

# Hood + Du Solier

Site: Braddock, Pennsylvania

## a. Residency Outline

We are one of three artist teams working in Braddock, PA. Our residency consists on three site visits and three explorations in response to each visit.

### Visit One – summer 2004

Our first visit was a week-long stay and an on-site design *charrette* in the summer of 2004, in which we coincided with the visit of the rest of the Braddock teams: Newton and Helen Harrison from California; and Christine and Jonathan from Pittsburgh. Several presentations from Braddock leaders, conversations with its residents, long discussions with our colleges, two boat rides along the Mon River, and numerous walking tours in town, provided an in-depth introduction of this small borough east of Pittsburgh, as well as an overview of the Monongahela Valley in general. Our work space was located in Braddock's library, the first Carnegie library ever made, where we had direct and daily interaction with residents.

The majority of the team's discussions in this visit focused on the implications of the Turnpike Authority's current plan of building a new freeway through Braddock. Nonetheless, we also learned about the site's steel industry heritage and the demographic transformations of the last 30 years as a result of their disappearance that have left Braddock –and the entire Mon Valley for that matter- practically deserted.

Our first exploration –developed while in Braddock- focused on the former RR right-of-way. Based on historic maps and current site perceptions, we created a series of conceptual models and sketches to explore the potential of this vacant space of becoming reclaimed ground for community pride. As a response to the alleged imminent arrival of the freeway, we searched for ways to empower the citizens of Braddock with a “gorilla” approach. A number of lots in the right-of-way have been rented since the railroad track was officially dismantled in the mid-1990s, but their program is primarily storage and parking. We proposed runoff infiltration zones and recreational uses that would be simply done in an incremental manner, to make this fallow space visible, suggest a sense of public ownership, and connect the borough's natural systems with its infrastructure.





## Visit Two – fall 2004

Our second visit during the fall showed us a new face of Braddock. The trees and vines that covered many of Braddock's decaying buildings during our last visit had lost their leaves, and this leafless Braddock highlighted the structures more than the urban voids. This time we decided to spend most of our time walking along Braddock Avenue.

This main street, which historically had been the linear heart of town, now appears as a slow and somewhat sad thoroughfare with a handful of occupied buildings, next to many boarded-up crumbling storefronts, and several empty lots where apartments and stores once stood flanking the commercial corridor. We visited John, a new resident to Braddock who owns a large abandoned church, where he now runs a program to help kids-at-risk and high school drop-outs obtain their diploma. He shared with us his collection of historic Braddock postcards, and told us that he had acquired the church last year for only four thousand dollars. The vintage records of Braddock's brighter past, and their contrast with the current monetary value of the buildings, made us think about the future of Braddock Avenue.

In response to this second visit, we began working on a series of "prosceniums" using the remaining Braddock Avenue's buildings, in search of ways to attach redefined value to them. The idea is to find uses that build on structure decay, by transforming the destructive process into an opportunity to build momentum for a form of reconstruction. With the second exploration, the buildings thus become mechanisms that do not necessarily try to recreate the past, but attempt to preserve its heritage and create new ways to revive Braddock.

## Visit Three – spring 2005

The third and final visit is in the spring of 2005. We foresee this visit to focus on Braddock's waterfront. The first exploration included an intervention in the river utilizing barges filled with soil and planted to regenerate a temporary riparian edge and create a river walk. We will examine this third line in Braddock within the context of connecting the three lines and forging a new urban morphology and structure for the borough of Braddock.

## b. Exhibit – Reiterative lines.....Braddock’s Shifting Right of Ways

*(Preliminary)*

Three Lines:

1. Railroad
2. River
3. Main Street

Braddock’s main street, the central railroad ROW, and river’s edge where once continuous lines of movement and access to the town’s center and neighborhoods. Today each is fragmented, i.e. main street consists of districts of occupied buildings between empty lots; Rail ROW has been appropriated by adjacent uses; and the Mon River with industry gracing most of its edges.

The exhibit poses a series of questions:

- How can Braddock save its Main St?  
= As buildings are falling down, which ones do you save? Can smaller incubator districts prevail?
- In the face of the proposed Turnpike, can the ROW be used in a transformative manner?  
Can Small public spaces transform the freeway?
- How can the use of the river coincide with industry? What is the relationship between a clean river and jobs?  
= Barges with trail
- As density decreases, do we bet on a return or do we redefine density?

The exhibit consists of a tripartite assemblage of images models and drawings that create three “lines” of inquiry.

Line One-

1. Main Street Prosceniums: districts connected by a line: a series of prosceniums suggest a new model for Main Street.

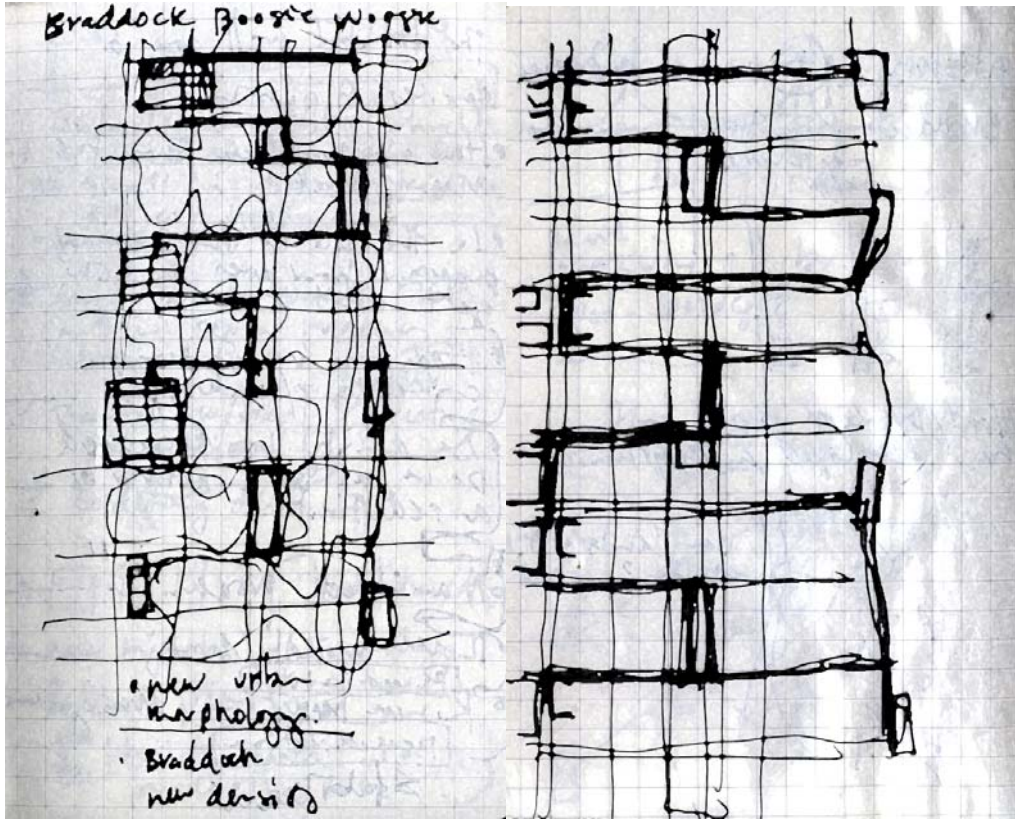
Line Two-

2. ROW Models / Drawings: A series of proposals for the ROW

Line Three-

3. River Barges: Sections of barges illustrating planting and physical improvements.

The exhibit posits three strategic directions that are at once separate but need the other two to connect and form the town’s new morphology. Strategies will be illustrated in the gallery setting as three physical spaces that use drawings and images as a backdrop to three experimental prosceniums.



**DIAGRAM: REITERATIVE LINES**