

MIT Student

11.239 The City in Film

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The City's Heart

At the point where Summer Street turns into Winter Street streets in Downton Crossing, a figure in a red coat pauses. One white gloved hand stretches its fingers before disappearing into a pocket. Even though it is cold enough to see people's breath mix with the steam coming from the man hole in the middle of the cross, construction is underway in to the figure's right. The top of the building remains as it was when built; classic 1930s style architecture, with four soundless bells on the corner. The figure stops to gaze at these four useless bells that have never been seen to make sound or even to have a way to ring them. Though the street level is obviously being changed and updated, the tops of the buildings and most of the store fronts remain in their original or at least older form. Like the old bricks below and delicately patterned facades above, change comes slowly to this corner.

A man walks across the man hole in the middle of the road near where the figure is standing and creates a metallic clank with the heel of his boot. A few faces join in the motion of the figure's turning head down away from the bells on the second story to the ground a few feet away. A close look at the entrance to the underground creates a reminder that there is a network of tunnels and pipes that are walked and driven over without second thought. Only at points where the sound of the rumbling subway or the hot air from below drift out into the street does a pedestrian remember that there is more around them than what they can see. What would the tunnels under a busy area like this look like? The dirt from thousands of shoes would find its way below, exhaust from Tremont Avenue blown down though this very man hole perhaps light from

a passing Red Line train picking up more commuters heading home. Would it be deep? Could you put the tall buildings above below? Or does the tunnel keep the same height all the way through, so what you see when the train comes around the bend in the station and temporarily lights up the entrance to the station is throughout? Or what about an abandoned stop, only sometimes seen if the light catches the old red stripe and a long forgotten name on a map whisks by? Here it is probably another road, the tunnel between Downtown Crossing and Park Street, a refuge for the winter commuter, enabling a train change without venturing into the cold.

The absence of cars and vehicles on these two streets gives this corner of the city a timeless quality. Hats and scarves cover faces and hair styles and coats obscure forms for a moment so the crowd that covers the street becomes no more than an amorphous blur, the people become cells in the blood of the city. Out of the blur another figure emerges walking towards the figure in the red coat. The white glove reemerges from the coat and waves to the new distinct figure. The other figure waves as one final crowd passes between them, isolating each in the sea of people for one last moment. This is very close to the center of the city, the place where cars, trains and people come the closest to mixing. Cars come in down the street from the highway and the four main subway lines all have stops within a few blocks. Getting from one part of Boston to another means passing through on some level this small group of winding streets, network of tunnels and narrow sidewalks. The two figures could have come from anywhere in Boston or its satellites, directly to this intersection. They finally meet and begin walking away, pumped through the heart and sent out to oxygenate the rest of the city.

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