Tactics of Disappearance, Hiding in Plain Sight

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Tactics of Disappearance, Hiding in Plain Sight

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture
Harvard University Graduate School of Design, by

Celeste Martore

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
[Master of Architecture]

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(signature)  
Celeste Martore

[Student Name]  
[Thesis Advisor Name]

Andrew Witt, John May
TACTICS OF DISAPPEARANCE, HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

CELESTE MARTORE
master of architecture I
harvard university graduate school of design
advised by john may and andrew wit
FALL 2023
“Pitching” is a complete, localized act that turns an idea into reality. When applied to space, it describes the quick and temporary transformation of a ground for sleeping. “A pitch” is also the meaningful distance between various points, such as the high and low notes on a musical scale, and in architecture, the slope of a roof. When applied to space, “a pitch” is the active boundary of a sports arena or a field of play. In all its tenses, “pitch” overlays boundaries and points of reference onto existing space that would otherwise not relate to the body. For this thesis, “pitch” is a design tool that turns fiction into reality, providing an origin, or at the very least, a convenient point of reference.

Transforming an existing space without rebuilding or demolishing is a form of spatial resistance often used by nondominant groups to momentarily exist/survive/express joy/freedom within an adversarial landscape. Therefore, pitching is also a way to describe spatial resistance—exemplified by quilombos, and capoeira rodas—in which impermanence is not only a quality, but a strategy of subversion.

Within Los Angeles (a city that exists at the edge of reality in both cinema and urban sprawl), the LA River exists as a loose index of its natural form. What remains is a body of water cast in concrete. This thesis uses “pitch” as both a dimensioning tool and a geometric strategy to create spaces of freedom for water and people in the concrete container of the Los Angeles River. As a design tool, “pitch” suggests both an orientation and a temporal point of reference, recategorizing the river from an engineering project to an architecture project.
Typical trapezoidal channels have a bottom width of 200-400 feet and a top width of 400-800 feet with a depth of 30-35 feet (Tetra Tech 2002). There is typically a low flow channel embedded within the larger channel (Figure 3). Low flow channel dimensions in upstream reaches vary between 12-20 feet in width and are usually 1 foot in depth (Tetra Tech 2002). Typical rectangular channel widths range from 60-120 feet and typical depths are 12-20 feet. Low flow channel dimensions range between a width of 12-20 feet and a depth of 1-3.2 feet.
(TOP) PHOTO FROM LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS, 2022, accessed November 2023

(BOTTOM) PHOTO OF THE LA RIVER, COPYRIGHT SEPULVEDA BASIN WILDLIFE réserve above, the L.A. River looking north from the Burbank Bridge in the late 1970’s before giant reed took over., sepulvedabasinwildlife.org, accessed November, 2023
THE "RIVER"

The 2.4-mile reach (34°11'00.16"N, 118°30'36.63"W downstream to 34°10'00.63"N, 118°28'25.44"W) within the Sepulveda Basin, a 2,150-acre flood control facility constructed in the upper watershed, that is designed to collect, retain, and release floodwaters during major storms. The Sepulveda Basin flood channel is unlined and soft-bottomed which allows the growth of dense riparian and wetland vegetation. Sloped channel banks consist of either grouted rip-rap or soil and vegetation.

July 1, 2010
THE “FLOOD CHANNEL”
TO PRODUCE PARADISE, YOU HAVE TO ADD WATER

As this architecture shows, the mixture of Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon traditions could have provided the basis for an interesting culture, even if its economic basis had remained agrarian. But the Yankees were coming because they knew a better trick with land than...
so, LOS ANGELES BECAME A CITY OF PRIVATE POOLS
AND HYPER ISOLATION
AND NOW, EXTREME HEAT

Nearly one million people live within one mile of the LA River, and nearly half of Los Angeles County residents live within the river’s watershed. More impressively, more than a third of California’s live within a one-hour drive of the river. Channelized to protect land and property from flooding during the late-19th through mid-20th centuries and continuing to serve flood-risk-management purposes today, the LA River has largely been separated from our social, cultural, and ecological communities. While fragmented jurisdictions, land ownership, and funding present hurdles in rethinking the LA River, the LA River Master Plan seeks to build on prior and current planning efforts to continue to reimage the LA River from a single-use corridor to a tangible, multi-benefit resource for the communities of LA County. The LA River right-of-way includes over 2,300 acres of primarily publicly owned land that can greatly benefit the communities near the river. The Plan recognizes the need for resilient

Extreme heat

California is working on solutions to worsening climate change. Will they be enough?

Perhaps the most devastating impact of a warming planet can be seen in extreme heat events. California suffered its worst heat wave ever less than a year ago, and the state’s six warmest years have all occurred since 2014.

A 2011 investigation published by the Los Angeles Times found that California chronically undercounts heat-related deaths. In Los Angeles, extreme heat is the city’s biggest climate threat and greatest cause of climate-related deaths and hospital visits.

By 2050, daily maximum average temperatures in California are expected to rise by 4.4 to 5.8 degrees, and heat waves in cities could cause two to three times more heat-related deaths.
WHAT IS A NEW PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE?
It's raining in England, yet all England is outdoors. Why? There is a soccer match at Wembley. As in all great sport spectacles, the inaugurating ritual is observed with great formality. At certain periods, in certain societies, the theater has had a major social function: it collected the entire city within a shared experience: the knowledge of its own passions. Today it is sport that in its way performs this function. Except that the city has enlarged: it is no longer a town, it is a country, often
Remember in soccer,
Or in capoeira,
Or in any container of moving precision parts,
When forced to tighten the boundary of play
I would often think
We all thought to ourselves
How is this gonna work?
Perhaps the truly fearless
Relished in the constriction.
Before long, so did I.
With open fields you can run
But in the tight circle,
You have to weave.

(words) “THE MAGIC OF THE SQUEEZE” BY LUCA SMITH SENISE overlaid
(photo) LEONARDO FINOTTI “FUTEBOL: URBAN EUPHORIA IN BRAZIL” 2014
Can we remove the concrete?

Many have asked if we can remove the concrete from the LA River to return it to a more naturalized river. Because a more naturalized river requires a much wider flow path than the existing channel allows, it is not feasible to remove the concrete from the LA River without causing significant negative impacts to communities and local culture. Without displacing hundreds of miles of transportation routes and utility corridors, thousands of businesses, and potentially hundreds of thousands of residents, removal of concrete is difficult to accomplish. Additionally, climate change poses future uncertainty, so we need to maintain the existing capacity of the channel while also finding ways to increase capacity where the channel is undersized. As such, the LA River Master Plan does not pursue a strategy of massive concrete removal and community displacement as other goals would be supplanted by this singular strategy. Instead, the Master Plan seeks to find areas where natural ecosystems can exist while maintaining flood risk management and retaining river adjacent communities, culture, infrastructure, and amenities.
(L) CONCRETE MONOLITH NEGATIVE BECOMES HOT TUB IN THE CONCRETE RIVER BASIN

(R) DIMENSIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF 3" IN ARCHITECTURE
3 PLANS
(L) EXISTING RIVER + RIVER BED
(C) RIVER, RIVER BED + 3'X3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS REMOVED
(R) SOCCER FIELD BETWEEN CONCRETE REMOVAL
SECTION OF THE CONCRETE RIVER BED WITH 3X3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS REMOVED
SHADOW AS SHELTER
DIPTYCH, AXONOMETRIC OF THE LA RIVER (L) WITH CONCRETE REMOVED AND FORMED INTO ROOF (R)
ACCUMULATION OF 3'x3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS
(L) 1/2-SCALE MOCK-UP OF ROOF ASSEMBLY
(R) FULL-SCALE MOCK UP OF 3'X3' SQUARE
RIVER ROOF SKETCH MODEL
DIAGRAM OF VARIABLE ROOF SUSPENSION
168 RELOCATED CONCRETE MONOLITHS 3X3'

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STRUCTURE