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REGULATIONS ON USE

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Background

The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

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‘Route Description’ Elicitation

Background History of The Task:

This task is based on one devised by Jürgen Weissenborn (1986) as reported in his paper “Learning How to Become an Interlocutor: The Verbal Negotiation of Common Frames of Reference and Actions in Dyads of 7-14 Year Old Children”. His aim was “to investigate the development of the establishment of verbal reference frames in an interactive, goal-oriented situation, and in the absence of a common perceptual field” (1986: 400). Weissenborn’s design had the following features:

- 1) Two participants, a director and a matcher, who are next to each other, facing the same direction, are screened off from one another so that they cannot see each other.
 - 2) Each participant has an identical small (0.60m X 0.7m) wooden model of a town in front of them.
 - 3) The base model of the town is organized symmetrically (mirror-image) around the central axis.
 - 4) Four different paths of equal difficulty (same number of subpaths and turning points) were defined and each was then successively described by one participant to the other.
 - 5) The path to be described was available to the director, but not the matcher.
 - 6) The matcher had to move a toy car along in accordance with the route description given by the director.
 - 7) Three of the four paths were described under three distinct conditions:
 - (i) with supplementary landmarks (trees, animals, cars) destroying the symmetry of the display and with gestures (the children were allowed to use their hands freely during the descriptions);
 - (ii) without landmarks and with gestures;
 - (iii) without landmarks and without gestures (the children were sitting on their hands)
 - 8) The fourth path was always described by the child to the experimenter under condition (ii).
 - 9) The task was videotaped.
- [N.B. videotapes of Weissenborn’s task apparently exist, but in an old format that needs to be converted.]

Variants of the above task were undertaken in the field by Gunter Senft and Steve Levinson. Crucially the identical models were internally asymmetrical in all axes, and were not in any way comparable ‘towns’ to that used by Weissenborn. Further, Senft and Levinson did not attend systematically to parts 4, 7, and 8 of Weissenborn’s design, as their interests were primarily elicitation.

Gunter originally built a Lego block town model which was too complex, and abstract for all of his Kilivila consultants to interact with successfully. Steve, who happened to be visiting with Gunter at the time, worked with Gunter to build a simpler base landscape that represented the gardens and landscapes that Kilivila speakers were more familiar with. At Hopevale (Queensland, Australia), Steve bought and used a cheap locally bought Korean toy set to make and design his identical models, which were less abstract than the ones proposed here.

[N.B. Both Steve and Gunter videotaped their implementations of these task variants]

The current version of the “route description” elicitation task described here was designed by David Wilkins in consultation with Eve Danziger, Suzanne Gaskins, Gertie de Groen, Deborah Hill, Steve Levinson, Paulette Levy, and Eric Pederson. It expands on, but remains fairly faithful to, the brief set of instructions developed by Gunter Senft. [The basic idea for using this task in our work is Gunter’s, and it was affectionately labelled “Gunter’s route description task” within the Cognitive Anthropology Research Group.]

Current Version of the Route Description Task

Main Aims of the Task:

(1) To elicit route descriptions.

[N.B. Since this task does not involve real human travel in space it would be useful to collect some real route descriptions to see how different the descriptions elicited by this tool are from real life route descriptions (if such things exist in the language your working on).]

(2) To elicit basic motion verbs, and see under what conditions different basic motion verbs are used.

[N.B. This task is not intended to elicit manner of motion verbs, although they may come up. It is primarily concerned with notions that loosely equate with 'coming', 'going', 'going into', 'passing by', 'ascending', and so on.]

(3) To explore how route descriptions vary when the basic scene is (i) symmetrical along the central axis, (ii) asymmetrical along the central axis, and (iii) augmented by larger landmarks which are external to the scene, but are available as reference points.

[N.B. It is expected the condition in (i) may produce some errors, so you may wish to pay special attention to these, although we don't expect one will be able to do a neat error analysis of the data.]

Task Material:

2 X pieces of white plastic table cloth material each cut to 0.65m x 0.80m [These are the base mats for each landscape]

4 X easy block short cylinders [which form the base of 4 towers] (all the same colour)

4 X easy block short cones [which form roof of 4 towers] (all the same colour)

4 X easy block 'roof' shapes [which act as landmarks on their own] (all the same colour)

4 X simple 'bridge' made of Duplo blocks (all the same colour)

2 X 'up&down step structure' made of Duplo blocks (both the same colour)

4 X yellow plasticized squares [which act as starting and ending points for paths.]

8 X Duplo fence links

1 X 2.5 meter length of small link chain (used to map out the route the director is meant to describe)

2 X small trucks (both same shape and colour)

2 X Duplo people (small enough to manipulate within the landscape easily, and to fit under bridges, etc. — these will be the figures travelling in the routes)

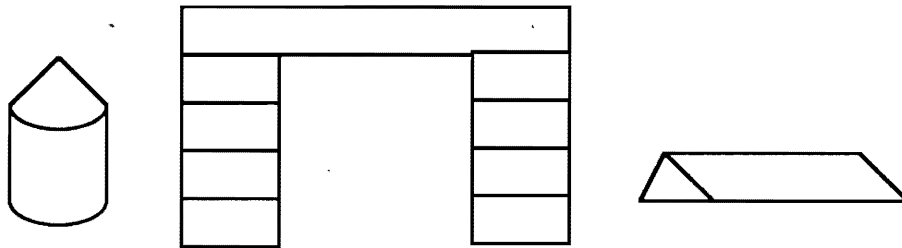
[You will need a screen as in the photo-photo matching task, and it is preferable if this is done on a table. The task is to be videotaped. - You will want other objects to destroy symmetry, such as toy animals, or trees. Remember the same objects must be added to both scenes to keep them identical. You will also need larger objects to provide scene external landmarks for one route variation.]

Basic Scene Design

Remember both the director's and matcher's landscapes are identical. The basic landscape design is organized symmetrically around a central axis, with objects on each side of the central axis being of identical shape and colour. As Weissenborn (1986:381) notes, "[t]he symmetrical design of the model was chosen because the referential determinacy of any path description that refers to it is only guaranteed if these descriptions are embedded in a verbal reference frame that has jointly been defined by the participants. For example a description like 'You pass under the bridge' would not suffice given that there are two bridges." As we have seen in our own work the

cross axis (the so-called left-right axis) is crosslinguistically the axis which is least likely to be elaborated, and when it is elaborated its coding is the most variable from language to language (in comparison to up-down and front-back). Building symmetry into the base design such that one is forced to differentiate directions in the cross axis should allow us to explore more fully the range and type of variation across languages.

Three pairs of different objects form the constant objects of the basic scene: in the foreground is a 'roof' shape on each side, in the middle ground is a simple bridge on each side, and in the back is a tower on each side. These three objects have the following shapes.



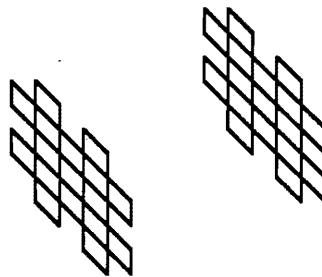
The towers rounded base allows for easy elicitation of notions like 'going around' or 'circling'. The bridges allow for elicitation of notions like 'going through (away from, and towards participants)' or 'going under'.

The 'roof' shape allows for elicitation of notions like 'going along' (short side or long side)', or 'going over (hill or bump)', or 'going up (flat) slope'

[Note that one could, at a pinch, use the tower and 'roof' to determine if there is a difference in climbing to a pointed pinnacle, or an elongated apex, and in the later case what movement along a thin edge is coded as.]

While the objects above make up what should be the fixed constants in the scene, other objects that are symmetrical in one axis can be placed with their axis of symmetry along the central axis. That is, one way of varying scenes, while maintaining symmetry, and limiting the number of objects that has to be used, is by placing symmetrical objects of various sorts along the axis of symmetry. The basic design proposed here uses the following:

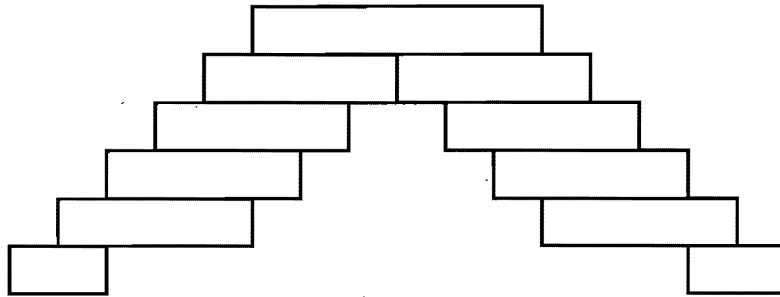
1) two short fence rails in parallel to elicit a notion of 'passing through (between)'



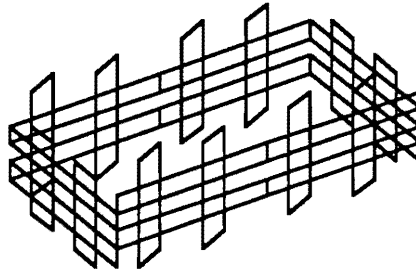
2) a car or truck, which gives a featured object to see if there's a difference in 'moving to the front of', 'moving to the back of', 'moving on the left side of', 'moving at the behind', etc.

(N.B. for further elicitation you might want to put people or animal along this axis to see whether special forms for moving with respect to animate beings arise)

3) a stair structure which is open below, to elicit notions of 'going up and down (steps)' as well as notions such as 'passing through/under (on the traverse)'



4) a rectangular fence structure which allows elicitation of notions like 'climbing over', 'going into', 'moving around inside of', 'following around the outside edge of', 'getting out of', etc.



This same structure can be opened out into a long fence which will run parallel to the far edge of the scene. This allows elicitation of a notion like 'moving along (side of)'.

An example of one basic scene is given on the following page.

What to do?

1) Set up the two identical landscapes next to each other with a screen in between. (Remember, when playing, both participants will be next to each other, facing the same way, and unable to see each other.)

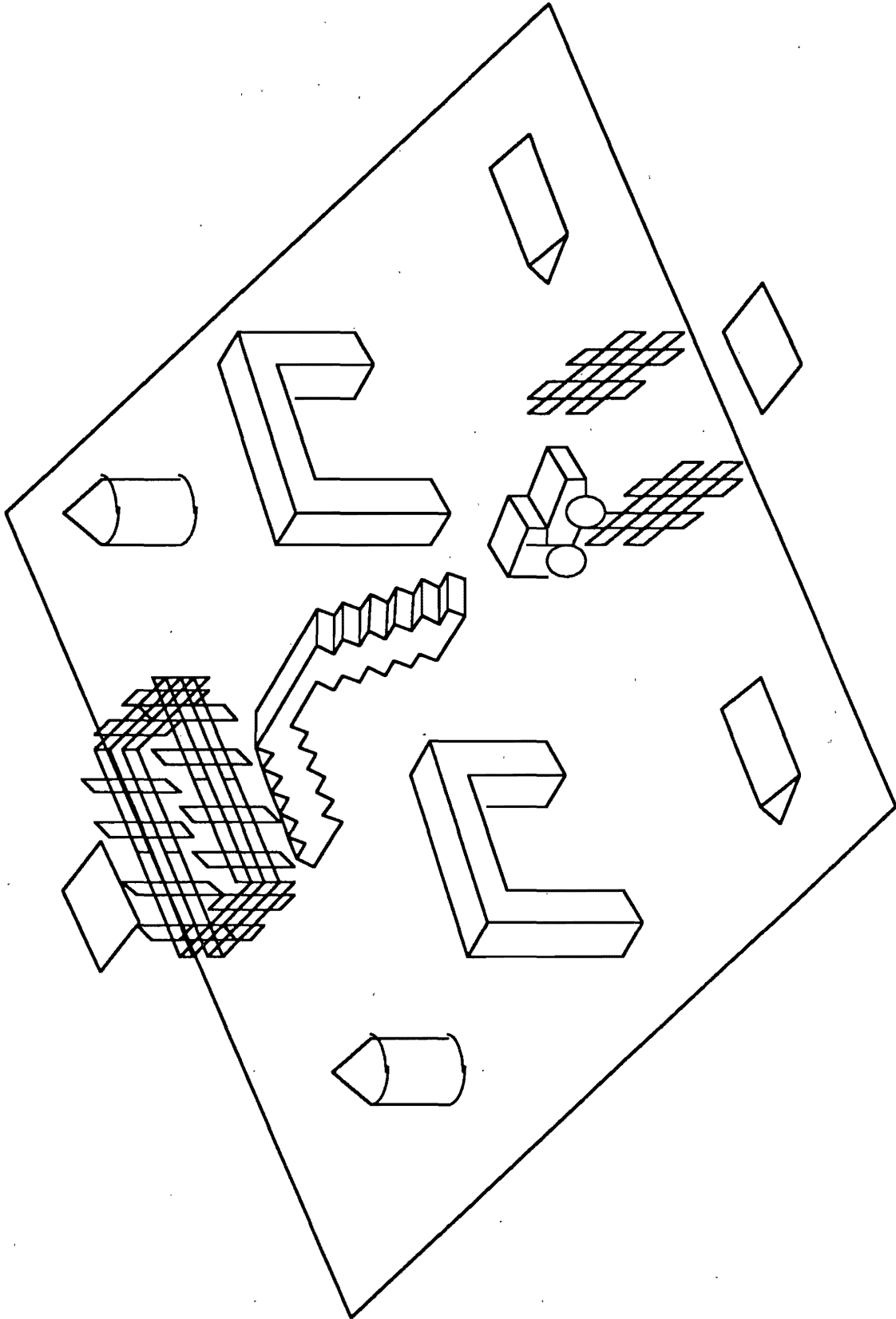
2) Show the two participants the basic set up, and show that the scenes are identical.

3) Tell the two participants that you are going to be putting down some chain to mark out a route in one of the scenes, and that one of the participants (the director) will have to imagine that she/he is moving along the path marked out by the chain. She or he will move a little person along the path and describe the route to be covered in such a way that the other participant (the matcher) can take his or her doll and follow exactly the same route in his/her own landscape.

[N.B. A doll is used to move through the scene (rather than a car, or just telling the person to describe the route of the chain), because (i) this is more likely to evoke left-right usage if there is any, and (ii) this is more likely to approximate natural route descriptions.

BEWARE : It is possible that you will get transitive placement verbs (e.g. "put the doll through under the bridge"), instead of intransitive motion accounts (e.g. "I'm moving under the bridge.", or "Go under the bridge.". So perhaps you will want to provide a brief demonstration of what you mean by having the person imagine they are moving along the path.]

4) Let the participants decide who is going to be director and matcher for the game.



- 5) Make sure both dolls are on their respective beginning yellow squares. Place the chain down for the route to be followed, and encourage the matcher to ask for more information if she/he is unsure of which way to move the doll.
- 6) Start the game and audio record and videotape.
- 7) Watch carefully the matcher's moves, and if you can, record it on a template scene. [If you can't, it doesn't matter, since you've taped it.]
- 8) When the description is completed, let the matcher see the original route, and encourage the pair to discuss how it might have been described differently.

There are four basic scenes to be elicited. Mixed in with these are three distinct conditions.

- The first condition is one of pure symmetry in the scenes, and this applies to the first two routes. [Remember, the point of this condition is to see how the cross-axis is discussed, and to see if any errors are made because of symmetry.]

- The first path starts off to the left and never moves back towards the speaker, but finishes at the other end of the table (on the far yellow square).

- The second path moves off to the right and is a long return path back to starting point.

- The second condition applies to the third route. Here you are to use the open spaces in the design to place objects which destroy symmetry. You can do this any way you want (e.g. placing trees on one side at the back and placing animals on the other side in the front). The only constraint is that you don't block the route that is to be described. [N.B. This may be a chance to get some local objects into the scene to make it feel more accessible.]

[The point of this condition is to see whether the new objects in the scenes are taken up as landmarks which resolve any of the original problems which may have arisen in the symmetrical condition.]

- The third condition applies to the fourth route. On either side of each mat, place relatively large objects that are not to be construed as part of the scene itself. For instance, you might place an apple to the left of each mat, and a bowl to the right. (Alternatively just place outside the scene at each end of the table.) [The point of this condition is to see whether ad hoc local landmarks (basically outside the scene) will be used to facilitate the route description.]

THESE SCENES ARE REPRESENTED CRUDELY AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT
(Photos of each of the four proposed routes should also be available.)

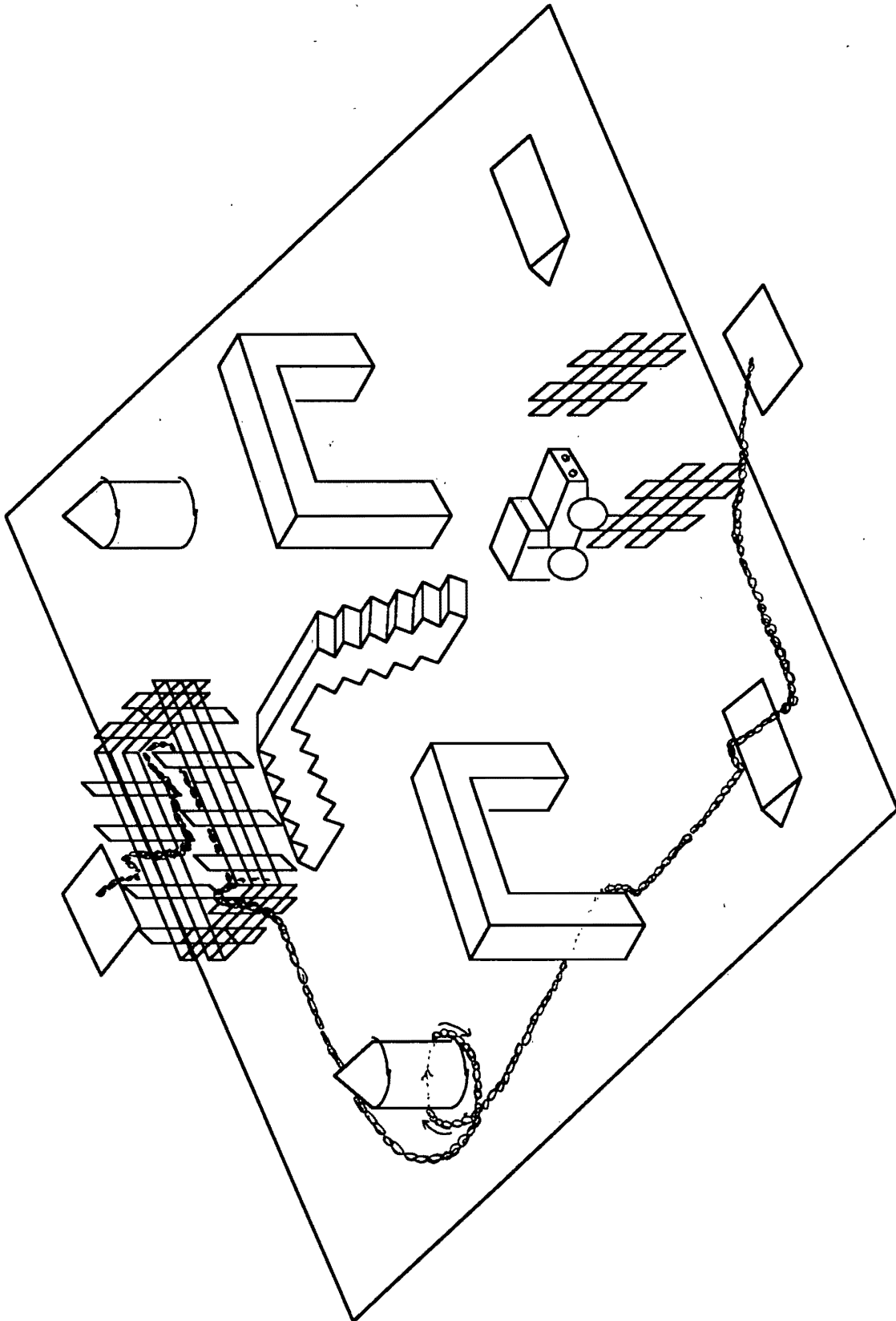
Number of Pairs: Please try and do the four routes with three pairs of participants.

You are encouraged to do further elicitation, and to do more route tasks for each condition.

You are especially encouraged to use these basic materials to help work through the 'Come' and 'Go' Questionnaire.

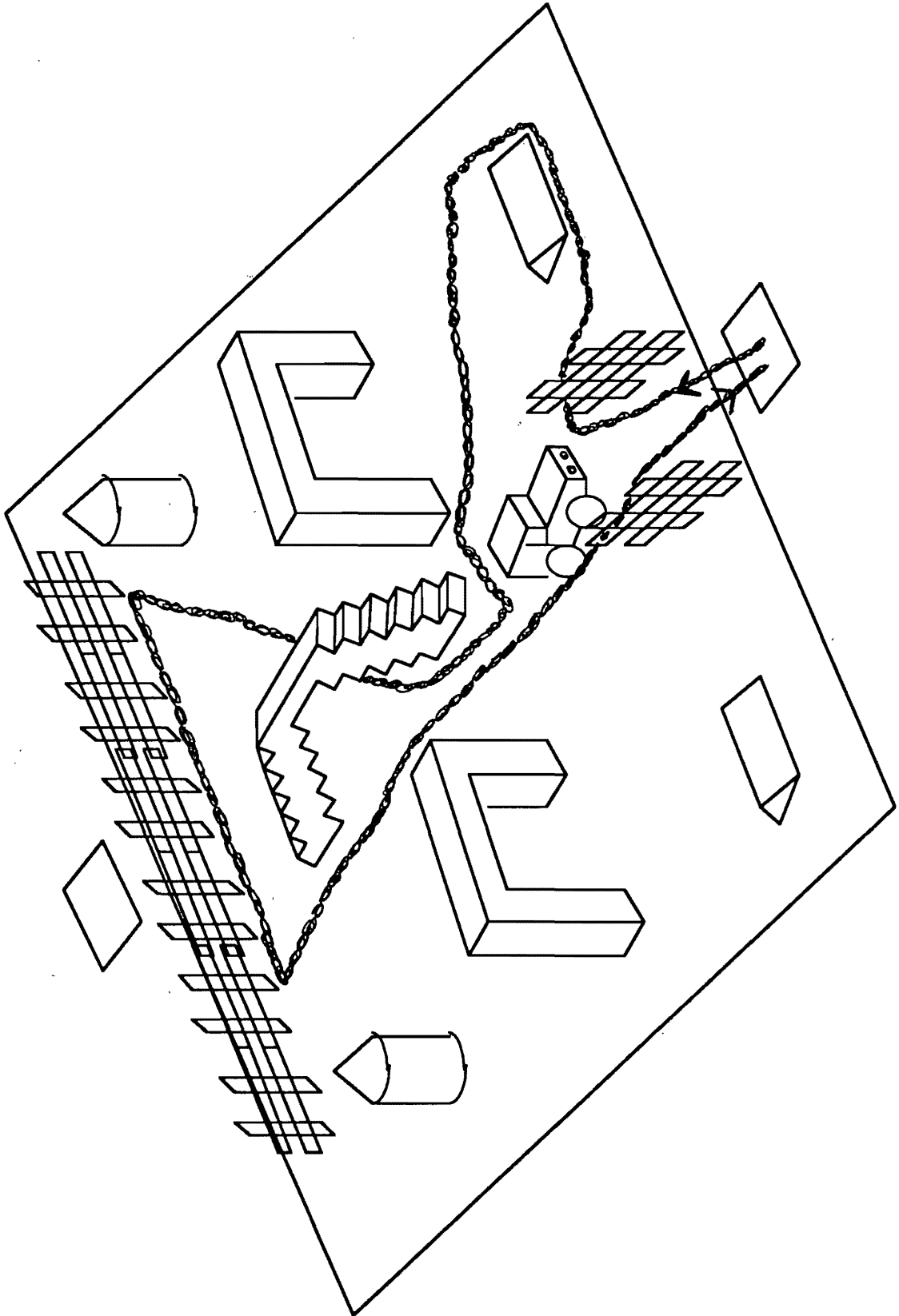
Note : Since this is primarily an elicitation task, you may not wish to saddle yourself with a lot of extra gear. However, you are encouraged to still try the task, following the same principles and guidelines outlined here, but using locally available materials. Of course we don't want everybody to take this option, since we would like our data to be as comparable as possible, and since we want to have a sense of how people may react to certain materials and set ups which we would employ in the cognitive tasks.

[Some possible misgivings about this particular design include the relatively abstract nature of the objects used, and the sparseness of the scenes. The worry is that they may not seem like real route scenes and participants won't engage. The current reply to these is that: The open nature of the design is supposed to facilitate manipulation and taping. The complexity is not to be in the scenes per se, but the routes traversed. As for the abstractness of the materials, all that can be said is that it is nearly impossible to find a universally applicable natural scene. Since we are looking for both a degree of comparability, and possible materials to use for future cognitive testing, it could be argued that the more "unreal" set ups are an advantage rather than a detraction. Still ...]

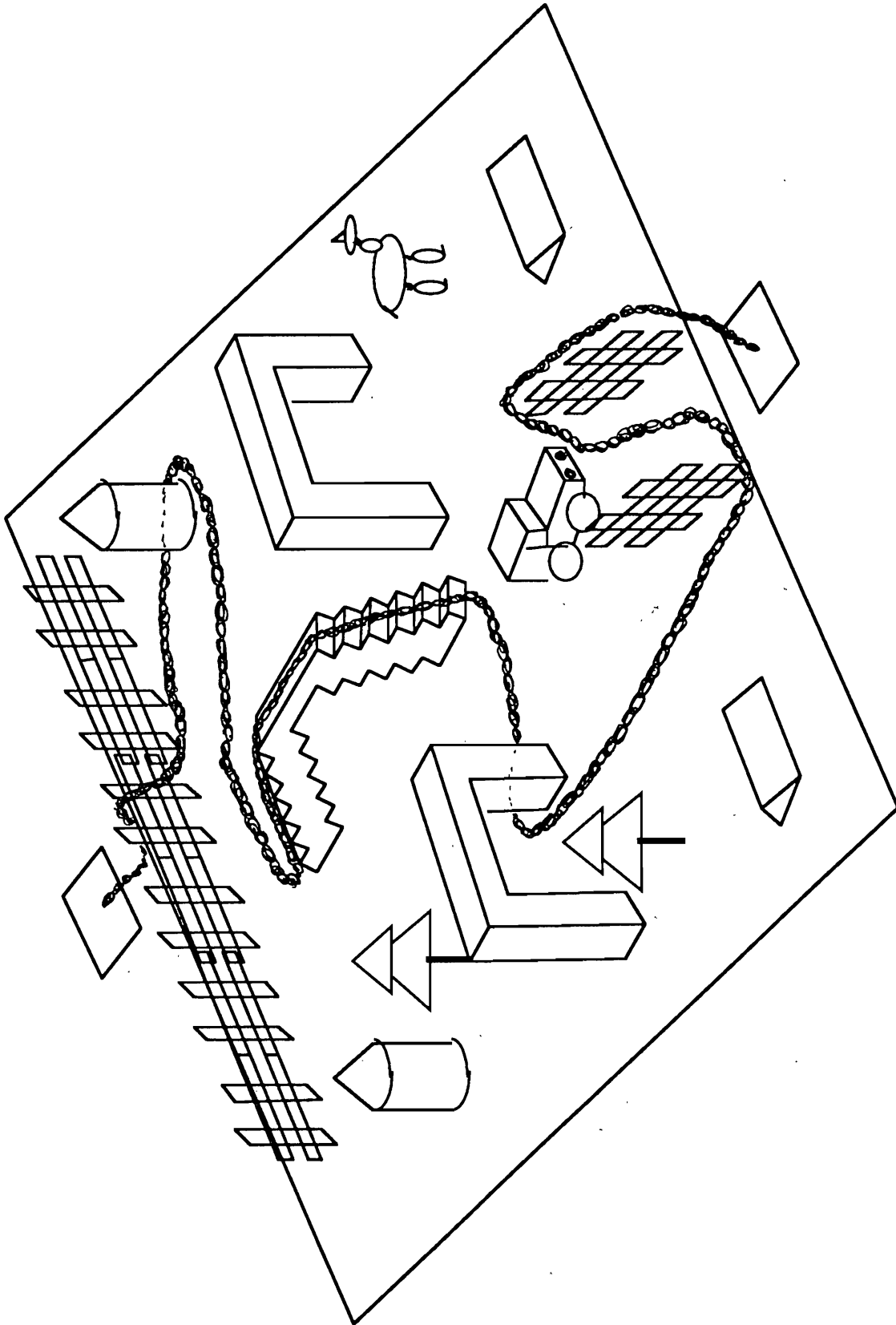


set-up for Director Path 1

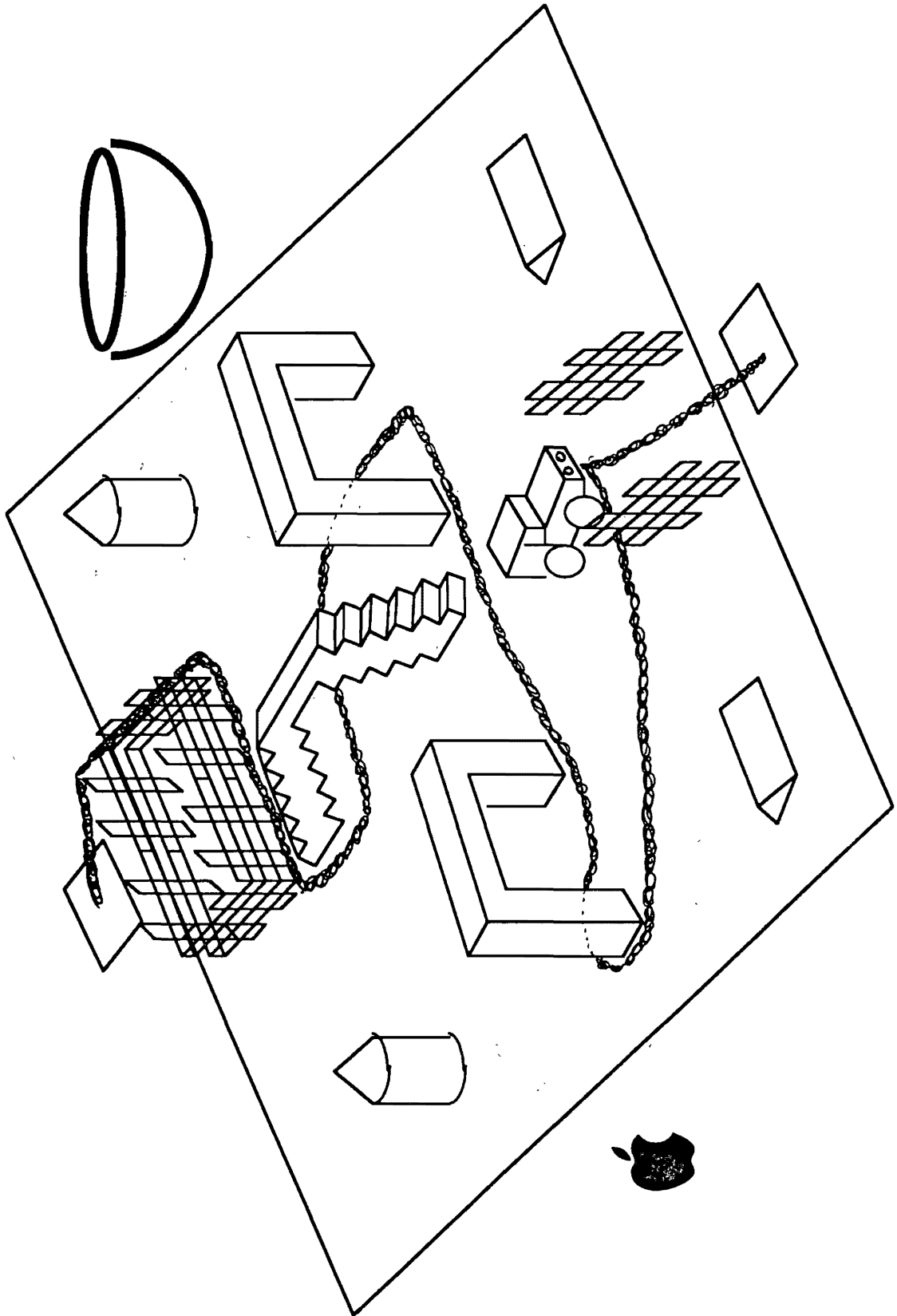
(Be certain that it is perfectly symmetrical in the cross-axis)



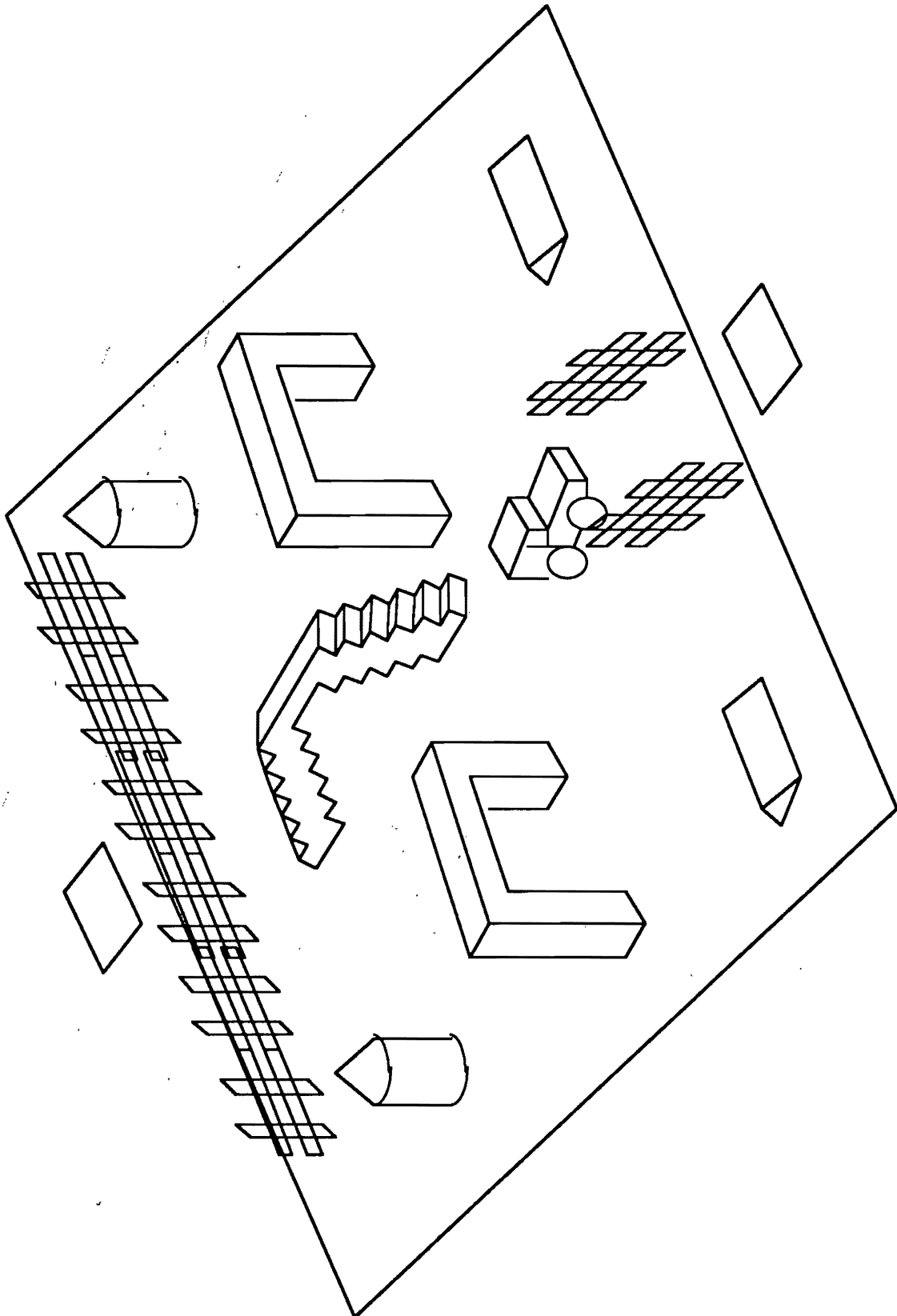
Set-up for Director Path 2



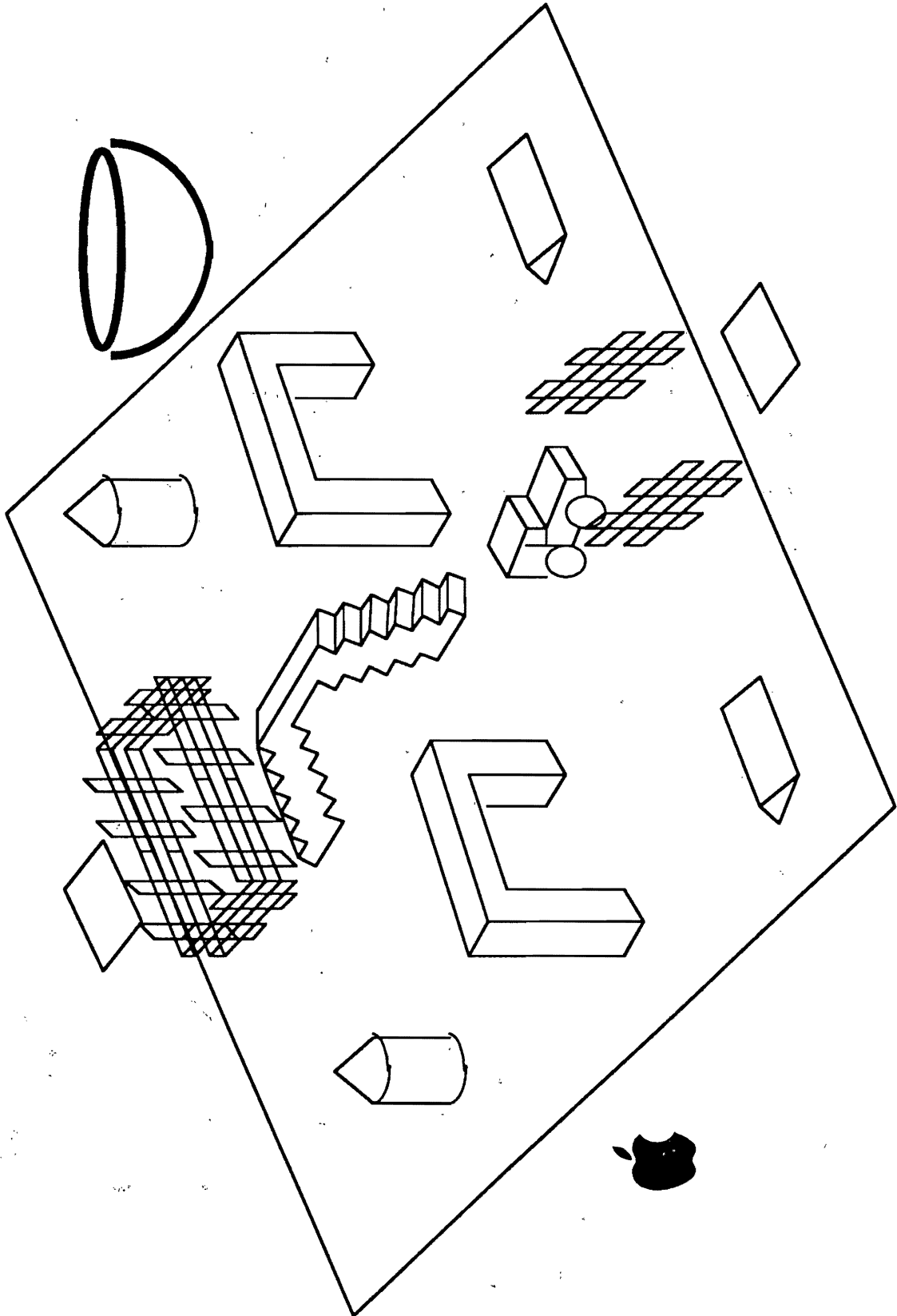
Set-up for Director Path 3



Set-up for Director Path 4



Set-up for Matcher Path 2



Set-up for Matcher Path 4