

LA Markings: Architectural Densification and the City of Los Angeles

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Nolli plan of Rome

OPEN POCHE

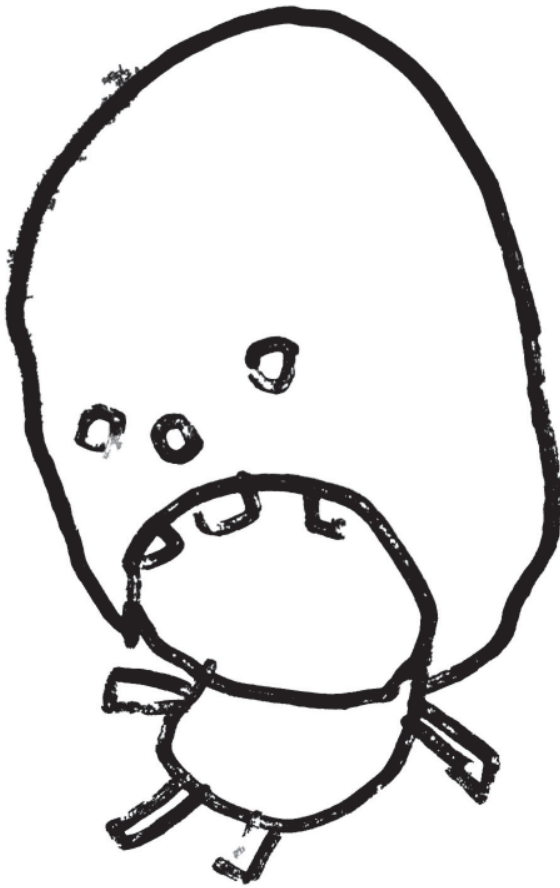
Los Angeles is a hyper accelerated city. As an extreme condition of population, cultural diversity, construction typology, and geography, the fabric has evolved as a sprawling horizontal with an indelible dependence upon the automobile. The extreme degree of the city's development makes it a representative parent of the trajectory of other American cities. Los Angeles for better or worse sets a standard. Its fabric is specifically local, but broadly representative of greater urbanisms in diverse cities such as Atlanta, Houston, Phoenix, Dallas and countless others. Los Angeles has reached a benchmark of fullness prior to these other cities. It sits at a spatial crisis. The implication of how we now develop within this fabric suggests a new type of urbanism: an urbanism of open poche.



Los Angeles city fabric

The city of Los Angeles as a full landscape must begin to look towards the voids of open poche as an opportunity for expansion. The densification of the current fabric is essential based upon the physical limitation of geographic boundaries and commute times. As a result the city must look inward. Cracks in the fabric currently deemed left-over or marginal are precisely the new frontier of urban architecture.

This project pursues an analysis of the Los Angeles city fabric to identify select sites in the city representative of such open poche; programs these sites based upon localized need; and design hypothetical solutions as to how the city of Los Angeles can pursue the development and employment of such conditions.



graffiti figure

"Residual space in between dominant spaces with varying degrees of openness can occur at the scale of the city and is a characteristic of the fora and other complexes of late Roman urban planning. Residual spaces are not unknown in our cities. I am thinking of the open spaces under our highways and the buffer spaces around them. Instead of acknowledging and exploiting these characteristic kinds of space we make them into parking lots or feeble patches of grass – no man's lands between the scale of region and the locality." - Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* p. 80

The city of Los Angeles is full. It has expanded with a relatively equal density to its maximum boundaries. Hemmed in by geography, distance relative to commute times, and infrastructure, the city has reached its limit. A new threshold and methodology of urban development must be deployed to continue the inevitable expansion. The future of the city has yet to be determined.

Historically the city has been looked at as a fabric. The densities of the buildings carved out public and private spaces. Accessible public spaces and quarantined private spaces are determined by the architecture and formal composition of the urban environment. The famous Nolli Plan of Rome is typical of this conceptualization of the city. Using a method of poché: a process by which buildings are represented as solids, with voids being left where public spaces exist and general civic access is granted: the city is not represented as a series of interiors or exteriors or as a collection of discrete objects, but rather as a continuation and extension of public space. The result is a reading of the city that looks at the grain and the density to reveal patterns – patterns of daily life, patterns of hierarchy and patterns for expansion. The application of this methodology to the city of Los Angeles suggests a new way of thinking about development in the American city.

To specifically pursue and implement the ramifications of this premise, four sites embedded within the fabric of Los Angeles and engaged with infrastructure serves as case studies. As typical but specific conditions – they are chosen for their diversity of scale and context. Four sites, currently marginalized and distinctly "open," serve as exemplary testing grounds for architectural operations. These sites are specifically located, researched and planned to engage the surrounding community. Individually and collectively they concern themselves with the fullness of the city of Los Angeles.

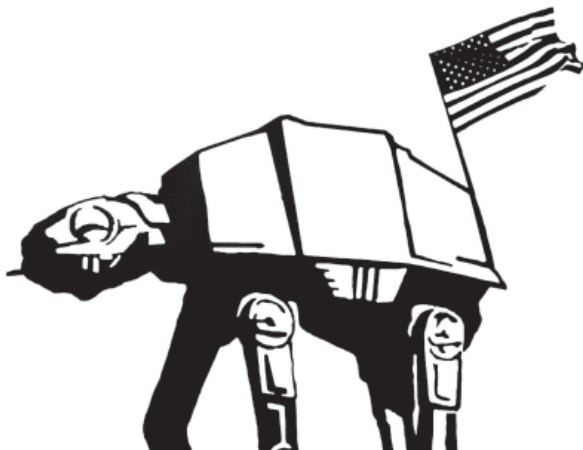
DENSITY

This work proposes an answer to the densification of the sprawl city. It illustrates a methodology that inserts new programmatic solutions into existing voids. The production of specific designs permits the illustration of how sprawl cities can grow smartly not simply grow. Through site strategy, programmatic choreography, and innovative formal design systems, these prototypical design solutions confront social and governmental preconceptions about where and how it is "safe" to grow. Stretching the envelope of conventional development patterns, this research reconsiders the pedestrian city. It develops a strategy for the preservation of urban boundaries that limit the horizontal expansion of the city's fabric by turning growth back upon itself. This densification improves and re-populates the middle.

The Roman city developed with a distinct edge bounded by walls built for protection and security. These functional edges limited the expansion of the city and forced a tight development to the urban fabric. As a result the density grew evenly throughout the city with every aspect of the city filled, considered, and celebrated for its poten-

tial. This density is still felt in the current fabric of these archetypal cities. Marked by increased property values and perceptually varied spatial qualities these conditions are still easily discerned in the current fabric where the city has engulfed and breached these historic boundaries. This morphological approach to the urban fabric provides a development methodology for the contemporary city.

The densification of Los Angeles is a looming question. It is an inevitable and essential question to the quality of life both socially and economically. As a city representative of many American cities, its advanced state of evolution and ailment asks the questions that are essential to our survival. How do we invest in the city to preserve the natural? How do we add density to reduce the destruction of our environment? What are the formal possibilities for operating within a city that is already full? How can we develop smart growth principles? How do we re-conceptualize our perception of site? How do we build at the beginning of the 21st century in the current political, environmental and social landscape?



MARGINS

"Margins - 1. Blank space at the side of page - a blank space on the left or right edge, or the top or bottom, of a written or printed page 2. Line down side of page - a straight line drawn down the left- or right-hand side of a page to separate a narrow section from the main part 3. Outer edge - the edge of something, especially the outer edge, or the area close to it 4. Part farthest from center - that part of anything, for example, a society or organization that is least integrated with its center, least often considered, least typical, or most vulnerable 5. Limit - a boundary indicating the limit beyond which something should not go or below which something should not fall 6. Difference between one amount and another - the difference between two amounts or scores"

What are margins? Margins are the leftover. The edge; the border, the fringe, the periphery, the outskirts, the boundary, the opposite of middle. Los Angeles takes everything about the suburban to the extreme. Architecture is the guidance. The car is the prosthetic. Nature provides landmarks in the hills and the ocean. Traffic is the speed. Economics is the location. Los Angeles is the site.

Presence can only be felt through the making of a mark. A mark, like a graffiti tag, is made to show presence in the complexity of one's surroundings. The mark illustrates through its action, but affects the city by calibrating it. The mark is a reference to a place made to ignite the surroundings and intervene in the machine of LA. To mark a landscape that is so dominant and so full is to try to join the machine. The machine is full. Operation must stay in the margins. By formatting the margins one can find LA. By formatting the margins one can change LA.

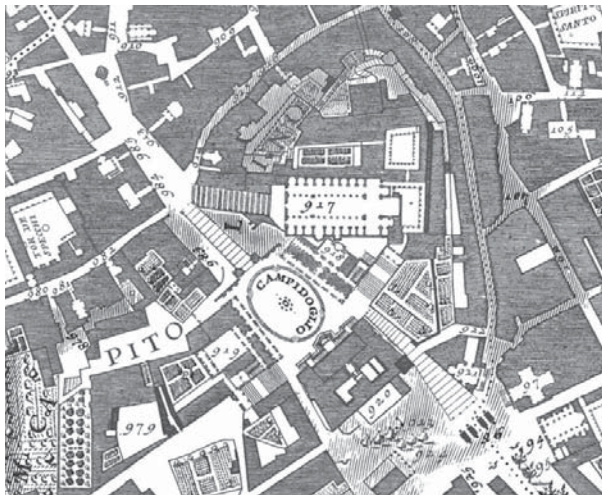
Eight separate conditions have been identified. Each of them is hyper specific in that it has a locality and orientation and a relationship to the specific surroundings within the neighborhood and city. Each condition is embedded within a larger infrastructure. The local is a fragment of a system and thus the piece is found in varying quantities and with varying degrees of density throughout the city's fabric. Each piece has the potential to impact more than just an individual moment. These designs are not intended for serial production to plug every opening, but suggest a method of identifying these leftover margin spaces that still exist. They are the ability for the city for finish itself - to tuck in the cracks and insulate the final openings. Thus these are not the broad strokes in their own right, but rather small gestures. The broad strokes come through their potential seriality and the parasitical relationship to these larger infrastructures. A confluence of need and action join to find a way of filling.



LEFTOVERS

The marking sites are those leftover moments, engineered into the fabric but otherwise forgotten. Each site is intrinsically compromised, but through this compromise comes the potential for its exaltation. These markings are moments within the city that provide for the statement of the individual and re-appropriation of moments thought lost to the broader networks of controlling interests. These moments do not interfere with the systems they piggy back upon or even confront their host in anyway - they simply join and adhere and through this juxtaposition find a collaboration.

These sites are a product of a city that is so full and so costly yet at the same time so open. These moments of development within the city remain and opportunity for architects to address these fragments of open poche and find opportunity in the scraps - the margins. These designs are marks on their forgotten surfaces - installations and appropriations that maintain the "there" and context but suggest a new "their" for program and ownership.



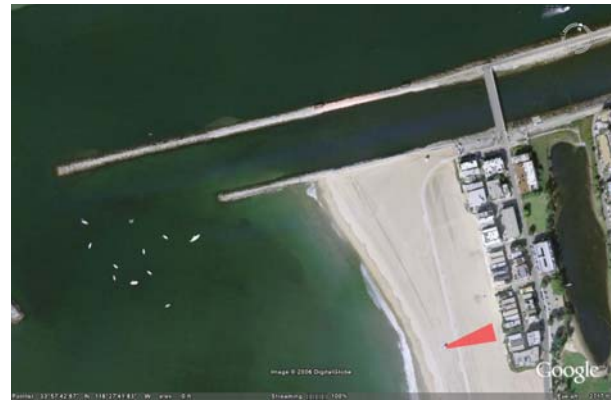
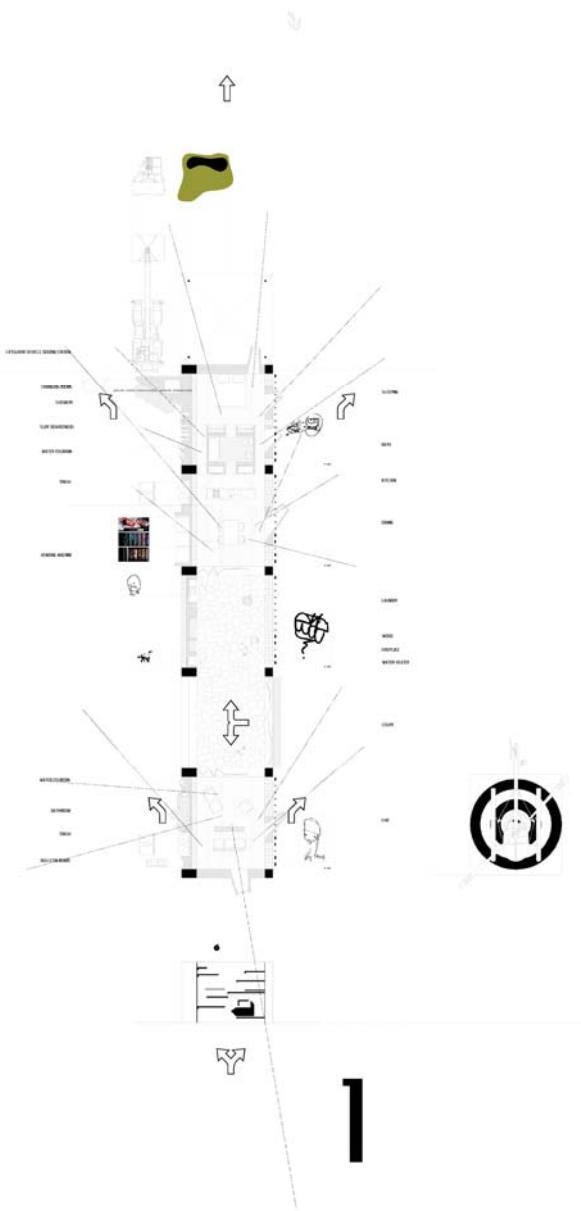
campidoglio: noli plan

SITE TYPES

Lodged within every city are the infrastructures that provide its presence. Linked to transportation, safety, commerce, energy, water, and utilities - these infrastructures provide the necessities of the fabric. The 8 types of conditions that are identified as uniquely LA and marked for consideration are: Billboard, Drainage Culverts, Power Lines, Overpass, Railway, Lifeguard Tower, Pier, Oil Derrick [projects in red illustrated here.] Each of these Types exists as serial systems. Each marking occurs upon a specific moment but these moments are within the broader repetition of their systems. Issues of scale and density are determined by need and geography. Each network develops differently.



LA freeway interchange

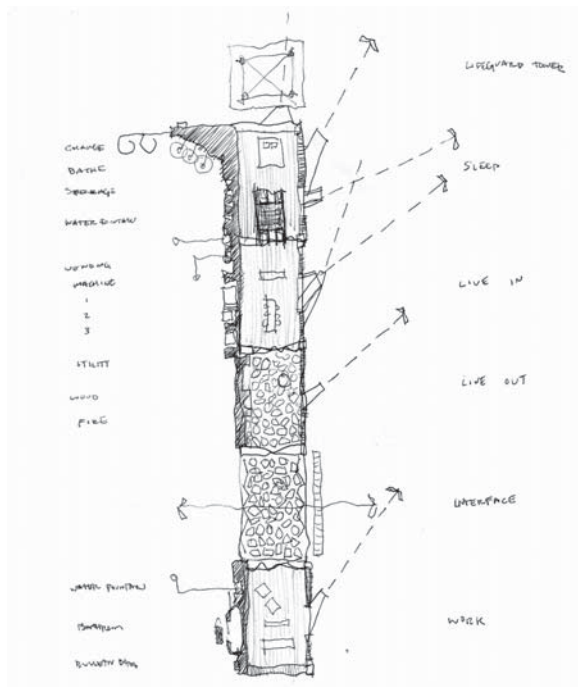


aerial view of site: anterior cone

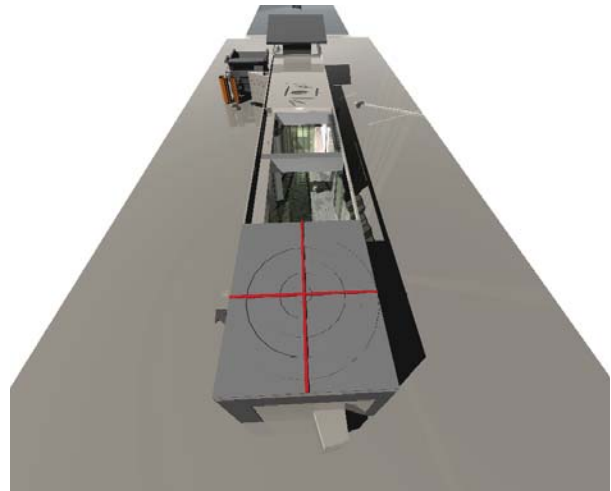
LIFEGUARD TOWER

anterior vision: behind the focal cone

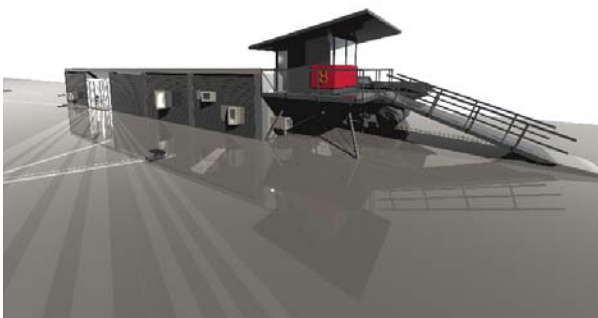
The Lifeguard Tower is a beacon for safety. Located as outposts incrementally spaced along the coastal edge, the lifeguard tower is an icon and a staccato rhythm. The premise is an elevated platform to survey the water and provide rescue, security and first aid as required. Their gaze is always forward - scanning the horizon and identifying need. Their position is an increment of speed and the human body. Located at an increment determined by the speed of a lifeguard running across sand and the average amount of time an individual can survive without assistance. The lifeguard towers are always watching deploying as needed. The result however is a backside that is unnecessary. A behind condition that hides outside of the cone of vision of the tower and contaminated by the presence of the tower separating this space from the ocean and vast horizontal of the beach. This no mans land suggest and opportunity for insertion - a public private facilitator that services and fills this prime abandoned location.



sketch plan



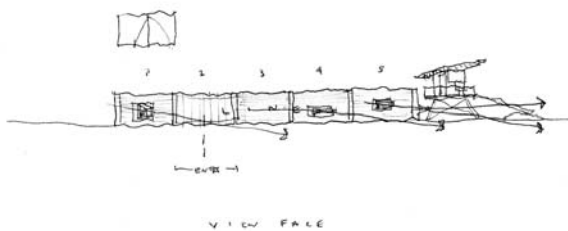
helicopter view



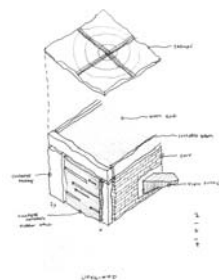
side view – tower line



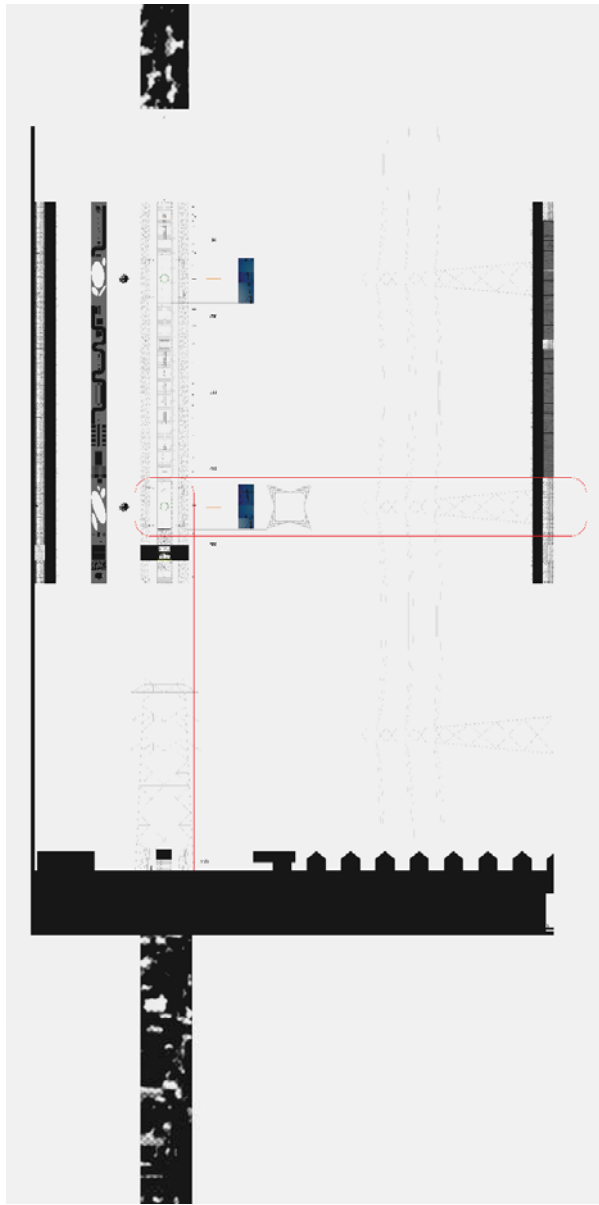
public service wall



linear edge – back building



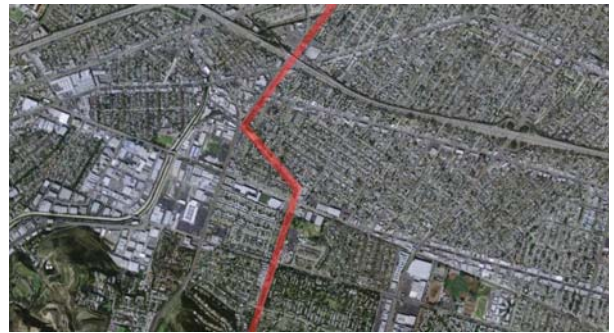
end detail



line – lid – site



slide under power lines

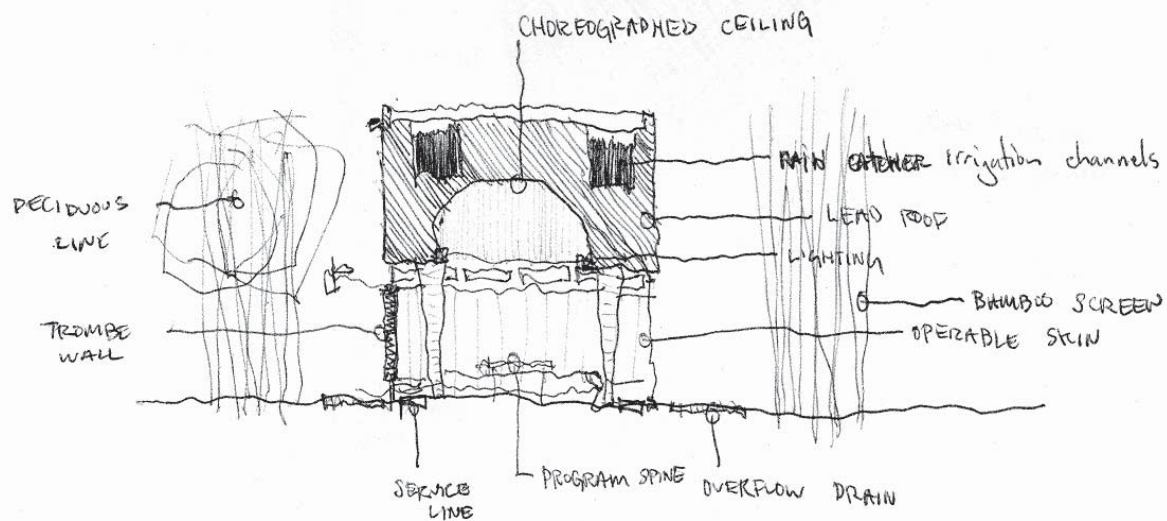


line through west LA

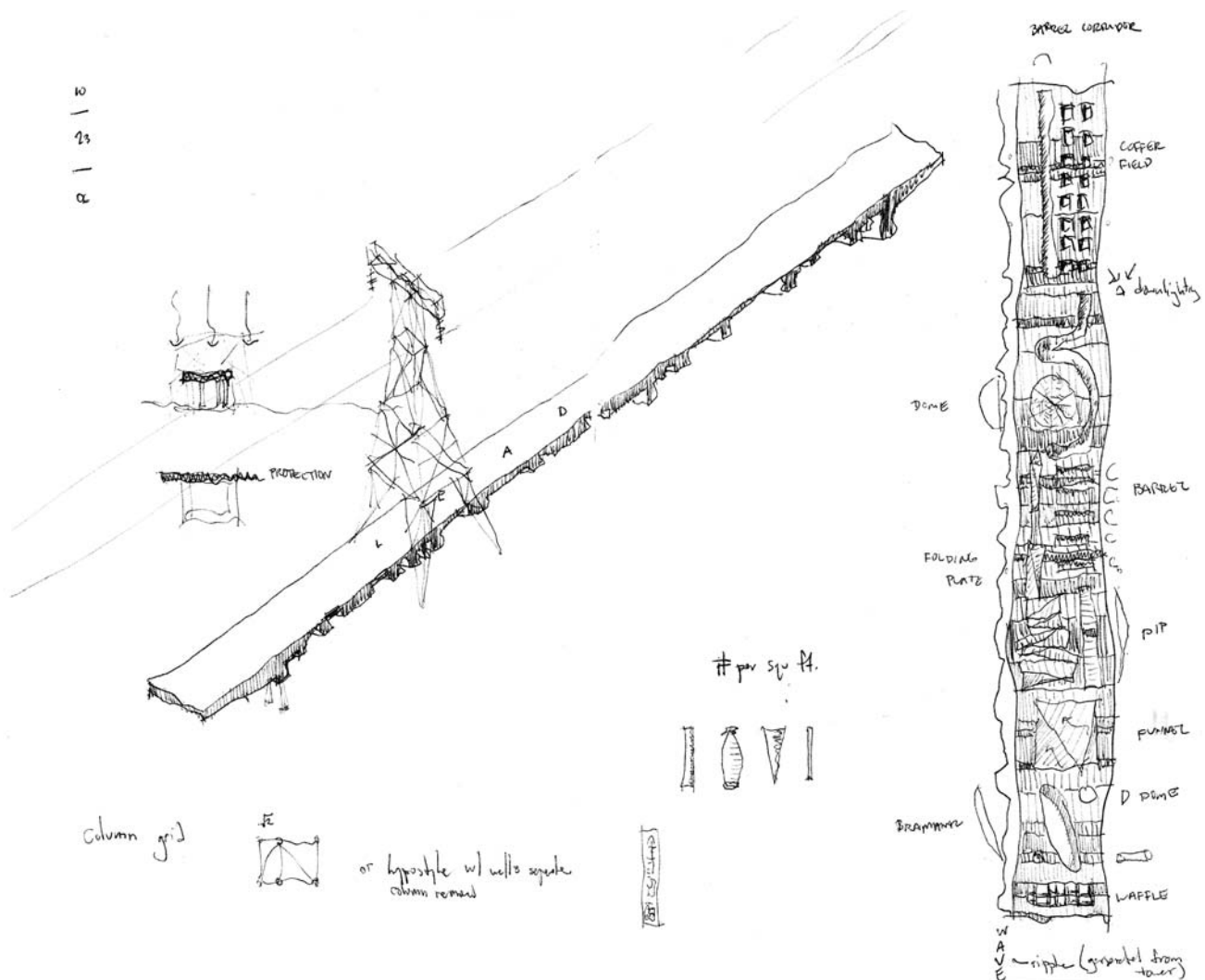
HI-POWER LINE

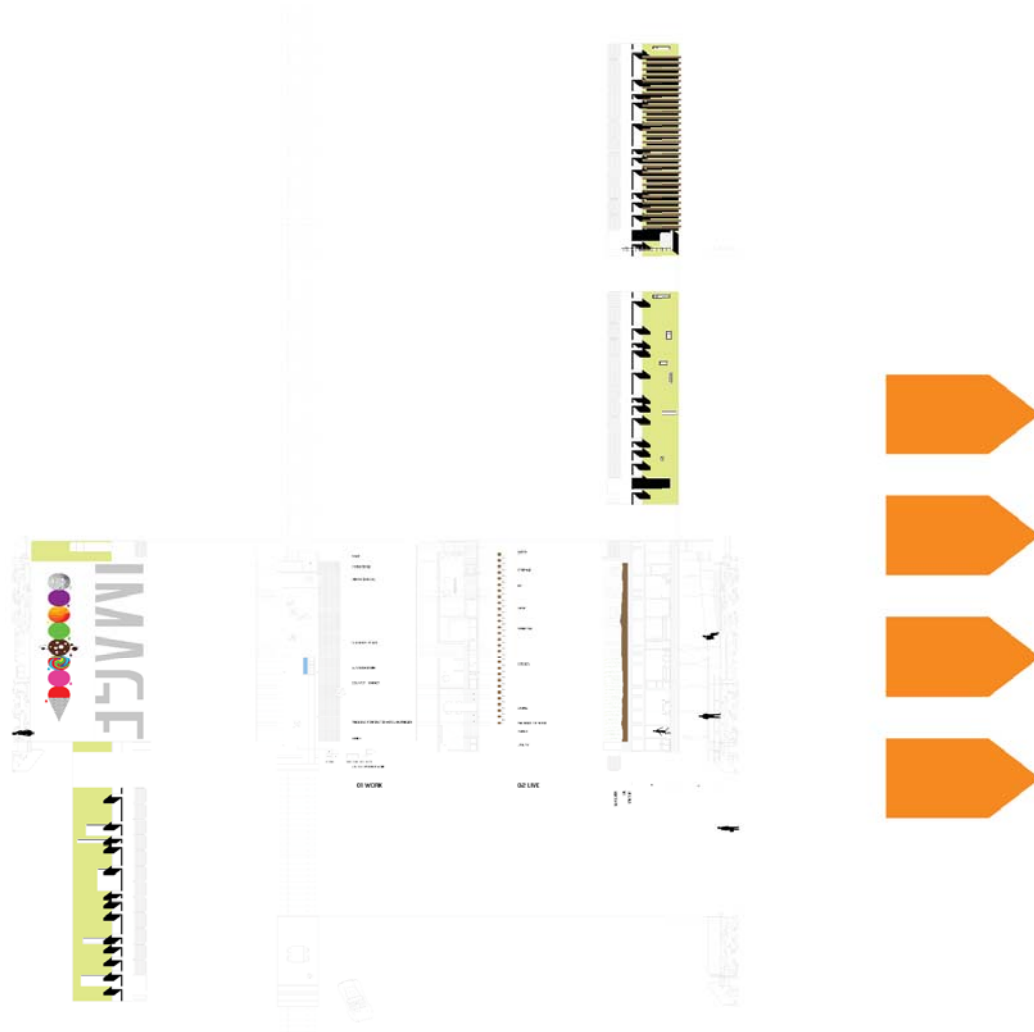
linear voids + radiant fields

The Power Lines are essential to deliver energy to the individuated object fabric of the city. Generated in central plants and then transmitted across the fabric, the lines produce a web of corridors for the high power lines. Studded with engineered lattice towers, the lines span vast distances. Their footprint produces large swaths through the city fabric of undeveloped land. The uncertain health issues associated with the power lines produces skepticism and distrust. The development of this line must shield and engage.

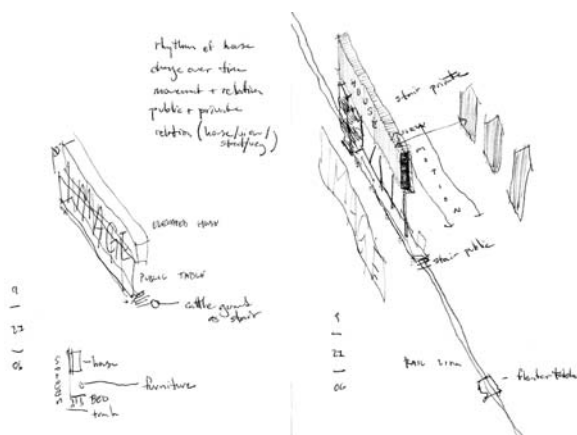


02





rail car – mobile house/market



mobility: billboard + public private functions

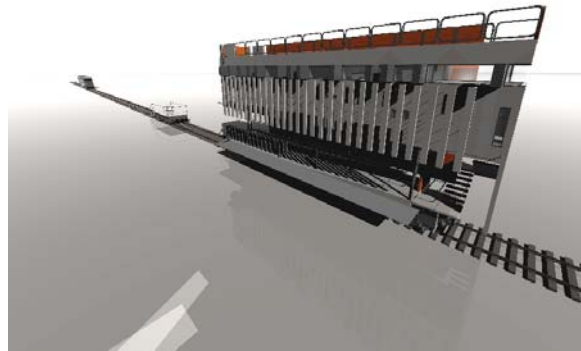
RAIL CAR

mobile line - reactivated circuit

The Railway is an essential artery from an era of product and people movement gone by. Connecting the port of Los Angeles and the former Port of Santa Monica, the rail line was the primary artery for moving freight and people cross country. These lines were left open. The infrastructure of these marks has been abandoned. The legacy of their presence still remains. The mechanics of movement [the rail car itself] and the infrastructural circuit now broken and juxtaposed allows for these lines to be re-occupied.



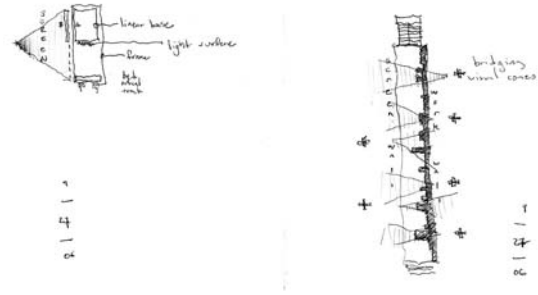
view in site



sectionally layered zones



abandoned rail corridor



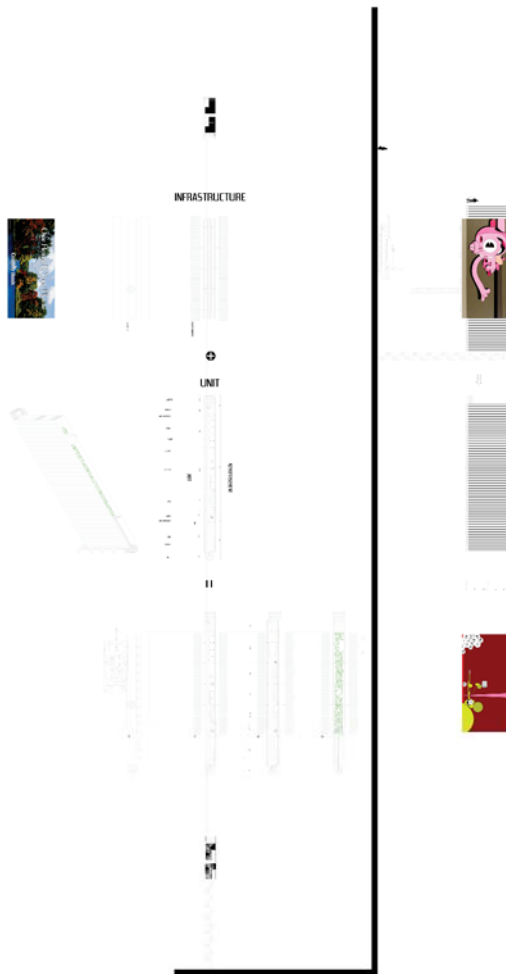
service edge



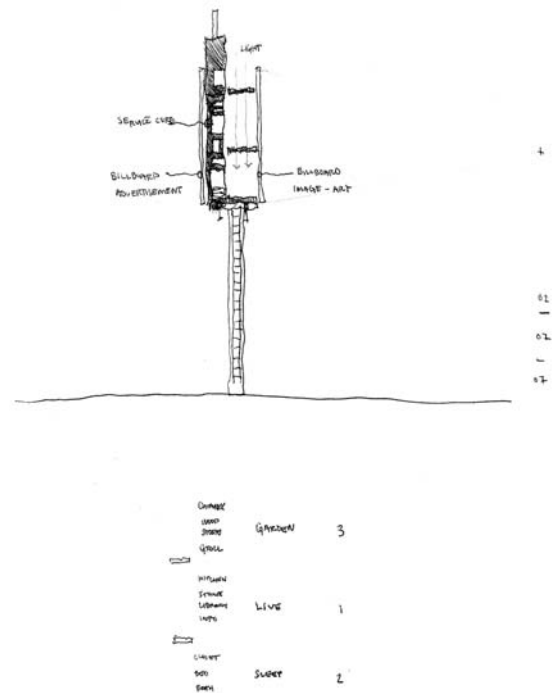
transitory house – mobile line



view of railcar and satellite stage



billboard house: layered walls + section



section: core with programmatic layers

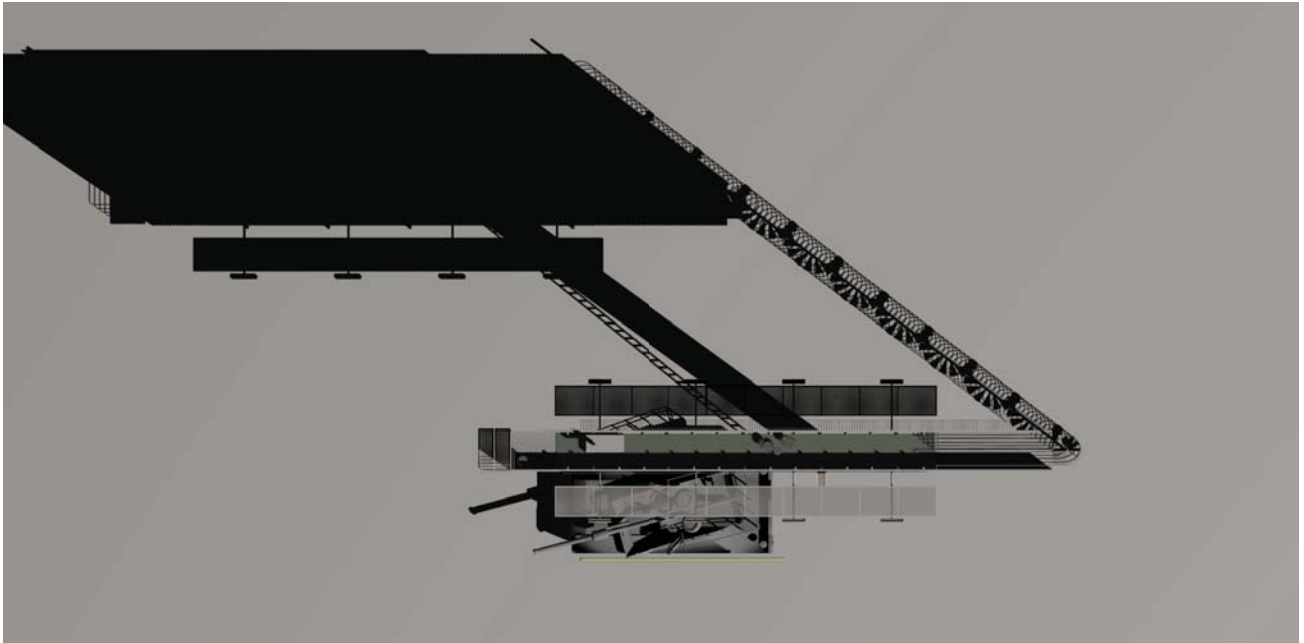


site

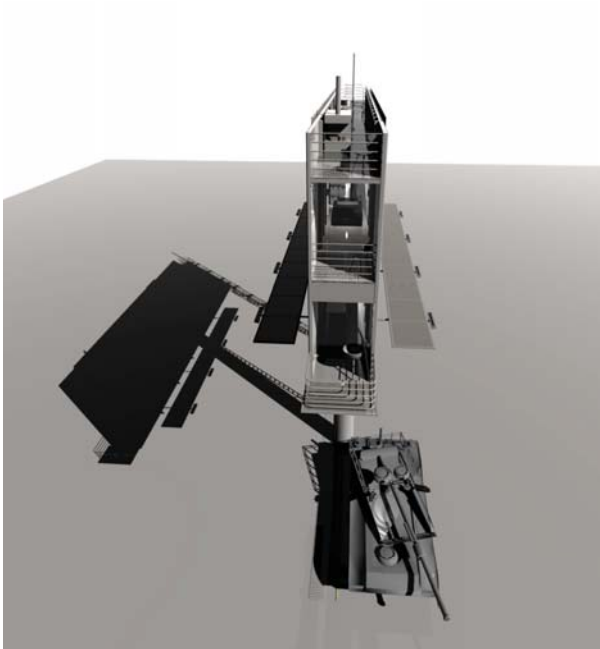
BILLBOARD

sign and signifier

The Billboard condition occurs with densities relative to vehicular traffic and frequency of viewing, the specific geometry of each billboards configuration varies with the sightlines and geography of the local moment. As a network they are standardized in function but are nodal points overlaid on the fabric of the city. The density and frequency determined by the events that occur in adjacency. A typical and semi conventional configuration was adopted for intervention, one embedded along an artery of the city bridging between the speed and visual distances of the automobile and the local conditions of the fixed site.



top view



view from end



LA billboard sky