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Arch 243

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Agent 1

I would consider myself the familiar agent in my Fabric of the Kips Bay Neighborhood, because I have grown up here my entire life and have experienced much that the area has to offer. I have a unique perspective on the city since I am able to look at it now, with an Architecture student's perspective, as well as look back on growing up in the city, and seeing how differently I experienced it without looking through an architectural lens. Growing up I never thought about the engineering, urban planning, and architecture of where I lived too deeply, I was just a kid growing up. It is amazing to think about how it was built from the ground up, and all of the unique parts of the city that make it such a great place.

The East River Walkway is a section of a continuous path that wraps all the way around the perimeter of Manhattan. Some of my favorite memories took place along this walkway. I remember skateboarding with my friends by the river, hanging out after school or late night at one of the many parks that the path connects, or hiking up to the Ward's Island Bridge on 103rd street to get to Randall's Island, a destination for music festivals and sports events.

The walkway represents an escape for play, something that other parts of Manhattan lack. It almost acts as a subway line: a linear continuous path with multiple "stops" that all have something new to explore. There are parks, fields, tables with big open paths that create an irreplaceable aspect of human life. Natural running water completely engulfs the small peninsula, but it is sad how infrequently New Yorkers get to experience its natural beauty. It provides a destination separated from city life. I use destination because there is a distinct feeling of separation created between the walkway and the rest of inner Manhattan. In order to get to the river, you usually will have to cross the FDR highway, or get up onto an elevated walkway where there is a bridge that goes over the highway.

It is not designed as a street, but an open path. In the city, there is a certain "flow" that dictates how people move. Of course cars and bikes must bow to traffic laws and lane directions, but there is a different kind of flow of pedestrians. Everyone always has somewhere to be in the city, and this manifests into how people move throughout the fabric. There is little tolerance for

moseying, as you are probably in someone's way. Walking through the city feels a bit like you are on autopilot, weaving through whatever comes your way to get from point A to point B. Most people do not stop and look at something, even if it is out of the ordinary, because of the rapid lifestyle. The walkway provides a place for moseying, schmoozing, and the like. It is successful in this because there is no sense of urgency, business, or work on the east river walkway, only recreation. It is a beautiful ambiguity, in a city that spells everything out for you.

Kips Bay Towers has always been home to me, so it conjures up feelings of family, love protection, and destination. The physicality of the building may juxtapose those emotions to some people, as the heavy concrete brutalism of the site may be viewed as daunting or scary. However, the true residential character lies in the garden that connects the two towers. It is a three acre park, with over 50 trees, lush gardens of grass, and flowers that bloom in the spring. Stacks of tables, seats, and reclining chairs line the towers and are frequently moved around to find the best spot for shade, or for suntanning. In the spring and summer the gardens are filled with all kinds of people: kids are playing basketball with their friends as their parents talk at a table, older residents in need of fresh air are relaxing, and young fit couples are jogging around the property. Though there are other parks to play at, stoops to talk on, and sidewalks to jog on, there is a disconnection between the person and their community.

It is similar to the river walkway, in the sense that linear pathways are created ambiguously to promote play and recreation. The paths are consistent with little decoration, allowing a "create your own adventure" kind of attitude that is lacking in our modern lives. We are now so involved in tech that we rarely look up to smell the roses.

Kips Bay Towers garden is able to reference city life, but fills in the blanks of suburban life that is not available to the average urbanite. It creates a middle-ground between the home and the street, almost like a front lawn, somewhere between public and private. Many micro interactions take place on the front lawn, like saying hi to your neighbor, seeing your friends ride bikes with their kids, or soaking up some sun and people watching. There was a strong 'stoop culture' in New York city that dominated for many years, but sadly that era is slowly fading away. Less and less people relax on their front stoop, casually seeing friends or reading a book with a coffee. Kips Bay Gardens is able to keep that culture going into the modern era.

Its importance was magnified by COVID, where people are stuck in a city of millions without being allowed to see anyone. It created a space where people could feel safe about exiting their

residence to face the outside, especially older residents. I have never seen so many people utilize the park, until the virus took away much of our freedom and we realize what we took for granted.

I view the HRA Men's Shelter in a very different light from the other two conditional sites. It was originally a psychiatric asylum that has transitioned into a men's shelter. Growing up, I remember being scared of the place. I think part of that had to do with the name "asylum", and how the Batman franchise made that term popular with the youth with the dreaded "Arkham Asylum" in Gotham. My mom would always tell me not go down this street at night because it gets a bit shady, she said she would even take a cab to go just a few blocks to avoid the area. Many people in the surrounding area were not doing very well and needed help, but it seems the shelter is always packed and the staff overworked. This results in many people in troubled situations who are left on the street with no where else to go. When looking up reviews of the site, there are many people thanking the facilities for how well they were treated, but also many people warning of the danger of staying in the shelter. It has been a hotbed for crime for a long time, and there have been many articles detailing murder and drug use in the facilities.

The architecture of the site is fairly simple, and very symmetrical. It is a one pieced structure created by mirroring a piece twice on the x and y plain, respectively, to create a wrench-like shape. It is a large, heavy brick building with vines that wrap around the facade. The vines make up most of the greenery, with some trees and bushes in the courtyards. The structure feels abandoned, old, but not repurposed, even though it has been. It shows how we treat the kind of people that need help from these facilities as a society. Though there are all of these negative connotations, something about the site feels righteous, like it has weathered a great deal and is still standing to help those who need it. It looks upon the street not with weary eyes, but with conviction, as if it is aware of its duty to serve.

Each of my conditions have a distinct threshold that separates the site from the outside world. The HRA Men's Shelter has a physical gate that surrounds the perimeter, and symbolically it represents the separation of refuge and the cold real world. It is literally a place of refuge, the origin of the word "asylum". What separates this threshold from the others is that it is more concrete and severe than the previous two thresholds I talked about. The tall, black fence wraps around the entire building, separating the whole structure from the sidewalk. My previous thresholds were a bit more general, and provided a middle ground between outside and inside, whereas this threshold does not provide a middle ground. There is a clear interior and exterior. The nature of the

space requires this sort of severe threshold because of its conflict ridden nature, there is no space for being in between. Whereas the other areas represented recreation, this threshold draws the line between out and in, between care and trauma. All of the thresholds, however, do represent freedom within and outside of the line.

The key element that binds all of these conditions together is the usage of thresholds. We may not inherently notice them, but the world we have created has been designed with thresholds, to keep us moving from one point to another. When we step back and think about these movements, we can better understand how we should be living in our spaces, and how we should be connected to our communities.