OnRamp

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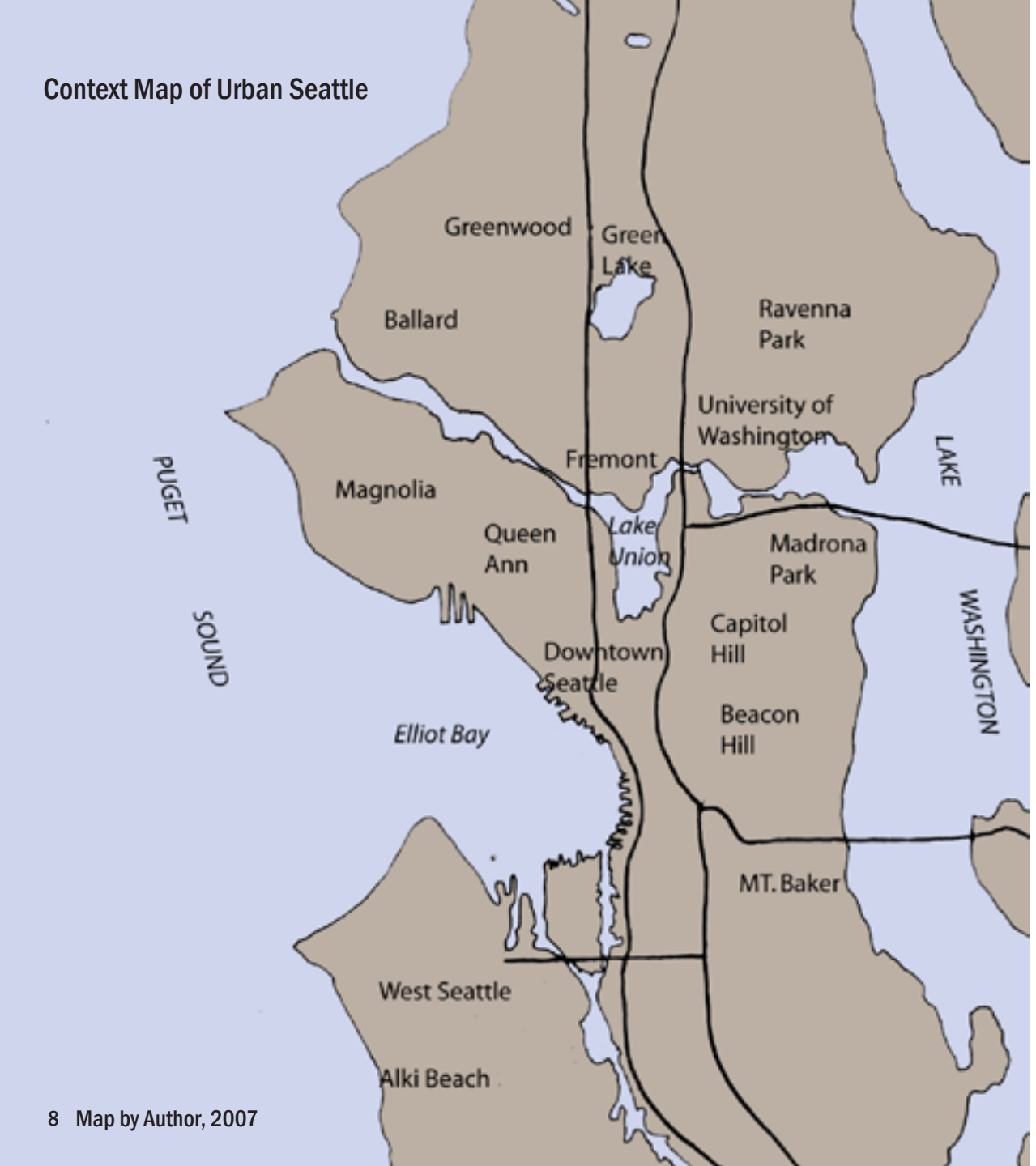
Context Map of Urban Seattle



8 Map by Author, 2007

Abstract

The proliferation of the automobile as a personal environment and the construction of freeways in the North American urban landscape during the mid to late 20th century are often blamed for noise and air pollution, the sprawling homogeneous metropolis, the erosion of the neighbourhoods, streets and communities, and a generally destructive quality of life.

The construction of Seattle's I-5 freeway during the 1950s was successful in creating and expanding commuter accessibility for Seattle's drivers. But in the process it created a border, severing urban communities from one another at a localized level. OnRamp, seeks to reconnect the communities of Capitol Hill and Eastlake through an urban trail design. The intention is to incorporate this trail design into Seattle's existing historic City Parks system to create a continuous chain of navigable open space in which to wander.

The importance of urban freeways in our contemporary cities are often overshadowed by the physical and cultural separations they have created in the urban landscape. When considering freeways, we should resist the impulse to associate them with the ills of society. They are a product of a cultural fascination with prosperity, mobility, privacy and the pastoral. They represent a collective will to create a more satisfactory way of life. They are relics of the past; sculptural artefacts that inform us of where we have been and where we are going.

The purpose of OnRamp is to demonstrate how the distinct ecologies of urban freeways and the residual space surrounding them can be creatively entwined with the structure of the city.

Chapter 1

As automobiles became mass-produced and widely available, the need to create infrastructure in major American cities to accommodate them became an increasing concern. In the 1940s, the American government launched The Nationwide Interstate Highway System, an aggressive road building program motivated both by military defence and by the desire to foster economic growth. The project was designed to link major urban centres throughout the country. As a result, the roads cut through existing urban areas and thousands of people were required to relocate.

Along with these major road works came large infrastructure projects built under the guise of 'urban renewal'. In his book, *Finding Lost Space*, Roger Trancik (1986) suggests that these "projects rarely corresponded in spatial structure to the evolved community pattern they replaced, nor did they respond to the social relationships that gave meaning to community existence" (p.12). In Seattle this new urban infrastructure created a series of disconnected spaces that continue to be neglected.

Fremont Troll under the interstate 99 freeway, photo by Author 2007.

For those who inhabit the communities surrounding Seattle freeways, a different perception of the urban landscape exists. Residual spaces along freeways are considered by many to be valid public space. In some instances these spaces have been designed as dog parks, public art sites and greenbelts. In many more they have remained derelict. The opportunity to expand these greenbelts exists under the Seattle Green Space Policy which encourages the creation of natural buffers between land uses in order to mitigate noise and air pollution as well as reduce the need for constructed storm water systems. (http://www.seattle.gov/parks/proparks/projects/stmarks.htm)

Many Seattle neighbourhoods lack public open space and could benefit from the creative reclamation of residual freeway space. Most of these neighbourhoods are located on significant slopes creating an opportunity to develop these spaces as scenic overlooks and tourist destinations. In turn, a new appreciation for the history and the current state of the city and its communities could grow.

In *Walkscapes,* Francesco Careri (2002) suggests that residual spaces are “urban voids left over nooks and crannies of various scales in the urban landscape that represent the overlap between spaces of going and spaces of staying”(p.177). Too many of these spaces appear undesirable and do not make a positive contribution to the urban landscape. Where urban space is becoming increasingly valuable, there is an opportunity to creatively approach these areas as part of the urban fabric instead of the urban void.

So frequently People are blind to residual space because they are experienced from a speeding vehicle. These spaces do not register as anything more than a gap in the landscape. They are insignificant to people driving past them but the spaces hold meaning to those who live with(in) them or near them.

When considering the place of paths and roads in the landscape, the freeway has become married to our modern landscapes. In the article *Tunnelling*, Paul Andreu (1998) argues that the linkage between the journey and the space you are traveling through gets separated from our perceptions when traveling at speed. This has resulted in a tunnelling effect, where roads are set apart from the land, remote from it. The travel time along the journey becomes the negative factor to experience. For Andreu, “excessive duration destroys our relationship with the landscape” (Davidson 1998, 59).

How then can the journey of traversal be linked back to experience in a more meaningful way?


HOME:NOW

Seattle's I-5 freeway looking South, photo by Author 2007

In *On the Beaten Track,* writer and cultural critic Lucy Lippard (1999) argues that as modern transportation increased during the 1900s, public access to the North American landscape increased as well, opening up a more generalized and populist notion of travel and tourism (p.136). As a result, the way people looked at the landscape changed because the modes of traversal changed.

The proliferation of the automobile as a personal environment and the construction of freeways are often blamed for common urban–suburban, metropolitan–malaise. The sprawling faceless metropolis, the erosion of the neighbourhoods and communities, and a generally destructive and dehumanized quality of life are the modern consequences of automobiles and highways. In the book *LA Freeways,* David Brodsly (1980) argues that "the freeways were really more a product than a cause of the prevalent urban form" (p.9). The history of the Los Angeles freeways are an important precedent in the study of freeway planning and community design because cities like LA have taught us that "a city can grow as a response to what is perceived as a less satisfactory way of life" (p. 33).

The residual spaces under and around freeways today, in overused industrial sites, and in abandoned shopping mall parking lots, is the indirect product of a city responding to what it perceived as a less satisfactory way of life. These spaces are not just part of the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary urban form but rather are useful and potentially productive places, waiting for someone to reclaim them.

Artist Jon Brumit's art installation called "Pioneers" is a project that attempts to draw attention to the way people see and engage with the landscape. *Pioneers* is a radio-based driving tour of Detroit, Michigan in a 12 part multi-site broadcast on Detroit's 107.9 FM. Short range transmitters are installed in 12 different homes near the I-75 freeway. The driving tour takes listeners to some of the less populated banal areas in and around urban and suburban Detroit. The project is designed to explore the lives and neighbourhoods in between freeway exits to uncover the local histories of people who have stayed in the depressed areas of Detroit.

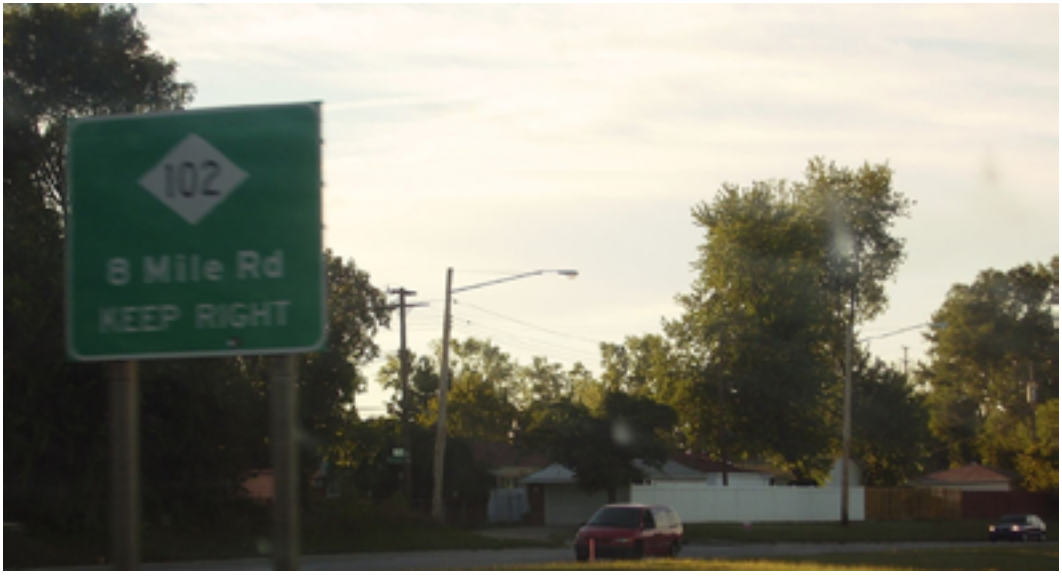


Photo by Author, 2007

Photo by Author, 2007

Similarly, the ATSA, a Montreal based art collective that investigates and transforms the urban landscape in hopes of restoring the citizens place in the public realm has contributed to this new type of Do-it-yourself (DIY) tourism. Their installation work entitled “Frag ‘04” (for fragments), is an in situ visual journey reflecting the history of the Saint Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. The permanent graphic installation along the artery’s facades display powerful personal narratives that capture the manifold currents and impulses which marked its urban social, cultural and economic history.

Furthermore, another way for people to experience the urban landscape is through audio walking tours. *Soundwalk* is a series of audio walking tours in boroughts of New York, is downloaded as a podcast into the walkers ipod or personal music device. Such tours include: The Bronx River Hip-Hop Walk, Manhattan Wall Street Walk, The Williamsburg Hasidic Walk, Manhattan Ground Zero Walk, and the Manhattan Lower East Side Walk. As the narrator guides the listener across culture and historical landscapes, an intimate and personal experience is created, through the use of sound effects and a map. Audio walking tours appeal to tourists, who don’t normally take walking tours, or locals who want to experience a new side of/perspective on their city. They are an opportunity for tourists and locals to share experiences, cross paths or even reverse roles.

Despite the explosion of DIY tourism over the past decade, the interdisciplinary artist group that runs the *Centre for Land Use Interpretation* (CLUI) has been taking people to some of the more banal "tourist destinations" across the United States. CLUI's bus tours, documented in the book *Overlook: Exploring the Internal Fringes of America* (2006), illuminate "how we, individually or collectively, interact with each other and with our surroundings" (CLUI,p.16) Humans consciously and unconsciously transform the land they inhabit. The tours to derelict bomb ranges, oil fields, landfills and shopping malls reveal narratives about our culture and society through a form of banal sight seeing. Exposing the banal allows us to gain a greater appreciation of who we are and how we got to this point. The CLUI treat the contemporary landscape as a museum, a "repository containing some of the material culture of our time" (31).

OnRamp seeks to understand the ways people perceive and interact with the landscape and to provoke thinking about the urban landscape.

In the book *How to See*, George Nelson (1977) argues that we all tend to see in terms of what we know, or believe (p.2). He theorizes that a small segment of the population have learned to read visually while the majority of the population are only able to read verbally. The problem arises when the appearance of visual pollution, such as derelict residual spaces, are quantified or measured. Ugliness, argues Nelson, cannot be measured. It all comes down to the matter of taste, which Nelson adds is an unreliable yard stick (p.3).

The intention of OnRamp is to understand how to design for a population who sees the landscape in so many different ways.

In *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri (2002) considers walking a critical tool and an obvious way of looking at landscape. Walking forms a certain kind of art and architecture. Careri's argument that pervades the book is "that walking has always generated architecture and landscape, and that this practice, all but totally forgotten by architects themselves, has been reactivated by poets, philosophers and artists capable of seeing precisely what is not there, in order to make something be there" (p.13).

This type of site is evident in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, who in the 1970s bought up tiny bits of land in between almost touching buildings and cut massive slices through them. He declared that "through the negative space a void exists so that the ingredients can be seen in a new and dynamic way". (p.13)

Walking as a political and aesthetic position is evident in the theories of the mid-twentieth century artist groups: the Situationist International (SI) and Dada who scrutinized the unconscious residual zones of the city through a new type of aimless urban investigation. The situated act of aimless wandering, traditionally known as *zonzo*, is a form of expression which accentuates a place by physically traversing it. Dada and the SI thought of traversal as "an instrument of phenomenological knowledge and a symbolic interpretation of territory" (p.11)

The purpose of OnRamp is to demonstrate how the distinct ecologies of urban freeways and the residual space surrounding them can be creatively entwined with the structure of the city. It will propose an urban trail design that connects existing urban green spaces while allowing visitors and locals to formulate a more meaningful understanding of Seattle's urban structure and sense of place. OnRamp will reveal how the symbolic act of traversal correspond with the vernacular form of urban residual space above, under and around metropolitan freeways.

Process

My life up until now has reinforced the notion of interconnectivity, or evolution and of journey. It has become obvious that in design there are no rules to either obey or express; there is only the moment and your expression of it, using the means and methods available to you at that time, no matter what form it might take. If life is a journey, it is recorded by a mapping of our experience through memory.

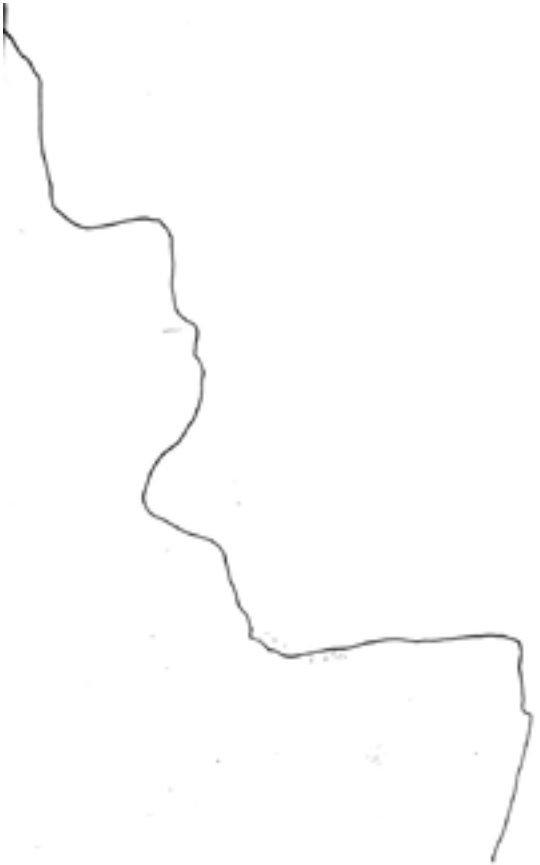
OnRamp is about the experience of the journey. An important basis of my design formulation has been to document the transformation of self from a tourist to inhabitant. This has been achieved through guided walking tours, city trail books, investigating local establishments, audio walking tours, aimless wandering and postcard collection. My personal experience of being in a place is represented through photo documentation, cognitive mapping and cartographic collage.

The OnRamp process seeks to capture and represent the fleeting multiple details and momentary sensations of daily experience. Process is personal and intuitive. It reveals and informs other processes including the process of experience and process of seeing.

Case study research has been important in OnRamp as well. I am constantly exploring the work of artists who use the landscape as a part of their medium. I am interested in the creative processes of artists and how they can influence and be incorporated into landscape architecture process. Creation, no matter the medium or method, is about, and of process. In that sense, creativity is all time based and sculptural since nothing exists in a vacuum. In the end something is made.

1-6 are blind contours drawings of the journey my wife, Liz and I, take every day to and from her office in Eastlake. These maps are recordings of our experience of traversal. We compare our maps, overlay them one upon another. It is within this discourse between these different relative states that the forms of the landscape start to break down. The activity of walking and driving are transmitted into a conscious creation.

Walking - Capitol Hill to Eastlake existing



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Walking - Capitol Hill to Eastlake through OnRamp design

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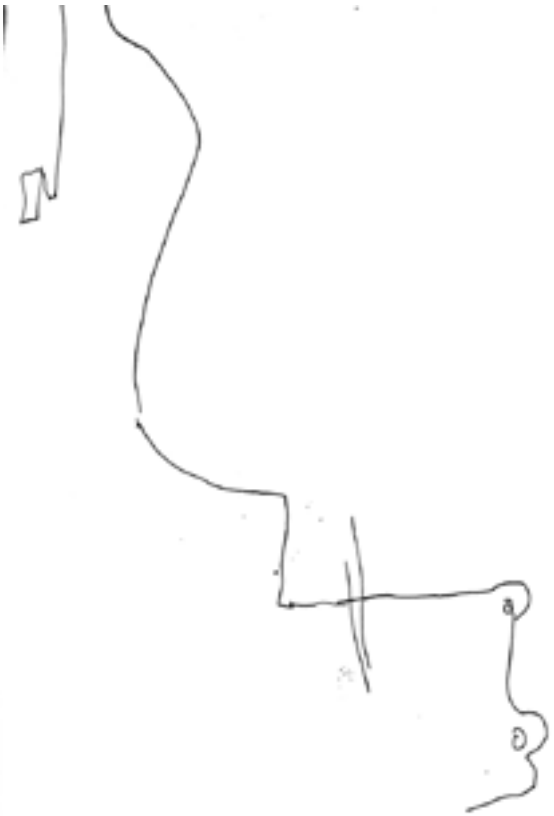

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Driving - Capitol Hill to Eastlake existing

The land is important to me, but even more important is the idea that it becomes a place because someone has been there
(Marlene Creates in Lucy Lippard) (1997, p.32)

Chapter 2

I am interested in the ways people perceive the landscape and how people choose to use it. I am fascinated with how people view the landscape's inadequacies and its beauty. I am drawn to the ebb and flow of society and the traces that are left because of that movement.

I like the idea that a place has a present. To quote Lucy Lippard (1997): "All places exist somewhere between the inside and the outside views of them, the ways in which they compare to, and contrast with, other places. A sense of place is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and an intimacy with the land" (p.33).

My wife and I moved to Seattle, Washington from Winnipeg, Manitoba in February of 2007. Together we familiarize ourselves with our new surroundings; the smells, sounds, sights, and feelings of being in a new landscape. Everyday routes became weekly routines and eventually they became the movement of our life.

The site I have chosen to design is a landscape that we traverse when I walk with her to and from work. It is a treacherous landscape of extreme slopes and woodlands. Everyday, I think of how this walking route could be designed as an exploration of place in Seattle.

Seattle is just above 47 degrees 30' north latitude and slightly west of longitude 122 west. It is due west of Saint John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Basel, Switzerland; and Budapest, Hungary. The city's northern position receives 16 hours of sunlight in June and 16 hours of darkness in December. To the west of Seattle is the Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound, for Seattle is not on the ocean as many people presume. Because of its inland location, most of the heavy precipitation fizzles out in the west of the city over Puget Sound. As a result, Seattle receives roughly 35-40 inches of annual precipitation, which is less than almost all the eastern seaboard cities in the United States. Seattle has the quintessential moderate climate and is often compared to the south of England, although it is far less humid. For Seattleites, extreme temperatures are considered to be low 30's to high 70's F˚.

When I tell someone I live in Seattle, the first question the listener usually asks is: "It rains a lot doesn't it?" This statement is both true and misleading. Very little of Seattle's precipitation comes in the form of snow or from thundershowers. Steady rain for days usually results in less than an inch of rainfall and many people, such as myself, stand by the idea that Seattle's rain doesn't actually get one wet. Rarely does the rain ruin a nice fresh walk. Umbrellas are rarely necessary. The misty rain is consistent from late fall to early spring while it is common to have 2-3 week periods of drought in mid-summer.

More than the rain, it is the constantly grey sky that distinguishes Seattle from most other cities, and gives the essential feeling of the climate. As Sale (1976) comments, “sunrises are even more infrequent than sunsets” (p.4). But it is the constant green that counteracts the high and low over casts of dark and light grey during the winter months.

The city is bounded and dotted with bodies of water and the land between the bodies of water is almost never flat. The city is often referred to as “the city of seven hills” although the hills are not really hills at all. Seattle’s landscape is actually a series of north-south trending ridges that were scraped into formation during the last ice age. Generally speaking, the elevation rises from sea level on Puget Sound to about 457 feet over a distance of 1 mile. From almost any elevation in Seattle, a view of water, mountains or woodlands can be seen. The elements of water, rock, and wood typify the Seattle landscape.

Photo by Author, 2007

The images of wet coal smoke laden winters prevail in much of Seattle Historian Roger Sale's (1976) written descriptions of Seattle during the years preceding WWI. He argues that what managed to come out of the years between 1900-1920 was a comprehensive plan of city parks that is largely what exists today (p.83).

The private institution of the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners (SBPC), established in 1884, sought to preserve the natural and scenic beauty of the Seattle landscape before it became overly commercialized. This type of forward thinking prompted the SBPC in 1903 to contract the foremost landscape architects of the time, the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architecture firm, to develop a comprehensive plan for the city. The Olmsted Brothers' initial recommendation to the SBPC was to acquire as much land as possible that had views of water, mountains, and woodlands. The Parks Commissioners used their political influence and slowly began to acquire vast amounts of woodlands that had been passed over by local developers, including: Mount Baker Beach, Madrona Park, Greenlake, Capitol Hill, Magnolia, Queen Ann and Alki. Although most of these areas were separated by great geographical distances and a treacherous topography of hills, ravines and lakes, the Olmstead Brothers' vision was to link all the parks together in one coherent green chain or necklace. The goal of the Seattle plan was to provide green space or playgrounds within one-half mile of every home in Seattle (Sale, p.84-85).

Critics of the Parks Commissioners' vision pointed out the advantage of the Olmstead Brothers' plan for the city's elite citizens. The plan called for scenic transportation routes for the upper classes that could afford carriages and automobiles. It was indeed problematic that these new scenic parkways connected wealthier neighbourhoods and by-passed the industrial blue-collar neighbourhoods.

Despite impending controversy, the control of all city grounds came under the jurisdiction of the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners in 1904 (p.85). The board implemented the Olmsted Brothers' Plan.

The 'Plan' underlay whatever development the city would undergo in the future, despite various supplementary visions of what the city should become. In the absence of this plan, the city would have been dictated entirely by commercial considerations following the pattern of other industrial port cities in the Pacific Northwest.

Diagram by Author, 2007

Freeways

More often than not, the freeway is associated with the ills of society: air, noise pollution, congestion, sprawl, and the destruction of traditional streets. However, these urban structures are more than just artificial barriers and imposing structures, they are a form of urban sculpture, a cultural artefact.

OnRamp proposes that freeways were really more a product than a cause of the prevalent urban form. It was only one of many technological and social improvements to do so. Massed produced automobiles, mass produced housing and the growing population of babyboomers who were able to afford them were the key ingredients in perpetuating sprawling suburban development.


STOP FOR
WHEN
TURNING

Photo by Author, 2007

Freeways have accelerated the rate of suburbanization - the middle-class dream of privacy, ownership, mobility, independence and the pastoral. Freeways have made access to suburban areas easier but are often blamed for the creation of small suburban centres (Trancik, 1986).

Rurality is considered to be a supreme middle-class value. The thousands of people in Seattle who commute over 2 hours daily from rugged low density picturesque landscapes, support the societal perception that rural spaces are isolated from urban problems. In other words, commuters believe they can drive away from urban change at the end of the day. The sprawling archipelago of bedroom communities a-la-small cities such as Bellevue, Renton and Everett on Seattle's peripheries are examples of communities who possess an individual downtown and suburb but also serve as a suburb of Seattle.

The development of freeways in the United States was the first case in which urban form was overwhelmingly the product of individual choice free from the constraints of geography and economy.

The construction of freeways is an exercise in civil engineering rather than regional planning. The space needed for freeways encompasses more than the viaducts, on/off ramps and depressed twenty-nine lane expressways. The freeway created a need for a complex pattern of connector roads within the city. City streets were drastically altered to accommodate the new urban interstate systems.

The major artery replaced the avenue and the street lost its social meaning as multipurpose space. Roger Trancik (1982) argues that freeways dislocated and isolated districts from one another and created permanent boarders that resulted in homogeneous enclaves. Trancik states that “in the end the desire for order and mobility has undermined the diversity and richness of urban public life” (p.7).

Freeways have changed the ways people think about the urban landscape because they have formalized patterns of movement. The greater Seattle metropolitan area is not simply a series of suburbs in close proximity to one another, but rather, a fluid system of exchanges, of which the freeway system is the most important nexus. The reality is that freeways are essential connections that tie a metropolis together. They have created a new sense of place where urban space is integrated and delineated.

To think of a freeway as a place can help to define and delineate space but it is somewhat problematic. The freeway is the quintessential mono-functional non-place. Those who have been stranded on the side of a freeway with car trouble will agree that no other activity can safely occur on a freeway except driving at speed. Trying to use the freeway for the purpose of changing a tire, getting gas or walking for help is dangerous. As an environment, the freeway does not exist within the surrounding context. It is depressed into the landscape by walls and vegetation or it is elevated above communities. The freeway discourages the driver’s involvement in the city while opening accessibility to all its points. Commuting is not touring. The everyday world of others is not experienced in an automobile, motion is blurred, the drama and charms of a street do not exist. The freeway is a by-pass. They span social as well as geographical borders.

Our perceptions of the landscape when traveling at high speeds on freeways are no longer linked to the space we are traveling through. Drivers have become overly concerned with functions of place rather that the quality of place. Increased desires to reach destinations have resulted in freeways being stretched tight, straightened and set apart from the land, remote from it. The outcome of straightening roads is a different view of the landscape in which the eye skims over in a more general, synthetic and rapid way. The landscape has been reduced to a gaze.

How can the journey be linked to the space in a harmonious coherent whole? It can only be achieved if the path is the integral part of the trip, when the journey is as important as the destination.

Our perception of the urban landscape from the freeway is broken into segments or fragments. Our lives are spent in transit but we focus only on the destination points, life at work, life at home, life shopping etc. The freeway does not offer a unified perception of the metropolis because, at a gaze, the scale is beyond human comprehension.

Kevin Lynch's studies of cognitive mapping in cities reveal the contrast between mobility and perception of the urban environment.

Lynch found that "freeways are perceived as somewhat dissociated from the surrounding landscape" (Brodsley, P.24). Exiting a freeway results in a momentary loss of orientation. According to Lynch, people rarely include freeways in their mental maps of the city and often they can not locate a freeway on-ramp unless directed by signs.

Despite the freeway being a dominating vertical element in the urban landscape, Lynch's theories uncover the difference between the localised and metropolitan senses of orientation. Localised dwelling places are familiar but metropolitan orientations are abstract, as they are places we pass through on our way to destinations.

The freeway is the quintessential mono-functional space. It is the evolution of the street with its primary function being unrestricted mobility. There are distinct costs to our contemporary automotive freedom. One can drive anywhere in metropolitan centres but there are fewer and fewer good places to walk. David Brodsley (1982) states that "the automobile seems to reflect an overwhelming popular consensus rarely matched by social movements, and it flourishes because it continues to serve that will" (Brodsley, p. 36).

The automobile, for millions of Americans, is *the way* to get around. It is the dominant cultural phenomenon and cultural experience. The highway is a coherent state of being and a way of life. One *takes* the freeway.

More than any ecology, the freeway is a private space.

 Photo by Author, 2007

In the article *Tunnelling*, Paul Andreu (1998) states that the tunnelling effect of our freeways destroys spatial continuity (p.59). Consequently, the world we experience is broken into bits and pieces. The context of the urban freeway is experienced through automotive corridors. An urban environment of distinct points is replaced by a set of freeway defined vector relationships. The significant places to these freeway vectors indicate the time and distance traveled in a daily commute, therefore integrated into a meaningful context. In other words, a new sense of place is achieved, routed in daily experience by disembodied place names indicating the commuters orientation in the landscape. The fact that the commuter has not visited these places is inconsequential; the mobile freeway user brings them back into meaningful context.

Interstate 5 north leading out of Seattle. Photo by Author, 2007

Freeway driving can be a detached involvement. Often, the driver is not focused on driving. Freeway time, for some, is scheduled time to do nothing. It can be a form of urban meditation. It is amazing how much people can get done while driving on the freeway. “Hands free” mobile phone technology has allowed people to keep two hands on the wheel, but then there are the people who change clothes, put on make-up or eat a meal while driving. In our increasingly busy lives, the time spent on the freeway can be scheduled. The automobile interior is a private environment and the freeway becomes a private space in public space. No one really acknowledges other drivers even though they are so close, and traveling dangerously fast.

More than any ecology, the freeway is a private space.

photo by Author, 2006.

Residual Space

Every North American city has overlooked, lost, underused, overused, derelict, trashed, wasted, residual space. What are these spaces? Most importantly, how did these spaces come to be? Are they junk? Are they the result of "urban flotsam", a product of industrialization, urbanity or masked development? No, I believe they are potentially good, productive places, places for someone to reconsider, reclaim, and recreate.

In the urban domain, residual space can be created deliberately or inadvertently through the operation of land development. Often we are blind to these types of spaces because they do not register as anything other than a gap in the landscape when viewed from a speeding automobile. Often we cannot see them because they are part of the urban condition we have unconsciously accepted. But what do these neglected areas mean for people who live with, near, or in them?

In *Finding Lost Space*, Roger Trancik (1986) defines residual space as:

"The unstructured landscape of surface parking lots, deteriorated parks and the un-maintained no-man's-land along the edges of freeways. They are undesirable places that make no positive contribution to the surrounding urban context. They are ill-defined without measurable boarders." (p.3)

Of all the possible causes of residual space, the increased dependence on the automobile and the functionalist movement in architecture are causes which resonate in the history of 20th century urban design.

The automobile has accomodated and accelerated the American way of life. The mass production of the automobile and the decision to design our cities for them has resulted in an urban environment where highways, thoroughfares, and parking lots are the dominating forms of open space.

However, vehicles contribute very little to cultural meaning and human purpose in the urban environment. The linear street designed for pedestrian use was slowly replaced and dominated by the automobile's functional requirements during the mid to late 20th Century. Lost is the connection between the building and the pedestrian. Instead, vast parking lots border buildings where public squares used to be. The city street became 'the strip'.

In *Seattle, Past to Present*, Roger Sale (1976) comments that "the automobile, the ranch style house, shopping centres, vast open parking lots, drive-ins and real estate agencies all took hold of the American Psyche in the years after WWII. After the long Depression (1930s) and the War (1940s), growth could have been expected, but Sale argues that "seldom had growth been as mindless or montonous, seldom had so many people cared less about the value of money" (p. 140).

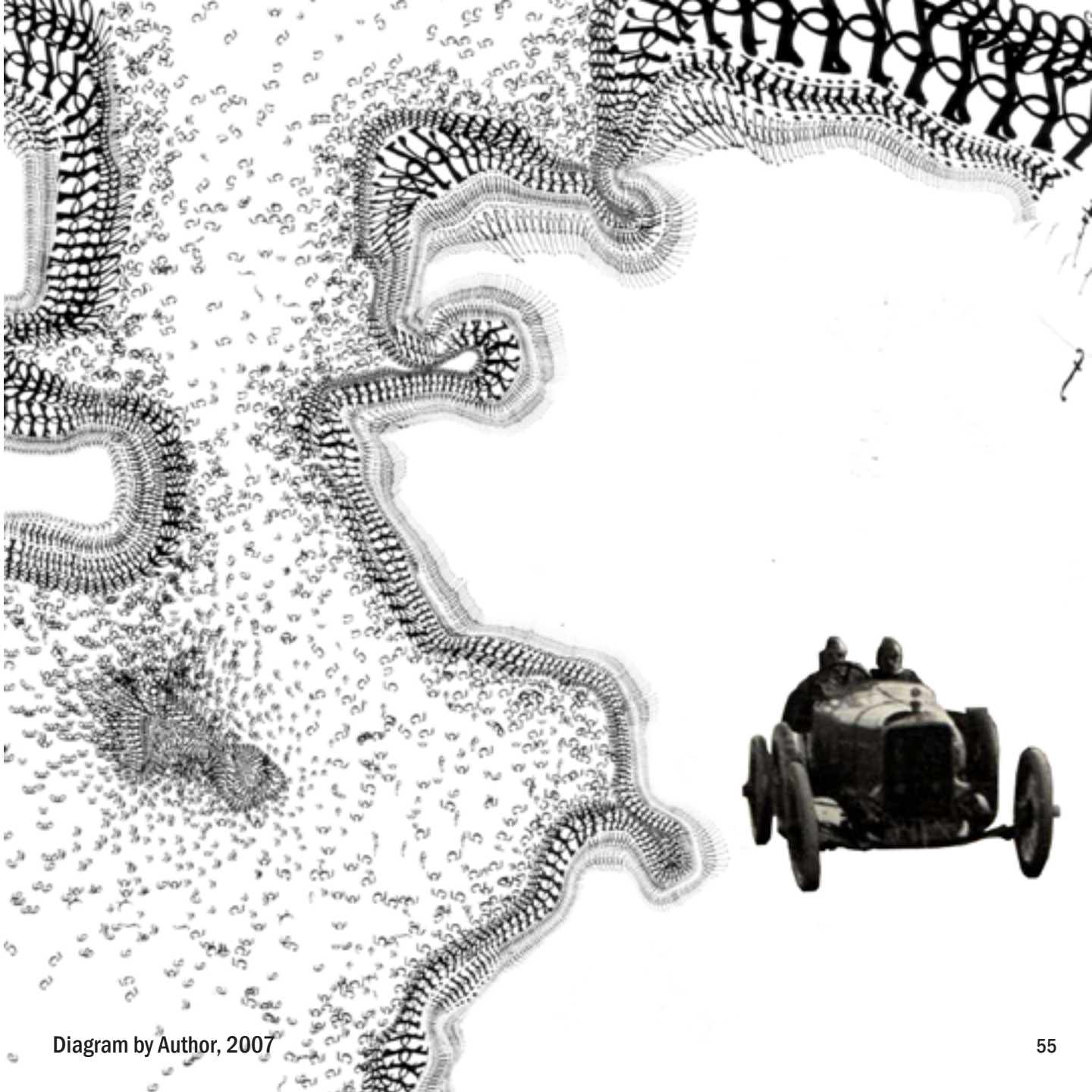


Diagram by Author, 2007

The structure of Seattle's urban space has been profoundly influenced by the Functionalist movement of the 20th Century. The functionalist program was based on the ideals of pure forms and unbounded, democratic, or flowing space (Trancik, p.21). The prevailing attitude of the Functionalist Movement was to start from a "clean slate", which meant ignoring regionalism and environmental identity. Individual buildings, vast parking lots and elevated highways all developed as a result of the popular acceptance of Functionalism (Trancik, 1986). Public open space was designed for utilitarian function, allowing people to get from point A to point B with little regard for the experience in between.

The emphasis on the individual object, at the expense of the space around it, did not suit the landscape of hills, ridges and lakes in Seattle. The demand for skyscrapers, a vastly expanded system of highways and a continued reliance on the automobile led to the marriage of form and technology.

One of the major contributors in the development of 20th century space in the United States was the architect Le Corbusier. The vertical separation of movement systems reflected Le Corbusier's fascination with highways and the city of the future. His utopian cities were vast and park-like, ideal for the flow of air and light, and intended to relieve citizens from the evils of the dense urban core. Trancik argues that when translated into physical form, the result was reversed. "Rather than yielding a green park-like setting, it produced a central city that was a wasteland; cities, pockmarked with the results of scavenger development, appeared more like bombed out ruins than images of a twentieth century utopia" (p.27).

The functionalist grid has a long history in the North American landscape. The territory west of Manitoba and the American Mid-West was laid out on a consistent grid pattern of 36 sq. mile parcels subdivided into townships. The lines of the grid became the freeway super-structures that we know today. The grid was successful in connecting and separating elements and uses, while the system could be left open-ended to allow for future growth. The functionalist grid is what we understand the American landscape to be; low density with a strong auto orientation resulting in a suburban quality. The stamp-like mechanical ordering system was applied to city plans throughout North America regardless of topography. The right angles of the grid system afforded cheaper, faster and easier construction. However, the application of the grid to cities like San Francisco and Seattle led to the creation of pie-shaped geometric spaces resulting in residual spaces. The horizontal geometry did not function in the same manner with dramatic topography. Significant adjustments are needed to make the grid work in Seattle. The rectilinear system of streets are not efficient, not as appropriate as in the flat landscape of American Mid-West.

Diagram by Author, 2007

Photo by Author, 2007

The essence of place theory in spatial design lies in understanding the cultural and human characteristics of physical space. Space can only become place when it is given a meaning. Often this meaning derives from a cultural or regional context. Often it is found in creative sculptural entry statements visible while traveling along highways, such Gladstone, Manitoba's "Happy Rock."

Each place is unique, adopting the characteristics of its surroundings, its vernacular symbols. The character of a place consists of both concrete material and intangible cultural associations. Cultural associations are the characteristics given to a landscape by repeated human use over time. For example, the unique presence of the industrial structures in Richard Haag's Gas Works Park in Seattle conveys the environment it grew out of, encompasses and exists within.

People need a system of places in which to grow and develop both socially and culturally. The needs of people transform places by adding an emotional content. The Burnside skate park in Portland, Oregon is an example of a type of successful creative community reclamation of a residual space under freeways.

Photo by Author, 2007

The Burnside skate park was built by skateboarders without permission. The park is located under the Burnside Bridge on the east side of the Willamette River underneath the I-5 freeway. During the American economic recession of the late1980s, the city of Portland's homeless population found shelter under the bridge. The space was also home to a growing population of squatters, drug attics, and prostitutes. Several members of the Portland skateboarding community pulled together their resources and limited funds and began quietly building a skate park in the derelict lot. No skate park existed in Portland at the time, and skateboarding was an illegal activity. Under the watchful eye of local business owners and the police, the skateboarders slowly constructed and poured concrete forms. The growing number of skateboarders in the space began to discourage the squatters. In 1992, the city passed the legislation to recognise Burnside as a public skate park. It set the precedent for community built skate parks across North America.

Photos of Burnside Skate Park taken by Author, 2007

Landscape architecture needs to respond to and, if possible, enhance environmental identity and the sense of place. The urban designer is given the challenge of discovering the best fit between the physical and cultural context and the needs and aspirations of contemporary users. Quite often, the best fit or the most successful design is the one that "stems from minimal interference in physical and social settings instead of a radical transformation" (Trancik, p.114). This approach aims to discover the intrinsic qualities of a location, and is often referred to as an ecological approach. This differs greatly from the early modernist approach to object making and impositions on the land.

In the article *The Swiss Way* Georges Descombes (1999) describes how he seeks to give landscapes a deeper sense of meaning through the design of carefully targeted interventions. The focus of these projects is to amplify the character of the site and its inherent qualities of place. Descombes does not add anything to intervention sites but rather accentuates and clarifies what already exists in his attempts "to begin something that was already there" (p. 153).

Descombes' subtle inscriptions or manipulations of the landscape produces an opportunity to recover innate aspects of place that often go unnoticed because they are forgotten or taken for granted. Reflecting on the beautiful, yet ordinary, elements of the exterior environment is not an oversimplification but rather a recognition of what is essential to us in our daily lives.

To create truly contextual places, designers must explore local histories, the needs of the locals or given populace, the local materiality, and deal with the local politics and economics. A designer needs to determine what the space wants to be within the existing setting. Designing to create places rather than to fill space requires symbols and fragments of history, the element of time, layers and layers of the existing made evident to the user as though it was never seen before.

Twentieth century urban development has treated buildings as isolated objects sited in the landscape, instead of a part of the larger fabric of streets, squares, and viable open space. Many cities have been designed without an understanding of three dimensional spatial relationships between buildings and spaces and even worse, without an understanding of human behaviour. The result is an environment that is unshaped. The “master plan” is simply a loose guide and is often reduced to the practice of arranging objects in the landscape. Deeper considerations of the patterns of use or the meaning of space surrounding objects are necessary.

Spatial designers should not seek to control the outcome of a design by completing every detail. It is as important to allow for user manipulation. Trancik, (1986) concludes,

Let no one pretend the quality of place will arise from zoning or master planning by themselves. Part of the presence of any good place is the feeling we have of it embodying and being surrounded by a field of its own sort of space within its special limits and potentials. (p.115).

The nomadic city lives in osmosis with the settled city, feeding on its refuse and offering, in exchange, its presence as a new nature, a forgotten future spontaneously produced by the entropy of the city. (Careri, 2002 p. 189)

Chapter 3

WanderLust

wanderlust / n. an eagerness for travelling or wandering [German]
Canadian Oxford Dictionary p. 1635

This practicum proposes to link together the journey of traversal through the design of an urban trail system that connects existing green spaces and reclaims a residual space along Seattle's I-5 freeway. Only through the intersection of the journey and the path can the act of traversal be linked to experience in a more meaningful way. Here a new type of zonzo tourism, or situated wandering, is overlaid to discover the residual urban landscape.

68 Photos by Author, 2007

On the periphery of urban North American freeways exists an enormous amount of empty residual space. In Walkscapes, Francisco Careri (2002) calls these spaces “urban voids”. These empty spaces are a fundamental part of the urban system that are often forgotten.

Cities that grew rapidly beyond their peripheries during the mid-twentieth century formed a series of detached suburban islands that resulted in an “archipelago” pattern. As the islands of the archipelago grew, they were transformed into independent centres. Holes of various scales between the islands were created. Thread like connector roads and freeways radiated from the islands’ centres and created urban voids parallel to these connections. Voids joined voids and suddenly a chain of navigable open space in an urban context was formed.

The voids of the archipelago represent a continuous place in which to wander in the urban domain. These empty cavities are a public space with a nomadic character that grows rapidly and alludes urban planners. By plunging into the systems of voids or ‘urban corridors’, we find that what we have grown accustomed to calling empty really is not empty at all.

Seattle consists of 2,500 acres of urban greenbelts, many of which are in close proximity to Seattle freeways. These spaces are not suited for residential or commercial construction because of there extreme slopes and the possibility of

landslides. They exist as environmental protection areas, noise and air pollution buffers, urban wildlife corridors and habitat for many species. The sharp boundary that divides wildlife and humans, know as the ecotone, is drawn through patches of Seattle's urban greenbelts. As a result of these areas, bear, coyote and cougar sightings are not uncommon in urban Seattle during the spring.

Many urban trail systems are designed to take trail users through various landscapes of the city. The Northern Interurban trail is an example of a former railway line converted to an urban trail in Seattle. The Interurban Rail Line was a passenger rail service that connected urban Seattle to Everett, Washington from 1900-1940. In Lowland Trails of Urban Seattle, Paul Hodge (2006) states that as the city moved outward toward the countryside, the Interurban Rail Line led through a mixed landscape of towns and farmland (p.36). By 1940, the construction of roads and the introduction of reliable automobiles meant the demise of the passenger rail line. Presently, the trail leads walkers among the stark industrial buildings and the early 20th century neighbourhoods of north Seattle. The urban industrial setting periodically gives way to picturesque open woodlands and wetlands. The Northern Urban trail system is the quintessential example of the urban archipelago, a corridor of navigable open space.

Seattle’s Interurban trail weaves through both industrial and wilderness corridors

Cities such as Seattle, which possess existing green spaces, have great potential for wilderness trail design. OnRamp is the design of a series of gateways along an urban trail that links a freeway residual space to a historic system of parks and green spaces. The trail is designed to facilitate aimless wandering by overlaying a type of zonzo urban tourism.

Perceiving a new place can be as simple as opening your eyes and ears and putting one foot in front of the other. Discovering a city slowly at a walking pace without a map or an agenda is a type of urban 'DIY tourism', a zonzo tourism.

In Italian, the term *andare a zonzo* means "to waste time wandering aimlessly" (Careri, p.185). The political and aesthetic contexts of zonzo has changed throughout the 20th Century by different artistic political groups, with the city wandered by the: Flâneurs, the European avant-gardes during the 1920s, and the Lettrists after WWII. Walking through the zonzo entails following a direction from the centre to the outskirts of a city in order to reveal the layers of the urban landscape. The views and sites walkers find through the zonzo are intuitive, personal and intimate, evoking a feeling of ownership and attachment with the land.

Audio walking tours are a contemporary example of zonzo tourism. These tours are suited for a wide age demographic and allow walkers to explore at their own pace. Audio tours in Seattle allow walkers to explore sites such as an anarchist bookstore, a peep show, and a hotel basement haunted by gold miners. These tours are designed to take you to the places only a local could, the places that a tourist would not normally go, nor would a tourist usually snap a picture in these locations.

Economically depressed and banal landscapes are not typical tourist destinations. However, North American cities with histories of industry, such as Seattle, have found creative ways to present their story of dirt and dereliction.

In 1889, most of Seattle's central business district burned to the ground in 'The Great Fire'. It was decided by local government to rebuild the city one to two stories higher than the original street grade, as downtown Seattle had been built mostly on filled-in tide-lands and often flooded. Several city blocks in the region were enclosed with brick and timber barricades and the pavements between were raised. This left sidewalks and some storefronts as much as 36 feet below street level. The 'Seattle Underground' is a guided walking tour that has become somewhat of an institution in the Seattle tourism industry. The tour takes tourists below the sidewalks of the Pioneer Square area of downtown Seattle. Over the years, the tour has become more popular, and the underground structures have been steadily refurbished to be more 'visually appealing'. The tour remains a popular attraction for visitors and locals alike. Despite its popularity, many tourists who have taken part say that the Underground Tour is an overrated and boring experience, and they would rather look around themselves than follow tour guides.

Underground tour, showing sidewalk above, Author 2007.

The Centre For Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) has also found creative ways to present the story of dirt and dereliction. The California based artist collective runs a research organization that explores and examines how land is used and appropriated in the United States. The Center produces public exhibits on land use themes and issues for galleries and museums, as well the group conducts guided tours for public and private groups.

The Tourist destinations are atypical by contemporary tourist standards. Old industrial manufacturing sites, ghost towns and open-pit mines are a few of the banal sites they visit. The CLUI can be viewed as curators of the American landscape. The tours treat the contemporary landscape as a kind of museum, “a repository containing some of the material culture of our time” (CLUI, 2006 p.31). They help people explore and experience the landscape directly to explain the mundane and extraordinary conditions our culture finds itself in. The Centre’s approach is benignly subversive; the tourists sites are viewed through a lens we normally reserve for evaluating another. For example, by treating a nuclear test site in the same manner as an outdoor sculpture, we are prompted to reconsider the radioactive site for its aesthetic value. This subtle shift is needed in order to view urban residual spaces through a different perspective.

Reclaiming residual spaces in the urban landscape can be achieved in more creative ways. Reclaim the Beach is an organised and spontaneous ephemeral beach party that arises on the London Thames River during low-tide. It is not an organisation or a group, but an idea or a tactic used in the reclamation of urban space. Similarly, flash mobs are a social experiment where groups of people suddenly materialize in public places, perform some silly scripted activity, and then disperse as suddenly as they appeared. Examples of flash mobs include: converging on a large public square to engage in a mass pillow fight or gathering in a crowded hotel lobby to carry out a random 15 second applause. Besides being an arbitrary social experiment, they can be seen as a creative way of reclaiming space, albeit for a short time.

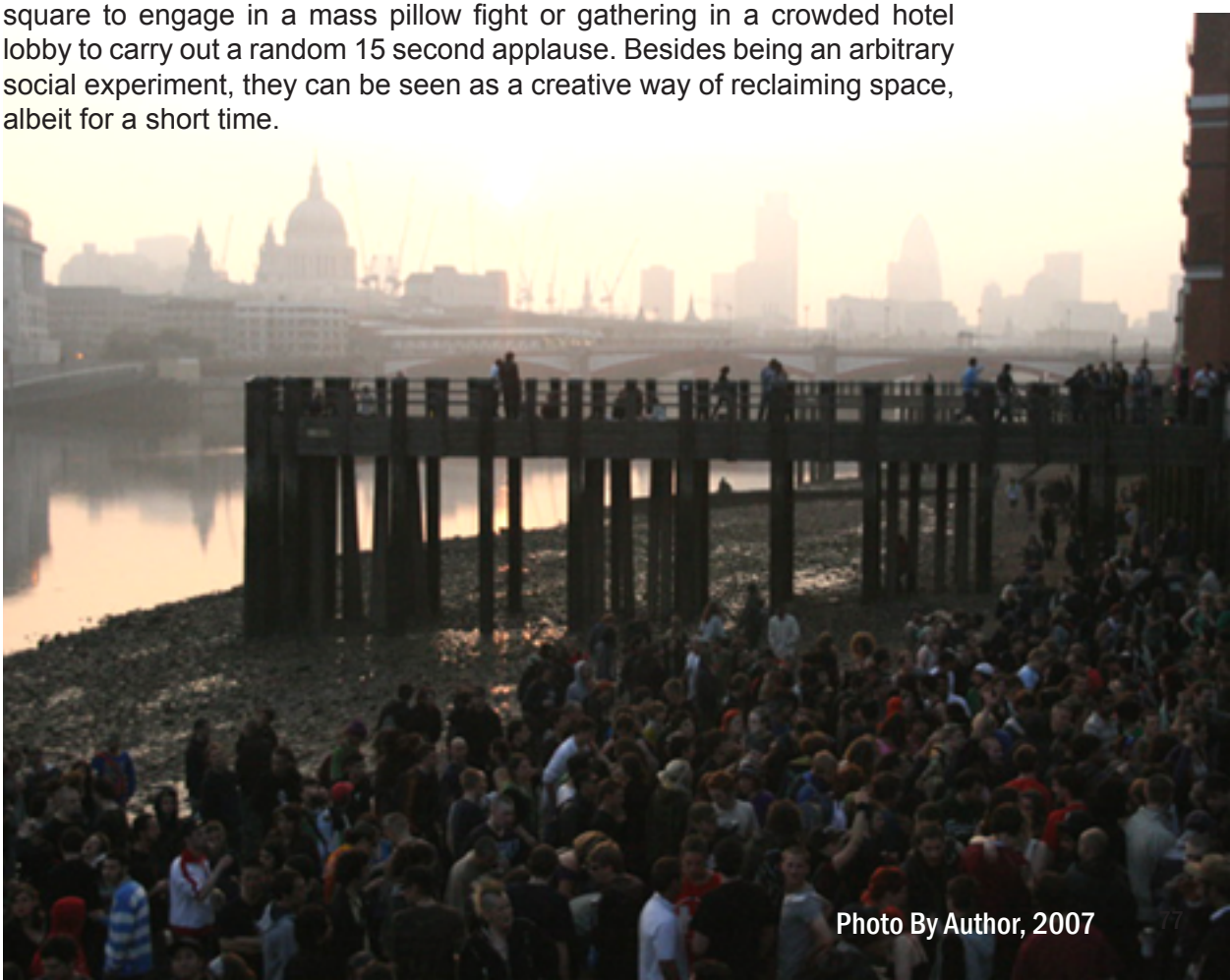


Photo By Author, 2007

OnRamp is a design that reclaims a residual space along Seattle's I-5 freeway. By traversing urban residual space, derelict landscapes are brought into the urban context in a form that contributes to a meaningful sense of place. Through critical mass urban residual spaces can be reclaimed.

Freeway Vernacular

Hyper-reality is when constructs become places (Lucy Lippard p.136.)

This practicum design connects a series of existing green spaces in the Capitol Hill and Eastlake localities of Seattle, Washington through the design of an urban trail that weaves through a residual space along Seattles' I-5 freeway. Vernacular elements of freeways will be incorporated into the urban trail to allow visitors and locals to formulate an understanding of freeways and residual space from both a driver and a pedestrian perspective.

In *Off The Beaten Track*, Lucy Lippard (1999) argues that during the 1940s and 50s, many of the first State highways were designed as parkways or drives at a time when the automobile was new and slow (p.140). As the construction of freeways improved and the speed of modern transportation increased during the 20th century, public access to scenic byways, National Parks and scenic overlooks augmented as well.

The National Scenic Byways Program is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highways Administration. The program was established in 1992 to reveal and preserve the depth and breadth of scenery in the American landscape. It is a grass-roots collaborative effort to preserve natural resources but maintain and improve selected roads throughout the United States. Scenic byways are promoted by the National Parks Service and the National Scenic Byways Program as “landscapes that lead to a disappearing world revealing a culture that has otherwise passed away”. (www.byways.org/learn)

Stan Abbott, the architect of the Blue Ridge Parkway, designed a motorists’ landscape that doubled as a mountain reclamation and a revealing roadside-as-art museum. The 469 mile parkway follows a portion of the Appalachian Mountains. The byway provides views of parallel ranges, scenic overlooks of hills and valleys. Some of the most spectacular views are from the highway itself. The Blue Ridge Highway was the first and largest rural parkway in the United States (http:www.blueridgeparkway.org). As a result of the precedent setting design, the word ‘parkway’ has become a euphemism, sixty years later, for all highways including the purely functional and homogeneous urban freeway landscape.

The National Parks system in the United States comprises 390 areas covering more than 84 million acres in 49 states (http:www.nps.gov). The Parks were established in 1872 as public pleasure grounds, because they were intended to be works of art. Visitors accessed the National Parks via horse, mule and wagon carriage. Lucy Lippard states that by the 1930s, “the automobile had refocused the movement of tourists and travelers to specific resorts, opening up a more generalised and populist notion of travel”(p. 136). The face of the National Park changed dramatically because of this societal shift toward automobile dependence. While the parks image progressed, the accommodations regressed from luxurious Victorian hotels, to motels, and finally to RV trailers.

Today, National Parks share the same problems as any North American Urban Centre: pollution, smog, crime, vandalism, and parking. The National Parks are landscapes of nostalgia, so much so that on a typical summer day, thousands of cars enter North American National Parks to compete for hundreds of parking spots. The changing appearance of National Parks indicates a faltering of the old concept of parks-as-art while the automobile has perpetuated the concept of parks-as-playgrounds, the place where the masses experience and eventually alter nature.

Scenic overlooks introduced, to the 20th Century North American motorist, a type of scale often too grand to comprehend. They are even less comprehendible in the form of a photo. The view of sublime landscapes, such as mountains, open prairie, gorges, canyons and seascapes, cannot be captured or taken. The photos become surrogates for lived experience, as they rarely live up to our expectations. After 60 years of scenic overlooks, the best view is still seen through the scratched-up view finder.

The overlook is about the practice of seeing. Not seeing what is here but what is there. The overlook is not a place. It is rather, a point at which to look at another place.


Islanders
Bar & Grill
AYCE
FISH AND CHIPS

Pages 84-89, Photos by Author, 2007

I do not know of any place where the natural advantages for parks are better than here. They can be made very attractive and will be in time one of the things that will make Seattle known all over the world.

John Charles Olmsted.
(http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=3290)

Chapter 4

Walk the Line

This practicum project links a series of existing green spaces near Seattle's I-5 freeway through the design of an urban trail. The majority of the exploration has been carried out through two modes of traversal, walking and driving. These explorations have been grounded in a thorough historical analysis then graphically represented through sketches, photographic documentation, collage, and mapping.

Walking has been the means for site exploration and analysis throughout the practicum process. By repeatedly walking a line from our apartment building on East Harrison Street in Capitol Hill to my wife's office in the neighbourhood of Eastlake, I performed a symbolic and aesthetic action, which has, through the course of this project, amplified the layers of cultural meaning and revealed qualities of place.

Driving on freeways was used as a method of perceiving the landscape that juxtaposed and illuminated the action of walking. The phenomenology of freeway transportation bare marked similarities to that of viewing moving television and film images. TV and film are generally viewed in a stationary position, in a domestic environment or darkened cinema, with images flickering before the viewer's eyes. Similarly, in the case of a moving vehicle, the driver appears stationary while scenery scrolls past at 24 frames per second or 100 mph. Understanding the urban landscape from the freeway perspective has been essential in identifying the design intention and overall concept of this project.

A historical analysis of Seattle and the Seattle parks system has been fundamental in propelling the practicum design interventions. The objective of designing a continuous green space between the Capitol Hill and Eastlake districts of Seattle, reflects the Olmsted Brothers' Master Plan for Seattle parks and open space.

In 1903, the Olmsted brothers designed a 20 mile 'green necklace' of parks and open space that linked most of Seattle's existing planned parks and greenbelts. The necklace extended from the southwest tip of Lake Washington to Green Lake in North Seattle. The park system provided a crucial amenity to the many isolated cottage-like-communities along Lake Washington. The design programmed scenic overlooks, boulevards, lawns, parkways and trails through Seattle's rustic terrain. By the 1920s, Seattle had become a city of beautiful vistas.

Understanding the evolution of Seattle's landscape has been important to the site analysis and inventory work in this project. Seattle's urban landscape changed dramatically from the late 19th to the mid-20th Century, as the city grew in spite of the fact that it was faced with restrictive topography.

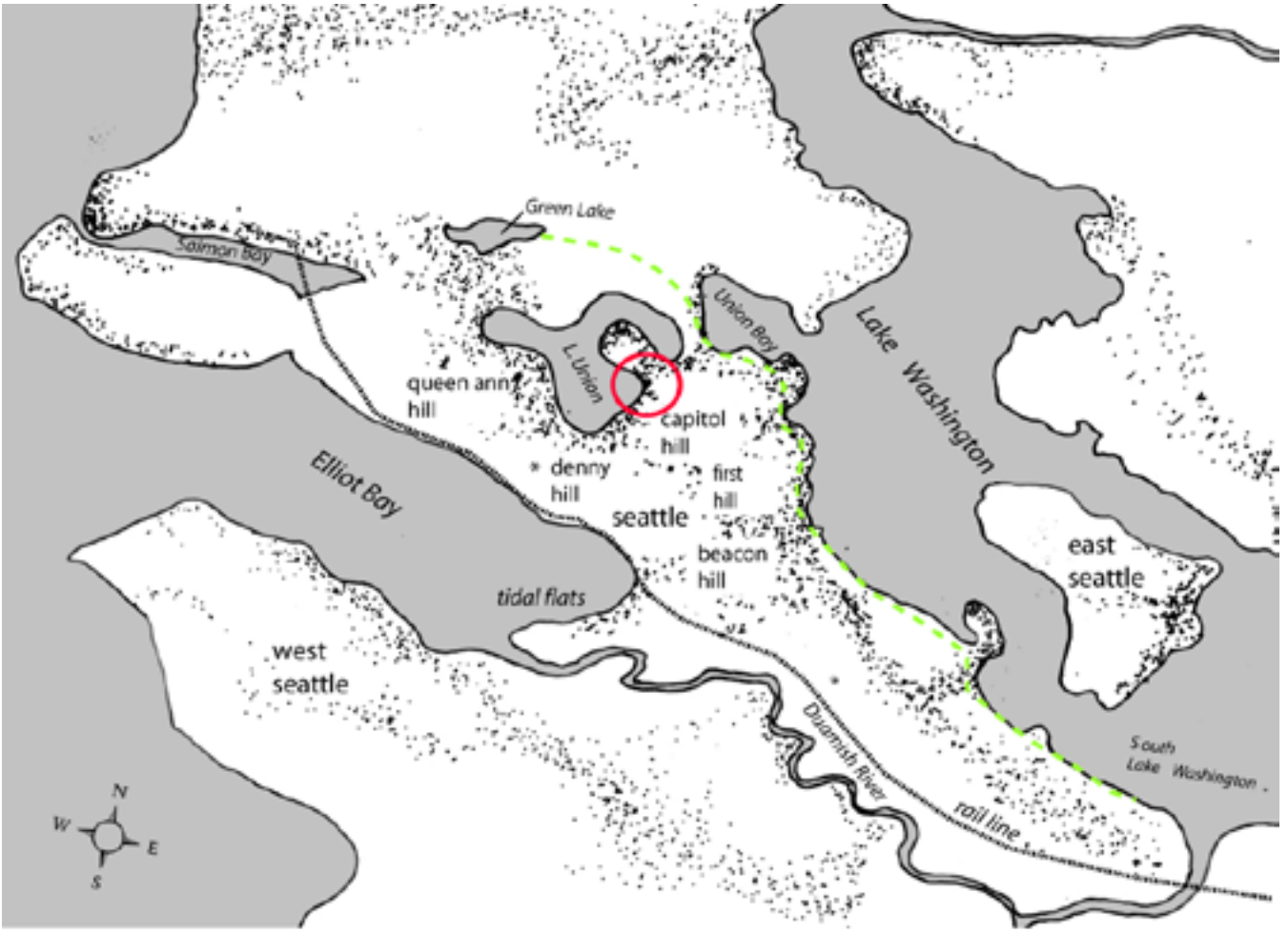
In the late 19th century, the city of Seattle did not stretch past its modern downtown borders because the city was surrounded and bounded by hills, including: Denny Hill to the northwest, Capitol Hill to the northeast, and Beacon Hill and First Hill to the southeast (see Seattle Map, 1874). These natural boundaries created problems for the city's growth potential and commuter transportation. Consequently, the civic authorities decided that it was easier to move a hill than to move people. Starting in the late 19th century and continuing into the early 20th century, the city undertook a complicated and expensive engineering project to fully regrade Denny Hill and significantly alter Beacon Hill and First Hill. The cut material from all three hills was dumped into the tidal flats of Elliot Bay and into South Lake Union, dramatically altering the landscape. The 'Denny Regrade' later allowed the I-5 freeway to be constructed close to the city's central business district and permitted commuter accessibility within downtown.

The St. Mark's Greenbelt site once extended to the edge of Lake Union, leaving the space around the I-5 freeway as a remnant riparian zone. Filling the South Lake Union area allowed an industrial port to develop along the lake. Prior to the freeway construction, there was a smooth exchange of residential streets between

the districts of Capitol Hill and Eastlake. Franklin Avenue East, Belmont Place East, and Boylston Avenue East all extended through to Eastlake. The freeway was constructed through this neighbourhood during the early 1950s, dislocating thousands of residents and breaking apart local streets and access ways.

Seattle's I-5 freeway was built during the Post WWII era, when shopping malls, drive-inns and freeways were being built at an unprecedented rate. Not much care or consideration was given to the design of houses, streets or stores, as the primary focus was on constructing homogeneous residential and commercial spaces. It is with this spirit that Seattle entered the second half of the Twentieth Century and began to increasingly move toward a dependence on the automobile as the primary means of urban transportation.

Seattle has a long history of problems with commuter transportation, as evidenced by the present state of the crumbling Interstate 99 Viaduct and the infamous Monorail. The city's Department Head of Engineering and Planning, Virgil Bogue, who had worked with the Olmsted brothers in the design of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York, initially addressed the problem of urban transportation. His early recommendation was to implement a commuter rail system, which tunnelled under Lake Union and Lake Washington, to service future residential districts. What Bogue and his department of city planners could not foresee in 1908 was the future of the mass-produced automobile and the public's willingness to spend thirty minutes to two hours twice a day getting to and from work. However, Bogue was correct in foreseeing that the problem of Seattle's commuter transportation would become progressively more difficult as the population increased (Sale, 1976 p.98). The failure to heed the advice is regarded by Roger Sale as one of Seattle's great missed opportunities.



Seattle Map 1874

Diagram indicating Seattle landscape in 1874 prior to the 'Denny Regrade'. The green dashed line shows the Olmsted Brother's future 'green necklace' along Lake Washington.

Eastlake / Capitol Hill Connection

Diagram showing the residential structure prior to the construction of the I-5 freeway.

The meaning of Zonzo is to touch upon the different strata of the land, to cross through layers, to form an experience from walking a line from the centre to the periphery, from the inside to the outside in hopes of stumbling upon a rarefied place (Careri, 2002 p.185). Entering the site systematically drifting on Zonzo is an immersion in the landscape. One enters the landscape's flux, encountering emergent phenomena and vernacular symbols. Zonzo is a useful method for the interpretation and transformation of landscape. Walking on Zonzo is an act that reveals the landscapes' specificities and complexities.

Zonzo differs greatly from other walk-as-art practices. Dérive, practiced by the Surrealists, and Situationists (SI) in Central Europe during the1950s, was born out of Zonzo (p.186). The Dadaists that preceded the SI came to realize that the touristy characteristics of Zonzo revealed a banal cultural void in the urban landscape. Through this void the repressed territories of the unconscious city could be discovered (p.187). The SI, who sought the absence of control, eventually shunned the linear path of Zonzo because they claimed it produced extraneous places. The Dérive was an exploration of the human psyche, evident through the SI's psycho-geographic mapping. New Babylon, the city of Constant, was meant to be just the opposite of the sedentary nature of Zonzo, a city in permanent transit (p.188)

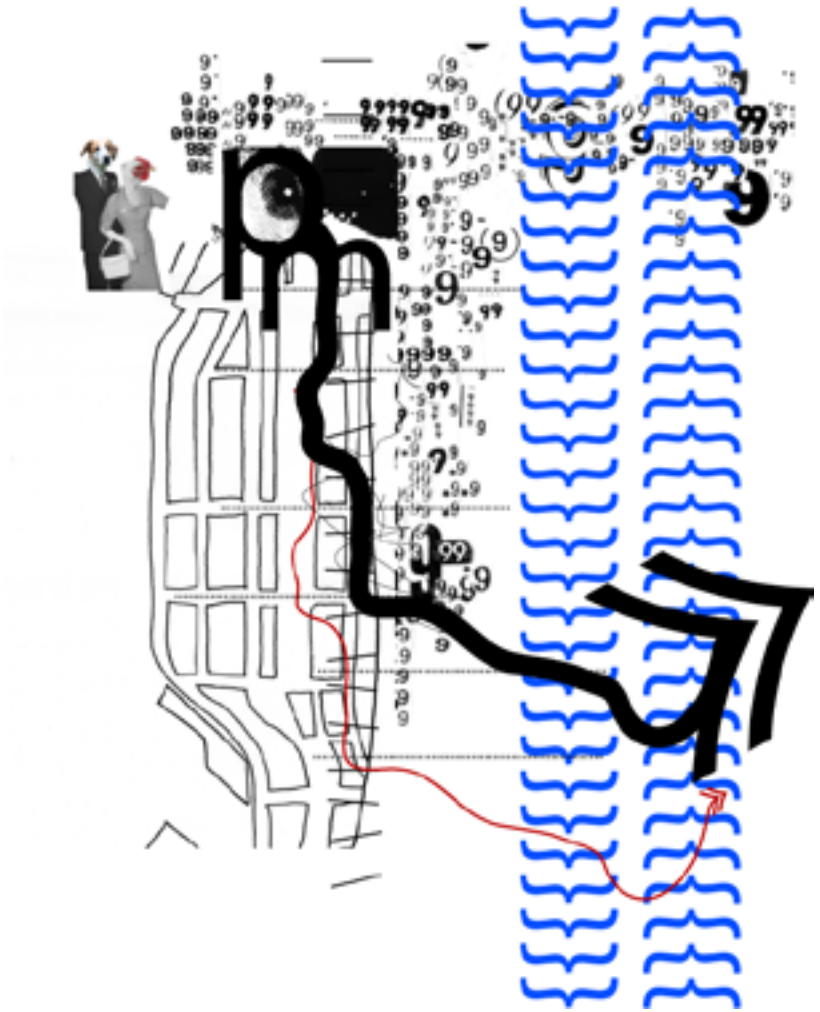
The critical stance of the Flâneur precedes both the SI and Dada's interpretation of Zonzo. The term "Flâneur" comes from the French verb *flâner*, "to stroll". Flâneur, like Zonzo, is about walking the city in order to experience it; to experience it by getting back to the everyday level of the street. Flâneur is an ethnographic approach that seeks to uncover the impulses, aspirations, and meanings motivated by social interaction in the city by drawing attention to the experience tourists gain outside their comfort of locality. The method looks at the different ways in which groups of people read the city. The term was initially a description reserved for Parisians, but it is now applied more generally to any kind of pedestrian environment that accommodates leisurely exploration of city streets, in particular commercial avenues where inhabitants of different classes mix.

Walking

In the act of walking, the greatest obstacle is the communication of the experience in aesthetic form. Mapping a walk is a transfer of action into cartography. The Dadaists, Surrealists, and Situationists, as well as the artists Robert Fulton and Richard Long represented their walks by some method of mapping. For these artists, both the path and the act of walking was the art form. In this practicum project, the representation of the path (trail) is achieved through cartographic collage that explores the experience of traversal. The following collages are mappings of the experience of walking and driving.

1

Cartographic collages1-2 represent the experience of walking from Capitol Hill to Eastlake (vice versa).

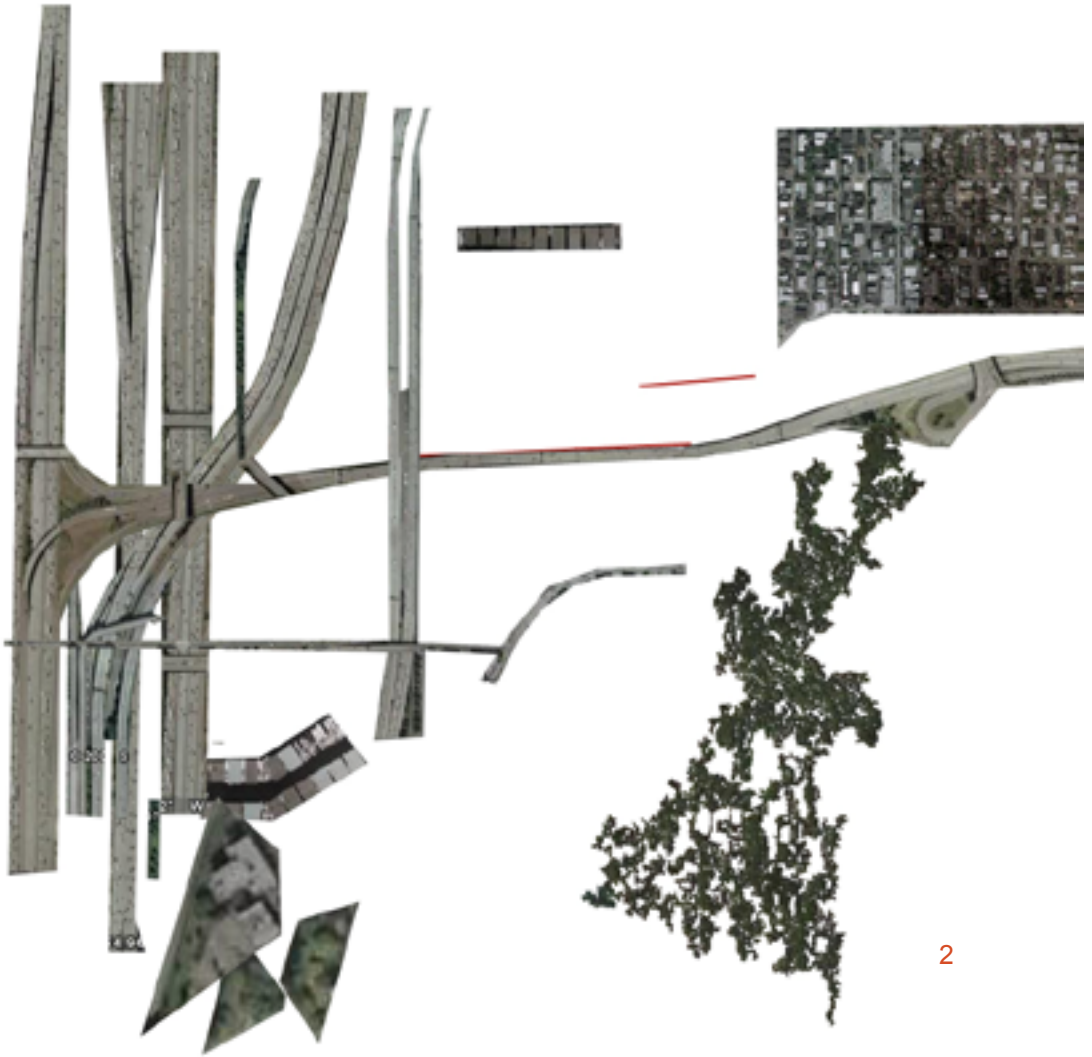


2

Driving

In the act of driving, time and distance are experienced at a scale which contrasts the action of walking. The occupant viewer from an automobile spatialises the metropolitan landscape by sky scrapers, horizon lines and sound barrier walls, all of which are beyond human comprehension at a pedestrian scale. The cacophony of the freeway environment is no different than the experience of being in an airplane, where time and distance are segmented. Neighborhoods are by-passed without recognition from the freeway. The distance traveled over a short period of time can take drivers tens or hundreds of miles away from their destination points without the driver realizing. Getting lost on a freeway is easy because drivers are in a state of constant motion, guided only by the on and off ramp exits which reconnect them to the ordinary pace of the urban landscape. Cartographic collages 1-3 represent the experience of driving on Seattle's Freeways.

1



2

3

SITE CONTEXT

Context map reveals parks and open space that was part of the Olmsted Brother's Master Plan in 1903 (shown in light green).

Sites

Seattle life is about connections to and relationships with bodies of water and green space. A regional and meso scale inventory and analysis revealed a number of green spaces in urban Seattle that are part of the original Olmsted Master Plan. The design of an urban trail links these sites and their surrounding areas. The trail stems from the freeway bringing the land back into the historic system of parks and addressing the meaning of the freeway in Seattle's contemporary urban landscape.

The site analysis for this project incorporates site vernacular, historical context, human needs and the essential qualities of place to determine the following design intervention points in the Capitol Hill and Eastlake neighbourhoods:

Volunteer Park Conservatory, 2007.

Volunteer Park

Volunteer Park, once called “City Park”, has been a great asset to the community of Capitol Hill since it opened in 1892. The Olmsted Brothers’ design was intended to take advantage of the views of water, mountains and woodlands. Volunteer Park is considered an attractive destination point for tourists and local residents. It is composed of striking views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains, a Victorian period conservatory and the Seattle Asian Art Museum. The proximity of this historic park to the St.Mark’s Greenbelt site presents an opportunity to link together the regional green spaces in order to create a continuous space in which to wander.

View from Volunteer Park, 2007.

Corner of Highland Street and Broadway Ave. E , 2007.

Capitol Hill Ravine / Highland Street

The Capitol Hill Ravine, in the St.Mark's Greenbelt, is a 150 ft. ravine composed of a forested woodland, lush native vegetation, and natural storm water drainage. Parallel to the ravine at the corner of Harvard Avenue and Highland Street, there is a vacant block of land where a condo development is planned to be built. This is an opportunity to establish a more meaningful link between Volunteer Park to the east with the Capitol Hill Ravine through a gateway design in the vacant site.

Winter in the Capitol Hill Ravine , 2007.

St. Mark's Greenbelt / Capitol Hill Ravine , 2007.

St. Marks Greenbelt

The St.Mark's Greenbelt is a six-acre native forest preserve on the northwest slope of Seattle's Capitol Hill. The greenbelt is a green buffer for noise and air pollution from the I-5 freeway to the west. It extends the length of ten city blocks and serves as a significant barrier for those who wish to access the community of Eastlake to the northwest. The two main access ways are the Blaine Street Public Stairway to the north and Belmont Street to the south.

The opportunity to utilize the greenbelt for its picturesque panoramic views does not currently exist. The design solution should make the greenbelt more accessible to pedestrians, tourists, and locals. However, the site is not a safe destination. Its treacherous slopes and periodic landslides make the site inaccessible to trail users for most of the year. The challenge lies in mitigating the issues of safety with a functional and aesthetic need to utilize the greenbelt for its picturesque views of downtown Seattle, the Olympic mountains, Lake Union, and Puget Sound.

St. Mark's Greenbelt, St. Mark's Catherdral, industrial Lake Union and the I-5 freeway , 2007.

Streissguth Gardens, February , 2007.

Streissguth Public Gardens

The Streissguth Gardens is a family maintained garden located on the northwest side of Seattle's Capitol Hill, immediately south of the Blaine Street Public Stairway, between Broadway and 10th Ave E. The gardens are situated on a steep hillside that offers spectacular views of Lake Union, downtown Seattle, and the Olympic Mountains. During the 1990s, the Streissguth family donated the property to the City of Seattle for permanent preservation as a garden. If this beautiful garden were incorporated into the urban trail design, it would be an opportunity for locals and tourists to gain an appreciation of place.

Streissguth Gardens, May , 2007.

View from Blaine Street Public Stairway, February, 2007.

Blaine Street Public Stairway

The Blaine Street Public Stairway is an important pedestrian access way connecting Seattle's Capitol Hill and Eastlake communities. Fitness enthusiasts regularly traverse the 175 vertical feet or 300 stairs. Some pedestrians incorporate the stairway into their daily walking route to and from work. The stairs are located at the northern edge of the Streissguth Gardens and the St.Mark's Greenbelt, on the northwest side of Capitol Hill, perpendicular to the I-5 freeway. The freeway becomes visible to walkers on the lower segments of the stairway while the noise of the freeway is audible throughout the northwest side of Capitol Hill. The site will be utilized as a major pedestrian route in the trail design.

View from Blaine Street Public Stairway, May, 2007.

View from under 1-5 freeway, 2007.

The I-5 Colonnade

The I-5 Colonnade is a city park located underneath the I-5 freeway. It contains a public stairway, a mountain bike training area, and a dog park. The sites freeway noise and air pollution, limited sunlight, and lack of vegetation render it an undesirable destination point and traversal route. The intention of the park design was to utilize the seven acre residual space for community programs and to create a more meaningful link between the communities of Eastlake and Capitol Hill. The limited budget for the design was spent installing the universally accessible site ramps. Unfortunately, the remainder of the park looks undersigned and unfinished. The existing design is unsuccessful in its attempt to provide an enjoyable experience for both walkers traversing the site and people wishing to sit in the site. A more meaningful community link will be explored within this site.

Looking South from under 1-5 freeway, 2007.

1-5 freeway over Lake Union, 2007.

Eastlake

The emerging neighbourhood of Eastlake is a community composed of mixed industry, commercial, and residential use. The construction of the I-5 freeway during the 1950s disconnected Eastlake with the context of Seattle. The segment of land is bounded in all directions by Lake Union and the I-5, rendering it an isolated centre. Presently, the area includes few amenities and has only one small park in a state of disrepair. The community could be promoted as a desirable tourist destination in which visitors could take advantage of the unique houseboat community on Lake Union and could see the Fourth of July fire works display. Eastlake is an exceptional piece of waterfront with an ideal orientation, views, water access and proximity to downtown.

Eastlake house boat community on Lake Union, 2007.

Plan indicating gateway site locations 1, 2 and 3.

Chapter 5

OnRamp

The design intent of ‘OnRamp’ is to link a series of existing green spaces near Seattle’s I-5 freeway through the design of an urban trail. The design interventions respond to the Olmsted Brothers’ intentions to create a continuous chain of navigable open spaces that possess inspiring views of mountains, woodlands, and water. Three sites, which possess these above elements and border the St. Mark’s Greenbelt and the I-5 freeway, were chosen for development. The sites were designed as a sequence of gateways connecting the Capitol Hill and Eastlake areas of Seattle, two neighborhoods divided by the construction of the freeway.

The design concept of the trail is to propose a ‘pedestrian freeway’ in a residual space along the I-5. Each site is joined by a freeway-style on-ramp that leads the visitor through the greenbelt via an elevated pathway.

Treetop path concept collage, 2007.

Treetop Path

The treetop path through the greenbelt is composed of a series of 90 ft stainless steel horizontal sections. The delicate overhead structure contains several widened nodes that provide perches or overlooks for visitors to pause and observe the views of the Olympic Mountains, Puget Sound, downtown Seattle, Lake Union and the canopy of the forest below. The 100 ft high walkway threads through the towering dense forest of Big Leaf Maple, Horse-chestnut, and Western Red Cedar.

Treetop path concept sketch, 2007.

Vernacular Materiality

Embedded 20 inch wide yellow steel bands inspired by the lines on a freeway, stretch across the intervention sites acting as subtle way finding indicators. The bands serve a dual purpose: to distinguish the sites from the adjacent residential setting and the dense forest landscape, and to orient pedestrians as painted lines do for drivers on a freeway.

The concrete walls, which appear throughout the gateway sites, are inspired by the sound barrier walls of freeways. Historical images depicting landscape change are photo-etched images in the concrete walls throughout the sites. In addition, audio walking tour stations appear in various locations. At these stations, visitors are able to download podcasts of oral histories to listen to as they traverse the greenbelt. The tours are designed to be informative for both locals and tourists alike. The podcasts include historical accounts by local residents who were living in the region before and after the construction of the I-5 freeway.

Materials used in this design are significant to the region's vernacular palate. For example, cobblestone is used consistently throughout the design because it was the primary surface material in Seattle's early 20th century road construction. Numerous Seattle streets on significant slopes are still cobblestone. Asphalt roads in disrepair throughout the city often reveal a cobblestone base.

The signage used in the trail design is inspired by the character and scale of signage used on freeway. Powder-coated green steel sheets with white text and arrows are mounted on stainless steel poles that pop out of the forest canopy below. The signage structure also provides a perching area for the various species of songbirds whose natural habitat is the greenbelt.

Audio walking tour concept collage, 2007.

1 Highland Gateway Design

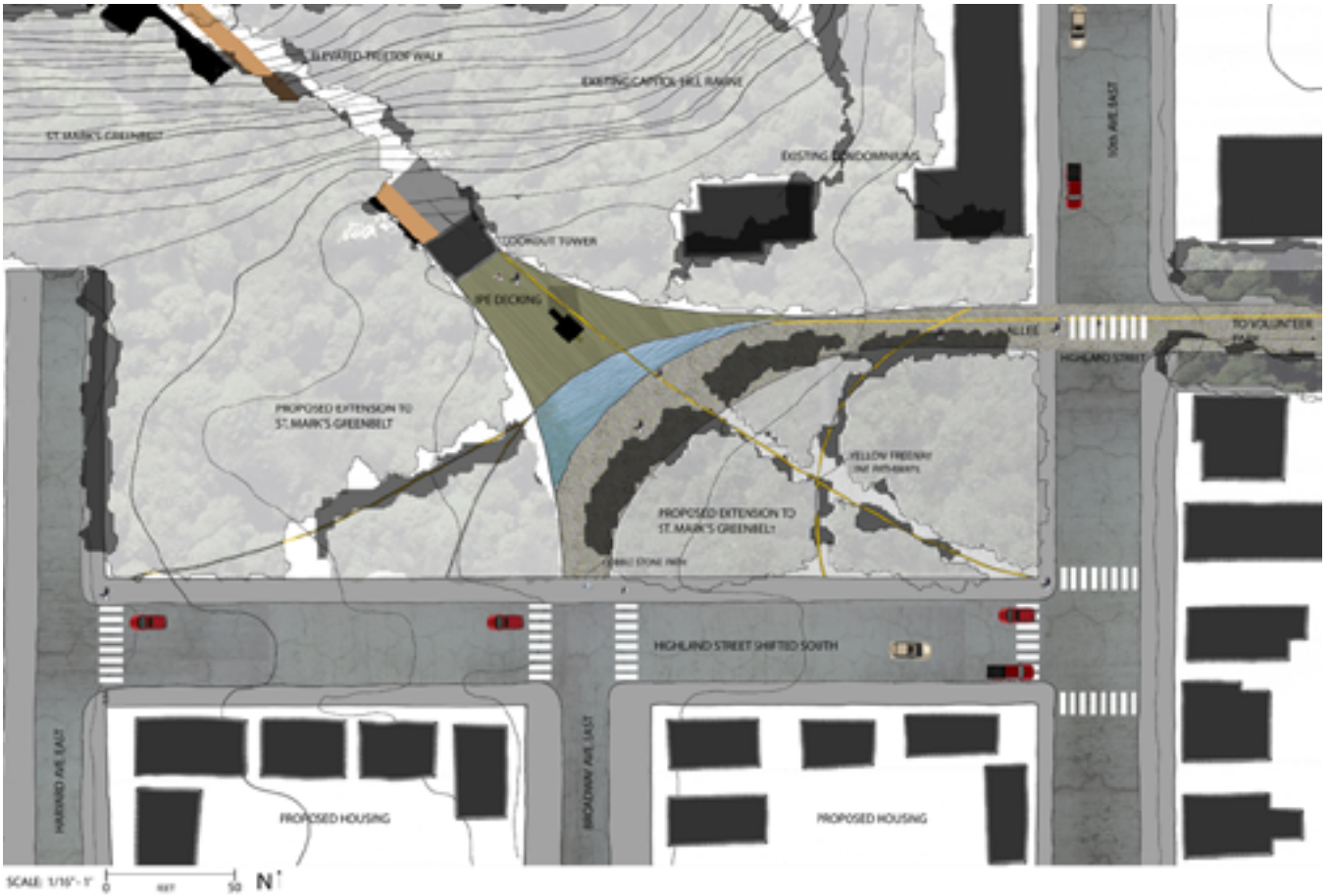
Highland Street is an east – west oriented road that meets a dead end at Volunteer Park. It is the highest southern surface elevation entry into the St.Mark's Greenbelt. The existing street is parallel to the Capitol Hill Ravine.

In this intervention, Highland Street is relocated 150 feet south of its existing location to delineate a gateway design to the greenbelt. A three story look-out tower marks the gateway of the St. Mark's Greenbelt treetop walk. The greenbelt vegetation is extended south-east into the site to provide a continuous matrix of native forest. The site design includes: a historic Seattle boardwalk inspired by the piers on Lake Union, a rushing storm water collection water feature that flows under the boardwalk into the ravine, and a cobble stone pathway that curves through the site linking Broadway Avenue East to the existing portion of Highland Street. Dry-layed granite walls mark the perimeter of the site.

The existing part of Highland Street will serve as a pedestrian avenue that connects the greenbelt gateway with Volunteer Park, a lush Olmsted style park in the heart of Capitol Hill. Embedded yellow steel bands orient the visitor toward the greenbelt entry from the south as well as from the east. An audio walking tour information kiosk is located on the boardwalk outside of the greenbelt treetop walk.

Entry to Highland Street Site, 2007.

Highland Gateway



Site Design, 2007.

Perspective collage showing entry to the St. Mark's Greenbelt, 2007.

2 Streissguth Gardens Gateway Design

The Streissguth Gardens site is at the middle elevation among the three intervention sites. The site design links the greenbelt to the public gardens and marks the fringe of the greenbelt at this elevation. The treetop walk's elevated pathway extends further at a lower elevation (see sections a and b) linking the Streissguth site with the Blaine Street Public Stairway which is the typical method of traversing under the freeway and down the dramatic topography.

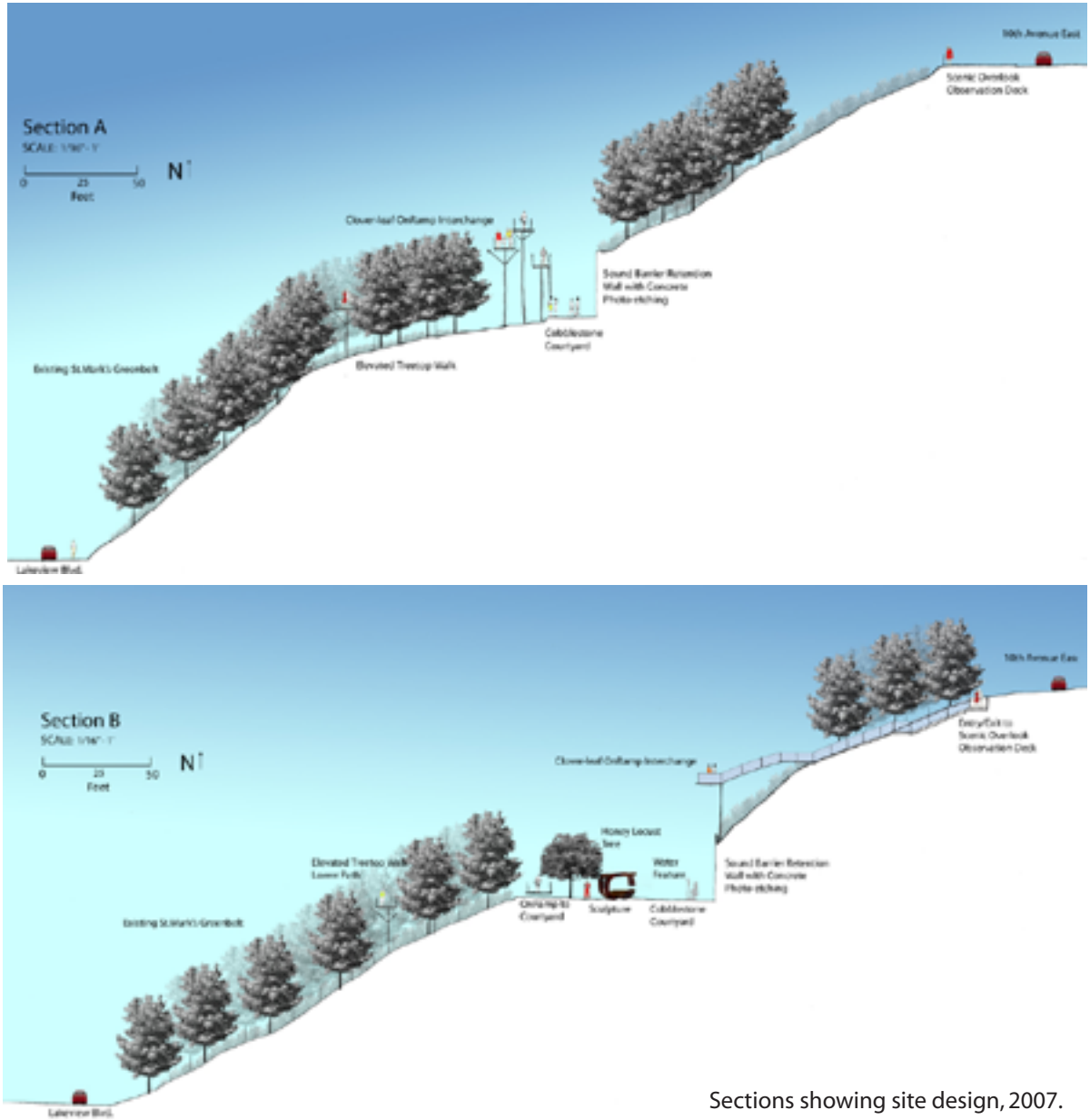
In this intervention, the elevated treetop walk is split into a long swooping cloverleaf interchange that connects visitors to an observation deck on 10th Avenue East. The observation deck / boardwalk is located in an existing parking lot. The design of this portion of the site includes a series of viewfinder telescopes to catch glimpses of Seattle's sublime landscape.

The entry to the Streissguth Gardens includes a curvilinear "sound barrier" retention wall etched with images of the regions local history of landscape change. Audio walking tour podcasts can be downloaded from the sound barrier wall.

The design also includes: a line of Honey Locust trees chosen for their flat top form, a bubbling fountain water feature fed by storm water drainage, a cobblestone walking surface, and a public art space. The fountain intermittently produces a small release of water above the surface of the cobblestone, a metaphor for the ephemeral streams that are created during periods of consistent rainfall. The water is channelled across the cobble surface into a thin strip drain. The visitor follows the yellow steel way-finding bands toward the Blaine Street Public Stairway or toward an elevated onramp that merges back onto the lower treetop walkway.

Gateway between St. Mark's Greenbelt and Streissguth Gardens, 2007.

Site Design 2007.



Sections showing site design, 2007.

3 Blaine Street Public Stairway Gateway Design

The Blaine Street site is the lowest elevation gateway and the most northern point of the St. Mark's Greenbelt. The design is located beside and beneath the I-5 freeway. The design connects the I-5 Colonnade (Seattle City Park) with the Blaine Street Public Stairway and the greenbelt.

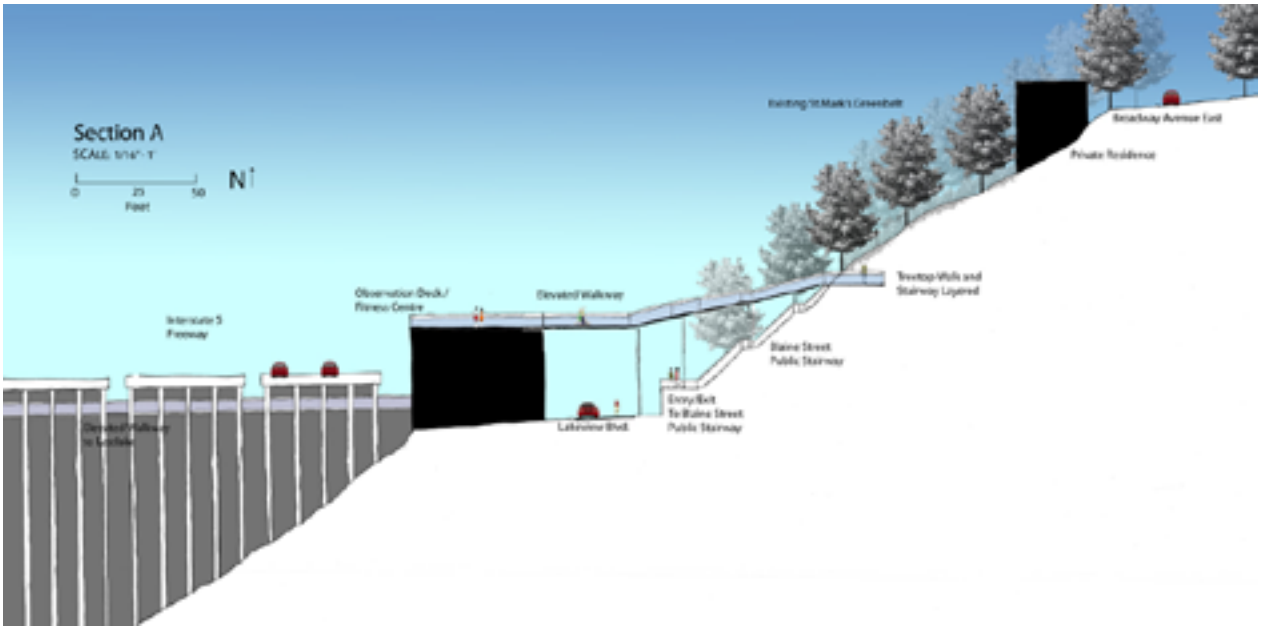
In this intervention, the treetop pathway diverges in three directions from a freeway observation deck. The elevated pathway extends west under the freeway to Eastlake while another pathway stretches north toward the I-5 Colonnade. The elevated pathway crosses Lakeview Blvd to connect with the Blaine Street Public Stairway. The elevated pathway is layered on top of the stairway. The layered structure splits apart half way up the existing stairway, with the treetop walk extending south through the St. Mark's Greenbelt.

Below the observation deck is a fitness centre that services fitness enthusiasts who use the public stairway as a work-out site a common use of the pedestrain infastructure. The centre is equipped with public facilities and bike storage.

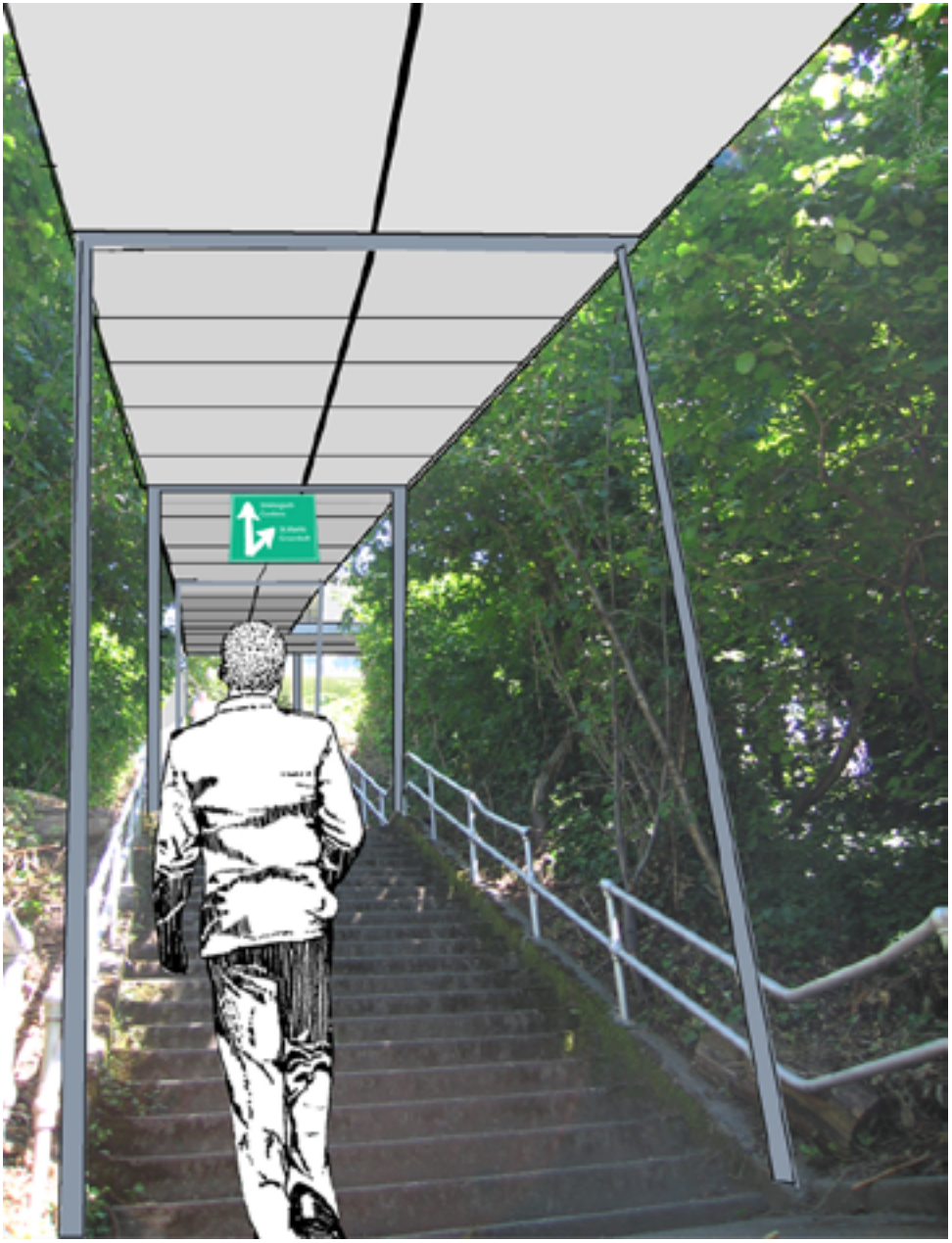
The visitor enters a sunken courtyard café located at the northern side of the fitness centre. On the western side of the courtyard, a waterfall wall (fed by storm water from the freeway) is designed to drown out the sound of the I-5. Honey Locust trees are planted on 20 foot centres to provide a protective canopy from the freeway. A yellow curvilinear I-beam sits atop four photo-etched concrete walls that extend out of the sunken courtyard.

Gateway between St. Mark's Greenbelt, Blaine Street Public Stairway and I-5 Colonnade, 2007.

Site Design, 2007.



Secion showing site Design, 2007.



Concept Collage, 2007.

The ‘OnRamp’ gateways provide an amenity to the communities of Eastlake and Capitol Hill, access to a landscape that is currently unused, ignored and unnoticed.They begin to reveal the residual local landscape and the historical development of the area to both locals and tourists. By highlighting the distinct ecologies of the urban freeway and the dense forest landscape, the beauty and utility of both spaces are revealed as entwined with the urban fabric in a meaningful way.

Chapter 6

“Freeways no longer lead to places…..they are places” (Lippard, p.239)

The purpose of OnRamp has been to demonstrate how the distinct ecologies of urban freeways and residual space surrounding them can be creatively entwined with the structure of the city, while allowing locals and tourists to formulate a more meaningful understanding of Seattle’s urban structure and sense of place.

The site I explored through this project is one that my wife and I traverse daily. The environment we perceive on this walking route has changed since the first time we walked from our apartment in Capitol Hill to her office in Eastlake in February 2007. Typically, landscapes that we see everyday become ambient. We become comfortable in our everyday environment and do not notice the world around us. All that matters is reaching the destination point.

For many people, the freeway is part of their everyday landscape. The freeway’s place in the urban landscape is complacently accepted despite being imposing and destructive to community continuity. For tourists, the on and off ramps and arterial connector roads are next to impossible to locate and traverse in Seattle’s urban environment; however, the locals easily, and often blindly, navigate their surroundings.

While living in Seattle, I have been aware of a change in my perception from a tourist’s gaze to a local’s perspective. Our view of the urban landscape has shifted as we have become more comfortable navigating our new surroundings in an automobile. Understanding this shift in perception has allowed me to see the potential for change in everyday spaces.

Point Douglas, Winnipeg, Author 2006.

OnRamp has also made me appreciate the landscape of Winnipeg, Manitoba, an environment that I know intimately. When I started the practicum process, I was exploring residual post-industrial spaces in the Point Douglas district of Winnipeg. I struggled to step back from my own preconceived notions of place because I viewed the landscape as a local.

This practicum project has helped me to be cognisant of how people see and interact with the urban landscape. It has taught me that we cannot allow ourselves to become comfortable. Landscape architects must continue to question why a place is the way it is. We must question how it can be designed better. We have to see that any space has the potential to be a good, productive place. What appears initially to be wasted space is actually a place awaiting its next reinvention.

OnRamp has sought to link the experience of traversal back to the land. The walk-as-art practice of Zonzo has been useful as a method of subjective analysis and a way of personalizing the landscape. As designers we see our urban environments in order to change them, which is very different than the intentions of Zonzo where the landscape is traversed as a passive observer. Zonzo has been a way of uncovering potentials in the landscape and a way of creating an intimacy with the land that has allowed the design to be of that place.

My research intentions for this project have been to explore how artists, landscape architects and architects are addressing the conflicting environments of freeways with the landscape surrounding them. My intentions have been to understand the effects that freeways have had on urban structure and to find ways of overcoming these effects. I have sought to understand how different modes of traversal influence how people see the landscape.

The pace or temporality of the freeway and residual space ecologies are revealed in the OnRamp design. The elevated pedestrian freeway is a way of traversing an imposing landscape of extreme slopes. However, it is not meant to yield the quickest path from A to B. It is meant to be slow. No exertion is necessary. The path offers few options to exit. The long slow gentle bends of the pathway infastructure connect the experience of freeways to the journey of traversal where a slow walk reveals all that is missing from the interior of a speeding vehicle. Place. To achieve an awareness of place the path must be an integral part of the journey.

The importance of urban freeways in our contemporary cities is often overshadowed by the physical and cultural separations they have created in the urban landscape. When considering freeways, we should resist the impulse to associate them with the ills of society. They are a product of a cultural fascination with prosperity, mobility, privacy and the pastoral. They represent a collective will to create a more satisfactory way of life. They are relics of the past; sculptural artefacts that inform us of where we have been and where we are going.

Seattle I-5 freeway, photo by Author 2007

144 Seattle I-5 freeway, photo by Author 2007

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