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DES 3332 Critical Conservation
Topic 1: Mid 20th Century Scientific Progressivism Supplants Tradition
10/7/13

Divided Somerville:

In many ways, the transformation of the Brickbottom, Somerville, from a fine grain residential mixed use neighborhood to a low density industrial zone closely follows the larger narrative of the 20th century American city. Brickbottom has been shaped by the the interrelation of infrastructure, industry, and scale. The development of transportation infrastructure attracted industry which in turn necessitated additional highways to ship the goods of mass production. Together, the construction of infrastructure and industry introduced an entirely new scale that supplanted the existing neighborhood. Although these forces manifest in Brickbottom in a way that is specific to its place, their spatial consequences can be found in cities across America and their cultural origins are deeply entrenched in the history of urban planning and the global currents of modernization.

Brickbottom at the turn of the century closely resembled the tenements of Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*. Somerville had already been urbanized due to rail and road infrastructure linking the city with Boston and the rest of New England. As a result, the neighborhood was already densely settled and heavily industrialized, with most of the residents working in nearby manufacturing plants or auxiliary industries. Like the Lower East Side documented in Riis' book, Brickbottom's residents were primarily first or second generation immigrants and their housing conditions were characterized by similar health and safety concerns of overcrowding.

Although Riis was a progressive reformer who wanted to use modern scientific theories to improve the lives of the poor, tenements quickly took on a moral valence with the rise of the temperance movement and post-WWI xenophobia. This equation of the physical degeneracy of the housing stock with the moral degeneracy of its residents is evident even in Riis' stated agenda of inculcating 'American'

values on these immigrant populations through their built surroundings. Although Brickbottom was demonstrably an active neighborhood, it was publicly considered one such 'decadent' slum of foreigners. This perception which would have long lasting consequences for residents as Brickbottom as similar neighborhoods nationwide were targeted for urban renewal and highway infrastructure projects residents.

The explosion of highway construction in the 20th century can be traced to two major interrelated forces, Fordist mass production and Le Corbusier's *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*. Ford and the car industry sat at the intersection of industrialization and infrastructure, in which automotive transportation was both the product and enabler of mass production. Furthermore, as seen in General Motors' exhibit *Futurama* and dissected by Morshed in the "Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama", the automotive industry successfully incorporated highways and car culture into the narrative of national progress and American manifest destiny. This marshalling of public opinion gave social agency to highway construction as an instrument of economic growth and urban development.

Fordism and its effects are evident in the evolution of Brickbottom. The most direct of these ramifications can be seen in the series of highway construction projects, the first of which was the Central Artery. Built in 1926, the project followed the western edge of Brickbottom. Like other infrastructure projects, it was intended to catalyze economic development in Somerville, and indeed the construction of the highway did usher in a period of increased industrialization. Between 1900 and the 1930s, a number of large manufacturing plants and their auxiliary storage and transportation companies were built in the vicinity of Brickbottom, including a Ford plant in Assembly Square.

However these infrastructure projects came with spatial and social consequences. The expansion of the street not only displaced hundreds of homes, it also began to separate Brickbottom from the rest of Somerville. Furthermore, the increased industrialization of the area began to lower the density of the fabric and erode the residential character of the neighborhood. It is important to note that the Central Artery was constructed in 1926, contemporaneously with a high profile court case that highlighted

Brickbottom's reputation as a degenerate slum. This suggests a correlation between the governmental power to implement large scale construction and vulnerable populations with limited economic and political clout. In 1958, a mile and half long overpass was built along the path of the Central Artery in response to congestion concerns. This not only further widened the street but created a grade separation that effectively severed Brickbottom from Somerville.

The manifestation of Fordism can also be seen in the 1968 Linwood-Joy urban renewal project in Brickbottom. Fordism was theorized as an approach to urban planning by Le Corbusier in *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*. Like Riis, Le Corbusier wanted to apply scientific principles of engineering to the city. As discussed in Guillen's *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical*, Le Corbusier patterned his approach on mass production by developing theoretically optimized urban morphologies which could be applied at a large scale to any city. His metaphor of 'physic or surgery' suggests that what ailed the city could be cured by architecture and planning, specifically large scale redevelopment and highway infrastructure.

This concept urban 'surgery', or wholly replacing large swaths of existing urban fabric with an entirely new scale, underpins the urban renewal projects of the mid-20th century, such as those by Robert Moses in New York City. The Linwood-Joy project is typical of urban renewal projects in that it relocated residents and business and re-parceled and then rezoned the area for industry. Together with the infrastructural divide of the highway, this rezoning effectively supplanted the former active residential mixed use neighborhood with an industrial zone. However, the city was not able to attract industries that would generate economic revenue, and the area now mostly houses low density uses such as parking and storage.

Beginning in the 1960s, public resistance to Corbusian urban renewal and infrastructure project grows with Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and the defeat of the Manhattan Expressway. In Boston and Brickbottom, this plays out in the cancellation of the proposed Inner Belt

highway in 1971, which would have run through the northern side of the former neighborhood and further separated the site from the rest of Somerville. However, by that point the forces of Fordist mass production and infrastructure had replaced the original neighborhood with an entirely new scale, grain, and use.

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