

Abstract – The Maze

The MacArthur Maze is one the most important freeway interchanges in the state of California. As the gateway to one of the nation's busiest bridges, the Bay Bridge that connects San Francisco with the East Bay, it allows 300,000 vehicles each day to travel to all four corners of the Bay Area and beyond. But the Maze also cuts through four distinct landscapes that each tell a story of separation and connection.

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Script

Title Card: From a birds-eye perspective, the freeway interchange known as the MacArthur Maze on the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay, cuts through four different landscapes:

A port, a shopping mall a historic neighborhood and a state park

Opening birds at Emeryville crescent

MacArthur Maze in the background. Images of cars on the maze.

NARRATOR: The MacArthur Maze. An intersection of three major California highways: the I580, the I880 and the nation's second longest highway running from New Jersey to the San Francisco Bay Area: The Interstate 80.

This elevated, static river of concrete asphalt and steel, towers some 50 feet above the ground.

Also known by its original name, the Distribution Structure, this interchange allows 300.000 cars, each day, to travel to all four corners of the Bay Area

This multi-level interchange, packed with hundreds of vehicles that are zig-zagging, while heading into various directions, is one of the most important intersections in California.

People protesting at shopping mall.

People praying at shopping mall

But long before the Maze was built, another man-made structure rose above a different kind of landscape...

PROTESTER [vo]: "It's a burial ground...a grave yard. A native grave yard"

CORRINA GOULD [vo]: "[speaks in Ohlone language first], thank you so much for coming out today. We stand here together, we stand on a sacred site. The sacred sites of my ancestors.

My ancestors were right in this space

This place was the biggest one of all 435 shellmounds that once ringed the entire bay area."

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Photos and drawings of Ohlone people

CORRINA GOULD [vo]: "Shellmounds are burial sites of our ancestors and they got larger and larger as people passed away. And they just so happen to also work for us to have ceremonies as they grew on top. And on top of them we

would light fires to send signals. And since there's no electricity, imagine seeing those fires at night, all along the bay. We were able impact a lot of people. We were able to trade with places."

Photos of shell mound being destroyed in 1920s

Maze with shopping mall in the background

NARRATOR: But industry and an amusement park heavily damaged the shell mound, and eventually made way for a multi-complex shopping mall, luxury apartments and a 16-screen movie theater. All of it, conveniently built next to the MacArthur Maze, which today stands almost twice as tall as the sacred hill where the people who first called this place home, laid their loved ones to rest.

CORRINNA GOULD [vo]: "People destroyed this, because they didn't know what it was. They give us this little tiny memorial, that's supposed to represent thousands of years of my ancestors. That's not what's it about."

"Even though the shape of the land now looks different, it's important for us to go back."

"It doesn't make it less sacred that now there's a parking lot on it, or there's a mall on top of it or there's a school or bar or railroad tracks on top of it. It's our relationality to that land and space."

"So, there're songs that need to be sung there and there're prayers that need to be put down there."

"But I think there's no honor of the Ohlone people. There's no idea that we still exist."

"And that's what's so difficult about living in this city. When your traditional territory is built upon by these communities that came much later on and have destroyed these sacred places."

The Temescal Creek flowing out into the SF Bay

NARRATOR: The Temescal Creek, once of the life lines of the Ohlone people, today remains a hidden waterway, covered by asphalt and cement. The 1880 flyover touches down right on top where the stream of fresh water, flows into the San Francisco Bay.

Birds at Emeryville Crescent

Willetts, dunlins and marble godwits are among the thousands of birds that flew from all over the Americas to winter along the California coast. Some have opted for the muddy shore of the State Marine Reserve, nestled against the Maze.

But just a couple of feet below from where the birds sticks their beak into the mud lies a mixture of toxic waste and landfill consisting of rubble dating back to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Partly built on the same fill and bay mud in the 1930s, the Maze has since played a major role in the economic development of the state of California.

Trucks on the Maze

Pan the Maze to Downtown Oakland Skyline

It's an integral link in a system that enables mass transportation of people and goods, which is at the heart of Oakland.

B&W archival port of Oakland

ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS [vo]: "In the 1860s, the location of Oakland was recognized as a really good location for deep water vessels coming in from the Golden Gate, they need a place to anchor. And that was the beginning of Oakland as a freight terminus."

Photos Central Pacific Railroads yards

ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS [vo]: "The next huge thing was the construction of the Central pacific railroad. It terminated in Oakland. It's the place where the railway ends and where the ocean traffic comes. You know, the shipping comes in."

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Moving images trains at Central Pacific Railroad yards

ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS [vo]: "And when the Central Pacific yards came in, they brought a huge amount on jobs. They were pretty well paid and they were permanent. So, it becomes a hub, it becomes an attractant, it becomes a magnet."

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Ferries crossing San Francisco Bay

ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS [vo]: "And if you wanted to travel from Oakland, in the East Bay, to San Francisco, you'd have to get on a ferry. So especially in that area of the MacArthur Maze everything is really focused around transportation. That's what brought people there. That's what gave people good jobs. Transportation."

Images of Bay Bridge being built

NARRATOR: As the engine of the second industrial revolution started picking up steam and Oakland came of age as the transportation nexus of the American West, dreams that once seemed far-fetched were now within arm's reach.

ARCHIVAL VOICE OVER [vo]: "After 80 years of planning and three years of actual building. The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge is completed. The largest engineering structure ever conceived and built by man. Now for the opening ceremony. The golden chain has been cut by a settling torch. Whistles shriek. The harbor fire boat streak the air with ribbons of water. And the first cars the cross the world's largest bridge come rolling along like a regiment of soldiers."

Blueprint of Distribution structure + photo of construction of Distribution structure

NARRATOR: And meet what was built in the shadows of the new world wonder: the distribution structure. Basic and far less grand and impressive than the bridge. But undeniably linked. And in the following eighty years, the interchange and its freeways would leave a lasting impact on the communities surrounding this modern-day crossroads...

Archival photos of West-Oakland

NARRATOR: The bright side of the bay flourished. And the screeching sound of steel wheels coming to a halt, echoed throughout West Oakland, as trains still dominated transportation.

Archival photos of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

NARRATOR: Every day, dozens of black workers arrived at, and departed from these yards.

And as they unionized, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Cart Porters instilled the activist spirit the town would become known for.

Travelling all over the United States by rail, they advertised this place called Oakland, California. And the black cultural capital on the pacific became a home.

Archival photos Alternier Baker Cook

ALTERNIER BAKER-COOK [vo]: “My family has been here since the 1860s, and I’ve never every forgotten what Oakland was about, I guess. And in certain sense I have some type of romantic idea about Oakland.”

“These were the people who were able to make a pretty comfortable living for their families.

Archival photos of West Oakland

NARRATOR: Despite the restrictions and racism black people faced in the Golden State, the first generation away from slavery was able to enjoy and middle class life and own their own property in West-Oakland.

ALTERNIER BAKER-COOK [vo]: “It was really kinda idyllic. But there was white flight.”

ARCHIVAL VOICE OVER [vo]: “There’s an internal treat. Like a cancer, it thieves upon and drains the economy and vitality of the entire city. Almost in the shadow of the city hall can be found the end result of this disease: the slum. Yes, this too is Oakland. The tax-payers in the good areas of the city pay for the slum. City officials and department heads have worked together to assure steady

progress and proper planning for Oakland's rejuvenated future. To prevent the spread of deterioration.

Images of map

Images of building cypress express way

ARCHIVAL VOICE OVER [vo]: "The Cypress street viaduct is essentially a two-mile-long double-deck structure, connecting the bay bridge distribution structure on the north, with the east-west section of the east shore freeway. The completed project provides four lanes north bound on the lower deck. Four lanes south bound, on the upper deck. We are now arriving at the distribution structure. With appropriate [inaudible] ceremony attended by notables too numerous to mention the Cypress street viaduct was opened to traffic."

NARRATOR: "The new freeways that sprouted from the Distribution Structure in the 1950s and wrapped their tentacles around West-Oakland were Bigger. Wider and Higher.

Displacing hundreds of families, businesses and cultural institutions. It cracked open the social fabric of the people who made this strip on the south-east corner of the Maze, home.

ALTERNIER BAKER-COOK [vo]: "And we became more and more isolated. The freeway just displaced my whole life, I feel. And some people in my community, they don't know it, but they really had an impact on making me the woman I am today. And they're gone now. They're gone. And just little kernels and nuggets and stuff, OK?"

"In certain circles, they saw the freeway as a conduit for them getting to where they needed to be. They could get to San Francisco, cause that's where the jobs were. But no one wanted to get to us."

Image of Maze and train going under structure

Pan down to homeless encampment.

ALTERNIER BAKER-COOK [vo]: "At the same time, dope was being dropped into our neighborhood."

GABRIEL CRUZ [vo] : “I’ll never call this home because I don’t want this to be permanent. That’s why I probably haven’t got a tent, because it’s like admitting...you feel me?”

Images of darker side of freeway

“It’s some type of shelter. But not a very good shelter because when it rains and you’re still under the freeway, you’re still going to get wet. “

“Surprisingly, they’re steadily building condos for people who aren’t from here. They just care about money and getting richer. So, people say it’s economics, it’s not race anymore. It’s race to a certain extent.

“I think it’s not fair for a person who didn’t grow up in a neighborhood flooded with drugs, to judge a person who did grow up in a neighborhood overran with drugs for being on drugs.”

“There’s a group of people that moved down here they turn their noise up and pointing the finger towards us. It’s not just homeless people, it’s homeless black people.”

“The freeway is not a roof over my head brother. A roof over my head, I’m thinking four walls right up under that roof, some type of heat, some kind of couch and some type of cable TV.”

“Very hard to hear. Very hard to sleep...very hard to sleep! Constant noise. Cars. Police sirens.”

Images of Maze at nightfall

ALTERNIER BAKER-COOK [vo]: “The Maze is a mess. as far as I’m concerned. It’s a necessary evil in this day and time. Because people have to have it in order for them to get where they’re going.”

Images of traffic and maze traffic jam

TRELAWNY DIOS [vo]: “I try not to fight the traffic, but at the same time it’s like...”

“ugh, 6.11”

“There you go buddy, enjoy it...look at this.”

TRELAWNY DIOS [vo]: No! no...there’s nothing communal about this. Communal kinda gives this picture that we’re all in this together. I think we’re all little individual modules.”

“We don’t interact unless you’re asking me to let it, or I’m asking you to be let in or your flipping me off or you’re honking at me”

“Fuck you! You’re not getting in!”

“This is a physical manifestation of the rat race, right? This is what it feels like.”

“What is this guy doing?”

“We’re all these little beings trying to get to our very important lives and trying to navigate this maze...”

“So, maybe if I was not navigating the maze on such a regular basis I might see beauty in it, but it’s very hard to see beauty in it. It’s like this further disconnect.”

“And here I am in my SUV driving into the city.”

Images of Maze + drone footage of Maze

From a bird’s-eye perspective, the freeway interchange known as the MacArthur maze separates four different landscapes: a port, a mall, a neighborhood and a state park.

NARRATOR: It stands as a testimony of this history of the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay. As the gateway to one of the busiest bridges in the United States, the maze is a kaleidoscopic monument of the everyday mundane. And each frame, each layer representing what has been before, and what had to move, in order for others to move around.

Treatment



photo by: Serginho Roosblad

Synopsis

The Maze: *An American intersection* is a 26-minute documentary film about the MacArthur freeway interchange on the east end of the San Francisco – Oakland Bay bridge, known as the MacArthur Maze. The film looks at how the structure impact the lives of those who live in its vicinity and has done so for over 80 years.

A Work of Art

The film opens as day breaks at Emeryville Crescent, a section of the Mclaughlin Eastshore State Park, bordering the I-80 corridor from the Bay Bridge Toll Plaza at its southwest point. We see the tidal marsh and outfall for the Temescal Creek, which flows straight into the San Francisco Bay. As the water of the bay recede, it lays bare growing patches of mudflats on where foraging birds search through the muddy ground, looking for food. Gently the sound of traffic on the freeway creeps up. Enough to make the audience aware of the that there's something off with this location.

As we continue seeing images of the flora and fauna of the crescent, a rack-focus reveals the freeway interchange in the background filled with cars during the morning

rush hour. Cars are barely making any forward progress. The sight is in stark contrast with the images of the wildlife sanctuary that's nestled against it.

"The MacArthur Maze," a female voice over begins. "An intersection of three major California highways: the I580, the I880, and the I80. An artificial, elevated riverbed of concrete, asphalt and steel, towering over residential areas, the port of Oakland, a mall and a wildlife sanctuary. The Maze, also known as The Distribution Structure allows 250.000 cars each day to travel to all four corners of the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond."

"If you ask me, this is absolutely beautiful!" says Jorn Kroll, an architect and transportation and safety specialist. "A multi-level freeway interchange packed with hundreds of vehicles that are gracefully changing lanes and purposefully heading in various directions...look at it, it's beautiful! These large infrastructures in a way can generate some sense of common achievement and pride for people,"

Kroll explains how even philosophers in the last century have been fascinated by freeways. According to them, he says, interconnecting freeways and interchanges can help people grasp, what is called, their technological understanding of being. He further explains how German philosopher Martin Heidegger, saw freeways as a unifying factor in our society. "In his philosophy, the Maze could even be considered a work of art. I believe Heidegger said something like: 'freeway interchanges are like a late-modern temple. They quietly reinforce our technological understanding of all reality.'"

From shots of the freeway lanes high up in sky above, the camera pans down to the underworld of homeless encampments under the overpasses of the Maze.

Voice over: "And like ancient temples of times gone by, the Maze offers shelter for those less fortunate..."

A Toxic home

Fly-on-the-wall scenes introduce us to one of the encampments that have been growing for years now. We see how various camp community members are helping each other out fixing bikes and other necessities. Some of the people here are victims of the foreclosure wave that hit West Oakland in the latest recession, while others are victims the opioid crisis. All, however are 'neatly' tucked away under the Maze.

Through 'in situ' interviews we learn about life under the interchange. Why some chose to live under the overpass for safety reason, even if it means to live between heaps of pigeon feces and rodents. Members of the encampment community explain how their day-to-day life is dictated by the rhythm of the Maze. "Once he starts making more noise, we rise and our day starts," a camp community member says.

"It's stressful, brother. You already sleep bad because of the stress of living on the street. And then you have to deal with the freeway. The constant noise we hear, the air we breathe is bad and then you have people dumping their shit here. It's bad brother. It's unhealthy!"

Many of the homeless already feel that they're with their back against the wall and have no other place to go, but live under these underpasses. "But at least we have a home. the Maze is some sort of home."

Arial drone footage show the traffic flowing through the Maze. From above the interchange looks like a heart; an endless stream of cars gets sucked into the Maze's core and seconds later pumped out in through one of the three lane highway vessels, flowing into all four wind directions.

Over the images of the inner workings of the Maze, the voice-over explains how, in all of its beauty, the Maze and its surroundings are one of the most polluted places in the Bay Area. "And not just for the homeless. Emeryville ranks second in the state of California for childhood asthma hospital admissions, which is triggered by pollution coming from the Maze and the port of Oakland, south of the interchange."

We see footage of people doing their shopping at the various malls and shopping centers next to the Maze as the voice over continues. "And it doesn't stop there. Thousands of people each day are only a couple of feet separated from toxic soil."

"For almost two centuries, West Oakland has been the industrial heart of Northern California and a transportation nexus of the West. A crossroads of goods and people. And that has left its marks on the land."

A Crossroads on the shore

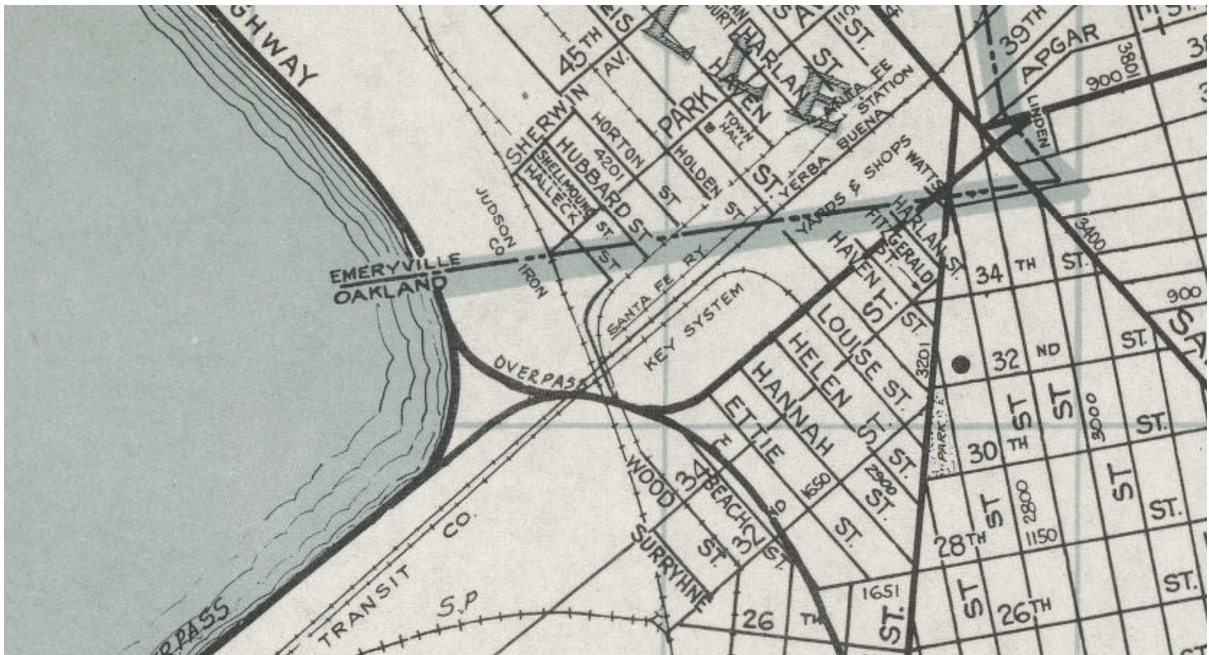
Macro shots of historical maps and engineering plans of the Maze, show how the structure was designed. "The Maze was built during the Great Depression", says Brian

Stockle a San Francisco based cartographer and urbanist. “It was built in tandem with the building of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge between 1933 and 1936.”

The images of the maps crossfade with moving archival footage of West Oakland from the 1930s. Stockle explains: “The building of the new bridge happened in a time when the country was devastated by the economic situation. Although the building of the provided some jobs, you could start seeing entire neighborhoods turning into slums.”

“The Maze is an integral of a system that heralded the change in how goods and people were transported to, from and around the Bay.

“If you look at the design of the Maze, it doesn’t look like other interchange you see more often. It’s not a beautiful cloverleaf interchange. The MacArthur freeway that runs from the east to the bridge, doesn’t align with the bridge. Therefore, the Maze is a little crooked.” Stockle explains how the freeway had to be built to circumvent the Santa Fe rail yard that stood where a Target superstore stands today.



Oakland Emeryville border 1938. Map by Thomas Brothers

“And then you had the Southern Pacific railway that went North-South along the waterfront. And the key system that ran into the bay on a mole. All those freeways had to go over that, that’s why the Maze looks the way it does.”

Voice over: “the building of the Bay Bridge and the Maze set in motion something that would radically change the character of the area. Far more driven by automobiles and less so by trains and streetcars.

Shot of old railway and streetcar tracks in West Oakland with the Maze in the background reveal how the battle was eventually won by cars and elevated roads.

A border

We continue to see images of the Maze and its environment. First Emeryville with people going out for their shopping. We see the iconic Pixar Animation studios with the Maze at the end of its street. Young people on their race bikes drive around the area. Others are sitting outside former warehouses-turned-coffee shops. The images create this sense that despite the fact that Emeryville sits right next to the Maze, the people have accepted the Maze being part of the built environment.

From Emeryville, we move to West Oakland and similarly see people going about their ever day lives. People doing their gardening, driving around on their bikes, all in the vicinity of the Maze.

We see an older woman sitting on her porch on Hannah Street, two blocks away from the Maze. “You hear that?” she asks as we hear the grumbling sound of the 1880 and 580 in the background. “I’ve been hearing this sound from 73 years now. From the time that I was born until today, that noise has been a part of me.”

Ms. Juanita who has lived in the same house as she was born, can still remember the expansion of the interchange when she was about 10 years old. “It was a time, in the 1950s, when this part of Oakland was deemed a slum,” she says.

Voice over, over historical footage of the 1940s: “In the previous decades,” the voice-over continues, “African-Americans, notably from Southern states moved to West Oakland leaving Jim Crow laws behind and hoping to find a better future. Most of them came by trains. With West Oakland, being the last stop in the West. This part of Oakland became the center of the African-American community in Northern California.”

“But as this community grew, so too did the need for an expansion of the freeway system serving the people of the East Bay. And with a new freeway system, the Maze was expanded”

Paul Cobb, publisher of the Oakland Post, the largest African-American weekly Northern California, explains the wider effect of the newly built freeway system in Oakland. He talks about the loss for the community and culture with thousands of families losing their homes.

Ms. Juanita remembers how her friend's house was torn down and how the new highways made this part of Oakland, she calls home, an urban island, under the smoke of heavy industry and the port of Oakland.

A Test case

"The building of the freeway system with the Maze as one of its junctions has caused tremendous harm to communities and especially black communities in Oakland, and we try to learn from that experience," says UC Berkeley Urban Design Professor Elizabeth MacDonald.

We see MacDonald in front of her class giving a lecture on city and regional planning. In her class, about 15 graduate students specifically look at how contemporary urban planning can learn from its past mistakes, using the freeway system in Oakland as a test case.

In an interview, MacDonald explains how urban planners are much more aware of the impact of freeways and interchanges on communities. She explains how, after the Cypress Express Freeway collapsed during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in the San Francisco Bay, killing 42 people, the community of West Oakland came together and fought to not have that part of the freeway rebuilt. "The Maze permanently lost an arm and this became the Mandela Parkway," she says, as we see images of the parkway with the Maze in the backdrop.



Photo by Cait Oppermann

As we see image of the sun setting behind the Maze, architect Jorn Kroll tries to explain how even the ugliness of the concrete, and keeping in mind the effects freeways and interchanges have had on communities, art is never produced in the absence of pain and suffering. And so too we have to start seeing the Maze.
