Entry Condition

The duality of solid and void gains experiential significance only through making the juxtaposition readable, as in the case of the entry condition of Richard Meier’s Douglas House. In the Douglas House the bridge entry and vertical circulation routes are aligned with the fireplace flue on the upper stories and the fireplace mass on the lower floors, redirecting views to the lake upon entry into the void at any floor level. Through forced, horizontally redirected views one begins to experience the openness of the void, so that the two halves become perceptually present. In either the experience of movement between floor levels via the interior stair, or through accessing the main entry at roof level, the dialog between solid and void metaphysically links the inhabitant to natural conditions of the site, specifically its location on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan.

The reading of solid and void in the models of the thesis project provided a link to several previously completed studio projects. Reconsideration of these earlier works, coupled with an integration of the entry experience with the terrain, provided a filter for continuing development of the project.

Formal acknowledgement of east and west enables creation of an entry pathway along a waist-high retaining wall securing the naturally rising dunes to the south. Initially conceived as a large, monolithic, physical presence, concerns of structure and economy precipitated an evolution of the fundamental gesture to a more autochthonous response, a continuous, linear, ground-level decking, connecting street to house to marsh. Flush with the concrete surface under the main portion of the house, the wooden walkway mediates between sculpted land – the underside of the house and an opposing lawn area, or bocci court – and the surrounding wild, often flooded underbrush and reeds.
Prospect and Refuge

Considered phenomenologically, the juxtaposition of solid and void succumbs to a more easily identifiable duality, that described in Jay Appleton’s seminal work entitled *The Experience of Landscape*, as the theory of Prospect and Refuge. Originating from an anthropological basis, the theory is most easily summarized by the phrase, “to see without being seen.” Implicit in the statement is the idea of prospect dominant terrains and refuge dominant terrains, each playing a necessary role in the most basic animal behaviors.

The two properties exist as a endpoints on a spectrum rather than mutually exclusive juxtapositions. Prospect dominant terrains contain varying degrees of refuge; conversely, refuge dominant terrains contain certain degrees of prospect, or a visual link with the surroundings. Appleton states that there is an innate human pleasure derived from occupying a somewhat secluded place that provides views of either predator or prey.

The fundamental ideas of prospect-refuge theory were always present in the guiding thoughts of several previous studio projects. One such project, conversion of a Zurich attic into an apartment, most clearly embodies the coexistence of both prospect and refuge in the form of a loft balcony, constituting a single physical violation of the delineation of solid and void, two diametrically opposed prisms. The loft provides the ultimate prospecting position from a fairly confined refuge.

The idea of attic, particularly the notion of refurbishing an existing space with complex, irregular ceiling planes, exists as a two-fold phenomenological condition, each addressed in Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. Childhood memories of an attic conjure up images of confined spaces where one is constantly engaged through touch with multiple, intersecting planes, whether interpreted as wall, ceiling, rafter or joist. Bachelard also describes the inherent human pleasure afforded by an observatory position over a certain domain, above all that is below. The existing geometry of the attic and location of the stair entry provided an opportunity for the dual conditions of attics from memory to each be experientially manifested through division of the volume along the primary ridgeline into opposing prisms of solid and void.

These objectives of creating simultaneously present and phenomenologically distinct spatial experiences underpinned the most essential, guiding ideas of the tidal retreat. Sketches from *The Experience of Landscape* graphically describe fundamental aspects of the theory. The clarity of architectural conditions in the thesis project existed for me more so in terms of phenomenological intent than in clarity of structure or geometrical composition.

Much of Frank Lloyd Wright’s residential was imbued with characteristics of prospect and refuge. The brow off the master bedroom at Taliesin was Wright’s most basic condition of prospect, overlooking the Wisconsin River valley that was so instrumental in both his formative and practicing years.
Watercolor Vignettes
Architecture of Experience

La Tourette’s power as an architectural work exists in its capacity to intensify the inhabitant’s consciousness, particularly of daily rhythms and the corresponding significance of the natural world. The monastery itself thereby induces a state of contemplation and reflection, through ritualistic activities of the Order, powerfully accommodated in this intermingling of light and built form. Inhabiting La Tourette over the course of a full day, and perhaps through successive seasons, is necessary to fully comprehend its dependency upon and strength derived from the relationship to nature, both in terms of physical space and cyclical time. The foundation of Monasticism as a way of living rests primarily in the ritualistic structure of each day. I felt that this was a rich and appropriate precedent, not necessarily in terms of architectural form, but as a paradigm for thinking about ritualistic activities of the day. This construct is particularly valid in the case of designing a retreat as a place of solitude, contemplation, of refuge in this coastal setting where the fundamental spatial and temporal order is tied inherently to natural rhythms, be it of the course of the sun during the day, or more significantly, of the ebb and flow of the tides.
Conclusion

In the midst of the struggle for hierarchy, and clarity, I consistently returned to thoughts about experience, about my own experience whether at La Tourette, or at Figure Eight. My objective in this thesis, both the investigation and the project, was to explore architecture’s capacity to enhance, enrich, or imbue the occupants’ experience with not so much a quality of respect, but with a certain prescience of the natural conditions, manifest most clearly through cyclical events. Phenomenology provided the basis for much of the work; as one writer describes it, “Phenomenology in its essence is a philosophy of how time is realised in consciousness,” or, our awareness of the passage of time.

It’s a thought as simple as sitting in a chair awaiting the impending sunset, with feet propped upon the railing, accompanied solely by a good book and good coffee, preparing for a journey through a writer’s imagination to another time and another place, contingent upon manipulation of the senses, enriched by the reality of the present (and present) condition.

The investigation evolved through fragmentary, localized or individualized thoughts about creating architectural conditions that enhance one’s perception of place, one’s perception of the natural condition. Within this phenomenological context, there is also a recognition of inherent desires for dwelling, of Bachelard’s imagery of the tower and cave, of light and dark, enclosed and open. The small watercolors are an attempt to represent those individualized conditions, whether they pertain to the notion of topophilia, to phenomenology or temporality, or to the idea of prospect and refuge. The hope is that the constructional acts, despite a certain complexity, are able to exist in a viable acknowledgement of fundamental surrounding conditions which are informative of and contributory to the evolving whole. In some way the agglomeration of these concerns, more so than a final proposal, comprise the result of the study.