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An analysis of the between space in the experimental city

Dokos, Kelli Ann, M.Arch.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE BETWEEN SPACE IN THE EXPERIMENTAL CITY

by

KELLI A. DOKOS

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

William Sherman, Director
Associate Professor
School of Architecture

Mark Wamble,
Assistant Professor
School of Architecture

Peter Goldstein,
Architect

Houston, Texas
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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of the Between Space in the Experimental City

by

Kelli A. Dokos

Houston is the rebellious younger sibling of the traditional city, a product of the tug-of-war between the amorphous historic past and the open field of future possibilities; this dichotomy contributes to the form of the experimental city which is direct challenge to the traditional city as applied urban model. In the traditional city urban meaning and architectural form are innately linked, in the experimental city it is not building which embodies the urban iconology, but instead the Between Spaces, the direct, although inadvertent, spatial results of Houston’s construction processes. Thus, architecture and urban meaning are disassociated, and through this schism meaning is physically relocated outside of architecture in the Between Space of the experimental city. Through the analysis of two casestudies, Transco Tower/Lamar Terrace, and Sam Houston Tollway/Memorial Bend, an alternative experiential and perceptual framework through which Houston’s urban forms are assessed is determined.
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I. Introduction to the Experimental City

The vision of this strange terrain, 
Such as no mortal eyes have seen, 
This morning, faint and far, again 
Bewitched me with its novel scene. 
(Charles Baudelaire, Flowers of Evil) ¹

Houston is the wayward child of the traditional and modern cities; criticized for the inability to conform or measure up to preconceived notions of urbanism, it is considered to lie in a lacuna between the phantasmagoric and the ideal, an ill defined conglomeration of strip, suburb, concrete, empty lot, and monolith.

In the backs of our minds we carry the load of urban history whose codified, honored standards have been determined and 'proven' over time, success over time becoming the ultimate test and definition of good urbanism. And with the image of the city defined by the historical shadows of Paris and Rome, we will continue to consider the city at hand, Houston, within the circumscribed parameters of the forms and experiences of the traditional cities;

thus, with dogged resolution we scrutinize Houston and pursue answers to the queries: Where is the city center? How are streets made? Where is the public realm?. And in turn, if the answers to the questions turn up empty, architecture becomes the method through which to fix Houston's urban shortcomings.

When judged by the established standards of what defines 'city', Houston seems to be the cruel joke, the deformed urban child, the ostracized city that will never measure up to model, as well as never supply the urban experiences that we have been taught to idolize. When addressing Houston it is exactly these methods of comparison which have become the excess baggage in the examination of the city; monocular vision leads to the conclusion that this city is a failure, falling short of success because it refuses to bend or comply to the established canons of urbanism.

The traditional city embodies stability within the physical forms which is reinforced through rituals, customs, and community; life is a series of reactions and responses within the structure which is the coalescence of both the physical and the social forms.

In contrast, Houston is the result of an amorphous history (part legend and part local hearsay), and the open field of future possibilities; this dichotomy promotes the everchanging matrix of the form I term the 'experimental
city', experimental because it has not yet been proven or disproven, but rather is in a trial state.

Houston is the experimental city, a young city whose rules of construction are not leashed to the past, but whose patchwork form is the direct culmination of the how of Houston's construction, a how based often on the economic exigencies.

Houston and the Platonic City

Some insight into the nature of the experimental city comes from a seemingly unrelated source of discussion in Plato's Republic. In the Republic Book II Plato seeks to locate justice in the individual's soul by first locating it in the city:

So, since we are not clever persons, I think we should employ the method of search that we should use if we, with not very keen vision, were bidden to read small letters from a distance, and then someone had observed that these same letters exist elsewhere larger and on a larger surface. We should have accounted it a godsend, I fancy, to be allowed to read those letters first, and then examine the smaller, if they are the same.

(Plato, Republic: II) ²

² Plato, Republic: II, in Plato, the Collected Dialogues, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns
Plato's meaning is clear—read the larger inscription first because it is easier to see, and then check it with the smaller to make sure the two correlate. This method involves an extrapolation of scale from the larger size to the smaller size, with the goal being the apprehension of the totality in order to identify the individual character. The Platonic analysis clearly assumes two points: 1) that the larger city essentially has the ability to represent the same character or essence of the smaller individual 2) that the representation of the meaning in the larger is the correct representation of the smaller (the two inscriptions contain the same letters in the same order and so, the same meaning).

When applied to the urban analysis Plato's one-to-one correlation, that the larger inscriptions reveals the smaller, is translated into the mapping and remapping, the cartographic diagramming of the monuments, nodes, circulation, and paths of the city. In the traditional city, given that there exists a unitary meaning, these diagrams may reveal insight into the nature of the city, but problems arise when attempting to apply this method of analysis to the experimental city.

What happens if in Houston the larger inscription does not correctly represent the smaller, if the larger is in a different language or physical form from the smaller, or the

larger is a garbled symbolization of the smaller or vice versa?

This kind of questioning is not idle curiosity, because in this lies the crux of the significant separation, the split, between the experimental city and the traditional city; the constant reinforcement of meaning through architecture and culture in the traditional city creates a singular understanding. In Houston, in the experimental city, the totality of comprehension, the goal of the traditional city, is not a knowable or maybe even identifiable entity— in the experimental city the large inscriptions and the small inscriptions maintain a tenuous relationship, not necessarily correlating in meaning and not easily read.

The quest for an overall analysis or order in Houston may produce diagrams of street grids, paths, and monuments, but these reveal nothing of the experiential nature of the city or information about how meaning is conveyed within the city. With this in mind, knowledge of the experimental city is attained through examination which attempts to assess the representation of meaning within the city; in other words, this is an assessment which allows for the existence or entrance into the systems of urban meanings of a less selfconscious, but equally powerful system which is at work within the city, perhaps outside of, or in addition to the legitimized systems of architectural meaning and form.
As an important tool of analysis the conceptual diagram or model of the city has traditionally been applied as the means through which we architecturally link the city and urban meaning: Artistic city planning, the City Beautiful, the city as metaphor for the machine, the Metabolist model, the symbolic American strip, the Surreal city. All are conceptions of the city based on the attempt to internalize in the city an externally generated idea by serving as the model for city building or as a tool or process through which to achieve insight into the city. The experimental city is an attempt to analyze and develop Houston on its own terms, as a tool to further develop an understanding of the relationship between architecture and urban meaning.

The analysis of the experimental city becomes a method of rethinking our perceptions of Houston, an attempt to achieve and locate understanding and meaning in a city, where in opposition or contrast to most conceptions of the city, an absolute unitary meaning becomes an impossibility.

Thus, the experimental city is not an all encompassing model of city to be copied, but rather an analysis which acknowledges the underlying nature of the city and the motivations behind its construction; the 'rules' of the experimental city will challenge the accepted models of what constitutes successful city and 'good' urbanism.

The analysis of the experimental city requires the examination of the location of meaning within the city, a
shift which forces reexaminations of the architect's
definition of the constituents of urban meaning, as well as
architecture's symbolic role in the urban environment. Due
to its processes of expansion through the accruement of land
the experimental city contains quantities of space not
filled by building, which, through analysis one understands
maintain a powerful position within the system of urban
meaning.

Through examination the experimental city's essence is
thus revealed in specific physical form; not in building,
but rather in the space between buildings, often the left-
over, the by-product, the inadvertent, and ignored, which
when analyzed constructs an image of urban growth and active
social and political forces. To elucidate and clarify this
examination two casestudies have been isolated in Houston:
the Transco Tower and Lamar Terrace, and the Sam Houston
Tollway at Memorial Bend, which will serve as illustrations
of the phenomena of the Between Space of the experimental
city.

But, finally, the experimental city becomes an analysis
based upon the recognition of the growth processes of the
city, and so, becomes the basis for the extant iconological
systems of the city. Thus, the image of the experimental
city is recognized as not completed or finished, but as
remaining open-ended.
II. Architectural Form and Meaning in the City

1. Type and Symbol in the Experimental City

In the traditional city, usage of type or architectural form is the foundation for the symbolic system, the established means of urban representation and, thus, communication, as well as the method employed to achieve one unitary meaning of the city; in the traditional city urban meaning is integral with typological/symbolic systems of architecture.

Significantly, this system of architectural form/urban meaning permeates all models of the city, not limiting itself only to what may be considered the 'traditional' models. And it is this system which is the basis, whether overt or covert, for even the reactionary models against the traditional city:

... the development of the city, since the direction lies in the hands of a single body such as a City Council, can give us a sense of unity and coherence; and this is a reassuring thought.

But the details of this development involve the growth of individual cells (houses), each of which is an individual thing; this tends to a lack of coherence, and is a grave menace. Perhaps this difficulty can never be altogether avoided, and its
defects can only be combated by those weapons which
belong to the function of Architecture in town
planning. ³

Thus, when Le Corbusier constructs the city of "to-day" the
architecture forms the core of the urban symbolic system
utilized. The same may be said for the later revolutionary
models, such as those of the Metabolists, and Team 10; both
prescribe a language of architecture, which although
differing visually from the traditional, becomes the basis
of the representation of meaning within the city-- the
meaning in the city is transferred to the architectural
language of modernism.

In "The City as the Place of Representation" Diana
Agrest (1980) identifies the conception of 'time' as an
important aspect of the foundation of the city
representational systems, juxtaposing Piranesi and Le
Corbusier's conceptions of the cities as extreme contrasting
eamples:

The confrontation between the fantasy and the real
appears as a characteristic feature in the
consideration of the representation of the city....

Two forms of representation appear, the representation
of the existing real and the representation of fantasy.
The two forms of representing and confronting the

³ Le Corbusier, The City of Tomorrow and its Planning
(London: John Rodker Publisher, 1929), p. 72.
fantasy with the existent city are based on the notion of destruction— the ruin in one instance, tabula rasa in the other: a vision of a new, impossible city with the ruin at its origin in the one case and in the other the destruction of the existing city. One is founded on remembering, the other on forgetting. ⁴

But, no matter what the specific motivation behind the representational utilization of architecture, whether the concentration on the past or the future, in each case the architecture essentially assumes an iconic role in the city; that is, it presents or represents the urban meaning to the inhabitant through physical recognition; the urban symbolization of the city built in this way thus depends clearly and directly upon architecture and the language of architecture as part of an identifiable system.

The experimental city poses a direct challenge— a harsh threat— to this coalescence and fusion of architectural form and meaning.

In the experimental city there is a shift in representation away from the building form; representation becomes an outgrowth of the process of building, the how of Houston's construction. A harsh incongruity between the conscious symbolism of the building, the ordained iconic

architecture, and an emerging unselfconscious symbolism arises; the emerging symbolism does not solely depend on architectural form, but is informed instead by the inadvertent, non-sanctioned spaces resulting from Houston's expansion. These spaces, the spaces which occur between and beyond the city's buildings, reveal with a brutal, direct candor the soul of Houston with its active political, social, and economic forces in motion. They thus conflict and disagree with the traditional role architecture has maintained within the urban symbolic system.

Urban meaning is transferred from a highly structured system, the taxonomy of type, to the amorphous, often deemed unattractive forms of the experimental city, the nameless ill-defined spaces which began as incidental product of Houston's expansion patterns, but now assume the role of basic structural urban glue, as well as symbolic element in the experimental city.

2. Building Type and the Justification of Origin

This crucial question of linkage between architectural form and meaning has historically been a critical point for theoretical investigations; and it is with this capricious, changeable dynamic of the relationship between type and meaning an examination of the experimental city begins. By understanding the motivations of construction, the space of
the experimental city can be seen in terms of contrast, and as a breaker of the established rules of city building.

To talk of a building type, then, implied not only its search for original validation, its ultimate restoration to the temple or hut, but also its specific aspect, the form that enabled it to be read as to its purpose at first glance: "all the different kinds of production which belong to architecture should carry the imprint of the particular intention of each building, each should possess a character which determines the general form and which declares the building for what it is," wrote Jacques Francois Blondel, 1749.  

Quatremere de Quincy also stressed this connection with the past, theoretically defining type as a method to acknowledge and underscore the historical continuum of architecture— the genesis. The ideal type was introduced, a form which developed due to historical usage, but not intended to be a duplicable model: "In spite of the industrious spirit which looks for innovation in objects... who does not prefer the circular form to the polygonal for a human face? Who does not believe that the shape of a man's

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back must provide the type of the back of a chair?"  

In the next century Durand in the *Lessons at the Ecole* (1802-1805) reduced architecture to the taxonomy of building elements which could be combined to form larger units, which formed the urban scale, basically a primer or pattern book for 19th century standardization. For Durand the exterior and the interior could be separable elements which allowed for play; building structure would be defined according to necessity and pattern, and then the facade determined. Thus, disparities between the formal structure of the building and the surface treatment occur-- the surface and the structure are disassociated.

Vidler relates this severing of skin and structure to the development of style:

With the freeing of geometry from classical form to become pure technique, and the acknowledgment of "style" as a coherent system of decoration, style was now seen as clothing for an otherwise "naked" object. As for type, the notion of constitutional form thereby became the more significant, as something completely separable from the outer surface and only recognizable in the inner workings of plan and distribution.  

Thus, although the connection with the historical past is

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7 Vidler, "Idea of Type," p. 110.
still of importance, a separation of meaning and form within the building occurs. Typological meaning is read on the interior; another public or urban meaning on the exterior. As inner and outer separation occurs, the meaning of buildings is located just one step farther away from integration, perhaps setting up the split for the location of meaning outside of the architectural form.

Alan Colquhoun asserts that meaning in architecture depends upon this relationship between type and symbol, the comprehension of which is based upon the cultural context—the general agreement of the 'rules' or members of the readable system, an agreement that stresses the fixation or matching of meaning with specific physical form. With this system underlying cultural meanings are now expressed through corresponding architectural form, translated to architecture, and they are, in a sense, once removed from their original form:

In the first sense, type has a genetic connotation: it is the essence that has been stamped on the original version which each subsequent form will recall. In the second sense, type merely has the connotation of a de facto form which is rich in meaning and can be reinterpreted again and again in different historical circumstances.  

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This linkage that the symbolic and typological form maintain with the past as a cultural history is significant when one turns to the case of Houston. For Houston the idea of past -- 'idea' because it is clearly a mental conception of the city as an historical place -- has become polemic: In a city such as Houston, where history is not clearly defined and where the universal agreement of meaning is relative, challengeable, and maybe impossible, what role can urban typology maintain?

3. Building Type and the City: Rossi

Vidler's analysis of type outlines the definition of two historically prevalent typologies; both address the significance of type in relationship to science and technological progression: 1) the typology of the "natural basis for design" in which form is related to the quest for primitive architectural origins (Laugier) 2) the typology of form developed from production process (Le Corbusier). 9

In contrast is Vidler's so-called Third Typology which shifts from the technological emphasis to "... the traditional city as the locus of its concern. The city,

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that is, provides the material for classification, and the forms of its artifacts provide the basis for recomposition. This third typology, like the first two, is clearly based on reason and classification as its guiding principles ...." 10

The Third Typology underscores historical continuity through the usage of architectural forms which have developed integral with urban context, rather than as single, isolated architectural building block. Urban meaning and architectural meaning are inextricably interwoven; singular meaning in the city is reinforced through usage of forms.

In Rossi's theory of type meaning is clearly placed in the hands of architectural form, which achieves an urban significance when defined as "urban artifact" in acknowledgement of this relationship between form and urban meaning; the architectural form becomes the bridge between the scale of the city and itself (architecture), through the expression of its own history as well as the history of the city. Due to this significant connection with history, form becomes connection over time, as opposed to that of function or usage which is outgrowth of a specific time and so considered variable. Function is discounted as insufficient explanation of type:

In reality, we frequently continue to appreciate

elements whose function has been lost over time; the value of these artifacts often resides solely in their form, which is integral to the general form of the city... Often, too, these artifacts are closely bound up with the constitutive elements, with the origins of the city, and are included among its monuments. Thus we see the importance of the parameter of time in the study of urban artifacts.... ¹¹

Architectural form becomes direct nexus to urban meaning-- the city is made of architectural forms-- and linked to urban origin which is integral to the comprehension of the city: "The city is invariably the sum of its artifacts". ¹²

But given the emphasis of this system on history and time, can the experimental city be addressed within these defined parameters? Do the Between Spaces of the experimental city have an active role in Rossi's system?

Consistent with his theory Rossi approaches these Between Spaces as part of the historical continuum; they are the visual or physical manifestations of the "processes of transformation" occurring over time:

Amorphous zones do not exist in the city, or where they do, they are moments of a process of transformation; they represent inconclusive times in the urban dynamic.


¹² Rossi, p. 95.
Where phenomena of this type appear very frequently, as in the suburbs of the American city, the processes of transformation have usually been accelerated, since high density puts greater pressure on land usage. ¹³ For Rossi these are in the waiting room of redevelopment, not permanent; once assigned this unresolved state they do not become part of the typological system.

But, Rossi does acknowledge the sensual and aesthetic aspects of these spaces, as urban foils or contrasts, but again as part of the city developing over time and thus, as part of the urban history:

In this way, formerly peripheral parts of large cities in transformation often appear beautiful: London, Berlin, Milan, and Moscow reveal entirely unexpected perspectives, aspects, and images. The different *times* more than the immense spaces of the Moscow periphery, by virtue of an aesthetic pleasure that resides in the very nature of the artifacts, give us the real image of a culture in transformation, of a modification taking place in the social structure itself. ¹⁴

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¹³ Rossi, p. 95.

¹⁴ Rossi, p. 96.
4. Symbol and the City: Learned from Las Vegas

Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. (Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man) ¹⁵

Type is an iconographic organization of information; through the identification of formal, visual elements meaning is established to communicate within the city. In this lies the incongruence between the reading of the traditional city versus that of the experimental city--the iconographic reading of the traditional city (the identification of visual clues) versus the iconological reading of the experimental city (the reading for symbolic meaning and underlying symptoms). For background information on the theories and usages of icon, iconography, image, and symbol as tools of study see Appendix I.

Given the tradition of the typological/symbolic architecture, what role does it maintain within the experimental city? Must we go beyond this canonized system of communication to a less formalized, raw or vulgar system in order to comprehend the experimental city? Is this symbolic system of the experimental city a more powerful representation or purveyor of the underlying nature of

Houston?

In order to address the question of the potency of these symbolic systems the influential writings of Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form will be examined as a starting point from which to critically analyze the operative architectural communication systems used within the city; this examination will ultimately address the polemics of representation and communication within the experimental city.

We shall emphasize image—image over process or form—in asserting that architecture depends in its perception and creation on past experience and emotional association and that these symbolic and representational elements may often be contradictory to the form, structure, and program with which they combine in the same building. 16

In Learning from Las Vegas the Forgotten Symbolism the symbolism which permeates the American city in architecture from roadside vernacular to Modern becomes the focus for an examination into the contradictory nature of this communication system. For Izenour, Scott Brown, and Venturi two forms arise from this contradictory condition of architecture—the duck and the decorated shed: "The duck

is the special building that is symbol.; the decorated shed is the conventional shelter that applies symbols." 17

Both terms, duck and decorated shed, derive from an examination of the building as icon; due to the likeness of image, a physical attribute, the building is read and understood. For this reason perhaps it is not so much a Forgotten 'Symbolism', but a forgotten 'iconography' of architecture which is examined, a criticism reinforced by the emphasis of this system on the surface; as one recognizes or identifies the surface meaning, no other reading beyond is necessary, or even necessarily present to be revealed.

The strip analysis of Learning From Las Vegas is similarly focussed on the iconic; in Las Vegas urban meaning is conveyed through sign, and building as sign; space is excluded from the system, and in fact it is the sign which gives meaning to space:

We have described in the Las Vegas Study the victory of symbols-in-space over forms-in-space in the brutal automobile landscape of great distance and high speed, where the subtleties of pure architectural space can no longer be savored. But the symbolism of urban sprawl lies also in its residential architecture, not only in the strident, roadside communications of the commercial

17 Izenour, Scott Brown, Venturi, p.87.
strip (decorated shed or duck).  

The urban sprawl of America embraces icons and symbols (both typological and historical models) which, although "Ugly and ordinary", "Ambiguous urban image", "Architects don't like", become the primary means of urban communication; this is in contrast to the modernist explicitly self proclaimed rejection of symbol. (An arguable point, since Modernism has also become a symbolic system of architecture in its own right.)

Thus, although of a questionable aesthetic, the strip, which is customarily denigrated, fulfills the functional needs of the inhabitants, but also reintroduces an 'overt' or explicit symbolism. In terms of architecture, building may be sign which reveals meaning, but meaning in the language of the city-- the architecture of the "I Am a Monument". Similar to the billboard, architecture is read like icon at a glance, as the significant element of meaning in the city; architecture literally explains or spells out the symbolism of the city. (For an analysis of the overt, intentional symbolism of Casestudy 1., The Transco, see Appendix II. This will form a significant contrast with the examination of the Transco and the Between Spaces.)

Thus, this is the same system utilized in the traditional city, now extrapolated and applied to Las Vegas

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18 Izenour, Scott Brown, Venturi, p.119.
by Izenour, Scott Brown, and Venturi. Their methodology incorporates the traditional city as point of comparison: Las Vegas is examined as Nolli map of Rome, the A&P parking lot is the American spatial representation of Versailles. In 1986 Scott Brown acknowledged this historical ground:

The journey from Las Vegas back to Rome allowed us to learn again from historical architecture through a reappraisal of its symbolism and decoration.... Las Vegas therefore helped us to reinterpret traditional architecture and by redirecting us to Rome set us to mending the rupture Modern architecture made with its tradition. In so doing we were also able to incorporate portions of the American suburban landscape into the fold of architecture, where they had not been included before. 19

Thus, the essential motivation was a basic reinterpretation of the then, contemporary architectural form and city as linked with the past symbolic/meaning system, rather than a refutation of the traditional symbolic systems of the city.

In "Aspects of a New Urban Vernacular" (1980) Peter Papademetriou specifically questions this system of symbol/type proposed by Learning from Las Vegas, but in utilizing Houston as casestudy he points out a significant

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distinction--a split between the building symbolism and the urban context occurs. Because Houston does not follow the traditional urban patterns of space usage--it is a city of voids rather than solids, and maintains a different developmental history--a relationship between architecture and urban form has developed in which building no longer reinforces urban structure. Using specific office building case studies, Papademetriou demonstrates the range of symbolic usage in contrast to building function, and the usurping of building type for other usage, such as the Miesian Museum as bank, or office building type as housing. Thus, for Papademetriou, style becomes the conveyance of meaning in Houston, but the rules defining style are flexible and lead to hybridization and fusion of forms; meaning may still be read as in the traditional city from building as sign, but a scale reduction occurs and the architecture becomes like the "traditional barber pole." 20

For Webb and Zweig this usage and subversion of symbolic/typological systems is a natural part of Texan development because of the Texan history of growth as a history of people moving into the land with their own ideas, their own pasts, and their own stories to tell; Texan land becomes a frontier to be molded into an image, perhaps an

image from the pioneers past, or a reflection of the economic present:

The builders of the recent past seemed to view the Texas landscape as a tabula rasa where contrived dreams could be manufactured on a grand scale. And that was exactly the kind of building in which Texans of that period could excel.... Architecture became a kind of media event of familiar symbols arranged inside the anonymous air-conditioned perimeters. None of this may be architecture, but it was the kind of can-do attitude and audacity which came to characterize the Texas image. 21

But for Zweig and Webb problems arise with this symbolic system when the symbol is no longer referential, but part of the code, and meaning is not read beyond the symbol. These "shriveled symbols" thus lose their potency, and purpose of meaning:

There is a line of thought which views symbols as a kind of quotable language, a code which can be called up to provide meaning to something. And because symbols can be independently designated, they do not represent so much an understanding of what is being

symbolized as they do an understanding of the code. 22

Thus, meaning in the city is, in a sense camouflaged, hidden under a system of codes which are no longer communicating; in Houston one may question whether the system ever did communicate.

In the experimental city it must be acknowledged that there are operative systems which convey meaning outside of the realm of architecture: the power lies not in the sign itself, but in the contrast of the sign with other urban forms, or perhaps in the space between the signs. Thus, urban symbolism or meaning is transferred from building to another form, the Between Space whose meaning derives from interrelationship and contrast of both the conscious and the inadvertent pieces of the city.

5. The Economic and Political Criticisms of the Type/Symbol System of Postmodernism

The connection between form and meaning has been discussed in an historical context in the previous sections, now it will be considered in a different light, in relationship to its manifestation in the contemporary architecture of the city, as part of a general cultural symptom— Postmodernism:

22 Webb and Zweig, p. 59.
The evolution of postmodernism in architecture thus raises the question of whether the utilization of past styles has ensured more meaning, or whether it is a nostalgic refusal to recognize architecture's own situation in history.... In their duplication and exaggeration of historical forms, architects unintentionally parody that which is important to them— an architectural heritage that speaks to society. (Mary McLeod, 1985)  

Izenour, Scott Brown, and Venturi's outline of the symbolic urban role of architecture has been examined from the aesthetic and the economic viewpoint by Jameson in "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984); for Jameson all positions in the postmodern world are driven directly by the multinational capitalism which is the chief promoter of a homogeneous world culture which takes its cues from Western (American) culture. This leads to what he calls a "depthlessness" in urban form:

If this new multinational downtown...effectively abolished the older ruined city fabric which it violently replaced, cannot something similar be said about the way in which this strange new surface in its

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own peremptory way renders our older systems of perception of the city somehow archaic and aimless, without offering another in their place? 24

Jameson basically suggests that if the form of the city has changed, our preconceptions and notions about urbanism may be undermined and possibly nullified, not able to directly address the city. He poses this as criticism of the Postmodern city, but if one looks beyond the obvious symbolic systems of this city, is there the possibility of uncovering another system of meaning? Can the experimental city be considered this alternative approach to the city, an approach which must rely on a changing perceptual alteration?

Jameson focuses on Portman's Bonaventura Hotel as a case study to critique the Postmodern building in the city:

... it is generally affirmed, in other words, that these newer buildings are popular works on the one hand; and that they respect the vernacular of the American city fabric on the other, that is to say, that they no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign-system of the surrounding

city, but rather, on the contrary, seek to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax as that has been emblemsatically 'learned from Las Vegas'.

But, through this subversion of the sign-system to architecture, the "ugly and ordinary" architecture once denigrated in pre-Learning from Las Vegas days—the 'junkyard' of Peter Blake—becomes the system through which architecture officially functions, the ordained or canonized symbolic system of the city, and so how urban meaning is determined.

But what happens when the original system of the commercial, the sign, is adopted and then institutionalized by an aesthetic determining elite? Does confusion occur with the same system being used for different purposes, one elite, a legitimized way to create meaning in the city, the second usage in the verity of the strip?

Through the institutionalization and the conscious effort to speak the language of Las Vegas has the "ugly and ordinary" lost its potent iconic power?

With the postmodern iconographic reading of the city, architectural scale, based on the ease of the identification of the symbol, becomes a tool utilized to make meaning legible. For Jameson this results in a misunderstanding on the part of the individual; the human is no longer capable

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25 Jameson, pp. 80-81.
of mentally synthesizing this environment:

... this latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment...can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects. 26

Thus, architectural scale essentially mimics or imitates the scale already established by the culture and vice versa; a reflecting or mirroring of culture and architecture in which the true source or identity is difficult to isolate, the body unable to perceptually comprehend it, the mind unable to keep up.

Bruce Webb considers this phenomena to be a result of the incompleteness of the modern project, and its failures: Lacking real sources of imagery other than those found in economically determined functionalism and the

26 Jameson, pp. 83-84.
routines of modern civic life, the built world becomes colorless and insignificant. The demise of a vivid and multifaceted civic life acted out against the real settings that marked the past and present life of the city produced a reciprocal rise in the importance of media culture as an encyclopedic source of emptied-out cultural symbols, artifacts, and stories.  

And for Jameson it is a rethinking of this representational system which will allow meaning to be achieved or conveyed in the city, and it will be political in nature:

... the new political art-- if it is indeed possible at all-- will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object-- the world space of multinational capital-- at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the

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invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale. 28

Thus, Jameson calls for a representational form which will somehow express the underlying organization and structure of the whole to the individual, a form which is new and representative of recondite urban meanings. Through this process the individual maintains deeper comprehension of the city and, so also the universal organization; this is in contradiction or opposition to the Izenour, Scott Brown, Venturi symbolic stance in which meaning is purely related to a surface understanding.

M. Christine Boyer (1988) extends this outline of the economically fueled homogenous world culture to the motivation behind the aesthetization of the environment--emphasis on the surface becomes the overt goal behind architecture and urban planning in the contemporary city--which is exemplified by the Postmodern city that craves referential ornamentation:

Further pleasurable experience lies in manipulating already known and familiar patterns, hence our urban vocabulary is filled with reiterations, rehabilitations, recyclings, and revitalizations all based on the regeneration of already known symbolic codes. Even our nostalgia for the vernacular could be

28 Jameson, p. 92.
called ornamental; habitats, decor, eating habits, craftsmanship, were re-valued at the very moment when television culture, agribusiness, and mass consumption invaded the countryside and virtually destroyed its regional identification and material culture.  

The proposed symbolic codes in a sense have already become hackneyed, and used; the city ceases to be the focus of our amazement, we look to the city as a place to buy or supply entertainment, a capitalist, marketplace wonderland. The aesthetic handling of the city underscores this attitude, which is one of complacency, on the brink of boredom, a boredom which may be both aesthetic as well as political or social; the only really exciting space of this city is freeway which counteracts the boredom of the physical image with speed and experiential rush.

In time, the oppositional and unassimilated nature of modern art and architecture became canonized: in the museums of modern art, in the advertising images of modern life-styles, in the design of everyday objects and habitats, in the city plans of redevelopment. The actual aestheticization of everyday life that the modernist doctrine proclaimed, the total theatricalization of its environment and its forms of

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visual communication, in the end produced one more style propelling the march of the commodity through culture.  

And like Bruce Webb, Boyer considers the Postmodern city's role related to the modernist continuum; the modernist aesthetization of the urban environment is represented by the contemporary preoccupation with the total design of the environment accompanied with the entrenchment of the symbolic system of architecture in the culture. And in this case the symbol retreats in significance; the utilization of symbol is important as a tool of building, but nobody in particular bothers to read it for meaning-- it is a stylistic or aesthetic ploy.

The symbol/sign system no longer maintains the potency it once wielded. If this systematic demise occurs, is the icon dying a slow death?

Mary McLeod in "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era" (1989) outlines the connection she believes exists in architecture as an expression of the changing political and social responsibility of architects; for the modernists there was a clear connection between the two, but for the postmodernists, the clear reaction against modernism forced an initial emphasis on the populist culture. But as McLeod explains this dichotomy in practice begins to coalesce:

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30 Boyer, p. 105.
A passivity vis-a-vis economic and political power has continued to be one of the major reasons for leftists' unease with postmodern architecture. However critical postmodern architects were of corporate skyscrapers and government housing projects, it was soon apparent that their focus was on form and style. With amazing rapidity, postmodernism became the new corporate style, after Philip Johnson's notorious Chippendale top for AT&T instantly convinced patrons of its marketability and prestige value. 31

If significance in the city shifts away from the icon where does it go? Are we in the experimental city in the process, or have we shifted the symbolic away from the iconic to other form?

What is the power of type in the experimental city?
What is the power of symbol in the experimental city?
What is the power of the sign in the experimental city?

6. The Paradox of Type and Symbol in the Experimental City

In the search for the architectural forms of the experimental city, typology, an accepted system of

symbolization of the urban form, has become the ordained solution to the dilemmas: How can we build the city? Where can we locate urban meaning in the city?

In the experimental city, the paradoxical nature of this usage is clear: type is used in the city to form the basic connection with history, to somehow validate Houston as city. But in Houston, an American city which must be acknowledged as part of another developing tradition, an extra European tradition, this usage of type must be carefully considered in relationship to the nature of the city. In our desperation to create meaning in the city we have imported and usurped a language for Houston, in fact, a system of languages which perhaps do not connect with the urban dynamics of the city.

Because of its ready availability as an organized system of thought and as set of standards to be embraced, as well as its pushing in the theoretical texts of the last twenty years, typology became the old stand-by, the fix-it prescription for the city whose physical form breaks the rules and whose history is as amorphous and incomprehensible as that urban form. The previous examinations of the typological/symbolic theories underscored this; within these theories there is an attempt at urban unification and meaning with building; architecture becomes part of the historical continuum, and is thus validated. Through the use of typology a system of physical form and symbolism for the
city, which ostensibly does not have one, is achieved; two birds are killed at once.

But when applied uncritically to Houston, with blinders over the eyes, one will only see that the city is still falling short of the desired ends. Validation of Houston through the marriage of building form and urban meaning has failed to produce the unity and cohesion desired; this failure suggests that the idea of the singular, unified city is unattainable, and out of reach for the experimental city.

In Houston we are not working within the parameters of the traditional city, a city in which all aspects of life, from social to political, can be clearly linked to history and which simultaneously reinforce the structure of one another. Because of this there is no single image of the city; it is a city of pieces, but a city which does not ask for forgiveness, redemption, or a quick fix.

Thus, the paradox of the experimental city: in using typology to return to the historical city the basic process of Houston's growth, as well as the resultant urban forms, are being ignored; in Houston the structure of the city is sketchy, but there are forms and spaces that do exist which are the direct linkage to the basic how of city growth.

An unforeseen, recondite urban meaning may be in the works, one which does not rely on the highly designed, organized, 'legitimate', architecture of the city, but is
rather the direct line of connection to the vulgar basis of the city building. The symbolic meaning of the traditional city has been relocated outside of the architectural form, in a space termed 'Between Space', but the examination into this relocation must allow for the possibility that our own quest for 'meaning' in the city, meaning in the traditional symbolic/urban meaning sense, may turn up empty or null.

But we must beware: an attempt to conform the experimental city to our own preconceived notions of city—to even find the location of meaning within the city—assumes its existence, that each city, even this bastardized urban form of Houston, must contain meaning. And we may be forced to go a further step away from this traditional idea of urbanism, and Plato's search for the 'soul' of the city, to critically reevaluate the validity of our own quest for urban meaning in the experimental city.
7. The Shift to the Between Space of the Experimental City

The preceding discussion of type and symbol analyzes the traditional systems of meaning and representation within the city and questions the application of these canons to Houston; through this examination it becomes evident that the application of these theories to Houston is not an adequate explanation of the relationship between architecture and urban meaning within the experimental city, and in fact, typology, once thought to be the corrector of this city, is shown to be losing its potency as a symbolic system.

Instead of looking to external models as tools through which to understand Houston, in this chapter, an attempt is made to identify meaning within the spaces and forms inherent to Houston, but that lie outside of the sphere of ordained architecture; thus, the Shift in the experimental city, will consist of the dislocation of meaning within the city away from the collapsing typological systems of the traditional city, to the 'Between Space' of the experimental city. Two case studies: Case 1: The Transco Tower and Lamar Terrace, and Case 2: The Sam Houston Tollway and Memorial Bend, will be enlisted as tools through which to enter into the discussion of the Between Space of the experimental city, and to assess what these spaces reveal, in terms of the urban meaning of the experimental city.
a) An Explanation of Terms: the 'Between Space'

I will denote the symbolic form of the experimental city, Houston, as 'Between Space' a term which emphasizes the two significant aspects of the condition: usage of the term 'Between' is locational, that is space viewed in relationship to Houston's built architectural environment. Defining the Between as 'Space' emphasizes the inability to limit this to specific architectural form; it is rather an urban condition, in which space maintains as potent an impact as building. Comprehension of the experimental city relies on the recognition that urban meaning can become a function of space, and that these previously unacknowledged spaces of the city may become significant basic elements of the city's physical and symbolic structure.

In Houston there exists a clear disapprobation of space; Houston has not been squelched to conform to natural or human built boundaries, or, for that matter, a rigorous set of zoning regulations; space is devalued due to its profusion, as well as the inhabitants' familiarities with the historic, traditional city-- empty space, except that which is justified as 'public realm' or 'used' is not considered asset in the city. In reality when we, as architects, speak of the city we don't refer to space anyway, we really mean architecture. We have determined that space, in order to qualify as 'good' is resolved,
pleasant; non conformation to an ideal of 'good' city space is in need of correction.

The irony of this line of thought is evident when one considers Houston's history of expansion as a process which leads directly to the 'empty' spaces of the city, a result of both Houston's capitalistic, individualistic development, and Houston's urban policies of extending the city limits through annexation of the surrounding land. Acknowledging that this is part of the process of Houston's growth leaves us in a quandary, we may malign the Between Space, but as the basic urban form of the city, it is not going to be an easy task to fix; in Houston it is not just a matter of "left-over space", the Between Space is the basic urban structural system.

In Houston land is an economic commodity developed through the art of the deal, development being the physical sign of progress; the decision of land use is left up to the individual owner and developer who are driven by the great economic payoff. The textbook rationale for private land development is utilitarian: if land is "worth" its usefulness, then a materialistic society's interest is in putting it to its "highest and best use" as determined by market forces; the plans of the highest bidder are presumed to represent that highest and best use.  

\[\text{32 Douglas Harvey, "Escape From the Planet of the Modernists: Beyond the Growth Syndrome," Texas Architect,}\]
Houston's origin is based upon this economic system of the city built as real estate proposition, a fact attested to by the advertisement of 1836 offering land for sale:

Situated at the head of navigation on the west bank of Buffalo Bayou, is now for the first time brought to public notice, because, until now, the proprietors were not ready to offer to the public, with the advantages of capital and improvements....

No place in Texas possesses so many advantages for building.... The proprietors offer lots for sale at moderate terms to those who desire to improve them and invite the public to examine for themselves. (A.C. and J.K. Allen, Advertisement for "Town of Houston", August, 1836) 33

Thus, this trend which basically began at its founding continued as Houston expanded, with enclave of private development after enclave of development. Eventually the annexation of land in order to broaden the tax base added to the empty spaces between organized developments, and it is these spaces which became the uncomfortable glue, or sinew, of the structure of Houston's expansion.

Peter Papademetriou's Metro Authority study of Houston (1980) outlines the history leading up to the annexation of

October 1988, p. 37.

33 Dr. S.O. Young, True Stories of Old Houston and Houstonians (Galveston, TX: Oscar Springer, 1913), pp.5-6.
land which has become Houston's expansion pattern, describing the decentralization which was already occurring in the city growth; the 1942 Major Street Plan attempted to unite and counteract this decentralization through the addition of a structured all encompassing city circulation plan-- a modernist attempt to organize with an overlayed organization of automobiles the already evident waywardness of Houston's laissez-faire growth. In 1952 the largest annexation of land by Houston occurred which more than doubled the size of the city from 164 square miles to 353. In 1963 the Municipal Annexation Act set the standard for the codification of Houston's expansion through annexation as "extra-territorial jurisdiction." the hand-in-hand attempt to control the spreading of the city through circulation organization actually spurred the spread, providing ever quicker and more direct access to the periphery.

Thus, the Between Space becomes the resultant physical form of Houston's growth, codified by laws of the government and the economy, a direct consequence of Houston's thirst for 'progressive' growth-- with benevolent progress, comes the ungainly, unsightly forms of the urban spaces.


35 Papademetriou, *Transportation*, p. 75.
The phenomena of the Between Space has been considered under a variety of nomenclature by urban theorists for the past 30 years; the significance of its role within the city varies greatly among these theories, ranging from its acknowledgement as an urban form to being termed worthless, excess urban space.

Koetter and Rowe allow for these Between Spaces in their study of the city, an analysis which attempts to find, or establish, an equilibrium in the contemporary city which is a connection back to the historical city. With this agenda in mind the contemporary city is characterized as:

A debate in which victory consists in each component emerging undefeated, the imagined condition is a type of solid-void dialectic which might allow for the joint existence of the overtly planned and genuinely unplanned, of the set-piece and the accident, of the public and the private, of the state and the individual.  

In the Koetter and Rowe models both the traditional and the modern cities coalesce and coexist through a process which is largely based on compositional moves; this process is reinforced and epitomized by the plethora of figure-ground, aerial, and plan analyses which are the backbone of the

"contextualist" urban analysis.

William Ellis succinctly states the inherent problems with this type of analysis-- "For all his (Rowe) interest in three-dimensional spatial concepts, with their scenic implications, he works like an abstract painter composing in two dimensions." 37 The analysis of the city becomes a basically 2-D urban diagram, beautiful, abstract, but yet not revealing anymore to us about the perceptual sense of the space. The abstraction becomes a deception with which we fool ourselves into making compositional moves that might visually be aesthetically correct, and powerful, but are basically decisions unrelated to the human perception of the city.

In the experimental city Koetter and Rowe's process of abstraction, and blanket analysis, must be critically utilized and examined. It must be understood that as a process this will not fully acknowledge or explain the experimental city; it must be counteracted with an analysis which allows for the specific experiential aspects of the city.

Koetter and Rowe do clearly acknowledge a form of the Between Space as part of their collage system of the city, considering it as the glue or ad hoc stuff between the ideal types, or rigidly designed pieces of the city; for them it

provides an alternative to the totalitarian designs of the modernist vision, in which these zones were not admitted. Koetter and Rowe theoretically view these areas as integral to the historical continuum and the expansion of cities, terming them the "interstitial debris" found in the traditional cities like Rome and London. In a description of Rome applicable to Houston they are characterized as:

a compilation of rationally gridded fields, mostly corresponding to estate structure, with conditions of confusion and picturesque happening in between, mostly corresponding to stream beds, cow tracks, etc, and, originally serving as a series of inadvertent D.M.Z.'s which could only help to qualify the virtues of order with the values of chaos. 38

But, in terming these zones as "interstitial debris" Rowe and Koetter set up a slightly derogatory viewpoint, a viewpoint which does not recognize the intrinsic, individual value of the Between Space, but rather sees them as leftovers, debris; the value of the "debris" derives from their relationship only with the other parts of the city, their role as urban balancers or qualifiers, part of Koetter and Rowe's continuing dialectic between the designed and undesigned spaces of the city, a condition not allowed by

the modernist urban vision. This evaluation thus relies on the compositional 2-D aspects of their analysis which have already been criticized; in other words, the symbolic importance of these spaces remains unacknowledged, only the compositional role visible in plan in which they provide relief from the formal designed pieces of the city.

The Between Space has also been previously identified and denigrated as a problem zone, the target for well intentioned fixing by Roger Trancik in the antimodernist *Finding Lost Space* (1986);

So, as urban designers we must work as surgeons or auto mechanics and repair the diverse broken parts of the city rather than trying to manufacture a completely new, self-sufficient, conflict-free urban machine. We must reorient our thinking toward centralization rather than dispersion, integration rather than segregation, and urban space that expresses its setting rather than superimposing order from outside. 39

Trancik includes these zones and their various offshoots as "Lost Spaces" to be organized, patched and "infilled" through a series of fix-it panaceas derived from the traditional cities in order to counteract the isolation and self-containment of the modern building, and the resultant modern city. Linking sequential movement, lateral enclosure

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and edge continuity, integrated bridging, axis and perspective, and indoor/outdoor fusion are all geared toward the physical reunification of the city, and the reinforcement of the singular meaning and experience. 40 But in the application of these correctives to the experimental city it must be realized that the guidelines generally are in fact counteractive, antithetical, to Houston's innate method of expansion and growth.

In "Ephemeral Places, Here Today-- Gone Tomorrow" (1989) Grady Clay designates the Between Space as one of the generic leftovers of city construction, which at times become durable and permanent parts of the urban environment and range in form from the garbage dump, construction site, abandoned zone, to airspace. For Clay the Ephemeral Place is the repository, emblem or marker of time passage in the city, and thus the visible sign of temporal flux. The quality of genericism and commonplaceness which causes us to pass over these areas for Clay is a significant characteristic of their longevity:

Specific places come and go, but the generic ephemeral places will continue forever-- I use the term rashly but accurately-- to be essential moving parts of human society so long as human societies exist.... Can such places, in fact, constitute gene pools for the future,

40 Trancik, pp. 220-225.
exemplars whose lessons we can pass along as folk knowledge, part of the general level of culture? Do they not reveal generally accepted ways of settling into and using places—call it "place-craft"—that are passed down from father to son, master to apprentice, mentor to pupil, neighbor to neighbor? 41 Thus, for Clay the possibility of these zones to be absorbed into the culture and community of the city, as part of an urban history, exists. The zones become representative, as in Houston, of a commonplace, basic, or essential level of urban understanding, which perhaps is not evident in the architecture of the Postmodern city.

Vittorio Gregotti (1990) calls for the recognition of the Between Space, termed "Placeless Typologies", the outgrowth of the peripheral spread of city core and generally disagreeable by-product of movement away from the traditional city. He addresses this space as in opposition to traditional urbanism (he hints at their American, "extra-European" origins), yet he urges the acknowledgement of them because of their prevalence:

These are landscapes, if the term can still be used, whose presence is rapidly increasing, often built on extra-European models, that refuse any form of integration or even simple confrontation within the

dense historical fabric of our territories. 42 But, Gregotti's criticism points out his desire for this urban form to synthesize with the form of the city and underscore the historical urban meaning, a goal he considers possibly attainable because of the knowledge gained through the recent preoccupation with the historical city:

After many years in which European architectonic culture has been occupied for the most part with the historical city, with its conservation and transformation, or more generally, with building within built areas, it seems to me that the time has come when, armed with this recently gathered experience, we can turn our attention to that vast, incomplete, devastated, and, indeed unpleasant legacy which is the urban periphery, especially that of more recent and untamed proliferation. 43

Thus, Gregotti urges the acknowledgement of this existent form, yet he continues to see them in relationship to the construction of the traditional city, a discrimination suggested by his developed terminology, Placeless Typologies; Is the form "Placeless" because it is not of traditional European origins, so undesirable? Perhaps the usage of the term "Typologies", a word overtly connected


43 Gregotti, p. 2.
with a body of theoretical works, also suggests a hopeful desire to categorize these spaces, see them as part of an historical continuum, so that they may become understandable and fixable.

But, despite these shortcomings Gregotti's definition of the "placeless typology" begins to acknowledge it as a new form of urbanism, taking it a step beyond Rossi's "zones of transformation":

... an interpretation of the phenomenon was attempted (long before Venturi and Colin Rowe) along the lines of its aspects as "new characteristics", falling back on the categories of collage-city or urban surrealism. That is, they tried to get the phenomenon, with all of its degenerate aspects, to fit into the general formative process of settlements, as if this were but an intermediary, incomplete phase. I believe that today we have to admit that this is not the case: the phenomenon of placelessness has assumed an aspect of flagrant willfulness that puts it on quite a different level. 44

And with this Gregotti significantly recognizes that these zones which have often been considered as simply areas of future growth and change, may actually be permanent parts of the landscape; Gregotti points out the misconception that

44 Gregotti, p. 2.
these zones are forgotten or extra, but rather they are a component of the laws governing land usage set by profit making, evidence of an overlying economic power, as well as the regulatory organizations which control the making of the city. In Houston this often holds true: although permanency is relative, obvious superstructures like freeways, as well as zones of future development, have been assimilated into the cityscape; for example, the blocks of land lying fallow around the Astrodome have become an integral, recognizable part of the Houston after twenty-five years of non-development.

In the experimental city, Houston, the character of the Between Space will require the utilization of two casestudies, through which an attempt will be made to define or identify another operative, covert, system of the city; although this system may be of incongruous character and variable or amorphic form-- it will break the rules of urbanism and perhaps begin to define its own standards-- it will relevantly address the construction of Houston and the translation of urban meaning.
b) Case 1: The Transco Tower and Lamar Terrace, The Transformation of Meaning in the Experimental City

The Transco Tower has been examined in Appendix II as a product of the overt symbolic/typological system of Houston, its meaning and symbolic function assigned and determined by architect and developer. The following section will now look beyond the buildings and Tower to the spaces between and around--the Transco Tower in terms of its role in the experimental city--and attempt to investigate what these spaces reveal of the specific context of Houston.

The Galleria's development is the commonplace story of Houston growth, a city built as the function of economically driven private interests, which drove and determined the visual style of architecture. In the 1970's and 1980's this process became more defined as the scale of development expanded and the economic stakes attained new heights; Gerald Hines has become the emblem of the Houston developer for these years, achieving success as the prime visionary behind the Post Oak/Galleria, and notoriety as the developer who saw beyond the mere utilitarian provision of office space to the additional desire for distinct architectural image. Hiring 'name' architects Hines created the memorable Houston corporate images of the boom years, an achievement
for which Hines was honored by the AIA in 1984. 45

In the case of the Galleria Hines recognized the desire for an urban form which combined suburbia with office space, a morphology which Joel Garreau in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* identifies as prime example of the germinal urban morphology termed 'Edge City'. Garreau characterizes this form with a cut and dried five point definition: 1) 5 million square feet of office space 2) 600,000 square feet of retail 3) contains more jobs than bedrooms 4) perception as a singular place within the city, and 5) is "new"— "Was nothing like "city" until thirty years ago." 46

Garreau's assessment is grounded in analysis of the economic impetus and the architectural style but without looking beyond the obvious to the spatial qualities of the Galleria, other than pigeon holing the experiential aspects of the city in terms of surrealistic and futuristic lingo; descriptions of the Houston Galleria become "a scene straight out of Batman" and the Dallas Galleria is "Blade Runner Landscape". 47 The analysis approaches the city in terms of the image making which occurs in the Postmodern city, and in a sense falls into the hands of the facades and


styles, not looking beyond the obvious implications of the city making to the structure of the construction.

Garreau views the Edge City movement away from the traditional city core as part of an historical continuum of traditional city expansion, not as an independent urban form; Garreau suggests that given time, these peripheral cities may gain the historicism of the traditional:

In the unsettled, unsettling environment of Edge City, great wealth may be acquired, but without a sense that the place has community, or even a center, much less a soul. And the resolution of these issues goes far beyond architecture and landscape. It goes to the philosophical ground on which we are building our Information Age society. It's possible that Edge City is the most purposeful attempt Americans have made since the days of the Founding Fathers to try to create something like a new Eden. 48

With the phantom of the traditional city lurking in his mind, the criteria with which Garreau judges are determined by the consideration of the traditional city as the model of urbanism, and city building as an attempt to build a paradise on earth; Garreau's criticisms either overtly or silently seem to hold the Galleria up to the standard of the traditional city forcing him to query and rhapsodize:

48 Garreau, p. 15.
If Edge City is our new standard form of American metropolis— if Edge City is the agglomeration of all we feel we want and need— will these places ever be diverse, urbane, and livable? Will our Edge Cities ever be full of agreeable surprises? Will they ever come together gracefully?

Will they ever be sociable places found by struggling students to be spirited? Will they ever yield memories treasured forever by the traveled? Will they ever be delightful places about which love songs are written? 49

And with this point Garreau seems to miss the potency of the experimental city— perhaps urban achievement cannot and should not be measured any longer in terms of "memories", "love songs", and "agreeable surprises".

But for now let us turn to the actual case at hand, the Transco Tower, as a challenge to the traditional symbolic systems of the city.

The disjunction of the Transco Tower with its surrounding elements, and the spaces created by this oppositional play of buildings, introduce a different set of meanings found outside of the ordained architectural form. These zones lying between the architecture are the Between Spaces, the physical coalescence of the dualities of

49 Garreau, p. 214.
separation and unification, the result of the crazy quilted
matrix of pieces of the experimental city where each piece
yields or abides by its own laws; in the experimental city
individual condition and localized circumstance rule.

And in this lies the paradigm of the experimental city;
at once composed of highly ordered mega-structure,
ingengineering feats, and enclave—freeway, shopping center,
subdivision—as well as the free-will imposed upon the
city by those with money to build, the Galleria and Houston
fluctuate between the hermetic high design and the
incidental juxtaposition.

In the title of this section the role of the Transco
Tower and Lamar Terrace is termed part of a "transformation"
to underscore the dynamics of the experimental city and its
development; the city continually undergoes transmutation
due to the construction. Meaning within the city is a
function of these vacillating changes in the urban form, and
thus, the system of meaning is in a changeable state of
incompletion.

In the casestudy of the Transco the tower maintains its
explicit role as an "I am a monument" marker within the
city, but it is only icon for one facet of Houston's society
and economy, not to be mistaken for a cultural symbol; when
seen as part of the urban context the building gains a
stronger symbolic meaning as foil for the surrounding areas.
(Photo 1.)
Photo 1. Transco Tower from Loop 610, the Between Space, Lamar Terrace Home.
Photo 1. of the Galleria area from Loop 610 and the Lamar Terrace Neighborhood reveals the essential disjunction of form, scale, usage, and economy in Houston, and the Between Spaces created as a result of this development. In section the Transco Tower becomes only one element, the monolith, in contrast with what lies beyond, it is a looming reminder of Houston's boomtimes. Still a marker on the horizon, from the West Loop while moving along the freeway, the building becomes another piece of the fragmented cityscape, perceived as a piercing backdrop, yet not particularly read or acknowledged for its explicit meanings beyond the recognition or identification of it as 'tower'.

The 75 foot arched portal of the Transco's Post Oak entrance, only visible from Loop 610 in bits and snatches, is no longer seen as historically referential, but instead as more of a bizarre oddity, or a perversion of scale, peering from behind a parking garage, western wear store, and office building, as one ricochets along the freeway.

The perceptual image of the mind thus created of the experimental city becomes one formed through a series of fractured images; the eyes shift from side to side reducing the cityscape to a disjointed group of snapshots, a perception which creates an image of perpetual flux— a singular image of the experimental city is an impossibility.

The space lying beyond the Transco garage is land cleared of apartment housing for future building, but its
"temporary" state has now become part of the city. Behind the gothic concrete parking garage and the formal structure of the water wall procession, this rolling land beckons one to move away from the hyper-designed pieces of the city, the Transco and the Galleria, to a different scale, a place without buildings, where the person can once again reassert her/himself, devoid of the heavyhanded iconicism of the Galleria.

The first field of land contains disparate trees playing against the ordered groves of the Transco, as well as contrasting in scale with the Galleria and the Tower; the lot then opens up towards Lamar Terrace into a hilled grassy pasture, devoid of trees. Across this plain the small frame houses of Lamar Terrace assert themselves as dwellings in the midst of this zone of commerce and wealth, testaments to the physical and social disunity of Houston. Many houses are rental property, some boarded up, others falling apart, but looking down the dilapidated roads the eyes are drawn up to the Transco, in whose shadow this neighborhood lives.

Examination of a 1951 map of Houston shows Lamar Terrace as one of several peripheral western suburbs established independently of the surrounding areas in a pocket of development, separated from the inner city by the railroad, and separated from other enclaves by the 'jump over' effect of Houston's expansion. In Lamar Terrace the original meandering street grid is all that remains of this
community. Because of Houston's patterns of expansion the neighborhood has been placed in a no-man's land as the warehoused land for future Galleria building; houses are still occupied in the neighborhood, but in Houston, where land must be put to its 'best' profitable use, the neighborhood is now considered 'empty' and blighted.

Called "Beirut West" this edge of the Galleria is a blatant contrast to the highly controlled (desirable) environment of shopping center, planned public realm, and office buildings which proliferate on Post Oak; it offers a physical opposition to the Transco, and with this contrast brings us closer to the underlying driving forces of the experimental city.

This casestudy becomes an extreme, but typical diagram, of the forces of Houston's construction-- the jumping over of land development, leaving fallow zones of land lying in wait for money, need, greed, and desire to initiate the building. From the sidewalks of Lamar Terrace, the Galleria and the Transco begin to lose their symbolic significance within the city; in contrast, once analyzed on its own terms, this Between Space begins to gain force as a space whose power is not seen as reliant on the ability of it to be 'read' or identified with specific meaning. Its potency lies in its sensual, at times jarring, experiential qualities which are the direct result of the constructive forces of the city; thus, the understanding of the Between
Space lies outside of an overlying taxonomic system of architectural meaning and form, and is the direct result of the urban dynamics.

Postscript for Lamar Terrace:

"I'm trying to clean up the subdivision because its an eyesore and a health hazard that lies between some of the finest commercial and residential property in Houston." (Robert L. Silvers, Developer, 1990)

In December of 1992 bulldozers enter Lamar Terrace—signs proclaim, "We're cleaning Houston for the 21 century". Dilapidated roads and infrastructure are being repaired with water and sewage improvements. Why the interest in Lamar Terrace? The area has become part of a controversial redevelopment by developer Robert L. Silvers of New York, who has bought a majority of the subdivision's lots from defunct S&L's. In 1992 the City Council considers the issue of Lamar Terrace, designated by the media as "Houston's first zoned neighborhood", with controversy arising in the funding of the improvements; Silvers is awarded permission by the Council to sell 3 million in tax exempt bonds to pay for the improvements, improvements which will raise the land value from 8 million to 70 million dollars upon completion of the infrastructure. With the area
as a bond district, bonds will be paid off by the home
owners in the new development; property taxes can be frozen
for up to 20 years for this bond pay off to occur. The
neighborhood is on its way to being consumed by the
Galleria. (Photo 2.)
Photo 2. Lamar Terrace is "Cleaned for the 21 Century."
c) Case 2: The Sam Houston Tollway and Memorial Bend

In the experimental city the freeway is a physical marker of the domination of the automobile on the cityscape, and given the urban expansion of Houston, it has become the most clearly recognizable ordering device within the city; ask anyone to draw a map of Houston and chances are the map shows downtown surrounded by the great circulation rings. But the misconceptions and ironies of this cartographic image are evident when the conflicting role of the freeway is also recognized; the mega-ordering structure of the freeway, the most overtly unifying element of the city, has also promoted the disunity of the patchwork expansion of the city, as well as the propagation of the maligned chaotic strip.

But in the experimental city, where each suburb resembles the next, and strip center and mall replicate themselves seemingly uncontrollably; in areas of visual sameness, the generic, commonplace freeway becomes the mighty cut through the ground providing the harsh basis for contrast and juxtapositional reading within the city. The case study of the Memorial Bend subdivision is just one of many similar tales of Houston's freeway construction; this once stable community located along the line of the Beltway 8 freeway, directly south of Memorial Drive, is now bisected by the section of the Beltway called the Sam Houston
Tollway. In this relationship between the community and the freeway, the experiential potency of the Between Space is made evident, as clear result of the experimental city's construction, but also as glue of the urban form.

Part of the great suburbanization push of Houston to the west in the late 1950's and early 1960's, Memorial Bend epitomized the then contemporary American ideal of community. Relatively small sized in comparison to the 1980's 'planned communities' farther west, suburbs stretching for miles across pastureland and accommodating hundreds of thousands, Memorial Bend is composed of picturesque curving streets at a walkable scale. The Memorial Bend of the 1960's was a neighborhood initially bisected by a boulevard four laned street, West Belt Drive, with a community pool, an elementary school, churches and shopping on Memorial Drive, and the promise of the future development of the grand mall, Town and Country Village; the Audubon Society bird sanctuary flanked the neighborhood to the west on the banks of Rummel Creek providing parkland.

Significantly Memorial Bend offered community homes at reasonable prices--modern suburban homes; the builders mixed the traditional one-storied narrow porched ranchhouses with the "new" style of Mies translated to suburban Texas, flat roofs, clerestory windows, and freestanding brick walls all proliferate here, many houses as self-contained courthouses camouflaged behind their walls. With its clear set
of deed restrictions, the neighborhood also managed to curtail the teardown trends of the 1980's in which the smaller dwellings in established, convenient commuting neighborhoods are torn down to make room for the suburban mega-house mansion. This consistency of community and residency has become a major source of pride for Memorial Bend; one resident proudly describes it as the sort of neighborhood where the children who grew up here in the 1960's have now returned with their own families to be near mom and dad.

But what has become the monkey on the subdivision back, the disruption of the idyllic community, is the construction of the Sam Houston Tollway, the present day fourteen laned superhighway descendent of the original four laned boulevarded Westbelt Drive.

The Sam Houston Tollway is part of the Beltway, the concentric citywide loop system proposed in the 1920's as the basic transportation circulation around the downtown core; thus, the land of the Beltway was slated for future circulation at the time of the development of Memorial Bend in the 1950's, the original plan calling for a boulevarded on-grade thoroughfare, the Greenbelt Parkway.

By the late 1950's the originally established 150 foot right of way was expanded to 300 feet, and after many years of inattention the project surfaced again as an essential part of a road system, officially being entitled the Beltway
8 Project, which would improve circulation to the west and the north of Houston; in 1973 the right of way through Memorial Bend was again expanded to 450 feet. When the city of Houston finally acknowledged that the road would be wider than the originally planned four lanes, attention turned to the discussion which continued from the late seventies until the mid-eighties of how to build 10 lanes of freeway and a system of feeder roads through the Memorial Bend neighborhood. Problems of major concern involved the effects of the noise and pollution on the Audubon bird sanctuary and the drainage of water from the freeway—Rummel Creek which handled the neighborhood's drainage was already at capacity.

Over a ten year period of litigation the proposals for the Tollway ranged from an on-grade freeway, to elevated overpasses, and a submerged road system; the final solution to the problem was the Sam Houston Tollway constructed submerged as a 40 foot deep by 100 foot wide chasm, through Memorial Bend, flanked by three feeder lanes at ground level on each side.

The story of the beginning of the Tollway construction is now recounted and retold by the residents as part of the local urban, or suburban, legend of Houston: It was a holiday weekend, Labor Day, the earth moving equipment moved in, onto the grassy boulevard in the middle of the neighborhood, the median which had become part of the neighborhood's recreational space, popular for frisbee games
and bike riding. By late afternoon everyone in the neighborhood was out, sitting in lawn chairs, standing, watching their pine trees ripped from the ground as the section of the Tollway, known to residences as the "Ditch" was beginning to be dug.

The development of the Sam Houston Tollway has essentially sliced the neighborhood into pieces; there is now an edginess, a raw quality about the neighborhood, as if things are not quite complete. Streets which were once thoroughfares across the two laned Beltway are now dead ends, abruptly ended by regiments of yellow signs reinforced by sapling crepe myrtles, a half-hearted attempt to disguise the street closings behind a screen of trees. Where houses were removed at the ends of blocks, the sides of homes are left uncomfortably exposed, exhibiting bland side elevations never meant to be seen by the neighborhood. Side yards are also pared down, with the three feeder lanes cutting close to backyard patios, pools, and garages. (Photo 3.)
Photo 3. Soundwall of Memorial Bend, Beltway 8 "The Ditch", Modern Home of Memorial Bend.
The bifurcated Memorial Bend now contains a western piece with bird sanctuary, and an eastern part containing community pool and park, neither comfortably accessible by foot or bike. Going to the neighborhood pool these days, even if only three blocks away, you drive; sidewalks are built into the feeder roads, but who isn't daunted by the speed and recklessness of the six lanes of traffic, not to mention the crossing of the bridges over the Ditch?

Basically the interneighborhood pedestrian and bicycle traffic has been replaced by the automobile, the only clear visible reminders of the connection between the two fragments of the neighborhood are the post-tollway signs proclaiming "Memorial Bend", signs too small to be noticed from the moving car, and the street names, which continue across the chasm of the Tollway, although the streets no longer connect through. Names like "Boheme", "Traviata", "Tosca", and "Butterfly" remind of the original neighborhood connections, which perhaps now only exist covertly in organizations which control pool dues and deed restrictions.

This discussion of the Tollway might seem a bit nostalgic, like a maudlin tribute to a by-gone neighborhood ruined by progress; but what significantly begins to surface when one turns to the actual examination of the Tollway is that as constructed, the Tollway offers an interesting trade off to the changes in Memorial Bend. If the Between Space of the Tollway can be examined on its own terms, perhaps
important qualities may be discovered which assert its
significance as more than merely a circulation channel.

The Tollway at Memorial Bend is a space designed purely
to resolve the necessities of city circulation-- how to
move people quickly and in the most direct way possible--
while attempting to, at least superficially, attend to the
neighborhood needs. The physical form of this resolution,
the Sam Houston Tollway, is a space built for speed and
movement, which ultimately creates a three-dimensional
experience of Houston, an experience rare in this city.

And what is significant is that the excitement
associated with the form of the Tollway is ultimately not
tagged to any ordained architectural system of form or
meaning, but rather is the result of the construction of the
experimental city and the freeway as a basic structural
member of the city.

The juxtaposition of the Tollway and Memorial Bend
suggests the power of the relationship established between
freeway and house; not built for the human, but rather for
the automobile, the "Ditch" introduces a scale, which is
bizarre, perhaps even perverse, and a contrast to the
neighborhoods it traverses. The Tollway is a 40 foot deep
channel interred in the flat topography of the Houston
cityscape, which physically disassociates the automobile
from the ground plane above, presenting a different system
of dynamics from the stability and tradition of the
neighborhood perched on the edge above. With abysmal walls the Tollway controls the vision of the users, forcing one to concentrate on the chute of the freeway rather than the surrounding city. From the bottom of the canyon only the tops of the trees are visible, severing any visual connection with the dwellings; all thoughts become isolated and focussed on movement through the chute; there is neither city debris, nor architecture, to cloud the purity of the experience—simply a space focussed on movement.

(Photo 4.a, 4.b, 4.c)
Photo 4.a. The Tollway On Grade at Memorial Bend, Entering the "Ditch", Inside the Walls of the "Ditch".
Photo 4.b. Climbing Above Town and Country Mall, Approaching the Radisson, Rounding the Radisson.
Photo 4.C. On Top of the Interchange Face to Face with the Radisson, Leaving the Radisson Behind, Office Complex.
The Between Space of the Tollway

The sequences of Photo 4. describe the experience of the 1.5 mile stretch of the Tollway south of I-10: you are carried up onto an elevated bridge into the trees of forested undeveloped land, then down to ground level alongside homes shielded by twelve foot sound protection walls, pushed up a ramp, and then plunged down into the Ditch of Memorial Bend. (Photo 4.a.)

Emerging from the sublevel the excitement builds as you're then carried up 60 feet to the top tier of the I-10 exchange, a tangled convergence of overpasses swinging every which way, all the while rising above and beside the mall. (Photo 4.b.)

The gray modernist mall boxes of stores, all discreet tasteful, Neiman's and the defunct Sakowitz, are also lost in the excitement and tension of the movement; the well designed signs proclaiming the "Town and Country Village" become insignificant and ignored while this spatial dynamic occurs.

What does stand out in the mind is the location of the Radisson Hotel-- the rebellious building which refused to retreat-- whose logo peers out at the freeway at eyelevel, as you swoop around the curve you are seemingly just feet (40 feet according to the hotel) from the eighth floor rooms. (Photo 4.c.) This close cut juxtaposition of the
hotel and freeway is the result of the lengthy battle between the Tollroad Authority and the owners of the then Sheraton; when the hotel refused to relinquish hotel land for the Tollway the Harris County Tollroad Authority condemned the edge of the property, paying one million dollars for it, and then proceeded to build the exchange 40 feet from the hotel. The entrance canopy of the hotel now resides huddled under the freeway, the engineered overpass sheltering the hotel porte cochere.

Curving around the hotel the impact is the strongest, the sea of red tiled roofs of a 1960's office development is left behind, and you are faced with a rare glimpse of the sprawl of Houston to the east; a topographically flat horizontal city of green, with a seemingly limitless spread.

And it is in this contrast where one importance of the Between Space of the Tollway lies, as a dynamic foil for the horizontality of Houston. The space of the Tollway adds three dimensionality to an essentially flat city-- the only verticality in Houston is in the form of architecture, skyscrapers-- and as the freeway rises above the ground it forms another space below it, that of the underbelly of the city. (Photo 5.)

The Between Space thus breaks out of the surface bounds of Houston and begins to incorporate other places, above and below the usual frame of the city. Perceived experientially as one drives the road, the Between Space is physical
symptom of the process through which the road was built, and
the experimental city was constructed. As Tollway the
Between Space expresses the political and cultural process
of the construction, but perhaps even more importantly it
becomes a forced place of exposure to the elements of
urbanism within the experimental city, a city whose
inhabitants thrive on the security offered by the protective
enclaves of suburb, workplace, and entertainment zone.
Within this Between Space the awareness of the city is
heightened, physically translating the dynamics of the city
construction to an experiential extreme.
Photo 5. The Sprawl of Houston from the Tollway Exchange,
The Underbelly of the Exchange.
Postscript for the Sam Houston Tollway:

The Sam Houston Tollway is significant as an example of the laissez-faire growth of Houston and the irreligious 'up for grabs' attitude toward land and development; when the Tollway was hailed by the media as the "next Loop 610" it was not as criticism or jab, but rather as positive sobriquet. A fitting commentary on this attitude within Houston occurred with the grand opening of the Tollway in July of 1990; for this event the city of Houston sponsored a "Road Party" or "Freeway Jam", a multimedia extravaganza that was held on the overpass of the last finished leg of the road, complete with skydivers, ribbon cuttings, and the band Huey Lewis and the News.

And it is this kind of celebration which epitomizes an essential, yet perverse, quality characteristic of the experimental city which for the followers of traditional urbanism is so difficult to swallow; rather than looking back longingly or atoning for its 'sins' of construction and urbanism, the experimental city celebrates its mistakes.
III. **Commentary on the Between Space in the Experimental City**

Using Houston as example of the unrecognized urban form, the "experimental city" may be identified, the intention not being to create a new urban model, but rather to suggest an alternative assessment to the criticisms which uphold the contemporary city to traditional urban models. The crux of this analysis relies on the issue of the relationship between architectural form and urban meaning: within the traditional city urban meaning has historically been defined by architectural form, often in terms of a typological/symbolic system. The experimental city attenuates this link; meaning is pushed further outside of the architectural form into the space beyond the architecture, the Between Space, and in the process the historically based integrated system of the traditional city is challenged.

Thus, as the experimental city, Houston breaks the long maintained urban rules, introducing an urbanism outside of the parameters of the traditional city, and once this nonconformity is acknowledged all preconceived urban notions must be readjusted. The experimental city's forms must be examined on their own terms external to the codified system of architectural form and urban meaning.

In the analysis of the construction processes of the
experimental city one discovers that often the urban rules are generated externally from the inhabitant and the architect; urban decisions are based on necessity and economy which in the city are physically represented in spaces and forms that underscore the ever-present cultural, social, and political disjunctions. The physically fragmented city developing from this disjunction becomes the, using a traditional term, 'urban morphology' of the experimental city, a morphology which for architects and planners bent on urban unity and clarity in the city is difficult to accept.

Ironically this fragmentation which is maligned by architects is essentially considered positive by the inhabitants because it allows for choice, at least for those who are insiders of the system, and it orders by establishing hierarchy, and the illusion of protection, safety, and control. The designed city piece spells out meanings clearly by defining the accoutrements of power as tangible, legible goals for the population; the appearance of attainment of these is a good second for the urban inhabitants if true ownership is not possible. But the criticism still remains; these designed city pieces in general are representative of only one system of urban meaning within the experimental city.

And it is in contrast to this city form that the Between Space has been introduced as the means through which
to enter into the experimental city on its own terms, as a
direct connection to the unorthodox processes of Houston's
construction. The Between Space gains power in contrast to
the 'designed' city as a physical symptom of the disjunctive
processes of urban construction.

Two casestudies are used to analyze the Between Space
of the experimental city, those chosen being the common or
typical occurrence of the space in Houston, rather than the
exception; the forceful dynamic of the Sam Houston Tollway
is viewed in sharp contrast to the 'abandoned' static space
behind the Transco Tower, but from both studies the roles of
the Between Space are identified as: 1) the structure for
the urban system, the space which physically holds or glues
the disparate elements of the experimental city together,
and 2) the space within the experimental city where the
forces of construction are in physical evidence.

In both cases these are experientially perceived
characteristics; the Sam Houston Tollway at Memorial Bend
experientially changes the dynamics of the community, and,
on the Tollway, movement and elevational changes literally
alter the urban perceptions of the inhabitants adding
another dimension to the space of Houston. In the case of
the Transco and Lamar Terrace a more static, but potent
contrast of scale, and economy, is evident.

With this recognition of the Between Space architecture
is no longer seen as solely responsible for the core of
urban symbolism or meaning within the experimental city. The Between Space's power lies in its role as the space which translates into the experiential form the bare bones diagram of Houston's expansion as a function of private growth and development.

But as architects we are disturbed by this Between Space, the void, and the unbuilt in the city; we want to find a way to fix and fill it. For us, without building there can be no urban meaning. In order for the recognition of the Between Space to occur the doubt and disbelief must be suspended, the possibility of the non-institutionalized system must be considered. Which is where our (as architects) leap of faith occurs: that even an inadvertent form-- a space-- not even a 'filled' space, can become significant.

And with this adjustment in attitude change must occur in terms of our understanding of the perceptual implications of the experimental city; the definition of what determines the 'image of the city' requires rethinking to acknowledge the experimental city and the image of the contemporary city-- a unified image of the contemporary city becomes a fallacy.

The analysis of the Between Space illustrates a condition that defies the accepted idea that urban meaning is, or should be understandable, and in fact begins to suggest that perhaps the term 'meaning' in this case has
lost some of its validity, and demands redefinition. Meaning has perhaps been replaced within the experimental city by the *experiential* impact of the city space, reaction and understanding of which is variable, and internally subjective.

Considered in this light urban meaning becomes 'up for grabs' and with this smashing of the barriers of the codified symbolic urban and architectural systems, the possibility of the opening up of the symbolic systems of the city exists; the experimental city exemplifies the significant break with the conceptions of meaning communicated in the city through the clarity of the applied symbolic system.

Ignorance of this basic alteration of the symbolic system of Houston results in the state of the perpetual search for the urban panacea of Houston, as well as the limitation of architectural and urban thinking; we will remain in that no-person's land of the correctives for Houston.

The external objections to Houston's method of growth, the many attempts for correction of unacceptable forms through architecture and urban planning, are at present time being vocalized and legitimized more and more through the government and the media. At this time in Houston we find ourselves faced with the desire for the comprehension and the unity which this thesis attempts to address. Zoning, a
subject of discussion in the city council for the last fifty years, has become a strong possibility, and for many inevitable; Houston faces the attempt to institutionalize urban planning and zoning.

In my own inner city neighborhood I have also visibly seen the changes over the last four years as the increased numbers and powers of the various organizations are being felt— the Westheimer Arts festival has been exiled from its street location, to a downtown parking lot, while people lament the dearth of street life in Houston. The small scale townhomes and apartments of Montrose are now being replaced by projects which easily fill city blocks. The neighborhood association newsletter prints the number of prostitutes chased out of the neighborhood by the patrol during the month; the irony of this is clear, the prostitutes move one block over to the next neighborhood, outside of the 'jurisdiction' of the community rent-a-cop.

What I am seeing is a move toward the normalization of the city, somehow these Inner Loop neighborhoods are being made more palatable for the inhabitant and the inhabitant-to-be. The hierarchical structure of the city becomes more pronounced, but perhaps in a more dangerous, subtle manner, no more relegated to the suburbs and the designed enclave it has moved into the undesigned areas of the city.

And with this progression perhaps the importance of the Between Space will increase; it becomes significant as the
space within the city where the uncontrived possibilities of the city, the full sensuality of urban contemporary life in the experimental city may be experienced.

Postscript for the Experimental City:

In the Introduction of this paper I assumed that within the experimental city there must be meaning, the city had to have the Platonic essence or soul. Through a critical exercise in which texts relating to symbolic meaning and architecture were examined I dismissed the typological/symbolic systems of the traditional city as appropriate for Houston. My own search for meaning suggested the existence of the alternative urban symbolic system lying outside of institutionalized architecture in the Between Space. But with the examination of the Between Space the forces of the city dynamics of construction and destruction—power, economics, and need—became clearer, as did the significance of the sensual, experiential aspects of the city.

Thus, my search for the Platonic city, is not found in the form of a symbolic system, at least within the definitions of symbolism as we know it. If anything, the basic structure of the experimental city, the Between Space, is constructed and structured by a process which in itself is dynamic and inconclusive in nature, not about meaning.
With this in mind the goals of resolution, unity, or meaning no longer are the only ambition for the city; the nature of the experimental city is the unresolved and open-ended. And this is where the importance of the experimental city arises, as contradiction, challenge, and perhaps as nemesis to the sacred, long held beliefs of urbanism and architecture.

The role of architecture and the architect thus changes, no longer seen as savior of the experimental city, but rather working critically in relationship to the urban forms and forces of the city.
Appendix I

Glossary: Image, Icon, and Iconology, Insights into the Illusive Relationship Between Image and Interpretation

The analysis of the experimental city necessitates an explication of the extant systems which comprise the primary method of representation, and hence communication within the city. The experimental city is essentially perceived through 'image', the comprehended image is accepted as the 'reality' of the city, although reality is not what the inhabitant of the city is after; the inhabitant prefers a good facsimile, or a representation of what they mentally desire in the appearance of the city, rather than any sense of verity on the image's part. In the experimental city understanding and cognition are not based on a permanent or static condition but rather ever-changing and personal perceptions which involve the internalization of the visual image to the mental image.

It is important to understand that the mental imaging of the experimental city does not necessarily require the legibility of a diagrammatic comprehension of the city, and often this legibility is, in fact, an impossibility; this is a significant break with the influential analysis of American cities by Kevin Lynch in The Image of the City (1960), a book still much appreciated and used for its methodology and examination of urban forms through basic
diagramming.

Lynch broke the ground in recognizing that the understanding of the city, in opposition to the Modernist totalitarian stance, occurs through fragmentary mental imaging of the city, which depends on all sensual perceptions as well as movement through the city. But for Lynch, as opposed to Houston's condition, the goal of this imaging is the reinforcement of clarity and legibility.

What then is "icon" as related to image? Icon (Greek eikon) means image, figure, representation, likeness, or picture. The use of "icon" seems to stress the physical form, as visually perceived by the viewer, over the spiritual representation, perhaps as evidenced in the iconoclastic conflicts of the Byzantine church.

Given the above is the experimental city a place of images or icons? Will developing a system of iconography alone explain the experimental city? This kind of methodology is what some people have grasped, and applied in building the Postmodern city.

If image is associated with the experimental city as means of representation the method of interpretation becomes extremely significant. Iconographic interpretation is a reductive process which concentrates on the individual naming or identification, in a sense a typological system of identification. In contrast, iconology examines the individual within a larger subject matter, attempting an
interpretation based on unification of content with the physical form.

In the experimental city the development of image is not patently based on judgements of physical form, but rather is the result of the how or the why of construction—the exigencies of the process are translated into form which may be by-product or secondary offshoot. The iconology may rest on the unresolved aspects of the city construction and become the coalescence of the various active forces; the images of the city thus become symbols of expression for underlying meanings and concepts of culture. Utilizing this outline one moves from basic recognition, to identification of type, to an interpretation based on form and content and the revelation of the symbol.
Appendix II

The Transco: The urban symbolism of architecture? or How well Houston learned its lessons of type and symbol.

In this section the overt or intended meanings of the Transco Tower (Johnson/Burgee Architects for Gerald Hines Interests, 1984) will be examined in relationship to the discussed theories of type and the symbol; this will help to establish a contrast with the analysis of Case 1 which considers the Transco Tower within the context of the experimental city.

The Transco is composed of three pieces--- 1) the monolith, the skyscraper, 2) the fountain, 3) the parking garage--- all of which conform to specific rules of form and meaning; they are all historically derived typological forms either based on usage or symbolic associations which typologically connect with history. The tower is the American skyscraper elongated and reaching, but far removed from dense Manhattan, now standing isolated on the low-lying Texan prairie of suburbia and mall, yet still representing a link with the historical skyscraper.

The parking garage is banded horizontal concrete, modern typology deriving from usage and construction process; the fountain becomes a proscenium or theater screen, a triumphal arch with a semicircular wall of water behind.
The Transco Tower site is a microcosm of the symbolic/typological theories of Durand, Rossi, and Izenour, Scott Brown, and Venturi, the building forms being the result of the conscious desire to assert the symbolic power of architecture within the city. Through a universal or communal recognition of an overt symbolic system, based on both the building form and the external surface or style, meaning is identified.

The Transco Tower may be viewed as example of the Durand separation of skin and structure, the skin used to refer to an Art Deco building, but the structure being an important consideration and strictly up-to-date; the meaning of the tower clearly becomes a function of the surface, and thus the identification of the building as a particular style. And with this comes the recognition of the tower as sign, the "I am a monument" with a 75 foot front door, a granite arch facing east toward downtown and the freeway, which proclaims "I am a portal".

The tower and the park become historical foils for one another, the triumphal arch of the fountain playing off the tower, the space between the two like a processional route or a marching ground, a great urban scaled meeting place for the city inhabitants. Perhaps this space becomes a Russian reference to the common collective urban memory of the great public spaces of the pre-industrial city.

In all three pieces the form and the clothes used to
dress the building reflect an image of the 'past'; all are representative and referential to history. The parking garage's corners terminate in concrete gothic spires, the tower's surface is covered with panels of reflective and nonreflective glass reinforcing the image of the alteration of solid and glass of the early tall buildings, the fountain becomes the proscenia screen, city gate, and entrance. And within this historical symbolic system it must be recognized that there is other imagery at work, the imagery of corporate America as building and public space; the Transco fountain exemplifies this attempt at unifying the corporate with the public space.

Thus, in the Transco the symbolic/typological system of the traditional city is continued, and architecture is used for symbolic means, yet in this case it is the projection of a developing corporate imagery, rather than one of a purely urban historicism. Thus, the historical and corporate signs become signs unto their selves, not particularly relating to the cultural urban context outside of the specific corporate purpose.

But the question still remains, where does the cultural symbolism of the experimental city occur?
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Appendix I

Glossary: Image, Icon, and Iconology, Insights into the Illusive Relationship Between Image and Interpretation


Appendix II

The Transco: The urban symbolism of architecture? or How well Houston learned its lessons of type and symbol.
