Infrastructured: Opportunistic Infrastructure, Urban Revitalization, and Socioeconomic Reconciliation at Boundaries in Downtown Syracuse, NY.

Nilus Klingel
Infrastructured:
Opportunistic Infrastructure, Urban Revitalization, and Socioeconomic Reconciliation at Boundaries in Downtown Syracuse, NY.

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

Nilus Klingel
Candidate for B.Arch. Degree and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2011

Honors Capstone Project in Architecture

Capstone Project Advisor: Francisco Sanin

Honors Reader: Theodore Brown

Honors Director: James Spencer, Interim Director
The contention of this thesis is that large-scale infrastructures, such as highway systems, energy networks, or water supply complexes – as well as more abstract infrastructures, such as the infrastructures of capitalism or mercantilism – have, as the ‘harbingers’ of Modernity, an indelible impact upon the lives of the human beings who exist under their influence. Eradicating the traditional way of life that preceded them, these structures provide only one point of reference: the unknown future, in which the human struggles to find an identity.

Recent recuperations of infrastructures illustrate how the transformation of former agents of alienation can build community and foster the growth of a vibrant, humane city. In world cities such as Manhattan, Los Angeles, Seoul, as well as smaller cities such as Poughkeepsie, NY, abandoned industrial rail systems, or underused highways, have been transformed into vibrant public spaces, causing the neighboring communities to take on a renewed character and vitality.

Syracuse, NY presents an unusually clear illustration of the crippling effects of infrastructure on various urban constituencies. Examples range from the industrial destruction of the city’s waterfront; the isolation of housing projects from food sources; and the use of highways to eradicate or exclude “unfavorable” communities from Syracuse’s urban core.
A prime example of the accumulative effect of these malignant strategies lies in an interstitial zone between the Downtown and emergent Near Westside neighborhoods. In this area, an unusual density of infrastructure (namely a rail line, intersection of three main roads, and the Onondaga Creek) exist in close proximity, yet also in complete isolation. Their combined effect is one of a series of barriers, cutting Downtown off from the Near Westside.

The specific focus of this project will be to explore how these massive infrastructures could be repurposed/redeployed to transform this marginalized urban zone into a vibrant part of the city, through complex and multi-layered reprogramming, the restoration of public space, and the creation of a pedestrian-traversable landscape.

Specifically speaking, I will provide a hypothetical, speculative vision for what the redevelopment of this zone, and the retooling of its definitive barriers, might yield in terms of design, and what the results of such a renewal might have on the broader urban context, while also developing means by which real, small-scale interventions and/or events might occur on the site, yielding real or tangible effects in the immediate term. Meanwhile, through my participation in the “Crisis City” thesis collaborative, I will continue to publicize the issues surrounding my thesis via the group’s blog, and participate in dialogues on challenging the typical academic architectural thesis process.
The design manifests itself as a “thick landscape” which has active, remedial properties in terms of rainwater treatment and creek ecology. Instead of the channelized creek, a series of locks, pools, and tanks return the Onondaga Creek, at this portion, closer to the borders it occupied as the Mill Pond as late as 1920. This landscape is organized through a series of horizontal bands, which through different densities of remedial plants organize different paths and zones of activity.

Traversing the site and its three barriers (West Street, Onondaga Creek, and the elevated rail line) are four bar-buildings, which are structured as bridges. The programs of the four buildings are as follows: a water filtration and combined-sewer-overflow facility (the “Clinton CSO facility”); a public forum building of auditoria and meeting rooms; a recreational building with a series of seven open-air courtyards which can be flexibly combined or reprogrammed to host playgrounds, basketball courts, musical concerts, film screenings, or farmers markets; and a new facility for the Rescue Mission which provides direct access to a new light rail station at the intersection of Onondaga Avenue and Gifford Street.

Finally, I will continue to promote the issues investigated by my thesis, and reach out to community constituents, through my involvement with The Storefront for Syracuse initiative, at http://aias.syr.edu/front a project to bring
the research and ideas developed on campus out into the public that they are designed for, to stimulate conversation and debate about the role and obligations of architecture in the urban context.
Table of Contents

Introductory text: Syracuse as a Crisis City 1
Definition of unique terms 2

Modernity, Alienation, Agency: The Uses of Infrastructure in a Crisis City 5

Planning a Thick Field: Collecting Infrastructure in Syracuse 12
Tactics for Infrastructural Urbanism 18
Final Project Design: Figures, Drawings, Images 22

Bibliography 39
Syracuse as a Crisis City

Syracuse provides an example of a Crisis City, although not a particularly unique example. Instead, Syracuse is indicative of the way crises play themselves out, throughout all urban environments.

Lefèbvre argues that space is “the location of coherence” - the place where greed, hatred, empathy, apathy, care, anger, and the machinations of the political machine all come into physical manifestation. If space is the place of this coherence, then the built environment (that being the combination of architecture, landscape, and infrastructure) is the medium.

To the left, is a photo of Syracuse in 1965, during the construction of I-81 and I-690. The area highlighted is that which was demolished by the city to make way for these new highways, an area which was predominantly minority and poor citizens of the City.

This began the expulsion of residents from the city into the suburbs, a critical turning point in the evolution of the post-war city from which cities like Syracuse are still struggling to recover.
The urban void becomes a place where this record is kept. These voids linger in the city’s memory, for though they have been patched up, they remain dead zones, devoid of life or community.

**Unique Definitions of Terms**

**Agency** - both the freedom and the ability of a constituency to perform, act, or otherwise determine its own course of action.

**Alienation** - the loss, by an individual or community, of its agency, and an ensuing isolation from other individuals or communities, specifically as a consequence of modernization. In Marx’s terms, this specifically relates to the worker, and his loss of purpose or objective, as he is alienated from his work, his fellow workers, and consequently himself.

**Architect** - an agent of change, a provocateur, who provides vision, and is not simply focused on the process of designing and constructing a building, a landscape, or an infrastructure, but also in identifying problems and solutions, analyzing and organizing data and knowledge, and designing remedial processes.

**Crisis** - a point at which the status quo can no longer continue; an opportunity to put forth bold propositions for necessarily realistic consideration. Consequently, crisis becomes a moment of social innovation.
Dehumanization - the stripping away of, or marginalization of, an individual’s (or community’s) identity, such that their human condition becomes obscured or lost.

Humanism - a word with a vast definition, for the purposes of this project, Humanism will be defined as the belief that the human can attain whatever it pleases, and have whatever it wants, without restrictions. As such, Humanism will be closely tied to consumerism, as well as with the metropolitanization of cities / human identities.

Infrastructure - most frequently, a large construction or physical edifice which has the purpose of conveying resources, transporting goods or people, or performing a large-scale purpose. However, infrastructure can also be intangible or virtual, as in capitalist ‘infrastructures,’ or political ‘infrastructures,’ both examples of which are large-scale systems which perform a certain non-physical purpose, but have physical consequences.

Infrastructured - the subjection to infrastructures (whether physical or intangible) which results in dehumanization, and the loss of identity.

Metropolitan - the condition of a city which has grown so rich in capital and population that it overgrows the boundaries that had defined the traditional
city. The metropolitan city becomes an interdependent urban area which in Koolhaas’ terms is no longer associated with cityness but rather, loses its identity and is subsumed into a globalized whole.

**Modernism** - the period in the arts, literature, and architecture associated with the advent of modernity. Within the architectural context of ‘stylistic periods’ it is very much up for debate whether Modernism is still in play. Nonetheless, I will use Modernism to describe works of art or architecture that emerge in the advent of modernity, which whether Modern or Postmodern, share a likeness in that they are suffused with modernity, and are unable to turn back.

**Modernity** - the condition of an industrialized or post-industrialized society, largely secularized, rationalized, and capitalized; however, it is also, in Berman’s terms, a torrent against which the individual is powerless, a social force of constant change which is bewildering and alienating.

**Transdisciplinary** - a nature of research, speculation, and practice, which is informed by the logics and processes of multiple disciplines.
Modernity, Alienation, Agency: The Uses of Infrastructure in a ‘Crisis City’

In its May 1943 issue, Architecture Forum described Syracuse as the perfect candidate for a speculative architectural brainstorm, a series of hypothetical projects by prominent architects including Charles Eames and Mies van der Rohe, called “194X.” More specifically, the description is as follows:

Syracuse was chosen for this cooperative effort for a variety of reasons. A busy industrial community of 200,000, it has many of the characteristics and the problems of a thriving city of medium size. It has a highly diversified industry, an excellent university, no real slums. Like other typical communities it is still trying to force motor-traffic through horse-and-buggy streets, it has too much noise, too little sun, too few parks, and too many commuters who waste years of their lives in a daily escape to the fringes and open country. Most important, it has a citizenry, which is progressive and interested in improving the community.¹

The problems Syracuse faced seemed insignificant to the good will and can-do attitude that pervaded the “urban renewal” movement at the time. Through simple modernization of the city’s infrastructure, community could be reinvigorated, and life could be improved.

Ironically, this moment of speculation set the stage for what might arguably be the most disastrous period of Syracuse’s development, in which the city’s urban core and metropolitan vitality were undermined by the creation of massive infrastructures which evacuated residents from the urban core; isolated and

marginalized “undesirable communities;” and established unhealthy relationships between the upkeep of the city, and the health of the surrounding environment. These developments will be described in the next section.

This was the beginning of a crisis. The crisis was not simply restricted to Syracuse, however, as the situation in Syracuse was emblematic of an emerging crisis in cities throughout America. It was a moment when the built form of the city was forced to boldly leap into the new Industrial Era: to embrace the automobile, to be subjected to the economic agendas of a willful emerging industry – in other words, to experience, for the first time, the condition of modernity.

In his 1982 work All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity, Marshall Berman, an urban theorist, offers an evocative and complete description of this new condition:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”

In this environment, there was no clear way forward for the American City. To be sure, there was a need for ‘bold new visions’, which deployed new infrastructures to accommodate emerging technologies, most notably the automobile.

At the same time as this need for Post War transformation, Syracuse was also undergoing some intense industrial transformations as well. Following the demise of commercial traffic on the Erie Canal, and the changing dynamics of a nation engaged in international trade, Syracuse traditional economy was in danger. The City had started as a colonial trading post with the Onondaga Nation, but shortly after the creation of the Erie Canal, Syracuse, with its salt springs and “Salt Lake” (later renamed Lake Onondaga). The area surrounding the lake was not a recreational landscape, but a productive one; lined with hundreds of “salt sheds” tended to by a workforce that made up most of the city’s population.\(^3\)

However, especially in the Post War period, the shift to a transnational economy left Syracuse in a difficult position: its salt was no longer in demand, and the industry essentially dried up. In a matter of a few years, the life blood of Syracuse’s economy was gone, and with it, the many jobs it provided for its citizens. The city of Syracuse was, by and large, ‘infrastructured,’ left on its own to determine its fate in the advent of modernity.

\(^3\) Map of the City of Syracuse, 1942, Syracuse University Library Map Room
The change in economics had its effect on socioeconomy, as well. Those who were able to weather the transformation of Syracuse from an industrial city to a service-oriented city created an emerging, distinct middle class. Though socioeconomic disparity and tensions had existed both in America and in Syracuse for quite some time, this turning point began a period wherein the design of the city was consciously engineered to embody those tensions and produce separations between different socioeconomic, and frequently, racial or ethnic groups.

An early example can be found in the 1937 “Redline Map” (fig. 1) for the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) which was a Federal corporation preceding loan-granting corporations such as Fannie Mae. Sergei Grimm, who later went on to become the city’s urban planner, produced this document of Syracuse which was used by the HOLC to determine whether a piece of real estate would be given a loan. Residential areas which were at the time inhabited by predominantly African-American and Jewish residents were, by and large, marked red, including the Near Westside (“D4”) and the Eastside, where several housing developments were constructed, including Pioneer Homes, completed in 1941 as the first Federal Public Housing project.
Housing stock for the university neighborhood (Euclid Ave., Westcott Ave., etc.) is in the top two grades.

Later, in 1965, another prime example would be found in Mayor William F. Walsh’s decision to raze the homes of 20,000 inhabitants in the immediate area of Downtown, and replace this neighborhood with a new civic and commercial development known as “The Community Plaza” (fig. 3) - an example of race-targeted urban planning, and evisceration of the urban core.⁴

As recently as 2007, this pattern of ‘infrastructuring’ socioeconomic minorities, is documented to have been persisting. In a paper presented at an environmental justice symposium at Howard University Law School, the Onondaga Creek Partnerships’ Aggie Lane and Tarki Heath show how lobbying by affluent residents of the city, along with major commercial interests, led to a necessary water purification structure, known as the Midland Avenue Water Treatment facility, being placed in an inefficient hydrological and ecological location, largely due to the socioeconomic makeup of that area.⁵ The result of the construction of this facility is that the real estate values in this neighborhood plummeted, further marginalizing the disadvantaged community living there. This most recent episode is further proof of the central

---

⁵ Aggie Lane and Tarki Heath, “Environmental Racism in Syracuse, NY: A Case Study of Government’s Failure to Protect and Endangered Waterway and a Neglected Community.”
contention that infrastructure, even today, is often used as a tool for social or economic alienation.

New Infrastructures

Moving forward, Syracuse has an opportunity to overcome the social tensions and economic instabilities that characterized its past. There are indications that this is already an emerging trend, as witnessed by the community-driven initiatives surrounding two major infrastructural projects: the reconstruction of I-81, and the rehabilitation of the Onondaga Creek. In the previous paradigm, infrastructure was deployed at the order of autocratic political leaders who had amassed sufficient political capital as to do what they alone saw fit. (Examples would include Robert Moses in New York and Nelson Rockefeller in Albany.)

This situation results in a quantifiable economic, political, and social disenfranchisement (and, therefore, alienation) of the constituencies who are adversely affected by the autocratic process by which the infrastructure is put in place – if not by the infrastructure itself.

Opportunities arise to undo this disenfranchisement, often to the benefit of the community, and thus, the activity and built environment of the city. Recent recuperations of infrastructures illustrate how the transformation of former agents of alienation can build community and foster the growth of a
vibrant, humane city. In Poughkeepsie, NY, a train trestle looms over a
“formerly urban” city, having once ferried convoys of freight trains carrying
food, water, and fuel to their ultimate consumption in New York City. The
trains were interlopers; neither of the city, nor for it. The residents were
alienated by this machine: simply bystanders, unable to comprehend the vast
and abstract system of which it was a part. With railroads overtaken by
trucking and airfreight networks, the trestle went unused, until its recent
reclamation by the residents of Poughkeepsie, resulting in its transformation
into an elevated park and pedestrian path, known as “The Walkway.”

Syracuse’s own infrastructure, mostly under utilized or in need of attention,
repair, or reinvention, is a prime candidate for this type of infrastructural-based
urban revitalization. (See figures 10, 11, and 12.)

While the social and economic tensions of the past two centuries still persist, as
one may find rampant in any Syracuse internet discussion board, it is possible
for an urban intervention to broach them. The architecture of intervention
proposed for this area will aim to become involved in highlighting these
conditions, and creating an interpretive framework through which the residents
of the City can better understand the structure and nature of their own community.
Through the revitalization of an disinvested, marginalized, and infrastructured zone of the city, Syracuse may begin to stitch together two segregated parts of itself, and engage in the public discussion about the city community: who belongs, who doesn’t, and how the community can cohere and work together for their own betterment, and the improvement of their City.
Planning a Thick Field: Collecting Infrastructure in Syracuse

Surveying Syracuse for a site suitable for this sort of infrastructural recuperation, one finds several candidates. The two interstate highways, 81 and 690, and particularly their gnarled intersection at the heart of Syracuse’s downtown, are uniquely interesting for the historical and social issues they raise. Loaded with the baggage of midcentury urban renewal projects and postwar planning policies, they are also at the heart of contemporary debates about the role and use of infrastructure in the American city.

At the regional level, (fig. 4) Syracuse is one among a string of small, originally industrial cities whose development was made possible by the Erie Canal, the famous man-made waterway which was completed in 1825. Syracuse, had existed prior to the canal, primarily as a Revolutionary War-era trading outpost with the Onondaga Nation.  

Once the canal infrastructure was created however, the development of Syracuse exploded. Lake Onondaga, fed by salt springs, was a tremendous source of salt, and the city’s industry grew up around the salt sheds east of the lake, which exported salt to the surrounding cities, which themselves had switched from producing wheat to pork, which required large amounts of salt.

---

Over time, the canal system, with its slow pace of traffic (about 4mph) was eclipsed by new railroad systems, which by and large ran parallel to the canal. Within 10 years, local railroads had been chartered, and by 1853, the New York Central emerged as the economic powerhouse. The rail infrastructure had overtaken canal traffic for the most efficient and cheapest method of moving goods throughout the region.

Just about 100 years later, in 1956, the Federal Highway Act was passed, inaugurating a boom in interstate highway construction through the region, predominantly between 1960 and 1970. Very quickly, the highway infrastructure overtook the rail infrastructure, primarily as the preferred mode of passenger transit, especially as the automobile proliferated the American landscape.⁷

To this day, the rail system is used to move a considerable amount of freight through the region, and Syracuse is providentially at the intersection of both two highways and two rail lines.

Evident throughout the development of the Upstate New York economy is the role infrastructure plays in the development of cities. Those cities which sat at a

confluence point between two or more infrastructures always prospered, while those with limited access to infrastructure were consigned to limited development.

However, Syracuse cannot be understood simply as a city. Instead, Syracuse is a major capital center for a larger metropolis, a network of industrial, commercial, and civic centers which are interlinked through the infrastructures of Onondaga County. (fig. 5) Syracuse lies at the heart of the County, providing the seat of government. Contiguous to it are smaller cities and townships, including Solvay, East Syracuse, Liverpool, North Syracuse, and Dewitt; these population centers have grown and sprawled to the point where they have now morphed into a single urban whole.

Farther out from the City center lie smaller townships, villages, and hamlets, which are to some extent self-sufficient, but ultimately dependent on the capital generated in the City for their existence. Many are also bedroom communities, housing the City’s office workers in “family friendly” suburban environments.

It is interesting to note the lack of dense settlement on the banks of the numerous water features in the County. Lake Onondaga and Oneida are both largely undeveloped, or have a small scale of development. Similarly, Lake Skaneateles is surrounded by farm land or light residential areas. The dense settlement occurs not at a particular “water feature” but rather, at the
confluence point between a productive body of water (the former Salt Lake, Onondaga) and the infrastructures of delivery and transportation.

In this context, it is easy to see the vital importance the highway infrastructure (and, for industry, the rail infrastructure) play for the residents of this metropolitan area. Furthermore, it is clear the importance that the crossroads of these separate infrastructures (rail, highway, creek, and former canal) play in the development of Syracuse as the predominant capital center in the area. It is clear that when there is an interconnection between infrastructures, urban development, and as a consequence, urban vitality, follow.

Within the bounds of the City of Syracuse, these infrastructures, which operate on a regional and metropolitan scale, all converge at a local point in the City. Surprisingly, as will be see in the following diagrams, these infrastructures no longer connect or interact; their meeting point in the middle of the capital center is isolated and, for the most part, barren of real urban activity.

Syracuse is, in many ways, defined by its infrastructure. Throughout its history, any deployment of urban planning (until recent years) was primarily focused on the development of traffic flows and patterns, and the development of commuter-delivery systems. The history of the city could be said to be one of self-evisceration, in which the planning principles proceeded along two lines: (1) remove poor minorities and their slums to “clean up the city” and (2) create
a network of highways, boulevards, and parking structures which will expedite
and encourage the commute of some 200,000 people into and out of
Syracuse from its surrounding suburbs each day.

The urban fabric was not seen as a dynamic landscape, but rather, as a
glorified office park. And it was treated accordingly: while the surrounding
landscape was suburbanized, so too was Syracuse. Insensitive traffic engineers
and urban planners eviscerated integral parts of the city, installing vast roads,
sometimes elevated, and frequently wider than four lanes. The primary design
agenda with these new systems was not the preservation or creation of
interconnected urban fabric: it was the optimization of traffic flows and velocity.

This is a story not unique to Syracuse, it is the story of urban renewal in the
1950’s and 1960’s, a story over which figures like Robert Moses loom large.
These planning principles encouraged the sprawl of generic suburban spaces,
and left urban cores eviscerated, disconnected, and struggling to maintain any
sense of vitality.

The area where these various infrastructures converge is a fascinating urban
condition, characterized by marginal development and little-to-no public
accessibility. Despite the amazing density of infrastructure, which in many
cities might result in high-desirability land, this area is marginalized. It is this
site which I have selected this particular area as the location of my investigation
and intervention. While not one of the city’s formal centers, it is a confluence point for many of the city’s major roads, infrastructures, and systems, and its revitalization and activation could make it a key urban node in the connection between the Downtown neighborhood and the Near Westside. The infrastructures on this location consist of:

(1) The elevated track of the former Susquehanna & West railroad, now owned by CSX. This line formerly hosted OnTrack, a passenger shuttle between the University, Downtown, and Mall. This service was generally unprofitable, and was terminated after a few years of state-mandated operation. Now, the line is used exclusively to move freight through the city, to the industrial areas south of Lake Onondaga, and in East Syracuse.

(2) Onondaga Creek, a body of flowing water which is an integral part of the Onondaga valley watershed, and which provides the lake with 33% of its water. It is currently inaccessible to the public, locked behind chain-link fences, and subjected to point-source contamination from factories, gas stations, and the combined storm water sewer system.

(3) The West Street Arterial highway, and associated feeder streets (Harrison, Adams, and Onondaga). Developed and installed during the interstate highway project of 1965-1975, West Street cut the Downtown area off from the Near Westside, effectively isolating the land lying east of it, which is also
bound by the Creek and OnTrack. Onondaga Avenue, one of the longest continuous streets in the city, and one of the only streets to travel diagonally. It originates in Columbus Circle and terminates in a rural area to Syracuse’s south-west.

Furthermore, these systems create a series of boundary conditions that insulate the Downtown area from the low-income, predominantly minority communities lying to the south and west.
Tactics for Infrastructural Urbanism

“Architecture today cannot concern itself only with that one set of structures that happen to stand upright and be hollow “buildings” in the conventional sense. It must concern itself with all man-made elements that form our environments; with roads and highways, with signs and posters, with outdoor spaces as created by structures, and with cityscape and landscape.” Alex Wall (quoting Victor Gruen), 1955

“The time has come to approach architecture urbanistically, and urbanism architecturally.” Alison Smithson, 1968

“Infrastructure prepares the ground for future building and creates the conditions for future events. Its primary modes of operation are: the division, allocation, and construction of surfaces; the provision of services to support future programs; and the establishment of networks for movement, communication, and exchange.”

Developing on Stan Allen’s definition of infrastructure, one can see that this act of creating preparing the landscape, the fundamental foundations for the city are laid. It is thus unsurprising to find this infrastructural ‘act’ taking on civic overtones, as, for instance, when Dana Cuff describes the place of

---

infrastructure as a new civic square, as infrastructure is that system which executes “the public’s work”. 9

Certainly this conception of infrastructures’ profound potential is a key to its recuperation as an enabling force in the life of a community or city, as opposed to a debilitating one. If the ecological and social problems of the last century are rooted in social alienation further enabled by the physical isolation of an automotive city, then the solutions to these problems lie in a return to a central gathering point. There is perhaps no better focal point for this civic conversation than at the infrastructure which is functioning to remediate our environment, so that instead of being dead spaces which are left to execute their processes in isolation, they may become vibrant, social spaces in which the workings of the city (both ecologically and socially) are revealed.

With three languishing infrastructures already seeding the site, my intention is to promote their activation through the addition of new infrastructures, in a sense “priming the pump.” The additional infrastructures consist of (1) a hypothetical redesign of the Clinton Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) storage facility; (2) a forum for public discussions, symposia, meetings, and community events; (3) a recreational ‘platform’ of seven open-air squares and their attending amenities which can be used for a number of public recreational

---

purposes; (4) a new enhanced facility for the Rescue Mission charitable outreach center.

Additionally, the preexisting three infrastructures would be transformed as follows: THE ONONDAGA CREEK would be widened and expanded at this area into an area roughly resembling its 1880 status as “The Mill Pond,” through a series of pools and locks which regulate flow, slow surface velocity, and encourage desedimentation to occur. In conjunction with this creek rejuvenation, the infrastructure would include a thick landscape embedded with remediative plants, walking, and bicycle paths, surrounding the newly-expanded creek. (Refer to figure 15.)

WEST STREET ARTERIAL HIGHWAY would be given a ‘road diet,’ as is currently being discussed in numerous public forums, eliminating essentially four of its eight lanes. The space gained from this diet would be utilized towards parks on the western side of the street, promoting community gathering spaces and activities on the outside edge of the neighborhood, adjacent to the park, encouraging the reclamation of the West Street space by the community, and engendering movement across the newly-shrunk roadway into the project.

ONTRACK ELEVATED RAIL would be repurposed not simply as a class-1 heavy freight corridor, but also for the purposes of a light rail system connecting Downtown to neighborhoods in the South, and infrastructural connections in
the North. As part of this light rail system two new rail stations would be proposed for the site, tying into the existing buildings, providing mobility for visitors to downtown, as well as to the homeless and marginalized communities already living in proximity to downtown, enabling them unmitigated access to a powerful urban mobility corridor.

The combination of these infrastructures would yield a space which was programmatic rich, varied, and active; the density ensuring that multiple demographics were frequently interacting with one another. This, the barren land once razed by the construction and operation of the vast infrastructures which feed the City of Syracuse can now become not just an active field, but also a monument to a society which is actively engaged in reshaping itself and remediating its latent crises. Such a project would become not simply a gathering point in the city, not a productive space of ecological remediation, but even a monument to which the community could aspire, and in turn, contribute to. This would achieve the end goal of this project, to overcome the negative effects of infrastructure, by enabling formerly ‘infrastructured’ communities, and to, as Alexander d’Hooghe suggests – describing ‘the liberal monument’ – “introduce a system of public architecture in a territory otherwise devoid of it.”

---

Final Project Design: Figures, Drawings, Images

Figure 1 – Image of the 1946 Home Owner’s Loan Corporation rating map, Syracuse University Library archives.
Figure 2 – comparative aerial imagery of Syracuse, 1926 image from the Onondaga Historical Association; 2009 image from Microsoft Bing.
Figure 3 – Image from the 1965 Community Plaza planning document, indicating the extent of the 15th Ward to be demolished to make way for a new civic center designed by Victor Gruen.
Figure 4 – Diagram indicating the confluence points of infrastructural systems at the scope of New York State: rail lines (orange), canals and waterways (blue) and highways (yellow).
Figure 5 – Diagram indicating the confluence points of infrastructural systems at the scope of Onondaga County: rail lines (orange), canals and waterways (blue) and highways (yellow).
Figure 6 – Diagram indicating the confluence points of infrastructural systems at the scope of the site of the project in Downtown Syracuse: rail lines (orange), canals and waterways (blue) and highways (yellow).
Figure 7 – Diagrams analyzing existing site conditions related to buildings and lots, in relation to the projected parameters of the intervention.
Figure 7 continued – depicting the relationship between combined sewer overflow (CSO) lines and the ecological systems of Onondaga Creek.
Figure 8 – Image of the official design for the Clinton CSO facility on the site, from the Onondaga County “Save the Rain” initiative website.
Figure 9 – Diagram sketches analyzing existing site conditions: boundaries, road connections, available open space, and social networks applicable to the site.
Figure 10 – Diagram analyzing critical nodes interconnected by the existing highway infrastructure.
Figure 11 – Diagram analyzing critical nodes interconnected by the existing creek infrastructure.
Figure 12 – Diagram analyzing the critical nodes which are currently (or could become) connected by the existing rail infrastructure. This diagram projects the future of what a light rail system could consist of.
Figure 13 – Exploded axonometric illustrating project components.
Figure 14 – Site plan of project, illustrating placement of the four infrastructures relative to the expanded creek landscape.
Figure 15 – Site rendering of overall project.

Figure 16 – Rendering of infrastructures #1 and #2, the Clinton CSO facility and the community forum.

Figure 17 – Rendering of the community forum.
Figure 18 – Rendering of the community forum.

Figure 19 – Rendering of the water facility in relation to Armory Square.

Figure 20 – Rendering of the site in its broader context.
Bibliography


Carmona, Matthew. Public Places Urban Spaces: the Dimensions of Urban

Cohn, Jerome. Urban Background to the Interstate Highway Program: The

Corner, James. Recovering Landscape. New York: Princeton Architectural

Gandelsonas, Mario. X-urbanism: Architecture and the American City. New


Lahoud, Adrian. “Post-Traumatic Urbanism.” Architectural Design. Volume 80,

Leach, Neil. Rethinking Architecture: a Reader in Cultural Theory. New York:

Rattenbury, Kester. This is Not Architecture: Media Constructions. London: 
Routeledge, 2002.

Schaik, Martin Van. Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956-76. Berlin: 
Prestel, 2005.

Tafuri, Manfredo. Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist 


Wall, Alex. Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City. Barcelona: Actar, 
2005.