

*The depth of foundation
is decided according
to the nature of the
ground.*

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A Boys Club

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A Gymnasium and a Swimming Bath

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I

A Boys Club

I regularly spend time walking the grounds. Walking the grounds and thinking. I like to spend time in one place, space or room – taking them in and thinking them through.

To think of a place designed for a purpose helps remove me from the place and time where I happen to be and allows me to think about that purpose. We are a group of people here through choice (choice is very important in this case) or more specifically, we are here through willing.

Willing is the crux of the whole thing. It draws a distinction between the things that happen or the way things go when affected by the elements. Willing is the point at which we become accountable. It is all a scale of control and non-control. Yes, control and non-control.

Each building is characterised by its angular corners – they give the impression that a great deal of mathematics is required to create such a form. One of rigour and of rigorous intent too.

This is something to be part of, this is where we club together, bringing our brains and bodies to meet in buildings.

Together.

There are, of course, differences in the group.

I can't exactly remember the details of how we all came to be here. We arrived at different points throughout the first year or so, but there

have been no new members for at least two months, nor does anyone seem to leave.

At first, when the word of the Club began to spread, the lodges became populated by people from the nearest city and eventually further afield. It has become somewhat of a metropole, the parent state of the other, newer, clubs. What began as only a few of us is now many. Now people seem to flock here as if it were some sort of glamorous resort with ideas for better living.

The Club has nine lodgings – each separated by an area of grass. A lodging is originally a term for a relatively small building, often associated with a larger one. The largest building, or the main Club, hosts the library, gymnasium, dining rooms and a number of smaller rooms for varying functions. Each building is modern, angular and unadorned. Metres of unpolished stone which is congruous with the architectural style.

Each of the lodgings is exactly the same. Although I haven't been inside each one, I have been inside enough of them to decisively say that there existed a design for one – one that has then been replicated a further eight times, all with the same precise uniformity (with the exception of specific doors leading to the exterior).

Despite first impressions, any time spent here leads to the conclusion that many things were not considered to make it work. We are refined in our ideas and our architecture. The refinement of the group proves harder. First the buildings, then they become populated.

We are defined by outsiders by our separateness, where we are in fact a collective, a club. A club, like a static cruise ship. With every new intake the space is occupied, erased and re-written, but the fundamentals remain the same.

We each have our own room, which is simple – correction: ample and unified. I think about designing for a homosocial group and I think about the sameness and this building.

From the higher floors you are able to look out and take in a large area of the grounds – a south facing panorama. On a cloudy day I like this view because you can see the shadow of the cloud formations above, and this gives me the feeling that I am high above as the clouds move across the area freely. Sometimes I think about the possibility of levitation and looking at the grounds of the Boys Club in its entirety, where the vertical lines of the buildings meet the horizontal lines of the landscape and recede back to form the vista.

The roof of the club is flat. The roofs of the lodgings are also flat, however in the summer the roof of the club can be used for bathing, or perhaps sitting to read or eat lunch.

In the daytime when I get bored, I leave the lodging to walk the grounds. I follow the corridor along the front of the house, to my right the large horizontal window that spans the facade. I am told this typifies a lot of modern architecture, along with the whitewashed exteriors and exclusion of ornament.

The architecture is heavy, holding the weight of history like a haunting. A haunting of one place by another – interior and exterior. How much does a legacy weigh?

To the front of the main house, the expanse of land stretches out and extends far beyond plain sight. To both the right and the left of the main club are the lodgings. Again the grounds are characterised by their symmetry. I imagine that from above these look like dense blocks of concrete in the surrounding landscape, all of which have been conceived with an immense amount of exactitude. It seems strange to me that (in a rejection of what is developing in the

nearest metropole) we would be sent to focus on both mental and physical development, when the proxemics to nature are understood to be integral to any real progress in these areas. If the presence of green space and a small body of water constitutes 'nature' in the current popular ideology, then the nature of the hills, the lakes and the coast lines must seem barbarian. I sometimes think of this barbarian.

The system here is beautiful, but only because of its ugly parts.

Along the back of the house there is a long, narrow corridor off which are several doors. I take this corridor right to the end and I reach the library of the Boys Club. The room is small, square and bright. It is decorated in shades of brown, red and teal. I stop in here for a moment. I am familiar with the room.

For me to read, and to understand, I try to fully digest the words and pages – peeling each page

from the spine, scrunching it up in the palm of my hand and easing it into my mouth and down my throat. To stew them over. To fully digest those words. As I am doing this, I am joined in the room by another member of the club. They look directly at me, say nothing and immediately turn to leave. On his face is a look of quiet despondency; perhaps they are having a bad day, which has nothing to do with me.

The system here is beautiful, but only because of its ugly parts.

I stand up from the first of two tables in the library, open the door, and scream down the corridor. Not a shrill, high-pitched sort of a scream but a lower, more guttural sound, one that seems to quaver in my belly before taking leave from my mouth. I wait a moment. Nobody replies. I close the door again and move to the second table.

There are not as many books on the shelves as you might expect for a library and they range from fiction (mainly the classics, not so much science-fiction or romance), various collections of poetry by the late male greats, to biographies of prominent figures in history (again male). A lot of the books seem to focus on areas of popular knowledge and industry.

I wanted to be less lonely, but the differences between us have completely evaporated. *The same*. It is hard to see a future when things are unchanging, no progression. Correction: no need for progression. No future. Correction: no need for the idea of future. Future is mostly just an idea that we plan for. Something that is exponential in all directions rather than lineal.

Sometimes I feel nostalgic and get sentimental. The best thing I can think of is to channel these feelings into creative or intellectual pursuits. Sentiment and nostalgia are not suitable for physical or vocational activities.

I leave the library and walk down the hall; the walls are white, the floor is brown (oak), and any detail is painted red or teal, like in the library. Note the distinction between detail and ornament. Detail implies a high degree of care, whereas ornament implies the use of unnecessary decoration.

At the opposite side of the house is the gymnasium. In the gymnasium, on the rear-side wall, the windows stretch from ceiling to floor. Sixteen panes of glass forming three large windows, the one in the centre exactly twice the size of the two that sit adjacent to it. The floor is wooden, and features the markings of pitches for different indoor sports. As the sun moves across the sky and when there is little cloud cover, the light casts a shadow of the window frames across the floor of the gymnasium. The shapes are caused by the light and the lines concurrently, and I often spend an hour in the late afternoon, just before the sun disappears, to watch them slide across the floor in cubist configurations until they disappear.

Opposite the windows, there are three large, wall-mounted, wooden balancing beams. Again, these stretch the entirety of the walls from floor to ceiling.

In the corner of the room I notice that someone has left a towel, folded, and to the right of this a pair of white pumps. On top of the towel are two pieces of paper folded together at the corner.

They move through the corridors slowly and commune in rooms as soft groups, gently pulsing with the presence of each other; speaking quietly and sincerely.

As I lose the details of the time spent here I think more and more about passing the day in the company of those who are the same as me, which then leads me to thinking more and more about the growing sense of otherness that I feel from everything else.

We share our concerns and spend extended hours defining the differences in the terms

we use. I leave feeling part of a group pushing upwards. As the days go by, the words from the conversations we have bounce between the walls, eventually falling stagnant in rooms, meaning something at the time to most of us and meaning very little later on to anyone. But then once in a while we'll get news from outside – someone will bring today's paper or the housekeepers will have left the radio on in the cafeteria before it fills up for breakfast. The air spikes, punctures the wall and everyone turns to look out.