

Conceptual Framework

Intrigued by Foucault's discussion of the heterotopia and interested in the concept of physical mapping, we are attempting to manifest heterotopic spaces of a variety of scales within MIT. An element under-stressed by Foucault in *Of Other Spaces* is the physical attributes of heterotopic spaces in addition to their loaded cultural contexts. While Foucault, along with Lefebvre would stress the importance of space as an organizing historical tool, there is little discussion of the physical phenomenon of these heterotopias. While MIT as an institution is ripe with culturally heterotopic spaces, we are concerned with exploring heterotopias of scale and use.

In order to accomplish this task we chose string to as a medium through which to explore the boundaries between these spaces. String is especially apt to serve in this role because of its limited cultural associations and because it is in itself a heterotopic material. While possessing what amounts to no mass on its own, string has the amazing ability to create volume not by sheer amount, but through appeasing the physiological phenomenon of gestalt.

Three phases of a conceptual exploration of the heterotopic spaces of MIT



Path_Discipline_Seam

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m.arch level i
m.arch level i
m.arch level i
m.arch level ii

Path

Key Text: Gaston Bachelard 'The Poetics of Space'
Location: Building 3 Staircase

Paths have an ability to create their own boundaries. By mapping movement across departments and floor, certain boundaries are made evident-boundaries between safety/danger, security/fear. This installation recognizes a space that cannot be occupied defining a space that is occupied. By examining the threshold we hoped to give presence to a space of physical use juxtaposed with a space of phenomenological use.



Scale: Social scale
Interaction: Dynamic, proximal

This exploration not only helped to refine our conceptual framework, it revealed the potential phenomenological power of the string.



Discipline

Location: Killian Court telephone

Key Text: Michel Foucault 'Crime and Punish'

What are the implicit boundaries that divide heterotopic spaces? We wanted to examine how one interacts with these spaces, and can they be divided into their component uni-topias? What is the experience of moving between these spaces of different uses? How do interventions in the space heighten one's awareness of uncanny relationships?

Scale: Personal

Interaction: Penetrating boundaries, crossing thresholds

As our visual language of delineating boundaries became more refined and increasingly flat, it spurred us to look for thresholds of greater depth.

Path_Discipline_Seam Seam

Location: Light well between Rotch Library and Building 7

Key Text: Michel Foucault 'Of Other Spaces'

While the first exploration drew boundaries around a place that cannot be inhabited, and the second examined corporeal thresholds, the most recent incarnation is an examination of the space of the boundary itself. The threshold in this installation is not a static, infinitely thin division between spaces, rather it is a dynamic zone that is perceived differently, given the entry point, the point of observation or the route through the space.

This installation resonates with our first exploration in the stairwell. While the well around which the stairs spiral is an essential part of the experience of climbing/descending, the seam between building 7 and Rotch disappears if one is not moving through the space because of its narrowness. The only real occupation of the space is limited to a restricted zone of the library, save the Athena terminals and the bridge. Similar to the stairwell, this space is an organizing feature and plays a large role in the use of the space, but is an invisible architecture whose presence is suppressed. Our intervention attempts to express the subtle undulations in perception that exist in the space, given each location's vision of adjoining spaces. The contour of the installation is modified by the points of privilege and power inherent in the space.



Scale: Attenuated

Interaction: Static, observed from a few privileged observation points