

HOUSE IN THE WILDERNESS

13th Shelter International Architectural Design Competition

*Wilderness is a way and tradition in its own right. If we are willing to be still and open enough to listen, wilderness itself will teach us.*¹

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history the authentic experience of wilderness has served as a precondition for periods of deep reflection, personal renewal and spiritual awakening. The ritual process as it has been documented by early peoples and the last vestige of contemporary tribal groups point to the necessity of the wilderness as the stage in which humanity has direct and unhindered access to both the powers of the cosmos and the limitless expanse of the unconscious. A direct engagement with the natural environment and its causalities affects the whole person on levels psychological and biological, aligning ones inner rhythms and biological constitution with the patterns found in the natural world. This, as has been documented, results in a superior mode of functioning for the human inhabitant; conversely, the typical urban inhabitant unknowingly resides in an environment that perpetuates increasingly high risks toward the development of psychosis.² When removed from the natural environment - our species native home - we suffer the effects of an arguably inhumane isolation from the larger life-giving environment.

The reintroduction of wilderness experiences into our contemporary milieu has been met with both positive affirmation as well as prejudicial criticism. However, when studying the work carried out by wilderness practitioners in fields of study such as eco-psychology and deep-ecology the enormous benefits of prolonged exposure to the natural environment cannot be ignored. Likewise, the impact of the natural environment on some of modernism's greatest thinkers can be viewed anew when compared next to contemporary eco-psychological study, and such comparative analysis only further cements the premise that although a unique manifestation, we are still an interconnected part of the natural environment. It is in how we treat and engage the natural environment that has become an increasingly crucial issue in our contemporary setting; specifically, it has become the central issue of our species continued survival.

*A culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being – from wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self informing ecosystems) and from that other wildness within – is doomed to a very destructive behavior, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behavior.*³

¹ Harper, Steven. "The Way of Wilderness" in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Ed. Roszak, Theodore, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner. (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1995) 185

² Van Os, J. "Does the Urban Environment Cause Psychosis?" *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 184.4 (2004): 287-88.

³ *Ibid*, 184

PRECEDENTS: WILDERNESS DWELLINGS

The concept of a house in the wilderness carries with it connotations pertaining to the essentials of dwelling. Increased exposure to the wilderness mediated by an enlightened architectural poverty brings with it the potential for prolonged stays within settings that would be otherwise only suitable for shorter durations. The idea of an essential dwelling, capable of supporting the basic necessities of life can derive itself from ideas associated with the primitive hut. Throughout history we see examples of primitive shelters having the capacity to invoke deep self-reflection and self-cultivation. From the monastery to recent modern manifestations, an economy of space is closely associated with approaching the wilderness inside; a vast, creative and infinite domain.

The Primitive Hut and Enlightened Architectural Poverty

In her essay “An Architecture of the Self” Caldwell traces a paradigmatic shift in the self understanding of those involved in Catholic monastic life occurring at the advent of the 12th century.⁴ At this point, Caldwell suggests a change in emphasis; early records of monastic life employ metaphors describing containment, denial, self chastisement of the body, removal from the world, and imprisonment. At the advent of the 12th century, the focus seems to shift; monastics in greater number begin using metaphors associated with liberation and the affirmation of spiritual power in an effort to describe the contemplative’s interior life. Caldwell notes, “the metaphors of liberation that appear from the twelfth century onward free the monastic from the confining community or cell by offering an increasingly psychological interpretation of that physical space where the monastic meets the divine”.⁵ Although these changes transpired within a specific milieu and sect of theological, political, economical, and social undercurrents, What is of particular interest to our conversation here are the effects that an economy of space have on the psycho-spiritual self; specifically, the paradox of existential freedom that occurs within physical/spatial restraint.⁶ Caldwell shows how Saint Teresa, in her work *Interior Castles* (1577), expounds this paradox:

“Considering the strict enclosure and the few things you have for your entertainment, my Sisters, and that your buildings are not always as large as would be fitting for your monasteries, I think it will be a consolation for you to delight in this interior castle since without permission from the prioress you can enter and take a walk through it anytime”⁷

The economy of space within the cloister and cell are conducive, and perhaps absolutely necessary, for rich interior cultivation and spiritual fertility to occur.⁸ Seemingly, it is the restraint of small

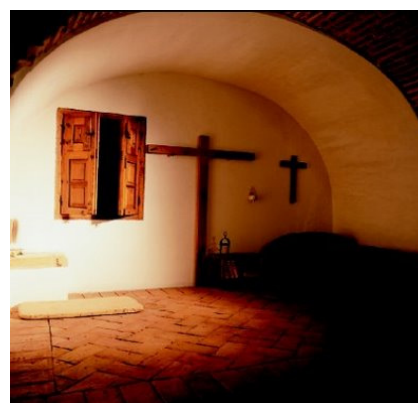


Figure 1: St. Teresa's cell at Avila

⁴ Caldwell, Ellen M. “An Architecture of the Self: New Metaphors for Monastic Enclosure.” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 8 (1991) 15.

⁵ Ibid, 15

⁶ Ibid, 19

⁷ Ibid, 20

⁸ Ibid, 21

spaces which invoke a psycho-spiritual liberation into possible and vast realms of self discovery. The unadorned cell, primitive or wilderness hut is a significant gateway into deep personal reflection and creative intellectual cultivation. Throughout the history of humanity stories of the wisdom of sages are exceedingly associated with a form of architectural reductionism, closely associated with the wilderness. Primitive huts of the ancient Taoist masters were almost always associated with an enlightened architectural poverty as a means of assisting intellectual and spiritual formation. Taoist master Yuantong Na once remarked: "...In remote antiquity all regulated themselves, even though they lived in nests and caves; later on everyone became reckless, even though they lived in spacious buildings".⁹ Even in the contemporary architectural setting of luxury and gross excess, a thread of enlightened architectural poverty has remained. Modernity has produced several well known examples reiterating the psycho-spiritual benefits of embracing the wilderness and natural environment in spaces akin to the primitive hut. The three modern examples discussed below (Thoreau's Cottage, Heidegger's Hut, and Le Corbusier's Cabanon) all exercise an economy of space and an engaged relationship to the natural environment, as requisite for deep creative pursuit and the interior cultivation of self. A simple review and documentation of these spaces will illustrate places where significant works of literature, philosophy, and architecture were carried out. These works have all subsequently influenced and directed the trajectory of modern intellectual and creative endeavor.

Thoreau's Cabin

"...the cottage is more holy than the Parthenon."¹⁰

In 1845, Henry David Thoreau (1817-) built for himself a small wooden cabin at Walden Pond, just outside of his hometown of Concord Massachusetts, as an experiment in primitive living. Slightly disillusioned by the excesses of the contemporary cultural milieu he found himself in, Thoreau sought a primitive life through an economy of means and greater intimacy with the wilderness. He rejected the unchecked acceptance of rapid commercialization and modernization that was prevalent throughout his society;



Figure 2: Replica of Thoreau's Cabin at Walden Pond

⁹ Cleary, Thomas F. *Zen Lessons: The Art of Leadership*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1989) 4.

¹⁰ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 127.

As with our colleges, so with a hundred modern improvements; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance...our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end¹¹

Inspired by the rural retreat of many of his contemporaries, Thoreau sought architectural authenticity through simplification. Thoreau built his cabin on a plot of land borrowed from his close friend Ralph Waldo Emerson. His budget was excessively minimal with many of the materials having been reclaimed, and all labor performed by himself. The primitive hut was an obvious point of inspiration for Thoreau, as he desired a more noble life contiguous with the primitive simplicity of his transcendentalist ideals. Humanity's close contact with nature in an environment of solitude was the means to a higher life of reflection and contemplation; "My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university."¹² In his essay *Thoreau's House at Walden*, Maynard aptly states;

From our village houses to this lodge [Walden]...was a transition as from a dungeon to an open cage...the atmosphere of our houses has usually lost some of its life giving contemporary dialogue, that of the healthfulness of the primitive hut.¹³

The Walden experiment that Thoreau undertook in his cabin was a lesson in the spiritual riches found in a context of architectural frugality in close dialogue with the natural environment.¹⁴

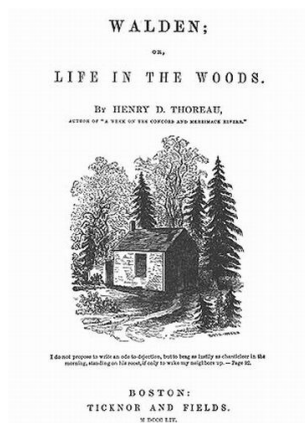


Figure 3: One of the greatest works of American Literature was composed in the cabin at Walden Pond.



Figure 4: Interior of Cabin (replica)

¹¹ Ibid, 48

¹² Ibid, 99

¹³ Maynard, W. Barksdale. *Thoreau's House at Walden*. The Art Bulletin 81.2 (1999) 316.

¹⁴ Ibid, 308

Heidegger's Hut

In the summer of 1922, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) built for himself a hut in the Black Forest Mountains of southern Germany outside a small town named Todtnauberg. Heidegger would dwell at the hut for extended periods of time for over five decades, cultivating many of his most well known works in the small office located in the back of the hut. "Die Hutte" as Heidegger called it, was the preferred place of doing philosophy, and he retreated here alone whenever possible:



Figure 5: Heidegger's Hut

I'm off to the cabin- and am looking forward a lot to the strong mountain air- this soft light stuff down here ruins one in the long run. Eight days lumbering- then again writing...It's late night already – the storm is sweeping over the hill, the beams are creaking in the cabin, life lies pure, simple and great before the soul...sometimes I no longer understand that down there one can play such strange roles.¹⁵

The small wooden hut took after many of the small peasant cottages dotting the landscape within the Black Forest region, and Heidegger regularly participated in helping the locals with the chopping of wood and the felling of trees. It is clear through Heidegger's published opinions of the hut, that it brought him closer to a purity and integrity of experience of being in the world; his experience was not one of outside observer, but rather as active participant; "Solitude has the peculiar and original power of not isolating us, but projecting our whole existence out into the vast nearness of the presence [Wesen] of all things."¹⁶ The hut in the wilderness was the architectural mode conducive to Heidegger's relationship with the world as he experienced it; it was a clear and unadorned typology capable of facilitating a "mutual intermediation of mind, body and place".¹⁷ Sharr contrasts Heidegger's house located in Marburg with the architectural frugality of the hut, showing a clear relationship between architectural frugality and deep philosophical enquiry;

¹⁵ Sharr, Adam. *Heidegger's Hut*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006) 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 65

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 7

The house's amenable comforts were seemingly gained only at the expense of experiential resonance, whereas the physical size of the hut necessarily intensified the interaction of individuals' "dwelling" with "places" of inhabitation...more comfortable, more public, closer to human affairs, the house could never be, for him, as acute a measure as the hut. It was not elementary enough, clouding rather than emphasizing questions of being.¹⁸

Heidegger here forged a deep relationship between his modes of thought and a geographic place that subsequently would go on to affect the whole of modern philosophical thought. These of course, were both mediated and confronted via an enlightened architectural poverty within the natural environment. Quantitative restraint through the economy of space resulted in a qualitative richness far surpassing the limits of the physical container.



Figure 6: One of the most important philosophical works of the modern era was significantly composed at the quaint Black Forest hut



Figure 7: Heidegger at his desk

Corbusier's Cabanon

¹⁸ Ibid, 103

Initially conceived as a birthday present for his wife, “le cabanon”, sits behind a carob tree atop the coastal hills of the village of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin and takes in wide-angle views of the Mediterranean. Built in 1952, The 3.66m cube is tucked into the hillside and clad with split dark brown pine logs, looking similar to a hidden garden shed. Corbusier reflects on the architectural reductionism he employed;



Figure 8: Corbusier's cabanon

I adore this nook. And I always wanted to build a little house. The idea came to me during a 15 day cruise I took. My cabin measured 3m x 3m with a dresser and a bathroom. 15m in all. Not a square centimeter was wasted. A little cell in the realm of human existence where every eventuality had been foreseen. My ‘cabana’ in Cap-Martin is a little smaller than my luxury Cabin on board [the ocean liner]...¹⁹

Le Corbusier was perhaps also inspired by his father, who spoke to him of the richness of the primitive hut, which, “had been constructed for those who are seeking...nature as she had been made by the Creator...primitive life...healthy and pure emotions, without any other reward than inner satisfaction”²⁰

The small dwelling exists as the only building le Corbusier would ever build for himself, yet is one that holds within it its master’s great adoration;

I have a castle on the Riviera who is 3.66 meters by 3.66 meters. I did it for my wife and it is an extravagant place of comfort and kindness. It is located in Roquebrune, on a path that reaches almost to the sea. A tiny door, a tiny ladder and access to a cabin embedded below the vineyards. Only the site is great, a superb bay with steep cliffs.²¹

¹⁹ Bayley, Stephen. *Architecture Review: Le Corbusier's Cabanon 1952/2006 - The Interior 1:1* | Art and Design | The Observer. *Latest News, Comment and Reviews from the Guardian* | [Guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk). Web. 15 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/mar/08/architecture-exhibition>>.

²⁰ Pierluigi, Nicolin. *La Sindrome Di Roquebrune = The Roquebrune Syndrome: Roquebrune Cap Martin - Le Corbusier versus Eileen Gray*. *Lotus International* 119 (2003): 106-19.

²¹ *Ibid*, 111.



Figure 9: Some of Corbusier's most recognized masterpieces were conceived inside *le petit cabanon*. Chandigarh, India



Figure 10: Ronchamp, France

It is evident that Corbusier found significant inspiration within the economy of space offered by the cabanon and its relationship to the landscape. The primitive cabin offered Corbusier unyielding views of the Mediterranean, where he would sit at the window for hours in contemplation, cultivating some of his greatest works. Although “primitive” in its construction and use of space, there does exist one apparent paradox; the cabanon shares a wall with *Etoile de Mer* restaurant – a favourite place for fresh sea urchin. Whether this small luxury negates the ideals of the primitive or not, what is clear is that the frugality with which Corbusier constructed his petit cabanon, and its relationship to the natural environment resulted in an atmosphere where the master felt modes of deep psycho-spiritual reflection were possible. There is no question that the cabanon provided Corbusier with a place unencumbered by the excesses of material luxury and let him revel in the contemplative air of simplicity. Le Corbusier spent his last waking hour here before drowning in August of 1965 in the Mediterranean Sea below.

"I feel so fine here... this is likely where I will breathe my last breath."

-Le Corbusier



Figure 11: Corbusier inside 'le cabanon'

WILDERNESS AND RITUAL

Throughout history the wilderness has been the setting of important rites of passage that have facilitated wide spread personal and collective transformations, whether social, cultural or spiritual. The well known ethnographer, Arnold Van Gennep, gave widespread credence to the notion that rites of passage typically involve three main stages; preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation).²²

i. Separation

The first phase of the rite of passage is one of separation, the removal of one from his or her level of comfort and identification. This is usually symbolized by the crossing of a significant threshold, an entering into a geographic place of wilderness. Islands, sea journeys, deserts, jungles, and the setting out into alien lands are all representative of the “detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, or from both.”²³ Geographic distance and change of physical setting are significant for the individual to implement both a physiological and psychological separation from a prior state of identification with an earlier cultural framework. Such symbolic actions, “consciously performed”²⁴ are important in that there is a reciprocal relationship between inner and outer worlds; “Ritual actions give expression to the desires of one’s heart. They provide a bridge between physical reality and the reality of the spirit.”²⁵ In this project, the role of separation is provided for in the journey from mainland to island. The ‘house in the wilderness’ is located on an island outcropping in Lake Temagami in Northern Ontario and is accessible only by a significant automobile ride, followed by a lengthy canoe journey. These two modes of travel, traversing across significant geographical area, will provide an impactful degree of separation both physiologically and psychologically. Major changes in geology, traversing from the continental shelves of southern Ontario into the Canadian Shield region where the project is located will heighten this perception of separation. Perhaps the most influential threshold to be crossed is one of water. Throughout the world of myth, stories associated with water are stories associated with separation and transformation. Water is the element *par excellence* when speaking of significant thresholds; “Water is truly the transitory element. It is the essential, ontological metamorphosis...”²⁶ The sojourn by canoe, that most simple and primitive of water vessels, speaks to us of a removal of what is known to that which is unknown. The canoe by nature of its very simplicity is the echo of the coffin, the hollowed out tree, floating across the

²² Gennep, Arnold Van. *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960) 11.

²³ Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977) 94.

²⁴ Clift, Jean Dalby. and Wallace B. Clift. *The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning*. (New York: Paulist, 1996) 15.

²⁵ Ibid, 15

²⁶ Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Dallas: (Pegasus Foundation, 1983) 16.

deep unknown, into a state of the liminal, the precise preparation for our experience in the wild. Gaston Bachelard aptly states:

Thus a farewell at the water's edge is the most heartrending and, at the same time, the most literary of all farewells. Its poetry makes use of an old wellspring of dreams and heroism. It awakens in us, no doubt, the most painful of echoes. One entire facet of our nocturnal soul can be explained by the myth of death conceived as a departure over water.²⁷

ii. Liminality

Perhaps the most significant of the three stages resides in the period marked by liminality. The word liminal, is from the latin root *limen*, meaning "threshold". In this stage, marked by concentrated ritual actions, the individual undergoes a systematic deconstruction of preconceived notions of her/his former self. The liminal entity is a being in flux, neither here nor there but rather a creature suspended in the in-between statuses of former and future self. This liminal period is closely associated with death, to being in the womb, or the belly of the whale, adequately expressed in many ancient mythological legends and stories. The liminal period is a period of intense humility, an existence of passive obedience to the powers that be, with the individual at the complete mercy of authority, an instructor, the elders, or the cosmos. The wilderness plays a crucial role in the liminal state as a place of separation from societal and cultural frameworks of understanding. It is a place where the individual is exposed to the harsh realities and beautiful discoveries of the natural environment. It can lead to a "development of the person toward an enlargement of personality or worldview, toward the transformation of the person by their connection with some important reality or value beyond themselves."²⁸ Such transformation typically has the aim of preparation for a renewed sense of purpose or meaning, a new role to be assumed by the initiate after the liminal period has been completed. Anthropologist Victor Turner remarks of the initiate;

Their behavior is normally passive or humble...they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as if they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life.²⁹

The house in the wilderness facilitates a direct engagement with ritualistic action through an architectural spatial sequence. It is here in the house of the wilderness, a basic mode of shelter, where the initiate is exposed to both the beauty and harsh reality of the natural environment in a holistic encounter with the wilderness and all that is wild within and without.

²⁷ Ibid, 75

²⁸ Clift, 20

²⁹ Turner, 95

ii.b. Liminality: Architectural Sequence as Ritual Action

In the essay “From Shinto to Ando”, Gunter Nitschke exposes the power of explicitly planned spatial sequences in eastern notions of space, where a destination is experienced via several ‘arrivals’ as opposed to the more western conception of a singular arrival.³⁰ This sequential aspect is clearly expressed especially in Japanese architecture both traditional and modern where many techniques are employed in order to delay and make conscious the journey of *arriving* as a process instead of a singular moment. The process of arrival is intended to happen through stages of ritual, where several minor destinations manifest themselves while pursuing the final major architectural destination. Many of these successive stages involve specific physiological changes where the body and its movement through space is importantly considered. Whether a change in direction, the crawling through a small garden gate, the successive climbing of stairs- even differences in vegetation and plantings along the path – all are indicative of a prolonged and ritualistic sequence of arriving at a special place. The house in the wilderness takes cues from this essay in its manifestation, learning from the two projects outlined by Nitschke; the temple at Shisen-do, and more so, Tadao Ando’s Mount Rokko Chapel. Both of these projects explicitly expound spatial manipulation techniques in order to heighten the experience of sacred places. Below is diagram indicating the spatial sequence at Ando’s Mount Rokko Chapel, from which the ‘house in the wilderness’ takes significant inspiration.

³⁰ Nitschke, Günter. *From Shinto to Ando: Studies in Architectural Anthropology in Japan*. (London: Academy Editions, 1993) 31-47.

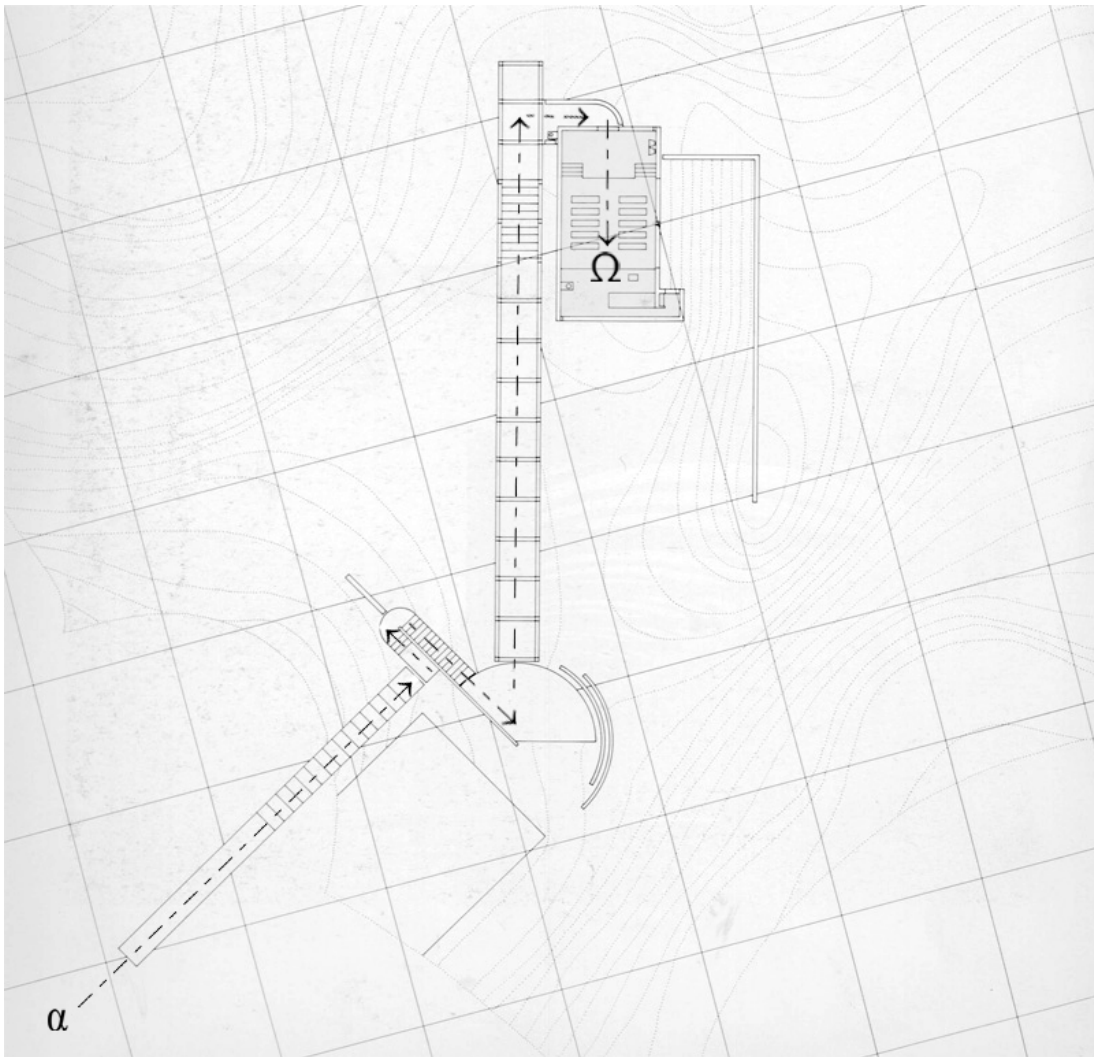


Figure 12-15: Tadao Ando's Mount Rokko Chapel employs an elaborate spatial sequence to heighten the sense of arrival at the chapel proper. Several changes in direction, elevation, areas of repose and views out into the landscape prepare the visitor for entrance into the sacred space.



Figure 13



Figure 13



Figure 15

House in the Wilderness: Spatial Sequence

"I see wilderness as our primary teacher. For this reason I consciously acknowledge the transitions of entering and leaving the wilderness with rituals."³¹

1. After several hours in an automobile, traversing across a large part of the province of Ontario, experiencing major shifts in geology and landscape, one launches the canoe and prepares for the lengthy canoe paddle to an obscure little island outcropping at the northern edge of Lake Temagami. After several kilometers of canoeing the hut appears on the horizon as a simple roof structure saddling a ridge of carved Achaean rock on the southern side of the small island. Approaching closer, a small docking area is visible; upon reaching the dock the initiate docks the canoe while sighing a breath of relief that they have reached the point of destination after several lengthy stages of removal from the 'outside' world.



³¹ Harper, 191

2. Following a rather narrow and determined path cut into the rocky ridge, the initiate finds that the path descends into the stone incision, instead of ascending directly to the hut. What was once understood as a direct and easy path turns out to be somewhat of a detour. The initiate finds that they are being lead underneath the shadowy overhang of the roof structure, back to the level of the lake, where the water subsumes the path and covers it over with its deep shadowy waters.



3. Here, at the 'ceremonial stone bath,' the initiate must undress and wade through the neck-deep lake water, finding that there is an opening through the ridge and back out into the lake. If so desired the initiate can swim through this opening, and enter the deep black lake as a symbol of initiatory cleansing, a baptism of sorts, where all that has been carried with oneself from ones previous position in the world can be left behind. It is here that water becomes *"an invitation to die; it is an invitation to a special death that allows us to return to one of the elementary material refuges."*³²



³² Bachelard, 55

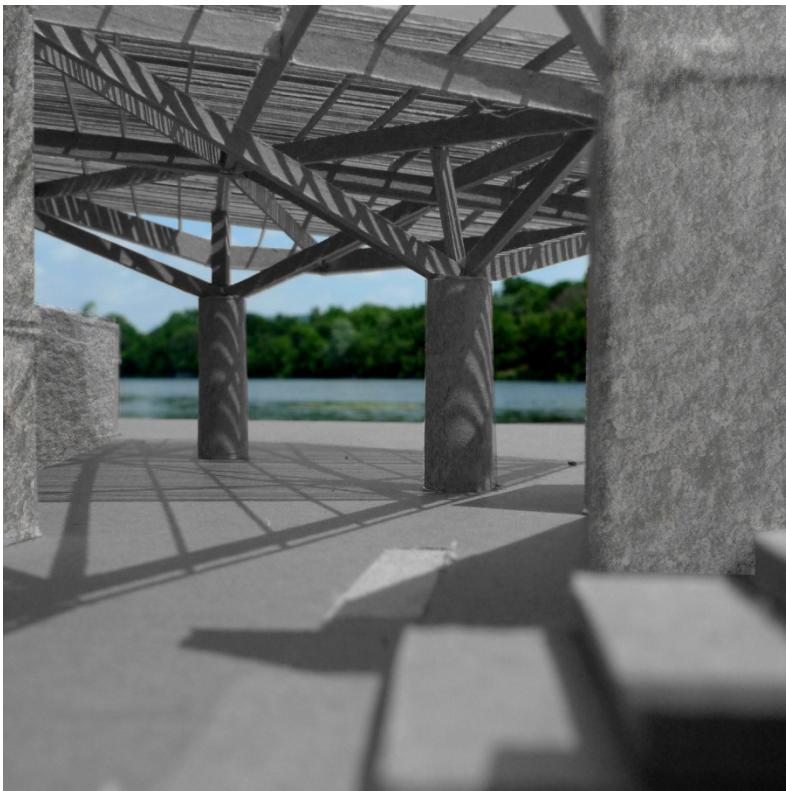
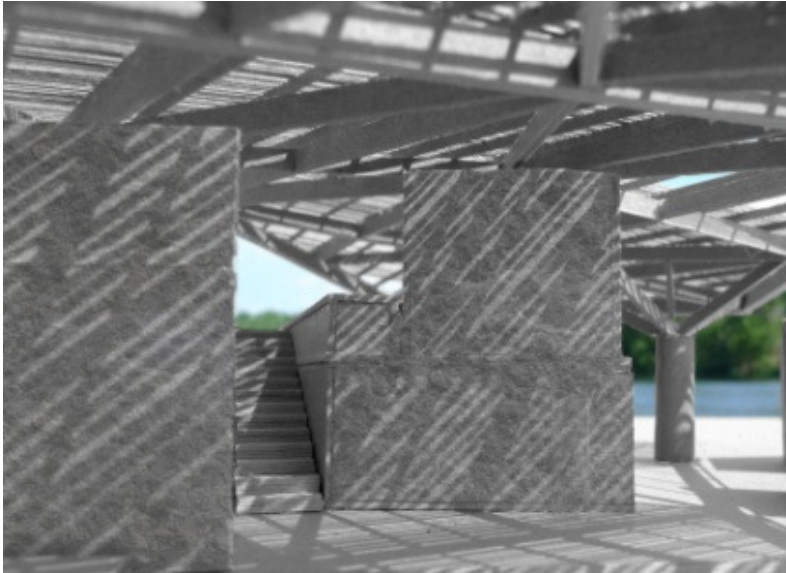
4. Upon returning and exiting the 'ceremonial bath,' redressing (it is hoped that one might have brought a change of clothes, further signifying a change in status) and continuing along the entrance path, one is lead out from underneath the shadowy overhang of the hut, ascending steps that lead east, away from the hut where one arrives at an elevated stone outcropping with magnificent views out toward the open lake. This outcropping is a place of meditation and resting, a place where one can contemplate ones relationship to the body of water from which they have recently emerged.



5. After a desired amount of contemplative mediation, the path shifts 180 degrees west, back underneath the shadowy overhang of the hut. Here it is imagined that one will finally enter the hut – but this is not yet so. One instead is forced to duck underneath the eave and continue another passing along the width of the roof.



6. Turning 90 degrees south, one is directed to a staircase which then descends in the northern direction, leading down into the 'cave' hut, turns one, two more times, and arrives back at lake level looking due south across the lake. Facing south, the inhabitant has opportunity to bask in the heat of the noonday and late afternoon sunlight.



The hut proper is a small cave-like dwelling carved into the stone ridge and facilitates a very primitive mode of existence, thereby exposing the inhabitant to the natural environment as much as is possible. A large timber roof is supported by the stone ridge, large timber posts and wooden trusses, and provides basic shelter under which a sleeping area and fire-pit are located. Such basic amenities although seemingly sparse are intentional, thereby forcing the inhabitant outward into the surrounding landscape to engage its material contingencies, in search of materials that might make the hut dwelling more habitable; “A critical aspect of experiencing wilderness is the willingness to simplify.”³³ It aims to provide simultaneous introversion and extroversion, at one with oneself and the natural environment. Such small spaces within the natural environment have always been sought-after by those looking for ultimate repose; an existence stripped of all superfluous attachment and amenity, a place where the fundamental realization of what is important can be actualized:



³³ Harper, 188

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.³⁴

iii) Return: Fostering a Cultural Understanding of Sustainability

In developing sustainable strategies that will affect off-setting the increasingly rampant destructiveness our current contemporary milieu has manifested, a direct and holistic engagement with the natural environment should be considered vital. A sustainable approach that relies solely upon technological invention without the development of a broader cultural understanding of sustainability will not provide the impetus necessary to balance the current state of megalomaniac exploitation. The house in the wilderness seeks to provide a place where a significant relationship to the natural environment and cosmos can be manifest. It attempts to provide an atmosphere of contemplation and solitude, a place that may lead to a stronger alignment of inhabitant and environment where a sustainable identity can be nourished and developed. Access to similar structures on a National level, carries with it the potentiality of strengthening a collective cultural understanding of empathy toward inhabitant and environment and provides a basis from which subsequent sustainable technologies can flourish. The economy of space within an enlightened architectural poverty subjected to the natural cycles of environment and ecology could very well provide a place rich in imaginative incubation; an activity which will be increasingly relied upon in inventing and developing new ideas for sustainable living. Such new strategies will, and should, increasingly inform an individual and collective identity; one that has as its basis a deep reverence and respect for the life-sustaining environment. Recently, Canada's entry into the Venice Biennale for architecture (2012), dealt with questions of National identity in the face of increasing migration. A national identity forged along Canada's unique and varied landscape could provide a point of shared concern and unification across ethnicity and cultural belief. Such an identity would serve to protect and nourish both citizen and environment, and could lead to increasingly rich and multivalent cultural manifestations. Canada's landscape contains some of the most affective and complex ecological systems, that, if given the chance, could inspire sustainable leadership on a global scale. Although the house in the wilderness is manifest here as a somewhat simple and crude structure, it should not be judged in terms of insignificance; for as Thoreau's cabin, Heidegger's hut, and Corbusier's cabanon have shown, primitive structures are capable of influencing the course and trajectory of contemporary literary, philosophical, and architectural thought. In light of numerous and

³⁴ Walden, 59

increasing manmade environmental disasters and exploitation, the time for right living on an individual and global scale has never been more important.

“Without a complex knowledge of one’s place, and without the faithfulness to one’s place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed.”³⁵

³⁵ Berry, Wendell. “The Regional Motive,” in *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*. ed. Vincent B. Canizaro. (New York: Princeton Architectural, 2007) 38.

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