

Drawing the landscape. (Drawing of a mountain range in Jämtland, Sweden, by Samuel Otto for the Swedish Natural Philosopher Olof Rudbeck, published by Rudbeck in *Atlantica* (1679). Illustration from *Svensk Idéhistorisk läsebok*, Atlantis, Stockholm 1991, p 713.

Topographical Strategies for Architectural Research

Katja Grillner

And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation.

For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings.¹

Could it be that the nature of architectural investigations, as much as Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations, 'compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction'? If so what would be the appropriate objects of architectural research found on these journeys? How might we define the body of learning that a legitimate architectural researcher should be expected to hold? These anxious questions are asked both by practicing architects and by researchers in our field today. Whenever the criss-crossing investigation lures the curious mind too far away from its mother concept Architecture, the architect flags a warning and guides the traveller back on the road. The wide field of architectural thought appears infinite in its extensions, impossible to house in any architectural creation. It does not approve of sharp

boundaries. Yet the architect in us seems to desire such a construction to house our research.

In this article the nature of such a construction will be critically discussed and extended into the realm of landscape. I will argue for the necessity of leaving any search for one identity, one body of learning, far behind in our long and involved journeys across the landscapes of architectural research. The articles presented in this issue of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research point towards multiple practices and models for understanding this field of knowledge that we call architecture.

Symposium programme

Alternative strategies for mapping and navigating within this epistemological topography were applied at the symposium Landscapes of Architectural Research, organised in April 2002 by the Nordic Association of Architectural Research at the Department of Landscape Planning at SLU, Ultuna, Sweden.² This was billed as a mapping and exploratory event where the landscape of architectural research should serve as

an experimental field for participants. Four steps were taken to ensure that the discussions would not lead us back to ontological searches for the 'core' identity of architectural research: 1) The replacement of the house metaphor with landscape itself; 2) the discovery of an archipelago; 3) the naming of some of its islands; and 4) the exploration of these islands.

The three-day program was centred around four workshops (islands) led by researchers who were invited to investigate how the following themes relate to and operate within architecture, cities and landscapes:³

- Cultural theory. How do we understand architecture, cities and landscapes as cultural phenomena? (Anne-Katrine Geelmuyden)
- Empirical analysis. How may aspects of architecture, cities and landscapes be isolated and analysed by precise scientific methods? (Monica Billger, Lars Marcus)
- Research by design. Do experimental architectural projects open up new ways of seeing architecture, cities and landscapes, and, if so, what does this imply? (Jonathan Hill)
- Innovative design practice. Might architectural research be conducted in the form of innovative design practice in commercial contexts, and, if so, what does this imply? (Fredric Benesch, Jonas Runberger)

The islands reflected existing and developing paradigms, even if they were categorised somewhat differently than is usual. Many possible islands were not represented, for example, categories of planning research and housing research.

A fifth workshop team (Katja Grillner, Bobo Hjort, Jörgen Dehs, Susan Paget, Johanna Wiklander) were responsible for moving between the islands and coordinating the concluding session on the third day. Each workshop was specifically called upon to discuss the following questions in relation to their assigned field:

- Are there limits to the field of knowledge under investigation? If so, what are they?
- How does the field of knowledge under investigation relate to notions of scientific, practical and artistic

knowledge?

- In what way may the field of knowledge under investigation maintain a critical perspective on the object of research? (What constitutes that object of research?)
- Is there an obvious site where the field of knowledge under investigation belongs? If so, is it within academia, within practice, or somewhere else?

The workshops were initiated by each workshop leader issuing a preliminary statement to the symposium. These statements had been published on the web a month prior to the event.⁴ Most participants had also written statements (compasses) concerning their own position (navigation tool) within the field of architectural research by way of preparation for the individual workshops.

Before going into the details of the discussions during those days, let us pause for a moment to reflect on the initial questions posed in this article. What are the arguments for setting up a symposium programme based so strongly on spatial and topographical metaphors such as landscape, field, archipelago, and islands?

Topographical thinking

The use of topographical metaphors for epistemological reflections has a long history. The Latin word for garden, *hortus*, holds for example the double signification of garden and philosophical system.⁵ In *The Art of Memory* Frances Yates provides a thorough history of memory theatres in the classical tradition of rhetoric as it developed into the Renaissance.⁶ These devices were used both for remembering and communicating knowledge by physically embodying a thought structure. In the Renaissance actual theatres were constructed, such as Giulio Camillo's in the mid-sixteenth century, but the theatre would more often be based on existing buildings or urban structures. The selection of places (*loci*) within these real structures was essential for the art of memory, as well as the placing of images (*imagines*), representing what was to be remembered in these places. In order to later 'recollect' what had once been organised in this memory system, one simply had



to retrace one's steps in the memorised building or city. The notion of a journey was a prevailing metaphor for the seeking of knowledge. In Diderot and d'Alembert's encyclopaedia the individual entries were likened to islands in a vast ocean. The reader embarked on individual journeys guided by an elaborate system of cross-referencing, designed for this purpose.⁷ In spite of its monumental character, the encyclopaedic project was described in humble terms in the prospectus: "Nature presents us only with particular things, infinite in number and without firmly established divisions. Everything shades off into everything else by imperceptible nuances."⁸ Nature, according to the encyclopaedic project, has no intrinsic order. Only temporarily does man draw the dividing lines. Let us replace nature with

architecture: 'Architecture presents us only with particular things, infinite in number and without firmly established divisions.' Is this true? If nothing else, it twists our thinking into a different shape.

The programme for Landscapes of architectural research emphasised the necessity of acknowledging a multiplicity of research perspectives in architecture. These perspectives are described metaphorically as forming an archipelago where we navigate and reside, following (without reflecting on it) the metaphorical model of the Encyclopaedia. The strategy behind using metaphors such as 'landscape' and 'archipelago' was to escape the common tendency to seek absolute definitions of what architectural research ought to be, its 'proper' identity or specific methodology. In organi-

sing the symposium and workshop programme the committee did not have any aspirations for the workshops to arrive at proper definitions, of any kind, of architectural research. Architectural research has stumbled upon too many traps in pursuing that path. The key notion of 'tacit knowledge' provides one important perspective on professional knowledge formation but runs the risk, if over-emphasised of neglecting the large proportion of factual, explicit knowledge that also makes up architectural knowledge, and that may very well be researched through analytical methods. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on 'scientific' methodologies limits the questions we dare to ask and the explorations that we allow ourselves. Research pursued within commercial design practice may have great difficulties in assuming a critical position towards its own activities, while the researcher maintaining a strictly orthodox critical position in the examination of architecture, cities and landscapes as cultural phenomena, in the end may suffer from his distance to design practice. And a strong call for 'useful' knowledge for architectural practice may reduce research to the simple production of handbooks, an activity that ought to be pursued elsewhere. While all of these perspectives are important, none of them may independently define the most essential issues of the field.

With his concept of "family resemblance" Wittgenstein managed to specify this common-sense condition that remains epistemologically very difficult to comprehend – i.e. the existence and usefulness of 'blurry' concepts. His first example is the concept of a 'game.' We all know what it is, but when asked to define it many different propositions would come up. Most of them would also be appropriate. As in members of a family, Wittgenstein argued, there may not be one single feature that is the same for every partial definition of a phenomenon or a concept, but a set of relations between some of the partial definitions and other relations between other partial definitions.⁹ For considerations on the identity of architectural research this way of thinking would efficiently untie a set of problematic knots. One of the most prominent knots is the relationship between architectural research and architectural practice. This demand overshadows most pu-

blic debates on the value and desired identity of architectural research: 'it ought first and foremost be useful for design practice.' If considered as the position of one of the members in the architectural research family, this particular position is, of course, valuable. As valuable a position as its sister's. She refuses to have anything productive to do with architectural practice at all. Instead she critically scrutinises its power structures and reveals it to society. Or the empirical analyst. She walks into the completed building and believes she may objectively measure its actual performance. She does produce some data. But so what? And so on. Any of these perspectives, if prioritised, will be problematic. The idea that the architectural researcher should allow herself to be primarily defined by her usefulness for practitioners constructs a limited view of a research field that has no significance to anyone but the architects themselves. The field of significant knowledge relating to architecture is surely wider than that.

So how can we avoid prioritising and polarising and yet find appropriate means to understand the epistemological field in which we operate? The habit of organising our thoughts in simple boxes is difficult to break without introducing metaphors that help us to think differently. The family metaphor works well for understanding relations of likeness and difference, but not so well if we want to avoid hierarchical organisation. The landscape metaphor is very efficient and widely used to conjure up an area of thought (as Wittgenstein does in the passage quoted above). But on its own, landscape appears such an open concept that its usefulness for our purposes may be questioned. The landscape metaphor does, however, provide our thinking with a starting point that from the very beginning is open-ended and impossible to wrap up. Still, if the landscape were conceived as an infinite flat plain, would we not soon find ourselves marking the ground with rectangular fields? Precisely that which we would like to escape?

We need a particular landscape, a landscape that resists simple boxing. One which allows 'everything to shade off into everything else by imperceptible nuances' to paraphrase Diderot and d'Alembert. Hilly, partially open, partially overgrown, or an archipelago

with islands of different sizes, and sounds between them of different widths and depths? On islands of different forms and sizes different research cultures have developed and between some islands the ferry traffic is intense. Between others no boats have so far been sighted. From some islands weekly ferries leave to far away cities... It might be necessary to be this literal in our metaphorical fantasies. Could we name the islands? Could we name the faraway cities? Would the map we then came up with be of any use for the researcher planning his or her next action? Or for anyone else, who by chance or through clever navigation, sails through our archipelago?

The islands

The islands that were explored during our Ultuna symposium were difficult to name satisfactorily. What were indeed our organisational criteria? Two of the workshops concerned more traditional methodological categories – cultural theory and empirical analysis. The two others concerned the development of research by design in academia and in practice – a category which currently receives much attention.¹⁰ The emphasis on methodologies and approaches rather than categories of study objects was criticised by some participants as less appropriate. ‘What’ (we are investigating) should be more interesting to discuss than ‘how’. It is however difficult to not intertwine those questions. Anne-Katrine Geelmuyden’s workshop Research on Architecture, Landscape and Urban Design as Cultural Phenomena indicates the importance of such intertwining: if we are interested in studying the symbolic operations of Steven Holl’s Chiasmamuseum in Helsinki, it is evident that we need to qualify our research skills in the field of cultural theory. In her initial statement Geelmuyden argues for the necessity of addressing questions of value and quality through architectural research. These questions, she contends, are dealt with within the field of aesthetics, which thus ought to be developed as a research basis for architecture.

Design, as practice, process and methodology, may be considered to generate particular research questions and methodologies. Since a few years frontline architectural practices typically claim to perform ‘research-ba-

sed’ practices (for example OMA, UN-Studio, MVRDV, FOA, Greg Lynn to mention a few). In relation to this development Jonathan Hill’s workshop Building a Drawing on research pursued by design within academia, and Fredric Benesch and Jonas Runberger’s workshop Innovative Design Practice, asking whether research may be pursued through design in commercial practices, raise critical questions concerning the different ‘sites’, in which research takes place. “Academic research,” Hill writes in his initial statement, “offers architects a space to speculate as designers and to develop a deeper and more thoughtful understanding of their practice and discourse, which they often lack at present.” Benesch and Runberger acknowledge the need for generating external criticism in order for innovative commercial practices to provide critical contributions to a wider research community. To this end they point in their article to conferences and exhibitions as important forums for such exchanges.

Monica Billger and Lars Marcus’ workshop Studies of architecture, cities and landscapes through empirical analytical methods points to the absence in architectural research of qualified methods to describe and analyse the artefact itself.

“We are standing,” they write in their initial statement, “in the midst of what ought to be every empiricist’s dream, an enormous mass of yet unexplored matter, which, if we applied the appropriate methods, should be capable of providing us with heaps of answers to the questions we have concerning the significance of architecture in a human context.”

The articles

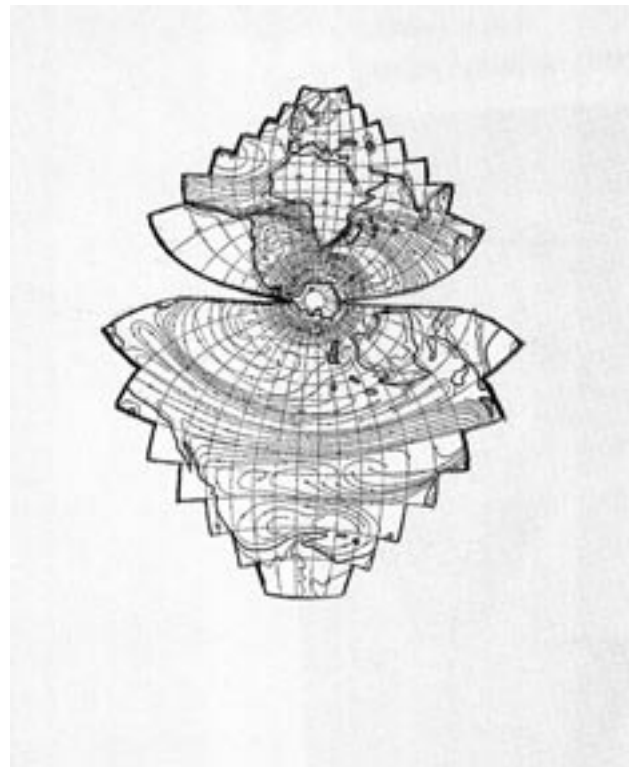
The articles in this issue of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research are the outcome of the symposium. All workshop leaders and moderators were asked to contribute. The resulting articles by Jonathan Hill, Lars-Henrik Ståhl, Lars Marcus, Fredric Benesch and Jonas Runberger, do not strictly follow the categorization we tested in the workshops during the symposium. It was unfortunately not possible for Monica Billger and Anne-Katrine Geelmuyden to contribute to this issue and therefore we lack their important points of view here. Additional contributions were also commis-

sioned from Hilde Heynen and André Loeckx, Maria Nyström and Lena Villner. In the Forum section Bobo Hjort and Halina Dunin-Woyseth contribute with articles providing a background to architectural research in Sweden and at the Oslo School of Architecture. I will provide a brief outline of the articles below.

Hilde Heynen and André Loeckx propose in their article "Signs, images and life: Researching the mimetic mode of architecture" a holistic view of the field of architecture as consisting of three modalities of knowledge captured under the concepts signs, images and life. They articulate these modalities very sharply through the theories of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin (sign and image), and Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu (life). They then apply their own model onto previous studies they have performed themselves.¹¹ Lars Marcus, in his article "The Need for Theoretical Knowledge in Architectural Practice", also approaches the epistemological field of architecture with a holistic ambition. He presents Bill Hillier's analysis of different modes of theory in architecture (generative, predictive and speculative). Marcus points to a particular ignorance in architectural practice for the usefulness of scientifically-based knowledge, which would be of particular importance in the predictive phase of design.

In "Building a Drawing and Drawing a Building" Jonathan Hill takes a critical view on the architect's protectionist delusion that he is the maker of buildings. He proposes a reassessment of the crucial influence of the architectural drawing on design practice. And, contrary to Lars Marcus, Hill argues that instead of asking what scientific research methods can bring to architectural design, the important question is what design can bring to architectural research. In "Modified Knowledge in the Field of Architecture" Lars-Henrik Ståhl asks a related question by exploring what contemporary art practices bring to architecture. Ståhl discusses particular projects by the Swedish artists Magnus Bårtås, Roland Beijer, Mike Bode, Gunnar Sandin and himself, that all in different ways challenge or expand, that is modify knowledge in, the field of architecture.

"Making Research Design" is a design research



program that has been developed by Maria Nyström which involves architecture students as collaborators in the research projects. In her article Nyström presents her research which spans from kitchen design in developing countries to design of capsules for living in space for NASA. She discusses how her methodologies relate to Gibbons' "The new production of knowledge" and his articulation of two modalities of knowledge. While Nyström's innovative research practice is based in an academic context, Fredric Benesch and Jonas Runberger "Progressive Practice in Architecture" presents primarily design practices outside of the academy which do not consider their designs in terms of academic research. The key-elements they examine in these practices (Wilhelmson Arkitekter, NaturOrienteradDesign, Foreign Office Architects, and Servo) are innovation, critical approach and external communication, and they emphasise the important function of the ge-

neration of conceptual platforms for all these practices.

The last article in the theme Lena Villner's "Maktens arkitektur och arkitekturens makt" ("The Architecture of Power and the Power of Architecture"), presents the academic architectural landscape of Uppsala through which she guided the symposium. The article discusses the important historical connections between architectural form and knowledge, tradition and power, and takes the reader through key buildings such as the Cathedral, Theatrum Anatomicum, Gustavianum, Botanicum, Carolina Rediviva, and the University Aula.

Naming

So, having outlined the islands' research population, its cultures and the articles generated from our game, we should at last attempt to name these four islands



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examined in our research archipelago in the region of architecture, landscape and urbanism. For example: Critical Theory – Critical Design – Innovative Design – Artefact Analysis. As soon as these names are provided uneasiness may arise. It is obvious, for example, that artefact analysis would be most useful for a researcher in the field of critical theory in architecture. The artefact analysis that Billger and Marcus call for appears to be, however, mainly focused on the factual, physical, properties of the object, and not so much on its cultural significance and immaterial functioning in the cultural sphere. Possibly a third term should be added (Empirical Artefact Analysis?). Further concerns may be that critical and innovative design appear to be mutually exclusive, as we have put them on different islands. Would this also imply that a fifth island ought to be named and called innovative theory then? Or should critical theory, in following Geelmuyden's advice, be replaced by aesthetic theory instead?

These islands were populated for three days only and in reality our own islands at home have different names. We can come up with many more alternatives that already exist. And we are very likely to overlap several perspectives along the lines that Heynen and Loeckx indicate in their article. The hesitation and uneasiness many of us feel whenever we are placed under a label that is neither entirely of our own choosing, nor pre-ordained (as in university departments), might however in a staged, temporary event like this be of some use. If we agree to at least test out a label as part of the game, most of us will hopefully return home with a critical impulse to question or redefine the islands we most often populate in our everyday lives, and to sharpen our focus whatever lens we have selected as our particular investigative tool.

Notes

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Preface, Blackwell Publishers, London 1997 (1953).
2. The symposium was arranged in collaboration with the Department of Landscape Planning Ultuna, SLU, and the School of Architecture, KTH, Stockholm. Organising committee: Katja Grillner (Coordinator), Susan Paget, Jan Eriksson, Per Hedfors, Bobo Hjort, Magnus Rönn, Lena Villner, Fredrik Wallin, and Malin Zimm. The event

- was financially supported by Formas, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Stiftelsen för Arkitekturforskning, SLU, Uppsala Kommun, and Arkus.
3. The invited workshop leaders and moderators were: Jonathan Hill, Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, London; Lars-Henrik Ståhl, School of Architecture, LTH, Lund; Anne-Katrine Geelmuyden, Dept. of Landscape Architecture, Ås, Norway; Sigmund Asmervik, Dept. of Landscape Architecture, Ås, Norway; Monica Billger, Dept. of Architecture, Chalmers, Gothenburg; Lars Marcus, School of Architecture, KTH, Stockholm; Fredric Benesch, Wilhelmson arkitekter, Stockholm; Jonas Runberger, SSARK-Medialab, Stockholm. The concluding discussion was coordinated by a fifth workshop team: Katja Grillner, School of Architecture, KTH, Stockholm; Bobo Hjort, The Department of Landscape Planning Ultuna, SLU; Jörgen Dehs, Aarhus School of Architecture, Aarhus; Susan Paget, The Department of Landscape Planning Ultuna, SLU; Johanna Wiklander, White arkitekter, Stockholm.
 4. The web page is still online at <http://arkitekturforskning.nu/symposier>. The workshop statements issued were: Anne-Katrine Geelmuyden: "Research on Architecture, Landscape and Urban Design as Cultural Phenomena"; Jonathan Hill: "Building a Drawing"; Monica Billger and Lars Marcus: "Studies of architecture, cities and landscapes through empirical analytical methods"; and Fredric Benesch and Jonas Runberger: "Progressive Practice". In addition Katja Grillner gave an initial discussion of the symposium question: "Landscapes of architectural research?" and Bobo Hjort a historical background: "A hundred years in a Swedish landscape of architectural research."
 5. Anne van Erp-Houtepen The Etymological Origin of the garden, *The Journal of Garden History* 6, pp. 227–231, 1986.
 6. Frances Yates *The Art of Memory*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966.
 7. Sylvia Lavin "Re Reading the Encyclopaedia: Architectural Theory and the Formation of the Public in Late-Eighteenth-Century France", in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol 53, no 2, 1994, pp. 184–192 (p. 190).
 8. Quoted from Diderot *Prospectus de L'Encyclopaedie* in Robert Darnton "Philosophers trim the tree of knowledge", in *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Penguin Books, London 1984, p. 195.
 9. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 67 ff.
 10. The Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL, London offers a MPhil/PhD by Architectural Design programme directed by Jonathan Hill. In Sweden the National Research Council issues since 2001 special grants for the development of practice based research in the arts. As a result of this government venture, an 'Academy for the development of research by design in architecture' has been formed as a collaboration between the architecture schools at KTH, LTH and Chalmers, with the objective of developing research projects and an epistemological discourse concerning this field. The next issue of NJAR will be devoted to research by design in architecture (Editor: Pia Bille).
 11. Heynen and Loecx' article is an edited version of the paper presented at the EAAE-conference at McGill University in Montreal, May 2002.