

In the introduction of *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, author Norman R. Yetman provides exposition for a sociological discussion of the afore mentioned categorical descriptors pertaining to human interaction within and between societies. Yetman establishes parameters to work within by defining literally and through extrapolation what “ethnicity” is:

The word *ethnic* is derived from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning “people.” An ethnic group is socially defined on the basis of its cultural characteristics. Ethnicity, the sense of identification with and membership in a particular ethnic group, implies the existence of a distinct culture... in which people perceive themselves... to be bound together by a common origin, history, values, attitudes, and behaviors...¹

While Yetman continues on, setting up how ethnicity and race will play a significant role in the social stratification of United States, this definition provides a substantial foundation for the culmination of an ethnographic site study of slightly smaller proportions than that of America. For the past three months, starting in mid-January of 2012, I spent a great deal of time at a north Seattle neighborhood local watering hole called The Reservoir Bar and Grill, or more colloquially known as ‘The Res.’² While at The Res my goal was to immerse myself in the culture of the bar, discuss with bar patrons and staff the trends and overarching personality of the space and its inhabitants, and then relay these findings by means of written word, audio interviews, picture

¹ Norman R. Yetman, *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*. 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1991), 2.

² The abbreviation of The Reservoir Bar and Grill is most “commonly” represented as ‘The Rez’ with a ‘Z.’ I have no specific reason as to why my shorthand recognition of the bar has come to be spelled with an ‘S’ other than it, to me, logically seems like the best abbreviation and it has been what I have always called it.

galleries, and art video pieces all compiled and organized into one cohesive online blog.³ While the crux of the study was to present cogently the culture of The Res and not necessarily to prove any hypothesis wagered before observation began, reflecting back on the work done and the relationships made bears out some striking generalities that held up throughout my observational experiences. Ultimately the scope of the material gathered while on assignment is limited in nature and often based around interactions occurring between myself and one or more other people, but the self-reflexivity in this report is both purposeful and necessary; this project rests squarely on my shoulders and I carry the responsibility of presenting what I deem fit for knowing. The information is no doubt biased in that I editorially made the decision to construct it in to the portrayal of The Res, but it also comes from a thoughtful place; I strove to adhere to consistent fact gathering procedures, ethical means of interaction with individuals in the establishment and accurate representations of the observed culture. However, now having a body of work produced through this roughly described ethnographic process, conclusions from my observation of The Res can be drawn. Through my studies, I have found that the people of The Res identify as active members of the culture and that this relationship most likely stems from a unique comfort achieved through accommodation and environmental amenities.

One of the most profound findings of what The Res *is* was finding out what it *is not*. An opportunity for this binary comparison presented itself during a conversation I had with two bar-goers: Carla and Nicole. These women had previously frequented another Seattle bar known as the Seven Seas (now defunct) and were both very closely associated with the specific cultural aspects that pertained to what would be safe to call

³ “The Res, an ethnographic study,” last modified March 14, 2012, <http://kxbchid250.wordpress.com/>

their “stomping grounds.” Due to the closing of the business, Carla and Nicole sought near literal refuge in a new home, and landed upon The Res as their haven. Refuge is a slightly over-dramatic word for the situation, but perceived from their perspective, Carla and Nicole had established such a connection with the Seven Seas that its closing was in many ways a traumatic experience for them and others that they had come to know and build relationships with while there. They identified as ‘Seven Seas-ian’ and required a new homeland to fill the void left by their old one. The Res now presents itself not as just a bar but as a reflection of the people who go there, and as a safe environment where people feel they can properly be reflected. While Carla and Nicole may never feel that same connection as they did with the Seven Seas, The Res offers the opportunity to reestablish an all-important sense of being. Author Christian Norberg-Schulz offers insight on this relation by focusing on the notion of “dwelling,” saying that the term has come “to denote the total man-place relationship.” He goes on to say that “When a man dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to a certain environmental character... to *identify* himself with the environment... he has to know *how* he is in a certain place.”⁴ So the relationship is cyclical; the person defines the space, and the space defines the person. This relationship is most likely both spontaneous and evolutionary in nature. In order for a space to develop character, the development must occur over time and those who frequent the space must nurture it. But the culture will more closely relate to innate specificities of the culture of the sum of the individuals rather than a contrived effort to idealize an environment. People do not go to The Res because it is classically beautiful, but because it is aesthetically pleasing to them and

⁴ Christian Norberg-Schulz, “The Phenomenon of Place.” *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 423.

because it satisfies and falls in lines with the person's sensibilities. Those who go to Res are the providers of culture, and The Res subsequently houses the culture. Or, The Res houses culture and the people who go there provide it. The temporality of the process is not entirely important, nor is it definitive. The resultant, though, is a place where ethnic identity has developed into a unique 'Res-ian' culture and those who dwell there assume this ethnicity and wear it proudly. Those who seek newly required acceptance into another culture are able to relate to the culture of The Res and weigh this against their own previously established ethnic identity.

The Res is a bar, a food place, a watering hole, a gathering spot, an area to smoke (outside), somewhere to play video games or pool or shuffleboard. Its décor is divey. The bar feels both new and old. It may be profoundly poetic that the actual Maple Leaf Reservoir namesake that used to be across the street is no longer there, yet the bar still stands.⁵ The Res does not appeal to the aristocrats though. It has been described to me as "blue collar," and those who prefer to not have a stuffy, pretentious bar experience tend to feel comfortable here. Comfort plays an interesting role in this whole ethnographic exercise. Varying levels of comfort were needed in order to gain access to the information I wished to find, and comfort with me and my seeking-of-information was needed on behalf of the participants in order to provide access. Ethnographer Sarah Pink outlines the hazards of doing ethnography, specifically through use of a visual means, and draws attention to the inappropriateness of "using cameras and making images of informants."⁶ Indeed, this was made apparent to me after some slight altercations with

⁵ The Maple Leaf Reservoir is currently under construction and is being converted to a subterranean reservoir with a park and playfield to be built above it.

⁶ Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 43.

both patrons of The Res and management at The Res who often drew the most severe conclusions from my unsolicited picture taking or personal queries. These objections are understandable and represent the difficulties of studying culture, especially ones populated with people. But communication is king and as had been established through my visits to The Res and my descriptions of it above, comfort can be attained and substantial connections and understandings can be made while working with people as participants in a site study.

What remains one of the most unique aspects of The Res, and acts as an ultimate attest to its 'homeliness,' as in its overarching embodiment of a home to its patrons, is the reality that The Res is a literal home. The Res has a 2 bedroom apartment directly above the main bar area where two men pay an understandably low rent to live above a neighborhood pub. An unlikely home no doubt, as weekend nights often reach their peak around one-in-the-morning with jukebox blaring and all the commotion of a bar full of drunk and rowdy types. But this additional layer provides yet more explanation as to the feelings of comfort that are often used to describe The Res. Whether it is a conscious realization every time walking through the front doors of The Res or, more likely, an ingrained sense of domestication and familiarity, The Res acts as a homelike place not only to those who actually live there above it, but also to those who frequent it often. There is a certain level of expectation when being at the Res that often is seen when considering ones relation to his or her own home. Things are where one expects them to be, the people or characters that make up the space can be counted on as being there or not with a decent amount of certainty, and the dependability one develops with recurrent inhabitation persists into the overall attitude towards the place. There is an "ease of use"

or efficiency mentality that seems to stem from these places that we frequent often, and it certainly makes sense why; those who go to The Res can count on a bartender knowing what their drink is, or they can count on seeing familiar faces and having amicable conversations. The documentary *One Below the Queen: Full Version* offers a relatable perspective with those who live above The Res and those who frequent it. Residents of The Alexandra and Ainsworth Estate (a now historic community housing building in England) describe the uniqueness of their living situation saying “you’re so close to people you have to get [along] with them, and also you do get [along] with them because you are so close... it forces you to understand things more.” Another interviewee in the documentary goes on to comment that “I certainly can hear my neighbor, and my neighbor can hear me... we, to some degree, start participating in each other’s lives.” This participation is inevitable at The Res and to cite one more line from the film, “you are explaining the nature of the building on its architecture.”⁷ The nature of The Res can thus be explained as a product of what it really is: a home for some that also exudes a homelike manner.

In accompaniment with the above report is an art-piece photo collage created to stand as a symbiotic representation of the aesthetic, material, and environmental aspects of The Res and the people who go there. The collage was created by surveying 21 people at The Res to view a photo slideshow of 132 pictures of things in and around The Res, with each picture being labeled by a unique number. The prompt given to each participant was to “Circle the numbers of pictures that either you identify as representative of The Res or that you feel are significant to your relationship to The Res.” The results were tallied, assigning a 1-point value to each circled number and a

⁷ digital:works. (2011) *One Below the Queen: Full Version* [Film]. London.

proportional ratio value was then given to each picture by dividing the total number of times it was circled by the total number of participants. This value was then used to rescale the corresponding picture, producing a wide spectrum of different sized pictures based on the frequency of how often the picture was selected. The nature of this survey was in no way scientific or definitive, but rather it utilizes the collective knowledge and history of people of The Res in order to create a work that highlights the general aesthetic attributes that are associated with the space. The variety of the kinds of pictures range from iconic images of The Res to general gathering areas to possible collective appreciations for certain specific area aspects. While some surveys were taken two or more at a time, each participant filled out his or her own survey card and was thus represented as an individual. The inherent small sample size again points to the inability for this photo collage to signify anything predictive. The work instead stands as crowd-sourced effort to give multiple voices a say in what the substantive aspects of The Res in fact actually are. While the crop of pictures themselves are limited in scope and can never provide an all-encompassing perspective of The Res, they do represent my own views of what ought to be considered in representing The Res and provide a distinctive view into the visual culture of the space.

What has resulted from this ethnographic experience has been a realization of what it means to be a part of a place. In many ways, this feeling is ubiquitous. We often feel familiar comfort in our homes, our hometowns, a frequented vacation spot, our work environments, etc. In his *The Great Good Place*, author Ray Oldenberg discusses this phenomenon of desire to seek out extra-domestic spaces. He develops the notion of a “third place,” where first place is home, second place is work, and the

third place is some other environment where socialization occurs and “the core settings of informal public life” are established.⁸ The truly fascinating aspect of The Res is that it is in fact all three places; first place for the people who live above the bar, second place for those who work there, third place for those who frequent the bar. The three places mix and come together with one another, building a bond that is unique and strong. Oldenberg describes the unique relationship that occurs between person and third place: “If the individual has a third place, the place also ‘has him.’”⁹ This coexisting relationship plainly appears in all of the relationships observed at The Res. While these links may be subconscious attachments to the bar, literal necessities to go to the bar (because of work or home living purposes) or conscious efforts to manufacture or recreate specific environment-self associations, The Res stands as significant first, second, and third place for all who go there.

⁸ Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1999), 16.

⁹ *Ibid.* 39.

Bibliography

digital:works. *One Below the Queen: Full Version* [Film]. London, 2011.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian. "The Phenomenon of Place." *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1999.

Pink, Sarah. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: Sage Publications, 2007.

Yetman, Norman R. *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1991.