



IMMENSITY
IS
WITHIN
OURSELVES

“Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man.”

—Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, page 184

TO THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

*A PROPOSAL FOR A PUBLIC ARTWORK,
BY JOHANNA REED*

My experience of Los Angeles, which your prompt has labeled the “city of speed,” has been one of motionlessness, frustratingly so. Since moving here earlier this year, the majority of my time has been spent negotiating a new, uninvited, and all-encompassing relationship with traffic. Most of the time, I sit in my car, moving glacially, inconsequential and isolated. A look out my window, at the frozen line of cars in front of, behind, and on either side of me, proves that I am only one of many.

According to an April 2007 essay in *The New Yorker*, on the rise of commuting:

Roughly one out of every six American workers commutes more than forty-five minutes, each way...The number of commuters who travel ninety minutes or more each way—known to the Census Bureau as ‘extreme commuters’—has reached 3.5 million, almost double the number in 1990. (Paumgarten)

Los Angeles has been ranked consistently as the most traffic-congested city in America.¹ To consider the physical and psychological landscape of the city of Los Angeles is mostly a consideration of car culture, commuter culture, traffic congestion, urban planning, urban sprawl, and the effects and implications of the landscape on the city’s inhabitants.

What does this mean for the individuals of Los Angeles in terms of our health and happiness, and how we spend our time? Further, as a community, what are the effects on our environment, community networks, and social interactions? Robert Putnam, a Harvard political scientist, states, “There’s a simple rule of thumb: Every ten minutes of commuting results in ten per cent fewer social connections. Commuting is connected to social isolation, which causes unhappiness” (Paumgarten). Applied to my case—I average an hour commute, one way—this means that the 120 minutes I spend in the car each day has resulted in 120% fewer social connections. If we consider the Los Angeles population of more than 10 million (not including the “Greater Los Angeles Area,” many of whom are commuters), the amount of time collectively spent in our cars is staggering, and the effects of it on our social connections, and thus our city, unspeakable.

I am proposing a project which attempts to lessen, if only for a moment, the psychological effects of traffic in Los Angeles; of feeling inconsequential and isolated, unmoving, within the “city of speed”; of feeling disconnected by the immensity of the Los Angeles landscape, which is most often seen through a windshield. If we can feel, even for a fraction of our commute, that we are happy and somehow engaged with our surroundings by experiencing a simple phenomenon that beautifies our environment, I posit that the collective consciousness of—and about—Los Angeles, will change, indeed for the better.

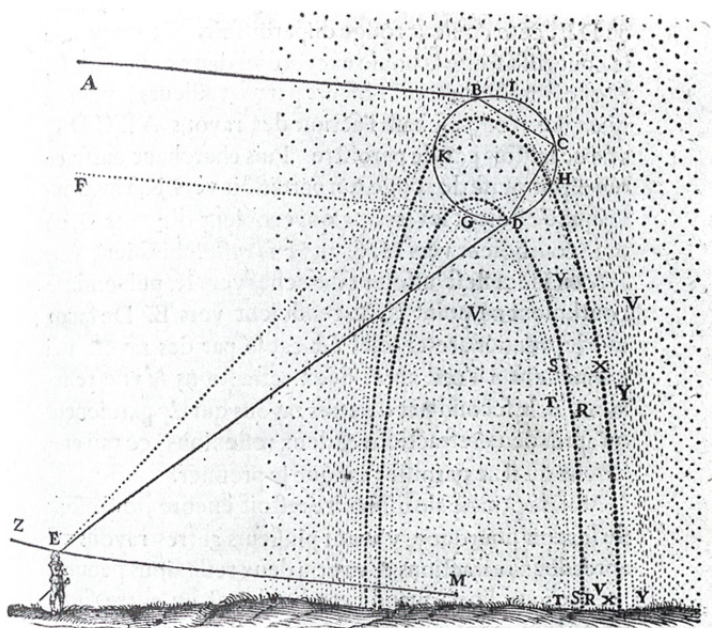
¹ SEE WORKS CITED PAGE FOR STATISTICAL AND SURVEY-BASED FINDINGS.

“One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream....And one might say that daydream is original contemplation.”

—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p 183

For a period of three to six months, installed at six locations in the city chosen for their notoriety as heavily congested, will be a simple apparatus consisting of an industrial water mister placed in relation to an existing architectural structure (see Budget for mister details). Positioned at a calculated angle, the water mist will react with a natural light source—either the sun itself, or as reflected off the architecture (depending on the time of day)—and create a rainbow in the atmosphere.¹ It will appear several dozen feet above the ground.

The project will be unannounced to the public; at the installation locations, it is imperative that there is no mention or sign of the presence of the project, other than the result itself. The only thing noticeably visible will be a small rainbow in the sky.



RENÉ DESCARTES' SKETCH OF HOW PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RAINBOWS ARE FORMED.

Depending on the density of particles in the air at a given time, the rainbow may appear faint or robust, fleeting or solid. As noted by Kenneth Sassen and Jiang Zhu, “The viewing position [for a rainbow] is critical to what one sees....With a changing position the rainbow [type], position, and shape are in constant flux, including unnatural, skewed, or elliptical rainbows” (Sassen and Zhu 175). In effect, each individual will see a different rainbow, depending on location; further, the rainbow will appear to change slightly, depending on the movement or position of the viewer.

¹ PLEASE SEE KENNETH SASSEN AND JIANG ZHU'S PAPER “THE RAINBOW AS INTERACTIVE ART: MODELING THE ELIASSON BEAUTY INSTALLATION AT SFMOMA” FOR THE EXACT MATHEMATICAL CALCULATIONS FOR CREATING RAINBOWS WITHIN A SPACE. ALSO, FOR A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF HOW RAINBOWS ARE CREATED, PLEASE SEE THE WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE FOR RAINBOWS, SECTION “SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION.”

Rainbows have a varied history as symbols of cultural significance, whether in religion and mythology, as used in artworks from prehistoric cave paintings¹ to contemporary works, or as adopted by different groups and social systems. (See South Africa's Rainbow Nation; various political organizations acting under the moniker, Rainbow Coalition; and the adoption of the rainbow as a symbol for gay and lesbian rights.) At its core, though, the rainbow's simple arc of color, seemingly painted on the sky, produces a simple, innocent delight when viewed in the environment. Specifically, it is the unexpectedness and apparent delicacy of the rainbow that imbues it with profundity (further, a certain sentimental worth has been attached to the rainbow in connection to the fact that it is created at the end of a rainstorm).

² SEE KENNETH SASSEN'S ARTICLE "RAINBOWS IN THE INDIAN ROCK ART OF WESTERN AMERICA" FOR THE RAINBOWS SIGNIFICANCE IN NATIVE AMERICAN CAVE PAINTING AND ROCK ART, AS AN EXAMPLE.

The choice to create rainbows in the Los Angeles daytime sky, at particular locations of heavy traffic, is an attempt to offer a reprieve from the frustrations of immobility. It is to be taken as a small, unexpected gift. I have chosen the rainbow, despite its numerous cultural and sentimental connotations, as a universal symbol of simple, environmental beauty. Because the rainbows will be created from a generated relationship between the sun and the built environment, I am attempting to subtly introduce an element of architectural and environmental interaction.

Further, because the rainbows will be created in locations populated with many people at a time, I anticipate an ad-hoc social network to be incited—observers will react to the rainbow and spread news of the event within their own networks. Children in the backseat of a car will tell their parents in the front seat. A passenger will inform a driver. Beyond the car itself, people on the street will be able to experience the rainbows, both from the vantage points of a pedestrian, as well as that of inhabitants of buildings. I anticipate that the news will spread between office coworkers, roommates, even strangers on the street, imploring each other to look up.

THE PROJECT (CONT.)



COMPOSITE IMAGE OF BLOGGERS'S PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE OCCURENCE OF A RAINBOW, 2007.

In addition to “traditional” face-to-face social interaction, the mobile media networks (cell phones, text messaging, email, Web 2.0 networking apps, YouTube, etc.) will be utilized in an organic, democratic way: It is likely that a proliferation of rainbow images and rainbow-themed status updates will appear on Los Angelenos’s Facebooks, Twitters, and blogs; an eventual creation of a Flickr pool of images taken of the event could lead to uploads to Google Map’s street view, outside.in (a “hyperlocal news and information service”), and other inclusions on community-based information websites.

As an example, on the occasion of a rainbow appearing after a rainstorm in 2007, the Los Angeles-focused blogdowntown wrote,

Saturday evening’s rainstorm brought an amazing rainbow to the area, and Downtown’s bloggers did an amazing job of capturing it. Catching up on my RSS feeds after a busy couple of days I found not one, not two, not three, but four different rainbow posts. (Garza)

The post included hyperlinks to these four rainbow mentions, as well as a composite of the images taken by the bloggers (above).

As an addition to the Los Angeles cityscape, the rainbows will, at the most basic level, beautify the environment. In relationship to the built surroundings, the rainbows will engage the city’s architecture with the natural environment. And when considered as a new element of social interaction within the city, the rainbows will prompt new connections and an expansion of social media networks, all of which will result in an exercise that creates, out of mere joy and conversation, a new way of experiencing the city of Los Angeles.

THE CONTEXT

“...we are not ‘cast into the world,’ since we open the world, as it were, by transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started dreaming.”

—Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p 184

“Immensity Is Within Ourselves” takes its title from Gaston Bachelard’s seminal work, *The Poetics of Space*, which is described by its publisher as “the classic look at how we experience intimate places” (Bachelard). I am interested in reconfiguring the city to be an intimate place, and my project attempts to do this by focusing an experience of the city to an intimate point, on a moment of observation that provokes a reaction from an individual inhabitant.

I wonder, though, where does the interaction, or intimate experience, happen between the city and the inhabitant? It seems that, generally speaking, in Los Angeles, such an event does not occur in the actual city environment, but the environment as filtered through the space of a vehicle. With this as my starting point, I am interested in exploring how this effects what Los Angelenos remember, emotionally relate to, or feel about their city and environment. From the vantage of a car, the space of Los Angeles is both intimately close, as it seems to physically push against us with its traffic congestion; and yet, it remains at a distance, disconnected, for we are forever trapped inside our vehicles, while the city exists outside.

I see this investigation in the experiential space of a city as aligned with the notion of “psychogeographies” as enacted by the Situationist International (SI). Unlike the Situationists, however, “Immensity Is Within Ourselves” places great significance in quietude, in a subtle method of intervening in people’s lives, as opposed to the more overt methods of the Situationists’s *dérives* and *détournements*. According to Greil Marcus, in his essay “The Long Walk of the Situationist International,” the SI “looked for images of refusal, or for images society had itself refused, hidden, suppressed, or ‘recuperated’” (Marcus 5), in an attempt to recover their society’s “forgotten desires.” Where the Situationists were interested in agitating and explicit diversions, my project is more aligned with provoking simple, happy reactions. I am inspired not by what boredom and nihilism can provoke, but by what subtlety, beauty, and quiet interaction can achieve.

THE CONTEXT (CONT.)



With this in mind, I see “Immensity Is Within Ourselves” as aligned with projects such as Olafur Eliasson’s “Green River” (pictured) and “Beauty,” and Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s “Blur Building.” The similarities of these projects and mine are that, by working with weather phenomena and nature, at their cores, all are investigating new ways of experiencing one’s environment, both physically and psychologically. The emphasis is less on the method or art object, and more about how these are encountered and engaged with; for me, the key to promoting more intimate interactions with the city is to shift the significance from the form of the city to its essence. This falls in line with “relational aesthetics,” proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud, as described by Nalan Bahçekapıly and Pınar Artykoglu, “Form is defined as an encounter, it is relational property” (Bahçekapıly and Artykoglu 148). The idea of “relational property” also triggers the premise that to truly inhabit a city, one must feel as if they are somehow in dialogue or cooperation with it—that they are, in some sense, influencing and part of urban property.

Recent literature about the aforementioned artworks has focused on the significance of engagement with physical reality, via an awareness of one’s psychological reaction to a space. Speaking about his work, Olafur Eliasson says, “I think that having an art experience is stepping into the world, it is *having reality*” (Eliasson). In this vein, my aim with “Immensity Is Within Ourselves” is to quietly nudge the city’s inhabitants toward stepping into the world, to remind them that Los Angeles does exist outside the car.

That the work can be viewed outside, as a sort of “installation,” would seem to enlarge it to the point of an alien or unknown experience. However, because (as I mentioned earlier) rainbows are experienced as different entities depending on an individual’s position in relation to it, the work maintains a level of intimacy and relatable scale. It is important to me that this work feel close and personal to the viewer. As Lucy Bullivant writes in *Responsive Environments*, “Interactive media is often misunderstood as something that is only part of audio visual devices like DVD players or multimedia software, but our grasp of its potential is extending into an awareness of how it engages with other realms of the senses and at a real-life human scale” (Bullivant 10).

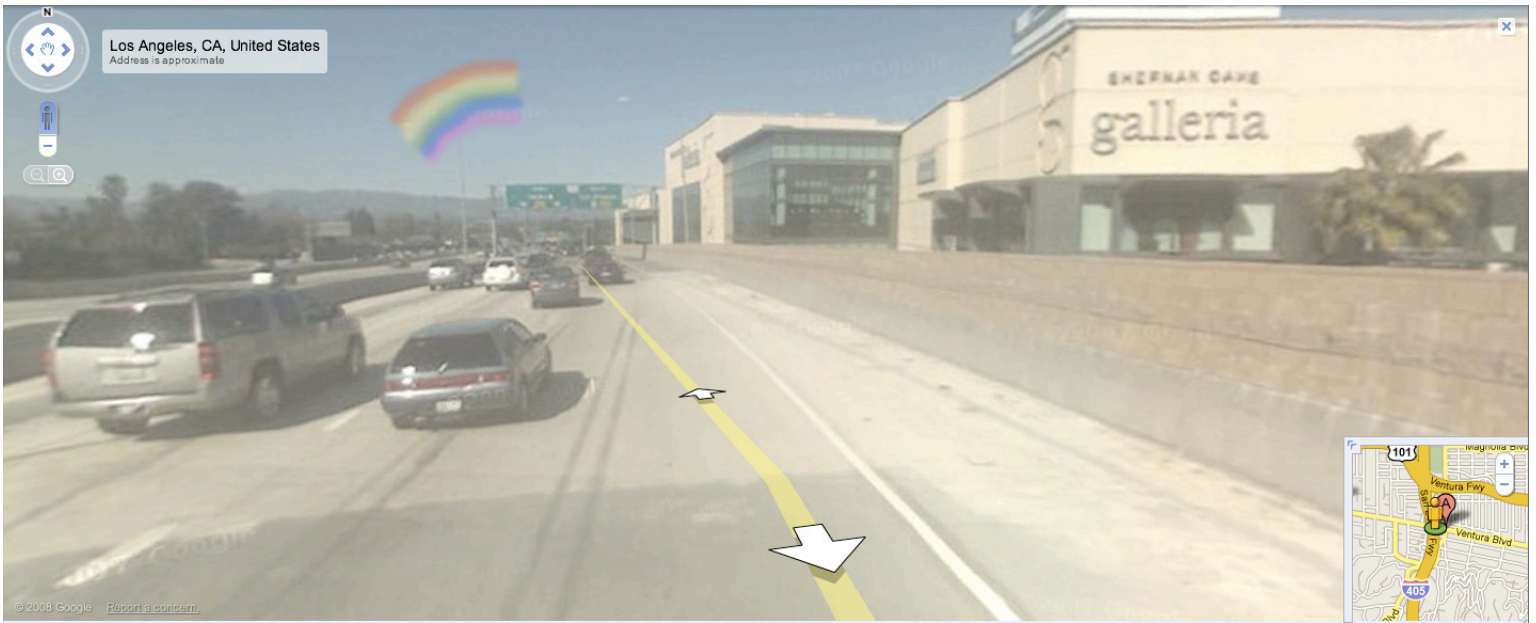


I also view “Immensity Is Within Ourselves” as a form of new architecture, closely related to what Diller and Scofidio termed, about their Blur Building (pictured), “making an architecture of nothing,” or turning architecture into atmosphere (Bahçekapıly and Artykoglu 152). Going back to my initial remarks about feeling inconsequential and isolated in the city, I see this kind of reconfiguration of the cityscape as a possible solution for reconnection. By experiencing, in the way of a “psychogeography,” the built environment through an atmospheric occurrence—and a pleasant, beautiful one, at that—it seems plausible that an individual’s experience of a certain location can decidedly shift. Where before, a driver in traffic loathed the I-405/US-101 interchange, now the experience of glimpsing a rainbow has reshaped the memory of the location.

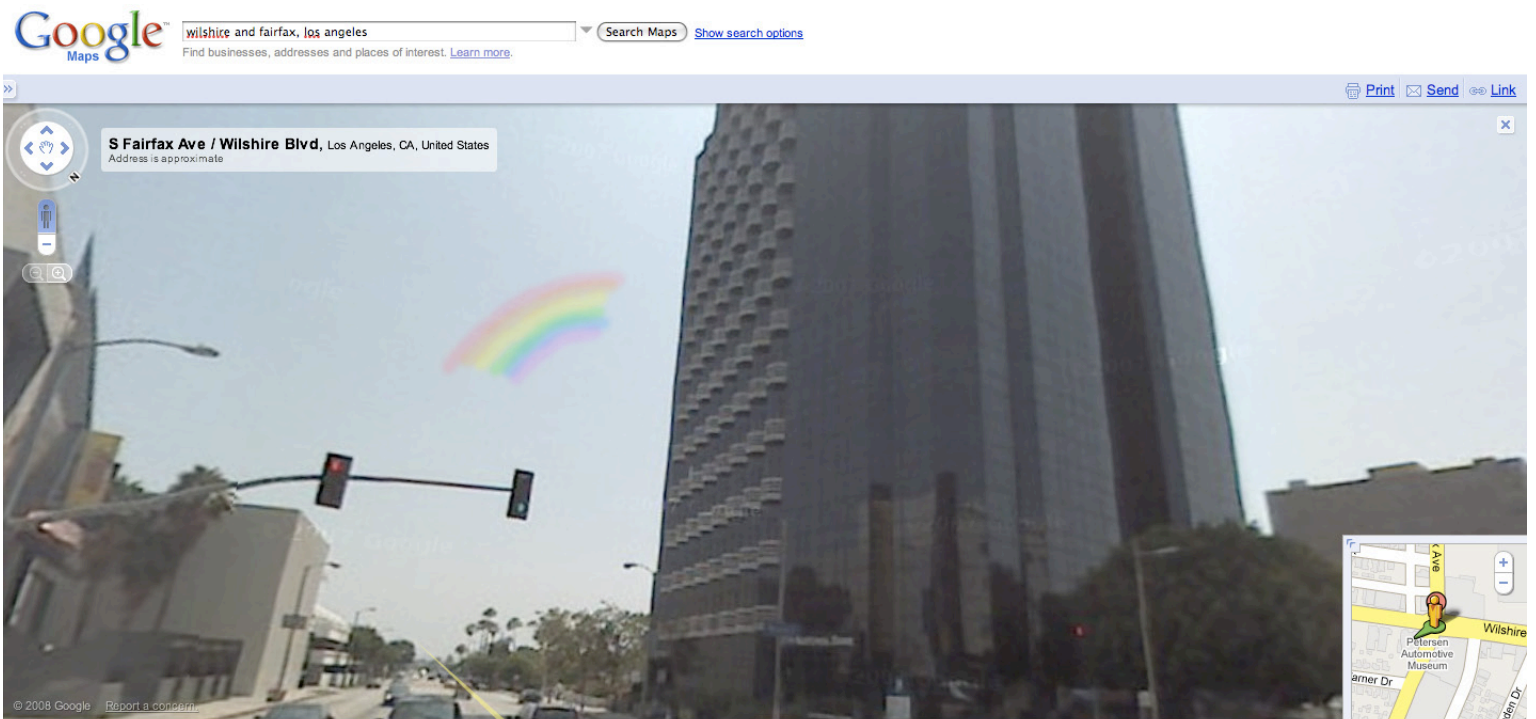
It is exciting to imagine how many locations in Los Angeles can be reshaped, in a positive way, in the minds of the inhabitants. Also, the possible creation of new social connections (which, if we recall, were hitherto reduced by one percent for every minute stuck in traffic), borne from something as simple as sharing the news of spotting a beautiful, momentary rainbow, is in a way thrilling.

LOCATIONS

IMAGES TAKEN FROM GOOGLE MAPS STREET VIEW.
RAINBOW SIMULATION SKETCHES BY THE ARTIST.



THE I-405/US-101 INTERCHANGE. APPARATUS INSTALLED ON WINDOW FACADE OF SHERMAN OAKS GALLERIA.



INTERSECTION OF FAIRFAX AVENUE AND WILSHIRE BOULEVARD (MIRACLE MILE). APPARATUS INSTALLED ON WINDOW FACADE OF PETERSEN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM.

LOCATIONS (CONT.)



THE US-134/US-101 INTERCHANGE.

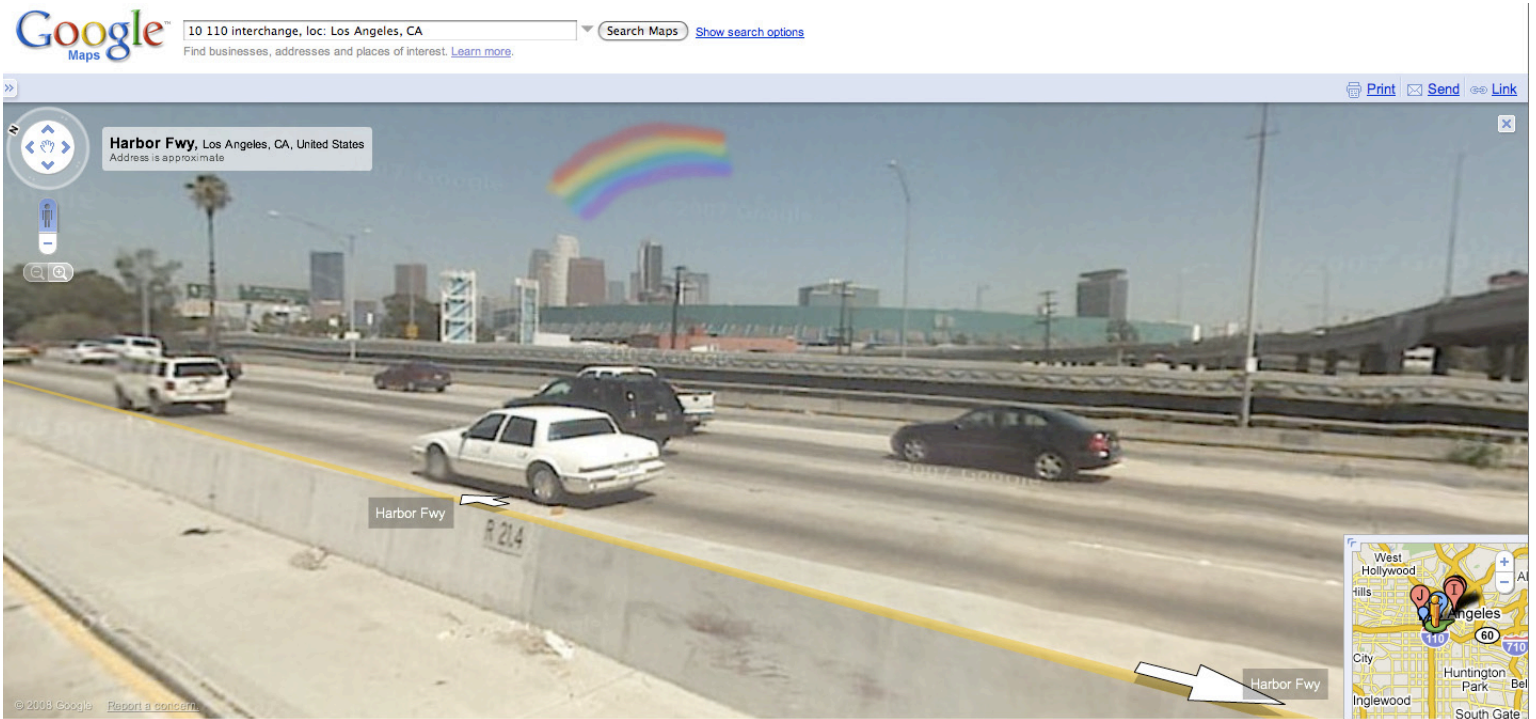


THE I-405/I-10 INTERCHANGE.

LOCATIONS (CONT.)



THE US-134/I-5 INTERCHANGE.



THE I-110/I-10 INTERCHANGE.

BUDGET

MISTERS

PER LOCATION, FAN AND PUMP APPARATUS SHOULD CONSIST OF ONE PUMP, OF 40-60 GPM, AND THREE TO FIVE FANS. TUBING TO BE CONNECTED TO LOCALIZED WATER SUPPLY. WATER USAGE QUOTED AS LOW AS 1/4 GALLON PER MINUTE TO SUPPLY THREE LARGE FANS. THERE ARE SEVERAL OPTIONS FOR A FAN/PUMP SET-UP. THE BELOW INFORMATION IS QUOTED FROM COOL-OFF MISTING TECHNOLOGY, INC.

TWELVE 20" ARCTIC-BREEZE FAN KIT \$6899

INCLUDES: 20" ARCTIC-BREEZE FANS (12); (1500 PSI) SUPERIOR HIGH PRESSURE PUMP (1); TUBING (100FT.); INLET FILTER ASSEMBLY (1); NOZZLE ASSEMBLIES (12); T's (12); 90's (6); COUPLINGS (1); REPLACEMENT NOZZLES (6); DRAIN VALVE (1); TUBE MOUNTS (72); CUTTERS (1) ; ZIP TIES (72); REPLACEMENT ANTI-SCALE CARTRIDGE (1) AND 5 MICRON FILTER (1)

MAINTENANCE

MISTERS SHOULD BE CHECKED EVERY OTHER DAY BY A CITY OFFICIAL, FOR ANY DEFECTS OR PROBLEMS, DURING THE PERIOD OF INSTALLATION (3-6 MONTHS). BASED ON THE ANNUAL SALARY OF A PARKS MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR (APPROX. \$50K), THE ESTIMATED COST OF MAINTNENCE IS \$9000-\$9500, WITH A VISIT ESTIMATED TO AT 1-2 HOURS, 4-5 DAYS PER WEEK, FOR SIX MONTHS.

INSTALLATION AT 6 LOCATIONS

MISTER INSTALLATION AT 6 LOCATIONS CAN BE CONDUCTED BY A CITY OFFICIAL. INSTALLATION TIME IS ESTIMATED AT 12 BUSINESS HOURS, WHICH YIELDS AN ESTIMATED COST OF \$330.

ARTIST'S FEE \$2000

TOTAL \$18830 (EST.)

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