

Double Vision

Melrose Street, Massachusetts 2009/1911

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An image (Fig. 1) taken in 1911 of Melrose Street in Newton, Massachusetts was aligned with an image of the same view from 2009 (Fig. 14). Adobe Photoshop was used to layer the images and gradually erase the 2009 image to reveal the 1911 one below. The layers were then made transparent (Fig. 15) so both images could be seen at once: the 'double vision' that is the goal of this project.

The eraser feature of Photoshop is used to focus on moments of transition in the built environment, moments that are easily overlooked: The hill of 1911 becomes the basis for the brick wall of 2009 (Fig. 2). The image challenges our dichotomy of the land vs. the built environment: in 1911 we can see that the land, a groomed slope, has already been molded, and that that shape becomes the base for further human construction. The house in the vista of the 1911 image becomes overgrown with trees in the 2009 view, evidence that the land is no longer worked or cleared, but has been allowed to fill in with trees to provide screen between the closely set houses (Fig. 7). The street is a defining feature of any neighborhood. Here we can see how dirt road and paved street correspond to the more open land and more delineated subdivision that flank them (Fig. 4).

These images show two moments in a typical story of subdivision played out on many American suburban streets. Such neighborhoods may look stable but are constantly in flux through tear-downs, further subdivision and commercial development. Older residents may see the changes that have taken place. Newer residents are more chronologically limited in their views. Indeed, the transience of modern life makes it possible that few residents of any block know much about the geography and history of where they live. This project posits that the more we can see in a place, the more we know about where we are, the more ways we can think about it, and how we might want to change or preserve it.

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