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francisco besa **misencounters**

misencounters signs and gestures

a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
masters of fine arts in design, visual communications at
virginia commonwealth university

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perhaps that's what i feel
an outside and an inside and me in the middle
perhaps that's what i am
the thing that divides the world in two
on the one side the outside
on the other the inside
that can be as thin as foil
i'm neither one side nor the other
i'm in the middle
i'm the partition
i've two surfaces and no thickness
perhaps that's what i feel
myself vibrating
i'm the tympanum
on the one hand the mind, on the other the world
i don't belong to either

samuel beckett—*the unnamable*

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Abstract

We are immersed in an era of *supermodernity*, an age defined by excesses: of information—the acceleration of historical time—spatial overabundance—the nullification of distance by electronic media and transportation—and an excess of self-reflexive individuality.¹ In this context, the idea of place is giving way to *non-places*: designed spaces in which social relations are tangential and the boundary between the individual and the group is increasingly mediated.² Media plays an important role in the creation of non-places, by favoring a removed form of communication made pervasive and extensive through mobile devices. The blurring of the line between media and actuality extends its definition to encompass not only traditional modes such as radio and television but to a web of systems that regulate and determine relationships between people and collective entities.

As a visual communicator, I seek to understand the evolving relationship between individuals and society by focusing on the spatial-social codes and gestures that permeate and define our interactions. In my thesis project, I explore the boundary between personal, subjective space and social space in their physical manifestations. I perceive the latent tension that exists between what is expressed and what is kept to ourselves in a highly codified environment. I depict the inadequacies of media narratives to portray human drama and the strength of these codified visual systems to represent the drama of living inside their constraints. I look for ways of representing the duality of our shared vulnerability in the alienation of contemporary living perpetuated through media, and our acceptance of its imbalances.



Codes and Gestures

The creation of social space

As graphic designers we immerse ourselves in the semiotic systems that form the vocabulary for social interaction. These systems fascinate me, especially those that blend what is projected by the media with people's actual lives and lifestyles. TV home improvement shows and decor blogs are a good example, using their own vocabulary to create aspirational lifestyles that are confirmed through the market that sell them. "A spot of the avant-garde art in your home is a subtle nod to the French"; "A vintage desk with water rings from coffee fueled days has character and brings a human element to a space"; "Modernism is much heralded by the French, and chic modernist pieces juxtapose beautifully with pieces with age and history." All these discourses conjure images of desire through a web of arbitrary associations replicated in the market itself to form self fulfilling loop.

Having lived between two countries with divergent priorities, beliefs and lifestyles—Chile and the United States—these differences and their corresponding visual and textual vocabulary become evident to me whenever I pass from one to the other. The overstated secularism of American daily life contrasts with the strong underlying Catholicism of my native country. The neoliberal right wing politics contrast with the left-wing tendencies of post-dictatorship Chile. The highly systemic commercial nature of American society, in its proliferation of strip malls, household products, logos and all around saturation of stuff is striking in its resolvedness to the improvisation that is endemic to Chile, no matter how hard North American culture has pervaded its borders. Wherever I find myself the virtues and defects of the other become more apparent, and the codes that define the place I find myself in presently become more evident. They are readable as part of a specific context, with their own grammar and syntax.

Graphic design has historically taken the languages of advertising, government communications, and other authority and used them to create new forms of representation, using what is already there to be taken out of context, abstracted or subverted for communicative impact. Visual and written language form the basis of the profession. Moreover, these codes today are assimilated so quickly by the market, fed and redistributed through social media channels, that the irony of subversion is lost and any stance is part of a trend. There seems to be no need to apologize today for wearing a brand on a piece of clothing or even on the skin as part of defining one's own personal identity. Actual life mimics media life and vice-versa, compounded by the ubiquity of media through mobile devices and the reality of 24 hours live streaming of everything through everyone's personal recorder-transmitters.

For Guy DeBord we live in a society of spectacle and that spectacle can be understood in terms of the infiltration of the mass media (in particular visual media such as television, film, and photography which offer vivid but false images of life) into many aspects of contemporary life; including private life

or today rather starting at private life. As such, we have transformed everything we see into an image of itself, into a surface and into a stage, or set for spectacle.³ Today, this is compounded by mobile communications which place a new window, a personal nomadic window, between ourselves and the world. They question the notion of the real, dividing us into multiple presences.

In this context, the cultural distance between one country and another, especially in urban environments, has drastically reduced with ubiquitous internet access and mobile devices, and Chile is rapidly being engulfed by a projected monolithic media version of America. This shift seems to be at times merely cosmetic and to correspond to a superficial appropriation used by marketing groups to sell a certain vision of an aspirational lifestyle. Its colonialistic pretensions—the insertion of English words in Spanish language advertisements, the presence of American retail experiences in the urban landscape—are evident and all the more awkward when placed in the context of an everyday way of life that doesn't correspond to the image being sold. These instances of economic and cultural colonization can seem superficial when understood merely as the proliferation and replacement of one kind of image over another.

However fascinating the continuously mutating landscape of visual communication—juxtaposing the image of media and the image of contemporary living—I am more interested in the underlying structures behind both the virtual and the actual space, and the physical gestures that accompany each. These structures and gestures mimic each other between both spaces allowing for a true continuity of constructed reality between the two. The perpetuation of one through the other and the merging of the actual with the virtual also means the permeation between the private and the public. For Georg Simmel “the border reveals itself through and in-between condition. Any threshold or marginal zone induces a reciprocal state - it looks two ways at once.”⁴

These codes/structures and physical gestures are sometimes harder to grasp and to re-present effectively without falling into the pitfall of recreation. When I talk about gestures I am talking about the movements and positions we assume with our body to engage with media devices. An example is the scroll. The gesture of scrolling is fundamental to the navigation of virtual spaces. The gesture itself is as important to the situation and experience it creates as the content. It creates an infinite continuum of information-stimulation through its perpetual motion. It forms a membrane between the virtual and the actual, placing an object between ourselves and the world.

The codes in architecture, including the graphic elements define and regulate the physical and virtual spaces we inhabit, and that ultimately create social space. These spaces are made up of territories, be they physical—the street, the store— or virtual—the snapchat window, the facebook page—delineated by specific boundaries.

For Henri Lefebvre “Social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by the philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of nature).”⁵

This means that there is a need to create distinctions between what has previously been the very diffuse category of mental space and social space, which is a product of man, manifested in the production of space by different societies. These manifestations are important because through them we can understand not only the signs that regulate the interaction between people in a common space but also what is the motivation behind their use and enforcement. The elements that define social space are all around us ground us in the present, in a language of limits and demarcations. They are second nature to us, manifesting themselves with clarity through their materiality, visually and haptically.

They work at different scales and pass from public to private: the organization of the city and its streets, the concrete strip that separates the asphalt of the street level from the brick cobblestone of the sidewalk, the grass that separates the sidewalk from the home; the bright, refractive paint and plastic lines, yellow and orange, signifying the voice of government and municipality, dividing street lanes and constructing a temporary barricade where the sidewalk is being replaced; the grid of lines in the parking lot;

The arched threshold whose roof indicates that that you're within an apartment building's territory, but whose glass doors tell you that you haven't yet been granted permission to enter, the foyer, the door to the apartment, the divisions within a domestic space: the numerous ins and outs, thresholds and points of passage; the connected spaces of the dining room, the living room and drawing room, the carpet in the middle with a corresponding fan hanging from the ceiling, the minor territories that are the bed, the sofa, the chair.

Because they contain us and also regulate more direct interactions these elements seem natural, inherent to the visual landscape, unobservable. The field of exhibition design offers an interesting opportunity for the reassessment of these gestures and their use as communication tools, in the possibilities of organizing space, and creating instances of physical interaction. As elements of communication, they call attention to their purpose, to the forcefulness of what it means to separate, to enclose, to put under, in the end, to join and divide.

Graphically they can be reinterpreted to form an in-between representation and abstraction. They are abstract, yet they are also representational interpretations of something that we are accustomed to observing in reality. The essential element is the line. The line more than any other graphic mark establishes a threshold and is the formal representation of the desire to divide and unite. It is a door and at the same time a bridge.

I am a graphic designer with extensive experience in exhibition design. I believe an exploration into the communicative possibilities offered by the language of spatial creation, is imperative to critically assess the impact of my work. This thesis is a personal study of the observation of the elements of social space and their translation into tools for communication. To understand what it means to be present in a space today the relationship between our own private and mental space, and physical space has to be questioned and probed. This threshold, the reciprocal membrane between private and public, mental and physical serves as a site for more engaged communication possibilities. Through this reinterpretation I seek to bridge the gap between these dichotomies, towards communicative spaces. The goal is to move beyond what can be called the theatrical and into the realm of an audience's experience.





Supermodernity and non-places

A mediation between ourselves and the world

Non-places is a term coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé in his 1995 work *Non-Places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. Non-places are anthropological spaces of transience where the human beings remain anonymous and that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as “places”. Examples of non-places would be motorways, hotel rooms, airports and shopping malls.⁶

The concept of non-place is opposed, according to Augé, to the notion of “anthropological place”. The place offers people a space that empowers their identity, where they can meet other people with whom they share social references. The non-places, on the contrary, are not meeting spaces and do not build common references to a group. A non-place is a place we do not live in, in which the individual remains anonymous. Through virtual spaces, they offer a controlled, remote interaction and in physical spaces create consumer environments, where people are tourists and passengers. They are much more akin to the idea of spaces as opposed to places, in a view such as that of de Certeau meant to be traversed rather than representing a destination.⁷

The language of these non-places, of collective individualism and interaction defined by instances of exchange and consumption, is highly pervasive. It transforms both objects and architecture into a kind of media for its own perpetuation. These are representational universes. They correspond to a constructed reality that is not the product of a continuous history but lived fictions, akin to Jean Baudrillard's *simulacra*, which have their own codes and relations of power.⁹

Symbolic universes, which are themselves broadly fictional, replace universes of knowledge with universes of recognition. These are universes which we recognize but don't know personally; closed universes where everything is a sign; collections of codes to which only some hold the key but whose existence everyone accepts. Everyone knows Paris and knows its signs, but only a minority have actually been there.

They occupy both the public and private spheres with a constant bombardment of collective-individual messages that reinforce the systemic nature of contemporary living in urban spaces. It redefines spaces as territories to be disputed by those who wish to influence the consumer. In this territorial clash, objects and language become extensions of the individual; projections of the body and its will. They mediate between ourselves and the world and allow us to extend our private selves into the public realm. At the same time, they allow a whole system of commerce that sells an imagined lifestyle to enter our private territories, effectively mixing private and public, actual and imagined, making them indistinguishable.

According to de Certeau a place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct locations, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions.

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. In short, space is a practiced place.⁸



3b reflection sequence, fall 2017

Nonplaces are an expression of the context we find ourselves in today, what can be called an era of *supermodernity*. Supermodernity is a term used by Augé to explain the need for the discipline of anthropology to reexamine its methodologies in light of accelerated transformations in contemporary society. Such transformations included concepts of time and space that redefine the study of 'the other' and the "link between the individual and the social link consubstantial with him."¹⁰

The first transformation is time. According to Augé, time is no longer a principle of intelligibility. This means that the idea of progress, which implies an afterward explainable in terms of a before, has been debunked. This is important on the macro scale of history but also on a more personal level, because identity is not defined in terms of an origin. "Our accumulation of personal accounts, documents, images and all the 'visible signs of what used to be' is what is different about us now, rather than explaining from where we have come."¹¹

The second accelerated transformation is space. Distances disappear and give way to a condensed space in which screens relay a representation of the world that is relatively homogenous in its diversity: a proliferation of imaged and imaginary references.¹²

In between these contractions and extensions of the self, it is media and its devices that blur the boundary between what is private and public on a fundamental level. These modes of communication offer the user a sense of control, by allowing them to regulate both their presence in public and the intrusion of the public into their private sphere. Through these virtual spaces, we see ourselves in the third person and construct a disembodied version of ourselves. We find others in a multiplicity that hides an individualism, others as reflections of ourselves. At the same time, media devices strongly mediate that communication by defining both the structures and the language of exchange. In this way, media redefines the relationship between the individual and the group. The commodified ways of expression we use as individuals mask our true intentions, and create *non-places for communication*, spaces of reciprocal interaction, of collective individualism.

The social begins with the individual

A mediation between ourselves and the world

The relationship is, constantly evolving, and it is important to evaluate the link between the individual and the group through the lens of contemporary society in which it is immersed. Because communication is the willful extension to breach the threshold between individuals, it is crucial to understand how its structures and modes of representation are changing.

I believe that the proliferation of non-places is what defines not only our physical spaces today but also the virtual space and what can be called spaces of communication. If a place is defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then space which is not defined in these terms will be a non-place. Non-places for communication are therefore spaces of transit and of self-involvement; not defined by a common history but representational spaces, formed by the auto-generative nature of media's language.

The physical elements, the prefabricated homes and their arrangement, the vast parking lots and ubiquitous Starbucks are themselves languages, and the presence of 'stuff' that fills the American garage confirms a discourse that is more about a fiction that is self-engendering than a fulfillment of needs. These fictions we inhabit materialize not only through the language of marketing and media but in the very spaces we live in. The essence of architecture is characterized by critic Beatriz Colomina as "a mass medium composed of spatial and gender-defined signifiers".¹³

As a visual communicator, I seek to understand the evolving relationship between individuals and society by focusing on the spatial-social codes that permeate and define our interactions. The language of spatial organization, both in the creation of new spaces and the regulation of existing ones creates fundamental divisions between people and things. These groupings and separations can strike essential chords in the viewer because they make the abstraction of thought real. But they also reveal the harshness of social organization and its power relations, from the intimate scale of the body to the planning of urban spaces and geopolitical territories.

As a designer, I seek to revitalize the relation between the individual and the other,' by creating sentient instances that draw awareness to our immersion in this system. To a life lived in the face of media; its structures, gestures, and language, and to the relationship between the individual and the group. To communicate is to find conditions of representativeness. I believe that what binds us is a common tension between what occupies our minds, our headspace, and what we manifest to society. That tension, contextualized by a life lived in the face of super-modernity, defines both the content and the forms of my work.

Throughout my work, I am striving towards a language of ambiguity: finding a balance between abstraction and representation and between what is shown and what is hidden. By creating ambiguity between what we recognize and our assumptions, I create a level of distance from the content of the piece; a removal that allows the viewer awareness to the separation between mental space, and their own susceptibilities, and reality. By focusing on the relationship between the event and the non-event, between the particular and the mundane, I call attention to the value of what we perceive and remember versus what is manifested.







Extended Media

Stages and Territories

To understand the pervasive and highly systemic quality of the contemporary social space it is helpful to consider objects and architecture as media. In this context what surrounds is always vying for our attention in an attempt to tell us something, to sell an object, a service, an inhabitable fiction or ideology.

If our bodies can be considered our most immediate territory, then the movement can become a displacement or extension of that territory. Objects, in turn, become extensions of the individual; projections of ourselves and our will. They mediate between ourselves and the world and allow us to extend our private selves into the public realm, negotiating a shared space. In this context, the environments and things surrounding us as the extension of a multiplicity of voices who seek to claim a territory. In this way, social space becomes territorial dispute in an attempt to influence the passenger, the tourist, the consumer. A good example is the supermarket.

When I go to a retail space such as a supermarket, I don't see the owner of the store. The store is presented simply as Kmart, without any need to enter into questions of authority over the space. Authority is enforced through specific signs, such as the security cameras and surveillance systems. More importantly, there is an implicit understanding that this space forms a part of a private-public system. It is protected by private security and ultimately backed up by the state.

This commercial space is filled with messages from the owner and from the makers and marketing teams of the products sold there. These signs speak to us in the second person, personal yet indirect. The signs are distributed to communicate specific information, but they are also there to occupy space and lay claim to territory. They compete and are part of a larger system of signs defined by layouts that controlling the intentional interaction with the customer.

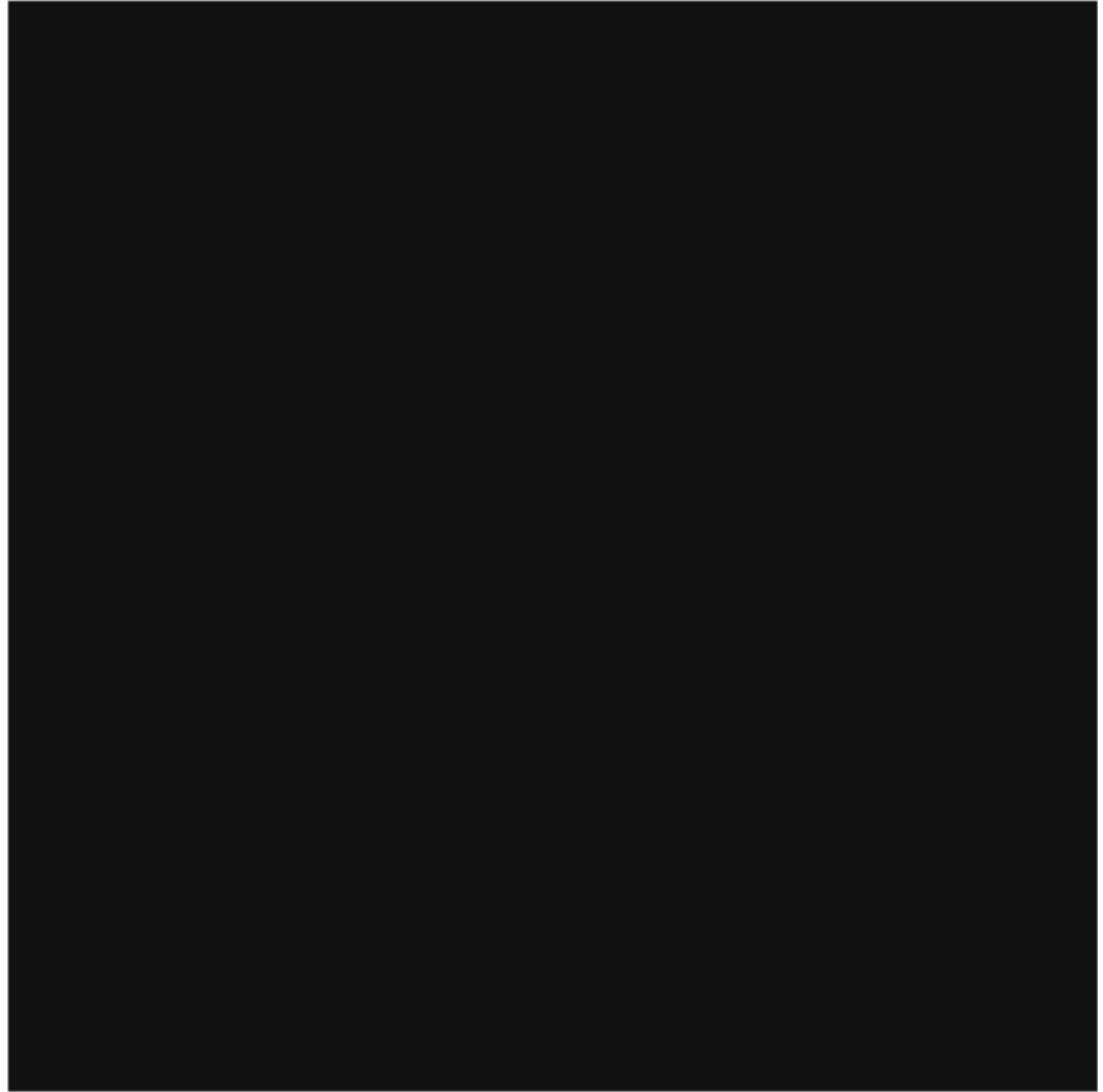
Sociologist Erving Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,¹⁴ describes human behavior in these social situations, using the metaphor of theatrical performance as a framework. He equates the store as presented to the customer with the stage. That which is behind the counter—the store-rooms where the staff is out of sight or off duty—to the backstage. According to Goffman the official presentation of the staff of a commercial venue to the public is a performance, and Areas for different unofficial functions—such as talking on the phone or recriminating a fellow worker—are incorporated into the design of the place.

As can be gleaned from these common examples, the overlap between different voices in a given location creates a social space that is rich and fraught with contradictions. The actors present in Goffman's play are on stage, backstage and also operating from a distance.

At the same time that there is resistance between the parts, the relationship between them has been accounted for and even conceived to coexist in agreement and tension. It is this highly structured co-existence that allows for replication and the establishment of a model.

Regardless of how structured and sanctioned the dispute of territory, these tensions between the various actors exist—from the micro scale of the domestic space to political conflicts over borders and situations of war and displacement. The constant mythmaking of media through a 'world reality' lens is creating representational universes to make fictions out of these conflicts. These fictions create roles to inhabit, images to dwell in, and symbols to reduce the complicated nature of individual realities to homogenous surfaces.

The resistance between the layers of ownership over a space and the representation of these personal and political boundaries—coupled with the distance between introjection and physical projection—lies at the core of the work of much film, architecture and installation art. Different artists have approached the subject of boundaries at different scales of territory, ranging from the geopolitical macro stage to the body as threshold and frontier.



precedents

mark making: walter de maria

intimate gestures: paul graham

physical space and identity: tom burr

architecture and gender: monica bonvicini

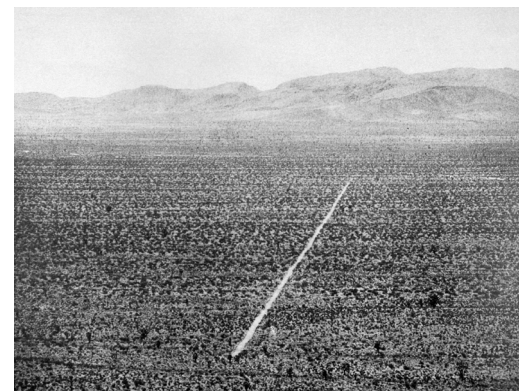
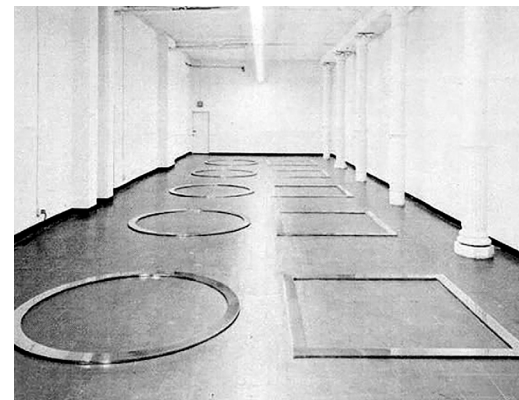
spaces of memory: jane and louise wilson

memory: guillermo kuitca

the non-event: ida applebroog

The conceptual art of Walter de Maria targets the symbolic nature of space making through marks, creating an abstracted gesture with minimum means. By employing basic geometrical shapes: line, circle, square with mathematical precision, he calls attention to the relationship between containing forms, and between these forms and their surroundings.

In the *Equal Area Series* of 1977, a series of metallic linear circles and squares are laid on the floor arranged in pairs along the length of a large, extended room. The squares and circles diminish along this length, each fitting inside the previous. Each circle has the same area as its opposing square partner. The installation has been described in terms of making the audience pay attention to relationships of size and form, and their relation to perspective. But what can also be gleaned from the experience, is the relationship between the viewer and two types of spatial gestures, the square and the circle, and the varying degree of open-closedness that they offer. The repetition of the elements, no matter their diminishing sizes, can be extrapolated as a call to project these relationships onto the canvas of daily encounters with constructed space. What is also interesting to note is that this installation has been described as a success or failure depending on the space in which it has been presented. The size of the piece and its parts lend themselves to more intense relationships, and stronger meaning making in more intimate spaces, compared to larger rooms where the dialogue is lost.



For James Nisbet, "What ties together this body of site-specific work is an insistent exploration of how the plain forms of line, circle, and sphere propagate into physical and social environments. De Maria's most important work poignantly expresses the temporalities embedded within spatial dimension, repeatedly reflecting on and ultimately casting off the possibility of encapsulating earth-based sites through any single image."¹⁵

In his 1968 piece, *Line in Tula Desert*, De Maria drew a chalk line along a one mile stretch of the Tula Desert, outside Las Vegas. By drawing a single line across the desert floor, he created two spaces, divided and united, a here and there, establishing a reference to the creation of geopolitical territories, and the imposition of social space on the natural environment. Whenever a line is expressed, a threshold is created. Again, the scale of the piece fundamentally defines its meaning in terms of the creation of space.

What's interesting when comparing these pieces is that depending on the scale and in relation to the surrounding environment, both pieces can be thought of in terms of territory and a geopolitics. The *Equal Area Series* can also be deemed to be about borders, only of a more intimate geography.

Paul Graham's photography captures the everyday gestures that people use to mediate between their internal selves and society. He focuses on the conscious and unconscious revelations of our body language. Through framing, he explores what these gestures convey at different distances. The face, the body and the human figure are depicted in mundane, urban environments showing the human desire to create distance between ourselves and others. Graham perceives these gestures not only in their physical significance but culturally as well. In *Empty Heaven* he observes the contrast between Japan's Occidentalized cultural output and the remnants of traditional expressions of privacy in social gatherings. In *American Night* he represents these gestures to talk about the alienation of contemporary American consumer society and the differences between the wealthy and the less privileged.



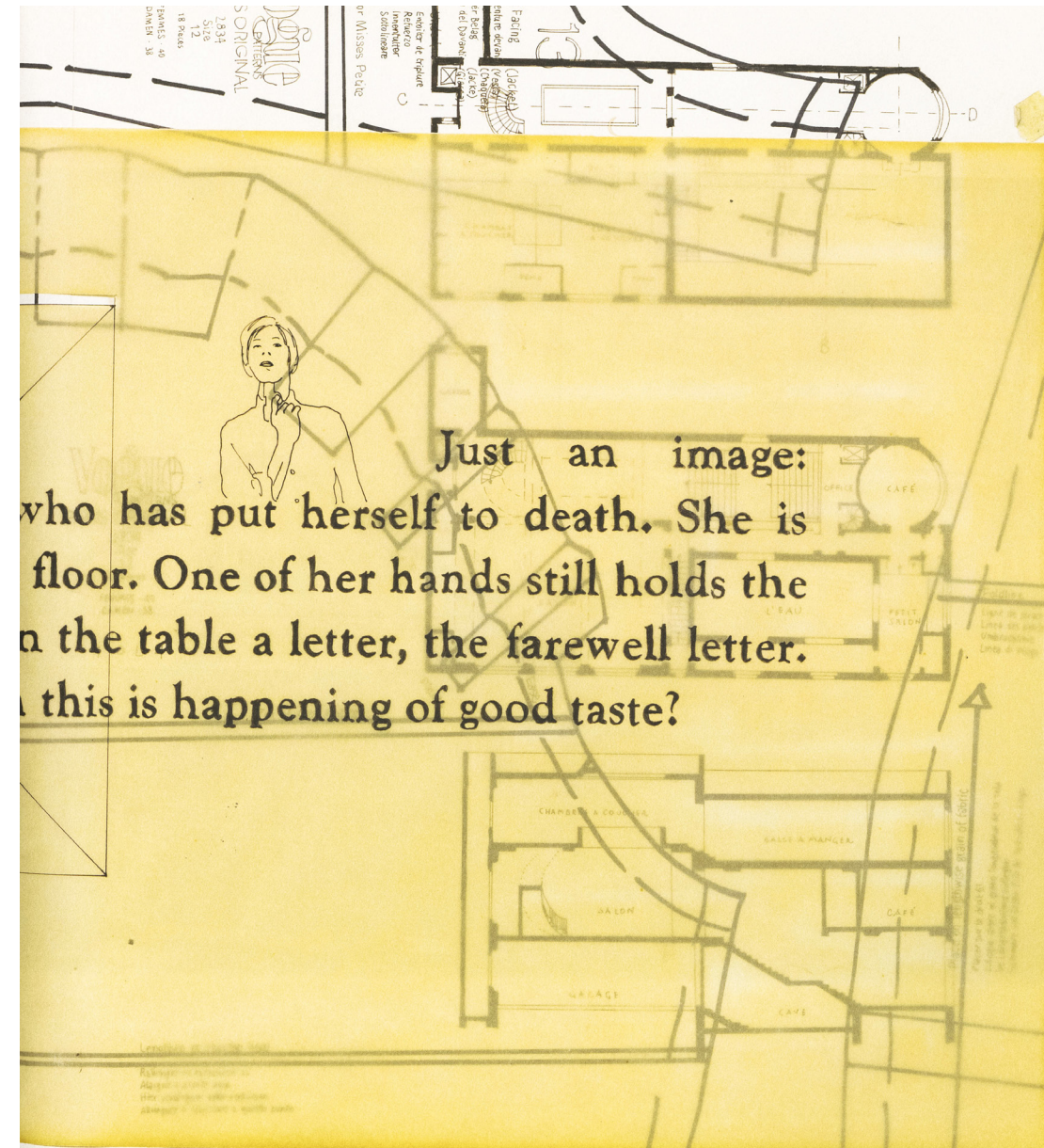
Sculptor Tom Burr questions the way in which identity, especially sexual identity, is constructed or constrained by society and its physical spaces. Burr is interested in small modular spaces that exist next to countless other small modular spaces— bodies being next to bodies being isolated. He examines the ways in which these move through architecture, and architecture works on them. What interests him about design in relation to this modular nightmare, is the very self-consciousness of it, “the act of planning, arranging and orchestrating, exposed or revealed, or at least hinted at.”¹⁶

He consciously explores the theoretical underpinnings behind acts and gestures of spatial design and rearrangement. He explores the tensions between individual and collective, private and public and reveals the psychological framework we create around ourselves through our relation with design and architecture.



10 tom burr. impulsion, 2013

Artist Monica Bonvicini explores this idea of the relationship between architecture and gender. She situates the human body within the context of the built environment and its related promises of marketing. For Bonvicini “in any architecture or interior design magazine, the lifestyle media of architecture became imaginable as a possible space. Its depiction is a space of longing; and the elusive presentation in media, an existence placed at the consumer’s disposal. A photograph, a sketch, floor plans of architecture contain a reality that whose codes we now understand and which one may experience.”¹⁷



11 monica bonvicini. untitled (detail), 1997

Video artists Jane and Louise Wilson address cohabitation of space, by focusing on abandoned spaces as containers for the memory of the activities that took place in them. Stasi City is a psychological exploration of the mute, abandoned architectural spaces of the former headquarters of the East German secret police. Photographs and video combine, probing the hallways and interrogation rooms, invoking the long history of abuses that took place there. Star City looks at a disused training center for cosmonauts on the outskirts of Moscow. The ruins of a recent past that still sit within the collective consciousness are contemplated in the non-places created by the defunct USSR.¹⁸ What the artists look for are places through which one moves not only physically but also imaginatively. "As we moves through space, a constant double movement connects interior and exterior topographies."¹⁹

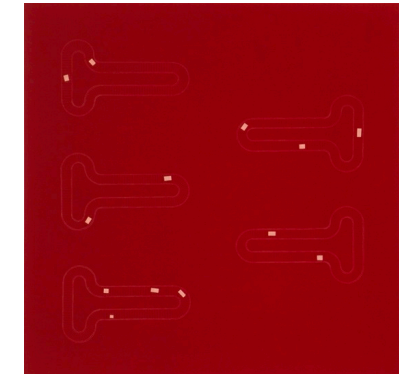
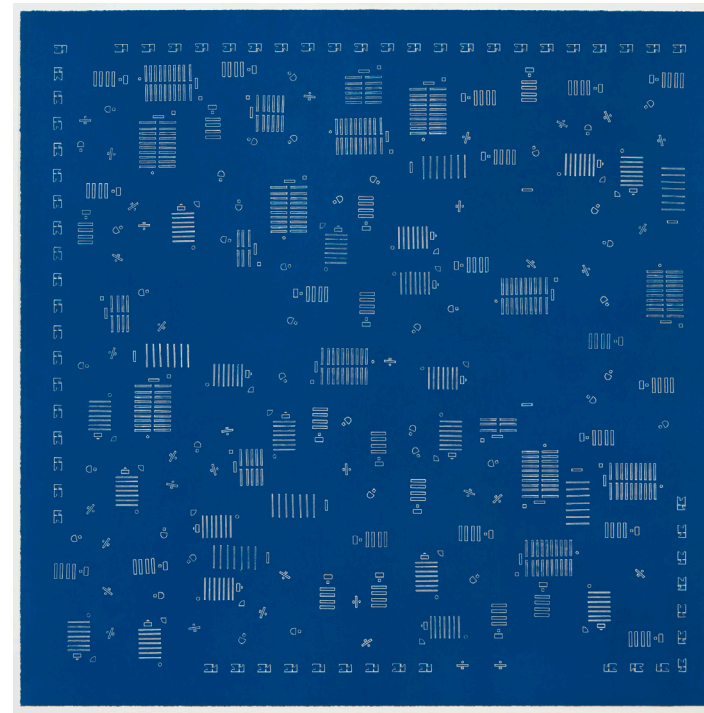
"That is also down to the way we photograph places. They are not signature shots of the space. That would be too documentary. We look a lot at periphery spaces. It makes the encounter more three-dimensional. To capture an essence of a building's phenomenon you have to look at the inconsequential, the periphery."²⁰
—Jane Wilson



13 jane and louise wilson. reconstruction of doors, 1997

12 jane and louise wilson. double doors, 1997

Guillermo Kuitca paints spaces and maps of loneliness. He examines the space between image and language. Through the limitations of painting, he echoes the limitations of the spaces we inhabit to tell a story. He gives us fragments that connect the external reality of contemporary spaces with personal space, through systems of signs. Surprise at the intimate landscape within leads the gaze towards the space outside, represented through the abstraction of maps and charts. There is an explicit link in Kuitca's work to theatre and literature which can be seen in the creation of scenographies and in the poetic association of visual and literary forms of expression.²¹



14 guillermo kuitca. devotional benches, confessional booths, mercy seats and altars, 2002

15 guillermo kuitca. unclaimed luggage, 2001

The Non-Event
Ida Applebroog

Artist Ida Applebroog examines the relationship between the mundane and the event, skewing banal images into more anxious scenarios, exploring themes of sexual identity, relations of power and the role of mass media in desensitizing the public to violence. She uses the frame by frame logic of the comic book to infuse these scenes with a sense of temporality. By putting the viewer in the middle of a given scene in which there is no beginning or resolution, she focuses on the dissonance between media's portrayal of life as a series of events versus the banality of everyday living. Applebroog looks at the disparity between action and feeling by juxtaposing harsh texts with mundane images, effectively questioning the role and truthfulness of each as media. There is a sense of covert violence that takes place offstage or between the lines. In the end, loneliness pervades.²²

16 ida applebroog, i'm back on the pill, 1986



17 ida applebroog, you're rat food, 1986



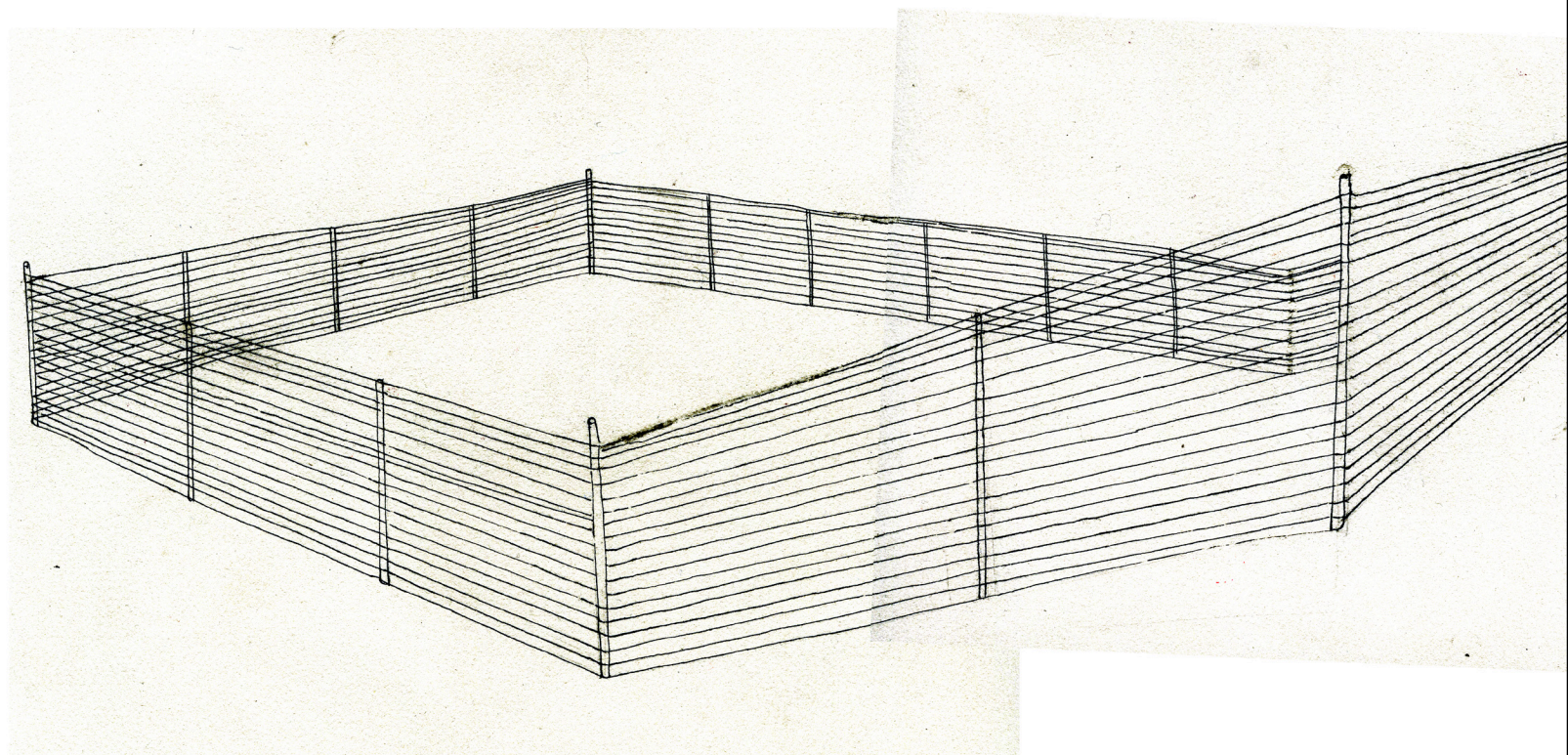
18 ida applebroog, anhedonia, 1989

It is in this context that I wish to set my work: in the examination of the relationship between the individual and 'the other,' in the boundary of tension that exists between what we show and what we think; between what conforms to the system and that which falls out of it. I believe that our physical gestures of spatial creation—both as individuals and as a society—constitute a fundamental language that can be used to create experiences that resonate with common experience.



projects

fences
intervention map
risk map
easements
police abuse
public intimacy



Fences

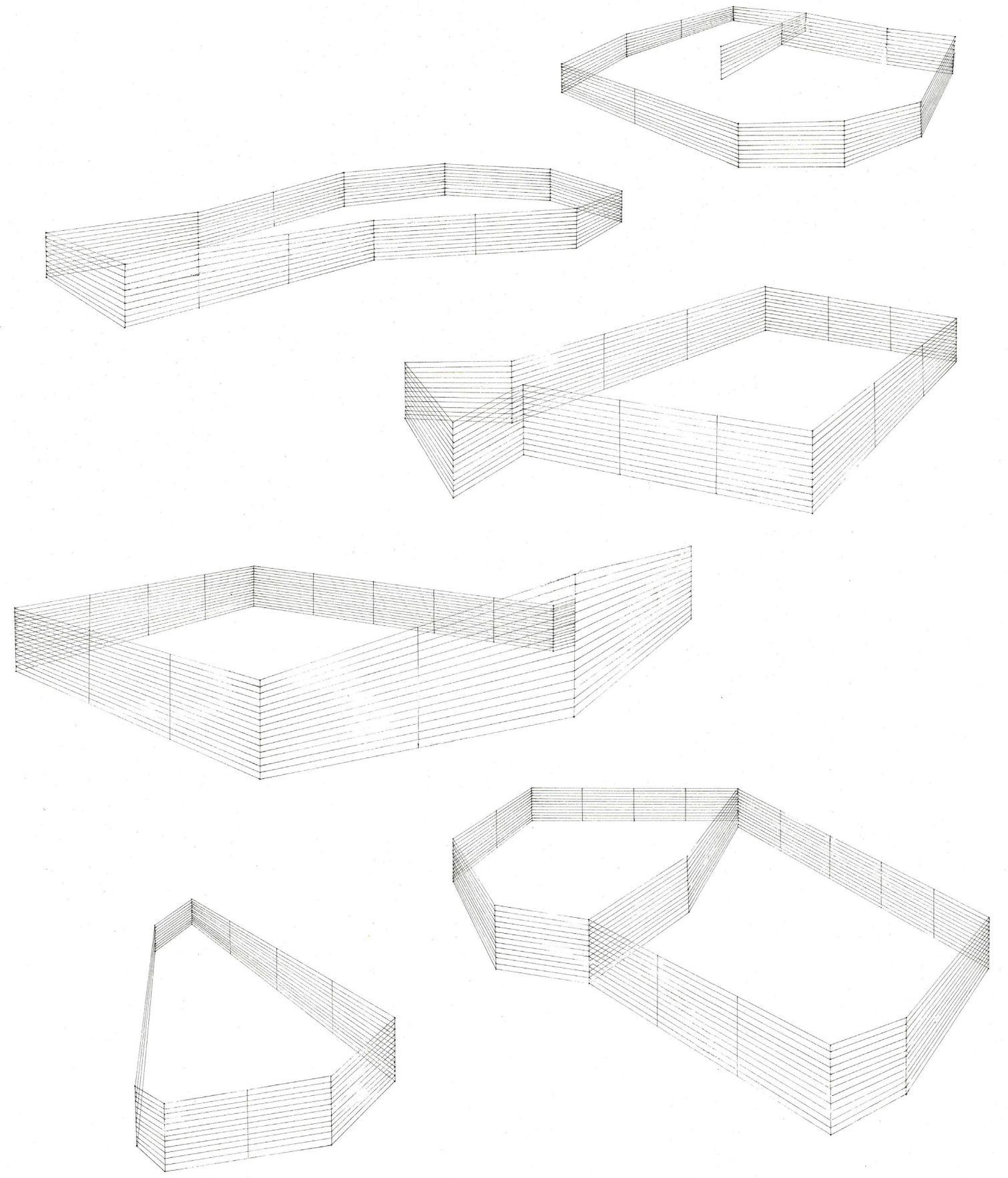
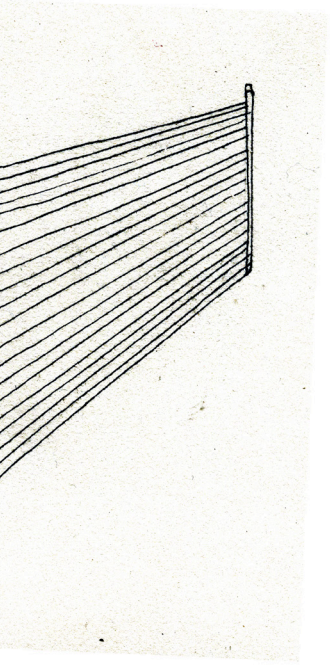
The *fences* are the product of an open-ended investigation into a significant threshold object. They are not in reality fences but corrals and as such have been designed to be mass produced enforcers of boundaries and captivity. I became interested in them—or rather the image of them—particularly because of their distinct mechanical nature. Because they are designed for livestock they have no pretension of warmth or humanity. They are designed for efficiency: metallic, streamlined and highly contrasting.

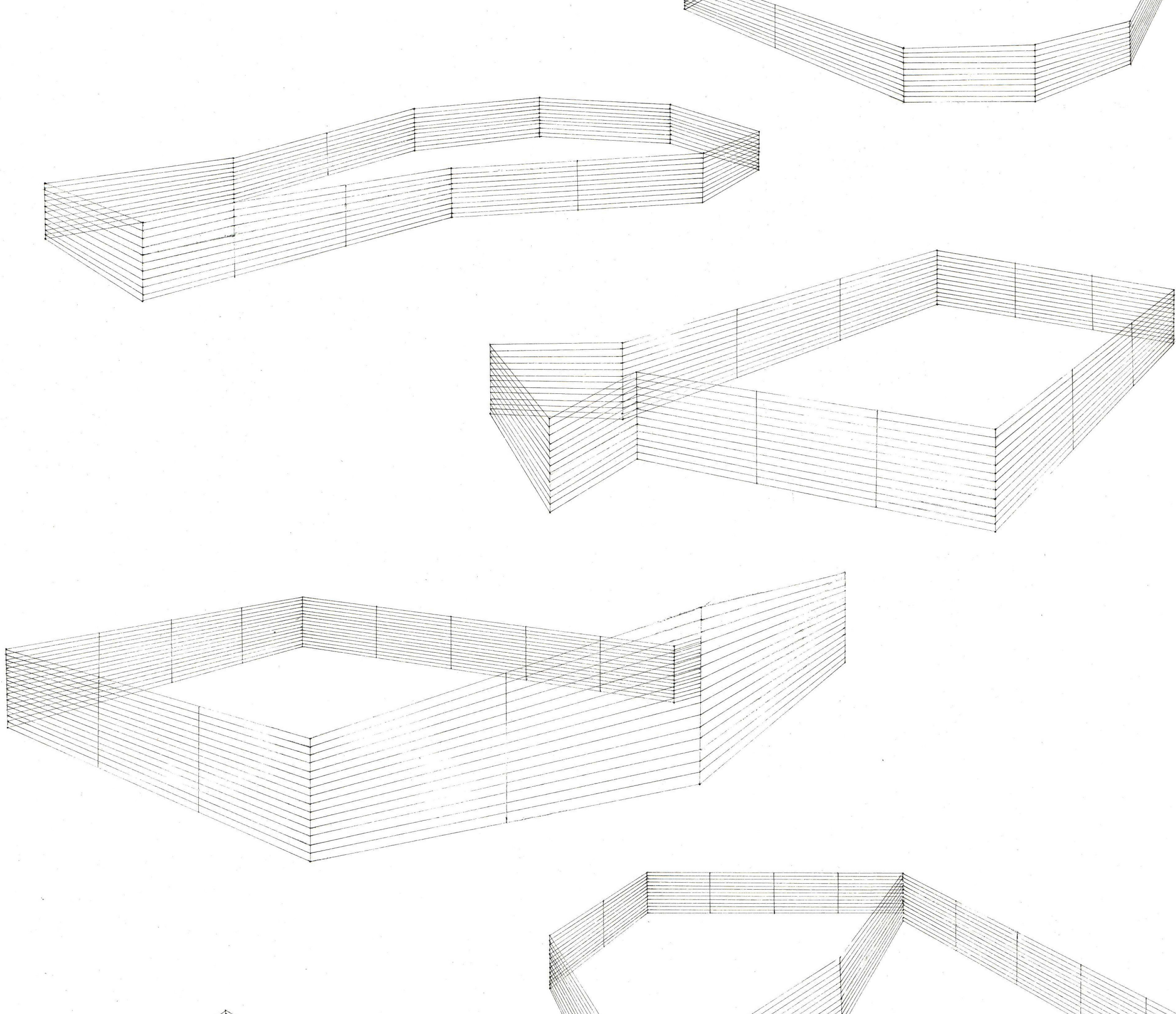
The effectiveness of the corral as a sign of calculated, functional captivity lies in its mechanical nature, but it is intensified when the presence of animals is eliminated. By streamlining the image into thin, unmodulated lines it becomes ambiguous, retaining its functional qualities but losing its natural subject. It begins to straddle the line between fence and corral and in this implication of human captivity gains a level of conflict. The act of planning and arranging imprisonment—even of animals—is a perverse notion. The idea of repetitive cages possibly echoes other modular living spaces.

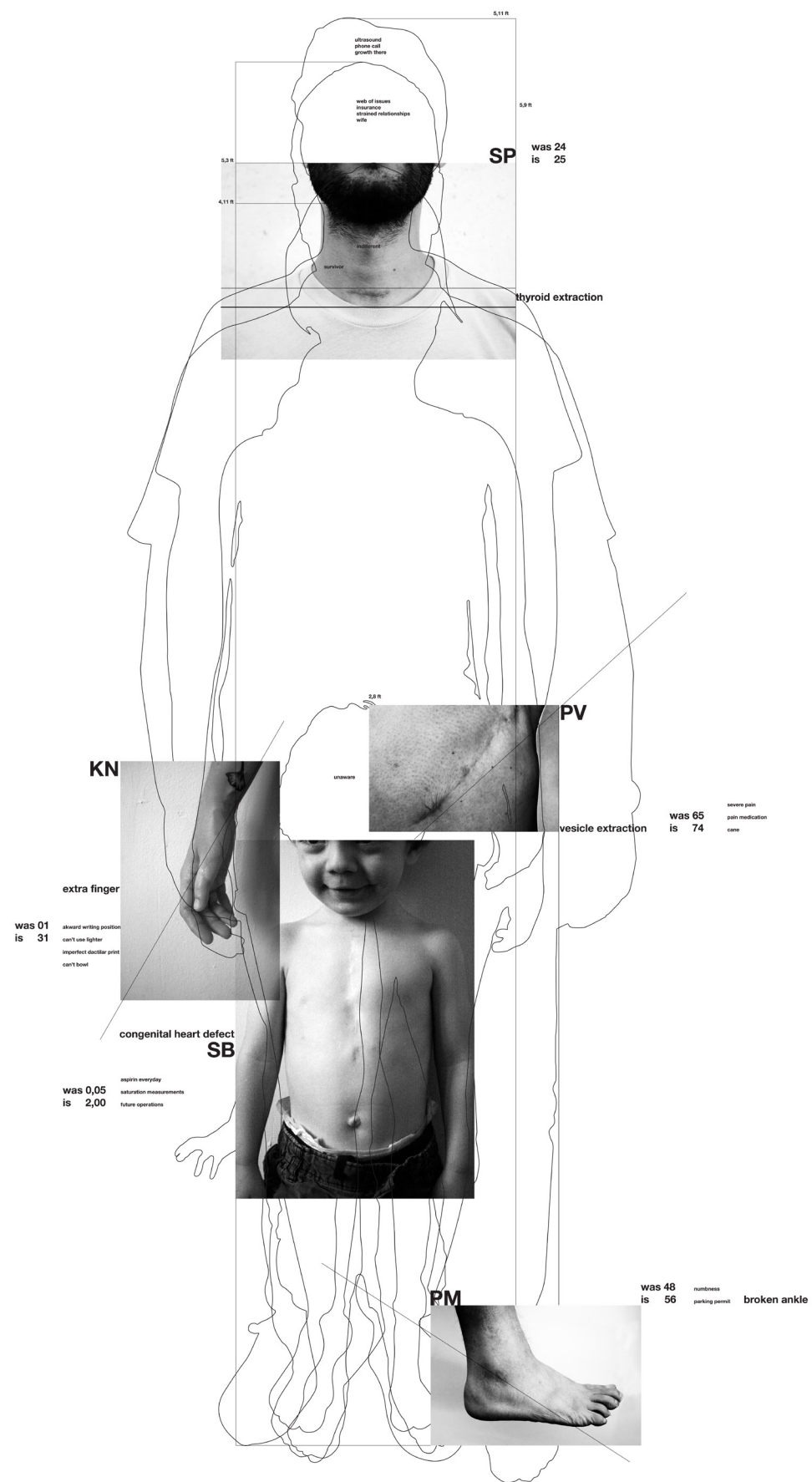
The indefinite level of abstraction of the corral leaves the image in an ambiguous state, between a representational object with specific functional qualities, and a sign. The use of perspective seems to compound both these notions simultaneously. Perspective allows the object to inhabit three-dimensional space with a physical presence. At the same time, the perspective of each corral does not correspond to the others creating the impression of a series of signs that together form a larger spatial sign. The idea of a group of heterogeneous corrals points also to a planned, operative set in which each configuration fulfills a specific role, again, adding a level of perversion. Their arrangement, however, seems to correspond to formal, rather than practical relational purposes. It pulls towards the idea of a sign.

The arrangement of the objects, their permeability and the absence of a human subject create a space that we inhabit with our mind. In the fences, a description of our perception as a navigation sequence is achieved, a compression of several moments. Time and space become the language for the piece.

The fences, in the ambiguity achieved through the abstraction of their interior structure and group distribution, point to a solution for a threshold between objects and their spatial configuration, and their interpretation as semi-abstract signs. They suggest that objects and their arrangement can be generators of spatial signifiers and that their representation through abstraction can lead to ambiguity and tension.







Intervention Map

Choices are not what we see in these photographs. In the first we see a boy's chest (my sons), his diapers poking out of his shorts, smiling and alert. His belly, infantile body, is smooth, pure, innocent. The scar is a physical manifestation of something gone wrong with our natural system that demands correction, sometimes constant correction through medication or future interventions. It incites uncomfortable questions and shakes up our priorities.

These photographs form part of a small study whose objective it is to portray the body as a territory for intervention. They depict a series of surgical interventions carried out on different people of different ages. The main goal is simply to state this fact and confirm through a schematic cartography, observing the effects on our physical and mental selves, the idea that even minor changes in a specific part of our body carry consequences. These consequences also denote the interdependent relationship between physical, mental and psychological well-being.

The photographs were taken as part of a short interview with five acquaintances. Each person was asked what surgical intervention they went through, what anomaly or health issue was addressed, what age they were when operated on and their current age, what situations related to the intervention or problem they confronted on a regular basis, and what was their psychological state regarding the intervention.

These statements were then mapped out onto overlapping silhouettes of each person, with the information accompanying photographs located in each specific area of intervention. An extra element, a fine line, overlaps each photo to show the general angle of incision of the surgery. The choice of integrating line, photography and text stems from practical reasons of overlapping data sets but is also related to their connotative implications. In light of this, each fulfills a specific role that relates to the portrayal of the body as a site for an overlapping perspective of objective and subjective cartography.

The photographs are highly representational and serve the purpose of grounding the map in reality. Their high density and continued image field serve as a plane, the base for a site. The silhouette lines define a border, a more personal, transitory and vulnerable territory for the harsh interference contained in the photo. They are analogous to an architectural section. The incision line connotes the personal (especially as regards scale) but technical, swift hand of the surgeon. Finally, the text serves the purpose of specificity of the personal information. The initials, larger, bolder, work as an anchor point and the finer text, through their density, function as a basic visual unit, a pixel of sorts.

This small study fulfills the role of depicting the body as a site for human intervention, but also as a site for a cartography that mixes an objective view with a more personal, subjective perspective. The potential for a deeper look into both these questions is considerable, especially when we take into account the depth and regularity of intervention to which we submit our bodies. From a mapping point of view the possibilities are also many, and fall in line with conversations about the body as a physical geography: landscape and topography, but also as a territorial geography of borders, delimitations and ultimately conflict which compromise our body as a system, physiologically and psychologically.

The overlapping of bodies speaks to a shared uneasiness of the body as a site for intervention. When we see others in situations of physical pain, we participate in that pain.

24 infographic maps intervenciones (detail)

5,11 m

5,3 m

4,11 m

SP

silenced phone call
growth there

web of tissues
insurance
strained relationships
wife

SP

25 infographic maps intervenciones without outlines

5,11 m

5,3 m

4,11 m

SP was 24
is 25

thyroid extraction

KN

extra finger
was 01
is 31
stayed writing position
can't see lighter
superficial denture color
can't taste

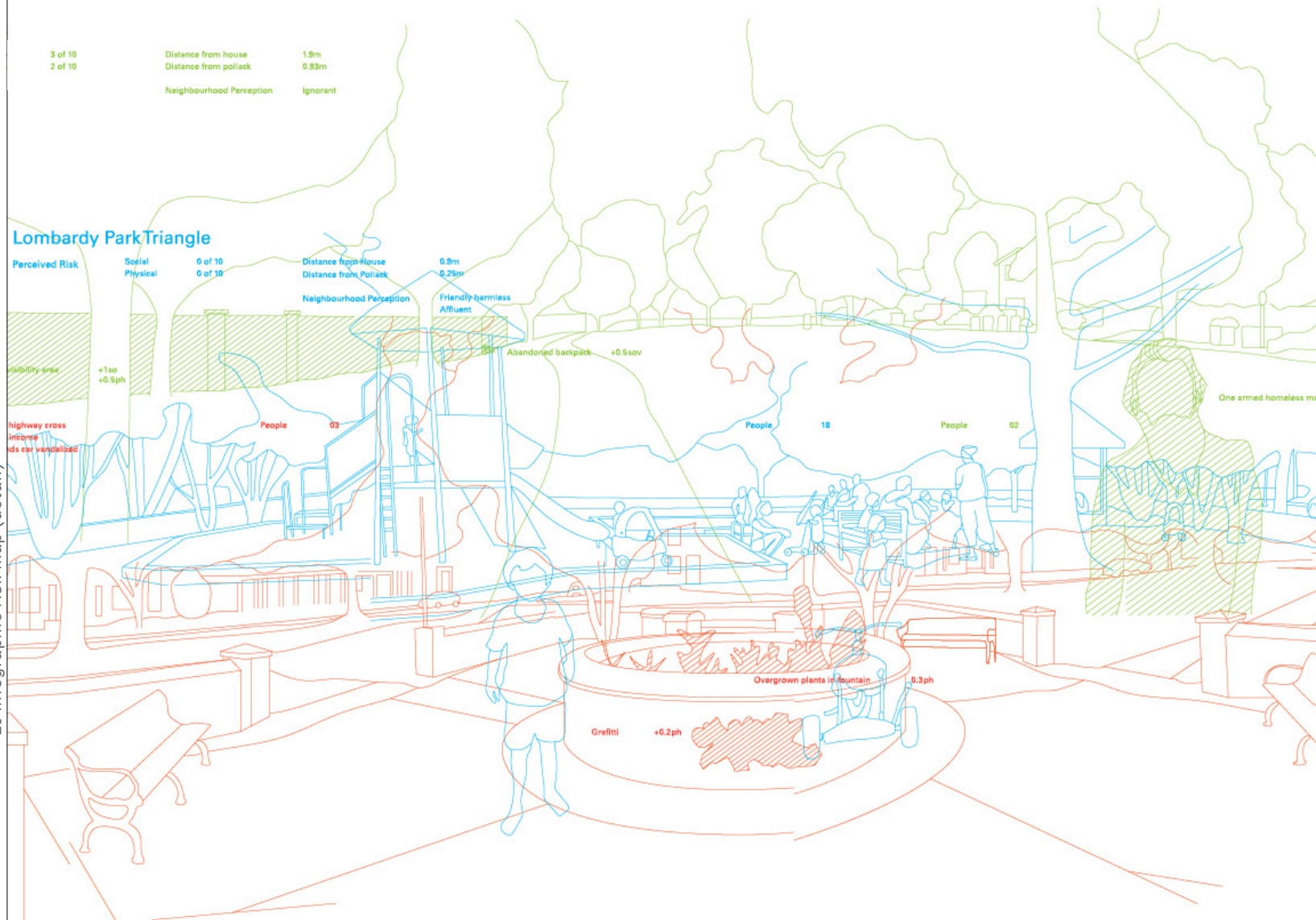
congenital heart defect
SB
was 0,05
is 2,00
multi-enzyme
extradent measurements
future operations

PV

vesicle extraction
was 65
is 74
skin pain
pain medication
none

PM
was 48
is 56
numbness
paralytic
broken ankle

26 infographic risk map (detail)



Risk Map

The *Risk Map* is an information visualization that seeks to display how preconceived notions of urban spaces—location, infrastructure maintenance, people and casual factors—such as the time of day—affect perceptions of vulnerability and security (and comfort) in a given location.

The project situates the designer as the subject of his own prejudices and juxtaposes different layers of information that make up his assumptions about a place together with what is actually going on in a location at a specific time. These layers are composed of information that pertains to my own ideas of security beforehand such as gender, size, country of origin, and family and casual information like the time of day and distance from what are deemed 'safe spots' such as my home and the University building. My own preconceptions are in part guided by previous knowledge: what I know about the U.S. in general (or think I know), what I know about different neighborhoods in Richmond and specific markers such as the I-95 highway, race, class, etc. These contrast with what is actually going on in a given location—social situations, people driving by, the state of the public infrastructure—and finally with the actual criminal statistics from the local police department about each place.

The juxtaposition seeks to be objective about a subjective individual perception, by enunciating in the most direct way possible, what the subject brings mentally into the location and what is actually going on there. An arbitrary scale is established in which social and physical perceptions of risk and safety add or subtract to an overall feeling of risk. On the social scale, 0 represents absolute comfort and ease while standing in a place and 10 denotes a feeling of extreme discomfort and being out-of-place. On the physical scale, a 0 represents no perception of physical risk and 10 stands for fear of imminent physical harm.

The method used to obtain the data was to walk to three different neighborhoods, at roughly the same time in the afternoon. I photographed what was going on in a panoramic take composed of several successive shots and at the same time recorded my personal sensations according to the scales described before. After collecting the data I created linear drawings of the panoramic photos, indicating what each significant element of the space added or subtracted to the overall sensation of risk.

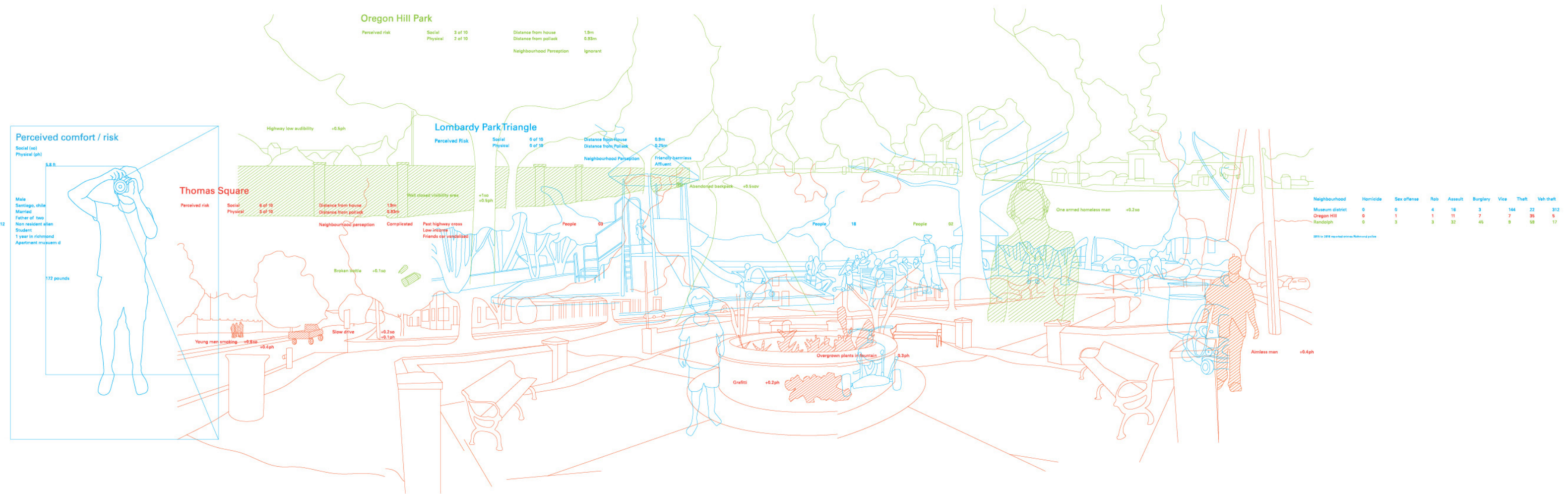
The choice of the line instead of the photo was to create an interpretation of what was relevant and what was not, eliminating items that I deemed superfluous in my perceptions of vulnerability to a place. The line creates an abstraction of a subjective perception. It objectively observes my subjectivity.

The line also allows for a juxtaposition of the three spaces, each coded by a distinct color. It schematizes the surrounding environment, allowing for a more architectural rendering of the spaces that emphasizes their similarities in their overall spatial organization. It suggests that they are not that different, and that each situation could occur in the other; that the differences are if not completely, then at least partially in the viewer's eyes and mind.

Although the use of lines allows for a superimposition of spaces, the actual feeling of discomfort experienced during the process of recording the information stems in large part from the use of the camera. The reflex camera forces you to look through the viewfinder, while showing a limited view of surroundings, and effectively isolating the photographer. This creates and reinforces sensations of vulnerability, especially in continuous panoramic shooting. In this sense true discomfort might be better shown by the photos themselves and their inconsistent assembly; the distances at which they were shot and the elements that point to the circumstances in which they were taken.

This way of talking about vulnerability, through a translation of the circumstances of its production put the designer on the spot, confronting his own prejudices and fears—justified or not—instead of allowing him to preach from outside and act as a critic of society. A designer works to generate tension; the easiest way to do that is through his own experience, confronting his own vulnerabilities. In this regard, the camera, as a register of circumstances can be an interesting medium for the representation of fear and insecurity.

The architectural drawing, through its use of line and absence of solid planes, offers a different experience than the photograph. According to Walter Benjamin, the space depicted is “not primarily seen, but rather is imagined as an objective entity and is experienced by those who approach or even enter it as a surrounding space sui generis, that is without the distancing effect of the pictorial space. Thus, what is crucial in the consideration of architecture is not seeing but the apprehension of structures. The objective effect of the buildings on the imaginative being of the viewer is more important than their being seen. In short, the most essential characteristic of the architectural drawing is that it does not take a pictorial detour.”²¹



l Park

Social 3 of 10
Physical 2 of 10

Distance from house 1.9m
Distance from pollack 0.93m

Neighbourhood Perception Ignorant

Lombardy Park Triangle

Perceived Risk
Social 0 of 10
Physical 0 of 10

Distance from house 0.8m
Distance from Pollack 0.25m

Neighbourhood Perception
Friendly barmiss
Affluent

Wall closed visibility area
+1so
+0.5ph

Past highway cross
Low income
Friends car vandalized

Abandoned backpack +0.5sov

People 03

People 18

People 02

One armed homeless man +0.2so

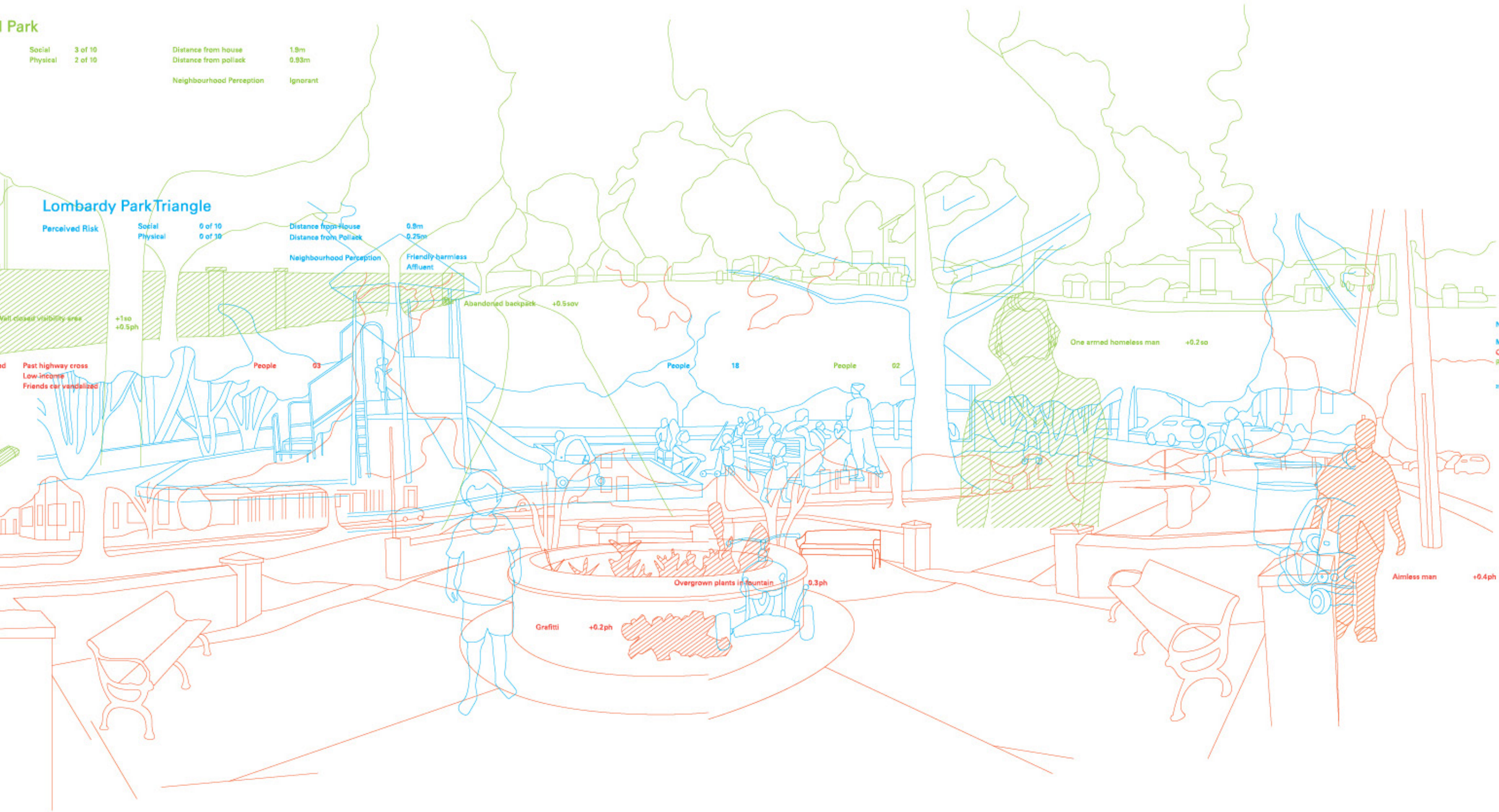
Neighbourhood
Museum district
Oregon Hill
Randolph

2015 to 2018 reported crimes

Overgrown plants in fountain 0.3ph

Graffiti +0.2ph

Aimless man +0.4ph





Easements

The *Easements* are a photo assembly that isolates the in-between spaces of houses in Richmond's fan district by juxtaposing them and omitting the houses themselves. I come from Chile, where we do not have spaces between houses such as there are all throughout Richmond. These in-between spaces fascinate me, because of their varying physical qualities and proportions, but also because they reveal a specific world view. From this perspective, it is understood that what is given value aesthetically is highly codified. Certain things are revealing of the owners and the emphasis they put in how they present their home to the public—in this case, facade of the houses—and other things are understood to be irrelevant. They are overlooked by convention no matter that they occupy the adjacent space.

Between renovated and beautiful old houses, exist these spaces that denote different levels of care but mostly of disregard, scattered with trash bins, rotted wooden doors, tangled cables and old toys. To a Richmonder, the easements, like the larger alleyways, are only normal, but to an outsider, they seem to be glitches in the fabric of everyday life. They are an example of the unintended by-product of a population that has grown accustomed to the constant stimulus of billboards and advertisements and a landscape of spread out strip malls and highways. It is an environment where in-between spaces such as the street, have, in many cities disappeared, and a more efficient, instrumental ethos has prevailed.

By omitting the houses, attention is called to the characteristics of the in between, both in their reality as depositories for discarded items and as a second level of signifiers that talk about their owners, but also to their formal qualities. They establish a counter from between the houses, working as a rhythmic counterpoint to the fullness and redundancy of the decorated facades. The choice of black and white underscores form and counter form and accentuates the dark and light, that are characteristic of these spaces.

30 easements study (detail)

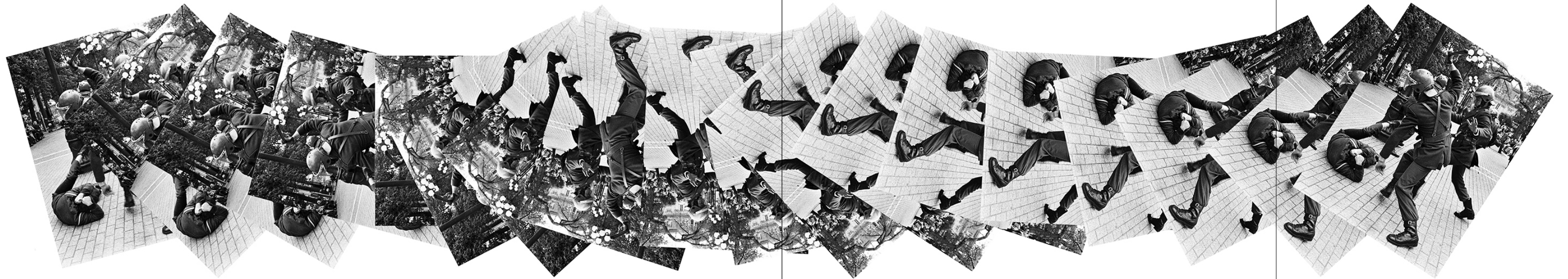






Police Abuse

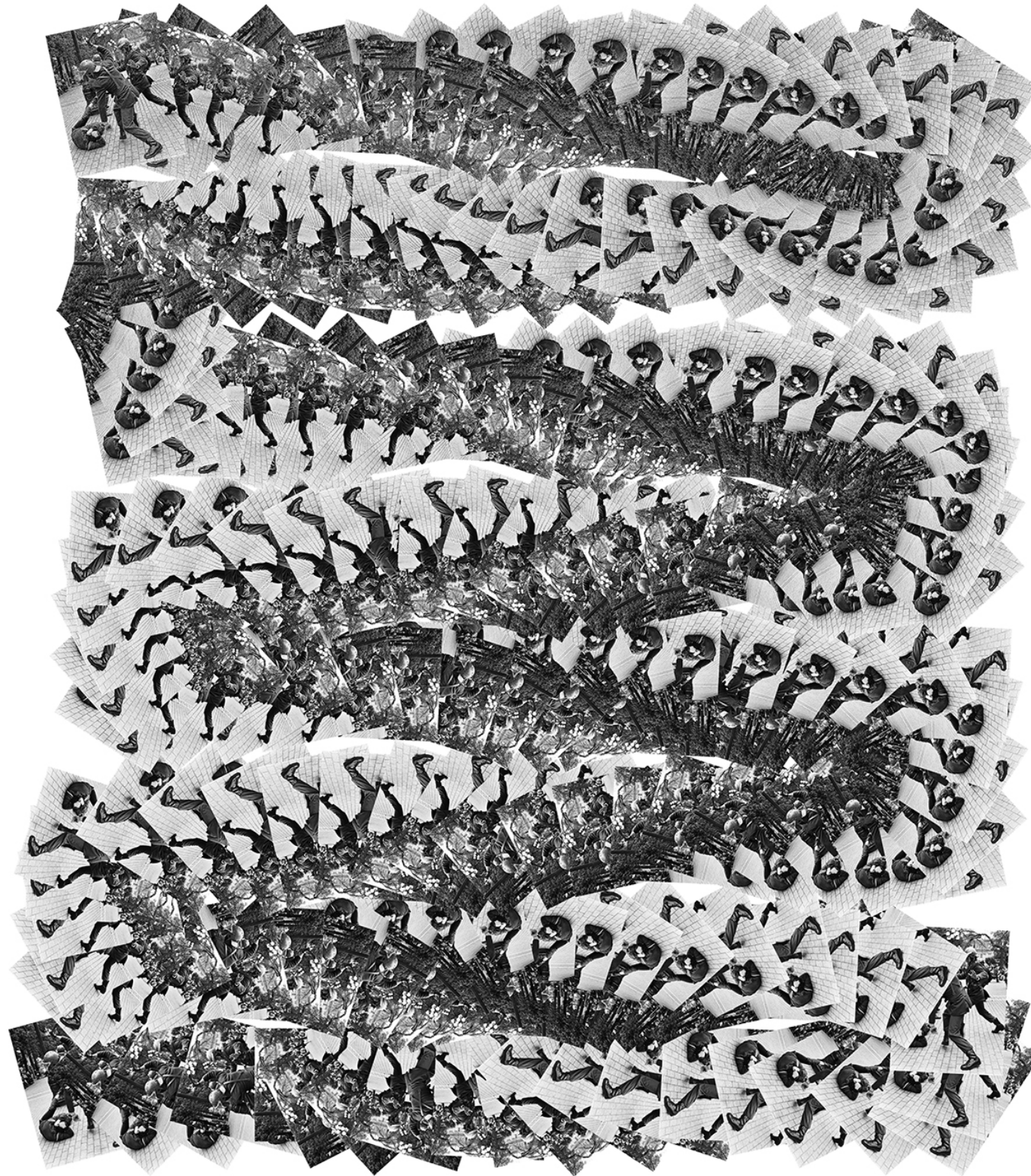
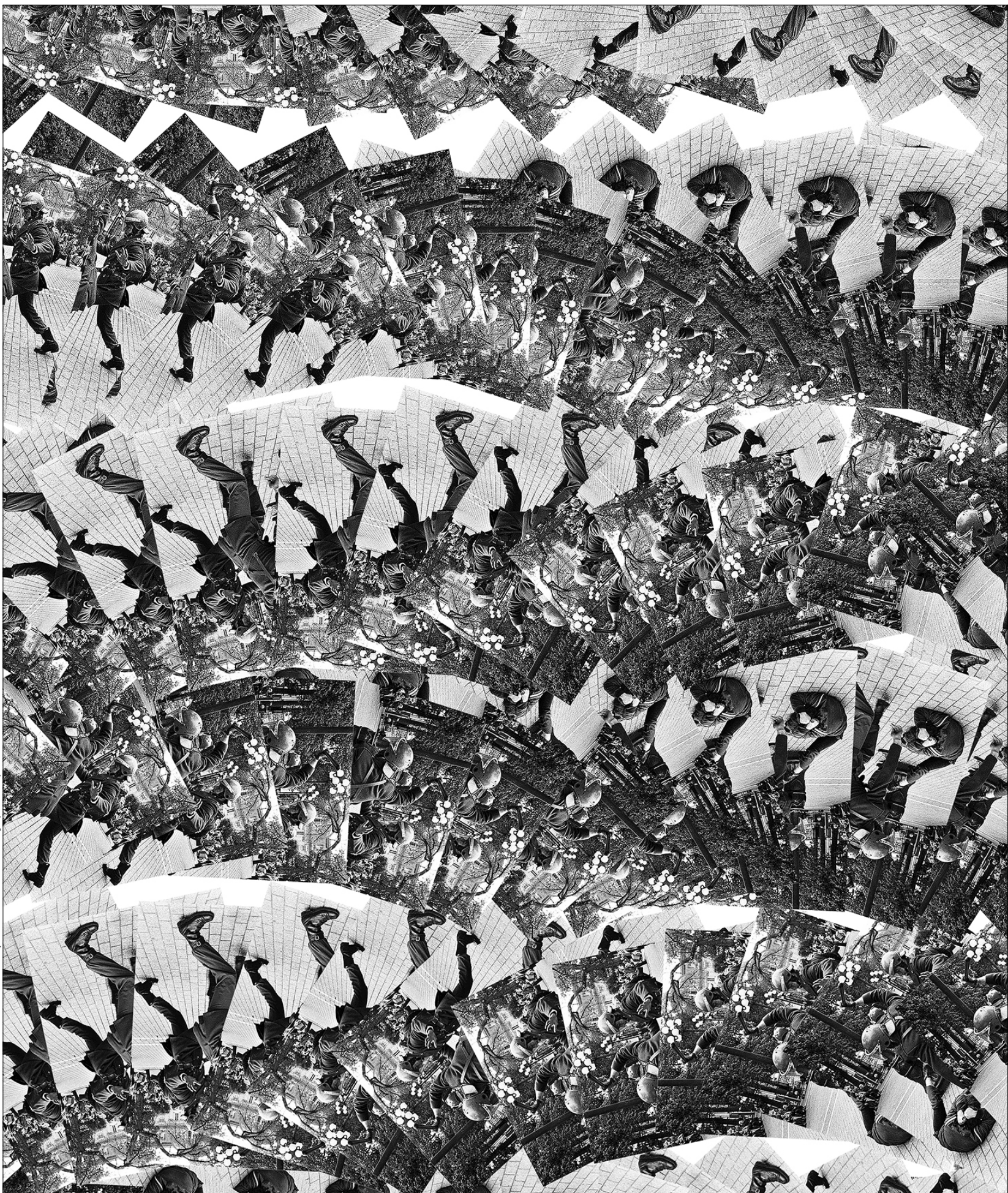
The series of pieces that make up the larger study called *police abuse* are an in-depth exploration of the expressive possibilities contained in a single image. It is an investigation developed under the concept of minimum inventory-maximum diversity. The study is guided by the nature of the image; it's expressive qualities of movement and force and it's subject matter of violence and positions of power. The different paths are taken to understand the potential of the image approaching both the interior subject of the photograph and also the spatial and temporal qualities it offers when understood in the logic of a repeatable whole with a distinct format. The image depicts a situation of police abuse towards an unarmed citizen in a public square in Santiago, Chile during the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet during the 1980's. Three policemen in riot uniforms can be seen beating and kicking a young man who lies on the ground trying to cover himself from the assault.



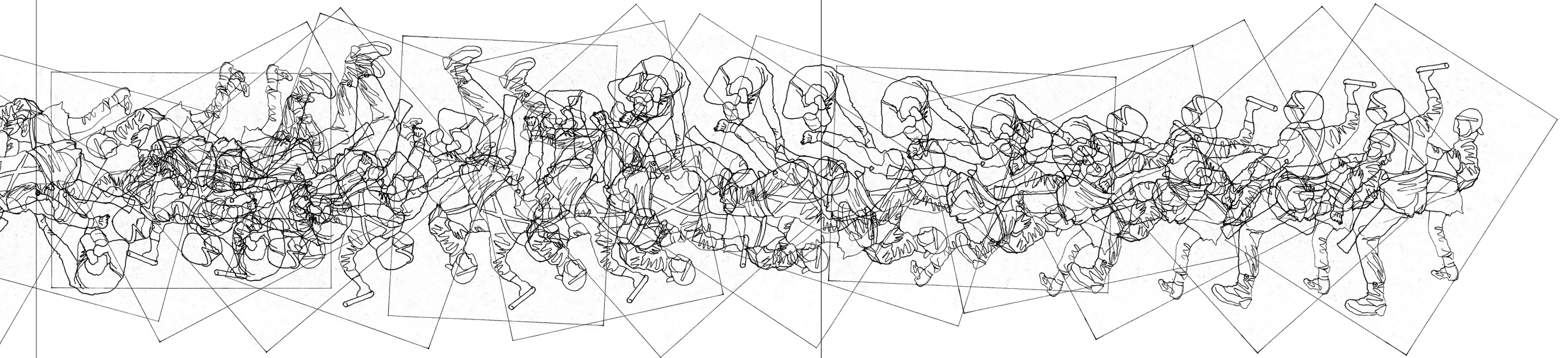
In this first piece, I am exploring the temporal and spatial characteristics of movement in a contained format such as the photo. By using repetition and a regular rotation of the image, I test the three hierarchies of color present in the superimposition—black, gray and white—to create different readings of movement that read together and separately. The movement amplifies the turmoil of the original image and creates a temporal sense of progress, leaving us to wonder if we are seeing one image or several moments. The dynamism of the image takes precedence over the image itself, conferring a sensation more than a clarity of time or place. The format and its clear form and counter form clarify the movement and give us a place for the eye to rest.

A second denser and more intricate rendition loses the clarity of counter form in the photograph's edges leaving us to follow the movement through the interior. The lack of a clear guide and the density of the images create an effective sensation of movement, albeit one that is less defined in its subject. The eye actively scans the surface but loses the meaning of the original image.

34 police abuse study (detail)



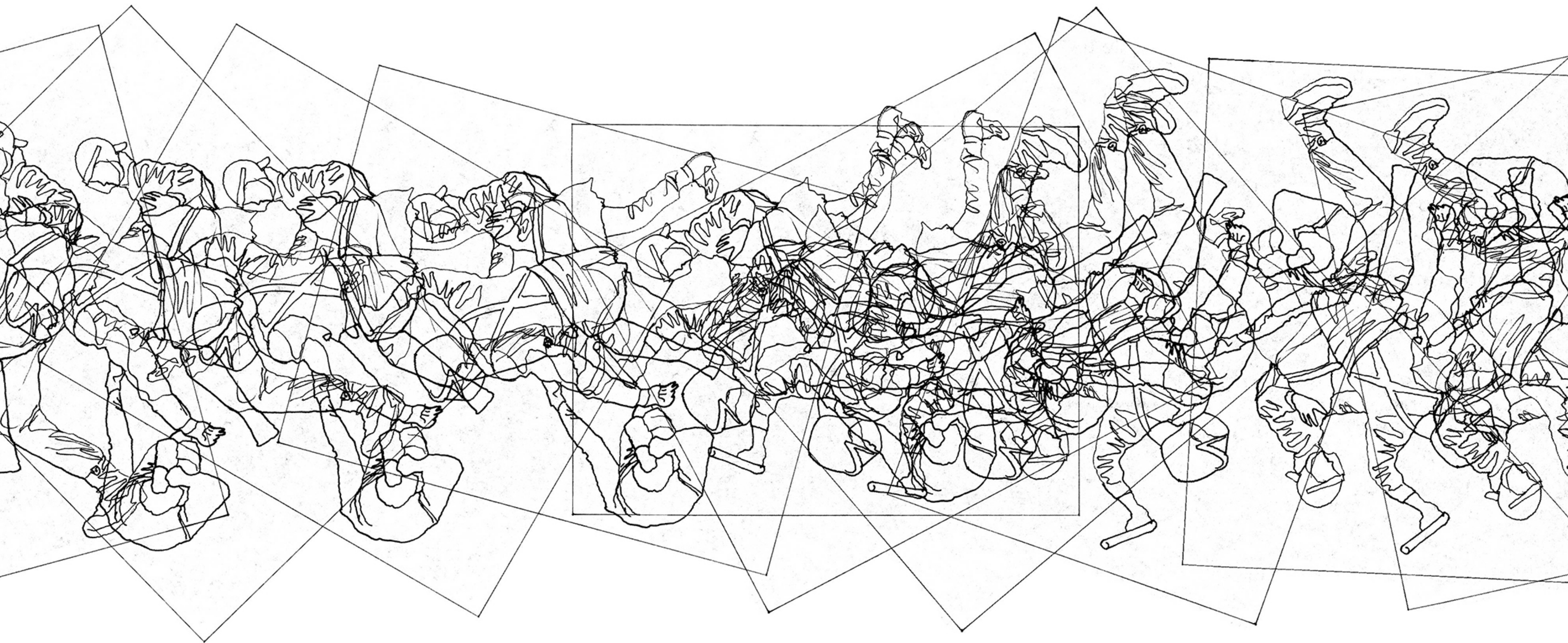
35 police abuse study (detail)



36 police abuse study (detail)

A linear interpretation prioritizes the interior of the image—the superimposition of the subject and its movement—over the contrast of the photo format itself.

What is evident here is the transformation from the focus on the victim of the abuse to the abuser. Also displayed is a clearer temporality and a transition of control.





In this study I focus on the temporal possibilities that an image offers if recombined. The question asked is 'Can an image have a first, second and third moment? Can one part come after the other?' This reconfiguration suggests that it can. By dividing the image horizontally and juxtaposing repeating sections the idea of an action occurring over time, a 'scene' is conveyed. The repetitive nature of the kicking movement, in this case, reinforces the perception of time. The spatial deconstruction of the image distorts the scene, amplifying the original space and time of the action. Instances supersede one another.



An isolation of a horizontal section of the image creates an abstraction that still maintains an idea of action and speed, substantiating the importance of the perspective floor lines and shadows in the original photograph.

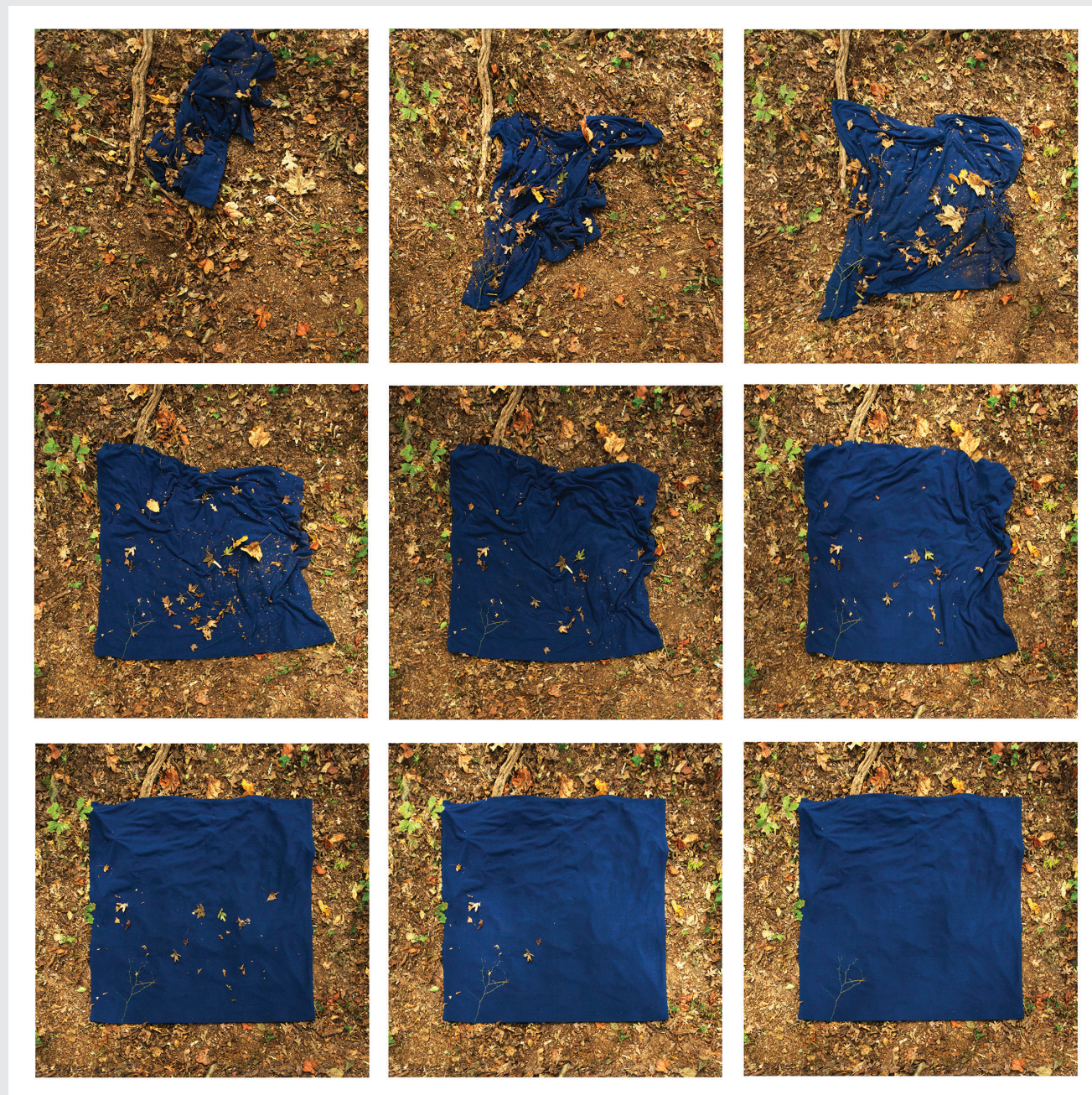


The action of fracturing the image is taken further by creating a spatial fragmentation in which each section corresponds to a physical module. This technique creates a subjectivity with respect to appropriate ways of perceiving the image. A spatial and time component is added through the possibility of walking around and among the sections, in which what changes is not the object itself but our perception of it through the creation of juxtapositions and superimpositions of the parts.

This experience represents an extension of the photographic assembly allowing for multiple lines of appreciation simultaneously. The image remains, but it is reinterpreted through its spatial configurations. Certain aspects are reinforced while others are muted or even changed. The active nature of the image means that its sections not only confer an idea of multiple vantage points in space but also several instances of perception. The three-dimensional quality of the modules and their size (48 x 6 x 2 inches), compound the possibilities of the multiplicity of both angles and moments but also meaning by creating front, back, side, top and bottom sides to explore and potentially imbue with further content. These opportunities are explored here only partially through superimposition of white sections of the module. It is important to note the potential for staging a montage in the cinematographic sense, in which each side tells a different story or moment and a synthesis of these into a definitive meaning is up to the viewer and their own navigation through the piece. There are tensions and contradictions to be explored beyond the original image.

41 police abuse study





The Map and the Territory

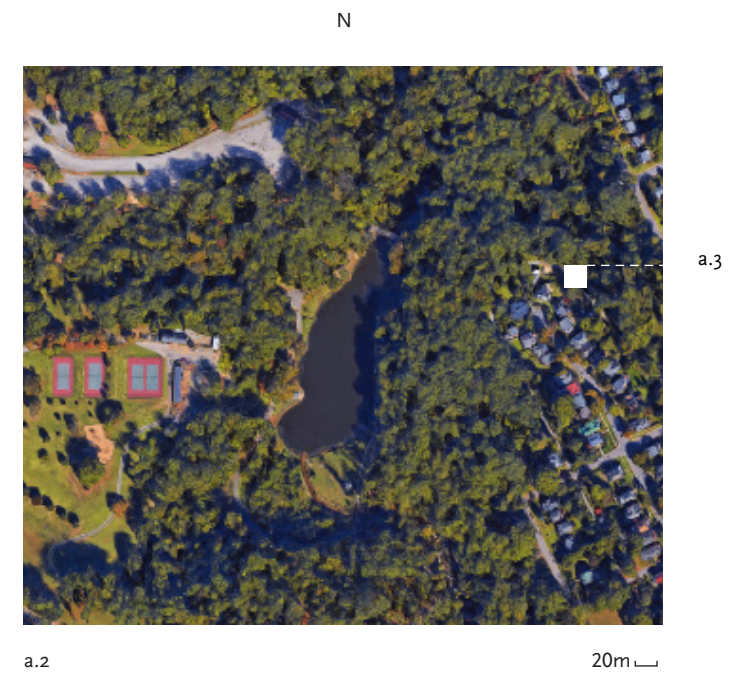
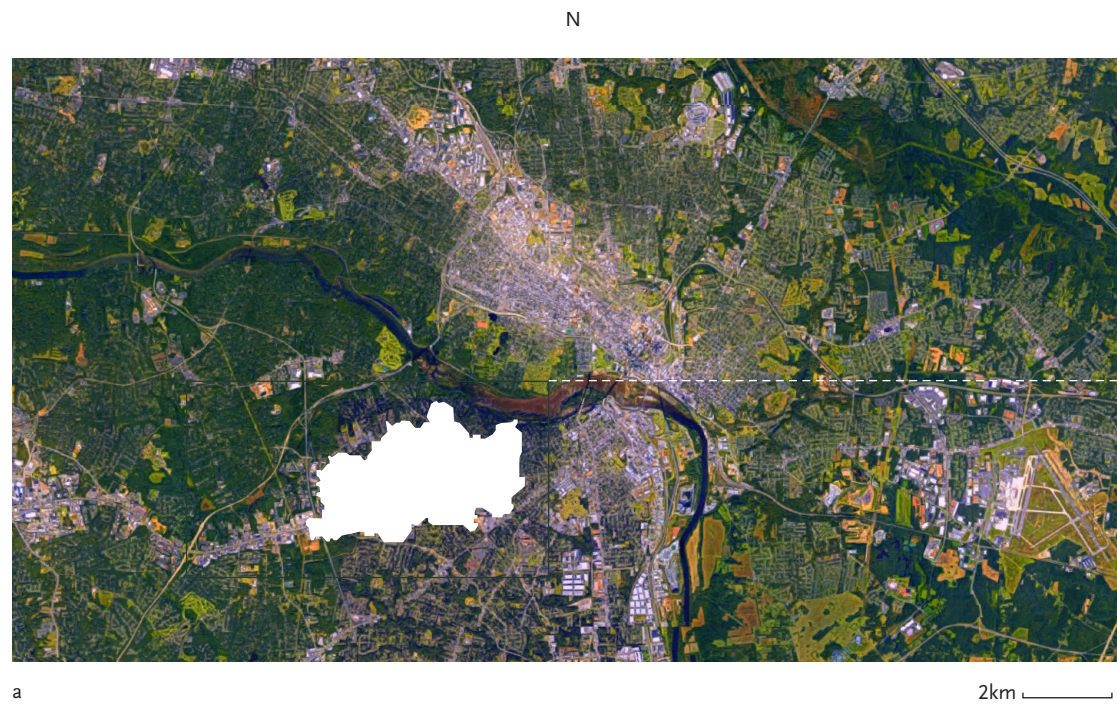
Plants, animals and human beings all stake a place in the world. They claim a territory as their own, and through the simple action of calling something theirs, x a position for themselves, a vantage point from which to engage their surroundings. They say "I'm here. I am." Birds carry out different calls, jumping from branch to branch, tree to tree in an effort to demarcate their space. Human beings create limits, and through these borders define themselves as part of something and not part of another thing: this not that. Through maps, they seek to create the knowledge of dominion, of authority on what a territory is and how it functions.

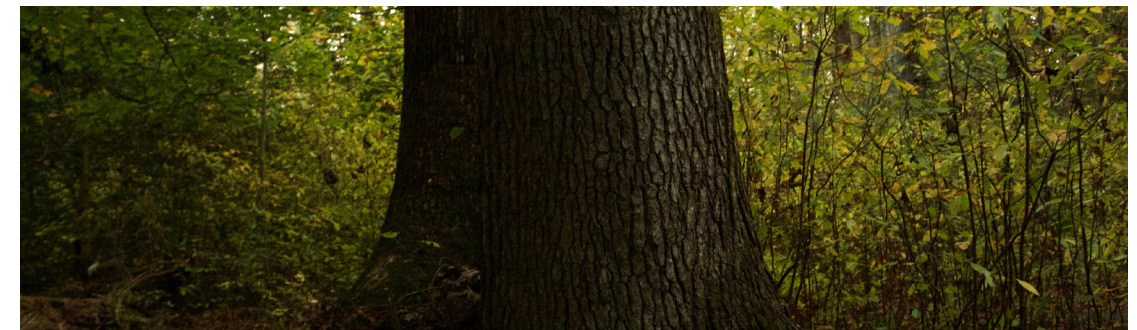
The project consists of using a blue blanket to create a small territory, personal in size, inside the woods surrounding Reedy Creek in Richmond VA. The size of the territory is defined as a 48 inch sided square, a space sufficient to lay my full body along the diagonal. It is a human resting scale. It is not a scale for activity. It is a scale for being. The size of the blanket emphasizes the notion of a territory inside a territory. There is a clear shift between an overview of the city of Richmond and the Reedy Creek area and another shift between the Reedy Creek area and the project space. Because of the reduced study area, the scale of the project changes, and smaller elements take on more prominent roles. The topography of the floor becomes a landscape of mountains and valleys. The shade of a single tree can darken the whole territory. A strong wind can change not only the borders but relocate and redefine the whole landscape.

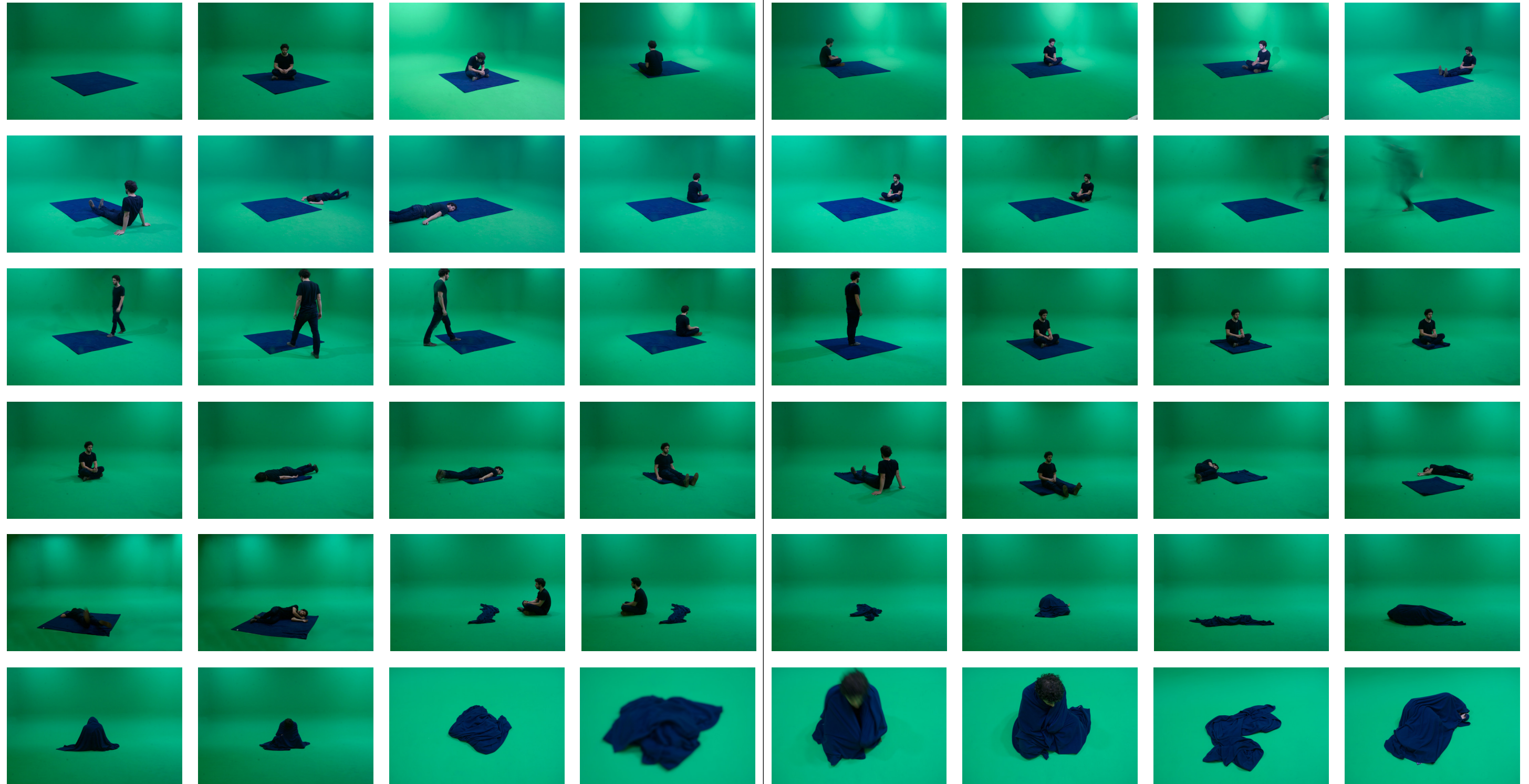
The square blanket was set out on an inconspicuous piece of forest, surrounded by trees. I documented parameters such as temperature and humidity. From an aerial perspective, I observed the blanket, photographing it at the same time each day, every two days, for over two weeks. From this single vantage point, I was able to document the changes. I looked at the passage of light and shadow. I saw how the blanket became wet with condensation on its surface, and how the fallen leaves of autumn began to cover it. It accumulated dust and pieces of leaf, losing its sense of purity. The wind disrupted the surface, modified the boundaries and changed the location of the territory. It became a part of the landscape of the forest and interacted with its different elements. It no longer was distinct.

As the fragility of the blanket in relation to the forest became apparent, its boundaries became more and more obscured. It became physically reduced by the scrunching up and folding. Consequently, the arbitrary denomination of the blanket as territory became an illusion. It passed from being a space, a territory with its own landscape and even projected aerial space, to an object, discarded in the woods by an owner. It was no longer a territory. It became part of a larger place.

The choice to use a common blanket originated from practical motivations: establishing a clear contrast between inside and outside the space, and also emphasizing the contrast between elements that were not originally present in the space, such as leaves and dust. Furthermore, the softness of the blanket allows for an even more ambiguous relationship with the forest. Its malleable surface takes on the topography of the underlying surface. The blue blanket also references a type of blanket, those present in refugee camps and situations of displacement. It emphasizes the transitory nature of the new territory and speaks of narratives that concern public and private intimacy.









Public Intimacy

The language of spatial organization, both in a constructive and regulatory manner, creates fundamental divisions between people. These grouping and separations strike essential chords in the viewer because they make the abstraction of thought real, and reveal the harshness of social organization and the power relations they express, from the physical relations of bodies in shared space to the planning of urban spaces and geopolitical territories.

This project constitutes an attempt to summarize and communicate some of the most important aspects of this thesis. It is designed to acknowledge that our lives are determined by the socio-economic systems in which we find ourselves immersed; that the language of this social-spatial construction is deliberate and that determines not only the way we organize as large groups on a macro scale but even the communication that exists between individuals on a domestic scale.

The project focuses on the permeation between private and public, and how we live in the face of media, in the extended form we have described before. I collapse two different scales of human existence into one: I superimpose an intimate, domestic living scale onto the larger scale of an imagined suburb. To do so I focus on both physical and graphic elements that convey an idea of territory, appropriating the languages of architecture, interior design, and urban planning. There is a simultaneous coexistence of public and private in the graphics elements of video, text and small domestic scenes that are mirrored in the experience of the audience itself. This sum of parts and coexistences reinforce the idea of living together but as individuals, each in our own headspace.

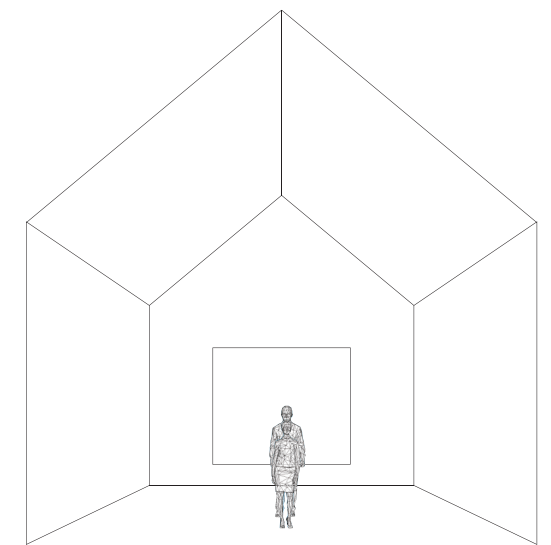
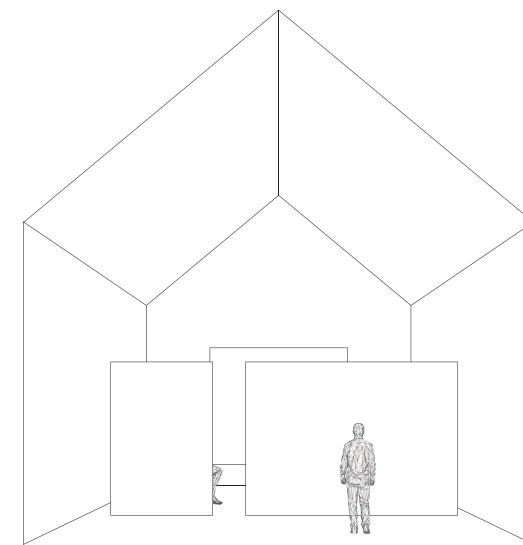
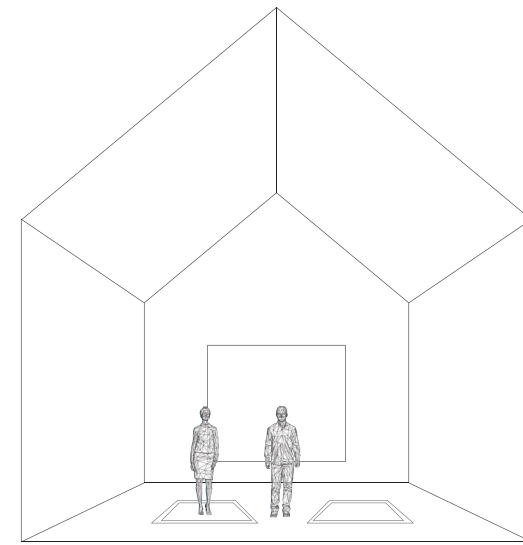
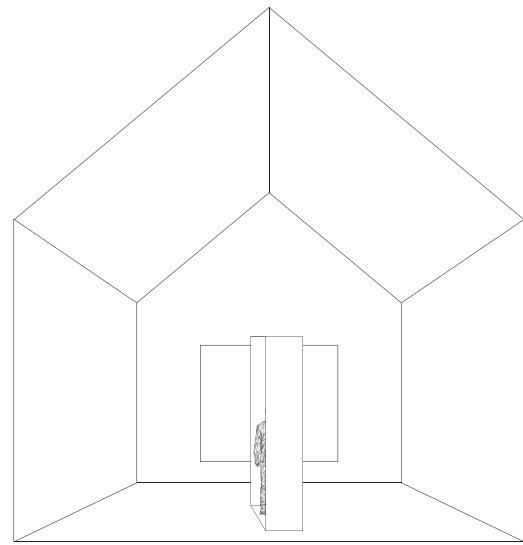
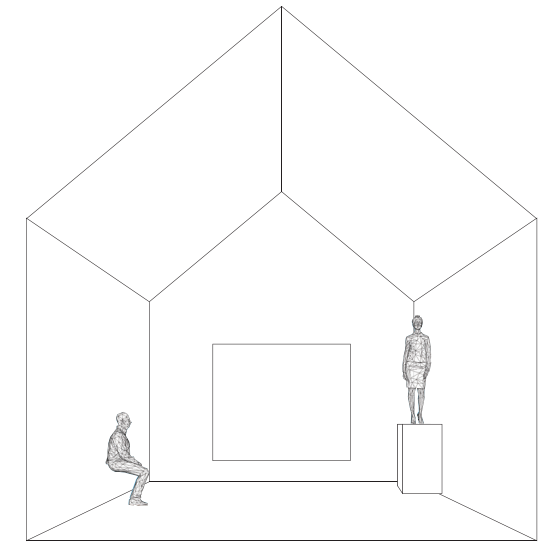
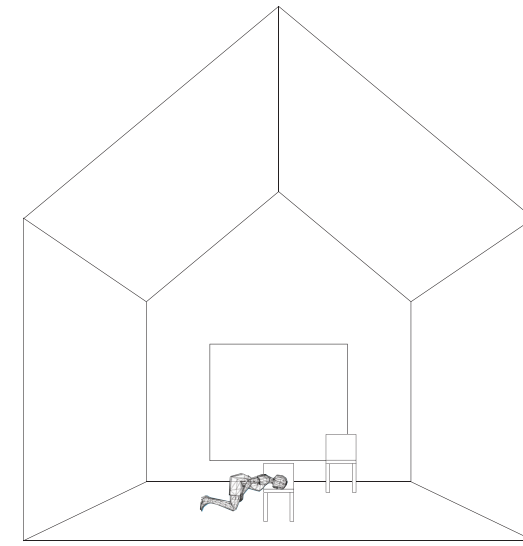
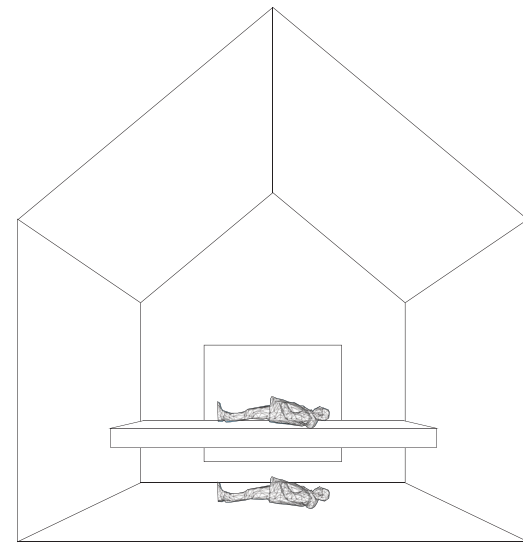
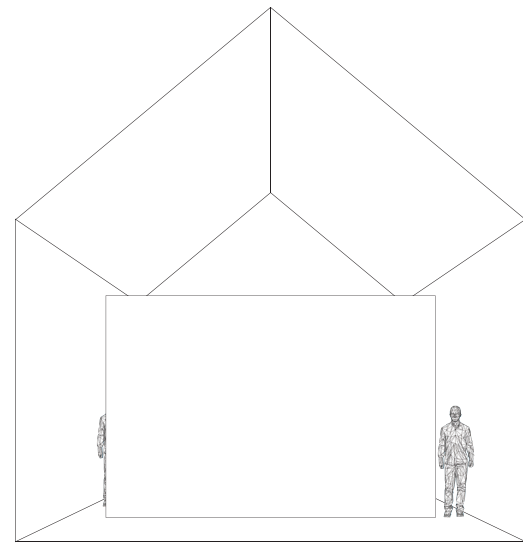
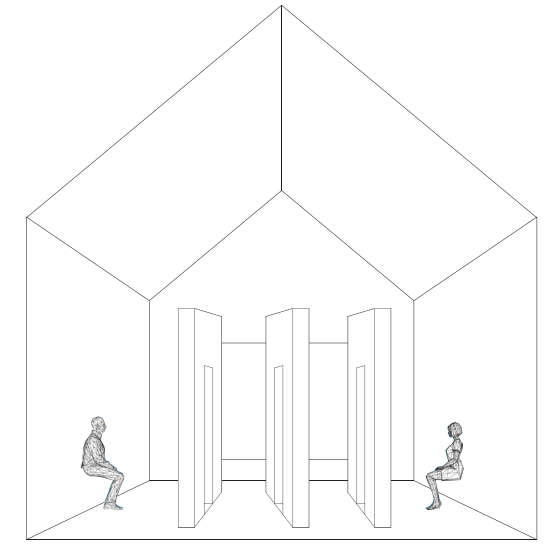
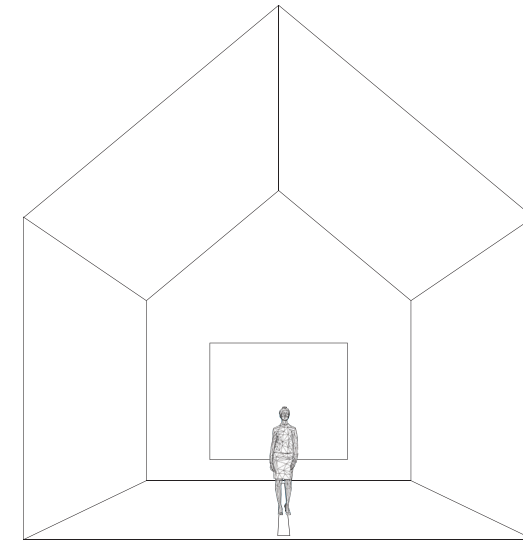
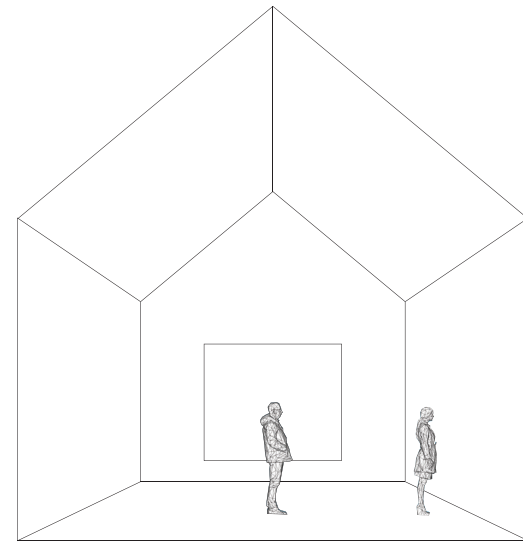
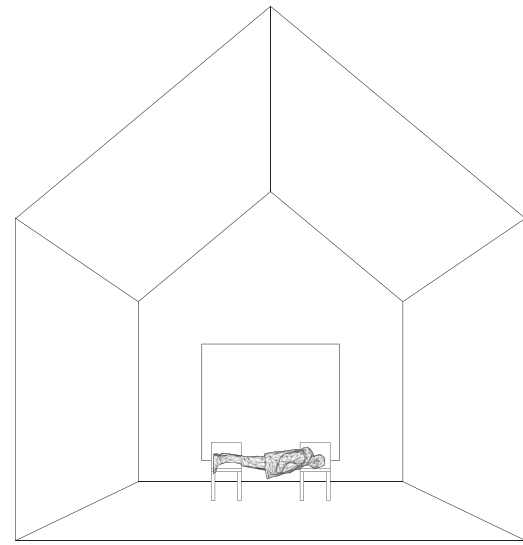




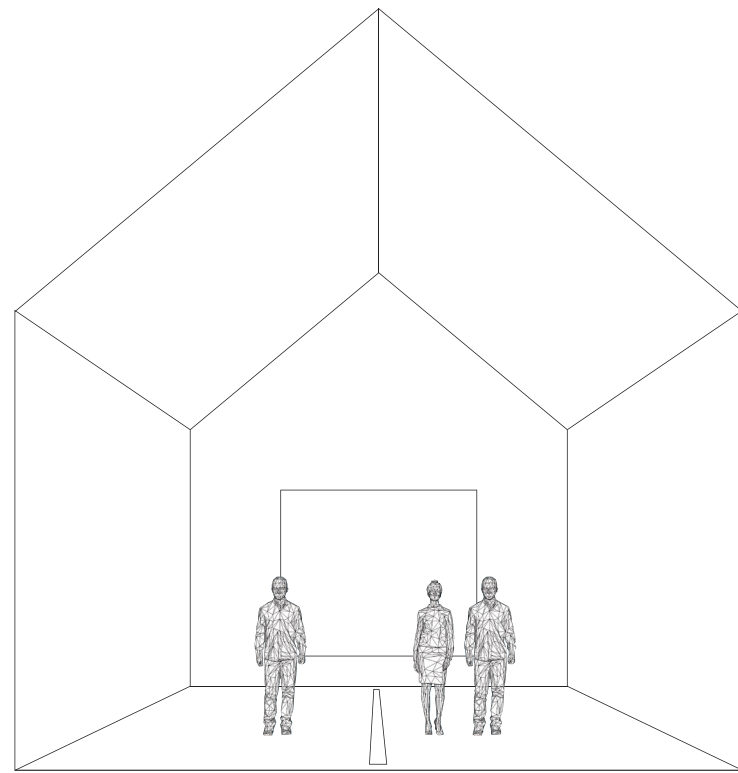
The installation is made up of a group of thirty-one small houses organized to form a small suburb. These houses float in the air, suspended from an overhanging structure. Each one contains a small scene, sculpted from white 3d-printed plastic, mostly showing a male-female couples' relationship. The houses exteriors are iconic, a mix between a suburban house and the images or idea of a house. The interior scenes, however, contradict that serial setting and defy the expectations of what to expect from the exterior. They function as a compendium of awkward spatial configurations in which spatial elements and distribution of the parts amplify the flat, negativity of the text. The audio inside the different houses is in frank contradiction with the rest of the interior content. It speaks of real estate lingo, home improvement network shows and Ikea commercial talk, emphasizing the commercial nature of the home market, the creation of false necessities and the contradiction between lifestyles portrayed by mass media and the reality and unglamorous drama of the lives lived in these spaces. The repeated use of a traditional mother-father-son relationship emphasizes the pursuit of a way of life that is in accordance with this image.

The starkness of the interiors and the relationship between the space and human figures creates a space of theater that mimics Goffman's idea of different spaces as theater's in which each person plays a role. These roles are also present here and their cookie cutter mold resonates the banality of believing in their effectiveness to navigate the more complex situations of life.





50 internal house scenes



how can i help it that you've wasted your life
doing someone else's duty

you're alright aren't you?

better never

i know how to hurt you

i wish i could do that for you
share your cancer

yeah

you are very lonely that's not it
but you are yes

i can't please
i can't

daddy told me

when we were camping

it looked easy on the show

i love your forehead here

at the hairline

i felt my body for lumps
and?
nothing

just stay here until i get back



The houses are arranged in pairs to form rows—like streets—each looking out into the other. This arrangement emphasizes the idea of looking into the 'other's' home while looking into one's own, and also looking into another person's headspace in the macro scale of the people looking in. The distances between houses create tension by making it impossible to focus on both scenes at the same time. From outside the houses, it is possible to observe several situations occurring at the same time reinforcing a sense of voyeurism.

Containing the network of houses and shared domestic space, there is a perimeter established by a door, a window and to projection screens that make the space into an island with clearly established limits, not defined by those of the gallery space in which it finds itself immersed. These situate the suburb directly inside a domestic space; a small apartment or house plan in vinyl on the floor reinforces this idea, with its own sub-territories; rooms and surfaces such as beds, couch, and dining room table.

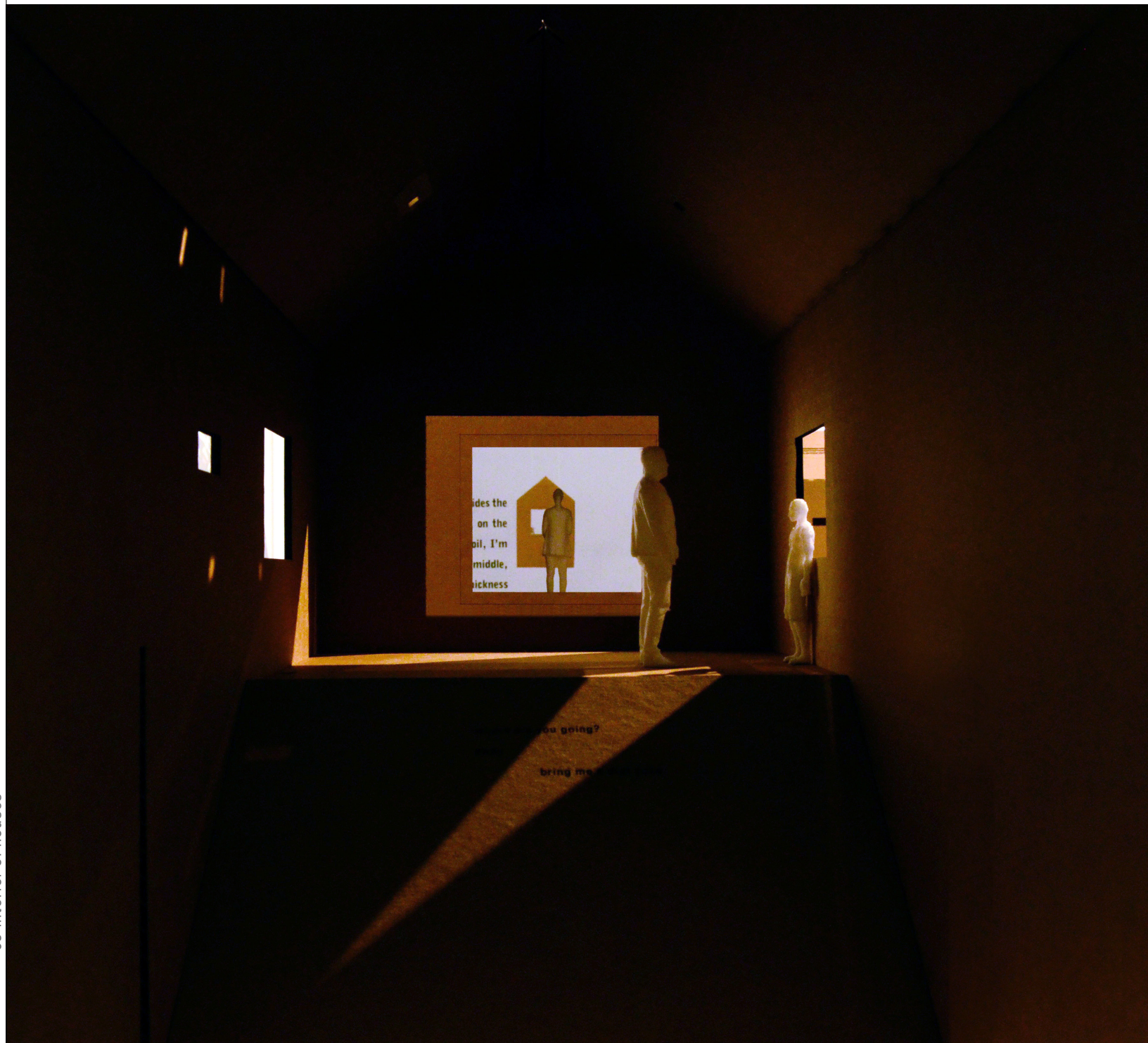


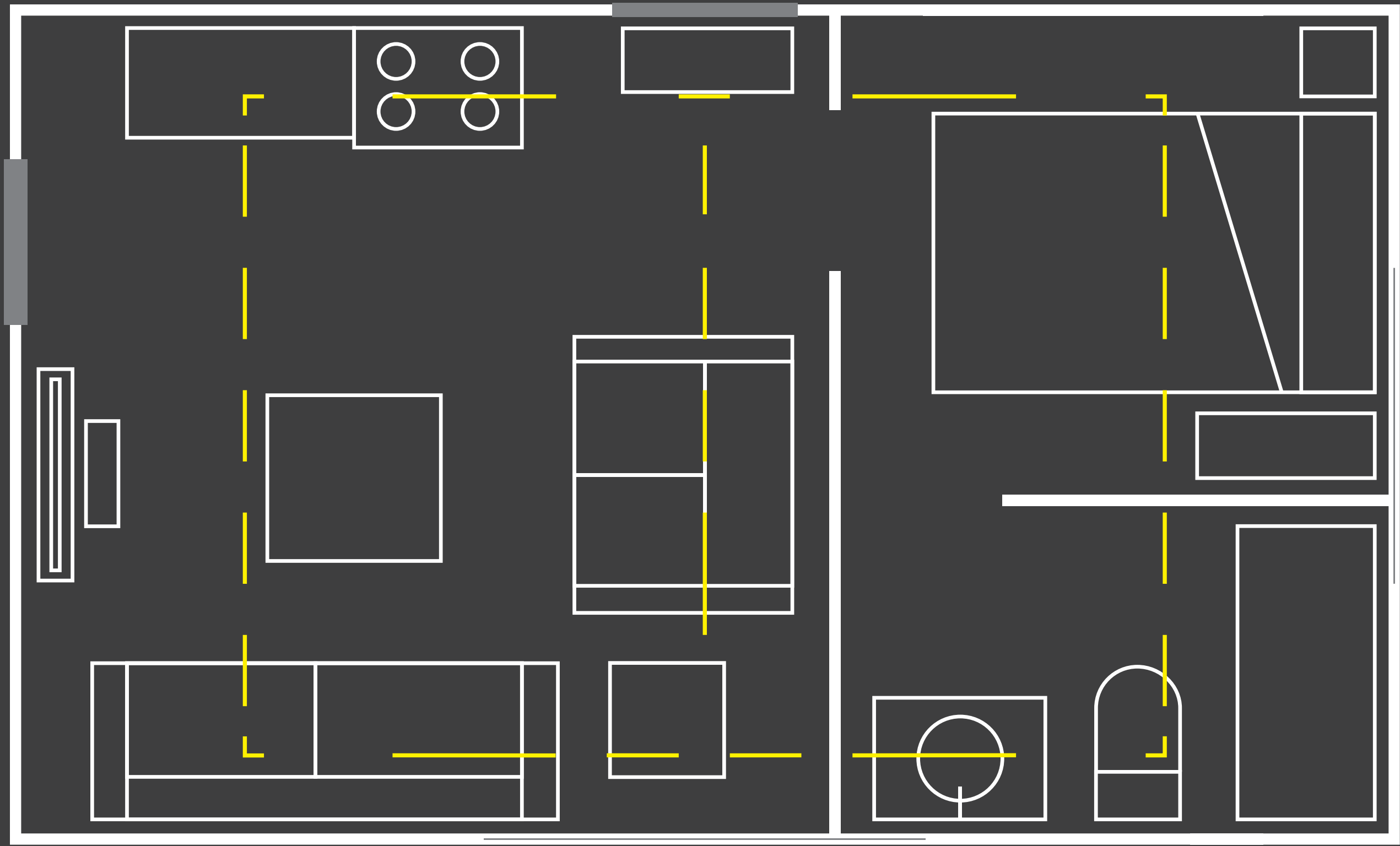
The idea of territories of interaction and dispute, of objects and architecture as mediators between individuals is also compounded in the projections that occupy two of the perimeter screens. The videos develop a fractured language that speaks of individual headspaces and a circular, unempathetic dialogue between a couple. The idea of territory is present again through elements such as a dining room table and a bed. Two subgroups of houses look directly onto the screens instead of facing another set of houses. The video serves as a media background which permeates into the smaller intimate spaces of the houses, with the attempt to create a tension for the viewer between the video, the audio dialog, and the small scene inside the house. New meaning can be gleaned by this narrative superimposition and a relationship between the invasion of media into the domestic private space can also be observed.

Superimposed on the house floorplan is a yellow dashed line that echoes the yellow fences that join and separate at the same time the rows of townhouses. This permeable line together with the fences helps to establish a graphic language for commentary on regulation and safety and a community immersed in a planned urban setting.

These myriad levels of superimposition of scales and scenarios, including situations of personal and shared intimacy and voyeurism create a level of detachment from the scenes themselves. It is an investment in the language of the spaces and the nature of exchange inherent in them. These levels of removal reinforce the idea of public intimacy, of systematic living, and encourage the audience to question these premises.

The form of the houses and their reduced outlook make the viewing experience of the video limited and push the viewer to focus on details they might not have perceived otherwise. Together with the audio, they change the experience of the video, enhancing the coupling of the eventful with the mundane and otherwise insignificant.





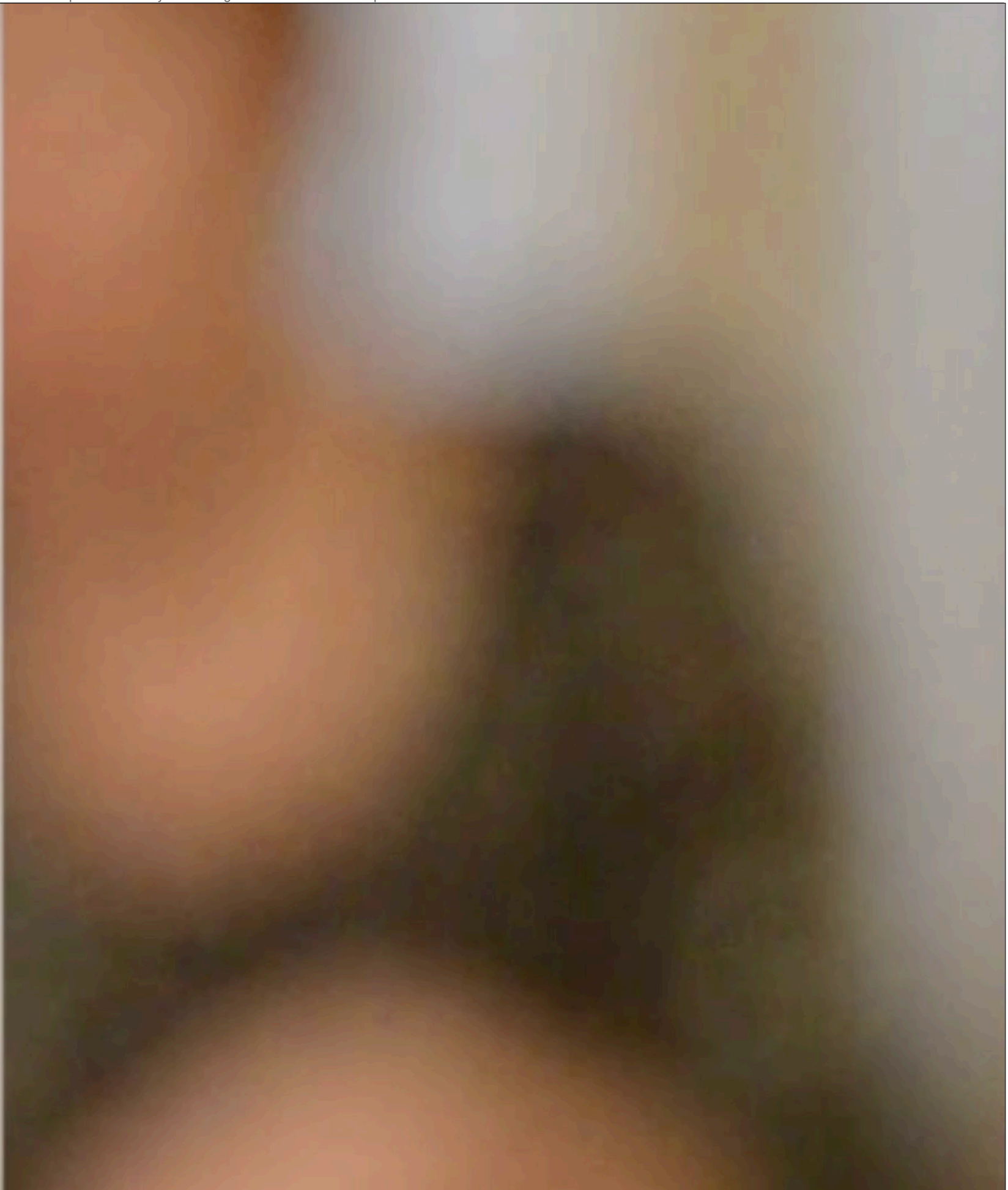
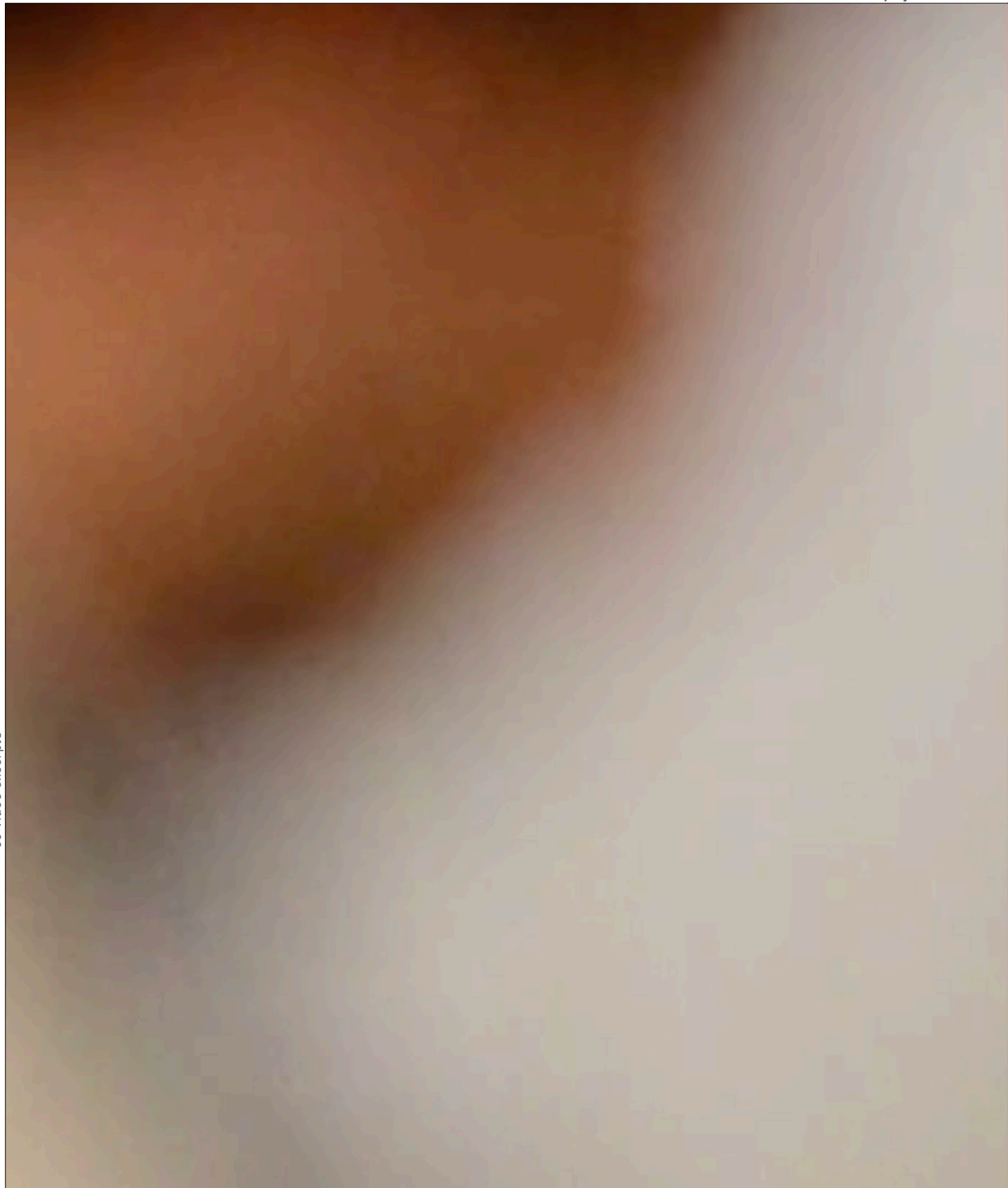
54 vinyl floor plan (not installed)



The visual language of the videos supports themes of unity and isolation. The split screen functions as a threshold that divides a shared space into two subjective headspaces. The image reflects the fractured dialogue weaving in and out of synchronization. I play with the idea of proximity juxtaposing intimate, personal and social distance. I compound the subjectivity and the attention paid by one person to the other through blur and focus. I position spatial objects such as the bed and table as objects of mediation.

The table functions as a territory. It is akin to other domestic and urban territories: the lawn, the street, a landscape, that reflects the tacit dispute between the couple. As an object, it mediates between the husband and wife and collects the gestures of coming together and apart that the woman and man express through their bodies and relative position to each other.

The videos are meant to be seen from inside three different houses-helmets. Each person hears the audio but only sees a small portion, different from their fellow audience, of the action. A large blindspot is formed and the audio becomes increasingly important versus the non-event of the detail of the image that is being observed.





58 video excerpts



Video Dialogue Example

P2a Me and K (table as territory + chair)
P2b Mateo and Me (curtain and toys)

—

How are you?

Didn't we just talk about that?

That was yesterday. Today is Tuesday.

Did you hear the bell? I don't want to miss it.

You know, if you put some aloe

On those hands of yours

They'll be better by the morning

It's the wood shavings

I really do hate them

Do you want your shoes off?

You know, they're not happy with each other.

Who?

Paul and Helga.

No?

No.

Do you think she has something going with him?

Who?

Elisabeth with that guy?

What do I know?

I have a headache.

But I'd sure like to know .. whether she has something going with him.

How should I know?

I wasn't asking you.

Was that the bell? It's going to start soon. What time is it?

Mateo can you please be quiet?

She has such lovely children

They are good kids

Good kids

Mateo please!

You hold your tongue about us.

Sure.

I don't need problems.

You should really put some aloe

On your hands. You just rub a little.

They'll be fine by the morning

You can't work with them like that

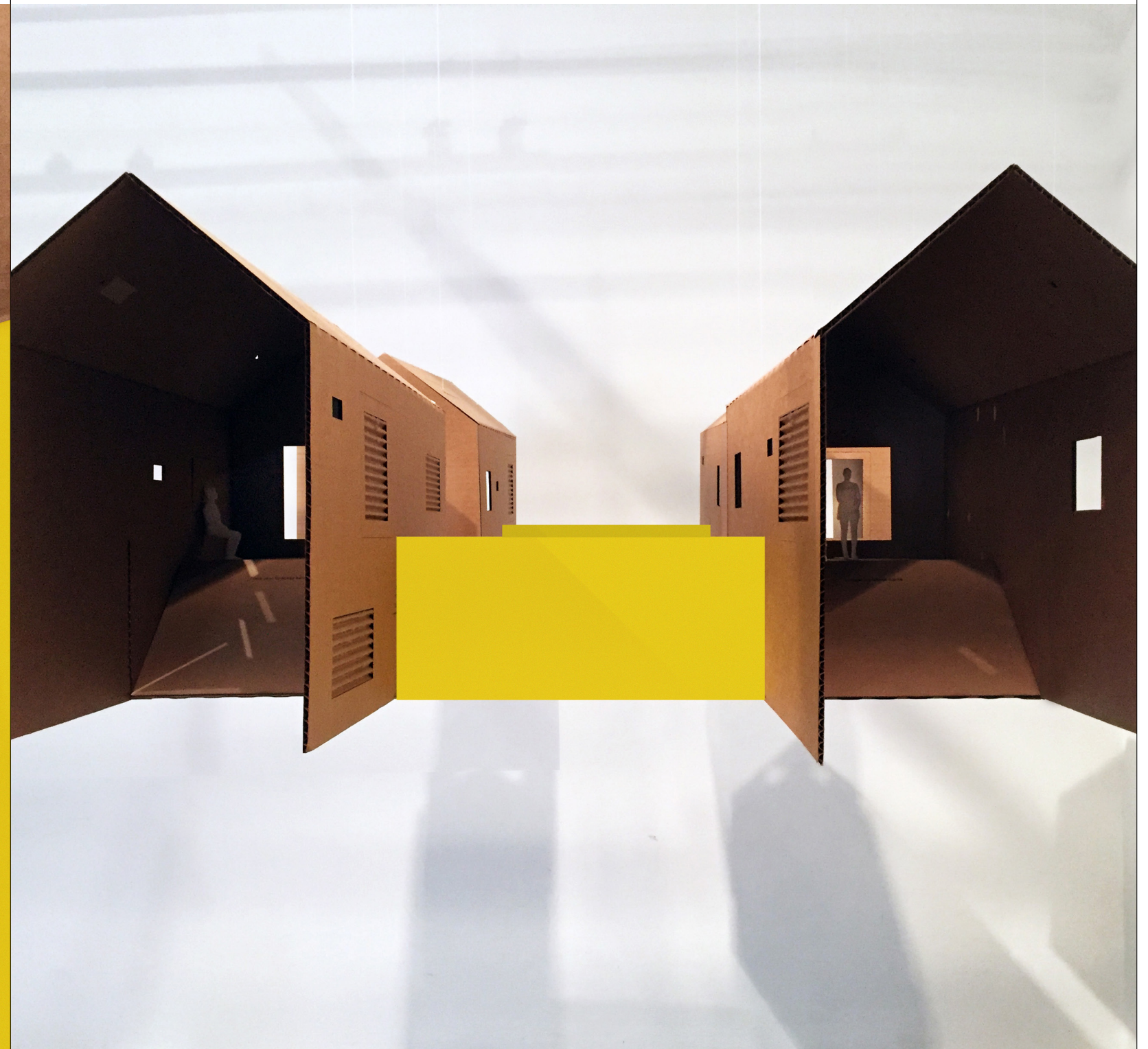
I need to ask you something (moves chair closer or changes to closer chair)

then asks: Can I sit closer to you?

If we divide up your room, we can get another one in there and earn more money. It's big enough, after all.

If you think so.

59 houses and fences



The cardboard is a good compromise between intention and constraints. It speaks of industrial systems and also evokes experiences like changing homes and the improvised beds of the homeless in the streets.





The Project and the Image of the Project

Public Intimacy, as a project had the intention to produce not only the gestures described when inside the installation space, but included another level of removal which was the exterior perception of the public's interaction within the space itself, with the exhibition and among themselves. The concept of voyeurism, of controlled participation while watching others engage is a key aspect to the idea of non-spaces of communication.

My observations of the public in the space served as an evaluation and also as a platform for future designs. What happened varied substantially depending on the time of day at the gallery. The opening at the gallery space generated a chaos and noise that didn't allow for much intimacy and obscured the audio components of the videos and houses. Comparatively, people's time inside the houses, reading the text, listening to the audio, and looking into the houses reduced considerably. The overall tone of the installation was lost or changed, and what was retained was the gesture of looking into the houses and looking into other people's temporary residences. A voyeuristic attitude was also present, of people observing from outside and through the main window other people's gestures. When the majority of the houses were filled with people the idea of a network, its systematic quality increased. Subjectively I noted that a sensation of loneliness was greater when there were many people and when there were very few people, as in the normal hours of the gallery. At these hours, with the lights lower, the public came in pairs or alone and the audio of the individual houses and especially the video's dominated the environment with its fractured rhythms and punctured silences. People took much more time inside each house and the focus was greater on the combination of text and audio.

It is important to establish that due to the possibilities of the installation schedule the project installed was a reduced version of the original project and that I also varied the components in the space during the time the exhibition was running to test out what each element did both visually and in terms of interaction. The main omissions from the project design were the absence of the door frame as part of the system that surrounded the space-territory and the partial absence of the complete vinyl floor plan. I only installed the white baselines that denote the perimeter and smaller internal divisions of the space. I believe that their omission was significant in the communication of two superimposed scales in one space and the reinforcement of the idea of shared territories. In terms of variations, I played with inserting and removing the fences. These opened up space visually when removed and multiplied the possibilities of house-to-house voyeurism. When present they helped establish a clearer division between the houses and reinforced a notion of privacy amongst them.



62 exhibition interaction

Samuel

Beckett

Perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the
 world in two, on the one side the outside, on the
 other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm
 neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle,
 the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness

63 exhibition statement

64 | looking through houses and video: blindspots



Mirroring the human experience of separation and connection

The relationship between the individual and society is constantly changing. Communication has been redefined by technology and the lifestyles engendered by a commitment to that technology, not only in its context but in the very structures that act as a space for its development. The merging of the private and the public sphere and the replacement of places with non-places are in synch with and in effect part of that shift. In these massive shifts in the way we live and interact, I perceive there is a loss. There is a loss of face to face communication and the unknown openness of the consequences that come from effective coexistence. There is a replacement of universes of knowledge of who the other is obtained through experience for universes of representation where the other is depicted for us. Graphic design risks replacing the experience of connection for a communication that is largely superficial, symbolic. There is an opportunity to question this surface and the systems it serves by creating experiences that revitalize the connection not only between an audience and a narrative (and consequently, its narrator) but the public itself and the individuals that constitute it.

The *Public Intimacy* project employs accumulation and repetition to address the systematic components of contemporary living spaces. Its large system of moving parts created a series of opportunities and challenges that were met with varying degrees of success. In effect, there was an opportunity to create a highly nuanced montage of situations and uses of media (audio, video, three-dimensional figures, graphics) and challenges to reduce these to fulfill specific communication roles.

What montage allows for is a juxtaposition and superimposition of parts that allow for multiple viewpoints to be expressed. It creates a temporal element that allows for detachment and focuses on language and engagement and a more visceral response in the same spatial experience. The superimposition of scale is part of that montage and creates a similar relationship of overview—third person perspective—and direct engagement.

The diversity of techniques concentrated into a reduced space allows for a richness of information that allows the designer as a narrator to create more than one voice in a place—for example through different dialogue voices and audio—allowing for specificity in places and more open interpretation in others. This, in turn, presents the important possibility of creating an ambiguity with respect to an overarching narrator and tone. In *Public Intimacy* a variety of voices is presented. The presence of the system is echoed in the domestic interactions inside the houses. However, there is a very constant moral tone—of judgment at least—to the work. The superimposition of systems and perspectives that tone to breathe and appear less heavy handed.

At the same time, the integration of a web of parts is crucial to the overall success of the communication. The more intricate and complex this web is, the more complete control and attention to the different parts and interactions is necessary. An overabundance of pieces can lead not only to the need to balance too many individual instances. More importantly, specific interactions are looked over by the public, replaced by an overall impression or a general impression of the gesture of the piece.

The diversity of techniques concentrated into a reduced space allows for a richness of information that allows the designer as a narrator to create more than one voice in a place—for example through different dialogue voices and audio—allowing for specificity in places and more open interpretation in others. This, in turn, presents the important possibility of creating an ambiguity with respect to an overarching narrator and tone. In the case of this project I think that a variety of voices was created and the presence of the system was designed to be echoed in the domestic interactions inside the houses. However, there is a very constant moral tone—of judgment at least—to the work and what these superimposition of systems and perspectives offers is for that tone to breathe and appear less heavy handed.

In this sense, the project was too ambitious in its scope and details for the impact I sought to make, especially given the time constraints of installation and a number of individual content pieces it required. Although this can be interpreted as specific to this project, it represents a warning for future projects, especially for a considered approach to the objectives of an installation and the way it is to be consumed.

I first believed showing a reduced version as an opportunity to distill the project to its essentials; the true nature of this project and its conceptual development stems from its montage possibilities and nuances. The original installation and its subsequent modifications still only represent an image of the project, more than the project itself. The creation of audios, the work on the small houses as a group but also individually, the dialogue for each individual home, plus the longer dialogue for the video, the hanging system for the more than thirty houses made me question not only the need for all those components, but about the possibilities of creating more reduced expressions that benefit from a more restrained approach. In a way, this is similar to the question of what can the experience of an exhibit offer in comparison to other media: book, photography, video, film. If my goal is to create an intimate experience will a book or a movie be more intimate, more immersive in the way it asks the viewer for their one on one, undivided attention?

Of all the different media encompassed by the field of visual communications, exhibition design is most directly concerned with both the telling of stories and the utilization of space as a media.

It is isolation that permits us to connect to someone else in an exhibition context, while at the same time being vulnerable to the collective. It is this dichotomy which humanizes us and opens up a connection with the “other.” The gestures of privacy in the collective, and of vulnerability, but also strength in identification with a story—while being among the group—are key to establishing spaces of dialogue.

Movies do this through the conditions they create: the collective individuality of the dark theater space and the individual intimacy of personal narrative as seen through the eyes, the projection of the mind, and even of the protagonist. However, movie theaters are sanctioned spaces for this audience-material relationship and do not establish a bridge with the audience through the gestures of their own body. The exhibition space, by being inherently less codified, and by demanding a participation in the audience instead of a general attitude of reception, has the opportunity to generate individual investments that favor a sense of alertness, investment, and connection.

In this way, the exhibition space can mirror the human experience of separation and connection and the shared impression of vulnerability that leads to a more empathetic response. The creation of the group and individual instances both separately and simultaneously allows for these situations to arise.

Having established these differences, it is still relevant to question the reduction of elements and their potential in isolated instances and in smaller reconfigurations. This is something I discovered while I was working on the project: the potency of audio and dialogues on their own, without the need for an image. Moreover, a reduced format allows for concentration on creating richer individual pieces, that possibly evoke in the audience an impulse to spend more time with a particular instance, versus regarding each instance as merely part of a larger whole.

At the same time, a number of small dialogues and instances for a larger palette of moods and situations seems logical. I see it as a missed opportunity not to have incorporated more optimistic and humorous elements into my design palette, beyond a few texts.

Form: Abstraction and Representation

The idea of using spatial language as a direct form of communication allows for a range of applications that allow it to be present as the main focus of a visual communications project or as a supportive frame for other forms. The language of spatial creation is powerful because it is a representational abstraction. As if placing a map over a territory, it physically—and therefore politically, geographically, personally—enforces an abstraction, an idea upon reality and upon people's lives. It speaks of relations of power and the imposition of one person's view over another. Its potential as a tool for communication is, therefore, immense, and has something to offer to the designer no matter the context or subject matter. Its use as a generator of signifiers can be graphic or can be used to create a design that focuses on experience over metaphor and merges the symbolic with the experiential.

Spatial elements as language allow engagement with the figurative, the abstract and the in-between for the two to be expressed and bridged. The expectation is that this runs parallel to the continuum between a detached focus on language and immersion-representativeness. However, these do not necessarily correlate. The gestures of the human figure can be seen as abstract because they are projections of thought, and lines on the floor can be seen as representations because they are depictions of those that already exist in the urban context.

There is room to further explore this continuum between abstraction and figuration, always with the idea of juxtaposition and superimposition of voices. This can also be personal: the interior monolog and exterior manifestation as an aid to addressing the distance between the two. The quality of the mediums employed takes in a preponderant role in this ambiguity. The line has special significance because it is the expression of boundaries. It is an abstraction of the figurative, a reduction of thought into a distilled physical mark and straddles the boundary between the systematic and the personal, the real and the remembered.

Final Thoughts

The most important question raised by this thesis investigation and the work described here is the need to recognize the systematic quality of contemporary living and acknowledge that these systems are at the least reductive to communication. Rigorous examination of the coded structures and gestures that define the spaces we inhabit can allow for a critique of their underlying intentions and the attitudes and modes of interaction they engender. A major theme that Erwin Goffman treats throughout his work is the fundamental importance of having an agreed upon definition of the situation in a given interaction, which serves to give the interaction coherency. There is an opportunity here to reveal our complicity in these systems and question not only our participation in a theater of prescriptive roles but also the consequences of that participation in other's experiences.

The scenarios touched upon in the current series of projects described are perhaps the larger, more recognizable symbolic universes that make up the contemporary American urban landscape. Further inquiry into the nature of non-places and their individual sets of rules of engagement reveals a rich territory of instances and scales to explore.

My study of these thresholds or spaces of resistance—between ourselves and that which we project, and between the different actors that occupy the territory of a social space at any given time—is driven not only by content that deals with a creation of spatial narratives projected by a consumer market. It is also gaining impulse by tensions that can help to reveal the site for significant events: “a lived space, frequented by the stories that took place there over the course of time, and bears traces of those spatial narratives.” It can help uncover the non-events that occupy the majority of our lives, what Giuliana Bruno calls “psychoanalytic residue, the fragments, and relics of one's terra incognita, sometimes traveled so much by way of habit and habitation that they have become unknown.”²² A collective unconscious—both of *non-places* and *non-events* as spaces—is a fundamental aspect of contemporary life and a potent generator of signifiers.

The opportunity for graphic design here lies in the use of spatial relations as an adequate language for speaking about the essence of human nature: the desire to be alone and to connect, the loneliness and longing for connectedness. By emphasizing visual thresholds through the use of line and framing, the underlying theme of *together apart* can be acutely expressed. The use of montage can help to create a continuum between abstraction and representation in which both individual subjective perspectives and objective realities can coexist in a shared space, a space for interpretation and encounter with the other.

Notes

1. Augé Marc, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2006), 30-41.
2. Augé, 75-116.
3. DeBord Guy, *Society of The Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 2000), 198.
4. Simmel Georg, Bridge And Door, *Theory, Culture and Society*. Volume 11, pp.5-10. February 1994.
5. Lefebvre Henri, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 27.
6. Augé, 82.
7. Augé, 81.
8. De Certeau Michel, *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000)
9. Baudrillard Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014)
10. Augé, 19 .
11. Augé, 25.
12. Augé, 34.
13. Colomina Beatriz, *Sexuality and Space* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007)
14. Goffman Erving, *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000)
15. Nisbet James, "Surface/Sphere: Walter De Maria's Geopolitical Dimensions," *The Art Bulletin*, accessed May 11, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00043079.2016.1143755?needAccess=true>.
16. Burr Tom, *Tom Burr: Extrospective: Works 1994-2006* (Lausanne: Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 2006)
17. Bonvicini Monica, *Monica Bonvicini: Disegni* (Berlin: Distanz, 2012)
18. Wilson Jane and Louise Wilson, *Jane & Louise Wilson* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2003)
19. Bruno Giuliana, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007)
20. Wilson Jane and Louise Wilson, 50
21. Kuitca Guillermo, *A Book based on Guillermo Kuitca* (Amsterdam: Contemporary Art Foundation, 1993)
22. Applebroog Ida, *Are You Bleeding Yet?* (New York, NY: La Maison Red, 2002)
23. Benjamin Walter, and Thomas Y. Levin, "Rigorous Study of Art," accessed May 11, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778983?seq=1contents>
24. Bruno, 40.

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Primary

Applebroog, Ida. *Are You Bleeding Yet?* New York, NY: La Maison Red, 2002.

Artist Ida Applebroog's work makes uncomfortable. She creates pictorial scenes that show us inherently flawed characters, recognizable but only so far as to allow us to identify with them. These characters are monsters, but monsters in which we see our own flaws. We arrive at a scene always in the middle. There is no narrative arch, only the uneasy feeling of something gone wrong and a longing for completeness. There is no final closure—the story moves endlessly on and on.

The scenarios she chooses are mundane, without background noise. In them, she examines how power is exerted by economic forces, the pervasiveness of relationships that are transactions. She speaks of a hollowness of spirit that is unsuccessfully filled by consumer products. Marketing first conveys that something is missing or wrong and then offers a product to fill the void or fix the problem.

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. London: Verso, 2006.

Anthropologist Marc Augé lays the groundwork for a new anthropological method, determined by the need to re-evaluate the relationship between the individual and society. This rethinking of the study of the 'other' is a response to the accelerated transformations in space, time and the ego in contemporary society.

Benjamin Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Boston, MA: Belknap Press, 1999.

In the Arcades Project Benjamin explores the commodification of things—a process in which he locates the decisive shift to the modern age. In the arcade the street and the interior merge in an array of objects that capture time within them. This threshold between exterior and interior is a permeable membrane. Benjamin takes the time to distinguish between a threshold, as a concept linked to transformation and a boundary. 'Schwelle (threshold) is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave actions are in the word schwellen, swell and etymology ought not to overlook these sense.'

Boettger, Till. *Threshold Space: Transitions in Architecture. Analysis and Design Tools*. Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014.

Till Boettger positions the threshold space as an essential element of any architectural project. He examines the different roles this space can assume as an articulator and as a key space that can open up or close off a building. He describes a set of parameters—delimitation, sequence, geometry, topography, materiality, furnishings—through the lens of the essential open-closed dichotomy of the threshold.

Bonvicini, Monica. *Monica Bonvicini: Disegni*. Berlin: Distanz, 2012.

Monica Bonvicini's drawings are fuelled by the illusion of spaces and bodies that media generate and by the transfer that renders them consumable as imaginations. Bonvicini is interested in the escapist aspect of these spaces of longing. She takes and re-appropriates interior design magazines and their historical discourses on the role of the woman as subservient to man. She uses our assimilation of the architectural language of these publications language to create transparent, almost linear pictorial spaces. In these, we forget about the environment in which the picture appears and turn the pictorial space into real space.

Bruno, Giuliana. *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

In this collection of essays, the author explores the relationship between architecture and the arts—especially film—and the positioning of the exhibition space as an intermediate between the two. The museum space unites the internal space of memory and subjectivity present in film with the traversal of space in architecture.

Burr, Tom. *Tom Burr: Extrospective: Works 1994-2006*. Lausanne: Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 2006.

Tom Burr's work articulate problematics linked to architecture and public spaces, and questions of sociology, psychology and gender politics. The conceptual investigation questions the way in which identity, especially sexual identity, is constructed or is, on the contrary, constrained by society and its physical spaces.

Burr consciously explores the theoretical underpinnings behind acts and gestures of spatial design and rearrangement. He explores the tensions between individual and collective, private and public and reveals the psychological framework we create around ourselves through our relation with the design.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

De Certeau seeks to delineate the differences between the concepts of space and place. He describes place as "... (lieu) the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence." In De Certeau's view, the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct locations, a location it defines. Space takes into account variables of movement and time. It is a practiced place.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000.

Sociologist Erving Goffman describes social interaction, especially face to face exchanges through the lens of theatrical performance. According to Goffman, individuals attempt to control the impression that others have of themselves by adapting their context and assuming roles that allow them to generate the desired effect and avoid misunderstandings. These roles are codified into different parts to be acted out, and the setting in which the performances take place also divide into sections—mainly front and backstage—with the mutual understanding between the parts that to assume this guise is best for everyone involved. The agreement to comply and assume different roles exists bound by the common tension that this strategy is profitable to everyone and helps maintain peace and order. This coherency, established through a tacit understanding, happens on every level of social organization, from top to bottom and allows for keeping with the status quo.

Graham, Paul. *Paul Graham: Photographs*, ed. Michael Mack. Göttingen: steidlMack, 2009.

Paul Graham's photography captures the everyday gestures that people use to mediate between their internal selves and society. He focuses on the conscious and unconscious revelations of our body language. Through framing, he explores what these gestures convey at different distances. The face, the body and the human figure are depicted in mundane, urban environments showing the human desire to create distance between ourselves and others. Graham perceives these gestures not only in their physical significance but culturally as well. In Empty Heaven he observes the contrast between Japan's Occidentalized cultural output and the remnants of traditional expressions of privacy in social gatherings. In American Night he represents these gestures to talk about the alienation of contemporary American consumer society and the differences between the wealthy and the less privileged.

Hall, Edward. *The Hidden Dimension*. Gloucester, Ma: Peter Smith Pub, 1992.

The author investigates the invisible sphere that makes up a person's personal territory. He defines this critical distance as one of the key dimensions of modern society. Hall starts from the field of biology and moves into the realms of sociology and anthropology, linking instinctual desires for safety and territoriality with contemporary issues of interpersonal relations. Hall introduces these relations of distance as a new field: proxemics. Through proxemics, he demonstrates how the space of mediation between a person and his physical and social surroundings can affect personal and business relations, cross-cultural interactions, architecture, city planning, and urban renewal.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991.

Lefebvre's argument in *The Production of Space* is that space is a social product or a complex social construction (based on values, and the social production of meanings) which affects spatial practices and perceptions. This argument implies the shift of the research perspective from space to processes of its production, and the focus on the contradictory, conflictual, and, ultimately, the political character of the processes of production of space. Lefebvre argues that this social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, hence of capitalism itself.

Nisbet, James. "Surface/Sphere: Walter De Maria's Geopolitical Dimensions," *The Art Bulletin*. accessed May 11, 2017.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00043079.2016.1143755?needAccess=true>.

DeMaria targets the symbolic nature of space making through marks, creating an abstracted gesture with minimum means. By employing basic geometrical shapes: line, circle, square with mathematical precision, he calls attention to the relationship between containing forms, and between these forms and their surroundings. Through his work, he shows how the elements of spatial creation that bind and divide and ultimately define the identity of a place, start with the basic gesture of drawing a line.

Simmel, Georg. Bridge And Door, *Theory, Culture and Society*. Volume 11, pp.5-10. February 1994.

Bridge and Door is a short essay in which the author portrays the door and the bridge as metaphors for the inherent human desire to be alone and at the same time be connected to the rest of society. The door acts as a reciprocal threshold through which the internal and external mediate, while the bridge represents the extension of man's will to communicate.

Teysso, Georges. *A Topology of Everyday Constellations*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013.

Teysso considers the intrusion of the public sphere into private space, and the blurring of notions of the interior, privacy, and intimacy in our societies. If the threshold no longer separates public from private, and if we can no longer think of the house as a bastion of privacy, Teysso asks, does the body still inhabit the house—or does the house, evolving into a series of microdevices, inhabit the body?

Whiteread, Rachel. *Rachel Whiteread: Transient Spaces*, ed. Lisa Dennison. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2001.

Through her sculpture's Rachel Whiteread transforms negative space, the spaces we inhabit and traverse, into solid form. She casts from domestic objects, the spaces within furniture and interior spaces, and even entire rooms and buildings. Through the presentation of the unrepresented, she draws attention to our domestic existences and the duality of interior and exterior, of private and of public, of the object and its image.

Secondary

Allison, Dorothy. "River Of Names," in *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*, ed. Tobias Wolff, 9-19. New York, NY: Vintage, 1994.

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer, The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, 94-136. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Badley, Linda. *Lars Von Trier*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Bausch, Richard. All the Way in Flagstaff Arizona, in *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*, ed. Tobias Wolff, 21-34. New York, NY: Vintage, 1994.

Barthes, Roland. Objective Literature: Alain Robbe-Grillet, in *Roland Barthes: Critical Essays*, 13-24. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1981.

Benjamin, Walter, and Thomas Y. Levin. "Rigorous Study of Art." *October* 47 (1988): 84-90. doi:10.2307/778983.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014.

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