Wise Sayings from my Collection
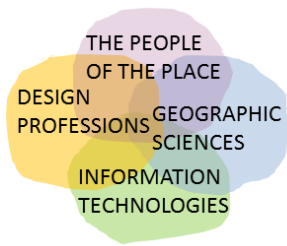
Carl STEINITZ

Introduction

I collect wise sayings and cartoons related to different aspects of design. During my years at Harvard University I taught a course called "Theories and Methods of Landscape Planning". It was my custom to have a slide of wise sayings related to the theme of the day's lecture or experiment visible as the students entered the room. It gave them a foretaste of what that day's activity would be about. I also liberally used cartoons to support points that I wanted students to think about. Some of the wise sayings and cartoons were purposely chosen to be serious, but many, especially the cartoons, were selected to be humorous and even cynical about that very seriousness. It has always been my view that we should take our work very seriously and engage in design for the improvement of significant societal and environmental conditions. However I also think that there is a role for the self-criticism that humor engenders.

I therefore decided to offer the editors of this volume of Digital Landscape Architecture papers a selection of wise sayings from my collection. I cannot publish the cartoons because of copyright issues, but I intend to use them in a different setting. The wise sayings are purposely organized in relationship to the major sections of the framework within which I organized my Harvard course and also my recent book "A Framework for Geodesign", Esri Press, 2012.

ON COLLABORATION

"Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than the one where they sprang up."
Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Politeness is the poison of collaboration."
Edwin Land

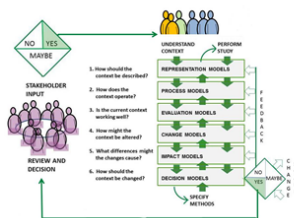"Guard against talking more clearly than you think."
anonymous

"The secret is to gang up on the problem, rather than each other."
Thomas Stallkamp

"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team."
Phil Jackson

"No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it."
H.E. Luccock

"The trouble with the rat-race is that even when you win, you're still a rat."
Lily Tomlin

A FRAMEWORK FOR GEODESIGN

"Put in simplest terms, a theory explains, a model predicts and a framework organizes. A framework can be judged on its reasonableness and its utility, but claims no exclusivity vis-a-vis other frameworks".
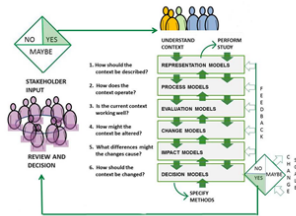Amos Rapaport

"The problem is not that we don't know; rather it is that we can't figure out and organize our questions, search out the answers (most of which exist), remember them and use them. If we could do this, we could then identify the truly missing overviews and parts, and work on these."
Carl Steinitz, 1972

"Grau, theurer freund, ist all theorie und grun des lebens."
("All theory is gray and life is green.")
Goethe, *Faust*

A FRAMEWORK FOR GEODESIGN

"In theory, there is no difference between between theory and practice.
In practice, there is no relationship between theory and practice."
     Grant Gainey

"Furthermore, the gap between theory and practice in practice is larger that the gap between theory and practice in theory."
     Jeff Case

Theory is when you know everything
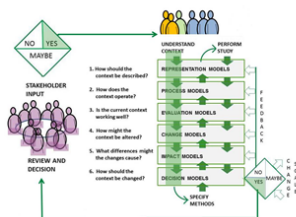but nothing works.
Practice is when everything works
but no one knows why.
In our lab, theory and practice are combined:
nothing works and no one knows why.
     Sarah Steinitz

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

"The environment is full of 'To whom it may concern....' messages."
     Norbert Weiner

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the level of thinking we were at when we created them."
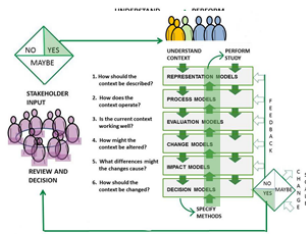   Albert Einstein

"The judge held the orange in his hand while the two petitioners each insisted that he needed the whole thing. Unable to decide between then , the judge cut the orange in half, giving half to each petitioner.
Both went away very unhappy. Later, the judge found out that one had wanted the peel while the other had wanted the inside.
MORAL: Find out what the question is before you propose an answer."
     as told by Sarah Steinitz

SPECIFYING THE METHODS

"He who seeks for methods without having a definite problem in mind seeks in the most part in vain."
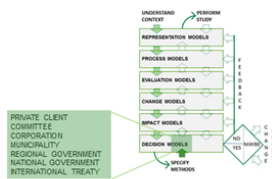David Hilbert

"By three methods we may learn wisdom:
First by reflection, which is noblest;
Second by imitation, which is easiest;
And third by experience, which is bitterest."
Confucius

"It would be naïve to think that the problems plaguing mankind today can be solved with the means and methods which were applied or seemed to work in the past."
Mikhail Gorbachev

DECISION MODELS

"Good decisions come from experience, and experience comes from bad decisions."
Author Unknown

"From experience of the past, the present acts prudently, lest it spoil future action."
Pierre Bersuire, medieval scholar

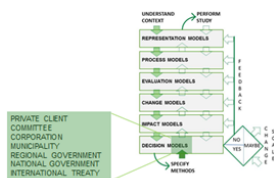"The risk of a wrong decision is preferable to the terror of indecision."
Maimonedes

"As soon as questions of will or decision or reason or choice of action arise, human science is at a loss."
Noam Chomsky

"It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are."
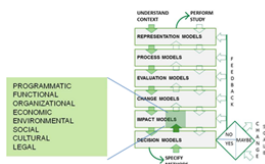Roy Disney

DECISION MODELS

"We Athenians……take our decisions on policy and submit them to proper discussion: for we do not think there is an incompatibility between words and deeds: the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. And this is another point where we differ from other people. We are capable at the same time of taking risks and estimating them beforehand. Others are brave out of ignorance; and when they stop to think, they begin to fear. But the man who can be most truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the meaning of what is sweet in life and what is terrible, and then goes out to meet what is to come."
Pericles

IMPACT MODELS

"Not everything which can be counted counts;
And many things which cannot be counted, count."
William Bruce Cameron

"I have found that all ugly things are made by those who strive to make something beautiful and that all beautiful things are made by those who strive to make something useful."
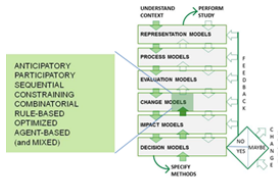Oscar Wilde

"What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"
Henry David Thoreau

"If you wish to make an impact for a year, plant corn; if you wish to make an impact for a generation, plant a tree; if you want to make an impact for an eternity, educate a child."
Author unknown

CHANGE MODELS

"Develop an infallible technique,
and then place yourself at the mercy of inspiration"
Zen saying, via Walter Gropius

"Everyone designs who devises courses of
action aimed at changing existing situations into
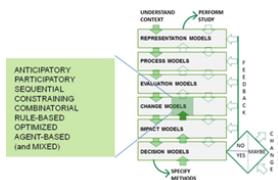preferred ones."
Herbert Simon

"For every complex problem there is an answer
that is clear, simple, and wrong."
H. L. Menken

"The true artist possesses the power to inspire
others. A light that cannot kindle other lights is
but a feeble flame. The core of art is its
teaching and ennobling influence not only on
other artists, but on humanity."
commentary on *Exodus XXV*

CHANGE MODELS

"Imagination is a good horse to carry you over the
ground. Not a flying carpet to set you free from
probability."
Robertson Davies

"The gift of imagination is not just the artist's—
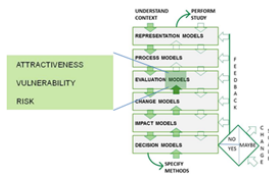it's a gift we all share."
Leonard Bernstein

'When creative genius neglects to ally itself to some
public interest it hardly gives birth to wide or
perennial influence. Imagination needs a soil in
history, tradition, or human institutions, else its
random growths are not significant enough and, like
trivial melodies, go immediately out of fashion."
George Santayana

"If you want to make God laugh,
show him your plan."
heard on BBC4

EVALUATION MODELS

"True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information."
  Winston Churchill

"The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong question"
  Peter Drucker

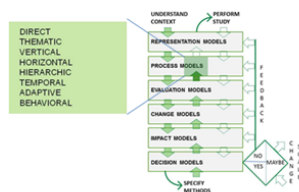We cannot discover what ought to be the case by examining what is the case. We must decide what ought to be the case. "
  Paul Taylor

"Evaluation criteria should be expressed as the answers to three questions:
-What is important?
-How is it important?
-How important is it?"
  Carl Steinitz

PROCESS MODELS

"Prediction is difficult, especially about the future."
  Niels Bohr

"All models are wrong. Some are useful."
    anonymous

"1--Guess
 2—Compute consequences
 3—Compare with nature and experience"
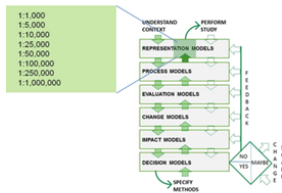   Richard Feynman

"What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning."
  Werner Heisenberg

"And they'll build systems dark and deep,
And systems broad and high;
But two of three will never agree
About the reasons why."
  Peter Pindar, *The Wise Men of Gotham*

DATA/REPRESENTATION MODELS

"I understand, therefore I see."
    John Constable
(*not* "I see, therefore I understand." CS)

"To be conscious that you are ignorant of the facts is a great step to knowledge"
    Benjamin Disraeli

"It is better to be approximately right than to be precisely wrong."
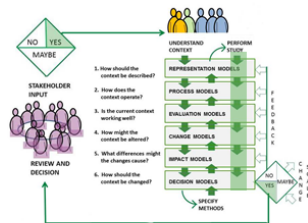   John Maynard Keynes

"It is the mark of an instructed mind to rest satisfied with that degree of precision which the nature of the subject admits, and not to seek exactness where only an approximation of the truth is possible."
    Aristotle

"Be as simple as possible, but not more so."
    Albert Einstein

PERFORMING THE STUDY

"There is no design without discipline. There is no discipline without intelligence."
    Massimo Vignelli

"Design is the application of intent - the opposite of happenstance, and an antidote to accident."
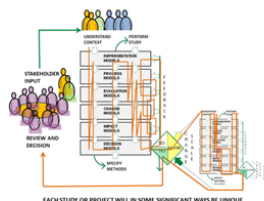   Robert L. Peters

"Designers have a dual duty; contractually to their clients and morally to the later users and recipients of their work."
    Hans Hager

" A good designer is like a good barber. There are three criteria. First, protect what you have. Second, edit carefully. Third, invent when necessary. And they are important in that order."
    Laurie Olin

THE FRAMEWORK WILL NEVER BE LINEAR IN APPLICATION

EACH STUDY OR PROJECT WILL IN SOME SIGNIFICANT WAYS BE UNIQUE

"In formal logic, a contradiction is the signal of defeat, but in the evolution of real knowledge it marks the first step in progress toward a victory."
Alfred North Whitehead

"When adversity strikes, that's when you have to be the most calm. Take a step back, stay strong, stay grounded and press on."
LL Cool J

"People take the longest possible paths, digress to numerous dead ends, and make all kinds of mistakes. Then historians come along and write summaries of this messy, nonlinear process and make it appear like a simple, straight line. "
Dean Kamen

ON EDUCATION FOR COLLABORATION IN GEODESIGN

"Learning is the organization of experience."
Kristin Hammond

"Fortune only favors the prepared mind."
Louis Pasteur

"I hear and I forget.
I see and I remember.
I do and I understand."
ancient Chinese proverb
"I do and I still don't understand."
Eleanor Duckworth

"It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."
Harry Truman

'A tragedy of our educational process--including graduate education--is the over-reliance on 'self discovery' by students of basic methods."
Carl Steinitz, 1967

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