a place “cut off”. Being cut off and separate, any thing or place contemplated is necessarily distinct and separate from the contemplator. Nothing (he notes) is more distant from human existence than the divine” Leatherbarrow (1993) pg 217

Thus the cemetery is defined firstly as an interior, enclosed by its wall and secondly as a place of contemplation, distinct from the world which surrounds it, a place where we confront our own mortality.

On passing through the semi circular entrance gate, the initial experience is of a gathering place, entrance hall or narthex, the path, immediately enclosed on both sides by low walls flanked by trees stretches out and up.

Following the preparatory experience of enclosure, the path begins to rise as it tracks the line of a low wall, ascending to the portico of the Chapel of The Holy Cross and the great basin, outlined by a wall of trees and roofed by the vault of the sky, and which contains the Hill of Remembrance.

The grove of elm trees appears at the summit and the great granite cross marks the culmination of the route with the mortuary chapels at the crest of the hill.

The journey to the summit is calibrated to take place through a period of time, measured over some distance and can be compared to the entrance sequence

found at many sacred sites such as the Neolithic site at Avebury in England which, as Barrie states is drawn out and “elongated to underline its importance, traversed by the solitary pilgrim, or the processional retinue, the path serves as a mediator between outside and inside – profane and sacred – and underlines the importance of entering the sacred place” Barrie (2010) pg 104

This articulation of entrance, route and goal, sequence, the path or nave and the goal or sanctuary is of course a familiar one, and is replicated in the interiors of cathedrals and indeed sacred buildings across different religious traditions.

The path is both a gentle walk up an incline following a guiding wall and a metaphorical journey or pilgrimage route, the path is also the Path as Anne Whiston Spirn suggests. Spirn (1998) pg 20

Having gained the summit of the hill, and having reached the Hortus Comtemplatus nested within the trees the visitor is offering both refuge (interior) and prospect (exterior), of both cemetery and the distant city beyond. From here, a number of routes can be chosen, some lead deeper into the cemetery, others return to the gate and back out into the world.

Turning from the Mound and on axis with it, is the 880m Seven Spring Way that leads to the portico of the Chapel of Resurrection. This path is lined with tree species chosen to moderate levels of light falling on the path, as the mourner approaches the chapel itself.

At the start, the path is lined with deciduous Weeping Birch, then Silver Birch, followed by conifers, Pine and finally Spruce which provide increasing density of cover diminishing the level of light on the path which varies with fluctuations in the weather, and may be dappled sunlight at first, whilst always becoming increasingly sombre in preparation for the funeral service to come.

After the service the mourner leaves the chapel by the west door onto a shallow incline and into the light, in preparation for the return to city beyond. The route within the cemetery is choreographed as a single journey through a series of settings, as considered as any table arrangement, with the catafalque as hearth as the smallest and the great basin as mirror as the largest. These are akin to shallow dishes, or bowls, nested one within the other. Woodland Cemetery articulates a weaving together of influences from The Nordic humanists, ideas of divine nature and the spiritual essence of daily life in the everyday experience of place.

Conclusion

We have suggested that the cemetery is a theatre, we have focused on the 'front of house, but of course there is also a 'back of house', discreetly joined yet remaining separate.

We have argued that the fabric of the terrain is 'dressed', as Semper would have it, in order to 'stage' acts of remembrance and mourning. Trees are living walls, essentially textile in nature, that form the edges of the major enclosures. The character of an individual tree is less important than its 'weave' as a part of the screen wall, in a manner analogous to the Greek Corus which, according to Mallgrave, Friedrich Schiller has described as " a living wall that tragedy has drawn round herself, to guard her from contact with the world of reality, and maintain her own ideal soul, her poetic freedom" Semper (2004) pg 51
Species selection conveys narrative and setting as a 'score' for events. The Hill of Remembrance is planted with dwarf elms, which afford the mound a more impressive, yet, more distant status.

Interior and landscape theory and practice inevitably start with something that is **there**. Both disciplines are 'terra fluxus', seeking to release potential and capacities and sensitive to that which *might be lost*.

We have argued that Interiors and Landscapes are linked by spatiality, materiality and temporality and that Gottfried Semper's theory of dressing can be usefully applied to both disciplines and used as a tool of interpretation, care and curation.

We close with a story, drawn from our collective experience – it is the tradition in Sweden, we understand, to visit the family grave and light candles on Christmas Day, when there is often snow on the ground. At the Woodland Cemetery the graves are situated within the trees, in the interior of the woodland, off stage and particular in their location, and when the light begins to fail, as it does in early afternoon in Stockholm at that time, one can see groups of people between the trees where pin points of light punctuate the gathering darkness and the chill of the early evening. This experience turned us once again to Semper's thinking and his belief that "Architecture becomes ideally ennobled by evoking a "certain carnival spirit" or "festive haze of carnival candles" which for him, reflected, " the true atmosphere of art". Semper (2004) pg 50

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