A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE OF ‘HUTTING’

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1 ABSTRACT
This article explores two terms: walking and hutting, two components of an immersive and experiential investigation of intervening along a walking track in one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Forest Parks. Here, the familiar terms of ‘walk’ and ‘hut’ are disrupted and re-proposed. This research was first undertaken as an on-site experience, then subsequently ‘mapped’ in a design studio setting. Through the relationship of designer, experience, and experiencer, a reciprocating dialogue is constructed. Through this conversation, particular attention is given to the revealing of often invisible aspects of landscape experience. Drawing on the work of Tim Ingold and Rachel McCann, we explore the immersive and experiential qualities of the landscape, and as a consequence the seemingly contained categories of walking and resting, become fluid and enfolded. The noun ‘hut’ becomes in an Ingoldian sense ‘to hut,’ with an expanded field of ‘hutting’ which embraces a breadth of being in the landscape.

1.1 Keywords
Walking, hutting, phenomenology, experience, mapping
2 INTRODUCTION

Encountering nature and wilderness is a firm part of the New Zealand identity. Our relationship with
the land is imbued with a host of social and cultural values. Abbott and Reeve position: "Wilderness is an
ongoing fascination in this country. The most compelling evidence for how highly we value wilderness in
this country lies in the sheer scale of the lands and waters constituting our [protected areas]". (2011:8). Through
this framing the interaction of people and nature invites an interrogation of the ways in which we
might interact with it when guided by values and perceptions. Both defining and experiential implications of
this relationship with the environment are looked at through the lens of a two day tramp, meandering along
the Nina River in Lake Sumner Forest Park, South Island, Aotearoa New Zealand. Here, we examine the
experience undertaken, and through applying the tool of experiential mapping, challenge preconceptions
associated first with defining terms ‘walk’ and ‘hut’, and second with the ways in which we experience
Landscape.

3 DISRUPTING STATIC TERMS: THE ‘WALK’ AND THE ‘HUT’

Two conventional terms - the walk; and the hut - were the central focus of this research. These two
corcepts comfortably imply known parts of a tramp, (the New Zealand term for a hike). In conventional
usage these terms invoke images of walking tracks and humble backcountry huts. This perception is in one
sense, accurate, but, as is unpacked in the following discussion, there is also an intricacy to this relationship
not readily expressed.

In order to spatially and temporally locate these concepts, it is useful at this stage to perceive the
whole tramp experience as two distinctive sections: first, the section undertaken through walking- ‘The walk’;
and second, the section undertaken through staying in a hut- ‘The hut’. As will be examined through this
article, this binary implies the notion of ‘crossing a threshold’, as if at some point on the tramp you could
indicate that you were definitely within ‘the hut’ section and therefore no longer in ‘the walk’ section and vice
versa. Whilst these terms are useful when discussing or explaining a tramp or outdoor experience because
they illustrate movement through space, a disruption in definition occurs when experienced actively through
an on-site journey. This brings to question ideas of encountering versus defining; interacting versus meaning.
Moreover, which is more reflective of how we engage with the world? Authors such as Abbott (2011), Ingold
(1993), Mcann (2013), Merleau-Ponty (2013) and Murphy (2014), as discussed below, expand on how this
idea of engagement challenges the binary and contained concept of walking. As a more readily graspable
term than ‘hutting’, walking is unpacked and examined- a precursory transition to the tem hutting.

3.1 The ‘Walk’

As expressed, there is a duality in meaning: ‘the walk’ as a defined construct, ‘the walk’ as a known
quantity, and of an expected experience; or, ‘the walk’ as an activity, a mode of encountering, an experience
made. Landscape Architect Mick Abbott proposes a useful study of this difference: “In the photograph at
Observation Col can be seen a line of footprints that leads from the camera to me...What these footprints
manifest is a landscape that is in part being delicately made and remade by the accumulated footprints of
successive groups of people” (pg 76). Aside from the direct link of footprints and walking, what he
emphasises here is how an act of walking, making footprints, shaping landscape and landscape shaping
walking are all part of the same process that is at once unfolding and transformative as activities of
movement are accumulated in space. In this short and intimate description of a moment playing out in place,
commonly described as ‘The walk’ appears insufficient.

3.2 Dissolving the binary

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (1993) offers a set of useful frameworks which expand the possibilities of
this section-to-section relationship of ‘walk’ and ‘hut’. Moreover, perceiving ‘walk’ and ‘hut’ as acted
experiences- as in ‘to walk’, or ‘to hut’- invites an emerging set of qualities. To dissect this, we begin with
Ingold’s expression of the necessary interpretation of the world as something which is encountered: “…To
adopt a perspective of this kind means bringing to bear the knowledge born of immediate experience, by
privileging the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world”
(1993:154). Here Ingold writes of an evolving encountering. But he also highlights that this is more readily
understood as a binary: “The world of nature...is what lies ‘out there’. All kinds of entities are supposed to
exist out there, but not you and I. We live ‘in here’, in the intersubjective space marked out by our mental
representations. Application of this logic forces an insistent dualism, between object and subject, the material and the ideal, operational and cognized” (1993:154). Ingold proposes a rejection of the binary relationship and instead advocates an encompassing of both: “In Landscape, each component enfold within its essence the totality of its relations with each and every other” (1993:154). Therefore Landscape and experience, according to Ingold, do not exist in an either/or relationship, but in a between relationship. Lastly, Ingold proposes an inevitable activation within landscape through interaction between form and function. “The [themes] of the landscape are not, however, prepared in advance for creatures to [discover]. [Instead, these interactions] are generated and sustained in and through the processual unfolding of a total field of relations that cuts across the emergent interface between [person] and environment” (1993:156).

Architectural Academic Rachel Mcann, in her discussion of philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ideas, expresses a complimentary scenario: “the painter sees a portion of the world, brings it inside the body through vision, mixes it with his or her embodied way of understanding the world, and expresses the mixture back into the world in the form of a painting. This act makes the painting a carnal echo, a residuum of the dynamic mixing of the visual world and the painter’s carnal schema”. (pg. 265). The ideas of Mcann and Ingold present to this work the context in which ‘the hut’ and ‘the walk’ takes place - convoluted and imbricated, and much more than static sections of distance or time.

3.3 The ‘hut’

In section 3.1, ‘the walk’ was challenged in terms of its conventional understanding and application. Section 3.2 introduces the notion of a far more nuanced experiencing of the world, thus calling for a more nuanced way of defining or expressing such experiences. As a term more embedded in the specifics of this particular research, the transition from ‘the hut’ to ‘hutting’ is unpacked in the following section. As with the evolving nature revealed through Abbott’s description of footsteps at Observation Col, so too are the evolving subtleties of hut exposed through a describing of a night at Nina Hut.

4 RESEARCH CONTEXT

At the core of this research was a visit undertaken in August 2015, along the Nina Hut Walkway in a South Island protected area. On one level, the visit could be read as an ordinary and uneventful two day walk. Yet, through engaging with place through designing and mapping, new layers of possibility emerged. It was from this very process of mapping, that the notion of to walk and to hut emerged. The visit therefore becomes much more nuanced: an overall experience contributed to as much by the ‘coming together’ or ‘between-ness’ of ‘the site’ and ‘the participant’.

4.1 Method

As expressed, the site visit which has provided the basis for this research, is essentially a very common activity and experience. As a standalone, everyday experience, it does not in itself reveal particularly complex insights. This can be understood as a form of ‘muted enagement’. Landscape Architect Charlotte Murphy writes: “as an experience is repeated it develops an aura of familiarity. We do not have to fully experience [it] as our previous experience tells us that we already know [what to expect]” (2014:33). In order to make this substantial jump to an investigation of hidden relationships and convuluted perceptions, a disrupting process was applied to the site visit content. This process was an interpretive and experiential ‘mapping’ of the site visit (see figure 1). Rather than recording locations, and distances and dimensions of things - as a traditional ‘map’ might-, a focus was instead placed on recording and unpacking far more intangible aspects such as feelings, and qualities of atmospheres, and sensations of memories from the tramp: distance and time were seen as ‘elastic’; locations were seen as perceptively relational, not spatially anchored; and ‘unformed’ and ‘fully-formed’ memories were equally considered. These phenomenological underpinnings were employed and interrogated in the process of mapping.
Figure 1: Interpretive and experiential ‘map’ of the Nina hut tramp experience.

4.2 Nina Hut and Walk- An animated experience

Returning to the original site visit, and the host of both familiar and nuanced aspects of that experience, the following is an excerpt from the journal written during the visit: “the visit itself took place early August, 2015. Three friends and drove from Christchurch and parked at the Palmer Lodge off State Highway 7. Rain persisted the entire first day and did not ease until evening. This made for a soggy 4 hour tramp to Nina Hut. We set off at 11.30 am, crossed the second swing bridge an hour later where we had a quick lunch standing in the rain. The next three hours took us across several streams which had swollen during the rain. A continual climb over slippery greywacke made this part the most arduous of the two days. We stopped 50 metres or so from the hut (although we didn’t realise this) and checked our Map. One of the group spotted the hut through the trees and we all but ran up the last 50 metres. The hut was empty upon arrival, and we remained the only group for the stay. We set about lighting a fire, hanging up wet clothing and bringing in wet wood to dry. We passed the afternoon playing games, talking, cooking dinner and drinking tea. Having spent 4 hours in cold rain, none of us felt like exploring outside the hut that afternoon or evening, but the hours passed quickly until we turned in at 8.30 pm and slept through till about 7 am. Day two was overcast, but rain free. We set about cleaning the hut, re-setting the fire and restocking the wood supply and exploring around the hut area. The weather forecast had predicted rain for this day so we got on with the walk back after exploring the hut’s surrounding grove of beech trees and moss carpet. Day two was far more engaging, particularly across what had been our last three hours the day before. Most of the landscape we either hadn’t seen or taken in the previous day. Streams flowed a little less boisterously, and our previous day’s crossings were more useable as most water had found its way into Nina River. We moved quickly and animatedly across tree roots and spongy floor, through Beechs, and across bogs. We ate, photographed, raced, talked and all over engaged far more so with our setting day 2.

Through this journal entry a number of emerging realities are presented. These are useful to isolate, as they offer an insight into this transition from a simple tramp, to a re-proposing of terms and understanding of landscape experiences: the presentation of the tramp is of a connected and evolving journey, and not of clear sections or segments of activity, or as a binary relationship; in this entry, we come to know both the ‘walk’ and the ‘hut’ through the activites of people, the atmospheres of the memories and the emotive layer of events that occurred; lastly, at no stage are the descriptive. Returning to the two key terms, walk becomes much more than a distance traversed, and hut much more than a shelter (figure 2).
Hutting is arrival and elation, stocking of firewood, making of a fire, hanging up clothing, playing games, talking about the tramp, making and drinking cups of tea, cooking dinner, washing the dishes, setting up our beds, falling asleep warm and cosy. Here, hutting is much more than a site, rather it is a host of experiences and activities (figure 3).

Exploring the same such transition for the term ‘walking’, walking is: soggy, crossings, standing in the rain, swollen rivers, slippery greywacke, continual climbing, arduous, checking of the map, spotting our accommodation, investigating the resources around the hut, beech trees and a carpet of moss, tree roots and spongy floors, racing, chasing and animating through the landscape (figure 4).
Just as in Abbott's description of 'walking', footprints in the snow are part of an ongoing making of landscape, these intimate acts of 'hutting' are part of an ongoing making of a hut. In encounters there are elements both wholly familiar and 'expected', whilst other descriptions are very experience specific. As Cultural Landscape Professor Peter Howard (2013:70) highlights, “Landscapes in this rendering are not static backdrops, but instead are imagined as fluid and animating processes in a constant state of becoming.” Here, as with Ingold’s proposition, We do not propose an ‘either/or’, but rather an expanded understanding of concepts which are, both terms and activities. Through a process of interpretive mapping, this content was expanded, challenged and re-proposed (Pickett: 2016).

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 The Processing of Landscape through Experience

The work of Ingold, Mcann and Abbott provide a multi-disciplinary lens highlighting key parameters of our relationship with Landscape. Ingold’s concept of dwelling in the world reveal a central nature of unfolding-ness and affective/affecting dualities. Merleau-Ponty through Mcann expresses an inseparable mixing of simultaneous interpretation and projection when experiencing. Lastly Abbott writes of the active making – rather than passive encountering – of experiencing through Landscape. Together they express the ‘activity’-generated qualities of revealing, projecting, interpreting, making, and changing as we go. All of these qualities speak of a movement through and with the Landscape.

5.2 Expanding Binary Descriptions of Landscape

In reflecting of on-site making, this work highlights the fragility of the idea of binaric relationships in Landscape. Often implicit in people’s descriptions (such as ‘The house’ and ‘The garden’), this investigation disrupts this static relationship, and reveals an intrinsic sense of movement and flow between a central relationship: ‘the walk’ and ‘the hut’. Bound together, each takes it’s identity from the existence and interaction of it’s partner – there is no ‘walk’ (as it is framed in this relationship) if there is no hut; Like two sides of a coin (Ingold, 1993), their identity is reciprocally and experientially reinforced.

5.3 Experience as a Concept Disruptor

The notion of concept expansion, the ‘grey areas’ of experience and the unfolding qualities of landscape have been examined and re-proposed through this work, but an opportunity to bring this varied discussion together, lies in the validating of ‘experience’ as a concept disruptor. Contained ideas can – as has been shown – be defined, deliberated and applied to settings, but a key message in this work is the un-contained reality of activity-inclusive concepts when acted out through an experience. Moving past the discussions of ‘challenging concepts’, we further position that investigations of landscape experience build possibility in and for site-design responses.

6 CONCLUSION: Hutting as a disrupted term

This discussion of the concepts: walk, hut, time and distance, as examined through the temporal and spatial unfolding of their processual qualities, leads to an expanded presentation of hutting. Writing from a landscape architectural perspective, Michael Lewis offers a succinct and complex expression of this transformation, paralleling the disruption we explored in this research, from hut to hutting. For Lewis, “The [hut] is not merely a thing, a collection of objects, or a problem to be fixed, but a place of process and relationships” (2010:1). As he proposes “to champion the transitional state of interaction between mobile entities” (2010:2) a focus on “the subtle nuance and allusive courtship in which each assumed entity (hut + user) becomes another in a mutual resonance” (2010:1). Moving past the familiarity of ‘a hut’, as was uncovered through mapping, when activated through experiencing, the term hutting more readily expresses this sense of evolving interaction and activity.

For landscape architecture, this offers an insightful model for challenging concepts, revealing the hidden depths of the taken-for-granted elements of the built landscape. Opportunity is presented here in leveraging out of tension between form-dominated definition, and activity-borne behaviours. Examples such as: wayfind-ing, carpark-ing, swimming-pool-ing, neighbourhood-street-ing, residential garden-ing, green/grey infrastructure-ing, all invoke, as with walk, hut and signs, form-based images. But as has been shown through this process, the unpacked reality of walk and hut reveals a processual depth not addressed
in form-favouring definitions. Unsettling the fixed containers of landscape can mobilise the seemingly static categories of things into processual, interactive, dynamic elements. Through immersive and interactive engagement we can become, again, part of the landscape, in landscape, and understanding the creative practice which is to landscape.

7 REFERENCES