



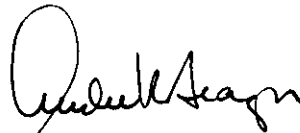
An Environmental Summer Camp
a study of "place"

Debra S. Hoene-Frazier
May 1993

An Environmental Summer Camp
a study of "place"

Ball State University
College of Architecture and Planning
Bachelor of Architecture • thesis design

thesis critics



Andrew Seager



Robert Koester

I would like to thank Andy, Bob, and my colleagues for their continued support and guidance on this design. I would also like to extend a special thanks to my husband Rob for his patience and endurance during this important time in my life. May we only grow stronger as a result.

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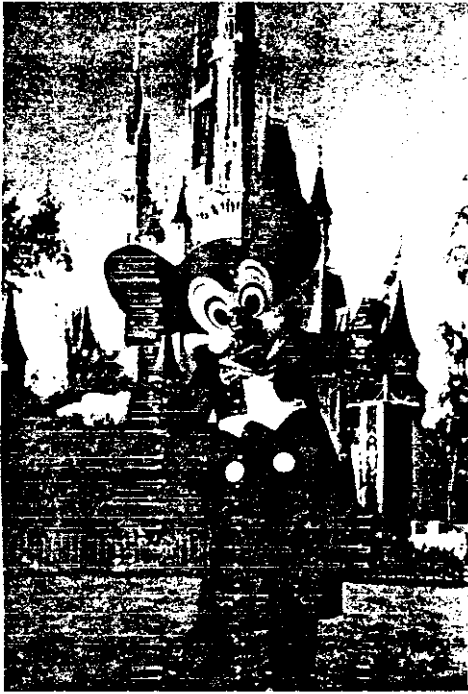
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an abstract

An architect's ability to make place is, perhaps, the most fundamental element of his work. This is the one characteristic that sets him apart from engineers, contractors, etc. It is this enhancement of the quality of life by way of an appropriate expression of place that separates architecture from "shelter". New York City is not Effingham, Illinois, just as your own bedroom is not a city park. The furnishings in and around these prescribed areas are different to reflect the activity, climate, user, etc. of the place. Similar in that sense, architecture should also have everything to do with its own "sense of place"; it should reflect and complement its context.

An environmental summer camp and visitor/educational center became the vehicle for my thesis, "a study of place". The camp was to serve as a setting for educational programs in a community/campus setting in an effort to increase environmental awareness among campers and visitors. The camp was to be established to house up to thirty children for a one to two week long period and would provide a visitor/learning center for both day and night activities for the campers and other guests. The camp will be located south of Effingham, Illinois on a site engulfing a man-made lake and preserved by the Illinois Department of Conservation and the Illinois Disciples of Christ. The effort put forth by the Disciple of Christ to preserve this site is reminiscent of the hard work ethic and pride found all around this rural community.

As a result of a study of place, I hope to better understand human comfort needs at societal and individual levels within the built environment. I anticipate a better understanding of the community in which I grew up, both environmentally and culturally. In combination with these investigations, I aim to study other successful places in an effort to begin to establish a basis or criteria for culturally-specific placemaking. It is through these and other studies that I hope to define or establish successful placemaking in Effingham, Illinois, an environmental summer camp and visitor/educational center.



premise

A study of "place" stems from a desire to better understand human comfort and needs in an architectural environment. What qualities influence human sensitivity to "place", what "places" do people flock to most often, and is there a basis for design criteria or principles for creating "place"?, are just a few of the questions I was considering.

It is difficult to generalize successful places because each should be particular. However, it is not unusual to define qualities good places might capture. Most importantly, a good place should move and enhance us both as an individual and en masse, and should evoke a feeling of use, comfort and sensitivity to the user. It is in spaces addressing these two levels of territorial space, individual and the society at large, that we find the most successful of places.

While each different kind of place requires different approaches, our understanding of factors that effect place relates to the particular culture in which we have been brought up. The points below only begin to define a handful of factors that can effect and sometimes inspire expressions of place within a particular culture:

...social habitat -- Place begins with a criteria of user needs and wants, and it is by defining and addressing these issues within a particular problem that place can begin to be established.

...building type -- Place responds to users as well as passers-by. As a result, place can be architecturally expressed by its functionality or facility type: a spiritual place, a medical place, etc.

...climate -- Place most definitely addresses the climatic issues of a particular context. For example on a personal level, place can be realized as one uses his umbrella on a dreary rainy day.

...materials -- The warmth or coldness, texture, etc can make or break the human sensitivity to a particular place. Materials act as supporting elements in successful placemaking. A bed may not be seen as such a comfortable place if it weren't for its cushy, insulated mattresses and blankets.

...technologies -- Place can be augmented through traditional and modern technologies or as a product of the site.

...forms -- Forms carry particular symbolisms and images. They, too, can be used to initiate a strong sense of place.

These factors as well as others became guides in my own exploration of placemaking. Placemaking is an important aspect of architecture that can be taken for granted. We, as architects, must recognize and attempt to understand this fundamental element of our work, placemaking. It is what makes architecture more than just a shelter.



programme

This program, a student design competition sponsored by the American Wood Council, is a design project for an Environmental Summer Camp and Visitor/Educational Center for children that centers on the idea of a total community experience to increase environmental awareness. According to the American Camping Association, camping is defined as:

A sustained experience which provides a creative, recreational and educational opportunity in group living in the out-of-doors. It utilizes a trained leadership and the resources of the natural surroundings to contribute to each camper's mental, physical, social and spiritual growth.

In light of this rooted belief, design objectives for this campus included:

...to promote and support the physical and emotional well-being of the campers and visitors through activities such as swimming, biking, hiking, plays, music, games, and others that passively and actively stimulate the body and soul.

...to provide a total community experience with social and task oriented responsibilities for the children that will enhance their capacity to learn, grow, and relate to other persons and the earth.

...to develop an acute awareness and appreciation of the interdependence of all living and non-living resources through observation, experimentation and hands-on experience.

...to be responsible and sensitive to the local community influenced by the presence of this camp with respect to their privacy, boundaries, customs, needs, and architecturally respectful of their regionalism in form, materials, and technologies.

...to stimulate public interest and participation in organized camping and environmental awareness.

...to promote sensitivity and understanding of local and global issues related to the environment through the development of an environmentally sensitive learning camp.

Nature, in itself, is a special "place". As a result, it needs to be preserved, cherished, and celebrated as we, as architects, join the fight to save the earth. The nature of this facility speaks of multi-levels of place: first within or around the greater forest, then amongst the complex of public and private buildings, and finally within each particular building and its spaces. With considerate attention to those qualities that unequivocally contribute to the making of place, as seen in man's built environment, an appropriate expression of community can be explored.

program requirements

Sleeping Cabins, 3-5

No more than eight per cabin. Separate quarters for boys and girls. These cabins must be easily accessible to, but not visible from the Visitor/Educational Center in order to create a separation of camper and visitor facilities and to promote the highest standard of safety for campers. 800 s.f.

Personnel Cabins, 1-2

to accommodate sleeping and bath requirements for all staff members of the camp. 800 s.f.

Visitor/Educational Center

Socializing space for formal and informal gatherings. Daytime activities for the center include a variety of activities such as camp crafts, plays, music, games, and dancing. Evening activities are especially focused around the fireplace, an essential program element. These activities include singing and evening snacks. A variety of spaces should be provided such as seating alcoves or lofts for smaller, more intimate activities.

breakdown of spaces for V/E center:

lounge	1200 s.f.
reception area	200
commercial kitchen	500
conference room	500
auditorium	1200
craft/music area	700
exhibition area	3000
storage	700
administrative	1500

administrative personnel

program personnel

Outdoor Program Area

The exterior program spaces must include an outdoor cooking area and a fire circle. The outdoor cooking area should be covered with a roof. Space should be provided for 50 people to eat "outdoors," but under roof cover. Outdoor storage requirements include a place for rake, shovel, and bucket for the firecircle. Firewood storage can occur under the eaves or a simple wood box could be built.

Additional outdoor activities may include swimming, riding, and boating.

Parking

Provide parking and turn around area for immediate access to the education and visitor center for 35 cars and 2-4 buses.

Site

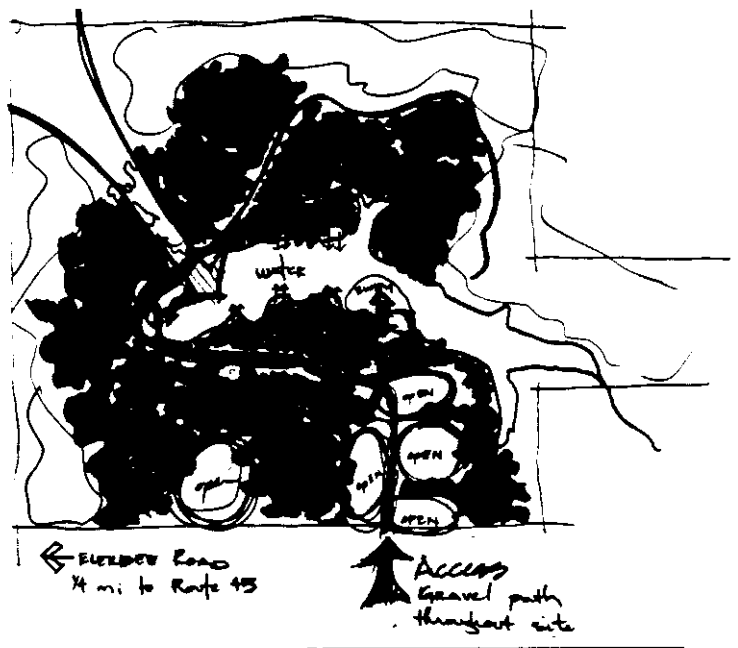
A site should be selected within a students' own ecosystem in order to better understand the characteristics of their surrounding region, and to provide sensitive solutions to the problem.

physical-cultural context

The secluded and serene camp site is located twelve miles south of Effingham, Illinois and represents a private effort to protect and preserve a "god-given" gift of nature. The Illinois Disciples of Christ, a Christian based group, are personally responsible for the funding and evolution of this particular area since the late 1950's.

It began as a fully timbered area and evolved into a series of wooded and cleared spaces surrounding and protruding into a man-made lake (created in 1965). As a result, wonderful niches near the water's edge and look-out points at higher elevations were created. These somewhat secluded areas seem to invite exploration and add to the specialness of the area. A wonderful intensity of life can be envisioned when campers fill these woods. The planned reforestation of this preservation area was made possible by the Illinois Department of Conservation and the hard work and dedication of the Illinois Disciples of Christ.

Effingham is strongly a rural area. The people of the community have a strong bond; neighbors actually know each other and always help each other in times of need. County and city organizations plan fairs, picnics, parades, etc for the people of the town, especially the children. Many of the people are church-goers of one faith or another and most exert a rural work ethic and pride associated with so many small mid-western American towns. Effingham is a community-oriented city and, as seen in the camp site I have chosen, they truly care about the community and future preservation of the area.



objectives • methodologies

Objectives

...to better understand color and materials and their effect on human comfort by hands-on experience and personal interview.

...to strongly emphasize and address societal and individual spatial needs at all architectural levels by studying similar successful and non-successful manifestations.

...to analyze non-successful places, not in an effort to always do them differently, but to do them better.

...to promote regionalism within a community socially and architecturally through form, color, materials, geometry, and scale.

...to express the increasing need for user comfort and sensitivity within an architectural world, for it is they who ultimately pass judgement.

Methodologies

My design inquiries began with investigations of "everyday" environments which, in my opinion, represented successful kinds of place, continually keeping in mind that they are culturally-specific to Midwest America and to Effingham, Illinois, itself. i.e.

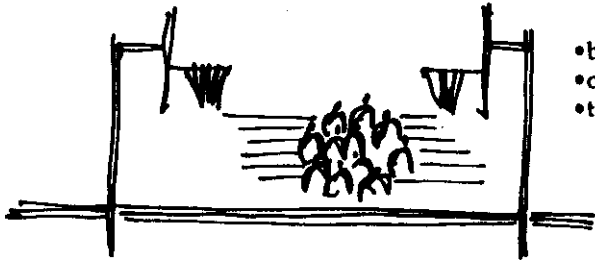
a bed, front stoop, cafe table, basketball arena, a campfire
(see page 10)

Descriptive characterizations of a variety of these places revealed similarities in placemaking and began to establish a basis or criteria for successful placemaking.

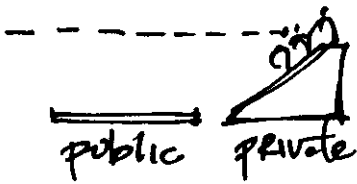
It also studied non-camp facilities such as office complexes, city centers, etc, that each, in its own way, deals with the problem of spatially addressing humans as individuals and groups.

In an attempt to better understand Midwestern American regionalism within the Effingham, Illinois community, so that the architecture of this camp promotes and celebrates it, a typology study and cataloguing of regional constructs, geometries, and scale was needed.

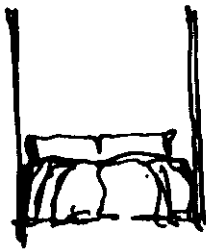
place—as definition of space



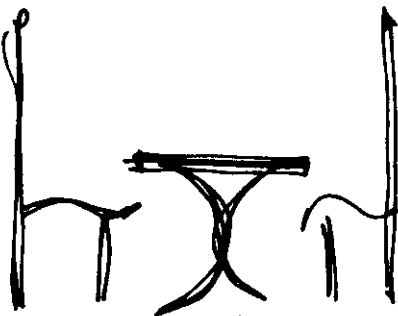
- boundary
- central activity
- third dimension



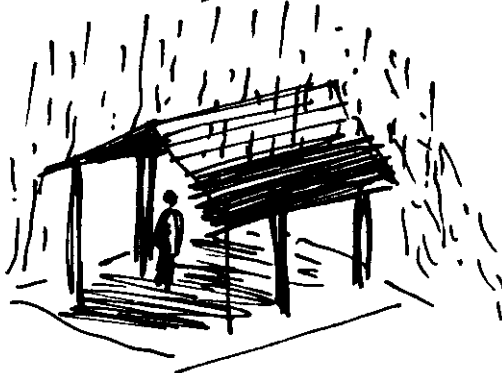
- noise
- player vs. spectator
- active vs. passive
- texture



- material—mattress—layering
- height—third dimension
- boundary
- color



- chairs as definers of space
- subjective space
- light as definer
- central activity
- inward facing

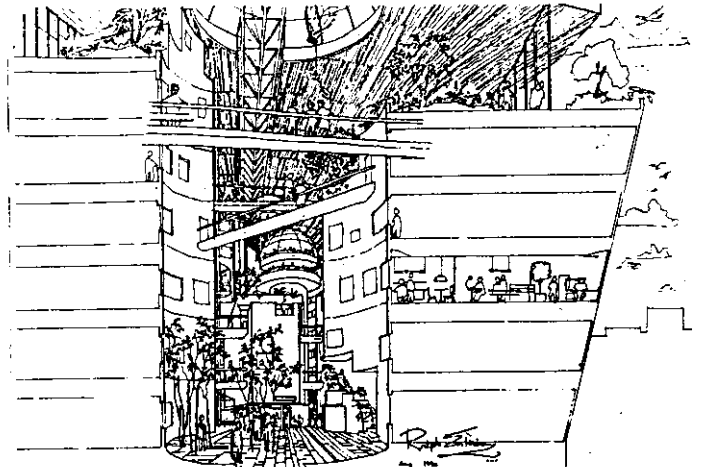
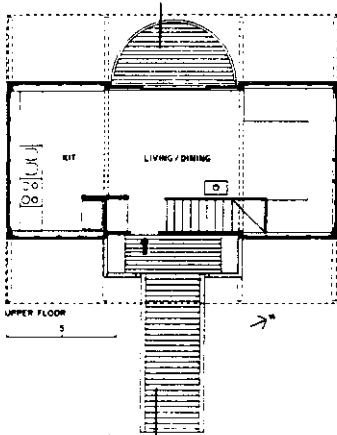
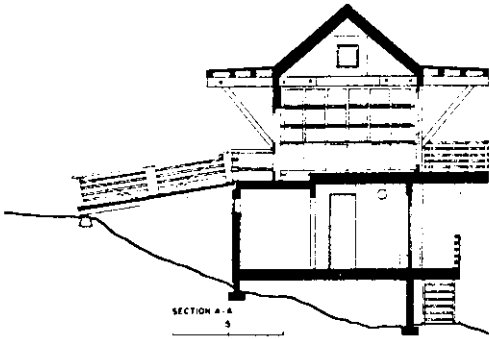


- light
- climate
- overhead plane
- outward facing

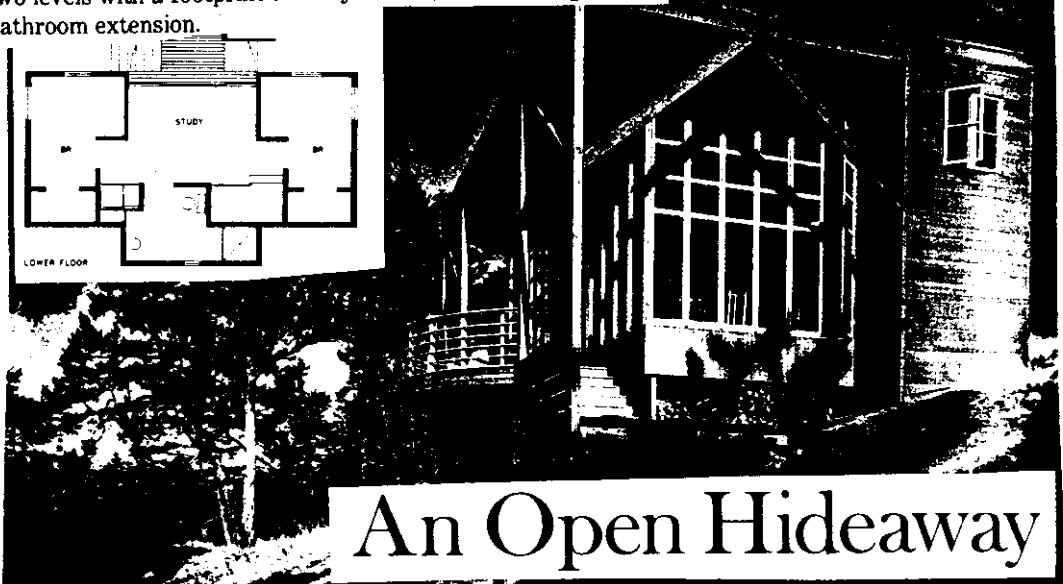
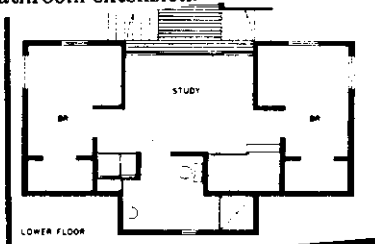
kinds of places—non-camp facilities

The intentions of Torp's SAS building, where the interests of the individual and corporation are more balanced, are perhaps less liable to be subverted by management changes. But, like the Larkin headquarters and Centraal Beheer, it is a building made for a particular company, a private world which is cut off from the rest of the city. Once workers cross the threshold, they are totally in the power of the corporation, and in effect the additional facilities: the shops, sports and recreational spaces are ways of increasing the amount of time during which an individual is controlled.

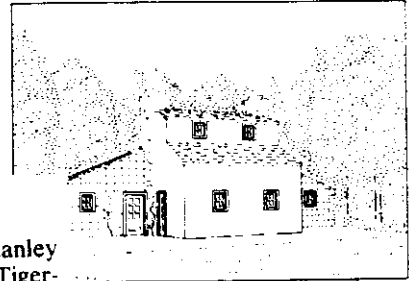
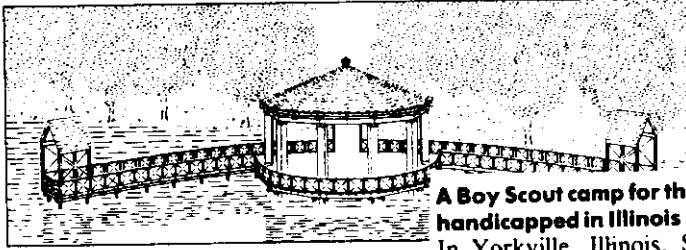
Home Alone



“Don't call it a house, it's a cabin,” insists architect Bob Hull, of the Miller/Hull Partnership. And a tiny cabin it is: 840 square feet on two levels with a footprint of 13 by 30 feet, not including a small bathroom extension.



An Open Hideaway



A Boy Scout camp for the handicapped in Illinois

In Yorkville, Illinois, Stanley Tigerman, principal of Tigerman Fugman McCurry Architects is designing a Boy Scout Camp for the handicapped.



OF THE ADIRONDACK CAMPS



**Paul Newman's visionary
Hole in the Wall Gang Camp**

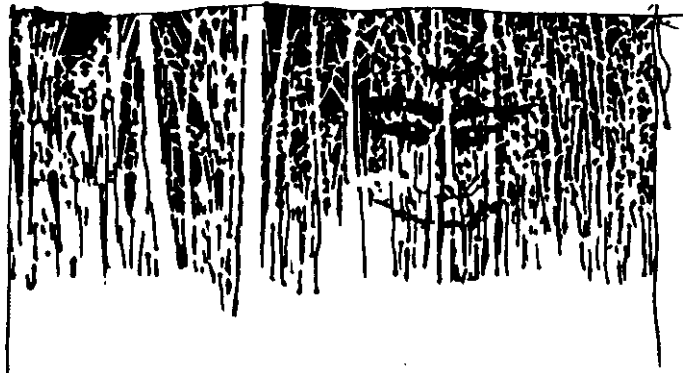
kinds of places--forests

Nature works as a system of pieces. Together they thrive to form many different levels within nature. The forest operates as a series of niches, "places" or microclimates: cleared areas, to of mountains, cliffs, caves, coves, edges of the trees, edges of the water, high in the trees, on the forest floor, etc.

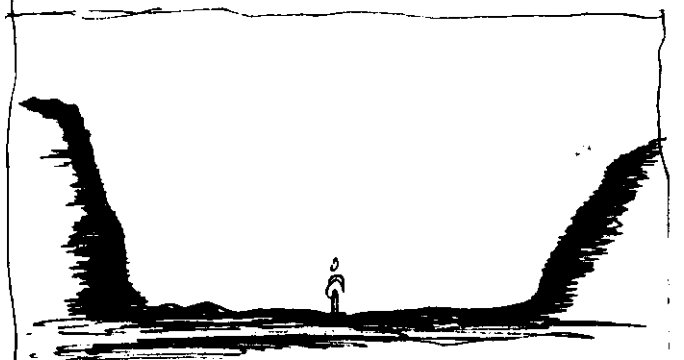
a feeling of place • @ the edge of the forest

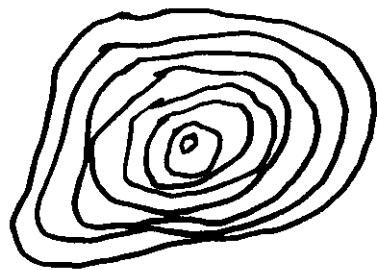


a feeling of place • in the forest



a feeling of place • in the valley





material--wood

root of nature

expanding

growth

living material

soft

hard

centered

levels...years...time

layers

breathing

grain

scale

simplicity

expressive

strong

aged

structural in nature

the project—the questions

This project began not as a question of the environment but rather of environmental awareness. It is about how we are, how we act toward, and how we should be to the environment. It is a realizing of the environment as a person and treating it as so that will ultimately aid in a solution to saving our planet.

in process questions....

- how to study the environment?
controlled environment
unharmd environment
national parks—man's hand in it
view it from a distance

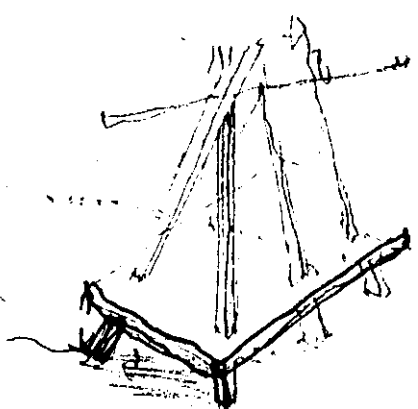
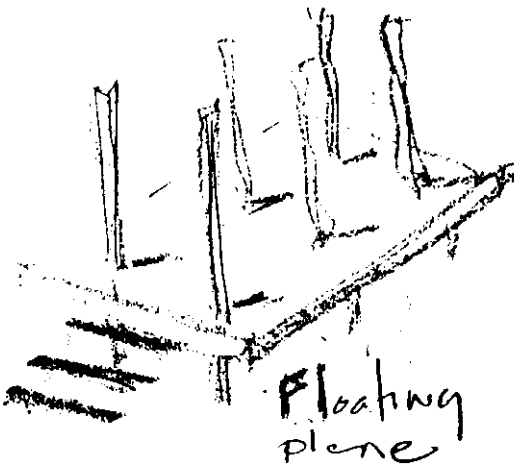
- how to experience the power of nature, its possibilities...options?
touch
interact
smell
view from a perch
live with it, on it, under it, within it...

- how to make aware or sensitive?
force to deal with....operable windows and doors for natural ventilation

-always keeping in mind
1/what we want
2/what we need
3/how do we get it
4/consequences of getting it
5/impact of it

- how we touch, interpret, and mark the landscape?
realize it as an individual, treat it
like a person
meeting it
greeting it
what is it like

- how to greet the environment
with delicacy....not knowing how she might react, a gentle, non-obtrusive approach seems appropriate.



.....*more*

•"....a man's heart away from nature becomes hard;...lack of respect for growing living things soon leads to lack of respect for humans, too." (10)

•"Earth is a life-giving force!!" (10)

•"....I consider the plants to be my mentors simply because their straightforward advice about the cycles of the seasons teaches me how to connect with the earth." (10)

All of these questions, quotes, and more became guides for my design solution. Each in its own way helped me sort out my own views about the environment and awareness of it as initially stated. As I allowed the camp architecture to lightly emerge from its own micro-context within the site, the architecture became integrated and peacefully "shook hands" with nature.

I digress.....

Nature represents growth.....

motion • visual and evident over time
static • internal growth, growth of the heart and mind

it can be felt (not visual)

The wonderful part of nature is that it is constantly growing, changing. Therefore, the setting within which the architecture sits matures, alters through the years.

Suburbs that twenty years ago had mere saplings as trees have been transformed into new spaces with a greater definition of space in all dimensions, including the shade canopy it forms to protect it and its users.

Buildings, although they are alive, and are a piece of their ecosystem—appear to be the static element in most pictures.

the cyclical pattern with which nature exists:

pieces/parts • layers • grow • culminate • die

the questions continue.....

My questioning then turned toward the idea of "camp"

- what type of person goes to an environmental camp?
 - conscious
 - interested
 - aware
 - curious*
 - caring
 - sensitive*
 - hard-working
 - heart-felt
 - healing
 - who wants a better world
 - ambitious
 - self-motivated*
 - spiritual
 - health conscious
 - expressive
 - save the world!

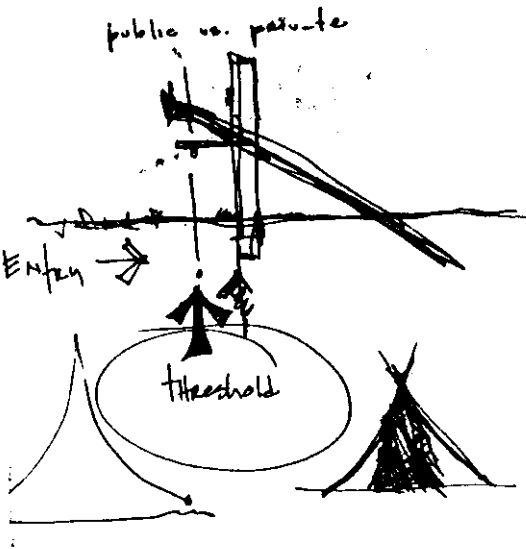
- what is a cabin?
 - home away from home
 - privacy
 - sleeping quarters
 - comfort space
 - "rest area"
 - an intimate space that can be opened up or closed up for the elements, and or intruders

- what is a sustainable architecture?
 - meeting today's needs without damaging the future of others

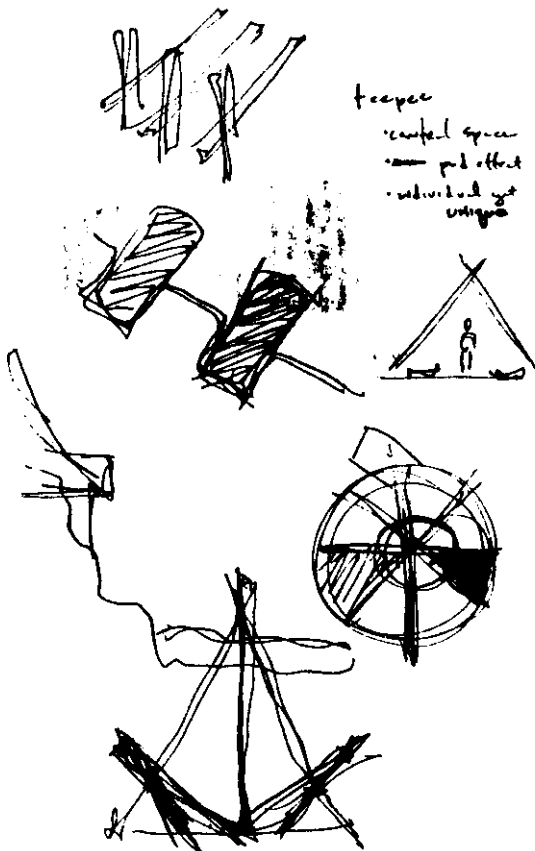
- what are the limitations of this project?
 - aim to preserve existing landscape and woodland
 - no unnecessary trees shall be removed
 - I shall build upon the land

- summer camps seem to work. Kids enjoy them; they return year after year. So, what will make this particular summer camp different, better, or maybe not either? What will make it an environmental camp worth visiting? What is its goal?

read on for more questions and answers.



a definition of personal space



the project—anevolution....

As I searched for solutions to my questions, I ultimately found guidance from the forest itself. As I stated in my initial inquiries in a study of "place", nature is already defined as a series of "places" or microclimates that work together to form a system. I capitalized on an existing condition and the site defined my ordering system.

The cabins, or as I saw them, sleeping huts, acted as markers or reference points within the system. Each, individualized in its own sense, emerged from within a different microclimate, offering to the campers, a multitude of vantage points of the environment and of the facility itself.

I suggested as part of the camp program that children would sleep in a different hut, within a different microclimate, each night. These markers or datum points would give them an opportunity to judge their experiences against one another, to experience the sun, wind, climate.....the environment, differently. Even if the children would not be able to semantically express the differences they were feeling, the goal would be for them to simply recognize that these sub-environments were individualized.

The camp program could include explaining to the children how trees and plants grow differently in different microclimates, and how different animals habitate in microclimates.

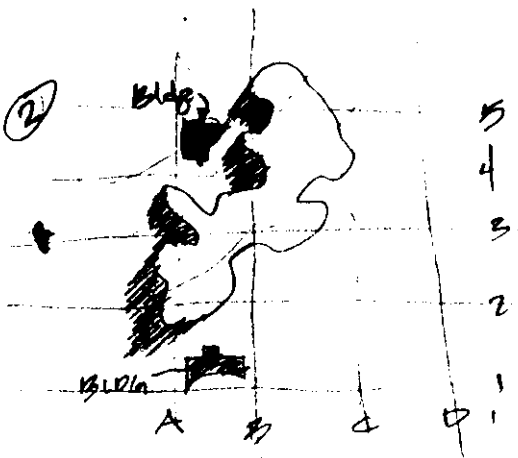
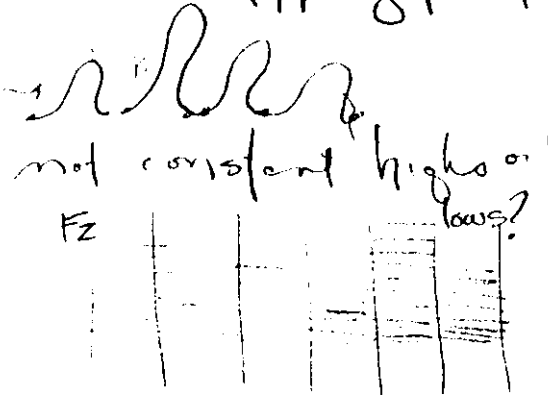
As there are many microclimates within the forest and around a lake, I chose five that maintained a strong and recognizable diversity:

- in the clearing
- on the forest floor
- in the lake
- in the tree tops
- at the edge of the lake
- in a cove.

The site already housed a gravel path that wove around the lake and through the woods. I chose to utilize this path as a main trail while each hut provided, as a stated before, a reference point or node off the main trail. This invited exploration for the children and added a bit of mystery to the camp. Because of the one main entry to the complex, the camp evolved in to a sequence of architectural nodes that were mysteriously exposed as campers wandered from the main path.

...similar to when one moves from within the forest to the edge—stumbling upon an open space, valley, or the edge of a hill, cliff, or water.

camp
interval
period
stopping points



a sequence

wander • glimpse • anticipation • arrive •
only to begin a new journey

The sequence I speak of occurred on many levels within the project. On one level, it occurred as one drove around the sweeping drive, viewing the arrival point, the visitor/educational center, across a meadow of green grass, stopping only momentarily and then on into the woods. At another level, one that I have already spoken of, the camper sways from the main path only to emerge into a "place of nature". On a third level, I integrated this sequence into the architecture of this environmental camp. Entry processions into the buildings are exaggerated, with long ramps and rooflines that extend well beyond the actual entry, to emphasize a process. Each procession then culminates in a gathering space for the campers, a balcony, a firecircle, a dock, etc. The sequence must then be reversed to return to the path again and ultimately to the parking area. Entry is also the exit.....gaining multiple vantage points of the same space.

the right of passage—passage as fabric

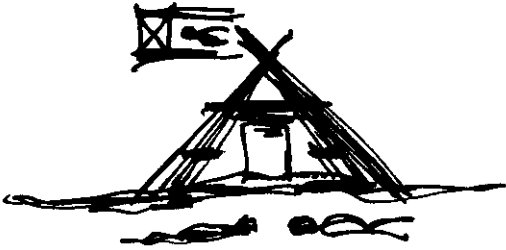
The site maintains a wonderful aura about it already. My intent is not to destroy it but to keep in sync with the serene woodland. Several words begin to describe components that I have realized and drawn inspiration from in this wooded site. The ideas of:

layers
scale
simplicity
growth
expressive

These ideas, although words on the surface, began to speak of a language of the woods, a language I would later use as a guide to establish an architectural language for this camp.



a program



sleeping hut

The plan for each unit on the site consisted of a direct circulation path through the main space, flanked with multiple multi-level sleeping areas and auxiliary spaces. This path invited interaction between the campers and could be referred to as a conversation tunnel.

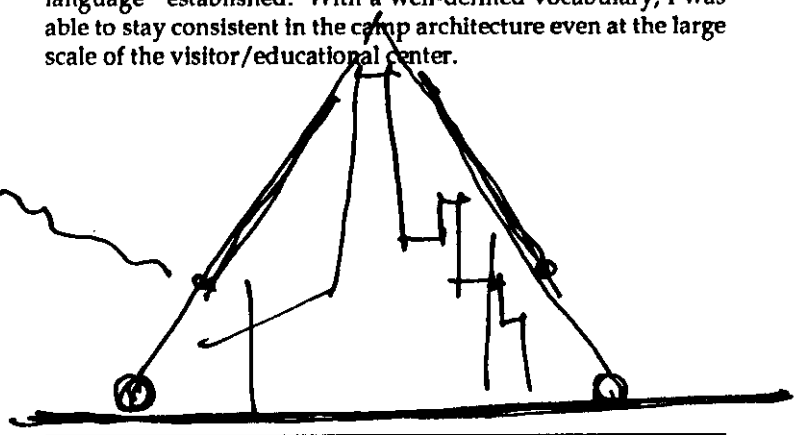
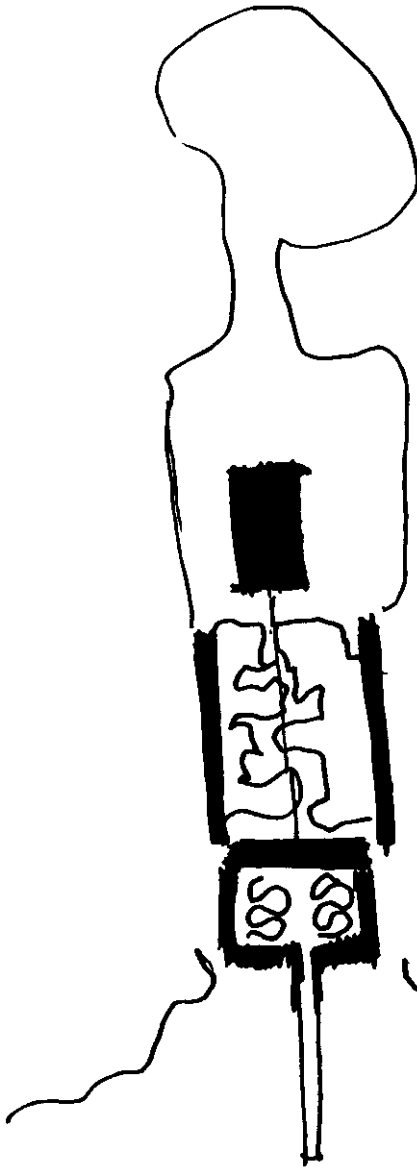
visitor/educational center

The visitor/educational center, specifically, also maintained a singular circulation path through the building yet with its complex programmatic requirements, relative to the sleeping huts, it provided an opportunity to manipulate the main path in an effort to give hierarchy to particular spaces.

As one moves through spaces of the v/e center, one is taken back by the verticality of this structure and the numerous multi-level spaces within that volume of space. The visitor is taken through a sequence of small and large, multi-level spaces, so as to emphasize the procession through the complex (similar to the sequence discussed in other parts of the camp).

Horizontally, the visitor/educational center is divided into three major areas, and each area is emphasized through materiality changes and the roof treatment (cutting away of the roof to define a space). The first section is the exhibition space which is the arrival space. The visitor then moves on into the main working area of the complex, including the craft area, offices, conference room, and kitchen. These spaces flank the main circulation space and work together to create the undulating path I spoke of earlier. Ultimately the visitor reaches the culmination point in the center, the lounge and firecircle, flanked with exterior eating spaces. These spaces are primarily intended to be used by the campers yet visitors.

The visitor/educational center also speaks of the architectural language established. With a well-defined vocabulary, I was able to stay consistent in the camp architecture even at the large scale of the visitor/educational center.



an architectural language

In short, the architecture of this camp spoke of variation on a theme. A theme that involved many levels of architectural issues.

orientation

I attempted to orient entries into the buildings in an east/west fashion, recognizing the eastern sunrise and western sunset, life and death, entry and exit.

geometry

I utilized a simple rectangular form as a common footprint for each building. Entries/exits and focal spaces became extensions of the floating planes.

....buildings shall grow and emerge as germinated seedlings from a well-fertilized field.

A variation of the pitched roof began to give an individuality to each hut.

the floor plane is a stage
the facade a backdrop
the roofline a romantic silhouette

materiality

I limited my pallet of materials to wood, stone, slate, and glass, yet diversity found itself in the assemblage of these materials.

"...simplicity becomes a foil for poetic inspiration, a deliberate act of restraint." (11)

scale

I attempted to bring space into proper rapport and emphasize the camper by creating interesting niches or sleeping spaces within the sleeping huts and open areas or lounging spaces within the visitor/educational center.

opacity vs. transparency

I introduced openings to provide a focus or framework through which to view the precious commodities of nature: the moon, trees, wind, sun, stars, birds, etc. The contrast of light and dark was also used to define circulation, entry, and sleeping units.

sequence

wander • glimpse • anticipate • arrive
approach • threshold • penetrate • culminate

The architecture of this facility speaks a definitive language, a language of simplicity. By establishing a few guidelines for design, I was able to create many different expressions of a single sleeping hut using a kit of parts and arranging those pieces in a manner conducive to each individual microclimate. Each time, a sense of "place" was created, not only within the woods, but also within the architecture.

the project—a reflection

In retrospect, the most positive aspect of this thesis was the way in which the investigations and ultimately the project remained within my control. I feel there was a simple, poetic yet functional, path of design. It was this maintained simplicity within the thesis that ultimately led to a cohesive design.

Simplicity accompanied this project from the beginning. After choosing a basic "natural" system of microclimating to order the complex, I simply chose six distinct climates. Each building within each micro-context took the footprint of a fixed rectangular geometry and within a limited material vocabulary, they evolved as individuals through the manipulation of assemblage.

These limits allowed a dialogue to occur within the architecture and pushed the design to a level that dealt more specifically with issues of human interaction, physical and visual interaction with the architecture and the environment.

Also by seeking inspiration from my feelings of the forest and attempting to instill them into the experience of the architecture, the architecture became a part of the site rather than a menace to it.

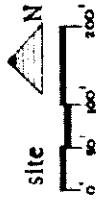
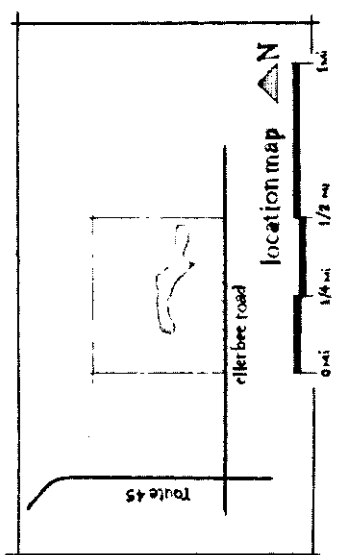
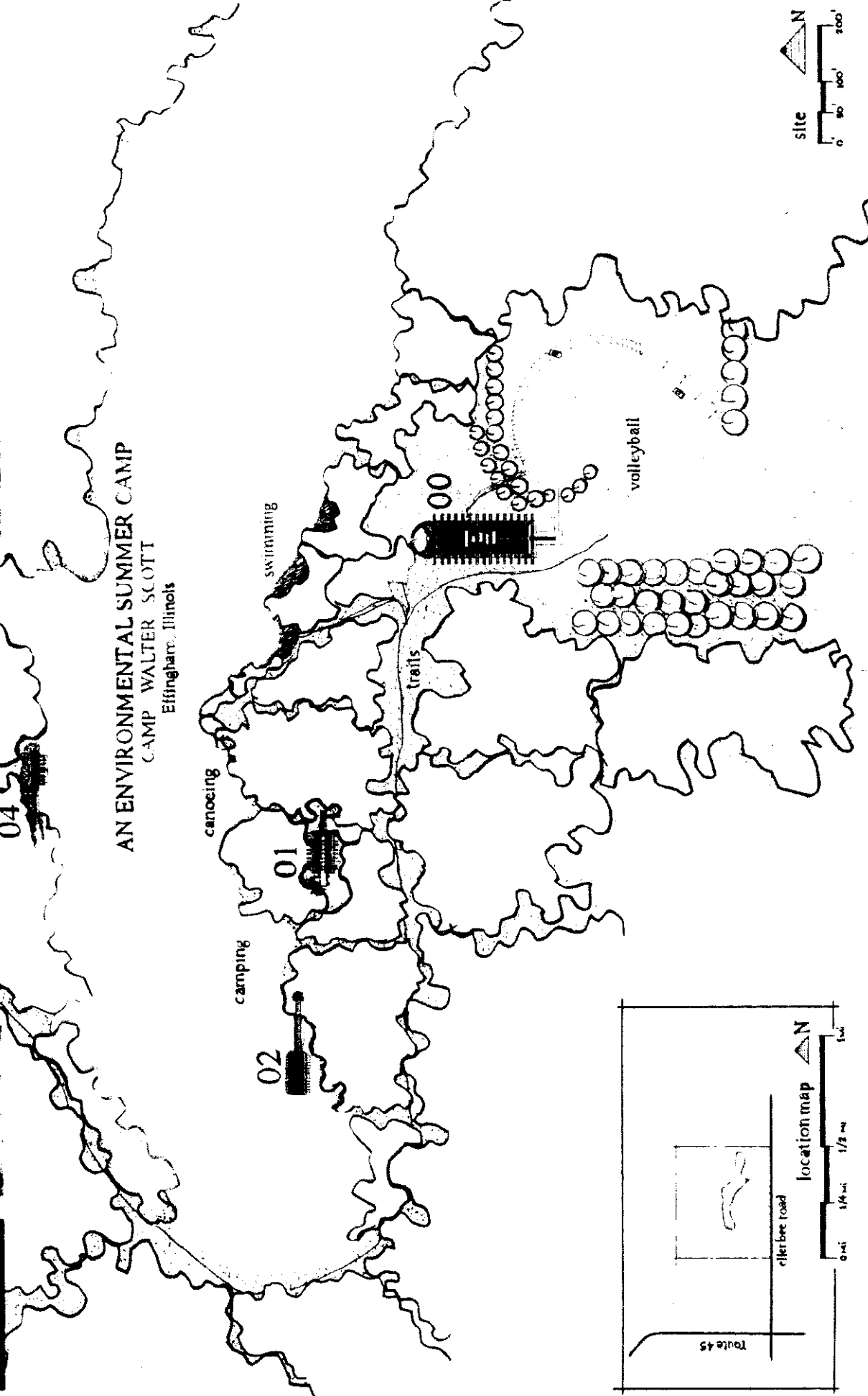
Overall, however, the design became dependent on the simple architectural language established and the different levels upon which the design grew. Materiality, geometry, and movement and transitioning were probably the strongest dictators for this language while maximizing natural sunlight and wind in relation to each specific microclimate was probably the weakest. I feel a more detailed analysis of climatic patterns was probably in order, rather than just stating that they were each different. Having specific data on each microclimate would have enabled me, as the designer, to better take advantage of those natural amenities.

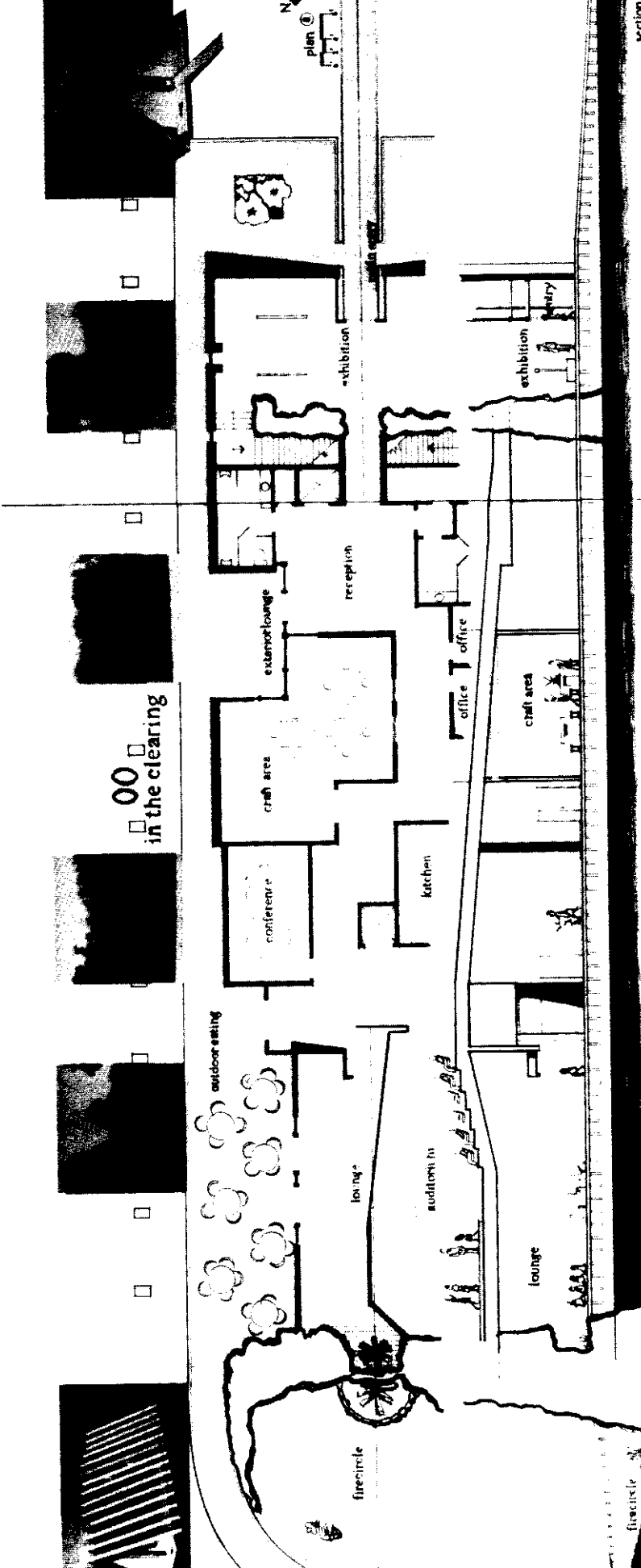
I also feel I didn't address enough my initial goal of human comfort within the space. However, I feel the potential for niches within my interior spaces was evident. With additional time and development, I feel the project would have easily evolved to accommodate these needs as well as the project's need for further thematic detailing.

In closing, I was pleased with the level of design I achieved with this thesis and ultimately this environmental summer camp. I foresee only progress as I venture out into the professional world and experience this "real world" we hear so much about in school. I can only hope I carry with me and reinforce to others in that "real world" the hopes, dreams, and aspirations I had in school the ones I hope to transform into my reality.



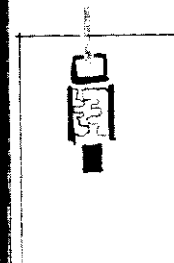
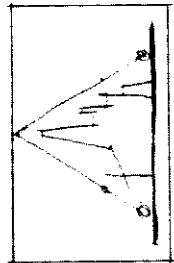
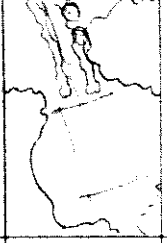
AN ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMER CAMP
CAMP WALTER SCOTT
Effingham, Illinois





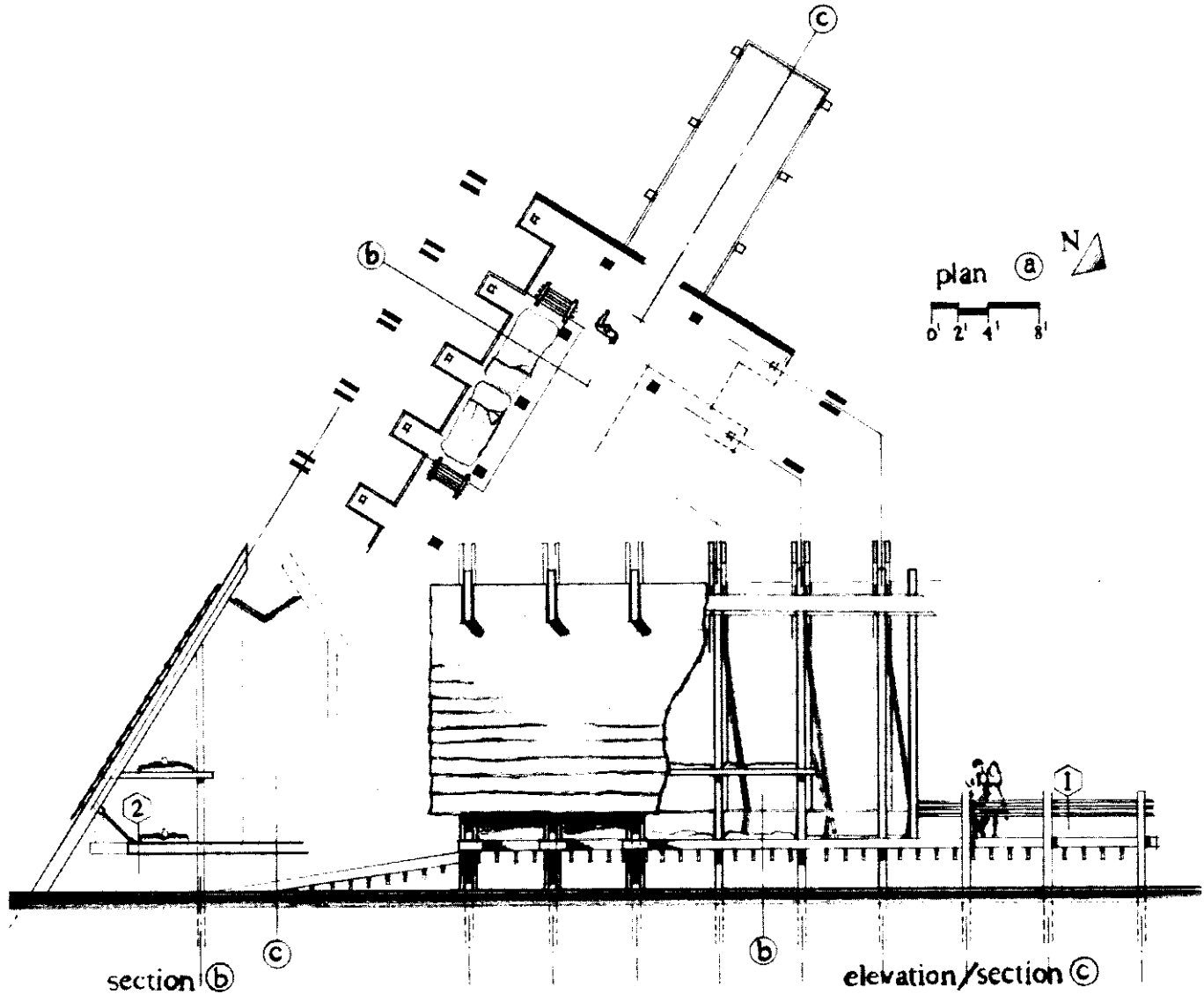
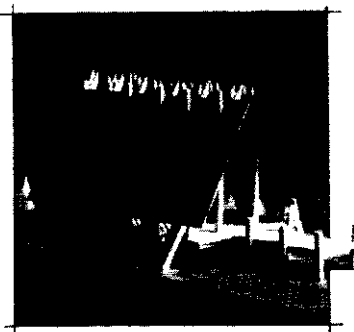
OO
in the clearing

section



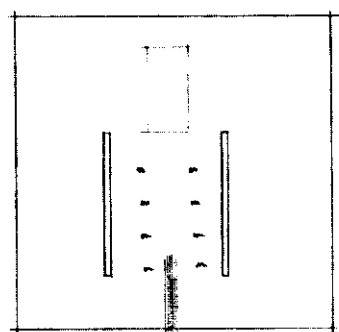


01 on the forest floor

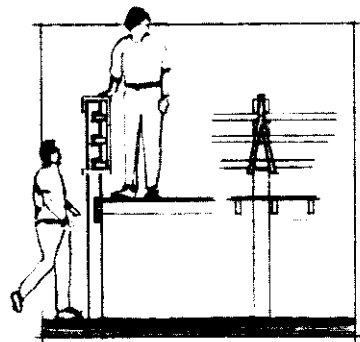


section (b)

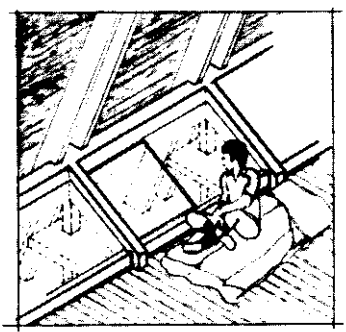
elevation/section (c)



diagram



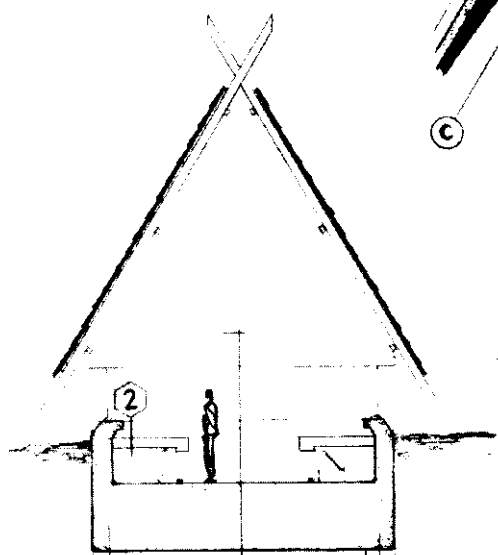
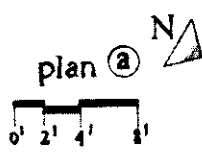
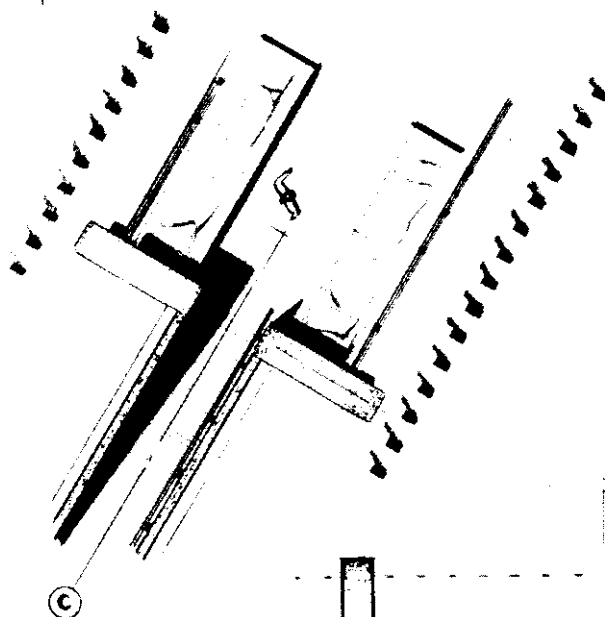
detail ①



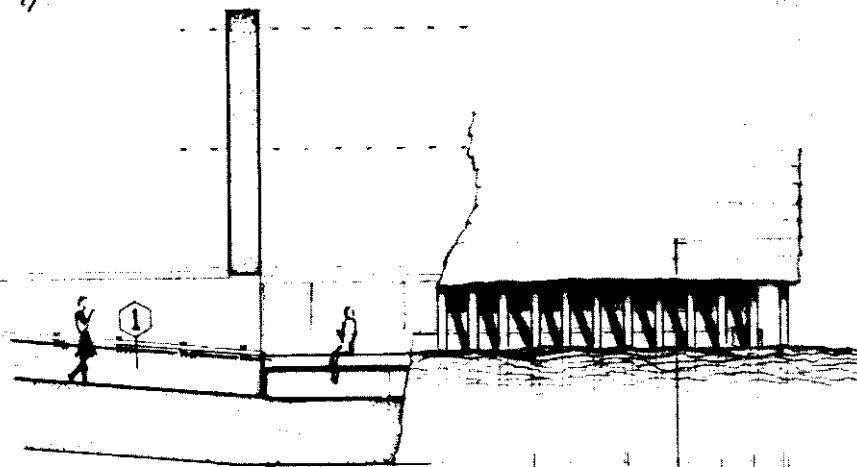
sleeping area ②



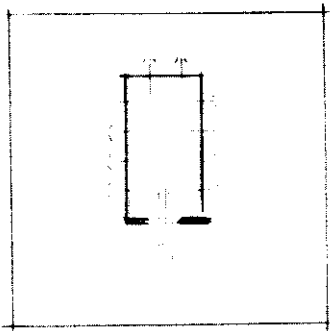
02 in the water



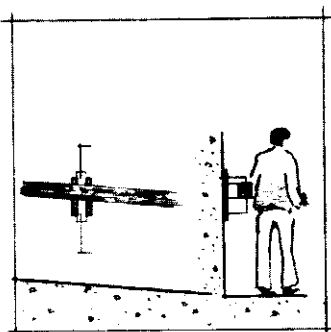
section (b)



elevation/section (c)



diagram



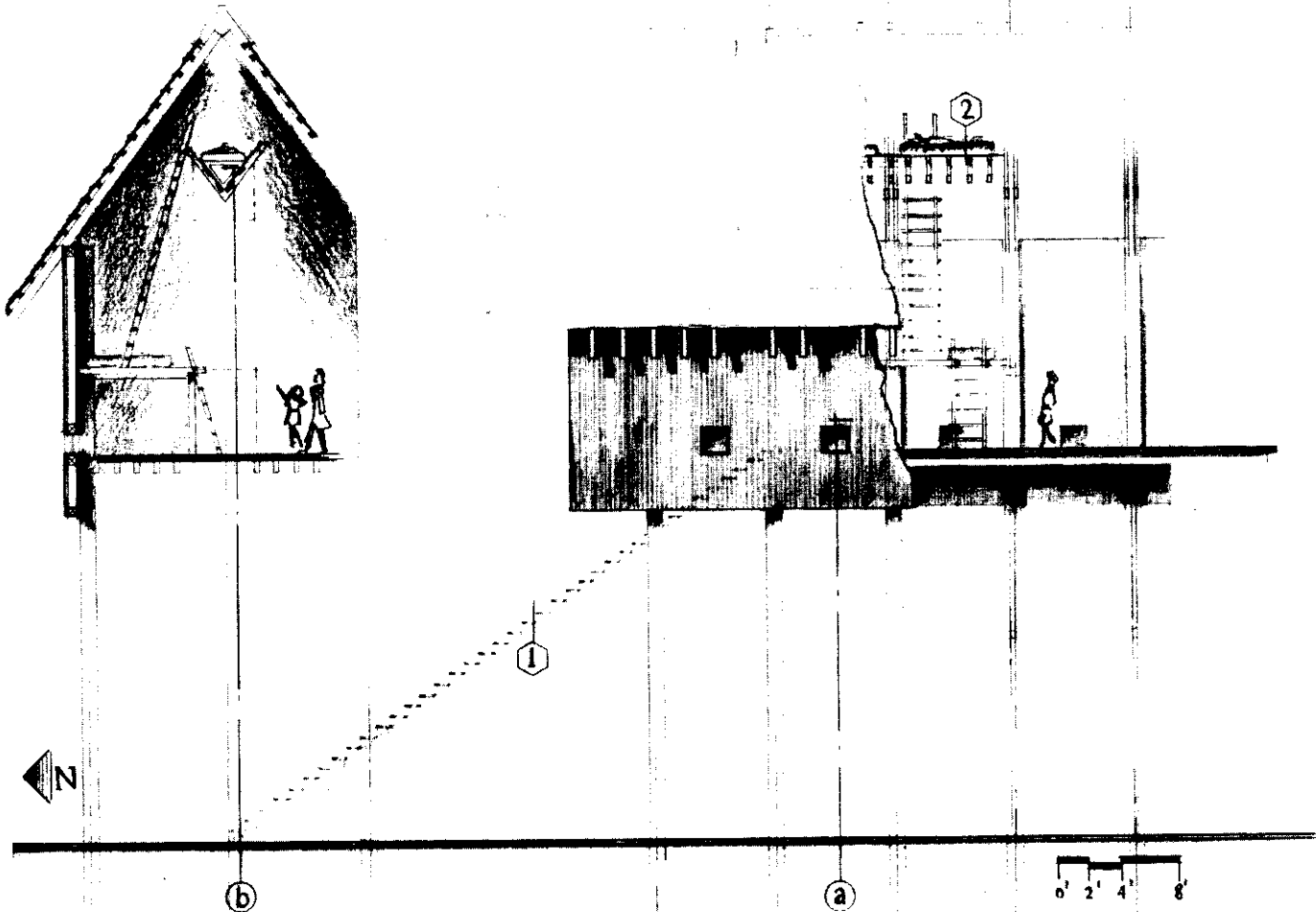
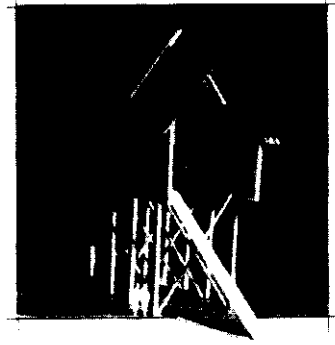
detail (1)



sleeping area (2)



03 in the tree tops



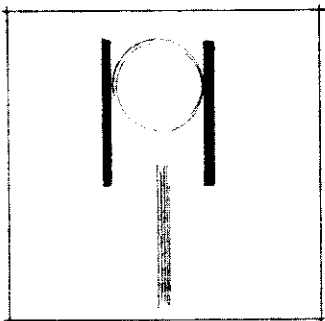
b

section ①

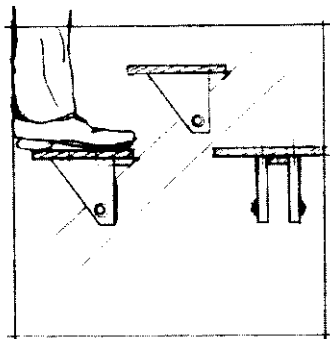
a

elevation / section ②

0' 2' 4' 8'



diagram



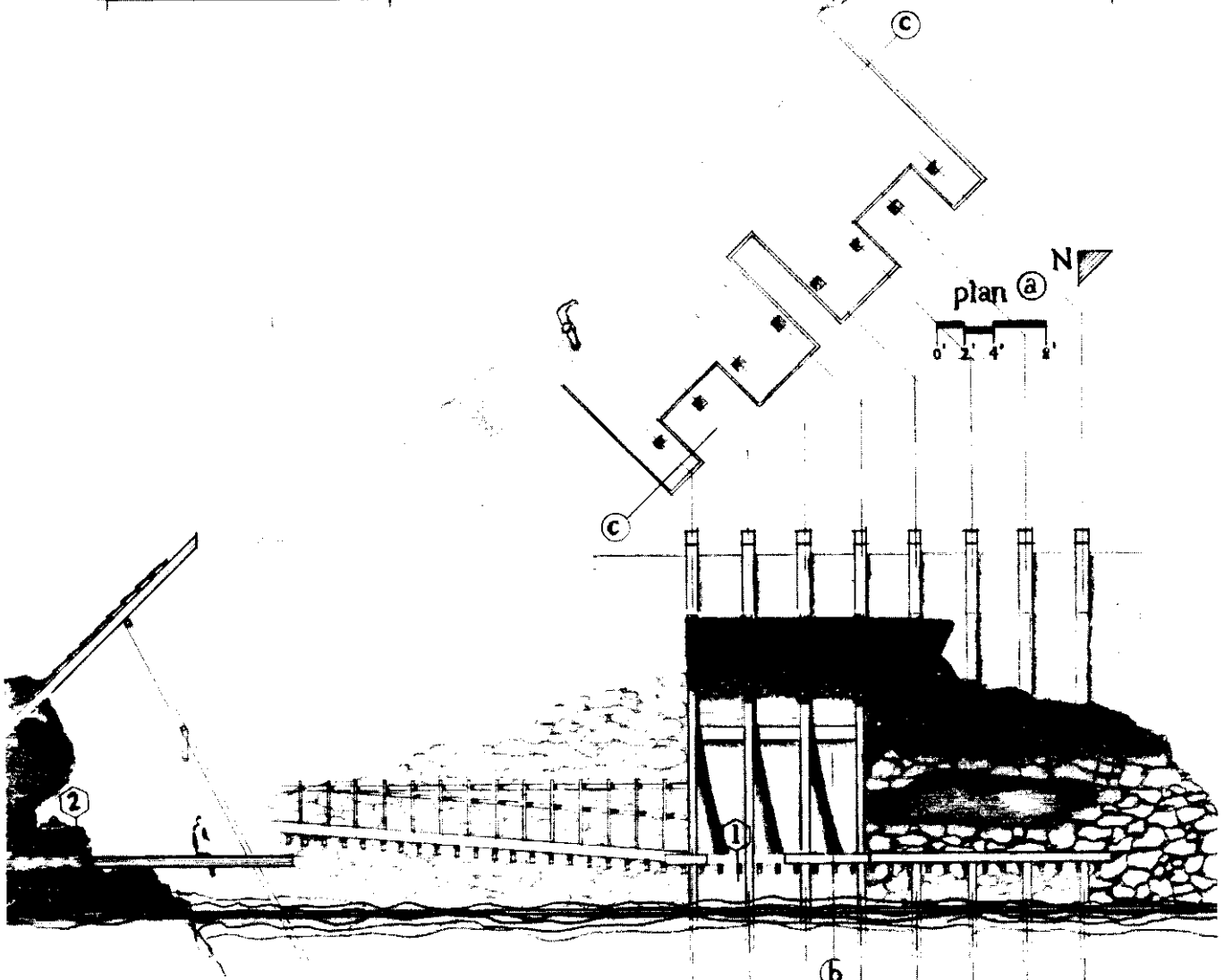
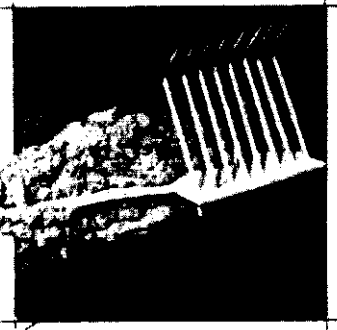
detail ①



sleeping area ②

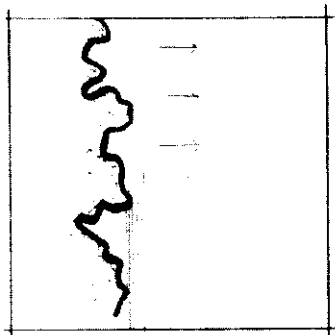


04 at the water's edge

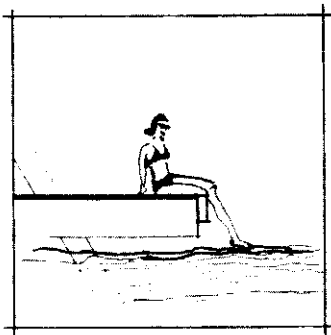


section (b)

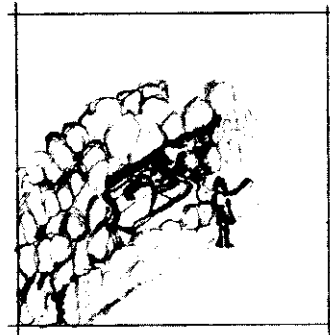
(b) elevation / section (c)



diagram



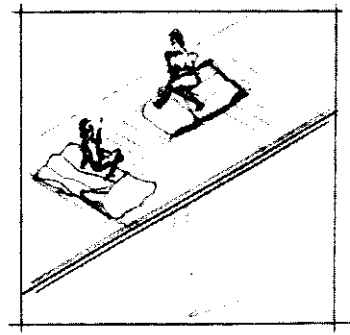
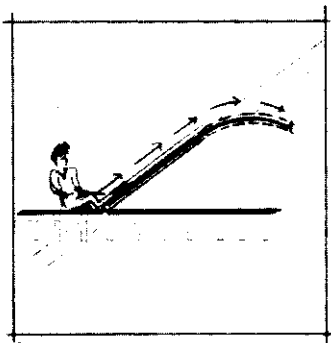
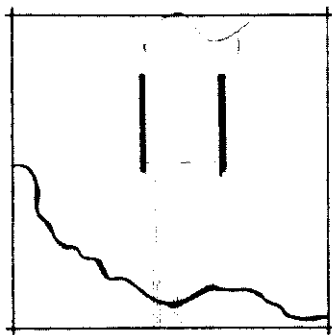
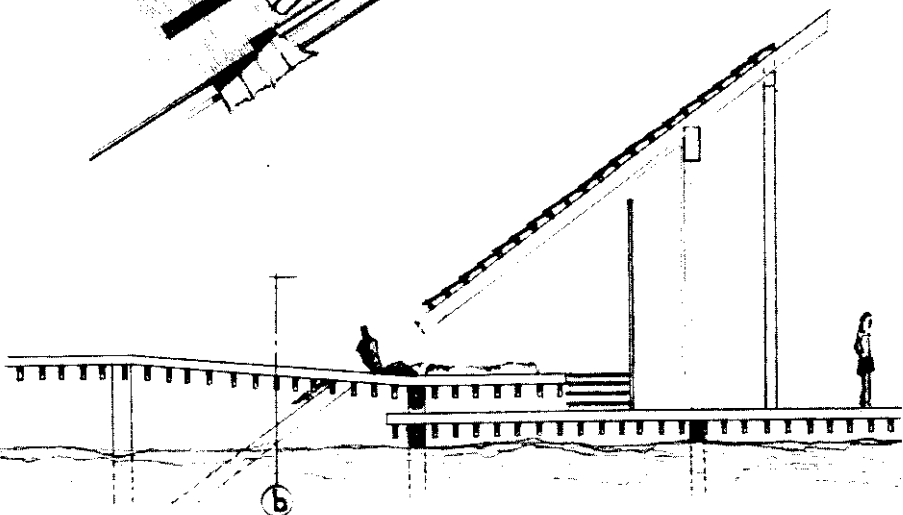
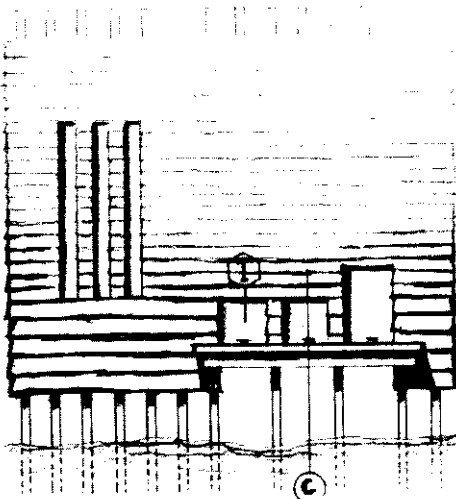
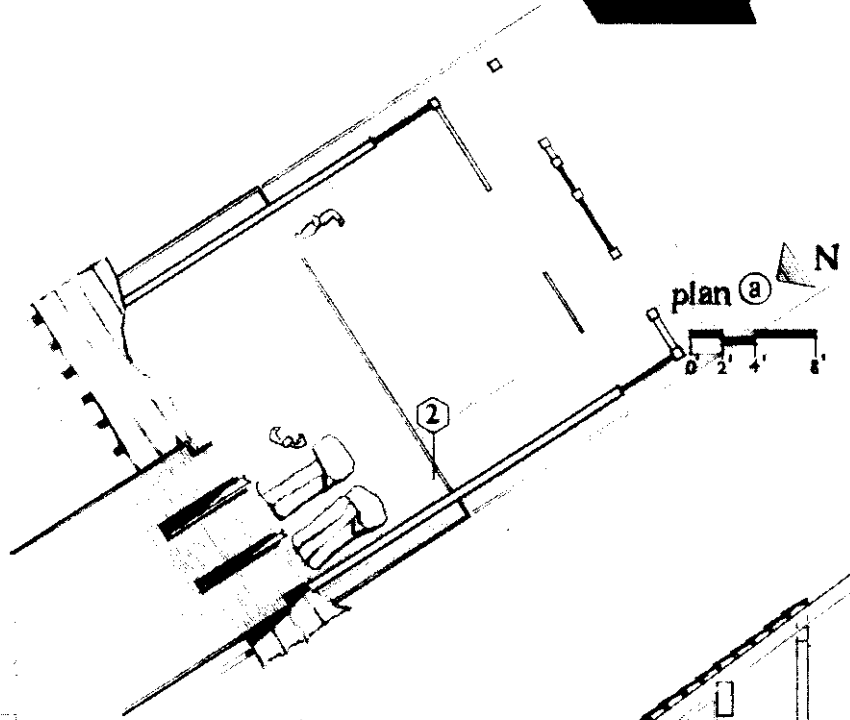
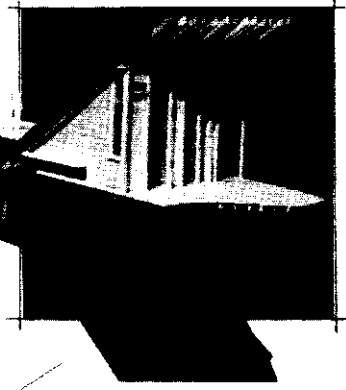
activity (1)



sleeping area (2)



05 in the cove



elevation (b)

section (c)

diagram

entry detail (1)

sleeping area (2)

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