



Andrew Wyeth, Untitled (*Olson House, day of Christina's funeral*), 1968

***Do Fences Make Good Neighbors: The Paradoxes of Connectivity in Urban Infrastructure Corridors***

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**Project Brief:**

The need to preserve and construct ecological corridors has been a cornerstone of landscape design and planning since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Passageways connecting habitats of specific animals and plants establish vital migration routes that facilitate the movement of species and ensure the balanced distribution of natural resources. Although they are anthropogenic interventions, evolutionary biologist Robert Dunn argues that such spatial regimes, as a mode of “living with nature,” help maintain environmental integrity in the face of territorial fragmentation, physical isolation, and climate change. Yet, by enabling the migration of all kinds of organisms and resources, ecological corridors put their circulation beyond direct human control, resulting in unanticipated and unintended consequences.

This studio relates ecological corridors to the broader discussion of infrastructure and urbanization. Different modes of connectivity unite our cities, neighborhoods, homes, and bodies, and facilitate information exchange. Historically, urban infrastructural corridors served as a means of escape from unfavorable environmental conditions. Today, they enable the spatial distribution of organisms, materials, and information, both beneficial and harmful, at an ever expanding pace and scale. On the positive side, this agency increases the biodiversity and resiliency of our cities, communities, and neighborhoods. On the negative side, organisms and diseases

unwelcome in our environment have historically appropriated these artificial ecologies. Caravan trade routes across deserts and steppes, for example, used to spread plague, railroads increased the speed of enemy armies. More recently, shipping containers provide passage for insects and pathogens that defoliate forests, and social networks propagate misinformation. This agency, and its ingrained paradoxes, prompts the following questions: What human and non-human entities do these corridors benefit? At what scales do their spatial and temporal ecologies operate? Do possibilities exist for the emergence of novel corridors? And, if so, how do diversity, climate change, and community health play into this picture?

To study the agency of connectivity in urban infrastructure corridors, this studio will explore the fence, the most commonplace, unappreciated and unstudied urban infrastructure. Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley have observed that there is enough fencing wrapping the Earth to reach the Sun, and this length exceeds the total length of constructed roads by an order of magnitude. This network of physical boundaries organizes the movements, interactions, and behaviors of people, plants, and organisms, which makes it similar in operation to walls. Unlike walls, fences are permeable: they constrain movement but do not prevent it. Moreover, the same fence can be protective and beneficial to one organism and restrictive and harmful to another, which makes it selective and exclusionary. Given these traits, it is not surprising that fences occupy a place of prominence in the American cultural imaginary, where they demarcate freedom, possession, and unsettling rights-of-passage in texts ranging from *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain and *A Worn Path* by Eudora Welty to *Fences* by August Wilson and *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Sanders.

To understand what fences are and what they do, the studio will explore their spatial and temporal ecologies, and their physical and social impacts. Exercises will map their location, examine their construction and maintenance, note their materials and visibility, and study how they mark territory, manage migration, defend against intrusion, establish ownership, protect resources and investments, shape identity, and articulate social order. In combination, this interplay of movement, inclusion, and exclusion encompasses the actions and experiences that shape our human and non-human communities and determine their health. The exercises will culminate in an exploration of fence design. The intent is to study fences at a range of spatial and temporal scales and assess their impact on community cohesion and wellbeing. Put another way, if good fences make good neighbors, as poet Robert Frost suggests, what is a good fence?

Invited scholars will provide a range of perspectives on the paradoxes of connectivity. Myla Aronson of DEENR will discuss the ecology of urban infrastructure corridors. Anatole Tchikine from Dumbarton Oaks will discuss historical case studies. Bradley Evans from the English department of SAS will discuss the role of fences in the cultural imaginary. Jason-Munshi-South of Fordham University will discuss the wilding of cities and rat movements in subways.

New Brunswick, NJ inclusive of Rutgers University and its College Avenue, Busch, Livingstone, Douglas and SEBS campuses is the site of exploration.