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Gathering Thoughts on Dwelling

“Is it possible to find a dwelling, a place within the world, while moving across it?” (Dean & Millar, 2005, p. 149).



Figure 1. 'y bend wood'. Figure 2. 'smooth wood'. Figure 3. 'collection'. Collecting wood in Northern Argyll and Bute. Images: Mauragh Scott, 2023.

Collecting Materials in Northern Argyll and in Bute, Scotland

Wandering a pebbled beach that lined Loch Linnhe in the Scottish Highlands, a place I once called home, I took in the vast amounts of driftwood, fishing nets and seaweed that had swept onto the shore and lay around

my feet. Along the walk, I gathered the materials that caught my eye, considering the history of each object and the journey it had taken to arrive here. Once I had reached the other side of the beach, I came to realise that my bounty was comprised solely of wood – wood from nearby fencing, wood that had washed up along

the shore, and wood that people had brought with them and burnt for a campfire. All this wood has its own past, its true origins unknown, but it came together on the shoreline, creating a collective present here.

Collecting the wood on this beach made me recall earlier memories of traversing the forestry tracks two miles away up the mountainside from this shoreline. The dead tree stumps lining the landscape act as a symptom of this place's long history, with wood as a commodity. The long history of wood in this landscape reminded me of Tim Ingold's (1993) concept of a 'dwelling perspective.' Ingold explains that landscape "can be an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within, and in doing so, have left something there something of themselves" (Ingold, 1993, p. 152). Therefore, to have a dwelling perspective is to perform the practice of remembering the landscape (Ingold, 1993).

Walking along this beach, I found myself wondering if wood could be the tool I used to help me embody this perspective. As wood is a medium that can transcend the social boundaries of time, it is a medium that can store time within it. In one way or another, wood and time mix together, providing the perfect tool for me to understand the temporality of the landscape within which I find myself.

As I no longer live in this landscape, my mind wondered about the future landscapes I would explore throughout this summer school. I hoped that this dwelling perspective would come with me to more unknown places that I would visit only temporarily. I hoped that I

could embody the driftwood I found on this beach that day – wood that had travelled from far away but now sat as comfortable inhabitants of their new landscape.

Finding Materials in Rotsidan, Nordingra, Sweden

Arriving at the windswept section of forest land that steadily transitioned from vibrant pine trees to the harsher rocky coastline of Rotsidan, I felt dumbfounded at how I could attempt to find some dwelling in this environment completely new to myself. I wandered for a long time, looking for a place to sit but unsure of where I could place my feet, wary of disturbing something unknown to me.



Figure 4. 'mybase'. Figure 5 'globesofmoss'. My carving base and surroundings in Rotsidan, Images: Mauragh Scott, 2023.

As I did before, I gathered materials as I walked and again found myself carrying only wood. Taking the time to feel the textures and weight of each piece in my hands,



Figure 6. 'rotsidan'. My carving base and surroundings in Rotsidan, Image: Mauragh Scott, 2023.

I slowly realised the small similarities between this landscape and my previous well-worn landscape: the sound of waves from afar, the lichen that clung to the side of branches and the roughness of the bark.

This action of noticing allowed me to form a relationship with the environment around me. As I continued to observe the occasional resemblances to my home landscape, a sensation of uncanniness washed over me. The uncanny can be described as “dwell[ing] at the hinge of that which is familiar and unfamiliar, homely and unhomely, natural and supernatural or unnatural” (Mitchell & Petty, 2020, p. 404). At this moment in time, I felt suspended between two places—two histories.

Sparked by inspiration from a carved wooden doll I saw exhibited in the Västerbotten museum in Umeå the day before, I wanted to carve a figure out of the wood

that I had found as a way to root with and respond to the landscape around me. This practice of working with the wood I found, through carving, slowly made my feelings of apprehension fade away and the sounds of the forest around me gave me ease instead of suspicion as it had done previously.

As I carved a figure in the wood, I found myself not just feeling but remembering the wood, learning the knots and grains within it that would block or aid my blade's path. This also became a process of personal remembering, as I learnt and continued to learn this skill from others (including those on the trip with me). Carving became an embodied practice of re-

membering.

Time passed around me as I carved, and I wondered about the doll I had seen the day before and the new life that wood could be given after being collected and carved into new forms. This repetitive action of spending time in an environment and forming knowledge of its qualities allowed me to conduct a small act of dwelling in a landscape so unknown to myself. Once my time was up here and I had to continue my journey, I found myself disappointed in leaving this landscape and the seat I had carved out for myself.

Conclusion

Gathering wood, whether from the forest floor or the seashore, has become an action of remembering, a way forming a dwelling perspective. Each piece I gather carries with it a history and a connection to the land and those who have inhabited it. By carving it, I reflect on

and create relations with a landscape I am within.

Ultimately, these two experiences have been fundamental experiences that have helped me create my art-based approach to landscape investigation. I look forward to continuing my relationship with wood as a tool to dwell in the landscape.



References

Dean, T., & Millar, J. (2005). *Place*. Thames and Hudson.

Ingold, T. (1993). The Temporality of the Landscape. *World Archaeology*, 25(2), 152–174.

Mitchell, J. P., & Petty, K. J. (2020). Uncanny landscapes: An introduction. *Material Religion*, 16(4), 401–409.



Figure 7. 'contemplating'. Figure 8. 'starting to carve'. *Beginning to carve in Rotsidan, Images: Mauragh Scott, 2023.*