THESIS

URBAN HINGING

a business club

Synopsis

The thesis begins as an investigation into the strict discrimination of distinct opposites in binary systems. From Cartesian dualist logic to the symbolic formal language of the computer, thinking in terms of contrasts and opposition is fundamental to our thought patterns. Conventional regimes of signs, languages, and codes are often located by the persistent and natural contextualization of one thing and its opposite within a single field.

The experiences of bisexuals however, enforce the human apprehensiveness to dichotomous relationships. Bisexuality is a hinge fluctuating between gay and straight characters; swinging both ways. As bisexuality unsettles certainties: straight and gay, it has affinities to both and is delimited by neither. In this challenge of dichotomous relationships, we can perhaps find a more meaningful dialogue between opposing polarities. The idea is not to reinforce boundaries by isolating differences or deliberately reversing hierarchies. Take the example of a disc that is painted white on one side and black on the other. As the disc spins, the dialogue produces 'grey', but it is ultimately still 'black and white'. This dialogue develops the issue that it contains the diversity of two opposite states, emphasising each particular position while in constant coexistence.

The site is a prominent strip on marina bay and fronts Fullerton Building, a grand classical structure, which is being converted into an elite business hotel. Belonging to the developers of Fullerton Hotel, the site is a special but frustrating place, an enigmatic combination of extraordinary opportunities and irritating practical difficulties. The waterfront site is set on the fringe, caught between the modern business commercial area and the cultural colonial heart of the city. This gives the project a prominent linking role and raises questions about which strategies and schemas are appropriate to develop this connective tissue. These schemas involve reconsidering the culture of the business district and the section of the city relative to public and commercial conditions.

The contradictory notions of public and private are very glaring on this site, which belongs to Fullerton Hotel but is also attached to the very public marina promenade. The program of a business club is chosen for the reasons that it rejects the public demands of the site;
that its functions serve the business district professionals; and that it also operates independently while running complimentary to the hotel. These contextual and programmatic conflicts create challenges to integrate the zones of private business club and public access cum facilities in an evocative but not uncomfortable way.

The idea of a 'mobius' plane is used and translated, with mutually exclusive public and club surfaces on each side. Folding creates spatial quality and defines the two realms, with each position emphasised and contained by the other. This way, the privacy of the club is maintained while the public is afforded accessibility, views and functions. The perception of these two states making the whole picture, reiterates the essence of binary categories, while defying and liberating that very essence at the same time.