

Norwich University

ESCAPE

A Thesis Submitted to
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Master of Architecture
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Dedicated
to my family.

Your support throughout these past five years
is forever appreciated.

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ABSTRACT, PREMISE AND QUESTION

Abstract

On a larger scale, we retire into dark caves to fantasize collectively [...] in these ways we erect faux caves that remove us from the rational structures of our everyday lives – edges blur, perspective disappears, we find ourselves staring at ourselves and the world we have made. [...] The cave is a transformative space where we can reject the worries of the modern world and focus on a direct contemplation of ourselves and our place in relation to something immense and abstract.

– Aaron Betsky, *Landscrapers* (pages 58-59)

The development of the modern world has led to higher demands on society and increased levels of stress within everyday life. The fleeting nature of the urban context is such that a moment of rest and composure becomes critical; by using the experience of going underground as a way to break away from reality, spatial submersion can provide a means of disconnection and, consequently, escape.

Premise

In modern society many seek a place for rest and composure away from the turmoil of everyday life, though it is hard to find.

Question

How can subterranean space in an intensive urban environment be transformed to provide a retreat for personal contemplation and meditation away from urban pressures?

PREFACE

“Who hasn’t - sometime - wanted to escape?
But from what? To where?”

- Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (1998)

This time last year, while considering topics for my graduate thesis, I found an article on the abandoned subways in Boston, MA. I was instantly drawn to the Tremont Subway; as the historical site of America's first subway, the internet was strewn with pictures of this ominous forgotten passageway.

Located beneath the Theater District, the Tremont Subway became the grounds upon which I based my research. I delved into research on subterranean architecture and underground living while using the context of the site to create a bond between the two.

It is here that I came to my thesis:

How can subterranean space in an intensive urban environment be transformed to provide a retreat for personal contemplation and meditation away from urban pressures?

Society has become such that often people

seek absence from the present condition, for a moment of escape. My greatestest intrigue was in the idea of turning this potentially dark, damp, and generally disorienting place into a space of calm and release.

I have spent the last semester testing ways in which to prove that this is not only a possible but also beautiful solution.

Enjoy.

C.M.

