

**No Longer Urban,
Can't Be Rural,
Definitely Not Suburban:**

The Experience Of Detroit

Karin Jane Hostettler | Thesis 2019

Remembering the past and looking towards the future, performance and agriculture industries collaborate to form a new town center, unified under a single roof as means of redefining the economic geography of Detroit.

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“Speramus meliora; resurgent cineribus”

we hope for better days; it shall rise from the ashes

-motto of Detroit

abstract

Detroit is a city of makers, dreamers and doers. When pushed to the brink the city does not step down, but instead continues to fight through grassroots movements, community advocates and neighborhood innovators. In this way Detroit has regained notoriety, not through corporate industry, banking or sports, but through those residents who have put their own difficulties aside for the betterment of their communities. However, the current economic and social developments in the city are centered around the downtown core of posterity, ignoring the work done by those individuals within the greater community context. In these neighborhoods, where autoworkers once lived in dense residential blocks, the current context cannot be more different; Detroit has created its own urban typology, that of transparency. Remembering the past and looking towards the future, performance and agriculture industries collaborate to form a new town center, void of street walls and automotive centric transportation, unified under a single roof as means of redefining the economic geography of Detroit.

These industries have always had a place in the city, even in the heyday of industry and manufacturing, and now they return to energize the community. Sweeping across Gratiot Avenue, this large horizontal roof collects these industries within it, as did the old auto-plants of the city, centering both economic and social empowerment for the residents of Detroit. There is a constant and active play between market and performance, it is a place for both business and leisure, of learning and making, and of growth and connectivity. The structure brings into play the Detroit vernacular of low, expansive industrial scale with the newly developed direction of transparency, where programs blend into a blur of activity, where performance is both market and Motown, activating and giving space for the rise and expansion of these individual movements.

Located in the neighborhood of Poletown East, the project relies heavily on restructuring the job market and transportation systems. Gratiot Avenue becomes the location of a new BRT line for the city, transporting both people and fresh food, and thus the heart of the structure. Where train tracks once lay connecting these hubs of industry, recreation appears, adding a human focused corridor to a historically automotive focused city. An array of performance spaces, recording booths, and practice rooms mix and interact with the encompassing market, and gathering and breakout spaces are loosely defined as one program or the other. Education acts as a programmatic sponge in the blending of market and performance, while surrounding industrial buildings are reutilized for the means of food and artistic production, all crossing paths under this single lid. Here, roof is both architecture and urbanism, creating a new typology of the town center.

placement in history

Growing up in the suburbs, Detroit has always captivated me. From a distance I have witnessed the rebirth of the downtown. Detroit has come a long way since declaring bankruptcy in 2013, with new restaurants and shops appearing downtown almost everyday, a brand new sports arena bringing in tourists and revenue, and many luxury developments planned for the future. However, these changes compel one to question what is being done for those who never left the city? How has the city repaid its loyal residents? With all these downtown centric development strategies, little is done for the long time citizens of Detroit. As designers we must turn our attention to the greater reaches of the city. In order to understand the current context of Detroit, we must understand the city's placement within the past, and how it guides the future.



Detroit streetcar in Cadillac Square. Source: Detroit Public Library

[004]



Canfield Street, 2018. Source: Google Maps



Render for Hudson's Site. Source: Curbed Detroit

Diagram of the affects of the auto industry on Detroit, and outlook for the industries future prospects for the city

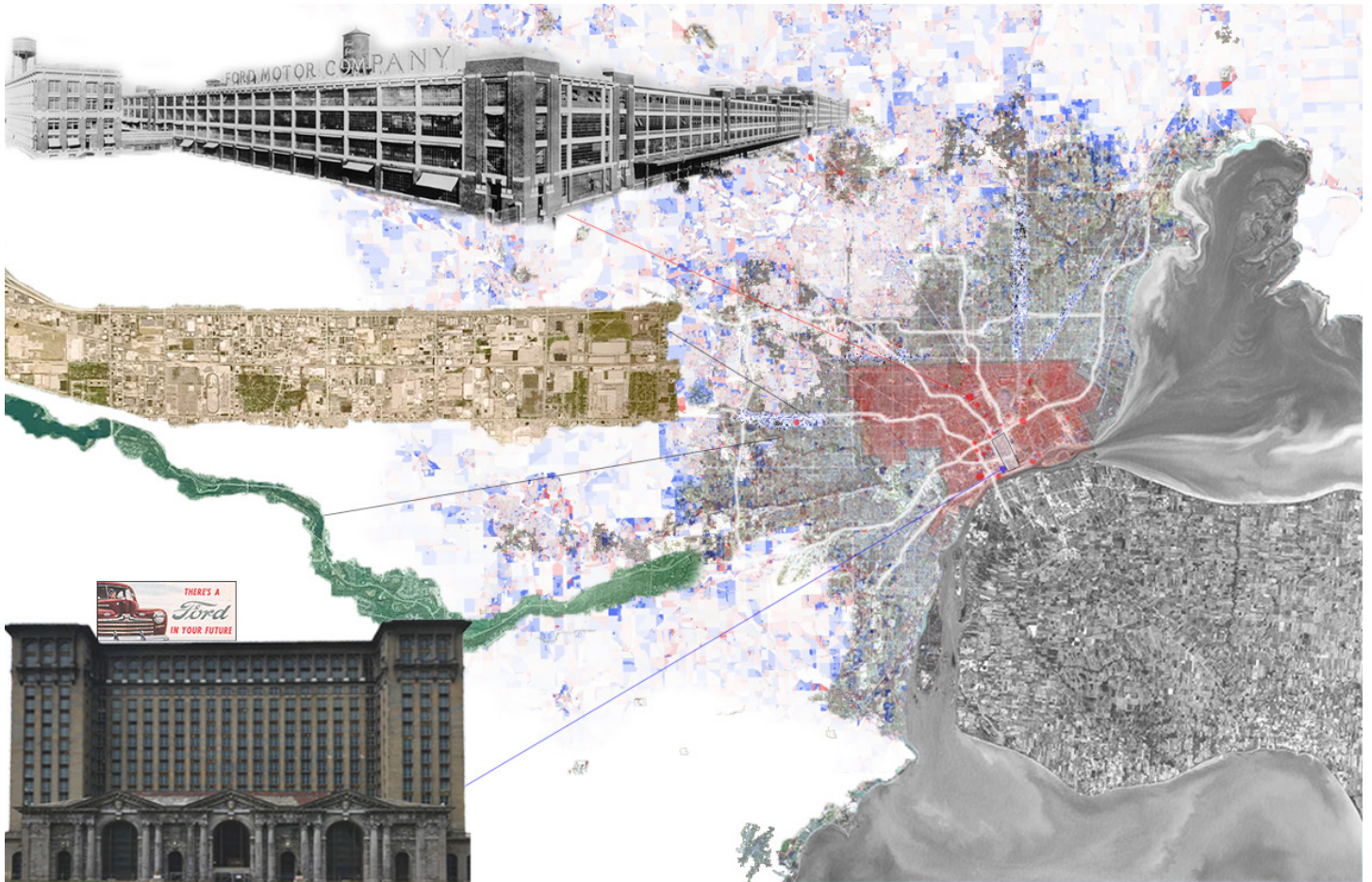


Diagram of vacant lot potential for the use of agriculture, recreation and the preserving of the past



probe: explorations for the future

Throughout recent years the urban agriculture industry in Detroit has grown. Residents taking initiative have turned vacancies into thriving patches of green, as the movement continues to grow. It is clear the industry will have a strong impact on the neighborhood economy of Detroit. The thesis probe sought to question the future of Detroit through the lens of urban agriculture. Here past relics and future explorations are overlaid onto the present, making viewers engage in the discussion surrounding the context of Detroit's development.



Thesis probe: No Longer Urban. Can't Be Rural. Definitely Not Suburban. 2018





















Detroit's industrial future

Within the current urban context, urban agriculture is fit to transform the economic future of the city. Through examining the vacancies that spread through the neighborhoods of Detroit, one may begin to design for their future. Utilizing this vacant space creates jobs and revenue for many people without such, and plants urban agriculture as one of the main future industries of the city. Though, Detroit shall not again rely on a singular industry, but multiple must be established for the working class to avoid a repeat of the auto industry. Here Motown comes into play, through the coupling of agriculture and performance as two unique industries already in the city that can both be used to strengthen the city as well as cultivate neighborhood connections.



Diagram of possible greenway of urban agriculture utilizing vacant land, generating interconnected neighborhood centers across Detroit.

finding place

Using the greater context of the city site was specified through industrial and transportational strategies. Locating the project in Poletown East, a neighborhood just next to Eastern Market along the Gratiot Avenue corridor, the manifestation of a new town center takes root. The place lies at a nexus of transportational opportunities, and at the junction of urban typologies. An old industrial corridor runs North/South out of the site, holding large horizontal expanses of bricks, with the blowout neighborhood of Poletown East to the West as a proposed agricultural zone, and a denser residential neighborhood off to the East. The placement along Gratiot Avenue becomes most important, as this thoroughfare becomes the spine of the project, connecting both market and performance.

Packard Plant
+
Reutilized
Industrial zone

Proposed
Urban Agricultural
Corridor

Dense
Residential
Neighborhood

Belle Isle
Detroit River

Eastern Market
+
Downtown



[024]



Current conditions at site. Source: Google Maps



Current conditions at site. Source: Google Maps

a transparent city

The exploration into place and context lead to the discovery of the new urban fabric of Detroit, that of transparency. Looking at the density of the past makes the current situation stark in comparison. However, this new spacial organization has a lot to offer, a new way of urban design must emerge, where street wall no longer guides direction or placemaking. In turn the ability to see through the city situates oneself within the place. Here we can see the devastation of the city in new light, as a blank canvas for the notion of activating the transparency.



past | present

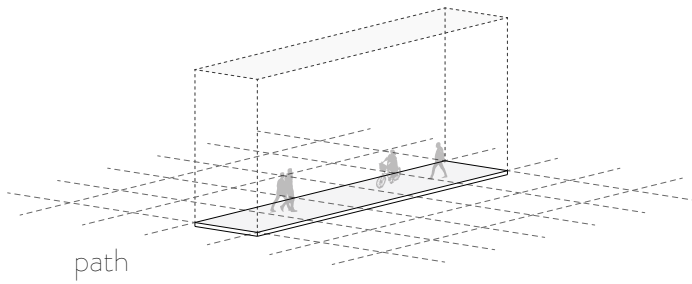
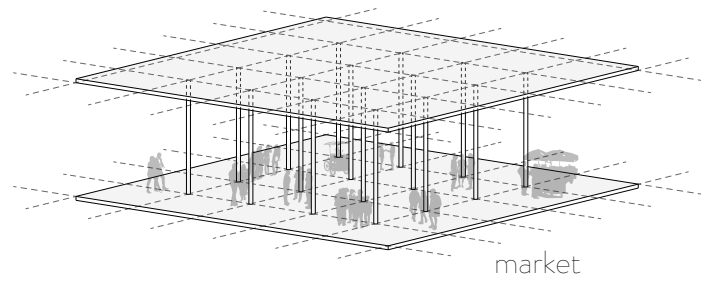
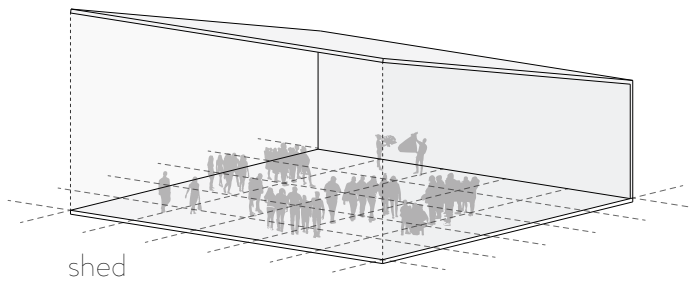
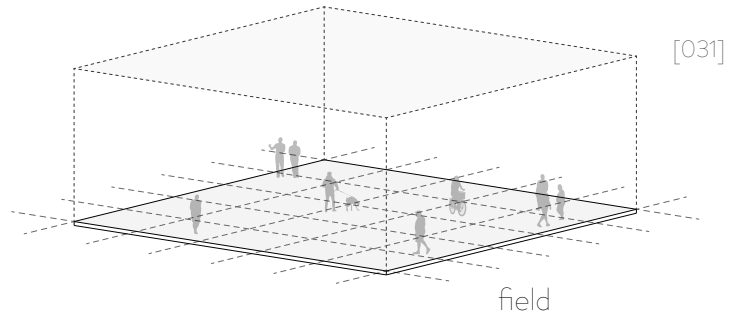


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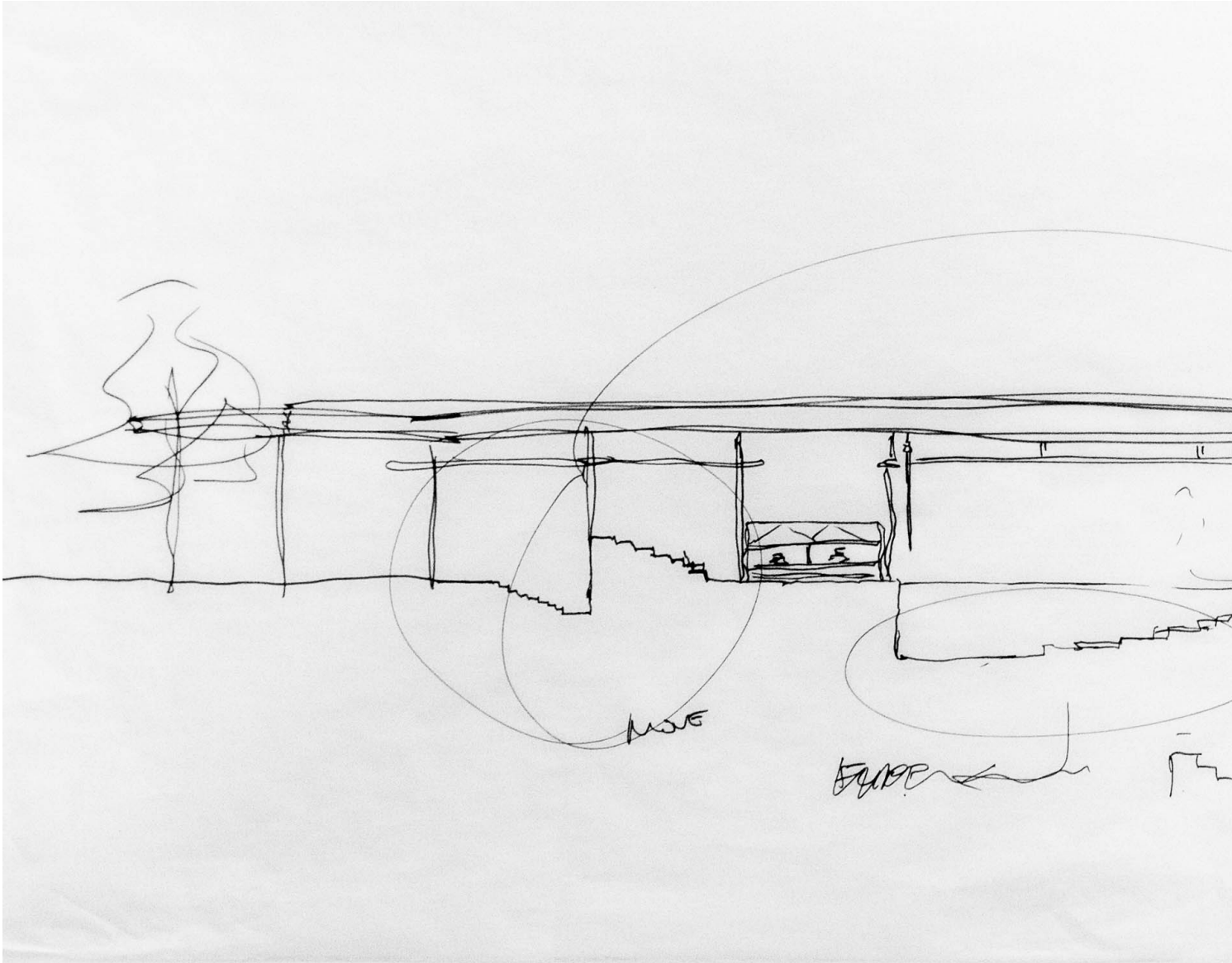
developing spacial typologies

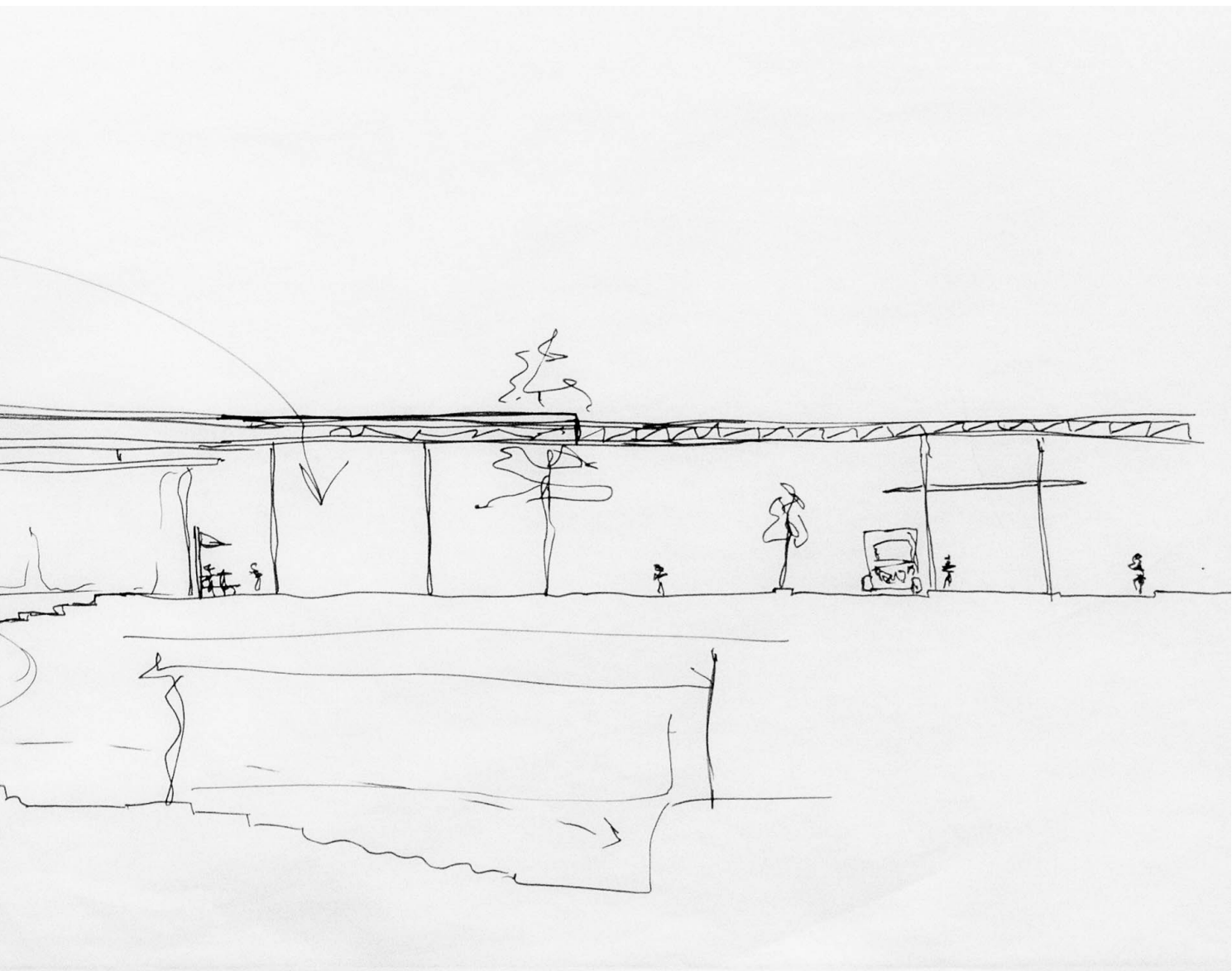
Through the merging of the urban agriculture and performance industries, a series of spacial typologies were introduced. Each typology has the ability to function for one or both industry at a time. The interplay and overlap of each typology generates the feeling of an active transparency, connecting market to performance.



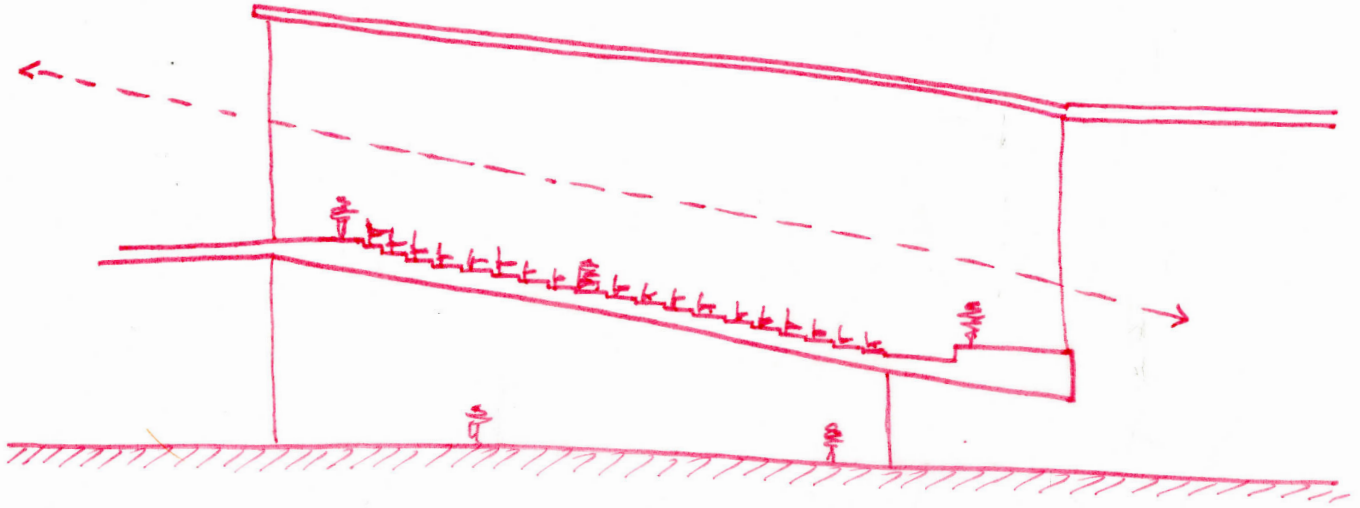
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explorations of performance through roof

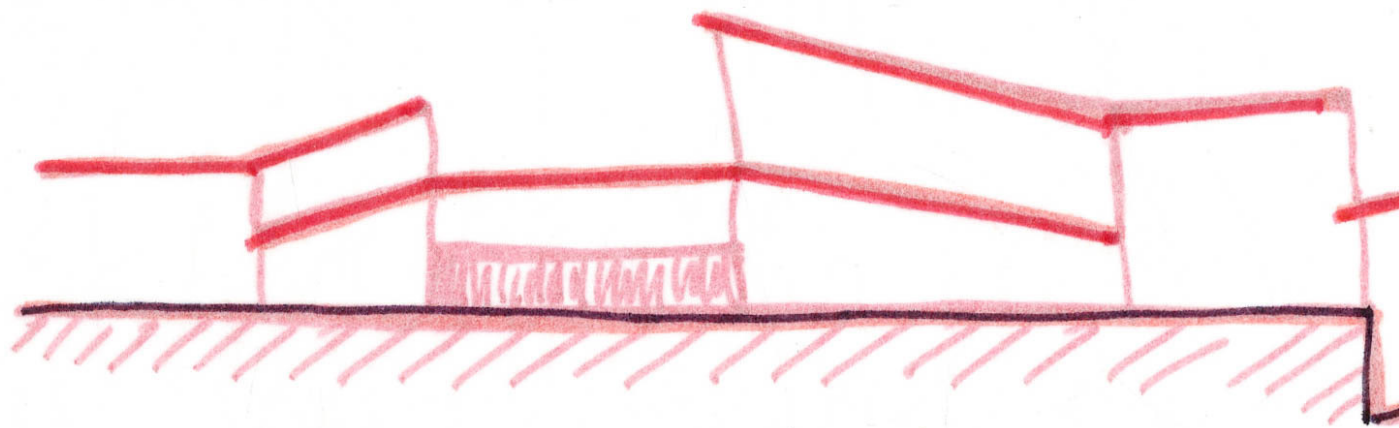


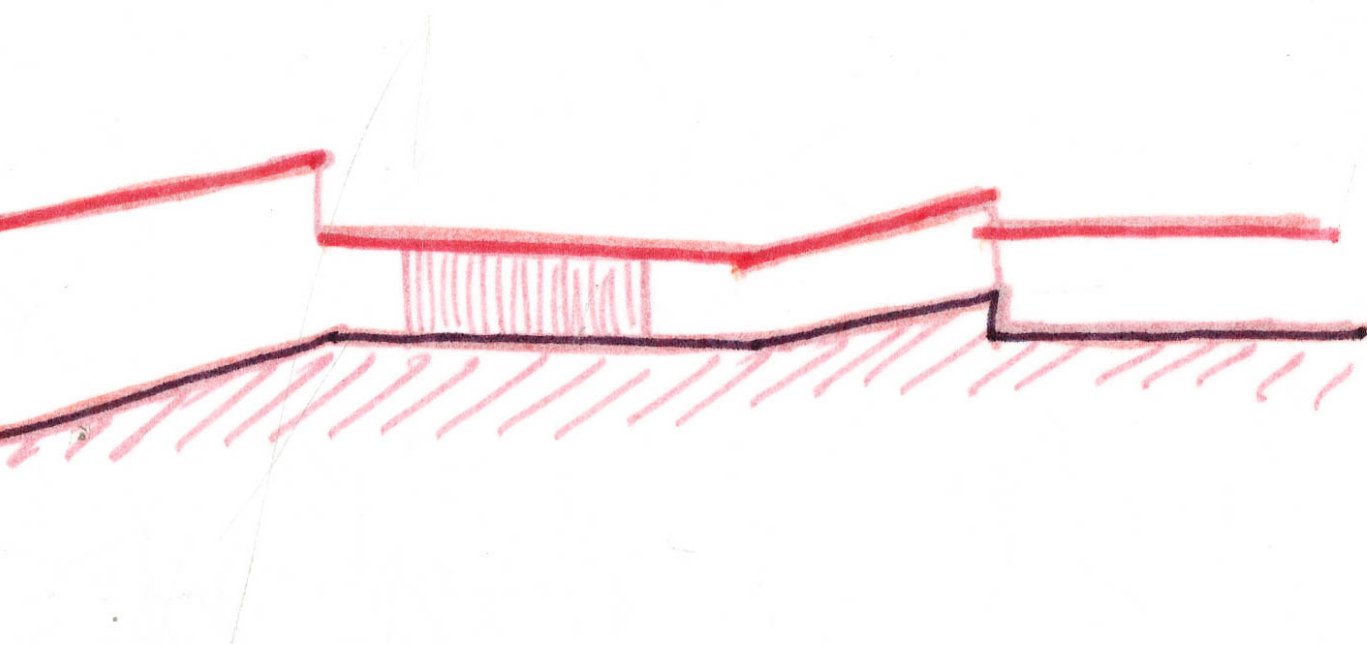


It quickly became clear that a uniting factor was needed into the mix of spatial typologies; roof. Here roof becomes not only an element of protection, but also functions as both a uniting feature and a visual marquee to the rest of the city. The roof marks the town center, where industry is once again at the heart of the neighborhood. Using roof as the main piece of architecture, early iterations explored its interaction within the world of performance, and how roof can be used to open up performance spaces to the surrounding site, city and market.



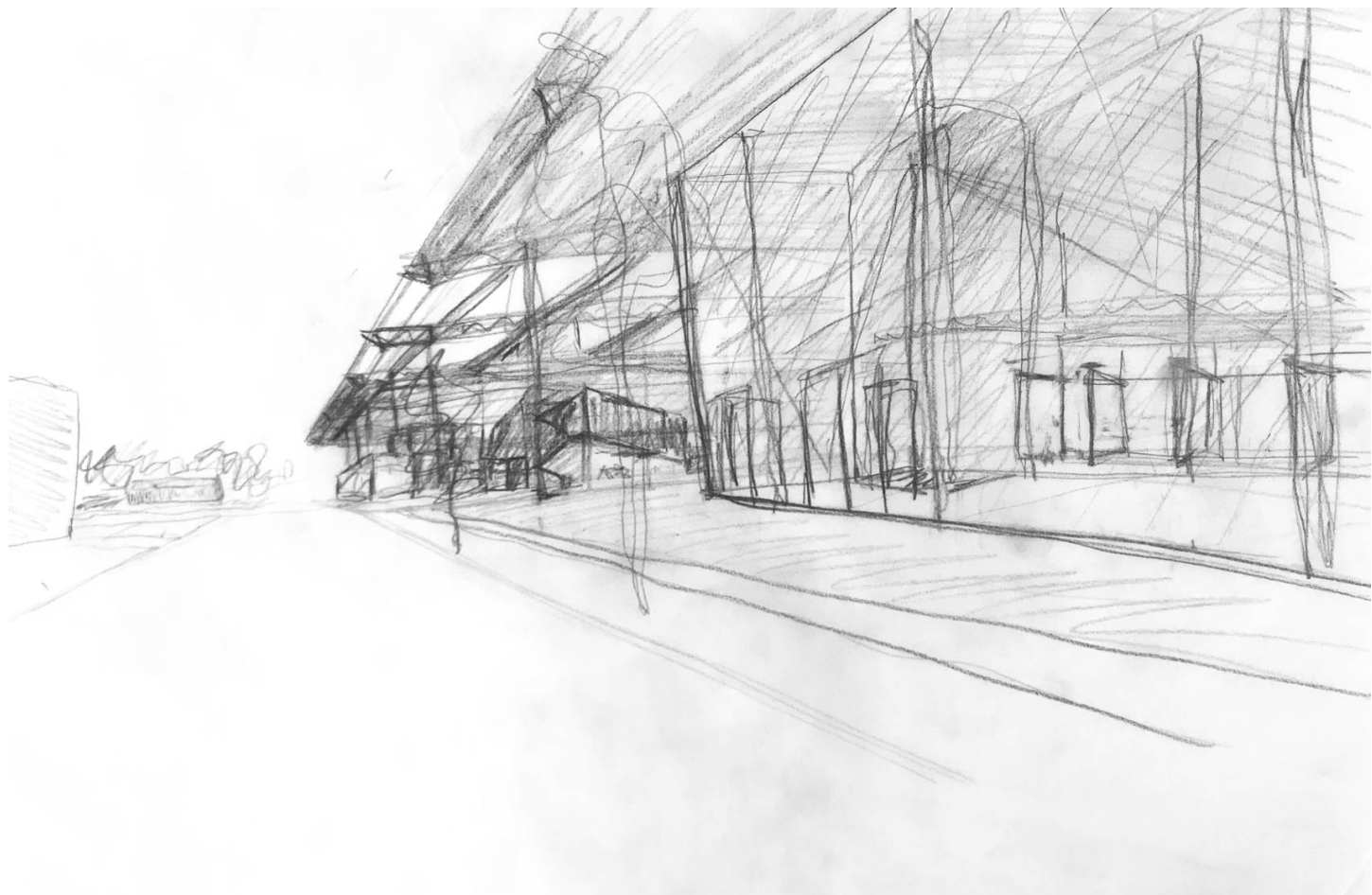
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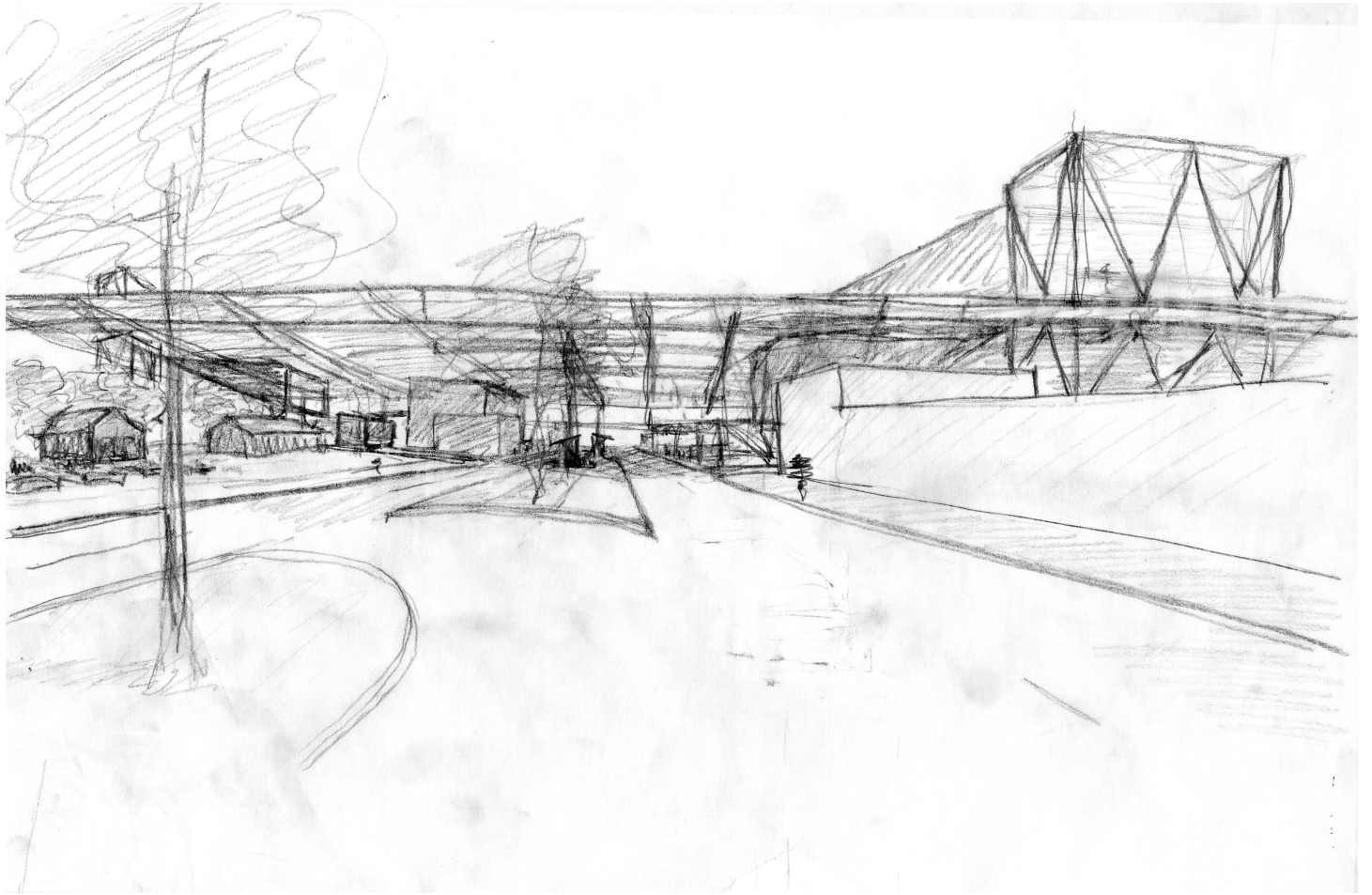


sketching transparency

In understanding the display of transparency across market and performance, one must understand the relation from the street. This series of sketches explores the breakdown of the street wall. Here layered transparency creates visual corridors, opening from transitional ones. No longer is the town center defined by a densely walled main street, but by an opening up of visual experiences. View becomes directed towards activity, creating a sprawling town center devised from the irregularity of block to the main street of Gratiot Avenue.

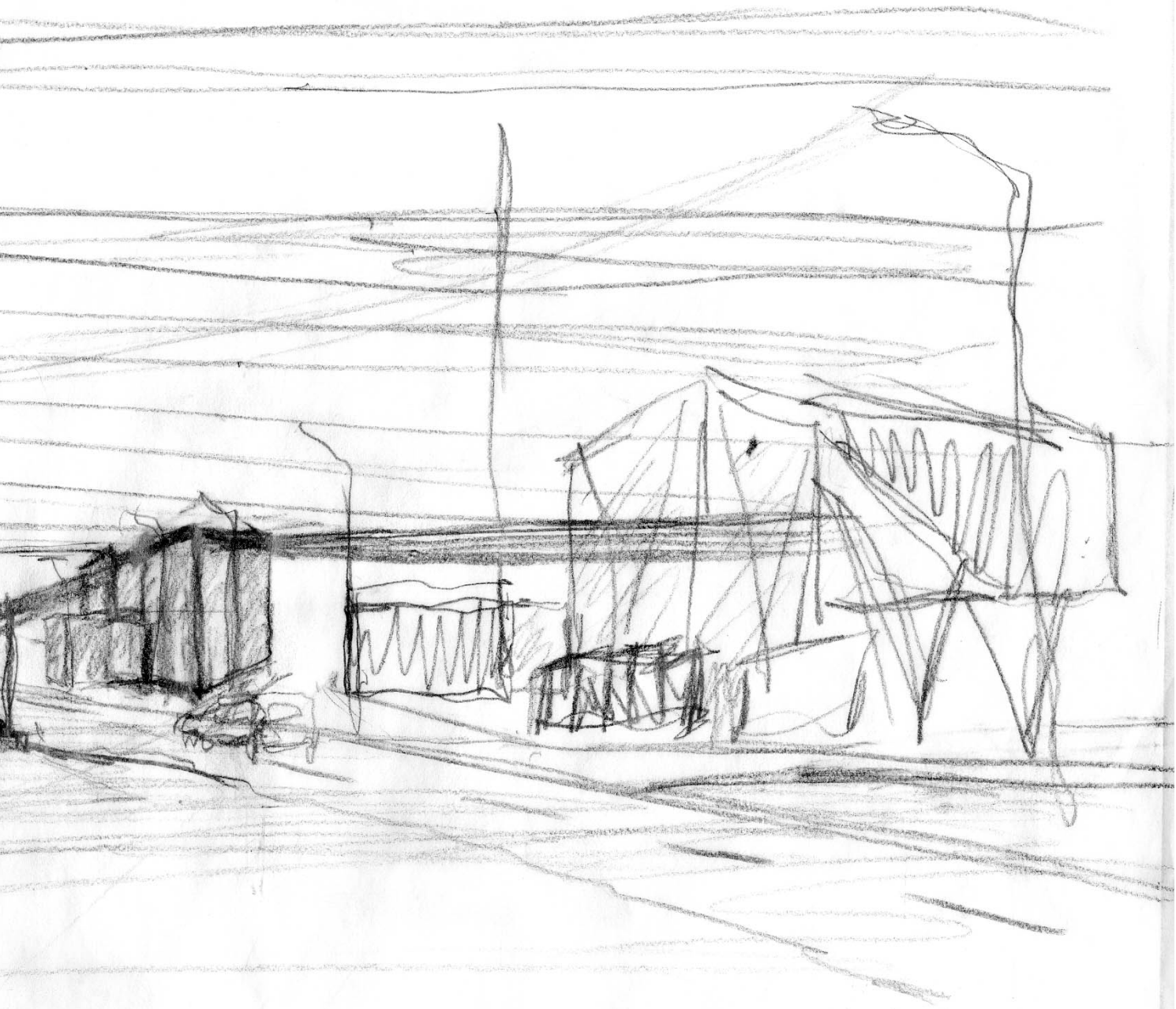


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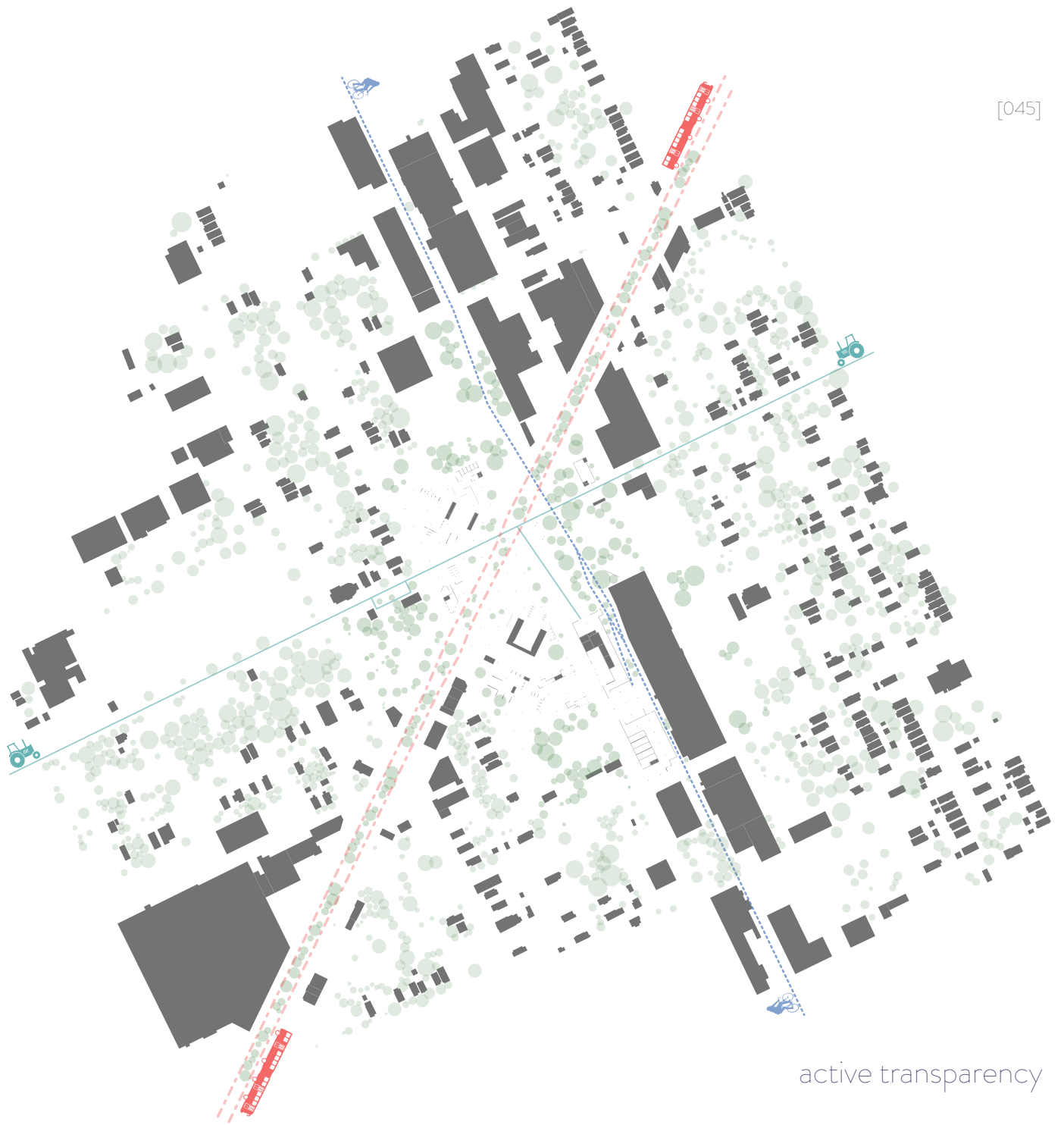






return to figure ground

This hunt for transparency returns us to the figure ground. Through the lens of active transparency, the newly dispersed fabric of Detroit neighborhoods creates a new method of urban design, local to the context of Detroit. Here the figure ground is looked at from the view of a Nolli plan, where no longer are these spaces seen as masses but as walls that form public space and allow the public to encounter and infill these spaces. The new town center plan blends into the surrounding context as way of creating place. While it used to be the street wall that provided way finding and place, now it is the lack of such feature that does so. The user becomes influenced by these seemingly never ending lines of sight, where the distant surrounding context becomes the main method of wayfinding and placemaking.

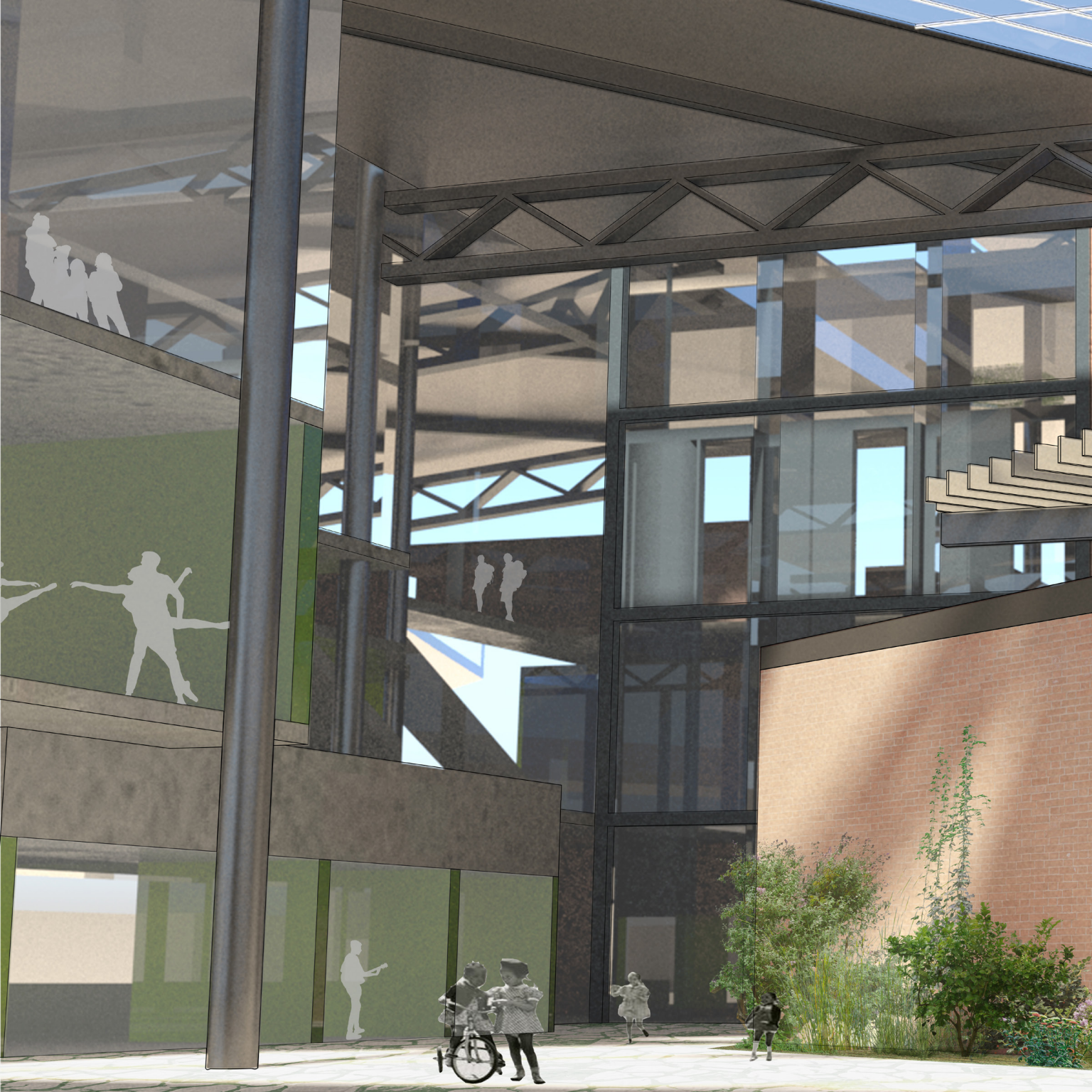


PoleTown Center

The manifestation of these market and performance programs, dappled under one roof become the PoleTown Center. Playing from the historical precedent of the automotive factory as the heart of the working class neighborhood, these new industries coalesce to create a thriving and exciting new town center for the community. Here, market, performance, recording, and education come together to interact and socially collaborate to form a new economic core of the city, creating the much needed working class jobs for the long time residents of the city. Old industrial and commercial buildings are reused for the production of food and goods, as well as artistic expression. Performance, practice and recording spaces surround the market, creating community and activity, thus giving life to the town center. Gratiot Avenue is re-imagined for the human rather than the automobile, with an open street system blurring the line between building and street, and providing a BRT solution to the transportation of people and food. Canfield Street now becomes a main thoroughfare, connecting the East and West as a new farm road, moving fresh produce from nearby farms to sorting the kitchen facilities, as this procession turns into its own type of performance. The old industrial corridor is opened and made a recreation trail, again focused on the pedestrian. Large horizontal industrial structures are retrofitted with rooftop greenhouses aiding food production with year - round growing. The PoleTown Center becomes not only a new economic hub for the city but also a an active social core.



Roof plan showing site strategies, and possibilities for outdoor food production as well as retrofitted rooftop greenhouses.







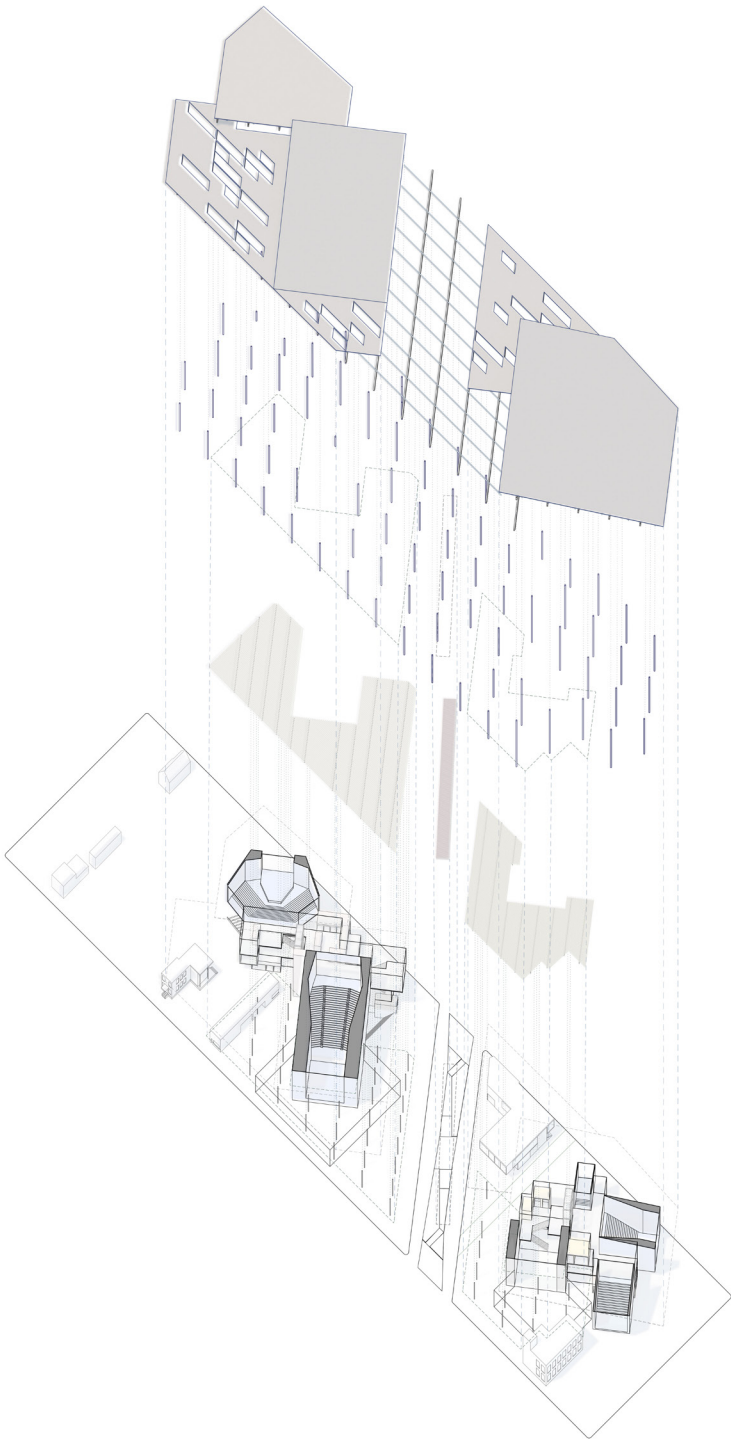






roof is architecture

The architectural manifestation of transparency does not only occur through the arrangement of wall and mass, but is made possible through the use of roof. With the disappearance of the street wall, ground and roof become the uniting factors of design. Here, roof is the architecture. Roof allows for the diffusion of transparency through uniting the dispersal of space below. Extending across Gratiot Avenue the roof also acts as a marker of place, framing views to downtown and indicating arrival for those traversing the site. While the roof peels and breaks the structure continues, reminiscent of the strength of industry in Detroit. Here, roof is what allows the creation of a new type of urban system for the urban town center of transparency.

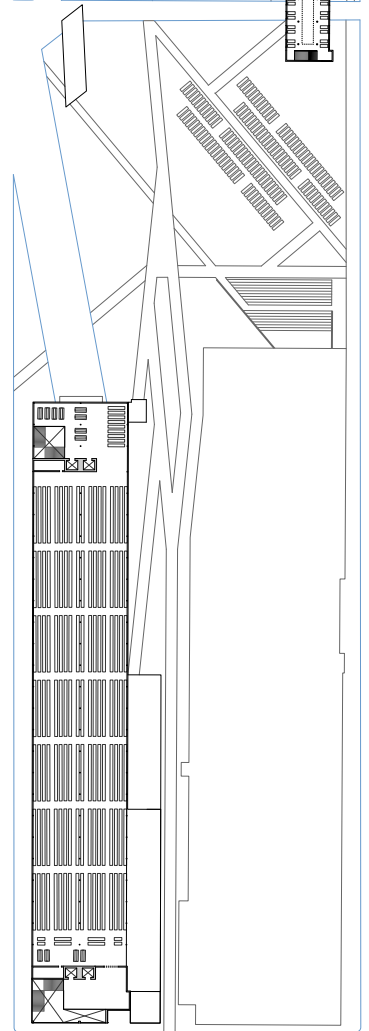
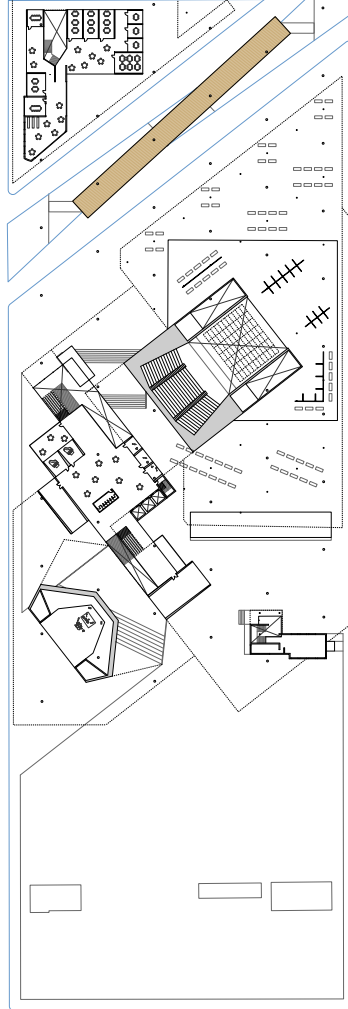
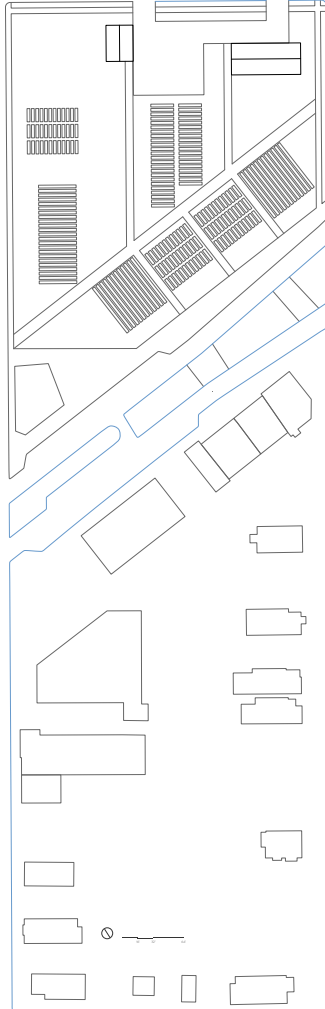
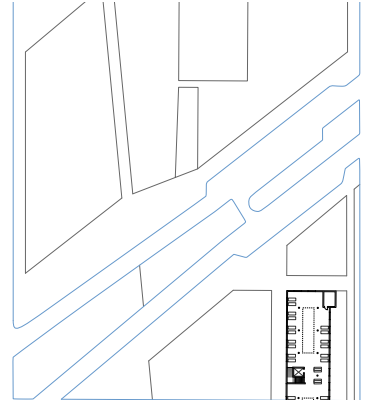
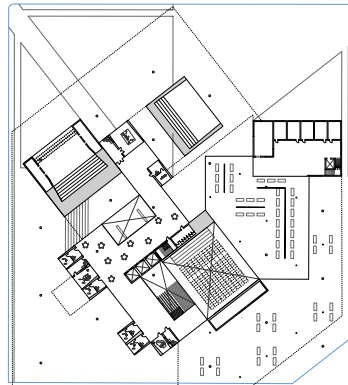
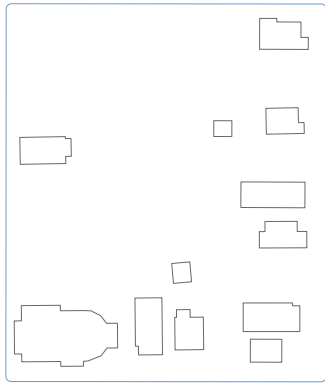


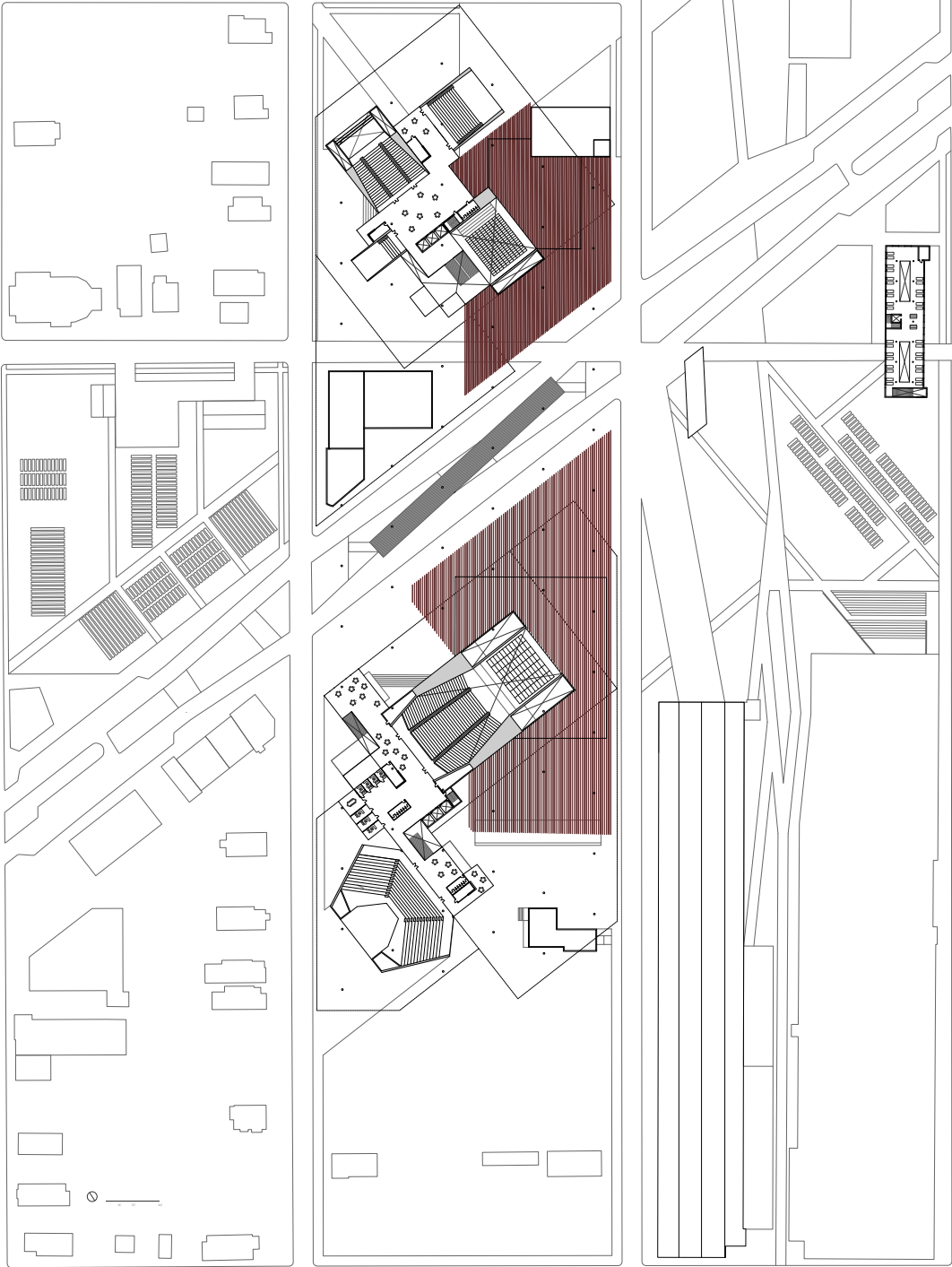
Exploded axonometric revealing the roof and underlying structure, highlighting market and performance connections

[056]

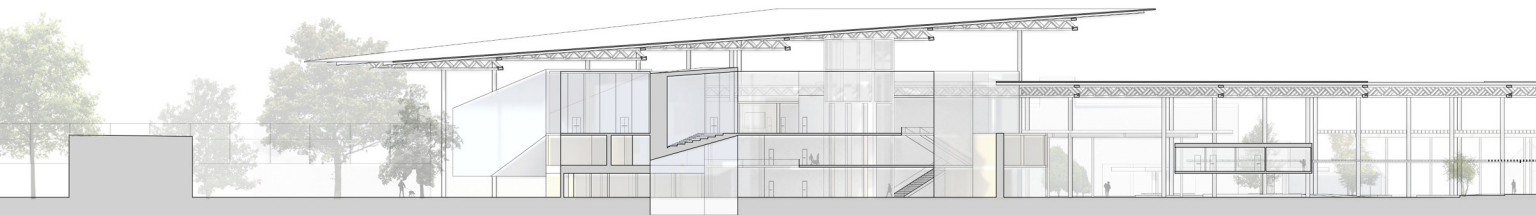
plans + sections

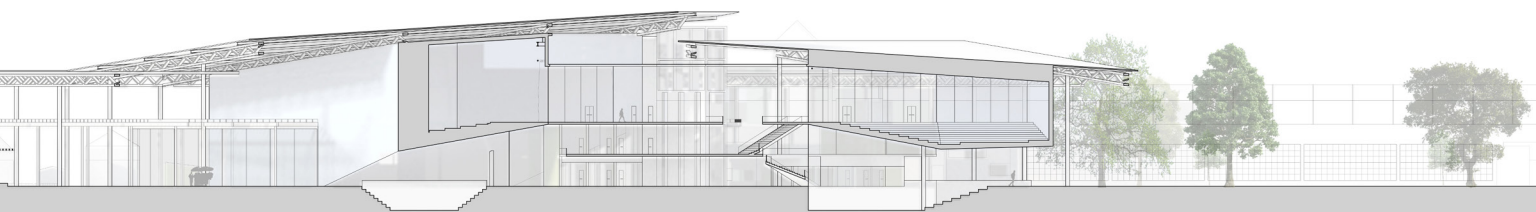






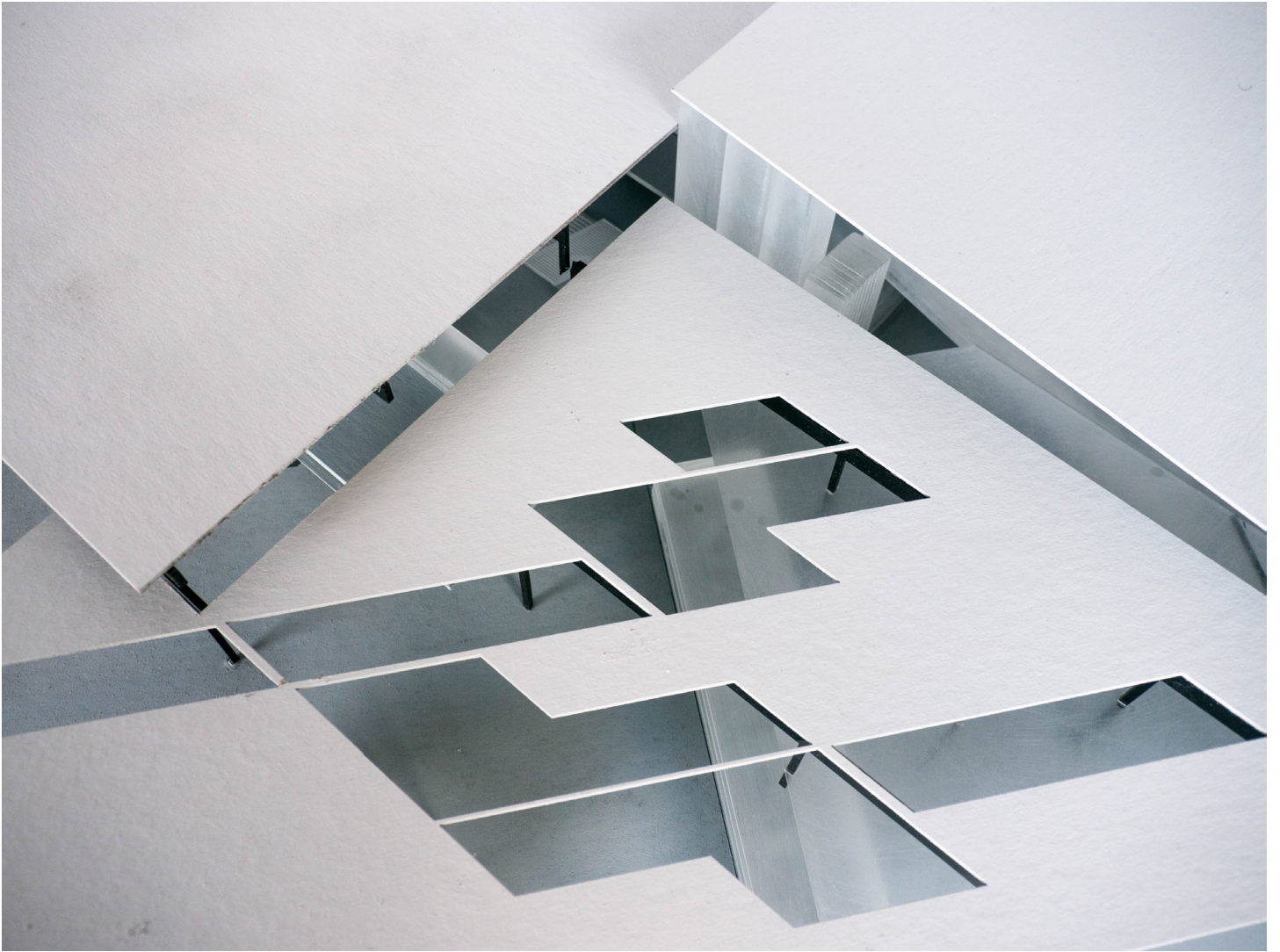
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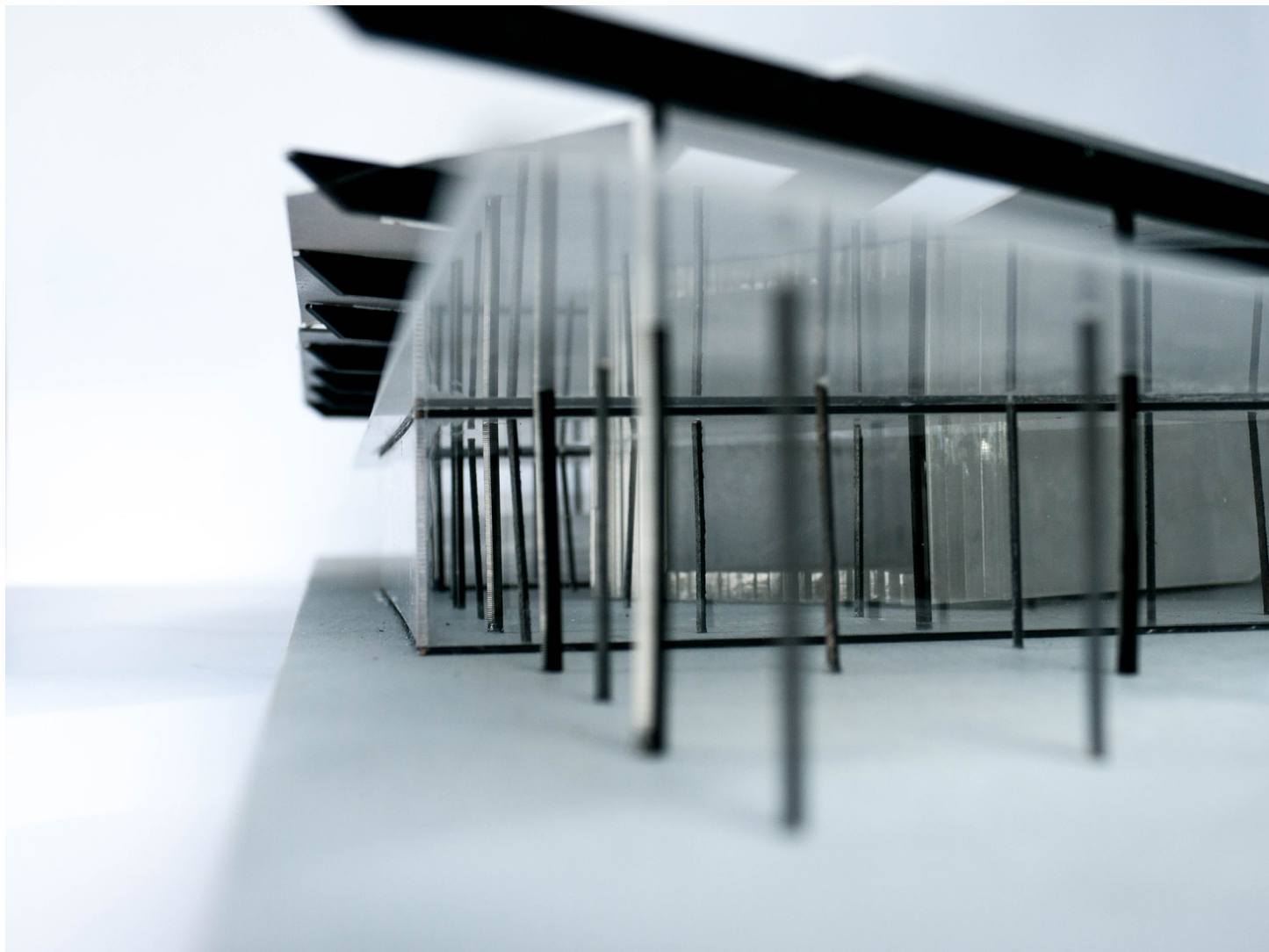


[062]

modeling transparency



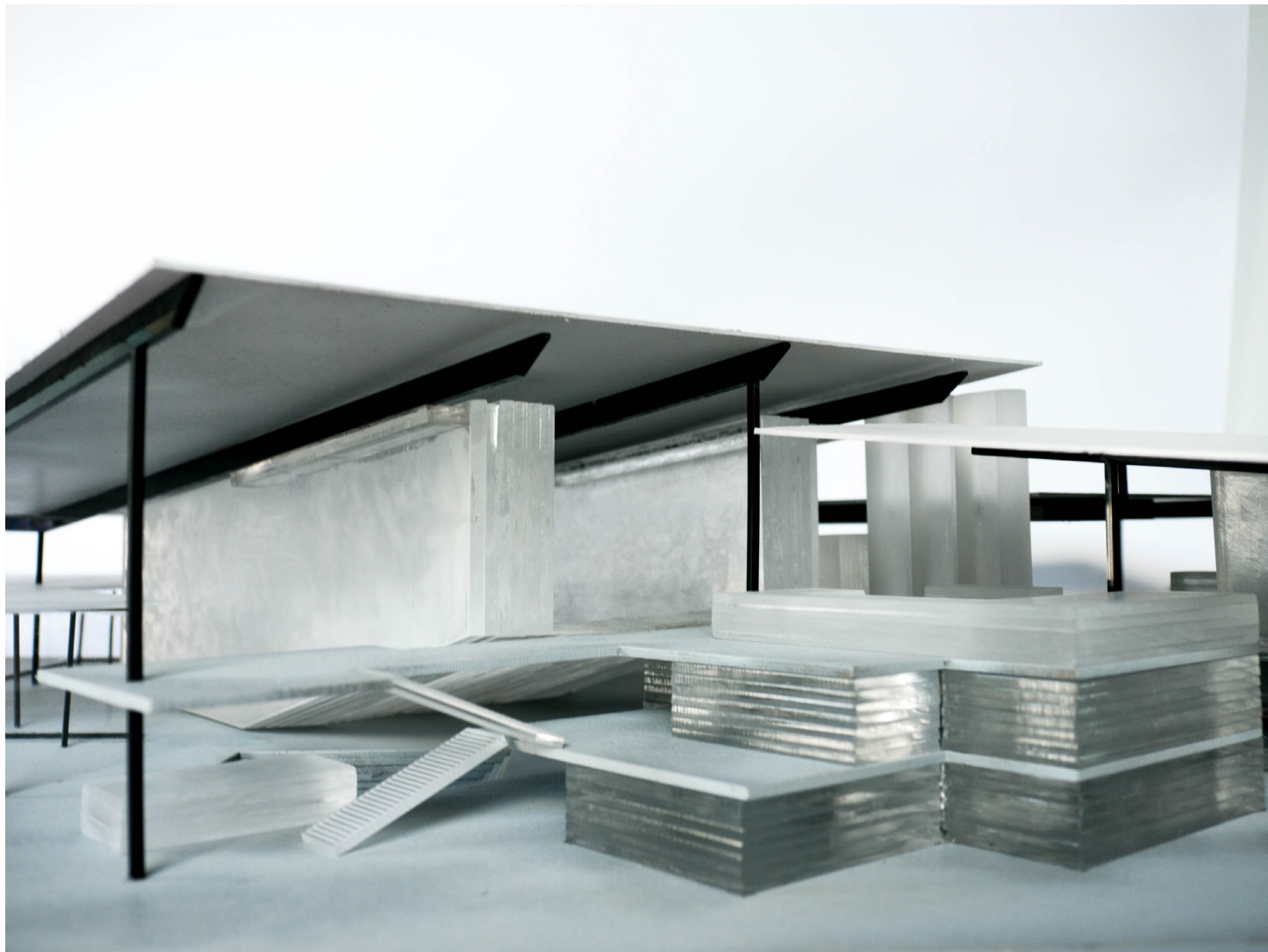












[070]

acknowledgments

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents. Without their patience and encouragement I would not have made it this far.

[072]

appendix [01]

a very brief list of some important dates

1701 - City of Detroit founded as French colonial city by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac

1805 - Detroit adopts city motto after devastating fire

1863 - Detroit begins laying out tracks for streetcar system

1896 - Henry Ford test drives first automobile

1899 - Ransom E. Olds opens first automotive manufacturing plant in Detroit

1903 - Ford starts Ford Motor Company

1910 - Ford cars no longer produced in Detroit

1913 - Michigan Central Station opens, designed by Reed & Stem

1915 - Dodge Brothers open Dodge Motor Company

1925 - Walter Chrysler founds Chrysler Corporation

1950 - Detroit is 4th largest city in the United States

1956 - Streetcars replaced by bus system

1959 - Motown Records founded by Berry Gordy

1967 - Riots shake the city of Detroit

1986 - Heidelberg Project begins on Detroit's East Side

2008 - Detroit has 90,000 fires in one year

2009 - Dequinder Cut opens to public

2018 - Q-Line lightrail opens to public, traveling 3 miles down Woodward Avenue

[074]

appendix [02]

spacial typologies

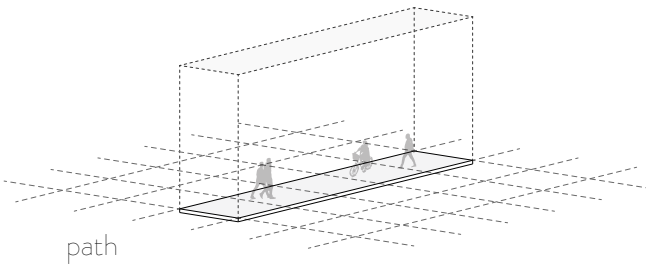
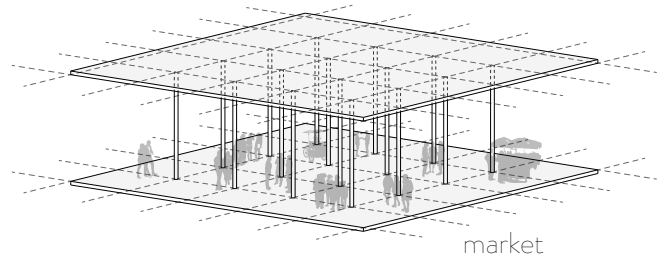
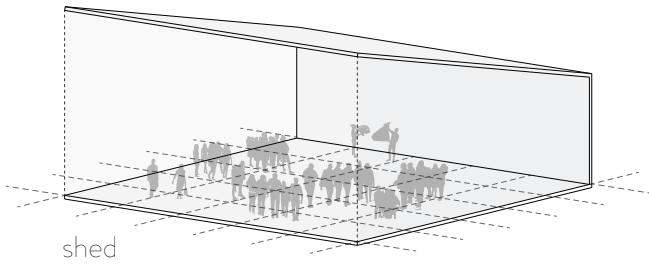
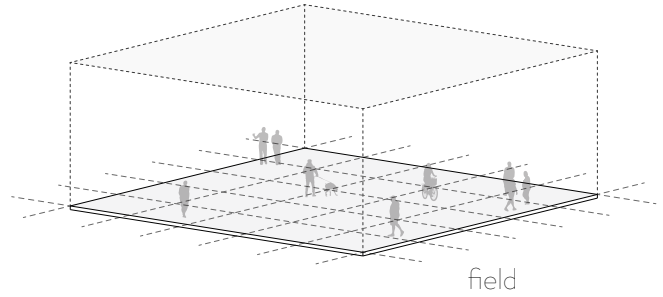
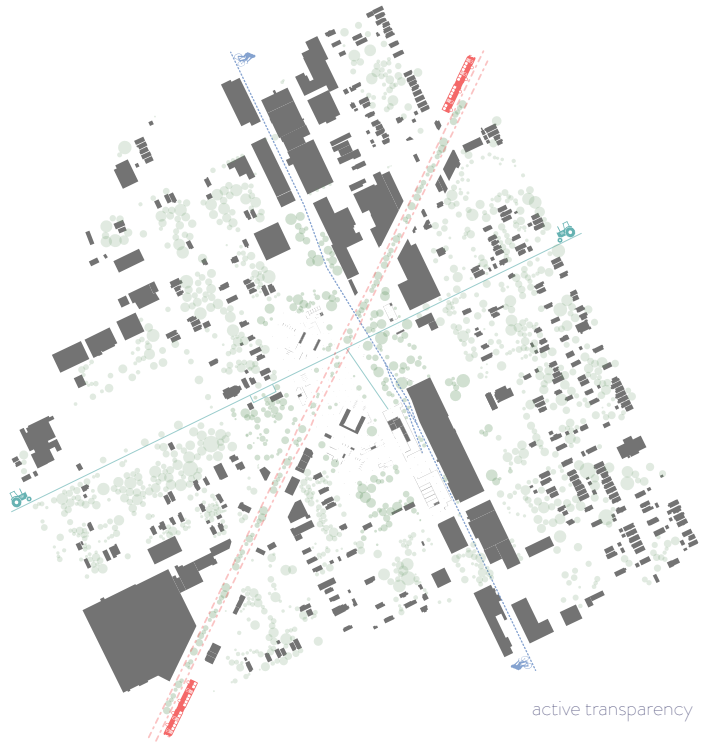




figure ground analysis



[078]

image credits

003 **Detroit Streetcar in Cadillac Square.** “People boarding Mack streetcar at Cadillac Square, looking west, City Hall in background.” *Detroit Public Library*. Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.detroitpubliclibrary.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A159068>

004 **Canfield Street.** maps.google.com

005 **Render for Hudson’s Site.** *Curbed Detroit*. <https://detroit.curbed.com/2017/12/14/16776518/hudsons-site-groundbreaking-renderings>

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organizations

The Michigan Urban Farming Initiative (MUFi)

Detroit Future City

The Greening of Detroit

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