Median Elements

The land strip on which the roadbed is placed, represents a significant area of the landscape that is stripped of every natural feature during the process of construction. The flatness and openness of the median strip is visually monotonous and oftentimes dangerous. To counter the existing condition, areas, textures, silhouettes, contrasts of masses and enclosures, asymmetrical and kinetic shapes are used as median elements. Median elements can provide visual and intellectual relief through the design manipulation of the strip. The continuity of the roadway need not be seen as a barrier or wall isolating opposing sides of traffic. Through careful placement, and composition of median elements, the quality of the lateral space can be preserved as well as visually enhanced.

The design projects presented in this section stress the movement through, in or around a spatial event. The distance between the roadbed varies from several feet to several hundred feet. The movement of vehicles can be attenuated through the placement of man-made objects within the framework of the median strip. The visual experience becomes a three-dimensional passage and a "happening" that can leave a lasting impression of the traveled route. Depending on the scale of the "event", the placement can engage the driver's attention
at a great distance leading to a higher level of anticipation. The middle-ground experience is one of curiosity and the drive-through completes the spatial "event." The projects stress the importance of the lateral space within the median strip. The median elements, placed in a random pattern along the roadway, can provide formal articulation where little exists.

Using a variety of platonic forms, surface mounted or embedded into the median strip, the compositional aspect of the spatial assembly emphasizes the form as well as the actual event. This approach establishes the highway landmark as a major component of roadway design. Either singly, or in groups, the objects are placed in random patterns, with changes in scale, color and texture identifying locational differences. Form motifs can be introduced that extend out from the highway in either a parallel or perpendicular arrangement. Where tall embankments or deep cuts are necessary, the insertion of the median element can not only stabilize the surface material, but provide visual interest and focus from the roadway.

Color, within the median strip, plays an important role in the maintenance of bridge structures as well as establishing the bridge aesthetic. Using paint, in an artistic sense, can transform any bridge structure or median element into a highly original work of art. Color is used extensively in European highways to accent or give form to an otherwise featureless autoroute. Primary colors, used in a free-form manner, can add textural relief to the ordinary and repetitive highway landscape.
Median Elements

Object: Superscale Bottle

The American landscape and the natural and man-made elements that shape it can form an image that has expressive content. The median strip offers the highway designer great opportunity to maximize the visual interest of the roadway. A superscale object placed within or adjacent to the median strip can enhance the visual interest of the highway.

In this example, a superscaled bottle is placed within the center of the median strip providing a very potent three-dimensional symbol. The simplicity and recognizability of the form is important to maintain driver interest. The three-dimensional aspect of the object is necessary to maintain driver safety. A giant tire, located to the west of Detroit, Michigan has similar character-
istics to that of the bottle. In the case of the tire, a unique local or regional symbol, coupled with a high-volume artery, plays an important role as a landmark for the entry or exit from urban centers. The landmark along the route is necessary to increase driver safety.

The bottle, approximately 60 feet tall with a diameter of 30 feet, would be placed on a concrete pedestal between the opposing roadways. The bottle would be constructed from ferro-cement which is a high strength low-weight concrete, with the surface painted. There would be the possibility of a national underwriter financing the construction. The bottle would be entirely freestanding and would not be repeated on that particular segment of the roadway.

Other objects that would fulfill the visual requirement might be provided by local and regional community resources. The main requirement being that the object selected has high form recognition, be of sufficient scale to be seen at great distance and that there is sufficient maintenance for a 25 year period.
Median Elements

Object: Spaced Columns

The use of spaced columns within the median strip is a means of providing a means of "gating" for the motorist. In this proposal a single triad of columnar elements is placed across the roadway. It is the intention to develop groupings of the elements over a great distance for the purposes of demarcating distance, speed, landmarks or places of regional, geological or environmental interest. The effect of gating is to enhance the overall interest and alertness of the driver from point to point. The placement would be more frequent than the more traditional rest-stop area and would be un-announced as to location, distance or frequency. The columnar elements would be fabricated from poured-in-place concrete or ferro-cement and would be set on concealed pedestals. Depending on the
number used, three as a minimum, the columns would be arranged in a triangular, circular, oval or rectilinear manner. The variation in the geometry and frequency of placement would provide an unusual path for the motorist and would increase driver safety due to heightened awareness and curiosity about the columnar elements.

By introducing different colors, heights and surface textures on the columns, each location would have an identifiable character. Maintenance would be kept to a yearly cycle as the material and placement of the objects would require minimal repairs. The "gate" effect would provide the motorist with a means to measure vehicle movement and progress along the route. The triangular gate becomes a means of increasing driver safety through the development of the expressive content of the landscape.
Median Elements

Object: Large Scale Spheres

The sphere has traditionally been considered a universal form as it is recognized as having symbolic meaning. In the context of the American culture, the dome has been used in a variety of ways for the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, New York, Montreal, Canada as well as Osaka, Japan. The universality of the form and its applications make it eminently suitable for use along the national interstate highway system. Each sphere would be 40 - 60 feet in diameter and placed within the center median. The sphere itself would overhang the roadway above the 14' maximum height restriction. The purpose of the overhang is to define the spatial edge of the sphere and increase its visual connection to the roadway proper.
The sphere would be constructed as a prefabricated piece made of reinforced concrete or light-weight steel elements. If steel elements were employed, the sphere would resemble a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome. Since this form is recognizable at great distances, its meaning would be derived from its particular location and could be used to mark or locate a natural feature or regional place.

The sphere or dome is suitable for placement in urban, suburban and rural areas. It is recommended that suburban and urban application is more appropriate due to the cost of manufacturing and maintenance. In addition, the dome can be artificially illuminated for night-time application. This would increase its form visibility over a greater distance.
Median Elements

Object: Small Scale Spheres

With the linear placement of small scale spheres along the median strip, the movement of the vehicle is accentuated. The processional atmosphere of driving through a series of spheres or similarly scaled objects, is intended to enhance the sense of movement and increase the driver's visual awareness. By manipulating the frequency of the spheres the highway designer is able to modify driver behavior in terms of the cone of vision and in turn, vehicle speed. Symmetrical placement of the spheres is necessary to keep driver vision balanced. Asymmetrically placed elements can divert the central focus of the driver thus increasing the potential for accident.

The spheres are placed so as to appear to float along the
highway roadbed to enhance the feeling of vehicular movement and to separate the man-made object from the natural landscape as much as possible. The landscape is maintained in its natural state to emphasize the man-made object.

The spheres would be placed at intervals ranging from twenty-five feet up to one-quarter mile apart. The distance between groups of spheres can range from one to one-hundred miles. The effect of long distances coupled with irregular placement of groups of spheres can increase driver safety. Similar placement of objects along European autoroutes has proven to reduce the frequency of accidents within the vicinity of the placed objects.

The spheres, ranging from 3 to 6 feet in diameter can be constructed from steel, plastics or concrete. All spheres can be internally illuminated for night-time application. The small scale spheres may be placed at the urban, suburban and rural scales.
Median Element

Object: Large Pyramid

The large scale pyramid placed within the confines of the median strip can provide a form centered object to the motorist but also provide a means of establishing the character of a site specific place. The scale of the pyramid provides the
motorist with a recognizable form on the distant horizon on which to focus. The large scale pyramid can be employed to provide an identifiable place along the route. The pyramid can become a local or regional phenomena similar to the Pyramid House along I-94 in northern Illinois and Wisconsin state line. The house has become a landmark for the region and is frequently visited by tourists. It is that special quality imparted by the object that can effect a change or anticipation in the driving experience.

It would stand over 60 feet tall and would have a base dimension of 60 by 60 feet. The pyramid could be hollow or include observation platforms at a number of levels. The pyramid would be constructed from heavy-timber or steel depending on the extent of the closure required. The structure could be surface finished in a variety of materials to enhance or contrast with the surroundings.
Median Element

Object: Small Scale Pyramid

The use of small scale objects randomly placed along or around the median strip form the basis of this design. The placement of the small scale pyramids is critical to increasing the visual experience of the motorist and highway safety. Through the use of symmetry and skewed perspective, the objects become guidelines for the driver. By placing the objects in lines, triangles, circles, squares or in irregular blocks, the linearity of the roadway is accentuated. The contrast between the small scale objects and the landscape draws focal interest to the objects since they appear to be out of place in that environment. By changing the position of the objects in relation to the roadway and the driver's cone of vision, the three-dimensionality is increased.
The small scale pyramids, or similar objects, would be 8 feet high and would be placed 20 to 30 feet off the edge of the roadway. The base dimension would vary from 4 to 12 feet and all the objects would be opaque. The pyramids would be painted a variety of different colors that would either compliment or detract from the surrounding area.

All of the objects would be constructed from prefabricated concrete or steel and would be ground connected through a pedestal base. This design would work quite effectively at all three scales.
Median Elements

Object: Multiple Small Scale Pyramids

The highway embankment is underutilized in the design of the highway system. Often left uncovered revealing the geological strata or the remains of a cut and fill operation, the embankment has been undertreated from a visual standpoint.

The placement of small scale pyramids or similar objects along the ridge of the embankment or parallel to the plane of the slope can create a visual aesthetic that articulates the natural landform. The intention is to create visual interest in the natural elements that are a byproduct of the highway construction process. If covered with crown vetch or similar natural vegetation, the embankment can be integrated in a more pleasing fashion.
Using small scale pyramids set on a concrete pedestal, the embankment can be utilized as a plinth or base for the sculptural forms. Using a variety of colors, hues or sizes, the small scale objects can be used to accentuate the natural landform.

Built from fiberglass or similar light-weight material, the objects can be illuminated for night-time use to create forms other than those of the landform.
Median Element

Object: *Rectangular Solids Embedded*

The national interstate highway system currently has a number of landmarks that populate its length. In Texas, one particular project is known as Cadillac Ranch designed by the group Ant Farm. They embedded a number of Cadillac automobiles in
concrete so that the tail ends of the cars appear to stick out of the ground. The cars are lined up parallel to the highway and are arranged on an annual stylistic basis. This novelty has drawn visitors from around the country to view this unique expression of American Art.

Through the careful placement of rectangular objects, set on end, the edges of the highway system can be aesthetically enhanced. The embankment becomes the base on which the rectangular solids are embedded. The solids could be constructed of reinforced concrete and painted in a variety of vibrant colors. The angle of the slope and that of the objects is important to impart direction. The entire assembly is seen as an event along the highway in the same way as Cadillac Ranch has become a national landmark.
Median Elements

Object: Small Scale Conical Forms in a Plane

The use of man-made natural plant or tree forms is not new to the highway environment. In Southern California, synthetic plants were placed within the center median strip to act as a buffer and a light screen between lanes. In this proposal, conical tree forms are placed as a screen across the highway strip. The plane of the "trees" can act as a screen to hide or to isolate elements within the highway corridor. In addition, the trees can act as an entry through which the motorist passes. If these planes are placed repetitively, the effect is a forest of parallel planes. Constructed from ferro-cement or light-weight steel shell, the trees are placed on concrete pedestals. Trees would be painted to fit the existing context.
**Median Elements**

Object: *Scaled Cylinders Opposed*

The introduction of opposing scales is the basis for this proposal of scaled cylinders set up in a pattern where the low to high scale is with the direction of vehicular movement. The cylinders, each three feet in diameter, create a specific spatial
zone that is passed through. The assemblage would be built over a distance of 200 feet. This would provide ample distance to experience the ascending scale of the cylinders. The distance between cylinders would be 40 feet. While the entire driving experience would only last 2.5 seconds, the overall impact of the changing spatial experience would have a much longer impact. In this proposal, the effect of the experience is the key to understanding the visual sequence. As the driver approaches the cylinders, the first recognized pattern is that of the overall form. As the driver enters the middle-ground, the form takes on its vertical meaning but it is not until the driver has proceeded through the spatial form that specific information about the construction becomes apparent. The heightened awareness of the driver and passengers stems from the uniqueness of the overall experience and the questions that remain unanswered. The cylinders would be constructed from poured-in-place concrete with a concealed foundation. This assembly is suited for urban, suburban and rural areas.
Median Elements

Object: Superscale Letters

The use of superscale letters is not new to the roadway environment. Initially used in commercial signage, superscale lettering has become a symbol for a new art form found throughout the United States. In this proposal, the letters are placed within the center median strip and are intended to be read from both directions. The purpose of this proposal is to create the potential for a learning experience from the highway trip. Frequently, the roadway simply conveys the passengers without utilizing the educational aspects of the highway experience. Coupled with natural or man-made landmarks, the superscale letter or word can add a level of understanding about that particular region or object. In an urban setting, unique features could be called-out to the passing motorist.
utilizing inexpensive advertising space - the urban corridor.

The overall configuration of the letters and their respective placement can be modified from one part of the country to another. The letters, ranging in height from 16 to 30 feet would be constructed from steel or ferro-cement. Each letter can be demountable and the actual word or words employed can be changed on a regular basis. In this proposal, the letters are rotated from the perpendicular 22.5 degrees so that a driver will recognize the forms in the distance. The letters become recognizable as the driver approaches the middle ground and the message is fully understood before the assembly is passed. Another use of this type of signage would be to convey messages along the route over great distances similar to the Burma Shave advertisements that populated the highways from the 1930's.