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April 2020
Capstone Paper

Novelty Sets: A Re-Understanding of Experience

In the redefinition and reconfiguration of narratives and objects we have Novelty Sets. Extracting fictional worlds into tangible and temporary spaces provides the template for these unique lives and experiences to be understood individually and fully. By examining literature for its ability to remove someone from time, from space, from reality, how do we change and adapt our own narratives? How do we merge our perspectives and align our experiences? Conversely, how do we do the exact opposite? Novelty Sets plays the role of host and visitor, becoming both the event and the spectator- as is the individual experiencing it in the first place.

Located in the Point Defiance Park of Tacoma, Washington, this project uses the site as a means for temporary removal from the rapidly urbanized climate of the city. The park is consistent in the promotion of individual and group discovery within nature. From the zoo and aquarium, to the beach and marina, and several hiking trails, the park is welcoming to a wide and inclusive demographic at all times. Regardless of the season, the park maintains the integral essence of opportunity, growth, and experience that projects the freedom to purely inhabit and take up space.

The tangible and discernible qualities of nature and the constant evolvment in appearance and function, prompts the never-ending rediscovery of space itself and one's place in space. This is similar to reading a story for the first time, and then re-reading it for a second time, and

then a third. The story, although the same, begins to slowly mold into something else entirely; perhaps a motif lost on the first read through or a piece of dialogue missed. Establishing Point Defiance as the host for Novelty Sets, allows for the rediscovery of one's own experiences with literature and stories as a whole. Incidentally, the opportunity to construct a template for these sets, not being characterized by surrounding existing architectural vernacular, supports the notion of being a permanent vessel for the stories to temporarily materialize and exist as they are.

Due to the park's expansive landscape, Novelty Sets is spread evenly across the main trail head,



Figure 1: Illustrated depiction of the Point Defiance Park in Tacoma, WA. The five circle graphics indicating the positioning of the five pavilions along the main walking trail.

bisecting the park. Five pavilion structures, alike in materiality and form, are created to establish exhibition space to tangibly format fictional stories and to act as host for the narratives and experiences told within those pages. In his book *“Orality and Literacy”*, cultural philosopher Walter J. Ong states that “The shift from oral to written speech was essentially a shift from sound to visual

space... writing tyrannically [locking words] into a visual field forever...”. The ability to dissect a text and provide new context becoming critical to the holistic understanding of an idea or a concept. The ability to shift our senses in our journey of comprehension and experience is a benefit to our own self-analysis and personal growth. The purpose of this capstone thus being the importance of becoming unfixed in our individual perspectives of observation and experience to generate a new foundation in the understanding of narratives and realities.

Through the study of phenomenology, or the study of human thought and consciousness, there is an understanding that there must constantly be balance between objective and subjective observation of the nature of consciousness in order to look at the phenomena of the human experience accurately; or at least to the best of one's abilities. In his work, *"Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint"*, contemporary philosopher Franz Brentano states that "In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hates, in desire desired and so on... phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves." Intentionality thus distinguishing how a thing is perceived versus how it exists in actuality. Identifying the intentions of perceptions within human behavior allows for the understanding of a topic, or life, in general. The way we, as a people, experience life and nature, or place and space, is directly correlated to how we understand our own realities and how they ultimately link and connect us to others.

In the ongoing timeline of the human experience, there has always been the internal struggle of self realization and actualization within individuals; a question of existentialism and purpose plaguing the psyche often mentally and sometimes physically. This is a motif not uncommon to the standard person, but the way in which it is presented, and then understood, is displayed in an array of means. Philosopher and seminal thinker, Martin Heidegger argues in his book *"Being and Time"* that as "The temporality of Being-in-the-world thus emerges" so does the "foundation for that spatiality". Heidegger makes the point that in the attempt to understand ourselves and our place in the world, we focus too much on the future as opposed to the present. He states that "[existing] would not temporalize itself if it were not temporal" meaning the things we experience in life as individual beings is not as permanent as we believe, thus being problem-

atic in our own existentialism. As the play between permanence and temporariness roots Novelty Sets, rotating stories out every four months, the first phenomenological theme consists of the existential qualities of the human life. The many layers and subgroups of phenomenology lends itself easily to various future thematic groupings, such as the transcendental effects of travel or the genetic attributes within a family.

Philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, who is considered to have been the first to speak on existentialism, proposed that “One must first learn to know himself before knowing anything else. Not until a man has inwardly understood himself and then the course he is to take does his life gain peace and meaning.” The journey one takes in order to address their own existentialism is uniquely paired with their own individualism and the balance between the two, thus being needed for personal fulfillment. Kierkegaard also stated that in order to find purpose one must “... find the idea for which [they are] willing to live and die.” The intense desire to experience the true purpose of self, life, and society, is found throughout the following stories in one way or another. In “*Holes*”, by Louis Sachar, the main character is unjustly sent to do time at a juvenile detention center where he must dig holes with other teens in a supposed attempt to “build character”. In “*Cannery Row*”, by John Steinbeck, the town seems to only be able to exist as a whole, and any attempt at individuality leads to despair. In “*One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest*”, by Ken Kesey, society attempts to stifle individual acceptance through insinuation, manipulation, and control through the belittlement of self. In “*Timeline*”, by Michael Crichton, the multiverse and quantum theories are used in desperation in the process of identifying an individuals place in the world and time itself. Finally, in “*Stardust*”, by Neil Gaiman, the adventures of a human man, in

a magical world, are relayed simultaneously showing his own self-belief. This selection, a mixture of genres and age groups, was imperative to reflect the demographic of the site itself.



Figures 2 and 3: Interior renderings in spade of the pavilion set design for the book *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* written by Ken Kesey

In the conception and development of the interiors for these pavilions there came the understanding that these spaces should tell the story in its entirety. A collaged interpretation of every piece of dialogue and scene descriptor. The individual parts of the narrative becoming a whole. In the interior for "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*" one can see the precarious balance of brooms as representational for the main character Bromden, nicknamed Chief Broom by those in the ward. An exploded deck of cards mirrors the physical and metaphorical card games played between the patients and the staff. The kinetic and static attributes become representational of the attempt to break free from control and the fear of backlash from the antagonistic Combine. The accumulation of physical objects into space thus creates an interior world extruded from an analyzed interpretation. Existentialism is found in this method of collaged composition in that the viewer is meant to discover their own interpretation of the structure; finding sense in the madness and confusion of life itself. The objects that stand out to one person being vastly

different than the next, and so on. The content re-understanding of the piece until it is no more; an integration of temporality in thought.

In “*The Eyes of the Skin*”, a book centered on architectural theory, and specifically on the relation between architecture and the phenomena of senses, philosopher Juhanni Pallasmaa states that “The task of art and architecture, in general, is to reconstruct the experience of an undifferentiated interior world in which we are not mere spectators, but to which we inseparably belong.” Becoming integrated within the spaces we inhabit, as a people, shifts the lens from which we view our own self awareness. The single immersion into and out of reality through a single plane in space is perhaps pre-meditated but not intentional. In design, there is a universal law to cater to, and create for the user, a medium to make things easier and more functional; but that is ever evolving and often dated before it’s even in rotation. In our belonging, our realities become viscous and malleable; interweaving and exposing our truths throughout time. The often fleeting characteristic of our experiences in life take on this temporary effect; permanence being often only for the individual through memory but lost to the world.

When we take in stories, we absorb the experiences of another being. A collaged framework of perspectives, of dialogue, of actions, of heartbreak, and of triumph. In this, there is the opportunity to remove oneself from reality completely; to dive into another dimension altogether. The theory of liminality states that in design and spatial creation, the way we think and engage in space is directly correlated to our own feelings and engagement of intuition and interpretation. In “*Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*” by Karin Knorr Cetina, she defines liminal knowledge is “knowledge at the edge or periphery of phenomena”. “*Describing Liminal Knowledge in Architectural Design: Knowing What We Do Without Knowing Everything*”, by

Otto Paans and Ralf Passel, suggests that “This “hidden knowing” cannot be expressed in words and is often lost in translation.” This suggestion creates the need for a visual and tangible component for text that is often inferred; the implicit knowledge of a thing versus the objective knowledge of a thing being constantly weighed and questioned. As aforementioned, according to phenomenology, in order to observe the human experience one must find balance. At Novelty Sets, liminal space acts as the template for this exhibition and way of thinking; a permanent viewport to identify this intangible process.



Figure 4: Louise Nevelson's *Mrs. N's Palace* (1964–77). On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 922 (2020)

In prominent museums and curated spaces, work is divided into two factions. The first, is work designed for a gallery, and the second is work formatted for a gallery. From photographs and painted canvases to entire rooms gutted from residences to be put on display, there is a shift in essence, that space takes on a piece of art regardless of intention. An ex-

ception to this rule is a piece by Louise Nevelson. When looking at “*Mrs. N's Palace*” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, one can see the line of liminality that the structure rests on. Composed of more than a hundred found objects, then painted over and over again until those objects transcend their use and definition, Nevelson is able to present time, space, and form at a single moment. The interconnectedness of collage and the happenstance of intensity provide

both a private and public experience at once. The accumulation of parts and the creation of a whole in real time develops a stark contrast between how space is perceived and how it is forced upon us. Looking at the removal from permanent space into a point of temporary experience allows the piece to stand apart from reality; to have created an uninterrupted paradox that is individually fueled.

There is a relationship between sight and site when considering built and unbuilt environments, or even static and evolving environments. The attempt to create site specific spaces and structures challenges time itself. The visual attributes and characteristics of nature are, at their core, unpredictable and ever changing; consistency becomes a non-descriptor. In “*Contemporary Follies*”, by Keith Moskow and Robert Linn, follies are described as “isolated moment[s]” within nature and landscape, but simultaneously separate from it; this separation thus “[provoking] inquiry into humankind’s position in the natural world”. In the synthesis of one’s own realities, a blurring of information can often take place, removing a sense of hierarchy from the scenario. Through the isolation of moments one can separate from time itself generating a platform for a reanalysis of space and form.

This concept is utilized in the 2014 film *Ex Machina*, directed by Alex Garland and starring Domhnall Gleeson and Oscar Isaac. This plot revolves around the concepts of individualism, escapism, and the merging of self-awareness with artificial intelligence. As a tech worker wins a company wide competition, he is awarded one week with the CEO at his private estate in northern Europe. Due to its remoteness, the setting becomes an integral part of the story; a silent observation of the events to take place. The folly in this scenario thus being the characters and their individual journeys. Through cinematography and art direction, a layered effect of separation is

integrated into the plot. The audience is encouraged through the curated interior home of the CEO to feel removed and isolated from the natural work outside; and when a character does go outside, an unnatural and imposing aura surfaces.



Figure 5: A still of competition winner Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson) and CEO Nathan (Oscar Isaac) in conversation in Nathan's kitchen at his remote estate.

Shot on site at the Juvet Landscape Hotel in the remote area of Valldal, Norway, the space was initially designed to fuse the guest into the surrounding environment while still being separate from the space, to curate an unparalleled symbiotic experience. Following the idea of isolated moments in time, the hotel is spread out in a campus layout in which no two windows face the same direction. This structure is utilized in Novelty Sets as a means for debrief between pavilions. Through a shift in cinematic context, a feeling of belonging and an individualized experience turns into a feeling of exclusion and creates a debilitating lack of control. The power of storytelling is used as a mechanism to understand a space in relation to ourselves. The narrative essentially suggests a method of comprehension; a product of the mixture of tacit and objective observation and analysis seen in liminal thinking and behavior. The way in which one experi-

ences a space is inherently linked to prior knowledge and current conditions; what is being shown, and what is not. Looking at the division of physical space and intangible headspace becomes critical in the exploration and in the development of an idea and of a feeling.

Novelty Sets has been created with the intent to develop a physical space where stories can exist in real time, and where the complex system of the human experience can be analyzed and exhibited. In all fiction, there are elements of truth. The way we conceptualize and communicate our ideas is curated by our own experiences. even when they are universally understood. The human consciousness is linked throughout our collective goal to understand and be understood. By reintroducing a concept or idea in a different method or format, there is the opportunity for self awareness and personal growth. The way we understand ourselves shapes the way we understand each other.

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