

Ryan Schneiderman
Professor Melius
ILVS - 0070

Heideggerian Notions in *Seeing While Moving*

Since 1999, Charlotte Moth has kept what she calls a Travelogue: a collection of images accumulated from her travels which she often uses as inspiration for her works. In *Seeing while Moving*, the Travelogue manifests itself through a table-top display of images in what Moth calls *Noting Thoughts*, a display of photos on upright, folded metal “cards”. Images of varying architectural structures, wooded vistas, and natural formations dominate the collection and though it is detailed in the handout that the photographs were taken in Germany, Portugal, Ibiza, Texas, Japan, Canada, Poland and elsewhere, the photographs could be from anywhere. In fact, they are almost entirely lacking in context aside from the short vignettes which accompany them, which are often equally obscure. Four other displays comprised the exhibit: Two protruding bronze hands each carrying a glass object, a rotating 3D printed plant, two Carousel slide projectors also displaying images from Roth’s Travelogue, and a series of wall mounted images of the interior(s) of a home(s). In this essay, I will first analyze the two introductory elements of the exhibit (the hands and the plant) and how they prime the viewer for proper viewing of the exhibit, and then I will investigate the spatio-temporal implications of *Noting Thoughts*, and how they draw from Heideggerian notions.

Upon entry to the exhibit, the first display to come into view are the two bronze hands. Protruding out of the wall, the first view of the hands is a profile which emphasizes the fact that one is raised while the other is lowered. The raised hand is extended, propping a translucent, cup shaped glass object. The lowered hand is also cupped, but around a black, ovular glass object. In

this display, I believe Roth is introducing the visitor to the notions of outwardness vs inwardness, both opposite yet equally human feelings. The raised hand represents the outward, vivacious, and bright aspects of human experience, and the lowered hand the inward, possessive, and dark. The lower hand is expounded in *Noting Thoughts* vis à vis Roth's writing on the exploitative intentions of many of history's travelers — "Whatever the date of this first colonization, each and everyone among its settlers was looking for something and left in turn their imprint on the territory". In exploiting land, colonizers sought personal gain, a selfish and inward looking goal. Alternatively, Roth's personal travels represent the raised hand. Through taking photos of the landscape and exhibiting them, she leaves the land untouched yet cherished. It is notable Roth does not choose to display photos as you would see in a magazine. There is no advertisement, no tourist attraction; just the real, mundane landscape where ordinary people live. In doing so, she displays an outward respect and dignity towards the everyday inhabitant of these lands. Monuments, mansions and million dollar views aren't the only things deserving of display.

Directly to the right of the hands is the 3D printed plant. It is entirely beige. The form of the plant is quite pleasing it slowly rotates as if it were in a European fashion show. Yet, the bland color deprives the plant of its true potential and the viewer is left slightly disappointed. If only a beautiful color were to accompany the beautiful form. Here, I believe Roth is again priming us for the main part of her exhibit, *Noting Thoughts*. By abstracting away the plant's color, Roth defies the viewer's expectation for what a plant, especially one on display, should look like. She lets us know that what we are about to witness will require us to let go of preconceived notions of how objects on-display should look if we are to gain a complete understanding of her work. Perhaps she is commentating on a commercial culture which favors

eye catching products over those with substance. The plant does not immediately catch the eye but upon further inspection it is quite beautiful.

Both the hands and the 3D printed plant serve as introductory displays that prime us for the meat of her exhibit: *Noting Thoughts*. This part of the exhibit not only takes up the most physical space, but its sheer number of images and philosophical reflections also dominate the mental head-space of the viewer. The aforementioned lack of context provided by the images defies our expectation of a visual exhibit much like the beige coloring defies our expectation of a plant: we are left slightly disappointed. “If only she would provide a clue!”, I beg in hopes that context will provide connective links between the images from which to extract some holistic meaning. Nonetheless, this kind deprivation makes the visual experience more exhilarating in a way: it challenges us, stirs our emotions and draws us in. It is as if Roth provides an unsolvable puzzle for the viewer to struggle with. But, maybe this is the perfect puzzle — for the fun in a puzzle is always in the solving process; the during, never after.

This notion of constant struggle, of perpetual “during”, is something that is further expounded on in the poetic vignettes which accompany the images. Roth’s poetic reflections evoke a very Heideggerian sense of being as an intertwined spatio-temporal complex.

Accompanying a photo of ambiguous suburbia, is the following excerpt: (*note the format of the quote is directly replicated from the exhibit)

“These are dystopias embodying the full difficulty inherent in the realizations of dreams of a different life.

These dreams are not forgotten though, but continue to be carried on by subsequent generations seeking redemption”

This is reminiscent of the notion of ‘Others’ presented in Heidegger’s “Being and Time”. In his discussion of ‘Being-in-itself’ Heidegger says that we are inherently connected to ‘Others’ with which we interact on either a direct or indirect level. He maintains that a boat anchored at shore is assigned being by not just the one who mans the boat, but also by all others who have or would use the boat throughout history. In this way the “Others” of the past and future are connected to the self in an intimate way. Heidegger says:

By ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too... By reason of this *with-like* Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. (*Being and Time* 26: 154–5)

This notion of inseparability from ‘Others’ manifests itself for Roth in the form of dreams for the future. For Roth, the dreams of a “different life” live within every member the community: those who came before them and those who will come in the future. In her use of the word dystopia, Roth is commenting on the struggle of the most disadvantaged communities where generational dreams are rarely realized and the sense of responsibility of each generation compounds on itself. The nature of this dystopia is further demonstrated by the structural form of the quote. The separated and opposing orientation of the two lines evoke the dissonance between generations in where the desire to have individualistic and unique dreams are put in direct conflict with the dreams of generations past. The form also resembles the cyclical nature of such a dystopia. Individualistic dreams become unrealistic and turn into redemptive dreams for children to realize; only for the children to have dreams of their own, and so the cycle continues.

In a nearby excerpt, Roth provides further commentary on the being-ness of space with the assertion that spaces are constantly in flux. She then furthers another Heideggarian principle.

Roth writes:

“It follows that spaces are neither neutral nor fixed but forever changing.

Their meaning can be inferred from a careful analysis of form, function and context — like in a traditional anthropological approach

Alternatively, it may simply be “lived” through an intuitive understanding mediated by direct experience”

In the first line, Roth alludes to the notion of Heraclitus’s river: you can never step in the same river twice due to its ever changing nature. In the following two lines she provides a couple of ways the meaning of a space can be interpreted: one driven through conscious analysis, the other driven by the intuition of the subconscious. This duality is reminiscent of the Heideggarian notions of presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger illustrates readiness-to-hand by alluding to the process of hammering a nail. He says “The less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment.” So the less we analyze the hammer and nail from a distance and “live” them as Roth would say, the greater an intuitive understanding we gain of the hammer. Alternatively, presence-at-hand concerns itself with the facts or objective characteristics of an object. Using this dualistic framework, Roth extends Heidegger’s handed-ness to include space in addition to objects. Roth notes that the meaning of a space will always be in flux because the uniquely subjective

experience of the person who occupies a space dictates that the readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand be unique as well.

In “Seeing while Moving”, Charlotte Moth impressively packs a great amount of meaning into a relatively small exhibit, and in this essay, I have only just scratched the surface of it. To end this essay, I feel it appropriate to end with an excerpt that expertly encompasses the at once mundane yet profound nature of Moth’s exhibit: “The place depicted in this image is no different from other places around the world that have come to embody the shifting nature of one’s positioning in space and time”.