Abstract:

As systems of meaning making, cults appear differently to their members than to society. The dialectal image of the internal and external definitions of a cult serves as the driving force for the design of a house for a cult to occupy within the suburbs. This house disrupts the infinitely homogenous landscape of the suburbs in the same way that cults disrupt and reorganize societies understanding of spirituality and domesticity. The deviation of the exterior of a Victorian Shingle house through misalignment from the suburban datum and the compliance of the interior to a regular and mundane datum draws attention to the form of the cult: the reality of a cult that between how flagrantly sinister a cult appears to the external society and how mundanely beautiful it appears to itself. A fuller, nonbinary architectural experience of a cult allows you to resist our tendency to demonize that which is only strange and see yourself in those who belong to different systems of meaning making. The singular experience of the house connects you to two systems of meaning making through a sequence of relation and distinction, occupying and recognizing the two systems simultaneously.
Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank James Kerestes for advising me throughout this project and for all his support academically and professionally during my time at Ball State.

I would like to thank Josh Coggeshall, Phillip Heidemann, Enrique Ramirez, Janice Shimizu, and Richard Tursky for their constructive critiques throughout the course of this project.

I would like to thank my studio this semester who were always willing to be a sounding board for ideas and whose enthusiasm and work for their own projects always inspired me to try harder than I would have on my own.
# Table of Contents:

- **Process Analysis** ........................................... 04
- **Thesis** .......................................................... 05
- **Model Photos** .................................................. 27
- **Site Model Photos** ........................................... 34
**Process Analysis:**

The primary design problem for this studio was to develop a proposal for “housing” a program of refuge within a familiar North American home. I selected a Victorian Shingle house for its vaguely odd latent misalignments and digitally modeled this original house. My definition of refuge was inspired by cults and the role they serve in society. Cults offer a space for communal deviance; questioning the norms of society by creating a micro-society that exists as a reaction against the larger society. I was interested in the way cults often reveal more about the society they exist within and against than they reveal about themselves. This relationship between cult and society offers a sort of refuge for both parties: a space to question the norms of your own system of meaning-making.

The misalignments within the original house mirrored the way cults disrupt the ubiquity of our “normal” systems by separating object from datum. Through a series of iterations, I exaggerated these misalignments by shifting and rotating and literally lifting components of the house away from the suburban datum. I evaluated each iteration and made decisions about the varying degrees of future deviations based on the criteria of critical mirroring, where the deviated form is not indistinguishable from the original, but has points of reference, which emphasize critical moments of deviance. This process led to a new house that is legible as both related to the suburban typology and as “other.”

An architectural interpretation of the dialectical relationship between the interior and exterior definitions of “cult” was found in Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction: “Every phenomenon... is a product of the duel between native constitution and outside environment.”* This was a description of architectural form resulting from the negotiation between the inside and the outside of a building, but it also applied to the way I was thinking about cults as being the negotiation between how it appears to society and how it appears to itself. The reality of the cult is everything between these two limits.

I began to look at the suburbs as an infinitely homogenous datum both architecturally and politically and the skin of this house would deviate away from that datum in the same way society views a cult. This deviation away from the datum calls attention to the redundancy of the infinite suburban datum. However, the interior of this house follows a different datum—this datum recalls the oppressive regularity of the suburban datum but is manifested with a 45 degree shift and represents the mundane inner reality of the cult. This misfitted relationship between inside and outside only meet at the thresholds of the house, where society butts up against cult and the poché becomes evident, revealing the existence of both systems simultaneously. The decisions, which resolved how the interior would be contained within the exterior, were made to serve those relationships and the singular experience of the house, which connects you to two systems of meaning-making simultaneously through a sequence of relation and distinction. Conventional thresholds and finishes were then fitted to these unconventional shapes to serve as regular referential devices that would further reveal the misalignment between the inside and outside.
cult (internally): common interests, beliefs, practices and identity
cult (internally): deviance from typical ascetic, protestant, or capitalist ethics. Appears sinister, immoral, and dangerous. Reactionary moral panic characterized by concern, hostility, disproportionality, volatility, and demonization
The cultural datum of the suburbs is a totalitarian identity that has dissolved the formal and dialectical, both architecturally and politically. It is infinite in the sense that it has no distinctions and is infinitely exactly like your own neighborhood with no difference or heterogeneous space. The external eccentricity of a suburban cult disrupts the datum, adding complexity to the infinite suburban datum.
The Victorian Shingle house I chose was clearly determined by the suburban datum but had the kind of latent misalignments which matched the way cults disrupt the ubiquity of our "normal" systems by separating object from datum.
I wanted to exaggerate these misalignments by shifting and rotating and literally lifting components of the house away from the suburban datum. Misalignments have the ability to expose the mundane redundancy of suburbia even to those immersed in it through critical mirroring: not indistinguishable from original, but has points of reference which emphasize critical moments of deviance, making the new house legible as both related and "other"
“Every phenomenon is a product of the duel between native constitution and outside environment.”

-Robert Venturi
There is a dialectical and image of the cult and the suburbs: they are sort of two sides of the same coin.
Whether it is normal or deviant—is ambiguous because it’s subjective. A cult member, estranged from the outside world and unable to see the cult objectively because it has merged with her own subject would define the cult as normal and society as deviant. Who the subject is matters, because the perceiver applies the meaning to the image.
For example, this image demonstrates that the image isn’t actually on the page. It’s only patches of light and dark, and as humans, we give meaning to this raw information according to which system of meaning making we exist within. But, this image is binary; you see it one way, then the other, and then it leaves you alone.
However, Escher's image does not allow you to only see the dark as the background and the white as the figure on the ground. It forces you, as you keep following its motion, to reverse your perception and see that the white could just as easily be the background. It forces you to take a both/and perspective, rather than an either/or perspective. Cults are usually portrayed as binary systems, making them seem frightening and other, and an easy straw man to tear down. This project engages with and creates a fuller, nonbinary image of the cult and society, that, like the work of Escher, draws us into a both/and perspective allowing us to see that we are to our own datums or systems as the cult members are to the datum of the cult. This nonbinary approach to these two systems moves us past "cult" as a derogatory label and especially becomes important as the world is on the verge of drastic changes in technology, politics, economics, and religion.
“Successfully functioning in a society with diverse values, traditions, and lifestyles requires us to have a relationship to our own reactions rather than be captive of them. To resist our tendencies to make right or true, that which is familiar, and wrong or false, that which is only strange.”

-Robert Kegan
People and organizations move between their internal and external definitions. These are our extremes, our limits, or our form. All systems, like the cult and the church in True Detective, have the potential to be as flagrantly sinister as it appears to the external society or as mundanely beautiful as it appears to itself. It moves between these limits as the cult reflects both the bizarre and mundane of the society it exists within and against.
In True Detective, the glowing white cross and a crude depiction of a ritual sacrifice within one church are different manifestations of related systems, the church and the cult, both characterized by the same oppressive regularity. This image compels us to see the cult as a reflection of the complex system we are immersed in rather than something completely other. Aureli’s definition of the formal as the relationship between the inside and outside is a good metaphor for what this nonbinary experience of a cult could be architecturally. If the formal is the negotiation between the internal and external, then the form of the cult is the implicit and inevitable limit between the two, both uniting and differentiating them.
The suburban datum, or the outside, is an infinitely homogenous landscape.
The envelope is how suburbanites view of cults—as an exaggerated misalignment from the suburban datum.
The cult datum, or the inside, is a contained and hidden reflection of that suburban datum and its normalcy.
The form of the house is the negotiation between the compliance to one datum and the deviance from another.
The envelope is separate from the interior, and relates to it only in sense that the interior datum reflects the context it develops in while the envelope is a willful departure from the context.
The misalignment of the form and resulting profiles and poché creates a dissociation or rift between contents and its expression, the inhabitants and the external world, the cult and the suburbs. The interior is a misaligned experience of moving in a system between being immersed in a system and butting up against the other. It is a singular experience of the house that connects you to two systems of meaning making through a sequence of relation and distinction, occupying and recognizing the two systems simultaneously. F. Scott Fitzgerald articulates this condition as being “within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.” Conventional thresholds and finishes fitted to unconventional shapes serve as regular referential devices revealing the misalignment between the exterior and interior. Experiencing the isolation and connections of envelope and interior should alter or manipulate or expand our understanding of cults and other systems of meaning making. It should make us step back from a thing so engrained in our lives and embedded in our identities and look at domesticity as a system and object, allowing us to see ourselves in those who belong to different systems. It should allow us to see the withdrawn for what it is and for what it relates to, to see the cult for what it is and what it relates to, and to see ourselves for who we are and what we relate to.