Hidden City
Here is nowhere, here is everywhere
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“Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” Polo said. “Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little.”

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
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“The modern secular individual, despite deep down recognizing the futility of his effort, cannot help reflecting on the meaning of life as he tries to locate the center of the novel he is reading— for in seeking this center, he is seeking the center of his own life and that of the world. If we are reading a literary novel, a work whose center is not obvious, one of our main motivations is the need to reflect on that center and determine how close it is to our own view of existence.”

Orhan Pamuk, *The Naive and Sentimental Novelist*
Abstract

The act of writing and reading fiction is a search for its center, its hidden meaning. In writing, the author constructs every element, rendering trees, buildings, and people with the knowledge that the final landscape is more than the sum of its parts. The reader engages with these details, mundane or extraordinary, in pursuit of the fiction’s center, its hidden meaning. The tension between the described and the center is what makes reading fiction compelling.

The thesis describes a fictional underground city through narrative. Like all fictions, the thesis is based on both the fantastic and the author’s own experiences. The reader is not told everything about the city. Much of it remains (both figuratively and literally) in the dark. It is in the gaps, the narrative leaps, that the reader is intended to fill with his or her own experiences and imaginings. In this way, the thesis seeks to evoke both the fantastic and the personal. For each reader a different reaction - for each reader a different center.

The underground city is harsh urban condition; intended to provoke. Its dystopian framework is inspired by the works of architects Antonio Sant’Elia, Uttskin + Broensky, and Superstudio, among others. Through drawings and narrative, these architects challenged the architectural zeitgeist of their time. Their work continues to provide a basis for reflection by providing an alternative reality, a new frame of reference. Through the fantastic, the unbuilt, it is possible to come to a better understanding of our own architectural experiences.
The city was light.
Light of pale blue and soft red.
Light that pulsed, breathed.
I woke early to watch them travel.
Too pale to illuminate their bearers:
small men and large machines.
They seemed to float, free,
contradicting their intended warning:
Careful, something this way
comes.

The city was dark.
People did not ask what you saw,
but rather, what you felt.
We wore thin cotton shoes to feel the ground below.
On narrow walking paths,
ground is smooth.
Compacted over years and years,
the earth is silent and yields no prints.
On the roads, ground is raw.
A blanket of rocks,
bouncing, rolling with the movement of the rails.

The city was light.
Light that pulsed, breathed.
Light that glistened in the corner of your eyes,
pupils wide and deep.
Light that shifted, faded,
hid you in its shadows.
The moment lost, the memory
uncertain.
Were your eyes blue or gray?
I thought I saw you-
perhaps I simply saw myself.
Reflected in the light.
Here

Here the city ends.
Here is the edge.
Here stretches beyond and below what is known.
Here is wild.
Here fungi shyly glow from crevasses, shades of white.
Here clinging precariously.
Here nestled softly.
Here giving way to a child’s curious thumb-print,
squish.
Here, as sharp as a needle.
Here a beauty in the not beautiful.

Here a mole peers with his no-face face.
Here a fluoride rock streaked with blue.
Here a salt stalactite warns the head.
Here she steps softly, ducks.
Here a sheer rock, unbroken but for a single cleave.
Here, a force once, deep across its broad face.
Here a small ladder, slipped between.
Here she fits, climbs.
Here she sweats hot on the cold stone.
Here beads cling and roll,
cling and roll down the smooth face.

Here air rushes from below in lullabies.
Here nature whispers,
can barely be heard.
Here pebbles roll and fall in a beat that has no beat.
Here is an accidental rhythm.
Here is a thousand tiny movements,
a thousand tiny lives.
Here is nowhere
and everywhere
but mostly
here is home.
Slope

The city tilts.
Ground is not plane, but slope.
To rest, he climbs up. His calves do not burn.
His breathe remains steady.
He was born in the tilt.
To work - down.
Tipping, stopping, tipping down.
In the door - a friend.
Asking, up or down?
To go up - a pleasure.
To slip down - a necessity.

Above, ground is dry and shallow.
Below, ground is slick and steep
with the river’s raw marks
and the people grip to keep from falling.
Ground is never constant,
and in its inconsistencies
lies no deeper order.

A short woman is suddenly eye to eye
with a tall neighbor.
A child looks over his parents,
climbing towards him.
A man sees only his wife’s shoe,
seven steps above.
Height is never measured,
height is always changing.
Moving, eyes meet briefly, absolutely.
The moment,
sometimes too brief,
sometimes too long.

A trio of friends part,
two below, one above.
Climbing, the one notes the footsteps of the others,
quick and light.
Wondering, were they eager to leave or unable to slow?
The short woman and the neighbor on the same step. On
even ground, they can barely understand each other.
A friendship based on distance,
a passing kindness not meant for more.
In the tilted city, the people see
eye to eye with everyone,
yet rarely do they truly see someone.
In the city, time falls.
Time falls -
time accelerates.
Each moment is shorter than the last.
A baby is born,
the longest moment of its life over before it is
remembered.
A child runs to his friends -
it is the longest this run will ever take.
An old man, breathing deeply,
knows that this breathe will be deeper and longer than
all future breathes.

In the city,
the people know that this shift,
this rest,
this walk
will be longer than any they will have in the future.
They do not complain about tedium because
they know that the experience will never be as long again.
Each moment is cherished.
Each moment is bitter
with the knowledge that it is the
longest that will ever
happen.

To compensate, many hurry as they grow old.
They learn to converse concisely,
hours of youthful ideas compacted into the
briefest of meetings.
They make love hurriedly, passionately,
not afforded moments of shyness.
They drink their coffee on their way to work
and eat their dinners on their way home.
Frantically packing each moment with experience.
For many, rushing is the only way to live in shorter moments.

Others seek to fall out of time.
To forget, to fall without reference to past or future.
Seeking solitude in the edges of the city,
they cannot see the faces of the young and old,
cannot be reminded of what was and what
will be.
They let themselves fall, and in falling,
find themselves
free.
Rumors

There were rumors of the other place. Beyond the city and some whispered even-above. In the center of the city-a closed door. A spiral stair, down. Soft steps on hard treads. A hermit. Him with the hard diamond eyes. Him with the white-blond hair-visible even in the dim.

The man with no name, no age. A thousand rumors, fragile as thread. Woven across the city to him. Vibrating, taut with tales of beyond. A world not of feeling, but of seeing. A world of surface, not mass. A world on an edge-an edge of infinite space both dark and light.

People scoffed together. Mass was infinite, they knew, not space. Above earth extended forever in concentric rings-below earth became infinitely smaller. There was a center but not an edge. Space was humanity, carved from infinite mass. The earth that brought forth, took back. Womb, dwelling, cemetery-the earth that brought forth, took back.

She wondered. Many wondered in the privacy of their own rooms, own minds. She sat in the crevasse, imagined. Imagined the crevasse extending to the edge, wrapping up and around. Infinite space rushing down along its sides, into the mass. Filling the city with the beyond.
Water

The city swells.
Above, a deep shaft, a pin of light.
A single misty star in an earthen sky.
A portal of rain.
Sometimes
beads fall hard and ragged.
Their drop palpitating, quivering on the edge of a beat.
Sometimes beads roll slowly.
Sometimes
there are no beads at all, and pools grow shallow with waiting.

The baths sink-
the people grow dirty.
The market holds as pipes run dry.
To quench their thirst, the people descend below.
Below, the river, smooth and silent.
Carefully, the people still on its edge,
fill their buckets.
A toe away,
a line not crossed.
The river watches with reflective eyes.
From the river came the city-
the river judges its creations.

The city has two Gods:
the river and the rain.
In the rain,
the people see themselves as they wish to be seen.
Flickered drops leave ample room
for the hopes between.
In the river,
the people see themselves as they are and avert their eyes.
A god of hope
and a god of truth.
The people love the rain,
the people need the river.
Dreams

The people dreamed.
Not together,
but in shifts.
On one shift, the students, the scientists, the councilors.
On the other, the miners, the garbage men, the drill men.
In each room, two strangers, never meeting.
Never rising, leaving together.
Never cooking, eating together.
Never reveling or sympathizing with each other.
Most importantly,
ever sharing dreams together

For dreams were not to be spoken,
but transcribed.
Below the central district,
a library suspended.
A giant tower in steel webbing.
Once a week the people went,
pressed soft dreams into hard letters.
Slowly, carefully.
A matrix of dots,
the barest sketch of dreams.
They described,
but they did not explain.

Did not explain the wonder and fear of their dreams-
the subtle delights and revelations.
And in transcribing,
they lost these subtleties,
these memories
that were not.
To fix in words
is to forget in mind.
Translated, the dream is both lost
and recorded forever.
A room of dreams-
and a people without.
Sound

The city is not one,
but two.
In the first-
the people, the machines, the animals.
In the second-
their sounds.
In each room in the first city,
a pipe,
connected to other pipes.
A second network, a second city.
A city of sound.

Through the pipes the second city listens.
Listens to the breath of the first city,
the soft patter of children’s feet.
The neighbor gently humming,
the tired man’s snores.
The laughter of new lovers, quickly muffled.
The gliding carts,
the smooth metal bearings round and round.
The creaking of pulleys, straining on their journey up.
A thousand sounds,
a single sound.
The sound of the first city.

She slips into the city of sound,
an accidental turn into a large pipe.
In the second city, she hears her city for the first time.
Hears the neighbor humming, the tired man snoring.
Hears the young lovers, the gliding carts.
Hears the grinding pulleys, the soft patter of feet.
Hears the sounds the earth has guarded jealously.
From the second city,
she hears the first city and she understands.
For the city of sound makes no sound of its own,
yet it is full
all the same.
Waiting

The city waited.
Waiting for the coming meal, the slender break.
Waiting for the subtle glance, the shy interest.
Streets lined with smooth stone, worn by years of waiting.
Waiting for the carts to pass, waiting for a friend to come.
Waiting for a chance to speak,
waiting for the one to listen.
Waiting for a day off- waiting to return to work.
Waiting for a child to be born,
waiting for his cries to cease.

The city was its people,
the city waited.
Waiting for a thousand different things,
waited for the same thing.
Waiting, the faces of the city changed- skin crinkled and stone grew smooth.
The people aged,
the city grew young.
Corners worn, edges erased by the people- a history of waiting.
For each generation, more places to wait.
For each generation, fewer reasons to go.
The city was its people-
the city waited.

At the bottom,
a place for those who could no longer wait.
A narrow bridge over a deep river.
People came with buckets, anxious.
Drawing water, they sensed the possibility of what they had been waiting for.
They darted quickly, eyes lowered, to fill their buckets.
They did not want what they waited for.
For in waiting,
they could not be disappointed.

Sometimes a neighbor or friend would pause on the bridge,
take a few steps further.
Returning, a few moments longer,
a few more careful steps.
A gaze not averted.
Eventually disappearing, tired of waiting.
There were a thousand reasons to stay,
a single reason to go.
The city was a life of waiting,
beyond a life that was maybe more.
Thematic Inspirations
“There was darkness; then a dizzy, sickening sensation of sight that was not like seeing; I saw a Line that was no Line; Space that was not Space. I was myself, and not myself. When I could find my voice, I shrieked aloud in agony, “Either this is madness or this is Hell. “It is neither” calmly replied the voice of the Sphere, “it is Knowledge; it is Three Dimensions: open your eyes and try to look steadily.”

Edwin Abbott, *Flatland*

**Method**

An Argument for the Imaginative

In order to critique our perceptions, we must engage in the imaginative. Imagination is the tool through which we are able to critique the character of reality. As philosopher Rene Descartes posited “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes famously questioned the reality of his existence by imagining that an evil spirit was trying to trick him. Through the imagined spirit, Descartes concluded that thought is reality. He developed this idea into the concept of consciousness, a concept that continues to influence how we perceive ourselves today.
Descartes determined what is real by determining what could not be false. Just as we cannot determine darkness without light, we cannot determine reality without fiction. Fictions provide an antithesis to reality, and in doing so, help us define reality. The novel Flatland exemplifies how fiction can shape our perceptions of reality. The novel is set in two dimensional space, bereft of height. When the protagonist, a square, is brought into three dimensional space as we experience it, he is initially shocked before proposing the existence of a fourth dimension. Flatland thus engages with the mathematical debate of the early nineteenth century in which it was published: what is the nature of the fourth dimension? Before Einstein’s Theory of Relativity was published in 1905, fictional novels, including Flatland and HG Wells’s The Time Machine, speculated on the nature of the fourth dimension.

Through fiction, Abbott and Wells constructed a question about reality, one that ultimately led to our understanding of time as a fourth dimension. They are but two of countless artists, writers, and architects, whose imaginings have helped define reality. Philip Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? posits the question of what is means to be human through the fictional construct of androids. The android, the fictional antithesis, lacks empathy; thus the humanity is defined by its ability to empathize. The novel The Museum of Innocence questions the nature of love through a protagonist whose obsessive tendencies prevent him from experiencing it. In the pursuit of a fictional romance, the protagonist causes the death of his beloved. The fiction within the protagonist’s mind throws into sharp relief the reality of his situation. Through his fiction, we understand his reality.

“Some fill their dwellings with objects and, by the time their lives are coming to an end, turn their houses into museums. But I, having turned another family’s house into a museum, was now—by the presence of my bed, my room, my very self-trying to turn it back into a house. What could be more beautiful than to spend one’s nights surrounded by objects connecting one to his deepest sentimental attachments and memories!”

Orhan Pamuk, Museum of Innocence

In recent years, the importance of narrative fiction, as construct through which to evaluate reality, has been supported by neural research. Specific neural networks have been linked to the human ability to construct narrative. In studies in which these networks are damaged, not only is the ability to narrate lost, but also the ability to construct a sense of self. Fiction is an integral part of self-awareness. As philosopher Roland Barthes wrote:

“Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere has there ever been a people without narrative… (it) is international, trans historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself”

Often, narrative requires the suspension of disbelief. Dystopian narratives, specifically post-apocalyptic narratives, are particularly adept in enabling the suspension of disbelief. In such narratives, we expect the conditions of the narrative to be different from our own, constrained and shaped by a world of the author’s imagination. We accept flying ships, shape-shifting people, and other fantasies as part of a constructed world in which we engage. These conditions are the vehicle for narrative through we deride enjoyment and hopefully, understanding.

The Hidden City is a fragmented, post-apocalyptic narrative thematically and structurally inspired by the Dimension X episode Universe. Characters in Universe are trapped on a vast arc, unaware of what lies outside. Mere speculation of the outside is a punishable crime. Likewise, characters in the Hidden City know no life but that of the city. Through their stories, the reader engages in a world removed from reality, a world of shadow and water and stone.
Motive

The Hidden City is intended to provoke the reader. It is the antithesis of the ideal, a dystopia intended to incite both trepidation and fascination. Its inhabitants are trapped, both by the geology of the city and by their own ignorance. Their perceptions differ from ours in ways that are intentionally limiting. Sight, our dominant sense, is constrained by a lack of light and is not the primary means of navigation. Sound is both more muffled and intense depending on the quality of stone and earth. Touch is paramount, as the feel of webbing, gravel, and stone blocks indicate program.

Yet despite the harsh conditions of the city, the people remain. Why are they here? Why do they remain? These questions are the heart of the narrative; the answers intentionally withheld. The reader is left to speculate, and in speculating, draw from his or her own experiences. What are the architectural constraints in which the reader willingly (perhaps unknowingly) submits? The cubicle, the dwelling, the levy wall? In trying to understand the fantastic, are we better able to understand our own experiences? In the words of poet Fernando Pessoa,

“What we see is not what we see, but rather what we are.”

2
Our reaction to the fantastic reflects our own realities. The fantastic and evocative cities of Invisible Cities, as described by Marco Polo to the Kahn are but iterations of one city, Polo’s home Venice. When chided by the Kahn for describing cities from his imagination and not his travels, Polo replies:

“Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveler recognizes the little that is his, discovering much he has not and will never have.”

In recognizing what is not and cannot be, we are better able to understand ourselves.
Case Studies
A House dies twice - the first time when people leave it [;] then it can be saved if they return. The second time finally when it's destroyed...

In some big city where the modern architecture almost pushed out old buildings there are still a number of old little houses with people living there for many years. All these houses must be destroyed according to a general city plan and people living in them must receive flats in new buildings. There is only one possibility for the owner of a such a house to save it: let them take the house from its place and put it into a Columbarium - a huge concrete cube standing in the center of the city. But they do it only if the owner and his family continue living in their house - now standing on a shelf in a concrete box. While they live in it the house lives also [;] but if they cannot live in these conditions any more and refuse[,] their house is destroyed. [A]nd its place becomes empty waiting for the next one...
Utkin + Brodsky

The illustrations of Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin use poetry to inspire a dark and beautiful architecture. Working in the Soviet Union during the 70’s and 80’s, the pair had little opportunity to channel their creativity in practice. Instead, similar to many of their colleagues, they entered foreign competitions, most of which were theoretical. The pair drew from the West they had never seen, using Piranesi’s technique of hatching and a perspective boldness that mimics the drawings of Etienne Boulee. In all their drawings, the relationship between the inhabitant and city is fraught.

A Columbarium Habitable (left) depicts a city of homes, refusing to be destroyed. In response, the city consumes the homes in a concrete bunker. The scale of the inhabitant, asserted through the home, is once again lost and the homes eventually abandoned in favor of apartments.


Bottom diagram by author
Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas

Superstudio

1971

Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas explores futuristic cities, each uniquely terrible. Spaceship City (Image 1) envisions humanity contained on a floating wheel. Each revolution of the wheel takes one year. When the inhabitants reach their eightieth revolution, they are detached from the wheel and abandoned to the abyss. The empty pod then becomes a fertilization chamber, beginning the cycle again.

A Ferris wheel of life.

City of the Book imagines twin cities: one light and one dark, existing side by side (Image 2). In the dark, citizens wear infrared goggles and follow rules on the right pages of the book, visible only in the dark. In the light, the inhabitants follow the rules on the left pages of the book. There are two societies, two sets of morals and laws, in which inhabitants slip between.

Barnum Jr’s magnificent and Fabulous City (Image 3,4) is a city for pleasure. There are no inhabitants, but rather paying participants. The city costs 50 cents per minute, double to play the role of a celebrity. You may do whatever you desire in this circus city, as long as you are willing to pay damages.

“You didn’t want any of the cities to come true. So, you feel satisfied, but you shouldn’t. Because you have not caught on, you haven’t understood that the descriptions represent cities now.”

Superstudio, Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas
Continuous Monument
Superstudio
1969

Imagine a monument spanning the earth, disrupting cities and landscape. A gridded superstructure, relentlessly homogeneous. “A single form of architecture, capable of shaping the earth (measuring it, like longitude and latitude) a recognizable architecture” (128) is how Superstudio characterizes the Continuous Monument. Is the Continuous Monument terrible or beautiful in its dominance? Piero Frassinelli of the studio describes the vision as “utterly beautiful, utterly neutral [...] everyone could see their own ideas reflected in it” (80). The continuous monument is an architecture of dominance, one that subsumes nature and culture within its relentless grid. Yet in its rigidity is also ambiguity, the ability for each individual to have a different experience within it. Who controls the ultimate experience: the individual or the architecture?

Diagrams by author
Antonio Sant’Elia’s Citta Nuova offered a critical antithesis to the architecture of the early twentieth century. Sant’Elia proposed, through oblique renders and line drawings, an architecture free from historical continuity, an architecture beholden only to the present. He wrote “an architecture that finds its raison d’etre solely in the special conditions of modern living [...] It must be as new as our state of mind is new.” As new materials and machines are invented, “we must find inspiration in the mechanical world we have created.” Houses and cities will last less than a generation, as each generation will have new technologies, new ways of living. Through his renders and complementary manifesto, Futurist Architecture, Sant’Elia conjures a city both evocative and intentionally incomplete. The absence of plan prioritizes image and idea over functionality (34). The New City was not meant to create a new city, but rather a new frame from which to critique the existing city.

“From an architecture conceived in this way no formal or linear habit can grow, since the fundamental characteristics of Futurist architecture will be its impermanence and transience. Things will endure less than us. Every generation must build its own city.”

Antonio Sant’Elia, Manifesto of Futurist Architecture


Diagrams by author
Oxygen House
Douglas Darden
1991

“A house is for living.
A house is for dying.”

Oxygen House is one of ten theoretical projects in the collection *Condemned Buildings*. Each uses fictional narrative to question an architectural canon. Oxygen House, located north of Frenchman Bend, Mississippi, challenges the relationship between home and life. The client, a fictional Burnden Abraham, commissions Darden to build him a home in which to die. Abraham has suffered a crippling accident on the site of his dwelling and wishes, for reasons not fully revealed, to live out his remaining time there. Through narrative and pencil drawings, Darden constructs a simple yet unconventional program. The work provokes conversation about the inherently temporal nature of home, as it relates to us temporal creatures.

1 During Life
Visitor Screened by Nurse
Nurse Releases Facade, Visitor Ascends Stair
Abraham receives visitor
Visitor descends by lift

2 After Death
Oxygen tent is dismantled. Abraham is wrapped in tent. Abraham’s body is removed and buried in base of lift. Willow is up-rooted; replanted in drum base. Drum-torso is dismantled; relocated over well-spring.

Whispers and Echoes
Coy Howard
2011

*Whispers and Echoes*, exhibited at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, seeks not to provoke, but rather seduce the viewer. Images, recorded audio, and sculpture are displayed to provoke an experience that is emotive yet ambiguous. Howard argues that the work’s power lies in the gap between understanding and wonder. Shifting reflections, layered voices, and covered objects create an environment that incites both doubt and fascination.

“This is an installation as an invitation to a journey, a silent dialogue with absence and longing in the pursuit of presence.

Four objects, without names, each implying intimacies.

Four objects, doubting their object hood.

Four objects, all footprints and shadows, each silently eavesdropping, hearing only covert murmurs of many voices.

Four objects, playfully teasing the logic of analogies, seeking a grasp of significance.

Four objects, now you see it, now you don’t, a thousand shades of possible.

And poems and stories, all whispers and echoes, leaving the secret in the middle to know.”

Mazzoleni, Ilaria. “Coy Howard’s Whispers and Echoes at the SCI-Arc Gallery.” Abitare, March 1, 2011
Site
The site of the thesis is not a specific physical location. Rather, the site is a specific set of conditions, generated by the author, that provoke a particular experience in the reader. Conditions are generated by topographic and cognitive studies. Landscape is specific geologically but not geographically. Karst caves, notable examples of which are located in Slovenia and Spain, inspired the geology of the imagined city. Yet the city is not in either of these locations, or any other, so as to free it of any cultural or political preconceptions. Where is not a point on the map, but rather an imagined frame of reference.

Karst is “A terrain, generally underlain by limestone or dolomite, in which the topography is chiefly formed by the dissolving of rock and which may be characterized by sinkholes, sinking streams, closed depressions, subterranean drainage, and caves”1. The Postojna Cave system in Slovenia, extending a known 27 km, is a karst system. Upper levels are characterized by stalactites and stalagmites, lower levels by the subterranean river Pivka, which continues to erode the rock and extend the depth of the caves. The imagined city draws from the geology of the Postojna Caves and the Cueva Mayor Caves in Spain to render tactile experiences. The feel of cool stone, the sound of water dripping off stalactites, the continual erosion of rock and expansion of space are all important conditions of the imagined city.


Diagrams

Below | by author
Beyond the tactile, the city is a state of trepidation and fascination, provoked by narrative. Humans seek narrative as means to determine sense of self. The link between narrative and self-awareness is now evident in neural research. “When individuals sustain damage to the neural network involved in story making, they lose “the ability to construct narrative… (and) have lost their sense of selves”.”2. The city is sited within our own narratives, our own perceptions of ourselves. In the imagined narrative, we seek out the familiar, the face. “The human brain devotes more area to face recognition than to the recognition of any other visual object”2. As a result, we see faces everywhere, in the moon, in toast, in our buildings in a phenomenon known as pareidolia. “What happened is, we grew lonely living among the things, so we gave the clock a face, the chair a back, the table four stout legs, which will never suffer fatigue.” (ibid 147)

We move cautiously through the imagined city, seeking the familiar, the face.
Annotated Bibliography

[ In identifying sources, the thesis will distinguish between narratives that are thematically, structurally, or stylistically inspiring to the work. Style address syntax and tone, structure the way in which characters, settings, and action is presented. ]


Flatland is a fictional story concerning the inhabitants of two dimensional space. It is thematically inspiring in that its setting is lacking a common frame of reference. How do characters live in two dimensions? The novel uses geometry and supporting illustrations to demonstrate fundamental differences between two dimensional and three dimensional space. As sight is limited to the perception of lines in Flatland, characters must identify each other by feel. In a world lacking natural light, how do characters navigate? How does architecture, through texture or sectional qualities, inform movement?


Cavendish, Margaret. The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World. London: A. Maxwell, 1668. Print

The Blazing World is presented as a stylistic inversion of what the thesis seeks to achieve. The tone, told from a third person omniscient narrator, is didactic. The narrative is not described through sensory experience, but rather explained as if one were reading a guide on the Blazing World. The protagonist, who accidentally crosses from our world into the Blazing World, enables a narrative rooted in comparison. “Architectures were noble, stately, and magnificent, not like our Modern [...]”(6) Cavendish writes. The thesis attempts not to make these comparisons, instead immersing the reader into the underground city. Characters will be born in the underground city and know no other reality.


Brave New World is thematically relevant to the thesis. The dystopian novel explores disturbing methods of control in a closed-loop society. The following passage is inspired by the social structure of Brave New World as it relates to an isolated underground city.

[ She doesn’t like the pills. Square with sharp edges. Easy to feel. Easy to know. On each person a pill. Taken in tight spaces, spaces with no room for reason. Spaces of restricted breathe and shrilling mind. The end seems near and slow. Before, people disappeared in panic. Searching for the out. Lost. Now the pills. Take one, the pulse slows, the reason returns. One continues on. Pills are productivity. But she doesn’t like the pills. ]

The Endless House, a hypothetical dwelling, is a stylistic precedent for the transition from narrative to design. The project consists of sketches, photographs, and loose spheroid models. Kiesler describes the womb-like dwelling:

“All ends meet in the “Endless” as they meet in life. Life’s rhythms are cyclical. All ends of living meet during twenty-four hours, during a week, a lifetime. They touch one another with the kiss of time. They shake hands, stay, say goodbye, return through the same or other doors, come and go through multi-links, secretive or obvious, or through the whims of memory.”

Although never constructed at full scale, Kiesler’s projections for the house are delightfully textured, including sand, water, grass, terra cotta, and wood planks.


Laylin, Tafline. “Postojna Concert Hall Boasts the World’s First Post Office Inside a Cave.” Inhabitant.


Einstein’s Dreams is a compilation of fictional short essays concerning time. The essays are both structurally and thematically significant to the thesis. Each is told from an omniscient, third person narrator who describes both hypothetical worlds and specific characters’ plots within them. The narrative technique, oscillating from the vast to the detail, humanizes unfamiliar concepts. Time is different and strange in each story, sometimes behaving like a circle, sometimes like water. The stories inspire the question: Without sun or celestial movement, how is time organized? How does time change the way people live?

Mazzoleni, Ilaria. “Coy Howard’s Whispers and Echoes at the SCI-Arc Gallery.” Abitare, March 1, 2011


The Museum of Innocence is stylistically inspiring in its ability to imbue the tragic with beauty. The narrator, Kemal, is a privileged bachelor who seemingly throws his life away in the pursuit of a younger distant relation. Over eight years he visits her with her family, hoarding, among other things, 4,213 of her cigarette butts. This period is best described in the chapter “Sometimes” which describes his experiences with his love as a series of “sometimes” in which he concludes:

“Sometimes I would say, “Shall we have a look at your painting, Fusun? and we would go into the back room, and as Fusun and I looked at her painting, I realized that this was the time when I was happy” (400).

The thesis seeks to draw from the beauty of Kemal’s world, as a separate reality, to describe an underground experience.

Speer, David, and Bryan Vickroy. “Karst Topography.” University of Wisconsin.
Light
Time
Rumors
Water
Dreams
Sound
Waiting
Diorama Models
Haptic Models