affect + interaction on atlanta's beltline

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acknowledgements

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preface

This book is the product of a research by design endeavor. It tells the story of a journey through thesis year in a landscape architecture program. It seeks to highlight the decision making processes that have guided the designs to the stage which the reader finds in this book. The story is not entirely linear, so the reader is asked to evaluate the results of the study (the design proposals) on the basis of a clear and sound set of decisions that began with an original research interest and question, not on any other set of criteria. It is this process that has guided the project, applying techniques and ideas in novel ways, exemplifying this work as true scholarly research into uncharted territory rather than the results of a predetermined idea and end-game.

abstract

This project addresses homogenous infrastructural design. The research suggests that a reevaluation of infrastructure based on a close attention to its social and physical conditions can enable new approaches to its design. Specifically, it looks at the BeltLine, an upcoming light rail system that will connect historic neighborhoods, parks, and other transportation hubs within and around the heart of Atlanta, Georgia. It assumes that around the BeltLine, design and construction will revolve solely around the guidelines of necessary criteria set up by the city's transportation department. This research seeks to satisfy these criteria as well as identify and analyze what the existing conditions are at an unused site slated for through-passage by the BeltLine. Results of this analysis show that there are fragile and unique environments within the site, including human and nonhuman migrant colonies, an urban field used for the practice of tagging, and materials that have been allowed to weather with rust patterns, stains, and cracks and fragmentation. This project is based on the proposition that not only are such marginalized and undervalued spaces within a city crucial, but they do not have to be erased in favor of a rolled out piece of infrastructure. The BeltLine, instead, can be brought into this site in such a way that the ecologies are highlighted and privileged, the surfaces embraced, and the materials actively used in the design process. In this way, urban infrastructure does not have to be homogenous, inefficiently utilized, and removed from a given site situation.

illustrations

All figures are property of the author unless otherwise noted below.

Figure 1. Atlanta BeltLine 2011. http://beltline.org/

Figure 2. Hopper, E. Artist. Nighthawks. [Painting]. Chicago, Illinois. Art Institute of Chicago. http://www.dartblog.com/data/2010/10/009174.php

Figure 3. Casebere, J. Artist. La Alberca. [Digital chromogenic print]. http://jamescasebere.net/group4_0.html

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chapter 1
introduction

research question transformations

9/13/10 - How can emergent fuel technologies and new mechanisms of flow influence large-scale mass transportation while reducing the spatial impact of transport infrastructure in the city of Atlanta, GA?

10/3/10 - How can systems of movement be forced together to magnify the relationship of people with cargo and information?

11/29/10 - How can romantic urban affect inform site design for transportation systems?

4/13/11 - How can a heterogeneous and marginalized landscape inform site design amidst the connected urban network?

7/20/11 - How can semantic fission inform site design in a heterogeneous and marginalized landscape within the urban environment?

studio and infrastructure

This project is born, first and foremost, out of an interest in a self-directed, research by design adventure. Although thesis projects necessarily differ within any given studio, the theme of this studio is infrastructure - the physical and organizational units required for the functioning of a society or enterprise (Online Oxford English Dictionary 2011). As Brian Hayes writes, an incredibly lucky person might, once in his/her lifetime, catch a glimpse of an ivory-billed woodpecker. A much more common site is a line of utility poles and their electrical transformers flanking a street (Hayes 2005). His point is that infrastructure infiltrates contemporary society in complex and unavoidable ways and forms itself into landscapes as important and beautiful as any "natural" landscape. It is precisely this angle of landscape architecture that appeals to me. Rather than attempt to create, revitalize, restore or otherwise focus on a "natural" plot of land within a city, I wish to focus on the landscapes we interact with everyday to study and enhance the interaction patterns themselves.

With that in mind, the project began by examining a very conspicuous infrastructural component: that of transportation. In one of the first articles that caught my eye, Thun and Velikov clearly state that a simultaneous decrease in the carbon based fuel supply and the increasing need for mobility and urbanization, along with a deteriorating transportation infrastructure, must yield "the emergence of a synthetically networked hybrid infrastructure to support and propagate emerging urbanisms" (Thun & Velikov 2009, 85). Of course they are right. If we are to continue enjoying the freedoms of mobility that we currently take advantage of without much thought, it is necessary to examine the methods by which we travel.

To do this, I began by looking at metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) on the national scale. Defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as a set of communities and cities with a large population nucleus as well as a high level of social and economic integration, MSAs generally must be connected to each other for transfer of goods, services, and information (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). What I found, however, is that not all areas are linked together in the same manner. MSAs exist that are serviced by air transportation, rail, and interstate (I ignored shipping by water in this process). While some are serviced by all, some are not, reminding us that interstate and vehicular transportation, although perhaps dominant, is not the only means of movement.

finding site

I chose the city of Atlanta for a more in-depth study. With a population of over 5 million in its statistical area, Atlanta is the largest city within 3 hours of Auburn University and thus seemed like a perfect starting point for this thesis.

On my first trip to Atlanta I visited an abandoned GM plant. It proved to be far too large to manage into a project and completely inaccessible. I also visited an operating petroleum field. For safety reasons this also proved inaccessible. While traveling through the downtown area, I accidentally found the Hulsey cargo rail yard. Although unusable in itself due to current and ongoing operations, near it I found an area reserved for through passage by the new Atlanta beltline.

I was immediately interested in the urban grime of the site. Littered and abandoned by corporate use, the small area was nonetheless alive with rich ecological and social systems. I felt a strange and curious attraction to its affective qualities that I will explain more fully later.

The Hulsey train yard is owned by CSX Transportation and provides transport services to the entire continental U.S. It ranks 7th in overall freight volume for CSX rail yards and is the largest intermodal carrier in the U.S. The most common products handled at Hulsey include coal, automobiles, agricultural products, chemicals, and paper (Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce 2009).

The BeltLine is a light rail transportation system that will circle central Atlanta. It is touted as an economic development project in its own right rather than strictly a method to reach citywide destinations like MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority). It revives a rail line that once connected to the Hulsey rail yard and moved cargo throughout Atlanta and into other cities. The project installs a loop of 22 miles of track around the downtown area along the historic line connecting 45 neighborhoods, public parks and multiuse trails to each other.

The idea behind the BeltLine is to create a model for development through an "integrated approach to land use, transportation, greenspace and sustainable development" (Atlanta BeltLine 2011). It seeks to combat regional sprawl that currently pushes Atlanta into ever far reaching suburbs, and to attract economic and social development around the city's center. As part of a network design strategy, the beltline also links to MARTA (which reaches most of Atlanta, including outside of the I-285) and has capabilities of attaching to any new transit system. Pedestrian trail lines will follow the 22 mile loop of tracks as well as extend into existing and planned parks in the area for a total of 33 miles. The 40 parks will increase Atlanta's greenspace by 40% and add 1300 acres of greenspace over the next 25 years to the existing 700 acres.

Economic estimates suggest that the BeltLine will generate $20b of development over the same period, generate nearly 30,000 new jobs, provide 5000 new units of affordable housing, and clean up 1000 acres of brownfield for redevelopment. In combination with this, the city lists public art and

Map of Atlanta, GA. The bold gray lines represent interstates, with the outermost circle (forming the ring that runs off of the pages) being I-285. The bold black ring near the center of the pages represents the future route of the BeltLine. The red circle highlights the intersection of the BeltLine with the Hulsey cargo yard, with my site in the center.

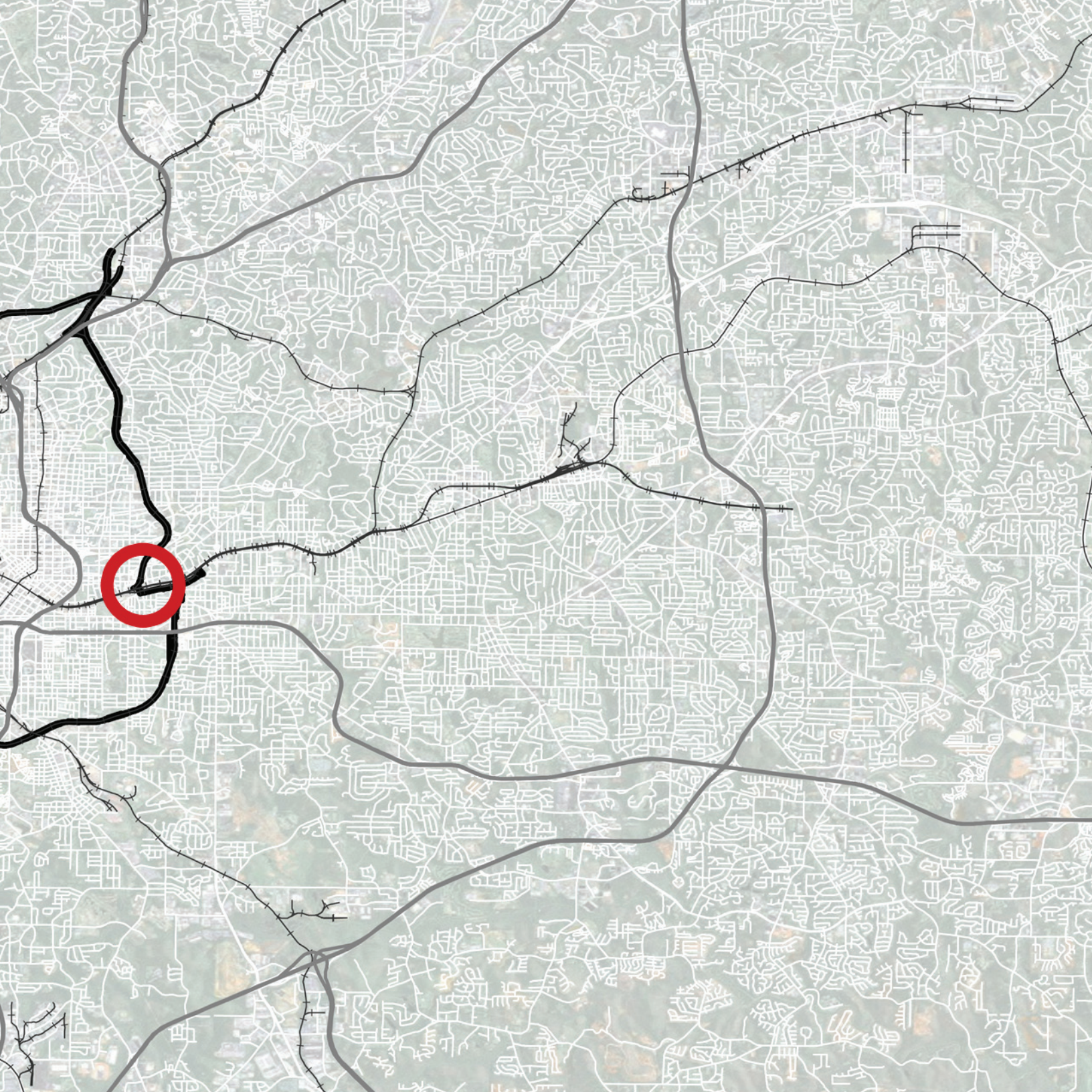


image courtesy of Atlanta BeltLine 2011

Figure 1.

historic preservation as key BeltLine goals. It will "showcase art" along the entirety of the BeltLine as a new way of experiencing the districts and seeks methods to identify and preserve historic structures (Atlanta BeltLine 2011).

In terms of this landscape architecture project, there is one glaring problem with the stated BeltLine goals. Although historic preservation is deemed important, the methods by which the BeltLine Organization seek to accomplish this only references the historic structures and homes that make up the neighborhoods. All listed preservation methods relate to tax-saving mechanisms, either on buildings or property and nothing actually describes how the BeltLine will preserve the physical, social, and cultural specificities of the line and its neighborhoods. In light of this, the scarce images of the BeltLine relating to the transit and trail line are generic, homogenous, and suggest again that the most important aspects of the implementation are the economic development, housing provisions and façade revitalization, rather than the actual landscapes that contribute to the unique conditions.

My research explores a gap in the BeltLine's fundamental framework. Rather than disagreeing with the processes already set in motion, the research adds to their incomplete perspective. Historic preservation is more than just buildings that make up neighborhoods; it also includes the urban field as a networked system of social and physical interactions. It is the modest, daily, unremarked operations of this field that my project harnesses and develops.

With new development (and particularly with public space), infrastructural procession is typically accompanied by a program that serves to obscure the reality of urban conditions. If, as landscape architects, we only ever provide this masking of the actual social forces that operate in our cities, then we are doing a disservice to the various users of infrastructure. By "obscuring" and "masking," I mean the act of making these conditions less noticeable at a glance or completely covered up by facades of commercialism and more affluent neighborhoods. For instance, in city improvement operations as shown in the graphic to the left, the reality of the urban field (left side) is often covered, wiped away, and transformed into a happy, productive, and populated scene (right side). While the benefits of such operations are typically measurable and apparent, concomitant losses of social and ecological systems, accompanied by their respective aesthetic characteristics, occur in the transformation that go unnoticed or undervalued.

Therefore, it is worth exploring the full range of possibilities with respect to the social relationships that are established in LA projects. This project seeks a marriage between accessibility, safety, & functionality and uncertainty, challenge, & discomfort by intersecting the city's goals of the BeltLine with the unmasking of this field as a truly marginalized landscape.

chapter 2: proceeding

finding method

A theoretical framework is a set of assumptions or claims that underlie a project. In other words, it is both the material and the means by which to investigate something. More broadly, people interact with each other and the world around them based on sets of these assumptions. In fact, life would be impossible without them. Because of this, research also occurs within a theoretical framework, whether it is clearly stated and important to the project methods and results or not. This project is completely hinged on its framework, and through it, the representational method. Therefore, the ideal outcome is to marry the representative style of the graphics to the framework for a cohesive unity.

For the purposes of this project, one of these assumptions is that most current landscape architecture practice caters only to a narrow range of feelings that the human body is capable of experiencing. These are primarily the positive emotions (i.e. affect of joy, as will be discussed later), and designers are not wrong to cater to these, making places that are serene, calm, enjoyable, uplifting, even thrilling, for example. However, hotspots of urban grime within the city have instabilities and complexities that are inherently valuable to the human-landscape web of interaction. To simply ignore this in favor of creating normatively functional and pretty landscapes is wrong because it is the landscape architect's job to instigate human-landscape interactions that bring forth the entire range of possible emotions. These might include wonder, mystery, despair, awe, ecstasy, nostalgia, instability, complexity, melancholy, fear, and aversion, to name a few. If landscape architects are truly interested in creating places for people, they cannot design a world that rests within one end of this spectrum of emotions; rather, we must encourage the development of all possible emotional responses to the environment. This, in turn, allows the user to evaluate their engagement with the site in a manner that is more than aesthetic; by fostering these previously unrealized engagements, new possibilities emerge that stretch beyond the site itself into the lives of those who encounter the site.

In speaking of the theoretical framework in these terms, I have suggested that the site has an indeterminate yet captivating thrill. I will demonstrate these characteristics later. For now, one of the goals of the project is to manipulate the current conditions of the site in such a way that the landscape's grim provocation is magnified and articulated, thus hopefully broadening the possible emotional responses elicited from the user. In doing so, the site may be celebrated and glorified for fetishistic reasons from the designer's perspective and become clearly framed within its context rather than marginalized and erased. In other words, the power of the place rests with the establishment of an alternate aesthetic, one that enables a wider range of person-landscape relationships on the basis of uncertainty and even discomfort.

Developing the graphics to scratch the surface of these undervalued emotions proves a challenge within landscape architectural discourse. The idea of marrying representation to content is certainly not new, however. Here I will examine case studies from three subfields: painting, modeling + photography, and film. With painting, one example of a

somber style and extraordinarily uncertain quality is Edward Hopper's Nighthawks, which instantly suggests an ambivalent, provocative atmosphere to the viewer.

Completed in January 1942, Hopper reflected in the painting the gloomy atmosphere that emerged across the country after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 (Spring 1998). He depicted the bar patrons as equally gloomy, seemingly lost in their own unhappy thoughts. It is impossible to tell whether the couple is interacting with each other or not. The lone man facing their direction has a coffee cup and glass of water. His head is tilted slightly downward, possibly looking at a newspaper. The bartender appears to be staring out of the window onto the empty and eerily glowing street outside while doing something behind the counter. Possibly influenced by movie stills from gangster films of the 1930s, Nighthawks very likely influenced the look of some film noir movies of the 1940s (Doss 1983).

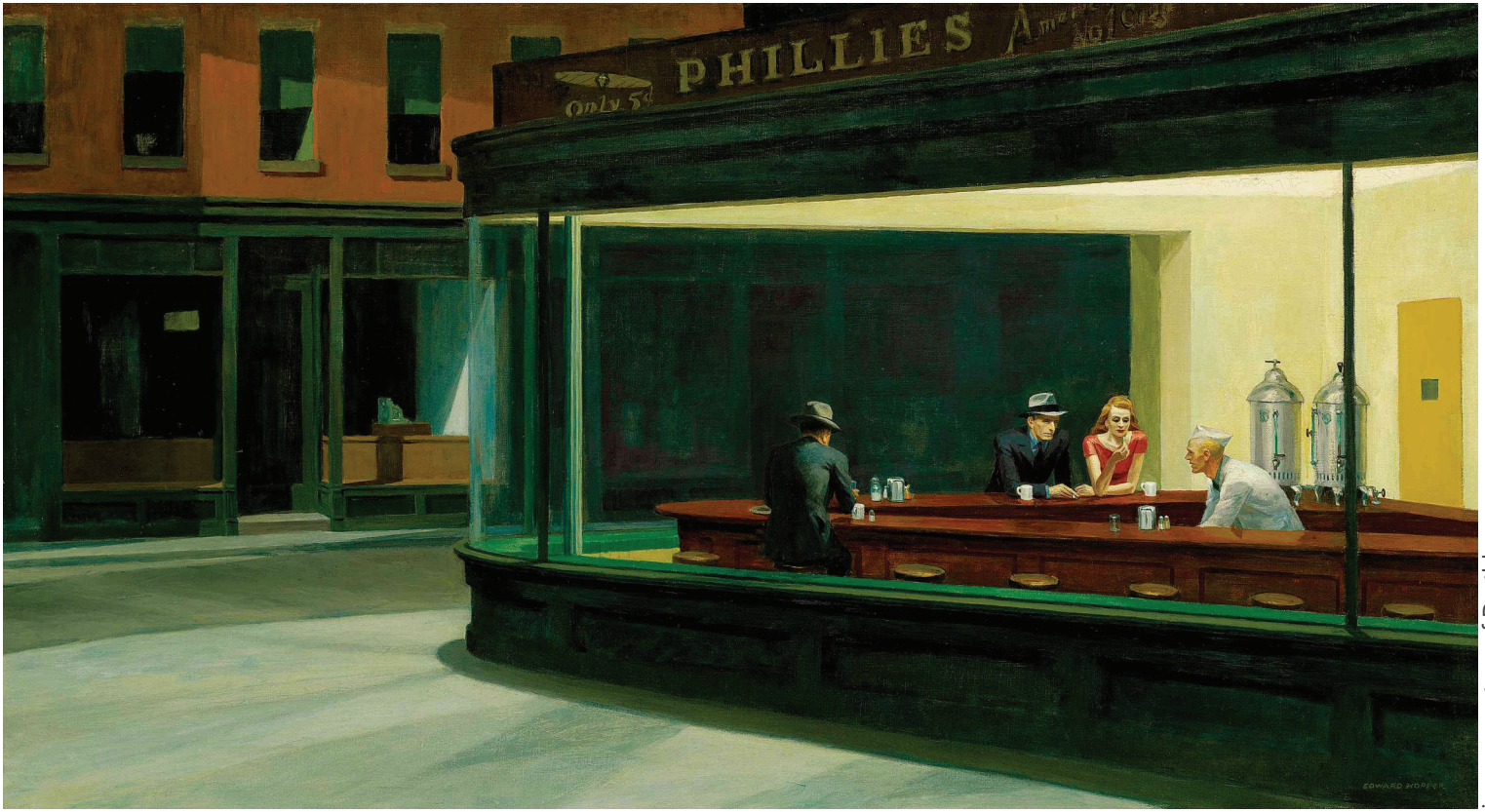


image courtesy of Dartblog

Figure 2. Nighthawks

image courtesy of James Casebere

Figure 3. La Alberca

After James Casebere graduated from Minneapolis College of Art and Design with a BFA in 1976 and received an M.F.A from Cal Arts in 1979, he began using his training as an artist and sculptor to join the "pictures generation" of "post-modern" artists (Casebere 2010). Specifically, he explores cinematic, architectural, and art historical themes through model building and photography of these models. Mounted on large sheets of Plexi (e.g. 72" x 90"), the resulting artwork blurs the line between real world and fantasy, causing the viewer to question the atmosphere within the work.

Perhaps most interestingly, Casebere's modeling and photography is unpopulated. This seemingly subtle choice removes any narrative from his work, drawing readers in and encouraging them to formulate their own narratives through person-artwork interaction. As Diehl states, the fictitious nature of the place (although often based on well-known architecture) "[makes] me feel that I, the viewer, had taken the place of the photographer" (Diehl 2007, 155).

One of the moodiest and unsettling of Casebere's images of the last decade is La Alberca, 2005, in which he employs the technique of filling the model with water and lighting it. The room is dark nonetheless, causing the depth of the central pool to be unknown and foreboding. The plastered walls of the room formulate a sense of deterioration while the lack of visible exits adds to the unsettling nature.

Casebere's work offers this project several examples of how to approach the graphics and content issue. The unpopulated images force the viewer to imagine their own involvement, formulating relationships that would otherwise be undeveloped. Additionally, the imagery of the work begs the question of the reality of the setting, and it is this fantastical quality, along with lighting, color, and material choices that give Casebere's photography the edgy quality this project seeks to create.

Figure 4. The Big Combo

Film noir settings achieve their visual uncertainty largely through camera placement and lighting. Interestingly, even the term film noir is vague. French for “black film,” it was first applied to Hollywood films by French critic Nino Frank in 1946. It was not widely accepted as a classification until the 1970s, however, when scholars began to use the term to describe films from the 1940s and 1950s that used low-key lighting and asymmetrical composition to explore similar themes (Naremore 2008).

Famous themes of film noir include the inversion of traditional values and its corresponding moral ambivalence along with feelings of alienation, paranoia, and cynicism (Conard 2006). These motifs are often related to the philosophical idea of existentialism. According to Faison, a person’s awareness of their metaphysical reality is obtained through their own personal experience (often under physical or emotional duress) and their realization that the world is not clean, orderly, and sane only comes through such an encounter (Faison 2008). This awareness is triggered by the adverse reactions to such experiences and suggests a becoming of character, only achieved through the unfolding of stimulus-reaction (Barnett 2008).

This famous film noir still comes from The Big Combo, directed by Joseph H. Lewis in 1955. The plot unravels to show the obsession of tortured Police Lt. Leonard Diamond to bring down violent gangster Mr. Brown and his girlfriend (IMDb 2011). Here, cinematographer John Alton uses several characteristic film noir moves to portray the sadistic atmosphere. The camera is placed lower than the eye level of those in the shot, subtly suggesting overwhelming qualities. The figures themselves are completely silhouetted, yet instantly recognizable from their garb and postures which are firm yet undecided. The fog that engulfs them and the wheelbarrow is eerily lit from somewhere in the distance, creating a thick (physical and metaphysical) atmosphere.

Although the purpose of this research is not to create a landscape of film noir, the dark moods and personal interactions of the movement contribute to the project and offer credence for adopting a representational style suited both to suggest and to discover new structures of feeling in landscape architecture.

affect + interaction

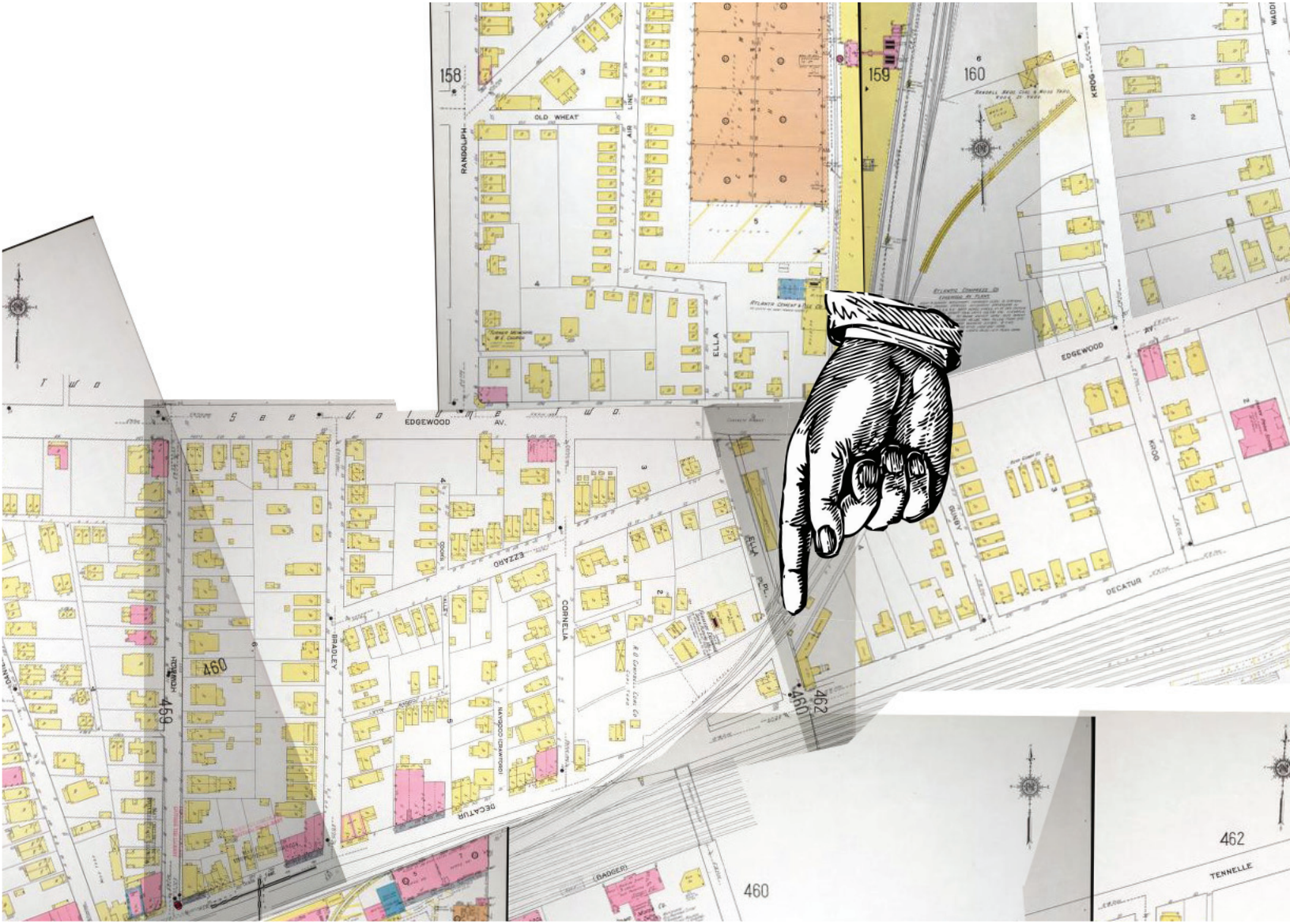
The selected site has a specific affect. It is not unique in this regard, as all things have affect. In a basic form, affect simply refers to a vibe, or feeling. It also means much more than this, however. The philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677), for example, perceived affect as a very specific thing. He differentiated it from an idea. An idea, he states, "is a mode of thought which represents something" (Murphy 1978, 1). This point of view refers to the thing's objective reality. An affect, on the other hand, he defines as "any mode of thought which doesn't represent anything" (Murphy 1978, 2).

This distinction has extremely important ramifications for this project. For example, as noted above, a feeling such as uneasiness or fear represents nothing at all. It can describe something, of course, but it does not refer to anything in itself. One cannot imagine, in this case, a pure form of uneasiness or fear because it does not exist.

Spinoza also formulated a concept which describes the extent to which something has power. There is a continuous variation of the force (or power) of existing. The variation comes in the form of an increase-diminution-increase-diminution force of existing. "This kind of melodic line of continuous variation will define affect . . . . in its correlation with ideas and at the same time in its difference in nature from ideas. We account for this difference in nature and this correlation" (Murphy 1978, 4) (emphasis mine). In other words, affect necessarily includes the participatory party (i.e. the site's user). More importantly, along this line of continuous melodic variation, Spinoza assigns to poles: joy-sadness, which for him are the fundamental emotions. Sadness, then, is any passion that diminishes one's power of acting, and joy is any passion which increases this power.

What does this mean, and why is it important?

Simply put, the sad passions are necessary, and inspiring such passions is crucial for the exercise and exchange of power. Here, the "sad" passions refer more to just the opposite of happy. Specifically, they encompass all of the emotions which I intend to bring to light through the design of this landscape, as described in the finding methods section. With regard to humankind's interaction with themselves and the world around them, there is a succession of encounters with ideas (things) and one's power is increased or diminished in a continuous manner. It is what we call existing. Without the sad passions, the joyous passions would be meaningless. Thus, as a landscape architect interested in the entire range of emotions that a person is capable of experiencing, I am exploring the darker, uneasy side of human-landscape experience to both support and combat the traditional motives of landscape architectural design to elicit positive emotions.



Collage pieces of a 1911 Sanborn map show the study site in relation to the Hulsey cargo yard and the historic rail line. Although the cargo yard is still in operation and this arm of the line has been disconnected and removed, it will be replaced by track for the new commuter rail system. Also of interest here is the degree to which the rail line historically traveled through and necessarily influenced (and was influenced by) the surrounding residential, commercial, and industrial operations of Atlanta. It is crucial to know that the same will be true of the BeltLine.

The person-landscape interaction of this site is different from the affective relationship of the surrounding neighborhoods and industrial lots and necessarily different from the remainder of the BeltLine. As Cullen masterfully writes, place presents itself as a conundrum, born from the sum of its parts yet containing a unique soul in itself (Cullen 1962). While one can argue that this constitutes all of the landscape to some degree, the interest in this project is delving into the idea of truly being born from the parts.

Edward Relph links the concept of place to what he calls the "instant environment machine." He states that historically, each place has been necessarily distinct from each other, each rising from local and micro-geographies, cultures, and unique landscape-economic interactions (Relph 1993). This in turn fostered personal interests in townscape upkeep and alteration with respect to the micro and regional distinctions with which each place was endowed. Relph admits that thinking about place in such a historical manner somewhat romanticizes days gone by, but that out of such thinking and critique, one can conjure values which may not be present in modern built society. Specifically, he writes, "these ideals and images are valuable for a modern world rapidly being overtaken by the renitent landscapes of rationalism" (Relph 1993, 25). The process of rational takeover through development contextualizes his idea of the instant environment machine. This is, in his words, the realization of James Fergusson's self-acting machine that could produce city plans and structure design with little to no thought. Relph posits that the contemporary environment's equivalent of this self-acting machine is the ability by architects and contractors to instantly create or destroy landscapes of almost any type, mashing up styles, cultures, and histories in any manner desired. Immensely complex, it consists of "ideologies, economic linkages, institutions and corporations, methodologies for planning and design, huge organizations and communications systems, and veritable panoply of technologies" (Relph 1993, 28).

Relph relates the instant environment machine (inflecting within it certain derogatory undertones) to two of its operating components: corporatization and telecommunications. During the 20th century, in which cheap energy fueled growth at unprecedented speeds, major corporations, in conjunction with city planning departments, reshaped the landscape in crucial ways. Together, they built vast suburban tracts, theme parks, shopping malls, and even carefully crafted "natural" parks. Relph suggests these landscape operations were born from a post World War II desire to "create rational and efficient developments by controlling change and eliminating chance" (Relph 1993, 29). To control this new enemy of chance, the aforementioned institutions developed standardized regulations and development operations that were applied to all aspects of planning and design. This resulted in places that are no longer entirely unique. Rather, they are born more from the planning approach applied than from the character of the landscape and the people within it.

Telecommunications also fueled the instant environment

image courtesy of Seaside Florida Rentals

Figure 5. Seaside, FL. Because of the standardization of design and planning principles, many environments are no longer explicitly linked to their geographical or social histories. Instead, a normalized strategy has been applied, resulting in a landscape that is not entirely unique. One example is the new urbanist community of Seaside, FL.

machine's rise to power. Never before the 20th century did people have immediate access to all portions of the globe as well as the ability to make these places their own. Joshua Meyrowitz describes the technological revolution as an event that allowed "electronic media [to] affect us primarily not through their content but by changing the 'situational geography' of social life" (Meyrowitz 1985, 6). Because of this instant situationalism, people are capable of experiencing anywhere from everywhere and thus, "a flexible and elusive vagueness is thereby conferred on everyday experience" (Relph 1993, 31).

Due to telecommunications and the corporatization of the instant environment machine, planning and design (from city scale to site scale) have been "normalized." That is to say, as Relph points out, standardized regulations for planning and design dominate building permits and zoning requirements, while the telecommunicative aspect of site design has encouraged site-unspecific, normative strokes to be brushed across the landscape, forming predictable and even boring options for many institutional projects.

This instant environment machine approach is currently the normative practice. It fulfills the desires of corporations and city planning departments as mentioned above. In a sense, many (though not all) of these institutions seek to formulate a design palette that can be applied and canvassed upon multiple areas of interest. For instance, one method by which this happens is through the rigidity of control. Overall, American cites have transitioned from places of industrial might to contemporary nodes of capitalism and culture over the last half-century, producing several unintended consequences, including the informal, ever-changing, and open-ended spaces that this project investigates. These in-between spaces stand in direct opposition to the highly manicured spaces of 17th Century France and 18th Century England, in which obsession with domination over the landscape resulted in intensely strong, formal, and spatially geometric spaces geared towards the fulfillment of man's aesthetic pleasure (Jellicoe 1995). Interestingly, many corporative and institutional landscapes continue to impose these enlightenment ideals of formal organization of space, suggesting a sense of power and timelessness to all who use it. In doing so, they succeed in influencing the perception of the space as controlled, orderly, and tidy. This appeals to many, from

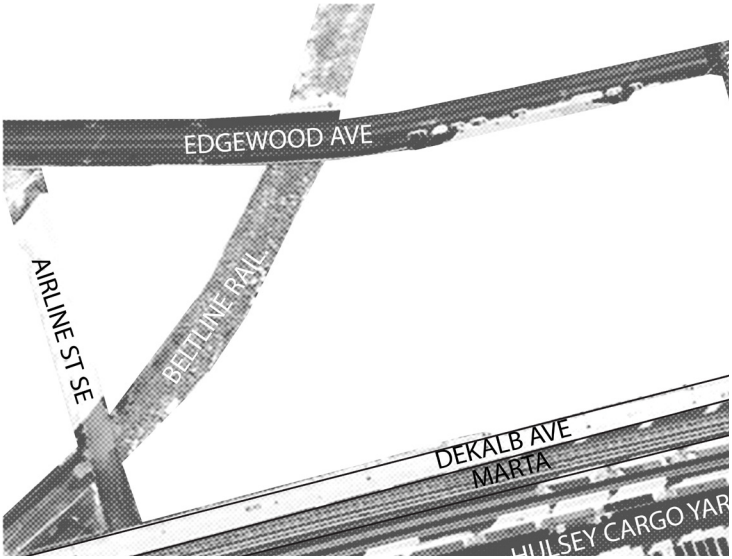
those seeking to live in or use such a space for recreational or consumer activities to city officials and entrepreneurs seeking to profit from the interest. For these reasons, such places "work:" results are somewhat predictable and case studies are plentiful.

A non-normative approach, on the other hand, would allow leftover, accidental, abandoned or otherwise un- or ill-used spaces to remain as such while contributing to the larger context of economic or social growth. It might furthermore provoke or heighten disturbance and experiential qualities at this end of the emotional spectrum. Cities, like any living organism, need constant fluctuation, abrasiveness, even turmoil to survive, for it is only with stagnation that they die. Such places are, in Alan Berger's terms, liminal. As he explains it, a liminal space is an in-between landscape, not fully able to be ascribed to a specific function, category, or idealistic endeavor "because they remain at the margins (or limen, which means 'threshold' in Latin), awaiting a societal desire to inscribe them with value and status" (Berger 2006, 29). Similarly, Sola-Morales, Doron, and Levesque have written on the subject of in-between landscapes, which they term terrain vagues. Their work explores the relationships between user and landscape, and not only encourages a non-normative design approach to shaping the landscape, but even advocates non-normative behaviors (residual, transgressive, loose) (Preston & Klingenstein n.d.).

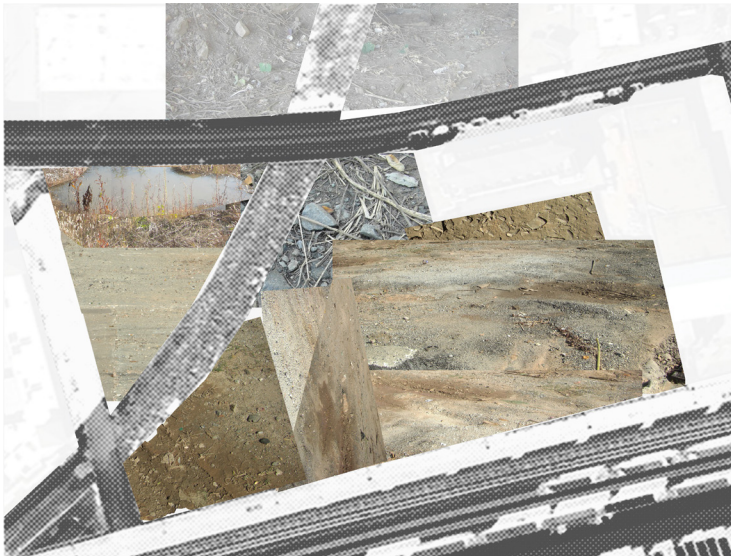
It is an interest in both a non-normative approach to landscape design as well as a desire to cater to non-normative behaviors that my project engages. It addresses homogenous, rigid, predictable design – the normative, suggesting it is only adding to the eventual demise of Atlanta, GA by not acknowledging inner turmoil and agitation. Relph's interest in place as reclamation of space is, as he states, somewhat shallow in regard to a fundamental design approach. According to him, "the results are often pleasant, informative, and exquisitely restored, but they do nothing to challenge the placeless processes of modern development methods" (Relph 1993, 33). My critique of this is that the impersonal, mass producible environment that emerged from the instant environment machine was almost a welcome outcome of the technological advances of modernism. Nonetheless, my project critiques the very notion of placeless design at its core, asking of the populations involved if heterogeneous environments can offer security while allowing them to be far more dynamic than current conventions allow. Through its interest in the historical formulation of the site, my thesis project allows the city to achieve its goal of historic preservation by enabling the processes that have shaped the site and the city over the last 150 years to continue, kept constantly in dialogue by various parties, user groups, and vested interests.

Figure 6. Terrain Vague. Often described as leftover spaces, terrain vague landscapes are plentiful. They represent the margins of society and often provide alcoves for the practice of non-normative behaviors.

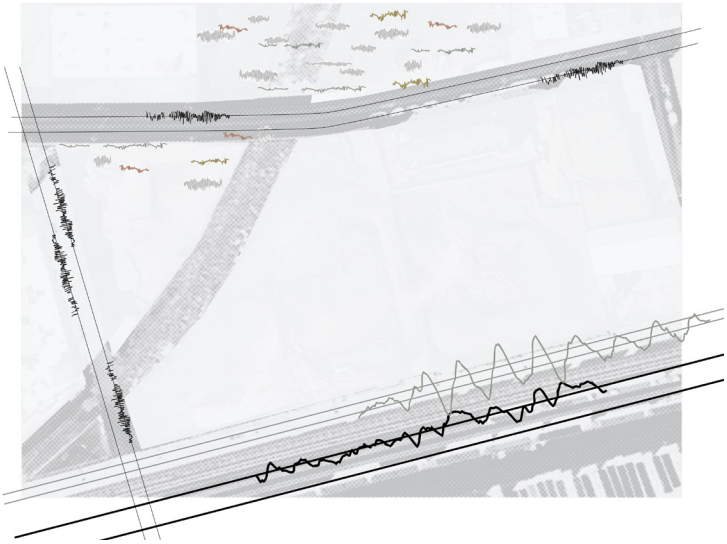
chapter 3:
site investigations



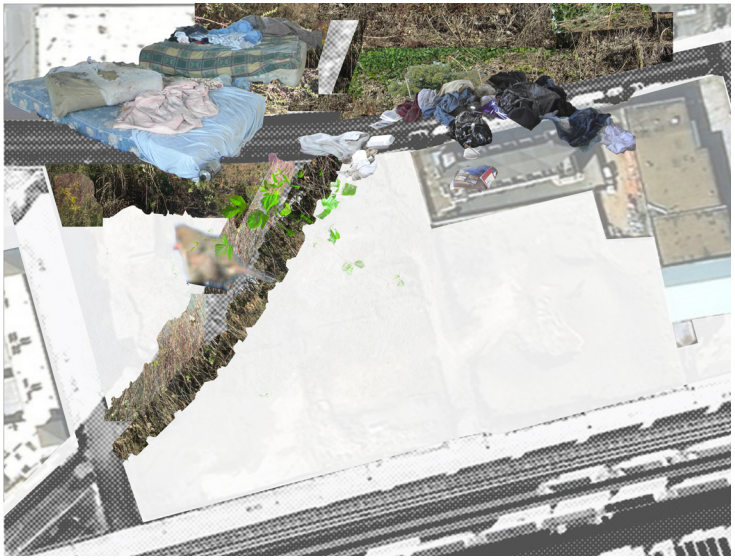
Transportation Network. The terrain of study is enclosed on three sides by existing streets and rail lines. The BeltLine rail route on the map does not yet exist, although its placement here refers to the historic rail location.



Ground-plane Textures. Surface material differentiations range from newly exposed soil to well-compacted and exposed earth; from bits of asphalt and concrete to basins of sludge.



Aural Origins. At the northern, woodier edge, subtle bird and insect vocalizations can be heard. At the southern edge, however, thunderous rumbles from passing trains overpower everything else.



Social and Ecological Systems. Most evidence of ecology surrounds the historic rail line as well as the bridge overpass at the northern edge. Heavy machinery is likely the cause of disturbance for the other areas.

preliminary spatial mappings

In terms of isolating important site elements in order to investigate spatial relationships, the four maps to the left all share a common element: the existing and proposed transportation network which forms pseudo site boundaries and edge conditions. To the south of the site lies the Hulsey cargo yard. Adjacent to it runs the MARTA light rail system with DeKalb Avenue underneath. At the north end of the site runs Edgewood Avenue which sits at grade except for the overpass where the rail travels underneath. Smaller streets run along the east and west side, enclosing the site.

The ground plane condition is currently in a unique state. Because the BeltLine has begun to be implemented in various locations around the (proposed) track, some site disturbance has occurred (such as the addition of BeltLine markers and the movement patterns of construction equipment) but no surface material manipulations have yet been initiated. Consequently, the study terrain intricacies that beg to be manipulated and explored more fully. These will be discussed in more detail later.

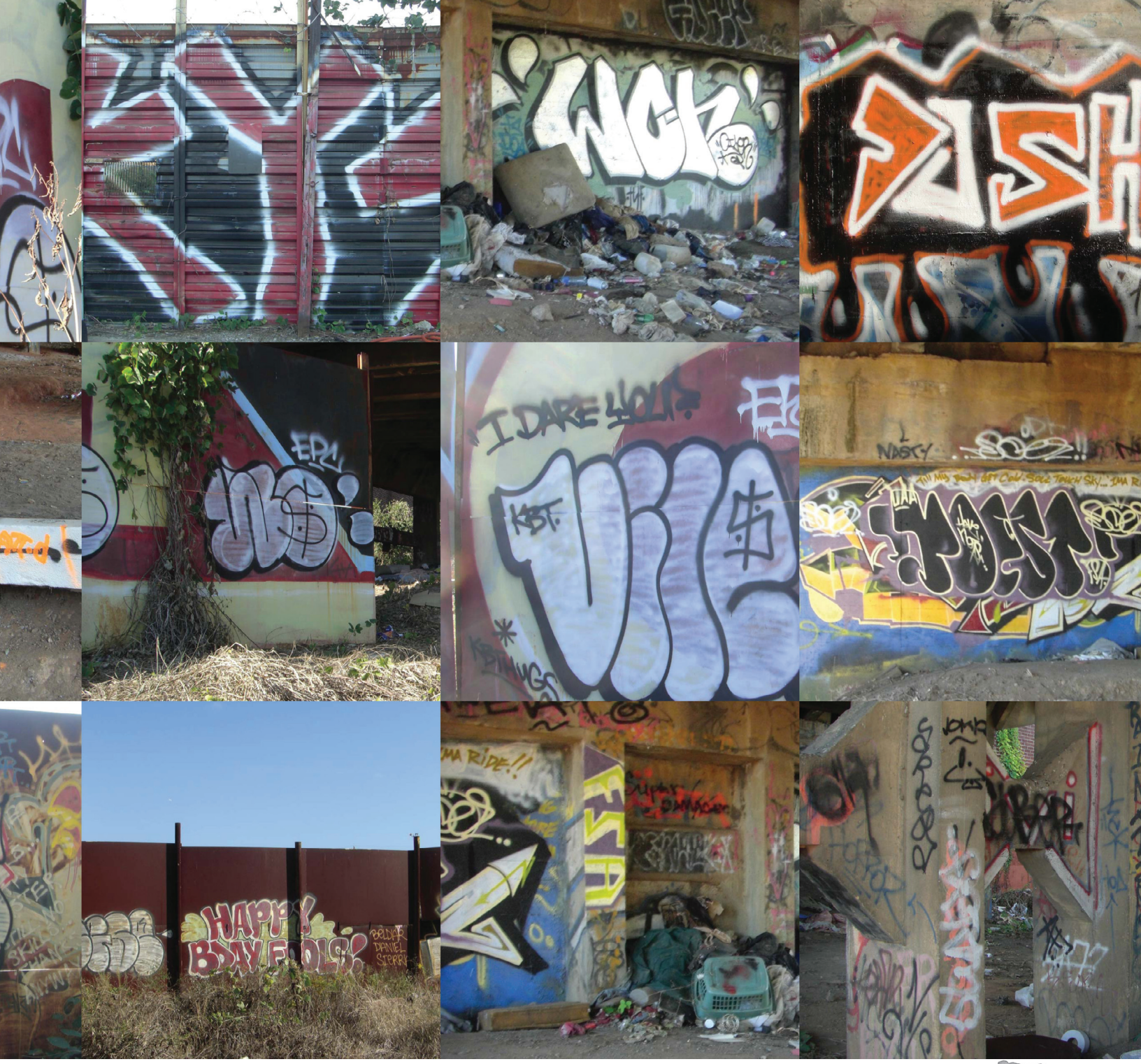
For the map of aural origins, the most interesting dichotomy comes from the north and south poles of the site. At the woodier north end, the sounds originate primarily from birds and insects, while at the southern end the airwaves are dominated by sounds of the roaring MARTA and cargo trains.

In the map of social and ecological communities, evidence of life seems to occur mostly along the historic rail line where the ruderal ecology has begun to reclaim ownership. Outside of this line the heavy machinery has prevented much growth. The spaces of human interaction primarily occur underneath and around the area of the overpass where a migrant community has set up what appears to be a temporary but stable base and sleeping grounds.

texture palettes

The following texture and content palettes seek to reveal and accentuate what the maps of spatial relationship in plan cannot: intricacies of scale, angle, and application. Together, they encapsulate a representation of the site's affect, an initial interpretation of and connection to it. Uninhibited by weighted graphic representation, they seek to expose the site characteristics in a manner that is easy to engage so that the reader may formulate opinions that agree or disagree with mine. The beauty of the person-landscape interaction is that each interaction is completely different and open to interpretation. However, I wish to put forth and explain my connection with it to substantiate its affect and, more broadly, the project's goal of justifying the design of spaces to support this under-explored set of emotions.

The graffiti palette to the right shows the colorful additions to the existing concrete and metal while underlying the boundaries of contestation and ownership through the content of the words. The specific images display various colors, symbols, tags and locations of placement. Although the majority of the text is difficult to decipher, it appears to be deliberately placed. As Sanchez-Tranquilino writes, unique insignias of graffiti have, historically, appeared in locations relevant to the street culture at hand. Close observation of such signs show they often appear on the peripheries of youth gang territories, and the inscriptions themselves, although readable only by few, convey very specific territorial ownership information (Sanchez-Tranquilino 1978).


I DARE 4 OLI?
HAPPY BDAY FOOLS!
BELDAR DANIEL STERRY

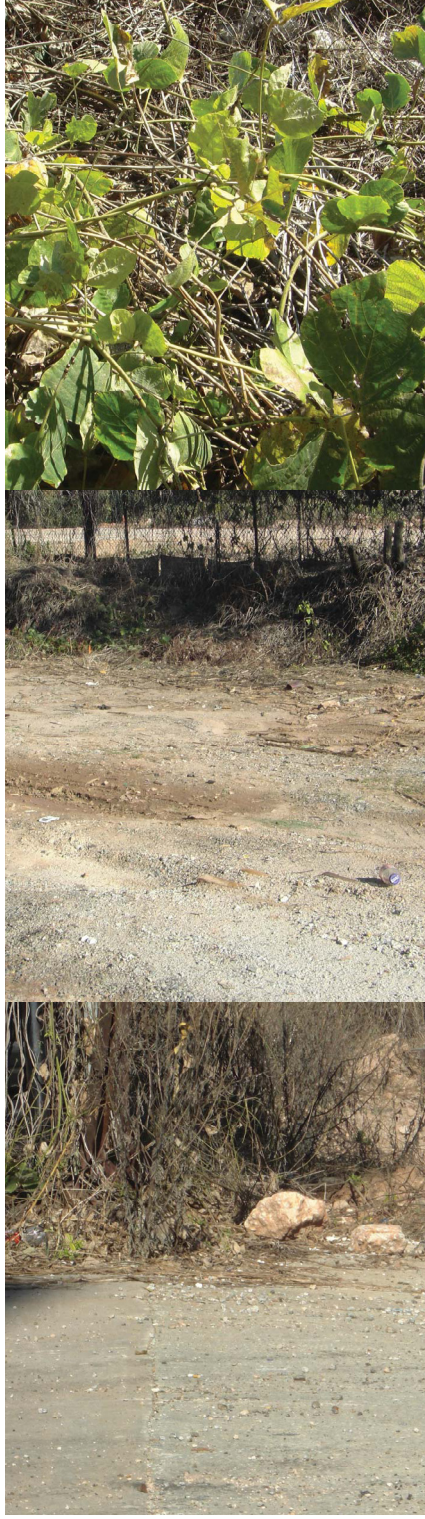
The palette depicting the variation between light, shade, and shadow seeks to draw out the subtleties of microclimate across the site. Areas under and around the overpass, for example, are always in shade and cooler, while the areas north of the overpass are usually dappled in shade and the space at the south end of the site is wide open to the sun and wind. Less apparent but implied in this palette is the ability of the vertical and horizontal elements to affect wind patterns as well. These markers can offer just as much spatial orientation to the user as the specific graffiti insignias, depending on seasonal and daily variations.

In designing with microclimates, thermal comfort zones can be taken into account to encourage/ discourage inhabitation of particular spaces. Six common conditions that establish comfort factor are sun position, wind direction, site topography, vegetation, and existing infrastructure (and buildings). Moreover, admitting a desired resource at the site scale is more important than blocking an undesired resource because constructed elements can typically reduce the impact of the undesired resource while gaining access to the desired resource is more a problem of location (Brown & DeKay 2001).

The materials palette also moves through scales between objects and context with displays ranging from small concrete surface cracks and rubble to large oil stains, standing water, and several species of vine and shrub.

With respect to the plant communities, succession refers to the natural replacement of one species / set of species with another. For Georgian fields, the most likely pattern of succession after abandonment includes grasslands of aster, broomsedge, and horseweed, giving way to shrubs and pines and finally oak and hickory hardwoods (Johnston & Odum 1956). Although this site is found within the heart of Atlanta, some of the early grassland species are evident (i.e. broomsedge), although the seed bank is far more diverse than a Georgian field.

With respect to the site's abandonment, the evidence of concrete and asphalt in variously sized portions suggests that heavy machinery has disturbed nearly all traces of former use. In combination, these factors most notably give the site its marginalized and heterogeneous status, as discussed in more detail later.



Another palette draws out the distinctions between the permanent and nomadic conditions of the site with elements from the long-standing overpass and billboard columns to tire tracks, the seasonal leaf bed, and evidence of daily human interaction. It is this aspect of the site that has contributed most to its affective potential, most likely due to the unpredictable nature of the impermanent elements (i.e. the distinct signs of temporary migratory encampment manifested through bedding, clothing, boxes, and food, as well as signs of through-passage by machinery.)

Interestingly, signs of impermanence occur most often near the relatively permanent elements (the columns, fences, walls, shrubs, and trees). Because of this, the areas with the most notable signs of impermanence elicit the strongest affective response. These include: vulnerability, disproportionately scaled, intrusiveness, trespassing, suspicious, curious, unsafe, unsanitary, dirty, enclosed, cold, sheltered, and scared.

TOUGH CALL
WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE
NEED DOG $ FOOD

The transportation infrastructure palette includes some elements from all of the previous photo sets but emphasizes the industrial might and quality of the two opposing bridges: at the north end the overpass that is Edgewood Avenue and at the south end the permanently elevated corridor that MARTA runs along.

Their presence subtly emphasizes the location of the site with respect to the city of Atlanta. Already filled with infrastructural components, the city is meeting the citizens' need for movement. Because the two bridges shown here are existing, they serve as both symbols of this marginalized landscape and as the functions of transportation and industry. Their aesthetic quality as they pertain to the affect of the site comes from their re-appropriation as markers of ownership and boundaries of social groups as well as temporary shelters for the nomadic people of the area.

TOUGH CALL
wisp
get
use
to
it.

chapter 4:
design investigations

semantic fission

According to Claude Levi-Strauss, every thing (or idea, as described by Spinoza) has a context. Implied here is the relationship of the thing with its environment (signifier and signified). Umberto Eco terms this signifier and signified relationship the "sign-vehicle and meaning," and maintains that because of this relationship, the object and its environment are interpreted as one thing.

If the object is moved into another context, the meaning changes. That is, we must read the object with its new context. It lives within this context and has a particular meaning. This concept Levi-Strauss terms semantic fission (removing the object from its current relationship) and fusion (forming a new relationship) (Mahsun 1987). Russian formalists call this rearrangement operation "ostranneniye," or "making it strange." Eco states, "we have separated the meaning from its significant, and have made the significant available to another meaning or other meanings. The sign object becomes ambiguous, strange, loaded with (and empty of) meanings" (Eco 1971, 1210).

With respect to art and the environment, Eco has applied Levi-Strauss's idea of semantic fission to pop art. In principle, pop art takes an object or idea and asks the viewer to reinterpret the object within a new context. As Mahsun states, "the popular arts, while not concerned with revelation but rather entertainment or persuasion, inadvertently reveal the values of our society when elements of them are placed within the context of fine art" (Mahsun 1987, 46). Pop art, because of this, mixes up the visual communication method with an elicitation of contemplation by the viewer. "We are being asked to delete our habitual, unthinking reactions, to replace them with new, personal responses to our environment" (Mahsun 1987, 47). The artist then, views the object as separate from a context and asks the viewer to instill his/her own context of reality into the signifier and signified relationship.

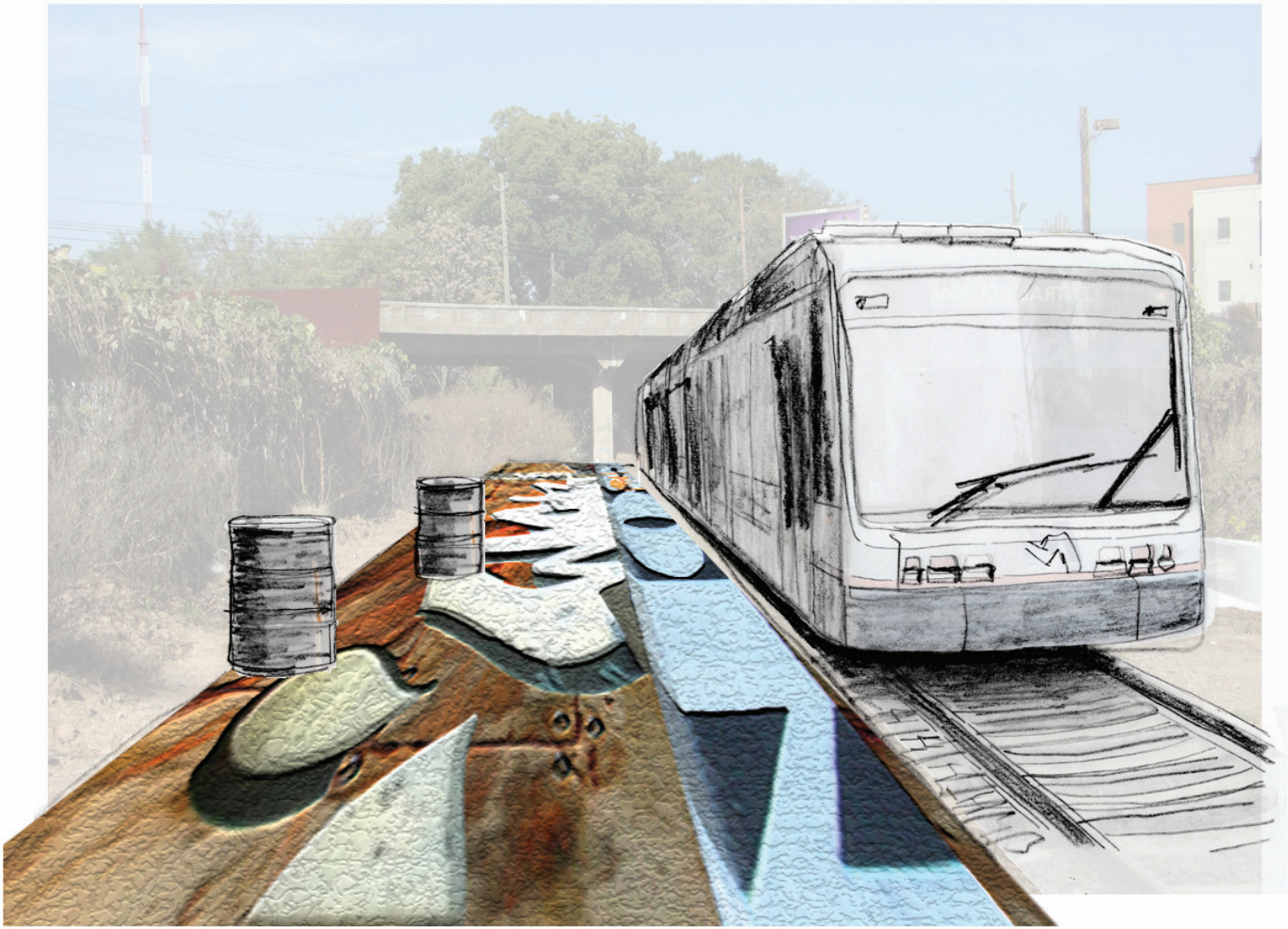
This project uses a similar mechanism of semantic fission. By rearranging given objects within the terrain, it seeks to elicit emotional responses from the users of the site through their own interpretation of object-environment relationship.

Initial rearrangement strategies are discussed below. They do not add anything to the field that is not already existing (save the addition of the BeltLine), nor do they remove any objects. By doing so, the affect of the site becomes intensified. The semantic fission transforms the way in which the user will interpret common items. This is a kind of user perpetrated semantic fission. It explores the marginality and negative social-environmental relationship that cities wish to cover up, erase, or otherwise alter through public works projects.

image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Figure 7. Fountain. This piece by artist Marcel Duchamp is classified as a "ready-made," due to the fact that the urinal already existed. Signed R. Mutt, the fountain is considered one of the most important readymade pop art pieces. By viewing the urinal in a new context (i.e. drinking from it), the viewer must interpret the piece in a radically different way than the context in which urinals are normally found. Duchamp explored the semantic fission of the object-environment relationship, and the user must semantically fuse the object into a new relationship.

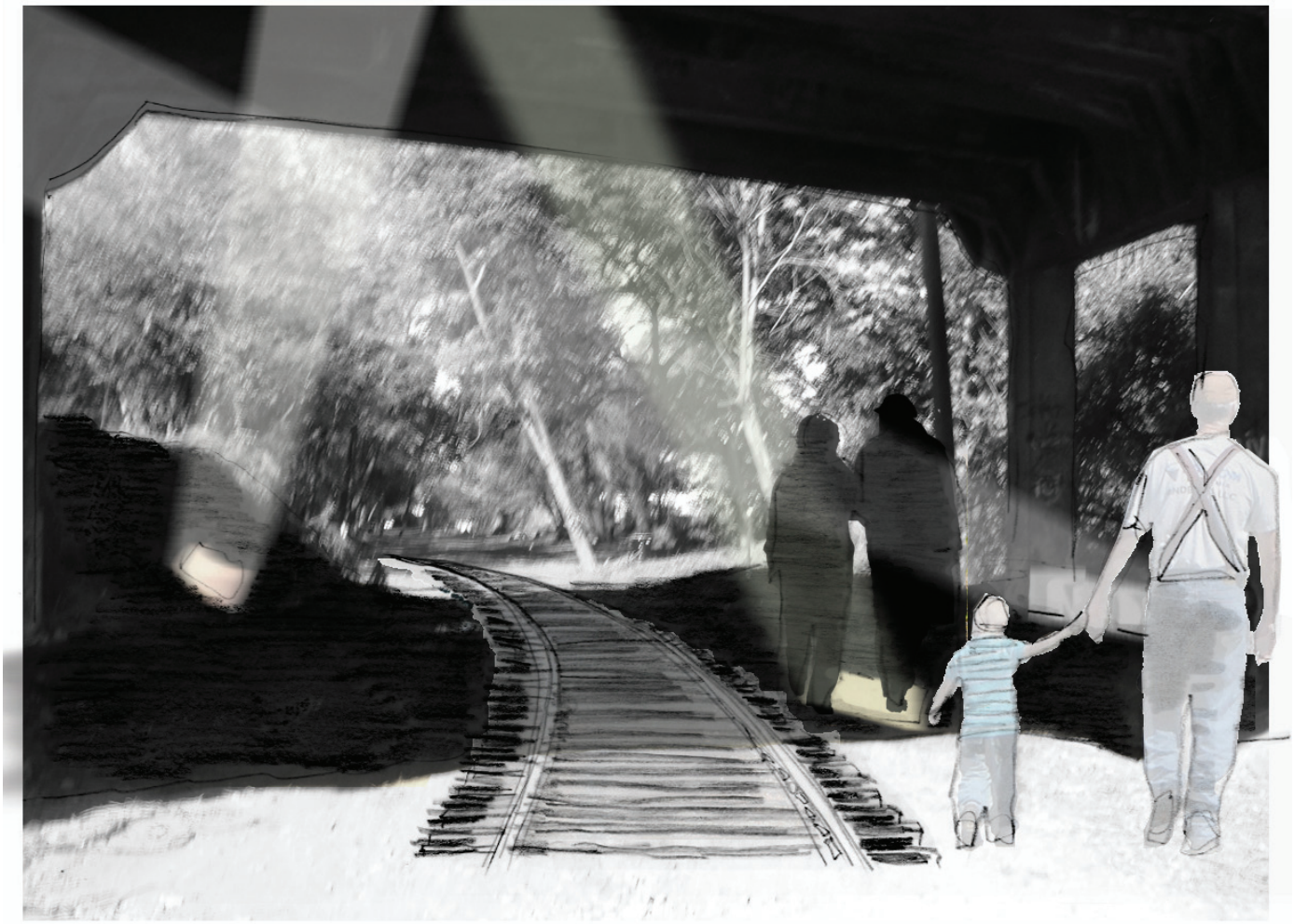
A set of four early design investigations rearranged site elements to create new user-landscape relationships without introducing new material. In this example from the current project, the ruderal ecologies are encouraged to overtake the concrete in swaths. Shown here, the remaining concrete in the northeastern corner of the site would be broken into large blocks, allowing the plant species to infiltrate the cracks and run along the top of the concrete, forming a new relationship between plant and concrete. Rather than remove this rubble, this relationship would highlight the differences in texture, drainage abilities, and longevity of the matter itself. Interestingly, the people in this example detract from this relationship. They seem rather into interacting with the landscape rather than adding to the rearrangement.



Another rearrangement strategy involves altering the plane in which a metal barrier exists. Rather than break up the site, it could be simply turned into a platform for entry and exit from the train with the leftover oil drums used for trash and recycling bins. It would make more apparent to the BeltLine passengers that they are entering and exiting this terrain of contestation by actually walking on the graffiti markers.

By being placed onto the ground plane, the symbols more clearly signify their intent as well as indicate that instead of serving as examples of vandalism, they are ingrained within the social ecologies of the landscape.

This image shows the application onto the Edgewood Ave. bridge surface of a material that rusts, changing the color of the metal walls to a permanent feature and juxtaposing it with the green of the vines. By doing this, the grime and indeterminate quality is preserved. Careful contemplation would reveal, however, that the materiality of typical concrete columns prevents them from rusting. One would be left wondering why the concrete is coated in metal and whether the rust is intentional or accidental, as well as how the soil base for the vines allows them to grow on the side of the bridge, maintaining a slight sense of ambiguity and room for interpretation by the viewer. A hulking piece of rusting infrastructure with new plant growth (that is still in use) seems simultaneously confusing and awe-inspiring.



The light and shadow patterns could easily be deconstructed with a few well-placed cutouts in the overpass. This strategy is similar to a technique Casebere has used to call attention to both the shaded and sunny portions of the area of interest. The effect would be further variable according to the angle and intensity of the sun. As the sun moves throughout the day, different portions of the underpass would be highlighted, from specific territorial graffiti markings to evidence of nomadic migration and encampment and even shrub undergrowth. The user is asked to form interpretations of this scene through the simple rearrangement of sunlight.

This series of six drawings investigates whether the territorial boundaries and the idea of contestation can be visually represented in a way other than graffiti. Specifically it uses shadows to mark the entry and exit points of the site in relation to the remainder of the BeltLine. By traveling under objects with different intensities of shadow, site boundaries are made more ambiguous, and users are left wondering where this study terrain begins and ends. Above is the existing condition at the north end. Notice the narrowness of the permanent shadow underneath the bridge.

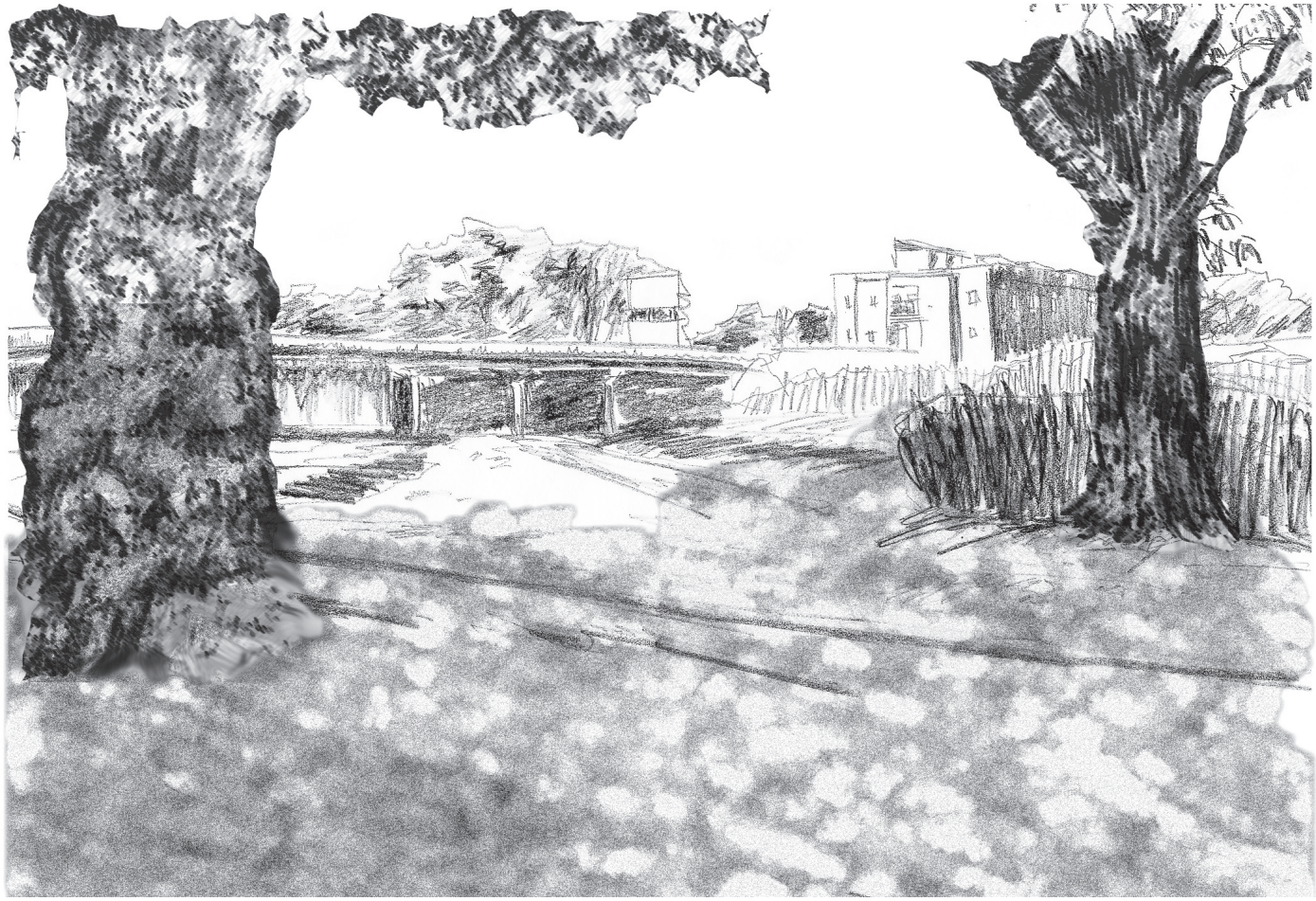
Here, the subtlest of dappled shadow extensions enhances the transition by adding to the area under shadow. Because this rendition specifically shows a tree not typically used for shade, the slight addition of shadow does not sufficiently demarcate a boundary of transition. The shade produced by the tree would most likely not be interpreted as having the same meaning as the shade produced by the underpass. A more clear approach is necessary.

Because the shadow created by the addition of a single small tree is perhaps too sublte, two larger trees here add to the effect in terms of shadow intensities. Also slightly larger shade trees have been chosen to corroborate the thick shadow of the underpass, extending it along the path of entry and exit as well allowing it to filter into other portions of the site. However, the size of these trees still fails to sufficiently demarcate the entry point. Additionally, the effect will vary as a function of how users move. For instance, those walking or running along a path will almost certainly interpret the areas of shade in a different manner than those traveling faster inside the confines of the BeltLine train.

At the south end of the site no existing structure delineates entry and exit points, so any addition will seem more dramatic. Shown here is the existing condition. The train will enter from the north end and exit here, crossing Airline St SE in the foreground. The goal of this additional investigation is to create a canopy above and shadow on the ground that creates a similar feeling as the underpass at the north end.

Because of this, larger trees will be selected to perform this function.

The initial planting and growth of the trees on either side of the future track of the BeltLine will not serve the desired function. Although the addition of the trees is clearly noticeable, the desired transitional zone is not of great enough effect to suggest a boundary. The marking of boundaries is crucial here to allow users to formulate a sense of where the site begins and ends especially because no graffiti exists at this portion of the site. The goal is to differentiate the terrain and its affect from the remainder of the track system as well as the surrounding commercial and residential context of the city.



Once the trees reach a mature height, however, an edge effect is immediately noticeable. Thickly dappled patterns of shadow as well as the height and canopy of the trees will force users to realize they are moving through another boundary. However, and perhaps most importantly, the result is that the scene appears normatively romanticized. Because this counteracts the desired goals, the study serves as a good example of methodologically working towards achieving a certain affect, but it is far too ambiguous in this regard. Different approaches will follow, adding to the interpretive potential of the site rather than relying on indications at the entry and exit points.

The following graphic series represents a range of possibilities of landscape manipulations based on the normative and non-normative behavioral patterns of various user groups. The user groups are being studied in insolation here to show the wide difference in landscape re-appropriation over time, should any of these user groups be given power to manipulate the landscape as they choose. This series investigates the user-landscape relationship in terms of the dynamic and vested interests different groups of people might have over the installation's longevity. It includes a rail + trail strategy, which is perhaps most closely related to the BeltLine organization's proposal series, an industrial strategy, which hands control of the study site to the operators of the Hulsey cargo yard, a successive seeding strategy, which relies on the city arborists and volunteers to craft an initial conditions approach to the site's evolutionary pattern, and a transgressive strategy, which permits any and all behaviors deemed inappropriate in the majority of public space.

From a historical standpoint, Atlanta has been built on constant change, on the transfer of control of plots of land and the changes to the landscape that any of these parties has willed upon it. One historic preservation strategy that the city and the administrators of the BeltLine have not thought of or discussed is this strategy of entrepreneurship and capitalism. Remaining true to the history of not only the site but of the foundation upon which the city sits would mean not simply restoring building facades to buildings over a certain age, as the city suggests, but holding onto the principles of landscape control and manipulation over time.

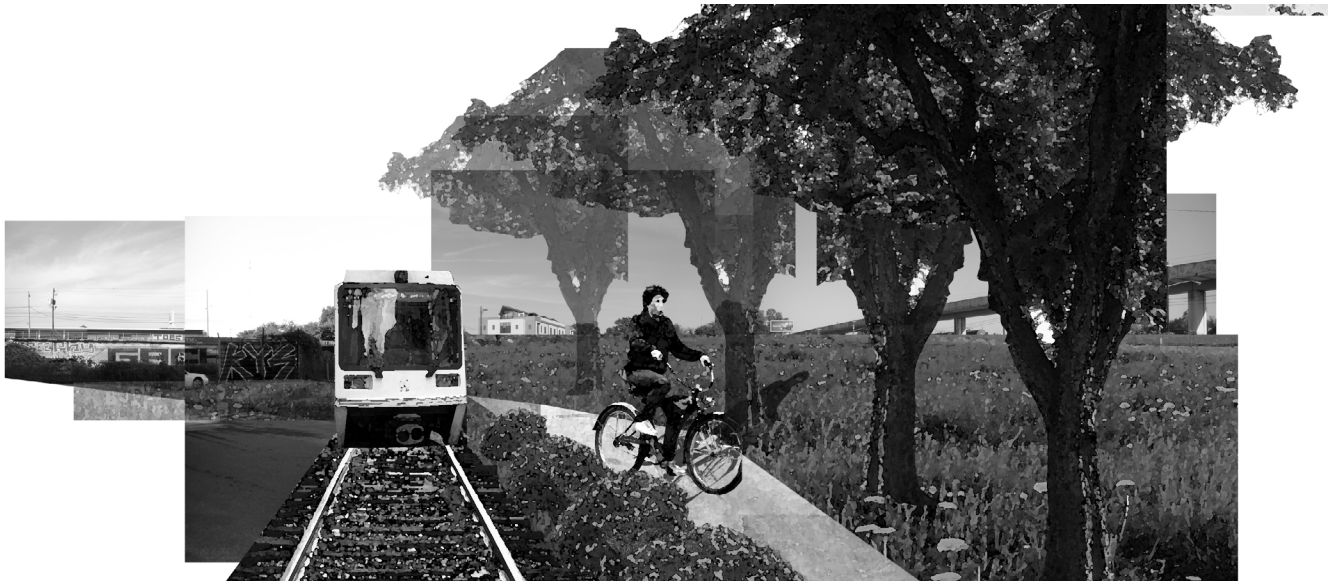
However, it is not the intent of this project to hand control of the landscape over to any of these user groups. Rather, this study is designed to determine what consequences the normative vs non-normative behavioral patterns might have in physical form over time.

The above image is a photographic montage taken from a similar angle as the study of sun and shadow manipulations at the south end of the site facing north. It serves as the baseline for the changing landscape.

rail + trail strategy

Above: The rail and trail strategy seeks to mimic a possible outcome of giving control of the landscape to the BeltLine organization, which might handle it in much the same way as it would with its other surrounding property. After the tracks are laid and the sidewalk poured, rhythmic planting and maintenance would likely occur.

Below: As the space matures, it would begin to feel more comfortable to users of the trail, due to the organization of the space, as well as the size, shape, and maturity of the plant community. It would, in other words, assume a human scale and would foster activities such as running, bicycling, and sightseeing.



Above: As the landscape matures, one likely outcome is the park-like feeling of the open landscape to the east of the tracks. A meadow might arise, inviting such activities as neighborhood sports or picnicking. This strategy is played out like this to discover what benefits such a strategy might give to the landscape, although this outcome stands in direct opposition to the stated goals of this project. It is the assumption, then, that the activities noted above might arise in the other locations along the line.

industrial strategy

Above: The industrial strategy gives control of the landscape to the neighboring Hulsey cargo yard. It is thus used in various capacities related to the operation of the yard. In this example, the landscape is used as a storage yard for the materials passing through Atlanta. Trains would be unloaded and the materials hauled across Dekalb Ave. to be stored.

Below: Because the storage of many of these material elements does not fundamentally require the physical alteration of the landscape (although it might cause an alteration), these materials would be moved and swapped as needed. Some, however, might require structures for storage, such as the silo pictured below.

Above: The unaltered portions of the site could just as easily be used for other functions such as worker and machinery parking. Permanent storage structures might remain due to the cost of building such infrastructure and the probability with which they will be used in the future.

Below: As heavy machinery traverses the site, it is clear that changes must be made (i.e. asphalt) and the ramifications of such actions would change topography, hydrology, vegetation growth, etc. In studying the industrial example, however, it is unclear exactly how the Hulsey yard organization would transport materials, machinery, and man-power across a busy avenue and elevated passenger train line, and whether or not storage space is necessary at all.

successive seeding strategy

Above: This strategy explores the changes to the landscape if, for instance, control is given to the city arborist organization. Initial planting would occur from seedlings to foster a specific site atmosphere.

Below: The seedlings (in addition to the seed bank already present in the soil) would give way to a less organized landscape, filled with plants clearly placed into this environment and those which have sprouted up from the soil, blurring the line between manicured, desired plants and weeds.

Above: As the plantings mature, preferential treatment would be given to those species likely to perform beneficial operations on the landscape, such as trees with dense root structures to prevent soil erosion and site runoff, as well as to those that perform aesthetic functions, marking the site as a clearly public property open for inhabitation.

Below: Within this hybrid planting matrix, some things would clearly emerge, such as pathway lines from the most traversed points of entry and exit, as well as areas of inhabitation. Such a strategy, however, limits site use to predominantly ecological functions.

transgressive strategy

Above: The transgressive strategy caters to a social appropriation of the space such that any behavior becomes plausible and permitted, even those that are prohibited elsewhere. This remains the truest to the operation of the current site, which includes activity by nomadic migrants and gang related activity.

Below: These actions will likely reappropriate any site additions to match this social organizing strategy so that installations such as orienting markers, signs, art pieces, train stops, etc. might be altered to rearranged according to anyone's will.

Above: Covered structures might be used for makeshift shelters or stations of panhandling, while the landscape itself might be dug up or altered as any passerby wishes.

Below: Such operations would be cumulative, so that graffiti builds up, trash accumulates, and pits and piles form. This strategy offers a dynamic that engenders emotional responses from users most closely related to the goals of this project, as well as prevents the site from reaching a final state of maturation, providing historic preservation only to the processes of re-appropriation rather than specific objects.

chapter 5:
design formulation

Hannah Höch: fission revisited

Hannah Höch, known primarily for her early artwork emanating from the Dada movement, was one of the most prolific artists working in the realm of photomontages. Procuring material for her work almost exclusively from current event German periodicals, she rearranged and retold modern stories of civilization through war, social, and technological changes and advances.

Her career spanned over half a century, and with that, her photomontages transformed. She produced pieces that advanced Dada, surrealism, abstract art, and even studied industry and social change. The one unifying factor throughout her career and research interests, however, is her devotion to method. By ravenously procuring imagery material, she was able to keep on hand the raw materials to create anything imaginable (Makela & Boswell 1996).

She would take the images, remove them from their current contexts (within the magazine or newspaper), and rearrange them onto canvases and boards, fusing them into entirely new creations. This is Claude Levi-Strauss in its purest form. Mechanically fissioning images from text and elements from images and arranging them into new compositions, she performed a singular art form, relying far more on the found elements to tell stories than a painter would rely on the paint to tell a story, for instance.

Consequently, she was able to create photomontages that enhanced an aspect of the affect of the images with which she was working. Rather than creating something entirely new, she told stories with actual material, completely dependent on the social, environmental, technological, and artistic communities within which she lived and worked.

Because this method so closely mimics the philosophy of Levi-Strauss, I have chosen photomontage as the principle mechanism to move forward the design strategy. After studying the site in terms of the palettes and historic and current communities discussed above, I chose Höch as a case study for method. It is clear that her technique and ability became more complex and advanced over the course of her career, in which time she could weave multiple stories out of seemingly almost irrelevant material. Because I have not practiced the photomontage technique for this length of time, it is necessary to keep the fission and fusion manipulations as simple as possible to maintain a methodical course of action.

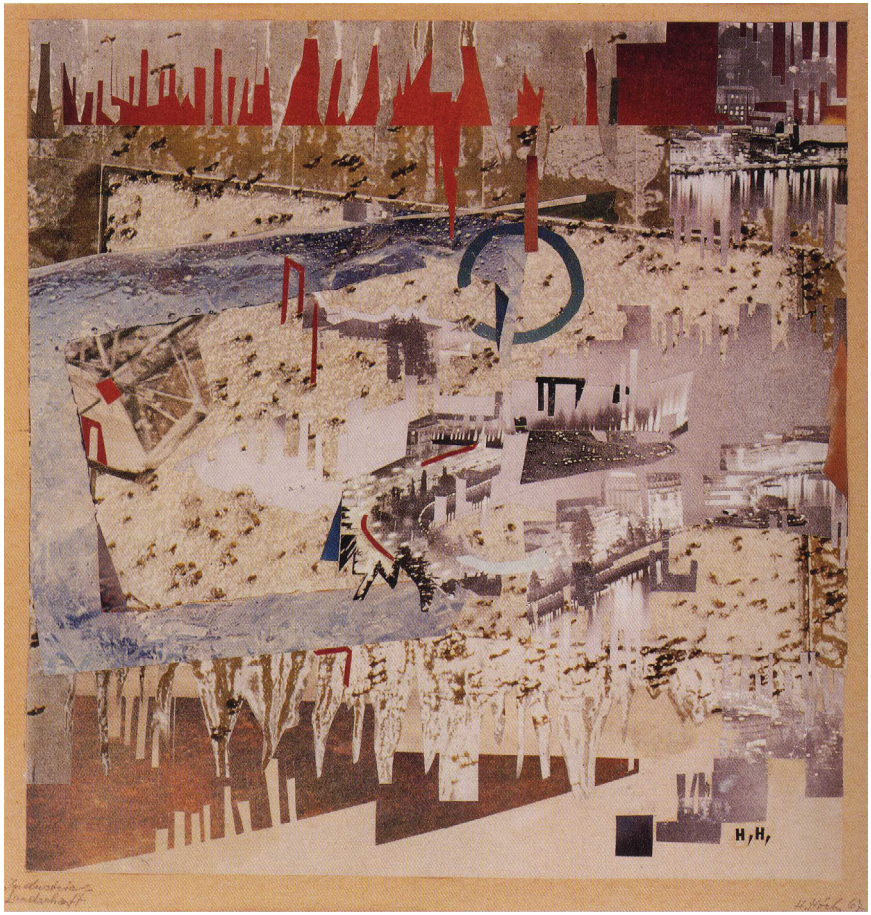
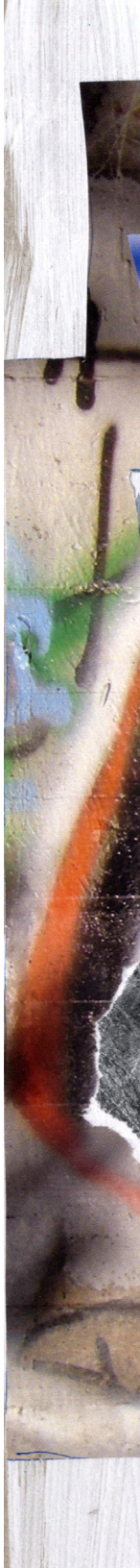


image courtesy of Makela Walker Art Center

Figure 8. Industrielandschaft (Industrial Landscape). Höch's composition of this piece is one of her only landscape montages. It is compelling due to its range of depth. Unlike some of her work, this piece seems to draw from many different sources and represent a complex field of various operations, depicting plan, section, and perspective all in one. On further study, however, it becomes clear that she has used a cutout technique to imply busy skylines and industrial units on images that originally implied completely different meanings, such as the crowded aerial view of people that makes up most of the center of the montage. By doing this, she creates an atmosphere of bleak density and mechanized production from images of people and water, among other things.

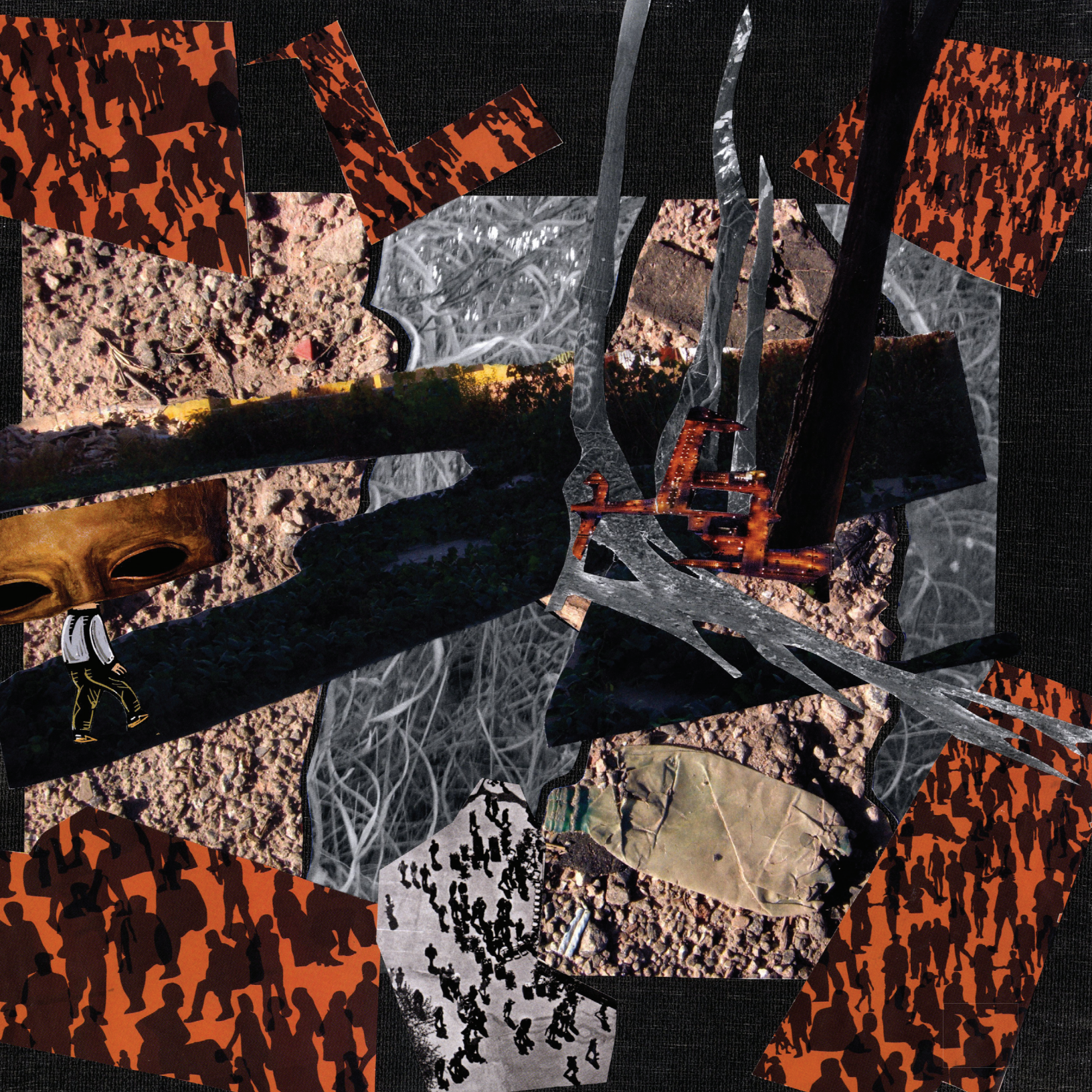
This set of four montages is the first attempt to delve into the world of photomontage to represent the design site. For a material base, I gathered printed photographs from my visits there, as well as magazines and other printed media. There were no rules in this process of creation. I was only interested in the processes of cutting, rearranging, and placing pieces of images to create new ideas. I did however, make an attempt to create montages in the form of different modes of representation.

Here, for instance, I chose plan view as the representational mode. Out of a photograph of a wall of graffiti, I cut the outline of the site and infrastructural movement routes around the site. The tarnished, worked-over conglomeration of colors, sights, and meanings becomes one thing when applied to this surrounding field relationship. On top of this I placed an over-emphasized pool of water, wrought with pollution and overgrowth, with its source of infiltration and a drainage valve in the center. I was particularly interested in the juxtaposition of the strategies of fission: the pool is torn out while the site edges are carefully cut.



This photomontage attempts to create a plan-perspective hybrid, exploring simultaneously the themes of ecology and sociology. While the ground plane is constructed of rock, pebbles, debris, and grasses, clear pathways are installed, leading visitors to a dense inner grove, which is lit from the ground up with a scheme mimicking the street layout of the city.

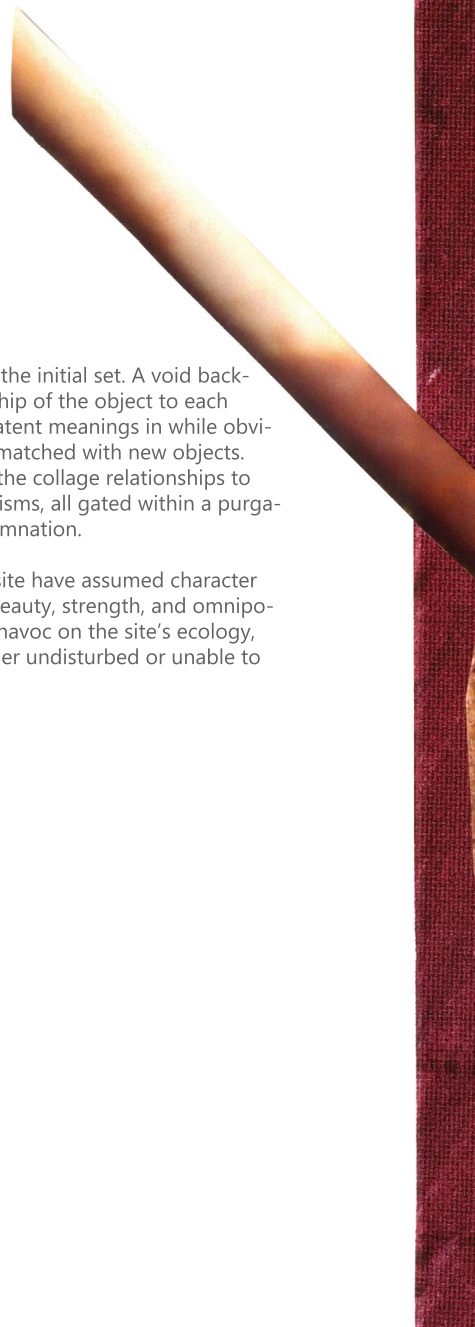
Elements are intentionally oversized and undersized, adding to the mystique of the scenographic arrangement. Additionally, while there are many people shown in the image, the vast majority of them gather on the edges of this landscape, remaining faceless and nameless either too afraid, unimpressed, or otherwise occupied to enter. One person, however, is immensely intrigued by the affect generated and must find out what is hiding in the grove.



Here I seek to explore the relationship of the foreground to the background, as well as viewer orientation. Rising into view at the bottom is a person peering off into the distance of the landscape. Opposite her is a clear pathway leading to the horizon, while the murky status of the remainder of the foreground remains unclear and foreboding.

Immediately behind this sit an oversized flower covered in dew and an inverted tree trunk. It is impossible to determine whether or not the tree grows from some unseen destination or whether it has been intentionally placed here and whether its graffiti has come before or after its possible demise.

In the center of the image, clouding the horizon, is a formation of stalactites and stalagmites, representing the rising ground plane meeting a downward infiltration of infrastructural components and the no-man's-land it created in between.



This photomontage completes the initial set. A void background heightens the relationship of the object to each other, allowing them to bring latent meanings in while obviously forming new ones when matched with new objects. Restrictive color palette forces the collage relationships to focus on simple fusion mechanisms, all gated within a purgatory of confinement and condemnation.

Rusty railroad spikes from the site have assumed character and personality, representing beauty, strength, and omnipotence. Industrial debris wreaks havoc on the site's ecology, while the characters watch, either undisturbed or unable to aid in the site's rehabilitation.

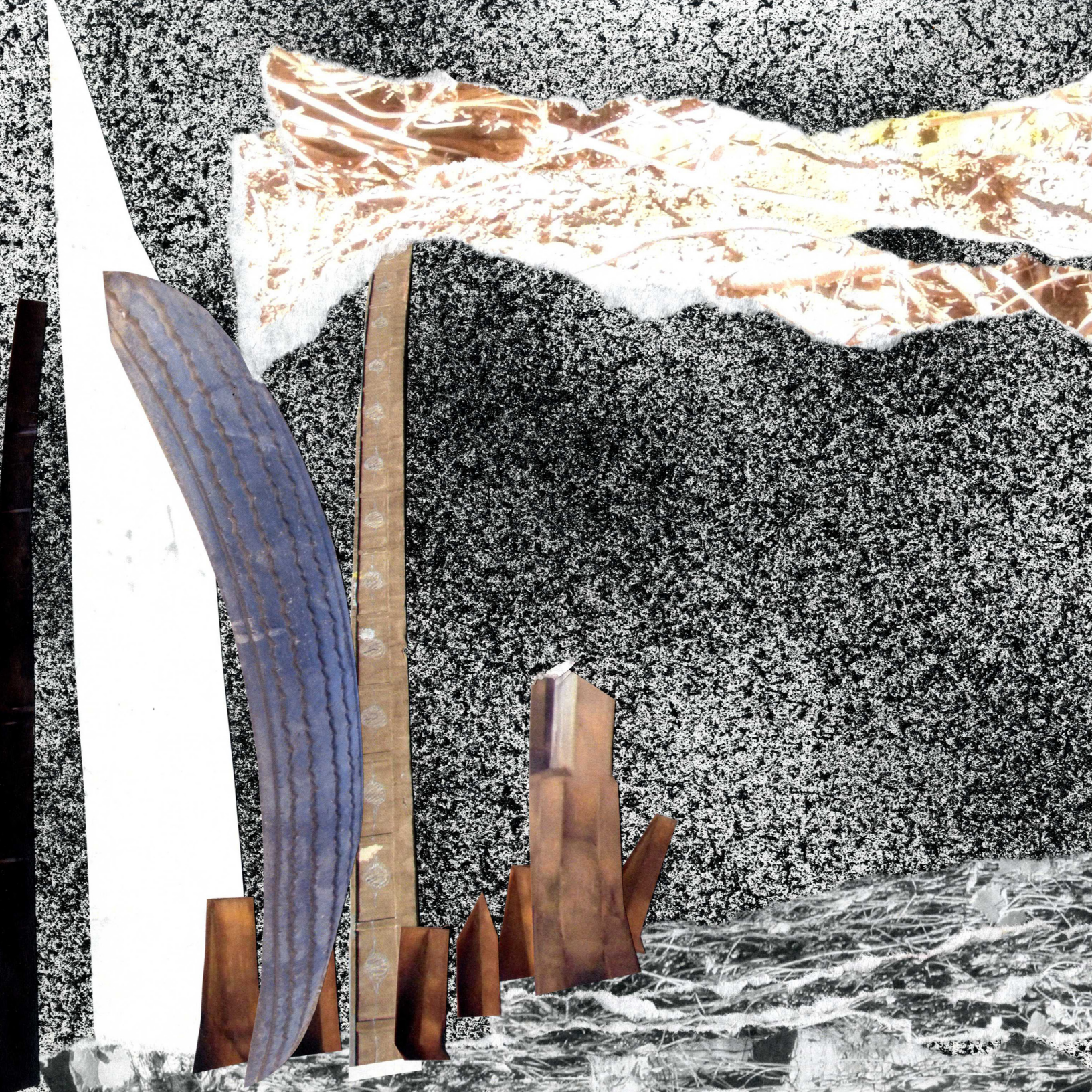
D'GEL
CABLE GEL
SOLVENT WIPE

The next four montages comprise an effort to extend the exploratory mechanisms of the previous set. To do this, a set of very simple rules was established to begin to ground the collages in a way that could lead to a design parameter. Thus, they serve as a crucial link between abstract exploration and a series of drawings that fit into the representational form landscape architect's frequently create: plan, section, perspective, etc. A careful analysis of Höch's work reveals that over her career, she progressed into making more and more complicated collages, out of which her own rule making decisions can be picked up. This stands in contrast to her earliest work, where the rules seem to be very simple. The four collages I have created here mimic the simplistic rule base of Höch's early work in order to most clearly establish a link between abstract collage making and a set of design proposals. In this series, the collages must have been created from photographs only taken from the site. They must also be organized in such a way that the organizational structure is clear. To accomplish this, I made all of the collages in either plan or section format.

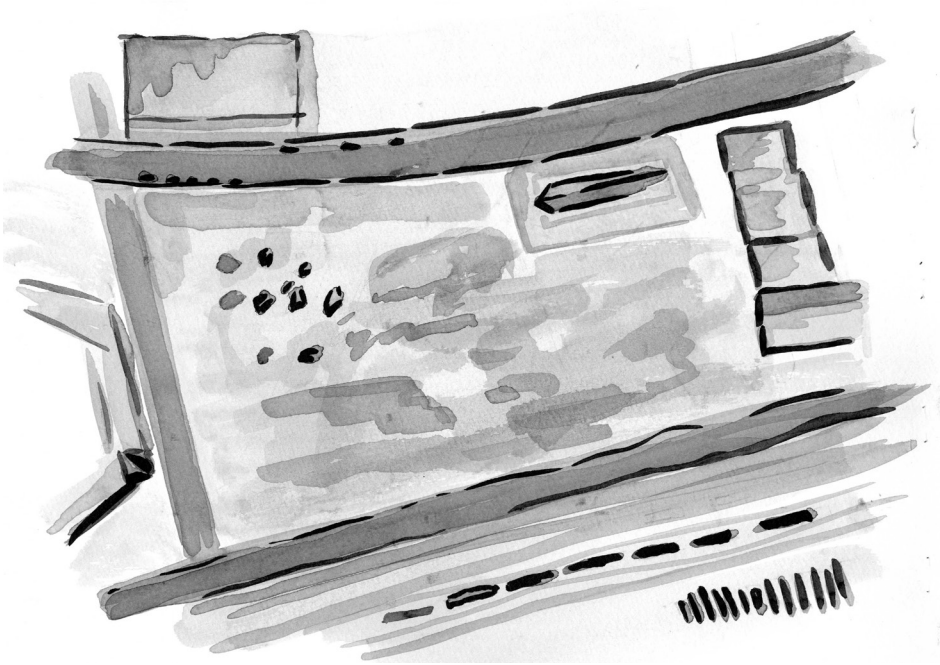
Here, the plan format lends example of possible pathways around objects, or zones of differing materiality. These pathways intersect at both orthogonal and non-orthogonal angles. In critiquing this collage in terms of how the intended affect is established, the seeming randomness of the spatial format of the objects in relation to the field of pathways suggests a mild chaos that is desirable. However, the elements themselves and the shape and size of the pathways seem too detracted and random to imply a causal design strategy.

Here, a plan is set on a void background. This strategy diminishes the relative importance of the ground plane and instead heightens the intensity and relationships among the field elements. The metal wall is cut to make a platform, possibly for the purpose of the train stop. The rock slabs are removed and manipulated to suggest both a site pathway and a pile of rubble which simultaneously seems out of place and perfect for a site like this, leaving the user wondering in what state of construction or completion the site lives. The pool of slimy water is moved away from the other elements to make it a more formidable, stand alone object, while the site vegetation is arranged in clear strips across the landscape, between which users must navigate. They are given the most importance however, forcing all other elements to bend to their rules. The growth springs forth from the metal platform, extends into the pool, and clambers over the rocks. The resulting affective relationship is more successful than the previous collage, in part because it has been simplified even more into just a few elements, and also because the strategy in which it was laid out and that which it implies for design is much clearer. In addition, the resulting mental imagery of this collage suggests an almost lost or forgotten landscape in a state of disrepair, save for the very obvious strips of "weeds" laid upon the ground plane and other elements, forming an affective relationship of wonder, confusion, vague, and possibly danger.

This montage uses aspects of perspective in a sectional format. Against another void background, the thick foreground brush on one side is becomes vertically dominated by a hulking obelisk of a glass bottle. The bridge forms a canopy overhead to complement the dark underbrush drawing one's attention to the created frame, depicting nothing at all, instead pushing focus back to the edges of the piece. The theme of scale is seen again in the bridge pillars, with fencing of both mesh and thick cables covering the openings between the concrete. In front of this, stalagmites of bark spring forth from the ground, seemingly dripped from somewhere just out of the picture. The effect of the piece relies heavily on this sense of over-scaled objects and muted color palette, on the dark and dense versus the single and clustered shown in the spotlight, on the smooth texture of concrete and glass juxtaposed against the thicket of brush and rough bark and cables. Because these objects arise out of the vague ground plane and void background, they serve as pillars of superhuman scale, as exemplars of craft and biological growth processes, and as beacons in the sky to this eerie landscape.



The final photomontage in this series is also depicted in the form of section. It perhaps furthers the previous collage in terms of organization and construction, emphasizing the importance of vertical elements jutting out from the ground plane. Here, the color palette is focused almost entirely on the vertical elements. The black and white nature of the sloping ground plane and the infinite background cause them to blend into one field upon which clear objects are placed, again serving as beacons of gritty urban symbolism thrusting into the sky. The elements themselves are made of different materials, colors, sizes, and forms, creating a loosely clustered connection between them. One can imagine weaving through these pieces which at one point forms a portal with a constructed canopy of limbs and branches woven together like the constituents of a bird's nest. Furthermore, because the vertical columns can be erected with site rubble, the arrangement is authentic, unlike that of the previous collage, in which oversized statue-like pieces would have to be created and placed. This collage remains truest to the concept of semantic fission, in which only rearrangement strategies of earth, elements, colors, and textures create an organized yet unclear landscape welcoming personal interaction and interpretation.



from montage to paint

Moving from collage into more concrete and legible methods of spatial representation, ink wash was used to depict the set of final drawings. They fall in line with the project goals of methodical affective representation while allow for a more detailed understanding of site design initiatives than do montages.

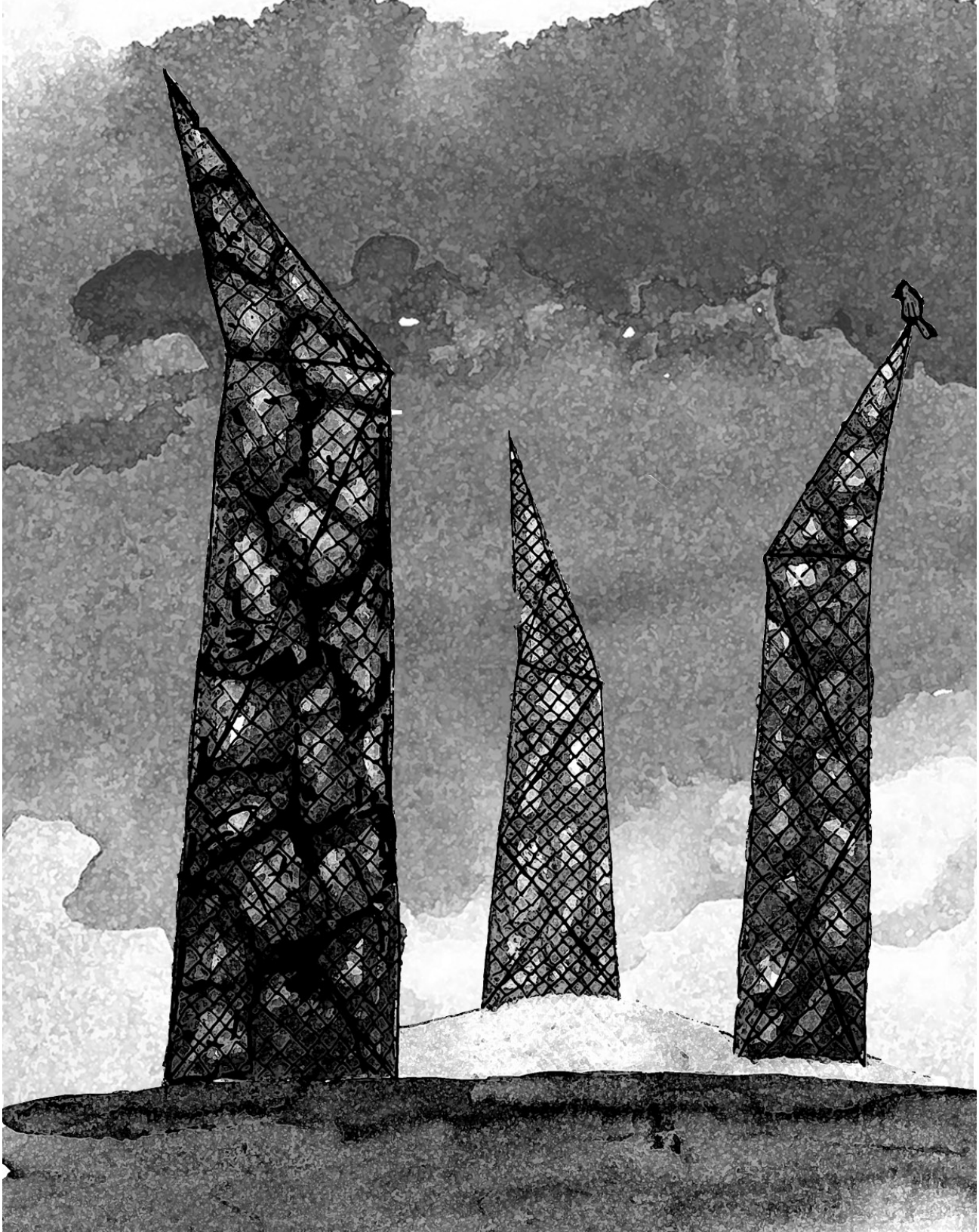
The three images shown here represent the initial transition into this form of media, similar to the first set of montages. Again they do not follow any organizational rule pattern, although they very clearly draw from elements gleaned from the montages. Specifically, the plan is meant to depict a murky field where water, plants, and soil blend together and shard-like columns protrude from the landscape.

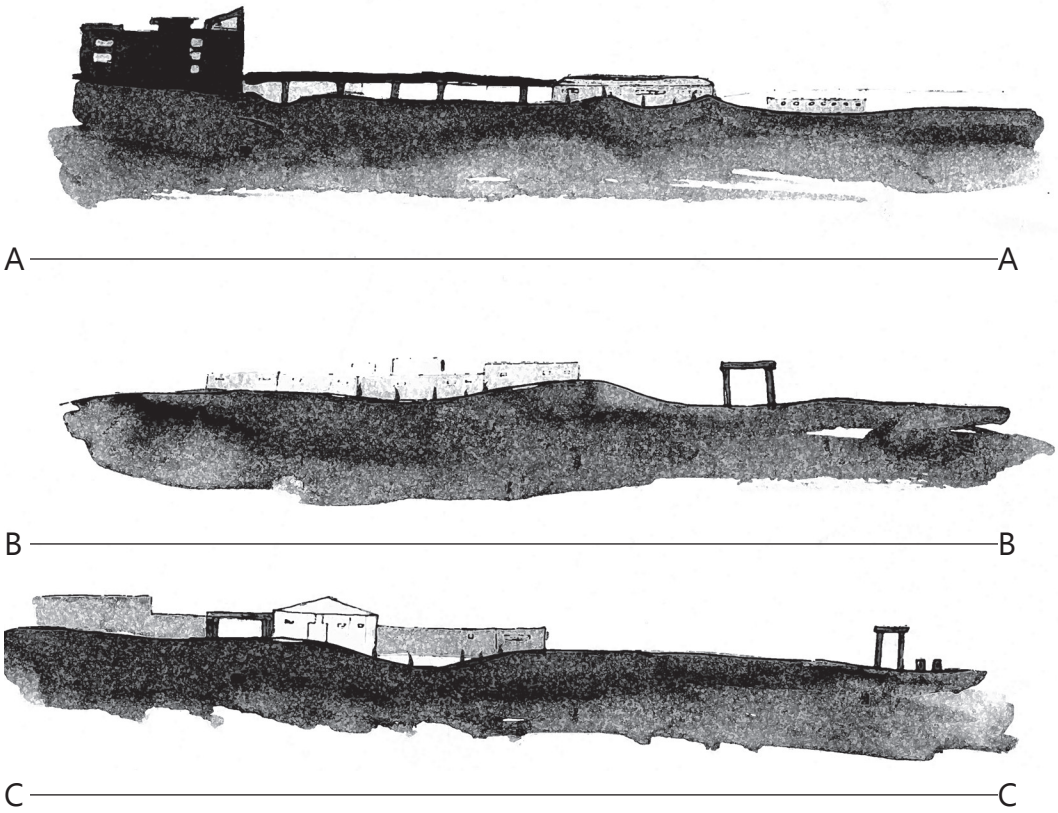
The perspectives to the right begin to flesh these mechanisms out, dealing with size, shape, and orientation of the columns to the grasses and water while framing specific views that site users might encounter.

Slowly, a more detailed plan rendition was formulated, adhering to a set of rules of spatial organization. For example, the pool of water sits on the west side of the site. Out of the concrete slab that currently occupies this location, rock and rubble is removed to form the columns. Soil is also removed for site regrading, which is shown in the topographic plan above as well as the merged image to the right. The contours are measured in four foot increments, identifying large land formations and dips at the east end of the site. Vegetation responds to these topographical and hydrological conditions, creating the most diversity near these areas.

The light rail tracks sweep through the west portion of the site in respect of the historical preservation of their previous location. In his book, the Machine in the Garden (1964), Leo Marx explores the development of machine technology against the pastoral ideal of America. Probing deeper than the juxtaposition of machines in a pastoral environment, Marx touches on the psychological ramifications of such an action. He critiques the popular argument of achieving a common ground between this pastoral ideal and America as an industrial strength, seeking to contradict the urge for rural happiness and the desire for the benefits of living in a dense city. Here, the landscape design strategy rejects the park-like

environment that is being created elsewhere along the Belt-Line and gives power to the dynamism of the ecological and social possibilities that may spring forth from a site of such affect and responds to the grading plan. In addition, one maintenance strategy for the site dictates the clearing of the ground plane on a six-month basis, restricting the growth of trees in favor of a dense ground layer.

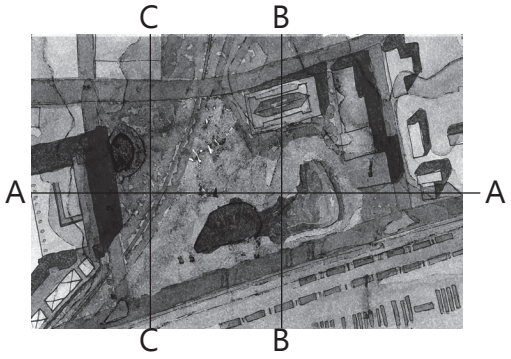


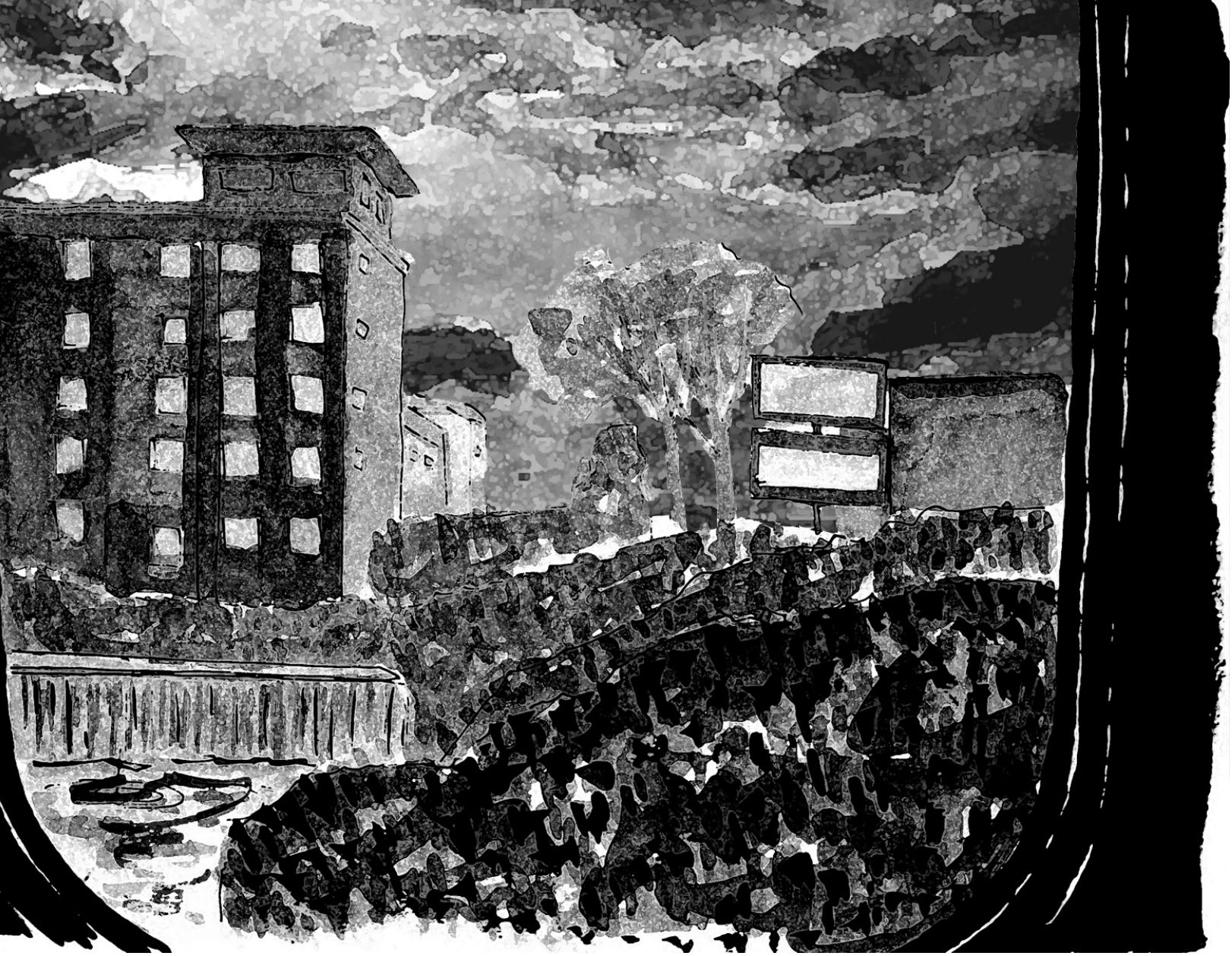


The plan also depicts the location of rubble pillars in relation to the tracks. It should be apparent that there is no train stop, forcing those curious enough to find their own way into this landscape, and keeping a distance between the train passengers and the pillars, the beacons of organization and intrigue in this otherwise vague, dynamic landscape.

The pillars themselves are constructed from the broken concrete removed to create the pool. The structures are formed by erecting rebar frames, wrapping them with the chain link that currently surrounds much of the site, and filling them with the pieces of concrete and debris.

The sections above cut through the site in both NS and EW directions, picking up the tracks, columns, pool, and hills with respect to the bridges and buildings.

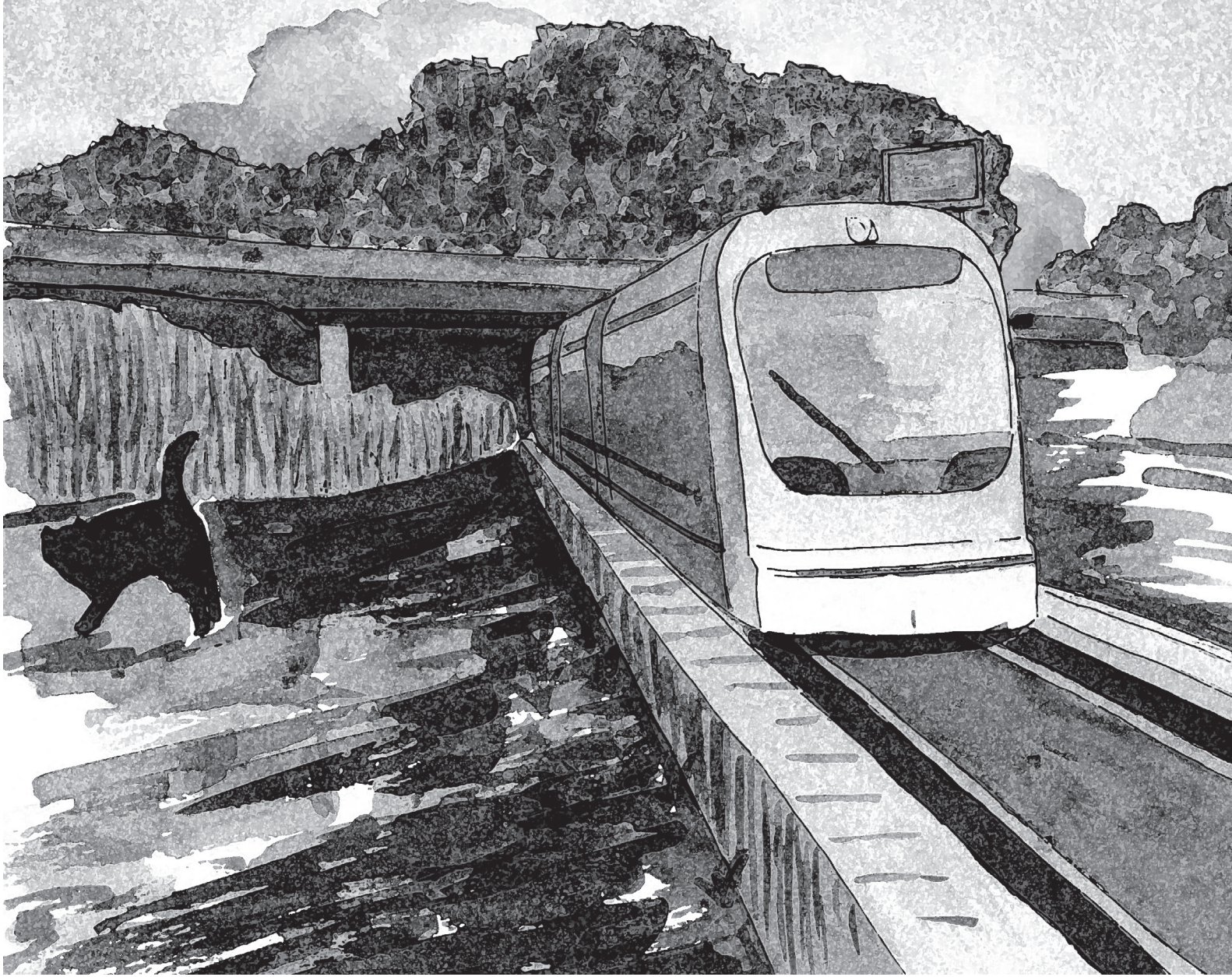




From the train, passengers would be exposed to two distinctive views. While traveling south, they would view to the west the pool at the concrete ledge, grassy embankment, and apartment complexes and industrial buildings in the background, as shown above.

To the east, the view would be of a receding mounded topography, overtaking the MARTA train line in the background, while the columns shoot out of the landscape in the middle ground, as seen on the right.

This detail of the ephemeral pool seeks to show that the process of concrete removal creates scars to the remaining ledge, partially overshadowed by the embankment and foliage. Also highlighted are potential ecological ramifications of creating such a space.



A detail of the train trecking through the landscape shows how it will interact with the ground plane. A concrete ledge raises the structure slightly, subtly differentiating it. Additionally, it is unlikely that the track pattern will mimic historic railroad tie formation, instead forming the structure out of concrete

conclusion and reflections

This endeavor began as an interest in a self-directed studio thesis engaging in infrastructure. Although it changed drastically throughout the course of the past ten months, the rigor of conducting this experiment did not waver. It took me into completely uncharted territory of which I was not even aware before the process began. Born out of this project, then, is not only a proposal for a specific site with respect to the infrastructural theme, but also an understanding of how to conduct research with unforeseen endings, allowing the findings to change the theoretical framework, research interests, and methodologies along the way to arrive at truly novel outcomes.

Once a site was found, it was the interest in the person-environment relationship that reshaped the chronology of the research questions as well as the procedures by which I progressed. Because of this, the methodology of designing this site differs drastically from the normative models of landscape architectural design. Because I completed the project as a thesis study, I was able to provide my own concerns and throw out those that I was less interested in.

The final drawings displayed in this book arise directly out of the methodological processes which led the research, both in terms of the theoretical framework and the representational method I set up from the beginning. They propose and depict often overlooked dynamic operations in vague landscapes. Social implications of the design proposal rely on the ability of user groups to re-appropriate the space for their own concerns. By advocating this strategy, the terrain of study frames the landscape against the backdrop of the BeltLine, its goals and objectives, adjacent parks, and the social, transportational, and ecological networks that are born of its existence. The historic preservation strategy of allowing changes to the study site to be brought about by necessity is held within the context of the pillars and their ability to convey these webs of networks as a single, necessary unit within the larger urban fabric.

Strengths of the project come from this alternative approach to landscape architectural design, ignoring past conventions in favor of the interests described throughout the book. Because of this, rigor was maintained throughout the process. Weaknesses arise, however, in response to these decisions and the strengths gained. For instance, I rejected clean drawings (as shown in the appendix) in favor of the somewhat more murky ink wash depictions. I could have taken these one or two steps further, had time permitted, but the effort to create such images was far more time consuming for me than the computer generated images that are common practice today. Other weaknesses include the decisions to largely ignore the interests of the BeltLine organization as well as the nomadic populations that currently use the site. Additionally, the project could have benefitted from a more thorough examination of the ecological growth of the site after implementation of the tracks and the pillars of concrete. Although these faults were somewhat intentional, they only occurred as a result of lack of more time. Should the project proceed in the future, these are the first things that would be revisited.

The success of the project is dependent on the extent to which the BeltLine light rail train is able to be reframed within the landscape, specifically how it merges with the dynamic ecology, sociological patterns of appropriation that arise, and the pillars of concrete and rubble. Additionally, this all needs to be visited in light of the remainder of the BeltLine.

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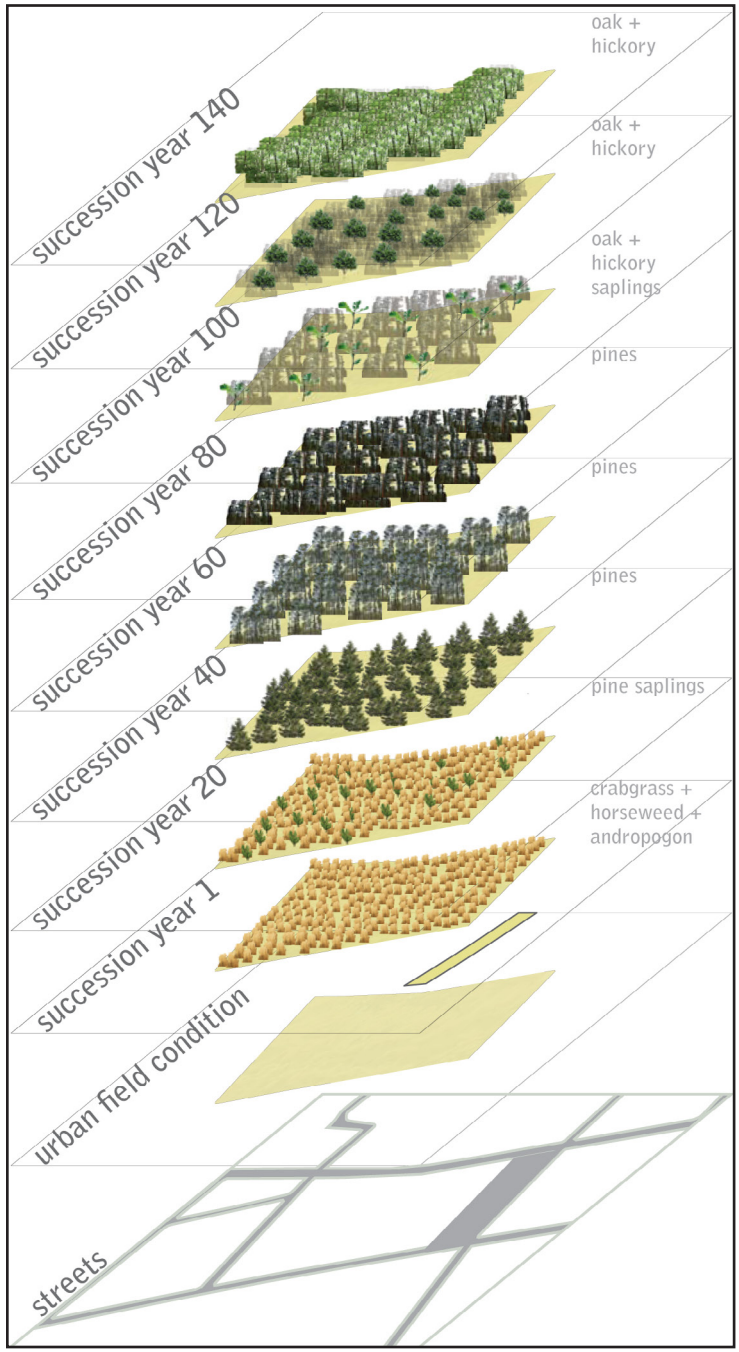
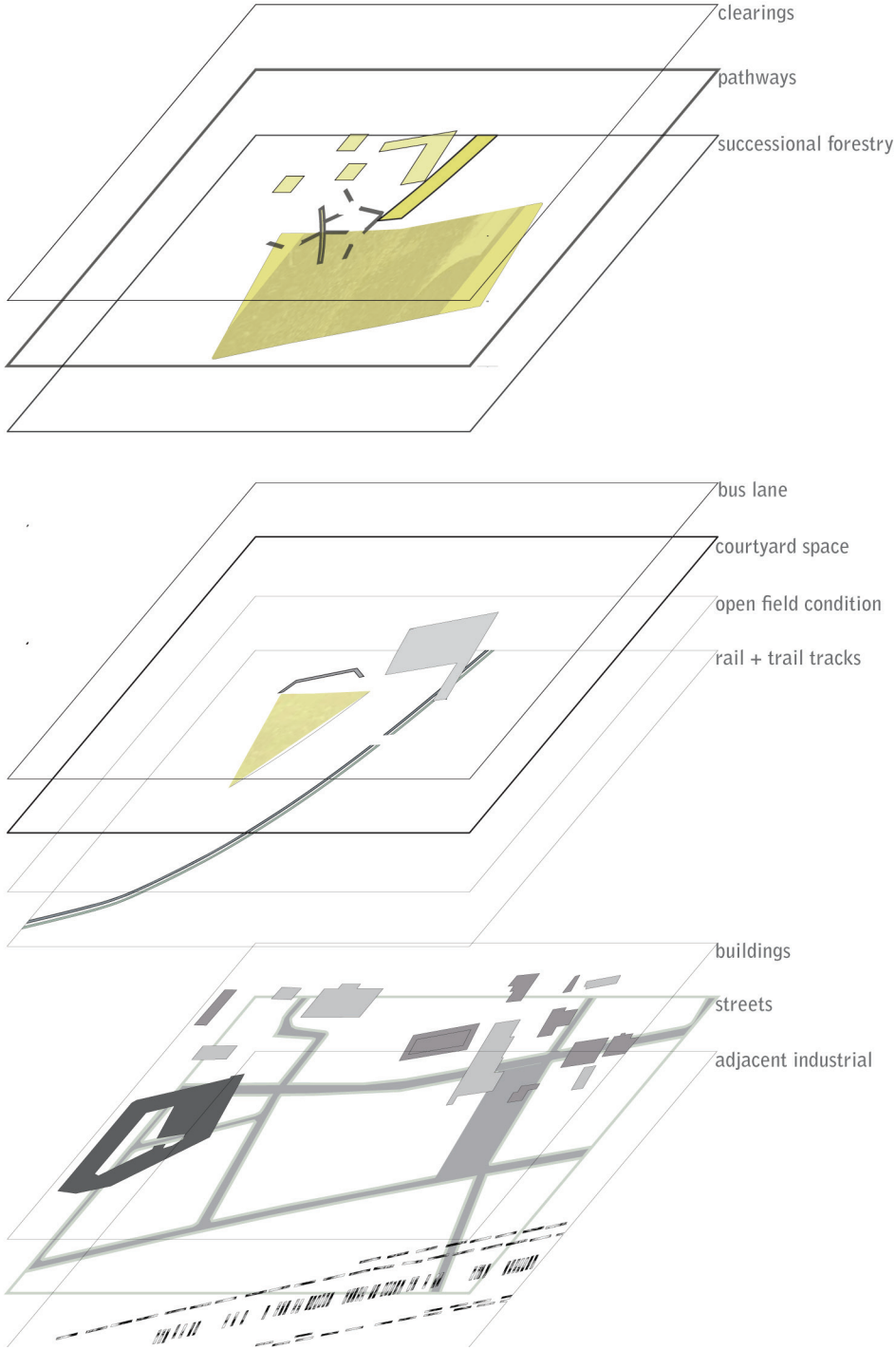
appendix:
rejected proposals

Along the course of the project, my initial reaction to the research presented above was to focus primarily on a ground-up approach to Atlanta's lack of grasp on historical preservation. Rather than stay true to the graphic style and rearrangement strategies that I have since committed to, I formulated a strategy that would allow the ruderal ecologies to become permanent. Specifically, this involves the succession of the site in terms of the most likely Georgian field species as well as the presence of any invasive species latent in the soil or any that would arrive in the future. The following graphics display this process. While interesting in their own right, they do not, upon careful reflection, meet the desired goals of this thesis project. They seem too focused on the possibilities of the non-normative behaviors that add to the affect of the site rather than the user-environment interpretive relationship. Consequently, they are shown here as an appendix for the failed (first round) final design strategy.

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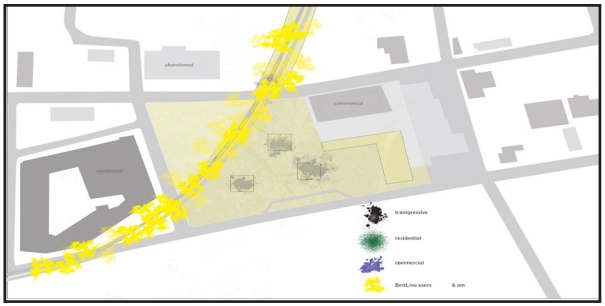
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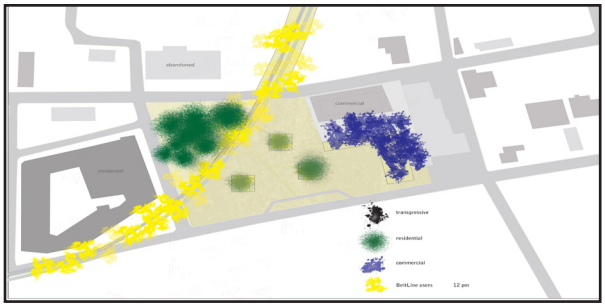
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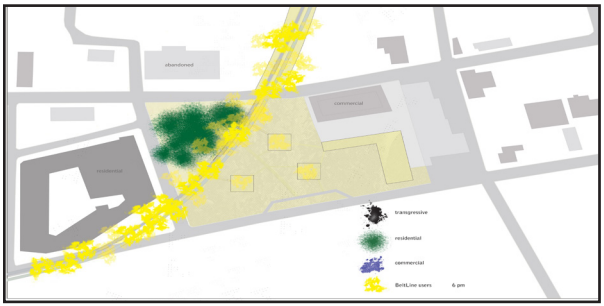
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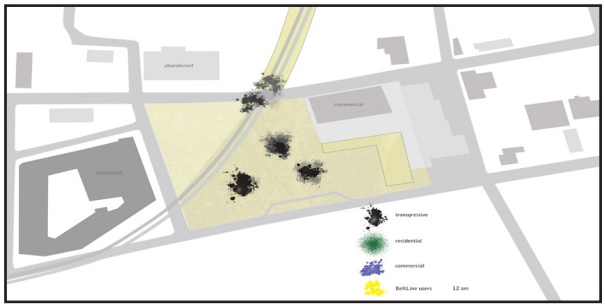
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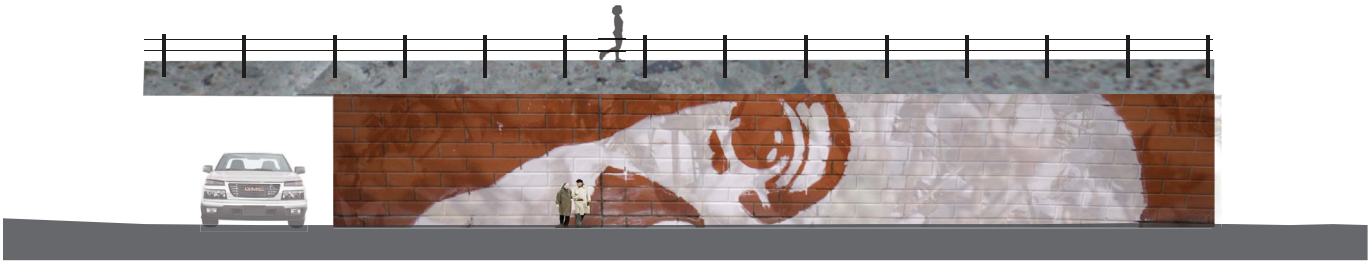
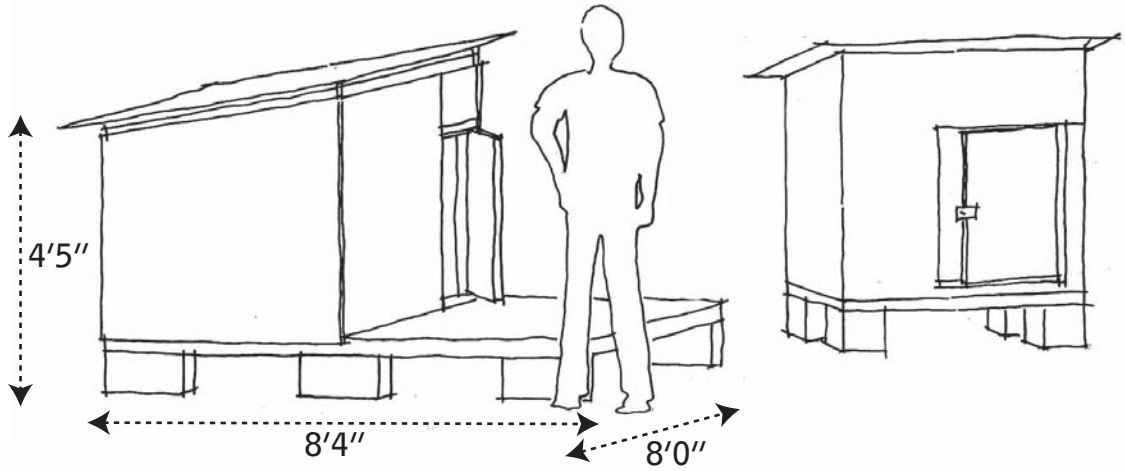
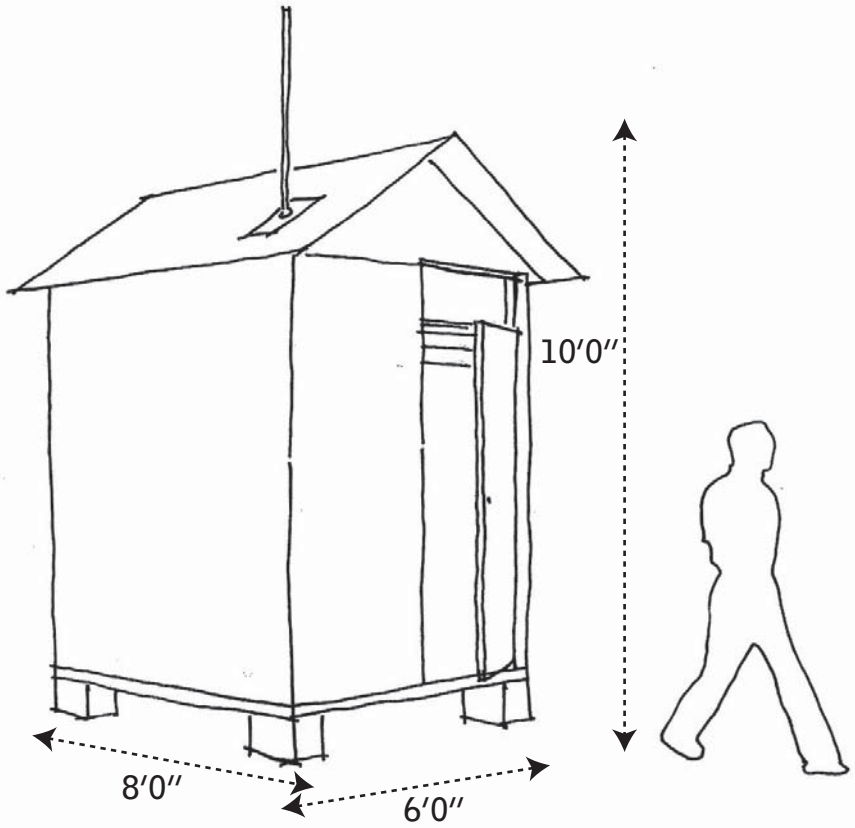






affordable (free) shelter

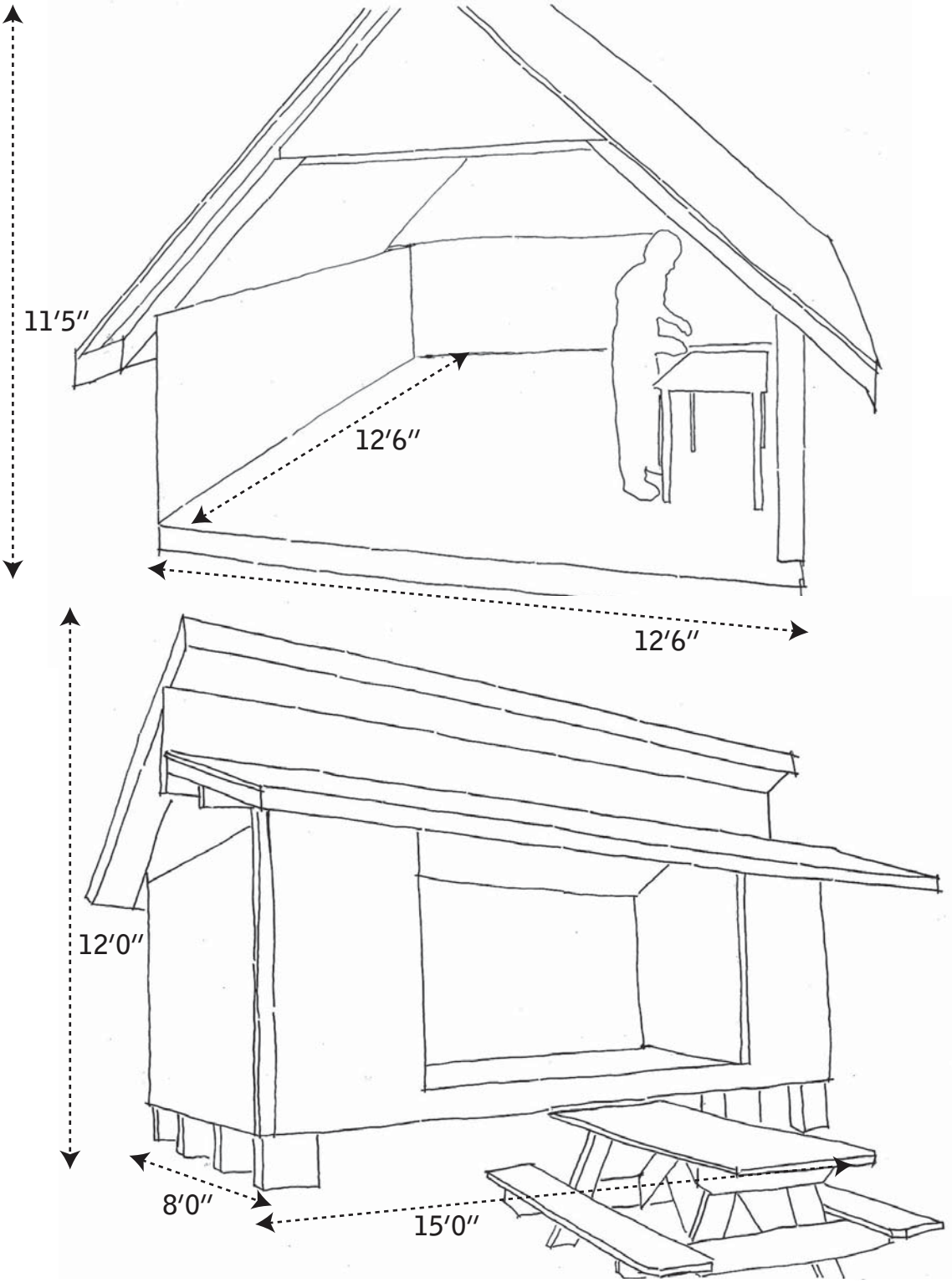
There are organizations like the Mad Housers of Atlanta that provide make-shift emergency shelters for those in need of a reliable place to sleep. Although they come in various forms and sizes, all provide amenities with one goal in mind: a first step of support from which people may begin to help themselves.

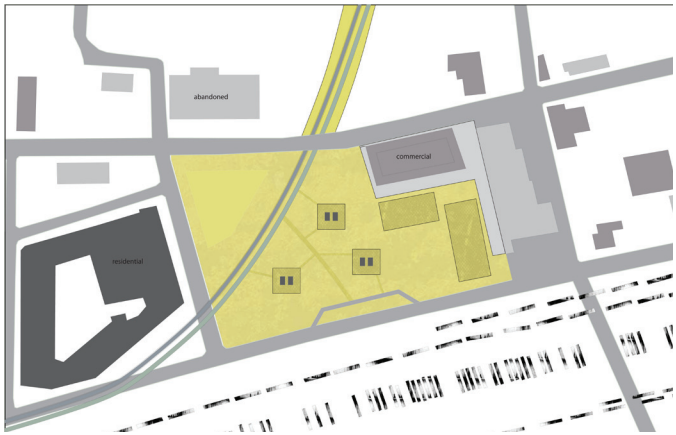
Not devised as a way to end homelessness, these huts simply offer established homeless or migratory camps a tool from which to operate.

backpacking shelter

Other types of primitive shelter include those found on many backpacking trails, such as these from the Appalachian Trail. Like the Mad Houser huts, they are designed with a specific clientele in mind. They do not, however, belong to a single person or group of people. Instead, they are used on a day-by-day basis and often require advance booking notice .

Because these shelters are also open, they provide a stronger sense of security to the passerby, and could be used for a variety of functions, not just shelter.

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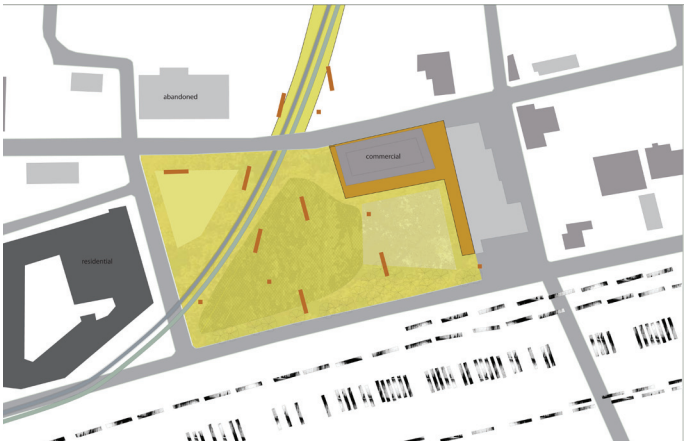
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courtyard space for art studio and corporate complex
unused rail carriages frame important views on site
storage zone for rail yard
lawn
till existing soil
populate historic rail line with fruit trees

courtyard space for art studio and corporate complex
urban junkyard
exibition space for artists
allow shops to develop and front BL
replicate existing ruderal ecology
through lawn and into junkyard

exhibition space for artist galleries
courtyard space for artstudio and corporate complex
install tree grid
stree commerce
urban detritus as art
lawn
tree grid breaks down

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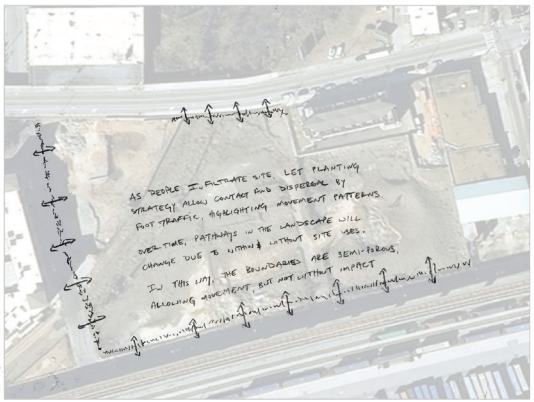
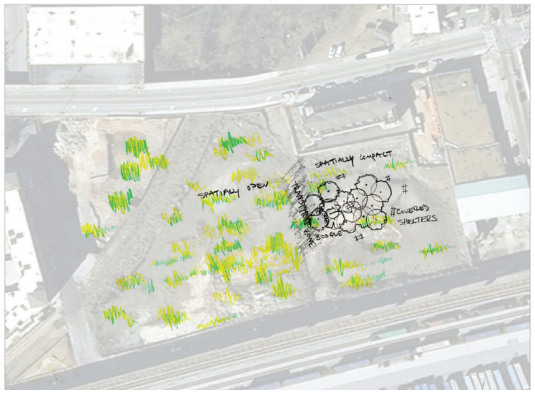
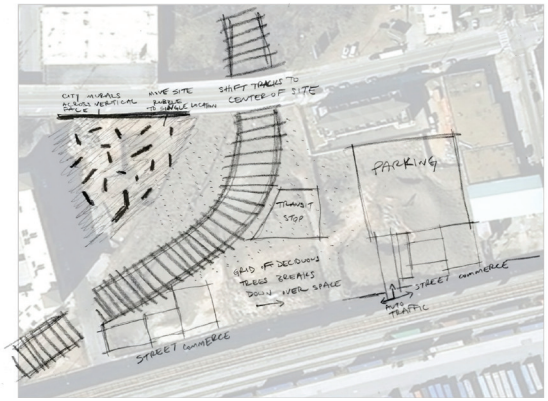
STRATEGY 1:
DISTURBANCE BY TRAIN MOVEMENT

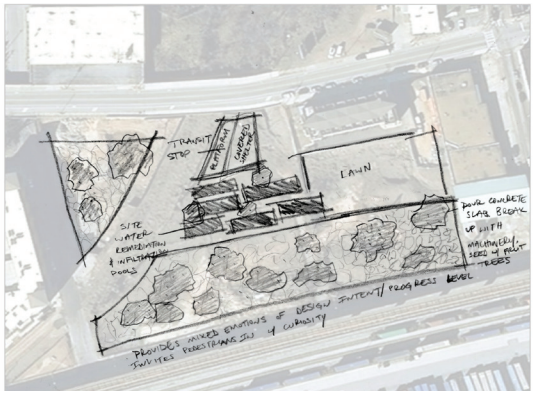


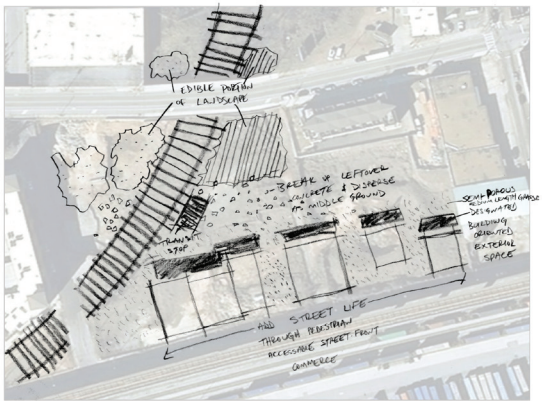
STRATEGY 2:
DISTURBANCE BY FOOT TRAFFIC

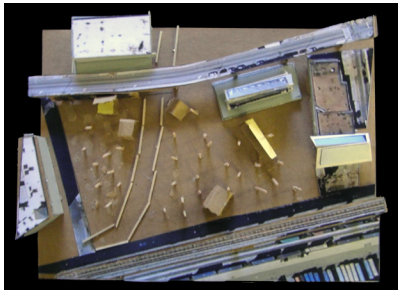
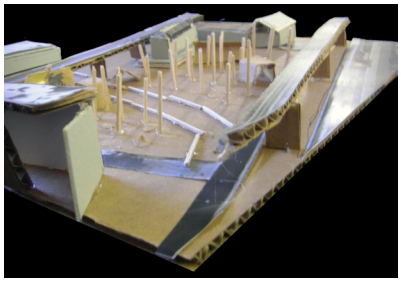
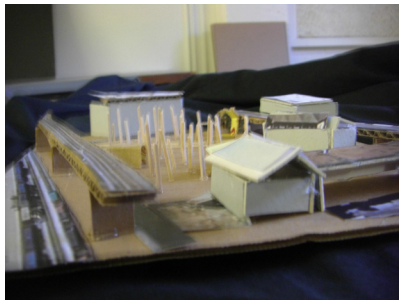
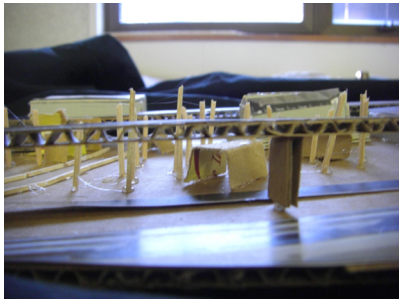
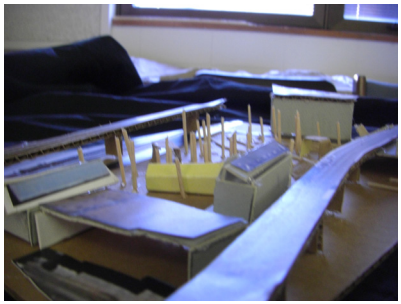
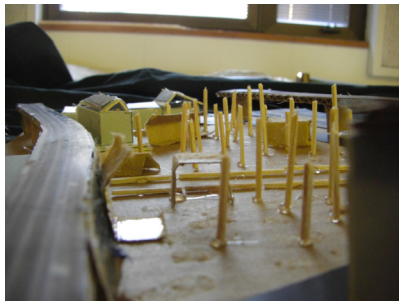
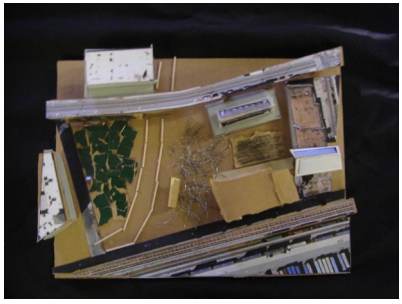
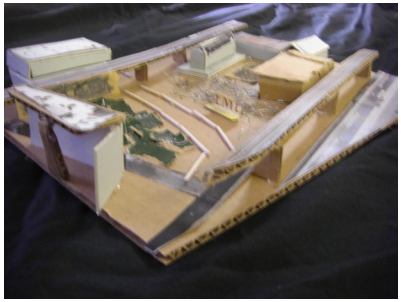
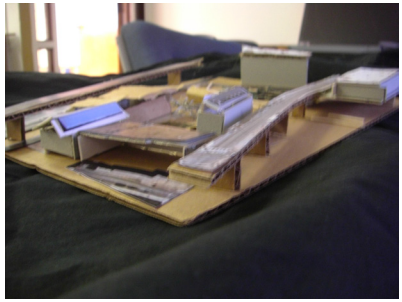
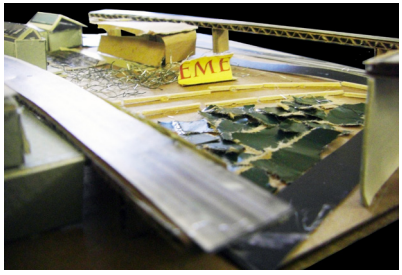
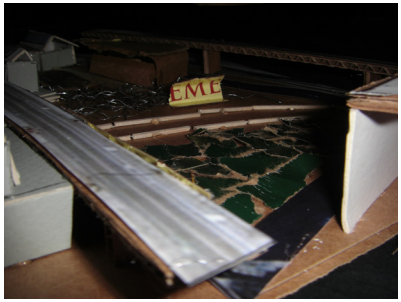


STRATEGY 3:
ALLOW PLANTS TO REDIRECT ACCORDING TO COMFORT & CONTESTATION







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