Dwelling and Drawing in the Florida Landscape at Paynes Prairie: 
The Interstitial Space

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While continuing to work in a sketchpad, I recently began expressing thoughts about the landscape at Paynes Prairie, which is located on the southern edge of Gainesville, Florida. The end product is a photo collage triptych that was derived from drawings as well as readings. I have used mixed media to show ideas about dwelling in the landscape and how man dwells within the landscape. Sketchpads remain ongoing tools which I employ to think and express my ideas; they always remain works in progress allowing me to make concrete ideas. Previous ideas have worked themselves into the recent Paynes Prairie drawings.

I often draw with my two girls. We often react to each other’s marks on the paper with more marks and conversations; we call it collaborating. My youngest likes for me to draw hearts, so hearts have recently worked their way into my drawings. I have modified the hearts to be at the core of a fruit as well as with the seeds of the fruit, the seeds become hearts as well.

Hearts, being an obvious symbol for love with the combination of the fruit, join to symbolize spirit. The blend of the two symbols brings together the drawings to relay new thoughts about common symbols. I have created several renditions of these drawings. The drawings reflect the ability, with age and time, for individuals to grow with knowledge as well as bear fruit. The fruit is not conceived of as literal reproduction but rather of thought, growth and bonds. *Heart and Bean Soup* is not a drawing of the landscape, it is a drawing done in the landscape (Figure 1.). It speaks of the space between individual beings. Space between individuals, while being literal, is figurative as well. There are connections between people that are filled with thoughts and feelings toward others as individual beings. Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology speaks to this idea of being with others and the “empathy” of looking through another’s eyes. This speaks to the fact that there are experiences that are shared between individuals that create bonds and familiar experiences by being in the same space and place.1

My wife and I were drawn to Paynes Prairie when we moved to Florida in December of 1998. We enjoyed experiencing the landscape through cycling. We enjoy the slow speed that the bicycle allows through the experience of places through sound, smells and direct exposure. There is a much closer connection to nature with a bicycle than an automobile.

Over the summer of 2010 on July 22nd I was cycling on the Gainesville / Hawthorne Rails-To-Trails, which curves along the northeastern borderline of Paynes Prairie. My bicycle and I came into an abrupt contact with a deer, we collided and I severely broke my collar bone to the point it needed a metal plate and ten screws (Figure 2). My greatest concern was not being able to bicycle the trail and be in the landscape for the several months due to the surgery. The injury and subsequent surgery slowed down my bicycling activities, but I was still drawn to the need to be in the landscape. I now have an intimate connection to the place that is constant. I have since bicycled back many times to Paynes Prairie taking photographs and drawing with my family.

To experience the prairie, I decided to sit for a few hours to draw, to think and to experience the place. As I drew *Paynes Prairie at Alachua Sink* for two hours, I began to notice the light conditions changing as I tried to capture the qualities of the place (Figure 3). As the time passed I came to the realization that the qualities of the place could not be captured with a quick snapshot. There was no experience with a picture; a photo does not relay the experience of the place.
individual cannot be involved with the place without an investment of time. Drawing allows and
requires time for contemplation. The more time spent the more investment the hand and mind have
to interact with the landscape. Drawings enable thoughts to solidify, the length of time in space
allows for a better understanding of place; a sense of the quality of the place is gained with time.

As time progresses, memory only perceives that which the eyes immediately see… the mind
erases that which has passed. Drawings freeze time and hold it; allowing the mind to perceive the
old and the new simultaneously. The sense of time can be felt by the person drawing.

While *Paynes Prairie at Alachua Sink* as a drawing is an illustration of the space, it did not bring
the layer of deeper meaning that I was searching for. I would go back later to draw and to think.

On October 20th, 2010 I thought I was having a heart attack and called 911. My vision went
black and my heart felt as if it had collapsed. As fate would reveal, it was not a heart attack. Since I
thought I was dying; I began to think differently about being. Being itself, for me, is something that
was called into question. I began to think about my heart and the importance of my being. After
visiting a cardiologist I drew *The Heart* (Figure 4). A simple symbol and a diagram of the heart are
obviously different. They both speak of heart, but one is an idea or symbol and the other is a map.

While confined to the indoors, I began to think about my condition which led to my
drawing of the triptych *Medicine* (Figure 5). A triptych is a work of art in three parts that work
together as a whole. The triptych was used in early Christian works to tell stories. Working in series
and multiples has always been present in my work; I believe that these works build upon each other.
The triptych provided more opportunity to develop a story that went beyond creating a snapshot.
This method allowed for more commentary, storytelling, reflection, and thought whereas *Paynes
Prairie at Alachua Sink* does not. The panel on the left depicts a plant, the panel on the right shows
bottles of medicine with symbols of hearts and the middle panel shows strange fruit on the table as
well as fruit floating in the space between. The strange fruit floats between the manmade medicine
bottles and the vegetation; it bends perceived reality and it transforms itself into an idea instead of
literal meaning.

After biking back to the edge of Paynes Prairie on the Rails-To-Trails I stopped at the
Sweetwater Overlook. The covered wooden sitting structure shown in *Come Sit Stay* allows for
people to sit and observe the landscape from a man-made control point (Figure 6). In the drawing
*Come Sit Stay*, the left panel shows the covered sitting bench with the paved path wrapping around.
The right panel shows a glimpse of the prairie with a dividing fence. The middle panel shows sky,
fence, path and grass as well as the *in between*. It holds tension between man and nature, much like
the connection in the drawing *Heart and Bean Soup*. In *Heart and Bean Soup* the connection is between
individuals. Interstitial space is the connection between two separate beings, whether or not it is
physical or simply an idea. In some cases the connection is between people and in others it is the
connection between man and nature.

After drawing *Come Sit Stay*, I began to like the story as it began to unravel. I decided to add
to the media of the triptych and create a photo collage. The photo collage allows for more levels of
experience of the actual landscape over a period of three days. Being in the space over a period of
several days and working on the collage, allowed me to ask questions of myself. I knew that the
obvious end panels of the triptych would be man and nature, but I was still working on how the
middle panel could bring the works together. While biking to the site on the last day to take
photographs, I realized that the bicycle I was on was much like the middle panel of *Medicine*; it
transported me from the manmade to the natural world. The bicycle itself was much like Hermes.
While it physically transported me from city to nature, it also mentally transitioned me from place to
place.

The collage was created over three days in November 2010. On the 18th through the 20th I
began by bicycling to the site, taking the photographs and then organizing the composition
electronically with a paint program. I recorded the sights and qualities of the space with my camera in order to create the collage. Much time was spent at the Sweetwater Overlook capturing the fall vegetation, animals and manmade objects that controlled the space of man and nature. The manmade covered bench is an object that controls man as well as directs the view. The wooden fence divides the space as man-occupied and nature-occupied. Nature does not follow the line of the manmade fence. Standing close to the fence on the first day, I saw a deer with her young doe following close behind, on Paynes Prairie; the photos are incorporated into the collage. On the second day as I was watching for the deer again, I looked behind me and noticed the two standing deer; they had no trouble ignoring the fence as divider between man and preserve.

In the *Art of Memory* by the Renaissance writer Jacobus Publicius, he referred to the medieval tradition of marking memorable places with material objects. This act establishes a framework that secures a meaningful place within the vast space. I established a framework of images in *Man Hermes Nature* to outline the essence of the Sweetwater Overlook while being able to express an interstitial space, a space of Hermes, a place where the soul resides, and a place where man and nature can commune (Figure 7).

Wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed. The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into the modes of revealing allotted to him.²

Landscape has meaning because of our interpretation of it.³ There is a pictorial space and a landscape space. The pictorial space is a representation through two-dimensional images whereas landscape space is the actual space and the phenomenological experience that is gained from being in the space. There are analogies that can be made likening: pictorial vs. landscape, to sketch vs. to be in and live in as well as the visible and the invisible.

The series of drawings could not have happened in any other way other than sequentially. The drawings and photo collage have built upon one another. The photo collage triptych was formed as a thought before it was constructed. It came into being as an idea before it was physically created. By creating *Man Hermes Nature,* my thoughts have been un-concealed and revealed. While nature can exist without man, man has difficulty existing without nature.
Figure 1. *Heart and Bean Soup*, mixed media drawing, 4.25” x 6.5” (Drawn at Lake Wauberg, Gainesville, Florida), July 4, 2010
Figure 2. X-ray of author’s right clavicle after surgery in August 2010

Figure 3. *Paynes Prairie at Alachua Sink*, red pencil and red ink, 5.25”x16.5”, October 3, 2010
Figure 4. *The Heart*, collage with ink and pigment wash, 5.25”x8”, October 29, 2010

Figure 5. *Medicine*, pencil and ink, 5”x8”, October 29, 2010
Figure 6. *Come Sit Stay*, pencil and ink. 5”x8”, November 3, 2010

Figure 7. *Man Hermes Nature*, photo collage triptych, panels are 20”x40” @ 300dpi, November 20, 2010
Endnotes

3 This understanding emerged from the discussions in Dr. Hui Zou’s *Landscape Approach in Architecture* seminar at the University of Florida, Fall 2010.