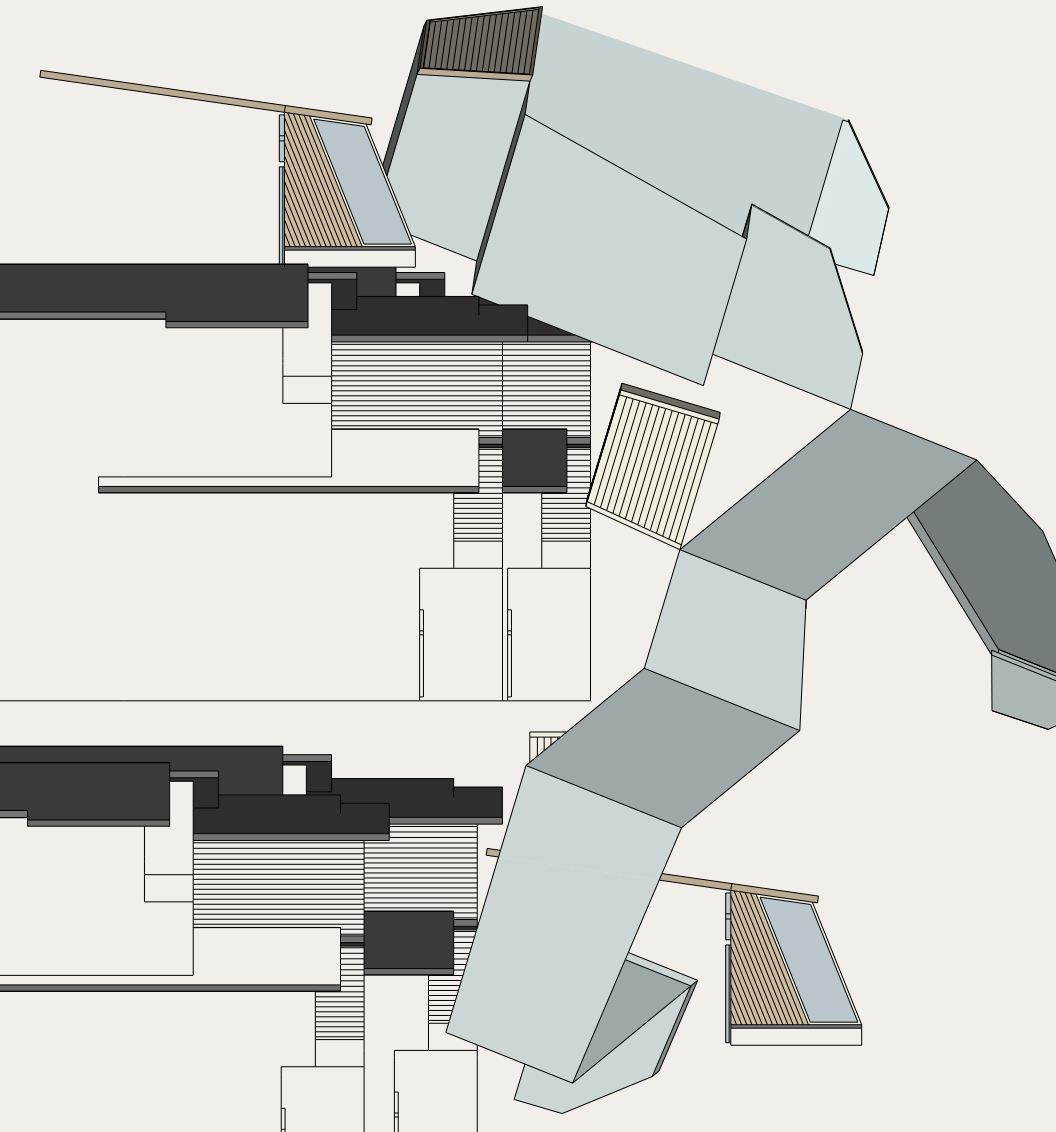


12 STEP

The transition to abstract thinking is not inevitable. About 30% of teenagers naturally make the shift without aid. To assist with the concrete/abstract transition the learner has to be presented with a problem which cannot be solved without abstract thinking and then be assisted to construct the concept for themselves.



Roughly a dozen of us are seated in a circle. We are all contemplating something in the centre. Each of us represents a radian of the circle or the polar coordinates resulting from the fixed point that we are contemplating.

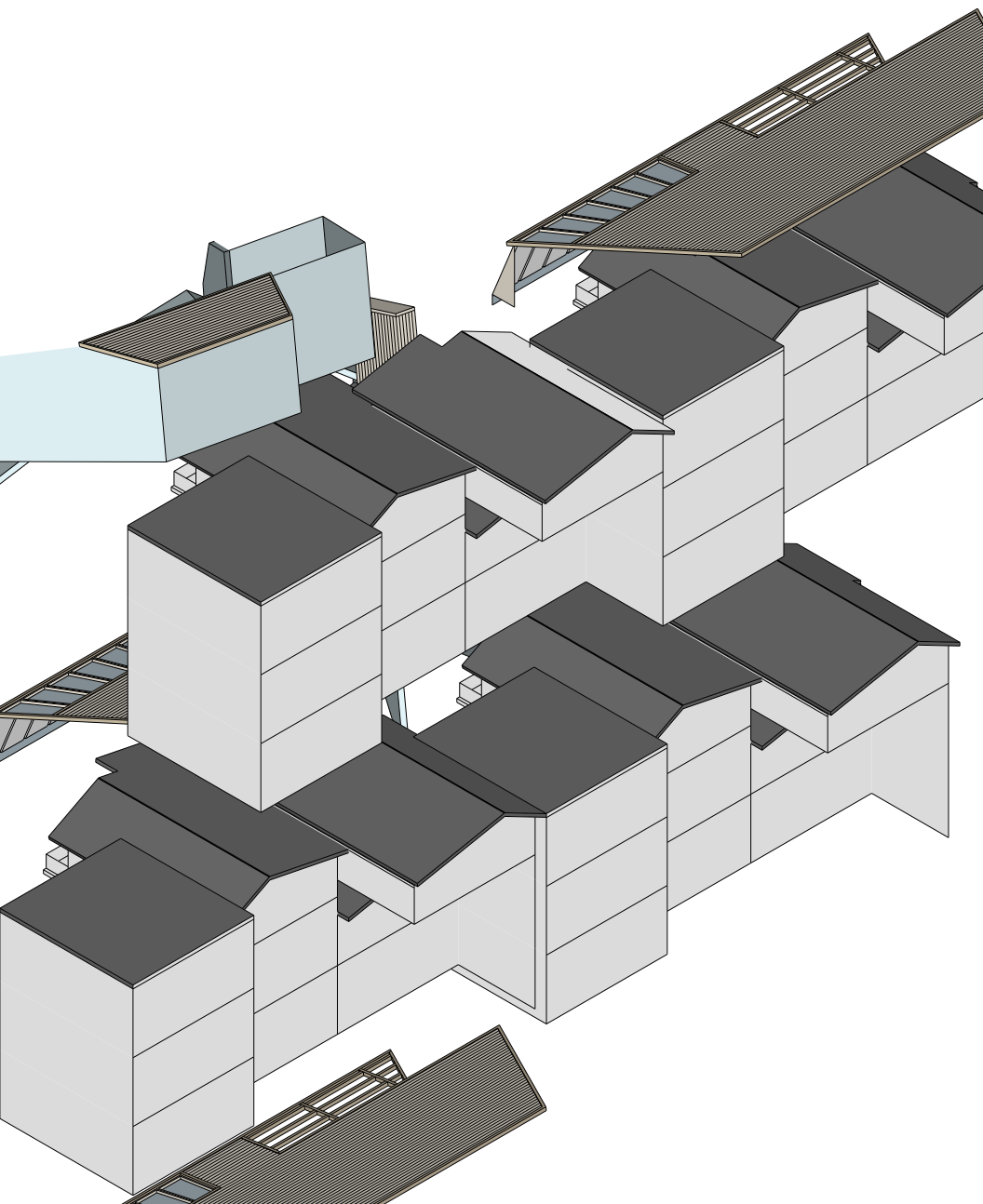
At times we become the object in the centre, and other times the object becomes one of us. The object is very difficult to describe because it's not something physical or tactile that can be seen, touched or reviewed at different angles. Yet, we are all looking intently at this thing, we are all seeing it and reviewing it from different angles. Instead of touching the object, we touch each other.

We are all here for the same reason.

I take inventory of the room, cataloguing scars, tattoos and overall body type. Here's what I lost, the guy to my left says, launching into a list of grievances. We smile and nod, touch shoulders and cast our eyes toward our shoes as if to confer respect while maintaining our individual sadness.

This can be hard to understand. When we are unified in our concentration towards the object, it takes on a recognizable shape. When our concentration wanes, the object fades and our talking sounds vain and distracted. Once we have fully solidified the object, we see that it becomes angular, sharp, and has many detailed edges. We continue on in this way in order to fully understand its architecture. Folding chairs are shuffled and make small noises against the gymnasium floor.

We are designing the object together. Our words give the object its initial structure, then as if colouring in its lines we fill the empty parts with a materiality borne out of our own experiences. Using the object as a totem, we are charting the various ways in which we are broken. It's not always a pleasant cartography and at times the terrain seems alien or foreboding.



We develop a naming convention for each part of the topography so that we can feel a sense of mutuality, making the object seem less foreign. The new language we are creating allows us to fully understand the scope of the object and situate its extents in 3d space. Each of us secretly wishes we could craft the object into human form and take this form inside ourselves, welcoming it as our missing piece.

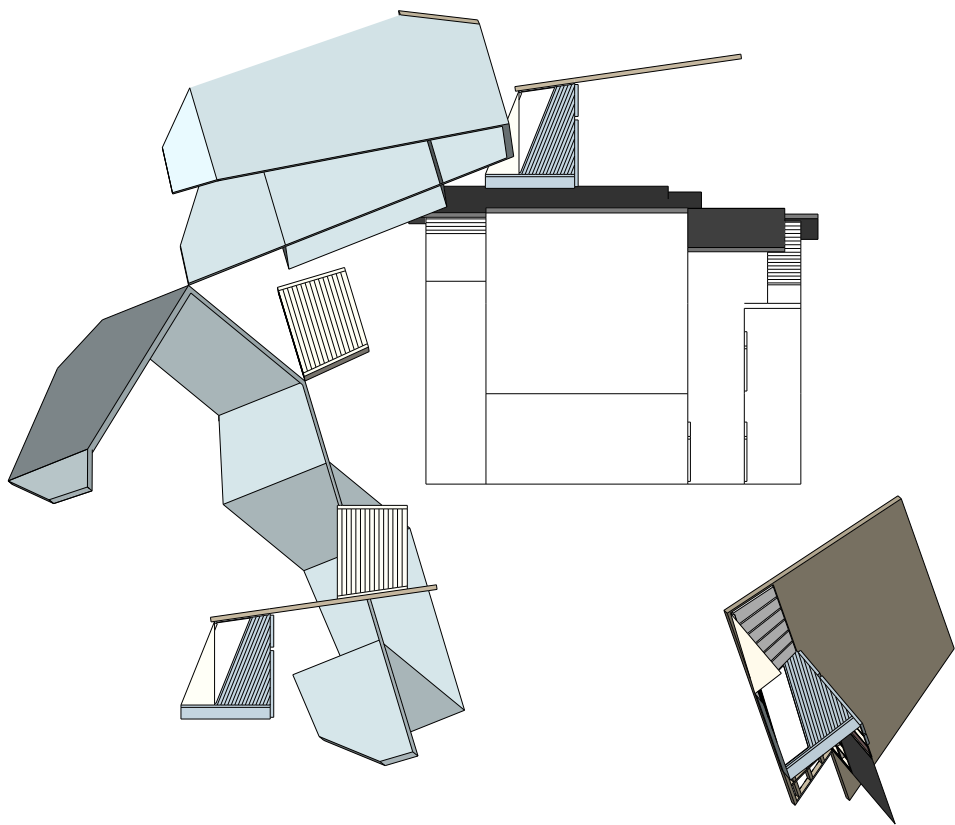
The object becomes many things. Sometimes it represents the shape of our future, other times it becomes an elaborate instrument for voicing tragedy. Over the course of our hour together, we continue to name parts of the object; some cough, others cry, and we leave intermittently to piss or smoke.

My mouth is dry, I worry I won't be able to focus my thoughts enough to give them a distinct emotional shape, to string together a net, cast it carefully towards the object and take in the parts that belong to me. When I start to speak, I'm calmed by the sound of my own voice.

When I was younger, I had the luxury of believing myself to be unique, possessing a certain range of feelings and questions that were mine alone. I survived minimum-wage jobs, office jobs, bad dates and the mornings after. I cultivated a career and the audacity to think of myself as adult. In this uniqueness, and with the belief that my life was still full of possibility, I allowed myself to become fearless. Fearing nothing, I became reckless: I used others to measure out the boundaries of my existence, I used my perception of others to perceive myself.

I became self-conscious, aware of every twist and volley of my body. I watched my parents decompose as they aged, and felt my own body lurching as I headed forward in time. I lost trust in my ability to contain the essence of my own identity, I lost faith and the belief in God. I came to believe that people were generally disappointing, myself above all. I went days without leaving my apartment.

I was very tired.



I came to understand the persistence of singularity which occurs mathematically when a physical process leads to consequences which cannot be accepted. I became a living example of how an equation, surface, or volume explodes or becomes degenerate and in doing so changes its nature.

I was changed.

It was here in my new life that I came, broken, to be seated with men and woman who had also lost some essential part. In our brokenness we began to discover the two ways in which we could be human: consumption and creation. When we ate together we consumed not only food but the labour involved in production, packaging and transport. We learned that there are two types of creation – to take something internal and make it external or to take something external and change its nature.

We learned that with pure hearts we could form a circle and each become a chord joining the circumference, easing our brokenness. This allowed us to see the object with clarity and resolve. The object's atoms, molecules, and ions extended out in all three spatial dimensions, and we regained the ability to see life as full of possibility.

I want you to understand the object. I want you to know it as I do. I want you to give the object a name, and when you call its name, I will step inside the object and come running towards you and I will know you at last. I will have taken the steps I need to take – methodically and with great heart – and I will be whole.

