

Home: Transition between
the Outer and Inner Worlds

Arch 684 - Competition Elective Final Essay
Submitted to Professor Terri Meyer Boake

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Preface

To fulfill the requirements of my masters degree, I decided to complete a competition elective. I had never submitted an individual entry into a design competition before and hoped that it would enable me to take my academic investigations beyond the range of topics offered at school. Among the available competitions, I found the Shinkenchiu Residential Design Competition 2006 to be the most thought provoking and challenging. I enjoy the pleasures of 'the bigger idea' conceptual thinking and analysis, in oppose to dealing with meticulous details. I felt this competition afforded me the opportunity to explore judge Kengo Kuma's pursue of a plan-less condition as a result of an unease and skepticism towards the essence of a house described purely by walls: the method of dividing lifestyle. The use of walls is an innate tool in any architect's vocabulary that he takes for grant. For Kuma to reevaluate the use of walls is comparable to him amputating one of our limbs. He wanted fresh perspectives and ideas. I decided to submit an archetypal concept of a home that would engage in a new

dialogue about domesticity. "It is necessary to undertake a reduction, a simplification, one that consists in making a series of archetypes visible by means of defining them through their strongest traits. As occurs with the caricature, since an archetype is nothing more than that, in emphasizing certain features one moves away from reality; it's the distance that separates a face from its caricature" (Abalos 9).

Kuma's ideas stroked my curiosity for the search of a deeper essence of a home. Other than a few studio terms, my contact with house design was few. A large proportion of my experience lies in personal domestic experiences, which led me to the exploration of the concept: home as the transition between the experiences of the outer world and our inner world. It facilitates this primary function by responding to our physiological and psychological needs. Parts of the investigation led me to rethink many of my own preconceived ideas and much of the investigation brought me back to previous works whose contribution to my submission entry are evident.

Home

From the many building types around the world, houses are the most abundant in quantity and style. They come in many forms: stand-alone or stackable units, stationary or mobile, grandiose or cage-like, and towering or beneath the ground. Furthermore, when the factors of location, economy and culture are incorporated the physical possibilities of homes are endless. In plan, houses are simply a series of walls used to divide and organize functional spaces for sleeping, eating, bathing, playing, working and more. However, houses are more than just an array of intersecting lines, they are homes. The house is the built manifestation, and the home is the idea. There are many ideas of what a home is, some of which include a “place of self-expression” and “a vessel of memories” (Marcus 4). However, what I found most intriguing was

the idea of home as a place that mediates the relationship between our experiences with the outer world and our inner worlds. The outer world comprises of other people in society and the environment, built and natural. Our inner worlds comprise of our bodies and our psyches, conscious and unconscious (Hopcke 36). People often refer to their homes as a retreat or a sanctuary. It is true if you consider what people leave behind when they are at home or how their homes shelter them from the chaos of a bustling city to the volatile elements of nature. If you had to continually keep a watchful eye for the threats of the world, they are difficult give one second to listen to ourselves. Under the protection and nurture of the home, we are able to freely submit to our inner worlds of desires and thoughts. Sometimes, we are not capable of

hearing the most inner voices until we have shut out the outer world entirely and fallen asleep. It is not a coincidence that the primitive hut (Fig. 1), commonly believed to be the earliest building was a house and home. The need for a home is vital to the well being of humans, past and present. The construction of a home responds to the need “to form a fabric for their own preservation from the inclemencies of the season or other, more prevalent motives.” (Vidler 14) Furthermore, it responds to the need, as described by psychoanalyst Carl Jung, for the “dynamic resolution of unconscious conflicts, which are effected by bringing to awareness feelings, thoughts, and impulses that have been kept from awareness” and “an inward journey towards individual fulfillment.” (Hopcke 54)



Figure 1: Primitive Hut by Charles Eisen

Ever since our departure from the birth canal, we’ve come to realize how wonderful it is to be in this world. Interacting with other people brings us uncontainable bliss, and observing the complexities of the world excites and bewilders us. However, sometimes people hurt us, sometimes it rains, and sometimes we fall and scrape our knee. There are good times and bad times. When the going gets good, we don’t want it to stop. When the going gets tough, we just want to runaway. We bury our faces in our hands. We experience times of pain, grieve and embarrassment. There are times we just want to be alone Through personal experience, I prefer to conduct my creative thinking alone at home. I am able to be in a variety of positions: sitting, standing, lying down, or pacing. I am able to release creative energy by loudly verbalizing my ideas, or scribble like a mad man. Throughout all these situations, the home embraces us by hiding

and protecting us by shutting out the world completely. Inaki Abalos while describing Mies van der Rohe's House with Three Patios in 1934 (Fig. 2) explained the need for privacy, "the walls are there to ensure privacy, to hide the person living there, to enable a profoundly free life to unfold within the house, on the margins of any morality or tradition, on the margins of any social or political control...he wishes to deny the very possibility of such a judgment, to affirm his individuality, to affirm the house as the empire of the self" (Abalos 24). It is in complete privacy that we can let our guards down, lose all sense of the external world and become enraptured by our inner thoughts manifested through our dreams (Hopcke 24-25). But, if there are no walls, as this competition suggests, how do we hide? The absence of walls leads to the elimination of containment, privacy and boundaries

essential to qualities that we depend on from the home. I proceeded the design with the conviction that it will need to have a protective shell. Inside, it would be an open space, without division walls. With simply a shell, its flexibility and non-specificity permits the occupant to personalize and determine the desired spaces for the numerous domestic activities. Plus, this will respect the occupant's distinct personality and lifestyle.

Eventually, we dry our eyes, and build the courage to face the world again. Behind the curtains, we peek through windows at the world. Windows allow for a secured interaction with the exterior elements. Artist Stephen Willats explained from his research that he found "the window pane as an agent was the boundary between realities into which one had to pass, and this act enabled imaginative

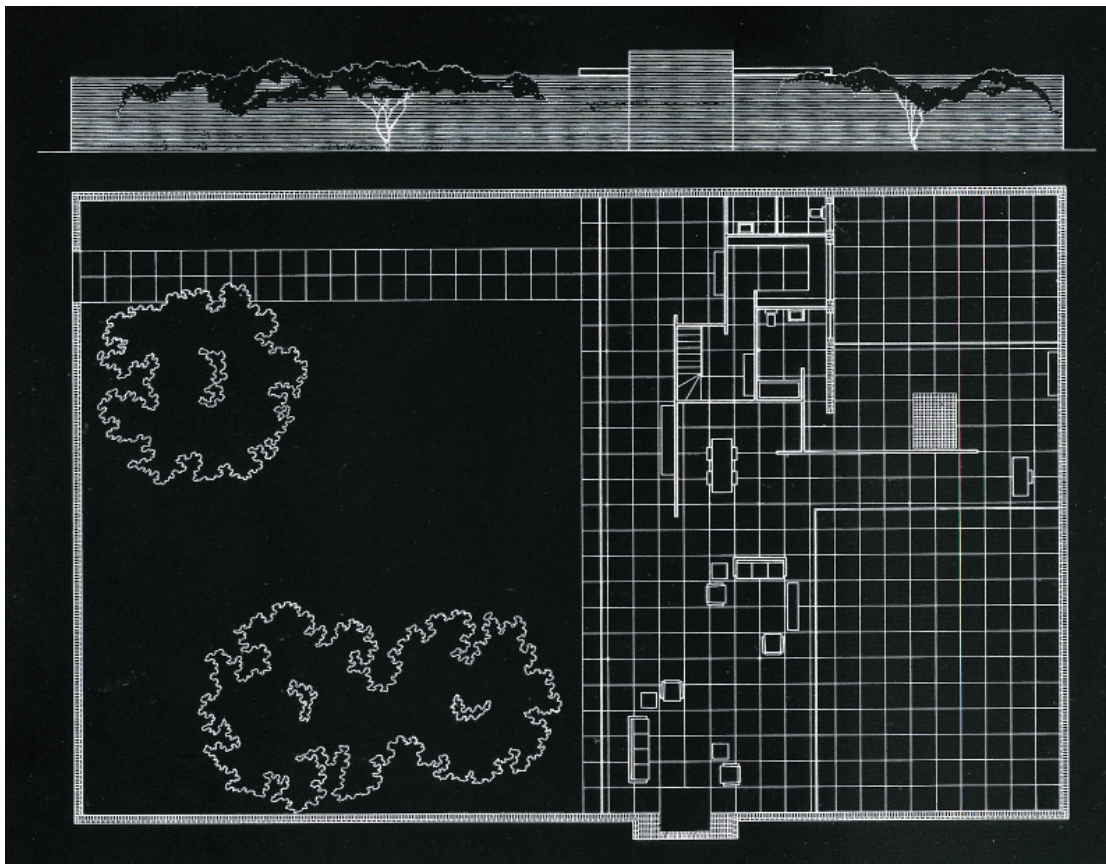


Figure 2: Mies van der Rohe's House with Three Patios

transformations, wanderings and projections. Often these projections gave the person a feeling of being in the company of other people, especially marked if they were living on their own” (Willats 23). On the other hand, windows allow the world to look in, and what they see behind the windows are telling descriptions of the inhabitants. In looking at different neighbourhoods, Willats found different messages through the dressing of the windows. “At Bramcote Hills the picture window took on an overt role as a stage for personal display. The passer-by was attracted to look into the living room, usually via a display of objects placed in the window that would convey a desired message about the occupants...at Hyson Green the front living-room window also played an important role, but here objects, often potted plants, seemed to have the role of keeping you out, of stopping you from looking in”

(Willats 8). From the protection of our homes, we interact with the outer world and the world interacts with us. With changing degrees of transparencies and opaqueness in the shell of the design, the home affords the inhabitants to the choice among the varying levels of privacy and exposure. Today, numerous devices such as telephones, computers, cameras, and televisions can also connect us with the world. They are equipped with various options to control how much we see and hear the world, and how much the world sees and hears us. The home provides a livable means of surviving this world through the methods of hiding and exposing.

To enter the design is not similar to stepping into a black hole. It is comparable to entering into a cave (Fig. 3). As you go deeper and deeper into the cave, it becomes harder and



Figure 3: Cave

harder for the outside to see you. We gradually lose connection with the external world until we become completely alone with ourselves. Our focus gradually transforms from the external world to our inner world. The design takes on the form of a sheltered passageway or an elongated container. The journey terminates with the complete attention to the self and a complete disconnect from the external world. This end of the home is closed, opaque and impenetrable.

To capture this concept varying privacy and exposure in the design, the shell or façade is a gradual gradient of transparency and opaqueness (Fig. 4). Each end is the extreme condition of full visibility and concealment. Depending on the needs or preference of the inhabitant, any of the functions can be performed under anywhere on the spectrum of

privacy conditions. On the submission panel, I suggested activities at various locations, but ultimately this depends on each individual occupant. I personally would prefer to bathe in the most concealed portion of the house (at the opaque end), however, some occupants may prefer to be an exhibitionist and bathe at the most transparent end.

Most days, we spend an entire day unconscious of the inner workings of our bodies. Through our five senses of touch, sight, sound, taste and smell, we are “able to receive detailed and incessant information about our environment, and respond quickly and appropriately to each individual situation, we are in a constant dialogue with the outside world” (Greenfield 54). During our waking hours, when we are actively moving about in the outer world, we inhale more frequently and our

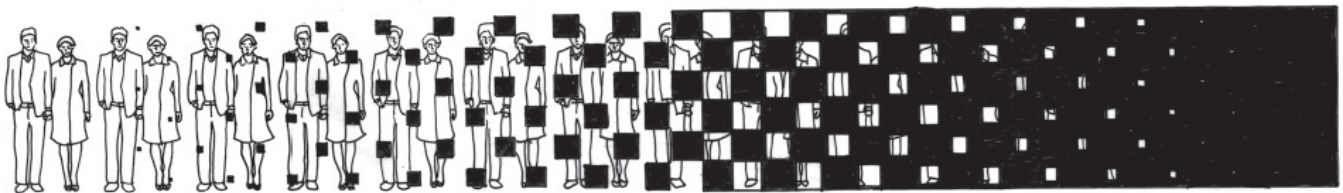


Figure 4: Transparency and Privacy Diagram

hearts can beats up to 180 times per minute to supply sufficient oxygen to our bodies. To process all the stimuli, hundreds of thousands of brain cells generate waves of electricity, which are easily captured by an electroencephalogram or EEG. When we are highly active, beta rhythms of 30 to 14 Hz (Fig. 5) are detected. But, “high arousal leads to distracted behavior where we overreact to a minor occurrence and move about in a restless, purposeless way” (Greenfield 57). As our bodies relax and rest, our heart rate drops to about 120 beats per minute and our brain waves enter the alpha level of 14 Hz to 8Hz. Psychologists have found this to be the most efficient state for performing tasks. When we fall asleep, our heart rate can drop to about 60 beats per second and our brain waves drop below 8Hz. Throughout the night the rhythms raise and fall. When the rhythm is between 8 to 4Hz,

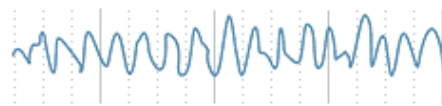
our eyes move rapidly backward and forward; this is called REM sleep. This is an indication that we are dreaming. When the rhythm falls to between 4Hz and 1Hz, we are experiencing a dreamless sleeping state. Time spent with our unconsciousness has been shown to be important. Tests have shown that a fetus at 26 weeks old spends all day in REM sleep. Furthermore, experiments have shown that people who are consistently interrupted during REM sleep, attempts to make-up for lost REM sleep in subsequent nights. Sleep allows us to gather chemicals needed for the brain to function properly. Lack of sleep leads to energy to be stored inefficiently, wasted and dissipated as heat. Ultimately, sleep-deprived individuals burnout (Greenfield 54-58).

The design’s varying conditions of transparency and opacity or exposure and privacy support



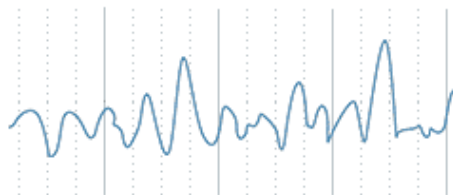
Beta (14-30 Hz)

Concentration, arousal, alertness, cognition
Higher levels associated with anxiety, disease, feelings of sporation, fight or flight



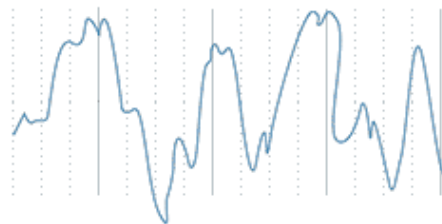
Alpha (8-13.9 Hz)

Relaxation, superlearning, relaxed focus, light trance, increased serotonin production
Pre-sleep, pre-waking drowsiness, mediation, beginning of access to unconscious mind



Theta (4-7.9 Hz)

Dreaming sleep (REM sleep)
Increased production of catecholamines (vital for learning and memory), increased creativity
Integrative, emotional experiences, potential change in behavior, increased retention of learned material
Hypnagogic imagery, trance, deep mediation, access to unconscious mind



Delta (.1-3.9 Hz)

Dreamless sleep
Human growth hormone released
Deep, trance-like, non-physical state, loss of body awareness
Access to unconscious and “collective unconscious” mind, greatest “push” to brain when induced with Holosync®

Figure 5: Four Categories of Brain Wave Patterns

the needs of our physiological changes. By reducing or increasing our visual and audio contact with the world, our heart rate and brainwaves shift to appropriate levels. The outer world can be overwhelming and highly arousing. By entering deeper into the design, the opacity of the shell increases, the exposure to the natural lighting from the outside decreases, our heart rate and brainwaves lower and ultimately we achieve better concentration and efficiency in productivity. When we've become tired of consciousness and want to rest and dive into our inner thoughts and unconsciousness, our heart rate and brain waves need to drop even more, the opacity of the shell continues to increase until all natural light and sound has been shut out and the occupant is concealed in a comfortable setting for sleeping within. On the other hand, in preparation for the external world after a period of seclusion, the increasing transparency (while traveling the opposite direction) allows us to once again familiarize ourselves with the sensation affects of the outside including our increase heart rate and brain functions. To step out into the outer world from seclusion can be shocking. The experience can be compared to stepping onto the spotlight in front of a large audience or stepping from behind the heavy doors and thick walls of a renaissance building onto the streets of Rome (Fig. 6). There are other design qualities which appeal to our other senses as well. Noise can be a strong irritant to the relaxation of our bodies. From the entry to the opposite end of the design, sound level decreases from fortissimo in the outside world to pianissimo in the spherical opaque cocoon. The surfaces become softer and subtle in texture as you descend deeper into the home. Quality of



Figure 6: Door

sound and textures can be affected through changing in the materials used.

Reoccurring symbols are often found in our everyday lives. Their repeated use reinforces our understanding of their meaning. It is not surprising to find them reappear in our dreams and designs. In the beginning of my masters, I did a series of explorations into the containment of the human body. In a piece called Suffocation (Fig. 7), inspired by a Ted Hughes poem, I wanted to describe a grotesque violation and unnatural confinement of the human body. The installation comprised of a grid of white square frames. Inside every frame was a trapped tomato whose size exceeded that of the frame. The flesh of the tomatoes were bruised and ripped while their juices bled out. In another piece called Trust and Submission (Fig. 8), the condition was completely opposite.

I wanted to capture the sense of infinite bliss through security and reception. The installation resulted in a circular hollow sculpture made of soft quilt batting that hovered above the ground. It could have been viewed as an inviting object or a void to be inhabited. Why did I choose to use the square as the controlling malevolent force, and use the circle as the trusting gentle containment? My use of the square and circle were completely based on intuition.

In the design, the shapes and their respective symbolic meanings once again resurfaced. In the diagrams titled "People and Space" (Fig. 9), figures are shown inside squares, curved squares and circles. Their postures describe the quality of their sense of containment. The figures in the squares appear trapped as if they are waiting in an elevator. The figures in

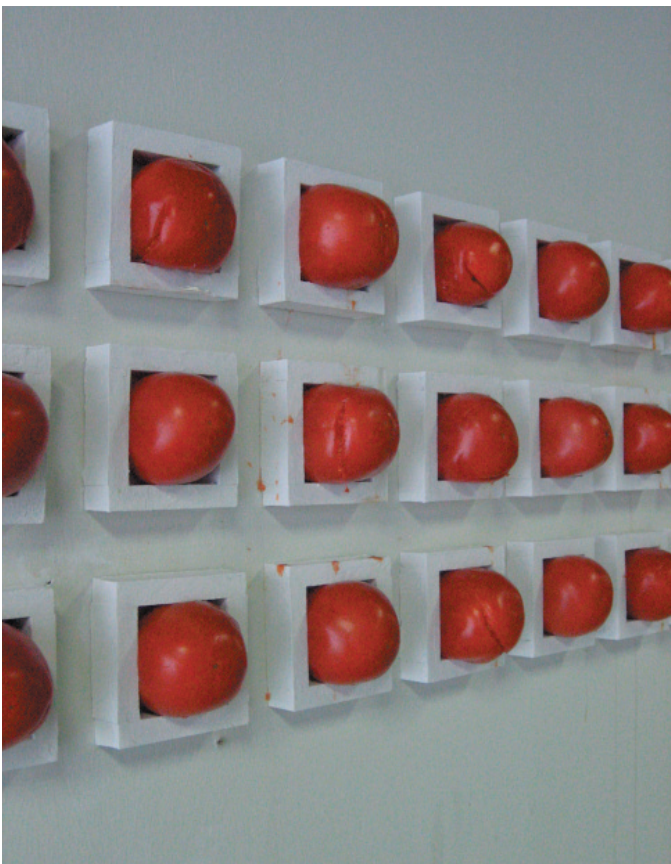


Figure 7: Suffocation



Figure 8: Trust and Submission

the curved squares are a little more relaxed. Lastly the figures in the circles are joyfully levitating. These diagrams are intentionally placed adjacent to the site plan. Consider the city as the uncomfortable and relentless containment, the home as the receptive and blissful containment, and the street as the in-between, consisting of the best and worst of both conditions. The circle and square conditions are realized in the sections of the design. One end of the home is cube or square in section and the other end is a hemisphere or circle in section. The square section morphs into a circular section. The square section occurs in the fully transparent portion of the home. On the other hand, the circle section occurs in the fully opaque portion of the home appropriate to its inward focus of the self and the psyche and its full protection and embrace of the inhabitant. The transition from one to the opposite reinstates the transition from the chaos of the external world to the perfect totality of the psyche.

My use of these shapes resonates with the thinking of Carl Jung. He described the square as “the pluralist state of man who has not achieved inner unity (perfection)” (Cirlot 1962). On the other hand, the circle is “an

archetypal image of the totality of the psyche” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 200). In religion and myths, the square often symbolizes the realm of the mortals and earth (Gaskell 159). On the other hand, the circle often symbolizes the realm of the immortals and heaven. It is also the symbol of protection and the assertion of security of all within its embrace. When taken as volumetric forms, the “square elongated horizontally by the fragment of a circle, and also cube and dome... it thus might symbolize aspirations towards a higher world or a more elevated plane of existence” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 194-200). The use of these shapes and forms can be found in Hadrian’s Pantheon in Rome (Fig. 10). The central interior space alludes to a perfect sphere that represents the cosmos and its divinities. It is circular in plan and section. The obelisk that frames the view into the heavens is also of a circle. The portico, however, the entrance for the mortals, is rectangular (Sear 50).

Another symbol I made reference to was the one of descent (Fig. 11). In the design, the floor is sloped, the inhabitant descends from the square sectional end of the home towards the circle sectional terminating end. Personally, the descent represents the entry into dark

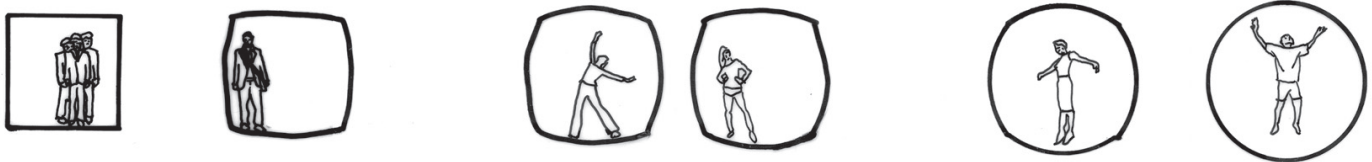


Figure 9: People and Space

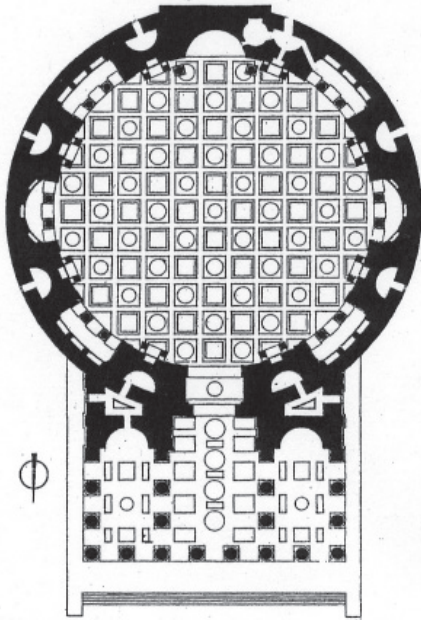
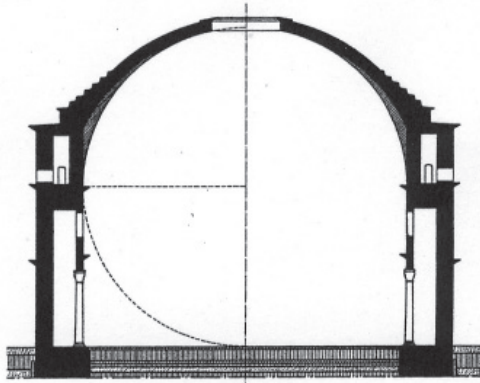


Figure 10: Pantheon Section and Plan

ness in oppose to ascending towards the light. In a previous design studio housing project, I segregated the bedroom to a separate wing of the house. It was connected to the rest of the house only by a walkway that sloped downwards into the bedroom. This coincides with the common term for going to sleep, ‘falling’ asleep. A descend down a flight of stairs symbolizes the entering into the depth of the unconsciousness. However it also symbolizes a descent into a mystical underworld (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 433). The imagery of the Hade’s home does not match my description of a peaceful sleep or a sweet dream. However, it might refer to a nightmare that reveals our deepest fears and repressed feelings. Or it could once again be symbolic of discovering our unconscious, which Jung referred to as the “steps toward the darkness” (Jung 199).

Other imagery that stuck with me included one of a series of paintings regarding the human psyche, which I did in high school. In one

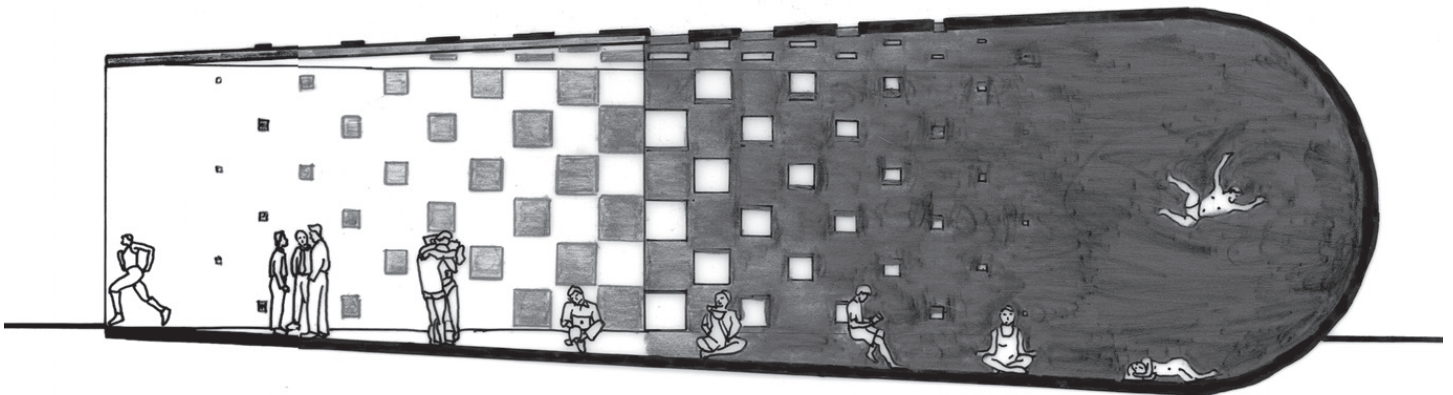


Figure 11: Longitudinal Section

piece, I painted a homeless man curled up under a cardboard box with the superimposition of an outline of a human fetus in the womb (Fig. 12). I agree with the psychological theories, which suggest our retreat to the fetal-position during sleep or times of fear as a manifestation of the longings for our return to our wombs. These desires can also manifest themselves towards the concept of the home. At the turn of the century, Toronto Designer Johnson Chou designed an inhabitable multi-purpose space that he called the “Womb” (Fig. 13). The idea behind the design was a “retreat from external chaos” (Womb 20-21). For many people including Chou, the home resonates psychologically as a cocoon or a womb. People described the home to the likeness of being in the nurture and protection of their mother’s body. This ineffable quality that we are searching for is as Iris Marion Young

explains as a “recurrent desire for return”. After “the expulsion from warmth and security of the mother’s body”, we pursue a “constant search for a symbolic substitute for lost home” and “for an original union with the mother within safe walls of warmth” (Hardy & Wiedmer 121).

Through the comfort of the circular form, tranquility of the darkened space, the opaque end of the design attempts to recreate the atmosphere of the womb. The transformation from the opaque to transparency, dark to light and peace to chaos can be compared to the growth of a fetus into a toddler (Fig. 14). Within the womb, the fetus is completely protected and free from external contact. After birth, the baby maintains his focus on himself and depends heavily on the mother for survival. Afterwards, as he starts to leave the arms of the



Figure 12: Untitled



Figure 13: Womb by Johnson Chou

mother, he begins to explore the world around him. His ability to talk, crawl and then walk facilitates the baby's independence and explorations (Boden 23). This relationship can also be carried to a more macro scale where the home is the protective womb or inner world, the street is the birth canal or the caring mother, and the city is the outer world. On the other hand, the transition from the experiences of the external world to the inner world can be compared to the aging process. Due to age, the once active person begins to grow weaker and weaker. He can no longer be as active as he used to be. He retreats to calm solitary in the comforts of his home. At home, he begins to focus on their own well-being and his purpose in life. As his body fails, he loses the ability to care for himself and become increasingly dependant on the nurture of others. Eventually, he accepts the fates of his life, surrenders and prepares for

the eternal sleep, death (Baron, Earhard & Ozier 391-392).

If we define the concept of home by its qualities of privacy and exposure from the outer world, symbolic forms of squares and circle, the conditions for relaxation and sleep and the ineffable qualities of a womb, we can also find home outside of the house. We can find privacy from an office cubicle, phone booth and dressing room. We can find squares and circles in houses of religion, government and shopping centres. We can find conditions for relaxation and sleep in spas and hotels. Lastly we can find qualities of the womb in the fetal-position on a street corner. While away from home, we are still capable of finding elements of home. Does this indicate our ability to survive without the home? Or does this indicate that our dependence on the home is even greater than we imagined? We frequently

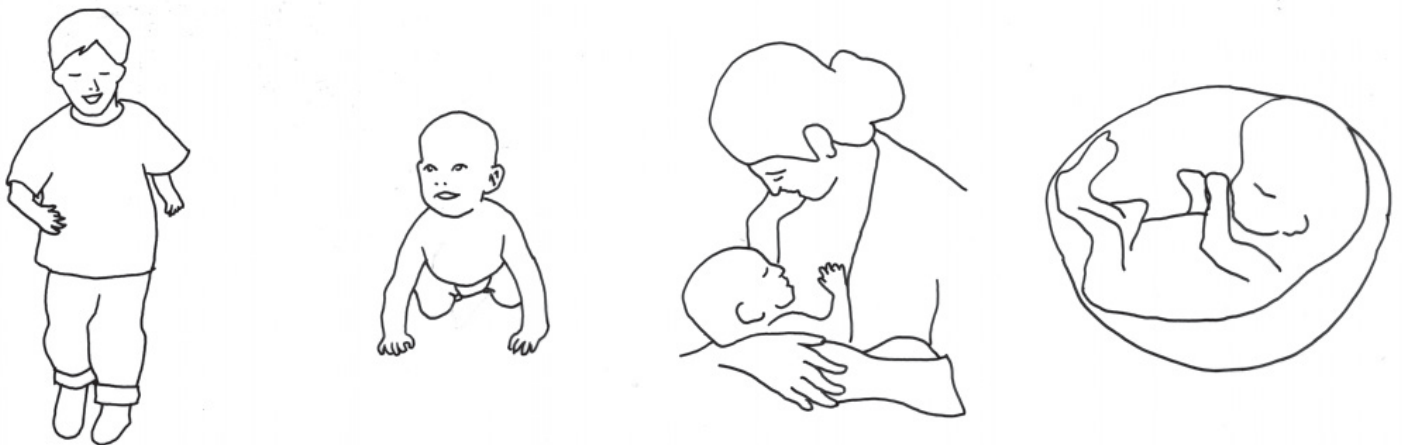


Figure 14: Child Development

need to commute between the outer and inner worlds in the course of a day and therefore we duplicate the elements of homes outside of the house. However, our houses are the epitome of all elements of domesticity, unlike the other places and without compromises, it contains all of the qualities of homes. Furthermore, its familiarity, personalization and reliability breed instant comfort and ease.

Throughout, it has been suggested that the home facilitates the gradual submission into the unconscious. However, Clare Marcus suggests that aspects of our unconscious are expressed in our homes. She gives these following examples. “Adolescents may leave their rooms in disarray as an unconscious gesture of defiance against their parents. A woman may buy a home, unconsciously emulating the style of a much-loved deceased relative. Or a man may be mystified as to why he rented a

house that is completely inappropriate to his needs, only to discover later that it is a copy of a childhood home that is still reverberating in his unconscious” (Marcus 10). After some consideration, the design does represent my view on the outer and inner world. The outer world accessible during my waking hours are open-books: clear and comprehensible. This is reflected in the transparent portion of the design that is visually connected with the outside. The section through this portion, a square, cleanly defined, understandable and easily constructed. My experience with the unconscious and the messages it delivers are hard to decipher, mysterious and as Jung describes dark (Jung 199). This is reflected in the opaque portion of the design that is the condition of complete darkness. The curvilinear section through this portion is more complex and not as easily constructed.

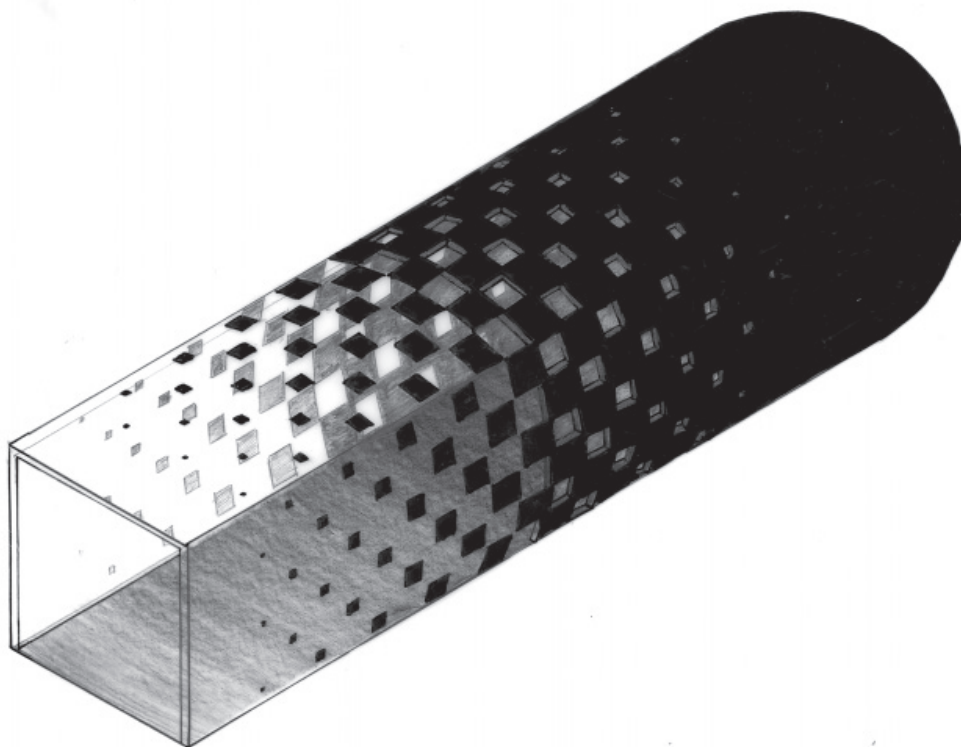


Figure 15: Axonometric

Conclusion

Personal experiences and explorations have led me to the conclusion that the fundamental definition of a house is not the spatial division of lifestyles. It is, however, a home that has the ability to mediate our passages between experiencing the external world and our internal world. The transition between the two worlds is a continuous cycle. We venture into the outer world because it excites and amuses us. We venture into the inner world to bring light upon repressed feelings and unresolved conflicts. We also venture into these worlds to retreat from the other. Or sometimes, we like to have the best of both worlds and we access the world from home. The movement between these two worlds are comparable to the cycles of birth, life and death. In order to mediate between the two worlds, we need various conditions of privacy and connectivity; and we need to respond to our physiological and psychological needs. The design submitted for the Skinkenchiku Residential Design Competition is a concept that responds to these concerns. The concept consists of a passageway between the outer and inner world that utilizes the archetypal devices of squares and circles, transparencies and opacities, sounds and textures. Life in this world is like a roller coaster; it's a bumpy ride of flips and turns. We scream in fright and clench our eyes until tears roll down our faces. All of a sudden, it comes to a screeching stop, but you don't want to get off.



Figure 16: Roller Coaster

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