

ACSA Distinguished Professor

2014-2015 Winner: Submission Materials

GREG WATSON
Louisiana State University

PORTFOLIO

In Support of the Nomination for the
2014-2015 ACSA Distinguished Professor Award

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STATEMENT ON TEACHING

Teaching still feels new to me. I made this observation once before. It was part of a position statement on teaching I was asked to write early in my academic career. The sense of 'newness' I reported came from the uncertainty and doubt I felt in the role of a design teacher. While some might have seen this as a disqualifying characteristic, for me it was an important indication that the question of how to teach design was not settled. The openness of the question led to continuing experiments with the content and the process of the studios I was teaching. At that time I stated the hope that I would feel the same way in twenty years.

I am now almost exactly at that point and, remarkably, I can report that my hopes in this regard have largely been met. Of course in the interim much has changed, but my sense of uncertainty surrounding teaching design has remained intact. The initial uncertainty was attributable to the incompetence that defines being a novice professor. Now, technically past my novitiate, I have earned a more useful understanding of the source and value of the uncertainties that still occupy me as a design teacher. I have come to understand that the inability to reduce this experience to a stable and reproducible model of how to teach architecture is precisely what keeps me actively interested in the effort. I work hard to protect the openness of this process against assumption and habit. While questions about the specifics of how I teach design are difficult for me to answer concisely or consistently, questions about why uncertainty and doubt are important attributes to bring into a design studio can be more clearly articulated.

"Here is what we have to offer you in its most elaborate form — confusion guided by a clear sense of purpose." Gordon Matta-Clark

Before becoming an architect, I studied to be a behavioral scientist, an experimentalist. After architectural practice, and before teaching, I pursued studio art focused on painting and drawing. The thing that relates these interests is that they are all design practices: the design of inquiry, the design of buildings, and the design of visual language and communication. In all these contexts, if pursued in a curious and diligent way, design is always a slippery and risky task. It has shifting and ambiguous boundaries surrounding ideas of content, quality, meaning, intent, relevance, and responsibility. Within any serious design process the questions get larger before they get smaller and persistent success emerges slowly from a field of failure. The strongest answer is never the first. As I understand design, this is the inherent nature and anatomy of the process and is common to all creative work of any substance.

Given this as a frame for design education, the responsibility of teachers is to help students find confidence in their abilities to survive full immersion in this process. It seems obvious that this can't be accomplished by advocating methods of making and thinking which pretend the complexity and ambiguity intrinsic to design work does not exist, or by forcing linear thinking and methodologies on a beautifully nonlinear process. Design instruction based on this type of reduced view that over-values predictability, control, and conformity falsifies creative work. The abilities and confidence to deal with the complexity of architecture, and to develop an independent voice as a designer, emerges only with diligent questioning, hard work, disciplined practice, and patience. It demands persistence in the face of uncertainty.

The goal is to prepare students to engage and act on the world as it is, as they find it. They have to be prepared to question everything they see, be suspicious of their assumptions, and be willing to risk failure in order to reveal things of value within their work. They should be prepared to take chances in order to see their work and ideas in ways that challenge their own, and other's, preconceptions. They must develop a sense of responsibility beyond their individual ambitions and wants by seeing architecture in a larger social, political, and cultural context. They must be encouraged to resist the indifference which has created so much of our physical environment and to agitate for action. Most importantly, before we ask students to take such risks we, their teachers, must be willing to do the same. We have to be genuine in our requests.

The profession of Architecture continues to emerge from a difficult period in which its influence on the quality of the built environment has been greatly eroded. The traditional structure of practice is being altered by technology, both digital and material, and challenged by the economics and politics of building. It is the nature of these changes, and others, which verify for me the importance of instilling in our students the attitudes mentioned. The people who will enter this profession need to be iconoclastic in their attitudes toward the role of architecture and architects within the community and the larger society and be prepared - and willing - to remake it.

THE STUDIOS

What follows are selected examples of work from first through fourth year studios, a brief synopsis of the selected first year projects, and an excerpt from a first semester syllabus. Many of the issues and attitudes toward design work introduced in the syllabus are consistent across all the studios and elective courses I have taught in design and representation. The final images are from a materials course which was structured as a studio.

First Year Design

The goals for the foundation studios are appropriately basic. The structure of the process intends to quickly develop in the students a sense of responsibility for their work. The projects demand that the students deal immediately with the uncertainties of the subject and the process and bring order and judgement into their work. All the projects stress the ability to advance speculative positions on what is important in the process, on what shapes their decisions, and what brings meaning to the work.

The design process is structured as a sequence of deliberative arguments that are supported and advanced by strong visual evidence and a willingness to engage in the debate about ideas and motives. This can only happen in a context which accepts their efforts as the work of novices. They are relieved from the requirement to produce beautiful work and are instead encouraged to produce work that is intentionally provisional, generative, and debatable, no matter how awkward. In the end the object is to present design as a positioned, principled, and idealistic action, driven by generous, humane, and poetic motives. There is no better place to start these lessons than at the beginning.

Part 1 The Cows

The Cows are studies meant to reveal the nature and persistence of strong visual habits that control and limit beginners work. These constructions open discussions around topics of balance, symmetry, equivalence, interval, rhythm, contrast, and other fundamental issues associated with 2 and 3-D design. This work also involves intensive graphic exercises that reinforces the connections between drawing and making and push the development of disciplined observational and representational skills.

Part 2 The Cuts

A series of gestural, 3-dimensional, studies of form, space, and order lead to a construction, both physically and graphically, of a composed fields of structure and space. These constructions are then physically and graphically dissected and studied to both verify their designed order and reveal hidden aspects of their character that are suggestive of new spatial and formal strategies.

Part 3 & 4 The Improvised Landscape & Good Squats in Badlands

The final projects involve the interpretation of abstract 2-dimensional composition into 3-dimensional form. This work produces a 'landscape' into which a composed and scaled sequences of spaces and forms are sited. This work reiterates and builds on the lessons of previous trials and introduces basic concepts of site, and begins conversations about the roles of context and landscape in architecture.

Syllabus ARCH 1001-Fall-2014 LSU



Jorge Santos *Vessel*

SOME NOTES ON MAKING S(tuff) UP

*A*s you begin your first year in design school, there are some general things about design education that need to be made explicit. As you may have heard, or have already experienced,

the nature of design education is considerably different from your previous experiences as a student and it's helpful to keep this in mind. Given this, most of your expectations are wrong, or at least premature. So as you proceed this fall remember, it's not that you're getting dumber, it's that learning how to design stuff is hard to do. The process of design will challenge the utility of many of the habits and strategies you've developed and applied to learning other things. This will all become slightly, and slowly, more clear over the term. Patience will be the most useful first lesson.

“Here is what we have to offer you in its most elaborate form — confusion guided by a clear sense of purpose.”

Gordon Matta-Clark

One of the important differences between design and the subjects you have studied in high school is, in spite of attempts to pretend otherwise, we don't have a body of facts and rules concerning the specific procedures and process of design that we can ask you to learn, practice, and copy. Excluding the relevant laws of physics, design is, inherently and desirably, an “ill-structured” field of knowledge. There are traditions, and dogma, theories and movements, trends and fashions, and, of course, history, but no codified consensus on the rules of how this work is done. As you'll begin to sense, if you're paying any attention at all, the process of creative work of any seriousness, pursued with curiosity and an open mind, is an ambiguous, uncertain, complex, and frequently frustrating enterprise. It's progress is marked by catastrophic failures, sprinkled with periods of breathtaking self-deception and indecision, and a stupefying blizzard of ugly and annoying evidence of the limits of your skills, both intellectual and manual, sometimes causing a disheartening sense of the impossibility of doing this work well. And that's if things are going right!

This all reveals something very interesting and important about design work. That it's the intrinsic nature of this subject to resist being easily understood and ordered, of responding to 'rules', of giving itself up, without a significant struggle. Too often the reflexive reaction to this state of affairs is to fall back on the familiar approach you were trained to use on a tricky word problem, or some other shortcut, to create a reduced sequence of small questions and equally small answers that when re-assembled will give a correct answer. While buildings and landscapes can result from this method, it's highly unlikely that good design will. The biggest challenge of being a beginner in anything revolves around the question of how willing are you going to be to restructure your thinking and action in the face of novel situations.

So how does this work? How does your desire and effort translate into the beautiful, generous, responsible, poetic, and humane objects and environments you came here intending to design? First, try to learn to accept this task as it is: difficult, ambiguous, blurry, mercurial, non-linear, subjective, but in the end not arbitrary.

“What really exists is not things made but things in the making...put yourself in the making by a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing and the whole range of possible decompositions coming at once into your possession, you are no longer troubled with the question which of them is the more absolutely true.”

William James

Consider, as James suggests, that the intensity and quality of your work is shaped as much by your sense of things as it is by your knowledge of things. Trust your 'intuitive sympathy.' To take this a little further, what you come to know is constructed out of your sense of how things are or could be. Consider how the conceptual grows from the intuitive ('students construct knowledge,' Lev Vygotsky). You may also want to adjust your expectations of working toward a singular 'correct answer.' Instead consider that what you're working with are conjectures, predictions, and approximations that are more about working with tolerance than they are about achieving precision. The process of design, particularly as a beginner, is most compelling and generative when pursued as a series of speculations, hunches, observations, experiments: trials and errors. Everything should be questioned. Treat your assumptions and preconceptions with scepticism and be prepared to give them up. Mistakes must be freely made.

"All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention."

Rudolf Arnheim

"Failure is closer to success than inaction."

Earl Bakken

There are virtually no errors that you can make that haven't already been made, probably by your faculty. A new one is rare and should be highly prized. Given this you must be willing to make huge and embarrassing mistakes in your work in order to ultimately gain a useful grip on this process. This is the only way that your knowledge progresses and gains persistence and usefulness. Understand that design is inherently risky; you need to expose yourself to that risk. This is hard to do. It's hard because the 'process' often contradicts the way we were trained to approach complex things. Working in doubt is hard to sustain.

STUDIO OBJECTIVES • The work of designing is about the structuring of an inquiry, of generating and putting forward ideas, asking questions, and testing answers in an iterative and reflective way. The objective of first-year design is to help you develop an earned confidence in your ability to start and sustain this process and to creatively and constructively deal with abstract ideas and the uncertainty and ambiguity that define any creative process.

To get this process started you need to have a strong grasp of some basic skills. In simple terms these are a prepared hand, eye, and head. The utility of these skills emerge from disciplined practice of the fundamental operations of design; manual (drawing and making), visual (seeing, looking, and observing), and intellectual (comparing, contrasting, assessing, judging). These are the experimental instruments of design which are critical to testing the validity and robustness of your thinking and judgement.

While the final products of the process are important, we will focus on the work in-between the beginning and end. You'll spend considerable time seriously playing with fundamental issues of order, form, space, color, material, two and three-dimensional composition, and the arguments you develop to support your judgements about these things. These experiments will require that you continue to practice observing things, drawing things, and building things. Developing confidence in your abilities in manual drawing, digital imaging, physical modeling, photography, and the mixing of these media, is an important objective of this term.

RESPONSIBILITIES • The skills that will be developed over the two terms of first-year design are all linked to one another and share a very important thing in common: they develop only with committed effort and practice. The nature of this work is like the practice that musicians, actors, and athletes are familiar with in that it requires discipline, fearlessness, persistence, patience, curiosity, and a willingness to take risk. Answers are found doing the work, not so much thinking about doing the work.

Therefore it's not possible to succeed in this, or any, studio if your work is halfhearted or indifferent. The ultimate strength of your confidence in these skills will depend on your willingness to take responsibility for the decisions you make and the risks you take. You need to play and experiment with your work in ways that intentionally challenge your thinking and test the limits of your skills. To do this is to assume control over the direction and quality of your work. Diligence, rigor, and an assiduously honest eye toward your work, and the work of your peers, are the only ways to make meaningful progress. If you approach this casually, the best you can be here is a tourist.

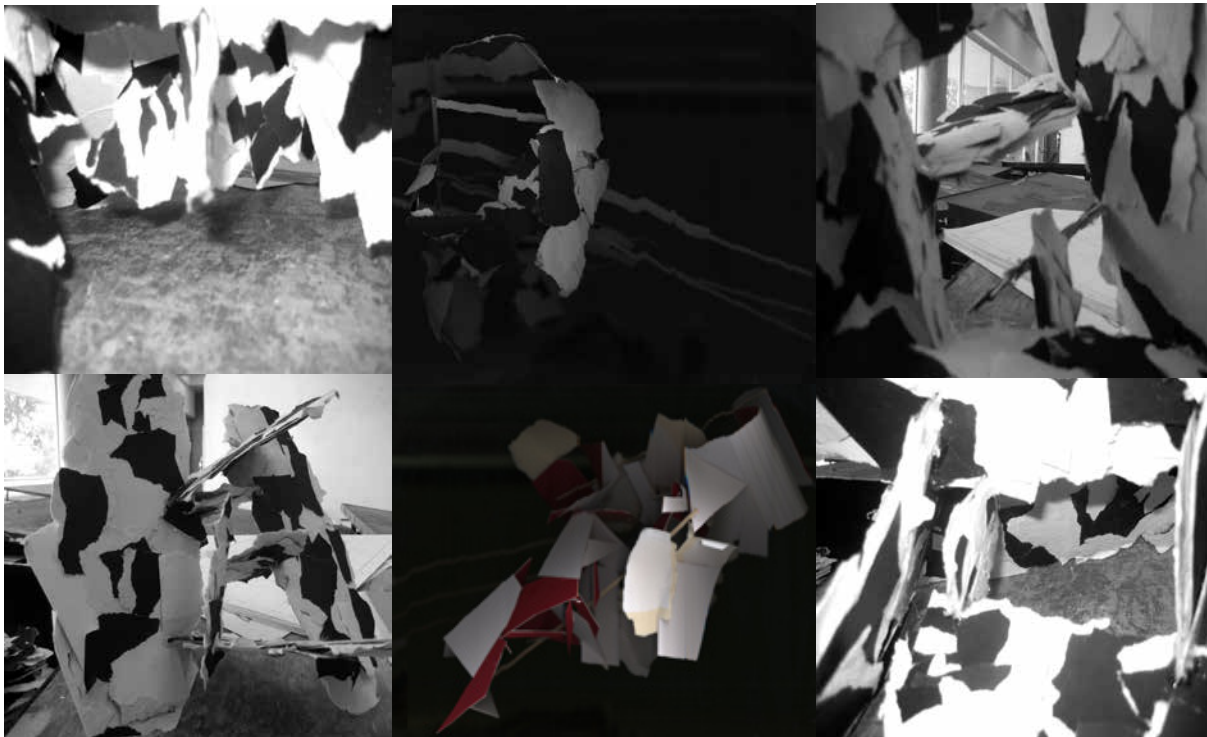
Innocent Eye Test - The Cows

First Year Studios MSU & LSU



Tansey, Innocent Eye Test

The Cows are Iterative works designed around an impossible task. What makes this work impossible are the cognitive and visual habits that control and limit beginner's work. The objective of these studios is to systematically reveal the presence and nature of these habits. Once seen for what they are, they can be quite beautiful and, more importantly, a powerful datum against which to push. These constructions open discussions around questions of balance, symmetry, equivalence, interval, rhythm, contrast, and other fundamental elements of design. This work also involves intensive graphic exercises that reinforces the connections between drawing and making and push the development of disciplined observational and representational skills.



Brennan Plunket, Emily Stark, Matt Jordan, Alison Monigold, Tina Narghi-Pour

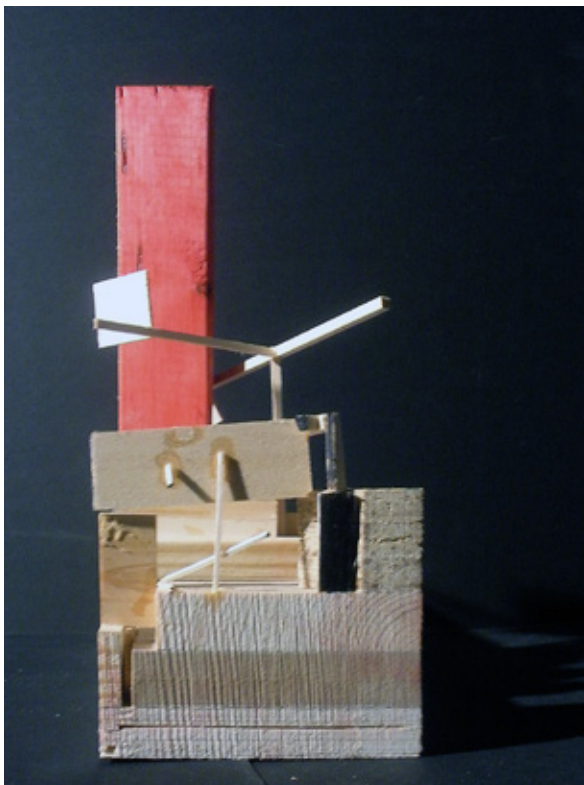
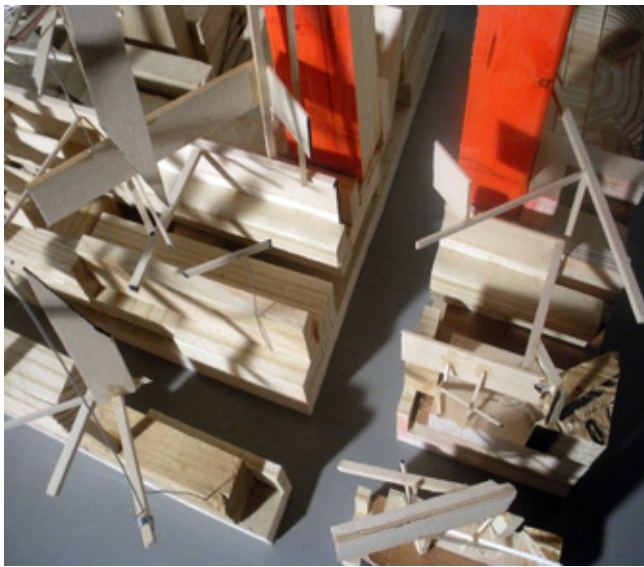
THE CUTS

First Year Studios MSU

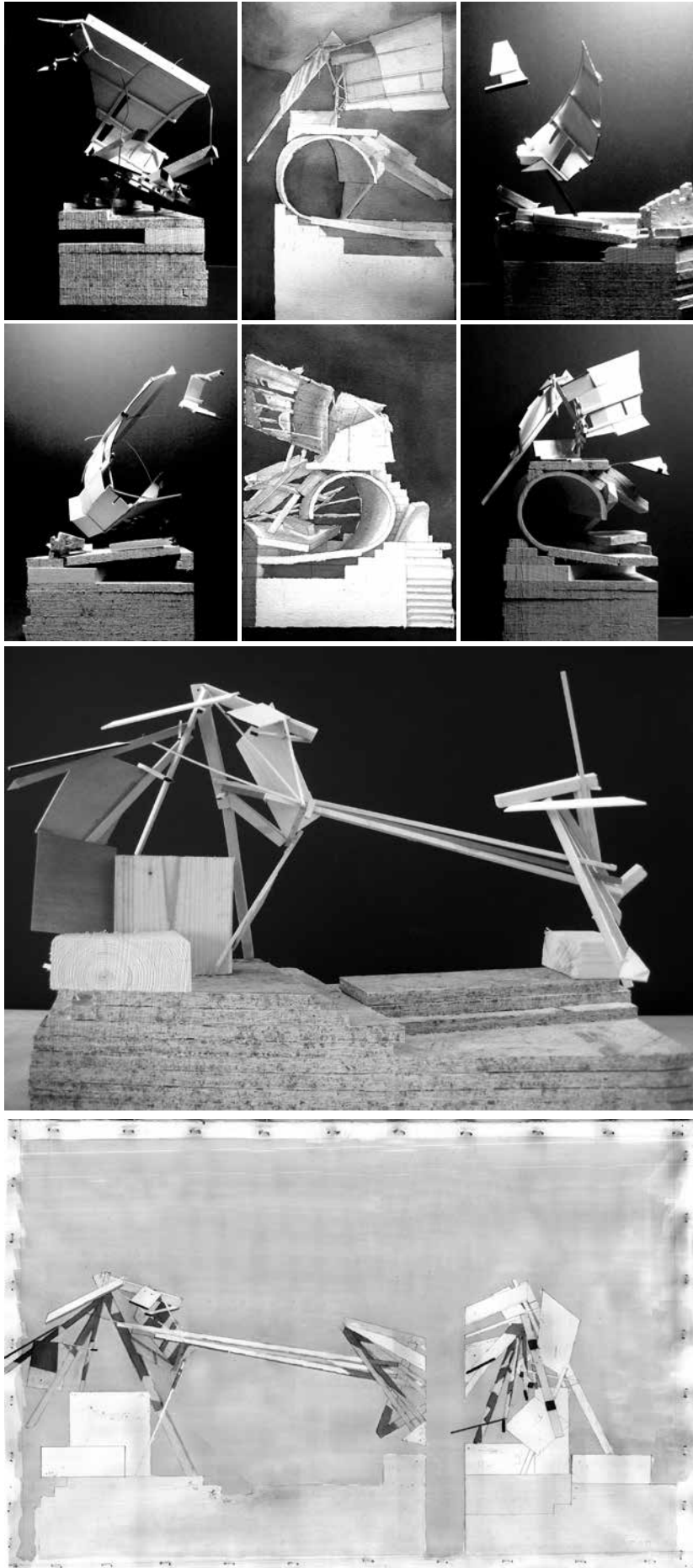
(REPEAT AFTER ME) "The aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity."

Ludwig Wittgenstein

The opposite end of the first year. A developing awareness of the reflexes revealed in "The COWS" is used as a lever to disrupt the stillness and familiarity habits insists on. These characteristics are increasingly weakened by work that has a very long latency between its creation and its comprehension. The work now insists on patience rather than familiarity. The early introduction of the sectional view aids in ruining the familiarity of the work and literally opening the work to a huge range of conceptual options. These constructions are physically and graphically dissected and studied to both verify their discovered order and reveal hidden aspects of their character that are suggestive of new spatial and formal strategies.



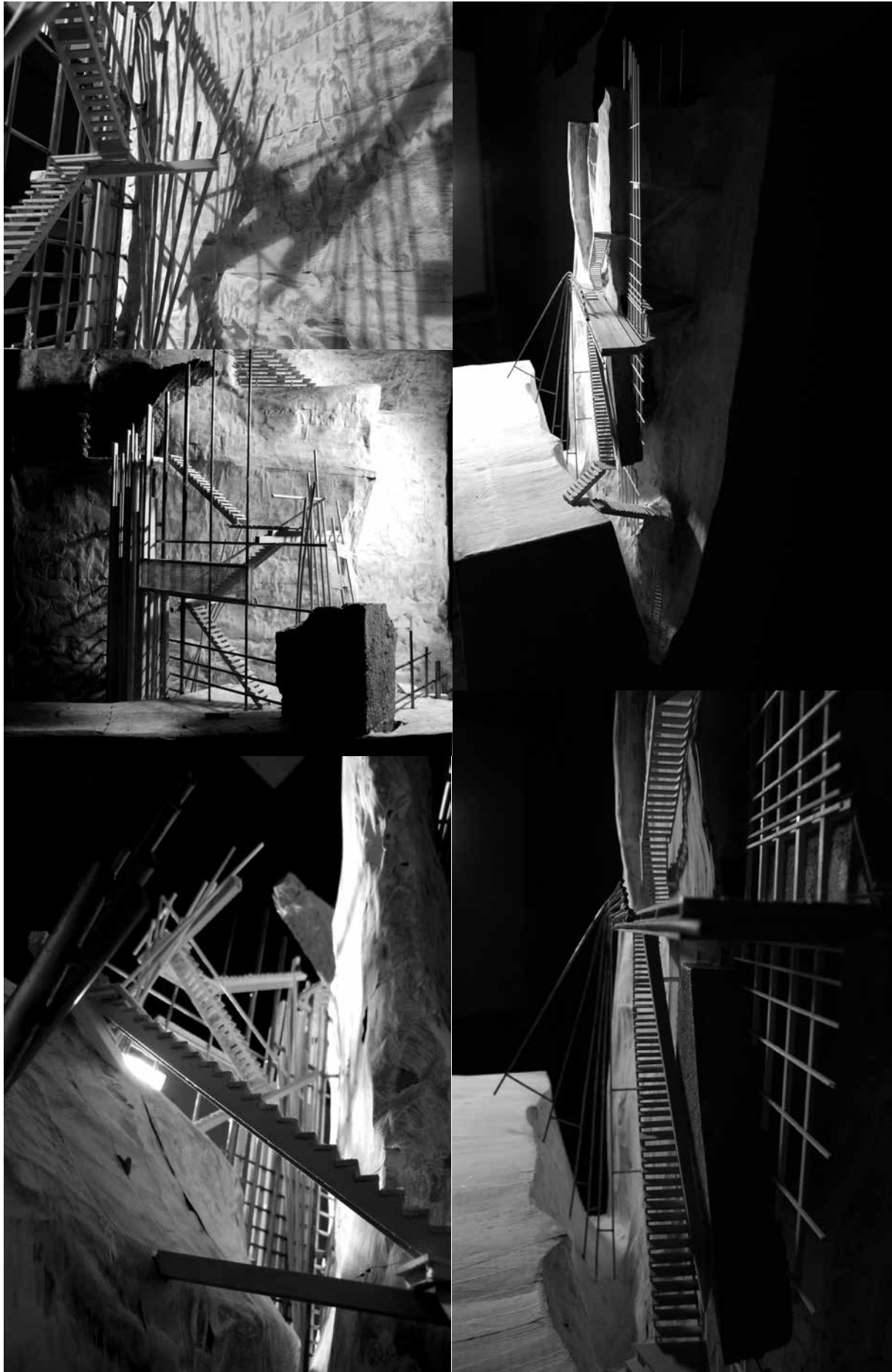
Eric Lynn. Summer 2010



Exploded sectional studies of color, form and space, based gestural drawings - Summer 2010
John Thomas, Kelly Milam, Eric Lynn. Summer 2010.

Good "Squats" in Badlands

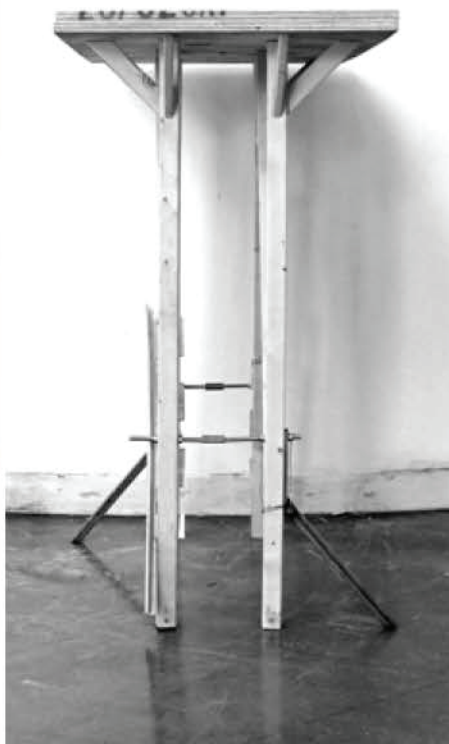
First Year Studios MSU



Jake Johnson, Alex Reeves



BLOOMS, EFFLORESCENCE, AND OTHER DERMATOLOGICAL EMBELLISHMENTS (Herpes) & HARDWARE
Lauren Kalman



Casey Walker

**PROSTHETICS
AMENDMENTS
REVISIONS
AUGMENTATIONS
IMPROVISATIONS
RECOGNITIONS
REITERATIONS
ETC.**

First Year Studio MSU

An introduction to the space between conception and construction / the design of things and the making of things. Beginning students who are largely naive to the specifics of structural and material behavior are given a familiar object to design and construct. They know just enough about the techniques of manual drafting to make a scaled drawing of their designs.

They then construct their designs, as drawn, using common materials of specified dimensions.

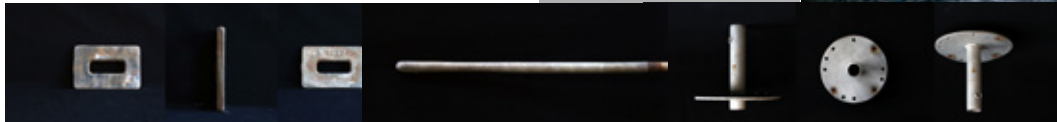
The results of this translation quickly reveal the gap between best intentions and material reality. They are disappointing at best.

Time is given to reflect on the modes of failure and the difficulties associated with the un-predicted resistance of material to intentions.

The modes of failure are studied and collections of found materials are assembled that will be used to amend the construction and the design in ways that vividly reveal the brightest points of failure within the work.

The juxtapositions created by the prosthetics against the designers hopes reveal new and larger opportunities within the work that exist far beyond what was originally preconceived. Beauty and utility are found in the flawed, made discoverable by failure.

Podium View 1



Prosthesis Analysis:

Problems:

- 1-Joint is too weak causing leg to warp and table to wobble.
- 2-Joint is too weak. Same problem as 1.
- 3-Leg is too short which is causing the table to shake back and fourth.

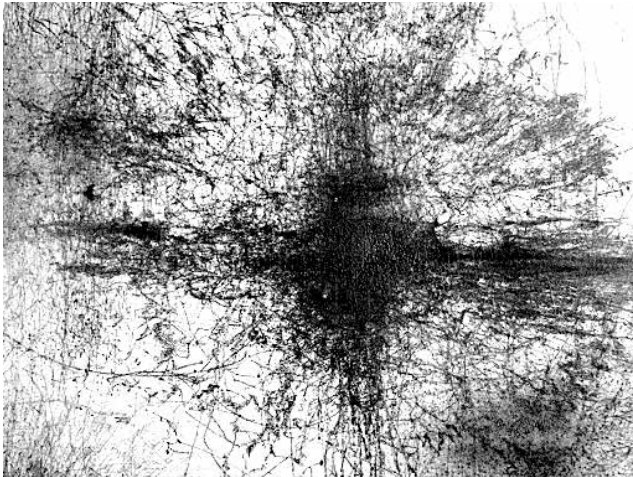


Devin Carr, Hanah Waycaster

Justine Holzman, Greg Watson (C) / Erin Dibos,
Amy Gemelli, Alyce Howe, Ju Liu, Matt McKeever

Drawing Machine (7.3)

David Ford Truck Drawings



Apply what you've learned from the prototypes of your mark-making machines to the design and building of a machine that graphically translates the experience of your path to studio everyday. The device can be worn, or pulled, or pushed, or ridden, or flown, or floated, etc. But it must make a telling mark, or field of marks that create a record of some phenomenal conditions of your commute to your desk in Atkinson - the texture of the ground, the speed of travel, the distance, the exertion, some changing elements of the climate and environment, etc. The product is a drawn record abstracting one or more of these conditions.

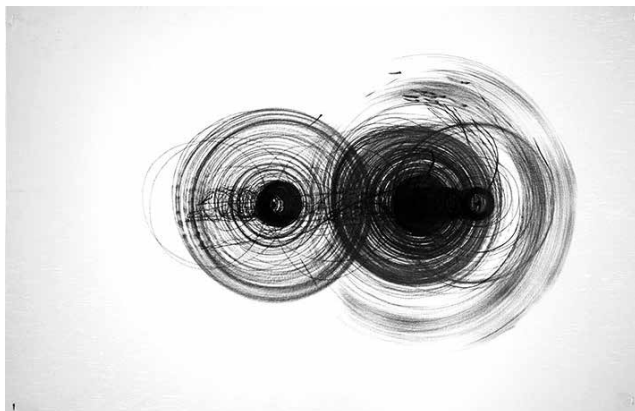
Create a list of these conditions.

Before beginning, re-read and reconsider the questions posed in 7.2. Prepare and document a new list of questions that have been raised by the prototype studies.

Both the list of conditions and a list of the questions are and important part of the assignment

The materials for this construction should be carefully considered and the apparatus well made. It must be durable and ultimately beautifully crafted. Parts that touch the body should be carefully considered as should those that touch the ground or otherwise interact with elements in the environment.

Recommended materials: Wood, metals (sheet, springs, wire, mesh, etc.), fabric.

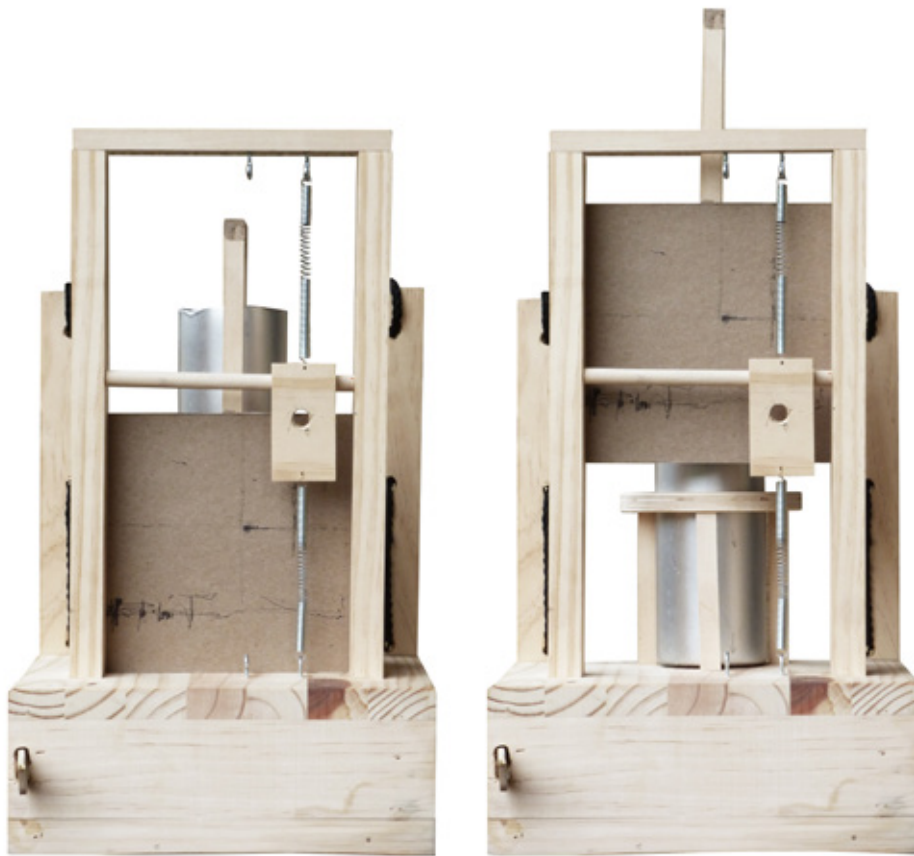


Francois Xavier Saint George . Rotodrawings

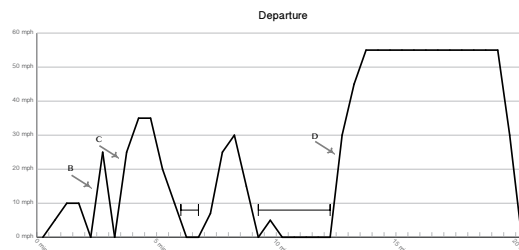
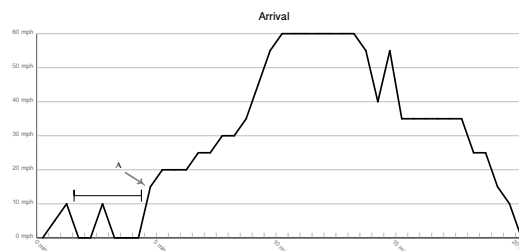
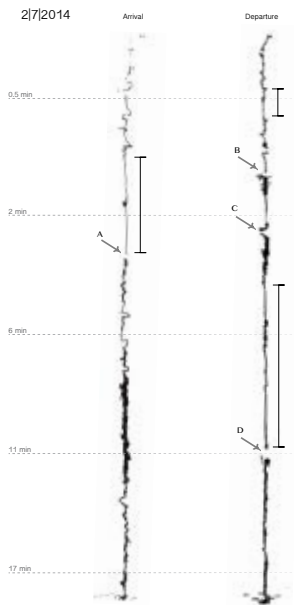
Use of plastics should be minimized or avoided. Exceptions to this should be carefully considered and justified.

Media is open to your experimentation.

References: Francois Xavier Saint George . Rotodrawings
Olafur Eliasson . Kinetic Drawing Machine
Kouchi Okamoto . Magnetic Field Record
Kip Jones . Drawing Devices
Joseph Griffiths . Bicycle Drawing Machines
Tim Knowles . MKI, MKII, MKIII Postal Project
Karina Smigla-Bobinski . ADA
Arthur Ganson
David Ford

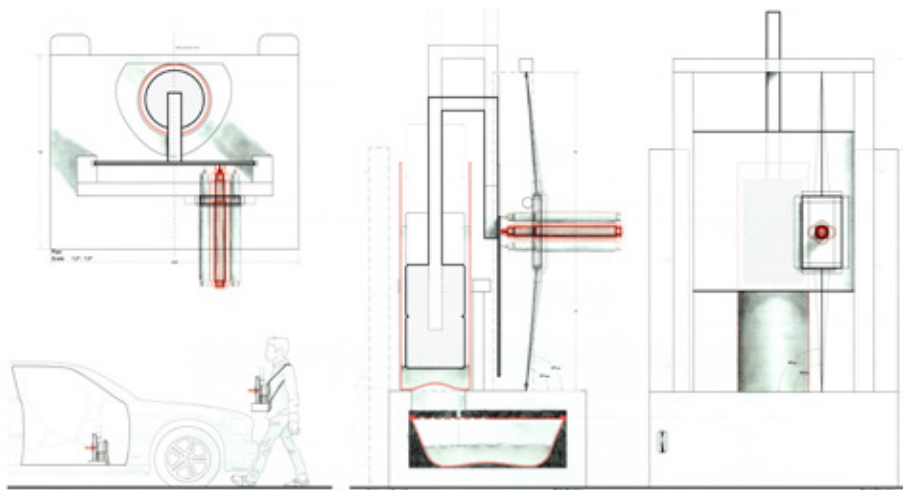


2/7/2014



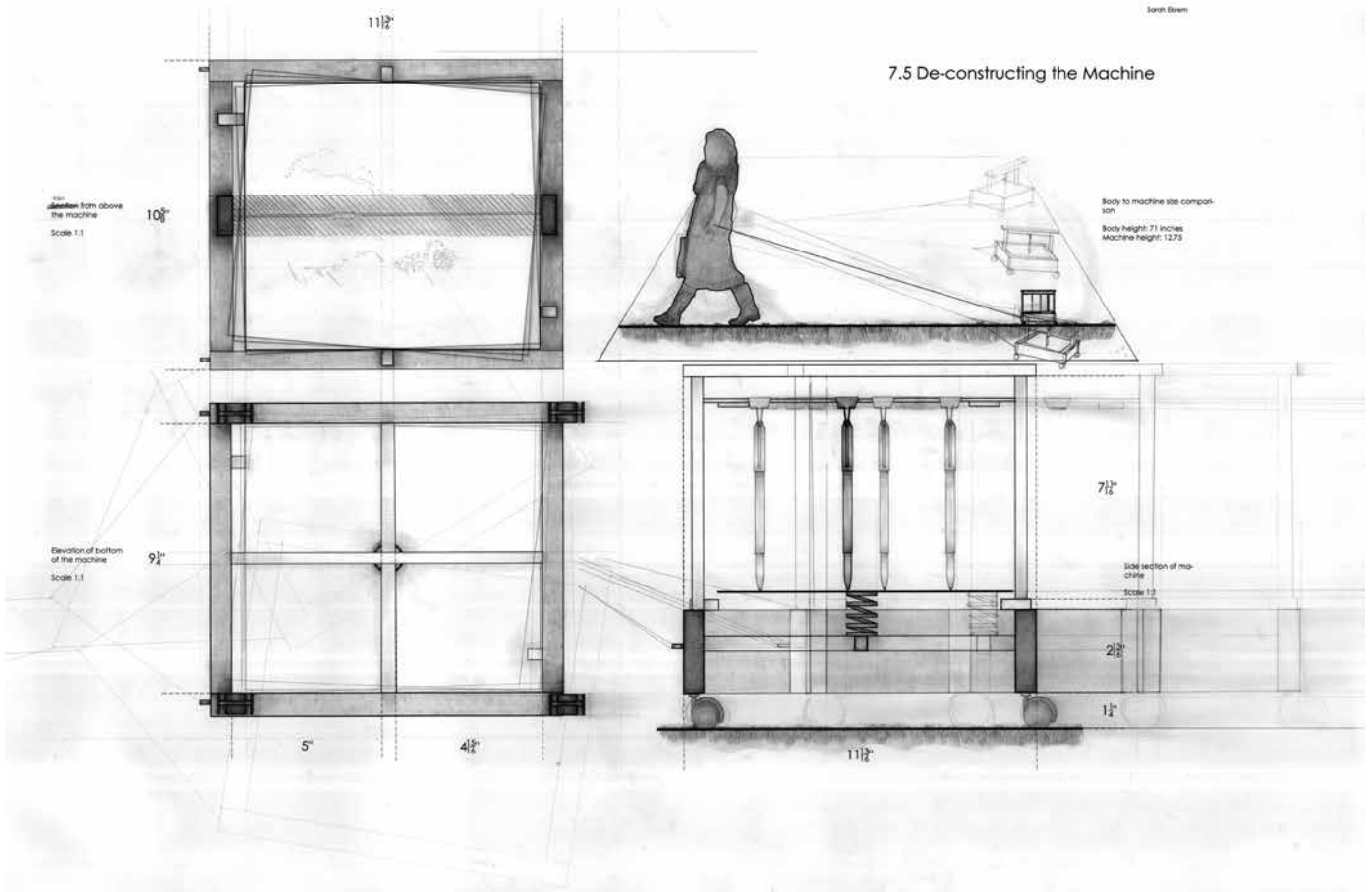
— after reaching or stopped traffic pattern
 — major point of acceleration
 A left turn at Nicholson and Leabridge Crossing light
 B right turn onto Nicholson Exit from South Station
 C left turn on Nicholson from Nicholson Exit
 D continuation on Nicholson at Brighton light

Daniel Hernandez



Daniel Hernandez

7.5 De-constructing the Machine



February 6th 2014

Minute/Color Key:

Red = minutes zero through one
 Orange = minutes two through three
 Yellow = minutes three through four
 Green = minutes four through five
 Blue = minutes five through six
 Pink = minutes six through seven
 Purple = minutes seven through eight



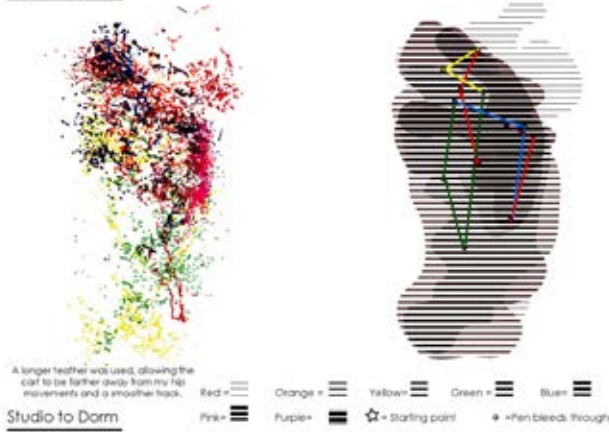
February 5th 2014

Minute/Color Key:

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 Blue = minutes five through six
 Pink = minutes six through seven
 Purple = minutes seven through eight

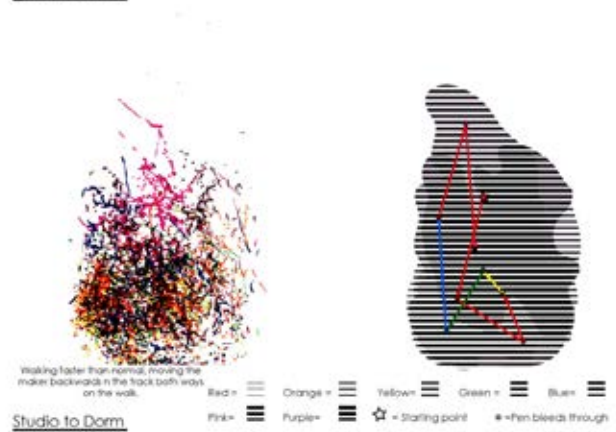


Dorm to Studio

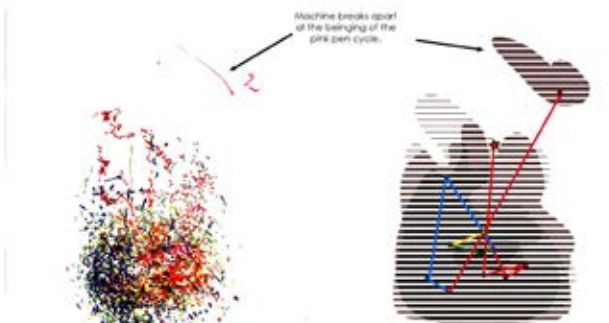


A larger feather was used, allowing the car to be farther away from my his movements and a smoother look.

Dorm to Studio



Walking faster than normal, moving the maker backwards in the track both ends on the wall.

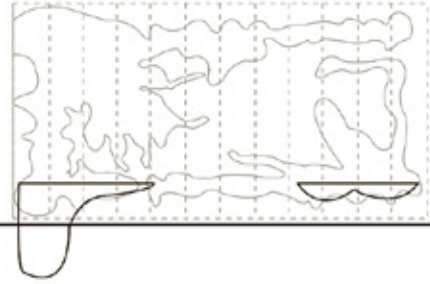
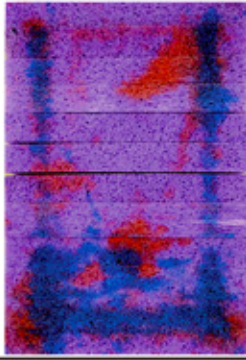


Daily Recordings

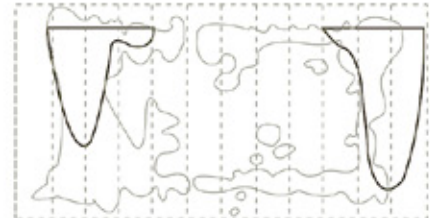
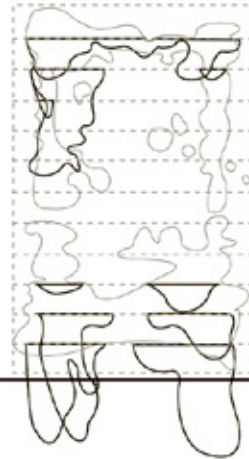
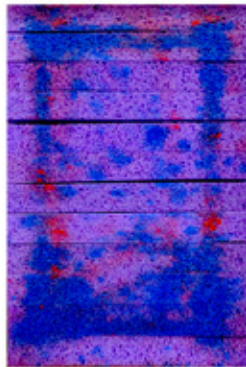
Cross-Cut Sectional Diagrams

Longitudinal Sectional Diagrams

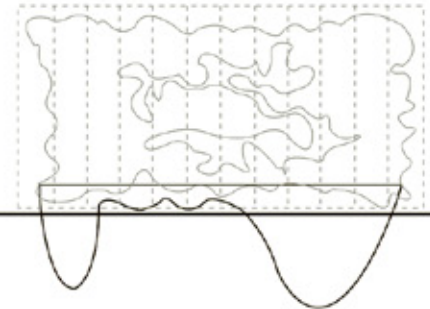
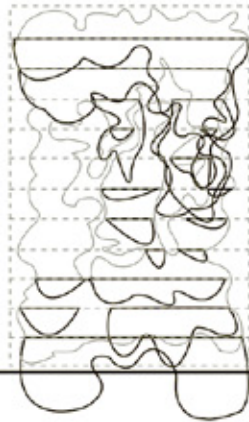
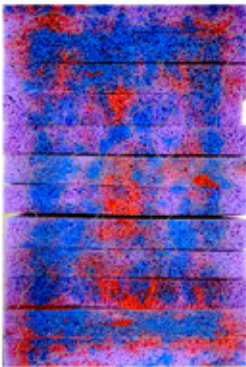
Wednesday, February 5



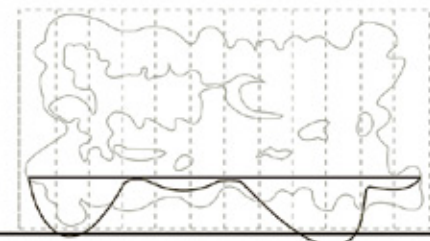
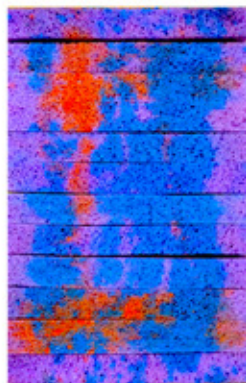
Friday, February 7



Monday, February 10



Tuesday, February 11



The depth of ink absorption illustrated in these diagrams is proportional to the time variable recorded by the machine, i.e. the more ink absorbed by the sponges, the larger the marker remained in a position.

The Sliver

Third Year Studio

FALL 2009

Sliver Redux

SMALL space BIG living



SITE: Toronto-the corner of Beverly & Cecil Streets.

PROGRAM: 8-10, STUDIO & LOFT apartments (1 to 2 person occupancy). **Ground/**

City Level: Retail / Commercial space, public

use. **Entry:** Private plus Public plus Service. An elevator is required. **Energy:** Should creatively address basic passive strategies regarding heating, cooling, and lighting appropriate to the climate of Toronto. The project assumes limited mechanical cooling.

Site: This is a zero lot line project. You cannot project beyond the property lines. There is no on-site parking.

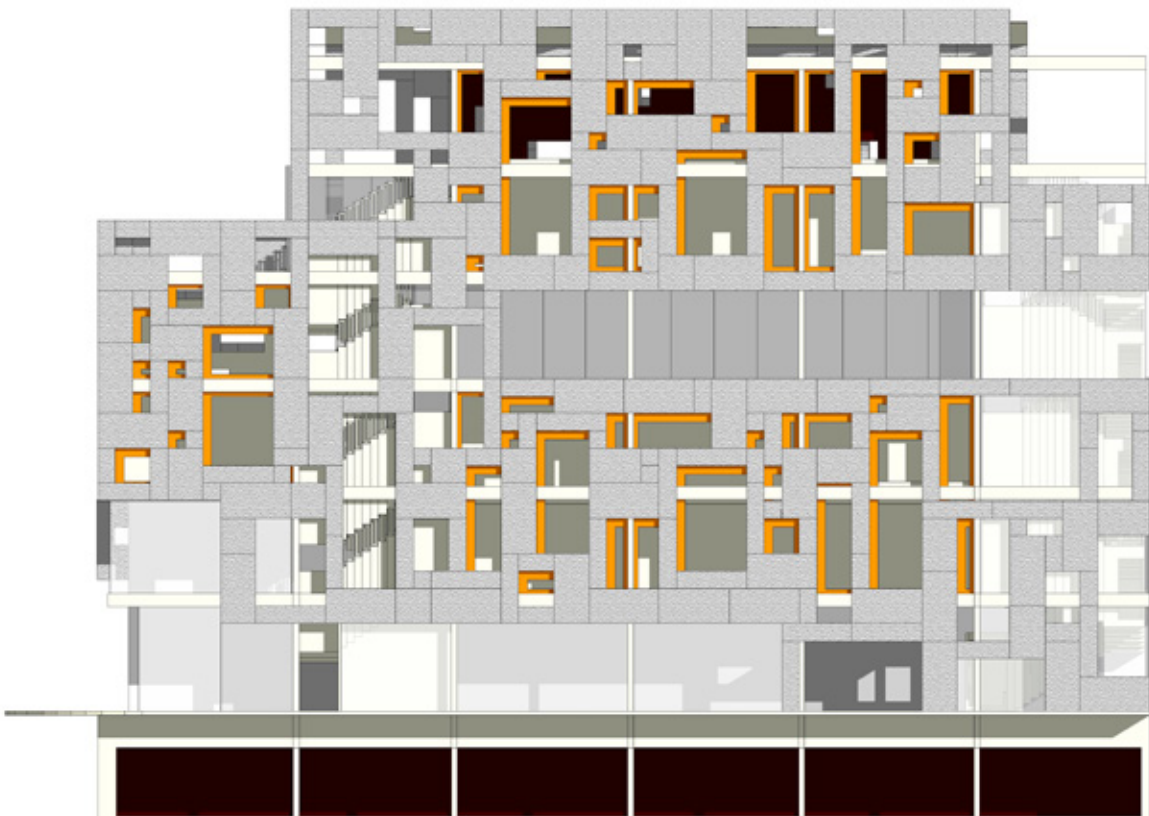
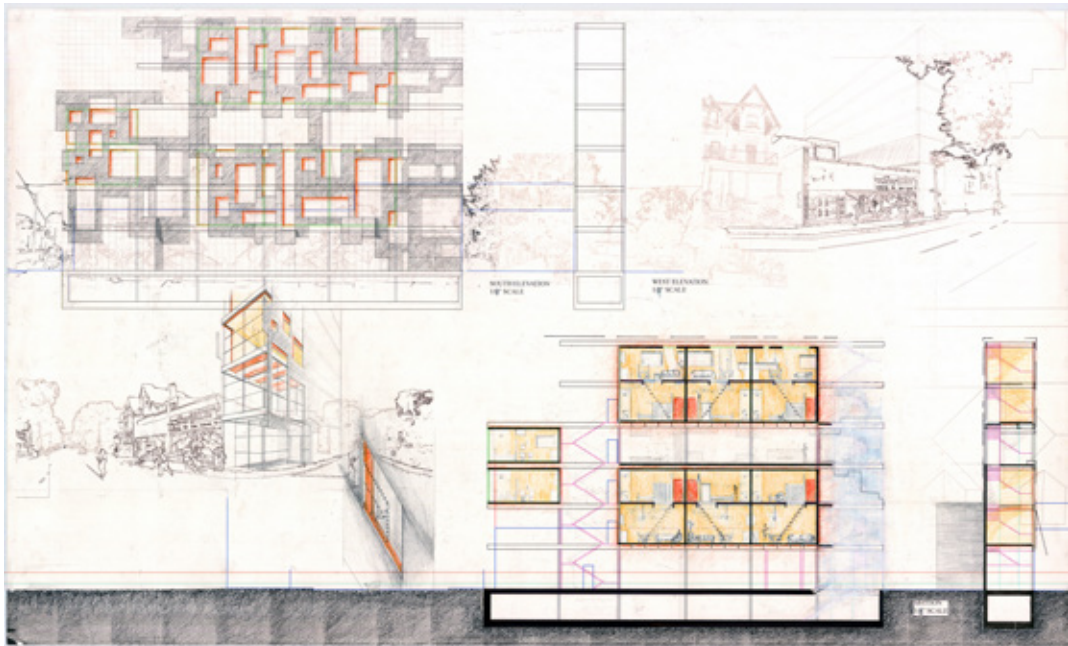
Building on the Starkville project, the objective is to responsibly, generously and graciously accommodate the daily life of residents and neighbors by designing a bitching chunk of urban commercial space topped by a twitching hunk of boss domestic bliss.

Again, strive to poetically defy the limits of this site by providing generous access to air, light, & view while responding to a dreadful climate.

MATERIALS: Concrete, pre-cast or site cast, modular concrete block, brick masonry, steel, glass.

An Introduction to the gift of limits





Sliver Housing - Toronto
Robert Featherston

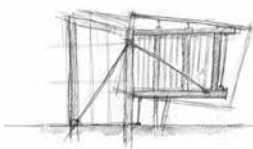
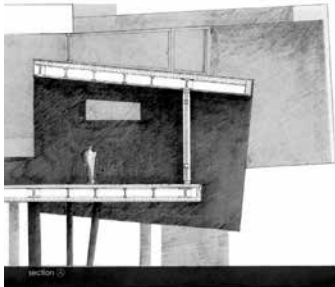
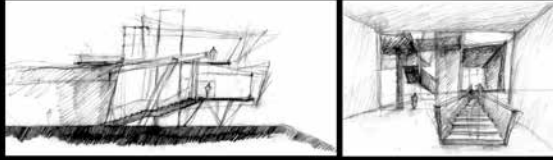
Pella Competition

Fourth Year Studio

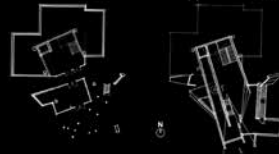
Museum of Contemporary Southern Art

Position

- An art museum has a responsibility to **display** itself to the outside world.
- In creating artful architecture, **the building must have a voice** for the art it houses (some way of communicating with its surroundings).
- People on the inside should be able to see out, while people on the outside should be able to see in, **creating an active dialogue between itself and its surroundings.**
- The building's presence should be noticed from the outside, while allowing moments for the building to reveal itself.
- While the building has a responsibility to express itself accordingly, a sense of balance and control must be present in the competing formal and spatial relationships that arise.



The display boxes torque within one another, actively engaging themselves with their surroundings.



Each gallery space is its own box, which contains only art and people. These are given the full attention by displaying them to the outside.



Critique

Weaknesses

Overall, there are still many issues to be resolved in this project, even in the most focused area of the building.

Programmatically, **there are still large areas of the building that are suspended in a vague, conceptual stage.** Further resolution of these spaces will affect the more resolved portions of the building in a very critical way.

More investigation should be given to material selection and the effect they have. Currently, the majority of the materials consist of metal panels, glass, and drywall. A richer and more thoughtful material palette could perhaps enhance the formal and spatial characteristics trying to be achieved.

Strengths

Conceptually, the project has a strong foundation to work upon. Throughout the design process, the weaker ideas have successfully peeled off while the stronger ones have persisted.

There is a strong dialogue being set up between elements within and around the building. In that way, it begins to have a strong voice without being too overpowering.

As the project has developed, **more control has been obtained over the contrasts between the forms and spaces.** Though the building should be somewhat high contrast, the control of this leads to a more gracefully composed set of elements.

The Road Shark

Second Year Materials

THE ROAD
SHARK

ARCHITECTURE
2723
MATERIALS

Design a vehicle which will be powered by gravity.

Your design should respond to the following criteria:

It must seat one person

It should respond to the effects of wind while enclosing the body

It must be capable of being controlled and stopped

It should strive to be fast

It should be colorful

It should cost next to nothing

It should be beautifully built

A major component of its structure will be reinforced concrete

It should look good under the following conditions:

**Sitting Still
Going Fast
In a Wreck**

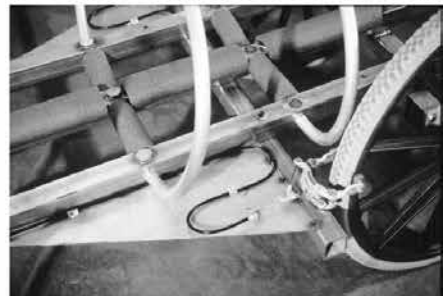
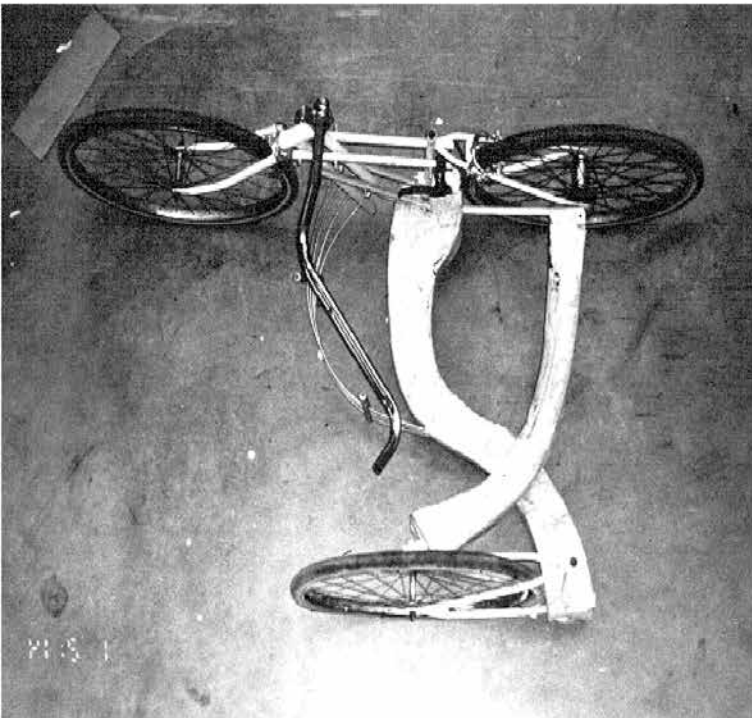
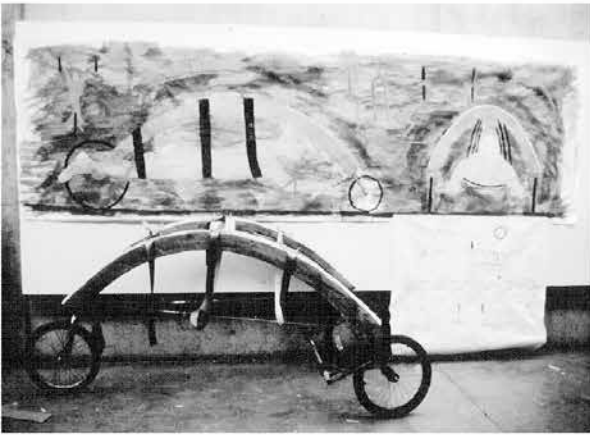
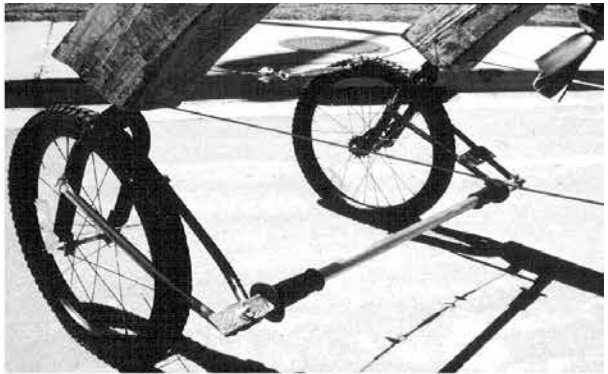
RACE DAYS



4.24.96 8:30-10:50 AT THE TANK

&

4.26.96 8:30-10:50 AT THE TANK





Works by Second Year Students:

J.D. Balzli and Carolyn Hinger (Winners), Wes Mims and Kyle Wagner, Brad Bufkin, Asad Bakeer, and Sigrid Ostlund, Matt Lam and Giant Jones, Ginger Pence and Joe Hagerman, Matt "Crash Dummy" Lee and Scott "the Other Dummy" Schmerge.