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Activating Infrastructure

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Activating Infrastructure

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Architecture

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Abstract

“The City Implant is an urban design project that can be used to strengthen an existing center or create a new one. It is a spatial and programmatic upgrade that gives an area the status of a center or increases the density of an existing center. Rather than intervening in undeveloped land, a City Implant should be a transformer of empty land and even under-exploited traffic junctions. A City Implant should describe the quality of centrality itself.” Alex Wall “Boomtown v. Regiocity: Thinking and designing or the Networked City Region.” (Almy, 286)

Transportation infrastructures across the United States create issues with urban planning and design and the general operations of life that occur around them. As much as they sponsor movement and transport, they impede the ability to perceive cohesive identities of urban landscape.

Rusted, decaying, impassable walls of infrastructure are imbedded all across the nation’s landscape. The availability and necessity of transportation and increased mobility in the times of planners such as Robert Moses, gave transportation infrastructure the title of progress and innovation.

In the wake of this progress, the impact that the infrastructure has on the landscape that supports it has often been ignored. This gives rise to divided and undesirable landscapes that too often are inhabited by un-mediating programs and wastelands of uninhabitable space. Communities outside thriving civic centers are often divided into regions of un-integrated commercial, residential and industrial land that has developed haphazardly around the large systems of infrastructure as opposed to around a thriving city center. Areas of “frozen-space” arise in “in-between” places, and it is the crucial role of architecture to re-connect and give value to these places through the creation of vital paths and public spaces.

Architecture has the potential to intervene (to be “implanted”) within pre-existing infrastructural elements in such a way as to create valuable space.

In doing so, it can regenerate and strengthen an otherwise derelict urban environment by providing scalar mediation and new programming.

The resulting condition could support the creation of public space while allowing for future growth and development in creating vital links between public spaces and programs otherwise divided by the infrastructure.

In 1893, a railroad network was put in place in Massachusetts, stemming from the center of Boston and radiating to major metropolitan areas to the South and to the West. The Massachusetts government wanted to be at the forefront of those trying to take hold of the power and potential of the steam locomotive, harnessing it to allow for maximum travel and importation of goods. In 1950, the SouthEast Expressway was built. These two elements have had limitless impact upon the communities which they invade (Kennedy, 34).

Setting up a framework that mediates the edge where the city meets transportation fabric, creates possibilities of new opportunities, where once there was a barrier.

The site of Dorchester, Massachusetts is a place that is a manifestation of the divide that has been created by the infrastructure. On the one side of the train tracks and highway infrastructure is a dense neighborhood void of green space and significant identity. On the other, is a peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic called Harbor Point. Located on Harbor Point are the UMASS, Boston campus, the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, a mixed use housing development with walkable amenities and a diverse coastline. As is typical with much of the Boston terrain, Harbor point was added as infill in 1930. Though physically connected to the mainland of the Dorchester neighborhood, it maintains this identity of separate part and piece.

I want to attach onto that which has divided the area, the infrastructure. I want to use the idea of the train, the way in which it facilitates accessibility and mobility and use it to spur future growth of the area. The nature of the infrastructure that has created an environment for the train and automobile that is out of scale with the human body

that utilizes it on a regular basis. I want to use this infrastructure to create an intervention that reclaims areas divided by impassable barriers.