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**Diminuology: A Narrative
The Phenomenology of Scale**

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**Diminuology: A Narrative
The Phenomenology of Scale**

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Thesis

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Susan Hinshaw; you are my “Yes,” in a world full of “No.”

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Abstract

Diminuology: A Narrative The Phenomenology of Scale

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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Diminuology is a performative installation piece designed to re-imagine the relationship between audience and performer in the creation of narrative through scale objects.

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Chapter 1: Hunting

Sunlight filters through the canopy, deceptively soft—and hot as Hellfire. The trek has been long and his water supply is nearing depletion. The young man winces as trail dust mixes with brow sweat and a thin, salty stream of mud trickles into his eye. His legs are red from countless thorn-bedecked twigs, his hands raw from clambering over god-knows-how-many limestone bluffs.

“It should be here,” he mutters and swats through a buzzing mosquito cloud.

He’s been searching the better part of an afternoon and his patience wears thin. He knows it won’t be obvious to the eye, even if it’s hiding in plain sight. He may have to dig through mud or overturn rocks or climb trees to find it. But he knows it’s here. He’s narrowed it down to these 10 square feet of forest, now it’s just a question of where...

It’s probably quite small; nestled in a gopher hole or under a sprig of grass, completely unnoticed unless one knows what to look for. Underbrush, fallen logs, damp, spider-ridden nooks... Nothing. All empty.

“Screw it,” he breathes and bats at a spider making its way up his arm.

He stands, stretching as a chorus of crackles runs up his spine. With an exasperated sigh, he turns and begins searching for the trail of broken twigs and trampled greenery that will lead him back to his car. Sundown is coming—it’s no picnic trudging through all this after dark—and the moon isn’t anything near full tonight. Why does he

always do this? He knows it's going to take longer than he thinks, he knows the sun sets faster than he plans, he knows—Wait. There.

Right there.

It's right there.

Thirsty, tired and not a little peeved, he's suddenly surprised at how delighted he is to have discovered it. A film canister wrapped in camouflage duct tape, wedged in the crotch of a tree, hiding in plain sight. He plucks it from its perch and pries open the lid...

This is the point that inevitably leads to keen frustration and bitter disappointment.

Inside is a grubby plastic bag containing a tiny rolled up pad of paper and a pencil stub.

He unrolls the pad, revealing a long list of screen names.

Qprider01

Biker_gurl43

Noms519

Dannyboi78

Kittybane02

On the second page, there are scrawled messages in smudged graphite; "Britney was here," "Best cache yet!" or "Ohio rules!" That's it? All that hiking and climbing and hunting and crawling for this? He isn't sure what he was expecting—he isn't sure what he was hoping for—but this is not it.

He twirls the pencil in his fingers but it proves too short and gets lost in the brush at his feet. After rooting around for a moment, he retrieves the pencil and stands poised to add his own proclamation to the world that he, too, was there.

“Tartar sauce,” he exclaims to no one in particular (he always did have a penchant for creative cursing.)

He slips the pencil and paper back into the bag, refills the canister and presses the lid shut. He carefully sets the canister back in the tree, taking a moment to ensure that rain and wind won’t dislodge it, then turns and starts back through the woods.

Later, upon relating the experience to friends unfamiliar with the concept, he’ll say, “It’s like hiking, but at the end you find trash.”

This mini-saga is one of many just like it, played out on any day of the week in any part of the world where people are out geocaching. Part treasure hunt, part nerd-sport and part archeology, geocaching—in its simplest form—is the tracking, finding and hiding of small weatherproof containers (or caches.) Once the GPS coordinates of said cache are posted online, other cachers then embark on a pilgrimage (sometimes quite short and simple, other times interminably long and impossibly complicated,) to reach the coordinates, locate the cache and leave some token proclaiming to all other cachers, “I was here.”

At face value, it may (or may not, depending on one’s feelings toward pointless quests to find a series of totally random worthless objects,) seem an exciting or at least mildly amusing proposition. Yet upon completing my first cache, I am struck immediately by a sense of betrayal, unwarranted as it may be.

When I agreed to partake in this little adventure, I hadn’t thought much of it. A treasure hunt through the woods with friends for an afternoon... It sounded good enough. As a backpacker/hiker/camper I’d spent far longer stretches of time trekking

through wilderness without any particular purpose, so why not add the element of a “mission” to the mix?

The disappointment I felt later that day, staring down into yet another plastic box filled with a few plastic trinkets and a pad of paper, was therefore directed more at myself and my expectations than at the owner who’d assembled and hidden the cache. I suppose, having grown up on *Indiana Jones*, *Treasure Island*, *Alias* and other stories involving complex treasure hunts to unlock ancient mysteries, part of me was hoping for more of a plot; something, anything more than “Congratulations, you found the box of junk I buried in the woods.” If only there had been something more interesting in the cache than... Well, trash.

Granted, as a theatre artist and student of semiotics, I know that every object in the box has a story. Everything in the cache has been placed here by someone for some reason, and each object signifies a choice, a backstory, yet the overall message seems to be “Nobody wanted to put anything of value out here, so we emptied our collective junk drawers, raided the seat cushions of our couches, checked the cup holders in our cars and dumped the contents here.” In short, the story presenting itself to me seemed unintelligible, and as subsequent caches would prove, unvarying.

What if, I found myself wondering, these sandwich boxes full of trash were all connected somehow? Suppose there was a narrative one could follow over the course of an afternoon—Hell, over the course of a week—and piece together bit by bit as one advanced from cache to cache? Or better yet, suppose one wasn’t looking for anything at

all but simply stumbled upon a cache whilst going about a daily routine? Would my disappointment be lessened were I not expecting to find something interesting?

It wasn't the first time the idea had presented itself; as a child, my father built me a miniature castle—I say “miniature,” but the plywood structure stood nearly 5 feet tall—in which I spent many an afternoon creating characters, furniture and props to flesh out the tiny world. The small inhabitants of the castle were as alive to me as any of my real-world friends, though I'd always assumed that they were only alive to me.

One afternoon, however, I had packed all the pieces into the castle with no particular rhyme or reason—simply to clear the floor where I had been playing—and a friend came over to play. As we passed the castle on our way out to the yard, he stopped, stared at the cluttered interior and said, “It looks like something's about to happen.” I was confused—I hadn't consciously arranged the pieces in any narrative vignette, I'd simply tossed them into the rooms for storage. Yet out of that jumble of objects, he had found something that spoke to him of action, character and plot. He described the scene as he imagined it was about to play out and I was intrigued as I realized that anything could trigger the desire to create narrative, regardless of whether it made sense to anybody else. I didn't see any story in the pile of objects in the castle, but he clearly did.

Years later, I would encounter a similar phenomenon in Richard Isackes's Performance Theory course at the University of Texas at Austin. In one assignment, we were charged with the task of taking a chair and making it the star of a short film. There were little-to-no parameters outside of that and I was immediately resistant to the idea. Despite a taste for stop-motion animation, illustration, puppetry and other media which

frequently make use of objects as characters, I was ardently opposed to the idea that I could make any kind of interesting narrative on my own.

Curiously, as soon as I selected a chair and dragged it to the first location I'd chosen for our little shoot, I discovered something I had not anticipated; the chair (an old metal folding chair with upholstered backrest and seat, probably from the late 70s) became a character as soon as I took it out of the classroom context and placed it in conversation with the middle of Wahler Creek. In this new environment, it instantly generated part of a narrative and begged a host of questions; what the Hell is this classroom chair doing in the middle of a creek? Did it crawl here on its own power? Who put it there? Why? How long has it been here and when was the last time it was touched by human hands? Curiosity was sparked and I was hit with a tsunami of ideas as to where I could film the chair next. In the end, I produced a seven-minute film featuring the chair in a variety of settings and situations, alternating interiors and exteriors, inhabited spaces and unpopulated locales. While I find the film almost unwatchably strange, it does offer up a narrative—albeit a surreal and readerly one—that I cannot help but try and string together in a way that makes some sort of sense.

Chapter 2: Seeds

It is an ordinary hallway, one of millions just like it. The architecture is dated, impersonal yet not overly minatory. The floor is broad, tiled with innocuous laminate squares in lackluster shades of white, gray and an array of pale earth tones. The walls—high enough to be unfriendly yet not so high as to be grand or imposing—are institutional white with large, brown rubber baseboards. The scene is lit from above with bright florescent tubes in textured plastic covers, bathing the world in monotonous, shadowless white. This is not a place where things happen—it can hardly be called a place at all—this is a space for people on their way someplace else, a cattle run to direct the flow of bodies through a building. The message is received loud and clear; you enter this space as someone who is not in control, merely a number, an EID (Electronic Identifier,) an entity who does what you are told, appears when and where you are summoned and don't muck about in the interim.

Today, the space is different. Barely noticeable yet highly conspicuous, there on the floor at the far end of the hall, stands a tiny structure. Hardly taller than the industrial rubber baseboard behind it, a diminutive house sits, it's dark windows staring blankly down the hall. If one were to approach the elfin abode, one might notice that farther down the corridor lay a second house, nearly identical to the first. Farther still, another petite building hovers improbably in mid air, windows aglow with eerily green fluorescent light. The hallway itself, once nothing more than a channel to allow bodies to

travel from point A to point B, has suddenly ceased to be mere space and transitioned into place; something is happening.

Upon closer inspection of the first house, you discover that with a little coaxing, the façade swings open and the walls hinge outward, revealing a tiny vignette inside. A hand-written note in indecipherable but elegant scrawl lay crumpled against the back wall of the house, a series of tiny trees and a small oval mirror frame dangling in front of the stained paper note. The second house opens in a similar manner, disclosing a tiny candelabrum atop a tiny table sitting in front of what looks like a collage of antique photos of men in a mix of black suits and rugby uniforms.

On and on through the hall, down the stairs and into various spaces throughout the cold, institutional Winship—like a trail of breadcrumbs—lay nearly thirty of these miniature mansions, each with its own interior, disparate and yet connected. One feels the desire—no, the need—to collect the various scenes and make sense of the strange aggregate.

Chapter 3: Stories

A myriad of ingredients have been tossed into the bubbling cauldron of my artistic process—many of which I am still discovering—yet I shall attempt to enumerate the more prominent influences that led me to this particular venture.

I must first give credit to the endlessly varied and beautiful California coastline. Having spent my formative years on the Central Coast, I know the woods, hills and beaches better than I know my own reflection. The twisted Elfin Forest, the crags of Morro Rock, and the endless oak-dotted hills of Templeton were my playground and I—along with a cadre of friends and siblings—would wage elaborate wars against imagined aggressors, embark on epic quests (though always returning in time for supper,) and sprawl—exhausted from hours of adventures—on a grassy hill to watch billowy clouds roll in from the sea. Those years are an integral part of my aesthetic; in a world consumed with hunger for the next gadget or technological breakthrough, art has always been a channel through which I reconnect with that grassy hill where I'd stared into the sky to watch clouds drift over treetops.

In my teen years I relocated to Southern California, eventually settling in Hollywood, a short walk from Grauman's Chinese Theatre. This new urban world—and its signature cloud comprised of equal parts soot, smog and cocaine drifting down the boulevard—brought a host of new influences, particularly a change in the way I experienced space; there isn't a whole lot of it in downtown Hollywood and this fostered

a renewed interest in miniature—a format I could easily accommodate in the back of my car or pile in the corner of my Spartan room.

Developing as an artist and storyteller, I have of course tossed many more ingredients into the witch’s brew of my creative cache. Miniaturist and street artist Slinkachu, novelist Bram Stoker, sculptor Thomas Doyle, and design/installation team Ruth Gibson and Bruno Martelli are among those with whom my current work comes into most direct conversation.

Slinkachu—not his given name—first struck my fancy while researching contemporary miniaturists not working in the entertainment or hobby realm. His tiny installations—which surprise and delight the public throughout the UK—consist of miniscule figures and props interacting with the larger environment in which he places them, often generating humorous commentary on contemporary life and our relationship to our immediate environment. The key here is that his work is not housed in any gallery, it is not heralded by newsletter or opening night gala; instead it is simply placed, completely conspicuous, in the street, on the sidewalk, in a puddle, or on a mailbox. He uses scale to draw his viewer into a whimsical and often humorous dialogue, encouraging those who chance upon one of his diminutive installations to be more mindful as we make our way through a world we all-too-often take for granted.

Inhabiting a nearby corner of the art world we find sculptor Thomas Doyle, whose work is as surreal and diminutive as Slinkachu’s but features a darker, disturbing bent. His pieces feature tiny war-torn mudscapes, suburban houses buried in bones and debris or figures isolated atop crumbling islands of rock. As a more traditional “gallery-bound”

creator, Doyle's work is presented in isolation from distractions of the outside world—we view Doyle's tiny scenes in conversation only with our own internal associations.

While miniature installation art is all well and good, I am also interested in narrative that connects disparate pieces into a whole à la *Dracula*. In Stokers famed novel, the story is presented through fragments; newspaper articles, journal entries and letters, rather than relying solely on direct narration. This conceit has been employed many times since, with varying degrees of success, particularly in the “found footage” sub-genre now common in horror films (*Cloverfield*, *The Blair Witch Project*, the *Paranormal* series, etc.) This technique is particularly effective in horror stories as it evokes tension and anticipation in the willing reader/viewer (as opposed to it's application to, say, a romantic story in the vein of *The Last Five Years*, in which a viewer might become bored or put off by the sudden leaps in narrative when—ostensibly—the appeal of romantic stories is the voyeuristic pleasure of watching sexual tension build between the leads over a unidirectional story arc.)

Finally—and perhaps most directly applicable to my own journey—we arrive at design team Ruth Gibson and Bruno Martelli. The artists are interested in many of the same questions surrounding around narrative, space and the viewer-as-performer, but tackle the issue via virtual reality rather than physical space. Their haunting virtual world, *Swanquake:House*, leads participants through a dystopian landscape sans avatar, allowing the viewer a more direct connection as opposed to watching an avatar experience it for them.

Chapter 4: Beginning

“Some say that as we grow up, we become different people at different ages, but I don't believe this. I think we remain the same throughout, merely passing in these years from one room, to another, but always in the same house.” Peter Pan (1960)

As I'm sure many artists will tell you, freedom can be a downright frightening thing; few things are more intimidating than the blank canvas, and facing down a project that could literally take any shape, some much-needed parameters are in order. To begin, I decide on a handful of “rules” to follow.

First, the physical structure... Why work in miniature? Why not construct a full-scale installation for viewers to “perform” in? The simple answer is I find miniatures strike my imagination in more powerful ways than their full-scale counterparts. A full-scale chair is—under normal circumstances—just that; a chair. A chair in any other scale triggers a myriad of questions. Such a chair is often useless for use as a “chair,” yet as an object it still functions as a sign that reads “chair,” while calling to mind it's full-scale counterpart; already I am more interested than I might be were I presented with an “ordinary” chair or a flat representation (photo or painting.) Semiotic associations aside, miniatures require our imaginations to work in a different way; it isn't possible to build a miniature that captures all of the detail of a full-scale object, so the artist must find ways to *suggest* those details. In recreating a claw-footed table in ¼” scale, I don't take the pains to sculpt the claws as I would were I carving a foot for the full-scale table; instead I find ways to suggest the detail so that the miniature reads as “claw-footed,” and the

viewer extrapolates what the table might look like were it full scale. This removal from the world of human scale encourages the viewer to approach the piece with his imagination primed to fill in the gaps, while at the same time making it necessary for that viewer's mind to call up his own ideal, quintessential claw-footed table. To borrow again from the horror genre, the monster lurking in the shadows is far more terrifying than the monster we're given a clear look at; our imagination is ready to provide all the details that make the monster our own personal, living nightmare. *The Babadook* is far more frightening than *An American Werewolf in London* by virtue of what we don't see. In a similar way, our imaginations might interpret the limitations of miniature as a medium as "gaps" for our imaginations to fill with missing information—that information being deeply personal and meaningful to each viewer (the same might not be said for experienced model builders, who might view such "limitations" as shoddy craftsmanship rather than intentional artistic omission.)

In addition to serving as an imaginative springboard, miniatures present the viewer with an invitation *to get closer*. When I see a particularly interesting or beautiful piece of furniture, I may stop and admire it, I may imagine what it might look like in my own living space, but I don't project myself mentally into the same space as the furniture as I'm already physically there, next to the table or sitting in the chair, etc. If I see the same objects presented in miniature, my reaction is curiosity. I want to get closer, to examine the work, to ask, "How did they do that?" and to project myself mentally into the place presented. Miniaturization is, for me, an important tool in sparking a shift in the viewer from passive audience to active performer. This may simply be a side effect

of working in theatre where all miniatures are created with the assumption that the furniture or set will be inhabited by actors, thus encouraging the me as designer to continuously project myself into the set and imagine how it feels, how the space holds my body, how the layout impacts my movement.

Lastly, scale can be used to suggest tiny playthings instead of faithfully reproduced architectural models. This does something quite powerful; it triggers nostalgia. Childhood, for some, was a time of happy self-involvement—lost in our own personal universes; we are inherently selfish creatures (ask any parent of a two-year-old about the dreaded “mine” stage,) and must be socialized to pay attention to the needs and wants of others. Among my own young nieces and nephews, I’ve watched them trained up from totally self-involved creatures to socially aware human beings. We quickly learn there are other people on the planet and compromise is a necessary part of life.

I believe there remains a part of us that longs to return to the days when we were neither expected nor required to compromise—when we existed in a narcissistic paradise—and things that remind us of that time can trigger pleasure in our adult experience (as an artist, I am quite familiar with the desire to do what I please and to Hell with the peanut gallery and the powers that be.) In this way, miniaturizing my pieces will—I hope—flip some deep-seeded switch in the performer that gives them a twinge of pleasure reminiscent of those care-free early years.

Chapter 5: The Dollhouse

In the late 1980s, on the affluent Van Ness Street in downtown Fresno, California, stood an old mansion in the style of a 17th Century French chateau. On countless trips to visit my grandparents (who resided at a far less auspicious address,) my siblings and I would press our faces against the car window as we drove past, imagining stories about the inhabitants of this architectural oddball (the dominant architectural aesthetic in the valley being Craftsman, making the chateau all the more intriguing.) Perfect. What could contrast better with the imposing 1960s institutional styling of UT's Theatre and Dance department than the romantic charm of a tiny haunted French chateau?

I begin building mockups immediately; I want to handle a dimensional object as soon as possible, given that these are artifacts the performer must engage with in a tactile manner as opposed to an objet d'art that screams "look-but-don't-touch." Experimenting with a couple styles confirms that the French chateau evokes what I hope to stir in the performer; that blend of wonder and whimsy tinged with fear (speaking, of course, from my own experience—though as we shall find later, I am not alone in my associations.)

Relying solely on recollection, I invite every inaccuracy and conflicting memory to infiltrate each incarnation of the house. Every time I revisit the street in my mind, different areas of the picture come into focus, but none of my mental retreads are consistent—only the emotion associated with the memory is fixed; the details surrounding it swirl, lazily changing shape like the forms in a lava lamp.

In addition to my commitment to historical inaccuracy, scale aides my quest for visceral reaction. Animators and cartoonists have long known that in order to make something appear “real” or alive on the page, their subject must be based in reality but carefully exaggerated; a too-truthful representation will appear stilted and wooden. Similarly, miniatures that are exact replicas of their full-scale counterparts may be feats of artistry, skill and craftsmanship, but can also appear academic or clinical in their accuracy and lack the emotional power of less-than-perfect miniature creations. The Thorne Rooms, for example, are exquisite historical re-creations, but lack the primal evocative power of a Thomas Doyle miniature.

With this in mind, I approach the creation of each house in “nonsense” scale rather than 1/8”, ¼” or ½” scales common in miniatures. By exaggerating some details and omitting others, the tiny house becomes iconic and simultaneously symbolic, suggesting more than just “house-ality.” The simplified, exaggerated edifice speaks—I hope—of memory, childhood and perhaps a hint of the nightmarish.

Chapter 6: The Monster Lives

The man stands, shoulders unconsciously hunched forward, his glasses slipping down the bridge of his nose. He pushes them back up to the bony indent where years of wear have left a permanent trench both in the top of his nose and the sides of his head, just above his ears. His desk is littered with twigs, a jar of broken marbles, tiny windows, hand-made Bristol furniture, die cast metal furniture, jars filled with various grits of earth, thin strips of wood, cardboard, lengths of wire, teabags and a 4” high carved ship’s figurehead in the form of a weathered, wooden mermaid. In a matter of weeks, this miniature junkyard will assemble itself into carefully crafted interiors resembling an amalgam of a stage set, a Cornell Box and a Magritte dollhouse (had he ever played with one.)

As the interiors take shape, I become wary of making the scenes too linear and routinely line up my houses and shift elements around, taking something intended for this scene and putting it into that one. When everything has been arranged and the interiors are fleshed out, I arrange the little abodes again, in an order that makes narrative sense to me; then I shuffle the houses around until I’ve lost the thread.

This degree of “invited accident,” makes me uneasy at first; what if viewers are put off by the lack of clarity? Suppose instead of guiding people into a narrative journey, I’m simply putting out objects that interest no-one as there is no readily discernable “text” for them to follow? In any other environment, these concerns might have more weight, but I am quick to remind myself that this is Winship. I can think of no other

place on campus, or in Austin, where minds will be more open to the journey I am presenting.

By happy coincidence, I stumble upon an interview with *Swanquake* creators Gibson and Martelli. In the course of their talk with *Video Games and Art* contributor Grethe Mitchell, she relates her experience with narrative installation art:

At first I am nonplussed by these strange and lonely spaces without a story or goal. I am left alone to work it out without any help or direction—trying to make sense of it, to find the pattern that links it all together... Eventually I realize that—like most good art—it shakes up my viewpoint, it gets me asking questions...and the more I open up to the work and allow it to work on me—the more it acts as a catalyst to my inner concerns and questions. It becomes a portal, a way of opening doors to my own thoughts (161).

This open-ended exploration fascinates me, though it also presents it's share of frustrations in the creation of the installation. On the one hand, the installation format is helpful because it allows the performer autonomy in their trajectory through the narrative; they are not constrained to a theatrical format with a curtain time, a predetermined-length performance, etc. Additionally, it is important to me that the narrative evolves gradually—potentially not at all—and at the performer's discretion. Perhaps they notice one house by chance and it is several hours or even days before they notice a second, a third and so on.

In experiences like *Swanquake:House*, the performer is given no explicit instruction, no written text, merely an implicit invitation to explore. Any narrative that presents itself is therefore the invention of the performer—guided and conditioned by the design choices of the creator, true, but it rests with the performer to create their own story.

The major difference between an environment like *Swanquake* and an installation like *Diminuology* is the space occupied. The former is a virtual experience, while my own project takes place in conversation with a physical building. Rather than an explicit invitation to don a virtual reality headset, *Diminuology* presents itself quietly, surreptitiously, and in a manner that does not reveal its intentions upon the first encounter. The houses are arranged such that anyone walking a freely accessible path through the building might be confronted with one of these objects. At first glance, it's simply a lone, tiny house. Perhaps it's sitting on the floor, or perched on a doorframe. Or maybe it's dangling disconcertingly in mid air. Whatever its orientation, the house sits in the path of the performer, asking "What will *you* do with me?"

By moving away from any written instruction or signage, I hope to spark curiosity and above all, action in the performer. The discovery of one house will inevitably lead to another, and while not all of the nineteen structures are as confrontational as those in the main hallways on the first and second floors of the building, all of them are readily available to any performer set on discovering each of the locales. To spark this journey, I am tasked with two primary goals; first, to lure the performer into *touching* the house and second, to spur them into finding more.

The first of these challenges is—as I soon discover—tricky. People in Western culture seem to be programmed with A) "Don't touch what doesn't belong to you," B) "Don't touch anything that looks like art," and C) "Don't touch anything that looks delicate." In a setting described earlier as "institutional," designed to encourage orderly

behavior and reinforce power structures; it is exceedingly difficult to encourage people—non-verbally—to handle delicate-looking art objects that do not belong to them.

Making the houses public-proof is not an especially tall order; the houses are surprisingly hardy (though their hardiness comes at the cost of their manipulable interiors—I initially intended their small vignettes to be comprised of loose pieces the performer could arrange, rearrange and even carry from house to house. For obvious reasons, I decide against this almost immediately.) Getting people to handle them (for it is only on close inspection that one discovers the houses are boxes that open,) proves more challenging.

In order to make the boxes more accessible, I place several in high traffic areas, not on physical structures (model stands, pedestals, etc.) which would only reinforce their appearance as precious art objects not to be touched, but instead suspended in the air via near-invisible nylon thread. This accomplishes several of my goals simultaneously: first, it allows me to position each house directly under a light source which illuminates their interiors, giving passersby a glimpse that there is more to these than their exteriors; second—and I am not sure why this is the case, but I have found it to be so—suspending them in the air makes them somehow more inviting to the performer. Perhaps it is the human instinct to reach out and touch what we do not quite believe (from certain angles, the illusion of the floating house is quite unsettling,) or perhaps as the house is unsupported by any visible means, a performer is less wary of dropping it. Whatever the reason, I have seen people far more willing to reach out and touch the houses that seem to float than those that rest on solid surfaces. In any case, the levitating dollhouse trick seems to bolster the surrealistic nature of the experience.

Epilogue

She bursts into the room, backpack swinging from one arm, purse dangling from her elbow as she struggles to push the hair out of her flushed face; she's about 18 years old, an undergraduate, and she is flustered.

"I'm sorry I'm late—there was the creepiest little house floating in the hall and I just had to check it out."

She pulls out her phone and plays a video she took of the house, floating in the empty hall outside her classroom.

"What *is* it?" She asks, a touch of uneasiness in her voice.

"And I found another one around the corner and another one on the stairs... They're everywhere and they're freaking me out."

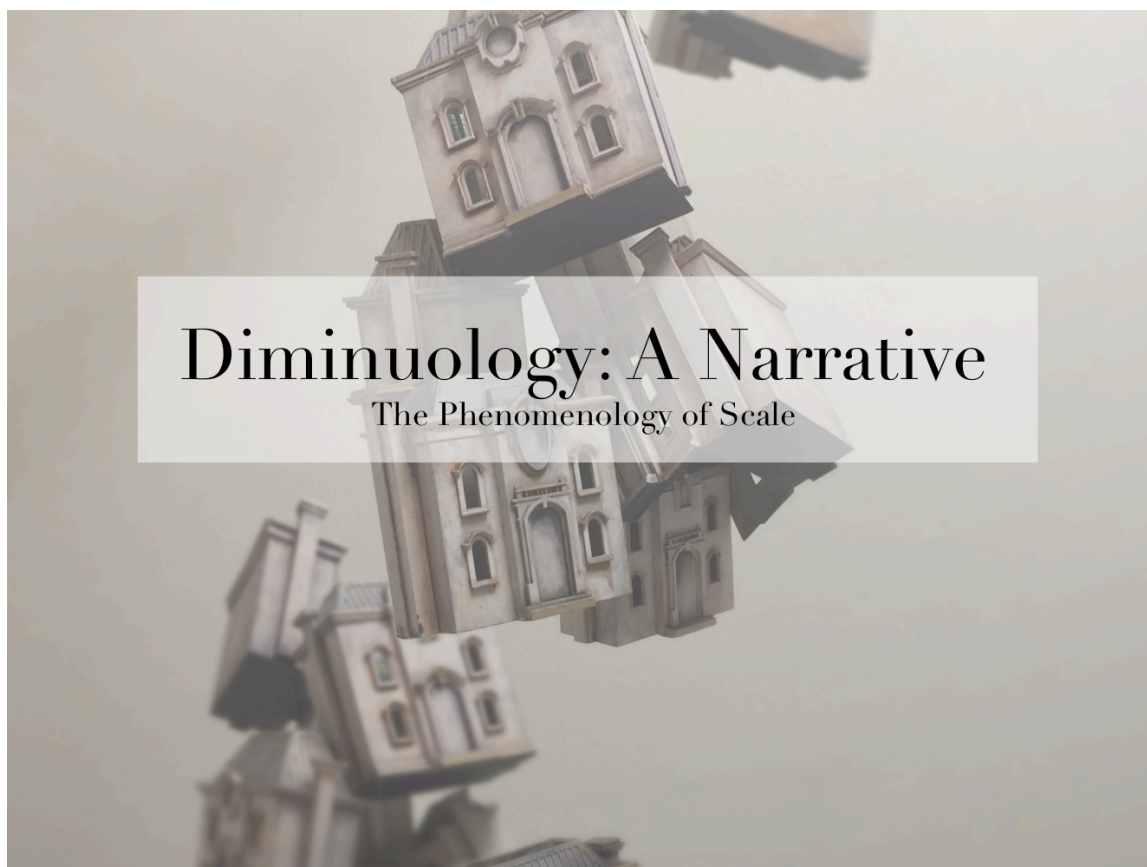
As only the design faculty and graduate students are familiar with the project, many people in the department know nothing of the purpose behind the houses nor of my involvement. Thus I enjoy the benefit of quietly observing and overhearing as gossip and questions fly. The above is just one of many exchanges I've overheard or had related to me. The reaction to the installation has been stronger than I anticipated, ranging from genuine uneasiness (I suppose to some it might feel a little Hitchcock-esque to be confronted with an ever-increasing number of tiny haunted houses appearing throughout the building, à la *The Birds*,) to sheer delight. People appear to address the houses with shyness, annoyance ("what is this thing and why is it in my way?"), possessiveness

(many in the department have taken an almost paternal, protective ownership over the little structures,) but above all, *curiosity*. It's been brought to my attention that Facebook has erupted with posts about the little houses as people share their experiences and reactions. I am not a member on Facebook, but I am pleased to know that people are doing *something* with the experience. What that is is, frankly, none of my business and of little interest to me but it is gratifying to know that they are reacting in a very real way.

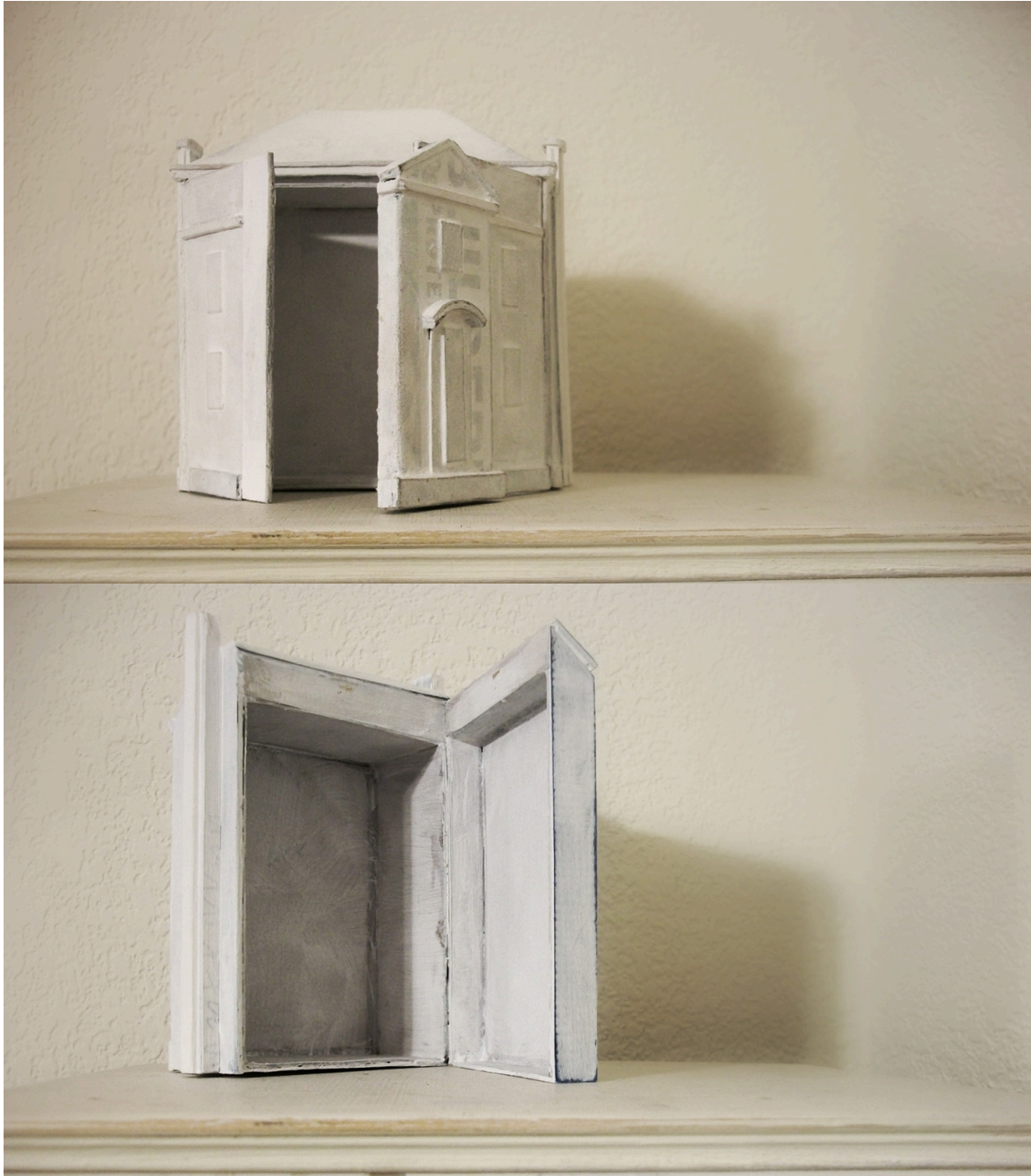
One group of students went so far as to develop a short performance piece to tell the story of one of the houses. The wordless performance moved through several locations within Winship, and with a few props and some creative lighting, the students managed to generate an intriguing, highly atmospheric narrative journey. It was really quite interesting, evocative and even powerful—as the designer of the house that inspired the piece, I could see how my object informed various aspects of the performance, but it was more interesting to me watching the viewers who were not familiar with the house that served as the starting point for the devised narrative.

In the end, this is precisely what I hoped to achieve; miniatures in conversation with spaces we take for granted, sparking dialogue and even collaboration in those that encounter the diminutive installations. By providing places through which people can experience the story in whatever manner comes naturally to them, I hope to have given them something that will “stick” longer than a traditional theatrical performance might.

Appendix A: Title Plate



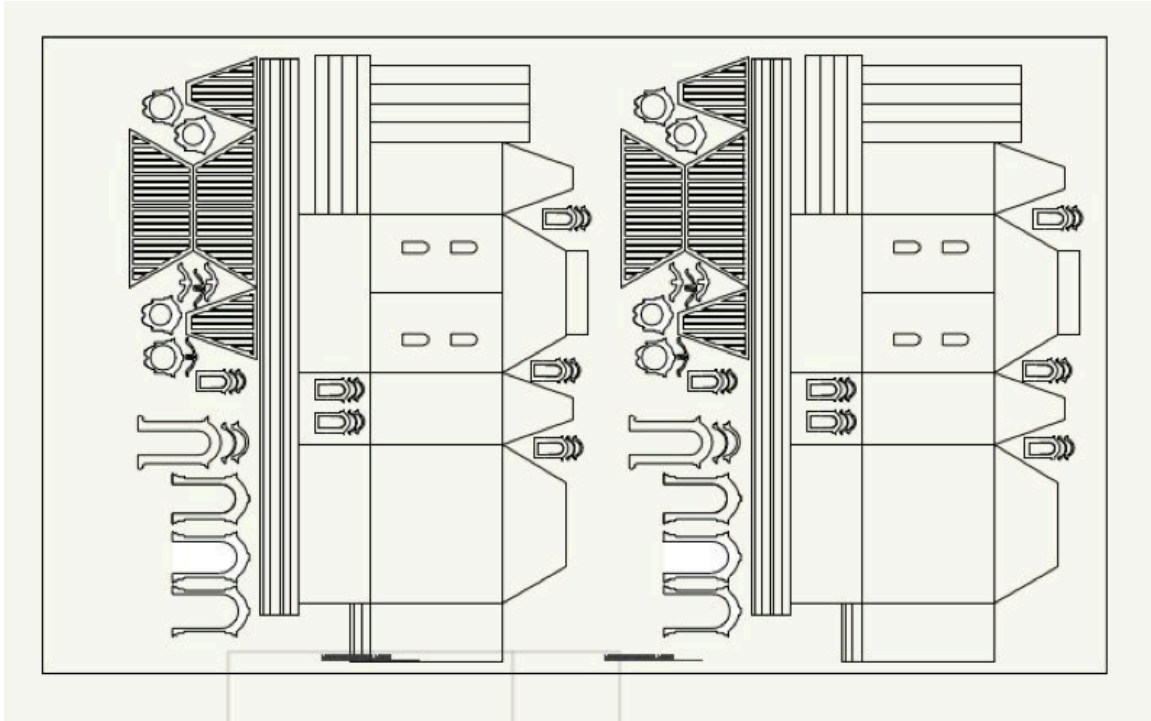
Appendix B: Early Maquettes



Appendix C: Sketch Model



Appendix D: Drafting Prepped for Laser Cutting



Appendix E: Assembled Unpainted Houses



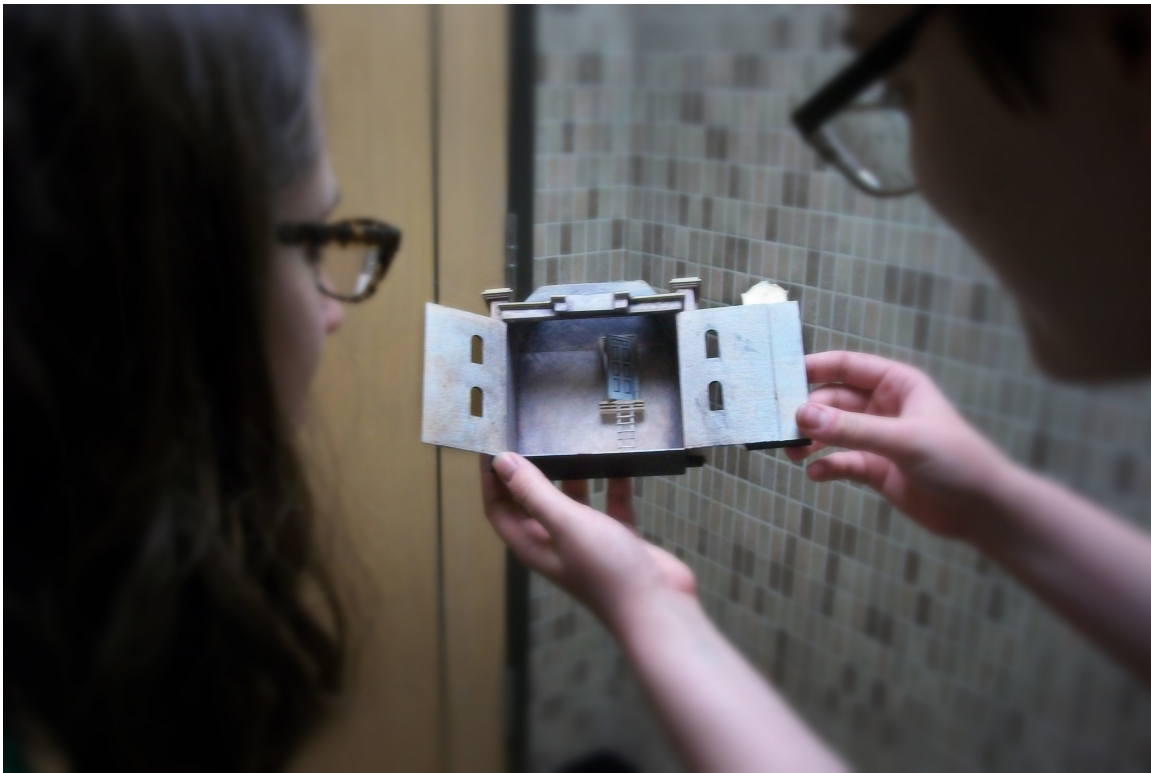
Appendix F: Rigging



Appendix G: Installation



Appendix H: Interaction



Appendix I: Painted Details







References

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Vita

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