ARCH 384

CONVERGENCE OF SPACE

“One environment for cooking, dining, living.”

Abraham Galway 20092697

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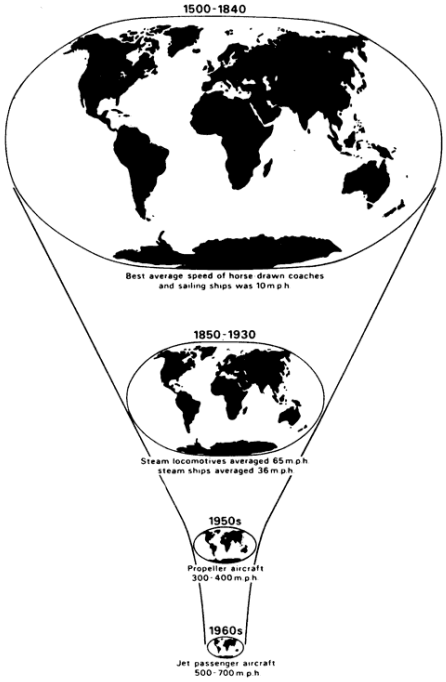
"One environment for cooking, dining, living". This is the entirety of the competition brief entitled 'Convergence of Space'. Although open ended and vague, the simple instruction provided infinite r[1]oom for investigation and experimentation. The resulting design, which I chose to entitle 'Life Dock', incorporates a wide spectrum of thought; considering the sweeping connotations of social morphology through to specifics of materiality and construction.



The concept of converging space is one that has a certain fascination for modern society, as evidenced in part by constant, accelerating development in mobile technologies such as laptops, mobiles and the like. Unquestionably, the 21st century heralds a new information-based society; a society which fosters both total mobility and connectivity simultaneously. In fact, the consumption of GSM mobile technology has been astounding, faster than any other communication technology to date. [1]

In nearly every aspect of contemporary life, evidence exists to prove that a general acceleration is occurring. All sorts of clues, from mobile hand-held communication, to 24 hour work days through foreign outsourcing, to the length of the pre-prepared food aisle in the local grocery, all begin to hint at the situation society is increasingly drawn into.

In his book, The Condition of Postmodernity, David Harvey makes reference to this phenomenon as the 'compression of space-time.' Harvey attributes the appearance of new artistic styles, namely cubism, to the changing experience of time-space.[2] Cubism, according to Fernand Leger, was an artistic expression which was dynamic enough to be able to capture the increasingly

[1] GSM World News. Internet. http://www.gsmworld.com/news/statistics/index.shtml

fragmented and faster moving life of the early 20th century. As well, transformations in spatial and temporal experience can account for mode[2]rn society's passion for, as Harvey states, "the ideological labour of inventing tradition" within museums and libraries. Harvey describes modern society as one afflicted by a loss of spatialization due to the free, and global, flow of capital, goods and information. Consequently, we have seen attempts towards re-spatialization, resulting in the vernacular pastiche of the 'post-modern', as well as the development of what Hans Ibelings refers to as 'non-places'. By Ibelings definition, non-places are places which have no spatial attachments to their situation, spaces such as airports, roadside fast food rest stops, or Ikea living rooms. These are the type of spaces that feel identical whether they are in Idaho or Germany. [3]

The concept for 'Life Dock' considered these conditions, that of the post-modern simulacrum of place, and that of the non-place, and in response has attempted to become neither. A re-evaluation was necessary. Backed with an understanding of a de-spatialized, increasingly mobile populace, the design attempts to provide simply the fundamental elements for living, rudiments which relate directly to the individual, and which allow the individual to create a pocket of space with personal relevance. In much the same w[3]ay a piece of mobile technology always needs someplace to replenish itself, the 'life dock' design intends to provide this place for the mobile individual.

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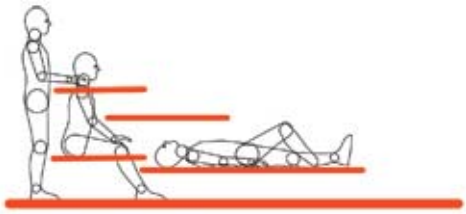
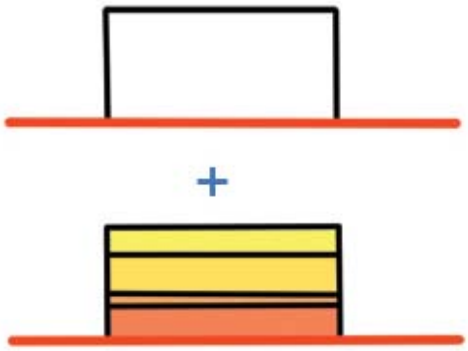
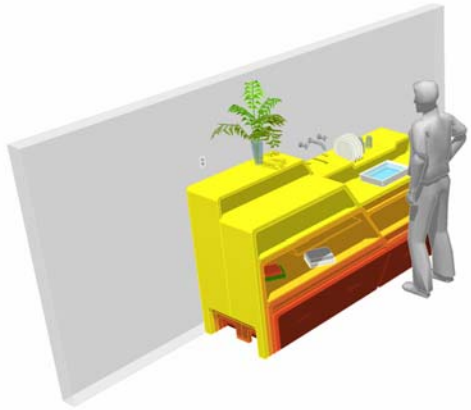
[2] Harvey, David. The Condition of Postmodernity.
[3] Ibelings, Hans. Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalization



The design approached the challenge from two directions. The first was to distill life down to several useful levels, all of which relate to human positions. Le Corbusier, with his concept of the modular man, understood that certain dimensions are more effective in relation to the human scale. Following this principle, the design is based on dimensions which serve an individual lying down, sitting, working/eating while sitting, or standing. From observations of everyday life and its existing fixtures, it was fairly evident that most aspects of daily human life could be distilled down to only four dimensions, or levels. The first being a low bed height of approximately 30 centimetres high, the second a seat height of 45 centimetres, third a table height of 75 centimetres and lastly a worktop height of approximately one metre above the floor. With only these simple dimensions, a wealth of tasks can be accomplished.



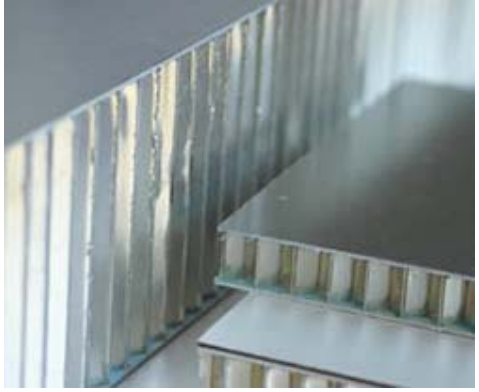
The second consideration was that of convergence, not just using less space but questioning how the space being used could be used more effectively. Conveniently, the distinct nature of the four levels meant that a compression and expansion could be achieved sectionally, much like a standard set of nesting tables. Moreover, the spaces left over between levels could be utilized as well. This led to a fundamental concept of a volume composed of surfaces, in this case levels naturally suited to human functions, and zones, ancillary spaces available to support the type of task being performed on the surface just above. In fact, as a result of the structural design, the depth of the zones literally does provide strength and rigidity to each ‘surface plus zone’ element.



The synthesis of these two considerations results in a fully utilized volume, which offers incredible potential once expanded. In its fully compressed state, the 'Life Dock' can sit quietly out of the way beside a wall. Yet once it is expanded, provision exists for every aspect of life from simple storage lockers, to a cot, to seats and a table, even a basic food preparation and dishwashing countertop. Although the overall volume never changes, the usable surface area has potential to increase by five fold once fully expanded. The fact that every surface relates directly to a specific human position, whether it be sitting, prone, or standing, adds another level of functionality…an ideal platform for a multiplicity of human circumstances. Each element intends to provide basic essentials to make it useful, but not be over designed, as this may begin to limit what could be accomplished with that surface, as well as stifle unexpected uses. Generally, the area of each surface is matched by the area of its complimentary zone, which potentially means all items can be moved from surface to zone when the elements are converged back into a single volume.

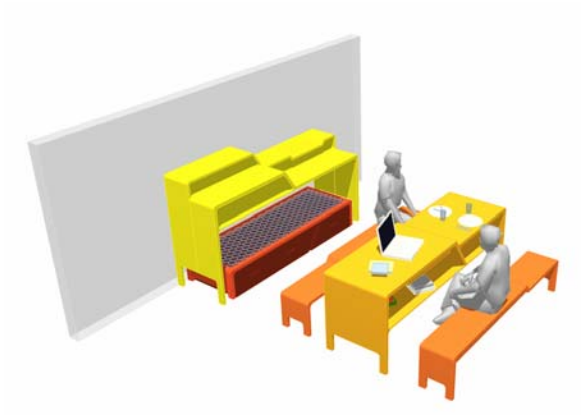
The structural solution evolved naturally. A fundamental need existed to create a surface at a specific level, thus the obvious continuation was to place supports at either edge. Slightly adjusting the length of each resulting U-shaped element allowed them to slide within each other. In order to provide a steadier base on potentially slightly uneven surfaces, the supports were notched out to form smaller legs at each corner. By placing web elements directly above the neighbouring surface, the depth between surfaces was utilized in order to add increased strength and rigidity.

The elements demanded a lightweight and rigid material solution for convenience of moving and sliding about. An injection molded, fiberglass reinforced polypropylene, or alternatively as cellbonded material would be ideal. Cellbond is an ultra light material which gains a high level of



rigidity from sandwiching a honeycomb layer between two veneers of various materials of the designer's choice.

Each element has been specifically designed for its efficacy individually, as well as in a grouping. Lateral and longitudinal division of the surfaces was an effective yet simple method of providing versatility, yet not dictating functionality. For example, the seat height element, when split longitudinally, became two benches which not only provided extra seating, but opened up the possibility of two or more people facing each other in a convivial situation. A lateral division of the bench provides two slightly distinct seating heights, relating to the height of the users, as well as recognizing that different seated tasks may require slightly varied levels. The table top element uses a single lateral division to establish an idea of two surfaces, potentially a working surface as distinct from a clutter surface. Similarly, the worktop is split in both directions, in order to define spaces for wet and dry, working and clutter surfaces. These gentle design interventions intend to apply a slight functional shaping to the surfaces, hopefully catalyzing a diversity of unexpected use.



The premise of converging space has great implications on many scales, from pervasive social trends, to furnishing small living spaces. As a design concept, the 'Life Dock' approaches ideas of space across this spectrum, taking a stance regarding its relevance in modern society, as well as its functionality as a physical object. Presumably, infinite potential exists within a properly proportioned framework; the 'Life Dock' design is conceivably only the beginnings of a complex exploration to fathom its full extent.

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