Beyond Kennicott
Perceptions of Threshold Conceptions of Distance

by
Steven Keith Bull

Bachelor of Science in Art and Design
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990
Cambridge, MA

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

January 1997

© 1997 Steven Bull. All rights reserved.
The author hereby grants to M.I.T. permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

signature of author

Steven Bull
Department of Architecture
January 17, 1997

certified by

Imre Halasz
Professor of Architecture, Emeritus
Thesis Supervisor

accepted by

Andrew Scott
Associate Professor of Architecture
Chairman, Departmental Committee on Graduate Students
Thesis Committee

Imre Halasz
Thesis Supervisor
Professor of Architecture, Emeritus
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dimitris Antonakakis
Visiting Professor of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Bill Hubbard
Visiting Associate Professor of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ann Pendleton-Jullian
Associate Professor of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Beyond Kennicott
Perceptions of Threshold-Conceptions of Distance

by
Steven Keith Bull

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 17, 1997
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Thesis Supervisor: Imre Halasz
Title: Professor of Architecture, Emeritus

ABSTRACT

threshold
The thesis explores descriptions of threshold. Threshold is not an ordinary space. It relates to the here and the there and the understanding of
distance. It is the phenomena of distance, no matter how close things may be. It is also the phenomena of closeness, no matter how distant things
may be. It is a perceptual and conceptual understanding of distance in terms of the here and the there at a moment when they touch.
It is active and cannot be neutral.

Kennicott
Kennicott is in Alaska.
It is a silent collection of abandoned mining structures between a wide glacier and a range of mountains. It has trails. One that comes from
someplace far up the valley becomes a narrow road that cuts through its center. This road then leaves Kennicott. Exiting along the straight line of
the abandoned railroad, it descends toward a town and the terminus of the glacier where it must end.
A river stops the road.
However, on the far side it begins again and for sixty bumpy miles it covers the remains of the old mining railroad until, at its end, it passes through
the mountain and the Alaska highway system begins.

project
The project presents an inhabitation of Kennicott. The actors are the tourists who come to this place. Inhabitation reflects a relationships between
their activities and the context. It requires acts of construction. The act of construction creates the here, a place for activity, and describes a
relationship with the context; the there. Construction mediates between the here and the there.
Completing this thesis has involved a number of people without whose help and support it would not have been possible. My thanks are first to my committee, my advisor Imre Halasz, and my readers Bill Hubbard, Ann Pendleton-Jullian and Dimitris Antonakakis for their patience, good advice and criticism. I am especially grateful to Dimitris for the friendship and education I gained while I was his TA. I would also like to thank Essy Banassad, Brian Carter and Miriam Gusevich for their interest and criticism at the presentation of the final project.

The people I met at Kennicott, McCarthy, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and the National Park Service offices in Anchorage and Copper Center, and the tremendous amount of information they made available were invaluable in developing an understanding of the past, present and future of Kennicott. Thanks must also go to my friends in Anchorage who generously opened up their homes and spare bedrooms this summer, Elena and Pandelis who helped bring the final presentation into form, and my friends at MIT who offered support, humor, and advice when it was in short supply. I would particularly like to thank Bill, Paul, and Dave for the conversations at Carberrys that made the early morning something to look forward to.

It is difficult to express the deep thanks my mother, father and brother deserve for the opportunities and challenges they’ve given to my life. I would never have reached places like MIT or Kennicott without them behind me. My aunt and uncle, also, have given more than one could ever expect by inviting me into their family for two years while I studied at MIT.

Lastly, I’d like to thank my dear friend Christiane for the hours of untiring help and, more importantly, for making this fall one that will stand out the rest of my life for reasons other than this thesis.

Ahhhh, Paris.

S.B.
This thesis represents part of an architectural exploration. It is founded on the following loosely related objectives:

**The search for inhabitation**: In a context where we have become so good at sheltering ourselves from the physical forces of the environment and so concerned about protecting 'nature' from ourselves that we have lost intimate contact with any place, construction that express the inhabitation of a particular place become more meaningful. This search recognizes that architecture transforms the environment in the service of our activities. Inhabitation and construction must be understood as the act and the expression of the relationship between our actions and the specific qualities of a place.

**A search for thresholds**: The acts of inhabitation and construction define relationships between our selves and the things that surround us. When we devote ourselves to the construction of objects and the transformation of places we create distance between our selves and our surroundings. Because of this we must explore that which allows us to participate with what is now distant. Threshold is this space of connection.

**The search for 'nature'**: According to Raymond Williams, 'nature' is perhaps the most complex word in the language. Its meaning is culturally based. Construction, as the expression of the relationship of a culture to its environment, can reveal a potential interpretation of the 'nature' of a place.

What follows might best be described as a work in progress. It presents a form of conclusion that has emerged through the conflict that exists between language and an architectural proposition. It is through design that I have challenged my conception and understanding of these terms. It is through careful thought directed toward a specific architectural proposition that I hoped to render clear descriptions of these terms. It is not a broad survey or complete history, but a description that emerged out of the issues latent within the territory of Kennicott.

---

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.

_**Henry David Thoreau**_

from *Walden and Other Writings* by *Henry David Thoreau*. p. 172
Threshold relates what is here to what is the there through a perceptual and conceptual understanding of distance. It is the phenomena of distance no matter how close things may be. It is also the phenomena of closeness no matter how distant things may be. It is a space formed by the overlaying of the perceptual and conceptual understanding of distance between things that allows them to touch.

Threshold has three parts: distance, desire and movement. Distance is the perception of space between the body and another object or place. It is physical. Desire is the transformation of the perceived physical distance into a mental conception of distance. Your desire to bring that thing closer or to push it away forms this conceptual understanding. Passage is the movement of the self away or forward toward an immanent arrival.

Threshold, in one of its simplest forms, occurs at a doorway. The doorway provides the essential elements needed to encounter threshold: a perception of distance; desire—or the conceptualization of that distance, and passage.

Standing in front of a doorway places you in a space where that which exists on the other side of the doorway is perceived at a distance. This is a physical distance. Your eyes and ears perceive this physical distance between you and the other side. If you desire what exists in the distance you form a
conceptual understanding of the distance between your self and the space that is through the doorway. This formulation is independent from your perception of the actual physical distance. It is held in your mind. The mind, then, can bring that what is through the doorway into the space you occupy. The mind overlays these two spaces, one a physical and the other a mental, and creates the perception of threshold.

Passage, then, is the act of moving your self mentally and physically toward the space on the other side. Movement through the threshold is the movement of the self through the thickness of a space that is physical and mental.

There are other more difficult and interesting descriptions of threshold to consider. Threshold can be associated with experiences of pain or consciousness. In these cases, you perceive the threshold of pain and consciousness only after they have begun are present. Threshold is perceived the moment at which something begins its "essential unfolding."¹

Pain and consciousness are not readily understood in terms of a physical distance. Still, a space in the mind surrounds them that is thick and difficult, a cloud often, that holds the threshold.

A physical and spatial threshold that has similar characteristics is the Museo di Castelvecchio by Carlo Scarpa. Within this space you encounter distance, desire and passage through an interaction with the building and the sculptures—or figures.

A figure has a front and a back. It has a gaze. You understand the different sides and the gaze through an interaction with the figure using vision and movement. The figure has an aura.² It possesses the capacity to look back. It, however, is autonomous from the


2. Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Illuminations (New York: 1955), p. 223 writes that the Aura relates to authenticity which Benjamin describes: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."
space and time of the museum for its gaze reaches beyond its setting. A combination of multiple figures can be used to create a perceptible threshold.

Witness the Scarpa example above. Four large figures stand in a room with a central path and 3 windows. Two gaze across the path to a window and an unknown distance beyond. One is turned. One looks back, at an angle, into the room. Together, they form the space of interaction between the visitor and the figures. It is a space with distance, desire and movement.

A distance exists between your self and the first figure. You wish to engage its aura. It, however, looks beyond you. Its gaze brings the unknown distance that it desires close, overlaying the space of the room with the space of its gaze. This transforms the room into a place of conceptual distance. The figure has created a threshold around it. You move before the figure and enter its threshold. You feel yourself moving through two spaces, that of the museum and that of the figure; perceptual and conceptual spaces, respectively.

A grouping of figures creates yet another threshold--a void. This is the space that receives the light from the high window. It is defined by the gaze of the figures. A space defined by the gaze of the figures, it is a moment when, as a visitor, you have moved beyond the threshold of the figures into the place where true distance enters the room.

Here, under the light from the window you can touch an infinite distance. When you enter the room you desire to move toward this space.

The challenge, then, is the search for an architecture that actively employs these ideas.

For this, there exists a place.

The Way of the Cross
Erik Gunnar Asplund, Woodland Cemetery
(from Global Architecture #62)
Soon the signs started appearing. THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA. We counted five signs before we reached the site. There were forty cars and a tour bus in the makeshift lot. We walked along a cowpath to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and photographing. All the people had cameras; some had tripods, telephoto lenses, filter kits. A man in a booth sold postcards and slides—pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot. We stood near a grove of trees and watched the photographers.

Murray maintained a prolonged silence, occasionally scrawling some notes in a little book.

“No one sees the barn,” he said finally.

A long silence followed.

“Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.”

He fell silent once more. People with cameras left the elevated site, replaced at once by others.

“We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies.”

There was an extended silence. The man in the booth sold postcards and slides.

“Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We’ve agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism.”

-- Don DeLillo

from White Noise p. 12
The Kennicott Glacier is in the Wrangell Mountains of Alaska. It begins in the frozen white reaches of Mount Blackburn and cascades over an icefall into a valley with the same name. Through this valley it pushes ice and stone until it has stretched itself completely across the wide swale frozen like a wild sea. At the end of the valley a turbulent river fueled by the glacier braids its way south; mixing and churning with the waters of the Nizina, the Chitina and the Copper until it flows at last into the Gulf of Alaska and the water of the Pacific.

During the summer the lower reaches of the Kennicott glacier melt slowly and if you sit close enough to it you can hear the recurring sound of a single stone sliding down its face as the ice recedes. The sound is hollow and full of depth.

But there was a time when this was not possible. Beginning in 1908 the crushing sound of men mining the earth masked the voice of the shrinking glacier. Diesel engines and steam belched. Wheels, belts and chutes groaned. Copper, so much it turned the mountain top green, was tunnelled from a seam in Bonanza Ridge high above the glacier, then dumped into buckets and transported by tram to the company town of Kennicott four thousand feet below. Squatting on the moraine at the eastern edge of the glacier, the men and machinery of
Kennicott smashed, sifted, leached, bagged and loaded copper ore onto flatbed rail cars that then rode one hundred and twenty miles to the port town of Cordova; to the steam ships that would take the ore to Tacoma; to the smelters belonging to the vast Guggenheim fortune.

Then, in 1938 all the noise stopped. The men digging in the mines came down the mountain one last time and were boarded onto a train to the coast.

Somehow, through remoteness and good luck, the town exists today. It is an abandoned collection of buildings between the wide glacier and a range of mountains. Truly, the only viable way to reach Kennicott over land is by the long thin line of the abandoned railroad, at least during the summer. The road is level but not smooth. For sixty miles it bumps and rattles its way on top of buried railroad ties and spikes. There are no services along the road. No gas. No toilet. No tire repair. The roughness and remoteness conspire to control the cars speed, constraining it to a steady, slow twenty five miles per hour.

The road makes a wide swing to the left near its end. To the right a bluff reveals views of the Kennicott and Nizina Rivers. The road begins to fall, gradually leading down a hill to a curve, then straight-away that crosses the wash out from the melting glacier. The road travels this for a mile then passes from the confinement of the trees out onto the gravel
that contains the river.

The road ends.
Here, all cars are left behind.
A hand tram, constructed after a torrent ripped the bridge out, carries everything to the far side; beer, food, plywood, motorcycles, bicycles, backpacks and tourists. Mornings, around ten during the summer, a cue of twelve camera carrying visitors can be seen lined disorderly at the platform waiting to cross.

McCarthy sits on the far side, up the road just a stretch. A boom town from the mining era, its gravel street and buildings reflect a sort of live in it as you find it form of living. From McCarthy there are three routes to Kennicott. The first, and easiest, continues
Tram crossing the Kennicott River

along the route of the railroad. A dust filled route in a dry summer, it provides quick access to the end of the road, Kennicott. A footpath loosely follows the road. This was the wagon trail that connects McCarthy and Kennicott before the railroad was removed and a true road installed. Lastly, there is the trailless lateral moraine of the glacier. This is a twisting, lonely walk through a dry moonscape of gravel. But even here there are artifacts and footprints of the mining era.

Kennicott reveals itself as the railroad town it was and is. Abandoned buildings are strung out like a great red necklace of neglect. Broken windows, boarded up doorways, collapsed roofs stretch nearly half a mile along the edge of the glacial moraine. Mid-
Kennicott townsite - looking north. Donahoe Peak in distance

Kennicott, industrial buildings from store.

Kennicott Glacier

1943 Map of the area
(Historic McCarthy, p. 93)
way through the townsite a bridge crosses a clear creek. The road becomes wooden, then gravel again as the fourteen story mill building rises on the right side. The mill, an enigma, somehow rescales the whole valley from this point. Beneath its shadow, all that seemed large is now small; even the enormity of the landscape is temporarily dwarfed by the mill's aura. Kennicott, now a giant, hides nature for a moment, but just a moment.

Alders, having already swallowed up small buildings nearby, soon reach from the hill into the road, choking it. It is forced to become simply a path. The path passes beyond Kennicott back into wildness, back into the true landscape with its glaciers, mountains, and ruins all included.
“I spent the following day roaming through the valley. I stood beside the sources of the Arveiron, which take their rise in a glacier, that with slow pace is advancing down from the summit of the hills to barricade the valley. The abrupt sides of vast mountains were before me; the icy wall of the glacier overhung me; a few shattered pines were scattered around; and the solemn silence of this glorious presence-chamber of imperial nature was broken only by the brawling wave or the fall of some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the avalanche or the cracking, reverberated along the mountains, of accumulated ice, which, through the silent working of immutable laws, was ever and anon rent and torn, as if it had been but a plaything in their hands. These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillized it.”

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

Henry David Thoreau
from Walden and Other Writings by Henry David Thoreau p. 172
It ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its crooked print, shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big, too big for the dogs which tried to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope. It was as if the boy had already divined what his senses and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punitively gnawed at by my men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name, and through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life which the little puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorance and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant;--the old bear, solitary, indomitable, and alone; widowered childless and absolved of mortality--old. Priam reft of his old wife and outlived all his sons.

William Faulkner
The Bear
from Go Down, Moses. p. 193
site model
The project proposes an inhabitation of Kennicott. The actors are tourist who come to this place, summer residents, and year round inhabitants of the valley. Inhabitation is the act of transforming a place so that it may accommodate their actions. It creates a relationship between the actors and the environment around them. It requires acts of construction.

Construction must be understood as an act. It is also the object that mediates between the actors, their actions, and the environment. It creates a sense of distance that did not exist before inhabitation.

The project proposes a temporal understanding of Kennicott. It responds to time in the sense of duration. It recognizes that the length of stay effects the actions of the inhabitants. During a short stay, one is captivated by the physical presence of the artifacts and the setting. It is perceived through a concentrated visual gaze or the unseeing click of a photograph. You stands in awe of the glacier of the mill. As time is spent in a place, it is encountered in a more distracted manner. Details are discovered not by careful visual concentration, but by daily interaction.

The project accepts both of these conditions. It provides places for the visual—for the tourist—as well as places that engage the site in a less visual manner. It accepts that different activities require spaces that embody different relationships to the larger context. It also accepts that the tremendous changes from summer to winter require

Program
The project begins with a program that provides the following. These reflect the activities of the actors within the time and space that currently exists in Kennicott.

- a place to cook
- a place to eat
- a place to cleanse the body
- places to sleep
- places to gather
- a place to work and
- a place to winter
- a place to engage history
- a place to look back at where you’ve come from.

Site
The immediate site for the project is in close proximity to the company store. The store is the last building (still standing) before one reaches a bridge that separates the industrial northern part of Kennicott from the residential southern part. It is the moment when the three different paths that leave McCarthy meet and become one again. Just past boarded over storefront one discovers the first unobstructed view of the Kennicott Glacier rising up to Mt. Blackburn, as well as the first look at the fourteen story edifice of the mill building.

It is here, within the narrow space of the road that the project begins.
bridge

company store

site - from top of mill building

aerial photo of Kennicott
(courtesy of AeroMap U.S.)
1. bridge
2. birch grove
3. sleeping
4. cooking
5. eating
6. winter
7. working
8. multi-use
9. kiosk
10. bunkroom
11. toilets
12. bath house
13. history
14. work yard
15. south court
16. central court
17. open space
18. company store (existing)
19. ice house (existing)
20. bunkhouse (existing)
a grove of birch and a path
Construction
Birch trees planted within the road.

Design
Grove represents the first transformation of the site. It is designed as a temporal landscape device—a mechanism through which the deceleration associated with coming to Kennicott reaches a point of change. Leaving the world at large, you abandon the speed of the car for that of the bike or foot; first on an open road, then on narrow trails. The birch grove provides a space that transitions from this speed of coming to the speed of exploring. It is not a boundary between the two, but a gradual becoming of each in their own direction.

So it is also the space that begins the reacceleration back to the world at large.

An important consequence of the birch grove is the extension of the forest across the road. It recognizes the two sides of the road as one and brings them together. It shadows the line that once sliced Kennicott in two.
Fence

Design
Fence shelters nine private rooms that sleep up to four visitors each, a large bunkroom, a multi-use room, storage, two outdoor rooms and a kiosk for basic supplies and material about the area. It is a temporal building that reveals an ever changing inhabitation.

Fence represents the search for scale. Recognizing that the project is quite small within the context of both the abandoned structures from the mining era and the much larger landscape, it attempts to express a larger scale through simplicity.

The design reflects a search for thinness: Thinness is tied to the conception of distance. How far away one conceives of something is related to how thick or thin a mediation is perceived to be. A perception of thinness brings things close. Fence manifests this. It is a taught line that stretches between the actor and the environment. The exterior is articulated to reveal its thinness. One can see the wall passing the edge of the roof. The wall is understood as a plane that is independent from the roof. This plane, then, is easily tranformed to bring the glaciers close. The act of opening the large sliding doors breaks the thin line between the actor and the valley; leaving only the skeleton of the structure and allowing the distant space to enter the room. In this instance, the wall is not a physical threshold that one can cross. It is a mediator that reflects a conceptual
relationship to the distance one places the self in regard to the environment.

Fence is the first and largest move on the site. It protects the rest of the project from the winds out of the northwest. Its thinness allows it to become the datum against which the rest of the project is oriented in both plan and elevation.

In summer, Fence is opened up as an ambiguous boundary between the inside and the outside of the project. These openings are devices that frame the valley. The inhabitants sheltered in its lee are free to engage the environment beyond the wall. Then, in winter, the wall is closed and Fence becomes the protector and reference for the project.

It is constructed out of timbers felled in the valley and treated on site, 4 x 6 primary framing members on concrete footings, steel connectors, 2 x 12 roof framing and floor joists, iron barn hardware, glass and metal roofing.
fence - transformed by inhabitation - opened up to the landscape
Hearth

Design

Hearth shelters a place to cook, a place to eat, a bunk room and a south facing court.

A totemic element, it provides for the initial inhabitation. It ensures protection for the acts of survival. Stones collected from the glacial moraine are laid as a rough floor and stacked into walls that shelter a cooking hearth. It is oriented toward the moment the winter sun sets in recognition of the space of the seasons that stretch from the far northern sunset of summer to the low sunset of winter.

A timber stair rises from the central court and passes over the cooking space to give access to the upper bunk rooms. The cooking space is constructed of stone. It is part of the ground. The stair accepts this condition and climbs as a continuation of the ground on axis with the setting sun. While climbing the stair you remain rooted to earth until you step through the wall of the bunkroom and encounter the thinness of Fence.

The southern face creates a spatial relationship to the south court employing orientation and edges to define space casually. This reflects the attitude that the different buildings, by serving specific activities, will not easily accommodate their neighbors. Instead, they enter into a conversation across the open spaces they collectively define. In this way they become figures in a larger landscape.
Design
Winter shelters a gathering space, a sleeping loft, a small cooking hearth, a library and a court.

Its construction is of stone and timber and represents an exploration of thickness. Glacial stone is employed to construct the walls that an elemental roof rests upon. The roof, constructed of wood rafters, 2 layers of purlins, sheathing, then metal cladding, presents itself as a thin skin on the exterior. However, the interior is different. The interior is sheathed with plywood that conceals the roof’s actual thickness.

The act of sheathing the inside of the space with plywood shapes it into a containing form. The plywood hides its system of construction. You inhabit the space under the roof at an unknown distance from the environment that surrounds the structure.

The primary aperture for light within the twin spaces are at the summit of the roof. The pyramidal form is transformed for a window. This act creates an additional space within the extreme height of the form and strengthens the sense of thickness.

These twin apertures also act to give Winter a front and a back. They recognize the southern orientation of the structure and stretch to bring the light closer. Winter captures the distant sun within its space through a gaze of its own. This reflects an attitude that favors a formal orientation over an articulated orientation.
In an articulated orientation the form of the building is neutral. Orientation is then expressed through an exterior articulation like a large window. This act serves the gaze of the viewer within the form.

A formal orientation is directed from the outside as well as the inside. It recognizes that the construction occupies its own space and time autonomous from the inhabitants, much like the figures within the Scarpa museum.
Design

Work shelters a large work space, a small work space. Its exterior contributes in the definition of the central court and a work yard.

It is constructed of stone walls that rise nearly ten feet on all sides from concrete footings. The floor is made of the small gravel that currently covers nearly all of Kennicott. On the northern wall clerestory windows in wood frames bring light into the space. A canopy of glu-lam beams, purlins, and translucent acrylic panels stretches over the space.

Work represents an exploration of the singular transformed by the particular. The roof expresses this. It is singular and analogous to landscape. It rises from the ground to shelter the space within. It is a canted plane that rests on the stone walls that vary in height in order to meet it. The walls vary because the shape they form is irregular. This reflects that the workspaces, as much as they are shaped by use, are shaped by the unseen outdoor spaces that surround them. It is around these spaces that the project turns.

The central court brings the valley near through an aperture in Fence. Here the stone walls inflect to make space for this exchange with the landscape. Likewise, on the southern side, the whole form can be understood as an inflection. This inflection creates the work yard. The largeness of this move reflects the position of the workyard as a void. It is the space the workshop turns its back to. It is the space History looks past. And it is the space the road looks over but is not allowed to enter.

The inflections of the wall creates three interior spaces. Within these spaces your relationship is with the object of your labor. All are painted in white and the only light is from above. Except for the large barn door to the workyard there is no place to connect your self to the exterior landscape. Just the sky.
History

Design

History shelters the interpretive experience of Kennicott.

History is an insertion. It represents a confrontation between the old and the new. It reflects the attitude that you come to better understand the existing through a confrontation with something new.

It is an exploration of the sequential. You approach the building along the road; encountering the front of the company store in its existing and unaltered condition. You gaze through boards nailed across the storefront at a floor and shelves strewn with paper and goods. In this way you greet the building through an unmediated or interpreted encounter. Beyond the building lies the first new construction; a ramp that leads to the rear part of the building. Here you see a separation has been created between the front and the rear. The newness of this separation reveals itself through the use of a narrow metal skin. The separation activates the building in two ways. It creates a distance between the existing structure and the structure that is to be experienced as a transformation. It also activates both parts as figures within a dialog with the other structures and landscape of the project.

Ascending the ramp, you pass over the void and into the darkness of the existing store through the opening created in the skin of the building. Then, passing into History, you move into the light.
History is a vessel inserted within the company store and holds a pictorial and written story of the valley and Kennicott. The vessel sits at the end of a sequence of movement that takes you out of the present Kennicott and leads you through a past and future understanding of the context. History takes all that is the present and physical Kennicott and distances it from you. When standing on the floor of History, under the glass roof, unable to see the physical Kennicott, the place enters the realm of the imagination where you formulate ideas about the lives, heroes and enemies of this area. This ambiguity of location, this threshold, is where the mind is fed that allows you to then encounter the rest of the context without the need for maps or signs; simply the imagination.

At the far end of the vessel are oversized stairs that act as seating for small lectures. You can climb these stairs. From the top is a view over the whole of Kennicott, the glacier, the icefalls, and Mt. Blackburn sixteen miles beyond.

This is the end.

Like the top of a mountain, the only way is back along the route of arrival; back along the path that will lead to the ground.
within History
Design

One must cross the road to reach Body.
The siting and orientation of these structures address the rituals of cleansing.
One moves up the hill to the bath house. Showers are taken out of doors. A sauna offers another way to clean oneself. A bathing pool offers a place to dip oneself after a sauna.

Here the project engages a new path, a cross axis, that introduces another set of rituals other than passing up and down the central road of Kennicott.
beyond
kennicott
Sverre Fehn once termed a museum as a dance with dead things.
I like this thought for three reasons.
First, a dance is all about movement. It conjures up ideas of a fluid continuous movement through a space and all the conditions of it--movement around and through and by and near and on and on and on.

Second, a dance is all about the space that is between the two or more things that are a part of it. In dance, space becomes the realm of closeness and distance and contact and freedom and joy and desire. It transports the mind from the space of the present to a space the imagination can enjoy.

Third, through the dance the dead things can come back to life. As a dancer we give it life by moving with its aura.

Beyond Kennicott is where we dance. It is the space of a whole landscape full of figures-full of glaciers, of mountains, of ruins. Full of sentiments of hope.

We move through this space not as if it is a past to be buried or a future to be denied, but as a living space, with newly constructed actors that enter the floor with their own sense of identity and their own relationship to that landscape.
Friday, August 7th.

Stopped and camped at a windy, snow-covered summit look. The winds were howling like crazy, and the windchime was chiming in the church. Set up camp in a good spot along the road, near the edge of the hill, looking through the snow-covered trees. Saw my old companion of the summer.

Why I met with the folks in the back of the car, the back of the car. It seemed that if they lay the trunk, we could end up like a hamster trail.

It took so long to imagine that place with our determined way through the trees, the strength of the wind, and other old things, in the personal "journey." One makes putting your head into some place you start of feel like you don't know. The sense of a risk being taken, the thrill of the risk.

Traveled through the gateway gap, cut, clearcut, (threshold) of the Christina. Skirted it and shot some photos. No need to tell how big it is until something in it, like one can take more of the trees and ground over the gap. Then it cuts through to the road. One can really feel the mountain, the wind, away at the rocks to make the gap.

From here, the other side, and the big world. Copper River, nothing but land and the wide sweep of the Christina River Valley and of course, more in the road, no longer an asphalt but gravel and here at the gap, rocky at its edge, so easy. I hope that my friends could shake out on the way into this valley.
Berkley River:
Another 20+ canyon - this one made by water and crossed by a bridge. A good spot to go beyond jumping - although we are not jumping today. I seem to be playing leaping with a couple of others, each of us trying on different ways to get off and both of something, get passed by the others and only to pass them again later. I'm travelling the road much slower today than the last trip. Decided not to fly to get down the road this time. I got back after a few hours to sketch and shoot photos. I've noticed some more things like the canyon consisting of the really rough and the river (now I tried to make a small arrangement of stones near the river to explore threshold in a linear visual manner, then photograph it, but wasn't very successful. Maybe I'll have better luck another day, the road.
Culbike Trestle:

I stepped here the last time things. In fact, every time I've gone down there and I've stepped at this trestle. It's like the other that runs along the foreshore to Cooks, but here, along this road, it is the only one.

Standing beneath, the light filters through the forest covering, and in the best. In fact, it was hard to tell if the trestle's piers are built or just enormous trees standing in a warm green light.

One could build a fantastic bedroom up in this thing, high in the air above a clear stream. One could sleep peacefully here.

Built again by several cars later, my stop was longer than average. But at the end of the road called, among some guys with a flat tire or so standing around with beer in hand so one began a camp fire and hammer at the chain that held up the span. It was needed solid, each keb-a-boo-1, I can say things done that these others can't. Life exchange. After my toy I left one did it otherwise leaving the strident with their cheese sandwiches and smiled out tobacco.

Perhaps the next car will give me a lift either to Cottage or back to Berkeley.
Appoaching the end of the road, where it turns sharp and one can almost see the river, is a small triangle of public land where one can camp. I drive to the river edge, crossing the much-cast of private fish channels and weaving between 8 year old asp larch and rocks until I see the camp. Down the tent set up by two men camp out how spayed they hike, the check. I move the helper feeling it colder in the last 15 then roll into my tent and, by the light of an inside desk lamp for a spell while.

Ng 10

Today it's cold enough to wear a down coat - at least early in the morning. It snowed down to 5500 ft, pushing by the termination dust on the peds across the valley. It's sunny lightly. I packed my soaking stuff into my bolt bags, and my measures. Paddling away from camp I realize I left my knives hanging behind so I have to head back, just in case. This is country where you really need to be self-sufficient and prepared. At the farm I get stuck behind a van-load of tourists anxious to cross the river.
The Measuring.

People "tram," or spend the day "trammeling." That is, they help others and their own across the river by putting on their gloves and pulling for some time. Trammeling is particularly important when the landscape turns out to be too distant or if a bridge has been destroyed. I helped across the river, and we walked up the road to meet with Ben and Mari Thornton-Shirae.

I met Ben in his study, a small, very small, building down the hill from the house. We spoke for a while about Kennebuck/McCarthy, confusion and perception of nature, thresholds, moving, and the relative scale of things. Ben told me the question of living in a mountain wilderness without a boundary between you and wilderness but in a rhythm that is integral and intertwined with the land you live on. He spoke mostly to Kennebuck and Anchorage folks about Kennebuck. Ben reminded me of the larger picture that I had been thinking of earlier.
When we finished speaking we went up to the house for lunch. Brooklyn, coleslaw, cheese and the two cheese sandwiches I had packed for the conventions. One main room faced south, towards the open end of the valley where the early afternoon sun threatened to burn through the light rain. There was a garden to the rear and a window of the house. Their daughter had a friend over and the two children made a mess. Their life in a place like this requires a good deal of effort. Their books, papers were scattered - without a generator there are few luxuries.

Around 3 pm I pulled on my backpack and walked back down the road to my slice hidden in the Alders near the road. I decided to head to the high country. The weather was fair and there was a chance of getting some light. If I could find tomorrow I may not get as good a chance to see the upper mining supporters and the high country.
I rode my bike through the main trail, slowing but not stopping, where the road splits to head out to the glacier or up to the Bona Vista Ridge. I went right, up the hill toward Bona Vista. A few people have purchased land up here and are now building cabins; an occasional sound of hammers drifted up the hill as I pushed my bike up the steep rocky road. I finally drove the bike on the dirt road because the valley opened to the south. You could see a view of the mountains from the cabin. It must be warmer here during the summer. I saw a small rabbit sitting on an old cabin and a herd of elk ahead of me. The path was well-traveled, half-way to the top. Even this cabin has been broken into by someone. A 4-wheeler sat outside, just above the spot where the road ends, and only a footpath continues on. An old train support frame was found and ruts were visible. I found a log spot to sit on where I stretched the Valley below. By now I was so cold and I added another layer of clothes and my jacket. When I left the spot I took a quick look for blueberries, it looked like areas I had found berries in the past.
Romance was at the snow line. Its roots were white with the first snow of the late summer. Otherwise, the wood was dark and old, almost drifted up through the high valley, obscuring the summit then passing over the ridge. I decide to reach the summit, then come down to explore the snow. In case the weather really turns it is very deep and rocky under the snow. The stone here differs from the stone in the Choysk and the Talkeetnas. Its sharper than the Choysk but less ragged than the Talkeetnas. All the mountains have their own character. They form in different ways, but more importantly, they seem to wear down differently. On the summit the clouds moved out, then closed back in. I took a couple self timed photos then found a nice line of screws to take down to the mine. The snow rolled down in front of me, leading the way as hundreds of small bulbs let loose to create, building, then breaking apart from their own weight. After I dropped a few hundred feet the clouds lifted to let the sun shine momentarily on the hundreds of rolling balls and the trees they dropped down the mountain.
Hiking near the structures I realized I was not alone. I could hear the rocks falling down the hill that some other hiker, collector, explorer had set free. The tide buildings are in much worse shape, the 4000 feet in altitude above the valley probably means it takes as much snow. I could see how parts of the structure are simply being crushed up here. I picked my way into the main building area where white diaphragm from above, as well as light and panel cut the end where one, or I should say, continued on their journey to the mill and beyond, symmetry. The structure that built the bridge is beautifully symmetrical like the transom point below. At the edge of the exposed sandstone, so there enough integrity in this place to build me up.

I thought I had cleared off earlier and given me great views of the back-country, perhaps I'll have those again later to arrive up again...
Stayed for a beer at the lodge, but all that was left was Miller Genuine Draft. Bot t'wait, I'm too weak until I could have something better if I wanted and helped from the good stuff across. Decided to Miller and chatted with a couple from New York before heading to the town. I pulled in not a three or two errors. It was a dark dunk when I wanted to bed.

August 11.

Back the old wagon trail to the mine today. Took the road yesterday. Stopped at the countryside to take a photo. One can still see the remains where the bodies lay behind small white wooden crosses. There is a town meeting, church so long that I'm sure they didn't dig the graves, but moved bones instead. A square cemetery within a wall and fence. You can open it and it seems so out of place, a reminder that people really died and die in this area, simple working in the mines, or people dying here permanently seem so absent when one has only experienced the works of Kennecott. As if a whisper that says don't forget us.
Mill Building.

By the time I reached Kennecott it was almost afternoon. I spent near time wondering the rim edge of the road. The road towards the end of the road is really a good example of car park development. Get out the back and scramble. A good route for some money counted about 100 cars in the area. I wonder where all the people are. At the mines, up the glider, off in the hills. Today was spent looking at the mines of Kennecott mostly. Up the road past the mill, to the trail and back to Rich Reewood's place, and back again. Into the store — a place that it seems all things are converging upon. Park Series included.

I walked out onto the gravel that covered the glacier and shot the panarama angles. It seems that the glacier is always moving. You can't see it, but you hear it shrinking so the rocks on top, one by one slide down the face as the ice melts imperceptibly.
The Company Store & Bank Office

Without asking where, almost everyone I met talked to says the store is the best site for facilities at Kennecott. I didn't even remember it from my last trip here. Maybe, they all agree, compared to the mill and power plant, it's other improvements, it's also on the new side of National Creek, yet another building next to the lodge, the bunkhouses, and the people who set up a small camp to mine the tailings piles. It helps the memorability of most of Kennecott but it sits, in a good spot, the point of convergence to the trail, along the National Creek, and my tent from the glacier moves near this spot. It's a collector, a showplace and provides for most of the goods that come into this town. I crawled in through an uncovered window in the rear. It was dirt and cluttered with high windows. I went upstairs, walking over piles of paper and debris from up to the top floor where the word recently repaired, covered the first interior open with light. It's not a spectacular building. Maybe that's why it a good place to begin, or is it end?
I wondered how much I could do to the building here, what could be too much? Not enough? Could I literally take the stone apart and remake a new thing out of it? Could I insert a new opening, a threshold into the powerhouse, that enhanced the spirit of the Walpurgis. Could I turn this place inside out? I walked down to National Creek then back up, approaching from the glacier. From below it's bigger and colder at once. It laces with a background that is missing nothing. This is really the hard way to come. It appears like no hidden, then appears again at a new scale. It's like a full train in a way, a linear one. I began with coming to this place is like if you are just passing by it on your way to somewhere else, or is just another part of the landscape. What about when this is your destination? or what if it is your beginning?
August 12

It rained most of the night but stopped by morning. This was to be my last day and I felt as if I had far too much to do. After a quick breakfast of cereal I crossed the Kickinghorse before the warmth of the day raised the water too high. The water was deceptively and cold. It was pouring. I never thought water could be so cold. It took 15 minutes to slowly rose. With cold feet and I scrambled up the moraine to shoot a photo of the Kicking Icefall. I crossed a small depression and river and emerged on top 25 feet from a black bear. I had known sitting to announce my presence, but the bear musique had my voice. I then stuck to both and the bear ran. How quickly danger arrives in this place.

I crossed back to camp, packed, then left for my last day at Kickinghorse. I had planned on running up the edge of the glacier to the mine, the 13th day to arrive, but 2 guys in a pickup offered me a ride up from116.
Kinerikoff Glacier.

They dropped us off in front of the store. If you walk behind the store there is a view of the glacier. A scaleless landscape. The hillsides had sharp, serrated scarps to me, but that is something more indescribable. Moving, alight, stop, and existing. A sea of cloud, turbulent, liquid, frozen. If I had the proper gear I would have hired the zodiac to see the ice.

I hired Ken and She showed me how to get into the backcountry. I thought we could see the glacier from there. We hiked after immediately, determined to catch the ice from a distance. I had to see how it really looked. We saw the ice and the river in a glacial channel, and tried to capture their scale in a photo, but I was far too much of a detail and the ice was too far away. It was contrasted, and some color.

I climbed into the color again to review some things with my waking mind and make some more photos. The ice was different, still at openings, undercuts, and small square frames that offer small glimpses of the beyond.
Leaving Kennecott & the Wrangells.

I left by taking along the glacier's edge, leaving Nihintur Creek until it disappeared into the glacier, along the closed road, never being aware that said dam was step by step creeping just a little more. It was not a trail, it was a bank, a bare from someone who had also traveled in this place. It was a reminder that I was not alone here, a feeling that had set in. There were also eating spots and some paths, but no trail along this route. Just path was shown on the map. I had gone from Kennecott to the town in about 30 minutes, and it took about 3 hours. But it was only 3 hours of change. Nearly found somewhere, first time we got this year, to great animal and plant photos, to small water and flowers on a walk, to steaming, and a path with ice bags to the Kennecott and finally a path and lake banks and car tracks and the road and the town and my truck.

I took my first baths about 30 minutes out the resident Tostere lake. Later, in the room, I was passed by a science doing about 30. He must have had a new font and waiting for him in Christine.


Poole, Scott. *New Finnish Architecture.* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992)


Spude, Robert L. and Faulkner, Sandra McDermott. *Cordova to Kennecott, Alaska.* (Cordova: Cordova Historical Society, 1988)


Wrede, Stuart and William Howard Adams, eds., *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1988)
all photos and drawings by author unless noted otherwise

Page 1 courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art
Page 9 courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art
Page 11 courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art