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Excerpts from an Interview with Gunvor Nelson
by Kathy Geritz and Lynne Sachs, 1992

LS: Many of your films have water in them- - still. Especially Kristina's Harbor and Old Digs.

GN: I think of the flowing quality through time that I wanted. Whereas now, most of the films have been straight cuts. But still thinking about that flow, interrupting that flow.

KG: There are things which suggest flow -- like the river, the car driving, the shots from cars...

GN: Yes, I like motion, then stopping that motion as a surprise.

KG: That was so interesting, in the new film, that idea of stopping the motion. Following a series of collaged still images there would be a new shot where perceptually I would be ready for another still image, but instead it would move. Suddenly there was flow again. The back-and-forth between thinking it was still, thinking it was moving was very effective.

GN: I also try and figure out ways to make the stills move. So that they have a flow to them, or motion in some way. And then play with that back and forth.

LS: I wanted to ask you about houses. It seems like it's been an interest of yours.

GN: Well, I happen to like the old Europe where people have created in the landscape an interchange between people and the land. You can stand on the land and know that so many generations and thousands of years have happened. Here, it's the Indians. But you don't see very much left. And there's a beauty that is astounding to me between what the humans have exchanged with the landscape. The last century has accelerated so much that natural building between landscape and what humans do in the landscape has been too fast. It's not balanced anymore. The Swedish landscape, where it has that tradition...I'm very interested in that. And when you travel in France and Germany, wherever you are, it's just astounding to me how beautiful it is. And because I am a human, I do identify with it a lot. There's a romance that I have with that.

Now, the specific red that's on these old buildings, the Swedish red, they don't have in Germany. They don't have it in Norway. It's a different red. There is a red that I don't think I captured for people, but it's what I created. It can grow old so beautifully...the different colors within the red, and so on. It's not a flat red. It just lives. And so the beautiful landscape, which is the eye-of-the-beholder, is pretty flat in many places in Sweden. Norwegians think it's a little uneventful. for instance, because they have high mountains. So the relationship that I have to that landscape takes my breath away. I feel warm towards all the Buddhist things I imagine to be inside of those houses; culture and family tradition. So if you see a building, you also know that there is not only the outside, but also a human being. And I think that I enjoy spatial things.

Digs has, and Kristina's *Harbor* has, that quality too because they're torn down. You saw all those steps down to the river? They were all houses along there when I grew up. They tore all those down and were going to build this huge building like a community center, but they never really had enough money to do that. Now it's just vacant lots. But it's in a way nice. So there is a vacant quality for me there. So I had a special interest in that. Like going to the woods in Sweden when I was 12 years old. We were traveling in the woods beside our old summer place. As we came upon an old chimney that was left or some fruit trees.... It just sparked a romance within me, or interest or something that triggered imagination to what had happened there.

LS: Do you think of your way of working to be filming something you know? There's only a few places in the world that inspire you.

GN: I make films here too. I think that in a way, and I've said this before, we create our own vocabulary, our own symbols, whatever those landscapes are that we have each one of us. They are influenced by where we are, but they're also very much influenced by our own fantasy world. And then we take them out in the world and find similar moods or clouds or whatever it is. It's easier where you grew up but you can go to another country, like France, to paint those images that you had before.

LS: How do you start a project? How do you start gathering things?

GN: Well, every project has its own history. I just start where I know. It's like painting. If you put one thing down you have to react to that and you put something else and something happens between the two. You just start shooting and see if it has any correspondence to where you want to go and maybe what you get back really triggers something else that you then can go on doing. When I go to the animation stand I usually have enough material so that at least I have a corner where I can start. Because like in all of them, I had filmed before and then I brought in photographs. Like *Frameline*, I had gone around and bought a lot of cards of Stockholm. One was this card which was the old city with one spire on it. The card was a puzzle. So that started me thinking about the puzzle. That got me centered on that specific image so then I might have gone out and filmed that on a ferry going to that island. So, you know, you just take this trip or journey with material. And one thing leads to another. And then you back track and say, 'oh I want to do more of that.'

LS: Do you feel like Old Digs and Kristina's Harbor show two sides of who you are?

GN: They might. Well, you never know how closely they relate to who I am. You are picking out certain feelings that you have. But how much of who I am is hard to say. There are certain states of being that you try to reach. If other people get into that, that is up to them. I try and then I know how much that relates to other people.

GN: Sometimes I miss-say my films and say "dream" instead of "film."