



# ARCHITECTURE AND TIME

MODULE ESSAY

## REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE AND TIME

by Lukasz Kuchta

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times the study of how people act and move, both as a group and as an individual has become more and more prevalent. As the world becomes more centralized and globalized it is an inevitable development which is catered for by both artists and professionals.

The artists investigate people to find inspiration and to gain a more profound understanding of the world, while the professionals seek to create easy to read data which will help them or their clients in future developments. While both goals are perfectly admirable they have a fundamental problem artist's work can never have any real application as it is too unique, and too personal to be of any use outside the academic circles. To quote Oscar Wilde: "A flower [art] blossoms for its own joy"<sup>1</sup>. At the same time large corporate investigations turn the people they research into numbers and statistics, which can be read and understood yet they become detached from the subject.

In this essay I have investigated both artists and professional work. I looked at the ways of representation of movement over time as well as the research methods. Based upon the research I have conducted study of my own which attempts to find a centre between the two.





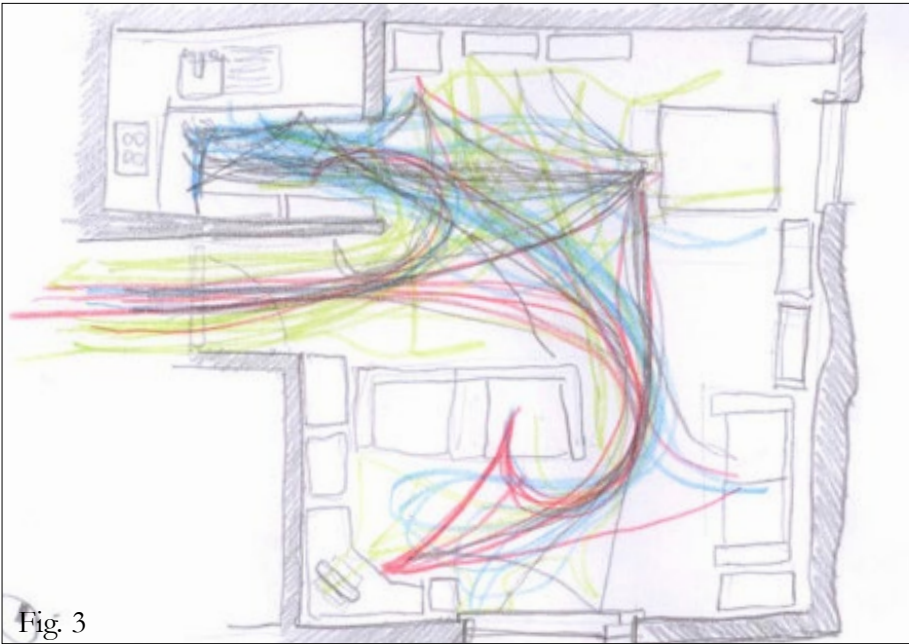


Fig. 3

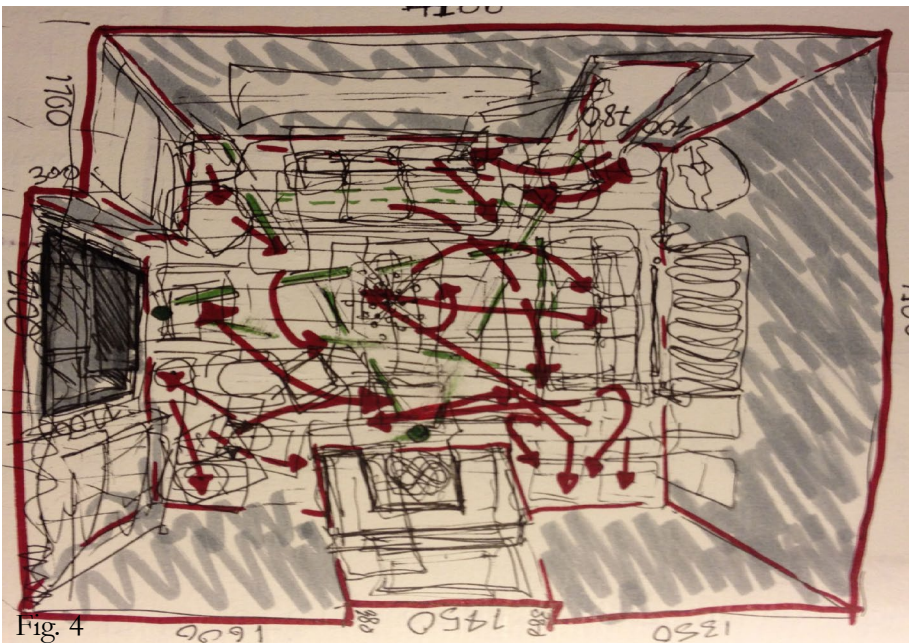


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

### STUDENTS WORK

I have begun my research with the look at some of the student examples. The great advantage of these works is their uniqueness. Students very often are not as liberated as an artist, while not being as constrained as a professional. Their work, while very inspired, moderates the level of abstraction and detachment from the subject of study.

The Fig. 3 is a sketch created by Darragh O'Shea. It uses color to indicate the time at which the person's movement is taking place. This simple yet effective technique gives us a very easy to understand yet still a very personal document which can be understood by almost anyone. While the document is not presenting the subject of the study directly, we can certainly see that person in the free strokes that represent them. On the other hand in this drawing by Robert Curley (Fig. 4) is a little more convoluted than the previous but it seems that the overall understanding of what the drawing depicts is better. While I cannot easily distinguish where the arrows are pointing from and to, I am very much aware of the setting. Bottom image is authored by Sean Hughes who photographed his desk at different times, in the image we can see the objects repeating as they are in different positions over time. Again, like Curley, he uses a very analytical point of view which allows for surveillance of all of the items of interest. The author explained to me that it was intended that the opacity was supposed to reflect the time that the object occupies the space. Made me wonder why didn't he use a long exposure photo to make this and cut out the middle man that is Photoshop, then I realized that this image was representing hours, not minutes. Normal camera is not capable of a still this long and at the same time it removes the possibility of editing, one can imagine that if this was a photo we would see nothing but Sean's blurred back of the head.





Fig. 6

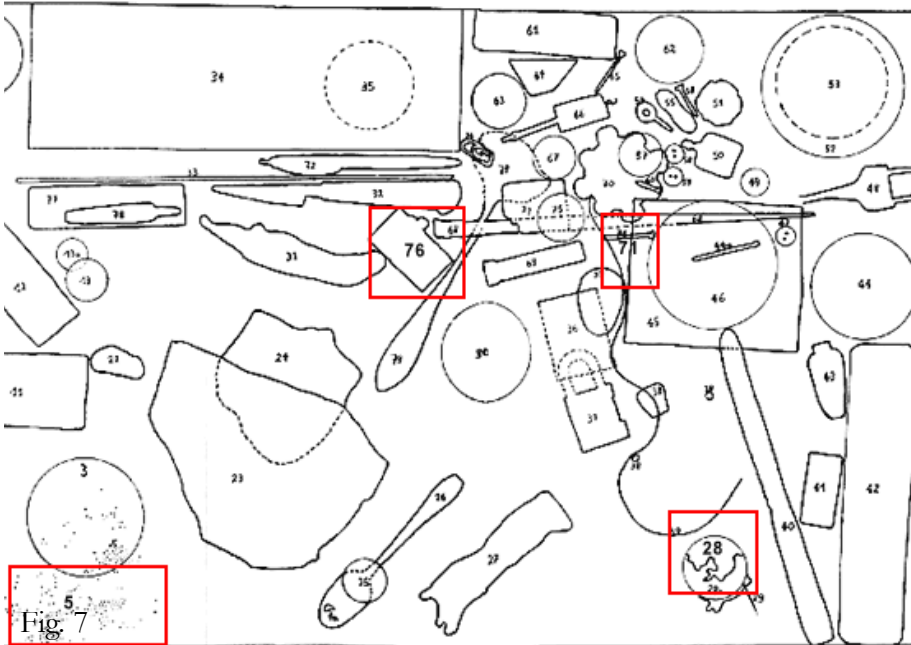


Fig. 7

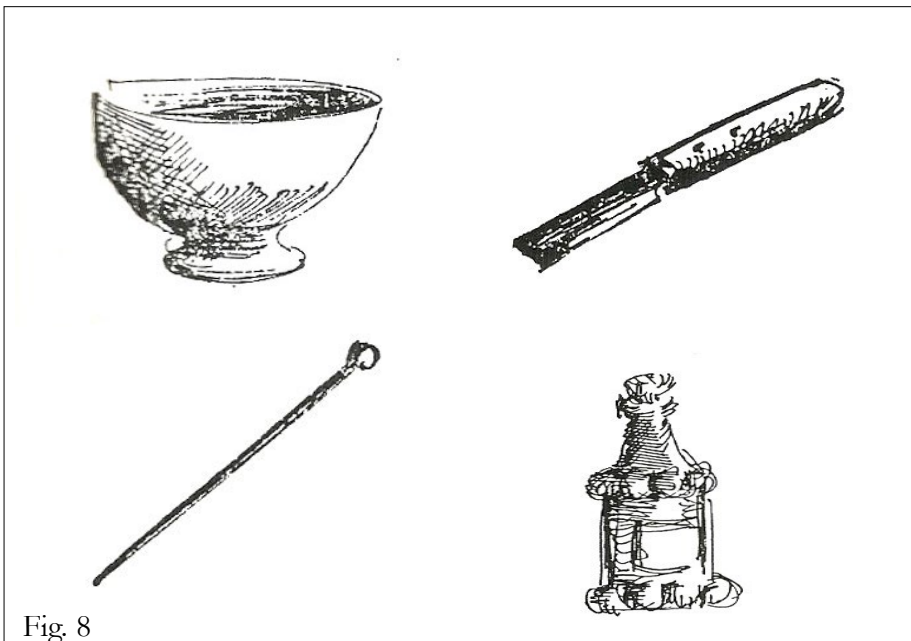


Fig. 8

### DANIEL SPOERRI – AN ARTIST

Spoerri was one of the first signatories of the *Nouveau réalisme* (New Realism) manifesto, this avant-garde movement was primarily concerned with the perception of the everyday<sup>2</sup>.

One of his most known works was “An Anecdoted topography of chance”.

He was interested in the stories of the everyday objects and their movement as well as histories behind them. In 1961 he took a picture of his desk with lots of items scattered over it, he retraced the picture to create a map of items (Fig. 7) on his desk. Each item was numbered and catalogued. In the book he describes every object and his own personal association with it<sup>3</sup>. The collective result is not just a list of items but “a collective stroll” of his entire life<sup>4</sup>.

What interested me the most was that Spoerri’s work was later expanded with sketches of the items (Fig. 8) to create a very methodical atlas of the individual objects. Every object is described with a measured dose of sentiment: “26. Small aluminum spoon, a real bargain”<sup>5</sup>. Especially with the new, very personalized sketches of each item, the objects collectively described the life and habits of the artist. Amazing element is the elegance and the simplicity of indexing every item to describe it in a measured level of detail, because that little detail can be all the difference between a person being a number or a human being.



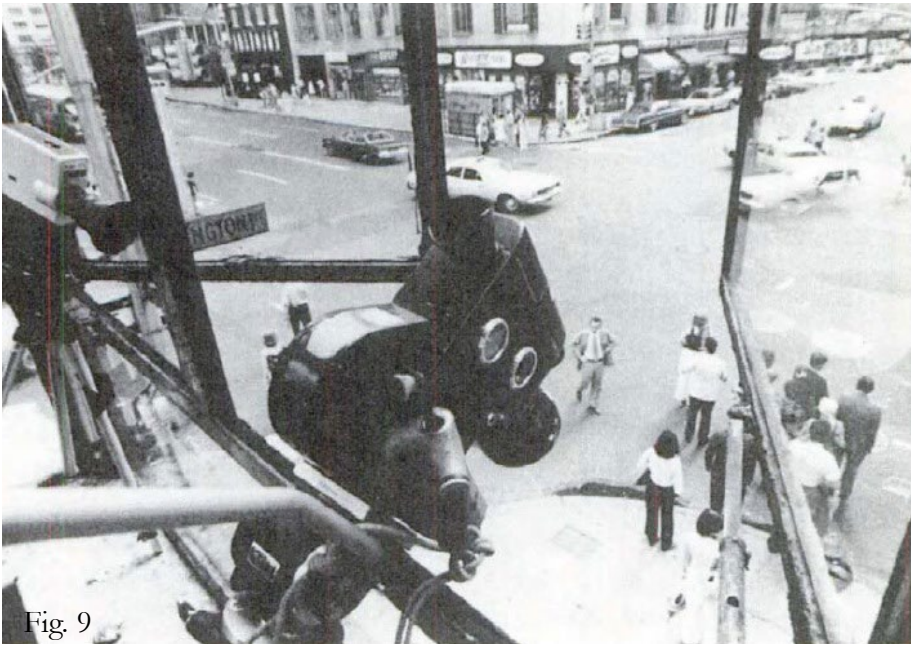


Fig. 9

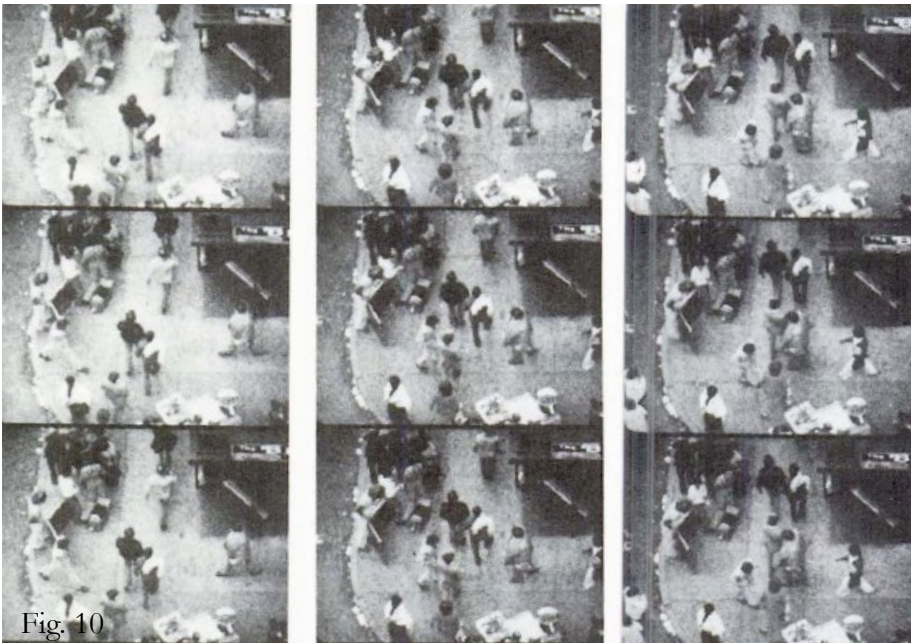


Fig. 10

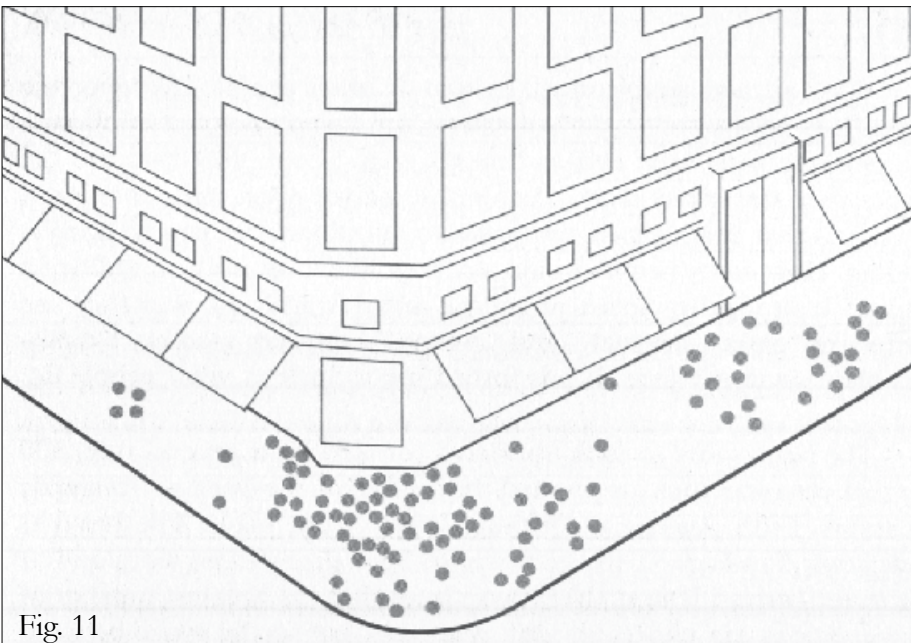


Fig. 11

### STREET LIFE PROJECT - PROFESSIONAL

This study conducted by William Holly Whyte was very unique for its time. It lasted sixteen years and was aimed at determining how people use the public spaces as well as what makes a good public space. Although they did conduct interviews and other experiments they were primarily researching through photography and a little by film. They would install cameras in high vantage points or even walk up to people and photograph them close up, without informing them<sup>6</sup>.

This information was later disseminated into written and numerical record. The duality of the research is amazing, on one hand Whyte and his subordinates produced charts, diagrams (Fig.1, Fig.11) but at the same time he has written a number of books which are primarily descriptive. I have studied the *Rediscovering the city centre* and *Social life of Small Public Spaces* to find a relatively small amount of photographs and nearly no diagrams. Occasionally he would throw in a phrase 40% or 2/3<sup>7</sup> however one cannot help thinking that this is a figure of speech not an actual research finding (even if it's true). There are some very interesting graphics which were clearly designed at trying to appeal to non-professionals however they remain non-dynamic, dry representation of people, not people.





Fig. 12

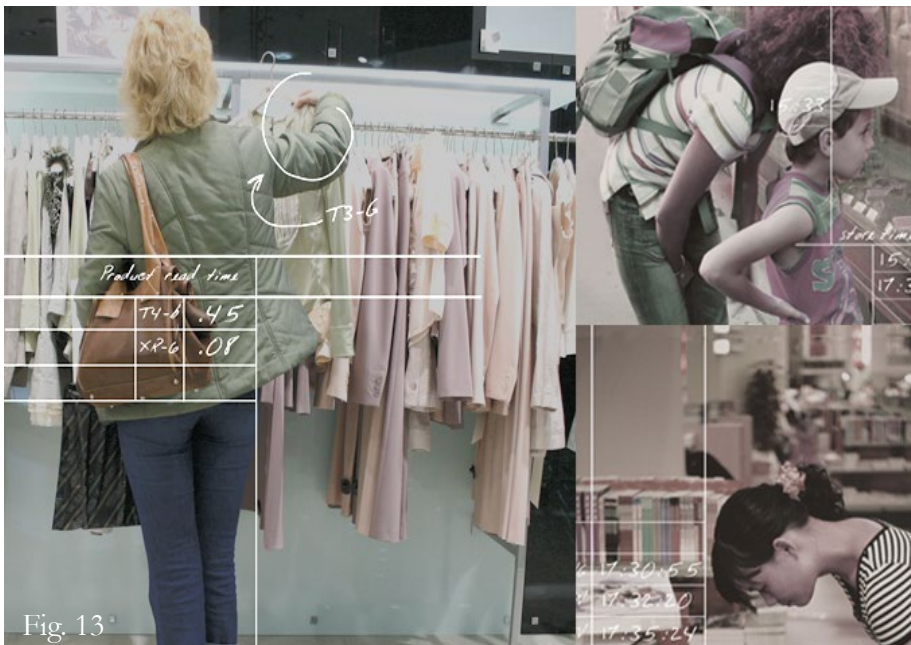


Fig. 13

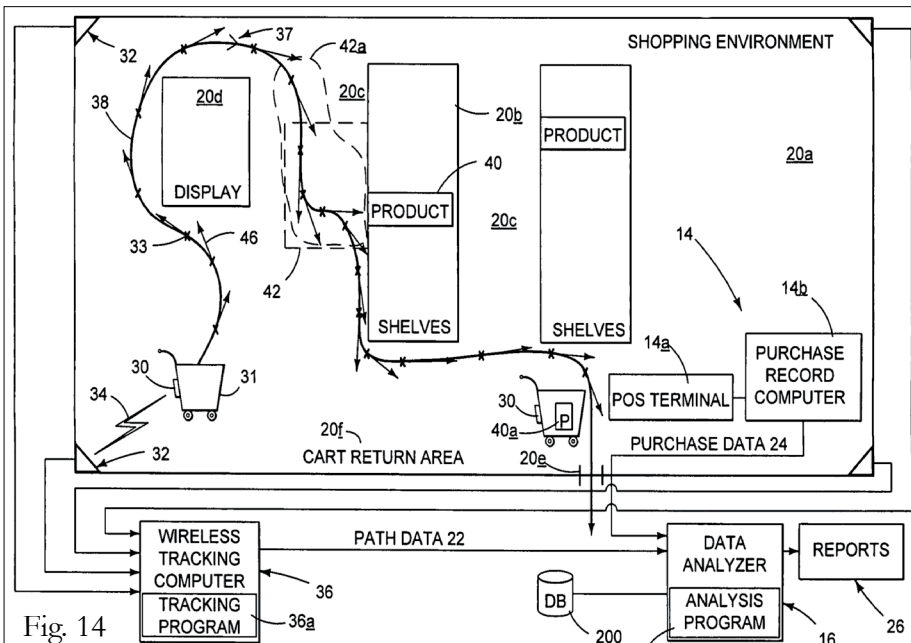


Fig. 14

ENVIROSELL - PROFESSIONAL  
 To finish my research I have looked at how such researches are done today by professionals.

Based upon the techniques developed by William Whyte, in 1977 Paco Underhill has found company Envirosell. It offered consumer behavior research and consulting services<sup>8</sup>. What is relevant to me is their research methods, which was mainly based around filming and tracking people within the places of interest. Once again the research was primarily revolving around the immediate movements of people, however they have also opted to conduct a large amount of interviews. These interviews would be later disseminated into dry information in the form of charts and numbers which are then presented to the clients<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly the original tapes were retained and as of today the Envirosell head office is one of world's largest video tape archives<sup>10</sup>. None of the tapes however are presented unless as a small featurette to promote the product<sup>11</sup>, almost as if they were aware that the research about people's behavior is lacking a human face.



Fig. 15

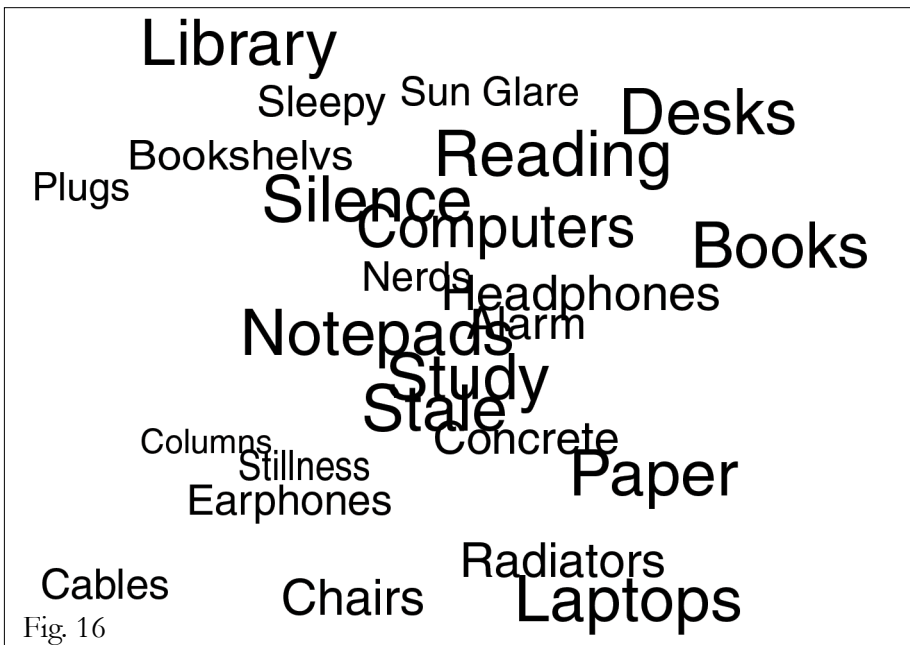


Fig. 16



Fig. 17

Envirosell has been shown to recognize the precious nature of the personal opinion of the subjects of their studies, they retain all of their original records however they don't use them<sup>12</sup>. I have come to a conclusion that the fault lies in the lack of possibility of presenting two moving images (Fig. 15) at the same time, the soundtrack could be overlaid or preferably edited and key words and/or sentences could be used to show collective information. I have simulated such method however the results were not impressive, the result was interesting but illegible (Fig. 16).

I also conducted my own small experiment, I took a picture of myself with long exposure, it is a technique that I used a number of times in the past however for different reasons.

My own picture was taken while preparing my dinner. Such pictures can be great for estimating the movements of a person especially in a dynamic setting. This way every movement of a person is assigned weight. The amount of time that each action takes is very easy to recognise. The problem is that a very short amount of time is recorded and presented. If the material were any longer it would be too blurry thus it is very limited. This is something that Sean Hughes had so successfully avoided in his work.

It seems in general that most of these studies cover a very limited lapse of time. In a commercial driven operation such as Envirosell, the focus is on area not people thus every person becomes a dynamic intruder. Whyte's research has been a lot broader but it has also remained clear of actually investigating how people act on the next day or even watching a person longer. The only times when the Street Life Project took an interest in an individual over an extended period of time is when these people stood out of the crowd<sup>13</sup>. Spoorri was unique that he did manage to represent his entire life, yet it lacks the conciseness and can be difficult to maneuver between the various elements of the document. It is also quite incomplete in the sense that this exercise provides only snippets of information about the subject and therefore could be expanded exponentially<sup>14</sup>.





I believe that the fault lies in task of turning the gatherings of the study into an easily accessible data. Every precedent I have investigated had excellent findings, yet somewhere along the way the research is turned into a representative of the research which is lacking some of the key characteristics of the subject. This is particularly prevalent in a commercial research and representation of said research. In order to capture the full scope of the interviewed one must create a research method where the findings are can be immediately presented as the results. The can be of course edited, but never changed.

I have looked at examples presented in Fig. 18 and 19 as my final source of inspiration. AS I have mentioned earlier I have found that the students work is the closest that I can find to what I am trying to achieve. The Fig. 17 depicts the sound pollution in part of Dublin. The simple line drawing is covered with small dots of varying size color and shape. This is because they were done by hand by a member of 4th year studio Aitana Perez. What amazed me was that even though every dot was a little unique and had its own personality, together the dots looked very uniform. My way of thinking was solidified when I have found this drawing by Deirbhile Doddy, where the people are represented by little blobs of color which take a loosely humanoid figure. What if every person in the study could draw their own representation of themselves in the study. Their efforts would of course be controlled by rules yet even a small deviation between each person is enough to produce a hint of organisity and the illusion of of passage of time. This could be later exploited to create graphics which do hint at the person behind every dot.

I decided to conduct a survey where the findings are presented using the survey itself. I have devised clear set of rules which were written on the sheet to guide people to make their sheet comparable to that of their colleagues. The task was simple mark two stationary positions on the map and mark one movement path. The surveys can be later overlayed to provide a simple concise document.



The opportunity of the survey is that all of the applicants know how to draw a plan and no instructions are needed

I have drawn a very minimalistic drawing to reduce any amount of time people will spend looking at it, essentials only to speed up the process

# ARCHITECTURE&TIME SURVEY

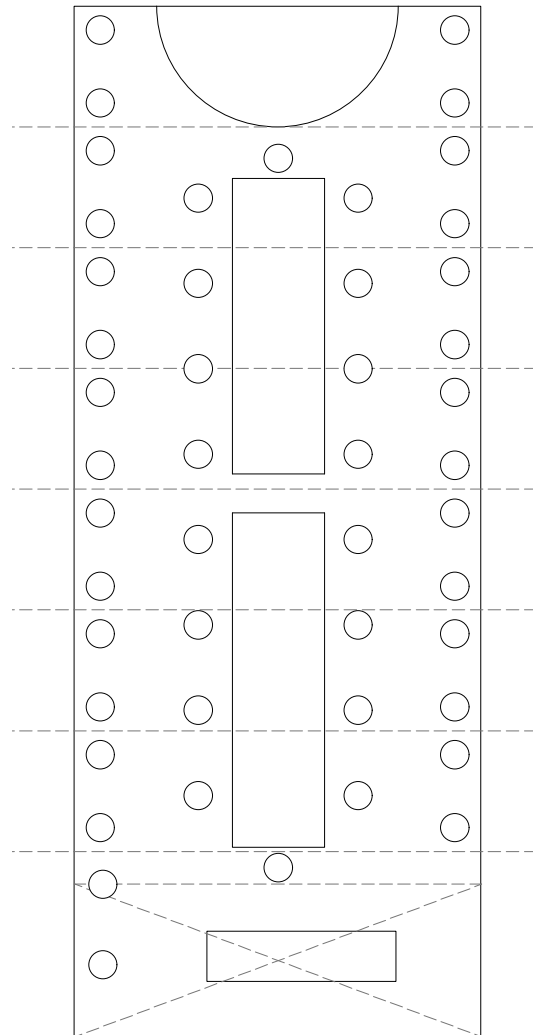
by Lukasz Kuchta

Where are you in this drawing:

Mark blue where first sat at the beginning of the semester

Mark red where you sit now

Mark green the path between the two spots



Fold when finished

Fold when finished

Where are you from:

What group are you in:

Colors are used to simplify the message and to suggest the tone of the colors

Folded element to protect the information about the applicants from other people

Structural bays are used to help people orient themselves around the studio



Fig. 20



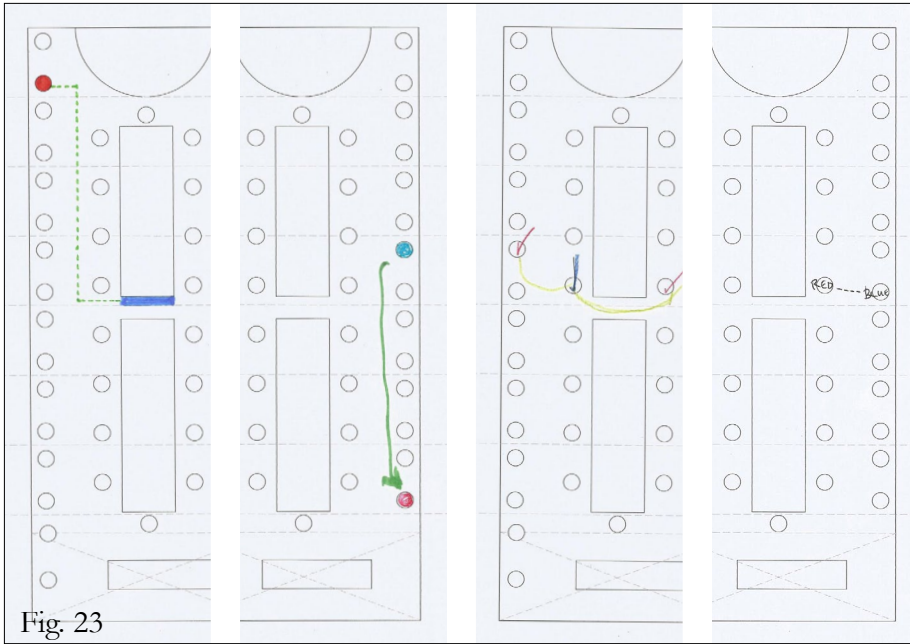
Fig. 21



Fig. 22

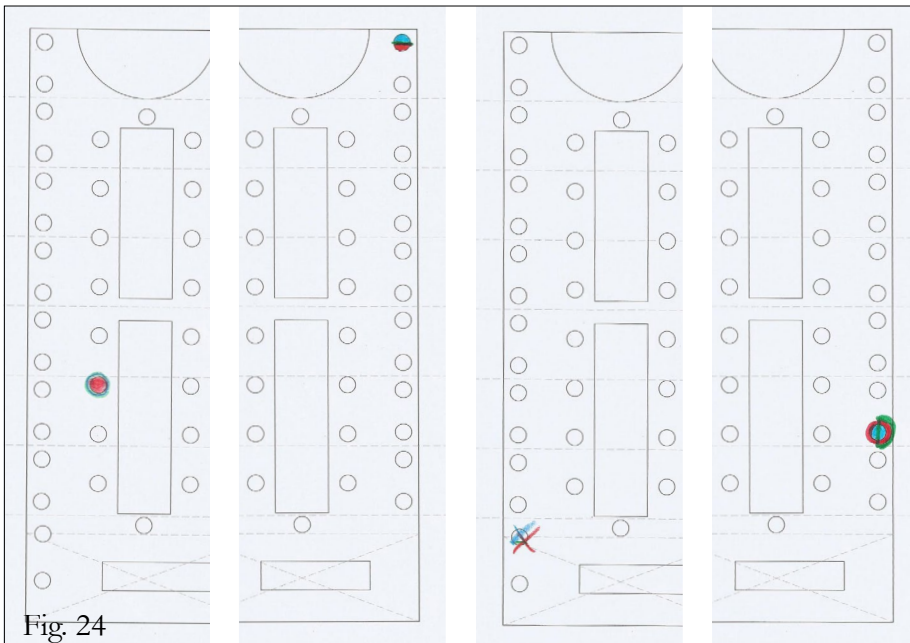
The experiment itself was conducted on 30th and 31st of November. The reason for the exercise being stretched over the course of two days was the absence of a number of members of the studio. I have handed out the sheets just after lunch hoping that people would be more willing to take a miniscule extension to their break. Each sheet was delivered personally, I requested the reading of the instructions provided and then filling out the survey. I have consciously made a decision to step away from the subjects to force them to make their own decisions on how to proceed with the exercise. A number of people actually started to chase me through the room attempting to get more instructions however I simply told them to use their own best judgment. The collection of the results was a problem. Most of the people whom I know (even very little) actually made an effort to bring me the sheets with the results. While I very much appreciated their effort, it made it hard to figure out who brought the survey back and who didn't. Most of the students I have not been familiar with, mainly the Erasmus students, have never returned the sheets. This was very annoying as I was very curious about the actual results of the long term movement of this group around the studio. They very often asked for more time to fill the sheets which they never did as they became more and more immersed in their own work. Some were almost hostile for being disturbed at their work and usually I immediately stepped back to avoid any unnecessary scenes. Since as mentioned earlier I did not supervise the filling out of the sheets many of them never got back to me. Large amount of students have also not been in school to complete the survey, it was mainly the mature students. Eventually I managed to collect 27 sheets out of possible 50.





Most of the sheets were filled out correctly or were close enough to be compared to others, a number of people have marked the sheets with wrong colors while some had to fill in information that was unforeseen when the survey was initially written. That most of the people had never moved during the semester thus many of them had decided to use both the colors where they sit was at the beginning and at the end in one spot. Others only used one color to mark where they sit now.

The most interesting of the deviations from the standard was the person who never sat in the studio and was handed the form by accident. That person took the liberty to draw in the missing elements from the diagram.



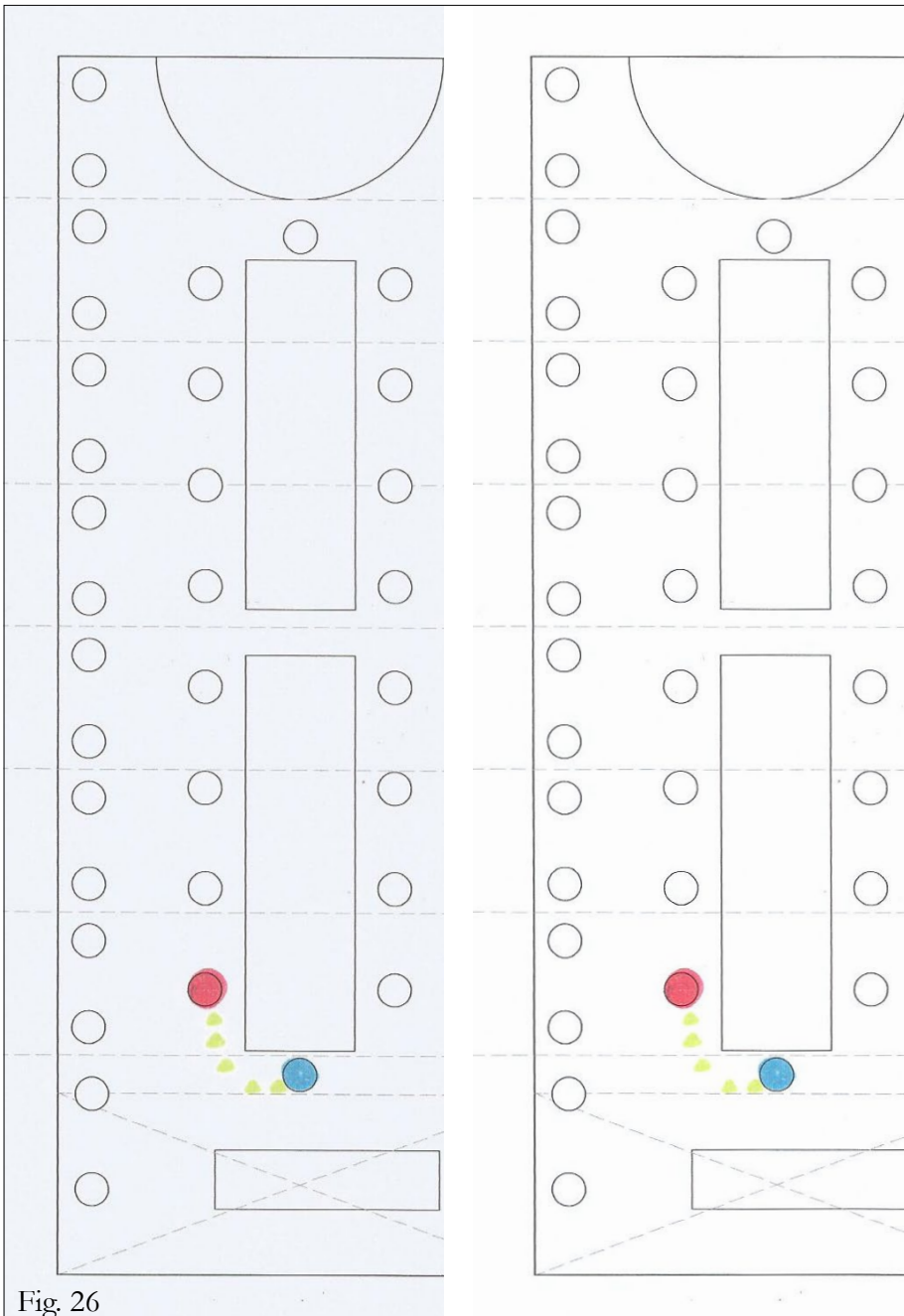


Fig. 26

After collecting the sheets I have scanned them in and cropped them, a few were immediately pulled out as filled out wrong. The rest was very quickly collated into a film. The initial result was not very breath taking, the images were sad and lacked the vigor a human being.

I also found that very few people switched seats over the course of the semester meaning that the color green which represented the most dynamic action of moving was almost missing. The reason for this miscalculation was simple, the group that did the most cohesive amount of moving around the studio was the German Erasmus students who (with the exception of the few that I was friends with) did not return the survey sheets.

I had to Photoshop images to create more dynamic colors as well as rearranging the sheets so that the amount of color was consistent throughout the movie. The final attempt is far from what I had hoped, it is still very stagnant and the colours do not dominate the image and draw the eye, yet it is a good start.

The video can be accessed at <http://vimeo.com/114539308>.



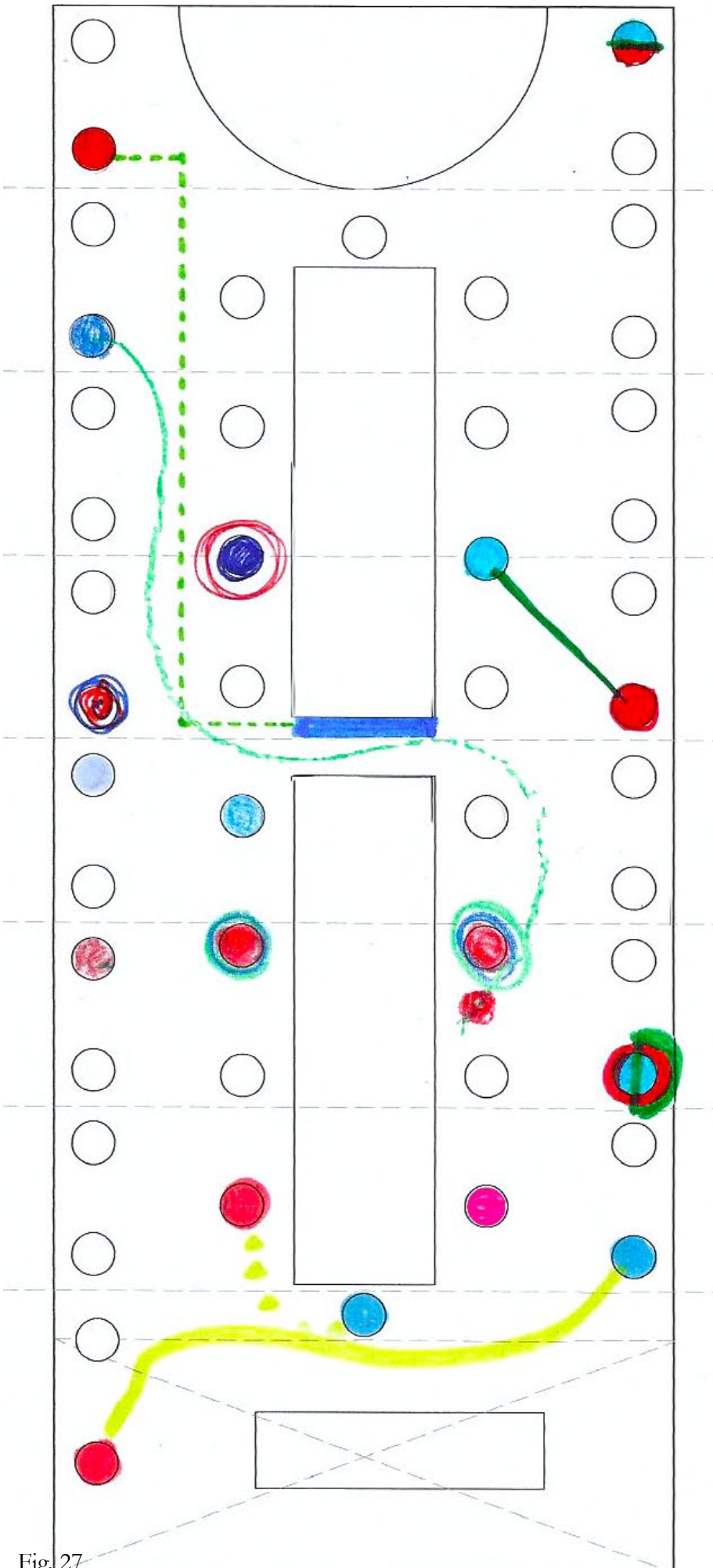


Fig. 27

It is clear that the final exercise was far from success, yet I believe that it is the fault of circumstances as well as the need of improvement of certain elements of the process. Firstly I should have collected at least 40 to 45 sheets. That way I would have more correctly filled out sheets, which would mean that the film would have more comprehensive feel as the dots would appear on the entire diagram. There would also be more even distribution of colour. The colour range in the survey was too large, I had initially thought that this would help to establish the uniqueness of each sheet, however people used colours which were not remotely what I asked for, one person even wrote the colours instead of using them. Ideally the colouring pencils would be provided with the sheet however this provides a serious logistical issue. Either pencils with every sheet or one sheet to one person at a time to make sure that they return both the sheet and pencils. This will mean that the people will constantly ask questions on how to fill the sheet which ruins the concept of uniqueness of every submission. People would not read instructions and fill the survey according to what they are told by the person handing out the survey. At least all of the sheets would be returned but the study would be robbed of its best aspect. To avoid that the person would have to be specifically instructed to refuse any information regarding the survey, which means that there is probably a necessity for more comprehensive instructions on the sheet.

One of the most interesting findings of this exercise to me was the uniqueness of every submission, everyone wanted to use all of the colors even if they hadn't moved over time.

Overall the exercise was a half success, it seems promising but needs to be tested a lot more on larger group of people.

## Footnotes

1. Oscar Wild, *Art is useless...*, <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2010/01/art-is-useless-because.html> (accessed 12 December 2014)
2. James Malpas, *Realism*, 65
3. Daniel Spoerri, *An anecdoted topography of chance*, 12.
4. *Ibid.*, 12.
5. *Ibid.*, 83.
6. William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 4
7. *Ibid.*, P4,5,10
8. Paco Underhill, 'About Paco', <http://www.pacounderhill.com/about.html> (accessed 12 December 2014).
9. Keith Hammonds, "How we sell", <http://www.fastcompany.com/38514/how-we-sell.html> (accessed 12 December 2014)
10. *Ibid.*, (accessed 12 December 2014)
11. EnviroSell, Multimedia, <http://www.envirosell.com/en/interactive/video.html> (accessed 12 December 2014)
12. Keith Hammonds, "How we sell", <http://www.fastcompany.com/38514/how-we-sell.html> (accessed 12 December 2014)
13. William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 25-55
14. Daniel Spoerri, *An anecdoted topography of chance*, 10-15

## Bibliography

- Oscar Wild, *Art is useless...*, Letters of Note, <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2010/01/art-is-useless-because.html>, September 07, 2009, (accessed 12 December 2014)
- James Malpas, *Realism*, London: Tate Gallery, 1997
- Daniel Spoerri, *An anecdoted topography of chance*, London: Atlas Press, 1995
- William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, New York: Doubleday, 1988
- William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Public Spaces*, Washington, D.C : Conservation Foundation 1980
- Paco Underhill, *About Paco*, Paco Underhill, June 26, 2012, <http://www.pacounderhill.com/about.html>, (accessed 12 December 2014).
- Keith Hammonds, *How we sell*, Fast Company, <http://www.fastcompany.com/38514/how-we-sell.html>, October 31, 1999, (accessed 12 December 2014)
- Envirosell, *Multimedia*, July 24, 2012, <http://www.envirosell.com/en/interactive/video.html>, 2011, (accessed 12 December 2014)

## Images

- Fig. 1 William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Public Spaces*, 26-28
- Fig. 2\_Snare Picture by Daniel Spoerri (from <http://www.wikiart.org/en/daniel-spoerri/assemblage-mit-dem-kopf-eines-pferdes-1990>)
- Fig. 3\_Mapping a space in time by Darragh O'Shea (from <https://architectureandtime.wordpress.com/mapping-a-space-in-time/>)
- Fig. 4\_Mapping a space in time by Robert Curly (from <https://architectureandtime.wordpress.com/mapping-a-space-in-time/>)
- Fig. 5\_Mapping a space in time by Sean Hughes (from <https://architectureandtime.wordpress.com/mapping-a-space-in-time/>)
- Fig. 6\_Snare Picture by Daniel Spoerri (from <http://www.foodcrypt.com/wp-content/uploads/max.jpeg>)
- Fig. 7\_Daniel Spoerri, *An anecdoted topography of chance*, 19
- Fig. 8\_Daniel Spoerri, *An anecdoted topography of chance*, 240
- Fig. 9\_William Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 5
- Fig. 10\_William Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 60
- Fig. 11\_William Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*, 9
- Fig. 12\_Screenshots from EnviroSell Promotion video "Methodology" (from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIkTlqZ\\_1kc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIkTlqZ_1kc))
- Fig. 13\_EnviroSell Promotion poster (from <http://indexcreativevillage.com/envirosell-thailand/>)
- Fig. 14\_Drawing based on EnviroSell research (<http://www.google.com/patents/US7933797>)
- Fig. 15\_Collage by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 16\_Image by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 17\_Image by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 18\_Image by Aitana Perez (scan of the original)
- Fig. 19\_Mapping a space in time by Deirbhile Doddy (from <https://architectureandtime.wordpress.com/mapping-a-space-in-time/>)
- Fig. 20\_4th year studio\_Picture by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 21\_4th year studio\_Picture by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 22\_4th year studio\_Picture by Lukasz Kuchta
- Fig. 23\_Samples of correctly and incorrectly (left and right respectively) filled out survey
- Fig. 24\_Samples of surveys without green movement line
- Fig. 25\_Incorrectly filled out sheets
- Fig. 26\_Survey with adjusted colours
- Fig. 27\_Survey flattened

## All my videos:

- <http://vimeo.com/114538588>
- <http://vimeo.com/114538589>
- <http://vimeo.com/114539306>
- <http://vimeo.com/114539307>
- <http://vimeo.com/114539308>