

THINK SPACE PAMPHLETS

2nd Think Space Unconference Edition

Zagreb, February, 2013



Think Space Pamphlets

Impressum:

Publisher:

**Zagreb Society of Architects ZSA /
Društvo arhitekata Zagreba DAZ
Trg bana Josipa Jelačića 3/I
Zagreb, Croatia
2013**

Think Space

Past Forward Call for Papers

Editorial team:

**Sanja Cvjetko Jerkovic, Luka Korlaet, Ana Dana
Beroš, Lukas Pauer, Adrian Lahoud with Kata
Gašpar, editorial executive assistant**

ISBN number: 978-953-7939-00-7

Contents:

00 *Past Forward Call for Papers / Selected Papers*

01 Aaron White

Infinite Deferral: Olmstedian use and its Challengers

02 Anna Neimark & Andrew Atwood

Abstraction Returns:

A Grid Proposal for the Island of Manhattan

03 Benjamin J Smith

Evaluating the Manifesto

04 Celia Faria

“HOMEd”: to be or not to be? “an HOME-ingfest”

05 Cesar Losada Romero

Sensation, Sign, Situation.

06 Daniel Koehler

Rereading Hilberseimer: Punktualization as an architectural method

07 Daniel Luis Martinez

When The Cathedrals Were Black

Mies' Spatial Cosmology

08 Emil Jurcan

Nomad Palace: Ten Theses on Architecture of Transit

09 Ethel Baraona Pohl & Cesar Reyes Najera

Transcoding Situationism

10 Heena Kokel

“Architecture” through user’s perception

- 11 Ishita Chatterjee**
Through the Looking Glass
- 12 Juan Martinez Amores**
Lifetime in Architecture
- 13 Kathy Velikov, Geoffrey Thun, Dan McTavish**
Fragmentary Utopistics
- 14 Lee Aviv**
Dismantling/Recouping: Peter Eisenman's
Engagement with Classical Architecture in the 1980s
- 15 Lucia Jalon Oyarzun**
Acrobats in The Rooftops of Teheran
- 16 Luis E. Carranza**
Longness, or the problem of Length
- 17 Marija Marić**
From the Standing Perspective
- 18 Marissa Looby & Michael Holt**
The Bilbao Fallout:
The Incidental End of Theory and the Death of
Postmodern Architecture
- 19 Nenad Stjepanovich**
Linear Typologies - extended urban space
- 20 Neyran Turan**
Against Gross
- 21 Nick Axel & Pedro Hernandez**
Manifesto of the Copyist Party
- 22 Pedro Pitarch Alonso**
From originalities to singularities
[or how to lose our identity]
- 23 Reed P. Mariner**
Personal Investigation Log, Case #273
- 24 Sarah Lyons**
The Social from Empathic Space/ The Blur Building
- 25 Slobodan Anđelić**
The Athens Charter
- 26 Tigran Harutyunian**
Architecture in non sustainable system
- 27 Tom Marble**
Oblivious LA
- 28 Toni Gelabert**
Contingent Architecture Manifesto
- 29 Wojciech Dzioubek**
U S A G E / A Tragicomedy In Two Acts

O2

Andrew Atwood & Anna Neimark

ABSTRACTION RETURNS:

A GRID PROPOSAL FOR THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN

The Map of the City of New York of 1811 by the Commissioners superimposed a grid onto the Island of Manhattan (fig. 1). The drawing neither accounted for irregular edges of its shape nor the topography of the island. It rendered the lines of former streets, houses, and fields as dashed. Ordering the orthogonal grid of blocks independently of geography, history, and memory, the Commissioners defined an autonomous urban form.

Now consider Krauss's emphatic description of the grid as one of modernism's founding myths: "In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back to nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral result not of imitation, but of aesthetic decree..."ⁱ

By ordering the city to the shallowness of a gridded plane, the Commissioners unknowingly added urbanism to what would become central to the aesthetic discourse of modernism. They preceded the discipline of art by one hundred years. Their drawing brought abstraction to bear on the everyday lives of millions of people who would eventually inhabit that island. The map defined a distance, a sense of *estrangement*, between the city and its inhabitants through an object and concept of representational order.

In the two centuries that followed, the distance between the drawing and the city appeared to close. Although we purposefully interpret it as an aesthetic ordering system, the grid fulfilled the Commissioners' pure instrumental reason: a parcelization of the city for the real estate market. The island was fully turned over to Capitalist speculation. What might have been abstract turned into kitsch.

"And so life is reckoned as nothing," writes Victor Shklovsky. "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war..." And yet, "the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*"ⁱⁱ

To reopen the Manhattan grid to abstraction through representation, we subject the island to conventions of orthographic drawing and projection that estrange its now familiar form. In the three studies that follow, the urban object is summarily reconstituted through a mechanical reduction of resolution: extrusion. What emerges is a template for urbanism, governed not by the figure-ground plan, but by the flattened, gridded skyline. The models project the city from the outside in, describing it as a monumental whole made up of discrete parts.

In the first model, Manhattan is divided into parcels according to variations and anomalies found in the original plan (fig. 2). Once the iconic districts are outlined in plan, each one is treated as an internally closed system, defined by two internal skylines – one on the southern, and another, on the eastern edge (fig. 3). The independent elevations, when projected through one another, reproduce a recognizable, yet inaccurate, model of the island (fig. 4). The irregularities tie this abstraction to quasi-real zones in the city, yet the union of the two projected skylines produces an uncanny sense of distance. Attached to its original reference, the exercise maintains as much as it alienates.

The second model takes Manhattan to its lowest level of resolution. While the most recognizable image of the city is the skyline, an extrusion along this line delivers a radical estrangement from the real (fig. 5). The seventeen parcels of the first abstraction are reduced to one undifferentiated block in the second (fig. 6). Describing Manhattan as one volume through its three faces, the island plan and its two skylines, produces a pure plaid (fig. 7). None of the exceptions preserved in the first model exist in the second. Extrusion does not average. It does something else, favoring extremes. The model of the city does not recover the original; the form only retains the character and name “New York.”

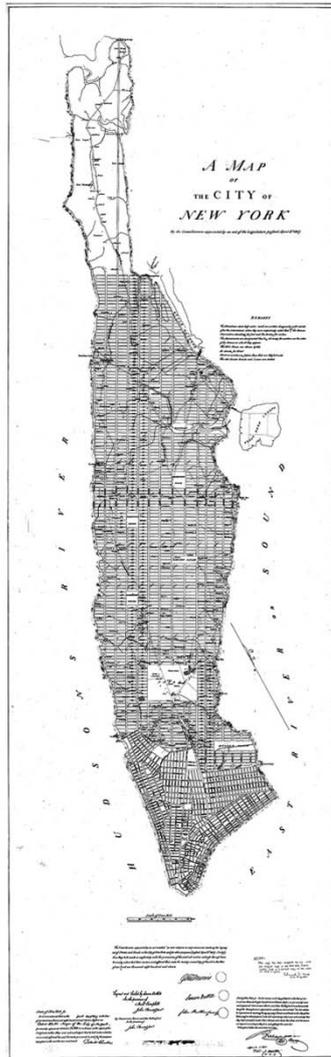
The final study gives the island a new form of discontinuity through a grid of evenly spaced two hundred acre parcels (fig. 8). As with previous models, each cube is then projected from three drawings only, crossing two hundred skyline segments through one another (fig. 9). When the cubes are placed together, the elevations do not match (fig. 10). Only the street grid lines up to connect the superblocks into a continuous urban fabric. There are visible seams. The cubic parcels resist being brought together into one unified model (fig. 11). Each one is a mini Manhattan, governed by its own internal logic.

This final reduction estranges the island through an alienated form of its own composition – the grid. Yet the new blocks resist conforming to the effective standards of efficiency, property, and function. In gridding the grid of Manhattan once again, we revisit the moment of the Commissioners’ original abstraction.

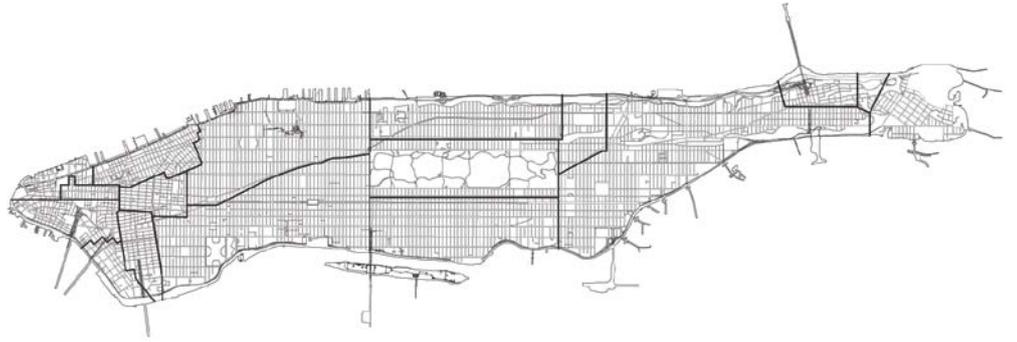
Andrew Atwood has lectured at SCI-Arc, Rice, UCLA, Cornell, USC, UVA, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Michigan. He recently led an ACSA panel on “The Agency of Drawing and the Digital Process” at MIT. His installations include 5 Doric Columns at the Pacific Design Center and Cone Ceiling at the Beijing Biennale. He has worked and consulted for Belzberg Architects, mos, and BIG. He holds a BA in Political Science and Studio Art from the University of Richmond and an M.Arch from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD). His research can be found at atwood-a.com.

Anna Neimark teaches at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc). In 2011 they founded First Office, a design studio based in downtown Los Angeles (firstoff.net). Their forthcoming publications include essays in the Think Space CityScapes Pamphlet and the inaugural issue of the journal, Project. Anna has lectured at the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), MIT, and UCLA. Her research on the Soviet canal system was exhibited at the WUHO gallery and will be published in the forthcoming issue of Future Anterior. Prior to joining the faculty at SCI-Arc, she was at the University of Southern California (USC) and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA/AMO). She holds a BA in Architecture from Princeton University and an M.Arch from the GSD. She is originally from Russia and a 2004 Soros Fellow.

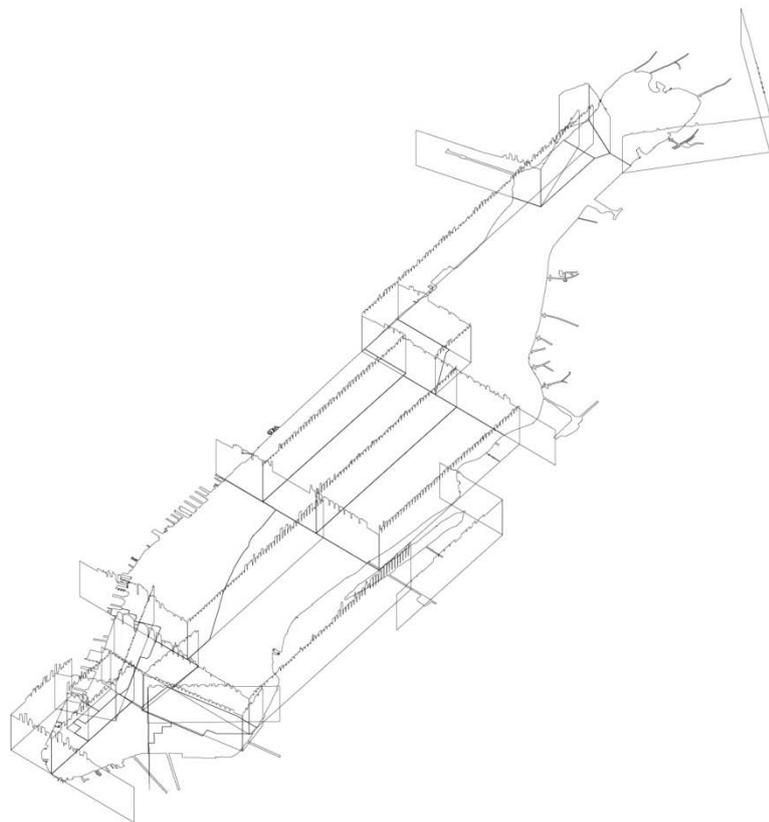
Illustrations:



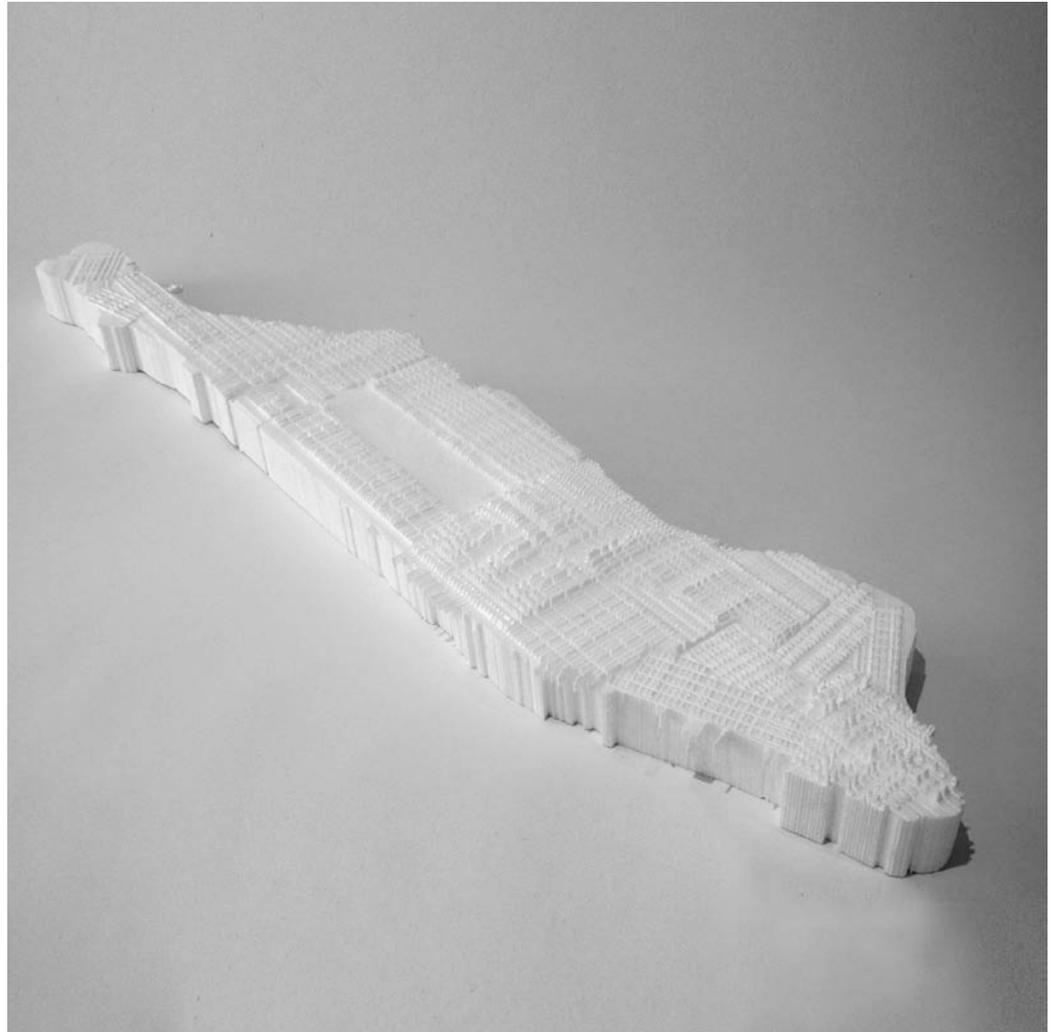
- 01 A Map of the City of New York by the Commissioners Appointed by an Act of the Legislature. 1811



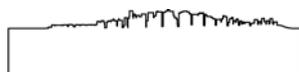
02 Manhattan divided into districts by grid orientation. Plan.



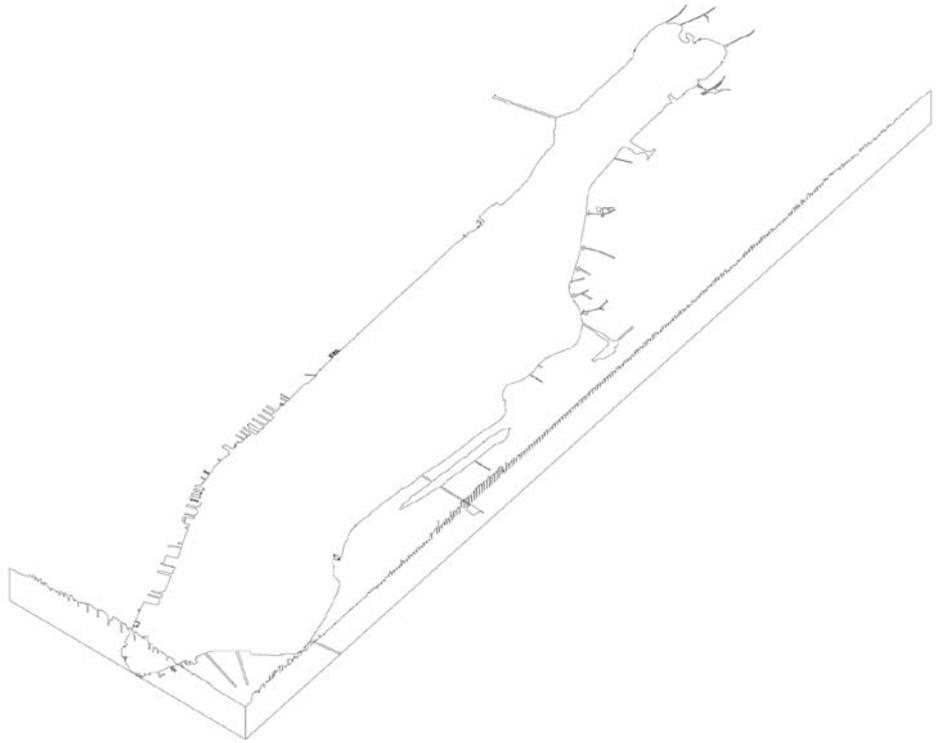
03 District elevations. Axonometric.



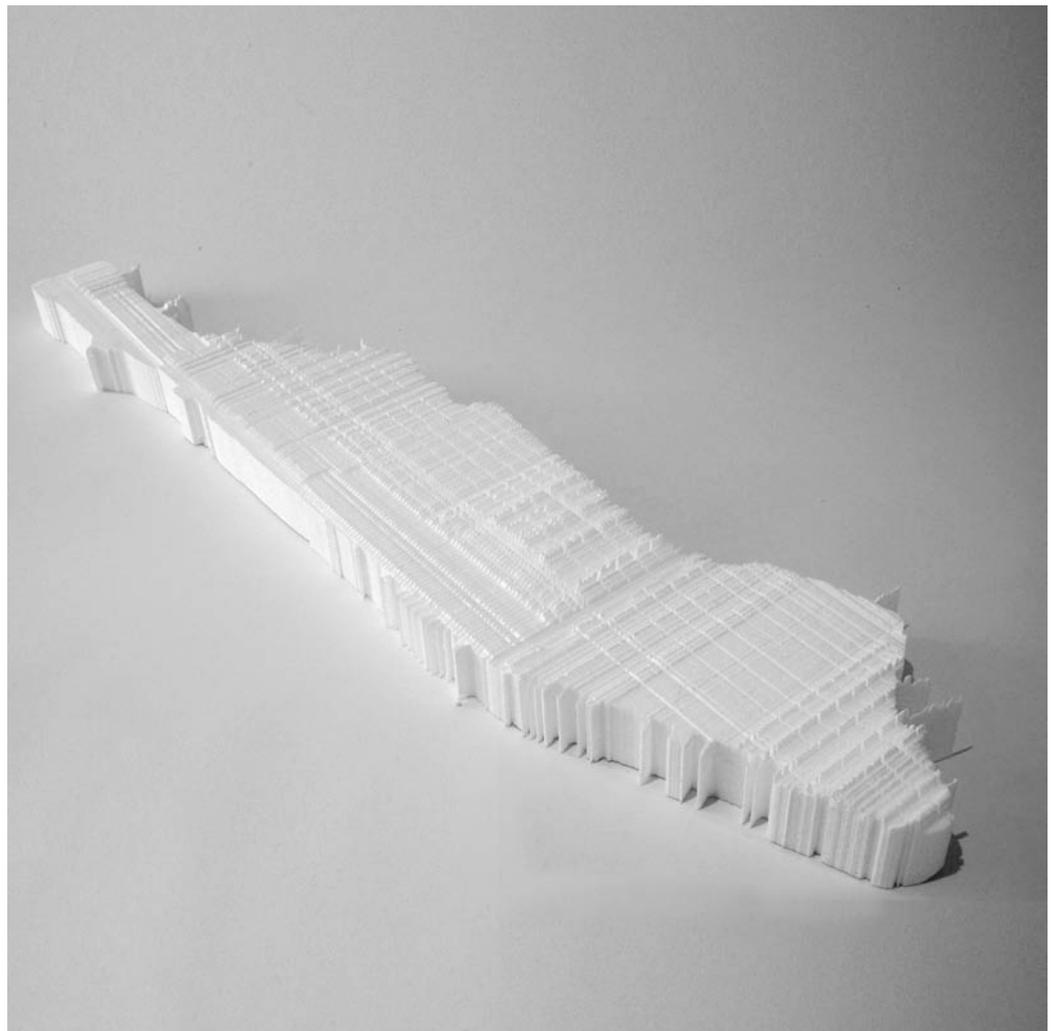
04 Manhattan reconstituted from district parcels. Model.



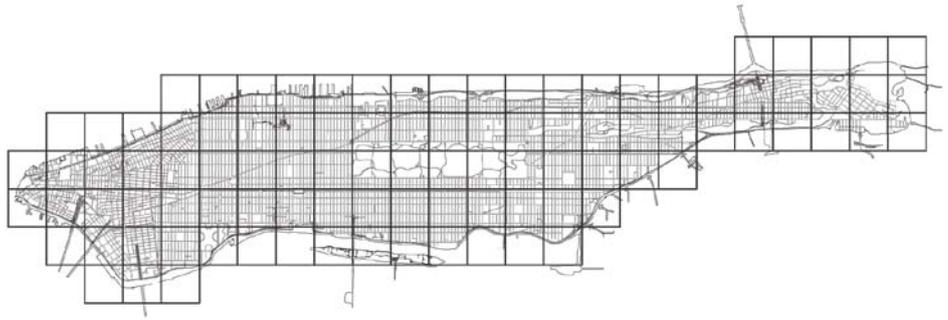
05 Manhattan skylines, east & south. Elevation.



06 Skyles. Axonometric.



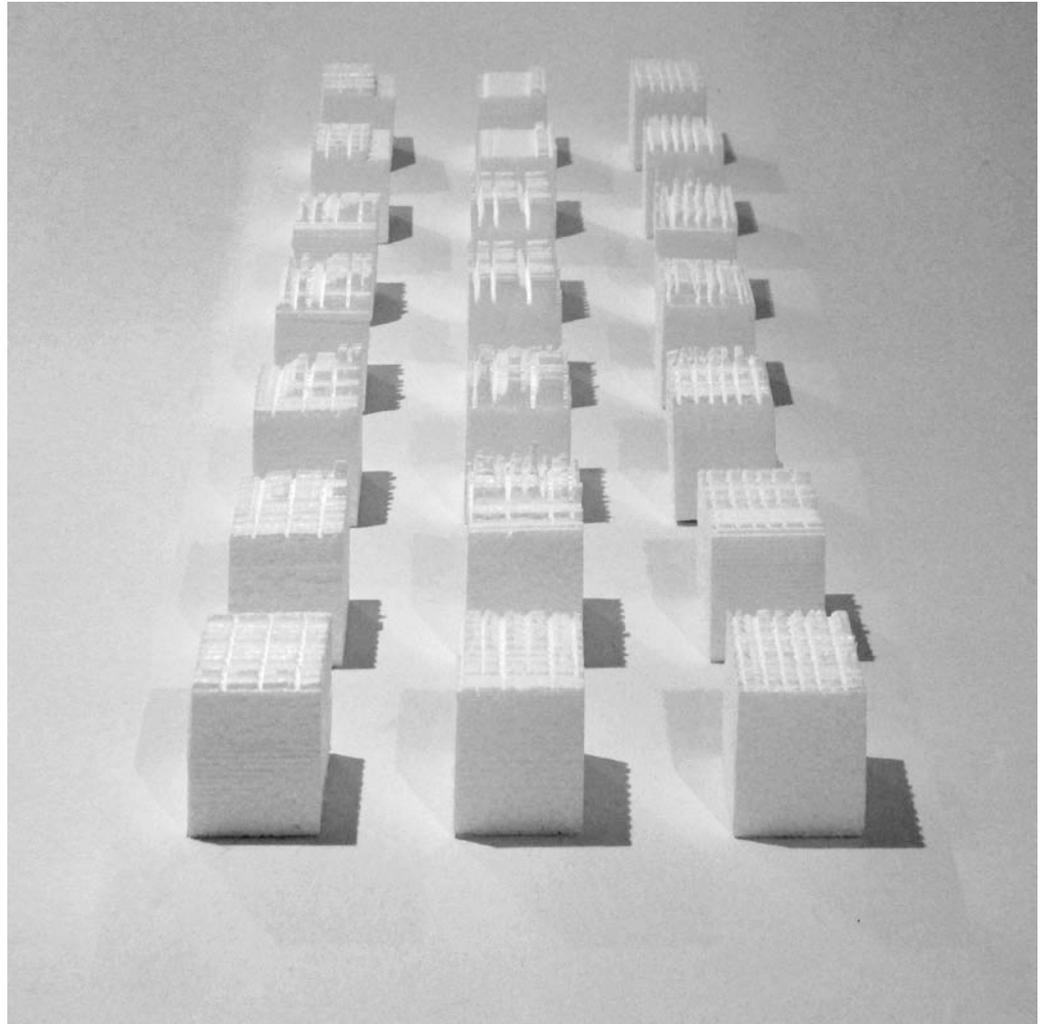
07 Manhattan reconstituted from skylines. Model.



09 Two hundred acre grid elevations superimposed onto the existing street grid of Manhattan. Axonometric.



10 Manhattan grid. Model.



11 Twenty-one of the two hundred acre Manhattan grid tiles. Model.

¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), p. 50

² Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 1917, in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12