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Prof. Lim

Visual Essay

Assignment

### *The “Secret Garden”*



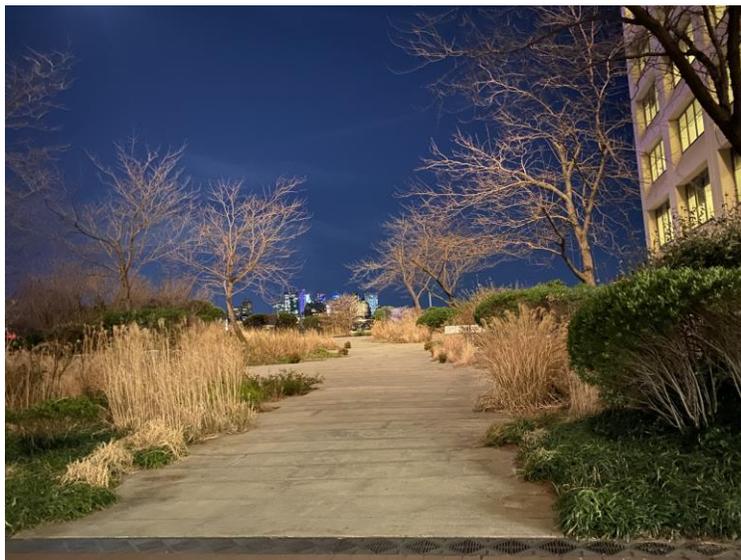
As a commuter of the city, I’ve never paid much attention to all my surroundings because of all the madness that goes by, each second of the day. The city to me is a very diverse place but it is all full of chaos. At every corner, there is something happening. It feels like it just gets more overly crowded each year. This is just how I view it, but usually its known for its rich history and it is the main attraction for many tourists. Out of all the places I’ve seen in NYC, this one was oddly intriguing because of the serenity this tiny piece of space provides. This was my first time heading towards a new park. Usually in the summer, even battery park is full of people but this one is so discreet, it is hard for people to even know it exists. Therefore, I referred to a secret garden. This is a plaza which is located about 30 ft from the street level.

The plaza is called the “Elevated Arce”. It is located downtown Manhattan at 55 water street. This park is the type of place where people around the neighborhood can come to relax, and enjoy a piece of mind from a city of chaos. The park is built on top of a parking garage. Its dimensions are approximately one acre and it was fully built by 2005. This space is surrounded by two financial district buildings, one being a skyscraper of 52 stories owned by the Retirement Systems of Alabama and the other a 15-story building. The Park itself is a privately owned public space. This means it's under a city zoning ordinance and it is required to be open to the public. Usually these types of deals are done between private real estate developers and the city. Therefore, it means the city had to come to an accordance that they’ll grant permission for their urban development in a specific zone; and in return, the developer provides a POPOS (Privately owned public open space). The park itself is interesting because the building provides many amenities during the summer. It interested me because out of all the parks in the city this one is secretive and peaceful. The spaces around the plaza are mostly rich corporations. Top making tenants rent the spaces in 55 Water Street. This specific area is distinct from other places because to the people who are always busy it gives them a space for relaxation.

This secluded area is great for sightseeing because it offers a view of the east side of Brooklyn, the bridge, and the New York harbor. It has a lawn, and small gardens with benches which provides a sense of tranquility. As I walked by, I observed couples hanging out in the benches watching the Brooklyn lights in the night sky. It seemed very peaceful; full of cinematic energy. This plaza is surrounded by small shops like a Starbucks lobby, parking, convenience shops, etc. This area is



also not so far from main attractions such as Staten Island ferry, restaurants, seaport, world trade center, wall street, battery park, and the charging bull. Although, I went during the evening, there were not many people, I presume there aren't as many people in the morning. This is because this area is so secretive most likely only tenants of the building know about the plaza. The activities that occur in the plaza are outdoor movies, beer gardens, events such as yoga classes in the summer. It can also be described as simple, as enjoying the scenery of the small colorful gardens, to eating lunch during break. This plaza can also be rented out as a venue for different events.



The role built into this environment is to provide New Yorker's or commuters with a sense of peacefulness even if its during lunch break. Its visible to recognize it as a place through the stairs, benches, a lawn to lay back and relax. You can see the escalators and main stairs that go up the building to the park. Even the plants are laid back and relaxed. The shops that surround the area to even the street vendors that are in the corner. This is what makes a piece of land to be known as a place. All the details

designed into the plaza specifically, is what makes this space peaceful. In a city, where all you see is strangers bumping against each other, noisy traffic, and tall skyscrapers, it would feel good to be in an environment where you have the water view, green plants, and trees. I believe this was designed to portray a sense of freshness as if we can sit back and take a pause in the chaos. A creates a sense of "so far, yet so close" because it feels as if we're so far away from the city in suburban, but we are actually located in the busy downtown district. In my opinion, the owner of

the building invested to have this acre of space designed suitable for his tenants and to keep the attraction of their buildings growing. There are many factors to recognize this space as a place.

Power in an urban community can be portrayed even in the smallest of details. In this specific space, we have to recognize the district itself. This specific area is in the financial district which is considered a rich neighborhood. The area itself has many buildings being reconstructed to form luxury apartments. This place is known for



many of its attractions which brings tourists. The power here comes from the owner Retirement systems of Alabama, which is given enough power by the city to function well, in a rich neighborhood like this one. The specific plaza called the Elevated Arce is place that can be rented as a venue to host for weddings, parties and other events. The restaurants around also provide catering. This is how power is portrayed in this environment, this plaza is built to attract more people into the buildings and the surrounding businesses. A place with a great environment will always attract the customers. According to an outside source, the neighborhood itself is said to be home to many famous singers. As an example, two of the tenants from 55 Water Street are big corporations such as McGraw Hill financial headquarters, and the Emblem Health. Emblem health is 10-million-dollar company, and McGraw Hill is worth 1.24 billion. Money is usually the best way to show power. This is how power can be portrayed in even the smallest piece of land.



Overall, land is very vital to the understanding of urban planning because it gives us the back-root history of how it all started. There are many spaces of land which now have been reconstructed on or renovated on to what it is today. This one acre of land is very quiet, and discreet, I referred it to a secret garden because not many

people know about the plaza yet. From this specific piece of land, I would like to know why did the owner want to increase the total square feet of 55 Water Street? What was their purpose in increasing their square foot? What is there to gain from by doing so? I strongly believe in order to receive answers to my questions I would need to speak to the developers directly, to understand their reasoning as to why need an increase of land. I believe I would need to better inform myself, and go further back into the property details to get research on how it used to be back then, in order to make sure I am asking the right questions.