

a defense for Night

emily bingham
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[5.0]

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets importing change of times and states,
brandish your crystal tresses in the sky!

William Shakespeare

a delicate play between a massive darkness, a sign of the infinities, and an enveloped brilliance, a reminder of the temporal, directional and mythical presence of self, is the deepest experience of light. light without dark becomes flat, bounded by material. Dark without light becomes nothingness, unfathomable and chilling.

the light of the stars hold us at night. us is a people, changing, the stars are an infinity, timeless.



[7.0]

Darkness in definition is an absence of light. Darkness disallows the things that light allows. A total darkness is an overwhelming experience of disorientation and detachment from the reality of time and place. The most common experience of darkness occurs underneath the untainted night sky. This is an experience that obscures earth, our common reality, but retains place and time through the subtle shine of the stars and the moon. In this circumstance the mind is bounded by light ever so slightly, but allowed to fill the space from the ground, gravity being a sensation that bounds the body, to the sky, made real by the objects we can see.

To be lit is to be true. Photography is an example of this idea in some ways. The exposure of a photograph requires light and the light renders reality in a way that we can observe. To observe is to be true. A dynamic and artistic photographer pushes these realities in order to create an opportunity for interpretation for the viewer, the critic. By manipulating an obscurement of reality, choosing to render areas in deep shadow and removing the glossy colors of reality through the lens, photographs become deceiving- an incomplete representation of reality in order that the reality becomes that of the viewer instead of the artist.

Does architecture have the capacity to reserve reality for the individual?

Shell

Edward Weston, 1927



[8.0]

Detail, Therme Vals
Peter Zumthor, 1996

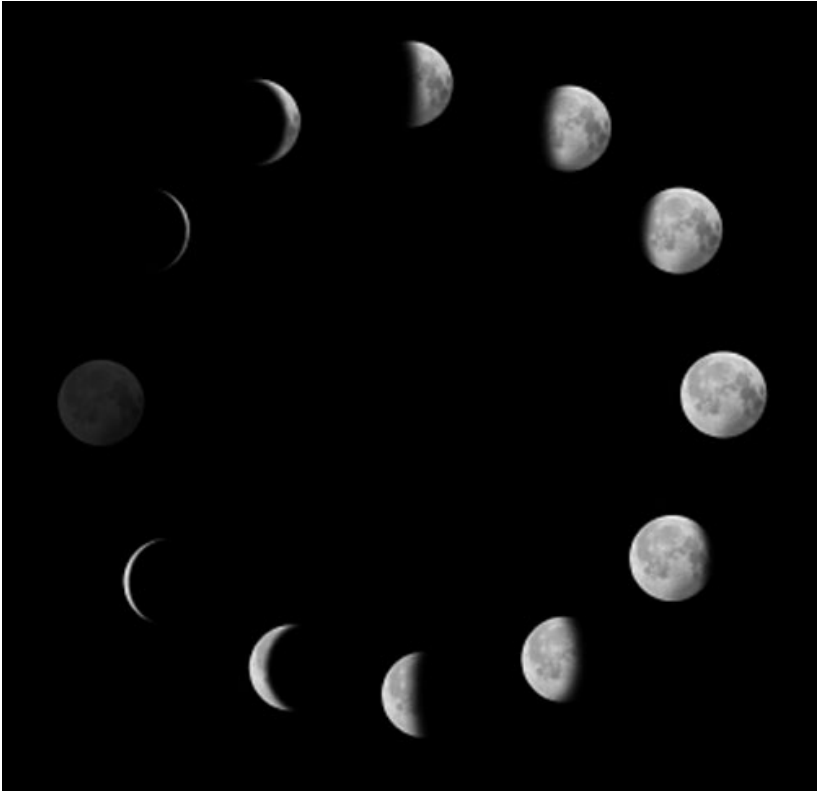
Darkness is the medium for obscuring. Edward Bartholomew is a leading expert in lighting design, especially performance based lighting design which is a field interested in reducing unnecessary light. By nature he must study darkness. His research has led to a list of five particular dynamics of darkness: light, material, area, contrast and time. If these measures are used as a means to understand the characteristics of darkness: its [depth, speed, sound, weight, and texture], a science of darkness is derived.

Light allows for darkness by providing the awareness of place. For one thing to be illuminated is to define reality. For darkness to enshroud space, the light of the sun, the moon or a lesser source must be tempered in some way. This tempering asserts the dynamic of area in relation to darkness; darkness can either be defined as global:night or local:shade. Here lies a critical point of divergence in this study: does local:shade darkness compensate mentally for global:night darkness? Is the darkness of the night sky that ties people together across the planet the same as the contrived darkness of architecture?

In the image at left, light renders the wall in a display of local:shade darkness, giving quality to the wall, the ceiling, and even the sky that filters into the space. Here shade is a dominant object in the space. These spaces have the light that Louis Kahn was speaking of in his thoughts on shadow and silence, saying

"At the threshold, the crossing of silence and light, lies the sanctuary of art, the only language of man. It is the treasury of the shadows. Whatever is made of light casts a shadow. Our work is of shadows; it belongs to light."

Louis I. Kahn, 1971



[10.0]

This darkness is one of revelation: one that serves form. What then is the darkness that serves to obscure? The deep night is the darkness that creates a personal experience, one that is filled by the mind instead of form. Darkness resonates most powerfully as a phenomenon of the night, the night of the stars and the moon and the creatures within them. It is this darkness that affords people across time and place a diagonal experience: one that is completely independent and riddled with the nuance of the situation, yet universal in image and reaction.

In its purest form, the form that was known by the native people, the others before us, night is a moving composition, a symphony, of time and place defined by the cycles of the sun, the moon, and the stars swaying about each other. This composition is of global:night and the light is a beacon encapsulated by a greater darkness. We relate to this effect because of its placeless-ness, a universal escape from reality that is momentarily stifled by darkness. To still the light of the present is to open our minds to the greater world and galaxy contained by darkness.

The value of the night is also found in its time and place telling assurance. For hundreds of thousands of years the cycle of the sun has marked in some degree a biological passage, a cycle of day and night. For even thousands of years, the stars have been a solitary navigational tool. What is the effect of the combination of these cycles? The night is to become a part of this navigational history, to place yourself without time on the continuum of time.

All of these experiences are an action on the part of the individual, not on the part of an instruction, that are driven by an isolation from expectation and normality.



[12.0]



[12.1]

"Blur is decidedly low-definition: there is nothing to see but our dependence on vision itself."

[Project description. Diller Scofidio and Renfro website]

Blur Building

2002

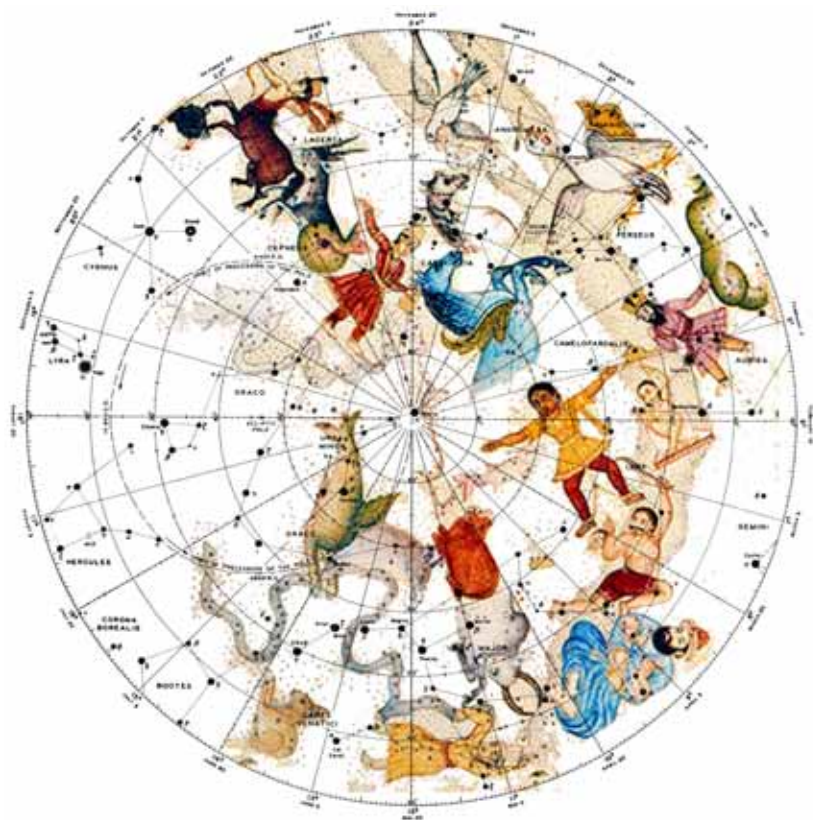
Diller Scofidio & Renfro



This is a project that is interested in taking the line between site and building and fusing them as one. The water to create the cloud is pumped directly from the lake and the shape of the building changes with the atmosphere. The project is called Blur.

The Blur project is captured with more depth and mass in photograph than in reality. It cannot attain these properties in truth because of the thinness and temporality of the material: a blur. It seeks to de-emphasize the boundaries created by architectural representation.

This project's relevance to darkness is in its phenomenological experience, the experience driven by experience and meaning, not notions or planning. In this thesis an element of study will be how to make the vast night sky a site: How to blur the distinction between physical site and site of experience and phenomenon?



[14.0]

Myth allows for our prescriptive nature to break boundaries and derive meaning from nature, for this is the basis of myth. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche compares the sublime aspects of Greek myth and illustrates the way in which we balance human nature and art. This is the ultimate Apollo, reason, against Dionysus, passion. Reason (Apollo) lacks the Passion (Dionysus) and human naivety to create art that coexists with nature while Passion lacks the structure to create cohesive art without Reason and light (Nietzsche, 32-44).

This comparison is one that I would like to make between light and dark, codependent conditions that must balance in some way. It is the value of the unaltered night sky that is where my values are based, but it is the blaring lights of the city where my reality remains. Where is the intersection of a night of darkness and a night of light?

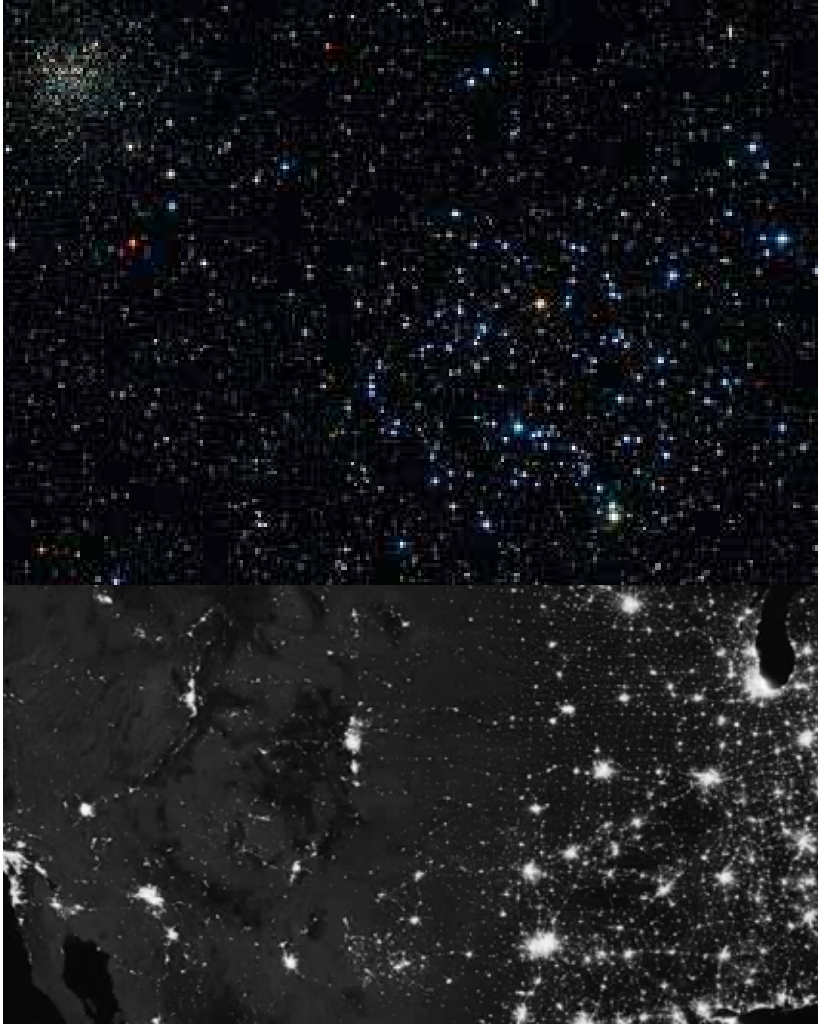
The mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among the remotest antiquities. Let us ask ourselves whether the feverish and uncanny excitement of this culture is anything but the greedy seizing and snatching at food of a hungry man-and who would care to contribute anything at all to a culture that cannot be satisfied no matter how much it consumes, and at whose contact the most vigorous and wholesome nourishment is changed into "history and criticism"?

*Friedrich Nietzsche,
The Birth of Tragedy*

*Metsan seinä
on vsain vihrea ovi
josta valo
ohjaa ystavansa*

The forest wall
is only a green door
from which light
directs its friend

-Risto Rasa, 1972



seeking an occupation of the constellation as myth

[16.0]

constellation:

1. any of various groups of stars to which definite names have been given
2. a group or configuration of ideas, feelings, characteristics, objects, etc., that are related in some way

Light as an object in darkness is a thing of the heavens, a thing of the myths that does not belong to the earth, but to the mind. The light is the element that relates us to reason: *enlightenment*, if you will. It is the binding argument in the thesis that explores the night sky as a means for experience, pleasure, and individualism.

Light as a medium of the city reveals only falsities, dimensionless over-exposure of the realities of place. It is this kind of light that belies the brilliance of the night. It is this kind of light that produces a hazy twilight dome around the metropolis.

The light of the city is also a reality, and while there is a nostalgic desire to find a way to deny its presence, the new night depends upon the city. The city supports the individuals, the dwellers of the city are the dreamers and futurists in this time.

Light is often a necessity: useful for safety, for work, for reality. Light makes it simpler to walk, light gives an increased sense of security, light renders the materials of the city. Light pours in the windows of the city in the daytime, daylight a necessity for healthy work; light pours out of the windows of the city in the nighttime, windows a necessity for healthy homes.



[20.0]

Light Lattice House
1980
Shoji Yoh Hamura

The light itself has no weight, no shape and no shadow.

It is absolutely free and eternal.

I have been always fascinated with the light from the beginning of my career started in 1970.

At first I started giving a form to shape the light.

Then I found a suspended cube 1m³ weighing 100kg loses visually its weight at once when it's lit.

I call it a "Gravity Conversion into Light" which suggests an immaterial ambience.

The coffee shop made of dark mirror glass does not show its inside in a day but we can see out.

At twilight we can see through, both inside and out.

Equilibrium of transparency is found twice a day. Sunrise and sunset.

This discovery starts giving me a sense of the Time Process of a day's performance.

Finally when I designed the Stainless Steel House with Light Lattice in 1980 I was deeply impressed by the slow but accurate movement and silent phenomenon of light.

A silent symphony of the solar system is performed in the house. You are the only audience.

I started thinking an imaginary "Breathing Light" i.e. a respiration in 24 hours.

The house breathes in the light in daytime and breathe out in night through the Light Lattice.

The house breathes light. Any house does the same though.

It was the time to start a phenomenological approach toward designing Light Architecture further. Responding to natural phenomena such as light, air, heat, sound and then wind load, snow load and the horizontal or vertical gravity load as well as vibration and thermal load became my concerns.

I was majored in economics, which disappointed me. It was too much hypothetical to analyze human behavior.

That's why I became interested in design which is much more convincing to me with many alternatives.

Survival design is not possible if we ignore the Natural phenomena as we are a part of them.

Breeze under a tree shade in summer is worth but it's free and it's not sold in a market.

An astronaut told us he was watching and listening all day long to rain drops when he returned from universe to our planet.

House of Light Lattice, Cross of Light House and House of Sun Dial have nothing to do with any particular geographical location but anywhere in the world for you to synchronize yourself with the solar system, listening to the silent symphony.

These are all originated from the Pantheon in Rome.

The Pantheon attracts us as long as it exists, reminding us how to live.

[23.0]



“What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas”

The secret affinity between gambling and the desert: the intensity of gambling reinforced by the presence of the desert all around the town. The air-conditioned freshness of the gaming rooms, as against the radiant heat outside. The challenge of all the artificial lights to the violence of the sun's rays. Night of gambling sunlit on all sides; the glittering darkness of these rooms in the middle of the desert. Gambling itself is a desert form, inhuman, uncultured, initiatory, a challenge to the natural economy of value, a crazed activity on the fringes of exchange. But it too has a strict limit and stops abruptly; its boundaries are exact, its passion knows no confusion. Neither the desert nor gambling are open areas; their spaces are finite and concentric, increasing in intensity toward the interior, toward a central point, be it the spirit of gambling or the heart of the desert — a privileged, immemorial space, where things lose their shadow, where money loses its value, and where the extreme rarity of traces of what signals to us there leads men to seek the instantaneity of wealth.

Jean Baudrillard



[24.0]

Las Vegas, Nevada presents as a dynamic location for studying these conditions for two reasons: its topographical/geographical location and its relative distance from 'reality' itself, marketed and understood as a wild escape. Located within the Mojave desert, Las Vegas is a unique city that stands in stark contrast to the desert landscape that surrounds it. Originally the city was a stopover city in railroad times on the way to Los Angeles. Its proximity to other cities is relatively isolated, yet it is one of the least expensive places to fly in the United States (). It is located in a valley that is surrounded by desert mountains to the west and northeast. The northeast area is home to Lake Mead, famed by the Hoover Dam that provides water for the city.

More paramount to its desert isolation is its sociological (?) isolation, a tourist city like no other. It is marketed as a private, detached experience: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, after all. It stands as a mark of myth on the American landscape, a truth in the fact that we are interested as a culture in an alternative to the monotony. Las Vegas' main industry is tourism, and the tourism industry is supported by gambling opportunities in large, glamorous mega-resorts. The mega-resort is an icon of the city that has evolved over time but now each include skyscraper hotel suites, large gambling facilities and other amenities and attractions to draw the spotlight. Roller coasters, large fountains and light shows are common along the famed 'Strip'.

The glamorization of foreign culture, of 'sin' and of anonymity refer to myth in the dimension of escape. A myth in the dimension of image. Las Vegas itself is born out of image, not reality. Perhaps it is naive to believe that the night sky might exist in a city, but if it is possible is Las Vegas not the most likely site? Is a hyperreality (Baudrillard) possible that is a merging of the city and the landscape in the night? If Las Vegas is born out of image, it is not real. If it is not real then why would we let it affect the night as more than an image itself?



..... *Stratosphere*

..... *LV Hilton*

..... *Circus Circus*

..... *Riviera*

..... *Encore*

..... *Wynn*

..... *Treasure Island*

..... *Palazzo*

..... *Venetian*

..... *Mirage*

..... *Harrah's*

..... *Flamingo*

..... *Caesar's Palace*

..... *Bally's*

..... *Bellagio*

..... *Paris*

..... *Planet Hollywood*

..... *Cosmopolitan*

..... *CityCenter Aria Resort*

..... *Monte Carlo*

..... *MGM Grande*

..... *New York, New York*

..... *Excalibur*

..... *Tropicana*

..... *Luxor*

..... *Mandalay Bay*



[27.0]

The mega-resorts of the strip are a simulacrum in themselves. Each one is often based upon a theme that is based in cultural image. The Luxor is a giant pyramid radiating a beam of light to the night sky, the New York, New York Las Vegas comes complete with its own 'Times Square'. These hyperrealities are indeed based upon other realities, but only in image. The goal of each is to transport your body into a simulation state, one where like you are not actually in New York, your body is not actually you and alternate reality can take over: a reality where you, a mother of four, a calculating business executive, a widowed grandmother become a gambler.



[29.0]

Red Rock National Conservation Area

The night before I left Las Vegas I walked out in the desert to look at the moon. There was a jeweled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs ten stories high.

Norman Mailer



[30.0]

las vegas valley; red rock national conservation area//process

the las vegas metro area presents as a unique position for the coexistence of:

city and desert

myth and reality

night and day

plain and mountain

the direct and near adjacency to red rock national conservation area presents as a location to present a foil for the city, as one of the initial goals of the project is to combat and draw awareness to the issues of light pollution. the light pollution of las vegas encroaches on this park fully, inhibiting its full natural envelope. the site's rugged naturalism and deeply varied topography, stretching like veins away from the city, lend to a study of contrasts:

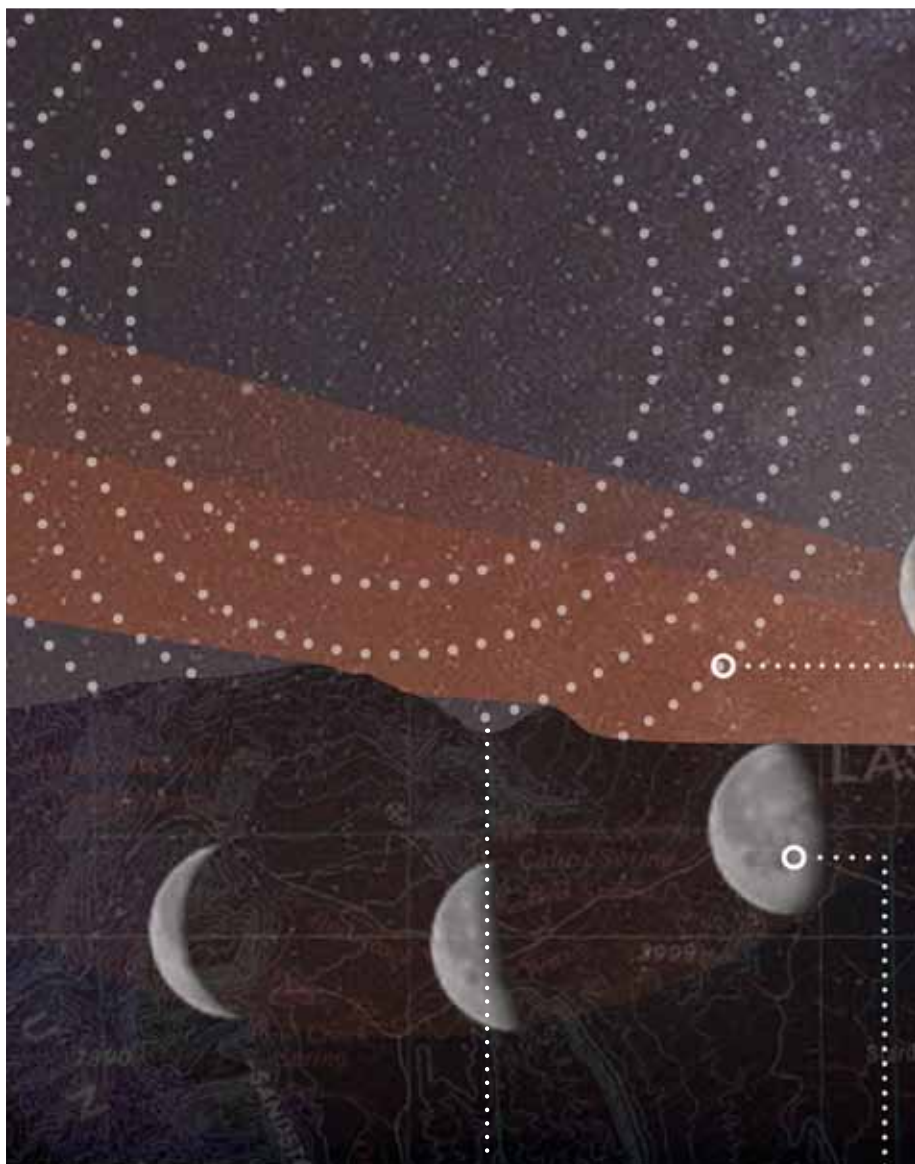
urban and nature

mountain and valley

beacon and shield

light and dark

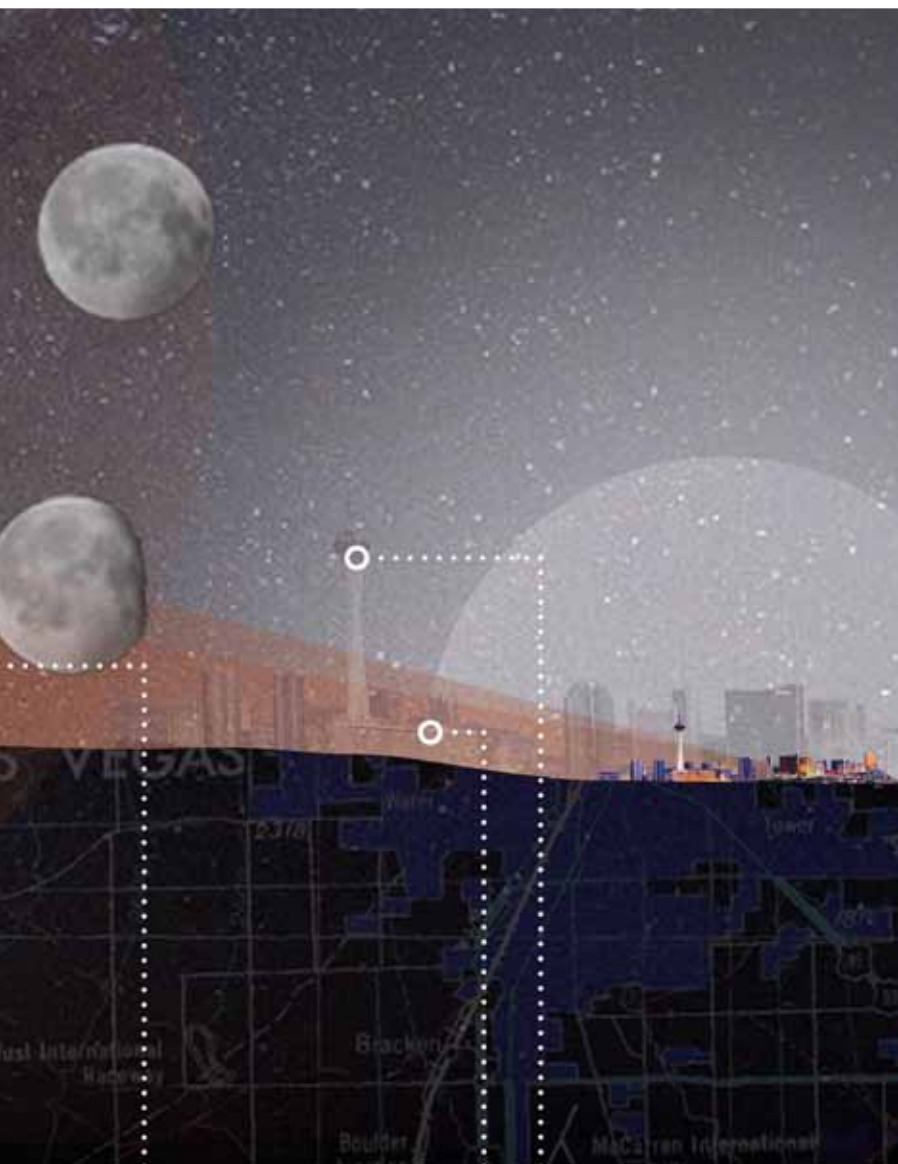
this sharp contrast from horizontal desert into high mountains is caused by a fault called the Keystone Fault. This naturally occurring phenomenon may provide a natural basis for the points of divergence between the antithesis pairs listed above.



[32.0]

icebox canyon
the denial of the city
the calm in the storm

the moon
a cycle of light that draws focus
on a path, an orbit



*the stars
a pattern of mysteries
tracking the night*

*the stratosphere:
the icon of the city
the darkest form of bright*



but one small portion of the sky provides an infinity of experience.

[34.0]

Roden Crater Observatory
1979-ongoing
James Turrell

[35.0]



[35.1]



“... I wanted to use the very fine qualities of light. First of all, moonlight. Also, there’s a space where you can see your shadow from the light of Venus alone – things like this. And also wanted to gather starlight that was from outside, light that’s not only from outside the planetary system which would be from the sun or reflected off of the moon or a planet, but also to emanate light from the galactic planes where you’ve got this older light that’s away from the light even of our galaxy. So that is light that would be at least three and a half billion years old. So you’re gathering light that’s older than our solar system. And it’s possible to gather that light, it takes a good bit of stars to do that, and a good look into older skies, away from the Milky Way. You can gather that light and physically have that in place so that it’s physically present to feel this old light.

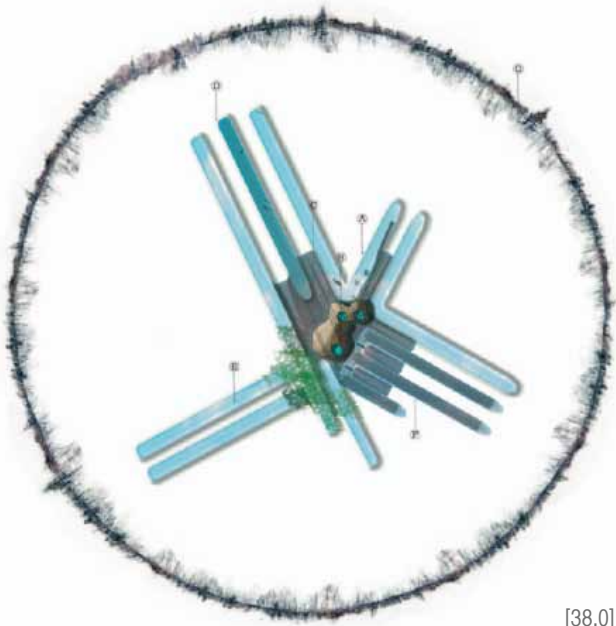
Now there’s a lot to do with sensory synesthesia as well, in that the feeling of light in so many ways – you probably have seen or handled a lemon and suddenly felt the taste in your mouth. I mean it suddenly floods your mouth. The perception through vision actually creates the sensation in taste. The same thing can happen in sound and sound can change the perception of color.”



[37.0]

The character is determined by the material and formal constitution of the place. We must first ask : how is the ground on which we walk, how is the sky above our heads, or in general; how are the boundaries which define the place. How a boundary is depends upon its formal articulation, which is again related to the way it is “built”. Looking at a building from this point of view, we have to consider how it rests on the ground and how it rises towards the sky

Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture [Christian Norberg-Schulz]



[38.0]



Fenland Obscura

[38.1]

The Fenland Obscura is a landmark of the Fen landscape: one of man-made rigid geometries of roads, rivers and railroads. The project seeks to be a monument to the juxtaposition of manmade and natural progression in a landscape. The central core of the space contains a digital camera obscura which is projected from the outside down onto a table within the interior below the projection.

Part of the intent of the project is an education center about digital media and ecological processes. The projection occurs onto a table that is enabled with interactive gesture-recognition software. When touched, the image becomes populated with information about the site: its natural change and manmade features and commerces. One of the more interesting features of the design is that in addition to the data interaction, the selection of a point on the projection selects a hue and the wall of the obscura room is washed with a matching hue in light creating a spectrum of immersion in ever-changing colors (Smout, 7-11).

In program, I seek to explore the same goals as in experience and performance: a duality of meaning and experience, a value of image, a value of myth and a relationship between city and landscape.

In order to explore the dark sky and the bright city as a coexisting phenomenon the program will involve the exploration of projection and filtration.

- In use, the project will be an outpost of the dark skies initiative.

- In outreach the project will be a site for the retreat of the city.

- In image the project will be another simulacrum among the city of Las Vegas that is composed of two images: the city and the sky.

To achieve these goals an education center and research outpost for the dark skies initiative will take form outside the city of Las Vegas in the Red Rock National Conservation Area. This outpost will have a facility for the study of the immediate and long term effects of light pollution on the environment in an effort to reduce the effect of the city on the starscape.

This element will be contrasted with a camera obscura observatory: one that observes both the city and the sky in one action, in a balance that is derived from light and a reaction contained in darkness.

(Drawing: section turned plan from west to east that describes balance and discord between sky and city.)



View of Central Park Looking North
Summer, 2008 (Abelardo Morell)

[41.0]

What if reality is denied by a projection? The overlay of image and space create a dynamic superimposition that, when balanced, provide a counterintuitive experience. This effect can be achieved by means of a camera obscura: a tool formed by a small pinhole that allows light into a contained space where an inverted projection can occur. The technology has existed for over two thousand years. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it was the primary model for explaining human vision because it works much like the human eye, yet without the aid of the brain to rectify the inverted image. It also metaphorically describes the relationship between the viewer and the perception of the external world (Crary, 29).

"Statements are compared with each other without regard to their history and without considering that they might belong to a different historical strata."

Paul Feyerabend (Crary, 25)

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a proposal for night
emily bingham
2015

to permit the experience of night by allowing it to serve day. to
treat the night as an experience between observation and display.

above: the site for the program; red rock national conservation
area.



death valley, california

100 miles west of the site rest some of the darkest skies in the united states today. the thesis seeks to restore the sensation of stargazing that might be experienced in death valley. this exercise is significant because of its historied use for time and place-telling and as the most primitive diagonal experience across culture and time unaltered by culture and time. one of the comtemporary values and experiences of stargazing is the feeling of anonymity that it affords, at once a protection and a connection.



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top: site plan entering the lost creek canyon, layered with form of the units and the metaphor for form, a single cycle of the moon, a passage of underrealized time.
the circular formation of the cabins sets up contrasting experiences on the inside and outside of the circle, the bays face inward in the day, with a compressed shift outwards for the night, facing outward at night gives the sensation of anonymity and solitude.
1/32" = 1'-0"

left: site section relating the keepers' tower and the cabins to the northwest across the valley of day.
1/32" = 1'-0"

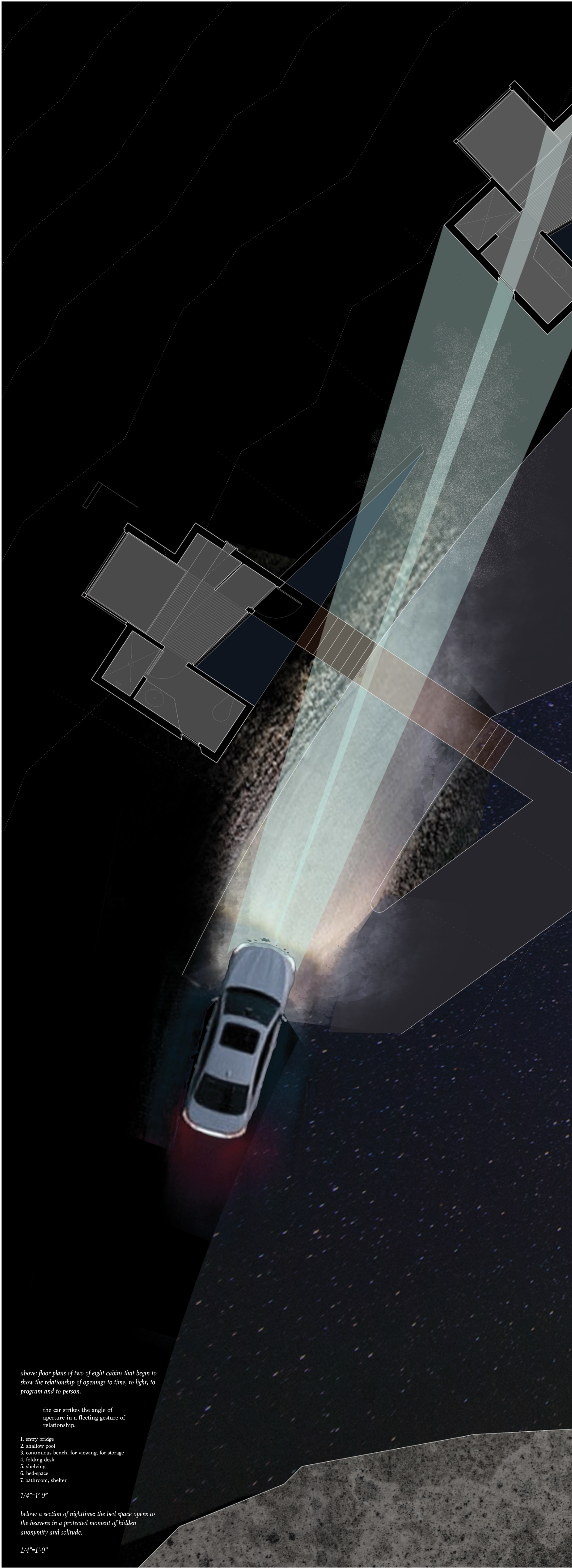
"I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day the sun has shone on the surface of some savage swamp, where the single spruce stands hung with usnea lichens, and small hawks circulate above, and the chickadee lisps amid the evergreens, and the partridge and rabbit skulk beneath; but now a more dismal and fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of Nature there."
Thoreau, Walden 1854



las vegas, nevada

30 miles east of the site, las vegas stands as marker for myth in the american landscape and culture. in a perpetual and artificial day-like state due to overwhelming light pollution, the city disregards the natural cycle of time and threatens to do so for the areas around it.





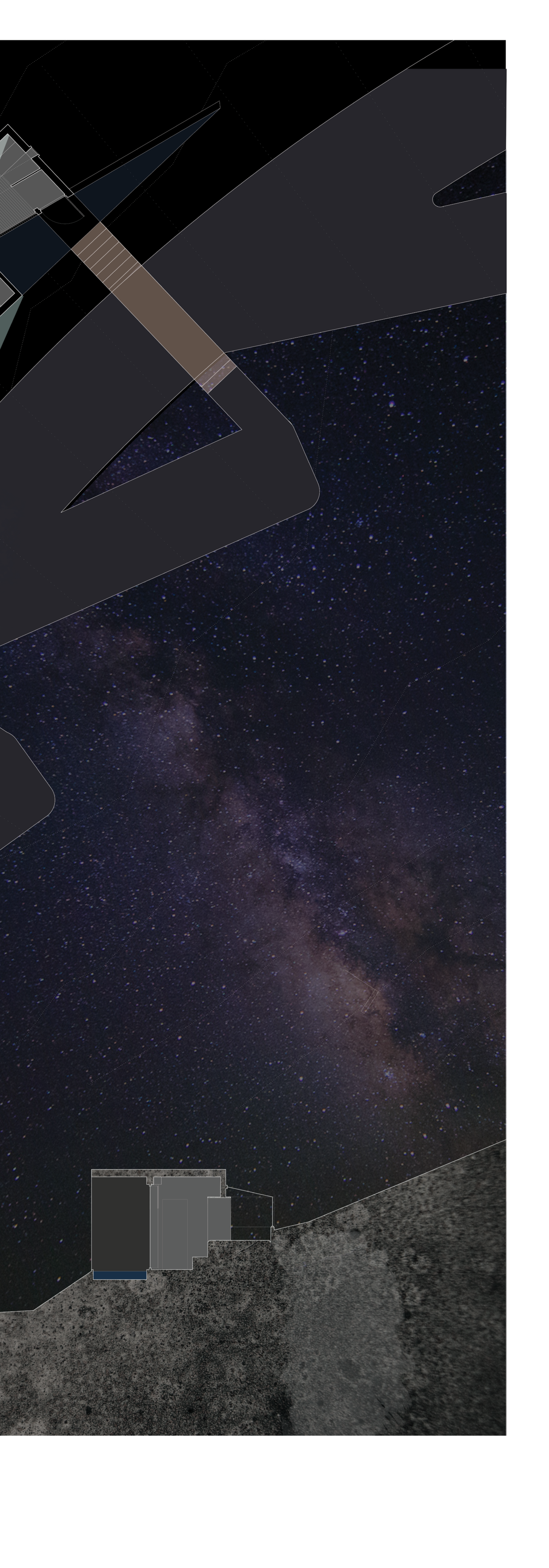
above: floor plans of two of eight cabins that begin to show the relationship of openings to time, to light, to program and to person.

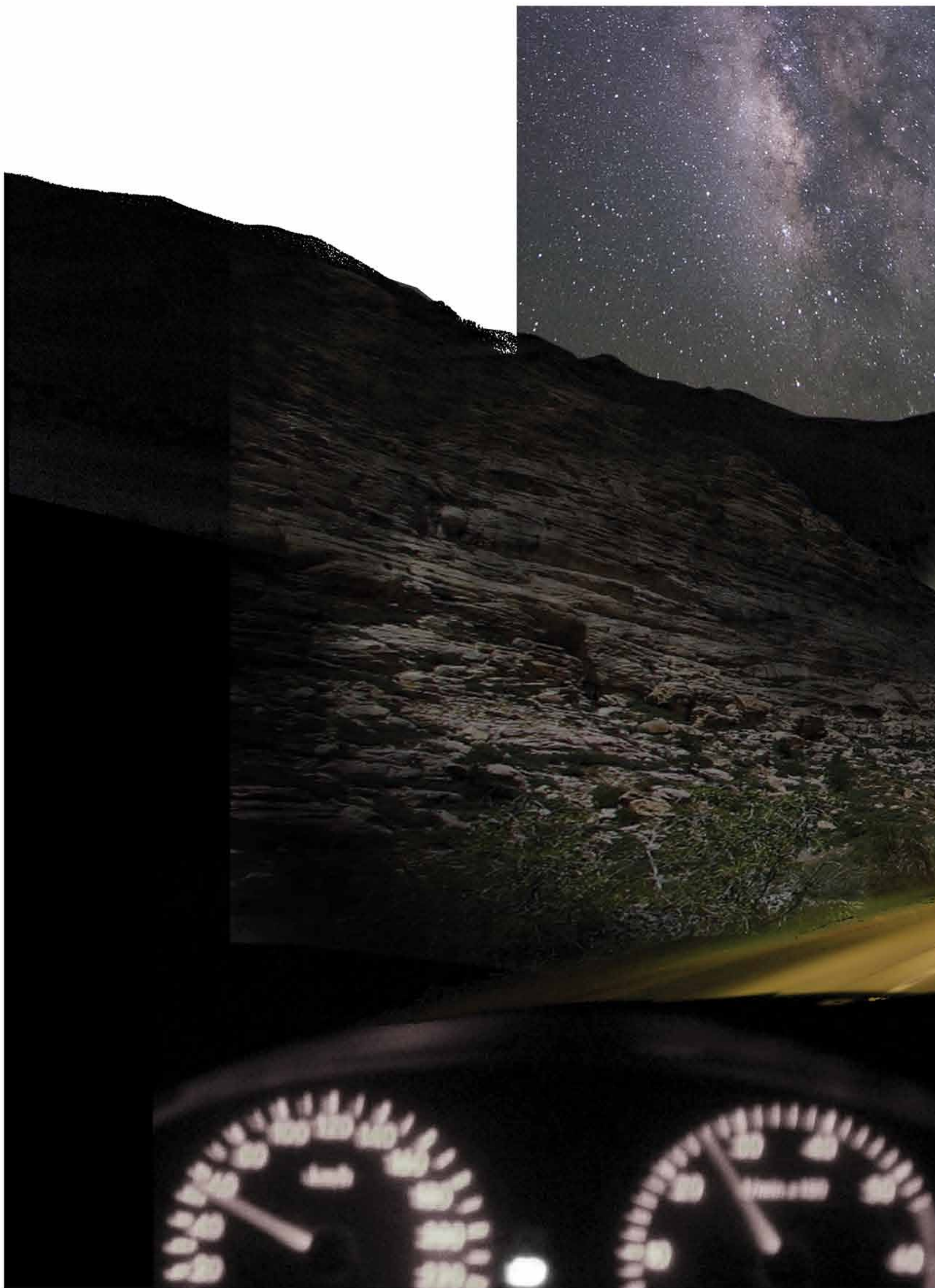
- the car strikes the angle of aperture in a fleeting gesture of relationship.
- 1. entry bridge
 - 2. shallow pool
 - 3. continuous bench, for viewing, for storage
 - 4. folding desk
 - 5. shelving
 - 6. bed-space
 - 7. bathroom, shelter

1/4"=1'-0"

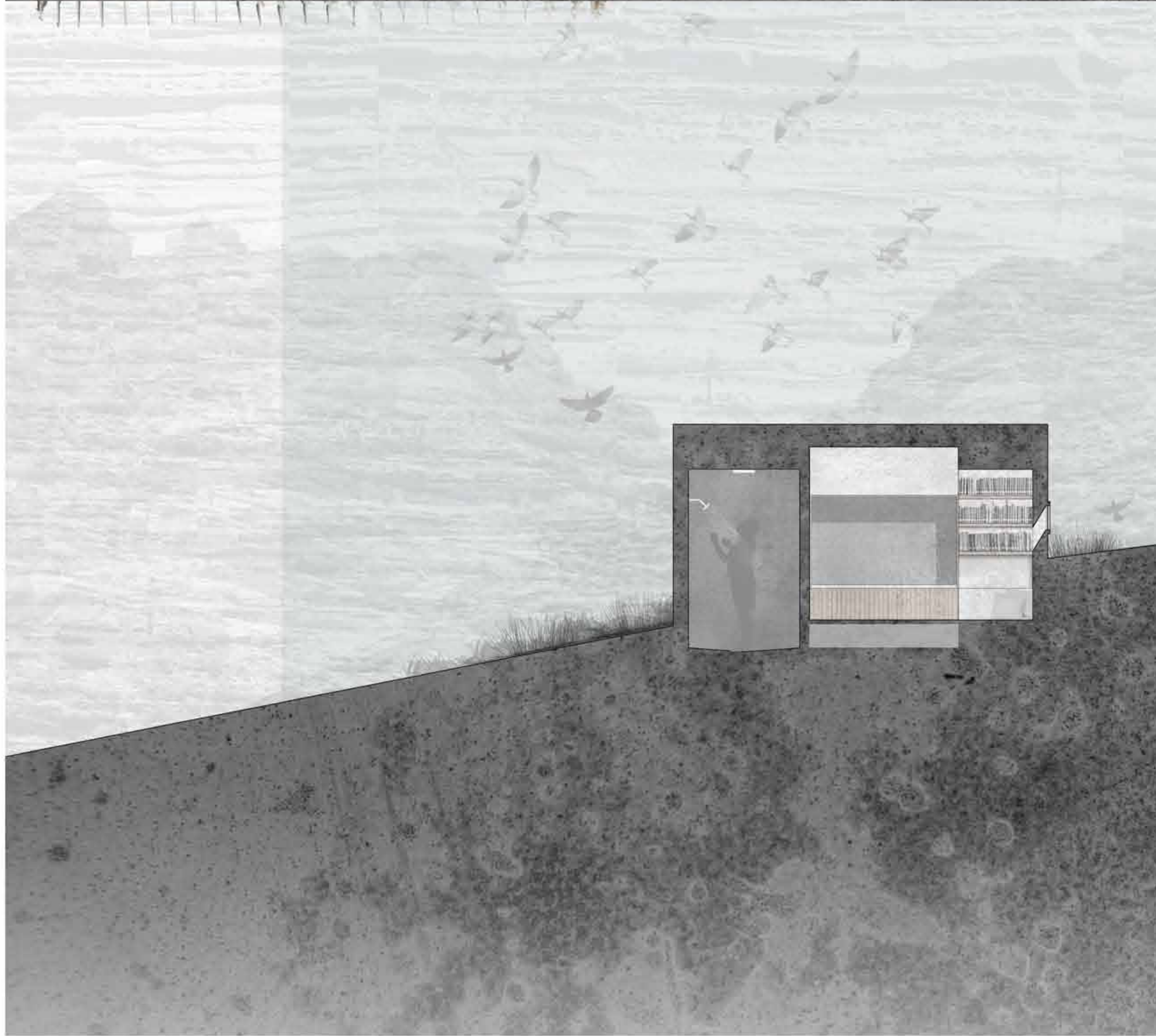
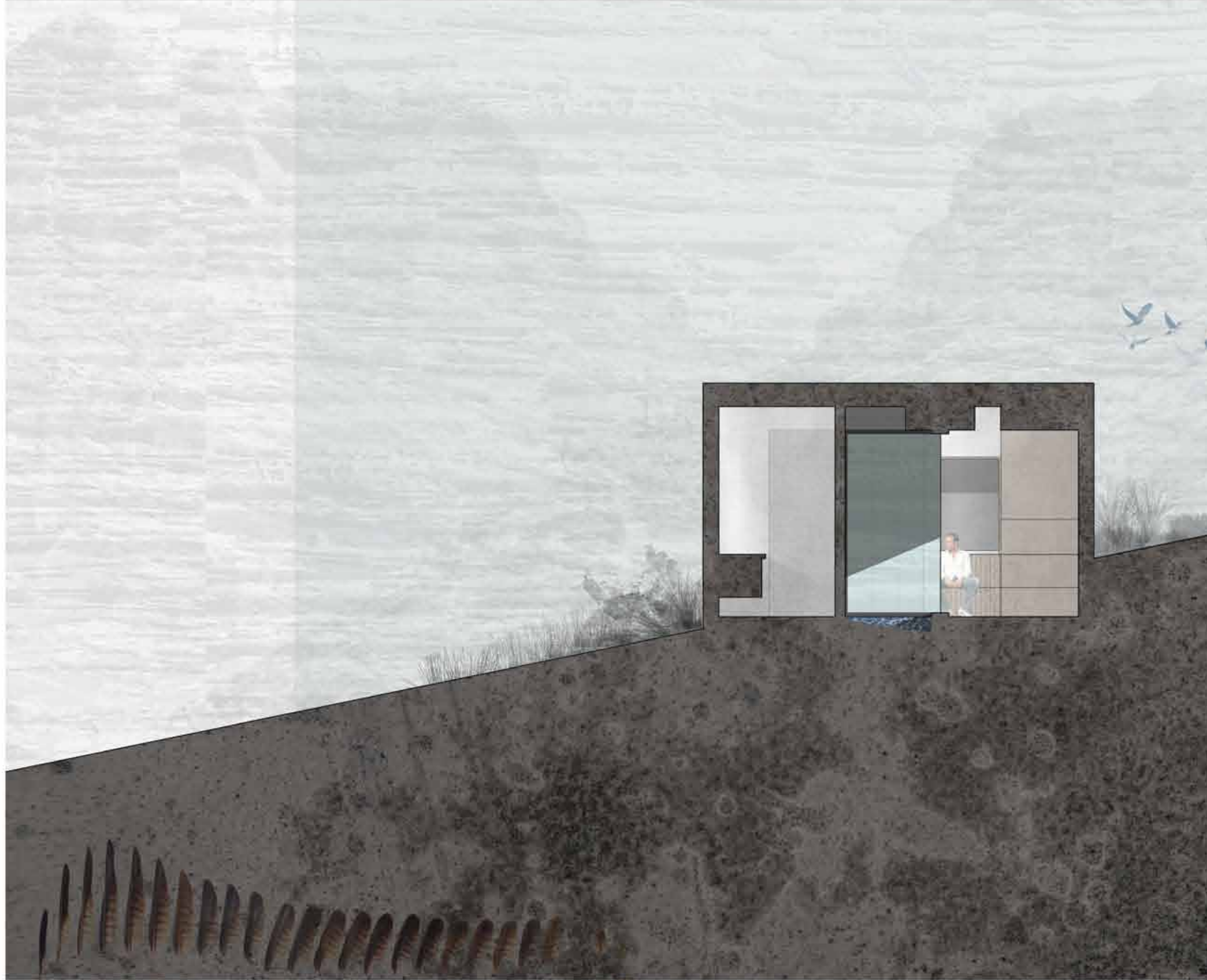
below: a section of nighttime: the bed space opens to the heavens in a protected moment of hidden anonymity and solitude.

1/4"=1'-0"











the entry of the cabin floats above the shallow pool, that is in immediate service to the abundant wildlife of the site, but also in service to light and vantage point. The reflection of the water onto the glazed facade serves to veil the inside of the cabin during the day, a factor critical to the meditation like act of bird-watching.

1/4" = 1'-0"

passing through the threshold of entry puts you in an oblique space, a space between indoors and out, seeing and hiding, hidden and seen. the angle of space turns you inward, into a space for meditation and viewing. a wall hides the most compressed piece of the cabin: a folding desk and space for a reduced view into one of few shared spaces. A contrast of warm and cool materials presents as another metaphor in contrasting experiences. The splashing light off of the water during the day blends the space into one experience.

1/4" = 1'-0"

sitting on the bench that runs the length of the cabin affords a comfortable spot for resting and meditation and the outward viewing of the 'community' and the wildlife of the natural area. facing the same direction as las vegas, yet shielded from its monotony by the facade of a ridge.

1/4" = 1'-0"



...in that field is a castle

protection. display. image. reality. the rapid transport of the mind between these conditions, between reality and fiction, light and dark, serves a higher purpose: a heightened awareness of self and time, the ultimate experience of night. the thesis serves to create a night that serves the day, a reversal of the standard mode of operation in contemporary culture. the stars, the wonder, the *reality*, serve a change in perception that creates a cycle of thoughtfulness and mindfulness.

