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A N I M U S

HOW CAN SET DESIGN PSYCHOLOGICALLY IMPACT THE HUMAN ELEMENT?

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In this article I will be exploring the concept of 'Set Design' and its relation to the psychological effect on the 'human element'. Further to this, I will be investigating the impact that set design may have on the aforementioned 'human element' as a result of any psychological effect, if any at all through a range of research methods and techniques. When I say the 'human element' I am referring to the actions, responses and the process which trigger cognitive connections formed from the audiences' experiences of a production all the way back to the designers' initial ideas. Essentially, the process of start to finish including the action and reaction. I wish to explore what goes on in the inner workings of our minds when we experience a production whether it's from theatre, film, TV or even an exhibition. Not only this, but what tools are used to trigger these psychological responses. As this research topic is quite specific, existing secondary research on this phenomenon is unfortunately lacking, however this simply ensures that the primary research motivating this work will be all the more relevant.

Although, this will help to navigate avenues which may be unexplored or possibly to reconsider an established idea through another perspective –additionally influencing primary research being conducted.

Due to the extensive research to follow, I chose to respond by breaking my topic down into the following subheadings: 'Research Approaches', 'Set Design History & Context', 'The relevance of Psychology in Design', 'Communication of Set Design' and finally 'The Impact of these Devises on the Human Element'. I am exploring these headings through a mixture of primary and secondary research, analysing the qualitative research findings rather than focusing on quantitative data. As I am interested in the methodology and how these schools of thought can be applied to different disciplines such as therapy or architectural & Spatial practices from finding of interviews, focus groups and other one-on-one interactions and see if they either provide solutions or challenges to the industry.

"Theatre is a mirror, a sharp reflection of society. The greatest playwrights are moralists."
 - Yasmina Reza

While this topic is made up of very familiar and broad subjects - Set Design and Psychology – this does not mean it has a straight forward approach to gathering insightful and useable research. The challenge is to find how one impacts the other and vice versa. As the two subjects do not directly relate and would not be considered something the average person would pair together, the way one might when reading psychological research such as the behavioural traits of children with their social development skills with each other within neurodivergent differences such as autism. Alternatively, jumping to the other end of the scale, some might think of the criminal behaviour of serial killers and what made them do as they did when they think of psychology. Trying to answer the question of "What makes them tick?"

However, when thinking about what set design brings to mind, some will conjure up images of royal theatres, stages, ropes and rigging suspending large metals frames with animated bulbs to illuminate the performers and spectators perched in a sizable auditorium.

Hopefully the research gathered for this article sparks interests and starts to ask more questions with the goal of fuelling creative responses and exploration. As a guide to figuring out not only how to start gathering information, through such means of focus groups, surveys, interviews and observations, the book 'Research Management' by Mark Easterby-Smith also explains the positives and negatives of different types of research whether its primary or secondary, qualitative or quantitative. And while this book seems to be more focused in a business sense, the information is transferable to many disciplines, including design. After reading through this book, it seemed to be a good idea to break the topic down and start asking questions. From this point the next stage was finding case studies and points of interest to guide the primary research and finding an exciting way to explore the topic of psychology with a creative edge to draw it into the design world and what this might look like.

To respond to these existing notions of psychology and set design and find the link between them, an experimental exercise was used with a number of participants and was inspired by 'Art At The Start' – a project which explores the impact that art therapy can have on young children and their art experiences and how they build relationships and attachments. Distributed by Dr Vicky Armstrong, the founder of Art At The Start, boxes containing art supplies and materials were sent out to over 180 families during the COVID-19 pandemic with the goal of continuing to enhance the creativity of the child as well as to engage the parent or guardian in the process with their child. Using this format, boxes with materials ranging from magazine cut-outs, a collection of pens and other assorted stationary were given the participants along with simple instructions to use their own creativity in response to questions on how they feel Set design impacts their own psychology which draws from their experiences. This exercise was called 'BOX SETS'.

Research Approach

"No action without research; no research without action"
- Kurt Lewin

Before we can begin at the beginning of set design and its origins, it's important to clear any doubt of what this branch of design is and why it's needed. Set, or as it's commonly referred to in some areas of the entertainment industry such as theatre known as Scenic Design, is the creation of a constructed environment or 'scene' in which the action of performance takes place. Sometimes referred to as 'scenography' and usually practiced in theatre, not only gives the impression of time the production is set, but also the location. The designer achieves this by decorating the stage in various ways and through clever use of furniture, costumes, and props from any given time period along with the use of difference stage types which include, 'Box Sets, Unit Sets and Multiple Sets.

Why is this important? Imagine for a moment, performers acting out a scene in a vast, blank room adorning casual attire with no props and only improvising through actions and gestures. To the observer this would be difficult to fully grasp what is happening, what is being performed, where is this supposed to be taking place, when is this supposed to be happening and who they are? Then introduce a stage into the room, with the vista of a countryside or possibly mountains behind the performers. At least we know roughly where they might be. Then swap the casual clothing for costumes to the actors which gives indications of the period in time this is taking place and judging by how 'fancy' or 'dishevelled' the attire is, who they might be in their social class as well as where in the world this could be taking place. Then props and furniture are placed around the stage along with the

decorated appearance, use of lighting accompanied by music and sounds to create context all before a single word has been uttered by the actors. The scene is set, and the audience and performer are on the same understanding and immersed in production.

Already there is a cognitive reaction, this being the ability to identify key qualities that provide understanding to the scene. However, before we can understand a deeper impact of the practice of Set or Scenic Design and the role it plays with psychology, we must first learn where it began. Looking as far back as possible, the Ancient Greeks have been recognised as the creators of theatre. Viewers would originally sit on a hill looking down toward the orchestra on a flat ground, as time went on, the slope became seating made from wood and then eventually stone to create the Koilon which referred to the bowl-like seating. Theatron, as the structure of the theatres often built into the sides of hills and mountains, were used to depict great stories and ancient Greek myths both as tragedies and comedies.

Theatre was enjoyed so much that it spread through Greece and Rome, although the romans would often use their open-air theatres at a competitive capacity for entertainment. Viewers of Ancient Greece could make their way to such stages the Theatre of Dionysus (named after the god of wine and festivities), Athens, the Theatre of Delphi or the Theatre of Pergamon situated in Modern Turkey and many more historically theatrical structures to see such playwrights as Euripides for his creation of heroines like Alcestis, or one of the other well-known playwrights of the age, Aeschylus, Aristophanes or Sophocles, who Aristotle admired and considered the greatest among the Greek Playwrights.

Today, set design has evolved from outdoor theatre and moved inside as well as onto our screens through television and movies. As the Entertainment has evolved, so too has the way we portray scenes through the advancements of technology like green screens, 3D modelling software, Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) and materiality. Even though these devises are primarily used in contemporary entertainment, designers are still utilising the original technologies such as ropes, pullies and cranes in creative ways to construct scenes in the most imaginative, abstract or realistic manner as possible.

Image above: The Theatre of Dionysus

Image above: The Theatre of Delphi

Image above: The Theatre of Pergamon

Image to the right credit to Walters Art Museum: 'Amphora with Scenes of the Hermes and Dionysus'

The relevance of Psychology in Design

Now we know a what Set Design is, where it began and why is it required, we can start to look at the psychological relevance to the field. Afterall, we have established even the smallest cognitive reaction through the means of creating context in a production and what is involved in setting a scene. Psychology and the workings of the brain govern our emotions, thoughts and behaviours both consciously and unconsciously. While there is still much to learn, the human brain is a mystery which is becoming slightly clearer day by day. The brain is an organ which has the most control over our physical being and emotional self as well as our ability to develop, learn and process information and thoughts.

Therefore, it's important to try and understand what can trigger changes within our minds and what can we do in response as a form or treatment or growth exercise. Being such a prominent concern, it is relevant in our everyday lives, whether we know it or not. Similarly, so is the entertainment industry as this is often used as a means to unwind after a tough day. It can be the simplest of things like binge watching your favourite show while relaxing, being accompanied to the cinema to see a movie you've been eager to see since first watching the trailer or even planning a trip to the theatre for a special occasion. It may not be very noticeable to some, but this industry shows its psychological impact in our day to day. To the music we listen to, the clothes we wear or even the food we consume.

All areas within this industry have a commonality, as they're all used within a setting. If we begin to break down into the key elements of psychology, it becomes easier to comprehend the intricacies of each working part and how this can be applied to the practice of Set Design. If we want to understand why design and psychology are joined, a good place to start is reading from 'Rezonant', a website which discusses the important role psychology has to play within design, not just of sets and scenery, but in all fields of the discipline. "Applying the knowledge of psychology helps us to understand what goes on in the behavioural thought processes of people…" by doing this we can have a mindful focus on the human element of design which enhances the users experience on a deeper level. Being able to achieve this means we can reach people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures which is something we as designers try to achieve and a set designer strives for as a story teller.

Image above: Jason & The Argonauts 'BOX SET'

Carrying this thought into the psychology of our surroundings is equally important, especially after spending what feels like a few years in doors because of a global pandemic. The spaces we occupy have negative and positive consequences on our mental wellbeing. If you're a solitary person who enjoys their own company to that of others, the COVID-19 pandemic may have been a slightly better experience for you than for others who consider themselves to be 'social butterflies'. Whatever the case, the walls which constitute our homes is part of our psychological behaviour, from the colours or textures used to decorate these surroundings or if it's the configuration of the furniture and personal belongings which are collected as a personalisation on our dwellings. We create our own space as a reflection of our own thought and feelings. In a way, by doing this we're creating an extension of ourselves much in the same way as a set designer brings personality to a production to draw in the audience and creating an immersive environment.

To illustrate how we might think about Set design on a simpler level in regard to our initial thoughts and feelings and what sparks an emotional reaction, the aforementioned exercise 'BOX SETS' was conducted to understand what first goes through our minds during the first moments of a scene. To initiate this exercise, the box containing the previously mentioned stationary was given to multiple participants with straight forward instructions to use these materials in anyway they choose to create a set to respond to being asked to think of any scene where its from a book, movie, TV show, theatre production or even exhibition. The principle here merely to spark the first thing that comes to mind in to break down why they chose it.

One participant chose to open the shoe box up as she decided to illustrate the journey of the characters in the popular show 'Good Omens'. The Box shows the collage of images expressing the characters journey from the world mortals only perceive in a fictional sense into the reality where the angelic protagonists exists among the humans they pretend to be. While another participant used her passion for animation to box in their 'SET' which was inspired by 'Jason and The Argonauts', a 1963 fantasy which depicts the tale of Jason, a young man determined to reclaim his throne by retrieving a golden fleece with a handful of Greek soldiers.

While this is a spectacular picture, this is not the reason the participant chose this classic movie. This motion picture included the work of Ray Harryhausen, who is considered a 'pioneer of animation' and whose involvement rendered iconic scenes from this movie which include animating skeletons in a battle. Looking at the 'BOX SET' created by the aspiring animator, the words "Scale", "Perspective", "Movement", "Challenge", "Ideas" and "Innovate" jump out. When speaking with the participant, they confirm that this scene was chosen as it was a source of inspiration to their career path. Not only this, the 1963 semi animated production is a motivation for creative exploration.

So, a simple interaction task shows that initial cognitive reactions to a scene can be interpreted in a few ways. Firstly, we see an interest between contrasting environments – from fiction to reality, or vice versa. The Good Omens', looks as though it has the initial impact of escapism which can be argued is a common trait of fictional based literature. Secondly, we see an early production as a source of inspiration to spark a creative interest which later developed to career path. The elements (scale, perspective, movement etc) that the Harryhausen used to animate had the response to explore, investigate and "innovate" for themselves.

Image above: Good Omens 'BOX SET'

Communication of Set Design

This is a rather broad question. What devises are used scenography to communicate the concept or idea? Is there an emotional response being targeted? Just by considering our factory senses alone, sound, smell, sight, touch and taste. Each one of these senses can be stimulated but how can they be used to prompt a psychological response when thinking about a setting?

In an interview with Barend Slabbert, Senior lecture in Interior Design at the University of Derby, when asked what communication devises set designers have, Slabbert gave an interesting insight; "you need to first think about the experience of say, design and form, and to start back to what is the first thing that you do and that is often to dumb down some of the senses to isolate the spectator from other people, that's surrounding them."

By starting in this way of "dumbing down the senses" we can identify key sensory devises to trigger emotional responses to the observer. As a result this can possibly be to extract a response from the spectators as a group, or simultaneously, reaching them as an individual and creating a one-on-one connection with each member of the audience. To illustrate this, Slabbert gave a great example, "some of the things it's like for simple experience or example is if you watch a film and somebody's head is being crushed or somebody's being cut, you don't necessarily need to have experience at the same action on top of your skin to know that it's going to hurt." Barend Continues to articulate that this visual effect gives the observer the secondary sense of the pain they're watching through their sense of sight.

Now, it's not only the sight of an actor convincingly portraying an injury, there are also other forces at play here. In Barends words, "start by darkening the room that you're within so that you minimise any distractions from your surroundings, so they don't pull focus from the front." The spectator's direction of sight is being guided without any words being uttered - a simple change but one completely taken for granted. They may not realise that a change of this small scale has a large impact. Light and movement are the "key drivers", as Barend explains, which guides the gaze toward the performance.

For the longest time, sight has been regarded the dominant sense and the other senses are only an extension of the sight. Or as Juhani Pallasmaa puts it in his book 'Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses', "Vision and Hearing are now the privileged sociable senses, whereas the other three senses are considered as the archaic remnants with a merely private function, and they are suppressed by the code of culture". Yes, of course this will be the case when we consider the obvious nature of Set Design, to produce the sceptical of the built environment. This, however, does not mean that we should think less of the "archaic remnant" senses. It's in the creativity of how information is used that is becomes significant and starts to give meaning. Let's look at the sense of smell for example, while the majority of people would probably rather live without the sense of smell over sound or sight, the particles in the air which pass through our nostrils can have a psychological effect, nostalgia being a strong emotion.

Take Walt Disney parks for example, an interesting not so 'secret' of theirs is that as park-goers make their way down main street to the attractions, their noses are invaded with the scents of sweets, treats and baked goods to activate dormant memories in the subconscious to spark the feeling of times gone by, leading you into the surrounding shops much like the way a whisp of steam carries a cartoon cat to the delicious pie cooling down on the window ledge.

Sight also has a similar effect. There's a sense of direction with light within architecture in Tadao Ando's 'Church of Light'. Built in a small town outside of Osaka and completed in 1989, the main feature of this church is the biblical cross carved out of the wall, letting in natural sunlight which illuminates the service taking place within. An onlooker may think this is a relatively simple design with a clever feature, however, Tadao achieved this with his strategic positioning of the church toward the direction of the suns long lasting raise in relation to the site's location. Not only this, Tadao's knowledge of materiality only enhances the fact that while this is a minimalist concept, its one with great detail. Tadao used concrete that when poured in a particular way, gives a candescent quality when exposed to the suns raise. With this in mind, it fair to say that in addition to light and movement, materiality can be used as a sensory communication tool as this furthers the effects of the aforementioned sensory devises a set designer has to play with.

"If you give people nothingness, they can ponder what can be achieved from that nothingness."

- Tadao Ando

Image above: 'The Line' Benoit Maubrey's Audio Ballerina's adorning the wearable speakers

The Impact of these Devises on the Human Element

Light is not the only visual which has an impact on our mindsets, colour is an integral part of how we think, feel and express our emotions. As many people are aware, colour can be assigned to an emotion. Red is commonly associated with love and romance on the other hand it is also associated with violence. Yellow is often paired with laughter, happiness and warmth yet has also been known for it attachment to intensity and frustration much like green can be thought of as a colour of nature, health and growth but simultaneously, to money, greed and envy.

Colours can be used to set the tone and build atmosphere, but it can also trick our minds making our bodies react in different ways. James Turrell, and American artist who uses light, space and movement as his devises, plays around with these ideas and creates installations such as 'The Colour Inside', an art installation to be found in the student activity centre of the University of Texas. This room is used not only as an art installation, but as a meditation room for student and staff. The installation consists of a darkened, circular room with very basic and minimalist furniture and light emitting inward to the ceiling. Sarah Thurmond, a writer on the Austin Monthly blog, expressed that when she visited the installation, she was immersed in the "brilliant red, making me feel giddy and warm inside".

Turrell uses his knowledge of light and space as well as the connotations which the colour red carries to affect the way the spectator feels emotionally as well as on a physical level. Just the presence of light being thought of as something which fills up the space which surrounds the observer while still being something which passes through us, enables Turrell to stimulate multiple senses and as a result triggering a psychological reaction, in this case to feel warmth just by looking at light. This would be an amazing sight to behold if paired with the work of artist and self-proclaimed 'Analog Man', Benoit Maubrey, whose interactive work is comprised of installations constructed with recycled speaker and audio systems to replicate landmarks and other iconic structures.

However, one of Maubrey's more notable and relevant pieces is the wearable speakers used as performance piece entitled 'Audio Ballerinas'. Aptly named, the performers are adorned with plastic tutus with speakers built in. Using an array of sensors accompanied with pre-recorded sounds from small-town squares, the performers move between the audience and as they do, sounds resonate. In a manner of speaking, the ability to dance between the audience and conjure up different noise from movement alone is immersing the viewer and making them part of the performance.

Understanding emotions and comprehending the power attached to the colours assigned to them is effective to the psychological journey the observer has during the performance. If these devises are used properly, the designer can trigger almost any type of cognitive reaction according to their design. Now, this can be used for purely entertainment purposes, however, if utilised in the correct setting, the devises of, light, sounds and movement can be brought into the interior for mental health purposes as a form of art therapy. By understanding the relationship of the space to the individual who will be enveloped within, as well as the colours, textures, lights, and sounds in similar way to these creative outlets, designers can start to create effective environments to enrich and nurture mental health.

While designers should strive to continually improve the experience of the user, this has not always been the case before. If we glance toward the built environment and design, we come across Hostile Architecture. This is a preventative style of design which ironically is commonly used in public spaces to prevent the 'misuse' of public intervention or as it has been better articulated by Winnie Hu, an author at The New York Post who wrote 'Hostile Architecture: How public spaces keep the public out'.

This style of architecture is the home to such designs as 'The Mosquito' design, which is an anti-loitering devise, emitting a high frequency noise, can be heard only by young people to deter them from hanging around in any given area. Or the more commonly used, Anti-Homeless spikes, concrete studs or metal spikes being places in areas to prevent the homeless from setting up camp by creating a rough or dangerous surface which is impossible to sleep on. Unfortunately, this poor display of architecture goes on.

In an article written in 'The Collector' author Joseph T F Roberts recounts that some advocate these defensive practices to "maintain order, make public space safer, and stop people from using public space in ways that are unwanted." However, if anything, this design can be thought of antisocial in itself. Afterall, they're used to stop people from using a space in a manner which is "unwanted" is subjective and different for everyone. These practices prevent the homeless from finding a safe place to sleep for a night, they prevent social behaviour between young people. It's almost as if they designer is saying "you can look, but not touch" or "go outside and socialise, just not here".

Image below: Under-road spikes, Guangzhou, China

Another fascinating practice of training the mind involves resetting dopamine levels to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. To clarify, dopamine is a chemical which acts as a courier around the brain which connects cells deep in the brain with others around the it which give feelings of pleasure, motivation and satisfaction and are often associated as the rewards passages of the organ.

The idea is to abstain from things that sustain our dopamine levels in order to reset them by carrying out tasks which we may consider boring. By doing this, our dopamine levels create a new, much lower baseline so when a task is completed, the activities we have given up produce higher levels of satisfaction. As a result, the scales are tipped to increase our sense of motivation, satisfaction and pleasure and decrease anxiety, depression and stressed. Although, its not a quick fix. Much like gym sessions, training for a marathon or dieting, it takes dedication, willpower and consistency. Can we design spaces which influence the occupier to encourage these positive behavioural traits?

In any case, while it's easy to get lost down that particular rabbit whole of lucid dreaming or meditation techniques along with the many experiments, technology and subfields of psychology still unventured. The point to take note of is that if designers think of mental wellbeing as something which can be trained in these ways, then another path is ready for exploration.

Designers can take the concept of the "exercise" mindset by being exposed to the communication tools and carry this forward to a spatial context to enrich the experience the person in need of psychological assistance as well as the entire human element involved such as family, friends and depending on the setting, staff too. And an extremely important element to remember is the involvement of the audience you're designing for. After all, how can you possibly know what needs to be created without having firsthand experience of the task being explored?
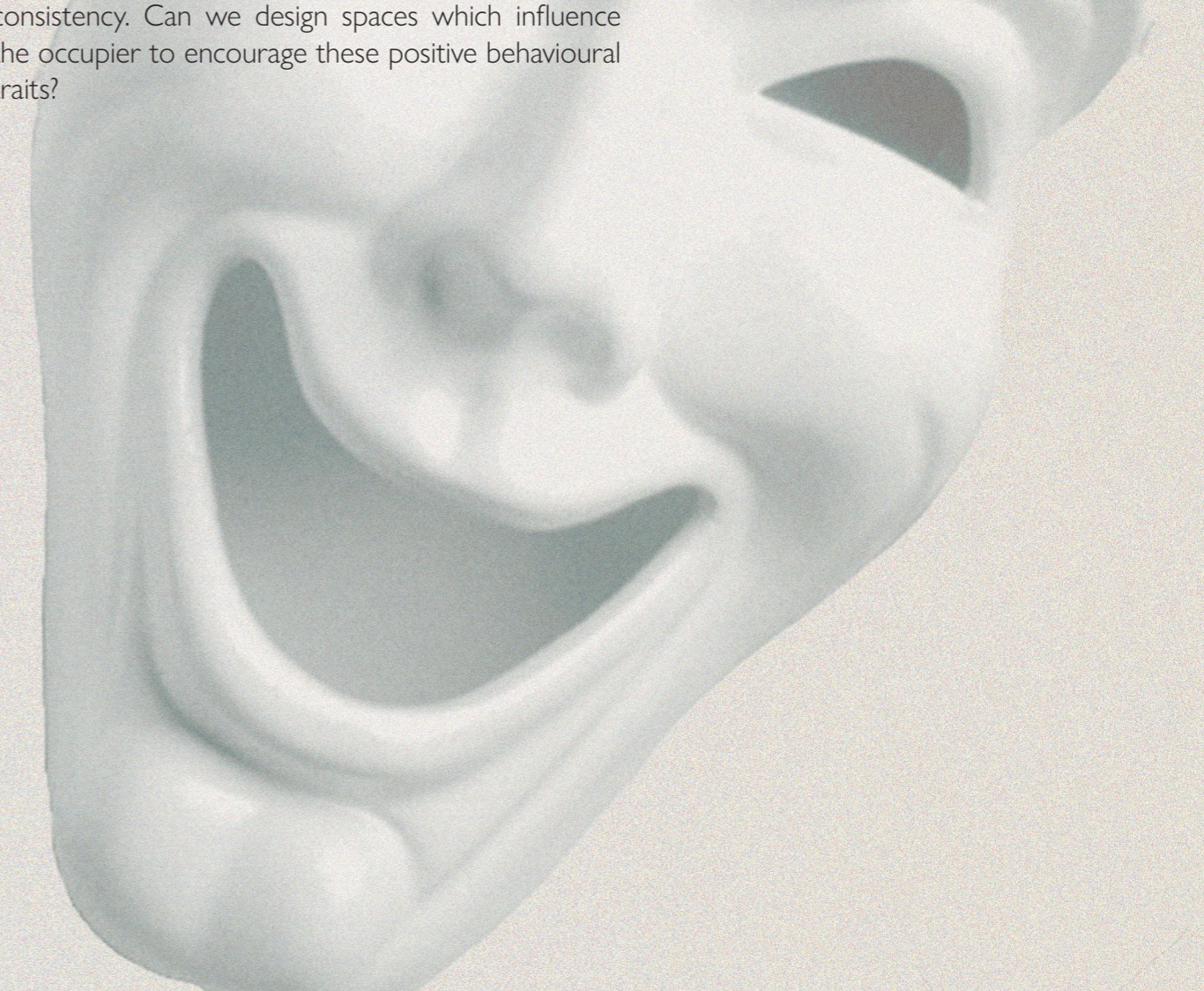
What Impact Do These Devises Have On The Human Element?

Now, this raises more questions; How can we design for mental health? What is mental health and how can these devises be used in this psychological maze? First, let's try to answer the question of, what is mental health? Of course, this is a broad question and ultimately, a query professional's are still figuring out today. After all, its hard to define something as ever-changing and fluid as the state of the human mind.

However, we know that there is no 'one true' definition of this emotive subject, yet, when asked the question "how would you define this topic?", an intriguing range of answers was provided, one participant in particular replied "I'd describe mental health as our physical health, without the physical state. So, just as one would need to exercise to improve the physical health, one would have to work to improve their mental health. A means of discipline". So, if this response was treated as the Oxford definition of the "Mental Health", we can look at ways to expose our minds to "exercise", in the same way we would train our bodies, as if in a gym.

What's exciting about this idea, are the doors this opens to the psychological exercises like meditation, which are commonly used for finding peace and tranquillity through a combination sensory stimulus, for example, calming white noises in the background or the scent of burning incense in the air. Shutting off all visual distractions, coupled with ritualistic breathing techniques to regulate the heart beats per minute - ultimately reducing stress and anxiety to achieve a more centred state of mindfulness. There are also fascinating avenues such as 'lucid dreaming', the ability to consciously know that you're dreaming as you are sleeping. While it is currently known that only 20-30 percent of us have this ability, it turns out that if you were one of the many born without this capability, you may be able to train yourself to do so. However, it's still unclear just how this can be done.

Background Images: Sock & Buskin - Ancient Greek depictions of Comedy & Tragedy

Knowing this, is it possible to bring this to a project of some kind? Can these methods be utilised in a theatrical piece or perhaps an animation? An interesting example which showcases the visual representation of a character's state of mind is a theatre production known as Wozzek, the 2002 operatic production which took place at the Santa Fe Opera. This rendition of the emotionally problematic play depicts a man's mental state slowly breaking down after a series of unfortunate scenarios which include his wife's infidelity to a captain.

What's truly engaging about this production is that the audience does not have to rely on the actor's ability to convey an emotion as the creative design of the set perfectly represents how the characters mind is gradually breaking as the story unfolds. This is achieved by strategic use of natural light bleeding through the gaps in the stage, which is broken apart, brilliantly illustrating the weight that stress can have on the human psyche. The designer also uses colour to build the rising emotions of the characters, for example, Wozzek, the protagonist of the piece, discovers his wife's unfaithfulness and contemplates killing her while he is also suffering from visions of death and destruction which include the overbearing rays of the sun engulfing the earth in flames.

As his thoughts of this action grows, so does the deepening red colour of the sun setting in the background and the thunderous tones of an operatic tenor. The scene is set merely by this combination. Pairing these devices is enough to understand what's is going on as some may suggest, opera singing is not always easy to distinguish the words being sung, especially if they're being sung in another language unknown to our ears.

What's fascinating is that this play was written by German composer, Alan Berg, in 1925 which in a popular opinion would be before mental health was really considered to be relevant. In an anonymous survey, eighty-nine percent of participants agree that there is a generation divide on the topic of mental health and its relevance to society today. These results go onto to clarify that they see this divide between those from the age of forty years and older. One participant commented "I couldn't put an exact number to it. But it seems to be sort of the start of the millennial generation and any time before this that adopts this 'get over it' or 'man up' mentality. Feel that mental health is stupid." While another contributes "Young adults & older generation. (They don't believe in it) I've been told "we just didn't have all of this when we were younger"". Hearing these two comments we can deduct from present that it seems those born before

the 1980 can be considered to not acknowledge the relevance of mental health and its importance. Now, this is a generalisation given the raw feedback from the survey as this does not speak to individual groups from economic or social backgrounds as well as other dividing groups such as ethnic or gender groups – this merely categorises the age bracket only. Taking into account that those in the forty-plus bracket "just didn't have all of this when we were younger" and then comparing this to the devices used in the 2002 production of Wozzek, again was written in 1925, it can be argued that mental health issues have always been there, they just were not acknowledged with the attention it has now, or even in a nurturing and safe environment which we as a society strive for now.

Aristotle implies that education should be achieved only with values. By teaching the mind and the heart, we can achieve enlightenment and overall, a better cognitive development. As designers there is a responsibility to clearly carry forward these values into the work we produce. As we have established, the problems have always been there, they were just not spoken of, which is why we must carry this ideal of educating ourselves on the importance of mental health both in our minds and our hearts and learning the connection between the two to enhance our own lives and as an extension, our design. The result of this would be a circular motion where we influence

our designs to influence the public, to shape more designs and so on. And while this ideology would essentially close the door on the outdated perspective of mental health being something we "just didn't have", it does not mean this should be completely dismissed as it still serves some purpose as a driver to do better.

It is counterproductive to overlook how other generations have viewed or in some cases, dismissed the importance of psychology and everything which falls under this umbrella, such as mental health and mental illness. Being dismissive is a trait which can be dangerous as history has taught us on many occasions. These

experiences should only be used as a learning curve to know what doesn't work and how to design for betterment. We should not forget that mental illness and mental health was not considered real for those born before the 1980's, in fact we should use this as motivation for education and awareness not only for ourselves and everyone before us, but also for those who come next. Having briefly mentioned how paramount our mental wellbeing is both in mental health and illness, this begs the question, is there a difference between them? In a survey, seventy-eight percent of participants agree that there is a difference between the two while twenty-two percent were unsure.

Yet, if we look at the answers to the follow up question asking for elaboration, we see the responses concisely illustrate how they differ along with how they're both as important as each other. One participant writes ""Mental health is something that affects everyone. Mental illness does not affect everyone and is usually something to be diagnosed and treated" and another writes "Mental health is a broad term that can be used in context to everyone within society. Mental Illness involves a diagnosis". This is a common opinion in the survey, and again, we have already discovered that 'mental health' can be considered similarly to physical health in that it can be either a positive or negative state which we determine ourselves by the work we put into it, whereas these comments can lead us to believe that mental illness is something that requires a diagnosis; an identification of the nature of an illness or issue based on an examination of symptoms.

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all".
   - Aristotle

Image to left: Ancient Greek Philosopher, Aristotle

An amazing effect Set design has been its ability to create a sense of escapism for the viewer; an activity used by a person as a distraction to escape the realities of life. It is a device we human's have conjured up to divert the mind from the harshness of the world we live in. Escapism takes many forms, the most common being the use of social media, games or movies, sports or even burying oneself in their career. These examples appear to be the least harmful types of escapism when you compare it to the use of alcohol, drugs and overeating to avoid thinking about something, someone and the stresses which come with relationship issues or pain from traumatic events. Although that's not to say that the 'lesser' forms of escapism can't be harmful to.

Noah Smith, an American journalist, made an astute observation in the form of a tweet "fifteen years ago, the internet was an escape from the real world. Now, the real world is an escape from the internet." These few lines are extremely relatable, possibly why this has become such a popular quote amongst the online community. On one hand, it acknowledges the presence the internet has on our day to day lives now – our phones are basically an extension of our own limbs due to how many things they can do. Phones not only make calls and text messages to others for distance interactions, but now due to the millions of apps and information available at our finger tips at super-fast speeds, you can order food, stream movies and TV programs, you can find a match on the dating scene, have access to the lives of strangers halfway across the world through social media or share opinions through the formally known app, Twitter.

With the majority of our time being monopolised by screens, it's easy to understand why escapism is needed from the internet.

On the other hand. fifteen years ago, the internet would have been used in a different manner, focused on connectivity whether it's with and old acquaintance or reconnecting with friends and family separated by distance. Or to make new connections with like-minded souls who share similar interest, or as Noah puts it in his article "you found your people" on topics like Sci-Fi, games, sports or in fact any interest.

Compared to having to be forced into the same setting as work or school with people who may not share the same intrigue to something can be hard to deal with – this is where the escapism would come in handy. However, now, being bombarded with images and 'content creators' through every tap on a screen or seeing the unrealistic expectations on lifestyles set by the rise of the influencer is detrimental to our mental health. Its stands to reason that we would need to get away from this and reconnect ourselves with reality. Perhaps, like lots of addictive substances or activities whether its alcohol or drugs, it can be less harmful to our minds if used in moderation. However, I digress. Noah's observation shows just how much of an impact the internet has on our cognitive wellbeing and how we find ways to allude it.

"As an architect, you design for the present with an awareness of the past for the future which is essentially unknown."
-    Norman Foster

"Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality"
- Lewis Carrol.

An incredible art exhibition titled Khao Mo (Mythical Escapism) is aimed at 'city dwellers' to help them escape from their lives into a Chinese garden type of relaxation. This piece whose name translates to 'Mythical Escapism' uses mirrored boxes formed together to create a fascinating geometric structure reminiscent of the reflective skyscrapers found in cities all over the globe. Situated within the centre of the piece is a mound of earth, the hill of soil which in the interactive exhibition uses the dominant sense of sight and the 'lesser' sense of smell and touch to invite the natural features of the earth to bring the observer closer to nature allowing them to empty their minds of the stress from city life and encourage room for creativity. "The smell of earth, the moisture and vapour that evaporate from the earth, the ordinariness and the emptiness allow the audience time to imagine."- From the designers, Sanitas Studio, to Archdaily, an online architectural design journal.

While escapism is a tool which has come from our negative need of facing life's challenges, it does not necessarily cause negative effects like getting lost in fantasy worlds or abusing substances to dodge traumatic memories and feelings, Its can be used for a positive outlet. By channelling our urge to leave and enter a space of our own imagination, it also allows the creation of the constructed environment to fulfil the fantasy of building scenes from imagination or the fictional worlds we have read in books or from scenes from our favourite shows.

Afterall, is this not the ultimate goal of a set designer? The ability to fabricate a constructed worlds which transports the viewer from their reality and give them a immersive escape, even if it is only for an hour or so.

"The smell of earth, the moisture and vapour that evaporate from the earth, the ordinariness and the emptiness allow the audience time to imagine."
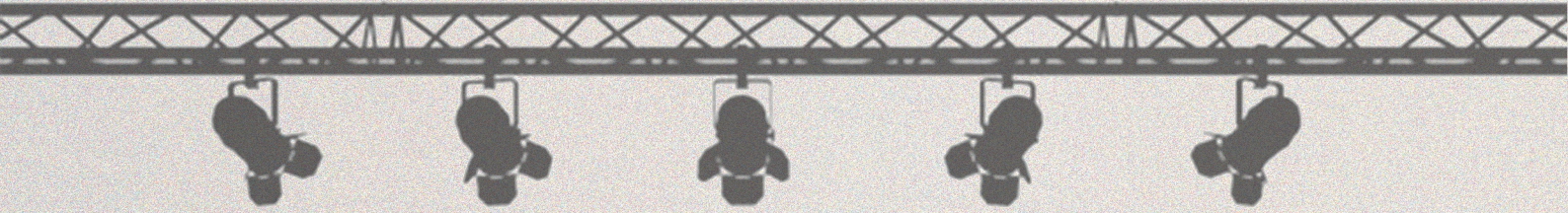- Sanitas Studio

Final word

There has been much to consider but ultimately, it is reasonable to conclude that Set Design does have an impact on the human element through a range of different methods and devises. Whether it's through stimulating the senses with lighting, sounds smell, or visual effects created by an intelligent use of colours and lighting from artist like James Turrell or the incredible, wearable speakers by Benoit Maubrey, which engulf the audience with exciting noises and motion or even by warping the set and scene to depict and emotional transitions the way it was portrayed in Wozzeck or playing on the idea of escapism for the viewer to whisk them away from the stresses of reality in a similar manner to Khao Mo.

Through research and experimentation of these tools and how they can trigger cognitive reactions both good and bad, we can start to combine these devises in a spatial context to enhance the human element, this being established as our mental health. The ultimate goal of exploring the topics of Set Design and Psychology was to find a deeper understanding of how we can design for the betterment of the human experience and what can set design contribute to this cause. And while the research doesn't answer every question within the vast world of the human brain and how to works, this article should raise curiosity and encourage further exploration with the hope of enhancing our quality of life.
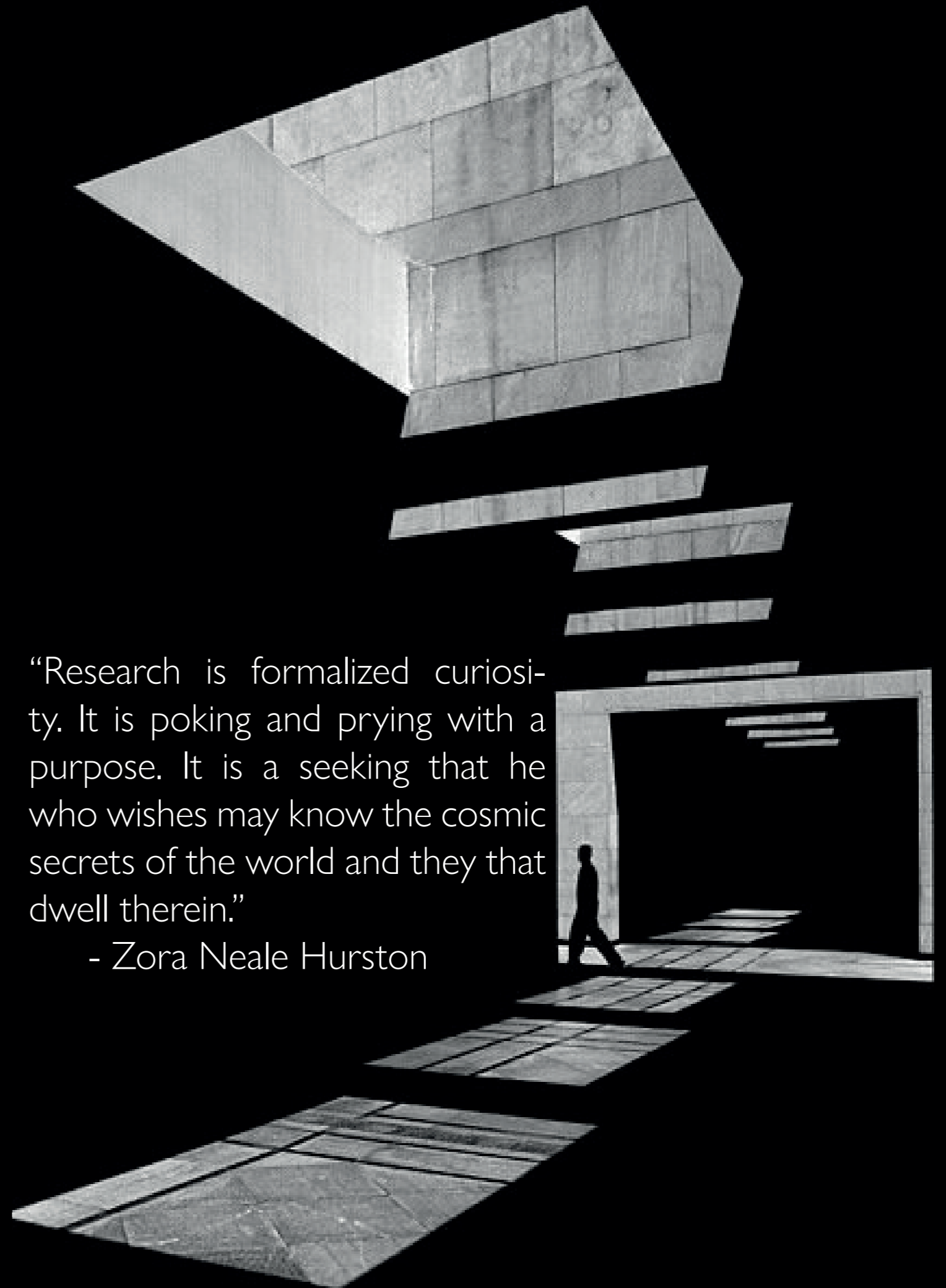
"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein."
    - Zora Neale Hurston

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