

A GREEN LOOP

Introduction: Standing at the top of
the steps of Green Hall

Hello. Maybe you know this voice, have heard it recently, not so recently, or maybe you haven't heard it all before. I'll be guiding you on A GREEN LOOP today. Take a second to be present, look around you, look at Chapel street from these steps. What do you see? I wonder what's between our perspectives. Does my "now" look like yours?

"Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them." Merlau-Ponty wrote that. What's echoing within you? Let's bring that with us today on this walk.

Alright, let's keep moving. Let's walk down the steps and head to our right.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS DOWN GREEN HALL STAIRS TO CHAPEL STREET.

Moving down the steps of Green Hall
and along the short wall

Let's walk along the wall and stop at the telephone poll at the left. Look at the wall engraving here. Notice the word "GREEN." There is a time of day, maybe time of year, that when the sunlight hits the building across the street just right, it casts a greenish reflection of light right on the word "GREEN" carved into the stone here.

At the “GREEN” engraving

Run your fingers along the engraving. What does green feel like? What do you imagine when you’re touching a color?

Our friend Merlau-Ponty declared, “Color is the “place where our brain and the universe meet ... All flesh, and even that of the world, radiates beyond itself ... it is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand.”

Alright let’s keep going. We’ve got a long way to go today. We’re gonna walk east on Chapel Street towards the New Haven Green. Let’s go!

Walking to Chapel Street and York Street

As we’re walking around, take a look around you. What do you notice? Look over at the cafe’s outdoor seating here on the right. As we move forward up here on the left outside of the cafe, let’s stop by the metal bike rack. Look towards the edge on the far side. Look at the little black symbol of the bike. It’s funny, there’s somehow always a distance between a thing and a representation of a thing. This distance is like a proposition for perception of what is and what might be.

Let’s look towards the corner now. Notice the planters. Look at the tiling on the center of them and the symbol

of the tree. Now look at the plants within them. Always a distance between a thing and a representation of a thing, of what is and what might be.

Walking from Chapel and York Street
to alley with “Details” sign

Alright, let’s cross the street and keep walking down Chapel street towards the Green. Let’s continue down this street, past High Street, until we get to a small alley just past the glowing green street sign of the Union League Cafe on the right. We’ll stop just past there on the right.

Oh look, here’s the Yale Rep on the right. It sounds like someone is practicing their vocal exercises inside.

SFX: SINGER PRACTICING VOCAL EXERCISES.

Beautiful, right?

Like the bike and the tree behind us, signage is all around us. It’s one of the meeting points between graphic design and public spaces. The symbols like the bike and the tree are only a few of many in our visual landscape. Designing these symbols involves a constant process of filtering, editing, translating, and obscuring of details away from the formal representation of something until it reaches the symbol as it becomes. This process is embedded in all the signs you’re passing, typographic or symbolic or both.

A friend recounted to me once that he heard the concept of history described as an “obsessive smoothening of seams.” But the seams are all around us if we look carefully. As we pass High Street, just across the street on our left is a building with two large sculptures outside. This was the first home of the Yale School of Fine Arts, first opened to students in 1869. But we’ll return to that later ...

Back to the immediate path, there’s a sea of seams beneath your feet as you’re walking, interconnecting each step from the past step behind you. Are you getting closer to the green neon sign of the Union League Cafe? When you pass the sign, just to the right is a small alley. Take your time to walk into the alley and sit on one of the benches there if you can.

Entering the alley and looking at
the “Details” sign

Once you’re inside of the alley or sitting on one of the benches, turn to the right and look at the last sign inside the alley across from you. The word ‘details’ jumps out of the street theater. Sometimes the pragmatism of a sign can be taken for granted for its poetic potential. Right below the word details is an arrow, pointing to the theater of the space below. Walk up towards the sign and have a look at the back.

The back of this sign is like a blank canvas waiting to be painted on. It allows us to draw the details from our own

experiences onto it. What do you see here? What traces would you leave for someone else? Would you draw an arrow back out to the street, like the opposite side of the sign? Would you draw that bicycle we saw earlier?

This uncovered surface is an unintentional invitation, a gap for you to look back out to the street and focus your attention on what you see around you.

Take a moment on one of these benches. Take a moment to think about what you’re seeing. Is it pointing to your steps earlier into this alley? Is it pointing to the cars passing by?

Leaving the “Details” sign and
walking towards the Green

Ok, let’s get up and moving again, there is still so much to see! Let’s walk out of the alley and turn right, walking towards the New Haven Green.

Take your time to approach the crosswalk and walk to the corner entrance of the Green.

As you move towards the corner, notice the grid of small gray concrete squares arranged towards the entrance. In the grid, one larger stone panel stands out, unaligned, just at the edge of where the bricks meet the asphalt pathways of the Green. When you get to that panel, stop there and have a look at the words inscribed in it.

The gap between us and a bicycle, like the one we encountered earlier, is not so far away from us it appears. Here on this panel we are at the beginning again, at the “Dawn of Cycling.” Just a few years prior to the Yale School of Fine Arts opening down Chapel Street, a young man named Pierre Lallement left his native France bound America and settled in Connecticut, about 12 miles west of where we are now. Within a year, Lallement rode his new invention east here to the New Haven Green and introduced the American public to cycling. Like the gears of a cassette turning tape to emit sound and signal, the gears and chain of Lallement’s bicycle looped to open up the possibility of movement for a new public. The following November, Lallement was awarded a US patent for the first complete plans for a bicycle.

Tape gears must spin to emit sound. The gears of Lallement’s cycle turn to keep the wheels spinning. Let’s keep moving into the New Haven Green.

SFX: BICYCLE MOVING BY.

Walk slowly down the path to the right of the upright vertical sign, which declares in small letters, “Please enjoy this beautiful historic space.” Aside from the obvious color of the grass, I wonder why it’s called the Green ...

“Free Bobby, Free Ericka”

Looking across the Green, there is a vast and bountiful space. The Green, while looking quite open, is full of memories from the past. A person sits on the bench. A group of musicians play outside of one of the churches. And, about a 100 years after the School of Fine Arts opens and Lallement’s bicycle arrives, a sea of students and young people gather around the Green to protest.

SFX: PROTEST CHANTS TO FREE BOBBY SEALE AND ERICKA HUGGINS
OF THE “NEW HAVEN NINE”, CA. 1970.

This sea of young people you hear gathered on May Day in 1970 to protest the prosecution of the New Haven Nine: members of the Black Panther Party including co-founder Bobby Seale and New Haven Chapter founder Ericka Huggins. The members were on trial stemming from murder charges in the previous year. Students, professors, and people from the university and elsewhere came and organized to show their support for these individuals who were key targets of the unethical and unjust COINTELPRO program run by the FBI at the time.

Following the protests and in the ensuing months, the juries were deadlocked. The charges laid against Seale and Huggins were eventually dismissed by the case’s judge the next year in a rare acknowledgment of the impossibility of selecting a jury without bias.

I first came to learn about these events through a documentary on May Day 1970 shared in a class of mine at the School of Art. But as with history, my understanding of these events is limited to what I know, reading traces of text, seeing images echo from the past to now—fragments of a complete understanding of the atrocities against people seeking liberation. And so, on this walk, we must continue to move between the visible and the hidden.

Walking further east into the Green

Ok, keep walking down this path towards the right and head to the center walkway towards the east side of the New Haven Green. There, we're going to cross the street and head straight for the monument there in the center.

As Judith Butler once declared, "When bodies gather as they do to express their indignation and to enact their plural existence in public space, they are also making broader demands; they are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are exercising a right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life."

Still walking down the path, imagine the bodies of the young people chanting on either side of you, filling this space. Can you hear that sound emanating from the past to now? From my voice to the day you took this walk? All of those memories in this park that continue to echo?

Approaching the center monument
and walking around it

Look up ahead of you at this monument, this flagpole, this stone carved basin around the circular pathway of the Green. Walk around the circular monument to the left until you see a green dot on the ground on the opposite side. Stand on the green dot and look back at the monument and it's plaque.

Why is it that some memories are carved into stone, granite, marble, and others just exist in our minds? Imagine this park full of monuments, one for each of the people whose voices you just heard. What would that look like? Instead, most of us rely on our memories, our ordinary monuments.

Looking at the bronze plaque that's attached to the basin of this monument, those first three words call out ... "In Grateful Memory." The importance of remembering, the importance of not forgetting, the importance of not forgetting, the importance of collapsing that gap.

Looking towards Bennett Memorial Fountain
and the bus stop

Let's look away from this central monument and look towards the corner of Church and Chapel Street. Look towards the smaller monument over at the southeast corner. Now that we are looking at the Bennett Memorial

Fountain, maybe we can look just over to the right at the bus stop that extends along the rest of the block. There's something wonderful happening here. We see permanence and impermanence at the same time, at the same juncture. As the memories that are carved in stone sit permanently at the corner with Bennett, people come and go from the bus stop, every hour, every day, and every year.

The bus stop is an ordinary monument in a way. People show up, they get off, they come, they go. Behind them, the shops rotate in and out.

Walking towards Bennett Memorial Fountain
and Chapel and Church Street

Alright, let's walk towards the Bennett Fountain and stand right by it at the corner.

Walking towards the fountain, you might notice this lion's head in its small alcove at its base. What's this animal that is looking at us doing here?

Oh look! A tour, maybe we can jump in for a second ...

SFX: PUBLIC ART TOUR TALKING ABOUT BENNETT MEMORIAL
FOUNTAIN, DISCUSSING ITS HISTORY AND USE.

Walking back down Chapel Street
towards Green Hall

Alright, it's time to leave the Bennett Fountain. You see that gravel path to the right that extends behind the bus stop, back towards Green Hall? Let's walk in that direction.

Walking along the bus stop, imagine the monuments for each of the people coming and going here. How could a monument embrace ephemerality rather than permanence? What would that look like?

Walking back towards Green Hall, at each crosswalk, occasionally we hear echoes that line up with one another.

These hum creates a line made of sound to walk along leading us back towards our destination where we started.

SFX: CROSSWALK HUMS.

Walking alongside the fence to the Green here, listen carefully. We can hear those musicians outside the church playing, echoing through time.

SFX: DRUM CIRCLE AND PEOPLE SINGING OUTSIDE
THE CHURCH ON THE GREEN.

Nearing Chapel Street and College Street

As we near the corner of Chapel Street and College Street, back near the entrance of the Green, look at the metal pole on the left hand side of the sidewalk. Look over to the two green signs on them. Now look at the bicycle.

Remember Lalllement's bicycle that stands just 20 feet to the right of here. Again, the gap in representation and time and space is not so large.

Ok, let's keep moving towards Green Hall. Stay on the north side of the street and keep walking in that direction.

Walking on Chapel Street between
College and High Street

As we start walking back closer and closer to Green Hall where we started, take a look at these signs on the left of the sidewalk. Notice on the lowest sign the small symbol of the person touching the kiosk. It's the parking meter just behind the sign.

Parking meter: can networks see G-R-E-E-N?

As we keep walking towards the building with the two sculptures outside of it, stop just before it and walk up to the upright parking meter kiosk on the left. It's odd to be able to use a keyboard just below a screen like this just out here on the street. A bit like moving your desk outside. Think about the color green that you saw earlier as you ran your fingers through the engraving on the wall outside of Green Hall. How does a network visualize a color that is rendered in bytes of data? What color does it imagine green as if it only understands it as information? Can this network interpret this color at all? Press the start button to boot up the process. Now type in G-R-E-E-N and hit the green

checkmark button in the lower right corner of the keyboard.

SFX: BEEPS ON THE PARKING METER KIOSK KEYBOARD
TYPING IN G-R-E-E-N.

You've given something for the machine to contemplate.

Louise Nevelson sculpture and Street Hall

Let's turn around and look at the sculpture behind us. Outside of the Yale School of Fine Arts, now Street Hall, stands a sculpture by the artist Louise Nevelson. Around 1970, about the same time those young people were gathering in the Green just down Chapel Street to protest, Nevelson was completing her sculpture.

Turn your attention towards the ground just to the left of the sculpture to the plaque raising out of the ground. This piece is called "Atmosphere and Environment XI." Nevelson's piece speaks to the spaces we have moved through on this walk and move around in New Haven. Like the weathering of its pieces, the sculpture contains traces of the past and perhaps hints towards the future.

What I find amazing about this sculpture is that it is built entirely from a framework of gaps. It uses the distance between things to form a larger whole. In fact, when you walk around the sculpture from different vantage points, the shapes within the frames appear to complete each other to form a whole, collapsing into one.

SFX: BICYCLE ROLLING BY.

Nevelson Sculpture to Green Hall,
past the Art Gallery

Ok, let's keep walking back towards Green Hall on the northern side of the street here, past the University Art Gallery.

As we walk past the gallery, notice the planter symbols again. Now look over at these other signs which say "Keep New Haven Green." Again, the poetic potential of language and atmosphere at work together.

Nearing Chapel Street and York Street

As we near York Street, look across the gap of the street to the other side. Like the echoes of your footsteps from earlier and like Nevelson's sculpture, these gaps are beginning to complete a whole for us.

SFX: SINGER CONTINUING TO PRACTICE VOCAL EXERCISES.

Let's cross York and Chapel street and walk back towards Green Hall on the side of the street we began this walk on. We're almost there.

As we pass the cafe again, look at the symbol of the small black bicycle from earlier. Does it look any different to you now after the distance you've walked?" Can you imagine it's wheels spinning in the still symbol?

Turning left into the alley next
to Green Hall

How many times when you walk towards Green Hall from this direction do you turn to the left just before the steps where we started? Let's do that today.

Turn left and continue walking alongside the building. When you reach the steps, walk down them. What an incredible space! Look towards these two buildings where they almost meet.

Walking into the apex between both
buildings and looking up

Walk as far into the corner as you can and come to a standstill where it's comfortable for you.

When you come to a stop, take a second to just look up. This short distance between the buildings is remarkable—the way they inch towards one another.

They appear as if they are about to hug, converge, but then they stop, leaving space between each other. It's like a naturally occurring sculpture; one unintended but yet present, framing the sky and light as a sliver of space and time right before us.

Conclusion

This concludes A GREEN LOOP. Please take your time to stay or leave. As you walk back towards Chapel Street, I'd like to invite you to consider something. When you get there back to the street, what echoes do you hear? What gaps do you see?

A GREEN LOOP is a 33-minute guided sound walk exploring the gaps in symbolic representation in graphic design, the distance between memories and the present, and the ephemeral around sculptural permanence. The walk loops between the steps of Green Hall to the New Haven Green and back again.

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