The Great Indoors

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ABSTRACT

This paper locates an interior condition, The Great Indoors, relative to the The Great Outdoors via historical and contemporary notions of wilderness and its associations to awe, wonder, fear and chaos. Initially posited as sites of spatial retreat and protective shelter, such interiors are shown to be observatories of external weather phenomena. Extending beyond the conventions of the picturesque view given by overlooks or large expanses of window glass, The Great Indoors is considered as a temporal and political vessel vulnerable to contemporary (interior) storm clouds. The migration of atmosphere-forming weather and wilderness across the sill is most notably activated by the works of Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, Vladimir Jankovic, James Turrell, and New Zealand Architects, Stuart Gardyne and Michael Bennett.

WILDERNESS AT LARGE

In 1845 Henry David Thoreau sauntered into the Massachusetts forest where he reportedly built a small dwelling with his own hands. The makeshift structure has become emblematic for its frugal construction as provisional resistance to the pervasive climate and the tempering demands of civilisation. (Figure 1) As the story goes, the remotely sited, single-room cabin fostered an interior space in which Thoreau could think and write, a space so unencumbered by the ills and noise of everyday life that a work of prosaic philosophy could emerge. (Figure 2) Thoreau wrote:

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.

Thoreau's Walden or, life in the woods is an address upon socio-political consciousness specific to mid-nineteenth century American life. As an introspective diary saturated by romanticism, material economy and social commentary, it is a text that rekindles poetic reflection, self-sufficiency and resilience towards political and cultural conformity. Thoreau's poignant examination of life and thought in 'The New World' pinpoints a transitional moment in western culture's notion of wilderness.

In the Middle Ages, wilderness prevailed as a form of nature that instilled fear rather than wonder or pleasure. As Pollack states, it was a limitless and lawless state, a physical territory as well as a mental attitude strongly aligned with the rhetoric of the sublime.² J. B. Jackson claims that this notion of wilderness was replaced in the early eighteenth century by a view central to American history's relation to Nature Romanticism, whereby:

The belief that any one exposed to the forest for a certain length of time underwent a spiritual awakening, became aware of the Seamless Web of Being, and thereafter renounced the world.³

As the means to possess and cultivate land in the early nineteenth century increased, the concept of wilderness acquired a pastoral and picturesque definition that saw it as an aesthetic and domesticated view hemmed in by wildness; i.e. wildness with reference to un-owned, as opposed to unknown. As early as 1888, American hunting groups with a goal to promote manly sport with the rifle' formed the tenets of contemporary wilderness experience and land policy. ⁴This form of wilderness acquired two distinct identities: one, where 'wilderness' implied a state of mind, 'terra incognita' (a concept created and held by individuals and groups), and two, a political construct (a specific protected area defined and designated by government decree). ⁵

Wilderness, as a discrete physical entity, is central to a current legal battle between ecologists wanting to protect the last stands of wilderness from human intervention, and lobbyists sponsored by tourism, recreation and resource developers such as mining and logging, who support freedom of access and enterprise. A spatial and political inversion has occurred; wild lands are now contained and surrounded by domestic lands as inter alia i.e land to be kept and maintained in a state of nature. 6 Wilderness as raw, unruly Nature has been recast as an interior.

In a far more condensed time span, New Zealand has adopted all of these shifts in the notion of wilderness simultaneously. Boasting a stauncher bio-centric policy than the USA, its management of





Above left

Figure 1:Thoreau's Walden Pond cabin. Julieanna Preston, 1989.

Above right Figure 2:Thoreau's cabin interior. Photo © K. M. Lynch.

wilderness seeks to eliminate 'developments such as huts, tracks (trails), bridges, signs and mechanised access'. And yet, at the same time that New Zealand has committed over thirty percent of its total land mass to conservation, touts itself as a protector of land, birds and water, and advertises itself as 'Paradise Lost' and 'God's Own', it wrestles to balance a sustainable consciousness with a freedom associated with land rights and a desire to capture a flourishing tourist economy. As Hugh Barr writes:

New Zealanders have always considered it their birthright to go to the beach, climb or ski mountains, tramp (a New Zealand term for backpacking or biking) the forests and wildlands, hunt for introduced deer, goats and pigs, and fish the rivers for introduced salmon and trout... [It] is a fundamental component to what New Zealanders see as quality of life and part of our identity as a fit and free outdoors people.⁸

This brief outline of wilderness' notional transformation establishes two points: First, wilderness is a complex idea grafted with social values and political agendas not singularly defined or uniformly understood. Second, because of its relative short history of settlement, its allegiance to Western European landscape attitudes and its alliance with American land policy legislation, New Zealand sports an intensified and hybridised wilderness. As thousands of tourists flock to the country each year to stand at overlooks and forest peaks in order to obtain a first-hand glimpse of that photograph posted in a guidebook or website, it is no longer clear whether the experience or the image is more important. With equal enthusiasm, hundreds of holiday homes are constructed within or at the edge of wilderness with a primary aim to glean a spectacular view of the surrounding landscape, a particularly western European attitude, that, according to landscape theorist Gina Crandell, is a result of seventeenth century landscape painting's influence on revaluing nature as a pastoral ideal. ⁹

ISI AND WEATHER

On the surface, New Zealand is the epitome of wilderness. Wild spirits and mythic creatures lurk in the flora, fauna and waters, yet one soon feels an eerie absence of mammals while tramping in the forest. It is not poisonous snakes, wolves or malaria-ridden mosquitoes that will 'get you' but a quick shift in temperature, wind direction or rugged terrain that claims the lives of more than eight people each year and necessitates many rescue operations. Ouch differential is due to the islands' small land area and significant topographic differential. Ensuing weather does not linger or gather — it rushes in and out. In a matter of an hour, winds can shift from south to north without hiatus, temperatures can plummet or soar from 8 to 38 degrees Celsius, a fog can brew in the harbour thick enough to close airports, plants can sprout a measurable length right before your eyes, and a year's supply of rain can storm the drains. Sometimes all of this happens on the same day. According to regional weather map analysis, New Zealand is merely a minor blip of frictional resistance to large atmospheric forces operating at a global scale. Returning to Walden, Thoreau describes its climate:

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. I

In contrast to this gentle pageantry of seasonal shifts, the magnitude of spatial forces enveloping New Zealand defies even the best forecasting methods. Weather is posited as the most variable and consistent characteristic of everyday life. As contemporary cultural theorists and landscape geographers argue as to the authenticity of New Zealand's modern landscape, and government continues to sanction large tracts of land and ocean as reserve, weather appears to be the last bastion of wilderness (and a rogue one at that) to elude the grasp of regulation and management. Always present, New Zealand weather lingers, hovers, thrashes and deluges every scene as a high-pitched, dramatic performance.

CALCULATED OBSERVATION

Weather watching has developed a special strain of architecture that is remarkably similar to Thoreau's cabin: small and often for solitary occupation, simple and often temporary, and always sited in order to maximise monitoring of the surrounds. As data collection stations, weather observatories are designed to obtain a true and accurate measure of the vicinity's atmosphere using universally standard procedures.

The site chosen for exposing the outside instruments should be the most unrestricted area possible. An open space 300 or 400 feet square without buildings or trees and without large areas of concrete bordering the site...would afford the ideal location. To prevent rays of the sun from falling on thermometers used for air temperature measurements, a screen, or instrument shelter, is required. It should be placed near the center of a plot covered by short, level grass, with a minimum area of about 20 feet by 20 feet...The rain gage (sic) should be about 10 feet from the shelter. The plot should be in an area of level ground. In the shelter of the shelter of the shelter.

In this case, collecting quantitative data ranks more importantly than inhabitation and comfort: the area dedicated for weather watching in weather stations is small and unadorned. Technologically precise instruments detect cloud direction, cloud height, temperature, humidity, wind direction, wind speed, pressure and precipitation, while cloud types, states of visibility and definitions of hydrometeors such as dry haze, damp haze, light fog, ice fog, smoke, dew, dust, frost and drifting

snow are qualitatively described and annotated through human observation.¹³ Read with a full bodied vocabulary which includes clouds described as 'heavy and swelling', 'like waves of the sea', 'in the form of upward hooks ending in a little claw', 'sprouting', ¹⁴ the sky is figured as a stage:

There are occasions on which the sky is serene and the stage is empty, but generally there are clouds to be seen; they move, they change - all on business, with a purpose in their direction and behaviour...The whole stage is full of action, the action which carries on the life of the world, for clouds are the precursors or survivors of the rainfall upon which the world thrives. ¹⁵

Perhaps divulging meteorology's latent prosaic tendency, Shaw's metaphor is not a casual one: his weather watching occurred from within a weather station. A window frame served as the only hard-edged observational instrument to supplement qualitative interpretation, rather than calculating the local forces of wilderness.

WATCHING FROM WITHIN

Other forms of constructed interiors for observation in the wilderness include hunting and bird watching structures known as blinds, stands and hides. These structures occupy the landscape in an effort to blend in, provide cover from the elements and afford key opportunities for viewing prey.¹⁶





A blind, used for hunting ducks, often consists as a woven mat of local plant material configured as a camouflage screen. It is frequently left open to the sky.¹⁷ A stand, typically used in hunting deer, is a makeshift perch for one person situated in a tree. While it does not offer much enclosure or area in which to move about, it provides exceptional overhead viewing while reducing the chance of detection by scent. Bound by minimal size, material and aesthetic considerations, each of these forms of observatory demonstrates a basic condition of an interior: to support the power of vision extending from the inside out.

Hides, on the other hand, sequester bird watchers in a fully enclosed interior space immersed within the environment. Usually roofed and fitted with seats for patient waiting, hides are often blended into the foliage by using materials gathered from the immediate site¹⁸ or paint colours approximating the local palette. A hide nestled into the grasses of a local New Zealand tidal inlet enunciates a slight shift in our weather-watching discussion. (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6) As a hut set apart from other dwellings, as a shelter from climate, and as a disguise that facilitates immersive observation, this hide suggests more than fortuitous viewing. It proposes interior occupation by a plague adorning its lintel which commemorates its founder, the accoutrements of its internal furnishings (latches, benches, ledges, ventilation flaps), and the smooth and oily surfaces demonstrating use — marred only by graffiti carved into the timber's salt-leached patina. As such, it gives evidence of what J. R. Tolkien identifies as a 'flet', an archaic term referring to the inner part of a dwelling, a structure used to monitor border crossing activity by elves in Middle Earth.



Opposite leftFigure 3:A New Zealand hide: context. Julieanna Preston, 2008.

Opposite rightFigure 4:A New Zealand hide: entry detail. Julieanna Preston, 2008.



Above left Figure 5:A New Zealand hide: look out. Julieanna Preston, 2008.

Above right Figure 6:A New Zealand hide: furnishings. Julieanna Preston, 2008.

The branches of the mallorn-tree grew out nearly straight a logic or consciousness formed by its look into that space. Also

In this paper, the term 'flet' signifies an interior constituted by could be felt and generated by merely closing one's eyes.²² the migration of atmosphere-forming weather and wilderness 1997 for client Ray Labone.

I FTTING IN

In the late 1960s, Turrell transformed an abandoned hotel in the ceiling, or witnessing a 'fresh' wind of 130 kilometres per hour small seaside town of Ocean Park, California, into a studio and throw a roof across the valley. exhibition space. In an effort to master the art of light projection, he painted over and covered all windows on the outside with Turrell's signature is an infusion of light around, upon and against gypsum board walls, insulated all spaces with acoustic deadening a surface, such that the edge of what is concrete vaporises. This material, and surfaced everything in a pure white plaster finish. poetic technique is reminiscent of the luminists, a group of late These efforts effectively severed all spatial and temporal ties nineteenth century landscape painters known for inducing silence between the inside and outside. Upon realising that the external and stillness into a perfect, miniature universe that triggered environment was an untapped resource of fine grades of light monumentality through scale rather than size.²³ As a sequence experience, Turrell set out to mine the interior space of the hotel of scenes couched in spatial duration, Mendota Stoppages is an as a spatial instrument. As a site-specific orchestration of temporal introspective re-conceptualisation of interior. More phenomenal values, Mendota Stoppages existed as a progression of ten night than political, more sensual than technological, it is a work more spaces and two day spaces for either side of the 1970 equinox. intimate and immersive than a large glass window could possibly A musical score was produced to annotate the performance to offer. reflect small shifts in sunlight angles and light intensities.²⁰ External events were filtered through apertures created in the body of the In contrast, the Labone Cabin is situated thirty metres above a building and cast upon the walls, floors and ceilings surfaces.

Mendota Stoppages was significant because it was the first site- Mountains. (Figure 7) Such a privileged vantage point is facilitated specific sensing space: a space that responds to a space outside with by large expanses of horizontal window glass, a highly desirable

from the trunk, and then swept upward; but near the top the visual qualities within such spaces - their density, grain, tone, the main stem divided into a crown of many boughs, and sense of surface, and where vision lost its distinction of being 'out among these they found that there had been built a wooden there' and 'in here' – were explored.²¹ Both of Turrell's biographers, platform, or flet as such things were called in those days... 19 Noever and Adcock, credit the installation as a founding work of Turrell's continuing re-conceptualisation of space as something that

across the physical threshold between the The Great Outdoors Mendota Stoppages lends credence to understanding interiors and The Great Indoors. Two case studies articulate my call to as vessels for receiving, observing and appreciating exterior consider interiors as climate-ridden environments inclusive of environment, especially those spatial factors associated with storm clouds. The first is an artist's installation called Mendota weather. It highlights the manner in which interiors harbour a Stoppages performed by James Turrell in the late 1960s. The threshold: weather in the form of raw nature being cajoled across second is a house at Morison Bush, Wairarapa, New Zealand, the boundary and transformed by the process of falling upon designed by architects Stuart Gardyne and Michael Bennett in an interior surface. In greater than visual terms, this suggests a sensate awareness of weather demonstrated in such moments as waking in a flood of floral scent lofting across a window sill: hearing the house shrink and paint blister as the day's heat evaporates; being seduced by erotic sunsets strewn across the

river and oversees a full compendium of native bush, river bed and farm land culminating in a panoramic view of the Tararua by overt signs of civilisation, a significant factor in real estate frame, several observations can be made. Because of its size and value. The cabin is a prime example of New Zealand's general the economy of its internal planning in relation to the scale of the infatuation with the landscape as simply a view, a pleasurable surrounding landscape, the cabin nearly forfeits an architectural indulgence while time and weather pass by As New Zealand exterior. The building envelope is a highly attenuated skeletal meteorologist Erick Brenstrum states: We are people of the sky. screen of minimal thickness, necessary to hold the roof down in We live surrounded by the sky and we cushion ourselves from gale force southerlies, and keep the house intact during lateral its effects with our clothes and houses'.24

tree house and cave'.²⁵

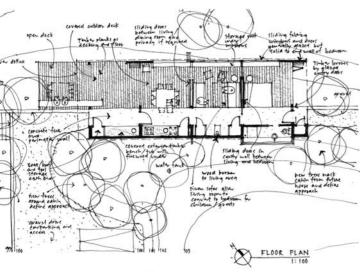
The plan and section reveal the manner in which the cabin reduces the idea of 'house' to the essential need for shelter and It is the architect's mention of dreaming that tenders hope of refuge, 'the psychological comfort of the cave', as well as a desire moving beyond the picturesque value of nature and wilderness for outlook – the sense of potential and possibility suggested towards an interior more akin to Thoreau's musings on life, politics, by a wide view...²⁶ (Figure 10). This statement reveals a facet culture and social custom. His cabin had but two windows, which, between weather and cabin beyond what W.G. Clark²⁷ cites as because of the quality of glass-making at the time, were less than the pervasive tendency to treat shelter as simply a bare necessity crystal clear. His text implies that the door stood agape except response to threat by Mother Nature and a knee jerk reaction for the coldest of months letting in mice, bird song, visitors and of survival, where both models ignore underlying motives for pungent aromas of the forest. This same door served to extend pleasure, or even simple comfort. Like Thoreau, Gardyne is not the interior by virtue of his daily walks. As his cabin afforded writing with the ambivalent eye of the surveyor measuring the him protection from the elements, his writing afforded him time land with a theodolite; he is an interloper tracking a dramaturgy of to scrutinise a state of affairs beyond the bounds of Walden. climatic events in the context of daily life, an activity that rehearses I do not mean to advocate Thoreau's retreat or philosophy as redemptive retreat as spiritual or emotional rejuvenation.²⁸

feature in New Zealand houses, and when unencumbered Given the cabin's expansive view and its ubiquitous structural seismic movement. There is nothing extraordinary about the cabin's form - in fact the architects call it a shed. Everything The Labone Cabin also exemplifies a general trait in New about this cabin features the sublime power of the surrounding Zealand architecture to figure frugality over aesthetic exuberance. environment and suggests that it is a transparent hide which It represents a tendency to value the basic needs of shelter, - blends into the wilderness by virtue of a minimal wall thickness protection from wind, rain, cold, heat, earthquakes, tsunami, and that spatially distinguishes The Great Outdoors from The Great drought – as the primary drivers for architectural form (Figure Indoors, Instead of mining the surroundings as seen in Mendota 8.). Exterior and interior domains are often treated with the Stoppages, the Labone Cabin simply lets the outside in perhaps as same aesthetic language uniformly applied in detail, scale and a refined form of camping in a sophisticated tent. As an instrument surface. In the case of the Labone Cabin, this aesthetic is driven for providing basic living conveniences and an observatory by the cabin's timber frame construction which regulates formal within range of New Zealand's managed wilderness, it acquires and spatial proportions, and, as the architects state, organises a a touristic form of occupation without the intent of working the layered sequence of interior experiences from the front façade land agriculturally or occupation through all seasons. I propose (a fully open and vulnerable state) to the back wall made up that it is an interior flet gauged to hunt and track clouds, fog, of smaller, intimate and more secluded cells. (Figure 9) Stuart haze and storms figured by wind and sunlight, and seize temporal Gardyne, one of the cabin's architects writes: 'The cabin is both possession of a never-ending drama that measures daily life, even if that life is in the form of a vacation get-away. As Gardyne indicates, it is a house to induce dreaming.²⁹

a model for contemporary contemplation or development of









wilderness areas, nor do I wish to cast judgement on the merit of phenomenal experience inside or out. The aim has been to make note of the way that interiors and wilderness are hinged by phenomenal and cultural events manifesting themselves at micro and macro scales.

Vladimir Jankovic inspired this boundary-crossing activity in an essay that traces the affects of weather on healthy living in early eighteenth century Britain. Calling it a form of virtual citizenship

between indoors and outdoors, Jankovic reminds us that weather is a private and public condition, not a measureable entity.

One learns important things about the historical meanderings of meteorological interests if one sees them as related to social and somatic attitudes towards the weather as a milieu... Seeing the weather before it is assembled and appropriated as a subject of a shared discourse based on rational discussion and exchange of comparable data – as in some way a boundary object straddling conceptualizations – is like seeing a soil before it is cultivated. What is cultivated depends on the nature of the soil.³⁰

Jankovic's investigation of intimate climates via medicine, health and social preconceptions around dampness, draughts, fresh and stagnant air is an inquiry on domestic atmosphere, a subject which he notes is marginally addressed in historical research. 'We possess no studies on bathroom monsoons, attic drizzles or the oven Scirocco'.³¹ While Jankovic's essay paves the way for future study, it also suggests another form of weather-watching much more akin to John Ruskin's lecture, *The Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century,* which begins by dispelling any notion that there is an ulterior motive to his talk: he merely wishes to bring attention to a series of clouds unnoticed by meteorologists.

Cleverly wooing his audience of weather-watchers, Ruskin draws parallels between the familiar experience of mist as an aqueous vapour that blurs distinction between cloud types – and also social and political orders. For in this lecture, Ruskin seems to play out a metaphor that launches criticism of unfathomable truth' attributed to the physical sciences and his sense that a fragmented harmony was emerging between phenomena and learning through observation. Ruskin's storm-clouds are not merely gaseous volumes traversing the sky in a manner of everyday atmosphere-forming weather; they are signs of a world that is changing (in his terms) for the worse. While Jankovic's call for research on interior weather suggests a focus on the macro-climatic effects of moisture, heat and health in interiors – effectively an importation of weather-watching measures to the inside – Ruskin provokes an interpretation of weather that dismisses atmosphere as simply a passive consequence of climate-forming forces and redirects it towards an interior of self-reflection and critical engagement. His was a warning of ensuing environmental and political upheaval.³²

So imagine yourself positioned in one of these Labone Cabin lounge chairs on any given day in New Zealand (or your own version of wilderness). (Figure 11) Envisage constructing a forecast. As you sit basking in the heat of the sun amplified by the glass, speculate upon what lies beyond the physical and temporal horizon that this perch nurtures. Will that sky be speckled by waves of military aircraft, noxious windborne insects, avian flu or tainted milk powder? Does the sky belie increasing global warming with greater colour saturation, much like the old northern hemisphere proverb: 'Red sky at night; shepherds delight. Red sky in the morning; shepherds warning'. 33

Opposite top left

Figure 7:A view from the Labone cabin interior. Photo © Paul McCredie.

Opposite bottom left

Photo © Paul McCredie.

Figure 9: Plan and section, Labone cabin. Drawing © Stuart Gardyne.

Opposite bottom rightFigure 10:The necessities of comfort in The Labone Cabin lounge area.

Opposite top right

Figure 8: Entering the simple form of the architectural shed. Photo © Paul McCredie.



As the sun wanes and the wind forces you further into the cave's depth, would you contemplate the consequence of the road and power lines being washed away and start collecting water from the roof, or would you fall asleep in the afterglow of a bottle of local Chardonnay to the sound of gurgling downspouts? And as you woke to Tui birds squabbling over cabbage tree seeds and flax blossoms, would your anxieties about rising unemployment and a devalued dollar be dispelled by a sense of well-being and comfort?

Herein lays the fullest sense of interior and wilderness as weather flets.

Note: I would like to acknowledge that an earlier form of this essay was originally delivered as a keynote lecture at the 2009 Atmospheres Symposium at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg Canada. That symposium provided me with valuable insight in order to advance this essay into what it is here.

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Opposite

Figure 11: Interior weather-watching in the Labone Cabin. Photo © Paul McCredie.