Defining Acts

TAKING ACTION

A politically rooted act is best described as a moment of TAKING ACTION. Politics literally means *the* things concerning the polis as members of a society, a community, or a city'. Taking action is becoming political, which Bruno Latour understands as a contribution to a so called Dingpolitik. „An object oriented manner of action that aims to multiply occasions to agree, to compose, to assemble and to share. It is action that MAKES THINGS PUBLIC."

REHEARSED ACT

Describes a method an actor derives from theater expertise, such as set-objects, stage effects and masquerade to enhance his appearance in public.

Telephone Deal,
Kicking White Crosses,
Attracting Customers by Knocking on the Shop Window

Acting: Taking Action

Defining Acts

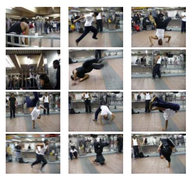
ACTIVITY / PLAYING

The Act can be rooted in a rather spontaneous play, typically a child's play.
A spontaneous play is BEING ACTIVE in Hannah Arendt's terms. „Only through action we can be distinct as humans, while human plurality is the precondition for public life."

IRRATIONAL GESTURE

The Act is composed by gestures, which are a MANNER OF BODILY MOVEMENT. Defined by phenomenologist V. Flusser, a gesture is an expression of intention that is „a movement of the body or of a with it connected tool, for which there is no scientific explanation."Gestures make us unique in our action, they even become characteristic. Researching gestures of irrational origin was explored in art over the past century, starting with DADA that even originated in improvised acts on a stage. Irrationality accomplishes to raise curriosity, while breaking expectations.

M. Duchamps Nude, descending a stair, 1912



B-Boys at a Metro Station

Acting: Activity/Playing

Defining Acts

MISBEHAVIOR

The Act can be a form of misbehavior, which means we notice the act because there is a rapture from familiar everyday patterns.
Philosopher Foucault stated about behavior that „a real and effective incorporation of power was necessary in the sense that power had to gain access to the bodies of the individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behavior." He concluded that the everyday routine is what an individual has to free himself from. To misbehave is a first step to disobey a dominating, incorporated system, making it an important method to reflect on the surrounding.
Acts of misbehavior accomplish provocation, annoyance and often even a reaction from the audience.
THEY DISTURB EVERYDAY ROUTINE.

Old Pervert, Queens

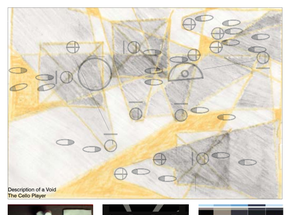
Acting: Misbehavior

Tracing Acts

PRESENT AUDIENCE/ SPATIAL MANIPULATION OF ACTS

A dynamic audience consists of people, e.g. passers-by that happen to be in the same space at the moment an act occures. Since my research was limited to the public realm following any kind of path through the city, including the network of public transport, there was an overwhealming presence of citizen movement.

Thanks to this density of dynamic audience, I discovered an indirect mapping technique. For instance I traced the reactions, interactions, and changes in behavior or movement an act inflicted (visibly) to its dynamic audience. This way, an act manipulated a space without necessarily needing physical means of manipulation, and the manipulation could be read by mapping the audience. For example the audience around a musician does not primarily react to the person or the instrument, but to the music.



Description of a Void
The Cello Player

"No-Dance" with Drums
A girl improvised on a wooden plate rhythms. A group of boys answered her with drums. The girl then responded to rhythms she which then respond to. A fair amount of people passing had stopped to watch, blocking passage for yet others. Even though they were simply enjoying themselves, everybody rhythms and moves.

Audience: Spatial Manipulation

Defining Acts

AUDIENCE, PSYCOLOGICAL MANIPULATION

In his book Propaganda (1928), Bernays argued that the manipulation of public opinion was a necessary part of democracy:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ...We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society. ...In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons...who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the strings which control the public mind.

Bernays was not merely paid by corporations to persuade people to accept an idea or commodity. The NYC based co-father of Public Relations (a synonym for Propaganda) was the creator of events that dramatized new concepts and perceptions, aimed to influence the actions of leaders and groups in society.
His idea of engineering consent (the acceptance by an everyday person of ideas being fed to him by PR campains) was:

If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The recent practice of propaganda (Nazis) has proved that it is possible.

Bernays argued that the scientific manipulation of public opinion was necessary to overcome chaos and conflict in society. For economic benefit, he lured people into constant mass-consumption using leaders to give examples. By feeding the society's wishes and impulses, the individual lost his own knowledge about true needs.
Especially the members of the Frankfurter Schule began to critizise the resulting society, having witnessed both Nazi propaganda and the public relations guided US-american society of common consent after WWII.

Audience: Psycological Manipulation

New York „is a city that gives artists a home without offering them a subject. This is partly because New York's unique contribution to the world's art was abstract. [...] Levitt's supremacy as a photographer of this island resides on a simple, unpretentious, never-quite-articulated organizing insight: New York is an improvised city, and the people in it live improvised lives. Where her God, Cartier-Bresson, took pictures of Parisians who show off and settle in, her New Yorkers dress up and act out. [...] This theatricality is rarely particularly high-hearted or even joyful. It is a function of need as much as desire. This street theater, she shows, is naturally disjointed; we never quite see qualells, or battles, or pitched fights, or even riots or robbery. What we see are small disquieting pantomimes that point to something else that will happen out of frame: fragments of a play whose first and last acts are elsewhere."
Adam Gopnik, Dec. 2002
Foreword to Helen Levitt *Here and There* (Powerhouse Books, New York, 2003)

Left Side: Photographs from Helen Levitt, capturing life in the city.
Right Side: Movies taken on the Field Trip to New York, capturing everyday acts in the public realm.

Helen Levitt: Interpretation of NYC as a Stage

Tracing Acts

MAPPING ACTS AND ABSTRACT DRAWINGS

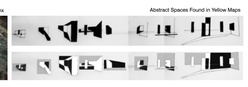
Stage and object are material, they can be analysed objectively. The act on the contrary is immaterial, it takes place sequentially, but leaving no traces in spaces. As Duchamps wrote in respect to *his Nude, descending a stair*: "There may perhaps be a flow of movement, but there is no flow of perception." In New York, I filmed an act, went to the stage where the event had taken place and tried to trace the choreography of these acts. I litterally had to repeat the manner of bodily movement of each actor, to be able to trace their positions, orientations in space. The entire procedure to try to capture with my body their movement and to trace it from there, was virtually impossible. I hence had to abstract the tracing of movements to a few, essential gestures. The manner of bodily movement is absolutely unique for each person, only the gestures can be immitated.

In martial arts the only way to learn fighting techniques is to imitate a persons' sequence of movements and to practices the movements inbetween the gestures. There are so many little details in a singular gesture within the sequence that any description with words would fail to transmit everything of something so simple. To describe the movement of a person only using three stairs in one picture, Duchamp created a painting full of abstractions, where he managed nevertheless to capture the movement in its distilled form. Picasso abstracted in his paintings of bullfights moments that start to retell the fight when put in sequence. He also drew plenty of drawings with several perspectives in one painting, not interested in movements of acts, but phenomenological portraits of a person or a thing.

It is really difficult to capture movement with anything different than a human body. The puppet theater for instance imitates the human with the dolls on such a perfect way that the dolls gestures start to communicate the same way, we can communicate with gestures. Therefore the transition from act to map was certainly one of the biggest challenges. The abstract drawings and models I produced from the 'yellow maps' were a long phase of experimentation with imagination and inspiration that finally evolved to a number of different architectonical ideas. One deals with manipulation and parasiting (Public Parasite), one with the disconnected sequence of acts (Description of a Void) and the last one creates a sequence of spaces from the essence of an act (Folds of a Third Skin). These three ideas become the foundation for my design.

Traces on Original Stage in the Bronx

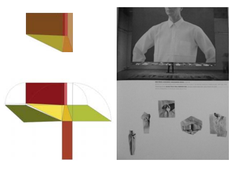
Abstract Spaces Found in Yellow Maps



Mapping and Abstract Drawings

Folding Spaces

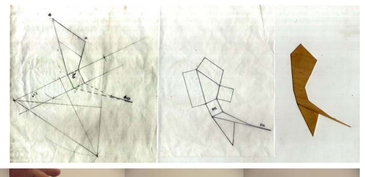
During first attempts to design with abstract spaces found in my Yellow Maps, I discovered spaces without obvious scale from unfolding and refolding in different manners the abstract notation. This method did not lead to a design, because the spaces were entities, more like objects rather than spaces, but the method was used later to fold the notations of the act traced in chalk.
Right Side: Found Space in a Yellow Map and its Folding.
Left Side: Models in Architecture Practice, for example Diller, Scofidio and Renfro were experiencing with folds from abstract materials.



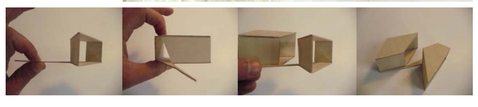
Folding Spaces

Chalk Traces

One of the encountered acts in the Bronx I traced on the stage itself, by re-acting the movement of the actor. The chalk traces were analyzed in the Notation of the Act traces and separated into positions, movement geometry, orientations and combined to a sequence.

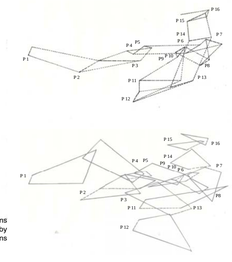


Right Side: Geometrial Construction of P13, indicating missing sides to get an enclosed space from the field, contour of unfolded P13.
Lower Side: Discovering the Space created by the P13 fold inside and in connection with the sequentially next fold, P14, the in-between space.

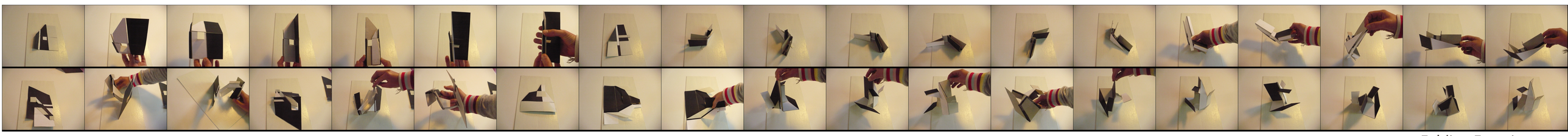


Notation of an Act

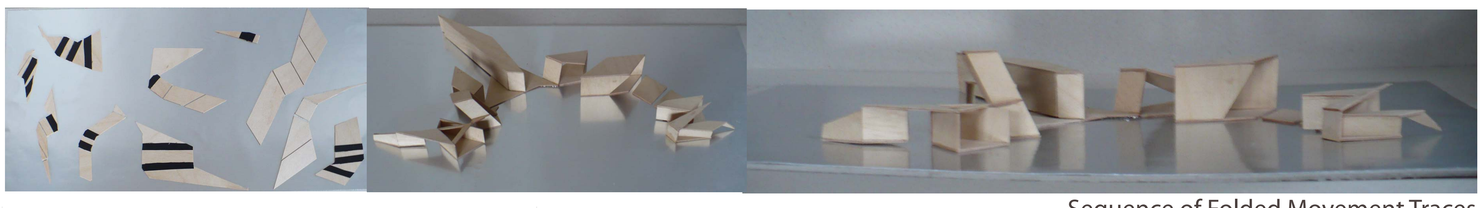
Folding a spatial notation of an act into a sequence of spaces means in my case that I have a series of positions, a geometry defined by the dimensions of an actors movement, and a series of orientations within space and in relation to the act's audience.



Tracing Acts



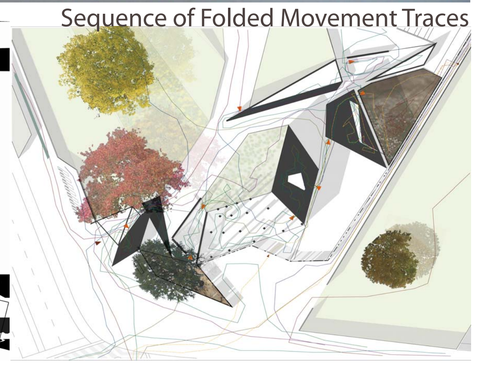
Folding Experiments



Sequence of Folded Movement Traces

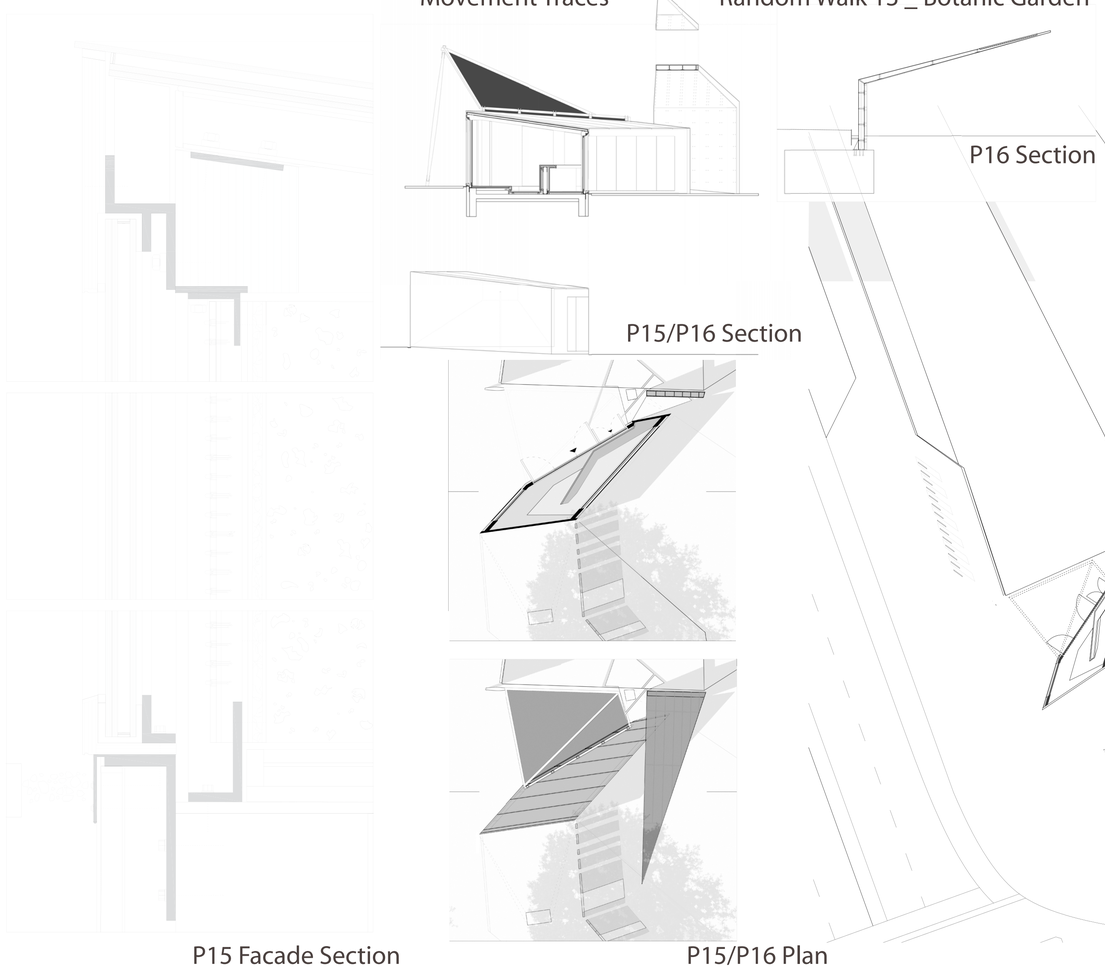
Movement Traces

Random Walk 13 _ Botanic Garden



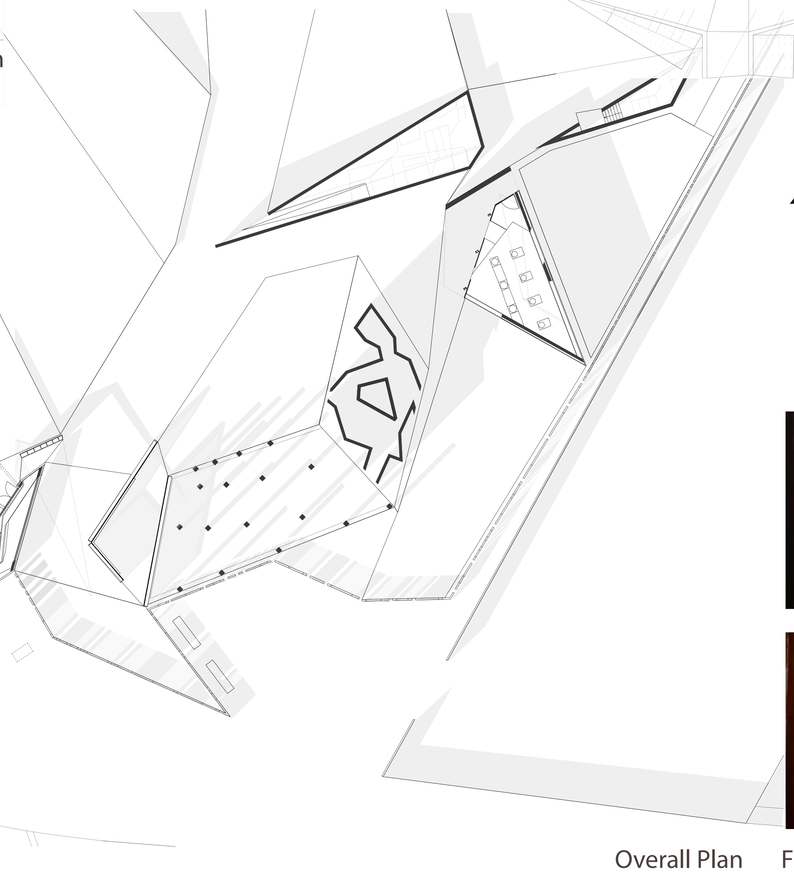
Collage Overall Plan

Collage P12 Bonsai-Tea House

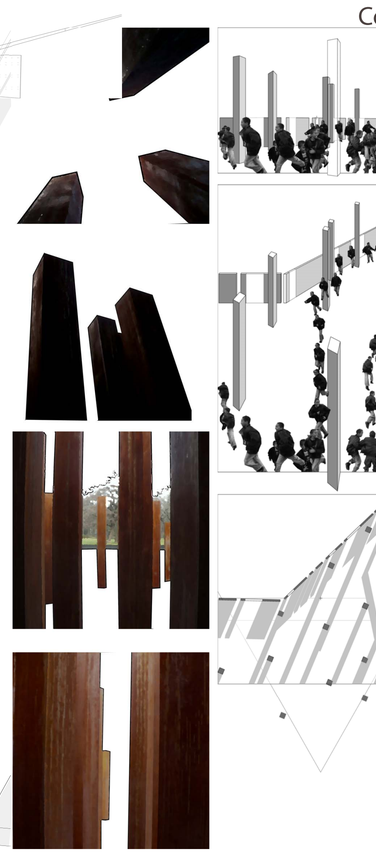


P15 Facade Section

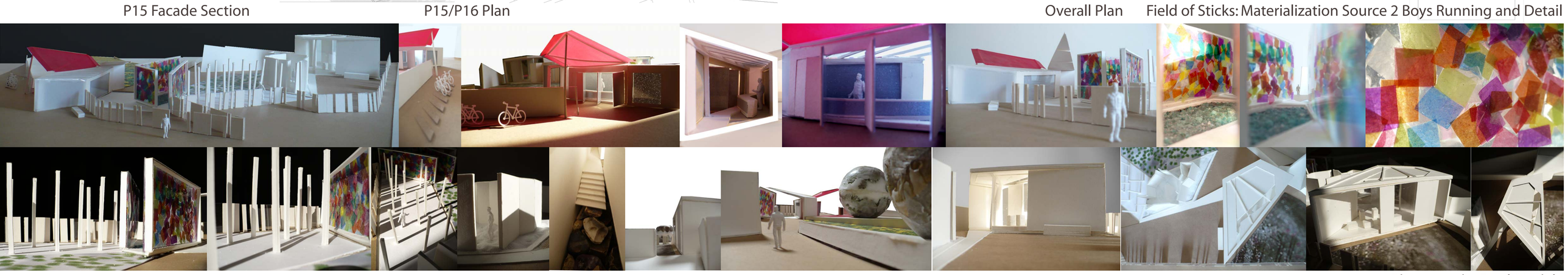
P15/P16 Plan



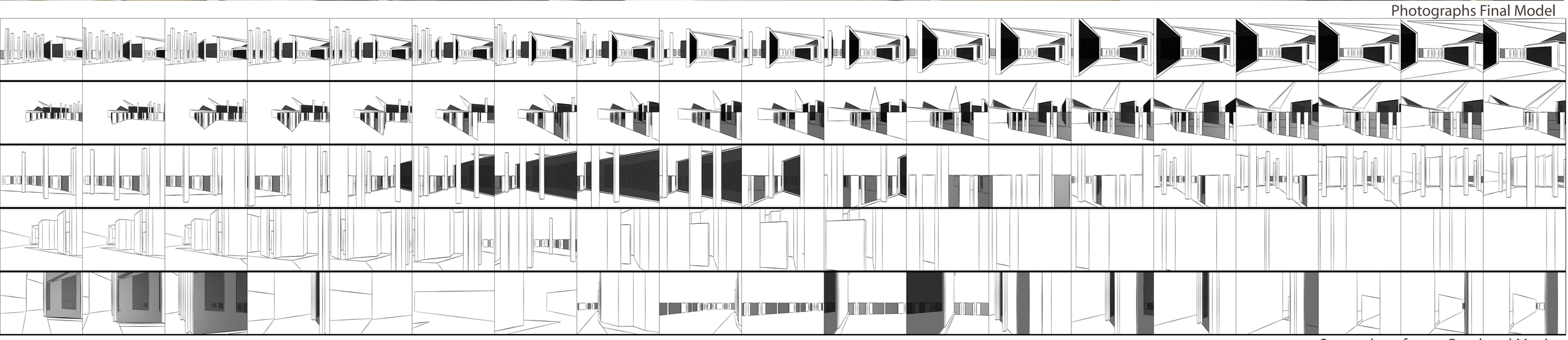
Overall Plan



Field of Sticks: Materialization Source 2 Boys Running and Detail



Photographs Final Model



Screenshots from a Rendered Movie

Border Conditions Folded Skins, Public Parasites and the Description of Spatial Voids

An Architectural Project based on Experimental Abstraction and Traces of Randomly Encountered Public Acts in New York City

Graduation Project Emma Kaul Mentors O. Rommens M. Schoonderbeek F. Hoekstra 08.December 2008